

# History of 'James Gillespie's' by Elaine J.C. Cochrane, (Form 3.c.) 1953

## Chapter Two

### The First School (1803-1870)

By the terms of his will, James Gillespie left a member of legacies, but he bequeathed the greater part of his fortune for the erection and endowment of a Hospital for aged men and women and a Free School for poor boys. The history of the Hospital is so joined with that of the school that something has to be written about it also here.

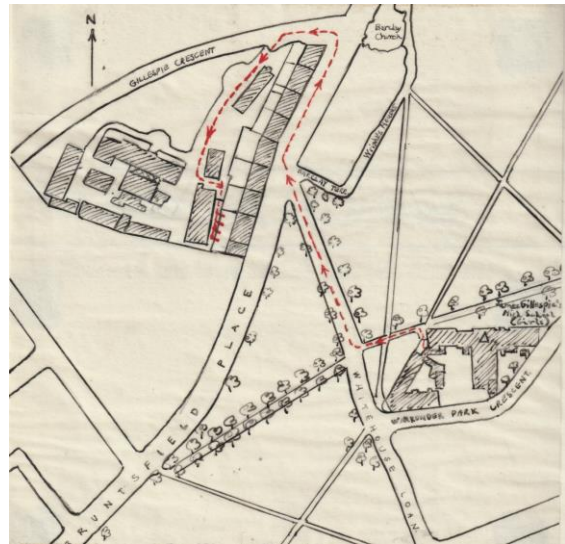
James Gillespie left £12,000 for the hospital and £2,700 for the school. He also left £500 to the Edinburgh Merchant Company on condition that they acted as Trustees. The Merchant Company agreed to do this, and the [original] Gillespie Trust was formed. The whole Trust included the Master, Treasurer and twelve assistants of the Merchant Company, the Old Dean of Guild and four Old Bailies and two Ministers of the Tollbooth.

In April 1789, the Gillespie Trust began its work by looking for a site on which to build the Hospital and the School. They bought the building known as Wrichtis Housis with a few acres of ground surrounding it at the West end of Bruntsfield Links.



It was a very old building and the Trustees found that they could not convert it to suit their purposes, so they swept it away to make room for a new one. The antiquarians of Edinburgh were very upset when Wrichtis Housis was demolished.





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On the space now cleared, the Hospital was now built and in 1802 it was opened.



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According to James Gillespie's will, those that were to be admitted to the Hospital were to be men and women of fifty-five years of age or more. They were to have a good character and were also to be poor. James Gillespie's servants were to be admitted first and, after them, people with the surname 'Gillespie'.

The School was built near-by and was opened in 1803, and it is believed that this was the first Free School opened in Scotland.



The cost to build it was to be £700 and £2,000 was left for the upkeep of the school. It turned out, however, that the building cost more than £700 and some money had to be taken from the £2000 to make up the difference. In his will, James Gillespie stated that a hundred poor boys of not less than six years of age and not more than twelve were to be admitted. The boys had to have certificates proving their poverty and, at the time of their entrance, they were to have no disease. They were to be taught Arithmetic, Reading and Writing (known as the 'three Rs'). Mr Gillespie also stated specially in his will that attention was to be given to morals and religious principles.

Because the building of the school cost more money than had been anticipated, and the money for the upkeep of the school was therefore less, the Trustees could accept only 65 boys and not 100 boys that they had hoped for. The Headmaster, Mr John Robertson, taught the boys himself since the Trust could not afford to pay an assistant. Mr Robertson was paid the sum of £65 a year, i.e. at the rate of £1 for each boy. The boys worked six hours a day in summer and five in winter, except on Sundays. Not much is known about this first school except that Mr John Robertson, the Headmaster, kept his post for forty years. When he retired, he was replaced by the Rev. R.T. Auld and later by the Rev. D. Henderson.

About 1868 the Merchant Company was very worried about the Hospital system. They had enquiry made by Mr Simon S. Laurie, Secretary of the Education Committee of the Church of Scotland. In his report he stated: "If monasteries are bad for men who deliberately enter them after their characters are formed, how much more hurtful must they be to boys whose characteristic they form". The next year, Parliament passed an Act called 'The Endowment Institutions (Scotland) Act, 1869', which led to the Hospital System being completely changed.

As a result of this it was decided to convert the Hospital<sup>9</sup> into a school and, in 1870, the old men and women in the Hospital were sent to live with friends and given a yearly allowance. This left the Hospital



building empty<sup>10</sup> and the scholars then moved into it from their own old building i.e. The Free School. The first School building was swept away about 1874 and the shops and tenements between nos. 37 and 43 Bruntsfield Place were built there instead. So ended the first chapter in the history of 'our' School.

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Notes:

<sup>1</sup> Wrichtis Housis. This is a photograph of the etching that Mr C. K. Sharpe gave to Mr Daniel Wilson for his book, 'Memorials of Edinburgh in the Olden Time'. There are different ways of spelling this name such as: Wrychtis Housis; Wrichtis Housis; Wryttes House; Wrytes House; Wright's House. The building was also known as Barganie Castle; Boroughmuir Castle; Burntsfield Castle; Bruntsfield Castle.

Daniel Wilson was born at Edinburgh in 1816. When he was young, he and his brother formed an antiquarian museum in their house. His greatest amusement, when he was on holiday, was exploring Edinburgh. On leaving High School he was employed by Mr William Miller and became a very good engraver himself. He later set up a business, in Hanover Street, as a print-seller and artist's colourman. Many distinguished visitors came to his shop and here he met Mr Charles Kirkpatrick Sharpe. Both were very interested in art and antiquities. Sharpe was an older man than Wilson and he told him many things about Edinburgh. Wilson wrote many books including his 'Memorials of Edinburgh in the Olden Time' for which he made many sketches of old buildings, wynds and closes. He went to Canada in 1853 as a Professor at Toronto University. He was knighted in 1888 and came home to Edinburgh to receive the Freedom of the City. He died in Canada in 1892.

Mr Charles Kirkpatrick Sharpe was born at Hoddam Castle, Dumfriesshire, in 1781. He came to live in Edinburgh in 1813 and, for nearly forty years, he was one of the most notable persons in the city. He was a writer, a sketcher and a collector of pictures, drawings and china. He also had a wonderful museum of curiosities at his home, at 28 Drummond Place. He was a friend of Sir Walter Scott and Sir Daniel Wilson, the antiquarian. He also wrote a book on witchcraft in Scotland. Charles Sharpe was a strange man who had a high, squeaky voice, and one of his eccentricities was to have a visiting card printed thus:



<sup>2</sup> Sculptured stone from Wrichtis Housis. According to Wilson's 'Memorials' this is the stone that was 'built over the doorway of James Gillespie's School'

<sup>3</sup> Sculptured stone from Wrichtis Housis. This is the stone that, according to Daniel Wilson was 'placed over the Hospital well'. (There is a unicorn's head at the top right-hand corner of the shield, but it has nothing to do with 'our' unicorn)

In Volume IV of the 'Book of Old Edinburgh Club' (1911) it is stated: 'The two stones mentioned by Wilson as being built over a doorway and well respectively are now placed in the east wall of the Gillespie's school playground under the shadow of the adjoining Bruntsfield Place tenements. This book also gives an explanation of the carvings.

<sup>4</sup> This sketch map shows where the stones are situated.

<sup>5</sup> & <sup>6</sup> These two stones are also relics of Wrichtis Housis which was swept away by the Gillespie Trust. They are built into the wall next to the other two stones. They can all be seen today [1953] by anyone who is interested.

<sup>7</sup> Gillespie's Hospital 1805 (from 1870 Gillespie's School)

<sup>8</sup> This is a photograph of part of an old Ordnance Survey Map which shows the positions of Gillespie's Free School and Gillespie's Hospital. The road on the map is Bruntsfield Place, leading to Tollcross at the top of the map and to Boroughmuirhead at the bottom. The map itself has the following inscription at the foot of it: 'Scale: Five feet to one Statute Mile = 1/1036. Surveyed in 1851 by Captain Gosset, R.E., engraved in 1852 under the direction of Captain Yelland, R.E., at the Ordnance Map Office, Southampton, and published by Col. Hall, R.E., Superintendent, 31<sup>st</sup> March 1852' (Price Two Shillings)

<sup>9</sup> The word 'Hospital' here does not mean a place where people are taken when they are dangerously ill or hurt in an accident. According to the Dictionary it means: 'An institution for the board and education of children of poor or deceased parents; an almshouse; a charitable institution.'

<sup>10</sup> When the Hospital building became the School building, the Merchant Company removed the 'Foulis' oil-painting from the Council-Room in the Hospital to their hall in Hanover Street. They also removed for safety's sake, the marble bust of James Gillespie by Mr Burn.

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