

Aberdeen City Poor Relief

Until 1895, the poor relief system in Aberdeen was administered on a parish basis. The central St Nicholas parish had oversight over an area to the east of the Denburn bounded by the Dee at the south, the coast at the east and a line running between Gilcomston/Broadford and the coast to the north. The areas to the north and east of the St Nicholas Parish were part of Old Machar parish until 1895. Torry, which became part of the City in 1891, remained as part of Nigg parish for poor relief purposes until 1895.

This explains the presence of two poorhouses in Aberdeen during the 19th century: the West poorhouse in St Machar Place (now Fonthill Road) was operated by the Old Machar Parochial Board, and the East poorhouse in Nelson Street was operated by St Nicholas. No records for either of these poorhouses survive but there is some information on both sites on the [Workhouses website](#). You may also be able to identify if someone was resident in the City poor houses from census or burial records.

Parochial boards were replaced with parish councils in 1895, leading to the formation of the Aberdeen City Parish Council. The boundaries of the parish council's jurisdiction expanded beyond the limits of St Nicholas Parish to encompass area within the City municipal boundaries as defined in 1891 (areas formerly in Old Machar, Peterculter and Nigg parishes). The new authority was known as the United Parish or the City of Aberdeen Parish Council. The City Parish Council took over responsibility for all those whose settlement lay in the transferred area, and for the Old Machar poorhouse.

The City Parish Council opened a new poorhouse, Oldmill, in 1907: this became Woodend Hospital. Records for Oldmill/Woodend are held by [NHS Grampian Archives](#), but few records of individuals survive for the Oldmill period.

Limited poor relief records relating to individuals survive for the City area. Below is a summary of what records survive:

CA/1/15 St Nicholas Parochial Board (at the Town House):

- Printed minutes from 1884 – 1895 (CA/1/15/1-4);
- Indexes to the minutes from 1845 (CA/1/15/5-7);
- Lists of paupers 1856-57, 1865-66, 1871/72 - 1880/81 and annual reports with lists of paupers 1874-1895 (CA/1/15/8-10); minutes and reports of the committee from 1874 – 1885 (CA/1/15/11-21).

The lists of paupers are generally broken down in to those receiving out-door relief; orphans and deserted children; kirk session fund recipients; poor in other parishes and “stranger” poor in St Nicholas parish; children in industrial schools; poor in institutions (such as the Asylum for the Blind, the Institution for the Deaf and Dumb); “lunatics” or “fatuous” paupers boarded out or in asylums; and the inmates of St Nicholas Poorhouse.

The lists usually give the individuals name, residence, age, number of dependents (or the name of their parents or guardians in the case of children) and the amount of allowance they were granted.

Old Machar Parochial Board:

- AS/APomc/4 Old Machar Parish: Parochial Board / Parish Council General Register of the Poor 1886 – 1924 (at Old Aberdeen House)

The **Local Studies Department of the Central Library**, Rosemount Viaduct, hold the following printed records for the Parochial Board of Old Machar:

- Reports of the Finance and Assessment Committee of the Parochial Board of the parish of Old Machar, 1867 - 1884 and 1886
- Reports of the Managers for the Poor of the parish of Old Machar, 1838 - 1840, 1846 - 1848
- Reports of the Committees of the Parochial Board of the parish of Old Machar with Lists of Paupers etc, 1855, 1859 - 1860, 1866 - 1867, 1870 - 1873 and 1877 - 1880

CA/1/16 Aberdeen City Parish Council:

- Printed Minutes of the Aberdeen City Parish Council, 1895 – 1930 (CA/1/16/1-12) and indexes (CA.1/16/13-14) – copies at both offices;
- List of the Poor in Receipt of Relief from the City Parish of Aberdeen, 15th May 1922 (CA/1/16/15) - includes a list of the residents of Oldmill (at Old Aberdeen House).

The minutes deal with the day to day running of the poor houses and the administration of poor relief. There are some references to individuals:

- Weekly lists of poor placed on the Outdoor Roll (i.e. those receiving payments rather than those placed in the Poorhouse) by the Supply/Relief Committee record the individual's name, age, residence, state, dependants & weekly allowance.
- No equivalent details are recorded for those placed in the poorhouses. The Parish Council's West and East Poorhouse Committees' minutes record deaths taking place in the poorhouses (name, age, settlement, cause of death) up until they are replaced by the Poorhouses committee in May 1897.
- The minutes also tend to include more information about individual cases for orphans/children or "lunatics"/"mental patients" in a special committee. These are generally not included in the indexes.
- Details of unemployment cases also seem to be recorded from late 1921 but these do not give individual names, just a reference number and a set of initials.
- From the adoption of old age pensions in 1909, there are entries for the Inspector's "Recoveries" relating to various payments for people's care (e.g. old age pensions, army pensions, navy pensions and other sources). They list the individual's name and, in some instances, the institution they are residing in (this isn't specified for Old Age pensions and in these cases it isn't clear if the individuals are receiving indoor or outdoor relief). All the cases, aside from those for old age pensions, are listed by the individual's name in the Advanced Recovered section of the volume's index.

Access to Poor Law records which are less than 100 years old may be restricted under the Data Protection Act. Please contact us for further information.