

Education in Haddington across the centuries

by William Ferguson, Rector Knox Academy, 1963-1977

This is a necessarily brief account of a talk given to Haddington's History Society in October 1996. It concerns the language used in teaching, from Latin to English; the increasing variety of subjects taught and recreation provided; the widening range of pupils in age and background, and the gradual cessation of direct payment for education.

Latin was the language of the Roman Empire and, from 330AD, of the Christian Church throughout the Empire. At first it was spread by the Church. In 363AD Colomba had at Iona a 'farleyn' or principal, the 'rector' or teacher of Latin, and the 'scoloc' or assistant.

Haddington was at the heart of the 'Granary of Scotland'. It was one of the five Royal Burghs first created by David I, who reigned from 1124-1155. It could hold fairs and levy dues on merchants and tradesmen and was therefore rich. There was a parish church established on the site of the present St Mary's Collegiate Church. The Carmelite Friary or Lamp of Lothian stood at the site of the present Holy Trinity. Latin would be used at services and these bodies would give education in Latin to entrants aiming at Holy Orders. John Major of Gleghornie near North Berwick and John Knox from Giffordgate were two such.

In 1374 comes the first solid evidence of a separate school, a reference to a 'rector scholarum' but this probably records a long-existing position. The hours then would be 6 am to 6pm, Latin only being used until night. This would be the 'auld schule' near the Doocot. Let us call it Grammar School 1 since Latin Grammar was the essential key to all learning at that time. In the Exchequer Rolls of 1378 there is a payment of £3 15s to the master and in 1385 a grant of £4 per mensa to 'poure scholars' in the Chamberlain's accounts. This was a 'boys only' school. In 1496 there was an act to compel Barons' eldest sons to learn Latin and the law. They would board. Meanwhile English and Scots had a strong existence; John Barbour's poem in Scots, 'The Brus', was circulating in manuscript by 1375. Printing came in 1450.

By 1559 the Reformation removed the College of Priests in St Mary's. Education was now the responsibility of the Burgh Council. The first Protestant Rector was G.S. Dormant who was paid 24 merks per annum with 12d per term for 'ilka bairn' and 4d from the parents. His successor in 1564, Thomas Cumming, promised to teach grammar, Latin and moral virtue.

In 1579 the 'auld schule', which often flooded, moved to a site at 5, 7 and 8 the Sands. We'll call this Grammar School 2. A school for girls to learn sewing and reading is established in 1586. In 1676 and 'Act for Settling the Schools' required Presbyteries to set up parish schools. A general desire for extended education led to 'Adventure Schools', that is by private venture. Jenny Hallyburton had a very superior Girls' School at Bothwell Castle.

In 1759 the Grammar school moved to the red sandstone building still standing in Church Street, i.e. Grammar School 3. The advertisement for a Rector said 'no preachers', since they were always looking for a church with its manse, glebe and sundry extra payments. An English School was added and, in 1809, a Mathematical School, where Edward Irving tutored Jane Welsh, who demanded to be taught Latin 'like the boys'. In 1834 779, a third of the population, could read and 287 could write. There were Sunday Schools for children who worked during the week. A ragged school was opened in 1826. By 1851 a school funded by philanthropic gentlemen was operating in one room at Abbey Village, providing English, Writing and Arithmetic.⁽¹⁾



The Grammar School 1759

From 1843 to 1874 the last Rector of Haddington Grammar School was the Rev William Whyte, who flogged and beat the boys with his stick: one died. The roll dropped from nearly 200 to 3. The Council had to resort to the Court of Session before they could get rid of him. As a result the private schools profited, in particular Paterson Place Academy in the house now known as Park View – the coat hooks are still there in the upper story. The Landward Heritors had established a school in Lodge Street in 1826 for the benefit of the children of landward parishioners. This too enjoyed a long period of popularity during the sad situation at the Grammar School.

The 1872 Act began the provision of Primary Education by the state. A Roman Catholic primary was set up. In 1879 the Knox Institute was built in Knox Place by public subscription. In 1939 the Secondary Department of the Institute moved to the present Knox Academy with its playing fields. A tower block and science block were added. An extended Library and Computer Area have recently been built. Education is free, the leaving age is 16, the roll around 800. Eighteen subjects are taught at Standard Grade and Higher. The tawse has been abolished (shades of the Rev Whyte). The strengths of the Maths and Science Departments were demonstrated some years ago when Campbell Scott won the Gold Medal as 'First' in the St Andrews Bursary Competition. He is now on the staff at Harvard. Music flourishes with choirs, continental visits and instrumentalists. There is an active cadet force and the school still has a lively Classic Department, continuing the centuries old tradition.

Acknowledgements

Apart from numerous printed sources, I am indebted also to Mrs J.D. Ferguson, A.B. Ellis, I.R. Macaskill and N.R. Whitty.

Notes

- (1) Davie Rose's grandfather taught at Abbey Mill. Davie Rose was the proprietor of the eponymous garage that preceded the Ideal Garage. [Arthur Reid]