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COUNTY BUILDING IN DORSET

1660–1830

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The work of the justices of the peace as builders in Dorset is interesting for several reasons. All the major types of construction by English quarter sessions were done here during these years. Bridge building was considerable throughout the period, the gaol was erected in the 1780s and rebuilt in the early 1790s, the shire hall in 1795–97, and a pauper lunatic asylum at the end of the 1820s. The growth of population was slower than in counties with major industries or big towns. It rose from about 70,000 in 1660 to 114,452 in 1801 and 161,026 in 1831, as the economy was basically agricultural. Change has been relatively slow since that time. In consequence the building works, including nearly all the bridges, survive apart from most of the gaol. Further, the quarter sessions records are among the best county collections. The order and minute books together provide a complete coverage of events from the 1660s with earlier orders for 1625–39; and treasurers' accounts exist between 1739 and 1825, giving a full record of payments.

QUARTER SESSIONS

Quarter sessions was a court dealing with petty crime and breaches of the law, and was also the county administrative authority. It supervised the running of the poor law by parish overseers, handled vagrants, maintained transport by roads and bridges, and looked after prisons and their inmates. It also handled much regulatory business, seeing to the enforcement of statutes. Business grew enormously, particularly between 1770 and 1830 on

account of growing population, greater administrative efficiency, higher living standards, and the increased willingness of the justices to raise the county rates. The number of justices more than doubled by the 1820s. Under an Act of 1531 bridges were their responsibility if not under the care of parishes, corporations, trusts or individual landowners, and after a legal judgment of 1780 the number each county handled grew. They spent money on the county gaol, which housed debtors, prisoners awaiting trial and sentence, and, especially from about 1780, those undergoing terms of imprisonment. Sessions were also legally responsible for smaller prisons called houses of correction or bridewells, used to incarcerate and give work to vagrants and minor offenders. Some counties rebuilt their gaol and houses of correction between 1660 and 1780, and all re-erected or altered them in a larger, purpose-built form during the next fifty years. Shire halls were needed to hold sessions and assizes, and from the 1770s greater business and rising standards of comfort increased the number of new buildings. From 1808 sessions were allowed to build pauper lunatic asylums, and some built and owned judges' lodgings in the 1810s and 1820s. Expenditure was paid for first by several rates collected by high constables, who were sometimes slow in collecting and handing the money to the county treasurers. After an Act of 1739 a single rate was deducted from parish poor law assessments, which smoothed collection.¹

Until 1825 Dorset Sessions were held at Blandford (Epiphany), Sherborne (Easter), Shaftesbury (Midsummer) and Bridport

(Michaelmas), with a few justices attending adjourned Sessions at Dorchester for particular business. Sherborne and Shaftesbury lie near the northern county border and Bridport on the coast in the west. Blandford and Dorchester, the county town where assizes were also held, are in more central locations. Travelling difficulties explain the holding of sessions in various places. During the later seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries between three and fifteen justices attended; an average of eight or nine met at the general sessions held formally, with one or two at the adjournments at an inn, where matters could be handled over refreshment.²

THE JUSTICES OF THE PEACE

Justices were among gentry with the largest estates, often held for at least several generations in the male or female line. Some had been trained as lawyers or had attended Oxford or Cambridge. Sometimes they were justices for 20 or 30 years. In the 1660s and 1670s they included former Royalists whose landed wealth had suffered as a consequence. In the decade 1664–73, when there were important bridge works, justices attending meetings usually lived all over the county.³ George Browne, ‘gentleman’ of Forston, Charminster, three miles north-west of Dorchester (d. 1677) attended all courts except Easter 1671.⁴ Henry Whitaker (1623–96) lived at Motcombe near Shaftesbury.⁵ Matthew Davys (1595–1678), of Chicks Grove, Tisbury and Shaftesbury, was trained at the Middle Temple, and had been an MP and a Cavalier who had had to compound.⁶ William Okeden (d. 1696) lived in a large mansion at More Crichel five miles east of Blandford, where he owned farmland which his family had acquired by a marriage with the heiress of the Uvedale family in 1598.⁷ Robert Seymer, who lived in a stone mansion at Hanford, north-west of Blandford, built by an ancestor, also owned property at Stoke Wake and near Stowminster Newton.⁸

Another justice was John Tregonwell (1625–80), a former Royalist, who lived at Milton Abbey, seven miles north-east of Dorchester, the last Tregonwell to own the manor and property near Abbotsbury on the coast.⁹

Apart from difficulties in rate collection by the high constables, there were also difficulties in the keeping of proper financial records. At Easter Sessions at Sherborne in 1738 it was reported that the six treasurers and deputy treasurers had not passed their accounts for six years and some had died.¹⁰ In the late 1720s and early 1730s, when Longham bridge was rebuilt, all the justices were gentry (untitled) and there were still no clergy.¹¹ The most frequent attender, Richard Bingham (1666–1734), lived near Melcombe Horsey seven miles north of Dorchester. He was a justice for over 40 years and also an MP for Bridport and Dorset; the family had been ‘seated here [at Bingham’s Melcombe] several ages’, and the house dated from about 1555.¹² Another justice who often attended was Richard Brodrepp of Mapperton, near Beaminster (1673–1737); his house had been built by a Morgan ancestor in the late sixteenth century and he improved it: according to Hutchins, ‘there were . . . in the old parlour and hall a great number of the arms, impalements, and quarterings of the Morgans, carved on wood or stone, or painted in glass’. The family were considerable landowners in the vicinity. His nephew Richard of Mapperton (d. 1774) extended the estate, was a trained lawyer, justice and chairman of Sessions.¹³ A Henry Whitaker of Motcombe and William Okeden of More Crichel were also among the justices at this time.¹⁴

To some extent efficiency improved in the last quarter of the century as business grew. There were regular chairmen from the 1770s, and the use of bridge, gaol and finance committees for particular purposes developed before 1800. On the other hand the Court’s experiment in 1790 of making justices responsible for the repair of bridges in their area does not seem to have answered.¹⁵ The number

of justices at sessions stayed the same until the 1780s,¹⁶ unlike in some other counties such as Gloucestershire where it grew, and despite rising interest in sessions work, shown for example in greater willingness to spend money on building, which was partly the consequence of rising incomes from farm rents in the later eighteenth century. As before, the majority came from long-established families and were among the larger landowners. In the 1780s, when two county gaols were erected, the chairman was Anthony Chapman, who bought property at Longburton near Sherborne and at Tarrant Gunville near Blandford, on both of which he built a mansion; Gunville Manor at Tarrant Gunville was later sold to Josiah Wedgwood, junior.¹⁷ Another active magistrate was William Toogood, also a chairman when the Sessions were at Sherborne, who lived in a new mansion near the town at Newwell Water; two cousins were local clergy, the sons of a rich Sherborne mercer.¹⁸ A long-serving justice, and the last of his family was Francis J. Browne (d. 1827), of Frampton, near Dorchester, a descendant of the seventeenth-century justice; the estates which his father George had bought as well as inherited made him possibly the largest landlord in Dorset.¹⁹ Two more magistrates were George Gould, the descendant of a Dorchester attorney (heir of a Countess of Abingdon) and a local clergyman, who had inherited estates at Fleet, where he had an 837-acre farm, Upway, Portisham and West Mills, all south of Dorchester, and his brother-in-law the baronet Sir John Smith of Sydling St Nicholas, six miles north-west of the county town.²⁰ The Brodrepp estates near Beaminster and in Somerset had descended by marriage to Sir William Oglander, baronet, of a family from Brading, Isle of Wight, who was also a justice. William Morton Pitt (d. 1836), closely involved with the gaol building in the early 1790s, and responsible for its workshops, also attended Sessions, his estates being at Kingston Maurward, a mile east of Dorchester.²¹

By this period clerical justices were a substantial minority, as they were to remain when the number of justices increased in the early nineteenth century. As in other counties clergy were becoming wealthier as higher corn prices drove up incomes from tithes and glebes; mixing with gentry became normal and more clergy were younger sons or other relatives of landowners. Their education and devotion to duty made them useful on the Bench. Out of 26 justices attending in 1784–86 two were baronets, one the son of a peer, 14 esquires, and nine clergy.²²

Toogood, Browne, Gould and Pitt and other justices were to remain active as magistrates for many years. Toogood successfully controlled and dispersed a rioting mob peacefully in September 1800; Browne was a county MP who gave his mansion for a county lunatic asylum after his death; most notable was Pitt, a philanthropist who established schools, was a county MP, was to be chairman of the committee which set up the lunatic asylum after 1828, and whose *Thoughts on the Defence of these Kingdoms and the Raising of the Posse Comitatus* (1796) was used by the government.²³

From 1825 all principal sessions' meetings were held in Dorchester, because of greater business and probably improved roads. The number of justices at Sessions finally grew sharply. By the 1820s justices at meetings averaged 20 with 40 being the most. Between three and six attended adjournments. The clergy comprised a higher proportion than in the 1780s. The 61 justices attending in 1821–23 comprised two earls, seven baronets, a knight, 25 esquires and 26 clergy. Committees for the gaol and finance functioned regularly.²⁴

The most prominent justice of the 1810s and 1820s was a Tregonwell descendant, and brother-in-law of a local peer (the earl of Ilchester), James Frampton of Moreton, near Dorchester, where one ancestor had rebuilt the small family mansion about 1580 and another had re-erected it in stone in Palladian style in 1744; conservative and keen on social respect and deference, hard at Sessions

on petty criminals, he took a strong line with crowds during the Swing Riots and formed the Dorset Yeomanry (1830).²⁵ Another justice at this time, J. J. Farquharson, of Langton Long Blandford, was a great huntsman, Dorset being noted for fox hunting.²⁶ C. B. Wollaston, chairman of quarter sessions, barrister-at-law and recorder of Dorchester, was the son of a Dorchester doctor who was a younger son in a leading Leicestershire gentry family.²⁷ In their genteel ancestry, substantial estates and variety of interests the Dorset justices were typical of early nineteenth century magistrates.

COUNTY BRIDGES

Dorset is a county of average size, with several rivers which needed to be bridged for important roads. Its justices were raising and spending more money on bridges than many quarter sessions in the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries. Whereas the average expenditure per shire may have been £70 or £80 annually, over £4000 was spent in Dorset between 1660 and 1700.²⁸ Lists made in the 1720s record about 28 county bridges, of which 24 were stone.²⁹ There were a few more timber structures earlier. The stone bridges, were up to seven or eight arches and probably between eight and sixteen feet wide, being of medieval or sixteenth century origin. Stone building was dearer than timber, but more durable and needed less repair. New bridges typically cost at least several hundred pounds, and major repairs and alterations £50 upwards. Minor works costing £10 or £20 were done much more frequently. County responsibilities grew in the seventeenth century, with several bridges being adopted, including Blandford between 1631 and 1664, Sturminster Newton Castle, either 1638–39 or 1662, the Little Bridges there, 1673 and Sherford 1683.³⁰ On one or two occasions afterwards sessions were still doubtful as to whether they were responsible for a bridge. By 1700 new bridge work ended as the justices became increasingly opposed to more expenditure. County bridges

were particularly important over two rivers: on the Frome in south Dorset were Wareham South Bridge, Wool Bridge and the bridges near Dorchester. To the north on the Stour lay Longham, Welford, White Mill, Blandford and Harford Bridges. On the whole the justices handled the most important bridges. They were far outnumbered by the smaller ones in the care of parishes, local property owners, corporations and feoffees, and turnpike commissioners who presumably took them over from parishes and individuals in the later eighteenth century. In 1791 out of 438 stone bridges only 24 were a county responsibility, 252 being cared for by parishes, tithings, and hundreds, 97 by individuals, 24 by towns or trustees and 36 by turnpike commissioners.³¹

The earliest surviving sessions orders show considerable bridge expenditure between 1625 and 1639 and again in the 1660s. There were spasmodic works from 1625, reaching a peak in the later 1630s, when the Five Bridges, Canford and Julians Bridges all had several hundred pounds spent on them, Julians Bridge being rebuilt with eight arches.³² Between April 1664 and January 1674 £2,400 was ordered to be raised in rates for bridge works. It may reflect decay dating from the 1640s when the Civil war made rate collection difficult. At least 14 bridges were affected. The work was mainly repairs and improvements, the alterations including the raising of walls on each side of the bridge. At October Sessions 1667 a report stated that Welford bridge would cost £55 and White Mill bridge £60 to repair and erect walls three feet high, and Canford bridge ‘a great and publick bridge is in great decay and like to be very chargeable to the county without present remedy notwithstanding the late repaying thereof.’ Wool bridge (200 feet long) if repaired would cost £120, and Wareham North bridge (120 feet) £130. In the event the justices contracted for White Mill bridge at £250, and the final charge was £290.³³

One bridge was rebuilt in this decade, in 1674. The report on the old structure of Kingsmill bridge

showed the advantage of stone over timber building, and the growing need for bridges to take wheeled traffic. The timber footbridge was decayed, and two justices recommended a stone bridge wide enough for carts and carriages. This was earnestly requested by the neighbourhood. An inspection of the old bridge showed that most of the timber was perished and new timber was needed. None of the carpenters (not named in the records) they had asked would repair it for under £150 on account of the scarcity of timber. Masons said a stone cart bridge would cost £240, 'with all signifying the dangerousness of the ford (if it remained a footbridge) for ploughs who have occasion to pass that way which is not to be prevented without great prejudice to the mill below the ford'. The timber footbridge had been rebuilt in 1651 for £160 and since then £20 had been spent on repairs 'whereas (as they conceive) had it at that time byn made a cart bridge and built with stone it might in all probability have continued firme to this day without any charge to the county and if it would be now new built in that manner and forme as now it is with timber it would soone want reparacons by reason of the great water floods which sometimes flow over the said bridge'. A rate of £250 was voted for the new stone bridge, and the old timber and materials were to be sold.³⁴

From the mid-1670s bridge expenditure declined, probably because the major repairs had been completed. Rates totalled £960 between July 1675 and April 1683; £625 was raised between October 1687 and July 1697. Longham bridge was contracted to be built in timber by John and Richard Clapcott for £150 (4/10/1687); West Bridge, Sherborne was repaired for £79 and Wool Bridge for £50 (12/1/1697). Bridge works appear to have continued at this subdued rate in the 1700s and 1710s. The biggest recorded expenditures on a single bridge were £101 for Frampton bridge (10/4/1716) 'broke down last October through the violence of the waters', and £123 10s for Crawford bridge (12/1/1720).³⁶

The repair of Yeovil bridge cost £79 in 1720–1. Blandford bridge was rebuilt and repaired for £115 in 1726 by two masons (Thomas Oliver and James Collins) after it had 'lately fallen down', probably in part. In 1731 Oliver also repaired the north and south ends of Canford bridge which he had estimated at £116. There was great expenditure on Longham bridge at this time. The county began with repairs, building being resorted to later as a last resort on account of the cost. In 1725 Oliver and two carpenters repaired it for £101 10s, and Oliver received £43 more next year. There was more outlay in 1727–28. These works failed to make the bridge sound. At Easter Sessions 1728 the justices received an extraordinary petition from several counties, Southampton and 'other adjacent places' to the bridge, complaining about recent dangerous accidents, and stressing the need to repair or rebuild. No other English example of such a petition expressing widespread interest has been traced. As usual the Court told justices to inspect the bridge, consider whether to repair or rebuild, choose the materials and to get plans and estimates. After they reported back, and John Wagg of Ringwood and others (not named) employed for the purpose produced plans and estimates, it was decided to rebuild. Justices then met at Longham, inspected the bridge and its immediate past history, consulted 'able and experienced workmen' and decided to build a stone bridge of 13 arches according to a plan.³⁷ A contract was signed with Wagg for £2000. £250 was to be paid within a month, £250 when part of the bridge to the third arch was done, £250 more at Lady Day 1729, £500 at Midsummer and £500 at Michaelmas Sessions, and £250 on completion, payment by instalments being normal practice in the case of big works. It was one of the largest county bridges built in the early eighteenth century. Though much altered in 1792 and 1814, it survives.

In the mid-eighteenth century sizeable bridge works were few: repairs were made to Blandford, Wareham and Crawford bridges costing between

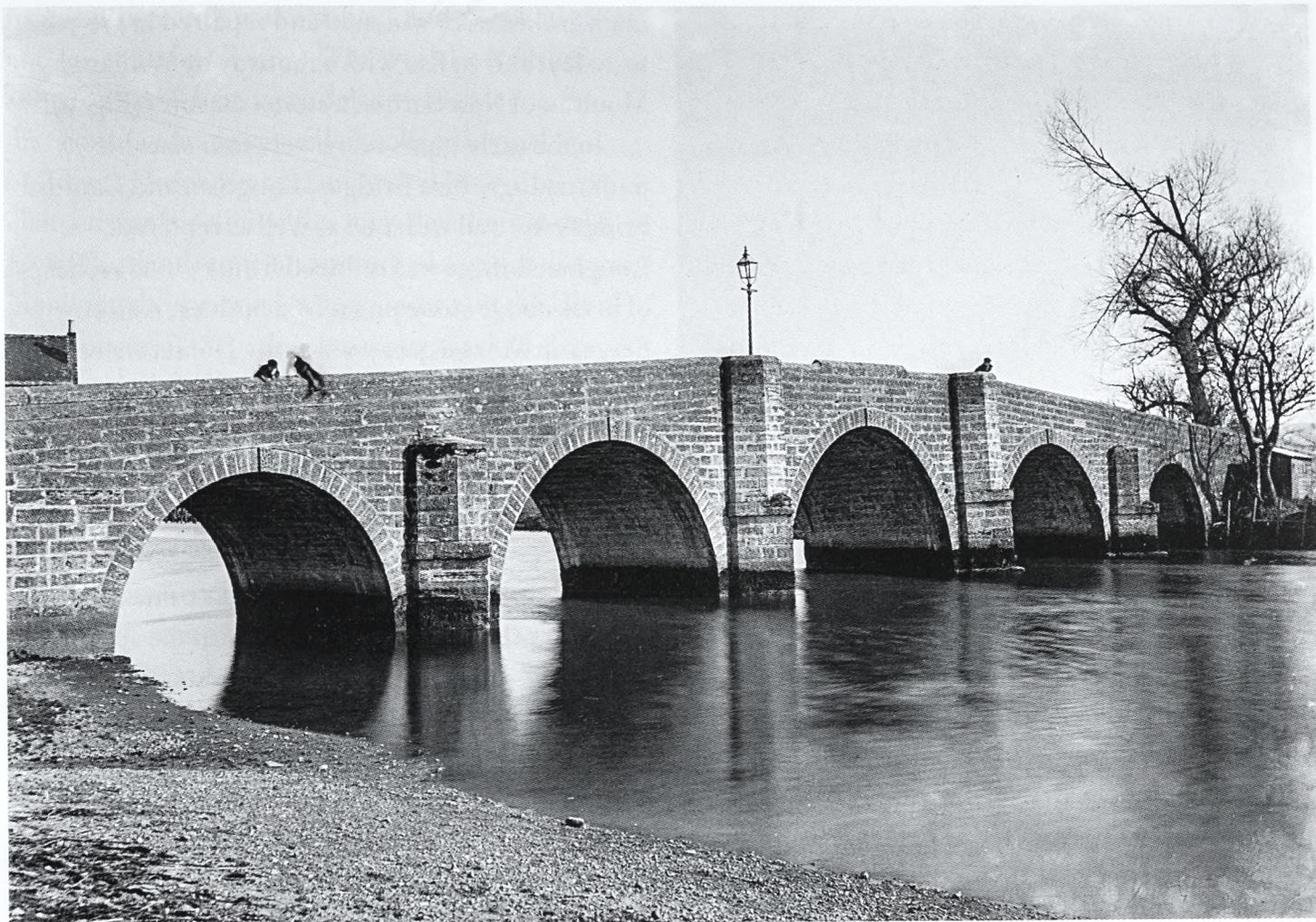


Figure 1. Wareham South bridge, Dorset, rebuilt 1775–8. *Royal Commission on Historical Monuments of England*.

£120 and £185 in the 1740s, 1750s and 1760s.³⁸ The subdued expenditure partly reflects reluctance to spend as the failure of farm rents to rise deterred the justices from raising rates, partly perhaps the benefit of earlier work. In general the steady but undramatic outlay of the previous century with its emphasis on repair reflects the durability of the stone bridges inherited from earlier centuries and the relatively slow growth of trade.

The normal practice was for sessions to ask two or three local justices to have a bridge repaired by local artisans. On at least one occasion, at Blandford Sessions in January 1731, the Court appointed a surveyor and craftsman to do all necessary bridge repairs according to his estimate.³⁹ After 1739 bridge and other building works were advertised in hand bills and newspapers to obtain the lowest tender.

From the 1770's expenditure on bridges became larger, reflecting both more bridges being rebuilt or repaired and the occasional very big outlay. Like other counties Dorset took over more bridges. Whereas 28 bridges were repaired by the county by 1730, in 1830 the number reached 60. There were two more in the 1790s, at least ten in the 1800s, five in the 1810s and 16 in the 1820s.⁴⁰ Trade was growing more rapidly and the science of bridge building improved with bridges being broader, with wider arches, stronger foundations and sometimes more convenient approaches.

The repair of the five-arch Wool bridge in 1770 was the dearest bridge work since the 1720s, but it was not altered in a major way. The chief craftsman was a stonemason, William Percy of Wimborne, who had just repaired Crawford bridge with James Percy, another stonemason. The rebuilding of



Figure 2. Blandford Bridge, of greensand, seen from the east. It was widened in 1783–84, by William Moulton.
Christopher Chalklin.

Wareham South bridge ranks with the repair and rebuilding of Canford bridge in 1809–13 as one of the two most costly works (in real terms) by the Dorset justices before 1830. The decay of the seven-arched bridge was presented at Easter Sessions 1775 and a bridge with five arches in Purbeck stone was built⁴¹ (Fig. 1). The two Blandford bridges of six

main arches were widened and repaired in 1783–84, to 20 feet and 24 feet with a footway by William Moulton of New Sarum, a stone-mason⁴² (Fig. 2).

In the early 1790s there were four sizeable undertakings. Five Bridges, Longham and Canford bridges were all widened as well as repaired; Longham bridge was reduced from 13 to 11 arches, of brick above stone piers, by a builder, Anthony Sergeant. More expensive was the Dorset share of the rebuilding of Yeovil bridge, of three stone arches, by Evan Owen and James Penny, for a contract of £900 and a total of £1,236. Between 1800 and 1808 eight more bridges were repaired or rebuilt costing between £156 and £255.⁴³

The great period of bridge works came in the six years after 1809. This coincided with the appointment, of a Bridge Engineer, John Dyson, in July 1809, with the obvious aim of improving the quality of the county's bridges, following the example of neighbouring Devon. Many counties, including also Wiltshire and Berkshire, increased bridge expenditure at this time, reflecting a national boom in transport and building construction. Canford



Figure 3. Canford Bridge, rebuilt 1775–8. *Royal Commission on Historical Monuments of England.*

bridge was rebuilt with Purbeck and Portland stone and fewer arches (Fig. 3). The work lasted from 1809 to 1813. There were delays which led to the first contract being cancelled. The principal builder, a Dorchester mason called Jesse Bushrod, claimed that his difficulties included the late delivery of Portland stone on account of a wages dispute involving the quarrymen and loaders on the Isle in the summer of 1810, the consequent lack of shipping, and the halt to building the following winter, and the higher prices of stone in 1812. There were extensive repairs in greensand to Blandford bridge under three contracts at several dates between 1810 and 1812. The east side was done by another mason, William Bushrod of Radipole near Weymouth. The other major work was Longham bridge, costing £2,300 in 1814. Apart from more bridge projects which were named in the accounts, the Engineer received £8,685 for bridge expenditure between 1810 and 1815 for work which was not described. The Engineer was paid £500 a year and his clerk £50, presumably so that they should devote all or most of their time to the bridges, and the appointment was ended at Christmas 1815, probably because the bridges were now in a better state. Altogether £28,084 was spent on bridges in these years.⁴⁴ More than half county expenditure was on bridges.

Outlay on bridges was less in the late 1810s, and in the 1820s it was less than a quarter of county expenditure. Much money was devoted to Hayward bridge: repairs in 1817–18 cost £1,140; it was partly rebuilt and further repaired in 1821–22 for £1,829, and in 1825–26 it was rebuilt in stone which included granite and Melbury stone as a single arch bridge. Despite the loss of Dyson supervision became more efficient. Between 1816 and 1818 the justices in their respective divisions superintended bridge works with different surveyors. Then until 1821 a carpenter, John Bellamy of Whitechurch, was used as surveyor under the direction of a committee of justices. He was succeeded by the Surveyor for Somerset, G. A. Underwood, paid on a charges

basis as by its Bench, then from 1824 by a Surveyor of County Works, Thomas Evans of Wimborne, at £200 a year. In addition in January 1826 the county appointed a bridge and building committee of two justices from each division. Its care, by reporting on each county bridge and repairing or rebuilding where necessary, seems to have led to additional expenditure for two years, then a sharp fall until 1830. Only £15,579 was spent in the seven years 1824–30, compared with £28,024 in six years under Dyson.⁴⁵ The years 1810–15 was the peak period of Dorset building, as its work declined permanently in the mid-1830s.

THE SHIRE HALL

The five sessions halls received repairs from time to time at county expense. The county hall at Dorchester was built before the 1630s in High West Street by St Peter's Church, and it was shared with the Corporation. In 1750–51 extensive repairs done by a Sherborne mason, Benjamin Bastard, cost the county £447 13s 6d. In 1753 a wall was rebuilt and the floor paved by Bastard for £261.⁴⁷ The building lasted until the mid-1790s, when it almost collapsed. According to Hutchins, 'The front wall, from having given way, being in a most dangerous state, and more than one foot out of perpendicular, it was found necessary to shore it up with timbers previous to the summer assizes of 1795; and after several meetings it was at last determined, at the Epiphany Sessions . . . 1796, to re-build it upon a design produced by Thomas Hardwick, esquire of London, architect'. The aim was real utility and the strictest economy, consistent with durability and good workmanship. High war taxation and rising material and labour costs were presumably special inducements to economic construction. In fact as with other shire halls the prestige of the county was at stake. At least the Dorset brick building was to be given a facade of Portland stone⁴⁸ (Fig. 4). Following normal practice it was ordered that a notice be inserted in the Sherborne and Salisbury

BRIDGE WORKS 1740–1825⁴⁶

Date	Bridge	Type of work	Cost (£)	Cost (£) <i>constant prices of 1750s</i>
1739–40	Blandford	repairs	160	
1742–3	Blandford	repairs	185	
1756	Wareham	repairs	145/17/8	
1765	Crawford	repairs	119/12/5	113
1770	Wool	repairs	330	311
1775–8	Wareham South	rebuilding	3050	2723
1775	Mohuns	repair & new building	188	168
1781	Longham	repair	172/12/4	154
1782	Great Mohuns	repair & widening	224	190
1783–4	Blandford	widening & repair	813/13	690
1784	Canford	work & materials	128/2/3	108
1785	Crawford	repair & gravelling	170/14	145
1792–3	Five Bridges	widening & repair	699/0/3	507
1792	Longham	widening & repair	899/12/6	652
1793	Canford	widening & repair	700/2/6	507
1794–5	Yeovil	rebuilding	1236/4/2	896
1800–1	Barnaby	repairs	209/3/6	107
1802	Canford	work	255/7/7	114
1804	Crickmore	rebuilding & repair	247/1/8	110
1809–10	Durnston	rebuilding & repair	c.380	c.146
1809–13	Canford	repair & rebuilding	6477/2/10	2444
1809–13	Blandford	repairs	4310	at least 1626
1810–15	expenditure on unnamed bridges by Dyson:		8685	3217
1812–13	Long	repair	at least 400	148
1814	Longham	repair	2300	852
1817–18	Hayward	repair	1140/2/2	456
1819	King's Mill	repair	529	212
1819	Crawford	repairs	514	206
1820–1	Sturminster	repairs	315/9/3	130
1821–2	Hayward	building	1494 (contract for building)	638
1821–2	Hayward	repairs	1825/11/1 (building and repairs)	780
1823	Beckhampston	rebuilding	300	128
1823–4	King's Mill	building & repairs	1089/2/8	465
1823–4	Charmouth	building & repairs	816/6/9	349
1824	Hayward	building & arches work	[not known]	



Figure 4. Dorset Shire Hall, 1796–97, by Thomas Hardwick. *Christopher Chalklin.*

newspapers to ‘such persons as are willing to contract for the execution of a plan for rebuilding the County Hall’ which could be seen in Dorchester, to deliver in their estimates, sealed up by 27 February. On that date the justices adopted the tender for the basic work at £2,399 of three contractors James Hamilton of Weymouth and Thomas Currie of Dorchester, builders, and Thomas Gritton, carpenter. Hardwick was appointed architect and surveyor and the Clerk was asked to prepare a contract according to the plans, drawings, descriptions and particulars designed by Hardwick and approved by the justices. They were to begin taking down the old buildings on 14 March, and to lay in the foundations by 10 May; the roof was to be covered in by 15 November, and the whole work was to be done by 1 June 1797, all subject to the direction and inspection of Hardwick and the direction of the justices, making such alteration, addition or omission as they directed. As Hardwick was based in London he used a clerk of the works, William Cave junior, for daily supervision. £7162 was spent in 1796–97.⁴⁹ Thus permanent quarters were provided for the Dorset courts.

COUNTY PRISONS

A county gaol was built for £1,200 in 1624 at the bottom of High East Street, Dorchester, a chapel being added unusually in 1674.⁵⁰ The gaol was one of the first erected by an English quarter sessions, at a time when the sheriff and not the benches were legally responsible for prison building. No description of the building survives. The cost suggests the size of a substantial house, and there were presumably rooms for debtors and also for felons and those awaiting trial, with the men and women separated at night. As late as the mid 1770s John Howard found it dirty and with only one yard for exercise.⁵¹ Repairs were done periodically, as in 1741 when about £54 was spent, and in 1761–73 (£70 being paid to a Robert White).⁵² Howard still found that work was needed a year or two later. Little interest was taken in the goal by the justices over the 150 years after 1624 as long as the inmates were secure, and the goaler made money from the sale of liquor to those with the money to buy and from other fees. But by the late 1770s they were paying a salary to a surgeon and raising that of the chaplain. In addition to a lack of compassion, small numbers explain the relative absence of the justices’ concern. On four dates in 1773–75 and 1779 there were 21, 19, 14 and 14 debtors, and 9, 9, 7 and 6 felons. Despite major prison works in other counties, none were carried out on the Dorset building in the 1770s.⁵³

At this time the smaller Sherborne bridewell, the other county prison, had two rooms for each sex, but no work was provided for the nine prisoners recorded on 22 September 1774, or the two on 6 February 1779. Large repairs and rebuilding had been done by the local mason Benjamin Bastard for £132 in 1741–44, £12 in 1747, and £41 17s in 1750, when the building had been re-tiled.⁵⁴

Partly because of the absence of major alterations earlier in the eighteenth century, Dorset was one of the first to rebuild its gaol during the decade of major English prison construction between the mid 1780s and about 1795. ‘Being in a ruinous and insecure state’ its rebuilding was ordered in 1784.

Several plans were considered and William Tyler of Vine Street, St James's Westminster, a sculptor and architect who designed country houses and public buildings, extended it for £4,000. The county action was hasty. Howard complained that William Morton Pitt submitted a better plan. At the assizes in March 1787 fifteen justices including Pitt presented it as insufficient and too small. In April a gaol committee including Pitt was appointed. Advice was sought from William Blackburn, the surveyor and architect of Southwark who worked with Howard. In 1779 he drew up plans for penitentiary houses and by 1787 he was the leading gaol architect. Commenting on Tyler's prison, he complained that different types of prisoners were not separated, and that cells were housing two prisoners, which encouraged escapes and prevented solitude, the source of a reformed character. The building was damp, imperfectly ventilated, badly constructed and insecure. The justices considered his report and asked for his plans for a new gaol in November. In July 1788 they accepted his scheme for a new site on Castle Hill at the edge of the town. In November he attended the prison committee and tenders were invited.⁵⁵

By an Act of 1784 sessions were allowed to borrow for gaol building. £10,000 was to be raised at four per cent. Benches normally found the money easy to borrow because of the security of the county rates. Loans were cheaper between about 1786 and 1793 than in the twenty years from the mid-1790s, when the going rate was five per cent. The larger of the 20 subscriptions included £1000 from Pitt, £300 from the Marquis of Buckingham and £200 from Lord Rivers, the others being made by gentry and at least two attorneys. The money was repaid by 1807.⁵⁶

As Mr Weinstock has described the details of the building process and the layout of the new prison only some brief comments are needed. Blackburn employed a clerk of the works, John Noble (1789–91) and John Griffiths (from 1791) at 25s and 1½ guineas a week respectively. John Fentiman of

Newington Butts near Southwark was awarded the major building contract for £12,000, craftsmen engaging to do the iron and slate work separately. The details of materials and specifications fill a book. Fentiman built the carcass of five gaols and houses of correction and completed three more between 1787 and 1790, all in southern England, after Blackburn had prepared plans and probably encouraged him to tender. He was unique in the number of prisons he built. Though most craftsmen and labourers were presumably recruited locally, his base in London gave him access to skilled workers, and also to credit, if it was not fully available in Dorchester. Wilson Birkbeck and Joseph Ball of Southwark agreed to do the cast iron work at £11 10s per ton, and William Bates of Islington, slater, to cover the roof with Bangor slate at £2 4s per square, the lowest estimates.⁵⁷ While he was finishing details to the prison he built a neighbouring barracks between 30 April 1794 and 4 July 1795 for an estimated cost of about £24,000, which presumably drew on craftsmen no longer needed at the prison and many newly recruited men.⁵⁸ He was also responsible for the Nisi Prius Court in the new Shire Hall already described.⁵⁹

Work began in the summer of 1789. March 25 1792 was the agreed date for completion. Periodic payments were made to Fentiman, who was soon behind in his work, partly at least because the committee kept ordering minor changes to the contract. It was not finished until 1795, and the final cost was £16, 179 10s 6d. Surrounded by a strong wall, there was an entrance block partly for administrative use (the only part of the prison which remains), a central block with keeper's quarters, a chapel, debtors' day and sleeping rooms and cells for condemned and refractory prisoners (Fig. 5). This block was linked by iron bridges to four smaller blocks with 88 cells for working and sleeping, each six by eight feet, the number reflecting the big jump in inmates. There were ten courtyards to keep the different classes of prisoners separated. The rooms were lime washed. There were hot baths and water was laid on.⁶⁰

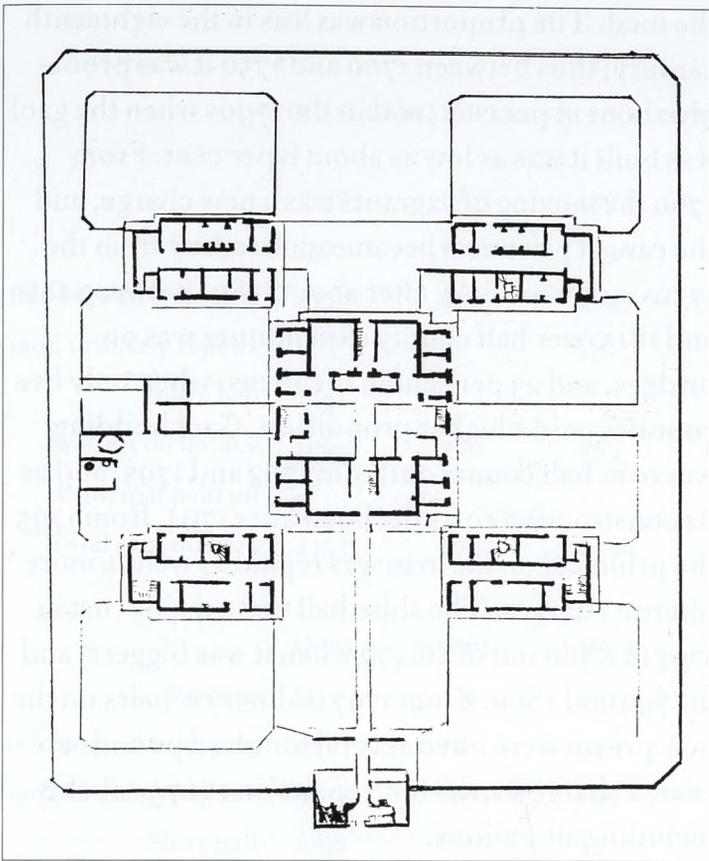


Figure 5. Dorset Gaol, finished 1795.
Dorset Record Office.

The gaol was given a treadmill, to introduce hard labour, and other alterations involving the separation of prisoners of different types were made for about £7,000 in 1822–25, the justices adopting the compulsory regulations for the classification of prisoners under an Act of 1823. As the prison of the 1790s incorporated the idea of the prison reformers, no major changes were needed.⁶¹

Following an Act of 1782 requiring the separation of the sexes and different types of prisoners and the provision of work in houses of correction, the Sherborne building was rebuilt with more, but still cramped, accommodation between 1783 and 1786 for £1,541 under the supervision of the local justice William Toogood.⁶² When the goal was nearing completion at the end of 1793, it was decided to use a wing as a house of correction. Sending prisoners to the edge of the county was too expensive, and the Sherborne building was immediately closed.⁶³

The growth of the concern for lunatics which was a minor aspect of the humanitarian movement that emerged in the 1780s and 1790s, and the expansion of the care of the mad from prosperous families in private asylums, led to an Act in 1808 giving counties the power to establish pauper lunatic asylums. As the law was permissive, not mandatory, and there were other pressing calls on the rates, such as the care of prisoners and rising bridge costs after about 1810, only a few counties erected asylums in the following years, in spite of the availability of voluntary contributions.⁶⁴

In 1827 F. J. Browne, a landowner without a male heir, offered his mansion, garden and seven acres at Forston for a pauper lunatic asylum. And £4,000 three per cent consols as an endowment. The Court accepted the offer at Epiphany Session 1828 and appointed a committee chaired by W. M. Pitt. Considerable additions were needed, and enclosures to separate and accommodate patients, with furniture and fittings. Designed and directed by Evans the County Surveyor, they cost just under £14,700; £3,000 was raised by voluntary subscriptions, and the rest by loans, paid off within seven years by special county rates. The principal building was given two wings (costing £5,320); a scullery and outhouses were adapted, privies, pumps, exercise grounds, houses for washing, brewing and baking and a boundary wall with cottages added. All the expenses of the patients and the wages of officers and servants were borne by weekly rates on the parishes to which the paupers belonged, with salaries being partly paid by endowment. Repairs were borne by the county, and a fund was also created, by legacies and voluntary donations, towards extraordinary and contingent expenses. The asylum was intended to hold 35 males and 30 females, and it opened on 1 August 1832.⁶⁵ Only one-third of English counties had an asylum by this date.

THE PAUPER LUNATIC ASYLUM

JUDGES LODGINGS

Just before the justices considered a lunatic asylum, at Michaelmas Sessions 1826 and at Epiphany 1827, it was decided to buy a house for judges' lodgings for £2,750, which Browne offered to lend as it exceeded half a county rate. In contrast to a rented building, ownership allowed alterations according to need. The existing lodgings were deficient and the house adjoining the county hall was bought, part of it being suitable for the Clerk's offices.⁶⁶ Thus by the early 1830s Dorset had all types of county building.

CONCLUSION

Dorset Sessions' record in building was among the best at least among southern English benches. The very early new gaol and the considerable bridge building in the seventeenth century may have created a tradition of active construction. W. M. Pitt was clearly outstanding as a county reformer and leader in building works, like the the famous G. O. Paul in Gloucestershire. The gift of a mansion and an endowment for an asylum was good fortune.

Bridge works were an important item in county expenditure throughout the period. Although between 1660 and 1700 there is no evidence of expenditure apart from that on bridges, material from other counties suggests that it may have been £300 or £400 a year in Dorset. Thus between 1664 and 1674 when bridge costs were exceptional, with £2,400 being raised in bridge rates, they were probably about one-third or two-fifths of total outlay. Thereafter they may have been 20 or 25 per cent of

the total. The proportion was less in the eighteenth century; thus between 1700 and 1750 it was probably about 15 per cent, and in the 1790s when the gaol was built it was as low as about 8 per cent. From 1700 the moving of vagrants was a new charge, and the care of prisoners became more costly from the 1750s, and especially after about 1780. Between 1810 and 1815 over half county expenditure was on bridges, and 23 per cent in the 1820s, when only five counties paid a higher proportion. Gaol building was over half county outlay in 1792 and 1793, and as its construction costs declined after 1794, from 1795 the principal on the loan was repaid as well as more interest charges. The shire hall was a major cost in 1797 (£2,560 out of £6,472 when it was biggest) and in 1799 and 1800. From 1797 ordinary repairs on the new prison were often several hundred pounds a year, a charge £2,168 for 'repairs' in 1807 probably including alterations.

Building charges were eased by spreading expenditure over a long period. Wareham South Bridge was erected in the mid-1770s. Though Sherborne bridewell and the first gaol of the 1780s were built together, both were small. In the 1790s the Bench built the second gaol first, then the shire hall. Bridge expenditure was rising and peaked about 1810–15. In the early 1820s additions were made to the gaol, and the judges' lodgings and lunatic asylum followed after 1827. These works coincided with a decade or more of lower bridge costs. By this means the full range of county buildings was obtained without burdening the ratepayers with exceptional charges in any short period of time.

BUILDING CHARGES AND TOTAL EXPENDITURE (IN £), 1792–1823⁶⁷

	1792	1793	1794	1795	1796	1797	1798	1799
Bridges	357	1078	1590	999	162	181	41	46
Gaol, building and enlarging	2358	3771	2647	1344	141	750	71	48
Gaol, ordinary repairs	11	3	17	–	38	164	102	138
Shire hall	–	–	–	1	12	2560	538	1153
Interest on money	100	280	483	689	495	449	217	392
Principal paid off	–	–	–	300	1700	–	800	–
Total expenditure	4334	6797	6799	5572	5807	6472	4494	4660
	1800	1801	1802	1803	1804	1805	1806	1807
Bridges	112	179	553	316	315	318	95	461
Gaol, building and enlarging	10	22	44	10	10	166	13	10
Gaol, ordinary repairs	92	116	199	172	168	215	650	2168
Shire hall	1092	88	46	153	82	30	14	10
Interest on money	427	352	369	347	275	214	156	86
Principal paid off	–	–	–	–	–	–	800	–
Total expenditure	4483	4371	4335	3585	3829	3309	3805	5212
	1808	1809	1810	1811	1812	1813	1814	1815
Bridges	348	223	3006	5488	4719	7664	3895	3113
Gaol, building and enlarging	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	10
Gaol, ordinary repairs	414	398	423	380	151	127	224	578
Shire hall	27	74	17	21	35	57	17	90
Interest on money	36	–	–	3	2	18	55	45
Principal paid off	–	–	–	–	–	–	800	–
Total expenditure	3242	3207	6183	8507	8020	11810	7813	7723
	1816	1817	1818	1819	1820	1821	1822	1823
Bridges	1538	230	720	1095	1856	1640	1476	1341
Gaol, building and enlarging	–	–	–	–	–	–	2042	662
Gaol, ordinary repairs	484	319	285	185	188	281	340	1554
Shire hall	66	20	76	128	45	19	61	27
Interest on money	–	6	20	24	7	–	–	–
Principal paid off	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	800
Total expenditure	5816	4898	5864	6256	6279	6236	7962	9112

NOTES

- 1 For the history of similar buildings in other counties see C. W. Chalklin, *English Counties and Public Buildings, 1650–1830*, London and Rio Grande, 1998.
- 2 London, London School of Economics (hereafter LSE), Webb Local Government Collection (hereafter LGC): Dorset.
- 3 Dorchester, Dorset Record Office (hereafter DRO), Quarter Sessions orders 1663–74.
- 4 G. D. Squibb, 'A Calendar of Dorset Wills, Administrations and Inventories', *Proceedings of the Dorset Natural History Society* (hereafter PDNHS), LXIII, 1942, 72.
- 5 John Hutchins, *The History and Antiquities of the County of Dorset*, 3rd edition, Westminster, 1861–73, III, 628–9.
- 6 Hutchins, *op. cit.*, III, 8.
- 7 Hutchins, *op. cit.*, III, 128, 468–69.
- 8 Hutchins, *op. cit.*, III, 66.
- 9 H. Pentin, 'A Dorset Parish during the Commonwealth', PDNHS, LVX, 1944, 110.
- 10 LSE Webb LGC: Dorset.
- 11 DRO, Quarter Sessions Orders 1727–35.
- 12 Hutchins, *op. cit.*, IV, 368–78.
- 13 Hutchins, *op. cit.*, II, 115–17, 159–62.
- 14 See footnotes 5 and 7.
- 15 LSE Webb LGC: Dorset.
- 16 DRO, Quarter Sessions Order Book 1783–7.
- 17 Hutchins, *op. cit.*, III, 452; IV, 127.
- 18 Hutchins, *op. cit.*, II, 240, 645, 683–5, 726, 769; *ibid.*, IV, 212; H. S. L. Dewar 'Flax, Hemp and their Growers in West Dorset', PDNHS, LXXI, 1969, 216.
- 19 Hutchins, *op. cit.*, IV, 38.
- 20 Hutchins, *op. cit.*, II, 742, 763, 798.
- 21 Hutchins, *op. cit.*, II, 132–34, 561–66.
- 22 DRO, Quarter Sessions Order Book 1783–97.
- 23 K. P. Bawn, 'Social Protest, Popular Disturbances and Public Order in Dorset, 1790–1838', PhD thesis, University of Reading, 1984, 17, 245.
- 24 DRO, Quarter Sessions Order Book 1819–27; LSE Webb LGC: Dorset.
- 25 B. Kerr, *Bound to the Soil: A Social History of Dorset 1750–1918*, London, 1968, 101–02; Hutchins, *op. cit.*, I, 400–01.
- 26 Bawn, *op. cit.*, 95, 241.
- 27 Hutchins, *op. cit.*, I, 339; Bawn, *op. cit.*, 83.
- 28 Chalklin, *op. cit.*, 104; DRO, Quarter Sessions Orders 1663–74, 1686–99, Minutes 1669–87.
- 29 DRO, Quarter Sessions 1/1 papers.
- 30 E. Boswell, *The Civil Division of the County of Dorset*, Sherborne, 1795, 76–86; W. T. Jackman, *The Development of Transportation in Modern England*, 2nd edition, London, 1962, 152; Hutchins, *op. cit.*, I, Introduction, LXVII, LXX, *ibid.*, IV, 338; DRO, Quarter Sessions Orders, 1663–74, 14; DRO, Quarter sessions 1/1 papers.
- 31 Hutchins, *op. cit.*, I, Introduction, LXVI–LXX.
- 32 J. S. Cockburn (ed.), *Western Circuit Assise Orders 1629–1643: A Calendar*, Camden South Series, XVII (Royal Historical Society), 1976, 76; DRO, Quarter Sessions Orders, 1625–39.
- 33 DRO, Quarter Sessions Orders, 1663–74, 193–245.
- 34 *Ibid.*, 412–13, 405.
- 35 DRO, Quarter Sessions Orders, 1669–87: Orders 1686–99.
- 36 DRO, Quarter Sessions Orders, 1693–1703, 1703–11, 1712–26.
- 37 DRO, Quarter Sessions Orders, 1712–26, 1727–35; Winchester, Hampshire Record Office: 19 M56 E/B4, T45–46.
- 38 DRO, County Treasurer's Accounts 1739–7.
- 39 LSE Webb LGC: Dorset.
- 40 Boswell, *op. cit.*, Dorchester, 1833, 244–56; *ibid.*, Sherborne, 1755, 76–86.
- 41 DRO, County Treasurer's Accounts; 1739–77, 1777–1806; Hutchins, *op. cit.*, I, 92.
- 42 DRO, Quarter Sessions bridge contracts relating to Blandford Bridge.
- 43 DRO, County Treasurer's Accounts, 1777–1806; LSE Webb LGC: Dorset; DRO, Quarter Sessions bridge contracts relating to Yeovil, Canford and Blandford bridges.
- 44 LSE Webb LGC: Dorset; DRO, Quarter Sessions bridges contracts relating to Canford and Blandford bridges.
- 45 DRO, Quarter Sessions Order Books, 1819–27, 1827–36; *ibid.*, Quarter Sessions bridge and building committee minutes, 1826–65; LSE Webb LGC Dorset; *Parliamentary Papers*, VI, 1825.
- 46 DRO, Quarter Sessions Orders 1735–44, relating to Blandford bridge, 1739–40; *ibid.*, Quarter Sessions County Treasurer's Accounts 1739–77, 1777–1806, 1806–25; *ibid.*, Quarter Sessions bridge contracts relating to Hayward bridge, 1821.
- 47 Boswell, *op. cit.*, 1795, 95, 103; DRO, County Treasurer's Accounts 1739–77.
- 48 Hutchins, *op. cit.*, II, 372; D. W. Lloyd 'Dorchester Buildings', PDNHS, LXXXIX, 1968, 202.
- 49 DRO, Quarter Sessions order book 1783–97.

- 50 Hutchins, *op cit.*, II, 371; *Acts of the Privy Council of England 1629–30*, 260.
- 51 John Howard, *The State of the Prisons*, 2nd edition, Warrington, 1780, 341.
- 52 DRO, Quarter Sessions County Treasurer's Accounts 1739–77.
- 53 Howard, *op cit.*, 341; DRO, Quarter Sessions County Treasurer's Accounts, 1739–77, 1777–1806.
- 54 Howard, *op cit.*, 343; DRO, Quarter Sessions County Treasurer's Accounts 1739–77.
- 55 M. B. Weinstock, 'Dorchester Model Prison 1791–1816', PDNHS, LXXVIII, 1957, 94–96; DRO, Quarter Sessions order book 1783–97.
- 56 DRO, Quarter Sessions account book relating to the building of the county goal, D1688 B/x2.
- 57 Weinstock, *op cit.*, 95–97, largely based on DRO minute book relating to the building of the county prison 1/9; Chalklin, *op cit.*, 88–89.
- 58 Hutchins, *op cit.*, II, 374.
- 59 DRO, Quarter Sessions minute book 1798–1806, 149.
- 60 Weinstock, *op cit.*, 95–97
- 61 *Parliamentary Papers* 1825, vi, and 1833, xxxii, DRO, Quarter Sessions order book 1819–27.
- 62 DRO, Quarter Sessions County Treasurer's Accounts 1777–1806; *ibid.*, Quarter Sessions order book 1783–97.
- 63 DRO, Quarter Sessions order book 1783–97.
- 64 Chalklin, *op cit.*, 199–200,
- 65 Boswell, *op cit.*, 1833, 95; M. B. Weinstock, *Old Dorset*, Newton Abbot, 1967, 121.
- 66 DRO, Quarter Sessions order book 1821–36, fol 2.
- 67 *Parliamentary Papers* 1825, vi: some of the principal repayments are not stated.