

THE BOOK
OF THE
OLD EDINBURGH
CLUB

The Journal for
Edinburgh History



The Very Reverend Ronald Selby Wright, 'The School of the Royal College of Holyrood House',
Book of the Old Edinburgh Club, New Series 2 (1992), pp. 133–135.

~~~~~

This article is extracted from **The Book of the Old Edinburgh Club, The Journal for Edinburgh History** ISSN 2634-2618

Content © The Old Edinburgh Club and contributors. All rights reserved.

For information about The Book of the Old Edinburgh Club (BOEC), including contents of previous issues and indexes, see <https://oldedinburghclub.org.uk/boec>.

**This article is made available for your personal research and private study only.**

For any further uses of BOEC material, please contact the Editor, The Book of the Old Edinburgh Club, at [editor@oldedinburghclub.org.uk](mailto:editor@oldedinburghclub.org.uk). The Club has a Take-Down Policy covering potential rights infringements. Please see <http://oldedinburghclub.org.uk/oec-take-down-policy>.



Digitised by the Centre for Research  
Collections, Edinburgh University  
Library from the copy in the Library  
Collection



THE SCHOOL OF THE ROYAL COLLEGE OF HOLYROOD HOUSE

THE VERY REVEREND RONALD SELBY WRIGHT

IN THE *History of the Abbey, Palace, and Chapel-Royal of Holyroodhouse*, published in 1819, there occurs the following paragraph:

During the reign of James VII who manifested an unconstitutional partiality to Roman Catholics, Holyroodhouse appears to have been destined by that bigotted Prince as a nursery for superstition. Not satisfied with securing to his Popish subjects within the precincts of his Palace, the free exercise of their religion, at a time when the most limited degree of that religious toleration now so liberally enjoyed by every British subject, was considered as a connivance at heresy, James most imprudently instituted a 'Popish College in the Abbey of Holyrood', and published rules for it on the 22nd March 1688, inviting children to be there educated *gratis*.

The establishment of this Jesuit College or School at Holyrood falls into the perspective of the gradual introduction into Edinburgh of various institutions designed to strengthen the Roman Catholic presence. Although James, then Duke of York, wrote to Lord Dartmoor from Holyrood in 1681 saying 'I live here as cautiously as I can, and am very careful to give offence to none', he had already appropriated the Long Gallery in the palace to serve his private use as a Roman Catholic chapel. In September 1686 King James issued his warrant to the Lords of Treasury to maintain this private chapel, and in May 1687 another authorising payment of £100 a year for music therein. Then in December 1687 he gave orders that the Chapel Royal established in the former nave of the Abbey Church since 1672 should be adapted for Roman Catholic worship and as a Chapel of the Knights of the Order of the Thistle, all this work to be finished by May 1688. Furthermore, the King appointed James Watson as 'printer to our household in our ancient Kingdom' in 1686. After his death the following year the Holyrood Press continued to issue books and pamphlets of a Catholic bent under his successor Peter Bruce, from a shop built for his use in the centre court of the palace.

The story of the Jesuit College can be taken back to August 1687 when the King issued a Royal Warrant to the Keeper of the Palace to hand over the Chancellor's House to the Society of Jesuits 'to be made use of by them as a College for their own use'. From then until the conclusion of the reign the Superiors of the College, first John Seatoun and then Lewis Leslie, drew a monthly allowance from the Treasury.

From the first, as might be expected, this Jesuit College was hotly resented by the people of Edinburgh. This resentment stemmed from their suspicion that young scholars were being lured away from the 'Tounis College' by the attractive terms laid out in the new College's regulations. The King had granted freedom of worship to all his subjects and, following on this, the school at Holyrood was open to all and was entitled to accept all denominations including Presbyterians.

It is of interest to compare the rules for the Jesuit School with those of the Royal High School of Edinburgh at this time. At the High School the boys were called to give attendance from 6.00 am until concluding prayers at 6.00 pm, with short breaks for breakfast and dinner; this regimen included Saturdays. Once or at most twice a week some time was allowed for games. On Sundays the boys had to go to school before the morning service in order to be catechised by the headmaster, who then accompanied them to church. Throughout the school day, and even at play in the 'yards', the schoolboy was expected to speak Latin at all times.

Comparing the rules of the High School with those for the Jesuit College printed by Peter Bruce in 1688, one recognises how forward-looking and conciliatory in purpose were the latter. Clause I states firmly that education there is free of charge. Clauses II to VI are concerned with freedom of religion and the non-

denominational character of the school. Clauses VII, VIII and IX describe the routine of the day and the week. School commences each day at 8.00 am and lasts for four and a half hours in the morning, with a further two and three-quarters hours in the afternoon. The remaining hours of the day are to be devoted to study at home; on two afternoons a week there is 'recreation' and relaxation from school attendance is given on 'Holy-days' (see *Appendix*).

However, this educational experiment was not to last for long. On 5 November 1688 the Prince of Orange landed at Torbay and made his way to London. News eventually reached Edinburgh and on 17 December a huge crowd of citizens and students came down from the Netherbow with the intention of attacking the Jesuit establishment at the palace. This first attack was repulsed by Captain John Wallace and his Palace Guard of 120 men who were driven to open fire, killing some and wounding others. On the next day the mob returned, this time led by the Lord Provost and Magistrates in their robes and by two of the Heralds. Wallace and his Guard retreated inside the

palace, but the mob entered by the back and the Guard had no option but to surrender. The sacking of palace and chapel began. The rioters cleared out the college, throwing out the furnishings and library and the documents that they found, all of which formed a huge bonfire in the forecourt. The private chapel and the palace were rifled and the priests' vestments burned, and the new furnishings of the Abbey Church with the stalls of the Knights of the Thistle were destroyed. Finally, the printer's shop was ransacked and its contents added to the fire. It was at this time, of course, that the drastic vandalism of the royal tombs in the Abbey Church took place, with the coffins destroyed and the bones scattered.

So ended what might have been a uniquely notable landmark in Scotland's educational history. The highly commendable purpose of the school at Holyrood was that it should reflect King James VII's desire that there should be freedom of worship and a degree of religious toleration. The school which started with such great possibilities, alas, was to exist for so short a time.

## APPENDIX

The following transcript of the Rules of the Jesuit College is taken from the copy in the National Library of Scotland, pressmark L.C.Fol.75(116). The paper is damaged at the right-hand margin; suggested reconstructions of missing words are supplied in parentheses. It appears that only two other copies have been recorded.

RULES OF THE SCHOOLS OF THE  
ROYAL COLLEGE AT  
HOLY-ROOD-HOUSE

i. The Intention of Opening these Schools is, to Teach Youth Vertue and [Learning]. They shall be taught *Gratis*; nor shall they be at any farther Charge [or E]xpenses than the buying of their own Pens, Ink, Paper and Books.

ii. These Schools are common to all, of what condition soever, [and none] shall be excluded, when they shall be thought fit to begin to learn [to] Write sufficiently well: And in these Schools shall be taught Greek and [Latin?] also Poetry, Rhetoric, and Philosophy, etc, as they shall rise to higher s[tandards.]

iii. And although Youths of different Professions, whether Cat[holics or] Protestants, come to these Schools; yet in Teaching all, there shall [be no dis]tinction made, but all shall be Taught with equal Diligence and Care, [every]one shall be promoted according to his Deserts.

iv. There shall not be, either by Masters or Scholars, any tampering [...] to perswade any one from the Profession of his own Religion; [there] shall be all freedom for every one to practise what Religion he



shall please, and none shall be less esteemed or [...] for being of a different Religion from others.

v. None shall upbraid or reproach any one on the account of Religion; and when any Exercise of Religion be practised, as hearing Mass, Catechising, or Preaching, or any other, it shall be lawful for any Protest[ant with]out any molestation or trouble, to absent himself from such publick Exercise, if he please.

vi. All shall be taught to keep God's Commandments, and therefore none shall be permitted to Lye, [...] Curse or talk uncivil Discourse; Nor shall fight or quarrel with one another; and he who shall be observed [disobeying] these Duties, shall be punished according to his demerit: And when any one, for these, or other Faults sh[all be] judg'd to any Chastisement, if he shall refuse to receive such Chastisement quietly, or be stubborn, he shall be [expelled] the Schools, and not be re-admitted again, until he shall have given satisfaction for such his Fault.

vii. All shall be in their respective Schools by a quarter before Eight in the Morning and shall there stay [four hours] and a half; Again at a quarter before Two, until half an hour after Four. And all Parents are earnestly desir[ed to send] their Children timely to School and not easily to stay them at home; for the neglect of some Days may [lose] Profit of many Weeks

and Months: And they are to send them decently Clad.

viii. The other hours of the day they shall Study at their own Homes, and prepare those Exercises which th[ose] in the Schools appoint to be brought, at their next coming to the Schools. And therefore all Parents are [to] allow their respective Scholars such conveniency for their Studies at their own Houses, that they may comply [with those] Duties which are appointed them.

ix. All are required to be exact and diligent, in daily frequenting the Schools, and being there, none are [to be absent] without leave of their Master: and when any one shall be absent from School, he shall the next day he co[m]es bring from his Parents a Ticket of the lawfulness of such his Absence: Yet they shall have every week two After[noons re]creation, in which they come not to School, unless a Holy-day happen that week, which shall then be [their re]laxation.

x. Such as comes from the Writing School, and have no Entrance in Latin, are to be received but three [imes a] Year, viz at the Beginning of the *New Year*, at *Easter*, and about our *Lady-day* in *September*.

HOLY-ROOD-HOUSE. Printed by Mr P. B. Engineer and Printer to the King's Most Excellent Majesty for his House[hold,] Chappel and Colledge. MDCLXXXVIII.

NOTES AND SOURCES

[Charles Mackie], *History of the Abbey, Palace and Chapel-Royal of Holyroodhouse* (Edinburgh 1819), p. 89.

William S. Daniel, *History of the Abbey and Palace of Holyrood* (Edinburgh 1852).

John Harrison, *History of the Monastery of the Holy-Rood and of the Palace of Holyrood House* (Edinburgh 1919), pp. 217-222.

The Holyrood Press is discussed in Alastair Cherry, *Princes, Poets & Patrons: The Stuarts and Scotland* (Edinburgh 1987), pp. 103-104, which includes an illustration of the *Rules*. For greater detail see William Cowan, 'The Holyrood Press, 1686-1688', *Publications of the Edinburgh Bibliographical Society*, vol. 6 (1906), pp. 83-100.