

# Glasgow School of Art's 'forbidden' events revealed

Anger over decision to use Mackintosh building as venue before fire

Mike Wade

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The meeting took place in a part of the Mackintosh building known as the Furniture Gallery

GSA ARCHIVES

Glasgow School of Art hosted “forbidden” events in the vulnerable Mackintosh building that lacked any fire suppression system, it has been claimed.

A photograph on the school's website shows alumni gathering around an audio visual display in December enjoying a “Mackintosh Memories Tea Party”.

The 2014 fire that devastated much of the building began when a projector ignited gases from a foam canister used in a student project.

The image appears to show the same type of equipment being deployed again in the partially restored A-listed building.

A senior figure at the art school said that he was flabbergasted by the image of guests in part of the building known as the Furniture Gallery while construction work was going on elsewhere and with no fire suppression system in place.

Gordon Gibb, an architect and director of professional studies at GSA, said: “The art school didn't just occupy discrete offices, but used vulnerable areas deep in the heart of the building and brought in large numbers of people with no adequate safety provision or PPE [personal protection equipment].

“A client may not do so on a construction site, it is forbidden. This was a historic building under reconstruction; they were forbidden to

be in there. They lacked necessary respect for the Mackintosh building.”

Mr Gibb added: “They stored flammable materials in it, they operated computers, cooking facilities and kettles. They even had a television and used an AV projector, the piece of equipment that caused the first fire when it ignited filler foam.”

In an interview published today in *The Times*, Muriel Gray, chairwoman of the art school’s board, denied that industry guidelines had been ignored.

Professor Tom Inns, the principal, resigned on Friday, prompting Paul Sweeney, the MP for Glasgow North East, to call for the entire board to leave “en masse”.

In a turbulent few days for the art school, it was revealed on Saturday that GSA had occupied the Janitor’s House, an integral part of the Mackintosh building, which had kitchen facilities.

GSA’s presence, along with the site office occupied by the main contractor Kier Construction, may affect any insurance settlement, experts say.

The school insists that Kier Construction had a fire plan in place to mitigate risk in the building which had been reviewed by the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service and Glasgow city council building control prior to sign-off by GSA.

The school also “made sure there was 24/7 manned security”, it said. A spokeswoman added: “A full risk assessment was done ahead of the event in December with the principal contractor and before other any other event.”

The tea party took place in the contractor’s technical office and used the contractor’s equipment.

Mr Gibb, an expert witness in the field of professional liability, building failures and claims analysis, said: “You cannot live in a building if it is being in any way compromised by construction activities, or even worse does not have a fire suppression system in it.

“You could only have practical completion or partial possession if the fire suppression system was working, because that part of the building would not be complete.”

At a meeting soon after the fire, Professor Inns told staff the building had been in the control of the contractor.

The fire had begun at the east end of the building. GSA said no events had taken place in the Mackintosh building on the day of the fire, graduation day.

There is growing anger among staff about the behaviour of the board and the directorate of GSA. One lecturer said: “For the senior management the building was just a badge. They didn’t care for it as they should have done.”

Kier Construction has previously said: “On some building projects it is typical to base a site management office and team on the premises of the project.”

GSA said the majority of the rebuilding work would be paid for by insurers and that the board did not know where or how the fire started.

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