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## London Borough of Enfield Local History Sheets.

### Poor relief in Enfield a history

## **Legislative Background**

**1601 Poor Law** - Each parish made responsible for the upkeep of those without the means to look after themselves. Appointment of overseers of the poor in each parish, working under the supervision of the local magistrates. Powers to collect a rate from all occupiers of property to cover costs.

**1662 Act of Settlement and Removal** - Poor relief was only to be available in a person's place of settlement. (Settlement was normally obtained by birth, apprenticeship or in the case of women, by marriage) Those people falling destitute in a parish other than their place of settlement could be removed (forcibly if necessary) back to their place of settlement. These provisions only applied to persons occupying property valued at less than £10 per annum.

**1722 Knatchbull's Act** - An adoptive Act. Gave parishes the power to build workhouses and the authority to refuse relief to able-bodied paupers who refused to enter the workhouse.

**1782 Gilbert's Act** - Forbade the entry of able-bodied paupers into workhouses. Parishes were required to find work for them or to grant outdoor relief. Parishes were given the power to combine together in unions for Poor Law purposes.

**1795 Speenhamland System** - A system of subsidising labourers' pay out of the poor rate, devised by the Berkshire magistrates to cope with food shortages and sharply rising prices. Widely copied throughout England, but never adopted in Edmonton or Enfield.

**1834 Poor Law Amendment Act** - Compulsory amalgamation of parishes into Poor Law Unions. Each Poor Law Union to have a directly elected board of guardians. Powers to abolish outdoor relief (never fully implemented). Powers to order the building of workhouses. Setting up of the Poor Law Commission to supervise workings of the Poor Law.

**1929 Local Government Act** - Abolition of boards of guardians. Their powers passed to public assistance committees of county councils.

### **Old Poor Law (Pre-1834)**

#### **Edmonton**

The parish of Edmonton built a workhouse (1731/2) on a site on the south side of Church Street, immediately west of All Saints Church. The building was closed and demolished after the opening of the Edmonton Union Workhouse (Silver Street) in 1842.

#### **Enfield**

The parish of Enfield established a workhouse in 1719 in rented premises to the east of Chase Side. The premises were purchased in 1740. The workhouse was completely rebuilt in 1827. The building was retained by the Edmonton Board of Guardians.

## **New Poor Law (Post-1834)**

The Edmonton Poor Law Union was set up in 1837, comprising the parishes of Hampstead, Hornsey, Tottenham (including Wood Green), Edmonton (including Southgate), Enfield, Cheshunt and Waltham Abbey. (Hampstead left the Edmonton Union in 1848). The workhouses at Cheshunt, Waltham Abbey, Tottenham and Hornsey were closed almost immediately. The aged and infirm were concentrated at the Hampstead Workhouse. Able-bodied paupers (men and women) were housed at the Edmonton Workhouse. The Enfield Workhouse was given over entirely to children. A new Edmonton Union Workhouse was erected on a site in Silver Street (completed 1842). The old Edmonton Workhouse in Church Street then closed. A purpose-built orphanage (The Chase Farm School) was built in 1886 thus enabling the children to be moved out of the former Enfield Workhouse.

## **Poor Law Institutions Belonging to Other Parishes**

Many of the parishes of central London had difficulty in finding suitable sites for workhouses etc and looked for sites in the outer suburbs. Enfield and Edmonton once had many Poor Law buildings belonging to inner London parishes.

### **Cripplegate Poor House**

Belonged to parish of St Giles Cripplegate. Situated in Fore Street, Edmonton. Listed in a valuation list of 1834. Precise site is not known.

### **Islington Infant Poor House**

The site is described variously as Fords Green or Green Lanes (probably close to the junction of Green Lanes and Fords Grove). It appears on a valuation list of 1834, on the 1841 census and in a Kellys directory of 1845.

### **St Luke's Infant Establishment**

This institution is listed on the schedules of the 1861 census. It lay close to the junction of Southgate High Street and Balaams Lane adjoining a group of cottages called Blewe Row. It belonged to the parish of St Luke's, Old Street (later merged with Clerkenwell to form the Borough of Finsbury).

### **Shoreditch Infant Poor House**

The original building in Kingsland Road was demolished for road widening in 1806. A replacement building was purchased at Baker Street, Enfield. (The site was on the west side of Baker Street, south of Gordon Road, close to the Jolly Butchers public house). It appears on the 1841 census and in a Kelly's directory of 1845.

### **Strand Union Children's Establishment**

The Strand Board of Guardians opened a children's establishment at Millfield House, Silver Street, Edmonton in 1849. A workhouse was later built alongside. Both establishments closed in 1913.

### **West London Union Children's Establishment**

Situated in Church Street, Edmonton (precise site not known). It appears on the 1841 census and in a Kelly's directory of 1845.

## **Surviving Poor Law Buildings**

### **Chase Farm Hospital**

Built as an orphanage in 1886. Became a general hospital in 1939.

### **Millfield House Arts Centre**

The former Strand Union Infants Establishment. After closure in 1913, the building was used briefly for housing Belgian refugees, before re-opening as an epileptic hospital. The hospital closed in 1971 and the building was subsequently adapted as an arts centre.

### **North Middlesex Hospital**

The hospital buildings incorporate substantial remnants of the Edmonton Union Workhouse.

### **St Michael's Hospital**

The former Enfield Workhouse, used for many years as a geriatric hospital. The name has recently been euphemised to the Enfield Community Care Centre.