

ADELAIDE GAOL

Off Port Road



(CD Ref 2835/45)

Parts of Adelaide Gaol, together with elements of Government House, are the two oldest remaining colonial public buildings in Adelaide. Both were designed by the architect George Strickland Kingston who was employed by the government as the civil engineer. The extravagant public works represented by these two buildings contributed to the colony's bankruptcy in 1840 and to Governor Gawler's replacement by Governor Grey in May 1841.

The importance given to the construction of a substantial gaol reflects the new colonists' fear of contamination from New South Wales by absconding convicts and runaway drunken seamen. They felt that the gaol was needed for these vagrants rather than for the deviants from their own pure society. Sheriff Dutton even suggested constructing a new gaol to halt the expense of paying private ship-owners to transport South Australia's worst criminals to Van Diemen's Land. Prisoners could also provide a labour force ' . . . which even the mother country has found useful'.

The source of Kingston's gaol design was probably in England. In 1837 Kingston returned to England on behalf of the colonization commissioners to recruit men capable of quickly surveying land. Kingston did not return until 1838 when he temporarily replaced the surveyor-general, William Light, before reinstatement as colonial engineer. During 1837-38 Kingston perhaps familiarised himself with gaol designs, for the half-decagon design that Kingston produced for Governor Gawler was not unique in design or concept. In fact it was a

Heritage of the City of Adelaide

common design of a panopticon used for hospitals and prisons of eighteenth and early nineteenth century European and colonial American establishments before being considered out of date. Designed on a radial plan it meant that many patients or convicts could be overseen from a central point.

When Kingston was in London the design for Pentonville Prison was well advanced. The inspectors of prisons in England had arrived at a set of general plans for prisons in an effort to create a model prison, followed by an effective publicity campaign to make the excellence of Pentonville Prison known. Architecturally the Adelaide Gaol is important, for until 4 February 1988 when it officially closed, it was the oldest radially designed gaol remaining in use in Australia. While considerably altered from the original plans it retains the nineteenth century colonial design with little alteration to the halfdecagon concept.

The limestone, described as the 'best hard milkstone' used for the first stage of 1840-41, was quarried from one of the three government quarries along the River Torrens, near Government House and near the Land Office. Red brick was also used and was made on site. The limestone was used for the outer 18 foot high walls, and 'best handmade bricks' for interior walls and buildings, apart from the governor's house of brick and stone.

Governor Gawler had decided that a large solid gaol should be built as a result of a grand jury investigation into the conditions of the temporary gaol which proved to be filthy, miserable and insecure. This temporary goal had been built while Kingston was in England, but soon proved to be inadequate.

Borrow & Goodiar won the building contract for £17 000 and commenced the works in 1840. Like Gawler (who was, however, swiftly replaced), Kingston was carried away by his enthusiasm. He departed from the original plans by preventing the contractors from completing specified work, but on direction from Governor Gawler, designed and had built two octagonal castellated towers and made considerable alterations to the governor's house.

The building contractors were disturbed at the manner in which the whole works were being organised. Costs escalated, wages rose and the government began to haggle over the estimated cost of works. By mid-1841 a quarter of the decagon shape had been completed, together with the gaol governor's house and one of the towers complete with castellations leaving the other tower without its castellations.

With only a quarter of the decagon completed it had already cost over £16 000.

The *South Australian*, 20 December 1840 reported that the gaol would shortly be fit to be occupied. No. 1 yard was nearly complete. No. 2 far advanced with seven good lock-up places for debtors. Five solitary cells were nearly finished, as were two out of four of the towers intended as the places of residence for the turnkeys or guards. 'As a whole, it is a highly creditable erection - nothing of the kind for health or convenience being found in any of the neighbouring colonies'.

Governor Gawler, when justifying the size of his gaol only days before he was replaced by Governor Grey, said it was to be of lasting advantage and it would have been folly to have built a gaol too small.

Heritage of the City of Adelaide

Francis Dutton, however, did not share Governor Gawler's views:

This buildin, stands on the outskirts of the town, to the westward; it is an extensive building, flanked by towers, forming a section of an octagon, and is like Government House, incomplete. This jail is an eyesore to the Colony; newcomers on seeing it ask quite aghast: 'What do you want with such a large jail in this free Colony?' Aye! Well may you ask that question! What do we want with it indeed? A building upon which £34,000 has been thrown away, ornamented with a parcel of trumpery and useless towers, each of which cost thousands; a building containing accommodation for 140 imaginary prisoners, whilst the total number of convictions for petty crimes and misdemeanours, out of a population of 20,000 was only five and twenty for the whole of 1844, or two per month! - A jail so large, and still only half finished, is necessary to entail a heavy yearly expense on this Colony, to guard only the half dozen poor devils who are occasionally locked up in it. Who will pretend to excuse this expenditure, richly deserving the terms 'lavish' and 'extravagant', which the Commissioners and others so readily apply to the whole of Colonel Gawler's administration? This jail is a libel on our free, industrious and well disposed population, it is a libel on a Colony, proverbial for the security of both life and property!

When the first quarter of the decagon had been built, work came to an abrupt halt while Borrow & Goodiar and the government were locked in arbitration. Governor Grey had arrived and he saw to it that Borrow & Goodiar received only what he considered the real value of the works done. Borrow & Goodiar, almost bankrupt as a result of the stoppage and wrangling, received much less than they claimed was their due which they believed was in excess of £30 000. Claims by Borrow & Goodiar's creditors against the government went on for nearly twenty years.

By 1843 there was one governor at the gaol, two turnkeys and two guards to oversee the prisoners. There was no official matron for the female felons until 1850. In 1841 Sheriff Newenham wrote to the colonial secretary about the immorality between the guards and the female felons and asked for some provision to overcome this. The colonial secretary on behalf of Governor Grey replied that it would be a much cheaper plan to dismiss men suspected of immorality than to build separate enclosures to keep them from the female prisoners for few women were imprisoned. In 1847 there were only two women inmates according to a visiting reporter, one was a lunatic and the other a thief. Before the second stage of 1847-8 was undertaken there were only two yards and so women were confined in the space between the inner and outer walls.

The foundations of the outer wall that was to complete the half decagon were built by day labour and the walls themselves were built by R.S. Breeze in 1847. Stone for the coping came from the Government Farm at Belair.

Between 1847 and 1850 stage two of the completion of the half decagon began. As with the first stage all buildings in these yards began as one storey in brick (approximately 400 000 were made for the works, manufactured close by on the banks of the River Torrens). The overall plan was carried out in a similar way to Kingston's original design. Colonial engineers involved at this time were Edward Charles Frome until February 1849, Richard Lambeth from February 1849 to June 1849, and Sir Arthur Henry Freeling from June 1849 to June 1852. When the additions were completed there were five interior yards each separated by 10 foot high brick walls.

There were now two separate divisions for women, and in these yards two significant buildings were constructed. Both were single storey. The building facing into two yards was divided to contain quarters for untried and convict females. The building is still intact with little alteration. The other building constructed up against the interior wall facing into yard one began as a one storey building containing twenty four lock-up cells for convict females and female lunatics. Major alterations and additions in 1862-64 and in 1880 transformed this into a two storey building in sympathy with the earlier structures making it difficult to detect that this building has undergone these additions.

Another significant single storey building constructed at this time was to the west of the governor's house and contained solitary cells, a condemned cell, the infirmary, the lock-up, storeroom, workshop, the mill room and the tread mill:

The Workshop can give room to twenty-five prisoners at work and the Tread Mill is constructed for eight prisoners at once. The Mill will grind from three to four bushels of wheat an hour and there is a reaping machine attached.

Between 1857 and 1859 the first two storey cell block was constructed by I. & J. Baker and straddled the two women's yards. For the first time bluestone was used. Limestone was now no longer used or being quarried from the known sites along the River Torrens. A third storey was added in 1862 by the contractors English and Brown. A 'complete brick and grill fireproof colonnade face' was built in 1881 by Henry Ruthven which transformed the building's facade. A two storey building for debtors and felons was built in front of the tower without castellations and was constructed of stone with brick dressings.

In 1867 additions were made to the keeper's quarters alongside the governor's residence. The existing single storey structure to the east of the main entrance was made two storey, adding one room to the first floor.

In 1867 Wills & Dicken also built a substantial two storey cell block for debtors and felons made of bluestone and brick with an impressive colonnade facade. W. Baker constructed a two storey block of thirty eight cells and workrooms for short sentenced prisoners. Prison labour was used in conjunction with the contractor for the works which were completed in 1872. These cells were along the inner wall of No. 5 yard and alongside the one storey building of 1840 on the south-east corner in front of the castellated tower. Built of bluestone, the quoins, windows and doorways are of brick.

Further additions were made to the women's cells in 1873. The new section was built using Dry Creek stone and the unskilled labour was again by prisoners who broke the stone quarried at Dry Creek.

By the mid-1870s there was a shift away from attempting to build any new additions that would have to fit within the existing radial design. However, there was by this time a need for further classification of petty offenders. This justified the erection in 1879 of a new T-shaped cell block. As the *South Australian Register*, 17 May 1879 reported:

The want of increased accommodation within the walls of the Adelaide Gaol, and especially such as would afford facilities for the better classification of the criminal classes, whose great

Heritage of the City of Adelaide

or small offence alike bring them under prison discipline but whose degrees of baseness are of different depths, has long been felt . . . The old building, although in times past considered adequate to the 'unwilling wants' of the criminal community, has for years been found to need enlarging; and not only that, but such have been the improvements in the internal economy of prisons that the Adelaide Gaol has fallen behind the times in retaining its old-fashioned characteristics. The interior of the prison is kept scrupulously clean, and so far as facilities will allow its internal management is very good; but even so careful a Governor as Mr. Howell must find it impossible to meet the difficulties arising out of insufficient accommodation, defective design, and bad ventilation. Additions have been made at different times but not to the extent really required . . .

Sheriff Boothby was sent to England and visited penal establishments to obtain full information on their internal arrangements, discipline and regulations. On his return the government implemented his ideas and the architect-in-chief designed a new and separate cell block outside the existing boundary walls:

'T' shape in design, two storeys high it contained 92 separate cells, besides five solitary cells and affords room for about 100 prisoners. The old gaol contains 120 separate cells. The enclosing wall is solidly built, of great height and has loose bricks on the top in the same style as that surrounding the main building.

After the additions and alterations of 1880 and 1881 already mentioned, few alterations have been made and the integrity of the buildings has remained externally largely intact, dictating increasingly obsolete prison conditions on the inside.

From without, the old gaol complex is an impressive landmark, particularly as seen from passing trains.

Australian Heritage Commission, *The heritage of Australia*, 1981, pp. 2/229, 2/155, 7/71; Department of Housing Construction Plan Room, Plans HD1677-1719, Specifications for Adelaide Gaol, 1867-81; Dutton, F., *South Australia and its mines*, 1846, pp. 120-22; GRO, GRG 24/4/31.12.1841, 24/4/16.10.1841, 24/6/14.10.1841, 24/6/12.9.1846, 24/6/6.1.1847, 24/6/15.1.1847, 24/6/6.1.1848, 24/6/24.1.1850, GRG 36/32/10/5.4.1840, Specification for erection of a jail, GRG 38/9/1/Adelaide Gaol, Index by name of building to letters sent, 1849-77; Kerr, J., 'Classification and segregation in establishment for British convicts in the Australian colonies' in papers from conference *Architectural history in Australia*, 1984, p. 9; Kerr, J., *Design for convicts*, 1984, pp. 159-61; Langmead, D., 'George Strickland Kingston: Pioneer and architect', Ph.D., Flinders University, 1985; MLSA, Griffiths, A.R.G., *History of South Australian prisons* D4599 (T), 1964, Hague R.M., *The History of the law in South Australia*, D6788(T), 1937; Pike, D., *Paradise of dissent* (2nd ed.), 1967, p. 283; Pevsner, N., *A history of building types*, 1976, Chapter 10; SAPP, Colonial architect reports 1858-82; *South Australian*, 20 December 1840, 27 April 1841; *South Australian Register*, 17 May 1879; State Heritage Branch, Register nomination report (Adelaide Gaol), 1 April 1982; Sumerling, P., 'The history and cultural significance of the Adelaide Gaol' in Danvers Architects, *Adelaide Gaol conservation study*, Adelaide, 1986.

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Information Sheet are a selection of those held by Heritage Services, in digital format.

The property described in this Information Sheet is included in the Register of State Heritage places. A heritage listing does not mean or imply right of access by the public to such properties.

The heritage related Principles of Development Control as well as the Precinct specific objectives and Principles of Development Control are contained in the Adelaide (City) Development Plan. These should be referred to in whole when contemplating any development.

Further information on the Heritage Incentives Scheme, an initiative of Council to sponsor timely and appropriate conservation action is available upon request of the Customer Service Centre.



CITY OF ADELAIDE HERITAGE STUDY

The City Heritage Register-Definition of Items

Prepared by the Dept. of Planning and Development

Item	ADELAIDE GAOL	Building N ^o	271001
Address	West Park Lands (Park 27.10), off Port Road		

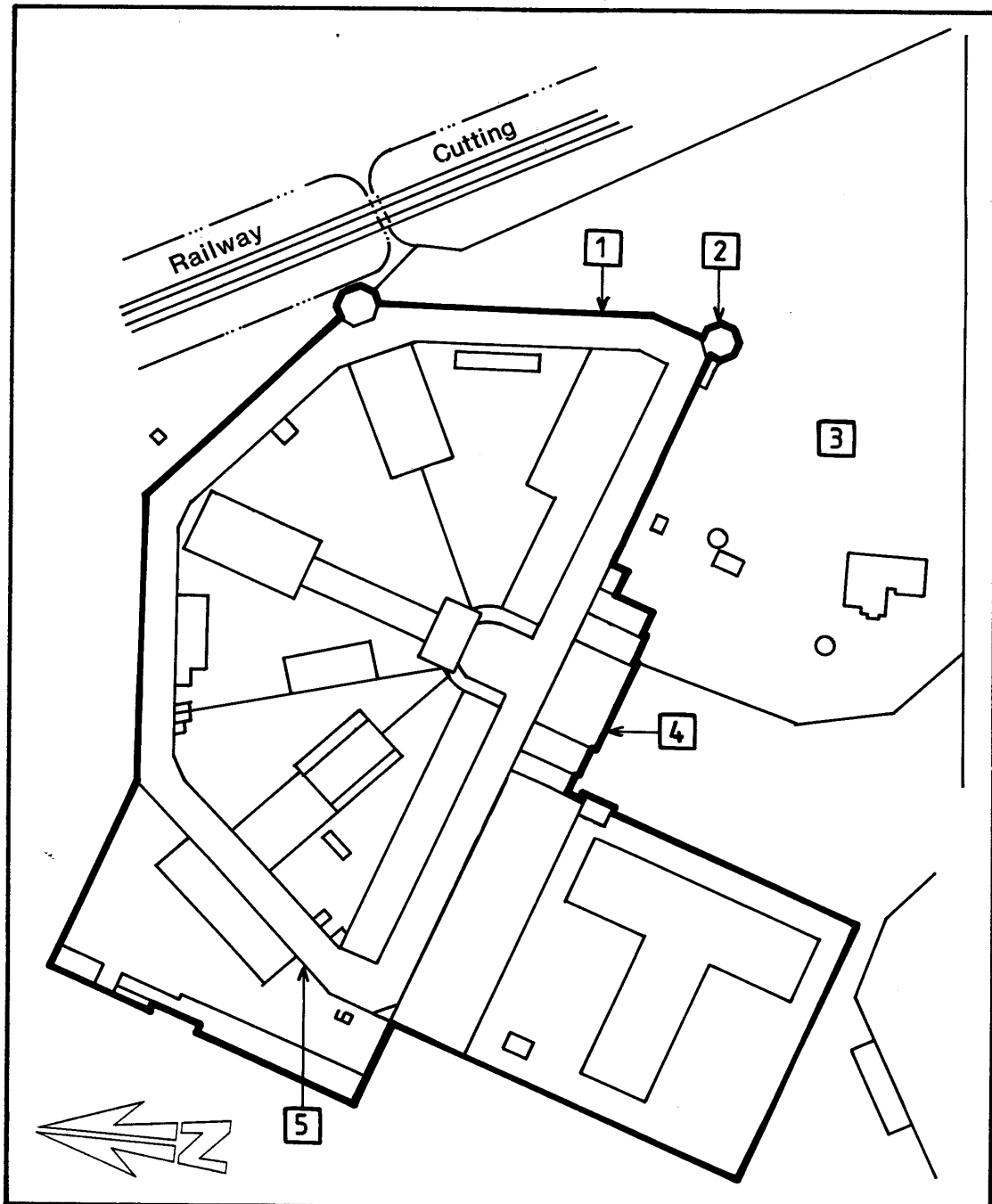


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NOTES:

1. Sandstone.
2. Note observation tower with battlement parapets.
3. Bluestone rubble with brick quoins.
4. Brick with stucco enrichment.
5. Limestone rubble.