

# History of 'James Gillespie's'

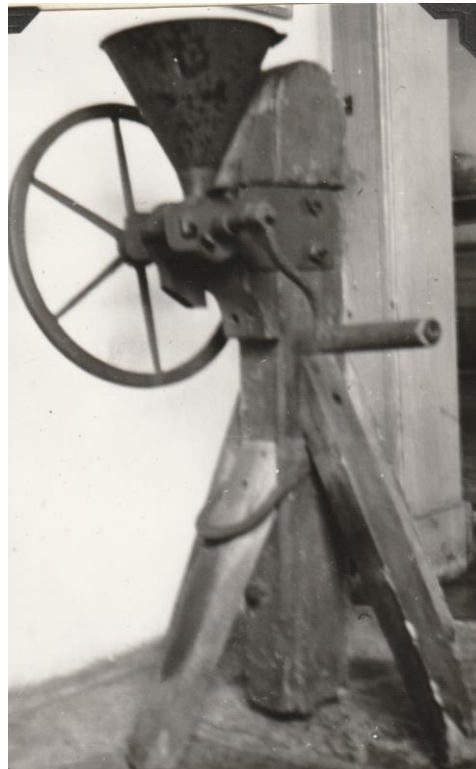
by Elaine J.C. Cochrane, (Form 3.c.) 1953

## Preface

When I first thought of writing this essay, little did I think it would be such a big task and that it would take up nearly the whole of my Easter Holidays and several weekends, too.

The Headmistress told us all that we could obtain some information from the Edinburgh Room, Central Public Library. I, therefore, went there first of all and consulted various books, newspaper articles and cuttings, all of which contained something about James Gillespie and the School. As the Edinburgh Room is a reference library only, I had to return several times to make notes. I also borrowed other books, such as Grant's 'Old and New Edinburgh' and John Kay's 'Original Portraits' from the Morningside Public Library

I decided to be like our late Queen Mary and to see places for myself. During my Easter Holidays I visited many interesting places connected with James Gillespie. I started off by going to the High Street to see where his shop had been at number 231, then to Lady Stair's House, near the Lawnmarket, to see his big snuff-jar; and then to Huntly House, in the Canongate, to see his shop sign and an old snuff-making machine.



Another day I went to Spylaw House where James Gillespie had lived. There were some workmen busy repairing it and they allowed me to go in and look around. The only thing of interest was the place where the water-wheel had been – actually inside the building. I also visited the Parish churchyard at Colinton and saw James Gillespie's tomb.

I knew that 'our' school had once been a Merchant Company School, so arrangements were made for me to visit the Merchant Company Hall in Hanover Street. There I was shown some interesting things, including the oil-painting of James Gillespie by Sir James Foulis (see below), the original 'Burn' bust of 'our' Founder, his Bible, and a portrait of the School's first headmaster, Mr. John Robertson.

My next visit was to Gillespie Crescent where I saw what used to be 'our' old School building. In the wall of the old playground, I also saw the old, sculptured stones which originally came from Wrichtis Housis – the building which had been swept away to make room for the new Hospital.

There were many things, however, that I still wanted to know – such as the place where the first School had been built, in 1803, the date when the first school magazine was issued and the reason why we wear the unicorn's head as our school badge and the date when we began to wear it. Accordingly I went in search of more information from other places, including the Education Department in St Giles Street, the Signet Library and the National Library of Scotland, both in Parliament Square; the office of the Keeper of the Burgh Records, City Chambers and the Court of the Lord Lyon King-of-Arms, H.M. Register House, and I would like to take this opportunity of thanking all the officials for their kind assistance. I also thank my father for making appointments for me at these places and for taking the photographs.

E.C.J.C.

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**Notes:**

1. Snuff jar. The snuff jar used to stand in James Gillespie's shop. It is about three feet high and about two feet across at the widest part. On it there is a very faded picture of two Highland gentlemen exchanging snuff. This jar is now kept in the museum at Lady Stair's House, near the Lawnmarket.
2. Snuff-making machine. There is an interesting story attached to this machine. It was discovered in 1942, by the occupier, Mr Cowan, in the cellar of the shop at 231 High Street – where James Gillespie's shop had been. It looked like a collection of scrap, but the City Architect's Department built it up. Mr Cowan gifted the machine to the City Museum, Huntly House, Canongate.