

# LET'S TALK SHOP

## THINKING ABOUT GOVAN'S SHOPFRONTS

Let's Talk Shop is a creative learning project examining the heritage of Govan through its high street. The project is part of the Govan Cross Townscape Heritage Initiative and is funded by Glasgow City Council and the Heritage Lottery Fund.

During the Autumn Term 2013, Primary 7 pupils from schools across Central Govan participated in a series of creative learning workshops and field trips to learn about their local area and built environment.

Focusing on the heart of Govan's historic centre at Water Row and Govan Road, pupils from Pirie Park, Riverside, St. Constantine's and St. Saviour's Primary Schools explored the physical, social and cultural development of Govan in relation to its 'high street', shops and shopfront design.

Govan has developed as a settlement through many cycles of change. It enjoyed two periods of great prosperity in both the medieval and 19th century industrial periods, before enduring a catastrophic rupture and decline triggered by the end of shipbuilding on the Clyde.

The project looks at one method being used to arrest this decline: the regeneration and conservation of the area's historic shopfronts and buildings. It aims to inspire local young people to think about how Govan can be made more attractive and prosperous in the future, and to believe that positive change can happen.

With guidance from the A&D Scotland learning resource and 'High Street' exhibition, the project promotes visual awareness and understanding of the built environment through creative design activities and reflective thinking.

Let's Talk Shop is an interdisciplinary schools project, using the local built environment as a teaching resource across 4 areas of the Curriculum: Expressive Arts, Social Studies, Literacy & English and Technology.



## Govan's Regeneration

Govan was a more important and prestigious settlement than Glasgow in medieval times and the centre of the world's ship building industry in the 19th & 20th Centuries. However it has declined both economically and physically in recent decades. To arrest this decline, public agencies, working hand in hand with the local community, developed Central Govan Action Plan (CGAP): a ten year physical regeneration programme running from 2006 to 2016 designed to make Central Govan attractive, vibrant and prosperous – a place where people wish to live, work, visit and invest.

Preserving and promoting Central Govan's exceptionally rich heritage, particularly its beautiful surviving listed buildings, is a key regeneration priority. As such, Govan Cross Townscape Heritage Initiative (GCTHI) forms a key part of the Central Govan Action Plan. Funded by Heritage Lottery and Glasgow City Council, this grant giving programme aims to restore and preserve the key historic features and buildings at Govan Cross, using the improvements to accentuate Central Govan's unique character and to improve the town centre's commercial prospects and quality of life. The THI also offers a range of training and educational projects to enable people to engage with and explore Govan's heritage and to develop new interests and skills in the conservation of the built environment.

Let's Talk Shop : Thinking About Govan's Shopfronts is a project funded by Govan Cross THI to promote a greater understanding amongst tomorrow's generation of the principles of good design, the role of good design in creating successful places and the economic, social and environmental benefits that can be created through the Traditional Shopfront Improvement Programme currently operating in Govan.

Let's Talk Shop was developed and delivered by Geraldine Greene for Govan Cross THI  
Exhibition design Geraldine Greene

Thanks to: Architecture & Design Scotland  
Pirie Park, St Constantine's, St Saviour's and Riverside Primary Schools, Govan

All images author's own, unless otherwise noted

for more information on Govan Cross THI go to [www.getintogovan.com](http://www.getintogovan.com)





# GOVAN HERITAGE AND THE HIGH STREET



Image: Exterior of the Lyceum Cinema, Govan Road c. 1920 © Newsquest (Herald & Times). Licensor www.scran.ac.uk



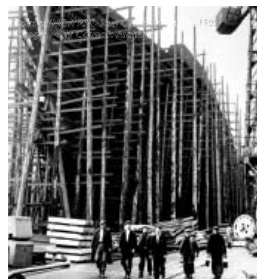
Reconstruction of Govan c. 1000 AD  
Illustration by Chris Brown



"Pictish Warrior, AD 297-841".  
By Wayne Reynolds. Copyright Osprey Publishing



Govan YMCA AND Post Office. Postmark 1905  
Glasgow City Council: Archives



Work in progress during the building of The Empress of Britain  
© Newsquest (Herald & Times). Licensor www.scran.ac.uk

## The place and people

In AD 870-1 Dumbarton was captured after a four-month siege by a Viking army from Dublin, and after this defeat, the centre of Strathclyde moved 18 km upstream to Govan. The Strathclyde Britons founded a royal stronghold at a site called Doomster Hill, around the church of St Constantine, on the southern bank of the Clyde.

The Strathclyde Britons spoke a P-Celtic Brythonic language. This would have been a volatile time for people with the constant threat of wars and invasion.

## Shops and shopping

At this time, shops as we know them, did not exist. People would exchange and barter agricultural produce, with some short-distance trading.

Most exchange was done without the use of metal currency, and small temporary tents might have been used by travelling traders.

10th Century  
Kingdom of  
Strathclyde

17th Century  
Weaving &  
fishing village

## TIMELINE

19th & 20th C  
Shipbuilding &  
Industry

1960's & 70's  
Post-War  
Years

## The place and people

Over the 19th and 20th Centuries, the physical landscape rapidly transformed with the deepening of the river and the construction of shipyards, factories, tenements and civic buildings for the expanding working population. The early 19th century population of about 2,000 rose to 9,000 in 1864 and to nearly 90,000 by the end of the century.

There was great poverty and deprivation at this time for the working class people in Victorian Govan, as well as much wealth and prosperity generated as a result of the industry.

## Shops and shopping

Shops at ground floor level were designed as an integral part of the building in which they were situated. Govan Road was a thriving shopping area, with all necessities close to home.

Over this period of time national retail brands began to emerge such as Marks and Spencer and Boots, and the expanding transport infrastructure meant that goods could easily be transported from afar.

The extraordinary history of Govan and its physical landscape have always been shaped and influenced by its position as a riverside settlement on the River Clyde. 'Let's Talk Shop' explores some of the most significant periods of time in Govan's history, and reflects upon its physical, social and cultural evolution along with that of shops and shopping through these times.

Govan has a very significant early medieval history, when it was the political centre and royal seat of the Strathclyde Britons. Later it was a small fishing, weaving and agriculture village and developed rapidly during the industrial revolution to become a world leader in the ship-building industry.



View of Govan Ferry in 1757 by  
T.C.F. Brachle © Glasgow City Libraries.  
Licensor www.scran.ac.uk

## The place and people

In the 17th Century, Govan was a small agricultural and fishing village, and the site of a ferry that linked the area with Partick. Trades and crafts such as weaving and pottery were established and coal mining was also important at that time.

## Shops and shopping

A market would have been the main trading centre and social hub, where people would get their daily food and provisions. Local produce and some imported goods like tea, coffee and perhaps spices could be bought from merchants from small lean-to shacks and stalls. At this time most ordinary people were illiterate, so pictorial signs with symbols would have been used as signage.



Jimmy Reid at UCS meeting 1971 © The Scotsman Publications Ltd.  
(Herald & Times). Licensor www.scran.ac.uk



Middleton Shipbuilding Yard, Govan and Meadowside Shipbuilding yard c. 1930. Glasgow City Council: Archives

## The place and people

As the heavy engineering industries on the Clyde began to decline, thousands of people lost their work in the yards and the population of Govan began to fall. This was followed by high unemployment and a lack of investment in the area.

## Shops and shopping

During the 1960's it became common for a household to have a car and so supermarkets became popular where people would bulk buy pre-packaged food for refrigeration.

Britain's first pedestrian shopping precinct opened in 1955, and the first 'fast food' store Wimpy opening in London in 1954.

LEARNING INTENTION:  
I HAVE AN UNDERSTANDING OF THE SOCIAL AND HISTORICAL SIGNIFICANCE OF THE HIGH STREET AND ELEMENTS OF MY LOCAL AREA'

What was a trip to the shops like in Victorian times?



What was Govan like in the past?



How important is the high street to a community?



How has shopping changed over time?

"We learned about Govan from the 10th Century to the 1960s & 1970s. We also matched pictures to their correct time in history. After that we made our own characters from different times in history and wrote a diary of what they would do at that certain point in history."

P7 Pupils, St. Constantine's PS

"Children have been made aware of their local area and have some understanding of the local economy."

A. Trelawney, P7 teacher, Pirie Park PS

"I think the history of Govan is brilliant"

"I enjoyed the trip to Govan because I learned lots about the area"



# HISTORIC SHOPFRONTS & CONSERVATION

Much of Govan's exceptional historic townscape was built in the 19th & 20th Centuries, at a time of great importance when Govan was a centre of the world's ship building industry. Many significant buildings were built in this time of prosperity, such as The Pearce Institute, Fairfield Shipyard Offices and the beautiful British Linen Bank and YMCA buildings at Water Row. Remarkably, these buildings still survive today.

At this time, sandstone tenements were built to house shipyard workers and their families, who had come to Govan to work in the rapidly expanding industry.

The tenements housed numerous examples of excellent ground floor traditional shopfronts, but these have not survived the intervening years.

As can be seen from historic photographs, Govan once had a vibrant shopping area with traditional shopfronts as fine as anywhere in Glasgow. There were a selection of interesting and varied frontages, which were well designed, constructed from high quality materials and finely detailed. They acted as a frame for the goods for sale and showcased beautiful window displays.

Many Govanites still remember the upmarket nature of the retail offering on Burleigh Street and the wonderful array of shops that once existed there.

Today, Govan is a Conservation Area, and the THI's Traditional Shopfront Improvement Programme is taking measures to preserve the surviving architectural features on shopfronts, and to restore shopfronts to their traditional design. This will make the streets more attractive, safe and enjoyable, and make Govan more prosperous and vibrant as a result.



222 Langlands Rd, 1938 - New shop front, grocer  
Glasgow City Council Archives



31 Burleigh St, 1935 - New shop front, tailor  
Glasgow City Council Archives



19-21 Burleigh St, 1927 - New shop front, Boots  
Glasgow City Council Archives



815 Govan Rd, 1927 - New shop front, truller and confectioner  
Glasgow City Council Archives



"The project has allowed the children to personalise the regeneration project at an important stage of their lives, as they are aware of Govan's challenges, but not necessarily what's being done to develop the area, or indeed what role they can play."

C. Morris, P7 teacher, St. Saviour's PS

Can you see any original architectural details?



What did this shop used to be?



What building materials are used in the design of this shop?



How do you feel about how your local shopping area?

The school children went on field trips to Govan and Edinburgh, observing and gathering visual information about shop front designs and the built environment.

Through an observation, sketching and riddle solving game, the quality of the built environment was considered. This referred to building materials, shop front design styles and signage, and reflected upon how well the area functions as a 'high street' today.

They viewed a wide variety of historic shop front types in Edinburgh's Royal Mile and Cockburn Street, to offer perspective on a different style of townscape to Govan's, and to analyse the reasons for these differences.

Within Govan, special attention was paid to some examples of shop front conservation already carried out as part of the Govan Cross Townscape Heritage Initiative.

LEARNING INTENTION:  
'I UNDERSTAND THERE ARE HISTORICAL AND PRACTICAL REASONS BEHIND THE DESIGN OF BUILDINGS AND CAN APPLY SOME OF THESE TO MY OWN CREATIVE WORK'



"We looked at the materials of the shop signs and worked out which shops were independent and which ones were chain shops. We also looked at what buildings are still in Govan today and what buildings are no longer there."

"I like the café because you can sit outside and enjoy the sun and read."



# HIGH QUALITY SHOP FRONT DESIGN



Café 13, Govan Rd. The first Traditional Shopfront Improvement project, completed as part of Govan Cross Townscape Heritage Initiative

The Govan Cross Townscape Heritage Initiative aims to breathe new life into Govan by improving the physical appearance of the area and enhancing the things that make Govan special and unique. People are attracted to and enjoy living in historic, locally distinctive and well-kept places.

Shops in Govan have a vital role to play in ensuring that the area maintains a vibrant and interesting range of economic activity, whether as retail shop windows, café and restaurant frontages or other public services such as banks.

Well designed and maintained shopfronts help contribute to a high quality urban environment, and will encourage people to spend their time and money in Govan. Increasing footfall, of course, leads to new opportunities for businesses and jobs as well as a better quality of life for local residents

## Best practice principles of good design

The aim is to reinstate the original details, scale & proportions of the shopfront.

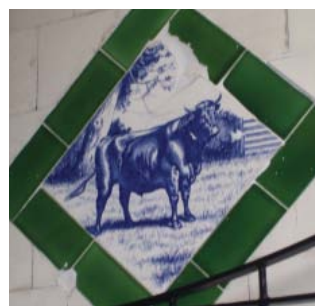
New designs should be in keeping with the building style & be sensitive to the context.

All new work should enhance the special character of Govan Conservation area & add quality and interest to the street.

Any original features should be retained or restored.

Only high quality, traditional materials should be used, such as timber with painted finishes.

Where possible hand painted signage should be installed.



Govan Cross 1915 Glasgow City Council Archives



Govan Cross and Café 13 new frontage 2013



Which typeface projects the desired 'personality'?



Does the way this shop looks appeal to you?



What building materials have been used here?

**LEARNING INTENTION:**  
'I HAVE AN UNDERSTANDING OF THE EFFECT DESIGN AND COLOUR CAN HAVE ON THE VIEWER AND CAN USE THESE APPROPRIATELY IN MY OWN DESIGNS'

The purpose of the lesson is to introduce different shop front design considerations, so that the shop looks attractive and appealing to the customer.

With an emphasis on signage design, the shape, form, colour, pattern, typeface, symbols and logos are explored, enabling the children to devise and design their own shop signage.

Professional traditional signwriter Frank Carty, from Artisan Artworks, visited the schools and discussed his trade with the children. He worked with the children to produce a sign for the project using traditional tools and techniques, such as a 'mahl' stick and gold leaf.

Comparing their area with another part of Scotland is a benefit of the project, reflecting on their local area, seeing the positives and the negatives

C. Morris, P7 teacher, St. Saviour's PS

"Signage is really important because it attracts people into the shops"

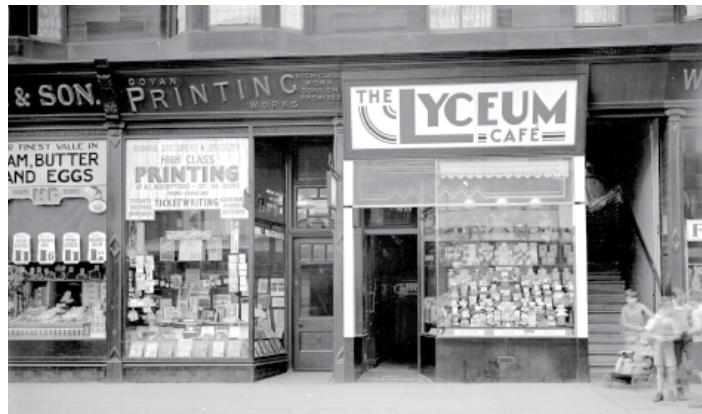
"I enjoyed seeing how the signwriter created his signs."

"We took a trip down the Royal Mile and looked at the many different signs, shop fronts and the materials used for them."



# SHOP DESIGNS FOR 21st CENTURY GOVAN

Historic shop frontages on Govan Rd - site for the children's new designs



853 Govan Rd, 1939. New shop front, Lyceum Cafe and Govan Printing Works. Glasgow City Council Archives



Improved shopfronts at The Portal, a creative community arts hub, Govan Road



The Bakehouse, Linthouse Urban Village

There are a number of innovative ways in which shop units in Govan have been imaginatively used to service the local community in a variety of ways, addressing problems of decline and high rates of vacancy within the area.

**THE PORTAL** A creative community arts hub transformed from a row of derelict shops in 2008 and further renovated with CGAP Shopfront Improvement Grant in 2013. Plantation Productions manage the space with The Portal Artist in Residence Space, Gallery 966 and Sunny Govan Radio currently based there.

**ALLOTMENT** In 2009 The National Theatre of Scotland produced a unique evening of live music, new art and theatre in a vacant unit in Govan Shopping Centre

**LUV CREATIVE SHOPFRONTS** 13 vacant and occupied shops in the Linthouse area of Govan participated in a creative shopfront redesign initiative, which included a cafe and gallery for community activities as part of Linthouse Urban Village.

**GOVAN GATHERING LIGHT 2003** As part of this festival of light produced by 'Roots in the Community' during winter 2003, a number of artists installed temporary lighting installations in vacant shop windows in central Govan.



'High Street Change: Our lifestyles, income and mobility have changed dramatically over the last century, directly affecting what happens on the High Street. We now have far fewer shops and travel much further to get to them. The most regular trips we make are still for groceries, but 76% of this demand is met by just four supermarket companies. We have convenient 24 hour internet shopping, one stop out-of-town shopping centres and big box retail parks with acres of free parking. Alternatives that our local High Streets sometimes find hard to compete with.'

Architecture & Design Scotland, High Street learning Resource

The challenge for the pupils is to create an imaginary new shop for a unit on Govan Road, which considers all of the aspects that 'Let's Talk Shop' has examined.

As well as creating designs that are visually appealing and that respect the conservation area, the pupils are encouraged to formulate ideas about what measures could be made to improve the function of Govan's 'high street', as a vibrant public space for social activity as well as a centre of commerce. Considering their own aspirations as children as a starting point, they are encouraged to think about the kind of shops that contribute to a healthy, safe and sustainable place for people living in 21st Century Govan today.

The pupils are encouraged to apply important design considerations to their work: how the style of shopfront relates to what is being sold, how well it fits with the surrounding buildings and the use of architectural features in the shopfront.

**LEARNING INTENTION:**  
'I CAN WORK CREATIVELY WITH VARYING MATERIALS TO CREATE A 2D MODEL DEMONSTRATING ATTENTION TO DETAIL'

What's your favorite thing about a day out at the shops?



What kind of shop do you think Govan needs?



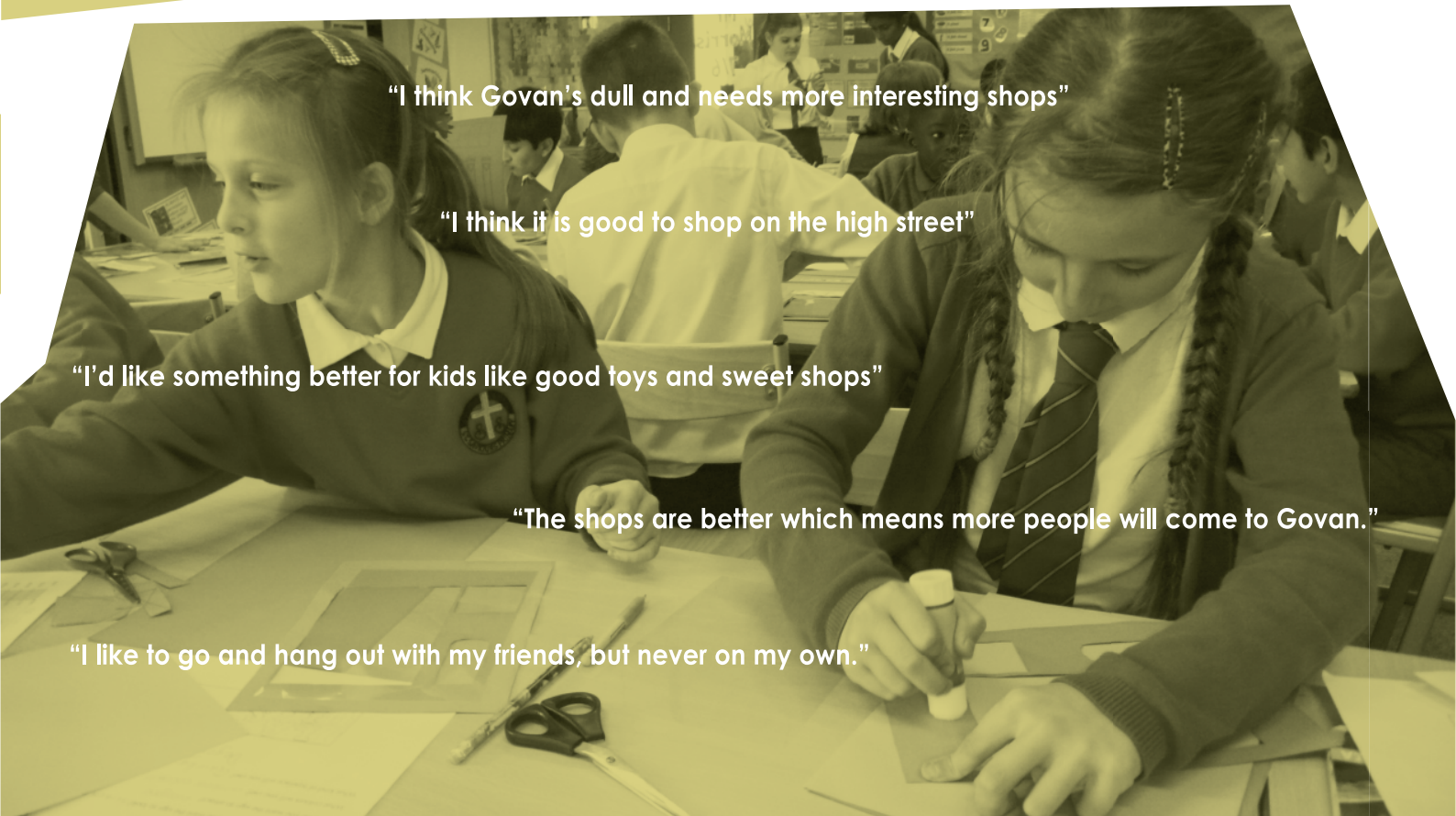
"The children can now recognise the difference between independent shops and chain shops."

N. Formissano, P7 Teacher, St. Constantine's PS

What kind of shops does Govan have now?



Who do you want to attract into your shop?



"I think Govan's dull and needs more interesting shops"

"I think it is good to shop on the high street"

"I'd like something better for kids like good toys and sweet shops"

"The shops are better which means more people will come to Govan."

"I like to go and hang out with my friends, but never on my own."