Ahoy! Return of a Govan landmark

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The famous ship sculpture has been restored to its former glory and yesterday celebrations marked its return to port. It had taken pride of place atop the Peace Institute for more than 100 years but was removed while the building's roof was repaired.

The Evening Times had exclusive access when the ship, which weighs 220lbs, was taken down last October – the first time it had been removed.

It's made of sheet copper and bronze alloy and is normally perched high on the south-west gable of the building. Restoration included repairing damage to the rigging and decorative flags which are designed to move in the wind. Around 200 people were invited to view the now gleaming ship before it was replaced on the roof.

Norie Mackie, chief executive of the Pearce Institute, said: "It is a very special moment for us to have the ship returned. It is a symbol of Govan's maritime heritage but also a symbol of change. Coming face to face with it was very exciting – it looks wonderful.

"It signifies the new lease of life for the Pearce Institute. The day I started here there was bailiffs at the door demanding £48,000 and it was £83,000 in debt – facing closure. Now, with the first phase of restoration work complete, we have secured the building for another 100 years."

The Pearce Institute, an A-listed building, was gifted to the people of Govan in 1906 by Lady Pearce in memory of her husband, Sir William Pearce, the chairman of the Fairfield Shipbuilding Company and Govan's first MP.

Restoration work involved removing rot and asbestos from the roof, renewing lead work and slates, new roof felt and re-slating. Conservation work to the cupola was carried out and a weather vain on the roof now gleams in gold against the skyline. Solar panels were also installed.

The roof repair came in under budget, meaning funds were available to transform the venue's MacLeod Hall.

Norie added: "We jumped at the chance to have the Hall restored and now it has become a venue fit for weddings and functions. It means we are not only on the way to be being financially secure, but financially independent."

Other areas which have been revamped include the former Lithgow Theatre and a billiard room – which has seen light for the first time since the Second World War. Skylights were painted black in the 1940s – and have only just replaced with clear glass.

The work is part of a wider programme to invest in Govan.

Glasgow contractor, CBC, who carried out the work, provided work experience opportunities for local youngsters throughout the contract, bringing wider benefit to the community.

It was funded by a partnership including Historic Scotland, Glasgow City Council, The Heritage Lottery Fund, Central

Govan Action Plan, and Govan Cross Townscape Heritage Initiative.