

accounts of male prisoners' cells

"Against the wall, on one side, is set the bright copper hand basin with a tap of water immediately above it; at the extreme end of the cell is the smallest closet, well supplied with water pipes; and in another part you see the shaded gas-jet, whilst in one of the corners by the door are some two or three triangular shelves, where the prisoner's spoon, platter, mug and soap box &c, are stored... There is a little table and stool, and occasionally on the former may be found some brown paper-covered book or periodical... Hanging against the wall is a paste board bill headed "Notice to Convicts" and the "Rules and Regulations" of the prison, as well as a little card inscribed with the prisoners registered number - and citing not only his previous occupation but term sentence, date of conviction etc.. Furthermore, there is, in the corner near the cupboard, a button, which on being turned causes a small gong to be struck in the corridor without, and at the same moment make a metal plate or "index" outside the door start out at right angles to the wall, so that the warder when summoned by the bell, may know which prisoner has rung."

(Criminal Prisons in London and Scenes of Prison Life by H. Mayhew and J. Binny, first published in 1862.)



"...13' 0" x 7' 0" X 7' 10" to arch-springing... The floors are of brick, and the windows "square-built", 2' 6" wide and 2' 0" high, with cast-iron sash in 24 panes of opaque glass... The hot-air inlets on the left above the door, and the extract on [the] right below the window. There are hinged wooden bedboards each with two feet. The painting of the dado in dark-brown was ugly.

The doors have good locks by Smith, with bevelled bolt and two throws, and large plates inside to protect them as they are not iron sheeted. They have cast iron frames, and all the cell-doors have traps which are used for observation by the Medical Officer. There is a water tap in every cell."

"Separate cell in Pentonville Prison."

(Criminal Prisons in London and Scenes of Prison Life by H. Mayhew and J. Binny, first published in 1862.)

female prison



"The Females' Prison which runs north and south is a little one sided building, with a passage and two cells lengthwise on each of three flats [floors]. On flat 1 beyond those cells, are two baths on the west side. On flat 2 after the cells is a w.c. and sink on the west side, and at the north end was the Female Officers' bedroom. On flat 3 after the two cells is a clothing cupboard, and then at the north end the Females' Hospital room, a good room for two patients. The six women's cells have wooden floors, large windows and gas-boxes. A second female Officers' room was formed in 1905... On west side of Females' prison is the little exercise yard for the women, and beyond it in front corner is the Laundry... Here six wooden tubs in boxes, a coal cellar, one copper and furnace, and an ironing room in the south corner beyond. In it is a drying closet of four horses which in 1904 had wood bars as well as wooden ends..."

(Ruthin Prison Inspection Report, circa 1906.)

ventilation

Every cell in the 1866 block was ventilated and heated separately. Vents in the cell walls and tunnels under the floor are part of an air circulation system that kept cells cool in summer and aired in winter.

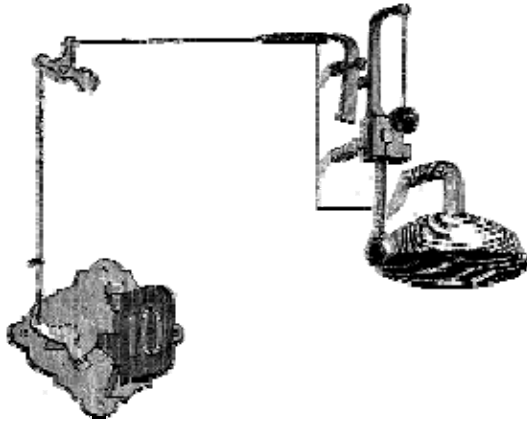
Each cell was separately linked to the roof ventilation tower. By circulating fresh air it was hoped to limit the spread of disease and keep the prisoners fit to work. This ingenious system meant that prisoners enduring the "silent system" could not communicate with their neighbours by shouting or tapping on the vents.

Specifications for the erection of the 'Pentonville Block', 1866 (Denbighshire Record Office).

communication

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"A Cell indicator, Wandsworth Prison."