

Broadsheet

Historic Govan

This summary of Govan's historic development is based upon a detailed survey of the burgh. It is part of the Scottish Burgh Survey project, which has produced detailed surveys of over 70 of Scotland's historic towns and cities since it was established in the 1970s. The primary objective is to identify areas of archaeological potential to help assess the implications of development. The surveys also provide background information on the history and archaeology of each burgh. The Glasgow University Archaeological Research Division has produced the Govan Burgh Survey for Historic Scotland.



Full accounts of the historical summaries in this broadsheet are to be found in the Burgh Survey report Historic Govan (ISBN 1902771621), which is published by the Council for British Archaeology (St Mary's House, 66 Bootham, York YO30 7BZ). The book can be obtained from Central Books (tel. 0845 4589910) or from any good bookshop.

Further information, particularly regarding legally protected sites, can be obtained from the PAST MAP web site (<http://www.PASTMAP.org.uk>). Where development is being considered, in all cases advice should be sought from Glasgow City Council's advisers, the West of Scotland Archaeological Service (Charing Cross Complex, 20 India Street, Glasgow G2 4PF, tel. 0141 287 8333).

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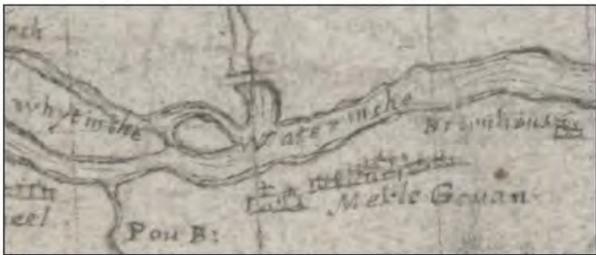
Historic properties to visit in and around Govan:

Govan Old Parish Church: One of Scotland's largest collections of early medieval sculpture is housed within Rowand Anderson's Gothic Revival masterpiece. For details of opening times consult www.govanold.org.uk.

Glasgow Cathedral: The best-preserved cathedral on the Scottish mainland dates largely to the 13th to 15th centuries. An outstanding example of Gothic architecture. Open all year.

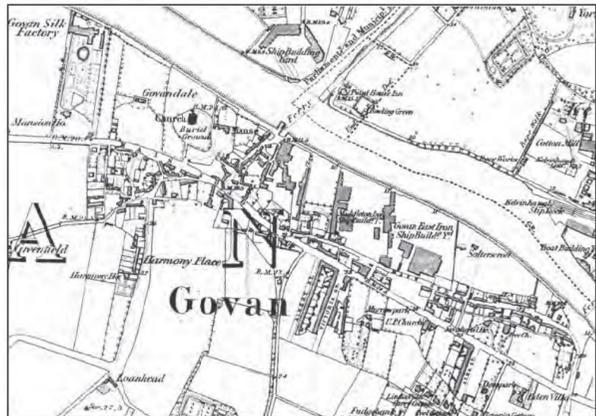
Crookston Castle: An unusual 15th-century tower set within impressive 12th-century earthwork defences offering excellent views over south-west Glasgow. Open all year.

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Map of Govan by Timothy Pont. Reproduced by permission of the Trustees of the National Library of Scotland.

The earliest map of Govan by Timothy Pont shows the sixteenth-century village of 'Mekle Govan' stretching eastwards from the church. This single street settlement probably preserves the medieval layout



Ordnance Survey First Edition (1857-58), 6 inches to the mile.

Govan was first surveyed by the Ordnance Survey in the 1850s, when much of the character of the pre-industrial village could still be appreciated. Early industry includes a series of small shipyards. Two main streets run east from the church towards Glasgow. The first fairly straight street (closest to the bottom of the map) was laid out in the eighteenth century and bypassed the original Medieval main street.

Medieval Govan:

Govan has a long history and ancient origins. The place is first mentioned, as *Ovania*, in the eighth century AD. Archaeological excavations at the Old Parish Church have found burials there dating to the fifth or sixth century AD and evidence of a church enclosed by a massive bank and ditch, which still forms the kirkyard boundary. The religious and political importance of Govan are reflected in the collection of tenth and eleventh century sculptured stones, which includes the Govan Sarcophagus (an elaborate stone coffin), stone crosses, and various burial monuments (47 pieces in total). The size and quality of this collection suggest the presence of a royal cemetery, probably connected to the kings of Strathclyde who had an estate across the Clyde at Partick.



Incised cross-slab, J. Stirling Maxwell. Sculptured Stones in the Kirkyard of Govan, 1899, pl. xiii.

The majority of the early sculptured stones are slabs with incised crosses and elaborate interlace decoration. 38 examples of this type have been found in the churchyard, and they date to the period between AD 900 and 1100. The Govan collection is one of the largest in Scotland, only surpassed by those at Iona, St. Andrews, and Whithorn and is the largest collection dating to the tenth and eleventh centuries.



Hogback tombstone. Copyright National Museums of Scotland.

The oldest sculpture at Govan consists of 'hogback' tomb stones such as this one (below). These were made between AD 925 and 1000 and are only found in those parts of southern Scotland and northern England where Vikings settled. These burial monuments are carved to look like a house or church, with a curving roof-ridge. The group of five hogbacks at Govan is the largest from anywhere in Britain and indicates a strong Norse influence in the British kingdom of Strathclyde.

Just to the east of the Parish Church lay the Doomster Hill, first described in the 18th century. This massive, flat-topped mound was levelled in the nineteenth century, but it is known from early maps, engravings, and descriptions. The age of the mound is not yet known, but the place-name *Ovania* probably derives from the Old Welsh for 'little hill' and this indicates that the Doomster Hill was already a notable feature by the eighth century. The mound's name suggests it served as a court hill and a place for public assemblies.

In the tenth and eleventh centuries Govan and Partick formed the most important royal and ecclesiastical centre on the Clyde, but from the twelfth century Govan's fortunes changed dramatically. At this time, Strathclyde was incorporated into the kingdom of Scotland and Govan along with Partick passed to Glasgow Cathedral. Thereafter the importance of the church at Govan declined and it is rarely mentioned in medieval documents, although a community certainly continued there.

The University of Glasgow undertook excavations in Govan in the 1990s. These showed that important archaeological remains survive in the centre of the burgh. The discoveries included evidence of a Christian cemetery, traces of an earlier churchyard and an early church near the present church. Also found were the remains of the massive ditch of the Doomster Hill and an ancient roadway leading from the church towards the Doomster Hill assembly mound. Given the sparse documentary sources for Govan in the Early Historic and Medieval periods, buried archaeological remains in and around the Old Parish Churchyard, along Water Row, and perhaps elsewhere within the Medieval village, are a valuable resource.



Excavations at Govan Old Parish Church. Copyright GUARD, University of Glasgow.

Govan from the Reformation to the mid-nineteenth century:

The Post-Medieval image of Govan is of a rural village of thatched cottages, with a farming and craft economy. But Govan was no isolated, unchanging backwater. After the Reformation, landholding changed dramatically – previously, much of the land belonged to Glasgow Cathedral; by 1600 it had been parcelled out to numerous private landowners. Illustrating this, the bishops' manor house at Partick was pulled down and a new one built by a layman, George Hutcheson.

Society and economy in Govan also changed. From the eighteenth century, farming was increasingly market-oriented. Efforts also began to deepen the Clyde, transforming it into a major avenue of trade. The profits of colonial trade funded many new country estates and mansions. In the village, the processing of colonial produce, particularly for textiles, became important, and the population soon came to be dominated by handloom weavers.



View of Water Row. Copyright Glasgow City Libraries (Mitchell) c1750.

Above is Water Row, photographed just before its demolition in 1911. The buildings largely date from the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. In the late nineteenth, Water Row became the image of Govan, representing a fast-disappearing rural idyll. At that time, it was important to some Govanites to give the town its own image and history, distinguishing it from Glasgow at a time when the City was trying to annex the independent burgh of Govan. Although the buildings shown have been demolished, valuable archaeological remains may survive below ground.

Linthouse, photographed in 1870, was typical of the country mansions built around Govan in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The house was built in the eighteenth century and survived, re-used as shipyard offices, until 1921 when it was demolished. The front porch, shown in the photograph, was re-erected in Elder Park, where it can still be seen.

Right: Lintthouse in 1870. Copyright Glasgow City Libraries (Mitchell) c7637.



With all these changes, tensions built up within the community, as is still clearly seen at Govan Old Parish Church. In the seventeenth century, the use of grave monuments there was confined to the landowners, but in the eighteenth century artisans, farmers, and colonial merchants began to have gravestones as well. These different groups used distinctive forms of memorial: artisans and farmers preferred new forms of upright headstone, while landowners preferred flat grave slabs, continuing an earlier tradition.



Headstones in Govan Old churchyard. Copyright GUARD, University of Glasgow.



Incised cross-slab, J. Stirling Maxwell. Sculptured Stones in the Kirkyard of Govan, 1899, pl. xiii.

This recumbent grave stone (pictured on the left) decorated with an interlace cross is around 1000 years old, but the initials AR and IR inscribed on it date to the 17th century. Such re-use is typical of a wider trend in Govan, with prominent landowners seeking to emphasise their long-standing connections with the area in opposition to the newly arrived Glasgow merchants and the new and growing class of textile workers.

Industrial Govan:

From the 1840s, Govan underwent massive industrialisation. An internationally renowned shipbuilding industry emerged, alongside engineering and other industries. The deepening of the Clyde continued, and new docks and ferries were provided. Heavy industry defined Govan's economy until the closure of many major firms in the 1920s and 1930s, and the demise of most by the 1960s.



Detail from advertisement. By courtesy of Kylie Seretis.

The population expanded significantly – in 1864 it was 9,500, by 1911 it was 89,725 – and to combat the growing problems of poor sanitation, health, and public order, the Burgh of Govan was founded in 1864 to manage the affairs of the town. But many Govanites, particularly the working class, supported the incorporation of the burgh into Glasgow – which eventually did happen in 1912.

This difference in outlook between the working and middle classes reflects a deeper conflict. While the growth of industry brought wealth for some, many suffered from chronic job insecurity and poor working and living conditions. Trade unions and other workers' groups emerged in opposition to the employers' associations, and the employers sought to reduce social tensions through charitable works.



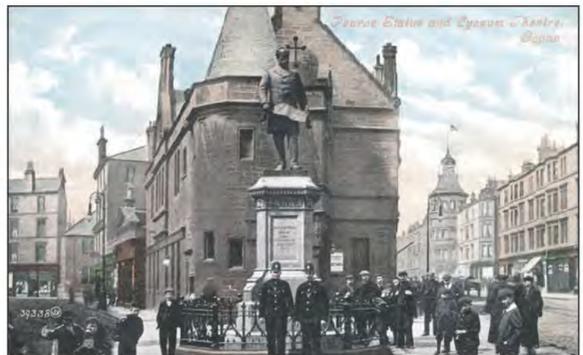
Mackie & Thomson's shipbuilding yard, 1891. Copyright Glasgow City Libraries (Mitchell) c4199.

The Old Govan Yard, also known as the Govan Shipbuilding Yard, was the first shipyard to open in Govan (on the site of the Doomster Hill). Founded in 1839 by MacArthur & Alexander, it passed to Robert Napier, the 'Father of Clyde Shipbuilding', in 1841, and then operated under various different firms until it was consumed within the Harland & Wolff yard in 1912. The picture above shows the launch of three steam trawlers.



Langlands Road c. 1910. Copyright Glasgow City Libraries (Mitchell) c7677.

To cater for Govan's nineteenth century population expansion, new forms of housing emerged. This photograph shows some typical examples. The earliest tenements housed the better-off members of the working population, such as shipyard foremen. From the 1860s, tenement building expanded, many of the new blocks being built specifically to house the growing numbers of shipyard workers. Single-end and two apartment flats became the most common: by 1891, 86 percent of families in Govan were living in one or two room houses.



Postcard showing statue of William Pearce (unveiled 1894). Copyright Glasgow City Libraries (Mitchell) c0515.

This statue of Sir William Pearce, the sole partner in the Fairfield shipyard (now BAE Systems) from 1878, was erected in 1894, and symbolises the significance of labour relations and private philanthropy in Govan society in the late nineteenth century. Pearce was a prominent anti-labour employer. However, when Pearce sought election as Govan's first M.P. in 1885, he needed the votes of Govan's working class. He re-invented himself as a champion of the labour interest, seeking credibility by announcing concessions on labour issues, making charitable donations, and helping to fund the rebuilding of Govan Old Parish Church. But this interest in the community was largely superficial, as his attitude in subsequent labour disputes, in parliament, and at later elections confirms. On the surface, the statue is a memorial to a noted philanthropist, but underneath are hidden many social tensions.



The opening of Elder Park, 1885. Copyright Glasgow City Libraries (Mitchell) c3977.

Contrasting with Pearce's opportunism is the sustained philanthropy of Isabella Elder, wife of John Elder, who acquired the Fairfield shipyard in 1863. Isabella was concerned by the social problems brought on by industrialisation. She tried to improve the situation with the creation of Elder Park. Built on the site of Fairfield Farm, Elder gifted the park to provide, as one contemporary put it, a 'breathing space [for the working classes] in a crowded industrial district'. The park was one of a series of philanthropic initiatives undertaken by John and Isabella Elder, including the creation of an accident fund at Fairfield's, but these charitable works were linked to labour relations. It is perhaps more than a coincidence that Elder Park opened in 1885, a time of economic depression when tensions in the industrial town would have been high.

The map opposite shows how Govan developed opposite the mouth of the Kelvin. This was a major river crossing going back to prehistoric times. The core of the settlement grew up between the church and the Doomster Hill. Although on the opposite side of the river, from earliest historic times the royal centre of Partick was linked to Govan. By the 17th century the village of Govan was strung out along a single street running east from Water Row, while across the Clyde settlement was starting to cluster around Partick Cross. On the eve of the great shipbuilding expansion of the mid 19th century, Govan and Partick were still fairly modest sized villages, but that was soon to change and by the start of the 20th century Govan had assumed the dense urban blend of domestic and industrial usage.



Aerial view of Govan c. 1930. Copyright Glasgow City Libraries (Mitchell) c0021.



Extract from the Roy Map (1747-1755). By permission of The British Library; shelfmark Roy Map 05/06a.

The Roy Map (1747-1755) provides the earliest detailed view of Govan. At the west end of the village stands the Parish Church, shown as a cross shaped-building. In the centre is Water Row leading to the ferry crossing and the massive Doomster Hill. To the east the village stretches along a single street, which is partially preserved as Clydebrae Street. To the north of the river stands Partick Castle on the west bank of the Kelvin. The rural situation is revealed by the cultivation strips surrounding the settlement.



The Govan sarcophagus. Crown Copyright: RCAHMS.

The discovery in 1855 of this sarcophagus sparked a great deal of interest in the ancient sculpture of Govan, because it is unique in the British Isles.

This magnificent sarcophagus is covered with abstract interlace and animal ornament, typical of Celtic art dating to AD 900 – 1100, and was clearly meant to be displayed prominently. The image of the mounted warrior may represent a long forgotten king of the Northern Britons.



Engraving of Govan, looking from Yorkhill by Robert Paul, 1758. Copyright Glasgow City Libraries (Mitchell) EGV210.

In this view from York Hill made in 1758, Govan is a small village probably not too different in size from the Medieval settlement. In the centre are the buildings of Water Row; to the left the Doomster Hill is shown as a stepped mound towering over the single storey cottages. This is the earliest and best record of the Doomster Hill. It shows the large ditch from which the mound was built and a distinctive stepped profile, which is known from other court hills in the Irish Sea area. This mound probably dates from the early Middle Ages (perhaps from as early as the 7th century), when it would have served as the focus for royal courts and popular assemblies. This view also shows the Clyde in its unimproved state as a shallow meandering river. Prior to its dredging, the Clyde at this point was only deep enough for small vessels such as those shown here and under the right tidal conditions could be forded at Govan.



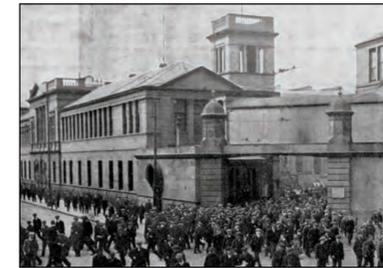
Left: Govan Old Parish Church. Crown Copyright: RCAHMS.

Partick was originally part of Govan and the site of a major lordly residence. Originally it was occupied by the British kings of Strathclyde, subsequently the manor was taken over by the bishops of Glasgow and finally in 1611 this castle was built for George Hutcheson (a co-founder of Hutcheson's Hospital). By the nineteenth century it was a ruin.



Nineteenth century sketch of Partick Castle, after MacGibbon, D & Ross, T 1892 The Castellated and Domestic Architecture of Scotland, volume 5. Edinburgh: David Douglas, fig. 1108.

The Gothic Revival masterpiece of Govan Old is one of several distinguished churches built in 19th century Govan. Burial has taken place here since the 6th century, and changing burial practices and attitudes to death are reflected in the diverse burial monuments.



Men coming off shift at the Fairfield Shipyard, around 1904. This scene was one of many of life in Govan portrayed on postcards at this time.

Left: Clocking off at Fairfield Shipyard. Copyright Glasgow City Libraries (Mitchell) c0513.

Fairfield shipyard was founded in the 1860s. Despite reconstruction of the yard in the 1960s and 1970s, Fairfield retains many historic buildings, including the former engine works of 1874; office blocks of 1889 and 1903; and, an Art Deco block of 1940. The crane seen in this picture was erected in 1911 and still stands by the wet basin.



Fairfield fitting-out basin, 1930. Crown Copyright: RCAHMS.

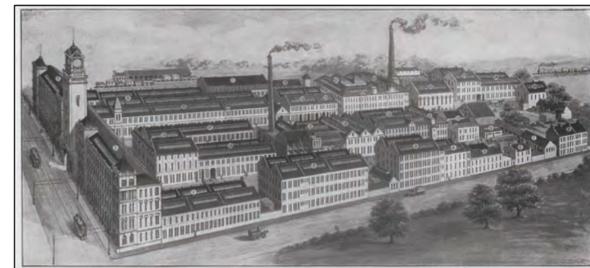


Illustration of SCWS works, 1914. From the SCWS yearbook of 1914.

The Scottish Co-operative Wholesale Society (SCWS) was established in 1868 to supply cheap staple goods for working class consumers. The 1887 SCWS factory at Shieldhall is pictured here. Shieldhall became one of the largest industrial concerns in the Glasgow area. By 1918 there were seventeen different departments, producing a wide range of food, clothing and manufactured goods and providing employment for some 4000 people. The only surviving outstanding element of the works is the 1939 Luma Building on Shieldhall Road.



Govan Combination Hospital (now Southern General Hospital). Copyright Glasgow City Libraries (Mitchell) c3738.

The Southern General Hospital started life as the Govan Combination Hospital and Poorhouse. Managing public health became an important issue with industrialisation as did caring for the poor. Together, the hospital and poorhouse were intended to maintain a productive workforce.



Above: Statue of John Elder, 1888. Unveiling. Copyright Glasgow City Libraries (Mitchell) c3978.

The unveiling of a statue of John Elder in Elder Park, 1898. Elder had served in Robert Napier's Old Govan Yard as chief draughtsman before becoming co-founder of the Fairfield Shipyard. The park was gifted to the community of Govan by John's wife, Isabella, 'for the use and enjoyment of the inhabitants in the way of healthful recreation'.



Govan Town Hall. Copyright Glasgow City Libraries (Mitchell) c0582.

Govan Town Hall opened in 1901. Alongside the council chamber and offices, there was a theatre and a concert hall. It was erected after a period of pressure from the City of Glasgow to incorporate Govan within 'Greater Glasgow'. Govan Town Hall is thus a celebration and expression of Govan's independence. It is perhaps no accident, then, that it was built on what was at the time the eastern fringe of the town, facing Glasgow.



This tenement block, known as the Linthouse Buildings, was built sometime before the 1890s to house workers from the nearby Linthouse Engine Works and Shipyard. At around the time that the tenement blocks were being built, some areas of Govan were developed for terraced houses and villas, such as these on St Kenneth Drive. These terraces were built to house a growing middle class of managers, draughtsmen and clerks.

Top left: Linthouse buildings. Bottom left: Terraces on St Kenneth Drive. Copyright GUARD, University of Glasgow.

