

English Society and the Prison: Time, Culture and Politics in the Development of the Modern Prison, 1850-1920



This social history analyses a period in which the modern prison experienced some of its most serious challenges both on a practical and philosophical level. These include the way in which prison was utilised to deal with poor, disaffected and political sections of society, and the failure to establish in the prison a legitimate means of punishment. English prisons have been the site of continued struggles over power, waged between prisoners, prison staff and prison authorities. Such struggles have been strongly influenced by social, political and penal contexts. These dynamics are examined from a perspective which emphasises the forms of disturbances that occurred within English prisons between 1850 and 1920 and the consequences of a custodial sentence for those subject to it. For many offenders, the taint of imprisonment closed down their choices and instituted a pattern of revolving door custody for repeated petty crimes. For some convicts, the physical and psychologically undermining effects of penal servitude, and in some cases extreme acts of self-injury, could incapacitate them for life.

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