Glasgow: A dear, green place

The 1997 R.I. Convention host city abounds with impressive architecture, open spaces, and overwhelming friendliness.

by Dorothy-Grace Elder

Mel Gibson is only one of countless visitors to Scotland who have fallen in love with Glasgow and its citizens. On his way north to the town of Stirling, during the earliest days of filming his 1995 Oscar-winning "Braveheart," the Hollywood actor-director stopped off here to meet with some extras he had hired to portray members of his fighting team.

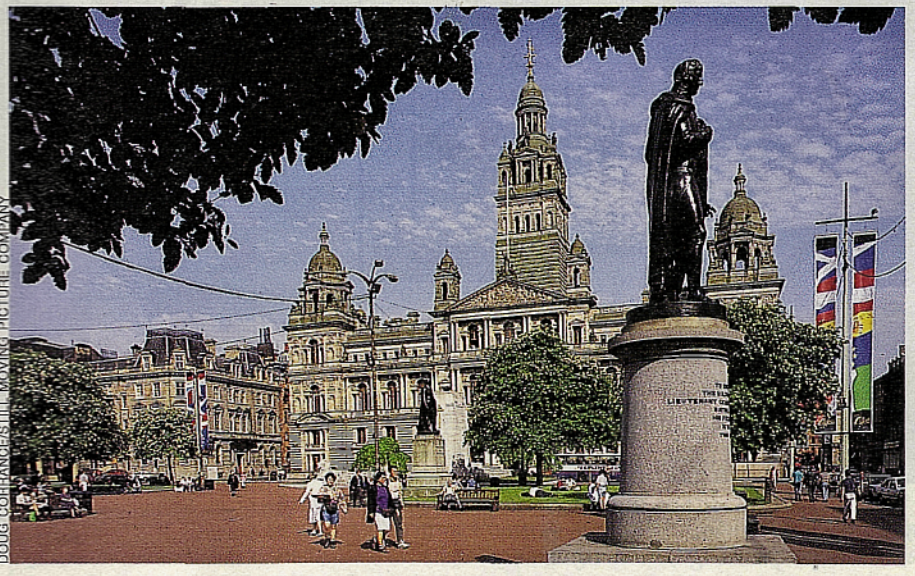
What Gibson discovered in Glasgow was goodwill, friendship, a tumbling waterfall of ideas, and people who, in his words, became, "the life and spirit of 'Braveheart.'" Gibson joined them for take-out meals of fish and chips wrapped in newspapers, and accompanied them to local pubs. He maintained his cover by copying his companions accents and wearing a *bunnet*—the Glasgow man's soft cap—pulled well down.

What most impressed the movie star was the enthusiasm his extras displayed in the movie's heralded battle scenes. But Glaswegians are like that: They pitch themselves wholeheartedly into any project and regard it as their duty to help visitors.

This friendliness—totally spontaneous, wrapping itself round you like a comfort blanket—is the first thing you will notice about Glasgow. Ask for directions here and it's more than likely someone will take you halfway there, inquiring whether you're from North America—or Australia, or New Zealand—and if so, surely you must know their auntie, who emigrated there.

There is some truth in the old saying: "You'll have more fun at a Glasgow funeral than at an Edinburgh wedding." It was a Glasgow man who greeted mourners with "I'm the corpse's brother. I'd like you to drink to his health." Glaswegian humour is delivered in a blur of fast-moving lip, rather U.S. in style, for there are links to North America, first through Virginia and Scotland's tobacco lords, then through whisky and largely forced emigration.

During the past 800 years, Glasgow grew from a mediaeval village into Scotland's largest city. Its location on the River Clyde helped the city spawn centuries of ship building and water-dependent industry which provided work for generations of its people, Highlanders and



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George Square in the heart of Glasgow's downtown is the ideal starting point for a tour of this city.

ALL PHOTOS FROM THE GLASGOW TOURIST BOARD EXCEPT WHERE NOTED

The Kibble Palace, a late 19th-century greenhouse, is the centerpiece of the 40-acre (16.2 hectare) Botanic Gardens in Glasgow's West End.

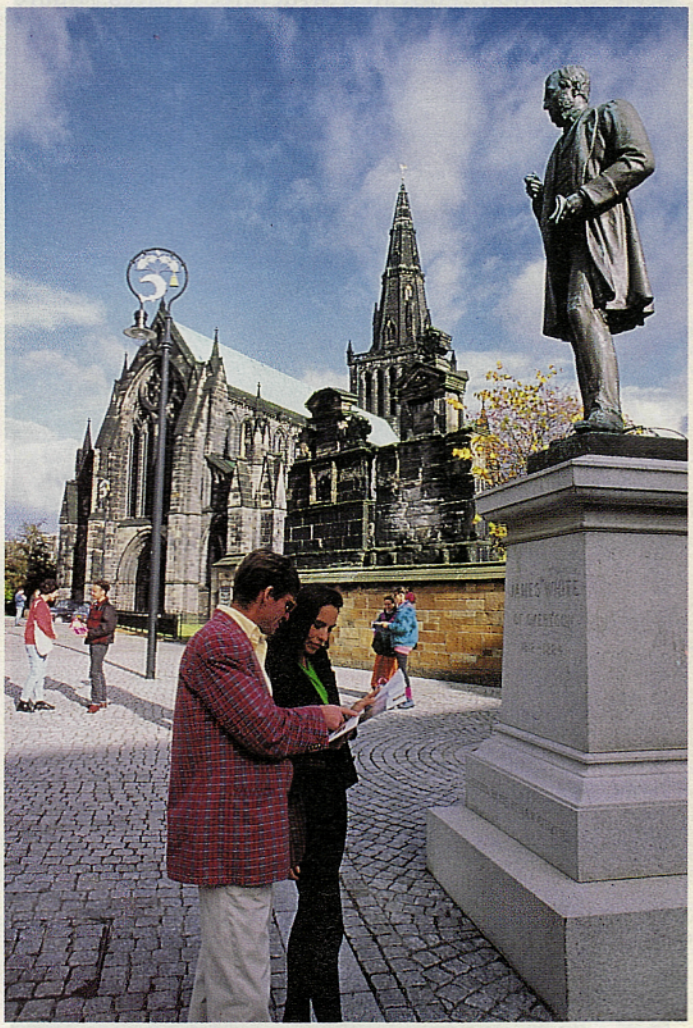
Irish immigrants among them. For decades until the 1890s, Glaswegians referred to their home as "Second City of the British Empire"—an urban center that manufactured trains so robust they still steam around India.

But the word Glasgow actually means "a dear, green place," and that is what it has returned to. In the elegant West End, the tall trees touch each other across residential streets. All over are rolling acres of gardens, both public and private. Glasgow has more such spaces than any other city in Europe, and its giant civic hot houses make it one of the world's biggest orchid growers.

When Rotarians find their way from the ultra-modern Scottish Exhibition and Conference Center beside the River Clyde—now silent when it once rang like the hammers of hell—they will discover the fine architecture which makes Glasgow Britain's greatest surviving Victorian city. As the city determinedly reinvents itself from the days of heavy industry, the black soot has disappeared from its buildings, allowing their original pink and pale primrose sandstone to gleam through. Glasgow had such a magic wand waved over her that by 1990 she was named European City of Culture. She enhanced her reputation by hosting the 1996 Festival of Visual Arts, and in 1999 will become the United Kingdom City of Architecture, the most glittering prize.

Glasgow is a grand city to wander in, especially during June, Scotland's best month for weather. Take advantage of the 11 P.M. sunsets and board an open-topped double-decker bus to get your first glimpse of central Glasgow and the nearby Merchant City, a cluster of recently renovated buildings that date back nearly two centuries.

You'll need to look up here if you want to behold some of the most glorious eccentricities created when wealth poured through Glasgow. Business moguls decreed that nothing was too grand for their city, and the resulting architectural styles are blatant grandeur preserved in stone: Victorian Gothic and wildly rococo palaces (built as offices) jostle French and Venetian styles

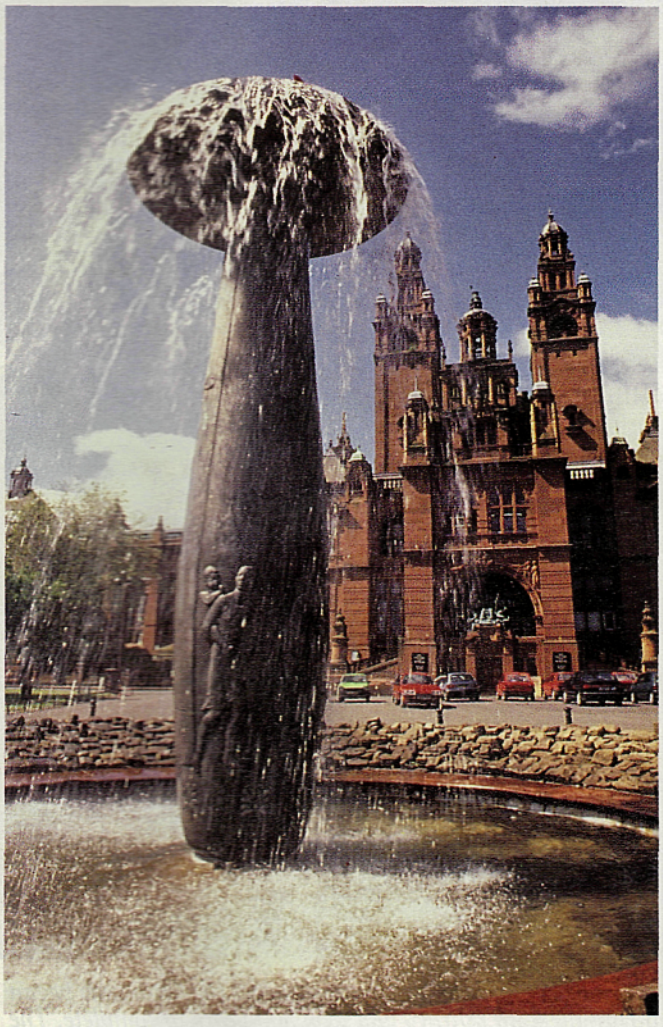


Construction of the Glasgow Cathedral (background) began during the 12th century and took 300 years to complete. The building contains the crypt of St. Mungo, the city's patron saint, who founded a church here in the sixth century.

and buildings rendered to reflect the simple splendour of classical Greece.

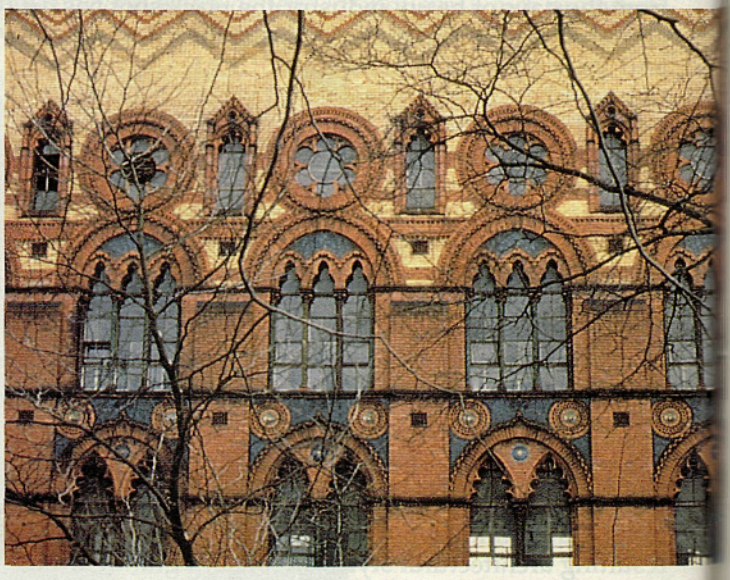
Keep looking up! Symbols of the city's greatness stand overhead: carved stone ships, hundreds of statues, dazzling stained glass, exquisite buildings decorated with iron lace, and balconies packed with flowers. One businessman liked the Doge's Palace in Venice so much he ordered that his factory be built to look just like it; still standing, the building is now called the Templeton Business Centre. And of course Glasgow produced Charles Rennie Mackintosh, a consummate designer of everything from the mightiest buildings down to teaspoons. His masterpiece, the Glasgow School of Art on Renfrew Street, is a must visit.

Like most British cities, Glasgow suffered more damage from 1960s architects than from the Luftwaffe. These concrete curses are now despised! Modern buildings of which we're proud include the Italian Centre, a sunny downtown courtyard surrounded by cafes and stylish dress shops. (Glasgow has more of the latter than any other Scottish city, and even in the poorest days, its women were tops for remarkable style.) Another renovated structure, Princes Square even won frevent praise from Prince Charles—he



A modern fountain provides a dramatic counterpoint to the Kelvingrove Art Gallery, located in the city's West End.

JOHN D. IVANKO



Attention, all architecture aficionados: When in Glasgow, remember to "keep looking up."

who has called new buildings "carbuncles." It is an oasis of recreated *fin de siècle* elegance.

Glasgow is also a model of architectural adaptability. The Adelaide Place Baptist Church solved the universal problem of keeping up huge buildings by dividing itself into a smart bistro, a nursery, a small hotel, and a conference centre. But its core remains an active church. Some of the city's great banking halls—with their soaring domes and tiled splendor—have become cafes, bistros, and pubs. The former Drama College building off Buchanan Street is now the Town House Hotel.

Many eating places are just as architecturally eccentric. The famous Ubiquitous Chip (chips are about the last thing on its exotic menu) features an indoor garden with a fountain. Rogano's Oyster Bar, near the Merchant City, is quite special: a restored 1930 art deco masterpiece with mermaids frolicking about the walls and an ambience which only needs a Marlene Dietrich performance for a final touch of theatricality.

Still found in some Glasgow cafes is the unique Scottish "high tea." In Scotland, "high tea" means the full version—tea, scones, cake, toast—plus bacon and eggs or a fish supper. And in the endless rivalry between Glasgow and Edinburgh (don't believe anyone who tells you this is outdated), the adage goes: Glaswegians say "come on in, you'll have your tea." In Edinburgh, it's "come in, you'll have *had* your tea."

So Rotarians and guests, be prepared for vibrant, surprising Glasgow. I've always regarded it as some kind of city-state, ferociously proud of its long history of engineering and invention—and of its transformation during this century from a center of industry into a leading European city of art, culture, design, and architecture.

But Glaswegians are incapable of being overawed by what ordinary citizens call "the arty farties." Sandy Stoddart, a Scottish sculptor of international standing, sums up this cultural overdose as he stands at the Italian Centre beside his superb traditional rendering of the naked god Mercury. "I think there really is new pride," says Stoddart. "That means city youth don't vandalise my statue. But they do sometimes stick a pizza on his bare bum!"

Given such pranks, you can safely assume that Glaswegians are superior party-throwers. People here celebrate on a grand scale and with stunning efficiency, as they have shown after winning European cultural titles. Note to Rotarians: We understand the important ideas and work that are part of your annual conventions, but will not tolerate you coming to grind your jaws to the bone in serious talk without pausing for some fun.

Glasgow is eager to entertain you in her stylish, civic surroundings, but you may end up like Mel Gibson, who within a few days of coming here had quit his many-starred hotel to join his Glaswegian film cohorts in a flat above a Chinese restaurant. Like him, you may find yourself more drawn to the quirky attractions and the endearing, down-to-earth people who populate this dear, green place.

• *Glaswegian Dorothy-Grace Elder, who writes for the publication* Scotland on Sunday, *was honored as British Reporter of the Year for 1996. She also writes for the* Daily Express.

Learning 'The Patter'

Scotland has its own varied speech patterns—English mixed with old Scots, plus Gaelic in some areas. But Glasgow has a rich broth of language, with many words and phrases even the rest of Scotland doesn't understand. Many make visitors laugh—even when they don't know their meaning.

If a Glaswegian says "I'm away for the messages," that means he or she is going shopping. A "scratcher" means a bed. Many do not go into the city, but "up the toon."

Avoid being called a "numpty" or a "tumshie": both mean a "dolt"—probably derived from "turnip." Calling someone a "bampot" or an "eejit" serves the same purpose.

Other Scottish words have crossed the Atlantic: "mooch," as in "mooch a fiver off him" is used the same way in the U.S.

"Cludgie" is the old word for toilet, "dunny" means basement, and "bahookey" means bottom. All three play a role in the revered Glaswegian pastime of putting down *nouveau riche* acquaintances: "I remember when you lived in a dunny with ten to a cludgie and the bahookey hinging oot yur breeks."

Glasgow's most puzzling phrase originated from bus conductors of the past: "C'mon, gerraff!" (Come on, get off!)—quite effective against troublemakers when bawled by a tough Glasgow clippie.

Princess Diana need not have been startled when a wee drunk man once shouted to her "Ye're a stoatir, hen!" This is the highest compliment drunk Glasgow men can pay a woman: "Stoatir" denotes remarkable female pulchritude; "hen" covers all ages.

Many other phrases serve as put-downs—especially for those who don't share Glasgow's innate cheerfulness. They may be accused of having a face like: "a horse in a huff"; "a City Bakeries Hallowe'en cake"; "pudding supper with the jaundice"; "a fish supper looking for a vinegar bottle"; or "a half-chewed caramel."

When you visit Glasgow, drop by a bookstore and request a copy of "The Patter" (Glasgow City Libraries). Although not all Glaswegians speak in the manner detailed here, author Michael Munro humorously details some of the more interesting terms and expressions you're certain to hear on the city's streets, in homes, and on television and radio.

—D.G.E.