

Glamorgan Archives

~RECORDS OF POOR RELIEF~

The records of poor relief were created out of a need to look after the poor. The records relating to poor relief were produced at different times by different bodies; those created under the old poor law system, those created by the new poor law system, and those created by the successors of the poor law.

1. What was the Old Poor Law?

From the late sixteenth century until 1834, the parish was responsible for the relief of poverty. Parishioners set a poor relief rate and appointed unpaid overseers of the poor to collect and distribute the money. Poor relief was restricted to those who were 'settled' in the parish, and those who could not claim settlement could be sent back to the parish from which they came. By the early nineteenth century, social and economic changes meant that the system was more difficult to administer. A Royal Commission was set up to investigate the problem in 1832 and the Poor Law Amendment Act was passed in 1834.

Records of the Old Poor Law

The Archives hold a number of records relating to the administration of poor relief, including vestry minute books, overseers' books and other documents for various parishes in Glamorgan. Details of the records can be found in the 'Civil Parish' and 'Ecclesiastical Parish' catalogues.

Vestry Minute Books, 1759-1925

Vestry meetings were held periodically and attended by the more substantial ratepayers in the parish. Details of the matters discussed can be found in the minute books. These books have survived for only a small number of Glamorgan parishes.

Overseers' Rate and Account Books, 1637-1928

The overseers of the poor were responsible for the collection of the poor rates and the distribution of relief. The accounts kept by them show all the payments they made, both to individuals in poor relief, and for expenses incurred, for example, in the removal of paupers from the parish under settlement laws. The names of individuals receiving relief are also usually listed.

Glamorgan Quarter Sessions Records

Poor Law cases often came before Quarter Sessions, for example, cases under the settlement and vagrancy laws, filiation orders, and appeals against assessment of the poor rate. Cases might be mentioned in the following records:

Quarter Sessions Rolls	QSR
Quarter Sessions Minutes	QSM

A small number of other poor law documents have also survived:

Settlement papers, 1685-1808. In order to claim relief a pauper had to be 'settled' in the parish, and had to undergo a settlement examination. If they could not claim settlement, they could either be removed to their original parish, or that parish could be charged for their relief.

Removal orders, 1743-1842. These were taken against paupers who were ineligible for relief in a certain parish, under settlement rules. As a result of these orders, paupers could be removed to the parish from which they originally hailed.

Bastardy bonds and filiation orders, 1742-1801. The father of an illegitimate child would be encouraged by overseers and church wardens to enter into a bastardy bond to maintain the child, to ensure that the parish would not become responsible for the child. If he refused to do so, a filiation order would be obtained from the Quarter Sessions, which would force the father to pay.

2. What was the New Poor Law?

Under the 1834 Act, parishes were to be grouped together into Poor Law Unions. Poor rates continued to be collected by the parish, but in each union a Board of Guardians was elected to be responsible for organising poor relief and to build and run a workhouse. Relief to able-bodied paupers living outside the workhouse (Outdoor Relief) was no longer to be available. Conditions in the workhouse were deliberately harsh, to deter people from entering the workhouse unless they really had to.

In addition to the workhouses, Boards of Guardians were responsible for Industrial Schools and later cottage homes for children, hospitals for the sick, homes for the elderly.

Three Poor Law Unions were responsible for the relief of the poor in the eastern part of Glamorgan in 1836: Merthyr Tydfil, Cardiff, and Bridgend and Cowbridge Unions. In 1863, the Pontypridd Union was created from parishes formerly in the Cardiff Union and Merthyr Tydfil Union.

Records of the New Poor Law

	Bridgend & Cowbridge (U/B)	Cardiff Union (U/C)	Merthyr Union (U/MT)	Pontypridd Union (U/PP)
Workhouse Records	1900-1950	1846-1847 (1 volume)	1857-1940	1897-1948
Children's Homes	1879-1955	1905-1948	1877-1970	1892-1955
Outdoor Relief	1924-1925	1874, 1905		1930
Employee Records	1925-1932	1868-1957	1886-1930	1885-1927

Minute books

These contain the minutes of the meetings of the Boards of Guardians, and its sub-committees. Details on individual cases may be included, in addition to administrative information. Minute books are held for all the unions from 1836 (1863 for Pontypridd) until 1930.

Administrative records

A number of administrative records are held in the collection, most of which relate to the union workhouses, industrial schools and hospitals, and contain information about individuals admitted to the institutions. These include:

- creed registers
- admission and discharge registers
- registers of births and deaths
- registers of lunatics
- lists of paupers, which also contain information about those in receipt of outdoor relief

Other Records

Among the other poor law union records held are:

Masters' journals and report books, which give details of the day-to-day events of poor law institutions

Day books, account and stock books and inventories, which detail items consumed and purchased

Year books, which give details of all the union institutions (including plans and brief histories, regulations and dietaries) lists of all Union officers (including income) and details of the arrangement of the payment of outdoor relief as well as information on the Board of Guardians

Letter books, containing correspondence and applications for employment

Notices which were displayed in institutions

Infirmary and hospital records

Records relating to the non-poor law functions of the Boards, such as the vaccination of schoolchildren

Settlement examinations

Where can lists of the records be found?

Most of the records are kept together in the 'Poor Law Unions' catalogue. However, additional records can be found in other collections:

Settlement papers for the Bridgend and Cowbridge Union can be found in the Petty Sessions binder (PSNEW12)

Childrens Home records for Cardiff can be found in the Social Services binder (SD/SC and BCPAC)

Records for Ely Homes and Hospital can be found under the reference (DHE4)

3. After the Poor Law Unions

In the early twentieth century, measures such as the introduction of Old Age pensions in 1908 and forms of unemployment and health insurance in 1911 diminished the role of the Board of Guardians. They continued in existence until April 1930, when their responsibilities passed to Local Government, and were undertaken firstly by Public Assistance Committees, and later by Social Services.

Records of the Public Assistance Committee (PAC)

The Archives hold records of the PAC of the Glamorgan County Council, (GC/PA) and of Cardiff County Borough Council (BC/PAC). The records of the Public Assistance Committee for Glamorgan County Council include letter books, correspondence, case papers and registers for the period 1930-1958. And for Cardiff, minute books, registers and correspondence dating from 1913-1978.

Social Services Records

South Glamorgan (SG/SD) – Documents cover the period 1891-1981, and include children's homes admission and discharge registers, correspondence and registers and administrative documents from homes for the elderly.

Mid Glamorgan (MG/SD) – Children's homes registers, 1938-1984

Glamorgan County Council (GC/S) - contains documents from the 1930s to the 1960s, including case papers, returns of persons in receipt of benefit, and some admission books and registers.

Closure of Poor Law Records

By their nature, poor law records contain confidential details on named individuals. In order to minimise any revelation of details on people who might still be living, all hospital records and children's case papers, workhouse and cottage homes reports are closed for 100 years from the date of the last entry.

Ordering documents

Please note that some of the documents are kept in an outside repository. A week's notice is required so that they can be brought into the Record Office.

Useful Books

The following books and articles deal with poor relief in Glamorgan and are available in our library. Those marked with an asterisk can be purchased from the Record Office:

* Raymond K.J. Grant, *On the Parish. An Illustrated Source Book on the Care of the Poor under the Poor Law* (1988)

* Tydfil Thomas, *Poor Relief in Merthyr Tydfil in Victorian Times* (1992)

Edna Adams, *Indoor and Outdoor Relief for the Poor of Cardiff, 1926-1936* Unpublished thesis for diploma in Local History (1993)

Ian Dewar, 'George Clive and the Establishment of the New Poor Law in Glamorgan' in *Morgannwg* Vol. 11 (1967)

Tydfil Davies Jones, 'Poor Law Administration in Merthyr Tydfil Union, 1834-1894' in *Morgannwg* Vol 8 (1964)

A.C. Davies, 'The Old Poor Law in an Industrialising Parish, Aberdare 1818-1836' in *The Welsh History Review* Vol 8, No3 (1977)

J. H. Thomas and W. E. Wilkins, *The Bridgend- Cowbridge Union. Workhouse and Guardians* (1995)

Useful Website: www.workhouses.org.uk