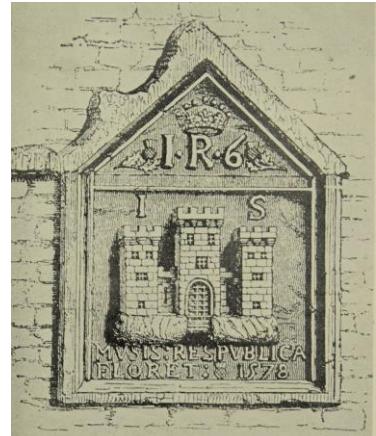


The origins of the Edinburgh High School coat of Arms and Motto

In 1505 the school was described as a high school, the first recorded use of this term in either Scotland or England. In 1566, following the Reformation, Mary, Queen of Scots, transferred the school from the control of Holyrood Abbey to the Town Council of Edinburgh. James Lawson was a big influence in building work for the school in 1578 and from about 1590 James VI accorded it royal patronage as the Schola Regia Edimburgensis, or King's School of Edinburgh

The establishment of the Blackfriars Monastery school, 1578

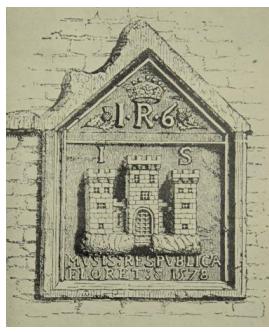
The new High School faced the Canongate, with two circular towers (a favourite feature in the City architecture), and crowstepped gables. The entrance was in a square projection, similarly crow-stepped, and terminating in the national emblem, the thistle. The panel over the doorway, installed in 1578, was relocated firstly to the 1777 Building at High School Yards, then subsequently to the Building on Regent Road. A plaster replica was created for the 1968 Barnton Campus when it was found that the original would have been damaged in removal. There is found the motto that serves it yet, "Musis Respublica floret," (The Republic flourishes with the Muses) with the date of erection, 1578. The individual letters I and S immediately above the turreted building require clarification, but I R 6 refers to King James 6 of Scotland (Iacobus Rex VI). This gives the School a very important link to the Scottish monarchy. The same characters (I and R) are present on a 1567 one pound Scots coin (see image below)



Wiki (quoting an extract from the 1974 History) says: "The Royal High School armorial bearings derive from the shield of the city arms, and antedate the Act of Parliament on the subject in 1672. Their simple early form can be seen on a carved stone formerly set above the principal entrance to the school at Blackfriars in 1578". The pediment from the 1578 building was incorporated into the Regent Road building in 1897, and a facsimile installed in the Barnton campus around 1968).

The present design (shown below) was matriculated by the Lord Lyon in 1920. The description reads: 'Sable, a castle triple towered and embattled argent, masoned of the first, windows and doors open gules set upon a rock proper. Above the shield is placed a helmet befitting its degree with a mantling sable doubled argent and in a scroll over the same this motto Musis Respublica Floret' (The State Flourishes with the Muses). The W.C.A. Ross memorial crest displaying the school arms was unveiled at the main entrance at Barnton in 1973.

Examples of School (and school-related) coats of arms



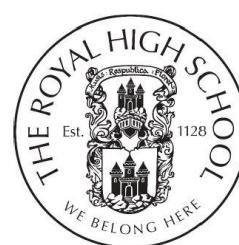
1578 – The plaque installed on the on the school established in the grounds of Blackfriars monastery. The motto is Musis Respublica Floret. 'IR6' refers to James VI of Scotland (Iacobus Rex VI) 'I' and 'S' lettering is currently unknown



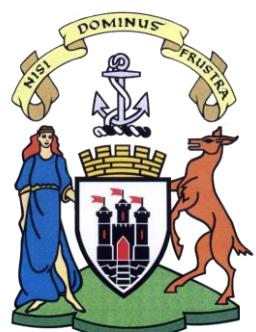
1920's RHS logo, Musis Respublica Floret. This is the one is the one currently shown on the 2024 Annual Report (along with the 2015 logo) See Lord Lyon description above.



1950's RHS logo, Musis Respublica Floret. A variation on the 1920 design.



The approx 2015 contemporary version which appeared without explanation.



The 1732 City of Edinburgh Coat of arms. The motto 'Nisi Dominus Frustra' (unless the lord is in vain) also appears in High School documents from time to time. The three-towered castle on the plaque is almost identical to the one in the 1920 and 1950



1567 - 1 Ryal - (Pound Scots)

Coin with the same I and R characters as the 1578 Coat of Arms. I and R translate to Iacobus Rex (King James)

Acknowledgements

1. The source of the phrase '*In 1505 the school was described as a High School, the first recorded use of this term in either Scotland or England*' is a combination of extracts from the 1911 Trotter history (p186), and the 1974 Barclay history (p137), and as neither has listed attributions, this date should be taken as approximate.
2. Wikipedia - several references from the 'Royal High School of Edinburgh' article.
3. The 1567 - 1 Ryal - (Pound Scots) coin illustrated was offered at auction in 2025.
4. The definition of 'Edinburgh High School', and the transition to 'Edinburgh Royal High School' does not seem to be recorded in any of the school histories, but the historian has sought to establish a date. 1859 appears to be the best option, that being the approximate date of the tutorials given by Rector Leonhard Schmitz to the future Edward VII while in residence at Holyrood Palace with his mother [Read more here](#).