



Discovering Pre-Industrial Glasgow

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Introduction

The perceptions of the city of Glasgow have been governed, first, by its role as the second city of the Empire, with a focus upon the nineteenth century, and then by a post-industrial perspective after the subsequent economic collapse of the city during the twentieth century. The city reached its nadir in the early 1970s. As it redefined itself, the focus was either one of praise for the Victorian city, pioneered by Lord Esher's Conservation Report, and reinforced by the majestic *Architecture of Glasgow* by Andor Gomme and David Walker, or a depiction of Glasgow as an industrial Babylon, hideously oppressing its citizenry, which was the approach mostly (and still) supported by academia. The Glasgow of earlier ages has received scant attention.

The first catalyst of change was the rediscovery in the early 1970s of the city built by Glasgow's immensely wealthy 'tobacco lords'. The tobacco lords, who dominated Glasgow from c. 1720 to 1776, were a small coterie of elite West of Scotland merchants and Glasgow lord provosts who commanded most of the tobacco trade between Virginia and Europe, and, at the same time, directed Glasgow's fortunes. Their

Merchant City, carved out of the back rigs between the Trongate and Back Cow Loan (Ingram Street), was centred upon Wilson Street, and the entire district was scheduled for demolition and rebuilding to the plot ratio of 1:3.5. Destruction had begun with the construction of a Marks & Spencer store. An article by the author published in the summer of 1971 in *Official Architecture and Planning* (McKean 1971), which drew attention to the gracious, unpretentious classical streets axially focused upon civic monuments, built largely with money from tobacco and cotton, symbolized by Virginia Street (fig. 1) and the splendid Tobacco Exchange, coined the term 'Merchant City'. This was the part of the city that Dr John Strang had memorialized in *Glasgow and its Clubs* (1840). The destruction ground to a halt, and the gradual restoration of the Merchant City became the first comprehensive signal of Glasgow's revival. It had improved sufficiently by the mid 1980s that visitors wished to visit it, and plans were prepared for its total revitalization and transformation (Kantel 1984). They were never completed.

Figure 1. Virginia Street in the 1970s – the pediment of a tobacco lord mansion is visible behind the dome of the then bank. Originally focused upon the Virginia Mansion, the street still retains much of the early scale and character of cotton Glasgow, but the Tobacco Exchange located here was needlessly demolished only a few years ago.





By courtesy of the Mitchell Library, Glasgow City Council.

Figure 2. Thomas Hearne's 1772 watercolour of Glasgow Cathedral and the Bishop's Palace, with the remains of the palace's twin-towered gatehouse in the middle and its inner court wall, principal tower and Elphinstone tower on the left.

Since the subsequent periods of Glasgow's architectural history are already well covered, this essay ends, therefore, with the completion of tobacco and cotton Glasgow, c. 1800, at the time when the city's later new towns were only just beginning. The focus is thus upon the city's pre-industrial period – the bridge between medieval/Renaissance Glasgow and its nineteenth century transformation. It is impossible to have a full appreciation of the city's character without an understanding of the architectural distinctiveness of that period.

Renaissance Glasgow

Analysis of early modern Glasgow has been sporadic and largely focused upon the cathedral, although *A Tale of Two Towns* (Baxter 2007) has at last begun to explore its wider urban history. It accepts that old Glasgow comprised two separate urban communities and that the friaries and grammar school settled in the open ground between. An upper and lower town can also be found in other Scottish towns – Stirling, for example. The plan of Glasgow's upper town was a sophisticated example of the distinctively triangular Scottish chanonry – the self-contained ecclesiastical settlement for canons (hence chanonry) that surrounded all cathedrals – with its market cross at the centre of a market place. It was similar – albeit grander – to

those in Dunblane, Dunkeld and Elgin. Not only has the curious urban form of this upper town not been examined, but nor has the entirely different character of the lower town – nor indeed the relationship between them. The episcopal town is much better known. First, there are good ecclesiastical records. More importantly, as a by-product of its virtual abandonment from the later sixteenth century, its ancient fabric survived to be drawn in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries by artists such as Thomas Hearne, William Simpson, Thomas Fairbairn, David Small and the like (fig. 2). Although we know that there was a tolbooth downtown by the fifteenth century, the nature of the mercantile lower town, its buildings and its monuments, remain almost entirely unrecorded.

Figure 3. Ruins of George Hutcheson's 1611 country villa at Partick, drawn by Jean Claude Nattes in 1799.



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Figure 4. Duke's Lodging, Drygate, drawn in 1841 by William Simpson. This view shows the rear of the courtyard, where linen is being dried on a former bowling green, overlooked by a summer house. The free-standing building was the duke of Montrose's town house.

A city like Glasgow existed in counterpoint with its region. In common with the other towns of Renaissance Scotland, Glasgow was probably surrounded by the country villas of its principal merchants and professionals – neatly exemplified by George Hutcheson's 1611 villa and sumptuous gardens in Partick (fig. 3), built, like many of the others, on former ecclesiastical land. Here, surrounded not by a large estate but solely by walled parks sufficient to feed the household, their owners would ride out to enjoy 'blisful ease' (McKean 2007). Whereas there have been studies of their equivalents surrounding Dundee and Edinburgh, no comparable study has been made of the Glaswegian renaissance villa. Indeed, very little study at all has been undertaken of Renaissance Glasgow. Whereas the regional nobility and gentry would certainly have maintained a town house in Glasgow, it is entirely unclear whether aristocratic town houses would have been located in the upper or lower town. The only one recorded to any extent was the Duke's Lodging (fig. 4), the courtyard town house with its garden and summerhouse in the Drygate belonging to the dukes of Montrose, which, it is thought, may have been altered by the architect James Gibbs. But where were the town houses of the Hamiltons, the Glencairns, the Douglasses, Loudons and Lennoxes – the houses, in short, of the group known as the Westland Lords? We know far less of Renaissance Glasgow than is now known of Edinburgh and Dundee.

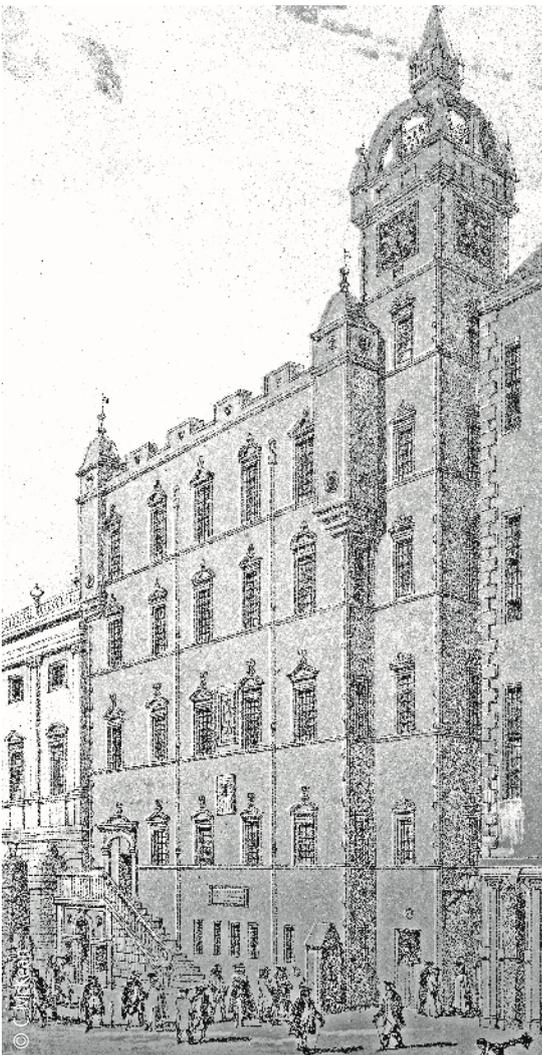
Civic Ambition

With the decision to rebuild the Glasgow Tolbooth in Trongate in 1625, our knowledge improves, but only scantily. This great mercantile monument was of a truly European scale and quality (fig. 6). Probably designed by the royal architect Sir James Murray of Kilbaberton prior to 1625, it stood, relative to the scale of each city, comparison with the great Renaissance Rathaus (town hall) of Augsburg. Yet this sumptuous building has never been adequately studied or documented, and even its most basic dimensions have yet to be determined. The mason, George Boyd, to whom the building is normally attributed, was appointed after the Council had begun purchasing specific building materials, indicating that the design already existed. The tolbooth attracted the admiration of all visitors who were taken up to its belvedere or viewing platform six storeys up.

Glaswegian civic ambition, however, was not just restricted to the tolbooth. At about the same time, Glasgow rebuilt its university into a double-courtyard pile with an exceptional facade to the High Street (fig. 5), and the Hutcheson brothers were constructing their towered hospital (fig. 7) on the north side of the Trongate. How was all this afforded, and what was the source of the inspiration? When the city rebuilt itself in 1652 after the disastrous fire that destroyed the principal streets around Glasgow Cross, it created a novel townscape of regular four-storeyed ashlar gables sitting upon carefully regimented arcades,

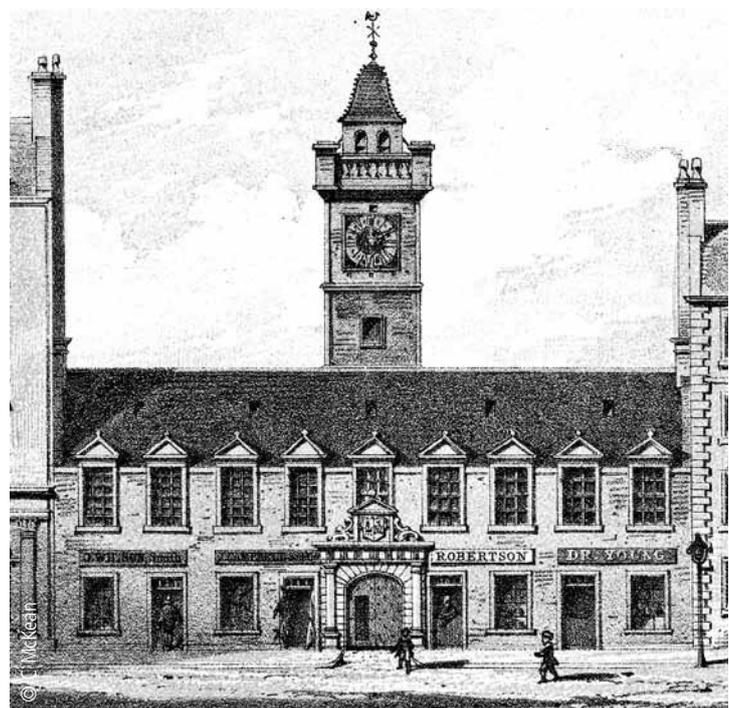


(Above) Figure 5. This watercolour of the great facade of the University of Glasgow when located on the High Street was made by William Simpson in the 1830s.



(Left) Figure 6. Glasgow Tolbooth c. 1760. Copied by Allan & Ferguson in 1834 from Robert Paul's original 1760 engraving, this drawing shows the great tolbooth of 1624–5 in all its glory. Judging by the similarity of the detail to the palace in Edinburgh Castle, it was probably designed by the royal architect Sir James Murray of Kilbabernton and then built by the mason John Boyd.

(Below) Figure 7. The towered Hutchesons' Hospital, Trongate, erected in the 17th century, and drawn by William Simpson in the early 19th century.



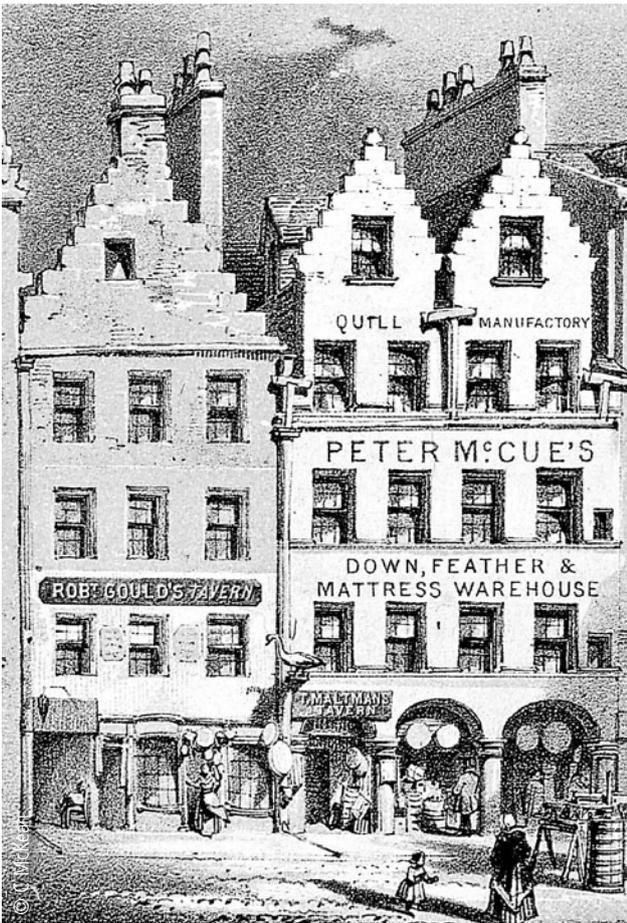


Figure 8. The centre of Glasgow was badly damaged by fire in 1651. When the streets were rebuilt, the magistrates insisted on regular ashlar stone facades above arcades, making it, as Daniel Defoe observed, the neatest town in Britain. This drawing of the High Street is from the 1830s.

Figure 9. Bailie Gibson's Land, at the corner of Saltmarket and Trongate, drawn by James Denholm in 1794. McUre was the first to draw attention to this great urban mansion, belonging to the first Glaswegian to advertise for what looks like a slaving enterprise. It sat upon unusually fine pilastered classical columns and was characterized by a corbelled corner turret. This view also shows the plainer, rather Germanic arcaded frontages lining the Trongate, constructed after the 1651 fire.

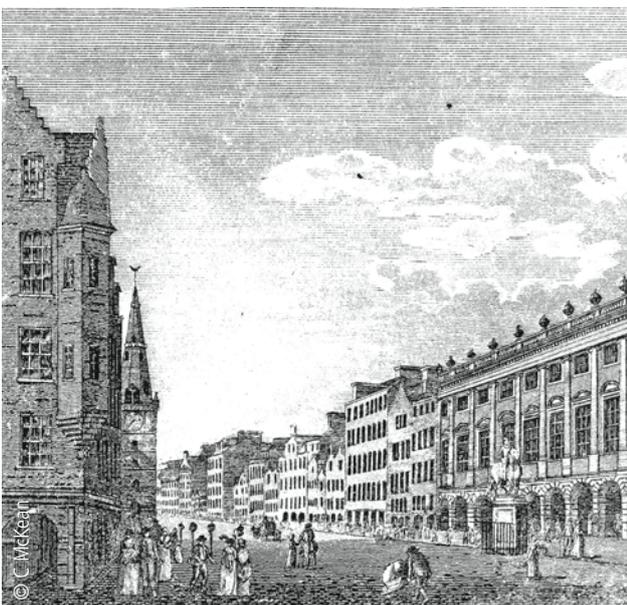
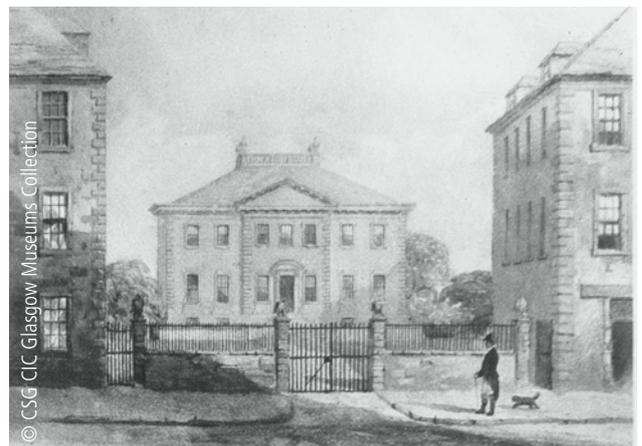


Figure 10. The Merchants' House, Briggait, in the early 19th century, of which only the steeple survives. It is said to have been designed by Sir William Bruce in 1659, but Bruce was – and had been for almost a decade – in Holland and La Rochelle. The Merchants' House was a fine, ornate building with eight tall dormer windows indicating its hall on the principal floor.

all to dimensions specified by the magistrates (fig. 8). But since no other Scottish town was comparably regulated, the inspiration must have come from beyond. The similarity between Glasgow's new streetscape and houses in the barbican at Lubeck is not sufficient to view the latter as the sole inspiration. However, what is inescapable is that Glasgow must have been imbued with a sophisticated sense of civic improvement that has not, hitherto, been appreciated.

Moreover, it is uncertain whether the celebrated Bailie Gibson's Land (fig. 9), with its sophisticated classical arcades and its jaunty angle turret marking the corner of Saltmarket and Trongate, was built at this time or after the second great fire of 1677. Mercantile confidence, however, continued to be expressed in the later century, with the construction of the Merchants' House in the Briggait (fig. 10). Although this has been attributed to Sir William Bruce, this is unlikely given its date (when Bruce was abroad) and the architecture. The substantial neighbouring mansions in the Saltmarket painted by William Simpson showed style, confidence and a very Low Countries approach.

Figure 11. Designed for Daniel Campbell by Colin Campbell in 1711, the Shawfield Mansion was the forerunner of British Palladian architecture. It was also the prototype for the tobacco lord mansion.



Tobacco and Cotton Glasgow

The lack of an adequate cultural narrative for pre-industrial Glasgow is further exemplified by the lack of curiosity about how or why Glasgow became the location of the Shawfield Mansion – what has come to be classed as the first Palladian villa in Britain – which was built facing axially down Stockwell Street in 1711 (fig. 11). It was designed, before he departed for fame in London, by Glasgow resident (although Highlander) Colen Campbell for Daniel Campbell of Shawfield. This extraordinary house, which may well have been the inspiration for all the tobacco and sugar mansions soon to follow, more or less coincided with

James Gibbs' proposals to rebuild the Duke's Lodging (F Walker, personal communication 1992). So what was happening in Glasgow at the time to inspire such innovation? In the 1730s, Allan Dreghorn designed a richly classical Town House (fig. 12) to supersede the 1630s' tolbooth, which has architectural parallels only with the considerably later Somerset House in London. Dreghorn's own town house, on the banks

Figure 12. The right-hand five bays comprised the Town House designed in avant-garde classical style by Allan Dreghorn in 1739, predating Bristol's Exchange by six years. It was extended in keeping for the Tontine coffee room in the 1780s.





Figure 13. Allan Dreghorn's personal house was located on the banks of the Clyde beside the Town's Hospital. Probably built c. 1740, it was the first tobacco lord villa, with its sturdy pediment with its urns and flanking pavilions. Dreghorn was not a tobacco lord, but the qualities of his house evidently seduced them.

of the Clyde beside the Town's Hospital, was probably the prototype tobacco-lord mansion, with its flanking pavilions and steep ornate pediment (fig. 13), and the huge portico of his St Andrew's Parish Church, designed with Mungo Nasmith, was very adventurous (fig. 14). The later treatment of St Andrew's kirk was even more innovative in that William Hamilton surrounded it by houses to create an urban square. That urban form, which was, within Britain and Ireland, until the mid nineteenth century, to remain unique to Glasgow, was followed in St Enoch's Square, Exchange Square and Nelson Mandela Place. Comparable urban squares were only to be found on the American east coast.

Figure 14. St Andrew's Parish Church by Allan Dreghorn and Mungo Nasmith surrounded by the later 1789 houses of St Andrew's Square by William Hamilton. Drawn in 1798 by James Denholm.



The tobacco lords have been studied as an economic rather than cultural phenomenon, and the sugar and cotton lords barely at all. Yet a culture shared across the Atlantic was probably only to be expected, and that might well explain the greater distinctiveness that Glasgow's architecture took on during the period of tobacco and sugar dominance. Given that John Glassford of Douglaston now lived in the Shawfield Mansion, the influence of that great villa (which was replicated in America) cannot be overemphasized. In its mature form, the five-bay tobacco lord house evolved into a villa with three central bays projecting, capped by a high ornate pediment with urns, and flanked by small twin pavilions. In some cases, such town houses replicated their country mansions – as was certainly the case with James Ritchie of Craigton. No matter how close they were to each other, these houses remained detached, and the nearest parallels are the villas of Anapolis, Maryland. This urban form countered the trend to build uniform terraced streets of 'houses in the English manner' favoured elsewhere in Enlightenment Scotland. Being detached from each other, these urban villas of Charlotte, Queen, Miller, Virginia and Buchanan streets were suburban in their form, and the most striking was the regularity of Charlotte Street (fig. 15). It should not, therefore, be too surprising in this celebration of individuality, that Britain's finest architect, Sir John Soane, should have been approached for two designs for the next generation of villa building in Queen and Buchanan streets (G Stamp, 2003).

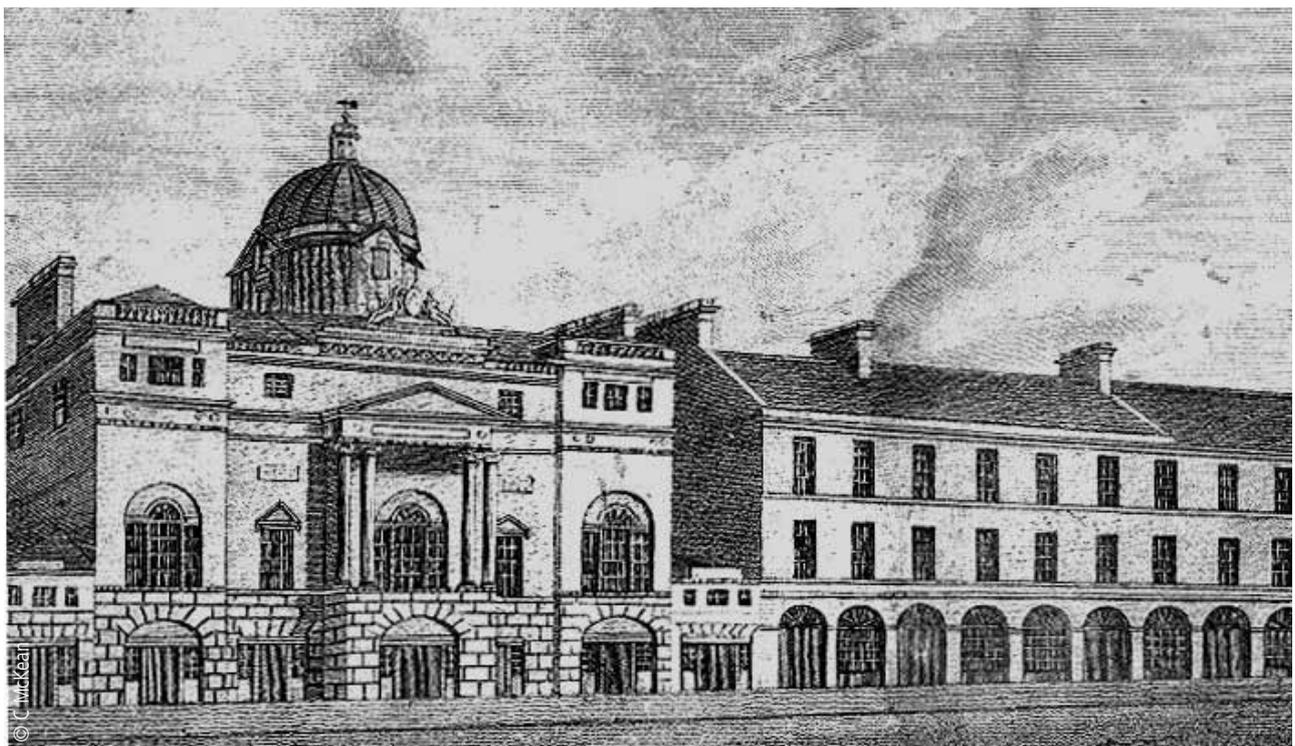
Just as individual was the way that the lesser merchants were occupying this new town. They also shunned regular terraces of houses, opting instead to live in lavish apartments in three-storeyed blocks above



Figure 15. Charlotte Street, drawn by David Small in the late 19th century – the only entire street of the idiosyncratic tobacco lord houses to be recorded. It was a unique urban/suburban form of detached villas with pavilions in a regimented layout. A similar urban layout existed in Queen, Buchanan and Miller streets.

arcaded commercial premises at street level. Thus were Glassford and Albion streets developed (fig. 16), and that is what Robert and James Adam proposed for the private speculation of Stirling's Square, just behind the High Street. It was entirely closed in that all the streets were blocked, usually by a monument set on the axis. Glassford Street was terminated by the Star Inn, Brunswick Street by David Hamilton's 1802 replacement Hutchesons' Hospital, Garth Street by Robert Adam's Trades House, and the Candleriggs by the Ramshorn Kirk. The principal weather-protected space at its

Figure 16. Glassford Street in 1798, drawn by Robert Scott for James Denholm. It shows James and Robert Adam's Trades' House flanked on each side by the apartments above arcaded shops typical of the Merchant City, which was an extension of the city centre rather than a suburb.



heart was Wilson Street, facing which the Adams designed one of their arcaded blocks. This urban form had much more in common with contemporary European than with contemporary British practice. It was entirely different from the later 'open' Glaswegian grid of the city's subsequent new towns as they surged over Blythswood hill in the early nineteenth century.

Conclusion

Glasgow's architectural trajectory 1560–1810 was distinctive, innovatory and fascinating. The city bred the designers of the tobacco and sugar lord

houses, of whom we know the name of only one – Allan Dreghorn – and virtually nothing at all about the nameless remainder. Although it attracted the attentions of architects as celebrated as James Gibbs, William Bruce, James Smith, Robert Adam, James Adam and Sir John Soane, it has never been seen fit to examine the ambitions of the city's architectural culture. It is high time that early Glasgow was researched to the same degree as industrial and post-industrial Glasgow, for prior to 1800 it ploughed a very distinctive furrow. It was only after 1800 that the city's architecture began to converge much more strongly with that of the remainder of Scotland.

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