

Vol. 27, Issue 1, January – March 2026

British Connections

*Official Publication of the International Society for British Genealogy
and Family History*

EDUCATION



Wales: Lifelong Learning
English Schools and the Laws that Changed Them
The Scottish Education System
The Schools of Belfast

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**Bridges to the British Isles from Colonial America:
Sources and Methodologies for Genealogists
with Gordon Remington**

June 22, 2026

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Education

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British Connections (ISSN 0736-8054) is published four times a year in March, June, September, and December. Deadlines for submissions are: Feb. 12, May 12, Aug. 12, and Nov. 12.

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Submissions may be sent electronically to: editor@isbgfh.com, or by mail to:

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1312 17th Street, #1751

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President's Message

It's a Pleasure to Meet You!



W. Todd Knowles

Welcome to 2026! My name is W. Todd Knowles, and I am pleased to introduce myself as the newly elected President of ISBGFH, a role I am honored to fill. I have been a member of ISBGFH for many years and have served in several positions with this organization along the way. For those of you who don't know much about me, I am also the Deputy Chief Genealogy Officer at FamilySearch, soon approaching my 30th year with that organization. My personal family history journey began at the age of 11, when I first discovered my own Jewish heritage.

In the spirit of our new adventure together, I have chosen the theme "Moving Forward." We have just completed our first board meeting of the year; we welcomed a new trustee to the board and saw a bit of "shuffling" of positions among our dedicated board and trustees. For this, I am extremely grateful and appreciate the commitment of all 16 of you.

I am equally appreciative of our membership, whose continued support and engagement inspire us to provide high-quality programming and publications supported by a wide array of experts in the fields of genealogy, family history, and general history—important areas of study that continue to shape our lives today.

Please take note of our newly updated website, calendar, store, online and recorded events, and excellent *British Connections* quarterly publication. Members of our community have access to a plethora of online materials, along with ISBGFH event discounts. ISBGFH is an incredible value, as readers of *British Connections* know.

We have a few upcoming items for you to make note of: Two more Winter Webinars scheduled for 7 March and 21 March; RootsTech scheduled for 5-7 March; our Summer Institute on 22 June; and British Institute during the week of 5-9 October. We are in the process of planning several additional events, so watch the website for upcoming details.

Please join us as we "move forward" together, and prepare yourself—not only for learning and discovery, but also for some smiles and laughter along the way.

Best regards,

Todd



From the Editor's Desk

This issue is packed with fascinating articles about the evolution of education in England, Ireland, Scotland, and Wales. After reading our authors' submissions, I asked my husband Phil, who grew up in Yorkshire, to share some stories about his school days with me.

Below is a photo of Phil's old middle school in Bradford, Yorkshire. It's an apartment complex now—he says it was far less grand when he attended school there. And last year, his middle school class had a reunion. Many people who hadn't stayed in touch became reacquainted on Facebook, and they decided to throw a party in Bradford.

Apparently, at least one extraordinarily cruel math teacher (long buried, no doubt) provided a trauma-bonding opportunity for the group of former students. Miraculously, perhaps, Phil went on to get "A-levels" in maths and computer science.

Enjoy this issue! – Sandra



By Byron Halls Apartments (formerly Pollard Park Middle School), Barkerend Road, by Stephen Armstrong, CC BY-SA 2.0, <https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/index.php?curid=139743573>



Lifelong Learning and Broadening Horizons: The Varied Educational Experiences of Our Welsh Ancestors

From the 1700s onwards, our Welsh ancestors experienced several revolutions. Not the bloody kind witnessed across the waters in France, but more peaceful, yet nonetheless transformative industrial, religious, and educational revolutions.

Religious revivals and the rise of formal education in Wales went hand-in-hand. As the decades wore on, the thirst for both increased amongst the population, to a point when, by 1914, it is said that Wales had the second highest number of children and young people entering secondary and university level education in western Europe.¹

Before the 1700s, education in Wales had been mainly informal. Cultural and historical knowledge (which included knowledge of family pedigrees), and vocational skills had been passed down mostly through a practical, word-of-mouth process within the community. Wales was also then a land of *beirdd gwlad*, or folk poets: ordinary people who, over the course of multiple centuries, taught younger generations the different forms of Welsh poetic craft, but who were also stewards of an oral tradition which ensured a continuation of broader historical, cultural, and environmental learning from one generation to the next. Their classrooms were not housed beneath gleaming spires or within the walls of great libraries, but were instead the fields, hearths, and barns of their communities. Elements of these educational traditions lived on well into the twentieth century in many places, although they had by then started to decline in



The Rev. Griffith Jones, Llanddowror (c.1684–1761). Amgueddfa Ceredigion Museum / People's Collection Wales / Creative Archive Licence, <https://www.peoplescollection.wales/items/452851>.

the face of the influence of formal education and a fast-changing society.

Classroom learning began to take root in Wales during the first half of the eighteenth century when the Rev. Griffith Jones of Llanddowror, Carmarthenshire, set up the ground-breaking circulating schools system. The chances that your eighteenth-century Welsh ancestor attended one or more sessions of these schools

are relatively high. They were itinerant places of learning that provided classes in different parts of Wales for both children and adults alike. They stayed in one location for around three months at a time, teaching the population how to read. The language taught was Welsh, and the basis of the instruction was the Bible. It is estimated that by the time of Rev. Jones's death in 1761, well over 200,000 people throughout Wales had been taught to read (at a time when the country's population was under half a million), which has led many to boast that the country then had the highest literacy level in Europe.

The momentum was difficult to sustain following his death and that of his benefactor Madam Bevan who later died in 1779; however, Sunday Schools continued with their legacy, where children and adults became adept at reading the Bible and, often, other relevant texts. I specifically refer to "reading" here, for that was the focus of the learning, rather than reading and writing. While for some, one led to the other, this was often not the case; so if your Welsh ancestor signed their marriage record or their will by mark, even though this would indicate they couldn't write, it doesn't necessarily mean they couldn't read.

As nonconformist chapel attendance grew apace into and during the nineteenth century, the thirst for learning also increased. In addition to Sunday Schools, during the week, congregations flocked to their places of worship in order to attend an increasing array of discussion meetings and presentations which furthered the opportunities for learning. Although the Bible was the main focus of most of these various meetings, sessions that involved the teaching of tonic sol-fa (a method that helped congregations learn to sing) were highly popular. Visitors were invited to



A ladies' Sunday School class, Babel Calvinistic Methodist Chapel, Cilgerran, Pembrokeshire, 1906. Amgueddfa Cymru – National Museum Wales / People's Collection Wales / Creative Archive Licence, <https://www.peoplescollection.wales/items/29351>.

give talks on a range of different topics, including subjects relating to the community such as local history, as well as contemporary issues affecting Wales, Great Britain and the world, with particular attention to social issues such as problems stemming from alcohol. It was also relatively common to invite people who had left Wales to seek work overseas and who were back home visiting relatives, to give talks on the history of and their experiences in their new homeland—such presentations were often the inspiration that spurred others to follow in their footsteps. In such cases, education literally broadened their horizons.

Gradually, as the nineteenth century progressed, more formal schools opened, although school attendance did not become compulsory until the 1880s. Up until that time, the classroom schooling we are more familiar with today had been fitted around home, chapel, and community life; consequently, when the law changed to make school attendance compulsory, it often clashed with our Welsh ancestors' priorities, in

FARMERS AND EDUCATION.

A Complaint at Caerleon.

William Morgan, of Walnut Tree Farm, Llantarnam, a burly specimen of John Bull, stepped on to the defendants' stand at the Caerleon police-court to-day to explain why his son, John, had not taken the necessary lessons in the three "R's." The boy, it appeared, had been absent from school for nearly twelve months. Mr Morgan now explained that he could not get a man to do the farm work, and kept his son, who takes an interest in the farm work, to assist him.—The Bench said they could not accept this excuse, and said that the law directed that the parent should send his son to school. This led the defendant to deliver a little lecture on the evils of education. Children, he said, were having too much education now, and there would soon be no men to do the agricultural work, as the lads objected to long hours on the farms, and were going to the towns to work.—The Bench said unfortunately they only had to administer the law, and made an order for the lad's attendance at school.

South Wales Echo, 28 May 1891. For some parents, compulsory schooling meant they lost valuable help on the farm.

particular in the countryside, where centuries-old customs dictated that children must help with farm work alongside their adult relatives and neighbours. Children had traditionally helped with seasonal activities, such as harvesting, haymaking, sheep shearing, and the like—all hands were on deck during those busy times, when boys and girls were taught the skills they would continue to employ during adulthood. For example, boys would be taught to shear the sheep, while the girls and women would sort the wool. Collecting the sheep from the hills and bringing them down to farms to be sheared was often a whole-community event—the men and

boys would gather and shear the sheep while the women and girls prepared the food for all. These events, which had the twin roles of passing down knowledge and skills to the next generation and helping to form community cohesion, were eagerly anticipated, as my own grandmother fondly remembered when recounting stories of her early twentieth-century childhood.

Therefore, It isn't surprising that during the early years of compulsory education, children were often absent when these seasonal events took place. Many parents—both those who were critical of the new law and even those who were regarded as being highly supportive of education—were given court orders to send their children to school, as many newspaper articles reveal. School logbooks of the period, where headmasters kept a record of events in their school (and often in their community), contain many complaints of absenteeism, for example during the potato-picking period and haymaking time.

Despite this, it can't be overstated how important education had become for a large swathe of the Welsh population by the mid- and late nineteenth century. Many families became focused on ensuring their children, their sons in particular, received a good education that

set them on a firm career path—a large number would become nonconformist ministers and teachers. That path took them from primary school to the local grammar school, then to the Welsh theological colleges or to the new University of Wales (established in the 1890s, with colleges based in Aberystwyth, Bangor, Cardiff, and Swansea) or teacher training colleges. Others (including girls) found a career path in education by staying on in their primary schools as pupil teachers, later progressing to become fully-fledged teachers.



A "Welsh Not" plaque, typical of the small wooden sticks given to children in school during the nineteenth century as a means to discourage them from speaking Welsh. It was handed to a child heard speaking Welsh, who would then hand it to another child they heard speaking the language. Whoever had the Welsh Not at the end of the school day would be punished. Amgueddfa Cymru – National Museum Wales / People's Collection Wales / Creative Archive Licence, <https://www.peoplescollection.wales/items/840216>.

Even though there was a huge appetite to develop educational opportunities in Wales between the 1700s and the twentieth century, the growth of formal education in the country was not without its difficulties and controversies. For example, Welsh, the mother tongue of a majority throughout a large part of the country, was restricted and often banned as a means of communication during school-time, and a strict "Welsh Not" system was in place in most schools.

This and a controversial government inquiry into the state of education in Wales are significant topics in their own right and warrant a special focus in a future article for it would be fair to state they had a notable influence on the lives of our Welsh ancestors and their life trajectories, as well as on the communities in which they lived.

Welsh School Records and Where to Find Them

- As we have seen, our Welsh ancestors set a great store on education, arguably throughout history, but certainly during the Victorian era, but this does not necessarily mean the survival rate of relevant records is high.
- Unfortunately, evidence of early learning is fairly sparse, and that is the case with regards to the circulating schools of the eighteenth century—even though so many adults and children took advantage of these classes, record-keeping was not a priority for the system's founders.
- The most widely preserved of school admissions registers and logbooks date from the 1870s onwards, in particular after education became compulsory in the 1880s. The vast majority of them are housed in the local archives that relate to the county in which the schools were located, and many of those have been digitised and appear on the www.findmypast.co.uk website (but not all – Carmarthenshire's registers, for example, have not). Remember, however, that the survival rate of individual schools' records is patchy and varies from school to school. No historical records have survived from some schools, while there are often gaps in collections relating to others. Logbooks and punishment books have survived for some but not all admission registers. Access to all school records is restricted by the 100-year rule, and therefore searches would be limited to a period relating to individuals who were born over 100 years ago.
- Sunday School attendance registers, also with other records relating to chapel events, have survived for some chapels, although the survival rate is very patchy. When they have been conserved, you will find them at the relevant county archives or at the National Library of Wales (NLW).
- If your ancestor was one of the earliest students to attend the original University of Wales colleges in Cardiff, Swansea,

Register of Scholars.

entrance fee paid

Name of Scholar, *Owen Ernest Jones*
 Names of Parents, *Joshiah Owen Jones & Jane Esther Jones*
 Profession, *Mineral Surveyor*
 Residence, *King's Head, Oxford Street*
 Date of Entering, *September 12, 1878* Date of Leaving,
 Admitted on *payment as Day Scholar*
 Age on Entering, *12 years* : — Age on Leaving,
 Previous Master and School, *The Rev. E. Davis, Vicarage, Clydach.*
 Attainments on Entering, *very meagre; almost nil*

Progress and Conduct in the School, *Progress & conduct good Xmas 1878 //*
Progress very good, Conduct very good July 1879 // *Progress not*
so decided, conduct regular Xmas 1879 // *Progress fair, conduct good*
April 1880 // going on well July 1880 //

General Remarks, *This boy's father died suddenly (of apoplexy) in the street*
August 1880, so that the lad was removed from school, & placed
in Messrs Evans & Co's Drapery Establishment as a clerk

John Young
 HEAD MASTER.

Register No. *24*

Bishop Gore School. Most admission registers include children's names, dates of birth, addresses and parents' or guardians' names. However, some grammar school registers include additional details, such as this example taken from the Register of Scholars of Bishop Gore's Grammar School, Swansea. It includes the names of the boy's parents and address, and a summary of his conduct and progress. But it also reveals that his father "died suddenly (of apoplexy) in the street...so that the lad was removed from school, & placed in Messrs Evans & Co's Drapery Establishment as a clerk."
Reproduced by permission of West Glamorgan Archive Service / trwy ganiatâd Gwasanaeth Archifau Gorllewin Morgannwg.

Aberystwyth, or Bangor, or taught there, then you may find reference to them in the University's collection housed at the NLW. That collection includes Registrar's Papers

that encompass student records from 1894 onwards and lists of matriculated students.

- The NLW also holds collections relating to some of the country's theological colleges. For example, within the Library's Calvinistic Methodist Archive there is a register of students (from 1837 onwards) who attended the denomination's college and preparatory school in Bala, Merionethshire, and a register of tutors and students' signatures (from between 1842 and 1919) relating to its south Wales Tevecca College campus (located in Breconshire). The Bala-Bangor Manuscripts which relate to the Independent or Congregational denomination's colleges in those locations can be found at Bangor University's Archives.
- Some records relating to Wales's teacher training colleges have survived, although what has survived with regards to individual institutions' student and admission records varies. For example, the St Mary's Bangor North Wales Teaching College collection, housed in Bangor University Archives, includes some of the most detailed students' record books, dating from 1883 onwards. The records of the nearby Bangor Normal College are held at Gwynedd Archives, Caernarfon, but student records are limited.
- Records relating to St David's College Lampeter and Trinity College Carmarthen are housed at Trinity St David's Roderic Bowen Library & Archives in Lampeter. In addition to those colleges' records, this repository holds material from the Ystrad Meurig School collection, Cardiganshire, a grammar school that was established in the mid-1700s as a result of the same educational fervour that drove the Rev Griffith Jones of Llanddowror to set up his circulating schools. The ambitions of the school in Ystrad Meurig were, however, loftier—its aim was to provide classical education to the boys of that county (and later further afield) so they could follow a path through to university and forge distinguished careers in their chosen fields, in particular as clergy in the Anglican church.

Endnotes

1. *A History of Education in Wales*, Gareth Elwyn Jones and Gordon Wynne Roderick, University of Wales Press, 2003.

Links to Relevant Archives

Bangor University Archives and Special Collections: www.bangor.ac.uk/archives-and-special-collections

National Library of Wales: www.library.wales

University of Wales Trinity St David Roderic Bowen Library & Archives, Lampeter: www.uwtsd.ac.uk/special-collections-and-archives

Eilir Ann Daniels has been studying family history for well over 30 years and, as the founder of the research service Your Welsh Ancestors, has been working as a professional researcher since 2009.

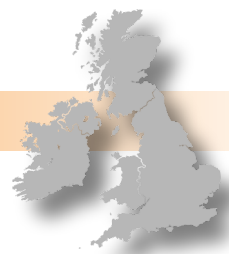


Eilir is a Full Member of AGRA (the Association of Genealogists and Researchers in Archives), and is a Pharos Tutors instructor, teaching "Researching Your Welsh Ancestors and Tracing Living Relatives" courses. She provides research services for private clients and solicitors and carries out research for the BBC's Who Do You Think You Are? and for programs on S4C (the national Welsh language TV channel) and BBC Radio Cymru.

She is a native Welsh speaker, and her academic background, which includes a degree focused on the development of Welsh and UK society after the Industrial Revolution, provides the basis for her genealogical work today.

Uncover your *English* roots

Paul Milner, FUGA, M.Div.



English Schools and the Laws that Changed Them

The convoluted development of the English education system can be overwhelming—even for those of us who went through it and experienced it first hand. What I would like to do here is outline the development of the English school system, the laws that changed them over time, and the way your ancestors would have experienced school.

The earliest known organized school in England was a cathedral school, King's School, Canterbury, founded in 597. This was followed in 604 by a school now connected with Rochester Cathedral. Additional schools followed throughout the seventh and eighth centuries, usually connected with cathedrals. These were usually of two types: grammar schools to teach Latin, aiming at those who planned on the ministry, government, or law; and song schools to train singers for the cathedral choirs. These early schools had large endowments and a high level of patronage, especially as they developed in the later Middle Ages. These endowed schools were designed to educate “poor scholars.” They became known as “public schools,” indicating that they were open to anyone accepting students from across the country, rather than just local residents. Almost all of these schools were boarding schools—think Hogwarts without the magic.

By the seventeenth century, these institutions were moving away from their charitable roots to better serve the sons of the gentry and aristocracy. They became schools of the elite, reflecting the status of both their students and their headmasters. There was a heavy emphasis on Latin and Greek (the Classics), which were seen as essential for the future leaders in government and the military.

By the mid-nineteenth century, these public schools were facing criticism for rowdiness and outdated curricula. The Clarendon Commission (1861–1864) investigated the “Sacred Nine” schools. This was followed by the Public Schools Act 1868 (31 & 32 Vict. c. 118) allowing them to move away from their charitable beginnings, and opening the way for schools to reform and modernize their governance, administration, and curriculum. It specifically named seven schools: Charterhouse, Eton, Harrow, Rugby, Shrewsbury, Westminster, and Winchester. In effect, the act reinforced their role as institutions for the wealthy elite and upper classes. In 1869, the Headmasters' Conference was established, later evolving into the Headmasters' and Headmistresses' Conference (HMC)—www.hmc.org.uk—which is the official international organization for these public schools. There are over 350 in the British Isles. American readers should be reminded that these public schools are fee based and usually residential, unlike in the US where a public school is paid for with local or state funds. Certainly, during the seventeenth through mid-twentieth centuries, it was the graduates of these public schools and their sons that played major leadership roles in government, military, industry, and the church across Britain and its Empire.

But what about the non-elite and the rest of society? Here I am going to focus on the eighteenth century to the present.

The Sunday School Movement was established in 1780, by Robert Raikes, a newspaper publisher and Anglican layman in Gloucester. He started by teaching children to read the Bible, reasoning that reading comprehension acquired through Bible study could be transferred to

CHAPTER 79.

An Act to make further provision for Elementary Education.

[15th August 1876.]

WHEREAS it is expedient to make further provision for the education of children, and for securing the fulfilment of parental responsibility in relation thereto, and otherwise to amend and to extend the Elementary Education Acts:

Be it enacted by the Queen's most Excellent Majesty, by and with the advice and consent of the Lords Spiritual and Temporal, and Commons, in this present Parliament assembled, and by the authority of the same, as follows:

Preliminary.

- Short title. 1. This Act may be cited as the "Elementary Education Act, 1876."
- Extent of Act. 2. This Act shall not, save as otherwise expressly provided, apply to Scotland or Ireland.
- Commencement of Act. 3. This Act shall, save as otherwise expressly provided, come into operation on the first day of January one thousand eight hundred and seventy-seven (which day is in this Act referred to as the commencement of this Act).

PART I.

Law as to Employment and Education of Children.

- Declaration of duty of parent to educate child. 4. It shall be the duty of the parent of every child to cause such child to receive efficient elementary instruction in reading, writing, and arithmetic, and if such parent fail to perform such duty, he shall be liable to such orders and penalties as are provided by this Act.
- Regulation as to employment of child under 10, and certificate of education or previous school attendance being condition of employment of child over 10. 5. A person shall not, after the commencement of this Act, take into his employment (except as herein-after in this Act mentioned) any child—
 (1.) Who is under the age of ten years; or
 (2.) Who, being of the age of ten years or upwards, has not obtained such certificate either of his proficiency in reading, writing, and elementary arithmetic, or of previous due attendance at a certified efficient school, as is in this Act in that behalf mentioned, unless such child, being of the age of ten years or upwards, is employed, and is attending school in accordance with the provisions of the Factory Acts, or of any byelaw of the local authority (herein-after mentioned) made under section seventy-four of The Elementary Education Act, 1870, as amended by The Elementary Education Act, 1873, and this Act, and sanctioned by the Education Department.
- Penalty for employing a child in contravention of Act. 6. Every person who takes a child into his employment in contravention of this Act shall be liable, on summary conviction, to a penalty not exceeding forty shillings.
- Enforcement of Act by school board or school attendance committee of existing local authority or by inspectors of factories or mines. 7. The provisions of this Act respecting the employment of children shall be enforced—
 (1.) In a school district within the jurisdiction of a school board, by that board; and
 (2.) In every other school district by a committee (in this Act referred to as a school attendance committee) appointed annually, if it is a borough, by the council of the borough, and, if it is a parish, by the guardians of the union comprising such parish.
 A school attendance committee under this section may consist of not less than six nor more than twelve members of the council or guardians appointing the committee, so, however, that, in the case of a committee appointed by guardians, one third at least shall consist of ex-officio guardians, if there are any and sufficient ex-officio guardians.

Fig. 1. Opening page of pdf copy of Elementary Education Act 1876 (39 & 40 Vict. c.79) available from www.legislation.gov.uk. Text copy is available from www.education-uk.org.



secular studies. Sunday was the day of choice, as that was usually the only day children were not working. The idea was publicized, catching on, so that by 1801, there were over 2,200 schools; by 1851, there were 23,000, with approximately two-thirds of working-class children between 5 and 15 attending.

National schools were established in 1811 after the Church of England created the National Society for Promoting the Education of the Poor in the Principles of the Established Church (the National Society). The society aimed to provide a school in every parish to provide religious and basic education for the poor. The schools relied on voluntary subscriptions and donations.

British schools originated in 1808 as the Royal Lancastrian Society, evolving in 1814, when the British and Foreign Schools Society for the Education of the Labouring and Manufacturing Classes of Society of Every Religious Persuasion (the British and Foreign School Society—BFSS) was founded as an alternative to the National Society by liberal Anglicans, Roman Catholics and Jews. Its schools used Quaker Joseph Lancaster's monitorial system (developed in 1798) whereby older children were used to teach younger ones as a way to provide

cheap, widespread, non-sectarian, Bible-based education to all faiths.

Ragged schools developed to overcome the feeling that charity, denominational, and Sunday Schools were not providing for significant numbers of children, especially in the inner-city areas. John Pounds, a Portsmouth cobbler, is usually recognized as the founder of the movement in 1818. There would be an emphasis on reading, writing, arithmetic, and Bible study (the 4 R's), though trade skills would often be added. Growth occurred with the formation of the Ragged Schools Union (RSU) in 1844 under the guidance of Lord Shaftesbury and writers like Charles Dickens. It is estimated that around 300,000 children went through the London Ragged Schools between the early 1840s and 1881. Following the 1870 Education Act, as state-funded board schools began providing free education for all students, their use declined. But London's largest Victorian Ragged School, opened in 1877 by Dr. Barnardo, operated for over 30 years, and is now a museum—www.raggedschoolmuseum.org.uk.

Board schools developed after the Elementary Education Act 1870 (Forster's Education Act) (33 & 34 Vict. c.75). School boards were established with locally elected officials to manage school districts that were funded by local rates and grants from the central government. A goal was to address the shortage of school places, leading to a school building boom with over 2,000 new schools within a decade. The new board schools were required to be non-denominational, improving access to education for working-class children, and in effect laying the foundation for a state-run system. It also in effect set up a dual system between board school and "voluntary" church run systems.

The Elementary Education Act 1876 (Lord Sandon's Act) (39 & 40 Vict. c. 79), see Fig. 1, gave parents a legal obligation to ensure that their children were educated; it restricted the employment of children under 10; those over 10 had to show a level of education in reading, writing, and arithmetic; and school attendance

committees were established to enforce attendance.

The Elementary Education Act 1880 (Mundella's Act) (43 & 44 Vict. c. 23) mandated compulsory school attendance for 5- to 10-year-olds in England and Wales. It forced local authorities to create bylaws for attendance, effectively ending the prior voluntary system. It also stopped the employment of children under 10 and anyone under 13 without a certificate of proficiency in reading, writing, and arithmetic.

The Elementary Education Act 1891 (Fee Grant Act) (54 & 55 Vict. c. 56) made major changes to elementary education in England and Wales by effectively abolishing fees, making it free for the first time. Parliament funded a "fee grant" of ten shillings per child, for all children aged 3 to 15. This was true for both board and voluntary (church) schools. There were some exceptions, so where fees were still charged, the act strictly controlled them. For the most part, education was free. The act is seen as a critical step in democratizing education and increasing school attendance, plus reducing the financial burden on working-class families.

The minimum school-leaving age was raised from 10 to 11 in 1893, with some exemptions. It was raised again in 1899 to 12, with some exemptions. In 1917, the government proposed raising the age to 14 with no exemptions. The 1926 Hadow Report, *The Education of the Adolescent*, proposed secondary education for all and increasing the school leaving age to 15.

The Education Act 1902 (Balfour Act) (2 Edw. 7. c.42) radically reorganized the administration of education at the local level. It abolished the 2,568 school boards in England and Wales. All elementary schools were now controlled by Local Education Authorities (LEAs) supervised by county and county borough councils (which had been established in 1888). Now all voluntary schools (mostly Church of England and Roman Catholic schools) received funding from local taxes for maintenance, in addition to government grants. It also empowered LEAs to develop and support secondary education and technical instruction. This act was controversial as

Nonconformists protested again using public funds to support church schools.

The Education Act 1921 (Consolidation Act) (11 & 12 Geo. 5.c. 51) consolidated 31 separate acts and statutes enforcing the minimum school-leaving age at 14 (proposed in 1917) and authorized Local Education Authorities (LEAs) to manage and monitor schools from nursery to age 14+. The act also solidified free, mandatory state elementary education and set the legal foundation for state education in the inter-war period.

The Education Act 1944 (Butler Act) (7 & 8 Geo. 6. c. 31) was designed to modernize the post-war education system. It created a tripartite structure (grammar, technical, and modern secondary schools), ensuring free, compulsory secondary education up to age 15. The placement into the system was based on the child's aptitude determined by the 11+ exam. It aimed to improve administration by reducing the number of LEAs to 146. It had a much wider effect socially by providing health inspections, free milk, meals, and medical treatment for pupils. However, the 11+ exam became a major flashpoint for inequality, cementing social stratification, as many working-class students were placed into secondary modern schools rather than the academic grammar schools. It was this act that influenced my education as well as that of my siblings. I failed the 11+ but was good enough to get into the technical school. My younger sister passed the 11+ and went on to grammar school and then to university. My youngest sister failed the 11+ and ended up in secondary school, later going on to community college. We were all caught in the transition out of this system in the late 60s and early 70s.

A School Certificate introduced in 1918 by the Secondary Schools Examination Council (SSEC) was the standard educational qualification in England for 16-year-olds, replacing a diversity of local exams. In 1951, this was replaced by General Certificate of Education (GCE) Ordinary Level (O-Level), again for 16-year-olds in England, Wales and Northern Ireland. It was designed for the top 20% of ability, but by the

1980s, this was a much higher percentage. It acted as a pathway to Advanced Level (A-Level) studies. In 1965, a Certificate of Secondary Education (CSE) was introduced to provide a national qualification for the 40% of students below O-Level standard, particularly in secondary modern schools. It was graded 1-5, with a Grade 1 being equivalent to an O-Level pass. The O-Level and CSE were replaced by a General Certificate of Secondary Education, with teaching beginning in 1986, and the first exams in 1988. The intent was to create a more egalitarian system.

How did this history affect me? And possibly you or your ancestors?

In 1964, age 10, I failed the 11+ exam, not getting into the grammar, but must have gotten a good enough grade that I went to the all-male Technical School in the fall of 1964. In 1966, age 12, I failed my second attempt at the revised 11+ to get into the grammar school. In the fall of 1967, the Technical School closed and we moved to a brand new, all-male, secondary school. In 1969 I passed 5 O-Level exams, and 2 CSEs with Grade 1, equivalent to an O-Level. At that point, age 16, I was one of only two students from my graduating class who chose to go to Grammar School to work towards A-Level and university. All the other students left school to work or get an apprenticeship. The post O-Level study for an A-Level is a two-year program, focusing on specific subjects, in my case maths, physics, and chemistry. You needed to pass at least two with specific grades controlled by the universities you are selecting. I failed, passing only one subject. I did an unheard of thing, and that was to repeat my final year and take the exams again. In that additional year, I changed what I wanted to do and where I wanted to go, which was a good job, as I would still not have gotten into the universities I originally applied for. I passed 2 of my 3 A-Level exams. I ended up choosing a professional college rather than a university. I graduated from college with a First Class degree. After emigrating to the US, I then went on to get Master of Science and Master of Divinity degrees. Pretty good for someone who had to repeat the final year of grammar school (equivalent of high school).

The Records

Education records that will be of use to researchers include:

- records created by the institution and its managing or sponsoring body; check for deposits at the county archives
- records given to the students and their parents or guardians; check family collections
- reports of events associated with the institution and its students; check the newspapers

Teachers were required to be licensed by the bishops until 1869, and lists will often be found in diocesan archives.

Many schools had admission registers often noting the child's birth date, father's name, address, occupation and the name of previous school, if any. There are Class or Form lists, logbooks, examination and assessment books, honours books, rolls of honour (pupils who served and died in the war), punishment books, yearbooks, school magazines, school / class photographs, and minutes of meetings of the governors / trustees / managers. Many of these records will be in the county record offices and some are available through www.familysearch.org.

Many National School Admission Registers & Log Books for 1870–1914 have been put online at www.findmypast.com. Definitely use the All Record Sets, doing a search for "National School Admission Registers & Logbooks 1870–1914." This will give you more filtering options—town, county, and school name—which are not options when searching and filtering from the main screen. Many of these records will provide the name of the child and their parents, birth dates, event dates, addresses, name of the school, and more.

For a more detailed timeline of education, with links to transcript copies of the education acts, see www.education-uk.org/history/timeline.html

For a more detailed description, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History_of_education_in_England. For pdf copies of the original acts, search at www.legislation.gov.uk.

Bibliography

There are numerous resources for the English education system; these may be useful from the perspective of a family historian:

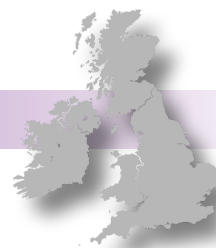
1. Chapman, Colin. *The Growth of British Education and its Records*. Dursley, Gloucestershire: Lochin Publishing. 1991.
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Paul is currently the book review editor for the BIGWILL newsletter and retired review editor of the FGS FORUM. He is currently on the board of the International Society for British Genealogy and Family History (ISBGFH), the past president of the British Interest Group of Wisconsin and Illinois (BIGWILL), and a past board member of the APG, FGS, and GSG. Paul focuses on British Isles resources and methodology on his blog at www.milnergenealogy.com.





The Scottish Education System



Madderty parish kirk, Perthshire. The Church of Scotland initially handled the education of children at the parish level following the Reformation of 1560 (author's image).

The formal provision of education in Scotland dates back well over 600 years, when the University of St. Andrews, the country's oldest academic establishment, was initially established by charter as a school in 1411, before being granted full university status in August 1413. In its earliest days, the main teachings of the university were religious, with similar institutions later established in Glasgow in 1451 and Aberdeen in 1496.

The initial goal of such bodies was to produce learned men who could take up positions within the Church. Although there were lower-level schools, they tended to be grammar or song schools built to serve religious establishments, or burgh schools designed to teach the offspring of burghesses the necessary skills for business.

Following the Reformation of 1560, the situation dramatically changed, with an important new theological concept introduced to Scotland—the Godly Commonwealth—which declared that the Kirk (the Presbyterian Church of Scotland) had to assume responsibility for both the discipline and education of its flock in order to create an orderly, God-fearing society. As well as successfully revamping the university system and establishing a further institution at Edinburgh in 1582, the Kirk also set about creating a national elementary school system for the young, albeit at a slow pace initially. It was not until 1616 that the state formally backed the Kirk's programme by declaring that every parish should have a school, and then it was not until 1633 and 1646 that acts were

passed making it compulsory for heritors to provide for them, in addition to their other responsibilities as landowners in funding the parish system. By the time Charles II was restored to the English throne in 1660, most Scottish lowland parishes had at least one schoolmaster, known as a "dominie," often with the minister himself doubling up in the role.

The earliest curriculum comprised of learning the catechism and prayers, and reading and writing through Bible study, whilst in burgh schools basic mathematics was also taught. Some schools also offered lessons in Latin and French. Children studied every day for up to ten hours, but in the summer months the parish school could be closed for several weeks to allow them to return home to help with the harvest.

In the Lowlands the system was soon well established, but the Gaelic speaking Highlands were not so well served. It was not until the early eighteenth century when charitable institutions such as the Society in Scotland for Propagating Christian Knowledge (SSPCK) set up schools in the north and north west of the country, as well as on the islands. The SSPCK's purpose was to establish schools "where religion and virtue might be taught to young and old," but this tragically came at a price. Education was initially provided solely through the medium of English, which led to an increasing decline in the use of Gaelic, with many children taught that speaking in their "uncivilised" tongue was a handicap to social advancement. Although tuition through Gaelic was slowly reintroduced by the late 1760s, the damage had already been done, and discrimination against the language and its speakers would continue for another two centuries.

The industrial revolution in the eighteenth century would present the Kirk with many new challenges. In the country parishes, the education system continued to work well, but in the industrialising towns and cities, it was a different matter, with the Kirk slowly losing its grip on society. By the early nineteenth century, about two thirds of children were being educated in establishments known as "adventure schools," which were controlled by private benefactors; the exploitation of child labour became another crucial barrier, with children working long hours in factories and mines. When the Calton weavers' dispute in 1787 in Glasgow descended into violent riots, it merely confirmed to the Kirk that something had to be done to restore some sense of morality and discipline. Its response was to set up a new initiative to teach children on their one day off. This "Sunday School" movement was an instant success, with many children receiving education from 8 a.m. until 7 p.m., and in the process, keeping out of trouble.

For the poor and destitute, another innovation came from the charitable sector, in the form of "ragged schools." First established in 1818 by a Portsmouth shoemaker called John Pounds,



The University of Glasgow was established in 1451 (author's image).

ragged schools educated poor children without tuition fees; the idea was further developed in Scotland by the Reverend Thomas Guthrie, who set up a school in Edinburgh in 1841. A similar institution was established in 1844 in Aberdeen to educate delinquents who kept popping up in the local sheriff's court as repeat offenders, and the movement soon spread across Scotland.

By 1867, however, a parliamentary commission had established that one in five children was still not receiving an education. Despite changes in the law to prevent child labour, many children were still employed. The Kirk itself was undergoing something of a crisis, having dramatically split in 1843 at the "Disruption" over several issues long fought over by its members, such as patronage (the right of landowners to decide on a new minister's appointment) and a

perceived drift away from the Godly Commonwealth idea. The solution, as the state now saw it, was to introduce the landmark Education (Scotland) Act of 1872. This effectively removed the Kirk's responsibilities and transferred them to local school boards, and made it compulsory for all children aged between five and thirteen to receive an education. The school-leaving age was later raised to 14 in 1883, and 15 in 1945.

Further harm to the Gaelic language was caused by this act in the Highlands and Western Isles, with no provision provided in the statute to cater for tuition through the tongue. Consequently, many children being raised through English language tuition were unable to speak to their parents and grandparents in their native tongue; in many cases the language was literally beaten out of them in their classrooms (something also affecting those speaking the Scots language). This circumstance was not finally addressed until the provision of Gaelic language medium education in 1985, known in the language itself as "*foghlam troimh mheadhan na Gàidhlig*."

Following the 1872 Education Act, Scotland's Protestant church schools opted into the new state system. In 1918, however, the churches were furious at the creation of a new Education Act which provided many concessions to Roman Catholic schools, including the right for the church's clergy to maintain access to its schools, the provision of religious instruction, and the Church's approval of all teacher appointments. The Protestant denominations described this as "Rome on the rates," with Protestant taxes paying for Catholic education, leading to an atmosphere of increased sectarian tension between Scotland's religious communities.



A display at Kildonan Museum, Isle of South Uist, showing a typical pupil's desk after the 1872 Education Act (author's image).

The provision of secondary level education was initially very poor in Scotland. The 1872 Education Act only dealt with elementary education, and the high schools and academies of Perth, Edinburgh, and Glasgow mainly provided for the middle classes, catering for the sons of tradesmen and professionals. They were refused state funding and maintained their secondary status through high fees. "Higher Grade Schools" were established in Glasgow to try to cater for a more advanced curriculum for the working classes, but it was not until 1892 when fees were abolished in many secondary schools that access to them became more widespread.

At university, the nineteenth century saw a great deal of change as graduates were increasingly required to administer the civil service of a rapidly expanding British Empire. Four-year honours degrees, bursaries to encourage the working classes, a revised curriculum, and, towards the end of the century, the right for women to study at university, dramatically improved the numbers of students taking degrees. Standards were also raised by the



Sgoil Baile a' Mhanaich, Isle of Benbecula. Gaelic medium education was introduced into Scotland in 1985, and is now available within 16 of the country's 32 local authorities (author's image).



Records after 1872 are most likely to be found in a local authority archive, such as Glasgow City Archives (pictured), or at the National Records of Scotland (author's image).

introduction of a new entrance examination which had to be passed before entry.

The records for both teachers and schoolchildren before and after 1872 are substantially different, with many held at the National Records of Scotland (NRS), which can be searched via its online catalogue at <https://catalogue.nrscotland.gov.uk/nrsonlinecatalogue/welcome.aspx>.

To find evidence of a schoolmaster in a Church of Scotland parochial school, you will need to check the relevant kirk session and heritors' minutes, catalogued under CH2 and HR, for details of appointments and payments. Presbytery minutes (from the Kirk's

higher court tier) will also confirm appointments; for the Free Church of Scotland, consult the relevant Deacons Court records under CH3. For burgh masters, you will need to check local burgh records or town council minutes, indexed under B, though many are also held in local archives; locate these through the Scottish Archives map at <https://www.scottisharchives.org.uk/explore/scottish-archives-map/>, and the Your Scottish Archives platform at <https://yourscottisharchives.com>.

If your ancestor taught through a SSPCK school, the society's minutes are held at the NRS also, under GD95. Many female teachers taught domestic skills, and a book entitled *SSPCK: Index of Women Spinning and Weaving Mistress* by A. S. Cowper (1997, Scottish Records Society) lists those employed from 1723–1872.

For teachers' details after 1872, you will need to find the relevant school board records in the relevant local county archive. The NRS has only a handful of such records, including records for some of the Western Isles, North Berwick, and Prestonkirk.

Records for pupils before 1872 are rare, but many post-1872 registers can be found in local authority archives, or at the National Records of Scotland. The registers for Perthshire schools from 1869–1902 have been digitised and placed online by Ancestry (www.ancestry.co.uk), as well as records from West Dunbartonshire from 1834–1922. FindmyPast (www.findmypast.co.uk) also hosts a "Scotland, Lanarkshire School Registers and Records" collection.

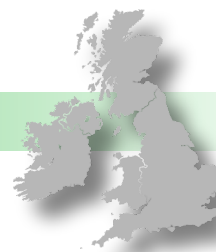
For university staff and student records, contact the respective institute's archive, though there have been some published collections of alumni for the older universities. Aberdeen Rolls of Graduates from 1860–1900 and 1901–1925 are available on The Genealogist (www.thegenealogist.co.uk), whilst Findmypast hosts a "University Of Aberdeen Alumni 1596-1900" database. Glasgow University Matriculation Rolls from 1728–1858 can be found on TheGenealogist and FindmyPast (www.findmypast.co.uk), whilst a matriculation roll for St. Andrews University from 1747–1897 is

available on both Ancestry and FindmyPast. Findmypast also hosts a "University Of Edinburgh Graduations 1583–1858" database.

A detailed bibliography of published lists of students and teachers is available in *Scottish Trades, Professions, Vital Records and Directories* by D. R. Torrance (1998, SAFHS www.safhs.org.uk).



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The Schools of Belfast

Belfast, the capital city of Northern Ireland since 1921, has long been proud of its academic credentials and its education provision. Thanks to the heavy influx of Scots to the city from the seventeenth century, Presbyterianism had a great influence on education-related matters, but it would not be until the nineteenth century that a more universal system would be introduced for the education of all, irrespective of their religious background.

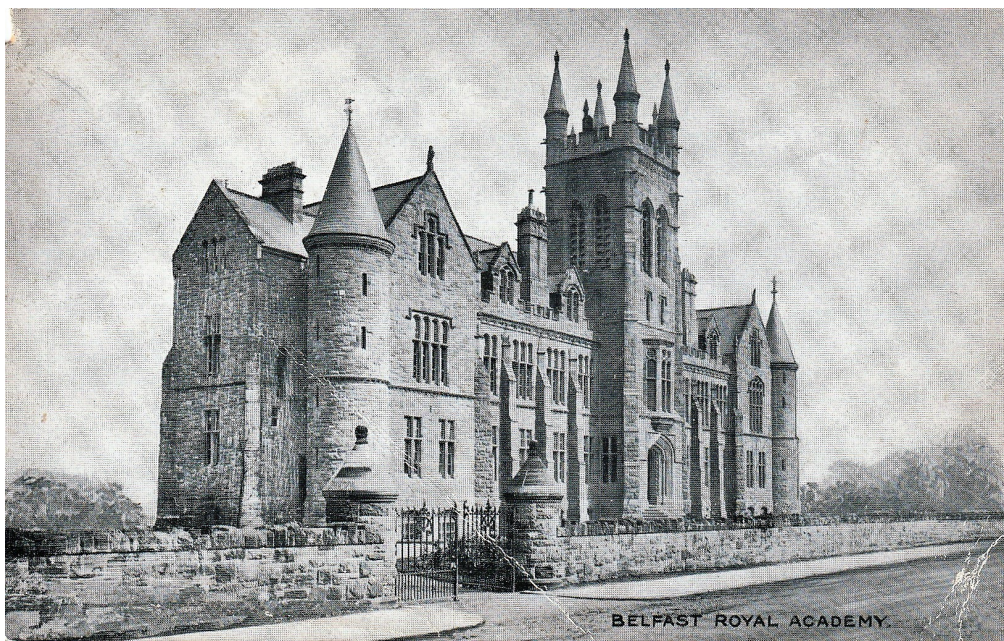
Prior to the nineteenth century, the city's individual Presbyterian churches provided for their own schooling, with a boys school established in 1762 by First Presbyterian Church on Rosemary Street. In 1786, the church's Rev. James Crombie established Belfast Academy (Belfast Royal Academy from 1888) as a high school and college for middle to upper class boys, initially based on Academy Street, and from 1880 on the Cliftonville Road. Girls were finally admitted to the upper school from 1900, albeit segregated from the boys, before a mixed education approach was established in 1923. A history of the school, as well as the names of notable alumni, can be found on its website at www.belfastroyalacademy.com, whilst published histories include *Belfast Royal Academy: The First Century 1785–1885*, by A. T. Q. Stewart (1985), and *Belfast Royal Academy: The Second Century 1885–1985*, by Edward McCamley (1996). The North of Ireland Family History Society (www.nifhs.org) has a copy of the school's admissions register from 1880-1935.

In 1810, the Belfast Academical Institution was founded by Presbyterian reformers as a boarding school at College Square East, providing both a boys school and a further education college department, with the latter's General Certificate



First Presbyterian Church on Rosemary Street, Belfast (author's image).

recognised as the equivalent of a Scottish degree. In 1831, it became the Royal Belfast Academical Institution, although today it is more colloquially known as "Inst." Many of those who studied at Inst's collegiate department went on to become Presbyterian ministers, whilst from 1835–1849, it was also possible to train at the body's very own medical college, the Royal Institution Hospital at Barrack Street. The development of Queen's College (later Queen's University Belfast), ended its collegiate



Belfast Royal Academy, shortly after its relocation to Cliftonville Road (old postcard).

programme. In the First World War, 132 of the school's alumni lost their lives, with 213 decorated for action, including one Victoria Cross. A history of the school is available on the school's website at <http://rbai.org.uk>, whilst an interesting account of its more radical origins can be read online at https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Royal_Belfast_Academical_Institution#Dissident_foundation.

In 1913, the *Royal Belfast Academical Institution Centenary Volume 1810–1910*, by Joseph R. Fisher and John H. Robb, was published. The book's appendices included a list of students and scholars from 1814–1912, as well as a list of students who received a General Certificate in the Faculty of Arts from 1817–1838. Both are accessible via the members-only section of the website of the Presbyterian Historical Society of Ireland (<https://presbyterianhistoryireland.com>), with an introduction to the Inst detailed on its website at <https://presbyterianhistoryireland.com/web-resources/minister-lists-fasti/royal-belfast-academical-institution/>. Following the merger in 1840 of the General Synod of Ulster and the Secession Synod to create the Presbyterian Church in Ireland, a new Presbyterian educational institute was established in 1853 as

the Assembly's College, today known as Union Theological College, with its history detailed at www.union.ac.uk. Robert Allen's *The Presbyterian College, Belfast, 1853–1953* (1954) also has a list of students, which can again be searched on the PHSI website.

In 1868, a similar institution for the provision of the Methodist church in the city, to train boys and ministers, opened with 141 pupils as Methodist College on the Malone Road. Initially formed as a boys school, just three months into its

existence, the decision was taken to teach girls also; it has remained a co-educational facility ever since, with the college more colloquially referred to today as "Methody." The school's website has a potted history available at www.methody.org/about, with its records held at the Public Record Office of Northern Ireland (www.nidirect.gov.uk/campaigns/public-record-office-northern-ireland-proni) under SCH/955.

The forerunner to Belfast High School, Pyper Academy, was first established in 1854 at Eglinton Street. After briefly being known also as Eglantine Academy, it soon changed its name to Belfast Mercantile Academy, and from 1874 was based at Glenravel Street. From 1929, it was referred to as "Belfast Mercantile Academy High School for Boys and Girls (from 6 years of age and upwards)", eventually adopting the simpler name of "Belfast High School" from 1 August 1942. The school now lies just beyond the outskirts of Belfast at Jordanstown.

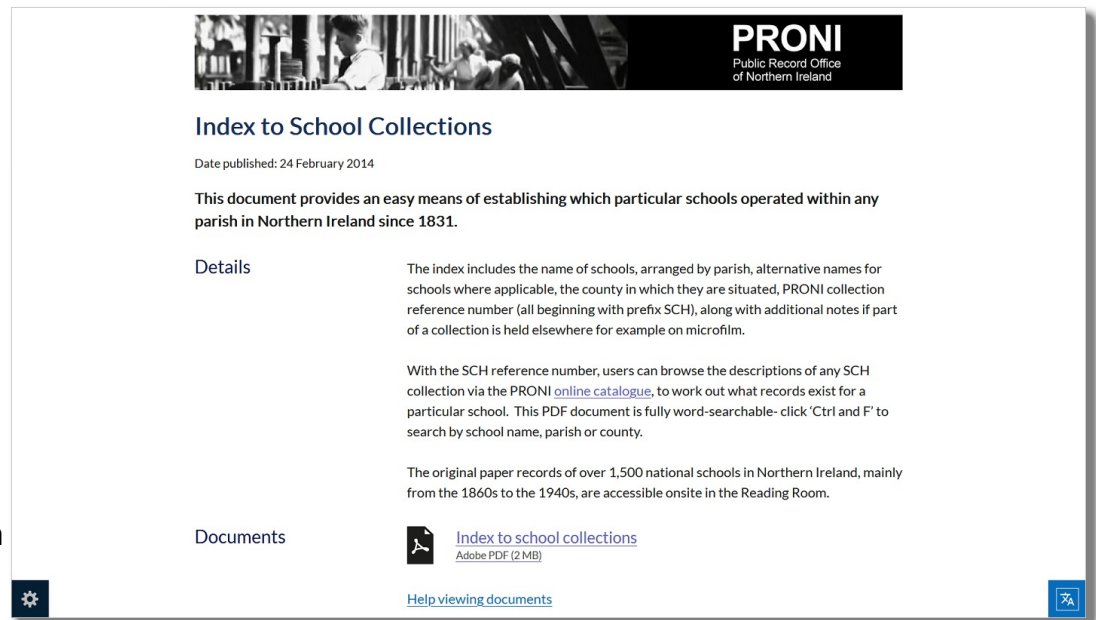
In 1894 Campbell College was later established on the Belmont Estate by philanthropist Henry James Campbell, where it continues to provide education to students from across the world on its 100-acre woodland campus. "The Campbell Story" at www.campbellcollege.co.uk/welcome-

[to-campbell/the-campbell-story](#) names some of its alumni, and offers a tribute to former staff and students who lost their lives in the First World War through its "Men Behind the Glass" project. A database of former students from 1892–1938 is accessible via Emerald Ancestors (www.emeraldancestors.com), whilst a register from 1954 is available on www.lennonwylie.co.uk.

Whilst the schools mentioned so far were primarily established for middle to upper class

Protestant families to send their sons to, not everyone in Belfast society could afford to be educated in such illustrious surroundings, with the working classes seeking their learning from the church and from other entrepreneurial establishments. Belfast's first Sunday School was opened in 1802, and with the success of the movement across the town that ensued, a more formal school was erected in 1811 at Frederick Street for the children of labourers. This was followed a few years later by the Brown Street Sunday School in 1814 in the Shankill, which became a day school from 1821, and later a National School (see below). Its records can be consulted at Belfast Central Library (www.librariesni.org.uk/libraries/greater-belfast/belfast-central-library/). Elsewhere, a school for the blind opened in 1801, initially holding lessons at an Independent Meeting House on Donegall Street (later King Street), and then from a purpose built facility at College Street from 1836.

For the education of young girls, Margaret Byers set up Ladies Collegiate School in 1859 at 13 Wellington Place, which from 1888 became Victoria College (www.victoriacollege.org.uk). In 1924 the school moved to Cranmore Park, with its former building in Belfast's Lower Crescent now hosting the Crescent Arts Centre. In 1870,



PRONI
Public Record Office
of Northern Ireland

Index to School Collections

Date published: 24 February 2014

This document provides an easy means of establishing which particular schools operated within any parish in Northern Ireland since 1831.

Details

The index includes the name of schools, arranged by parish, alternative names for schools where applicable, the county in which they are situated, PRONI collection reference number (all beginning with prefix SCH), along with additional notes if part of a collection is held elsewhere for example on microfilm.

With the SCH reference number, users can browse the descriptions of any SCH collection via the PRONI [online catalogue](#), to work out what records exist for a particular school. This PDF document is fully word-searchable- click 'Ctrl and F' to search by school name, parish or county.

The original paper records of over 1,500 national schools in Northern Ireland, mainly from the 1860s to the 1940s, are accessible onsite in the Reading Room.

Documents

 [Index to school collections](#)
Adobe PDF (2 MB)

[Help viewing documents](#)

The PRONI Schools Index.

another boarding school for girls was set up by Anna Hunter at College Square, later moving to Princess Gardens, where from 1901 it became Princes Gardens School. In August 1887 the school merged with Ashleigh College to form the current all-girls grammar school at Hunterhouse College.

For the maintenance and education of destitute girls, a union school was first founded in 1795. With the aid of prominent suffragist Isabella Tod, Byers later set up the Belfast Women's Temperance Association in 1874, which led in the 1880s to the establishment of the Shamrock Lodge Industrial School for destitute girls at Lagan Village (www.childrenshomes.org.uk/BelfastVictoria/), which moved in 1892 to Ligoniel. Margaret Byers acted as its first superintendent for almost a quarter of a century. With Byers' support, as well as from others, Tod was later successful in securing rights for girls to sit for public exams through the 1878 Education (Ireland) Act, and to be granted degrees from the Royal University of Ireland through the 1879 Universities (Ireland) Act.

Following the extension of the English-based Industrial School system to Ireland in 1868, which educated juvenile offenders, Saint

The screenshot shows the homepage of the 'Children's Homes' website. The header features the title 'Children's Homes' and a subtitle 'The institutions that became home for Britain's children and young people.' Below this is a search bar and navigation links like 'Help', 'My Books', 'Bookstore', 'Donate', and 'Copyright'. A sidebar on the left contains a 'Home Page' menu with options like 'Introduction', 'All About...', 'List by Location', 'List by Type', 'Rules for Homes', 'Records', 'Memoirs', 'Abuse in Homes', 'Places to Visit', and 'This Site'. The main content area displays 'St Patrick's Orphanage / Industrial School for Roman Catholic Girls, Belfast, Antrim, Northern Ireland'. It includes a 'Print as PDF' button and a 'Buy now' button for an 'ancestryDNA' test. The text describes the school's history, established in 1840, and its location on May Street, Belfast. It mentions the Sisters of Mercy and the school's closure in 1871. A 'Start Chatting 1:1 in Minutes' button is also visible.

Peter Higginbotham's Children's Homes platform, <https://www.childrenshomes.org.uk>.

Patrick's Industrial School for Roman Catholic Boys was set up on Donegall Street, as well as an equivalent school for girls on the Crumlin Road from 1869. An affiliated institution, Sacred Heart Industrial School for Girls, was later set up in Whiteabbey in 1896. Elsewhere in Belfast Lough, the Industrial School Ship "Gibraltar" was established from 1872 to accommodate and train over 300 Protestant boys aged 10–14, with younger boys aged under ten instead sent to Fox Lodge Industrial School from 1884 onwards. Hampton House Industrial School for Protestant Girls was set up at Balmoral in 1873. For details on all of these, visit Peter Higginbotham's Children's Homes website at www.childrenshomes.org.uk.

In November 1833, just four years after Catholic emancipation, St. Malachy's College was established on the Antrim Road, opening with just eight boarders and ten day pupils. Today it retains the status of Ireland's oldest diocesan college, its motto being "Gloria ab Intus," meaning "glory from within." The website of its

alumni association at www.stmalachysalumni.co.uk hosts historic class photographs from 1962 onwards.

The college was not the first Catholic school in Belfast, however, with that honour falling to St. Patrick's National School on Donegall Street, which opened in 1828, and taught pupils from the area until its eventual closure in 1982. The National Schools system was formally established from 1831, initially as a means to set up non-denominational primary level education across Ireland, run by a national Board of Education, and as a means to close down the more informal "hedge schools" that had previously provided the only means of education for many within the Catholic community during the period of the Penal Laws. According to the government's Chief Secretary, Edward Stanley, they were supposed to admit "children of all religious persuasions" and "should not interfere with the peculiar tenets of any," but whilst some schools did have mixed classes, most soon became affiliated to one denomination or



The Public Record Office of Northern Ireland (author's image).



The former St. Patrick's National School, next to St. Patrick's Cathedral (author's image).

another. Whilst the system did make a huge improvement in functional literacy in the English language, it was deemed by many to be massively damaging to the ability of the Irish language to survive and flourish.

Whilst the earliest registers from Belfast's national schools, which later evolved into the city's public elementary and then primary schools, have not survived, records from the 1860s to the 1940s are held at PRONI. An index to its Schools Collection is available as a 101-page PDF document accessible at www.nidirect.gov.uk/publications/index-school-collections, which provides each school with a catalogue number, with which a search can be performed on the online catalogue for relevant records. Many other school records are held at PRONI, which can be sourced from the catalogue by simply typing in the name of the institution and looking for returns with catalogue numbers beginning with "SCH." Another interesting dataset, digitised and available through PRONI's catalogue, is that of the National Education Board grant applications

for schools from 1832–1889, catalogued under ED/1.

If your ancestors were teachers in Belfast, the National Archives of Ireland Guide to Sources on Education at www.nationalarchives.ie/article/guide-sources-national-education includes a "List of Teachers Employed by the Commissioners of National Education" on 31 March 1905. PRONI also has a separate guide to the National Education Board's records at www.nidirect.gov.uk/publications/local-history-series-information-leaflet-5-national-education-records, which includes details on teachers' salary books from 1899–1927 (earlier registers are held at the NAI in Dublin).

For more on PRONI's education records, read its online Local History Guide: 5 National Education Records and the Ministry/Department of Education Archive guide at www.nidirect.gov.uk/publications/national-education-records, with a considerably more detailed guide to education resources available from the archive at www.nidirect.gov.uk/sites/default/files/publications/education-archive.pdf.

Based in the Ayrshire town of Stewarton, Northern Irish-born Chris Paton runs the Scotland's Greatest Story research service (<https://scotlandsgreateststory.wordpress.com/>) and the daily Scottish GENES genealogy news blog (<http://scottishgenes.blogspot.com>). Amongst his many publications are Researching Ancestral Crisis in Ireland, Tracing Your Irish Family History on the Internet (2nd edition), Tracing Your Irish Ancestors Through Land Records, and Tracing Your Belfast Ancestors from Pen and Sword, as well as Sharing Your Family History Online. Chris also tutors short courses through Pharos Teaching and Tutoring Ltd, including two Irish-themed courses, Progressing Your Irish Research Online and Researching Irish Land Records.





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