

## “A MODE FOR SOME TIME IN USE IN THE UNITED STATES:” Regressive Design and the Don Jail

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ANTHONY HOPKINS is Associate Professor Emeritus, Department of English, Glendon College, York University. In literature, his career focus was on the modernist novel in England and America. In the humanities, he explored the inmate experience of institutions such as asylums, prisons, hospitals, and schools as depicted in film, fiction, memoir, documentary, and television. This led eventually to an interest in institutional architecture, especially with respect to jails/gaols in pre-Confederation Upper Canada.

In March 1856, Toronto City Council set out to replace the existing Toronto jail.<sup>1</sup> Councillors quickly turned their attention to researching the contemporary context of prison theory, management, and architecture. One suggestion was to send a delegation to the United States to study existing American prisons.<sup>2</sup> Council rejected the idea, opting instead to survey written reports and studies, as indicated by their later authorization of payment to A.H. Armour and Company, a Toronto bookseller, for “Reports on Prison Discipline and the Organization of Reformatories and Houses of Refuge in England and elsewhere.”<sup>3</sup> The committee charged with making recommendations concerning plans and an architect reported in March 1857, and then Council appointed the Toronto firm William Thomas and Sons as architects, their first instruction to that firm being to design a prison along the lines of Pentonville Prison in England<sup>4</sup> (figs. 1-2). By July, the plans “having been received and submitted to and approved by the Government,” Council authorized the calling of tenders.<sup>5</sup>

The final building, the Don Jail, does not look like the many-spoked Pentonville. As indicated in the drawing shown in figure 3, it is, essentially, rectangular.

The considerable difference between what was ordered and what was delivered suggests an architectural story, perhaps an architectural adventure.

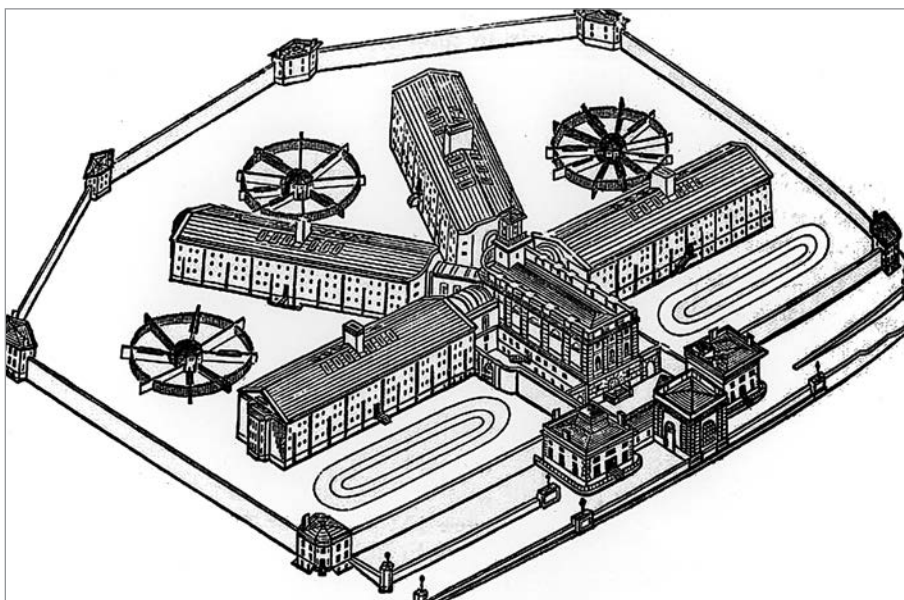


FIG. 1. PENTONVILLE PRISON. | MAYHEW, HENRY AND JOHN BINNY, 1862, *THE CRIMINAL PRISONS OF LONDON AND SCENES OF PRISON LIFE*, LONDON, GRIFFIN, BOHN AND COMPANY, P. 116.