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THE BOOK OF THE  
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TWENTY-EIGHTH VOLUME



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## THE MINUTES OF THE TRADES MAIDEN HOSPITAL

By

Rev. Edwin S. Towill, B.D., B.Ed., F.S.A.Scot.

THE Trades Maiden Hospital, or more correctly 'The Maiden Hospital founded by the Craftsmen of Edinburgh and Mary Erskine,' is comparatively unknown to our citizens, or is confused with its sister institution the Merchant Maiden Hospital, which has become the Mary Erskine School. Yet for two hundred and fifty years the institution of this name has continued in the midst of our city to fulfil the original terms of its benefaction by maintaining and educating daughters of the citizens. That today it remains, with John Watson's School, as the last of the old hospitals to survive changing conditions, would alone give its records a certain importance, but they are valuable also in that they provide a firsthand picture of life in a Scottish charity school in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, and at the same time show something of the decline from power of that interesting institution, the Convenery of Trades.

The Trades Maiden Hospital was one of the earliest of the hospital or charity schools which formed a distinctive feature of education in the eighteenth century both in England and Scotland. In the former country the movement gave rise to such famous institutions as the Blue Coat School; in our own land it has left us the great merchant schools and similar endowed seats of higher education.

The Reformation struck grievously at Scottish education, as much of the patrimony of the ancient Church which had been earmarked for educational endowment disappeared into the pockets of a rapacious nobility. When the reformers attempted to lay the foundations of a new educational system



in the Book of Discipline, the Privy Council refused it the sanction of law, and many of its provisions remained unrealised until last century. In the landward parishes elementary education was fairly well provided for, but the towns suffered most, as, with the increase of population, the burgh grammar school and the few parish schools were quite inadequate for the needs of the children. Not until the nineteenth century was the State ready to accept responsibility for education, and into this gap of some three hundred years stepped a remarkable group of private benefactors whose generosity provided schooling for a large group of poorer children.

In 1623 the George Heriot endowment set an example for benefactors whose names are remembered in our schools today—Mary Erskine, George Watson, James Gillespie, Jean Cauvin, John Watson, James Donaldson, William Fettes and Daniel Stewart. It is significant that, with the exception of the French teacher Cauvin, all these were of the wealthy burgh class which since the Reformation was all-powerful in civic life; significant also that their bequests were for the children of 'decayed or deceased burgesses,' guild freemen of the city. They were in no way charity schools in the later sense of that word as schools for the 'depressed poor.'<sup>1</sup> It should also be noted that these were all 'hospital schools,' boarding and clothing the pupils as well as providing education. Indeed, the terms of some of the bequests indicate that the idea of education was secondary to the provision of home and maintenance. As time passed, however, and the educational standard in the hospital schools was raised, and as, for girls, education elsewhere was expensive and limited in scope, the demand for admittance came from those to whom maintenance was not the major necessity. The social status of the hospitals tended to rise until, during last century, there was a move to

<sup>1</sup> Anderson, *Hist. Edin.*, 1847, quotes Dr. Guthrie as saying that if he had his way he would turn every hospital in Edinburgh into a Ragged School.

change the name from The Trades Maiden Hospital to 'Rillbank Institution for Young Ladies.'

### THE FOUNDATION OF THE HOSPITAL

The Trades Maiden Hospital owed its existence to the rivalry between the merchants and the trades or craftsmen of the city. The story of the growth and decline of these bodies has been told elsewhere. In 1661 the merchants, particularly the cloth merchants, consolidated their position against the rising power of the various trades by securing a charter for the Company of Merchants of Edinburgh. Membership dues of the company were set aside, as was customary, for charitable purposes, and the new body assumed as one of its duties the supervision of charity for its members.

Thirteen years after its foundation the Merchant Company was called upon to undertake the administration of one of its largest benefactions when notification was made that one Mary Erskine, relict of James Hair, druggist in the High Street, had mortified 10,000 merks, to be administered by them 'for the maintenance of burgess children of the female sex.' They appealed for public subscriptions to augment the bequest through 'the fund for the lasses,' and within three years opened 'The Maiden Hospital, founded by the Merchants of Edinburgh and Mary Erskine.'<sup>1</sup>

The foundation by their rivals of this female counterpart to Heriot's stirred the Incorporated Trades to action. By the year 1704 they had gathered funds, obtained Town Council support, purchased a suitable house and opened their

<sup>1</sup> At first situated in Bristo, just outside the Port, the Merchant Maidens later moved to the handsome classical building which stood at the foot of Archibald Place. When the Infirmary was built on the site of George Watson's Hospital, the boys moved into this building and the girls moved again to the Hopetoun Rooms at the West end of Queen Street, where they remain today under the title of the Mary Erskine School.



own hospital school.<sup>1</sup> Three years later, before the dissolution of the last Scottish Parliament, both the new schools were regularised by Acts laying down suitable constitutions.

After this Act had been passed, Mary Erskine, who had assisted the merchants so liberally with their school, came forward and donated such a large sum to the Trades Maidens that she was given the title of co-foundress, and it was decreed that in perpetuity two governors should be chosen from the family of Erskine—a connection which, in the person of the Earl of Mar and his representatives, has been maintained until this day. Thus arose the strange situation of two different girls' schools, with almost identical titles, both looking to Mary Erskine as foundress.

The rights of presentation to the hospital were in the hands of the various Incorporated Trades, each of which paid a levy towards the funds, and of the Society of Surgeons which from the first had associated itself with the Trades in this matter. Preference in presentation had to be given to daughters or granddaughters of guild burgesses. In addition, certain private benefactors, as well as Mary Erskine and her successors, were given presentations and could present any girl who was 'an object of charity.' The hospital was to be administered by a board of governors consisting of the deacons of the various incorporated trades, two members of the Erskine family and certain others, with the Deacon Convener as preses.

The matron or governess was appointed for life, or until marriage, to 'take care that scholars and servants be brought up in the fear of God.' She was to 'catechise the scholars in the principles of the Christian reformed religion and to correct them for faults when occasion requires.' She had to renew annually an oath of loyalty to the governors. Under her direction a schoolmistress was 'to teach the children to read,

<sup>1</sup> Maitland gives 1701 as the date of the first suggestion to endow a hospital for girls. The relevant minute of Town Council is May 3rd, 1704.

work stockings, lace, coloured and white seams, spinning, carding, washing and dressing of linens, dressing of meat, cleaning of house and all sorts of needlework and other ordinary household thrift, and, if she can, to teach also writing, arithmetic and the common parts of vocal music.' Perhaps they doubted if such a versatile lady could be obtained for 'if she cannot do all this they will provide an honest man for some part of the day.' Serving women completed the staff, although much of the work was done by the girls as part of their training.

The school was at first housed in a building on the west side of the Horse Wynd, a narrow vennel running from the Potterrow Port to the Cowgate. Maitland suggests that this was an existing building which had been purchased by the Convent for this purpose. The Act of 1707 envisages the building of a new house on the same site. Colston states, without giving authorities, that 'the building was erected about the year 1740,' but a minute of 1840 records 'the present house is now 136 years old.' The first extant minute (1739) mentions 'the new building,' and certain masonry and joinery accounts are passed by the board about that date.

The west gable of this building, whether new or merely restored from an older fabric, formed the east side of the newly formed Argyle Square, its east gable was facing the old Horse Wynd.<sup>1</sup> The building, with the whole square and wynd, was cleared to make way for Chambers Street and the Museum.

Unfortunately the minute books before 1739 are missing. The book now marked 'one' begins with the governors' prayer, which was used at all meetings, and then follows the first minute, headed

'Maiden Hospital, 5th January 1739, being the Anniversary meeting

<sup>1</sup> Reid's plan of the new South approaches clearly marks the hospital, and Hamilton and Burn's plan shows its proposed demolition—both plans are in O.E.C. volume 18. Grant gives a good woodcut of the old hospital, and Colston a passable sketch. Ogilvy's painting of the hospital and grounds hangs in Ashfield.



of the Governours and Donators of said hospitall appointed by the Statute.<sup>1</sup>

William Mitchell was convener, and the provost was among those present. The entry continues:

'The which day the Treasurer and Clerk reported to the Governours and Donators present that agreeable to an Act of their last sederunt, they had received from Mr. Broun their late clerk's mother, all the Bookes and papers belonging to the Hospitall which she could lay her hand upon at that time, and that she had promised to deliver to them any other that should afterwards be found.'

Later in the same year:

'Robert Campbell, merchant, delivered the principall and originall copy of the Statutes of the Hospitall which had been wanting for a long time, and that none of the Governours knew where the samen was.'

This would indicate that upon their entry into the new building the governors were making an effort to collect the records of the previous forty years. Probably they never recovered the earlier minute book, and as the Conventory minutes of the same period are missing, our record of these interesting years is slight.<sup>1</sup>

From this date, however, there is an unbroken record of governors' meetings and of committees from which the material for this paper has been extracted. It has not been our purpose to study these minutes for the information they contain on various modifications to the original constitution—which would be of interest only to the governing body—nor to record the various purchases and sales of land—although much of the history of Bruntsfield district and the Union Canal lie hidden in them—nor have we read them for the interesting light they throw on the decline from power

<sup>1</sup> Also missing are the old chest with its deeds and documents and the original benefaction boards, also all the matron's record books which would have thrown more intimate light on daily life in the school.

of the Incorporated Trades. Rather have we sought from them some light on the administration of, and the life within, a girls' charity school over the last two and a half centuries.

These books give a new sense of values to the historian who opens them; there is no mention here of the golden or the silver age of Modern Athens; Ramsay, Mackenzie, Jeffrey, Cockburn, Brougham, even the great Dundas are never mentioned. Wars go by unnoticed—the only reference to the '45 is as 'the late disturbance in this city' which had interfered with the governors' meetings. But here at first hand is the simple story of girlhood told against the background of developing civilisation and changing years.

It will be convenient to divide our study of the minutes into three sections corresponding to the periods of occupation of Argyle Square, Rillbank House and Ashfield.

#### ARGYLE SQUARE: 1739-1855

We have already quoted from the first extant minute of the governors' meeting. Thereafter there is a note of a meeting of The Committee of Nine, which has throughout the history of the hospital acted as a convener's or executive committee. For some years it met in the old Goldsmith's Hall, while the governors met within the hospital itself. They were summoned to meetings by the officer of the hospital, and were fined for non-attendance. They annually reappointed the matron and schoolmistress, discharged the treasurer of his accounts and set up visiting panels, whose duties were laid down in a prescribed formula which is repeated year by year in the minutes.

Only once during the school's history was there a suggestion that lady visitors might be co-opted, but the deacons felt themselves qualified to superintend the details of running a girls' school, down to the selection of 'new stayes'—an event which occurred only once in several years. In more



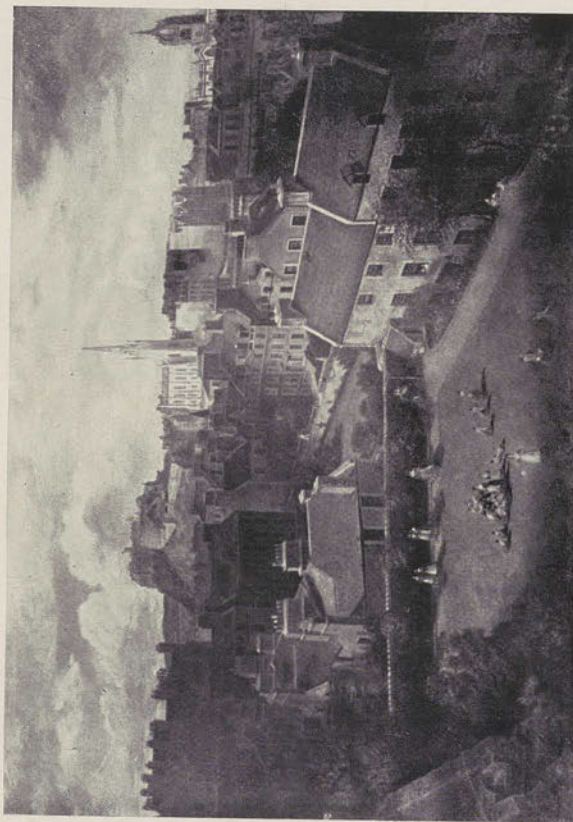
weighty matters they showed diligence, seeking for land in which to invest their capital. In 1742 they entered into negotiations with James Hamilton for the purchase of the estates of Wrightshouses, thus beginning a connection with the Bruntfield district which has lasted until today; it is said that at one time the girls were popularly known in the city as the 'lasses of Wrightshouses.' This land included the sites of the future canal and rubber works.

The Convenery early entrusted the Blue Blanket to the custody of the hospital, and in 1743 there is a record of money accruing to the school from a fine imposed some twenty years earlier on Deacon Brounhill for 'a foolish attempt to carry off the blue blanket from the convener.' In 1755 there is mention of the old custom of the magistrates wearing velvet coats. These had been replaced by a gold chain and medal, and the sum given annually to the Deacon Convener for the purchase of his coat was commuted for a payment of £30 which was passed on to the hospital.

#### *Education.*

Apart from the appointment of the schoolmistress and suitable visiting teachers (often young men proceeding to the ministry), there is little mention in early minutes of the actual education of the girls. The curriculum consisted of reading, spelling, English, writing, arithmetic and music—which probably meant little more than that after eleven years' study<sup>1</sup> the girls left the hospital reasonably literate. A great deal of their time was devoted to helping in the house, sewing, mending and what would be called today 'vocational training' as preparation for domestic duties as wives or maids. The early matrons and schoolmistresses do not seem to have been possessed of broad culture or great educational ability, and teaching methods were primitive and wasteful of time.

<sup>1</sup> Under the original statute girls were admitted between the ages of seven and twelve and remained until eighteen. The age of leaving was later lowered by a year.



Photo

THE TRADES MAIDEN HOSPITAL, CIRCA 1854

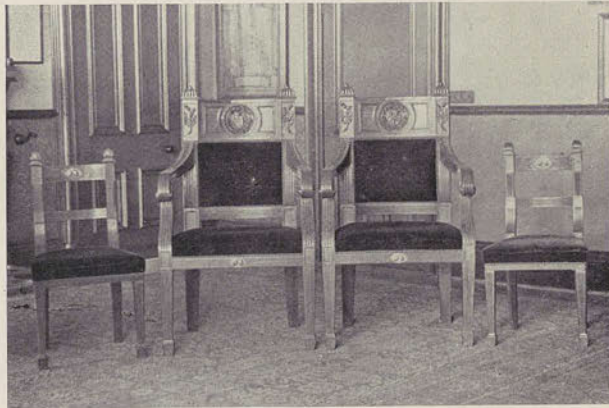
E. S. Tourill

From the painting by James Ogilvy now hanging in the Board Room at Ashfield (see p. 30). Probably painted from the window of a tenement adjoining the present W. College Street; a fragment of the Flodden Wall is seen on the left; the garden at the rear of the hospital occupies the foreground, while behind it are the houses and gardens of Argyle Square.





Wooden plaques with the arms of the  
Wrights and Masons (above), and of  
the Hammermen of Canongate (right)  
(see page 31)



Part of a set of nine chairs of Mary's Chapel, the two large chairs for the deacons  
of the Wrights and of the Masons. Now in the Board Room at Ashfield

In 1762 the governors had a meeting with the girls at which several of the latter read and sang. It was resolved that this should be held annually, and from it sprang both the yearly examination by the governors, which lasted into the latter part of last century, and the annual party, which still continues today. Next year, however, the governors found the standard of English deficient, and ordered that for reading the school should be divided into three classes—the first to study words of one syllable, the second words of two syllables and easy pieces from the New Testament, and the third to read words up to seven syllables.

In 1743 they decided to teach more girls to spin and purchased wheels and accessories; in 1769 they decided to teach lacemaking 'as this was extremely fashionable and would provide an occupation for the girls on leaving, as they were finding difficulty in getting employment.' Only later did the hospital, like similar institutions, become a training ground for prospective governesses; in these early days the object was to send them out to some trade, including probably a fair percentage into service.

In the English charity schools less was thought of education than of the profit which would come to the school from the sale of needlework and other crafts, and while this never became customary in Scottish schools there is at least a suggestion of it in a minute of 1780, when the governess was reprimanded by the governors because the work done by the girls brought in eight pounds less than in the previous year. Ten years later we find the governors recommending that hairdressing be taught, as some of the girls leave to become ladies' maids and need proficiency in this art. In 1793 the teaching of samplers was discontinued, as it was taking too much time from other subjects. Hairdressing was not a success, or fashions were changing, for next year the hairdresser was paid off and mantua and staymaking were proposed in its place. In 1784 they instructed the governess that



'at all times when her health will permit she attend the fleshmarket herself in order to purchase butcher meat for the use of the hospital on the best terms she can, and that she will carry some of the older girls with her in order to instruct them in that useful branch of their education.'

From the beginning of the nineteenth century we note that the governors begin to take a much greater interest in the girls' education. They were affected by the growing popularity of the Lancastrian system<sup>1</sup> and in 1807 recommended that the older girls might teach the younger and so save the cost of a second schoolmistress.<sup>2</sup> At the same time they made a thorough revision of the curriculum, insisting on a better grading of the subjects already taught, *viz.* writing, arithmetic, geography and English language and grammar, and suggesting that it might be widened by the inclusion of French (which took place in 1826) and music (which had dropped out and was reintroduced in 1813). In 1816 dancing was introduced and a new floor laid in the schoolroom to make this possible; Madame Rossignoli, who also taught the Merchant Maidens, became the first visiting teacher of this subject. They considered that their present governess was not qualified to put this curriculum into effect, and advertised for a new one.

At the same time an effort was made to improve the religious instruction within the hospital. It had been their practice to appoint a chaplain, who might be one of the city ministers or a divinity student. They now suggested that 'Mr. Porteous, the chaplain, did not have the talent of communicating religious instruction to the children in such a way as to impress it on their minds.'

<sup>1</sup> The Quaker Joseph Lancaster developed a monitorial system by which a large number of children could be taught by a small number of teachers. There were several such schools in Edinburgh; Cockburn mentions one on the slopes of the Calton Hill, while Rector Pillans introduced a modification of the system into the High School.

<sup>2</sup> In 1762 they had made an experiment in this line by appointing Elizabeth Dick, one of the older girls, to assist in teaching.

While enquiry was being made Mr. Porteous passed to a sphere beyond the problems of imparting scripture to a maiden hospital, and the governors debated whether it would not be better to combine the offices of chaplain and teacher so that 'they might secure the highest talent, which they did not consider they had in the past been able to obtain.' Enquiry was made of John Woods (the famous educationist of the Sessional School) but as he had no names to suggest they continued their present teacher with the Rev. Dr. Gairdner as chaplain.

The governors took this opportunity to lay down more definite instructions not only about religious instruction but about the whole time-table, which we now see (1832) for the first time:

- 7-8 a.m. At the first hour in the morning the chaplain is to conduct family worship, every person in the house to attend, and afterwards select portions of scripture are to be read under the direction of the chaplain.
- 8-9 Sewing.
- 9-10 Breakfast and recreation.
- 10-12 Writing and arithmetic.
- 12-2 p.m. Sewing, dancing, instrumental music and composition.
- 2-3 Dinner and recreation.
- 3-5 English, reading, grammar, geography and history.
- 5-6 Recreation.
- 6-7 Preparing lessons for next day.
- 7-8 Supper and recreation.
- 8 p.m. Family worship conducted by the chaplain.

For the older girls more advanced composition and the keeping of accounts is recommended, with extra lessons for those intending to become governesses. It was customary for one girl to read aloud during the long periods of sewing, and as some of the books selected were considered unseemly, it was decided that the readings should be censored by the chaplain. It was also suggested that the tedium of sewing might be relieved by singing, and that, when finances per-



mitted, book-keeping and French might be introduced—the latter subject having apparently been started and dropped. Later, occasional lectures in history and chemistry were given. The annual examination by the governors was at the same time revised.

'The 1st division exam. was to consist of English, reading, grammar, orthography, etymology, explanation and composition.

The 2nd division exam. of arithmetic and geography.

The 3rd division exam. of drawing, music and French.'

As early as 1758 a library had been formed in the school, financed partly through the fines levied on the deacons for non-attendance at meetings, and in 1846 books on astronomy were purchased. Then, as now, some subjects tended to become for a brief spell fashionable, and the deacons were not behind in providing instruction in such subjects until after a few years others came to take their place.

Thus, by the middle of the nineteenth century, we find the curriculum established on a broad basis, and the governors increasingly aware of their responsibilities. They are now making provision not so much for future serving girls as for potential governesses—a profession which drew largely upon the hospital schools and which continued to attract many of the girls until the advent of ladies' colleges in the last quarter of the century closed this door.

#### *Discipline.*

In the early minutes considerable space is devoted to questions of discipline. While the constitution gave the matron power 'to correct them for faults when occasion requires,' any major misdemeanour was referred to the governors who could hold over the delinquent the threat of expulsion and loss of benefits. In 1750 they warned one Jean Smith that if she did not behave they would 'expose her to utter misery and ruin.' One of the first minutes records that

'On being informed that severall of the girls in the Hospitall were guilty of gross crimes and misdemeanours, called before them Janet Davidson and having examined her, she acknowledged that she, in company with some others, had broke up the chest of Agnes Simpson, one of the girls in the Hospitall, and took out of it a Bible which she tore; that she also took some of the silks belonging to the Hospitall and used them for her own private advantage, and that this is the third publick fault she had been guilty of and acknowledged. She was reprimanded for the other two with a certification; the committee also called before them Elizabeth Hutton and having examined her, she acknowledged that she broke up a press in the Hospitall, at least that she got a key from one of the other girls with which she opened the press and took four shillings out of it, which she afterwards laid back, being discovered by one of the children, and further acknowledged that she had made use of some of the hospitall's silk for her own private work, and that this is her second fault for which she has been corrected and for which she has been reproved.'

It was resolved that while 'the two girls mentioned in the report deserve to be extruded out of the Hospitall and deprived af all benefit thereof' yet this step would not be taken if they showed good behaviour in the future. When extrusion took place, as it did upon occasions, it was a solemn affair; two years later Agnes Inglis, who had been before the magistrates for theft and reset, confessing that she had stolen shifts, stockings, stays, mutches, aprons and napkins (handkerchiefs), was extruded:

'in consequence quher of the governours, schoolmistress and hail girls and servants being called to appear in presence of the governours, the sentence was read and Robert Wight, officer, by order of the governours, took the said Agnes Inglis by the hand and led her out of the Hospitall. Thereafter the Convener, agreeably to the appointment of the governours, gave most proper and suitable instructions to the girls to beware of all vicious practices and showed them what would be the naturall consequences of these and such like habits.'

While on such occasions the deacons could show severity, they were usually ready afterwards to give the delinquent a second



chance. Upon a petition from the Baxters, whose presentee she was, Agnes was forgiven and received back.

In 1743 two girls who went to Dalkeith without leave and remained out of the hospital all night were ordered

'to stand at the back of the rest of the girls in the hospital during the whole time of dinner, and to be fed with bread and water only for that meal in presence of the Deacons.'

In 1757 a major controversy arose which was to drag on over several years, and in which, strangely enough, church attendance was blamed for indiscipline. It appears that after the foundation of the hospital the girls first attended Lady Yester's Church, but for some years before the trouble arose they occupied a loft in the Greyfriars, opposite to that which was occupied by the Merchant Maidens. When, in 1757, the New Church<sup>1</sup> was opened the girls were transferred there for a limited period to assist in the better singing of the psalms. The board became sharply divided on the wisdom of this move, and Deacon Langlands protested that it was

'unreasonable to do anything they would not put their own children to. Their poverty, instead of using them with more freedom, should engage the governors to be more circumspect and careful to prevent anything that may hurt their characters or prejudice their education. It may have a tendency to raise in them false and foolish ideas of their own importance.'

He went as far as to say that they might as well send them to the stage or 'other musical meetings, which he believed

<sup>1</sup> Which was this church which is always referred to in the minutes only as 'The New Kirk'? Buccleuch Chapel of Ease was opened in this year, and the walk to it via the Potterrow would fit in with the objections that they had to pass through a bad locality. On the other hand, there is a much later mention of a connection with New North, and the present West St. Giles congregation (which continues the rump of the New North which did not leave at the Disruption) would claim an older connection with the Maidens than 1892, at which date they began to attend that church on moving into Ashfield. The Churches attended regularly by the hospital since its inception were Lady Yester's (to some date before 1740); Greyfriars, with spells at the New Kirk, until removal from Argyle Square in 1855; Newington (1860-1892); West St. Giles (1902 to date).

was attempted with the Merchant Maidens.' As a result of his protest the girls were withdrawn and returned to Greyfriars. But the matter was not finished, for the magistrates had prepared a loft for them in the New Church, and asked that they might return there. Deacon Langlands again protested, alleging that the walk to the New Church was having a bad effect on their morals and that it had led to the girls meeting with

'insults and abuses, rude, riotous attacks made on the house, throwing in at the door of wicked lascivious letters and the sending of the City Guard to protect the house.'

Feeling in the controversy was now running high, and Dr. Doig replied for the majority of the governors that

'among forty or fifty girls, many of them in their teens, one may find as many constitutions, of which some may not be severely virtuous.'

They protest that the disturbances have nothing to do with the New Church, and point out that even from Argyle Square to the Greyfriars many dark vennels have to be traversed. They maintain that the situation at the latter place of worship had become impossible, for at a recent service the rivalry between the Merchant and Trades Maidens had become so acute (due apparently to the number of ribbons being worn in their bonnets) that when one hospital sang the other remained silent, and during the sermon they were overheard making remarks about one another's beauty and dress. They conclude that, as 'one hospital, especially of girls, is enough in conscience for one kirk' they will adhere to their resolution to remove them. Thirty-seven years later they asked for their former seats in Old Greyfriars back again.

The locality in which the hospital was situated was not of the best, and the governors were often troubled by the undue attention paid to their maidens by the younger lads of the town. In 1766 both they and the governors of the sister hospital prosecuted sundry trades' lads for gathering about



the doors of the hospitals. Thirteen years later they complained of mischief between Watson's Boys, the Merchant Maidens and their own girls. Again, three town boys came over the dyke at night and the convener of the Watchmakers was ordered to find and prosecute them.

Discipline over the older girls was always difficult, and in 1771 they fixed the upper age limit at 17 instead of 18 in an effort to make control easier. In 1796 several of the older girls sent a letter to the governors complaining of their treatment; unfortunately we do not have the terms of the complaint, but the governors called a special meeting to consider it—and decided to rebuke both girls and staff:

'The governors in the most serious matter deliberated thereupon and were unanimous in considering that the harmony and welfare of the hospital depended upon strict subordination—that those girls who had subscribed the letter to the governors were highly to blame and in consideration whereof it was moved that they should be called in and examined and peremptorily desired by Convener Braidwood . . . to behave and conduct themselves with obedience and respect to those under whose care they were placed and strictly enjoined not upon any account whatever to enter into any combination among themselves, and it was likewise proposed and agreed that Mrs. Howe the governess and Mrs. Rattray the schoolmistress be called in and admonished by the governors, agreeable to the tenth section of the laws—which was done accordingly.'

The following year they received a letter of complaint from Mr. Archibald Young, complaining that his daughter had been ill-treated by Mrs. Howe; as a result of this Mrs. Howe resigned through indisposition and Mrs. Rattray was discharged. Three years later five of the senior girls were expelled for insubordination, and on this occasion they refused to receive them back into the house.

#### *Uniform.*

The distinctive uniforms became so closely associated in the popular mind with their various schools that in England

several of them became known by their colours, the Blue Coat School, the Grey Coat School, etc. The original colour for the Trades Maidens was blue, and law XIV of the statutes reads:

'each at their entry must be decently apparelled, at the sight of the governors and treasurer; and when that apparel is worn, their apparel afterwards is to be all of one piece, without distinction of persons, and as plain as may be, and all of one colour, and with such mark as the governors shall appoint; but when they go out of the hospital at 18 years of age, they are to be clad in new apparel, distinct from what they did wear in the hospital.'

In 1743 the governors drew up 'Rules for the Establishment of Cloathing,' which ordained:

1. That each girl be allowed a new gown of orkney stuff every year and a pair of new stayes every two years, the choice of the colour of the gown to be left to the governors.

2. That each girl be furnished with four petticoats in four years, viz. a miln'd (?) sarge petticoat and a pleaden petticoat once in the two years, and that each girl be provided with five shirts (shifts ?) in two years, viz. two the one year and three the next year and alternately in time coming.

3. That each girl be provided with three coarse linen mutches each year and with two finer for Sabbath days each two years.

4. That each girl be allowed two white aprons each two years and a Bengal apron each year which is afterwards to be turned into pocket napkins.

5. That each girl be provided with two white napkins each two years and with one coloured napkin each year.

6. That each girl be furnished with two pair of stockings and three pair of shoes each year, and likewise with a pair of gloves each year.

7. That cloaks of blue cloth be provided for the girls, their wearing on Sundays, which cloaks shall be the property of no particular girl but shall be given out to the children by the governess as she shall see fit.'

If a girl died her clothing was not to be removed by the relatives but retained for the use of others, an extremely dangerous practice in view of the number of deaths from



what would now be considered infectious or contagious diseases.

The distinctive hospital dress was not popular with the girls, and there are continual complaints that the uniform regulations are not being observed. When this matter is raised in 1771 the Skinners and Furriers rather illogically blame the influence of the New Church. Seven years later there is a regulation that the girls must keep their clothes properly mended, and the older girls get black silk handkerchiefs and the younger ones bibs. On Heriot's Day each girl was given a new set of ribbons. In 1790, as the result of a complaint that the better-off parents were providing a more expensive type of headdress, it was ordained that all girls should wear 'a round beaver hatte,' with no additional ribbons. The governors inspected patterns of hats from the Bonnetmakers, and ordered a model at six shillings, with threepence 'King's Duty,' Deacon Thomas Tibbetts to make one for each girl.

Much of the clothing was made by the staff and girls from materials purchased, and the account books give some indication of the change in the purchasing power of money then and now. The shoes were supplied by a contract which included repairing.

#### *Health and Hygiene.*

The minutes furnish many indications of the simplicity of city life in the eighteenth century; many public facilities which are now necessities for the private dwelling, and more so for a public institution, were scanty or non-existent.

In 1742 the Treasurer acquainted the governors

'that there was no cistern in the Hospital for holding any quantity of fresh water, which was a great inconvenience and occasioned the family to be frequently straitened for water, especially when there was a scarcity of it, which would in a great measure be prevented by a proper cistern or reservoir . . . they appointed the Treasurer to

provide a sufficient cistern and charge the price thereof to the yearly accounts.'

In 1774 a sick room was first established. In 1798 there is the first mention of a water closet. Gas was first introduced in 1833.

As a result of the primitive conditions and the lack of facilities for isolation, epidemics were frequent. In 1741 it was reported that there were 'not enough beds to separate the sick from the whole,' and the practice of sleeping two or three to a bed continued until the end of the nineteenth century. In November 1831 cholera broke out in the city, and there was a suggestion that if it became epidemic the children might be housed in the Merchant Maiden Hospital and their house given for the sick. The hospital doctor stated that if this were done he could not say when it would be safe to reoccupy it, and the request was refused, while the committee were given powers to isolate the girls if necessary. 1836 saw a serious outbreak of scarlet fever, and the next year one of typhus. In 1851 fever resulted in the death of one girl.

These are but a few of several references to the epidemics which took their toll of city life, and the hospital, being situated within the closely built-up area of the old town, could not hope to escape. The consequences would probably have been even more serious had not the governors from the earliest times provided a hospital doctor, an office which was occupied by a succession of conscientious physicians, such as the three Doctor Woods, father, son and grandson, who between them held this post for exactly one hundred years (1781-1881).

The doctor had control over the girls' diet, concerning which there were frequent complaints. In 1795 the governors made a thorough investigation into diet and cleanliness, and resolved to purchase knives, forks and tin dishes for the girls' use; pewter utensils gave place to stoneware in 1831.



In 1829 the *Caledonian Mercury* published a letter which made serious allegations against the governors for the treatment and general health of the girls.<sup>1</sup> Deacon Wood called the attention of the board to the statements made and the Committee of Nine were called upon to report. After going into the matter this committee reports that the statements can only have been made from ignorance, prejudice or malice. They have enquired of former staff and pupils, who have affirmed that conditions were good, and they note

'the kindly, affectionate and judicious treatment which the young and interesting community under their charge receive. . . . The hours of employment and recreation seem well allotted both to advance the purposes of education and to preserve the health of the pupils, and no restraints are experienced which with due regard to the safety and morals of the young people could well be avoided. . . . instead of the harsh treatment and severe punishment by strict confinement which has been so wantonly and unfoundedly alleged, the most severe punishment inflicted has been the privation of a holiday, and even then the offenders have been permitted to see their friends at the hospital or to amuse themselves . . . in full liberty within the house or in the playground . . . past pupils retain a vivid and grateful recollection of the happiness and contentment which in common with their companions they enjoyed while inmates of the institution.'

One charge had been that of high mortality, and to this the governors replied that while numbers varied in different years, there had been only nineteen deaths in the last twenty-nine years, four of which occurred in one year, and during ten years there were no deaths. The fact that they could look with complacency on this death rate in a hospital of

<sup>1</sup> The letter, signed 'Humanitas,' called attention to lack of exercise—'not allowed more than an hour daily for air and exercise and that in the confined and small plot at the back of the building. They are kept in the school locked in for hours together at their tasks in a small compartment. The slightest fault is punished by close confinement, and indeed they are treated more like the inmates of a house of correction.' The letter suggests that deaths are too numerous. Constructively, it suggests more exercise, backs to the school forms, and a married matron. (*Caledonian Mercury*, Nov. 30, 1829.)

less than fifty girls gives some indication of the lower expectation of life a hundred and twenty years ago.<sup>1</sup>

While the governors had made what they considered a sufficient reply to the public allegations, five years later they were shaken from their apathy when a girl, Elizabeth Mac-Lauchlan, died under distressing circumstances in a dormitory. Not only was the room completely unventilated, but there was no means of communication with the staff after the girls had been locked in for the night, and the cries for help had gone unheeded. It was resolved that ventilators be fitted and that spar doors might be placed in such a position near the head of the stairs that the matron's and school-mistress's rooms would be included. In the end they found it more economical to fit a system of bells between the dormitories and the staff rooms.

At the same time they recommended more open-air exercise. When walks on the Meadows were suggested there was some opposition and the matter was delayed. Five years later the suggestion was brought up again on a motion that the girls might be allowed to walk out on two days of the week, but in the meantime the inmates had to be content with the limited playground of the hospital.<sup>2</sup> The truth was that, in spite of the comparative spaciousness of Argyle Square, the old wynds which surrounded the hospital provided no healthy environment for a boarding school, and as Heriot's occupied almost the only open and high ground within the city walls, the time was ripe for removal to one of the suburbs.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> In 1789 the governors complained that too much money was being spent on funeral expenses for girls who died while inmates of the hospital. In the nineteenth century the hospital received, as benefactions, lairs for burial in both Newington (Preston St.) and St. Cuthbert's burying grounds.

<sup>2</sup> In 1826 the governors agreed to procure proper bathing quarters at the seaside for such girls as require sea bathing, but there is no indication as to whether this was ever carried out. In 1831 backs were first fitted to the forms.

<sup>3</sup> A minute of 1744 deals with special provision for girls who leave the hospital blind, maimed or disabled, and there are several very sad cases specifically mentioned.



*Staffing.*

Many of the governors' problems were concerned with staffing difficulties. Many of the early matrons gave long and satisfactory service, even if they were not culturally fitted to provide education of any very high standard, but occasionally there were lapses on the part of matron or schoolmistress, and often disputes between them which were reflected in the general discipline.<sup>1</sup>

Complaints of ill-treatment by the matron were sometimes received, but seldom were the allegations specific enough for action to be taken. In 1774 Janet Spence complained that her daughter, Blair Spence, had met with 'ill-treatment in sundry particulars,' but the accusation was dismissed as ill-founded. We have already referred to the girls' own letter of protest in 1790 and the complaint of Mr. Young in 1797. In 1807 it was reported that Mrs. Cowden, the governess, and Mrs. Blair, one of the schoolmistresses, could not agree. The Committee of Nine reported that they had met, and in presence of the girls had read the hospital rules, but immediately they had left the building Mrs. Blair attacked Mrs. Cowden in front of the girls. When they again called the two persons before them

'a conversation took place between the ladies which was neither very honourable to themselves nor respectful to the committee.'<sup>2</sup>

Sometimes it was the visiting teachers who proved troublesome. The original constitution had given powers to the governors to employ visiting teachers, and as the curriculum widened it became necessary to make increasing use of such supplementary staff. In 1843 they made inquiries

<sup>1</sup> The terms matron and governess are synonymous, while schoolmistress is used for the subordinate upon whom most of the actual teaching devolved.

<sup>2</sup> They decided that the governess was not qualified to put into operation the new curriculum which they drew up at this date, and looked for a better fitted person. The following year Mrs. Cowden became insane while still in the hospital.

into the conduct of Mr. Arthur, chaplain and visiting teacher. The Committee of Nine reported

'that his impudence did not extend beyond kissing several of the girls. But upon the whole he appeared to be deficient in that dignity and decorum becoming a teacher. . . . The effect of his presence upon the girls caused giddiness and levity.'

As a result, Mr. Arthur resigned. The following year the French teacher, Mons. Guession, left suddenly without fulfilling the period for which he had received his salary. The governors endeavoured to trace him, but had to let the matter drop when they discovered that he had left Peterhead on a whaling vessel.

In 1836 the governors note with some surprise that the matron's account books contain items of spirits, porter, ale and wine, against which some protest as objectionable and out of character with the aims of the hospital; they suggest that tea should be provided at the expense of the hospital. The fault here would appear to be that the matron was not moving with the times, for tea had not been the regular drink of her predecessors, and in 1778 it had been agreed that the hospital beer, in which presumably girls and matron shared, should be bottled.<sup>1</sup> Tea apparently did not agree with her, for the following year the same items reappear and the matron leaves the hospital, perhaps to seek an institution where the old habits survived and the old beverages could be consumed without interference. The following year the governors decreed that there should be no spirits at the annual party given to the children.

In 1840 the governors decided that in the appointment of a new matron consideration should be given to those able to teach, especially French and music, and from this date the character of the office changed from the more homely

<sup>1</sup> In 1780 it was decreed that the girls were 'to drink tea with the matron at her expense.'



figure of the early days to the more cultured and dignified Victorian headmistress.

*The Last Years at Argyle Square.*

Before passing from the Argyle Square period of the hospital's history certain matters arising in the later years may be mentioned. As we have noted a change in the girls from the less sophisticated maiden who drank porter from a pewter tankard to the young lady in training for a governess, and in the matrons from the homely eighteenth century figure, often a widow with few qualifications except her homeliness, to the cultured headmistress, so we gradually detect a change in the governors. They are less frequently referred to as Deacons, because the authority of that office was diminishing with the dying power of the Convener. They are no longer the simple tradesmen, masters of a few apprentices, who ruled the city in the eighteenth century, but are becoming the substantial business leaders of the nineteenth century. Their opinions are couched in more ponderous if less quaint phrasing; their controversies, if no less keen, are conducted more politely.

In 1812 the governors made a purchase which was to be of some value to them in the future. As a token of appreciation of the services rendered to the hospital by Dr. James Hamilton they commissioned David Raeburn to paint his portrait. Dr. Hamilton replied in a letter:

'Gentlemen,

The portrait for which you did me the honour some time ago to request me to sit to Mr. Raeburn is finished and at your disposal. I embrace the present opportunity of making my acknowledgement to you for this flattering mark of your attention, which I own I received not without hesitation, but with a feeling that I ought not to withhold myself from your wishes.

But this is not the only instance on your part which calls for expressions of gratitude on mine. In early life I experienced the countenance and support which has been manifested towards me

during a course of many years by successive appointments to be one of your number in the administration of the affairs of the excellent institution under your care. If in this situation I have had the opportunity of contributing to the welfare of your hospital and you are pleased to think that I have done so, I beg to say that in this respect I conceive myself to have only discharged my duty and I regret that my ability has not kept pace with my inclination to have been more useful.

I shall always retain a grateful remembrance of all your favours, and I am, gentlemen,

Your obliged and obedient servant,

20 March 1812.

JAMES HAMILTON.

The portrait was sent to London for engraving, and Dr. Hamilton presented to the hospital a drawing and painting table. In less prosperous days the governors were able to sell this painting for a considerable sum.

The last years at Argyle Square saw the introduction of a system, known as outboarding, which has lasted until the present time. By 1853 certain of the incorporations felt that the time had come for radical changes in the constitution, and the Convener of the Baxters submitted a motion

'that the young persons under the charge of the governors should live in the houses of their parents and attend in the hospital as a day school for their education only, with an allowance for board and lodging.'

This motion is of considerable importance as it represents the first indication of the rising tide of dissatisfaction with the hospital system, which thirty years later was to change the whole character of these institutions, leaving the Trades Maidens as one of the few to continue on the original lines. After investigation the committee reported:

1. That they felt they did not have the necessary powers.
2. That even if they had, it would not be desirable.

But they thank the convener for raising the matter, as it has led them to realise that 'the hospital does not now afford



the inmates all the advantages which the benevolent founders contemplated.' They suggest that the age of admission might be lowered by one year, and that at 14 the girls should cease to live in and should board with their parents, with suitable supervision until they reach the age of 17, and that they should attend the hospital on Sundays and go to church with the younger girls. They feel that after 14 the children do not make good progress, partly because the funds do not permit music, French and drawing to be taught at the hospital's expense,<sup>1</sup> and partly because

'the children, owing to their seclusion for so long a period, are deficient in knowledge of the world, unaccustomed to society, and consequently unfitted for taking part in the ordinary affairs of life.'

They estimate the annual cost of maintenance of a girl as £7, 10s. with £3, 10s. for clothing. This report was submitted to the incorporations and the patrons for their consideration.

In November of the same year the committee reported on the result:

'All incorporations have sent in returns except hammermen, skimmers, furriers and waulkers; eight approved generally of the report, viz. surgeons, goldsmiths, bakers, cordiners, websters, bonnetmakers, fleshers and the society of barbers. The incorporation of Tailors consider some change in the present system to be required, but would prefer the adoption of a rule whereby all the children would leave the hospital at 15, receiving an outgoing of £10 in place of the present £5.11.6, and that their connection with the institution should then cease. The Incorporation of Wrights and Masons disapprove of the proposed change being made imperative and recommend the enactment of a rule giving the governors power to deal with any special case in which the parents may wish to remove a girl before seventeen. Of the private patrons only two answered, the Earl of Mar, who holds six presentations, disapproving of any change, and William Weyms approving.'<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Since the beginning of the nineteenth century funds had been low and economies effected by reduction of staff.

<sup>2</sup> Two years later they inquired into the position of the Earl of Mar. By the

As the opposition to the more radical proposal was considerable the governors adopted a *via media*, passing a regulation allowing parents to ask for girls over fourteen to live at home. It was reported that six had taken advantage of the offer—one governess, one teacher, and four learning millinery and mantua work. After two years' trial the Education Committee of the board reported on the outboarding system. Seventeen girls had taken advantage of it, of whom nine were learning dressmaking or millinery, three teaching, five studying at home for teachers or governesses and taking some classes in the hospital. They had sent out a questionnaire concerning the effect of outboarding on these girls, and all the answers except one had been favourable. In the case of Jessie Forbes, her father wrote:

'She prepares her French exercises, writing, knitting, and sewing and improving her fancy works. At times, but very seldom, she amuses herself. Her behaviour towards her brothers and sisters is becoming and exemplary and is very dutiful and obedient towards me. The new system has a tendency to brush off that bashful, reserved and awkward deportment too common in the inmates of similar institutions.'

But one of the teachers complains,

'the girls cease to be one family, they are better dressed and look of a superior class—the outdoor girls talk during class.'

As a result of the report the governors decided to continue the outboarding system but to make more stringent regulations. The girls were to be allowed to go to business only if

act of foundation he was not *de facto* a governor, but had the right of appointing two governors, of whom he might name himself as one; but as he had not exercised his right of nomination they could see no occasion to send his lordship calling notices to the meetings: however, 'considering his lordship's peculiar temper' they decided not to contest the matter. On the dispute over the title in 1866 both the Earl of Mar and the Earl of Kellie claimed the presentations to the hospital, which the governors held over 'until the two earls had settled between them.'



their English education was well grounded. They recommended that those taking posts as governesses should remain in the hospital, as 'the education is good enough for that.' The demand, however, for outboarding began to fall away until, in 1855, the Treasurer reported that there was only one girl taking advantage of the provision, and

'a scheme which seems to offer such advantages has met with little encouragement.'

The main problem before the governors in the first half of the nineteenth century concerned the building, which had served them for a hundred years. Not only was the fabric dilapidated but the district in which it was situated was rapidly deteriorating. As early as 1805

'The Committee of Nine stated that it perhaps might be attended with very great benefits to the institution if a new hospital was built upon the lands of Wrightshouses, and the present hospital and the area connected therewith sold.'

In 1819 there was some talk of the purchase of the hospital by the college, and in 1830 a second approach was made. The governors were still reluctant to move and two years later obtained plans for improving the building, and introduced gas lighting. The unfortunate death of Elizabeth MacLauchlan, mentioned above, and two serious epidemics caused them further disquiet, and in 1836 their Finance Committee reported that

'it cannot be lost sight of that the Hospitall itself is now a very old building, standing in need of repair, year after year of course greater and greater. It becomes the governors, therefore, promptly and seriously to consider whether a new building shall be erected in their own grounds or some substantial repairs made on the present one.'

Their finances, however, had become badly depleted, partly through an expensive Court of Session action, and funds for rebuilding were not available. Next year they

turned down a proposal to advertise the building for sale. In 1840 they reported :

'that as the present house is now 136 years old and constantly requiring repairs which in its decayed state cannot be made on it, and consequently that the safety of the numerous inmates is very questionable, which was the second time proven last Monday, when a large piece of the flooring in the East bedroom broke down when one of the children was walking on it, by which her leg might have been broken, from which it is quite evident that it is necessary for the governors to take adequate measures for building a new house ...'

A year later they protested unsuccessfully against the city building a funerary next to the hospital, and from this date they seem agreed that a move would have to be made from the district. In 1850 they declined an offer of £2000 for the house, but two years later decided to offer the property to the Museum at £5000. In March 1854 at a special meeting, the Treasurer intimated that the government was willing to acquire the property at Argyle Square as the site of a National Museum, and to offer the sum of £5000, which was above its real value. Dr. Lyon Playfair was to negotiate with the governors on behalf of the government. The board readily accepted this offer, and took immediate steps to acquire new property, thus bringing to an end their long connection with the Horse Wynd and Argyle Square.

#### RILLBANK HOUSE : 1855-1892

The assets of the governors were insufficient to allow them to erect a new hospital, so they made an offer of £3250 for Rillbank House 'situated at the foot of Meadow Walk, an excellent dwelling house and containing nearly four acres of ground.' This property stood to the east of what is now Sylvan Place, on the site of the present Hospital for Sick Children, bounded by the Meadows on the north, and on the south by Sciennes Road, then known as Sciennes Loaning.



After certain substantial alterations had been carried through the hospital was opened and the governors met there for the first time on September 10th, 1855. On this occasion John Clark, the Treasurer, stated :

'The former residence was not left with[out] a pang of regret on the part of a number of its inmates both old and young. It cannot be doubted, however, that Rillbank is a most eligible site. . . . The governors have greatly improved the external appearance so that now it presents to the eye a very chaste and graceful architectural structure. The internal arrangements are also judicious and convenient. The lobby and staircase are peculiarly handsome, the schoolrooms are capacious and well proportioned in their dimensions, the dormitories are spacious lightsome and well ventilated. . . . The institution will possess singular advantages for carrying forward its chief and ultimate design, namely, to train and educate the daughters and grand-daughters of our decayed fellow craftsmen in the paths of learning and virtue, fitting them for the right discharge of their duties in after life, and, by the blessing of God, for a happy immortality.'

A Christmas fete, or party, was held to celebrate the new era, at which Sinclair, the officer, took the part of Father Christmas—the first mention of this festive figure. At the same time Mr. James Ogilvy's painting of the old hospital was purchased for £40, and the old benefaction boards were rehung in the new building.

#### *Convenery Relics.*

This move from the old hospital made the governors conscious of their long history, and during their period at Rillbank they acquired many of the relics which are now preserved in the governors' room of the present building. As the various incorporations ceased to be active they offered their relics for safe keeping to the hospital, and there were also several gifts from private donors. For the purpose of record these may be briefly detailed here as they appear in the minutes :

1854—'The Town Council having presented the convenery with the chair hitherto occupied by the conveners in the council room, a new one having been substituted in its place more in accordance with the style of furniture in the room, the meeting unanimously resolved to present the old chair to the hospital to be kept by them in the governors' room and to be used in all time by the conveners or preses at their meetings.'

1861—'There was laid on the table an old Bible, having on its title-page the name of Mary Erskine, and understood to be in her handwriting. Mr. Thos. Johnstone, a member of Mary's Chapel, had received this valuable relic from a descendent of the Mar family and begged to present it to the hospital.'

1862—'Mr. Steele asked the governors to accept the gift of an old coat-of-arms of the Incorporation of Hammermen of Canongate, which had at one time been placed up in the Canongate Church and having it with him he exhibited the same.'

1869—The Lodge of Journeymen Masons offered to furnish a handsome glass case for the preservation of the ancient Blue Blanket of the Convenery, and it was proposed to place it in the board room. The Convenery intended to enclose the smaller flags belonging to them in a similar case.

1870—Messrs. Watt, of California, who had presented a case for the Blue Blanket, were met while on a visit to this city, and thanked.

1878—A copy of the decalogue, which had been presented to the Incorporation of Skinners and Furriers two hundred years ago, was given to the hospital.

1890—St. Mary's Chapel gave a permanent loan of nine old carved chairs belonging to the Incorporation.

1892—Mary's Chapel handed over a snuff mull and a Breeches Bible, and Mr. Kirkwood gave an antique mahogany table with a glass top for the preservation of relics.

1895—(While in Ashfield) Mary's Chapel Incorporation presented for custody an oval wood tablet on which had been inserted the silver badge of the Incorporation's officer and silver buttons of his livery, also a coloured wood carving of the Arms of the Incorporation and a large marble slab on which the Incorporation's arms have been sculptured.



*Life and Routine.*

Life in the new hospital went on much the same as it had done in the more cramped quarters of Argyle Square. There were considerable drainage improvements going on in the Meadows during the first years at Rillbank, and some building of the new streets around the hospital. In 1860 it was decided that

'in future the children and mistresses be not required at New North Church and that they attend Newington Church because of the distance in the winter . . . that Newington Church was now erected into a parish church and provided with an excellent minister so that in this respect they would not suffer from the change.'

Some governors suggested New Greyfriars, as one of the City Churches, but the move to Newington was made and the girls continued to worship there until 1892, when it was decided to apply for sittings in Grange Parish Church, as being nearer to Ashfield; as the requisite number of sittings could not be obtained there they took seats in West St. Giles, with which congregation they have retained their connection until today.<sup>1</sup>

The forty years' occupation of Rillbank was not an easy period for the hospital governors; they had to face the rising tide of disquiet about the whole institutional system, and to seek, within their limited resources, to modernise their educational facilities. In addition, their young charges, under the conditions of greater freedom, seemed determined to make things more difficult for them. The more they were treated as Victorian young ladies the more they continued to act as rather naughty girls, and much of the governors' time was occupied in drawing up regulations or dealing with specific

<sup>1</sup> The writer, minister of Newington, met an old lady who had worshipped regularly at that church as one of the Trades Maidens. The minutes record the receipt of tickets for the governors on the occasion of the introduction of the organ in 1873 and the forwarding of five pounds donation from the hospital towards its installation.



RILLBANK INSTITUTION

*From Colston's 'Incorporated Trades of Edinburgh.' The present Royal Hospital for Sick Children occupies the site*



ASHFIELD, GRANGE LOAN, FROM THE SOUTH: THE PRESENT  
TRADES MAIDEN HOSPITAL





Carving on the great chair of the Fleshers, or Butchers,  
bearing the date 1708



Chairs now in the Board Room at Ashfield: left, chair of Mary's Chapel: right,  
chair formerly used by the Deacon-Convener of Trades in the old Council Chamber  
(see page 31)

## TRADES MAIDEN HOSPITAL

33

cases of indiscipline. In 1858 the governors made new household arrangements :

1. A record to be kept by the matron and teachers of all the girls who have during the month received punishment, the faults and the penalty inflicted being stated. Also of the position each girl has maintained in the class during the month.
2. That a certificate be given to each girl on leaving, setting forth character and proficiency.
3. Failing the parents or guardians it shall be the duty of matron and treasurer to look out suitable situations for leavers.
4. Intimation of all complaints to go to the Treasurer.
5. A record of absences to be kept.

At the same time they suggest that botany excursions might be conducted by the English teacher, and that Sabbath evening exercises should be limited to one and a half hours.

About the year 1860 there are several cases of indiscipline on the part of the older girls. Helen Stevenson, who had been confined for previous misconduct, used her period of confinement to break up the piano, and the governors write to her father in London to recover part of the damages. Barbara Wilson has to be confined for roughness to the younger children and her brother forbidden to come about the house in the rude way he has done. One of the deacons demands an inquiry into the death of his daughter who had been a foundationer. In September 1862 the clerk read to the governors nine sets of new rules which had been prepared by the treasurer :

1. Rules for the matron.
2. Rules for the servants.
3. Rules for the outgoing girls.
4. Rules as to punishments.
5. Rules for the relations and guardians.
6. Rules as to holidays.
7. Rules for the girls.
8. Rules as to clothing.
9. Rules as to baths.

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If these rules had been engrossed in the minutes or otherwise preserved they would have given some information on life within the hospital at this period. As punishment by confinement had led to many complaints the governors may have decided to change their methods, for at the beginning of the following year the account book carries the item 'To Andrew Watt, for leather straps, 2s.' Nor can this have been very successful for within eighteen months the Committee of Nine are asked to enquire into the whole question of discipline. No report was forthcoming, perhaps because the committee was busy investigating a particular case of indiscipline, of which we may give a fuller account.

'A meeting of the Committee of Nine was called in consequence of certain irregularities having occurred amongst the children in the hospital. It appeared that certain of the girls had for some weeks past been exchanging letters with boys residing in the neighbourhood, and that on the evening of Wednesday May 25th three of them, *viz.* Helen Lapsley, Helen Hutton and Mary Jane Murray had secretly left the hospital between nine and ten o'clock in the evening and did not return till between twelve and one o'clock the following morning. That immediately upon receiving this information he (the convener) with the treasurer and clerk, had made a full investigation into the whole circumstances and after examining the matron, governesses and three girls, had found that the report was perfectly true. The girls had been in the habit of meeting with boys of about their own age at the place where the building operations in front of the hospital are going on and where the hospital's ground is separated from the new buildings by a slight fence only, that these meetings have been followed by the interchange of letters, and that on the night in question the three girls had slipped out of their bedrooms unknown to the matron and governesses and had escaped by the backdoor and did not return until after twelve o'clock. The statement of the girls is that the interchange of letters had been discovered by the governesses and that they had gone out in the hope of meeting the boys to put them on their guard, that they had gone from one street to another where the boys resided but did not meet with any of them, and that after wandering about the streets they had returned to the house to which

they got admission by climbing to the top of the portico and entering by a window on the staircase. It transpired that the girls had been in the practice of procuring candles and getting up during the night to write their letters. It thus appeared that there had been a system of deception practised for some time and he could not help coming to the conclusion that there had been a want of proper care on the part of the matron and governesses in not regularly seeing the children undressed and in bed before retiring to rest. He left it to the committee, but thought it would not be necessary to remove any of the girls from the hospital or to make any change in the matron or governesses. He considered the conduct of the children, whilst very blameable, to be one of those foolish outbursts which will occasionally occur amongst young people through thoughtlessness without any bad motive; that the letters received by the girls (and which he laid on the table) were evidently the production of children and contained nothing objectionable in a moral point of view; upon the whole he thought that a solemn admonition to the girls, accompanied by a warning that any further misdemeanour would be followed by expulsion, would be the best course to follow and that a letter be sent to the matron and governesses.'

This was done, the windows were made secure and the wall was heightened, but soon afterwards the matron resigned 'because of family arrangements' and the resignation of the governess was demanded. Certain complaints of ill-treatment and particularly of detention continued, however, and five years later a new committee was again asked to report on discipline. In addition, there were now complaints about the dietary, particularly concerning the Friday pudding. Although the doctor denied the significance of these complaints, two girls were withdrawn in 1870 because of the diet, and as a result the menu was revised:

'breakfast consisted of porridge and milk; lunch of bread; dinner included beef on three days, fish pie and roast meat with potatoes on six days (? sixth day) and soup or pudding; tea of bread or rye loaf and milk with marmalade or syrup on Sundays; supper of bread and milk in summer, coffee or cocoa in winter.'



After this date complaints become less frequent. In 1873 they inquire why a girl, Christina Steele, went home after only one week in hospital, but her mother replies that the girl's only objection to the school was 'that she could not see her mamma as often as she liked.' The last complaints were four years later, this time of alleged uncleanness.

On the credit side, the governors did much at Rillbank to make life happier for the girls, and the account books show how they introduced modern improvements. In 1881 an early type of gas-cooker was introduced, and four years later sewing-machines were bought for the older girls. In 1888 croquet sets were purchased—and elastic chest expanders. A number of magazines and *The Daily Review* were taken.

In 1870 they decide to use the word 'institution' instead of hospital—but only in reports, and for several years the prize list is headed 'Rillbank Institution.' Other suggestions were that the school might be called 'The Rillbank Educational Institute' or 'The Trades Maiden Educational Institute,' and we may be glad that these names did not in the end displace the old title.

In 1875 the governors recommended certain alterations to the house, including a new dormitory, but it was not until 1884 when the schoolrooms were disused that it was possible to have enough dormitory accommodation to allow each girl to have her own bed.

#### *Educational Changes.*

Much of the space in the minute books of the Rillbank period is taken up with attempts to alter the old hospital system to suit the changing conditions of the times. With the development of specialised secondary education it became increasingly difficult for a small hospital school to provide adequate facilities for senior girls. Other institutions, much more liberally endowed than the Trades Maidens were, either willingly or under pressure from the Educational Commis-

sioners, changed their character. The minutes indicate that opinion was often so divided that the whole future character of the hospital hung upon one or two votes. For a time the board was divided into two parties, the reformers desiring powers to make very radical changes and the conservatives seeking to retain its original character. The latter party found that the most effective way of stultifying motions for change was to remain absent from meetings and thereby reduce the number present below that needed for a quorum. For this reason there were no annual meetings in 1864 and 1865, and in 1866 the minute states

'The gentlemen above convened, having waited a quarter of an hour after the hour appointed for a meeting, separated, there not being present the statutory quorum of 17.'

The compromise which emerged from the controversy both preserved the hospital character of the school in line with the original intentions of its founders, and at the same time allowed of sufficient alteration to satisfy the government commissioners and prevent compulsory changes being forced upon them.

In 1862 the governors received word of the proposed commission to revise all educational endowments, and held conference on the subject with the Merchant Company and other similar hospitals. The same year Deacon Moir called attention to the disadvantage under which the children laboured from not having a government certificate and proposed that the girls who intended to follow the profession of teachers should be allowed to attend one or other of the Normal Schools. It was agreed that such children should attend the Normal School of the Established Church for one year. At the same time rules which would widen the rights of presentation were proposed, but could not be carried as the opposition withdrew and created no quorum. The governors obtained a report from the Lord Advocate on their powers of



altering the rules to allow any girl to be presented, and as a result resolved that, failing any eligible girl seeking nomination, any other might be accepted.

In 1863 the Educational Committee of the governors considered a remit 'to consider and report on the education and upbringing of the girls.' They reported:

'that considerable changes in the present system are desirable, but would require further consideration . . . however, having regard to the working of the rule of 1844 giving leave to girls to leave the hospital on arriving at the age of 14 for the purpose of learning some trade, were unanimously of the opinion that it had not acted so beneficially as it would have done had it conferred full powers on the governors to fix and determine what girls should be boarded out, and it would be highly expedient that in future all girls should leave the hospital at the age of 14 for the purpose of learning dress-making or other suitable employment, with the exception of such girls as have shown talents likely to qualify them for being governesses. They further recommend that on each child reaching twelve, the Education Committee should ascertain from teachers whether she has shown such talent and application as would justify the governors in educating her to be a governess, and where she has not shown any special fitness her education should be confined to English, writing, arithmetic and drawing, and her parents notified to look out for a suitable occupation.'

The next year the committee adds that with the best education in the hospital they are unable to compete with highly educated young ladies who fill situations as governesses and whose education is not usually completed until 20 or 21 years, therefore they recommend generally educating the girls not as governesses but to some trade such as dress-making. Those needing higher education would be better in a Normal School, and those of decided ability in a private school. In 1867 the committee made a determined attempt to bring the syllabus up to date, suggesting that:

1. There should be three classes for the English department, with promotion on progress and not on age.
2. That the two top classes should be taught by a specialist.

3. The youngest classes to be taught by one who makes elementary teaching his business: he shall be under the specialist, who shall also direct the governesses.

4. There should be another teacher for writing and arithmetic.

5. There should be a proficient governess to reside in and assist the present governess as tutor, also to do the sewing and be in charge of the girls.

6. German, French, drawing and piano and vocal music and dancing to be as at present.

7. Worship and religious knowledge to be taken by the matron.

8. The matron meantime to teach the Sunday evening class.

9. They should employ a respectable middle-aged servant as nurse.

Within a year the committee present another report, on the advisability of throwing open the hospital to day-girls:

'As the hospital system is costly, as George Watson's governors about 20 years ago obtained an Act authorising the admission of day-scholars, and as after experience they found the arrangement to work well, as the same system has been adopted by Heriot's and the Merchant Maidens—they resolve to admit day-pupils on the following conditions:

1. That it in no way affect the rights of patrons or the ordinary rules of the hospital.

2. That girls be (a) such as have the right to be elected to the hospital, (b) daughters of burgesses, (c) any others—all between the ages of 11 and 14.

3. That they remain until 17 and pay 5 guineas per annum, and two for music, with lunch included.<sup>1</sup>

The committee considered that under rule 21 and appendix 24 they had powers to act, but the governors decided not to adopt the report until fuller consideration had been given to the question. In 1869 the Endowed Institutions (Scotland) Act became law, and the governors decided to take advantage of it, bringing forward a scheme which included such far-reaching changes as using Rillbank entirely as a day-school,

<sup>1</sup> There is one instance during the Argyle Square period of a fee-paying girl. The legality of this was not at the time questioned.



boarding out their foundationers, enlarging the buildings, purchasing the private rights of presentation and altering the constitution of the governing body. A provisional order was framed, but when the Lord Advocate presented it to the Solicitor-General the latter considered many sections to be incompetent, and no action was taken.

In 1876 they requested H.M. Inspector to visit the school and report. He reported that the discipline was good, as was the proficiency in all subjects. He considered, however, that there was lack of a definite time-table and that classes were too small.<sup>1</sup> He further suggested the appointment of a headmaster.

Upon reception of this report the committee reported to the governors:

1. That fee-paying day-pupils be admitted.
2. That a headmaster be appointed.

The governors delayed the first recommendation, as they had not ascertained if they were legally entitled to put it into practice, but proceeded to carry out the second recommendation. In 1877 Mr. Robert Henderson was appointed at a salary of £250 per annum.

It became obvious, however, that the two recommendations stood together; without the addition of day-pupils the school was too small to make a headmaster an economic proposition. Three years later another special committee set up to investigate the situation presented the governors with two alternatives: 1. Turning the hospital into a fee-paying school with boarded-out foundationers, or 2. Providing only boarding facilities for their foundationers and sending them out for their education to some other school such as one of the Merchant Company schools.

An active minority, led by Deacon Leggatt, favoured the

<sup>1</sup> This was a common charge against hospital schools in the nineteenth century, since when educational opinion has changed and small classes sought after.

first course, but the majority of the governors inclined to the second alternative. The Headmaster of George Watson's Ladies' College reported that:

'The whole of the girls could be received into the Merchant Company school at George Square. Forty nine girls of the average ages of those at present in the hospital could be educated there at a cost of £331. For attending to the girls and supervising the preparation of lessons in the evening he suggested that a matron and one governess would suffice.'

The governors acted on this report, the headmaster and two resident governesses were dispensed with and the girls were sent to George Square. Within two years, however, in 1882, Deacon Leggatt's alternative proposals secured a majority on the board, and the Education Committee drew up plans for turning the hospital into a day-school; their report stresses that:

'A tutorial staff should be appointed sufficient for the instruction of pupils in school in contradistinction to the now prevalent practice of merely giving out and hearing lessons in school and practically throwing the labour of instruction upon the parents or relatives of the children at home.'

They even decided to advertise for staff and pupils, and drew up a scheme which they submitted to the Educational Commissioners. In 1883 they were asked to appear before the commissioners, but by this time the view of the governors had swung back again and they opposed the draft scheme which was laid before them. In 1886 Crown Counsel decided that many of their endowments were outwith the Act of 1882, and the commissioners indicated that they intended to take no action.

The scheme for turning the hospital into a large fee-paying school was then finally dropped and the practice which they had begun in 1880 of sending the girls out to school was retained.

It is interesting to note that the two Mary Erskine founda-



tions, the Merchant and the Trades Maidens, whose history to this date had been along similar lines, adopted different alternatives, the former losing its hospital character and becoming a large fee-paying day-school, the latter retaining its boarding facilities but sending out its girls to other schools for their education.<sup>1</sup>

#### ASHFIELD: SINCE 1892

In 1889 the governors were approached by the board of George Watson's Ladies College to see if Rillbank House might be sold to them. The governors agreed to sell at £12,000 if the Merchant Company would set up another day-school there which their own girls could attend and if they could procure a suitable site for a new hospital. The Company decided that the price was too high and negotiations proceeded no further. In the same year the governors saw the plans for the new school which the School Board proposed to erect next to the hospital in Sciennes Road.

In 1891 the governors received a letter from the directors of the Royal Hospital for Sick Children as to the sale of Rillbank, as the Royal Infirmary desired their present property for extensions. The overture was declined by one vote, but they were again approached by the same body with an offer of £15,000. The governors asked £17,500, a figure which was accepted by the Infirmary and Sick Children's Hospital only after a year's hesitation.

In 1892 the hospital moved into Ashfield, at the corner of Grange Loan and Blackford Hill Avenue, which had been purchased from Mr. Henry Younger for £7000. Mr. T. L. Sawers was commissioned to paint Rillbank, the painting to be set in a carved wooden frame from which the previous owner had removed a family group. They also decided to

<sup>1</sup> The 1844 rule for outboarding remained in force under the new arrangement. The headmaster of George Square reported in 1890 that when girls were boarded out at 14 their interest in their lessons diminished.

have a catalogue prepared of the blackboards which hung on the walls of Rillbank with a record of benefactors.<sup>1</sup>

During the early years at Ashfield the girls continued to receive their education at George Square, but there were reports that they were behind the other girls in the school in progress. More girls were placed on the outboarding allowance. In spite of the monies received from the sale of Rillbank and the reduction in staff due to giving up the educational side of the work, the governors found expenses too heavy, and in 1901 decided that

'to limit expenditure on education without impairing its efficiency all the girls in the hospital receiving primary education should be sent in future to James Gillespie's School.'

For several years the senior girls continued to attend George Square, until finally they were all removed to James Gillespie's. Today many of the girls still attend this school, but a number are accommodated at the non-fee-paying schools of the Edinburgh Education Committee.

Ashfield continues to house the hospital, and the modern schoolgirls who are the Trades Maidens of today bear little resemblance to the maids of the beaver bonnets and blue cloaks who traversed the vennels from Horse Wynd to Greyfriars Church, or to the Victorian young ladies of Rillbank Educational Institute. But in the regulations many of the old customs and phrases survive, and there are still evidences of the connection with the convenery—the board room with its relics of the incorporations, the wall-boards with the names of deacons who played their part in its history, and the Christmas party and prize-giving attended by the Deacon-Convenor with his ancient chain of office.

<sup>1</sup> A record of these boards, which have now disappeared, was engrossed in the minutes. One entry reads: 'In remembrance of Miss Marion Wight, who being educated in this institution repaid the benefits received by a faithful and efficient discharge of the duties of Matron for a period of twenty years, and in token of gratitude bequeathed a sum of one hundred pounds sterling to the funds in 1867.'