

Trades House Craftsman Magazine

The Trades House Education Legacy

The Trades House has a long tradition of educating the children of Burgesses of Craft Rank and we find as far back as 1649 discussions concerning the setting up of a School and Schoolmaster for instructing the poor children whose parents were not able to pay for their education. In November 1649 John Paterson was elected to be school master. We are unsure if the School was in the Alms House or elsewhere as in 1652 there is a comment that in the minutes that the School was at the Wyndehead.

In addition to educating the children, in June 1652 the Trades House proposed an act whereby they decided to fund poor boys, born in the city, apprenticeships. The Deacons met with their Crafts and agreed this would be a good and pious thing to do and agreed to support it.

In 1806 that the House elected a chaplain called Mr John Ritchie, who managed to secure the position by one vote, and it was he who would later be the Teacher of the Trades Free School.

It was not until September 1807 that the Committee appointed to examine the practicality of setting up a school presented their extensive report and the principles in the report were adhered to from then onwards.

By September 1808 the new School Room at the rear of the Trades Hall was complete and the first batch of 27 pupils were received until it reached a maximum of 108 boys, no girls were admitted until 1839 and then only 54 girls were admitted.

In 1841, the House decided that the School was costing too much and looked at ways of reducing its costs and in 1843 decided to increase the number of girls to 108 to match that of the boys. This had been a long sought after improvement and as far back as 1814, attempts had been made to give girls access to the School.



In October 1844, Mr Thomas Struthers was appointed Principal Teacher at a salary of £120 a year. Mr Struthers was to cause some consternation in the House when he argued that his proper title should be Head Master, the House disagreed and he was to retain the title given until his retirement in 1866 after 22 years connection with the School.

The new Principal Teacher resigned amidst some controversy in 1868 and 135 candidates applied for the position of Principal Teacher when it was advertised.

The School had not finished with controversy as Mr David Laugland, who had been a Teacher of number six Nursery, Kilmarnock, was let go with hints of inappropriate behaviour in the minutes. Sadly no records exists at present which indicates what his offence was, but clearly the Directors of the School had the children's welfare at the heart of their concerns.