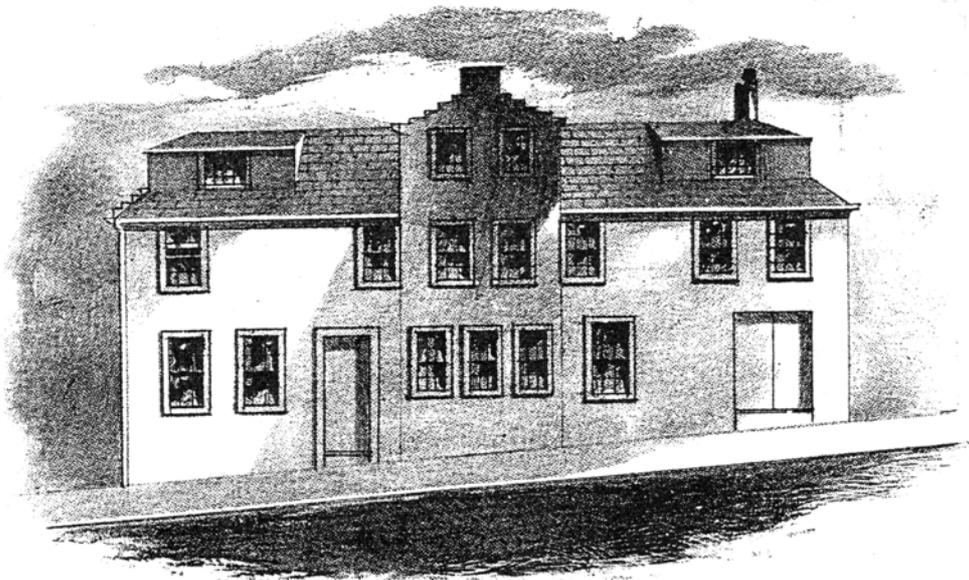


1. Paisley's Early School Campus in Oakshaw

William J McKechin

The four schools discussed here; Grammar, 'English,' Commercial, and Hutcheson's Charity were all concentrated in Oakshaw in sites only a few yards from each other. With the exception of Hutcheson's Charity School, which did not open until 1804, the other three schools were the only providers of education in Paisley from the Reformation until the 1780's, a period of over two centuries. By present day standards, the schools seem tiny and hard to distinguish from the town's tenement dwellings. The small number of schools, all with comparatively low rolls, emphasises how Paisley from the destruction of the Abbey until its rapid growth in wealth and population which followed the industrialisation of the early and mid nineteenth century was in comparison to the bustle that then ensued a small, poor, backwater of a town. It was, indeed, so poor that it is doubtful if these schools ever lived up to the Reformer's aim of a national education by providing schooling for everyone in the town.

The schools have long since gone from this area, but to some extent, history may be beginning to repeat itself. Paisley University has taken over, as a lecture room, the former Congregational Church in School Wynd - one of the many church buildings to be found in the Oakshaw area. As it expands physically, as it is bound to do, the University may annex more of the redundant church buildings that abound in Oakshaw; and so the educational campus of the 16th and 17th centuries may be followed after this long lapse of time by one of the 21st century.

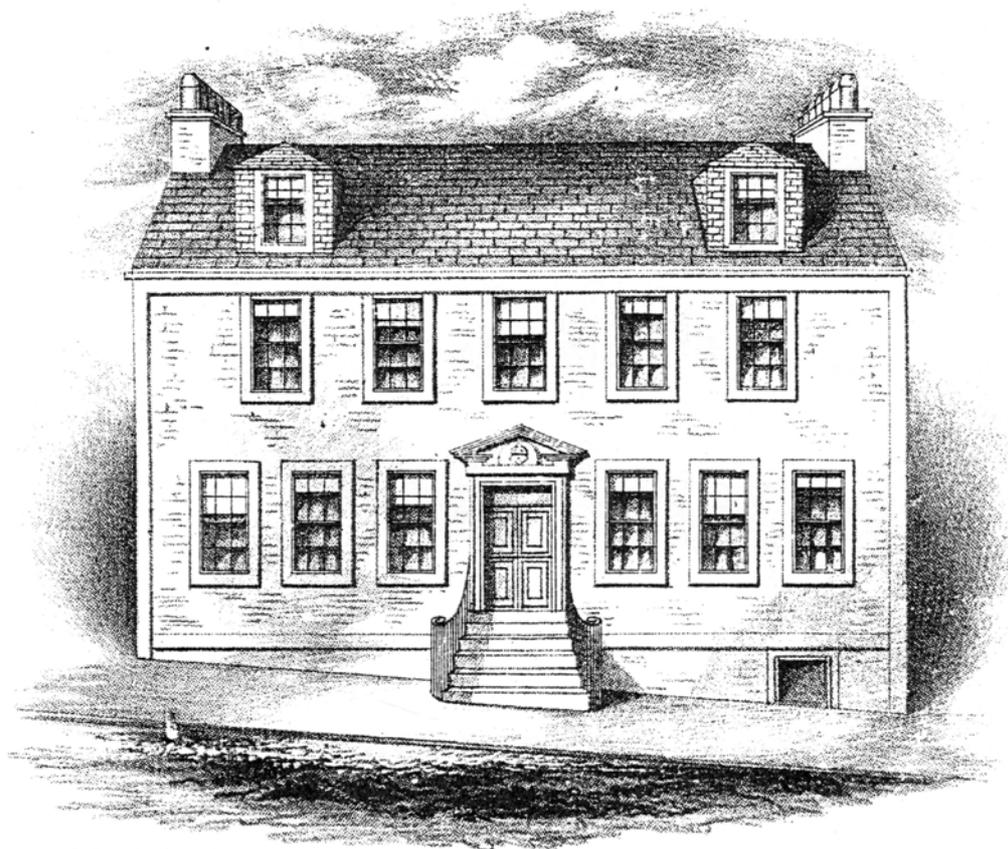


SECOND GRAMMAR SCHOOL, SCHOOL WYND.
Erected 1753.

The Grammar School

Since the Church was the repository of learning during the Middle Ages there is little doubt that schools of some sort existed in Paisley under the surveillance of the Abbey, but since few records of the Abbey survived the Reformation one can only guess as to their nature or purpose. The Reformation re-awakened interest in learning, with the Reformed Kirk deciding that there should be a school in every parish and that each burgh should support a grammar school. This national system was to be financed from the wealth confiscated from the old

Church. Thus in 1576, in the early days of the Reformation, Paisley was awarded a charter allowing it to build a grammar school. The charter decided that the funds necessary to build and maintain it were to be obtained from some of the former revenues that accrued to Paisley Abbey, viz. from the various chapels that had been built on Abbey lands and from the disposal of the lands of the chapel of St. Roch which had formerly stood at the junction of Castle Street and Wellmeadow, now at the present day the site of a Co-op supermarket. St. Roch was the patron saint of lepers. In the Middle Ages leper houses, usually dedicated to him were built outside the walls of burghs, as was the case here. In medieval times the West Port of Paisley lay between New Street and Storie Street. The school was built in 1586 at the south junction of School Wynd and Moss Street on the site of the chapel of St. Nicholas - St. Nicholas was the patron saint of children, quite an important saint in the medieval church calendar, but whom today we are more familiar with as Santa Claus - but these endowments were never placed in a separate school trust, something that was to rankle between the school and the burgh for centuries, as the school had then to subsist on the parsimonious caprice of its Town Council.



GRAMMAR SCHOOL, HIGH CHURCH HILL
Erected 1802

This first building had a thatched roof and two rooms, each containing a school; one the grammar school in which, in continuation of medieval practice, the classics were taught through the medium of Latin and Greek; the other, the 'sang' school where more elementary lessons were conducted in the vernacular. 'Sang' schools dated from pre-reformation times and were originally created to teach the hymns and music which formed an integral part of church liturgy; but in order for this teaching to be effective the Latin language used had to be

explained and developed in terms of the vernacular, and so the schools became known as 'Scots' and eventually 'English' schools as Anglicisation increasingly encroached after the union of the crowns in 1603. By the mid 18th century the building was in a state of dilapidation and had grown too small for Paisley's increasing population. In 1753, it was demolished and replaced by a larger building of two storeys, the lower providing the schoolrooms and the upper the schoolmaster's house. This school replacement cost about £280, which the Town Council raised by a tax on beer. The buildings which housed these first two grammar schools have long been demolished, but a drawing of the second one is to be found in Brown's History of the Grammar School; in external appearance it differs little from the typical tenement of that period.



ELEVATION

SHOWING PROPOSED ADDITION 1859, OF THE PAISLEY GRAMMAR SCHOOL.

By 1802 this second building was in a deplorable state of repair, mainly because of the Town Council's reluctance to provide proper maintenance, and so it was forced to replace it with a larger building. The building which was used in recent times by the Assessor's department of the former Renfrew County Council still stands derelict today at the top of Church Hill, sandwiched between the High Church and the Middle Church. It differs in some detail from that sketched in Brown's History of the Grammar School, published in 1875, suggesting that the building has been extensively altered since the book's publication. As it appears today, the staircase to the front door has disappeared; there is an additional attic, and the two attics shown in this drawing have been substantially altered. An annex to the building has been built on the side nearest to the Middle Church. This is very much different in design from that proposed in 1859 and shown in Brown's drawing on page 226, but never proceeded with, and so presumably the annex which was built was that of a later date.

The rapid industrialisation that occurred in Scotland in the early and mid 19th century and its concomitant social upheaval revealed that the existing system of parochial schools was unable to cope with the demands being placed upon it. From then until schools were brought under state control in 1872, a ceaseless campaign and clamour for educational change was continuously waged. One strand of this campaign was a movement to broaden the curriculum of higher grade schools - fossilised in a medieval fixation on the classics - to make them more relevant to current thought and needs. This was usually expressed in the

creation of academies - schools where the curriculum was not imprisoned in classical languages and antiquities, but extended to mathematics, commerce, science, and modern languages such as French and German. From the eighteen thirties onwards academies were founded in many towns in Scotland. Paisley followed in its typical canny manner. A public meeting was convened in 1836 by the Provost to discuss the possibility of providing one. The meeting decided to establish a Commercial, Scientific & Literary Academy in Paisley and to form a Joint Stock Company, composed of shares of £5 to bring this into effect. As only £40 11s 6d was collected - some were obviously paying their shares by instalments - the proposal ignominiously fell.



But the impetus for change did not disappear and was revived when in 1859 the Town Council proposed extending the Grammar School to incorporate in it both the English and the Commercial Schools at an estimated cost of £1000, to be raised by public subscription. Support this time was much more enthusiastic, the appeal soon being oversubscribed, and so the Council decided to widen the appeal to £3000 and build a new school rather than enlarge the old one. The new school, now renamed Paisley Grammar School and Academy, was built in Oakshaw Street, at the summit of Church Hill, in close proximity to its predecessor. It now had a broader curriculum, including mathematics and modern languages, with its staff increased to six, including a female teacher for the younger pupils, housed in a single storey building containing five classes and accommodating 580 pupils. Its site is now a car park, but part of the walls of the building still remains and can be seen at the east side of the junction between Church Hill and Oakshaw Street East. The Grammar school remained there until 1892 when it moved to its present site in Glasgow Road. The vacated building then became, firstly, a primary school, Oakshaw Primary, and when this was closed in the late 1940's a centre for technical education and the forerunner of the Reid Kerr College, being finally abandoned in the early 1950's.



THE WEST OR WEE STEEPLE AND ALMSHOUSE.



ENGLISH SCHOOL, SCHOOL WYND
Erected 1788.

The 'English School'

Although the 'English' school started in 1586 in the same building as the Grammar school, it must have moved from there to the loft of the town's almshouse sometime between then and 1684 when it was recorded that a 'doctor,' as assistant teachers were then called, had been appointed to teach in it. The almshouse had been built in 1618 just beyond the town's West Port, mainly from the stones of the medieval chapel of St. Roch, to which reference has already been made. In 1724 the almshouse was rebuilt, this time with a steeple, known as the West Steeple or the Wee Steeple to distinguish it from the larger steeple of the Tollbooth. Here in its loft the 'English' school remained until 1788. In 1788 the council decided that each of these parishes should have a school. A new school was built for the 'English' school at 19 School Wynd, which became the parish school for the Middle parish. A new school was also built for the Low parish in Storie Street, but the High parish had to be content with the loft of the Wee Steeple which the 'English' school had vacated. The masters of these schools received no salaries, although they did benefit from the pupils' fees and were also appointed session clerks for their respective parish churches. Again the Town Council after providing the schools failed to provide sufficient maintenance. By 1821, the classroom of the 'English' school was in such a poor state of repair that its head was forced to rent a room nearby in which to conduct the school. The Council made no attempt to repair it and this state of affairs persisted until the school was demolished in 1863 to build the new academy.



COMMERCIAL SCHOOL, MEETING HOUSE LANE.
Erected 1781.

Paisley Writing or Commercial School

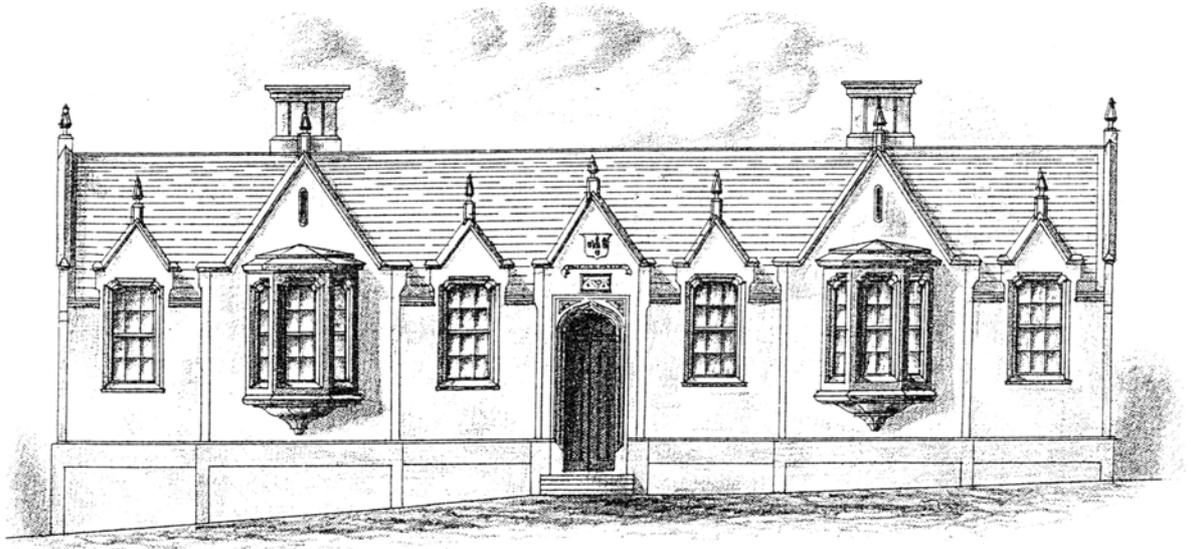
The Writing School began as part of the Grammar school, at or before 1762, when it was recorded that the Town Council appointed a teacher to it. Because of increasing numbers, in

1781 the Town Council built a new school in Meeting House Lane, changing its name to the Commercial School. It consisted of two storeys, the lower storey the schoolroom, the upper the master's house. The subjects provided included Writing, Arithmetic, Bookkeeping, and practical applications of Mathematics such as mensuration. Although the Town Council provided the school it did little to maintain it, as seems to have been its practice, so that by 1823 it had fallen into disrepair, which only grew worse with time. By 1844 the school was failing to attract pupils because of the condition of the classroom. In 1853 it had become so bad that its teacher resigned in protest because of its condition and his replacement declined the appointment after seeing the state of the classroom. The Council made no attempt to remedy the situation and sold the building in 1863. Since then there has been a general decline in the area and most of the buildings then in existence have been demolished; but a small part 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.

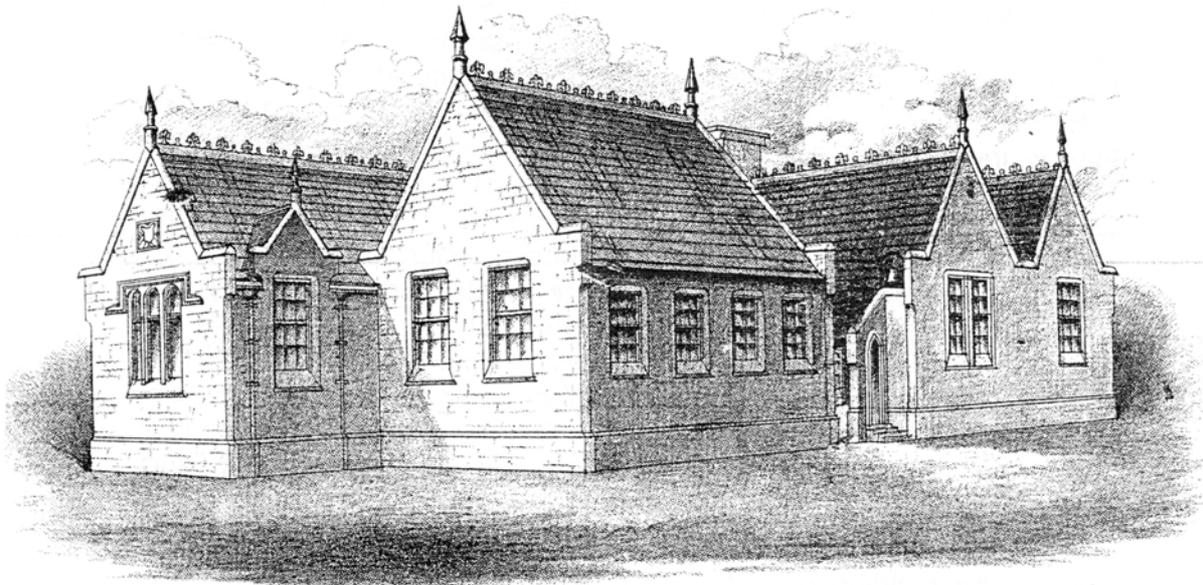
Hutcheson's Charity School

This school was founded in 1804 as a result of a bequest by Mrs Margaret Hutcheson or Park. Mrs Hutcheson was born in Govan, her husband John in Houston. The couple who lived in Paisley after their marriage were of modest means until she became wealthy when her brother, who had amassed a considerable fortune in the West Indies, died and left her over £20,000, an immense sum of money in those days. In 1793 she bequeathed a sum of £1500 in a trust, to the Hutcheson Charity Trust - to erect, establish, and endow a charity school to be called Hutcheson's Charity School to instruct poor orphans and the children of poor parents residing in the town of Paisley. After her death in 1795 the Trust which included the Paisley Magistrates, some of Paisley's senior ministers, and the convenors of various local societies and guilds was formed; but it was not until 1804 that the school was started with 44 day and 40 evening pupils in a rented room in the High Street.

In 1805 the school was moved to the loft of the Wee Steeple after the High Parish School had vacated it. There it remained until 1807 when the Town Council put the room up for sale and sold it to another party who had offered a higher price. The Trust then rented a room in the Baptist Meeting Hall in Pend Lane (Pend Lane was the lane that led from the pend in the Wee Steeple building to Oakshaw Street. Roughly it followed the path of the present day Orr Square.) By then the number of day pupils had risen to approximately 100 and the number of evening pupils to less than 50. In 1818 the Trust bought land at the east junction of Orr Square and Oakshaw Street from C.Orr, a leading Paisley industrialist - hence the name change - to build a school. The school was completed in 1822 and was held there until 1833, when under the Educational Endowments Act which followed the 1822 Education Act that brought schools under state control, the Park Bequest was incorporated in the Paisley Educational Trust which was focused mainly on the John Neilson, and its pupils were transferred to schools of Paisley School Board. By the time the school closed, its complement of day pupils had risen to about 150 and evening pupils to about 70. The general expectation of life in the 19th century was low compared with the present, and so there was no shortage of orphans during its 80 years of existence, ensuring that it always had a full complement of pupils. The building is still in use, as one of the church halls of the High Church; but only a small part of the original facade, a portion of stone rubble wall, remains. The rest has been subjected to so many 'face lifts' that its original appearance has been obliterated.



ACADEMY,- FRONT ELEVATION.



ACADEMY — SOUTH WEST VIEW.

Note: All drawings illustrating this article are copied from
Brown's *History of Paisley Grammar School*
published by
Gardner, Paisley in 1875.