

# History of 'James Gillespie's'

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

### Chapter Three

#### The Second School (1870-1914)

The new school was opened in September 1870. It was still an Elementary School, but girls were now admitted as well as boys. Instead of being a Free School, however, fees had now to be paid. The new system was popular and parents of 1,700 children, between the ages of five and a half and thirteen and a half, made applications for their children's entry. Only 1,000 boys and girls could be admitted, however, including the boys who had come from the first school.

The new Headmaster was Mr Robert Foulis who in 1876 resigned. His successor was Mr William Wallace Dunlop, M.A. In the year 1882, Mr Dunlop was transferred to Daniel Stewart's as Headmaster and he was succeeded by Mr William Jenkins, M.A.

For the next twenty-six years the school flourished under the Merchant Company, mainly as a preparatory school for the Company's Secondary Schools. On 28th August 1900, a circular was issued from the Scottish Education Department calling on the Scottish Schools to teach Science and Art; and in 1904, a Science Room was added to the school building. The school then became a Higher Grade one and was then known as 'James Gillespie's Primary and Higher Grade Schools'.

About this time a school was being built by the Edinburgh School Board on Bruntsfield Links and on 3rd February 1905 this new school was formally opened as 'Boroughmuir Higher Grade School'. (This fact has to be mentioned here because, as will be seen later, this building was afterwards occupied by 'James Gillespie's'.)

In 1908 larger classrooms were needed at 'Gillespie's', but the Gillespie Trust had not sufficient money so the Merchant Company, very reluctantly, handed over the School to the Edinburgh School Board. This brought to an end the first one hundred and five years of the school's history while under the care of the Merchant Company, who deserve great praise for the work that they did to make the school a success.



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During the next few years various alterations were made to the school such as adding a new top story, a clock tower, and a large hall for infants to the west. Later a new wing was built consisting of a gymnasium with classrooms.



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When the school was taken over by the Edinburgh School Board, the Headmaster, Mr William Jenkins, M.A, was succeeded by Mr Alexander Blacklaws, B.A.

The next interesting event in the history of the School, was the publication of the first School Magazine which was issued in March, 1911 – price 3d.!

In 1913 another new school was being built, in Viewforth, which was to be the new Boroughmuir School, and the School Board intended to transfer 'Gillespie's' to the old Boroughmuir school building in Bruntsfield links. Before this took place, however, the Edinburgh School Board wrote to the Merchant Company about the name of 'James Gillespie's School'. The School Board's minutes give the following information about this correspondence: –

“14/7/’13. Minute of Meeting of Edinburgh School Board James Gillespie's School – Question as to continuance of name. In connection with the transference of James Gillespie's School to the existing Boroughmuir School on the completion of the new premises for the latter school, the clerk was instructed to communicate with the Merchant Company in regard to the continuance of the name of 'James Gillespie's School'.”

“13/11/’13. Minute of Meeting of Edinburgh School Board, James Gillespie's School. Sanction to the continuance of name on transfer of School. Adverting to Minute of Meeting of the Board on 14th July, there was read a letter, dated 19th July, from the Merchant Company consenting to the proposal of the Board to transfer the name of James Gillespie's School to the existing Boroughmuir School, and expressing their satisfaction at the perpetuation in this way of James Gillespie's connection with the school. It was also suggested that a tablet giving a short history of the school might be placed in the hall of Boroughmuir School and, if the suggestion were approved, the Merchant Company would bear the cost thereof. It was unanimously agreed to approve the suggestion.”

“9/3/’14. Minute of Meeting of Edinburgh School Board. James Gillespie's School – Tablet to be placed in new premises. Adverting to Minute of Meeting of the Board on 13 October, there was submitted a draft of the inscription for the tablet to be placed in Boroughmuir (Old) School by the Merchant Company, giving a short history of James Gillespie's School.

The Committee approved of the proposed inscription and remitted it to the Convenor to meet the Master of the Merchant Company and decide as to the position in which the tablet<sup>3</sup> should be placed. They also agreed that the name 'Boroughmuir School' be removed from the front of the building and 'James Gillespie's School' substituted, and that enquiry be made as to where there were any curved stones at the old James Gillespie's School which might be transferred and built into the new premises.”

Nothing seems to have been done about the curved stones because nothing more is mentioned about them in the Minutes; but the stones were there all the same, as will be explained later. (Since the School is celebrating its one hundred and fiftieth year, it might be a good idea to commemorate it by having the

stones – or, at least, the one that used to be over the doorway of the first School building – brought up to ‘our’ school in Bruntsfield Links.)

The following year (1914) the scholars and staff of ‘James Gillespie’s’ removed from Gillespie Crescent to their new building (actually then nine years’ old) on Bruntsfield Links<sup>4</sup> which Boroughmuir School had just left to go into their new premises at Viewforth.

When war broke out in August, 1914, ‘the Military’ took over the old building in Gillespie Crescent. The war ended in 1918 and after ‘The Military’ had left the old school, it stood empty till 1922 when it was sold to the Royal Blind Asylum who still have it [1953]; and so ends the second chapter in ‘our’ School’s history.

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Notes:

1. Gillespie’s Hospital 1805 (from 1870, ‘Gillespie’s School’)
2. The same building in 1953 (The Royal Blind Asylum)
3. This tablet is fixed to the wall in the Entrance Hall of the School. It is made of oak with the Merchant Company’s coat-of-arms at the top and has the following inscription in gilt letters -  
  
‘This tablet was erected by the Merchant Company of Edinburgh in memory of James Gillespie of Spylaw, Merchant in Edinburgh, who bequeathed to the Company the bulk of his fortune to endow a Hospital and found a School’. The School was opened in 1803 in a building erected at the North-East corner of the Hospital grounds next to the turnpike road, now Bruntsfield Place. In 1870 it was transferred to the Hospital. Here in 1908, it was taken over by the School Board of Edinburgh and, in 1914, the staff and scholars were transferred to this building [on Bruntsfield Links] known as ‘James Gillespie’s School.  
  
This tablet states that the first School was ‘erected at the North-East corner of the Hospital grounds next to the turnpike road – now Bruntsfield Place. This is strange because, according to the maps of 1828<sup>5</sup> and 1952<sup>6</sup>, the School is shown to be at the South-East corner of the Hospital grounds. Also, in a book about the Merchant Company<sup>7</sup> it is stated, ‘A site was found for the Free School also on the main road at the South-East of the property’. I wonder if a mistake has been made in the printing of the wall tablet.
4. In July, 1752, a tailor named James Fyfe obtained from the Town Council a grant of land of which came to be known as ‘Brown’s Acres’ because Fyfe had been acting as a ‘dummy’ for a man named Brown, the Deacon of the Tailors of Edinburgh, so as to obtain a cheap feu. This land later became known as ‘Viewpark’ and, in May, 1876, Sir George Warrender purchased half of the estate for £8,000 and Warrender Park Crescent was built there. The other half of the Viewpark estate was sold to a firm of builders for £10,000 and ‘our’ School was built on that piece of ground.
5. A plan of Edinburgh and Leith at page 228 of Volume 2 of Wilson’s ‘Memorials of Edinburgh in the Olden Time’.
6. This is a photograph of part of an old Ordnance Survey map which shows the position 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 Boroughmuir 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 Yolland, R.E., at the Ordnance Survey Office, Southampton and published by Lt. Col. Hall, R.E., Superintendent, 31<sup>st</sup> March 1852. (Price Two shillings)’.



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7. ‘The Merchant Company and its Schools, 1694-1920’.

