

= Marshalsea =

The Marshalsea (1373 ? 1842) was a notorious prison in Southwark (now London) , just south of the River Thames . It housed a variety of prisoners over the centuries , including men accused of crimes at sea and political figures charged with sedition , but it became known , in particular , for its incarceration of the poorest of London 's debtors . Over half the population of England 's prisons in the 18th century were in jail because of debt .

Run privately for profit , as were all English prisons until the 19th century , the Marshalsea looked like an Oxbridge college and functioned as an extortion racket . Debtors in the 18th century who could afford the prison fees had access to a bar , shop and restaurant , and retained the crucial privilege of being allowed out during the day , which gave them a chance to earn money for their creditors . Everyone else was crammed into one of nine small rooms with dozens of others , possibly for years for the most modest of debts , which increased as unpaid prison fees accumulated . The poorest faced starvation and , if they crossed the jailers , torture with skullcaps and thumbscrews . A parliamentary committee reported in 1729 that 300 inmates had starved to death within a three @-@ month period , and that eight to ten were dying every 24 hours in the warmer weather .

The prison became known around the world in the 19th century through the writing of the English novelist Charles Dickens , whose father was sent there in 1824 , when Dickens was 12 , for a debt to a baker . Forced as a result to leave school to work in a factory , Dickens based several of his characters on his experience , most notably Amy Dorrit , whose father is in the Marshalsea for debts so complex no one can fathom how to get him out .

Much of the prison was demolished in the 1870s , though parts of it were used as shops and rooms into the 20th century . A local library now stands on the site . All that is left of the Marshalsea is the long brick wall that marked its southern boundary , the existence of what Dickens called " the crowding ghosts of many miserable years " recalled only by a plaque from the local council . " [I] t is gone now , " he wrote , " and the world is none the worse without it . "

= = Background = =

= = = Etymology , Marshalsea Court = = =

Marshalsea or marshalcy referred to the office of a marshal , derived from the Anglo @-@ French mareschalcie . Marshal originally meant farrier , from the Old Germanic marh (horse) and scalc (servant) , later a title bestowed on those presiding over the courts of Medieval Europe .

Marshalsea was originally the name of the Marshalsea Court . The prison was built to hold prisoners brought before that court and the Court of the King 's Bench , to which Marshalsea rulings could be appealed . Also called the Court of the Verge , and the Court of the Marshalsea of the Household of the Kings of England , the Marshalsea court was a jurisdiction of the royal household that , from around 1290 , governed household members who lived within the verge , defined as within 12 miles (19 km) of the king .

From 1530 to 1698 the verge was usually 12 miles around the Palace of Whitehall , the royal family 's main residence . But the Marshalsea was an ambulatory court that moved around the country with the king , dealing with trespass , contempt and debt , and increasingly it came to be used by people not connected to the royal household .

= = = Southwark = = =

Southwark was settled by the Romans around 43 CE . It served as an entry point into London from southern England , particularly along Watling Street , the Roman road from Canterbury ; this ran into what is now Southwark 's Borough High Street and from there north to old London Bridge . The area became known for its travellers and inns , including Geoffrey Chaucer 's Tabard Inn . The itinerant

population brought with it poverty , prostitutes , bear baiting , theatres (including Shakespeare 's Globe) and prisons . In 1796 there were five prisons in Southwark ? the Clink , King 's Bench , Borough Compter , White Lion and the Marshalsea ? compared to 18 in London as a whole .

= = = Prisons in England = = =

Until the 19th century imprisonment in England was not viewed as a punishment in itself , except for minor offences such as vagrancy . Prisons simply held people until their creditors had been paid or their fate decided by judges ; options included execution (ended 1964) , flogging (1962) , the stocks (1872) , the pillory (1830) , the ducking stool (1817) , joining the military , or penal transportation to America or Australia (1867) . In 1774 there were just over 4 @, @ 000 prisoners in Britain , half of them debtors , out of a population of six million . (In 2010 there were over 85 @, @ 000 prisoners in England and Wales out of a population of 56 million .)

Eighteenth @-@ century prisons were effectively lodging houses . Poorly maintained and often filthy , they might consist of a couple of rooms in a cellar . Before the Gaols Act 1823 , then the Prisons Act of 1835 and 1877 , they were administered by the royal household , the aristocracy and the bishops , and run for profit by private individuals who bought the right to manage and make money from them .

Prisoners had to pay rent , feed and clothe themselves and , in the larger prisons , furnish their rooms . One man found not guilty at trial in 1669 was not released because he owed prison fees from his pre @-@ trial confinement , a position supported by the judge , Matthew Hale . Jailers sold food or let out space for others to open shops ; the Marshalsea contained several shops and small restaurants .

Prisoners with no money or external support faced starvation . If the prison did supply food to its non @-@ paying inmates , it was purchased with charitable donations ? donations sometimes siphoned off by the jailers ? usually bread and water with a small amount of meat , or something confiscated as unfit for human consumption . Jailers would load prisoners with fetters and other iron , then charge for their removal , known as " easement of irons " (or " choice of irons ") ; this became known as the " trade of chains . "

The prison reformer John Howard travelled around the country in the 1770s inspecting jails , and presented his research in *The State of the Prisons in England and Wales* (1777) . In a jail owned by the Bishop of Ely , Howard wrote , prisoners had ten years earlier been kept chained to the floor on their backs , with spiked collars round their necks and iron bars over their legs . The Duke of Portland had a one @-@ room cellar in Chesterfield that housed four prisoners , with no straw or heat , which had not been cleaned for months . Lord Arundel owned a jail in Penzance , where Howard found a debtor in a room 11 ft x 11 ft and 6 ft high , with a small window . The door of the room had not been opened for four weeks .

= = = Debt in England = = =

Before the Bankruptcy Act of 1869 , debtors in England were routinely imprisoned at the pleasure of their creditors . Around 10 @, @ 000 people in England and Wales were in prison for debt in 1641 , often for small amounts . In the 18th century debtors comprised over half the prison population : 945 of London 's 1 @, @ 500 prisoners in 1779 were debtors . Other European countries had legislation limiting imprisonment for debt to one year , but debtors in England were imprisoned until their creditors were satisfied . When the Fleet Prison closed in 1842 , two debtors were found to have been there for 30 years .

Prisoners would often take their families with them , which meant that entire communities sprang up inside the debtors ' jails . The community created its own economy , with jailers charging for room , food , drink and furniture , or selling concessions to others , and attorneys charging fees in fruitless efforts to get the debtors out . Prisoners ' families , including children , often had to find employment simply to cover the cost of the imprisonment .

Legislation began to address the problem from 1649 onwards , but it was slow to make a difference

. Helen Small writes that , under George III (1760 ? 1820) , new legislation prevented debts of under 40 shillings leading to jail (£ 409 in 2014) , but even the smallest debt would exceed that once lawyers ' fees were added . Under the Insolvent Debtors Act 1813 , debtors could request release after 14 days by taking an oath that their assets did not exceed £ 20 , but if a creditor objected they had to stay inside . Even after years in prison , the debt remained to be paid .

= = First Marshalsea (1373 ? 1811) = =

= = = Overview , sources = = =

The Marshalsea occupied two buildings on the same street in Southwark . The first dated back to the 14th century at what would now be 161 Borough High Street , between King Street and Mermaid Court . By the late 16th century the building was crumbling . In 1799 the government reported that it would be rebuilt 130 yards (119 m) south on what is now 211 Borough High Street .

Measuring around 150 by 50 feet (46m x 15m) , with a turreted front lodge , the first Marshalsea was set slightly back from Borough High Street . There is no record of when it was built . Historian Jerry White writes that it existed by 1300 , but according to Ida Darlington , editor of the 1955 Survey of London , there is a mention of " the good men of the town of Suthwerk " being granted a licence in 1373 to build a house on Southwark 's High Street to hold prisoners appearing before the Marshalsea of the King 's household . Darlington writes that earlier mentions of a Marshalsea prison may refer to other prisons , one kept by the Knight Marshal at York and another at Canterbury . There is a reference to the Marshalsea prison in Southwark being set on fire in 1381 by Wat Tyler during the Peasants ' Revolt .

Most of the first Marshalsea , as with the second , was taken up by debtors ; in 1773 debtors within 12 miles of Westminster could be imprisoned there for a debt of 40 shillings . Jerry White writes that London 's poorest debtors were housed in the Marshalsea . Wealthier debtors arranged to be moved ? regularly securing their removal from the Marshalsea by writ of habeas corpus ? to the Fleet or the King 's Bench , both of which were more comfortable . The prison also held a small number of men being tried at the Old Bailey for crimes at sea .

The Marshalsea was technically under the control of the Knight Marshal , but was let out to others who ran it for profit . For example , in 1727 the Knight Marshal , Sir Philip Meadows , hired John Darby , a printer , as prison governor , who in turn leased it to William Acton , a butcher (who was later tried for murdering three of its prisoners) . Acton had previously worked as one of the prison 's turnkeys . He paid Darby £ 140 a year (roughly £ 18 @, @ 780) for a seven @-@ year lease , giving him the right to act as resident warden and chief turnkey , and an additional £ 260 for the right to collect rent from the rooms , and sell food and drink .

Much of our information about the first Marshalsea is about the prison in the early 18th @-@ century , courtesy of three sources . John Baptist Grano (1692 ? c . 1748) , one of George Frederick Handel 's trumpeters at the opera house in London 's Haymarket , was jailed there for a debt of £ 99 (£ 12 @, @ 000 today) , and kept a detailed diary , A Journal of My Life inside the Marshalsea , of his 458 @-@ day incarceration from 30 May 1728 until 23 September 1729 . The other two key sources are a 1729 report by a parliamentary committee , led by James Oglethorpe MP , on the state of the Fleet and the Marshalsea , and the subsequent murder trial that year of William Acton , the Marshalsea 's chief jailor .

= = = Master 's side = = =

By the 18th century , the prison had separate areas for its two classes of prisoner : the master 's side , which housed about 50 rooms for rent , and the common or poor side , consisting of nine small rooms , or wards , into which 300 people were confined from dusk until dawn . Room rents on the master 's side were ten shillings a week in 1728 , with most prisoners forced to share . John Baptist Grano paid 2s 6d (two shillings and six pennies) for a room with two beds on the master 's

side , shared with three other prisoners : Daniel Blunt , a tailor who owed £ 9 , Benjamin Sandford , a lighterman from Bermondsey who owed £ 55 , and a Mr. Blundell , a jeweller . Women prisoners who could pay the fees were housed in the women 's quarters , known as the oak . The wives , daughters and lovers of male prisoners were allowed to live with them , if someone was paying their way .

Known as the castle by inmates , the prison had a turreted lodge at the entrance , with a side room called the pound , where new prisoners would wait until a room was found for them . The front lodge led to a courtyard known as the park . This had been divided in two by a long narrow wall , so that prisoners from the common side could not be seen by those on the master 's side , who preferred not to be distressed by the sight of abject poverty , especially when they might themselves be plunged into it at any moment .

There was a bar run by the governor 's wife , and a chandler 's shop run in 1728 by a Mr and Mrs Cary , both prisoners , which sold candles , soap and a little food . There was a coffee shop run in 1729 by a long @-@ term prisoner , Sarah Bradshaw , and a steak house called Titty Doll 's run by another prisoner , Richard McDonnell , and his wife . There was also a tailor and a barber , and prisoners from the master 's side could hire prisoners from the common side to act as their servants .

The prison reformer John Howard visited the Marshalsea on 16 March 1774 . He reported that there was no infirmary , and that the practice of " garnish " was in place , whereby new prisoners were bullied into giving money to the older prisoners upon arrival . Five rooms on the master 's side were being let to a man who was not a prisoner ; he had set up a chandler 's shop in one of them , lived in two others with his family , and sublet two to prisoners . During Howard 's visit , the tap room , or beer room , had been let to a prisoner who was living " within the rules " or " within the liberty " of the King 's Bench prison ; this meant that he was a King 's Bench inmate who , for a fee , was allowed to live outside , within a certain radius of the prison . Although legislation prohibited jailers from having a pecuniary interest in the sale of alcohol within their prisons , it was a rule that was completely ignored . Howard reported that , in the summer of 1775 , 600 pots of beer were brought into the Marshalsea one Sunday from a public house , because the prisoners did not like the beer in the tap room .

= = = Common side = = =

Prisoners on the master 's side rarely ventured to the common side . John Baptist Grano went there just once , on 5 August 1728 , writing in his diary that , " I thought it would have kill 'd me . " There was no need for other prisoners to see it , John Ginger writes . It was enough that they knew it existed to keep the rental money , legal fees and other gratuities flowing from their families , fees that anywhere else would have seen them living in the lap of luxury , but which in the Marshalsea could be trusted merely to stave off disease and starvation .

By all accounts , living conditions in the common side were horrific . In 1639 prisoners complained that 23 women were being held in one room without space to lie down , leading to a revolt , with prisoners pulling down fences and attacking the guards with stones . Prisoners were regularly beaten with a " bull 's pizzle " (a whip made from a bull 's penis) , or tortured with thumbscrews and a skullcap , a vice for the head that weighed 12 lb (5 @.@ 4 kg) .

What often finished them off was being forced to lie in the strong room , a windowless shed near the main sewer , next to cadavers awaiting burial and piles of night soil . Dickens described it as " dreaded by even the most dauntless highwaymen and bearable only to toads and rats . " One apparently diabetic army officer who died in the strong room ? he had been ejected from the common side because inmates had complained about the smell of his urine ? had his face eaten by rats within hours of his death , according to a witness .

When William Acton ran the jail in the 1720s , the income from charities , collected to buy food for inmates on the common side , was directed instead to a group of trusted prisoners who policed the prison on Acton 's behalf . The same group swore during Acton 's trial in 1729 for murder that the strong room was the best room in the house . Ginger writes that Acton and his wife , who lived in a

comfortable apartment near the lodge , knew they were sitting on a powder keg : " When each morning the smell of freshly baked bread filled ... the yard ... only brutal suppression could prevent the Common Side from erupting . "

= = = 1729 Gaols Committee = = =

The common side did erupt after a fashion in 1728 when Robert Castell , an architect and debtor in the Fleet prison , who had been living in lodgings outside the jail within the rules , was taken to a " sponging house " after refusing to pay a higher prison fee to the Fleet 's notorious warden , Thomas Bambridge . Sponging houses were private lodgings where prisoners were incarcerated before being taken to jail ; they acquired the name because they squeezed the prisoner 's last money out of him . When Castell arrived at the sponging house on 14 November he was forced to share space with a man who was dying of smallpox , and as a result became infected and died less than a month later .

Castell had a friend , James Oglethorpe , a Tory MP who years later founded the American colony of Georgia . Oglethorpe began to ask questions about the treatment of debtor prisoners , and a group of debtors , perhaps at Oglethorpe 's instigation , lodged a complaint about their treatment with the mayor of London and his aldermen , who interviewed the Fleet 's warden on 21 December 1728 .

In February 1729 the House of Commons appointed a parliamentary committee , the Gaols Committee , chaired by Oglethorpe , to examine conditions in the Fleet and Marshalsea . The committee visited the Fleet on 27 February and the Marshalsea on 25 March . William Hogarth accompanied the committee on its visit to the Fleet , sketching it , then painting it in oil (left) . The painting was commissioned by Sir Archibald Grant , MP for Aberdeenshire , standing third from the right . The man in irons is thought to be Jacob Mendez Solas , a Portuguese prisoner .

The committee was shocked by the prisoners ' living conditions . In the Fleet they found Sir William Rich , a baronet , in irons . Unable to pay the prison fee , he had been burned with a red @-@ hot poker , hit with a stick and kept in a dungeon for ten days for having wounded the warden with a shoemaker 's knife . In the Marshalsea they found that prisoners on the common side were being routinely starved to death :

All the Support such poor Wretches have to subsist on , is an accidental Allowance of Pease , given once a week by a Gentleman , who conceals his Name , and about Thirty Pounds of Beef , provided by the voluntary Contribution of the Judge and Officers of the Marshalsea , on Monday , Wednesday , and Friday ; which is divided into very small Portions , of about an Ounce and a half , distributed with One @-@ Fourth @-@ part of an Half @-@ penny Loaf ...

When the miserable Wretch hath worn out the Charity of his Friends , and consumed the Money , which he hath raised upon his Cloaths , and Bedding , and hath eat his last Allowance of Provisions , he usually in a few Days grows weak , for want of Food , with the symptoms of a hectic Fever ; and when he is no longer able to stand , if he can raise 3d to pay the Fee of the common Nurse of the Prison , he obtains the Liberty of being carried into the Sick Ward , and lingers on for about a Month or two , by the assistance of the above @-@ mentioned Prison Portion of Provision , and then dies .

= = = Trial of William Acton = = =

As a result of the Gaols Committee 's inquiries , several key figures within the jails were tried for murder in August 1729 , including Thomas Bambridge of the Fleet and William Acton of the Marshalsea . Given the strongly worded report of the Gaols Committee , the trials were major public events . Ginger writes that , when the Prince of Wales 's bookseller presented his bill at the end of that year , two of the 41 volumes on it were accounts of William Acton 's trial .

= = = = Case of Thomas Bliss = = = =

The first case against Acton , before Mr. Baron Carter , was for the murder in 1726 of Thomas Bliss , a carpenter and debtor . Unable to pay the prison fees , Bliss had been left with so little to eat that he had tried to escape by throwing a rope over the wall , but his pursuers severed it and he fell 20 feet into the prison yard . Wanting to know who had supplied the rope , Acton beat him with a bull 's pizzle , stamped on his stomach , placed him in the hole (a damp space under the stairs) , then in the strong room .

Originally built to hold pirates , the strong room was just a few yards from the prison 's sewer . It was never cleaned , had no drain , no sunlight , no fresh air ? the smell was described as " noisome " ? and was full of rats and sometimes " several barrow fulls of dung . " Several prisoners told the court that it contained no bed , so that prisoners had to lie on the damp floor , possibly next to corpses awaiting burial . But a group of favoured prisoners Acton had paid to police the jail told the hearing there was indeed a bed . One of them said he often chose to lie in there himself , because the strong room was so clean ; the " best room on the Common side of the jail , " said another . This despite the court 's having heard that one prisoner 's left side had mortified from lying on the wet floor , and that a rat had eaten the nose , ear , cheek and left eye of another .

Bliss was left in the strong room for three weeks wearing a skullcap (a heavy vice for the head) , thumb screws , iron collar , leg irons , and irons round his ankles called sheers . One witness said the swelling in his legs was so bad that the irons on one side could no longer be seen for overflowing flesh . His wife , who was able to see him through a small hole in the door , testified that he was bleeding from the mouth and thumbs . He was given a small amount of food but the skullcap prevented him from chewing ; he had to ask another prisoner , Susannah Dodd , to chew his meat for him . He was eventually released from the prison , but his health deteriorated and he died in St. Thomas 's Hospital .

= = = Other cases , acquittal = = =

The court was told of three other cases . Captain John Bromfield , Robert Newton and James Thompson all died after similar treatment from Acton : a beating , followed by time in the hole or strong room , before being moved to the sick ward , where they were left to lie on the floor in leg irons .

So concerned was Acton for his reputation that he requested the indictments be read out in Latin , but his worries were misplaced . The government wanted an acquittal to protect the good name of the Knight Marshal , Sir Philip Meadows , who had hired John Darby as prison governor , who in turn had leased the prison to Acton . Acton 's favoured prisoners had testified on his behalf , introducing contradictory evidence that the trial judge stressed to the jury . A stream of witnesses spoke of his good character , including a judge , an MP , his butcher , brewer , confectioner and solicitor ? his coal merchant thought Acton " improper for the post he was in from his too great compassion " ? and he was found not guilty on all charges . The Gaols Committee had managed to draw attention to the plight of England 's prisoners , but reform had eluded them .

= = = Notable prisoners = = =

Though most of the prisoners in the Marshalsea were debtors , the prison was second in importance only to the Tower of London . From the 14th century onwards , minor political figures were held there instead of in the Tower , mostly for sedition . William Hepworth Dixon wrote in 1885 that it was full of " poets , pirates , parsons , plotters ; coiners , libellers , defaulters , Jesuits ; vagabonds of every class who vexed the souls of men in power ... "

The Marshalsea became the main holding prison for Roman Catholics suspected of sedition during the Elizabethan era . Bishop Bonner , the last Roman Catholic Bishop of London , was imprisoned there in 1559 , supposedly for his own safety , until his death 10 years later . William Herle , a spy for Lord Burghley , Elizabeth I 's chief adviser , was held there in 1570 and 1571 . According to Robyn Adams , the prison leaked both physically and metaphorically . In correspondence about Marshalsea prisoners Herle suspected of involvement in a plot to kill the Queen , he wrote of a

network within the prison for smuggling information out of it , which included hiding letters in holes in the crumbling brickwork for others to pick up .

Intellectuals regularly found themselves in the Marshalsea . The playwright Ben Jonson , a friend of Shakespeare , was jailed in 1597 for *The Isle of Dogs* , a play that was immediately suppressed , with no extant copies ; on 28 July that year the Privy Council was told it was a " lewd plaie that was plaied in one of the plaie houses on the Bancke Side , contaynyng very seditious and sclandrous matter . " The poet Christopher Brooke was jailed in 1601 for helping 17 @-@ year @-@ old Ann More marry John Donne without her father 's consent . George Wither , the political satirist , wrote his poem " The Shepherd 's Hunting " in 1614 in the Marshalsea ; he was held for four months for libel over his *Abuses Stript and Whipt* , 20 satires criticizing revenge , ambition and lust , one of them directed at the Lord Chancellor .

Nicholas Udall , vicar of Braintree and headmaster of Eton College , was sent there in 1541 for buggery and suspected theft , though his appointment in 1555 as headmaster of Westminster School suggests the episode did his name no lasting harm . When Sir John Eliot , Vice @-@ Admiral of Devon , was moved to the Marshalsea in 1632 from the Tower of London for questioning the right of the King to tax imports and exports , he described it as leaving his palace in London for his country house in Southwark . The jurist John Selden was jailed there in 1629 for his involvement in drafting the Petition of Right , a document limiting the actions of the King , regarded as seditious although it had been passed by Parliament . Colonel Thomas Culpeper ended up in the Marshalsea in 1685 or 1687 for striking the Duke of Devonshire , William Cavendish , on the ear .

= = Second Marshalsea (1811 ? 1842) = =

= = = Overview = = =

When the prison reformer James Neild visited the first Marshalsea in December 1802 , just 34 debtors were living there , along with eight wives and seven children . Neild wrote that it was in " a most ruinous and insecure state , and the habitations of the debtors wretched in the extreme . " There had been riots in the prison in 1749 and 1768 . The government acknowledged in 1799 that it had fallen into a state of decay , and a decision was made to rebuild it 130 yards south (119 m) , at 150 High Street (now called Borough High Street) , on the site of the White Lion prison , also known as the Borough Gaol . This was on the south side of Angel Court and Angel Alley , two narrow streets that no longer exist .

Costing £ 8 @,@ 000 to complete (£ 523 @,@ 509 in 2013) , the new prison opened in 1811 with two sections , one for Admiralty prisoners under court martial , and one for debtors , with a shared chapel that had been part of the White Lion .

= = = Debtors = = =

Like the first Marshalsea , the second was notoriously cramped . In 1827 , 414 out of its 630 debtors were there for debts under £ 20 ; 1 @,@ 890 people in Southwark were imprisoned that year for a total debt of ? 16 @,@ 442 .

The debtors ' section consisted of a brick barracks , a yard measuring 177 × 56 ft (54 m x 17 m) , a kitchen , a public room , and a tap room or snuggery , where debtors could drink as much beer as they wanted , at fivepence a pot in 1815 . Philpotts reports that , by the early 19th century , most debtors spent only months in the prison ; on 19 April 1826 it held 105 debtors , 99 of whom had been there for less than six months and the other six for less than a year .

The barracks was less than 10 yards wide and 33 yards long (9 m x 30 m) and was divided into eight houses , each with three floors , containing 56 rooms in all . Each floor had seven rooms facing the front and seven in the back . There were no internal hallways . The rooms were accessed directly from the outside via eight narrow wooden staircases , a fire hazard given that the stairs provided the sole exit and the houses were separated only by thin lathe and plaster partitions .

Women debtors were housed in rooms over the tap room . The rooms in the barracks (the men 's rooms) were 10 ft . 10 ins (3 @. @ 3 m) square and 8 ? 9 ft (2 @. @ 4 ? 2 @. @ 7 m) high , with a window , wooden floors and a fireplace . Each housed two or three prisoners , and as the rooms were too small for two beds , prisoners had to share . Apart from the bed , prisoners were expected to provide their own furniture . The anonymous witness complained in 1833 : " 170 persons have been confined at one time within these walls , making an average of more than four persons in each room ? which are not ten feet square ! ! ! I will leave the reader to imagine what the situation of men , thus confined , particularly in the summer months , must be . "

Much of the prison business was run by a debtors ' committee of nine prisoners and a chair (a position held by Dickens ' father) . The committee was responsible for imposing fines for rules violations , an obligation they met with enthusiasm . Debtors could be fined for theft ; throwing water or filth out of windows or into someone else 's room ; making noise after midnight ; cursing , fighting or singing obscene songs ; smoking in the beer room 8 ? 10p. am or 12 ? 2p. pm ; defacing the staircase ; dirtying the privy seats ; stealing newspapers or utensils from the snuggery ; urinating in the yard ; drawing water before it had boiled ; and criticizing the committee .

As dreadful as the Marshalsea was , it kept the creditors away . Debtors could even arrange to have themselves arrested by a business partner to enter the jail when it suited them . Historian Margot Finn writes that discharge could therefore be used as a punishment ; one debtor was thrown out in May 1801 for " making a Noise and disturbance in the prison . "

= = = Garnish and chummage = = =

New prisoners were expected to pay garnish when they arrived , a donation to the prisoners ' committee . When the commissioners reported to parliament between 1815 and 1818 , male prisoners were paying five shillings and sixpence , increased to eight shillings and sixpence by the time the anonymous witness was writing in 1833 . Women were asked for a smaller sum . This allowed them to use the snuggery , where water could be boiled and meals cooked , and candles and newspapers obtained . Prisoners failing to pay were declared defaulters by the prison crier , had their names written up in the kitchen , and were sent to Coventry .

After paying garnish , prisoners were given a " chum ticket , " which told them which room was theirs and which prisoners they would be chumming with . They would often spend the first night in the infirmary until a room could be made ready , and sometimes three or four nights walking around the yard before a chum could be found , though they were already being charged for the room they did not have .

English professor Trey Philpotts writes that the newest arrival was usually placed with the youngest prisoner who was living alone . A wealthier prisoner could pay his roommate to go away ? " buy out the chum " ? for half @-@ a @-@ crown a week in 1818 , while the outcast chum would sleep in the tap room or find another room to rent in the prison . The only prisoners not expected to pay chummage were debtors who had declared themselves insolvent by swearing an oath that they had assets worth less than 40 shillings . If their creditors agreed , they could be released after 14 days , but if anyone objected , they remained confined to the poor side of the building , near the women 's side , receiving a small weekly allowance from the county and money from charity .

= = = Admiralty prisoners = = =

The Admiralty division housed a few prisoners under naval courts @-@ martial for mutiny , desertion , piracy , and what the deputy marshal preferred in 1815 to call " unnatural crimes . " Unlike other parts of the prison that had been built from scratch in 1811 , the Admiralty division ? as well as the northern boundary wall , the dayroom and the chapel ? had been part of the old Borough gaol and were considerably run down . The cells were so rotten they were barely able to confine the prisoners ; in 1817 one actually broke through his cell walls . The low boundary wall meant that Admiralty prisoners were often chained to bolts fixed to the floor in the infirmary .

They were supposed to have a separate yard to exercise in , so that criminals were not mixing with

debtors , but in fact the prisoners mixed often and happily , according to Dickens . The parliamentary committee deplored this practice , arguing that Admiralty prisoners were characterized by an " entire absence of all control , " and were bound to have a bad effect on the debtors . The two groups would retreat to their own sections during inspections , Dickens wrote :

[T] he smugglers habitually consorted with the debtors ... except at certain constitutional moments when somebody came from some Office , to go through some form of overlooking something , which neither he nor anybody else knew anything about . On those truly British occasions , the smugglers , if any , made a feint of walking into the strong cells and the blind alley , while this somebody pretended to do his something ; and made a reality of walking out again as soon as he hadn 't done it ? neatly epitomizing the administration of most of the public affairs , in our right little , tight little island .

= = = Women = = =

The presence of wives , lovers and daughters was taken for granted . Visitors could come and go freely , and even live with the prisoners , without being asked who they were . Female prisoners were allowed to mix freely with the men . Some of the rooms were let to prostitutes . The prison gates were closed from ten at night until eight the next morning , with a bell warning visitors half an hour before closing time , and an officer walking around the prison calling , " Strangers , women and children all out ! "

According to the anonymous eyewitness , women in the Marshalsea were in constant moral danger : " How often has female virtue been assailed in poverty ? Alas how often has it fallen , in consequence of a husband or a father having been a prisoner for debt ? " The prison doctor would visit every other day to attend to prisoners , and sometimes their children ? to " protect his reputation , " according to a doctor testifying in 1815 to a parliamentary commission ? but would not attend to their wives . This left women to give birth alone or with the help of other prisoners . The doctor told the commission he had helped just once with a birth , and then only as a matter of courtesy , because it was not included in his salary .

= = = Closure and abolition = = =

The Marshalsea was closed by an Act of Parliament in 1842 , and on 19 November that year the inmates were relocated to the Bethlem hospital if they were mentally ill , or to the King 's Bench Prison , at that point renamed the Queen 's Prison . On 31 December 1849 the Court of the Marshalsea of the Household of the Kings of England was abolished , and its power transferred to Her Majesty 's Court of Common Pleas at Westminster .

The buildings and land were auctioned off in July 1843 and purchased for £ 5 @ , @ 100 by W. G. Hicks , an ironmonger . The property consisted of the keeper 's house , the canteen (known as a suttlng house) , the Admiralty section , the chapel , a three @ - @ story brick building and eight brick houses , all closed off from Borough High Street by iron gates . Imprisonment for debt was finally outlawed in England in 1869 , except in cases of fraud or refusal to pay , and in the 1870s the Home Office demolished most of the prison buildings , though in 1955 parts of it were still in use by George Harding & Sons , hardware merchants .

Dickens visited what was left of the Marshalsea in May 1857 , just before he finished Little Dorrit . He wrote in the preface :

Some of my readers may have an interest in being informed whether or no any portions of the Marshalsea Prison are yet standing . I did not know , myself , until the sixth of this present month , when I went to look . I found the outer front courtyard , often mentioned in this story , metamorphosed into a butter shop ; and then I almost gave up every brick of the jail for lost . Wandering , however , down a certain adjacent " Angel Court , leading to Bermondsey , " I came to " Marshalsea Place : " the houses in which I recognised , not only as the great block of the former prison , but as preserving the rooms that arose in my mind 's eye when I became Little Dorrit 's biographer ...

A little further on , I found the older and smaller wall , which used to enclose the pent @-@ up inner prison where nobody was put , except for ceremony . But , whosoever goes into Marshalsea Place , turning out of Angel Court , leading to Bermondsey , will find his feet on the very paving @-@ stones of the extinct Marshalsea jail ; will see its narrow yard to the right and to the left , very little altered if at all , except that the walls were lowered when the place got free ; will look upon the rooms in which the debtors lived ; and will stand among the crowding ghosts of many miserable years .

= = = Location of the prison remains = = =

The building on the site of the prison houses Southwark Council 's John Harvard Library and Local Studies Library , at 211 Borough High Street , just north of the junction with Tabard Street . All that remains of the Marshalsea is the brick wall that marked the southern boundary of the prison , separating it from St George 's churchyard , now a small garden . It can be reached by underground on the Northern line to Borough tube station , or by train to London Bridge station .

The surviving wall runs along an alleyway that was part of the prison , now called Angel Place . The name Angel Place has led to confusion because there were two alleyways on the north side of the Marshalsea (Angel Court and Angel Alley) , the first of which Dickens refers to when giving directions to the prison remains in 1857 . See Richard Horwood 's 18th century map , which shows Angel Court / Angel Alley near the Borough Goal [sic] , marked by the number 2 .

The wall is marked on the garden side , on what would have been the external wall of the prison , by a plaque from the local council . There is also a paving stone with information about Dickens 's father . The Cuming Museum has one of the prison 's pumps and the Dickens House Museum one of its windows .