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The Trust

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The Erasmus Smith Trust

"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

The High School, Dublin was founded in 1870 by 'The Governors of the Schools Founded by Erasmus Smith, Esq.' This institution is more commonly known as The Erasmus Smith Trust. The Trust was established by Royal Charter in 1669 on the instigation of Erasmus Smith, esquire. He 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, which meant that he had put money towards the Cromwellian campaign, so that when the war was over he received lands in Ireland. In the settlement of Ireland, and by further dealing, Erasmus Smith acquired over 46,000 acres of land in several different counties in Ireland. In petitioning the King for permission to establish the Trust, Erasmus Smith desired that the revenue from the estates be used to educate children because he was of the firm belief that it was ignorance that made people unruly.

"...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 charter states that there be thirty-two Governors, including 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, in order that they could at least learn to read, write and count. Other 'charitable uses' to which the revenue was put were apprenticing children; providing exhibitions and scholarships for students at Trinity College, Dublin; paying for the salary of the Professor of Hebrew there; providing accommodation and a grant for King's Hospital or The Blue Coat School in Dublin; and also providing an annual grant to Christ's Hospital, London, England.



Left: Portrait of Erasmus Smith, School of Lely, mezzotint, courtesy National Gallery of Ireland.

Right: Portrait of Erasmus Smith, oil on canvas, aged 79, private collection.

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, owing to neglect, and involvement in wars. The school 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 which it occupied when it was under Trust control.



Left: Galway Grammar School (1715-1958), designs by Richard Morrison (1807). This building is currently being renovated to be used as private offices. Photo collection of Erasmus Smith Trust Archive.

Right: Tipperary Grammar School – The Abbey School (1760-1922), this building was burnt down in 1939 and the school was rebuilt on the same grounds under different governance. Photo courtesy of the National Library of Ireland.



http://www.hightschooldublin.com:80/the_trust.htm

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About this capture

Right: Drogheda Grammar School (1680-1938), this building was demolished after the school had moved elsewhere in the town. Photo courtesy of the National Library of Ireland.

Left: Ennis Grammar School (1776-1891), the school has had several uses but is once again a school, housing Maoin Ceoil an Chair. Photo collection of Erasmus Smith Trust Archive.

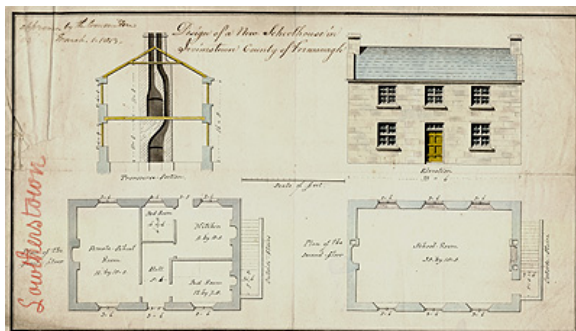
The High School, Dublin, was the last school to be established by the Trust and it was not established as a grammar school but with the aim of training boys for the civil service, the army and for the world of commerce. Classical studies were also emphasised in the school, with several of the school's headmasters being particularly gifted in that area. 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 the suburbs and to 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 grant aided nearly 200 'English Schools', distributed throughout Ireland. The schools were referred to as 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 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 Erasmus Smith Trust land.

However, by the mid-1800s 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 1880s 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 as was the case, for example, in Glencolumbkille English School, county Donegal. Because of the wide dispersal of the English Schools, they are perhaps better known that the grammar schools although the establishment of grammar schools was the main aim of the Trust.



Above: Irvinestown or Lowtherstown English School, county Fermanagh (not dated but the school was sanctioned in 1812). The plans show elevations, floor plans and section (including the design for the chimney).

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 establishment of the Irish Land Commission, and other parts were sold off during this century.



Above: Page from a map book bound volume titled 'Survey of the Lands of Pallis in the barony of Coonagh and the county of Limerick', by Sherrard's Brassington and Greene, 1818.