

prison welfare

Conditions inside many gaols were dreadful. Held without segregation "according to sex or classification" men, women and children were kept in filthy damp communal cells. Drinking, gambling and immorality were rife and disease widespread. Outbreaks of "jail fever" (typhoid) killed many prisoners, jailers and judges.

In 1773 John Howard began investigating prison conditions. Horrified by what he saw he suggested the state pay gaol-keepers a regular wage and that prisoners be kept in separate cells and given "useful work". In 1774 two acts were passed to improve prison hygiene and stop discharged prisoners having to pay their gaolers to be released.

Prisons remained under the control of local authorities until 1877 when the English and Welsh prison system was brought under the control of the newly formed Prison Commission. Fifty-three prisons closed including those at Anglesey, Brecon, Cardiganshire, Flintshire, Merionethshire, Montgomery and Radnorshire.



Pentonville Prison



"Friends visiting prisoners at Coldbath Fields Prison."

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

the bath cell

"...the floor was strewn with bundles of clothes, and a prisoner, with his hair wet and clinging in matted pencils about his face, busy dressing himself in... Flannels, shirt, and stockings, and with a couple of warders in large aprons standing nearby."

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

In the nineteenth century many thought "cleanliness was next to Godliness" and prisoners followed strict hygiene rules:

"Every Prisoner shall make his or her own bed, and be washed before 9 o'clock every morning, on pain of forfeiting one day's allowance of provisions. Soap, towels, and combs provided for washing by the Gaoler..."

The bath in this cell, and the one next door, are made of earthenware. They were used by male prisoners who were allowed one bath a week.

There were also strict regulations about keeping the gaol clean:

"The chambers and cells shall be swept out by the Prisoners every morning before the same are left, and washed clean twice a week in the summer, and once in the winter... The day rooms, stairs, and stair-cases shall be washed and cleansed by the Prisoners, on Mondays, Wednesdays, and Saturdays, in every week in the summer, and on Wednesdays and Saturdays in the winter; and also the yards, baths, and privies in the same order..."

("County of Denbigh Rules and Regulations for the Government of the Gaol, and Female Prison at Ruthin, 1826.")

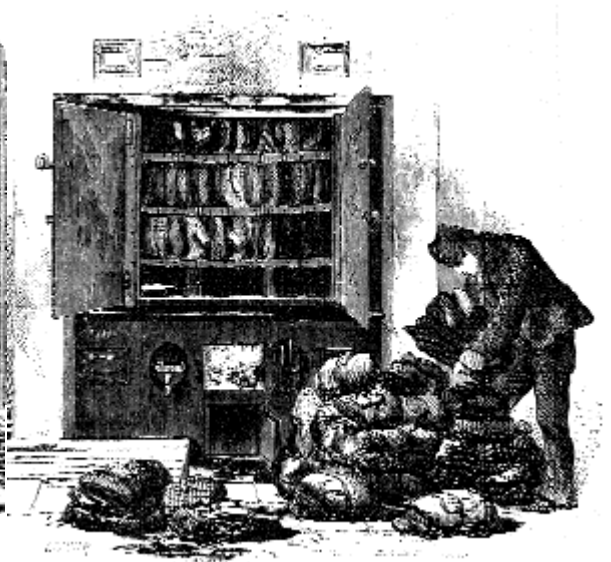
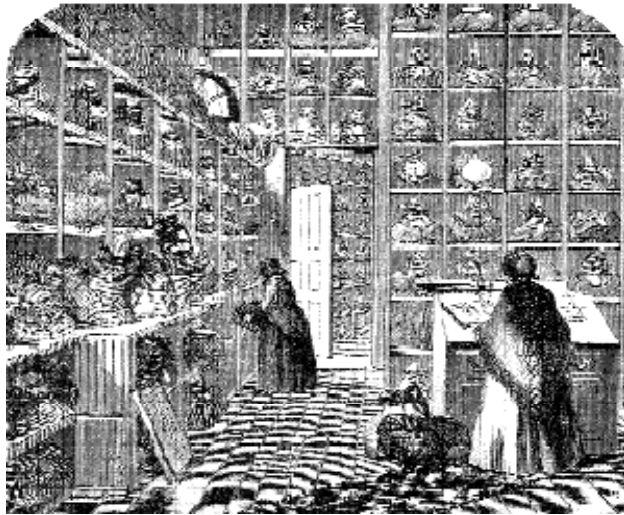


"lazeretto" cell

The Lazeretto Cell, usually placed near a prison's gatehouse, was an isolation cell where new prisoners were given a bath and health check before being allowed into the main prison.

Prisoners would be issued with prison uniform and their own clothes fumigated or burnt to kill lice and fleas. It is likely this cell also had an earth closet (toilet) which prisoners working in the exercise yard or garden could use.

According to the Inspector's report of 1904, the present courtyard was then a "beautiful garden."



"The Female prisoner's own clothes store, Tothill Fields Prison."

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

"Fumigating prisoners' clothes at Coldbath Fields Prison."

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

the chapel

Ruthin County Gaol Rules For Prisoners.

[Rule] 3.- Every prisoner shall attend prayer and public worship, except in case of illness, or other reasonable cause, to be allowed by the governor or a visiting justice.

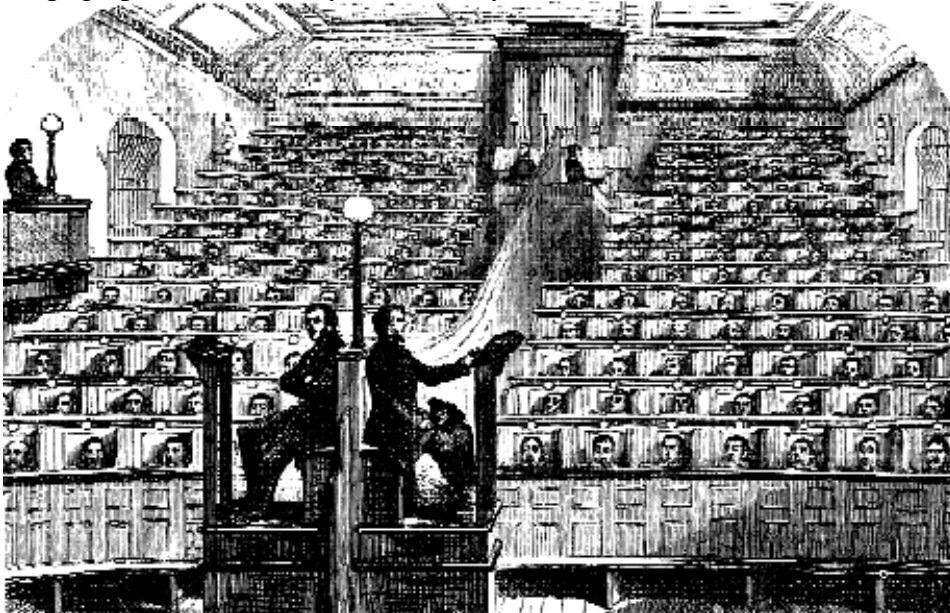
(Ruthin County Gaol Rules for Prisoners, circa 1850.)

Church attendance was compulsory. Every prisoner attended services in the prison chapel. In 1833 Samuel Lewis recorded:

"...divine service is performed twice, and a sermon delivered once, on every Sunday by a Chaplain; prayers are read daily by the gaoler to the prisoners, who are supplied gratuitously with bibles and religious tracts..."

Leaving the chapel during a service "unless in case of sickness, which must afterwards be certified by the surgeon..." and "irreverent behaviour in chapel either before, during or after the service..." were punishable offences. Strict rules of silence and male / female segregation were also enforced.

(Topographical Dictionary of Wales by Samuel Lewis, 1833.)



(Criminal Prisons in London and Scenes of Prison Life gan H. Mayhew a J. Binny, cyhoeddwyd gyntaf yn 1862.)

"The Chapel, on the 'Separate System', in Pentonville Prison, during Divine Service."

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

The prison chaplain had many duties. As well as performing "Divine Service according to the Liturgy of the Church of England" he talked to inmates, enquired "into the state of mind of each individual", visited prisoners in solitary confinement or awaiting execution, and the sick.

the infirmary

In 1833 Samuel Lewis stated that "...There are two infirmaries in the prison" - one each for female and male inmates. The 1904 prison inspection describes the "Males' Infirmary" as:

"...entered from the south-end of flat II (second floor) of the Males' cell-block, and is over the Males' reception. There is first a nice "cross-lobby" , in which is a flue for extraction from [a] private clothes-store below, and also the hospital w-c. on the west. Then comes first the Surgery (on left), then a highly ventilated ward for three patients, with clear glass and fan-lights, and a Galton grate in the fireplace. There is a high pressure boiler behind the grate, for the bath. There is also a smaller ward (used as a store), and at the back of all, the good fire-clay bath stands at the south end of this clean and bright sunny passage."

(Ruthin Prison Inspection Report, published 1906.)



"The Infirmary at Brixton Prison."

(Criminal Prisons in London and Scenes of Prison Life by H. Mayhew a J. Binny, cyhoeddwyd gyntaf yn 1862.)