PRISON SERVICE JOURNAL

November 2014 No 216

The Georgian Prison:

Inquisitive and Investigative Tourism

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Some elements of the media are quick to claim that time in prison is like visiting a holiday camp. Therefore, it was perhaps with some irony that in 1996 the Prison Service briefly considered taking over Middleton Towers Holiday Camp to use as a category C prison to contribute to easing the accommodation crisis of the 1990s. Inmates would have been able to enjoy the faded remains of Harry S. Kamiya's art deco holiday camp, which opened unfortunately on 19 August 1939 and was promptly requisitioned by the government! Tourism and prisons might at first seem to be inappropriate bedfellows but this paper will seek to describe how there might be a noble reason for tourists to visit prisons.

Inquisitive Tourism

In the 17th century substantial numbers of wealthy people flocked to spas in search of cures for their various medical conditions and ailments and by the 18th century seaside resorts were beginning to attract a similar clientele. These people with the money and time to enjoy leisure drank spa and sea water and bathed in the sea, activities that took place in the morning before the sun had warmed the water. This left the rest of the day to socialise with fellow visitors in the circulating libraries, assembly rooms, coffee houses and theatres. It also left plentiful time for other pursuits such as walks and riding into the countryside where they could visit the country seats of aristocrats and gentry who seem to have been highly accommodating, even when they were in residence. For instance, John Feltham's *A guide to all the Watering and Sea Bathing Places* … includes many references to places that tourists could visit. At Scarborough his entry for the resort included a number of large houses including Hackness, the home of Sir Richard Bempte Johnson where the 'company, who visit the place, are allowed every indulgence they can desire, by the worthy owner' and Castle Howard — 'Parties are frequently formed to visit Castle Howard, the seat of the Earl of Carlisle'.[1] Georgian holidaymakers also spent time at other types of historic buildings that still attract millions of people today. In 1815 Thomas Lott enjoyed a youthful visit to Deal Castle: 'I forgot to mention that before we went to the play we went to deal castle a very nice large one with excellent rooms and furniture. I brought a wafer from there and also ground my knife on a Stone there. Pulled the alarm Bell. We went on the Battlements and climbed up the Ladders to the towers etc'.[2] The Georgian tourist also had time to keep journals and these, in combination with guidebooks, reveal that the enquiring visitor could also venture to a range of less historic sites. Charles Powell, who was sixteen years old in 1823, was interested in more recent coastal fortifications, visiting Martello towers on the Kent Coast and looking at steamships at Ramsgate, vessels at the cutting edge of technology.[3] Daniel Benham while on holiday visited Margate's Royal Sea Bathing Infirmary in 1829.[4]

The English coast was in the frontline of wars with during 18th century, yet visits to military sites and garrisons were commonplace. It is surprising that prisons were also places where holidaymakers seem to have visited routinely. Teenage Charles Powell visited Maidstone Gaol a year after Daniel Asher Alexander's monumental detached-radial plan structure had been completed in 1822.[5] On 19 September he recounts how they: 'Arrived at Maidstone at 4 o'clock to Bell Inn, Papa came in soon after us, then we all walked to the New Jail a fine stone building — went into the wards and chapel — saw the prisoners spinning, weaving, making mats, string, ropes, etc., then we came in to dinner.'[6] At the end of his day's visit he concluded that: 'Maidstone seems a large town and the Jail a large, strong, melancholy and clean place of punishment.'

It is clear from Charles Powell's diary that he and his father were inquisitive about a range of places and activities, but it is also evident that Maidstone Prison, like the Martello Tower and the steamships in the harbour, were simply part of the family's entertainment while on holiday. The 19th century may have been the

1. Feltham, John (1803) *A guide to all the Watering and Sea Bathing Places, with a description of the Lakes; a sketch of a tour in Wales, and Itineraries*. London, 98-9.
2. Grandfield, Y. (1989) The Holiday Diary of Thomas Lott: 12-22 July, 1815, *Archaeologia Cantiana*. 107, 63-82, 78.
3. Hull, F. (ed) (1966) A Kentish Holiday, 1823, *Archaeologia Cantiana*. 81, 109-17, 111-3.
4. Whyman, J. (1980) A Three-Week Holiday in Ramsgate during July and August 1829, *Archaeologia Cantiana*. 96, 185-225, 200.
5. Brodie, Allan et al (2002) English Prisons. Swindon: English Heritage, 67-70.
6. Hull, F. (ed) (1966) A Kentish Holiday, 1823, *Archaeologia Cantiana*. 81, 109-17, 110.

heyday of the freak show at fairs, but visiting hospitals, asylums and prisons is almost a manifestation of the same kind of interest in the 'grotesque body', one that is now satisfied by quasi-medical television programmes.[7] The works of other more famous writers demonstrate that prisons were part of mainstream tourism at least from the early 18th century. John Macky in 1714 visited the new Bethlem Hospital, which had been designed by Robert Hooke in 1676, and he also visited Bridewell:

> *BRIDEWELL was formerly a Royal Palace, but is now converted into a Work-house, like the Rasp-House at Amsterdam. Many a pretty Girl is brought into it with their fine Cloaths, but for all that is forc'd to receive Correction here for Night-Walking; of which Sort of Cattel this City abounds more than any City in the World; it being impossible to walk the Streets, and especially about the Play-Houses, without being picked up by this Sort of Vermine. There is also another House of Correction in this City for all Vagrant Loose Persons who are taken in the Night, and are there put to Work.*[8]

A house of correction had been was established in Bridewell, the former Tudor royal palace that had remained unused since 1530.[9] The Great Fire largely destroyed the palatial building in 1666, but a new institution had been created on the site.

Prior to the reforms introduced as a result of the works of John Howard (1726—1790), works that were a direct result of investigative tourism, gaolers had made a living by levying fees on the arrival and discharge of inmates, and iron fetters could be removed if prisoners paid for this privilege. Some gaolers were also able to supplement their income by charging visitors to their prison. William Pitt, the keeper of Newgate, made more than £3,000 from people who wanted to see Jacobite prisoners being held there, while visitors to see the highwayman Jack Shephard in 1716 paid £200.[10] On 3 May 1763 James Boswell decided to visit Newgate simply out of curiosity:

> *I then thought I should see prisoners of one kind or other, so went to Newgate. I stepped into a sort of court before the cells. They are surely most dismal places. There are three rows of 'em, four in a row, all above each other. They have double iron windows, and within these, strong iron rails; and in these dark mansions are the unhappy criminals confined. I did not go in, but stood in the court, where a number of strange blackguard beings with sad countenances, most of them being friends and acquaintances of those under sentence of death.*[11]

The ease of visiting a prison undoubtedly added to the air of disorder, but the availability of alcohol, tobacco, gambling and the mingling of the sexes also contributed to poor morality and bad behaviour.

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The life of prisoners could provide amusement for visitors, but their deaths were also part of the Georgian entertainment landscape. Executions at Tyburn were the most riotous and potentially the ones most likely to cause authorities concern regarding maintaining law and order, and therefore in 1783, once repairs had been completed following the Gordon Riots, the new prison at Newgate became the site for public executions in the heart of the capital. In county towns the county gaol was also the scene of public executions; at Gloucester executions took place at the gate to the new prison that was built in the 1780s. The body of the hanged prisoner dropped through a trapdoor to dangle inside the gateway for the public to witness, an arrangement reproduced in the new gate that was added in 1826 when the site was enlarged.[12]

Investigative Tourism

Prisons and executions attracted the curious and the morbid, but they also attracted people who had the more altruistic aim of reforming prisons by recording and exposing to public scrutiny the conditions that inmates had to endure. Foremost amongst these

7. Urry, John (2002) The Tourist Gaze. London: Sage Publications, 29.
8. Macky, John (1714) A Journey Through England. London: T. Caldecott, 1, 195.
9. Thurley Simon (1993) *The Royal Palaces of Tudor England*. Yale, 53.
10. McConville, S. (1981) *A history of English prison administration*. 1 London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 71.
11. Pottle, F. A. (ed) (1950) *Boswell's London Journal 1762-3* London: William Heinemann, 250-1
12. Neild, J. (1812) *State of the Prisons in England, Scotland, and Wales* ... London: Printed by John Nichols and Son, 245.

investigative tourists was the renowned philanthropist John Howard, but he was only one of a series 'investigative tourists' who would contribute to transforming Britain's prisons. Perhaps the earliest was Dr Thomas Bray, one of the founders of the Society for the Promotion of Christian Knowledge (SPCK), who published *An Essay Towards ye Reformation of Newgate and Other Prisons in and about London* in 1702.[13] He found that in Newgate there was no separation between male and female inmates, and between old incorrigible prisoners and new arrivals. Swearing, gaming and blaspheming was rife and there was unlimited access to strong liquor. As well as describing the poor conditions he suggested ways that Newgate and prisons in general could be reformed. He recommended that behaviour would be improved by employing a better type of person as the gaoler and a minister should also be provided to lead daily worship. Both should be paid a salary so that staff no longer had to rely on fees levied from inmates. Men and women would be held separately, preferably in single cells, similar to those at Bethlem Hospital. In his writing he was anticipating the reforms that John Howard would seek to implement later in the 18th century.

Following Bray's work a number of other reformers visited individual prisons and suggested, and in some case, helped to introduce reforms. Newgate was frequently at the centre of reformer's attention as it was a particularly bad place of imprisonment, as well as being conveniently based in central London, though the capital's other unhealthy gaols also received considerable attention. Newgate was damaged during the Great Fire of London, but was patched up and repaired or rebuilt by Robert Hooke in 1672.[14] In the course of the 18th century some improvement and enlargement took place, including the installation in 1752 by Dr Stephen Hales (1677—1761) of an air ventilator system, driven by a windmill on the roof of the building.[15] John Howard during his travels around Europe in the mid-1770s discovered that this apparently minor initiative had attracted attention from German reformers. He met Dr Duntze of Bremen who had been in London in the 1750s and had seen the ventilator at work, though he observed that the rooms were still pervaded by an offensive smell, a telling observation at a time when disease and smell were thought to be inherently linked.[16] In 1755 the City of London decided to rebuild Newgate Gaol, though this scheme was dropped when the government refused to contribute money. However, the need to rebuild the prison did not disappear and had to be reconsidered during the 1760s. The foundation stone of the new prison was laid on the 31 May 1770, the Sessions House was completed by 1774, and the whole complex was finished by 1780, though damage by the Gordon Rioters delayed its opening until 1783.[17] Newgate Gaol was undoubtedly the largest and most visible new prison of its day, but although it was a marked improvement on its predecessor, John Howard would nevertheless be rightly highly critical of it.

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John Howard (1726-90) was the son of a partner in an upholstery and carpet business in London.[18] Following the death of his wife in 1755 he travelled to Portugal in January 1756 in the immediate aftermath of the catastrophic earthquake and tsunami, but *en route* a French privateer captured him. After a short period in prison, and two months on parole in a house in France, he returned to England in exchange for a French Officer.[19] On his return to England he resided at Cardington in Bedfordshire, managing his estate, but with his election to the office of High Sheriff of Bedfordshire in 1773 his life changed forever .[20]

As Sheriff, Howard was responsible for the management of the county gaol and he discovered that prisoners were being detained after being found innocent or after completing their sentence until they

13. Hinde, R.S.E.. (1951) *The British Penal System*. London: Gerald Duckworth and Co Ltd, 21-6.
14. Pugh, R. B. (1968) *Imprisonment in Medieval England*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 137.
15. Evans, R. (1982) *The Fabrication of Virtue*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 100.
16. Howard, J. (1777) *The State of the Prisons in England and Wales*. Warrington: William Eyres, 118.
17. Brodie, Allan et al (2002) *English Prisons*. Swindon: English Heritage, 26-8
18. Gentlemans Magazine LXII 1792, 61-2; Howard, Derek Lionel (1958) *John Howard: Prison Reformer*. London: Christopher Johnson, 20-2; Southwood, Martin (1958) *John Howard, prison reformer. An account of his life and travels*. London: Independent Press, 14-17, 19.
19. Southwood, Martin (1958) *John Howard, prison reformer. An account of his life and travels*. London: Independent Press, 20-3; Howard, Derek Lionel (1958) *John Howard: Prison Reformer*. London: Christopher Johnson, 23-6.
20. Ramsay, M. (1977) 'John Howard and the Discovery of the Prison' *The Howard Journal of Penology and Crime Prevention*. 16, number 2, 1-16, 4.

paid a discharge fee.[21] To remove this impediment to their release, the Justices of the Peace insisted that he provided a precedent and therefore he visited neighbouring counties where he witnessed 'scenes of calamity, which I grew daily more and more anxious to alleviate.'[22]

By 4 March 1774 he had already visited many parts of England when he attended the House of Commons to give evidence in support of legislation being introduced by Alexander Popham, MP for Taunton. The result was two Acts of Parliament. The Discharged Prisoners Act 1774 abolished discharge fees and replaced it with payments from the rates.[23] The Health of Prisoners Act 1774 was the first concerted attempt at improving the physical conditions of prisons although it was frequently ignored.[24] It ordered that the walls and ceilings of cells and wards should be scraped and whitewashed once a year. They were to be regularly washed and constantly supplied with air by means of hand ventilators. Separate rooms were to be provided for sick prisoners and baths were to be introduced into prisons. An experienced surgeon or apothecary was to be appointed and all the provisions of the Act were to be painted on a board to be hung in a conspicuous part of each prison.

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Although Howard could have ceased his travels, he continued to travel throughout England and Ireland until March 1775, when he went on his first visit to European prisons. In total he made seven journeys around Europe reaching as far as Moscow, Constantinople, Lisbon and Malta and between these longer trips he continued to visit British prisons. The result of these journeys was published in 1777 as *The State of the Prisons*, and revised editions appeared in 1780, 1784 and 1791.[25]

Howard's last journey began on 7 July 1789, a week before the storming of the Bastille, a building he had visited a few years before. He travelled along the Baltic coast to St Petersburg and Moscow. By January 1790 he had moved on to Kherson, near the Crimea, where he died on 20 January 1790 of typhus, the same disease that he had previously proved resistant to throughout his hundreds of visits to prisons.

Howard's books revealed that the buildings that he visited were usually in a poor state of repair and even modern purpose-built prisons, such as St George's Fields in Newington (Surrey), which was built in 1772, had dirty rooms inhabited by chickens.[26] Many prisons had no sewers or water supply and cramped urban prisons often had no exercise yards.[27] Inmates were sometimes detained in pits and many were forced to sleep directly on the ground.[28] Howard also feared that the foul air would infect him: 'It was not, I own, without some apprehensions of danger, when I first visited the prisons; and I guarded myself by smelling to vinegar, while I was in those places, and changing my apparel afterwards.'[29] Vermin was also a problem in some prisons. At Knaresborough an officer who had been imprisoned for a few days 'took in with him a dog to defend him from vermin; but the dog was soon destroyed, and the Prisoner's face much disfigured by them.'[30] The surroundings, as wells as the buildings, were also filthy with prisons such as Birmingham and Gloucester having dung heaps in the yards.[31]

Howard's *The State of the Prisons* is rightly celebrated as a biting indictment of the state of prisons in the 1770s and 1780s and it is also a tribute to his stamina and tenacity in travelling so extensively. It is even more remarkable when the extraordinary complexity of legal jurisdictions is considered. Some prisons were run by towns, some by counties and in some towns they might share the same building. Similarly the house of correction and the county gaol were separate institutions, with differing origins, but they might nevertheless share one building. He also had to visit, and record, the conditions in prisons run by the church and the stannaries in Cornwall. The fragmented nature of legal jurisdictions suggests the magnitude of

21. Howard, J. (1777) *The State of the Prisons in England and Wales*. Warrington: William Eyres, 1.
22. Howard, J. (1777) *The State of the Prisons in England and Wales*. Warrington: William Eyres, 2.
23. 14 Geo III, c.20.
24. 14 Geo III, c.59.
25. England, R. W. (1993) 'Who Wrote John Howard's Text ...' *British Journal of Criminology*. 33, 203-215, 203n1.
26. Howard, J. (1777) *The State of the Prisons in England and Wales*. Warrington: William Eyres, 236.
27. Howard, J. (1777) *The State of the Prisons in England and Wales*. Warrington: William Eyres, 14.
28. Howard, J. (1777) *The State of the Prisons in England and Wales*. Warrington: William Eyres, 15.
29. Howard, J. (1777) *The State of the Prisons in England and Wales*. Warrington: William Eyres, 5.
30. Howard, J. (1777) *The State of the Prisons in England and Wales*. Warrington: William Eyres, 410.
31. Howard, J. (1777) *The State of the Prisons in England and Wales*. Warrington: William Eyres, 275, 344.

the task that he faced when trying to gain access throughout the country. Today Howard is a celebrated reformer, but at the time in which he was conducting his first rounds of visits around England in 1773 and 1774, he was simply the Sheriff of Bedfordshire.

The records of the English and Welsh sites in *The State of the Prisons* rarely, and almost certainly deliberately, give little insight into the process of his visit to an individual site, each entry being put forward in a factual, documentary way. In his entry for Newgate he mentions that he attended prayers there on one occasion. However, there are more insights into his personal experiences in his foreign visits. In Paris he visited a number of prisons without incident, but his visit to the Bastille proved to be difficult. After knocking on the door he was allowed to enter and looked round the outside of the building; 'But whilst I was contemplating this gloomy mansion, an officer came out of the Castle much surprised, and I was forced to retreat through the mute guard, and thus regained that freedom, which for one locked up within those walls it is next to impossible to obtain'.[32] In Germany he spent a week in Hamburg and got into its prisons because he was accompanied by his friend Senator Voght, while in Bremen Dr Hornwinckel who was the Magistrate accompanied him.[33]

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Howard's tireless visiting, meetings with justices and campaigning in Parliament helped to start a process of transforming England and Wales's prisons, but nevertheless in the 1830s it was recognised that there were still fundamental problems in England's prisons. Of 165 borough and town prisons examined by Municipal Corporation Commissioners in 1835, only sixty-one (37 per cent) offered adequate accommodation. Twenty-six (16 per cent) were described as being 'unfit for the confinement of human beings'.[34] Since 1823, the basis of prison discipline had been classification according to the nature of the offence, but this was not evenly applied. While small borough gaols were unable even to separate criminals and debtors, large county gaols and houses of correction accommodated an increasing number of classes. Shrewsbury, for example, was divided into seventeen categories (excluding sick and condemned prisoners) in 1797, but had twenty-six categories by 1834 and therefore potentially twenty-six sets of accommodation and yards.[35] Classification based on the nature of the offence rather than the character of the offender was increasingly seen to be flawed, since habitual criminals convicted of minor offences were imprisoned alongside young or first offenders.

New directions would be needed and so the British Government looked to the USA for ideas. In 1831 Earl Grey's Whig administration appointed a Select Committee of the House of Commons to examine the question of secondary punishments and it reported in June 1832.[36] It recommended employing a system of solitary confinement with hard labour along the lines of the silent system practised in Auburn prison in New York State. Their preference for this model rather than the separate system was influenced by publications of the Boston Prison Discipline Society and by the experience of Captain Basil Hall of the Royal Navy (1788-1844).[37] He had travelled extensively in North America during 1827 and 1828 and had visited a number of American prisons, including Sing-Sing and Cherry Hill. Hall favoured the former prison because its silent system allowed human contact and he condemned the absolute solitude of Cherry Hill, where the separate system was in force. The 1831-2 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; that a return should be made by all prisons estimating the expense of these alterations and additions; and that prison inspectors should be appointed.

Following the Committee's report William Crawford (1788-1847) was dispatched to the USA to examine at first-hand their state prisons. Crawford had been a secretary of a committee that investigated the cause and increase of juvenile delinquency in London,

32. Howard, J. (1777) *The State of the Prisons in England and Wales*. Warrington: William Eyres, 93.
33. Howard, J. (1777) *The State of the Prisons in England and Wales*. Warrington: William Eyres, 116-7.
34. First Report of the Commissioners appointed to inquired into the Municipal Corporations of England and Wales, PP, 1835 (116), XXIII, 96.
35. Shropshire Record Office, QA/2/3, 151/1, *General Rules, Orders, Regulations and Bye-Laws for the Inspection and Government of the Gaol and House of Correction for the County of Salop* (1797); QA/2/3, Rules and *Regulations for the Government of Salop Gaol and House of Correction* (1834), 7-8.
36. Secondary Punishments 1831-2, PP 1831-2 (547), VII, Report 3-20.
37. Secondary Punishments 1831-2, PP 1831-2 (547), VII, Minutes of Evidence, 43-8.

and he was a founder member and secretary of the Society for the Improvement of Prison Design (SIPD). He was one of a number of European visitors to investigate the respective merits of silent- and separate-system prisons in the United States. On his return, Crawford 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.[38] He praised the moral discipline imposed at Cherry Hill and recommended the adoption of a modified form of the separate system in England.[39] Every prisoner should have his own cell in which to sleep and eat and certain classes should be held in solitary confinement, with or without work. Where separation was not enforced prisoners should undertake associated labour in strict silence. He argued that classification alone did not prevent contamination and that all communication between prisoners should be prevented. Crawford also emphasized the importance of employment, religious instruction and the uniform application of discipline in all prisons.

Conclusion

Tourism in the Georgian period could be prurient, satisfying the need to witness punishment, suffering and even death, but there was also potentially an educative element even to a casual visit; hopefully the youthful Charles Powell's visit to Maidstone in 1823 taught him that crime would not pay. However, a more constructive form of tourism also existed in the 18th and 19th centuries undertaken by a range of people seeking to record the state of prisons and by doing this seeking to introduce reform. Most famous among these was John Howard who crusaded to improve prison conditions until his death in 1790, but a generation later his heroic effort had still not improved all England's prisons, forcing the British government to look to America for ways to improve the prison system.

38. Crawford, William (1834) *Report of William Crawford, Esq. on the Penitentiaries of the United States*, PP 1834 (593), XLVI, Report, 19, Appendix, 23.
39. Crawford, William (1834) *Report of William Crawford, Esq. on the Penitentiaries of the United States*, PP 1834 (593), XLVI, Report, 19, 31, 36-41.