

Schools of the Department of Science and Art

'When we want steam, we must get Cole.'
*Prince Albert*¹

THE ESTABLISHMENT OF THE DEPARTMENT OF PRACTICAL ART

The period from 1852–73, during which Henry Cole directed public art education, saw the most rapid increase of art institutions in British history and included the establishment of the first training school for art masters, the first Government art examinations and teaching certificates, the first state art education in the public day schools and the training colleges, the first art masters' association, and the first great museum of applied art, later to become the Victoria and Albert Museum. A national system of art education was set up of such thoroughness and rigidity that it truly merited the name 'cast iron'.

One of the last offices of Henry Labouchere as President of the Board of Trade, before the fall of Lord Russell's administration, was to ensure that Cole had his way. On 16 February 1852 the Board of Trade, with Labouchere in the chair, authorized the creation of the Department of Practical Art of the Board of Trade, and a few days later the Schools of Design were informed by a circular letter to their committees from G. Richardson Porter, Secretary of the Board, that 'their Lordships . . . have made the following arrangements, with a view to their more efficient management. . . . A department of the Board of Trade has been created, called "The Department of Practical Art". This department consists of two officers, called Superintendents of Schools of Practical Art, and a secretary. . . . My Lords have been pleased to appoint Mr Henry Cole to the first mentioned of these offices, namely, that of superintendent of the business of general management; and Mr Richard Redgrave to that of art superintendent.'²

The *Art Journal* complained in despair that 'the mischief has been entirely the work of Mr Labouchere, the late President of the Board of

Trade'.³ However, Henry Cole had come into his kingdom, which he was to rule and enlarge for twenty years.

When Cole assumed office and took over supervision of the twenty-three Schools of Design in Great Britain, the Central School was still in Somerset House. There was no provision in this school for the widely varying careers of the students, nor was there any proper system of progression. Future craftsmen, teachers, clerks, and designers could be found in any class, for once a student had passed out of the Elementary Class, he usually managed to enrol in the class of his choice and stayed there.

The first task which Cole set himself, as General Superintendent, was to separate the various functions of the Central or Head School and the priority was to obtain the necessary separate accommodation for each.

His first acquisition was part of Marlborough House, which he obtained from the Queen on the excuse of needing room to display some objects purchased from the Great Exhibition. Cole moved his Department into this building so quickly, once he had heard that permission had reached the Office of Works from the Palace, that the Board of Trade had not even received confirmation of the move, and, in his own words, 'I was upbraided with having taken possession with the full intention of using the place'.⁴ Cole had, in fact, not only the full intention of using the first floor as a museum, but also intended to use the second floor for special technical classes, and did so later in the year. He could not take possession of the ground floor without pushing the Vernon Collection out into the Mall, but he did insinuate a ladies' class into the kitchens.

Cole next secured rooms in the Literary and Scientific Institute in Great Smith Street, Westminster. The Elementary Drawing Class was removed from Somerset House and opened at the Institute on 2 June 1852 as the Elementary Drawing School.

The Head School at Somerset House, renamed the Metropolitan School of Ornament for Males, was put under one headmaster, Richard Burchett, and a training class for art masters for the Schools of Art was established there. The Female School of Design, then at Gower Street, was renamed the Metropolitan School of Ornament for Females, and its class of wood engraving was moved to the second floor of Marlborough House to join the Special Technical Classes which Cole was establishing there.

The Provincial or Branch Schools were renamed Schools of Practical Art, and it was Cole's intention that they should concern themselves with Elementary Drawing and supplying the Metropolitan Schools with good students.

The pattern of provision which Cole established in 1852, and which is

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now discussed in detail, continued until the last decade of the century.

PROVISION FOR TEACHER TRAINING IN ART

'The great work that is before the London School is to form a normal school of people competent to teach,' Henry Cole had stated before the Select Committee of 1849.⁵ Whereas the managers of the Schools of Design had constantly affirmed that their chief purpose was to train ornamental designers and improve the artisans for the Board of Trade's purposes, Cole had assumed a definitely educational viewpoint. The prospectus for the new courses at Marlborough House made the point that anybody could attend 'without reference to preparation for any special branch of industry',⁶ and the first annual report of the Department of Practical Art stated that the object of the Class for Training Masters was 'to secure a uniform system of sound elementary tuition throughout the country'.

In the following year a circular sent to H.M. Inspectors by the Council on Education noted that 'the Department of Practical Art has determined to encourage the multiplication of common drawing schools, and to confine the schools of design to a few districts in which application of art may be studied with advantage by persons already instructed in the rudiments of delineation'.⁷

The Council on Education may have believed that Cole intended to provide for schools to train designers, but the local Schools of Art did not. In actuality Cole had planned two main areas of provision: firstly, for a central training school and art museum, and secondly, for schools of elementary art in the provinces which would teach parochial children and feed the expensive central institution with candidates for training as art masters. During 1852 and 1853 Cole and Redgrave gave a series of lectures in Schools of Art on the importance of Elementary Drawing, and on 28 February 1853 they were up at Manchester lecturing 'on elementary instruction in Art'. The Committee of the Manchester School seemed very much aware of Cole's intentions and its members protested: 'We are not prepared to be reduced to the rank of an infants' school or nursery for the metropolitan establishment at Marlborough House.'

The provision which Cole organized for training teachers of art fell into three categories: training existing schoolmasters and schoolmistresses, training pupil teachers and students in training colleges, and training masters for the Schools of Art.

TRAINING SCHOOLMASTERS AND SCHOOLMISTRESSES IN ELEMENTARY DRAWING

'Elementary Drawing in National Education was the new principle brought into activity in 1852,' claimed Henry Cole.⁸ Ever anxious to

demonstrate the practical side of his art department, Cole quickly took steps to bring it into direct contact with the public day schools. A post of Teachers' Training Master was created and J. C. Robinson, who had distinguished himself as a teacher of the advanced classes at Somerset House, was appointed.

The duties of the Teachers' Training Master were firstly, to visit the National and Public Elementary Day Schools to instruct teachers in Elementary Drawing; secondly, to supervise instruction given in the London schools by masters-in-training of the Department; and thirdly, to prepare teaching manuals and drawing examples for copying. The Training Class for Schoolmasters, Schoolmistresses, and Pupil-Teachers met on two evenings a week and on Saturday afternoons, and the London teachers were so keen to attend that Robinson had seventy teachers and pupil-teachers in the class by the fourth meeting. They had to pay a fee of ten shillings per session, which was a considerable sum in 1852.

The course consisted of eight stages of the National Course of Instruction, which had just been drawn up by Richard Redgrave, the Art Superintendent, and Richard Burchett, the headmaster (see Appendix C). These eight stages, numbers 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, and 13, constituted the Primary Course for Schools which the teachers were expected to repeat for the children after graduation. The first part of the training course was called Elementary Drawing from Flat Examples, and the teachers commenced it by copying out an exercise, which the Department had just produced as an entry test for admission to any Elementary Drawing Class, say in a School of Art. This consisted of drawing three large capital letters, about 8 inches high, from examples mounted on a card, starting off with a simple straight A, then doing the simple circle of the O, and finishing with the double curve of S. Outlined and shaded diagrams of simple objects, ornament, and the symmetrical forms of leaves were then copied. The teachers were next given a short course on Linear Geometry with instruments.

Having now completed the first section of the course from the Flat, the teachers, 'thus armed with hand power, some training of the eye',⁹ were then allowed to start the Elementary Course from Solid Examples. Robinson set simple solids and casts of ornament before them, and demonstrated how to give instructions on them from the blackboard. The teachers were next taught Linear Perspective using instruments, and the course ended with some of the most promising painting a flower in colour from a print supplied by the Department.

The complete course was intended to give their future pupils 'a power of close and refined imitation from the flat, knowledge of the elements of practical geometry, and the power of drawing objects themselves.