

Schools

Please note that some of these records may be closed for 100 years.

As early as an Act of 1406, it was decreed that: "...every man or woman, of what estate or condition that he be, shall be free to set their son or daughter to take learning at any school that pleaseth them within the realm..." However, it was not that easy to put this into practice.

From the late 17th century, the Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge (SPCK), an Anglican organisation, aided the foundation of **parochial schools**. The Act of Uniformity of 1662 required all schoolmasters and tutors to be loyal to the Church of England. Through the Declaration of Indulgence of 1672 and the Toleration Act of 1689, the nonconformist religions began to establish their own academic centres.

Also in the 17th century many private schools for young children, run by women in their own homes and known as **dame schools**, were popular in many towns and villages. **Charity schools** were set up, and these were often known as Blue coat, Green coat or Grey coat schools. **Workhouse schools** were attached to the parish workhouses, particularly after the General Workhouse Act of 1723 when Overseers of the Poor could engage a schoolmaster.

Voluntary schools were set up by individual societies. These included such establishments as the Royal Lancastrian Institution, known from 1814 as the British Foreign School Society or British Schools. In Oxfordshire many National Schools were established by the National Society who promoted the Education of the Poor in the Principles of the Established Church. These National School foundations survive today in many cases as Church of England Primary Schools.

The 1870 Elementary Education Act saw the formation of School Boards and Board Schools. This allowed local authorities to found schools in parishes where existing education provision was lacking.

The 1902 Education Act saw the creation of Secondary Schools and the abolishment of School Boards as their duties were handed over to the County Councils.

The 1944 Education Act saw changes to the provision of Secondary Education with the raising of the school leaving age to 15.

Key Dates

1662 – Act of Uniformity – required all schoolmasters and tutors to be loyal to the Church of England

1672 – Declaration of Indulgence and 1689 – Toleration Act – these two Acts enabled nonconformists to set up their own education centres

1723 – General Workhouse Act – Overseers of the Poor could appoint a schoolmaster

1802 – Act regulating the working conditions of apprentices; this included free part time education

1811 – National Schools set up by the National Society for promoting the Education of the Poor in the Principles of the Established Church

1814 – The former Royal Lancastrian Institution then became known as the British and Foreign School Society

1870 – Elementary Education Act – creation of Board Schools

1902 - Education Act

1944 – Education Act ‘Butler Act’

1972 – School leaving age is raised to 16

Where are these records?

Many school records have not survived, particularly those of the dame schools and the workhouse schools. Some parish school records can be found within the parish records catalogue.

The Macclesfield House collection

This is arranged alphabetically by parish and relates to 246 Oxfordshire schools under county authority. It also covers some schools outside the county and some schools within the county but not under direct county supervision. The material covers the first two decades of the 20th century. For each school there are usually (but not always) references to details such as: lease of the school property; OS location map; ground plan of school; variable information on structural condition and alterations; heating, lighting and ventilation; sanitary arrangements; teachers’ houses; size of pupil rolls; annual expenses; teachers; methods and standards; medical officers’ reports; other uses of premises and out of hours activities.

The collection holds approximately 4,000 photographs and many of these (but not all) have been copied to film with contact prints made from the negatives. These contact prints can be viewed in the hard copy browsers of the Photographic collection, on the open shelves of the search room. Some of them are also available online.

Where is the catalogue?

The catalogues of individual schools are available online at [Heritage Search](#) and in the search room, where there is also an index by parish. For example, Records for the Oxford Blue coat school can be found under ref. S200.

The Macclesfield House collection is on index cards; there is also a separate index for the photographs.

What do I do now?

Find out how to [visit Oxfordshire History Centre](#) to see the Schools records