

THE BUILDING OF HORSLEY HOUSE OF CORRECTION &
ITS HISTORY UNTIL 1844

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In 1785, the Gloucester Justices, under the guidance of Sir George Paul, obtained a local act enabling them to rebuild their County Gaol and Houses of Correction. A commission was set up under the chairmanship of the Duke of Beaufort in that same year.

There were to be four Houses of Correction in the County, at Horsley, Littledean, Northleach and Lawford's Gate, Bristol. At Horsley, it was decided that the institution should be built on a piece of land adjoining the churchyard and belonging to Henry Stephens. In October 1785, Sir George Paul reported that he had approached Mr. Stephens who intended to present as much land as might be necessary to the County, and the Commission decided that a record of his public-spirited act should be published in the Gloucester Journal, and that also an inscription recording the donation should be placed in the House of Correction.

Mr. William Blackburn was appointed Surveyor and furnished an estimate of £2,850 for the building which was to accommodate forty six prisoners. He was allowed a commission of 5 per cent and in addition £300 for incidental and travelling expenses until the work was finished. He was required to attend not less than four times in each year or twelve times in the progress of the work. Blackburne's total estimate for the House of Correction at Horsley, Littledean and Northleach came to £7,075, and in November 1786, a contract was signed with Gabriel Rogers the Younger, of St. Mary Magdalen, Bermondsey, Surrey, whose estimate for the three buildings came to £6,930 - just £145 less than Blackburne's estimate. Gabriel Rogers provided securities comprising £1,000 on his own behalf and £500 each on behalf of Mr. Gabriel Rogers the Elder and Mr. John Fentiman, a bricklayer, also from Surrey.

Separate estimates for all the various types of building work were obtained mainly from local craftsmen, and it appears that the cheapest was always chosen, even if it involved only a few pence. It was agreed that the roof should be made of Bangor slates, but as Mr. Rogers agreed not to be responsible for slating, the amount was deducted from his contract. Mr. Rogers was to be responsible for paying the craftsmen.

The work progressed, but in January 1789, it was reported that Gabriel Rogers had gone bankrupt. He had sustained a loss of £1,305 on the contract, and his securities were ordered to pay this amount, or to finish the building. John Fentiman offered to complete the work for the sum of £1,000 over and above the sum remaining on the contract. It was agreed to accept this and to sue Rogers for his £1,000. In actual fact Rogers was imprisoned in January 1792 and offered £200 in July to settle his debt, which was accepted.

In January 1790, Mr. Blackburne was asked to submit plans for a copper roof to cover the internal courts, the estimate for this being £224. In July of that year, Mr. Blackburne withdrew from the business suffering from a paralytic complaint, and died

in September of the following year. Mr. William Hobson, the executor, and brother-in-law, and moreover a builder, offered to complete the business. In September 1791, Mr. Fentiman reported a loss of £2,000 but he was not recompensed, as it was decided that he had done work over and above that specified in the contract.

In the event the work took over six years instead of the three originally estimated and the Justices of Horsley met on the 20th October, 1792, to open the prison officially. An interesting feature of the opening of the House of correction was the agreement to hold Petty Sessions in the Sessions room. This continued until 1801, when the custom lapsed. However, in Sir George Paul's General Report of 1808, the rules regarding the holding of the Sessions were revised, and it was agreed that they should be held in the Sessions Room at specified times for auditing prison accounts, appointing overseers, appointing visiting Justices and licensing public houses.

The first analysis of the number of prisoners, reason for imprisonment, and length of stay is given in the General Report of 1808. The offences were all minor, the largest group of prisoners being that imprisoned for breach of contract of service, followed by those convicted of petty theft and those convicted of offences under special statutes concerning employments in the woollen trade. The average length of stay was ten weeks and two days. However, the statistics include a group of women confined for twelve months for bastardy, and so the average stay was obviously shorter. The greatest number imprisoned at any one time was thirty seven. Sir George Paul commented in his report on the fact that crime increased as the price of food rose.

Apart from the 1808 report, there appears to be no other actual statistical breakdown of prisoners. From the 1825 register of prisoners, we see that there were one thousand, four hundred and fifty four prisoners in the four years 1825-9. The main offences seem to be leaving a master's service, and leaving a wife and children chargeable to the parish. Other offences include being a rogue and a vagabond, prostitution, rioting, disobeying an order of bastardy, larceny, assault and trespass. For all offences, a short period of hard labour seems to be the norm. There were also a number of debtors. Quite a number of young offenders were committed, but as the class of the prisoner was noted in the register of prisoners, the separation of the various types of prisoners could be enforced.

In the 1830s we see an increase in the number of prisoners, particularly in 1831 and 1832. The habit seems to have grown up in this period of offering a fine as an alternative to a period of imprisonment and hard labour. An additional case which is seen at this time is riding on a waggon without holding on to the horses' reins. Another is running away from the Workhouse, and sometimes this is aggravated by a theft from the Workhouse. Prisoners awaiting trial at the Gloucester Sessions and Assizes for serious offences such as rape, threats to kill, and serious assault were also held at Horsley. From 1840 onwards, there appears to be an increase in cases of food stealing, such as apples, potatoes and turnips, and also more cases of poaching. From 1840-44, one thousand five hundred and seventy five prisoners were admitted and the average length of sentence was between one and two months, usually with hard labour.

Records giving an insight into the running of Horsley House of Correction show the importance attached to the prisoners being set to work, and their general welfare including diet, health, and religious education. Prominent among the entries in the Visiting Justices Journal are those of Sir George Paul. In February 1792, he directed that a broad loom should be installed, and in April that a loom for narrow cloth be purchased. Lengths of cloth were to be sold and the money obtained divided among the prisoners and the County and the Governor. In the following year he suggested that money paid to the prisoners be saved for them, to be given to them on their release, or to be used to buy extra bread during those times when they were not working. When not employed at the loom, the prisoners did domestic and garden chores, and dyeing. Women with suckling children to look after were given light duties.

In January 1822 it was decided to contract with Pann of Greenwich for a mill to be set up, operated by an external tread wheel, the size of which was to be proportionate to the number of prisoners. The mill was set to work in December of the same year, and it was soon reported that oatmeal for the prisoners' diet was being ground at the mill, and this was proving an economy. However, in February 1832, the first signs of discontent were seen among the prisoners. At four o'clock in the afternoon, the prisoners at the wheel refused to work saying that they were tired. The men were questioned and two judged to be the instigators were put into solitary confinement. In the following month it was reported by the Governor that the men were talking and noisy on the wheel. Seven were ordered to be locked up and the remaining eleven to continue on the wheel for an hour for punishment. One man, Edward Savage, refused. According to the Governor, he always seemed 'to be spokesman on every occasion', and he was put in the dark cell from a quarter to five until bedtime.

In April, the visiting magistrate, Rev. M. Hawker, thought that the men looked rather heated working on the wheel and ordered that they should change places after going round twice on the wheel instead of after every fourth round. In May the prisoners at the tread wheel were insolent again and again reprimanded by the Governor, and in July, several of them complained of feeling too ill to work. The surgeon was called, and certified them all fit to work. Despite these difficulties, in August, the Magistrates agreed that a tread wheel for female prisoners be set up. In the later records of 1840 onwards, the influence of the surgeon in deciding the fitness of prisoners to work is more often seen, and it is quite often reported that he took a prisoner off the wheel. On the other hand, in November 1842, it is reported that he ordered George Cooper on the wheel as he had put on 12 $\frac{3}{4}$ lb in weight in one month, and was getting 'very stout'.

The importance of giving the prisoners a religious education is commented upon on several occasions. In March 1792, Sir George Paul attended the Good Friday Service at the institution and wrote that the prisoners were 'not attentive and respectful enough' and that they were to be 'taught and then punished'. In October 1802, after the Chaplain had been taken ill in the previous month, Sir George wrote that a service should not be dispensed with, and that a clergyman should be obtained, even if

it involved temporary expense. In December 1804, Sir George reported that the Chaplain had not performed Divine Service on the Sunday, and six months later he visited him, to find him ill in bed with gout. In December 1815, on a visit by one of the magistrates, a prisoner was actually found reading a New Testament, and in October 1817 it was recommended that more Bibles and Testaments be made available. These were subsequently provided by the Chaplain.

Particular attention was paid to the prisoners' diet. It was believed that a good diet, including meat, was essential to ensure that the prisoners were healthy enough to work. In the General Report of 1808, Sir George Paul reported that the prisoners were given one and a half pounds of bread, one and a half ounces of oatmeal to be made into gruel for breakfast, and a quarter of an ounce of salt every day, and in addition on Sunday, twelve ounces of meat with the bone, comprising a pound in all. The broth from the meat was to be kept to the following day. One pound of potatoes was served a week, together with vegetables from the garden. An extra quarter of an ounce of salt was given on Sunday. Sir George Paul was sympathetic to women feeding their babies and was concerned that they should receive an adequate diet. In December 1799, it was ordered that one shilling a week extra should be levied from the Parishes of two women with children for extra food. Previously he had ordered that a penny a day and an extra loaf a week be given to a woman with a suckling child.

He also showed concern for debtors who were often worse off than other criminals, being ineligible for the County allowance, and in October 1796, ordered that they be paid more, so that they could buy more bread. Periodically, visiting magistrates reported that the bread was not well baked enough, and on occasions prisoners made complaints about the food, but despite these instances, in March 1822, a lower dietary standard was ordered as it was said to be the equivalent of that served in the penitentiary at Gloucester where the prisoners were committed for a longer stay.

Emphasis was placed on cleanliness both of the House of Correction and of the prisoners. The visiting Magistrate usually spoke very highly of the state of the building and of its inmates. However, after the appointment of a new Keeper in April 1795, Sir George Paul found the cells dirty and suggested that the Keeper had not read the rules! In August of the same year, he again found the building dirty, especially the bathroom and was incensed when the men cleaning it insisted that it was 'as clean as his former house'.

In 1802, Sir George Paul found the prison 'was dusty and dirty and littered in every corner ...'. The Keeper made the excuse that the prison had been crowded, but this was not accepted, the magistrate maintaining that half the prisoners should work while the other half should sweep and clean. The prison was reported to be in need of a whitewash and moreover short of brooms and mops. However, later, Sir George reported that it had been whitewashed and was now clean. No further complaints are noted until June 1822 when Henry Campbell, magistrate, complained that the prisoners had worn their shirts from four to five weeks and their stockings from seven to eight weeks. He therefore accused the Governor of neglect.

The Surgeon was required to visit the House of Correction and to keep a record of his visits. In 1801, when the numbers of prisoners had risen, Sir George Paul suggested that the Surgeon visit weekly. One occasion, a prisoner or prisoner's baby died, a coroner's inquest was held at the House of Correction. In April 1821, the Surgeon is reported to have been in attendance at the whipping of prisoners, and again in May 1842. In one case in 1843 he stopped a whipping while six lashes were still to be given.

In 1841, a spare room was made into an infirmary for sick prisoners; occasionally the Surgeon bled a prisoner and now and then was called on to deal with a prisoner who was mentally disturbed. Reasons for death include in January 1821 'by the visitation of God', and in July 1841 'of a fever', and in June and August 1842 'of typhus fever' and 'dropsy' respectively. In November 1842, the Turnkey himself requested leave of absence because of his disturbed mental state. This request was granted.

As previously noted, the prisoners were provided with religious books, although many could not read. However, in April 1843, it is reported that the Governor actually taught some prisoners writing. One prisoner, Mark Wheeler, was taught to write in 'large and small' writing.

Escapes from the House of Correction were always fully investigated. In July 1794, the Turnkey was sacked for opening the prison doors too early in the morning and allowing two prisoners to escape and in July 1805, the locks were changed after they had been successfully picked. However, until 1808 only six escapes were made. In 1819, another escape is recorded in which the prisoner broke the shutter of his cell with the iron bar with which they were meant to be closed, and in 1821, another Turnkey was sacked after a prisoner had escaped from him while he was drunk. In 1841, after a deserter escaped, it was found that every lock in the institution could be picked with a nail.

From reading the records, one obtains the impression of a well ordered House of Correction, carefully supervised by the magistrates and with a concern for the prisoners' welfare. Of course, the House of Correction no longer exists today and the minor offender of any age is usually dealt with by the magistrates in such a way that he is kept in the community if this is at all possible rather than being deprived of his liberty. These methods include the probation order, the suspended sentence, fining, binding over, and more recently, community service orders. The social reports which are presented to the courts today were unknown in Sir George's day and one wonders what he and the other magistrates who instigated the then exemplary House of Correction at Horsley would have thought of our approach to today's minor offenders.

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