

## **THE BUILDING OF THE COUNTY HALL, AYLESBURY**

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[The following paper was read at a Meeting of the Institution of Municipal and County Engineers held at Aylesbury on 30th October, 1926. It has been reprinted, with certain omissions, and with the addition of a few details from the original records kindly supplied by the Clerk of the Peace, from the Journal of the Institution. Founded as it is on the unimpeachable evidence of the official records, and dealing with the most important administrative building in the county, it was thought that this valuable paper should appear with the "Records of Bucks." Besides the very curious history of its construction, the legend which made Sir John Vanbrugh responsible for the design of the Hall is now explained by the fact of his having acted as judge of the designs submitted; neither Lysons (1806) nor Lipscomb (1847) fell into the error of naming Vanbrugh as the designer, but Sheahan (1861) definitely states that "Sir John Vanbrugh was the architect of this building" (p. 75). Gibbs (1885) says that "the design is ascribed to Vanbrugh," and proceeds to give a biographical notice of him (p. 500-502). Even the Victoria County History (III., 2) continues the story with the saving prefix "said to have been designed." The question has now been settled for all time, but as the design chosen was the work of "Mr. Harris & Co." there is still a slight uncertainty as to whether it should be ascribed to Mr. Harris himself, and that name is unknown to the Royal Institute of British Architects.—EDITOR.]

The County Hall, as it stands to-day, originally formed part of a scheme for building a new county gaol, which was inaugurated at the Easter Quarter Sessions, 1720. It appears from the records of the Court that at this session a presentment was made by the Grand Jury, complaining that the house of Mr William Benson, in Aylesbury, which for many years past had been hired and used for a county gaol at a

rent of £20 per annum, was neither strong, convenient, or large enough to hold or keep the prisoners in safe custody. This is hardly surprising if what was apparently an ordinary private house had been adapted and used for the purpose!

It is evident that this: house stood more or less on the sit of the present County Hall, and the magistrates proceeded to consider whether a new county gaol should be built, and, if so whether at Aylesbury or elsewhere in the county. They decided in favour of Aylesbury, and the Court ordered that the county gaol be kept in this town, " being the most proper and convenient place in the county for the service thereof," and that the new gaol should be built at the county charge. The matter was referred to a number of magistrates present in Court, whose names are mentioned in the records, " and all such other Justices of the Peace as are absent if they please to come," who were ordered to meet on Wednesday, 8th June, 1720, at the George Inn, Aylesbury, at 9a.m., to consider:—

- (a) What sum of money should be raised for carrying out the work.
- (b) What workmen were to be employed.
- (c) Whether it might not be best to purchase new ground for the new gaol, or to erect the same upon Mr. Benson's ground, where it then was, or to rent or purchase the same or any other house or ground in Aylesbury.

At the next Session at Midsummer, 1720, it was reported to the Court that the following magistrates had met as ordered—namely, the Duke of Wharton, Symon Mayne, Francis Tyringham, Dr. Busby, Richard Abell, Charles Pilsworth, and Thomas Ligo.

The meeting considered a letter from Mr. William Benson, the owner of the house already mentioned, which ran as follows:—

"To all and every of His Majesties Justices of the Peace for the County of Bucks.

"May it please your Worships,

"I understanding your Worships being desirous to purchase the old Gaol and all other my premises at Aylesbury which are described in Mr. Clisbye's draught or about to provide another gaol for this county humbly beg leave to propose and offer to sell for the service and benefitt of the said County and the publick good the same premises and gaol which my ancestors have held enjoyed repaired and kept as such time out of mind and have been att great charges and expenses thereby together with all

irons and other necessary utensills in the inventory annex att the sum of One thousand pounds being less than the same estate will amount to according to the present income of fifty five pounds per ann. in which the profitts arising from the waterworks are not included and that since severall improvements have been and may be made thereto by buildings waterworks and other wayes I humbly conceive and hope the said price will not be thought unreasonable and submitt the same to your Worshippes serious considerations hoping your Worshippes will not prefer another person before him who- is

Yo. Worshippes most obedient humble servant

WM. BENSON

The whole estate containes about two acres of ground & above sixty bay or square of building besides ironwork fixed to the freehold & if the consent of the Lord of the Mannor can be obtained the houses round the Markett might be supplied with water from the Waterworks which would bring in a considerable profit and gaine.

8 July 1720

I have receded from the demand of one thousand pounds above mentioned and doo agree to, accept of six hundred pounds in lieu thereof.

WILL. BENSON.

Witness: FRA. LIGO.

The Committee reported that they had accepted this offer, being of opinion that the site was the most convenient, and the cheapest, that could be bought in the town, and that the Duke of Wharton and the Rt. Hon. Richard Hampden (great-grandson of the Patriot) had promised, in writing, to give £500 each towards buying the ground and building the new gaol.

The Court confirmed the arrangement made, and at the next Session at Michaelmas, alternative plans, which are said to have been prepared by Mr. Harris and Co. and by Mr. Brandon and Co., were brought into Court for inspection and approval by the magistrates, who ordered that they should be considered by Mr. Hampden's surveyor, or some other surveyor appointed by the Committee, who was to decide which of the two plans was considered the best.

At the Epiphany Session at the end of the year, it was reported that this had not been done, and apparently what are called the "planns, ground plotts and modellls," were again brought before the Court by the designers, when the Court decided that Mr. Bernard Turney, one of the magistrates, should take the plans to Sir John Vanbrugh, and it was decided to follow whichever plan was approved by him. Sir

John Vanbrugh was then the Controller of the Board of Works and Surveyor of Greenwich Hospital.

The Records go on to say that Mr. Bernard Turney had been prevailed upon to undertake and carry on the building, and had been authorised by the Court to contract for and buy all manner of timber, stone, bricks, tiles, lime, sand, iron, lead and all other materials necessary for the building.

It appears from the later records that Sir John Vanbrugh selected the plan of Mr. Harris and Co., but the next entry of interest in the records is that at Midsummer, 1721, an order was made for raising a county rate of 1d. in the £ towards building the new gaol, which produced £983 16s. 4¾d.

At Midsummer, 1722, a detailed report was made to the magistrates by three of their number, Thomas Ingoldsly, Francis Tyringham, and Bernard Turney, from which it appears that they had bought 200 loads of the best oak timber lying in Wing Park, Bucks, at £3 per load, which they had contracted to be carried to Aylesbury at a charge of 3d. per foot. They had further hired a piece of ground in Aylesbury for laying this timber on from a Mr. Edmunds, for which they had to pay him £2 2s. for one year. They had also been in communication with one Henry Bayley, a brickmaker, of Aylesbury, who had offered to supply bricks and lime, asking 18s. per thousand for bricks and 18s. per load for lime.

The Court, however, made an order that only 17s.<sup>1</sup> per thousand should be paid for the bricks, and agreeing to pay 18s. per load for the lime.

At this Session also a further county rate of 2d. in the £ was ordered to be raised, realising £1,967 9s. 11d.

It is evident that considerable discussion had taken place as to whether the new building should be merely at gaol for the detention of prisoners, or should include a court room for the trial of prisoners and what we should now call a County Hall, and at the end of the records for this Session of Mid-summer, 1722, the following illuminating paragraph appears:-

" And, lastly, for the preventing all disorder or disagreement in or about the manner and forms of building the said new county gaol, It is ordered; by this Court and all and every the Justices assembled at this present Session have approved of, resolved and agreed that the said new county gaol to be built shall be built with a court room, and after the manner and forms and according to the draught plan and modell prepared by the county, \_\_\_\_\_

<sup>1</sup> This price for bricks compares well with the price obtaining at Winslow some 20 years earlier, where the average paid for over a million bricks was. 17s. 5¼d. (See " Records of Bucks," XI., 412.)

and afterwards inspected and approved of by Sir John Vanbrugh at the county charge, now in the hands of Dr. Busby, the same appearing to be for the most service, advantage and honour of this county."

**Apparently the building proceeded under the supervision of Mr. Bernard Turney, and at Easter, 1723, Mr. Francis Ligo, the younger, who was acting as treasurer of the monies raised for the building, was ordered to attend upon the Duke of Wharton and Mr. Hampden to receive payment<sup>2</sup> on their promissory notes of £500 each towards the cost.**

At Midsummer of that year the records state " that the monies which had already been raised for building the new Gaol had been laid out and expended in and about the said building, and that unless more monies be speedily raised for carrying on the said work the same must stand still and lie unfinished," and an order was made for raising a further rate of 2d. in the £ (£1,967 9s, 11d.).

Evidently some difficulty was experienced in raising the rates for the purpose, as we find at Midsummer, 1724, an Order being issued " for the more effectual levying of the Gaol Tax," as complaint had been made that several persons who had been assessed had refused to pay their proportion, **and at Michaelmas the same year Mr. Francis Neale, the Clerk of the Peace, was ordered to take counsel's opinion as to the best method of proceeding against these defaulters.**

**At the end of 1724 we find in the records a complete financial statement as to the progress of the building, which, after being extracted from the legal phraseology and verbiage, is as follows:—**

|  | £     | s. | d. | £      | s. | d. |
|--|-------|----|----|--------|----|----|
| Amount ordered to be raised at<br>5d. in the £                 | 4,918 | 12 | 9  |        |    |    |
| Amount paid out by Mr. Ligo for<br>work and materials provided |       |    |    | 4,291  | 0  | 11 |
| Rates in arrear  |       |    |    | 355    | 2  | 4  |
| Balance in hand  |       |    |    | 272    | 9  | 6  |
|  |       |    |    | £4,918 | 12 | 9  |

<sup>2</sup> It may be supposed that this was not an easy task; in fact, there is no record of these sums ever being actually paid. The Duke went abroad about this time after his estates had been vested in trustees, under a decree of the Court of Chancery, and Richard Hampden, who had been Treasurer of the Navy, relinquished that office in 1720, when there was found to be a deficiency of £73,707 in his accounts, and his estates were also vested in trustees under a special Act of Parliament (12 Geo. I., c. 28).

|  | £      | s. | d. |
|--|--------|----|----|
| Balance in hand  | 272    | 9  | 6  |
| Paid by the Three Hundreds of Newport at<br>this Session on account of rates in arrear | 14     | 15 | 3  |
|  | <hr/>  |    |    |
|  | £287   | 4  | 9  |
| The following payments were authorised out of<br>the balance in hand (£287 4s. 9d.) :— |        |    |    |
|  | £      | s. | d. |
| To Mr. Ligo for his work in connection with<br>the matter                              | 217    | 6  | 10 |
| „ Mr. Thomas Reed, on account  | 5      | 13 | 10 |
| „ Mr. John Watts, the Plumber, on account  | 50     | 0  | 0  |
| „ Mr. Thomas Harris (? the designer), on<br>account                                    | 14     | 4  | 0  |
|  | <hr/>  |    |    |
|  | £287   | 4  | 8  |
|  | <hr/>  |    |    |
| Workmen's bills remaining unpaid   | £1,860 | 0  | 9  |

It would seem that the building remained in abeyance after the end of 1724, as no more money was raised, although nearly £2,000 was outstanding in unpaid bills, and it is extraordinary to find that for nearly eighteen months no further reference is made to it in the records of the Court.

At Easter, 1726, however, it is stated that application was made to the Court " by several workmen in behalf of themselves and several other persons who have been employed in building a new County Gaol at Aylesbury in this County, showing that there were many and great sums of money due and owing to them from this County for work by them respectively done and performed and for materials they had found and provided in and about the said building, and praying their case might be taken into consideration."

The Court ordered that full accounts should be laid before them at their next Session, showing what bills remained unpaid, together with estimates of the cost for finishing the Gaol, in order that they might make an Order to raise the necessary amount of money.

The following memorandum appears in the records for this Session:—

" Memorandum at this Session 'tis desired by the several Justices of the Peace assembled at this present Session that his Grace the Duke of Bridgewater be pleased to order the Clerk of the Peace to send Notices to all the acting

Justices of the Peace within this County to meet at the next General Quarter Session of the Peace to be holden for this County to consider of proper measures to be taken for finishing the County Gaol now erecting and that such meeting be at Aylesbury."

It seems that there was some legal difficulty in raising any more money by a county rate.

At the following Session, at Midsummer, 1726, the Clerk of the Peace was ordered to prepare a petition for obtaining an Act of Parliament for obviating and removing all difficulties, " and for the better and more easy levying in such manner as the Land Tax the money already assessed and also what further sums shall be found necessary to be raised for the New Building finishing and compleating the Gaol or prison and Court Room now erecting at Aylesbury in this County."

The Act of Parliament was not obtained for another eleven years, being finally passed in 1737. The official reference of the Act is 10 Geo. II, cap. 10, and it is entitled " An Act to empower the Justices of the Peace for the County of Bucks, to raise money to discharge the Debts incurred on account of building a Gaol and Court Rooms, and for finishing the same for the use of the County."

Evidently the Act was only procured after exhaustive inquiries by Parliament and the Committee of the House, and there is in the Record Room the original report, dated 17th July, 1731, signed by Thomas Ingoldesby, Henry Crosse and Charles Pilsworth,<sup>3</sup> which was prepared in pursuance of a request made by a Committee of Parliament. This report shows that the following was at that date the financial position :—

|   | £      | s. | d.  |
|---|--------|----|-----|
| Amount raised by rate and paid for building<br>the gaol | 4,578  | 5  | 7¾  |
| Amount due to workmen and remaining<br>unpaid           | 1,907  | 15 | 3½  |
| Estimated cost of finishing the work                    | 1,129  | 13 | 10½ |
|   | <hr/>  |    |     |
| Total   | £7,615 | 14 | 9¾  |

<sup>3</sup> Thomas Ingoldesby, of Waldrige, Dinton, was grandson of the regicide; he was High Sheriff 1720, and M.P. for Aylesbury in 1731, the year of this report. Henry Crosse was of Bledlow; His father was High Sheriff 1693; Henry's grand-daughter married Samuel Whitbread. Charles Pilsworth, of Oving, was a barrister and M.P. for Aylesbury, 1741, in "which year he died; he married Parnell, the daughter of Francis Tyringham, of Nether Winchendon.

It is also shown that £340 7s. 1¾d. was outstanding in respect of unpaid rates.

The Committee seem to have gone very deeply into the accounts and report "Mr. Graham the carpenter" for not returning scaffold-poles to the value of 10s. They conclude by saying that the "rates and prices charged by the creditors are reasonable and usuall for such kinds of work and materials except the rates for the iron work, and that is charged at 50s. per hundred, which is but 16d. per hundred short of 5½d. per pound, and we think it too much for such heavy work." This criticism seems justified, for charges at Winslow about 1700 were 2½d. and 3d. per lb. for window-bars, and spikes and bolts were 4d. per lb. (See "Records," XI, 422.)

The Schedule attached to this report shows that the fee paid to Sir John Vanbrugh was twenty guineas. Amongst the other "extraordinary charges" were the following:—

|  | £   | s. | d. |
|--|-----|----|----|
| Mr. Brandon's bill for a modell  | 15  | 0  | 0  |
| Mr. Harris (Surveyor) — for draughts and<br>modell   | 21  | 0  | 0  |
| The same—for upwards of two years surveyor-<br>ship  | 100 | 0  | 0  |
| Mr. Read (Clerk of the Works)—For two years<br>clerkship, keeping an account of timber,<br>bricks, and, other materials delivered and to<br>see them duely applied | 100 | 0  | 0  |
| The same — Two journeys to London and<br>charges attending parliament about peticon  | 4   | 4  | 0  |
| Mr. Ligo (Treasurer)—<br>Expended at severall meetings with the<br>Gentlemen   | 75  | 3  | 10 |
| For attending them above sixty meetings  | 31  | 10 | 0  |
| Servant and horse to summons them  | 14  | 10 | 0  |
| Attending Mr. Hampden for his 500£ which<br>he promised to give towards the building   | 2   | 2  | 0  |

Another Schedule furnishes an estimate for finishing the "goale and Court Rooms "; the specification for the panelling is very full and precise.:

Joiners work against the walls to be done with right wainscott very well matched, free from stains, framing to be inch ½ thick and pannills inch ¼ thick, rabetted behind to lay flush with the framing and the foreside of the framing to be wrought with a ¾ quarter board, and the pannills to be raised with a bead in the raising and to be 7 foot in height, with a fuse pannell at the top 8 inches



wide, and handsomely furnished with a small oak post moulding. Circular work at the back of the Justices &c. to be 4 feet high and handsomely furnished, done in the same manner as the wall work and with the same sort of framing and pannills, and free from stains. Benches **and bracketts to be inch ½ right wainscott.** The wainscott about the pound and Jury Boxes to be done in the same manner as the wall work and about five feet high with benches and bracketts 1½ inch wainscott. Two pair of out doors made circular at top and thickness of 2 inch right wainscott glewd and screwd together quarter round and pannills raised both sides. Close wainscott all round the great stairs, at the landing made 3 feet high. 2 Judges' seats to be worth 30£ each carving included. King's Arms not considered in this work. All this works to be performed in a good and workmanlike manner will cost about £612 17 0.

A minute of the Midsummer Session, 1737, records the placing of certain contracts for some of this work; Watts, of Wycombe, obtained the contract to lay "the pavement under the piazza of the said goale with the best Portland Stone at one shilling and two pence by the foot, superficial measure, and also to lay steps of the best Portland stone at 3s. 6d. by the foot running measure." The last-named price agrees with the estimate of 1731, but the estimate for the paving does not agree, possibly because it was based on the cost per foot run instead of per square foot.

It is evident that no further work had been done to the building since 1724, and that the outstanding accounts were still unpaid in 1731, seven years later; in fact, they were not paid until 1737, after the Act was passed, by which time a number of the unfortunate creditors had died, so that the amounts had to be paid to their executors.

The preamble of the Act of 1737 contains the following:— "Whereas ..... very considerable Progress hath been made in such Buildings, but the same not having been perfected and finished, the said Buildings have not only thereby sustained great damage, but the greatest Part thereof remains unservice-able ; And whereas several Sums of Money are justly due to several Workmen, poor Labourers, and others who were employed in and furnished Materials for the said Buildings, for Want of which Money they and their Families are much impoverished; and a further sum is also wanting, and necessary to finish and compleat the said Buildings for the use and Accommodation of the said County, all which Monies cannot be raised without the Assistance of Parliament,".

This Act authorised the Magistrates of the County to raise a rate not exceeding 4d. in the £ for paying the outstanding accounts and finishing the Gaol, and giving them power to make contracts with builders, etc., for finishing: the. work. The town of Buckingham was specially exempted from the rate on the ground that they had already provided a gaol them-selves.<sup>4</sup>

Section 4 of the Act provides as follows:—

" That the soil and ground so purchased as aforesaid, and the said Gaol, Court Rooms, Buildings, and other Conveniences thereon erected, and which shall be erected, shall for ever hereafter be deemed and taken to be the Ground, Common Gaol, and Buildings of the said County."

As a result of the passing of this Act the magistrates at the Midsummer Sessions, 1737, ordered the sum of £3,916 11s. 6d. to be raised by rate.

An agreement is also recorded with Mr. Watts, of Wycombe, Stonemason, " to lay the pavement under the piazza, of the said Gaol with the best Portland Stone at s1/2 by the foot superficial measure, and also to lay steps of the best Portland Stone containing 13 inches clear in the tread at s3/6 by the foot running measure."

An agreement was also made with Edward Bayliss, of Helmdon, Northampton, to do all the pavement work at the rate of 9d per-foot super measure with Helmdon hardstone, also with Thomas Harris, Robert Hickman and William Grassum, carpenters, to lay the floors and stairs.

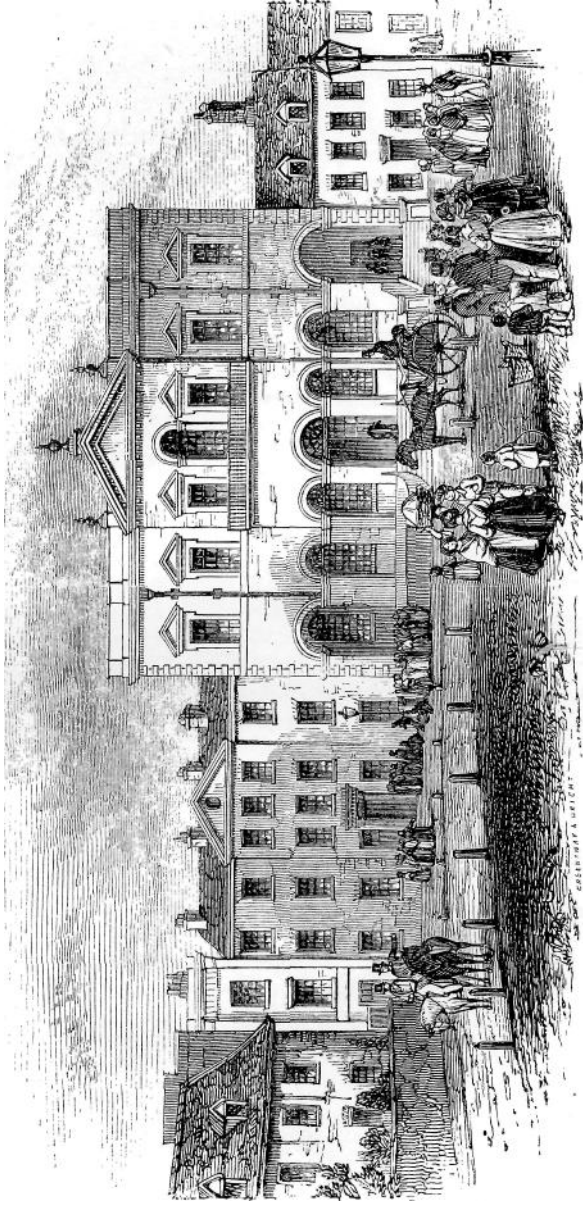
At the next Session, Michaelmas, 1737, appears a list of the debts which had been owing for thirteen years, amounting to nearly £2,000, and were at last ordered to be paid. In no less than 12 cases the amount due had to be paid to the executors of the workmen, who had died since doing the work.

It seems that the work was not finally completed until 1740, for at the end of 1739 we find contracts recorded for wainscoting the Grand Jury Room with deal and flooring the Petty Jury and Grand Jury rooms, the former with oak and the latter with deal.

There does not seem to be any record of any formal opening of the building. Probably it was put into use gradually as the various parts were completed, but it is at least clear that the work was spread over a period of 20 years from start to finish, and that for 13 years in the middle of that period the building

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<sup>4</sup> The Midsummer Assizes were held at Buckingham, 1724-1728, and in 1748 an Act was obtained to confirm this. The Midsummer Assizes were not held again in Aylesbury until 1849.



COUNTY HALL IN 1845. (From Illustrated London News.)

[Note the people round the Gaol entrance; also the central balcony where public hangings took place.]

was left in an unfinished state—at least as far as the County Hall was concerned. It appears that the actual Gaol was finished first and the County Hall and Court Rooms were the parts of the building that were left incomplete.

The total cost seems to have been, in the neighbourhood of £9,000.

Originally the building, which formed the frontage of the County Gaol, had three entrances, but the one at the eastern end which formed the passage to the Gaol at the rear, and was immediately under the office of the Clerk of the Peace, is now closed, and a window appears in its place.

The central entrance leads to the office of the Clerk of the Peace, and what was formerly the Magistrates' chamber but is now used by the Clerk of the Peace, for the work of the registration of electors.

The western entrance leads up by a broad and fine oak staircase to the public Courts. The doors for both entrances are very massive, and were evidently intended to be, if necessary, strong enough to repel the attacks of riotous mobs. Inspection of the heavy inner door at the central entrance shows that it was fitted with armour plating and was loop-holed so that muskets could be fired through it. These holes are now plugged with wood and painted over.

Under the centre window on the first floor a balcony was formerly fixed, which was for many years used for public hangings. Here criminals were executed in the presence of large crowds assembled in the Market Square. The last occasion when this took place was on the 28th March, 1845, **when a notorious murderer named John Tawell, of Slough**, was executed in the presence of a crowd which, we are told, contained many who had travelled long distances to be present.<sup>5</sup> Subsequent to this public executions took place outside the new County Gaol, which was opened in 1847 on Bierton Hill.

The illustration shows the exterior of the building, as it appeared at this time, with the White Hart Hotel adjoining. The balcony referred to is clearly shown under the central window.

The County Hall was bounded on the east by the **White Hart Hotel, which stood on the site now occupied by the Town Hall** and the archway leading to it; the grounds of the White Hart ran back a considerable distance over the whole of the

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<sup>5</sup> The great point was that this was the first occasion on which telegraphy was used for securing the arrest of a suspect; but the man's whole life was a strange, if very sordid, one, and a full account of it is given by J. K. Fowler: "Echoes of Old County Life," p. 125-130.

ground now occupied by the cattle market, and adjoined the gaol premises for the whole of their length as far as the Bear Brook. The hotel was demolished in 1864, when the present Town Hall was built and opened as a corn exchange by the Aylesbury Market Company.

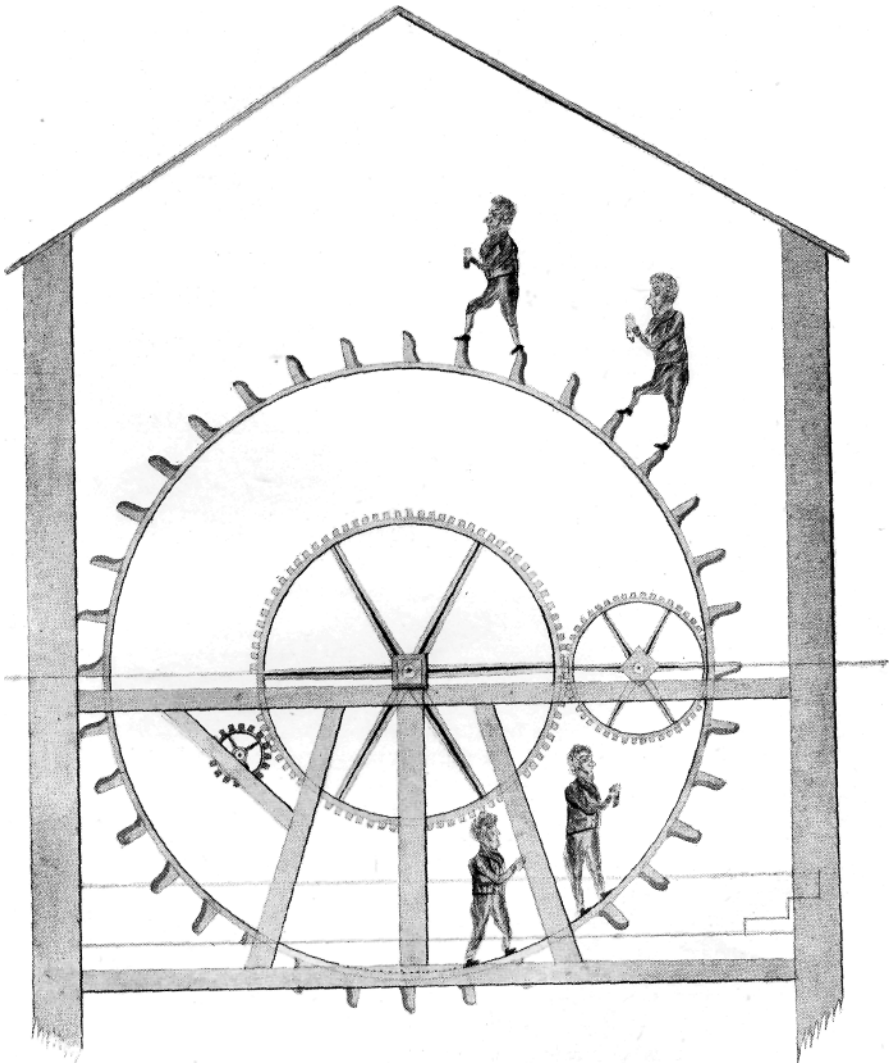
It will thus be seen that the grounds of the gaol were on a very narrow frontage, closed in as they were by the White Hart garden on the one side and the backs of the houses in Walton Street on the other, and this was afterwards found to be most inconvenient from the point of view of proper super-vision of the prisoners.

The entrance to the gaol was, as already shown, by a narrow passage under the offices of the Clerk of the Peace of the County. Within this entrance were two sets of gates of open ironwork, placed some yards apart, with the turnkey's lodge between. There were no other buildings on the left, the whole of the rest of the gaol being on the right-hand side. First **came the gaoler's office, consisting of parlour and kitchen**; then an entrance to the felons' court and felons' hall. Next came the debtors' hall and debtors' court, and beyond that again was what was first known as the House of Correction and used for misdemeanants, but was afterwards used as the women's prison. Further to the right of this was what was known as the "Datchet" side, consisting of a day room and open court, which, according to Gibbs, the Aylesbury historian, was generally used for the confinement of poachers and was called "The Datchet" owing to the number of poachers who came from that part of the county.

The cells were immediately under the inner court, as they still are, and comprised a set of no less than five condemned cells, presumably for those sentenced to capital punishment, and a dark cell which apparently had no window and was nothing more or less than a dungeon; this was condemned as unfit for use early in the nineteenth century.

When originally built the gaol contained no hospital or chapel. Services were conducted, we are told, in the County Hall, probably in the present Council Chamber or Second Court. The townspeople were admitted to these services, and **a collection was usually made, the proceeds, according to Gibbs,** being divided amongst the debtors and prisoners. He tells us that this arrangement resulted in a full attendance of the inmates of the prison! A chapel and an infirmary were built about 1825.

One of the difficulties with which the prison authorities had to contend was that of providing sufficient hard labour for the convicts within so confined a space. For this purpose a huge



SECTION OF TREADMILL (from original drawing.)  
[Each man is grasping a horizontal bar, shown in section. It is seen how the wheel was manned inside and outside simultaneously.]

treadmill was erected, with a wheel of 20ft. diameter. One **gang worked inside the wheel while a similar number** occupied the top of it. (See illustration.) These gangs worked by shifts of twenty minutes at work and twenty minutes, at rest. The **wheel helped to grind corn and pump water, but its** construction proved to be dangerous, and several fatal accidents occurred when the prisoners were working it, as well as minor injuries being inflicted. The use of the wheel was condemned by the Inspectors of Prisons in 1841, when a very adverse report was made upon the whole building. This resulted in the magis-trates purchasing a new site on Bierton Hill in 1844, upon which a new gaol, now the Borstal Institution, was erected and opened in 1847.

There are many amusing anecdotes of the doings of the prisoners in the old days. Gibbs tells us that one of the first Acts of Parliament passed for the reformation of prison discipline in England prohibited the admission of spirits or liquor within the gates of gaols. This was overcome at Ayles-bury owing to the proximity of the prison to the White Hart Inn, and a little window in the White Hart premises opening into the prison yard was used for admitting beer and spirits without its having to pass the prison gates, so that the Act of Parliament was evaded!

Again, the rear of the gaol abutted on the Bear Inn, and it was no unusual thing to meet a prisoner in the inn drinking his beer. Indeed, beer was regularly allowed to such prisoners as could pay for it. The White Hart and the George supplied **it in alternate weeks, the potboys from these two hotels** calling regularly on the prisoners three times a day for orders, which naturally had to be prepaid.

In those days people who were unable to pay their debts, instead of going bankrupt and so evading payment as they do **now, were confined in prison indefinitely until they were able** to pay, and quite a large proportion of the prisoners in the county gaol, who usually averaged something like 200, were debtors. **They were, however, allowed special privileges which were** not enjoyed by those who had been convicted of crime, and the debtors were given "the liberty of the stones"—that is to say, the privilege of parading in front of the County Hall within the boundary posts, where they could talk freely with their friends and the public. The gaoler was, of course, responsible if any escaped, and the story is told that one night after the debtors had been sitting out on the County Hall steps enjoying the evening rather later than usual the gaoler said, "Look ye here, gentlemen, you must come in earlier, or I'll lock you all out."

The prisoners who behaved themselves well were allowed many privileges, and were permitted to leave the prison to work, no doubt owing to the difficulty already mentioned of supplying sufficient hard labour for them inside the prison.

Mr. Acton Chaplin, who was the Clerk of the Peace at the beginning of the nineteenth century, lived at that time at the **Old House in Walton Street, close to the prison, and** employed prisoners in his garden there. The lake which is still in the garden was excavated by convict labour, and other earthworks were done.

The Governor of the prison also employed prisoners in his garden and stables, apparently with considerable success, for we are told that he won many prizes at local horticultural shows, although, as was pointed out to him somewhat forcibly in a report by the Inspectors of Prisons, he kept no paid gardener or groom.

**Prisoners were also sometimes allowed to act as** handymen at the White Hart, and in one case a prisoner, after he had been discharged, waited on the proprietor and presented his account for services rendered during his imprisonment.<sup>6</sup>

On the demolition of the old gaol in 1847, the site became available for the erection of other county buildings, and a few years later the Judges Lodgings were built.

The Council Chamber was not always divided from the lobby outside by the present permanent partition, but this was formerly moveable, so that the whole could be used as one large hall. Here the Parliamentary elections were held before **the Ballot Acts were passed, and voters had to come and** record their votes verbally before the Returning Officer, stating their qualifications as electors. In those days an election frequently lasted for more than a week, although the number of qualified electors was only a fraction of the population, as the vote was practically confined to owners of freehold land.

After the County Council came into existence in 1888, the present offices in rear of the County Hall were erected to accommodate the County Surveyor, the Inspector of Weights and Measures and the Education Staff. These have since become inadequate, even for that portion of the staff, and the County Surveyor has had to move to larger offices' hired in the town.

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<sup>6</sup> See J. K. Fowler's "Echoes of Old County Life," p. 117.