Robert Raikes and Social Reform

Gloucester in the 18th Century

In many respects Gloucester developed into an up-and-coming fashionable social centre during the 18th century. Its wealthiest citizens built a number of elegant mansion houses in the centre of the City. One of these was Ladybellegate House, where Robert Raikes was born.

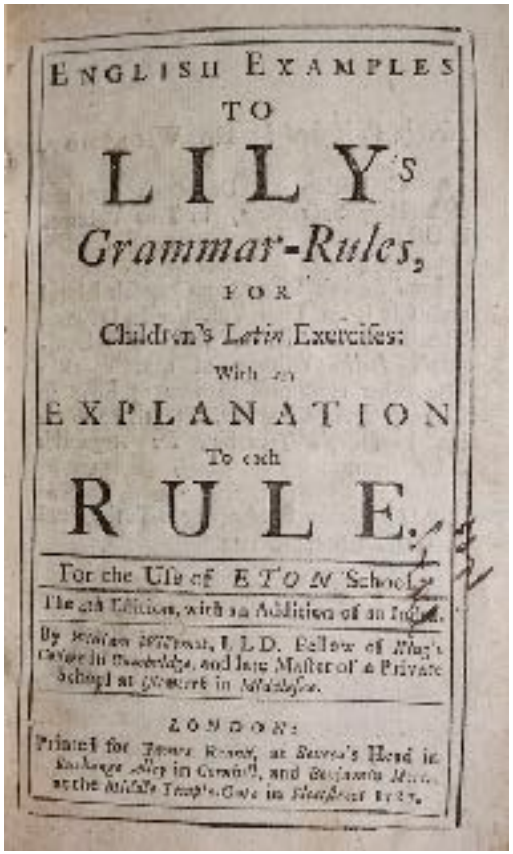
The first spa appeared in Gloucester in 1788, when a spring was discovered behind Eagle House.

The Three Choirs Festival flourished and each year a winter 'season' of assemblies, concerts and plays was held in the Booth Hall and the assembly rooms at the Bell Inn in Southgate Street.

Ladybellegate House in Longsmith Street, birthplace of Robert Raikes

Alongside these developments, at the other end of the social scale, poverty remained a great problem for most of the 7,000 inhabitants of 18th century Gloucester and its suburbs. Many people lived at subsistence level and were frequently drawn into a life of petty crime in order to fight for their survival. The streets were rough, lawless and brutal.

There were just three schools in the City of Gloucester at this time, all of them exclusively for boys. The Crypt School, the King's School (usually referred to as 'the College School) and Sir Thomas Rich's Bluecoat School were run as grammar schools specialising in the teaching of Latin. Each of them required a boy already to have been taught at home by his family how to read and write in good English. For poor children, whose parents themselves were illiterate, this was all-but impossible and the problem was compounded by lack of time.


ENGLISH EXAMPLES
TO
LILY'S
Grammar-Rules,
FOR
Children's Latin Exercises:
With an
EXPLANATION
To each
RULE.
For the Use of ETON School.

Lily's Latin Grammar was the most widely used Latin book; in early Grammar Schools boys were beaten if they spoke anything other than Latin while at school.

Most children had to work in the iron and pin-making factories, for which Gloucester was well known in the 18th century.

Their shifts could be up to fourteen hours long and the conditions they endured horrendous. Without any education, the children – often referred to as street urchins or ragamuffins – were unable to make progress in life, leaving them trapped in desperate poverty and always likely to end up in prison through law-breaking.

Early pin-making

Despite the huge social gulf that separated them, several privileged members of Gloucester society developed a genuine sympathy with the poor and those who ended up in prison. One of these was Robert Raikes.

Robert Raikes

Robert Raikes was the owner of the 'Gloucester Journal', a newspaper that had been started by his father in 1722. He was born in 1736 and baptised in the Church of St Mary de Crypt.

At the age of twenty-one, Raikes took over as editor of the 'Journal' and dedicated most of his time thereafter to his job until he retired in 1802. The printing press was sited in various locations around the City, at Blackfriars and in houses in Longsmith Street and Southgate Street. In 1772 he moved the family home into the half-timbered property in Southgate Street, which is now a pub known as Robert Raikes House.

Raikes was by all accounts known as a good-looking trend-setter in the City. He cut a dashing figure, wearing the latest designs of wigs and three-cornered hats that were fashionable in this period. But he was also a philanthropist of great generosity, someone with a strong sense of right and wrong. Gradually he

came to the conclusion that the root cause of poverty and crime lay in the fact that the majority of the population were illiterate and lacked access to any education.

Raikes used the 'Gloucester Journal' as a weapon to publicise the injustices he saw. He seems to have had a real affinity for children and would give them cake whenever they came to sing for him in his garden. The children who attended his funeral in St Mary de Crypt Church in 1811 were each given plum cake and a shilling because, it is said, Raikes would not have wanted them to be sad. One of the most quoted phrases attributed to Raikes is:

"The world marches on the feet of little children. To **CHANGE THE WORLD**, *reach its children"*

Raikes and Sunday Schools in Gloucester

Robert Raikes was one of a group of people who looked for practical ways to provide education for the children of the very poor at the end of 18th century. In his 'Memoirs' written in 1783, he recalled how he had gone in search of his gardener in the northern suburbs of Gloucester. On his way he came across a group of poor children acting rowdily in St Catherine Street.

"I was struck with concern at seeing a group of children, wretchedly ragged, at play in the street. I asked an inhabitant whether those children belonged to that part of the town. 'Ah! Sir', said the woman, to whom I was speaking, 'could you take a view of this part of the town on a Sunday, YOU WOULD BE SHOCKED INDEED; for then the street is filled with multitudes of these wretches who, released on that day from employment, spend their time in NOISE AND RIOT, PLAYING AT CHUCK AND CURSING AND SWEARING in a manner so horrid as to convey to any serious mind an idea of hell rather than any other place'."

From experiences such as this Raikes and others realised the potential that Sunday Schools could provide. Sunday was the one day in the week when poor children might be able to receive an education as they were not required in the factories.

Rev Thomas Stock

Raikes corresponded with people who had already set up Sunday Schools elsewhere, such as John Moffatt, who had opened a school in Nailsworth in 1772. One of his acquaintances was William King, a clothier who had established a school at Dursley Tabernacle in 1778. Most influential of all was Thomas Stock, the Oxford-educated Headmaster of Gloucester's College School and Rector of St John's, Northgate. Stock had already been responsible for a Sunday School in the chancel of his previous church, St Mary the Virgin in Ashbury (Oxfordshire), where he had been curate.

Between 1780 and 1782 a whole network of Sunday Schools came into being in Gloucester sponsored by Robert Raikes and Thomas Stock acting together in partnership. It is likely that Stock provided the teaching expertise, while Raikes supplied much of the finance and publicity through his newspaper. Raikes also used his printing press to publish reading books, spelling books, Bible study books and copies of the scriptures for the Sunday Schools.

The first boys' Sunday school in St Catherine's Street

The first of the Gloucester Sunday Schools met in St Catherine Street in a cottage which belonged to James King, who was steward to John Pitt, the City's MP. Over ninety boys were taught in this first school, the principal teacher being Mrs King, her salary 1s 6d per day. The cottage, one of Gloucester's important historic sites, was regrettably demolished during the modernisation of the 1950s.

Within just a few months a number of other similar schools were established. The first Sunday School for girls was also in St Catherine Street, on the corner with Park Street. Mrs Brabant taught in a Sunday School in the Oxbode off Northgate Street.

In St Aldate's Square there was another school in the home of Mr Trickey, the sexton of St Aldate's Church. Next to his parish church at St Mary de Crypt Raikes had yet another Sunday School in the house of Mrs Sarah Critchley on the corner of Greyfriars and Southgate Street.

What were the first Sunday Schools like?

Today, we tend to think of a Sunday School as something happening for an hour or so to occupy a few young children while their parents attend a church service. The Sunday Schools that Raikes and Stock promoted were much more serious affairs. There were up to a hundred children aged from five to fourteen. Lessons took place for most of the day and provided the most rigorous instruction possible in what became known as the four 'Rs: Reading, 'Riting, 'Rithmetic and Religion. Raikes' described it as follows:

The building used first girls' Sunday School on the corner of Park Street and St Catherine Street.

***"The children were to come after ten in the morning and* STAY TO TWELVE; *they were then to go home and return at once; and, after reading a lesson, they were to be conducted to church. After church, they were to be employed in repeating the catechism till after five, and then dismissed with an injunction to go home* WITHOUT MAKING A NOISE".**

Discipline was strict and stern in the schools. There were punishments for bad behaviour, especially telling lies. Rewards were also used as an incentive to learning and good appearance. Those who made good progress received slices of plum cake provided by Anne Raikes, Robert's wife.

The principal aim of Raikes and Stock was one of philanthropy. Through the education they provided, they hoped to raise the life chances of children from poor backgrounds, teaching them how to read and write in the hope that this would improve their job prospects and make them less tempted to resort to crime when life was difficult.

Not everyone approved of their venture initially. The schools were sometimes derisively called 'Ragged Schools'. Critics argued that the new schools were a desecration of the Sabbath as Christians should not be made to work on a Sunday; others believed that the schools would weaken home-based religious education. Some prominent church leaders, among them Bishop Samuel Horsley, feared that the Sunday Schools might be infiltrated by radical politicians keen to incite the poor to read their revolutionary tracts.

Such fears were quickly allayed as from the very start the philanthropy of Raikes and Stock was tempered by their conservative and authoritarian instincts. Sunday School scholars were always taught to obey their social superiors and to fit in with the expectations of society. In the 'Gloucester Journal' Raikes wrote in 1784:

"The good effects of the Sunday Schools established in this City are instanced in the account given by the principal persons in the pin and sack manufactories. GREAT REFORMATION has taken place among the multitudes whom they employ. From being idle, ungovernable, profligate and filthy in the extreme, they say the boys and girls are become not only MORE CLEAN AND DECENT IN THEIR APPEARANCE, but are greatly humanised in their manners, more orderly, tractable and attentive to business, and of course MORE SERVICEABLE than they ever expected to find them".

The Gloucester magistrates responded at the Easter Quarter Session of 1786 by passing a unanimous vote to the effect that

> **"the benefit of Sunday Schools to the morals of the RISING GENERATION is too evident not to merit the recognition of this Bench and the thanks of the community to the gentlemen instrumental in providing them"**

It is for this reason that some modern historians have regarded Raikes' work with great suspicion, viewing the Sunday Schools as essentially repressive organisations designed to persuade the lower orders meekly to accept their earthly lot.

The publicity Robert Raikes gave to his schools in Gloucester reached far and wide. His articles were reprinted in the London newspapers. John Wesley spoke of the success of the Sunday School movement in 1784 when he remarked:.

> "I find these **SCHOOLS** springing up wherever I go"

Robert Raikes statue on the Embankment in London

Raikes received many visitors and in 1788 was invited to Windsor to tell Queen Charlotte about his ideas. The Sunday School movement led directly to the founding of the National Society by Andrew Bell and the British Society for Non-Conformists, religious voluntary bodies that eventually received government grants to set up day schools for the children of the poor in the 19th century.

Robert Raikes and Prison Reform

Alongside his campaign for Sunday Schools, Raikes also used the 'Gloucester Journal' to inform the public of the appalling conditions that he witnessed in the gaols of Gloucester. One prisoner whose case was highlighted in the 'Journal' was John Weaver, who was convicted in 1790 for stealing two geese and was eventually transported for seven years. Raikes traced a direct connection between crime and lack of education. Commenting on a young man executed for housebreaking, he remarked:

"He had never received the smallest instruction. He had never offered up a prayer to his Creator. He said HE KNEW NOT HOW TO PRAY. He was totally devoid of all sense of a future state".

18th century prisons were quite unlike the prisons of today. They were not regarded either as places of punishment or as places of reform. Instead, they functioned mainly as temporary lodgings to hold suspects awaiting trial, debtors being detained until they settled their debts or convicts held before being hanged at the gallows or put on ships for transportation to Australia or another overseas colony. There were no separate cells.

All prisoners, from innocent suspects to the most hardened criminals, were herded together in filthy overcrowded buildings, which were themselves breeding grounds for crime. About a quarter of prisoners died each year from disease. Typhus, a virus spread by mice, lice and fleas, was so common it was nicknamed 'jail fever'.

Those who ran the gaols were not paid salaries, but were expected to live on whatever money and goods they could extract from their inmates, charging fees for everything, even bread and water.

Interior of a debtor's prison

Debtors' prisons were the greatest scandal of all. Inmates were detained until they paid their debts in full, but they had no chance of earning money.

If friends could not help them, they had to beg from strangers. For this purpose, they were sometimes led in chains through the streets or put in barred cages built into the outside wall of their prison. Needless to say, much of what they received found its way into the pockets of the gaolers.

William Hogarth, The Prison Scene from The Rake's Progress (1735)

Already raising funds to help improve conditions for prisoners, Robert Raikes entertained John Howard to dinner. Howard was the most famous national prison reformer, who carried out a detailed investigation across the country in 1777 and wrote a best-selling report called 'The State of Prisons in England and Wales'.

John Howard (1789) by Mather Brown

As part of his research, Howard visited Gloucester, which had two different types of prison at this time.

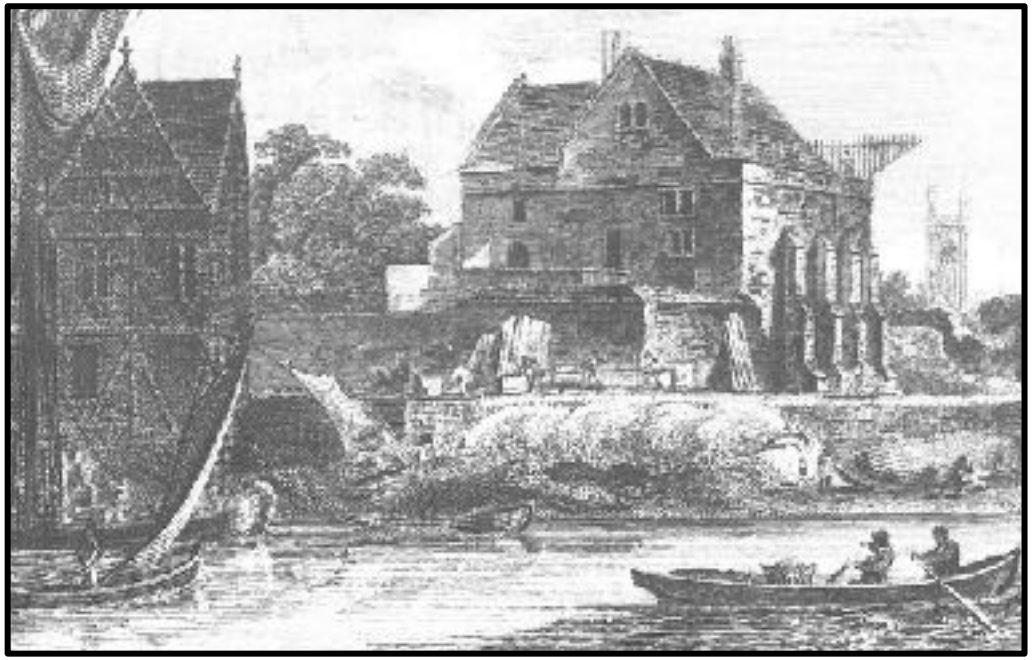
Lock ups for criminals and debtors were housed in the medieval entrances to the City, one in the North Gate and one in the East Gate.

Howard criticised the North Gate prison for being too small; debtors, felons and petty offenders were all crowded in together, and there was no courtyard.

The East Gate prison was equally unsavoury and was demolished in 1780, leaving the North Gate even more overcrowded.

In Gloucester there was also the County Gaol, which was in the ruins of the medieval castle. Here Howard found that sixty-five prisoners were herded indiscriminately regardless of age, gender or offence into a single courtyard and one day-room measuring twelve feet by ten feet.

The debtors' room had no window and the male felons' night room was 'dark and ruinous'. The whole building was so dilapidated that prisoners had to be chained up at night for fear they might escape. No useful work was provided for the inmates to do and many died of infectious diseases. There was no bath and only one sewer. Howard was particularly shocked by the immorality in the gaol and reported that several children had been born there.

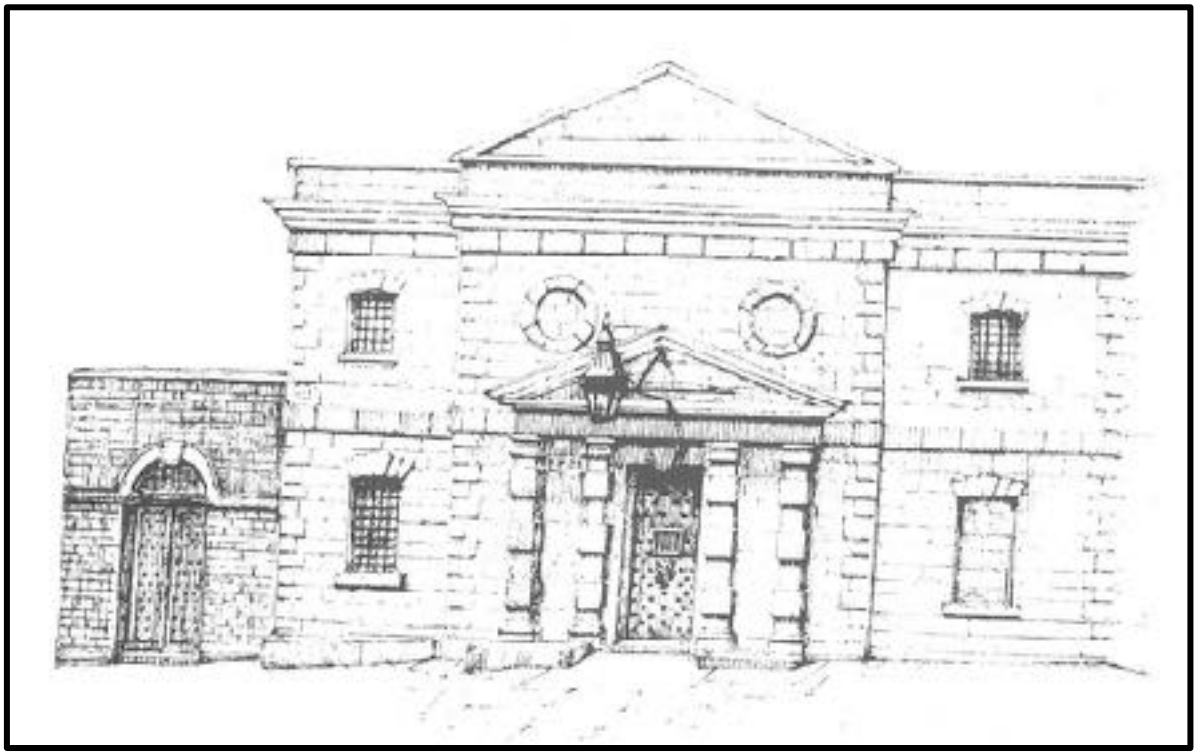


12th century castle keep used as the county prison until the 1780s, when it was demolished

Felons received a 6d loaf every two days, but debtors had no such allowance, often being saved from starvation by other inmates who shared their rations with them.

The recommendations Howard made included:

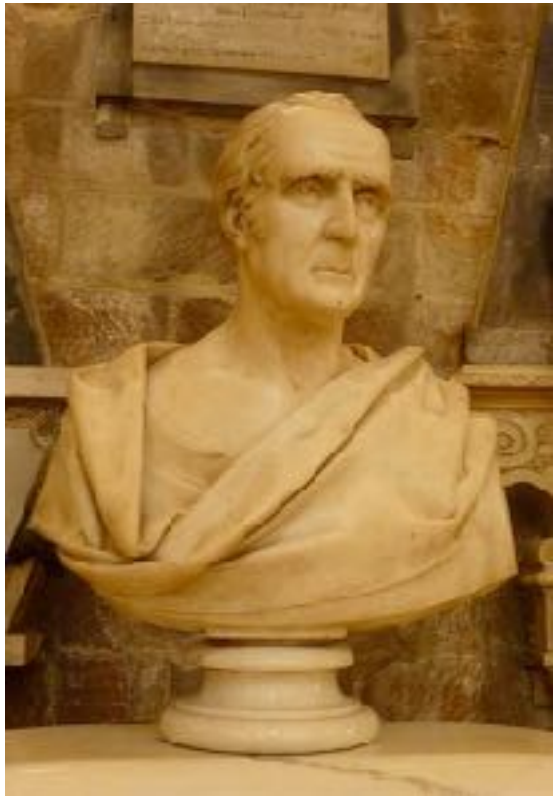
- the regular payment of gaolers and other staff
- humane rules
- the separation of men and women
- the provision of a bath house and an infirmary in every prison
- better sanitation and ventilation
- clean clothing and bedding
- chapels staffed with chaplains
- the introduction of workshops, where prisoners could be set to work on useful tasks.



The Old City Gaol in the late 18th century outside the South Gate – demolished in 1862

Robert Raikes and several other prominent people in Gloucester sympathised with Howard's findings and began to improve conditions in the local prisons. Editorials in the 'Gloucester Journal' were used to expose the most appalling conditions and money was raised to help the families of some of the inmates.

Sir George Onesiphorus Paul, the High Sheriff of Gloucestershire, emerged as the leader of this campaign. His views on the functions of prisoners were radical for his day. He believed that, although prisons should be severe, they should still care for the inmates and take their health seriously. Most important of all, he argued that prison should not simply punish but help prisoners to reform and lead better lives once released. "By reform," Paul stated in 1783,



Memorial to Sir George Onesiphorus Paul, Gloucester Cathedral

"I mean nothing less than an ENTIRE CORRECTION of the principle of our modes of imprisonment"

As a result of Paul's efforts, two new prisons were created in Gloucester. A new city gaol was built in 1782 outside the South Gate, allowing the old gaol – the North Gate – to be knocked down.

A new purpose-built county gaol was designed by William Blackburn in 1785 and built on the site of the medieval castle, which was demolished. Intended to house more than two hundred men and women, it aimed to put the ideas of Howard, Paul and Raikes into practice.

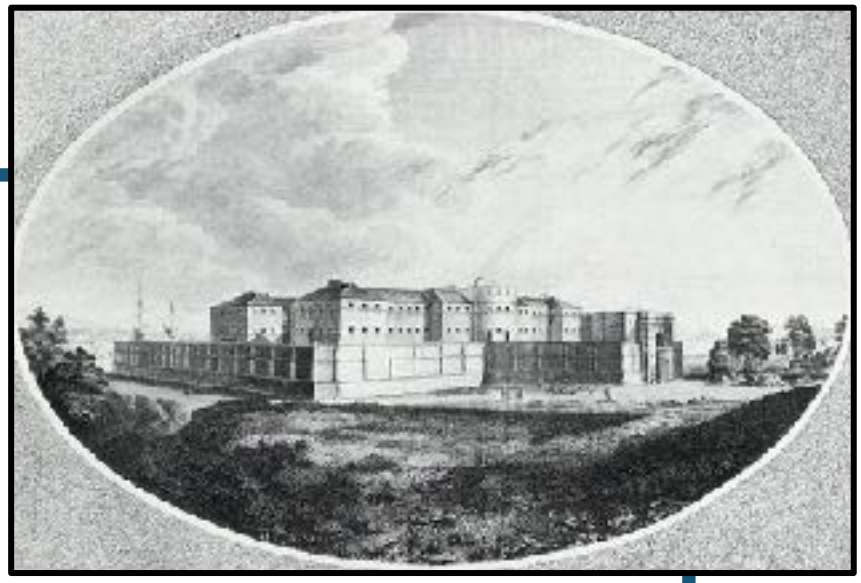
The new county gaol, Gloucester

Although still harsh by modern standards, the new prison was regarded as the epitome of humane treatment and became a tourist attraction visited by King George III in 1788.

It was based on five key principles: security; health; separation; productive work; and regulation.

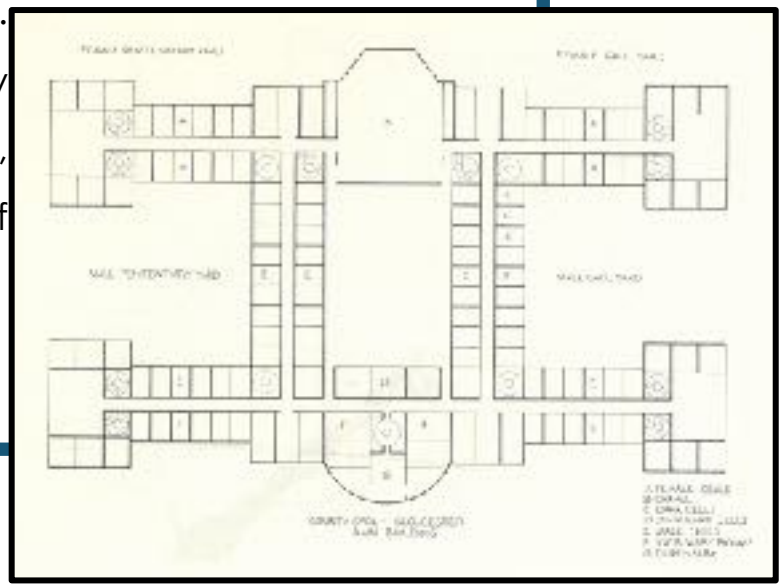
Security:

The new prison was surrounded by a six feet high wall with iron spikes on top. It was made of large stones that could not be chiselled out; buttress supports were put on the outside of the wall to prevent inmates scaling them. The buildings were arranged so that prison staff could see what was going on at all



Separation:

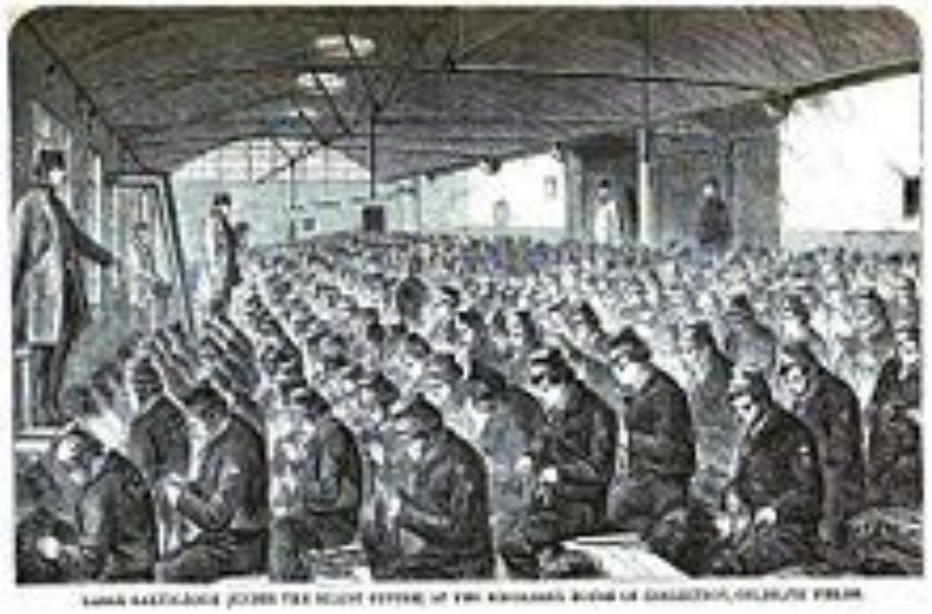
The prison was divided into two main sections, the gaol for debtors and those awaiting trial, and the penitentiary for prisoners serving sentences. Each of these sections was itself divided into carefully segregated accommodation for men and women. In what was known as the 'Separate System', inmates were to be given their own single cells and were expected to spend most of their time in solitary confinement. Paul believed that criminality could spread like a miasma and that people could 'catch' badness from another bad person. He therefore advocated prisoners being together only for brief periods, in the exercise yard or in chapel, although this was relaxed towards the end of a period of sentencing.



Plan of the county gaol main building

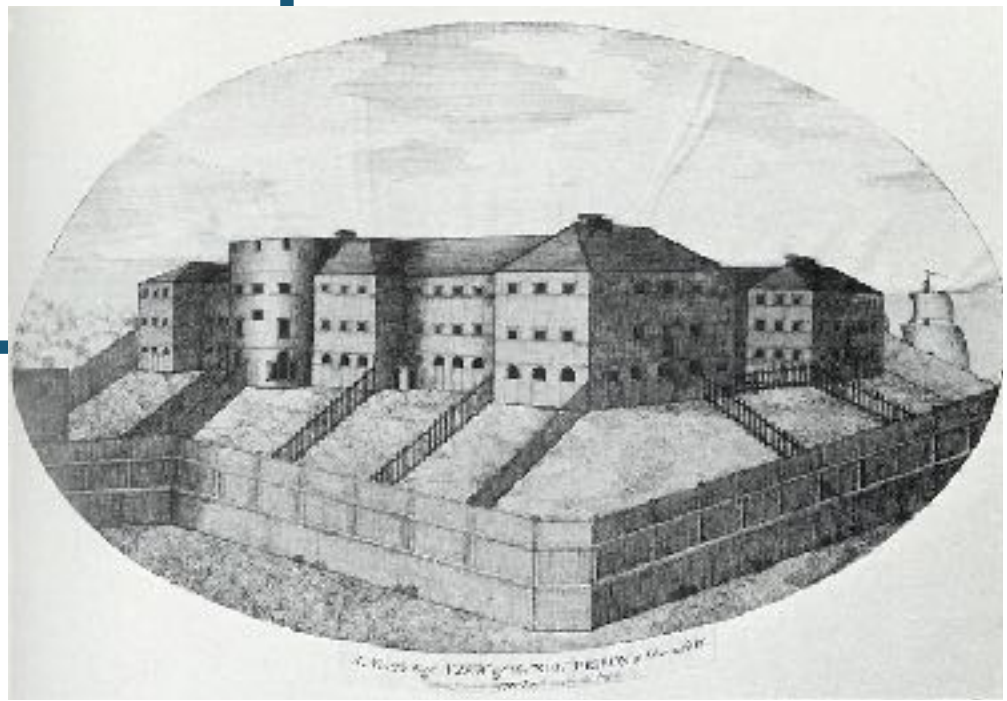
Productive Work:

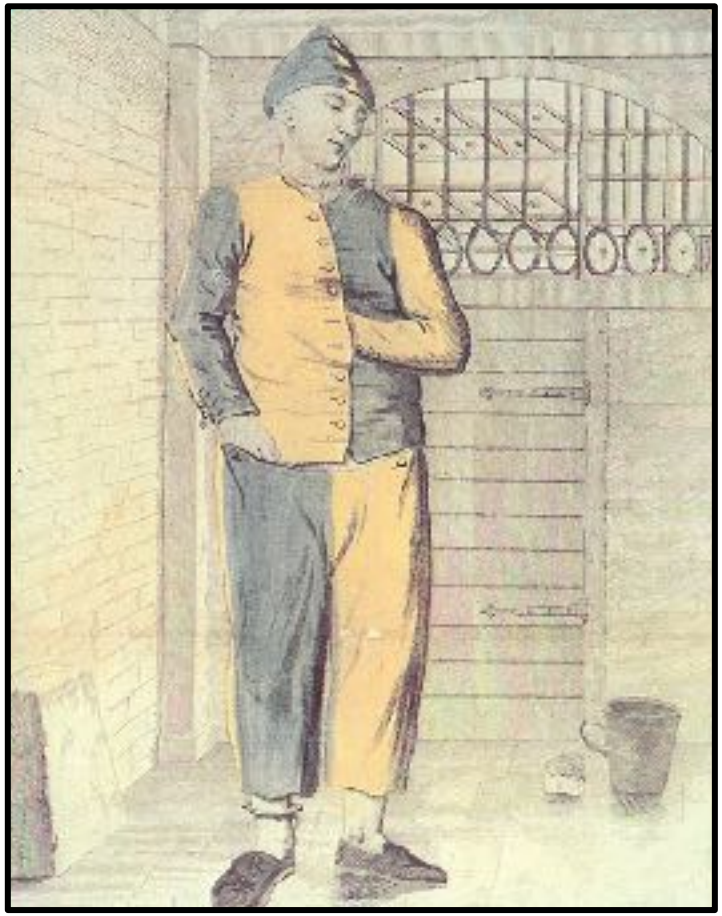
The new prison was designed to implement the principle that regular work would help to reform prisoners and build up a capacity for hard work, which would help when an inmate was released. Inmates were given opportunities to undertake crafts such as carpentry, shoe-making and tailoring, making prison uniforms and weaving sacks, providing them with useful work to do in their individual cells.



Health:

The prison was designed to be airy and open-plan with the cell blocks sited well above ground to provide a plentiful supply of fresh air; on all floors rooms were peppered with iron grills to encourage a high volume of ventilation. A novel feature was the first lazaretto or entrance lodge built at a distance from the main complex. Here incoming prisoners received a bath and health check and had their clothes





A number of political prisoners were sent to Gloucester from London. One of these was Kidd Wake, a printer sentenced in 1795 to five years solitary confinement for demonstrating outside Parliament in the politically charged atmosphere after the French Revolution.

Regulation:

Paul advocated firm rules for staff as well as inmates, which he laid out in his Rule Book. He required prison officials to maintain detailed record books, listing decisions taken and punishments administered. He also understood the need for independent inspection, envisaging daily visits by chaplains and formal inspections by local magistrates.

“Those who condescend to visit these miserable tenements can testify that neither health nor decency can be preserved in them. The weather frequently penetrates all parts of them, which must occasion illness of various kinds particularly agues – a fever, which frequently visit children. And it is shocking that a man, his wife and half a dozen children lie ALL IN ONE ROOM TOGETHER. Great towns are destructive both to morals and health and the great drains in cities and manufacturing towns where they put up with bad accommodation, and an unwholesome confined air, which breeds contagious distempers, debilitates their bodies and SHORTENS THEIR LIVES. Since knowledge of such appalling conditions was common what kind of monarch, what type of government and why a national church professing Christianity REMAINED UNMOVED BY IT”

Nathaniel Kent, historian

The ideas of Howard, Raikes and Paul eventually led to changes at national level. Sir Robert Peel, Home Secretary in the 1820s, reformed the penal code.

- **He limited the crimes punishable by death to murder, attempted murder and treason.**
- **He legislated for all prison staff to be salaried officials and took steps to improve the educational opportunities available to prisoners.**
- **The first national prison inspectors were appointed in 1837**

Nonetheless, the work of the reformers only scratched the surface of poverty and injustice. Progress towards a more humane society remained slow. After Sir George Onesiphorus Paul's death in 1820, the Gloucestershire magistrates abandoned some of his ideas, considering his approach too soft. It proved difficult to find suitable productive work that could be undertaken in individual cells and instead a much more punitive hard labour system was introduced, involving prisoners being herded in large groups on to a treadwheel.