

GREENOCK TOWN TRAIL

A WALKING TRAIL THROUGH
TIMES, PEOPLE AND PLACES



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GREENOCK TOWN TRAIL

INTRODUCTION



Welcome to our Greenock Town Trail.

This special free Greenock Town Trail booklet gives you lots of additional information about each of the plaques you will find as part of doing the Trail.

The information within this booklet has been put together by a host of people to bring you interesting facts and figures about Greenock, its people, its trade and its past. We are especially grateful to the Inverclyde Tourist Group for their help and input.

You will find all the information in this booklet and much more at our Discover Inverclyde website www.discoverinverclyde.com and we would encourage you to visit there often and also our Facebook page.

We hope you will enjoy following this Greenock Town Trail with all it will uncover for you.

The Discover Inverclyde team

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River Clyde



1 The Customs House



One of Greenock's finest buildings, the Customs House was built in 1818 on what was then known as Steamboat Quay, one of the first docking areas of Greenock. It was built from designs by William Burns of Edinburgh at a cost of £30,000. It is a spacious edifice with fine Doric portico. Situated to face the river it reflects the wealth and importance of the port at that time. Above the door is the Royal Coat of Arms, a portcullis.

The clock tower and public drinking fountain were added around 1860. The town's motto 'God Speed Greenock' appears above the lion's head on the side of the fountain. Steamers departed from the pier on a daily



basis for Liverpool, Bristol, Inverness, Belfast, Dublin, Cork and Clyde ports including Glasgow, Dumbarton and Helensburgh. There were also regular trips to the Islands of Mull, Skye and Islay. The steamers carried both goods and passengers. In addition, many of the 600,000 people who emigrated from Greenock left from this pier. The building was used until 2011 by HM Revenue and Customs.



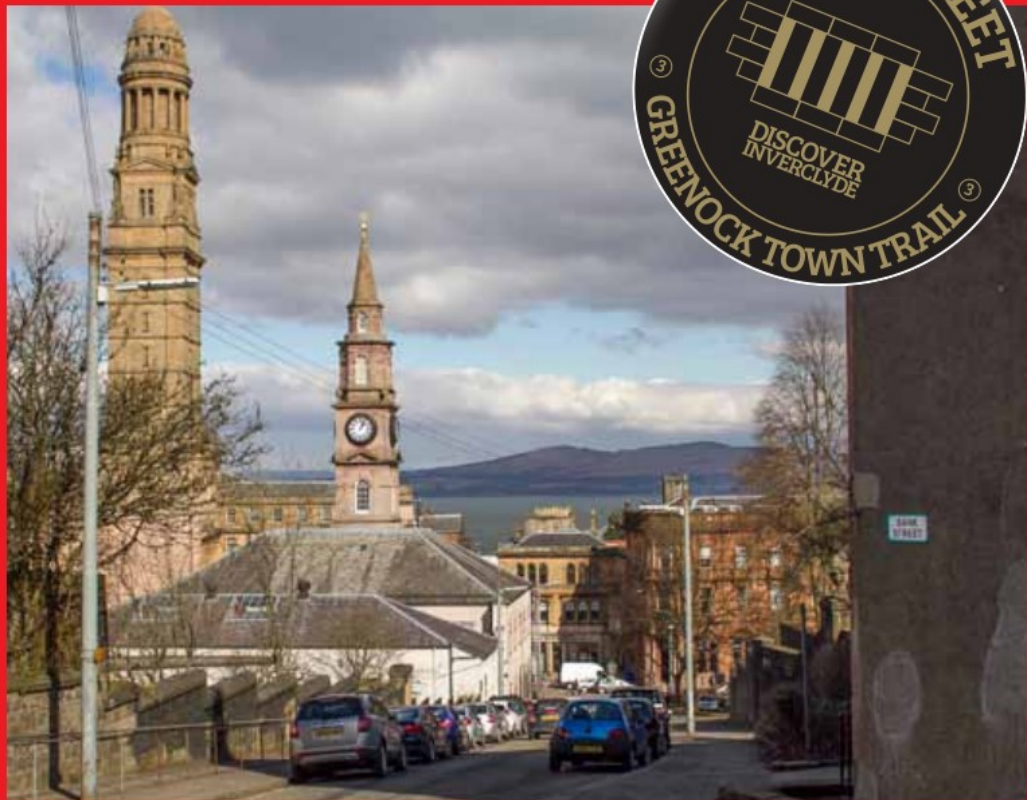
This is where the railway from Glasgow which reached Greenock in 1841 linked with the steamers which berthed at Custom House Quay. Along the riverside were the main industrial harbours and early shipyards. Greenock Central Station opened in 1841 as the terminus for the Glasgow, Paisley and Greenock Railway Company, providing a journey time from Glasgow of around one hour compared with the at least two hours journey by steamer. On leaving the station passengers had only a 300 yard walk to Custom House Quay.

Cathcart Street was badly hit during the German bombing raids in May 1941. Many buildings

were destroyed or damaged and had to be demolished - hence the variety of building styles. Over the two nights 280 people were killed and over 1,200 injured. From a total of 18,000 homes nearly 10,000 suffered damage and 1,000 were destroyed outright.

Ginger the Horse – the sculpture by Andy Scott of a horse at the entrance to Cathcart Street celebrates the contribution that working horses such as Clydesdales made to local industry. Horses carted sugar up to the refineries from the dock and also worked in the shipyards and harbours.

3 Bank Street



Bank Street was the location of the Renfrewshire Bank building, still standing on the east side with the horseshoe stair but now used as a rehabilitation centre. It was also the site of the original Castle of Wester Greenock which became the mansion house of the Schaw family. The street provides an entrance to the Well Park and to the town's main war memorial. The park has good views over the river.

Behind the Wellpark Mid Kirk stood Greenock prison. Known as Bridewell prison it was built in 1808 in the style of an old castle, with two towers in front and battlements on top.

It cost £1,500 to build and was demolished in 1887 to make way for the Caledonian railway line to Gourock.

On 8 April 1820 some radical weavers from Paisley were escorted to the jail by the Port Glasgow Volunteers. As they prepared to march back they were met by a hostile crowd which increased and became more hostile with the result that the officer in charge ordered the Volunteers to shoot into the mob, a number of whom were killed or injured. The crowd then stormed to the prison and released the prisoners. This episode became known as the Radical Demonstration.



Cathcart Square was the civic and commercial heart of Greenock. The church, known locally as the 'Toon Kirk' was built in 1760 with its 146 foot high steeple added in 1787. A handsome classical church, its iconic portico and steeple were modelled on St Martin-in-the-Fields Church in London. The horseshoe embedded between the church and the fountain was the location for hangings and public floggings.

The ornate Lyle central fountain was gifted to the town by Provost Abram Lyle in 1880. It was designed by Mr F.A. Scudamore of Coventry. Bronze shields which bear the crests of the Ardgowan and Carlsburn

families and 16 other prominent families of Greenock can be seen above the fountain.

Abram Lyle was a successful businessman born in Greenock in 1820 and was a partner in the largest shipping fleet in Greenock, transporting sugar from the West Indies. With four business partners Lyle bought the Glebe Sugar refinery in 1865. He was the Provost of Greenock from 1876 - 1879.

The Clydesdale Bank building, now known as The Square was built in 1899 by architect James Thomson – the sculptures above the windows depict Greenock's history of ship-building and trade.



William Street is the oldest street in Greenock and birthplace of James Watt, the prolific inventor. The two oldest surviving buildings in the street are No. 9 William Street built in 1752 and the Dutch Gable House built in 1755. Watt, Greenock's most famous son, was born in 1736. His improvements to the steam engine led to efficient steam power and were fundamental to the world's first industrial revolution. He developed the term 'horsepower' in the late 18th century to allow him to compare the output of steam engines with the power of draught horses. He used this to market his improved steam engine to mine and

mill owners. One horsepower was defined as 33,000 footpounds/minute of work and this was later defined as 746 watts of electrical horsepower. The power of all electrical equipment is now defined this way and is usually expressed in kilowatts (kw) or 1,000 watts. In this way James Watt's name lives on.

The James Watt Memorial College, endowed by Andrew Carnegie, opened in William Street in 1908, the main subjects taught being marine engineering and navigation. There is a statue of James Watt on the north east corner of the building.

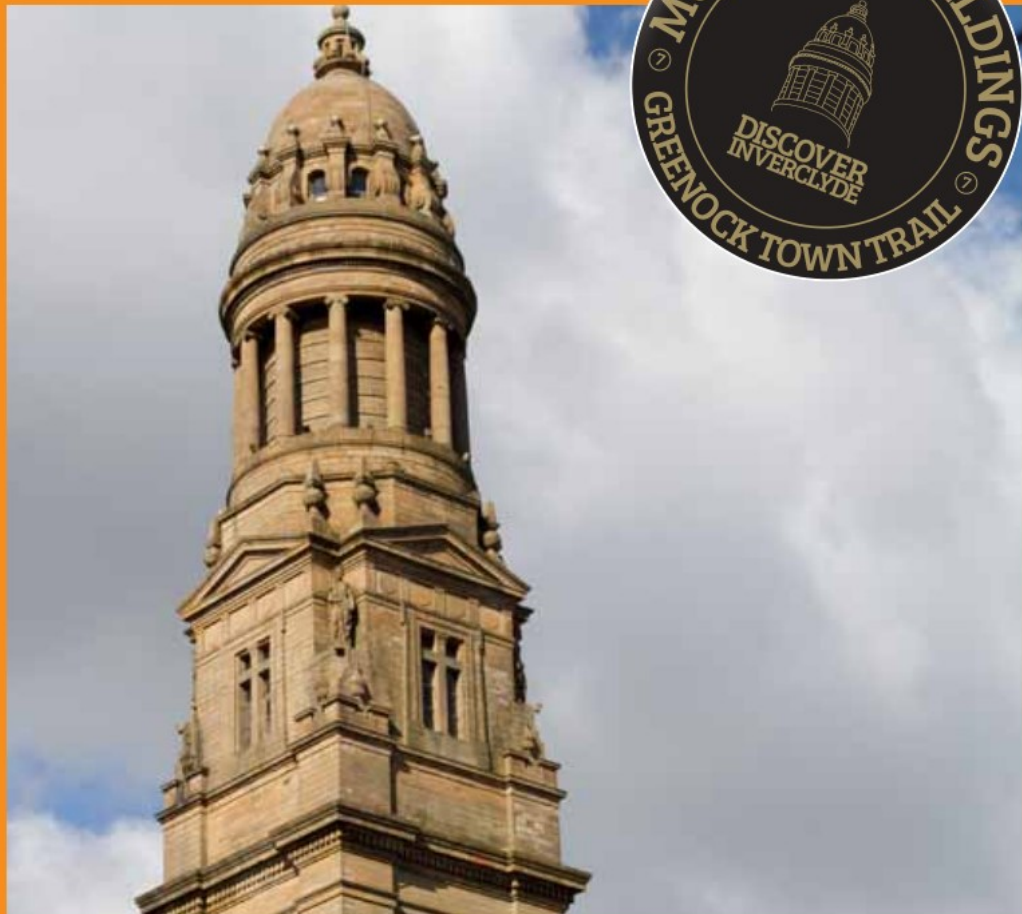


The Municipal Buildings once incorporated the court house entered by Drummer's Close, the police station with holding cells and the fire station. The carvings on the building illustrate some of these functions.

The court house was used as a district court until 2011. Formerly Drummer's Close was used when those found guilty of a crime were met by a drummer and 'drummed' out of town.

The Strathclyde Fire & Rescue Preservation Museum has recently been restored to its former glory and is well worth a visit. The museum is on the site of the original Greenock fire station and its exhibits include several older fire engines and equipment. It is run by retired volunteer firemen and the building also used to house the officers' quarters. For the Fire Brigade Museum's opening hours please contact Dave Adam on 07766 134 289.

7 Municipal Buildings



Greenock Town Hall is part of Inverclyde Council's Municipal Buildings which were completed in 1889. The building is ornately decorated both internally and externally with Peterhead granite used for the pillars. The Victoria Tower (245ft) is Italianate in style. It exceeds the height of the tower of Glasgow City Chambers as allegedly Greenock Town Council held back the plans for the tower until Glasgow City Chamber's

plans were revealed. While the tower is not accessible to the public, check out the view from the tower's webcam at www.inverclyde.gov.uk. When the Municipal Buildings were being constructed, Robert Cowan, a local businessman, refused to sell his property and therefore the buildings are incomplete. During the May 1941 blitz on Greenock, a bomb destroyed his property, leaving a gap. This area is still known as Cowan's Corner.



The name relates to the ancient Celtic chapel dedicated to St. Blane which was here in the 8th century. The chapel was the earliest known trace of Christianity in Greenock. It stood in the heart of what later became St. Mary's parish. Except for the name of Kilblain Street, nothing now remains of the chapel, which may have been originally founded in the sixth century by St Blane of Bute himself, or one of his followers. In pre-Reformation

times Greenock belonged to the large rural parish of Inverkip.

John Hastie, an engineer and millwright, opened a small works here in 1845 which developed into the world renowned firm of John Hastie & Sons, pioneers in the development of electric hydraulic steering gear. The firm had premises here until it closed in 1991.

9 Inverkip Street Cemetery



The Inverkip Street cemetery is the burial place of author John Galt (2 May 1779 – 11 April 1839) the Scottish novelist, entrepreneur and political and social commentator, as well as the family of Sir Gabriel Wood and many other families who made Greenock a prosperous place. The cemetery was opened in 1787 and because of the increase in population in the town, an extension in Duncan Street was opened in 1816. The Duncan Street cemetery had a separate entrance until Duncan Street itself was levelled and the entrance closed.

It is now entered through the Inverkip Street cemetery gates.

In the cholera epidemic of 1832 – 33 as many as 1,097 funerals from cholera took place. The cemetery presented more the appearance of a battlefield than a well ordered cemetery in the heart of a densely populated locality. Many years elapsed before the cholera pit subsided. It was mainly because of this that new land nearby in South Street was purchased for a new cemetery.

10 The Sheriff Court

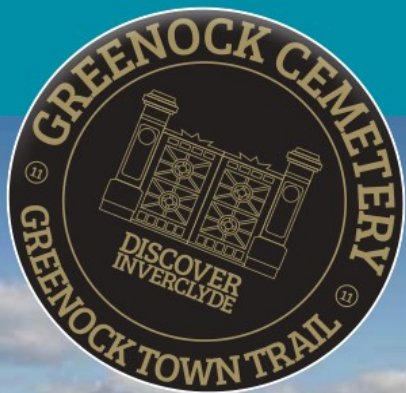


The Greenock Sheriff Court is a fine Scots baronial building designed by Peddie and Kinnear in 1867. The courthouse originally opened on 5 November 1869, was extended in 1981 and is still in use. It has been described as being a fine specimen of old Scottish architecture of the 16th century. The cost of the building was shared equally by the Treasury and the county.

A new prison was built adjacent to the courthouse in 1860 and was used until 1910 when another new prison for the Renfrew, Argyll and Bute counties was erected at

Gateside in Greenock. Nearby to the courthouse is the Westburn Church, formerly known as The Old Kirk and built in 1840 with the steeple added in 1854. The church's clock was donated by Miss Frances Ann Wood, sister of Sir Gabriel Wood. When the Old West Kirk became too small for the population of the town, this church was built as the replacement.

11 Greenock Cemetery



Greenock Cemetery was opened in 1846 across 120 acres laid out on a hill. The gates were designed by Charles Wilson. The population had been rising as many people were arriving in Greenock and finding employment and the cemeteries in Inverkip Street and Duncan Street were reaching capacity. The land was acquired from the Schaw Stewart family and Stewart Murray, curator at the Royal Botanic Gardens in Glasgow, was commissioned to lay out a new cemetery.

The cemetery includes memorials to James

Watt and his family and to Henry Robert (Birdie) Bowers who died in 1912 as one of Scott's ill-fated Antarctic expedition. It also includes the graves of Highland Mary, the sweetheart of Robert Burns, and the Scott family with their 300 years of local shipbuilding. Commonwealth war graves are dotted throughout the cemetery for servicemen, mainly sailors, dying on their way to Greenock. There are also memorials to those killed in the two nights of bombing in May 1941 during World War 2 and those killed in action in World War One.

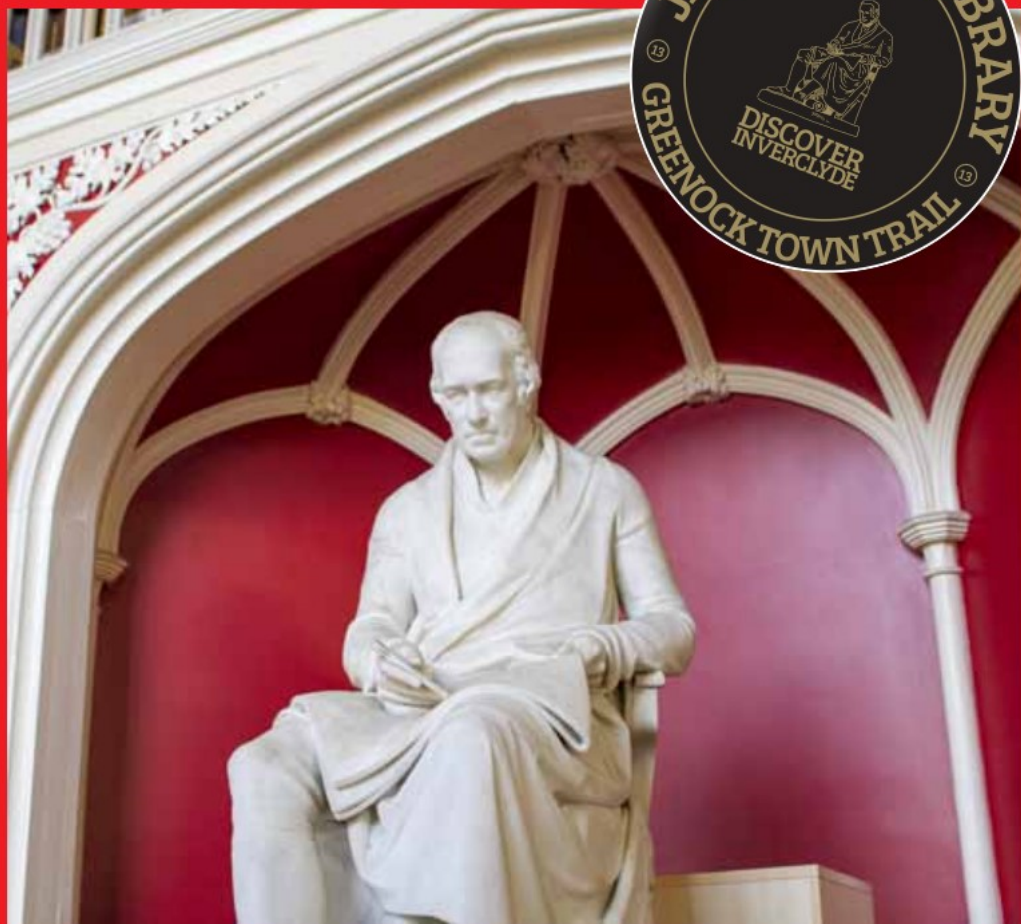
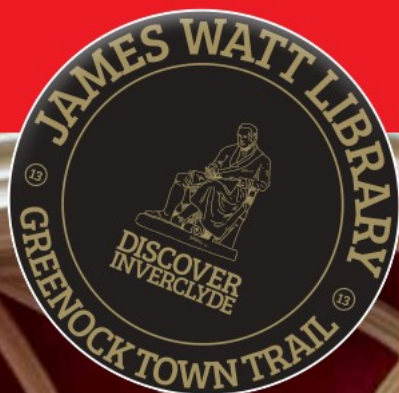


George Square is surrounded by the rich architecture of the 19th century. The Square was established in 1790 and marks the entrance to Greenock's prestigious West End, an example of a planned town layout also dating from the late 18th century. The grid system of the West End streets is in contrast to the original haphazard and crowded town centre. A number of churches and former churches surround the square:

St George's North Church – a large ashlar round-arched renaissance style building with a tall stone steeple having an open crown top and built in 1870.

Greenock West Reformed Church – formerly George Square Congregational Church.

The former George Square Baptist Church was built in 1888 and is now used as a children's gymnastics centre.



The James Watt Library was built in 1837 with the museum and hall constructed in the same style in 1876. The museum, known as the McLean Museum and Art Gallery, is the main museum in the Inverclyde area and has many wonderful collections for the visitor to discover and explore. The displays feature an outstanding art collection, items related to the engineer James Watt, displays on Inverclyde's maritime and industrial

traditions as well as world cultures, Egyptology and natural history. There is also a temporary exhibition programme and it is well worth a visit for all ages.

The Watt Library contains many of the town's records and is of great interest for anyone wanting to trace their families in the local area. A large marble statue of James Watt by Sir Frances Chantrey stands within.

14 Jamaica Street



The street name commemorates the sugar trade with the West Indies and the USA, as do nearby Tobago, Trinidad, Antigua and Virginia Streets.

In 1852 the refineries in Greenock were employing around 700 men and producing 50,000 tons of sugar annually and it was the largest port for raw material in the UK. Within 20 years around 14 refineries were in operation producing about a million tons annually and giving employment to thousands of men.

These included the Westburn, Walkers, the Glebe, Lochore and Ferguson and the Dempster refineries, plus a sugar beet factory on Ingleston Street. Greenock's



harbour would be filled with ships from all the sugar producing nations of the world including Spain, Cuba, Dutchmen from Java, the Newfound Fleet from Brazil and Glasgow traders from the West Indies and Mauritius.

Along Jamaica Street is St. John's Episcopal Church built in 1877 and the former Free church built in 1844 which opened as the Gaelic United Free Church and was one of several where services were held in Gaelic for the highland population.

15 Ardgowan Square (east)



On the north east corner is the Mansion House, built in 1886 to replace the estate office of the Schaw Stewart family which was situated in the Well Park. The former Greenock Club, now Cedars School of Excellence at No 31 Ardgowan Square, was built in 1867-1869 as a club for local businessmen to meet and entertain.

Around the square are many 'listed' buildings, which are protected for their architectural styles and detail; overall there are some 244 listed buildings in Inverclyde. The square houses a number of professional businesses, clubs and societies.

16 Ardgowan Square (west)



This was the location for the first Bowling Club in Inverclyde. It was founded in 1841 by a number of gentlemen who met with the Lord of the Manor, Sir Michael Robert Schaw Stewart and it was agreed that the area now known as Ardgowan Square would be laid out in order that the games of bowling, curling and quoiting were available to members. The first clubhouse was built in 1860 with the present main clubhouse built in 1926. The curling pond was filled in in 1863, quoiting also stopped around this time and tennis courts were set up in 1875 with the first tennis club formed in 1891. The

original four blaes tennis courts are now all-weather courts with floodlights.

The Tontine Hotel was originally built as a mansion for Baillie Robertson in 1807 and considered the finest house in Greenock. Baillie Robertson was a businessman involved in many successful ventures including the Newfoundland trading firm of Hunter, Robertson & Company and the Greenock Provident Bank, now part of the Lloyds Banking Group.



Originally the gardens of the mansions on the Esplanade ran down to the water's edge. The Esplanade road and walkway were then built using materials from the Albert Harbour. Walking along the Esplanade you will see many of the mansions built by the wealthy merchants and business families of the town.

The Esplanade is just over a mile long, and is a popular walk with river views. The church, now known as the Lyle Kirk, was founded in 1591 and originally built in the middle of the town. It was moved stone by stone to its present

location in 1925 - 1928. The reason for this is that in 1917 Harland & Wolff bought Caird Shipbuilders' yard in Greenock and wished to extend. They proposed to provide another suitable site to which the church and the churchyard could be transferred with all care and reverence. The current site was chosen and the congregation watched as the church was dismantled and rebuilt on the site. A different design of steeple and extra windows were added at this time. Although there are gravestones around the church there are no burials within the grounds.



The two churches built at this corner reflect the immigration of people from Ireland and the Highlands of Scotland. Many Irish immigrants came to Scotland and on arrival at Greenock they found work in the factories and shipyards. By the middle of the nineteenth century the Catholic population had greatly increased and the larger St Mary's RC Church was built in 1862 and has recently been refurbished. The parish's St. Mary's school can be found close by.

St Columba's Gaelic Church was built in 1832 with Gaelic used in the services. It originally opened as Chapel – of – East (Morin's Kirk) closing in 1843 and re-opening as St. Thomas church in 1857. By 1872 three quarters of the population of the town were Highlanders or their descendants, and Gaelic was often heard in the streets. This church is now a warehouse.



Many buildings relating to Greenock's industrial heritage have been lost but here you see the wedge shaped Glebe sugar refinery built in 1840. It is the only surviving sugar house in Greenock which used to have over 20 such establishments.

Sugar refining began in Greenock in 1745. Most of the raw cane sugar was imported from the West Indies. Prominent amongst the refiners and the most successful was Greenock born Abram Lyle. He owned the

Glebe sugar refinery and is also credited with the invention of syrup.

In WW2 allied troops were billeted here. The Egeria Wood Nymph statue by Andy Scott stands at the entrance to West Blackhall Street. She is a Roman nymph credited with wisdom and prophecy. West Blackhall Street marks the start of the shopping area with many smaller specialist shops leading to the Oak Mall shopping centre.



The original site of The Old West Kirk, built in 1591 is marked by this plaque. The Old West Kirk was the first church built in Scotland after the Reformation which included compulsory attendance at church.

At that time, the nearest place of worship was at Inverkip, a four mile walk with river fords and often impossible to reach in winter. The local laird, Johnne Schaw was therefore petitioned, together with the King, for a kirk within Greenock. A royal charter was granted in 1589 to the laird at his own cost to build a parish church and the location was chosen near to the river shore which reputedly provided for solid foundations.

Greenock grew with burgeoning shipyards. One such was Caird's shipyard established about 1844 and near to the church and this yard steadily expanded to the point where in 1917 Harland & Wolff, the new shipyard owners, proposed to the Greenock Presbytery to purchase the ground on which the church was built and to provide another suitable site to which the church and churchyard could be transferred. The church was moved stone by stone to its current location on the Esplanade during 1925 to 1928.



All of the land here has been reclaimed from the river Clyde to allow the building of the quays and shipyards which at the beginning of the 20th century extended for 5 miles. These included:

The West Harbour – begun in 1707 and completed in 1710 at a cost of £5,555.

The Graving dock was completed in 1786 and cost about £4,000.

The East India Harbour – the foundation stone was laid in 1805 and the dock completed in 1809 at a cost, exclusive of the ground costs, of £43,836.

The Victoria Harbour – begun in 1846 and completed in 1850 at a cost of over £120,000.

The Albert Harbour – the foundation stone was laid in 1862 and the dock opened in 1867 at a cost of £250,000.

Princes Pier – begun in 1862 and completed in 1870 at a cost of about £100,000. It was extended in 1921 at a cost of £14,000.

The Garvel Graving Dock – the foundation stone was laid in 1871 and the dock completed in 1874 at a cost of £89,000.

The West Quay was completed in 1880 at a cost of £10,821.

The Custom House Quay was completed in 1885 at a cost of £40,774.

The James Watt Dock and Great Harbour – begun in 1878 and completed in 1886 at a cost, including the price of the land, of £850,000.

The land now houses a sports centre and college.

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