# Greenock Municipal Buildings

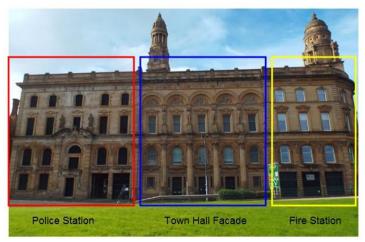


By John Smith

## The Decorations on the Municipal Buildings

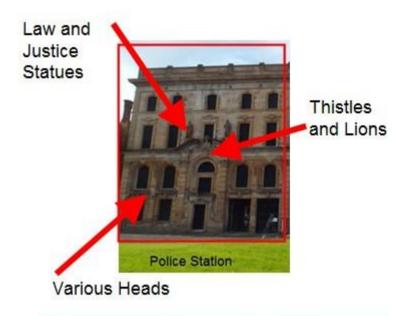
This is a walk around the Municipal Buildings from the north face, past the west and south faces to the Victoria Tower. Interpretations of the decorations are the author's alone.

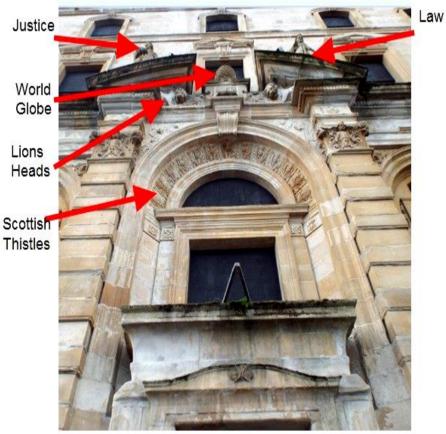
### The North Face



This was the first phase to be worked upon, as the police station had to be up and running so that the old police station could be pulled down to allow the west face to be constructed.

The police building has two statues representing Law and Justice. It also has other decorations.









Justice and Law







Then there are two women's heads and two male heads that represent, I believe, some of the functions in the Police Station.

## Firstly the two women:



Pipe around her neck Sanitation Offices

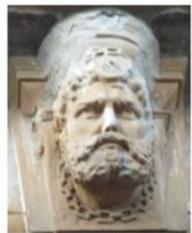


Cleaning Offices in this Building

## Then the two men:

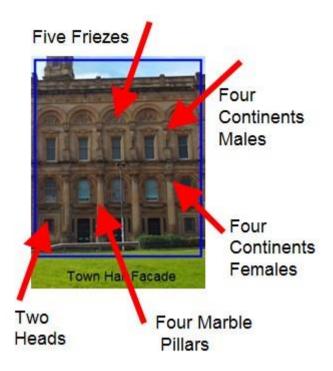


Snakes in his hair Represents Police Doctors Offices



Chains around neck and a lock in his hair Represents Turnkey and Police Cells

The Town Hall elevation (the blue square) between the Police Station and the Fire Station had to have its own character as it is the Town Hall's only public visible frontage.



It is divided into five bays by four Corinthian composite columns.

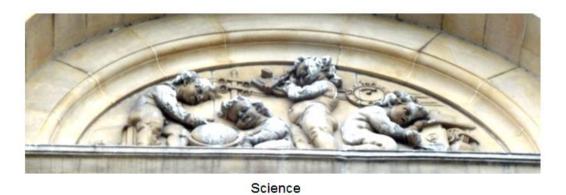
Above the columns there are male, half dressed colossal figures representative of the four continents on the globe. Nowadays we think of five. In 1880 Australia had not gained the title of a continent.



The four male statues represent the four continents. The ladies' heads at the top of the pillars appear to match the four men in nationality.



There are five friezes above the third floor windows. As I have interpreted them, they represent, from left to right, Science, Industry, Navigation, Agriculture and Music and Art.





Industry



Navigation



Agriculture



Music and Art

In the façade there are a male head and a female head, which point to two sets of stairs behind two doors that lead to the Town Hall.



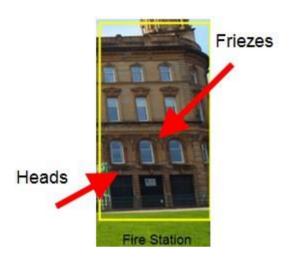
Gentlemens' and artistes' entrance to stairs to the Town Hall.



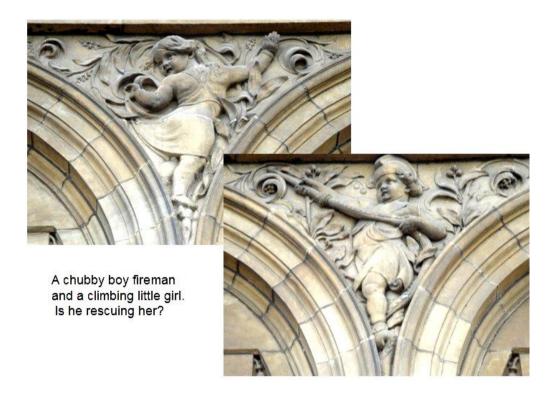
Ladies' and artistes' entrance to stairs to the Town Hall.

These entrances were meant to allow performers to access the rear of the Town Hall without mixing with the public.

The Fire Station is on the west of the north face (in the yellow square)



There are two friezes above the second floor windows:



There are also three heads above the three doors on the ground floor. Again this is my interpretation of their significance:



Barrels and Bales around her neck

Harbour Dues Administration



Fireman's helmet and a hose round his neck

Fire Service

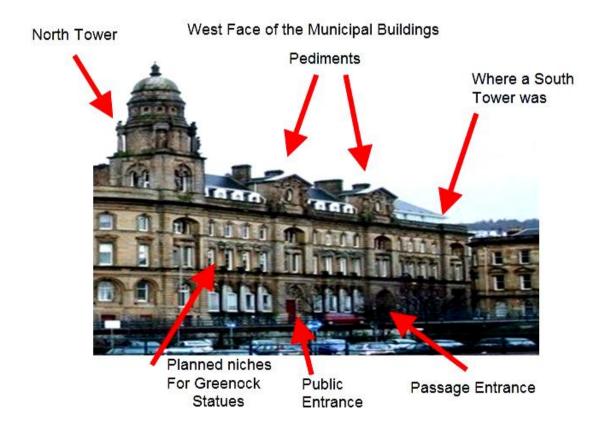


Chains around her neck and a yoke in her hair

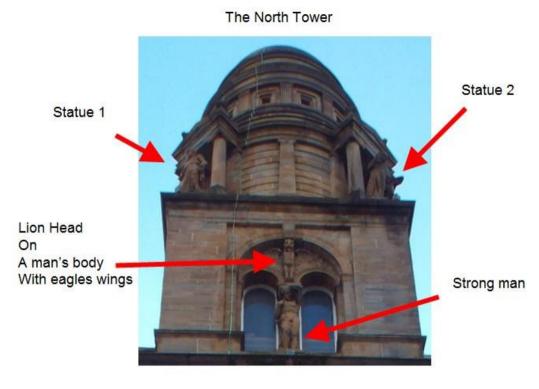
Transport Administration

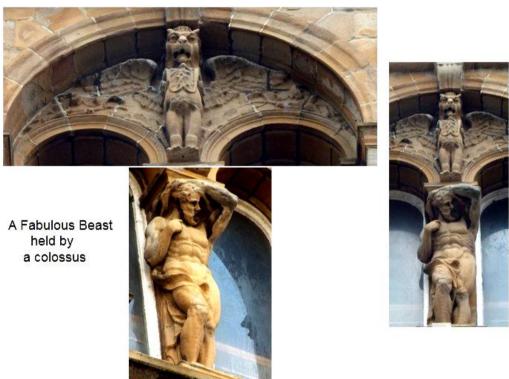
## The West Face

The west face was the last to be completed and contains offices:



### The North Tower





The only beast that had a lions head, eagles wings and stood like a man I have found is the First Beast of the prophet Daniel. Daniel in a vision stood upon the shore of the "Great Sea" (the Mediterranean), and saw four "Great Beasts" come up out of the sea in succession.

The "First Beast" was like a lion and had eagle's wings, and as the Prophet watched it, he saw it lifted up from the earth, and made to stand upon its feet as a Man, and a man's heart was given to it. (*Dan. 7:4*) This was Daniel's image of Babylon, but I cannot make a Greenock connection!

The colossus is Samson, Heracles /Hercules, or perhaps Atlas.





Statue 1

Statue 2

Statue 1 and Statue 2 are next. I do have a good idea who they were and I will reveal this later.

There are two empty niches for statues at the rear of the tower.

The next decorations to the west side of the Municipal Buildings are the two pediments with rich sculptures.



Each has a different frieze and I have interpreted them as Industry and Navigation from the things they are holding and doing.

It is now appropriate to tell a little of the overall plan to the Municipal Building.

When the Cowan's Corner problem forced the council to rethink, they also redesigned.



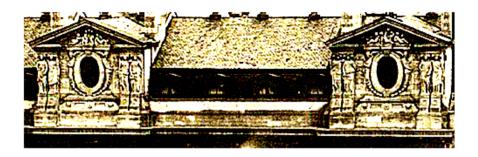
So four new pediments were erected and much grander North and South towers were erected. Along with this, to be discussed later, the Victoria Tower went from 180 feet to 245 feet high.

During the Second World War the Municipal Buildings suffered severe bomb damage in 1941.

There are few pictures of the lost pediments up close.

The following gives a reasonable close up but the interpretation of the friezes is given with caution.

South Face Lost Pediments





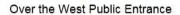


Art and Music?

Science?

The interpretation is based on the left frieze having a child playing a lute and on the right a child pointing up to the heavens, similar to the two friezes on the North Town Hall façade, given the same meaning.

Back to the west face:





Over the public entrance to the west side there is a lady riding a chariot over the sea. This could be interpreted as Amphitrite, the wife of Posiedon, god of the seas.

In the upper corner of the large windows on both the west face and the south face there are heads of women in a particular style. They do not appear to represent more than womanhood. To be noted is that each lady seems to have a different hairstyle.









A selection of the many heads at the corners of windows The only difference between them seems to be hairstyles

There is an entrance to the passageway access to the Town Hall. The symbol above it is Viking



Above the entrance to the underpass A Viking ship with raised oars and two huge fish

## The South Facade

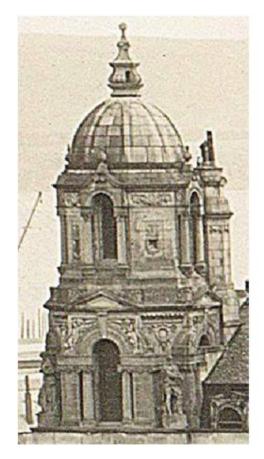


### West of the South Facade



Part of the South Facade

This was the second phase to be worked on. We have discussed previously the lost pediments of the south face. Now a little about the lost tower that was pulled down in 1944: this tower is shorter than the North Tower but it does have three standing statues at its base.



The Lost Tower



Seen from the west

There are decorations over empty niches:

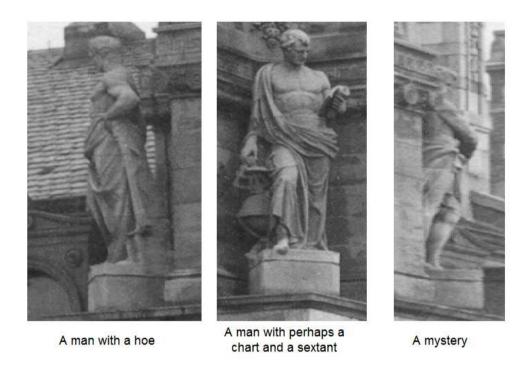


The three statues on the South Tower face out to the town.

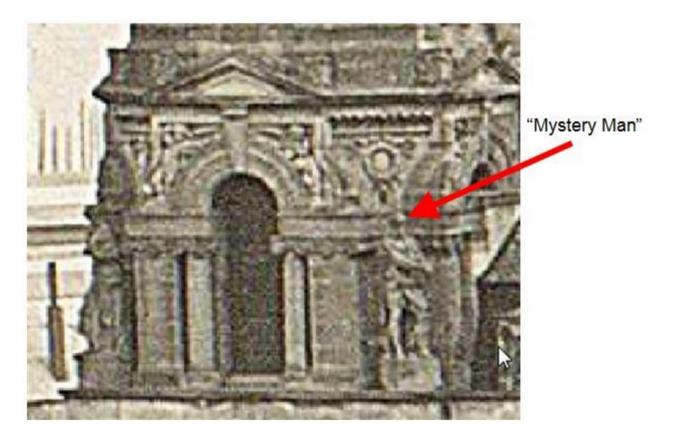




The three statues on the South Tower



There is a tantalising glimpse of the mystery man but it is not clear what he represents.



## The entrance to arcade at the west end.

There was to be an arcade at the front of building on the South Façade. The corner had an entrance facing west and a second facing south. They

were decorated by different means. The entrance facing west had two males in the arch, and the entrance from the south had two females in the arch. They seemed to proclaim some of the goods to be sold in the town.

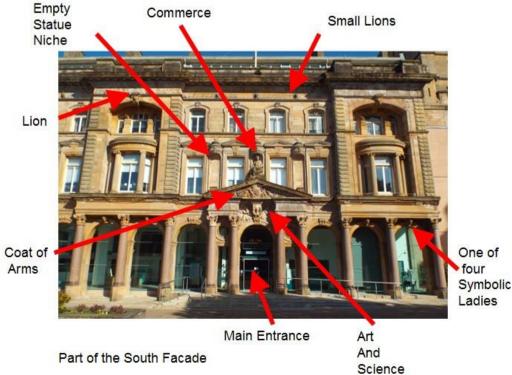


West entrance - wheat and sugar cane



South entrance - vines and roses

## Overview of East of the South Façade



The principal entrance and staircase is to have been in Hamilton street. It has a portico on which is carved the town coat of arms.

•



Town Arms and two sea horses?

In the spandrels of the arches of the doorway are sculptured figures in bas relief representing Science and Art.



Science and Art

The portico is surmounted by a seated female figure representing Commerce.

This was meant to be a private entrance: the public entrance was in Taylor's Court.



The architects wanted the public to know what Greenock stood for. They put four very symbolic ladies' heads to show the type of employment there was in the town:



The pillars in the colonnade are Peterhead granite.



There are various lions' heads up high.

### The Victoria Tower

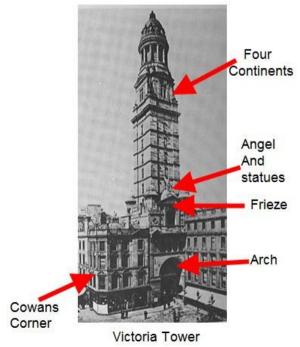
The tower was the centre of the concept of the Municipal Buildings. They were to be located in a very busy town centre and needed to stand out as an obvious landmark.



Original Plan Tower (150 Feet High)

The tower does this. It was originally meant to be 150 feet in height but when the Cowan's Corner dispute put an end to the fully balanced plan, and Glasgow had made clear its plans for City Chambers, a fresh look at Greenock's plan prompted the view that the tower needed to be taller and more prominent than Glasgow's tower. It was!

The re-planned tower was decorated by various statues and friezes, though some are difficult to see now without binoculars.



The tower is twenty-seven feet square, but with flanking turrets it becomes forty feet square. The square tower rises and terminates in pinnacles with statues.

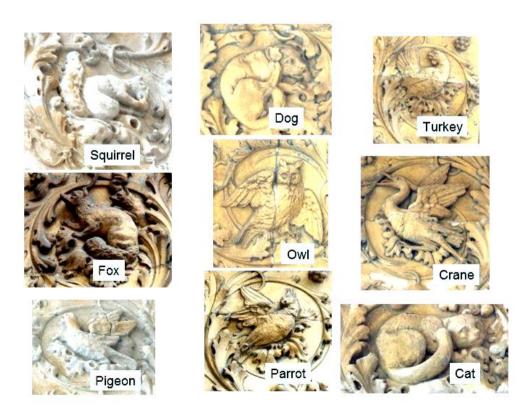
The total height of the Victoria Tower is two hundred and forty five feet. The foundation of the tower is thirteen feet in depth and forty feet square. It is built of brickwork and firebrick blocks set in Portland cement.

## The Archway



The Archway into the Town Hall

In the archway frieze there are many creatures, but no fish or insects. It seems to approve a rural life in a bustling town setting.



There are two languid ladies resting in the archway. Their clothes are Greek, because (despite their laid-back poses) they are powerful virgin Greek goddesses. The lady on the left with the torch is Hecate, who had power over birth, life and death. On the right, with her snowy owl companion, is Athena, who gifted Athens the olive tree, and was strong, independent, powerful and wise. These qualities are being celebrated here.

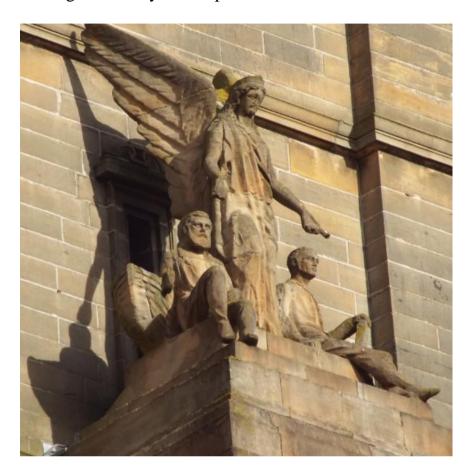


The archway ladies

High above the archway there is a frieze of six young men in a sailing boat, facing Cathcart Square. The Greenock weather has not been kind to them as erosion of the stone they are made from has coarsened their features almost to grotesque. A possible explanation why they are here may be the reliance of Greenock on herring fishing and the use of Dutch style busses manufactured in Scott's shipyard since 1712.



Above the frieze is an unusual scene. It is not unusual that we have an angel standing proud with wings outstretched. This angel may be Gabriel the guardian angel. What is unusual is the two gentlemen sprawling in front of the angel in a very casual pose.

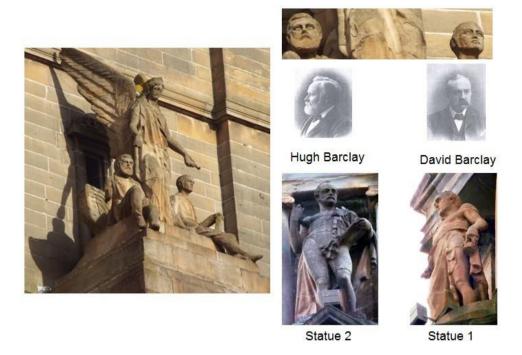


These do not seem the poses of town councillors or provosts. So who could these gentlemen be?

The radical thought that comes to mind is that this is a representation of the two architects Hugh and David Barclay. Even more of a radical thought is that we may have seen them before going round the buildings.

This would be in the North Tower where Statue 1 and Statue 2 stand proud carrying implements an architect or stone mason may carry. In the aftermath of the redesign of the project caused by Cowan's corner difficulties and the lack of Greenock candidates for statues the architects perhaps were recognised and immortalised.

The nice thing is, dear reader, if you disagree, you can choose your own alternative.

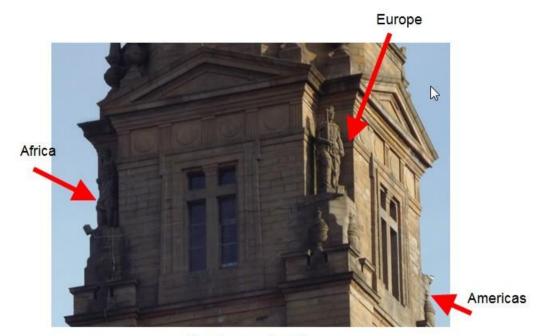


Hugh and David Barclay made a lasting impression elsewhere around Greenock. They were busy architects and supplied their services to many projects in what is now Inverclyde.

> 1879 Greenock Municipal Buildings 1879 St Andrew's Free Church 1884 Jean Street School, Port Glasgow 1884 East Crawford Street School 1886 Highlanders' Academy Replacement 1886 Clune Park School, Port Glasgow 1908 Watt Memorial School 1909 Highholm School, Port Glasgow

### The Four Continents

At the top of the tower below the dome are four female personifications of the four continents. These are difficult to make out. They stand at each corner of the tower and have been sculpted to show native dress and features.



The four continents



Europe

Southeast corner

Americas

Northeast corner

Asia

Northwest corner

Africa

Southwest corner

## Author's Note

So finally I arrive at the end of this journey through Greenock's Municipal Buildings. I hope it has given you a new perspective on these amazing buildings.

I want to state here that I was encouraged by my partners in the Cottage Identity group in Greenock. I also would like to acknowledge a missing friend, John McQuarrie, taken from us this year.





Greenock of Today

I leave you who have got this far a picture above of a modern view of two great projects that Greenock took on and succeeded in. They were the James Watt Dock project and the Municipal Buildings project.

## God Speed Greenock

## The end

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