

1. Paisley Commercial School

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Paisley Commercial School was one of the three higher schools that the burgh managed when from 1576 to 1872 it had charge of education, the other two being Paisley Grammar School, where education was focused on the classics and most teaching was conducted in Latin, and Paisley English School, where the medium was English and which provided a more general, preliminary education. The first mention of the Commercial School was in 1762 when the town council appointed a teacher of Writing and Arithmetic to the Writing School, as it was then called. The school was at that time held in the east end of the Grammar School house, showing it to be one of its offspring. In 1781, the town council decided to build a new one, having finally realised that increasing numbers necessitated a separate school.

The school, with its name now changed to the Commercial School was built in Meeting House Lane. It consisted of two storeys, the first contained the classroom, which was 30ft long, 18ft wide and 11ft high. The second storey was adapted as a dwelling house and here the schoolmaster lived. For over the next sixty years the school was to be ruled by the Macome dynasty. Ebenezer Macome had been previously appointed schoolmaster in 1770 and held the post until 1802 when he was succeeded by his nephew, Robert Macome. He, however, had only a brief tenure, succumbing to an early death around 1806 or 1807 and in turn was succeeded by his brother, Alexander Macome who held the post till his retiral in 1844.

The subjects provided by the school were geared towards the mathematical and commercial. Writing, Arithmetic and Book-keeping were obviously relevant to budding clerks, cashiers and accountants, whilst geography, algebra, geometry, trigonometry were essential forerunners to a study of navigation. (The school seems to have coached ships' officers) and a knowledge of mensuration was essential to architects, builders and surveyors.

Although the town council had provided the school, it did little to maintain it and by 1823 Alexander Macome was complaining to it about the condition of the schoolroom, but nothing was done about it. By the time he retired in 1844 the school was failing to attract pupils, mainly because of the condition of the classroom, so much so that in 1853 his successor resigned in protest. The town council did not immediately attempt to replace him as it was now considering a change in the organisation of its schools: namely to close both English and Commercial schools and return their classes to an extended and more expansive Grammar School, in the interval leaving these two schools as the Grammar School's responsibility. In 1855, realising it would be some time before the extension to the Grammar would be started, the town council decided it would be wiser to appoint a new teacher to the Commercial School, meanwhile, but their appointee after seeing the state of the classroom

declined the appointment. No further attempt was made to revive the school and in 1863 it sold the building.

Over the years since then there has been a general decline in the area and most of the buildings which existed there, including the Commercial School, have been demolished. But not completely, a little of the school still remains as part of the back boundary wall of St. John's Church, the five windows and the door of the classroom now bricked up but still visible. Unlike other sites of much less significance to the history of Paisley, there is no plaque on the wall pointing it out as a part of Paisley's heritage, but it undoubtedly is. The newly created University of Paisley has arisen from the metamorphosis of Paisley College, which itself can trace its roots back to the Paisley Technical College, the Paisley School of Design and ultimately the Paisley Commercial School. In turn it can show it grew out of Paisley's Grammar School, which no doubt inherited features from the pre-reformation schools of the Abbey. The Commercial School is thus a vital link in the chain of Paisley's educational development.



COMMERCIAL SCHOOL, MEETING HOUSE LANE.
Erected 1781.