



THE
GEORGIAN
GROUP

Christopher Chalklin, 'County Building in
Leicestershire, 1680–1830', *The Georgian
Group Journal*, Vol. IX, 1999, pp. 69–85

COUNTY BUILDING IN LEICESTERSHIRE, 1680–1830

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In Leicestershire both prison and bridge construction were concentrated between 1790 and 1830. The shire had its gaol in the county town of Leicester, for debtors, those awaiting trial, and convicted people awaiting transportation or execution, or those serving terms of imprisonment, who were increasingly numerous from the 1780s. There was also a bridewell or house of correction in Leicester, and sometimes one or more in other towns, housing vagrants or the disorderly for several months, work being legally required though it was often neglected.

The gaol was extended at the cost of the county in 1686, though not by the justices, and there were then only minor works for a century. After 1790 the gaol was rebuilt twice, three houses of correction erected, and bridge works were numerous, though mostly small.

The population of Leicestershire, 1670–1831¹

1670	c. 60,000
1701	79,123
1751	91,649
1781	101,613
1801	130,081
1831	197,003

The prison building reflected in part the rapid rise of population from the 1780s, which was especially the result of the development of the hosiery industry, and bridge construction was caused by the growth of trade. The late emergence of county bridge works and the modest size of most bridges erected in the last four decades were partly

the consequence of Leicestershire being a relatively small inland county. Certainly in the case of prisons, and possibly that of bridges, the county was slow to react to growing need, and expenditure when it came was at first too small.

The study of sessions' construction in the 1790s and between 1800 and 1830 is interesting not only for the number of works but also on account of the quality of the records. They are among the most detailed and varied for any county, including contracts, tenders and specifications for building, bridge plans, accounts and order books.

THE JUSTICES AND THE SURVEYORS

Between 1786 and 1795 up to 12 justices of the peace attended quarter sessions; thus in July 1787 five laymen and six clergy.² The former were landed gentry and the occasional peer, the accepted leaders of society. The majority of gentry who came most regularly represented families which had owned their estates for several generations, either through the male or female line. Thus Clement Winstanley (d.1808) lived at Braunston Hall, two miles from Leicester, which he had inherited in 1771. A Winstanley ancestor had bought the property in 1649. He was high sheriff in 1774, deputy lieutenant and a commanding officer in the militia, representing the borough of Leicester in Parliament in the 1790s. He rebuilt his mansion about 1775 and extended his estate.³ Samuel Steele Perkins (1742–1808) lived at Orton on the Hill, near the Warwickshire border, where his property was

improved by an enclosure act in 1782 and the rebuilding of the Hall in 1786. The family estates, including four manorial properties, had been bought by an ancestor, John Steele (d. 1675).⁴

Two justices are of special interest, though they were not typical in all respects. The famous live-stock breeder Robert Bakewell was a tenant farmer who came from a local family. He rented a huge farm of 440 acres at Dishley near Loughborough between 1755 and 1795, the farm having been his father's before him. 'The Bakewells had farmed at or near Normanton-le-Heath for several centuries before one of them moved to Dishley'.⁵ Charles Loraine Smith owned the manor of Enderby, three miles south-west of Leicester, and the neighbouring rectory of Whetstone, which Richard Smith had bought in 1695. He was high sheriff in 1783, MP for Leicester, 1784–90, and was made an honorary freeman of Leicester in 1815. He was a huntsman in a keen fox-hunting county, poet, painter and patron of the arts. He showed six pictures at the Royal Academy between 1795 and 1806, five being on sporting subjects.⁶

In the 1790s the clergy outnumbered the laity at sessions. Although a hundred years earlier, when the county records begin, there had been no clergy and only lay land-owners as justices, now the growing value of tithes and glebelands as food prices rose increased the income and social standing of the clergy, and their superior education helped to make them ideal local administrators and judges.

Although clerical predominance was unusual, probably the result of a shortage of lay justices or an exceptional number of wealthy clergy, clerical justices were in a substantial minority in most other counties.⁷ As they came from the more well-to-do clergy, the holding of more than one living was common. Some were landowners or related to the gentry in the county, being thus natural friends and colleagues of the lay justices. The most important family of clergy justices attending Leicestershire sessions at this time was that of Burnaby. Robert Burnaby (d. 1807) and Thomas Beaumont Burnaby

(d. 1823) were sons of a Leicestershire clergyman who had been rector of Knighton and a prebendary of Lincoln. Robert was rector of Knighton after his father, 1763–89, and vicar of St Margaret, Leicester, in the same years; he also held the rectory of South Croxton between 1765 and 1770, which he resigned for Wanlip, a worse living, on account of its being nearer Leicester. Robert Burnaby and Winstanley directed the rebuilding of Zouch Bridge in 1789. His brother held the livings of Ashby Folville and Asfordby, where he was lord of the manor and patron of the benefice. Robert's son, Thomas, also held several livings in the course of his career.⁸ Thomas Greaves, who was probably a Yorkshireman, was rector of Broughton Astley, where he owned the manor and part of the parish in right of his wife, the daughter of the previous rector, who had bought the estate in 1769.⁹

Most of the justices who attended regularly for the rest of the period had a similar background. Among the new names between the 1800s and 1830 was G. A. Legh Keck (d. 1860), who succeeded his brother at Stoughton Grange, four miles from Leicester, in 1797, with an estate in Lancashire as well as in Leicestershire. He was also deputy lieutenant, elected M. P. for Leicestershire several times, and Lieutenant-Colonel commandant of the Leicestershire Regiment of yeomanry.¹⁰ There was also a lay member of the Burnaby family, John Dick. Particularly prominent among the clergy was William Richardson Tyson (d. 1831), from Lancashire, a former Fellow of Emmanuel College, who was rector of Thurstaston, north of Leicester, between 1798 and 1831. Exceptional among the clerical justices in the 1820s was Gilbert Beresford (1774–1843), a native of Derbyshire. Between 1819 and 1838 he was rector of St Andrew, Holborn, said to be worth several thousand pounds, while living at Aylestone.¹¹

By the 1820s gentry as distinct from clergy attendance at sessions had risen. As in other counties there were more available gentry with population growth, interest in judicial and administrative work was rising, and in particular the volume of business

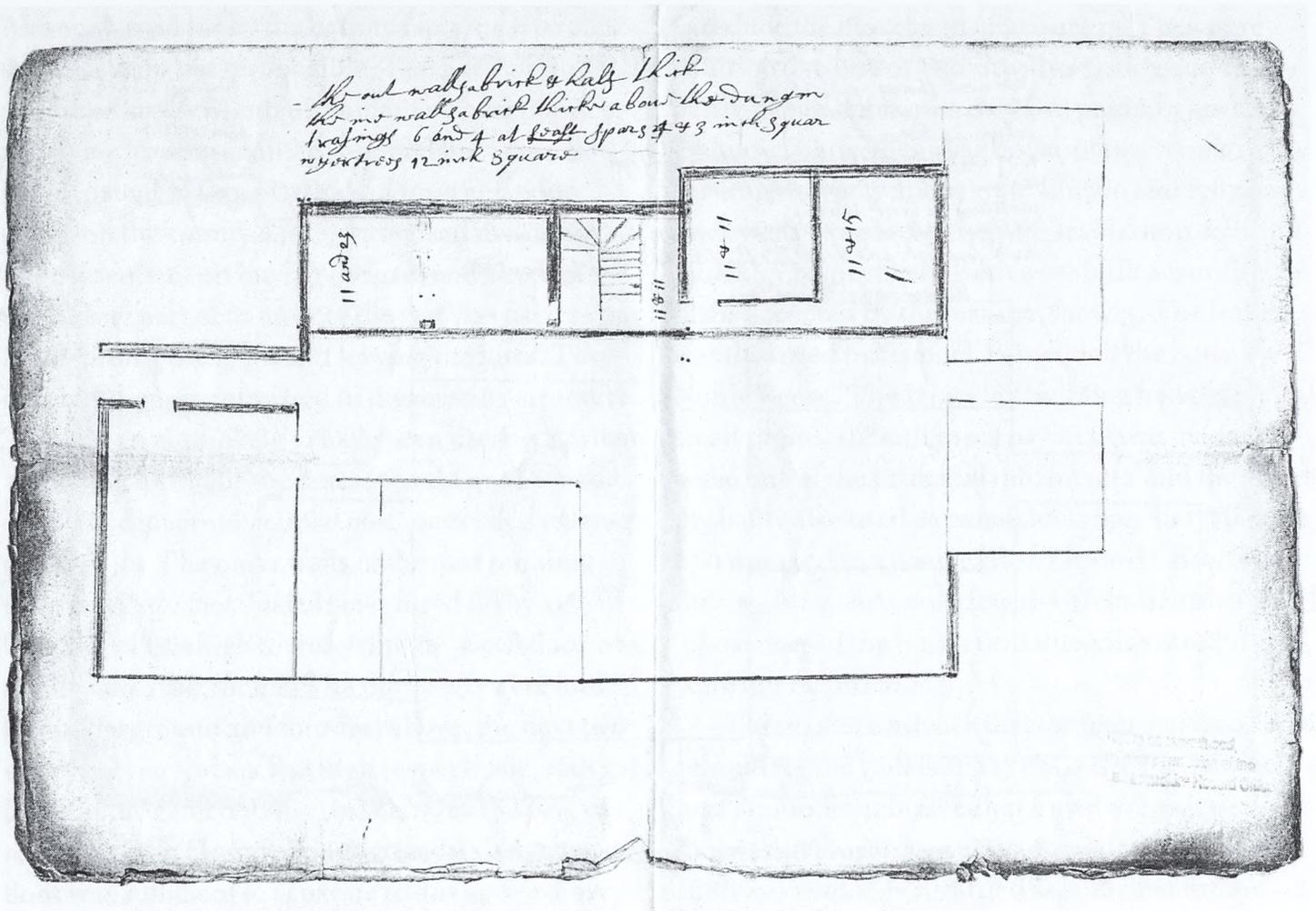


Figure 1. Plan of Leicester Gaol, 1686. The rooms shown on the lower part of the drawing, and on the far right, are the older buildings probably not used later as a prison. *Leicester Record Office*

was expanding. While single justices or temporary committees had always been used to direct special tasks, there were now a standing chairman and deputy chairman, visiting justices for the prisons, and permanent committees for bridges and finance. The county surveyor reported regularly on the state of the bridges.¹²

Greater efficiency at sessions was matched by the use of a salaried and experienced surveyor. In the later eighteenth century the justices employed men on an *ad hoc* basis to act as surveyor of bridge and prison works. In 1803 the county appointed William Kirk superintendant of works and repairs of all the county bridges at £25 salary with expenses. Payment was twice increased, to £50, then to £100.¹³ By 1808 county buildings were in the care of an 'architect for the county work', Joshua Harrison, who was a carpenter and builder and the architect of

at least one church.¹⁴ The offices were combined in 1819 when Kirk was also made surveyor of county works. In fact he had already planned the house of correction in 1814–15 and a new prison in 1818, and handled other building work.¹⁵ Finally at April Sessions 1823 his place was taken by William Parsons of Leicester at the same salary of £100. As well as being a builder of churches and parsonages, Parsons was surveyor for most of the Leicestershire turnpike trusts and built the Theatre Royal in Leicester.¹⁶

PRISON BUILDING

The one major prison expenditure before the 1790s was the purchase and extension in 1686 of the property long used as a county gaol on the east side of High (Cross) Street in Leicester (Figs. 1–3).

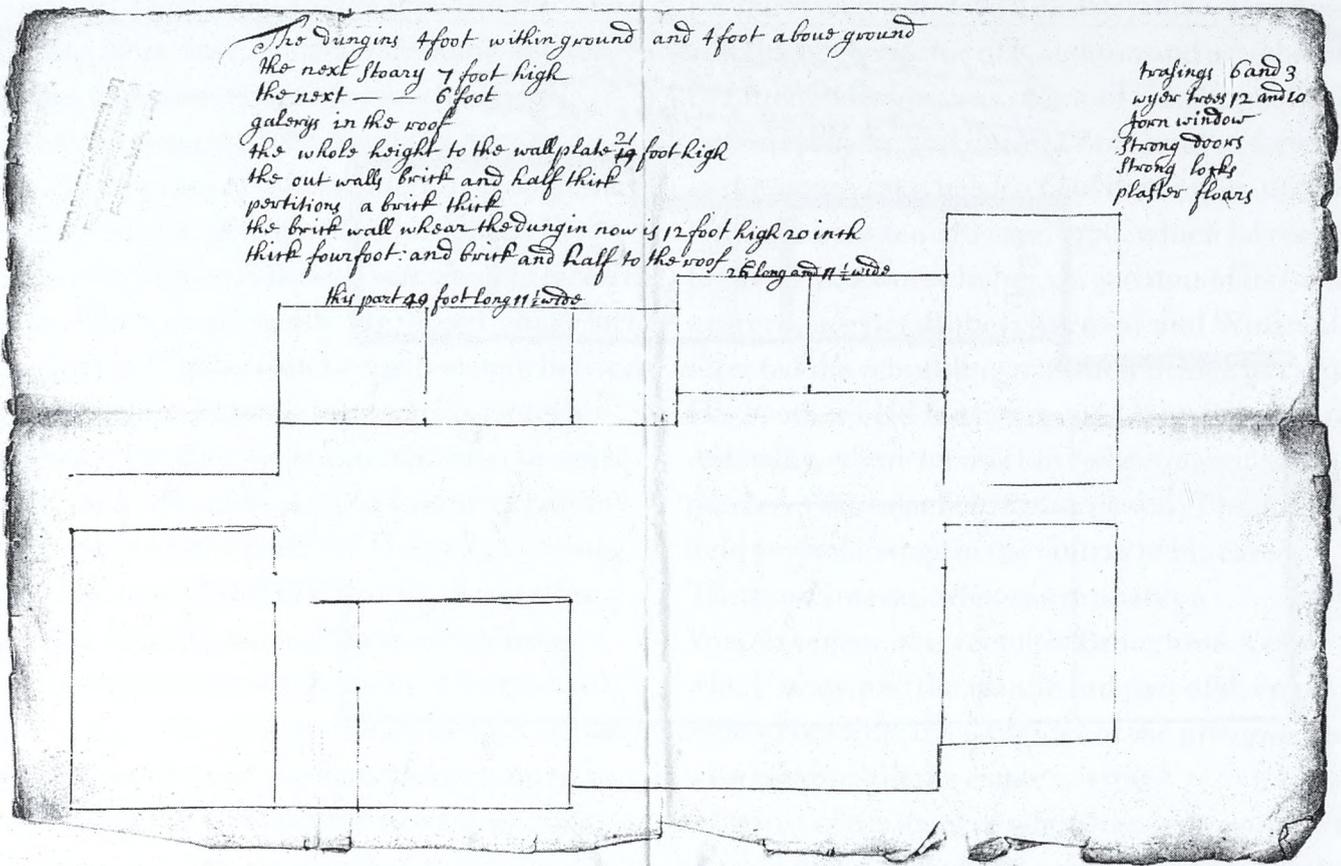


Figure 2. Plan of Leicester Gaol, 1686. *Leicester Record Office*

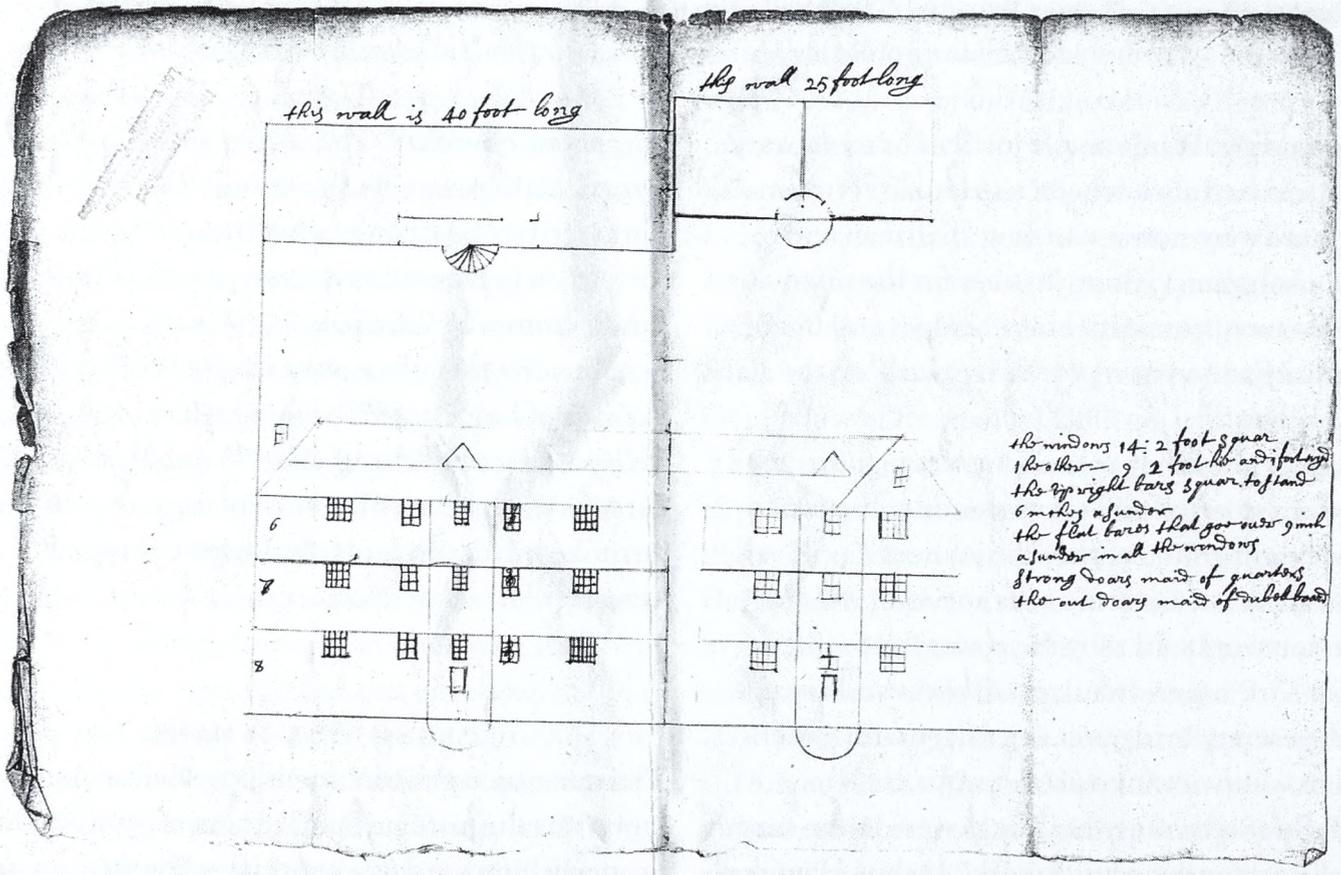


Figure 3. Plan and elevation of Leicester Gaol, 1686. *Leicester Record Office*

Although paid for by the county rates, quarter sessions were not responsible. The Earls of Rutland and Huntingdon, both prominent in local politics, and some leading gentry petitioned the Crown for letters patent to levy two fines of 1000 and 2000 marks on the county. £1063 was raised in this way. £600 was spent on buying the gaol and £200 on rebuilding part of it; most of the rest was used to pay for obtaining the grant and levying the fines. The new building was attached to the existing structure. The latter was unlikely to have been used as a prison any longer, probably because it could not be made secure except at substantial cost, or needed extensive repairs. The outer walls of the new building were brick, 1½ feet thick. It measured 66 by 11 ½ feet, and 21 feet high to the wallplate. Each floor was divided into five rooms. The dungeons were four feet underground and four feet above, the next two storeys seven and six feet high respectively, with galleries in the gabled roof.¹⁷ In the 1770s the prison reformer John Howard found that the dungeon floor was sufficient to separate felons and ordinary debtors with day and night rooms. The extensive space of the ten upper-floor rooms housed the masters' side debtors, being those whose family or friends paid for their accommodation. There was a small court for exercise and fresher air.¹⁸ Repairs were done occasionally in the eighteenth century. In 1774, a year when gaol improvements were general due to legislation, ventilators were inserted and two rooms added or converted for an infirmary.¹⁹

The county bridewell in Blue Boar Lane, Leicester, built before the sessions records begin in 1678, was not altered in any major way in this period. Large repairs were done in 1710–11, when £72 16s. 4d. was spent. Howard wrote that it had three rooms below for men and three above for women. On the three dates the inmates were counted in 1775, 1776 and 1779, the total was only 13.²⁰ Repairs and minor improvements were made between 1778 and 1781.²¹

In the mid-eighteenth century the justices erected tiny houses of correction elsewhere in the county

to reduce the movement of prisoners. They were additional to one or two already existing and used partly as parish prisons. £65 was paid to a justice, Thomas Crane, to build a house of two rooms in Melton Mowbray about 1756. In 1760 and 1767 tiny bridewells were erected at Market Harborough and Hinckley respectively. Both were built according to plans accepted by the justices, for £25. The former was designed by Samuel Turner and the latter by Noble Reeve. The Hinckley building had three small rooms. In both cases payment was made 'to some one of the principal inhabitants' and they were probably also used as parish lock-ups. In 1776 up to £50 was paid to a justice (Rev. Edward Cheselden) for repairing and extending the Melton bridewell. The names of the builders of these tiny structures were not recorded.²²

There is no evidence that the justices considered rebuilding the gaol in the 1770s, a decade in which many counties rebuilt either a gaol or bridewell. The relatively extensive accommodation built in 1686 was probably regarded as sufficient for the prisoners: debtors averaged 17 and felons only six between 1773 and 1779. The first reference to the possibility of a new gaol was in 1781: counsel's opinion was taken as to whether the trust set up in 1686 could sell the prison and buy a site for a new one, and he advised that an act of parliament was needed. Nothing more was done until 1789, despite extensive prison building elsewhere. The general reconstruction of the 1780s was the result not only of more prisoners on account of population growth and the rising percentage of prison sentences compared with those of transportation, but also a prison reform movement aiming to provide purpose-built prisons with all the necessary facilities, counties now being allowed to borrow for 14 years in order to build.²³

On 28 March 1789 the gaol was presented at the Assizes as being in bad repair, too small and unsafe for keeping its prisoners.²⁴ After the legal notice had been given three times, a special adjourned sessions was advertised by the justices at Midsummer

Sessions for 5 August, the first day of the next Assizes, a public occasion drawing most of the gentry to Leicester, ‘when we request the acting Justices, Grand Jury, and other Gentlemen of the said county, to attend, as the subject is of great importance to the county, and will be attended with vast expense’.²⁵ The meeting, attended by Rev. Henry Greene as chairman, two baronets, eleven other laymen and four other clergymen, appointed itself and the absent justices a committee to inquire and report on the state of the gaol. The committee reported that the gaol in its present situation was totally inadequate and that the adjoining buildings should be bought to provide a site for additional accommodation, which, with the plot of the present gaol, would be sufficient to confine and separate the various classes of prisoners. Separate cells about ten feet square were to be erected for 24 felons in three classes, each class with a separate court and day-room. 24 was the largest number of felons that the gaoler had held. 31 or 32 rooms about 12 feet square were to be provided for debtors, with one or two dayrooms and a workshop. This proposed accommodation was based on the fact that 62 debtors was the greatest number that the prison had confined. A local architect, William Harrison, said that the cost would not exceed £15,000. They thought that a gaol ‘constructed on the principles by which the morals, the security, and the health of the prisoners may be effectually consulted, is indispensably necessary for the county of Leicestershire’, despite ‘the largeness of the sum that appears necessary for attaining it’; the cost would ‘fall so lightly on individuals, if the requisite sum is borrowed on the security of the county rates, and paid off in the course of fourteen years by instalments’.²⁶ This was clearly an ideal scheme, putting into practice fully the principles of the prison reform movement.

Presumably on account of the cost, the Michaelmas Sessions scaled down the proposal, advertising for plans to house 16 felons and 30 debtors, involving the alteration, repair and enlargement of the present building. To get a good choice

of plans the justices decided to offer 30 guineas for the best, 20 guineas for the next most suitable, and 10 guineas for the third, the plans to be ‘in the plainest and least expensive stile, and be accompanied with correct estimates’. The house next the gaol was to be bought.²⁷ At Epiphany Sessions 1790 when the plans were considered, ‘amongst many others by some of the most able architects that drawn by Mr George Moneypenny, Architect of Derby, was fixed upon’.²⁸ An adjourned sessions was held on 9 March to allow a thorough discussion of the plan and specifications.²⁹ At Easter Sessions, attended by Winstanley, Perkins, Loraine Smith, and Revs. Robert Burnaby and Thomas Greaves, it was decided to contract with Moneypenny to build the gaol according to his proposals, plan and specifications at £3,000. The contracting was thus not put out to tender. In the absence of a county surveyor, William Harrison, who had presented the second-best plan, was appointed superintendant of the works at £40 a year. A building of two storeys was to be erected; the cells and dayrooms were principally in two rows on the ground floor, and upstairs were the debtors’ rooms and sick wards; the gaoler’s house was an altered part of the old building. The structure was of brick except for the facade of the gaoler’s house (part of the front elevation), which was in Attleborough stone.³⁰ The bricks were made locally, the internal woodwork as usual consisted of deals and firs imported from Scandinavia, and the stones were brought about 20 miles.

One of Moneypenny’s first tasks was to employ a number of local masons to work the stone for the facade. Another Derbyshire builder, a carpenter named George Sowter, who acted as surety for Moneypenny, may have done part of the work on sub-contract or by informal agreement.³¹ There is no other evidence about the way in which Moneypenny organised the building. Nor can the allocation of charges among the crafts be traced, though William Harrison, in suggesting a brick framework with a total price of £5,256, estimated as follows:–

bricklayer	£1,978
mason	£243
carpenter and joiner	£1,173
slater and plasterer	£640
plumber and glazier	£379
ironmonger	£440
painter	£25
(unforeseen)	£478

Thus the exterior framework cost more than two-fifths of the total cost, and the woodwork less than a quarter of it.³² The property cost at least £1,700 on account of its central situation and the house, the money being borrowed on mortgage from the Leicester bankers, Boulbee and Mansfield. An architect named Norris checked the finished structure. Moneypenny received £4,150 on his contract and for extras, and the total charge was a little over £6,000.³³ The relatively cheap total cost was the result of the use of existing buildings, the smaller accommodation, and probably of the layout, which was more cramped than in prisons designed by Blackburn. Despite this possible criticism of the interior, the prison writer James Neild in 1812 described ‘the noble front’ as having ‘a prison-like appearance. The ingenious architect, Mr Moneypenny, has shown his knowledge of grand design bordering on the terriffick’, and he thought the courts at least were ‘airy’.³⁴

The old house of correction in Leicester was still used. No action is recorded about implementing the act of 1782 for classing and employing prisoners in bridewells, despite its general use in other counties.³⁵ At Michaelmas Sessions 1802 a committee, which included Clement Winstanley, C. L. Smith and the clergy Greaves and Tyson, was set up to consider its imperfect state.³⁶ Its printed report states in some detail the motives of the justices and their reasons for deciding to build a bridewell. They wrote that it did not conform to the various statutes about houses of correction such as that of 1782. ‘They would wish to call the attention of the Court, not only to the insecurity and insufficiency of the

Building itself; to the easy intercourse during the day between the male and female prisoners; but also, to the total want of all compulsory labour whatsoever’³⁷ Epiphany Sessions 1803 appointed a committee to execute the plans and specification which had been presented by William Oldham, a Leicester architect, without prior advertisement. Oldham presented the alternatives of altering and adding to the existing bridewell for £600, or the sale of the present building for £850 and the erection of a new one behind the county gaol at £1,280. The second proposal was chosen, not so much because it was cheaper, but on account of ‘the superior convenience and aptitude it possesses for the purpose intended; to the additional strength and security that it will give to the gaol; and above all to the ease with which the future internal regulations of the prison may be formed, by the possibility of entrusting the safe custody of those confined in either prison to the gaoler’. The justices contracted with Oldham for £1,390, and he received an additional £40 4s.10d. for extras. The two-story building was erected in 1803 and 1804, including men and women’s courts, dayrooms, workshops, sickrooms and 13 cells.³⁸ An additional building of three cells and a large workroom was erected in 1809 for £640. It was planned and built by Joshua Harrison, then ‘the architect for the county work’.³⁹

The buildings of 1803 and 1809 were soon considered unsatisfactory, presumably on account of their size and a growing number of prisoners. This was in spite of the use of the Melton bridewell. At Epiphany Sessions 1813 it was decided to discuss the internal management of the bridewell at the next meeting, and in April a committee was appointed to consider its state. In October the report was ordered to be printed, and the Chairman of Sessions and the two visiting justices of the house of correction were authorised to employ persons to make plans and estimates of what alterations and additions they might think necessary in the present bridewell, and to lay them before the Court. At this Session the legal procedure was begun by a justice

presenting the house of correction as insufficient, inconvenient and inadequate for keeping, separating and employing the inmates pursuant to the act of 1782.⁴⁰ At the Epiphany Sessions 1814 the justices had notice given of the presentment and of their intention to consider it at the next Sessions. This enabled them to make a decision either to improve the existing bridewell or to build a new one at the Easter Sessions. The committee was asked to obtain a plan and estimate for a new house of correction distinct from the gaol, and outside Leicester.⁴¹

At Easter the Court decided that it was absolutely necessary either to amend and enlarge the existing premises, or to build a new prison on a separate site, if possible outside the town. The plans and estimates for both a new house of correction and for altering the present one were to be left in the office of the Clerk for the justices to inspect. They were submitted by William Kirk of Great Wigston, the surveyor of the county bridges, who was by this date also looking after county buildings.⁴² At the July Sessions the justices decided to build a new house of correction on a site in the parish of St Mary, near the Infirmary. Kirk's plan and elevations for a prison to hold 80 people were adopted and he was asked to prepare specifications. Tenders were to be sought by advertisement. In October they were received from Joshua Vinrace, a builder of Ashby de la Zouch who constructed at least 11 county bridges between 1809 and 1826, from William Bradley of Leicester, J. Smith of Stamford, a Birmingham builder, Edward Jackson, and from two Leicester builders in partnership, Joshua Harrison (who had designed and erected the 1809 bridewell extension) and Ellis Mortin, a Leicester architect, stonemason and builder.⁴³ The justices had second thoughts about the size of the building, and decided in April 1815 to postpone the erection of the right wing. £1,500 was therefore deducted from the successful tender of Harrison and Mortin, and the contract signed at £5,590.⁴⁴ £1,333 10s. was paid for the land. Kirk was appointed to superintend the building at 7s. per day in addition to his salary as bridge survey-

or, with a man paid to supervise the bricklayers. He also received £30 for his plans and specifications.⁴⁵ The other wing was ordered to be built by the contractors for £1,500 in July 1816. Thus the justices finally erected a bridewell which was temporarily more than sufficient for the present number of prisoners. The final amount due on the contract and this extra wing (£7,090) was ordered to be paid in March 1818, and they also received £855 7s. 10d. for more works. With the land and the surveyor's charges the total cost was probably nearly £9,500. The justices also provided a corn mill to be worked by the prisoners. John and Richard Orridge, the former being governor of the Bury St Edmunds goal in Suffolk, were paid £30 to come to advise on the construction, and the mill with its machinery was erected in 1818 for £472, with bricks costing £132 more.⁴⁶

Works continued on the house of correction through the 1820s. Mortin and Harrison were paid a few hundred pounds for erecting a structure to contain the prisoner's cart, pillory and hanging apparatus under an agreement of 27 April 1822.⁴⁷ At this time attention was given not only to prisoners' security, diet and moral welfare, but also to hard labour. A building with as many as four treadwheels side by side (so they could be supervised) was erected in 1824–25, the number reflecting the rising number of inmates. The structure by Henry Clay and John Mortin cost £425 and the treadwheels by Messrs Wilson £750. After a prisoner escaped over the outer wall in daylight in 1825 up to £200 was spent on topping the wall with big slates covered by loose bricks, following the example of the Cambridgeshire prison. In 1829–30 up to £300 was voted for another treadwheel, as numbers rose further, and flagging the wards by John Mortin cost more than £300.⁴⁸

In 1816 the Court also decided to build a house of correction at Loughborough to hold persons committed by the local justices for examination before they were sent to the gaol. In July a committee of justices of the hundred was appointed to procure a plan and estimate of the building, reporting

at the next sessions, and the matter came up again at Epiphany Sessions 1817.⁴⁹ It then appears to have been dropped until 1823 when Michaelmas Sessions ordered that the plan for building on a chosen site in Loughborough be referred to the County Surveyor for inspection and approval. The site was bought for £270 and in April 1824 notice was given that the justices intended to contract for a four-cell building according to specifications which Parsons supplied. The contract was awarded at the lowest tender of £384 to two Loughborough men, William Hack and William North, though the cost was at least £496.⁵⁰

Sessions were still using the small bridewells or lock-ups. In 1824 Hinckley parish wanted the situation of its bridewell altered and its enlargement, but an adjourned sessions on 15 May, after considering Parsons's report, decided that scheme was too costly and dismissed it. When application was made at Epiphany Sessions 1826, probably by Ashby de la Zouch parish, for a new prison there to hold offenders before they were committed to the gaol or Leicester house of correction, the justices agreed to pay half of the cost, or up to £200 for the purpose.⁵¹ The use of these minor bridewells by sessions in conjunction with parishes was unusual from the later eighteenth century.

The insecure state of the county gaol built in the early 1790s, perhaps because of cells on the ground floor, was referred to a committee at the time of the completion of the new house of correction in April 1817, when the possibility of using it as a gaol seems to have occurred to the justices.⁵² A year later Kirk was asked to prepare for the next sessions a plan of a new gaol consisting of a keeper's house and up to six wards; he was to estimate the probable cost using the materials of the present gaol, and also the likely value of the site and materials of the present gaol in case they were sold.⁵³ At the July Sessions Kirk was asked to find a new site as a possible alternative for the existing one. The matter of a new gaol was then dropped for several years, although the visitors were asked to spend up to £500 in altering

and making secure the debtors' part of the gaol.⁵⁴

The passing of the Gaol Act concerning the classification and separation of prisoners in 1823 led to the state of the county prison being considered again. In January 1824 the gaoler and visiting justices reported on the condition of the gaol under the provisions of the act, that it was 'inconvenient insecure and insufficient for the due keeping and separating the several persons therein confined, and for supplying them with proper day rooms and night cells, and that the said gaol is wholly inadequate to give effect to the rules and regulations prescribed by the said act.' The visiting justices were to look out for a site for a new gaol, and to contract to buy it if they thought fit.⁵⁵

The proceedings of the following months are a little confusing, as the quarter sessions order books do not provide a full record. In May an adjourned Sessions ordered the visiting justices to buy a plot in the South Fields belonging to the Corporation, and on 16 July the *Leicester Journal* announced that 'the ground is staked out on the Welford Road, for the erection of a new County Gaol'.⁵⁶ Yet in October the justices had clearly not finally decided on a new site. Notices of the intention of the justices to consider the state of the gaol at the next Sessions were ordered in January, May and September. In July the County Surveyor, William Parsons, was ordered to provide a plan for the October Sessions to consider.⁵⁷ In October the Court, chaired by Legh Keck, decided that 'the present county gaol being on mature enquiry and consideration found to be insecure and inefficient, it is the unanimous opinion of the Court, that a new gaol must be erected, or the present gaol enlarged and made efficient. A committee open to all county justices was appointed to consider plans and take other necessary steps, to meet six times at the County Public Office up to January 1825.'⁵⁸

The committee at its first meeting on 27 October directed Parsons to prepare a plan of the premises adjoining the gaol which might be bought, to estimate their value, and that of the existing buildings,

so that the justices might decide whether to buy new site or build additional accommodation to be attached to the old gaol. The committee also decided that the new gaol should be able to hold 35 debtors, 20 female prisoners, 65 male prisoners, three solitary or condemned inmates, two King's evidence prisoners, and six sick, a total of 131. This scale of numbers would appear to have been less than that in the plan drawn by Parsons for the October Sessions. On 10 October the committee resolved against extending the existing gaol because of the cost of the purchase of the adjoining premises (at least £15,513), and the fact that the space (7,433 yards) would still be insufficient. The County Surveyor was directed to prepare a plan for a new gaol for 131 inmates, with an estimate. On 24 November the committee finally decided to take a new site of over three acres, being the ground contracted with the Corporation earlier. The County Surveyor was to advertise for contracts for the supply of bricks for building, to be delivered between 1 May and 31 October 1825. The Surveyor having found that the number of cells needed for 35 debtors and 65 male prisoners would not fit his plan, the committee opted for buildings extended at each end to contain 39 debtors and 70 male prisoners. At January Sessions 1825 the prison was formally presented as 'inconvenient, insecure and insufficient for the due keeping, separating and employing the prisoners', and wholly inadequate to give effect to the rules and regulations of the 1823 Act; the place was improper and a new gaol needed on a different site. This was accepted and the Court approved Parsons's last scheme, the third series of plans which he had drawn, and contracts for the supply of bricks with a Leicester bricklayer and two Leicester builders in partnership.⁵⁹ The final scheme comprised eight wards round a central governor's house, with a chapel over the house communicating by bridges with the upper stories of the wards. The wards included day-rooms, work-rooms and airing yards as well as cells. According to a contemporary, the topographer Samuel Lewis, the front

had a 'handsome castellated facade in the ancient style of English architecture'.⁶⁰

At the meeting of the committee on 8 January 1825 the justices approved the recommendation of Parsons that the different works be let out under a measure contract, the quantities being ascertained as the works proceeded. His comments make an interesting contribution to a subject which was the cause of lively contemporary debate among architects and building contractors.⁶¹ The advantages compared to a single contract for a fixed sum was that it allowed the justices to make any alterations and improvements in the progress of the works without the great inconvenience involved in altering the contract in a work of this magnitude. He found that there were great disadvantages in a contract for a fixed sum 'for large buildings of an unusual character and description, viz, the Custom House which was so altered and varied from the contract by constant additions and improvements that the whole of the work was obliged to be measured and left to a value price and the contract abandoned. . . . By a contract for quantities the work is equally put into competition and there is always a greater anxiety and willingness on the part of the contractor to do his work in the best style because he is satisfied that he has his price for the quantity he gives, which in a general contract let him make his estimate ever so carefully, he is not'. Worcestershire and Rutland county gaols had been built in this way without inconvenience, and the Derbyshire prison was being erected by this method.⁶²

At Easter Sessions building was ordered to be started, using the conditions and specifications for works submitted by Parsons. Seven justices (including Keck and Tyson) were appointed a committee to see to the works, meeting on alternate Wednesdays, conferring with the County Surveyor, with full power to take such steps as necessary in receiving proposals, making contracts and engaging workmen. Parsons was ordered to contract for the stone, which, like the bricks, was to be obtained under a separate contract, and to proceed immediately in

levelling the site. The Clerk was ordered to advertise for tenders for the different types of work. The tenders were chosen on 7 May and 8 June. One of the two firms supplying bricks, William Earl and Samuel Grocock, builders, won the contract for the brickwork. Separate craftsmen supplied the stone and undertook the stonemasonry, carpentry, plumbing and glazing and the ironwork. Stones came from Mountsorrel six miles away, two quarries near Chesterfield in Derbyshire (by canal), and paving slabs from Yorkshire (also by water). Joshua Harrison won the carpentry contract, and also bid unsuccessfully for the bricklaying, slating and plastering, the mason's work and the plumbing, glazing and painting. It is not clear whether part of these works would have been sub-contracted, or whether Harrison had all the various craftsmen in his employ. The second is certainly possible by the 1820's, in a large provincial town. Another builder, Joseph Swann, was prepared also to contract for most of the work: he bid unsuccessfully for the bricklaying, masonry, carpentry and joinery, and the glazing and painting. The contracts for prices without specifying the amount of work enabled the justices to alter the prices in 1827; at Easter Sessions Harrison's proposal for an increase in the carpentry prices was accepted, and the ironfounders were allowed to continue on tendering reduced prices.⁶³

After the completion of the prison five justices (including Rev. Gilbert Beresford) reported on the accounts in January 1829. The total cost was £59,574. This included £4,460 for the site, £3,021 for Parson's fee at five percent and the salary to the Clerk of the Works, and £3,407 for fixtures and furnishings and miscellaneous expenditure. A large part of the cost of the actual building (£48,686) was the brick and stonework; the stone and stonemasonry cost £19,683 and the bricks and bricklayers' work £14,120, compared with only £4,924 on timber and the carpentry and joinery. The figures suggest the great use of stone, though it was often more expensive than bricks, and the minimal use of wood for interior work. £54,000 was borrowed, of which

£30,000 came from the Exchequer Loan Commissioners, who lent for several new prisons in the 1820's. A Leicestershire clergyman lent £6,000 as the first loan in October 1825, and seven women supplied a total of £10,400. On account of its security and the automatic payment of interest, a loan to a quarter sessions was regarded as an attractive investment for a woman. The justices anticipated that the debt would be liquidated by continuing the existing quarterly rate of 1½ in the pound.⁶⁴ At last Leicestershire had a gaol which conformed to the best contemporary standards.

THE SHIRE HALL

As a shire hall the justices used the Castle in Leicester, which was leased from the duchy of Lancaster. Built about 1150, it has been described as 'the oldest surviving aisled and bay-divided hall in Europe'.⁶⁵ When the traveller Celia Fiennes visited Leicester in 1698 she found the front of the Castle was newly built 'all of brick'.⁶⁶ As there is no record of expenditure on it in the sessions records beginning in 1678 the facade was probably built by the subscriptions of Leicestershire gentry and other local people as in several other counties.⁶⁷

Minor repairs and changes were made during the eighteenth century. The first major attempt to improve the Assize accommodation seems to have been in 1808, when the justices were told at Easter Sessions that the civil or 'nisi prius' and criminal or 'crown side' courts and the grand jury rooms were very incommodious and inconvenient. The Clerk was to apply to Harrison 'the architect for the county work' for a plan and specification to improve them. But nothing seems to have been done.⁶⁸ In October 1819 the Clerk was ordered to advertise in the *Leicester Journal* for plans and estimates for altering and remodelling the courts. Next sessions the three plans received were referred to the visiting justices of the gaol and house of correction, to consider which should be used. In July 1820 Joshua

Harrison and Ellis Mortin were awarded the work for altering the courts on a measure basis.

Altogether they received £1,916 3s. for the tasks which were done mainly in 1821.⁶⁹ Ample space was provided in the hall of the Castle for assizes and quarter sessions, the courts being arranged so as not to interfere with each other by the destruction of the wooden arcades and the insertion of high wooden partitions.⁷⁰ Leicestershire justices thus avoided the expense of a large and ornate new building, which other counties erected at this time.

LUNATIC ASYLUMS

Sessions were given permissive powers to provide pauper lunatic asylums under an act of 1808, which reflected an increasingly humane approach to madness at this time. The matter was discussed in 1816, when the old house of correction was becoming vacant, and after fresh legislation in 1829. However, Leicestershire was among the majority of counties which did not establish an asylum before 1830.⁷¹

THE JUDGES' LODGINGS

Under pressure from the judges Leicestershire decided to follow the example of several other counties and provide a new judges' lodgings. At Lent Assizes 1817 the Grand Jury drew the attention of the justices to the inconvenience of the existing accommodation (which was too small, and hired), and recommended the buying of a house suitably fitted up. The justices themselves wanted a permanent office for their growing business, the result of the rise in the population of the county, and needed a record office. In April 1817 the Sessions appointed a committee to meet at the Hotel, a building owned by a group of subscribers who were unable to make it pay, to inspect its state and, if convenient, to treat for its purchase. In July the Court approved the buying of the Hotel for £3,150, and appointed a committee to meet there to have the roof repaired and make any alterations and improvements so as to make it suitable for the judges by the next Lent Assizes. To confirm the legality of their expenditure of rates, the justices obtained an act. It gave them the right to borrow £7,000. Half of this loan went on the purchase of the Hotel and expenses of the act (£450). At Easter Sessions 1818 it was decided that no more than £1,500 should be spent on repairs and alterations, nor more than £1,500 on furniture. The committee appointed Joshua Harrison to estimate the repairs and alterations set forth in the specifications already provided by him, and then to superintend the repairs. He obtained the main contract, receiving £1,628 13s. 4d. out of the total payment for building works of £2,037 5s. presumably mostly for carpentry; half the rest went to the plumber, Lang, and there were smaller payments to the mason, Kirk, the bridge surveyor (£76 13s. 2d.), Oldfield, the painter (£54 10s. 6d.), and Cort the ironmonger (£46 8s. 4d.). Bills for furniture totalled £1,592 15s. 7d. Of the £7,000, £5,000 was borrowed from the Clerk, Thomas Freer.⁷²

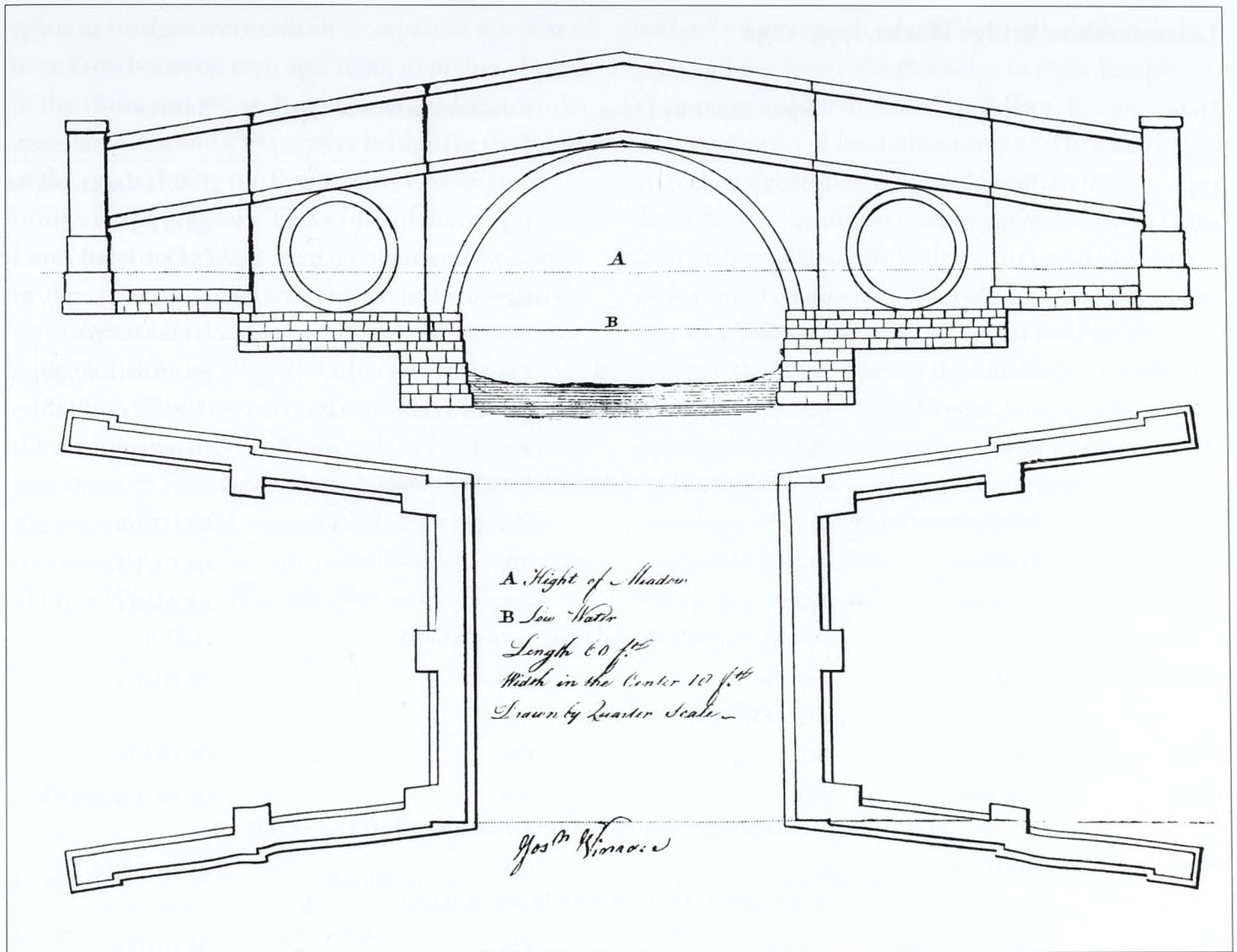


Figure 4. Joseph Vinrace, plan and elevation of Harris's Bridge, 1809. *Leicester Record Office*

BRIDGES

For most of the eighteenth century sessions did occasional small repairs to the bridges for which it was responsible, and made grants for work on non-county bridges, both types of expenditure normally costing up to £20. In response to commercial growth from the 1750's landowners who levied tolls, groups of subscribers and turnpike trusts which charged for the use of roads, as is well-known, built, rebuilt and widened bridges.⁷³ Yet sessions were not involved in larger works, as they were in other counties in the later 1760s and 1770s.⁷⁴ Presumably as sessions were spending on other matters, including the tiny bridewells, the county bridges were in a

tolerable state. They were durable, being mostly stone, some dating from the Middle Ages.

Expenditure on bridges by the justices began to be sizeable from the 1780s. As elsewhere the number of county bridges was growing; it was probably less than a dozen in the early and mid-eighteenth century, and 28 in 1824. In the 1780s and 1790s there were six bridge works costing at least several hundred pounds. They included by far the biggest bridge undertaking before the 1830s, the rebuilding of Sunday bridge, Leicester in 1795, a stone structure 231 feet long by 24½ feet wide within the parapet walls. Altogether in the constant prices of the

Leicestershire Bridge Works, 1779–1830

Date	Bridge	Expenditure by Leics £	Constant prices of 1750s £	Source
1758	Kegworth	[c. 100]		<i>V.C.H. Leics.</i> 111, 82
1779	Witherley	150	134	QS 5/1/5 (5 Oct. 1779)
1784	Kegworth	350 (‘repair’)	297	QS 5/1/6 (11 Jan. 1785)
1787–8	Fielden	500	424	QS 5/1/6 (10/7/97, 2/10/87, 7/10/88)
1790	Zouch	350 (700 contract shared with Nottinghamshire)	297	QS 30/2/1
1792	Braunstone Gate	255	185	QS 111/1/3
1795–6	Fielden	244	161	QS 111/1/3
1795–96	Sunday	2407 (£2045 contract shared with Corporation)	1584	QS 30/2/4, 111/1/3
1801–02	North	1076 2s. (repaired and rebuilt)	480	QS 111/1/3
1809	Harris’s	441	170	QS 111/1/3
1810	Welham	259 (£482 contract shared with Northamptonshire)	100	QS 111/1/3, 30/2/6
1810	Bensford	401 (£550 contract shared with Warwickshire)	154	QS 111/1/3, 6/2/1
1811	Ratcliffe Culey	769 6s.	285	QS 111/1/3
1814	Harborough	597 10s. (£900 contract shared with Northamptonshire)	221	QS 112/190–5
1819	Lewin	750 (contract)	300	QS 30/2/12
1820	Burton	770 (contract)	308	QS 30/2/14
1820	Medbourne	300 (£600 contract shared with Northamptonshire)	120	QS 30/2/13
1821	St. Mary’s	420 (£840 contract shared with Northamptonshire)	179	QS 30/2/15
1821	Cossington	1450 (contract)	620	QS 30/2/16
1822	Eye Kettleby, Melton	1287 (contract)	550	QS 30/2/21
1826	Stoney	319 (contract)	144	QS 30/2/21
1829	Crow Mill	249 10s. (contract)	113	QS 30/2/22

Prices stated are the costs in contemporary money, and those prices adjusted to the building costs of the 1750s. Between the 1750s and 1820s building charges rose two or three times, the adjusted prices are based on contemporary wage data, the rising costs of imported timber, and changing brick prices.

1750s 21 bridges were rebuilt or repaired at a cost of over £100 between 1779 and 1830, 10 of them being in the 1810s and 1820s. But none of the latter works were large, the most expensive bridge (in the prices of the 1750s) being the five-arched Cossington bridge in 1823 (£620). The width of these Leicestershire bridges varied considerably. Zouch bridge, (167 feet long) was only 16 feet wide and the tiny 60 foot Harris's bridge of one arch was 18 feet wide in the centre (Fig. 4). Others were broad enough to allow two carriages or waggons to pass in the middle, such as the Eye Kettleby bridge, which was about 27 feet wide. Three builders won most of the contracts, which were usually advertised, as required by an act of 1739. John Cheshire, a builder of Over Whitacre, Warwickshire, erected Zouch

bridge for Leicestershire and Nottinghamshire in 1790 and the larger North bridge in 1795. Joseph Vinrace, a builder of Ashby de la Zouch, was responsible for at least nine stone and brick bridges, including the stone bridge at Melton in 1822, described as 'the finest example of his work', a two-arch bridge at Ratcliffe Culey (1811), and the four-arch stone-faced bridge near Medbourne (1822). The Leicester builder Ellis Mortin handled five bridges, the biggest being the Cossington bridge.⁷⁵ All three, and especially Mortin, were paid smaller sums periodically for repairs, which were not advertised, suggesting a preference for craftsmen with a known record.⁷⁶ Although until the 1780s county expenditure on all kinds of building work was tiny, it then began to grow markedly.

BRIDGE AND TOTAL COUNTY EXPENDITURE, 1792–1830.⁷⁷

Date	Bridge costs	Total county charges	Percentage
1792–1800	£2,912	£22,742	12.8
1801–10	£2,947	£34,533	8.5
1811–20	£6,240	£85,793	7.3
1821–30	£12,046	£185,939	6.5

The proportion of bridge expenditure out of total county charges would be much higher in 1811–20 and 1821–30 if the cost of prison building is omitted.

It is also interesting to consider the cost of the new prison in the 1820s. The structure was by far the most expensive public building in Leicester before the 1840s. The next most costly building was St Margaret's parish church in 1826, at £14,964.⁷⁸ In urban England as a whole public buildings cost about ten per cent or a little more of the price of house building in the 1820s. Leicester's new housing between 1821 and 1831 may

have cost about £240,000, considering that 1,608 houses were added at a suggested average price of £150 per house.⁷⁹ Thus the cost of the gaol was about one quarter of the expenditure on housing, and if the charges of the house of correction works and that of the church are added, public buildings cost about a third of the price of the dwellings. The expenditure on the prisons was about one-third of total county outlay in this decade, and if bridge charges are added the figure rises to about two-fifths. Altogether expenditure on building by sessions reached a peak in the 1820s.

APPENDIX⁸⁰

Building expenses incurred on the Gaol and Leicester House of Correction, 1801–30

Years	Gaol £	House of Correction £	Years	Gaol £	House of Correction £
1801	191	110	1816	210	3308
1802	180	116	1817	371	3252
1803	116	652	1818	261	1599
1804	120	268	1819	290	1407
1805	104	26	1820	260	40
1806	86	49	1821	480	371
1807	110	60	1822	370	295
1808	78	51	1823	317	587
1809	117	756	1824	203	142
1810	169	91	1825	310	620
1811	273	127	1826	9,174	732
1812	517	197	1827	18,509	1134
1813	561	235	1828	16,166	411
1814	315	1074	1829	16,323	408
1815	360	2255	1830	1,396	891

Figures are given here to the nearest pound. They include repairs as well as new building. Maintenance on the gaol cost about £120 annually in the 1800s and over £300 in the 1810s; repairs to the house of correction cost about £70 in the 1800s and about £120 in the 1810s. One cannot distinguish building and repairs after 1823.

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