

Explore A Glossary for the York Poor Law Records.



Glossary

Poor Removal Act and Bodkin's Act (1846): in 1846 the Poor Removal Act introduced the concept of irremovability into the poor law system. This meant that anyone who had been resident in a parish for more than 5 years could claim irremovability if they applied for relief. Bodkin's Act was passed in order to place the burden of the cost of such claims onto the poor law union common fund rather than on individual parishes. (See also the Irremovable Poor Act, 1861 and the Union Chargeability Act, 1865).

Board of Guardians: group of officials responsible for carrying out the work of a poor law union. Guardians were elected by ratepayers, although magistrates were ex-officio members. The guardians usually met weekly to carry out the formal business of the union, however over time a system of committee and sub-committees developed to carry out various functions of the Union. These committees reported to the Guardians.

Boarding-Out: refers to the process whereby children admitted to the workhouse were boarded out with foster parents and families.

Casual/Vagrants Ward: a specific ward within the workhouse which was used to house homeless paupers who wandered from place to place and who were not permanently settled in York. On admittance, individuals were given food and a bed for one night in return for a day's work. They were then sent on their way. The aim of these wards was to reduce begging and rough sleeping.

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Casual poor: the destitute, homeless, wandering poor.

Common charges: the cost of relieving the poor usually came out of the poor rates collected by each individual parish. This meant that each parish was responsible for bearing the cost of maintaining the poor who were legally settled within that parish. However there were groups of poor who applied for poor relief but were not the responsibility of the parish, for example, vagrants, non-settled poor, and the irremovable poor. The overall administration of the poor law was however the responsibility of the York Poor Law Union.

Creed Register: exist from 1869 or later. Registers of inmates which record the religion of each person entering the workhouse. These registers were required so that matters such as the burial of inmates and education of children could be carried out in accordance with the individual's stated religion.

District Medical Officer: provided care and medicine for sick paupers. Also provided assessments and reports on ill paupers, and also acted as public vaccinators. Employed by and reported to the Board of Guardians and worked in tandem with the Relieving Officer.

House/Institution Committee: committee responsible for administering the workhouse. In York the workhouse was later known as The Institution or the City Institution.

Indoor relief/in-relief: relief paid, in the form of food, accommodation and clothing, to poor people within in the workhouse. Able-bodied paupers residing in the workhouse were usually expected to work without pay. The terms indoor relief and outdoor relief essentially distinguished between relief given to those inside the workhouse and those outside the workhouse.

Irremovable poor: non-local poor who had been resident in a poor law union for the required period and therefore deemed irremovable (i.e. it was not possible to send them back to where they originally came from).

Irremovable Poor Act 1861: reduced period required to claim irremovability from five to three years. The Union rather than the parish became the area of residence for these claims and money for relief came out of the common fund rather than the parish fund.

John Hodgson Charitable Trust: John Hodgson Charitable Trust was first administered by the Guardians of the York Union (together with a representative appointed by Sheriff Hutton Parish Council from 1891 onwards). This continued until the 17th October 1930, when the Charity Commissioners amended the constitution for the regulation of the charity as the Board of Guardians had been dissolved in 1929.

The charity held railway stock bequeathed by the late John Hodgson Esq, a Guardian of the Poor who lived in Strensall. The income was to be given at the discretion of the Board of Guardians to people in the area living on small incomes, afflicted by illness, or without the means of procuring items they needed in times of distress. The stipulation was that these people could not already be receiving poor relief, other than outdoor medical relief, and had to live in the York Union area or the village of Sheriff Hutton. Residents could also be from the areas of Beningborough and Overton, as these villages were in the York Union area at the time of John Hodgson's death in 1890.

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Local Government Board (1871-1919): established in 1871 and took over the functions of the Poor Law Board along with other local government responsibilities.

Medical Officer of Health (MOH): The first medical officer of health in York was appointed in 1873 when the Corporation became responsible for the urban sanitary district. The MOH was employed by the Corporation and the post became full-time in 1900. At times the post holder was also the Principal School Medical Officer. A qualified doctor, the MOH advised on policy, improvements and produced annual reports and statistics. From 1900 the MOH reported to the Health Committee. The MOH was not part of the York Poor Law Union.

Ministry of Health (1919-1968): established under the Ministry of Health Act 1919 to look after all aspects of public health including sanitation, disease, training of health professionals and poor law functions, which it took over from the Local Government Board. The Ministry continued to deal with poor law matters after the Poor Law Unions and Boards of Guardians were abolished in 1929.

New Poor Law: came into force with the Poor Law Amendment Act of 1834. Under the New Poor Law parishes were grouped together into unions, and each union was administered by a Board of Guardians. The Act intended to bring in a range of sweeping changes regarding the type of assistance provided for poor people. Essentially, only those in dire and exceptional circumstances were to receive assistance, and this assistance should be in the form of board and lodging within a workhouse. All out-relief, that is, relief provided to people in their own homes was to cease. The Act was meant to save money and address what was seen as the idiosyncratic, inefficient and overly generous practices of the Old Poor Law. However, in reality the Act met with much local resistance, and many of its central ideas, such as the abolition of out-relief never came to pass.

Non-resident poor: refers to the poor who had right of settlement within the York Union but were residing and claiming relief from another poor law union.

Non-settled poor: refers to the poor who were resident within the area administered by the York Union (and claiming relief) but who were legally settled elsewhere.

Old Poor Law: the system of administering relief to poor people in England and Wales which existed from the seventeenth century to the passing of the Poor Law Amendment Act of 1834. The system was administered at the parish level by unpaid administrators called overseers.

Outdoor Labour Test: made provision for relief to be granted to the able-bodied poor. The Outdoor Labour Test Order was issued by the Poor Law Commissioners 13 April 1842. It enabled able-bodied paupers to receive outdoor relief in return for hard manual labour, typically stone-breaking in a yard usually attached to the workhouse. The order signalled a major shift in the provision of relief under the New Poor Law, and the acknowledgement that it was not possible to eliminate outdoor relief entirely.

Out-relief/outdoor relief: grants either in kind or in money (or a combination of both) which allowed poor people to remain in their own homes. Relief was what today we would call 'welfare'. People could be on temporary relief or permanent relief.

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Out-Relief Union: out-relief unions were formed where a poor law union covered more than one administrative county. The creation of separate out-relief unions allowed individual counties to administer their own out-relief. Ten out-relief unions were formed in 1894 -1895 following the Local Government Act 1894. Four of these new unions, Flaxton, Bishopthorpe, Escrick and York were attached to the York Poor Law Union. The York Joint Union, made up of members of all four out-relief unions, still administered indoor relief for the whole union, but each separate out-relief union was responsible for its own outdoor relief. However, the three rural out-relief unions, namely Flaxton, Bishopthorpe and Escrick were administered jointly with their respective rural district councils. This meant that the rural district councillors also acted as poor law guardians for their associated union. Out relief unions ceased to exist in 1929 with the abolition of the Poor Law Unions.

Poor inspectors: (originally assistant Poor Law Commissioners) appointed by the central poor law administration. Each inspector was assigned a geographic region and inspected the Poor Law Unions within that region. Their main function was to inspect workhouses and check finances for irregular expenditure.

Poor Law Board (1847-1871): central body governing the poor law from 1847 to 1871. Replaced the Poor Law Commission. The Board provided recommendations and directions to the poor law unions.

Poor Law Commission (1834-1847): central governing body charged with overseeing the New Poor Law from its establishment in 1834 until 1847. They provided direction to the poor law unions but relations between unions and the central commissioners were sometimes fractious.

Poor Law Union: the basic administrative unit of the New Poor Law. Groups of parishes, sometimes from different counties were joined together in order to administer relief to the poor. The York Poor Law Union, formed in July 1837, covered an area of 103 square miles and included 80 parishes (later 83 parishes), 32 of which were urban and 48 of which were rural. By the 1920s the Union consisted of 40 urban and 43 rural parishes. It also included parishes in the East Riding, North Riding and West Riding. The poor law union was governed by a partly elected board of guardians and financed by a rate levied on property owners. There was a requirement for each union to have a workhouse.

Relief in kind: payments of welfare made in food, clothing, fuel or other necessities.

Relieving Officer: officer of the poor law union who assessed applications for relief; recommended any necessary actions (such as admittance to the workhouse, or attendance by a district medical officer); and paid out-relief to those who were eligible. Relieving Officers reported directly to the Board of Guardians.

Rural District Councils (RDCs): created in England and Wales by the Local Government Act of 1894 at the same time that urban district councils were created. They inherited the functions of the sanitary districts which they replaced, but also gained authority over matters such housing and planning. Rural, and urban, district councils were abolished in 1974, following the Local Government Act of 1972. They were replaced by district councils.

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Settlement and removal: in order to have the right to claim poor relief a person had to have the right of settlement in a parish administered by the relevant poor law union. Settlement was conferred by various means including birth, marriage, residence in an area for a particular time, employment, and through various property qualifications. Individuals claiming poor relief in an area where they did not have the right of settlement could be forcibly removed to their parish of legal settlement.

The Union Chargeability Act of 1865: repealed the provision of the Poor Law Amendment Act of 1834 which made poor relief a parochial charge and transferred the whole cost of relief to the Union common fund. Also reduced period for claiming irremovability to one year.

Workhouse/poorhouse: institution which housed individuals and families in poverty. Workhouses existed prior to 1834 in order to house paupers who were not able to live in their own homes. They were usually small parish buildings or houses and were often not fit for purpose. The New Poor Law intended an end to all out-relief which meant that the poor were expected to receive relief only within the workhouse. Each poor law union was expected to build a new workhouse or refurbish old buildings to conform with the requirements of the New Poor Law, which stated that inmates should be separated according to class of pauper (e.g. women separated from men, the infirm separated from the able-bodied etc).

The Workhouse Test: the idea that those in poverty should only be granted relief within the workhouse, or not at all. Conditions inside the workhouse were meant to act as a deterrent to people who could work but chose not to (otherwise known as 'the undeserving poor').

York Rural Sanitary Authority: was formed in 1872 following the Public Health Act of the same year. It comprised the area of the York Poor Law Union less the city area which was covered by the Urban Sanitary Authority. The York Rural Sanitary Authority was administered by the country guardians of the York Union, whereas the Urban Sanitary Authority came under the control of York Corporation and therefore was not administered by the city guardians. Sanitary authorities were responsible for matters relating to public health such as drinking water, sewage, slum clearances and removing public nuisances. Sanitary authorities were replaced by rural and urban district councils in 1894.

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