



MONUMENT TO

# SIR WILLIAM PEARCE

'THE BLACK MAN' - GOVAN, 1894

# INTRODUCTION

The statue of Sir William Pearce, known locally as 'The Black Man', is a much loved landmark of Govan Cross. Silhouetted by Cardell Halls and Brechin's Bar since 1894, it is an iconic image of Govan and is instantly recognisable to Govanites all over the world.

In 2013, after 119 years of exposure to the elements, the Govan Cross Townscape Heritage Initiative carried out repairs to the statue using funding from the Heritage Lottery Fund and Glasgow City Council. As the statue's sooty layers were removed, its stone plinth cleaned, lettering refreshed and missing railings replaced, the local community also started to unpick the passing years to reveal more about the man who, more than any other, propelled Govan Shipbuilding to the centre and admiration of the world stage. With the same spirit and passion that Pearce himself displayed in his life's work, local residents pieced together a picture of lives now lost to modern day Govan and were inspired to pen poetry and prose to interpret the story of Sir William and his wife, Lady Dinah Pearce.

These details and those of the statue's restoration are collected within this leaflet, produced to celebrate the unique heritage features of Govan and the fascinating and often flamboyant people who helped shape this remarkable place.

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# 'THE BLACK MAN'

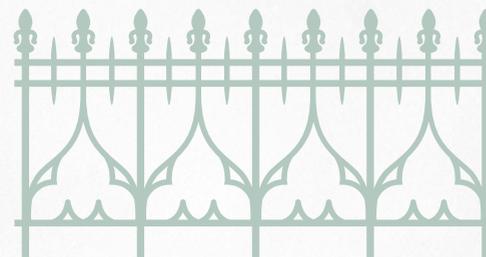


The Sir William Pearce Statue was unveiled in 1894 and quickly became a focal point for the people of Govan, becoming affectionately known as 'The Black Man' as the city soot coated the bronze figure.

The memorial statue stands at the gusset between Burleigh Street and Govan Road at Govan Cross. The land was specially selected and gifted to the people of Govan by Sir William Pearce's wife and widow, Lady Dinah. By doing so, she wished to preserve the site of her husband's memorial and create "a beautiful breathing space for the public".

The statue was erected by public subscription in swift response to Pearce's early death. "Scarcely had the grave closed..." reported the Govan Press, "when the working men of Govan and their more opulent brethren thought that something should be done to keep green the memory of one so dear to all of them".

Within a very short time, a substantial amount of money was raised and the prominent sculptor, Mr Edward Onslow Ford, of London, was commissioned to produce the memorial piece.



## COMPOSITION

The bronze figure of Sir William stands 3m high. He is dressed in a tightly buttoned frock coat, as is confidently stepping forward with a plan inscribed with a drawing of a ship, possibly the HMS Achilles or one of his famous 'Ocean Greyhounds', unfurled in his hands. It was thought to be an excellent likeness of him. The bronze stands on a polished plinth of red Peterhead granite constructed in five sections and weighing 25 tons. It has an anthemion cornice and carved leaf ornaments at each corner. The base is surrounded by a hexagonal stone kerb.

The original cast-iron railings were of an ornate Victorian design, most likely produced in the Saracen Foundry of Walter MacFarlane & Co. It is thought that these were removed during the War effort.

The statue is Category B listed in recognition of the historic importance of its subject matter and its special interest as a sculptural piece.

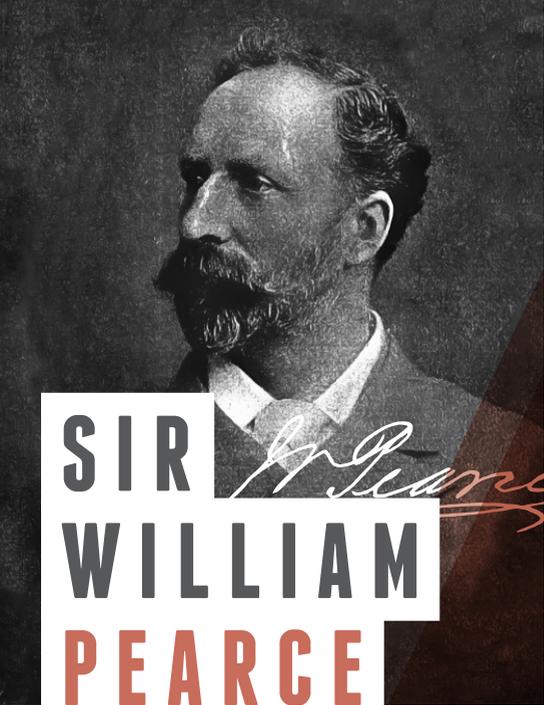
Detailed dedications are cut into each face of the plinth and read as follows:

**East Face:** Sir William Pearce Bart. M.P. Died 16th December 1888 aged 55 years.

**North Face:** As a shipbuilder and engineer his originality of thought and his marvellous skill in execution contributed largely to the development of the navy and mercantile marine. In token of his eminence in his profession he was created a baronet in 1887. His extensive and accurate knowledge led to his appointment to serve on the royal commissions on tonnage, loss of life at sea and depression of trade. His career furnished a striking example of what genius combined with energy, industry and indomitable courage may accomplish, even in a short business lifetime.

**South Face:** For a time he served as a commissioner of police of the burgh of Govan. He was also Honorary Colonel of the Second Volunteer Battalion Highland Light Infantry; Provincial Grand Master of Glasgow; Commissioner of Supply; Justice of the peace, and Deputy Lieutenant of the county of Lanark. When Govan was made a parliamentary division in 1885 he was returned as its first representative, and was re-elected in 1886.

**West Face:** Erected by public subscription in grateful recognition of his numerous noble qualities, as a man and employer of labour 1894.



# SIR WILLIAM PEARCE

*Sir William Pearce Bart.MP*  
*8.1.1833 – 18.12.1888*

**Govanites are familiar with ‘The Black Man’ statue and, equally so, The Pearce Institute. Both were bequeathed by Lady Dinah to the people of Govan, as a legacy of the Pearce name. But perhaps less familiar is the actual story of Sir William Pearce. So, who was ‘The Black Man’?**

William Pearce was born on the 8th January 1833 in Brompton, Kent. He trained as a naval architect at the famous Chatham Naval Docks. It was here that his talent for shipbuilding was recognised when, at the age of only 27 years, he supervised the construction of the first ever iron-clad warship — HMS Achilles. This practical experience, and the knowledge of the Admiralty (Royal Navy) that he gained at Chatham, served him well throughout his professional life.

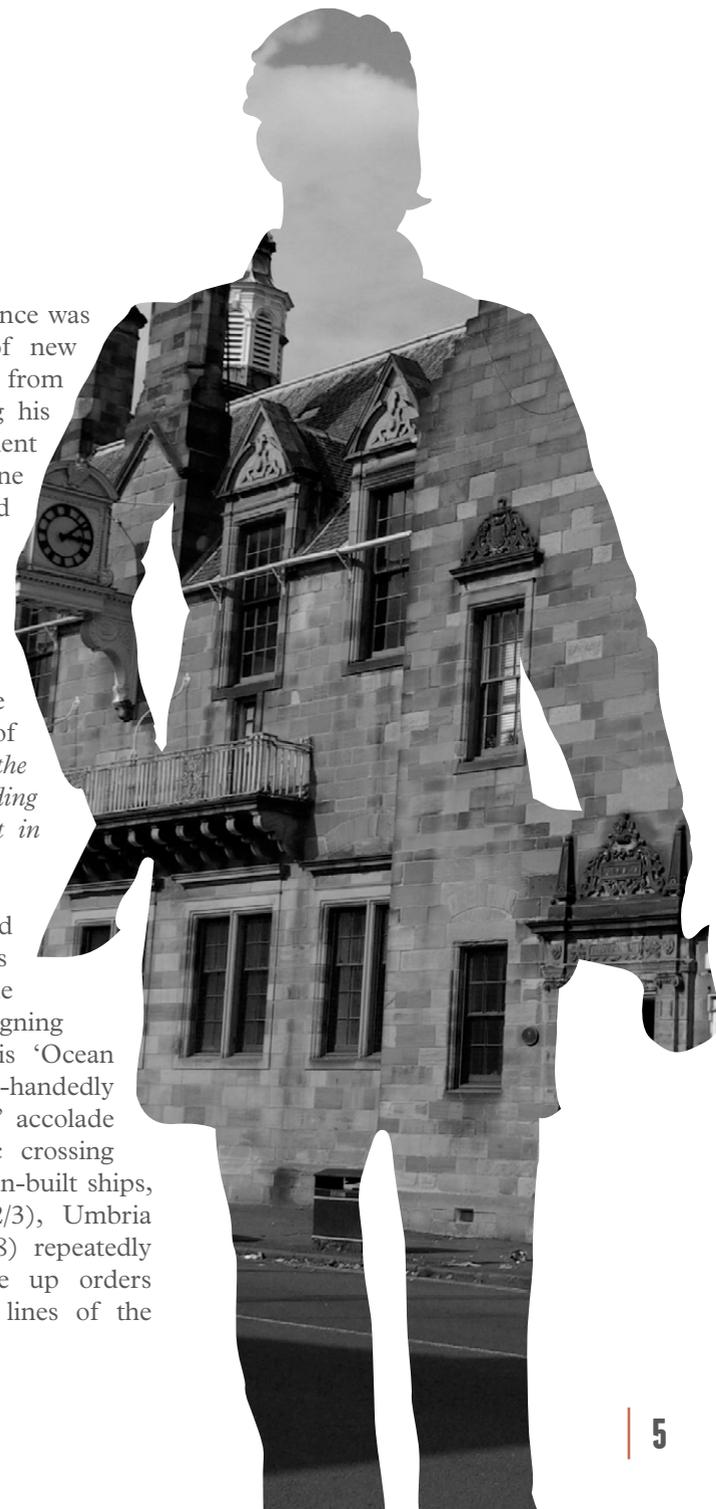
With a reputation as a young man in a hurry, Pearce’s meteoric rise came on the back of his proven business management and design skills. Drawn to Glasgow in 1863 as a surveyor with the Lloyd’s Register, his talents were quickly noticed by Robert Napier, the acknowledged ‘Father of Clyde Shipbuilding’. Within a year, Pearce had taken on the prestigious and highly responsible role of manager of Napier’s shipyard, and he immediately stamped his mark by designing and building the fastest steamships on the Atlantic.

Following the early death of John Elder, and at the request of Elder’s widow, Lady Isabella, Pearce, in 1870, became one of three partners who owned and managed the Fairfield Yard under the title of John

Elder & Co. Again his influence was immediate. The tonnage of new shipping produced jumped from 74 tons to 493 tons during his time there, and the development of the triple expansion engine guaranteed the Yard’s, and the Clyde’s, supremacy in marine engineering for the next 30 years.

By 1878, only 15 years after arriving on Clydeside, Pearce became the sole proprietor of John Elder & Co by then *“the most notable private shipbuilding and engineering establishment in the world”*.

He had proven to be a shrewd and competitive business man. Pearce dominated the transatlantic market by designing fast passenger liners — his ‘Ocean Greyhounds’. He single-handedly cultivated the ‘Blue Riband’ accolade for the fastest transatlantic crossing time, a record that his Govan-built ships, such as the Alaska (1882/3), Umbria (1887) and Etruria (1885/8) repeatedly smashed in order to drive up orders from the major passenger lines of the



world, including Cunard and Guion. He applied the same tactics to the cross-channel market, whilst at the same time establishing his Govan shipyard as a naval builder, securing, amongst others, many contracts to build the German naval fleet. It was Pearce's achievements in these three competitive markets that helped the Fairfield Yard of John Elder & Co ride out the great trade depression of 1873-79, a fact that established Pearce's credibility, if not respect, amongst his 5000 strong Govan workforce.

In 1885, Pearce was successfully elected as the first Conservative MP for Govan. In a typically shrewd business move, he converted his business to a limited liability company, to ensure his new political role would not prevent his firm's continued access to government shipping contracts. The now famous Fairfield Shipbuilding & Engineering Co. was born and was to continue to flourish until the 1920's.

William Pearce was by now a powerful, influential businessman and an established politician in Westminster Society. He held numerous positions of responsibility: he served on three Royal Commissions, chaired many private companies, was the Police Commissioner of the Govan Burgh and was also Member of Parliament for Govan. In 1887, he was made a Baronet in Queen Victoria's Jubilee Honours, a hereditary and highly prestigious honour that ranks above a Knighthood and which entitled the use of 'Sir' before and the letters 'Bart' after his name.

Politically, Pearce remained a controversial figure. Despite public acts of charity, his voting record was consistently anti-labour and he actively sought to suppress workers' wages and rights.

As a self-made millionaire, Sir William commanded a weekly salary of £3,700 compared to his workers £1. He was known to be a flamboyant character who lavishly entertained colleagues and friends, often on his steam pleasure launch on the Thames. Newspaper reports also document an alleged affair with a young woman in London, a scandal that was hushed-up.

Perhaps it is not surprising, given the pace, ambition and responsibilities of Pearce's life, that his health started to fail, and on 18 December 1888, he died of a weakened heart at his home in London's Piccadilly. He was 55 years old. He left behind a vast fortune of £1,069,669, about £120 million in today's money.

Sir William Pearce, Bart, MP, was a man driven by vision, ambition, skill and success. A flamboyant character, astute business man and skilled engineer, he achieved the extra-ordinary in his relatively short life and stamped his indelible mark on shipbuilding, Govan and the world.

## RIBAND TAKERS

Some of Pearce's prize winning ships.

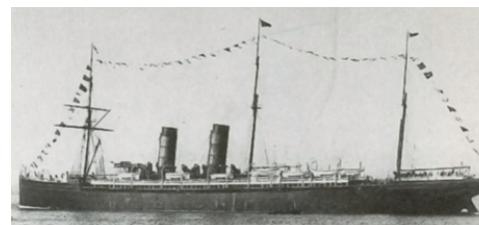


### The Alaska

**Built:** 1881

**Claimed Prize:** 1882 (7 Days 6 Hours)

**Owner:** Guion Line



### RMS Umbria

**Built:** 1884

**Claimed Prize:** 1887 (6 Days 4 Hours)

**Owner:** British & North American Royal Mail Steam Packet Company



### RMS Etruria

**Built:** 1885

**Claimed Prize:** 1885 (6 Days 5 Hours)

**Owner:** British & North American Royal Mail Steam Packet Company

## FACT OR FICTION?

Legend has it that Pearce kept a luxury yacht built on a hoax order from a fake foreign prince. True or not, the story inspired local resident, Suzanne Gibson, to pen a poem!



### The Steam Yacht by Suzanne Gibson

*A foreign prince he ordered a yacht,  
But he had nae money so  
it didnae get bought,  
When William wis telt he wisnae too pleased,  
But said "Haud oan, a've aye had  
a fancy fur wan o' these".*

*An advairt fur ma yerd it wid be,  
The style and design fur aw tae see,  
Clients there wid be wined an' dined,  
Mair liner orders (at the back o' ma mind).*

*Deals an' contracts could be  
made it wid seem,  
Afloat on the boat – the age o' steam.  
An mony wee "soirees" on  
board we could hold,  
Dinah an' me – or is that a bit bold?*

*By invite only, fur coats, top hats an' tails,  
Then aff "doon the watter"  
the yacht wid tak sail.*

# THE UNVEILING CEREMONY



The Pearce Statue was unveiled on Saturday 6th October 1894, in a grand ceremony to which people, rich and poor, turned out in their thousands.

A large procession including Sir William's family, local dignitaries and members of all the Trades Societies headed to Govan Cross amidst streets decked in bunting and flags.

The unveiling itself was performed by Lord Kelvin of Largs with the 105th Lanarkshire Rifle Volunteer Corps providing a guard of honour. To loud applause from the mass of onlookers, he noted that those who saw the statue "*would keep in remembrance what Sir William had done for Govan, for the Clyde and the world*". While Ex-Provost Fergusson declared "*the statue to be an incentive and encouragement to every passing apprentice to do what he could to emulate the professional career of the great founder of the Fairfield Yard*".

The Title Deed of the land was then presented to Provost Kirkwood by Sir William George Pearce, Sir William and Lady Dinah's only child, to loud and rapturous cheers from the watching crowd.



**(1) Lady Dinah Pearce** – Wife of Sir William and a philanthropist in her own right. She supported many good causes in and around Govan and bequeathed the Pearce Institute to the people of Govan.

**(2) Sir William George Pearce** – Son and only child of Sir William and Lady Dinah Pearce. He assumed control of Fairfields when his father died and also inherited the Baronetcy (2nd). He died childless in 1907, ending the bloodline.

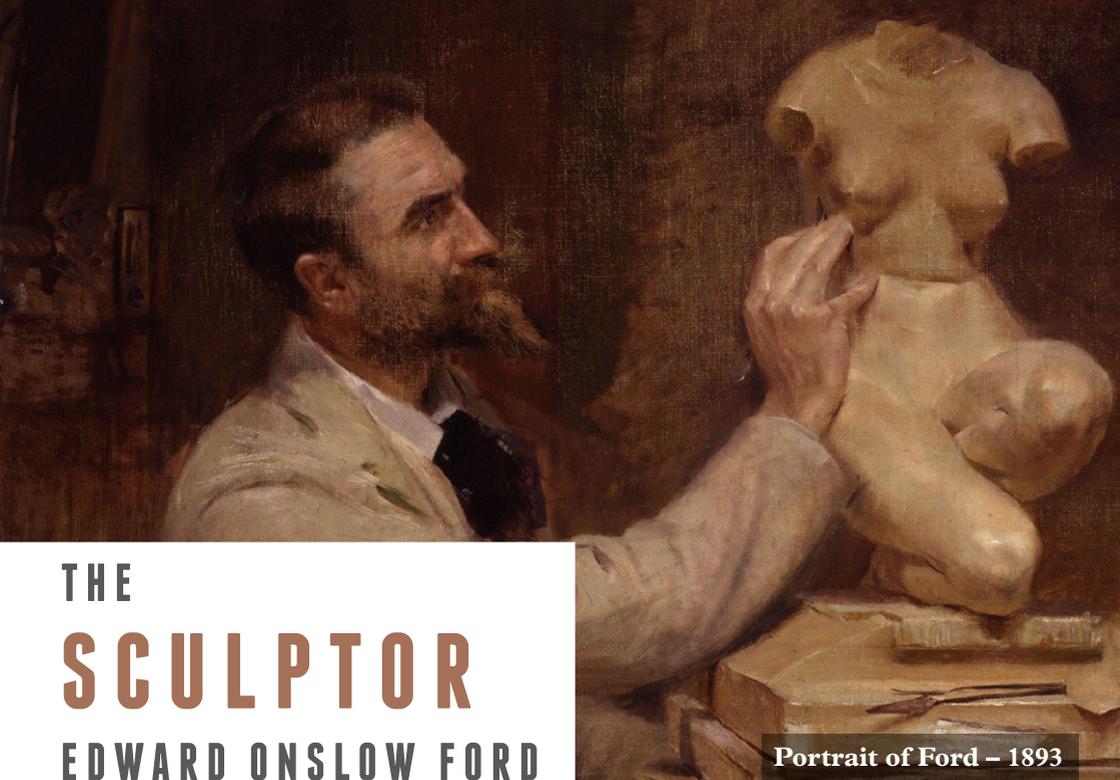
**(3) Lord Kelvin** – Often referred to as 'Glasgow's greatest scientist', Lord Kelvin was an inspired mathematician and physicist who had extensive maritime interests. A professor at Glasgow University for 50 years from 1846, his memorial statue can be found in Kelvingrove Park.

**(4) Sir William Arrol** – The owner of Dalmarnock Iron Works. He is credited with building 'The Forth Railway Bridge', 'Tower Bridge, London' and the second 'Tay Bridge'.

#### Also in attendance:

**Rev. Dr. John MacLeod** – Minister of Govan Old Parish church from 1875 to 1898 and a great friend of Lady Pearce. She named the MacLeod Hall in the Pearce Institute after him.

**Mr McGregor Malloch** – Of Tod and McGregor's yard on the Clyde. The yard was credited for building the first propeller driven craft 'The Vesta' in 1848.



Portrait of Ford – 1893

## THE SCULPTOR EDWARD ONSLOW FORD



Edward Onslow Ford was born in Islington, London, in 1852. He was a gifted but largely self-taught sculptor. He specialised in portraiture, initially exhibiting portrait busts and statues, then from 1884 onward, specialising in the sculpting of symbolic figures, such as the Sir William Pearce monument.

Ford was an innovator and was part of the 'New Sculpture Movement' that introduced a new realism to sculpture and broke from the establishment to experiment with new poses and techniques. He was known for the accuracy and attention to detail of his portraiture, with some critics declaring that

his work was too life-like to be acceptable as sculpture!

Ford went on to create many beautiful artworks and monumental sculptures, among them memorials to Queen Victoria (1901) and the great English Romantic Poet Percy Shelley (1892).

Ford died suddenly and prematurely in 1901, at the age of 49, but his memory lives on through his artworks all over the world. A sculpted monument was erected in his memory near his home in St John's Wood, London, just across from the Abbey Road Zebra Crossing made famous by the Beatles.



Queen Victoria – Ford

## BRONZE PROCESS



Bronze has been used to make sculptures for many hundreds of years. It is an alloy, usually a mixture of copper with tin, lead or zinc. As a metal it is hard wearing and long lasting, making it perfect for memorialising important historical figures.

Making bronze sculptures is a highly skilled craft and a number of casting processes may be used to create a final piece. The sculptor must first create a mould, into which molten metal can be poured to reveal a bronze cast when cooled. The metal is then worked to remove any signs of the casting process or, in larger statues, to join together elements that have been cast



The Egyptian Singer – Ford

separately. After final polishing, the artist may choose to apply a surface colouration or 'patina' to achieve a particular colour or finish. The process of manipulating the bronze surface to determine the final colour or accentuate the features of a piece is known as 'patination', and is carried out in the foundry often by burning different chemicals on to the bronze.

Originally the surface of the bronze would then have been sealed with beeswax to stop water (and other elements) from damaging the metal, but nowadays modern microcrystalline waxes perform the same function much better.



## THE STATUE'S CONDITION



The Pearce Statue was actually found to be in very good condition for its 119 year age – no bronze disease was present, fine details were still intact, and there were no structural issues or graffiti. Inevitably, after so many years of exposure to the elements, some repairs were required. The top priority being the green staining on the bronze.

### Here comes the science part...

The statue is known locally as the 'black man' because of the sooty deposits that covered it during Govan's industrial heyday when people burned coal for fuel. When bronze is exposed to sulphuric compounds in atmospheric pollution, such as soot, it starts to oxidise. The



resulting copper sulphate is green in colour and is an unstable surface finish. While a green surface colour or 'patina' may have been the sculptor's original intention, it is more likely to reflect a lack of appropriate maintenance. The main aim of the restoration was to gently clean the bronze surface, and re-establish the original patina and protective wax coating.

Many of the mortar joints to the granite stonework had also become loose and needed repointing. Some surface soiling was evident to the plinth, particularly at the statue base, and the original cast-iron enclosure railings were missing. The lettering on the plinth also showed some signs of damage due to weathering and the inappropriate application of paint.

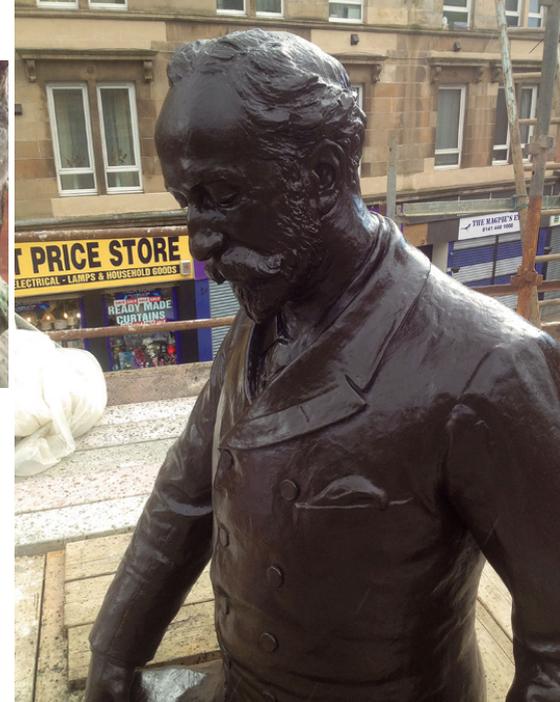


## RESTORATION PROCESS



Once the condition of the statue and the issues affecting it were understood, a plan was drawn up to describe how it should be restored. Because there was no structural damage to the bronze statue, it was decided that the metal really only needed sensitive cleaning and re-patination to restore it to its former glory.

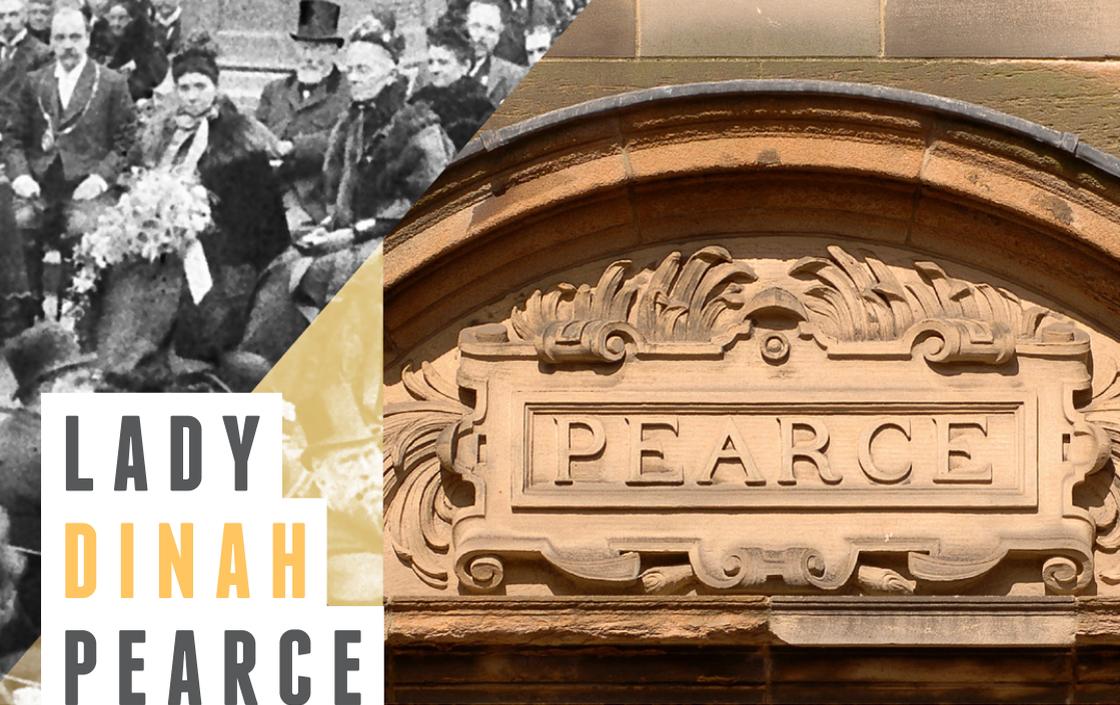
First the bronze was cleaned using white spirit and water before a liquid called dichloromethane was used to gently remove layers of old surface coatings. This revealed the fine details of the statue. After another inspection and clean with white spirit, the bronze statue was then skilfully coated in a product called Paraloid B72 – a protective coating commonly used in restoration and conservation fields, which can be pigmented to produce the desired colour, is non-damaging to the bronze and can be easily removed in the future



if necessary. Finally, multiple layers of a special protective wax called 'Renaissance Wax' were applied to the bronze. This improves the appearance of the statue and seals the metal further. Particular attention was paid to pick out key features and details of the structure such as the head, hands and the scroll being held by Sir William.

As well as the restoration work to the bronze statue, the granite plinth was cleaned, mortar joints were repointed and the original lettering on the plinth was refreshed.

Old photographs were used to identify the pattern of the original cast-iron railings - No 277, from the Walter & MacFarlane & Co catalogue. This allowed replacement railings to be produced that are exact replicas of the originals.



# LADY DINAH PEARCE

## Lady Dinah Elizabeth Pearce 1836 – 1918

Sir William was survived by his wife, Lady Dinah Elizabeth Pearce. Although overshadowed historically by her husband, Lady Pearce was nevertheless held in extremely high regard by the people of Govan. It was said of Lady Pearce: “Any community was well off where there was a ‘Good Angel’ in the district, with a liberal heart and a readiness to help forward the best interest of the people and the district”.

Lady Pearce acquired an intimate knowledge of and deep affection for the people of Govan. A discerning philanthropist, she was continually involved good causes and

was one of the pioneers of the ‘Fresh Air Fortnight Scheme’ which gave hundreds of children, who had been ill or sickly, the opportunity to convalesce at the coast or the country. Lady Pearce was relentless in her activities, striving to improve living conditions for the poor and to alleviate distress and hardship. Through her efforts, she kept many homes together in dark days. Her most enduring gift to the people of Govan is the Pearce Institute, a beautiful A-listed building containing a public hall, library and other rooms, which remains a community establishment to this day.

**Written by local resident  
Mairi Holmes**

## To Dinah – Lady Pearce by Fullertone, local resident.

*At the Gushet, “The Black  
Man” statue stands  
But there is no memorial to his wife  
For her honest goodwill to  
the people of Govan  
We should commemorate her... and her life*

*Her name, Lady Dinah, Elizabeth Pearce  
Though rich, suffered in Victorian life  
Then, when her husband died  
She seemed to thrive  
And was freed from being just a wife*

*Well, when he passed on  
Honoured, buried and gone  
He left a fortune... indeed  
And Dally... that’s Dinah,  
came into her own  
Helping those, in Govan, in need*

*Behind every great man stands  
a great woman, they say,  
Well, Dally was no exception  
She stood by her man, proudly  
In his colourful life  
No matter society’s perception*

*Yes she carried on supporting his name  
With this statue erected in his honour  
In this showed pride, and,  
The strength of the “women of the Clyde”  
So three cheers and good wishes fall on her!*

*She commissioned and built “Our Institute”  
And other buildings important to all  
As comfy with the people of Govan  
As she was at the society ball*

*Now like I’ve thought before  
This woman was more, and much more  
Than just a powerful man’s wife  
‘Till eighty one years, she  
lived long and strong  
Contributing to “Good Govan life”*

*No airs and no graces  
No sign of two faces  
She mixed so easily with them all  
The elite and high fashion  
Though, that wasn’t her passion  
For the poor, she spoke loud and stood tall*

*She fought the good fight  
She knew it not right  
That the sick were ailing and sore  
And although she was wealthy  
Good, strong and healthy  
She never forgot nor left out the poor*

*Her wonderful “fresh Air fortnights”  
Filled up weak lungs...with good air  
City kids gifted with air to breath  
And free to run wild  
With the wind through their hair*

*Her modern mind knew that  
the town’s life was killing  
And to good health the smog was a thief  
So for the children at most  
A trip to country or coast  
Was a two week pollution relief*

*So to Dally, Dinah Beth, an angel in Govan  
I for one, would raise a glass  
If a monument is proposed in HER memory  
For she was truly a woman of class!*

# GOVAN'S REGENERATION



Much has changed in Govan since Sir William Pearce's day, when the air rung with the sound of shipyard hammers and the place was a thriving mass of people and industry. While many of the intervening years have not been kind, remarkably many of the buildings, streets and features that Lady Dinah would recognise still exist today. This surviving historic townscape maintains an important connection between the community of today and those long gone. It also defines Govan's unique identity and wonderfully rich heritage. As such, it is irreplaceable.

In 2008, Govan was designated as a Conservation Area and the establishment of Govan Cross Townscape Heritage Initiative (the THI) followed swiftly in 2009. Both are measures set in place by Glasgow City Council at the request of the local community, to protect what remains of Govan's outstanding built heritage. The THI, in particular, aims to ensure that Govan's historic buildings and features are kept in good repair for future generations to enjoy, and that the rich aspects of Govan's history are revealed and celebrated.

As well as restoring the Sir William Pearce Statue, THI investment has helped make the Pearce Institute wind and water tight, restored the Aitken Memorial Fountain



and transformed the public space at Govan Cross. Traditional shopfronts — with wooden frames, full-length glazing and hand-painted signage — are being reinstated to spectacular effect. And essential building repairs are being carried out to Govan's signature historic buildings at Water Row and Brechin's Bar/Cardell Halls. The THI's funding is provided by the Heritage Lottery Fund and Glasgow City Council.

The theory behind this investment is simple — successful places are invariably attractive places. The more we make of Govan's unique historic environment

and its extra-ordinary heritage, the more people will be attracted to the place, and the more prosperous and vibrant the place and people will be as a result.

The Govan Cross Townscape Heritage Initiative is an important part of much wider regeneration proposals being implemented between 2006-2016 to make Central Govan attractive, vibrant and prosperous. You can find out more about this and indeed all things Govan at

[www.getintogovan.com](http://www.getintogovan.com)

Go on, get into Govan!

Work to restore the Sir William Pearce Statue was carried out in May 2013, funded by Glasgow City Council and the Heritage Lottery Fund as part of the Govan Cross Townscape Heritage Initiative. The restoration of the Pearce Statue, one of Govan's most recognised landmarks, forms a central part of wider regeneration proposals being implemented during 2006-2016 to make Central Govan an attractive, vibrant and prosperous place to live, work and visit. Find out more at [www.getintogovan.com](http://www.getintogovan.com).  
Go on, get into Govan!

This commemorative leaflet was produced by Govan Cross Townscape Heritage Initiative in association with Impact Arts.

Special thanks to Robert Fullerton and the people of Govan for their contributions.



Cover portrait photograph by Andy Byars,  
courtesy of Govan Workspace Ltd.