

# Our New Prisons: Adapting Building Design to Community Patterns

BRIAN PROCTOR, DIP. ARCH.

*Research Scholar, Architects Registration Council, 1962*

THE GOVERNMENT White Paper, *Penal Practice in a Changing Society*, published in 1959 announced the first major prison building programme for well over half a century. Since the Victorian prisons were built advances have been made in the social sciences and in building techniques, and there is now in existence a body of knowledge which has not been fully related to prison training. Certainly a re-appraisal of penal building is needed, and it should be carried out before too much of the new building programme is implemented.

What is needed above all in our building programme is a flexibility which will enable buildings to be adapted to meet the needs of new advances in sociology and penology. The old Victorian prisons, having been designed for purposes other than that of rehabilitation, failed because they could not accommodate new methods of training. The mistake must not be repeated.

Alexander Paterson said that modern methods of penal treatment must be based on the principle that a man cannot be led to adjust himself to the demands of society if he is deprived of every form of social experience while in prison. If this is so, how much of the normal community pattern can be retained within the limits of an abnormal and captive community? The best service that the architectural approach to prison reform can render is to find this out through the design and lay-out of buildings, which can then be used for further experiment.

It would seem logical to introduce into the abnormal prison community as much normality as possible. With a realistically functioning community in prison there would be the opportunity for skilled staff to assess the ways in which an inmate shows maladjustment, and to practice reorientation within the prison community framework. Furthermore it should be possible to

make a more accurate assessment of an inmate's rehabilitative progress based on his showing in the community of the new prison. The ability to control, essential to any method of rehabilitation, must no longer be viewed only as the rather negative method of keeping the inmates from escaping, but as the means whereby this artificial community can be manipulated in any way conducive to the rehabilitation of the inmates.

### Community Groupings

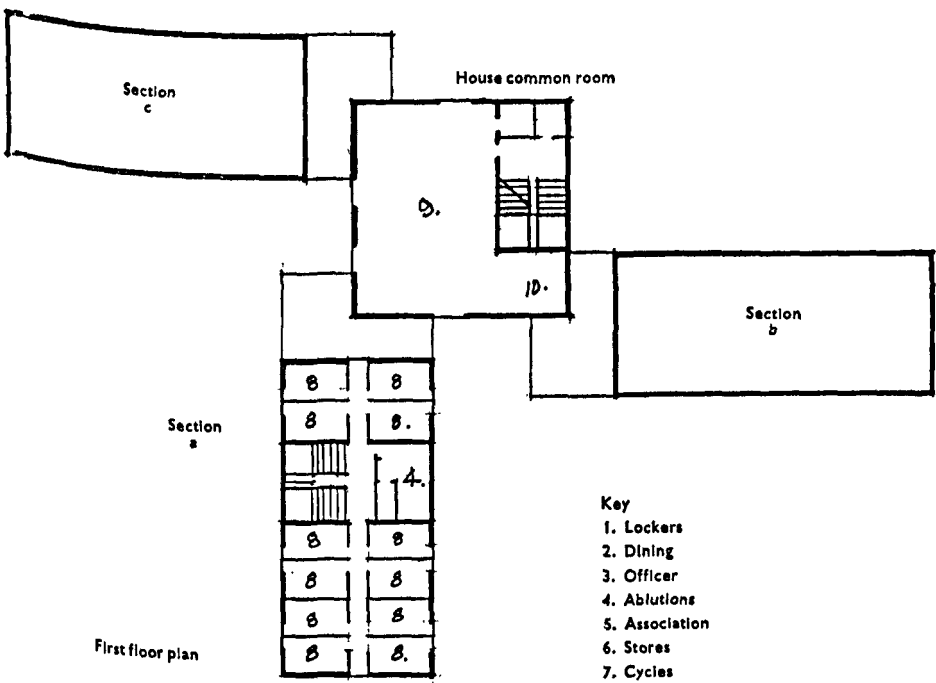
Although a community is an infinitely complex organization, a minimum of four basic groupings seem relevant in this context. They are the family, or intimate group; the immediate neighbourhood; the wider but still familiar locality; and the total community. Within these patterns the individual personality develops in relation to the strengths and weaknesses of those with whom he comes into contact, and within the prison group there should be similar facilities to permit comparable development.

In this scheme the family group has its counterpart in the Section which houses the smallest of the prison groups, and I have made twelve inmates the number on which to base the design, but the building is planned to permit experiment in group sizes. The Section is a suitable place for group therapy or counselling to be carried out on the "home ground" of the inmates. A small group is known to make it more difficult for inmates to contract out of

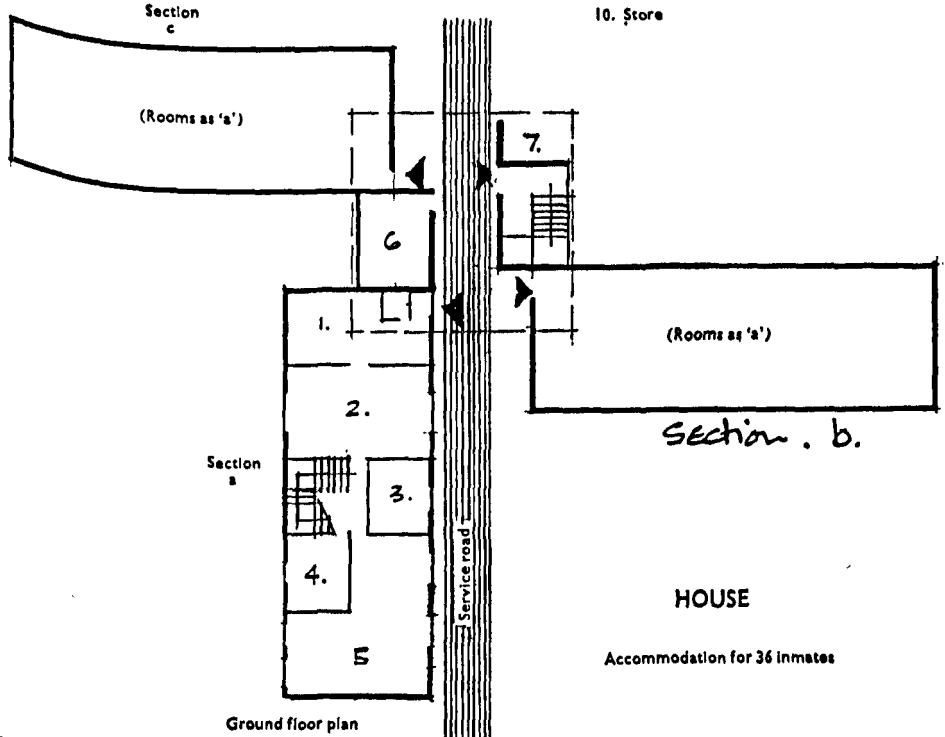
prison life. In terms of general discipline the prison population, always notoriously difficult to handle, will be controlled more easily in such small numbers, and the staff will be able to exercise more personal supervision. From this more opportunities should arise for positive staff/inmate relationships to develop. The Association area, which is similar to the living-room of the family, provides accommodation for leisure-time activities of a sedentary nature and there is also a dining-room area, positioned for easy access to the Service road running through the House unit, along which food deliveries are made. (See diagram.)

The dimensions of the dining area are such that it can be readily converted to a sleeping area if extra accommodation is required as a result of experiment in group sizes. The Association area will then be called upon to serve as a dining-room as well. The sleeping cell modules are designed with non-load-bearing partitions to facilitate conversion into dormitories, so that on the first floor, too, experiments can be carried out with both forms of sleeping unit. A security partition has been designed which can be added or removed without the necessity for structural alterations.

Already precedents exist for this family-type group in the Swedish small group pavilions, in some of our mental hospitals (e.g. Belmont Hospital family groups), and in



- Key**
1. Lockers
  2. Dining
  3. Officer
  4. Ablutions
  5. Association
  6. Stores
  7. Cycles
  8. Cells/bedrooms
  9. House room
  10. Store



certain children's homes. At Rox-tuna, a Swedish institution for youthful offenders with psychiatric complications, the inmates are housed in six separate single-storey buildings each housing seven. Two of these pavilions are surrounded by a steel mesh fence providing maximum security. There is one separate pre-release open building for nine inmates. Each group dines within its own pavilion, food being delivered from a central kitchen.

At least three Sections (families) are combined by lay-out into a House unit (neighbourhood), and flexibility of House size is possible because space is provided for the addition of an extra Section.

The provision of toilet facilities in security sleeping cells is a subject debated in this country with much passion. The present British practice is to provide the inmate with a pot to be emptied each morning. This is totally unsuitable, and if lavatories are not to be provided inmates should be able to contact night staff for escort to communal ablutions. Certainly it is extravagant to provide a lavatory for each inmate, or so it seems at the moment, but experience may prove it to be essential. The solution which flexibility dictates is to design the cell to allow for the installation of a lavatory at a later date with minimum structural disturbance. In my Section design I have done this, while allowing for communal lavatories a short distance from the sleeping area,

which corresponds to the facilities available to the normal family.

In this new prison community the part played by the neighbourhood in normal life is taken over by the House. Its main expression is to provide a focal point for the family groups in a common meeting room where the atmosphere will be akin to that found in a community centre or club. Within the House the individual will find a wider range of inmates with whom he can relate, and there will be scope for inmates to take on responsibilities in the organization of and participation in activities. Here too, as in the Section, there can be consultation and discussion between inmates and prison authorities on matters concerned with the running of the House. Already we have a precedent for this type of neighbourhood in the houses of our approved schools and borstals, and in the cell block of Blundeston Prison. Club activities, such as table-tennis, darts, billiards and snooker, take place in the common room of the House.

The House headquarters straddles the Service road at the point where the Sections adjoin, the common room of the House being at first floor level and the administrative office on the floor above this. All the House officials are provided with office accommodation on this top floor. Personal control is still possible at House level, emanating from the housemaster (of Assistant Governor status), deputy housemaster, and

matron-case-worker, together with the principal officer of the House and the Section officers. The common room of the House is designed for flexibility of function—to allow inmates and staff to be seated for discussions, to accommodate the sports equipment sufficiently well to make participation easy, and for use as a dining-room if it is found that eating here is preferable to Section meals.

The total prison community represents the locality of the outside world. In miniature the facilities of the normal local community are there—basic education, sports and hobbies, shop and canteen, religion, medical care, vocational training and work. Opportunities for the expression of personality come from inmate participation in those activities, sporting and cultural, for which the larger social group is needed. The administration is now present in the form of the Governor and his staff of medical, religious, technical and clerical workers.

The size of the prison locality must be subjected to experiment just as that of the Section and House will be. The Governor should be able to make some personal contact with each inmate, which entails in this scheme an acquaintance with a minimum prison population of 144 and a maximum of 256 if Houses of four Sections and 16 inmates each are built. This could be doubled should it be found necessary, for

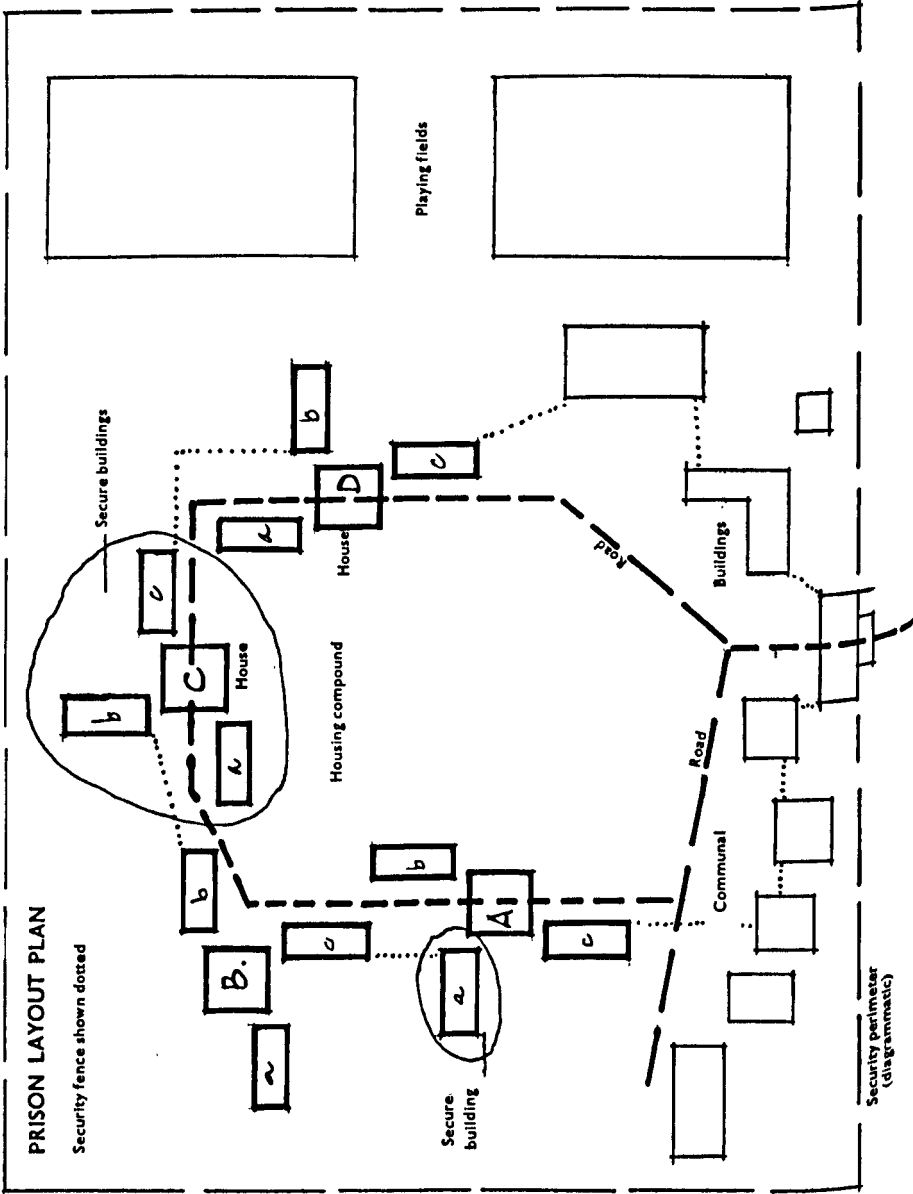
the locality planned will allow for the number of Houses to be increased to eight.

The principles of community living are relevant to all types of prison, and the buildings are designed so that special facilities such as vocational training or increased security are capable of assimilation without altering the basic design. Inmate housing is the generic factor in adapting community patterns to prison life.

### Security

Because the prison population varies both in numbers and in security-classification from month to month, there must be prisoners at present serving their sentences in closed prisons who are not considered security risks. Where the number of places for security and non-security prisoners is fixed, constructive placement is not possible for all prisoners. Place filling then becomes a yardstick. . . . What is needed in our new prisons is considerable flexibility of security measures so that incoming prisoners can be more suitably placed according to their classification.

Sweden successfully uses institutions which incorporate sections of maximum, medium and minimum security, through which inmates progress towards release. The prison design which I am advocating can obviously be used without any adaptation as an open institution, however it can also be used for medium and maximum security training with a little adaptation.



and as such can incorporate widely varying and readily adaptable degrees of security. Within such a prison scope is allowed for experiment with training techniques, and the cohesion of training groups can be maintained by suiting the degree of security to the state of responsibility of each group, with the minimum of transfers.

Such flexibility is possible because each Section can be isolated by securing its single entrance. All windows within the inmate housing area are fitted with security grills which—when minimum security is the order—can be removed and stored, or slid into a special cavity beside the window. Thus each section can be rendered basically secure if necessary. Alternatively the sleeping floor only can be rendered secure, and/or the single cells can be isolated.

Security within the confines of each House can be assured by controlling the exits and entrances of the Service road, so that some or all Sections can enjoy freedom of movement within the secure House. The layout of the inmate housing, together with the social buildings, forms a compound which can be made secure by the addition of security-fence infill between the buildings. This allows for freedom of movement, if necessary under staff control, within the compound for inmates in some or all of the Houses and Sections. Thus some of the Houses within the compound can be

totally secure (e.g. House C in diagram) with no access to the compound, House B in the diagram is open with all Sections having access to the compound and House A has one Section rendered secure and two others open with access to the compound.

Finally a relatively inflexible perimeter security can be added for institutions where maximum security is necessary. However because the basic housing remains the same, within such an institution the same opportunities can exist for flexibility in freedom of movement within the prison.

### Summary

This research has been instituted because of the evidence that Blundeston Hall Prison is to be made the blueprint for future British prisons. Blundeston fails because it has been designed primarily for security, with rehabilitation a secondary consideration. Although it is a distinct advance on the Victorian prisons it still retains some of their worst features, e.g. the monumental institutional form of building. That five more prisons like it are planned is depressing news—for time is needed to see how Blundeston functions, how it can be improved upon.

The prison I have attempted to design can serve in many ways—as something akin to the present Victorian prison, as a Blundeston, as a Roxtona, or in ways quite different from any of these. There is nothing to be lost by building

the flexible-security prison, and a great deal to be gained from the result of experiment.

A building programme of institutions incapable of flexibility is extremely short-sighted in view of the anticipated advances to be made in sociology, criminology

and, we hope penology. For the next 20 years all new prisons should be experimental to a considerable degree, otherwise in a hundred years' time the prison population will be housed in institutions as unfitted for their task as the Victorian structures are today.

## OUR CONTRIBUTORS

W. J. BOOTH is the Deputy-Principal of the Prison Service Staff College.

DR. MELITTA SCHMIDBERG, has been psychiatrist to the Institute for Scientific Treatment of Delinquency (I.S.T.D.) London; physician to the London Clinic of Psychoanalysis; training analyst of the British Psychiatric Society until 1949 when she left to become professor of psychiatry, Adelphi College, New York. She worked for 12 years in New York. She founded the Association for Psychiatric Treatment of Offenders (A.P.T.O.) and worked as director of its New York Clinical Services; medical adviser to the Board of Correction of New York City. She is president of A.P.T.O. and European editor of the *Journal of Offenders' Therapy*. In 1959 she served as official delegate for the American Psychiatric Association to the U.N. conference on juvenile delinquency in London. Dr. Schmideberg is the author of about 120 psychiatric papers in nine countries. In 1961 she left the U.S.A., spent a year studying delinquency and its treatment on the continent, now lives and works in London. She has been described as "an example of the brain drain in reverse".

CARL AUDE graduated in law in Copenhagen 1939 and entered the Ministry of Justice in Denmark 1940. After being a deputy governor and governor, in 1949 he was appointed director of Danish prison industries and since 1956 he has been principal of the central training school for prison officers. He has written a book on Danish penology.

BRIAN PROCTOR qualified at Nottingham School of Architecture in 1961, his final thesis being a design for a borstal. Granted an A.R.C.U.K. scholarship to continue research on the possible extension of his ideas to prison, he is now working for Somerset County Council.

H. F. FERGUSON, Administration Officer at Hollesley Bay Colony, joined the Prison Service at Northallerton in 1946, aged 17, and has since served at Gringley, Ashwell, Wetherby and Head Office.

S LEAKE is the Chief Officer of Wetherby Borstal. An ex-sergeant in the Grenadier Guards, he has worked in almost all types of penal establishment.