This text was written for the Kandinsky in Govan conference by Brian Thom McQuade MA, a resident of Govan, born in Wine Alley, and historian to the GalGael Trust. A full book version of Brian's study can be downloaded on Kindle for £4.42 at http://bit.ly/Govan-McQuade-Ebook (mind the capitalisation if you're keying that in).

A History of Govan to 2011

Although the first written mention of the River Clyde (the *Clota)* was not until the Roman author Tacitus [i] wrote his '*Agricola'* in AD 98, we know from the evidence of Monolithic stones and Neolithic canoes that people were living and working in that area of the Clyde c. 2,500 BC. We also know from recent archaeological digs that people continued to live in Govan through the Bronze and into the Iron Age when a settled, metal-working community lived at Govan around the year 750 BC. [ii] From that time until the present, people have been residing in the same area which means that Govan is one of the oldest continually inhabited places in the world.

The name 'Govan' is first mentioned in the 12th century *Historia Regnum Anglorum* as *Ouania* – a place which lay near the stronghold of the Strathclyde Britons at Dumbarton Rock. There are two versions about the origin of the name: one comes from folk etymology and is based on the Gaelic word '*gobha'* meaning a smith or 'place for ironworkers'. [iii] The other name for Govan *is* '*goban'* which derives from a north British or Old Welsh dialect which translates as 'little hill'. As Govan is relatively flat, the coining of the word might have been used for what was Govan's most defining feature then - Doomster Hill, which stood adjacent to the present day Govan Road, Water Row, and the river itself. [iv]

This huge heap of earth was a stepped, two-tiered man-made mound that was 17 feet high, with a diameter of 150 feet at the base and 107 feet at the top. In 1996, an archaeological dig found the ditch that originally surrounded the mound. It was about 24-30 feet wide (8-10m) and between 6 to 9 feet (2-3m) deep with a broad flat base. It is thought that this ditch represents the quarry from which Doomster Hill was constructed. It would have had a footbridge to cross the gap and steps leading to its flattened apex which some scholars think might have been used originally for the worship of the sun. [v] During the early 1800s a reservoir was excavated to a depth of 12 feet for the local dye works. When this was deepened to the base of the hill, the excavators discovered several charred planks of oak along with fragments of human bones and a bed of decayed bulrushes. Along with other evidence of pagan rites this proves that it was used as a pre-Christian burial site at least 2,000 years ago. [vi] The first detailed map of Govan, which forms part of the *Military Survey of Scotland (*1747-55), clearly marks its location. [vii]

When the Romans arrived in the Govan area in AD 81 the inhabitants were Brittonic speaking Celts who, according to Ptolomey (*Guide to Geography*, c. AD160), practised Druidic rites and called themselves the *Damnonii.* Later on they were recognized as the Britons of the Kingdom of Strathclyde. Govan was part of this territory and important in a number of ways. First of all, the monolithic stones that once surrounded the site of Govan Old church tell us that Govan was sacred to the pagans who lived there – and had been for a very long time. The area itself was an attractive site for the Clyde estuary and its low fertile lands would have provided good resources in fishing, farming and hunting. Moreover, the ford at the bottom of Water Row, which had been in use since pre-historic times, was an ideal location for whoever controlled the area to guard and tax any movement of people and goods crossing over or passing along the Clyde. Armies could

easily cross at this point where the low water depth was 15 inches and the high 3 feet 3 inches. [viii] The Romans and later invaders were certainly aware of this fact as we see from an account of 756 where the ford at Govan or *Ovania* was named as the place where a large force of marauding Northumbrian and Pictish soldiers crossed over from the north bank to the south. [ix]

The road leading to the ford at Govan was in all likelihood a Roman way, built by their soldiers from their nearby base at *Vanduara* (Paisley?). This connected them with the fort that they built on the site of what is now Yorkhill Children's Hospital. When work men were digging its summit in 1868, they found Roman remains including several brass coins (one of Trajan), bronze finger rings, glass, and fragments of red Samian ware. [x] The fort itself dates sometime from the early period of Agricola to the time of the Antonine Wall which was built later in AD 142. The Romans must have meant to put down roots in the Govan area because they erected a temple beside the burn which ran parallel with Water Row on the west side of Doomster Hill. The ruins of this temple could still be seen in the 18th century. According to ancient usage, it might have been erected to the goddess who presided over frontiers or maybe it was dedicated to the triangular meeting of three waters formed by the burn, the Clyde, and the river Kelvin which flows opposite the site. We do know that it had a decorated pediment because some of these sculptured stones were still to be seen in the 19th century, lying around amid a vast jumble of other stones in the grounds of Govan Old Church. [xi]

Although the Druids were ruled by kings and tribal chiefs, Julius Caesar [xii] says that the real power lay in the hands of their priests. He thought that this priesthood originated in Britain before it spread to the continent, and it was their great power over the tribes that the Romans tried to eradicate when they invaded Britain in force in AD 43 under the emperor Claudius. [xiii] It took the Romans another 38 years before they moved into the Govan area under the command of Agricola, the Governor of Britain, in AD 81. They must have allied themselves with the Damnonii because there is no mention of any war or battles against them which Tacitus would surely have mentioned as he was writing a boastful eulogy of Agricola who was his father-in-law. There is no word either in Tacitus of attempts to eradicate the native religion or of any resistance when the Romans built a line of forts along the Clyde Valley from *Camelon* or Dumbarton Rock, at the mouth of the Clyde estuary on the west, to the River Forth in the east. [xiv]

Opposite Doomster Hill, the Romans built a fort on the site of what is now Yorkhill Children's Hospital. This dates sometime from the early period of Agricola to the time of the Antonine Wall which was built later in AD 142. The Antonine Wall either superseded or reinforced the earlier one and extended about 36 miles across Scotland from the Clyde to the River Forth. This turf based structure, surmounted by a wooden palisade, was erected under the command of the emperor Antoninus Pius. The wall was about 10 feet (3m) high, and 14 to 16 feet (4 1/2 metres) in width. It had a ditch in front of it that was 40 feet (12 metres) across and 12 feet (4 metres) deep while a military road ran behind it. In total, there was a series of 19 forts, separated by intervals of 2 miles (3 kilometres).

Construction of the Antonine wall extended the northern boundary of Roman Britain

farther into Scotland and provided defence beyond Hadrian's Wall, which had been completed some 100 miles (160 kilometres) to the south in about AD 136. Occupation of the most northerly wall interrupted once during a northern revolt which lasted three years (155–158), and the garrison withdrew. The wall was then reoccupied for around another 30 years before it was finally abandoned about AD 190 when trouble in Germany forced the emperor Commodus (180-192) to withdraw his troops behind Hadrian's Wall in the North of England.

Govan was an attractive site for a long time. The Clyde estuary and its low fertile lands would have provided good resources in fishing, farming and hunting. Moreover, the ford at the bottom of Water Row, which had been in use since pre-historic times, was an ideal location for whoever controlled the area to guard and tax any movement of people and goods crossing over or passing along the Clyde. Armies could easily cross at this point where the low water depth was 15 inches (0.4m) and the high 3 feet 3 inches (1m). [xv] The Romans and later invaders were certainly aware of this fact as we see from an account of AD 756 where the ford at Govan or *Ovania* was named as the place where a large group of marauding Northumbrian and Pictish soldiers crossed over from the north bank to the south. [xvi]

Whether or not the Romans eradicated Druidic rites in the Govan area, some form of pagan worship would have continued there until Christianity had replaced it. The religion of the Druids was noted for its compassion and fairness, and an unshakeable belief in life after death. When the new faith of Christianity reached the British Isles, it grafted itself easily to the older because many of their tenets were the same. This was the beginning of the Celtic Church whose missionaries also followed the Druidic belief that there was no such thing as original sin and that each individual could seek their own path to salvation. These beliefs were too individualistic for the Papal enclave because it meant that the centralized authority at Rome would be held as nothing. Thus, Papal envoys were sent in a steady stream to Britain to counteract the Celtic church principally for taking away their power over all aspects of a person's soul. This relentless campaign eventually led to the demise of the Celtic church in Britain sometime in the 13th century.

The earliest written reference to Christianity in the United Kingdom comes from Origen of Alexandra (d. c. AD 254) and we also know that 3 British bishops were present at the Synod of Arles in AD 314. This means that there must have been some sort of Christian organisation by that time in Britain. [xvii] As I mentioned, the first established 'Church' was the Celtic Church, which basically developed local rules to suit local conditions and interpreted the Scriptures as it thought best. [xviii] Many of their earliest sites were built upon or akin to the same spot as megalithic structures, standing stone circles, and sacred pagan places which is probably what happened at the site of Govan's Old Parish Church where Druidic remains still exist. [xix]

One of the earliest churches in Scotland was St. Ninian's 'White House' (c. AD 370-432) in Galloway, which he built when founding the first known monastery in the British Isles. [xx] The first church at Govan was built some time in the 5th or 6th century AD where recent studies of its archaeology have revealed the presence of two early Christian burials

beneath what is thought to have been the remains of Govan's first stone and timber church. This makes Govan the earliest known Christian site in the region. [xxi] According to John of Fordun (c.1350), the person who brought Christianity to Govan was Constantine, a 7th-century king of Strathclyde who founded a monastery at Govan, where he died and was buried. According to legend, the site was founded by St. Constantine who brought Christianity to the area when he founded a monastic settlement around the year 565. The best known tradition about this saint is that he was a pagan King of Cornwall who abdicated after murdering his 2 sons in a fit of insanity. Constantine then became a Christian convert and travelled to Wales where he began a new life as a working monk under David, the future patron saint of Wales.

After spending some years in Wales, Constantine moved to Ireland where he joined a monastery under the charge of St. Columba. He ordained Constantine into the Holy Orders of the priesthood, and also suggested to him that he should try and spread Christianity among the heathen Britons of the Kingdom of Strathclyde. Constantine crossed the Irish Sea and eventually found his way to the south bank of the River Clyde where he established his Celtic Church on its present day site, and where he was later appointed as the Abbot of Govan. When Constantine was an old man, he prayed that he might die as a martyr to the Church for his past sins. His prayers were answered when some pagans attacked him and cut off his arm while he was trying to preach to them in Kintyre. Constantine died from his wounds there in 576 and his followers brought his body back to Govan where they buried him in front of the High Altar of the Church.[xxii] Whoever was the true founder of the church, from the date of his death in the 6th century, Govan became a place of pilgrimage and a centre of Christianity, which was spread from there to other parts of Scotland.

The earliest mention of Christianity near Govan is a note on the death of Glasgow's patron saint St. Kentigern or 'Mungo' (dearly beloved) in AD 612. Although there are many myths and fabrications about his life, in Jocelyn Furness' *Life of St. Kentigern* (c. 1175), we do know that he founded a new Celtic church beside the Molindinar Burn in *Glascu ('the green hollow'),* when he was asked to become the bishop of Glasgow c. AD 580. The city was not a cult centre – this already existed at Govan (c. 2 miles downriver) under the aegis of St. Constantine. Govan retained its cult status and remained the pre-eminent religious centre in the area until the 12th century when its status was downgraded by King David 1 (1124-53). [xxiii] The same literary source on the saint also mentions that the British King Rhydderch Hael of Dumbarton died c. 700 in the royal *vill* at Partick which was then part of Govan. [xxiv] Although this was written nearly 500 years after the fact, Jocelyn's account contains many Brittonic names and therefore most likely was sourced from an account of the 7th or 8th century which was written in the ancient British tongue. [xxv]

Howsoever, shortly after the Romans had left Britain for good in AD 410, 5 separate groups began to fight for territory in what came to be known as Scotland. These were the Britons of Strathclyde, who lived in the Clyde valley and further south; the Scots (or Gaels), who had come over from Ireland and now inhabited Dal Riata (West Scotland); the Anglians (Saxons) who had migrated from Germany, and who lived in the south east

of England; the Picts (an amalgamation of various tribes – not a separate entity), who lived in north and east Scotland, and finally the Vikings or the Scandinavians from Norway, Sweden and Denmark. [xxvi]

The Picts were a Celtic people who lived mainly in the north and the east of Scotland c. AD 200-900. The first literary mention of them as 'Picts' comes from the Roman writer Eumenius who called them by the name 'Picti' in AD 297. [xxvii] Although scholars thought that this meant 'painted people' they now believe that what Eumenius meant was 'someone who owned a property'. [xxviii] Both St. Ninian (400's) and St. Columba (AD 565) spread Christianity among the Picts before they became the most powerful group in northern Britain c. AD 700. In AD 843 they united with the Scottish king Kenneth MacAlpine and then seemed to disappear as an individual race of people around the year AD 900. [xxix]

The (Norwegian) Vikings first appeared in Scotland just before AD 800 when they colonised the Pictish islands of the Orkneys and the Shetlands. From there they moved southwest down the mainland of the Scottish coast and eventually set up other colonies in the West of Scotland, Ireland, and the Isle of Man. Contemporaneously, other Vikings (the Swedes and Danes) were attacking the shores of England before they settled down there also. In fact, it was the Viking threat to the Scots and the English that helped the unification of both these countries. For instance, when the Picts felt surrounded by the Vikings in the north, west and southeast, this was one of the reasons that they joined forces with the Dal Riadan Scots under Kenneth MacAlpin and formed a new nation known as Alba in 843. [xxx]

The Vikings were pagans who brought with them their own religion and burial culture, which included burying people either inside boats or underneath them. They also brought with them their distinctively shaped longhouses, which rose in a curve - akin to a hog's back, and this is why they are known as hogback longhouses. These distinctly shaped structures were believed to be Viking in origin because of certain parallels with houses in Scandinavia however, they are also found in Germany and Holland.[xxxi] The largest known group of these structures are the remains of those found inside the circular fortresses at Aggersborg, Trellesborg and Fyrkat. Each of the buildings had long, curved walls about 100 feet long, which swung in at both ends and terminated in straight gables.

Their shingle-covered ridgeback roofs came down over the walls where their great weight was held by external, inwardly sloping posts (see fig. 1). As dozens of them were found in each of the above fortresses, it seems reasonable to assume that they were barracks for the fighting men who lived there. [xxxii] Although hogback tombstones perhaps reveal the shape of Viking houses in Scotland and the north of England, the stone hogback memorials that they left behind were probably brought about by a mingling of cultures in these isles. [xxxiii] In fact, by c. AD 850, a warrior force of Gall-Gaedhill 'Foreign Gaels' (natives and Vikings), were recorded on both sides of the Irish Sea and this shows the degree of integration that was taking place among the natives and the Vikings

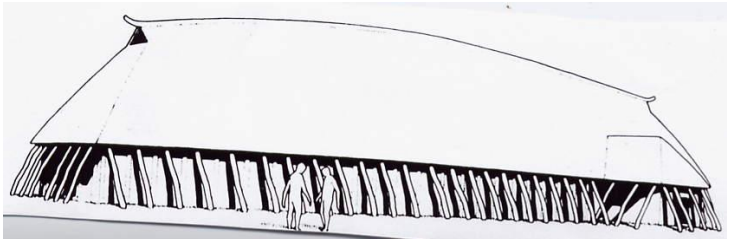

Fig. 1: Artists impression of fortress hogback

Not long after the death of Kenneth MacAlpin, his successor Constantine 1 allied himself to Olaf the White, the Norwegian King of Dublin. This helped lead to the 4-month siege and capture of the Strathclyde Britons capital of Dumbarton Rock on the Clyde, and Scots/Viking hegemony over the area around AD 870. A medieval account of the siege says that the Vikings took away 200 boatloads of prisoners which denuded Dumbarton Rock and the surrounding area of its population. At this time Govan was one of the major centres of the Kingdom of Strathclyde. Not only did it hold royal estates in Partick but it was also the pre-eminent religious centre in that part of the country. Given the importance of the site of the church, the royal residence and Doomster Hill, Govan would have been the central focus for the Britons of Strathclyde, the site of their national assembly, and the place where their kings were proclaimed. [xxxiv]

It was shortly after the downfall of Dumbarton Rock that the Scots took control of the Strathclyde kingdom – including the much prized area of Govan. This would have been Constantine's reward for helping King Olaf of Dublin. As Govan sits on the ancient crossing point between the Highlands and the Lowlands, the West of Scotland and the East, and having a navigable river that leads out to the open sea, it seems very likely that the Vikings shared this focal point of the Strathclyde kingdom with their ally, Constantine 1 and his heirs. Another reason for thinking this is that it was from after the capture of Dumbarton Rock that Govan blossomed into the largest centre in Europe for the production of stone carved Celtic Crosses and carved memorial tombstones – both Christian and pagan. The sudden appearance of this type of sculpture, centred in one place, can only reflect the tremendous political upheaval that took place in this local towards the end of the 9th century.

The religious and political importance of Govan then can be seen is seen in the collection of its inscribed 10th and 11th century stone slabs which were recorded as lying in the churchyard of Govan Old Parish Church in 1855. Altogether, there were 46 items of which 30 remain today. The others could be buried in the yard or lost. Four of the slabs were upright crosses with only the 'Sun Stone' being complete. This roughly-hewn monolith has on the obverse a deeply cut boss with four protruding snakes heads. The reverse displays an interlaced cross over a square-cut panel displaying a mounted warrior. He is either carrying weapons or playing a set of bagpipes. The Sun Stone was one of a circle of such stones which stood at one time around the present day boundary of Govan Old. The majority of the remaining slabs (38 were recorded in 1855) are incised with interlace crosses and were used as burial markers. Although the group at Govan are part of a wider tradition of such work, the stones there are specific to that area only. All of the

stones are now within the church and date between the 9th to the 12th century. [xxxv]

In addition to the above, there are five Viking style hogback stones which are steeply pitched and covered from half way up with what appears to be rectangular 'roof-tiles' - which is what they probably are – if they represent houses for the souls of the departed. Beneath the 'roofs' is the familiar motif of interlaced fretwork while the heads of stylised beasts frame the ends and face each other across the concave roof. Many of the hogbacks show sculptural stylistic connections with Cumbrian, British, Scottish, Pictish, Irish, Saxon and Scandinavian art, which in fact can be seen as the first expression of a truly national style. [xxxvi]

In the same year that the stones were set on record, an elaborately carved sandstone sarcophagus was found while digging a grave in the south east corner of the churchyard. Originally, there were three such relics at Govan church in the 18th century but today we only have this one which is thought to have been used to contain the body or relics of Saint Constantine. Although claims have been made that the coffin is 6th or 7th century, stylistically, the carving indicates a later date in the 10th or 11th centuries. While the saint's identity remains uncertain the decorative style of the sarcophagus could mean that it is actually the remains of King Constantine's own sarcophagus from the late 800's or early 900's. This would then be the reliquary of a *dynastic saint* of the Scottish royal house. Besides the style of its embellishment it is almost certainly a cult reliquary for a royal burial for it depicts a helmeted and sword wearing horseman out hunting stags with his dog, which is well known symbolry for a Royal hunting scene. [xxxvii]

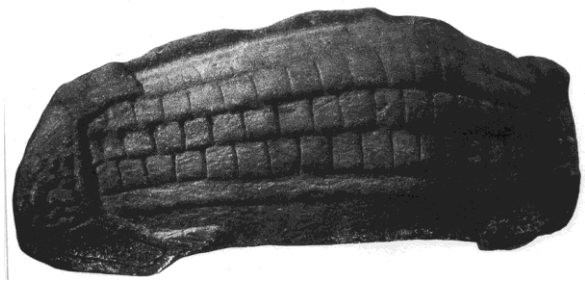

Plate 1: Hogback stone from Old Govan Parish Church, Glasgow c. 9-11 century.

All of the stones in the church are some form of burial monument and are evidence of high-status internments which underscores Govan's position at the time as a major church. [xxxviii] Not only that but the sudden appearance and the sheer amount of the monuments can only mean that a major reorganization of the political landscape took place around this time. That it happened in Govan can only mean that it had become by then the royal centre of the last of the British kings, and the first of its Viking/Scottish rulers from c. AD 900 to c. AD 1200.

This took place in the year 1034, when Duncan I formally united Alba with the other areas of the Strathclyde Britons including Cumbria, and Lothian. Thereafter, the name

Alba and Strathclyde began to fade away; and every king was normally styled "king of Scots." Govan still retained its importance until King David 1, shifted cult patronage from Govan to Glasgow Cathedral when it was formally consecrated in 1136. The king also gave to the cathedral the church at Govan and its lands in Partick as part of his scheme to remodel the church in Scotland. The real motive behind what was a downgrading of Govan's importance was that it was in the king's interests to shift cult patronage away from the heathenish aspect of Celtic spiritualism practiced at Govan towards the more Romanized aspect of that practiced at the Cathedral. This is why David destroyed the Celtic church there and built a Romanized Norman one dedicated to St. Constantine. Besides this, the king wanted to remove any lingering memories of an older royal house at Govan which might have a more legitimate claim than his own. The upshot, as far as Govan was concerned was that, once the place had lost its royal and spiritual connections, it dramatically diminished the area's importance and Govan's production of Celtic crosses ceased. [xxxix]

Shortly afterwards, this church was created a prebend of Glasgow cathedral by Herbert, Bishop of Glasgow, with its first recorded minister being the Rector Help in 1160. [xl] During the reign of King David's grandson, William the Lion, the Church at 'Guvan' must still have been quite important because it was mentioned 3 times by Pope Alexander 111 in 1172, 1174, and 1179.

Hundreds of Govan's valuable, medieval records are missing but those that do survive include an act given in Govan by one of Scotland's national heroes, Robert the Bruce in 1298. [xli] Although he later defeated the English at Bannockburn in 1314, areas of Scotland like Govan, where still in English hands. This is why the English king Edward 11 was able to grant the Prebend of Govan to one of his followers, Johannes de Lund, in 1319. [xlii] Other early records concerning Govan include a major flood there in 1454 which destroyed a great deal of property and forced the inhabitants up onto the roofs of their homes. It was also around this time that the Govan Fair was first celebrated, given either by ecclesiastical or royal grant. [xliii]

Other early records concerning Govan include a major flood there in 1454 which destroyed a great deal of property and forced the inhabitants up onto the roofs of their homes. It was also around this time that the Govan Fair was first celebrated, given either by ecclesiastical or royal grant. The Fair died out before it was revived again in 1756 where it lasted until 1881. It was brought back once more in 1920 and is still celebrated every year on the traditional date of the first Friday in June. [xliv]

By 1577, the teinds of Govan were granted to the University of Glasgow, and the Principal of the University ex officio was appointed minister of the parish. The settlement was set aside in 1621, and only the patronage of Govan was left to the University. By 1645 the 'Black Death' hit Glasgow and its surrounding villages although we only know of one case in Govan. Other records from then include the minutes of the kirk sessions from 1651-62 and also from the period 1710-1821. [xlv] Govan Church was rebuilt in 1762 and again in 1826. The present day church was begun in 1884 and was opened in 1888,

perhaps the 6th church on the site. Other records about Govan from the 16th to the 19th centuries contain information on houses, mills, landowners, various trades and the names of those who paid rent to the Archbishop of Glasgow.
The former Parish of Govan was very large and covered areas on both banks of the Clyde. On the north side of the river, its boundary included Maryhill, Whiteinch, Partick, Dowanhill, Hillhead and Kelvinside. On the south side there was Govan, Ibrox, Kinning Park, Plantation, Huchesontown, Laurieston, Tradeston, Crosshill, Gorbals, Govanhill, West and East Pollokshields, Strathbungo and Dumbreck. [xlvi] This large area along both sides of the Clyde gives some indication of Govan's former importance as the royal home of the former kings of Strathclyde. During the 16th century, many families from outside the Parish were granted permission to settle in the lands at Govan. For instance, Maxwell of Nether Pollock settled in what is known today as the Pollock Estate. [xlvii]

From the 16th until the 19th century, Govan was a coalmining district with pits in the Gorbals, Ibrox, Bellahouston, Broomloans, Helen Street, Drumoyne and at Craigton. These mines were finally closed near the end of the 19th century. Other industries during this time were salmon fishing, hand loom weaving, pottery, agriculture and silk making. Handloom weaving was introduced into Govan around 1800 although the Govan Weavers Society had been in existence since 1756. [xlviii] By 1839 there were 380 weavers in Govan who earned from 5 to 8 shillings a week. The silk mill was built in 1824 on the west side of Water Row before being demolished in 1901. [xlix] With the coming of the Industrial Revolution in the 19th centuries, the light industries disappeared and Govan became a shipbuilding town, with its first shipyard being the Old Govan Yard in 1839. [l]
This was at the bottom of Water Row and it was only three years later that Robert Napier also built his yard facing the Old Govan one at Water Row. [li]

Govan really came to the fore in the 19th century when it became a centre for heavy engineering works and shipbuilding. It was these industries that brought great prosperity to the town and with them came huge numbers of Highland and Irish migrants into the area. This caused the population to rise from just over 2,000 in 1830, to 92,000 people by 1912. By that time, Govan was part of Glasgow holding at least a dozen shipyards and numbers of associated heavy industries throughout the Parish. As Govan expanded new houses were needed for its growing population of workers which caused the old character, plan, and streets of the village to be mostly swept away and replaced with miles of tenement-lined streets. During the first half of the 20th century, Govan was known to the world as one of the best centers for ship-making and as an industrial manufacturing base.

The shipbuilding yards included John Elder and Company, who built a large number of steamships including the record-breaking Blue Riband liners Campania and Lucania for the Cunard line. Speed was the byword here and this came about through the development of the compound steam engine that Elder helped to develop in a manner that was every bit as important as James Watt's steam condenser. John Elder was born in Glasgow in 1824. He served his apprenticeship as an engineer with Robert Napier where he worked in the pattern shop, the moulding loft, and the drawing office. He then spent a year as a pattern maker for Messrs. Hick at Bolton-le-Moor in England before moving to

Grimsby where he worked in the Great Grimsby Docks as a draughtsman. Sometime before 1849 he returned to Napier's to take charge of the drawing office before he joined the firm of Randolph, Elliot & Company, 10 years later. There, he magically redesigned the existing marine with his invention of first, the triple, and then the quadruple expansion steam engine, and also the water tube boiler.

In 1852, Elder became a co-partner of the business known as Randolph, Elder & Company. Their firm began to produce steam-driven engines for ship propulsion at Centre St. in Kingston before the company bought the Fairfield Riverside Estate in Govan in 1864. There, the firm laid down slipways, engineering and boiler shops, and a fitted-out basin. In that same year, the yard built 4 blockade runners for the Southern States of America using Elder's superior type of fast engine. The Southerner's were at war with the Union States of the North, during the American Civil War, and these speedy ships helped to break the closure of the Southern ports that the North had imposed on the South. By that time, Elder's inventions and business acumen had made him rich enough to buy the firm outright and he renamed it John Elder & Company.

Elder's company went on to build many of the world's fastest steamships for the Atlantic and the Pacific routes, and also a large number of warships for the Royal Navy. Apart from paying his workers good wages, Elder also encouraged them to attend evening classes where he paid the fees for their education. Another shipping magnet of the time was Sir William Pierce who trained as an apprentice shipbuilder at the Royal Dockyard at Chatham in England. When Pierce was 28, he came north to work on the Clyde, and accepted the appointment as general manager in John Elder's company before buying a partnership in the firm some years later. When Elder died in 1869 Pierce bought into the company before becoming the sole proprietor until his own death in 1885. Under his guidance, the yard became the biggest shipyard in the world.

Govan became a Burgh (where it would be seen as a town rather than a village) in 1864 and adopted its Coat of Arms with the motto ''Nihil Sine Labore'' – 'Nothing without Work'. From that time onwards, cost advantages persuaded established firms to relocate themselves to the Clyde and this, coupled to the engineering expertise at Govan, led eventually to global domination of the ship and engineering industries.

In 1904, when some workmen were excavating the ground for the foundations of the Pierce Institute on Govan Road, they came across an ancient well which was 8 feet below the level of the ground. The well was bottle-shaped, 10 feet deep, and made from ancient, hand-crafted stones. As there is no tradition or even a mention of this well in the earliest records concerning Govan, and as it was found in the grounds of the old Church, it's thought that the well had been dug by the monks who first lived there. However, since they lived beside the river and next to the stream at Water row then it seems more likely that this bottle-shaped hole in the ground was a medieval prison. Examples of the same types from this time are known throughout Britain and Europe. The well was emptied of its infill but nothing was found before it was filled up again and built over. It is still there somewhere within a few yards of the Govan Road. [lii]

By that time, there were at least a dozen shipyards with associated heavy industries

throughout the Parish. By that time, there were at least a dozen shipyards with associated heavy industries throughout the Parish. The first shipyard here was the Old Govan Yard which was founded in 1839 at the bottom left-hand side of Water Row. [liii] Just one year later, Messrs. MacArthur & Alexander bought the land opposite this yard before selling it in 1842 to Robert Napier. [liv] His company built ships for a number of firms including the Cunard and the P & O lines, and also a large number of warships for the navy. Within two generations, Govan became known as one of the best and biggest centers in the world for ship-making and as an industrial manufacturing base.

Govan's pre-eminent position in the shipbuilding world lasted until after the First World War when shipbuilding at Govan and on the Clyde declined. It rose once more during the Second World War and continued into the 1950's. By the 1960's, cheaper alternatives were found elsewhere and the shipbuilding and associated industries went into a severe decline. [lv] The decline of both meant a fall in the local economy, which left a legacy of derelict buildings and vacant land that undermined the location and devalued its true potential. Large-scale demolition in the 1960s and the 1970s only made the place look worse and soon, the only thing that Govan had left, its reputation, declined also. In 2005, over 50% of its declining adult population were unemployed while a number of Govan's remaining residential areas have been (or will be shortly) pulled down – many of them to make way for industrial units. [lvi]

In the past, a jealous king had taken Govan's royal and religious importance away and had brought down its flourishing Celtic industry. By the year 2,000, something similar had happened again when Govan was de-nuded of its work, people, houses, value, and its prestige. In fact, it seemed that its very soul was about to disappear forever when it was seriously proposed that the name Govan, should be replaced by an anonymous digital number. Yet, just when it seemed that all was lost, something strange has happened. Like the legendary Phoenix, Govan has risen once again from the ashes of oblivion. There's a good feeling about the place that refuses to go away. Now, restoration of old properties, redevelopment of workspaces and new housing means that people are coming back to live and work in Govan, which has also become the media centre of Scotland.

In June 2004, the Scottish Parliament's Public Petition Committee heard presentations from the Govan Community Council about the failure of local regeneration policies in housing, poverty and unemployment. The main point of the Presentation was that, in an area which had lost 80% of its population between 1951 and 2001, the rezoning of demolished housing areas for warehouses and offices meant that there was less chance of people coming back into the area to live, as houses were needed in these areas and not anonymous commercial barns and offices.

The lack of house building was not only an added threat to the existing shops and services but also to the community life which was struggling just to survive because of the lack of houses. In reply to these petitions, the Scottish Parliament wrote to Glasgow City Council and to Scottish Enterprise Glasgow, asking for their responses to the submission and within 4 months, Glasgow Council had taken steps to set up the Central Govan Action Plan. In 2006 the plans for the future of Govan's Central area were

publicly revealed showing that housing and concern for unemployment was high on its agenda. Also, among the plans for Govan's hub was a programme to make its main shopping area at Govan Cross more attractive. Also, there was to be no demolition or destruction of any part of Govan's heritage – although places like the Victorian built Napier House was left to rot until a 'mysterious' fire made it unsafe and it had to be demolished. The same fate seems to be awaiting other parts of Govan's heritage for instance the old farmhouse in Elderpark, which appears as *Fairfield Farm Steading*, on the Govan Parish Map of 1852. Or what about the 140 year old Broomloan Road School and the Art Nouveu Lyceum picture house which was originally built in 1899?

Howsoever, its not all bad news for since 2006, Govan Cross has been transformed by its new lay-out of Caithness and Italian marble. The Aitken fountain has been restored and put back in its place and the shopping centre is booming once more. Even better, hundreds of new houses have been built in the area bringing in thousands of people who are repopulating Govan. Also, the BBC, STV, and some of the country's leading film production companies are now based in Govan along with the National Theatre of Scotland which now has its center in the former Harland & Wolff Shipbuilding yard at Clydebrae Street. Govan even has its own radio station, Sunny Govan Community Radio on 103.5 FM. Now, the restoration of old properties, redevelopment of workspaces and new housing means that people are coming back to live in Govan. Govan's main employer, the shipyard is still thriving although one of the remaining problems is jobs. This aspect remains to be rectified in the future.

Finally, just when it seemed that all was lost, something strange has happened. Like the legendary Phoenix, Govan is rising once again from the ashes of oblivion. There's a good feeling about the place that refuses to go away. I would never have believed all this ten years ago. Would you have? But then, that's Govan for you. It's always full of surprises

This text was written by Brian Thom McQuade, 2011, and published to the web as part of the "Kandinsky in Govan" conference background papers. A shorter version of it was originally delivered by him for filming by Mayavision for a television production. For URL citatation give (all as one line):

http://www.alastairmcintosh.com /kandinsky/A-History-of-Govan-to-2011.pdf

Bibliography:

Barley, M., *Houses and History,* Faber and Faber Limited, London, 1986

Bradley, I., *Celtic Christianity: Making Myths and Chasing Dreams,* Edinburgh University Press, Edinburgh, 1999

Brotchie, T. C. F., *The History of Govan,* John Cossar, Govan, 1905

Caesar, The Conquest of Gaul, trs. S. A. Handford, Penguin Books Ltd., Harmondsworth, 1956

Carver, M., *Surviving in Symbols, A Visit to the Pictish Nation,* Canongate Books Ltd., Edinburgh, 1999

Cummins, W. A., *The Age of the Picts,* Allen Sutton Publishing Ltd., Stroud, 1995

Dalglish C., and Driscoll S., *Historic Govan,* Council for British Archaeology, York, 2009

Dargie, R., *Ancient Scotland,* Heinemann Library, Oxford, 2002

Hardinge, L., *The Celtic Church in Britain,* Teach Services Inc., New York, 1973

McNeill, J. T., *The Celtic Church: A History AD 200 to 1200,* The University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1974

Owen, O., *The Sea Road: A Viking Voyage Through Scotland,* Canongate Books Ltd., Edinburgh, 1999

Ritchie, A., *Govan and its Carved Stones,* The Pinkfoot Press, Angus, 1999

Rosedahl, E., *Viking Age Demark,* British Museum Publications Ltd., London, 1982

Ross, A. and Cyprian, M., *A Travellers Guide to Celtic Britain,* Routledge & Kegan Paul, London, 1985

Simpson, J., *A History of Govan,* John Simpson, Glasgow, 1987

Tacitus The Agricola and the Germania, rev. trs. S. A. Handford, Penguin Books Ltd., Harmondsworth, 1973

Yeoman, P., *Pilgrimage in Medieval Scotland,* B. T. Batsford Ltd., London, 1999

Other Sources

The New Encyclopaedia Brittanica, 15th edit., Encyclopaedia Brittanica Inc., Chicago, 1995

Historic Govan, Council for British Archaeology, York, 2009

Report: Robertson & McIntosh, Consultants, Glasgow, 2005, Preface, p. 10

FOOTNOTES:

[i] Tacitus, 1973, p. 74
[ii] Simpson, 1987, p. 3
[iii] Owen, 1999, pp. 37-52
[iv] Dalglish and Driscoll, 2009, p. 28
[v] Simpson, 1987, p. 58
[vi] Simpson, 1987, pp. 3, 58
[vii] Dalglish and Driscoll, 2009, p. 21-22
[viii] Dalglish and Driscoll, 2009, p. 53
[ix] ibid, pp. 10, 12
[x] Brotchie, 1905, p. 8-9
[xi] Simpson, 1987, p. 58
[xii] Caesar, 1956, 1, 1
[xiii] Tacitus, 1973, p. 20
[xiv] Ibid p.22
[xv] Dalglish and Driscoll, 2009, p. 53
[xvi] Dalglish and Driscoll, 2009, pp. 10, 12
[xvii] McNeill, 1974, p. 22
[xviii] Hardinge, 1973, (intro) p. 5
[xix] Ross and Cyprien, 1985, pp. 55, 116-117
[xx] Bradley, 1999, p. 1
[xxi] Dalglish and Driscoll, 2009, p. 35-36
[xxii] Brotchie, pp. 10-14, 1905
[xxiii] Yeoman, 1999, pp. 16-16, 28-29
[xxiv] Dalglish and Driscoll, 2009, p. 30
[xxv] Dalglish and Driscoll, 2009, p. 18
[xxvi] Carver, 1999, p. 15
[xxvii] Cummins, 1995, p. 13
[xxviii] Carver, 1999, p. 14
[xxix] Dargie, 2002, p. 18-19
[xxx] Ibid
[xxxi] Barley, 1986, pp. 27-29
[xxxii] Roesdahl, 1882, pp. 147-155
[xxxiii] Ibid, p. 215-216
[xxxiv] Dalglish and Driscoll, 2009, pp. 130-134
[xxxv] Dalglish and Driscoll, 2009, pp. 31-34
[xxxvi] Owen, 1999, pp. 37-52
[xxxvii] Yeoman, 1999, pp. 18, 28-29
[xxxviii] Dalglish and Driscoll, 2009, p. 32-34
[xxxix] Ibid, pp. 16-18, 28-29
[xl] Dalglish and Driscoll, 2009, p. 30
[xli] ibid, p. 19
[xlii] Simpson, 1987, p. 4-5
[xliii] ibid, p. 48
[xliv] Simpson, 1987, p. 48
[xlv] Dalglish and Driscoll, 2009, p. 19-20
[xlvi] Ibid, p. 5
[xlvii] Ibid, p. 10
[xlviii] Ibid, p. 28
[xlix] Ibid, p. 10
[l] Dalglish and Driscoll, 2009, p. 80

[li] Ibid, p. 6
[lii] Brotchie, p. 288, 1905
[liii] Dalglish and Driscoll, 2009, p. 80
[liv] Simpson, 1987, p. 6-7
[lv] Dalglish and Driscoll, 2009, pp. 80-84
[lvi] Robertson & McIntosh, 2005, p. 10