

The suppression during the Reformation of monasteries and associated religious orders supporting the poor obliged the state to take over this role. In 1563 Justices of the Peace were empowered to raise funds to support the poor. The 'deserving poor' were to be given 'outdoor' relief whereby they would be provided with food, clothing or money but stayed in their homes. Those unable to work, ie the aged and infirm, would be given 'indoor relief' by being accommodated in orphanages, almshouses, workhouses or hospitals, whichever was applicable to their circumstances. The 'undeserving poor' were considered those who were idle or beggars and were set to work in workhouses. Such types of relief were provided by a parish for the poor of that parish. Those not from the parish were brought before justices of the peace and, if it was established that they had no claim on the parish, were 'removed' to their parish of origin. 'Removal Orders' listing who was removed survive in Record Offices. The parish-based Poor Rate was introduced in 1572 to raise the funds to support the poor and in 1601 the different measures were consolidated in The Poor Law.

In Bath the original Bridewell – a House of Correction for the 'undeserving poor' - was begun in 1632 and was situated in Sawclose near where the Blue Coat School was later built. In 1735 the parishes of the Abbey and St James bought an orchard between Broad Street and Milsom Street where a Poor House was built. In 1777 a 2 acre (0.8 ha) orchard in Widcombe was bought by these parishes and a new Poor House established there. This Poor House, which opened in 1781, was exclusively for the poor of the Abbey and St James' parishes. It was located in Armes Court behind Widcombe Parade. The building survived until 1961 when it was demolished.

In 1729 Widcombe parish had been first to establish its own Poor House at 5-8 Lyncombe Lane (now 9-15 Lyncombe Hill.) William Millard, landlord of the original Angel Tavern at the north end of Holloway, left money in his will for the establishment of a Poor House in the parish and this was designed in a classical style in 1729 by John Wood senior. The buildings in the area around Southcot Place date from around 1810, implying that the Poor House was rebuilt or re-clad around this time. Parts of the original structure, massive beams in the cellar and ground floor ceilings and stone cantilevered staircases, survive. The rear of the buildings shows evidence of the original design, whereas the front is clearly Georgian. The buildings still exist but the original houses have been subdivided to form four separate ones.



*The houses that were originally the first parish Poor House.*

The increasing population of the parishes of Widcombe and Lyncombe called for further accommodation and in 1825 the Overseers of the Poor entered into an agreement to buy the house in Claverton Street formerly occupied by the Luders family along with its extensive garden which was to be made into the parish's third cemetery.

The indenture includes a map showing the extent of the dwelling, including its conservatory, and its gardens. No pictures of the building have been found, although some paintings of Bath Bridge of the period have some buildings in Claverton Street in the background.



*Location of the second Poor House superimposed on the 1911 OS map*

The Poor Law Amendment Act of 1834 allowed parishes to be grouped into 'unions' for the purpose of supporting the poor and the Bath Union Workhouse was built in May 1838 on Odd Down on the site of the present St Martin's Hospital. The parish's second Poor House therefore had a short life from 1825 to 1838. In 1838 the building was sold to the Great Western Railway and used as offices for those building the railway. It later disappeared as the houses of Lyncombe Place were built, the western end of Claverton Street being refashioned to accommodate the railway viaduct. Lyncombe Place itself no longer exists, having being demolished when Claverton Street was widened as part of the redevelopment of the Holloway area in the early 1970s.

References

- 1 Lyncombe and Widcombe Poor Houses by Alistair Durie in *The Survey of Bath and District* No. 20 Oct 2005
- 2 A Forgotten Mansion: The Second Widcombe Poor House and Home of the Luders Family by Alistair Durie in *The Survey of Bath and District* No. 24 Oct 2009.
- 3 Bridewell and Poor Houses in *Bath Administer'd* by Trevor Fawcett, Ruton 2001.

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