

# History of 'James Gillespie's'

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

### Chapter Five

#### The Third School (1936-1953)

When Mr Burnett retired the post was advertised, and some women's organisations wrote to the newspapers enquiring if it would not be better for a girls' school to have a Headmistress instead of a Headmaster. On 22nd February 1937, Miss M. Andrew, M.A. was appointed Headmistress. She was introduced to the assembled school by Councillor Allan on 1st April, 1937. Miss Andrew had come from 'Morgan Academy', Dundee, and had had distinguished career. The appointment of 'our' first Headmistress marked a new era in the history of the school.

In 1936 it had been proposed to build a new secondary school for girls; and in March, 1939, part of Bruntsfield House grounds, next to Warrender Park Road, was obtained for this purpose. Unfortunately, however, the Second World War broke out, and all the arrangements were upset. On the outbreak of war, the school was used as an Evacuation Centre, and was later a Rest Centre. Because of lack of space, some parts of the school occupied the Barclay Church Halls, a dwelling-house in Alvanley Terrace and part of Bruntsfield School. 'We' had to overcome many difficulties during the war and were always cramped for room and space. This became worse towards the end of the war when 'we' had to leave Alvanley Terrace and the Barclay Church Halls which the owners wanted to re-occupy. Accordingly, part of Bruntsfield House was altered to take in the Preparatory Department which moved in, in November 1945. On Commemoration Day, the same year, 'our' School Song 'Fidelis et Fortis' was sung for the first time<sup>1</sup>.



At the end of the war, a new Education Act was passed and by this Act, the school leaving age was to be raised from 14 to 15 years of age<sup>3</sup>. Once again there was the difficulty of lack of accommodation and in 1947 plans were made to build prefabricated huts in the grounds of Bruntsfield House. In 1948 the huts were completed and in February of that year the Primary Department (part of which had been in Bruntsfield School, since the time of the war), moved into them. The new huts consisted of three parallel blocks of

classrooms with a dining-hall and staff rooms etc. The classrooms face the south and are situated in pleasant surroundings amidst the trees in the grounds of Bruntsfield House.



In 1950 a memorable day was Arbor Day – 30th April – when representatives of the various Forms planted flowering trees along the path adjoining the school. Another notable day was 10th May when ‘our’ school was chosen to have on loan a collection of pictures from the Scottish National Gallery, for six months at a time, to be hung in the Entrance and Middle Halls.

In the following year Miss Andrew, ‘our’ Headmistress, was awarded a Travelling Scholarship by the English-Speaking Union to enable her to visit the United States of America, which she did in October 1951. This was a great honour to Miss Andrew herself and also to ‘our’ School.

In 1952, the interior of the school was redecorated – walls were painted, woodwork was stripped and polished and various other alterations were made – making ‘our’ school an even more pleasant place in which to work. Outside the building, too, there were changes when the old laurel bushes and shrubbery were taken away and replaced by flower beds, beside the Annex.

So now we reach the present day [1953] and ‘our’ 150th anniversary. The school is flourishing greatly. As always, there is not enough room for all the children who would like to enrol even though the school is much bigger now. The little Free Elementary School for Boys has grown into such a great High School for Girls that its Founder would be astonished if he could see it today. The School has an excellent record and much of it is due to its teaching-staff, a number of whom are themselves former ‘Gillespie’ pupils.

The School has also been fortunate in its ‘Heads’ and ‘our’ Headmistress has done much to make the School what it is today. She has carried on the ‘Gillespie’ tradition and has also set her own high standards of work and conduct. As long as the School has good leaders, then it will continue to prosper in the future. It will always be true to its motto, ‘Fidelis et Fortis’.

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Notes:

1. The tune was composed by Mr J.D. Macrae, who was then ‘our’ Music Master and the words by Mrs King Gillies. ‘We’ sing this song at every Closing Concert and Commemoration Day.

2. The Main Entrance of Bruntsfield House. The earliest records show that the lands of Bruntsfield, before 1381, had been held by a man named Richard Browne. These lands came to be known as ‘Browne’s field’ or ‘Broune’s field’. This was gradually altered to ‘Brountsfield’ or ‘Bruntsfield’ as it is called today. After Richard Browne, the estate passed to the Lauder family who held it until 1603. After that it had a new owner, a man named John Fairlie. His wife’s name was Elizabeth Westoun, and above some of the windows in Bruntsfield house, there is a monogram of his initials and his wife’s - I.F. and E.W. intertwined – and the date 1605. Many people think that the ‘W’ here stands for Warrender but that is not so, because the Warrender family did not hold the estate until 1695. In that year it was bought by George Warrender who was afterwards Lord Provost of Edinburgh. In 1946 the house was sold to the Edinburgh Corporation. In the early morning of 14<sup>th</sup> April this year [1953] fire broke out and the top flat of the house was completely destroyed.

3. The school leaving age was raised on 1st April, 1947.

4. Prefabricated classrooms in the grounds of Bruntsfield House.