

## Love Lane Gaol & Police Stations – Crime & Punishment

There had been a lock-up, probably at the lower end of the Shire-Hall's ground-floor from its 1572 construction. A borough lease of 1598<sup>1</sup> states that the *Office of gaolership with tower called the Burgesse tower* (Burgess Gate) was held by *Robert jones, gent., servant to Rt. Hon. Sir Thomas Egerton, Lord Keepr of the Great Seal*. The 1875 OS Denbigh map indicates that a 19<sup>th</sup> century rear lean-to at the Shire Hall was for police use. However there must have been a larger prison elsewhere. A review of 1838 highlighted the inadequacy of the current prison in Denbigh (the old Bridewell) and it was agreed that the county be given the old Bridewell, towards the expense of erecting a new prison. This prison had been used for Judicial and police purposes by both borough and county justices, but had latterly gone into great decay. The Bridewell formerly called Tŷ Mawr was sold for £120<sup>2</sup>. A reference to a William Roberts<sup>3</sup> of Denbigh, a smith having a *Yard with stable and outbuildings adjoining the old Bridewell*, locates, the former site to the Swine Market area (now Mount Pleasant).

This led to the purpose built County Gaol of 1843 in Love Lane, which housed those convicted in the County Court at the Shire Hall. The Gaol was designed by Sir Joshua Jebb a military engineer and the Surveyor-General of convict prisons<sup>4</sup>. He had designed HM Prison Pentonville in London, which became the model for British and commonwealth prisons. The Love Lane gaol is built from squared limestone blocks, with rock-faced blocks to the central bay. It has a three-bay façade, with a two-storey part to the left and a central advanced bay with entrance. The right-bay is single-storey. The building is set back from the street, behind a low railed forecourt wall of squared, limestone with central gate piers, topped with ball finials. Its basement retains four of the original six prison cells. The area of the exterior exercise yards survive at the rear, with evidence that it was formerly divided into three yards. The right hand bay's basement plan has been altered internally and extended in the late-19<sup>th</sup> century over part of the exercise area. The surviving prison cells have brick vaulted ceilings, each with iron grates to a small window overlooking the walled exercise yard. The original cell doorways are double thick planks, each with a small hinged opening, iron hinge straps and mortise locks. A central stone stair links the basement to the ground-floor, which must have provided accommodation for the Head Gaoler and guards, with offices and refectory rooms. In 1874 it is described as consisting of: 'frontage, nine cells, three large yards for use of prisoners and a keeper's residence'<sup>5</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> Denbigh borough Records. Ref. BDA 114 Lease 12 August 1598

<sup>2</sup> Denbigh borough Records. Ref. BDA 151, Conveyance, Sept. 1843.

<sup>3</sup> Denbigh borough Records. Ref. BDA 140. Lease 29 Sept. 1827

<sup>4</sup> Report of the Surveyor-General of Prisons, London, 1844 reproduced in Mayhew, *Criminal Prisons of London*, London, 1862.

<sup>5</sup> Worrall's *Directory of North Wales*, 1874.

Grove Place on Vale Street, originally an 18<sup>th</sup> century town-house was used as the town's Police station from c1930 until 2001, when the Police moved to a purpose built police station in Graig Road. Grove Place still retains its prison cells in the rear wing, although it is now being converted back to domestic accommodation. The nearby County Gaol in Ruthin, became H.M. Prison in 1888, serving Denbighshire, Flintshire and Merioneth, and eventually led to the decline of Denbigh Gaol's status.

