

RHS Janitors



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Introduction

This topic has long featured in the RHS digital history 'To Do' list, but has been promoted up the ranking by the arrival of memorabilia relating to one of the more famous individuals who have occupied the post. Sergeant Major Alexander Falconer occupied the position from around 1894 until 1923, when his retirement was heralded by a full-page article in the summer 1923 edition of Schola Regia.

Falconer was one of a long line of Janitors at the school, where the first recorded we can find dates back to 1694. Interestingly, from the start of Falconer's tenure to the present day (2021), there have been the same number of Janitors as Rectors – fourteen.

Janitors are mentioned in all school history editions, from 1849 onward. There are a few colourful characters, and the post in the early days required more than just janitorial duties; discipline, drill instruction, Rector's secretary, librarian and tuck shop being some of those mentioned in addition to the normally expected duties, with swimming-pool cleaning being added to the duties some time ago and continuing to this day. Katy Gray (RHS teacher 1976-1993, and great grand-daughter of Sergeant Falconer) explains some of the more modern duties; "Ian Drummond's wife, Betty looked after my pre-school twins in the Janitor's house when I returned to teach (initially, part time) in the late seventies and I saw at first-hand how much Ian had to do - unseen and often unacknowledged!"

Several have been ex-servicemen, notably Falconer, Percy Campbell (a sub-mariner and POW for 5 years) and James Fulton MBE (also a POW). The post appears to have been considered as one of some standing, occasionally occupied by students, in one case by an undergraduate (David Malloch) who went on to become a famous poet. James Nisbet is shown due deference in his retirement photo of 1994 surrounded by three Rectors. An article (shown later) about William Crawford, one of his successors, does however add a touch of colour and comedy to the genre. Payment in the early days appears to have been haphazard. In the early 1800's, it was stated as **L.1 : 13 : 4** (One pound, thirteen shillings and fourpence – or £1.67p in new money), and by 1849 five pounds was all that had been added to the salary. In addition to this he receives at present one half of the Matriculation fee (1s 6d in 1927, 5s the following year, discontinued 1895). Sadly, since 2000 the title of Janitor has replaced by the thoroughly modern-sounding but somewhat antiseptic 'Senior Service Support Officer', so presumably this will attract a superannuated local authority salary.

List of Janitors

The first list is from the 1849 history page 90 – with little further information about the individuals with the exception of Malloch and Crawford

1694 Magnus Walker;
 1705 William Lyle;
 1706 John Ewart;
 1710 John Morrison;
 1712 William Charles;
 1717 David Malloch (the poet)
 1718 James Finlay;
 1720 Robert Scott;
 1730 William Crawford (see Gentleman’s Magazine for Dec. 1731, vol. 1 p. 542)
 1759 Thomas Elliot;
 1775 William Carfrae;
 1793 John Wright;
 1807 William Bowie;
 1831 John Gladow;
 1848 Donald Sinclair.

Sadly, we don’t have staff lists prior to 1903, but during the century following, when eleven individuals held the post of Rector, there were only ten holders of the post of Head Janitor

This list is compiled from the records in the Staff section of RHS Annual reports, with additional comments from the editor.

This list is compiled from information in Annual Reports, Schola Regia and Histories.

Dates	Incumbents	Notes
1718	David Malloch	Became a famous poet
1848-1894		Information to be established
1894-1923	Sergeant Falconer	Served nearly 30 years Assistant was Thomas Forsyth
1924-1935	Joseph Lawson	His assistant, Sergeant-Major Bruce Prattice, later becomes Prep. School janitor
1936-1947	Andrew Cogle	Shown in 1938 whole school photo (per J A Gilmour)
1948-1953	John Glen	
1954-1963	Percy Campbell	Jimmy Veitch assistant (WW2 Sub mariner and POW)
1964-1968	James Fulton MBE	WW2 POW
1968-1982	Ian/Kay Drummond	Why Ian and Kay? James Nisbet joined as assistant in 1968
1983-1994	James Nisbet	Joined as assistant in 1982
1995-2000	Stewart Will	CPO on a boat with Prince Charles
2001-2003	Alex Tweedale	Head Janitor becomes Senior Service Support Officer
2004-2005	Alex Abernethy	
2006-2007	Patrick Bowen	
2008-2017	Robert Sloan	a.k.a. Rab
2018-2021	Mark Gilchrist	

Note that between 1894 and 2021, there have been 14 Janitors. During the same period, there have also been 14 Rectors.

Individual Janitor CV's

Sergeant Major Falconer 1894-1923

A full-page article and photograph were published in the Summer 1923 edition of Schola Regia ([attached elsewhere](#)) He was awarded the Distinguished Conduct Medal in the Ashanti War and was (or became) a Sergeant Major during that time. He was brought up in a small hamlet called Mulben in Morayshire and believe that he worked in the Railway before the Ashanti War period. The Ashanti empire was located in the interior of the Gold Coast (now Ghana).

More information to be added by Katy Gray.

Percy Campbell 1954-1963

A full-page article was published in the Summer 1964 edition of Schola Regia ([attached elsewhere](#))

AR 1964 p6

Percy Campbell leaves for Napier College, to be replaced by James Fulton

James Fulton 1964-1968

More info - James Fulton MBE, SR Jul 69 p22 and AR 1969 p 4

A full-page article was published in the July 1969 edition of Schola Regia ([attached elsewhere](#))

Ian Drummond - 1968 -1982

(AR 1982)

On the non-teaching side, Mr Ian Drummond retired in September, slightly early, from the post of Head Janitor, which he had held since 1968. A joiner for thirty years, Ian was employed as a fitter during the Second World War at the S.M.T. Ordnance Factory at Fountainbridge where he was in charge of a squad of women. His training and experience made him an excellent handyman and stood him in good stead for the army of cleaners he had to organise as janitor. He joined the service in 1960. appropriately in the School of Building, before going to the Regent Road Institute (subsequently Telford College) and then coming here as Custodian, his original title. During those thirteen years, Ian served the school admirably, and to him and his wife, Betty, whom we also thank for her work as Dining Room Attendant, we extend every good wish for many years of retired leisure at their rural retreat in Wanlockhead,

James Nisbet 1983-1994

(Schola Regia 1994 page 7 and James Nisbet, AR 1994 pp 5-6)

James Nisbet was appointed to the Royal High school in June 1968 when the school moved from Regent Road. The Head Janitor then was Ian Drummond. Mr Nisbet succeeded in that role in 1981 on the former's retirement. "I first became a janitor in 1963 working as relief for some months until I was appointed resident at the newly opened Napier College. The then principal Janitor was ex-submariner Percy Campbell. who had been Head Janitor at the Royal High School in Regent Road. Percy often spoke of his time at RHS, so you could say that my connections with the school really began then."

AR 1994 pp 5-6

As session 1993/94 comes to close, the school loses the services of one of its best-known and longest serving figures. the Head Janitor, Mr James Nisbet. Educated at the old Davidson's Mains Primary and Flora Stevenson's Secondary School, "Jimmy" gained his leaving certificate and then took up five-year apprenticeship at James H. Lamont's as brass turner, Following National Service, he entered the Janitorial Service in 1963 and joined the janitorial team at the Royal High School in 1968, where he served under James Fulton and Ian Drummond before becoming Head Janitor in 1981. A man characterised by his great loyalty to the school, personal integrity and willingness to help, Jimmy has managed to survive the vicissitudes of spending 26 years 'on site' with the constant interruptions to

family life and he has battled bravely with leaking roofs, faulty boilers, even faultier alarm systems, flooding, unpleasant drainage odours, the occasional break-in and demanding staff! He has played full part in staff activities and some of us can remember him during those years before golf overtook him as a twinkle-toed star of the Staff Football X1! We acknowledge his long years of service to the school and wish him and Mrs Nisbet many years of happy and healthy retirement.

AR 1996 p6

Mr Stewart Will took over the 'helm' as Head Janitor in 1995, and the janitorial team was brought up to strength by the appointment of Mr James Hart as Janitor. (A short interview may be arranged in due course)

Mark Gilchrist 2018-2021

We are missing CV information from 2001 to 2017, but have resumed normal service in 2021 with an article and photographs of the current incumbent, **Mark Gilchrist**. Mark kindly provided a short CV.

1. How long have you been a Janitor, and how long at RHS?
 - a. 13 years at Drummond High, and 3 years at RHS
2. What sort of job is it?
 - a. Hectic! I now have many more pupils, and a much larger campus with extensive grounds
3. What are your normal duties?
 - a. Shifts (duties vary according to the three-shift system)
 - b. If early, patrol the grounds, checking for issues
 - c. Wash and test the pool
 - d. Fix/report and log any issues
 - e. Manage the other janitors
4. Who do you report to?
 - a. In the school, to Kalina, and AMEY (my employer) to Robert Stalker
5. Do you have any special memories so far? – that could include at Drummond
 - a. My most special memory so far was my first prizegiving (2019) as I had not previously experienced anything like that. I followed the practice of janitors in the past by being 'in attendance' outside the Memorial Door as the leaving pupils filed out
6. Do you have any funny or strange stories (publishable) to tell?
 - a. We recently had a nightmare start to the day when we were doing a favour for one of the science teachers by taking a freezer up in the lift, little did we know when we were all set to go up the freezer plug somehow managed to escape us and fell outside the lift. In a blind panic we were hitting all the buttons praying the doors would not close, but it did and we knew we were doomed, the lift started to go up but luckily for us the lift safety features stopped the lift but the bad news was me and my colleague Darren were stuck in the lift with no power. Realising it was 07:00 and all the staff were coming in and there was no one at the main entrance to let staff in me and Darren had no choice but to break the lift doors open and break free (don't tell Amey!)

Information from Schola Regia editions and Annual Reports

Schola Regia 1921

At the dedication of the Jock's Lodge Memorial athletic field on Saturday, 4th June 1921, at the end of the ceremony, the Rector read the names of the fallen, and after the 'Last Post' had been sounded, the School Flag was hoisted by the Head Janitor (Sergeant Falconer (photo in collection)

For a brief spell of six months during 1718 the position of janitor was filled by David Malloch, a man destined later to achieve fame as a poet and to gain the friendship of many literary characters most notably Alexander Pope. He is credited with writing the words of the song 'Rule Britannia'. Malloch earned sixteen shillings and eight pence sterling for his half year's work at the school.

AR 1964 p6

Percy Campbell leaves for Napier College / James Fulton replaces him

James Fulton MBE, SR Jul 69 p22 and AR 1969 p 4

James Nisbet, AR 1994 pp5-6

London speaker 2017 talked about a Jannie "take your hands out of your pockets"

James Nisbet retires – Schola Regia 1994 page 7

James Nisbet was appointed to the Royal High school in June 1968 when the school moved from Regent Road. The Head Janitor then was Ian Drummond. Mr Nisbet succeeded in that role in 1981 on the former's retirement. "I first became a janitor in 1963 working as relief for some months until I was appointed resident at the newly opened Napier College. The then principal Janitor was ex-submariner Percy Campbell. who had been Head Janitor at the Royal High School in Regent Road. Percy often spoke of his time at RHS, so you could say that my connections with the school really began then."

AR 1996 p6

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Data from histories

1849

Page 65

...and it has been determined that henceforth the Library shall be accessible to all the alumni of the Institution. The Rector and Masters, with the assistance of the Janitor, discharge in rotation the duties of librarian.

Pages 89/90

(Referring to David Malloch) Observing, however, that the election of a janitor was not at that period recorded in the minutes of the Corporation, it occurred to us that the vouchers in the City Chamberlain's custody might probably throw some light on the point. The disputed question was speedily put at rest, by the production of Malloch's holograph receipt, dated February 2, 1718, for 'sixteen shillings and eightpence sterling,' being his full salary for the preceding half-year. That was the exact period he held the office. The janitorship, it should be borne in mind, was

not esteemed a post unsuitable to the age, or beneath the dignity of a junior academic. In the University the same situation was repeatedly filled by students.

Page 90

As the Janitor is a personage of vast importance in the eye of an Edinburgh High School boy, the subjoined list of those useful functionaries may perhaps recall some curious scenes in connexion with the Yards, and be deemed not quite undeserving of preservation.

The list of janitors from 1694 to 1848 is transposed elsewhere in this article.

In the beginning of last century (i.e. 1700) the yearly allowance which the Janitor received from the town was L.1 : 13 : 4 (One pound, thirteen shillings and fourpence – or £1.67p in new money): since then the sum of five pounds is all that has been added to his salary (i.e. in 1849 he received £6.67 in today's money). In addition to this he receives at present one half of the Matriculation fee.

Page 196

The janitor clearly had an important part in the order of the school day...

Many an anxious group assembled round the janitor to enquire his instructions for the day, and half in pleasure half in fear, received the answer that confirmed their suspicions. The bell rings, - the murmuring tide of boys pours into the school-room, the master enters, the lesson proceeds, but, ere it close, they are ordered to hold themselves in readiness to write in the afternoon.

Page 204

... after the exam, I go to the playground but am greeted by no smile of recognition save from the hoary janitor...

Page 231

1829 23rd June, opening of the new school, in the procession is the ...Janitor of the High School, in his gown, and bearing his baton

Page 288

The Janitor keeps a store of wholesome nourishment, with which he supplies the applicants, rendered hungry by exercise and study

Page 304

The matriculation fee of five shillings (25p) per annum paid for Janitor, Library, maps, models etc

1911

Page 116-117 (a fanciful but charming account...)

In the Gentleman's Magazine for December, 1731, we read: "William Crawford, Janitor of the High School at Edinburgh, somewhat in years, having been thrice proclaimed in the Kirk, went thither with his friends, stood some hours expecting his bride. At last he received a ticket from her in these terms: "William, you must know I am pre-engag'd. I am so. I never yet could like a burnt Cuttie. I have now by the hand my sonsy mensful strapper, with whom I intend to pass my youthful days. You know old age and young cannot agree together. I must then be excus'd if I tell you I am not your humble servant."

The honest man, not taking it much to heart, only said, "Come, let us at least keep the Feast on the Feast-day. Dinner will be ready, let us go, drink and drive care away. May never a greater misfortune attend an honest man!" Back to dinner they went and from the company convened the Bridegroom got 100 marks and all charges defray'd, with which he was as well satisfied as he who got Madam.

Page 122

One stanza from a poem /ode to the school written sometime after 1777 – refers to a Janitor;

But hark ! the bell—the bell begins to ring,

*And sends through all the yards a sudden pang !
Old Bowie, of all Janitors the king,
Has seized the rope and makes a horrid clang ;*

(William Bowie was Janitor 1807-1831)

Page 129

Photo of the Janitor ringing the bell (presumably Sergeant Falconer)

1934

Page 32

On 27th April 1825 it was "moved and unanimously agreed that the ground on the east side of the Baxter's or Miller's Knowe, and on the north of the Calton (now Regent) Road was the most suitable site for a new High School, and the same was therefore set apart for that purpose—the present teachers of the High School having expressed their entire approbation of the site." The Baxter's Knowe, which was removed in the course of the levelling operations, was where the janitor's house now stands.

Page 34

The magnificent buildings financed in this haphazard manner consisted of the main School and the "temples" or lodges at either end, the western lodge being used as the janitor's house.

Page 35

The western lodge has had an even more varied career. Starting as a janitor's lodge, it became in 1885 a swimming bath. Ten years later it was a workshop, and now it is a class-room, with the lethal equipment of the C.C.F. concealed in the crypt.

Page 74

At various times we get traces that instruction in drill is given by janitors...

Page 145 (Regulations for external discipline)

XXII. The Rector, the Masters, and Teachers, along with the Janitor, are authorised to mark and report in the proper quarters for enforcement, all Violations of these Rules, to whatever class the violators may belong.

Page 162

1885 - Janitor's Lodge, Gymnasium and Swimming Bath built

1974

Page 51 – mentions the janitor's lodge which was part of the 1777 Infirmary Street building complex

Page 71 - Drill instruction was given by several janitors – this is implied as being prior to 1845

Janitors -page 80-81

School histories generally deal with buildings, masters and distinguished pupils. There have been in the High School number of janitors who took an active interest in the welfare of the school and live on as "characters" in their own right. Mr Falconer and Mr Lawson had ceremony each morning when ringing the school bell which was fixed to the retaining wall at the Calton Hill. As soon as the rector arrived for prayers in the hall the bell was ceremoniously locked up and any boy after that was "late" irrespective of the exact time. This bell has now been preserved by the city in one of its museums. In earlier times the post of janitor was often held by senior boy who received free or cheaper tuition for his services. Such an appointment was held by David Malloch in 1717. On leaving School Malloch passed through the university and became tutor to noble families. When he went to England he changed his

name to Mallet because the English could not cope with the sound. He was lifelong friend of the poet Thomson and wrote jointly with him the masque Alfred in which the song Rule Britannia appeared. Which poet composed it is unknown but perhaps we can claim it for our High School janitor of 1717.

Page 83 - At Regent Road there was the luncheon room, better known as the “Grubby” and in its basement buns and chocolate were sold for many years. Then the janitor ran a tuck-shop and made what profit he could. There were periods when tuck shops were frowned upon by education authorities and others.

Page 128 – In the School Rules of Discipline, 1846, the last section (XXII) states: The Rector, the Masters, and Teachers, along with the Janitor, are authorised to mark and report in the proper quarters for enforcement, all violations of these Rules, to whatever class the violators may belong. – The janitor clearly had POWER in those days...

1997

Page 57

The eminent gynaecologist Sir I. Halliday Croom, holder of the chair in midwifery at the University of Edinburgh between 1905-21, was an almost exact contemporary of Graham Bell at school. He says... “What shall I say of old Sinclair (1848-?), the Janitor, who ruled us with a rod of iron, and was known as Old Strawberry, from his rubicund countenance? He presided at the noon-day orgies of the tuck-shop. The odour of that shop and the buns and baps remain a fragrant memory to me to the present day”.

Page 86

The book of remembrance is kept in a glass case in the school foyer and the pages are turned once a week by the head janitor.

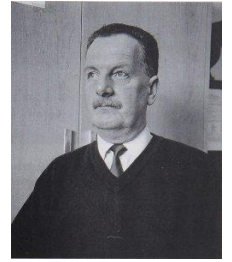
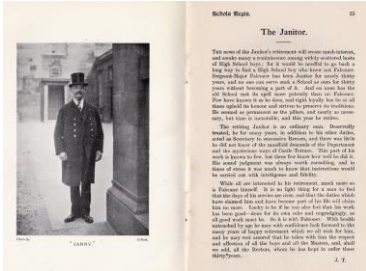
Page 133/134

School captain, Jennifer Dunsmuir (1995), in preparing schola regia for publication, said “...one month where I spent every available minute in the engine room trying to prepare Schola Regia for publication. We used to buy dinner from the tuck shop and work on the magazine until ten o'clock at night...or until the janitors threw us out.

London Club site

1. Two photos of jannies (Percy Campbell and James Fulton) and some text about Fulton
2. Jim Fulton MBE was elected by 10,000 fellow POWs to represent them, in ensuring the terms of the Geneva Convention were upheld. (Is this perhaps why he got the MBE?)
3. A London Club dinner speaker in 2017 talked about a Jannie telling him to “take your hands out of your pockets”

Photos



Annual Report (AR) data as supporting reference material

1903 AR Sergeant Falconer
1905 AR Falconer / James Macintosh
1906/07 AR Falconer / Alfred Harding
1908/09 AR Falconer / David Leighton
1916 AR Falconer Assistant – Robert Morrison
1923 AR Falconer / Walter P Goldie
1924 AR Joseph Lawson / Alexander K Murchison
1927 AR Lawson / John Glen
1928 AR Lawson / Sergeant-Major Bruce Prattice
1930 AR ditto
1935 AR Lawson / William Reid
1936 AR Andrew Cogle / William Young
1941-1947 AR Cogle / Donald Bamberry
1948/49 AR John Glen / Donald Bamberry
1950/51/52 AR John Glen/ Stanley Brignall/ Donald Bamberry (Engine Keeper)
1953 AR John Glen/ Stanley Brignall/ John Veitch/ Donald Bamberry (Engine Keeper)
1954 AR Percy Campbell / John Veitch/ Robert McGovern
1955/56 AR Percy Campbell / John Veitch/ William Pitt
1958 AR Percy Campbell / James McLean/John Veitch/ William Pitt
1959/60/61/62 AR Percy Campbell / James McLean / William Pitt
1963 AR Percy Campbell / James McLean / Henry Dodds/ William Pitt
1964 AR James Fulton/ Henry Dodds/ William Pitt
1965 AR James Fulton/ Henry Dodds/ William Pitt/ James Beechman
1966/67/68 AR Fulton/ Pitt/ John MacDonald
1969 AR K Ian Drummond/ James Nisbet/ Ernest Robertson/ John Lynch
1970/71 AR K Ian Drummond/ James Nisbet/ Ernest Robertson/ John Lynch/ James Mudie/ William Jessiman
1971/72/73/74 AR K Ian Drummond/ James Nisbet/ William Jessiman/ William Morrison/Robert Hunter
1975/76/77/78/79/80/81AR Kay(?) Drummond (same person as K Ian Drummond?) + 3 or 4 others
1982 AR Kay Drummond (retired) and James Nisbet + 3 others
1983-1994 AR James Nisbet + 2 or 3
1995-2000 AR Stewart Will + 2 or 3

From 2000 onwards, 'Head Janitor' became 'Senior Service Support Officer', and according to the current – 2021 occupants, they have also had the title of 'Facilities Officers'

2001/02/03 AR Alex Tweedale + 2 or 3
2004/05 AR Alex Abernethy + 3 or 4
2006 AR Patrick Bowen
2008-2017 Robert Sloan
2018 – today Mark Gilchrist

This article has been compiled with information from a variety of written sources, including RHS Annual Reports, Schola Regia editions, and individuals including Katy Gray (Janitor Alexander Falconer's great grand-daughter) and Tom Bacciarelli