



# THE TOBACCO MERCHANT'S HOUSE

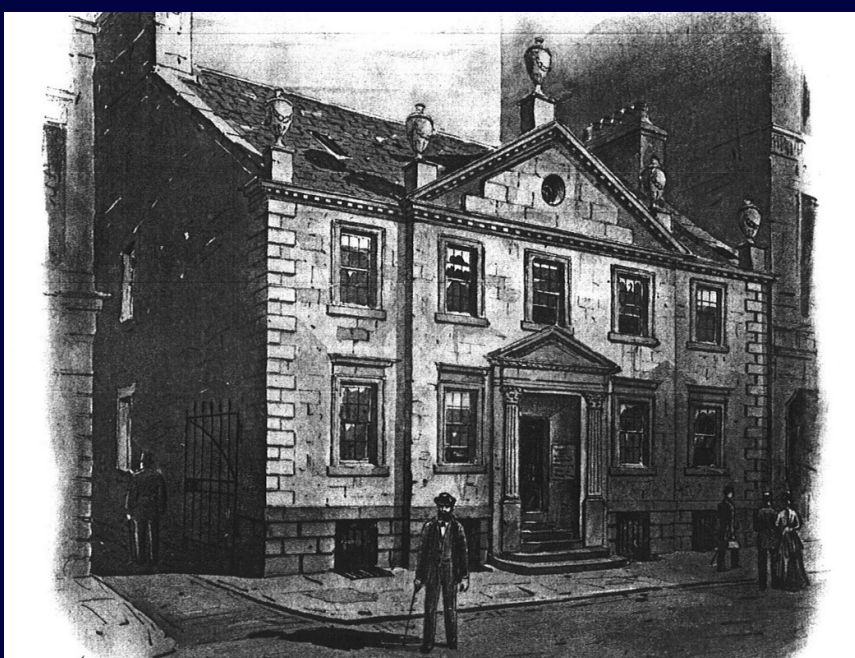
No. 42 Miller Street

Nestled amongst imposing 19th and 20th century industrial and retail architecture on Miller Street in Glasgow's Merchant City sits an attractive little house, built in 1775. 42 Miller Street, now known as The Tobacco Merchant's House, is remarkable for several reasons, not least of which is the fact that it survived the enormous industrialisation and commercialisation of Glasgow over the last two centuries.

The house was built by John Craig in 1775 on ground feued from the mansion house gardens of John Miller, Maltman. The house, originally one of a row of villas, was bought in 1782 by Robert Findlay of Easterhill, a tobacco importer. His son, also Robert, developed the nearby Virginia Buildings in 1814 as premises for his generation of tobacco traders.

By 1826, No. 42 had been sold and in 1836 it was inherited by the Misses Brown of Paisley, becoming the offices of the City and Suburban Gas Company until 1866. Thereafter, it was occupied by a variety of businesses, including jewellers, glass importers, cotton spinners, and printers.

From 1989, 42 Miller Street was vacant until it was restored by the Glasgow Building Preservation Trust and purchased by the Scottish Civic Trust, who still own and operate from the building.







# MILLER STREET

## Georgian townhouses for Glasgow's merchants

The expansion of Glasgow's medieval core westwards was the result of property speculators who had followed the tobacco merchants in their exodus from the medieval town. Miller Street was the outcome of just such speculation, and was the vision of John Miller, a maltman. Miller had built a villa facing what was to become Argyll Street in 1754. With rising land values, he proposed to erect a new street on a patch of former agricultural ground he owned next to his house. He set out preparing proposals for its development, known as a "feuing plan".

Miller did not intend to build the houses, only to let the ground to builders themselves. He set out strict regulations as to what would be allowed: "Each house must consist of a half-sunk and two square storeys, no gables, chimneys of "corbie steps" facing the street, and entered by a front door and flight of steps projected on the intended pavement." No "brewing, tanning leather, making of candles or soap of any other business" which could be "nauseous or hurtful to the inhabitants of Miller Street" were to be permitted. In order to secure a building lot, one had to conform to this pattern, but this caused no real problems as it ensured continuity of the street, and therefore continuity of the 'right sort of occupant'! Miller Street opened in 1773, lined with detached Georgian villas, functioning both as elegant town houses and business premises.



Artist interpretation of Charlotte Street, Glasgow, built in the 1780s. Miller Street would have looked similar.



# THE ARCHITECTURE OF NO. 42

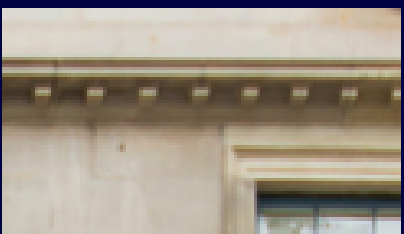
The Tobacco Merchant's House follows the Palladian style of architecture, which was developed by Andrea Palladio in the later 16th century in Venice and Vicenza. The style was introduced in Britain by Inigo Jones in the 17th century, but only became fashionable in the 18th century with the birth of the neo-classical movement.



**PEDIMENT:** a triangular gable sited over the building's centre was taken from Greek and Roman temple designs. Roof urns were popular additions to buildings at this time.



**AEDICULE:** (or door surround) is formed by two fluted Corinthian pillars that support a pediment attached directly to the wall. The columns are described as fluted as they have been carved with vertical indentations to create areas of light and shade. The name Corinthian comes from the carved acanthus leaves at the top of the column. This was one of the classical orders of architecture, of which Corinthian was one of the more elaborate. These particular columns are Roman as they have a base, whereas Greek columns do not.



**CORNICE:** is a decorative feature used to define the boundary between the roof and the main façade. This particular type of cornice is known as a modillion cornice as it is block-like and set at regular intervals. The carved stone around the window is called the architrave.

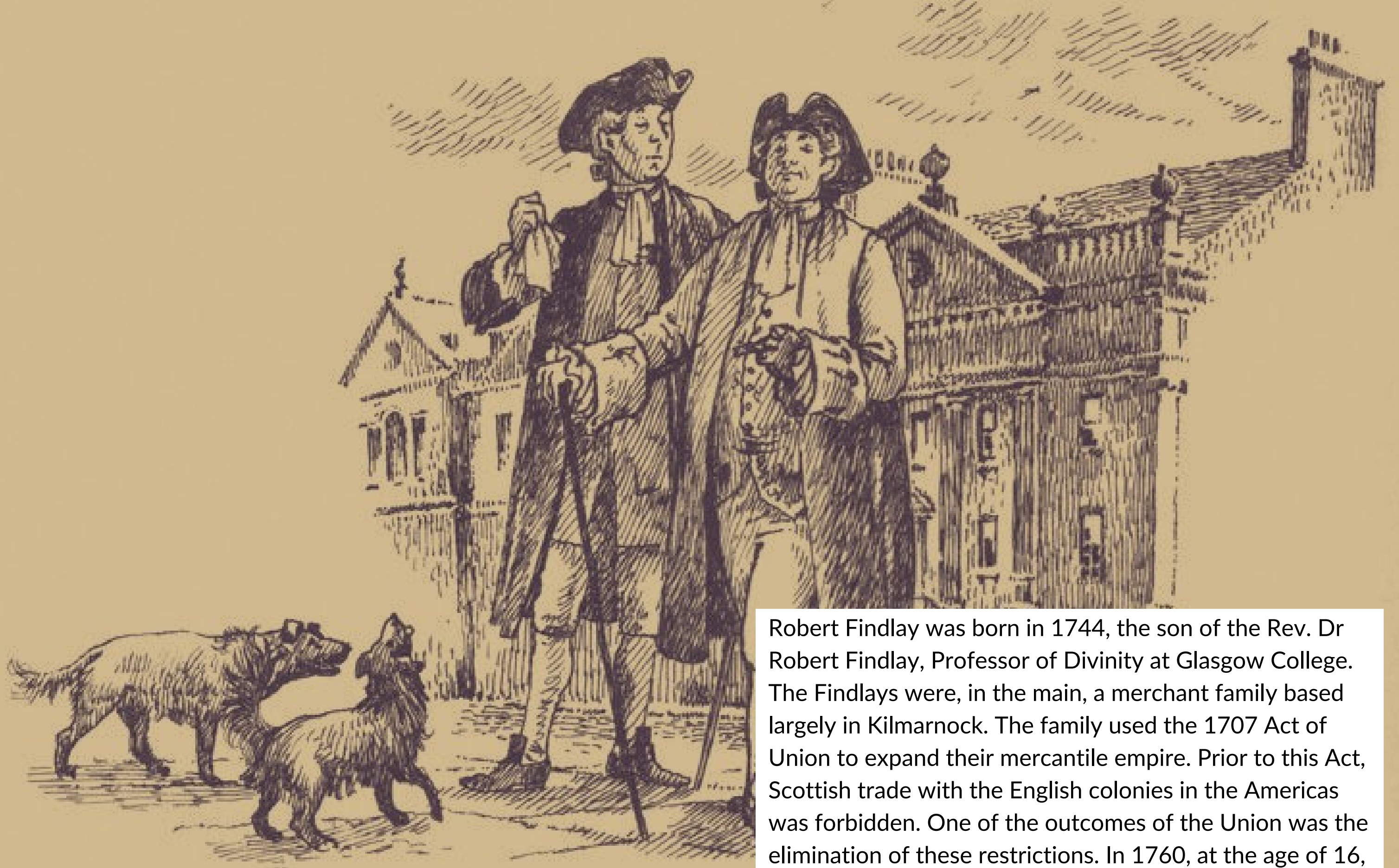


**FACADE :** polished ashlar stone (smooth with very fine joints) covers the first and second floors. Rusticated ashlar is smooth but with beveled edges, and is used to give the overall architectural composition a defining base. Rusticated quoins (corner stones) create definition at the corners of the building.



[www.scottishcivictrust.org.uk](http://www.scottishcivictrust.org.uk)  
Scottish Charity No: SC012569





Robert Findlay was born in 1744, the son of the Rev. Dr Robert Findlay, Professor of Divinity at Glasgow College. The Findlays were, in the main, a merchant family based largely in Kilmarnock. The family used the 1707 Act of Union to expand their mercantile empire. Prior to this Act, Scottish trade with the English colonies in the Americas was forbidden. One of the outcomes of the Union was the elimination of these restrictions. In 1760, at the age of 16, Findlay sailed to Virginia to join his two uncles where he was engaged in the tobacco plantations there.

After amassing a considerable fortune, he returned to Scotland and bought, in 1782, a house at No.42 Miller Street, Glasgow, which was one of the most fashionable addresses in Glasgow at the time. One of his uncles, William Cunningham, had returned some time earlier and built a fine mansion house in what is now Royal Exchange Square for the massive sum of £10,000. The house, much altered and extended, is now the Gallery of Modern Art.

Findlay's son, also named Robert, was born at No.42 Miller Street two years later in 1784. In the same year (1784) Findlay purchased Easterhill House, a country estate on the Clyde about 3 miles east of the medieval centre of Glasgow on the London Road. However, No.42 remained the family's townhouse. He died in 1803, and was succeeded by his son who became an eminent merchant and banker in Glasgow. This Robert Findlay (Robert the Banker) was responsible for the building of the Virginia Buildings in Virginia Street in 1814 as business premises. It was this Robert Findlay who eventually sold the house in 1826, and who died at Easterhill on 27 June 1862, aged 78. It was from this Findlay dynasty that the house takes its name.

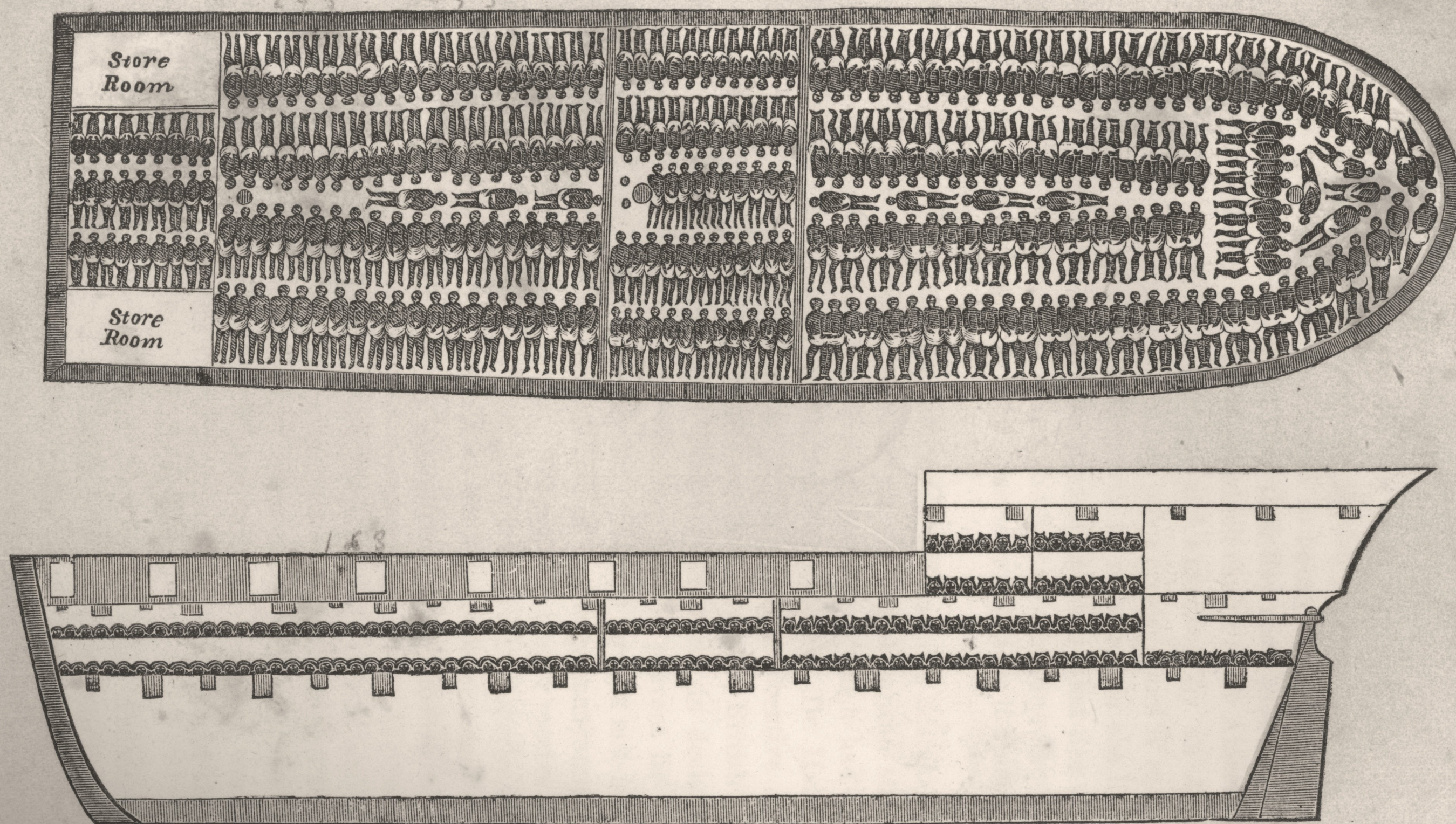
# WHO WAS THE TOBACCO MERCHANT?

## Robert Findlay and the Findlay family



Gravestone of Robert Findlay and his father, Rev. Dr. Robert Findlay, in the Ramshorn graveyard (Ingram Street).





DECKS OF A SLAVE

# GLASGOW'S TOBACCO TRADE

Profits from the transatlantic  
slave trade and slavery


At its height, over 40% of Scotland's tobacco trade went through Glasgow. The vast majority of Glasgow shipping was engaged in the tobacco trade. Almost all of the more successful merchants in the city had a financial stake in the business in the Americas. Tobacco made up over one third of Scotland's imports and over half its exports. This trade was fantastically profitable and tobacco traders became some of the richest men in the world.

Glasgow was linked to a triangular trade system, which saw essential manufactured and consumer goods shipped to the American colonies. On the return journey, ships were loaded up with tobacco, sugar, and cotton from plantations cultivated by enslaved Africans. The third leg of the transatlantic trade triangle carried enslaved people from West Africa to the colonies. Some 30% of plantations in Jamaica were owned by Scots, who had earned a reputation for being harsh taskmasters – life expectancy for an enslaved person was around 4 years.

In 1807, the slave trade was outlawed in the UK as a result of over 20 years of fierce campaigning. However, slavery itself lasted throughout the British Colonies until further legislation, the Abolition of Slavery Act, took effect in 1834. Plantation owners were generously compensated with £20 million (£17 billion today) from the Government, while enslaved people had to work without wages for their current masters for an additional 4-6 years to help pay for the cost of their own manumission.

Advertisement published in April 1773 in the *Glasgow Journal*

**DESERTED,**  
FROM his Master's house in Glas-  
gow, on the morning of Satur-  
day the 3d current,  
**A NEGRO MAN.**  
He is about 35 years of age, and  
5 feet 9 or 10 inches high, pretty broad and  
stout made, broad faced, and somewhat yel-  
lowish complexioned. The white of his eyes  
are remarkably tinged with black, and he has  
a surly gloomy aspect. His drets when he ran  
off, was an olive coloured thickset coat, jac-  
ket and breeches, a black wig tied behind, and  
silver buckles in his shoes; but as they were  
all good, it is probable he would change them  
for worie, and thereby supply himself with  
cash.







## DECLINE

An abandoned property



In 1992 the building was offered to the Glasgow Building Preservation Trust for £1 by the Virginia Court Development Company after sitting vacant for 6 years.

When GBPT first visited No.42 the original ashlar facade had long since been lost under thick paintwork which had weathered and caused the stone to badly erode. A clumsy and ugly mansard roof had been added, Victorian sash and case windows had replaced the original multipane variety and the swagged stone urns that decorated the wallhead had been removed.

Internally little, if anything, survived apart from some simple stone fireplaces, some panelled doors and fragmentary evidence of plasterwork on the ground floor, which was all used as the basis for remodelling. Despite its misuse during the 20th century however, it was still recognisably a Georgian villa of classical Palladian design, with its advanced centre bay and distinctive Corinthian pilastered doorway and plans were soon put together for its restoration and reuse.





Externally, GBPT attempted to reinstate exactly the appearance of this handsome building, using a drawing dated 1885 to guide the work. This involved rediscovering the natural stone facade, using crown glass in the windows and pure lime in the harling to gables and the rear. Inside new plasterwork and joinery has been reproduced to original profiles and the original room layout is recreated to form high quality offices.

The mansard roof was removed and replaced with an appropriate pitched slate roof, stone gables, chimneys and skewes. The decorative urns were reinstated and windows were replaced with six over six sashes.

As part of the final phase of the project, the tarmac pavement outside No.42 was relaid in Caithness slabs, with the original basement wells re-opened. A series of contemporary cast iron grilles by artist Jack Sloan were commissioned (the design of which is based on the clay pipe motif). In 1997 the Scottish Civic Trust bought the building with the aid of lottery and other funding and now occupies the first floor, letting the remaining office spaces. The Trust considers the building a most appropriate base, given its aims and objectives regarding the built environment and heritage.

# RESTORATION

## Saving No. 42 Miller Street

Funding To enable the restoration project to succeed, Glasgow Building Preservation Trust was indebted to the following:  
Historic Scotland European Regional Development Fund (via Strathclyde European Partnership)  
Glasgow Development Agency  
Glasgow City Council  
Strathclyde Regional Council  
Architectural Heritage Fund  
Merchant's House of Glasgow  
Pilgrim Trust  
Marks and Spencer plc  
Design Team  
Architect: McGurn Logan Duncan and Opfer  
Quantity Surveyor: Keillor Laurie Martin Partnership  
Structural Engineers: Roxburgh Associates  
Main Contractor: Hunter and Clark Limited

---

Design Team  
Architect: McGurn Logan Duncan and Opfer  
Quantity Surveyor: Keillor Laurie Martin Partnership  
Structural Engineers: Roxburgh Associates  
Main Contractor: Hunter and Clark Limited

[www.scottishcivictrust.org.uk](http://www.scottishcivictrust.org.uk)  
Scottish Charity No: SC012569





# SCOTTISH CIVIC TRUST

Thriving, beautiful and well  
cared for buildings and places

Our mission is to celebrate Scotland's built environment, take action for its improvement and empower its communities.

We aim to achieve this through three main strands of activity: Celebrate, Take Action and Advocate.

## Our Values

- We are robust and independent in advocating for Scotland's places and spaces
- We are positive about the future of the built environment
- We lead thinking on Scotland's civic spaces
- We collaborate across the heritage sector and beyond to develop ideas that tackle exclusion
- We support community groups looking after their locality

We are proud to represent Scotland's civic sector and strive to ensure our amenity groups are active, empowered, and educated to make a difference in their locality.

Learn more about what we do at the Scottish Civic Trust:  
[www.scottishcivictrust.org.uk](http://www.scottishcivictrust.org.uk)

Follow us to stay informed:



[www.scottishcivictrust.org.uk](http://www.scottishcivictrust.org.uk)  
Scottish Charity No: SC012569