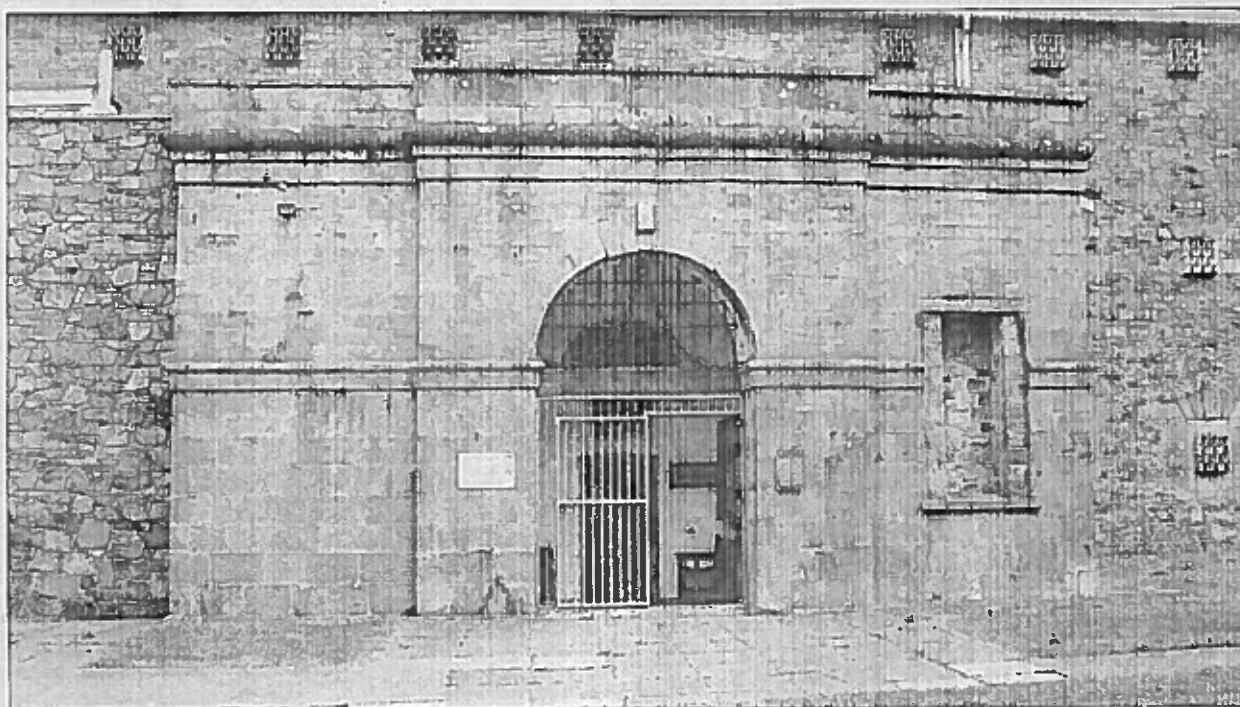


Nostalgia

Looking back at Pembrokeshire of yesteryear

Send your tales of life in the county to Western Telegraph, Western Tanglers, Fishguard Road, Haverfordwest, SA62 4BU

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The outside of the old prison building at Haverfordwest

Old jail to open up for public discovery

HISTORIAN Mark Muller unlocks the history of Haverfordwest's old jail, ahead of an opportunity for the public to explore the building's past...

As part of a Europe-wide event to make buildings available to the public that might not otherwise be accessible, the old jail at Haverfordwest Castle will be open on Sunday, thanks to the efforts of Haverfordwest Civic Society and Pembrokeshire County Council.

A prison, or House of Correction, had been created during the 1770s within the inner ward of Haverfordwest Castle but it was an extremely ramshackle, grim affair consisting of a double decker, timber arrangement against the north-eastern wall.

Prison reformers, most notably John Howard, Elizabeth Fry and much later Charles Dickens, campaigned endlessly for improvement in the treatment of prisoners but it was slow coming. As the result of an outbreak of scarlet fever, which the whole prisoner population succumbed to, a decision was made to build a new prison.

With grant money of £1,500 from the Govern-

ment in 1817, the prison was built that we are all familiar with.

This prison, for the county, was in addition to the tiny town jail that stood originally in the Mariner's Square before being moved a few yards to a point immediately below St Mary's Church wall in St Mary's Street.

A huge treadmill was erected in 1820 at a cost of £473 to provide the element of hard labour.

The wheel was built by and was the invention of Sir William Cubitt, whose engineering talents led to him being used internationally and he introduced a water supply to Berlin and surveyed the Paris to Lyon railway. Two teams, each of eight to 10 prisoners, were used on the wheel, each team doing ten minutes whilst the other rested.

A normal day would require ten hours of this. Although the object was largely to create hard labour, the wheel turned a millstone which ground the corn for the prison bread.

A miller was employed by the prison to supervise the wheel operation.

Female prisoners were expected to do turns on the

wheel but as elsewhere in the prison there had to be a partition placed between them and any males on the same wheel shift.

Women were also used for the domestic needs of the prison such as in the laundry and kitchen, whilst men were required to break stones used for road building or repairs.

Those deemed unfit for health reasons for any of these tasks were required to pick oakum, which was perhaps the most hated of all jobs in that rope that was considered too valuable to throw away, but was worn and covered in tar, had to be unpicked to enable the threads to be used again.

All that is being described here is not dissimilar to the life of those in the workhouse whose inmates were equally considered criminals, in this case for being poor.

The building ceased to be a jail in October 1878 and became the headquarters of Pembrokeshire County Police which it housed for almost 100 years.

The interior of the building was radically altered in the 1960s to house the Record Office and an upper floor was created and used

for the purposes of the museum.

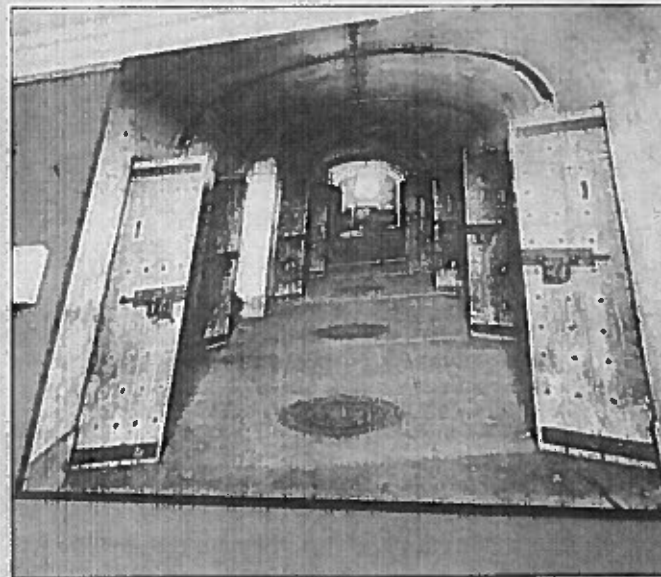
The Town Museum has since moved into the Governor's House and the Record Office/Archives moved into its Prendergast home on March 23, 2013.

Just as recently have been the attempts of a developer to purchase the building and turn it into a bijou hotel.

An application by Haverfordwest Town Council, based on an idea submitted by Haverfordwest Civic Society, to have the castle and its grounds registered as a village green - with the aim of protecting it against future development - was defeated following a public hearing held in County Hall in the autumn of 2013.

This is a building which you probably won't have an opportunity to view in the future, so come along to European Heritage Day on Sunday from 10.30am to 3.30pm with a talk on the prison (including the escapes and executions) at 11am and 2pm.

The Town Museum will also be open with knowledgeable staff present, from whom much of the research for this article has been obtained.



The old cells of the former prison at the castle, which no longer exist
PICTURE: Courtesy of Haverfordwest Museum