

POOR LAW AND WORKHOUSE RECORDS

INFORMATION LEAFLET 17



Poor Law Records can provide invaluable information about your ancestors and are important for the study of changes through time in the poor relief system and socio-economic history. The administrative history of the Poor Law can be divided into two periods:

- The Old Poor Law: pre-1834 the poor were the responsibility of the parish.
- The New Poor Law: post-1834 they were the responsibility of the Poor Law Unions.





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THE OLD POOR LAW

Prior to 1834 the administration of the Poor Law was the responsibility of the parish. The system was introduced by the Poor Law Acts of 1597 and 1601, and the Act of Settlement of 1662. The parish appointed Overseers of the Poor who collected rates from occupiers of land and property, and spent income on helping the destitute.

Parishes did not want to be liable for the relief of poor from another parish. Settlement certificates were issued to those who moved to another parish. If the need for maintenance arose, the parish could make a removal order to send them back to their parish of origin.

The parish of Liverpool was created in 1699. Liverpool Record Office holds the records of Liverpool Civil Parish (ref: 353 PAR). Unfortunately no records of the Overseers of the Poor appear to have survived. The Vestry minute books, however, do survive and they occasionally give details of people rewarded poor relief. These have been transcribed by H. Peet in *Liverpool Vestry Books, 1681-1834* (2 vols., ref. H 353.04203 PET).

A parish workhouse was founded in Liverpool in 1732 and a new one was built at Brownlow Hill in 1769-1772. No registers, however, survive prior to 1841.

In Liverpool on 10 May 1821 the Parish Committee was superseded by a Select Vestry, elected under the terms of the Sturges Bourne Acts, 1818 and 1819. These Acts had been aimed at giving parish government a more efficient constitution. Liverpool Record Office holds minutes of the Parish Committee and the Liverpool Select Vestry, 1803-1841 (ref: 353 PAR/2)

In the surrounding parishes and townships, if a workhouse existed it was usually a small cottage rented for the purpose. Records relating to the poor relief and the workhouses in the townships in many cases appear not to have survived.



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However, the following can be found amongst our township records:

- Allerton Township: overseers of the poor account book, 1821-1840 (ref: 354 ALL/1)
- Everton Township: Vestry minute books, 1820-1849 (REF: 354 EVE/1); Receipt and payment books and miscellaneous account books of the overseers of the poor, 1848-1914 (ref: 354 EVE/3)
- Skelmersdale Township: accounts of the overseers of the poor, 1763-1792 (ref: 354 SKE/2)

For the seventeenth and early eighteenth century some information can often be found in the petitions which were presented to Lancashire County Quarter Sessions by those seeking relief. These are held by Lancashire Record Office and include settlement certificates, removal orders and settlement examinations. The catalogue for the records of the Lancashire County Quarter Sessions is on-line at <http://www.a2a.pro.gov.uk>.

The Borough of Liverpool also had its own Quarter Sessions. The only surviving records prior to 1835 is a "Sessions Book", Apr 1724-Sep 1746 (ref: 347 QUA/4/1). This contains details of cases relating to maintenance and settlement.

THE 1834 POOR LAW AMENDMENT ACT AND THE NEW POOR LAW

The 1834 Poor Law Amendment Act replaced the old poor law with a national system for dealing with the relief of the poor. The new poor law was administered by the newly formed Poor Law Unions, each the responsibility of a Board of Guardians. It aimed to deter the able-bodied but provide a refuge for the ailing and the helpless.

LIVERPOOL SELECT VESTRY

As in many parts of northern England, Liverpool resisted the implementation of the 1834 Act, but Liverpool Poor Law Parish finally came into being on 25th March, 1841, under a 25-strong Board of Guardians.



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Liverpool Record Office holds records of the Liverpool Select Vestry (ref: 353 SEL). These include the records of the Liverpool Workhouse, Brownlow Hill, 1841-1928 (ref: 353 SEL/18-25). The workhouse was demolished in 1931 to make way for the Roman Catholic Cathedral.

Liverpool Record Office also holds some apprenticeship indentures for 1840-1870 in the records of the Liverpool Select Vestry (ref: 353 SEL/12). These indentures are indexed by name of apprentice and name of employer in *Apprenticeships' Indentures mainly of Liverpool Parish, 1797-1870...numerical list and typed alphabetical list of apprentices and employers* (1940), ref: Hq 352.4204 APP Rare Books.

In 1843 Liverpool Select Vestry erected an industrial school for the care and training of pauper children at Kirkdale. Liverpool Record Office holds the records of Kirkdale Industrial School, 1845-1904 (ref: 353 SEL/22-23). These include admission and discharge registers (1862-1865), classification registers (1845-1897), and religious creed registers (1869-1904). The school closed in 1904.

The site became Kirkdale Homes for the aged and infirm in 1904. Kirkdale Homes was taken over by West Derby Union in 1922 and Liverpool City Council in 1929. In 1948 it became jointly run by Liverpool City Council and the Regional Hospital Board. It changed its name to Westminster House in the early 1950s and closed in March 1968. Liverpool Record Office holds records of Westminster House (formerly Kirkdale Homes), 1913-1971 (ref: 352 SOC/4). These include creed registers (1913-1969) and registers of deaths (1924-1971).

Highfield Infirmary, Old Swan, an epileptic home, was opened in 1903 by the Liverpool Select Vestry. In 1922 Highfield Infirmary was transferred to the Liverpool Corporation and it became the Highfield Sanatorium for tuberculosis sufferers. In 1929 it changed its name to Broadgreen Sanatorium and later became Broadgreen Hospital. Liverpool Record Office holds the records of Broadgreen Hospital, 1931-1989 (ref: 614 BRO), but no earlier records for Highfield Infirmary survive.

The Liverpool Select Committee also administered Cleaver Sanatorium (opened c.1903), Heswall, a hospital for children suffering from tuberculosis. It later became Cleaver Hospital.



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No pre-1948 records of this institution survive (House Committee minutes, 1949-1974, are held by Wirral Archives).

In 1922 the Liverpool Select Vestry was dissolved and the area and institutions under its jurisdiction were added to the West Derby Union.

WEST DERBY UNION

The West Derby Union was formed in 1837 and was overseen by an elected Board of Guardians of 31 representing the following parishes:

Aintree, Allerton, Bootle-cum-Linacre, Childwall, Great Crosby, Little Crosby, Croxteth Park, Everton, Fazakerley, Garston, Ince Blundell, Kirkby, Kirkdale, Litherland, Lunt, Netherton, Orrell and Ford, Sefton, Thornton, Toxteth Park Walton-on-the Hill, Wavertree, West Derby.

Later Additions (from 1894): Seaforth , Waterloo.

In 1857 the West Derby Union lost the township of Toxteth Park which was carved out to form a separate Toxteth Park Union.

Liverpool Record Office holds the records of the West Derby Union, 1848-1940 (ref: 353 WES). These include minutes (1848-1930) and account books (1852-1855, 1900-1911).

The first workhouse built by the West Derby Union was built on Mill Road in 1838-45. By 1891 it had been renamed Mill Road Infirmary and it later became Mill Road Maternity Hospital. The records of this workhouse are catalogued with the records of Mill Road Maternity Hospital (ref: 614 MIL). These include Creed Register (1870-1939).

In 1864-1869 a new workhouse called Walton Workhouse was built on Rice Lane at Walton-on-the-Hill to serve the northern part of the Union. The workhouse later became Walton Institution and then Walton Hospital until its closure in the late 1990s. The records of Walton Workhouse are catalogued at 353 WES/13-14. However, very little has survived. Some records of Walton Hospital can be found in the Merseyside Record Office (ref: M614 WAL).



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In 1889-90 a workhouse was built at Belmont Road. It catered for able-bodied men and women, many of whom were vagrants. In about 1917 it became known as Belmont Road Institution and it later became Newsham Hospital. The records of the institution are catalogued with the records of Newsham General Hospital (ref. 614 NGN). These include admission and discharge registers (1924-1970) and birth and deaths registers (1909-1988).

In 1906 the West Derby Union bought the house and lands then known as Alder Hey with the ultimate intention of using the site to build '...a workhouse for the accommodation of chronic infirm paupers'. The foundation stone was laid on 30 March 1911 and it was used both as a military and a children's hospital during the First World War. The word 'children's' was added to the hospital's name in 1951 so that it became 'Alder Hey Children's Hospital'. Liverpool Record Office holds records of Alder Hey Hospital (ref: 614 ALD). However, early records relating to patients appear not to have survived.

Seafield House was opened by the West Derby Union in c.1914 in Seaforth. It was an institution for 'mental defectives' and the patients were mainly children. In 1939 all the children were evacuated to Greaves Hall Hospital, Southport. Merseyside Record Office holds the records of Greaves Hall Hospital (inc. Seafield House), 1914-1975 (ref: M614 GRE).

The West Derby Union administered numerous other institutions such as Deysbrook House, West Derby, a convalescent home for children. Unless mentioned in this leaflet, the records of these institutions appear not to have survived.

In 1922 the areas and institutions under the jurisdiction of the Toxteth Park Union and Liverpool Select Vestry were added to the West Derby Union.

TOXTETH PARK UNION

In 1857 the township of Toxteth Park became a Poor Law Union. It built a new workhouse on Smithdown Road in 1859. The workhouse later became Smithdown Road Institution and then Sefton General Hospital. The records of the institution are catalogued with the records of Sefton General Hospital (ref. 614 SEF). These include admission and discharge registers



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PRESCOT UNION

The Prescott Poor Law Union was formed in 1837 and in 1843 a new workhouse was opened on Warrington Road in Whiston. Prescott Union Workhouse later became Whiston Hospital. The townships of Speke, Little Woolton and Much Woolton which are now in the City of Liverpool were part of this union. The records of the Prescott Poor Law Union are held by Lancashire Record Office (ref: PUP). Some records of Whiston Hospital are held by Knowsley Archives and St Helens Local History and Archives Library.

COTTAGE HOMES

Fazakerley Cottage Homes was opened on 27 March 1889 by the West Derby Union for the accommodation of pauper children. In 1901 the Liverpool Select Vestry followed the West Derby example and opened its own Cottage Homes at Olive Mount in Wavertree. Liverpool Record Office holds the records of these cottage homes (ref: 352 SOC).

A Working Boys' Home was situated at 101 and 103 Shaw Street. No. 101 opened in 1889 and no. 103 in 1894 as the Wesleyan Mission Boys' Homes. In 1914 it was taken over by the West Derby Union. It became known simply as the 'Boys' Home' in c.1948. Liverpool Record Office holds Admission and Discharge registers for this home, 1934-1951 (ref: 352 SOC/3).

A Domestic Training Home for Girls was located at 57 Shaw Street and administered by the West Derby Union. The Toxteth Park Union also ran a Children's Home at Richmond Lodge, Church Road, Wavertree. No records of these homes appear to have survived.

1929 AND THE PUBLIC ASSISTANCE COMMITTEE

The Local Government Act 1929 abolished the Poor Law Board of Guardians and their functions were transferred to County Councils or County Boroughs.



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Thus after 31 March 1930 the West Derby Union ceased to exist and the Poor Law administrative functions belonging to the Board of Guardians of the West Derby Union were separated and transferred respectively to the Liverpool City Council, Bootle County Borough Council and Lancashire County Council. In Liverpool the Public Assistance Committee was appointed "pursuant to the provisions of the Administrative Scheme with regard to Poor Law for the City of Liverpool", sixty member were members of Liverpool City Council and the remaining thirty were representatives of various Public Authorities and Voluntary Organisations.

The Public Assistance Committee became responsible for the following institutions (as listed in *The Liverpool, Bootle, Birkenhead and Wallasey Official Red Book* (1931)):

Alder Hey Hospital
Belmont Road Institution
Cleaver Sanatorium, Heswall
Cottage Homes, Fazakerley
Cottage Homes, Olive Mount, Wavertree
Kirkdale Homes
Mill Road Infirmary
Seafield House Institution for Mental Defectives
Smithdown Road Hospital
Walton Hospital
Working Boys' Home, Shaw Street

Liverpool Record Office holds some records of the Public Assistance Committee (ref: 352 ASS). The minutes of the Public Assistance Committee are catalogued at 352 MIN/ASS.

1948 - THE END OF THE POOR LAW

The National Assistance Act 1948 and National Health Service Act 1946 came into effect from 5 July 1948 and brought the end of the Poor Law. Public Assistance Committees ceased to exist and their functions were transferred to various Government and Local Government Departments.



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DATA PROTECTION

Records that contain sensitive personal information of children are closed for 100 years and of adults for 75 years. This is in accordance with Section 1 of the Data Protection Act 1998 and Section 40 of the Freedom of Information Act 2000.

FURTHER READING

West Derby Union. *An Outline of the Main Features of the West Derby Union; Also of the Hospitals and Institutions referred to in the Souvenir presented to The Right Hon. Neville Chamberlain M.P. (Minister for Health), Upon the Occasion of his Visit, 9 October 1925.* Ref: Hq 362.51 WES . Gives an excellent outline of the main institutions administered by the West Derby Union (with photographs).

Jeremy Gibson and Colin Rogers, *Poor Law Union Record 2. The Midlands and Northern England* (Federation of Family History Societies, 1997), ref: H 929.107.2 FED

Jeremy Gibson and Colin Rogers, *Poor Law Union Record 4. Gazetteer of England and Wales* (Federation of Family History Societies, 1997), ref: H 929.107.2 FED

W. Lyon Blease, 'The Poor Law and the Parochial Government in Liverpool 1681-1834' in H. Peet (ed.), *Liverpool Vestry Books Vol. 1 1681-1799* (University of Liverpool, 1912), ref: H 353.04203 PEE

G. W. Oxley, 'The Permanent Poor in South-west Lancashire under the Old Poor Law' in J.R. Harris (ed.), *Liverpool & Merseyside. Essays in the Economic and Social History of the Port and its Hinterland* (Frank Case & Co. Ltd., 1969), ref: H 330.9 HAR.

<http://www.workhouses.org.uk/> is an excellent web site on the history of the workhouse and the poor law.

For more about hospital records please consult Liverpool Record Office Information Leaflet - 18 - Hospital Records

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LIVERPOOL RECORD OFFICE, LOCAL STUDIES AND FAMILY HISTORY SERVICE

Central Library, William Brown Street, Liverpool L3 8EW

General enquiries	0151 233 5817
Microfilm/microfiche bookings	0151 233 5811
Fax (Central Library)	0151 233 5886
E-mail	recoffice.central.library@liverpool.gov.uk

For opening hours, some catalogues and development news please
visit our website at www.liverpool.gov.uk/archives

Appointments are advisable for viewing sources on microfilm and on microfiche. A reader's ticket is needed to request archives, books, maps, photographs and watercolours. Please bring proof of name and address. You will be asked to leave any bags in lockers before consulting original material.

Annual closure for stock-taking and special projects
3rd and 4th weeks in June.



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