



A Description of Early Nineteenth Century Glasgow

John Melish

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This short description of Glasgow around the beginning of the 19th century was written by Scottish-born mapmaker John Melish (1771-1822). Melish worked in a Glasgow merchant company, and visited the United States a number of times in the early 19th century. Finally, he settled permanently in the United States. He is best known as the author of the first map of the US that showed the Pacific Ocean.

Glasgow is the biggest city in Scotland, larger than the Scottish capital of Edinburgh. People have lived in the Glasgow area since prehistoric times. In ancient times the Romans ruled England, but much of Scotland, which they called Caledonia, lay outside of Roman control. The Romans occupied southern Scotland for a period of time. The northern boundary of Roman control in Scotland was marked by the Antonine Wall, which ran through what is now the Greater Glasgow area. The Antonine Wall was north of the more famous Hadrian's Wall in northern England. The Romans had difficulty maintaining control over southern Scotland, however, and they were forced to withdraw from the area a number of times. Roman territory in southern Scotland and England were faced attacks from the Picts, or Caledonians, the ancient inhabitants of Scotland.

After the end of the Roman Empire, the Glasgow area became part of the Celtic Briton kingdom of Strathclyde, which control parts of Scotland and northern England. Strathclyde, and other kingdoms in Scotland, were eventually united into a single Scottish Kingdom. Early medieval Scotland was home to several different ethnic groups. There were Britons (related to the ancient Celtic people of England), the Picts, Gaels, Norse, and Angles. The Picts were an early medieval people who may have been related to the ancient Caledonians encountered by the Romans in Scotland. They may have been related to the ancient Celtic Britons of England. The Norse, or Vikings, were Scandinavian immigrants who raided and settled across Europe in early medieval times. They settled in some parts of Scotland (as well as in England, France, and elsewhere). The Angles, along with Saxons and Jutes, were Germanic tribes who settled in England after the end of the Roman Empire, bringing the ancestor of the English language with them. The Gaels seems to have immigrated to Scotland from Ireland. In medieval times, the Gaelic language became the main language spoken in Scotland. English, however, was spoken in some parts of southern Scotland.

In medieval times Glasgow served as an important bishopric. Beginning in the 17th century, Glasgow's importance as a trading and manufacturing centre grew. The city was enriched by international commerce, trading goods like sugar, cotton, and tobacco. By the 19th century it had become a major industrial and manufacturing centre, and eventually surpassed Edinburgh in population.

In his description of Glasgow, Melish emphasizes the city's important textile industry, which was largely based on cotton imported from the southern United States and elsewhere.

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