

Library of Birmingham Archives & Collections

Hospitals, Health and Poor Relief

This guide is intended as an introduction to some of the main archive sources for research in hospitals, health and poor relief. It is a starting point rather than an exhaustive list of collections and further sources will be found by checking the online catalogues, the Wolfson Centre paper catalogues and card indexes. Printed sources (e.g. annual reports of institutions and charities) will also be found in the local studies catalogue.

Until the nineteenth century poor relief was a function of the parish and documents such as apprenticeship indentures and settlement certificates will be found in these collections - see separate guide to Faith and Religious Records.

Birmingham had a workhouse from c1734 in Lichfield Street. An Asylum for the Infant Poor was built in 1797 to remove the children from the workhouse itself (see separate guide for Childhood and Education for records of children's homes). A new workhouse was built on Birmingham Heath which opened in 1852. A new Workhouse Infirmary opened in 1889 which was renamed Dudley Road Hospital in 1912 and the workhouse became Western Road House to accommodate the elderly poor (it later became Summerfield Hospital). A number of hospitals are in premises that were previously occupied by poor law institutions.

From the early 18th century Birmingham saw the development of a number of hospitals and related institutions which provided health care for the town's growing population. This began with the General Hospital in 1765 and over the course of the following century the institutions became increasingly specialised.

The administration of health care has changed substantially over the centuries, from a system based on voluntary, charitable and philanthropic provision to the post Second World War National Health System we know today.

All Hospital collections have the reference code HC followed by a code for each individual hospital e.g. Birmingham Children's Hospital in HC BCH.

All of the above developments resulted in the creation of records which document both the governance and administration of the institutions and the care and treatment of inmates and patients within them.

Points to remember:

- ▶ Records which include personal details of named patients and people in receipt of poor relief will have a closure period if they are less than 100 years old (see below); this may extend to administrative records such as minutes, reports etc. depending on their content, date, and whether individuals are named. Permission can be requested to see closed material or receive information from closed records – consult the Duty Archivist for details.
- ▶ Many of these collections are incomplete and the survival of records for particular periods or particular institutions can be patchy – check the catalogues to individual collections for details.

To access the Archives & Heritage online catalogue and information about our services go to <http://www.libraryofbirmingham.com> or access the printed paper catalogues in the Wolfson Research Centre. The printed catalogues are easier to use as you can see the overview and structure of the whole collection.

Poor Relief and Workhouses

Until the nineteenth century poor relief was a function of the parish and documents relating to individuals in receipt of poor relief will be found in parish collections where they have survived – see separate guide to Faith and Religious records.

Birmingham had a Poor Law Union from 1783. From 1836 Aston and Kings Norton Poor Law Unions were established. In 1912 Aston and Kings Norton Unions were amalgamated into the Birmingham Union. It continued to operate until 1930 when its responsibilities were transferred to Birmingham City Council.

We hold the administrative and governance records for the Unions – which mainly comprise of minutes books for the various committees.

- Birmingham Poor Law Union, 1783-1930 **GP B**
- Aston Poor Law Union, 1836-1912 **GP AS**
- Kings Norton Poor Law Union, 1836-1912 **GP KN**

- ▶ **There are no admission and discharge registers for the inmates of the workhouses.** Individuals can occasionally be found in minute books but this is the exception rather than the rule. The minutes **do not contain** a reference to everyone who entered the workhouse.
- ▶ **Closure periods:** records relating to named inmates **100 years.**

Further information:

Chris Upton and Joyce Fellows, 'Birmingham and its Workhouses' (1989) – available in the Wolfson Research Centre.

Hospitals

Compared to other large towns Birmingham was fairly late in establishing its first Hospital which was the General Hospital. Although the campaign to found the institution started in 1765 the hospital did not actually open until 1779.

Like other hospitals in the period it was maintained by philanthropic donations and voluntary annual subscriptions from the town's wealthier residents. It also raised money through fundraising activities like concerts. Subscribers could nominate poor patients who could not otherwise afford to pay for treatment and many large employers were subscribers for example so that their workforce could access care when required. Anyone who was destitute went to the workhouse infirmary. Some of the present day hospitals were established in former workhouse infirmaries and infirmary records may therefore be found among the hospital collections.

- Birmingham General Hospital, 1765-1990 HC GH
- Birmingham Royal Orthopaedic or Woodlands Hospital, 1817-1999 HC RO
- Birmingham and Midland Eye Hospital, 1823-1989 HC EY
- Queen's Hospital, 1840-1947 HC QU
- Birmingham Lying-In Charity and Loveday Street Maternity Hospital, 1842-1959 HC MH
- Birmingham Children's Hospital, 1861-1996 HC BCH
- Summerfield Hospital, 1864-1974
Formerly Birmingham Union Workhouse HC SM
- Birmingham and Midland Hospital for Women, 1871-1968 HC WH
- Birmingham Homeopathic Hospital, 1873-1954 HC HH
- Birmingham Dental Hospital, 1880-1957 HC DH
- Birmingham and Midland Skin Hospital, 1890-1981 HC SK

- Dudley Road, later City Hospital, 1891-1991 HC DR
Formerly Birmingham Union Workhouse Infirmary.
Always check the catalogue as many items in this collection are in very poor condition and cannot be served even if they are open!
- Birmingham Midland Ear & Throat Hospital, 1903-58 HC ET
- Selly Oak Hospital, c 1908-1977 HC SO
Formerly Kings Norton Union Workhouse.
- Queen Elizabeth Hospital, 1926-92 HC QE
- Accident Hospital, 1941-88 HC AC
- Midland Nerve Hospital, 1951-92 HC NH
- Sorrento Maternity Hospital, 1968-85 HC SH

- ▶ **Closure periods:** records relating to named patients **100 years**.
- ▶ Permission can be sought to access closed records – consult Duty Archivist.
- ▶ Always check the catalogue as not only can items be closed but some of the hospital collections are in very poor physical condition and it may not be possible to serve items for that reason.

Mental Hospitals

All Saints Hospital opened in 1850 and Rubery Hill, opened in 1882. Hollymoor Hospital opened in 1905 as an annexe to Rubery Hill Hospital.

- All Saints Hospital, 1845-1973 HC AS
Always check the catalogue as many items in this collection are in very poor condition and cannot be served even if they are open!
- Rubery Hill Hospital, 1880- 1982 HC RH
- Highcroft Hospital, 1890-1994 HC HI
Formerly Aston Union Workhouse and Infirmary.
- Hollymoor Hospital, c. 1897-1979 HC HO

- ▶ **Closure periods:** records relating to named patients **100 years**.
- ▶ Permission can be sought to access closed records – consult Duty Archivist.
- ▶ Always check the catalogue as not only can items be closed but some of the hospital collections are in very poor physical condition and it may not be possible to serve items for that reason.

Other Health Records:

We also hold records for some administrative bodies such as health authorities and hospital boards which are not listed here.

Printed Material

- Reports of the Medical Officer of Health, Birmingham, 1873 – **L 45.11**
- Cuttings about Hospitals from Birmingham newspapers, 1863 –