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‘Remember Now Thy Creator’

Scottish Girls’ Samplers, 1700–1872

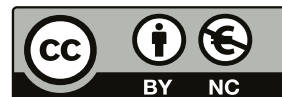
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CHAPTER 2

Samplers in the schoolroom: education for girls

This chapter aims to place the making of samplers within the context of education of girls in Scotland. It is a complex and controversial subject, and we can only hope to give an outline here. There is also the difficulty of teasing out the provision for girls as opposed to boys, and where these provisions were intended for all children, whether they were in fact applied equally to girls and boys.

Where did girls in Scotland learn to make samplers and why? Current research suggests that the majority of samplers were made in a school of some kind, or with a teacher who specialised in sewing and embroidery, rather than at home with their mother or other female relative. Evidence for girls' education is not easy to come by in general for Britain but even less so for Scotland. Most studies that feature women's education have tended to look at the battle for girls to learn academic subjects and the admission of women to university. Recent work has concentrated on the daughters of the elite, where more plentiful

records in the form of letters and accounts survive in family archives.⁵⁶ The education of middle-class girls, however, has been less easy to study.⁵⁷ Much less has been written about the education of girls from their early years, what today we would term their elementary education, to the time they might go to a boarding school from about the age of twelve, if they belonged to upper- or middle-class families. By this time most girls would have made an alphabet sampler and any needlework they did at boarding school was likely to be of a more specialist nature.

By the seventeenth century, boys were taught a range of subjects including Latin, rhetoric and possibly arithmetic, geometry and surveying, and they might also learn music and dancing. There was no attempt to teach them trades or crafts, which were the preserve of the apprentice system, jealously guarded by the guilds, or incorporations as they were known in Scotland. Girls, however, were required to learn different skills. For them the housewifely arts were seen as important and most of these could be learned at home. For girls higher on the social scale, learning the ways of 'polite society', what later became known as 'being finished', was important.⁵⁸

In 1560 Scotland became a Protestant Presbyterian country and the new religious leaders set about devising a structure of government for their congregations. Education was seen as important and knowledge of reading was required of all children because they needed to

OPPOSITE. 2.1 Mary Gibson's sampler of 1822 was worked at the school at Forester's Croft on the Strathallan estate in Perthshire, on a wool ground in silk. So far, no suitable candidates for her have been found in the baptism registers. Her sampler is full of small motifs including Adam and Eve, peacocks, corner designs and a large building with three doors. Her parents were probably WG and IH as these initials are worked more prominently than the others. Mrs Henderson was probably the teacher. 17¼ in (43.8 cm) x 13¼ in (33.7 cm). NMS A.1966.341.

be able to read the Bible in their own language. Salvation was to be achieved through justification by faith, obtained by an individual's reading the Bible and hearing sermons given by godly ministers, not through the intercession of saints or priests. *The First Book of Discipline* set out the objectives of the reformers for a school in every parish. They had hoped to use the money and lands of the old monastic foundations as the basis for funding the new schools, but the laity, particularly the nobility, frustrated this laudable aim by taking much of the land for themselves.⁵⁹ The idea of education for all therefore suffered a setback and it was hard work in a poor country to establish a nationwide school system that would serve all children in all communities within Scotland. In 1616 an Act was introduced that placed the burden of providing schools on all members of a parish, making it a community function. In 1633 another Act provided for levying a tax on the heritors (landowners) for the provision of a school, although the effect of both these Acts appears to have been negligible. The seventeenth century, though, was a time of war and famine in Scotland and the various attempts to provide schools in each parish produced mixed results, although research has proved that more schools were founded than was previously thought.⁶⁰ A later Act in 1696 appears to have been more successful and through the early years of the eighteenth century, parish schools were created in more areas. In many towns and cities much of the initiative to set up schools was left to the burghs, wealthy benefactors, or, later on, benevolent societies.⁶¹ There were also many private schools set up by individual teachers, often of very short duration, usually known as venture schools. Sometimes parents would club together to hire a schoolteacher for a period, as did the poet Robert Burns' father. John Ramsay of Ochtertyre, near Stirling, mentions in a letter of 1808 that 'My two ploughmen, both of them parents of families, finding themselves deficient in arithmetick, have put themselves to a *night* school set up by my servants for their infantry ... The attempt is laudable and they may be much the better for the addition and subtraction ...'⁶² In the late eighteenth and early nineteenth

centuries estate owners started schools for children of their estate workers and local villagers. Samplers from some of these schools survive, for example Mary Gibson's sampler 'sewed at Foresters Croft at the right honourable Lady Amelia Drummond school 1822', and naming Mrs Henderson, who was presumably the teacher (illus 2.1). Forester's Croft is on the edge of Strathallan Castle Estate and Lady Amelia was the wife of James Drummond, later Viscount Strathallan. Fothergill mentions a school started by Lady Rosebery at Cramond for the daughters of the Dalmeny Estate workers.⁶³ The nearby estate of the Earls of Hopetoun also had an estate school, known as the Blue Gate, or sewing, school in Abercorn parish. Samplers dated from 1813 to 1880 are known to exist from this school in private collections (illus 2.2). All these initiatives suggest that education was important to Scots and they attempted to fill the need in whatever way they could. But a good deal of basic learning was probably taking place at home, especially for girls.

In towns in the nineteenth century, more enlightened factory owners also started schools for the children of their workforce. The best known of these was at New Lanark, the cotton mills founded by David Dale in 1786, in partnership with Richard Arkwright, on the banks of the Upper Clyde. Later the mills were sold to Dale's son-in-law, Robert Owen, the Welsh social reformer and philanthropist, and a model village was built which came to embody utopian socialism. Owen was particularly concerned with the children of the workers and a school was built for them with a curriculum based on Joseph Lancaster's ideas. A sampler worked at New Lanark School by Margaret Sheddon, aged eleven

OPPOSITE. 2.2 Janet Jamieson worked her sampler at the Blue Gate school, Abercorn parish, in 1832. She was baptised in Abercorn on 8 December 1822 to James, a farmer, and Janet Orr and married a flesher, Alexander Turnbull, in 1852. Now rather faded and discoloured, the sampler shows a typical two-storey pedimented house with fence, worked in silk on linen. As well as a verse from Ecclesiastes 12:13 she includes nearly twenty sets of initials, mainly with the surname beginning with J. 16¼ in (42.5 cm) x 19¾ in (50.2 cm). Leslie B Durst Collection.



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ROB^t OWEN^S M^{rs} OWEN

R O W O A C O J D O D D O R O M D O

M^{ISS} DALE M D M D J J D



William Sheddon. Mary Forfyth. Alexander She
ddon. John Sheddon. Mary Sheddon. William She
ddon. Susanna Sheddon. John Sheddon. Susanna
M^{rs} Indoe. Alexander Forfyth. Mary Ann Sawrs.

Have thou no other God but me.
Unto no image bow thy knee. 
Take not the name of God in vain.
Do not the sabbath day profane.
Honour thy father and mother too.
And see that thou no murder do.
From whoredom keep thee chaste and clean.
And steal not though thy state be mean.
Of false report bear not the blot.
What is thy neighbours covet not.



This was done at New Lanark School by Margaret
Sheddon. Aged 11 years finished her Sampler 19
October 1812. Agnes's Richmond JR. AR. HK. JB.



years, and dated 1812, survives (illus 2.3). It names Robert and Mrs Owen and Miss Dale, with several initials ending in O and D, as well as Margaret's parents and siblings. It includes the Ten Commandments, crowns and a few simple motifs. Another philanthropic factory owner was Colin Dunlop of the Clyde Iron Works, who set up a school for his employees' children at Fullerton, which is where Elizabeth Perret worked her sampler, aged thirteen in 1866.⁶⁴

The Society in Scotland for Propagating Christian Knowledge, the SSPCK, founded in 1709, was granted powers to erect schools 'for the instruction of children particularly female children, in some of the most necessary and useful arts of life'.⁶⁵ Some of these schools succeeded and others failed. In Gaelic-speaking areas the use of English was resented, although Gaelic was later introduced into the curriculum, with the production of a Gaelic Bible. The Society was also disliked because of its religious stance. Part of the reason for its formation was an effort to counteract the threat of a possible Roman Catholic revival in the Highlands, where there were many who still belonged to that church and where there was a threat of a revival of Jacobitism.

That Scotland succeeded in providing enough schools before the 1872 Education Act at least to produce a basically educated population is a credit to the men and women who worked hard to provide this through the various initiatives of the Church of Scotland and private individuals. For example, the minister who wrote the entry for Dunrossness in the *New Statistical Account* in 1841 noted: 'There are few or none of the people who cannot read', which was obvi-

ously a source of pride to him. The 1872 Education Act for Scotland was the start of the state's provision of the major part of the education service. In an age when children of poorer families often had to work as soon as they were physically able, school attendance was always rather difficult to enforce and at times like the summer harvest all able-bodied men, women and children were out working in the fields. Indeed, the long summer holidays enjoyed by children today can be traced back to the need for everyone to help with the harvest, and even small children could play their part in this. This meant that the majority of children in Scotland had a very patchy education until the law forced their regular attendance at school.

In theory, the local schools, which each parish was supposed to set up after the Reformation, took both girls and boys. In practice this did not always happen and it is sometimes difficult to determine whether girls were attending a particular school or not. The curriculum of most schools was very basic, reading being the dominant activity because of the need to read the Bible and the Catechism in the vernacular.⁶⁶ Learning to read had the advantage of spreading knowledge of the Bible, which was also used as a textbook, with passages from it being reproduced in many books as well as on samplers. All children had to learn the Shorter Catechism and they were examined on it. *The Westminster Shorter Catechism*, 1647, is a simple question-and-answer format on God, sin, human nature, Jesus Christ, the Ten Commandments and the Lord's Prayer, that aids memorisation. A simpler version, *The ABC with the Shorter Catechism*, was provided for children. The majority of boys and girls were taught only to read, although boys were more likely than girls to be taught writing as well. It is clear from various accounts that many children, in particular boys, in rural areas could read well and that those who could afford it owned books. There were also chapbooks and a growing number of small booklets with stories suitable for children being produced in the eighteenth century.

Susan Sibbald was the daughter of Dr Thomas Mein RN, of Eildon Hall.⁶⁷ She often

OPPOSITE. 2.3 Margaret Sheddon's sampler was worked at New Lanark in 1812 and lists her own family as well as the initials of various members of the Owen family. Her father was butler to Robert Owen. It is a beautifully worked piece with the Ten Commandments, some small motifs and a set of crowns, and at the bottom is Agnes Richmond's name, who was probably her teacher. Margaret uses cross stitch throughout with the sentence at the bottom showing one way of working the stitch so that it produces stitches worked as a square. 16 $\frac{3}{8}$ in (42.9 cm) x 13 $\frac{3}{4}$ in (33.7 cm). © CSG CIC Glasgow Museums Collection E.1980.158, reproduced by permission.

accompanied her father when he was out planning new plantations, and while he conferred with the forester she talked to an old shepherd, Willie Carruthers: ‘I always found Willie reading, he subscribed to the circulating Library at Melrose, and he knew more of Ancient and Modern History, I am ashamed to own, than I did although I had left school only eighteen months before.’ Presumably Willie had time to read because as a shepherd he did not have to be moving all the time or use his hands as a man would who was working on an arable farm. However, many people simply did not have time to read and the church frowned on anyone reading books on a Sunday that were not of a religious nature. Lending libraries were another sign that reading was something that Scots of all levels enjoyed and by the early nineteenth century there were a surprising number of these. The quantity of books known to have been published in Britain from the early seventeenth century, and the number of editions some of them ran into, are surely an indication that the ability to read was more widespread than some accounts suggest.⁶⁸ For example, in 1622 printer Andrew Hart’s testament noted 15,000 texts while the testament of Agnes Campbell, Mrs Anderson, who ran a flourishing print business and was printer to the College in Edinburgh in the early eighteenth century, included a detailed inventory with over 50,000 books in stock including 29,000 Bibles.⁶⁹

Writing was always an extra in the school curriculum and was usually costed separately. Today we tend to see reading and writing as going together, but in the past they were seen as two very distinct accomplishments, because the majority of children did not require to learn to write. The ability to write is usually taken to indicate literacy and the signature has been the most common means of assessing this, but as R D Anderson points out, this is not direct evidence of an ability to read, or of a good command of writing skills.⁷⁰ There is some evidence from England that when couples were being married the vicars were reluctant to allow poor or labouring people to sign their name in the marriage register, as they were required by law to do, in

case they did not do it neatly, so they made their mark instead. This relates to the period after 1753, when a new law required churches to use printed forms in a bound book for marriages. The Act did not apply to Scotland and it was not until general registration in 1855 that the bride and groom had to sign, so it is even more difficult to guess at literacy rates before this date. It will probably never be possible to gauge with any accuracy the level of literacy in Scotland in the past.

How well girls could read and how much they read is likewise very difficult to ascertain. Few memoirs, autobiographies or biographies deal with the topic of elementary education in any depth. Any mention is usually vague, such as that their mother ‘taught them their letters’, but how or what texts she used is only rarely noted, and the phrase means that they were being taught to read, not to write. In the Museum of Childhood, Edinburgh, are building blocks with letters on them used by the children of Thomas Ruddiman, Keeper of the Signet Library, and National Museums Scotland hold a sampler worked by his daughter Allison in 1740.⁷¹ Most memoirs and biographies before the late eighteenth century are more concerned with the religious life and struggles of the author than their education or social life. Reading and writing, however, became more important as letter writing increased throughout the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. By 1800 better roads allowed quicker delivery of goods between towns, and trade directories list destinations and which days of the week carriers would leave for various places. Letters and parcels could therefore be delivered more reliably than in the past. For a woman who

OPPOSITE. 2.4 Elisabeth Low of Forgandenny, aged nine, has a rather old-fashioned appearance to her sampler of 1818. She includes the Ten Commandments and the thistle with a variation on the usual motto, ‘I have power to defend myself and offend others’. There are alphabets as well as the names of her parents and ‘Beatrex Bruce’. Elisabeth was the daughter of James Low, schoolmaster of the parish of Forgandenny, and Elisabeth Mitchell, and was baptised on 16 April 1809 by the Reverend John Willison. Beatrix Bruce was born on 13 April 1788, the daughter of George Bruce, wright, and Margt Balmain, also in Forgandenny, and she may have been the schoolmistress. 16½ in (42 cm) x 12¾ in (31.4 cm). Leslie B Durst Collection.



A B C D E F G H I J K L M N O P Q R S T U V W X Y Z

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13 14 15 16 17 18 19 20

I II III IV V VI VII VIII IX X XI XII XIII XIV XV XVI XVII XVIII XIX XX XXI XXII XXIII XXIV XXV XXVI XXVII XXVIII XXIX XXX



A B C D E F G H I J K L M N O P Q R S T U V W X Y Z

A B C D E F G H I

Have thou no other
gods but me UNTO NO
IMAGE bow thy knees
take not the Name of
GODS YAHU DO NOT the
sabbath day profane
Honour thy father and
Mother too



and see that thou no
Murder do FROM
whoredom keep thee
chaste and clean and
steal not tho thy hate
be mean of lalie report
bear not the blot what
is thy Neighbours
covet not



James Low & Elisabeth Mitchell Beatrix Bruce

Elisabeth Low aged 9 Forganberry October

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Collection



set up in business, being able to read, write and keep accounts was crucial for success, but such were in the minority.

What did eighteenth-century society see as the purpose of education? The Edinburgh Presbytery Minutes were quite clear when it came to the education of orphans: 'to prepare orphans for the business of life and the purposes of eternity' (29 December 1742). This is probably the basic belief of most adults at the time with regard to the education of their own offspring. Alexander Law makes the point that most people in the eighteenth century saw education as being for the disciplining of the mind and body, but the poor, as well as being taught virtue, had to be trained in industry.⁷² At the orphan hospitals, as these institutions were usually known, the girls would make all their own clothing and if there was a boys' section as well, they made the boys' shirts, and also the sheets and other household textiles that were required.⁷³ Contributions in kind by the pupils helped to cut down the cost of running the hospital and taught the girls a useful skill.

For middle-class girls, the sentiments of the author of *The Polite Lady: a course of female education, in a series of letters from a mother to her daughter*, first published in 1760, would seem to encapsulate their parents' attitude to sewing:⁷⁴

For though there are many other female accomplishments more showy and specious, yet there is not any one more useful [i.e. than sewing], nay, I may venture to say, there is none equally so. What an infinite number of the female sex, and, perhaps the most virtuous part of it too,

live by the needle? How greatly does it contribute to render our persons more decent, more agreeable, and more beautiful? What a surprising difference is there between the appearance of lady Morton, whom you have often seen at church, and Doll Common, the cinder-wench? And yet this difference is chiefly owing to dress; and dress depends chiefly on the needle.

The basic skills taught to girls were therefore those that could enable them to earn their own living and support their families. Life being uncertain, there was never any guarantee that marriage would not end in widowhood with several small children to support, but with a needle, a pair of knitting pins or a spindle a woman could always earn some money to support herself. So girls were taught plain sewing, that is, the making of underwear and other basic garments, knitting, mainly used for making stockings, and spinning flax and wool. Apart from reading and religious instruction, that was all they were expected to know.

Girls in larger households or from wealthier families had to learn about managing a home and they might well know the basics of cooking, but as more families became wealthier during the eighteenth century the skills girls had to learn changed. At one time they might have had to do much of the cooking but now the family might well employ a cook. More elegant skills, such as pastry making, might be something the women of the household would be interested in, and so pastry schools appeared. The making of pastry and other delicacies required expensive ingredients and it was incumbent on a housewife to know how to keep control of these. Girls from this kind of background were also expected to keep accounts, not only of housekeeping money but also of their own private allowances. This would be useful when they married and had their own home.⁷⁵

Plenty of teachers can be found in trade directories, newspaper advertisements or town minutes. For example, in late seventeenth-century Edinburgh there were seven schoolmistresses and

OPPOSITE. 2.5 Jessie Henderson's sampler starts with alphabets worked in different styles, reversed flower stem border and octagons with the Ten Commandments. There are other verses, many initials under 'turban-like' crowns and small motifs around a building that represents the Orphan Hospital in Edinburgh. Below she has also included the castle with a head in the doorway and a thistle and motto and a rose in octagons. She also names her teacher, Miss Catherine Gibson, but the other initials and names are probably of the other pupils. It is worked in silk on wool but the date has been unpicked. 19½ in (49.5 cm) x 12½ in (31.8 cm). © CSG CIC Glasgow Museums Collection E.1979.2.17, reproduced by permission.

eighteen schoolmasters for an estimated child population of 10,000.⁷⁶ Over 350 women teachers have been traced from various sources over the period 1660 to 1870 and many more could be identified by a more thorough search. Small private schools often had a very short life and teachers who had no school are unlikely to turn up in any documents, except perhaps bills in family papers. One woman who wrote briefly about a school she and her sisters opened in 1848 in Cupar, Fife, is Henrietta Keddie, who wrote novels under the pen name Sarah Tytler.⁷⁷ The sisters opened the school first as a day school and it later became a boarding school, finally closing in 1870 when Henrietta moved to London. In her memoirs Henrietta is much more concerned with describing how music dominated middle-class girls’ education at this time. According to the 1861 census a young German teacher joined the sisters, but no mention is made of needlework. The number of educational establishments and teachers found does suggest that education was viewed more highly than has perhaps been appreciated. To suggest that the subjects taught to females were merely to keep them in their place is to forget that the education of boys was also geared to the station in life that they were destined to fill. The ethos behind the education of all children was the same.

The 1825–6 Pigot’s trade directory lists over 160 teachers or schools throughout Scotland that taught girls, although what they taught is not usually mentioned. This was the first directory to be divided into trades and professions rather than just an alphabetical list. These are by no means the only schools at this period, as there were probably several that did not wish or could not afford to advertise in the directory, and there were probably governesses and other teachers not noted as well. Of the surviving samplers that mention a teacher, the majority can be dated to the first forty years of the nineteenth century. However, the identification of teachers named on samplers in any documents is usually rather tentative. Some very elaborate samplers were worked at institutions such as the Orphan Hospital in Edinburgh, where Jessie Henderson embroidered the façade of the building and dedi-

cated her sampler to Miss Catherine Gibson (illus 2.5). Catherine Gaunt, however, worked a very plain sampler at the Orphan Institution, Glasgow, while Jane Christie worked a beautifully neat sampler in 1823 at the Institute for the Deaf and Dumb, Glasgow.⁷⁸ For the later part of the nineteenth century it is the schools set up in the parishes that are most often noted on samplers.⁷⁹

CITY SCHOOLING AND TOWN SCHOOLING: EDINBURGH AND FORRES

Two places in Scotland where the provision of schools for girls was attempted, Edinburgh and Forres, contrast in size although their provision is very similar. By the eighteenth century Edinburgh, as befitted the capital of what had been a sovereign country, was different from most other cities and towns in Scotland.⁸⁰ It was the headquarters of the law, it had an old and well-regarded university and many wealthy merchants, and despite the fact that no parliament now met there it was still seen as the place where all wealthy and noble families might resort in order to meet their friends and to form alliances. It boasted the best shops and the milliners regularly imported the latest fashions, so it was a magnet for both men and women.

While their brothers might be attending the Royal High School in Edinburgh, girls would be attending a private school. If their parents did not live in Edinburgh, they might board with friends or family members. Boarding schools became more popular as the eighteenth century progressed, possibly because better roads were making travel around Scotland less hazardous. The Reverend John Mill, minister in Shetland, records in his diary taking his eldest daughter Nell with him when he went to Edinburgh to

OPPOSITE. 2.6 ‘Jennet Riddal McDonald her sampler sewed in the Edinburgh Castle Female School in the 12 year of her age October th 8 1830’. Jennet has included a large building with the verse ‘Jesus permit’, crowned family initials, a thistle and alphabets. A school for soldiers’ children in Edinburgh Castle is mentioned as receiving money from a concert in Edinburgh in 1819. 17¾ in (45 cm) x 13 in (33 cm). Leslie B Durst Collection.



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AG CB AT JG JC CG MC DB JD
BB JG JH JO MA II G H JO II G H DC DB JB EJ JB

Elisabeth Greenhill finished this work at the ladies school
in her 11 Year. A C H B W G M G

prov c 31
Many things have done virtuously but they are forgotten
that all things are created and made, it vain but a woman
that fears the Lord she shall be praised, blessed of husband
of her hands and in her own works praise her to the gates
1831

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attend the General Assembly in 1768. She was to attend the Misses Scot in Edinburgh, 'a minister's daughters of good reputation, to teach her to make her own cloathes, at least, and to see more of the world, as she has got already what this Country afforded as to sewing and working stockings, writing, arithmetick, dancing, Church music, etc.'⁸¹ Helen Mill was born on 5 August 1755, so she was thirteen when she went to Edinburgh. Her father does not mention when she returned but she probably spent about a year in the city. Like their counterparts in the rest of Britain, young Scottish ladies were thought to need to be educated in the niceties of etiquette, known as 'being finished', and to acquire suitable accomplishments to show off. The Honourable Mrs Ogilvie, for example, ran a finishing school teaching 'contemporary manners'.⁸² These included playing a musical instrument, singing, dancing, embroidery and other similar crafts, and possibly knowledge of a modern foreign language, but not, of course, Latin or Greek. To cater for the demand for these acquirements, specialists, particularly in music, dancing and languages, set up as teachers, sometimes going to girls' homes, but also visiting some of the girls' schools. There are at least eight schools advertising in the *Edinburgh Advertiser* in 1787, mostly boarding and offering the usual accomplishments, although one mentions mantua making and another, a day school, reading and writing. By the time they went to a boarding school the girls, like Nell Mill, would have been competent in the basics.

For poorer children there were the charity schools. The first Charity or Free School in Edinburgh was mentioned in the Town Council minutes in 1699.⁸³ Reading, writing, arithmetic

and the twelve common tunes for the Psalms were taught, and in addition the wife of the precentor of the Tolbooth kirk was to instruct the girls in working stockings. In 1743 there was a Charity Workhouse established where spinning, weaving and other female activities were taught.⁸⁴ In the 1840s there was a sewing school attached to the Workhouse as well as a school where the usual subjects were taught, which were examined on a half-yearly basis.⁸⁵

The Orphan Hospital, founded in 1733, took in about 200 children, admitting orphans from any part of Scotland. According to the *Second Statistical Account* for Edinburgh, a 'good plain education is given to both sexes, and the girls are exercised in the domestic duties of the house to train them for servants'.⁸⁶ There were also two schools catering for two specific groups, one for the girls of the members of the Merchant Company, founded in 1694, and the other for members of the Trades Incorporations, founded in 1704. These schools were designed to help the less fortunate members of the burgh class and it was not a stigma to be educated by them. They were both funded partly by the generosity of Mary Erskine, who died in 1707.⁸⁷ The schools aimed to produce capable housewives; so as well as reading, writing and arithmetic the girls spent a good deal of their time in practical work, such as sewing and spinning, but also going to market and assisting in the cooking.⁸⁸ Later on in the nineteenth century the Merchant Maiden girls had a wider curriculum, as they were mainly becoming governesses when they left, rather than earning their living by sewing.

Other institutions in Edinburgh sought to cater for the needs of a specific group (illus 2.6). These included the Asylum for the Blind, founded in the 1790s, which acquired a house for women in 1822 where they sewed, knitted and spun, earning money to help defray the costs of housing and feeding them.⁸⁹ Deaf and dumb children aged from nine to fourteen could attend the Deaf and Dumb Institution, but it had limited funds and so parents often had to pay something. There was also a day school where girls had to learn 'sewing, knitting and other domestic employments'. The Magdalene Asylum was

OPPOSITE. 2.7 Elisabeth Greenhill was baptised in South Leith, Midlothian, on 7 May 1819, the daughter of Andrew Greenhill and Catherine Borthwick, and was eleven when she finished her sampler at the ladies' school in 1830. At the top she has worked crowned and uncrowned initials of family and friends, and GR4 for King George IV. A large three-storey building is worked below a verse from Proverbs 31, beginning 'Many daughters . . .' There is a school in Duncan Street, Leith, in Pigot's Directory for 1837, run by Mrs Nimmo, which may be the school referred to in this sampler. 20½ in (52 cm) x 16¼ in (41.3 cm). Leslie B Durst Collection.

established in 1792 for taking charge of those ‘unfortunate females who, after confinement in the bridewell, were again liable to be set loose upon society’. These women could well be older than those at the other institutions, so ‘besides religious instruction and moral superintendence, suitable work is furnished them; and as an encouragement to industrious habits, one-fourth share of the produce of their labour is paid to them in clothes and other necessaries, the remainder going to the funds of the institution’. Despite the inmates of these charitable institutions working to help with expenses, they all required large amounts of donations from the public in order to survive.

Forres, in contrast, was a small royal burgh in north-east Scotland about 30 miles east of Inverness. Many towns in Scotland provided a schoolmaster and sometimes a schoolmistress for the town’s children and their appointments are recorded in the burgh records where these survive: it is here that the provision of schooling for girls in Forres has been traced.⁹⁰ Forres appears to have had a schoolmistress very early on, as the contract for Elizabeth Craige from Kincorth is dated 23 April 1660. She was to start on Whitsunday and teach reading, writing, sewing and weaving (probably knitting is meant here) of stockings, and she was to have a ‘water tight sufficient house with a piece of yaird yeirlye during hir service’. Each child of the town had to pay 6 shillings and 8 pence Scots⁹¹ quarterly for learning to read and write and 10 shillings quarterly to learn sewing and weaving. Those living outside the town had to come to an arrangement over cost with the teacher themselves.

The town records do not show continuous employment of a teacher for girls and there are long periods when no names are mentioned. Barbara Noble accepted a salary of £24 Scots in 1714, but there then appears to be a time when there was no teacher; in fact, teachers do not seem to stay for long at this period. In 1731 Isobel Tulloch was schoolmistress, but the council were looking for a new teacher by 1736. They then appointed Helen Spence, the daughter of a deceased burgher of the town, but by 1738 a new

teacher is mentioned, Jean Falconer, who taught sewing white seam and ‘Musik vocal and instrumental’. In 1744 Jean Mitchell resigned because the salary was too low, so it was raised to £3 sterling a year. By 1746 Elizabeth Fowler was the teacher but it is possible she also operated a private school. However, by 1748 the teacher was Mrs Cheyne from Elgin, a town just to the east of Forres, and hers is the last name mentioned for many years.

In 1778 a town’s schoolmistress was appointed at a salary of £10 sterling a year. The teachers for the next ten years were Miss Charles and then Miss Ross, and in 1788 the salary went up to £20 a year. Obviously the education of girls was seen as deserving more serious attention. In the 1798 ‘Survey of Moray’ it is recorded that girls attended the Grammar School in Forres at a separate hour of the day from the boys. It would be interesting to know what they were taught. The Survey then mentions a boarding school for young ladies ‘where various branches of needlework, music, and other parts of female education are taught’. The teacher’s salary of £16 a year was paid by the town, but this probably only covered the teaching of basics, as the article gives the cost of music at 2 guineas a year, gumflowers at 4 guineas, tambour at £1 and plain work at 10 shillings. Particular attention was paid to the children’s morals and to impress the young with ‘proper sentiments of honour and discretion’. This school for girls appears to have continued well into the nineteenth century, with the names of each new mistress recorded until 1838, when the council resolved to discontinue the salary of a teacher for the ‘Ladies’ Seminary’, as it was now known. It was felt that people would prefer to start their own seminary without interference from the town. Apparently there were several

OPPOSITE. 2.8 Meny Ewan’s small sampler dated 1815 was worked with several initials in black. Industrial schools were not set up on a regular basis until much later in the nineteenth century when they were intended for children who had committed some crime. The school Meny attended in Montrose is probably more like a charity school where she would have been taught sewing, reading and possibly other household skills. 5 $\frac{7}{8}$ in (14.9 cm) x 6 $\frac{1}{8}$ in (15.6 cm). Micheál and Elizabeth Feller Collection.



A B C D E F G H I J K L M N O P Q R S T U V W X Y Z
1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

J E F E W E M E M E

Sewed by JENY Ewan at the
Montrose Female School of
Industry April 1815 J E S E



A B C D E F G H I J K L M N O P Q R S T

G. Craig.

Wisdom is the
principle thing therefore
get wisdom and with all thy
getting get understanding.

Rev. P. Brown.

Rev. P. Brown.

M.C.

M.C.



Mary Craig Bridgton Public School May 1898

© Leslie B Durst Collection

schools for girls available, including two boarding schools, and 'dame schools' for the younger children. The town did give small sums to teachers of these schools when petitioned to help them.

By 1845 there was felt to be a want for a school in Forres for the daughters of tradesmen, since the poor and the wealthy were already catered for. Eventually in 1848 Miss Isabella Black from Dunkeld, who had opened a private school a little earlier, was appointed town's schoolmistress. She was to teach the elements, that is, reading, writing, grammar, arithmetic, plain and fancy needlework, as well as music, drawing, history, geography and French. Her sister was her assistant, and the fees were set at 12 shillings and sixpence a quarter for the elements, or £1 if history and geography were included. French, drawing and music were an extra £1 each quarter. Girls over twelve could board at £30 per annum, and those below this age for £25. This 'Ladies' Seminary' was in existence for nearly thirty years. Another long-lived school was opened in 1853. This was 'Fraser's Industrial School', named from a bequest by Colonel Fraser of Drumduan with the backing of the Kirk Session, and it continued until the Public School was founded in the 1880s. Two other schools founded in the mid-nineteenth century were Forres Infant School in 1863 and the Episcopal School. For a small town this was quite an impressive array of educational establishments.

THE 1872 EDUCATION (SCOTLAND) ACT

The government started to look at an overhaul of the education system in the early years of the nineteenth century, when various parish surveys took place. There was a long process of inquiry into schools and their provision in Scotland and one outcome was an Education Committee of

OPPOSITE. 2.9 Mary Craig was probably a pupil at Bridgeton Public School which is embroidered on her sampler. Dated 1845 Mary has included her parents' initials and name as well as that of the Reverend P. Brown. She was the daughter of Gabriel Craig and Mary Rankin, and was baptised on 12 May 1833 in Rutherglen, Lanarkshire. 22¼ in (57.8 cm) x 22 in (55.9 cm). Leslie B Durst Collection.

the Privy Council, set up in 1839 to review matters. It appears that there was a sufficient number of schools for the population, provided by a mix of church, private, community and charitable institutions, and all were non-sectarian. The Church of Scotland was concerned that too many schools were not under its supervision and therefore the moral and religious training of children was not guaranteed. The Church felt that this could only be achieved by having public schools directly under its control. However, sectarian disputes in the mid-nineteenth century and the Disruption in the Church of Scotland in 1843 meant that this was not possible and different sects were allowed to set up their own schools. It is clear that despite the increase in population as Scotland became industrialised, the mixed provision of schools kept pace with this increase. A Commission set up in 1864 looked at whether the system provided value for money, always a concern for governments. Schools were funded by private and church means and it was becoming a burden to finance them, so many churchmen backed the idea of a new compulsory national system based on Presbyterian values. The 1872 Act introduced a striking new direction for Scottish education under local elected school boards with strict administrative codes and regular inspections, which had no room for non-parochial or private schools, although of course compromises were often made. It also introduced compulsory attendance for pupils.

VOICES FROM THE SCHOOLROOM

It might be expected that the memoirs, diaries and journals of women would tell us something of their education, but many of them are disappointing on this aspect of their lives. Fashions in memoirs also had an effect. Those of the seventeenth century often concentrate on religion and the writer's struggle with their faults and perceived sins, none of which appear to be connected to sewing, needlework or embroidery. Vanity might well be mentioned, but rarely in the kind of detail that can be used to reconstruct the teaching of sewing. By the nineteenth

century there was a sense of change occurring at such a rapid rate that the way of life of the immediate past would be forgotten. In this climate the memoirs of several women were written, originally simply for the benefit of their families, but later some were published. From these a sense of the way girls were brought up can be extracted.

Some indication of the state of a middle-class girl’s education can be seen from the memoirs of Mary Somerville. Mary was born in 1780 and was the daughter of William George Fairfax, lieutenant in the Royal Navy, and Margaret, the daughter of Samuel Charters, Solicitor of Customs for Scotland. Mary and her family lived at Burntisland across the Forth from Edinburgh.⁹² Mary married a distant cousin and after his death was able to pursue her intellectual interests, particularly mathematics and astronomy, becoming a popular science writer. She later married another cousin and died in 1872. Somerville College, Oxford was named after her.

My mother taught me to read the Bible, and to say my prayers morning and evening; otherwise she allowed me to grow up a wild creature.

I never cared for dolls, and had no one to play with me.

My mother set me in due time to learn the catechism of the Kirk of Scotland, and to attend the public examinations in the kirk.

When I was between eight and nine years old, my father came home from sea, and was shocked to find me such a savage. I had not yet been taught to write . . .

My father at last said to my mother, – ‘This kind of life will never do, Mary must at least know how to write and keep accounts.’ So at ten years old I was sent to a boarding-school, kept by a Miss Primrose, at Musselburgh, where I was utterly wretched.

[Back home in Burntisland] . . . beside I had to *shew* (sew) my sampler, working the alphabet from A to Z, as well as the ten numbers, on canvas.

[Her Aunt Janet on a visit complained Mary never sewed.] Whereupon I was sent to the village school to learn plain needlework.

When I was about thirteen my mother took a small apartment in Edinburgh for the winter, and I was sent to a writing school, where I soon learnt to write a good hand, and studied the common rules of arithmetic.

Mary Somerville was obviously not a gifted sewer and it was to women like her that Mary Lamb’s article ‘On Needlework’ would have appealed.⁹³ Lamb, who had worked as a needlewoman for many years, considered that ‘needlework and reading are in a natural state of warfare’, a sentiment that was beginning to be used by many who saw needlework as an unworthy use of women’s time, as well as ruining their eyesight and not developing their mental capacity. But she also made a plea for needlework to be made a recognised profession for those whose only means of making a living was by sewing: ‘Is it too bold an attempt to persuade your readers that it would prove an incalculable addition to general happiness and the domestic comfort of

OPPOSITE. 2.10 Catherine Ure Hamilton in 1851 has embroidered a large red house with small side wings and over the door is ‘Millars School’. She has also named Miss Wallace as a teacher and the place as Glasgow. As well as two large trees the rest of the space has a verse and many small motifs taken from contemporary embroidery patterns. Her parents were William Hamilton and Mary McIntosh, and she was born 28 June 1839 in Glasgow. William’s occupation is listed in the 1851 census as spirit dealer and Chelsea Pensioner, which meant he was in receipt of an army pension. Today he would be described as an out-pensioner, meaning he did not live in the Royal Hospital, Chelsea. In 1851 Margaret Wallace was a sewing teacher at 151 George Street, Glasgow, while Millar’s Charity School is listed at the same address in the 1850–1851 Directory for Glasgow. 23 in (58.4 cm) x 21¼ in (54 cm). Leslie B Durst Collection.



both sexes, if needle-work were never practised but for a remuneration in money?’

Another Scottish girl who has left us some idea of her education is Elizabeth Grant of Rothiemurchus, but she was obviously someone who enjoyed sewing and was good at it. In her wonderful *Memoirs of a Highland Lady*, Elizabeth gives detailed descriptions of life on the family’s Highland estate near Aviemore, as well as at residences in Edinburgh and London.⁹⁴ Elizabeth married Col Henry Smith of Baltiboys and spent the rest of her life on their Irish estate in County Wicklow, where she died in 1885. She came from a higher social class than Mary Somerville, as her father was the owner of a large estate in the Highlands and a wealthy man, but this did not affect the way the children were brought up. Reading these memoirs, a modern reader probably wants to have the parents arrested for cruelty; although not untypical for the period, there does appear to be some eccentricity in the way the Grant children were brought up. The education of the girls, though, is wholly typical.

Elizabeth Grant was born in Edinburgh in 1797, the eldest child of Sir Peter John Grant and his wife. In 1802 the family were in London and there were two more children in the nursery, so Elizabeth spent most of her time with her mother’s dresser:⁹⁵

Mrs Lynch taught me to sew, for I was always very fond of my needle and my scissors too. I shaped and cut out and stitched up my doll’s clothes from very early days. I use to read to her too, she was so good natured!

Later she remarks, ‘My box of baby clothing has never been empty to my knowledge since I first began to dress my doll.’⁹⁶ She goes on to say:

Many a weary hour has been beguiled by this useful plain work, for there are times when reading, writing, or more active employments only irritate, and when needlework is really soothing, particularly when there is an object in the labour. It used as a child to give me

a glow of delight to see the work of my fingers on my sisters and brothers, and on the Rothiemurchus babies; for it was only for our own poor that I busied myself, every body giving me scraps for this purpose, and sometime help and patterns, my sisters requiring none as they never worked from choice . . .

In 1804 Elizabeth was sent to Richmond with two aunts, one of whom had been very ill. Here she helped the landlady, Mrs Bonner, in making puddings, preserves and pickles that stood her in good stead later on. Mrs Bonner lent her an old tea caddy ‘to put my work in; . . . the empty compartments exactly suited the patches I was engaged on . . .’⁹⁷

For the next three years the family lived in London and here the nurse, Mrs Miller, a sailor’s widow, saw that the children learnt their lessons and taught the girls to sew. They also learnt writing and ciphering from a Mr Thompson as well as geography and history. To their mother they read and spelt, while Mr Jones taught music and Mr Beekvelt French. It is clear that for a girl at this period Elizabeth was getting a fairly good education.⁹⁸

In 1807 when she was ten, Elizabeth got to make a sampler. The family were living at Twyford in Berkshire, and Lady Grant was expecting another baby, for which the girls were to make articles of clothing: ‘Jane hemmed some new soft towels for it – very badly – and I made all the cambrick shirts so neatly, that I was allowed to begin a sampler as a reward, and to go to Bishop’s Stortford to buy canvas and the coloured worsteds necessary.’⁹⁹ Unfortunately she never tells us what design she worked: it was probably a series of alphabets on fairly coarse canvas, but she may well not have made a Scottish-style one. It is a surprise to see a sampler being considered a reward for being good at plain sewing, but it was this type of needlework that girls were taught first, so to progress to embroidery stitches would be an indication that the first principles had been well learned.

In 1811 Elizabeth attended a boarding school as a day pupil for a short while:¹⁰⁰

Mrs Peter Grant, the widow of one of my great Uncle Sandy's sons, who had had charge of Anne Grant of Glenmoriston, and lived in a small house in Ramsgate, had been found so competent to the task of superintending the education of young ladies, that she had been prevailed on by first one friend and then another to receive their delicate children. At last her house became too small for her family. She took a larger one in Albion Place, engaged a clever governess, to whom she was shortly obliged to give an assistant, and soon had a flourishing school. She limited the number of pupils to eighteen, and generally had applications waiting for a vacancy. She was an honest hearted kind of person, a little given to 'sentiment', well read for her day and accomplished, having been originally intended for a governess by her parents . . .

To Mrs Peter Grant's school I was to be sent every day for so many hours, ostensibly to learn flower painting, and to be kept up in French and singing; but in reality to take down a deal of conceit . . .

Despite telling us earlier in her memoirs that she was taught sewing and cutting out by Mrs Lynch, her mother's dresser, Elizabeth later credits her mother with this. Presumably her education in

this type of needlework was an ongoing process and while Mrs Lynch taught her the basics it was her mother who taught her the finer elements of the craft:¹⁰¹

My Mother, when in health, was an example of industry . . . She was a very beautiful needlewoman, and she taught us to sew and cut out, and repair all our own, our father's, brothers' linen. She had become highland wife enough to have her spinnings and dyings, and weavings of wool and yarn, and flax and hanks, and she busied herself at this time in all the economy of a household 'remote from cities', and consequently forced to provide for its own necessities.

Mary Somerville and Elizabeth Grant led very different lives in later years. Mary achieved fame in her lifetime while Elizabeth led a domestic life with husband and family, gaining fame after her death through her wonderful memoirs and diaries. Mary leaves us information on her sewing because she disliked it so much and felt it interfered with learning the topics she was interested in. Elizabeth accepted her place in society and learned the topics required of her, but her skill and enjoyment in sewing come through in her account of her education. These accounts allow us to study how some girls acquired their needlework skills.