The Archive

The Erasmus Smith Schools Archive extend from about 1650 to the present day. They are reasonably complete, although much documentation of the schools is lacking in the late 18th century.

There is a complete set of minute books for meetings of the Board of Governors dating from 1674, as well as accounts from 1673, legal papers 1671-1959 and letter books from 1810-1930.

The Estates are well documented in maps which date from 1711 and through property documents such as leases, fee farm grants and conveyances 1658-c.1980; rental books 1658-c.1980 which give the names of tenants and sometimes also detail the quality and use made of the lands; Irish Land Commission documents and valuations 1879-1940. There are also land agent letter books for 1862-1911 and files of correspondence 1859-c.1980 for agents and solicitors who took care of the estates on behalf of the Governors.

Records for the High School, Dublin date from 1870-present; Drogheda Grammar School (open from 1679-1938), 1680–1956; Galway Grammar School (open from 1678-1958), 1715–1962; Tipperary Grammar School, The Abbey School (open from c.1676–c.1920), 1760–1939; Ennis Grammar School (open from 1777-1891), 1832–1930; These are files of letters relating to the maintenance and staffing, plans for alterations to school premises and records of the events that shaped the schools. For The High School, Dublin, there are also photographs for class groups, sports teams and school events dating from 1871.

The English Schools' records contain letters from the teachers and superintendents to the Registrar regarding the running of the schools from 1778– c.1980. There are also reports from teachers and inspectors on the school 1852-1935. Plans and estimates for the building of some of the English Schools also exist in the archives, including architectural plans for 64 buildings 1803-1902.

There are also archives of the many court cases, in which the Board of Governors were involved, mostly relating to tenants on the estates. There are letters and accounts relating to Christ's Hospital, London, England 1651-1912; The King's Hospital, Dublin 1807-1941; exhibitions, scholarships, professors salaries and other matters relating to Trinity College, Dublin 1702-1956; Great Brunswick Street Commercial School, Dublin 1871-1899 and reports on education in Ireland from the turn of the 20th century.

The Erasmus Smith Schools Archive

The Archive holdings have been listed in an extensive database and the collections have been arranged by main subject area. A listing of Grammar and English Schools has been posted on the Archive web pages which gives dates ranges and an indication of related holdings. There is also a past pupils database of The High School pupils.

Access

Researchers are invited to come to the Archive facility to conduct primary research. Access is strictly by appointment only. Hours of access are Monday to Wednesday 10:30 am to 5:00 pm. There is no charge for access although fees apply to requests by email or post. A detailed schedule is available on the Archives web site.

The book, "Faithful To Our Trust, A History of the Erasmus Smith Trust and The High School, Dublin" by WJR Wallace is no longer available for purchase from the Archive but available as a free PDF from the web site below.

For further information contact:
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web site: www.erasmussmithschools.ie

THE ERASMUS SMITH SCHOOLS ARCHIVE

Portrait of Erasmus Smith, (1611-1691) Aged 79 in this painting

"We have also directed your Agent to buy an Iron Chest to be in the custody of your Treasurer, and that the Charter Pattent, leases, Bookes, accompts and papers belonging to you, be from time to time locked in that chest; and to be delivered to the Treasurers Custody by Inventory or schedule, to be entred by him, and a duplicate thereof kept by him, and by them to be delivered over from time to time, when transferred from one Treasurer to another:"

minutes of the Board of Governors
24 February 1678

Erasmus Smith Schools

Erasmus Smith Schools is an educational charity that was established by Royal Charter in 1669 after its initial foundation under Oliver Cromwell. It was known for many years as The Erasmus Smith Trust or as 'The Governors of the Schools Founded by Erasmus Smith, Esquire'.

Erasmus Smith was a member of the Company of Grocers and as a trader he supplied Oliver Cromwell's troops in Scotland and Ireland with cheese, oats and flour. He was also an adventurer - one of the many English merchants who had funded the Cromwellian campaign in Ireland. In the Settlement of Ireland he received, in return for the investment, confiscated lands and by further dealing acquired over 46,000 acres of land in several counties. Income from rentals was purposed to educate tenants and fund other charitable uses:

"...Erasmus Smith reposeth in [the Trustees]...the great and ardent desire which he hath that the children inhabiting upon any part of his lands in Ireland should be brought up in the fear of God and good literature and to speak the English tongue"
Foundation deed, 1 December 1657

Later, after the demise of Cromwell, he petitioned King Charles II to Charter the charity. The Charter required 32 Governors, which included politicians, businessmen, Protestant clergy and the Provost of Trinity College, Dublin. Their task was to use the money raised from the estates to establish five grammar schools and primary schools for the children of the tenants of the estates. Other 'charitable uses' which the revenue was used for included apprenticeships for boys; salaries for various Trinity College, Dublin Professors including Oratory, Hebrew, History, and Physics; exhibitions and scholarships for students at Trinity College; grants for tuition and accommodation at The King's Hospital or The Blue Coat School in Dublin; and also providing an annual grant to Christ's Hospital, London, England. Donations to TCD also helped in acquiring the Fagel Library in 1798 and the construction of several buildings on campus.

The Grammar Schools

Grammar schools were established in Tipperary, Galway, Ennis, and Drogheda. Tipperary Grammar or The Abbey School, as it was known, passed out of the ownership of the Governors following legal action in the 1920's and 1930's. Ennis Grammar School, county Clare, had quite a short life span (1777-1890), after which the Ordnance Survey occupied the building. Galway Grammar School lasted for in excess of 200 years, closing in 1960. Drogheda Grammar School is still open today although it passed out of the control of the Governors in 1938, and is no longer in the original premises.

The High School

The High School, Dublin was established in 1870, not as a grammar school but as an intermediate or commercial school, with the aim of training boys for the civil service, colonial service, the army, the world of commerce and university - several exhibitions and scholarships were offered to Trinity College, Dublin. Its original building, which also contained the offices of the Board of Governors, was situated in 40 Harcourt Street, in Dublin's city centre. Like many of the other city centre secondary schools, The High School, Dublin, moved out to more spacious grounds at 'Danum' in Rathgar in 1971. The school became co-educational in 1974 on its amalgamation with The Diocesan Secondary School for Girls, Adelaide Road, Dublin.

The English Schools

The Board of Governors were also concerned with providing primary education, and gave grants, established or managed over 240 'English Schools', distributed throughout Ireland. They were called English Schools because they taught entirely through the English language, but local people tended to refer to them as Erasmus Smith Schools. The first English School established was in Xelva (1776), Valentia Island, county Kerry, and the last one was in Ardee (1807), county Louth. The schools ran on the basis that the local community or patron would pay for half of the teacher's salary, for half of any repairs and maintenance and for half of the books and equipment required for teaching. Many of these schools were established between 1810 and 1820, usually on the land of the main local land owner or on church glebe lands.

However, by the mid-1800's the financial burden of the schools became so great that they were forced to cut back the number of schools in their care. The land acts in the 1880's created difficulties for the patrons of the English Schools, as they were, more often than not, wealthy Protestant landowners. It was during this period that many schools closed or became National Schools. In the beginning, the English Schools were to provide basic education for tenants' children and then other poor children in the parish, often both Protestant and Catholic.

In the later decades of the 19th century schools were mostly in outlying areas, where Protestant communities were very small, but where there was a desire that the children be given a Protestant education. Various grant schemes helped support the schools but direct management was minor and rare. Because of the wide dispersal of the English Schools, they are perhaps better known than the grammar schools in local communities.

The Estates

The estates, which the Board of Governors managed and from which their income was derived, were situated in counties Limerick, Tipperary, Galway, Sligo, Louth, Westmeath and Dublin, with smaller portions of land elsewhere. The lands in the southern estates were very fertile, while land in Sligo derived its value from mineral deposits on Benbulben and the rights to hunting and fishing. The lands in Galway, however, were mainly urban, with a significant proportion of the town (e.g. Newtown Smith and Bohermore). A large amount of the Governors' estates transferred ownership following the Irish Land Commission, and other parts were sold during the 20th century. Some titles still exist related to ground rents but are mostly inactive and not income generating.