

THEIR LIVES THEIR CHOICE?

HOW PEOPLE WITH LEARNING DISABILITIES LIVED IN PRE-NHS OXFORDSHIRE

**Report on preliminary scoping exercise
by My Life My Choice (registered charity 1187726), April 2025**

INTRODUCTION

The aim of this scoping exercise was to lay out the potential for a research project on how and where people with learning disabilities were treated and housed in Oxfordshire before the advent of the NHS in 1948. The initial questions that My Life My Choice (MLMC) put forward to explore were surrounding access to healthcare in the 19th and 20th centuries. Was there equal access, were there waiting lists? Where did people with learning disabilities fall within this if they did at all? We were also interested in where people with learning disabilities lived in Oxfordshire: were they at home with families or were they in institutions? And further on from this, did they work; if so, were they supported and what did they do? As is clear from the fact that all of these questions are not only unanswered but largely unexplored, this is an extremely underdeveloped area of research. The hope was that this scoping exercise could provide the team with an idea of what kind of sources were out there that could make finding some of these answers possible.

Overleaf is a timeline of learning disability provision from 1834-1952 that was used as a touch point.

HISTORY OF LEARNING DISABILITY PROVISION - TIMELINE

1834	Poor Law Amendment Act	Early provision for people with learning disabilities (PLD) was via poor law (workhouses sometimes housed 'docile' PLD); madhouses (37 paupers who were 'idiot' and 'imbecile' were admitted to Hook Norton Lunatic Asylum before 1845 (Parry-Jones)); education boards; lunacy system; as well as mental defective services. Madhouses and the early public mental hospitals cared for both 'lunatics' and 'idiots' – people with learning disabilities. Although specialist institutions began to be opened for the latter from the mid-nineteenth century, it was only in 1913 that counties and boroughs were required to provide separate services (see below).
1845	Lunacy Act	Every county must establish a lunatic asylum, though counties could share. Hence Oxon took in patients from Berks.
1846	Oxfordshire County	At Littlemore, 2.5 miles south-east of Oxford. See

	Pauper Lunatic Asylum opened	https://www.countyasylums.co.uk/littlemore-oxford/
1846	Bath Institution for Idiot Children and those of Weak Intellect opened	First known British school for imbecile children. See https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.1177/0957154X0001104203
1848	Highgate Asylum for Idiots opened	Predecessor of Earlswood Asylum.
1870	Fair Mile Hospital (County Lunatic Asylum for Berkshire) opened	Near Wallingford; closed in 2003.
1876	Education Act	Made primary education compulsory. Until then, many PLDs worked on farms etc and were hence 'usefully occupied' without the need to go to school.
1886	Idiots Act	Intended to give 'facilities for the care, education, and training of Idiots and Imbeciles'. Made, for the first time, the distinction between 'lunatics', 'idiots', and 'imbeciles' for the purpose of making entry into education establishments easier, and for defining the ways they were cared for. Repealed by the Mental Deficiency Act 1913.
1892	National Society for the Employment of Epileptics founded	Founded by a group of physicians from the National Hospital for the Paralysed and the Epileptic; aim was to establish an agricultural colony where people with epilepsy could live and work. A 370-acre farm was bought in Chalfont St Peter, Bucks, which at its peak in the 1950s, cared for over 550 people. Later became the National Society for Epilepsy. See https://epilepsysociety.org.uk/what-we-do/about-epilepsy-society/history-epilepsy-society .
1895	National Association for Promoting the Welfare of the Feeble-Minded founded	Leaders included Ellen Pinsent and Mary Dendy, the most significant lobbyists for government action for the feeble-minded.
1895	Doctors to be trained in aspects of mental illness and learning disabilities	General Medical Council (GMC) requirement.
1898	Parliamentary Committee on Defective and Epileptic Children established	Led to 1899 Elementary Education (Defective and Epileptic Children's) Act.
1899	Elementary Education (Defective and	Empowered school authorities to make appropriate

	Epileptic Children's) Act	provision for 'defective' children.
1901	New wing for imbeciles opened at Littlemore Lunatic Asylum, Oxford	See <i>Jackson's Oxford Journal</i> , 05/10/1901.
1904-1908	Royal Commission on Care and Control of the Feeble-minded	Set up by Winston Churchill; recommended compulsory institutionalisation for the feeble-minded and sterilisation of the 'unfit' as a measure to improve the British population. Latter measure was never adopted, but both institutionalisation and segregation were employed to help prevent 'multiplication of the unfit'. https://wellcomecollection.org/works/j56q4s5z/items
1905	First version of the Binet-Simon test published	Usually regarded as the first formal 'intelligence' test. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Binet%E2%80%93Simon_Intelligence_Test
From 1913	Assessment of 'feeble-minded' children	Cyril Burt, first psychologist employed by London County Council, began ascertainment of children, linked to eugenic ideas about the causes of LD.
1913	Mental Deficiency Act	Superseded the 1886 Idiots Act (by this time two further classifications had been introduced: 'feeble-minded people' and 'moral defectives'). Made local authorities provide separate provision for PLD for the first time (though in practice these new institutions only began to be opened in the 1920s). See https://heritagesearch.oxfordshire.gov.uk/records/H9
1913	Central Association for Mental Welfare (CAMW) established	Established by Dame Evelyn Fox specifically to look after PLD. Fox (1874–1955) was a health worker, specializing in mental health and epilepsy, and was a major figure in various mental health endeavours.
1914	Mental Deficiency Act Committee established in Oxford	See https://heritagesearch.oxfordshire.gov.uk/records/CC1/16 for details. H9/PR/1
1919	Separate training for Registered Nurses of the Mentally Defective (RNMD) introduced	Introduced by the General Nursing Council.
From 1920	Assessment of children by IQ test introduced	Brought in by Cyril Burt (first psychologist employed by London County Council); 'ascertainment': first clear assessment of PLD. Links to eugenics.

1926	Provisional Joint Institution Committee set up	Represented the counties of Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire - Berkshire was also represented but withdrew later - and County Boroughs of Reading and Oxford. Set up under the Mental Deficiency Act 1913, which permitted local authorities to co-operate in the provision of institutional accommodation for PLDs by setting up joint boards. Proposed the purchase of the Wyfold Court Estate at Checkendon (near Henley and Reading) to be converted into a colony for 500 patients. This institution became known as the Borocourt Institution (see below). See https://heritagesearch.oxfordshire.gov.uk/records/H9 .
1929	Wood Report (Report of the Mental Deficiency Committee, a Joint Committee of the Board of Education and Board of Control)	Contains a useful history of reports and legislation regarding 'mental defectives'. Found that 10% of defectives were in mental deficiency institutions, 25% in mental hospitals, 39% in poor law institutions. The report was important because it argued that 'mentally deficient' children should not be isolated from mainstream education. See https://www.education-uk.org/documents/wood/index.html
1930	Borocourt Hospital, Wyfold Court, near Henley opened	Established to care for mentally handicapped people. Pre-1948, managed by the Berkshire, Oxfordshire and Reading Joint Board for the Mentally Defective; after 1948 by the Oxford Regional Health Board (see Berkshire Archives J/MH; ask Ivone Turnbull, BRO). However, did not provide sufficient space, so PLD still sent to Littlemore etc. Closed in 1993.
1931	Buckinghamshire, Oxfordshire and Reading Joint Board for the Mentally Defective established	Set up under the Bucks, Oxon and Reading Joint Board for the Mentally Defective Order, 1931 (Ministry of Health). Took over from the Provisional Joint Institution Committee (see above). See https://heritagesearch.oxfordshire.gov.uk/records/H9 .
1939	Government merged existing mental health charities	Following the Feversham Report existing mental health charities, including the Central Association for Mental Welfare (the then leading charity for PLD), were merged as a wartime emergency measure. This led to the establishment of Mind, which in its early years had a strong element of provision for PLD.
1944	Education Act	Key in that it used the label "ineducable."
1948	World Health Organisation (WHO) founded, and United Nations Declaration of Human Rights adopted	But it was not until 1971 that the Declaration on the Rights of Mentally Retarded Persons recognised that earlier editions were not specific enough to protect this population.
1948	National Assistance	Formally abolished the Poor Law and established a social

	Act	safety net for those who did not pay national insurance contributions (e.g. the homeless, the physically disabled, and unmarried mothers) and were therefore left uncovered by the National Insurance Act 1946 and the National Insurance (Industrial Injuries) Act 1946. Start of the NHS.
1952	Bradwell Grove Hospital near Burford, Oxon, opened	The first NHS hospital in Oxfordshire for people with learning disabilities. Site originally built during WWII as a transit camp for American troops and later as a receiving base for casualties. Closed in 1986.

METHODOLOGY

This is a fully inclusive research project following the principles of co production and people first research methods, to enact this the project needed to be led by people with learning disabilities from the very beginning, including the scoping exercise. They needed to have control over all decision making and be fully recognised as co-researchers along with any academics involved. This practice has multiple roots but MLMC is particularly influenced by the work of Jan Walmsley and Kelly Johnson and their book ‘Inclusive Research with People with Learning Disabilities’. Two of their major relevant points on how to conduct inclusive research are as follows:

- Being co-researchers: This creates an equal partnership where the researcher brings their learned expertise and research skills and people with learning disabilities bring their lived experience and unique perspective. They work together to create a full and more accurate understanding of how the research topic impacts people with learning disabilities than if it had been studied without their involvement.
- People with learning disabilities taking control: It is very rare for people with learning disabilities to be in control of their own narratives let alone academic research projects. By having people with learning disabilities take back this power they can start to shape their own lives and communities in ways that they know work and are safest for them.

We implemented both of these structures by having a research team of three people with learning disabilities, one academic researcher and one advocate from MLMC. All decisions were made as a team, primarily led by the members with learning disabilities, and the academic researcher and MLMC advocate were responsible for making all archival work accessible and for assisting the rest of the team in engaging with any research work that they did not have prior knowledge of so that they could then do it themselves.

All of the data gathered during the scoping exercise was done through archival research. The team had pre meetings to discuss what to look for and post meetings to discuss what had been found and any conclusions or new ideas that could be drawn.

SHORT ACCOUNT

First visit to the Oxfordshire History Centre, 24/10/2024

For the first archival visit the team agreed to start from a base point of looking at casebook records from Littlemore Asylum, the broad reasoning being that accommodation and treatment for people with learning disabilities often go hand in hand. Littlemore Asylum was the primary place where people with any kind of mental health problems or what we now call learning disabilities were sent in Oxfordshire during the 19th/20th century period. They also reviewed a psychological testing kit from the Warneford hospital dated from the 1920s-1940s.

The major takeaway from this session was the researchers from MLMC learned what archives were and gained experience reading the cursive writing used in the asylum records. While the writing is very difficult to decipher, the researchers quickly picked up the consistencies in the form. Conclusions drawn from what they were able to read were that everyone in Littlemore seemed to hate being there and many of them lived the majority of their lives and died there. They also decided that they would have to look for words such as 'idiocy' and 'imbecile' as the category of learning disability did not exist at this time. Judging by the psychological testing kit from the Warneford they were able to conclude that while the term learning disabled did not exist, the types of tests people were being given suggested they were being tested on mental capacity and education level, not just their mental health.



Second visit to the Oxfordshire History Centre, 07/11/2024

During this visit the group were accompanied by John Hall, former head clinical psychologist at the Warneford Hospital and senior research associate for medical humanities at Oxford Brookes University and John Stewart, Emeritus Professor of the History of Healthcare at Glasgow Caledonian University. Both agreed to advise on the project and share their expertise with the researchers.

In this session the researchers primarily focused on the Banbury Workhouse admission certificates from October 1880-June 1890. The aim was to see which admission certificates to the workhouse featured any of the terms discussed at the previous session such as ‘lunacy’ ‘weak-mindedness’ and ‘idiocy’ and to see if any of the people that did were moved to any of the local asylums such as Littlemore. Through doing this, the researchers learned what cross referencing was and through reading the detailed admission certificates were able to find out more specific information on how the process worked. For example, it was commented on that people could be labelled a lunatic but if they didn’t pose a threat to anyone and could work they were allowed to stay in the workhouse rather than go to an asylum. The research team were also shocked by the variation in age of those being assessed, the youngest being 15 and the oldest being in their 60s.

Members of the team discussed the lack of consistency both in the language used in the sources, and in the level of implied disability. There is the added complication that some of the terms, such as ‘mentally defective’ and ‘imbecile’ were used in legislation, thus ‘freezing’ their meaning for administrative purposes. The precise meaning of ‘weak-minded’ is particularly problematic.

Third visit to the Oxfordshire History Centre, 21/11/2024

The researchers were accompanied again by John Stewart and the group decided to split to look at things individually for this session. John and Gina used the British Newspaper Archive to search for inquests into Littlemore Asylum as another way to find named individuals that might have had learning disabilities at the asylum. Gina learned how to use the online search function and by searching Littlemore with the key words such as ‘imbecile’ and ‘feeble-minded’ was able to find coroner’s inquiries on patients that likely had learning disabilities. They also found references to an ‘imbecile’ specific wing at the asylum, suggesting that ‘imbeciles’ were viewed as distinct from the other patients at the asylum.

Pam was reviewing Warneford case sheets from the early 1900s. The records were not dated but after a while she realised they were alphabetized by last name which was a valuable research lesson and showed excellent engagement with the material. She also realised that sometimes multiple pages will have the same reference number which can make things difficult. She noted the term ‘approaching idiocy’ which was a useful discovery in

understanding that medical professionals had a scale for different types of disability and must have had a base idea of what makes someone ‘idiotic’.

Leigh was reviewing the medical certificates of people in the Henley workhouse from 1890-1903. She noticed that several of the certificates referenced someone described as ‘weak-minded’ or as having ‘idiocy’ and decided to count how many there were. She suggested counting how many cases there were in total so that we could work out what proportion of all cases were of ‘weak-mind’ or ‘idiocy’, which is a clear example of a research technique and again shows great understanding and engagement.



FULL LIST OF PRIMARY SOURCES CONSULTED AT THE OXFORDSHIRE HISTORY CENTRE DURING THE SCOPING PROJECT (OCTOBER AND NOVEMBER 2024)

(OHA = Oxfordshire Health Archives; held at the Oxfordshire History Centre, but catalogued separately, and not yet available via [Heritage Search](#).)

Title of source	Date(s)	Reference
Warneford Hospital: case books (see OHA catalogue Warneford Hospital (Lucy Barrell, Oct 2024))	1844-1867	OHA WV 154/i to OHA WV 154/viii
Littlemore Hospital: Medical case book of males (see OHA catalogue Littlemore Hospital (Lucy Barrell, Oct 2024))	1889-1890	OHA L 8 A1/1/12
Littlemore Hospital: Alphabetical register of female admissions, with name, date of admission, Union, bodily condition, mental condition (see OHA catalogue Littlemore Hospital (Lucy Barrell, Oct 2024))	1910-1913	OHA L 7 A1/1/9
St Thomas Industrial Home and Orphanage; report for the year ending 1886	1886	PA Pamphlet OXFO 362.7

St Thomas Industrial Home and Orphanage; report for the year ending 1898	1898	PA Pamphlet OXFO 362.7
Annual reports of the Guardians of the Poor of the City of Oxford, with statement of accounts	1873-1929	OXFO/362.5
Banbury Workhouse: Medical certificates to detain paupers in the workhouse suffering from mental or infectious diseases	1888-1890	PLU1/W/A2/1
Henley Workhouse: Lunatics certificate book	1890-1903	PLU4/W/A2/1
Buckinghamshire, Oxfordshire and Reading Joint Board for the Mentally Defective, Mental Deficiency Act: copy of the Act (1913) and Provisional Regulations (1914)	1913-14	H9/PR/1
Durrell Analysis of Reading Difficulty, Examiner's Kit	1930s	OHA accession ref. acc 743 (not yet catalogued)
Westminster Reading Scheme	1930s	OHA accession ref. acc 743 (not yet catalogued)
<p><i>Jackson's Oxford Journal</i> Examples: 01/07/1882 - inquest on a suicide who had been discharged from Littlemore, 'suicide by hanging when of an unsound mind'. 21/07/1894 - inquest on a man from Windsor, 'mysterious death of...'. 28/01/1899 - suicide of a Warborough man, with evidence of 'weakness of intellect'. 08/12/1900 – 'Inquest at Littlemore Asylum', deceased an 'imbecile', evidence of 'senile decay', with 'hereditary' issues. 05/10/1901 – mention of 'new wing for imbeciles'. 17/05/1902 - item on 'Pauper Imbeciles and Lunatics'. 07/06/1902 - item on 'Imbecile Paupers'.</p> <p>The last three references might imply either more 'imbeciles' as part of the asylum population; greater perceived need to separate them out; greater press/public attention; or some combination of these. Annual Reports might give some leads here.</p>	1882-1902	via the British Newspaper Archive website

FINDINGS AND GOING FORWARD

My Life My Choice office review 05/12/2024

After three archival visits the research group, accompanied by John Hall, met at the MLMC offices to discuss what they had found and to assess how this all might come together in one research project. This initial discussion surrounded the primary topics of language, economics and referral, with questions around the evolution of terminology, who could be put to work and how and who ended up in these institutions and why arising from their collective observations. The team also agreed that it was clear from their visits that there were more than enough materials to review to begin researching any of their initial questions.

After much discussion the idea that the team arrived to for going forward is a large scale project in which there are two research strands running alongside one and other:

- a) One strand looking at broad themes: how and where people with learning disabilities were looked after (or not) pre-1948. This can involve some qualitative descriptions of e.g. conditions in institutions, and some statistical analysis e.g. counting how many cases described as ‘weak minded’ or ‘idiot’ are found in the workhouse records for a particular date range, and what proportion of total cases this represents.
- b) Another strand looking at individual people’s lives, tracking them and their experiences via records such as asylum case books, the census, and parish records, to build up biographies of them.

The final report can bring together these two strands, as well as commenting on how the situation in Oxfordshire compared with what was going on elsewhere in England.

After seeking some feedback on the idea they received a response from Mark Priddey, Manager at the Oxfordshire History Centre, who advised that some records are closed for 100 years from date of creation because of potentially sensitive information about individuals. However, we can explore workarounds, as it's likely that some of the content of the documents will be more generic and we may be able to obtain Academic Access Research Exemption for closed records. Gary Tuson of the [Change Minds project](#) also fed back and advised how important it is to evaluate your research as you go, at Change Minds they do it by giving participants a questionnaire at the beginning and at the end so this is something to consider.

REFLECTIONS ON THE SCOPING EXERCISE FROM OUR ADVISORS

John Hall, former head clinical psychologist at the Warneford Hospital and senior research associate for medical humanities at Oxford Brookes University:

“In my previous work as a clinical psychologist between 1977 and 1980, when I was working clinically with people with learning disabilities, it would have been unheard of for them to

have been involved in such a project as this. Since working at Oxford Brookes University from 2002, I have supervised a MPhil thesis by an experienced learning disability community nurse, on the understanding of service users of the effects of their anticonvulsant medication, which indicated how many of them were well capable of understanding those effects, and crucially were able to communicate that knowledge, *if given an opportunity to do so*.

This project has further demonstrated how people with learning disabilities can access, and offer their own interpretations of, historical narratives and records, giving an additional perspective in a field which is under-researched. The historical case notes and other records they have examined, from an institution primarily intended for people with mental health problems, demonstrates how people with learning disabilities were admitted to a range of facilities before the 1913 Mental Deficiency Act, but how little attention was paid to their particular diagnosis and needs then. This is a useful method to significantly extend our understanding of the range of patterns of care of this group of people, and it further empowers present day services users to actively contribute to the ongoing debates around appropriate models of daily activity and care.”

John Stewart, Emeritus Professor of the History of Healthcare at Glasgow Caledonian University:

“ Prior to my involvement with the My Life My Choice project I had a reasonable working knowledge of the records of, especially, Littlemore Asylum. However, I have been struck by, when 'asked the right questions', the archives throw up interesting material about historical cases of people with learning disabilities. So while that expression was yet to be coined, sensitive reading of, for example, admissions registers reveals cases which would now fall into that category, and the institutionalisation of many of the individuals concerned. Almost as revealing has been the information acquired through searches in local newspapers for, for instance, coroners' reports. Even our relatively brief visits to the Oxfordshire Local History Centre have, therefore, proved productive, and further engagement with its resources would undoubtedly bring to light yet more relevant material.”

PRIMARY AND SECONDARY SOURCES IDENTIFIED AS POTENTIALLY USEFUL FOR THE LARGER PROJECT

OXFORDSHIRE PRIMARY SOURCES

Records of the **Littlemore (Pauper Lunatic) Asylum**. Housed in two archives:

Oxford History Centre, ref [H1](#). Include for example:

- Committee of Visitors minute books, 1841-1948, [H1/CV1/A1](#) (include lists of discharges of named patients both permanent and probationary and which parish was chargeable for them; from the 1930s onwards refer to numbers of ‘mental defectives’ or ‘idiots’ in the asylum).
- Committee of Visitors annual reports, 1847-1917, [H1/CV1/R](#).
- Oral history recordings (covering period 1926-1990) from Jocelyn Goddard’s *Mixed Feelings* project on Littlemore Hospital, available for listening and download within

OHC, except where one or two are closed to access:

https://heritagesearch.oxfordshire.gov.uk/search/all:avRecords/0_100/all/score_desc/Littlemore%20Jocelyn%20Goddard.

Oxfordshire Health Archives (OHA, held at OHC, but catalogued separately). See [OHA catalogue Littlemore Hospital \(Lucy Barrell, Oct 2024\)](#). Include for example:

- Registers of patients from 1846, OHA L 7 E.
- Registers from 1846 of patient admissions, OHA L 7 A, and discharges, OHA L 7 B.
- Case books, 1846-1910, OHA L 8 A1.
- Individual case files, 1872-1921, OHA L 8 A3.
- Annual reports, 1847-1967, OHA L 1 A1 and OHA L 1 A2.
- Medical Superintendent's report books, 1898-1967, OHA L 1 G1.
- Maps and plans of buildings, 1844-1938, OHA L 3 B.

Records of the **Warneford Asylum**. Held by the Oxfordshire Health Archives (OHA) at OHC. See [OHA catalogue Warneford Hospital \(Lucy Barrell, Oct 2024\)](#). Include for example:

- Admissions registers, 1826-1845, OHA WV 151.
- Admission certificates and papers, 1826-1926, OHA WV 153 and OHA WV 169.
- Case books, 1826-1926, OHA WV 154 and OHA WV 173 (n.b. Jane Freebody has kindly compiled [a list of cases of patients described as, for example, "verging on idiots", "congenital imbecile", "feeble-minded" \(1828-1898\)](#)).
- Patients' conversations with Commissioners in Lunacy, 1905-1926, OHA WV 160.

Records of **other Oxfordshire lunatic asylums** e.g. [Hook Norton and Witney Lunatic Asylums: Admission and Discharge Certificates 1845-1856](#) (Eureka Partnership, 2015) and [Hook Norton & Witney Lunatic Asylums - Volume Two - Admission & Discharge Certificates 1828-1845](#) (Eureka Partnership).

Oxfordshire Quarter Sessions papers: 'Lunacy' catalogue searchable via TNA's website: [QSL](#). N.b. Hook Norton and Witney had private asylums to which PLD were sometimes sent via the Quarter Sessions.

Records of **Cumnor Rise**, Oxford, 'home for feeble-minded girls' opened off Cumnor Rise Road in 1907. See https://oxfordshirehealtharchives.nhs.uk/hospitals/cumnor_rise/. Building designed by architect Clough Williams-Ellis: see plans on [RIBApix](#).

Records of **'rescue' societies/homes** e.g. St Thomas the Martyr Industrial Home for Girls in Moral Danger, Oxford ([PA Pamphlet OXFO 362.7](#)). See <https://www.childrenshomes.org.uk/list/Oxfordshire.shtml>

Records of **Oxfordshire Poor Law Unions**, https://heritagesearch.oxfordshire.gov.uk/search/all:combined/0_50/all/score_desc/Poor%20Law%20Union%20records. There were nine Poor Law Unions in Oxfordshire: Banbury, Bicester, Headington, Henley, Chipping Norton, Oxford, Thame, Witney and Woodstock. Records include:

- Chipping Norton Poor Law Union, medical journals for patients under guardianship

(record of examinations under the Mental Deficiency Act), 1928-1939, PLU3 [PLU3/W/3A7](#).

- Thame Poor Law Union (not specifically workhouse), 1835-1928, PLU5 <https://heritagesearch.oxfordshire.gov.uk/records/PLU5>
- Witney Poor Law Union (not specifically workhouse), 1835-1948, PLU6 <https://heritagesearch.oxfordshire.gov.uk/records/PLU6>
- Headington Poor Law Union (not specifically workhouse), 1841-1927, OCA/AU https://www.oxfordshirehistory.org.uk/public/catalogues/oxford_other_authorities.pdf

See also Eureka Partnership publications:

- [Abingdon Union Miscellany](#)
- [Banbury Union Miscellany](#)
- [Faringdon Union Miscellany](#)
- [Wallingford Union Miscellany](#)
- [Wallingford Union Miscellany - Volume Two](#)
- [Wantage Union Miscellany](#)

Poor Law removal orders (via [Poor Law name index, 1588-1928](#)) e.g:

- Charles Bishop the younger, “an idiot”, removed from Over Norton to Ratley, Warks, 16 Oct 1784, [PAR64/5/A5/10](#).
- Mathew Hull, “cripple and idiot”, removed from Great Milton to Kew (Surrey) 18 Apr 1818, [PAR171/5/3A1/1](#).

Records of **Oxfordshire workhouses**:

- Banbury, 1845-1952, [PLU1/W](#)
- Bicester, 1834-1859, [PLU2/W](#)
- Chipping Norton, 1906-1954, [PLU3/W](#)
- Henley, 1836-1919, [PLU4/W](#)
- Woodstock, 1866-1954, [PLU7/W](#)
- Oxford, 1843-1892, [PLU8/W](#)

Records of the **County Medical Officer of Health** ([H2](#)). Includes:

- Register of inspections of defectives not in institutions or under guardianship', 1934-1942 (n.b. closed until 2043), [H2/8/R1](#).

School records: admission records; attendance records (school attendance officers must have known of LD children); and log books. Mark Priddey (Manager, OHC) 19/09/24: “I’ve reviewed the school log books to which we’ve assigned closure periods, but none of them specifically highlights ‘mental deficiency’, ‘feeble-minded’, ‘backward’ or similar likely-used terms in the reasoning for potential closure. It may be that a sample check of school log books for geographical areas in which the researchers are interested would be as good a way as any of finding references to pupils with (perceived) learning disabilities.

Records of **special schools** (see

https://heritagesearch.oxfordshire.gov.uk/search/phrase:records/0_50/all/score_desc/special%20school), e.g:

- St Michael's Special School, New Inn Hall Street, Oxford, 1901-1903, [S211/4](#).
- Bayswater Rise School, 1931-1946, [OCA12/2/C25](#).
- St Thomas's School, Osney Lane, Oxford (built 1904) had a 'Backwards Class', [S217](#).
- South Oxford County Primary School, St Aldates, industrial school buildings for mentally-defective children were built in 1905, [CEDBP 839 NS](#).

Records of **local council Education Committees**, e.g.

- Oxford Borough Council Education Care/Special Services Subcommittee Minutes, 1937-1941, [OCA1/24/A16/1](#).
- Oxfordshire County Council Health and Attendance Board/Special Services Board Sub-committee minutes, 1945-1973, [CC1/12/A31](#).
- Banbury Borough Education Committee School Attendance Committee minutes, 1877-1934, [BOR2/2/8/A1](#).

Records of the **Oxford Mental Deficiency Act Committee**, 1914-1948, [CC1/16](#)

Records of the **Oxford Borough Council Mental Deficiency Committee**, 1914-1941, [OCA1/9/A4](#).

Records of the **Buckinghamshire, Oxfordshire and Reading Joint Board for the Mentally Defective**, 1926-1948, [H9](#). Include:

- Provisional Joint Institution Committee signed minutes, 1926-1931, [H9/A1/1](#).
- Papers relating to Borocourt and other properties, 1928-1949, [H9/C4](#).
- Correspondence files relating to individual staff and patients, 1940-1944, [H9/C5](#).

Census (1851 to 1921); **1939 register**; **parish records** (births, baptisms, marriages, deaths, burials), via [ancestry.co.uk](#) and/or [findmypast.co.uk](#).

Newspaper reports via the [British Newspaper Archive](#) (MLMC has a subscription).

Jackson's Oxford Journal (founded 1753), which became the *Oxford Journal Illustrated* in 1909 (lasted until 1928); the *Oxford University Herald* (1852-1892); the *Oxford Chronicle & Reading Gazette* (founded 1845); *The Oxford Times* (founded 1862), which merged with the *Oxford Chronicle* in 1929. Searchable index to pictures in the *Oxford Journal Illustrated* (1909-1928) at:

<https://www.oxfordshire.gov.uk/sites/default/files/file/history/OJPhotoIndex1912-1928.pdf>.

Newspaper reports are likely to coroner's inquests; people contesting their confinement under the 1913 Mental Deficiency Act; people living on licence in the community (under 'guardianship' of family or an upstanding member of the community) under the Mental Deficiency Act. Using search terms 'Littlemore' plus, variously, 'asylum', 'feeble-minded', 'moron' and 'imbecile' throws up a lot of hits, many regarding coroners' inquests.

People listed by name in OHC 'People' and 'Poor Law' indexes, e.g:

- Search for 'idiot': [22 results](#).
- Search for 'imbecile': [89 results](#).

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