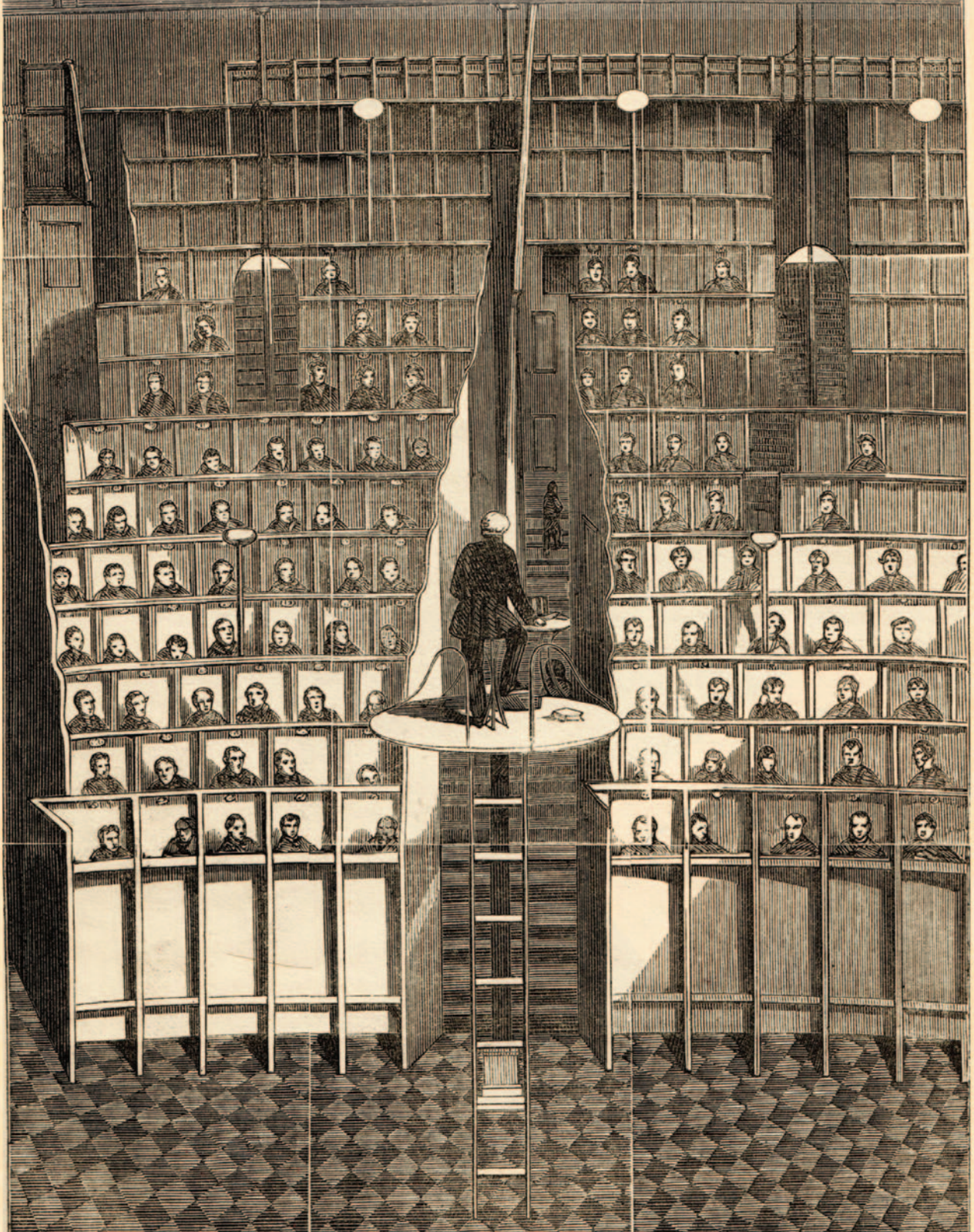


PRISON SERVICE JOURNAL

July 2026 No 285



ADULT SCHOOL IN THE CHAPEL, ON THE SEPARATE SYSTEM, AT THE SURREY HOUSE OF CORRECTION, WANDSWORTH.

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The Editorial Board wishes to make clear that the views expressed by contributors are their own and do not necessarily reflect the official views or policies of the Prison Service.

Printed at HMP Leyhill on 100 gsm Navigator Digital and 200 gsm Galerie Art Satin

Set in 10 on 13 pt Frutiger Light

Circulation approx 6,500

ISSN 0300-3558

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Editorial

Exploring the prison: Historical perspectives

Alyson Brown is a Professor of History at Edge Hill University, **Helen Johnston** is a Professor of Criminology at the University of Hull. **Ben Bethell** is a Lecturer in Cultural History at Central Saint Martins, University of the Arts, London.

What can historical work bring to a 21st century discussion of the prison? While it may be an oft-repeated aphorism that history repeats itself, and that we therefore learn directly from it, this special historical edition of the *Prison Service Journal (PSJ)* does not follow that somewhat simplistic line. What history can bring to current debates is perhaps better captured by Mark Twain's reputed observation that history does not repeat itself, but that it often rhymes. So, in different ways, we revisit the same patterns, ideas and practices over time. Why does this happen? Entirely new ideas are rare, certainly, but history is not just about the past; it is close and integral to the present, and throughout their history prisons have faced similar social, economic, political and cultural pressures, which have limited the options of policymakers and others. Hence, there is considerable historical evidence, a sample of which we present here, showing repeated mistakes as well as uneven progress. Sometimes the past has been mined with only a cursory glance at the previous impact of particular measures, practices and/or policies, which may already have proven ineffective, detrimental, or even harmful. Of course, institutions operate within contexts that can be limiting and constraining, especially when it comes to financial and other resources, and on the endless list of competing government priorities, prisons have rarely figured highly. Moreover, knowledge of history cannot ensure that mistakes are not repeated, in part because those who possess such knowledge are not the same people responsible for making key policy and resource decisions, and dialogue between the two is largely absent. This edition of the *Prison Service Journal* asserts the need for just such dialogue.

Historical research has located a fundamental shift in the form and purpose of imprisonment at the end of the eighteenth and beginning of the 19th century: it is during this period that the idea of sending people to prison to change their behaviour primarily emerged. Since then, scholars, reformers, practitioners and policymakers have debated different ways to achieve this, along with their potential

consequences. The collection of articles presented here engages with some key themes of contemporary relevance, helping us to explore and unpick the past. Some contributions fill gaps in our historical understanding, while others build a fuller and more developed picture of the continuities and changes faced by prison systems past and present.

Clare Anderson, Tammy Ayres, Mellissa Ifill, Kellie Moss and **Kevin Pilgrim** begin the edition with a consideration of the extent to which current prison systems can be profoundly shaped by their historical development. Their article examines the prison system in Guyana, its structures and operation, and the enduring impact of British colonial legacies. Guyana's prisons, the authors suggest, are haunted by colonialism. They explore the deep entrenchment of colonialism via the experiences of prisoners and prison staff. They conclude by proposing that participant action research can drive important reform in Guyana's penal system, with the potential to tackle deeply rooted and long-standing issues through ethical partnerships involving prisoners, staff and external stakeholders. For the authors, this is about creating a prison system that recognises its past, rather than seeking to eradicate it, and one that works towards 'a more equitable and rehabilitative future.'

Articles by **Anna McKay** and **Julie Brumby** both deal with varieties of the prison ship. McKay looks at England's notorious prison 'hulks' which, established in 1776 in lieu of transportation to the American colonies, survived until 1857, the penultimate article by Brumby examines the maritime versions of the reformatory and industrial training schools established after 1856, aboard which male juvenile offenders and boys believed to be vagrant or neglected sometimes found themselves confined.

Initially conceived as a temporary measure, the hulks, McKay argues, can be viewed in the first instance as a response to overcrowding elsewhere in Georgian England's decrepit gaols. As she shows, their persistence coincided with profound changes to the character of English penal institutions and the way

they were understood. Hence the hulks came to exist in parallel to the nascent modern prison and to be seen eventually as its unacceptable antithesis: filthy, rotten, social and disorderly as opposed to sanitary, sturdy, silent (and/or solitary) and controlled. As such, their end was inevitable: despite attempted reforms from the 1820s onwards, the hulks, McKay observes, 'were simply not compatible with new mid-century ideas of what a prison should be.'

Our third article, by **Paul Finegan** at the Dartmoor Prison Museum, shifts to the challenges of curating a prison museum, which, he shows, involve navigating visitor expectations, the responsibility to provide a meaningful and educational experience, and the potential to inform public perceptions of crime and punishment. Finegan outlines research conducted among Dartmoor Prison Museum's visitors, while also exploring the concept of 'dark tourism' — that is, visits to sites associated with tragedies, disaster and death — and its relevance in this context. Visitor responses suggest that the museum succeeds in transporting them through two hundred years of prison history, and that it makes effective (and affective) use of its authentic premises and exhibits. While less than half of its visitors had viewed the museum's website, the notoriety of Dartmoor Prison itself appears to have served as its own advertisement. However, Finegan concludes, the museum's visitors are not primarily dark tourists seeking a sensationalist version of prison history but are instead attracted to it as an important historical site.

It has long been accepted that educational attainment levels among prisoners are persistently low; hence the education of prisoners in order to reform them is, historically, among prison policy's long-standing objectives. In her article for the edition, **Ros Crone** charts the developing role of schoolmasters and schoolmistresses in prisons across the 19th century, which coincided with important changes in national education policy and practice beyond prison walls. Crone explores the social backgrounds and working lives of those involved in education in local gaols, new government prisons and, later, the long-term convict prison system. She shows that by the mid-century, the role of schoolmaster or schoolmistress could be an attractive career prospect, providing benefits and allowing professional development. However, by the end of the century prison education had been curtailed and this was no longer the case.

Alyson Brown and **Michael Cawley** explore a topic hitherto neglected by penal historians but, historically, of great importance to prisoners themselves: namely, their use of tobacco. Drawing upon newspaper reports and prison memoirs, Brown and Cawley focus mainly on the interwar decades,

which saw a gradual and uneven shift in tobacco's status in English prisons, beginning in 1922, from outright contraband to key behavioural incentive (and, conversely, means of punishment if and when denied). Following a smoking ban in all English prisons after 2018, this trajectory has now come full circle. Meanwhile, as Brown and Cawley observe, tobacco retains its unique cachet among prisoners, as currency, cultural practice and source of comfort; its blanket prohibition is therefore inevitably fraught.

Kiran Mehta then turns to a key period in prison history, the late 18th and early 19th century, examining the day-to-day management of London's late-Georgian prisons. While research on this period often focuses on well-known elite campaigners and key political voices in the prison reform movement, Mehta instead concentrates on the prisons themselves, looking at their staff, inmates, organisation and administration, and at the ways in which new ideas of reform were implemented. Her approach reveals that prison officers and prisoners had their own views about new penal methods and forms of management, which they sought to influence and shape inside the prisons where they lived and worked.

Brumby's focus is the punishment of juvenile offenders: three reformatory ships moored in the Mersey and the Thames, complemented by ten industrial training ships located at points around the British Isles. She concentrates primarily on the former (reserved for boys sentenced for criminal offences), showing that despite their reputation for demanding labour and harsh discipline, reformatory ships provided young inmates a stable environment, circumscribed opportunity for leisure, and, crucially, education beyond the level they might have obtained on shore. This was because the ships' ostensible purpose was to train boys for a life at sea (believed necessary to maintain Britain's maritime primacy); hence, alongside basic literacy and numeracy, they were taught geography, navigation and mapmaking. In fact, as Brumby demonstrates, only a minority of boys eventually followed this path, although she concludes the article by examining the cases of two who, having graduated from industrial training ships, did go to sea, but whose careers then led to markedly different outcomes.

Concluding the edition, the final article explores issues of race and colonialism. **Elena Ghiggino** examines the experiences of Black people with criminal convictions in the early 19th century. Historical evidence about race or ethnicity in the criminal justice system can be very limited or opaque in surviving early prison records and archival material and is also often shaped by stereotypes and racialised language. Here Ghiggino uses a micro-historical approach, employing two detailed case studies to

illuminate the interactions that two men of African descent had with the penal system. Records from Ilchester Gaol and Stafford County Gaol reveal the men's experience of the courts and imprisonment and suggest that if such prisoners were able to 'fit in' with the perceived goals of prison reform, they would be given opportunities such as early release and subsequent employment, regardless of their ethnicity.

Taken as a whole, the research presented in this special historical edition demonstrates both the salience of the past to current debates around prison

policy and the ways in which new approaches, topics, research methods and archival discoveries continue to extend and enrich our knowledge and understanding of prison history. We hope that PSJ readers find the edition useful, interesting and enjoyable.

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Colonial legacies and the prison system in British Guiana: Historical and contemporary perspectives

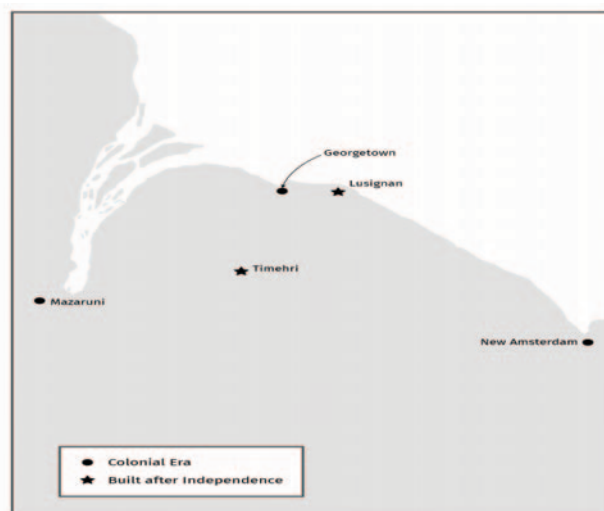
Clare Anderson is a Professor of History in the School of History, Politics and International Relations, University of Leicester. **Tammy Ayres** is an Associate Professor of Criminology in the School of Criminology, Sociology, and Social Policy, University of Leicester. **Mellissa Ifill** is based in the Faculty of Education and Humanities, University of Guyana. **Kellie Moss** is a Senior Research Associate in the Institute for Advanced Studies, University of Leicester. **Kevin Pilgrim** is a Deputy Director in the Guyana Prison Service.

The penal system in Guyana (formerly British Guiana) remains profoundly influenced by its colonial history.¹ Situated on the north-eastern coast of South America, Guyana was under British governance for a significant portion of the 19th and 20th centuries, resulting in the establishment and preservation of a penal framework that has left a lasting impact on its prison system. Following independence in 1966, three colonial-era prisons remain in operation today (2025): Georgetown (capital of Guyana), New Amsterdam, with a separate wing for women, and Mazaruni, which includes the Sibley Hall facility for first-time and minor infractions and a small facility for high-risk prisoners.² These were further augmented by the establishment of the Lusignan and Timehri prisons in the post-independence era (see Figure 1). More recently, the prison service embarked on the construction

of new facilities at Lusignan and Mazaruni. Despite these advancements, the prison system's infrastructure, protocols, and the experiences of both prisoners and personnel are still heavily influenced by colonial-era operations. Prisons are also overcrowded. As of January 2024, Guyana's overall prison population, encompassing pre-trial detainees, reached 2,300 (288 per 100,000), far exceeding the prison system's official capacity of 1,373.³

This article presents findings from a collaborative project funded in 2018 by the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC)'s Global Challenges Research Fund (GCRF). Academics from the University of Leicester and University of Guyana worked in partnership with the Guyana Prison Service to investigate the extent and treatment of mental, neurological and substance abuse disorders in Guyana's prisons from 1825 to the present day.⁴

Figure 1. Prison locations in Guyana (2025)



1. Anderson, C., Ifill, M., Adams, E., & Moss, K. (2020). Guyana's Prisons: Colonial Histories of Post-Colonial Challenges. *The Howard Journal of Crime and Justice*, 59, 335-349.
2. Moss, K., Anderson, C., Ifill, M. & Adams, E. (2020). Historical Overviews of Guyana's Prisons, 1814–1966. Available at: https://leicester.figshare.com/articles/Historical_Overviews_of_Guyana_s_Prisons_1814-1966/11591337
3. World Prison Brief, Guyana: <https://www.prisonstudies.org/country/guyana>. [Accessed 10 April 2025].
4. Economic and Social Research Council (award no. ES/S000569/1). Earlier work on the history of the nation's jails was funded by the British Academy (award no. IC2100030).

The article is organised into three sections. First, we analyse the enduring colonial legacies within the prison system, highlighting how historical practices and policies persist in influencing contemporary operations. Second, we explore the firsthand experiences of prisoners and staff, illustrating how these legacies shape daily life in prison now. Third, we examine how collaborative participant action research can drive meaningful reform within Guyana's penal system, addressing and mitigating the lingering aftermaths of colonial governance. Through this multifaceted approach, our aim is to support the decolonisation of the prison system and to foster a more just and equitable prison environment.

Colonial legacies in Guyana's prison system

The prison system in Guyana, as in other former colonies of enslavement, was established as an instrument of control, following emancipation, under British rule. Prisons and wider criminal justice systems were a means to manage the labouring population, namely Indigenous people, the formerly enslaved, indentured immigrants, and their descendants.⁵ In the post-emancipation era, physical punishment carried out on plantations during enslavement was replaced by laws to control the mobility of the formerly enslaved alongside the construction of new prisons where violent regimes were replicated. The arrival of indentured labourers in the decades that followed saw the extension of laws to control movement with the use of a contract that tied them to an employer for a

specified period.⁶ As a result of these interactions, concepts of law and justice became intertwined with practices of plantation labour control. To enforce these regulatory frameworks and oversee the labourers, penal institutions were established in strategic locations to confine and utilise individuals sentenced to hard labour.⁷ Following a three-month probationary period, male prisoners would be employed to maintain agricultural production or contribute to public works initiatives throughout the colony. The use of men and women's labour outside the walls of the prison reveals that prisons were not simply sites of punishment but were augmenting an easily exploitable labour force.⁸ This period marked a significant transformation in the role of the colonial state, which increasingly appropriated the judicial and social governance functions previously exercised by plantation owners.⁹

In the decades following emancipation, efforts to extract labour and maintain social order increasingly influenced the expansion and placement of prisons in the colony.¹⁰ The British expanded New Amsterdam and Georgetown prisons, creating new wards and cells to increase capacity. Three new coastal prisons were constructed in Mahaica (1837-1855), Wakenaan (1837-1854), and Capoey (1838-1876) (see Figure 4).¹¹ The prisoners, primarily the formerly enslaved and their descendants, worked within the prisons and on agricultural estates. To further manage the labouring population, in 1842 the Governor of British Guiana, Henry Light, proposed the creation of Her Majesty's Penal Settlement (HMPS) in Mazaruni, a remote upriver location near Bartica (see Figures 2 and 3).

Figure 2. Entrance to HMPS Mazaruni c. 1900, New York Library Collection



Figure 3. Mazaruni Prison 2019, Obrey James



5. See footnote 1: Anderson, Ifill, Adams, & Moss. (2020).

6. Roopnarine, L. (2011). Indian migration during indentured servitude in British Guiana and Trinidad, 1850–1920, *Labor History*, 52(2), 173–91; Adamson, A. H. (1984). The impact of indentured immigration on the political economy of British Guiana, in: K. Saunders (Ed.), *Indentured Labour in the British Empire 1834–1920*, Croom Helm. Hay, D., & Craven, P. (2004). *Masters. Servants, and Magistrates in Britain and the Empire, 1562, 1955*. The University of North Carolina Press.

7. Anderson, C., Moss, K., & Jackson, S. J. (2022). Coloniality and the Criminal Justice System: Empire and its Legacies in Guyana. *Slavery & Abolition*, 43(4), 682–704.

8. Adams, E. (2023). "At Work, in Hospital, or in Gaol": Women in British Guiana's Jails, 1838–1917. *Labour History: A Journal of Labour and Social History*, 125, 85–108.

9. Moss, K., Adams, E., & Toner, D. (2022). Immigration, Intoxication, Insanity, and Incarceration in British Guiana. *Slavery & Abolition*, 43(4), 705–729; Browne, R.M. (2017). *Surviving Slavery in the British Caribbean*. University of Pennsylvania Press.

10. See footnote 1: Anderson, Ifill, Adams, & Moss. (2020).

11. See footnote 2: Moss, Anderson, Ifill, & Adams. (2020).

Light's aim was to engage the prisoners in tasks that would prove to be economically beneficial to the colony, such as quarrying granite, cutting timber and cultivating crops.¹² Following the arrival of indentured immigrants, district prisons, depots and lock-ups were established strategically throughout the colony to hold men and women in breach of the 1850 immigration ordinance. This included the construction of prisons in Fellowship (1868-1892), Mahaica (re-opened 1868-1883), Suddie (1875-1914), Best (1879-1881), No. 63 (1888-1909), and Morawhanna (1879-1914) (see Figure 4). Later, the system underwent a shift from labour extraction to creating harsh conditions as a means of deterrence, mimicking penal philosophies and practices in Britain that emerged in the third quarter of the 19th century.¹³ This included in frontier areas such as the mining regions of Annai (1925-1931), Kamakusa (1925-1958), Mabaruma (1925-1974) and Kurupuka (1931-1948). Closed in 1930, to relieve pressure from Georgetown Prison, HMPS Mazaruni reopened in 1939, whilst Lethum (1947-1980s) and Enachu (1960-1978) were constructed as replacements for Kurupukari and Kamakusa prisons.

Figure 4. Prison locations in British Guiana



The continued use of colonial-era facilities today presents several problems regarding infrastructure, capacity and accessibility. The implementation of penal policies in British colonies like British Guiana was driven by innovations in Europe and North America. During this period, changes in punishment included the building of cellular prisons and penitentiaries.¹⁴ Though influenced by these new ideas, British administrators often tailored prisons and penal regimes to local circumstances, adapting prison architecture and regulations to align with labour needs. Ideally, prisoners would occupy individual cells, and they would be punished and rehabilitated through a programme of education, work, training and religious instruction. One notable feature of 19th-century punishment was the use of prisoners in colonial building projects.¹⁵ Prisoners built and repaired streets and pavements and even constructed parts of the sea wall. However, despite Britain's assertion of penal 'modernity', prisons could be violent places where prisoners faced isolation from their families, physical restraints, corporal punishment and harsh rations. Punitive forms of labour, such as the treadmill (1826-1857), shot drill (1867-1888), and crank (1881-1888) were also widely used until 1888.¹⁶ Situated on a limited 2.1-acre plot, the wooden structures in Georgetown were closely clustered together and located in close proximity to the surrounding streets.¹⁷ By the time Guyana attained its independence in 1966, it was evident that the site was not only overcrowded, due to the addition of numerous structures within the limited space, it also failed to meet the required security and safety standards.¹⁸ Consequently, cells and wards often housed three times the intended capacity, leading to severe overcrowding. The urban setting of the prison in Georgetown, the capital of British Guiana/Guyana, and the constricted space renders the prison no longer suitable for its intended purpose. Whilst historically prisoners were predominantly engaged in manual labour outdoors, nowadays the majority of prisoners who work, where possible, serve in positions such as orderlies.¹⁹ Prison officers supervise these orderlies, whose primary responsibilities entail assisting with the cleanliness and maintenance of the prisons. Additionally, whilst physical labour was a common

12. Anderson, C. (2022). *Convicts: A global history*. Cambridge University Press.

13. Johnston, H. (2008). Reclaiming the Criminal: The Role and Training of Prison Officers in England, 1877 to 1914. *The Howard Journal of Criminal Justice*, 47, 297-312.

14. See footnote 1: Anderson, Ifill, Adams, & Moss. (2020).

15. Anderson, C. (2019). An historical perspective on Guyana's jails, *MNS Disorders in Guyana's Jails*: <https://mns.guyana.le.ac.uk/2019/09/30>. [Accessed 10 March 2025].

16. See footnote 2: Moss, Anderson, Ifill, & Adams. (2020).

17. TNA, CO111 (1882). Colonial Office Correspondence for Guyana: CO 111/425/275, Minutes by Lieutenant Governor enclosed within a despatch regarding increased prison accommodation, 19 September.

18. NAG AC8 (1960). AC8 Box Collection, Prison Service: British Guiana annual report of the director of prisons for the year 1960.

19. See footnote 1: Anderson, Ifill, Adams, & Moss. (2020).

experience for many in the past, contemporary prisoners are more likely to grapple with the monotony stemming from prolonged periods of confinement within dormitories or cells throughout the day.

Mazaruni Prison, in particular, presents considerable challenges due to its isolated location, necessitating that staff reside on-site for long periods.²⁰ While Mazaruni's remote location was initially intended to isolate prisoners from past influences and thus aid rehabilitation, it severely limited and still limits family visits, an essential component of reintegration. The financial burden on families and the isolation faced by officers living on-site further exacerbate the challenges. New Amsterdam Prison, though more accessible by road, presents similar barriers due to travel costs and distance. During the project (2018-2022), several prisoners told us that their relatives could either visit them or send money for essential items such as toiletries and food, but not both. Similarly, officers revealed that due to financial constraints and limitations on their time, they frequently found themselves unable to visit their family and friends for extended periods, often spanning several months.²¹ Moreover, despite varying levels of modernisation, many prisoners continue to be held in colonial structures with inadequate sanitation, poor ventilation, and compromised structural integrity.²² In 2024, the U.S. Department of State's report on human rights in Guyana highlighted the dangers of prisoner-on-prisoner violence exacerbated by lengthy confinement in cells with limited opportunities for exposure to sunlight.²³ Officers' on-site accommodation is often little better, with limited access to running water, electricity and the internet.

The experiences of prisoners and staff

Guyana's Prison Service (GPS) was established in 1957 by the Prison Act No. 26 and its current mission statement reads:

The Guyana Prison Service as an integral part of the Criminal Justice System utilizes International Standards and Practices to provide a secure environment for Staff and Offenders. Through these approaches, offenders are rehabilitated and reintegrated into society as law-abiding citizens, thus contributing to public safety, critical for national development (GPS, 2022).

However, the ongoing use of colonial-era prisons has contributed to a penal system that often prioritises containment over rehabilitation. As in the colonial era, overcrowding, insufficient infrastructure and scarce resources have led to substandard living and working conditions for prisoners and officers. Meanwhile, security issues, staffing shortages and high recidivism rates exacerbate these hardships. It is these conditions that, until recently, led to increased levels of violence, both among prisoners and in interactions between prisoners and staff.²⁴

The experiences of incarcerated individuals reflect systemic inequities that date back to the colonial period. As in the post-emancipation period, individuals from low socio-economic backgrounds, specifically young Afro-Guyanese men, continue to experience a disproportionate rate of incarceration.²⁵ Inadequate healthcare and limited access to rehabilitative programmes compound the suffering of prisoners, many of whom come from underprivileged backgrounds. Described as 'more of a 19th century, Victorian heritage site than a national maximum-security penitentiary', Mazaruni Prison has been the location of several violent incidents.²⁶ The out-of-sight prison was overlooked for many years, despite the GSP's calls regarding the inadequacy of its security apparatus. On the 7th of August 1997, Mazaruni Prison was the scene of one of Guyana's most destructive prison riots, in which a prisoner died and three dormitories were destroyed.²⁷ Distraught by their treatment and the enforcement of curfew regulations,

20. The Prison is in Region 7, about forty-six miles up the Essequibo River, near the confluence of the Cuyuni and Mazaruni rivers. Guyana Prison Service, Mazaruni Prison
21. *Mental, Neurological, and Substance Abuse Disorders in Guyana's Jails, 1825-2022 (2023)*. [Data Collection]. Colchester, Essex: UK Data Service. 10.5255/UKDA-SN-856077. Material taken from interviews with prisoners and GPS officers, Guyana, 2018 - 2022.
22. Ministry of Home Affairs, Republic of Guyana, November 2023: <https://moha.gov.gy/permanent-secretary-mr-andre-allys-inspection-unveils-progress-and-innovation-at-mazaruni-prison-complex/>. For information on prison conditions see 2023 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Guyana, April 2024: <https://www.state.gov/reports/2023-country-reports-on-human-rights-practices/guyana/>. [Accessed 10 February 2025].
23. 2023 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Guyana, April 2024: <https://www.state.gov/reports/2023-country-reports-on-human-rights-practices/guyana/>. [Accessed 10 February 2025].
24. Inter-American Development Bank (IDB), 2020; also see: Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Guyana, 2016-2023: <https://www.state.gov/reports/2023-country-reports-on-human-rights-practices/guyana/>. [Accessed 12 January 2025].
25. United Nations Human Rights Council (UN HRC) (2018). Report of the Working Group of Experts on People of African Descent on its mission to Guyana. Available at: <https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/1642011#record-files-collapse-header> [Accessed 28 February 2025].
26. 'The Mazaruni Menace', Stabroek News, January 2007: <https://www.stabroeknews.com/2007/01/16/opinion/editorial/the-mazaruni-menace/>. [Accessed 20 February 2025].
27. United States Department of State, Guyana Country Report on Human Rights Practices for 1997: https://1997-2001.state.gov/global/human_rights/1997. [Accessed 5 March 2025].

prisoners armed themselves with implements from the prison workshop and set fire to various areas within the facility. Prisoner unrest has recently (2022) been recognised by the United Nations as one of the most significant contributors to deaths of persons in places of detention in Guyana.²⁸ The deadliest of these occurred in March 2016, when 17 prisoners perished at the Camp Street Prison (Georgetown) as a result of a fire that was started by a group of prisoners who were expressing their frustration at the length of time they were on remand while awaiting trial. The prisoners who perished were all males, most of whom were accused of serious offences including murder.²⁹

In addition to the loss of lives and structural damage, these incidents have led to increased understaffing and diminished morale as officers routinely operate in challenging conditions. Prison staff, many of whom are descendants of those historically oppressed by the system they now uphold, face various challenges.³⁰ Underfunding, long hours and the emotional strain of working in an outdated system contribute to significant workplace stress. Factors such as prison infrastructure, shift patterns and safety concerns all impact on the mental well-being of prison officers in Guyana today. Most officers informed us that they followed a schedule of two weeks on duty followed by three days off, which did not allow for sufficient rest and recovery, especially for those who live far away from their families. In interviews conducted in 2022, numerous officers assigned to Mazaruni Prison reported that they had not experienced a day off or any leave for several months. This lack of annual leave and extensive working hours restricted the time officers could devote to their families, adversely impacting their mental well-being and personal relationships.³¹ Despite these challenges, staff members play a vital role in shaping the prison environment and as we have learned possess

The prison system's infrastructure, protocols, and the experiences of both prisoners and personnel are still heavily influenced by colonial-era operations.

the desire and capacity to instigate reforms from within.

As in the United Kingdom, inadequate space, insufficient staffing, and limited funding have also led to a scarcity of rehabilitation programmes for prisoners and substandard living conditions. The lack of comprehensive educational, vocational, and psychological support for people in prison diminishes their chances of successful reintegration into society, a situation exacerbated by the issue of overcrowding.³² Similarly, there persists a notable shortage of prison officers. While many of these challenges were prevalent during the colonial period, they have been aggravated in recent years due to the fires that destroyed parts of Mazaruni and Georgetown prisons. Consequently, areas originally designated for dining and training were repurposed into cells. The focus on security rather than rehabilitation has been widespread and cumulative, giving rise to riots, violence and recidivist trajectories.³³ Furthermore, a significant proportion of prisoners come from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds (with limited educational opportunities, precarious job prospects, exposure to familial violence and early departure from their family home) ensuring that many will encounter challenges

upon reintegration into society due to the limited availability of rehabilitation programmes and pre-release support services.³⁴ This predicament is further compounded by the societal stigma they encounter on release.

In recent years, the system has undergone significant expansion following several high-profile incidents, such as Georgetown Prison fires in 2016 and 2017. This undertaking spans multiple phases and locations and is geared towards enhancing the overall infrastructure of the penal system and fostering a more modern environment for both prisoners and personnel.

28. United Nations, International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, May 2022. Third Periodic report submitted by Guyana under article 40 of the Covenant pursuant to the optional reporting procedure.

29. See footnote 28. United Nations, International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, May 2022.

30. Kerrigan, D., Ayres, T., & Moss, K. (2024). 'Prison officer pains': How and why coloniality shapes the job of a prison officer in Guyana today. *The Howard Journal of Crime and Justice*, 63, 418–439; Ayres, T.C. (2021). Guyana's Prison Officers: A Stressful and Dangerous Job. Available: <https://mnsguyana.le.ac.uk/2021/05/03/guyanans-prison-officers-a-stressful-and-dangerous-job/>

31. Anderson, C., & Halliwell, M. (2024). Mental health care in Guyana's jails before and after Independence. *The Howard Journal of Crime and Justice*, 63, 440–458.

32. Moss, K., & Warren, K. (2024). Resisting carceral confinement in Guyana: Legacies of a colonial state. *The Howard Journal of Crime and Justice*, 63, 459–475.

33. See footnote 32: Moss & Warren (2024).

34. Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) (2020) Regional comparative report: survey of individuals deprived of liberty: Caribbean (2016–2019). [Accessed 28 February 2025].

The first phase of work, to accommodate an additional 220 individuals at Mazaruni, was finalised in 2020, with the second phase set to be completed this year (2025). Other recent efforts to modernise the system include three newly constructed correction facilities at Lusignan. In March 2023, prison authorities transferred over 680 prisoners from the holding bay at Lusignan, a ‘temporary’ pen hastily erected in the wake of the Georgetown fire in 2017.³⁵ Guyana now also recognises that one of the primary contributing factors to prison overcrowding is the excessive use of remand—the detention of individuals in custody whilst awaiting trial—with unsentenced detainees accounting for 40 per cent of the prison population. This pattern of using prisons to hold people who had not been sentenced originated in the colonial period, with prisons also used to suppress potential unrest and control populations. Currently, the average duration of pre-trial detention is three years for individuals awaiting trial by either magistrates or the High Court, often exceeding the maximum potential sentence for their alleged offence. In July 2023, for example, Solomon George, a murder suspect, was discharged by the High Court after enduring over seven years in pre-trial detention.³⁶ While efforts are underway to modernise and revamp Guyana’s prison service and facilities, similar to the United Kingdom, there is still a considerable distance to cover. Given that Guyana’s prisons were based on British systems, many of the issues raised by prisoners and personnel in Guyana mirror those encountered within the UK Prison Service.

The role of collaborative participant action research

Collaborative participant action research offers a unique opportunity to address these deeply rooted issues.³⁷ By involving prisoners, staff and external stakeholders in our research process, equitable and ethical partnerships were created, and our findings

The research served
to raise the
awareness of
personnel who were
previously unaware
of the enduring
impact of colonial
practices on
contemporary issues.

were not only academically robust but also practically relevant to the Guyanese context.³⁸ This approach was important to also amplify the voices of prisoners and our practitioner partners, primarily the GPS, and enabled all to understand rather than simply research lived experiences. The creation of joint learning opportunities, capacity building and knowledge exchange was particularly important for the team and the project. All prison personnel were encouraged to engage in discussions and share their experiences, thereby enriching the purpose and content of workshops, training sessions and surveys. As a result of this collaborative effort, the project team and officers co-created the ‘Being Blessed’ survey to evaluate and comprehend the experiences of GPS staff. Dialogues

with the officers guided the survey design, ensuring that the research was tailored to meet their specific requirements. The findings from this research have subsequently been used to revise policies and regulations, thereby enhancing the working conditions within Guyana’s correctional facilities. Senior officers have since revealed that there has been a heightened regard for the service owing to the discoveries and insights brought about by the project; and that, many now feel better equipped to advocate for the service’s requirements.³⁹ There

exists a prevailing sense that positive transformations are underway, especially as numerous changes, such as the overhaul of the GPS standard operating procedures, which had remained unchanged since 2012, are due to be published this year (2025).

Another initiative involved two women staff members from HMPPS (His Majesty’s Prison and Probation Service) participating in an exchange visit in 2022, with the aim of fostering culturally appropriate changes in both Guyana and Leicester. Prior to their visit, HMPPS staff had personal experiences of prisoner outcomes influenced by the availability of resources and financial means. However, their perspective underwent a significant shift after witnessing what can be achieved

35. Ministry of Home Affairs, Republic of Guyana, March 2023, ‘Monumental move: All holding bay prisoners transferred to new Lusignan correction facilities’: <https://moha.gov.gy/monumental-move-all-holding-bay-prisoners-transferred-to-new-lusignan-correction-facilities>. [Accessed 1 March 2025].

36. 2023 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Guyana, April 2024: <https://www.state.gov/reports/2023-country-reports-on-human-rights-practices/guyana/>. [Accessed 10 February 2025].

37. Collaborative participant action research is a research approach where those affected by a problem actively participate in identifying, understanding, and addressing it.

38. Ayres, T. C., Levine, D., Anderson, C., Moss, K., Kerrigan, D., Ifill, M., ... & Warren, K. (2024). Doing transdisciplinary research in Guyana’s prisons. *The Howard Journal of Crime and Justice*, 63(4), 363–389.

39. See footnote 21: *Mental, Neurological, and Substance Abuse Disorders in Guyana’s Jails, 1825–2022 (2023)*.

with minimal resources. The concept of the 'orderly' role observed in Guyana provided inspiration for the development of the comparable role within the team's establishment, building a sense of community and prisoner engagement in the development of day-to-day operations. The act of delegating responsibilities to prisoners, monitoring their behaviour and advancements, constitutes a vital element of the rehabilitation process.⁴⁰ This visit was reciprocated when representatives from the GPS travelled to the UK in 2023, to explore the role of women frontline officers and their contribution to de-escalation efforts. Despite a significant portion of GPS personnel being women, the majority are typically assigned to prison receptions and administrative positions, rather than frontline duties (except for the women's prison in New Amsterdam).⁴¹ The exchange visit and workshops underscored the adeptness of women prison officers in employing effective communication and dialogue to manage prisoners, placing emphasis on persuasion and influence over physical coercion. Consequently, the GPS has made significant progress in advocating for the promotion of women officers in frontline roles.

The implementation of the collaborative participant approach yielded positive outcomes for all involved. The research served to raise the awareness of personnel who were previously unaware of the enduring impact of colonial practices on contemporary issues. Moreover, it played a crucial role in mitigating the social stigma experienced by prison officers through the increased visibility of the GPS among governmental authorities and the wider public. Deputy Director of the GPS, Kevin Pilgrim, noted 'We already knew certain aspects were dated (rules and regulations etc.) but had no idea how much stemmed from the colonial period. As a result, prison officers feel better prepared and happier to speak up about their own and the service's needs. There is a sense that things are finally changing for the better due, in part, to the attention the project provided.'

Addressing systemic harms and moving forward

The contemporary prison system in Guyana demonstrates considerable continuity from its

The continued use of colonial-era facilities today presents several problems regarding infrastructure, capacity and accessibility.

colonial past, manifesting in structural violence, inadequate living conditions, and challenges in rehabilitation and reintegration. Addressing these issues requires acknowledging the deep-seated legacies that continue to shape penal policies and practices. By integrating historical perspectives with contemporary research and adopting a collaborative approach, it is possible to create a prison system that not only recognises its past but also works towards a more equitable and rehabilitative future. Tangible impacts may be realised through sustained collaboration, policy reform, and culturally sensitive interventions addressing both systemic harm and the well-being of all within the prison system. Only by recognising how the past continues to impact the

present and working collaboratively with our Guyanese partners can positive, enduring and culturally nuanced change be implemented. Guyana's prisons are spaces in distress — symbolic and material manifestations of colonial rule, decay and violence.⁴² The buildings, spaces, regimes, processes, sounds, laws and rationale contain ghosts of the past, haunted by colonialism.⁴³ The process of decolonising the prison system in Guyana requires a comprehensive

approach encompassing historical reflection, collaborative research, and policy reforms aligning with the needs and rights of all those impacted. Only through such measures can we aspire to deconstruct the frameworks of colonial subjugation and construct a fair and compassionate system for future generations.

Acknowledgements

The authors are grateful to the GPS for their support, to Laura Vann who drew the maps, and Obrey James for the use of his image. All errors and omissions remain their own.

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40. See footnote 21: Mental, Neurological, and Substance Abuse Disorders in Guyana's Jails, 1825-2022 (2023).

41. See footnote 30: Kerrigan, Ayres, & Moss. (2024).

42. Fiddler, M. (2019). Ghosts of Other Stories: A synthesis of hauntology, crime and space. *Crime, Media, Culture*, 15(3), 463-477.

43. Ayres, T. C., & Kerrigan, D. (2021). *The Gaols of Guyana: Hauntology and Trauma in the soundscape of Prison*. LIAS Working Paper Series.

'Floating hells': Prison hulks and responses to prison overcrowding 1776-1857

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Prison hulks — repurposed ships used as floating prisons — were a notorious government response to prison overcrowding at the end of the 18th century. With their masts and rigging removed, they could be towed from site to site, and held around 300-500 male prisoners awaiting transportation. Pressed into service as temporary measures, they became part of the prison landscape for 80 years, until the system was finally disbanded. The hulks were immortalised in *Great Expectations* by Charles Dickens, first serialised in 1860-1. The novel was set in the early decades of the nineteenth century, where narrator Pip found himself an unwilling participant in the escape of a prisoner, Abel Magwitch. Having escaped from a hulk near to the foggy marshes of the Thames Estuary, Magwitch rose from amongst the graves to terrify young Pip. Eventually recaptured, he was escorted back to the ship, and it is here that the reader first encounters the hulks: 'By the light of the torches, we saw the black Hulk lying out a little way from the mud of the shore, like a wicked Noah's ark. Cribbed and barred and moored by massive rusty chains, the prison-ship seemed in my young eyes to be ironed like the prisoners'.¹

We encounter Magwitch and the hulks through the eyes of a child, and thus their image is one characterised by fear, vulnerability and powerlessness. Pip was told that 'people are put in the Hulks because they murder, and because they rob, and forge, and do all sorts of bad'.² There is a certain 'otherness' attached to the hulks; they were both familiar and unfamiliar. In their former lives as naval vessels, many had played a part in the Battle of Trafalgar and should have been symbols of national strength. Now, left to rot in the

Medway, their physicality invoked nothing but fear and unease. Across the first half of the 19th century, prison hulks faced extensive public and parliamentary criticism. Memorialised by Dickens, they were seen to represent all the evils of the British prison system: they were overcrowded, dangerous spaces, and were not seen as conducive for reforming inmates.

State responses to prison overcrowding

Effective from 1718, the Transportation Act legalised the process of deporting people convicted of crime — men, women and children to work as indentured servants or labourers in the American colonies, in Maryland, Virginia and the Caribbean.³ By 1775, the export of prisoners to America numbered roughly 960 a year — supplementary to numbers held in prisons, gaols and lock-ups across Britain.⁴ When the first shot of the American Revolution rang out at Lexington and Concord in April 1775 its impact was far-reaching. The War of American Independence that followed ground the process of transportation to a halt.

At home, Britain's prisons were pushed to breaking point. Prisoners were kept in overflowing county and borough prisons and joined by new would-be transportees sentenced after 1775. The haphazard administration and small scale of late 18th century gaols and houses of correction meant that institutions were not able to cope with increasing numbers.⁵ For a period of time, the state held onto the belief that the war against America would be resolved and transportation would resume. In the interim period, it turned to public servants to come up with alternative housing arrangements to help ease the overcrowding crisis.

1. Dickens, C. (1861). *Great Expectations* (E. Rosenberg, Ed. 1999). Norton, 36.

2. See footnote 1: Dickens (1861), 18.

3. Morgan, G., & Rushton, P. (2004). *Eighteenth-Century Criminal Transportation: The Formation of the Criminal Atlantic*. Palgrave Macmillan.

4. Shaw, A. G. L. (1966). *Convicts and the Colonies: A Study of Penal Transportation from Great Britain and Ireland to Australia and other parts of the British Empire*. Faber and Faber, XI, 574.

5. McConville, S. (1981). *A History of English Prison Administration: Volume 1, 1750-1877*, 50.

Driven by the pressures of war, at the end of the 18th century, ideas about efficiency and organisation began to shift, and management was placed into the hands of men open to new thinking. The Minister for the Northern Department's under-secretary William Eden was one such individual, appointed to find a solution to the overcrowding problem. Eden was the author of *The Principles of Penal Law*, published in 1771.⁶ This advocated a reduction in the number of capital offences and emphasised the need for reform.

Eden considered the state's options: war had caused the cost of overseas freight to rise sharply, and so sending prisoners to alternative British colonies was too costly. Mass hangings and chain gangs, the latter of which had not been used in England since the 18th century, had long since come to be regarded as barbaric and politically risky.⁷ Thanks to the high costs of waging war against the American colonies, the government was reluctant to invest in new or local prisons — Newgate was in the process of being redeveloped, but more sustained investment came later, with Millbank Penitentiary opening in 1816. Eden settled on prison hulks — decommissioned and partly dismantled ships — as the most acceptable and economic alternative to transportation. He advocated detaining male prisoners on hulks along the banks of the Thames at Woolwich, combining a spell of imprisonment with hard labour along the shoreline. In 1776, the British government passed the Criminal Law Act: it was designed as a temporary measure, lasting only several months.⁸

Over time, floating prisons were moored up in estuaries including Portsmouth and Plymouth, with the highest concentration along the Thames and Medway, at Woolwich, Deptford, Chatham and Sheerness.⁹ Those along the Thames Estuary initially received prisoners sent from gaols and overflowing prisons from across Middlesex but soon accepted from further afield. Only two ships were stationed at Plymouth, with more

at Portsmouth. In England, the hulk system ended in 1857 — what was supposed to be a temporary act therefore lasted around 80 years. At the end of the 18th century, Eden and his colleagues continued to search for permanent solutions, settling on the idea of transporting Britain and Ireland's prison population to New South Wales, Australia.¹⁰ The 'First Fleet' sailed in 1787, deporting its first group of prisoners, many of whom became settlers. This system continued — with interruptions, and objections from colonists — until 1868.¹¹ Male prisoners sentenced to penal servitude were held on board hulks prior to their transportation to the Australian colonies — This system was an important stage in this process.

Management — private contractors

Duncan Campbell, a merchant who previously held the contracts for transporting prisoners from London and the Southeast to the American colonies, was chosen as the first superintendent of the hulks at Woolwich by the Justices of the Peace for the County of Middlesex, beating competition including reformer Jeremy Bentham. Campbell lobbied for the role, recognising a good business opportunity — the payments from the enterprise acted as a stopgap until transportation resumed. He

Male prisoners
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supplied his own ex-East Indiamen ships, the *Justitia* and the *Censor*, as the first hulks at Woolwich. Rather than have them languish in port grounded by the American embargo, he could instead use them for financial gain. Campbell was no stranger to viewing bodies as commodities; in his youth as a midshipman for the Royal Navy he had also served on board a slave ship. Through marriage, he also owned enslaved people, as his wife's family owned an estate in Jamaica, 'Saltspring'.¹²

Campbell was soon permitted to expand the hulk system to cope with overcrowding. With the help of

6. Lee, S. (2009). Eden, William, first Baron Auckland (1744–1814), penal reformer and diplomatist. Oxford Dictionary of National Biography.

7. Gatrell V. A. C. (1994). *The Hanging Tree: Execution and the English People, 1770-1868*. Oxford University Press.

8. Criminal Law Act 1776, 16 Geo. 3. c. 43.

9. Campbell, C. (2001). *The Intolerable Hulks: British Shipboard Confinement, 1776-1857*. Fenestra.

10. On the ill-fated convict experiment in Africa, see: Christopher, E. (2011). *A Merciless Place: The Lost Story of Britain's Convict Disaster in Africa*. Oxford University Press.

11. Maxwell-Stewart, H. (2010). Convict Transportation from Britain and Ireland 1615–1870. *History Compass*, 8(11), 1221-1242.

12. Byrnes, D. (1993). From Glasgow to Jamaica to London and Australia – The Elusive Duncan Campbell (1726-1803). *Journal of the Clan Campbell Society of Australia*, 62, 11-16.

the Treasury, he purchased disused warships from the Admiralty — these were plentiful in a time of war, as major battles were fought at sea. The government was willing to allow the system to expand as long as large investment was not required. In 1787, Campbell positioned two new prison hulks at Gosport and Langstone Harbour near Portsmouth. This move indicated that the hulks were set to become a major component of the convict system — one year previously, in the summer of 1786, the government settled on the idea to found a penal colony in Botany Bay, New South Wales.¹³ The ‘First Fleet’ sailed from Portsmouth in 1787, with neighbouring prison hulks supplying male convicts.¹⁴ Setting up hulks in the area made prisoner labour more widely available — more

repairs were made to dockyards as Campbell’s profits expanded.

Campbell’s management was subject to little regulation. The terms of his contract were that he would not only provide hulks for the custody of prisoners at Woolwich, but that he should also supply proper officers, guards, clothing, medical assistance, and rations. Figure 1 is a table of the rations given out to prisoners on Campbell’s *Justitia* hulk around 1788. They were recorded by reformer John Howard, who visited the hulks on the Thames on two occasions — he found the hulks to be clean, the bread of good quality, and the prisoners healthy.¹⁵ Yet the rations in Figure 1 were divided between six men, leaving little protein to sustain a day’s hard labour.

Figure 1. Diet for prisoners on board the *Justitia*, Duncan Campbell’s hulk at Woolwich, c.1788 (John Howard’s *Account of the Principal Lazarettos in Europe*).

	Each mess is for six men, with seven pounds of bread every day
Breakfast	Every day: a pint of barley or rice made into three quarts of soup.
Dinner	Sunday: Six pounds of salt port or seven pounds of beef, with five quarts of beer.
- - -	Monday, Wednesday, Friday; Six pounds of bullock’s head.
- - -	Tuesday, Thursday, Saturday; Two pounds of cheese, and five quarts of beer.
Supper	Sunday, Monday, Wednesday; Friday. A pint of pease and barley made into three quarts of soup.
- - -	Tuesday, Thursday, Saturday; A pint of oatmeal made into burgoo.

A decade earlier, Howard had spoken to a parliamentary inquiry about the hulks, stating that prisoners were in a poor state of health, and not enough food or clothing had been supplied to them. The ships’ biscuits they were supplied with were mouldy, or simply bags of crumbs.¹⁶ The beef — bullock’s head, a particularly cheap cut that was mostly bone — was slimy and sour. When Howard made these early visits, he voiced concerns about the death rate on board the hulks at Woolwich — around one in four was alarmingly high.¹⁷ Records indicate that pulmonary tuberculosis was the leading cause of death, followed by other chest disorders. This was largely down to the poor sanitation and ventilation on board, as tuberculosis was spread through the air from one person to another. Howard also felt that there was a

lack of standardisation across hulks in different locations. This was common across gaols at the time, but there was a drive to correct this.

The state’s reliance on private enterprise to manage affairs enabled some of its contractors, like Campbell, to exploit their position. Facing growing public criticism, Campbell relinquished control of the hulks in Portsmouth in 1791 and then stepped down from his role entirely in 1802. His tenure as superintendent of the hulk establishment occurred at the same time government organisation underwent a fundamental shift, developing new, efficient forms of management.¹⁸ On the domestic front, this culminated in the formation of the Home Office in 1782. It had been a government department for twenty years by the time Campbell resigned. New legislation relating to

13. See footnote 5: McConville (1981).

14. Hughes, R. (1987). *The Fatal Shore: A History of the Transportation of Convicts to Australia, 1787-1868*. Collins Harvill.

15. Howard, J. (1798). *An Account of the Principal Lazarettos in Europe...together with further observations on some foreign prisons and hospitals, and additional remarks on the present state of those in Great Britain and Ireland*. Printed by William Eyres, 216.

16. British Parliamentary Papers (BPP). *Punishment by Transportation and Hard Labour* (15 April 1778). Sessional Papers, vol.36, pp.926-932. Testimony of John Howard, 928.

17. See footnote 9: Campbell (2001) p.37.

18. Pellew, J. (1982). *The Home Office, 1848-1914, from Clerks to Bureaucrats*. Heinemann.

convict hulks was passed, enabling the Crown to name an Inspector who was obliged to visit each hulk every quarter to examine the behaviour and conduct of officers.

Aaron Graham, a magistrate from the London police at Bow Street who came to the attention of parliament for his role dealing with the Royal Navy's Spithead and Nore mutinies in 1797, was appointed as Campbell's successor.¹⁹ Graham's tenure saw death rates reduce; hammocks replaced unsanitary sleeping platforms and increased airflow, rations were augmented, and decks were washed more frequently. By 1814, Graham was succeeded by John Henry Capper, a Home Office clerk. This appointment consolidated the notion that the confinement of prisoners was Home Office business. The hulks shifted to more direct Home Office control by 1820, although officially they remained outside of the jurisdiction of central government until 1847. As such, they were still difficult to regulate, continually overcrowded, and prone to mismanagement.

Who were the prisoners?

The rise in Britain's prison population at the end of the 18th century was linked to periods of economic depression — when the wars against France and America came to an end in 1815, there was a huge unemployment crisis, coupled with food shortages. Cities coping with increases in population saw crime rates rising sharply, with the most common crime being small-scale theft.²⁰ Male prisoners sent to the hulks could be on them for a matter of months before they were shipped to the Australian colonies, but many spent years on board. In fact, men could serve out their entire sentences on the hulks. Some were never transported, and so the hulks became the only prison system they experienced.

Prisoners held on board the hulks hailed from diverse backgrounds and were incarcerated for a variety of offences; men and boys could be imprisoned for stealing hats and handkerchiefs, or livestock,

pickpocketing, bigamy, killing deer, and stealing horse's saddles.²¹ Home Office registers reveal that men were not sent to the hulks according to the severity of their crimes, nor were they solely from urban areas. By 1800, as much as 28 percent of the population was in receipt of poor relief.²² Of course, not all 'poor' men and women turned to crime in order to cope with rising pressures, but a small proportion did.

After being convicted in court, and their fates decided, male prisoners were either marched to the hulks in chains, or ferried down the Thames towards Woolwich, Sheerness or Chatham. Prisoners who were sentenced to transportation would be sent to any hulk that had space to house them. Prisoners dreaded the hulks for a number of reasons: although a cell in

Newgate could be crowded and disease-ridden, isolation from land created a unique sense of separation from society and ruled out the possibility of escape. Prisoner petitions reveal multiple cases where men asked to be transferred off the hulks, either back to prisons on land, or to Australia. Such was the case of John Bevis, who argued he was wasting 'the prime of manhood in this receptacle of vice and misery' (p. 84) on board the *Stanislaus* in 1794.²³

Administrators had decided that the costs of holding prisoners on board hulks could be defrayed against the gains made by hard labour. Completed

work in the dockyards during the so-called 'age of sail' was in fact crucial to strategy and warfare. Prisoners dredged rivers, making them easier to navigate, they constructed administrative buildings and barracks for soldiers, they hauled ballast and timber. They were paid for their labour but only a third of their wages, amounting to one penny, was given to them per day at the discretion of the master shipwright or officer overseeing their work.²⁴ The rest was saved and handed out at the end of sentences. It was small recompense, but this, alongside the opportunity to learn to read and write, and receive three meals a day — however meagre — sparked rumours that some were tempted to commit crimes to earn transportation sentences.

Records indicate
that pulmonary
tuberculosis was the
leading cause of
death, followed by
other chest
disorders.

19. Easton, C. (2019). Counter-Theatre during the 1797 Fleet Mutinies. *International Review of Social History*, 64(3), 389–414.

20. Emsley, C. (2017). *Crime and Society in England, 1750-1900*. Routledge, p.13.

21. See, for example, the Home Office series HO9 (1802-1849). Convict Prison Hulks: Registers and Letter Books, The National Archives, Kew (TNA).

22. Porter, R. (1982). *English Society in the Eighteenth Century*. Penguin, p. 110.

23. TNA. HO42/28/37 (1794). Letter from Richard Bevis aboard the *Stanislaus* hulk. 83-84

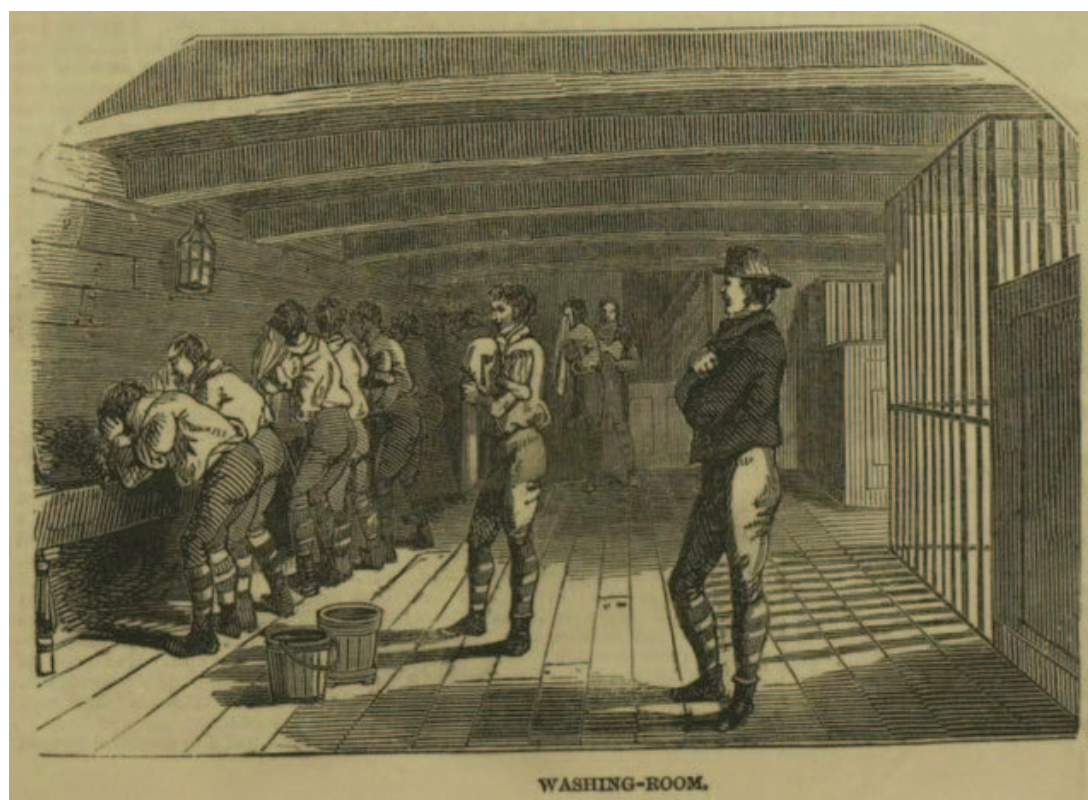
24. TNA. ADM1/3526/3 (1802). Letter from Samuel Bentham, Inspector General of Naval Works, Portsmouth, to Evan Nepean.

During wartime, prisoners were also drafted into the army and navy, providing manpower in return for early pardons.²⁵

Back on the hulks, labour dominated daily life. Prisoners rose at 5am and dressed. Wards were then unlocked, and the men washed themselves in water troughs — like those pictured in Figure 2 — before heading back to stow their hammocks. Whenever weather permitted, hammocks were brought upon deck to be aired. Rules dictated that the decks were to be washed twice a week and swept every morning and afternoon.²⁶ As the decades progressed, discipline and

routine became tighter — after cleaning the ship, prisoners were mustered — or counted — and rowed out to work in the dockyards until noon. All prisoners returned to the ship for lunch, which lasted 1 hour. Their duties in the dockyard then continued until 5.30pm. Men washed before supper was served. Evening prayers and schoolwork followed, and by 8pm they were counted one last time before bed. An hour later, an appointed officer visited each deck to check whether lights, bolts and locks were secure.²⁷ This kind of strict routine was designed to impose order and reform bad habits. There was never an idle moment.

Figure 2. Washing room on board the *Warrior* at Woolwich (Convict System, Economy of the Hulks. *The Illustrated London News*, 21 February 1846).



Threatening order: Escapes and violence

Working in open dockyards tempted some to attempt escape. Many resorted to violence in the act, hitting guards and even stabbing overseers. Uprisings made compelling news stories, and brought the hulks to the attention of a reading public: *The Morning Chronicle* covered an insurrection in 1802 at Woolwich, reporting that a group of fourteen prisoners rushed up to one of their keepers and, 'armed with large clasp knives', demanded that he open the gate to the

dockyard.²⁸ The report stated that the prisoners knocked the man down, took the key, and made their escape. They were pursued by several keepers who shot at them with loaded muskets. The incident was reported in great detail, right down to the wounds suffered by one who was shot from a distance of 30 feet: 'the bullet entered the left side of his head, which drove part of his skull and brains into his hat: he instantly fell lifeless to the ground'.²⁹ Some prisoners managed to escape, but were rounded up by troops of the Royal Artillery.

25. Emsley, C. (1980). The Recruitment of Petty Offenders during the French Wars 1793–1815. *The Mariner's Mirror*, 66(3), 199–208.

26. BPP. *Third Report from the Committee on the Laws relating to Penitentiary Houses*. Appendix B, Article 4, 154.

27. *The Illustrated London News*. 21 February 1846.

28. *The Morning Chronicle*. 7 August 1802.

29. See footnote 28: *The Morning Chronicle*.

Newspaper articles often relied upon descriptive imagery to highlight a sense of pace and movement; prisoners were described as rushing, running, disobeying commands and ignoring threats. The dockyard was portrayed as a scene of disarray, swarming with soldiers and noises of alarm; administrators attempted to suppress news stories that would paint the hulks in a negative light, but this was not always possible. Escapes through the dockyards where prisoners worked during the day was most common, but breaking free from the ships themselves also occurred frequently. In 1811, *The Times* reported that 37 prisoners had collectively escaped from one of the hulks stationed at Woolwich, by 'cutting through the ceiling and timbers of the hulk just under her bends' (the thickest planks on the side of a ship from the waterline).³⁰ When low tide came and the ship had grounded, or beached on the mudflats, the men waded through the mud to shore. The article confirmed that the military had recaptured fifteen of the escapees, but that the other twelve were still at large, and that 'many of them had their irons on'.³¹

Prisoners wore a heavy iron chain on one or both ankles at all times. They were also required to wear a uniform to reinforce and mark their separation from society. In the early period, this consisted of a brown jacket and pair of trousers. For those who managed to break off their leg irons, a change of clothes was often enough to slip away. As the circulation of the presses expanded, newspapers began to write physical descriptions of escapees and their clothing as a means to help the public identify them — anything from facial scarring, distinctive eye colour, to tattoos. The *Police Gazette* in 1829 described one escapee William Richie as having a 'fair complexion...and broad visage'.³² When an escape attempt was foiled, entire groups could be punished together by having their rations reduced, being put in solitary confinement, or having a pardon denied.

Attempts at reform

In line with wider penal reforms, administrators attempted to bring in changes on board, with limited success. In the 1820s, when the Home Office took control and hulks moved under more central management, men and boys — some of whom were as

young as eight — were separated. Boys were not put to work, and were instead taught trades including shoemaking, to become apprentices in Australia.³³ While they were spared heavy labour, these boys were still held on board ships, like the *Bellerophon* at Sheerness, and later the *Euryalus* at Chatham. Their conditions were miserable. There had been rumours of sexual assault on the hulks, and members of parliament were particularly keen to consider the morals of prisoners. They grew concerned that children — amongst others — would be morally corrupted living side by side with hardened criminals, and come out of the system worse than they went in.

On advice from the Home Office, prisoners were routinely segregated into separate 'classes' according to their character. Every three months, the names of all men were entered into a 'Character Book', where prisoners were graded from 'v.g' or 'very good', to 'v.b.' or 'very bad'.³⁴ The desired effect of classification was that it should act as a stimulus for good behaviour, as prisoners with a 'v.g.' track record could be recommended for pardon. However, prison hulks were also divided spatially, with better-behaved prisoners occupying the upper decks of the ship. This kind of segregation generally meant that 'very good' prisoners did not cross over with 'very bad' ones. Social separation allowed prisoners to be watched more closely, which restricted illicit industries like coining, or outbreaks of violence. But by restricting their freedom of movement in this manner, men couldn't choose their own social groups. Those labelled as 'very bad' therefore had less chance of being viewed as redeemed.

Across the 19th century, social reformers and prison officials shared the same negative viewpoint that hulks were unfit for habitation and for reform. Even prison chaplains spoke frankly; George William Livesay at Portsmouth stated in 1848 that hulks would 'never become a powerful engine of reform' (p.5) as long as prisoners were not separated by cellular confinement.³⁵ This system aimed to isolate prisoners for extended periods, with the goal of promoting reform through solitude and reflection.³⁶ By 1849, the hulks were under new management once more. Major Joshua Jebb had become a leading figure in both Pentonville Prison's operation and the prison hulk establishment; alongside Herbert P. Voules and Captain Donatus O'Brien, Jebb

30. *The Times*. 30 September 1811.

31. See footnote 30: *The Times* (1811)

32. *The Police Gazette; or, Hue and Cry*. 20 January 1829.

33. Shore, H. (1999). *Artful Dodgers: Youth and Crime in Early Nineteenth-Century London*. Boydell.

34. Mayhew, H. & Binny, J. (1862). *The Criminal Prisons of London and Scenes of Prison Life*. Griffin, Bohn, and Company. p.206-7.

35. BPP. (30 January 1849). *Report of the Manager of the Convict Hulk Establishment for the year 1848*. No.1 Report of Chaplain George William Livesay, Portsmouth, p. 5.

36. Johnston, H. (2020). 'The Solitude of the Cell': Cellular Confinement in the Emergence of the Modern Prison, 1850–1930. In J. Turner & V. Knight (Eds.), *The Prison Cell: Embodied and Everyday Spaces of Incarceration* (pp. 23-44). Palgrave Macmillan.

oversaw the hulks as they entered their twilight period.³⁷ Jebb, surveyor-general of convict prisons, and colleagues at the Prison Inspectorate claimed the hulks faced 'radical and irredeemable disadvantages' (p.311) when it came to implementing changes.³⁸

As the decades wore on, new modern prisons began to replace outdated 18th century gaols and lockups. Pentonville Prison opened in 1842 and was designed with isolation in mind — the less prisoners could talk amongst themselves, the less they were perceived to morally corrupt each other. Unlike Pentonville, the hulks had not been designed as prisons. These modified ships were far more social as spaces; it was impossible to separate prisoners or stop them from talking. Edward Gibbon Wakefield, who became a colonial politician in Canada and New Zealand had served a 3-year sentence in Newgate, before producing an 1831 tract, *Punishment of Death*. When interviewed by a parliamentary select committee, he stated that dozens of prisoners in Newgate called the hulks 'a pretty jolly life' because of 'indulgences' — they could work in the dockyards alongside their friends, smoke tobacco, and talk at night (p.99).³⁹ Hulks were simply not compatible with new mid-century ideas of what a prison should be.

Conclusion: Closure in 1857

A combination of factors led to the closure of the hulk system in England in 1857: at the forefront was public consternation, the slowing of transportation, and cost. Ten years earlier, the ships were in the public eye when a public health scandal erupted. It was found that the corpses of prisoners were being mistreated and trafficked to anatomy schools.⁴⁰ Following this, the hulks were soon blamed for cholera epidemics, and more reformers weighed in with their critiques of the system. In 1840, transportation to New South Wales ceased, but continued in Victoria, Queensland, Tasmania, and Western Australia. Yet Australian settlers continued to object to transportation and put pressure on the government at home to come up with a more permanent solution to dealing with its prison population. Emphasis was placed on deterrence. Faced with difficulties banishing prisoners overseas, officials agreed that the purpose of imprisonment should be to punish. However, reform — where men and women were better people when they left prison than when they went in — although slow to implement, was no less important.

Perhaps most significantly, the cost of fitting up and preparing new ships for the reception of male prisoners was found to be more expensive than the cost of building new prisons. In early 1855, reformer Henry Mayhew visited the *Defence* hulk at Woolwich and was shocked by the state of the ship, which he called a 'rotten leaky tub' (p.200).⁴¹ It was impossible to see how 500 convicts could be safely managed and kept healthy in a prison that was quite literally falling apart. Outlay for repairs was expensive, and the newly professional class of prison officers and officials like Joshua Jebb began asking questions as to why the government was not investing in building better prisons on shore. Jebb and his colleagues began to gradually move prisoners off the hulks into prisons they constructed on land. In 1857, the *Defence* and hospital ship *Unité*, both based at Woolwich ceased being used when the former was destroyed by fire. Hulks were used in colonial settings for a further two decades; in Bermuda until 1863, and Gibraltar until 1875.

Prison hulks were not the only government response to prison overcrowding in the 18th and 19th centuries, but they were certainly the most notorious. Across their 80 years in England, they represented a haphazard, badly managed system that became more permanent than anticipated. From the outset, the system had clashed with reforms and changes being made across penal institutions. Yet they occurred at a time of seismic change: across the period, there was a decided shift in the idea of what a prison was, and what it should do — should they exist to punish, or reform people convicted of crime? Punishment had moved from executions and public whippings to solitary confinement and education. It was a huge transformation. Hulks were not able to keep pace with change and always stood out as something archaic and outmoded. Although distanced from the image of Dickens's 'wicked Noah's ark', prisons today face similar challenges: there is still overcrowding, as well as financial constraints, reliance on private contractors, and concerns over safety. The hulks serve as an historical example that short-term fixes to prison overcrowding often prove to be more expensive and unpopular in the long run than investment.

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37. Emsley, C. (2012). Jebb, Sir Joshua (1793–1863), prison administrator. *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*.

38. BPP. (1854). *Directors of Convict Prisons: Reports on Discipline and Management of Pentonville, Parkhurst, Millbank, Portland, Portsmouth, Dartmoor, and Brixton Prisons, and Hulks*. *Command Papers*, vol.25, 1-391.

39. BPP. (1831). *Report from the Select Committee on Secondary Punishments*. *Sessional Papers*, vol.7, 1-177. Testimony of E. Gibbon Wakefield. (p.99).

40. McKay, A. L. (2021). 'Allowed to die'? Prison Hulks, Convict Corpses and the Inquiry of 1847. *Cultural and Social History*, 18(2), 163–181.

41. See footnote 34: Mayhew & Binny (1862). (p. 200).

How dark is Dartmoor? An exploration of the motivating factors for visitors to Dartmoor Prison Museum

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As a Curator at Dartmoor Prison Museum, I am constantly asking myself if what we provide is what visitors want and if it isn't, what do they want? Dartmoor Prison Museum, although outside of the walls, is part of the operational prison, the reputation of which is known worldwide even amongst those with no interest in crime and punishment. The museum focuses on the history of incarceration at Dartmoor and how this has changed over time. This can lead to an assumption that the museum is a shop window for what happens behind the walls out of the sight of the public. By association, the museum serves to either reinforce or alter public perception. This question forms the basis for this article, with an added dimension as to how far the museum goes to adding to or changing the perception of visitors' understanding of crime and punishment in the UK.¹

When conducting the research, it was important to ascertain the existing knowledge of visitors and how their understanding and perception of the subject matter changed or was reinforced by their visit. The questions allowed for both quantitative data (i.e. how often, in a typical year, do you visit museums?), and qualitative data (i.e. what do you feel is missing?). This allowed for direct answers to multiple choice questions designed to ascertain levels of prior knowledge of the subject matter, whilst the open ended qualitative questions allowed visitors to expand on their answers and express their perceptions and experiences in their own words.

The questionnaires were directed at adult visitors as it was thought they would have developed a stronger view of crime and punishment over time. The number of completed questionnaires provided a wide sample, and these were allocated at random.

Demographic information regarding respondents was not collected as part of the questionnaires.

One key area of investigation was to look at whether the museum tells the story that Dartmoor Prison wants to tell or is driven by what the curators perceive the public want to see. The museum website quotes the mission statement from Prison Governor, Steve Mead (2021):² 'Dartmoor Prison has a long and fascinating history that has seen many changes in its fortunes. But it is also at the cutting edge of modern penal practice, developing ways to help offenders change their lives. I hope you will take the opportunity to find out more about this hidden but uniquely interesting world, and to think hard about the serious issues of crime, punishment and rehabilitation'.

The advent of 'dark tourism', defined by Sharpley and Stone as tourism to sites associated with tragedies, disaster and death,³ has increased the number of visitors to museums dealing with crime and punishment. Some see this as voyeuristic, and it was important to examine whether the museum reacts to this or is providing an educational narrative and allowing visitors to draw their own conclusions from their experiences. The investigation was also led by an article by Barton and Brown which looked at dark tourism and the modern prison, drawing on Dartmoor and the museum. This article argues that the museum plays on the notoriety of the prison and therefore gives visitors what they expect, a foreboding site overlaid with stories of famous inmates. It does not represent prisons today or address the rights and wrongs of penal servitude. It concludes with the opinion that as with other forms of prison tourism it is concerned with profits and does little to challenge ideologies.⁴ Twelve years on, it was interesting to see if there had been a shift in the narrative of the museum and public perception.

1. Please note that this article was researched prior to the temporary closure of Dartmoor Prison and restrictions on access to areas of the museum due to radon gas.

2. <https://www.dartmoor-prison.co.uk/>

3. Sharpley, R., & Stone, P. R. (2009). *The darker side of travel: The theory and practice of dark tourism*. Multilingual Matters.

4. Barton, A., & Brown, A. (2012). Dark Tourism and the Modern Prison. *Prison Service Journal*, 199, 44-9.

In the past twenty years dark tourism has gained academic attention, and considerable literature has been published. However, understanding of the phenomenon of dark tourism remains limited.⁵ Whilst there has been an increased supply of dark tourist sites, much less is known about the demand for these sites in terms of the motivations of dark tourists.⁶ Martini and Buda focus on death and disaster as a motive for tourism but acknowledge that this motivation can be linked to crime and punishment sites. Their key suggestion is that sites are engineered or adapted to cater for the tourist, arguing that dark tourist sites can elicit strong and complex reactions by their nature with many places being consciously constructed to enhance such reactions. They further argue that stakeholders involved in the development of a site are required to frame its story and meaning for tourism purposes.⁷

Lennon and Foley observe that scholars who have begun to explore the phenomenon of dark tourism provide a starting point for the study of prison history tourism.⁸ Stone puts this study into context, arguing that sites representing bygone penal and justice codes to the present-day consumer sit in the middle of dark tourism typology, where sites of actual death and suffering (e.g. Auschwitz), and sites associated with death and suffering (e.g. The London Dungeon) represent the extremes.⁹ Barton and Brown also recognise that prison tourism can be considered as part of the broader practice of dark tourism.¹⁰ This reflects a universal agreement that crime-and-punishment tourism sits within the dark tourism framework and the arguments presented in various texts seek to explore the motivations behind dark tourism and whether this forms the key *modus operandi* of crime and punishment museums.

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It is notable that written sources state that whilst there is growing international literature on prison tourism, there is little research to date exploring this in the UK.¹¹ Barton and Brown emphasise this point in relation to studies of prison museums.¹² This may be due to the lack of available sites with the widespread decommissioning of prisons in Britain only occurring in the recent past and not all have since been developed for tourism. Shrewsbury prison, closed in 2013, now operates as a tourist site, drawing on its reputation as the 'world's second most haunted jail'. Compare this to Holloway Prison, closed in 2016, whose reputation would make it a prime site for tourism but which has been sold for redevelopment of the land for housing.

Barton and Brown highlight how Dartmoor Prison attracted large numbers of visitors merely to observe it from the outside and still does to this day.¹³ This illustrates that prison tourism is multifaceted in that visitors are not merely looking for former sites they can visit but are prepared to visit an operational site in what Hodgkinson and Urquhart call 'the ultimate voyeuristic criminological experience.'¹⁴

Hodgkinson and Urquhart look at how prison tourism links to crime and punishment in the UK and highlight the growth of prison tourism in the UK. They question how these sites represent crime and punishment, focusing more on entertainment than the true history of the sites. It argues that sites are created to appeal more to dark tourists and not those who want to learn. Whilst acknowledging the fact that sites tend to oversimplify and sanitise the realities of punishment, it does argue that these sites have potential to challenge visitor perception which, if done ethically, can challenge stereotypes and modern punishment practices.¹⁵

5. Martini, A., & Buda, D.M. (2020). Dark Tourism and Affect: Framing Places of Death and Disaster. *Current Issues in Tourism*, 23(6), 679-92.
6. Hodgkinson, S., & Urquhart, D. (2016). Prison Tourism: Exploring the Spectacle of Punishment in the UK. In G. Hooper & J. Lennon (Eds.), *Dark Tourism: Practice and Interpretation* (pp. 40-55). Routledge.
7. See footnote 5: Martini & Buda (2020).
8. Lennon, J., & Foley, M. (2000). *Dark Tourism: The Attraction of Death and Disaster*. Continuum.
9. Stone, P. (2006). A Dark Tourism Spectrum: Towards a Typology of Death and Macabre Related Tourist Sites, Attractions and Exhibitions. *Tourism*, 55(22), 154.
10. Barton, A., & Brown, A. (2015). Show Me the Prison: The Development of Prison Tourism in Britain. *Crime, Media, Culture*, 11(3), 1-41.
11. See footnote 6: Hodgkinson & Urquhart (2016).
12. See footnote 10: Barton & Brown (2015).
13. See footnote 10: Barton & Brown (2015).
14. See footnote 6: Hodgkinson & Urquhart (2016).
15. See footnote 6: Hodgkinson & Urquhart (2016).

Picken supports the points raised by Hodgkinson and Urquhart, stating that prison museums do very little to challenge commonplace ideas about punishment and the prison. This article argues that the sanitisation of history does not allow the visitor to empathise with prisoners.¹⁶ This raises an interesting question as to whether an accurate portrayal of crime and punishment should produce empathy. Whilst the treatment of prisoners in the past may appear barbaric to a modern audience, how do we emphasise that this was in keeping with the morals and ethics of the day?

Barton and Brown produced a critique of Dartmoor Prison in terms of its being a cultural icon.¹⁷ The article illustrates how myth and imagery of the site fuels the public perception of the prison. People visit with certain expectations based on what they have read or seen in the media with the backdrop of the moor always dark and mist-covered. They observe that the use of guns by officers and the shooting of escaping and 'mutinous' felons is one of the most controversial parts of the prison's history, with the remoteness of the prison and the dangerousness of its prisoners giving official legitimatisation to these actions.

Barton and Brown observed that whilst dark tourism may be associated with places of death, the link between dark tourism and prison sites may be symbolic given that a small proportion of people in prison have died in prison. In the case of Dartmoor, they state that in the public consciousness the prison was considered only one degree better than being condemned to death.¹⁸ This suggests that prison tourism in terms of deaths may only be related to sites of execution and does not address sites where suicide is prevalent. This would fit more accurately with dark tourism being associated with sites of suffering but does not appear to have the same draw as a site of execution.

The research explored these issues and examined how far the museum seeks to be a site of education and discussion or whether it functions as a site of entertainment. In this, does it address the needs of the visitor and what is it that the visitor is seeking during their visit?

The museum focuses on the history of incarceration at Dartmoor and how this has changed over time. This can lead to an assumption that the museum is a shop window for what happens behind the walls out of the sight of the public.

The study is based on fifty questionnaires distributed at random to visitors aged eighteen and over. They were asked fifteen questions made up of a mixture of multiple choice, yes/no answers and open-ended questions. The purpose of this was to ascertain visitors' interests and how the visit had changed or challenged their view of crime and punishment as represented by the museum.

Most visitors to the museum classed themselves as occasional visitors, with over half of respondents (53 per cent) stating that they only visit museums once in a typical year and 31 per cent visiting between 2 and 5 times per year.

Comments in the museum visitor book show a significant number of respondents stating they discovered the museum whilst passing by. Princetown, where the prison and museum are sited, is an isolated village on Dartmoor and is not readily 'passed by'. A number of tourists who come to Princetown are here to catch a glimpse of the prison itself and discover the museum whilst driving through the village, or those attracted by walking on the moor pass the museum as part of their perambulations.

More respondents (47 per cent) stated that they looked at the museum website before visiting. The responses support this assumption with comments such as 'checked opening times', 'no need to pre-book'. Comments such as 'price', 'dog friendly' and 'looked interesting and engaging' illustrate that the website is influencing the decision to visit. Interestingly in an increasingly digital age, eight percent of respondents stated they were not aware of the website.

Most respondents (69 per cent) stated that they had an interest in crime and punishment prior to their visit. An analysis of the respondents' interest in crime and punishment revealed that the difference in interest between true crime and crime fiction was fairly even, with respondents preferring to watch rather than read about the subject (51 per cent in both cases).

16. Picken, R. (2016). Experiencing crime and punishment: Emotions, perceptions and responses to crime and penal heritage in courtroom and prison museums. In *Our Criminal Past* - blog posted 21 March 2016.

17. Barton, A., & Brown, A. (2011). Dartmoor: Penal and Cultural Icon. *The Howard Journal of Criminal Justice*, 50(5), 478-91.

18. See footnote 4: Barton & Brown (2012).

It is reasonable to assume that the average visitor has some awareness about the nature of crime and punishment in the UK. Asked whether the experience added to their knowledge, the majority responded in the affirmative. The majority of comments followed two main themes: firstly, that visitors' knowledge of how punishment has changed over time increased and secondly that their knowledge about how prisons treat prisoners today in terms of a rehabilitative culture also increased.

The results for how much visitors enjoyed their visit showed that, with the exception of one response, all stated that they had enjoyed it. None of the respondents thought that the museum romanticised crime or trivialised punishment. Comments included 'definitely not', 'rather the opposite, it acts as a deterrent', 'very factual', 'it shows exactly as it was like' and 'no, it educates'. These comments indicate that the museum does not trade on 'sensationalism' but offers an account of how prison was and still is.

Respondents were asked to use words to describe what they thought of the exhibitions. Most responded that they found it educational and informative whilst few or none found it trivial or too graphic. Another frequent comment was 'genuine', suggesting respondents recognised the link between the museum and the prison and the authenticity of the objects they were looking at. Taylor and Neill identify the power of 'in situ' learning where museum objects take advantage of the contextual integrity of the site by bringing to life the inherent connection between the object and setting.¹⁹

The qualitative data gives further insights into how respondents viewed the museum. Asked how far the visit satisfied their knowledge of crime and punishment, most respondents gave a positive reaction. Building on the educational and informative indicators above, respondents stated 'there is always more to learn,' 'it has improved my knowledge considerably,' 'reinforced prior knowledge and extended historical understanding,'. One respondent who prior to visiting stated they had no interest in crime and punishment commented 'having an open mind the visit was very satisfying'. Less positive comments included 'I thought there would be more torture apparatus', 'I wished to

learn more about recent history,' and 'would like to know more about why they commit crime.' The first of these comments alludes to a need to satisfy an interest in dark tourism whereas the second and third comments illustrate that whilst respondents were engaged with the exhibitions, they felt that more information could be provided on certain topics.

Feedback received as to what could be covered in greater detail included 'guided tours', 'actors to answer questions', 'more interactive exhibits for children', and 'more internal pictures of the prison'. The most common comment was that more information could be provided on current prisoners, their crimes and sentences.

Visitors were invited to comment on their favourite aspect of the museum. For most it was the representation of past and present cells which they felt gave a good insight into how incarceration conditions have changed. Another aspect was the personal effects of prisoners, whether models and paintings or items of contraband such as weapons they constructed out of everyday items such as toothbrush handles. One major comment was that respondents were unaware that the prison was originally constructed as a war depot during the Napoleonic Wars. For many this exploded the myth that Dartmoor Prison was built as a high security convict prison but explained to them

how and why Dartmoor Prison came into being.

Hodgkinson and Urquhart state that 'prison tourism is somewhat undeveloped in the UK' (p.4),²⁰ a claim supported by the responses received. Of those who had an interest in crime and punishment, only eight respondents had visited other crime and punishment museums. Comparisons were that Dartmoor portrayed a more realistic, factual and lifelike representation of past and present living conditions.

Conclusion

If taken in the context of the mission statement by the Prison Governor referred to above, visitors to Dartmoor Prison Museum responded positively. Respondents indicated that the museum enlightened them to its past as a war prison whilst taking them on a journey of penal practices over time. The museum

People visit with certain expectations based on what they have read or seen in the media with the backdrop of the moor always dark and mist- covered.

19. Taylor, E. W., & Neill, A. C. (2008). Museum Education: A Nonformal Education Perspective. *Journal of Museum Education*, 33(1) 23-32.
20. See footnote 6: Hodgkinson & Urquhart (2016).

also satisfied existing knowledge whilst adding to the knowledge of others. It was seen as an educative, informative and genuine institution by respondents which seeks to explain over two hundred years of the history of the prison. The responses received did not indicate that the museum used dark tourism either to attract visitors or to shape what it displayed. Whilst it could be argued that the website focuses on the darker side of incarceration with its famous ex-prisoners, it must be remembered that this is an advertising tool and under half of those who responded stated they had visited the website prior to their visit. It is possible that the notoriety of Dartmoor Prison itself serves as an advert for the museum with visitors expecting something akin to the institution portrayed by the likes of Arthur Conan Doyle and Agatha Christie. The fact that visitors discovered a balanced representation between punishment and rehabilitation may be the museum's greatest educative and informative feature.

Visitors to Dartmoor were attracted more to the historical site and there was little evidence that those visiting Dartmoor Prison Museum did so as dark tourists. Strange and Kempa observed that heritage designers of dark tourism sites arrive on the scene after places of suffering have become famous.²¹ It is certainly true that the museum draws upon the notoriety of the prison, however the responses reviewed here suggests that it did not cater for tourists' pre-conceived ideas. Similarly, there was little evidence to support Hodgkinson and Urquhart's statement that the presentation of the penal past for public consumption is often controversial as sites try to cater to often macabre public demand. The way that the museum is structured is more in line with their later statement that the penal tourist experience can be seen as an important means of shaping attitudes and understandings of prisons and prisoners today.²² It does not 'invoke an idealized and even mythical representation of all prisons' but places the development of the prison in an historical context.²³

The responses received did not indicate that the museum used dark tourism either to draw visitors in or in what they display.

The museum seeks to present the subject matter in an honest and non-sensational way, allowing visitors to form their own opinions on how crime and punishment operates now and in the past, and this is reflected in the visitor feedback. The use of genuine artefacts illustrates the stories being told which helps visitors relate to them and feel they are a part of that story. There is a tilt towards dark tourism in that the museum draws on the most notorious or well-known subjects as exhibits. Whilst the museum does not actively seek to generate discussion on crime and punishment in the UK, by reporting the facts, it allows the visitor to reach their own conclusions on the rights and wrongs of the exhibits they see.

To further explore how the subject is presented it would be useful to undertake more detailed like-for-like analysis, for example comparing Dartmoor with the Peterhead Prison Museum in Scotland. This would compare a museum attached to an operational prison with a museum set up in a decommissioned prison where the authenticity of the sites and objects carry equal weight. To marry this up with the subject of dark tourism, a comparative study could be conducted with those decommissioned prisons which actively market themselves as dark tourism attractions such as Shrewsbury Prison and Shepton Mallet. More research is also needed on the factors that influence new crime and punishment attractions such as the West Midlands Police Museum, Birmingham. An analysis of their development design in context with other new developments such as Tavistock's Museum of Policing in Devon and Cornwall would shed further light on the impact of dark tourism.

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21. Strange, C., & Kempa, M. (2003). Shades of Dark Tourism: Alcatraz and Robben Island. *Annals of Tourism Research*, 30(2), 386-405.

22. See footnote 6: Hodgkinson & Urquhart (2016).

23. See footnote 17: Barton & Brown (2011).

The rise and fall of the prison schoolmaster and schoolmistress in 19th century England

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The Gaols Act 1823 represented the first attempt by a British government to impose some degree of uniformity on regimes in local prisons in England and Wales. It was a response to the diversity of experience of imprisonment, which reformers argued gave rise to abuses and generated high rates of recidivism. Attention focused on the classification of prisoners (to separate the convicted from those on remand, and ‘serious offenders’ from ‘petty criminals’), the provision of employment and hard labour (to prevent idleness and to punish), and religious instruction (to reform or rehabilitate prisoners). Among its various rules and regulations, the following clause stands out: ‘Provision shall be made in all Prisons for the Instruction of Prisoners of both Sexes in Reading and Writing’.¹

The ‘reading and writing clause’ (as it became known) was, to some extent, based on existing practice in prisons. Efforts were already being made at some local prisons, at the new convict prison at Millbank and even on some convict prison hulks to teach illiterate prisoners how to read and write. While a degree of literacy was necessary to read the Bible (and to better facilitate religious instruction), contemporaries also believed that education had a civilising — and thus decriminalising — effect. The clause was also likely devised by educational reformers in Parliament, who were disappointed about the failure of a recent bill for universal education in England and Wales and were keen to get something done.² In the event, the clause was a milestone for both penal and educational reform: it marked the birth of state-funded education in England and Wales. It also drove forward the expansion of prison education in England. By 1848, the majority

of local prisons and all convict prisons had some sort of scheme in place for the education of prisoners. In the wake of the Prison Act 1865, the proportion of prisons with education programmes exceeded 90 percent. By 1880, every prison in England had a formal education programme in which the three Rs — reading, writing and arithmetic — were taught.³ But who was doing the teaching?

This article seeks to answer that question, focusing in particular on the presence of qualified teachers in English local and convict prisons during the nineteenth century. It contributes to a relatively discrete literature on nineteenth-century prison officers, and sheds light on one aspect of a frequently overlooked element of the nineteenth-century penal regime: prison education.⁴ The article begins with an account of the various approaches of prison administrators to the identification and appointment of individuals to teach illiterate (and sometimes innumerate) prisoners in the wake of the Gaols Act 1823. It will explain why the authorities began to show a preference for trained and/or experienced schoolmasters and, to a lesser extent, schoolmistresses, and how, between the 1840s and 1860s, the role became an attractive career prospect. Finally, the article will account for the fall of the prison schoolmaster and schoolmistress in the last third of the nineteenth century, a process which severed remaining connections between the penal and educational world.

Finding teachers

While the Gaols Act 1823 insisted that prisoners should be taught to read and write, it gave no direction on how they should be taught including, crucially, by

1. Gaols, etc (England) Act [Gaols Act], 1823, 4 Geo. IV, c.64, section 10 (10).
2. For an account of the spread of prison education in England, see: Crone, R. (2022). *Illiterate Inmates: Educating Criminals in Nineteenth-Century England*. Oxford University Press.
3. See footnote 2: Crone (2022).
4. Specific studies of nineteenth-century prison staff include: Thomas, J. E. (1972). *The English Prison Officer since 1850: A Study in Conflict*. Routledge & Kegan Paul; Johnston, H. (2008). Moral Guardians? Prison officers, prison practice and ambiguity in the nineteenth century. In H. Johnston (Ed.), *Punishment and Control in Historical Perspective* (pp. 77-94). Palgrave Macmillan; Johnston, H. (2008). Reclaiming the prisoner: the role and training of prison officers in England, 1877-1914. *Howard Journal of Criminal Justice*, 47(3), 297-312. Several other studies contain chapters or information about specific staff, but they do not make prison staff their main focus.

whom. Rules for the management of convict prisons and hulks were similarly vague. Great variety in provision resulted, as institutional officials experimented with a range of different approaches. The quickest, cheapest and most expedient way to meet the terms of the Act was to supply prisoners with elementary books, pens and paper and let them get on with it themselves. Convicts on board the *Hardy* hulk at Tipnor (now commonly known as Tipner, Portsmouth), for example, spent their 'leisure hours after public labour ... very usefully, in mutually instructing each other in reading [and] writing'.⁵ In their annual reports, many prison chaplains reported the benefits of mutual instruction — some prisoners did learn to read and write, and engagement in this useful activity lifted spirits and morals. Others drew attention to the problems of unsupervised learning. The chaplain at Bedford County Gaol complained that male prisoners used the pens they had been given to draw in the books or write secret letters to friends.⁶

Mutual instruction, however, was soon eradicated in English prisons as a consequence of the rise in the mid-1830s of two new systems of prison discipline: silence and separation. Under the former, prisoners were kept in association but strict silence was imposed, enforced by a system of harsh punishments. Under the separate system, prisoners were accommodated in individual cells and let out only for exercise, to attend chapel, and for some forms of work, and even then, their separation was preserved through the use of peaked caps and physical partitions. Separation also had a reformatory purpose: strict isolation, it was believed, would break the hardened resolve of the prisoner, preparing him or her to receive Christian messages of salvation through repentance from the chaplain. Both systems marked the final stage in attempts to control interactions between prisoners, to prevent the 'contamination' of potentially reformable individuals by 'hardened

criminals', and to suppress prisoner subcultures which posed a threat to authority.⁷

The spread of silence and separation together with a clause in the Prison Act 1839 which forbade the employment of those accused or convicted of crime as schoolmasters or in the instruction of any other prisoner also put an end to the use of prisoner-schoolmasters (literate prisoners officially appointed to the role and often compensated for it) and prisoners as monitors, or teaching assistants, under an appointed teacher.⁸ Both practices were already on the decline. Officials often struggled to find trustworthy prisoners imprisoned for long enough to appoint as teachers, while the monitorial method (whereby monitors, instructed by teachers, would impart lessons to their group of peers) was falling out of favour both inside and outside the prison.

Other sources of free teaching included philanthropic visitors and the family members of senior prison officers. Not all visitors offered to teach prisoners — most limited their activity to reading the Bible aloud to individuals or small groups — and of those who did teach, most only taught reading. Through the 1830s and 1840s, prison visiting declined, both because it fell out of fashion and because prison authorities were becoming less welcoming, especially to visitors who were Dissenters. Family members of officers, often women, were not always considered suitable or reliable. At

Ely Gaol, the governor's daughter, a little girl of 11, taught the female prisoners.⁹ The head turnkey's wife taught the female prisoners at St Albans Gaol, but was frequently absent owing to successive pregnancies.¹⁰

Senior officers sometimes offered teaching too. While the governor at Wisbech House of Correction found it gave him better knowledge of the prisoners, most were too busy to sustain it.¹¹ Matrons were frequently required to teach the female prisoners as part of their duties because the 1823 Act had forbidden

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5. Parliament. (1829). *Two reports of John Henry Capper, Esq. superintendent of ships and vessels*. Parliamentary Papers [hereafter PP] England and Wales, XVIII.315, 9.
6. Parliament. (1837). *Reports and Schedules Pursuant to Gaol Acts*. PP Eng & Wales, XLV.1, 7.
7. McGowen, R. (1995). The Well-Ordered Prison: England, 1780-1865. In N. Morris & D. J. Rothman (Eds.), *The Oxford History of the Prison: The Practice of Punishment in Western Society*. Oxford University Press.
8. Prisons Act, 1839, 2 & 3 Vict. c.56, section 6 (4).
9. Parliament. (1850). *Inspectors of Prisons, Northern & Eastern District, 15th Report*. PP England & Wales, XXVIII.291, 215.
10. Parliament. (1845). *Inspectors of Prisons, Home District, 10th Report*. PP England & Wales, XXIII.1, 241.
11. Parliament. (1852-3). *Inspectors of Prisons, Northern & Eastern District, 17th Report*. PP England & Wales, LII.1, 13.

the use of male teachers unless they were chaperoned.¹² Because chaplains were responsible for religious instruction, skills teaching was often placed within their department. While some willingly or unwillingly gave lessons in reading and writing, most argued that because of their position and workload, they should be the supervisors of instruction, not the teachers. Finally, subordinate officers, or warders, were sometimes invited to teach, but most had little or no experience, and chaplains and prison inspectors often expressed doubts about their capabilities.

The rise of the prison schoolmaster (and schoolmistress)

The increasingly restrictive nature of the penal environment — the desire to limit contact between prisoners and to exclude outsiders who were not answerable to the authorities — and the unsuitability of many existing categories of staff combined to necessitate the employment of a prison schoolmaster and sometimes a prison schoolmistress. On the face of it, the evidence suggests that, in local prisons at least, the first generation of prison schoolmasters employed in the 1830s were rarely qualified nor had any prior experience in teaching. However, given the lack of teacher training opportunities before c.1840, this was not unusual even among elementary school teachers. Prison schoolmasters often came from other areas of employment; they had been tradesmen (for example, millwrights, woollen drapers, carpenters) or soldiers. A significant number worked part-time, combining prison

teaching with another occupation. For example, in the late 1830s, the schoolmaster at Shrewsbury County Gaol was a local publican who taught prisoners in the morning and pulled pints in the evening.¹³ They tended to be older men, aged in their forties or fifties, and their salaries, between £30 and £50 per annum, fell short of the average salary of an elementary schoolmaster (£60 to £70 per annum).¹⁴

From the late 1830s, changes in mainstream education and penal policy led to an increase in the number prison schoolmasters, a new interest in their qualifications for the role, and the creation of the post of prison schoolmistress. Concerns about the quality of teaching in elementary schools prompted the establishment of new teacher training colleges and, in 1846, a state-financed pupil-teacher system through which certificates were issued to qualified teachers.¹⁵ In 1835, the Home Office devised a new policy which required the appointment of schoolmasters in prisons where daily populations exceeded 50.¹⁶ New regulations for local prisons published in 1840 further specified that schoolmistresses should be employed in large prisons.¹⁷ During the 1840s, prison inspectors began to insist, in their reports, on the appointment of 'properly qualified' full-time schoolmasters. In 1842, subordinate officers in local prisons, including schoolmasters and schoolmistresses, gained the right to petition for a pension when leaving their post due to old age or ill-health. This was a benefit denied to most elementary school teachers which made prison teaching more attractive.

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12. Gaols, etc (England) Act [Gaols Act], 1823, 4 Geo. IV, c.64, section 10 (3).
13. Parliament. (1839). *Inspectors of Prisons, Southern & Western District, 4th Report*. PP England & Wales, XXII.217, 202.
14. Smelser, N. J. (1991). *Social Paralysis and Social Change: British Working-Class Education in the Nineteenth Century*. California University Press.
15. See footnote 14: Smelser (1991); Rich, R. W. (1933). *The Training of Teachers in England and Wales during the Nineteenth Century* (chapters 3-5). Cambridge University Press; Bischof, C. (2019). *Teaching Britain: Elementary Teachers and the State of the Everyday, 1846-1906*. Oxford University Press.
16. The National Archives [hereafter TNA] (1835). HO 21/7: HO Circular, to the Visiting Justices of all Prisons in England and Wales, 12 October 1835. This new policy was based on a recommendation from the 1835 Richmond Committee: *Select Committee on Present State of several Gaols and Houses of Correction in England and Wales (1835)* PP Eng & Wales, XI.495, iv-v.
17. HM Government. (1840). *Regulations for Prisons in England and Wales*. London, rule 178.

These reforms were reflected in recruitment patterns. Advertisements for prison schoolmasters in local and national newspapers called for applicants who were 'accustomed to tuition' or 'competent to give instruction in reading, writing and arithmetic'. Some sought men 'of irreproachable character', or who were members of the Church of England.¹⁸ Salaries ranged from £50 per annum at Worcester County Gaol to £80 per annum at Holloway Prison.¹⁹ Surviving collections of application letters suggest that men with teaching qualifications and/or experience, sometimes extensive, applied for these posts. Successful candidates at Aylesbury County Gaol and Lincoln County Gaol had previously taught adults.²⁰ The average age of schoolmasters on appointment also decreased, suggesting that prison schoolmaster was becoming a career choice rather than a way to make ends meet.²¹

The rise of the local prison schoolmistress was frustrated by the typically small populations of female prisoners at many institutions. This meant that some posts remained part-time. Although advertisements for schoolmistresses rarely mentioned qualifications or experience, two surviving applications from the period were both submitted by women who had taught before.²² Advertisements expressed a preference for single or widowed women, presumably to avoid the interference of family life. Some salaries were competitive and attractive, especially when compared with those of trained schoolmistresses in elementary schools who could expect to earn between £35 and £70 per annum. The schoolmistress at the Westminster House of Correction was paid £62 8s per annum, but this prison had a large number of female prisoners.²³ By way of comparison, authorities at Chester County Gaol

offered applicants for the post of schoolmistress at £25 per annum but also free lodging.²⁴

In the convict prison sector, the professionalisation of schoolmasters and schoolmistresses was much more rapid and complete. This was partly because convict prisons were under the direct control of policymakers in the Home Office and were funded by the Treasury, not by local rate payers (the latter made local authorities very budget-conscious). Convict prisons typically had larger populations of prisoners. Because they accommodated those convicted of serious offences serving long terms of imprisonment either prior to or in lieu of transportation to the Australian penal colonies, there was also more time for schooling and, therefore, potential reformation. However, while scepticism about

the value of educating prisoners serving short terms might have influenced some decisions on the appointment of professional teachers in local prisons, it was certainly not universal. The authorities and senior staff in many local prisons were committed proponents of the potential of education as a reformatory tool.

The first schoolmaster appointed at Millbank Penitentiary in 1824 was paid £100 per annum; this would have been a handsome salary for a trained teacher at an elementary school.²⁵ When the separation of prisoners intensified in the late 1830s, the

teaching team at Millbank was expanded to include two more schoolmasters (each paid £70 to £80) and two schoolmistresses (each paid £60).²⁶ The growth of teacher training in mainstream education coincided with the establishment of new convict prisons at Parkhurst (for juveniles), Pentonville and Portland. The management committee of Parkhurst sought advice from leading educational experts on the appointment

The establishment of the Convict Prison Service in 1850 standardised and further professionalised the role of the convict prison schoolmaster or schoolmistress.

18. For example: [Article title unknown]. (1840, March 28). *Leicester Chronicle*. [Article title unknown]. (1842, July 9). *Leicester Chronicle*. [Article title unknown]. (1843, June 10). *Leeds Mercury*. [Article title unknown]. (1849, November 23). *Essex Standard*.

19. *Berrow's Worcester Journal*, 16 July 1846; *Morning Chronicle*, 29 January 1853.

20. Buckinghamshire Archives, Q/AG/68: Papers regarding the appointment of a schoolmaster Aylesbury County Gaol, 1841-2; Lincolnshire Archives, CoC/4/1/22: Applications for the post of schoolmaster at Lincoln County Gaol, March 1849. Profiles of schoolmasters in annual and inspection reports from the 1840s and 1850s often contain references to previous teaching experience.

21. See footnote 2: Crone (2022).

22. Devon Heritage Centre, 2065M/22: Ellen Budge, St Leonard's Exeter, to the Visiting Magistrates, applying for the post of schoolmistress at Devon County Prison, 2 November 1855; Gloucestershire Archives, Q/AG/30/17: Letter of application from Mary Whiting for the post of schoolmistress, 19 January 1848.

23. Parliament. (1845). *Inspectors of Prisons, Home District, 10th Report*. PP England & Wales, XXIII.1, 430. From 1850, Westminster House of Correction only accommodated females and juvenile males. In 1861, it became a women's prison.

24. *Liverpool Mercury*, 11 December 1846.

25. The National Archives (1824). HO 21/6: Letter from Home Office to Millbank Management Committee approving request of Committee to employ a schoolmaster, 22 July 1824.

26. Parliament. (1839). *Inspectors of Prisons, Home District, 4th Report*. PP Eng & Wales, XXI.1, 13; Parliament (1840). *Inspectors of Prisons, Home District, 5th Report*. PP Eng & Wales, XXV.1, 192.

of schoolmasters. The first principal schoolmaster, David Smith, was appointed on the recommendation of David Stow, educational reformer and inventor of the Glasgow Training System, which emphasised moral instruction, comprehension and learning through play. In 1842, another schoolmaster, E. C. Daintree, was sent to the Battersea Training College to learn new methods of instruction.²⁷ The principal schoolmaster at Pentonville was paid £150 per annum and given lodgings. He also had three assistant schoolmasters.²⁸ From 1847, full-time, professional schoolmasters were employed on convict hulks and at Portland Prison.²⁹

The establishment of the Convict Prison Service in 1850 standardised and further professionalised the role of the convict prison schoolmaster or schoolmistress. Control over the appointment and dismissal of all officers was transferred from institutional management committees to the Directors of Convict Prisons. Staff were organised into a new hierarchy which applied across the sector. Some roles were subdivided into classes with standardised pay. Over time, officers were awarded pay increments and could achieve promotion. Those who remained long enough were entitled to a civil service pension on departure.

Schoolmasters and schoolmistresses were divided into three classes. New teachers were typically appointed as third-class schoolmasters (or mistresses). Through increments and promotions, a third-class schoolmaster who joined the service on £80 per annum could, over the course of his career, achieve an annual salary of £150.³⁰ Schoolmistresses were paid less, but even their salaries exceeded those of female elementary school teachers. Schoolmasters and mistresses who lived outside the prison were also given an allowance for accommodation.

As employees of the Convict Prison Service, teachers were sent by the Directors of Convict Prisons to prisons where they were needed. Promotion, which was dependent on vacancies, also often meant that those who were selected had to be transferred to another prison, and some locations were better than others. An anonymous convict prison schoolmaster, who published his memoirs in the early 1880s, described his reaction when informed of his promotion to first-class master at Dartmoor in the 1860s: 'My countenance just then would have made a picture of

mingled disgust and astonishment. Dartmoor! The thoughts of such a move were anything but pleasant.'³¹

Despite this, conditions for convict prison schoolmasters continued to improve, making the post an attractive proposition. In the 1860s, schoolmasters were given 3 weeks' annual leave each year, pay was increased (up to £160 for first-class masters), and the rank of third-class master was abolished.³² At the same time, pay for teachers in elementary schools declined as a consequence of the introduction of the 1862 Revised Code and 'payment by results', and they remained without any pension entitlement.³³ Negative perceptions of prisons would have dissuaded some from applying. The anonymous convict prison schoolmaster explained that when he applied 'the Education Act had not then passed, and the pay of masters of National Schools was in many cases miserably poor. For nearly a year after leaving training college I sought a situation, and took a post in a convict prison as a [last resort].'³⁴ He later expressed satisfaction with his career choice, even after his transfer to Dartmoor.

Some convict prison chaplains described the role of prison schoolmaster as highly specialised. Reverend Arthur Hill from Portland Prison wrote that the 'office of a prison schoolmaster is not one which any person can fill ... it requires a large amount of educational training, tact, patience, mental ability, and knowledge of life to be successful'.³⁵ Professional teachers in both local and convict prisons brought with them their training and experience from outside the prison, ensuring that there was some alignment of curriculum and pedagogy in prison and mainstream schools. But there were also significant differences. Despite their professionalism, prison teachers were not autonomous, and significant control was exerted by the authorities over what and how they taught. Prison chaplains proved to be vigilant superintendents of instruction. Some became micromanagers, telling their teachers what to teach, to each pupil, every day. Ordained members of the Church of England were never this involved in teaching outside the prison. It allowed chaplains to shape the experience of education, sometimes in ways that could be detrimental to prisoners' progress.

Similarly, systems of prison discipline made teaching in the prison unlike just about anything experienced outside. In some prisons, silence was enforced in the classroom and well before silent

27. The National Archives. (1839). HO 20/8: Letters on the appointment of schoolmasters for Parkhurst Prison, from April to November 1839.

28. Parliament. (1844). *Commissioners for the Government of Pentonville Prison, Second Report*. PP Eng & Wales, XXV.53, 46.

29. The National Archives. (1849). HO 21/12: Contains appointment letters for schoolmasters for hulks and Portland in 1849.

30. *Extracts from Circulars and Correspondence Explanatory of Different Subjects referred to in the Rules and Regulations for Convict Prisons* (1862) London: HMSO, 73-5.

31. 'Sketches of convict life.' (1881, April 2). Leicester Chronicle.

32. *Index to Standing Orders*. (1870), London: HMSO, SO78 and SO85; see footnote 2: Crone (2022).

33. Sylvester, D. W. (1974). Robert Lowe and Education. Cambridge University Press; See footnote 15: Bischof (2019).

34. 'Sketches of convict life.' (1881, November 29). Dundee Courier.

35. Parliament. (1871). *Directors of Convict Prisons: Reports, 1870*. PP England & Wales, XXXI.1, 172.

classrooms became a feature of mainstream elementary education. Dialogue between teacher and pupil was replaced with physical signs and writing.³⁶ Teachers at Preston House of Correction and Brixton Female Convict Prison experimented with Charles Baker's Graduated Reading, a scheme for teaching those with hearing impairment to read.³⁷ In prisons where separation was imposed, some teachers were required to instruct their pupils in partitioned chapels or schoolrooms.

At the same time, these spaces remained strikingly familiar to those acquainted with elementary school classrooms. Many were furnished with large blackboards, and the walls were adorned with moral maxims, the letters of the alphabet and maps of Britain and the world. On his visit to Cold Bath Fields Prison in the late 1850s, Henry Mayhew remarked that 'in ordinary schools the desks are notched and carved with names and initials, or covered all over with writings and drawings; but in this felon academy they were as white and free from ink or incisions as the top of a buttermilk's counter'. He gave the following account of a lesson in this 'silent' prison:

'The schoolmaster is assisted in his duties by two prisoners, who, by their proficiency and good conduct, have been raised to the position of hearers — and to them the scholars repeat their lessons. A big sailor-looking man, with red whiskers growing under his chin, advanced to the hearer's desk. Not a word was spoken as the copy book was handed in. The prison-tutor pointed in silence to a mistake, the pupil nodded, and, on another signal, began to read aloud from what he had written, 'Give every man that asketh, and of him that taketh away thy goods ask him not again.' ... Once the headmaster had occasion to speak. A lad with ruddy skin, and light hair, had a defect in his speech, and could not pronounce his 'r's,' so that he read out, 'Whatsoever is wight that shall ye weceive.' 'Do try to pronounce your r's better,' said the master kindly; and thereupon there was a shuffling of feet from the other pupils, as if the only method of laughing under the silent system was with the shoes'.³⁸

From the mid-1860s, prisoners were increasingly taught in their cells, each receiving between 10 and 20

minutes of individual tuition once or twice a week. Educational apparatus became largely confined to textbooks, slates and pencils. Individual, cellular instruction in prisons was entirely counter to trends in mainstream elementary education where the experience of school and large classes was increasingly the norm. Any potential benefits, such as the tailoring of instruction to individual needs, were rarely realised. Despite this, it could be argued that professional teachers in prisons became experts in adult education and, especially in institutions where attendance at school was compulsory, teaching learners with diverse and complex needs. Unfortunately, the nature of the 19th century prison meant that this valuable experience was rarely shared with educators outside the prison.

The fall of the prison schoolmaster (and schoolmistress)

Systems of prison discipline made teaching in the prison unlike just about anything experienced outside.

While significant advances had been made in the professionalisation of convict prison schoolmasters and schoolmistresses, the position of teachers in the local prison remained precarious. From the 1840s, new disciplinary requirements meant that full-time employees were preferred to part-time appointments. This was much easier to achieve in prisons with large populations of

male or female prisoners. Any time left over after teaching could be used for related duties, such as managing the library, recording the details of newly arrived prisoners, and clerical work for the chaplain or governor. Schoolmistresses might also take on library work and write letters for illiterate prisoners. But these additional tasks rarely filled the time in most prisons which had small populations of female prisoners, and so matrons, and occasionally wardresses, continued to take on the burden of teaching.

Schoolmasters willing to perform warder duties (and vice versa) continued to be appointed, especially in smaller prisons.³⁹ They were rarely qualified or even experienced teachers, and some chaplains complained about the quality of their teaching. Some men who had been appointed as full-time schoolmasters were ordered by the prison authorities to take on duties typically performed by discipline officers. In 1858,

36. See footnote 2: Crone (2022), 133.

37. Parliament. (1853). *Inspectors of Prisons, Northern & Eastern District, 17th Report (1852-3)*. PP England & Wales, LII.1, 46; Parliament (1864). *Directors of Convict Prisons: Reports, 1863*. PP England & Wales, XXVI.209, 225.

38. Mayhew, H., & Binny, J. (1862). *The Criminal Prisons of London and Scenes of London Life*. Griffin, Bohn & Co., 319-320.

39. [Article title unknown]. (1851, January 9). *Nottinghamshire Guardian*. [Article title unknown]. (1865, January 31). *Standard*.

Samuel Parker, lately schoolmaster at Newgate Gaol, sued his former employer for unreasonable dismissal after he complained about the new duties required of him, which included cleaning the chapel, schoolroom and water closets and occasionally serving as warder. Summing up, the judge said 'that he thought a schoolmaster would be degraded in the eyes of his pupils, if, in addition to acting in that capacity, he officiated as a turnkey, and was compelled to clean out closets'. Parker won his case and was awarded 6 months' salary (£45).⁴⁰ This did not, however, establish a precedent. Schoolmasters who performed clerical or warder duties were often put in uniform and became indistinguishable from other discipline officers. As the demands of their other roles increased, they also struggled to devote the time needed to teaching. The continued presence of male and female officers with teaching duties not only hampered full professionalisation in the local sector but also proved to be the thin end of the wedge, foretelling the demise of the prison schoolmaster and schoolmistress.

The nationalisation of local prisons in 1878, whereby control was transferred from local authorities to the Prison Commission (a new subdepartment of the Home Office), and the financial burden from rate payers to the Treasury, provided a fresh opportunity to consider the role of education in prison, and, by extension, the posts of prison schoolmaster and schoolmistress. A Home Office departmental committee chaired by Captain William Henry Fenwick was established to devise a uniform scheme. For the most part, Fenwick's committee reduced the content of education and the conditions of its delivery to the lowest common denominator. They decided that illiterate and innumerate prisoners aged under 40 and sentenced to at least 4 months' imprisonment should receive only the most basic instruction in the three Rs in their cells for 15 minutes twice a week.⁴¹

The process of nationalisation, which had led to the closure of many small prisons, actually increased the proportion of full-time schoolmasters and schoolmistresses across the local prison sector. Despite

this, Fenwick's committee proposed to reintroduce schoolmaster-warders by establishing two classes of teachers: one class of certificated schoolmasters and schoolmistresses, and a second class of uncertificated assistant teachers, appointed from among the warders, who passed an examination, and who would receive an additional £12 per annum.⁴² The Home Secretary, Under Secretary and senior civil servants questioned the need for certificated teachers at all, given the limited degree of education being imparted. A trial of the scheme demonstrated the necessity of having men who were able to teach if education in the prison was 'to be a reality, and not a sham'.⁴³ But the aim over time was to phase out certificated teachers once they had passed on their expertise to their subordinates, leaving a staff of schoolmaster-warders and schoolmistress-wardresses

who would continue to perform some discipline duties alongside their teaching.

Meanwhile, the advantageous position of schoolmasters in the Convict Prison Service was also in decline. Their deteriorating conditions of employment were revealed in the report of a Home Office committee convened in 1883. Promotions from second to first class had been frustrated by the falling numbers of convict prisoners and the closure of some prisons. Many schoolmasters were becoming stuck, for years,

at the top of the salary scale for second-class schoolmasters. At the same time, their salaries had deteriorated in comparison with schoolmasters employed in ordinary elementary schools. The advent of universal elementary education in 1870 had created a new demand for teachers which inflated salaries. According to James Stephen Crees, schoolmaster at Wormwood Scrubs, ordinary board-school schoolmasters were paid between £200 and £300 per year. Crees had worked in National Schools before joining the service, and believed that 'had I remained ... I should have been drawing a larger salary at the present time than I am now'.⁴⁴ The Committee remained sceptical, but in 1890 salaries were increased (up to £200 per annum for a first-class schoolmaster), and from 1893 second-class schoolmasters were

Fenwick's committee reduced the content of education and the conditions of its delivery to the lowest common denominator.

40. [Article title unknown]. (1858, June 26). *Manchester Times*.

41. Parliament. (1896). *Report of the Departmental Committee on Education and Moral Instruction of Prisoners in Local and Convict Prisons* [hereafter Mitford Committee]. PP England & Wales, XLIV.1, 19, 152.

42. The National Archives. (1880). HO 45/9574/79667: Proposals to fill vacancies in school staff, 25 June 1880.

43. The National Archives. (1880). HO 45/9574/79667: Report of the Departmental Committee on Education in Local Prisons, 15 November 1880.

44. *Report of the Committee Appointed to Enquire into the Position and Prospects of Convict Warders and Broadmoor Asylum Attendants* (1883) London: HMSO, 13-14, 65-7.

automatically promoted to first-class after 20 years' service.⁴⁵

If the persistence of the convict prison schoolmaster (and schoolmistress) offered some hope for the revival of qualified teachers across the penal sector, the 1895 Gladstone Committee provided an ideal opportunity. The Committee has typically been regarded by scholars as a watershed in penal policymaking, signalling a rejection of the punishing and deterrent ambitions of the mid-Victorian reformers and administrators, and refocusing attention on the rehabilitative aim of imprisonment. Improvements to prison education featured among the Committee's many recommendations.⁴⁶ And so, in 1896, a specific departmental committee on education in local and convict prisons, chaired by commissioner Robert Mitford, was convened to consider what could be achieved.

While Mitford's Committee confirmed the continued need for, and the state's commitment to, prison education, their proposals for improvement were modest at best. They recommended a small increase in the time for instruction, and some updates to curriculum to align with what was taught in mainstream elementary schools, but they retained age limits and cellular instruction. Although the Gladstone Committee had recommended that schoolmasters and schoolmistresses in local prisons should not also be discipline officers, and some witnesses expressed concerns about the teaching skills of warders, Mitford's Committee was not persuaded that any reform was required.⁴⁷

The prison commissioners disagreed. They introduced a new grade of warder — clerk-and-schoolmaster — who could be employed as a clerk, or schoolmaster, or both. Clerk-and-schoolmaster warders were ordinary warders who had attended prison-officer training school, served for at least 1 year, had

knowledge of book-keeping and accounts, and had been certified by the Chief Inspector for the Education Department. After promotion, they were not required to perform discipline duties or to wear uniform and they were paid an additional £12 per annum. The commissioners proposed to replace all male teaching staff in both local and convict prisons with these new officers. At the same time, schoolmistress-wardresses were to be retained. In prisons where between eight and 25 female prisoners were eligible for schooling, schoolmistress-wardresses were expected to perform

discipline duties. None were to be appointed in prisons with fewer than eight eligible female prisoners.⁴⁸ While the plan satisfied the demands of both the Gladstone and Mitford committees, it also led to the removal of the last remaining trained and certificated teachers from the penal world. Professional teachers did not return until the mid-1950s, when tutor-organisers were seconded to prisons from local education authorities to supervise the delivery of education by prison staff.⁴⁹

The aim over time was to phase out certificated teachers once they had passed on their expertise to their subordinates, leaving a staff of schoolmaster-warders and schoolmistress-wardresses who would continue to perform some discipline duties alongside their teaching.

Conclusion

This article has illuminated the rise and fall of the prison schoolmaster and schoolmistress over the course of the 19th century. It has demonstrated that the rise of the prison schoolmaster, and to a lesser extent the schoolmistress, was largely functional, the consequence of the increasingly restrictive nature of the penal

environment which aimed to suppress interactions between prisoners and limit the involvement of those who were not under the full control of the penal authorities. However, the increasing interest in, and appointment of, teachers with qualifications and/or experience is also an indication of the commitment of officials to the educational project, especially in convict prisons but also, somewhat surprisingly, in local prisons

45. The National Archives. (1890 and 1893). HO 45/9720/A51742: Scheme for dealing with ... Schoolmasters of Convict Prisons, 12 November 1890, and Proposals, Schoolmasters of the Second Class in the Convict Prison Service, 30 August 1893.

46. Parliament. (1895). *Report from the Departmental Committee on Prisons*. PP England & Wales, LVI.1, 55, 26.

47. Mitford Committee, Report, 9-10.

48. Parliament. (1898). *Report of Coms. of Prisons and Directors of Convict Prisons, 1897-98*. PP England & Wales, XLVII.23, 24-5, 155.

49. Parliament. (1955). *Report of Coms. Of Prisons, 1954*. PP England & Wales, XXVII.1, 53.

where prisoners served short sentences. Through competitive salaries, pension entitlements and, in the Convict Prison Service, a system of promotions and rights to annual leave, the post of prison schoolmaster and schoolmistress became an attractive career option, especially for young men. However, the persistence of unqualified teachers and warders with teaching duties and the limited presence of schoolmistresses in the local prison sector was a point of vulnerability for the whole project. Opportunities in the last third of the 19th century to push further the professionalisation of the prison schoolmaster and schoolmistress failed to be realised. Nationalisation, which brought uniformity — and certainty — to the provision of education in local prisons prompted a retreat from the appointment of qualified teachers because of the limited ambitions of the new administrators. Despite the new emphasis on the rehabilitative aim of imprisonment in the wake of the 1895 Gladstone Committee, administrators remained unconvinced that education in either convict or local prisons needed to be expanded, and they prioritised prison training and experience over teaching training and experience. At the close of the 19th century, the last remaining professional teachers in the prison service had effectively been removed.

In concluding, it is worth drawing out some important lessons from this account which continue to hold relevance today. The first is the way in which the penal environment shapes the delivery of education in

important ways. In this case, it helped to reveal the need for the employment of staff whose role it was, primarily if not exclusively, to teach, especially if education was to be in any way successful. Throughout the century, female prisoners in local prisons were put at a disadvantage, not because their acquirement of literacy was considered less essential, but because of their small numbers and the persistent use of matrons and wardresses as teachers. The penal environment also made the experience of teaching inside the prison quite unlike that outside; for example, silent classrooms, cellular instruction, and adult learners with a range of needs. The late 19th century prison administrators were not wrong in valuing the experience of dealing with prisoners when arguing the case for the use of warders and wardresses as teachers. But it should never have become an either/or situation. Education in prisons benefits from connections to education outside the prison, as the 19th century experience demonstrates. Equally, education outside the prison could benefit enormously from the expertise developed behind prison walls. Too often the penal environment prevents that sharing of knowledge, and leads to the devaluing of education in prisons.

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Power in a smoke: Tobacco use in English prisons

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The recent ban on smoking in British prisons and the controversies that ensued have attracted criminological interest. However, there has been little historical research on smoking in British prisons. In part, this is due to the hidden and illicit nature of much of the trade in tobacco in historical prisons as normally smoking was either not permitted or was a privilege to be earned. Also, smoking tobacco did not really become a clear and prominent health issue until the post-war era. This article considers the issue of smoking in English prisons primarily during the interwar years, by which time smoking had become a common and widespread habit among the general male population and, to a lesser extent, amongst women. The article makes use of prisoner autobiographies and archival sources as well as relevant historical and criminological discussion of smoking in prisons. It considers the possibility that by examining the admittedly limited evidence about smoking in prisons during the interwar years, we can gain insights into the tensions around tobacco in confinement as it became a more important aspect of working-class behaviours and therefore also an increased source of contestation between prisoners and prison authorities and indeed between prisoners.

Tensions have long surrounded access to tobacco, its distribution once inside the prison, and the power structures and influence that were facilitated by owning such a prohibited and sought-after substance. During the interwar period the development of prisoners' rights, as well as official and public perceptions of those emerging rights, gives an historical context prior to current prisoner incentives and earned privileges schemes and specifically the smoking ban in English prisons. In 2015-2016 total smoking bans were introduced in some prisons in England and Wales and into all prisons in 2018. This subject also has the potential to provide insights into a hitherto under-

researched aspect of the historical pains of imprisonment.

It has been stated recently that the relatively high levels of smoking by prisoners reflects characteristics of both prisoner populations and the prison environment. As has been observed, 'Prisoners are disproportionately from more disadvantaged communities and have high rates of mental health problems and substance abuse. These characteristics are associated with both smoking and resistance to smoking cessation' (p.1).¹ The disproportionately disadvantaged nature of the prison population in England since at least the late 19th century has been noted in scholarly work for some time.²³ For prisoners who experienced physical and/or mental health difficulties, the discipline, rigours and pressure of prison were likely to weigh more heavily. Prisoners resorted to multiple ways of coping with the emotional isolation, routine, monotony, indignities and stress of their confinement.⁴ Smoking, or rather the deprivation of access to tobacco, as one of the 'pains of imprisonment' has barely been touched upon by historians. Yet smoking has been an important means of coping which was recognised as such by prison authorities from an early point, although the regulatory context and access to tobacco has, of course, varied over time.⁵ Broadly speaking, as the modern prison moved away from the more chaotic, ad hoc prison system that existed prior to the 19th century, access to a range of goods and services, including tobacco, became restricted and regulated by more than just the ability of individuals to pay for them.

Smoking in English prisons is not a significant issue in historical primary sources until the 20th century when smoking became more embedded in working-class cultures and associated with masculine identities. Habits also changed within that rising market. By the end of the First World War, following technological innovation enabling mass production of cigarettes, a high proportion of tobacco consumed in the UK was in the form of cigarettes rather than loose tobacco.⁶ Over

1. Robinson, A., Sweeting, H. & Hunt, K. (2018). UK News representations of smoking, smoking policies and tobacco bans in prisons., *Tab Control*, 27 (6), 622-630.
2. Gatrell, V. A. C., & Hadden, T. B. (1972). Criminal Statistics and their Interpretation. In E. A. Wrigley (Ed.), *Nineteenth Century Society*. Cambridge University Press
3. Ignatieff, M. (1978). *A Just Measure of Pain: The Penitentiary in the Industrial Revolution, 1750-1850*. Macmillan.
4. Brown, A. & Clare, E. (2005). A History of Experience: Exploring Prisoners' Accounts of Incarceration. In C. Emsley (Ed.), *The Persistent Prison: Problems, Images and Alternatives*. Francis Boutele.
5. See footnote 1: Robinson et al (2018).
6. Hilton, M. (2000). *Smoking in British popular culture 1800-2000*. Manchester University Press.

time, this affected the nature of smoking in prison and internal means to disseminate this illicit contraband but importantly cigarettes remained convenient and portable.

The interwar expansion of more sophisticated and extensive branding, advertising and marketing of cigarettes available at lower prices stimulated increased social consumption but restrictions and prohibitions on smoking in English prisons remained, especially for those serving shorter sentences. Tobacco became a 'good' that nurtured subterfuge and illicit practices and influenced internal prisoner subcultures. In relation to tobacco smoking, the first milestone for convicted prisoners was in 1922. Convicts, defined at this time as those serving sentences of three years or more, gained limited access to tobacco. It was at this point allowed as a privilege following the fulfilment of specific milestones regarding length of sentence served (four years) and behavioural requirements. Those behaving well were able to enter the 'special stage' in which smoking and other privileges were allowed. Special stage convicts were also differentiated by their clothing. As Ex-Convict No.- pointed out,

'By my side marches a murderer, a grey-haired man with a North-country accent, He is dressed in dark grey, a different-coloured tunic from mine. Twelve years have gone since he entered Dartmoor Prison for life. His tunic denotes that he is in the privileged class. Four years of good conduct have earned him certain little luxuries — a pipe, tobacco, cigarettes, and a newspaper' (p.28).⁷

In the stark monotony of the inter-war convict prison, rumours were rife and often the stuff of desires for the long-incarcerated, among them inevitably that smoking and the use of tobacco were to be granted to everybody. As Ex-Convict No.- observed, 'I expect these rumours, tragic in their absurdity, will go on and on until the end of time. I have heard them repeated not once, but a score of times, and always found myself reminded of the drowning man clutching at straws' (p.53).⁸ Prison matters remained of interest to the press and during the interwar years newspapers reported intermittent stories of suicides, attempted suicides, and escapes by those apparently desperate for tobacco, and also stories about prisoners' families or friends

attempting to smuggle tobacco into prisons. In 1922 an extract from a suicide note left by a young man aged only 19 who hanged himself in Preston Prison was reported: 'I would never have done it if they had let me smoke.' (p. 12).⁹

So, from 1922 legitimate and limited access to tobacco was allowed as a reward for good behaviour over a long term, although within such an attenuated reward system it is unlikely this privilege operated to decisively influence behaviour or affect the stability of prisoner cultures. Individual experience and place in prisoner hierarchies would already have been established by the four-year point in an individual sentence at which access to tobacco could be earned. For those serving short sentences in local prisons tobacco was forbidden. This cohort made up the bulk

of the prison population because during the nineteenth and up to the mid-20th centuries a high proportion of those sentenced received what, to early 21st century eyes, seem like short terms. For example, the Prison Commission's annual report for 1931 states that as a proportion of all prison sentences nationally, 77.2 percent were for terms of not more than three months and 89.6 percent were for terms of not more than six months. The large local prisons, where many of these sentences were served, were bustling hives of toing and

Smoking, or rather the deprivation of access to tobacco, as one of the 'pains of imprisonment' has barely been touched upon by historians.

froing of prisoners, staff and general supplies, giving opportunities for the passing of contraband but less time to nurture the development of secure and embedded supply routes for tobacco. That picture changed somewhat following the Criminal Justice Administration Act 1914 which allowed time to pay fines awarded in court, leading to a decline in the number of shorter sentences as some defendants were able to avoid prison altogether. In addition, on the outbreak of the First World War the Home Office ordered the release of any prisoners with three months or less to serve.¹⁰ Within a reformatory ethos, the proportion of penal servitude sentences also declined so the total prison population dropped during the 1920s to a little over ten thousand.

Press coverage illustrates how historically the availability of tobacco to prisoners was viewed and the extent to which prisoners were deemed to deserve access. During the interwar years, the press often

7. Ex-Convict No- (1930). *Dartmoor from within*. George Newnes Limited.

8. See footnote 6: Ex-Convict No- (1930).

9. *Western Gazette*. (1922, September 8).

10. *Western Times*. (1939, November 10).

represented smoking as a luxury. Discussion of prison reforms rarely failed to include smoking as it retained a flavour of privilege about it. A recent examination of news media discussing 21st century smoking and smoking bans in prison also found frequent references, especially in the tabloid press, to taxpayers' costs and prisoners as undeserving of privileges. In the examination, constructions of tobacco-related prisoner cultures figured prominently depicting prisoners as desperate, unpredictable and disruptive. Smoking was often presented as essential to prisoners as the only legal stimulant and as currency, but with little linking of smoking to poor mental health and social deprivation. Even a brief look at the interwar press suggests that such perspectives have a long history with prisoners being portrayed as irrational and undeserving of provision beyond that led by the principle of less eligibility. In the 21st century one of the ways this has expressed itself is in the fragmented access to medication which could reasonably be expected for prisoners trying to give up smoking, such as, nicotine replacement patches.¹¹

Evidence of the cultural importance of tobacco in prisons, and the need of prisoners for it, can be found sporadically in historical records. Smoking was an issue that caused internal disciplinary tensions. Prison authorities certainly believed this to be the case. In a press interview in 1930, a well-known Prison Governor, Gerold Fancourt Clayton, stated that

'A convict...would go to endless trouble to pick up a cigarette end in the streets of Princetown [while on a work detail] and risk any punishment to get it into his cell with a match and a piece of box on which to strike it. That attitude was due to the fact that convicts were not allowed to smoke and regarded cigarette ends as a treasure trove of the highest value' (p. 7).¹²

One ex-convict agreed, asserting that 'A convict will do a knifing for not much more snout (as we call it) than gets left in any hotel ashtray' (p. 41).^{13,14} Ex Convict No.- observed, 'I've seen ten of them sharing a piece of tobacco the size of a pea'. He himself had often

'enjoyed a 'contraband' cigarette in prison without being caught. Tobacco and cigarettes were among the most valued of contraband' (pp. 75 and 57).¹⁵ This view was reinforced at the time in an interview with an ex-convict released from Dartmoor which was published in the *Western Times* of 29 January 1932, a week after a major riot had occurred in the prison. He maintained that tobacco and food were the main causes of the riot:

'Tobacco is the coinage of the prison. You can do nothing without it. But if you have friends outside it is easy to get it in. I have seen as much as four pounds at a time smuggled into the gaol. It has been left concealed under stones in the quarry and brought in by hiding it in a tool bag' (p.6).

In interwar Parkhurst, one convict was said to be joining the choir because he thought he could source 'snout' [tobacco] from the 'Star' men (those segregated for their first term of imprisonment).^{16,17}

The Prison Commissioners were aware of the potential difficulties and resisted pressure to allow tobacco to prisoners. If granted to some, how could that supply be controlled in a context where it was clearly already being trafficked into and within prisons? Hence, it was regarded as a potentially dangerous innovation. In 1932 they pointed out:

'If smoking is permitted for trial and remand prisoners the

difficulties of officers charged with the duty of preventing tobacco reaching other prisoners will be increased, since there will naturally be attempts by trial and remand prisoners to pass tobacco to the other prisoners' (p.7).¹⁸

Yet earlier that same year prisoners on remand at Brixton prison were allowed to smoke. So, Prison Commissioners were attempting to defend a position that had to an extent already been conceded. However, it was clear that practice had varied between prisons: in 1926 the Prison Commission had already explicitly prohibited smoking or the drinking of alcohol by prisoners awaiting trial causing, one newspaper stated, 'some surprise'.¹⁹ By 1938 men awaiting trial in local

A convict will do a
knifing for not
much more snout
(as we call it) than
gets left in any
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11. Dugdale, S., Semper, H., Povey, R., Elison-Davies, S., Davies, G., & Ward, J. (2019). 'Offenders' perceptions of the UK prison smoking ban. *International Journal of Prisoner Health*, 15(2), 114-125.

12. *Western Morning News*. (1930, June 14).

13. Sparks, R. (1961). *Burglar to the Nobility*. Arthur Barker

14. Clayton, G. F. (1958). *The Wall is Strong: The Life of a Prison Governor*. John Long.

15. See footnote 6: Ex-Convict No-. (1930).

16. See footnote 6: Ex-Convict No-. (1930).

17. Bethell, B. (2023). 'Star Men' in *English Convict Prisons, 1879-1948*. Routledge.

18. *Shepton Mallet Journal*. (1932, September 2).

19. *Sunderland Daily Echo and Shipping Gazette*. (1926, April 8).

prisons were allowed to smoke but they were not allowed to smoke if they were convicted.

Prisoner autobiographies evidence that smoking has long been a contested issue among those incarcerated. In 1937 ex-convict Red Collar Man observed,

‘I think...smoking, chewing or the use of tobacco by a convict who has not done four years is to a prison commissioner the most deadly of sins, an outrage only to be expiated by starvation and isolation which certainly gets the nicotine out of the system’ (p. 60).²⁰

Ultimately, the Home Office did concede that if the experiment begun in 1932 at Brixton Prison was successful, extension would be considered. That experiment was reported in numerous newspapers. On 17 February 1932, under the headline ‘PRISON SMOKING. NEW REGULATION IN A PRISON’, the Gloucester Citizen reported that

Following a new regulation during the weekend, prisoners on remand at Brixton prison are now allowed to smoke while at exercise. Each prisoner awaiting trial may buy up to 100 cigarettes or 2-oz. of tobacco per week. Destitute prisoners in this class are issued with two cigarettes or one pipeful of tobacco a day. Pipe-smokers are becoming cigarette-smokers. They have decided that there is more smoke in 100 cigarettes than in 2-oz. of tobacco.

Some of these articles revealed longstanding pejorative assumptions about prisoner behaviour and implicit doubts about the extension of these rights. However, pressure had been brought to bear by penal reform organisations.²¹ What ultimately drove the very gradual extension of legal smoking for convicted men was its interlocking with an earnings scheme. By 1938 smoking facilities were extended to prisons which had earning schemes, that is ‘Wakefield and the four convict prisons—Dartmoor, Parkhurst, Maidstone and Chelmsford.’ In those prisons, a Home Office spokesman observed erroneously, ‘a man can smoke pretty well as much he likes in his free time’ (p. 12).²² But it was also noted that ‘Generally speaking there are no opportunities for smoking in local prisons, except for men awaiting trial. It is intended gradually to extend

the earning scheme, and with it the facilities for smoking’ (p. 2).²³

It was explained that this extension of privileges was part of reforms trying to appeal ‘to the prisoner’s better instincts and make him leave with less evil disposition’ (p. 11). Rather than being deterrent the aim was for prisoners to enjoy privileges that they could lose.²⁴ The Prison Commission report for 1938 commented on experiments at Wakefield, supported and initially funded by the Howard League:

It is hoped that this system may help to teach the men the following lessons: (a) That it is worthwhile to get a job, and whether one likes it or not, to make good at it; (b) that honest work is not unpleasant, and brings its own reward; and (c) the value of co-operation and esprit de corps.

So, by 1939 some basic principles were established regarding legitimate, permitted access to tobacco, albeit that uneven practice continued into the post-war era. The valuable and power-giving commodity should be available in prison only to those not convicted and for the convicted it had to be earned as a privilege and was used as a tool to try and teach the value of hard work as well as a tool to maintain discipline. Nevertheless, according to one interwar convict, unregulated tobacco continued to be considered by prison authorities as ‘more

dangerous contraband than (a) an open-blade razor, (b) smuggled drugs (c) trafficked liquor’ (p. 231).²⁵

The legitimate supply of tobacco was important to prisoners (although for many there was also an illegitimate, if risky, supply available) but this also became important to prison staff and officials alike. For most prisoners, according to B.2.15, being deprived of tobacco was the chief punishment, especially early in their sentence.²⁶ In an account of his prison life published in 1936, Wilfred Macartney gave his verdict on how to manage a sane prison system, which seemed to concur with the introduction of a privileges and incentives scheme:

‘Permit talking, allow smoking, abolish flogging and bread and water; maintain

20. Red Collar Man (1937). *Chokey*. Victor Gollancz Ltd.

21. *Portsmouth Evening News*. (1931, 15 December 15).

22. *Western Gazette*. (1937, December 17).

23. *Warwick and Warwickshire Advertiser*. (1938, March 12).

24. *Hull Daily Mail*. (1937, June 4).

25. Phelan, J. (1940). *Jail Journey*. Secker and Warburg.

26. B. 2. 15. (1924). *Among the Broad-Arrow Men: A Plain Account of English Prison Life*. A. & C. Black, Ltd, p.45.

discipline by the deprivation of remission and of privileges — that is to say, permit a man to smoke, associate with his fellows from the beginning of his sentence, and, in the event of bad behaviour, take the privileges away' (p. 167).²⁷

Historically, prison authorities made use of smoking within a spectrum of punishment and deprivation at one end and reward and behavioural control at the other. Only recently has this been disrupted. In the early 21st century national prison administrations have, for the first time, endeavoured to impose smoking bans not explicitly and primarily, it is claimed, for disciplinary or control objectives. Rather, it is asserted, this has been undertaken for reasons of prisoner and staff health and concerns about legal action over the harmful effects of second-hand smoking.²⁸ The financial burden on the state of the associated insurance costs has also been included in the discussion. Yet there have been accusations that the ban adds to tensions and psychological damage caused by isolation and hopelessness in prison and that most return to smoking on release. Taylor et al support this and suggest there is likely to be less hostility towards informal attempts to enforce smoking cessation amongst the poor and working classes. They also remind us of the cultural significance of smoking in prison within these social groups reinforcing the 'status' of being able to smoke whilst incarcerated.²⁹ In the early 21st century outside of the prison non-smoking has become the norm due to restrictions on smoking in public and the promotion of narratives of health and wellbeing. This is in stark contrast to prisons where 'the 'normative' behaviour remains smoking, putting the non-smoker in the submissive position' (p. 41).³⁰ and highlighting the differing functions that smoking serves within prison and the increased complexity of attempting to regulate, and indeed, ban it, especially within a context of widespread use of illegal drugs in prison. Overall, people in prison often experience significant health inequalities but none starker than the difference in smoking rates. In England in early 2018, 14.9 percent of adults smoked tobacco, but for people in prisons it was about 80 percent,³¹ although cigarette

smoking is often replaced by e-cigarettes, which in recent years have raised their own concerns.

As Robinson et al point out, 'increases in tobacco black markets and riskier smoking practices [including illegal substances] have been reported' (p. X). But the suggested pre-ban anxieties about disorder appear to generally have proved unfounded although tobacco was cited as playing a role in recent problems in Birmingham Prison.³² Another important issue has been that the loss of autonomy regarding the choice to smoke was a potentially massive issue amongst the prison fraternity.³³ Some prisoners in this study expressed ways of claiming back some control and autonomy before smoking bans were implemented, 'That's why he's quit, because he had that much taken off him all his life by the prison system, just give it up now, so they can't take it off him in sixteen weeks' (p. 118).³⁴ This highlights the potential power struggle which may be ongoing in relation to smoking in prison and the prioritising by prisoners of the autonomy of being able to smoke over the potential health benefits a ban could bring.³⁵

Clearly, the issue of smoking in prison has long been contentious and will continue to be so. The faith invested in the use of tobacco as a key facet of incentive schemes to encourage good behaviour and reform emerged in the interwar years into active and public discussion. Embedded in these discussions were long-standing beliefs about less eligibility and the purpose of imprisonment within which the reformative ethos of the 1920s and 1930s made little headway. Smoking continues to be not only an addictive substance enjoyed and indeed prized during incarceration, but it also continues to represent a small level of autonomy within highly restricted regimes and tense environments, whether legally or illegally available. In this context, progressing a policy of attempting to ban smoking in prisons continues to be contentious of itself and also because it relates to other experiences of confinement.

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27. Macartney, W. (1936). *Walls Have Mouths. A Record of Ten Years' Penal Servitude*. Victor Gollancz Ltd.
28. Hopkins, S. (2015) 'British Smoking Ban Riot Fears As 'Stability' Concerns Overshadow Health Implications', Huffington Post. British Prison Smoking Ban Riot Fears As 'Stability' Concerns Overshadow Health Implications | HuffPost UK News
29. Taylor, P., Ogden, C., & Corteen, K. (2012). Tobacco Smoking and Incarceration: Expanding the 'Last Poor Smoker' Thesis. An Essay in Honour of Dr David Ford. *Internet Journal of Criminology*, www.internetjournalofcriminology.com.
30. Ritter, C., Stover, H., Levy, M., Etter, J.F. and Elger, B. (2011). Smoking in prisons: The need for effective and acceptable interventions. *Journal of Public Health Policy*, 32(1), 32-45.
31. Cropsey et al (2010), cited in Dugdale, S., Semper, H., Povey, R., Elison-Davies, S., Davies, G., & Ward, J. (2019). 'Offenders' perceptions of the UK prison smoking ban'. *International Journal of Prisoner Health*, 15 (2), 114-125.
32. See footnote 1: Robinson et al (2018).
33. See footnote 10: Dugdale et al (2019).
34. See footnote 10: Dugdale et al (2019).
35. See footnote 10: Dugdale et al (2019).

Reforming from inside: How prisoners and prison staff transformed London prisons, 1770-1820

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The late 18th century has long been seen as a transformative period in English prison history. It witnessed the blossoming of a prison reform movement, spearheaded by John Howard, and it saw unprecedented investment in and restructuring of prisons across the country as enthusiasm for reform caught fire. Reformers had broad objectives: to make prisons healthy, secure, orderly, and capable of effecting the moral transformation of prison inmates—or at the very least to avoid making them worse. Administrative change was key to this wider programme. As Howard explained in his popular work, *The State of the Prisons in England and Wales*, ‘without a due attention to the economy [sic] and government of a prison, it is evident that no contrivance of structure can secure it from being the abode of wickedness, disease and misery’ (p. 49).¹

Responsibility for prisons lay with sheriffs and justices of the peace, the monarch’s representatives in the counties and cities. In practice, however, these authorities delegated their power to prison keepers. These men (and some women) assumed financial responsibility for the prisons, including paying for most repairs and for hiring assistants. Typically, they did not receive a salary from the county; rather, many frequently paid for the privilege to run the institution. To recoup their costs, and ideally make a profit, keepers charged prisoners various fees, such as for locking and unlocking prison gates on a prisoner’s commitment and discharge, and sold them various goods, including food and alcohol, bedding, and higher-quality rooms. In operating prisons, keepers were guided by

parliamentary and local injunctions, though these mainly focused on detailing and restraining the type and amount of fees that could be demanded from prisoners. Within these broad guidelines and with relatively little oversight, keepers and their small staffs were left to govern prisons as they saw fit.² Against this, reformers and their allies on county benches sought to make prisons rule-bound, public institutions. Prisons, they argued, should not be run as private or commercial enterprises. They pushed for local authorities to draw up written rules to govern all aspects of prison life, for prisons to be funded by government authorities and staffed with salaried public servants, and for authorities to play a larger supervisory role.³ These proposals took time to implement, and implementation varied across the country, but historians generally agree that most elements of the ‘Howardian’ reform programme had been adopted in most of the larger and many of the smaller prisons in England by the mid 19th century.⁴

This article reconsiders the origin of reform ideas and explores the impact of such ideas on those working and living in prisons, both prison staff and prisoners. It focuses on the period from 1780 to 1820 and on prisons in the London metropolis, which in this period included the City of London, the City of Westminster and part of the counties of Middlesex and Surrey. In addition to shedding light on the actual experience of officeholding and incarceration, this article makes a case for seeing prison officers and prisoners as agents of reform, playing an important role in crafting of the reformed prison. To get inside the prison and recover day-to-day interactions, this piece draws mainly on internal prison records and on local government

1. Howard, J. (1777). *The State of the Prisons in England and Wales*. London.

2. Though prisoners, notably, crafted and enforced their own ordinances, at least in London. For pre-reform prisons in London, the best study remains Sheehan, W. J. (1975). *The London Prison System, 1666-1795* [Unpublished Ph.D. thesis]. University of Maryland; See also DeLacy, M. (1986). *Prison Reform in Lancashire* (ch. 1). Stanford University Press; See also Ignatieff, M. (1978). *A Just Measure of Pain: The Penitentiary in the Industrial Revolution, 1750-1850* (ch. 1). Pantheon Books.

3. Mehta, K. (2025). *To Detain or To Punish: Magistrates and the Making of the London Prison System, 1750-1840*. McGill-Queen’s University Press.

4. See for example: McGowen, R. (1998). The Well-Ordered Prison: England, 1780-1865. In N. Morris & D. Rothman. (Eds.), *Oxford History of the Prison* (pp. 71-99). Oxford University Press.

accounts, including minute books and reports authored by magisterial prison committees, letters sent to or from prisons, and the journals of prison officers.

The story of prison reform is usually told from the perspective of individual reformers, like Howard, who fought against established practice and apparently pressured those who administered and operated the prisons to change. Such accounts, however, neglect the important role played by prison staff, many of whom saw clear benefits to administrative reform and pushed actively for these changes.

Prison officers, for instance, had long urged local authorities to assume more of the financial burden of running prisons. As the cost of operating prisons increased and the profits from prisoner fees contracted in the 18th century, such efforts intensified. Keepers in Middlesex regularly petitioned the county bench for assistance with paying for prison repairs, alleging their inability to afford the cost themselves.⁵ Keepers in Surrey, south of London, successfully convinced the magistrates to provide them with additional income to hire extra assistants to manage the prison.⁶ Other officers, including surgeons, pleaded with magistrates to formalise their roles and to provide them with proper remuneration for their services.⁷ Howard's calls to make prisons properly public institutions, then, found ready support amongst some prison staff, who in previous decades had pressed, sometimes successfully for greater public support. Reformers' efforts marked an escalation and organisation of this earlier, uncoordinated campaigning.

Although the movement for prison reform had broad popular support, the translation of ideas into practice was a contested and drawn-out process. County authorities were reluctant to increase the burden on ratepayers—that is, local taxpayers—by

assuming full financial responsibility for prisons, and some were also disinclined to create extra work for themselves by playing a larger role in daily prison operation. Prisons, after all, were only one of magistrates' many areas of responsibility. Consequently, in London, prison staff played a key role in pressuring local authorities to embrace elements of Howardian administrative reform.

Take, for example, the introduction of detailed, written regulations to govern prisons. At some prisons, namely houses of correction, which primarily held prisoners who had been sentenced to imprisonment as a punishment, magistrates readily embraced the call to establish codes of regulations and took the lead in drafting these. As reformers like Howard had hoped, these rules laid out in considerable detail the obligations of prison officers, the routine and expected conduct of prisoners, and a system for magisterial supervision. Yet magistrates took a less active approach to managing prisons that mostly held individuals before trial, gaols (now commonly spelled jails) and compters (originally created to hold sheriffs' prisoners). They did not draw up new, written rules, and as a result, keepers and their inferior officers were left to decide how to run the institutions within the broad, pre-reform-era guidelines.⁸

This lack of instruction frustrated some officers, who were forced to find ways to manage increasingly large and heterogenous populations with little support from local authorities and whose management styles were increasingly exposed to public and parliamentary scrutiny. In 1813, for example, the Newgate keeper, John Addison Newman, wrote to the City magistrates about the 'real need for specific, detailed regulations' (p. 233).⁹ In the absence of such instructions, Newman had devised his own, an arrangement which seems to

As Howard explained in his popular work, *The State of the Prisons in England and Wales*, 'without a due attention to the economy [sic] and government of a prison, it is evident that no contrivance of structure can secure it from being the abode of wickedness, disease and misery'.

5. London Lives, 1690-1800 [hereafter LL], www.londonlives.org. LMSMP501900023-4 (December 1720). Petition of Gilpin Marwick; LL. LMSMGO400010178 (27 August 1723). Orders of the Middlesex Quarter Sessions; LL. LMSMGO556010202-3 (8 September 1737). Orders of the Middlesex Quarter Sessions.

6. The London Archives [hereafter TLA], London, United Kingdom. cla/032/01/034 (1783). Copy of Letter from Gibbs to Templeman

7. Surrey History Centre, Woking, United Kingdom. QS2/6/1757/Misc[II]/41 (1757). Petition by Prison Keeper.

8. For a detailed discussion of prison reform in London see footnote 3: Mehta (2025).

9. Sheehan, W. J. (1977). Finding Solace in Eighteenth-Century Newgate. In J. S. Cockburn (Ed.), *Crime in England 1550-1800* (pp.229-245). Methuen.

have worked fairly well for several years, but which was now under threat, with some prisoners publicly challenging Newman's authority to enact new rules. Newman begged the City magistrates to either confirm his rules or adopt others.¹⁰ Yet, a new code for Newgate had still not been approved in 1817, at which point Elizabeth Fry, a Quaker prison reformer, and a new keeper, William Brown, acted to fill the gap. While Fry assumed responsibility for drawing up rules to govern female prisoners, Brown deemed it 'his indispensable duty' to issue 'temporary orders merely for the present regulation and government of the gaol'.¹¹ Not only, then, were prison officers essential in convincing authorities of the need for written rules, but at times they had the most influence over the content of those rules.

In addition to shaping the adoption of written rules, gaol and comptroller officers in the 1810s played a leading role in pressuring local authorities to raise staff salaries, procure additional staff, and provide supplies for prisoners. The fight over staff salaries is illustrative of these wider struggles; it also highlights the ambiguous effects of the policies, and the diverse attitudes held towards them.

Howard initially took up the cause of prison reform after seeing people discharged in court nevertheless returned to prison due to their failure to pay the fees they owed prison and court officers. The abolition of fees, and the substitution of staff salaries in their place, was consequently a central plank of his reform programme.¹² London authorities in the late 18th century were broadly supportive of calls to provide salaries for prison staff; indeed, some officers had long been paid stipends.¹³ However, views on abolishing fees were more mixed. While authorities banned most fee-taking at houses of correction, they

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continued to allow the practice at gaols and compters. The salaries provided to gaol and comptroller officers were relatively small, so fees and emoluments continued to make up most of officers' income. In this way, magistrates limited the potential cost of prison operation on the tax-paying public. This situation may have suited some officers, especially those who worked at large prisons or prisons with at least a few well-off prisoners, as they could make sizable (though unpredictable) amounts from fees and other charges. In the 1810s, when City authorities paid the Newgate keeper £450 annually, he also received between £600 and £1,000 from prisoner fees and rents. In the same period, Newgate turnkeys typically made around £220 annually, yet their salary amounted to only a little more than £27.¹⁴ The question of fee-taking was settled in 1815 after Parliament banned the practice.¹⁵ City authorities complied with the legislation, but they did not immediately move to increase officers' salaries. Officers, though, quickly began petitioning the magistrates for compensation. As the principal turnkeys of Newgate noted, without fees and the other traditional benefits, 'the office was not worth holding'.¹⁶ By banding together to insist on greater remuneration, prison officers impelled government officials to raise their wages to satisfactory levels.

So far, we have focused on instances in which prison officers either anticipated or embraced proposals to reform the administration of prisons. Yet reform schemes were not universally welcomed, and some prison officials seem to have mourned the loss of traditional management practices. For example, while some officers encouraged magistrates to assume full financial responsibility for prisons, others regretted the abolition of prison fees that this entailed. Reluctant to

10. TLA. COL/CA/GAC/03/001 (July 1813). Petition of John Addison Newman, Court of Aldermen Gaol Committee Papers.

11. (10 May 1817). Rules Suggested by the Ladies Appointed for Employment and Management of Female Prisoners. Court of Alderman Gaol Committee Papers (COL/CA/GAC/03/002). TLA; (11 July 1817). Orders for Newgate. Alderman Gaol Committee Papers (COL/CA/GAC/03/002). TLA.

12. Howard, J. (1784). *The State of the Prisons in England and Wales* (pp. 29-30). London.

13. Mehta, K. (2025). *To Detain or To Punish: Magistrates and the Making of the London Prison System, 1750-1840* (pp. 107, 114, 116-7). McGill-Queen's University Press.

14. Report on Gaols in the City of London, 1813-14, British Parliamentary Papers [iv.249] p. 7; TLA. COL/CA/GAC/03/002 [no date but c.1816]. Petition of Davis, Smart and Bishop [Turnkeys of Newgate].

15. 55 Geo III c. 50.

16. See footnote 14: (1816) Petition of Davis, Smart and Bishop. See also TLA. COL/CA/GAC/03/002 [c.1816]. Petition of W.E. Hardy; TLA. COL/CA/GAC/03/002 [c. 1816] Petition of William Hutchinson Box.

abandon the old perquisites of prison work, several officers were subsequently accused of continuing to accept gratuities from prisoners. In September 1817, for instance, the principal assistant of Newgate, W. E. Hardy, was charged with accepting money from a prisoner, Mrs Hamilton, to improve the quality of her accommodation. The Aldermen opted not to punish him in this instance, perhaps recognising that old habits might take time to change or perhaps unwilling to let a senior officer go. Still, Hardy was warned that, in future, if he received any money, fees or other gratuities from prisoners, he would be discharged from office.¹⁷

Some prisoners also lamented the abolition of certain prison fees, particularly garnish or ward dues. Traditionally, inmates had been allowed to demand from all new prisoners a small amount of money to help pay for communal goods and services, including fuel, candles, cleaning tools and so on. The ban on fee-taking threatened this system. Some prisoners petitioned the magistrates requesting that, if the ban remained in place, the City take on the burden of providing prisoners with such allowances.¹⁸ Others, though, fought to preserve garnish. As a group of debtors explained in their petition to the City magistrates, 'the exaction of these fees has proved the means of keeping this side of the prison select, and at an expence never likely to be found faults with, because it is optional'.¹⁹ For these debtors then, garnish was a means of segregation. It allowed them to police the boundaries of their ward to ensure that only men of a certain class were admitted, thus preserving their 'respectability'.²⁰ Administrative reform, especially the growing involvement of magistrates in regulating prison practice, was resisted by these prisoners because it threatened prisoner self-governance.

Prison reform in late 18th century England was certainly popularised and propelled forward by elite campaigners, but it was not a movement wholly external to prisons. Unsurprisingly, those who lived and worked in prisons had views on the form they should take, and many had long sought to shape their operation. Consequently, as this section has highlighted, some prison officers used the heightened interest in reform to address long-standing grievances, and some put considerable pressure on government officials to adopt proposals over which they were dragging their feet. Others, officers and prisoners, resisted changes to prison administration and tried to slow down their implementation. Regardless, systems

of prison management and practices of officeholding were not transformed overnight. Some traditional practices continued illicitly, and habits took time to change. In the final section, we will look more closely at the ways that prison staff and prisoners responded to the introduction of administrative reforms, focusing particularly on reactions to changes in the nature of holding office.

A central concern of prison reform in the late 18th and early 19th century was the transformation of officeholding. Reformers aimed to minimise the discretionary authority of prison keepers and other staff; they sought to establish new standards of behaviour; and they looked to make officers more accountable to county and city authorities for their actions. Consequently, many of the new rules introduced into London's prisons between the 1790s and 1830s focused on staff conduct. Their roles and responsibilities were newly laid out in great detail, as were the punishments for failing to adhere to them. For keepers, their duties included going each day into every room and cell in the prison, seeing every prisoner daily, and keeping various account books, including a journal of daily occurrences and records of prison labour, amongst many other obligations.²¹ Considerable stress was placed on officers' demeanour. The Middlesex house of correction keeper, for example, was to 'guard against every impulse of personal resentment'; he was not to hit prisoners, unless in self-defence. 'Much less', the rules continued, 'can it tend to any good purpose to give his orders in a violent or insolent tone, or attend with oaths; he should command with temper; enforce his just authority with firmness and punish resistance without favor or partiality'.²²

Some keepers embraced this transformation, seeing benefits and opportunities for themselves, as highlighted in the previous section, but others found it impossible to adapt. For example, although Newgate keepers had long sought greater guidance from the City magistrates, once new rules were implemented in 1817, the recently-appointed Newgate keeper resigned his post, complaining that the new system had created 'excessive labour and anxiety' and 'injured [his] health and spirit'.²³ In a subsequent letter to the City magistrates, he fiercely defended his capabilities and reputation. Not only did he claim to have 'more experience than any other prison keeper in England', but he declared, 'I have reason to believe that I possess all the faculties sufficient to have managed the prison

17. TLA. COL/CA/GAC/01/001 (23 September 1817). Court of Aldermen Gaol Committee Minutes.

18. See footnote 17. Court of Aldermen Gaol Committee Minutes (1817).

19. TLA. COL/CA/GAC/03/001 (6 July 1814). Petition from Newgate Debtors.

20. See footnote 19: (6 July 1814). Petition from Newgate Debtors.

21. TLA. COL/CA/GAC/03/002 (1816-17), Letter Regarding Annuity; TLA. MA/G/GEN/1226 (1794). General Rules and Regulations for Middlesex House of Correction.

22. See footnote 21: (1794). Rules and Regulations for Middlesex House of Correction.

23. See footnote 21: (1816-17). Letter regarding Annuity.

under the former system'. However, the new system marked a radical break from traditional prison management, and ultimately, it demanded too much from him for too little reward: 'the new rules which have been thought necessary for me to adopt ... could never be contemplated by me or I believe I should not have applied to succeed the late [keeper]'.²⁴

While some keepers struggled under the weight of their new responsibilities, others found it difficult to match the new ideals of officeholding—or so some prisoners claimed. Indeed, letters and petitions written by prison inmates to London magistrates in the 1810s suggest that many supported the attempts to improve the standards of prison management and officer conduct, and they readily availed themselves of new systems of prison inspection to improve their experience of incarceration. In 1817, for instance, a considerable portion of prisoners, confined for debt in Whitecross Street Prison, took their numerous complaints respecting the governorship of Edward Kirby to the City of London prisons committee.²⁵ A key concern was Kirby's style of management, specifically his and his officers' demeanour and language in treating with prisoners. The prisoner-petitioners referred to a specific incident to provide a wider picture. As the prisoners told it, one night, when 'peace and quiet reigned in every part of the prison', a 'Gentleman carrying his violin' was requested by another to play a particular tune. The musician 'touched the tune very lightly' at which point Kirby not only yelled loudly 'in very coarse language and in a tone at once taunting and authoritative to desist' but also threatened to hit the musician. Moreover, he continued 'to indulge in a strain of invective and scurrilous abuse — every way calculated to provoke reply and execute tumult'.²⁶

This complaint reads like a checklist marking all the ways that Kirby failed to meet the expectations required of the men running reformed prisons. He used coarse language; he was hot-headed; he lacked control over his emotions and reactions; he was physically violent and threatened the prisoners. In response to such actions, the prisoner-petitioners stressed, they acted

with restraint, obeying his commands quietly. The new standards of officeholding, set out in such considerable detail in new prison regulations, gave prisoners an opportunity to forcefully challenge the conditions of their confinement. As this example highlights, it allowed prisoners to clearly illustrate the ways in which a given officer was failing to meet the conditions of his or her employment, as defined by local government officials, thereby strengthening the prisoners' case against prison officials. More generally, prisoners were well aware of the new rules and they were vigilant, ready to complain to magistrates whenever staff, finding it difficult to adapt to the new responsibilities and standards of behaviour, acted in breach of such regulations.

It must be stressed that prisoners were not a homogenous whole and they consequently responded to prison reform in different ways. Some, we have seen, embraced the new standards set out for prison officers' conduct as it held out the promise that inmates would be treated in a more humane manner. There is also evidence that some prisoners appreciated the adoption of detailed, written regulations as these spelled out how both officers and inmates should act. Such rules protected prisoners from being dealt with in an arbitrary manner. Debtors imprisoned in Norwich, for

example, were quick to contact the magistrates to seek assistance resolving 'inconveniences under which we labour by the existing laws of the prison being departed from, and others tolerated by custom rigidly enforced in their stead'.²⁷ They specifically alleged that the keeper was applying rules in an inconsistent manner, such that prisoners were receiving noticeably different treatment. They were also unhappy that the keeper had been adapting the processes for prisoners receiving visitors even though the written policies had not changed. 'We only request,' they wrote, 'such protection to our comforts those rules afford in their present state, and an impartial administration of them, by those who have the power of enforcement'.²⁸ Such comments suggest that the prisoners supported reformist efforts to limit the discretion of prison officers.

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24. See footnote 21: (1816-17). Letter regarding Annuity.

25. TLA. COL/CA/GAC/03/001 (1816). Appendix of Cases of Complaints from Debtors.

26. See footnote 25: (1816). Appendix of Cases of Complaints from Debtors.

27. Norfolk Record Office, Norwich, United Kingdom. C/Saa 1/8 (2 February 1827). Letter from Debtors in Norwich Castle.

28. See footnote 27: (2 February 1827). Letter from Debtors in Norwich Castle.

Other prisoners took a more critical view of efforts to reform prison officeholding and administrative practices. Some were especially concerned with how the new systems curtailed their autonomy and eroded their customary rights and privileges. Traditionally, prisoners had played a central role in governing their own affairs. They drew up and enforced ordinances that gave some structure and order to prison life. They managed and dispensed money and other gifts given to prisoners as charity. They filled important roles within the prison government, helping prison officers to inspect and police the wards, and so on.²⁹ Some debtors in Whitecross Street Prison, therefore, saw the introduction of new regulations not as a means of protection but as a threat to their traditional ways of living. In September 1816, they wrote to the City prisons committee challenging the legality and practicality of many of the new rules. For example, of the rule stating that no provisions or other articles, other than milk and bread, should be sold within the prison, the petitioners declared, 'contrary to law and usage and if persisted in, it will disable many persons who would otherwise subsist in some degree of comfort from having more than one or two precarious meals in a week'.³⁰ For similar reasons, some prisoners regretted the professionalisation of the prison service. As authorities came to see it as inappropriate for prisoners to hold positions of power within prisons, prisoners gradually lost privileged roles and the benefits that came with them. Such positions and perks were highly prized by prisoners, and they fought to retain them.³¹

The new administrative systems introduced into prisons during the reform period looked to transform the operation of prisons. They sought to make prisons

public institutions with set rules, responsible officers, and attentive inspectors. Many of the changes ultimately restricted the autonomy of prisoners to shape the pattern of prison life, a shift which some prisoners—especially those in positions of power within prisons and those with disposable income—clearly regretted and fought against. Nevertheless, reform also offered prisoners a powerful language with which to critique prison staff and prison operation. Many quickly recognised this potential, drawing upon the new rules and the codes of officer conduct to contest the terms of their confinement and shape the nature of incarceration. Likewise, for prison staff, administrative reform presented both challenges and opportunities. Officers were key actors within the reform movement. They devised new policies, and they tirelessly pressed government authorities to enact change. For some, however, the changes were too considerable. Certain officers found the responsibilities newly placed upon them too burdensome and restrictive, especially given the relatively low pay they received. Others found it difficult to abandon practices that had long been tolerated but were now unlawful. The transformation of prisons into properly public institutions and of prison officers into a professional body was an extended and contested process. Those responsible were not just prominent reformers or government officials, but also prison officers and prisoners.

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29. Sheehan, W. J. (1975). *The London Prison System, 1666-1795* (pp.423-7). [Unpublished Ph.D. thesis]. University of Maryland; Innes, J. (2009). *Inferior Politics: Social Problems and Social Politics in Eighteenth-Century Britain*. Oxford University Press.

30. TLA. COL/CA/GAC/03/001 (6 September 1816). Petition of Prisoners on Middlesex Side of New Debtors Prison.

31. TLA. COL/CA/GAC/03/002 (1816-17). Petition of Prisoners on Felon's Side of Newgate.

'A prison on water, plus the chance of being drowned': Reformatory ships and industrial school ships in England, 1856-1914.

Julie Brumby recently completed a PhD at Leeds Beckett University on 19th century reformatory and industrial school ships.

In 2024, a joint review between His Majesty's Inspectorate of Prisons and Ofsted raised concerns about the declining quality of education in Young Offender Institutions.¹ There was concern over lack of access to education, which could impede the youngsters' rehabilitation and prospects. Children in YOIs were found to have fewer hours of lessons per day than those in mainstream schools. Work experience opportunities were also found to be limited, leading to the youths' lacking skills and training to secure employment after release. A key point was that institution time could be an opportunity to provide much-needed education, and through this avoid a return to custody.

These conclusions are not new. Over 150 years ago, the idea of providing education and training to reduce reoffending was tackled in a unique maritime environment. The 19th century reformatory ships were an attempt by the Victorian middle class to rescue and retrain juvenile offenders before they potentially progressed to adult criminals. The idea was to utilise old wooden ships as reformatory ships. These would be able to house a large number of boys who would be trained for a life at sea.

As early as 1815, reasons for juvenile delinquency were identified as 'want of education', 'improper conduct of parents' and 'want of suitable employment' (p. 53).² These were the core issues reformatory schools (introduced in 1854) aimed to address by using a separate system for young offenders focusing on training and education rather than punishment. In the 19th century, there was widespread concern amongst the middle and upper classes about the perceived rise in juvenile crime. Amongst various solutions was the introduction of reformatory schools, which removed children from their homes, educated and trained them.

These schools focused on reform, training and education although they still had strict regimes and punishments.

Before the 19th century, children above the age of seven had generally been treated as adults in criminal proceedings. Ideas about how to deal with juvenile offenders slowly started to change. It became apparent that sending children to prison with adults was not working and that mixing with older, more experienced offenders might integrate these youngsters into a life of crime. In reformatory schools, youths were trained for work so they could learn to earn an honest living rather than return to crime. One problem was finding work for them when they left the school. England was a maritime country at this time, and sailors were constantly needed. Shipping was also changing with the invention of iron ships which were faster and could carry more cargo. Therefore, old wooden sailing ships were becoming obsolete, and many were lying unused in the docks, costing the Admiralty to moor them. With these ships readily available some were repurposed as reformatories. The isolation of being moored out in a river also provided the total removal of the boys from their corruptive environment.

There were four different types of training ships in the 19th century. The Royal Navy established the first training ships for those they considered 'good' boys, often from wealthy families. Then there were training ships for poor boys of good character. They had not committed a crime and were frequently orphans whose father had been a sailor. Next, there were two types of ships involved in reforming boys who had been before a magistrate, the reformatory ships and the industrial training ships. The reformatory ships were for boys who had been convicted of a crime. These boys had usually previously offended more than once, were aged about 12 to 16 years old and were sent on board for up to five

1. Ofsted, His Majesty's Inspectorate of Prisons. (2024). *A decade of declining quality of education in young offender institutions: the systematic shortcomings that fail children*. <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/thematic-review-of-the-quality-of-education-in-young-offender-institutions-yois/a-decade-of-declining-quality-of-education-in-young-offender-institutions-the-systemic-shortcomings-that-fail-children>
2. Muncie, J. (2021). *Youth and Crime* (5th Ed.). Sage.

years. The industrial training ships were for boys who had been brought before a magistrate but not convicted. Often younger than the reformatory boys, they might be sent on board for sleeping rough, having no means of support or living in a house of ill repute.

Akbar was the first reformatory ship established in 1856 and moored in the River Mersey at Liverpool. Next, *Cornwall* was established in the Thames in 1859. The third and final reformatory ship was *Clarence*, certified in 1864, also in the Mersey and solely for Roman Catholic boys. There were ten industrial training ships around Great Britain, five in England, two in Wales, two in Scotland and one in Ireland. The English ones started with *Wellesley* established in the Tyne at Newcastle in 1868, followed the same year by *Southampton* in the Humber at Hull. The *Formidable* was certified the next year and was near Bristol. There was then a short gap before *Mount Edgcumbe* was started in Cornwall in 1877 and the final English ship, *Shaftesbury*, in the Thames in 1878. The Welsh ships included *Clio* and *Havannah*; *Cumberland* and *Mars* were in Scotland and *Gibraltar* in Ireland.

While the idea of reformatory schools was to remove the youngsters from potentially harmful homes, the ships themselves had safety issues. Ships are hazardous places and a sailor's life is a dangerous one. In the 19th century, seamen had one of the highest mortality rates.³ While training boys on these old ships was practical and economical, they were being placed in a dangerous environment. This created a paradox between trying to save the boys from a possibly destructive home environment by putting them in another dangerous situation. In addition to the risk of general accidents in a working environment, the boys also faced the risk of falling overboard and drowning. There was also the risk of fire on the wooden ships, and all the reformatory ships had fires at some point, with the *Clarence*, moored in the Mersey, being burned three times. There was also the danger of disease in an enclosed environment and the risk from other volatile and violent boys. However, not only were these dangers recognised and accepted, but some contemporary commentators thought the risky lifestyle would appeal to some juvenile delinquent boys. The volunteer committee running the *Cornwall* thought criminal boys' love of danger and adventure made

them ideal sailors. It was considered that the boys' unmanageable tempers made them more able to cope with the 'risks and hardships of a seaman's life'.⁴

In the original PhD research on which this article is based, the lives of 150 boys who had been on the reformatory ships were traced, 50 from each of the three ships *Akbar*, *Cornwall* and *Clarence*. Their lives were followed using archival material, criminal records, civil registration records, the census, historical newspapers and other records detailing their lives. This research gave an indication of the family backgrounds of the boys sent on board and what happened to them afterwards. The key question was whether the ships had a positive influence on them, and whether they left the ships for a life at sea or whether they returned to crime on their release.

The reformatory ships were old wooden man-of-war ships. When a boy was committed to a reformatory ship he had to first spend time in prison — usually 14 days. This was so the public could see the boys were still being punished and so parents did not consider the reformatory with free education and training as a positive option for their children. The short, sharp shock of the mandatory prison sentence gave the boys a taste of prison and what it would be like if they did not take the opportunity for reform offered to them. However, the reformatory system

meant the boys had a far longer time in the state system; they could be on the ship for a further five years. From 1899, the initial goal term was abolished, and boys could be sent directly to the reformatory ship.

One aim of the reformatory ships was to attempt to create some type of middle-class family orderliness for the boys. With the captain acting as a father figure to his large brood of boys, by taking the boys back to a childlike dependency the aim was to reform them in a way the middle class saw more appropriate. According to maritime law, the captain had absolute authority on his ship; to lose control would jeopardise the safety of the vessel. The mid-19th century familial ideology placed women and children as dependants of the male head of the family, and this gender power structure was attempted in institutions. An appropriate male role model would teach the boys acceptable masculine values. While the emphasis was on obedience, morality and punishments, there was also time for play and occasional treats.

The idea of providing education and training to reduce reoffending was tackled in a unique maritime environment.

3. Carter, T. (2014). *Merchant Seamen's Health, 1860-1960: Medicine, Technology, Shipowners and the State in Britain*. Boydell & Brewer Ltd.
4. *Morning Post*, (1859, June 16).

The boys were organised into smaller watches or messes to utilise this 'family' model. They slept, ate and worked together, forming their own little unit with one boy chosen as their captain.⁵ The boys followed a busy timetable; each day included six hours of industrial training and three hours of education. While the focus was on industrial skills, the boys still had basic reading, writing, and arithmetic lessons. More advanced boys could learn geography and history. Religious instruction was important, with prayers every day, and the boys were allowed on shore to attend church on Sundays. The education aimed to build an honest, working-class character. Lack of education and school non-attendance have been found to be factors in juvenile offending.⁶ The education was practical; the boys were taught what would be most beneficial to them in life. It was considered important to teach the working class to read so they could follow the Bible and reading often had a priority over writing. Both were taught on the ships. Maths was also necessary if the boys were going to become successful mariners, so they could calculate navigation routes. Art gave boys the skills to draw maps and charts, geography taught them seaports and ocean routes. As the boys were committed on board for up to five years, this gave them a lengthy time for education. With the boys in an enclosed environment, there were no issues with non-attendance, a common problem in schooling at the time.

Industrial training was the focus of learning. Some day-to-day tasks, such as scrubbing the decks, were included in the 'industrial training'. The boys were taught skills all sailors would need, such as knotting, net and sail repairing, rowing and furling a sail. There was some crossover between education and industrial training, such as navigation or compass work, where theory started in the classroom before moving on to practical application. While the main large vessel was stationary, the ships had smaller boats; some went ashore daily to collect post and provisions, and others took longer voyages for a few weeks with the older boys once they reached the age of 15. These smaller vessels also gave the boys practical experience of handling a boat.

Imparting the value of labour was believed to be pivotal in reforming juveniles; they were being trained to earn an honest living to keep them from returning to crime. The focus was on training the boys to go to sea,

where there was plenty of work. It was not considered whether the boys wanted to go to sea. Other trades, such as tailoring and carpentering, were also offered; these were activities that were utilised on the ships, so the boys could learn alongside the staff on board. Boys could work alongside the ship's cook and they were trained to repair their own clothes and shoes, while some worked alongside the ship's tailor.

The daily life on board kept the boys busy, allowing them less time for mischief-making. The ships were run by strict naval order, instilling order and discipline. These regimented timetables would have been a marked change for boys used to living on the streets with little parental control. On the *Akbar*, the boys got up at half-past five in the morning, dressed, stowed their beds away, swept and washed the decks before breakfast at seven. There would be a parade on deck,

followed by prayers before the boys split into watches for school or seaman duties. There would be more training or school in the afternoon, with free time before supper and prayers before bed.

Recreation was considered an important part of the ship regime. After a day's work, free time in the evening showed the boys they could be rewarded for working hard. This 'play' was another attempt to give the boys an idea of the ideal family, and

they could be children for a short time. Physical activities were beneficial to use up excess energy, important for growing boys cooped up on a ship. The boys were encouraged to participate in boxing, as this was thought a better option to defend themselves on the streets than using knives. As a common activity amongst sailors, the boys were also taught to dance. The iconic hornpipe sailor dance gave the boys nimbleness while strengthening their arms and ankles. Daily drill, common in the military, was introduced as exercise and considered an appropriate activity for the working class.

Activities had to be adapted to an enclosed environment on board, although in later years, fields on shore were rented so the boys could exercise. The boys could play marbles on deck, perform plays or read. All the reformatory ships had a library on board, holding magazines, periodicals and books. Books were usually donated and included reading material deemed suitable for the boys, such as Bibles or the *Naval Brigade News*. Library books on board often had an adventure or maritime theme. Books were given as

Reformatory ships were an attempt by the Victorian middle class to rescue and retrain juvenile offenders.

5. *Liverpool Daily Post*. (1857, January 28).

6. Godfrey, B., Cox, P., Shore, H., & Alker, Z. (2017) *Young Criminal Lives: Life Courses and Life Chances after 1850*. Oxford University Press.

prizes and included titles now considered classics, such as *Tom Brown's Schooldays*, *Around the World in Eighty Days* and *Robinson Crusoe*.

With so many boys on board, there needed to be some form of consequences to behaviour in the form of punishment and rewards. The orderly regime on board mirrored that which the captain and staff would have been used to in the navy and strictness was vital to control a large number of boys. Some of the issues on board were what would be expected from teenage boys: surliness, disobedience and quarrelling. Some offences were more serious such as bullying and theft, and even physical assaults on staff and other boys. The boys were not allowed knives on board, but knife incidents happened; in one case on the *Clarence*, a boy slit the throat of another boy while he was asleep in his hammock and on the *Akbar* in 1881, a boy tried to stab one of the officers with a pocket knife.⁷⁻⁸ Boys were frequently punished for insubordination, neglect of duty and resistance to officers. The ship's staff were trying to form the boys into ideal citizens, the boys rebelled to attempt to have some control over their lives.

One common offence was absconding. It was more dangerous to attempt an escape from a reformatory ship than a land-based school. A boy would need to steal a smaller boat, abscond while on a shore visit, or attempt to swim away. This could often lead to tragedy: when two boys tried to swim away from the *Akbar* in 1889, one drowned when the bundle of dry clothes he was towing pulled him down.⁹ In another case, a boy from *Clarence* died from exhaustion when trying to swim away.¹⁰ Although the ships were not technically a prison, it was still legal custody and the boys could not just leave the institution. Therefore, the boys were charged in court if they absconded. The boys usually blamed excessive punishment on board for absconding. One *Clarence* boy claimed the work was too hard and he didn't get enough to eat.¹¹ Similarly, a *Cornwall* boy told the police he was starving and had been flogged for no reason while on board. He was not believed and returned to the ship after a month in prison.¹²

While punishments on the ships were harsh, they need to be considered in the context of the time. Corporal punishment was reasoned to be the only form of punishment the youngsters understood because of the abusive homes many came from. Corporal punishment was considered to be a quick and effective form of motivation. Only the captain or schoolmaster could administer punishments, and these had to be recorded in a punishment book. Physical punishment using the cane, birch or stick was common, along with confinement in a solitary cell or restrictions of food. A government School Inspector annually checked the ships, and he sometimes commented that punishments were unnecessarily severe and were sometimes more than allowed in the Home Office rules.

There were also rewards for good behaviour, showing the regime went beyond simply controlling the youths and that it was instead trying to show them the

rewards for acceptable behaviour. These rewards included trips out, such as when the *Akbar* boys were treated to see a pantomime and given an orange each as they left the theatre. Wealthy benefactors usually donated these trips, so the public did not complain about money being wasted.

Staff on board the reformatory ships were usually naval men, except for the schoolmasters. In an advert for a seamanship instructor on the

Akbar, it specified he must have served in the Royal Navy, be aged under 45 and 'must be active, of strict sobriety and even-tempered'.¹³ While this naval experience meant the men were used to living on board a ship, it did not necessarily mean they had the skills to train youngsters. All ships had a captain superintendent in charge and a chief officer. The number of seamen instructors to teach nautical training varied according to the number of boys on board. There were also tradesmen who did essential maintenance work and taught their trade to small groups of boys. Most ships had a carpenter, tailor, shoemaker, cook and bandmaster. The schoolmasters had large classes, with ratios varying from one teacher to 45 boys on the *Akbar* to one teacher to 50 boys on the *Cornwall*.¹⁴

The boys followed a busy timetable; each day included six hours of industrial training and three hours of education.

7. *Liverpool Daily Post*, (1881, August 8).

8. *Liverpool Echo*, (1881, October 26).

9. *Liverpool Mercury*, (1889, August 24).

10. *Liverpool Mercury*, (1873, May 7).

11. *Liverpool Echo*, (1879, December 16).

12. *South London Chronicle*, (1869, September 18).

13. *Hampshire Telegraph*, (1891 September 19).

14. Brumby, J. (2023). *Reformatory and Industrial School Ships in England, 1856-1914: Establishment, Experiences and Outcomes* [Unpublished PhD thesis]. Leeds Beckett University.

Only half the boys would be in school at any one time, the rest would be doing practical training.

The boys did not usually serve their full sentence on the ship and were generally released on licence. A boy could be licenced by the captain as soon as he was deemed fit to be released, if the licence terms were broken the boy could be sent back to the ship. Licencing on the reformatory ships was usually after three years had been served, a sentence could be up to five years. The licence gave the boys a helpful transition to everyday life, they were free but on probation. The chance of being released on licence was also an incentive for good conduct. To be allowed out on licence a boy had to be sent to live with a respectable person. If the terms of the licence were broken, such as by bad behaviour or committing a crime, the boy could be recalled back to the ship. As part of the aftercare provision, the boys were monitored for three years after the initial licensing period.

There has been much discussion among historians and criminologists as to whether institutions such as the reformatory ships were about 'saving' the child from a life of poverty and crime, or were, in fact, a form of 'social control'. The doctoral research on which this article is based found that most boys did not commit any offences

after leaving the ship regime. In a cohort of 300 boys leaving the reformatory and industrial training ships, 20 per cent (60 of the 300 boys) committed some sort of offence after being released. Many of these crimes were committed shortly after the boys left, and while they were still juveniles. The most common offence was theft. It appears that a stint on the ships did reduce the chance of reoffending, but it could also have been that the boys were isolated on the ships during the main teenage years when they were more likely to have offended.

While the main aim of the reformatory ships was to train the boys to work at sea, few did. Of the 150 reformatory boys in the study, only 23 per cent went to some sort of job connected with the sea. Most of the boys who went to sea became merchant seamen or fishermen. An original aim when the ships were established was to train the boys to join the Royal Navy. However, the entrance restrictions to the navy meant this was not an option for many boys. Few met the physical standard required, many were under the 4'10" required to join, and some did not have a birth certificate. It was easier for the boys to join the mercantile marine, and many were successful at joining the army. Numerous boys became labourers, fewer

became skilled workers. As they were on the ships during the years they could have been doing an apprenticeship, if they did not want to go to sea or join the army, there were fewer options available to them.

While the boys on these ships were numerous, it is important to remember they were all individuals, and the ship regime affected them all in different ways, both while they were on board and in their lives afterwards. To highlight these differences, the case studies of two boys are presented. While originally the reformatory and industrial training ships were intended to be different in the types of boys they admitted, evidence shows the two types of ships were similar. The doctoral research on which this article is based studied both the reformatory ships and the industrial training ships. The following examples are from an industrial training ship, as they provide a useful comparison. Both boys were committed to the *Wellesley*, the industrial training ship in the Tyne at Newcastle. Both boys were

named Thomas, and both had been before a magistrate and sent to the ship to reform them, but with very different outcomes.

Thomas Soulsby Williamson was born in Sunderland, Durham in 1877. The third of five children, his mother died when he was young. Thomas was on the *Wellesley* on the 1891 census, and when he left he

joined the Royal Navy. In 1910, Thomas was part of the crew when Captain Scott made his attempt to reach the South Pole. Captain Scott and his comrades were lost on the return journey and eight months later a recovery party was sent out. Thomas was part of this group who discovered the bodies of Scott, Bowers and Wilson in their tent. Thomas also saw active service in the First World War.

Thomas Stayman also followed a career at sea but with different outcomes. He was born in 1868 and sent to the *Wellesley* aged 11 for larceny. After leaving, he went to sea and quickly progressed through the ratings. In 1917, Thomas was charged with the attempted murder of the gunner serving on the *Claverley* where Thomas was captain. Thomas had ordered the crew to fire on a hospital ship and to fire more rounds than permitted. Concerned that he would be reported on shore, Thomas physically threatened members of the crew, resulting in several hours chasing around the ship before he was barricaded in a cabin. He was sentenced to five years penal servitude for attempted murder. Newspaper reports claimed he had been 'mad drunk' during his captaincy.¹⁵

Imparting the value of labour was believed to be pivotal in reforming juveniles.

15. *Exeter and Plymouth Gazette*. (1917, January 1).

These two studies show the range of outcomes possible. A former ship boy who went to the Antarctic and another charged with attempted murder are unique stories. But each boy who passed through the reformatory and industrial training ships had their own life story. Between these two stories at opposite ends of the spectrum, there were hundreds of boys who spent time on the ships during their formative years and a whole kaleidoscope of experiences. The ships existed for a relatively short time in the latter half of the 19th century. The wooden vessels which had been ideal for

housing the boys eventually deteriorated. As shipping practices changed, practical experience on a wooden sailing ship was not as relevant. Social welfare ideas moved more towards helping the family rather than removing children. A reduced need for the ships eventually led to them closing by the early 20th century.

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Treatment of Black individuals with convictions in Britain during the early 19th century

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Early 19th century prisons in Britain held an increasing number of inmates, and among this growing prison population were Black individuals accused of criminal activity. This article will explore the topic of Black criminality by adopting a microhistory approach, which involves in-depth case studies regarding the experiences of two men of African descent imprisoned within the period of study. Firstly, William Caines was incarcerated at Ilchester Gaol in 1817 and secondly, John Lewis imprisoned at Stafford County Gaol in 1830. Both of these men, committed, or were accused of committing, a form of theft. Theft was perceived as a grievous crime, as the importance of respecting property in this period was paramount. According to Peter Linebaugh, the chief lesson that the prison system had to teach was to respect private property.¹ Throughout the long 18th century criminals were hanged for an extensive range of crimes due to a series of laws passed in the British Isles mandating the death penalty, known as the 'Bloody Code'.² Yet, recent scholarship, including important work undertaken by King and Ward has suggested there was a reluctance to actually implement capital punishment, particularly towards the end of the 18th century and especially in regions outside of the capital city's jurisdiction.³ Thus, imprisonment and transportation were increasingly regarded as more appropriate methods in tackling criminality.

19th century reformers valued the prison as a site which could restore and reform the criminal by appealing to the convicted person's sense of morality; by extension, prisons were believed to generate a more humane society.⁴ The two prisons that this article will specifically focus upon are Ilchester County Gaol and Stafford County Gaol and House of Correction. Ilchester Gaol operated from 1615 to 1843, it was used as a site of incarceration for a total of 228 years, whereas Stafford Gaol was a newer institution opening in 1793, before closing its doors in 1916, housing prisoners for 123 years.⁵ This article concludes that Black men accused of theft who fostered positive relationships with their contemporaries could expect treatment which did not discriminate against them on the grounds of their colour in the carceral system. Furthermore, if they managed to behave in an exemplary manner they could even be offered job opportunities and shortened sentences.

Black presence in prisons

Scholarship which examines the topic of Black criminality has tended to focus upon the later 19th century. This is partially due to the scarcity of prison and trial records which explicitly recorded ethnicity within the period of study. One notable exception being London, as according to Peter King, there was, 'a uniquely detailed set of court records (the Newgate Calendars) in which ethnicity is systematically described... [as the city of London] contained large numbers of migrants' (p.1).⁶ Jeffrey Green provides

1. Linebaugh, P. (1992). *The London Hanged: Crime and Civil Society in the 18th Century*. Cambridge University Press.
2. King, P., & Ward, R. (2015). Rethinking the Bloody Code in eighteenth-Century Britain: Capital Punishment at the Centre and on the Periphery. *Past & Present*, 288(1), 159-205.
3. See footnote 2: King & Ward (2015).
4. McGowen, R. (1986). A Powerful Sympathy: Terror, the Prison, and Humanitarian Reform in early 19th-Century Britain, *Journal of British Studies*, 25(3), 313-334.
5. <https://www.prisonhistory.org/prison/ilchester-county-gaol-and-house-of-correction/>; <https://www.prisonhistory.org/prison/stafford-county-gaol-and-house-of-correction/> Accessed 16/02/2025.
6. King, P. (2016). Immigrant Communities, the Police and the Courts in Late eighteenth and Early nineteenth-Century London, *Crime, Histoire & Sociétés/Crime, History & Societies*, 20(1), 1-33.

insight into the experiences of Black Britons incarcerated during the Victorian era.⁷ His work analyses several important accounts of individuals who were both Black and convicted of criminal offences, including Joseph Denny, a former sailor who spent time in several prisons including Pentonville, Dartmoor, Liverpool, and Broadmoor. Green's article also makes direct reference to a case which occurred in 1895 and was recorded in several newspaper articles which state that a 'man of colour who gave himself the name Prince Alesam... [was] charged with cheating and defrauding Peter Gobeli, hotel keeper of 25 Edgeware Road' (p.3).⁸ Subsequently, in February of 1896, Alesam was described as 'developing [clear] symptoms of insanity... he has now been certified as a lunatic and will on the expiration of his sentence... be removed to Banstead Asylum as a pauper lunatic' (p.3).⁹ The case of Alesam highlights that during the 19th century, institutionalisation became increasingly widespread, as authorities wished to enforce stricter control over those who were mentally ill by placing them into asylums and prisons in a bid to control the physical body through surveillance.¹⁰

Another significant piece of research is by Peter King and John Carter Wood. Their work suggests that during the late 18th and early 19th centuries, Irish convicts were treated with more discrimination than their Black counterparts. They focus upon source material relating to crimes committed by Black individuals in London.¹¹ King and Carter Wood not only examine the experiences of convicted felons, but also the treatment of Black victims and witnesses during court proceedings. The authors note that clerks employed by the courts, rarely recorded the ethnicity

of the accused or victim; with the exception of the *Old Bailey Proceedings* a series of formal written records.¹² The seeming lack of interest in noting the exterior appearance of the individuals that came before the courts in London at this time may suggest that racially prejudiced stereotypes did not influence magistrates' decisions when passing sentences. While conducting this research I found a similar lack of detail regarding recording ethnicity in prison official documentation, indicating a degree of indifference to noting racial features upon entering carceral institutions at this time. Therefore, this research relies upon primary source material, including detailed letters written by contemporary magistrates, which explicitly stated that men of African descent were present within the British prison system.

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Case study one: William Caines

In the summer of 1817, in the county of Somerset, a Black man named William Caines was accused by Ann Laver of committing 'highway robbery'.¹³ She testified that, following a public fair in Curry-Rivel which had taken place on the 5th of August, a man fitting his exact description attacked and stole from her in the early hours of the morning as she was making her way home. Caines had been exhibiting his wounded arm at the fair as a way to make money telling passers-by that he obtained his injuries following a

naval battle. Caines, the alleged perpetrator, was born in the United States of America and had previously been employed as a privateer seaman, privateers were individuals granted a licence by their respective governments to attack enemy ships.¹⁴ After Caines obtained his disability, he struggled to find alternative

7. Green, J. (2017). The Criminal Justice System and Black People in Victorian Britain. *Prison Service Journal*, 232, 35-38.

8. Lincolnshire Echo. (1985, May 1).

9. Morning Post (London). (1896, February 1).

10. Cox, C., & Marland, H. (2018). Broken Minds and Beaten Bodies: Cultures of Harm and the Management of Mental Illness in mid-to-late 19th century English and Irish Prisons, *Social History of Medicine*, 31(4), 688-710.

11. King, P., & Carter Wood, J. (2015). Black people and the criminal justice system: prejudice and practice in later eighteenth and early nineteenth-century London. *Historical Research*, 88(238), 100-124.

12. See footnote 11: King, P., & Carter Wood, J. (2015).

13. The National Archives (Kew), *Report of Robert Graham on William Caines a 'man of colour' a beggar and formally privateer seaman convicted at the last Somerset Assizes held at Bridgwater, Somerset, for highway robbery committed on Ann Laver, 5th August 1817*, HO 47/56/17.

14. Hillmann, H., & Gathmann, C. (2008). *From Privateering to Navy: How Sea Power Became a Public Good* [Unpublished paper]. Stanford University, Department of Economics.

employment and began travelling around Britain displaying his wounds in order to gain an income and was referred to as an 'itinerant' wanderer. Following the accusation levied against him by Laver, Caines was arrested and was taken to a holding cell, prior to the commencement of his trial. According to a report written by Sir Robert Graham (1744-1836) one of the presiding magistrates for the court case, Caines, was described in his trial proceedings as, 'A man of colour, immensely stout and large, but mutilated in an arm and crippled in the other, th[ough] with some power of using it...' (p.255).¹⁵

Laver is introduced as the plaintiff to the case, who was at the time that the accusation was made, a mere eighteen years old.¹⁶ In her testimony she claimed that Caines wore 'a hanky on his face, he had wounds... in his right arm. He had a stump arm, the left of some cut off about here [she then pointed a little above the elbow].' (p.254).¹⁷ Her description of Caines corroborated exactly with his physical appearance highlighting that she could describe him in detail.¹⁸ Her sister Charlotte Laver, acting as a supporting witness, added further details substantiating the initial part of Ann's testimony, as she claimed that she had also seen Caines on the night in question, stating, 'I was at Curry Fair on the Monday, I saw the Prisoner there he begg'd a half-penny...' (p.254).¹⁹

According to Graham's report, he concurred with the assessment as to how Caines acquired his disability, stating that 'the prisoner... had lost the left arm in battle' suggesting that Caines had been consistent in relating to people how he had lost his limb (p.259).²⁰ The defence tried to argue that it was 'impossible that a man so mutilated [and] otherwise remarkable [in appearance] should hope to disguise

himself by merely putting [on] a handkerchief over his face' (p.257).²¹ Despite the considerable degree of doubt raised, a verdict of guilty was returned and Caines was sentenced to death. However, this decision was overturned, and he was instead sentenced to imprisonment at Ilchester Gaol. The overturning of the initial judgment was not unusual, as according to Gatrell's research, in the early 19th century there was a growing trend to commute even capital convictions to lesser penalties.²²

Caines was moved temporarily to the house of correction, Wilton Gaol, prior to his intended destination of Ilchester. Meanwhile, the local community in the area where the offence had supposedly taken place raised their concerns that Laver was being dishonest about the incident. Graham stated that, 'Immediately on my return from the assizes, I happened to see several of the principal inhabitants of the parish where Ann Laver resides, and I was informed by them that [they had] considerable doubts... as to the said Robbery and in fact it was generally rumoured through the county that what she had said was untrue.' (p.260).²³ In fact, it goes on to state that the locals were right to be wary, as Ann had indeed fabricated the whole event, as five eyewitnesses came forward providing testimonies that Caines could not have been at the field at the time that the

alleged robbery took place.²⁴ Vincent Stuckey (1771-1845), a merchant and prominent banker of Somerset, went to Ilchester prison to meet with Caines in person seeking his testimony on the series of events. This highlights that early 19th century prisons were permeable spaces, which permitted criminals to be interviewed following the sentencing process and Caines was allowed to give his side of the story in

The seeming lack of interest in noting the exterior appearance of the individuals that came before the courts in London at this time may suggest that racially prejudiced stereotypes did not influence magistrates' decisions.

15. Report of Robert Graham on William Caines.

16. See footnote 13.

17. See footnote 13.

18. See footnote 13.

19. See footnote 13.

20. See footnote 13.

21. See footnote 13.

22. Gatrell, V. A. C., & Gatrell, V. (1994). *The Hanging Tree: Execution and the English People 1770-1868*. Oxford University Press; see also, Briggs, J., Harrison, C., McInnes, A., & Vincent, D. (1996). *Crime and Punishment in England: An Introductory History*, Routledge.

23. Report on Caines.

24. The eyewitnesses were named Betty Moor, Samuel Priddle, James Gilliot, William Hooper and William Hawker.

order to appropriately uphold the judicial system. Stuckey stated that he 'ask[ed] the prisoner 'Caines' several questions [and] everything [that] he said convinced me of the opinion... indeed I am morally certain [that] he was never near the Field in which the girl states the Robbery to have taken place.' (p.261).²⁵ Over the false arrest, Stuckey justified how Caines had previously been found guilty as, 'he is a most remarkable man and she *described him so accurately* that he was soon recognised and taken.' (p.265).²⁶ Due to the hasty conviction, which took place, according to the records 'about a week' after the alleged crime had taken place, the community had been unable to provide the judge presiding on this case this crucial information until a later date. This account highlights that members of the local population were keen to ensure that innocent individuals were not convicted unfairly.

Upon hearing this new evidence, Graham claimed that in Caines's case 'the Prisoner [ought to be] a just object of the Royal Mercy', highlighting that his contemporaries were not necessarily prejudiced against the convicted man due to his skin colour, disability and foreign birth. (p.255).²⁷ An update provided ground-breaking evidence for the defence that 'the prisoner was at the fair in company with a very tall woman who was said to be his wife... they were [seen] at an alehouse called the Ball' at the time in question, providing a direct alibi that meant he could not have been responsible for the crime. (p.263).²⁸ A letter, included with the report, directed to 'Sidmouth', referring to Henry Addington (1757-1844) former Prime Minister from 1801 to 1804, who between 1812 to 1822 acted as Home Secretary, asked that Caines be released from prison. The immediacy of this action suggests that they sought to rectify the previous error, thus Caines was found 'not guilty' and as a result was granted a full royal pardon.²⁹

Caines was incarcerated at Ilchester, but the exact date of his liberation was not mentioned in the

original series of letters. However, material housed at the *Somerset Archives* reveals that he was there between the 7th of August to the 10th of November of 1817. The index of prisoners lists his name and describes him as being at the time of his imprisonment aged forty-two. The same document confirms under the heading which explains how each prisoner was discharged, that he was released by 'free pardon,' providing consistency across the two historical records. Frustratingly, it does not mention his African heritage, highlighting a challenge for researchers when examining the carceral records when ethnicity is omitted entirely.

Upon consultation of the register of sick prisoners serving time in Ilchester between the years 1811 to 1821, there was further evidence of Caines' experience while he was incarcerated. He is described in the register as having suffered from 'constipated bowels' and was admitted as a patient to the infirmary for male patients on the 18th of August, shortly after his arrival at Ilchester Gaol.³⁰ He would remain in medical care until his liberation on November the tenth. It seems remarkable that he stayed as an in-patient for the whole two and a half months for what is considered in the modern era as a minor and common ailment. Perhaps, due to his disability, his case was seen as potentially precarious,

denoting a particular degree of care that was taken by the prison medical staff. However, according to James Whorton, by the beginning of the 19th century, there was a medical consensus that constipation was considered a serious ailment, as blockages disrupted the ideal humoral balance.³¹ In Caines' case constipation was treated by the prison staff as a concerning condition, requiring medical attention. This record also omitted Caines's ethnicity, illustrating that it was not regarded as worth commentary within a medical context. Caines was potentially fortunate to have been at Ilchester prison in 1817, as according to a letter written by Henry Hunt to Thomas Buxton in March 1821, the prison had seriously declined in

Early 19th century
prisons were
permeable spaces,
which permitted
criminals to be
interviewed
following the
sentencing process.

25. See footnote 13.

26. See footnote 13. Italics added for emphasis.

27. See footnote 13.

28. See footnote 13.

29. See footnote 13, 267.

30. Somerset Archives & Record Service (Taunton), *Register of Sick Prisoners from 1811-1821*, Q/Agi/16/1.

31. Whorton, J. (2000). Civilisation and the colon: constipation as the 'disease of diseases', *British Medical Journal*, 321 (7276), 1586 - 1589.

quality, as he wrote there is an 'absence... of instruction, piety and propriety that perhaps was here in 1818.' (p.22).³² However, an account written in 1895, suggests that the jail was 'frightfully overcrowded' in 1817, which might have played a role in Caines being released so swiftly.³³

Overall, this evidence has shown that prison staff and legal officials were clearly not prejudiced towards Caines, as they had gone to great lengths to restore his freedom. It also suggests that while trials were often brief affairs, once incarcerated, Caines was interviewed and given the opportunity to mention alibis to prove his innocence. Moreover, during his stay at Ilchester, the staff ensured that his physical condition did not decline, and they carried out a good quality of care to prevent him from suffering further. This research aligns with the findings of King and Carter Wood that there was no significant discrimination against Black people within the justice system. Those who were defendants were less likely than average to be convicted, and more likely to have their sentences reduced or overturned.³⁴ The case of Caines echoes this interpretation, as he was granted a full pardon and was imprisoned for slightly over two months before being granted his freedom. This indicates that criminals who were both Black and disabled were not especially prejudiced against in this period. However, as this is a unique case, it cannot reveal the full scale of how Black disabled individuals within the prison system were perceived within the period of study. Yet, it is a remarkable account of a man whose own voice remains hidden, nevertheless the impression that he made within the historical carceral record is undeniable.

Case study two: John Lewis (alias Gombo)³⁵

A Black man named John Lewis was arrested in the county of Staffordshire, in December 1829, for

We see that Black
prisoners in the
early 19th century
left their mark
within the carceral
historical record.

committing the offence of house breaking. According to *The Staffordshire Advertiser*, Lewis was listed as one of the few individuals committed to the county gaol during the winter period. The article states, 'John Lewis, [was] charged with breaking into a dwelling house at Wolverhampton and stealing four pieces of linen cloth, cut for a shirt, the property of Matthew Vickers'. (p.4).³⁶ Lewis was formally charged during the Lent Assizes of 1830 and like Caines, was initially sentenced to death. This original punishment is recorded in an article from the local press dated to the 20th of March, a 'sentence of death [was] recorded against... John Lewis, for breaking into the house... stealing therein four pieces of linen cloth.' (p.4).³⁷ Neither of the two articles in *The Staffordshire Advertiser* mentioned John Lewis' African heritage, rather emphasis was placed upon the offence that he had committed. However, the initial sentence was quickly altered to twelve months imprisonment with hard labour, to be served at Stafford County Gaol.

The most vitally important details concerning the background of Lewis were provided in a series of correspondence between a visiting magistrate based originally at Dorchester named J.M. Colson, and the governor of Stafford Prison, Thomas Brutton. The letters were sent between the pair and were used as evidence to petition Lewis' case. The first letter is dated to the third of January 1830, by Colson to Brutton where he states, 'Sir, you have... in your custody a Black man named John Lewis charged with having committed a burglary or felony — I have known this unfortunate person some few years and have reason to think favourably of his honesty, industry and general behaviour and I shall feel greatly obliged to you if you will give me some little report of his care... and if the rules and regulations of your prison permit it, I shall be glad to send him a few shillings — Lewis will inform you that I am a clergyman and one of the visiting magistrates of the

32. Henry Hunt details the level of corruption of the governor William Bridle. Bridle was deemed responsible for the prison's later poor management. See Hunt, H. (1821). *A Peep Into a Prison, Or, The Inside of Ilchester Bastille*, Thomas Dolby.

33. Rogers Hamilton, W.H. (1895). *West Country Stories and Sketches, Biographical and Historical*, James G. Commin.

34. See footnote 11: King and Carter-Wood (2015).

35. 'Gombo' is used as both a first and last name in central Africa and areas of Asia. This could be Lewis' real name or one he has adopted.

36. *The Staffordshire Advertiser* (Stafford). (1829, December 5), p. 4.

37. *The Staffordshire Advertiser*, (Stafford). (1830, March 20), p. 4.

county gaol at Dorchester.’ (p.739).³⁸ This letter reveals the degree of relationship which had developed between Colson and Lewis, as the magistrate was prepared to testify to his previous good conduct and offer him financial aid to help him adjust to prison living.

The second letter that Colson sent, was dated the 12th of January, only nine days after the first correspondence. Here the account states, ‘You have my thanks for your kind and ready attention to my letter on behalf of poor Lewis... I am glad to hear his behaviour is so orderly.’ (p.745).³⁹ This indicates that the prison staff made efforts to respond quickly to the magistrate’s initial letter. Magistrates were men of considerable status and influence which might explain the staff’s desire to respond promptly. Moreover, it shows that Colson sought to once again highlight Lewis’ orderly behaviour to justify the financial support offered throughout the term of his imprisonment.

The third letter was sent several months later on the 27th of April. Colson remarks that he wishes to ‘endow [Lewis with] a half sov[reign] for his use. I wish I could send him more permanent assistance but fear the [repercussions]. I [hope that upon leaving the Jail he will be able to] re[join] the naval service.’ (p.746).⁴⁰ This piece of communication mentions Lewis’ background as a sailor, highlighting the similarities of his experience with Caines, as both had formerly experienced employment in a maritime career. Additionally, this letter demonstrates that during the early 19th century there was a clear concern about propriety, as Colson is unsure how much money he is allowed to send without damaging his reputation or causing problems for Lewis. Moreover, it suggests that jails permitted people in prison to receive financial assistance, especially if it had been sent by a man of high status. Following the *Gaol Fees Abolition Act*, passed in 1815, it was no longer necessary to pay the gaoler a fee to provide the convicted person with sustenance. Therefore, Colson wanted to send the money in order

to aid Lewis in the procurement of clothing which may have become dirty or damaged, as he declares, ‘I will certainly contribute a trifle towards procuring him better clothing [to wear while he is imprisoned].’ (p.746).⁴¹

The fourth and final letter, which was sent just prior to the decision to shorten his sentence and release him from prison early, is dated to the 13th of August. Here Colson states, ‘I hope I may [add a further contribution] in favour of your prisoner John Lewis — I first knew him [following an event] where [he was] committed to Dorchester Gaol... for a month — here his conduct was so orderly [that] I procured [for] him the situation of cooks mate in the Blonde

Frigate... I had the satisfaction of hearing that his behaviour had been uniformly correct and proper during the whole voyage and that he was discharged with a good character [reference] on account of ill health.’ (p.748).⁴²

This section signifies that although the housebreaking was not Lewis’ first offence, Colson still believed that he deserved another chance.

Thomas Brutton, the governor of the prison, wrote to General Dyatt, one of the presiding magistrates based at Wolverhampton, who stated that ‘Brutton informs me that John Lewis (a Black) whom I committed in December last for

housebreaking who is now undertaking his sentence has behaved very well in prison... I beg to say that I did not consider him a hardened offender and that I approve of the recommendation [to reduce his sentence].’ (p.749).⁴³ Following the letters which passed between the two gentlemen, a decision was ultimately made to alert Sir Robert Peel (1788-1850) of the decision to apply for a royal pardon due to Lewis’ exemplary conduct with the aim of granting him an early release. According to the document entitled, ‘Return of a convict under sentence of imprisonment in his Majesty’s Gaol at Stafford’ he was ‘recommended for a remission of his sentence’, this document states that he was aged thirty at the time of the sentencing and his release. (p.743).⁴⁴ Three visiting

Remarkable
account of a man
whose own voice
remains hidden,
nevertheless the
impression that he
made within the
historical carceral
record is
undeniable.

38. The National Archives (Kew), *Petition for John Lewis Or, Gombo*, HO 17/123/63: 738-751.

39. See footnote 38.

40. See footnote 38.

41. See footnote 38.

42. See footnote 38.

43. See footnote 38.

44. See footnote 38.

justices signed this release to signify that they agreed with the decision to end his sentence early.⁴⁵

In a final twist, Lewis was offered a potential job opportunity working at Stafford Gaol, as Brutton wrote, '[regarding] John Lewis alias 'Gombo', I beg to inform you that his conduct has been so good since he has been in my custody, it is my intention to provide for him and *retain him in my service* unless a better situation can be obtained for him.' (p.751).⁴⁶ The terms of his imprisonment were due to expire on the 11th of March 1831, but he was released early, on the 20th of August 1830 suggesting that he served only five months in total. This case has revealed that Lewis' friendship with a well-respected gentleman coupled with his extremely good behaviour while being imprisoned led to his early release. Moreover, Lewis was offered employment to work within the same institution where he had previously been incarcerated.

Conclusion

This article has demonstrated that prisons in the early decades of the 19th century were permeable locations which held a multitude of functions including infirmaries to heal the inmates, and spaces to carry out interviews to review cases. There were clearly benefits to possessing currency whilst incarcerated as demonstrated by Colson offering money to Lewis to aid him in the procurement of clothing and provisions. Overall, these two cases highlight that people in prison of African descent in this period, could expect equal treatment to their white contemporaries. Caines' was treated in the

infirmery and received at least an adequate standard of care while suffering from constipation. Additionally, while incarcerated he was able to provide an individual testimony to highlight his innocence. In the case of Lewis, despite the housebreaking being his second conviction, he was permitted to leave Stafford Gaol early and was even offered employment by the gaoler Brutton. This investigation has revealed that in these two cases Black prisoners were not necessarily prejudiced against and that their ethnicity did not inhibit sometimes considerable efforts being made on their behalf by men of influence. In Caines' case this may have been primarily due to a desire to right a perceived legal wrong and to uphold justice, but Caines' benefitted from actions following on from those desires. In Lewis' case actions on his behalf were due to more personal connections and his own behaviour which led to a stated belief in his warranting another chance. Magistrates and other men of considerable power and status could influence decisions to offer royal pardons or early release for good behaviour. As this is a very novel area of research the findings are still in their preliminary stages, yet it illustrates the distinct need for further investigation into a topic which has been long neglected. Overall, by adopting a micro-historical approach examining a brief snapshot into the lives of Caines and Lewis, we see that Black prisoners in the early 19th century left their mark within the carceral historical record.

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⁴⁵ See footnote 38.

⁴⁶ See footnote 38, 751. Italics added for emphasis.

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