

HERIOT SCHOOL



Heriot P. School, (P standing for Parish, Public, Parochial and currently Primary as common usage dictated through the decades) was one of many village schools before the 1870s offering unorthodox curricula, as local worthies brought in various academics to give the parish children a recognisable education. Favoured schools basked in the gracious patronage of local benefactors. Two generous bequests were made to Heriot scholars. In 1868 the Heritors met following the death of Miss Anne Johnston who had left £100 for prizes to be awarded to the best scholars of the Parish school. For such an enormous sum it was decided to set up a trust fund and some healthy stocks in the British Linen Bank were bought. The schoolmaster never logged this prize but a photo in 1895 of two prize winners proves it to be extent for some long time.

The Wright prize, noted annually just prior to the summer break, the result of a bequest in 1894 by a clergyman Dr. Rev. Robert Wright and was to be presented to the top boy and girl scholar in Religious Knowledge. It was not to be given to the same child twice — a rather nice touch.

We might expect that after 1872 when the state assumed responsibility for education these gracious practices would cease, but time and again are reported instances of care and interest by those who might thankfully have heaved the burden from their shoulders. An annual summer picnic at Borthwick Hall continued to be given by the then 'Lairds', Mr. and Mrs David McFie. Mrs McFie also came to the school to administer a children's savings bank and paid regular visits, along with other dignitaries, to check and sign the register. It

is as if the two systems marched together along the road of progress, the Heritors merely changing their title to School Board and working on under this new guise.

Costs had to be met and salaries paid so in 1873 an annual application for a grant was made by the Rev. John Francis Brown acting for the school board. To qualify, the school now had to be inspected annually and in order to make a good impression and receive the maximum, the master notes extra drills in his log several days before the Inspector's visit,

e.g. 13th April 1877 — Average attendance between 50 and 60. Special drill in arithmetic, history, geography, grammar and dictation.

This extract recalls a once familiar sound, the rhythmic chanting of dozens of young voices 'saying' their lessons. These daily rituals were strictly and evenly spaced with periods of dead quiet. To bring about a pin-dropping silence in a class of sixty pupils was considered to be the acme of professional ability. An Inspector's report of the period reads:-

'11th May 1877

James Blaikie H.M. Inspector.

Heriot Public School.
Edinburgh.

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"The discipline is very good and the instruction is sound and well advanced. The results of the examination in Arithmetic shows a marked improvement on that of last year. The History book used by the Fifth Standard does not cover the prescribed ground, and a fuller one should be substituted. The industrial work of the girls is very good."

The School Board would have been well satisfied that year and probably would spend some of the forthcoming grant to provide those new history texts.

Heriot P. School then, like the average Victorian rural school is a potent and powerful piece of utilitarian architecture, a present memorial to its scholars and masters.