

Sources for the Study of the Poor Law in Sheffield

A handwritten account book titled "ECCLESFIELD Relief". It lists various items and amounts, such as "Given to poor Rovers at", "Several times", "Given to Mr. Maitland", etc. The entries are organized in a table with columns for descriptions and amounts.

Front Cover Illustrations - left to right:

Removal Order addressed to the Overseers of the Poor of Sheffield, 1766
(*Sheffield Archives: TC367/43*)

The poor in Sheffield, c. 1870
(*Sheffield Local Studies Library: Picture Sheffield s03008*)

Extract from Ecclesfield (St Mary) Overseers of the Poor accounts, 1712
(*Sheffield Archives: PR54/145/1*)

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You can download a copy of this *Study Guide* from www.sheffield.gov.uk/archives

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Introduction

This *Study Guide* provides references for sources located at Sheffield Archives and the Local Studies Library relating to the study of Poor Law records. The aim of the guide is to provide an overview of the topic and direct the researcher towards key sources. It offers a brief context in which to place primary source material and is not intended as a detailed history of the Poor Law.

The roots of English Poor Law legislation can be traced to Tudor times and early laws passed to deal with problems presented by vagrants and beggars. However, the history of the Poor Law in England and Wales tends to be framed by two major statutes: the *Old Poor Law* of 1601, passed during the reign of Elizabeth I (which codified the array of earlier Tudor and Elizabethan poor law legislation) and the *New Poor Law* of 1834 (which modified the system of poor relief from one delivered somewhat haphazardly at local parish level to a more centralised system, centred on larger-scale Poor Law Union workhouses).

Hence this Study Guide has been divided into three sections to reflect the major pillars of the Old and New Poor Laws, which shaped pre-welfare state care of the poor in England and Wales:

Part 1: Before the Old Poor Law of 1601 (for which only limited documentation relating to poor relief has survived in our holdings)

Part 2: The Old Poor Law 1601 - 1834 (for which the key extant records are often grouped according to parish [to reflect the administrative unit which produced them] but the survival of which is extremely variable from parish to parish)

Part 3: The New Poor Law 1834 (for which separate sets of records have survived for each of the Poor Law Unions in Sheffield, but also for which records are available for individual civil parishes/townships which continued to have an input into poor relief [with reduced roles] within the Unions).

Any study of the Poor Law necessarily involves consideration of workhouse sources (particularly with regards to the New Poor Law of 1834 which was centred on the Union Workhouse system). Prior to the compilation of this study guide, a separate guide on [Workhouses research guide | Sheffield City Council](#) had already been produced by our service. There is inevitably overlap between this poor law study guide and the existing workhouses study guide. Whilst workhouses are mentioned in this study guide, for more detailed information about workhouses in Sheffield (and the local sources available specifically on workhouses), researchers are directed to consult the separate workhouses guide, which explores the workhouse topic in greater detail.

Timeline showing key dates:

| | |
|-------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1536 - 1540 | 'Dissolution of the Monasteries' instigated by Henry VIII (ending the monastic system of care for poor through hospitals, etc.) |
| 1547 | Law passed that impotent poor were to be conveyed 'from constable to constable' back to their originating parish where they were to be relieved with alms |
| 1552 | Act introducing parish registers of the poor and recommending each parish appoints two alms collectors |
| 1563 | Act categorising the poor into able-bodied, idle and impotent poor and empowering Justices of the Peace to raise compulsory funds for poor relief |
| 1572 | Act introducing a local property tax, the <i>poor rate</i> |
| 1576 | Act encouraging towns to provide work for the unemployed through workhouses/poorhouses |
| 1597 | Act giving Justices of the Peace additional powers to raise funds for poor relief and also creating a new position of <i>Overseer of the Poor</i> |
| 1590s | Series of failed harvests in England (exacerbating poverty) |
| 1601 | <i>Act for the Relief of the Poor</i> ('Old Poor Law') passed, making the <i>parish</i> the basic unit responsible for poor relief |
| 1628 | First workhouse established in Sheffield at West Bar |
| 1662 | The <i>Settlement Act</i> passed, establishing the settlement system (to identify the particular parish responsible for a poor relief claim) |
| 1834 | <i>Poor Law Amendment Act</i> ('New Poor Law') passed, grouping parishes into Poor Law Unions and centring poor relief on the 'Union Workhouse' |
| 1837 | In Sheffield, the Ecclesall Bierlow Poor Law Union and Sheffield Poor Law Union established. |
| 1842 -1843 | Ecclesall Bierlow Union builds a new workhouse at Cherrytree Hill, Nether Edge |
| 1871 | Poor Law Board replaced by the <i>Local Government Board</i> |
| 1881 | Sheffield Union Workhouse relocated to Fir Vale |
| 1925 | By order of the Ministry of Health, Ecclesall Bierlow Union and Sheffield Union dissolved and the new <i>Sheffield Union</i> created |
| 1929 | Local Government Act passed, abolishing the system of poor law unions in England and Wales, and their boards of guardians, passing their powers to local authorities |
| 1930 | By this point, Ecclesall Bierlow Union Institution was known as <i>Nether Edge Hospital</i> and the former Sheffield Union Workhouse (by this point Fir Vale Institution) became the <i>City General Hospital</i> (later Northern General Hospital) |
| 1948 | <i>National Assistance Act</i> passed, formally abolishing the Poor Law system |

PART 1: BEFORE THE OLD POOR LAW OF 1601

Before the Old Poor Law

Prior to the *Reformation* (and the establishment of the Church of England) it was considered to be the religious duty of all Christians to look after the destitute, following the examples set by monks and nuns. The *Dissolution of the Monasteries*, instigated by Henry VIII between 1536 and 1540, led to considerable social upheaval, leaving many poor people without a place of refuge (as well as diverting vast sums of money into the royal coffers). Following the Reformation, and the religious turmoil and social change it brought about, there was a noticeable decline in many of the old values and moral expectations (in terms of responsibilities and charity to the poor). Consequently, it became necessary to regulate the relief of poverty by law.

A law was enacted in 1547 (during the reign of Edward VI) that the officers of each town should convey the impotent poor on horseback, cart, chariot, etc., to the next constable, and so 'from constable to constable' until they were brought to the place where they were born, or had resided for three years, where they were to be kept and nourished with alms.¹

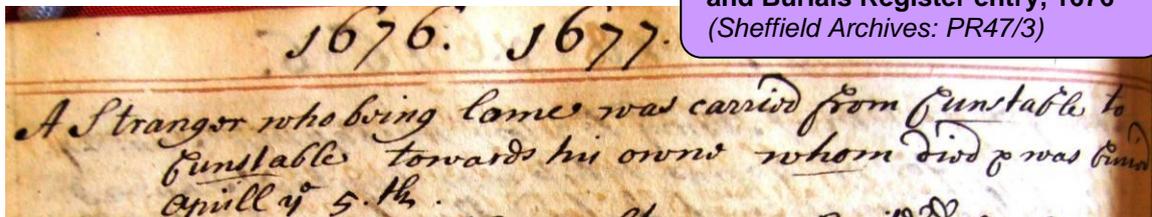
This enactment is evident in the early accounts of the Sheffield Town Trustees:

'Ffirst payde for caryeage of a creple to the next constable iij d [4p]'

Transcript of extract from Sheffield Town Trustees accounts, 1567
(Sheffield Archives: TT/4/1/1)

A later example of this practice (of an impotent pauper being conveyed from one parish constable to the next, back towards his/her originating parish) can be found in a baptism and burials' register for Harthill Parish Church:

Harthill (All Hallows) Baptisms and Burials Register entry, 1676
(Sheffield Archives: PR47/3)



1676. 1677.
A Stranger who bring lame was carried from Funstable to Funstable towards his owne whom did p was buried April 5. th

An Act of 1552 introduced parish registers of the poor, enabling an official record to be kept of those considered to be 'poor' (although no such pauper registers from the Elizabethan period have survived in collections at Sheffield

¹ See J. D. Leader, 'Extracts from the Earliest Book of Accounts belonging to the Town Trustees of Sheffield 1566 to 1707' (1879), p. 12 (*Sheffield Local Studies Library: Local Pamphlets, vol. 60 (042 SST)*)

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Archives). This 1552 Act also recommended that each parish appointed two alms collectors to assist the churchwardens in collecting money from the church congregation every Sunday and then distribute the proceeds to the registered poor.

During the reign of Elizabeth I, a further series of laws was introduced by the English Parliament (in 1563, 1572, 1576 and 1597) to deal with the increasing problem of the poor, culminating in the Old Poor Law of 1601. Prior to the passing of the Old Poor Law, a series of poor harvests in England in the 1590s had exacerbated the issue of poverty.

The Act of 1563 categorised the types of poor people to determine the treatment they might receive:

- *Able-bodied poor (deserving poor)* - those who were able and willing to work but unable to find employment. They were to be given help in the form of 'outdoor relief' or work in return for a wage.
- *Impotent poor (deserving poor)* - those who were too old/ill/young to work. They were to be given 'indoor relief' - looked after in almshouses, hospitals, orphanages or poorhouses/workhouses. Orphans and children of the poor could be given a trade apprenticeship.
- *Idle poor or 'sturdy beggars' (undeserving poor)* - those who could work but would not. They could be whipped publicly through the streets in order to make them learn the error of their ways.

In 1563, *Justices of the Peace* (local officials appointed to guard the peace) were also empowered to raise compulsory funds for the relief of the poor.

The 1572 Act introduced a local property tax, the *poor rate*. The 1576 Act encouraged towns to provide work for the unemployed through workhouses/poorhouses (where raw materials such as wool were provided and the poor supplied the labour).

The 1597 Act gave Justices of the Peace additional powers to raise funds for poor relief and also created a new position of *Overseer of the Poor*. Overseers of the Poor were responsible for calculating the poor rate a parish required, collecting the rate from property owners, dispensing money or handouts (such as food and clothes) to the poor, and supervising the parish poorhouse.

A key source of material for the early study of the care of the poor in Sheffield (which pre-dates the Old Poor Law of 1601) are the records of the **Burgery of Sheffield (later the Town Trustees and Church Burgesses)**.

The origins of the Burgery of Sheffield dates back to 1297 when the manorial overlord Thomas de Furnival granted a charter to his free tenants of Sheffield (allowing them to own their own land in fee, thus uniting them as a chartered community). The town burgesses were originally charged with both the secular and spiritual affairs of the Sheffield township, in effect becoming the

town's early (post-manorial) local governing body, responsible for such matters as collecting taxes, repairing roads, equipping soldiers, maintaining the town's defences, and, inevitably, dealing with the poor.

The Burgery of Sheffield had developed into two separate bodies by the mid 16th century. Whilst the *town burgesses* (later *town trustees*) attended to Sheffield's secular administration, the spiritual and ecclesiastical affairs of the parish and the parish church were dealt with by the *church burgesses*, hence two distinct collections of records at Sheffield Archives: the records of the **Town Trustees (Sheffield Archives: TT)** and the records of the **Church Burgesses Trust (Sheffield Archives: CB)**.

Surviving records created by the Town Burgesses (later Town Trustees) (the secular arm of the Burgery) include accounts, 1566 - 1929, and minutes, 1709 - 1953.

Transcripts of extracts from Town Trustees accounts, 1586 - 1588
(Sheffield Archives: TT/4/1/1)

'It gyven to Ed. Elles a poore boy when he went to dwell in Northforkk ij s iij d [3 shillings 4 pence]'

'It gyven to a poore woman yt came from London yt was gott with child with Ed. B ij s [2 shillings]'

'It gyven to Gilbert Spencer being verye sicke and poore' ij s [2 shillings]

'It gyven to poore Bower wiff for the Releving of her poore children vj d [6 pence]'

Transcripts of Sheffield town trustees accounts [1566 - 1707] can be found in J. D. Leader, *The Records of the Burgery of Sheffield* (Sheffield Archives: TT Print Source; Sheffield Local Studies Library: 942.74 S) and J. D. Leader, 'Extracts from the Earliest Book of Accounts belonging to the Town Trustees of Sheffield 1566 to 1707' (Sheffield Local Studies Library: Local Pamphlets, vol. 60 (042 SST)).

Since church and secular affairs were often inextricably linked, records relating to the poor will also be found in the Church Burgesses collection. For example, the early Church Burgesses accounts contain an account of money distributed to the poor, 1575 - 1576 (Sheffield Archives: CB/159). Surviving records created by the Sheffield Church Burgesses include account books, 1557 - 1939 and minute books, 1798 - 1959.

Finding records relating to the poor of Sheffield which pre-date the Old Poor Law of 1601

As well as accounts of the Sheffield Town Trustees dating from 1566 and accounts of the Sheffield Church Burgesses dating from 1557, Sheffield Archives also holds Churchwardens' accounts for the ancient parish of Ecclesfield (St Mary) which date back to 1520 (Sheffield Archives: PR54/86-96; accounts [1520 - 1651] also on *microfilm A80*).

PART 2: THE OLD POOR LAW 1601 - 1834

The Old Poor Law, 1601

From the late Middle Ages, the parish had become increasingly important as a unit of civil administration. From the 1500s, unpaid parish officers were responsible for keeping the peace, repairing roads and assisting the poor.

In 1601, the *Act for the Relief of the Poor* was passed, which became commonly known as the 'Old Poor Law'. Under the Old Poor Law, the parish was established as the basic administrative unit responsible for poor relief (with Churchwardens or Overseers of the Poor collecting poor rates and allocating relief). The Old Poor Law consolidated the earlier Elizabethan laws passed to tackle poverty (and formalised the earlier practices), creating a national system funded by levying local property taxes.

Under the Old Poor Law, poor relief was administered by the *parish vestry* (a committee consisting of the church minister, churchwardens and prominent local householders). Poor relief came in two types:

- *Outdoor relief*: the poor would remain in their own homes and were given either a 'dole' of money on which to live or were given relief in the form of handouts of daily necessities such as food, clothes and fuel.
- *Indoor relief*: the poor could be taken into a local almshouse or the poor house/workhouse.

As well as the provision of almshouses and poorhouses/workhouses, the Old Poor Law Act also encouraged the provision of materials such as flax, hemp and wool to be made available for the able-bodied poor so they could be set to work (able-bodied paupers who refused to work were liable to be placed in a *House of Correction* or prison). The Old Poor Law Act also allowed for the setting to work and apprenticeship of pauper children.

The Parish Chest

Early parish records relating to the poor (including Overseers of the Poor accounts, Vestry minutes, pauper apprenticeship papers, bastardy orders, etc.) are often found amongst so called *parish chest* records (the name derives from the old parish church chest in which the records were originally kept).

Overseers of the Poor

Under the Old Poor Law, each parish generally appointed two officials, known as the *Overseers of the Poor*, who were responsible for assessing the financial needs of the poor, setting a rate to raise money for poor relief, collecting poor rate from local householders and distributing relief to those in need. Overseers of the Poor were also responsible for supervising the parish poorhouse or workhouse (if the parish had one). The post of Overseer of the Poor (which, as mentioned above, was first introduced in

1597) was just one of the offices in the parish vestry but was the role with the most direct responsibility for dealing with the poor.

Information about the Overseers of the Poor (including the amounts of money they collected and how it was paid out) is well recorded in the various parish records (Ref. PR) and township/civil parish records (Ref. CA) held at Sheffield Archives.

| ECCLESFIELD. Relief. | | ? | ? |
|----------------------------------|--|----|---|
| Given to Maria Rivenon att | | 3 | 0 |
| Several times | | 3 | 0 |
| Given to Mrs. Martin | | 12 | 0 |
| Given to John Martin att several | | 19 | 0 |
| Given to Mrs. Dug. att sever | | 02 | 0 |
| Given to John Dug. att sever | | 09 | 0 |
| Given to Hill. Dug. att sever | | 03 | 0 |
| Given to Mrs. Merrill att | | 03 | 0 |
| Given for Bryn. (2) Crase | | 02 | 6 |
| more for a pair of shoes & shoes | | | |

Ecclesfield (St Mary) Overseers of the Poor accounts, showing money disbursed to the poor, 1712
(Sheffield Archives: PR54/145/1)

Expences of the Workhouse

| | | | |
|----------------------------------------|-------------------------|---|--------|
| Aug 25 1739. Given Val: Smith 2/6 | Given wid: Addy 1/6 | - | 0:4:0 |
| a hatt for William Rushby 1/4 | Ann Yaddy shoes mending | - | 0:1:7 |
| Two skins for John Eatons Britchup 1/8 | Thread 1: Taylor: 6 | - | 0:1:8 |
| 27. of Beef 4/6. Barns children 2/8 | Tobacco 1: | - | 0:8:2 |
| Sugar 2: to Mrs. Nugey for milke: 6: | Dats drying 1: | - | 0:1:8 |
| Sam. Lockwood Steer. Charles Green | | | 0:17:0 |

Ecclesfield (St Mary) workhouse/poor house expenses, 1739
(Sheffield Archives: PR54/144/1)

The Overseers of the Poor reported to the *Churchwardens* so relevant records may also appear in *Churchwardens accounts*. It is also sometimes worth checking *Vestry minutes* (i.e. minutes of the parishes presiding council) since Parish Vestry meetings appointed Overseers of the Poor and often recorded their decisions.

Quarter Sessions Court
Old Poor Law documents relating to the Sheffield area (such as settlement removal orders, bastardy bonds and apprenticeship indentures) were often drawn up on the authorisation of the *West Riding Justices of the Peace* (who had county-wide responsibilities for guarding the peace) and many poor law cases would have found their way into the West Riding Quarter Sessions Court. Records for the West Riding Quarter Sessions Court are held at [West Yorkshire Archive Service, Wakefield](#). For parts of Sheffield formerly in Derbyshire, relevant records may have survived in the Derbyshire Quarter Sessions Court collection held at [Derbyshire Record Office](#).

| | | | |
|----------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---|----|
| Sept. 16 | gone to Ringers when Ann was married | " | 2 |
| Oct. 8 | My Journey to Retford to make Enquiry about a poor's house | " | 8 |
| | to Peter Balk Amm. Godley; Rent | " | 12 |
| | Post for a Letter | " | " |
| Nov 7 | Coals for Wid. Slators | " | 7 |
| | for Salve for Tho. Darby | " | " |
| Dec. 21 | Expences at dividing the Poor's Money | " | 2 |
| 1778 | for a Wheel for wid. Slators | " | 6 |
| Mar. 25 | to In. Mashay his year's salary. | " | 2 |
| | to Nat. Swallow for 18th of Place | " | 12 |
| | to Wid. Slator for spinning of D. | " | 12 |
| | My Journey to Sutton in Ashfield to Enquire abt. Eliz. Gregory's settlement. | " | 5 |
| | My Journey to Tickhill for Expences for Ben. Kay's Removal | " | 4 |
| | My Journey to Sheff. to put in new Overseers | " | 4 |
| | for the Warrant | " | 2 |
| | to Joseph. Denton for the Doctor for Tho. Darby | " | 1 |
| | to Rich. Northen | " | 5 |

Harthill (All Hallows) overseers of the poor accounts, 1777 - 1778 (Sheffield Archives: PR47/89)

These accounts illustrate some of the duties of the Overseers of the Poor, for example:

- "journey to Retford to make enquiry about a poore house"
- "journey to Sutton in Ashfield to enquire about Eliz[beth] Gregory's settle[men]t"
- "journey to Tickhill for expenses for Ben Kay's removal"

Note: the concepts of *settlement* and *removal* are discussed below.

Settlement and Removal

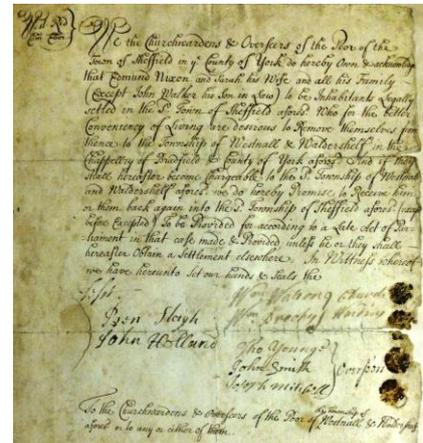
The introduction of poor relief soon brought about the increased movement of destitute people to regions where ratepayers were more affluent and the opportunity to claim poor relief was greater. The issues this created led to the *Settlement Act*, which was passed in 1662, with the aim of identifying which parish was responsible for an individual's claim to poor relief. Anyone 'settled' in a parish had a right to claim poor relief from it, others did not.

Qualification for legal 'settlement' within a parish was most frequently determined by an individual's parentage or marriage, although claims could also depend on location of jobs and value of property. It is fair to say that only the better off could change their settlement easily.

The main documents created by the settlement system were *settlement certificates*, *settlement examinations* and *removal orders*. The survival of such records is very patchy, but they can be of great value to family and social historians, particularly if an inter-related set have survived. They can offer an unrivalled picture of the lives of the working classes and those below the poverty line. They can show the migration of people and can also provide a 'potted biography' of an individual or family who fell on hard times.

Once the legality of a claim had been established by the parish vestry, a person could be granted a **settlement certificate**, which entitled him or her to claim poor relief. A person wishing to move elsewhere could hand this settlement certificate into the vestry of the new parish to satisfy the new parish that they were coming there for legitimate reasons, indemnifying the new parish from having to support them should they fall on hard times (instead the burden of poor relief would reside with their original parish of settlement).

Settlement certificate for Edmund Nixon and Sarah his wife and family from the Churchwardens and Overseers of the Poor for Sheffield to the Churchwardens and Overseers of the Poor for Westnall and Waldershef, c. 1704
(Sheffield Archives: Wil. D457/3)



In this settlement certificate the Churchwardens and Overseers of the Poor for Sheffield confirm that they:
'hereby own and acknowledge that Edmund Nixon and Sarah his wife and all his family (except John Walker his son in law) to be inhabitants legally settled in the town of Sheffield...who for the better conveniency of living are desirous to remove themselves from thence to the township of Westnall and Waldershef in the Chapelry of Bradfield...'



Ecclesfield settlement examination of Benjamin Armitage, 1754
(Sheffield Archives: PR54/22/3/11/1)

Claims to settlement were tackled by local overseers through a process of **settlement examination**. The personal history of each individual's movements was examined in order to establish the validity of a claim.

'He is aged about twenty and four years of age and is married. Was born at Wortley .. and at the age of nine years was bound apprentice by indenture to one Richard Beardshale' ...

'Wife of Thomas Hall a private in the Thirtieth Regiment of Foot now lying at Gibraltar... She is about twenty years of age... born in Rosscarbery in the County of Cork in the Kingdom of Ireland; When she was about sixteen... married to the said Thomas Hall... husband... born at Edensor in the County of Derby and... bound apprentice... to William Shaw of Sheffield... cutler...'



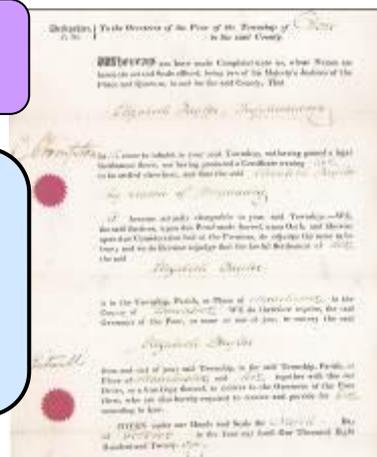
Sheffield settlement examination of Jane Hall, 1760
(Sheffield Archives: TC433/10c)

The Settlement Act authorised Justices of the Peace to issue **removal orders**, ordering the removal of newcomers (or *strangers*) back to the parish of settlement responsible for their poor relief.

Illegitimate children could be granted settlement in the place they were born - an issue which often led parishes to make concerted attempts to remove unmarried pregnant women from their parish (if they were not legally settled there) in order to prevent the new-born baby from becoming a burden on parish poor relief. An illustration of this can be found in the extract below:

Dore removal order, 9 Oct 1826
(Sheffield Archives: JC1258/27)

'To the Overseers of the Poor of the Township of Dore...Whereas you have made Complaint unto us...being two of his Majesty's Justices of the Peace...that Elizabeth Taylor, singlewoman hath come to inhabit your said township, not having gained a legal settlement there...and...by reason of pregnancy is actually becoming chargeable to your said township...



This removal order goes on to show how the Justices of the Peace for the County of Derby uphold the complaint of the Overseers of the Poor for Dore and order the removal of Elizabeth Taylor to Manchester (the place where her legal settlement is adjudged to be).

An index to the names of individuals mentioned in local settlement cases (where such documents have survived) is available at Sheffield Archives.

Pauper Apprenticeship

From 1601, under the Old Poor Law, the parish could apprentice pauper children to local craftsmen so they could learn a trade (in theory equipping the children with skills to keep them in employment for the rest of their working lives). The arrangement involved a contract being drawn up between parish officials, the master and the apprentice, known as an *apprenticeship indenture/certificate*. Employers were obliged to take pauper apprentices or they faced a fine. Apprenticeship indentures typically record the name of the apprentice (and often the apprentice's father), the master, the trade, the length of the apprenticeship, and the terms (whereby the master often pledged to provide training, clothing, board and lodging and the apprentice pledged to be of good behaviour!).



Sheffield pauper apprenticeship indenture, 1682 (Sheffield Archives: MD634/1)

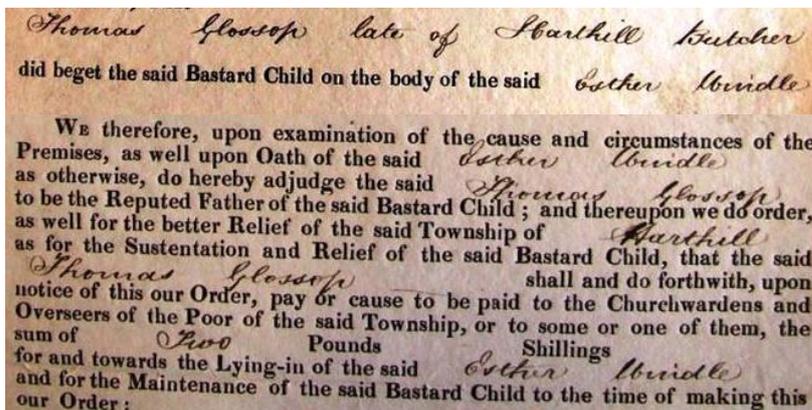
This indenture attests that the churchwardens and overseers of the poor for the parish of Sheffield:

'do put place and bind Susanna Bower, a poor childe of ye said town, of the age of 9, with William Bullas, joiner...'

Names of pauper apprenticeship children may also appear in Vestry minutes (on dates when the Vestry decided to 'put out' the child as an apprentice).

Bastardy

As evident in the Elizabeth Taylor case above, illegitimate children (with no father to look after them) were a particular concern for the parish, being an obvious drain on their resources. Under the Old Poor Law, upon the birth of an illegitimate child, the parish authorities would often seek to get fathers of illegitimate children to pay maintenance for the child's upkeep. The unmarried mother was often pressurised by parish officials to reveal the baby's father's name. A *bastardy bond* or *bastardy order* could then be drawn up to compel the father to accept responsibility for and contribute financially towards the maintenance of the child.



Harthill (All Hallows) bastardy order, 1833 (Sheffield Archives: PR47/96/139)



Handsworth Civil Parish Overseers of the Poor Day Book, showing bastardy orders and payments, 1809 - 1817 (Sheffield Archives: CA19/1)

End of the Old Poor Law

In the late 1700s, there was mounting concern in Sheffield over the efficacy of the poor law and in particular over workhouse conditions.

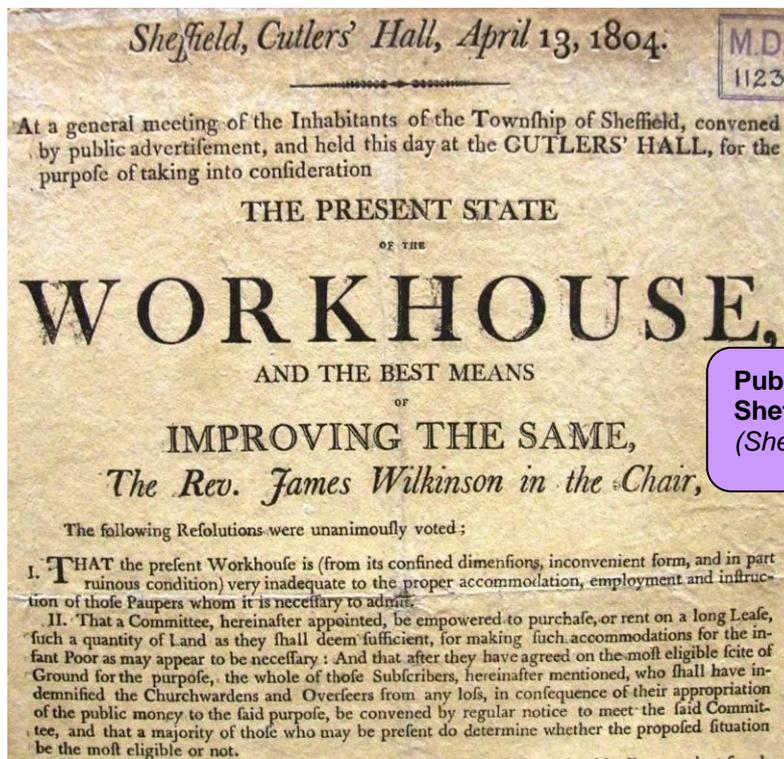
Transcripts of extracts from pamphlet titled *Facts and Observations relating to the state of the workhouse, 1789*

(Sheffield Local Studies Library: Local Pamphlets Vol. 63 No. 1 (042S))

'...the Sheffield Workhouse is a scene of distress, of illness, and profligacy [immorality]...'

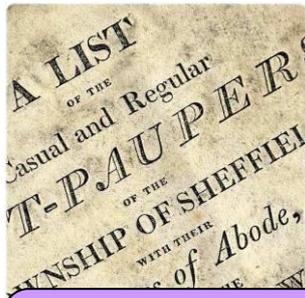
'...the Boys frequently run away from their service, and – if not enlisted as soldiers – become vagabonds and thieves.'

'...the town, for want of a proper Workhouse, maintains in a state of idleness a considerable number of Women, who might and ought to be compelled to maintain themselves...'



Public appeal concerning Sheffield Workhouse, 1804
(Sheffield Archives: MD1123)

Such concerns over workhouses were echoed nationally, and, in 1797, Sir Frederic Eden published the influential text *The State of the Poor* which examined the living conditions of the poorer classes and the abysmal state of workhouses in the country, concluding that the Old Poor Law of 1601 was a destructive drain on society's resources. A facsimile copy of this text is available at the Reference and Information Library, Sheffield (Sheffield Reference and Information Library: 368.4[0942]).



List of Sheffield Paupers, 1808
(*Sheffield Local Studies Library:*
352.9)

Finding Old Poor Law records relating to Sheffield

A full list of surviving records at Sheffield Archives and Sheffield Local Studies Library relating to the Old Poor, grouped into the main document types (Overseer of the Poor accounts, poor rate assessments, Vestry minutes, pauper apprenticeship papers and bastardy papers) and arranged by parish, is available at the end of this publication.

Pressure from the town's inhabitants over the state of the workhouse finally led to a new workhouse for Sheffield being established in 1829 in a former cotton mill on Kelham Street (for up to 600 inmates). However, nationally concern over the poor law persisted. As well as misgivings about the state of many workhouses, the mounting cost of looking after the poor elicited complaints that the system was encouraging the poor to be lazy and avoid work. Such criticisms helped to bring about the passing of the *New Poor Law* in 1834.

PART 3: THE NEW POOR LAW 1834

The New Poor Law 1834

By the turn of the 19th century, the traditional view of poverty being inevitable (with the poor seen in the main as innocent victims of their situation and therefore the relief of poverty a necessary Christian duty) had begun to be replaced by a growing more unsympathetic view that the poor were largely responsible for their situation and had the power to improve their prospects if they chose to do so. Such a view underpinned the 1834 'Poor Law Amendment Act', known as *The New Poor Law*.

The New Poor Law was designed to create a more uniform, centralized system for managing poor relief, appointing central bodies to manage the system both locally and nationally. The New Poor Law was overseen by a new administrative body called the *Poor Law Commission* based in London. At a local level, parishes were grouped together into *Poor Law Unions*. A union typically contained up to 20 or 30 parishes or townships and was run by a *Board of Guardians* (elected by the local rate-payers) who met weekly to carry out the business of the union.

The New Poor Law was centered on the workhouse; all Poor Law Unions were obligated to make provision for a workhouse building (whereas previously the provision of workhouses under the parish administration had been patchy). The New Poor Law largely brought an end to the system of outdoor relief and instead poor people could now generally only get help if they were prepared to leave their homes and go into a workhouse. Workhouse conditions were deliberately harsh (to act as a deterrent and force only the desperate to apply for admission); families could be split up and housed in different sections of the workhouse, and people of all ages were forced to do hard manual labour such as breaking up stones.

Campaign against the New Poor Law

The requirement to force the destitute into the workhouse if they needed relief led to intense opposition to the New Poor Law from some quarters. Critics, such as the political campaigner Richard Oastler, argued that the New Poor Law workhouse system amounted to little more than 'prisons for the poor' - a way of punishing people through no fault of their own.² Under the New Poor Law, the union workhouse often instilled communities with a sense of fear and dread - the stigma attached to workhouse buildings persisted throughout their existence.

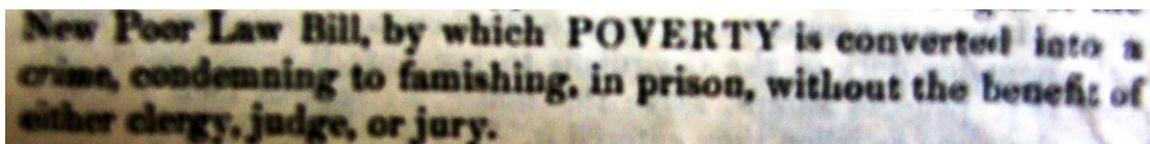
A vociferous critic of the New Poor Law in Sheffield was the author and pamphleteer Samuel Roberts (1763 - 1848) of Park Grange, who became

² See for example, Richard Oastler, *The Rights of the Poor to Liberty and Life*, 1838

known as the 'Pauper's Advocate'. Many of Roberts' pamphlets attacking the perceived injustices and cruelties of the New Poor Law are available at Sheffield Local Studies Library. Some of Roberts' disparaging views on the New Poor Law (extracted from a Sheffield Archives document) are listed below:

Extract and transcripts of extracts from pamphlet concerning the iniquities of the New Poor Law, 1838
(Sheffield Archives: SY619/Z8/30)

'this poor-destroying wicked measure...selfish, mercenary, inhuman supporters...every measure, that can be denied, however vile, wicked, unjust, tyrannical and oppressive'



'sycophantic, selfish Committees, Commissioners, and lying spies and informers, as well as the enslaving, degrading, and corrupting nature of their proceedings'

'this accursed - this really damnable bill (being opposed to the laws of God)'

'Devil's agents (Guardians of the Poor)'

Poor Law Unions in Sheffield

The New Poor Law led to the establishment of two Poor Law Unions in Sheffield in 1837:

Sheffield Poor Law Union made up of the townships of Sheffield, Attercliffe-cum-Darnall and Brightside Bierlow, together with Handsworth parish.

Ecclesall Bierlow Union made up of the townships of Ecclesall Bierlow, Nether Hallam, Upper Hallam, Beauchief, Dore, Totley, and Norton.

The **Sheffield Poor Law Union** initially adopted the existing Sheffield Workhouse on Kelham Street (which, in 1829 had been converted from a cotton mill to house up to 600 inmates). With the Kelham Street site becoming increasingly overcrowded, in 1881 the Sheffield Union relocated the workhouse to a new building at Fir Vale.

'Inmates of Sheffield Workhouse increased from 694 on the 1st April, to 823. File trade much depressed, and many of the members apply.'

Transcript of entry from Sheffield Local Register, 14 April 1848
(Sheffield Local Studies Library: 942.74s)

| | | | |
|---------|------------|--------|----------------------|
| Leah | Drafer | 12 - u | Blind & Infirmer |
| Ralph | Todsworth | 12 - u | Infirmer |
| Lana | Baton | 9 - u | Blind |
| Thomas | Grasson | 5 - u | Sicknefs |
| William | Hoyland | 5 - u | Subsial & Infirmer |
| Lana | Hobbsworth | 12 - u | Subsial & Blind |
| George | Hall | 30 - u | Epileptic |
| Lana | Lockart | 9 - u | Idiot |
| Mary A | Locker | 12 - u | As |
| Lana | Nicholls | 9 - u | As |
| George | Oldman | 6 - u | Deaf & Dumb |
| Henry | Oldman | 10 - u | Paralysed & Crippled |

Sheffield Poor Law Union Guardians Letter Book extract, 1860 (listing pauper inmates resident in the Sheffield Union Workhouse for a period of 5 years or more, together with reasons why they are unable to maintain themselves) (Sheffield Archives: CA24/55)

whatever...
 extenuation. The schoolmaster certainly does not like and he believes the Visiting Committee will not sanction the application to the boys of such terms as "thief" "devil" "vagabond" "liar" "villain", and terms blackier still which he could but shall not write all which she has and does use in reference to the boys.

the Visiting Committee
 the Sheffield Union

Yours faithfully,
 G. Hooley.

Letter to Sheffield Union 'Visiting Committee' detailing complaint of the schoolmaster about 'profane' language used by the housekeeper when addressing boys at Pitsmoor Workhouse, 17th Aug 1857 (Sheffield Archives: CA24/55)

The **Ecclesall Bierlow Poor Law Union** initially used an old workhouse building on Psalter Lane, Sharrow Lane. In 1842 -1843 the union built a new workhouse at Cherrytree Hill, Nether Edge.

134 ECCLESALL BIERLOW UNION WORKHOUSE.

| Date of Admission. | NAME. | When Born. | RELIGION. | Trade or Occupation, If Spinner, Wile, or Widow. | LAST ADDRESS. |
|--------------------|---------------|--------------|-----------|--------------------------------------------------|--------------------|
| 8. 3. 07 | Mellor Clara | 18. 12. 1866 | Catholic | Wife | 20 6A. London Road |
| 23. 3. 07 | McKinley John | 22. 9. 1844 | " | Spinner | 96. Netherdon Road |
| 3. 11. 07 | Mearns Kate | 1880 | Ch of Eng | Spinner | 35 Junction Road |
| " | John | 2. 11. 1897 | " | Legislator | |
| 5. 11. 07 | Warrham Ellen | 16. 2. 1840 | Catholic | Widow | |
| 23. 11. 07 | Warphy Bertha | 11. 3. 1879 | Ch of Eng | Wife | |
| " | William | 5. 2. 1897 | " | | |
| " | Albert | 18. 2. 1900 | " | | |

Ecclesall Bierlow Union Workhouse Admissions Book entries, 1907 (Sheffield Archives: NHS21/5/6/1)

More detailed information about the Union Workhouses in Sheffield is available in the Sheffield Archives and Local Studies Library guide [Workhouses research guide | Sheffield City Council](#).

There were also neighbouring Poor Law Unions at Wortley, Penistone, Rotherham, Barnsley, Doncaster and Thorne. Sheffield Archives holds some useful records (including minutes, 1838 - 1929) of **Wortley Poor Law Union** which covered areas now within the City of Sheffield (including Ecclesfield, Stocksbridge and Bradfield).

Finding New Poor Law records relating to Sheffield

Whilst the survival of Poor Law Union records relating to Sheffield is quite poor, useful records in our collections are available for researchers:

For **Sheffield Union** these include: Guardians' letter books (which include reference to pauper/workhouse cases), 1844 - 1861; registers of Union officers' appointments, 1876 - 1913; Union statements of accounts, 1884 - 1930; Union minutes, 1890 - 1930; Guardians handbook and list of committees, 1894 - 1929.

For **Ecclesall Bierlow Union** these include: miscellaneous papers (relating to officers appointments, financial statements etc.), 1837 - 1846; Union Workhouse admission registers, 1890 - 1931; Union Workhouse registers of births, 1898 - 1929; Union correspondence, 1900 - 1904; Union Workhouse register of deaths, 1903 - 1931; Union Workhouse registers of inmates, 1904 - 1931; Union reports (with list of officers, accounts, etc.), 1913 - 1924; Union Relief Committee minutes, 1929 - 1931.

Full lists of extant Union records in our holdings, together with surviving New Poor Law records of civil townships/parishes (which continued to operate in a reduced capacity within the Unions) are available at the end of this publication.

Changes and developments

In 1871, the Poor Law Board was replaced by the *Local Government Board* which included a much broader range of responsibilities such as sanitation and public health. The establishment of the Local Government Board was followed by a Local Public Health Act of 1872 which created *urban and rural sanitary authorities*, responsible for public health matters (for individual districts within a Poor Law Union) such as providing clean drinking water, sewers, street cleaning and clearing slum housing.

The 1894 Local Government Act replaced urban and rural authorities with *urban and rural district councils* (which had more general local government powers). References therefore to urban and rural sanitary authorities/urban and rural sanitary councils may well be found in later Poor Law Union records,



The poor in Sheffield, 1870
(Picture Sheffield: s03008)

and, conversely, poor law matters may also be mentioned in surviving urban and rural sanitary authority (later urban and rural district council) records.

In 1905, the British Parliament set up the *Royal Commission on the Poor Laws and the Relief of Distress*, a body which conducted a four-year investigation into how the Poor Law system could be improved. The commission produced two conflicting reports:

- *A Majority Report*, endorsed by fourteen of its members, recommended the creation of a new Poor Law authority in each county or county borough, together with the replacement of workhouses by more specialized institutions catering for separate categories of inmate such as children, the old, the unemployed and the mentally ill.
- *A Minority Report*, signed by four members which was more radical and advocated the complete break-up of the Poor Law Unions and the transfer of their functions to other authorities to provide care for various groups (its emphasis was on the *prevention* rather than the relief of destitution).

The contrasting nature of the reports enabled the governing Liberal Party at the time to ignore their recommendations, but the consensus both reports reached, that the Poor Law system should not continue in its current form, remained prevalent. The Poor Law system had already started to fall into decline at the start of the 20th century, with Liberal Party welfare reforms and the availability of support from other agencies such as 'Friendly Societies' and 'Trades Unions' all contributory factors.

In Sheffield, in 1906 the Sheffield Union Workhouse at Fir Vale changed its name to *Fir Vale Institution*. In 1914 the Ecclesall Bierlow Union Workhouse changed its name to *Ecclesall Bierlow Union Institution*. In 1925, by order of the Ministry of Health, Ecclesall Bierlow Union and Sheffield Union were dissolved and a new *Sheffield Union* created.

In 1926, the *Board of Guardians (Default) Act* enabled the dismissal of a Board of Guardians (deemed not to performing their duties properly) and its replacement with government officials. This was followed by a further Poor Law Act in 1927, and, in 1929 a Local Government Act which abolished the system of Poor Law Unions in England and Wales, and their boards of guardians, passing their powers to local authorities (county and city councils and boroughs). Responsibility for the poor was assigned to new local Public Assistance Committees (Sheffield Archives holds records of the Public Assistance Committee for Sheffield). Workhouses became public assistance institutions (such as hospitals) with later legislation transferring the control of these functions from the control of local councils to other public bodies: the National Assistance Board and the National Health Service (NHS).

In Sheffield, by 1930, Ecclesall Bierlow Union Institution had become known as **Nether Edge Hospital** and the former Sheffield Union Workhouse (by this point known as Fir Vale Institution) became the City General Hospital (later **Northern General Hospital**).



Nether Edge Hospital, Union Road (originally Ecclesall Bierlow Union Workhouse), 1982
(Sheffield Local Studies Library: Picture Sheffield s23489)

In spite of Poor Law Institutions becoming Public Assistance Institutions, many continued on into the 1930s virtually unaltered. They were still controlled by a committee of 'guardians' and often physical conditions improved little for the inmates, the majority of whom continued to be the old and infirm, the mentally deficient, unmarried mothers, and vagrants.

Under the *National Health Service Act* of 1946 (which came into force on 5th July 1948) the former Poor Law Institutions came under the control of Hospital Management Committees (under Regional Hospital Boards), However, often they retained the negative associations from their workhouse days and many of these new 'hospitals' kept 'Reception Centres for Wayfarers' (i.e. casual wards for vagrants) until the 1960s.

The *National Assistance Act* of 1948 formally abolished the Poor Law system (although parts of the poor law remained on the statute book until 1967) and made provision for welfare services, as part of the emergence of the post-Second World War welfare state. In spite of their reincarnation as 'caring' institutions such as hospitals however, the stigma of the old Union Workhouse building often remained.



Northern General Hospital (originally Sheffield Union Workhouse), 1988
(Sheffield Local Studies Library: Picture Sheffield s23604)

**List of documents, pamphlets and other items available at Sheffield
Local Studies Library and Sheffield Archives**

SOURCES PRE-DATING THE OLD POOR LAW OF 1601

- Ecclesfield, churchwardens accounts, 1520 - 1948 (*Sheffield Archives: PR54/86-96*, available covering dates [1520 - 1651] on *Microfilm A80* and transcript available covering [1520 - 1545] - see *TI/12*)
- Sheffield, church burgess accounts (including account of money distributed to the poor, 1575 - 1576), 1557 - 1939 (*Sheffield Archives: CB/159-166*)
- Sheffield, town trustees accounts, 1566 - 1984 (*Sheffield Archives: TT/4/1-2*)
- Sheffield, town trustees accounts above [1566 - 1707] are documented in J. D. Leader, *The Records of the Burgery of Sheffield* (Sheffield: Independent Press Ltd., 1897) (*Sheffield Archives: TT Print Source; Sheffield Local Studies Library: 942.74 S*) and J. D. Leader, 'Extracts from the Earliest Book of Accounts belonging to the Town Trustees of Sheffield 1566 to 1707' (1879) (*Sheffield Local Studies Library: Local Pamphlets, vol. 60 (042 SST)*)

OLD POOR LAW 1601 - 1834 SOURCES

Pauper Apprenticeship Records (indentures, lists of apprentices, etc).

- Beighton (Derbyshire), 1674 - 1713 (*Sheffield Archives: MD5788*)
- Bradfield, (copies) [1632 - 1738] (*Sheffield Archives: RC/157/7454-7494*)
- Bradfield (and Westnall and Waldershelf), 1701 - 1776 (*Sheffield Archives: Wil. D/457*)
- Bradfield, 1774 (*Sheffield Archives: RC/12*)
- Ecclesfield, 1676 - 1765 (*Sheffield Archives: PR54/148/1*)
- Ecclesfield, 1825 (*Sheffield Archives: MD3618*)
- Harthill, c. 1701 - 1776 and 1747 - 1828 (*Sheffield Archives: PR47/55 and PR47/94-95*)
- Hooton Roberts, 1767 - 1819 (*Sheffield Archives: PR26/22*)
- Norton, 1788 - 1822 (*Sheffield Archives: CA29/3*)
- Norton, 1798 (*Sheffield Archives: SSC/672*)
- Rawmarsh, 1782 (*Sheffield Archives: MD2692/30*)
- Rawmarsh, 1823 - 1833 (*Sheffield Archives: PR80/items 171*)
- Rotherham, 1613 - 1789 (*Sheffield Archives: PR87/item 168*)
- Sheffield Archives, 1682 (*Sheffield Archives: MD634*)
- Sheffield, 1725 - 1781 (*Sheffield Archives: TC/433-434*)
- Sheffield, 1766 (*Sheffield Archives: RC/17*)
- Sheffield, 1772 (*Sheffield Archives: SSC/670*)
- Sheffield, 1790 (*Sheffield Archives: MD3616*)
- Sheffield (and also Guiseley and Otley [West Yorkshire]), [18th cent?] (*Sheffield Archives: TC/367/34-36*)
- Staveley (Chesterfield, Derbyshire), 1782 (*Sheffield Archives: JC/1753*)

- Thorpe Salvin, 1803 - 1813 and 1837 (*Sheffield Archives: MD1237/157-158*)
- Todwick, 1754 (*Sheffield Archives: PR1/16*)
- Unstone (Dronfield, Derbyshire), 1809 (*Sheffield Archives: MD699*)
- Westnall and Waldershelf (Bradfield), 1701 - 1776 (*Sheffield Archives: Wil. D/457*)
- Whiston (Rotherham), c. 1710 - 1735 (*Sheffield Archives: MD6625*)

Bastardy Papers (bonds, maintenance orders, examinations, etc.)

- Bradfield (and Westnall and Waldershelf), 1720/1 - 1770 (*Sheffield Archives: Wil. D/457*)
- Bradfield, transcripts and index [c. 1721 - 1840] (*Sheffield Archives: MD7277*)
- Dodworth and Silkstone (Barnsley), 1703 - 1784 (*Sheffield Archives: MD3171/5*)
- Ecclesfield, 1758 (*Sheffield Archives: PR54/148/3*)
- Handsworth, 1699 (*Sheffield Archives: JC/1691*)
- Handsworth, 1809 - 1817 (*Sheffield Archives: CA19/1*)
- Harthill, 1735 - 1834 (*Sheffield Archives: PR47/96*)
- Hooton Roberts, 1767 - 1819 (*Sheffield Archives: PR26/22*)
- Rawmarsh, 1775 - 1823 (*Sheffield Archives: PR80/items 168-170*)
- Sheffield (and Rotherham), 1742 - 1754 (*Sheffield Archives: TC/435*)
- Sheffield, 1780 (*Sheffield Archives: MD256*)
- Silkstone (see Dodworth)
- Thorpe Salvin, 1659 - 1839 (*Sheffield Archives: MD1237/1-156*)
- Todwick, 1817 (*Sheffield Archives: PR1/16*)
- Thrybergh, 1758 - 1789 (*Sheffield Archives: PR94/item 94*)
- Tootley, 1825 (*Sheffield Archives: JC/1845*)
- Westnall and Waldershelf (Bradfield), 1720/1 - 1770 (*Sheffield Archives: Wil. D457*)
- Whiston (Rotherham), 1673, 1688 and 1732 (*Sheffield Archives: MD6625*)
- Whiston (Rotherham), 1701 - 1829 and 1800 - 1826 (*Sheffield Archives: PR37/46 and PR37/55*)

Overseers of the Poor Accounts etc.

- Aston, 1760 - 1840 (*Sheffield Archives: PR91/ items 136a-b*)
- Attercliffe, 1676 - 1788 (*Sheffield Archives: CA26/1*)
- Attercliffe, 1819 - 1890 (*Sheffield Archives: CA15/3*)
- Beighton (and Hackenthorpe), 1750 - 1753 (*Sheffield Archives: MD5786/3*)
- Bradfield, (copies of accounts), [1635 - 1779] (*Sheffield Archives: RC/167/15*)
- Bradfield (copies), [1635 - 1712] (*Sheffield Archives: PR44/item 23*)
- Bradfield (and Westnall and Waldershelf), 1739 - 1757 (*Sheffield Archives: Wil. D/457*)

- Bradfield, 1773 - 1774 (*Sheffield Archives: RC/13-14*)
- Bradfield, 1825 (*Sheffield Archives: CA63/3*)
- Bradwell (Derbyshire), 1781 - 1784 (*Sheffield Archives: OD/1179*)
- Brightside Bierlow, 1800, 1828 - 1829 (*Sheffield Archives: CA16/9-10*)
- Burghwallis (Doncaster), accounts on microfilm covering dates [1701 - 1791] (*Sheffield Archives: Microfilm A92*)
- Dodworth (Barnsley), 1755 - 1756 (*Sheffield Archives: MD3171/2-3*)
- Dore, 1720 - 1830 (*Sheffield Archives: JC/1258*)
- Dore and Topley, 1732 - 1772 (*Sheffield Archives: JC/1715*)
- Dungworth Barlow [Bierlow] (West Yorkshire), transcript of list of payments, [1699] (*Sheffield Local Studies Library: MP 1582 M*)
- Ecclesall, 1827 - 1831 (*Sheffield Archives: CA18/6-15*)
- Ecclesfield, c. 1680 - 1750 and 1712 - 1768 (*Sheffield Archives: PR54/87 and PR54/144-145*)
- Ecclesfield, poorhouse expenses [1737 - 1766] and names of poorhouse visitors (taken from above PR54 records) (*Sheffield Archives: Microfilm A84*)
- Greasbrough, 1813 - 1835 (*PR16/item 40*)
- Grenofirth (Ecclesfield), 1713, 1715, 1731, 1736 and 1756 (*Sheffield Archives: PR54/145/3*)
- Hackenthorpe (and Beighton), c. 1751 - 1753 (*Sheffield Archives: MD5786*)
- Handsworth, 1759 - 1871 (*Sheffield Archives: CA19/1, CA19/3-13, CA19/18 and X545*)
- Harthill, 1702 - 1774 and 1744 - 1866 (*Sheffield Archives: PR47/55 and PR47/89-91*)
- Hooton Roberts, 1753 - 1833 (*Sheffield Archives: PR26/19-20*)
- Hoyland, 1815 - 1850 (*Sheffield Archives: Acc. 1994/38*)
- Nether Hallam, 1780 - 1904 (*Sheffield Archives: CA21/2-29*)
- Norton, 1804 - 1809 (*Sheffield Archives: CA29/3*)
- Norton, 1809 - 1812 (*Sheffield Archives: PR2/8/1*)
- Norton, 1817 (*Sheffield Archives: OD/1561*)
- Pontefract (West Yorkshire), 1664 - 1673 (*Sheffield Archives: BFM/37*)
- Rawmarsh, 1682 - 1766 (*Sheffield Archives: PR80/items 92-93*)
- Rawmarsh, 1792 - 1838 (*Sheffield Archives: PR80/items 150-152*)
- Rotherham, 1672 - 1721 (*Sheffield Archives: PR87/120*)
- Sheffield, church burgess accounts, 1557 - 1939 (*Sheffield Archives: CB/159-166*)
- Sheffield, town trustees accounts, 1566 - 1984 (*Sheffield Archives: TT/4/1-2*)
- Sheffield, bill of expenses for and payments to vagrants, 1685 (*Sheffield Archives: CB/592/29*)
- Sheffield, book of receipts for disbursements to the poor, 1743 - 1744 (*Sheffield Archives: CB/598/1*)
- Sheffield, overseers' petty cash and wages books, 1776 - 1777 and 1787 - 1788 (*Sheffield Archives: CA505 and CA24/58*)
- Sheffield, overseers' receipts and payments (not clearly specified as Sheffield), Apr - Jun 1800 (*Sheffield Archives: CA24/48*)

- Sheffield, list of subscribers and a general statement of receipts and payments, 1802 (*Sheffield Local Studies Library: MP 185 L*)
- Sheffield, statement of accounts, 1833 - 1834 (*Sheffield Local Studies Library: MP 28 VL*)
- Silkstone (Barnsley), 1761 - 1763 (*Sheffield Archives: MD3171/1*)
- Southey (Ecclesfield), 1713, 1715, 1736 and 1767 (*Sheffield Archives: PR54/145/2*)
- Staveley (Chesterfield, Derbyshire), list of weekly pensioners and occasional distributions, 1784 - 1785 (*Sheffield Archives: JC/1748-1749*)
- Stoke (near Grindleford Bridge, Derbyshire), description of an account book of the overseers of the poor, [1793 – 1827] (*South Yorkshire notes and queries, vol. 2 p.42*) (*Sheffield Local Studies Library: 913.4274S*)
- Thorpe Salvin, 1659 - 1839 (*Sheffield Archives: MD1237/1-156*)
- Thorpe Salvin, abstracts of accounts, 1676 - 1724 (*Sheffield Archives: MD1240*)
- Thorpe Salvin, bills, 1749 - 1840 (*Sheffield Archives: MD1237/162-231*)
- Tinsley, 1802 - 1841 (*Sheffield Archives: PR144/40-42*)
- Todwick, 1738 - 1830 (*Sheffield Archives: PR1/13-15*)
- Tootley (Derbyshire), 1794 - 1837 (*Sheffield Archives: CA27*)
- Treeton, 1832 - 1837 (*Sheffield Archives: PR77/98*)
- Wadsley (Ecclesfield), 1713, 1715 and 1736 (*Sheffield Archives: PR54/145/4*)
- Westnall and Waldershelf (Bradfield), 1734 and 1743 (*Sheffield Archives: MD167*)
- Westnall and Waldershelf (Bradfield), 1739 - 1757 (*Sheffield Archives: Wil. D/457*)
- Whiston, 1721 - 1735, 1799 - 1837 (*Sheffield Archives: PR37/45-48*)

Poor Rate Assessments

- Attercliffe-cum-Darnall, survey for poor rate assessment with accompanying book of plans 1819 (*Sheffield Archives: CA13/1-2, available on Microfilm A176*)
- Bakewell (Derbyshire), 1730/1731 (*Sheffield Archives: Bar D729/1*)
- Barnoldswick (East Lancashire), 1737 - 1763 (*Sheffield Archives: OD/1178/11-14*)
- Beighton (and Hackenthorpe, Derbyshire), 1740 - 1764 (*Sheffield Archives: MD5786/3*)
- Bradfield, c. 1773, 1804 - 1807 (*Sheffield Archives: RC/16 /1-9*)
- Bradfield, 1818 - 1820 and 1861 - 1873 (*Sheffield Archives: CA63/1-2, CA63/4*)
- Brimington (Derbyshire), 1725 - 1793 (*Sheffield Archives: OD/1553*)
- Bradwell (Derbyshire), 1781 - 1784 (*Sheffield Archives: OD/1179*)
- Coal Aston (Derbyshire), 1815 (*Sheffield Archives: OD/1180*)
- Dronfield (Derbyshire), 1667 (*Sheffield Archives: AC/29*)
- Ecclesfield, 1747 - 1751 (*Sheffield Archives: PR54/146*)

- Fenwick (Doncaster), 1712 (*Sheffield Archives: BFM/39*)
- Hackenthorpe (and Beighton, Derbyshire), 1740 - 1764 (*Sheffield Archives: MD5786*)
- Handsworth, 1702 (*Sheffield Archives: MD6525/5/6*)
- Hasland (Chesterfield, Derbyshire), 1794 - 1805 (*Sheffield Archives: JC/1703-1708*)
- Maltby, 1832 (*Sheffield Archives: PR82/21*)
- Pontefract (West Yorkshire), 1664 - 1673 (*Sheffield Archives: BFM/37*)
- Sheffield, 1716 (*Sheffield Archives: JC/1694*)
- Sheffield, transcripts of poor rate assessments, [1756] (*Sheffield Archives: FrC/99-100*)
- Sheffield, extract from the rate assessment, 1781 (*Sheffield Archives: JC/1364*)
- Sheffield, 1798 (*Sheffield Archives: CA664*)
- Sheffield, 1819 (*Sheffield Archives: MD1867*)
- Staveley (Chesterfield, Derbyshire), 1782 - 1784 (*Sheffield Archives: JC/1746-1747*)
- Thorpe Salvin, 1659 - 1839 (*Sheffield Archives: MD1237*)
- Treeton, 1837 - 1843 (*Sheffield Archives: PR77/94*)
- Westnall (Bradfield), 1719 - 1729 (*Sheffield Archives: RC/158/9566-9579*)
- Whiston, 1812 - 1813 and 1827 - 1837 (*Sheffield Archives: PR37/48-49*)
- Worksop estates (Nottinghamshire), overseers of the poor valuation, 1672, and assessments, 1673 and 1755 (*Sheffield Archives: ACM/W/22-23*)

Settlement and Removal Records (certificates, examinations, removal orders, etc.)

- Aston, list of settlement certificates received [1697 - 1789] and certificates given [1781 - 1793] (*Sheffield Archives: PR91/ item 136a*)
- Attercliffe, 1712 - 1792 (*Sheffield Archives: CA26/1*)
- Bradfield (and Westnall and Waldershelf), 1700 - 1761, 1781 - 1793 (*Sheffield Archives: Wil. D/457*)
- Bradfield, transcripts and index [1705 - 1850] (*Sheffield Archives: MD7277*)
- Bradfield (copies), [1722] (*Sheffield Archives: PR44/item 23*)
- Chesterfield (Derbyshire), 1746 - 1809 (*Sheffield Archives: MD6525/5/1-4, 7*)
- Dodworth and Silkstone (Barnsley), 1703 - 1784 (*Sheffield Archives: MD3171/5*)
- Dore, c. 1720 - 1839 (*Sheffield Archives: JC/1258*)
- Ecclesfield, 1712 - 1715 and 1754 - 1766 (*Sheffield Archives: PR54/148/4 and PR54/148/2*)
- Harthill, c. 1701 - 1737 and 1700 - 1849 (*Sheffield Archives: PR47/55 and PR47/92-93*)
- Hooton Roberts, 1767 - 1819 (*Sheffield Archives: PR26/22*)

- Ludlow (Shropshire), 1721/1722 (*Sheffield Archives: MD6525/5/8*)
- Rawmarsh, 1707 - 1835 (*Sheffield Archives: PR80/items 160-167*)
- Sheffield, 1717 - 1787 (*Sheffield Archives: TC/433*)
- Sheffield, 1766 (*Sheffield Archives: MD3250*)
- Sheffield, orders and disputes relating to settlement, [18th cent?] (*Sheffield Archives: TC/367/37-46*)
- Silkstone (see Dodworth)
- Skelbrooke, (Doncaster), 1690 (*Sheffield Archives: MD3609*)
- Staveley (Chesterfield, Derbyshire), 1720 - 1830 (*Sheffield Archives: JC/1122*)
- Thorpe Salvin, 1659 - 1839 (*Sheffield Archives: MD1237/1-156*)
- Thrybergh, 1701 - 1815 (*Sheffield Archives: PR106/items 84-96*)
- Todwick, 1704 - 1820 (*Sheffield Archives: PR1/16*)
- Treeton, notes of individuals having settlement in Treeton (detailing background to settlement), May - Jul 1824 [in parish private memoranda book] (*Sheffield Archives: PR77/91*)
- Westnall and Waldershelf (Bradfield), 1700 - 1761, 1781 - 1793 (*Sheffield Archives: Wil. D/457*)
- Whiston, 1701 - 1829 and 1773 - 1843 (*Sheffield Archives: PR37/46 and PR37/54*)
- Whiston, 1701 - 1739 (*Sheffield Archives: MD6625*)
- Whiston, transcripts [1701 - 1739] (*Sheffield Archives: PR37/56*)

Churchwardens Accounts

- Aston, 1760 - 1832 and 1832 - 1904 (*Sheffield Archives: PR91/ items 136a-b and PR91/item 79*)
- Attercliffe, 1702 - 1780 (*Sheffield Archives: CA26/1*)
- Beighton, 1825 - 1873 (*Sheffield Archives: PR73/item 22*)
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Old Poor Law records held elsewhere

Relevant Old Poor Law records relating to Sheffield and the surrounding area may also be found amongst **Quarter Sessions Court** records. Sheffield was not granted its own court of Quarter Sessions until 1880, so, for records before this date:

- West Riding Quarter Sessions records are held at [West Yorkshire Archive Service, Wakefield](#) [Sheffield and the surrounding area largely fell under the jurisdiction of the West Riding Quarter Sessions Court]
 - See also *Guide to the Quarter Sessions Records of the West Riding of Yorkshire 1637 - 1971* by Brian Barber (West Yorkshire Archive Joint Committee, 1984) (*Sheffield Local Studies Library: 929.3s; Sheffield Archives Searchroom Library: WYAS/ RO Guide*).
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NEW POOR LAW (POST - 1834) SOURCES

Barnsley Union

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Ecclesall Bierlow Union (Records held elsewhere)

- Local Government Board and predecessors: correspondence with Ecclesall Bierlow Poor Law Union, 1833 - 1909 (*The National Archives: MH12/14939-53*)

Ecclesall Bierlow Union Workhouse (later Nether Edge Hospital)

See [Workhouses research guide | Sheffield City Council](#).

Ecclesall Bierlow Union (Children's Homes): Fulwood Cottage Homes

See [Workhouses research guide | Sheffield City Council](#).

Ecclesall Township

- Ecclesall, vestry minutes, 1808 - 1912 (*Sheffield Archives: CA18/4-5*)
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Glossop Union (Derbyshire)

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Rotherham Union

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Sheffield Township

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Sheffield Union

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Sheffield Union (Children's Homes): Scattered Homes

See [Workhouses research guide | Sheffield City Council](#).

Sheffield Union: Fir Vale Workhouse (later Northern General Hospital)

See [Workhouses research guide | Sheffield City Council](#).

Wortley Poor Law Union

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General Poor Law Union Records

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- Brightside Bierlow, vestry minutes, 1801 - 1858 (*Sheffield Archives: CA16/6 and CA16/1-2*)
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- Roberts, Samuel, 'A Dry crust for the Ecclesall Bierlow pauper bread, for the Building Committee of the Sheffield Guardians of the Poor', 1843 (*Sheffield Local Studies Library: Local Pamphlets, vol. 248 no. 1 (042S) or Sheffield Local Studies Library: Local Pamphlets, vol. 26 no. 1 (042S) or (Sheffield Archives Searchroom Library: ROB/POOR)*)
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- Roberts, Samuel, 'The Bone-gnawing system: addressed to Michael Hunter, the deputy-chairman of the Sheffield Board of Guardians', 1845 (*Sheffield Local Studies Library: Local Pamphlets, vol. 13 no. 6 (042S)*)
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New Poor Law Secondary Sources

- Elliot, B. J., 'The Last five years of the Sheffield Guardians', in *Transactions of the Hunter Archaeological Society*, vol. 10, part 2 (1973), pp.132-137 (*Sheffield Local Studies Library: 913.4274S; also available at Sheffield Archives: HAS*)
- Gibson, Jeremy and Rodgers, Colin, *Poor Law Union Records, 2: The Midlands and Northern England* (Federation of Family History Societies, 1997) (*Sheffield Archives Searchroom Library: GIB/HEALTH*)
- Rose, Michael E., *The English Poor 1780 - 1930* (Newton Abbot: David & Charles, 1971) (*Sheffield Archives Searchroom Library: ROS/POOR*)
- Tinsley, Amelia, 'An Examination of the Attitudes of the Residents of Sheffield to the Poor Law Amendment Act between 1834 - 1842' [2005] (*Sheffield Archives Searchroom Library: LOCAL HISTORY No. 11, MAROON FILE*)
- West Riding County Council, *New County Rate Valuation of Basis, 1909* [shows townships grouped in Poor Law Unions] (*Sheffield Archives Searchroom Library: COU/LOCAL*)

OTHER (MORE GENERAL) SOURCES

- Sheffield City Council rate books will include details of poor rates paid by individual householders (*Sheffield Archives: CA Rate Books*)
- Sheffield City Council minutes will include reference to overseers of the poor appointments, returns, reports, poor law orders, etc. (*Sheffield Archives: CA-MIN*)
- Sheffield City Council Health Committee minutes may include reference to poor law business (*Sheffield Archives: CA-HEA*)
- Sheffield Local Registers will contain details of annual overseers and guardians appointments, summaries of annual accounts, annual numbers in the workhouse, etc. (*Sheffield Archives Searchroom Library: WAT/ART; Sheffield Local Studies Library: 942.74S*)
- Sheffield Magistrates Court and Sheffield Quarter Sessions Court records may include references to orders for payments to poor law guardians (*Sheffield Archives: MC and QC*)

Newspapers

The main local titles available (on microfilm) at Sheffield Local Studies Library include: *Iris* or *Sheffield Advertiser for the Northern Counties*, 1794 - 1856; *Sheffield Daily Telegraph*, 1855 - 1986; *Sheffield Mercury*, 1807 - 1848; *Sheffield Telegraph* (weekly) 1989 - date; *Sheffield Independent* 1819 - 1938 and the *Star* 1873 - date

The British Library British Newspapers website (<http://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/>) includes over eleven million pages from over 400 national and local newspapers (including the *Sheffield and Rotherham Independent 1819-1909*, *Sheffield Daily Telegraph 1855-1950* and *Sheffield Evening Telegraph 1887-1920*)

Other sources can also be used to try to establish the dates of events. *The Sheffield Local Register* (*Sheffield Local Studies Library: 942.74 S* and *Sheffield Archives: SHE/YEAR* or *CD-Rom*) records a chronological list of events in Sheffield's history (including various references to poor law matters, workhouses, etc.) together with dates on which the events occurred. 'The year's record' in *The Sheffield Year Book* (*Sheffield Local Studies Library: 032.74 S*) also provides a chronological list of events taken from the newspapers.

Archives of some national newspapers are available on the internet, notably *The Times* (<http://archive.timesonline.co.uk>) and *The Guardian* (<http://archive.guardian.co.uk>)

Photographs

Picture Sheffield (www.picturesheffield.com) is an online database of photographs drawn mainly from the collections in the Local Studies Library.

Websites

- *The Workhouse* website includes maps, photographs and short histories of the Sheffield workhouses and also general information on Poor Law history and Poor Law Unions: www.workhouses.org.uk
- Nineteenth century Poor Law Union and workhouse records can be found at The National Archives:
<http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/beta/help-with-your-research/research-guides/poverty-poor-laws/>
<http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/beta/help-with-your-research/research-guides/workhouse/>
- Bradfield Parish Archives have over 40,000 records available to view online: www.bradfieldarchives.co.uk

Sheffield Archives and Local Studies services collect and preserve original records and printed material relating to Sheffield and the surrounding area.

The information dates from the 12th century to the present and relates to Sheffield, South Yorkshire and north Derbyshire.

Included are extensive collections of books • pamphlets • photographs • church registers • newspapers • census records • minutes • diaries • films • maps • deeds • records from schools • hospitals • businesses and charities • family estates • personal papers etc.

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Adding to our collections

Sheffield Libraries and Archives seeks to preserve information about events in our city's history. If you have photographs or personal papers that may be worth preserving please consider safeguarding them for current and future generations by placing them in the care of Sheffield Libraries and Archives. It is only through the generosity of individuals and organisations that we are able to have a complete record of important events in the history of Sheffield and the nation. We are interested in photographs, flyers and posters, minutes of meetings etc. For advice on record keeping and the facilities we offer please contact us, archives@sheffield.gov.uk or 0114 203 9395.

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