

Around the Archives

The Archive of The Edinburgh Academy

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The founding of a new school in Edinburgh's Georgian New Town was conceived during a walk in the spring of 1822 in the Pentland Hills. The perambulators that day were Henry (later Lord) Cockburn, then an Edinburgh advocate (barrister), and Leonard Horner, a linen merchant, geologist and a pioneer of education for the workers. Henry Cockburn concisely recorded their conversation thus: 'One day on top of one of the Pentlands – emblematic of the solidity of our foundation and of the extent of our prospects – we two resolved to set about the establishment of a new school.'¹ Both were agreed that their former school, the High School of Edinburgh, situated in High School Yards in the Old Town, was overcrowded and was devoting insufficient time to the teaching of Greek.²

Together with John Russell, an Edinburgh solicitor, Cockburn and Horner persuaded twenty-six eminent men to become Contributors who agreed to subscribe funds to establish the school.³ One of them, the architect William Burn, was asked to draw up a rough plan. He estimated about £12,000 (approximately £1.8 million today) was needed to acquire about three acres of ground near Canonmills on the north of the city and to build the school. The first meeting to be recorded formally in the Minute Book of the Directors of the Edinburgh Academy took place on 3 June 1822.⁴ At this and subsequent meetings that month, a *Scheme for the Establishment of a School in the New Town of*

¹ H. Cockburn, *Memorials of His Time* (Edinburgh, 1856), 391.

² A good classical education was foremost in the minds of Cockburn and Horner, but they also accepted the need for a modern education. The eighteenth- and early-nineteenth-century educational background in Scotland, and in Edinburgh in particular, is well summarised by M. Magnusson, *The Clacken and the Slate: The Story of The Edinburgh Academy 1824–1974* (London, 1974), 22–8. By the 1820s Edinburgh had several hospital schools, sessional schools and private academies, but, according to Cockburn in *Memorials of His Time*, 390–1: 'there was only one great classical school' (the High School) and 'this one placed under the Town Council, and lowered, perhaps necessarily, so as to suit the wants of a class of boys to more than two thirds of whom classical accomplishment is foreseen to be useless'.

³ Magnusson, *Clacken and the Slate*, 36.

⁴ Edinburgh Academy Archive (hereafter EA), 18/2/1/10, Minute Book of the Directors 1822–24.

Edinburgh on a plan similar to that of the High School was presented and discussed.⁵ Publication of the *Scheme* led to a rapid and positive response, so that by 1 July 1822, some 160 subscribers had agreed to take £50 shares.

However, considerable opposition to this proposal came from members of Edinburgh Town Council, notably from Bailie Thomas Blackwood (Baron Bailie of Canongate and Calton) who believed that there should be a single High School run by the Town Council, and a new building for same should be situated centrally between the Old and the New Towns. The protracted discussion over the next ten months, with public debate for and against a second school, between the supporters of the Academy and the Town Council, is well documented.⁶ Eventually, the Town Council confirmed its decision to rebuild the High School on a central site (a magnificent classical building was opened in June 1829 on the south-east side of Calton Hill), thus allowing the subscribers to the Academy scheme to proceed with a new independent school in the New Town. On 14 May 1823 fifteen Directors of the Edinburgh Academy, including Sir Walter Scott of Abbotsford were elected.⁷ Committees were convened, plans were agreed, land at Canonmills Park was purchased from the Governors of George Heriot's Hospital, and the school buildings, designed with much modification by William Burn, were constructed by the builder Walter Stuart Dinn in time for The Edinburgh Academy to be opened on 1 October 1824. The Revd John Williams, previously Headmaster of Lampeter School in Cardiganshire, was appointed its first Rector (Headmaster).

The founding and formative years of the school are well documented in the extensive archive of The Edinburgh Academy comprising correspondence, minutes of Contributors and of Directors, applications and testimonials of both successful and unsuccessful candidates for teaching positions, early pupil registers, financial documents (ledgers and receipts) and publications.⁸ The archive also holds several supplements and revisions of the Royal Charter which was granted to the School by King George IV and sealed at Edinburgh on 9 April 1824. The latest Supplementary Charter was granted in 2018.⁹

⁵ EA, 18/2/1/2, Printed Notice of the *Scheme for the Establishment of a School in the New Town of Edinburgh*, published in June 1822.

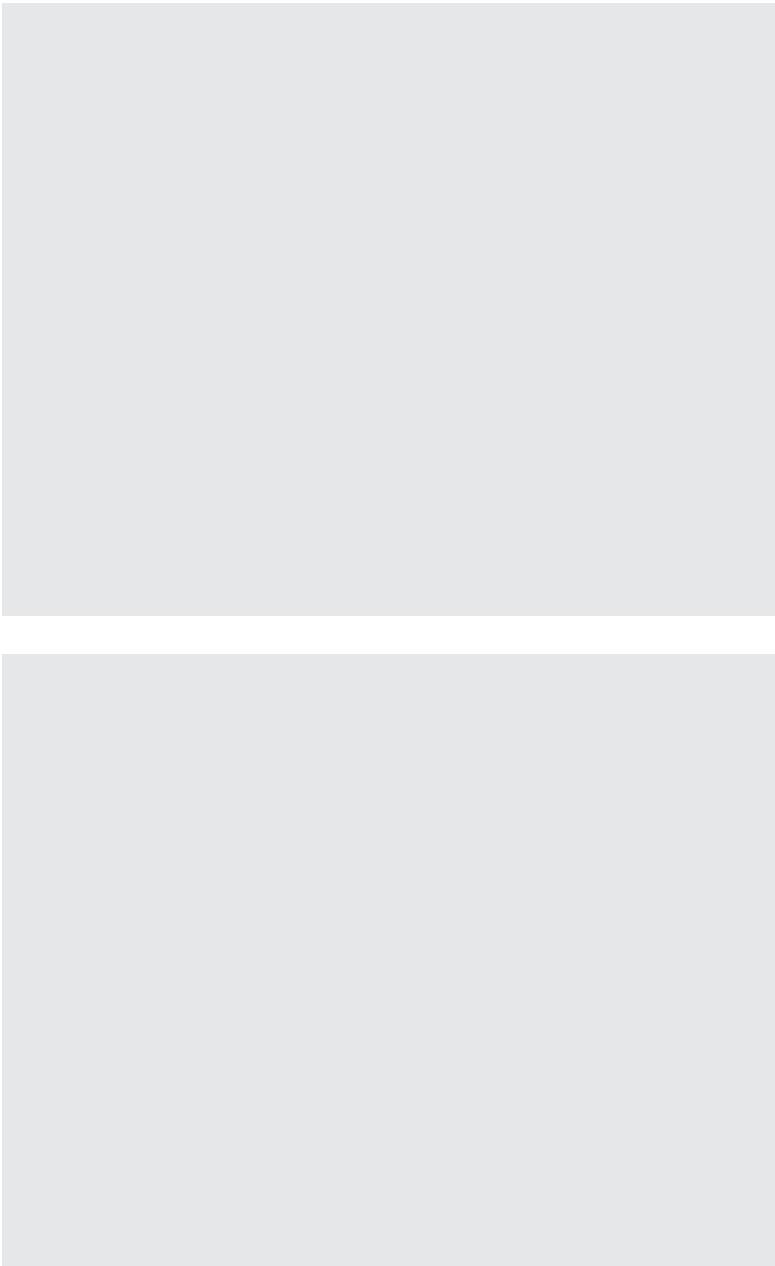
⁶ Magnusson, *Clacken and the State*, Chapter III, 'The Opposition (1822–23)', 42–56.

⁷ Ibid. 57.

⁸ A survey of The Edinburgh Academy Archive, prepared in 2002, was submitted to the National Register of Archives for Scotland (NRAS3407). A new survey, based upon cataloguing since 2010 using Microsoft Access software, was submitted in April 2020. The list may be accessed under NRAS4411.

⁹ EA, 25/20/0/6, Supplementary Charter in the name of The Edinburgh Academy, registered and sealed at Edinburgh on 1 February 2018. A total of 240 Subscribers were incorporated into a body politic and corporate with the name and title of 'The Proprietors of The Edinburgh Academy'. The Supplementary Charter of 1961 abrogated powers of Proprietors in favour of Directors.

Plate 1 Two-page letter from Sir Walter Scott asking that English reading, Orthography, Geography and History be taught to all classes (undated). EA, 18/2/1/30a.



The Directors' objectives were to improve the quality and conditions of teaching and to provide a broader, more complete education, with smaller classes, intervals between lessons, time for play and a greater emphasis on the health of pupils. Early correspondence includes several letters from Sir Walter Scott. In one undated letter, probably written to a fellow Director in the autumn of 1823, Sir Walter pressed for greater attention to be given to the teaching of English, Orthography, Geography and History (Plate 1).¹⁰ In it he writes:

Now although I am quite aware of the value of a classical education yet I would not have it like Aaron's serpent swallow up all other attainments and in my opinion in order to form Vir bonus domestic history with an acquaintance of our own language should be kept abreast of the acquisitions to be made in classical knowledge.

In December 1823 a prospectus was published detailing the proposed 'Plan of Instruction', the time-tables for classes, subjects to be taught, school fees and masters' salaries.¹¹ Subjects included Greek, Latin, Reading, Writing, Modern History, Geography and Arithmetic (with elements of Algebra and Geometry for the oldest boys). To teach these subjects four Classical Masters as well as Masters for English, Writing and Arithmetic were employed in 1824.¹² On 29 July 1825 the proceedings of the first Exhibition (Prize-giving) were published in what became an annual volume which included prize-winners, prize essays, class lists and reports from the Rector and Directors (Plate 2).¹³ A gold medal for Dux of the School and silver medals for class duxes were specified by the Directors in time to be awarded at the first Exhibition. The archive holds the designs for class dux medals (Plate 3). An extract from the Directors' report of 1825 stated that:

In order that the Medals might do credit to the Institution, both in point of Classical design and execution, the Directors were at pains to obtain dies of a superior quality, executed by Artists of eminence. The die for the Gold Medal, on which there is a head of Virgil, from the celebrated bust in the Louvre, has been executed by a young Scots Artist in London, Mr. Bain. That for the Silver Medal, bearing the head of Homer, from the bust in the Townley Collection in the British Museum, has been executed by Mr. Wyon of the Mint.¹⁴

The annual Exhibition volumes were published as the *Prize List, Public Exhibition Day of The Edinburgh Academy* and, from 1892 as *The Edinburgh Academy List*, in a continuous series until 1939. Other annual publications of the school

¹⁰ EA, 18/2/1/30a, Letter from Sir Walter Scott asking that English reading, Orthography, Geography and History be taught to all classes. The letter is undated but was probably written in the autumn of 1823 to a fellow Director.

¹¹ EA, 18/2/1/3, *Statement of the Directors of the Edinburgh Academy Explanatory Scheme of that Institution*. December 1823.

¹² Magnusson, *Clacken and the Slate*, 77.

¹³ EA, 26/1/0/1, *Prize List, Public Exhibition Day of The Edinburgh Academy*, July 1825.

¹⁴ EA, 26/1/0/1, Extract from the *Report by the Directors of the Edinburgh Academy to the Proprietors of the Academy at their General Meeting on 4th July 1825*.

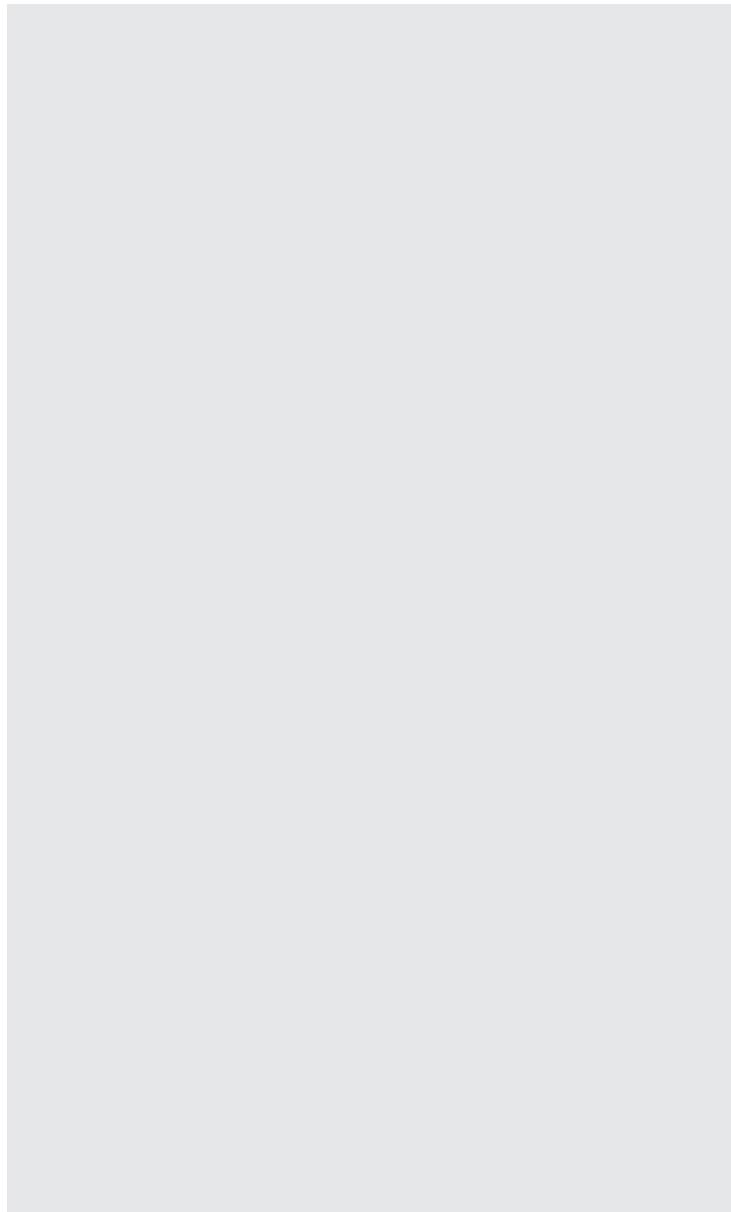


Plate 2 Frontispiece of *Prize List, Public Exhibition Day of The Edinburgh Academy*, July 1825 (the volume includes the prospectus, report by Rector to Directors, class reports, prize-winners, books used, Directors' report and financial statement). EA, 26/1/0/1.

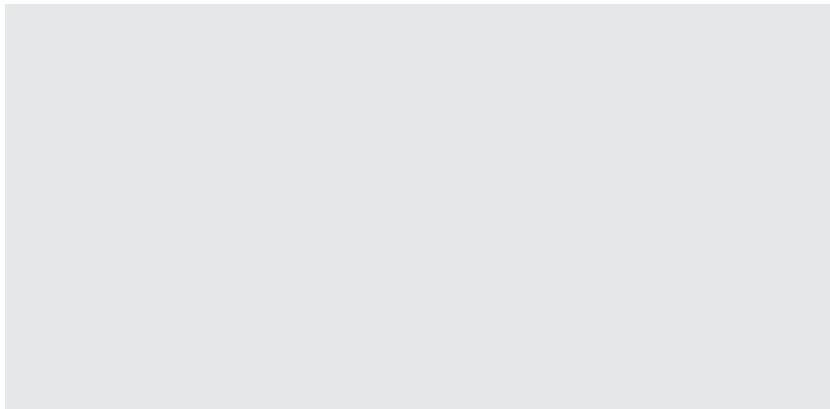


Plate 3 William Wyon's design for Class Dux medals. EA, 18/9/0/1. The diameter of the medal in the drawing is 5 cm.

include *The Edinburgh Academy Chronicle* which was first published in 1893 under the direction of Rector Robert Mackenzie, and continues to this day, having undergone a number of changes in style over the years. Nearly a hundred years after Rector Mackenzie's initiative, *The Academical* magazine was launched in 1992 for the Academical community.¹⁵ These various publications provide much useful background for research into, for example, the changing curriculum and school activities, as well as the lives and careers of Academicals.

Some 266 boys attended the school's six classes in its first year, 1824–25. The average age of 110 boys in the First Class was nine and a half. The average age of the sixty-eight senior boys in the Rector's Class was fourteen.¹⁶ In 1826 a plan was adopted to establish a Seventh Class to enable pupils to stay at school up to the age of sixteen, thus addressing the concerns of many parents that

¹⁵ The term 'Academical community' is used here *sensu lato*. The editorial in the first issue of *The Academical* magazine (1992) stated that it 'is a joint venture between the School and the Academical Club. Over the years we hope that it will become a welcome annual arrival on the doormats of Accies all over the world. It will seek to keep its readers well-informed about the life of their old school, to share past memories and current achievements, and to increase the conviviality of the Academy community.' The editorial continued: 'the Rector [John Rees] does have a vision of a broad community which encompasses all who have had their lives intertwined with that of The Edinburgh Academy as pupils, parents, teaching and non-teaching staff, and as former pupils'.

¹⁶ *The Edinburgh Academy Register 1824–1914: A Record of All Those Who Have Entered the School Since its Foundation in 1824* (printed by T. & A. Constable for the Edinburgh Academical Club, 1914), 1–28; see also Magnusson, *Clacken and the Slate*, 95–6 for details of the curriculum for each class. Note that the author misquotes the average age of boys in the Second, Third and Fourth classes. These should read ten and a half, twelve and thirteen respectively.

'by the system which at present prevails, their Sons are obliged to terminate their School Education at an age much too early for their entering with safety upon the comparatively independent life of a College Student'.¹⁷

In 1827, Rector Williams invited members of the newly formed Seventh Class to consider forming an old boys' club. This proposal was enthusiastically taken up and the Academical Club was inaugurated in 1828.¹⁸ The Club's papers and documents, including minute books, form part of the Academy archive. It is clear that, from the beginning, the Club was the school's strongest supporter both in cash and in kind. The Club established the earliest class libraries and, from 1831, endowed prizes for academic achievement. The regulations for the annual Academical Club Prize were altered in 1846 to enable it to be awarded to the successful candidate in an open competitive examination in all subjects.¹⁹

A further development starting in the 1840s was the establishment of Class Clubs. These were initiated by former pupils in honour of their teachers. In those days pupils were taught by the same master throughout their school career excepting their final year when they were in the Rector's charge. Clearly some masters were respected enough for clubs to be formed. The clubs held functions and supported the school in a variety of ways including the establishment of prizes for both academic and sporting achievements. The archive holds Class Club papers and photographic albums such as, for example, that of James Carmichael (Classical Master, 1856–94).²⁰

From its origins the Academy developed a strong reputation for sport in its many forms. Great importance was given by the early Directors to the provision of a playground at the school in conjunction with the awareness that boys needed space and encouragement to take part in games if they were to reach their complete potential. In the early years the playing of ball games took place in the spacious school yards (Plate 4). The most common playground game was hailes, an old Scots ball game similar to shinty. Subsequently cricket, with wickets chalked on the walls of the yards, was played. A rough game of football also featured, referred to as a disorganised rammy (brawl) which was largely devoid of rules, the ball being a raw bladder enclosed in a leather case. The inflation of the bladder was apparently a somewhat disgusting operation.²¹

In the early 1850s the then Rector of the Academy, The Revd John Hannah, took a major initiative in the promotion of sport at the school. Cricket was

¹⁷ EA, 18/2/1/14, Printed Notice of the *Plan for the establishment of a Seventh Class in The Edinburgh Academy*, 27 February 1826.

¹⁸ EA, 73/1/1/1, Minute Book of The Edinburgh Academical Club 1828–43.

¹⁹ Report of the Committee of Management of the Edinburgh Academical Club to the Annual General Meeting, held on July 27, 1846 (bound into EA, 26/1/0/22 *Prize List, Public Exhibition Day of The Edinburgh Academy*, 29 July 1846).

²⁰ EA, 56/3/0/1, Photographic album of the Carmichael Class Club 1879–86 in honour of James Carmichael (Classical Master 1856–94).

²¹ A. Fergusson, *Chronicles of the Cumming Club and Memories of Old Academy Days 1841–46* (Edinburgh, 1887), 54 (James Cumming was a Classical Master, 1826–46).

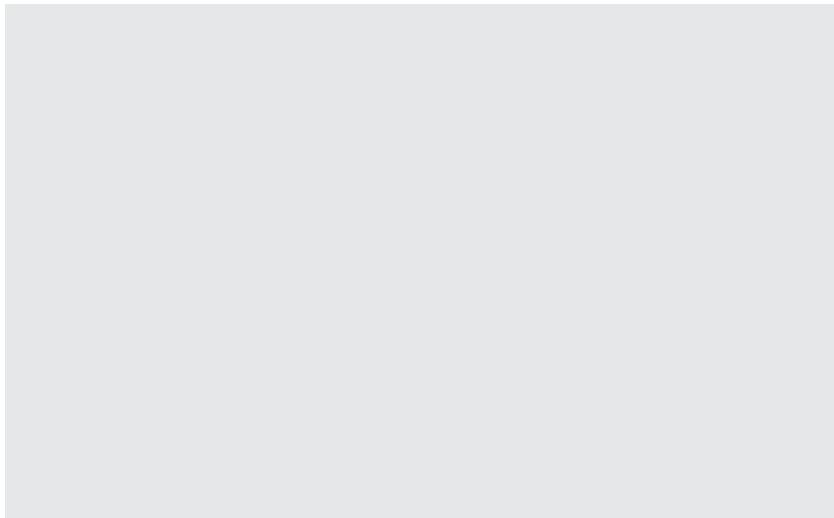


Plate 4 Thomas H. Shepherd's etching of *The New Edinburgh Academy* (1828) showing the yards and the building with its low profile and primitive Greek Doric order designed by William Burn. EA, 78/2/1/1.

already well established and in early 1853 Hannah raised the possibility of acquiring a separate playing field for his pupils. The Academical Club supported this idea and in August 1853 Hannah, together with former pupils Robert Balfour, Kenneth Mackenzie and Thomas Cleghorn, took on a lease of ten acres in Stockbridge, a few minutes' walk from the school. The Academy Cricket Field was opened on 17 May 1854. Raeburn Place, as it was known, became the hub for all of the school's organised sporting activities. Early cricket teams might comprise solely pupils, or both pupils and former pupils, organised matches against other schools or clubs at this stage being few and far between.

Some of the earliest games of rugby football in Scotland were played at Raeburn Place.²² The arrival in Edinburgh from the then Durham Grammar School of the brothers Alexander (Joe) and Francis Crombie in 1854 was the key moment in the organisation of rugby football for both pupils at the Academy and its former pupils. Alexander came to study law at Edinburgh University and his younger brother, Francis, joined the Academy for two years. At Durham they had played football to a rugby-like code. Alexander played with pupils and former pupils in informal games at Raeburn Place, while Francis became the school's first Captain of Football for the 1855–56 season. An Academy vs Merchiston

²² A. McMillan and D. Mennie, 'Edinburgh Academy', in (ed.) M. Tozer, *Puddings, Bullies and Squashes: Early Public School Football Codes* (Truro, 2020), 129–50; new edition published under the title *Early Public School Football Codes: Puddings, Bullies and Squashes* (Cambridge, 2022).

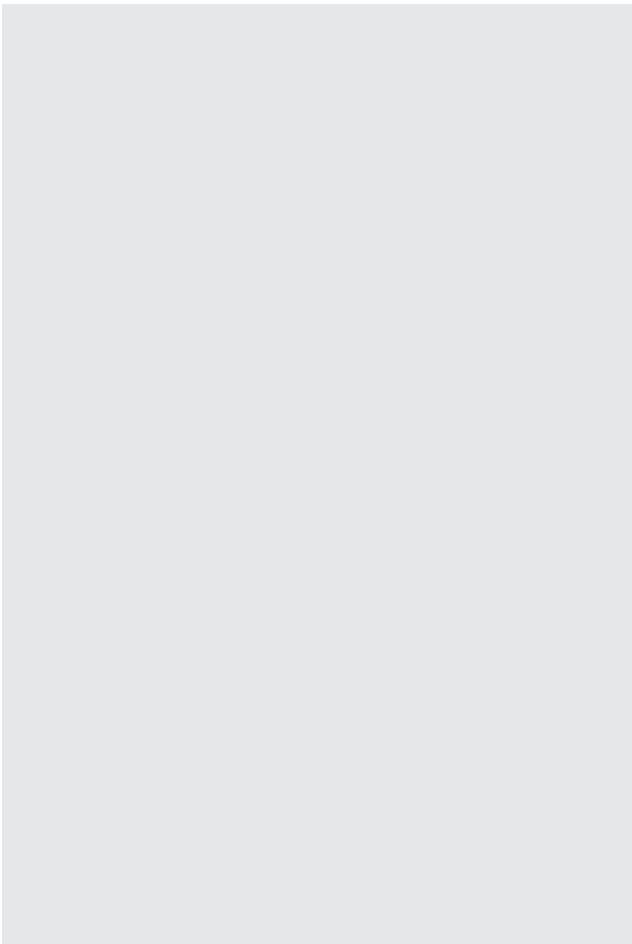


Plate 5 Cover page of the 'Green Book', *Academical Football Club: General Laws and Rules of the Game*, dated January 1858, and printed by W. Blackwood & Sons of Edinburgh. EA, 65/9/0/2. The book measures 6.8 × 11.5 cm.

Castle schools' match was played at Raeburn Place on 11 December 1858 with twenty players on each side, this being the first fully reported, interschool rugby football match in Scotland. It remains the world's longest standing and continuously played rugby football fixture.

In the late 1850s a former pupils' Football Club was formed. Although payments and receipts were recorded by the club's treasurer in December 1857 in relation to a match played against Edinburgh University, it was not until the following month that the first General Meeting of the Academical Football Club

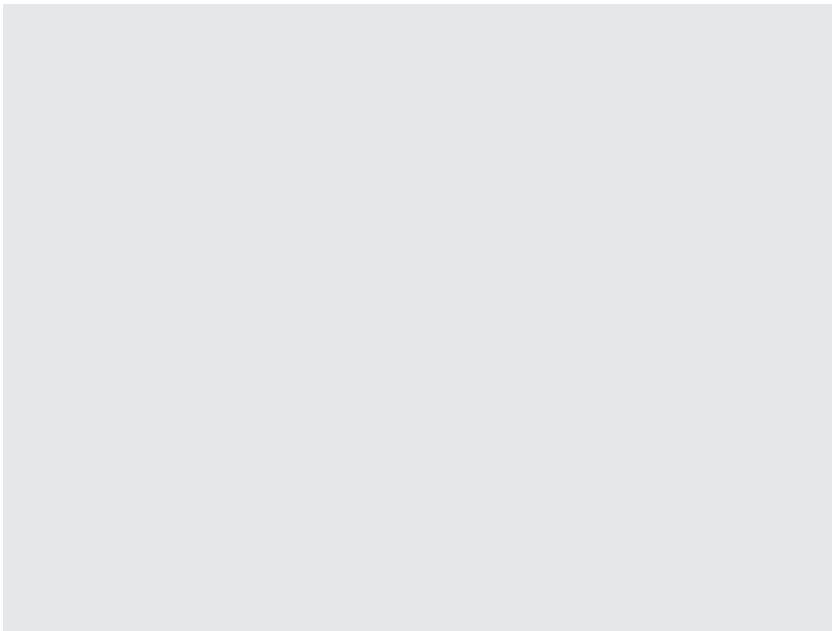


Plate 6 The Scotland Rugby Football team of twenty players selected for the first International match, played versus England at Raeburn Place on 27 March 1871.

was held – the actual date was not recorded in the minutes.²³ The club subsequently became the Edinburgh Academical Football Club, simply known as the ‘Accies’. Teams played the game more or less according to the rules printed in 1845 by Rugby School.²⁴ At the time of the Accies’ centenary it was thought that no original copies of the club’s 1858 laws of the game had survived. However, in August 1969 a small sixteen-page booklet – the ‘Green Book’ – was discovered in a deed box among the archives. It was titled *Academical Football Club: General Laws and Rules of the Game*, dated January 1858, and printed by W. Blackwood & Sons of Edinburgh (Plate 5). The foreword to the twenty-three rules stated: ‘The following are taken from the Book of Rules used at Rugby.’ However, there appear to be several differences between the two sets of rules. For example, in the original there are references to hacking but it is not addressed at all in the Academical rules.

Raeburn Place had a major role in the early history of Scottish rugby. The first-ever rugby football international was played there on 27 March 1871, between Scotland and England (Plate 6). A decision by the Academical Cricket Club to agree to the match being staged at Raeburn Place was taken only eleven

²³ EA, 65/9/0/1, Edinburgh Academical Football Club Minute Book 1858–99.

²⁴ D. Ray, ‘Rugby’, in (ed.) Tozer, *Early Public School Football Codes*, 323–34.

Plate 7 Extract pages 175–6 from the Minute Book of the Academical Cricket Club 1859–94: Minute of the Meeting of the Committee
16 March 1871. EA, 69/4/0/2.

days beforehand (Plate 7). Eight Accies played for the Scotland XX and one, Benjamin Burns, for the England XX. Scotland won the match by a goal and a try to a try (the unconverted ‘tries at goal’ did not count). Both of the Scotland tries were disputed and then allowed through the umpires’ interpretation of the rules. The umpires were H. H. Almond, headmaster of Loretto School, for Scotland and A. Ward for England.

Clothing and artefacts form an important component of the archive. The colours of clothing adopted for School, Academical Club and Sports clubs were blue and white. According to *The Edinburgh Academy Register 1824–1914*, these were ‘the colours of the young Gargantua – the white signifying gladness, pleasure, delight, and rejoicing, and the blue, celestial things’.²⁵ Blue and white striped cricket shirts were introduced from the 1850s to be replaced by white shirts in 1871. When the Edinburgh Academical Cricket Club, involving both schoolboys and former pupils, was founded in 1855 a blue and white striped jacket was adopted as official club wear.²⁶

In addition to school blazers, glengarries and caps, the archive contains many sports caps awarded to rugby and cricket players. The rugby international caps of Academicals include that of Charles ‘Hippo’ Reid, capped twenty-one times by Scotland between 1881 and 1888, latterly as captain. To date 115 former pupils have played international rugby for Scotland including most recently Blair Kinghorn (2018) and Meryl Smith (2022), the latter being the first Academical woman to achieve this honour.

The extensive photographic collection in the archive covers the activities of both school and former pupil sports clubs (including the Academical Football Club, Academical Cricket Club, Warriors Cricket Club and Wayfarers Club) as well as photographs of international sports teams in which Academicals have featured. In the collection the earliest school cricket XI team photograph dates from 1859 and that of the school rugby XX from 1873 (Plate 8). Given the extensive period of time involved, runs of team photographs are incomplete. While many are annotated with the names of pupils, a significant proportion has no description. The archive always welcomes donations to fill the gaps.

Photographs of school activities other than rugby and cricket are diverse. The collection includes photos of the whole school, drama, music, mountaineering, athletics, hockey, tennis, sailing, the Combined Cadet Force (formerly the Officers’ Training Corps started at the Academy in 1908) and the Pipe Band as well as boarding houses. The Academy opened the first two bespoke boarding houses in 1898 and ceased boarding in July 2008. There are many illustrations and photographs of buildings including the Upper School at Henderson Row (now the Senior School) and the Preparatory School at Arboretum Road (now the Junior School, opened in 1960), grounds including New Field, Inverleith (opened as the Academy’s new playing fields in 1896–97), and staff and pupils.

²⁵ *The Edinburgh Academy Register 1824–1914*, xix.

²⁶ D. Standley, *Academy Lore: The Story and Traditions of The Edinburgh Academy* (Edinburgh, 2012), 74–5.

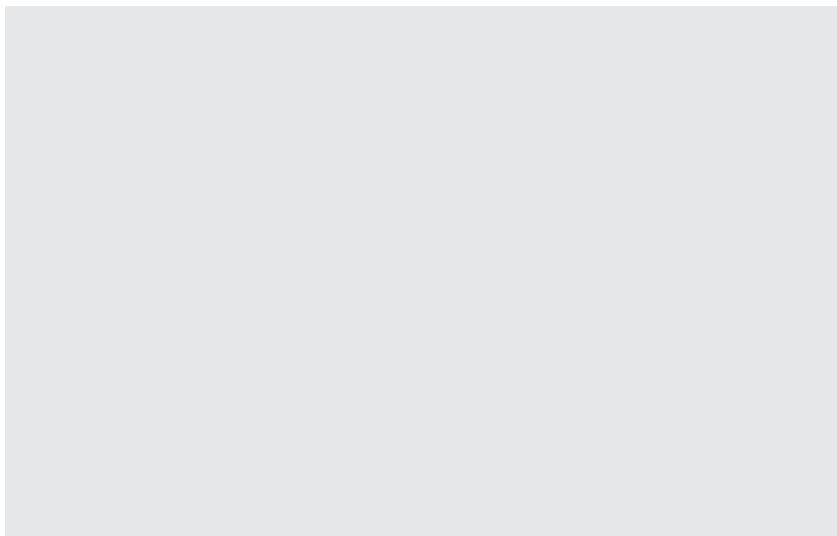


Plate 8 Academy Rugby Football XX of 1873. EA, 30/1/1/194.

The archive holds numerous photographic portraits of notable Academicals. Outstanding nineteenth-century figures who attended the Academy include Archibald Campbell Tait (the first Scotsman to be enthroned as Archbishop of Canterbury in 1869), the surgeon Joseph Bell who was the role model for his student Arthur Conan Doyle's fictional character Sherlock Holmes, the internationally renowned physicist James Clerk Maxwell, and the author and man of letters Robert Louis Stevenson. Those whose lives straddled the nineteenth and twentieth centuries include Peter Guthrie Tait (mathematician), Francis Cadell (colourist), John H. A. Macdonald (Lord Justice Clerk of Scotland), Viscount Richard B. Haldane (Lord Chancellor) and the outstanding sportsman Lewis Balfour-Melville. Viscount Haldane's brother John S. Haldane (physiologist) and the polymath D'Arcy Wentworth Thompson were two members of the school's scientific Eureka Club of 1876, four of whom were elected FRS (Plate 9). The photographic collection of pupils, staff and Academicals was put to good use recently for the publication of a volume commemorating those who died in service of the country during the Great War.²⁷ Notable wartime documents held in the archive include the diaries of Captain Charles Mackintosh of the 4th Royal Scots in Gallipoli and a prisoner of war notebook belonging to A. T. Sloan, dating from 1918.²⁸

²⁷ S. Heintze, A. Fyfe, A. McMillan, C. Cochrane, R. Cowie, G. Fyfe, N. Malcolm-Smith and D. Standley, *Pro Patria Mori: The Edinburgh Academy at War 1914–1918* (Edinburgh, 2015).

²⁸ EA, 76/1/0/1–3 Diaries of Captain Charles Mackintosh of the 4th Royal Scots in Gallipoli and copies of letters sent to his mother Mrs Henrietta Mackintosh in 1915

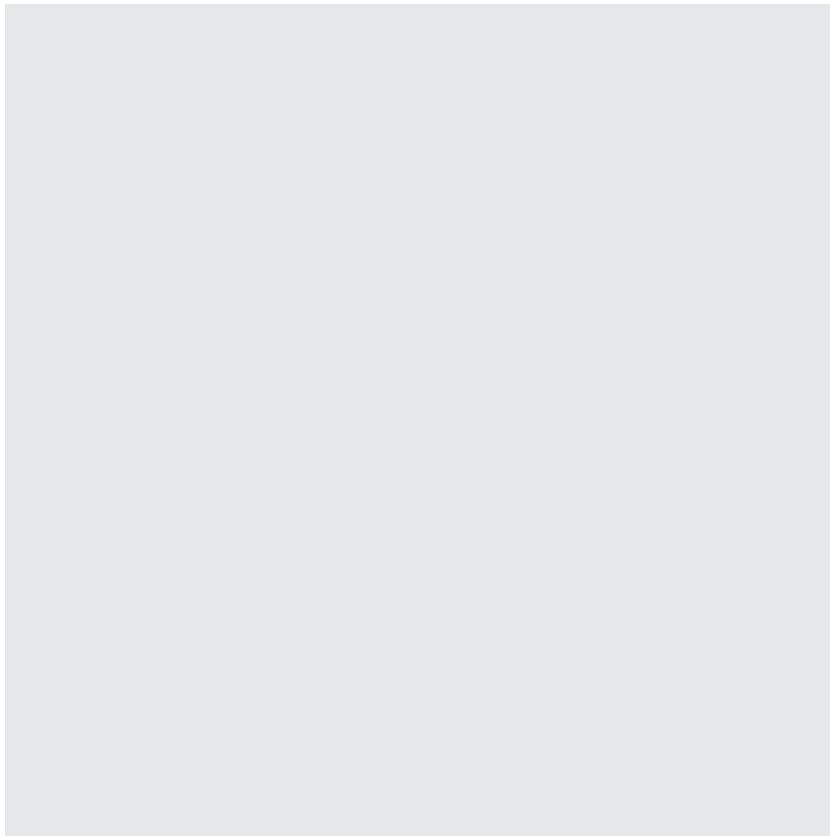


Plate 9 Members of the Eureka Club of 1876. EA, 51/12/0/1. D'Arcy Wentworth Thompson is missing from this photograph.

Senior girls attended the Academy from 1966, at first in small numbers to study for A levels (Consultant Nephrologist Edwina Brown was the first Academy girl). Full co-education was introduced in 2008 and the school now has an equal population of girls and boys within its current roll of just over 1,100 pupils. Notable women Academicals of recent times include international fencer Georgina Usher, author Sarah Pinborough and engineer Luci Rutledge. A 2019 issue of *The Academical* magazine celebrated Edinburgh Academy *Women in Science*.²⁹

during the First World War (donated by his daughter Eileen Mackintosh); EA, 76/1/0/5
Prisoner of War Notebook belonging to A. T. Sloan, recording prison meetings, 1918.

²⁹ *The Academical*, 27 (Edinburgh, 2019), 10–29, available online at <https://edinburghacademy.s3.amazonaws.com/uploads/document/TA27.pdf?t=1616088094?ts=1677929982>.

The archive owes its existence and preservation to several people associated with the Academy, most notably in the twentieth century to the historiographer and archivist Bruce Stenhouse (1911–91), who after attending the school as a pupil in the 1920s, became Secretary of the Academical Club (1946–65) and the Academy's first Registrar (1950–76). Following his retirement, successive office-bearers of the Academical Club and several teachers have assumed custodial duties. The author of this article, who was appointed part-time Honorary Archivist in 2010, is pleased to acknowledge the ready assistance of fellow volunteers. He inherited an excellent typewritten catalogue of documents and publications, and handwritten Index of Photographs, both prepared in the early 2000s (with advice from the Edinburgh City Archivist) by former teacher John Lister. However, much material remained to be sorted and catalogued. This essential work continues in tandem with answering day-to-day enquiries. With presently available resources little attention can currently be paid to capturing born-digital archive including social media or oral histories which would be of great value to future generations.

Recently, interest among pupils has resulted in the formation of an Archives Society which should serve to remind the present generation of pupils and teachers of the history of their school and the relevance of archives. The school archives and the role of archivists have featured in several career events for pupils. Archive materials are also of great interest for former pupils and offer an opportunity for temporary exhibitions around the school and for display at reunions.

The Academy archive has proved a popular resource for those researching biographies, family histories and, more generally, education over the last two centuries. Access to the archive at most times of the year, excluding public holidays, is by appointment only (email archives@edinburghacademy.org.uk). In an initiative designed to make the archive more accessible to the public, a programme of digitisation was begun in 2020. The resulting EA Digital Archive was launched a year later, and the aim is to digitise and make available online a representative selection of documents, books and photographs by the time of the Academy's bicentenary in 2024.³⁰ The selection includes early correspondence leading to the founding of the school, Prize List volumes (1825–1939), *The Edinburgh Academy Register 1824–1914*, the *War Supplement* to the Register (published in 1921) recording those who served and fell in the First World War, and the *War Service Record for 1939–1945*. As part of the bicentenary celebrations an historical archive exhibition is scheduled to take place during the Edinburgh Festival in August 2024.

³⁰ The Edinburgh Academy Digital Archives, <https://edinburghacademy.cook.websds.net>.