

Life At A Scottish University

by DIANE SCOTT

It was quite different. Our part of the University was situated in the Old Town, and was called King's College, because of James IV, who permitted Bishop Elphinstone to found it in 1494.

To get there, we would climb aboard a bus outside Marischal College—which was mostly for Science students—and set off on a series of narrow, winding ways, past the Kirkgate, down The Gallowgate, across Mount Loely, up the Spital, down College Bounds, and so to King's. One day the bus fares were raised from twopence to threepence. Then voices were raised, tempers grew high, organizations were organized and the Student Body protested formally to the Town Council. But the Town Council, as always, would do nothing. So it came about that the thriffter students would be seen tramping past the Kirkgate, down the Gallowgate, across Mount Loely.

King's was a beautiful college, mellow, and with an atmosphere that was at times overpoweringly rarified. On one side of the quadrangle stood the chapel, which was very old, with its fine wood carving and stained glass windows. Beyond it, on the front lawn, was the Bishop's Tomb, and at right angles to it, the Library. It too, was very old, and its interior was continually bathed in an atmosphere of ancient gloom, emanating, no doubt, from more stained glass windows and more wood carving.

Here there was no prohibition system. Any student could browse around the shelves in the main part of the library, borrowing as many books as he liked—up to the total of six—(or so they said). But the shelves stretched high up towards the arched roof, and the book required was always on the top shelf. An occasional ladder was provided to scale the heights. These implements, however, appeared to be as ancient as the building in which they were housed. Unstable and rickety, they were veritable death traps. However, wise bojanellas (i.e. freshettes) always found a host of willing ladder climbers to help them in their distress.

Honours students were permitted to enter the 'closed stacks'. This, indeed, was a doubtful privilege. A heavy iron sound-proof, fire-proof door would roll by, making a loud clanging noise, disrupting the peace of the library, to reveal a mausoleum of ancient tomes, heavy with dust. Small grey men would flit noiselessly by, bound on no one knew what errand, employees of the library since time immemorial. Overcome by the vault-like atmosphere, one would stagger out again to bask in the pale rays of sunlight that came filtering through the stained glass windows. Last year, however, they added a new wing to the library, containing more stacks. Now one could climb flights of stairs, eventually to arrive at a place of hospital-corridor aspect. A claustrophobic atmosphere induced, no doubt, by over-efficient central heating permeated by the smell of floor polish. (No doubt armies of

cleaners work there, silently, unseen, and by night.) Hedging one in on all sides were row upon row of efficient looking steel shelves, bearing an interminable array of assorted medicine texts and bound periodicals. Indeed PMLA, PBA, JEGP, PQ, RES, MLN, and MLR stretched as far as the eye could see. And glimmering dimly at the end of the passage, yellow painted bars could be made out. "The Golden Gates" we called them. Exceptionally rare volumes were incarcerated behind them, and what was behind the gates never came out.

Not only did the library have a very fine collection of books, it was also the hub of the life at King's. One would stroll leisurely down the aisles, greeting ones friends, and then proceed to ones seat, no doubt to doze, ones toga (a red gown traditionally worn by the students) rolled up to serve as a pillow. The Refectory—where coffee was served was also a good place to sleep; but somehow one slept with a clearer conscience—if such a state be possible—in the library.

Coffee, incidentally, was also served in the Students' Union, a large building situated opposite Marischal College. It had a couple of snack bars, a dining room, a hall with a stage where plays were played and dances danced, a great many comfortable sitting rooms, a "dive" in the basement where the Jazz Band played, and a bar whither students would traditionally repair around 9:30 p.m. In many ways, the Union was the centre of the University. Here the various clubs and societies conspired and intrigued. Social life was, on the whole, extremely healthy. Rival student politicians really took one another seriously. Much dark business would go on before the President of the Debate would be elected. Indeed, one did not encounter ill-written notices at every turn, ordering one to turn up at this, that or the other. The student paper "Gaudie" was often stimplating. The local, and sometimes the national press would pounce on any article from "Gaudie" that sounded remotely scandalous, magnify and distort it out of all recognition. Then the Town traditionally opposed to the Gown, would shake its head and say, "Those Students."

People would say that more often than usual during Gala Week, when we collected money for various charities. This was the occasion for many stunts, intended to bring the notice of the public to the campaign on hand. More stunts would take place during the weeks before the Rectorial Election and feeling would run high among the supporters of the various candidates for the Rectorship. The candidates, well known men of outstanding ability, chosen by the students themselves, run in competition. The method of electing the Rector is by poll. Several days

before the voting takes place however, a fight between the supporters of the various candidates is held in the quadrangle of Marischal College. The origins of this battle, like the whole tradition of the Rectorship are dim in the history of antiquity; but at the appointed hour hundreds of male students march boldly into the quadrangle and proceed to lure refuse and abuse at one another. The aim of the battle, it must be mentioned, is to capture the banners of the opposing parties.

For Sport proper, however, the facilities are excellent. There is a fine gym at Marischal College, and at Kings a modern pavillion of elegant design, containing a delightful swimming pool and the best squash courts in the north of Scotland, looks over acres of rich green playing fields. Sport is not tightly organized by any means, yet the majority of students participate. The most unlikely people will be discovered to play a good game of squash, while the serious looking boy sitting next to one in class may unwittingly reveal himself to be an International Rugby Football Trialist. I think the University even had a basketball team, composed, if I remember rightly, of the oddest people. Frenchmen fleeing from conscription, Egyptians fleeing from Nasser, and Americans fleeing, one must presume, from America. In short, cosmopolitans, fleeing from the cosmos. Yet they say it was a good basketball team.

From the scholastic point of view too, the system was quite different. Hidden at the entrance to King's College quad, was a little office, from which at the beginning of term the Sacrist would issue official forms. We would go off to some quiet spot and fill in the classes we intended to take—minimum two a year, maximum four—and thus we registered. No unending queue of students tying themselves into knots over the innumerable courses it is their lot to take, and over the number of credits they find it necessary to accumulate. English, for example, was not compulsory, yet a great many students took the Ordinary Class—because they really wanted to. As a result, the standard was always very high. If one wanted to obtain an Honours Degree, one spent the last two years of a four-year course in an 'Honours School' reading intensively for the degree. A strong competitive spirit prevailed among members of the Honours classes—usually about a dozen people—and at times the strain was very great. Yet we worked on the tutorial, rather than on the lecture system, and relations between staff and students were informal. Even sitting exams was an informal experience and the finals consisted of ten three-hour exams, one after the other. We would be tucked away in a pleasant little room, where windows with diamond shaped panes commanded a view of green College lawns. The organ would be heard resounding faintly in the distance, and we would know that it was five minutes to eleven, and that morning song had begun. No Fearful Machines click-clacked hideously from the roof at irregular intervals.

It was very pleasant, the green lawns of the quadrangle over which we wandered at will (subject to a fine of two and sixpence if caught) the chapel with the brown tower and the wishing well nearby. Yet it was all very different.



Fri., Jan. 30

Did betake me to the Strand, there to see most strange sights. Two factions have arisen among the rabble and call the attention of the Populace. Was astonished that these were not better kept in order, but was assured that the more conservative elements would prevail. This they did, albeit narrowly, despite the more feline propensities exhibited by some. **Egregious Hurry** and **Sad Cadillac** were opposing leader in the fray, whom **Call Thiefchild** was hard pressed to keep in order.

Sat. Jan. 31

In the afternoon to Fleet Street, whereupon I was siezed by a tyrannic editor and forced to labor with these hacks in scribbling their scurrility, a most debasing sight. Did betake me to the Coffee House in search of amusement, but found there only the logical crew, **Panning** and **McPurse**, **Lung**, **Mindly Holes**, **Mrs. Goss** and **Mr. Knowell**. Full of discussion of their logical exploits. No spiritual solace forthcoming did go my way to the abbey, being careful to avoid Fleet Street.

Thursday, Feb. 5

Did arise late. Upon strolling through the Common did behold a

huge gathering of the Populace, a most astonishing sight, muttering rebellion and insubordination as **Slave Hasheson** endeavoured to harangue the mob. **Alasandalack** gave voice from the floor. Would have tarried longer, but on hearing the vile slanders against the fair sex was seized by a violent fit of laughter, and woud fain have departed. The Populace at present very restless and unduly interested in that which does not concern them, i.e. things Politick. A sign of the degeneracy of the times. The lot of the labourer is poor it cannot be denied, and even the best commercial interests in our midst have recently come under a blight. The lawyers are mustering up their strength, now they are led by **Blossoming Symbol**.

Friday, Feb. 6

Up eventually. A day of most vile weather. In the evening a multitude did flock to the James, there to endeavour to create mirth and merriment. The atmosphere most interesting, a mixture of the bovine and the oriental. **The Gorgeous Hammer** in his element. Much pleasure in seeing **Miss Scarletrail** proclaimed belle with great applause, and most beauteous she did appear.

What Do You Think About

A Dal Winter Carnival?

Libby Grant. Not enough snow. Why don't we have a spring carnival in the rain!"

Julia Gosling. "Judging from the response to things like a musical comedy where you have to hound people to get them out to rehearsals. I think the idea is admirable but the probabality of its materializing is doubtful."

Margie Sinclair. "With enough snow it would be a wonderful idea".

Ron Simmons. "It would be impractical because: 1. We have no skiing facilities; 2. It's difficult enough to get spirit up for one night let alone three days and nights."

Ethelda Brown. "I think it would be a good idea; but to combat the amount of apathy, it would have to be very well organized and publicized."

Dave Logan. "Would have to make allowance for Halifax lack of snow. But, a carnival with events not necessitating snow would be fine—hockey games, dances."

Barbara Bollman. "It's a good idea—get some spirit into the place—a chance to bring other universities to Dal. A unanimous student approval would be necessary for it to be a success."

Fred Nicholson. "Have a summer carnival in February. Everyone else has one—why doesn't Dal think of something original."

Mike Fortier. "Wonderful idea if we have some snow."

Don Tomes. "Why have it when we have something similar on Munro Day?"

Joe Martin. "I don't think it's a good idea because there is too much else going on in the winter. We have a comparable type thing on Munro Day."

Bruce Webber. "Its a fine idea provided we have some snow we should seriously consider substituting it for Sadie Hawkins Week, because I feel that there could be events which could include more people than does Sadie Hawkins as it does now."

Francois Chavy. "I'm in favor of it."

Pat Boutilier. "Its a fabulous idea! We should have a big skating party."

Sharon Connolly. "It is a fabulous idea! I feel as it is the biggest University in the whole Maritimes, yet we have the least advantages for the Universities to get together—for example in a Winter Carnival."

Bob Weld. "No! Munro Day is the big weekend of the spring, an Ice Carnival woud merely be an anticlimax to the end of the year it would be a flop."

Janice Merritt. "Most Universities have them, it might help the spirit a bit."

Dave Fox. "A good idea provided everyone puts a bit of effort into it, otherwise, it won't be a success. Some society should be responsible for organizing it."

Alex Farrell. "There are already too many popular attractions here in February and March to make it worthwhile."

Hugh Gorham. "I would like to see a Winter Carnival here; but we need a student union building or some place where students could get together informally to plan and carry out the plans."

Nancy Rice. "We would never get enough snow for a Winter Carnival at Dal."

Rick Cashin. "It's getting out of hand—everyones having one."

ALL-DAY MILDNESS



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The Place to Eat

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