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Reid, S.J. (2007) *Aberdeen's 'Toun College': Marischal College, 1593-1623*. *Innes Review*, 58 (2). pp. 173-195. ISSN 0020-157X

<http://eprints.gla.ac.uk/8119/>

Deposited on: 06 November 2009

Steven John Reid

Aberdeen's 'Toun College': Marischal College, 1593–1623

Introduction

While debate has arisen in the past two decades regarding the foundation of Edinburgh University, by contrast the foundation and early development of Marischal College, Aberdeen, has received little attention. This is particularly surprising when one considers it is perhaps the closest Scottish parallel to the Edinburgh foundation. Founded in April 1593 by George Keith, fifth Earl Marischal in the burgh of New Aberdeen 'to do the utmost good to the Church, the Country and the Commonwealth',¹ like Edinburgh Marischal was a new type of institution that had more in common with the Protestant 'arts colleges' springing up across the continent than with the papally sanctioned Scottish universities of St Andrews, Glasgow and King's College in Old Aberdeen.² James Kirk is the most recent in a long line of historians to argue that the impetus for founding 'ane college of theologie' in Edinburgh in 1579 was carried forward by the radical presbyterian James Lawson, which led to the eventual opening on 14 October 1583 of a liberal arts college in the burgh, as part of an educational reform programme devised and rolled out across the Scottish universities by the divine and educational reformer, Andrew Melville.³

However, in a self-professedly revisionist article Michael Lynch has argued that the college settlement was far more protracted and contingent on burgh politics than the simple insertion of a one-size

¹ *Fasti Academiae Mariscallanae Aberdonensis: Selections from the Records of the Marischal College and University, MDXCIII–MDCCCLX*, ed. Peter J. Anderson, New Spalding Club, 3 vols (Aberdeen, 1889–98) [hereafter *FMA*], i, 61.

² John M. Fletcher, 'The foundation of the University of Aberdeen in its European context', in *The Universities of Aberdeen and Europe: the First Three Centuries*, ed. Paul Dukes (Aberdeen, 1995), 9–56; David Ditchburn, 'Educating the elite: Aberdeen and its universities', in *Aberdeen Before 1800: a New History*, ed. E. Patricia Dennison, David Ditchburn and Michael Lynch (East Linton, 2002), 327–46, at 331 and n.15, which notes the foundations of other universities in the 1490s and 1590s.

³ See James Kirk, "'Melvillian' reform in the Scottish universities', in *The Renaissance in Scotland: Studies in Literature, Religion, History and Culture offered to John Durkan*, ed. A. A. MacDonald, Michael Lynch and Ian B. Cowan (Leiden, 1994), 276–300, and John Durkan and James Kirk, *The University of Glasgow, 1451–1577* (Glasgow, 1977), 262–346. For the best representative of the older historical tradition see David B. Horn, 'The origins of the University of Edinburgh', *Edinburgh University Journal* 22 (1966), 213–25, 297–312.

fits all ‘Melvillian’ programme would allow.⁴ Lawson was, after all, considerably out of favour in the city when Alexander Clark, provost of the town between 1579 and 1584, oversaw the creation of a legislative and financial framework for the college between November 1581 and April 1582. Moreover, it was a newly elected moderate town council that completed the process of erection in October 1583 after a break of eighteen months, during which time a radical administration supported by the Ruthven regime and local presbyterian ministers had attempted to hijack the plans for the college. This same moderate council sent baillies to vet the curriculum of the college and ensure that no overly radical teaching would take place, and with complete silence on the part of both the General Assembly and presbyterian commentators like James Melville the new ‘Toun College’ opened. The whole episode is succinctly summed up by Lynch in the words: ‘Reform of the universities did not escape the overriding fact of burgh life in sixteenth-century Scotland – the power of localism.’⁵

This article seeks to ascertain the role of the ‘power of localism’ in the foundation and early development of Marischal College, and in particular the contributions of the Earl Marischal and the burgh and burgesses of New Aberdeen. It will suggest that although there were a number of motives and influences providing the impetus for the college, including those personally attributable to the Earl Marischal, the town council and the burgesses of New Aberdeen played perhaps the most significant role in bringing the college to fruition in its first three decades. In this sense, Marischal should perhaps be seen along with Edinburgh as a different kind of Scottish higher educational institution, distinct from the traditional Scottish universities, and likewise best described as a ‘toun college’.

The initial foundation and early years, 1593–1610

G. D. Henderson’s *The Founding of Marischal College, Aberdeen* is the only book that has attempted to deal in detail with the Earl Marischal’s motives for establishing this institute of higher education, less than three miles from the foundation in Old Aberdeen.⁶ Henderson saw the influence of European humanism, couched in reforming and Calvinist

⁴ Michael Lynch, ‘The origins of Edinburgh’s “Toun College”’: a revision article’, *IR* 33 (1982), 3–14; *Idem*, ‘The creation of a college’, in Robert D. Anderson, Michael Lynch and Nicholas Phillipson, *The University of Edinburgh: an Illustrated History* (Edinburgh, 2003), 1–49, at 9–18.

⁵ Lynch, ‘Edinburgh’s “Toun College”’, 13.

⁶ G. D. Henderson, *The Founding of Marischal College, Aberdeen*, Aberdeen University Studies no. 123 (Aberdeen, 1947).

terms, as the prime influence on the earl. Marischal had studied in France and Geneva under Beza between 1571 and 1580, and the curriculum he was exposed to had rejected the teaching of Aristotle from Latin texts and through scholastic commentators. Aristotle and other Greek authors were instead studied in their original language, as were the texts of the Old and New Testaments. Added to this programme was an expanded array of humanist subjects including history, geography and astronomy.⁷

Six years prior to Marischal's return to Scotland, Andrew Melville had come back from teaching in Geneva with the intention of bringing this curriculum to the Scottish universities, still struggling to reform themselves after the onset of the Scottish Reformation. Melville also brought with him the teachings of Pierre de la Rameé, or Petrus Ramus, whose method of teaching laid down rules for systematically organising and disseminating all the main subjects of the university curriculum, and also heavily criticised and reduced the teachings of Aristotle, Cicero and Quintilian in logic and rhetoric. Melville had huge success in his first role at home as principal of Glasgow University, reconstituting the near-defunct university in the *Nova Erectio* of 1577.⁸ In 1580 Melville moved to the principalship of St Mary's College in St Andrews, perhaps also to oversee the implementation of the 'New Foundation' of the university along Melvillian lines as enacted by parliament in 1579. However, Melville ran into considerable difficulty in attempting to reform the conservative and insular colleges of the university, and by the end of the 1580s little in the way of successful reform had been achieved. He continued to face continual resistance to his ideas at St Andrews, even when he was appointed rector in 1590.⁹

Similar resistance occurred when a reformation of King's College was attempted in the early 1580s, a process in which the Earl Marischal

⁷ *Ibid.*, 10.

⁸ Kirk, "'Melvillian' reform', 285; Durkan and Kirk, *University of Glasgow*, 271, 275–88; Henderson, *Marischal College*, 10–15. Kirk provides the best published account of both the early modern Scottish university curriculum, and of Melville's work on his return to Scotland. However, for a contrasting view to his work that emphasises the continuation of traditional conservative Aristotelianism at the Scottish universities in the seventeenth century, see C. M. Shepherd, 'Philosophy and science in the arts curriculum of the Scottish universities in the seventeenth century' (University of Edinburgh, unpublished PhD thesis, 1975). The best recent accounts in English of Ramus and Ramism are those by James Veazie Skalnik, *Ramus and Reform: Church and University at the End of the Renaissance* (Kirksville, Missouri, 2002) and Howard Hotson, *Commonplace Learning: Ramism and its German Ramifications, 1543–1630* (Oxford, 2007).

⁹ There is no detailed published account of this period in the history of the University of St Andrews, but for a summary of Melville's tenure at St Andrews see Ronald Gordon Cant, 'Melville', in *Idem, The University of St Andrews: A Short History*, 4th edn (St Andrews, 2002), 60–7, and J. Cameron, 'Andrew Melville in St Andrews', in *In Divers Manners: A St Mary's Miscellany*, ed. D. W. D. Shaw (St Andrews, 1990), 58–72.

played a central role. In November 1581 the earl headed a visitation commission to King's, made up of members of parliament and the General Assembly, and by April 1583 a new order for the college had apparently been completed which was seen by the General Assembly. However, it seems that over the following year James VI, or the administration led by the earl of Arran, thwarted all attempts to introduce any programme at King's that went against the old foundation. Whether this was due to resistance towards a faction of intellectuals that was perceived as allied with the king's former captors, the Ruthven lords, or resistance to radical constitutional changes is unclear.¹⁰

The Earl Marischal's devotion to the Protestant religion and his growing frustration at the delay in successfully reforming King's may have led him to create his own foundation. Alternatively he may have found it easier to establish a new college with a new constitution than to persist in trying to seek royal approval for a sweeping reform of King's.¹¹ Certainly, the curriculum and structure of Marischal College proposed in the foundation charter indicate that the earl and his assistants, the bishop David Cunningham and the ministers Robert Howie and Peter Blackburn, all had Melville's educational reform ideas in mind. The new college was to house three regents and six poor students, with the principal being responsible, as at Glasgow and St Andrews, for the teaching of biblical languages and the 'opening up of the mysteries of faith' (*ad aperienda fidei mysteria*). Professorial specialisation, another feature of the 'Melvillian' educational programme, where each regent taught a single subject as opposed to taking a year of students through the whole four-year course, was also to be implemented. The college was to provide expressly for 'New Aberdeen' a practical, civic-minded institution where the young 'might receive a godly and liberal education' that would enable them 'to spread the preaching of God's Word ... to instruct the young, or to administer the government' wherever the Church or the Commonwealth had need.¹²

In 1593 Marischal was given the role of lieutenant in the north by the king following a growth in his prospects at court as a result of his services in the king's wedding negotiations in Denmark. Conversely, the earl of Huntly, the traditional protector and patron of the north-east, had fallen from grace for his part in the Catholic intrigues of the early 1590s. Marischal must have seen his foundation as another way to exert influence

¹⁰ David Stevenson, *King's College, Aberdeen, 1560–1641: From Protestant Reformation to Covenanting Revolution* (Aberdeen, 1990), 30–4; Henderson, *Marischal College*, 22–3.

¹¹ Ditchburn, 'Educating the elite', 331.

¹² Henderson, *Marischal College*, 17–19; *FMA*, i, 60–7.

in the main town of the north, and the idea of creating a college that would turn out devout protestants in direct opposition to Huntly must have held an attractive irony for the earl.¹³

Despite these varying explanations for the foundation, Henderson is himself cautious in attributing the foundation to any one factor.¹⁴ However, a re-examination of the evidence surrounding the initial events of the foundation, with a special focus on their relation to burgh politics suggests that, while the Earl Marischal was the undoubted patron and benefactor of the college, the extent of his role in expediting the foundation is questionable. The evidence suggests that far greater credit should be given to the work and partnership between the local ministers of the town and the town council in bringing plans for Marischal College to fruition. As we shall see, the simple model of the presbyterian-minded earl creating a college with a ‘Melvillian’ curriculum does not do the history of the early foundation justice.

By the beginning of the 1590s Aberdeen was being subjected to radical change forced by political and religious tensions within the city. The burgh of New Aberdeen had grown over the preceding century from late medieval market town to fledgling urban economy and now vastly overshadowed its parochial neighbour, Old Aberdeen; the population of the former rose between 1575 and 1644 from around 5,500 to 8,300, compared to a fairly static 900 in the latter.¹⁵ With the growth of the urban population came increasingly vociferous criticism of the traditional, conservative oligarchy that had, from around 1490 onwards, controlled the town council and general administration of the burgh. A small coterie of merchant gentry families fiercely restricted election to official positions in the town,¹⁶ and for the majority of the century a member of one of these families – the Menzies – had held the office of provost. This tight control by the Menzies and their cohorts began to be challenged in the 1580s by the local craft guilds, resentful at restraints on their traditional privileges and the continued refusal of the Menzies to allow

¹³ Henderson, *Marischal College*, 74–8.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 28–31; *FMA*, i, 62. Anderson and Henderson both remarked on the fact that ‘academia’ is by far the most prominent term used to describe the college in the foundation charter, but the words ‘universitas’, ‘gymnasium’ and ‘collegium’ are also used with what appears to be no discrimination.

¹⁵ Ian Blanchard, Elizabeth Gemmill, Nicholas Mayhew and Ian D. Whyte, ‘The economy: town and country’, in *Aberdeen Before 1800*, ed. Dennison, Ditchburn and Lynch, 129–58, at 147–8; Grant G. Simpson, *Old Aberdeen in the Early Seventeenth Century: a Community Study*, Friends of St Machars Cathedral Occasional Papers no. 3 (Aberdeen, 1975), 5–6.

¹⁶ Michael Lynch and Helen M. Dingwall, ‘Elite society in town and country,’ in *Aberdeen Before 1800*, ed. Dennison, Ditchburn and Lynch, 181–200, at 187–91.

guild representation on the council.¹⁷ By the beginning of the 1590s the guilds had found a leader in the outspoken commissary clerk of Aberdeen, John Cheyne,¹⁸ who advocated electoral reform and increased rights for the guilds, and mobilised an opposition movement. In November 1591 the council overturned an unofficial election of Alexander Steven by the guilds as a ‘deacon of deacons’ whom they believed had been appointed solely to incite public gatherings of disaffected townsfolk.¹⁹ On 18 April 1592 the council denounced an appeal which had been made to the Court of Session by Cheyne and his faction three months earlier, claiming that the Menzies regime had governed the burgh without proper elections for over ‘threttie years’. Cheyne and his colleague William Gray also organised armed public gatherings following the elections of a Menzies as provost on 27 September of the same year, despite being expressly forbidden by the council from doing so.²⁰

Religion played its part in these tensions. Unlike Perth, Dundee or towns further down the east coast, there had been no radical underground Protestant movement in Aberdeen.²¹ The Reformation was impeded in the city when an iconoclastic mob was prevented from ravaging the area in January 1559, and two powerful factors contributed to maintaining the religious status quo thereafter. The first was the fact that the bishop’s burgh of Old Aberdeen, and King’s College in particular, remained to a considerable extent Catholic in the two decades after 1560. The principal and teaching staff of King’s were forcibly replaced with Protestant academics in 1569 for refusal to avow the confession of faith, and the last public vestiges of Catholicism were removed during a visitation by the Regent Morton in 1574, but Mass was apparently still practised in Old Aberdeen until the early 1580s.²² As a neighbour to New Aberdeen, the small settlement acted as a powerful engine for upholding conservative belief in the area. The second factor was the pervasive influence of the Gordon earls of Huntly in the north-east. Despite their unswerving Catholicism, the Gordons continued to exercise power as chief magnates

¹⁷ Allan White, ‘The Menzies era: sixteenth-century politics’, in *Aberdeen Before 1800*, ed. Dennison, Ditchburn and Lynch, 224–37.

¹⁸ Allan White, ‘Religion, politics and society in Aberdeen, 1543–1593’ (University of Edinburgh, unpublished PhD thesis, 1985), 304–45.

¹⁹ Aberdeen City Archives, Council Register [hereafter ACA, CR] XXXIII, part 2 (4 December 1590 to 28 February 1592), 1305–1307.

²⁰ ACA, CR XXXIV, part 1 (1 October 1591 to 25 September 1593), 295–8, 508; part 2 (2 October 1592 to 25 September 1593), 517–19.

²¹ For a full list of publications dealing with the Reformation in the north-east, see Stevenson, *King’s College*, 126 n.2.

²² *Ibid.*, 14–27; see W. S. Watt, ‘George Hay’s oration at the purging of King’s College, Aberdeen, in 1569: a translation’, *Northern Scotland* 6 (1984–5), 91–6 and commentary by John Durkan: *ibid.*, 97–112.

in the north because of their effectiveness as agents of royal policy, and were supported, despite their religion, well into the reign of James VI. Although the royal burgh consistently attempted to stay outside the sphere of direct Gordon control in the sixteenth century, it was equally reluctant to encourage a radical religious stance that would alienate the population from such a powerful local influence. The Menzies had a spirit of 'pragmatic conservatism' towards religion, and appear to have remained privately Catholic while professing a lukewarm adoption of the Protestant religion, a stance that by the early 1590s was furthering the sense of alienation that the Protestant majority of the town felt towards them, and which their opponents used against them.²³

It was to this situation in the town that the young sixth earl of Huntly and the fifth Earl Marischal, both competing for power in the local area, turned their attentions. Both had returned from the continent in the early 1580s after very different educations – Huntly, from tutelage governed by his Catholic kinsman Sir Patrick Gordon of Auchindoun, Marischal from Geneva and other continental Protestant arts colleges. Each made an impression at the court in the early 1580s, but in very different ways. Huntly carved out a position as a royal favourite that earned him tacit immunity for his beliefs and the role of lieutenant in the north in 1586, while Marischal made a name for himself working with the Kirk and was given the role of investigator of Catholic behaviour in the north by the General Assembly in April 1582. In 1587 tensions between the two erupted into a feud that resulted in the death of Marischal's kinsman, William Keith, at the hands of a Huntly supporter, and the two were made to reconcile by the crown in March 1589.²⁴

Following their growing religious and political alienation in the town, the Menzies had allied themselves with Huntly and in 1582 had given him access to the town council as a free burgess of the town, a move that served to anger the guild opposition, but ensured that over the next five years the Menzies maintained their power in the royal burgh with Huntly's backing.²⁵ The involvement of Huntly in Catholic proselytising in the late 1580s and early 1590s, most notably in the intrigues of 1589 and 1592 when his signature was found on documents implicating him in plots relating to a planned armed Catholic invasion of Scotland, led to his

²³ White, 'Religion, politics and society', 311.

²⁴ John Simmons, 'Keith, George, fourth Earl Marischal (1549/50–1623)' in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, ed. H. C. G. Matthew and Brian Harrison (Oxford, 2004) [hereafter *ODNB*], <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/15263> (accessed 1 September 2007); J. R. M. Sizer, 'Gordon, George, first marquess of Huntly (1561/2–1636)', in *ODNB*, <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/11036> (accessed 1 September 2007).

²⁵ White, 'Religion, politics and society', 317–19.

fall from grace and ultimate surrender to the king after a brief rebellion in February 1594.²⁶ Conversely, Marischal increased his influence following his successful negotiation of the king's marriage to Anne of Denmark in 1589, and was appointed joint lieutenant of the north with the earl of Atholl following Huntly's fall in 1593.²⁷

The fortunes of these men were directly connected with the sudden sea-change in the political control of the town on 26 September 1593, where by near-unanimous vote Cheyne and a number of his associates were elected as provost and baillies of the council.²⁸ The Menzies, no longer supported by Huntly, were removed from office, and although Cheyne's period as provost lasted only for a year, they would never again hold the unbroken period of power that they had for most of the sixteenth century.²⁹

As with Edinburgh University, these vicissitudes of burgh politics seem to have played a role in the creation of Marischal. The Cheyne faction has been credited as endorsing and completing the foundation of Marischal College, cast as presbyterian sympathisers to the earl who desired a 'godly' education for the townspeople.³⁰ However, this convenient interpretation of events does not sit well in the context of events in burgh politics. Firstly, it was while under a Menzies-led town council, with the support of the town ministry, that the majority of the initial administration relating to the college was undertaken. On 2 April 1593 the Earl Marischal signed the foundation charter for the college, witnessed by John Forbes of Pitsligo, Bishop David Cunningham, and the town ministers Robert Howie and Peter Blackburn.³¹ On 21 April the earl handed over the endowed properties to the same three ministers, and five days later the foundation was approved by the General Assembly.³² Between 7 and 18 June the ministers involved in signing the foundation

²⁶ Ruth Grant, 'The Brig o' Dee affair, the sixth earl of Huntly and the politics of the Counter-Reformation', in *The Reign of James VI*, ed. Julian Goodare and Michael Lynch (East Linton, 2000), 93–109.

²⁷ Henderson, *Marischal College*, 74–8.

²⁸ ACA, CR XXXV (26 September 1593 to 25 September 1594), 1–3.

²⁹ White, 'Menzies era', 224, 228–9, 233–7.

³⁰ White, 'Religion, politics and society', 341. However, the belief that Cheyne was acting for Marischal appears to be based largely on an entry in the town council register for December 1595 where Cheyne acted as procurator for Marischal in a case against Gilbert Menzies of Pitfodels, and thus comes after the events under discussion. See *Extracts from the Council Register of the Burgh of Aberdeen*, ed. John Stuart, Spalding Club, 2 vols (Aberdeen, 1844–8) [hereafter *Abdn Counc.*], ii, 119.

³¹ *FMA*, i, 39–59.

³² Henderson, *Marischal College*, 87–8; *FMA*, i, 80–4; *Booke of the Universall Kirk: Acts and Proceedings of the General Assemblies of the Kirk of Scotland, from the year MDLX*, ed. Thomas Thomson, Bannatyne and Maitland Clubs, 3 vols (Edinburgh, 1839–45), ii, 97.

elected an *oeconomus* and rent collector for the college, and had him empowered by the town council to remove unwanted tenants from the Greyfriars' yards and houses.³³ It was also the Menzies town council that initially organised the provision of the original college buildings, the former property of the Greyfriars on Broad Street in the town. These had been granted to the town by a charter of 1567 but in 1576 had been set in feu-ferme to Patrick and Gilbert Jack. Following discussions of the issue of purchase in January 1593, the council appears to have attempted to further the sale by the Jacks and agreed in June to pay 1,800 merks to buy the rights to the properties so that they might provide an income for the college.³⁴

The Earl Marischal was further active in obtaining confirmation of the college erection before parliament on 21 July.³⁵ However, the majority of the administrative work was carried out by the council and the ministers of the town who were in no way radically presbyterian. Certainly Cunningham, Blackburn and Howie all had intellectual connections with Andrew Melville, but in terms of their careers they had all chosen to follow a path that supported the king and moderate episcopacy.³⁶ Cunningham had been a supporter of Melville in Glasgow in the 1570s and had supervised the drawing up of the draft text of the *Second Book of Discipline* from the separate 'heads' written by commissions set up by the General Assembly. On his appointment as bishop of Aberdeen in 1576, however, he had become too 'courtly' for the presbyterian party and was treated with hostility by the Assembly, incurring a charge of immorality in 1586.³⁷ Blackburn was an ex-regent of St Salvator's and was the sole member of staff teaching at Glasgow on Melville's arrival there in 1574, but after his appointment as minister to St Nicholas' kirk in 1582 he also became a strong supporter of the king and accepted the bishopric of Aberdeen in 1600.³⁸ Howie was a son of an Aberdeen burgess appointed to the post of minister in the town after attending Rostock, Herborn and Basel universities. He became first principal of Marischal College, and would go on to succeed Melville as principal of St Mary's. Despite making a number of radical

³³ *Abdn Counc.*, ii, 79–80; *FMA*, i, 51.

³⁴ Henderson, *Marischal College*, 86–7.

³⁵ *The Acts of the Parliaments of Scotland*, ed. Thomas Thomson and Cosmo Innes, 12 vols (Edinburgh, 1814–75), iii, 123; *FMA*, i, 87.

³⁶ Henderson, *Marischal College*, 56–63.

³⁷ *Selections from Wodrow's Biographical Collections: Divines of the North-East of Scotland*, ed. Robert Lippe, New Spalding Club (Aberdeen, 1890), 57–65.

³⁸ Durkan and Kirk, *University of Glasgow*, 254; Alan R. MacDonald, *The Jacobean Kirk, 1567–1625: Sovereignty, Polity and Liturgy* (Aldershot, 1998), 71, 94; *Wodrow's Biographical Collections*, ed. Lippe, 66–79.

presbyterian comments in letters to friends on the continent in the early 1590s, by the end of the decade he appears wholly supportive of the king and episcopacy,³⁹ and in 1617, when he wrote the first history of the University of St Andrews, he conspicuously dedicated it to Archbishop Gledstones and couched it in terms of the contributions of the local bishops and archbishops to the university.⁴⁰ These men, like the preceding Protestant ministers of Aberdeen after 1560, were moderate and non-threatening individuals who have been described as ‘the functionaries of civic religion’ in the town, controlled by the council and never radically involving themselves with burgh politics.⁴¹ As a result, they were ideally placed to work as mediators for the earl on behalf of the council, and it seems that this was the role they adopted in creating the foundation, devoid of any radical presbyterian leanings.

The foundation of Marischal College ground to a halt in September 1593 while the Menzies government was still in power, owing to a difference in views between Marischal and the town council over the property formerly belonging to the Greyfriars. The earl argued that the properties should be given directly to him, presumably to allow him to give them as patron and thus gain further credit, while the town council argued that they should be held by it and given directly to the masters. This attempt to integrate the town council into closer alignment with the college patrimony was apparently strongly supported only by a minority on the council. The majority nevertheless wanted a clause stating that if the gift was given to the earl it would be annexed immediately to the college and remain there in perpetuity, and six members of the council were sent with this clause to the earl. No evidence survives to show what the motivation behind this episode was and the problem is compounded by the fact that our information for it comes from a later witness to a now-mutilated record in the town council register.⁴² However, it seems clear

³⁹ *Letters of John Johnston, c.1565–1611, and Robert Howie, c.1565–1645*, ed. James K. Cameron, St Andrews University Publications 54 (St Andrews, 1963), introduction, and compare the letters at 310–11, 316–17 (20 July 1592 and 22 March 1594–5) and 321–3, 326–7 (8 June 1601 and 9 August 1607) to see the shift in Howie’s attitude. The presbyterian rhetoric of the earlier letters may be due in part to Howie attempting to gain and maintain favour with J. J. Grynaeus, to whom he wrote the first two letters to ask for patronage of his young student James Cargill.

⁴⁰ St Andrews University Muniments, UYSL156, R. Howie, *Oratio Cal. Martis a. 1617... De Fundatoribus Academiae et Collegiorum... Andrapolitana*, fols 249–53.

⁴¹ White, ‘Religion, politics and society’, 354–5.

⁴² *FMA*, i, 85–6. The manuscript of the town council register has been torn, but an account of the events that it described are given in *A Memorial for the Right Honourable the Earl of Findlater... concerning the Union of the Two Colleges* (1754) and in *Memorials relating to the Union of the King’s and Marischal Colleges of Aberdeen* (1755) which were produced for discussions on a possible union between the two colleges.

that the issue for the council was not, as has been suggested, whether they were dealing with the Earl Marischal or the earl of Huntly and their influence in burgh affairs,⁴³ but rather one of the direct control and influence the council had over the college.

It was in the following week that Cheyne and his supporters were elected to the town council. Judging from the statutes they promulgated in their first month in office, this new administration, freed from the Menzies oligarchy that had dominated the burgh for the better part of the century, aimed radically to overhaul almost every aspect of burgh life. Attendance at Sunday sermons was to be enforced and the sale of meat and fish on the Sabbath was to be prohibited. Prices of bread, beef and other staples were to be fixed at rates set by the council, and the quality of ale and other goods monitored, while a number of statutes aimed at improving the speed and fairness with which petitions were dealt by the burgh courts.⁴⁴ Monthly fines were imposed on statute-breakers with limited success, culminating on 8 February 1594 in a list of almost ninety repeat offenders who were to be banished, and almost as many again to be set in caution.⁴⁵ Cheyne and his supporters appear to have enforced their own brand of rule within the burgh, which included a firm adherence to Protestantism. However, Cheyne lasted for only one year in office, being replaced in September 1594 by other ambitious men within his party.⁴⁶ Cheyne's administration does not appear to have been heavily influenced or supported by the Earl Marischal. In fact, its relationship with him, regarding the college at least, appears to have been somewhat strained, and it seems that the Earl Marischal actually lost interest in completing the foundation. The first piece of information on the development of the college in the Cheyne period occurs in the financial accounts of the dean of guild where, on 17 December, £9 was paid to raise letters of suspension at Edinburgh for charges raised by the Earl Marischal against David Cunningham to present the foundation documents before the Lords of Session, and for counter-letters authorising the bishop to deliver the documents to the town council as having interest. Four days later, £100 was given to the bishop to allow him to travel to Edinburgh to pursue this business. This action continued into February 1594 when, after miscellaneous expenses to pursue the earl 'in the mater of the college', the town procurator William Oliphant was sent 'be vertew of

⁴³ Henderson, *Marischal College*, 86–8; White, 'Menzies era', 237.

⁴⁴ ACA, CR XXXV, 3–12, 17–19.

⁴⁵ ACA, CR, XXXV, 41–4, 49, 50–5, 117, 165, 214–17.

⁴⁶ John Collison became provost in 1594, with Patrick Cheyne, William Gray, Alexander Jaffray and Andrew Sherar as baillies: ACA, CR, Index of volumes I–LXVII (1398–1800), 507.

ane ordinance of counsall . . . to persew the actioun of registration of the erectioun of the new college aganis the Erl Merschall'.⁴⁷

The matter seems to have dragged on as Howie was still being paid only for his services as a minister to the town in July 1594. His first official transaction as principal did not occur until 20 September when he was given the deed of erection of the college by the town council.⁴⁸ This act was also notably one of the final ones carried out by the Cheyne administration, suggesting that it wished to complete at least an initial start to the college before its removal from office. Thus the college had as protracted and difficult an opening as Edinburgh did in the year prior to 1583, yet it is by no means clear why this was the case. If the Cheyne faction were supporters of the earl, why did conflict persist between the town council and Marischal over the completion of the foundation? Moreover, if they were supportive of a strong presbyterian agenda why did they employ a bishop in their dealings with the earl over the college? It seems that any explanation should take into account the possibility that both sides of the council sought an active involvement and recognition of its contribution to a 'town' college of New Aberdeen. More cynically, it may be that, with the removal of the Menzies from power and thus an end to a faction sympathetic to Huntly, the Earl Marischal felt less pressure to reinforce his influence in the town with the high-profile development of a college and began to lose interest when the council asserted a right to it, leaving it to pursue the issue. While the evidence is scarce and contradictory, the length of time it took to secure the foundation and the fact that the dispute transcended both factions in burgh politics cannot be ignored. Perhaps the main credit should go to the town council for bringing the affair to a conclusion.

The college started out in a very modest fashion, if we are to judge from the scant mentions in letters by Howie sent on 28 January 1595 and 20 February 1597. Howie stated that his teaching focussed exclusively on the teaching of philosophy, causing him to lament that his own further studies into theology were put aside.⁴⁹ Student numbers were very small,

⁴⁷ 'Extracts from the accounts of the burgh of Aberdeen', in *The Miscellany of the Spalding Club*, ed. John Stuart, Spalding Club, 5 vols (Aberdeen, 1841–52), v, 39–181, at 56–7.

⁴⁸ *FMA*, i, 89; Henderson, *Marischal College*, 88.

⁴⁹ Cameron, *Letters of Johnston and Howie*, 304, 313–15. Both letters are addressed to H. Justus, and the second states *Ego tot curis premor (gravor nunc enim studiis Philosophicis, vocatus etiam ad iuventutis in Academia nostra institutionem), ut incumbere non possim prout volo studio theologico* ('I am weighed down with so many cares (for now I am burdened with the study of the Philosophies, having been called once again to the education of the young in our college) that I am unable to exert myself upon the study of theology as I would like.'). Howie had little positive to say about the state of Scottish education in general, referring to the Scottish universities as *Academiis seu potius Academiolis Scoticanas* ('the colleges, or rather, demi-colleges, of Scotland').

with the earliest and apparently incomplete list of students between 1598 and 1605 registering just twenty students.⁵⁰ Nothing else is known about the nature and extent of teaching at Marischal's before Howie's departure in 1598.⁵¹ His successor, Gilbert Gray, was related to both the Menzies and the Rutherfords, who also served as provosts during his time as principal. Described as 'remarkably diligent' by a near contemporary, Gray appears to have supervised the education of his students with some care, judging from an early extant notebook belonging to a Marischal student.⁵² Gray also appears to have been the first principal to create a detailed legislative framework for the college, in the 1602 *Statuta* of the college and possibly the undated *Leges* as well.⁵³ Most importantly, Gray used his connections with the burgh council to improve the collection of the available rents from the lands of the Greyfriars, obtaining decreets before the Lords of Session between 1600 and 1602 causing many of the tenants to accept a revised assedation of their crofts taking inflation into account and thereby increasing the financial return to the college in real terms by a third. The town council also aided Gray by providing him with decreets of removing non-paying tenants from the college crofts at Whitsunday 1606, allowing him to further increase the return to the college.⁵⁴

Development, 1610–23

Despite this tentative start and limited support and resources, it seems that Marischal underwent a remarkable growth and development between 1610 and 1623 that rivalled and in some ways surpassed that of the other

⁵⁰ *FMA*, i, 185. Out of this list of twenty students, five can be clearly identified as future ministers, along with William Forbes and William Guild, principals of Marischal and King's respectively, and a Peter Blackburn who acted as regent and appears to have been the son of the Peter Blackburn involved in the foundation of the college. Other early students who were unrecorded but are known to have attended the college were Thomas Reid and David Wedderburne, appointed as teachers of the grammar school in 1602, and Patrick Dun, Patrick Copland, Andrew Ramsay and Gilbert Jack, the latter two achieving great distinction as professors at Saumur and Leyden respectively.

⁵¹ The burgh was pleased enough with his tenure as principal to make him a burges and give him a 12 ounce 'sylver caiss' engraved with the town arms as a parting gift: *Abdn Counc.*, ii, 164.

⁵² A 1602–3 notebook owned by Thomas Forbes, filled with Latin exposition of Greek terms from works by authors including Homer and Demosthenes, shows that the college was teaching as full a curriculum as other universities in the country: Aberdeen University Library, MS116.

⁵³ Colin A. McLaren, *Aberdeen Students, 1600–1860* (Aberdeen, 2005), Appendix 1, 137–67.

⁵⁴ *FMA*, i, 92–109 (Rentals of the college drawn up by Robert Howie, 1593–8, and by Gilbert Gray, 1601–6). The decreets of the Lords of Session were enacted on 31 July 1600, 4 March 1601 and 20 July 1602.

Scottish universities. In the early seventeenth century each university experienced a growth in student numbers,⁵⁵ but Edinburgh certainly seemed to fare best in attracting funding for development. Between 1605 and 1634 the recorded figures for matriculations at Edinburgh rose from an average of 22.4 students for the period 1605–9 to 34 students for the period 1630–4.⁵⁶ At the same time the college's library and resources grew through bequests made overwhelmingly by private individuals from the burgh, raising a huge £71,000 between 1597 and 1655. A considerable portion of this money was used for the divinity school and maintenance of the divinity professor, but one gift of 7,000 merks from a local merchant was used to create a new building between 1644 and 1646 to house the college library, by then totalling over 3,000 works.⁵⁷

Marischal can claim a similar, but not quite as large, growth in student numbers in this period as the average number of recorded matriculations rose from 21.8 between 1605 and 1609 to 24 between 1630 and 1634.⁵⁸ Parallels between the two are also noticeable in terms of benefactions made to the college. Between 1593 and 1623 Marischal College received over 26,000 merks in bursaries and gifts from private individuals and donors. As J. M. Bulloch noted when comparing this with private benefactions to King's in the same period, which totalled just 50 shillings in feu-duty: 'the discrepancy, after making all deductions for the natural run on any new thing, is too remarkable to be quite accidental'.⁵⁹

What, then, were these bursaries, and where were they coming from? The earliest benefaction made to the college in 1596 was the mortification of four rigs of land in the Garioch by Sir James Leslie of Durno, with the view that children from his family would be entitled to bursaries at the college.⁶⁰ A benefaction of two feu-duties totalling 46s 8d on

⁵⁵ Although printed records do not exist for the colleges at St Andrews, the matriculation rolls for the period after 1610 show a considerable upsurge in the number of students attending. See St Andrews University Muniments, UYUY306/2, 9–72.

⁵⁶ I have benefited from being able to consult figures for Scottish university matriculations from the appendix of John Durkan's forthcoming volume, *Early Schools and Schoolmasters*, which is to be published by the Scottish History Society. I am grateful to Dr Jamie Reid Baxter and Professor Roger Mason, the editors of the volume, and Dr Sharon Adams, the publications secretary of the Scottish History Society, for enabling me to use and cite this material.

⁵⁷ Anderson, Lynch and Phillipson, *University of Edinburgh*, 28, 38–9.

⁵⁸ Durkan, *Early Schools and Schoolmasters*. These figures replace previously lower estimates of the number of student entrants at Marischal drawn from *FMA*, ii, 189–206 and McLaren, *Aberdeen Students*, 24–5. Entrant numbers at King's for the same period remained largely static, only rising from an average of 19 to 20 students.

⁵⁹ John Malcolm Bulloch, *A History of the University of Aberdeen 1495–1895* (Aberdeen, 1895), 98.

⁶⁰ *FMA*, i, 89–92.

25 January 1606 by Patrick Jack, a local dyer,⁶¹ appears to be an example of spontaneous civic-minded generosity that at a stroke almost equalled the total gifts made to King's in the 1593–1623 period. A still greater benefaction was made by David Chamberlane, surgeon to the queen, who bequeathed 1,000 merks for the upkeep of the college in 1618.⁶² All the other bursaries within the period under consideration, however, fall into two categories: either gifts by ex-students, or benefactions from the town council.

The first of these groups, the ex-students, were those who went into an academic or ministerial career and who did not teach at the college but clearly had a desire to expand the status of teaching at Marischal from that of a 'colledge of philosophie' to something far grander. The first benefactor of this kind was Duncan Liddell (1561–1613), an Aberdonian who studied medicine, mathematics and astronomy across the continent under luminaries including Tycho Brahe.⁶³ In Edinburgh in July 1612 he ordained that the lands of Pitmedden just outside Aberdeen be mortgaged to enable six bursars to sit their arts degree, who would then spend a further two years teaching mathematics to other students in the college. Although the initial mortgaging did not specify to which college in Aberdeen the bursaries should be granted, in December 1613 this was rectified by annexation to Marischal alone and was enlarged with a further grant of 6,000 merks to provide for a permanent professor of mathematics, 'weill versed in Euclide Ptolemye Copernik Archimede aliisque mathematicis', who would supervise the six bursars and ensure that they fulfilled their teaching obligations at the end of their degree. The professor was to be paid 400 merks annually if he was a 'perfyit mathematicus' and taught five or six times a week, with the stipend decreasing proportionally if the appointee was less qualified or did not fulfil his teaching allocation. Any surplus was to be used to maintain and enlarge Liddell's final bequest to the college of a range of mathematical 'globis and instruments' and his library, of which today over 120 works can readily be identified in the university collection. Liddell clearly intended to ensure a solid foundation for the development of higher learning in mathematics at Marischal, specifying details including the style of dress the bursars were to wear and authorising competitions in which the students would compete with one another in Latin orations of thanksgiving to the king and founders

⁶¹ *FMA*, i, 109–12.

⁶² *FMA*, i, 182–4.

⁶³ By whom he was accused of plagiarising the system of astronomy that Brahe had pioneered. See A. G. Molland, 'Duncan Liddell (1561–1613): an early benefactor of Marischal College library', *Aberdeen University Review* 51 (1986), 485–99.

of the college with the winner receiving ‘three pounds cum corona ex floribus’.⁶⁴

James Cargill, like Duncan Liddell, was another student who excelled in the study and practice of medicine on the continent, spending most of the 1590s in Basle under the celebrated early anatomist and botanist Caspar Bauhin and at Montbelliard under Bauhin’s brother John, physician to the duke of Württemberg. Cargill is known for the correspondence he kept with his teachers that illuminates many aspects of early medical and botanical research, and for the 4,000 merks he bequeathed in 1614 for the support of four poor scholars at Marischal, who was each to receive the interest of one quarter of the endowment to fund their course.⁶⁵ Initially, the interest of half this benefaction was used, with the consent of Cargill’s executor and brother David, to augment the salary of the principal, but two bursars were being entertained on some of the rents as early as 1617.⁶⁶

John Johnston, Robert Howie’s travelling companion on the continent and staunch supporter of Andrew Melville, was another Aberdonian (though one who had taken his initial degree at King’s) and spent the last nineteen years of his life in the position of second master at St Mary’s, where he specialised in the exposition of the New Testament.⁶⁷ At his death in 1611 Johnston left the sum of 1,000 merks to mortify a four-year studentship for a divinity scholar to be administered by the local ministry and teaching staff with presentation by the lairds of Caskieben and Crimond. The right of presentation was initially disputed between the town council and the lairds but was settled in favour of the former and on 3 July 1616 the town council presented John Sanders as the first regular bursary holder, who was succeeded by William Johnston on 22 May 1621.⁶⁸

There are two reasons that may have motivated staff and ex-students in founding benefactions in the college, and both reveal something of the nature and quality of education at Marischal. Cargill, Liddell and Johnston had all studied extensively on the continent, and were recognised as being talented and heavyweight academics in their fields. The staff at Marischal in the first half of the seventeenth century were also an exceptionally literate and well-travelled group who mirrored these men: the principals of the college from Robert Howie until Patrick Dun

⁶⁴ *FMA*, i, 120–39.

⁶⁵ James K. Cameron, ‘Some Aberdeen students on the continent in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries’, in *Universities of Aberdeen and Europe*, ed. Dukes, 57–78, at 64; *FMA*, i, 149–53.

⁶⁶ William Cargill and James Forbes each received 100 merks as bursars in the treasury accounts of 1617–18: *FMA*, i, 153.

⁶⁷ Cameron, *Letters of Johnston and Howie*, xlix–lxiii; *FMA*, i, 113.

⁶⁸ *FMA*, i, 113–17.

in 1640 had all studied abroad, and each published a range of literary works, something that contemporary principals at other universities often neglected to do once receiving a secure tenure.⁶⁹ The staff at Marischal also stuck rigorously to one facet of the ‘Melvillian’ programme of study that other universities had not adhered to: that of each professor having a specialised area of study rather than leading a class through four years of general study. While it appears that Robert Howie taught the first class in this manner (a process known as ‘regenting’), by 1601 staff were clearly adopting and sticking to specialist roles. Thus in 1601 staff signed as individual professors on town council documentation, and in the 1623 collection of elegiac poetry following the death of the fifth Earl Marischal, James Sibbald and William Guild describe themselves respectively as professors of natural philosophy and logic.⁷⁰ The fact that Cargill, Liddell and Johnston all specialised in teaching aspects of their respective fields seems to have encouraged them to provide funds to develop teaching of these same subjects at a college in their home town, where they knew a focus on professorial teaching was encouraged.

The other more pragmatic motive that connects these bursaries was simple advancement of families in and around the burgh, in the first instance those of the benefactors. Duncan Liddell specified that his bursaries were to be given to the offspring of his brother’s and sisters’ children, but if they were not of an age to attend then the bursaries were to be specifically employed for ‘honest poore mens sounes burgesses of new Ab[er]d[een]’, with the poorest and neediest being given priority.⁷¹ James Cargill specified that the 500 merks mortified to the grammar school could be moved to Marischal for the use of his ‘puire freyns’ if there were none at the school, a reference which may simply refer to poor bursars but is more likely to mean poor family members or friends of his kin.⁷² The desire to maintain bursars who would come from the town

⁶⁹ The first five principals all published various religious and poetic works which are listed in *FMA*, ii, 27–8. By contrast, James Martine, provost of St Salvator’s College, St Andrews, between 1577 and 1620, appears to have left no published written works despite a forty-three year tenure in the post.

⁷⁰ Henderson, *Marischal College*, 35; *Lachrymae Academiae Marischallanae sub obitum moecenatis & fundatoris sui munificentissimi: Nobilissimi et illustrissimi Georgii, comitis Marischalli* (Aberdeen: Edward Raban, 1623). This work comprises a long elegiac on the fifth Earl Marischal (d. 5 April 1623) by David Wedderburne, followed by short poems by James Sibbald and Andrew Massie, described as professors of natural philosophy and logic respectively, and a page of vernacular verse by William Guild. Another work by William Ogstone, *Oratio funebris in obitum maximi virorum Georgii, Marischalli comitis, D. Keith & Altre, &c. Academiae Marischallanae Abredoniae, fundatoris, et mecoenatis munificentissime* (Aberdeen: Edward Raban, 1623) gives Ogston’s title as Professor of Moral Philosophy.

⁷¹ *FMA* i, 124.

⁷² *FMA*, i, 150.

was heeded, unsurprisingly, by the town council and its executors. The first three recipients of Johnston's divinity bursary were all connected with the educational elite in the town or the surrounding area, with his nephew John Sanders taking the bursary in 3 July 1616, another kinsman William Johnston on 22 May 1621, and then Alexander Wedderburn on 29 January 1623, brother to the master of the grammar school and to a regent in the college.⁷³ Moreover, the first Liddel and Cargill bursaries went to the sons of seven local ministers and fifteen burgesses who were all employed in highly oligarchic and protected professions as merchants, advocates and craftsmen.⁷⁴

As a teacher of the divinity bursar provided by Johnston yet another well-travelled Aberdonian, Patrick Copland, provided a gift for the development of the college. Copland was a remarkable figure who studied at the Aberdeen grammar school and at Marischal, and in 1612 joined the East India Company as a preacher in its naval fleet. In the early 1620s while serving on its flagship, the *Royal James*, Copland supervised a fundraising programme to create a college in the newly founded colony of Virginia that would cater not only for colonists but for children of American-Indians. For his efforts he was made a brother of the Company of Virginia and rector-elect of the proposed college until the dissolution of the company in 1624 put an end to his plans. Copland then travelled with his family to the Summer Isles in Bermuda, where he strove to provide 'godly' education to the local populace until his death in 1651.⁷⁵

Keen to show a similar zeal for education in his home town, Copland mortified a total of 6,000 merks in three separate benefactions of 2,000 merks each between 27 January 1617, 18 July 1622 and 1 February 1628 for the purpose of providing a 'reader in Divinity' skilled in the biblical languages who would be chosen by the provost and baillies of the town. A remarkable series of letters, written by Copland in various locations while on his travels, detail the negotiations between himself and the town council regarding his endowment.⁷⁶ The correspondence shows that Copland was extraordinarily well-connected to the ministers and intellectual circle in the north-east, despite the immense physical distance between him and his home town, and he used all his influence to ensure that his bursaries would be put to his 'godly' intentions. Furthermore, the letters show Copland actively attempting to dissuade the town council from acceding to the wishes of the Earl Marischal in presenting staff to the college, advice that the town council appears to have followed in

⁷³ *FMA*, i, 117.

⁷⁴ McLaren, *Aberdeen Students*, 26.

⁷⁵ Shona MacLean Vance, 'Copland, Patrick (c.1572–c.1651)', in *ODNB*, <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/66917> (accessed 1 September 2007).

⁷⁶ *FMA*, i, 166–78.

order to procure funds that were much needed for the development of the college. Copland's first letter, dated 2 May 1615, states that he had intended to create four poor bursars through a donation of 2,000 merks before the death of Principal Gilbert Gray. In what could be construed as either devotion to the promotion of religious education at Marischal or as a piece of bare-faced cronyism, Copland intimated he would continue his original intention if the town now elected a new principal, and 'specially if they choose' his presbyterian colleague and former head of the abortive Fraserburgh University,⁷⁷ Charles Ferme. On 21 June the provost and baillies replied, advising Copland that, with the number of bursaries created by Duncan Liddell and James Cargill, his money would better serve the far more pressing purpose of augmenting the stipends of the staff. The merchant Robert Buchan was sent to obtain the 2,000 merks from Copland with letters authorising the mortification, and Buchan was bound as cautioner for the money. In a now lost letter, Copland apparently assented, but still urged that either Charles Ferme or another colleague, Patrick Forbes of Corse, be provided to the principalship.

However, on the same day the council was informed by Robert Menzies and Robert Johnston, commissioners sent to the Earl Marischal to ascertain his wishes as patron in nominating a new principal to fill the vacant seat, that the earl was 'weill affected' to see either Patrick Sands or Alexander Home elevated to the position. By August this inclination in favour of Patrick Sands on the part of the earl had become more explicit: a commission was ordered to see if he would be willing to take the post. We know nothing of Sands or whether he indeed took up the position, but Copland had apparently heard of him, for in his next letter of February 1616 Copland's stance had changed to one of tough but amiable negotiation. Having been informed of the council's choice of Sands, not only at the behest of the earl through letters from the council but also from Ferme and another Aberdonian minister, Archibald Blackburn, he remarked somewhat acerbically:

The man to myself is unknown, only by reporte I hear hee is a great Lawyer and Philosopher, but what Theologue and Linguist hee is I cannot learne; and [is not] a Divine and Linguist, as a man most fittest and necessary for your college is chiefly intended by the foundation.

Copland then appears to have given Buchan 900 merks of the bond, but shrewdly freed him from payment of the remaining 1,100 merks and sent the remainder and the obligation for the money to Ferme and

⁷⁷ There was an attempt by Sir Alexander Fraser of Philorth to found a university there between 1592 and 1602, to which Ferme was appointed as principal. See *FMA*, i, 78–9.

Blackburn. Copland would not allow the council to receive the obligation, nor would he send them the mortification erecting the bursary, until they had satisfied his colleagues as to the suitability of Sands. Most importantly, Copland was adamant that the Earl Marischal should have nothing to do with the presentation to this post, stating that ‘if the Erle Marshal shall place a man without the consent of the Provest, Bailyies and counsel of Ab[er]d[een] . . . then the use of the said tuo thousand markes shall goe to the maintenance of the Ministers of Ab[er]d[een] serving the cure’.⁷⁸ It is unclear why Copland would have such an animus towards the earl, but it may be that he felt that the college had been far better served by the town council than it had been by Marischal. Copland also appears to have felt that education was a town issue, as in his next letter he apologises for his heavy-handedness but states ‘it was never my intention to comit the right of patronage and presentation to any uthers than the Provost, Bailyies and Council (for who should have greater care for the flourishing of their Towne and Colledge than they that are Magistrats of it?)’.⁷⁹

The impact of Copland’s letter on the town council is noticeable and remarkable. Within a month of its receipt Gray was instead succeeded by a theologian, Andrew Adie, who apparently wrote to Copland to tell him of his appointment.⁸⁰ Copland’s next letter, dated 18 October 1616, is markedly more amiable, congratulating the council on its appointment. Copland also makes reference to the choice of William Forbes, made minister of the town on 24 September, as being chosen to be a resident theology teacher and linguist at the college. This is the earliest reference to the enactment by the council, recorded in the register on 7 January 1617,⁸¹ of Forbes’ appointment to teach ‘ane publict lessoun of Theologie weiklie’ in the college for an annual stipend of £600 from the interest of Copland’s benefaction and some town annual rents, with which an additional payment was to be made to repair the buildings of the Greyfriars as a site for the weekly lesson.⁸² It is clear from this letter that Copland was being actively consulted over the choice of person for the post of divinity teaching by the council, and that he was informed in a letter of 1 January as to the council’s intention, for by the end

⁷⁸ *FMA*, i, 168–9.

⁷⁹ *FMA*, i, 169.

⁸⁰ *FMA*, ii, 28; Cameron, ‘Some Aberdeen students’, 68–9. Adie had also been recommended by James VI to the Earl Marischal for the appointment in a letter of the preceding May, but the recommendation does not appear to have inspired any action until Copland’s intervention in the appointment. I am grateful to Professor James Cameron for this reference.

⁸¹ *Abdn Counc.*, ii, 347–8.

⁸² *FMA*, i, 156–8.

of the month he sent back acknowledgement and his letters authorising the mortification of the bursary, which were duly registered by the town council on 21 May. The letter of mortification strongly insisted that the provost and baillies have ‘full and absolute’ power over the presentation, and any attempt by the earl to place someone in the chair of divinity or to meddle with the annual rents would see the bursary handed out to the local hospital or distributed to poor scholars by the council.⁸³

What are we to make of this lengthy and unusual exchange? It certainly suggests that, although the Earl Marischal did indeed have the right of presentation of the college principal, his wishes appear to have taken on secondary importance to the council when there was potential to develop the range of amenities at the college, and that the council was willing to listen to benefactors like Copland, who were keen to see that their money was invested wisely and given directly into the hands of the council with little or no input from the earl. While this in no way implies that the earl was completely irrelevant to the foundation, it does seem that the council had the central role in managing the college even when its patron’s wishes may have conflicted with that role.

The negotiations with Copland are just one example of the considerable efforts in time and finance devoted to Marischal College by the town council. These donations took many forms beyond securing finance. The council itself also attempted to expand the quality of teaching at Marischal. In March 1620, hoping to entice William Forbes to accept the role of principal while maintaining his ministry in the town, the council ordained the creation of a fourth regent in the foundation to teach the graduating year, and devolved responsibility for ‘all extraordinary mareagis and baptisimes’ to Forbes’ fellow ministers, James Ross and Archibald Blackburn. Despite the fact that Forbes resigned his commission in the following year, the council decided that the creation of a fourth regent was still desirable, assigning 300 merks in annual salary to the new principal Patrick Dun from which he was to fund the new post.⁸⁴

The town council also concerned itself with developing the material needs of the college. On 30 August 1609 the council granted £100 for repairing a house within the college grounds to act as a library for a planned donation of books from the Earl Marischal. Despite the fact that the earl did not apparently fulfil his promise, the building was allocated another £100 on 20 April 1614 to develop it to house the books gifted by Duncan Liddell.⁸⁵ Other building projects were funded in and around the

⁸³ *FMA*, i, 159–63.

⁸⁴ *FMA*, i, 186–7.

⁸⁵ *FMA*, i, 112, 205–6.

college to enhance student life – on 8 April 1612 the council authorised the erection of a loft in the old kirk of the town so that the students might have their own space during church service, and masons were sent at the request of Principal Adie on 28 August 1616 to repair the ‘back dyick’ of the college grounds before it fell.⁸⁶ Most remarkably, the council agreed to a plan put forward on 11 June 1623 by William Guild, the son of an Aberdeen armourer and another early student of Marischal, and by 1623 minister of Kinneddar or King-Edward in the presbytery of Turriff, that he would mortify the ‘foirhous’ at the front of Greyfriars, bought from John Mercer, a local saddler, to build a proper entrance to the college, which would also house a stationer’s shop. This ‘shop’ was presumably to house the printer Edward Raban, who had moved to Aberdeen from St Andrews in 1622 and who printed the earliest recorded Marischal graduation theses as well as elegiac and poetic works on the death of the Earl Marischal. The considerable range of extant works published by Raban shows the level of early literary development at the college,⁸⁷ and it is clear that the council was interested not only in augmenting the staff of the college, but in giving New Aberdeen a wholly integrated higher educational system that would encompass worship, printing and all other aspects of educational life.

That this is the case is further illustrated by gifts to the other central educational institute in New Aberdeen, the grammar school. Founded in 1256, the school was housed in a street within a stone’s throw of Marischal, next to St Nicholas’ kirk. A well-established foundation in the burgh by the early fifteenth century, the town council records show that there was an increasing focus on regulation of the grammar school by the council from the early sixteenth century. By the 1590s the rights of the burgh school to have legal precedence over other freelance teachers were being asserted by the council, which also supervised the appointment of staff, creating Thomas Reid and David Wedderburne as joint masters of the grammar school in 1602. The town council also regulated student behaviour, disciplining unruly students who held up the tradition of running wild at the Yule feast in 1612.⁸⁸

In February 1620 an annual stipend was granted to David Wedderburne to teach a weekly lesson in Latin grammar and composition and rhetoric in alternate weeks at the college, presumably to smooth the transition between the grammar school and the college. Although this extension of Wedderburne’s work proved to be a failure – the council removed the role in 1624 owing to fears that Wedderburne’s duties at the

⁸⁶ *FMA*, i, 120; *Abdn Counc.*, ii, 346.

⁸⁷ Peter John Anderson, *Notes on Academic Theses. With a Bibliography of Duncan Liddell*, Aberdeen University Studies 58 (Aberdeen, 1912), 17–19.

⁸⁸ *Abdn Counc.*, ii, 313–14.

grammar school were being neglected due to his holding two posts – it is clear that the council was attempting to integrate a continual process of education between grammar school and college.⁸⁹

It is clear that there were considerable attempts on the part of the council to augment and integrate the system of education in New Aberdeen throughout the first three decades of the history of Marischal College so as to provide a better range of subjects and to ensure that the sons of burgesses of New Aberdeen had comprehensive education from the outset. It is true that this was occasionally a less than smooth process, and there were some problems at the college in this early period of development. For example, a small but steady stream of students passed from Marischal to King's in the 1610s, though why is unclear,⁹⁰ and when David Wedderburne was appointed as interim replacement for Principal Gilbert Gray in 1615 he found discipline had decayed and all students were ordered to swear obedience to him.⁹¹ There was also refusal, supported by the Earl Marischal, to open the gates to the visitation ordered by James VI for the colleges of Aberdeen in 1619, though again this may be explained by the fact that Aberdonians saw their college as being a local or civic foundation, rather than a royal one.⁹² However, none of these minor problems can detract from the fact that, following on from initial and limited patronage by the Earl Marischal, it seems to have been a sustained and concerted effort led by the town council which was instrumental in creating a quality and useful institute of higher education in Marischal College. This drive benefited from the involvement of reform-minded but moderate ministers who steered the college through a maze of administrative processes, and who followed the latest European trends in education and curriculum without necessarily pursuing a radical religious path. It also benefited from the generosity and pragmatism of Aberdonians both at home and abroad who wished to develop education in their hometown, but, in a characteristically 'thrawn' way, ensured that their own families would benefit first and foremost.⁹³

STEVEN REID IS A DOCTORAL STUDENT ON THE 'HISTORY OF THE UNIVERSITY' PROJECT AT THE INSTITUTE OF SCOTTISH HISTORICAL RESEARCH, UNIVERSITY OF ST ANDREWS.

⁸⁹ *FMA*, i, 185.

⁹⁰ McLaren, *Aberdeen Students*, 25.

⁹¹ *Abdn Counc.*, ii, 327–8.

⁹² *Fasti Aberdonenses. Selections from the Records of the University and King's College of Aberdeen, 1494–1854*, ed. Cosmo Innes, Spalding Club (Aberdeen, 1854), 278–80.

⁹³ The author wishes to thank Fiona Musk at Aberdeen City Archives for help in double-checking references from the council registers cited in this article. He would also like to thank Professor Roger Mason for his support and encouragement.

Steven John Reid

Aberdeen's 'Toun College': Marischal College, 1593–1623

Introduction

While debate has arisen in the past two decades regarding the foundation of Edinburgh University, by contrast the foundation and early development of Marischal College, Aberdeen, has received little attention. This is particularly surprising when one considers it is perhaps the closest Scottish parallel to the Edinburgh foundation. Founded in April 1593 by George Keith, fifth Earl Marischal in the burgh of New Aberdeen 'to do the utmost good to the Church, the Country and the Commonwealth',¹ like Edinburgh Marischal was a new type of institution that had more in common with the Protestant 'arts colleges' springing up across the continent than with the papally sanctioned Scottish universities of St Andrews, Glasgow and King's College in Old Aberdeen.² James Kirk is the most recent in a long line of historians to argue that the impetus for founding 'ane college of theologie' in Edinburgh in 1579 was carried forward by the radical presbyterian James Lawson, which led to the eventual opening on 14 October 1583 of a liberal arts college in the burgh, as part of an educational reform programme devised and rolled out across the Scottish universities by the divine and educational reformer, Andrew Melville.³

However, in a self-professedly revisionist article Michael Lynch has argued that the college settlement was far more protracted and contingent on burgh politics than the simple insertion of a one-size

¹ *Fasti Academiae Mariscallanae Aberdonensis: Selections from the Records of the Marischal College and University, MDXCIII–MDCCCLX*, ed. Peter J. Anderson, New Spalding Club, 3 vols (Aberdeen, 1889–98) [hereafter *FMA*], i, 61.

² John M. Fletcher, 'The foundation of the University of Aberdeen in its European context', in *The Universities of Aberdeen and Europe: the First Three Centuries*, ed. Paul Dukes (Aberdeen, 1995), 9–56; David Ditchburn, 'Educating the elite: Aberdeen and its universities', in *Aberdeen Before 1800: a New History*, ed. E. Patricia Dennison, David Ditchburn and Michael Lynch (East Linton, 2002), 327–46, at 331 and n.15, which notes the foundations of other universities in the 1490s and 1590s.

³ See James Kirk, "'Melvillian' reform in the Scottish universities', in *The Renaissance in Scotland: Studies in Literature, Religion, History and Culture offered to John Durkan*, ed. A. A. MacDonald, Michael Lynch and Ian B. Cowan (Leiden, 1994), 276–300, and John Durkan and James Kirk, *The University of Glasgow, 1451–1577* (Glasgow, 1977), 262–346. For the best representative of the older historical tradition see David B. Horn, 'The origins of the University of Edinburgh', *Edinburgh University Journal* 22 (1966), 213–25, 297–312.

fits all ‘Melvillian’ programme would allow.⁴ Lawson was, after all, considerably out of favour in the city when Alexander Clark, provost of the town between 1579 and 1584, oversaw the creation of a legislative and financial framework for the college between November 1581 and April 1582. Moreover, it was a newly elected moderate town council that completed the process of erection in October 1583 after a break of eighteen months, during which time a radical administration supported by the Ruthven regime and local presbyterian ministers had attempted to hijack the plans for the college. This same moderate council sent baillies to vet the curriculum of the college and ensure that no overly radical teaching would take place, and with complete silence on the part of both the General Assembly and presbyterian commentators like James Melville the new ‘Toun College’ opened. The whole episode is succinctly summed up by Lynch in the words: ‘Reform of the universities did not escape the overriding fact of burgh life in sixteenth-century Scotland – the power of localism.’⁵

This article seeks to ascertain the role of the ‘power of localism’ in the foundation and early development of Marischal College, and in particular the contributions of the Earl Marischal and the burgh and burgesses of New Aberdeen. It will suggest that although there were a number of motives and influences providing the impetus for the college, including those personally attributable to the Earl Marischal, the town council and the burgesses of New Aberdeen played perhaps the most significant role in bringing the college to fruition in its first three decades. In this sense, Marischal should perhaps be seen along with Edinburgh as a different kind of Scottish higher educational institution, distinct from the traditional Scottish universities, and likewise best described as a ‘toun college’.

The initial foundation and early years, 1593–1610

G. D. Henderson’s *The Founding of Marischal College, Aberdeen* is the only book that has attempted to deal in detail with the Earl Marischal’s motives for establishing this institute of higher education, less than three miles from the foundation in Old Aberdeen.⁶ Henderson saw the influence of European humanism, couched in reforming and Calvinist

⁴ Michael Lynch, ‘The origins of Edinburgh’s “Toun College”’: a revision article’, *IR* 33 (1982), 3–14; *Idem*, ‘The creation of a college’, in Robert D. Anderson, Michael Lynch and Nicholas Phillipson, *The University of Edinburgh: an Illustrated History* (Edinburgh, 2003), 1–49, at 9–18.

⁵ Lynch, ‘Edinburgh’s “Toun College”’, 13.

⁶ G. D. Henderson, *The Founding of Marischal College, Aberdeen*, Aberdeen University Studies no. 123 (Aberdeen, 1947).

terms, as the prime influence on the earl. Marischal had studied in France and Geneva under Beza between 1571 and 1580, and the curriculum he was exposed to had rejected the teaching of Aristotle from Latin texts and through scholastic commentators. Aristotle and other Greek authors were instead studied in their original language, as were the texts of the Old and New Testaments. Added to this programme was an expanded array of humanist subjects including history, geography and astronomy.⁷

Six years prior to Marischal's return to Scotland, Andrew Melville had come back from teaching in Geneva with the intention of bringing this curriculum to the Scottish universities, still struggling to reform themselves after the onset of the Scottish Reformation. Melville also brought with him the teachings of Pierre de la Rameé, or Petrus Ramus, whose method of teaching laid down rules for systematically organising and disseminating all the main subjects of the university curriculum, and also heavily criticised and reduced the teachings of Aristotle, Cicero and Quintilian in logic and rhetoric. Melville had huge success in his first role at home as principal of Glasgow University, reconstituting the near-defunct university in the *Nova Erectio* of 1577.⁸ In 1580 Melville moved to the principalship of St Mary's College in St Andrews, perhaps also to oversee the implementation of the 'New Foundation' of the university along Melvillian lines as enacted by parliament in 1579. However, Melville ran into considerable difficulty in attempting to reform the conservative and insular colleges of the university, and by the end of the 1580s little in the way of successful reform had been achieved. He continued to face continual resistance to his ideas at St Andrews, even when he was appointed rector in 1590.⁹

Similar resistance occurred when a reformation of King's College was attempted in the early 1580s, a process in which the Earl Marischal

⁷ *Ibid.*, 10.

⁸ Kirk, "'Melvillian' reform', 285; Durkan and Kirk, *University of Glasgow*, 271, 275–88; Henderson, *Marischal College*, 10–15. Kirk provides the best published account of both the early modern Scottish university curriculum, and of Melville's work on his return to Scotland. However, for a contrasting view to his work that emphasises the continuation of traditional conservative Aristotelianism at the Scottish universities in the seventeenth century, see C. M. Shepherd, 'Philosophy and science in the arts curriculum of the Scottish universities in the seventeenth century' (University of Edinburgh, unpublished PhD thesis, 1975). The best recent accounts in English of Ramus and Ramism are those by James Veazie Skalnik, *Ramus and Reform: Church and University at the End of the Renaissance* (Kirksville, Missouri, 2002) and Howard Hotson, *Commonplace Learning: Ramism and its German Ramifications, 1543–1630* (Oxford, 2007).

⁹ There is no detailed published account of this period in the history of the University of St Andrews, but for a summary of Melville's tenure at St Andrews see Ronald Gordon Cant, 'Melville', in *Idem, The University of St Andrews: A Short History*, 4th edn (St Andrews, 2002), 60–7, and J. Cameron, 'Andrew Melville in St Andrews', in *In Divers Manners: A St Mary's Miscellany*, ed. D. W. D. Shaw (St Andrews, 1990), 58–72.

played a central role. In November 1581 the earl headed a visitation commission to King's, made up of members of parliament and the General Assembly, and by April 1583 a new order for the college had apparently been completed which was seen by the General Assembly. However, it seems that over the following year James VI, or the administration led by the earl of Arran, thwarted all attempts to introduce any programme at King's that went against the old foundation. Whether this was due to resistance towards a faction of intellectuals that was perceived as allied with the king's former captors, the Ruthven lords, or resistance to radical constitutional changes is unclear.¹⁰

The Earl Marischal's devotion to the Protestant religion and his growing frustration at the delay in successfully reforming King's may have led him to create his own foundation. Alternatively he may have found it easier to establish a new college with a new constitution than to persist in trying to seek royal approval for a sweeping reform of King's.¹¹ Certainly, the curriculum and structure of Marischal College proposed in the foundation charter indicate that the earl and his assistants, the bishop David Cunningham and the ministers Robert Howie and Peter Blackburn, all had Melville's educational reform ideas in mind. The new college was to house three regents and six poor students, with the principal being responsible, as at Glasgow and St Andrews, for the teaching of biblical languages and the 'opening up of the mysteries of faith' (*ad aperienda fidei mysteria*). Professorial specialisation, another feature of the 'Melvillian' educational programme, where each regent taught a single subject as opposed to taking a year of students through the whole four-year course, was also to be implemented. The college was to provide expressly for 'New Aberdeen' a practical, civic-minded institution where the young 'might receive a godly and liberal education' that would enable them 'to spread the preaching of God's Word ... to instruct the young, or to administer the government' wherever the Church or the Commonwealth had need.¹²

In 1593 Marischal was given the role of lieutenant in the north by the king following a growth in his prospects at court as a result of his services in the king's wedding negotiations in Denmark. Conversely, the earl of Huntly, the traditional protector and patron of the north-east, had fallen from grace for his part in the Catholic intrigues of the early 1590s. Marischal must have seen his foundation as another way to exert influence

¹⁰ David Stevenson, *King's College, Aberdeen, 1560–1641: From Protestant Reformation to Covenanting Revolution* (Aberdeen, 1990), 30–4; Henderson, *Marischal College*, 22–3.

¹¹ Ditchburn, 'Educating the elite', 331.

¹² Henderson, *Marischal College*, 17–19; *FMA*, i, 60–7.

in the main town of the north, and the idea of creating a college that would turn out devout protestants in direct opposition to Huntly must have held an attractive irony for the earl.¹³

Despite these varying explanations for the foundation, Henderson is himself cautious in attributing the foundation to any one factor.¹⁴ However, a re-examination of the evidence surrounding the initial events of the foundation, with a special focus on their relation to burgh politics suggests that, while the Earl Marischal was the undoubted patron and benefactor of the college, the extent of his role in expediting the foundation is questionable. The evidence suggests that far greater credit should be given to the work and partnership between the local ministers of the town and the town council in bringing plans for Marischal College to fruition. As we shall see, the simple model of the presbyterian-minded earl creating a college with a ‘Melvillian’ curriculum does not do the history of the early foundation justice.

By the beginning of the 1590s Aberdeen was being subjected to radical change forced by political and religious tensions within the city. The burgh of New Aberdeen had grown over the preceding century from late medieval market town to fledgling urban economy and now vastly overshadowed its parochial neighbour, Old Aberdeen; the population of the former rose between 1575 and 1644 from around 5,500 to 8,300, compared to a fairly static 900 in the latter.¹⁵ With the growth of the urban population came increasingly vociferous criticism of the traditional, conservative oligarchy that had, from around 1490 onwards, controlled the town council and general administration of the burgh. A small coterie of merchant gentry families fiercely restricted election to official positions in the town,¹⁶ and for the majority of the century a member of one of these families – the Menzies – had held the office of provost. This tight control by the Menzies and their cohorts began to be challenged in the 1580s by the local craft guilds, resentful at restraints on their traditional privileges and the continued refusal of the Menzies to allow

¹³ Henderson, *Marischal College*, 74–8.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 28–31; *FMA*, i, 62. Anderson and Henderson both remarked on the fact that ‘academia’ is by far the most prominent term used to describe the college in the foundation charter, but the words ‘universitas’, ‘gymnasium’ and ‘collegium’ are also used with what appears to be no discrimination.

¹⁵ Ian Blanchard, Elizabeth Gemmill, Nicholas Mayhew and Ian D. Whyte, ‘The economy: town and country’, in *Aberdeen Before 1800*, ed. Dennison, Ditchburn and Lynch, 129–58, at 147–8; Grant G. Simpson, *Old Aberdeen in the Early Seventeenth Century: a Community Study*, Friends of St Machars Cathedral Occasional Papers no. 3 (Aberdeen, 1975), 5–6.

¹⁶ Michael Lynch and Helen M. Dingwall, ‘Elite society in town and country,’ in *Aberdeen Before 1800*, ed. Dennison, Ditchburn and Lynch, 181–200, at 187–91.

guild representation on the council.¹⁷ By the beginning of the 1590s the guilds had found a leader in the outspoken commissary clerk of Aberdeen, John Cheyne,¹⁸ who advocated electoral reform and increased rights for the guilds, and mobilised an opposition movement. In November 1591 the council overturned an unofficial election of Alexander Steven by the guilds as a ‘deacon of deacons’ whom they believed had been appointed solely to incite public gatherings of disaffected townsfolk.¹⁹ On 18 April 1592 the council denounced an appeal which had been made to the Court of Session by Cheyne and his faction three months earlier, claiming that the Menzies regime had governed the burgh without proper elections for over ‘threttie years’. Cheyne and his colleague William Gray also organised armed public gatherings following the elections of a Menzies as provost on 27 September of the same year, despite being expressly forbidden by the council from doing so.²⁰

Religion played its part in these tensions. Unlike Perth, Dundee or towns further down the east coast, there had been no radical underground Protestant movement in Aberdeen.²¹ The Reformation was impeded in the city when an iconoclastic mob was prevented from ravaging the area in January 1559, and two powerful factors contributed to maintaining the religious status quo thereafter. The first was the fact that the bishop’s burgh of Old Aberdeen, and King’s College in particular, remained to a considerable extent Catholic in the two decades after 1560. The principal and teaching staff of King’s were forcibly replaced with Protestant academics in 1569 for refusal to avow the confession of faith, and the last public vestiges of Catholicism were removed during a visitation by the Regent Morton in 1574, but Mass was apparently still practised in Old Aberdeen until the early 1580s.²² As a neighbour to New Aberdeen, the small settlement acted as a powerful engine for upholding conservative belief in the area. The second factor was the pervasive influence of the Gordon earls of Huntly in the north-east. Despite their unswerving Catholicism, the Gordons continued to exercise power as chief magnates

¹⁷ Allan White, ‘The Menzies era: sixteenth-century politics’, in *Aberdeen Before 1800*, ed. Dennison, Ditchburn and Lynch, 224–37.

¹⁸ Allan White, ‘Religion, politics and society in Aberdeen, 1543–1593’ (University of Edinburgh, unpublished PhD thesis, 1985), 304–45.

¹⁹ Aberdeen City Archives, Council Register [hereafter ACA, CR] XXXIII, part 2 (4 December 1590 to 28 February 1592), 1305–1307.

²⁰ ACA, CR XXXIV, part 1 (1 October 1591 to 25 September 1593), 295–8, 508; part 2 (2 October 1592 to 25 September 1593), 517–19.

²¹ For a full list of publications dealing with the Reformation in the north-east, see Stevenson, *King’s College*, 126 n.2.

²² *Ibid.*, 14–27; see W. S. Watt, ‘George Hay’s oration at the purging of King’s College, Aberdeen, in 1569: a translation’, *Northern Scotland* 6 (1984–5), 91–6 and commentary by John Durkan: *ibid.*, 97–112.

in the north because of their effectiveness as agents of royal policy, and were supported, despite their religion, well into the reign of James VI. Although the royal burgh consistently attempted to stay outside the sphere of direct Gordon control in the sixteenth century, it was equally reluctant to encourage a radical religious stance that would alienate the population from such a powerful local influence. The Menzies had a spirit of 'pragmatic conservatism' towards religion, and appear to have remained privately Catholic while professing a lukewarm adoption of the Protestant religion, a stance that by the early 1590s was furthering the sense of alienation that the Protestant majority of the town felt towards them, and which their opponents used against them.²³

It was to this situation in the town that the young sixth earl of Huntly and the fifth Earl Marischal, both competing for power in the local area, turned their attentions. Both had returned from the continent in the early 1580s after very different educations – Huntly, from tutelage governed by his Catholic kinsman Sir Patrick Gordon of Auchindoun, Marischal from Geneva and other continental Protestant arts colleges. Each made an impression at the court in the early 1580s, but in very different ways. Huntly carved out a position as a royal favourite that earned him tacit immunity for his beliefs and the role of lieutenant in the north in 1586, while Marischal made a name for himself working with the Kirk and was given the role of investigator of Catholic behaviour in the north by the General Assembly in April 1582. In 1587 tensions between the two erupted into a feud that resulted in the death of Marischal's kinsman, William Keith, at the hands of a Huntly supporter, and the two were made to reconcile by the crown in March 1589.²⁴

Following their growing religious and political alienation in the town, the Menzies had allied themselves with Huntly and in 1582 had given him access to the town council as a free burgess of the town, a move that served to anger the guild opposition, but ensured that over the next five years the Menzies maintained their power in the royal burgh with Huntly's backing.²⁵ The involvement of Huntly in Catholic proselytising in the late 1580s and early 1590s, most notably in the intrigues of 1589 and 1592 when his signature was found on documents implicating him in plots relating to a planned armed Catholic invasion of Scotland, led to his

²³ White, 'Religion, politics and society', 311.

²⁴ John Simmons, 'Keith, George, fourth Earl Marischal (1549/50–1623)' in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, ed. H. C. G. Matthew and Brian Harrison (Oxford, 2004) [hereafter *ODNB*], <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/15263> (accessed 1 September 2007); J. R. M. Sizer, 'Gordon, George, first marquess of Huntly (1561/2–1636)', in *ODNB*, <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/11036> (accessed 1 September 2007).

²⁵ White, 'Religion, politics and society', 317–19.

fall from grace and ultimate surrender to the king after a brief rebellion in February 1594.²⁶ Conversely, Marischal increased his influence following his successful negotiation of the king's marriage to Anne of Denmark in 1589, and was appointed joint lieutenant of the north with the earl of Atholl following Huntly's fall in 1593.²⁷

The fortunes of these men were directly connected with the sudden sea-change in the political control of the town on 26 September 1593, where by near-unanimous vote Cheyne and a number of his associates were elected as provost and baillies of the council.²⁸ The Menzies, no longer supported by Huntly, were removed from office, and although Cheyne's period as provost lasted only for a year, they would never again hold the unbroken period of power that they had for most of the sixteenth century.²⁹

As with Edinburgh University, these vicissitudes of burgh politics seem to have played a role in the creation of Marischal. The Cheyne faction has been credited as endorsing and completing the foundation of Marischal College, cast as presbyterian sympathisers to the earl who desired a 'godly' education for the townspeople.³⁰ However, this convenient interpretation of events does not sit well in the context of events in burgh politics. Firstly, it was while under a Menzies-led town council, with the support of the town ministry, that the majority of the initial administration relating to the college was undertaken. On 2 April 1593 the Earl Marischal signed the foundation charter for the college, witnessed by John Forbes of Pitsligo, Bishop David Cunningham, and the town ministers Robert Howie and Peter Blackburn.³¹ On 21 April the earl handed over the endowed properties to the same three ministers, and five days later the foundation was approved by the General Assembly.³² Between 7 and 18 June the ministers involved in signing the foundation

²⁶ Ruth Grant, 'The Brig o' Dee affair, the sixth earl of Huntly and the politics of the Counter-Reformation', in *The Reign of James VI*, ed. Julian Goodare and Michael Lynch (East Linton, 2000), 93–109.

²⁷ Henderson, *Marischal College*, 74–8.

²⁸ ACA, CR XXXV (26 September 1593 to 25 September 1594), 1–3.

²⁹ White, 'Menzies era', 224, 228–9, 233–7.

³⁰ White, 'Religion, politics and society', 341. However, the belief that Cheyne was acting for Marischal appears to be based largely on an entry in the town council register for December 1595 where Cheyne acted as procurator for Marischal in a case against Gilbert Menzies of Pitfodels, and thus comes after the events under discussion. See *Extracts from the Council Register of the Burgh of Aberdeen*, ed. John Stuart, Spalding Club, 2 vols (Aberdeen, 1844–8) [hereafter *Abdn Counc.*], ii, 119.

³¹ *FMA*, i, 39–59.

³² Henderson, *Marischal College*, 87–8; *FMA*, i, 80–4; *Booke of the Universall Kirk: Acts and Proceedings of the General Assemblies of the Kirk of Scotland, from the year MDLX*, ed. Thomas Thomson, Bannatyne and Maitland Clubs, 3 vols (Edinburgh, 1839–45), ii, 97.

elected an *oeconomus* and rent collector for the college, and had him empowered by the town council to remove unwanted tenants from the Greyfriars' yards and houses.³³ It was also the Menzies town council that initially organised the provision of the original college buildings, the former property of the Greyfriars on Broad Street in the town. These had been granted to the town by a charter of 1567 but in 1576 had been set in feu-ferme to Patrick and Gilbert Jack. Following discussions of the issue of purchase in January 1593, the council appears to have attempted to further the sale by the Jacks and agreed in June to pay 1,800 merks to buy the rights to the properties so that they might provide an income for the college.³⁴

The Earl Marischal was further active in obtaining confirmation of the college erection before parliament on 21 July.³⁵ However, the majority of the administrative work was carried out by the council and the ministers of the town who were in no way radically presbyterian. Certainly Cunningham, Blackburn and Howie all had intellectual connections with Andrew Melville, but in terms of their careers they had all chosen to follow a path that supported the king and moderate episcopacy.³⁶ Cunningham had been a supporter of Melville in Glasgow in the 1570s and had supervised the drawing up of the draft text of the *Second Book of Discipline* from the separate 'heads' written by commissions set up by the General Assembly. On his appointment as bishop of Aberdeen in 1576, however, he had become too 'courtly' for the presbyterian party and was treated with hostility by the Assembly, incurring a charge of immorality in 1586.³⁷ Blackburn was an ex-regent of St Salvator's and was the sole member of staff teaching at Glasgow on Melville's arrival there in 1574, but after his appointment as minister to St Nicholas' kirk in 1582 he also became a strong supporter of the king and accepted the bishopric of Aberdeen in 1600.³⁸ Howie was a son of an Aberdeen burgess appointed to the post of minister in the town after attending Rostock, Herborn and Basel universities. He became first principal of Marischal College, and would go on to succeed Melville as principal of St Mary's. Despite making a number of radical

³³ *Abdn Counc.*, ii, 79–80; *FMA*, i, 51.

³⁴ Henderson, *Marischal College*, 86–7.

³⁵ *The Acts of the Parliaments of Scotland*, ed. Thomas Thomson and Cosmo Innes, 12 vols (Edinburgh, 1814–75), iii, 123; *FMA*, i, 87.

³⁶ Henderson, *Marischal College*, 56–63.

³⁷ *Selections from Wodrow's Biographical Collections: Divines of the North-East of Scotland*, ed. Robert Lippe, New Spalding Club (Aberdeen, 1890), 57–65.

³⁸ Durkan and Kirk, *University of Glasgow*, 254; Alan R. MacDonald, *The Jacobean Kirk, 1567–1625: Sovereignty, Polity and Liturgy* (Aldershot, 1998), 71, 94; *Wodrow's Biographical Collections*, ed. Lippe, 66–79.

presbyterian comments in letters to friends on the continent in the early 1590s, by the end of the decade he appears wholly supportive of the king and episcopacy,³⁹ and in 1617, when he wrote the first history of the University of St Andrews, he conspicuously dedicated it to Archbishop Gledstones and couched it in terms of the contributions of the local bishops and archbishops to the university.⁴⁰ These men, like the preceding Protestant ministers of Aberdeen after 1560, were moderate and non-threatening individuals who have been described as ‘the functionaries of civic religion’ in the town, controlled by the council and never radically involving themselves with burgh politics.⁴¹ As a result, they were ideally placed to work as mediators for the earl on behalf of the council, and it seems that this was the role they adopted in creating the foundation, devoid of any radical presbyterian leanings.

The foundation of Marischal College ground to a halt in September 1593 while the Menzies government was still in power, owing to a difference in views between Marischal and the town council over the property formerly belonging to the Greyfriars. The earl argued that the properties should be given directly to him, presumably to allow him to give them as patron and thus gain further credit, while the town council argued that they should be held by it and given directly to the masters. This attempt to integrate the town council into closer alignment with the college patrimony was apparently strongly supported only by a minority on the council. The majority nevertheless wanted a clause stating that if the gift was given to the earl it would be annexed immediately to the college and remain there in perpetuity, and six members of the council were sent with this clause to the earl. No evidence survives to show what the motivation behind this episode was and the problem is compounded by the fact that our information for it comes from a later witness to a now-mutilated record in the town council register.⁴² However, it seems clear

³⁹ *Letters of John Johnston, c.1565–1611, and Robert Howie, c.1565–1645*, ed. James K. Cameron, St Andrews University Publications 54 (St Andrews, 1963), introduction, and compare the letters at 310–11, 316–17 (20 July 1592 and 22 March 1594–5) and 321–3, 326–7 (8 June 1601 and 9 August 1607) to see the shift in Howie’s attitude. The presbyterian rhetoric of the earlier letters may be due in part to Howie attempting to gain and maintain favour with J. J. Grynaeus, to whom he wrote the first two letters to ask for patronage of his young student James Cargill.

⁴⁰ St Andrews University Muniments, UYSL156, R. Howie, *Oratio Cal. Martis a. 1617... De Fundatoribus Academiae et Collegiorum... Andrapolitana*, fols 249–53.

⁴¹ White, ‘Religion, politics and society’, 354–5.

⁴² *FMA*, i, 85–6. The manuscript of the town council register has been torn, but an account of the events that it described are given in *A Memorial for the Right Honourable the Earl of Findlater... concerning the Union of the Two Colleges* (1754) and in *Memorials relating to the Union of the King’s and Marischal Colleges of Aberdeen* (1755) which were produced for discussions on a possible union between the two colleges.

that the issue for the council was not, as has been suggested, whether they were dealing with the Earl Marischal or the earl of Huntly and their influence in burgh affairs,⁴³ but rather one of the direct control and influence the council had over the college.

It was in the following week that Cheyne and his supporters were elected to the town council. Judging from the statutes they promulgated in their first month in office, this new administration, freed from the Menzies oligarchy that had dominated the burgh for the better part of the century, aimed radically to overhaul almost every aspect of burgh life. Attendance at Sunday sermons was to be enforced and the sale of meat and fish on the Sabbath was to be prohibited. Prices of bread, beef and other staples were to be fixed at rates set by the council, and the quality of ale and other goods monitored, while a number of statutes aimed at improving the speed and fairness with which petitions were dealt by the burgh courts.⁴⁴ Monthly fines were imposed on statute-breakers with limited success, culminating on 8 February 1594 in a list of almost ninety repeat offenders who were to be banished, and almost as many again to be set in caution.⁴⁵ Cheyne and his supporters appear to have enforced their own brand of rule within the burgh, which included a firm adherence to Protestantism. However, Cheyne lasted for only one year in office, being replaced in September 1594 by other ambitious men within his party.⁴⁶ Cheyne's administration does not appear to have been heavily influenced or supported by the Earl Marischal. In fact, its relationship with him, regarding the college at least, appears to have been somewhat strained, and it seems that the Earl Marischal actually lost interest in completing the foundation. The first piece of information on the development of the college in the Cheyne period occurs in the financial accounts of the dean of guild where, on 17 December, £9 was paid to raise letters of suspension at Edinburgh for charges raised by the Earl Marischal against David Cunningham to present the foundation documents before the Lords of Session, and for counter-letters authorising the bishop to deliver the documents to the town council as having interest. Four days later, £100 was given to the bishop to allow him to travel to Edinburgh to pursue this business. This action continued into February 1594 when, after miscellaneous expenses to pursue the earl 'in the mater of the college', the town procurator William Oliphant was sent 'be vertew of

⁴³ Henderson, *Marischal College*, 86–8; White, 'Menzies era', 237.

⁴⁴ ACA, CR XXXV, 3–12, 17–19.

⁴⁵ ACA, CR, XXXV, 41–4, 49, 50–5, 117, 165, 214–17.

⁴⁶ John Collison became provost in 1594, with Patrick Cheyne, William Gray, Alexander Jaffray and Andrew Sherar as baillies: ACA, CR, Index of volumes I–LXVII (1398–1800), 507.

ane ordinance of counsall . . . to persew the actioun of registration of the erectioun of the new college aganis the Erl Merschall'.⁴⁷

The matter seems to have dragged on as Howie was still being paid only for his services as a minister to the town in July 1594. His first official transaction as principal did not occur until 20 September when he was given the deed of erection of the college by the town council.⁴⁸ This act was also notably one of the final ones carried out by the Cheyne administration, suggesting that it wished to complete at least an initial start to the college before its removal from office. Thus the college had as protracted and difficult an opening as Edinburgh did in the year prior to 1583, yet it is by no means clear why this was the case. If the Cheyne faction were supporters of the earl, why did conflict persist between the town council and Marischal over the completion of the foundation? Moreover, if they were supportive of a strong presbyterian agenda why did they employ a bishop in their dealings with the earl over the college? It seems that any explanation should take into account the possibility that both sides of the council sought an active involvement and recognition of its contribution to a 'town' college of New Aberdeen. More cynically, it may be that, with the removal of the Menzies from power and thus an end to a faction sympathetic to Huntly, the Earl Marischal felt less pressure to reinforce his influence in the town with the high-profile development of a college and began to lose interest when the council asserted a right to it, leaving it to pursue the issue. While the evidence is scarce and contradictory, the length of time it took to secure the foundation and the fact that the dispute transcended both factions in burgh politics cannot be ignored. Perhaps the main credit should go to the town council for bringing the affair to a conclusion.

The college started out in a very modest fashion, if we are to judge from the scant mentions in letters by Howie sent on 28 January 1595 and 20 February 1597. Howie stated that his teaching focussed exclusively on the teaching of philosophy, causing him to lament that his own further studies into theology were put aside.⁴⁹ Student numbers were very small,

⁴⁷ 'Extracts from the accounts of the burgh of Aberdeen', in *The Miscellany of the Spalding Club*, ed. John Stuart, Spalding Club, 5 vols (Aberdeen, 1841–52), v, 39–181, at 56–7.

⁴⁸ *FMA*, i, 89; Henderson, *Marischal College*, 88.

⁴⁹ Cameron, *Letters of Johnston and Howie*, 304, 313–15. Both letters are addressed to H. Justus, and the second states *Ego tot curis premor (gravor nunc enim studiis Philosophicis, vocatus etiam ad iuventutis in Academia nostra institutionem), ut incumbere non possim prout volo studio theologico* ('I am weighed down with so many cares (for now I am burdened with the study of the Philosophies, having been called once again to the education of the young in our college) that I am unable to exert myself upon the study of theology as I would like.'). Howie had little positive to say about the state of Scottish education in general, referring to the Scottish universities as *Academiis seu potius Academiolas Scoticanas* ('the colleges, or rather, demi-colleges, of Scotland').

with the earliest and apparently incomplete list of students between 1598 and 1605 registering just twenty students.⁵⁰ Nothing else is known about the nature and extent of teaching at Marischal's before Howie's departure in 1598.⁵¹ His successor, Gilbert Gray, was related to both the Menzies and the Rutherfords, who also served as provosts during his time as principal. Described as 'remarkably diligent' by a near contemporary, Gray appears to have supervised the education of his students with some care, judging from an early extant notebook belonging to a Marischal student.⁵² Gray also appears to have been the first principal to create a detailed legislative framework for the college, in the 1602 *Statuta* of the college and possibly the undated *Leges* as well.⁵³ Most importantly, Gray used his connections with the burgh council to improve the collection of the available rents from the lands of the Greyfriars, obtaining decreets before the Lords of Session between 1600 and 1602 causing many of the tenants to accept a revised assedation of their crofts taking inflation into account and thereby increasing the financial return to the college in real terms by a third. The town council also aided Gray by providing him with decreets of removing non-paying tenants from the college crofts at Whitsunday 1606, allowing him to further increase the return to the college.⁵⁴

Development, 1610–23

Despite this tentative start and limited support and resources, it seems that Marischal underwent a remarkable growth and development between 1610 and 1623 that rivalled and in some ways surpassed that of the other

⁵⁰ *FMA*, i, 185. Out of this list of twenty students, five can be clearly identified as future ministers, along with William Forbes and William Guild, principals of Marischal and King's respectively, and a Peter Blackburn who acted as regent and appears to have been the son of the Peter Blackburn involved in the foundation of the college. Other early students who were unrecorded but are known to have attended the college were Thomas Reid and David Wedderburne, appointed as teachers of the grammar school in 1602, and Patrick Dun, Patrick Copland, Andrew Ramsay and Gilbert Jack, the latter two achieving great distinction as professors at Saumur and Leyden respectively.

⁵¹ The burgh was pleased enough with his tenure as principal to make him a burges and give him a 12 ounce 'sylver caiss' engraved with the town arms as a parting gift: *Abdn Counc.*, ii, 164.

⁵² A 1602–3 notebook owned by Thomas Forbes, filled with Latin exposition of Greek terms from works by authors including Homer and Demosthenes, shows that the college was teaching as full a curriculum as other universities in the country: Aberdeen University Library, MS116.

⁵³ Colin A. McLaren, *Aberdeen Students, 1600–1860* (Aberdeen, 2005), Appendix 1, 137–67.

⁵⁴ *FMA*, i, 92–109 (Rentals of the college drawn up by Robert Howie, 1593–8, and by Gilbert Gray, 1601–6). The decreets of the Lords of Session were enacted on 31 July 1600, 4 March 1601 and 20 July 1602.

Scottish universities. In the early seventeenth century each university experienced a growth in student numbers,⁵⁵ but Edinburgh certainly seemed to fare best in attracting funding for development. Between 1605 and 1634 the recorded figures for matriculations at Edinburgh rose from an average of 22.4 students for the period 1605–9 to 34 students for the period 1630–4.⁵⁶ At the same time the college's library and resources grew through bequests made overwhelmingly by private individuals from the burgh, raising a huge £71,000 between 1597 and 1655. A considerable portion of this money was used for the divinity school and maintenance of the divinity professor, but one gift of 7,000 merks from a local merchant was used to create a new building between 1644 and 1646 to house the college library, by then totalling over 3,000 works.⁵⁷

Marischal can claim a similar, but not quite as large, growth in student numbers in this period as the average number of recorded matriculations rose from 21.8 between 1605 and 1609 to 24 between 1630 and 1634.⁵⁸ Parallels between the two are also noticeable in terms of benefactions made to the college. Between 1593 and 1623 Marischal College received over 26,000 merks in bursaries and gifts from private individuals and donors. As J. M. Bulloch noted when comparing this with private benefactions to King's in the same period, which totalled just 50 shillings in feu-duty: 'the discrepancy, after making all deductions for the natural run on any new thing, is too remarkable to be quite accidental'.⁵⁹

What, then, were these bursaries, and where were they coming from? The earliest benefaction made to the college in 1596 was the mortification of four rigs of land in the Garioch by Sir James Leslie of Durno, with the view that children from his family would be entitled to bursaries at the college.⁶⁰ A benefaction of two feu-duties totalling 46s 8d on

⁵⁵ Although printed records do not exist for the colleges at St Andrews, the matriculation rolls for the period after 1610 show a considerable upsurge in the number of students attending. See St Andrews University Muniments, UYUY306/2, 9–72.

⁵⁶ I have benefited from being able to consult figures for Scottish university matriculations from the appendix of John Durkan's forthcoming volume, *Early Schools and Schoolmasters*, which is to be published by the Scottish History Society. I am grateful to Dr Jamie Reid Baxter and Professor Roger Mason, the editors of the volume, and Dr Sharon Adams, the publications secretary of the Scottish History Society, for enabling me to use and cite this material.

⁵⁷ Anderson, Lynch and Phillipson, *University of Edinburgh*, 28, 38–9.

⁵⁸ Durkan, *Early Schools and Schoolmasters*. These figures replace previously lower estimates of the number of student entrants at Marischal drawn from *FMA*, ii, 189–206 and McLaren, *Aberdeen Students*, 24–5. Entrant numbers at King's for the same period remained largely static, only rising from an average of 19 to 20 students.

⁵⁹ John Malcolm Bulloch, *A History of the University of Aberdeen 1495–1895* (Aberdeen, 1895), 98.

⁶⁰ *FMA*, i, 89–92.

25 January 1606 by Patrick Jack, a local dyer,⁶¹ appears to be an example of spontaneous civic-minded generosity that at a stroke almost equalled the total gifts made to King's in the 1593–1623 period. A still greater benefaction was made by David Chamberlane, surgeon to the queen, who bequeathed 1,000 merks for the upkeep of the college in 1618.⁶² All the other bursaries within the period under consideration, however, fall into two categories: either gifts by ex-students, or benefactions from the town council.

The first of these groups, the ex-students, were those who went into an academic or ministerial career and who did not teach at the college but clearly had a desire to expand the status of teaching at Marischal from that of a 'colledge of philosophie' to something far grander. The first benefactor of this kind was Duncan Liddell (1561–1613), an Aberdonian who studied medicine, mathematics and astronomy across the continent under luminaries including Tycho Brahe.⁶³ In Edinburgh in July 1612 he ordained that the lands of Pitmedden just outside Aberdeen be mortgaged to enable six bursars to sit their arts degree, who would then spend a further two years teaching mathematics to other students in the college. Although the initial mortgaging did not specify to which college in Aberdeen the bursaries should be granted, in December 1613 this was rectified by annexation to Marischal alone and was enlarged with a further grant of 6,000 merks to provide for a permanent professor of mathematics, 'weill versed in Euclide Ptolemye Copernik Archimede aliisque mathematicis', who would supervise the six bursars and ensure that they fulfilled their teaching obligations at the end of their degree. The professor was to be paid 400 merks annually if he was a 'perfyit mathematicus' and taught five or six times a week, with the stipend decreasing proportionally if the appointee was less qualified or did not fulfil his teaching allocation. Any surplus was to be used to maintain and enlarge Liddell's final bequest to the college of a range of mathematical 'globis and instruments' and his library, of which today over 120 works can readily be identified in the university collection. Liddell clearly intended to ensure a solid foundation for the development of higher learning in mathematics at Marischal, specifying details including the style of dress the bursars were to wear and authorising competitions in which the students would compete with one another in Latin orations of thanksgiving to the king and founders

⁶¹ *FMA*, i, 109–12.

⁶² *FMA*, i, 182–4.

⁶³ By whom he was accused of plagiarising the system of astronomy that Brahe had pioneered. See A. G. Molland, 'Duncan Liddell (1561–1613): an early benefactor of Marischal College library', *Aberdeen University Review* 51 (1986), 485–99.

of the college with the winner receiving ‘three pounds cum corona ex floribus’.⁶⁴

James Cargill, like Duncan Liddell, was another student who excelled in the study and practice of medicine on the continent, spending most of the 1590s in Basle under the celebrated early anatomist and botanist Caspar Bauhin and at Montbelliard under Bauhin’s brother John, physician to the duke of Württemberg. Cargill is known for the correspondence he kept with his teachers that illuminates many aspects of early medical and botanical research, and for the 4,000 merks he bequeathed in 1614 for the support of four poor scholars at Marischal, who was each to receive the interest of one quarter of the endowment to fund their course.⁶⁵ Initially, the interest of half this benefaction was used, with the consent of Cargill’s executor and brother David, to augment the salary of the principal, but two bursars were being entertained on some of the rents as early as 1617.⁶⁶

John Johnston, Robert Howie’s travelling companion on the continent and staunch supporter of Andrew Melville, was another Aberdonian (though one who had taken his initial degree at King’s) and spent the last nineteen years of his life in the position of second master at St Mary’s, where he specialised in the exposition of the New Testament.⁶⁷ At his death in 1611 Johnston left the sum of 1,000 merks to mortify a four-year studentship for a divinity scholar to be administered by the local ministry and teaching staff with presentation by the lairds of Caskieben and Crimond. The right of presentation was initially disputed between the town council and the lairds but was settled in favour of the former and on 3 July 1616 the town council presented John Sanders as the first regular bursary holder, who was succeeded by William Johnston on 22 May 1621.⁶⁸

There are two reasons that may have motivated staff and ex-students in founding benefactions in the college, and both reveal something of the nature and quality of education at Marischal. Cargill, Liddell and Johnston had all studied extensively on the continent, and were recognised as being talented and heavyweight academics in their fields. The staff at Marischal in the first half of the seventeenth century were also an exceptionally literate and well-travelled group who mirrored these men: the principals of the college from Robert Howie until Patrick Dun

⁶⁴ *FMA*, i, 120–39.

⁶⁵ James K. Cameron, ‘Some Aberdeen students on the continent in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries’, in *Universities of Aberdeen and Europe*, ed. Dukes, 57–78, at 64; *FMA*, i, 149–53.

⁶⁶ William Cargill and James Forbes each received 100 merks as bursars in the treasury accounts of 1617–18: *FMA*, i, 153.

⁶⁷ Cameron, *Letters of Johnston and Howie*, xlix–lxiii; *FMA*, i, 113.

⁶⁸ *FMA*, i, 113–17.

in 1640 had all studied abroad, and each published a range of literary works, something that contemporary principals at other universities often neglected to do once receiving a secure tenure.⁶⁹ The staff at Marischal also stuck rigorously to one facet of the ‘Melvillian’ programme of study that other universities had not adhered to: that of each professor having a specialised area of study rather than leading a class through four years of general study. While it appears that Robert Howie taught the first class in this manner (a process known as ‘regenting’), by 1601 staff were clearly adopting and sticking to specialist roles. Thus in 1601 staff signed as individual professors on town council documentation, and in the 1623 collection of elegiac poetry following the death of the fifth Earl Marischal, James Sibbald and William Guild describe themselves respectively as professors of natural philosophy and logic.⁷⁰ The fact that Cargill, Liddell and Johnston all specialised in teaching aspects of their respective fields seems to have encouraged them to provide funds to develop teaching of these same subjects at a college in their home town, where they knew a focus on professorial teaching was encouraged.

The other more pragmatic motive that connects these bursaries was simple advancement of families in and around the burgh, in the first instance those of the benefactors. Duncan Liddell specified that his bursaries were to be given to the offspring of his brother’s and sisters’ children, but if they were not of an age to attend then the bursaries were to be specifically employed for ‘honest poore mens sounes burgesses of new Ab[er]d[een]’, with the poorest and neediest being given priority.⁷¹ James Cargill specified that the 500 merks mortified to the grammar school could be moved to Marischal for the use of his ‘puire freyndis’ if there were none at the school, a reference which may simply refer to poor bursars but is more likely to mean poor family members or friends of his kin.⁷² The desire to maintain bursars who would come from the town

⁶⁹ The first five principals all published various religious and poetic works which are listed in *FMA*, ii, 27–8. By contrast, James Martine, provost of St Salvator’s College, St Andrews, between 1577 and 1620, appears to have left no published written works despite a forty-three year tenure in the post.

⁷⁰ Henderson, *Marischal College*, 35; *Lachrymae Academiae Marischallanae sub obitum moecenatis & fundatoris sui munificentissimi: Nobilissimi et illustrissimi Georgii, comitis Marischalli* (Aberdeen: Edward Raban, 1623). This work comprises a long elegiac on the fifth Earl Marischal (d. 5 April 1623) by David Wedderburne, followed by short poems by James Sibbald and Andrew Massie, described as professors of natural philosophy and logic respectively, and a page of vernacular verse by William Guild. Another work by William Ogstone, *Oratio funebris in obitum maximi virorum Georgii, Marischalli comitis, D. Keith & Altre, &c. Academiae Marischallanae Abredoniae, fundatoris, et mecoenatis munificentissime* (Aberdeen: Edward Raban, 1623) gives Ogston’s title as Professor of Moral Philosophy.

⁷¹ *FMA* i, 124.

⁷² *FMA*, i, 150.

was heeded, unsurprisingly, by the town council and its executors. The first three recipients of Johnston's divinity bursary were all connected with the educational elite in the town or the surrounding area, with his nephew John Sanders taking the bursary in 3 July 1616, another kinsman William Johnston on 22 May 1621, and then Alexander Wedderburn on 29 January 1623, brother to the master of the grammar school and to a regent in the college.⁷³ Moreover, the first Liddel and Cargill bursaries went to the sons of seven local ministers and fifteen burgesses who were all employed in highly oligarchic and protected professions as merchants, advocates and craftsmen.⁷⁴

As a teacher of the divinity bursar provided by Johnston yet another well-travelled Aberdonian, Patrick Copland, provided a gift for the development of the college. Copland was a remarkable figure who studied at the Aberdeen grammar school and at Marischal, and in 1612 joined the East India Company as a preacher in its naval fleet. In the early 1620s while serving on its flagship, the *Royal James*, Copland supervised a fundraising programme to create a college in the newly founded colony of Virginia that would cater not only for colonists but for children of American-Indians. For his efforts he was made a brother of the Company of Virginia and rector-elect of the proposed college until the dissolution of the company in 1624 put an end to his plans. Copland then travelled with his family to the Summer Isles in Bermuda, where he strove to provide 'godly' education to the local populace until his death in 1651.⁷⁵

Keen to show a similar zeal for education in his home town, Copland mortified a total of 6,000 merks in three separate benefactions of 2,000 merks each between 27 January 1617, 18 July 1622 and 1 February 1628 for the purpose of providing a 'reader in Divinity' skilled in the biblical languages who would be chosen by the provost and baillies of the town. A remarkable series of letters, written by Copland in various locations while on his travels, detail the negotiations between himself and the town council regarding his endowment.⁷⁶ The correspondence shows that Copland was extraordinarily well-connected to the ministers and intellectual circle in the north-east, despite the immense physical distance between him and his home town, and he used all his influence to ensure that his bursaries would be put to his 'godly' intentions. Furthermore, the letters show Copland actively attempting to dissuade the town council from acceding to the wishes of the Earl Marischal in presenting staff to the college, advice that the town council appears to have followed in

⁷³ *FMA*, i, 117.

⁷⁴ McLaren, *Aberdeen Students*, 26.

⁷⁵ Shona MacLean Vance, 'Copland, Patrick (c.1572–c.1651)', in *ODNB*, <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/66917> (accessed 1 September 2007).

⁷⁶ *FMA*, i, 166–78.

order to procure funds that were much needed for the development of the college. Copland's first letter, dated 2 May 1615, states that he had intended to create four poor bursars through a donation of 2,000 merks before the death of Principal Gilbert Gray. In what could be construed as either devotion to the promotion of religious education at Marischal or as a piece of bare-faced cronyism, Copland intimated he would continue his original intention if the town now elected a new principal, and 'specially if they choose' his presbyterian colleague and former head of the abortive Fraserburgh University,⁷⁷ Charles Ferme. On 21 June the provost and baillies replied, advising Copland that, with the number of bursaries created by Duncan Liddell and James Cargill, his money would better serve the far more pressing purpose of augmenting the stipends of the staff. The merchant Robert Buchan was sent to obtain the 2,000 merks from Copland with letters authorising the mortification, and Buchan was bound as cautioner for the money. In a now lost letter, Copland apparently assented, but still urged that either Charles Ferme or another colleague, Patrick Forbes of Corse, be provided to the principalship.

However, on the same day the council was informed by Robert Menzies and Robert Johnston, commissioners sent to the Earl Marischal to ascertain his wishes as patron in nominating a new principal to fill the vacant seat, that the earl was 'weill affected' to see either Patrick Sands or Alexander Home elevated to the position. By August this inclination in favour of Patrick Sands on the part of the earl had become more explicit: a commission was ordered to see if he would be willing to take the post. We know nothing of Sands or whether he indeed took up the position, but Copland had apparently heard of him, for in his next letter of February 1616 Copland's stance had changed to one of tough but amiable negotiation. Having been informed of the council's choice of Sands, not only at the behest of the earl through letters from the council but also from Ferme and another Aberdonian minister, Archibald Blackburn, he remarked somewhat acerbically:

The man to myself is unknown, only by reporte I hear hee is a great Lawyer and Philosopher, but what Theologue and Linguist hee is I cannot learne; and [is not] a Divine and Linguist, as a man most fittest and necessary for your college is chiefly intended by the foundation.

Copland then appears to have given Buchan 900 merks of the bond, but shrewdly freed him from payment of the remaining 1,100 merks and sent the remainder and the obligation for the money to Ferme and

⁷⁷ There was an attempt by Sir Alexander Fraser of Philorth to found a university there between 1592 and 1602, to which Ferme was appointed as principal. See *FMA*, i, 78–9.

Blackburn. Copland would not allow the council to receive the obligation, nor would he send them the mortification erecting the bursary, until they had satisfied his colleagues as to the suitability of Sands. Most importantly, Copland was adamant that the Earl Marischal should have nothing to do with the presentation to this post, stating that ‘if the Erle Marshal shall place a man without the consent of the Provest, Bailyies and counsel of Ab[er]d[een] . . . then the use of the said tuo thousand markes shall goe to the maintenance of the Ministers of Ab[er]d[een] serving the cure’.⁷⁸ It is unclear why Copland would have such an animus towards the earl, but it may be that he felt that the college had been far better served by the town council than it had been by Marischal. Copland also appears to have felt that education was a town issue, as in his next letter he apologises for his heavy-handedness but states ‘it was never my intention to comit the right of patronage and presentation to any uthers than the Provost, Bailyies and Council (for who should have greater care for the flourishing of their Towne and Colledge than they that are Magistrats of it?)’.⁷⁹

The impact of Copland’s letter on the town council is noticeable and remarkable. Within a month of its receipt Gray was instead succeeded by a theologian, Andrew Adie, who apparently wrote to Copland to tell him of his appointment.⁸⁰ Copland’s next letter, dated 18 October 1616, is markedly more amiable, congratulating the council on its appointment. Copland also makes reference to the choice of William Forbes, made minister of the town on 24 September, as being chosen to be a resident theology teacher and linguist at the college. This is the earliest reference to the enactment by the council, recorded in the register on 7 January 1617,⁸¹ of Forbes’ appointment to teach ‘ane publict lessoun of Theologie weiklie’ in the college for an annual stipend of £600 from the interest of Copland’s benefaction and some town annual rents, with which an additional payment was to be made to repair the buildings of the Greyfriars as a site for the weekly lesson.⁸² It is clear from this letter that Copland was being actively consulted over the choice of person for the post of divinity teaching by the council, and that he was informed in a letter of 1 January as to the council’s intention, for by the end

⁷⁸ *FMA*, i, 168–9.

⁷⁹ *FMA*, i, 169.

⁸⁰ *FMA*, ii, 28; Cameron, ‘Some Aberdeen students’, 68–9. Adie had also been recommended by James VI to the Earl Marischal for the appointment in a letter of the preceding May, but the recommendation does not appear to have inspired any action until Copland’s intervention in the appointment. I am grateful to Professor James Cameron for this reference.

⁸¹ *Abdn Counc.*, ii, 347–8.

⁸² *FMA*, i, 156–8.

of the month he sent back acknowledgement and his letters authorising the mortification of the bursary, which were duly registered by the town council on 21 May. The letter of mortification strongly insisted that the provost and baillies have ‘full and absolute’ power over the presentation, and any attempt by the earl to place someone in the chair of divinity or to meddle with the annual rents would see the bursary handed out to the local hospital or distributed to poor scholars by the council.⁸³

What are we to make of this lengthy and unusual exchange? It certainly suggests that, although the Earl Marischal did indeed have the right of presentation of the college principal, his wishes appear to have taken on secondary importance to the council when there was potential to develop the range of amenities at the college, and that the council was willing to listen to benefactors like Copland, who were keen to see that their money was invested wisely and given directly into the hands of the council with little or no input from the earl. While this in no way implies that the earl was completely irrelevant to the foundation, it does seem that the council had the central role in managing the college even when its patron’s wishes may have conflicted with that role.

The negotiations with Copland are just one example of the considerable efforts in time and finance devoted to Marischal College by the town council. These donations took many forms beyond securing finance. The council itself also attempted to expand the quality of teaching at Marischal. In March 1620, hoping to entice William Forbes to accept the role of principal while maintaining his ministry in the town, the council ordained the creation of a fourth regent in the foundation to teach the graduating year, and devolved responsibility for ‘all extraordinary mareagis and baptisimes’ to Forbes’ fellow ministers, James Ross and Archibald Blackburn. Despite the fact that Forbes resigned his commission in the following year, the council decided that the creation of a fourth regent was still desirable, assigning 300 merks in annual salary to the new principal Patrick Dun from which he was to fund the new post.⁸⁴

The town council also concerned itself with developing the material needs of the college. On 30 August 1609 the council granted £100 for repairing a house within the college grounds to act as a library for a planned donation of books from the Earl Marischal. Despite the fact that the earl did not apparently fulfil his promise, the building was allocated another £100 on 20 April 1614 to develop it to house the books gifted by Duncan Liddell.⁸⁵ Other building projects were funded in and around the

⁸³ *FMA*, i, 159–63.

⁸⁴ *FMA*, i, 186–7.

⁸⁵ *FMA*, i, 112, 205–6.

college to enhance student life – on 8 April 1612 the council authorised the erection of a loft in the old kirk of the town so that the students might have their own space during church service, and masons were sent at the request of Principal Adie on 28 August 1616 to repair the ‘back dyick’ of the college grounds before it fell.⁸⁶ Most remarkably, the council agreed to a plan put forward on 11 June 1623 by William Guild, the son of an Aberdeen armourer and another early student of Marischal, and by 1623 minister of Kinneddar or King-Edward in the presbytery of Turriff, that he would mortify the ‘foirhous’ at the front of Greyfriars, bought from John Mercer, a local saddler, to build a proper entrance to the college, which would also house a stationer’s shop. This ‘shop’ was presumably to house the printer Edward Raban, who had moved to Aberdeen from St Andrews in 1622 and who printed the earliest recorded Marischal graduation theses as well as elegiac and poetic works on the death of the Earl Marischal. The considerable range of extant works published by Raban shows the level of early literary development at the college,⁸⁷ and it is clear that the council was interested not only in augmenting the staff of the college, but in giving New Aberdeen a wholly integrated higher educational system that would encompass worship, printing and all other aspects of educational life.

That this is the case is further illustrated by gifts to the other central educational institute in New Aberdeen, the grammar school. Founded in 1256, the school was housed in a street within a stone’s throw of Marischal, next to St Nicholas’ kirk. A well-established foundation in the burgh by the early fifteenth century, the town council records show that there was an increasing focus on regulation of the grammar school by the council from the early sixteenth century. By the 1590s the rights of the burgh school to have legal precedence over other freelance teachers were being asserted by the council, which also supervised the appointment of staff, creating Thomas Reid and David Wedderburne as joint masters of the grammar school in 1602. The town council also regulated student behaviour, disciplining unruly students who held up the tradition of running wild at the Yule feast in 1612.⁸⁸

In February 1620 an annual stipend was granted to David Wedderburne to teach a weekly lesson in Latin grammar and composition and rhetoric in alternate weeks at the college, presumably to smooth the transition between the grammar school and the college. Although this extension of Wedderburne’s work proved to be a failure – the council removed the role in 1624 owing to fears that Wedderburne’s duties at the

⁸⁶ *FMA*, i, 120; *Abdn Counc.*, ii, 346.

⁸⁷ Peter John Anderson, *Notes on Academic Theses. With a Bibliography of Duncan Liddell*, Aberdeen University Studies 58 (Aberdeen, 1912), 17–19.

⁸⁸ *Abdn Counc.*, ii, 313–14.

grammar school were being neglected due to his holding two posts – it is clear that the council was attempting to integrate a continual process of education between grammar school and college.⁸⁹

It is clear that there were considerable attempts on the part of the council to augment and integrate the system of education in New Aberdeen throughout the first three decades of the history of Marischal College so as to provide a better range of subjects and to ensure that the sons of burgesses of New Aberdeen had comprehensive education from the outset. It is true that this was occasionally a less than smooth process, and there were some problems at the college in this early period of development. For example, a small but steady stream of students passed from Marischal to King's in the 1610s, though why is unclear,⁹⁰ and when David Wedderburne was appointed as interim replacement for Principal Gilbert Gray in 1615 he found discipline had decayed and all students were ordered to swear obedience to him.⁹¹ There was also refusal, supported by the Earl Marischal, to open the gates to the visitation ordered by James VI for the colleges of Aberdeen in 1619, though again this may be explained by the fact that Aberdonians saw their college as being a local or civic foundation, rather than a royal one.⁹² However, none of these minor problems can detract from the fact that, following on from initial and limited patronage by the Earl Marischal, it seems to have been a sustained and concerted effort led by the town council which was instrumental in creating a quality and useful institute of higher education in Marischal College. This drive benefited from the involvement of reform-minded but moderate ministers who steered the college through a maze of administrative processes, and who followed the latest European trends in education and curriculum without necessarily pursuing a radical religious path. It also benefited from the generosity and pragmatism of Aberdonians both at home and abroad who wished to develop education in their hometown, but, in a characteristically 'thrawn' way, ensured that their own families would benefit first and foremost.⁹³

STEVEN REID IS A DOCTORAL STUDENT ON THE 'HISTORY OF THE UNIVERSITY' PROJECT AT THE INSTITUTE OF SCOTTISH HISTORICAL RESEARCH, UNIVERSITY OF ST ANDREWS.

⁸⁹ *FMA*, i, 185.

⁹⁰ McLaren, *Aberdeen Students*, 25.

⁹¹ *Abdn Counc.*, ii, 327–8.

⁹² *Fasti Aberdonenses. Selections from the Records of the University and King's College of Aberdeen, 1494–1854*, ed. Cosmo Innes, Spalding Club (Aberdeen, 1854), 278–80.

⁹³ The author wishes to thank Fiona Musk at Aberdeen City Archives for help in double-checking references from the council registers cited in this article. He would also like to thank Professor Roger Mason for his support and encouragement.