

School Records

Introduction

Prior to the Education Act of 1870 there were a variety of schools where, depending on their social status, children could be educated. There were the Public Schools, which served the rich; Grammar Schools, which were often 16th century charitable foundations, serving the children of the middle classes; privately run schools, for both sexes, again aimed at the children of parents with some status in society; and Dame Schools in some places teaching the children of the poorer classes the elements of literacy. From the early 19th century there were the elementary schools founded by voluntary societies such as the National Society (established church), the British and Foreign School Society (non-denominational) and the Ragged School Union.

The 1870 Education Act saw the Government taking a hand in the education of the poorer sections of society. Locally elected School Boards could be established to assess local education needs, raise money through rates and build new schools where necessary. They could also enforce attendance for most children below the age of 13.

The 1902 Education Act abolished the School Boards and transferred elementary schools to the control of Borough or County Councils. These Councils now had the power to build and run secondary and technical schools, whilst developing the existing system of elementary schools.

In 1918, attendance became compulsory to the age of 14 and in 1944 the system of grammar, secondary modern and technical schools was introduced with the leaving age rising to 15.

The Records

Grammar Schools

The Heritage Centre holds large deposits of material for some of the County's ancient Grammar Schools, but these records consist mainly of documents relating to the estates from which the school's income came and the administration of the school rather than to the pupils who attended them. Some pupils may be mentioned in the minute books of the Governors.

The ancient Grammar Schools we hold records for are:

- Crewkerne Grammar: minute books from 1772, admissions from 1828 (ref DD\CGS)
- Ilminster Endowed Grammar: minutes from 1601, admissions from 1809 (ref DD\IGS)
- Langport Grammar: minutes from 1706 (ref D\B\la)
- Taunton (Huish) Grammar: boys' register from 1874 (ref A\AHO)
- Wells Blue School: minute books from 1713, boys apprenticed 1846-1864, applications for places from 1879 (ref DD\WBS)
- King's School, Bruton: minute books from 1564-1700, 1826-1944, admissions from 1862 (ref DD\BRU)

Elementary Schools

The records of elementary schools can be found in a variety of places. Many, both National and British, came via the Education Department of the County Council when a school closed, these can be found under C\E\4/*. Some of the older records of National Schools are included in parish deposits (D\P*/18*). Others have been deposited by private individuals.

Minute books: the record of the meetings of the School Board (pre-1902) and the School Managers (post 1902). They contain information on the school building including repairs and furnishings, the appointment and salaries of staff and other administrative matters. They include the **Education Committee Minutes**, **School Attendance Committee Minutes** and the **Education Sub-Committees' Minutes**.

Log books: the teachers' diaries of daily events in the school. There are occasional references to children being admitted or leaving, and to the behaviour of individual pupils. They are a source of fascinating information for social history, containing details on items such as childhood diseases, child labour, particularly in rural areas, entertainments, such as fairs and circuses and the weather, all of which affected school attendance.

Punishment books: a record of the punishment given by the Head teacher to individual children, and the reason for it.

Correspondence files: these contain many of the circular letters received from central or local government concerning school buildings, finance or the curriculum, as well as individual letters written by the Head teacher on a variety of subjects.

Plans: there is one large series of plans, which includes very many of the elementary schools built or extended in the last forty years of the 19th century. These often include block plans, floor plans and elevations. Earlier charitable foundations may have plans of later extensions to their buildings and there are some 20th century plans of schools among the County Council's records.

Education Committee Ledgers: financial records showing amount of money received from fees and government grants, money spent on salaries, building works etc

1902 Education Act Returns: these are questionnaires which were sent to every school which, after the passing of the 1902 Act, became the responsibility of the County Council. The first asked questions on the school including the date of building, its ownership, the size of the classroom(s), the type of lavatory provision, and how far they were from the school building, the number of children enrolled, whether there was an Evening Continuation school and whether there was a teacher's house. Details of the curriculum were also given and there is a financial statement and an estimate of the cost of maintenance. The second asked questions on the teachers, their qualifications and their salaries.

How to find the records

All the catalogues for the school records we hold are available on our online catalogue; a simple search under the school name should display the catalogue. Alternatively we have a card index to education records in the subject index cards found in the searchroom, filed under education, then alphabetically by parish.

Further Reading

The Heritage Centre has histories of many individual schools in Somerset. These can be found in the online catalogue. More general books on education include:

- Purvis, J.S. (1959) *Educational Records*
- Morton, A. (1997) *Education and the state from 1833*
- Stephens, W.B. (1987) *Materials for the local and regional study of schooling 1700-1900*
- Orme, N. (1976) *Education in the West of England 1066-1545*

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