

GUIDE ON TRACING THE HISTORY OF YOUR SCHOOL

This is a guide on how to get started and identify the main materials that you might look at. It's not fully comprehensive so there are other things to look at that depend on where you are searching. Throughout this guide you will find local record offices referred to; see their full titles and contacts here:

<https://hampshirearchivestrust.co.uk/about-hampshire-archives-trust/strategic-partners/>

QUESTIONS TO ASK YOURSELF OR YOUR TEACHERS AS A START - This will help guide you to archives and books that will help:

- How old is the school; when was it set up?
- Do we have a history of the school, or about the area which includes the school, and where can I find it?
- Does my school, or the local record office, have school records?
- Is there already a local history book about my town or area that contains information about the history of the school?

You may be able to answer some of these without help

- Age of the school – for primary schools the bulk would have been set up in the 19th century when various education acts were passed. This usually means around 1870-1890. If you want to find out more about 19th century schools see: <https://historyofeducation.org.uk/types-of-school-in-nineteenth-century-england/>
- Age of grammar schools – often these date from the 16th century and have been either created in the name of King Edward VI, or a local benefactor.
- Check your school or county library catalogue to see if there is a printed history. <https://www.hants.gov.uk/librariesandarchives/library/services/books-and-more>
- Check the archives catalogue at the appropriate local record office to see if they have records or photographs for your school e.g., <https://www.hants.gov.uk/librariesandarchives/archives/popular-records>

Remember until the mid to late 19th century pupils attending school had to pay.

National schools were religion based, usually Church of England. Board schools were elementary schools under the management of a School Board. Both started around 1870 under an Education Act. Secondary schools provision was made under the 1902 Education Act.

WHAT SORT OF SCHOOLS ARE THERE?

Broadly:

- Independent fee-paying schools – they often retain their own records.
- Grammar schools – like independent schools if they are founded early, they often retain their own records.
- Charity schools like ragged schools, benefactor schools, blue coat schools – these schools have often closed or transferred to local authorities.
- National or board schools – always primary schools. National school records may be found within the parish records, board schools within local authority archives. Both are now likely to be in your local record office.
- From 1902, secondary schools.

Remember, apart from those who could afford it or received scholarships, education provision stopped at around the age of 11 or 13 until 1902. There was also some basic schooling based around the scriptures in Sunday schools.

The records of some Grammar schools and independent schools in particular may already have been published.

WHERE DO I FIND THE RECORDS?

Always start your search with the school, then the local record office, then the National Archives:

<https://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/help-with-your-research/research-guides/schools/>

The latter has a useful guide to what they have, and what is on the FindMyPast past website

(<https://www.findmypast.co.uk>)

You might find references to schools in newspaper records.

Many schools have changed buildings over the years. It is worth looking them up on maps to find if they have expanded or moved.

WHAT SORTS OF RECORDS MIGHT EXIST? (These are mainly from the 1870-1945 period):

- School logbooks – a sort of headteacher’s diary
- School minute books
- School attendance and admission books
- Punishment books
- School photographs
- School exercise books
- School building plans
- Board of Education minutes

WHAT WAS TAUGHT IN SCHOOLS?

In the 19th century education was based around the misnamed “four Rs”: reading, writing, arithmetic and religion

SOURCES THAT GIVE NAMES of children and teachers:

- Attendance and admission books – these list the pupils to be found within school records.
- Logbooks and minute books rarely name pupils, although they do note when there are children away with illness or to help with the harvest!
- Kelly’s directory – will list schools and, often, the head teacher. Many of these have been digitised through the University of Leicester:
<https://le.ac.uk/library/special-collections/explore/historical-directories>
- If the school is run by the council, then the Treasurer’s accounts often list teachers with their salaries. Where they exist, they will be with the relevant local record office.
- Education committee minutes record the appointment and resignation of teachers.

WHAT NEXT?

Inevitably this guide is pretty general. Ask for the help of your archivist or librarian. It’s impossible to cover all the source material that might be available and sometimes specialist local knowledge is the best help. To hear what your school was like first-hand, talk to older village/town residents.