

Art Deco

This year marks the 100th anniversary of the *Exposition Internationale des Arts Décoratifs et Industriels Modernes* in Paris in 1925, considered the origin of the Art Deco movement.

A perfect time to celebrate Kelvin Court and all the Art Deco buildings in Scotland

The Paris exhibition of 1925 showcased a blend of modernist styles with traditional craftsmanship, creating a visual language that celebrated luxury, glamour, and technological progress. It's fascinating to reflect on how Art Deco has influenced architecture, fashion, and interior design over the decades, that continues to inspire contemporary artists and designers today. It's distinctive geometric forms and rich materials perfectly capture the spirit of the Roaring Twenties and the elegance of the following decade, making it a lasting symbol of sophistication and style that epitomised the 1920s and 1930s.

Art Deco's impact quickly spread further afield than its roots in Paris and New York, finding a unique expression in Scotland. Here, an impressive array of Art Deco buildings, objects, and images flourished as architects and designers began to incorporate the movement's distinctive features into their creations. This style manifested in a variety of contexts—from luxurious ocean liners like the *RMS Queen Mary* built in Clydebank in Scotland and fashionable new villas such as *Whitegables* in Newton Mearns to the *Empire Exhibition in Glasgow in 1938*. Other Scottish examples that embraced the Art Deco aesthetic included Rogano's restaurant and seafood bar in Glasgow, the *Lyceum* cinema in Govan, the *Portobello Bathing Pool* as a Scottish lido, and the iconic Glasgow 'Coronation' tram.



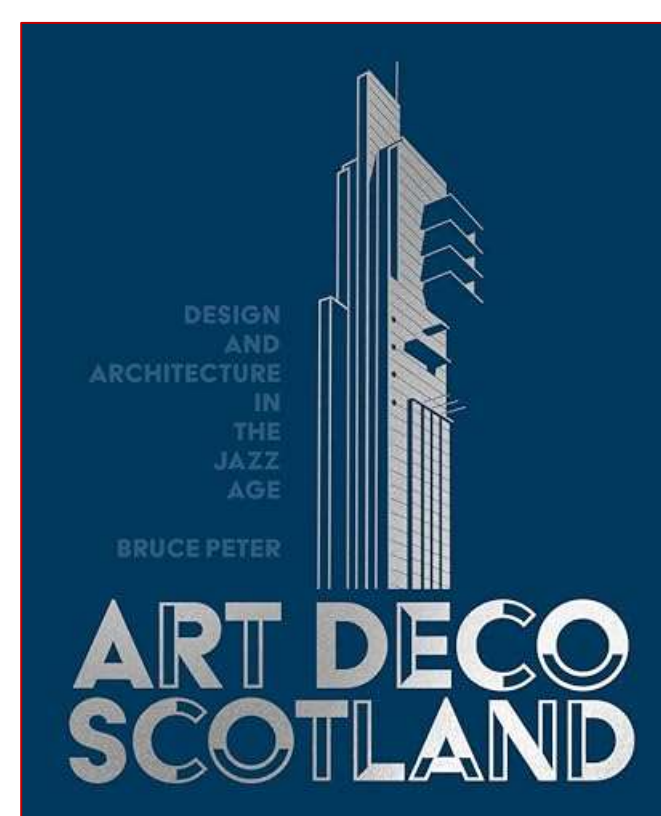
The Berestford, Glasgow



Art Deco at Rogano, Glasgow



Save me!! As we reflect on the vibrant Art Deco movement that emerged in the early 20th century, we must emphasize the importance of preserving this heritage, especially in Scotland. Iconic buildings that showcase this distinctive aesthetic, like the 1933 James Miller-designed Leyland Motor Company building in Tradeston now stand as reminders of urban neglect and are listed on the Buildings at Risk register.



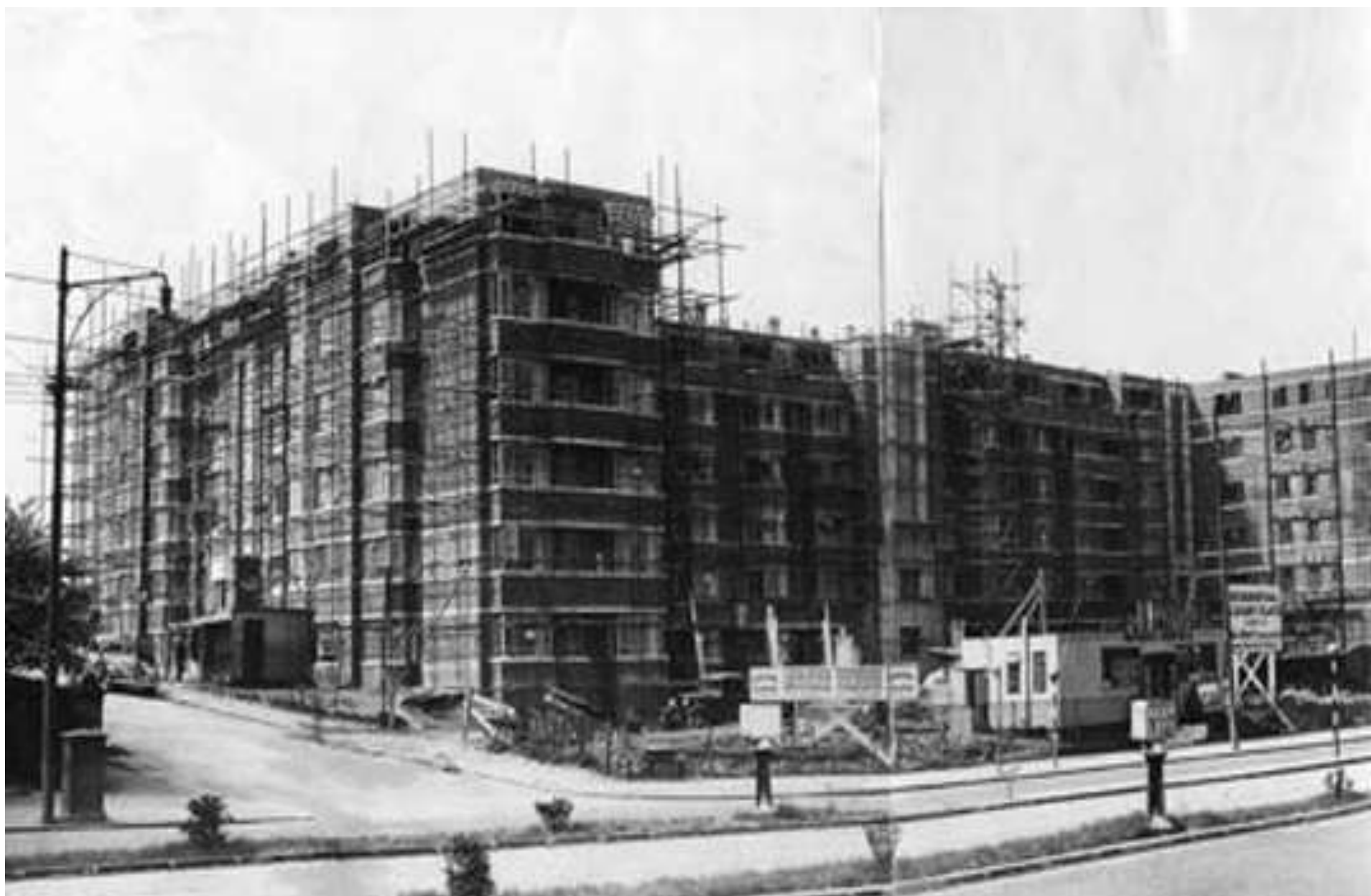
Want to know more about Art Deco in Scotland – and how Scottish architects and designers influenced the world? The wonderful **Art Deco Scotland – design and architecture in the jazz age** by **Bruce Peter** has just been published by Historic Environment Scotland.

History of Kelvin Court

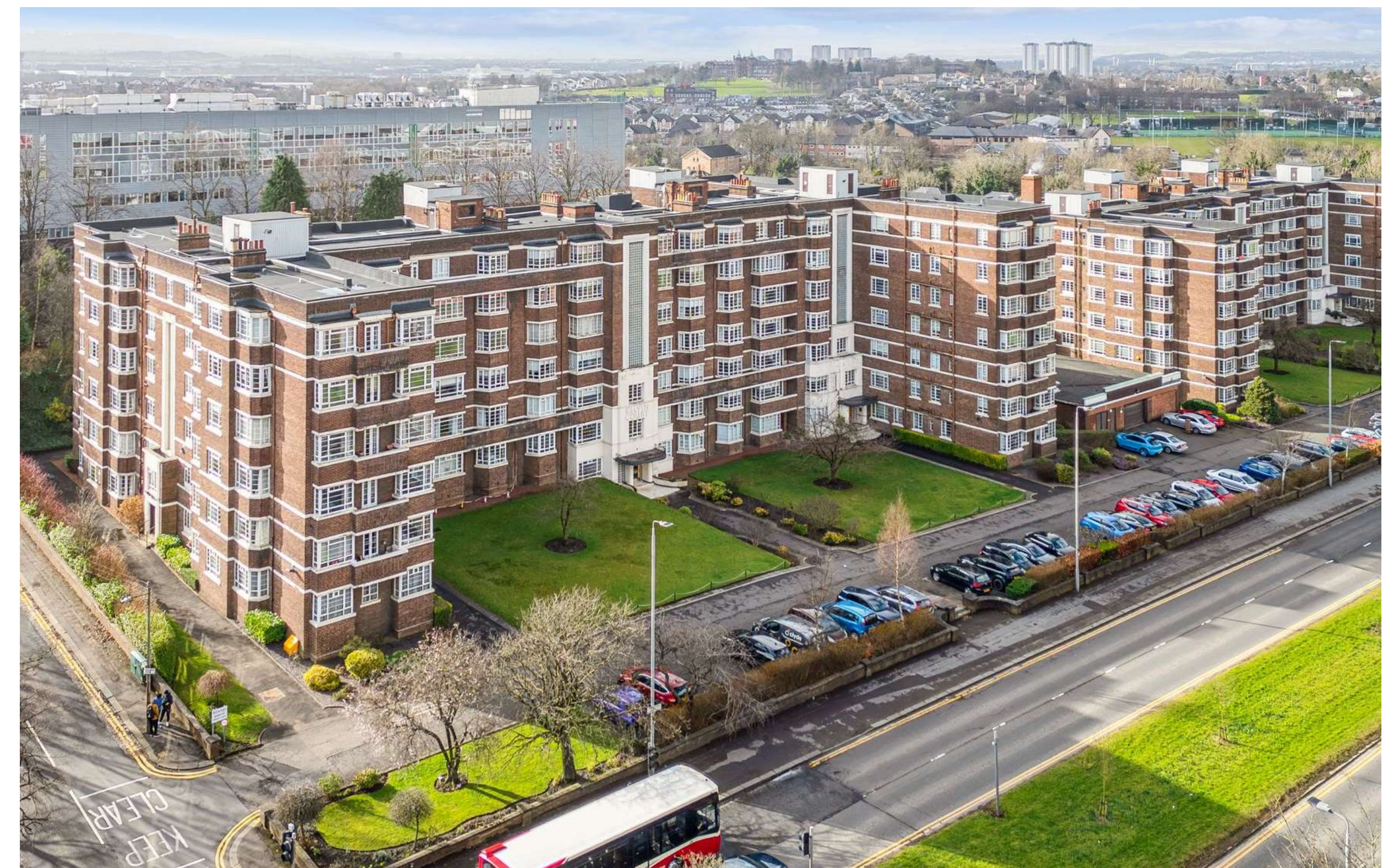
The design and construction

Built in the 1930s by Alec Woolf and designed by J.N. Fatkin, Kelvin Court is a stunning example of Art Deco architecture. The two striking residential blocks are designed in a distinctive H-plan layout, featuring two symmetrical wings that embody the elegance of the period.

Although early illustrations of Kelvin Court hinted at a monotonous design for the two blocks, which rise to five and six storeys, the completed structure features ribbons of exposed concrete and elegant brown brick with minimalist steel windows. This design has received praise, with the Buildings of Scotland guide noting its resemblance to respected buildings along London's arterial roads. Notably, the facing brick aligns more closely with English art deco style, drawing parallels to du Cane Court in Balham, South London. The pronounced horizontal lines are accentuated by the combination of brick and concrete.



The use of poured concrete facilitated undulating floor plates, allowing for numerous bay windows and cantilevered balconies that enhanced light distribution in every room, including halls. Crittall, a leading manufacturer of steel windows, supplied the framed units, which were glazed on-site. Concrete cast window lintels and cills, as well as balcony parapet tops, were initially intended to be faced in stone, but the quality of the shuttered material was likely sufficient to be left unfinished. By the time Kelvin Court was constructed, artificial stone was widely available, and was used for the main entrances and rear doors, pre-cast in ashlar-sized blocks to frame tall glass panels.



Kelvin Court under construction 1938, and now



History of Kelvin Court

Land ownership

Kelvin Court was built on land belonging to the estate of **Major James Brown Montgomerie Fleming, 1884 – 1917**.

James was the only male heir to the joining of two wealthy landowning Glaswegian families, the Montgomeries and the Flemings.

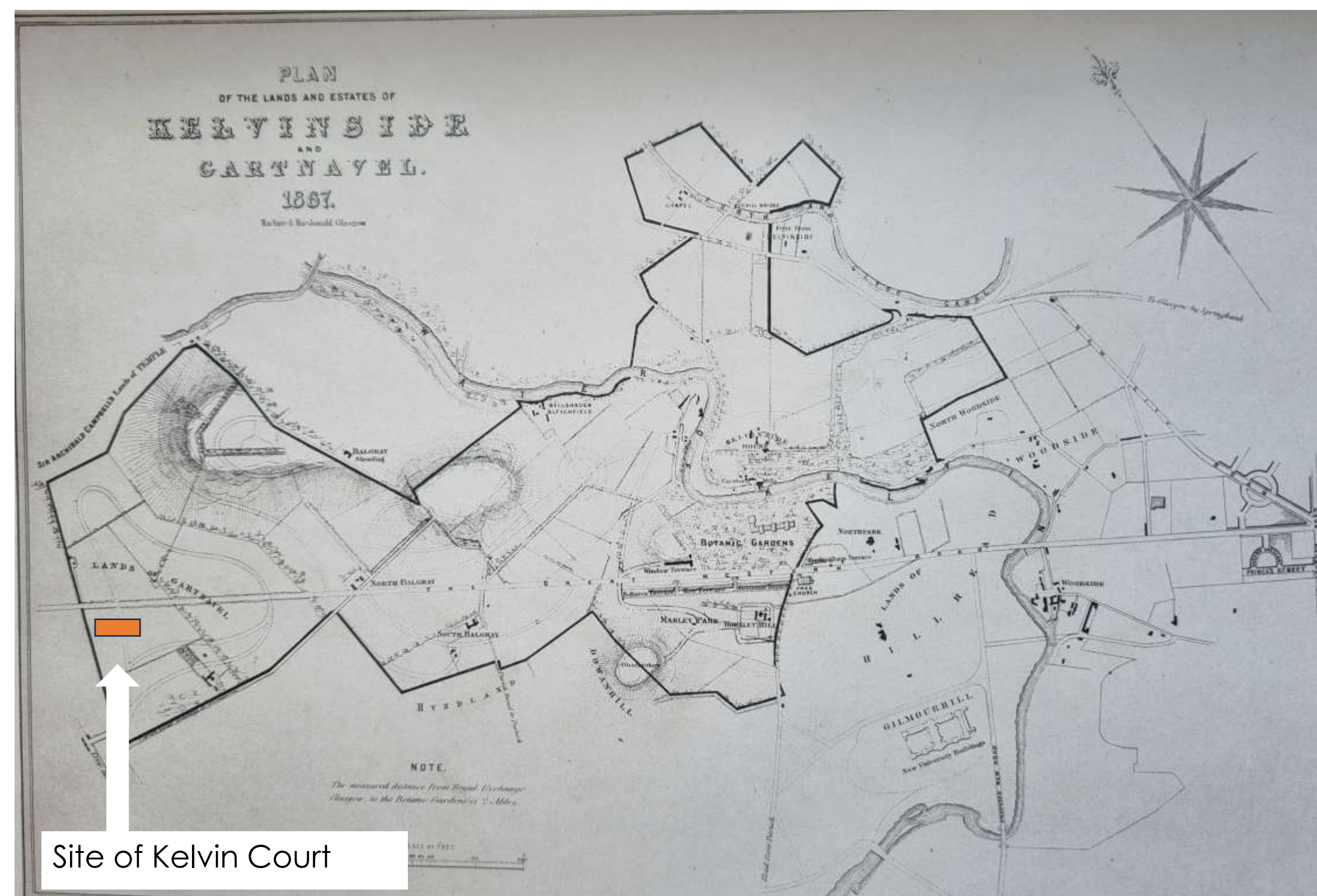
His great grandfathers, Mathew Montgomerie (1783 – 1868) and John Park Fleming (1790 - 1869) set up in business together in 1817, and together presciently bought the lands at Kelvinside in 1839. 462 acres in all, for £53,354 – an astonishing sum. Gartnavel was added in 1845, an additional 104 acres, for £10,948. The land was gradually sold off in parcels over the next 100 years to form the railway, Great Western Road, the Botanic Gardens and many grand streets and houses that exist today in the vicinity of Great Western Road. And eventually, Kelvin Court itself.



James Brown Fleming,
James Brown
Montgomerie Fleming's
maternal grandfather in
1894

James Brown Montgomerie Fleming was born on the 8th March 1884, surprisingly in Musselburgh, and grew up in Kelvinside House, Glasgow (where the British Prime Minister, Sir Henry Campbell Bannerman, was born). He attended Kelvinside Academy and then Glasgow University from 1909 -1910 to study Scots Law. (Prior to 1909, it seems he was playing professional football, but some confusion exists as to exactly where and when).

James enlisted shortly after the outbreak of WW1, joining a Sportsman's Battalion (largely made up of men who had made their name in sports such as cricket, golf, boxing and football or the media. It was intended for upper and middle class men, physically fit, able to shoot and ride, up to the age of 45). He took part in the horrifying Battle of Gallipoli from July to December 1915, and after recovering from appendicitis, he fought at the Somme in 1916 where he was promoted to Major. He then went on to fight at the Third Battle of Ypres in August 1917, dying of his wounds on 18 August 1917. James was listed as a keen sportsman and a student of nature.



Site of Kelvin Court

Boundary of the Kelvinside Estate. It extended "along Great Western Road from the Gate to the Botanics to where the Great Western Railway Station is, up Garscube Road from the Old Tollhouse at Springbank and from Springbank to the Barracks" and which later included land at Gartnavel.

Map of 1867

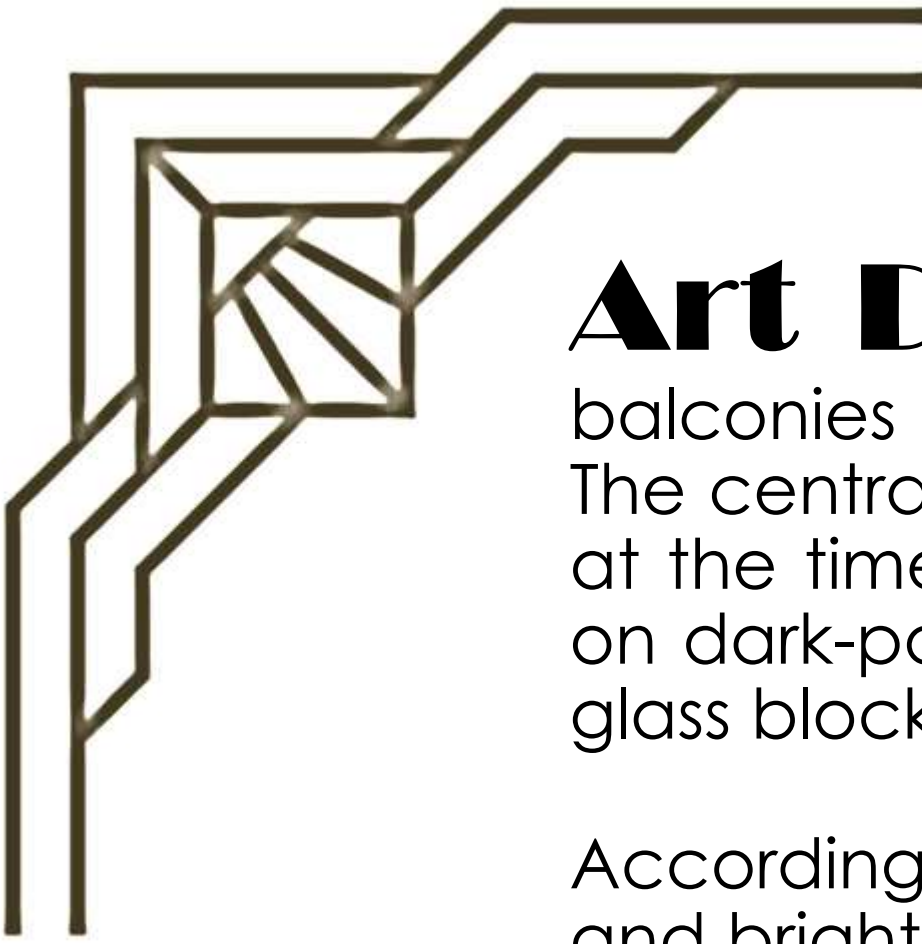


Master James Brown Montgomerie Fleming

Image Courtesy National Library of Scotland

Cutting First Sod of Glasgow Central Railway at Kirklee, Kelvinside, by **Master James Brown Montgomerie Fleming**, of Kelvinside, 10th June 1894





Art Deco Features The main entrances (and the streamlined curved balconies on the rear elevations) best advertised the development's thirties credentials. The central entrances are textbook examples of the aesthetic. All the materials in vogue at the time were present – cream-coloured terrazzo on the steps, chrome ironmongery on dark-painted doors, a sea-scroll balustrade in steel on top of a thin curving canopy, glass blocks, steel windows and the words “KELVIN COURT” in neon lettering.

According to the prospectus, the entrance vestibules were also to be tiled in terrazzo and brightly lit, although no real indication of the colour palette was given. The frameless mirrors were typical of the period, as were the cascade lights in the central stairwells. In the apartments, the latest in electric fires in tiled surrounds, heated towel rails and linen cupboards, and labour and space-saving kitchen equipment were made available (including an electric refrigerator as well as gas).





Art Deco Interiors There was concealed lighting in living rooms hidden behind ziggurat-stepped pelmets, vitrolite-tiled bathroom walls in a range of spectacular colours, built-in wardrobes in walnut and mahogany, and a telephone and wireless. The “latest type of press button cistern-less wc was promised and Fatkin’s services were made available for the design of bespoke cabinetry and fireplaces. The floors would have been timber boards on a soundproof rubber cushion. Most interestingly, a number of internal walls were curved in the more luxurious of the apartments, echoing the south-facing balconies that were added to the design after construction began.

Kelvin Court was completed on the eve of WW2, and despite Woolf’s determination to erect a second development, it was not duplicated, instead remaining unmatched in Glasgow (even Scotland) for scale of development, standards of accommodation, convenience of location, and boldness of ambition.

From the Kelvin Court Conservation Narrative by
Conservation Architect Fiona Sinclair (April 2019)

