

Prison Records

Dundee City Archives - Research Guide 02

Background

The first prison in Dundee was in the Tollbooth, located in the Overgate. In 1732 the new Town House was built on the High Street, roughly covering the area which is now City Square. In both of these buildings the jail was on the upper floors, whilst the lower was for general council use. Although dark and dingy, they weren't secure and many prisoners escaped. Some prisoners were housed in the Steeple at St Mary's.

By the 19th century the growth in population had led to a boom in crime and the Town House was overcrowded. In 1834 an Act of Parliament started the process of building a new Prison, which was built 3 years later in 1837. This was located behind the Court House on Bell Street. It lasted only 90 years and was closed in 1927. The site later became the depot for the Corporation's Transport Department.

After this there was no Prison in Dundee. The nearest prison was at Perth or the open prison at Castle Huntly (opened 1947).

Some information about Crime in 19th Century Dundee can be found on the [Central Library's ScRAN pages](#).

What Records are there?

Bell Street Prison (1837-1927)

Records of the Dundee Prison are held at the National Records of Scotland, however few survive. The only registers of criminals are: 1900-1902 (Reference: HH21/72/1); 1902-1905 (HH21/47/9); 1905-1908 (HH21/47/11); 1911-1915 (HH21/47/15); 1922-1927 (HH21/47/17). Most of these records are held amongst the Perth prison records collection, presumably sent there after the Dundee Prison closed in 1927. Other items relating to the prison held there include: Governors Journals, 1864-1927 (HH12/78); Deputy Governor's Journals, 1875-1895 (HH12/79) and Letter Books (HH12/80). These are unlikely to mention individual prisoners.

Townhouse/Tollbooth (Before 1837)

Like the Bell Street prison, no registers of prisoners survive. However there are some records in the Town Clerk's files. This includes petitions on behalf of prisoners, receipts for payments of support to prisoners, letters to the clerk about prisoners, legal case notes, as well as files about the running of the prison. These mostly date from the 1820s and some from the 18th century. There are weekly lists of prisoners from 1824 and 1825, but these are not complete. Some references to the prisoners might appear in the Town Council Minutes. The City Archives holds a photocopy of a Tollbooth Warding Book from 1767-1772 (the original is held at the National Records of Scotland—see over).

A list of prisoners held in Dundee for taking part in the 1745/6 Jacobite rebellion is available on the [Friends of Dundee City Archives website](#). This is taken from 'The Jacobites of Angus, 1689-1746' by David Dobson.

Related Institutions

Prison Aid Society

Dundee City Archives holds the records of the Dundee Discharged Prisoners' Aid Society, 1872-1997 (Ref: GD/X422). This includes minute books, annual reports, correspondence, accounts and general papers. The records are unlikely to contain information about individual prisoners. The aims of the society were to assist discharged prisoners in Angus, Perth and Fife by arranging accommodation in lodgings; providing clothing and helping children of discharged prisoners to find work or attend an Industrial School.

Industrial Schools (or Approved Schools)

The Dundee Industrial Schools Society was founded at Ward Road in 1847. Originally attendance was voluntary but after 1861, children could be sentenced to attend the school instead of going to jail. The boys school moved to Baldovan in 1878, and the girls stayed at Ward Road but moved up to Balgay in 1896. The following records contain information about pupils, for a full list of records, please contact the Archives.

Girls (Ward Road then Balgay)

Admission registers (includes boys before	1855-1924	GD/Balg/2/3/1-6
Log books	1910-1980	GD/Balg/2/5/1-4
Punishment books	1891-1966	GD/Balg/2/6/1-3

Boys (Baldovan or Balgowan)

Admission registers	1873-1980	GD/Balg/3/3/1-9
Log books	1922-1983	GD/Balg/3/4/1-3

Please note that records that contain personal information are closed for 100 years. Please contact us for further information.

Mars training ship

The Mars was moored in the Tay between 1869 and 1929. It was a training ship for boys; most were sent there instead of prison, however orphan boys were also sent there. Although in the Tay, technically the ship was based at Newport. The records of the Training Ship are held at Newport Library. However, we do hold some material relating to the ship at Dundee City Archives. This includes annual reports 1894-1927 (GD/AY/12) and photographs (GD/X1041; GD/X307). Some other records relating to the ship are held at National Records of Scotland.

Records held elsewhere...

The original copy of the Tollbooth Warding Book from 1767-1772 is held at the National Records of Scotland (Ref: CS96/1574).

Reports of crimes and trials often appeared in the local press. Copies of Dundee Newspapers are held at the [Dundee Central Library](#).

Some published items, such as notices of death sentences and reports, are held in the Lamb Collection at [Dundee Central Library](#).

Records of more recent prisons, including Castle Huntly, will either be held by the Scottish Prison Service or the National Records of Scotland. Some records may be closed.