

1 Clyde Square



Starting in Clyde Square, the imposing Greenock Town Hall and Municipal Buildings were built originally in the 1880s but have undergone additions and updates well into the 21st century.

Designed by Glasgow architects H & D Barclay, the original Town Hall building in the centre is ornately decorated internally and externally, with Peterhead granite used for the pillars. The surrounding Municipal

Buildings housed a court, the fire service and police service for the town, but are now the administrative centre for the whole of Inverclyde.



Rising above the buildings, the 75 metre high Victoria Tower exceeds the height of the tower of Glasgow City Chambers, allegedly in a bid of one-upmanship over the city.

The seated area at righthand corner of the building is known as Cowan's Corner,



after a local businessman who refused to sell his property and therefore restricted the building of the Municipal Buildings. Ironically his property was destroyed by a bomb during the May 1941 blitz, leaving the present gap site.

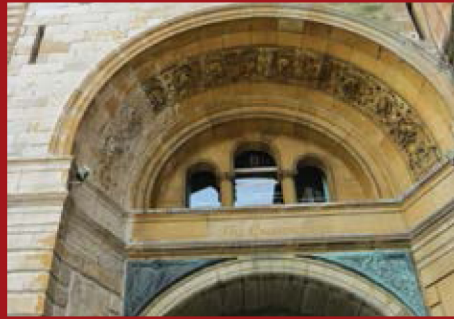
In the modern landscaped square in front of the buildings is the Men Of The Clyde plaque and statue, designed by Naomi Hunt, DA and sculpted by Malcolm Robertson, DA, commissioned in 1975. It is inspired by the paintings of WW2 official artist Sir Stanley Spencer, who depicted the wartime shipbuilding effort, and commemorates all who died working in the yards during the war years.



2 Cathcart Square

Entering the Square at the north west corner, notice a set of carvings on the arch over the Town Hall carriageway which depict a 'zoo' of animals, possibly inspired by Greenock's seafaring links with travel to foreign shores.

The Lyle Fountain in the middle of the square was gifted to the town in 1880 by Abram Lyle, a successful businessman who founded the sugar refinery Abram Lyle and Sons, which later merged with a rival to become Tate & Lyle in 1921. He was Provost of Greenock from 1876 – 1879. The fountain, designed by F A Scudamore of Coventry, has a filigree dome supported by six columns. Bronze shields which bear the crests of prominent families of the time can be seen around the dome, and a fish can be seen leaping out of the fountain bowl.



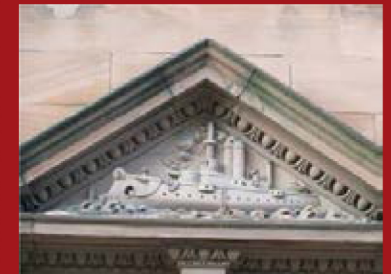
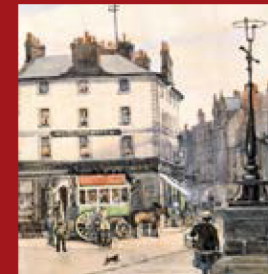
On the south side of the Square, Wellpark Mid Kirk is known locally as the 'Toon Kirk' and is still used for civic occasions. It was built on land gifted by Lord Cathcart in 1758 to a classical design, with its iconic portico and 44.5 metre high steeple modelled on St-Martin-in-the-Fields Church in London. The building can hold up to 1,600 worshippers with seating planned by James Watt's father.



Between the church and fountain, a Horseshoe is set in the stone paving to commemorate the gallows used for public hangings of the condemned from the nearby prison, although the gallows were in fact located in front of the church steps.

The Clydesdale Bank building on the north east corner of Cathcart Square was built in

1899 on the site of the former White Hart Inn. The Inn, founded in 1770, was the final stop on the stage coach journey from Glasgow and an important meeting place. The present building was constructed in 1899 by architect James Thomson. The sculptures above the windows depict Greenock's history of shipbuilding and trade.

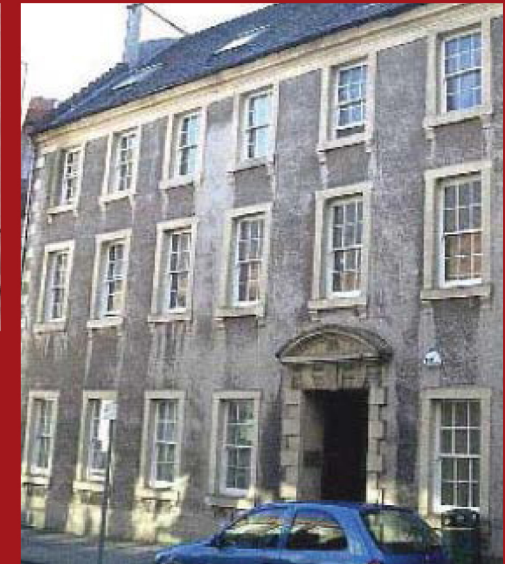


3 William Street

On the northern side of Cathcart Square is William Street, Greenock's oldest thoroughfare and the birthplace of one of its most famous sons, engineer and inventor James Watt.

Heading down the street are Greenock's two oldest surviving buildings, No 9 William Street built in 1752 and the Dutch Gable House built in 1755, recently renovated and refurbished by a local group and is sometimes open to visitors. The buildings further along were part of the Watt

Memorial Engineering and Navigation School, originally opened in 1908 in just two rooms, one on top of the other, following a donation of £10,000 by Scottish-American philanthropist Andrew Carnegie in recognition of the critical role James Watt's development of the steam engine played in driving forward the industrial revolution. The School expanded into adjacent buildings until it outgrew the space and moved to a new James Watt College building in Finnart Street in 1972.



The bronze statue on the corner, part of the Carnegie memorial funding, is just opposite the site of the house where James Watt was born on January 19, 1736.

Crossing William Street and heading back towards Cathcart Square, note the sign for Mince Collop Close, named after a local culinary staple made of minced meat and oats. The 1861/2 Old Bank building, now a bar, was originally the Provident Bank. Further along is Tenement Close, which is still used for housing.

Heading back south across Cathcart Square to the foot of Bank Street there is a Radical War Memorial 'Hands of the Fallen' sculpture by Angela Hunter and Wall Inscription by landscape artist James Gordon commemorating the martyrs killed in the Radical Demonstration or Scottish Insurrection of 1820.

This followed a series of strikes and protests from low paid craftsmen for reforms. The unrest came to a head on Saturday April 8 when a group of radical weavers from Paisley were brought to be jailed in Greenock. Local people who supported the weavers jeered and threw stones at the militia, who got their prisoners in to the prison but had to fight their own way back out through the crowds. The militia opened fire and killed eight local people, including an eight year old boy. The militia escaped,

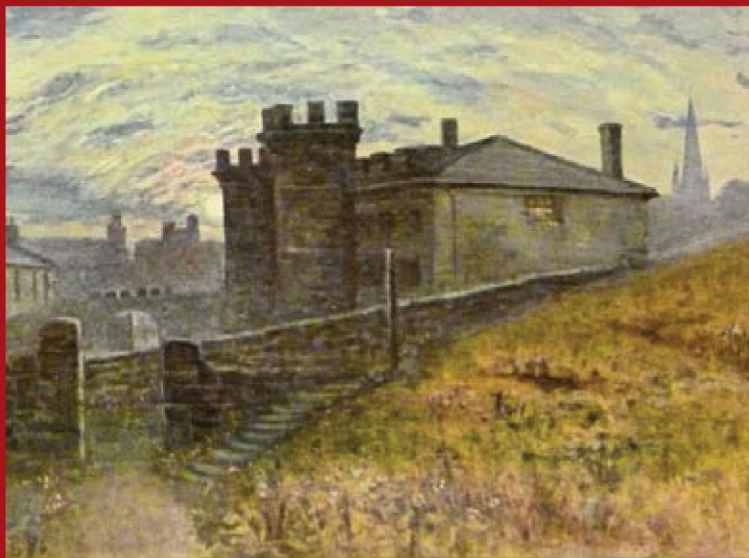
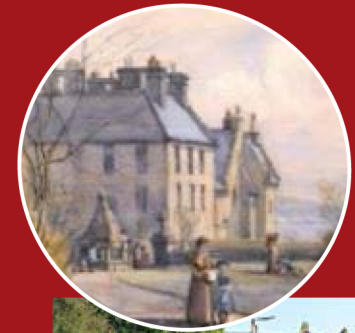
but the crowd stormed the prison and freed the weavers.

Towards the top of Bank Street, on the right hand side, was The Bridewell, the town's jail. It was built in 1808 in the style of an old castle complete with two towers in front and battlements on top at a cost of £1,500. It was from this prison that condemned men were marched, first to the Mid Kirk and then to the gallows in Cathcart Square.

Records show that thief Moses McDonald, who stole food and £4 from a local grocer, was literally let off the noose and dropped to the ground when the rope snapped at his hanging. He was taken back to the Kirk until a new rope was fitted and he was hanged for the second time, this time successfully. The Bridewell was knocked down in 1887 to make way for the Caledonian railway line to Gourrock.

On the opposite side of the road is the Renfrewshire Bank building which is still standing, although no longer used as a bank.

In front of the bank building are steps leading to Well Park, the grounds of the former Castle or Mansion of Wester Greenock home of the Schaw family. The building was demolished in 1886, being undermined by a tunnel for the expanding railway network and all that remains is a well, built in the Scottish Renaissance style with short columns supporting a pyramid top, erected in 1629. The park also has the town's main war memorial, built in 1924.



5 Cathcart Street

At the corner of Cathcart Street and Duff Street, inside a car park of an office building (only accessible on weekdays), look out for a commemorative plaque that marks the spot of the former Longwell.

Dating back to 1682, the 15 metre deep well supplied by a natural spring provided the only water supply for the surrounding area. This was an overpopulated maze of small lanes and filthy closes running straight down to the river, mainly inhabited by poorer families often sharing single rooms. With the influx of labourers for the rapidly

growing shipbuilding and sugar trades, the population exploded from just 746 in 1701 to nearly 40,000 in 1841. This, with the lack of any sanitation or running water, led to frequent outbreaks of smallpox, cholera and typhus.

By 1877, when the area was cleared under the Artisans' and Labourers' Dwellings Improvement Act, workmen rediscovered the well, which had by this time been infilled.

Cathcart Street, named after the Cathcart family, Charles-8th Baron Cathcart, married Marion Schaw, beginning a long

association with the town from 1718. It was one of the first streets to be officially named by the town council. The street developed as the commercial centre of the town with banks, coffee rooms and assembly rooms. Greenock's new Sugar Exchange and Assembly rooms, on the south side of Cathcart Street, next to the Station, helped make the town compete worldwide with the sugar trade, with brokers travelling by rail daily to and from Glasgow city.

In 1801, the Tontine was erected and was a handsome building. It was situated on the north side of Cathcart-street, and contained a large hall, with 12 sitting-rooms and 30 bed-rooms. There were large stables for the customers' use, in an adjoining street. The scheme's subscribers, 400 in number, were procured in the course of two days; making the subscription, which was £25 per share, amount to £10,000. In 1892 the site was sold to the government for a main post office building and at present is the James Watt Public House.



6

The Blitz

The Greenock Blitz transformed the face of the town, destroying as it did many of the historic buildings and making way for new developments.

The first wave began on the evening of May 6, 1941 when 50 enemy planes came down the River Clyde from the east and carried out a two hour bomb attack on the area, followed the next night by a relentless three wave attack by an estimated 250 to 300

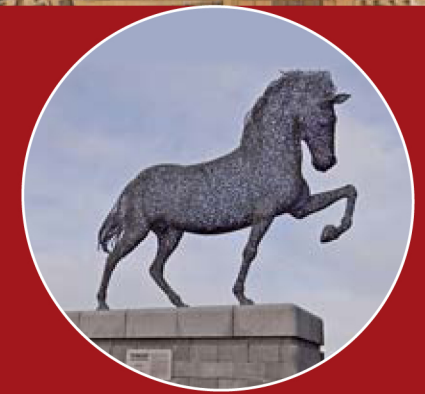
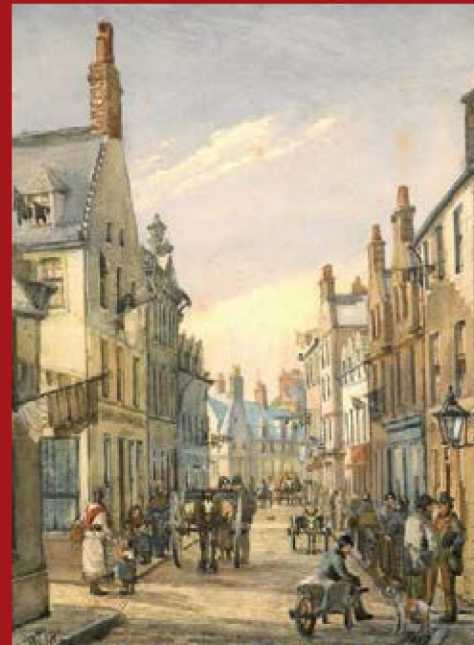
planes. Cathcart Street and James Watt dock were ablaze, 1,000 homes in the town destroyed and 10,000 damaged, resulting in 280 deaths and 1,200 injuries.

The terraces along the eastern side of Cathcart Street, from Bank Street to Terrace Road, were the site of temporary air raid shelters put up to provide a safe refuge for local people during WW2. The shelters were themselves bombed during the Blitz.



There was great excitement on March 31, 1841 when Greenock's Central Station opened on Cathcart Street, marking the start of a new era of rail travel. Flags were flying and bands playing when two locomotives, the 'Witch' and the 'Eagle', pulled out to take 12 carriages holding 300 passengers on the 65 minute journey to Glasgow, with 19 carriages making the return. The inaugural journey was so successful that 240 gentlemen sat down to a celebratory dinner just across the street in the old Tontine Hotel.

The advent of rail travel was of prime importance for the growth of the sugar trade in Greenock, bringing merchants from Glasgow to the town's Sugar Exchange, which had its own entrance to the station. It was also of great importance for the development of the shipping trade, bringing passengers right to the quayside. The station was later moved from its original location on the corner of Cathcart Street to Station Avenue to facilitate the construction of a new railway line to Gourock which opened in 1889.



Heading from the station to the foot of Cathcart Street is Ginger the Horse, a 2011 steel wire sculpture by Andy Scott, who also created the Falkirk Kelpies. It celebrates the contribution that working horses made to the industrial life of the docks, shipyards and sugar refineries, commemorating the tale of the Clydesdale horse Ginger who was said to have fallen into the river and drowned in 1889 while transporting sugar along the quayside.

Crossing Dalrymple Street to the quayside, in the gardens at Customhouse Place, is the Admiralty Plan Anchor which was presented to the town in 1972 by the Royal Navy to commemorate the many seafaring links of the area.

East Quay Lane, now named Brymner Street, was a chaotic bustle of carters and their horses, sailors and passengers all rushing from Central Station to the ships sailing from the docks. Many of the original buildings, including the Palmerston Buildings, have survived.



Customhouse Quay, alternatively known as Steamboat Quay, was the main port for the booming shipping trade and passenger travel of the 19th century.

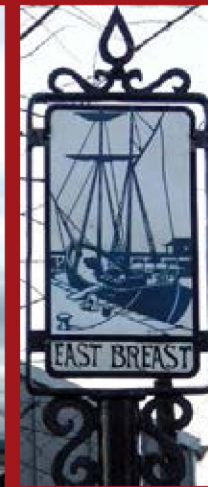
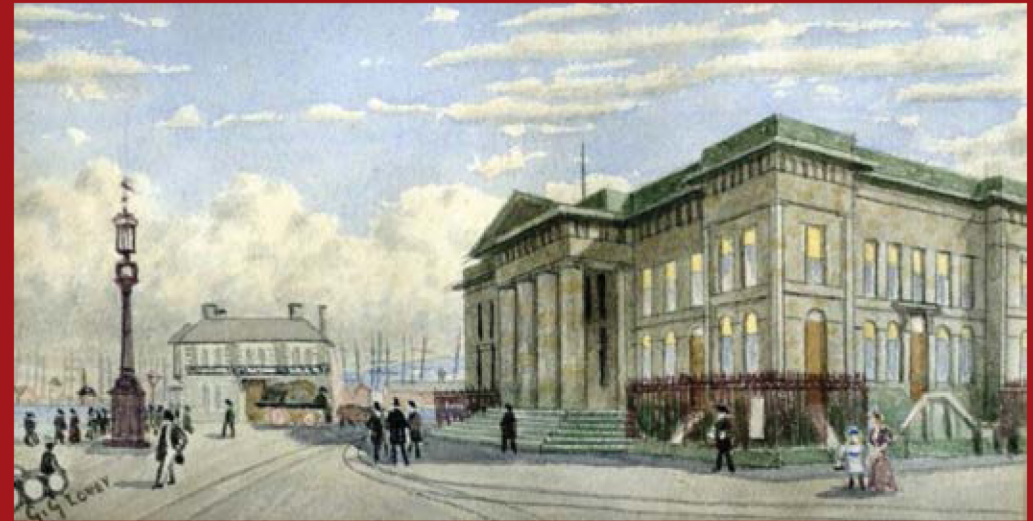
To facilitate this the Customhouse was built on its present site at the eastward side of the old West Harbour, which is now filled in, between 1817 and 1819 at a cost of £30,000. It replaced former small custom offices in Cathcart Street and West Quay.

The building has a Grecian Doric portico facing the river and a pillared entrance at the eastern end which was the entrance to the excise department. Every vessel coming into the area had to pay duty and the gross receipts had risen to more than £455,596 by 1828 compared with £15,231 in 1728, reflecting the growth in trade. The Coat of Arms on the building depicts the Scottish unicorn and English lion.



The elaborate Beacon Tower, which incorporates a clock, weather vane, bell, fog light, post box and water fountain, was designed by local marine artist William Clark and built at the Eagle Foundry in

nearby Baker Street in 1868. A more recent addition has been the Beacon Arts Centre with its two main performance spaces, rehearsal rooms and restaurant.



9 Shipbuilding

Inverclyde's rise as a major shipbuilding area had its roots in the eighteenth century, when it provided the vessels for a thriving local herring fishing industry. The skills learned were the springboard for local shipyards to take advantage of the growing demand for ocean-going vessels for trade with the West Indies and for warships for the Napoleonic Wars.

Scott's Yard, to the east of Custom House Quay, was at the forefront of this expansion of shipbuilding, it being the first shipyard on the River Clyde to build a vessel for non-Scottish owners in 1765 and its first warship, The Prince of Wales, in 1806.

As shipbuilding flourished, with Greenock becoming the second largest port of register in Scotland in 1828 with 425 vessels registered, associated trades of ropeworks, canvas manufacturers, foundries and sawmills grew up.

Pioneering work on the development of the steam engine leading to the launch of The Comet, the first steam powered vessel in Europe to carry paying passengers, in Port Glasgow, and the extension into building iron ships with steam engines, cemented the future of local shipyards.

The years 1875 to 1914 saw the greatest development of Inverclyde's shipbuilding industry.

In the years after the first World War depression hit the industry, briefly relieved by the need for shipbuilding during World War 2. Post-war the industry faced competition from abroad, restructuring and closures. Many harbours, including the former West Harbour, have now been filled in and, together with former shipyard land, redeveloped for shopping, leisure or new industries.

But Scott's Dry Dock, constructed in the 1800's and the oldest of its kind surviving in Scotland still remains. Also known as a Graving Dock, it enabled boats to be propped upright with struts for careening – the removal of barnacles from the hull.

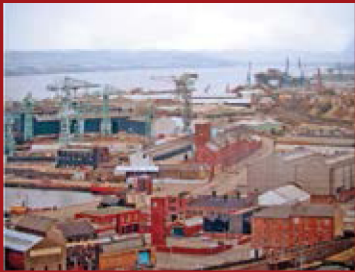
Heading east from the Dry Dock to the roundabout, a monument of heaped stones known as a cairn built on the site of Scott's shipyard commemorates 300 years of shipbuilding in the area



10 Immigration and Emigration

Greenock was a major immigration port in the 1840s and 50s. Scots looking for pastures new following the Highland Clearances and people from Ireland escaping the Great Famine headed for the town and the work opportunities made possible by the expansion of shipbuilding and shipping. It also played a major role as an embarkation

port in the mass emigration of the 19th and 20th centuries, which saw thousands of men, women and children seek new lives in Commonwealth countries and the USA encouraged by Government initiatives. Other schemes saw convicts, ex-soldiers and orphaned children likewise transported overseas.



11 Heading Back

Crossing Rue End Street, the present Fire Station is built on the site of the former St Laurence's Chapel, the first religious building in Scotland to use electric power.

In front of the Fire Station is a cairn built to commemorate the New York firefighters who lost their lives in the 9/11 Twin Towers tragedy.

Carrying on along Rue End Street and Dalrymple Street and a short distance past the James Watt statue, included earlier in the trail, look out for Drummer's Close with its plaque recalling that undesirables were 'drummed out of town' from the courthouse along this street.

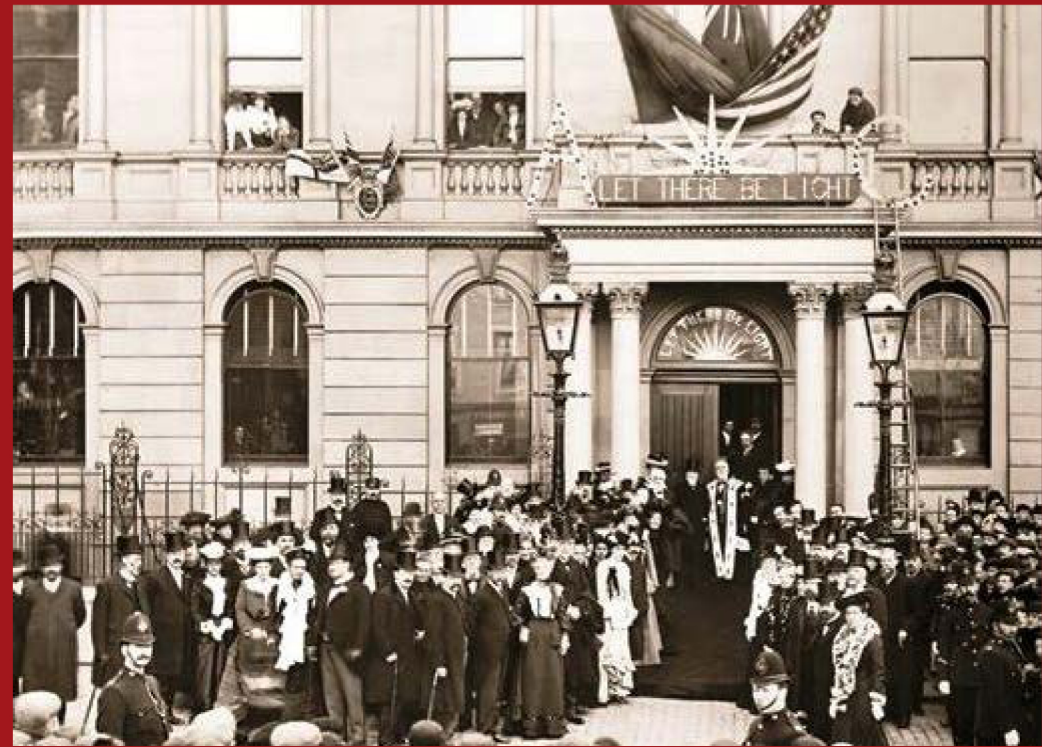


Continuing along Dalrymple Street, heading towards Wallace Place, is the Strathclyde Fire & Rescue Preservation Museum on the site of Greenock's original 1753 fire station which also housed the officers' living quarters.

The museum, run on a voluntary basis by retired fire service workers, has exhibits of several old fire engines and other firefighting equipment.

For opening hours see www.sfrheritagetrust.org

Coming in to Wallace Place, the imposing building to the right of the Town Hall and Municipal Buildings that is now used as Greenock Central Library was in 1882 the town's General Post Office.



When the Post Office moved to premises in Cathcart Street in 1899 the building was purchased with money donated by Scottish-American philanthropist Andrew Carnegie to set up a free public library. He visited Greenock in person to perform the opening ceremony on October 10, 1902.



It remained as Greenock's Central Library until 1970, when the service moved to a new building in Clyde Square before returning to the Wallace Place building in 2015.

Return to Clyde Square by the pathway between the library and Town Hall and Municipal Buildings.



ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Grateful thanks for permission to use photographs to:
Thomas Nugent
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A. Hunter

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

INVERCLYDE TOURIST GROUP

This free booklet has been produced by Inverclyde Tourist Group, a voluntary organisation set up to promote tourism in the area. Please see our website for further information on places of interest and local heritage.
www.inverclydetouristgroup.co.uk

INVERCLYDE COUNCIL

Free guide books, maps and information on where to stay in Inverclyde.
www.inverclyde.gov.uk

DISCOVER INVERCLYDE

Information on upcoming events and activities for visitors coming to Inverclyde for business or pleasure.
www.discoverinverclyde.com

VISIT SCOTLAND

Information on places to stay and things to do from Scotland's national tourist organisation.
www.visitscotland.com

GETTING TO GREENOCK

Road: The M8 motorway from Glasgow runs to the doorstep of Inverclyde, with Greenock just 25 miles drive from the city centre.

Rail: Frequent rail services run from Glasgow Central Station to Greenock.

GREENOCK HISTORIC QUARTER

A WALKING TRAIL THROUGH THE PAST IN THE HISTORIC CENTRE OF GREENOCK



GREENOCK HISTORIC QUARTER

WELCOME

Welcome to our Greenock Heritage Trail.

Take a step back in time and discover the hidden treasures of Greenock's rich past with this self-guided walking tour of the Historic Quarter.

Starting at the Victorian Town Hall, the circular route meanders along cobbled streets and modern highways, from the heart of the town to the waterside, taking in the 'Toon Kirk', a former prison, the railway station, Custom House, dry dock, statues and sculptures, fountains and wells.

Learn about the trade and commerce, shipbuilding, immigration and emigration – and find out about the famous and ordinary people who made it happen.

Follow the map and check out the information for each of the stops along the way. The walk can be done in its entirety or in sections, is mainly on the level and can be completed in about an hour. But linger longer, take in the atmosphere and enjoy the cafes and restaurants along the way.

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GREENOCK HERITAGE TRAIL

A WALKING TRAIL THROUGH THE PAST IN THE CENTRE OF THE HISTORIC QUARTER

- 1 Clyde Square
- 2 Cathcart Square
- 3 William Street
- 4 Bank Street
- 5 Cathcart Street
- 6 The Blitz
- 7 Central Station
- 8 Custom House
- 9 Shipbuilding
- 10 Immigration and Emigration
- 11 Heading back

