Allan Brodie - *The Castle or the Green Field: dilemmas and solutions in English prison planning, 1780-1850*.

Introduction

Life in England underwent a profound series of transformations between the late 18th and mid-19th centuries. The country witnessed a shift from rural to urban and small-scale to large-scale, with the country's rapidly growing population increasingly being concentrated in towns and cities. There was also a greater organisation of places, with new forms of local government and new legislation beginning to have an impact on the size, shape and character of settlements. By the mid-19th century services such as gas, water and sewerage were beginning to transform the lives of urban residents. England's national wealth was growing rapidly and an increasingly large part of the country's population found itself with disposable income and time to enjoy leisure and luxury, stimulating the creation of spa towns and seaside resorts.

No aspect of life in the country was immune from the changes taking place. Between 1780 and 1850 England's prisons were transformed from small-scale, often haphazard, locally managed institutions to larger, more structured and more centrally directed complexes. Their architectural form was transformed and their status shifted from being at the heart of the civic life of a town to being almost industrial structures often on the edge of a settlement. However, having made that sweeping generalisation, the reality was more complex. In some counties, the historic castle site that had traditionally been used as the site of the prison continued in use, posing a series of issues and challenges. This paper describes the thinking about the location of prisons in towns and cities at this date and seeks to identify how changes in their regime and architecture influenced their location.

Prisons in the late 18th Century

By the 1770s and 1780s there was a crisis in England's prisons. There was a lack of a clear legal framework for the management of prisons, the buildings provided were more or less poorly maintained by a bewildering array of responsible bodies, the

experience of imprisonment in one town or county was different to the next one, and there were only a handful of purpose-built facilities. Some counties maintained separate Houses of Correction and County Gaols, while others combined the institutions. And to further complicate matters, transportation to the USA as a punishment had ended with the American War of Independence.

To remedy this situation, new legislation was passed and transportation to Australia replaced the trans-Atlantic punishment. The pioneering work of John Howard and his many followers led to the appointment of full-time, salaried staff, who were no longer dependent on levying fees from inmates. Hygiene was improved and a chapel and infirmary would be constructed on each site to cater for the spiritual and physical well-being of prisoners. A system of classification was introduced in which inmates were held according to their age, gender and crime. Criminality was seen as a contagion and there was a desire to separate hardened, older offenders from younger, impressionable prisoners. New buildings were created to achieve this, often with individual cellblocks that were subdivided longitudinally to allow two classes of offender to share the same building, yet be separated from each other. By day prisoners worked alongside other offenders in their class in yards or in day rooms created on the ground floor of the prison blocks, while by night they slept in small cells on the floors above. Supervision of the external spaces and day areas was more significant than observing the landings at night and so a tower or a tall central building was often incorporated into the design to oversee the activities taking place in the yards.[1]

Transforming England's Prisons 1780-1850

By the end of the 18th century, purpose-built courthouses and prisons had become a feature of some castles, but at the same time the process was beginning to get

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[1] Brodie, A, Croom, J and Davies J (2002) English Prisons: an architectural history. Swindon: English Heritage, chapter 2, chapter 3 - available as a download https://archaeologydataservice.ac.uk/archives/view/eh_monographs_2014/contents.cfm?mono=1089057 accessed 6 June 2019

under way of moving prisons to new sites on the edge of towns, out of sight of the lives of most residents. This was necessitated by the growing size of these institutions, their increasing complexity and the consequent lack of space available on historic sites in an already densely urbanised area with little or no room for expansion.

A series of micro and macro geographical processes had an impact on the form of England's prisons and their location between the late 18th century and the mid-19th century. At the macro level, this included its industrialisation, the growing prosperity of the country and the increasing size of its towns and cities. The population of England in 1790 was estimated to be around 8.5 million; the 1841 census enumerated 15.9 million people, while a decade later a further 2 million lived in the country. Towns and cities were growing in terms of their population, but equally in the area that they covered. New industrial centres grew by three to four times between the first census in 1801 and 1851. For instance, Leeds grew by 325% from 53,000 inhabitants to 172,000 50 years later, Liverpool from 82,000 to 376,000 (459%) and Manchester increased by 404% from 75,000 to 303,000. Historic county towns, often the traditional locations of prisons, also grew significantly, if not quite so quickly. Norwich was populated by 36,000 people in 1801, but half a century later it was home to 68,000 residents, a rise of 189%. Oxford grew from 12,000 to 28,000 (233%), Wakefield 11,000 to 22,000 (200%) and York increased its population by 212% from 17,000 to 36,000.

As well as more people, there was inevitably more crime and therefore also more prisoners, hence larger buildings were needed to house them. In 1777 John Howard estimated that there were 4,000 prisoners, probably a serious underestimate, while an 1819 report suggested there were 16,000 local prisoners; convicts were counted separately. By 1878 there were 21,000 people held in local prisons and 11,000 in

convict prisons, though figures for both were dropping, surprisingly quickly and consistently.[2]

These factors were leading Justices of the Peace and local and national government officers to consider whether their renewed or rebuilt prison should continue to be on the historic prison site or should a new greenfield, effectively suburban, site be chosen. This would allow a necessarily larger, new prison to be constructed, while the old prison remained functioning. This was sometimes a solution to the issue of prison reform in the late 18th century, but by the mid-19th century, this had become almost the standard approach to new prison construction.

At the other end of the scale, the micro geography of prisons was being transformed during the late 18th and early 19th century. The haphazard architecture and organisation of imprisonment of the 18th century became more systematic following the reforms advocated by John Howard, but the experience of imprisonment during the late 18th century was still almost 'sociable', though not quite in the sense of the Company visiting a spa or a seaside resort. There was a presumption that groups of offenders classified by age, gender and seriousness of the offence could live and work together.

By the 1830s the situation was very different: the simple classification system introduced in the 1780s was in crisis; in fact it had become almost farcically complex to administer as the broad categories had been increasingly subdivided over decades. Where once inmates were divided into male and female, young and old, felon and misdemeanant, by the 1830s there might be over 30 classes of inmate, each requiring separate yards, cells and workrooms. The prison at Shrewsbury was to have thirteen classes in 1786, but this had risen to seventeen by 1797 and by 1834 twenty-six categories were specified.[3] **Fig 1** Most large county gaols had more

[2] Brodie, Croom and Davies. English Prisons above, 54, 147, 139
[3] Shropshire Record Office, Minute Book of Gaol Building Committee, QA/11, 348/10. General Rules, Orders, Regulations & Bye-Laws for the Inspection & Govt of the G & House of correction for the county of Salop (1797) Shropshire Record Office, QA/2/3, 154/1, pp.94-95. Rules & Regulations for the Government of Salop Gaol & House of correction (1834), Shropshire Record Office, 265A 139/10; QA/2/3, Order of QS, Dec 30 1833

than ten categories by the 1820s while the extreme example is Maidstone that could detain thirty categories of male prisoner and eight female classes.[4] Although classification might appear to be a desirable aim, the effect of this more complex system was to duplicate facilities and to fragment the layout of yards and buildings. This effect is clear at Stafford where a plan of the prison shows that there were approximately 36 yards or gardens serving adjacent small sections of the prison.[5] **Fig 2** Prisons built in the late 18th and early 19th centuries to enforce a simpler system were to prove incapable of such endless subdivision, and this was one factor that prompted a wholesale reevaluation of prison discipline and therefore penal architecture in the 1830s.

A new almost industrialised approach to imprisonment evolved, in which the individual was highly separated, the prisoner being held in a cell in an increasingly large, more uniform penal machine. In June 1832 a Select Committee of the House of Commons recommended imposing solitary confinement with hard labour along similar lines to the silent system practised in Auburn prison in USA because it allowed human contact, rather than the absolute solitude of the separate system practised in other American prisons.[6] The Select Committee also recommended that dormitories and dayrooms in existing prisons should be converted into separate sleeping cells and new cell blocks should be erected. Following the Committee's report William Crawford (1788-1847) was sent to America to examine their state prisons and produced a report on American penitentiaries and the two rival systems of discipline. Contrary to the conclusions of the 1831-2 Committee, he condemned the silent system since it was maintained by corporal punishment and he criticised the design of Auburn because it did not allow central inspection.[7] Instead, he praised the system of discipline imposed at Cherry Hill and recommended the adoption of a modified form of the separate system in England.[8] Every prisoner should have his

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[4] Brodie, Croom and Davies. English Prisons above, 62
[5] Brodie, Croom and Davies. English Prisons above, 62
[6] Secondary Punishments 1831-2, PP 1831-2 (547), VII, Report 3-20; Secondary Punishments 1831-2, PP 1831-2 (547), VII, Minutes of Evidence, 43-8
[7] Crawford, W (1834) *Report of William Crawford, Esq. on the Penitentiaries of the United States*, PP 1834 (593), XLVI, 19; Appendix, 23
[8] Crawford, *Report of William Crawford* 19, 31, 36-41

own cell in which to sleep and eat and certain classes of offender should be held in solitary confinement, with or without work. A Select Committee of the House of Lords was appointed in March 1835 to examine again the question of prison discipline.[9] It concluded that there should be a uniform system of discipline because: 'Entire Separation, except during the Hours of Labour and of Religious Worship and Instruction, is absolutely necessary for preventing Contamination, and for securing a proper System of Prison Discipline.'[10]

These recommendations were implemented by the 1835 Prisons Act, which required that each prisoner should sleep and work alone in a large cell that contained all the necessary facilities for prison life including lighting, heating, ventilation, a toilet and basin, and the means to call an officer.[11] The cells should be constructed so as to prevent communication between prisoners and separation should be extended to the chapel and exercise yards. The cellular solitude intended to induce reflection was to be broken by religious worship, daily exercise and frequent visits from officers, in particular the chaplain.

The Home District Inspectors produced a series of plans of model prisons, with the assistance from September 1837 of Joshua Jebb, a captain in the Royal Engineers. Ultimately this thinking would give rise to HMP Pentonville (1840-2), the model prison that set the standards for purpose-built prison designs for a generation. It was also a prison on a new site, at what was the outer edge of London at the time that it was constructed. London's population in 1801 was 1.1 million and by 1851 had risen to 2.65 million, an increase of 240%. When London's new 19th century prisons are plotted on a map, it is obvious that they were located at, or just beyond, the edge of the city as it existed when they were constructed. This assertion applies equally to Millbank and Brixton in the 1810s, Pentonville, Wandsworth and Holloway in the 1840s and Wormwood Scrubs in the 1870s. **Fig 3** These once semi-rural/suburban sites were soon engulfed by London's rapid expansion, but in the case of smaller

[9] Journal of the House of Lords, 1835, LXVII, 60, 245, 283
[10] Journal of the House of Lords, 1835, LXVII, 259
[11] 5 & 6 Will. IV, c.38

county towns, such as Aylesbury and Winchester, the nature of the prisons location could still be appreciated for much longer.

Joshua Jebb discussing general principles for prison design in 1844, began by discussing the ideal site, which should be 'in a dry and airy, and, if possible, in an isolated situation'. His reasoning was such a location was conducive to the health of prisoners, while at the same time providing them with 'quiet and seclusion', as well as making it easier to prevent communication from outside. Jebb's discussion of location concerns health and security, but interestingly he did not address the issue of sewage and water supply.[12]

By the mid-19th century, towns were becoming more complex; they provided more amenities and more unpleasant functions, including industrial sites, hospitals, a workhouse, gas works and later sewage treatment facilities. Many towns began to develop zones of unpleasantness, ideal places for prisons and often these were close to where the railway station was located. The 1850 Ordnance Survey map 1:1056 scale shows Leeds Borough Gaol, now HMP Leeds, standing in fields set within triangular area hemmed by railway lines on two sides. **Fig 4** A few industrial concerns and a gasworks was present, but in the course of the second of the 19th century, they were joined by other ironworks, forges, mills, a larger gasworks and the cemetery. An Aerofilms photograph of Winchester taken in 1920 still shows clearly the prison's original suburban location; the same image also shows that the county hospital was located across the road, while a short distance away was the substantial union workhouse of 1836-7, the first of the city's large institutions to find a home in this area.[13] **Fig 5** By the time the Ordnance Survey map was surveyed in 1874, these institutions had been joined by the railway station, gasworks, the county police station and the cemetery, and this zone measuring only about half a mile by half a mile was conveniently separated from the historic town by the railway line.

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[12] Jebb, J 1844 'Modern Prisons: their construction and ventilation.' Papers on Subjects connected with the duties of the Corps of Royal Engineers, VII, London, 1844, 2-3
[13] http://www.workhouses.org.uk/Winchester/ accessed 25 April 2019

Co-location with railway stations would have been ideal and could make the movement of offenders easier and safer. Many serious offenders were tried at the Old Bailey and after a short journey in a wagon found themselves on a train to prison. The most famous example was probably Oscar Wilde who described his humiliating train journey from HMP Wandsworth to Reading Gaol via Clapham Junction, where he was the focus of unwelcome public attention.[14]

As well as the desire to construct a new prison on a new site for architectural, transport and security reasons, the shift out of town centres also probably helped to improve the sanitary hygiene of towns and cities. The urban population of Georgian England was hardened to the stench of human and animal waste, with night-soil carts and cesspools being common features.[15] Epidemics of typhoid and cholera were all too common, and by the 19th century their relationship to poor sanitation was becoming better understood.[16] By the early 19th century sewers were being installed in towns and cities, though the cesspool would remain a prominent feature through much of the century. An 1849 survey of Lincoln to prepare the town for a new sewerage system showed that the prison's cesspool was set within the castle's walls, while the nearby asylum and hospital each had a cesspool near their location.[17] A treatise on the drainage of towns and buildings, coincidentally also published in 1849, recommended that 20 gallons of water per day would be needed by each occupant of a workhouse, prison or lunatic asylum, so that prison with 500 inmates would require 10,000 gallons of water per day, a huge demand to make on a primitive system.[18] Rogers Field, writing later in the 19th century, discussed water supply, drainage and sewage disposal at lunatic asylums. He also tackled the thorny

[14] 'Clapham Junction' in Selected Prose of Oscar Wilde
http://www.gutenberg.org/cache/epub/1338/pg1338.txt
accessed 6 June 2019
[15] Ellis, J M (2001) The Georgian Town 1680-1840. Basingstoke: Palgrave, 92-3
[16] Girouard, M (1990) The English Town. New Haven: Yale University Press, 204
[17] Mills, D R (2015) Effluence and influence: public health, sewers & politics in Lincoln, 1848-50. Lincoln: Society for Lincolnshire History and Archaeology, 2015, maps at rear
[18] Dempsey, G Drysdale (1849) Rudimentary treatise on the drainage of towns and buildings suggestive of sanitary regulations that would conduce to the health of an increasing population. London: John Weale, 130

issue of dealing with the waste produced by large numbers of inmates. Wisely, he recommended that cesspools should be kept apart from where the institution got its water supply if that was by a well, and ideally a rural location for an asylum would allow the solid waste to be used on adjacent farmland.[19] Therefore, it is perhaps no surprise that there was pressure to move prisons from crowded urban sites, to sites where a purpose-built building with adequate drainage and water supply to be created.

Conclusion

Within the past six years, the last working prisons in England still occupying recognisable historic castle sites have closed, bringing to an end the almost 1000-year-long link between military authority and civil justice. Between the 11th and 18th centuries the castle of each county town often served as a place of imprisonment and a location to dispense justice. Until their closure, HMP Oxford (closed 1996) and HMP Lancaster (closed 2011) still had recognisable mediaeval buildings within their walls, while prisons at Dorchester and Gloucester, which closed in 2013, were located on former castle sites. **Fig 6** Therefore, HMP Maidstone is now the only active prison located on the site of a former castle.

England retained a rich and enduring penal legacy located in its mediaeval castles at the heart of historic towns because of decisions taken two centuries ago. Factors in the decision-making revolved around the practicality of development on the castle site compared to the opportunities of a new semi-rural/suburban location. A new, larger site could undoubtedly more easily meet the architectural, security and hygiene needs of a new generation of prisons. Nevertheless, a number of counties simply redeveloped their historic castle sites, despite a lack of space, potential security risks and possible concerns about hygiene. Undoubtedly, cost may have been a factor in this decision, but there may have also been a desire to continue to co-locate the symbolic seat of local government, with new courthouses and places of

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[19] Field, R (1892) Practical Suggestions ... as to the water supply, drainage and sewage disposal for Lunatic Asylums, etc. London : Stationery Office, Page 15-16

imprisonment. As well as symbolism, there may have also been an element of convenience at least for the Justices of the Peace.

Some former castle prison sites have already been redeveloped and their sites have become used for housing, museums and even a hotel in the case of Oxford. The future of the recent closures remains to be decided, but some lucky urban housebuyers will be getting the chance to spend time inside, but at least they will have their own keys.

Figures

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Figure 1   HMP Shrewsbury in 1831. AA96/02667

Figure 2   HMP Stafford in the mid-19th century. AA95/05846

Figure 3   HMP Wormwood Scrubs in 1931, with new housing built in the previous decade. EPW034914

Figure 4   HMP Leeds in the centre of this 1951 photograph, with the various industrial concerns and workers housing around. EAW035544

Figure 5   HMP Winchester in 1920 with the County Hospital in the foreground and the workhouse and railway in top right distance. EPW000693

Figure 6   HMP Lancaster in the medieval castle in 1929. EPW029178