

# Scotland's Prisons

## Research Report

### 2015



HISTORIC  
ENVIRONMENT  
SCOTLAND

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# SCOPING OVERVIEW

## Project Summary

In 2014-16 Historic Scotland, and its successor Historic Environment Scotland, reviewed historic and listed buildings relating to Scotland's judicial and penal systems. This is the first time since listing was introduced that a thematic survey of this building type has been undertaken. We carried out a review of existing listed buildings owned by the Scottish Prison Service (SPS).

This report was compiled in 2015 (published 2017) and was intended as a preliminary aid to the review of the listed SPS estate and it provides an overview of Scottish Prisons as a building type. A concurrent review of Scottish court buildings will also be considered listed and unlisted buildings in the ownership of the Scottish Court Service.

Whilst many different types of buildings have historically included custodial accommodation, prisons, for the purpose of this report, mean buildings constructed for the sole purpose of incarceration to serve a judicial system. This can include old Jails or Gaols but does not extend to military prisons or to court houses and tolbooths where holding cells or prison accommodation were commonly combined with other functions.

Prison reform began in the late eighteenth century with the formation of the first real national prison system established in Scotland in 1839. The majority of existing purpose-built prisons therefore date from the nineteenth century onwards and this report covers this period to the present day.

There are only a small number of purpose built prisons remaining in Scotland dating from the nineteenth century with only three listed purpose built-prisons which remain in use by the SPS (HMP Perth, HMP Castle Huntly and HMP Dumfries).

## Methodology

Scoping work began in 2014 with a search of our listed building record database. This was cross-referenced with desk-based research based on publicly available material on the SPS estate alongside maps, archival and secondary research on the history of Scottish prisons.

# THE DEVELOPMENT OF SCOTTISH PRISONS

## Introduction

Prisons are designed for the incarceration of people and these buildings containing accommodation for the function of confinement have existed for centuries. Purpose-built prisons, however, were first constructed in Scotland in the late eighteenth century in the wake of a British wide reform movement.

During the period of continuous discourse of prison reform, (from the 1780s to the 1840s) the design of buildings and their plan form was considered key to facilitating a strict disciplinary system that sought to punish and reform the prisoner. Prison buildings were meant to function like machines, processing those detained through their daily routine whilst ensuring prisoner separation to prevent communication and to allow for constant surveillance.

As attitudes towards corporal punishment and penal discipline changed towards a more humane system that focussed on reform, the stark accommodation of nineteenth century prison architecture was deemed no longer fit for use. Relatively few eighteenth and nineteenth century structures remain today and even fewer prisons with fabric from this period continue to function as working institutions. In 2014, almost half of the prisons in the SPS estate were built within the last 20 years (47%).

A small number of historically and architecturally significant buildings dating from the first period of reform in the nineteenth century are still in use and have been adapted to suit the needs of modern prisoners.

The early purpose built prisons of the nineteenth century, were used to remove an individual from society but also to attempt to reform the prisoner during their sentence. Whilst the meaning of 'reform' has evolved, the architecture of prisons continues to be considered central to facilitating this process.

## Early Scottish Prisons (Mid 18<sup>th</sup> Century and Earlier)

Prior to the late eighteenth century the concept of imprisonment as a form of punishment was virtually unknown.<sup>1</sup> Prison or jail buildings served a purely custodial function to detain criminals pending the payment of debt or punishment such as transportation or execution.

The requirement for prison accommodation was simply for a secure space for an unspecified number of prisoners. Provision of custodial accommodation was local, *ad hoc* and where there were prisons, individual cells were rare.

In Scotland, in the centuries leading up to prison reform, this accommodation was predominantly found in the burgh tolbooth. Prison accommodation was often just one of a number of civil and judicial functions carried out in this building. Tolbooths, often of two or three storeys, commonly housed cells in the basement or tower as seen at Dysart.<sup>2</sup>

Accommodation also existed locally in the form of single cell lock ups. Larger correctional institutions such the Bridewell, built in Scotland from the seventeenth century to house vagrants and disorderly members of society, were also used to incarcerate prisoners for short periods of time.

The control of almost all Scottish prisons remained the responsibility of burghs up to the nineteenth century.<sup>3</sup> Three exceptions were the prisons built by the county magistrates at Glasgow, Aberdeen and Edinburgh in the very late eighteenth century under a special local Act of Parliament and a small number of other prisons built in the first two decades of the nineteenth century by large counties such as Fifeshire and Perthshire. These places apart, the remainder of the prisons of Scotland were burgh prisons.<sup>4</sup>

An overview of the extent of prison accommodation in Scotland in 1839 was recorded at the time of the establishment of the first Scottish prison board. Included amongst the 178 prisons counted were 70 lock-up houses, 80 small burgh jails, and 20 burgh prisons, bridewells and county jails.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> J. Cameron, *Prisons and Punishment in Scotland from the Middle Ages to the Present Day*, (Edinburgh, 1983), p 1.

<sup>2</sup> Cameron, *Prisons and Punishment*, p 34.

<sup>3</sup> An act of James VI in 1597 intended that all burghs should build prison houses. The majority of burghs however provided cells in Tolbooths rather than raise funds for separate prison buildings. (Source: [http://www.scan.org.uk/knowledgebase/topics/prisons\\_box6.htm](http://www.scan.org.uk/knowledgebase/topics/prisons_box6.htm))

<sup>4</sup> W. J. Forsythe, 'New Prisons for Old Gaols: Scottish Penal Reform 1835-1842', *The Howard Journal of Criminal Justice*, Volume 20, (July 1981), [pp. 138-149], p 138.

<sup>5</sup> 'The Scottish Prisons', *The Scotsman*, Sept 11, 1841, p 4.



Fig 1. Dysart tollbooth, 1576 and town hall, 1617 © Crown Copyright: Historic Environment Scotland.

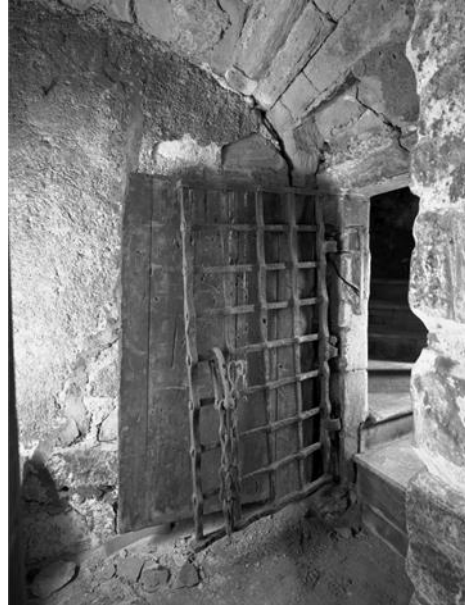


Fig 2. Third floor cell, Dysart tollbooth © Crown Copyright: Historic Environment Scotland.

## Prison Reform

The call for the reform of Scotland's prisons was advanced in the late eighteenth century in reaction to the increasingly apparent failings of the country's prisons.<sup>6</sup> The reality of the conditions inside Scotland's idiosyncratic prisons was revealed by the visits of philanthropic reformers such as John Howard and Elizabeth Fry who went on to publish their findings on the state of prisons in Britain. Howard, who was key in instigating nationwide reform efforts with the publication of his book, '*The State of the Prisons in England and Wales*' (1777) also visited Scotland where he found conditions comparable if not surpassing the worst seen anywhere in the country. On a visit in the early 1780s he reported a list of defects in Scottish prisons including the lack of courtyards, fresh water and sewers. As most of the burghs were very small they did not have sufficient funds to improve prison facilities and conditions were very uneven between localities. It was noted that prisons were rarely visited by magistrates, that prison keepers held licenses for the sale of alcohol and there was almost no attempt to separate prisoners by sex or class.<sup>7</sup>

Generally, the prisons of the time followed a congregate system whereby prisoners were kept together unsegregated throughout the day and night. Howard and other reformers vehemently condemned this practice as producing moral contamination and corruption.<sup>8</sup> Howard advised that alongside implementing healthier practices of ventilation and the employment of paid gaolers that prisoners should be divided by classes and housed in separate yards.<sup>9</sup> It was increasingly believed that different kinds of prisoners corrupted each other and that prisoners of different ages and type of crime should be kept apart. Howard and early investigators played a significant role in instigating reform by bringing to public attention the state of prisons throughout the country. Their recommendations regarding health, classification and inspection formed the basis for the reforms and legislation of the nineteenth century and encouraged architectural form towards the provision of cellularly divided spaces to fight against the spread of physical and moral contamination within the prison environment.<sup>10</sup>

A reformed prison system of classification was officially approved by the Goal Act of 1823 in England and Wales, which stated that all new prisons should provide separate wards and airing yards for different classes of prisoner.<sup>11</sup> Scotland was slightly slower in enacting legislative change. It was not until 1839 that an 'Act to improve Prisons and Prison Discipline' was passed to enshrine separation classification and separation as principles of prison discipline. Infrastructural change had however anticipated legislative reality in some instances.

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<sup>6</sup> H. Tomlinson, 'Design and Reform: the 'Separate System' in Nineteenth-Century English Prisons' in King, A. D. (ed.), *Buildings and society: essays on the social development of the built environment*, (London, 1980), [pp. 94-116], p. 95.

<sup>7</sup> Cameron, p. 50.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid*, p. 94.

<sup>9</sup> A. Brodie, J. Croom, and J. O. Davies, *English prisons: an architectural history*, (Swindon, 2002), p. 33.

<sup>10</sup> Forsythe, 'New Prisons for Old Gaols' p. 141.

<sup>11</sup> Tomlinson, 'Design and Reform: the 'Separate System', p. 95.

# EARLY NINETEENTH CENTURY PRISONS

## Designs or Separation

Central to prison reform in the late eighteenth century was the role of architecture to effectively manage prisoners. The following are examples of prisons built in Scotland in advance of the legislative change of the 1839 Act, which trialled new systems of classification, separation and monitoring of prisoners.

### Edinburgh Calton Hill Bridewell

A building that was never actually constructed but had significant impact on the development of architectural solutions to the problems of prison discipline was the panopticon design published by utilitarian philosopher Jeremy Bentham (1748-1832) in 1791. Bentham's design comprised a circular structure with a central tower around which individual cells spanned the circumference.<sup>12</sup> The panopticon was not strictly a model for prison architecture but an "apparatus of surveillance" that might be used for any number of building types such as schools, factories, asylums, hospitals and workhouses.<sup>13</sup> The panopticon functioned through a perceived feeling of observation by the individual in his cell. Each cell was designed to be visible by a single guard concealed in the central tower which presented an extremely economic and therefore utilitarian solution to prison design.

The nearest example of Bentham's plan ever constructed for use a prison in Scotland was the Edinburgh Bridewell on Calton Hill designed in 1791 by Robert Adam (the Governor's house and perimeter walls of 1815 are all that remain of this demolished prison). Although the building comprised only a half circle of cells the design took direct inspiration from Bentham's design.<sup>14</sup>

Whilst a true panopticon according to Bentham's design was never constructed, the ideas this example generated for utility of space and observation can be seen to have influenced the plans for the subsequent model prisons of the 1830s and 1840s.

### Jedburgh Castle Jail

On the prominent site of the Castlegate in Jedburgh, the final remains of the demolished castle were removed to make way for a new jail in 1823. Designed by Archibald Elliot, the jail is described as a 'Howard Reform prison'.<sup>15</sup> This description refers to prisons designed to take account of contemporary calls for the separation of prisoners by class, following Howard's recommendations. The building was designed with three rectangular accommodation blocks for male or female criminals, male debtors and young prisoners surrounding a jailor's house in the centre. Howard had

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<sup>12</sup> J. A. Miller and R. Miller, 'Jeremy Bentham's Panoptic Device', *October*, Vol. 41 (Summer, 1987), [pp. 3-29], p. 3.

<sup>13</sup> Miller and Miller, 'Jeremy Bentham's Panoptic Device', p. 3.

<sup>14</sup> R. Evans, *The Fabrication of Virtue: English Prison Architecture 1750 – 1840*, (Cambridge, 1982), p. 412.

<sup>15</sup> <http://www.museumsgalleriesscotland.org.uk/member/jedburgh-castle-jail-and-museum>



also recommended that the site chosen for a prison should be 'airy, perhaps on a hill'.<sup>16</sup> Jedburgh's elevated setting, further demonstrates that the design for the jail sought to implement the most recent design theories for the improvement of both the physical and moral health of the prisoner. The jail is now a museum and visitor attraction.

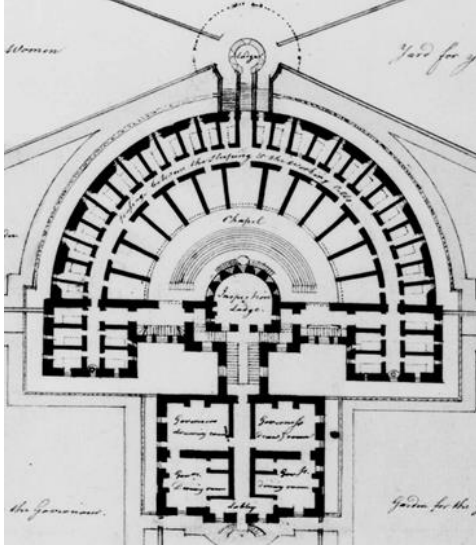


Fig 3. (detail of) Edinburgh Bridewell, Castle Style Scheme 2, Robert Adam © Trustees of the Sir John Soane's Museum.



Fig 4. Jedburgh Castle Jail, Archibald Elliott, 1823 alterations by Thomas Brown, 1847 © Crown Copyright: Historic Environment Scotland.

### Glasgow Bridewell, Duke Street

An early architectural response to the call for a system of the separation of prisoners in Scotland was the Glasgow Bridewell on the Drygate (now demolished) under the governorship of William Brebner. The Glasgow Bridewell was the only prison to receive any praise from investigators of Scottish prisons in the early nineteenth century and Brebner is generally considered to be the founding father of the Scottish Prison Service.<sup>17</sup> By 1826 he had established a system which attempted to use penal sentence positively by keeping prisoners separated in cells and occupied in work from 6am until 8pm.<sup>18</sup> Brebner's system was clearly influential and indeed when they came to build a general prison at Perth in the 1840s the Scottish authorities had their warders trained at Glasgow and attempted to entice Brebner to the post of governor.

<sup>16</sup> A. Brodie, J. Croom, and J. O. Davies, *English prisons: an architectural history*, (Swindon, 2002), p. 34.

<sup>17</sup> D. Thomson, *Prisons, Prisoners and Parole*, (Edinburgh, 2007), p 4.

<sup>18</sup> A. Coyle, *Inside: Rethinking Scotland's Prisons*, (Edinburgh, 1991), p 29.

## Early Reform Prison Architecture

Early purpose-built prisons established a style that imitated defensive architecture with exaggerated castellated elements. Archibald Elliot added to Adam's Bridewell on Edinburgh's Calton Hill, designing the gaol, Governors House perimeter walls in 1815 as a series of towers and crenelated curtain walls. Elliot adopted the style again in 1823 for the new Jedburgh prison on the former site of Royal Jedburgh castle on Galahill. In his design for the 1846-8 Prison to accompany William Burn's 1833 court House at Castle Hill in Inverness, Thomas Brown (1806-76, generally known as Thomas Brown II) created a dramatic ashlar castle with towers and machicolated parapets. In each of these designs the historic and highly prominent setting is used to full effect to give the prison the appearance of an imposing fortress.



Fig 5. East front of Calton Prison, Archibald Elliot, 1815. © Historic Environment Scotland (Scottish Colorfoto Collection).



Fig 6. Jedburgh Castle Jail, Archibald Elliot, 1823, alterations by Thomas Brown, 1847 © Courtesy of Historic Environment Scotland.



Fig 7. Inverness court, William Burn, 1833 and prison, Thomas Brown, 1846-8. © Courtesy of Historic Environment Scotland (Thomas Polson).

Where large blocks of prison accommodation were sited in less elevated, urban sites, such as at the Glasgow Bridewell in Duke Street (demolished) and the jail to the rear of the Ayr County Buildings (demolished) design was stark and largely absent of architectural detail.



Fig 8. Glasgow Bridewell, John Paterson and William Horn, 1795, altered nineteenth century © Newsquest (Herald & Times).

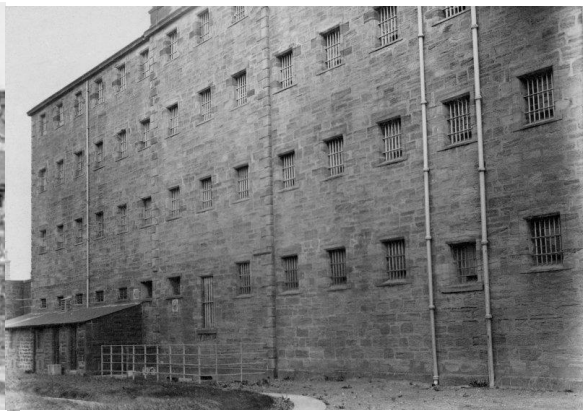


Fig 9. Ayr Jail, c. 1817-22, alterations by Thomas Brown, 1845 © Crown Copyright: Historic Environment Scotland.

## County Court and Prison ‘Complexes’

In the first quarter of the nineteenth century, the construction of new court houses or county buildings often combined further judicial accommodation with a prison to the rear of the court site. A prison was constructed to the rear of the court house at Ayr by 1818 (rebuilt post 1840s, now demolished) and at Perth County Buildings by 1823 (now demolished). As part of the specialisation of building types it was logical to contain the judicial functions of the county on a single site. Individuals awaiting trial or sentence would be housed in the prison without the need for transportation to court. In some buildings such as Perth County Buildings, when the prison was added to the court building in 1823 a passage was created from the prison cells to the witness stand.

The prisons constructed as part of county buildings complexes generally received more modest architectural treatment compared with the grand facades of the court or county buildings themselves. The prisons within these complexes were also designed to allow for the classification of prisoners, usually possessing at least two separate blocks in order to separate male and female prisoners or debtors as seen in the plans at Ayr and Perth.

Where complexes contained prisons of a significant size these have, in most cases, been demolished, such as at Ayr and Perth. At Inverness the court and prison complex, designed by William Burn in 1833, remains with both buildings more recently in use by the Scottish Court Service.

The few court houses that were constructed following The Prisons Act of 1835 and before the Sheriff Court Houses (Scotland) Act of 1860 typically had a small cell block range, such as Dingwall and Peebles. Cell blocks were also added to the court houses of Nairn, Inverness, Cromarty and Stonehaven (cell block has been demolished). Following the 1860 Act court houses generally had a solely legal purpose and did not incorporate a prison, other than temporary holding cells. Exceptions to this tended to be the more remote island court houses including Kirkwall, Stornoway, Tobermory, and Lerwick.

# REFORM OF SCOTTISH PRISONS 1840 – 1860

## Prison Architecture at the Point of Legislative Reform

Whilst new architectural models for prisons had been trialled, there was as yet no uniform system of discipline or management during the 1830s and the drive for reform continued.<sup>19</sup> In 1833 British and European representatives visited the United States to view the different disciplinary systems in practice at two penitentiaries with a view to the possible application of these systems in Britain.<sup>20</sup> One prison visited was John Haviland's Eastern State Penitentiary in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania which was opened in 1829 and was designed with a central rotunda and seven radiating wings. The Eastern State Penitentiary enforced what was called the 'separate system' as opposed to the alternative 'silent system' that had been in force in the state prison at Auburn (New York) since 1823.<sup>21</sup> The silent system of discipline involved the prisoners sleeping in separate cells but made to work in company, in classes during the day under strict enforcement of silence. The alternative separate system was described as,

"...the individual separation of prisoners by day and night, in cells of sufficient dimensions for health, and properly warmed and ventilated, accompanied with labour and religious and moral instruction."<sup>22</sup>

The two systems of discipline were outlined by William Crawford (1788-1847), Prison Inspector to the Home District, in his 1834 report. Although both systems sought to prevent communication between prisoners, the separate system was considered more humane, while the efficient running of the silent system required frequent and severe punishment in order to be enforced. The implementation of the separate system demanded a purpose-built prison to maintain the complete separation of prisoners. Crawford was careful to point out that the practice of separation was not original, having been in force in Glasgow and Gloucester several years previously.<sup>23</sup>

The first Surveyor-General of Prisons, former military engineer, Sir Joshua Jebb was put in charge of executing a new model prison to demonstrate how the separate system should be made to work.<sup>24</sup> His prison at Pentonville, Greater London of 1840-42 contained four open wings, of three storeys and 22 bays, in a half cartwheel plan. The design owed a significant debt to Haviland's prison but with the innovation of a large central gallery, utility and ventilation systems.<sup>25</sup> In its original conception, Pentonville was a government prison for confinement of prisoners awaiting transportation where selected adult male convicts spent the first eighteen months of

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<sup>19</sup> English Heritage, *English Prisons: An Architectural History*, by Brodie, A., Croom, J. and Davies, O. (2002), p. 84.

<sup>20</sup> W. Crawford, Penitentiaries (United States). Report of William Crawford Esq., on the Penitentiaries of the United States, addressed to His Majesty's Principal Secretary for the Home Department, 1834, (593), [XLVI.349], p.3.

<sup>21</sup> English Heritage, *English Prisons: An Architectural History*, p. 85.

<sup>22</sup> General Board of Directors of Prisons in Scotland, First Report, 1840, [229], XXVI.69, p. 22.

<sup>23</sup> Crawford, Penitentiaries (United States). Report, p. 14.

<sup>24</sup> English Heritage, *English Prisons: An Architectural History*, p. 93.

<sup>25</sup> T. Morris, and P. Morris, *Pentonville: a sociological study of an English prison*, (London, 1963), p. 13.

their sentence.<sup>26</sup> The strict regime at Pentonville, with its solitary confinement and moral instruction was to be most effectively used on criminals 'not yet hardened' and with the potential for reform.

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<sup>26</sup> M. H. Tomlinson, 'Prison, palaces': a re-appraisal of early Victorian prisons, 1835–77. *Historical Research*, Vol 51, 1978, [pp. 60–71], p. 64.

## The Scottish Prison System 1840-1860

By 1841 prisons in Scotland remained in a largely idiosyncratic and varied state. The 1841 report on Prisons in Scotland summarised the prison accommodation across the country:

“There are 170 prisons of all descriptions in Scotland. Of these 70 are mere lock-up houses and generally very bad and insecure; 80 are small burgh gaols and only a shade better, but generally ill constructed; and only one well managed prison, the Glasgow Bridewell...”<sup>27</sup>

The beginning of real change and regulation affecting Scotland had begun with The Prisons Act 1835 that appointed inspectors to record the state of prisons in Britain and established the requirement for prison inspection in Scotland. Frederic Hill was selected as Inspector for Scotland and immediately sought to impose uniformity as an enthusiastic advocate of the principles of the separate system.<sup>28</sup>

An Act to Improve Prisons and Prison Discipline, passed in 1839, enshrined the principles of the Separate System and outlined the proposal for a General Prison for Scotland to accommodate all prisoners serving sentences in excess of nine months, those sentenced to penal servitude and ‘criminal lunatics’.<sup>29</sup> The 1839 Act created a national prison system, run by the centralised prison board based at the General Prison at Perth. This form of administrative structure, with centralised control and uniform standards, differed from England where local prisons were not brought under close supervision until the later nineteenth century.<sup>30</sup>

As well as an extensive building programme of purpose-built prisons to implement the separate system this period also saw a large number of older prisons close. Between the formation of the prison board at Perth in 1840 and its replacement by the Managers of Scottish prisons under the Prisons (Scotland) Act 1860, 101 prisons (mostly found in Scotland’s burghs) had been closed.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> ‘The Scottish Prisons’, *The Scotsman*, Sept 11, 1841, p 4.

<sup>28</sup> *Forsythe, ‘New Prisons for Old Gaols’* p. 142.

<sup>29</sup> Thomson, *Prisons, prisoners and parole*, p. 1.

<sup>30</sup> D. F. Smith, ‘Scottish Prisons under the General Board of Directors, 1840-1861’, *A Quarterly Journal Concerned with British Studies*, Vol. 15, No. 4 (Winter, 1983), [pp. 287-312], p 287.

<sup>31</sup> Cameron, p 141.

## Model Prison - Perth General Prison

The site chosen for Scotland's General Prison outlined in the 1839 Act was that of the centrally located Perth Depôt, a former military camp on the banks of the Tay. Perth Depôt had been commissioned to accommodate large numbers of French prisoners captured in the Napoleonic war and was built between 1811-12. Designed by Robert Reid (1774 –1856) (Architect and Surveyor to the King in Scotland 1808-40), the fort comprised five barracks set against the eastern portion of the site with a central observation tower.

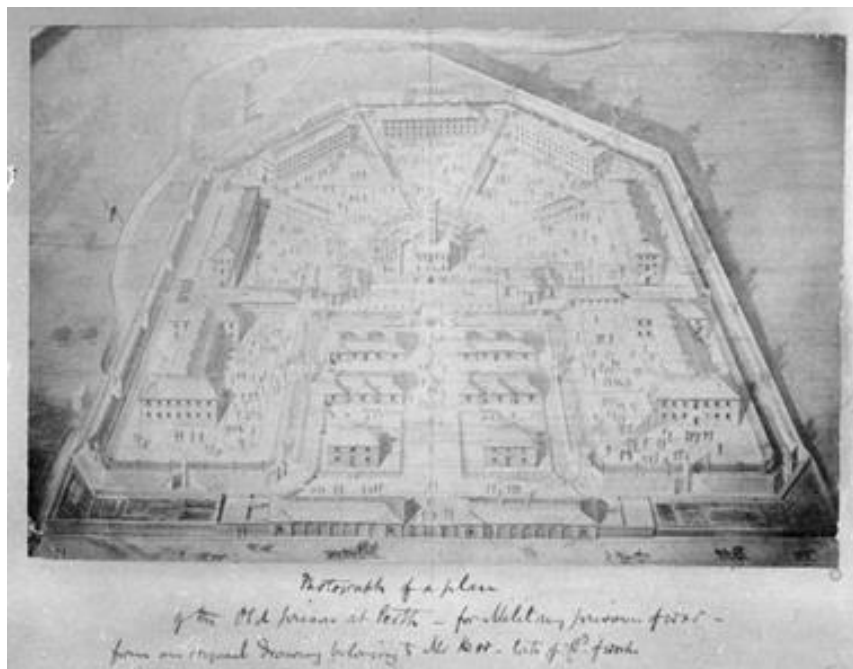


Fig 10. Perth Depôt, Robert Reid, 1810-12, photograph of a plan © Courtesy of Historic Environment Scotland.

In the construction of the new General Prison (in two phases between 1842 and 1857) the prisoner accommodation blocks of the former prisoner of war camp were demolished, retaining the perimeter wall, central tower and administrative buildings at the front of the site. Thomas Brown was appointed architect to the Prison Board of Scotland in 1837 and he adapted the model prison plan first introduced at Pentonville by Sir Joshua Jebb (1840-42).<sup>32</sup> His design at Perth comprised four wings radiating from a semi-circular viewing corridor interspersed with airing yards. The design dispensed with the central gallery at Pentonville to incorporate the tower of the military prison all within the perimeter wall of the military prison. Initially, only two of the four wings were constructed, providing accommodation for prisoners serving the longest sentences in Scotland. Each of the two wings was four storeys high and contained about 160 separate cells, with a further set of punishment cells on the lower ground floor. Within the wider complex at Perth there was, accommodation for the governors warden and Chaplin, chapel, laundry, accommodation for those deemed criminal lunatics or of unsound mind 'lunatic wing'.

<sup>32</sup> R. Evans, *The Fabrication of Virtue*, p. 346.



In determining the design for the new General Prison at Perth, the Board in its first report stated,

“...to deliberate upon the best mode of architecture...to great extent involves the question of discipline”.<sup>33</sup>

The plan and form of these new prisons was to be determined entirely by function in order to facilitate most readily the rules of the new disciplinary system that required a strict prevention of communication and regimented routine of work together with religious and moral instruction. The daily routine of the prisoner involved confinement to the cell where productive labour such as weaving and boot making took place. Prisoners received one hour of exercise a day in an airing yard and their only communication came from visits by a warder and instruction by the chaplain. Masks were worn to avoid recognition outside the cell. Food was delivered by means of a small service door so that even contact with the warder was limited; the belief being that isolation would prevent the mixing and encouraging of criminal behaviour and encourage reflection and self help.<sup>34</sup>



Fig 11. Perth Prison, Thomas Brown, 1842 and Robert Matheson, 1857, view of 'The Crescent' block from WSW © Crown Copyright: Historic Environment Scotland.

In order to facilitate this strict regime of separation, every aspect of construction was considered in terms of preventing communication. The doors of the cells were placed as far apart as possible to prevent prisoners from seeing one another. The walls were strongly built at between 14 and 18 inches thick between cells and the cells

<sup>33</sup> General Board of Directors of Prisons in Scotland, First Report, 1840, [229], XXVI.69, p. 3.

<sup>34</sup> J. B. Thompson, 'The Effects of the present System of Prison Discipline on the Body and Mind', *The Journal of Mental Science* (now the journal of British Psychiatry) vol. 12, issue 59. (1866), [pp. 340-348], p. 342.

had heavy floors of Caithness stone. Windows 3 ft. 6 by 15 inches were placed high up in the cell secured with iron bars to prevent prisoners from viewing the outside world.<sup>35</sup> The same level of attention to detail was applied to the disciplinary concerns of noise and prisoner surveillance. To facilitate inspection the cells were designed in an oblong form with a one-way viewing device installed in the door.<sup>36</sup> The entrance doors to the hall were to be capable of opening without any noise and officers were instructed to wear carpet shoes to muffle the sound of their approach.<sup>37</sup>

After almost a decade of experiment of the separate system, however, there was a clear disillusionment with its ability to reform. The Eleventh report of the General Board of Directors of Prisons in Scotland of 1850 stated that, "...the present system has not fully answered its expected object, as deterring offenders from a repetition of crimes".<sup>38</sup> By 1851 hard labour was introduced with crank machines installed at Perth alongside the practice of dry oakum picking. Within this context Scottish prisons were also facing the problem of overcrowding and plans were drawn up for the completion of the four wings designed by Brown at Perth by the principal architect of Public Works for Scotland Robert Matheson (1851-77).<sup>39</sup>



Fig 12. Perth Prison, Thomas Brown, 1842 and Robert Matheson, 1857, oblique aerial photograph taken facing north © Historic Environment Scotland (Aerofilms Collection).



Fig 13. Perth Prison, Thomas Brown, 1842 and Robert Matheson, 1857, west elevation © Crown Copyright: Historic Environment Scotland.

Perth General Prison is notable as Scotland's greatest experiment with the architecture of the 'model prison' and the separate system of discipline. The prison was the centre of the Scottish penal system during its greatest building period and now as HMP Perth is the oldest purpose-built prison still in use by the SPS. Whilst the first two wings designed by Brown have been demolished, the wings constructed in the 1850s remain in use as prisoner accommodation (2014).

<sup>35</sup> GD112/49, General Prison, Perth, 1839-57

<sup>36</sup> GD112/49, General Prison, Perth, 1839-57

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>38</sup> General Board of Directors of Prisons in Scotland, Eleventh Report, 1850, [1161], XXIX.437, p. 5.

<sup>39</sup> M. Glendinning, R. MacInnes, and A. Mackenzie, *A history of Scottish Architecture; from the Renaissance to the Present Day*, (Edinburgh, 1997), p. 589.

## Scottish County Prisons

Alongside provision for a 'first class' general prison at Perth the 1839 Act established that there were to be well-conducted 'second-class' prisons and lockups in every county for short term prisoners or persons awaiting trial. The Act established County Boards which functioned under the authority of the General Prison Board at Perth.<sup>40</sup> Each county was to raise funds for the running expenses of the general prison at Perth according to its populations and the number of prisoners it sent there as well as raising funds for building and altering prisons in their localities.<sup>41</sup>

Between 1839 and 1860 the General Board exercised its power to reduce the number of substandard prisons in Scotland from 170 to 72. At the same time, a large building programme was launched in the 1840s and across Scotland thirty-eight new prisons were built. A further eleven prisons were rebuilt on old sites, and fourteen were enlarged and improved to accommodate the separate system of discipline.<sup>42</sup>

The widespread implementation of the separate system in county prisons in Scotland following the passing of An Act to Improve Prisons and Prison Discipline in 1839 contrasted with the situation in England where separation had been far from universally adopted in local prisons. Both the Gaols Act 1823 (not applicable to Scotland) and the Prisons Act 1835 had broadly sought to reform by enforcing systems of classification and separation.<sup>43</sup> The Act to Improve Prisons and Prison Discipline 1839 however conferred a greater degree of control over local prisons than the legislation of 1823 and 1835 had achieved in the English context. Prison reform legislation came later to Scotland, however, it enforced a standard system of discipline on county prisons which resulted in a more comprehensive and unified approach to the architecture of prisons in Scotland after 1839.

The relative uniformity evident in prison design from the 1840s to 1860s, whilst outlined by the 1839 Act, was also due to the appointment of a single architect to the prison board, Thomas Brown (1806-1872). Brown, who had been appointed in 1837, designed or altered 28 prisons across Scotland between 1839 and 1869, during what remains the greatest period of prison construction in the history of the Scottish penal system.

Whilst striving for the separation of prisoners, the designs of county prisons were not standardised and can appear remarkably varied in plan. In many cases the prisons adapted or utilised existing buildings or fortified sites and therefore Brown's designs reacted to the existing site and fabric. A sense of utility and economy are evident in the majority of his prison buildings.

In almost all examples of prisons built during the period between 1839 and 1860 a severe castellated style remained dominant with architectural detailing focused upon crenellated corner towers and ventilation shafts.

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<sup>40</sup> 'The Scottish Prisons', *The Scotsman*, Sept 11, 1841, p 4.

<sup>41</sup> Smith, 'Scottish Prisons under the General Board of Directors, 1840-1861', p. 294.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid*, p. 296.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid*, p. 310.



Fig 14. Stirling Prison, Thomas Brown, 1848 ©  
Crown Copyright: Historic Environment Scotland.



Fig 15. Perth prison, Thomas Brown II, 1841 ©  
Crown Copyright: Historic Environment Scotland.



Fig 16. Dunblane Prison, William Stirling II, 1841.  
© Crown Copyright: Historic Environment  
Scotland.

# NATIONALISATION TO THE PRESENT DAY

## Late Nineteenth Century Prisons

The Prisons (Scotland) Act 1860 abolished the General Board at Perth; thereafter county boards reported to the Home Secretary. By the 1860s the great building programme to reform prisons was almost complete. However, the new structures soon became inadequate in the face of the rising rate of committals and overcrowding meant that the implementation of the separate system was often impossible.<sup>44</sup> There had been growing disillusionment in the separate system from as early as the mid 1840s. Nevertheless the associated architectural model continued to dominate prison building long after the disciplinary system fell out of favour.

The Prisons Act of 1877 nationalised the prison system bringing all prisons in the UK under the control of the Government with the administrative responsibility given to the Prison Commission for Scotland.

The commissioners held their first meeting in 1878 and closed 13 of the 56 local prisons transferred to them by the act of 1877. Under section 30 of the 1877 Act police cells were legalised as places of imprisonment for up to 14 days, rendering some smaller local prisons redundant.<sup>45</sup> The closure of many small prisons, leading to increasing centralisation, meant pressure on accommodation in the larger prisons. This in turn led to the need to build extensions or new buildings at the sites of the bigger prisons.<sup>46</sup>

New, larger prison complexes in Scotland's cities were built or extended in the last quarter of the nineteenth century to account for the closures of a number of smaller prisons. In the period between 1839 and 1862, the city of Glasgow saw seven of its prisons close leaving just the North Prison on Duke Street.

Increased pressure on prison accommodation led to the construction of a new prison, Barlinnie in 1880-86 which consequently allowed the closure of inadequate local prisons at Campeltown, Rothesay, Airdrie, Hamilton and Lanark.<sup>47</sup> In 1891 a new prison complex was constructed to serve the area of Aberdeen at a site called Craiginches. Following the closure of small prisons at Nairn, Portree, Fort William, Tain, Wick and Dornoch in the Inverness District after 1877 a new prison was built off Edinburgh Road, near the court house in 1903 and it remains in use today.

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<sup>44</sup> *Ibid*, p 300.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid*, p 255.

<sup>46</sup> Cameron, p 151.

<sup>47</sup> Cameron, p 155.

This period also saw existing prisons reworked or remodelled. At the Edinburgh County prison on Calton Hill, the semi-circular panopticon layout designed by Robert Adam in 1791 was demolished and replaced with two large accommodation wings in 1887. The prison on Calton Hill was demolished in 1930 and functions moved to new premises at Saughton. Only the Governors House and some of the walls of the original Bridewell remain on the site.

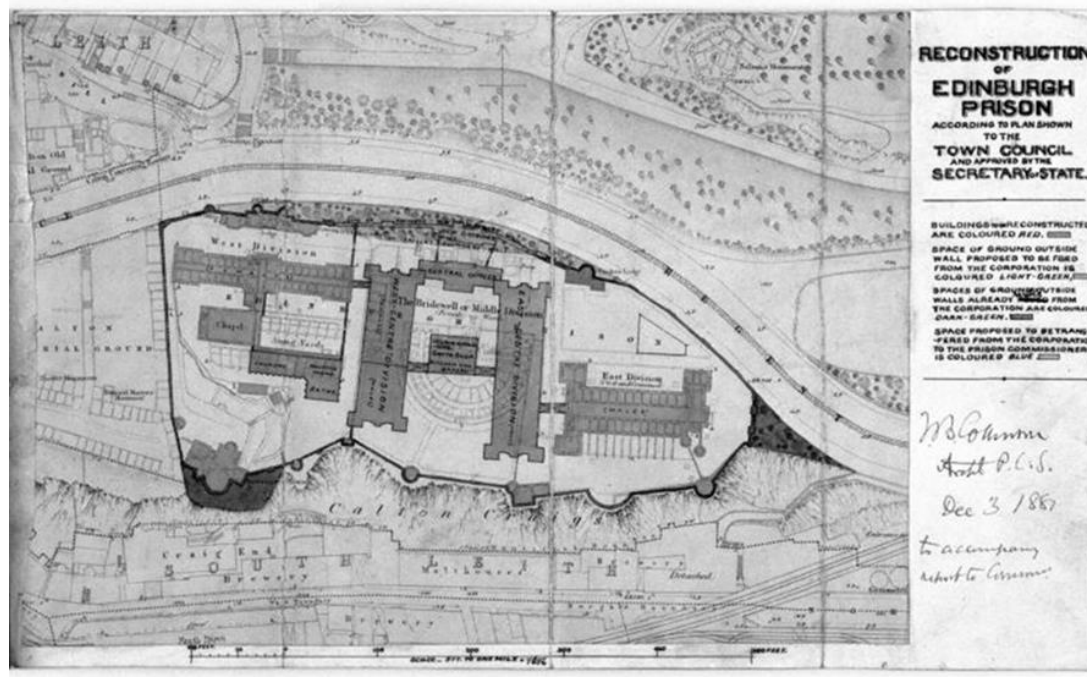


Fig 17. Edinburgh prison, Major T.B Collinson, Plan of 1887, showing the footprint of the Bridewell below the new Prison that replaced it © Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments

The prisons built in Scotland in the last quarter of the nineteenth century, following the 1877 Act, differed substantially from the preceding prison buildings. Whilst some of the changes towards a preference for large, parallel accommodation blocks were the result of a simple need for greater accommodation, much of the designs can be seen to follow the influential new prison of Wormwood Scrubs, London, 1874-1891.

Designed by Edmund du Cane, chairman of the newly established National Prison Commission, Wormwood Scrubs prison was arranged in parallel blocks linked by covered passages on what is called a 'telegraph-pole' plan. This layout, which dispensed with the radial model favoured in the 1830s and 40s is said to be based on that of European hospitals built after the Crimean War which were designed for effective air circulation and were oriented north-south to allow sunlight into each room.<sup>48</sup>

<sup>48</sup> <https://historicensland.org.uk/listing/the-list/list-entry/1393204>

The large parallel prison blocks constructed at Barlinnie in 1880 and Edinburgh in 1887 clearly display the influence of this new prison design. Once again the employment of a single designer, Major T.B Collinson for a number of prison commissions, ensured a level of uniformity in the buildings of the Scottish prison estate. As well as designing new accommodation at Edinburgh and Barlinnie, Major General T.B Collinson designed Dumfries Prison in 1883 which also dispensed with the radial model.



Fig 18. HMP Barlinnie, Major General T.B. Collinson, 1880 © Newsquest (Herald & Times).

The prisons designed after the 1877 Act are largely absent of the overtly fortified and castellated architectural elements seen in earlier prisons. The most distinctive feature can be found in the tall ventilation shafts that dominate the skyline at Peterhead, Aberdeen and Barlinnie. Internally, the layout of the wings in new prisons such as Barlinnie continued the earlier form of three storeys of cells lining an open corridor as seen at Perth General Prison.

By 1898 the number of prisons in Scotland had reduced to 14. These remaining prisons were at Aberdeen, Ayr, Dumfries, Dundee, Edinburgh, Glasgow (Barlinnie General), Glasgow (Duke Street), Greenock, Inverness, Kirkwall, Lerwick, Perth General, Peterhead and Stornoway. Most of these prisons built or reworked in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century remained in use well into the twentieth century, with four still in current use by the SPS at HMP Barlinnie, HMP Dumfries, HMP Inverness and HMP Greenock.



Fig 19. Perth prison, former D Hall, Robert Matheson, 1857 © Crown Copyright: Historic Environment Scotland



Fig 20. HMP Barlinnie, Major General T.B. Collinson, 1880 © Newsquest (Herald & Times).



Fig 21. Aberdeen, Craiginches, 1891 © Crown Copyright: Historic Environment Scotland



Fig 22. Edinburgh Prison, Major General T.B. Collinson, 1887 © Historic Environment Scotland (Aerofilms Collection)



## Twentieth Century Prisons

Significant development in penal policy begun in the late nineteenth century transformed the way in which twentieth century prisons functioned. Considered a landmark in the history of British penal reform, the Gladstone Report of 1895 gave consideration to the possibility of prison conditions designed to reform the criminal. Whilst previous disciplinary systems had sought to condition compliance and new behaviour in prisoners through restriction and punishment, the report recognised the need for improvement within prisons such as the abolition of useless forms of labour like the crank and treadmill, reduction in the use of solitary confinement, better food, more books and education, and work for prisoners.<sup>49</sup> The Prison Act of 1898, which followed the report, incorporated most of the committee's recommendations.

Another product of the the Gladstone Report was the concept of a prison where juvenile adults were separated from older convicts and provided with education and training to help them make a living on their release. The first institution which established the system was built in 1902 at Borstal Prison in Kent. Subsequent prisons which followed this model were called 'Borstals' and practised a strict regime of training, education and labour focusing on discipline and authority. The borstal system was set up under the Prevention of Crimes Act 1908 and the first Scottish prison to implement the system was opened in Polmont in 1911 occupying the building of the former Blairlodge School near Falkirk (now the site of Polmont Young Offenders Institution). The site at Castle Huntley (category A listed) was adapted and opened as a Borstal in 1947.

The general rise in crime from the 1960s led to a swing back to more punitive prison regimes in the latter part of the 20th century. More offenders and longer sentences led to an increase in the prison population which resulted in over-crowding, a worsening of conditions and less opportunity for education, workshop time and family visits which contributed to a series of prison riots in the 1970s and 1980s.

Despite these changes in policy, few new prisons were constructed until the 1980s when Victorian prisons still made up a significant proportion of the Scottish Prison Service estate. Major changes were necessarily forthcoming because of rising prison populations and pressure to update some buildings which lacked even the most basic of facilities such as in-cell plumbing.

The 1980s saw the borstal system abolished and replaced by young offenders institutions whilst the late twentieth century also saw the opening of privately run prisons.

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<sup>49</sup> Cameron, p 131.

## Twenty-First Century Prisons

Of the buildings of the SPS Estate almost half (46.6%) were built in the last 20 years. Earlier prisons have also undergone alterations. These most recent building projects by the Scottish Prison Service reflect the changed objectives of modern prisons and 21<sup>st</sup> century requirements to assist with social inclusion and rehabilitation.

The most recent addition to the SPS estate embodies these policies. HMP Grampian, the new 'super jail' replaced the late nineteenth century prisons at Peterhead and Aberdeen. Opened in 2014, HMP Grampian is the first 'community-facing' prison built by SPS, accommodating all categories and age groups of prisoners from a particular justice authority area. As a facility housing both male and female prisoners as well as young offenders, on a single site, it is unique in the UK.

The community-facing approach is intended to cut re-offending rates by providing greater links between offenders and the outside world. Where, for example, female prisoners from the northern regions of Scotland might previously have been accommodated at Cornton Vale in the central belt, housing all of a region's prisoners in a prison in their own area is intended to enable prisoners to maintain family links in order to assist rehabilitation.<sup>50</sup>

At HMP Low Moss, opened in 2012, a significant proportion of accommodation on the site is dedicated to facilities designed to aid prisoner rehabilitation. As well as 700 cells there is space for recreation and an education or link centre where prisoners are able to deal with matters such as employment and addiction.<sup>51</sup>

In contrast to the architectural design of nineteenth century prisons, prisons of the 21<sup>st</sup> century strive not to appear threatening but instead to present an exterior to prisoners and their visitors that is at once both secure and unthreatening. Typically a front reception or gate building of horizontal emphasis disguises the prisoner accommodation and facilities at the rear. Whilst the perimeter walls are windowless and impenetrable, large glass reception buildings show a clear emphasis on creating welcoming spaces for visitors to the prisons.

In some aspects of plan and building form however, these new prisons are reminiscent of the general layout of nineteenth century prisons such as Perth General Prison. The radial plan for cellular accommodation continues to be considered effective in providing economy of space, ventilation and daylight for all rooms and can be seen in use at Low Moss and HMP & YOI Grampian. The functional arrangement of placing receiving and administration accommodation at the front of the site, followed by rehabilitation facilities then prison accommodation in a radial form at the rear appears largely unchanged and remains the standard layout for modern prisons.

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<sup>51</sup> <http://www.sps.gov.uk/Prisons/LowMoss/low-moss.aspx>

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### **Archives**

The National Records of Scotland hold an extensive collection of records relating to  
Scottish Prisons including registers, reports, journals and plans.

<http://www.nas.gov.uk/guides/crime.asp>

Some of these have been digitised/ are available to view via the Scotland's Places  
webpage.

<http://www.scotlandsplaces.gov.uk/>