

HMP BIRMINGHAM



Birmingham Borough Gaol 1849

150 YEARS

Birmingham the City Prison 1999



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GOVERNORS OF WINSON GREEN PRISON

1849	George Glossop
1849 - 1851	Captain A Maconochie
1851 - 1853	Lieutenant Austin R N (Sentenced to imprisonment for ill-treatment of prisoners)
1853 - 1857	George Wright Hillyard
1857 - 1878	Edward Meaden
1878 - 1881	Major John William Preston
1882 - 1900	Rear-Admiral Arthur Tinklar
1901 - 1916	Captain Percy Green
1917	Captain Walter Lee Clements
1918 - 1919	Walter Joseph Pelly
1920 - 1924	Major E H Goldie Taubman
1925 - 1928	John Felmingham
1929 - 1930	Stanley Norton Roberts
1931 - 1934	Lewis Cecil Ball
1935 - 1941	H Collinson
1942 - 1947	Captain A C W Richards
1948 - 1952	Major J W Brown
1953	Brigadier E J Paton-Walsh
1954 - 1957	Hugh Kenyon
1958 - 1963	J Richards
1964 - 1965	Rundle Harris
1966 - 1971	Alan Clive Packham
1971 - 1975	E Gregory
1975 - 1978	William Perrie
1978 - 1981	Roland Arthur Attrill
1981 - 1982	J A Green
1982 - 1985	Roger J Kendrick
1985 - 1989	Peter Buxton
1989 - 1994	Colin Baxter Scott
1994 - 1998	Graham Gregory-Smith
1998	Christopher Scott

Note:

1. Captain Maconochie is stated to be the first Governor, but the 1849 directory shows George Glossop. The latter may have been acting Governor until Maconochie took up office, but no evidence to support this has been found.
2. After the appointment of Edward Meaden, the dates shown are the dates of the Birmingham directories in which each Governor's name appears. They are not the exact dates when each Governor took up and relinquished office. No record giving these dates could be found.

EXTRACT OF PUBLICATION - 29 JANUARY 1898

Mr Edward Meaden (Governor - 1857 - 1878)

Mr Edward Meaden, formerly Governor of Winson Green Gaol, died on 24 inst. at Bournemouth, at the age of eighty years. Mr Meaden originally served in the Army and was conspicuous for his soldierly bearing, which he preserved to the end of his life, his stature reaching to considerably over six feet. In about the year 1854 Mr Meaden was appointed by the magistrates of Birmingham to the governorship of Winson Green Prison, which at that time was "the borough gaol," and he conscientiously discharged the duties of the position until 1876. In that year the Government took over the prisons from the local authorities, and Mr Meaden retired on a pension of about £400 a year, which was payable by the Town Council. After his retirement Mr Meaden lived at Harborne, Westward Ho and Bournemouth. He continued to take a keen interest in the affairs of Birmingham, where he had made many friends. Mr Meaden, as Governor of the Gaol, was conspicuous for the kindly demeanour he displayed towards those committed to his charge.

When Mr Meaden went to Winson Green it was not at all uncommon to have 80 or 90 young boys imprisoned at a time, and there was a special wing there for their accommodation. The punishments inflicted upon them were very cruel, and suicides among the boys, at the rate of four or five a year were among the consequences. There had been so many inquests at Winson Green on boys who committed suicide that public indignation reached its climax when a boy named Andrews hung himself. These incidents led Charles Reade to write his famous book, "Never Too Late to Mend." Under the regime of Mr Meaden a milder course of treatment was adopted. Humane to those under his charge, and always ready with good advice to them. Governor Meaden was popular among the prisoners, and respected by his fellow officers. In 1878, when the prison was taken over by the Government, he retired, and until the time of his death enjoyed a substantial pension as the reward of his services.

The life that closed with the death this week of Mr David Meaden, a former Governor of Winson Green, was an interesting one, and many Birmingham citizens who remember the kindly old Governor will regret his death. He commenced life as an agricultural labourer in Dorsetshire, and enlisted as a private in the Life Guards. The friends of the lady who afterwards became his wife bought him off. Mr Meaden, after service at Parkhurst convict establishment, in the Isle of Wight, was appointed by the Magistrates to the Governorship of Winson Green, and his administration during his 23 years' residence at the prison was very successful. He hated unproductive labour, holding very sensible doctrine that nothing is so demoralising to the minds of prisoners. On one occasion, when the Home Secretary - I believe Sir George Grey - visited Winson Green, the late Mr J S Wright, Chairman of the visiting justices, with much pride invited the official to inspect a nearly self-supporting prison. This result was due to Mr Meaden's management.

SITE HISTORY

1845-1999

SUMMARY

1845	1849	Built to the designs of Daniel Rowlinson Hill
1854		42 female cells (?G Wing extended), wash house and laundry
1855	1859	New wing (B Wing)
1891	1892	Male Hospital (H Wing)
1903	1905	Female infirmary
1980s		J Wing built
1986		Gatehouse rebuilt
1992		K Wing opened
1995		New kitchens

REPORT

HMP Birmingham is built as a new Birmingham Borough Gaol at Winson Green, west of the city centre, between 1845 and 1849. It was designed by Daniel Rowlinson Hill, a Birmingham Architect who designed a number of other prisons, and the builder was John Matthews. The prison was to be built upon the same principle as the Model Prison, Pentonville, with 'four distinct wings or compartments' for males, females, juveniles and debtors and 300 cells. Hill's design offered a combination of a radial and linear plan. The main prison was to be cross-shaped with four wings (of which only three were built originally) at the cardinal points. One wing was for offices and the chapel (F Wing) and the other two wings had separate cells for 207 male prisoners (A and C Wings). In line with the north and south wings were two further buildings. To the north was a T-shaped female prison for 56 women (G Wing), and to the south was a L-shaped block for 40 juveniles (D Wing) and 18 debtors (E Wing). The prison had accommodation for a total of 321 inmates, but space had been left for a future extension to bring the total up to 500. The male and female cells measured 13' x 7' x 9' high, the same size as the cells at Pentonville and the juveniles and debtors cells measured 11' x 6'6" x 8'6" high.

Hill's alternative scheme was similar in outline to the executed design, but there were a number of differences in detail:-

1. The male prison was to have four stories and a basement, not three.
2. The female wing (G Wing) was to be a single-sided wing of seven bays on the east side and of ten bays on the west side, rather than a double-sided wing of seven bays.

3. The eastern male wing (B Wing), which was built only two bays long, was to have had twelve bays, it was also marked 'for future extension.'
4. The juvenile wing (D Wing) was to have ten, not seven, washing places.

The foundation stone was laid on the 29 October 1845 and the prison opened on 17 October 1849. The first Governor was Captain Alexander Maconochie, who imposed the marks system of discipline, whereby prisoners could earn a reduced sentence through good behaviour. The Birmingham justices considered the regime too lax and Maconochie was dismissed in 1851, to be replaced by his former deputy, Lieutenant Austin. In 1853 a commission of enquiry was set up to investigate allegations of cruelty and illegal punishments at the gaol. Austin was subsequently tried, found guilty and imprisoned.

The prison was extended in the 1850's. In 1854 42 female cells, a wash house and a laundry were constructed. The female wing (G Wing) was extended in length from seven to fourteen bays. In 1855 Hill produced plans for adding an east wing to the male prison. One plan is for a ten-bay addition and another plan shows the proposed new build and a future new extension to it. The wing may not have been completed until 1859.

Further additions or alterations were made in the 1890's and 1900's. In 1891 alterations were made to the female reception, between 1891 and 1892 the male infirmary was rebuilt (H wing) and between 1903 and 1905 a new female hospital was constructed south-west of G Wing. In 1906 the treadwheel house was converted and the following year a new Roman Catholic chapel was built.

More recent changes include the erection of two new wings, J Wing (in the 1980's) and K Wing (in the early 1900's); the demolition of the gatehouse and its replacement by a combined gatehouse, reception, visits and administration building in the 1980's and the construction of a new kitchen in 1995.

In 1878, following the nationalisation of the prison system by the 1877 Prison Act, a settlement was made between the borough authorities and the Prison Commissioners. 500 out of 552 cells were admitted by the Commissioners, together with thirteen extra cells allowed by the Secretary of State. When R G Alford visited the prison in 1903, he found accommodation for 498 men and 121 women, a total of 619, although the daily average role was 404 men and 60 women. In 1995 the CNA is 562.

Inventory

Gatehouse

The gatehouse was originally situated opposite the west end of F Wing. The governor's house stood to the south of it, and the chaplain's house (later the medical officer's house) lay to the north. There were also formerly four circular towers containing warder's quarters around the perimeter and two terraces of officer's houses in Winson Green Road, one of which was designed by Sir Edmund Du Cane.

The gatehouse was replaced in 1987 by a new entrance building further to the south. The building was designed by Donovan Hewitt and combines the functions of gatehouse, visits, reception and administration.

A, B, C and F Wings (the male prison and offices)

The main prison buildings are constructed of brick and have three stories and a basement. A distinctive feature of the prison is the point of intersection between the perpendicular wings and the canted centre, the eaves of the wings being carried on arches. The windows are round-headed with a decorative course of darker bricks outlining the head. The wings are open and the upper floors are reached from galleries. The inner end of each wing has an arched ceiling, with three ribs sitting on corbels, and the main body has a king-post roof. In the basement of the octagonal centre is a substantial octagonal pier from which radiate the floor beams.

A, B and C Wings were formally the male prison. A and C Wings (the north and south wings) are sixteen bays long. Only two bays of B Wing (the east wing) were built originally, but the rest was shown on Hill's plan for future extension and the wing was erected in the 1850's. A plan by Hill dated 1855 shows a ten-bay wing, and a second plan of the same date shows the proposed new build as well as a future extension. According to Alford, the wing is 24 bays long. Externally, there are ten windows at the inner end of the wing and twelve at the outer end, separated by a blank area of wall beneath the plenum tower. There is no obvious straight joint in the wall, so it is uncertain whether the wing was built to its full length from the start or whether it was extended from ten to 24 bays at a later date. In 1995, A, B and C Wings had accommodation for 85, 140 and 91 inmates respectively.

There are four corner rooms between the wings on each floor level. On the ground floor, the prisoner's visiting room was between A and F Wings, the Governor's office was between F and C Wings, the surgery was between A and B Wings and the chief warder's room was between B and C Wings.

F Wing (the west wing) contained reception facilities in the basement, offices on the ground floor and the chapel on the upper floors. On the ground floor, at the outer end of the wing, were a waiting room, the medical officer's room, the chief warder's room and an officer's room. At the inner end of the wing were the solicitor's room, the magistrate's room, the chaplain's room and the governor's clerk's room. The chapel has a queen post roof with angle struts and with braces from the wall posts to the tie beam and from the queen posts to the collar. It is ceiled at collar level. The gallery, which was used by female prisoners, survives.

G Wing (the female prison)

G Wing lies north of A wing and was built as the female prison. It has a T-shape plan, the long arm of which is fourteen bays long. It was originally only seven bays long, but was probably extended in 1854 when 42 female cells were added. The short arm contained the matron's accommodation, a waiting room and a visiting room on the ground floor, and female debtors and the female infirmary on the first floor. G Wing was closed for refurbishment at the time of investigation.

VIT Store (formerly Waiting Room)

The southern half of the VIT store is a two-storey, five bay brick building with windows similar to those of the main prison buildings. It lies west of F Wing and originally served as the entrance to the female prison. A covered way for female inmates formerly led from G Wing to the chapel and the waiting room was at the south end of this passage. It is still linked to F Wing at first floor level.

D Wing (the juvenile prison)

D Wing is situated south of C Wing and originally held juvenile prisoners. At the north end were school rooms on the ground floor and schoolmaster's and warder's rooms on the first floor. At the south end was a double-sided prison which was seven cell spaces long, with washing places at the southern end.

By the time of Alford's visit, the wing housed debtors on the ground and first floors and on the second floor held an isolation hospital which was entered by a separate external staircase. It still held debtors in 1946. The wing is now the vulnerable prisoner unit and holds 49 inmates.

E Wing (the debtor's prison) (demolished)

E Wing lay west of D Wing and was the debtor's prison and infirmary. The debtor's prison was a single-sided wing with, on the ground floor, six cells and an officer's room on the south side, a corridor on the north side and day rooms for first and second class debtors at the east and west ends. On the first floor there were eleven cells. On the north side of the wing, towards the west end, was the infirmary, containing three wards or rooms on each floor.

By the early twentieth century, the wing was used for the reception of new inmates, and it retained this use in 1946. It has since been demolished.

H Wing (the male infirmary)

H Wing is situated south of D Wing. It is built of brick, has two stories and dates from 1891-2. It was built as the male infirmary and remains in use as the prison hospital. At the time of Alford's visit, it had officers' rooms, a surgery, twelve convalescence cells and stores on the ground floor and two wards on the first floor.

J Wing

J Wing lies east of D Wing and was built in the 1980's. It is constructed of brick and has two stories.

K Wing

K Wing lies east of the junction of C and D Wings. It opened in July 1992. It is built of brick and has four stories. It is of a modern gallery design inside. The cells, which are mostly double, have a separate toilet cubicle.

Kitchen

The kitchen is situated in the yard between A and F Wings. A new kitchen was erected in 1860, possibly the existing one. It is being replaced by a new kitchen west of C Wing.

Female Unit (formerly the Female Infirmary)

The former female infirmary is situated north-west of G Wing. It was built between 1903 and 1904 at a cost of £4,856. There were five convalescents' cells on the ground floor and two wards on the first floor. On the east side of the infirmary, at the north end of G Wing, was a creche (which was still there in 1946).

Roman Catholic Chapel

A new Roman Catholic chapel was built east in 1906. It was dedicated in 1907 and could hold 120 men and 40 women.

Education Centre (formerly female officers' quarters)

A two storey block of female officers' quarters was built east of G Wing in 1907. The building retained this use in 1946. It has also been used as a female training centre and as an officers' mess. It now serves as the education centre.

THE JUBILEE

17 OCTOBER 1899

The gaol at Winson Green has been open fifty years today. When Birmingham was separated from the country of Warwick by the Charter of Incorporation granted in 1838, it became necessary to provide a separate gaol for the borough prisoners. The matter, of course, required time and much consideration. At length plans were approved, a suitable plot of land was secured on Birmingham Heath, and on 29 October 1844, the present building at Winson Green was commenced, the first stone being laid by the Mayor, Mr Thos Phillips. The estimated cost was £50,000. The contract proved ruinous to the builder, who became bankrupt and his sureties, Mr Edward Middleton, draper, Bull Street, and Mr S D Williams, Easy Row, were heavy losers.

This failure caused much delay in the execution of the work but at length, on 17 October 1849, the gaol was opened for the reception of prisoners. Captain Machonochie, RN, being appointed the first Governor. It was originally built for 366 cells but the additions which have since been made have increased the number to about 560. The gaol was taken over by the Government as from 1 April 1873, Major J W Preston being appointed Governor in place of Dr D Meaden.

The first culprits were received on 19 October 1849. Their names were John Potter (43), blacksmith, committed to the Quarter Sessions charged with stealing and John Smith (29), wood turner, sentenced to two months' imprisonment on the previous day for an assault. Singularly enough, one of the magistrates who sentenced Smith was the great Midland Railway man, Mr S Beale, a former Mayor of Birmingham, and afterwards Member of Parliament for Derby and Uncle of the Lord Mayor (Alderman C G Beale). The other magistrates was Mr Howard Luckcock. While Smith, who was a very violent character, was serving a second term of imprisonment, he attempted to strike Mr Meaden, the Governor, but was prevented by a blow with a slate dealt with by Warder - afterwards Chief Warder Brown, which had the effect of felling him to the ground.

It was stated that Tom Sayers, the noted prizefighter, who fought Heenan at Farnborough assisted as a bricklayer for three or four weeks in the erection of the gaol. In the year 1877, three prisoners contrived to escape, and one of them, John Sutcliffe, who got out on 25 July, was not recaptured until the 22 January following. On 27 December, Richard Whitling escaped, and has never been recaptured. The third was soon caught and brought home.

One of the dark pictures of past Birmingham life is connected with the atrocities perpetrated within the Borough Gaol between 1851 and 1853, and it was upon the revelations then made that Charles Reade based his famous story, "It's Never too Late to Mend." There is not a single official or ex-official living who entered the service shortly after the opening. Brookes, although he has passed the allotted span of life by ten years, is still hale and hearty, and was on extra duty so late as the last Quarter Sessions.

In the history of the prison there have been six Governors, six Doctors (Mr Alfred Hill, the present Medical Officer of health to the City being the fourth), and five Chaplains. The oldest official still serving is Mr William Winfield, the Chief Clerk, he having entered the service 46 years ago.

CAPITAL PUNISHMENT

Prisoners have been executed at Birmingham from when it opened until 1964 where a Christopher Simcox is the last recorded execution. 1885 is the first documented hanging some 36 years after the prison opened. However the presence of three unnamed graves by the current Education Unit and discovery and removal of four bodies from the new Gate site are proof that executions have taken place of which we have no current records. Some 68 known executed prisoners remain buried in the prison precinct which include 12 from Worcester Prison and eight from Warwick whose bodies were transferred here in 1929 and 1934 respectively when these two prisons were demolished. Two Irish prisoners were exhumed and returned to their home country in 1969 (Barnes and Richards/McCormack).

The first place of execution was a shed in the prison grounds (by C Wing). This "Execution House" also contained the whipping block. This building was described in 1903 as containing an 11ft high beam with a modern socket. The condemned cells were CI 30 and 31 with cell 32 forming an exit doorway. This arrangement came into place in 1904, before then condemned men were housed in the hospital (H Wing) with a long walk with many steps to descend on route to their fate.

In the 1930's a new execution complex was constructed on C2 landing, seven cells were converted to provide a suite which contained the condemned cell, with toilet and bathroom attached, the execution chamber next door with easy access via a foyer and double doors.

This new arrangement allowed the hangman and his assistant to complete their work with a minimum of delay, usually it took but 10 to 15 seconds from them entering the condemned cell to the execution being completed.

Executions normally took place at 0900 hours with the Governor and High Sheriff as witness. The hangman and his assistant arrived the night before to set up and test the equipment, there was also a need to view the condemned man so that the correct drop could be calculated.

After the execution an inquest was held prior to burial in the prison grounds. Graves were prepared by two grave-diggers provided by the City Council and after internment, were left without any marker. A register of graves was completed showing dimension of exactly where bodies could be located, the accuracy of these records was confirmed when Barnes and McCormack were exhumed.

With the abolishing of capital punishment, the execution suite was dismantled and destroyed. Little remains today to indicate this part of Birmingham's history, the records have been passed on to the city archive where they remain embargoed for 40 years. The cells have reverted back to use as normal accommodation.

REGISTER OF GRAVES FOR
PRISONERS EXECUTED AT BIRMINGHAM PRISON

NAME	AGE	REG. No.	DATE OF EXECUTION	DATE OF COMMITAL	OCCUPATION	COMMENTS	GRAVE No.	DEPTH	LOCATION
Henry KIMBERLEY		5285	17.03.1885				1		
C.M.D.		223					2		
H.B.J.		1811					3		
F.D.		927	1890				4		
Frederick William FENTON		7129	04.04.1894				5		
Frank TAYLOR		6119	16.08.1896				6		
John JOYCE		2748	20.08.1901				7		
William RIDER		5567	19.12.1902				8a		
Charles Samuel DYER	25	6842	05.04.1904	10.02.1904	Soldier		8		
Samuel HOLDEN	32	9891	16.08.1913	05.07.1904	Market Porter		9		
Frank GREENING	34	1203	13.08.1913	08.04.1913	Painter		10		
William Allen BUTLER	39	1952	16.08.1916	22.05.1916	Caster		11		
Louis VAN DER KEEKHOVE	32	1794	09.04.1918	14.01.1918	Toolmaker		12	6ft	
Henry Thomas GASKIN	27	214	08.08.1919	25.02.1919	Miner		13	6ft	
Samuel WESTWOOD	26	3948	30.12.1920	13.09.1920	Keysmith		14	5ft	14ft from workshop
Edward O'CONNOR	43	2268	21.12.1921	10.11.1921	Labourer		15	5ft	50 yds from Bailiff's quarters
Elijah POUTNEY	48	4050	11.08.1922	28.04.1922	Labourer		16		
William RIDER			19.12.1922	25.09.1922	Sweep				
John FISHER	58	2827	15.01.1926	31.11.1925	Mechanic		17		
George SHARPLES	20	3627	13.04.1926	01.02.1926	Farm Labourer		18		
Andrew FRAZER			23.11.1920						50 yds from Bailiff's quarters
Thomas Allen Woodcroft			11.7.1921						

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Elizabeth Baker									
James Joseph POWER	33	1881	31.01.1928	11.08.1927	Warehouseman		19	10 ft	3 ft from turret
Victor Edward BETTS	21	5477	03.01.1931	11.08.1930	Blacksmith		21	10 ft	8 ft from turret
Jeremiah EDWARDS	49	6174	02.02.1933	28.10.1932	Fuddler		22	10 ft	16 ft from turret
Valley Eric BOBBAY	21	8969	28.12.1933	07.09.1933	Electrician		23	10 ft	18 ft from turret
Corbetta Nancy WADDINGHAM	36	912	16.04.1936	14.02.1936	Unqualified Nurse		25	10 ft	28 ft from turret
James RICHARDS	29	8334	07.02.1940	14.12.1939	Labourer	Exhumed 1969	26	8 ft	32 ft from turret
Peter BARKES	32	8482	07.02.1940	14.12.1939	Labourer	Exhumed 1969	26	10 ft	32 ft from turret
Eli RICHARDS	45	3036	19.09.1941	31.03.1941	Labourer		21	7 ft	12 ft from turret
Arthur PEACE	23	4679	30.01.1942	05.11.1941	Soldier		19	7 ft	4 ft from turret
Harold Oswald HERRY	40	6195	10.09.1942	24.04.1942	Sheet Metal Inspector		23	7 ft	20 ft south from turret
William QUALLS	52	1174	03.08.1943	17.06.1943	Works Policeman		22	7 ft	16 ft from turret
James FARRELL	18	9702	29.03.1943	23.11.1949	Soldier		25		
Piotr MARSDROWSKI	33	3858	20.02.1950	27.01.1950	Labourer (Polish Subject)		19		
William Arthur WATKINS	49	7122	03.04.1951	23.12.1950	Enameller		21	5' 6"	12 ft from turret
Horace CARTER			01.01.1952						
Leslie GREEN	30	3308	23.12.1952		Motor Driver		23 (3rd)	6 ft	20 ft south from turret
Horace CARTER	30	9303	01.01.52	12.12.51	Labourer				
Frederick Arthur CROSS	34		26.07.1955		Concrete Moulder		25 (3rd)	6 ft	28 ft south from turret
Corbett Montague ROBERTS	46		02.08.1955		Journeyman Painter (American Subject)	Exhumed and reburied	26 (3rd)	6 ft	32 ft south from turret
Ernest Charles HADDING	42		09.08.1955		Painter		27 (New)	12 ft	36 ft south from turret
Dennis HOWARD	24		04.12.1957				28 (New)	12 ft	40 ft south from turret
Matthew SAVANAGE	32		12.08.1958				29 (New)	12 ft	44 ft south from turret
Oswald Augustus GREY	20		20.11.1962				27 (2nd)	8 ft	36 ft south from turret

Christopher SIMCOX		17.03.1964				30 (New)	12 ft	48 ft south of turret
Joseph LAURENCE		Not known				27		
Vincent McTAIR		Not known				27	8 ft	40 ft south of turret
Frank Gordon POCKETT		Not known				28 (2nd)	8 ft	40ft south of turret
John Francis SPRIGGS		Jan 1958				29 (New)	12 ft	44ft south of turret
Malhan SINGH		Not known			Double interment	29 (New)	12 ft	40ft south of turret
Frederick WILLIAMS		Not known				28		
Brij BRUSEMAN		Not known			Double interment	28 (New)	8 ft	40ft south of turret
William ESTRIDGE		Not known				28 (New)	12 ft	40ft south of turret
Worcester remains					12 prisoners 4 coffins	20		8ft south of turret
Warwick remains					3 coffins	24		24ft south of turret

* 3 bodies same place?

Note 1

Remains of 12 executed prisoners exhumed at Worcester Prison and re-interred at Birmingham, 3 on 31.01.29 and 9 on 05.03.1929 in Grave No. 20

Note 2

Remains of 8 executed prisoners exhumed at Warwick Prison and re-interred at Birmingham on 14.01.34 in Grave No. 24.

FLOGGING

HOW IT FEELS TO HAVE THE CAT-O-NINE TAILS

A short time since the writer had occasion to have a protracted interview with an individual who had just been released after serving a term of penal servitude for highway robbery. The man asserted his innocence at the trial, but he failed to convince that astute, if excessively austere Judge Sir Henry Hawkins, and he was sentenced to seven years servitude, and thirty strokes with the cat.

"It's no good my swearing to you that I was innocent, whether I was or not," said the man, "It can make no difference now that I have served my sentence, but I should like you to know that I was as innocent as a babe unborn. Not that I want to say I was a thief, because I was, but I did not go about knocking old men down, as the Police told the Judge I did, and it was this that got me my "bashing.""

"Yes, that is what the cat-o-nine tails is called by us, but I would rather have it called the "Murdering Cat." I should just like those that order you have to have it, and the warder, who gives it to you, to have a taste. They would only want a couple of cuts, and it would be all over with 'em."

"After I got my time at the Old Bailey, I was sent to Millbank to get my 'bashing.' I thought I should get it the next day, but I did not. During the next fortnight, I was taken before the Medical Officer and the Governor every morning, and they examined me most carefully and I can remember feeling my back just as if I had been a pig they were going to send to market to get them a prize. I was under remand a long time and the anxiety of not knowing what you are going to get its effect upon you, and you don't get over-strong on the grub that you get in quod, I can tell you. But they gave me first-class diet, and very little work to do, although plenty of exercise. A man has to be prepared for a 'bashing' just as if he was going to run a race or fight."

"At the end of the first fortnight, I was examined by one of the visiting prison inspectors, and I heard the doctor say that I was too flabby, and that I had got too much flesh on me; so I was put back for another fortnight. At the end of this time I was declared and certified to be fit, and I was told that the sentence with regard to the 'bashing' would take place the next morning (Wednesday) at nine o'clock."

"I had very little sleep that night and I lay tossing about all it was nearly daybreak when I feel off to sleep, only to be woken up about two hours later by the warder, who told me to have a 'good wash,' because I'd go to go in front of the Governor and have my 'dose.' They told me need not put my shirt on, as I should not want it until I came back, but all the same I dressed myself and was taken before the Governor. He read out my sentence and asked me if it was right, and I said "Yes." He then read over the Doctor's certificate, that I was in proper and fit condition to receive my sentence."

"I was taken into the mess-room where I saw the Doctor and nearly all the officials. I was then to strip to the waist, and I did, and again the Doctor examined me. Meantime, the Chief Warder, he was a great big, burly fellow, who has since been pensioned - was standing by my side, pulling out and arranging the lash."

"There are two strong iron hooks in the wall with rings through them and into these both my wrists are fastened with a couple of broad straps. Your feet are put into a kind of box and, when it is closed you can move about, but can't pull them out. Of course, your face is to the wall and, when your hands are strapped above your head, you are unable to move, and in order to be at ease, must bend your back, which is what they like to do."

"When all is ready a warder gives you a drink of water, holding the tin can up to your mouth and at the word "Go," you get the first lash. It feels just as if someone had hit you with about twenty whips, and it stings and hurts, but before the pain has gone you get the next one - that's worse. The third seems as if they were taking pieces of skin off your back, and the fourth the same. I can remember the sixth stroke - it made me cry out with pain; but I bit my tongue, and my mouth got full of blood. I could feel the blood trickling down my back. Then the 'cat' began to in same place as it had before, and it felt as if they had got a lot of hot wires and were dragging them across my skin. The warder then took a rest, and I thought they were not going to give me any more, but again I got it, and it seemed even harder. He seemed to lash me, and then when the cat was on my back and into my flesh, to pull it slowly and drag the skin with it. Stand it any longer I could not, and I remember just as the Doctor said, "Eighteen," I fainted and I felt them throw some water over me."

"When I came to, I was sitting on a chair and the Doctor was holding my hand and feeling my pulse. The warder who had given me my 'bashing' was washing the blood from the cat in a pail. After that I was fastened again to the wall (only my hands this time) and they rubbed salt and water into my back. This I could not stand, and I asked them to kill me straight away and not torment me to death. Pulling my shirt over my back I was taken back to my cell, but for weeks I could not lie on my back."

"What did they give me to my wounds? Nothing, only a little sweet oil to prevent my shirt sticking to my back. The scars are on my back now, and I suppose I shall carry them to my grave. You never get rid of them, and you can always tell them, they are long and thin, and never reach above the shoulders or below the waist."

FLOGGING A PRISONER AT WINSON GREEN GAOL

As we have already stated, a ruffian named Michael Nyland, who is undergoing a term of imprisonment at Winson Green Gaol, was on Wednesday last sentenced by Mr Alfred Hill and Mr J H Stone on behalf of the Visiting Committee, to receive 36 strokes with a cat-o-nine tails for a murderous assault upon an assistant warder named Sloan. Since his incarceration, Nyland has been very troublesome to the prison officials and some time ago he emphatically objected to the various kinds of work the authorities considered he was able to do. He pleaded that his eyesight being defective, he was unable to perform the task, but medical opinion was against him. On Monday he was engaged in making bagging for the use of the Post Office authorities and it became Sloan's duty to inform him of the result of an appeal he had made to the Governor against his class of labour, which was that he must proceed with the work. This command seemed to irritate him and he seized the first opportunity to show his resentment. Sloan entered his cell the following day and Nyland, who had been hiding behind the door - dealt him a "violent blow on the back of the head with a large piece of wood he had broken off the table in the cell. The effect was serious, and but for Sloan's cap the blow might have been fatal." The Visiting Committee investigated the affair and finding that Nyland had committed the assault, was bound to sentence him to 36 lashes with the cat. They could not give him more or less, as this was the specified punishment laid down by the Prison Commissioners. It should be stated that an assault upon a warder is the most serious offence that can be committed in the Gaol, seeing that the warders are not allowed to carry any weapons of defence. Had such an outrage been committed in a convict establishment, the warder might either have cracked his assailant's skull with the butt of his carbine, or even shot him.

Yesterday was selected for giving Nyland the first instalment of his punishment. It was argued that to divide the sentence would be advisable, because only half the pain inflicted and the other half still to come, the prisoner would feel it incumbent upon him to be his best behaviour during the remainder of his term of imprisonment. He was fastened hand and foot to a wooden triangle such as those that were once used in the Army. A couple of warders, one right-handed and the other left-handed, were deputed to give him nine lashes each. The object of giving the cuts in this way is that the two men, uniformly strong, one with the right and the other with the left hand, inflict the cuts transversely. Nyland's back being bared the cat-o-nine tails was applied. He firmly sets his jaws, and although he never uttered a sound of complaint, yet the involuntary twitching which accompanied every whish of the flesh tearing thongs testified how keenly he must have felt the punishment. His back was scored over with livid marks of the lash and there was no doubt that he richly merited every stroke from those terrible thongs. Nyland was then taken to his cell and informed that at some future period he would receive the remainder of his sentence. It may be of interest to know that the warders' fees for flogging are 1s each for the birch, and 1s 6d for the cat-o-nine tails. However, it is satisfactory to know that for many years the necessity for the use of the cat under circumstances similar to the present at Winson Green, has been of very rare occurrence.

THE TREADMILL

ARTICLE IN LOCAL PRESS
DATED 17 DECEMBER 1901

We hope none of our readers will have any painful memories aroused by the subject of this week's reminiscence, which is a link with the bad old past times depicted in, "It's Never too Late to Mend," in which Winson Green, the late Warder Brown, and a former Governor played a conspicuous part.

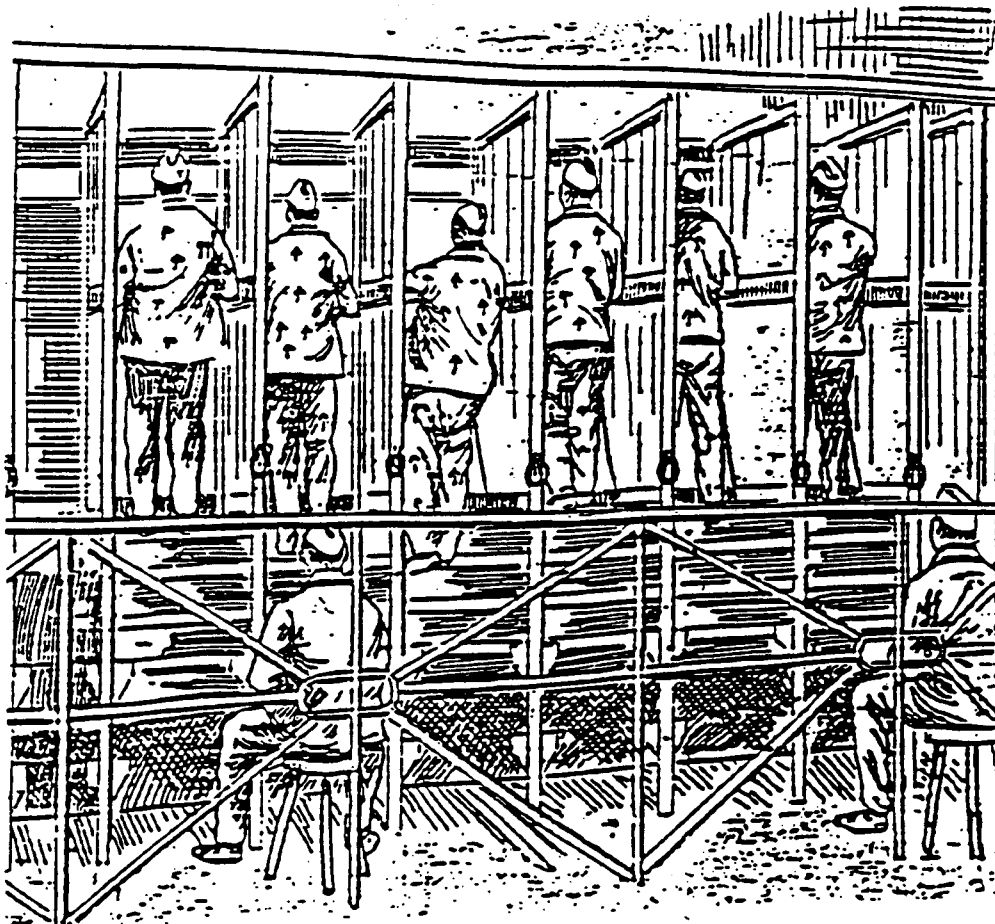
The accompanying picture of the old treadmill at that gaol shows that even the walls of a prison are not proof against the camera fiend. It is not surprising that the origin of so barbarous an implement of torture should be attributed to the Chinese. In patriarchal days hydraulic machines of various forms were called into use for the purpose of irrigation, many being worked by the feet of men. It was doubtless to this custom that Moses alluded when he reminded the Israelites by saying that the land they were journeying to "was not the land of Egypt from whence ye came out, where thou sowedst they seed, and wateredst it with thy feet, as a garden of herbs."

The treadmill of our prisons consisted of a hollow cylinder of wood on an iron frame, revolving on an axle, and resembling very much a very wide water-wheel. The cylinder is five or six feet in diameter, and is sufficiently wide to afford standing room for a row of forty men. On its outward circumference are steps nine inches apart. The weight of the prisoners constitutes the motive to the wheel at or near the level of its axis. To secure this advantage a screen is fixed in an inclined position above the wheel, thus preventing prisoners from climbing or stepping higher than the required level. A hand-rail, breast-high, enables each prisoner to retain an upright position as he treads each step of the revolving wheel, and while mounting or getting off. The face of the screen is partitioned off in open cells to prevent separate compartment. The speed of the wheel is regulated by a brake, which is applied by means of a Governor. The wheel makes two revolutions a minute, which is equivalent to a vertical ascent of 32ft per minute. The prison ascends 8400ft per diem, or an equivalent to climbing a mountain, nearly a mile and a half high. Having been examined and pronounced fit by the medical officer, a prisoner has to work on the wheel until he has earned the required number of marks (224). His spell is six hours a day, treading fifteen minutes at a time, so that all the places on the wheel shall be continuously filled up. The power of the treadmill at Winson Green Gaol was used for a number of years in grinding corn, but the authorities, finding that they could buy flour much cheaper than they could grind it, discontinued the practice for a time, but it was revived again.

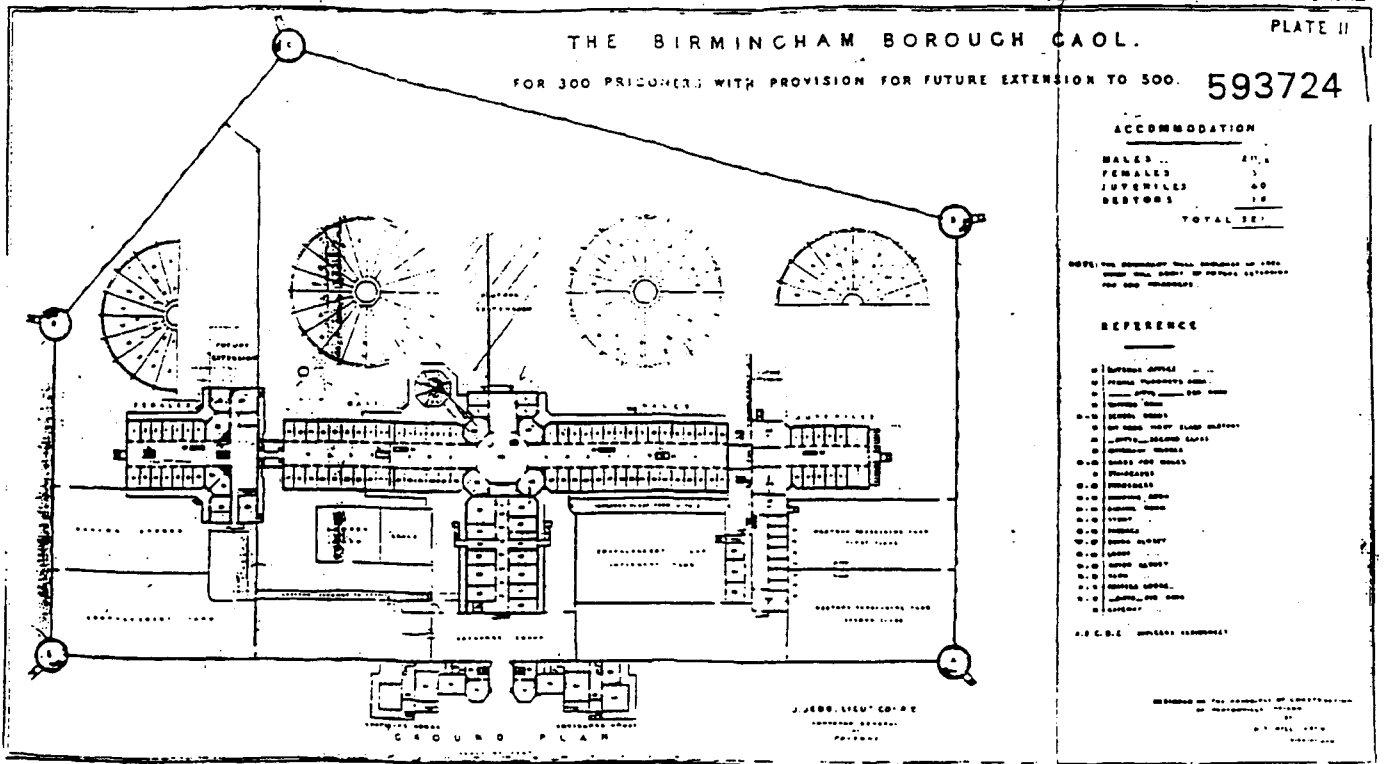
The instrument of torture at Winson Green, which was probably a century old, was sold in April 1901, to a Black Country showman for the purpose of exhibition at fairs and other places. Many of those who had already made its acquaintance under compulsion have probably since enjoyed a reminiscent turn of the golden stairs. The treadmill was in reality two wheels jointed together. One was brought from Brecon Gaol and the other from Leicester Gaol, which formerly had a reputation for severity. A curious story is told of a Judge who was anxious to try the wheel.

One day, many years ago, he found himself at Birmingham as Judge of Assize. He went through the prison and found himself at last opposite the treadmill in full work. "I should like to try what it is like" said the Judge, and when a vacancy came he mounted the step, laid hold of the rail, and commenced to tread. Taking side glance he recognised as his next-door neighbour Mr William Sykes, to whom he had on the previous day awarded "two year's hard." Mr Sykes said, "Golly!" The Judge said, "Stop, let me get off." But it was too late. The machine was arranged to on for twenty minutes at a stretch, and could not be stopped. At last the eminent one began to groan aloud and there came consolation, not of a comforting kind from his neighbour. "Opes yer like it, yer old beggar, what." "Gin me two year's stretch - opers yer like it! Wishes yer 'ad two year's hard. But golly! - who'd ever thought yer such a blazing fool as to come on it on yer own accord. Yer might 'ave 'ad the whole mill to yerself and welcome for me." After twenty minutes the turn came to an end and the Judge, escaping from his torturer, retired to his lodgings. But he took no more exercise that day. In accordance with instructions from Home Office, treadmills and cranks as forms of hard labour are fast disappearing from the prisons of this country. Of the 68 treadmills and cranks in operation in 1895 only 18 remained in 1902.

The endless staircase
Winson Green

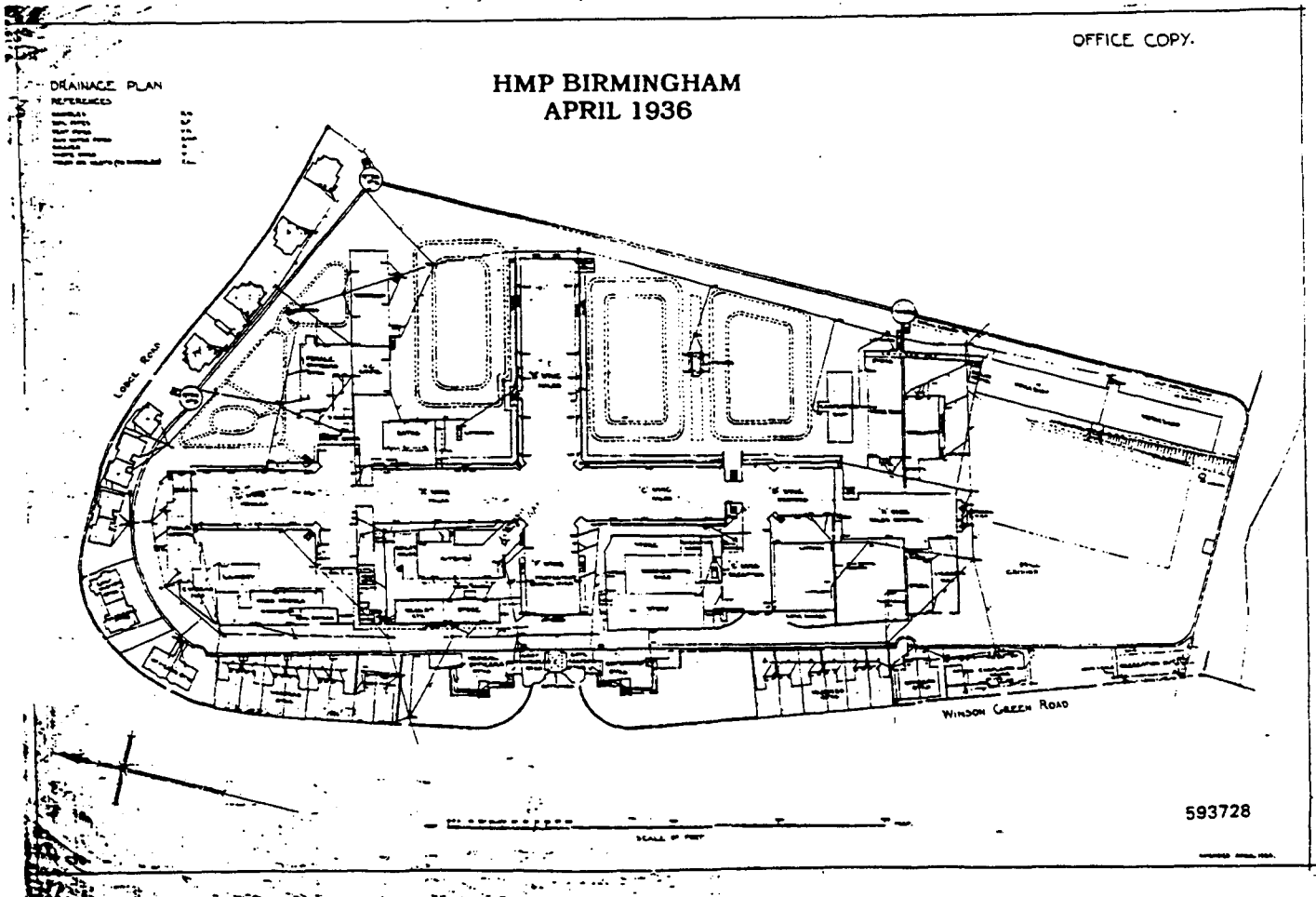


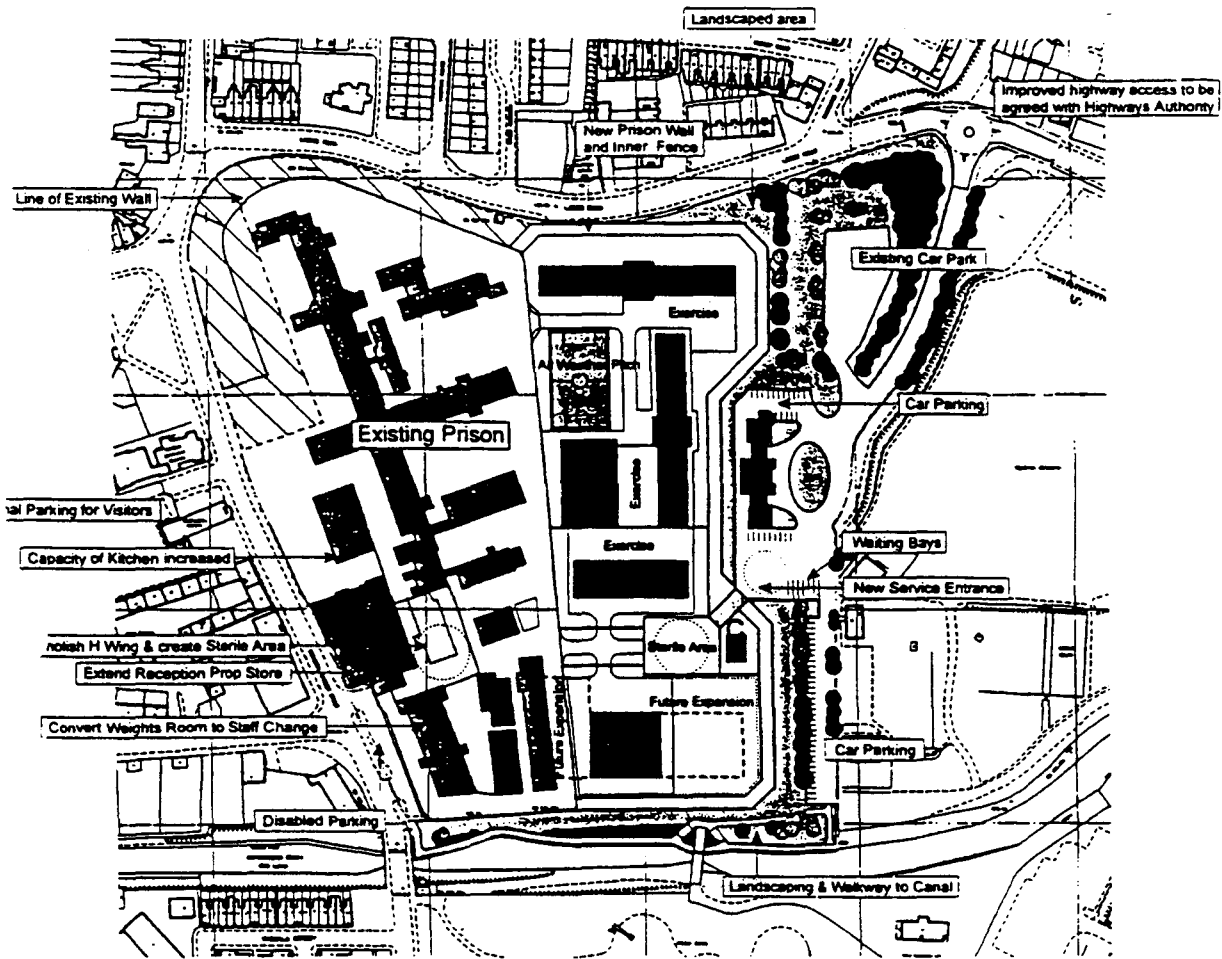
The treadmill in operation
the men on their rest turns in the foreground



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