



# A walk along Greenock Esplanade



# Greenock Esplanade



This fine wide street is enjoyed by local people and visitors alike for its views, its fine air and its history. We hope this leaflet will enhance your walk along the Esplanade and that you will discover a little about our area and history.

Officially opened in grand style in July 1867, the Esplanade was built with spoil from the excavation of the Albert Harbour. At that time around 1400 ships called Greenock their home port. As we hope to show you, the houses built here were funded by profits made in shipping, shipbuilding, sugar, engineering, woollen manufacture and associated industries.

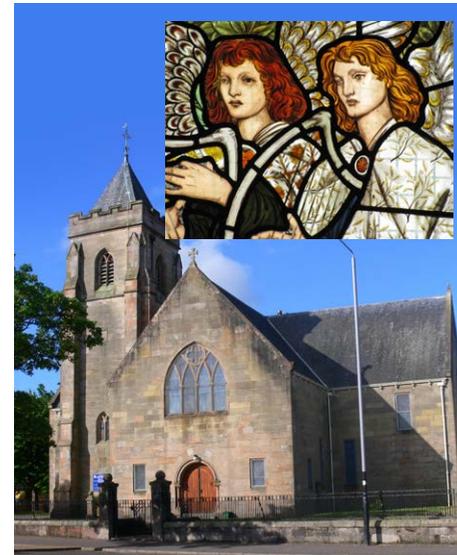


As you walk westward along the south bank of the River Clyde, you will enjoy fine views of the hills and lochs of the Scottish Highlands. The mid-river wreck is *Captayannis* a Greek sugar ship which sank on a sandbank in 1974 prior to unloading. The town you see across the river is Helensburgh, a town founded as a seaside resort by Sir James Colquhoun of Luss in 1776 and named after his wife.

The River Clyde played a vital role in both World Wars. It was where convoys gathered for both Trans-Atlantic and Arctic destinations.

## Estuary Control Tower

Providing a modern architectural twist, the control tower, at the end of the original Princes Pier, was for many years the base for Clyde shipping pilots when they needed to be able to see passing ships. Now the river is monitored by camera but small pilot boats are moored here along with *Torch*, the buoy tender.



## The Old West Kirk

This church was built in 1591 as Scotland's first Protestant church after the Reformation. It was originally in the centre of the town, but when shipbuilders Harland & Wolff wanted a site on the Clyde it was dismantled and rebuilt here stone by stone in 1925. It has a fine collection of stained glass by Burne-Jones, Rossetti and Cottier. The interesting old grave stones were moved with the church.

## Seafield

Modern sheltered housing has been built on the site of the original Seafield House, home of the Scott shipbuilding family. The 1881 census shows that John and Annie Scott, their three children, and five servants as well as six visitors from the West Indies were all residing in the house. Most of the houses on the Esplanade would have contained accommodation for live-in servants. Many of these large houses are now divided into separate dwellings.

## Fountain

The ornamental iron fountain in the grounds is typical of the work of the Saracen Foundry in Glasgow. In about 1880 it started to print a catalogue of its wares which was so successful that fountains exactly the same as this are to be found all over the world. This fountain was once situated at the west end of the Esplanade.



## Heywood House

Home of the family of Daniel Kerr, ship-owner. His daughter Isabel was Greenock's first woman magistrate. Her brother John Kerr was Greenock and Scotland's gentleman cricketer who played internationally for twenty-five years between 1908 and 1933.

## Sandringham Terrace

Built of local red sandstone in 1900, flats in this fine terrace are the most prestigious in Greenock and are much sought after. The front has symmetrical, full-height, bowed bay windows. Stairs to the upper floors lead from every second entrance. Some are lined with unique dado borders of tiles by J Duncan of Glasgow depicting scenes of the Clyde hills, river, steamers and yachts.



## Number 7

For many years the home of William Clark, marine artist, whose career in the mid-nineteenth century spanned the heyday of shipping on the Clyde, encompassing both sailing and steam ships. Ship owners often commissioned paintings from him, appreciating the accuracy of his work. The local McLean Museum owns some fine examples of his paintings.

## Number 9A

This house was used in the cult film "Dear Frankie". Greenock has been the location for many other films over the years including "Sweet Sixteen". The seventh, eighth and ninth series of the BBC TV drama "Waterloo Road" are set and filmed in Greenock.



## Seafield Cottage

Late Georgian in style, it features a shallow roof, a wide bow-fronted façade and decorative ironwork. Richard Cobden, eminent reforming politician, stayed here in the 1840's as a guest of Walter Baine MP.



## Bagatelle House

These two matching houses are spaced to allow a glimpse of the grand Bagatelle House behind. Built about 1841, it was the home of Dr Walter Washington Buchanan, godson of George Washington, America's first president. During World War Two it was communications centre for Flag Officer Clyde. It is now a care home.



## Rockvilla

This house, built around 1840, has been home to ship-owners, wool manufacturers and foundry owners, typifying some of Greenock's main industries.



## Navigation Pillar

The yellow cast-iron fluted column (c.1810) was probably moved here from further east when the Esplanade was formed. Along with the pillar behind, it marks the deep water known as the "Hole" at the Tail of the Bank, the anchorage used for many years by large ships, including trans-Atlantic liners.



## Number 23

An imposing castle-like edifice built in 1847 in the style of a Tudor gothic marine villa. The square tower has impressive stone astragals to the upper windows. At the right you can see an unusually tall chimney with a ladder for the chimney sweep.

## Number 31

On the gable of this house on the west corner of Bentinck Street you can see four blanked-out windows. For about 150 years until 1851, there was a tax on windows. In order to save money, houses were built with fewer windows, but a recess left for reasons of symmetry, or so that windows could be added later. You will see other examples of this on the Esplanade.



## Hope Bank

Childhood home to John Davidson, a Scottish journalist, playwright, fiction writer and translator, but best remembered as a poet. He died in poverty in Penzance, aged 51.

His poem "Greenock" starts -



“ This grey town  
That pipes the morning up before the lark  
With shrieking steam, and from a hundred stalks  
Lacquers the sooty sky; where hammers clang  
On iron hulls, and cranes on harbours creak,  
Rattle and swing whole cargoes on their necks;  
Where men sweat gold that others hoard or spend,  
And lurk like vermin in their narrow streets; ”



## 34 Elmbank

A distinguished building - three storey painted ashlar with attic, and later centre dormer windows, twin narrow bows, centre porch with Ionic columns.

## 35 Levensgrove

Double gabled house for some years the home of the Algie family, still trading in tea and coffee in Glasgow. A later resident was Ryrie Orr, at that time owner of the Greenock Telegraph, our local daily paper.





### 37 Roselle

Residence of John Denholm who, with his brother, founded the business of J & J Denholm, ship-owners, in the days of sailing ships (ship flag shown). A family business to the present day, the Denholm group still manages ships (about 1% of the world's merchant fleet) and also deals with the operation and servicing of ships in the fishing and oil industries as well as cruise ships.

### Flashing Buoy

The Clyde was the first estuary and river anywhere in the world to be lit by buoys and beacons. This buoy was placed to the north at Rosneath Patch in 1880 and was the first to use oil gas, which could be compressed without too much risk. Thousands of similarly lit buoys were soon in use worldwide.



### 38 Ellen Villa

Yet another shipping connection. Here lived Hugh Steel, whose family started a company dealing in dredging and lighterage (taking heavy cargo off ships at the Tail of the Bank, so the ships could sail up the shallow channel to Glasgow). In the 1870's it became Steel & Bennie and started to specialise in tugs, for which they became best known. The tugs characteristically bore robust names like *Warrior*, *Strongbow*, *Thunderer*, *Wrestler*.

### Home Cottage

This was the residence of Allan Park Paton, for many years Greenock's Librarian. He greatly extended its collection, often through his links to writers and artists of his day. He was a poet and scholar in his own right. His interest in local affairs led him to propose the building of the Esplanade.



### Galt Fountain

Allan Park Paton was the originator of the idea of this fountain in memory of Scottish novelist John Galt, a prolific writer in many genres. Although born in Irvine (in 1779), Galt was educated in Greenock after his family moved here. Galt was also the founder of the city of Guelph in Ontario, Canada, in 1827 during his time working for the Canada Company. John Galt died in Greenock in 1839 and is buried in the cemetery at Inverkip Street.



### Clyde House

For many years the home of Captain Edward Scott and his family. Scott commanded the steamer *City of Aberdeen* which was used by Garibaldi as a transport ship for his troops in the Mediterranean. For this service, Captain Scott was awarded the Order of the Crown of Italy by King Victor Emmanuel II in 1875. After this, Scott worked for the Anchor and Allan shipping lines. He died at home in 1883.





### 55 Clydeview

Here lived John Rowan, co-founder of Rowan and Boden, a company which furnished ships such as the Clyde-built Cunard liners *Queen Mary* and *Queen Elizabeth*.

Liners were finished to a high standard according to shipowner style specifications.

### Number 57

Childhood home of Henry "Birdie" Bowers, polar explorer. He served in the Merchant Navy before joining Captain Scott's ill-fated expedition to the South Pole. Bowers was in the party of five who reached the South Pole to find that Amundsen had beaten them by thirty-five days. Bowers died with the others on the return journey in March 1912.



### Number 60

Home of James McCunn, Greenock merchant and ship-owner. His ships flew the gold and black flying horse flag (shown). His second son, Hamish, educated locally, was very gifted musically: he wrote an oratorio when he was twelve and an opera when he was fifteen. He studied music in London, and became an able conductor as well as a talented composer. He is best known for his overture "Land of the Mountain and the Flood" (1887).

### Number 56

Abram Lyle (1847-1912) was director of the sugar refining business founded by his father (also Abram). The business became part of Tate & Lyle, Britain's foremost refiner. Later the house was occupied by shipbuilder Robert Caird of Caird & Co. Caird's built many ships for P&O and the German line which became Hapag-Lloyd. In 1916 Caird's was bought over by Harland & Wolff, whose plans for expansion led to the rebuilding of the Old West Kirk at the east end of the Esplanade.

Later it was owned by George Brown of George Brown & Co. This Company built many small ships at the James Watt Dock in their yard which was known as "Siberia" because of its exposed situation.

### 65 Yangtzepoo

This house, in the centre of a fine row of identical houses which date from the 1870s, was formerly the home of Alexander Fleming of Fleming, Reid & Co, woollen manufacturers, whose retail branches became well known as the Scotch Wool & Hosiery Stores. It now bears the name "Yangtzepoo", alluding, it is thought, to the connection of a later owner with the Hong Kong Dockyard.





## Royal West of Scotland Amateur Boat Club

Before the Esplanade was built, the owners of the houses used to launch their boats from their gardens. This was no longer possible with the new road, so the Club was founded in 1866 to provide access. It gained its Royal Charter when it lent a boat to Queen Victoria to row on Loch Maree during one of her tours of the Highlands. Since then the club has been a hub of activity for those who love to sail, canoe and row.



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The cover photo shows *QE2* on her last visit to her home river when crowds lined the Esplanade to see her.

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