

GLASGOW
WOMEN'S
LIBRARY

WOMEN OF THE GORBALS HERITAGE WALK

For much of history, the inhabitants of Gorbals faced daily challenges to make ends meet; then as today, women bore a disproportionate share of poverty. But there is another strand to the Gorbals story, that of a sharing economy. As one woman within reminisces, "Everybody helped each other, you know. When times were good you shared with others. When times were bad, others helped you out." Little of Old Gorbals survives, so you will need to use your imagination!

Begin at Victoria Bridge [1] (b: 1854). Here the 13thC wooden bridge at the edge of Glasgow's boundary crossed to Bridgend, a row of turf cottages on sleepy Gorballes Muir. When the bridge was rebuilt in stone in 1345, Lady Marjory Stewart of Lochoy funded an arch, which bore a carving of her head. By 1771 the village, now Gorbals, had grown to 3,000. Irish seeking seasonal work might find a bed at compatriot Molly Gillespie's (1766–1826). Her Gorbals lodging house charged thruppence a bed, but kept two free for the destitute. The motley guests included "beggars, fortune-tellers and rowly powly gentry". In 30 years, she provided shelter to 50,000, and was, wrote Hawkie, the itinerant broadsheet seller, "the most charitable person I have ever met with in all

my travels." By the mid 19thC, following the Irish potato famine and Highland clearances, the masses disembarking at Broomielaw were increasingly desperate, and Gorbals acquired a reputation for overcrowding, sickness and poverty that haunted it into the 20thC. Before crossing, glance at the mural of women hawkers on Clutha Vaults pub. Many Irishwomen in Gorbals worked as weavers, but some preferred self-employment, giving their name to Paddy's Market. This grew around Bridgegate in the early 19thC, convenient for Gorbals hawkers. From 1935 the better-off rented railway arches. Others traded in Shipbank Lane outside, but when police came, they had to grab their "dollops" (bundles) and run. Despite traders' protests, the market closed in 2009.

Front Cover Image: Staff at Whitefield's Drapery Warehouse, 1936 (L-R) Rose Sacharin, Sylvia Balkin, Doris Antick © Scottish Jewish Archives Centre. Main St (now Gorbals St) looking north (1868-71) by Thomas Annan. Glasgow City Libraries, Information and Learning

Cross bridge, turn left into riverside walk to **Glasgow Central Mosque [2]** (b: 1984). 19thC Gorbals was diverse. After the Irish came European Jews, fleeing Russian then later Nazi, persecution. Tenements commonly housed Jewish, Scots and Irish families together, and affinities developed. Christian women lit lamps for Jewish neighbours on Shabbat, and in return, shoes might be mended or a loaf baked. The community supported several synagogues and institutions, and a mikveh (women's ritual bath) was provided at Gorbals Baths. Last and in smaller numbers came South Asians responding to post-WWII labour shortages, the men later joined by their families. Grey skies and dark interiors were a shock, but neighbours assisted with unfamiliar appliances like Hoovers, and in turn discovered the delights of curry. Many Asian women, skilled dressmakers, worked in textile factories. From the 1960s, educated Muslim women taught extracurricular Urdu

classes at Abbotsford Primary, ensuring the community's children would not lose their mother tongue. Some still teach today at the Central Mosque. Cross Crown St, turn right into Florence St.

A decade before Scottish universal health care in 1948, **Florence St Clinic [3]** targeted the health of Gorbals children, with sun-ray treatment to prevent rickets. Nearby, where the Mosque stands now, was the area's first centre of healing, **St Ninian's Leper Hospital**. Founded in 1350, year of Glasgow's Black Death, tradition holds that its patron was the aforementioned **Lady Marjory**. In 1900, plague again visited Gorbals. The first victim was fish-hawker **Mrs Bogie** from this street (then Rose St). When funeralgoers became infected, the authorities banned Irish wakes. 16 died before quarantine and disinfectant halted the outbreak. Outwith such crises, addressing gaps in health provision for the poor fell to charities. Women and

children formed the bulk of patients at **Glasgow Medical Mission**, which opened its Oxford St dispensary in 1884. It aimed to heal the "sinful, as well as the merely sick" and its services were required into the mid-C20th, when the all-female staff included small but formidable "bible-woman"/nurse **Celia 'Goldie' Goldfein**. Funding for the first **Glasgow Samaritan Hospital for Women** (est. 1886) in South Cumberland St was raised by medical staff who perceived a dire need among poor women for gynaecological services. It later moved to Govanhill, developing into one of the largest such hospitals in Europe. Turn left to cross Ballater St, then first right into Commercial Rd.

This iron-framed mill, commonly known as **Twomax Clothing Factory [4]** (b: 1816), now houses social work services. The billow from its chimney which rotates like a weathervane is **Smokestack (1994)** designed by self-taught artist **Rita McGurn (1940–2015)**.

Molly's History. 1

Account of the Life and Transactions of **Molly G...**, otherwise **Molly the Stuffer**, who died in the Gorbals of Glasgow, on Tuesday the 1st of August last, and who kept a Lodging House there, giving an account of the numerous scenes she was engaged in with the various Lodgers who frequented her house for near 30 years, consisting of Tinkers, Beggars, Fortune-tellers, Road-side Gentry, and a



Molly's History (1826), Broadsheets Collection, Glasgow Room, Mitchell Library. **Two women outside Links' drapery shop, Main St (1907)** © Scottish Jewish Archives Centre; **Shafiqah Hassan teaching weekend Urdu School, Abbotsford Primary, 1973** courtesy of Parveen Ibrahim; **Samaritan Hospital for Women (1886)**, Glasgow Caledonian University Archives (Heatherbank PL6060).

Route length: 4km/2.5 miles
Terrain is flat pavements and paths, except grassed approach to Stop 10, which is uneven underfoot.

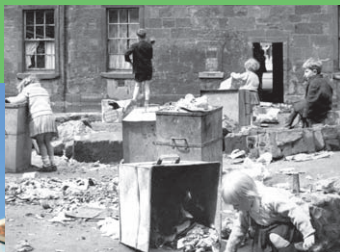


Glasgow Green

Southern Necropolis



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Staff of Glasgow Medical Mission (L-R) Dr Mae Oastler, Mrs Steel, Miss Celia Goldfein, Mrs Smith. gorbalschristian.homestead.com, Smokestack © Steve Hosey/Glasgow City Council, Children in the Gorbals © Newsquest (Herald & Times), Detail of Orchard Plan (2004) © Amanda Currie,



Weaving mills like this were the site for bitter industrial disputes in Glasgow from the 1820s. Operating spinning mules (machines) had long been a male preserve, but when factory owners introduced first lighter, then “self-acting” mules, women could be employed as operatives. Unemployed male spinners organised to terrorise female workers. The intimidation and violence included beatings, vitriol-throwing and shootings, and one worker’s mother was murdered. A parliamentary report described how one factory owner “found it necessary to dismiss all female spinners from their works, and to employ only male spinners, most probably the very men who had attempted their ruin.” Elsewhere, Gorbals women were employed in the **Adelphi Hair Factory** in Ballater St, which spun horsehair like wool. The factory’s shape earned it the nickname “coffin works” but working conditions could also be deadly. Russian horse manes were the source of an outbreak

of anthrax in 1878, resulting in three women’s deaths. Turn right into Old Rutherglen Rd to enter Rose Garden [5].

“**The Rosie**”, a former burial ground, was a precious green playground for children living in cramped “single-end” (one room) tenements. Today it contains two works by women artists. To the north is the bronze **Rose War Memorial** (2005) by **Liz Peden**, specifically dedicated to Victoria Cross winner Private James Stokes (1915–1945), but serving as a tribute to all from Gorbals who gave their lives during conflict. By the east wall is **Gorbals Orchard** (2004) by **Amanda Currie**. Free for all to harvest, it serves a practical as well as artistic function in an area that historically suffered poverty and malnutrition. Leave via south gate, go left then take second right into Queen Elizabeth Gardens [6].

On this site once stood the notorious high-rise flats of **Queen Elizabeth Square**

(b:1965) designed by Sir Basil Spence. Campaigning by Gorbals Labour MP **Alice Cullen** (1891–1969) was rewarded by Glasgow Corporation’s ambitious programme of slum clearance and building. When the Queen visited the site, Cullen insisted she view an old single-end, wherein Her Majesty enquired, “Is this all?” Delighted with their new sky-high kitchenettes and indoor bathrooms, some women nevertheless missed the tenement camaraderie. Spence enthused that on washing day, the flats would resemble “a great ship in full sail”, and suggested tenants could grow peaches on the balconies. In practice, elevators broke down, and people were blown off their feet by gusts round the base. Plagued by damp, the flats were demolished in 1993. During the explosion, bystander **Helen Tinney**, 61, lost her life. More flats fell in 2016 to make way for housing on a more human scale by New Gorbals Housing Association. Turn left into Cumberland St.



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Alice Cullen and Queen viewing model of high rises, 1961 © Newsquest (Herald & Times); Lilius Graham and children at Braendam House, by permission Lilius Graham Trust; Heroine of Matagorda illus. Swain (1873) commons.wikimedia.org; Helen Crawford (1920s) © Gallacher Memorial Library.

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Gorbals Boys [7] (2008) recreates Oscar Marzaroli's iconic 1963 photograph in bronze. Sculptor Liz Peden says, "The Gorbals always had this reputation of the men with the big rough and tough image, and this cut right through that." Walk on to St Francis Centre [8].

St Francis Church (b: 1881), now a community centre, serves as a backdrop to discuss the contribution of one Gorbals activist driven by faith. Lilius Violet Graham (1917–2008) was a Scottish aristocrat who moved to Gorbals in the 1950s as a lay worker with the Episcopal Church. She joined the **Gorbals Group**, a radical Christian ministry inspired by East Harlem ministers who lived among those they served. Her tenement flat in Abbotsford Place was a hub for locals seeking advice, women's groups, children playing and trainee social workers. Graham believed the Gorbals needed not only bread, but roses, and established a holiday scheme for children that runs today. On inheriting the family manor house near Stirling in 1972, she opened its doors as a holiday

and respite centre. She later gifted the house to the **Lilius Graham Trust** which continues her legacy, assisting families affected by social exclusion and poverty. Follow Cumberland St to cross Caledonia Rd and enter the Necropolis.

At the northeast corner of the Southern Necropolis (b: 1840) lies the **Heroine of Matagorda**, Agnes Reston, nee Harkness [9] (1771–1856). Harkness accompanied her soldier husband to Matagorda, Spain during the Napoleonic Wars and showed great courage under siege. As the troops withdrew, she made several desperate forays under fire to rescue her son and belongings. Back in Glasgow, the family lived on her husband's army pension but after his death, Harkness became an inmate of the Town's Hospital and Poorhouse for the next decade. A public appeal in 1845 gave her financial independence, but now 74, she chose to remain in the poorhouse, paying board until her death. Follow route southwest to a white monument of a veiled woman [10]. Buried here are

Magdalene Smith, her husband, and housekeeper **Mary McNaughton**. The women died in 1933 when, shielded by their umbrella, they walked under a tramcar. Local children know this monument as the **White Lady**, and believe her gaze turns you to stone. Exit by main gate, turning left along Cumberland St to cross at lights. Enter second metal archway on your right, then take left fork alongside grassed area. Continue through Hallside Place, then left into Cumberland St [11].

Born at no.175 (demolished), suffragette, pacifist, and communist **Helen Crawford** (1877–1954) endured imprisonment and hunger strikes for the suffragette cause, but quit the prowar wing in 1914. During WWI she organised strikes against rent-hiking landlords, and spearheaded the Women's Peace Crusade. At her funeral it was said she "personified all that was best in revolutionary womanhood". She was not the only local suffragette. When Ayr racecourse was firebombed in 1913, the identity of the woman



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Catherine Taylor © Stirling Smith Art Gallery and Museum; *Girl in a Wood* (1928) © Estate of Hannah Frank; *Ida Schuster in "The Balcony" by Genet* (1982) © Citizens Theatre; *Unity Theatre touring bus* (1946) © Glasgow University Library.



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responsible was guarded by her family for 90 years. It is now believed she was Gorbals cinema cashier **Catherine Taylor** (1868–1930). Before the suffragettes, Chartist organisations such as **Gorbals Female Universal Suffrage Association** (est. 1839) campaigned to extend the vote to all men. Still, even sedate political activities such as temperance teas had chairwoman **Agnes Lennox** (flourished 1839–1841) denounced as a “brazen-faced jade”.

Go right into Pine Place, left into Errol Gardens, then straight into Hospital St. Cross the car park and a busy junction at lights to arrive under the railway arch [12]. **Seven Arches** (2016) by **Liz Peden** and arts group **WAVEparticle** remembers notable locals. The reproduction of *Girl in a Wood* (1928) pays tribute to **Hannah Frank** (1908–2008). Frank was born in South Portland St to

Russian-Jewish immigrants. Her father ran a photographic and scientific equipment shop on Saltmarket, and perhaps early knowledge in this area led Frank to sign early works **Al Aaraaf** – a mysterious, brilliant star. She trained as a teacher, attending only evening art classes, yet became skilled in several different media. She is best-known for her austere yet romantic monochrome drawings, but after 1952, sculpture became her focus. For much of her life her work was not widely known, but after her niece championed her work in advance of her centenary, Frank finally achieved recognition as the last living Glasgow Girl. Turn right into Gorbals St.

Behind the modern atrium of the **Citizens Theatre** [13] (est. 1945), the auditorium of the 1878 theatre is preserved. This and the Linen Bank diagonally opposite are among the last remnants of Victorian Gorbals. Actor **Ida Schuster** (b. 1920) has appeared here for decades.

The youngest of nine born to Yiddish-speaking Lithuanian immigrants, she began acting aged 15 with the Jewish Players. In 1941, the Players merged with other groups to form the **Unity Theatre**, touring in a converted RAF bus to bring political theatre to the masses. Their major success was *The Gorbals Story* in 1946, which played to over 100,000 people in six months. Set in a crowded tenement, its characters represent a cross-section of postwar Gorbals society, including a Highland baker, Irish labourer and Indian peddler. Schuster says “The Unity Theatre was a particular response to a particular time. These were heady days and after the war we really felt utopia had arrived.” She turned professional in the 1950s, and directed the inaugural production at the Tron Theatre (est. 1981). She still takes to the boards today.

For further reading, visit the Women Make History pages at the website address below. For more insight into women's history contact Glasgow Women's Library to find out when our two hour guided walks of Gorbals and other areas of Glasgow take place. You can also download our maps and audio tours from our website.

About Glasgow Women's Library

Glasgow Women's Library is no ordinary library. It is the only Accredited Museum dedicated to women's history in the UK, and also a designated Recognised Collection of National Significance. A place for browsing, borrowing and being inspired, GWL is welcoming, free and open to all, with programmes of events and activities that offer something for everyone: from film screenings to literacy support; from talks to supported volunteering opportunities; and from exhibitions to workshops.

About Women Make History

Women Make History is GWL's women's history project. Volunteers research and deliver pioneering Women's Heritage Walking tours in Glasgow and produce related maps and audio tours. Other activities include talks, workshops, recording the histories of living heroines, exhibition curation, tour guiding, training and ongoing women's history detective work. For more details contact GWL.

How to get involved

Glasgow's women's history is still largely hidden from the general public. There are many ways to get involved to address this. Why not join our women's history detective or tour guide teams? You may have information you think could be added to this tour or suggestions of how it could be improved. If so, we want to hear from you. Some people choose to support GWL by becoming a Friend. This is an invaluable way of ensuring that GWL will be around for future generations and details can be found here: <http://womenslibrary.org.uk/how-to-get-involved/become-a-friend/>

Contact us

To find out more about GWL, Women Make History, our guided tour dates and maps and audio tours of other routes please visit our website: www.womenslibrary.org.uk, or email us at info@womenslibrary.org.uk

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