

Poorhouses

Dundee City Archives - Research Guide 04

Background

Before the industrial revolution, the population of Scotland was mainly rural. Poor relief was administered by the local parish. As people moved to urban areas, this became harder to manage and the growing cities couldn't cope. In 1845 the Poor Law (Scotland) Act set up Parochial Boards to administer Poor Relief in a better, more efficient way.

In 1856 The Dundee Parochial Board opened a Poorhouse—later known as the East Poorhouse. The site was at Main's Loan, just off Forfar Road. It could house 800 paupers, 100 sick people and 100 lunatics. The Poorhouse hospital, later known as Maryfield Hospital, opened in 1893. The hospital later specialised in maternity and child care. It closed in 1974. In 1948 the Poorhouse was renamed the Rowans and closed in 1977. The land is now used as sports fields.

The West Poorhouse was built in 1864. It was also known as the Liff & Benvie poorhouse as it was originally run by that parish. Liff & Benvie Parochial Board merged with the Dundee in 1879 and the name was changed to the West. The West poorhouse was much smaller than the East, only being able to accommodate 200 paupers. In 1914 the West Poorhouse was closed and the buildings were used by the Military. The site is now the location of St Joseph's RC Primary School.

In the later 19th century the West Poorhouse was used for the 'elderly, infirm or insane' poor, whereas younger, able-bodied poor were housed in the East Poorhouse.

The Poorhouses also gave out-door relief. This means that they helped the poor who remained in their own homes.

Please Note

Some poor relief records may be closed for up to 100 years. This is because they contain personal information relating to living individuals. Please contact us for further information on how to access this information.

What Records are there?

East Poorhouse

Dundee City Archives holds the following records for the East Poorhouse:

Register of inmates	1856-1878 (Index available to view online)
Register of inmates	1903-1908, 1935-1956
Register of accidents	1887-1919
Poorhouse Hospital Patients	1907-1909

We also hold the following records relating to staff:

Register of Attendants (engaged and leaving)	1865-1951
Registers of Servants	1881-1906; 1922-1962

What Records are there? (continued)

We also hold plans and elevations of the East poorhouse and Maryfield Hospital.

For records of Maryfield Hospital see 'Records Held Elsewhere' below.

West Poorhouse (Liff and Benvie)

The majority of the records for the West Poorhouse do not survive. We only hold one register of the poor in the parish of Liff and Benvie, including inmates at the West Poorhouse and those who received poor relief:

Register of the Poor 1854-1865 ([Index available to view online](#))

Parochial Boards/Parish Councils

We also hold administrative records for the Parochial Board/Parish Council who ran the Poorhouses and administered poor relief. These records are unlikely to contain information about individuals, although extreme or repeat cases might get mentioned. The records also give insight to how the poorhouses were run.

Dundee

Minutes	1848-1930
Committee Minutes	1852-1963 (with gaps)

Liff & Benvie

Minute Book	1869-1879
West Poorhouse Petty Cash Book	1864-1890

Please note that the Liff and Benvie Parochial Board merged with the Dundee Board, in 1879 to form the Dundee Combination Parochial Board.

Records held elsewhere...

Maryfield Hospital

The records of Maryfield Hospital are part of the NHS Tayside archive. These are held at the University of Dundee Archives. You can view a list of the records in this collection on their [online catalogue](#). For further information please [contact the University of Dundee Archives](#) directly.

Census

Census records will tell you who was an inmate in the Poorhouse on the night that each census was taken. Dundee census returns can be accessed at Dundee Central Library or via the Dundee Registrars. Alternatively you can search and view census returns online, for the whole of Scotland (for a fee), on www.scotlandspeople.gov.uk.

Newspapers

Some cases of pauperism are mentioned in newspapers. These are usually extreme cases, either referring to neglect, delinquency or crime. The amount detail given in a newspaper report will vary.