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A Brief History of Prison Closures 1777-2015

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In April 2015 English Heritage was divided into two bodies and a new heritage organisation, Historic England, has been established. The English Heritage Trust is now a charity that will continue to care for the more than 400 historic properties and their collections enjoyed by its members. Other functions previously carried out by English Heritage have passed to Historic England, a government service championing England's heritage and giving expert, constructive advice. It is responsible for providing advice about planning matters as well as the listing and scheduling of buildings and ancient monuments. It is also responsible for leading a research programme into England's heritage. This paper describes the prison work carried out by English Heritage in 2013-4, research and recording work that is being continued by Historic England.

In 2002 English Heritage published *English Prisons: An Architectural History*, which tells the story of the architecture of prisons from the Middle Ages to the present day. This book is now available as a free download.² As a work of architectural history, it inevitably focussed on the novel, the improved and the most impressive examples of penal architecture, but it is also clear that a key part of the history of prisons is about the closure of institutions that are no longer deemed fit for purpose. While a house, church or mill may be easily converted to other uses or updated as changing practices apply, prisons inevitably have a rigid structure that would prove difficult to upgrade or convert to other functions. Dozens of small prisons closed during the 18th and 19th centuries as the provision of imprisonment became more centralised and most were demolished when another function could not be found.

Today the Government is again closing some of the smallest and most expensive prisons and there is a challenge to find a way to reuse these structures. Almost a dozen have closed since 2010 and as part of the process to decide on their future English Heritage brought two of the authors of 'English Prisons' out of penal-architecture retirement to revise and update English Heritage's record of the sites. They have been

working with colleagues from the Designation Department who are responsible for the listing of historic buildings. Members of the National Planning and Conservation Department have also been involved: they are tasked with representing English Heritage's thoughts about sites and helping owners and organisations to manage change on historically sensitive sites. Historic England will continue to provide the Ministry of Justice and any subsequent owners of the sites with clarity about the nature of each site's historic character and the level of protection enjoyed by buildings. This will allow future development that can build on the historic character of sites and enhance the character of the townscape while ensuring economic viability for any development schemes.

In this paper the story of prisons will be told in terms of the prison closures that resulted from the implementation of new ideas about imprisonment. This will stretch from the impact of John Howard's work in the late 18th century to the reforming ideas of the first half of the 20th century, which had a central aim of transforming the prison estate from the despised Victorian blocks to a new regime and architecture founded on ideas of treatment and rehabilitation.

The Impact of John Howard's Reforms

The first round of prison closures was the largest. It was a result of John's Howard's reforming survey of England's prisons that transformed the way that people were detained in prison. In 1773 John Howard became High Sheriff of Bedfordshire and began a series of journeys around England to gather evidence about the conditions in prisons. His findings were first published in 1777 in *The State of the Prisons*, a book that documented the existence of insecure, badly maintained buildings overseen by staff who relied on levying fees from prisoners for their livelihood.³ Inmates might be held in pits or cellars, chained unless they paid to be released from their fetters. Vermin was rife and dung heaps and open sewers graced the yards of some prisons. Disease, especially gaol fever (typhus), was inevitable and deaths were commonplace. The wellbeing of inmates was dependent on their ability to

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 2. The book can be downloaded from the Archaeology Data Service. <http://tinyurl.com/nync8jx>
 3. Howard, John (1777) *The State of the Prisons in England and Wales ...* Warrington.

pay, including for meals. Fees were also levied on their arrival and before they were released on completing their sentence. Gaolers could make money by charging an admission fee for the public to see a famous prisoner, giving prisons an air of the carnival, an atmosphere exacerbated by the ready availability of alcohol, tobacco, gambling and sex. As well as documenting the conditions that he witnessed, and making the case for penal reform, Howard's book contained a section entitled 'Proposed Improvements in the Structure and Management of Prisons', providing a blueprint for a new type of prison based on inmates having individual cells. Howard's work effectively rendered almost every prison in England and Wales unsuitable and over the next 20-40 years counties undertook, more or less enthusiastically, building programmes to renew their prisons and improve conditions.

The most comprehensive reform scheme was undertaken in Gloucestershire, where Sir George Onesiphorus Paul was responsible for transforming his county's prisons in the second half of the 1780s.⁴ In 1777 Howard had published a description of the county's prisons.⁵ He began by documenting the inmate numbers and the fees of the County Gaol, which was housed in Gloucester Castle along with the County Bridewell and the Debtor's Prison. The buildings

were in a poor state of repair and deaths and illness were commonplace, the dung heap undoubtedly contributing to the unhealthy atmosphere. Elsewhere in Gloucestershire there were county bridewells at Lawford's Gate in Bristol, Berkeley, Cirencester and Winchcombe, and there was a small debtor's prison at St Briavels in the Forest of Dean. There was also the Gloucester City and County Gaol in the north gate of the city. All these were small, in a poor state of repair and contained at most a handful of rooms. There was little or no work and at some sites the inmates were imprisoned all the time in the room they slept in.

In 1783 Paul also described the ruinous state of the county gaol at Gloucester, including a nightroom that was so insecure that inmates had to be chained to the

wall.⁶ Prisoners who had been charged with minor offences might be held for a year until the next Assizes, and there was widespread illness, as well as the mixing of hardened criminals with juveniles and men with women. Paul blamed 'the magistrates' inattention' for this 'most licentious intercourse', which he believed was hindering efforts to reform prisoners.⁷ Therefore, he embarked on a major programme to transform his county's prisons by implementing Howard's ideas. Paul proposed the construction of five new bridewells and a county gaol in which each felon would have a separate night cell and each of the new gaols would also have a chapel, baths, an infirmary and workplaces. A working party was formed to secure a private Act of Parliament, which received its Royal Assent in April 1785. As early

as January 1784 the committee had seen the initial plans and estimates drawn up by William Blackburn, the country's leading prison architect, and at a meeting on 19 April 1785 he again presented his plans to the Justices. His schemes were accepted and work began within two years.

The main prison at Gloucester, the largest of the projects, finally opened in July 1791. It had been built on the site of the Castle, while four new bridewells prisons were built at at Dursley, Bristol, Littledean, and Northleach.⁸ Therefore, in Gloucestershire there were almost as many prisons as had

existed before reforms were introduced, but now the facilities were in tune with Howard's ideas. A similar pattern can be seen nationally. In 1777 Howard recorded conditions in 244 prisons, a number that may be an under-estimate, as in James Neild's survey in 1812 he recorded 317. A Parliamentary survey of 1819 placed the total at 335, suggesting that although many, if not, most prisons had been reformed and rebuilt, there was still an emphasis on large numbers of small prisons.

However, by the early 19th century some of the new prisons were increasing in size as they had to accommodate a growing number of categories of prisoners because the old divisions of felons, debtors and juveniles were being further subdivided into classes

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4. Oxford Dictionary of National Biography <http://www.oxforddnb.com/> [accessed 12 February 2015].

5. Howard, John (1777) *The State of the Prisons in England and Wales* ... Warrington, pp. 343-52.

6. Moir, E. (1969) *Local Government in Gloucestershire 1775-1800*. Bristol and Gloucestershire Archaeological Society, p. 113.

7. Moir, E. (1957) 'Sir George Onesiphorus Paul' in Finberg, H. P. R. (ed) *Gloucestershire Studies*. Leicester: University Press, pp. 195-224, p. 204.

8. Whiting, J. R. S. (1979) *A House of Correction*. Gloucester: Alan Sutton, p. 11; 25 Geo III, c. 10.

to reflect the range of apparent 'hardness' of criminals. At Stafford the prison was subdivided to provide yards for thirteen classes of offender, while Daniel Asher Alexander's design of Maidstone Prison, which was built between 1810 and 1822, provided day rooms on the ground floor with 452 night cells on the first and second floors, which were arranged to accommodate twenty-seven classes of inmates separately.⁹

By the early 19th century the reforming principles of Howard had been implemented and therefore older, smaller and wholly inappropriate gaols had been replaced or sold for other uses. A few of these survive as houses, often their name being the only suggestion of their former function. At Devizes in Wiltshire the reformed prison of the 1810s was demolished in 1927, but its predecessor the Bridewell has survived as a house in the heart of the town.¹⁰ Some of the old prisons have become local or prison museums, such as the medieval prison at Hexham, the mid-18th century Old Gaol at Buckingham and the museum at Ely. However, most are gone today and are only known through scant documentary sources.

The Separate System and Prison Closures 1837-77

John Howard's reforms helped to transform the country's prisons. Several hundred closed and were replaced by more modern structures, though the pattern of locations remained broadly the same, with the vast majority being small, local prisons, with counties having perhaps one larger county gaol. Some prisons contained convicts as well as local prisoners, and transportation remained a key part of the penal landscape.

However, by the 1830s a revolution in imprisonment was beginning to take place, which would see a shift to fewer larger prisons capable of enforcing the separate system of imprisonment, a regime based on ideas imported from America. Each prisoner should sleep and work alone in a large cell, which contained all the necessary facilities for prison

life including lighting, heating, ventilation, a toilet and basin, and the means to call an officer. The cells were to be constructed to prevent communication between inmates and separation would be extended to the chapel and exercise yards. The solitude experienced in the cell was designed to induce reflection and would only be broken by religious worship, daily exercise and frequent visits from officers, particularly the chaplain.

The implementation of the separate system required a purpose-built structure, again rendering most existing prisons unsatisfactory. Some prisons proved to be adaptable, though often at considerable cost, but the construction of the large radial prison at Pentonville established a model for new prisons and

wings that would be followed across the country. Building work began in April 1840 and the first inmates arrived in December 1842. Between 1842 and 1877 nineteen radial prisons were built ranging in size from 150 cells to 1,050 cells and this changed the shape of England's prison system.

In 1837 the reports of the Prisons Inspectors recorded that 256 prisons were in use, but by 1877 more than half of the county, borough and liberty prisons had been closed, leaving 113 local prisons in England and Wales. The majority of the closures were small gaols under corporate or peculiar jurisdiction, though some older county prisons that were too difficult, or too expensive, to adapt to the

separate system also closed. An Act of 1858 closed a number of franchise prisons and in 1863 Lord Carnarvon reported that since 1856 six borough prisons had also ceased operation.¹¹ However, Carnarvon's Committee also concluded that most small borough gaols remained insecure, inefficient, uneconomic and unable to impose proper separation or supervision.¹² In 1862 of the 193 prisons still open in England and Wales, 63 held fewer than 25 prisoners and of these 27 had fewer than 6 inmates. The 1865 Prison Act abolished a further thirteen borough prisons and one liberty prison, and a number of other municipal gaols closed between then and 1877, including those at

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9. Chalkin, C. W. (ed) (1984) *New Maidstone Gaol Order Book, 1805-1823*. Maidstone: Kent Records Kent Archaeological Society, p. 2.
- Evans, R. (1982) *The Fabrication of Virtue*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, p. 269 lists the categories.
10. Historic England Archive, Buildings File 93720 and 90989.
11. 21 & 22 Vict., c. 22; Carnarvon, Earl of (1863) *Report from the Select Committee of the House of Lords on the Present State of Discipline in Gaols and Houses of Correction*. PP 1863 (499), IX, p. iii.
12. Carnarvon, Earl of (1863) *Report from the Select Committee of the House of Lords on the Present State of Discipline in Gaols and Houses of Correction*. PP 1863 (499), IX, pp. xv-xvi.

York, Chester and Great Yarmouth.¹³ While many local borough prisons closed, some new ones were built, for instance at Bath, Ely, Hereford, Northampton, Peterborough, Tiverton and Wisbech.¹⁴ Perhaps the most unfortunate example is the Borough Gaol at Kingston in Portsmouth. It was built in 1874-77 at considerable cost to the local ratepayer, only to be immediately nationalised, leaving the town with a long-term debt to service despite receiving some central government compensation.

The Prison Act 1877 and Prison Closures

The process of centralising and rationalising county and borough prisons continued with the passing of the 1877 Prison Act. Local prisons were brought under national control through the newly established Prison Commission, which would advocate new designs and approaches to imprisonment. The first action of the new body was to take over any county and borough prisons that it deemed suitable and in the case of others undertake wholesale reconstruction. To do this required information about England's prisons and so a number of senior figures embarked on surveys. One of these was the former military officer and Prison Inspector Alexander Burness McHardy.¹⁵ The manuscript of his travels around the north and east of the country was compiled between September and November 1877 and provides a snapshot of fifty-one county and borough prisons on the eve of nationalisation. Later annotations dated January and February 1878 list the numbers of cells that would be received by the Prison Commissioners. This was a key figure as it would determine the level of compensation to be received by the counties and boroughs as a result of nationalisation.

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Of the 113 English and Welsh prisons in operation on 1 April 1878, 45 had closed by the end of August, including the old borough prison at Portsmouth.¹⁶ The new, rate-payer-funded Borough Gaol opened on 22 August at Kingston, Portsmouth, giving a total of 69 prisons with accommodation for 24,812 prisoners, 4,000 cells in excess of the actual requirement in 1878. Again it was the smaller borough and town prisons that closed, although eleven county prisons also ceased operation, while at Ipswich and Leicester the county and borough gaols were amalgamated.

Prison closures continued after 1878 due to a drop in the prison population, a further fourteen prisons closing between 1879 and 1894.¹⁷ The most celebrated losses of this period were Millbank (discontinued in 1890 and now the site of Tate Britain) and Newgate, which closed in 1882, except for detaining prisoners being tried at the Central Criminal Court.¹⁸ In 1895, there were only 50 local prisons in England and a further seven in Wales.¹⁹ The daily average population of local prisons had fallen from 20,833 in 1878 to 13,604 in 1895. Declining prison population would continue into the early 20th century and would usher in another set of closures

During the second half of the 19th century and the early 20th century there was a separate set of convict prisons, initially created to deal with people being transported to Australia, but after 1856 they were increasingly used to hold inmates who would have previously been sent down under. By the 1890s there had been a substantial decrease in the convict prison population, similar in extent to the decline in the local prison population.²⁰ Between 1878 and 1888, the daily average total of convicts fell from 11,357 to 6,680, and by 1898 it stood at 2,826. Therefore, between 1882 and 1906, twelve convict prisons closed.

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13. *Reports of the Inspectors of Prisons: 34th Report of the Northern District*, PP, 1871 (C.259), XXIX, p.6; *37th Report of the Northern District*, PP, 1873 (C.811), XXXII, p. vi; *39th Report of the Southern District*, PP, 1875 (C.1261), XXXVII, p. vii.
14. Colvin, H. M. (1995) *A Biographical Dictionary of British Architects*. New Haven and London: Yale, p. 639; *Reports of the Inspectors of Prisons: 10th Report of the Southern and Western District*, PP, 1845 (676), XXIV, p. iii; *11th Report of the Southern and Western District*, PP, 1846 (755), XXI, p. v; *14th Report of the Midland and Eastern District*, PP, 1849 (1033), XXVI, p. iv.
15. McHardy, A. B. (1877) *Notes on a few Borough & County Prisons, England & Wales, Oct & Nov 1877, 23 Nov [18]77*, (manuscript with later annotations in red ink). This was formerly in the Prison Service Library in Abell House in the mid-1990s and was due to be transferred to the National Archives. As it contained some hand drawn plans, it was supposed to be kept sealed for 130 years.
16. *Report of the work of the Prison Commission*. 1878, pp. 6, 7, 20-6, 33-5.
17. *Report of the work of the Prison Commission*. 1880, pp. 70, 89; 1880, app.11; 1882, pp. 3, 71; 1884, p. 2; 1885, p. 3; 1886, p. 4; 1888, p. 3; 1892, p. 2; 1895, p. 11.
18. *Report of the work of the Prison Commission*. 1890-1, pp. 8-9, 1881-2, p. 3.
19. *Report of the work of the Prison Commission*. 1894-5, app.17, p. 56.
20. *Reports of the Directors of Convict Prisons*. 1890-1, pp. v-vi.

Brixton became a military prison in 1882 and Pentonville, Millbank and Wormwood Scrubs were converted into local prisons.²¹ There were insufficient numbers of invalid and female convicts to justify separate establishments and so Woking invalid prison and Fulham prison closed in 1888 and Woking female prison closed in 1895.²² In 1895-6, the five remaining convict prisons of Aylesbury, Borstal, Dartmoor, Parkhurst and Portland could accommodate 3,954 men and 258 women, which comprised 16 per cent of all prison accommodation in England and Wales.²³ The declining convict population continued into the 20th century: in 1922 the four remaining convict prisons of Dartmoor, Liverpool, Maidstone and Parkhurst held 2,392 cells or 11 per cent of a total prison accommodation of 21,201 cells.²⁴

Prison Closures 1895-1931

The number of local prisons in England and Wales remained more or less constant between 1895 and 1913. Of the 57 prisons open in 1895, Newgate and York closed but Brixton re-opened, so that by 1913 56 local prisons were open. The closure of further local prisons would be a direct consequence of the continuing, declining prison population. The daily average number of local prisoners fell from 14,352 in 1913 to 7,938 in 1929. Therefore, between 1914 and 1922 twenty-four English and Welsh local prisons closed, of which nine subsequently re-opened.

A further round of closures was made in 1922 for reasons of national economy.²⁵ Five local prisons closed, Carlisle, Northampton and Worcester permanently, but Canterbury and Northallerton reopened in 1946. Both these prisons finally closed in 2013. Between 1925 and

1931 a further seven prisons closed.²⁶ Nottingham and Portsmouth shut briefly, and Preston and Shepton Mallet were closed until 1948 and 1966 respectively, but Ipswich, Newcastle and Plymouth were permanently discontinued.²⁷ By the end of 1931 there were only twenty-four local prisons in England and two in Wales.²⁸ This would be the low-water mark for prison numbers in the 20th century.

After a prison was closed, it remained in the hands of the Prison Commissioners until its future was decided. Many of the prisons that were discontinued between 1914 and 1931 were among the smallest prisons; Brecon, Carnarvon, Carmarthen, Ruthin and Plymouth all had fewer than 100 cells. Most had been erected before 1840 and had been subsequently altered in a piecemeal fashion, although some purpose-

built radial prisons, including Plymouth, Warwick and St Albans were also closed. The buildings of discontinued prisons were usually offered to local councils, but if they were not purchased, they were then put up for sale by auction. Of the fourteen English prisons that were closed permanently between 1914 and 1931, eight were conveyed to a local council and six were sold privately.²⁹ Eight of the fourteen prisons had been demolished by 1957, while the remaining six survived, at least in part.³⁰ Derbyshire County Council declined to buy the former

county gaol and it was sold in 1929. Its site was used as a greyhound stadium and later redeveloped for housing. Parts of York prison, which was discontinued in 1932, are now part of the Castle Museum.³¹ St Albans prison enjoyed a period of great celebrity after its closure, its gate being used as the entrance to HMP Slade in the TV series *Porridge*.³²

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21. Alford, R. G. (1909-10) *Notes on the Buildings of English Prisons*. 6 volumes, HMP Maidstone, I, p. 38; *Reports of the Directors of Convict Prisons*. 1885-6, p. viii; 1886-7, p. vii; 1890-1, p. vi.
22. *Reports of the Directors of Convict Prisons*. 1887-8, p. vii; 1888-9, p. vii; 1894-5, p. viii.
23. *Report of the work of the Prison Commission*. 1895-6, p. 123-4.
24. *Report of the work of the Prison Commission*. 1922-3, p. 75-7.
25. *Report of the work of the Prison Commission*. 1922, p. 21; 1929, p. 50.
26. *Report of the work of the Prison Commission*. 1925, p. 17; 1926, p. 19; 1930, p. 60.
27. *Record of Settlements with County & Borough Prison Authorities in 1878* (manuscript formerly in Prison Service Headquarters Library, Abell House), nos. 26, 37, 42, 49, later annotations in red ink; *Report of the work of the Prison Commission*. 1931, p. 21; 1932, p. 24.
28. *Report of the work of the Prison Commission*. 1930, p. 60; 1931, app.4.
29. *Record of Settlements with County & Borough Prison Authorities in 1878* (manuscript formerly in Prison Service Headquarters Library, Abell House), nos. 7, 10, 11, 12, 14, 21, 22, 26, 37, 39, 42, 49, 52, 54, 55, later annotations in red ink & typescript with manuscript notes.
30. *Prisons Relinquished by Prison Commissioners. Information gleaned 4th/5th November 1957 regarding present user of disused prisons*. (Formerly in the Prison Service Library, Abell House).
31. *Record of Settlements with County & Borough Prison Authorities in 1878* (manuscript formerly in Prison Service Headquarters Library, Abell House), no.56, later annotation in red ink.
32. [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Porridge_\(TV_series\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Porridge_(TV_series)) [accessed 9 February 2015].

Closures in the Later 20th Century

Low, apparently stable prisoner numbers during the inter-war years allowed the Prison Commission to employ innovative thinking about treating and reforming criminals. Foremost among these was the introduction of the earliest open prisons, aimed at reforming young people and appropriate adult inmates, but consideration was also given to the plight of female offenders. In 1938 Lillian Barker, the first female Assistant Commissioner, advocated the construction of a new female prison at Stanwell (Middlesex), which would allow Holloway to house male prisoners and in turn allow Pentonville to be demolished.³³ At Stanwell prisoners were to be housed in a series of semi-detached houses each holding twenty-five women who were to be supervised by a matron. On the campus there would be a chapel, library and workrooms. No prison was built on this model, but coincidentally the late-Victorian children's home at Styal, which became a female prison in 1962, employed this type of layout. The Prison Commission purchased Stanhope Farm at Stanwell on 3 August 1939, but the impending war delayed the project and the site is now part of Heathrow Airport.

Between the wars the prison population remained at around 10,000 per year, but since 1940 it has risen almost continually reaching 20,000 by 1950 and 30,000 by 1962. Today it stands at over 85,000. By 1945 the Prison Commission had recognised the need to provide new purpose-built prisons in addition to adapting former military sites, children's homes and country houses. It wanted to construct two borstals, one or two female prisons, a male training prison and an experimental psychopathic prison hospital. It was hoped that the opening of these new institutions would allow the closure of Dartmoor Prison when the lease of the site from the Duchy of Cornwall expired in 1949.³⁴ However, the fragile post-war economy did not allow any new prisons to be erected until 1956 and Dartmoor has remained opened, though it is now likely to close in the mid-2020s. In addition a number of the prisons that had closed before the war were reopened. Canterbury, Northallerton and Reading reopened in 1946, followed

in 1948 by Portsmouth and Preston.³⁵ Interestingly all of these prisons except Preston closed in 2013-14.

By the early 1960s a concerted programme of prison building was underway, providing seventeen New Wave prisons designed to realise a new vision of training and treatment for inmates. This programme was intended to replace Victorian local prisons, but 1960s optimism would be defeated by the inexorable rise of the prison population.

In the late 20th century the prison population was outpacing the ability of the Prison Service to provide suitable accommodation, but to overcome this problem it introduced standardised, prefabricated cell blocks and standard designs of facility buildings. The crisis also meant that any thought of a comprehensive closure programme could not be realised, but in 1996 HMP

Oxford closed. This 18th and 19th century prison shared its site with the remains of the medieval castle, including the Norman undercroft of the chapel. By the mid-1990s it was used as a hostel for inmates working in the city. After a brief period when it was used as a film set, it became a Malmaison Hotel.

In recent years the building programme has increased capacity faster than the population growth and this has allowed the closure of more than a dozen prisons.

The Current Closure Programme

In recent years much of the expansion of the prison system has come through the creation of new, large, private sector prisons

on brownfield or rural sites. In recent years the building programme has increased capacity faster than the population growth and this has allowed the closure of more than a dozen prisons. They have all been small, predominantly urban prisons ranging in date from the medieval castle of Lancaster to Blundeston and Brockhill of the 1960s. Former county gaols that were closed include the Georgian and Victorian prisons at Canterbury, Dorchester, Northallerton and Shrewsbury. HMP Kingston, Portsmouth's new prison of the mid-1870s, was eventually paid for by the town's rate payers, but was closed in 2013 and today stands empty.

So what will be the fate of former prisons? What can be done with them if the buildings are to retain some of their essential character and yet be economically viable to guarantee their future? Reuse as a museum is an obvious option, the one likely to see the highest rate of survival of buildings and their features,

33. Rock, P. (1996) *Reconstructing a Women's Prison*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, p. 90; Public Record Office, PCOM 9/2268; Thomas, J. E. (1972) *The English Prison Officer since 1850*. London and Boston: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1972, p. 178.

34. Public Record Office, PCOM9/2268.

35. *Report of the work of the Prison Commission*. 1945, p. 85; 1948, p. 66.

but there is a limit to the number of museums required and the size and location of prisons being currently closed means that a museum might only form one part of a larger scheme of redevelopment. The former HMP Oxford has been successfully converted into a hotel and some reuse of other prisons as hotel or hostel accommodation might be possible if the town is a destination for tourists. Another potential use is as halls of residence; HMP Canterbury's location beside Canterbury Christ Church University led to them purchasing the site in April 2014. The adjacent Sessions House has already been converted into facilities for the University and Georgian and Victorian cell blocks will hopefully prove suitable for students. On 24 December 2014 it was announced that the closed prisons at Dorchester, Gloucester, Kingston at Portsmouth and Shepton Mallet had been sold to City and Country, a firm that

has adapted historic sites to create new homes and commercial properties:

*At this stage City and Country has no fixed plans for the redevelopment of the sites because we always engage first with local people and key stakeholders to understand their aspirations, before drawing up firm proposals; as we recognise the importance of these buildings at the heart of their local community.*³⁶

Their website reassuringly recognises that the path to a successful development will be with the participation and support of the local community and these monumental structures that once provided work for the local populace may now again provide work and homes for vibrant communities.

36. <http://www.cityandcountry.co.uk/> [accessed 9 February 2015].