

LONDON PRISONS – EXTRACT

When Daniel Defoe published his tour through 'the Whole Island of Great Britain (1724-26), he reported there were twenty-two "public gaols" and many "tolerated prisons" in London. The city was awash with places for confining prisoners, whether they were arrested for debt, petty, or serious crime. Most were run along commercial lines, though the fees charged were regulated by Justices of the Peace and others.

Clerkenwell, Bowling Green Lane - This 'house of correction' often had more than one hundred prisoners. Numbers increased with the inclusion of prisoners sentenced to hard labour following the suspension of transportation to America.

'Clink,' Southwark - The Mayflower and the Clink. (1144 -1780). In 1586 a group of Protestant Christians who worshiped outside of the Church of England - were sent to The Clink, for refusing to obey the religious laws.

Cold Bath Fields Clerkenwell. (1794 – 1885) - Built in 1794, this prison held 384 prisoners of both sexes. It had 232 single cells and radial wings of two stories.

Fleet Prison Farringdon Street. (1197 – 1846) - Like most debtors' prisons, within the walls it was a relatively free community of more than 300 prisoners, run by a prisoners' committee. Wealthier prisoners stayed on the master's side, where they had their own rooms and lived in relative luxury, while poor prisoners lived on the common side and depended on prison charities.

Gatehouse Prison Westminster. (1370 – 1776) - The prison was vulnerable to escapes, and in 1749 was stormed by twenty-four armed Irishmen who released a member of the gang who had been accused of pickpocketing. It was pulled down in 1776.

Giltspur Street Compter - Intended to hold 136 prisoners, the prisoners were divided into four classes: debtors, felons, petty offenders, and those charged with assault.

Horsemonger Lane Gaol Newington Causeway Surrey. (1799 – 1878).

This was the county gaol for Surrey, located near St George's Fields outside Southwark. Built in 1792-99, it was a model prison, with 177 cells in three wings for petty criminals, and a fourth wing for debtors.

Hulks.

Hulks were an emergency measure to cope with prison overcrowding following the interruption to transportation caused by the outbreak of war with America.

King's Bench.

In 1754, a Parliamentary inquiry found mistreatment, misbehaviour, and overcrowding, and led to an act authorising the building of a new prison. In 1758 the new building in St George's Fields, Southwark, opened (the site was chosen for the fresh air), with 224 rooms and an open courtyard. The prison was soon overcrowded.

Ludgate Prison.

Originally one of the gates in the Roman wall of the City of London, this was used mainly for debtors and for petty offenders who were freemen of the City, clergy, or attorneys.

Marshalsea Prison.

Like other debtors' prisons, there were complaints that although required by law, coroners' inquests were not held when prisoners died in the prison.

Millbank Prison.

A cholera outbreak in 1824 meant the prison closed for a short period and the prisoners sent to specially commissioned hulks at Woolwich, the men to Dromedary and Ethalion, and the women to Narcissus and Heroine.

Newgate Prison.

As with most debtors' prisons, the master's side could be very comfortable, but the common side was "hell". Rebuilt after the great fire of 1666, the prison was five stories high.

New Prison, Clerkenwell. (1617 – 1877).

Owing to overcrowding at Newgate, those who were to be tried at the Old Bailey were not transferred to Newgate until just before the start of the sessions.

Poultry Compter Cheapside (Closed 1815 and demolished 1817).

Poultry was so-named because of its proximity to the poultry market. Compters did not officially have specialities, but Poultry was known for its Jewish and black inmates.

Savoy (Yes the place you now like to dine!)

The palace structure was badly damaged during the Wat Tyler led peasant Revolt of 1381, and in 1505 Henry VII ordered the palace to be rebuilt as a hospital, with St John the Baptist as its patron saint.

Tothill Fields Bridewell Westminster (1618 – 1853).

Like its City counterpart, the Westminster Bridewell was intended as a "house of correction" for the compulsory employment of able-bodied but indolent paupers.

Tower of London EC3. (World Heritage Site). (Building from 1078)

The castle was used as a prison from 1100 (Ranulf Flambard) until 1952 (Kray twins), although that was not its primary purpose.

Wood Street Compter Cheapside (1555-1791).

The prison was built and opened in 1555, replacing the earlier Bread Street Compter, from which many prisoners were transferred. Wood Street was closed and replaced by Giltspur Street Compter in 1791.

Watchhouses - Every parish had a watchhouse, where those apprehended by the night watch could be kept overnight before they were examined by a Justice of the Peace in the morning. The watchhouse was known by the poor as a

place where emergency relief could be obtained, but conditions in the cells could be horrific, particularly when overcrowded.

End.