

## Poor law records at Wirral Archives Service

The study of Pool Law records can provide a rich source of information about both individuals and communities. This leaflet gives a brief history of the subject and lists the Poor Law records held at Wirral Archives Service.



### Wirral Archives Service

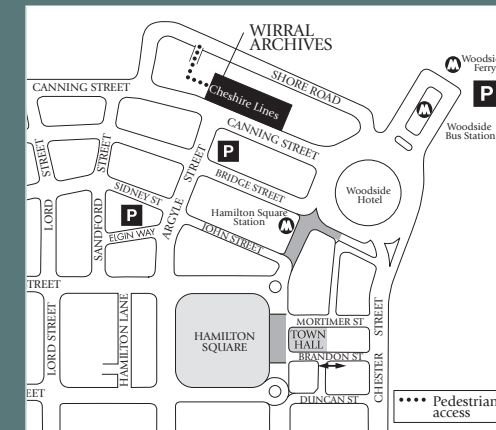
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(please go to Leisure and Culture -> Records and Archives).

### Opening hours

Monday - Friday, 9.30 - 16.30  
Saturday, 10.00 - 13.00

Please note that access to the Service is via Shore Road.



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## Poor law records

A guide to poor law records at Wirral Archives Service



## Brief History

In the Middle Ages care of the poor was undertaken by the Church. However from the Tudor period poor relief was undertaken by parish officials called Overseers of the Poor, who distributed funds raised by the parish poor rate.

In 1834 the Poor Law Amendment Act combined parishes into Poor Law Unions, run by Boards of Guardians. Each union was divided into districts in which a relieving officer would consider the circumstances of each person applying for help.

Able-bodied poor would be admitted to the workhouse, and those who could not work owing to ill health were supported by payments of 'outdoor relief'. Each Union Overseer would collect the poor rates to cover the costs of these activities from the residents of the union.

The introduction of old-age pensions and unemployment insurance between 1908 and 1911 removed much of the need for the Poor Laws. In 1930 the administration of the Poor Laws passed to the Public Assistance Committees of local councils, and many old workhouse infirmaries were converted into hospitals at the formation of the NHS in 1948.

The Wirral Poor Law Union was formed in 1836 from 54 constituent parishes, and a workhouse was built at Spital. (Clatterbridge Hospital now stands on the site.)

The growth of Birkenhead led in 1861 to the establishment of the Birkenhead Poor Law Union, consisting of the following former Wirral Union parishes: Bidston cum Ford, Birkenhead, Claughton cum Grange, Liscard, Noctorum, Oxton, Poulton cum Seacombe, Tranmere and Wallasey. A workhouse was opened in 1863 on Derby Road, Tranmere, and this later became part of St Catherine's Hospital.



## Records Held at Wirral Archives Service

Wirral Archives Service holds records of the Birkenhead Poor Law Union, and some records of the Wirral Poor Law Union.

Records of the Birkenhead Poor Law Union  
These include:

- Minutes from meetings of the General Board of the Poor Law Guardians and of the several committees of the Union from 1871 to 1930. These minutes contain a wealth of information about the Union's activities and administration, and in some cases information relating to individuals.
- Workhouse Registers, recording details of those admitted to the Birkenhead Union Workhouse. These include the 'Creed Registers', which record details of individuals

on admission (including religious denomination), and also birth, baptism and death registers for certain years.

- Civil registration and vaccination records. The Guardians acquired responsibilities beyond the care of the poor, including the listing of children to be vaccinated and the civil registration of births, marriages and deaths.
- Valuation lists. The Guardians levied a poor rate to carry out their work, and so registers of valuations of properties and rate books were created. These usually list both owners and occupiers of properties.
- Various records of the Birkenhead Poor Law Union, including letter books, accounts and statistics. These can all be found listed in the Poor Law and Workhouse catalogue in the search room.

Tracing Individuals through Records of the Birkenhead Poor Law Union  
The following list suggests some records held by Wirral Archives Service which may be used to trace individuals who worked for, or were cared for, by the Birkenhead Poor Law Union.

Workhouse Registers of Inmates  
Creed registers provide details of people admitted into the workhouse, including dates of birth and home addresses. Most inmates are listed alphabetically by surname. These registers date from 1864 to 1950, but some years may be missing.

Other useful sources include Staff Records, Minute Books, Union Records and Registrars' and Vaccination Records.



Records of the Wirral Poor Law Union  
Wirral Archives Service holds a small collection of records relating to the Wirral Union workhouse at Spital (listed with the records of Clatterbridge Hospital).

The main body of records relating to the Wirral Poor Law Union is held at Cheshire Record Office. These include minutes of the Board of Guardians, miscellaneous committees and workhouse officials' report books. For further information, the address is:

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