

The Landmark Trust

THE HOUSE OF CORRECTION, FOLKINGHAM, LINCOLNSHIRE

In 1982, the House of Correction was acquired by the Landmark Trust, a charity which rescues historic buildings in distress and gives them a new life by letting them for holidays. Its previous owners were Sir Arthur and Lady Petersen, who had rescued the building from demolition in 1965. By passing it on to Landmark, they both gave it a secure future and also ensured that it would be appreciated by all those people who now stay in it. Like many buildings cared for by Landmark, the House of Correction as we see it today is a fragment of a much larger building. This imposing structure was once the gateway to a prison capable of accommodating up to seventy wrongdoers. The inmates were not hardened criminals, however. Most of them were guilty of minor felonies and misdemeanours - petty theft, disorderly conduct or that once serious offence of idleness, which as all knew led rapidly to subversion.

There had been a House of Correction in Folkingham, serving parts of Kesteven, since 1609. This original building, now two houses in the market place, had four cells and a small yard for exercise. Here, in a system devised by the Elizabethans, the 'idle poor' were confined and put to work to teach them better ways. But while the corrective power of hard labour lay behind the original Houses of Correction (also known as Bridewells after the first to be founded in a former royal palace in London), they soon merged with ordinary gaols or lock-ups. This is what the one in Folkingham had become when it was visited by an inspector in 1774. His report was damning: not only was it damp and cramped, but there was no pump and no sewer. When another report of 1802 told the same story, plans were made for its replacement.

Work began on a new House of Correction in 1808. It was built on the site of the great castle of the de Gaunts and the de Beaumonts which had been abandoned since the sixteenth century. The moated inner ward lent itself exactly to the new strongly walled compound. The entrance seems to have been quite humble, however - an opening in the brick outer wall with the Turnkey's lodge just inside. The Governor's house lay beyond that, on the far side of which was the airing yard for the prisoners, surrounded by the prison buildings themselves.

An eighteenth century writer declared that prisons should be depressing by reason of their function, with civil prisons expressing misery while criminal ones should evoke actual horror: "let there be deepest shade, cavernous entrances, terrifying inscriptions". The first entrance apparently did not get the message across strongly enough. In 1825, a gifted local architect, Bryan Browning, was commissioned to build a new gatehouse. Browning had clearly studied neo-classical architects such as the Frenchman Ledoux, who published designs which were full of strength and drama. He was no doubt familiar too with the work of Vanbrugh, particularly his military buildings. As this gatehouse shows, Browning had undoubtedly learned how to give power to a design by the use of mass and form in a way that must have sent the hearts of new inmates plummeting into their boots.

The regime inside was still based on the original lines of reform through hard treatment and hard labour - a short, sharp shock. Bare boards to sleep on, bread and gruel to eat and work at a treadmill or stone-breaking were standard for felons undergoing a short sentence. Women worked in the laundry or picked oakum (recycling old, tarry ropes to use as caulking between ships' timbers). For all there was a daily chapel service.

The Landmark Trust Shottesbrooke Maidenhead Berkshire SL6 3SW
Charity registered in England & Wales 243312 and Scotland SC039205

Bookings 01628 825925 Office 01628 825920 Facsimile 01628 825417 Website www.landmarktrust.org.uk

The House of Correction closed in 1878. Two years later it was sold to a builder who pulled down the outer wall and turned the prison buildings into cottages. In the 1930s the gatehouse was also turned into a house, when a brick addition was made at the back. In the 1960s the cottages were declared unfit and were demolished. It was only through the intervention of the Petersens that Browning's monumental gateway did not suffer the same fate.

RESTORATION BY THE LANDMARK TRUST

When the Landmark Trust took on the House of Correction it had been lived in as a house for fifty years, with a 1930s brick addition at the back which doubled it in size. Landmark and architect for the restoration, Philip Jebb, felt that it was too much of an anticlimax when compared to the front. It was therefore agreed to take down the addition in order to restore the gatehouse to its original form.

Some sort of addition was still desirable, however, to link the two sides of the gatehouse. Examination of early plans of the building and a description of it in 1825 provided the answer, together with evidence found in the rear wall. It was clear that when the new gatehouse was built it backed onto the existing prison wall and Turnkey's lodge, which had one room on each side of the entrance, with a water cistern above. The new addition followed the same plan and comes as close to the original as is feasible without photographic or other visual evidence. Most importantly, it respects Bryan Browning's design, in that the rear pediment rises up over the reinstated plain brick and stone coping of the wall, as it originally did.

Bricks from the demolished addition were used to form the new back wall and the stones forming the arch of the back door were also taken from the addition, as they had no doubt been taken from one of the former prison buildings in the 1930s - perhaps even the Turnkey's lodge itself. In addition to this, the roof was repaired and new windows and doors provided. On the side elevations, outer doors were fitted to the ground floor windows to recall the original use of the rooms inside as the Governor's stable and coach house.

Some rearrangement was needed inside to make the new accommodation work. With the 1930s addition had gone the only stair from ground to first floor. Two new stairs were built therefore, one running all the way from the new kitchen to the top room via the new bathroom, the other from the sitting room to the bedroom above it. The floor levels were changed too, making the ground floor rooms slightly lower and those on the first floor taller. Over the arch the floor was raised a little to give a better view out of the window. In the sitting room an existing fireplace was opened up.

The restoration was completed in 1986. It was a long held wish of Sir John Smith, the founder of Landmark, to rebuild the first lengths of the prison wall on either side of the gatehouse, to put it back in its proper frame. This formed a separate phase of work, which was carried out in 1991. New gates and fences, based on a photograph of the old ones, were put up at the same time. Both this and the main restoration were carried out to a very high standard by E. Bowman and Sons of Stamford.

The Landmark Trust is a building preservation charity that rescues historic buildings at risk and lets them for holidays. The House of Correction sleeps up to 4 people. To book the building or any other Landmark property for a holiday, please visit www.landmarktrust.org.uk