

Glasgow
Merchant City
Women's
**Heritage
Walk**

Glasgow Merchant City Women's Heritage Walk

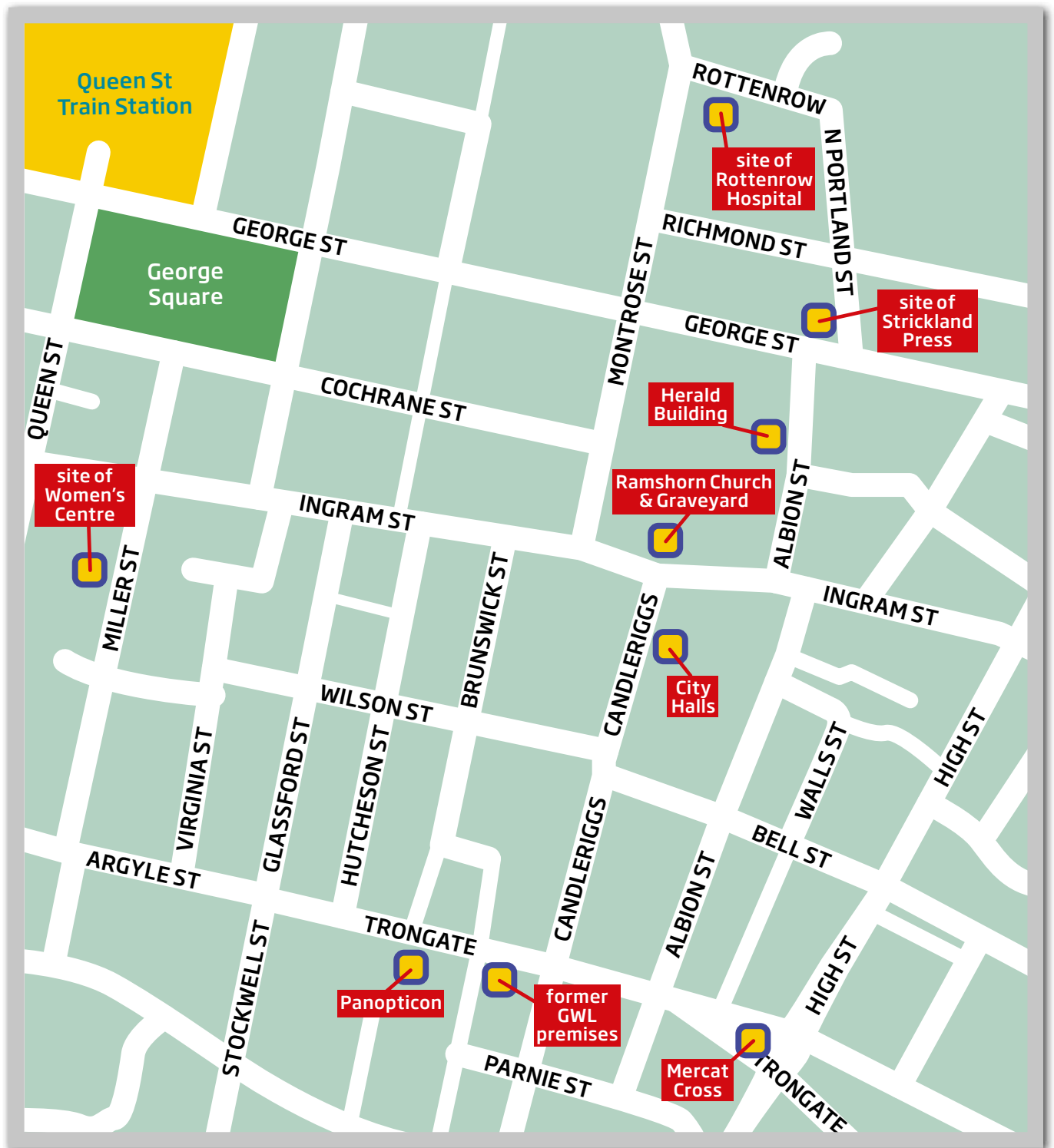
A portrait hangs in Glasgow's People's Palace. Infamous as damning evidence of the city's role in the transatlantic slave trade, the Glassford Family portrait holds another secret. The face of the wealthy merchant's wife has been painted over that of his former spouse. This piece of 18th century editing deems women to be replaceable, almost ghostly: there in spirit, but not important to the story.



This map aims to redress that view and to shout about, share and celebrate the achievements of women in this regenerated and thriving quarter of Glasgow. Women have played a part in this area from its dear green beginnings, through its darker days, to its recent resurgence. So, join us on a journey of her-stories - you can choose to follow the suggested route of the walk (in which case allow this to take around 45 minutes to an hour) or, if you have time, why not take a little longer to wander and soak up the sights and sounds of the area?



Route map



LET'S BEGIN our tour by walking to the upper edges of the Merchant City. Stride up the Montrose Street hill to savour the gardens behind Strathclyde University. A campus now, formerly these streets were crowded with ramshackle red sandstone tenements. Despite its poverty, one artist took inspiration from the area and the children who played in its streets. **Joan Eardley** (1921-1963) had studios close to here, firstly in Cochrane Street, then St James Road, and was often seen using a pram to transport her easel and paints. The Samson family who stayed further along Rottenrow at number 115 had a particular impact on Joan. Her resulting pictures of Glasgow children express her understanding of tenement life in the 1950s. Joan herself said: "I



like the friendliness of the back streets, life is at its most uninhibited here."

If you look north along the street of **Rottenrow** you will see a portico on the crest of the hill. This was the original entrance to **Glasgow Royal Maternity Hospital**. (If you hiked up, try to imagine doing it



whilst nearly 9 months pregnant; the incline was known by some as Induction Hill). The Royal Maternity Hospital moved to this site in 1860 before eventually moving to the Royal Infirmary in 2001. The gardens now occupy the site where generations of Glaswegian weans entered the world. This was not its only achievement. The hospital had an international reputation as a quality midwifery training centre. In addition, remarkable advancements in pre- and neo-natal care were piloted and developed at the Rottenrow. Risky caesarean sections were performed successfully in the 1880s; a significant development in an unhealthy city where many women found it difficult to give birth naturally due to developing rickets in their youth. Ultrasound was also developed at Rottenrow and tested on expectant mothers. A doctor who assisted on these pilots commented, "Glasgow women are wonderful and they accepted all this without demur".

When the building was demolished, paperweights were made from the rubble. They sold like hotcakes, evidence of the affection that people had for the building. The giant nappy pin in the middle of the garden pays homage to Maternity. It's a poignant stopping point to reflect on all that was achieved at Rottenrow.

Walk down and towards the left, through the garden and onto North Portland Street; continue downhill till you reach George Street. The shop to your right stands close to the former home of the **Strickland Press**, where the Socialist paper *The Word* was printed from 1938 until 1962. Two women, Jenny Patrick

(1884-1971) and Ethel Macdonald (1909-1960) were instrumental in its production. The *Word* published articles on topics such as family planning, peace and equality. Two years earlier, both women travelled to Spain at the height of the civil war. Ethel was to achieve particular prominence. Whilst in Barcelona she worked in an anarchist radio station and regularly broadcasted rousing reports on the conflict around the world. She smuggled food and letters to anarchist comrades in prison and relayed information and messages back out. The 28-year-old woman from Bellshill went on to assist in the escape of prisoners out of the country. Her rebellious actions led to her imprisonment, her position as a "thorn in the flesh of Barcelona authorities" and the moniker "The Scots Scarlet Pimpernel". She returned home to a rapturous welcome in November 1937. A newspaper reported on her speech to the crowd of 300: "I went to Spain full of hopes and dreams. It promised to be Utopia realised. I return full of sadness, dulled by the tragedy I have seen". Let's move on to consider more women who have been involved in media and journalism. Cross George Street and walk down the wide street in front of you. On your right you'll see a formidable black building. In this A-listed vitrolite monolith the *Daily Express* was produced for 38 years, but in April 1974 the presses fell silent. The publishers planned to move the production of the paper elsewhere. Journalists and other workers were stirred to action and produced a paper, funded by their redundancy money, which highlighted workers views and rights: **The Scottish Daily News**. Its slogan was "Read the people's paper and keep 500 in jobs." Dorothy Grace Elder was initially a features editor within the workers co-operative that created the paper. By her own admission she was "one of the very few women on the editorial floor - but that was true of all papers then." Underfunding and dwindling sales forced the publication to fold. However, some of the workers remained, staging a work in and "turning out a rebel 'emergency edition' to which [Dorothy] was elected as editor." Workers sold the paper in the streets of the city. "The people of Glasgow rallied when we were at our lowest points - cold, often downright hungry but still producing a paper for nothing. They turned up with donations, they marched, they bought the paper... We worked seven days. I can never forget the mighty roar of the presses starting up at night or the bonding and comradeship we felt." Financial pressures eventually ended the work six months after it began.

The Albion Street building went on to house the *Glasgow Herald* where a number of prominent female journalists made their mark and continue to do so. One of them, **Lesley Riddoch**, went on to co-found and edit the feminist magazine **Harpies & Quines**, which was published from 1992 until 1994.





Continue down the road then turn right on Ingram Street until you reach the Ramshorn Church. Walk into the graveyard through the gate furthest to the right. Just beyond half way in is lair five, resting here, in the Fleming family tomb lie the remains of Emile L'Angier. When his remains were exhumed two days after his death in 1857 he was found to be riddled

with enough arsenic to kill 20 men. Love letters, at first gushing, and then increasingly distant, found in his apartment were traced back to a **Miss Madeleine Smith** (1835-1928) of Blythswood Square. The same Miss Smith who signed for arsenic in a local druggist for beauty purposes. The subsequent sensational murder trial was a Victorian scandal of the highest order, with the story being reported as far afield as New York. Madeleine's dignity and coolness during the trial won and lost her admirers in equal measure. No conclusive evidence emerged to implicate Madeleine and the outcome of "not proven" left her free to see out her days in London and America.

Etched into the pavement in front of the Ramshorn lies the work of **Kate Robinson**, a rare and recent example of public art by a woman in the city. The City Council commissioned the artist to create this in 2008. Symbolic shapes and characters embed ideas of history and alchemy into the street itself. Take some time to unravel the story of the stones before you move on.

Further along this street and on the left (if you have time to wander now or later) at number 205-207 stood the remarkable tearooms of proprietor **Miss Cranston** (1849-1934). With a unique interior designed by **Margaret Macdonald Mackintosh** (1865-1933) and her famous husband, the Ladies Room was advertised specifically for business ladies to lunch in. Margaret's gesso panel, the May Queen (below) can be found in Kelvingrove Museum in the west end of the city. Tearooms provided an alcohol free space to meet at a time when the tem-

perance movement was flourishing. Temperance campaigns had gained popularity in the 19th century in a city where it was felt that many of its problems were perpetuated by the "demon drink". From the entrance to the Ramshorn Church, walk right cross the road and then left down Candleriggs. Turn left onto Candleriggs where you come to **City Halls**. A particularly vocal campaigner for prohibition came to speak to a rapt Glaswegian audience here in 1908. Carrie A Nation (right), known as "the bar-room smasher" came from Kentucky, hatchet in hand, to spread the word. Her bar smashing campaign wasn't her



only barnstorming message: she was outspoken too in her call for the enfranchisement of women. The Temperance movement in Glasgow was instrumental in politicising women and garnering support for the suffragette movement. Links were made too between domestic abuse and alcohol with the effects on the family being vocalised in this dramatic lament written by "Stella" with the music by a certain Miss E Pankhurst:

*We were so happy till Father drank rum,
Then all our sorrow and trouble begun;
Mother grew paler, and wept ev'ry day,
Baby and I were hungry to play.
Slowly they faded, and one Summer's night
Found their dear faces all silent and white;
Then with big tears slowly dropping, I said:
'Father's a Drunkard, and Mother is dead!'*

For 70 years until the 1940's the City Halls hosted Temperance Music nights every Saturday night.

Walk down Candleriggs until you reach a crossroads: on your left is Bell Street. A number of women's organisations including Rape Crisis and Women's Aid have found their home at number 30, collectively supporting women,



and campaigning against the causes and effects of violence and exploitation. The first of the Second Wave campaigning group premises was also launched in this area. Nearby, at 57 Miller Street, the **Glasgow Women's Centre** opened in 1975. Buses from here drove women to protests against pornography in Soho and to Greenham Common. The organisation also produced the radical publication (now in the Glasgow Women's Library's Archive) **Hen's Own**, one edition of which printed the full response of the Daily Record's editor in defence of the paper's "artistic" page 3 pictures.

Time has changed much in the Merchant City, but there are still lingering signs that tell stories. Take a right along Wilson Street, in the distance you'll see the impressive gold Jacobean Corsetry sign. Take a left, and as you walk down Brunswick Street, look up at the crumbling cream building on your left. You can make out a faded ornate "w" on the front of the building. This was site the former department store run by Gerald and **Vera Weisfeld**. Together they set up a clothing empire across Britain. They opened their first shop in 1977, giving "every woman what they wanted". Now Vera passes on her skills in business to other women and has funded various violence against women charities.

It doesn't take much to imagine even today this area living up to a former reputation of "a den of sin and a citadel of vice" whilst walking down this cramped lane. A number of shebeens and houses of questionable repute peppered this area back in the Victorian era.

Step out onto Trongate, walk left for a minute then look across the road to see a fantastic symbol of its regeneration. The front of the Britannia Panopticon Theatre has recently been restored to its former glory. **Marie Loftus** (1857-1940), a local luminary born on Stockwell Street, trod the boards here. Her talents and fame took her to London and beyond. On her return to Glasgow fans queued round Trongate to catch a glimpse of the hometown star.

Continue left along the street, beyond the Tron clock tower until you come to the medieval-looking Mercat Cross. Designed by **Edith Burnett Hughes** (1888-1971), the first practicing female architect in Scotland, it is a fitting point to finish our tour. Edith tended to



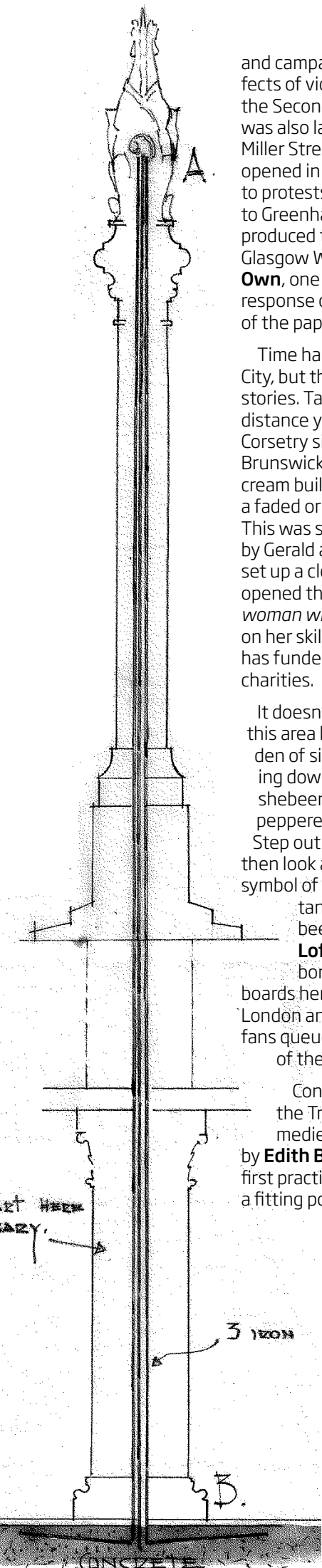
specialise in domestic architecture, but in the late 1920s she was commissioned to design the cross, working with the sculptor **Margaret Cross Primrose Findlay** who modelled the unicorn on top. Solid, strong and at the heart of the city, the building acts as a fine metaphor for the remarkable achievements of the women that we've celebrated during our walk.

We hope you've enjoyed your wander around the Merchant City. This provides a flavour of what we have uncovered about the hidden history of women, but there's always more to be discovered...



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Produced by Glasgow Women's Library's
'Women Make History' project

For more insight into women's history in this area contact Glasgow Women's Library to find out when our two-hour guided walks take place.

About Glasgow Women's Library

Glasgow Women's Library (GWL), launched in 1991 is a unique organisation in Scotland. It is a key information hub on women and gender. It has an exciting seasonal programme of events, activities, courses and other learning opportunities and has dedicated projects that support women to develop their reading writing and numbers and a project that is tailored for Black and Minority Ethnic women.

About Women Make History

Women Make History is GWL's women's history project. Volunteers have been involved in the research, design and delivery of pioneering Women's Heritage Walking tours in Glasgow and the development of related maps and podcasts. Other aspects of the groups' activities include talks, recording the histories of living heroines, tour guiding, training and ongoing women's history detective work.

With the
assistance of:



Glasgow
CITY COUNCIL



How to get involved

Glasgow's women's history is still largely hidden from the general public. There are many ways to get involved in Women Make History's work. Why not become a women's history detective? We can show you how. Or maybe you would like to join our research or tour guide teams? You may have information that you think could be added to this tour or some suggestions of how it could be improved. If so, we want to hear from you.

Some people have chosen to show their support of GWL and the aims of Women Make History by sponsoring a book, shelf or section in our new premises and dedicating it to one of Glasgow's lost heroines. This public fundraising campaign is called Women on the Shelf and you can donate telephone us or contact us at website address below.

Contact us

To find out more about GWL, Women Make History, our guided tour dates and maps of other routes please visit www.womenslibrary.org.uk, email us at info@womenslibrary.org.uk or call **0141 248 9969**

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*This trail was developed by the Glasgow Women's Library's 'Women Make History' group.
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