

COAL TODAY, GONE TOMORROW: How jobs were replaced with prison places

by Phil Mike Jones, Emily Gray and Stephen Farrall

Foreword

In early March 2020, we held an event on the spatial history of British prisons. The event explored how decisions about the siting and development of new prisons were connected to underlying social, economic and political changes over the course of the twentieth century and into the twenty-first.

We planned to publish the main insights that emerged from that event shortly afterwards. Then the COVID-19 crisis intervened, disrupting the best-laid plans, and casting a long shadow over the lives of far too many. Nearly one year on from that event, I am delighted that we are now able to publish this important briefing.

It is commonplace that prisons are created and maintained to hold those sentenced by the courts, and those remanded while awaiting trial. The geographical location of any given prison, whether it is newlybuilt, or adapted from existing buildings, is something far less frequently reflected upon. These are the questions explored by Phil Mike Jones, Emily Gray and Stephen Farrall in this briefing.

Taking in a sweep of time from the beginning of the twentieth century to the present day, the authors identify some striking patterns. In the years following the Second World War, for instance, a number of prisons were opened on former military bases and in former country houses. Such redevelopments are rare today.

Since the 1960s, a number of prisons have been built on former industrial sites, with most of them located in the former industrial heartlands of England and Scotland. In particular, the authors find a strong concentration of new prison capacity in former coal-mining areas, associated with the traumatic economic restructuring and deindustrialisation of the 1980s.

“Regions where industrial employment was concentrated may expect to see economic restructuring”, the authors write, “but if economic recovery is weak, the prison complex may come to replace the industrial complex”.

The claim that new prisons offer an economic bonanza to hard-pressed areas is a dubious claim at best. What this briefing points to is the interrelationship between governmental economic policies, and the decision to site prisons in the industrial wastelands left in their wake.

Richard Garside Director

Introduction

The reverberations of industrial closures and high levels of unemployment in the UK after 1979 have been charted by numerous scholars. Shipyards, steel and coal-mining industries and parts of the British automotive industry were heavily affected by deindustrialisation (measured as the relative decline of manufacturing or the decline of manufacturing employment).

While this development began in many advanced economies during the 1960s, it accelerated rapidly in the UK following the pursuit of monetarist economic policies instigated by Margaret Thatcher's administrations. These conditions hit the UK manufacturing sector particularly hard in the 1980s. High interest rates and an over-valued currency rendered UK manufacturing exports uncompetitive domestically and internationally. By 1995 nearly 90 per cent of the coal-mining workforce had been lost, and the impact of this unprecedented destruction of jobs was geographically concentrated.

In areas of the English midlands, south Wales and central Scotland, mining had been the dominant source of employment for men for generations, so the consequences for these communities were especially pronounced. Indeed, Britain's miners launched one of the longest and fiercest industrial disputes in modern times in the UK. At its peak, 142,000 miners went on strike over pit closures and pay and a violent conflict, dubbed the 'Battle of Orgreave' when a mass picket was charged by police, remains a controversial event some 35 years later.

Deindustrialisation continued throughout the 1980s as the British economy shifted from manufacturing to services. Notably, such was the impact of this economic transformation that Beatty et al., (2007) found evidence that by 2004 (more than 20 years after the miners' strike) former coal-mining areas had still not fully recovered. Substantial job losses in 'heavy' industries were not matched with new jobs, and many former miners registered as 'inactive' or 'permanently sick' (rather than unemployed), suggesting that official estimates of unemployment may have been significantly underestimated.

In this paper we explore what happened to those regions with regards to the location of prisons in the years since the 1980s. We look specifically at the places in those areas that were once economically dependent on coal-mining, assessing the extent to which prisons were located in them relative to non-coal-mining areas. We do this by examining the prison building programme that took place in England, Scotland, and Wales during the 1980s and in the period since.

From the 1990s there was a substantial expansion of the prison population and the criminal justice system. Between June 1993 and June 2012 the prison population in England and Wales increased by 41,800 prisoners to over 86,000 as a result of new sentences and recalls to prison. During the Thatcher and Major administrations (1979-1997) 26 new prisons were built. Others were extended to manage the mounting pressure on inmate places as crime and punitive attitudes increased, resulting in a ‘tougher’ criminal justice system and ultimately more inmates.

Older prisons also underwent refurbishment to improve conditions and security following disturbances, of which there were 46 in 1986, as well as a 25-day riot in HMP Strangeways in 1990. The privatisation of prisons also introduced an ‘enterprise culture’ into public services in the early-1990s. HMP Wolds was the first contracted-out prison in the UK, run by Group 4, in 1992. We assess if it is possible to detect a patterning in the location in time and space of new British prisons. Did they appear evenly spread across British counties, or did the building of such establishments mirror other trends that were taking place historically?

We consider this hypothesis in two steps. First, we examine the number and former uses of the sites where prisons were built 1901-2017, categorising key developments. Second, we compare the number of prisons in former coalmining areas to non-mining areas (controlling for population change).

Identifying previous usage

In all, our data set contain some 115 prisons that were opened in England, Wales and Scotland between 1901 and 2017. The peak years for openings were during the 1960s, when a flurry of prisons opened. Seventeen of these were purpose-built prisons that were conceived and constructed to replace dilapidated Victorian local prisons. However, due to the rise of the prison population, none of the proposed closures in the Victorian-era secure estate actually took place.

Table 1 summarises the role the site had before it operated as a prison. There were 17 which were converted from or built on the grounds of former-country houses. Eight were former hospitals (or similar institutions, such as HMP Longriggind, which was a tuberculosis sanatorium). In all, there were 41 former military installations that were re-purposed or converted into prisons.

Five brownfield sites and 16 greenfield sites were also utilised, while 13 prisons were built on the site of former-industrial complexes. These include railway works, collieries and mines, brick works and power stations. Nine prisons were built within the grounds of existing prisons, whilst six we classified as having had ‘other’ uses (for example, HMP Finnermore Wood was a wartime evacuation ‘camp school’).

Table 1. Previous usage of sites on which prisons were opened (1901-2018)

	Number	Percentage
Military (MOD, RAF, USAF, MI5 etc.)	41	36
Country House	17	15
Greenfield	16	14
Industrial works (brick, mine, power station)	13	11
Existing prison land	9	8
NHS	8	7
Other brownfield	5	4
Other	6	5
Total	115	100

Linking previous site usage and historical period

We sought to explore the opening of new establishments against the prior usage of the sites over the historical and political period since 1901. For the purposes of this study we have divided the period into historical categories based on key shifts in political direction from 1901 to 2017. Specifically, we distinguish between ‘pre-war consensus’ (1901-1945) and ‘post-war consensus’ (1946-1960) categories, given the end of World War II marked a transformation in social and political arrangements in the UK with the wide extension and consolidation of the welfare state. As Butler and Kavanagh (1997) note, the popular vote was evenly split between the two major parties (Labour and the Conservatives) in this era, emphasising what

is known as the ‘post-war consensus’. From the mid-1960s this consensus began to be challenged, hence our third category ‘the Wilson/Callaghan’ period (1961-1979).

The Conservative governments (1979-1997) are our fourth category (the Thatcher/Major period). These embarked on a project to ‘roll back’ the state and (ostensibly) give citizens greater choice, while reducing benefits for the poor and vulnerable in society. Moreover, these Conservative administrations marked a key change in how crime and criminal justice was framed politically, with a greater emphasis on ‘law and order’.

Two decades of New Right dominance eventually ended with the election of ‘New Labour’ in 1997. New Labour endorsed market economics and sought to synthesise capitalism and socialism. This period covers 1997-2010, while the final category is the more recent era of low crime and a decreasing emphasis on criminal justice populism via the Conservative-led coalitions and governments of 2010-17.

Table 2 presents a cross-tabulation of the above periodisation and type of institution that was repurposed as a new prison. Overall, we can see a small number of new prisons (nine) were opened in the first period from 1901 up to the end of World War II. During the ‘post-consensus’ period, 24 new prisons were opened. We then have an 18- year period from 1961 to the election in 1979 of the first Thatcher administration when 39 prisons were opened. The Thatcher and Major governments opened 26 new prisons.

The data in Table 2 presents three key trends over time in relation to the repurposing of country houses, militarisation and deindustrialisation. The focus of this summary will concentrate on the latter

Table 2. Political period and previous usage of sites on which prisons were built (1901-2017)

	Pre-war consensus 1901-1945	Post-war consensus 1946-1960	Wilson/ Callaghan 1961-1979	Thatcher/ Major 1979-1997	Blair/ Brown 1997-2010	Tory/ Coalitions 2010-2017	Total
Military	1	12	14	10	1	3	41
Country house	0	11	5	1	0	0	17
Greenfield	3	0	6	4	3	0	16
Industry	1	0	4	4	3	1	13
Existing prison land	0	0	4	2	2	1	9
NHS	0	0	3	4	1	0	8
Other brownfield	3	0	0	0	2	0	5
Other	1	1	3	1	0	0	6
Total	9	24	39	26	12	5	115

Deindustrialisation and the location of prisons

‘Deindustrialisation’ is generally considered as a substantial reduction in industrial capacity in the manufacturing and heavy industry sectors. Taking this definition, one can trace a major decline of such work in the UK from 1973. Fieldhouse and Hollywood (1999: 483) note that the 1980s and early-1990s witnessed an ‘unprecedented transformation leading to the virtual destruction of the mining industry in Britain’.

From Table 2 we see that the first real signs of the reuse of former industrial sites as prisons was in the 1960s. The one prison in the 1901-1945 period that was built on a former industrial site was HMP New Hall in West Yorkshire, which was the first open prison, and constructed on the site of a former colliery in 1933. The prisons repurposed from industrial sites after 1960 were: HMP Hindley near Wigan (1961), which was built on the site of a colliery; HMP Low Newton in County Durham (1965), which was built on the site of a brick works; and HMP Glenochil near Stirling (1966). It was built on National Coal Board land, having first opened as a detention centre, before being extended into a Young Offenders Institution in 1975. In the period between 1979 and 1997, five more prisons were built on sites formerly occupied by industrial institutions. HMP Wymott near Leyland (1979), HMP Frankland in County Durham (1980) and HMP Garth in Leyland (1988) were built on the sites of former brick works. HMP Whitemoor in Cambridgeshire (1991) was constructed on part of a railway yard.

Meanwhile, HMP Doncaster (1994) was built on the site of a former power station. Since 1997, a further four prisons with a post-industrial history have been opened: HMP Forrest Bank in Manchester (2000) was built on the site of a power station; HMP Peterborough (2005), built on the site of Barker Perkins Engineering Works; HMP Addiewell in West Lothian (2008) took over the site of a chemical works; and HMP Grampian in Aberdeenshire (2014) is located on the site of a former railway yard.

Of the 13 prisons built on former industrial sites, 10 are located in the former industrial heartlands of central England or central belt Scotland (the three exceptions were HMP Grampian in North East Scotland and HMP Peterborough and HMP Whitemoor, both in the more rural Cambridgeshire).

Charting the opening of prisons and deindustrialisation: A spatial analysis

As part of a wider and longitudinal investigation into the impacts of Thatcherite social and economic policies on UK society, we have documented the unfolding relationships between economic restructuring and truancy from school engagement in crime between ages 10 and 30 and housing, homelessness and crime. Underpinning this work is a strong relationship between radical economic restructuring and the UK’s geography during the conservative administrations 1979-1997

Briefly, the economic restructuring that was felt most strongly in the 1980s was concentrated in a number of specific areas in the UK. These included the south Wales valleys (where coalmining had been a major employer); central belt Scotland (where mining, steel-making and shipbuilding dominated); the north east shoulder of England (a region with steel-making and mining) and what might be referred to as ‘central belt’ England (stretching from Merseyside in the west to Humberside in the east, and where shipbuilding, mining, and steel-making were again amongst the largest employers). We know from the above analyses that several of the new prisons built after 1961 were on former industrial sites. This begged the question: to what extent was the establishment of new prisons related to the uneven geography of deindustrialisation that accelerated in the later part of the twentieth century? How closely associated are these new prisons with the geographical areas in which coal-mines (a key marker of the industrial base) were located? Population change must, of course, be taken into account within these analyses; we cannot simply compare the number of prisons (or number of new prisons) in the respective locations because the population increases in these areas differ in size over time. Tables 3 and 4 demonstrate the changes in number of prisons and the working– age male population respectively over twenty years (population figures taken from the 1981 and 2001 censuses).

Table 3. Change in number of prisons in former mining and non-mining areas (1981-2001)

Area	Prisons in 1981	Prisons in 2001	Increase
Coal	53	64	11 (20.7%+)
Non-coal	56	63	7 (12.5%+)

Table 4. Change in working-age male population in former mining and non-mining areas

Area	Population in 1981	Population in 2001	Increase
Coal	9,253,678	9,382,940	129,262 (1.3%+)
Non-coal	9,679,822	10,931,939	1,252,117 (12.9%+)

Results

The growth in the working-age male population between 1981 and 2001 is about ten times greater in non-coal mining areas than in former-coalmining areas, so we would expect to see about ten times as much prison capacity in these areas too, all things being equal. In fact, the raw number of new prisons in both former coalmining and non-coal-mining areas is about equal, suggesting there are approximately ten times as many prisoners in former-coal-mining areas as would be expected.

Discussion

Our contribution highlights what can happen to areas when rapid, unregulated deindustrialisation takes place. Regions where industrial employment was concentrated may expect to see economic restructuring, but if economic recovery is weak, the prison complex may come to replace the industrial complex.

Historically, as imprisonment rates in Britain have increased, it has been necessary for the government to locate new areas to accommodate prisons. Such decisions were often taken under pressure (for example, in 1996 the prison population increased quickly and an emergency accommodation programme was prompted), and newly available sites became an attractive option, be they vacant country-houses, disused military property or post-industrial land. Crucially, once prisons are built, they are very likely to remain there, since closures are rare. As previously noted, when ‘new wave’ prisons were designed and built in the 1960s to provide a modern regime, none of the planned closures of old-style prisons took place.

The rising number of inmates and the need to increase capacity eclipsed the optimism of the new building programme. Interestingly, an analogous pattern is currently taking place. In 2016, the Prison Estates Transformation Programme (PETP) was announced. It aimed to create 10,000 new prison places to replace old unsuitable accommodation, renovate existing properties and reorganise the estate to better meet the needs of the prison population. It committed £1.3 billion to do so.

Since then, one new prison has been built (HMP Berwyn in north Wales) which is the second largest prison in Europe and was built on a disused Firestone tyre factory that closed in the 1970s. The factory was part of the Wrexham Industrial estate, which had its origins as a Royal Ordnances Factory, ROF Wrexham during World War II. Meanwhile four existing sites have been earmarked for expansion (HMP Rochester, HMP Hindley, HMP Wellingborough and HMP Glen Parva) while HMP Full Sutton and HMP Stocken were to get additional buildings. It is expected that the inmate capacity of these institutions will expand significantly and consolidate a new generation of ‘supersize’ prisons. Notably, six of these seven enterprises launched under PETP are in coal-mine reporting areas.

While prison expansion may appear to be a common-sense response to an increasing prison population, it appears that it has disproportionately taken place in the regions affected by the crises of deindustrialisation and urban decline. These areas may be further affected as plans to ‘supersize’ existing prisons becomes customary, compounding the ‘legacy’ of deindustrialisation even further.

Indeed, the vestiges of neo-liberal economic policy in former coal-mining areas has been a farreaching expansion of criminal justice infrastructure. While deindustrialisation in the 1980s could be described as a dramatic and hardhitting process, with time we can also recognise it as a ‘slow-moving’ process, the consequences of which may not become fully realised for several decades. Our analysis points towards the value of thinking geographically and theoretically about the rise of the carceral [e]state and the context of where exactly prisons are built.

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A longer, fully-referenced, version of this paper is available for download: <https://www.crimeandjustice.org.uk/publications/coa-1-today-gone-tomorrow-how-jobs-were-replaced-prison-places>

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