

The Grammar School of Ayr 1746-1796

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THE SITE

There is no first-hand account of the appearance or position of the Grammar School of Ayr at any stage of its history. Fortunately we have the Armstrongs' map to establish its position and something of its form in 1755. Situated "on the School Green",¹ which is as near as the Town Council Minutes can take us, the "School-house" appears on this invaluable map at the seaward end of the School Vennel and separated from the gable-end of the last building on the north side by about a Vennel's width. A comparison with John Wood's map of 1818 shows that the original Academy (1800 so far as the building is concerned) was built further back on the green by about the width of the present road. Part of the north side of the Vennel had been taken down, leaving the south side projecting a little to the west. From the Academy Minute Book we learn that about 1804 the Grammar School gate had to be moved southwards to be opposite the middle of the old Academy² and, as Wood's map shows, that was exactly opposite the School Vennel, where the boys' gate of Ayr Academy is now.

It follows that the Grammar School gate was a little further down the hill but still approximately in line with the present school railings and the Grammar School itself occupied a site within the modern school playground, the Janitor's house being built on the most northerly part of its foundations.

In form, the Grammar School of 1747 and onwards consisted of two buildings running parallel to the river and a third joining them at right angles at the seaward end. By a broken line, Armstrong indicates railings or a wall with a gate on the side facing the town. This obviously enclosed a small courtyard. A building of this shape can be seen in the same position on the First Military Survey of Scotland, c.1754.

There is no 18th century picture of the Grammar School, but the oldest part of it can be seen on the well-known "Prospect of the Town of Ayr from the East", 1693, where a one-storey

¹ See page 64.

² *Ayr Academy and Burgh School*, p.77 and the two frontispieces.

building with two chimneys is in the position occupied by the south block of Armstrong's "Schoolhouse". The space between this venerable Grammar School and the end house of the School Vennel (north side) is closed by a wall, which is not shown on either of the maps to which reference has been made, nor on another to be mentioned presently.

Can we go back from 1693? Only by demolishing the thatched school in the Sandgate which has the support of Pryde, Pagan and Patrick. In his reconstruction Pryde puts the old Grammar School at the corner of Sandgate and the School Vennel, south side; and says, "The traditional site of the Grammar School is on the Sandgate, near the head of School Vennel (now Academy Street)."³ This agrees with Pagan, whom he cites: "The old Grammar School stood originally in the Sandgate."⁴

But Pagan proceeds: "A Minute of Council, of date 1690, speaks of the great loss which the Sandgate and its vicinity had sustained 'through want of the Church and School which were formerly there.'⁵ This may be his only authority (it is the only one he quotes in the single paragraph he devotes to the subject) for the suggestion that the Grammar School was ever in the Sandgate. It certainly does not prove that the Church was in the Sandgate, because we know that it was not. Nor should it be taken to mean that the Grammar School was there. On the contrary, only three years after 1690, the Grammar School building was at the top of the Academy brae. Moreover, the expression, "Church and School", may not refer to the Grammar School (the Latin School) at all, but to the Song School, which was much more likely to move with the Church, and which would also be a loss, since for the most part the girls were educated there.

Nor does the name "School Vennel" suggest that the School was in the Sandgate. Most vennels were named after the places they led towards: the Boat Vennel, the Water Vennel, Carrick Vennel, the Mill Vennel. The School Vennel was in all likelihood the Vennel leading from the Sandgate to the School.

As for the thatch mentioned by Patrick⁶, there seems to be no authority for it more recent than 1598, when, Pagan says, the Grammar School had been allowed to "decay unthekit"⁷ and in all probability the Grammar School of 1598 was still a Kirk building. By the Union of the Crowns, Pryde's marvellously evocative

³ Pryde, *Ayr Burgh Accounts*, 1534-1624, p.CXXV.

⁴ Pagan, *Annals of Ayr in the Olden Times*, 1560-1692, p.52.

⁵ Pagan, p.52.

⁶ *Ayr Academy and Burgh School*, p.29.

⁷ Pagan, p.52.

extracts from the Burgh Accounts show, that most of the town's public buildings were slated. The Kirk itself was, but the frequent references to "fog" in the Accounts suggest that the outbuildings were thatched with bent grass.

Indeed, it is to Pryde's "Ayr Burgh Accounts, 1534-1624," that we must now turn and here the first mention of a schoolhouse separate from the Kirk is in 1602-1603: "To John Osburne for 2 years' mail of the Schoolhouse, £20 (Scots)."⁸ From this and the extracts which follow, it appears that in the early 17th century both the Grammar School and the Song School were in rented premises, the Grammar School being in a complete house and the Song School in a room or "chalmers".

The Grammar School was fitted with a Schoolmaster's desk and forms (1602-03)⁹ and the Schoolmaster had a room with a timber braiss¹⁰ (mantlepiece) separate from the main schoolroom. This strongly suggests the building referred to in the Town Council Minute of 30 June, 1746, where it is noted that the elderly Schoolmaster, "Mr. James Fergusson, Master of the Grammar School of Ayr, who had served the town . . . for nearly fifty years" (i.e. since about 1696) "had been frequently confined to his room." In a minute of 1772 mention is made of a small room at one time used by the Writing Master to prepare his copies.¹¹

It is tempting to conclude that this is the same building we see on the "Prospect of the Town of Ayr from the East" (1693). I suggest that this is so and that from the time that it ceased to be held in one of the Kirk buildings near the Old Fort, the Grammar School was roughly where its successor, Ayr Academy, stands today.

"A SORT OF ACADEMY."

On 30 June, 1746, it was reported in Council that Mr. James Fergusson, Master of the Grammar School, who had served the Town in that station and as Doctor of the said School for nearly fifty years, was now become valetudinary, tender and much afflicted with the gout and gravel, whereby he was frequently confined to his room and rendered incapable to attend the education of the children under his care. He was willing to resign his office if the Magistrates and Council would continue upon him his yearly salary during the short time he might now live.

⁸ Pryde, p.216.

⁹ Pryde, p.217.

¹⁰ Pryde, p.236.

¹¹ Ayr Town Council Minutes, 11/3/1772.

"Quick being considered", a committee was appointed to converse with the said Mr. James Fergusson and Mr. John Mair, Doctor of the said School and to report.¹²

A "doctor" was an assistant to the Master. Ayr had had one at least as early as 1582 and Mair had come from St. Andrews to be Doctor in Ayr in 1727.¹³ He had to wait nearly twenty years for the position of Master and now apparently he was offered it without additional salary.

On 8 July, 1746, the Committee reported that Mr. Mair thought the proposal of the Magistrates and Council to continue with Mr. James Fergusson the full salary during his life extremely just and reasonable as being nothing more than what was due to one who had served so long in that station.

"But as to the other part of their proposal . . ." he did not feel that he could add the duties of Master of the Grammar School to his own in a way that would raise the character of the school. However, he would serve as Latin Master for a month or two, "till proper funds are settled for the encouragement of masters and the school put on a footing that will promise success."

He was appointed to keep the school till further orders and the keys of the Grammar School were delivered to him.¹⁴

By 2 September, 1746, the Magistrates were able to report that they had found a qualified master to teach Latin as one of the masters of the Grammar School. This was Archibald Wallace, Schoolmaster in Cumnock, with recommendations from three professors of the University of Glasgow. His encouragement was fixed at "200 merks (£11 2s. 3d. sterling) yearly of salary and 3/- sterling quarterly for each boy he teaches with the ordinary perquisites of his own scholars from and after Martinmas next."¹⁵

It will be observed that the term "doctor" is not applied to him and it is never used again. Mr. John Mair had the curious distinction of being the last doctor and the first rector in the Grammar School of Ayr, the latter title being conferred on him on 18 November, 1746.

On that date he gave in a "representation" embodying the results of several conferences he had had with the Magistrates.

¹² Ayr Town Council Minutes, 30/6/1746.

¹³ Grant, *History of the Burgh and Parish Schools of Scotland*, p.220.

¹⁴ A.T.C.M., 8/7/1746.

¹⁵ A.T.C.M., 2/9/1746.

"It is proposed that . . . there be three masters who are to be employed in the following manner. Vizt., One of them is wholly to be taken up in teaching to read English, and that according to the newest and most approved method. The business of another is to teach Latin and Greek and the province of the third is to teach Arithmetic, Bookkeeping (*sic*), Geography, Navigation, Surveying, Euclid's Elements, Algebra, with other Mathematical Sciences and some parts of Natural Philosophy.

"And in regard it may possibly be thought too great a task for the second master to have the charge of all the Latin scholars, he is to be eased in this by the third master (*i.e. third in the order in which he named them ; himself*) taking charge of one of the classes, particularly the superior or first class, which will give him an opportunity of acquainting himself with the genius, capacity and proficiency of the boys and so enable him to judge how far they are fit for being entered on mathematical studies the ensuing year.

"The School being settled on this footing will be attended with several advantages which otherways it could not possibly have. It will now be converted into a sort of Academy where almost every sort of the more useful kinds of Literature will be taught and the want of College Education will in great measure be supplied to boys whose parents cannot well afford to maintain them at Universities. Gentlemen also in the County will be encouraged to send their children to Ayr, considering that the school will by this means have no rival, there being no such ffund (?) for education anywhere in the neighbourhood.

"And whereas the Magistrates have been pleased to propose the representer as the third master, requiring him to take charge so far of the Latin School as frequently to visit the same, examine the boys and see that a regular method of instruction be pursued, allowing him the benefit of one of the Latin classes or, which will amount to much the same thing, one-fourth part of the benefit of the whole, he hereby declares his willingness to accept, Provided as was proposed he be allowed four hundred merks (£22 4s. 6d.) of salary and he imagines the Magistrates will easily perceive that by this means he parts with or drops in favour of the Latin Master as much and, in case the school shall happen to be numerous, a great deal more than the additional salary he demands, but he inclines to go all the length possible for encouraging and promoting a scheme which appears to him well formed for raising and supporting the reputation of the school."

The Magistrates and Council "agreed that the said Mr. John Mair be and is hereby elected and chosen Rector and first Master

of the Grammar School of Ayr and teacher of Arithmetic, Bookkeeping and other Sciences as in the Representation. That he shall have the Inspection of the School and teach the first or head class thereof. That for the current year, from Martinmas last to Martinmas next, his salary payable by the Town shall be 300 merks and payable quarterly and yearly thereafter during his continuance in his office 400 merks Scots money with the whole schoolwages and other perquisites of his own scholars."¹⁶

Mr. Archibald Wallace, formerly elected Master of Latin of the said School was now to enter to his office and have right to his salary, schoolwages and perquisites with the care of all the Latin scholars except the first or head class. Intimation was to be made "by beat of drum that the said Schoolmasters are to enter to the exercise of their office tomorrow, the Nineteenth Instant at two of the clock afternoon and that the Schoolwages are to be paid quarterly on each Thursday of the four fairs of Ayr for the current quarter."¹⁷

Mr. Wallace made no demur at the somewhat rigorous terms thus imposed upon him. On 20 January, 1747, however, it was resolved to offer the position of English Master to "one James Baillie, present schoolmaster in Irvine," on the same terms as those offered to Archibald Wallace¹⁸, and James Baillie had views of his own.

On 27th January, 1747, "the provest produced in Council a missive by Mr. James Baillie, Schoolmaster in Irvine." Rather surprisingly the Provost's letter had reached him the day after it was posted. He began by acknowledging the honour which had been done him and promising his best endeavours. "The nearer the center of the town the schoolhouse is the more agreeable and convenient it will be to those concerned, providing also there be a convenient place for children to go upon occasion. If the town of Ayr are to build a schoolhouse, a little more expences would make it ane house for the master which would contribute a great deal to the interest of the school. Thereby the master would have it in his power to prevent the abuse which usuall happens in and at schools situate at distance from the Master's dwelling. He could not meet with any avocations in his way to the school nor would his scholars have to wait at the door till he came and in that season of the year which renders a fire requisite it would be easy for the master to have it kindled when the School convenes. His scholars reaped ane other advantage in the Town of Irvine from his dwelling

16 A.T.C.M., 18/11/1746. Exactly a month later Mr. William Dalrymple was ordained second minister in Ayr. A.T.C.M., 18/12/46.

17 A.T.C.M., 18/11/1746.

18 A.T.C.M., 20/1/1747.

under the same roof and which was more than all the rest and that was when he had a number of beginners who could not be classed and were only employed in diverting their schoolfellows whilst they could do nothing themselves, his wife affording her assistance which she could not have done had the school been otherwise situate. This scheme if executed instead of being a loss or burden to the Town revenue would be an advantage as the rent the Master would pay them would in a few years exceed their extraordinary expences in building it. But as he had intruded too far he begged leave to subscribe himself his Lops (Lordships') most Hum ble and most Obedient Servant."

The Magistrates and Council, however, resolved and agreed that "ane English School be built with all convenience to the Latin Schoolhouse and recommended to and appointed the former committee named on the twenty-first instant to commune and agree with tradesmen for building the same and to prepare the materials therfor, the expence of which was to be payed by the Thesr and the same to be allowed to him in his Eque to be fitted at Michaelmas next and which Expence the Council were of opinion should be payed out of the Vacant Stipend being for a pious use." In case the same could not be got conveniently done against Whitsunday next they recommended to the said Committee to look out where they could have a schoolhouse for accommodating the children and to report¹⁹.

Opposition came from Patrick Ballantine, Dean of Gild, who on 3 February, 1747, "gave in a dissent against building the English School as agreed by the Council last council day and protested against the same. The tener of which dissent follows. Patrick Ballantine protested against building ane English School on the School Green because the English School ought to be in the center of the Town or therabout and be more proper for the convenience of the children that goes to said school, who are always young and tender in years and would subject severall of the Inhabitants to a great inconveniency who are at a great distance therof. He proposed a very good house for ane English school is (in ?) a very good place of the town not far from the center therof (I mean) the house belonging to the Town behind provest Girvan's house and also the Schoolmaster might live under the same roof by which he would have greater oversight of the children both for their education and their persons. And thereon took instruments in the hands of the Clerk to the Council. Which dissent Baillie Fergusson craved he might be allowed to answer the next Council

19 A.T.C.M. 27/1/1747.

day. Which craving was accordingly granted and he allowed to answer as craved²⁰."

On 17 February, 1747, he lodged his answers to the Dean of Gild's dissent but these were not engrossed by the Clerk.²¹

In September, according to ancient custom, the Treasurer presented his accounts for audit. Among these were one of Fifty-one pound nineteen shilling Scots from David Anderson, Mason in Ayr, for stone furnished by him to the Latine School in June last; another from Patrick Hume, Wright in Ayr, of £166 2/- Scots respecting the new school. Patrick Campbell, Slater and Glazier in Ayr, was paid £35 2/6 Scots for sundries supplied by him to the Grammar School, Kirk Steeple and Dumpovells (?). Four pound seven shilling Scots went to Robert McKean, Hammerman in Ayr, for Spykes (large nails) to the Grammar School. Thomas Anderson, Master of Work, built the school, for £255 18/- Scots, including "sixty-three days attendance therat from June last to michaelmas next." The Treasurer too had disbursed money on the new school, £75 12/- Scots on "stones furnished by him to the School and burning a lime-kiln for the use therof" and £678 10/- Scots in other payments. Finally, Andrew Taylor, Hammerman, had been paid £6 Scots "for a chimney to the school by the Dean of Gild's order."

There may be other items concealed in such general terms as those of James Hunter and William Ballantine, Merchants in Ayr: "£290 16/- Scots for three hundred and a half of deals and oak planks and others furnished to the Town in June and July last and September instant", in which timber for the school seems likely to be included.

It is obvious from these accounts that Mair and Baillie Fergusson carried the day and that the English School was built on to the existing Grammar School, converting it to the shape indicated on Armstrongs' map of 1775. There is, however, another 18th century map, undated but if accurately made, earlier than 1747.

This is the "Plan of the Town and Citadel of Ayr" by T. Walker, Assistant Engineer, original in the Map Room of the British Museum. On it there are three Grammar School Buildings, two of them disposed as in Armstrongs' map. These are the old Grammar School depicted in the "Prospect" (1693) and a similar building to the north and parallel to it. Between these, at the

20 A.T.C.M. 3/2/1747.

21 A.T.C.M. 17/2/1747.

town end, is a small square building, quite separate, occupying in fact the space shown as enclosed on Armstrong's map.

The inference is that the long building to the north was Mair's school in the days when he was Doctor in Ayr, the days when old Mr. Fergusson was Master of the Grammar School. If so, in 1747 the English School was built on between the western ends of these existing schools and this would explain why it was too small and why the English Master had to be allowed to use the Old Master's Room, which we can now place at the western end of the Grammar School. A door must also be conjectured between this small room and the English School, and perhaps one between the English School and the Mathematical School to the north. This would allow Mair to perambulate his little kingdom at all seasons without exposing himself to the rigours of the Scottish climate.

It ties in with another scrap of information, that the small room later used as a second English room had once been a second writing room or writing-master's room, for the writing-master used the Grammar School as his main writing-room at times when it was not in use for Latin²².

It may seem surprising that Mair did not use the small room with its separate fireplace as a Rector's Room. But Mair was very fully occupied in teaching Mathematics. Indeed he shed one non-mathematical duty after another. As Doctor he would have to teach the three R's, whereas even at his "trial" he excelled in Navigation and Bookkeeping and his writing was suspect²³. In 1746 he shed the teaching of Reading by the creation of an English School; and while he did acquire the highest Latin class, it would be a small one. From 1 September, 1747 to 30 May, 1749, he was surveying the Barony of Alloway in preparation for the Roup of 1754²⁴. He resigned as Precentor of the Kirk on 2 April, 1751²⁵ and almost immediately we find the Town Council appointing a fourth master who was to teach writing, vulgar arithmetic and music, thus relieving Mair of all primary teaching. At the same time he was—and this may not have been his own suggestion—relieved of the highest Latin class and in effect of the position of Rector, though his salary remained unchanged, for it was decided that "each of the four masters shall have separate charges."

"Hereafter, Mr. John Mair shall not be allowed to take any new scholars to teach them in the publick school either the Latin

²² A.T.C.M., 11/3/1772.

²³ Grant, p.220.

²⁴ A.T.C.M., 1/9/1747 and 30/5/1749.

²⁵ See Appendix 3.

or Greek languages. Mr. Alexander Paterson shall have the only privilege of teaching these languages."

Mr. Baillie could either teach English only, "with the privilege of being Session Clerk if chosen and a salary of £12 sterling yearly," or if he preferred it, teach writing and vulgar arithmetic only, with the privilege of being session clerk, and his present salary of £100 Scots (£8 6s. 8d. sterling). The fourth master was to teach whichever group Mr. Baillie refused and music in addition, while he was also to be precentor in the Kirk, "without any salary but that now in use to be paid to the precentor, being fifty merks Scots (£2 15s. 7d.) yearly".²⁶ It was a Mr. William Robinson who had to teach writing, vulgar arithmetic and music and to be precentor in the Kirk.

TIME TABLE

There were now four masters and only three schoolhouses, though the oldest one was divided into a large room and a small room. Only time-tabling could solve this problem. Here we are fortunate. The solution arrived at by the Magistrates and Council, we must suppose after consultation with Mr. Mair, is embodied in two minutes of Council, dated 30th April, 1755, and 9 July, 1761.

The "Instructions to the Person who shall be appointed Master of the English School of Ayr" were for the guidance of Mr. David Tennant, aged 21 and about to enter his first teaching post. It was laid down that he attend the Publick School from 9-12 and 2-4 from 1 March to 1 November, and from 9-12 and 1-3 from 1 November to 1 March, six days a week. On Sunday he was to attend the Publick School after the afternoon sermon to teach the principles of the Christian Religion. Before and after each day's teaching and before and after each Sunday afternoon's religious instruction, he was publicly to pray to God. He was to teach nothing else during those hours nor at any other time in the Publick School. Finally he was to teach gratis two children who would be nominated by the Council.²⁷

The school-hours for the Latin School were from 7-9, 10-12 and 2-4, in the Summer half-year from 1 April to 1 October; and from 9-12 and 2-4 for the Winter half-year.

The hours for the Mathematical School were from 9-12 and from 2-4 or 5 during the whole year.

²⁶ A.T.C.M., 2/4/1751.

²⁷ A.T.C.M., 30/4/1755.

No teaching of French was to be allowed in the public schools during those hours but French could be taught by any of the masters in the intervals betwixt public school hours.²⁸

This leaves writing to be accounted for, which it has to be by deduction. From a complaint dated 11 March, 1772, we learn that the Latin and Writing Masters used the same schoolhouse, while a letter from the schoolmasters, dated 13 April, 1791, points out that two hours at a stretch is too long to spend in the practice of writing. From these facts and the time-table for Latin given above, it can be seen that Writing was taught in the Latin School from 12-2.

That was the system. Two letters dated 1 February, 1769 and 11 March, 1772 will show how it was working.

The first is an application by David Tennant, English Master, for an assistant. His school numbered, he said, "upwards of 60, many of them, by reason of their tender age, unable to do anything of themselves and of those who were further advanced he had always a class learning English grammar, which was a branch almost entirely new and both augmented his numbers and required his spending much time with them to make them properly acquainted with the principles and rules of it, yet he thought it highly useful and ought to be carried to greater perfection. If his time were divided among such a number, the Magistrates and Council could easily perceive there could not be heard above a single lesson in a day and if more were attempted it behooved to be proportionally superficial. Did his own income admit of paying for an assistant perhaps the Magistrates and Council might have been saved that trouble; but as this was evidently not the case," he left the matter with them.²⁹

There it remained until the second letter was read in Council. This was a petition subscribed by a number of the inhabitants of Ayr, who were of the opinion "that the English Schoolhouse was by far too little for the number of children commonly taught in it, so that both their own and their master's health was endangered thereby. The Latin and Writing scholars were much incommoded and retarded in their progress by having but one house between them, the former being obliged to leave their lessons unfinished or take so much from the latter. It had been found necessary to allow the English Master the use of that room formerly allotted to teach the girls to write, by which means the Writing Master had no place in which to prepare his scholars' books as formerly and

28 A.T.C.M., 9/7/1761.
29 A.T.C.M., 1/2/1769.

cause them to write pieces or letters to their friends as specimens of their proficiency." The petitioners reminded the Council that the health and education of youth were of the highest importance.³⁰

"*Sufficient Trial.*"

In 1761 Mr. Mair left to become the first Rector of Perth Academy and the Town Council of Ayr appointed Mr. Alexander Paterson as Rector. He took over Mr. Mair's mathematical duties and retained the senior class in Latin and Greek. The five junior Latin classes were taken by a Mr. Arthur Oughterson, who had the title of Master of the Grammar School, and the new appointments were the occasion of the key minute of 9 July, 1761, already quoted, in which the hand of the departing Mair can be clearly seen.³¹

Early in the summer of 1768 Mr. Alexander Paterson died (his widow lent Burns bound volumes of the Spectator, Pope's Homer, Goldsmith, Spenser and Gray, from her husband's library). Once more the Council drifted away from the idea of rectorship. Mr. Oughterson took full responsibility for Latin and Greek without the title of Rector—he was merely Master of the Grammar School—and a new mathematics master was appointed, Mr. George Douglas. Mr. Tennant and Mr. Robinson continued in office.

Two years later Mr. Oughterson had gone and was replaced by a Mr. John Inglis. Two years later Mr. John Inglis had gone and was replaced . . . The divided emoluments had apparently made it difficult to keep a good man in Ayr. Nevertheless the Council persevered.

David Tennant, English Master from 1755-72 and now to be Master of the Grammar School, was practically self-taught. When giving evidence in 1821 in the dispute between Robert Auld and the Town Council relating to the Old Manse of Alloway, he stated that he was born in 1734, in the farm of Brigend now called Doonside, near the end of the old Bridge of Doon, on the Maybole side of the Doon. There he remained until 1748 when his father died and he removed with his mother to the farm of (Laigh) Corton, where he remained till 1755, when he came to Ayr as a teacher and had lived there ever since. He had never attended any of the schools in Ayr but had attended for one year the school of Alloway, which was held in Alloway Kirk, when he was about six years of age.

A handsome, well-built man and younger brother of "guid auld Glen" (John, formerly farmer in Laigh Corton, later factor to

30 A.T.C.M., 11/8/1772.
31 A.T.C.M., 9/7/1761.

the Countess of Glencairn in Ochiltree, later still farmer in Glenconnar) David Tennant married on 20 December, 1762, Catherine, youngest daughter of James Dalrymple, writer in Ayr and Sheriff Clerk of Ayrshire. He was, therefore, brother-in-law to William Dalrymple, Minister in Ayr, and also to Charles Dalrymple, Sheriff Clerk in succession to his father³².

On 19 November, 1770, Mr. Tennant had written to the Magistrates and Council: "As he understood Mr. Oughterson had given in a demission of his charge he would humbly offer himself to their consideration for his succession in the Grammar School. His private studies for some time past had been with a view to qualify him for such an office, which he was prompted to at first from an inclination to be acquainted with the Classics, afterwards from the pleasure he found in rendering some of them, and lately from the high probability that the place in question would soon become vacant..."³³

The Council, however, advertised for persons of good moral character and proper education to teach the Latin and Greek languages³⁴ and this produced applications from "several persons who had gone through several courses of education in the College of Glasgow."³⁵

"Examinators" were appointed and these included the Schoolmasters of Mayboill, Kilmarnock and Dalmellington; John Gillies, Student of Divinity at Sundrum; the two Ayr Ministers and Ministers from Kirkmichael, Kilwinning and Cumnock. These or any five of them were to meet along with a committee of the Town Council on 13 February, 1771.

Those who met chose John Gillies, Student of Divinity at Sundrum, to conduct the examination and this was done "in a very accurate and particular manner." The applicants had to translate literally certain passages in Caesar, Virgil, Sallust and Horace, give an accurate list of the parts of speech and explain allusions to ancient customs. In Greek test passages were chosen from the Iliad. The applicants had also to translate from English into Latin and in a free translation show their knowledge of the English language. Mr. John Inglis was selected as the best qualified.³⁶

³² Private papers of the Tennant family.

³³ A.T.C.M., 21/11/1770.

³⁴ A.T.C.M., 19/12/1770.

³⁵ A.T.C.M., 6/2/1771.

³⁶ A.T.C.M., 14/2/1771.

When the latter resigned on 14 September of the following year the Council merely appointed another committee to examine Mr. David Tennant and "after strict and sufficient trial"³⁷ he was installed as Master of the Grammar School.³⁸

Master of the Grammar School he remained to the end of its existence and he continued to teach Latin and Greek in the Academy under the Rectorship of Mr. Meikleham. Much later in the 19th century one of his former pupils there remembered him as a severe disciplinarian, "though I must give him the credit of being perfectly conscientious in his administration of the lash. The punishment was generally very sharp and if any of us appeared to writhe under it he sent us to our seats with the comforting words, 'It is all for your good. Go and tell the others how sore it is'."³⁹

He died on 27 April, 1823.⁴⁰

A NEW ENGLISH SCHOOLHOUSE

On 4 November, 1772, David Tennant having become Master of the Grammar School, John Murdoch, late teacher of English at Dumfries, was appointed English Master in his place.⁴¹ This is, of course, the John Murdoch who taught Burns at Alloway and visited the family at Mount Oliphant, 1765-68. He had been taught English by David Tennant, and was particularly strong in Grammar and in what would now be called Interpretation. He had also studied at Edinburgh and was teaching himself French when Burns stayed with him in the Sandgate for three weeks in the autumn of 1772.

At the same time, 4 November, 1772, a committee was instructed to look out for a second English Schoolmaster. They had finally decided that something must be done to relieve the overcrowding at the Grammar School.⁴² What they did would not have pleased Mr. Mair. It was, in fact, more on the lines suggested by Mr. Baillie.

On 14 April, 1773, the Council agreed that "the yeard belonging to the Town at the back of the old tower (*Wallace Tower*) was the most proper and central place" for the new schoolhouse and also that an addition ought to be made to the present English schoolhouse.⁴³

³⁷ A.T.C.M., 23/9/1772.

³⁸ A.T.C.M., 10/10/1772.

³⁹ *Air Academy and Burgh School*, pp. 91-93.

⁴⁰ Private papers of the Tennant family.

⁴¹ A.T.C.M., 4/11/1772.

⁴² A.T.C.M., 4/11/1772.

⁴³ A.T.C.M., 14/4/1773.

A fortnight later they had decided to build two new schools. The Town, they admitted, was now so populous that it was dangerous to confine so many children in one school. The present English schoolhouse might be converted into a writing school, which was much wanted.

One of the new buildings was to be upon the green fronting the avenue of old leading to St. John's Church (St. John's Lane). It was to be fifty feet long, by twenty wide and twelve feet high in the side walls. These were to be two feet thick and to contain four windows, four feet by two and a half, in front, and five upon the back part thereof, with hewn stone at the corners, door, windows and tabling. The other schoolhouse was to be forty-nine feet long, otherwise identical. Tenders were to be invited by "took of drum."⁴⁴

By 12 May, they were borrowing money, £100 sterling from Elias Cathcart and £150 from William McCormick, and a committee was appointed to supervise the building of only one new school, that behind the Wallace Tower.⁴⁵ The contract went to John Houston, mason in Ayr, but William Wilson, wright, contracted separately for the woodwork and ironwork,⁴⁶ Hugh Jameson, slater, for the glass and slate, and John McClure for the plaster.⁴⁷

By 18 August, 1773, John Houston was being ordered to build a privy and a coalhouse at the new schoolhouse and to make a proper entry to it through the Lockman's House. At the same time William Wilson was ordered to floor the schoolhouse and instal forms.⁴⁸ It was at this stage that Robert Burns lodged with John Murdoch in the Sandgate and attended his classes in the Grammar School at the western end of the School Vennel.

The new schoolmaster, John Hunter of New Galloway, was not appointed until 23 October, 1773⁴⁹. A year later, on 30 November, 1774, he applied for permission to go to Edinburgh to finish off some branches of education which he had begun but interrupted to come to Ayr. He proposed to substitute one in his room for a few weeks and found he could engage Mr. Neill, Schoolmaster at Munktown to supply his place. This request was granted.⁵⁰

⁴⁴ A.T.C.M., 28/4/1773.

⁴⁵ A.T.C.M., 12/5/1773.

⁴⁶ A.T.C.M., 19/5/1773.

⁴⁷ A.T.C.M., 21/7/1773.

⁴⁸ A.T.C.M., 18/8/1773.

⁴⁹ A.T.C.M., 21/7/1773, 23/10/1773.

⁵⁰ A.T.C.M., 30/11/1774.

HANDBALL AT THE SCHOOLS

An interesting entry, dated 15 May, 1775, throws light on the pastimes and incidentally on the roofing of the Grammar School at this time. "Considering that for sometime past a practice of playing at the handball at the Schools hath prevailed much, whereby the slates and windows of the schools are not only damaged but the children frequently get themselves hurt by idle persons following on that diversion. They therefore prohibit and discharge all playing at the handball at the schools under penalty of Three pounds Scots, toties quoties, and enact, statute and ordain that all masters shall be liable for their apprentices and parents for their children and appoint this act to be published by beat of drum."⁵¹

It is comforting to know that the pupils were not at all times confined to that very small enclosure on the town side of the school. Handball, in which such casual strangers as apprentices and idle persons could participate with damage to slates and windows, must have been played on the Green.

"Overtaken in Liquor."

The circumstances in which John Murdoch departed from the town of Ayr deserve re-examination. Gilbert Burns watered them down for Dr. Currie in 1797, thus: "He continued for some years a respected and useful teacher in Ayr till one evening that he had been overtaken in liquor, he happened to speak somewhat disrespectfully of Dr. Dalrymple, the parish minister, who had not paid him that attention to which he considered himself entitled. In Ayr he might as well have spoken blasphemy. He found it proper to give up his appointment . . ."⁵²

A fuller account can be found in a Town Council Minute dated 14 February, 1776, from which it appears that a complaint had been lodged against him by James Neill, the Procurator Fiscal, and this did, in fact, amount to a charge of blasphemy: "that the said John Murdoch, having shaken off all fear of God and regard for his servants in the Ministry . . . did . . . within the house of Mrs. Tennant, Innkeeper in Ayr, as well as in the house of Patrick Auld, Weaver in Ayr, utter the following, or such like unworthy, base, reproachful and wicked expressions, Vizct.

"That he, Mr. William Dalrymple, was as revengeful as hell and as false as the Devil, and that he was a Lyar or a damned

⁵¹ A.T.C.M., 15/5/1775.

⁵² Dr. Currie's, *Life of Burns*, p.19.

lyar; that he, the said John Murdoch, also called Mr. Dalrymple a hypocrite or accused him of hypocrisy."

A warrant was granted to convene before the Magistrates and Council such persons as the Fiscal should think it proper to adduce and the hearing was fixed for 10 February, 1776.

Murdoch's chief accuser was one Robert Auld, Writing Master in Ayr, though not employed by the Council. Robert Auld described two incidents, the first of which had occurred in his father's house, "within these six weeks", that is, in all probability on Hogmanay, 1775. Besides Murdoch and himself there were present his father, Patrick Auld, a weaver; John Eccles, servant to George Hutchinson, merchant; John Leece, apprentice to John Nimmo who was a surgeon and one of the Ayr Baillies; William Ross, a private teacher of French; John McColm, son of Dr. John McColm, physician; and George Hutchinson, son of the merchant whose servant is named above.

According to Auld, John Murdoch introduced a story that Mr. Dalrymple of Orangefield had been owing James Gregg, land-surveyor and dancing-master, an accompt. He had not paid it timeously and Gregg had summoned him before the court. In revenge, the Rev. Mr. William Dalrymple, Mr. Dalrymple of Orangefield's brother, "had not only taken his own children from Gregg's school, but had been active in going over the town persuading other people to do the same, to the destruction of Mr. Gregg's family."

Murdoch had ended by saying that the Ayr minister was as revengeful as hell and a hypocrite.

The second incident occurred on the evening of Saturday, 27 January, 1776, at an inn kept by Sarah McClymont. It was on this occasion that Murdoch used the expression "as false as the Devil".

He also said "that Mr. William Dalrymple had intimate from the pulpit that the Schools of Ayr were at this time in a flourishing condition, whereas he had not examined his, Murdoch's, School for a considerable time, and therefore Mr. Dalrymple was "a Liar or a damned lyar."

John Leece, the surgeon's apprentice, admitted being present at the inn and confirmed that Murdoch did say that Mr. Dalrymple was as revengeful as hell. James Dick, Weaver, also present on that occasion, remembered that Murdoch called Mr. Dalrymple

"false," but could not be sure about "false as the Devil", though the devil was certainly mentioned. John Eccles, present on the first occasion, at the house of Patrick Auld, weaver, testified to "revengeful as hell" and "hypocrite". All except Auld seemed reluctant and suffered from partial loss of memory.

Murdoch made no defence at all. He waived his right to examine the witnesses and produced none of his own. The verdict was unanimous. He was unworthy any longer to hold the office of one of the Schoolmasters of the Burgh, dismissed and found incapable of teaching either publicly or privately within the burgh and parish of Ayr in all time coming. He was to be paid a proportion of his salary and to deliver up the keys of his school to the Dean of Gild. The Council immediately advertised his post as vacant in the *Glasgow Journal*.⁵³

Nevertheless there is nothing improbable in the Gregg story. A dancing-master's bill was a debt of trade; it would be paid in due course and any attempt of a dancing-master to force the issue would be regarded as the height of impertinence. The Rev. William Dalrymple, hearing of this insult to his brother, would be quite likely to take his children away. If he, or his wife, were asked by parents of other members of Gregg's school why Wilhelmina (11) or Sarah (10) or just possibly Margaret (16) had ceased to attend... In any case it was quite clearly none of John Murdoch's business.

Why, even in his cups, did he go out of his way to stir up trouble for himself? Among those also present were the servant and son of a George Hutchinson, merchant in Ayr, who had at least the same surname as James Hutchinson, the Provost: and on the second occasion, when Murdoch made his complaint that the minister had said his school was flourishing without coming to see it, there was another interested party on the scene, Mrs. Sarah McClymont or Tennant, widow of Alexander Tennant, late baxter (baker) in Ayr and brother to David Tennant, Master of the Grammar School. The latter was, as we have seen, related to the Dalrymples by marriage.⁵⁴

Spoken before so many possible informants, Murdoch's in any case wild words could hardly fail to reach the ears of the establishment. Murdoch would have to be very drunk not to realise that. He sounds like a man who knows he is being reckless and probably unfair but who has been driven beyond the bounds of logic and common sense by some genuine injury or anxiety. And since nothing that happened to Gregg was likely to produce this

⁵³ A.T.C.M., 14/2/1776.

⁵⁴ Private papers of the Tennant family

effect, the cause of his discontent must lie in the words spoken by Mr. Dalrymple from the pulpit; and not, as Gilbert implies, in the mere fact that Mr. Dalrymple had not examined his school for some time but in the fact that contrary to what the minister announced from the pulpit, his school was not flourishing.

There could be two reasons for this. Either John Murdoch was neglecting his English teaching because of his devouring interest in French; or the English School at the Wallace Tower was reducing his numbers by drawing off the children in the Town-head area. This would be all the likelier if John Hunter had the active support of the Rev. Mr. William Dalrymple. The Hunters were another powerful Ayr clan—Mr. Dalrymple had married one of them, Susannah Hunter, daughter of the Rev. John Hunter, whom he succeeded.

It will be observed that Mr. David Tennant, Master of the Grammar School, took no part in these proceedings. His opinion was apparently neither asked nor offered. He was, however, on the committee to select Murdoch's successor and so was the second English Master, John Hunter.⁵⁵ This was exceptional.

There were four candidates, who met with the committee on Wednesday, 20 March, in the house of Mrs. Limond, Vintner in Ayr, at six of the clock at night. William Neill who had stood in for John Hunter in the winter of 1774-75 was unanimously appointed.

Meantime, John Hunter had naturally applied for the English Schoolhouse vacated by Murdoch. It was "more advantageously situated and in several respects preferable to the one he presently occupied". His application was received favourably. Both he and Neill who was appointed to the new English School near the Wallace Tower, were to teach two poor boys gratis if called upon to do so by the Magistrates.⁵⁶

ITALIAN TRILLS

Mr. Robinson, the Writing Master, has been known hitherto as the person who recommended Robert Burns to buy a Latin Grammar and told him it was the gateway to all knowledge. It had certainly helped Mr. David Tennant.

We know where he taught writing, but if he actually taught Vulgar Arithmetic, as he was supposed to, there is nothing to show

⁵⁵ A.T.C.M., 16/3/1776.
⁵⁶ A.T.C.M. 16/3/1776..

whether he taught it in the Grammar School or in the Mathematical School.

He took his musical duties seriously. By 10 August, 1775, he was offering to revolutionise church music in the town, not entirely at his own expense. He pointed out that "Church music, as performed for upwards of a century, of late in Scotland having been greatly compleaned of, attempts had been made in most of our principal burghs and several other places towards a reformation thereof, which endeavours . . . had succeeded far beyond expectation. Desirous to have such a reformation take place here, he thought it the duty of his station humbly to represent that for some time past he had been endeavouring to make himself acquainted with what was called the new music and being willing to do everything in his power to promote so good a design he . . . would propose to teach all those of station who could afford to pay at one shilling and sixpence per month, one hour each day, and that the poorer sort might not be neglected in an affair of such general concern to give them same attendance for an annual allowance such as the Magistrates and Council should please to fix upon."⁵⁷

The Council took his proposals to their consideration.

Much later he was practically asked to retire.

"Gentlemen," he wrote in 1782, "as I have reason to believe that my serving you any longer will not be agreeable, I therefore after having served you thirty-one years (I will add faithfully) now voluntarily resign to your hands all the offices conferred upon me."

The Magistrates and Council "accepted of Mr. Robinson's demission and ordained advertisements to be insert in the Edinburgh and Glasgow newspapers for a proper writing master to the burgh."⁵⁸

His successor, Alexander Carson, in applying for an increase in his schoolwages said that "At his appointment he conceived that he was required to teach only two hours a day. He had, however, always taught four and for more than a year five hours every day. The advantages to his pupils from being divided into so many classes were too obvious to need being mentioned."⁵⁹ What he does not mention, however, is how, when and where he was able to fit them in.

Three years later, on 15 July, 1790, he too was on the way out. "The writing master of the burgh was not behaving himself suitable to his office and the scholars under his charge made but little

⁵⁷ A.T.C.M., 10/8/1775.
⁵⁸ A.T.C.M., 18/9/1782.
⁵⁹ A.T.C.M., 8/11/1786.

proficiency in their education."⁶⁰ He was warned (28 July) to appear before the council and shortly afterwards the familiar advertisements were appearing in the Edinburgh and Glasgow newspapers.

The letter from the Schoolmaster, quoted above, shows that writing was giving them all concern. They suggested 8-9 in summer and 9-10 in winter for the younger classes; 11-12 for the higher classes; 1-3 other subjects; and 4-5 more writing practice for older and younger alike.⁶¹ In 1792, when the town once more had "a proper writing master", it was found necessary to write to each of the English Masters and to Mr. Morton, the Mathematical Master, asking them to desist from the practice of teaching writing.⁶²

William McKenzie of Kirkcudbright, appointed in 1792,⁶³ gave satisfaction but remained only two years when he went to Edinburgh, to study "other branches of literature."⁶⁴ He was replaced by Robert Taylor, teacher of writing at Dumfries House, who survived to teach writing in the Academy.⁶⁵

GEORGE DOUGLAS.

We first hear of George Douglas on 3 August, 1768, when William Fergusson, late Provost, reported that he had, "agreeable to the directions given him by the Magistrates and Council before he went to attend the Convention of Royal Burghs, made a proper Inquiry in order to find a fit person to serve the Town as Mathematical Master. He had at last found Mr. George Douglas, Mathematician at Edinburgh, a man of good character and fully qualified for that office."

The Council resolved to offer him the position and to inform him that he might expect £20.⁶⁶ On 3 September, 1768, it was reported that he had come to the Town with his family. He was to teach Vulgar arithmetic, Decimal arithmetic, Book-keeping, Geography, Navigation, Mathematics and Natural Philosophy in the Public School from nine to twelve and from two to four or five during the whole year. The Magistrates and Council took powers to present a scholar yearly to be taught gratis. A committee was appointed to enter the said George Douglas to the exercise of his office, to

⁶⁰ A.T.C.M., 15/7/1790.

⁶¹ A.T.C.M., 13/4/1791.

⁶² A.T.C.M., 21/3/1792.

⁶³ A.T.C.M., 22/2/1792. For an amusing series of minutes dealing with an application from Alexander Buchanan, whose 'specimen of write' was quite different from his normal handwriting, see A.T.C.M., 25/1/1792, 1/2/1792, 8/2/1792 (Rubric: "Alexr Buchanan's write found fault with").

⁶⁴ A.T.C.M., 27/4/1794.

⁶⁵ *Air Academy and Burgh School*, pp. 107, 108.

⁶⁶ A.T.C.M., 3/8/1768.

inspect the mathematical instruments and books, deliver the same to him and to report.

His predecessor, Mr. Paterson, had been Rector and had also taught the uppermost or last class of the said school in Latin and Greek, but Mr. Douglas was to have "no concern in teaching Latin and Greek or with the Grammar School." Mr. Oughterson present Master of the said school was to be the only public teacher of Latin and Greek and his yearly salary from the town, including his present salary, was to be twenty pounds sterling, commencing as at Martinmas next, "old stile".⁶⁷

On 9 April, 1770, George Douglas complained to the Council that he was having difficulty in collecting his wages from the pupils. These payments were made in retard and parents had the objectionable habit of taking their children away a few days before they fell due "and other such like shifts, whose only tendency was to deprive him of the foresaid regulations."

He asked that the schoolwages should be paid in advance but his request was not granted.⁶⁸

On 17 August, 1774, he applied for an assistant. The number of scholars attending his school had of late greatly increased and therefore an assistant properly qualified would be necessary to prevent the school from falling into disrepute. He proposed to give this assistant about ten pounds sterling annually, but thought that sum would be too small without further encouragement, presumably from the Council. He further proposed that the assistant he was to engage should be qualified for teaching French and Drawing, and asked that this assistant teacher of French and Drawing should be settled within the burgh, exclusive of others.

He was merely authorised to teach these branches of education in the public and mathematical school at any time not interfering with the school hours fixed for the teaching of other branches of education.⁶⁹

From later minutes we learn that his school did fall into disrepute. On 11 September, 1782, he was instructed to appear before the council and was enjoined to observe the school hours as recorded on 9 July, 1761.⁷⁰ Two years later, on 12 June, 1784, the Provost and Magistrates reported that while they applauded the proficiency of the scholars and the ability and attention of the

⁶⁷ A.T.C.M., 3/9/1768. "old stile," beginning the year in 15 March.

⁶⁸ A.T.C.M., 9/4/1770.

⁶⁹ A.T.C.M., 17/8/1774.

⁷⁰ A.T.C.M., 11/9/1782.

masters in both the English and writing and particularly in the Latin school, they observed with much regret that there were few scholars at the mathematical school and upon their examination they seemed to have made little progress. This has been represented to them as owing to the inattention and want of authority in the master.⁷¹

The fact was that he was spending most of his time at Sundrum, as tutor to the Hamilton family. He was peremptorily warned to attend the council on 23 June, 1784, and a copy of the minute appointing him to do so was lodged at his house by one of the town officers.⁷² He came, but no action was taken pending an examination of the mathematical instruments and books. He then withdrew from the town beyond their jurisdiction and as his letter of appointment rendered it impossible for the council to dismiss him was eventually able to force them to pay him £130 to resign at 1 May, 1791.⁷³

When he did at long last return the globes, instruments and books they were found to be "much defaced."⁷⁴

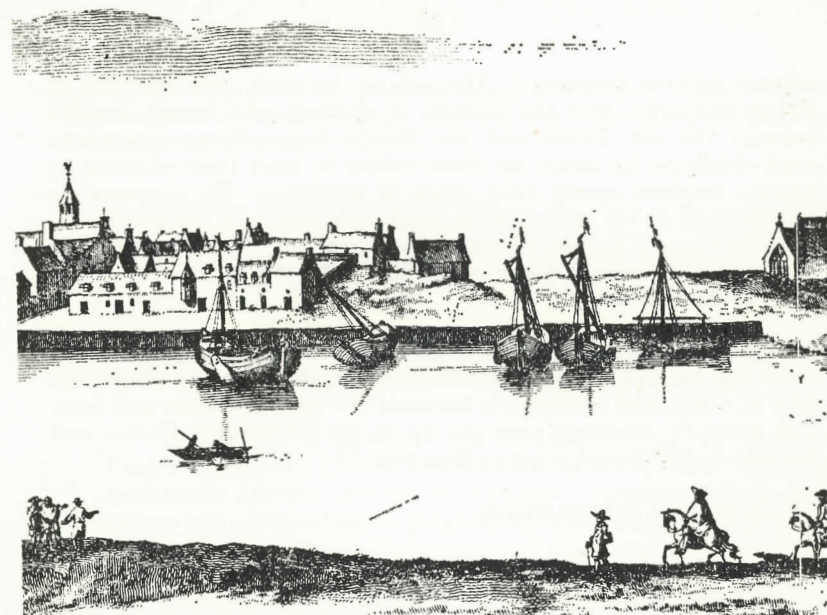
WILLIAM NEILL.

William Neill who succeeded Mr. Hunter as second English Master was extremely conscientious, judging by his letter dated 27 October, 1784, in which he sought permission to examine his classes twice a quarter, as was done in Glasgow, and invited such of the Magistrates and Council as cared to attend to do so.⁷⁵

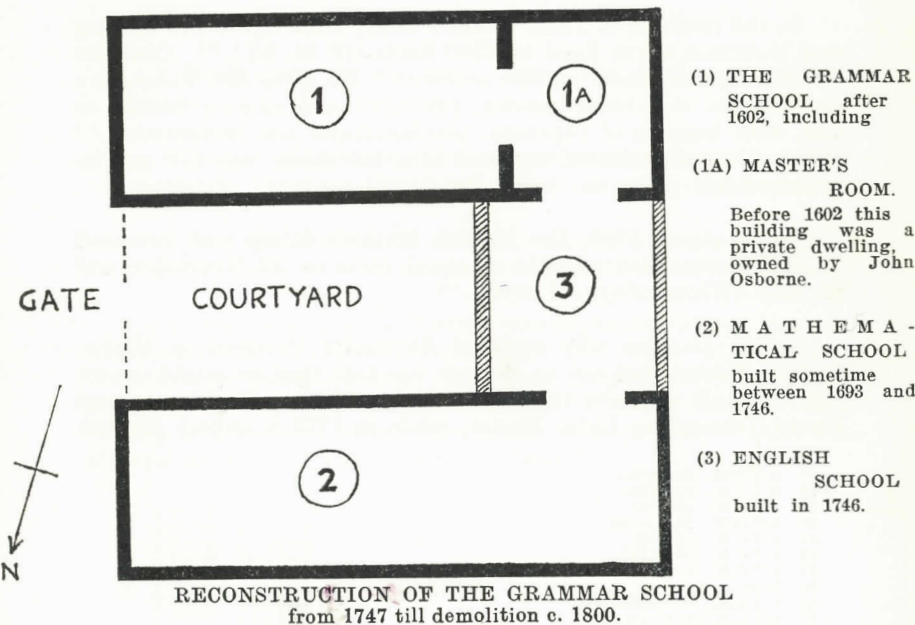
The situation of his schoolhouse behind the Wallace Tower was next to the stable of John Robb, innkeeper in the Townhead. This unfortunate position led on 19 May, 1779, to a petition—by the innkeeper—for permission to erect a high wall between his yard and the schoolhouse. Not to mention any trouble he might receive from the scholars, the petitioner was afraid of danger to some of them who were frequently going into the stables and might therefore happen to receive a stroke from a horse. There was no use, he thought, in building a wall under ten feet high "as in that case, either the youngest in the school or the petitioner's children would be able to throw over stones of such size as might be dangerous for those on the other side of the wall."⁷⁶

On 15 July, 1790, Neill complained that the number of scholars had greatly diminished of late, "owing chiefly to there being

71 A.T.C.M., 12/6/1784.
72 A.T.C.M., 19/6/1784.
73 A.T.C.M., 27/10/1790.
74 A.T.C.M., 1/8/1792.
75 A.T.C.M., 27/10/1784.
76 A.T.C.M., 19/5/1779.



THE GRAMMAR SCHOOL 1693.
Detail from 'Prospect of the Town of Air from the East'.



several private teachers." His school, he said, was situated so far up the town that the parents of children who mostly resided betwixt the old Tower and the Bridge from whence his school used chiefly to be made up chose rather to send their children to private teachers nearer their place of residence. He proposed to take a room at his own expense nearer the centre of the town. To this the Council agreed provided there was no objection from the parents of children at his school who lived betwixt the old Tower and the Townhead.⁷⁷

The school was leased to a Mr. John Sword who proposed to start the tambour working of muslins which would employ from fifty to a hundred young girls between the ages of eleven and fourteen years.⁷⁸ Shutters were put up on the former schoolhouse and the rent to Mr. Sword fixed at £6 a year.⁷⁹

SALARIES AND SCHOOLWAGES.

In 1746 Mair's salary as Rector and Mathematical Master was fixed at 400 merks (£22 4s. 6d. sterling);⁸⁰ the salary of the Latin Master, Archibald Wallace, was exactly half of this, 200 merks (£11 2s. 3d. sterling)⁸¹ and Mr. James Baillie was offered the position of English Schoolmaster on the same terms.⁸²

In the reshuffle of 1751, Baillie's salary went up to £12 sterling and Robinson's was fixed at £100 Scots (£8 6s. 8d.).⁸³ Compare Grant's figures, based on the accounts. He gives Mr. Robinson's emoluments as writing master, precentor and singing master as £20, with benefits of baptisms, proclamations and testimonials.⁸⁴ When Alexander Carson replaced him, his salary was £10 and he reckoned his place as worth £40.⁸⁵

On 30 April, 1755, the English Master's salary was increased to £120 Scots (£10) payable in equal parts on 22 November and 26 May (Whitsunday old style).⁸⁶

George Douglas who replaced Alexander Paterson as Mathematical Master (but not as Rector) was told that he might expect £20,⁸⁷ which was also the salary paid to Arthur Oughterson and David Tennant as Latin Master, while in 1773 a second English

77 A.T.C.M., 15/7/1790.
78 A.T.C.M., 21/7/1790.
79 A.T.C.M., 1/9/1790.
80 A.T.C.M., 18/11/1746.
81 A.T.C.M., 2/9/1746.
82 A.T.C.M., 20/1/1747.
83 A.T.C.M., 2/4/1751.
84 Grant, p.540.
85 A.T.C.M., 8/11/1786.
86 A.T.C.M., 30/4/1755.
87 A.T.C.M., 3/8/1768.

Master was appointed at the same salary as the first, namely £10.⁸⁸ The salaries of both English Masters were increased to £15 on 8 November, 1786.⁸⁹

In the same period the schoolwages per term were: English, 2/- until 1786 when they were increased to 3/-;⁹⁰ Writing 2/-, increased in 1776 to 2/6;⁹¹ Latin 3/-⁹² increased to 3/6 in 1776 in response to an application by David Tennant for an assistant;⁹³ and in 1787 to 5/-.⁹⁴

Arithmetic and all branches of Mathematics and Science were paid for not by the term but by the course:

"Arithmetic to the single rule of three, 5/-; for the whole of Vulgar Arithmetic (*further details*) half of one guinea; Decimal Arithmetic (*further details*) half-guinea; complete course one guinea and a larger sum in proportion to the length they proceed therein.

"For teaching Bookeeping with the first sett of books (*and further details*) half-guinea; full course, comprehending three sett of books (*and further details*) one guinea.

"Geography, with the use of globes, half-guinea.

"Navigation, in all parts (*very fully particularised*) one guinea.

"Course of Mathematics comprehending Elements, Trigonometry, Practical Geometry and Algebra, two guineas.

"Natural Philosophy (*full details*) two guineas. N.B.—A proportional price to be charged for each of the branches."⁹⁵

On 16 May, 1787, James Morton, who succeeded George Douglas, complained that children receiving the full course of arithmetic for which he was allowed to charge one guinea "frequently took two years and upwards to learn that branch, owing chiefly to their coming to his school before they could write properly"; and was allowed to charge 5/- per quarter instead.⁹⁶

88 A.T.C.M., 23/10/1773.
89 A.T.C.M., 8/11/1786.
90 A.T.C.M., 8/11/1786.
91 A.T.C.M., 31/1/1776.
92 A.T.C.M., 9/7/1761.
93 A.T.C.M., 24/7/1776.
94 A.T.C.M., 7/11/1787.
95 A.T.C.M., 9/7/1761.
96 A.T.C.M., 16/5/1787.

In addition to these "regulations" there were "perquisites" or "casualties", such as the "Candlemas offering", payable at the New Year in Ayrshire,⁹⁷ but the Town Council Minutes of this period supply no details.

The First Statistical Account gives the position for about 1791.

"Two English masters with salaries of £15 each, have each of them from 38 to 40 scholars throughout the year, at the rate of 3/- per quarter for every scholar. Besides these there are three other English schools without salaries, and with the same wages, and almost as numerous as the former.

"For the Latin there is a master with a salary of £20 per annum, and 5/- a quarter for every scholar; and the number of his scholars is generally about 40. His highest class he commonly instructs in the rudiments of the Greek language. The same salary is allotted to a master who teaches arithmetic, book-keeping, navigation, geometry, etc. Finally there are two writing masters of whom one has a salary of ten pounds per annum. French is taught privately by several hands."⁹⁸

It can be seen that Mair's Grammar School had burst its banks and overflowed into the town, while the distinction between public and private teachers had practically disappeared.

DEMOLITION OF THE GRAMMAR SCHOOL.

On 23 November, 1791, a letter from John Hunter, Esq., W.S., was read to the Council covering a deed of donation, whereby three thousand pounds sterling were left by John Fergusson, Esq., of Doonholm, lately deceased, for the benefit of the ministers, schoolmasters and the poor of the town.⁹⁹

This led in September, 1794, to "the sketch of a plan for establishing an Academy, which was approved and ordered to be printed and distribute."¹

A committee, which included the Duke of Argyle, was formed, subscriptions poured in and by 1 August, 1796, the Academy was formally opened, "under the direction of William Meikleham, A.M., Rector."

⁹⁷ W. Boyd, *Education in Ayrshire through Seven Centuries*, p. 63.

⁹⁸ *Statistical Account*, Vol. 21, pp. 40 and 43 for comparison with Minister's stipends. The account was compiled for Ayr by William Dalrymple, D.D., Minister.

⁹⁹ A.T.C.M., 23/11/1791.

¹ *Air Academy and Burgh School*, pp. 51-54.

It was, however, opened in the same old building and other premises, with the same old schoolmasters, Mr. Meikleham being the only newcomer, and he, though given the title of Rector, was little more than a Mathematics Master.²

A letter, dated 11 February, 1796, from John Ballantine to Robert Findlay of Glasgow asking him to engage Mr. Meikleham at a salary of £80 per annum makes this clear. "It is proposed Mr. Meikleham shall have little connection with the other masters, further than convening them at stated times to communicate with each other such observations as may occur for the benefit of the Seminary, which are to be engrossed in a Book and submitted to the inspection of the Committee . . ."³

Before the centre block of the new building was ready for occupation Mr. Meikleham left to be Professor of Astronomy at Glasgow University.⁴ It was his successor, Mr. Thomas Jackson, formerly Lecturer in Natural Philosophy in Glasgow, who attended the first Annual Meeting of Directors within the hall of the new Academy in May, 1801.⁵ By that time the Grammar School of Ayr had been demolished.

APPENDIX 1. PRESBYTERY AND COUNCIL (1708).

If it is a fact that in 1598 the Grammar School of Ayr had been allowed to "decay untheikit" it would appear that for thirty years after the Reformation nobody was shouldering the responsibility of maintaining the school building. Eventually, 1602-03, the Town stepped in, moved the school into a house rented from John Osborne, a prominent member of the Council, and thereafter added maintenance and new building to the masters' salaries which it had been paying since 1519.⁶

It is well known that he who pays the piper calls the tune. Nevertheless, throughout the 17th century the Presbytery of Ayr continued to administer the school. On 26 May, 1642, the Presbytery dismissed a schoolmaster, William Wallace, and they also from time to time visited the school, advertising the schoolmasters to wait on them and "enjoynd" them to diligence in teaching their scholars.⁷

² *Ibid*, *Air Academy and Burgh School*, pp. 55, 60.

³ *Ibid*, *Air Academy and Burgh School*, p. 56.

⁴ *Ibid*, *Air Academy and Burgh School*, p. 66.

⁵ *Ibid*, *Air Academy and Burgh School*, p. 69.

⁶ *Air Academy and Burgh School*, p. 24.

⁷ James J. Fowler, "The Presbytery of Ayr: Its Schools and Schoolmasters, 1642-1746," in *Ayrshire Collections*, Vol. 6, pp. 96-98.

In the 18th Century the Town began to assert itself. On 21 September, 1708, the Ministers of Ayr reported to the Presbytery that William Rankine, the Schoolmaster, was dead. The Moderator was appointed to write to the Magistrates and Council "recommending it to them to take care to have that place well supplied again." The Presbytery "expects they will make orderly steps in so doing, and that they will neither call nor receive any to that post till he be first approved by the presbyterie, as is appointed . . . by severall acts of parliament and Assembly."⁸

By 27 October, "it is surmised they (the Magistrates and Council) have advanced Mr. James fergusone (formerly Doctor) to be master of the grammar school by an act of the town council without previous tryal by the presbyterie." The clerk was to produce the relevant acts, so that the presbytery would know its powers.⁹

In November their suspicions were confirmed. It was stormy weather and few of the presbytery were present but they read up the acts and postponed action to the next meeting on 29 December. Then they asserted their right, basing it on an Act of Assembly, 1645. Nevertheless they appointed some members to take trial of Mr. Fergusson along with the ministers of Ayr and some of the Ayr Kirk Session, but they could not name the Act of Parliament on which they wished to base their claim.¹⁰

The committee did not carry out its task. The Kirk Session of Ayr was at daggers drawn with the Town Council who had taken the keys of the Church and the "laver" (font) and dismissed the church officer. The presbytery had now remembered if not parliamentary authority at least "a conjunct right of manadgement granted by Queen Mary of Scotland", which gave them a right of placing, displacing and calling of ministers, schoolmasters, doctors and precentors. They had found out that there was a decreit of the Lords of the Plantations, dated 25 February, 1648, giving them a conjunct power of patronage to dispose of the vacant stipend. They wanted to see the charters in the possession of the Magistrates. Meantime the Magistrates were demanding the "Handbell that goes for the dead." The Provost said he would call a meeting to see if they would allow the charter and decreit to be produced for inspection. The presbytery would not try Mr. Fergusson until this was done.

The dispute dragged on for ten years and apparently the presbytery were under the impression that the Magistrates and

Council had accepted the presbytery's conjunct rights.¹¹ However, in 1746, when Mr. Fergusson became old and unwell, the Magistrates and Council advanced John Mair, A.M., Doctor, to be Master of the Grammar School without consulting either the Kirk Session or the Presbytery. They did, not invariably but as a general rule, have the two Ayr ministers and sometimes others in their selection committees; but they recorded and exercised their right to be present at inspections of the school; and they also made the arrangements for dressing the pews for communion and allocated lairs in the Kirkyard.

APPENDIX 2. PRESBYTERY AND SCHOOLMASTERS (1714-32).

A second dispute was between the Presbytery and the Schoolmasters themselves. It began, for the Presbytery, on 2 March, 1714, when a committee of three was appointed "to take tryal of the proficiency of said schollars who are taught according to the grammar compiled by Mr. John Hunter . . ."¹²

This was the "New Method of teaching the Latin Tongue in such a natural order as a child may learn that language more speedily than any other Grammar yet extant" by John Hunter, Minister of Ayr; Kirkbride, 1711, 8vo. It was appended to a new edition of Dr. Thomas Harrison's "Topica Sacra".¹³

On the following day the committee expressed itself as "very satisfied". A further report was called for that October and on 22 June, 1715, the Presbytery recommended the use of a second, augmented edition "throughout the whole bounds of the synod."

Apparently the new Grammar was not adopted in Ayr, because on 26 April, 1732, Mr. Hunter represented that he had spoken to the Magistrates and Council about two years previously. They had ordered Mr. Mair, the doctor "to teach one classe and that Mr. Hunter would take some oversight of them, to make it more easie to him . . ."

Mr. Hunter now asked that these boys should be examined by a committee appointed by the Presbytery. This was done and on 31 May, 1732, the report was satisfactory. However, it was accompanied by a letter from Mr. Fergusson, Master of the Grammar School, protesting that the proficiency of the boys was due to the

¹¹ Fowler, pp. 99-105. Confirmation of the "incrotchments" including "a demand by the Magistrates for the 'handbell that goes for the dead'" can be found in A.T.C.M., 17/3/1756: "The Bellman went through the town and rang the bell that goes for the dead." Their demand had succeeded.

¹² Fowler, pp. 91-94.

¹³ David Murray, *Some Early Grammars and other Schoolbooks in Scotland*, Royal Phil. Soc., Glasgow, 1905, p.14.

⁸ Fowler, p. 98.

⁹ Fowler, p. 99.

¹⁰ Fowler, p. 99.

more than ordinary pains Mr. Hunter had taken on them. He and other schoolmasters should have been consulted in advance. Though he was willing to teach it in the school, yet he found on trial that the said grammar was greatly defective and in many things erroneous. Before they proceeded any farther he desired that Mr. Mair and he might be heard. To this the Presbytery agreed.

On 28 June, 1732, a letter from Fergusson and Mair was produced "with a large paper of objections against Mr. John Hunter's grammar". A committee was appointed to consider these but its findings are not on record.¹⁴

It is, however, on record that in 1714 (when the dispute began) a book called the "Rudiments of the Latin Tongue" by Thomas Ruddiman was published in Edinburgh and that John Mair, A.M., produced "An Introduction to Latin Syntax; or an Exemplification of the Rules of Construction as delivered in Mr. Ruddiman's Rudiments", Edinburgh, 1755.¹⁵ This text-book was used in the Grammar School of Ayr and later in the Academy.¹⁶

APPENDIX 3. KIRK SESSION AND COUNCIL (1747-52).

On 27 January, 1747, the Ayr Magistrates and Council minuted their decision that the expense of building "ane English School with all convenience to the Latin Schoolhouse should be payed out of the vacant stipend, being for a pious use."¹⁷ The rather heavy religious duties imposed on the English Schoolmaster and on none of the other schoolmasters may have a bearing on this point. They suggest that the council was not entirely easy in conscience about their decision.

The Ayr Kirk Session Minutes also reflect uneasiness. 12. 1. 47. The Committee appointed to meet with the Magistrates anent the conjunct administration of the vacant stipend . . .

26. 1. 47. Committee told by the Magistrates to apply to the Councill . . . The (Session) Clerk to lay their claim before the Councill tomorrow (i.e. 27. 1. 47.).

2. 2. 47. (Session) Clerk reported that he did so. Council asked to see the session's acceptance of the Decreet at St. Eviox by an extract from the minutes.

9. 2. 47. Reported by the Clerk that he laid before the Magistrates and Town Councill (a) the Decreet Arbitral, (b) a minute of the session approving the said Decreet, dated 13 August, 1733. "The Council's answer to Mr. Mair last day was this That untill the

Session made a proper claim signed by some of their number . . . and show on what title they claim any right to the vacant stipend . . . in a plain and open manner, the Magistrates and Council can pay no regard to such messages."

Consideration in the Kirk Session was delayed till the following Monday and was then "continued" until it was forgotten.

It will be observed that the Kirk's alarm began on 12 January, while the Council's decision was not taken until 27 January, but no doubt the Kirk Session would be well aware of what was to be proposed. The Clerk incidentally was John Mair, a very interested party.

The Kirk Session Minutes also throw some light on the changes at the Grammar School in 1751.

Mair resigned as precentor before 2 April, 1751 (Town Council Minutes) and probably at the same time "told the Session that he inclined to serve them no longer as their Clerk after Lambas 1751" (Kirk Session Minutes, 5 August, 1751). "Therefore they make choice in his Room Mr. William Robinson, precentor in the New Kirk of Edinburgh, whom Mr. John Hunter sought out when he was at Edinburgh . . . for which he is to have five pounds str. of salary and entitled to all the other emoluments of the office commencing from the first of August, 1751." Compare what did happen, T.C.M., 2 April, 1751.

On 27 January, 1752, John Mair was a Deacon and on 18 May, 1752, not merely an Elder but "Elder to attend the Presbytery this half-year."

On the same day, "immediately after dismiss of the Session, the Provost, John Neill, John Campbell, Peter Auld, and the Clerk received from Arold Shearer the collection plate, two napkins, four keys for present use with five old rusty keys. As also the Baptism plate (*the laver* ?) with the collection stool."

¹⁴ Fowler, pp. 91-94.

¹⁵ David Murray, p.30.

¹⁶ Grant, p. 369, says that it was still "a class-book in some of the schools in our day."

His *History of the Burgh and Parish Schools of Scotland* was published in 1876.

¹⁷ A.T.C.M., 27/1/1747.