

The Archives

The archives of The Erasmus Smith Trust extend from about 1650 to the present day. They are reasonably complete, although documentation of the schools is slightly 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 1711-1971 and through property documents such as leases, fee farm grants and conveyances 1672-c.1970; rental books 1658-c.1970 which give the names of tenants and sometimes also detail the quality and use made of the lands; Irish Land Commission documents and valuations 1879-1937. There are also land agent letter books for 1862-1911 and files of correspondence 1859-c.1970 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 1680-1956; Galway Grammar School 1715-1962; Tipperary Grammar School (The Abbey School) 1760-1939; Ennis Grammar School 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 and any problems that may have arisen 1809-1947. There are also reports from teachers and inspectors on the school 1851-1936. 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 Trust Archives

The Archives of the Trust have now been listed on an extensive database and are now available for use by researchers interested in the history of Irish education, local history, past pupils, etc. Finding aids will be posted on the Archives web site shortly which will provide some summaries of collection data. There is also a past pupils database of The High School students.

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.

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THE ERASMUS SMITH TRUST ARCHIVES



Portrait of Erasmus Smith, aged 79
(1611-1691)

"We have also directed your Agent to buy an Iron Chest to be in the custody of your Treasurer, and that the Charter Patent, 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

The Erasmus Smith Trust

The Trust was established by Royal Charter in 1669 under the instigation of Erasmus Smith, esquire. The Trust is officially known as 'The Governors of the Schools Founded by Erasmus Smith, Esq.'

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 the Settlement of Ireland he received in return confiscated lands and by further dealing acquired over 46,000 acres of land in several counties. In petitioning the King Charles II for permission to establish the Trust, Erasmus Smith desired that the revenue from the estates be used for education.

"...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

The Trust charter also required 32 Governors, to include several bishops and archbishops and the Provost of Trinity College, Dublin. Their task was to use the money raised from the estates to establish five grammar schools and schools for the children of the tenants of the estates. Other 'charitable uses' to which the revenue was put were apprenticing children; paying salaries for various Trinity College, Dublin Professors including Oratory and Modern History, Oriental Tongues, Mathematics, Natural and Experimental Philosophy, and Physics; exhibitions and scholarships for students at Trinity College; providing accommodation and a grant for The King's Hospital or The Blue Coat School in Dublin; and also providing an annual grant to Christ's Hospital, London, England.

The Grammar Schools

Grammar schools were established in Tipperary, Galway, Ennis, and Drogheda. Tipperary Grammar or The Abbey School, as it was known, had a very turbulent history and passed out of the ownership of the Trust following legal action in the 1920's and 1930's. Ennis Grammar School, county Clare, had quite a short life span closing in the 1890, whereupon the Ordnance Survey took over use of the building. By contrast 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 premises built by the Trust.

The High School, Dublin was established by the Trust in 1870, not as a grammar school but as an intermediate or commercial school, with the aim of training boys for the civil service, the army, the world of commerce and university (the Trust offered several exhibitions and scholarships 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 Trust was also concerned with providing primary education, and ran over 150 'English Schools', distributed throughout Ireland. They were called English Schools because they taught entirely through the medium of English, but local people tended to refer to them as Erasmus Smith Schools. The first English School established was in Xelva, Valentia Island, county Kerry, and the last one was in Ardee, county Louth. The schools ran on the basis that the local community 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 a wealthy land owner, if they were not on Trust land.

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 last few decades in which the Trust ran primary schools, the 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. Because of the wide dispersal of the English Schools, they are perhaps better known than the grammar schools although the establishment of grammar schools was the main aim of the Trust.

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 Benbulbin 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) belonging to the Trust. A large amount of the Governors' estates transferred ownership following the Irish Land Commission, and other parts were sold during the 20th century.