

THE PRESBYTERY OF AYR 1581 - 1981

A School In Every Parish

"Of necessitie therefore we judge it that every several kirk have one School-maister appointed, such a one at least as is able to teach Grammar and the Latine tongue if the town be of any reputation. If it be upland where the people convene to doctrine but once in the week, then must either the reader or the minister there appointed take care over the children and youth of the parish, to instruct them in the first rudiments and especially in the Catechisme".

Thus John Knox in his Book of Discipline highlights the significance of education to the early reformers and their Church. The General Assembly, meeting in 1638, reaffirmed this belief and stressed the importance of having a school in every parish: indeed, it went further in advocating that grammar schools be established in all towns and burghs. This policy was approved by the Scottish Parliament and confirmed by an Act of 1646. "The Estates of Parliament considering how prejudicial the want of schooles in many congregations hath been, and how beneficial the founding thereof in every congregation will be to this Kirk and Kingdom do therefor statute and ordain that there be a school founded and a schoolmaster appointed in every parish.... by advice of the Presbytery".

Over the centuries the Presbytery of Ayr shows a major concern for and close involvement with the provision of education within its own area and beyond

1645, May 7 "They regrated also that thair was no shole keiped at all in any of the paroches (i.e. Craigie and Riccarton) so that thair children wer not educat in learning".

The records bear witness to the varying success of its endeavours.

APPOINTMENT OF SCHOOLMASTERS

The Presbytery delegated to small groups of its members the task of examining applicants. In 1693 Parliament confirmed that "all school-masters and teachers of youth in schools are and should be liable to the trial, judgment and censure of the presbyteries of the bounds for their sufficiency, qualification and deportment in the said office."

1710, March 15 "Reported that Messrs. John Laurie Et John Steell took tryal Is of Mr. William Mitchell forsaid, Et that they found him qualified to teach the grammar: he is to sign the confession of faith".

1763, June 8 "As Hugh Wallace who has taught the School of Dailly for some time past being the person proposed by the Heritors to be school--master of Dailly if found Qualified. The Presbytery called upon the said Hugh Wallace Er examined his knowledge of English, Writing, Arithmetick Et of the principles of Religion, were satisfied and judge him qualified to be School--master of Dailly."

In 1708, friction arose between the Presbytery and the magistrates of Ayr. The post of master of the grammar school of Ayr was left vacant by the death of Mr. William Rankine. On 27 October the Presbytery heard that the magistrates had acted swiftly and promoted Mr. James ffergusone" without previous trial by the presbyterie". •

The resulting dispute dragged on for many months escalating rapidly to involve also the Session of the Kirk of Ayr, and awakening a considerable number of local non-educational grievances.

CONFESSION OF FAITH

In 1690, after the coming of William of Orange and the re-establishment of Presbyterianism, Parliament enacted that no schoolmaster could be appointed or allowed to continue in office unless he signed the Confession of Faith.

1710, August 13"All that have schoolmasters Et chaplains in their paroches who have not signed the confession of faith are to advertise them to be present to doe it ".

1800, November 26"The Presbytery then proceeded to take under consideration the Order and injunction of the last General Assembly, concerning teachers and Schoolmasters, when they appointed all the Ministers within their bounds to require all the Parochial and established Schoolmasters to subscribe the Confession of Faith and Formula, and also to inform all the teachers of Youth within their respective Parishes that they are to produce at next meeting of Presbytery attestations of their having taken the Oaths to Government; and the Ministers are to report their diligence in this matter at the meeting of Presbytery in March next."

1808, May 4 "The Presbytery finding that Mr. Smith, private teacher in Mauchline, declines the Oaths to Government, appoint Mr Tod to initiate to said Mr. Smith that the Presbytery are dissatisfied with his conduct in said instance, and that unless he takes the Oaths of Government or give up teaching, they will represent his case to the Sherriff of the County."

1808, July 6 "Mr. Tod reports that Mr. Smith, teacher in his parish, who had refused to take the Oaths to Government had given up keeping any school".

DISCIPLINE

Once appointed, schoolmasters were subject to a strict discipline, exercised by Presbytery.

1642, May 26 "Mr. William Wallace scholmaster (in Ayr) removed. The ministers approved him in his Doctrine Et facultie in teaching of the youth, and in the exercise of Discipline. Bot regrated his non attendance Diligentlie upon the schoole. The jarring and discord betuix him and the Doctor Robert Andro, quhilk wes liklie to overthrow the schoole. As also regrated the keeping bak of some weil disposed shollers becaus of the dullnes and ignorancie of vthers."

1704, October 10 "Mr. Roger informed the presbytrie that Mr. John Reid a student of Theologie, Er Mr. James Greg schoolmaster att Machlyne were both guilty of the scandall of drunkennes at Galstoun."

It is interesting to note that in the famous 'Orders' (guidelines for the master at Dundonald) included in the first volume of the records (from 1602 onwards) of Dundonald Kirk Session, the master is instructed to make use of 'censors'. "As without discipline no company can be kept in order, so least of all unbridled youth, therefore it shall be necessary that there be in the school a common censor who shall remark all faults and delate them to the master of whom account shall be taken once a week. And for more perfect understanding of the children's behaviour there would be a clandestine censor of whom none shall know but the master and he who is employed in that office, that may

secretly acquaint the master with all things". References to the use of censors occur at different points in the Presbytery records.

1699, March 15 "It's overtured that each Session apply to and concur with the civill Magistrate and principall Leading men of the Paroch, that censors be appointed in each paroch to go about, visit, and delate delinquents for cursing, swearing, drunkenness, etc: and where there is a town or clachan in the paroch, that the censors goe through the town or clachan and delate such as shall be found in taverns or alehouses in tyme of divine service; so also on week days, especially on mercat Et fair days, they go through the said town or clachan to notice and delate delinquents for the foresaid crimes; and likewise that the said censors or visitors go through the town or clachan and delate delinquents that are in alehouses at unseasonable tymes of the night."

In 1747 also, the Presbytery instructed its ministers to ensure that schoolmasters were making use of censors to report 'every Saturday' on the behaviour of children out of school.

SCHOOLMASTERS' SALARIES

The Acts of 1646 and 1696 laid it down that the heritors (i.e. landowners) in every parish should provide a "commodious house for a school and settle and modifie a sallary to a Schoolmaster which shall not be under one hundred marks nor above two Hundred marks".

1642, May 18 "thair culd not be ane convenient place for a shoole (in Auchinleck), in respect of the great distance of the parochiners from the kirk, Bot that honest men keiped thair bairnes at shoole at home besyde themselves. And that thair wes no setled maintenance for a shoolemaster."

1697, March 31 "All the severall members are required to use diligence to gett Sallaries for Schoolmasters setled in their paroch conform to a late act of parliament, Et report."

1734, October 1 "the Committee, appointed to meet at Kirkmichael the 24th ultimo, did, And Mr. Laurie informs that since that time all the heritors (except two one of whom is at a good distance from this country and the other gave a verbal consent) have by letters under their hands agreed to have ane hundred merks setled as a constant sallary to the schoolmaster at Kirkmichael and that if more be found needfull they will not be averse from granting allowance for some more by a private grant but that no more should go into the act of presbytryThe Presbytry appoint that a bond according to the tenor of the saids letters to be drawn up and presented to the heritors that they may subscribe the same and that it be put in the Register and ane Extract of it be preserved as a lasting document for the same." Unfortunately some heritors took a great deal of persuading to part with their money.

1697, July 21 "Some Ministers report that they have made intimation for conveyeing their heritors anent schoolmasters sallaries, Et others tell they finde inconveniency to doe it, & therefor must labour to bring them up to it by degrees.". Frequently, recourse to the law became necessary, i.e. "instruments were taken" e.g. in parishes in Sorn, Kirkoswald, New Cumnock (1698).

1735, September 2 "That these who have no school provyded nor a sallary to a schoolmaster according to law and have taken Instruments against their heritors for not doing it are the paroches of Dalgain Riccarton Kirkoswald Craigie New Cumnock Dailie, Barr Moorkirk Auchinleck Symintoun Stair 8. Monkton."

SCHOOL-HOUSES

The provision of the school-house also came within the remit of the Presbytery.

1741, March 4 "Mr. William Paton having represented that the heretors of his paroch intend to build a schoolhouse at the Kirk (in Dailly) he desires a Committee may be appointed to meet with them." This Committee was appointed and set to work immediately. Within a month their Report, prepared with the approval of the heritors (Sir James ferguson of Kilkerran, Sir John Cathcart of Carleton and Alexander Boyd of Penkill) and the assistance of a joiner and three stonemasons, was presented.

The schoolhouse, built "in the Northwest end of the Kirkyeard at the door from the high way" cost a total of "One hundred and Twentyseven pound fifteen shilling Scots." The account for the work was not rendered for some time!

1746, January 1 "Thomas Campbell mason having sometime agoe engaged with the heretors of Dailie to build a schoolhouse there and was authorized to uplift the money from the several heretors. And the said Thomas Campbell being dead since that time his son in law William Hunter has built the said schoolhouse and wants the Presbytrys Warrant to call in the said money to defray the charge. The Presbytry do hereby agree to and nominate the said William Hunter to call in and uplift the said money and if need be to use diligence against the recusants".

INSPECTION/VISITS

1707, August 27 "It was reported that the Grammar Schools of Air Et Mayboll were visited by these appointed Et having taken tryall of the scholars in both places they found they had made good proficiency, Et that they heard a good report of the schoolmasters as to their good behaviour Et christian cariage: with report the presbytrie were satisfied."

1742, August 31 "The Presbytry having communed upon proper expedients for promoting Edification in their several paroches Resolved and appointed as one most proper mean for this good purpose that Every minister shall in time coming Visit the paroch school once a month or as often as he conveniently can, And each time Instruct the scholars in the principles and practise of religion, and pray with them, and Enquire into their (i.e. the school-masters') diligence."

1747, April 29 "The Class of Ayr Judge it may Conduce greatly to make effectual the good Design of the Synod's Act for Visiting of Schools, that the Ministers at such Visitation recommend to the School-master that he Begin the Morning Diet with Prayer and Dismiss the School at night in the same Manner.

That the Schoolmasters be exhorted to take some proper method of being Acquainted with the Behaviour of the Children when out of School Such as appointing Censors who are to Report every Saturday.

And also that the ancient good Custom of repeating the Catechism in the Church on the Lord's Day before Sermon in the forenoon and likeways that a portion of the Holy Scriptures be read after repeating the Catechism. The Clerk is to send copies hereof to the Ministers."

Not all visits resulted in the schoolmaster's being commended.

1695, March 6 "... These appointed to visit the grammar school of Mayboll report that they finde the schoolmaster there insufficient to teach: whereup the Moderator is appointed to preach there upon a week day, Et to cause warn heretors, magistrates, session, a- heads of families to be present: Et desyre them in the Presbyteries name to provide themselves with another sufficient school master".

At the 10 April 1695 meeting Mr. Patrick Findlay was declared "Unsufficient to teach a grammar school." Unfortunately his successor, Mr. Hew Campbell, formerly schoolmaster in Cumnock, did not hold the post for long. He "demitted the charge (being accused of the scandall of fornication he is fugitive from discipline)". The school was declared vacant 13 May 1626.

Careful attention was also devoted to the curriculum being taught and the textbooks used by the teachers.

1714, March 3 "These appointed to take tryal of the proficiency of the children that are taught by Mr. Hunters grammar, report they did it Et were very satisfied with these scholars as to their knowledge of the three parts of Grammar, which they thought extraordinary, considering that they have attended the school only but about nine moneths."

1715, June 22 "The Committee appointed to visit Mr. Hunters grammar did agree upon the following report to be made to the presbytrie viz. That its their opinion the method is very good, Et that he has done good service by his pains that way, Et that the remarks they made are not so materia II, but that in the meantime, the presbytrie may endeavour to have it taught in all schools within their bounds, & that the presbytrie use their interest to have this method to obtain through the whole bounds of the synod. And in that case they finde Mr. Hunter is willing to give a second edition with amendments, & subject the copy to the opinion of the presbytrie Et synod, or any other they shall think fit to appoint to give their remarks upon it befor it be printed. The presbytrie approves Er recommends accordingly." Mr. James ferguson, Master of the grammar school, however had his reservations about Mr. Hunter s book and success. He claimed that the success of the pupils was the result of "the more than ordinary pains Mr. Hunter had taken on them" and found that the text book was "greatly defective and in many things erroneous".

SCHOOLS IN EVERY PARISH

By the end of the 18th century the early reformers' objective of a school in every parish had alrnost been achieved. In 1735 some twelve parishes in Presbytery of Ayr had no school but by the 1790's only the parishes of Auchinleck and Stair were without one.

The 19th century however brought massive changes to almost every aspect of life in south west Scotland. Against the background of a growing industrialisation of society, the Presbytery's influence over the education within its bounds declined rapidly. The need for a literate electorate and work force encouraged the setting up of more and more schools by various bodies—so that by 1866, in Ayrshire, parish schools accounted for only 25% of pupils. State intervention in the financing, running and supervision of schools rapidly increased.

Despite its declining role in education, the Presbytery continued to seek to exert influence on decision making at national and local levels.

1869, May 5 Presbytery petitioned against the Education Bill.

"1. Because no provision is made in the Bill for ascertaining the religious character of the Teachers of the new National Schools or the religious instruction they are to communicate.

2. Because it contemplates the complete overthrow of the present system of Parochial Schools, so long the boast and privilege of Scotland.

3. Because it interferes with the prosperity of a number of Schools at present in efficient operation such as Public Works Schools which have been erected on the understanding that the Government would continue to subsidize them.

5. Because it will put a stop to voluntary effort and introduce a system of rating which in many parishes will be complained of as a grievous and unnecessary burden".

1918, September 5 "A circular letter signed by the moderators of the General Assemblies of the Church of Scotland and of the United Free Church was laid before the Presbytery, recommending that steps should be taken to secure that provision should be made in the Education (Scotland) Bill, 1918 for Religious Instruction to be given in all public schools. Unanimously agreed — to convey to Prime Minister, The Secretary for Scotland, the Lord Advocate, and the members of Parliament for South Ayrshire and the Ayr burghs, the opinion of the Presbytery that provision ought to be made in the aforementioned Bill for Religious Instruction to be given in all public schools, Primary, Intermediate, and Secondary and further that a circular be issued to ministers of all parishes within the bounds strongly urging that action be taken in each parish on the lines recommended in the Moderator's letter".

1939, April 5"Presbytery resolved to enjoin ministers (1) that they give every assistance and encouragement to any Headmaster who invites their co-operation and (2) that they leave the initiative in this matter to the teachers; and that a letter explaining the situation should be sent to every minister within the bounds".

1943, February 2 "Presbytery petition the next General assembly to approach the Secretary of State for Scotland with a view to having the Church of Scotland adequately represented on the Scottish Advisory Council on Education".

1945, February 5 "Attention drawn to the fact that none of the 4 representatives of the Protestant Churches in Ayrshire to the County Council's Education Committee has been put on the Teaching and Staffing Sub-Committee. This was a distinct disadvantage in the matter of securing that sufficient attention be given to R.I. in schools. Presbytery instructed the committee to watch over this matter".

1949, September 6 "Mr. Wright explained that there are at present no School Chaplains officially appointed — but a number of ministers conduct religious services in certain schools from time to time and assist with religious teaching on the invitation of Head Teachers".

In 1981, this work continues.