

# Mackintosh and Glasgow Walking Tours

Welcome to the new series of downloadable walking tours developed by the Mackintosh Heritage Group. These will introduce you to Mackintosh's architectural heritage and the wider architectural riches of Glasgow, a city described by John Betjeman as the finest Victorian city in the world.



## Glasgow Style and Modernity



## Second City



## The West End



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# Second City

From Central Station to City Chambers and then to the Necropolis.  
**This walk takes approximately 1¾ hours.**

This walk will examine some of the best examples of Victorian and Edwardian commercial architecture in the city. Glasgow flourished, prospered and expanded in the 19th century, by the end of which it was often referred to as the “Second City” of the British Empire. Glasgow’s wealth and ambition was expressed in the magnificence of its City Chambers but also in its commercial buildings, many of which were opulent Classical designs inspired by Italian Renaissance models.

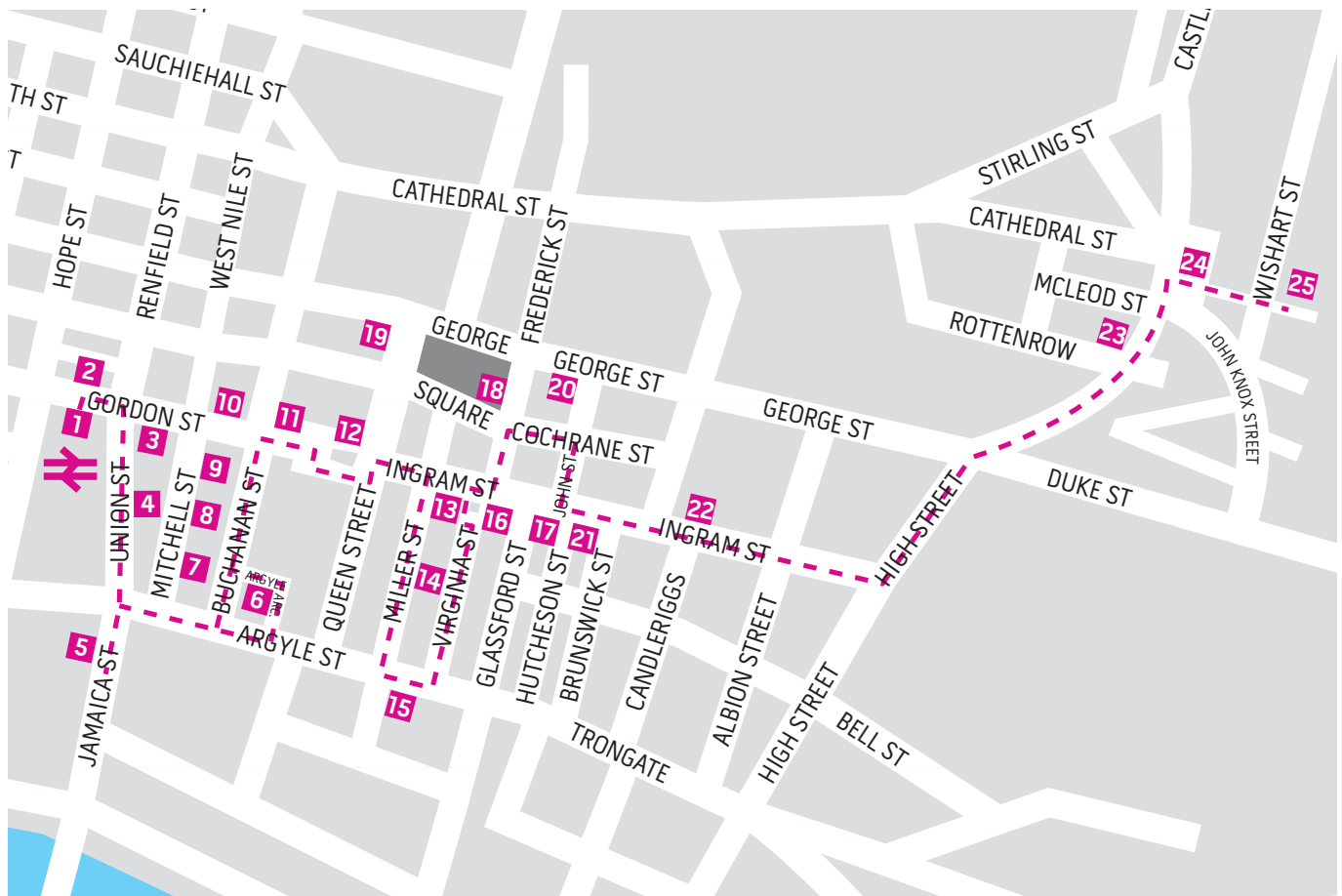
Glasgow also encouraged the talent of one highly original designer, Alexander ‘Greek’ Thomson, who applied his radical interpretation of Greek precedents to new building types like the commercial warehouse and was arguably Scotland’s greatest Victorian architect. Victorian Glasgow was further remarkable for the number of commercial buildings partly or wholly constructed of cast-iron, the most interesting of which date from the 1850s.

The great American historian Henry-Russell Hitchcock described them as “among the most successful Victorian commercial edifices to be found on either side of the Atlantic”.

Opening hours are provided for those buildings that are open to the public. These were correct at the time of writing, but you are recommended to check current times to avoid disappointment. Occasionally unforeseen building works may restrict viewing.



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**1** The walk begins at **Central Station**, whose spacious top-lit concourse is today perhaps the real centre of the city.

**2** Out of the front entrance, signed Gordon Street, and into Gordon Street where, directly opposite, stands the extraordinary façade of the **Grosvenor Building** introducing the unique style of Alexander ‘Greek’ Thomson. This was originally a four-storey block of commercial premises built in 1858–59 by Alexander & George Thomson, who rebuilt it after a disastrous fire in 1864. In 1907 it suffered the indignity of a Classical superstructure being plonked on top and today, after further mutilation and fires, only the façade survives. But it is still a remarkable design in which the interlacing of square piers, window frames, console brackets and Thomson’s personal style of ornament dissolve the wall plane and permit a large extent of glazing.

**3** A little further east, on the corner of Union Street is the **Ca’ D’oro**, originally a furniture warehouse of 1872, by

Mackintosh’s future employer, John Honeyman. Not only the tracery of the large windows of this Italianate palazzo was made of cast-iron but most of its two facades above the stone arcades as well as the original interior. The building illustrates the influence of John Ruskin’s book, *The Stones of Venice*, on the mid-Victorians, although the exotic name of the building only came with an eponymous restaurant in the 1920s.

**4** Turn right down Union Street. On the left hand side is the towering, fantastic façade of **Egyptian Halls**, ‘Greek’ Thomson’s grandest commercial building, currently undergoing restoration. Opened in 1872 as a sort of bazaar or shopping centre with an exhibition gallery, the interior was largely constructed of iron. But it is the exterior which is so remarkable: a sort of exotic layer-cake with each floor having a different, and highly original, treatment of windows and stonework. On the top floor, just below the majestic cornice, the glazing runs behind and independently of the squat columns,

allowing them to stand free. Despite the name, this building was Greek rather than Egyptian in inspiration and the changes in the architectural treatment on each level as it rises may represent the working out of an ideal of architectural development and perfection in Thomson’s highly original mind.

**5** Continue down Union Street to the junction with Argyle Street where, to the right, just before the bridge carrying Central Station, is a cast-iron façade of 1863 designed by James Thomson in conjunction with the iron-founder Robert McConnel. But we continue straight ahead, down to 36 Jamaica Street, to see – on the right – the best of Glasgow’s few surviving cast-iron buildings and one of the most remarkable anywhere in Britain. **Gardner & Son’s Warehouse**, now a pub, was constructed in 1855–56, that is, just a few years after Joseph Paxton’s Crystal Palace in Hyde Park in London demonstrated the possibilities of using pre-fabricated cast-iron sections filled with plate glass. This warehouse, for a cabinet-maker and

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upholsterer, was made entirely of iron, inside and out, using a structural system patented by the Glasgow ironfounder, Robert McConnel. The architect was John Baird, who was responsible for the Classical detail and the effective organisation of the subtly varied arched windows.

Return to Argyle Street and turn right. You will pass St Enoch Square on your right. The square once contained a church and was long dominated by a large railway station and hotel. Today it is a dismal space, but enlivened by the presence of the original station building for the Glasgow District Subway (now a café): a miniature Scottish Baronial red sandstone mansion by James Miller of 1896. There are also some good surviving commercial facades on the west side of the square.

**6** To the north stretches the long length of Buchanan Street, but it is more interesting to reach this via the **Argyle Arcade**, open Mon – Sat 10.00 – 5.30; Sun 12.00 – 5.00. To reach the arcade, continue along Argyle Street, cross at the pedestrian crossing. Facing you, you will see Cranston House, the site of Miss Cranston's **Argyle Street Tea Rooms**, designed by Hugh and David Barclay and furnished by Mackintosh. Turn right and then left into the **Argyle Arcade**, Glasgow's answer to the fashionable arcades of Paris with its shops roofed over with timber, iron and glass in 1828 by John Baird. After a sharp turn to the west, the Argyle Arcade emerges into Buchanan Street. Outwith the arcade's opening hours, continue straight into Buchanan Street, Glasgow's smartest shopping street ever since the early decades of the 19th century.

**7** On the west side, facing the exit from the Argyle Arcade, was **Wylie & Lochead's** red sandstone department store, now part of **Fraser's**, of which the major part is of 1883–85 by James Sellars with, inside, an impressive galleried hall rising the full height of the building.

**8** Further up to the north on the same side, is Mitchell Lane, down which is the former **Glasgow Herald Building**, now **The Lighthouse**: Scotland's

centre for Architecture, Design and the City. Built in 1893–95 and designed by the firm of Honeyman & Keppie, this tall red sandstone building has strange details, naturalistic and yet symbolic, which proclaim it to be an early work by the firm's new young assistant, Charles Rennie Mackintosh.



**9** Slightly further on at 91 Buchanan Street, the picturesque red and white stone gabled building in a North European Renaissance manner was designed by George Washington Browne. This originally housed Miss Cranston's **Buchanan Street Tearooms**, which opened in 1897, but the remarkable interiors by Mackintosh and George Walton have, alas, long gone.

**10** The next junction with Gordon Street was once the commercial heart of Buchanan Street, dominated by banks. On the north-west corner, the richly modelled Renaissance building was built as the head office of the **Commercial Bank Of Scotland**, now a bar and restaurant. The original block, of 1853–57, is in Gordon Street and was designed by the Edinburgh architect David Rhind. In 1886–88 this was extended around the corner into Buchanan Street by A. Sydney Mitchell, who continued the Italianate manner and discipline but added a grand domed tower. It is instructive to compare the Classical correctness of the mid-Victorian building with the greater freedom and invention of the later extension.

**11** On the opposite side of Buchanan Street is the more sober Italianate

façade of what was once the premises of the **Royal Bank Of Scotland**. Designed by Charles Wilson, this is, in fact, an extension of 1851 to the Royal Bank's original building which faces Exchange Place behind. This is reached through one of the elegant flanking arches across the passages on either side. Best to go along the right-hand passage, Exchange Place, for this means passing the Art Deco front of **Rogano's Oyster Bar** (its handsome Art Deco interiors are worth a look).



In Royal Exchange Square behind, these two arches can be seen to be an integral part of the composition of the original **Royal Bank** building, linking it with the handsome and regular stone terraces of commercial premises that frame the square. The Royal Bank itself is a most elegant Greek Revival building of 1827 by another Edinburgh architect, Archibald Elliot junior, but rather suffers from being hidden away in a confined space – “like a candle put under a bushel”, as a contemporary guide-book put it. Even so, this part of Glasgow is the most considered piece of town planning in the city.

**12** The Ionic portico of the bank is hemmed in by the great Reading Room of the former **Royal Exchange** which almost entirely fills Royal Exchange Square. Walk down the side to the Corinthian portico fronting onto Queen Street and you will see that this is a building of two distinct halves reflecting its curious history. This ambitious building, intended as a public meeting place for business transactions and now Glasgow's **Gallery Of Modern Art**, is a product of a rare case of sentimental conservatism in Glasgow. For the site was originally occupied by the handsome mansion built

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by William Cunninghame of Lainshaw in 1778–80. This was so admired that, when Glasgow continued its relentless expansion westwards from the ancient High Street, it was retained rather than demolished. But it was remodelled in 1827–32 for a new use as the city's Royal Exchange. This work was done by David Hamilton, Glasgow's leading architect in the early 1800s and who was sometimes described as the "Father of the Profession" in the West of Scotland. Hamilton added the portico and the church-like tower or tempietto which rises above the former Cunninghame Mansion, and the Reading Room behind. It is worth going inside the Gallery to see the Reading Room's large and most elegant interior with its coffered ceiling supported on impressive Corinthian columns.

In front of the portico, facing east down Ingram Street, is an equestrian statue of the Duke of Wellington by Queen Victoria's favourite sculptor, Baron Marochetti, 1844.

**13** Cross over to Ingram Street where, immediately on the north side, once stood Glasgow's elegant Assembly Rooms by the celebrated brothers, Robert & James Adam, a fragment of which was later erected on Glasgow Green as a sort of triumphal arch. Right into Miller Street, where the building on the corner (now Agent Provocateur and other shops) dating from about 1875, is of poignant and melancholy interest, for although the exterior is not remarkable the interior certainly once was. For here were the **Ingram Street Tearooms**, the first of Miss Cranston's famous refreshment rooms. Opened in 1886, the premises were later enlarged to contain a series of remarkable interior spaces by C.R. Mackintosh. In 1971, after a campaign to reopen them failed, these famous, unique interiors, which had been bought by Glasgow Corporation, were dismantled and are currently in store. Elements of the interiors are on display at Kelvingrove Art Gallery and Museum.

**14** Miller Street is now largely lined with Victorian warehouses, but there is also one precious relic from the previous century. On the left at no.42, now known as the **Tobacco Merchant's House**, is the



only surviving example of the several grand mansions built in this part of the city by the tobacco lairds, the wealthy merchants who traded with America and who were responsible for Glasgow's prosperity in the century after the Act of Union in 1707. The house, with its simple, elegant stone Palladian façade, was built in 1775 by John Craig for Samuel Abramson. It was restored in 1995 and is now the home of two building preservation trusts.

**15** Down to Argyle Street. Almost opposite, on the corner of Dunlop Street, is the **Buck's Head Building**, a block of commercial premises begun in 1863 on the site of the 18th-century Buck's Head Hotel. This is another work by Alexander 'Greek' Thomson, but here he adopted a slightly simpler treatment of the exterior by using a sort of grid of verticals and horizontals deriving from ancient Greek models. Thomson believed that arches were intrinsically unstable – "Stonehenge" he once wrote, "is really more scientifically constructed than York Minster." – and so adopted a system of "trabeation" with vertical square piers supporting horizontal beams or lintels. This abstracted treatment might seem to place Thomson on the line from the rationalism of the great Prussian designer K.F. Schinkel to the 20th-century modernism of Mies van der Rohe, except that Thomson never forgot the importance of ornament. Inventive Greek decoration is incised into the stonework while, on the curved corner, thin free-standing iron columns with extravagant capitals support a miniature balcony. The sculpture on the parapet was by the prolific Glasgow firm of sculptors, J. & G. Mossman. Inside, the Buck's Head building was constructed of iron and Thomson employed McConnel's patent beams, a composite of wrought and cast iron.

Left along Argyle Street (notice the distinctive steeple and clock-tower of the 17th-century Tron Church in the distance) then left into Virginia Street – the name of which emphasises the importance of the tobacco trade to Glasgow before the American War of Independence and where there was, until very recently, a former Tobacco Exchange. Some Georgian buildings, with sober stone facades, survive further up on the left hand side.



**16** Continue to the far end to the domed banking hall of 1853 designed by the elder James Salmon as part of the former **Union Bank**. Continue along the passage to the left to Ingram Street. Here you will see the other, infinitely grander frontage of the bank, rebuilt in 1876–79 as a magnificent Italian palazzo. Above a ground floor with rusticated stonework and an elaborate central entrance rise two floors articulated by free-standing Corinthian columns of granite, all below a rich cornice surmounted by a balustrade. Richly modelled window surrounds alternate and the columns are not evenly spaced, while the whole composition is enriched by sculptured figures by John Mossman. This ambitious composition was designed by the elder John Burnet but the refinement and richness of the detail is probably indebted to the intervention of his more famous son, John James Burnet, who had returned to Glasgow having made a tour of France and Italy after studying at the Ecole des Beaux Arts in Paris. The handsome and ornate interiors of this former bank are now accessible and well

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worth a visit as, having served as a court house for some years, it was re-opened in 1999 as **The Corinthian**, a complex of bars and restaurants.



**17** Immediately next door, to the east, in Ingram Street is another commercial building by the Burnets, father and son, the former **Glasgow Savings Bank**, but here the sophisticated work of the Francophile son predominates. The original building, set back from the street, was an Italianate building of 1866 by the elder John Burnet to which his son added a more interesting top storey some thirty years later. Shortly before, in 1894–96, John James Burnet had built the single-storey banking hall in front, between Virginia Place and Glassford Street. Although small in scale, this is a rich and powerful composition inspired by the Roman Baroque. The handling of the rusticated stone corners, with their recessions and tapering curves, is masterly and the windows, with their broken pediments, and the grand main entrance are enhanced by carving by George Frampton, a talented representative of the so-called “New Sculpture” which flourished at the end of the 19th century. Inside there is a splendid banking hall, now a shop, surmounted by a partially glazed Baroque dome.

**18** Cross Ingram Street and up South Frederick Street to reach **George Square**, originally laid out in the 1780s and long the civic heart of the city. This is comparable to London’s Trafalgar Square, complete with a giant column and statues of national worthies. Cross over to the centre of the square. The Doric column in the centre is the **Scott Monument** of 1837 – the first to be raised to Sir Walter Scott – designed by David Rhind (interesting that Glasgow’s tribute to the novelist was Classical while Edinburgh’s later monument is Gothic). Amongst the several fine statues, the equestrian bronzes of Queen Victoria and Prince Albert by Marochetti stand out. These are on the west side of the square. To the east is Glasgow’s **Cenotaph**, a necessarily severe pylon by Sir John James Burnet with flanking lions by Ernest Gillick. Architecturally, the interest of the square is to both east and west.

**19** The west side of the square is another tribute to the importance of commerce in the language of the Italian Renaissance, uniform in style if not in height. From left to right, two former banks of the 1870s – by J.T. Rothead and Campbell Douglas & Sellars – then, with its corner tower and dome, the **Merchants’ House** by John Burnet, again heightened and improved by his son thirty years on.



**20** But what dominates the square is the great public building that occupies the whole of the east side: Glasgow’s **City Chambers**. Designed by William Young, this is the result of a competition held in 1882 and the building was completed in 1890. Perhaps it is a pity the competition was held when it was, for ‘Greek’ Thomson was dead and his

successor as Glasgow’s progressive Classicist, J.J. Burnet, had not yet got into his stride. But the result, if conservative, is magnificent enough as an expression of the city’s wealth and ambition. And the influence of Thomson is there in the tall central domed tower. Domes also punctuate the corners of the principal elevation, with its richly modelled treatment of Italian Renaissance motifs all in pale stone. But this is a building which must be entered to appreciate its full glory. Access to the grand entrance hall is available during normal working hours. Guided tours are available twice daily on weekdays. The principal rooms – a mahogany Council Chamber and a vast Banqueting Hall with a barrel vaulted ceiling and walls decorated with fin de siècle murals by some of the painters known as the “Glasgow Boys” – are reached by not one but two grand staircases. Rising through two stories, these are of unparalleled magnificence, with their arcades and balustrades made of a rich variety of coloured marbles, alabaster and black stone. No wonder that when film companies need to recreate the splendour of the Vatican or Versailles they hire Glasgow City Chambers.



This walk could well end here in Glasgow’s civic centre, George Square. But fully to appreciate the ambition and prestige of the Glasgow merchant princes who made the architecture of Victorian Glasgow so splendid it is necessary to see where they finally ended up – in Glasgow’s Necropolis, one of the very finest and most impressive 19th-century cemeteries in Britain.

So we leave George Square by the south-east corner, along Cochrane Street, past the City Chambers on the left. Turn right into John Street. On the right are early

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Victorian warehouses made into the Italian Centre by Glasgow architects Page & Park in 1987–89.

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**21** Then left along Ingram Street, past, on the right, the Corinthian portico at the end of the long Greek Revival building which was the **County Buildings & Courthouses**, begun in 1841.

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**22** Then, on the left, a rare Gothic accent in the shape of the **Ramshorn Kirk** of 1824–26 designed by Thomas Rickman, the Quaker antiquary who coined the terms we still use for classifying Mediaeval architecture: "Norman", "Early English", "Decorated" and "Perpendicular".

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**23** On to the ancient but now rather desolate High Street, where the Old College of Glasgow University once stood. Then north up the High Street, between blocks of red sandstone tenements built by the City Improvement Trust in 1899–1902 and designed by Burnet, Boston & Carruthers, then past, on the left, the former **Barony Church**, now the **Hall Of Strathclyde University**, an austere, noble Gothic Revival work by J.J. Burnet & J.A. Campbell of 1886–89, to reach Cathedral Square in front of Glasgow Cathedral.

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**24** It is too often forgotten, or ignored, that one of the city's principal architectural glories is its ancient **Cathedral** which is not only Mediaeval but an austerely magnificent Gothic building.

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**25** But that must wait, as our immediate objective is the **Necropolis** on the hill behind, reached by a path to the right of the Cathedral which crosses the now buried Molendinar Burn. Glasgow's City of the Dead was opened in 1831, the third "hygienic" or "planned garden cemetery" in Britain, inspired by the Père Lachaise cemetery in Paris. Between the winding paths can be found magnificent mausolea and monuments, many designed by Glasgow's best architects and carved by the best sculptors. Architecturally impressive, they say much about the character, prestige and ambition of the merchants and industrialists, not to



mention the clergymen, who created Victorian Glasgow but they are far too many to list here. At the very top is a curiously squat and ill-proportioned Greek Doric column carrying a statue of the Presbyterian reformer John Knox. And from here can be enjoyed a magnificent view, looking over the ancient black Cathedral and what was once the Second City of the Empire stretching out towards the distant river Clyde beyond.

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Glasgow City Chambers and Great Western Terrace  
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# Glossary

**Bay:** repetitive façade unit; projecting unit of façade

**Canted:** the edge of a corner of wood, stone etc. that is bevelled or angled off, usually at 45 degrees

**Cantilever:** a horizontal projection such as a balcony or beam, supported at one end only

**Console:** projecting ornament or bracket

**Corbel:** block of stone projecting from a wall, providing support for a feature

**Cornice:** horizontal moulded or otherwise decorated projection which crowns the part to which it is affixed e.g. door, wall, window

**Dormer window:** window projecting from roof

**Gable:** vertical triangular portion of the end of a building with a pitched roof, from the level of the cornice or eaves to the ridge of the roof

**Ionic:** a Greek order of architecture distinguished by a plan concave moulding of the shaft and a capital with spiral volutes

**Moulding:** a plain or curved narrow surface, either sunk or projecting, used for decoration to frame features such as windows or doors

**Mullion:** vertical member dividing a window

**Order:** classical arrangement of column and structurally related elements

**Oriel:** bay window that projects without direct support from below

**Pediment:** a triangular feature over a door or window

**Pier:** vertical solid support, generally rectangular in shape

For further information see James Stevens Curl, 'A Dictionary of Architecture and Landscape Architecture', Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006