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Exploring the history of prisoner education

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About this free course

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Intellectual property

Contents

Introduction and guidance

Introduction and guidance

As a society we need to understand how we got to where we are. This free course, *Exploring the history of prisoner education*, has been developed for learners who are in prison, who work in prisons, who visit prisons and who are interested in the history of prisons and prison education. This course has 8 sessions, each with approximately 3 hours of studying to be done at your own pace. The eight sessions are linked to ensure a logical flow through the course. They are:

1. The origins of prison education
2. The rise of the prison school
3. Inside the prison school
4. Education outside the prison school
5. Systems of measurement
6. Education in a changing penal regime
7. Uniformity in prisons and prison education
8. A new era for prison education?

Each session should take you around 3 hours. There are a number of activities throughout the course where you are asked to note down your response. A text box is provided for you to do this, however if you would prefer to record your answers in another way that is fine.

At the end of each session there is also a quiz to help you check your understanding. And, if you want to receive a badge and statement of participation, at the end of Sessions 4 and 8 there is a quiz which you need to pass.

After completing this course, you should be able to:

- understand the history of prison education in the British Isles
- recognise that especially literacy and numeracy programmes have been offered to prisoners in a range of contexts and for a variety of purposes
- understand the variety of ways in which prisoners responded to schemes for their educational improvement and rehabilitation
- understand some of the ways in which the study of the past can aid policymaking and practice in the present.

Moving around the course

In the ‘Summary’ at the end of each session, you will find a link to the next session. If at any time you want to return to the start of the course, click on ‘Full course description’. From here you can navigate to any part of the course.

It's also good practice, if you access a link from within a course page (including links to the quizzes), to open it in a new window or tab. That way you can easily return to where you've come from without having to use the back button on your browser.

The Open University would really appreciate a few minutes of your time to tell us about yourself and your expectations for the course before you begin, in our optional start-of-course survey. Participation will be completely confidential and we will not pass on your details to others.

What is a badged course?

While studying *Exploring the history of prisoner education* you have the option to work towards gaining a digital badge.

Badged courses are a key part of The Open University's *mission to promote the educational well-being of the community*. The courses also provide another way of helping you to progress from informal to formal learning.

Completing a course will require about 24 hours of study time. However, you can study the course at any time and at a pace to suit you.

Badged courses are available on The Open University's OpenLearn website and do not cost anything to study. They differ from Open University courses because you do not receive support from a tutor, but you do get useful feedback from the interactive quizzes.

What is a badge?

Digital badges are a new way of demonstrating online that you have gained a skill. Colleges and universities are working with employers and other organisations to develop open badges that help learners gain recognition for their skills, and support employers to identify the right candidate for a job.

Badges demonstrate your work and achievement on the course. You can share your achievement with friends, family and employers, and on social media. Badges are a great motivation, helping you to reach the end of the course. Gaining a badge often boosts confidence in the skills and abilities that underpin successful study. So, completing this course could encourage you to think about taking other courses.

How to get a badge

Getting a badge is straightforward! Here's what you have to do:

- read each session of the course
- score 50% or more in the two badge quizzes in Session 4 and Session 8

For all the quizzes, you can have three attempts at most of the questions (for true or false type questions you usually only get one attempt). If you get the answer right first time you will get more marks than for a correct answer the second or third time. Therefore, please be aware that for the two badge quizzes it is possible to get all the questions right but not

score 50% and be eligible for the badge on that attempt. If one of your answers is incorrect you will often receive helpful feedback and suggestions about how to work out the correct answer.

For the badge quizzes, if you're not successful in getting 50% the first time, after 24 hours you can attempt the whole quiz, and come back as many times as you like.

We hope that as many people as possible will gain an Open University badge – so you should see getting a badge as an opportunity to reflect on what you have learned rather than as a test.

If you need more guidance on getting a badge and what you can do with it, take a look at the OpenLearn FAQs. When you gain your badge you will receive an email to notify you and you will be able to view and manage all your badges in My OpenLearn within 24 hours of completing the criteria to gain a badge.

Get started with Session 1.

Conclusion

Session 1: The origins of prison education

Introduction

The late 1700s to early 1800s was a time of significant social change in the four nations of the British Isles which created tensions and crises. Revolutionary ideas from America and France threatened the social hierarchy and encouraged an uprising in Ireland. There were struggles between workers and their employers, and disputes between slave owners and anti-slavery campaigners.

Between 1793 and 1815, Britain was almost continuously at war with France. Criminal statistics suggested that crime was increasing. A debate about the benefits of imprisoning criminals, rather than executing them, developed. Interest grew in building prisons where prisoners might learn remorse and self-improvement.

Figure 1 Newgate Gaol in London, sacked by rioters during the Gordon Riots of June 1780. The prison had only just been rebuilt and the repairs took several years to complete.

The first session of this course places the origins of prison education within the context of these major changes in society. The following sessions will explore how prison education evolved in the four nations during the 1800s.

Most of the evidence and examples in this course come from England, because that country has received the most attention from historians of prison education. However, schemes to educate prisoners could be found in all four nations of the British Isles – England, Scotland, Wales and Ireland (i.e. present-day Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland combined) – from the beginning of the 1800s. In 1801, the nations which comprised Great Britain (England, Wales and Scotland) were brought together with Ireland to form the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland. Despite this, both Scotland and Ireland continued to have their own systems of criminal justice, including prisons.

Over the next eight sessions you will encounter examples of education in many different UK prisons, including gaols, bridewells, penitentiaries, local prisons and convict prisons. However, you will keep returning to one: Lincoln Castle Gaol. Now a prison museum, Lincoln Castle Gaol provides both a captivating backdrop and a fascinating case study for your exploration of the history of the prison and of prison education. In Sessions 1–7, Rosalind Crone, Senior Lecturer in History at The Open University and one of the authors of this course, will present a new chapter in the history of Lincoln Castle Gaol.

Watch the first video now, in which Rosalind Crone uses the history of Lincoln Castle Gaol to explain the birth of the modern prison and how it has been conceptualised by historians. If you can, write some brief notes about the ideas being presented. You will return to these later in the session.

Video content is not available in this format.

Did you enjoy that introduction to the history of the prison? Was there anything that struck you as unusual, or which was unexpected? Perhaps you were intrigued to learn that historians interpret events or processes in different ways. Don't worry if any of the ideas presented were difficult to grasp; you will revisit them in detail.

By the end of this session, you should:

- be able to outline the development of the prison from dungeon and lock-up to purpose-built penitentiary
- have a sense of the wider political and social events and ideas which framed the rise of the prison and prison education
- be aware of the types of sources historians use to gain a sense of what happened in the past.

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1 Thinking about the past

We often hear, and tell, stories which are designed to explain how we, as individuals or as a society, got to where we are today. Some accounts offer a specific idea or circumstance as an explanation, others refer to a national trait such as 'British pluck'. One step towards being a critical thinker is to be aware of our preconceptions.

Figure 2 An important event in British national memory is the Battle of Waterloo, fought in 1815 in Belgium, in which a French army under Napoleon Bonaparte was defeated by a coalition of states which included the United Kingdom.

Activity 1 Assumptions about life in 1800

Allow approximately 10 minutes for this activity

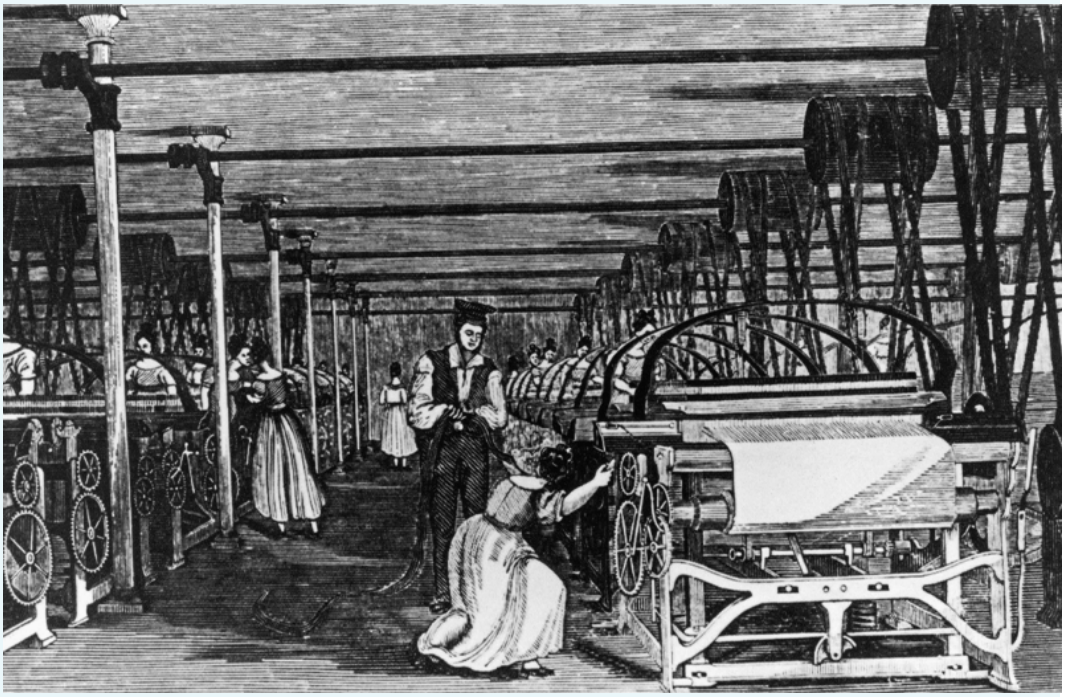


Figure 3 Women working on looms in a factory, around 1800.

Try to list some of your assumptions about life in 1800. You might want to consider some of the following questions:

- Did most people live in towns?
- Were most adults allowed to vote?
- Was the economy more rural than industrial?
- Was the country at war?
- Who had the most power, the Prime Minister or the monarch?
- Did British people own slaves?

- Were criminals more likely to be flogged, transported, executed or sent to prison?
- Could most people read or write?

Provide your answer...

Discussion

Keep these notes about your impressions of life in 1800. You might want to refer back to them. Over the next few sessions of the course, you will probably find that while some of your assumptions will be challenged, others will be reinforced and developed.

2 1823: the birth of prison education

In 1823, MPs at Westminster did something momentous. They passed new legislation (the Gaols Act) aimed at improving conditions in prisons which included the following clause:

Provision shall be made in all Prisons for the Instruction of Prisoners of both Sexes in Reading and Writing…

(Gaols Act 1823, section 10(10))

While it is true that the Gaols Act applied only to England and Wales, and only to around one-third of all local prisons in those two nations, it was still highly significant. It reflected steps already being taken in prisons across the four nations of Ireland, Scotland, Wales and England to provide prisoners with instruction in reading and sometimes writing.

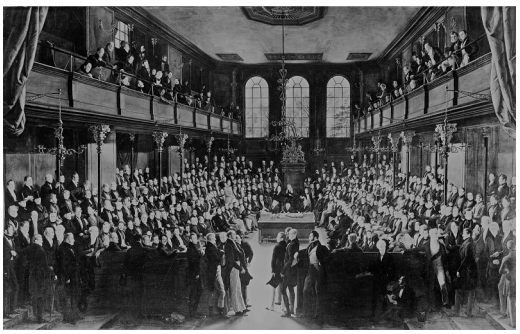


Figure 4 This painting, commissioned to commemorate the Great Reform Act of 1832, shows the newly reformed House of Commons where laws governing the whole of the United Kingdom (which included Ireland) were made in the 1800s. Some important features in common with the Parliament of 1823 stand out: all the MPs were men; they were also gentlemen who did not need a salary; there were much fewer of them than there are today.

Why was legislation passed for England and Wales and not for Scotland and Ireland? The particular penal and educational circumstances of each nation provide an answer. In 1823, there was no national system of elementary education in England and Wales. Several attempts by MPs to introduce one had failed. The failure of one education bill, on which many hopes were pinned, coincided with the insertion of the ‘reading and writing clause’ into the 1823 Gaols Act. In other words, penal legislation was used to bring about educational reform more broadly (Crone, 2022, ch.1).

Irish penal reform legislation predated that for England and Wales by a couple of years, and this timing could explain why a similar clause had not appeared in the Irish Prisons Acts. Penal reform was delayed in Scotland, but there was also perhaps less urgency for prison education there because Scotland already had a national system of elementary education of sorts: parish schools. This was lacking in the other nations. Educational and penal reformers in the decade leading up to 1823 proclaimed that lower crime rates in Scotland, compared with England, Wales and Ireland, were the consequence of its parish school system.

After 1823, education continued to spread across penal institutions in all four nations. You’ll look at how, and to what extent, in Session 2. First, you’ll take a closer look at where this idea of educating criminals came from.

3 Prison in the 1700s

Prisons have existed for centuries in the British Isles. In the 1700s, in all four nations, prisons were run by local authorities, mainly by those in charge of counties, boroughs and parishes, but also by universities and even cathedrals. There were different types of prison. *Lock-ups* temporarily held those who had been arrested for crimes and were waiting to see the magistrate, as well as drunks who needed to sober up. *Gaols* were used for prisoners on remand. *Bridewells*, or *Houses of Correction*, were for those convicted of petty crimes – vagrants, prostitutes and drunks – where efforts were made to correct their behaviour.

Prisons were not just for those accused and convicted of crime. Children were often imprisoned with their mothers, or some for their own crimes. Across Britain, over half of people in gaols were debtors. Another significant category of prisoner was those deemed a threat to the state for political reasons. After the 1715 and 1745 rebellions in Scotland, the prisons were filled with political prisoners and in 1794 habeas corpus (an arrested person's right to a trial) was suspended. This enabled people to be held without trial indefinitely.

Many prisons in the mid-1700s were pit-like castle dungeons. Prisons had no heating, no bedding and little access to running water. Sanitation was rudimentary. There was no segregation of women and children from men. Often the ventilation was poor and prisoners were chained to one another. There was little to do and prisoners frequently had access to alcohol. There were many cases of contagious diseases, notably *gaol fever*, a form of typhoid. Gaolers were typically unpaid officials who made their money by extracting fees from prisoners – for necessities such as food and bedding, and even for release.

Figure 5 Bristol Newgate Gaol at the end of the eighteenth century, showing the alms box for poor prisoners attached to the prison wall. Passers-by, who felt charitable, could donate coins to help feed and clothe those inside the prison.

4 The rise of imprisonment

From about 1760, efforts were made across the British Isles to reform prisons. The most famous reformer was John Howard. In 1773 Howard was appointed High Sheriff of Bedfordshire which gave him control over the county gaol. He was appalled by the conditions he found there. His demands for reform led him to travel the length and breadth of the United Kingdom creating a catalogue of prisons, with details of the conditions he found in each. His catalogue, published as *The State of the Prisons* in 1777, became a model for the next generation of penal reformers and, later, for prison inspection.

Figure 6 John Howard visiting an English prison. Originally drawn in the late 1700s by Francis Wheatley. Note the squalor of the prison, the lack of separation between men and women, and the presence of children, imprisoned with their mothers.

Howard's work was extremely influential and informed a raft of legislation which encouraged local authorities to reform their prisons. Between 1780 and 1799, around 60 prisons were built or substantially rebuilt in England and Wales. When Howard visited Ireland, he noted some attempts were already being made at prison reform. In 1786, Ireland witnessed the appointment of the first government-salaried prison inspector in the Western world. Jeremiah Fitzpatrick was an energetic man and has often been called 'the second Howard'. Through his efforts, many Irish prisons were built or reformed (Butler, 2016, p. 727).

As well as efforts to reform prisons, the use of imprisonment as a punishment underwent a significant transformation. In the 1700s, sentences of imprisonment were used relatively infrequently and typically only for very minor offences. In law, most crimes were punishable by whipping, branding or death by hanging. Although many crimes were officially punishable by death, the death penalty was used sparingly. It was meant to provide an example to deter others. Many of those sentenced to death were pardoned or had their sentences commuted to transportation, a form of exile, first to America and later to Australia.

At the end of the 1700s, more people accused of crime were being brought before the courts, and more of those who were accused were being convicted. This suggested to contemporaries that crime was increasing, though it is hard to tell from the available evidence whether this was true. The threat of execution, it seemed, was not deterring crime. This was compounded by the fact that, because it was not desirable to hang large numbers of people, the chance of being executed if capitally convicted was decreasing. By 1815, 90% of those condemned to death were either pardoned or transported (Gatrell, 1994, p. 21).

This led to calls for the reform of punishment and especially the greater use of sentences of imprisonment which were considered both proportionate (matching the gravity of the offence) and certain (prisoners would go to prison, rather than being pardoned). In 1816,

the first penitentiary run by central government was opened at Millbank, London. This prison was for men and women, convicted of crimes punishable by death or transportation, who were selected to serve long sentences of imprisonment instead.

Activity 2 Mapping the prison system in England and Wales during the 1800s

Allow approximately 10 minutes for this activity

The replacement of bodily or physical punishments – such as death, transportation, and whipping (among others) – with imprisonment led to the rise of new types of prisons in the early 1800s.

The penal system in all four nations became a complex web of institutions through which men, women and children flowed depending on the seriousness of the crime of which they were accused and, if convicted, the punishment given. Until 1877, local prisons were managed by local authorities and convict prisons were managed by central government.

Have a look at the diagram below which maps the prison system for England and Wales in the 1800s. It's quite detailed, because it was a complicated system! Don't worry, you don't need to remember everything, but the detail should enable you to identify three important points which are essential knowledge for this course. To help, here are three questions – have a go at answering them using the diagram.

1. The prison system comprised two sectors – the local and the convict. Local prisons accommodated remand prisoners (those awaiting trial) and those sentenced to imprisonment. Convict prisons held those convicted of serious offences and sentenced to transportation or (later) penal servitude (a long prison sentence which was served in stages). Can you identify the other crucial difference between local and convict prisons?
2. Although they held prisoners with different sentences, there was a relationship between the local and convict prison sectors. Can you briefly explain what that was?
3. The prison system was not static, but continued to evolve as punishments changed and new types of prison appeared. Can you identify any broad trends?

Click on the following link to access the diagram:
Prison system in England and Wales.

Click on the individual entries (for instance, 'Lock-up') to be taken to a more detailed account of that entry. Then click on 'Return to map'.

Provide your answer...

Discussion

1. **The other crucial difference between local prisons and convict prisons was the time that prisoners spent in them.** Sentences of imprisonment served in local prisons never exceeded two years and most were under three months. Many prisoners were sentenced to just one week. Remand prisoners were rarely held for more than a few months. Prisoners sent to convict prisons before being transported to Australia spent months or sometimes years

confined in them. Those who were not transported, or who were sentenced to penal servitude, spent more than two years in convict prisons (including long stretches at individual institutions). The difference is an important one, because learning – and by implication, rehabilitation – takes time. Short sentences limited the effectiveness of prison education.

2. **All prisoners who ended up in the convict sector first spent time in local prisons waiting for their trial.** It is worth noting too, that while local prisons typically accommodated those accused or convicted of crimes committed in the local area (broadly speaking), convict prisons, typically located in London and on the south coast, took prisoners from all over England and Wales. Transfer to the convict sector often took prisoners far away from family and friends.
3. **Over the course of the 1800s the number of different types of prisons decreased.** In the early 1800s, there were many different types of prisons, each of which purported to perform a specialist function in the prison system – for example, gaols for remand prisoners, prison hulks (decommissioned war ships fitted up as prisons) for 'invalids' (i.e. men considered too weak to undergo transportation to Australia), Pentonville for 'promising men' (i.e. those who showed signs they could be reformed). As the century progressed, the differences between prisons were eroded and the system was streamlined. In 1850, Millbank and Pentonville became prisons for all convicts serving their first stage of punishment in separate confinement. Hulks (in England) disappeared in the late 1850s. The juvenile prison was abolished in 1864. In 1865, all gaols and houses of correction became local prisons. By the 1880s, there were no longer probationary and public works prisons for men, just convict prisons, which often accommodated men in both stages. In the convict sector, the only remaining difference at the end of the century was between male and female prisons.

4.1 Irish and Scottish prisons

The diagram in the previous section only maps the prison system for England and Wales in the 1800s. Scotland and Ireland developed their own prison systems but these had many common features and, in the case of Scotland, connected with the English and Welsh prison system too.

Both Ireland and Scotland had local prisons which served as a point of entry into the prison system for those accused of crime, and which were used to accommodate those sentenced to short periods of imprisonment.

In 1840, a General Prison was established at Perth in Scotland for prisoners with sentences of imprisonment which exceeded nine months. In time it was also used for those serving the probationary stage of their transportation or penal servitude sentence. Otherwise, Scottish convicts were sent to convict prisons (and hulks) in England until the erection of Barlinnie Prison in 1882.

Ireland had its own convict prison system but there were similarities. The Richmond General Penitentiary in Grangegorman, opened in 1820, was Ireland's Millbank, and Mountjoy Prison (which opened in 1850) was Ireland's Pentonville. In 1853, Ireland diverged somewhat when it adopted a three-stage punishment for penal servitude

sentences. Convicts served a first stage in separate confinement, a second stage on public works, and a third stage in open prisons.

5 Penal reform after 1800

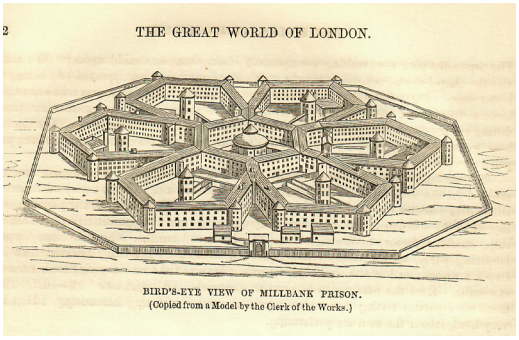


Figure 7 Millbank Penitentiary. Built between 1812 and 1816, for male and female convicts sentenced to transportation who would serve a sentence of imprisonment here instead. The geometric design and individual cells indicate the importance attached to routine, discipline and control.

Rising crime rates and the expanding use of imprisonment soon caused prisons which had been reformed in the late 1700s to become overcrowded and appear inadequate once more. Many prisons across Britain and Ireland had also remained untouched by the work of reformers such as Howard and Fitzpatrick.

A new generation took up the cause of penal reform. Like their predecessors, these new penal reformers also drew attention to the dreadful conditions in which prisoners were held. However, in the context of rising crime rates and the growing use of sentences of imprisonment, they paid greater attention to the character of the offender. Convicted criminals, they argued, should not be made worse as a result of their imprisonment but should be reformed and returned to society as productive Christian subjects.

Through the formation of lobby groups, including the Society for the Improvement of Prison Discipline in Britain and the Association for the Improvement of Prisons and Prison Discipline in Ireland, penal reformers put pressure on central government to act. Legislation to reform Irish prisons was passed in 1819 and 1821, and legislation for English and Welsh prisons in 1823, in the form of the Gaols Act. Attention focused on:

- the classification of prisoners to separate the convicted from the untried, and serious offenders from minor offenders
- the provision of employment to prevent idleness and foster good work habits
- religious instruction to reform the soul.

These core principles were combined with other reforms such as the prohibition of alcohol, a ban on the use of manacles (i.e. iron hand- or ankle-cuffs), and the provision of female warders for female prisoners. Such reforms helped to provide better conditions for teaching and learning in the prison. However, to explain the appearance of schemes to teach prisoners to read and write, developments outside of prisons also need to be considered.

6 Social unrest

In the late 1700s and early 1800s, Britain and Ireland were in the grip of a social crisis. Under pressure from the increasing pace of industrialisation and urbanisation, the old order appeared to be breaking down.

During the 1700s, many people moved from the countryside to towns for work. By the 1790s, about 60% of people in Britain and Ireland lived in the countryside and 40% in towns and cities. London was by far the largest city with about one million people, followed by 187,000 in Dublin. There had been rapid population growth over the last 40 years and with more people than there were jobs, wages were low. In Manchester, for example, unemployment was high and the endemic poverty was made worse by poor harvests and (due to the war with France between 1793 and 1802) fewer sales overseas.

Political unrest followed social change. In France, there was a revolution in 1789. Revolutionaries abolished aristocratic titles, called everybody citizen, and ended the practice of slavery in French colonies.

Across the British Isles, ideas spread about the ‘rights of man’. These ideas were dangerous for the ruling elites, given that, in Britain and Ireland, about half the land was owned by just 12,000–13,000 families. It was also possible to buy a variety of influential jobs, including that of MP, which further cemented the inequalities in society.

Figure 8 On 16 August 1819, local magistrates ordered the cavalry to charge a crowd of more than 60,000 people who had gathered at St Peter’s Fields, Manchester, to demand parliamentary reform. The event became known as ‘Peterloo’.

Rebellion broke out in Ireland in 1798 and there were violent protests by Catholics against the Protestant elite. Nor was such fighting confined to Ireland. Over 200 people died in a week of anti-Catholic rioting in London in June 1780. This involved attacks on metropolitan prisons, including Newgate Gaol, the New Gaol Southwark, the Surrey House of Correction and the Marshalsea prison. Hundreds of prisoners were released by the rioters.

There were riots in Birmingham in 1791 in defence of Church and King. In 1819, a Manchester protest meeting dispersed by armed cavalry resulted in approximately 18

deaths, and over 600 people injured. This last event, Peterloo, rapidly became a symbol of the tyranny of the old order, the fecklessness of the mob and the need for change.

Illiteracy (the inability to read and write), which had been acceptable in traditional, rural societies, began to look out of place and uncivilised in new, urban environments. Industrial employment combined with migration to the towns was stalling the spread of literacy among the lower classes. At the same time, the dissemination of cheap, seditious literature, such as Thomas Paine's *Rights of Man* (1791), suggested to the ruling elite that the acquisition and use of the skills of reading and writing needed to be controlled. A growing number of philanthropic individuals and groups sought to combat poverty, radicalism and crime by teaching the poor and prisoners to read and write.

7 Christian Evangelicalism

One proposed solution to the social crisis was the promotion of Christianity, or the evangelisation of the masses. In 1800, about 90% of the UK's population were Christians. Despite this, social elites believed that many of the poorer people had stopped attending church and knew little about God. Reacquainting them with the Bible, they argued, would secure social harmony and reduce crime.

Proponents of this belief were leaders of an Evangelical revival which began around 1740. This movement led to the formation of an Evangelical party within the Church of England, the revitalisation of older dissenting congregations (such as the Society of Friends, or Quakers, and the Independents), and the formation of new denominations, notably Methodism. All placed great emphasis on personal salvation and individual access to the Bible. The ability to read was therefore an essential tool for Christianisation. Instruction in writing helped to reinforce the skill of reading and to aid the memorisation of key messages from the Bible.

Evangelicals of all stripes took a particular interest in prisons and prisoners. John Wesley (1703–91), the founder of Methodism, preached at least 67 times in prisons, raised money for clothing and blankets and encouraged followers to visit prisons too. His campaigns led the authorities at Bristol's Newgate Prison to separate male and female prisoners, end drunkenness, and provide Bibles for prisoners to read. Wesley provided inspiration for penal reformer John Howard who was himself an Independent.

After 1800, Quakers took a leading role in the penal reform movement. Most famous was Elizabeth Fry (1780–1845). After visiting Newgate Gaol in 1813, Fry successfully campaigned for the improvement of conditions on the female side of the prison. She also established a school for children imprisoned with their mothers which was later expanded to include adult prisoners.

Figure 9 'Mrs Fry Reading to the Prisoners at Newgate in the Year 1816', by Jerry Barrett. This famous scene was painted in 1860 by an artist who had not been present at the event. It is representative and allegorical rather than accurate. To Fry's left are several notable prison reformers. Some of the prisoners are flouting Fry's prison rules by drinking

beer and gambling.

As a result of Fry's efforts, prison visiting became fashionable and associations of lady visitors were established throughout the UK. Quakers, some of whom were related to Fry, banded together to establish the Society for the Improvement of Prison Discipline in 1816. In this undertaking, they were joined by several leading Church of England Evangelicals. Focused on redemption, or the saving of souls from damnation, Anglican Evangelicals believed that the country's most troubled and troublesome people – alcoholics, slaves, prostitutes and prisoners – needed Christianity.

8 Utilitarianism

An alternative solution to society's ills was offered by Utilitarians. Their goal was the arrangement of society to achieve the 'greatest happiness of the greatest number'. Social harmony, they argued, could be achieved through legislation which channelled the people's impulses in ways that best served society. Literacy offered a means of self-improvement and, therefore, a solution to poverty.

Utilitarians also became active in penal reform. Jeremy Bentham (1748–1832) provided early leadership through his involvement in the quest to establish a national penitentiary (what became Millbank Penitentiary). His design for what he termed the 'Panopticon' assumed that humans wanted to maximise their pleasure and minimise their pain.

If prisoners believed that they were constantly under surveillance they would be motivated to regulate their own behaviour. He rejected hard labour, arguing that more interesting employment would lead the idle to love work. In his opinion, literacy made people more useful and productive.

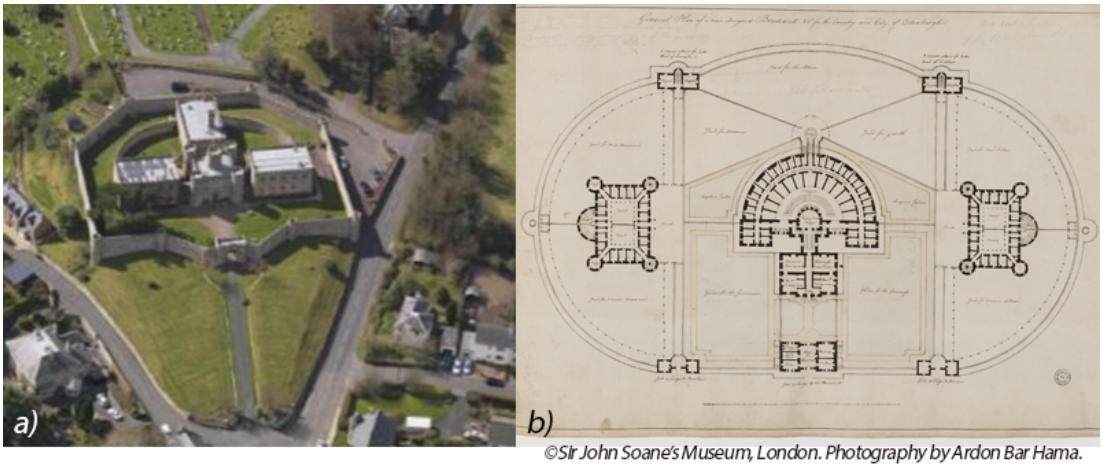


Figure 10 (a) and (b) Jedburgh Prison, in Scotland, was built in 1823. Each individual prisoner was in a single cell which was designed to be visible by a single guard concealed in the central tower. This was to be an economic and utilitarian solution to prison design. The design took direct inspiration from Bentham's proposal. There was also separation of prisoners by class with three accommodation blocks for male or female criminals, male debtors and young prisoners. The aim was to improve the physical and moral health of the prisoners. The jail is now a museum.

While approaching the problem from different perspectives, both Fry (or the Evangelicals) and Bentham (or the Utilitarians) supported the classification of prisoners, the use of productive labour in prisons, and the provision of both religious and scholarly education. Both saw people as capable of bettering themselves, and of improving their behaviour by controlling their desires.

9 The expansion of education

Both Utilitarians and Evangelicals favoured the spread of education. They were united in the idea that literacy could have ‘a profound impact on the mental and moral character of the individual and by extension [wider] society’ (Vincent, 1989, p. 6).

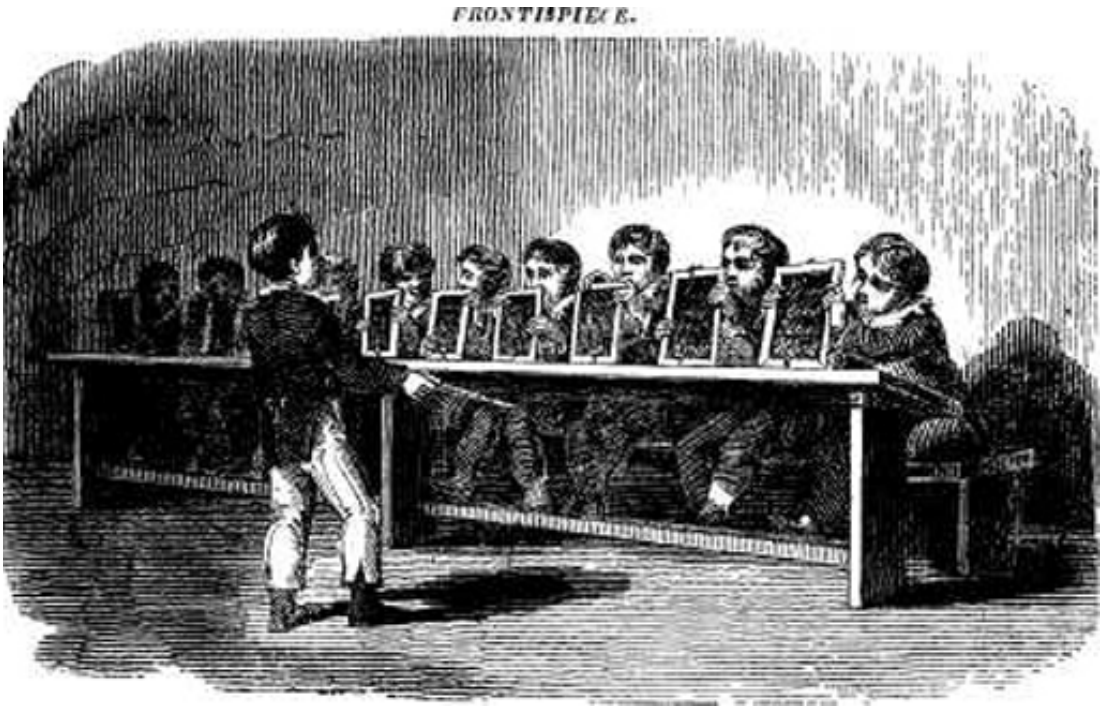


Figure 11 Frontispiece from Joseph Lancaster, The British system of education: being a complete epitome of the improvements and inventions practised at the Royal Free Schools, Borough Road, Southwark, 1810. The monitor, the boy with the stick, has just given the command ‘Show slates!’ and can see that every pupil has written ‘Long live the King’. Lancaster, J. and Corston, W. (1810) The British System of Education: Being a Complete Epitome of the Improvements and Inventions Practised at the Royal Free Schools, Borough-Road, Southwark, London, Longman & Co.

Members of both movements were involved in the expansion of education in England, Wales and Ireland from the late 1700s. As Scotland already had a parish school system, the task was considered less urgent. In Ireland, England and Wales, Christian bodies moved to supplement the teaching of the poor provided by private schools (i.e. schools run by working men or women who were themselves barely literate). Sunday schools (which were not only for children) appeared in the 1780s and spread throughout England, Wales and into Scotland.

In England and Wales, two rival school societies were established, the British and Foreign Schools Society (1808), which was run by Christians who did not belong to the Church of England (non-conformists), and the Church of England-run National Schools Society (1811). Both promoted a system of teaching called ‘monitorial’, in which pupil-monitors assisted trained teachers to drill their peers to memorise the letters of the alphabet and build up to words. Concerns about adult illiteracy led to the establishment of an ‘adult school’ by non-conformists in Nottingham in 1798. Methodists began an Adult School Movement in 1812. By 1818, there were more than 200 adult schools in England and Wales.

Reports published by the school societies and MPs at Westminster increasingly proclaimed that crimes were most often committed by those with the least education. Low levels of crime among Quakers, who were often highly educated, and Scots, who had access to a national system of education, were cited as evidence. Thomas Pole, one of the founders of the adult school movement, wrote in 1816:

By a comparison of the criminal calendars of England and Scotland, it is found that criminal offences are ELEVEN times more frequent in England, in equal portions of the population, than they are in Scotland! … What constitutes the difference? In Scotland the poor are educated – in England they are not.

(Pole, 1816, p. 60)

This view, combined with the expansion of education in British and Irish society, and the role of Quakers and Utilitarians in the penal reform movement, led to experiments with education in prisons. In 1814, the Coventry Branch of the National Schools Society helped to establish a school for juvenile offenders in Warwick County Gaol (Crone, 2022, ch.1). The chaplain at Millbank Penitentiary was tasked with providing instruction in reading and writing when the prison opened in 1816.

Reports of inspections carried out by the Society for the Improvement of Prison Discipline in Britain and the Association for the Improvement of Prisons and Prison Discipline in Ireland revealed the development of many more schemes, some of which were quite advanced. At prisons in Sligo, Naas and Carrickfergus, for example, schoolmasters were employed to teach reading, writing and arithmetic to prisoners.

Activity 3 What have been the reasons for supporting learning in prison?

Allow approximately 10 minutes for this activity

1. Summarise the reasons why reformers in the early 1800s promoted the education of prisoners.
2. Note any other reasons you can think of which support the case for prison education.

Provide your answer...

Discussion

Reformers in the early 1800s promoted the education of prisoners for the following reasons:

- Crime rates were lower among educated people.
- Reading enabled the personal study of the Bible which led to moral improvement.
- Literacy offered a means of self-improvement, and therefore a solution to poverty.
- Literacy was seen to have a profound impact on the mental and moral character of an individual and therefore on wider society.

Other reasons for providing education in prisons might include:

- Studying can give prisoners self-confidence and a sense of personal achievement.
- Through education prisoners can gain skills which will be useful on release.
- Having evidence of learning might aid a prisoner's case for parole.
- Educated prisoners are less likely to return to prison.

There are some important similarities between these two lists. In the early 1800s and today there is a belief in the transformative potential of education – that the ability to read and write and the acquisition of new knowledge can change a person's life for the better. You will explore this theme further in the sessions that follow. How did the authorities try to harness the transformative power of education? How successful were they?

At the same time, it is important to remember that education can be used for other purposes too, some of which have little to do with improving lives. Education can be used as a tool for pacification, or to occupy otherwise idle prisoners. In certain forms it might also serve as a tool for discipline. The magistrates in charge of Reading Gaol in the 1840s supported the programme of rote learning (the memorisation and recitation of passages of text) carried out there because they saw its value as a punishment. They believed it was more irksome than some forms of hard labour.

10 How do people know about the past?

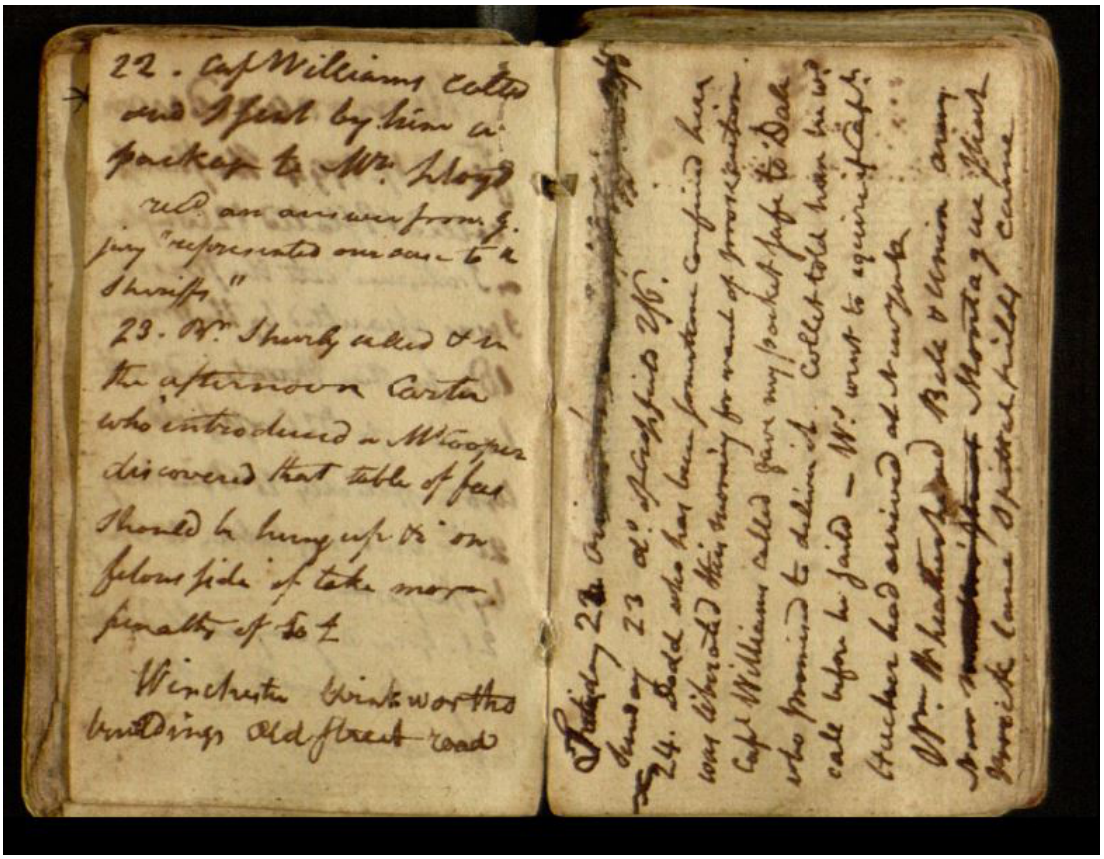


Figure 12 Entry in the Diary of Thomas Lloyd kept in Newgate Prison, 1794–1796. Thomas Lloyd (1756–1827) was an American who was imprisoned in the Fleet Prison London for debt. While in prison, Lloyd posted a 'declaration of republican principles' on a chapel door. He was found guilty of seditious libel and fined, sentenced to an hour in the pillory and three years in Newgate Prison.

We can learn about the past by using different types of evidence and sources. You could, for example, read a specialist book written by a historian. This will have been written after the event. It will use selected evidence and will provide a commentary and the views of the author. Such a book is called a **secondary source**.

To write secondary sources, authors study **primary sources**. These are materials created during the period being studied. They might include official reports, accounts of what was said in Parliament, correspondence or diaries from the time. Other primary sources might be newspaper reports, posters and images (for example, drawings of prisons or prisoners). From the 1820s, prison chaplains and inspectors began to keep records of what was being taught in prisons and how it was taught. These records are useful primary sources for the topic you are studying now.

However, just because a source was written at the time does not mean it is necessarily 'true' or unbiased. When writing accounts people contradict themselves, omit, interpret or even lie. They also write with a specific purpose in mind. Take, for example, the accounts of prison reformers such as Elizabeth Fry and members of the Society for the Improvement of Prison Discipline, who provided many descriptions of the squalor and misery they found in British prisons. Officials such as governors, chaplains and magistrates who were in charge of prisons often countered these with declarations of their

good management and care of prisoners. Historians now acknowledge that both groups were selective in their descriptions of imprisonment in order to make their case for and against reform.

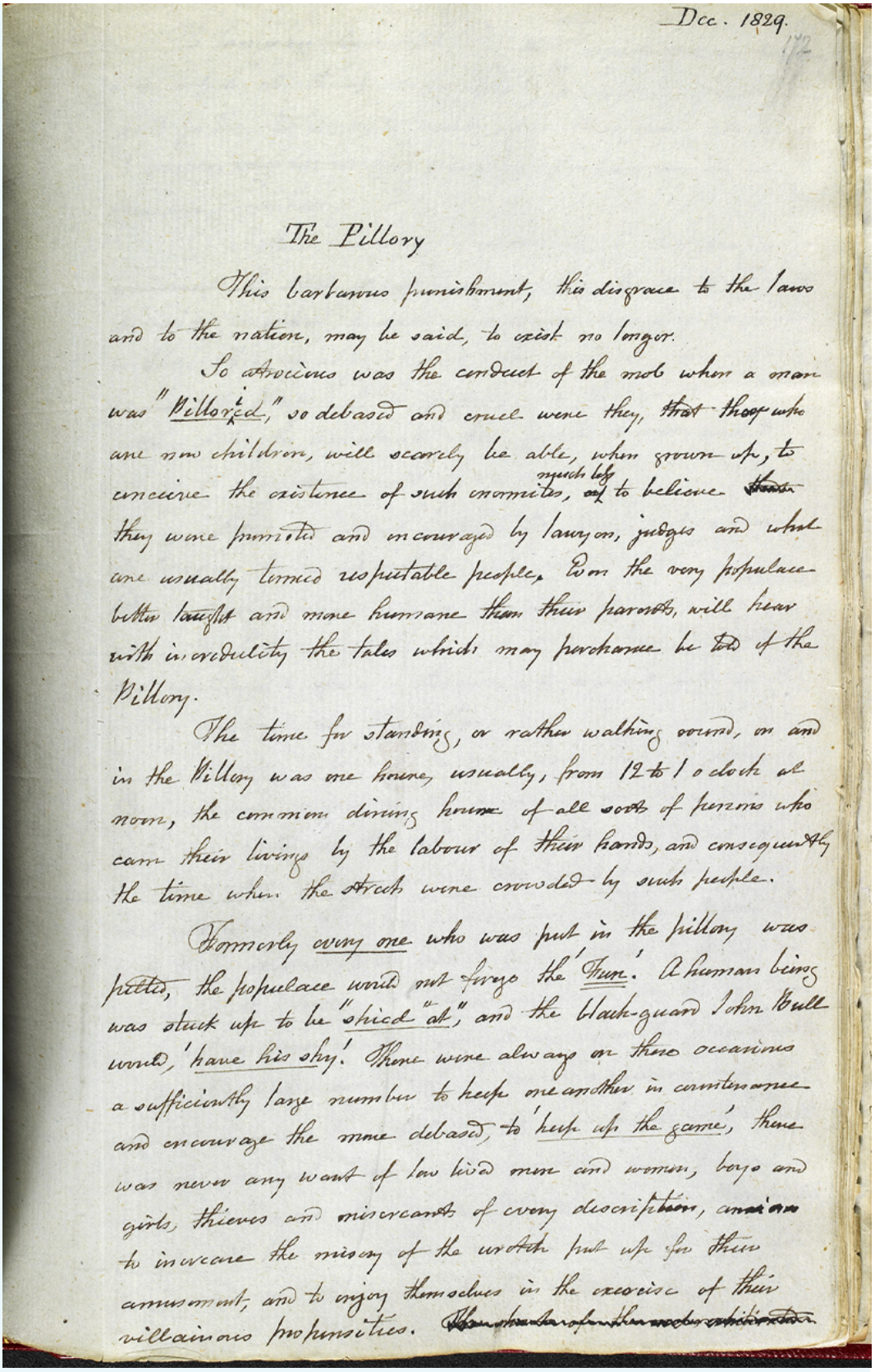
When looking at any sources (primary or secondary), try to assess the purpose, values or motive of the author. Perhaps you can see where the author has been selective or remained silent? Maybe you can make a judgement based on a comparison with another source, such as another prisoner's diary, another article from a different newspaper, or another history book on the same topic.

Activity 4 Using a source

Allow approximately 30 minutes for this activity

Part 1

Write a list of questions that you might ask to assess the relevance and value of a written source. You might find it helpful to use the source shown in Figure 13 as inspiration.



Dec. 1829.

The Pillory

This barbarous punishment, this disgrace to the laws and to the nation, may be said, to exist no longer.

So atrocious was the conduct of the mob when a man was "Pilloried," so debased and cruel were they, that those who are now children, will scarcely be able, when grown up, to conceive the existence of such enormities, much less to believe that they were promoted and encouraged by lawyers, judges and what are usually termed respectable people. Even the very populace better taught and more humane than their parents, will hear with incredulity the tales which may perchance be told of the Pillory.

The time for standing, or rather walking round, in and in the Pillory was one hour, usually, from 12 to 1 o'clock at noon, the common dining hour of all sorts of persons who earn their livings by the labour of their hands, and consequently the time when the streets were crowded by such people.

Formerly every one who was put in the pillory was pitied, the populace would not forgo the 'fun.' A human being was stuck up to be "shied at," and the black-guard John Bull would 'have his shy!' There were always on these occasions a sufficiently large number to keep one another in countenance and encourage the more debased, to 'keep up the game', there was never any want of low lived men and women, boys and girls, thieves and miscreants of every description, anxious to increase the misery of the wretch put up for their amusement, and to enjoy themselves in the exercise of their villainous propensities.

Figure 13 An 1829 diary entry by Francis Place, 1771–1854. A radical campaigner for public education and friend of Jeremy Bentham, here he describes the pillory. A person could be locked into this wooden framework. It had holes for the head and

hands and was placed in a public location. People could abuse the prisoner and throw things at them. Here is a transcript of the text shown in the figure. The term ‘John Bull’ was first used in 1712. He is a representation of the country.

The pillory

This barbarous punishment, this disgrace to the laws and to the nation, may be said to exist no longer.

So atrocious was the conduct of the mob when a man was “pilloried”, so debased and cruel were they, that those who are now children, will scarcely be able, when grown up, to conceive the existence of such enormities, much less to believe they were permitted and encouraged by lawyers, juries and what are usually termed respectable people. Even the very populace better taught and more humane than their parents will hear with incredulity the tales which may perchance be told of the pillory.

The time for standing, or rather walking round, on and in the Pillory, was one hour usually, from 12 to 1 O’Clock at noon, the common dining hour of all sorts of persons who earn their livings by the labour of their hands, and consequently the time when the streets were crowded by such people.

Formerly *every one* who was put in the pillory was pelted, the populace would not forgo the “fun”. A human being was stuck up to be “shied at”, and the blackguard John Bull would “have his shy”. There were always on these occasions a sufficiently large number to help one another in countenance and encourage the more debased, to “help up the game”, there was never any want of low lived men and women, boys and girls, thieves and miscreants of every description, and to increase the misery of the wretch put up for their amusement, and to enjoy themselves in the exercise of their villainous propensities.

Provide your answer...

Discussion

Here are some questions, but this is not an exhaustive list. You may have thought of other ones. When you come to look at sources in other sessions you might want to refer back to these questions. Note that a source might be a document or an image or a history book or a novel. You can ask similar questions of any of these.

1. When was it written or produced? Knowing this tells us whether the source is a primary source (written at the time) or a secondary source (written later by someone who did not live through the event). Dates on primary sources allow us to gauge how close the author was to events they were describing, and to place the source in the context of other things that were happening.
2. Who is the author? This is important because it can help us understand their motivation. For example, knowing that the author was a middle-class female Christian prison visitor might help you to understand some of their presumptions and motives.
3. Is there anything in the text which tells you why the author wrote this? What was at stake for this author?
4. Is the author making a specific argument, for example, for prison reform, or against the teaching of reading in prisons? Might they have selected evidence to support their case?

5. Does the author employ emotive language? Do they use seemingly neutral information?
6. How does this text compare to others on the same topic?
7. Who is the intended readership of this source?

Part 2

Return to any notes you made about the video in the Introduction to this session and see if you want to change them in the light of what you have read. Try to summarise the different approaches to the history of the prison outlined in the video.

Provide your answer...

Discussion

In the video three different approaches to the rise of imprisonment are outlined.

- One focused on the roles of reformers who had successfully argued for prison as an alternative to hanging. Although corporal punishment, such as the use of the lash, continued throughout the 1800s, transportation ceased, prisoners were clothed and fed and were not required to pay for their own accommodation.
- Another approach was to see reform not as a triumph of humanity but as a way to promote stability and order, to mould prisoners through disciplining their minds and bodies. Prisoners could be observed, categorised, and controlled through hard labour and the use of Christian observance to promote obedience.
- A third perspective examined the implementation of these ideas at the level at which people lived their lives. Across the UK there was a lack of uniformity and consistency regarding treatment and perspectives. While some politicians and governors focused on keeping order, not all of them achieved this goal or saw it as their main aim. Developments were determined by trial and error and individual passion as well as based on data derived from studying prisoners.

11 This session's quiz

Well done – you have reached the end of Session 1. You can now check what you've learned this session by taking the end-of-session quiz.

Session 1 practice quiz

Open the quiz in a new or window and come back here when you have finished.

12 Summary of Session 1

In this session, you have explored the transformation of the prison in the late 1700s and early 1800s and you have looked at how and why schemes to educate prisoners began to appear in prisons across the UK from *c.*1800.

You should now:

- be able to outline the development of the prison from dungeon and lock-up to purpose-built penitentiary
- have a sense of the wider political and social events and ideas which framed the rise of the prison and prison education
- be aware of the types of sources historians use to gain a sense of what happened in the past.

Nowadays it is widely recognised that learning is a social activity, that rather than simply receiving wisdom from teachers, we build knowledge together. You might also see learning as framed by the built environment, the culture of the wider society, the calibre of the teachers and the resources as well as the enthusiasm, skills and motivation of the learner.

In the next few sessions there will be opportunities to learn about life in prisons, the spread of prison education and where and how the teaching and learning took place. And you will have a chance to consider for yourself some of the sources used by historians, including the personal testimony of prisoners.

You can now go to Session 2.

Session 2: The rise of the prison school

Introduction

While the 1823 Gaols Act was significant as the first example of state-funded support for education in England and Wales – limited state aid for elementary schools had to wait another 10 years – there were limits. The Act applied only to local prisons – those run mostly by county and large borough authorities – and specifically only to one-third of these. It contained no mechanism to force the authorities in charge of these prisons to comply with it. In other words, local authorities were not obliged to educate their prisoners.

Despite this, by 1847 over half of all English local prisons had made arrangements to teach prisoners to read and often to write and cipher as well. On any given day, roughly 20 to 30 percent of prisoners in local prisons were receiving scholarly instruction. Convict prisons built after Millbank Penitentiary in 1816 – Parkhurst Juvenile Prison (1838) and Pentonville Prison (1842) – followed its example and developed education programmes. In 1848, all convicts on prison hulks (decommissioned naval vessels used as prisons) were held back from hard labour for half a day to attend ‘school’.

Figure 1 Inside the austere chapel at Lincoln Castle County Gaol.

In order to accommodate education in the prison changes had to be made – to space and timetables, for example. At the same time, the penal environment and new forms of prison discipline shaped the delivery of education in the prison. Formal prison schools replaced many informal modes of imparting instruction.

In this second session you will learn more about the expansion of prison education in Britain and Ireland after the penal reforms of the early 1820s. This session also outlines ideas about how you might plan your studies.

By the end of this session, you should be able to:

- discuss the expansion of educational provision in prisons
- discuss how the penal environment shaped forms of learning in the prison
- use a timetable to organise your study time.

Let's begin by returning to Lincoln Castle Gaol. In the next video, Rosalind Crone explains the impact that the rise of two rival forms of prison discipline – silence and separation – in the 1830s had on the architecture and experience of imprisonment at Lincoln Castle Gaol. Watch this video now, and try to write down some brief notes about the ideas being presented in it. You will refer back to these later in this session.

Video content is not available in this format.

1 Tracking the spread of prison education

From the 1820s, as a result of the penal reform movement, the central government began to collect information on prisons in Britain and Ireland. Two new prison inspectors in Ireland began to visit and to deliver official reports on prisons. Their reports showed that arrangements to teach reading and writing were being made in many prisons.

Figure 2 The back page of the Horsley House of Correction Prison Register. Here you can see the prison clerk summarising personal information collected in the register in preparation for the annual return which had to be submitted to the prison inspector.

In England and Wales, those who managed the gaols and houses of correction which came under the terms of the 1823 Gaols Act were required to submit annual reports to the Home Secretary. Governors had to provide information about the number of prisoners and to say whether prisoners had been supplied with books and given instruction. Chaplains were asked to remark on the 'condition' of prisoners. Often, they described how many prisoners could read and write and what they were doing for those who could not.

Reports mentioned the appointment of teachers, the purchase of books and writing equipment and the use of prisoners to help teach reading and writing. They suggest that education was spreading through the local prison sector, albeit slowly. Historians who use these documents need to recognise that when reporting to the Home Secretary governors might have wished to highlight some issues and minimise others.

Concern that so many prisons in England, Wales and Scotland remained unreformed – either because they were not covered by the 1823 Gaols Act, or because the prison authorities refused to comply with it – led to calls for the establishment of a British prison inspectorate. In 1835, five inspectors were appointed. Four men covered England and Wales and one covered the whole of Scotland (as well as part of north-east England for a time).

They were primarily information gatherers. They could remind prison governors of the legal requirement to instruct prisoners, and they could recommend changes to education programmes, but they could not force governors to act. The inspectors were also inconsistent in their approach. Only some took a keen interest in education. Where they found that arrangements for instruction had not been made, they did not always insist that prisoners should be educated.

Nevertheless, education spread. Between 1823 and 1850, it appears that many local prison officials were keen to introduce education, either because they believed in its transformative potential, or because they saw it as a useful tool for discipline and

maintaining order, or both. The prison inspectors' reports also suggest that the spread of prison education was driven by the closure of small, inefficient prisons which could never have provided prisoners with instruction. As small prisons closed, and those which continued to operate grew bigger, education in prisons became more likely and cost-effective. So, from around 1850, while the number of prisons with education programmes stabilised, the proportion of prisons with programmes continued to rise, until it reached approximately 100 per cent in the 1800s (Crone, 2022, ch.1).

2 Inclusion and exclusion

Even though arrangements to instruct prisoners in reading and writing might have existed within a prison, it does not mean that every prisoner in that prison had access to education. In convict prisons in Britain and Ireland, where populations were larger, and convicts remained for much longer periods of time, efforts were made to educate men and women, adults and children alike, even though the physical separation of these groups created a need for bespoke arrangements. Because the teaching of reading and writing was often bound up with moral instruction, and the Bible was used as the principal text, there was a strong belief that all could benefit from attending school, whatever the level of their knowledge. In practice, those prisoners working in the prisons as cooks, bakers, cleaners, nurses or in artisanal trades, were often unable to attend classes, and infirmary patients also tended to miss out.

Figure 3 Wymondham Bridewell in Norfolk was one of the first female prisons in Britain. Because of their small number and short sentences, the women imprisoned here did not receive any instruction until the late 1840s when the matron began to teach reading and spelling. Before then, prison officials argued that the women were too busy doing the washing to be given any schooling. Wymondham Bridewell is now a heritage museum and open to the public.

Populations were even more fragmented in local prisons. Legislation required that male prisoners were kept separate from female prisoners, that prisoners awaiting trial (or on remand) were kept separate from those who had been convicted, and that petty offenders (i.e. misdemeanants) were kept separate from serious offenders (i.e. felons).

Physical separation could lead to exclusion from education. For example, in the 1820s and 1830s female prisoners frequently missed out because there were often relatively few of them and because they required special arrangements. Male schoolmasters and chaplains could only teach them if a female officer was in the room. Female prisoners were often dependent on instruction offered by the matron (if she had time and was able)

or charitable lady visitors. Male juveniles were sometimes given instruction in order to separate them from adult male prisoners, who were left uninstructed. Over time, barriers to education based on gender and age eroded (Crone, 2022, ch.1).

At some local prisons the authorities experimented with compulsion. Daily attendance at lessons was made compulsory at Chester County Gaol in 1836, and by 1838 no one was exempt from attending classes taught by the schoolmaster (in the presence of the matron for the female prisoners) at Leicester County Gaol (*Inspectors, Northern & Eastern, 2nd Report*, 1837, p. 17; *Inspectors, Southern & Western, 4th Report*, 1839, p. 222).

However, participation in scholarly instruction in most local prisons was voluntary, and in 1843 new rules and regulations drawn up by the Home Office and circulated to local prisons in England and Wales stated that prisoners should not be compelled to 'receive instruction' (*Regulations for Prisons*, 1843, rule 129). Instead, it was suggested, and in many prisons enacted, that access to education should be given as a reward for good conduct. Prisoners aged under 17 years, however, were usually forced to attend school while in prison.

Some local prison officials questioned whether prisoners confined for short periods could benefit from instruction and restricted access to education to those with sentences of three months or more. This worked against female prisoners, who tended to be imprisoned for much shorter periods than men. Often prisoners who were already able to read, or read and write, were excluded from the prison school, though they continued to receive some religious instruction. A small number of officials began to suggest that some prisoners were unable to learn how to read and write. In 1835 the chaplain at Swaffham House of Correction argued that the prisoner aged under 25 might be taught to read in six months, but for those above that age it was much more difficult and many refused to learn (*Inspectors, Northern & Eastern, 1st Report*, 1836, p. 48).

Activity 1 Arrangements for instruction at Preston House of Correction

Allow approximately 10 minutes for this activity

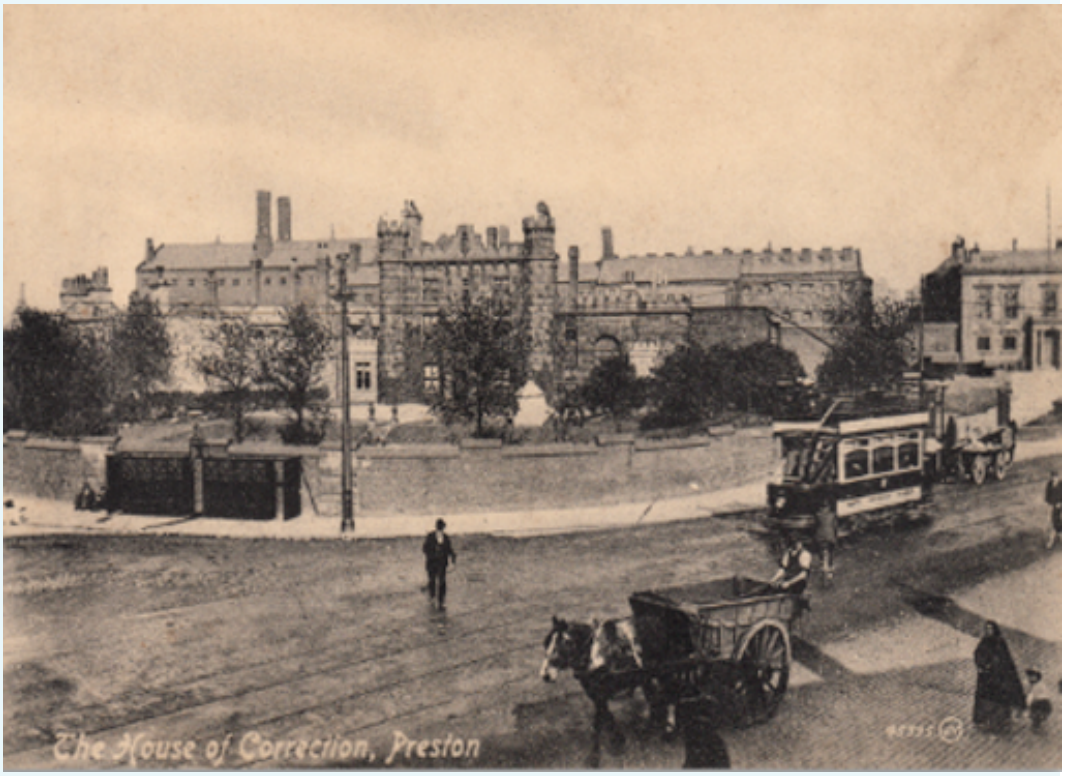


Figure 4 Prisons in the 1800s were often built to look like castles in order to remind local populations of the authority of the law. This is Preston House of Correction, first built in 1789 and substantially rebuilt in the early 1840s. Between 1823 and 1858, the Rev. John Clay was chaplain at Preston.

Read the following extract from the annual report of the Rev. John Clay, prison chaplain at the Preston House of Correction, for the year 1825. As you read it, take notes which address the following questions:

1. What arrangements were made to teach prisoners to read at this prison?
2. Were they effective?
3. What might have been the benefits of such arrangements?
4. Can you think of any drawbacks?

Annual report of Rev. John Clay, 1825

A system of mutual instruction is still practised among the prisoners of all classes. They are supplied with the necessary books; and it is generally found that those who can read are not only willing, but in many cases anxious, to instruct their more ignorant fellow prisoners … In the two principal wards of the prison, viz., the misdemeanants' and convicted felons', rooms are appropriated to a school, and it is not an unusual thing to find on a Sunday morning twenty-eight or thirty prisoners in the former, and fifteen or twenty in the latter – all of them assembled by their own free choice, and all of them occupied in giving or receiving instruction…

(Clay, 1969, p. 132)

Provide your answer...

Discussion

1. At Preston House of Correction prisoners were supplied with ‘the necessary books’ (i.e. elementary books) and encouraged to teach each other to read.
2. The chaplain seems positive about the arrangements. He says the prisoners are ‘anxious’ to participate. However, we do not know how many learned to read as a consequence.
3. There were multiple benefits. Not only was the arrangement voluntary but prisoners were actively engaged in their instruction. Learning from a peer with whom you can identify can be effective and it can foster self-confidence. It was still the common practice outside prisons for children to learn from literate adults or older children. There were benefits for the prison too. Instruction could take place in existing spaces in the prison and during times when prisoners were not working (in this case, Sunday morning). You might have noticed the reference to ‘misdemeanants’ (petty offenders) and ‘felons’ (serious offenders) – these two classes of prisoners were supposed to be kept separate. These arrangements did not interfere with prison classification systems.
4. As for drawbacks, these arrangements depended on the existence of prisoners who knew how to read well enough to teach others. This might have been a problem in prisons with smaller populations, or among female prisoners who were often a small group and who had to be kept apart from male prisoners.

3 Ways of educating

Education within the prison took a variety of forms. In some prisons, like Preston House of Correction, prisoners were given books – primers, spelling books, and grammars – and writing implements – pens and paper or pencils and slates – and told to instruct each other. While some chaplains found prisoners were uninterested, other chaplains were impressed with how they got on. The governor at Louth House of Correction declared in 1837, '[the prisoners] instruct themselves as well as they can, and it is quite wonderful to see in this way the improvement they make' (*Inspectors, Northern & Eastern, 3rd Report*, 1837–38, p. 52).

Figure 5 Sarah Martin, visiting the prisoners at Great Yarmouth Borough Gaol. In this picture, Sarah Martin is reading to men and women as some of them work. She also taught prisoners how to read and write.

More often, some kind of teacher was appointed to instruct the prisoners. Sometimes a literate prisoner who had behaved well filled the role. Other times, the authorities benefited from the visits of a charitable lady or gentleman who took it upon themselves to teach the prisoners to read and write. One of the most famous prison visitors was Sarah Martin who, between 1818 and 1843, taught the prisoners at Great Yarmouth Borough Gaol to read and write (Rogers, 2009).

Family members of prison officers were also asked to teach. At Ely Gaol in 1849, the governor's daughter, aged 11, taught the female prisoners. Prison officers – warders, matrons, and even chaplains – sometimes stepped in to provide instruction. At some prisons, paid schoolmasters, or, less often, paid schoolmistresses, were employed to teach the prisoners (Crone, 2022, ch.1).

Officials, then, drew on a range of available resources in order to teach prisoners to read and write. However, as you shall see, those arrangements which appeared to offer the least disruption to the penal environment – such as prisoners teaching each other – or required minimal financial outlay – the use of prisoner-schoolmasters, charitable visitors, or family members – soon proved to be the most problematic for the authorities.

Activity 2 Silence and separation

Allow approximately 5 minutes for this activity

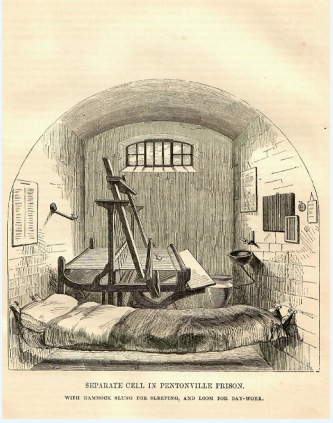


Figure 6 A separate cell at Pentonville Prison. The cells were large enough to enable prisoners to work in them during the day. This one is fitted with a handloom. Others had hand cranks. The cells also had running water, their own toilet facilities and heating, which was highly advanced at the time, but which also meant that there was little need for the prisoner to leave his cell. The sole purpose of the window was to supply natural light. It was deliberately high so that prisoners had no way of seeing out into the world.

In the Introduction to this session, you watched a short video on the rise of silence and separation, two competing forms of prison discipline that appeared in the mid-1830s. Take another look at any notes you made. Considering the various ways in which prisoners were taught to read and write, what impact do you think the imposition of silence or separation might have had on prison education?

Provide your answer...

Discussion

Under the silent system, although prisoners remained in association, any form of communication between them – verbal, written or physical – was strictly prohibited. Under the separate system, prisoners were locked in solitary cells as much as possible, and were also forbidden to communicate when brought into association for exercise or chapel services.

These rules on contact between prisoners meant that forms of mutual instruction or peer learning were abolished. Prisoners were also no longer able to be appointed as teachers. In some prisons, in consequence of the imposition of silence or separation, prisoners were left without instruction for some time until new arrangements could be made.

At the same time, education in prisons became more important under both the silent and separate systems. The ability to read provided mental relief for prisoners, and could protect at least some from depression and mental illness. Separation in theory relied on prisoners being able to read the Bible, and to understand its messages of Christian salvation, especially when the visits of the chaplain were necessarily short and few and far between.

4 The rise of the prison schoolmaster

The period 1835 to 1855 witnessed the rise of the prison schoolmaster. This was in part a consequence of the imposition of silence and separation. Schoolmasters were often employed to replace prisoners who had been teaching. The new importance given to education meant that prison officials were eager to employ qualified teachers rather than relying on the efforts of family members and subordinate officers. Regulations for local prisons in England and Wales published by the Home Office in 1840 insisted that schoolmasters and schoolmistresses had to be employed in large prisons (*Regulations for Prisons*, 1840, rule 178).

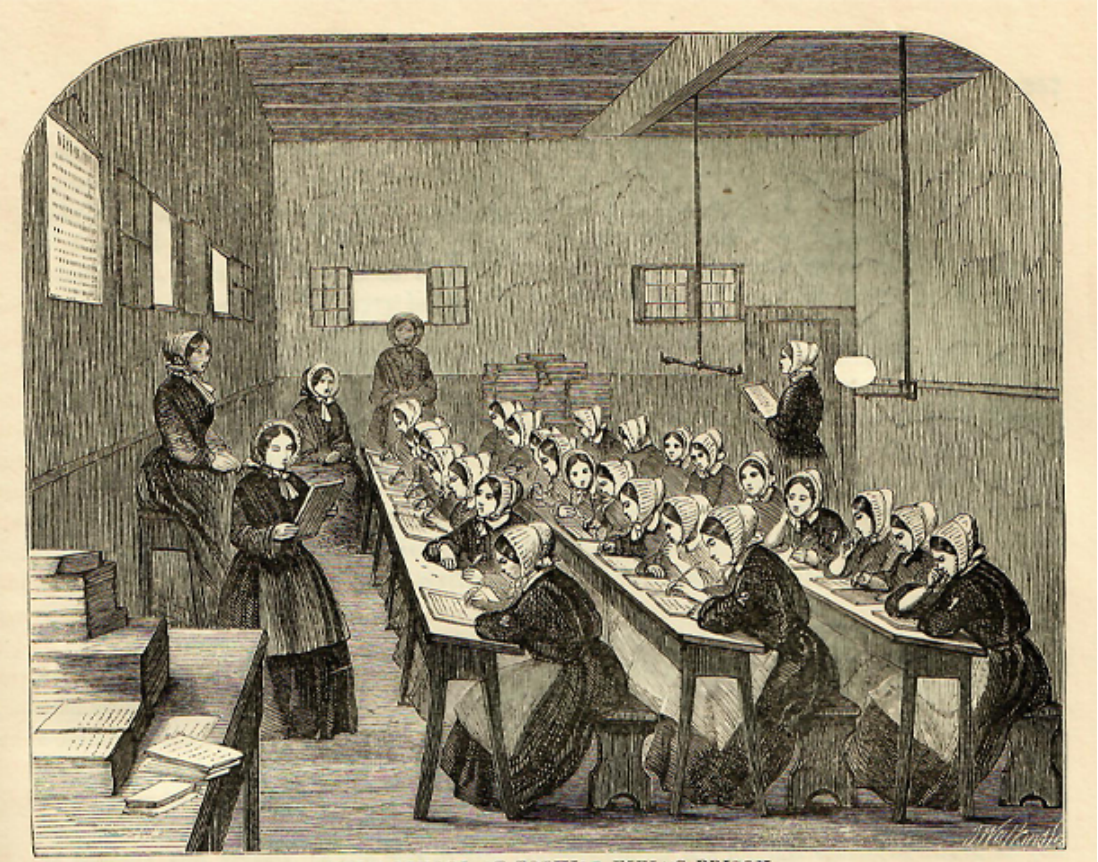


Figure 7 Girls' schoolroom at Tothill Fields Prison in the late 1850s. By this time, Tothill Fields had become a prison for women and juvenile males. This concentration of female prisoners meant that there were enough to justify the appointment of a schoolmistress. In many other local prisons, the matron took on the duties of the schoolmistress.

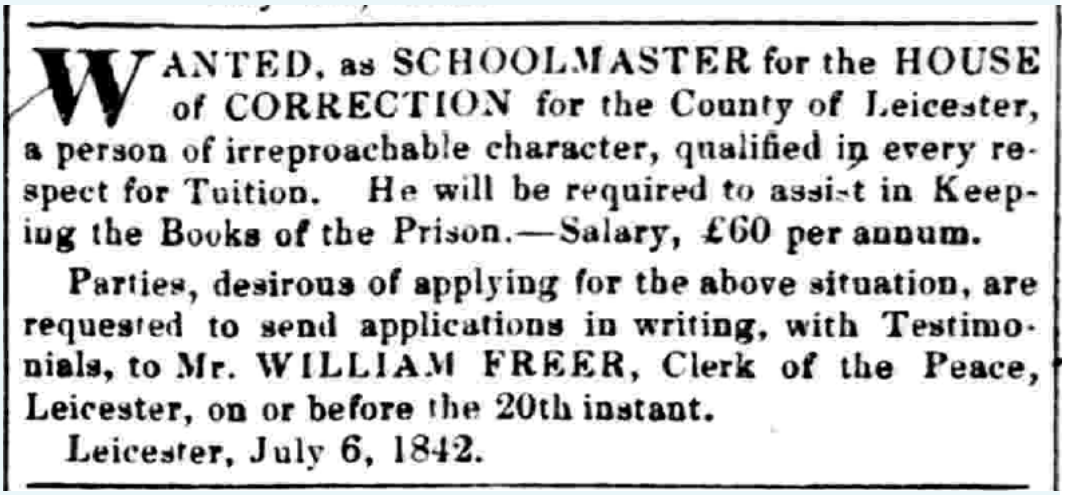
At the same time, prison visiting by charitable ladies and gentlemen began to decline. The famous prison visitors Elizabeth Fry and Sarah Martin both died in the mid-1840s, removing two powerful examples of philanthropy for others to imitate. Prison officials had also become wary of prison visitors who were not in their pay and so not under their control. Prisons were increasingly becoming closed worlds, cut off from civilian life outside.

Activity 3 Employing teachers

Allow approximately 5 minutes for this activity

Take a look at the following two advertisements for prison schoolmasters which appeared in local newspapers in 1842 and 1852. Answer the following question:

- What qualifications must applicants have for these roles?



WANTED, as SCHOOLMASTER for the HOUSE of CORRECTION for the County of Leicester, a person of irreproachable character, qualified in every respect for Tuition. He will be required to assist in Keeping the Books of the Prison.—Salary, £60 per annum.

Parties, desirous of applying for the above situation, are requested to send applications in writing, with Testimonials, to Mr. WILLIAM FREER, Clerk of the Peace, Leicester, on or before the 20th instant.

Leicester, July 6, 1842.

Figure 8 *Leicester Chronicle*, 9 July 1842.

WANTED, as SCHOOLMASTER for the HOUSE of CORRECTION for the County of Leicester, a person of irreproachable character, qualified in every respect for Tuition. He will be required to assist in Keeping the Books of the Prison – Salary, £60 per annum.

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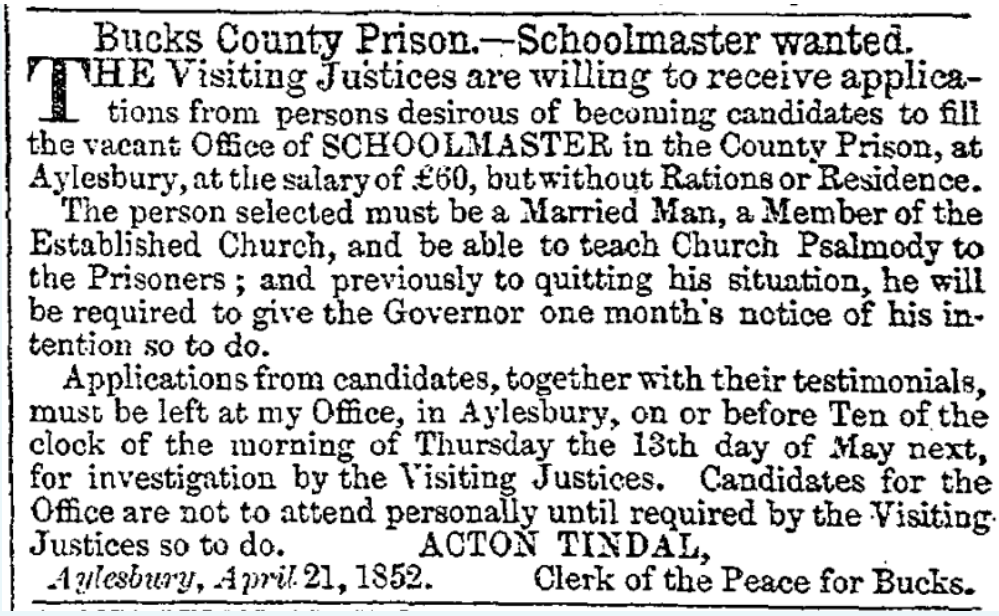
Leicester, July 6, 1842.

(Source: *Leicester Chronicle*, 9 July 1842)



Bucks County Prison.—Schoolmaster wanted.

THE Visiting Justices are willing to receive applications from persons desirous of becoming candidates to fill the vacant Office of SCHOOLMASTER in the County Prison, at Aylesbury, at the salary of £60, but without Rations or Residence.

The person selected must be a Married Man, a Member of the Established Church, and be able to teach Church Psalmody to the Prisoners; and previously to quitting his situation, he will be required to give the Governor one month's notice of his intention so to do.

Applications from candidates, together with their testimonials, must be left at my Office, in Aylesbury, on or before Ten of the clock of the morning of Thursday the 13th day of May next, for investigation by the Visiting Justices. Candidates for the Office are not to attend personally until required by the Visiting Justices so to do.

ACTON TINDAL,
Aylesbury, April 21, 1852. Clerk of the Peace for Bucks.

Figure 9 *Jackson's Oxford Journal*, 24 April 1852.

Bucks County Prison. – Schoolmaster wanted.

The Visiting Justices are willing to receive applications from persons desirous of becoming candidates to fill the vacant Office of SCHOOLMASTER in the County Prison, at Aylesbury, at the salary of £60, but without Rations or Residence.

The person must be a Married Man, a Member of the Established Church, and be able to teach Church Psalmody to the Prisoners; and previously to quitting his situation, he will be required to give the Governor one month's notice of his intention so to do.

Applications from candidates, together with their testimonials, must be left at my Office, in Aylesbury, on or before Ten of the clock of the morning of Thursday the 13th day of May next, for investigation by the Visiting Justices. Candidates for the Office are not to attend personally until required by the Visiting Justices so to do.
ACTON TINDAL
Aylesbury, April 21, 1852 Clerk of the Peace for Bucks.

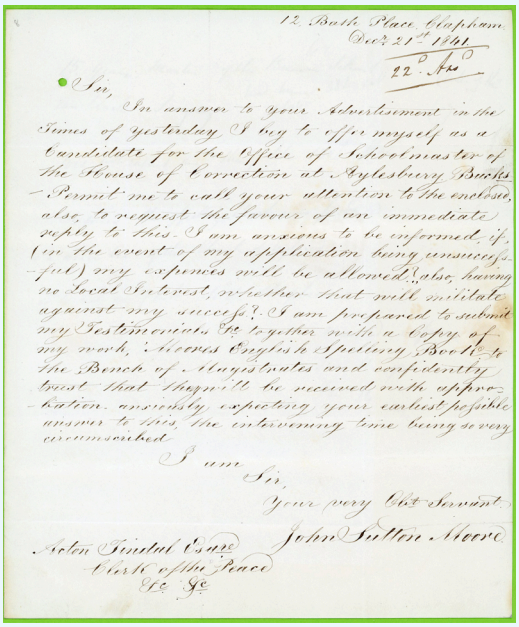
(Source: *Jackson's Oxford Journal*, 24 April 1852)

Provide your answer...

Discussion

The advertisement for a schoolmaster for Leicester House of Correction calls for someone who is 'qualified in every respect for tuition'. It's vague, and does not mention a specific qualification or training. The advertisement for a schoolmaster for the Buckingham County Prison does not even mention teaching qualifications. This was not unusual. Before the 1840s, there were only limited opportunities for teacher training in England and Wales. In 1846, a state-financed pupil-teacher system was established through which certificates were issued to those who completed a teaching apprenticeship, but there remained many elementary school teachers without certificates (Smelser, 1991, pp. 297–300).

Profiles of prison schoolmasters in annual reports and surviving applications for prison schoolmaster posts indicate that men with experience of teaching in elementary schools, and sometimes teacher training, applied and were appointed (see, for example, John Sutton Moore's letter of application in Figure 10). The prison offered an alternative – and sometimes better paid – career path for male teachers.



12 Bath Place Clapham
Dec 21st 1841
22 Ans

Sir,

In answer to your Advertisement in the Times of yesterday I beg to offer myself as a Candidate for the Office of Schoolmaster of the House of Correction at Aylesbury Bucks. Permit me to call your attention to the enclosed, also, to request the favour of an immediate reply to this. I am anxious to be informed if, (in the event of my application being unsuccessful) my expences will be allowed. Also, having no local Interest, whether that will militate against my success? I am prepared to submit my Testimonials &c together with a Copy of my work, "Moores English Spelling Book" to the Bench of Magistrates and confidently trust that they will be received with approbation. Anxiously expecting your earliest possible answer to this the intervening time being so very circumscribed

I am
Sir,
Your very Obt Servant
John Sutton Moore

Acton Tindal Esqre
Clerk of the Peace
&c &c

Figure 10 A letter of application from John Sutton Moore for the post of schoolmaster at Buckingham County Gaol in 1841. Moore included evidence of former teaching experience with this letter (including at an adult evening school), and he was eager to show the magistrates in charge of the prison a spelling book he had written. His letter strongly suggests that he wanted the job. Moore was appointed and remained in post until the early 1850s.

The advertisement from Buckingham County Prison does insist that the schoolmaster must be a member of the Church of England. This was a common requirement. Instruction in reading and writing had a religious purpose. Church of England prison chaplains were often deeply suspicious of teachers from other denominations (such as Methodists, Quakers, Independents). This suspicion led to many prison visitors, who tended to be Dissenters rather than Anglicans, being ejected.

You might have noticed that both of these were full-time posts. This was another important trend in the rise of the schoolmaster. Prison officials wanted complete control over those they employed and part-time hours were a hindrance to this. Especially in smaller prisons, time spent not teaching had to be filled with other duties. At Leicester House of Correction, the schoolmaster was required to do clerical work. At some prisons, he was given warder duties.

Both advertisements were for schoolmasters. Not much has been said about schoolmistresses. Their numbers also grew but their rise was far less apparent. Because of the small populations of female prisoners in many prisons, matrons continued to be given schoolmistress duties where possible. Occasionally, a schoolmistress was employed on a part-time basis. Career paths for prison schoolmistresses were only really available in the convict sector where populations of female prisoners were larger and more stable.

5 Schoolrooms

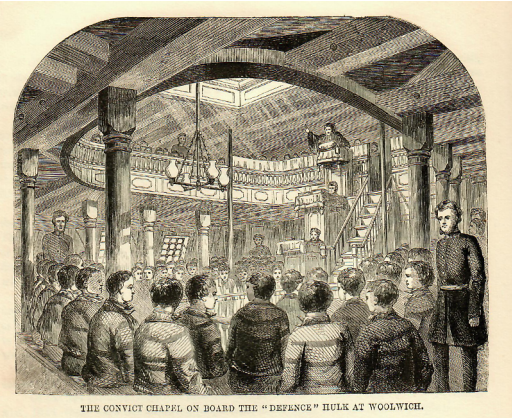


Figure 11 The chapel on board the Defence prison hulk at Woolwich. From 1847, convicts on hulks were given half a day for school each week and were taught in the chapel. In the body of the chapel, black, slanting desks with inkstand holes were arranged for school.

Before the 1860s, even in prisons which had adopted the separate system, prisoners were mostly assembled together for instruction. This required space. In the early 1800s, instruction in reading and writing often took place in any available space within the prison. Between 1816 and 1850, convicts at Millbank took the stools from their cells and gathered in groups of sixteen in the corridor for lessons. Convicts on hulks congregated in spaces on the accommodation decks. In local prisons, dayrooms, wards and yards were used. The governor's kitchen was used at Abingdon House of Correction in the 1830s. Some prisoners were taught at their place of work. At Bury St Edmunds County Gaol, men were taught next to the treadwheel during their rest intervals. At Maidstone County Gaol in 1837, the women were taught in the laundry.

These spaces were often unsuitable for education. The prisoners at York County Gaol were forced to use books for seats to protect against the cold of stone benches until wooden seating was introduced in 1842, while the dayrooms used at Leicester County House of Correction in 1842 were too hot for the schoolmaster to deliver a lesson. Therefore, from the 1830s, specially designated schoolrooms, either purpose-built or converted, began to appear in prisons (Crone, 2022, ch.3).

Activity 4 Designing schoolrooms for prisons

Allow approximately 5 minutes for this activity

The following pictures (engravings) of prison schoolrooms date from the 1850s. Take a look at them now and jot down any distinguishing features. It might help to compare them – they are rather different!

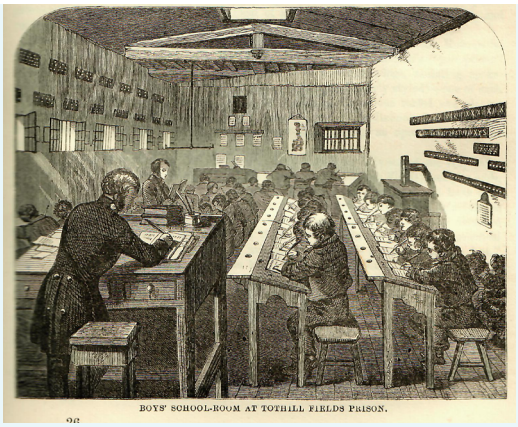


Figure 12 The boys' schoolroom at Tothill Fields House of Correction in the 1850s.

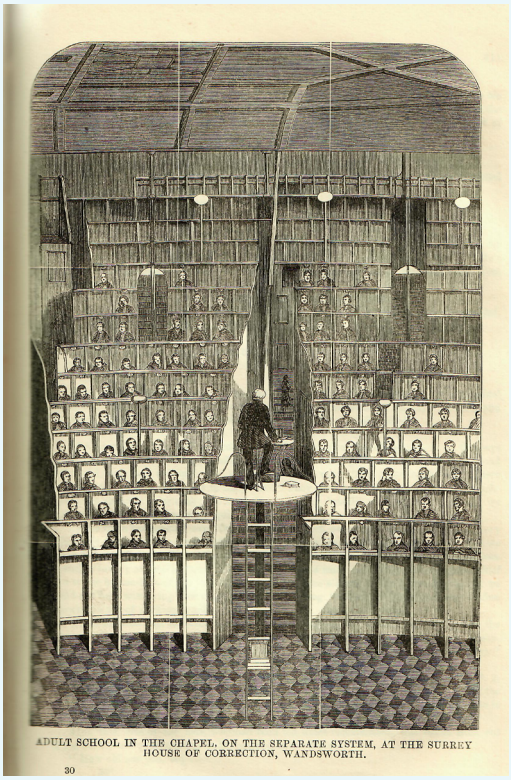


Figure 13 Adult School at the Surrey House of Correction, i.e. Wandsworth Prison, in the late 1850s.

Provide your answer...

Discussion

The boys' schoolroom at the Tothill Fields House of Correction looks like a fairly typical elementary school classroom. The boys are seated at desks in rows. The desks are slanted with ink pots. There are various wall hangings, one of which looks like the letters of the alphabet. The only feature which suggests this schoolroom is in a prison are the bars on the windows. You might have also noticed the raised desk of the teacher which allows him to supervise the boys.

The school for adults at Wandsworth Prison – which was held in the chapel – looks completely different. Each prisoner is confined in a separate box in order to prevent any communication. The schoolmaster teaches from a raised platform so that all the prisoners can see him.

Wandsworth is an example of the kind of experimentation in schoolroom design which was encouraged by the separate system. Although the leading proponents of separation believed that prisoners should continue to assemble for school, there was a desire to limit physical contact as much as possible.

From 1837, partitions began to appear in schoolrooms and, after the construction of the model prison, Pentonville, in 1842, in chapels too. For convenience, partitioned chapels were often used as schoolrooms on weekdays. Far from preventing communication, partitions in schoolrooms and chapels encouraged prisoners to redouble their efforts. The boards separating prisoners became covered with graffiti and had to be stripped and cleaned regularly.

6 Time for instruction

Education – when delivered by appointed teachers to classes of prisoners – needed designated time in the prison timetable. Initially, prison officials attempted to schedule school when prisoners were not at hard labour or employed in other types of work.

Sundays presented one option, if instruction in reading and writing could be done during time set aside for religious instruction, and if sufficient prison staff could be secured to supervise prisoners. Evenings were another possibility but only in prisons with a gas supply for artificial light; before 1850, few local prisons in Britain were illuminated after dark (McConville, 1981, p. 360). In larger prisons, including convict prisons, the sheer number of prisoners enrolled in the prison school often meant that there wasn't enough time on Sundays or in the evenings to teach everyone.

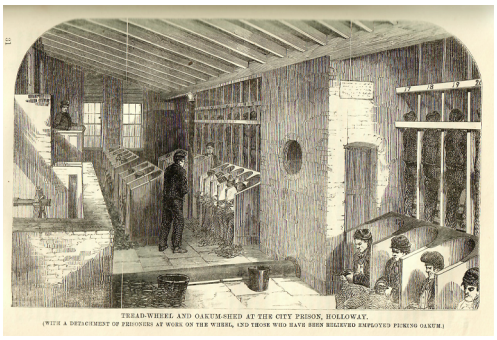


Figure 14 The treadwheel (or treadmill) and oakum shed at the City of London House of Correction (i.e. Holloway Prison). The image shows two different forms of hard labour – walking the treadwheel and picking oakum. Partitions kept the prisoners separate during labour.

Therefore, in most prisons, officials were left with no alternative but to schedule classes during the day and to withdraw prisoners from labour. Some officials complained that prisoners used school to escape part of their punishment. Others protested that labour interfered with education. Where prisoners were paid for their labour, or where non-completion of hard labour tasks led to punishment, prisoners refused to leave their work to attend school.

Activity 5 Timetabling

Allow approximately 25 minutes for this activity

This course is likely to take you at least 24 hours to complete. It is recommended that you study it over eight weeks. This could allow you time to think over questions and compose responses.

This course is not just about the history of prison education. It is also about how to read historical sources. Understanding the context in which a source is produced, and whether it is written by a witness or a later historian, helps us to interpret it. Being sensitive to different perspectives and being empathic to other people's cultures or the experiences of minority groups can often be crucial to your ability to solve problems and interpret meaning.

Learning all this can take time and energy. Now that you are a few hours into the course you should have an idea as to how long it took you to complete the first session. This activity provides ideas about planning your study time for the whole course.

Complete the grid below with your ideas for study time. You might find it easier to make your own grid.

- Start with your non-study activities. Put in mealtimes and sleep. You'll need to go online to complete the quizzes which occur at the end of each session. If your online access is restricted put that in and plan around it.
- Studying after a full day can be tiring. Even if you feel motivated now, you are advised to build in some time away from studying.
- Once you have drafted your grid, look at the discussion below. While scheduling is a matter for each individual, seeing the ideas of others can be helpful.

Below is an example grid.

My Exploring the History of Prisoner Education timetable								
	06:00-08:00	08:00-08:30	08:30-11:15	11:15-13:45	13:45-16:00	16:00-17:00	17:00-19:00	19:00-22:00
Monday								
Tuesday								
Wednesday								
Thursday								
Friday								
Saturday								
Sunday								

You can find an editable Word version of the grid when you access the following link: Example timetable

Discussion

Here are some examples produced with the help of former prisoner learners and mentors.

Timetable Core Day									
	06:00-08:00	08:00-08:30	08:30-11:15	11:15-13:45	13:45-16:00	16:00-17:00	17:00-19:00	19:00-22:00	22:00-06:00
Monday	Rise	Unlock	Labour	Lunch	Labour	Dinner	Association	Lock-up	Bed
Tuesday	Rise	Unlock	Labour	Lunch	Labour	Dinner	Association	Lock-up	Bed
Wednesday	Rise	Unlock	Labour	Lunch	Labour	Dinner	Association	Lock-up	Bed
Thursday	Rise	Unlock	Labour	Lunch	Labour	Dinner	Association	Lock-up	Bed
Friday	Rise	Unlock	Labour	Lunch	Association	Dinner	Association	Lock-up	Bed
Saturday	Weekend Routine								
Sunday	Weekend Routine								

Access the following link to get a larger version of the table.

The above timetable is the basic prison core day. Most prisons follow this sort of regime, with some variation on the times. If you are a prisoner you will have to negotiate with the prison staff, and Education Provider's staff for access to the Open University's Virtual Campus. If you are a prisoner who is in a double-cell you will also need to negotiate time with your cellmate so that you can study. This is not easy when you share a small room from 1900-0800 each day.

Timetable									
	06:00-08:00	08:00-08:30	08:30-11:15	11:15-13:45	13:45-16:00	16:00-17:00	17:00-19:00	19:00-22:00	22:00-06:00
Monday	Rise	Unlock	Labour	Lunch	Labour	Dinner	Association	OU Study	
Tuesday	Rise and OU Study	Unlock	Labour	Lunch	OU Study in Education	Dinner	Association	Lock-up	Bed
Wednesday	Rise	Unlock	Labour	Lunch	Labour	Dinner	Association	OU Study	
Thursday	Rise and OU Study	Unlock	Labour	Lunch	OU Study in Education	Dinner	Association	Lock-up	Bed
Friday	Rise	Unlock	Labour	Lunch	Association	Dinner	Association	OU Study	
Saturday	**Weekend Routine**								
Sunday	**Weekend Routine**								

Access the following link to get a larger version of the table.

This timetable was the schedule of a prisoner. He added ‘My early morning study was the time that I used to read material without taking any notes, and then I would type up notes during the afternoons when we had dedicated Distance Learner access to the IT equipment!’ He had to be focused and dedicated.

Timetable									
	06:00-08:00	08:00-08:30	08:30-11:15	11:15-13:45	13:45-16:00	16:00-17:00	17:00-19:00	19:00-22:00	22:00-06:00
Monday	Rise	Unlock	Labour	Lunch	Labour	Dinner	Association	Lock-up	Bed
Week2									
Tuesday	Rise	Unlock	Labour	Lunch	Labour	Dinner	Association	Lock-up	Bed
Week2									
Wednesday	Rise	Unlock	Labour	Lunch	Labour	Dinner	Association	Lock-up	Bed
Week2									
Thursday	Rise	Unlock	Labour	Lunch	Labour	Dinner	Association	Lock-up	Bed
Week2									
Friday	Rise	Unlock	Labour	Lunch	Association	Dinner	Association	Lock-up	Bed
Week2									
Saturday	Weekend Routine								
Week2									
Sunday	Weekend Routine								
Week2									

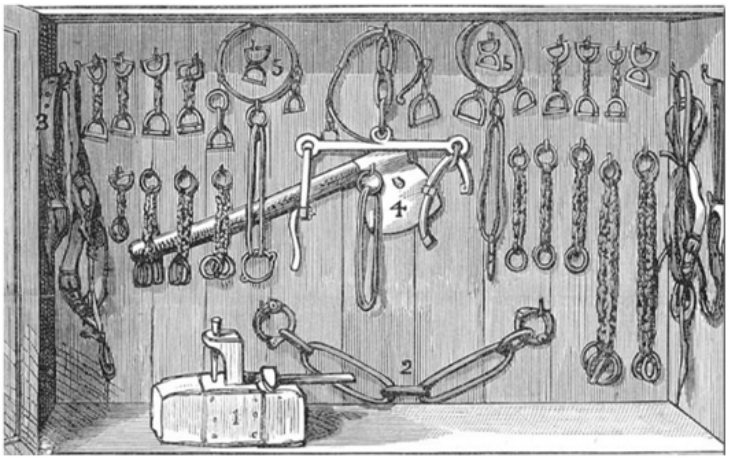
Access the following link to get a larger version of the table.
The ex-prisoner who produced this timetable added:

There is time for most learners in custody to study the basics of the course work within the coloured green time zones. You will see that I have used this single grid to create a two-week timetable – which I think is probably the best route to go down in prison and secure environments. That way the study workload can be spread over a longer period and allowing a more concentrated effort in the time given to study. I have found that prison employers are much more accepting of a timetable over a longer period rather than taking the same time off each week.

You can of course develop your own timetable that works for you, and these examples are not intended to be prescriptive. The aim is to plan your time effectively, and this is a useful and transferable skill which can apply to other activities as well.

7 Reflection

For this session, there is an opportunity for reflection. Like the quiz, it is designed to help you check on your progress. Reflection is an important way of reviewing and consolidating your learning. At the end of each session in this course, try to use the scheme laid out in the following activity. It might feel artificial at first, but if you keep it up it will likely become second nature to you.



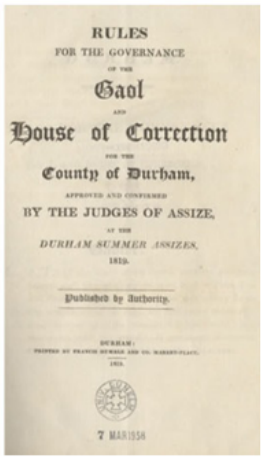

RULES
FOR THE GOVERNANCE
OF THE
Gaol
AND
House of Correction
FOR THE
County of Durham,
APPROVED AND CONFIRMED
BY THE JUDGES OF ASSIZE,
AT THE
DURHAM SUMMER ASSIZES,
1819.
Published by Authority.

Figure 15 While chaplains strove to reform criminals through encouraging them to memorise Biblical passages, prisons remained places in which non-compliance could lead to punishment. Instruction was framed by fear. Durham, opened in 1819, had this collection of items for flogging and fettering inmates.

Activity 6 Reflection

Allow approximately 20 minutes for this activity

Ask yourself the following three questions:

1. What happened?
2. So what?
3. What next?

You might find it useful to write two or three sentences in response to each question. Before you write the sentences, read the notes below about these questions.

What happened?

Reflection can start with a summary of what happened and what you felt. Was the content useful or interesting?

So what?

What is the value of the knowledge you have just acquired? Did you learn or improve a skill? Connect the material to the core concepts of the course. In Session 1 there was an introduction to the idea of reading critically, looking for the gap, what writers did not say as well as how they presented their ideas. Was this an important idea to understand? Have you noticed whether your understanding of the concepts, practices, themes and issues of prison history have changed since you started the course?

What next?

To ensure that you do not just learn the content of the course, but also consider how you might use the content in the future, think of skills that you might have gained. You might find that there are some skills which can be applied beyond the course. For example, you might want to apply the material on timetabling in another context. To what extent have Sessions 1 and 2 addressed your needs? Reflecting on the content, you might also ask what questions you want to answer in the coming sessions.

Provide your answer...

8 This session's quiz

Well done – you have reached the end of Session 2. You can now check what you've learned this session by taking the end-of-session quiz.

Session 2 practice quiz

Open the quiz in a new tab or window by holding down Ctrl (or Cmd on a Mac) when you click on the link. Return here when you have finished.

9 Summary of Session 2

During this session you have looked at how and why schemes for educating prisoners spread across the penal estate before 1850. You also looked at patterns of inclusion and exclusion: just because arrangements had been made to teach prisoners to read and write, this did not mean that all were allowed to attend lessons.

In this session you also explored the many ways by which instruction could take place. While prison officials initially adopted a range of strategies, increasingly the penal environment and prison discipline determined what was possible, facilitating the rise of prison schools. Prisoners were organised into classes and were taught by paid (and often qualified) teachers in classrooms, at appointed times.

You should now be able to:

- discuss the expansion of educational provision in prisons
- discuss how the penal environment shaped forms of learning in the prison
- use a timetable to organise your study time.

To what extent did adjustments made to enable delivery of education within the prison compromise the value and meaning of instruction? Were prisons ever suitable environments for education? You will consider these questions further in the next session when you will go inside the prison school, to see what prisoners were taught, how they were taught it, and how they responded to the instruction they were given.

You can now go to Session 3.

Session 3: Inside the prison school

Introduction

In this third session, you will now go inside the prison school to discover what was taught and how it was taught in the years between 1823 and 1855. Superficially at least, both curriculum and pedagogy (teaching methods) mirrored those in elementary schools outside the prison. However, the penal environment, and especially evolving views about the causes of crime, led to some divergence.

You will also look at what some prisoners said about their learning. The modern prison was designed to suppress the agency of the prisoner (that is, his or her capacity to act independently). However, the voices of prisoners can still be found scattered throughout the sources. In this session, you will listen to them, discuss their authenticity, and begin to consider the meaning of education to the individual.

By the end of this session, you should be able to:

- understand the ways in which prisoners' experiences of education can be recovered and the challenges of interpreting what they mean
- understand what was taught in the prison school, how it was taught, and why it was taught
- understand the intentions of educators and how the methods they used to instruct prisoners affected the usefulness and value of the education received by individuals.

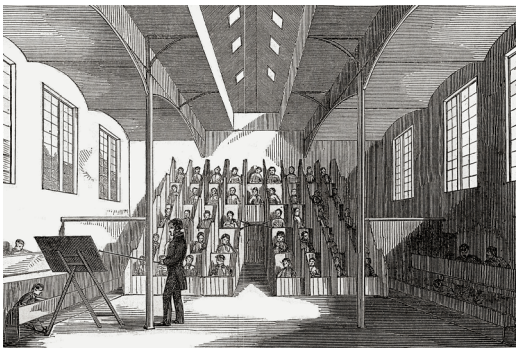


Figure 1 The schoolroom for boys in the probationary ward at Parkhurst Prison for Juveniles in 1847. Because the boys were undergoing a probationary period, they were accommodated in separate cells and taught in a partitioned schoolroom. Those who behaved well were invited to sit in the open desks at the front of the room.

What follows is, at times, a complicated story, which might well challenge some of your preconceptions about education and schools. Our case study, Lincoln Castle Gaol, should help to bring some of the threads together. Watch the next video now, in which Rosalind

Crone charts the evolution of the school for prisoners at Lincoln. What were prisoners taught at Lincoln and how did they respond to efforts to teach them? Write down some brief notes on the ideas presented in the video.

Video content is not available in this format.

1 Searching for the causes of crime

Figure 2 George Cruikshank, *The Bottle*. In 1847, the illustrator George Cruikshank published a series of eight plates (drawings) charting the decline of a man and his family as a result of drinking alcohol. The man loses his job and plunges the family into poverty. The sequence ends with his murder of his wife, all as a result of drinking.

By the 1830s, Britain was once again in the grip of a social crisis. Industrialisation (the rise of manufacturing) and rapid urbanisation (the movement of people from the countryside to towns) had led to a deterioration in living conditions and the expansion of poverty.

Unhealthy and overcrowded neighbourhoods – or slums – had become a common feature of most large towns and cities. At the same time, crime rates continued to rise, and some groups of people began to express their unhappiness through rioting.

The government was eager for solutions, and prison chaplains, with their easy access to those who had been convicted of crime, were keen to contribute. In order to illuminate the causes of crime, prison chaplains began to interview prisoners and to collect information about their lives. Foremost among them was the Rev. John Clay, chaplain at the Preston House of Correction from 1823 to 1858 (Forsythe, 1987). His reports were filled with tables which described prisoners' degree of literacy and religious knowledge, and which demonstrated a close relationship between the commission of crime and drunkenness.

The evidence from Clay and other chaplains was used to demonstrate that crime was a consequence of increasing immorality which was in turn largely caused by a lack of education – both scholarly and religious. In support of this view Clay used extracts from the testimonies of prisoners – collected via interviews, or in letters addressed to him or others – in his annual reports.

The evidence that Clay collected needs to be treated with some caution. When giving an account of their lives, prisoners, like other people, might have left out information or restructured it, or they might have lied. In a conversation with a chaplain, prisoners might have had reasons to manipulate their stories. They might have wished to try to gain early release or other privileges, to deflect their guilt, or to avoid a taboo subject.

However, such accounts can also provide useful information and a different viewpoint from official records. Even if they draw on stock narratives about the causes of crime or life in prison, prisoners' testimonies can shed light on the lives of individuals outside the prison, and tell us how they coped inside the prison. As with all sources, prisoners' testimonies reflect the biases of the authors, and of those who collected and arranged them for publication.

Activity 1 Testimonies of prisoners

Allow approximately 15 minutes for this activity

Figure 3 Prisoners at exercise at Pentonville Prison in the late 1850s. The men were forced to wear peaked caps to cover their faces and were referred to by number not name. This was, ostensibly, to prevent them from being recognised by other prisoners, though the imposition of anonymity – and with it, the deprivation of agency – was also part of the punishment.

The Rev. John Clay was a firm supporter of the separate system of prison discipline. He argued that the moral condition of individuals would improve if they were kept

apart from other prisoners and conversed solely with the chaplain. Clay was keen to prove that the separate system could be a success and that the Scriptures aided reform. Clay encouraged prisoners confined in separate cells to review their lives as a part of a process of repentance and reform. Between 1843 and 1846, Clay took personal testimonies from 1,234 males and 199 females (Clay, 1846, p. 21).

The testimony of J.M., aged 17 and sentenced to 12 months imprisonment for a felony (a serious offence), was included in Clay's annual report for 1849. Read the following extract from J.M.'s testimony and then try to answer the following questions:

- What does J.M. consider to be the cause of his criminal behaviour?
- Comment on the language this prisoner uses. Does anything strike you as a little odd or out of place?
- How authentic, or trustworthy, do you consider J.M.'s testimony to be?

J.M.'s testimony

My mother did her best to send me to Sunday School, and I believe I should have taken her advice, but for seeing my father's bad example. There is one lesson it has learnt me, that is never to be a drunkard, as bad as I am. If my father had been as my mother, instead of being in prison I should have been in an honourable situation.

(cited in Bennett, 1981, p. 81)

Provide your answer...

Discussion

1. In his testimony, J.M. does not mention his own guilt, but instead blames his father for the bad example he set (presumably by drinking too much). J.M. suggests that if he had listened to his mother, and continued to go to Sunday School – that is, a school held after church services on Sunday in which reading, writing, and Christian values were taught – then he might have got a good job rather than ending up in prison.
2. J.M.'s overall language is quite formal. He may well have called his parents 'mother' and 'father', especially when talking to the prison chaplain. The words 'drunkard' and 'honourable situation' appear more contrived. Perhaps J.M. was echoing terms he had picked up from Clay. The phrase 'it has learnt me' sounds odd and unnatural. It looks like an attempt by J.M. to employ the language of another rather than to explain things in his own words.
3. You could read this material as evidence of J.M. asserting his right to provide an account of the past. Perhaps you think J.M.'s emotional plea was a hypocritical attempt to win round Clay and gain concessions, such as access to books, a better diet, or time off his sentence. He would have known that these were the right things to say to Clay who was a religious man. There is also a possibility that Clay tailored the material he recorded. In his reports, Clay was very keen to emphasise the negative consequences of alcohol as well as the effects of religious ignorance. In 1848 he wrote 'Religious ignorance is the chief ingredient in the character of the criminal. This combines with the passion for liquor' (Bennett, 1981, p. 80). An account like J.M.'s was perfect for proving his point.

2 What was taught in the prison school

Between 1820 and 1850, the curriculum (skills and subjects) taught in prisons expanded.

Initially, prisoners in many institutions were taught only to read, primarily in order to read the Bible. Soon, instruction in writing was added. By 1850, schools in a large proportion of local prisons and in all convict prisons and on prison hulks were teaching basic arithmetic. At the same time, reports from some local prisons and from all convict institutions indicate that lessons in other subjects, notably geography and history, had been added. Women and girls sometimes received instruction in sewing or knitting as well.

In terms of reading, writing and arithmetic there was increasingly little difference between what men and women, adults and children were taught, at least officially (Crone, 2022, ch.4). In its essentials, the curriculum of the prison school largely reflected that of British and Irish elementary schools outside.

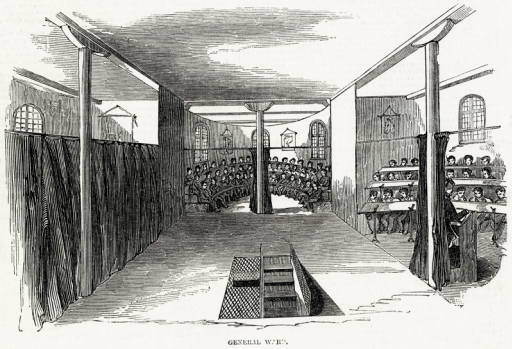


Figure 4 Classrooms at Parkhurst Juvenile Prison in 1847. Originally, this was one large schoolroom in which all the boys were taught together. With the introduction of the 'Battersea System' – a new method of teaching – in 1842, large curtains were used to divide the space into several classrooms.

Nonetheless, there were a number of important differences. In local prisons at least, the curriculum expanded and contracted according to institutional circumstances – for example, the departure of a teacher, or the appointment of a new teacher who could not teach parts of the curriculum might mean that prisoners were denied lessons they formerly enjoyed. Many prisoners in local prisons who arrived unable to read and so had to start from scratch were never given lessons in history or geography because their sentences were too short – there just wasn't enough time. For example, 165 prisoners (132 males and 33 females) were permitted to attend school at Lewes House of Correction in 1846. But only 17 of them, all men, who could already read when committed, received lessons in geography (*Gaol Act Reports*, 1847, p. 228).

At some local prisons, officials used access to different parts of the curriculum as a way to incentivise prisoners. Only the 'well conducted' at Swaffham House of Correction in 1851 were allowed the 'privilege' of instruction in writing and arithmetic (*Inspectors, Northern & Eastern, 17th Report*, 1852–53, p. 70). Prisoners wanted to learn to write in order to communicate with loved ones through letters. Instruction in arithmetic was prized, mainly by boys, because it offered a different mental exercise. In the eyes of the prison authorities, both writing and arithmetic threatened to make the curriculum too secular (non-religious).

3 The role of religion

Concern about the morality of the education that prisoners received also put some limits on the expansion of the curriculum. Education was meant to be ‘reformatory’ – to make convicted criminals into better people. Prison education was not about giving men, women and children particular skills to enable them to get jobs. Instead, it was thought that better people – made so through Christianisation and the civilising effects of literacy and numeracy – would make better workers.

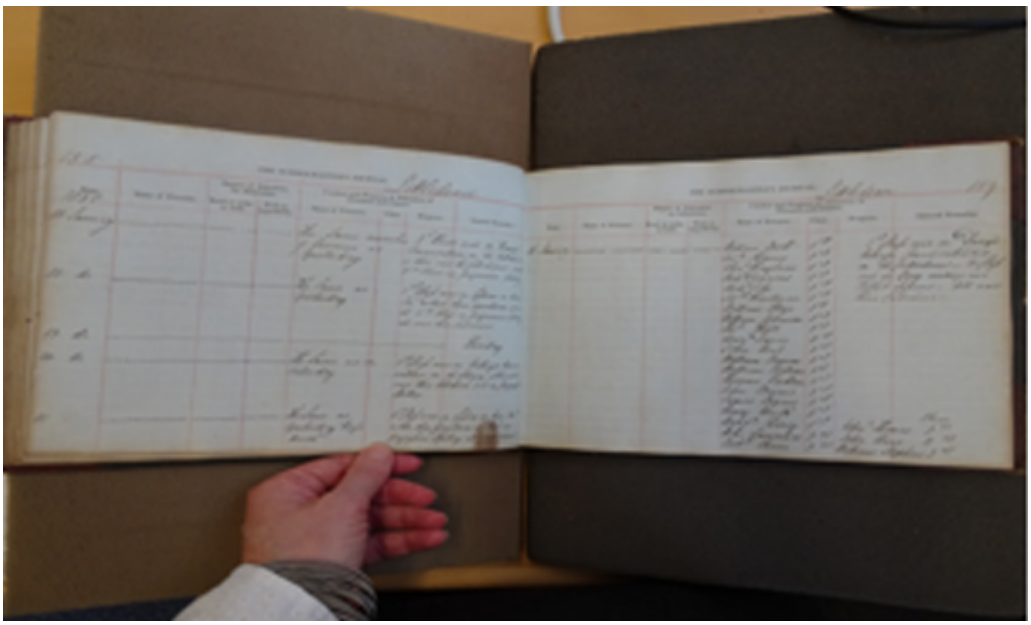


Figure 5 Pages from the schoolmaster’s journal at Littledean House of Correction, Gloucestershire. The schoolmaster recorded attendance and gave an account of what was covered in lessons. The entry for 16 January 1851 reads ‘1st class read in “Davy’s Village Conversations” [a religious text] on the Catechism. 2 class read in East reading in Tablet Lessons. All said their catechism.’

Earlier, you looked at how prison chaplains were collecting evidence to prove that a lack of Christian knowledge and belief was the cause of rising crime rates. By the 1840s, chaplains had firmly taken charge of education in prisons, at least in England and Wales. Supported by new rules and regulations for local prisons, chaplains directed the course of instruction, frequently attended schools to supervise the teaching, and regularly examined the progress made by prisoners.

Some chaplains welcomed the addition of secular subjects to the curriculum. The assistant chaplain at Millbank Penitentiary in 1839 explained that since the convicts had been exposed to ‘useful secular knowledge, their minds and tempers have certainly appeared to him to be in a more elastic and altogether healthier state – a state of mind which may be deemed generally favourable to their spiritual advancement’ (*Inspectors, Home District, 4th Report*, 1839, p. 97). For similar reasons, prison inspectors encouraged chaplains at local prisons to make their curriculum ‘a little more secular’.

However, there were limits. Captain Williams, the Northern District inspector, described education at Lancaster County Gaol in 1842 as too narrowly confined to reading and writing. While the prisoners were reading well and forming letters perfectly on slates, they were entirely deficient in religious knowledge (*Inspectors, Northern & Eastern, 8th Report*, 1843, p. 83). At Wakefield House of Correction in 1845, the chaplain suspended the teaching of writing and arithmetic because he thought the prisoners were ‘careless and

inattentive' during religious instruction, and interested only 'in obtaining information on secular subjects, with a view of bettering their temporary condition, and making the time pass more easily' (*Inspectors, Northern & Eastern, 11th Report*, 1846, p. 42). The study of geography and history were often limited to knowledge which aided the study of the Scriptures. Chaplains at Lewes and Fulham convict prisons ensured that Christianity pervaded every lesson taught in the prison school.

Activity 2 Lesson plans

Allow approximately 10 minutes for this activity

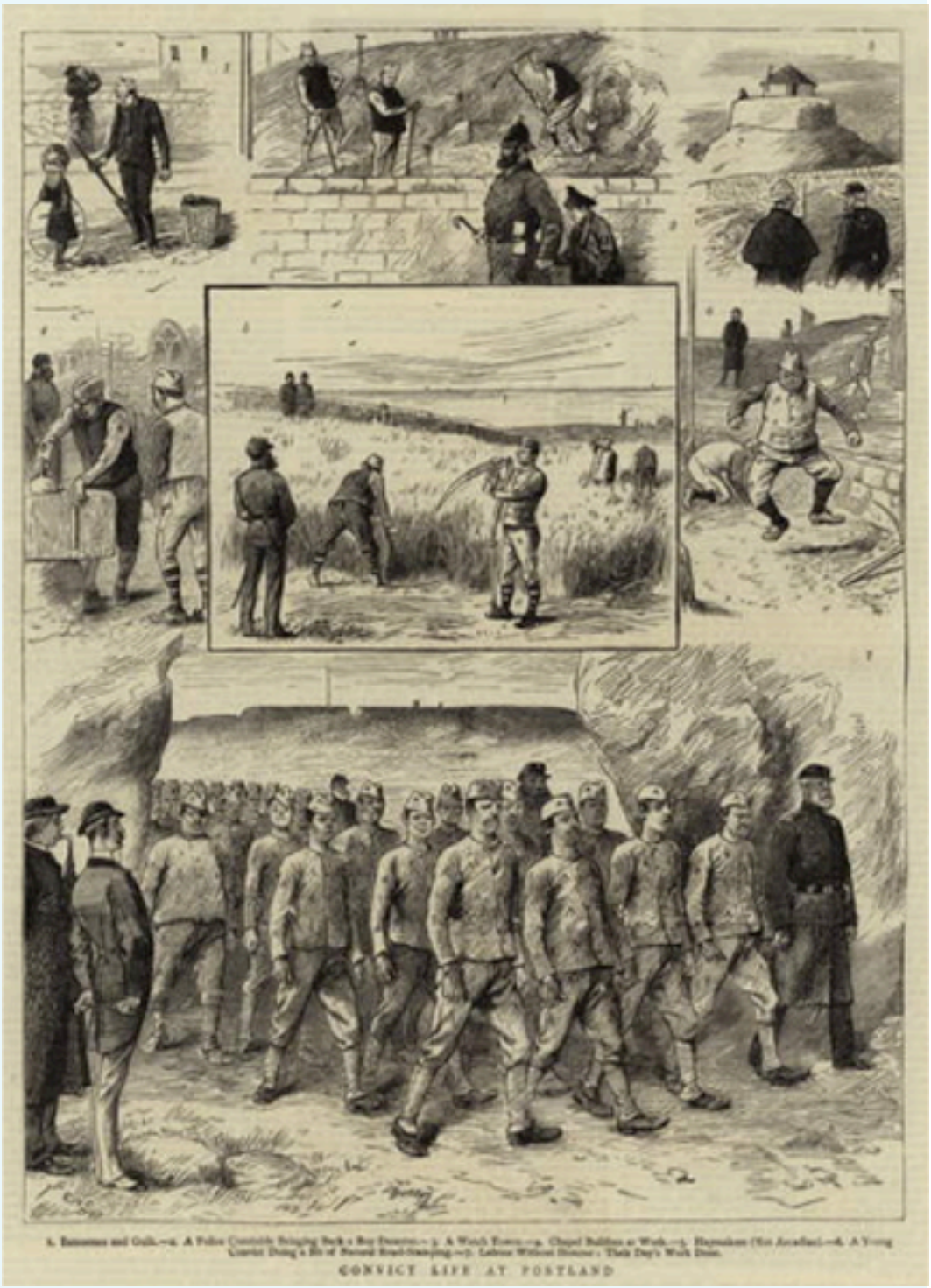


Figure 6 Convict life at Portland. Illustration for *The Graphic*, 31 March 1883. Portland Prison was opened in November 1848 for male convicts who had already served a term of separate confinement. The men were put to hard labour in the Admiralty Quarries breaking stone for the construction of the harbour.

In 1850 there were, on average, about 800 convicts on any given day at Portland Convict Prison for men. All the convicts were enrolled in the prison school. They were divided into 11 classes, and each class was excused from labour to attend school for half a day (or three hours) each week. The classes were taken sequentially, starting with the first on Monday morning and ending with the 11th on Saturday morning. Each class was further sub-divided into two groups.

Here is a copy of the school lesson plan for the morning class each day. The lesson plan for the afternoon class was identical, except that the school was held from 12.30 to 15.30. Look at the plan now, and try to answer the following questions:

1. What conclusions can you make about the lessons and the time devoted to each activity?
2. Are there any activities, or terms, which look unusual?

School lesson plan from Portland Convict Prison, 1850
Morning classes from 8:00 to 11:00
Opening school - singing hymns and reading Scriptures

Time	1st Division	2nd Division
8:25 to 9:30	Writing, Letters &c. Arithmetic on slates	Reading, spelling, geography, mental arithmetic
9:30 to 10:45	Reading, spelling, geography, mental arithmetic	Writing, Letters &c. Arithmetic on slates
10:45 to 11:00	Issuing library books, and concluding	Issuing library books, and concluding

Figure 7 School lesson plan from Portland Convict Prison, 1850 (‘Second report on Portland Prison’, 1851, p. 33).

Provide your answer...

Discussion

You may have been struck by the amount of time – 25 minutes – that was devoted to singing hymns and reading Scriptures at the beginning of the lesson. Considering that convicts had only three hours a week at school, and that they also attended services in the chapel on Sunday and read prayers every day, this was a lot of time to take from teaching other lessons. It shows how important religion was in the school curriculum.

Another 15 minutes at the end of school was taken up with the exchange of library books, again, eating into valuable time for teaching and learning. You will look at prison libraries in Session 4.

Did you notice the term ‘Letters’? Prisoners in convict prisons and in some local prisons were allowed to send letters home at various stages during their imprisonment. In order to supervise their composition, and assist those who could not write, letter writing was done during school time. Although it was another activity which consumed valuable time, it could also be used as a way to teach writing. In 1859, the chaplain at Chatham Convict Prison wrote that although ‘their school

> exercises are more or less interrupted … by writing letters to their respectable friends … such writing should tend in a measure to improve both their composition and their penmanship' (*Director of Convict Prisons Report*, 1860, p. 244).
>
> Another term in the plan which might be unfamiliar is 'slates'. Slates were essentially mini blackboards. Chalk or pencil was used to write on slates, and anything written on them could be rubbed out. Slates were common in elementary schools in the 1800s because they could be reused and so were cheaper than paper and ink. However, students who learned to write on slates found it difficult to move to paper and ink, as prison teachers and chaplains soon discovered. Despite this, slates persisted in prisons because of the need to limit any form of illicit communication. Paper could be secreted and taken away. Slates could be monitored and any writing easily erased.

You have ventured into a discussion of method – how prisoners were taught. Now, you'll explore that further.

4 Drilling and memorisation

When prison officials were establishing schools, they looked for guidance on how to teach reading, writing, arithmetic and other subjects from educational experts outside the prison. Until the imposition of silence and separation in the 1830s, the monitorial system, a method of instruction popular in elementary schools, was adopted in several prisons, including Millbank Penitentiary, Brixton House of Correction and Chester City Gaol. Prisoners requiring instruction were taught in small groups by monitors (fellow prisoners) who received their instructions on what to teach from the schoolmaster or mistress. Even after silence and separation prohibited the use of monitors, the core method of instruction remained much the same.

The monitorial method relied on drilling and memorisation. Language was broken down into a series of discrete units, or stages, each of which had to be mastered before the student could advance. Students began with the letters of the alphabet, which had to be learned by name (not sound); next they began the process of joining two letters; and then they advanced through words of one syllable, then two, and three, until they could master words with any number of syllables. At the same time, students were required to memorise the Lord's Prayer (a Christian prayer recited during church services) and the Catechism (a set of questions and answers affirming someone's belief in Christianity and commitment to the church). When they had reached polysyllabic words, they began to read, and commit to memory, passages from the New Testament (Vincent, 1989, p. 77).

Writing was sometimes taught after progress in reading had been made; at other times it was taught alongside reading. After instruction in basic penmanship, students were put to work 'making copies' – writing out chunks of text, often religious, which were either displayed on a blackboard or, to test spelling, dictated by the teacher. In order to ensure that students understood what they read and wrote, they were tested by question and answer, a method otherwise known as being 'catechised'.

These methods of instruction were bolstered by the use of popular school textbooks in the prison, such as Mrs Trimmer's *Charity School Spelling Book*. Written in the late 1700s it featured alphabets for copying, spelling lessons, and moral lessons about the godly and the ungodly told in words of one syllable. Reading lesson books published by the Society for the Promotion of Christian Knowledge, the Sunday School Union, and the National Schools Society were also used. Readers and spelling books specifically designed for adult learners were purchased for use in convict prisons. Prisoners navigated the Bible, and were 'catechised', with the help of Albert Judson's *Questions on the Holy Scriptures*, Matthew Henry and Thomas Scott's *Commentary Upon the Holy Bible*, and Sarah Timmer's *Lessons on Scripture History*.

The Sun ſhines bright.
The Wind blows hard.
The Rain falls faſt.

The Man digs well.
The Boy plows well.
The Girl ſews faſt.

The Girl ſpins fine yarn.
The Boy heads pins well.
The Boy mends his own coat.

The Girl makes the boy's ſhirt.
Good Girls make their own clothes.
Good Boys take care of their ſhoes.

A good Boy likes to have a clean face.
A good Girl loves to be neat and clean.
It is a ſad ſight to ſee dirt on the ſkin.

If you would be wiſe and good, you muſt learn to read your Book.

It is a good thing to learn to read well.

If you ſpend all your time in play, you will be a dunce.

None but a dunce will ſpend all his time at play.

Play is good when work is done, and the Book learnt.

When Boys or Girls go to School, they ſhould not ſtop by the way to play.

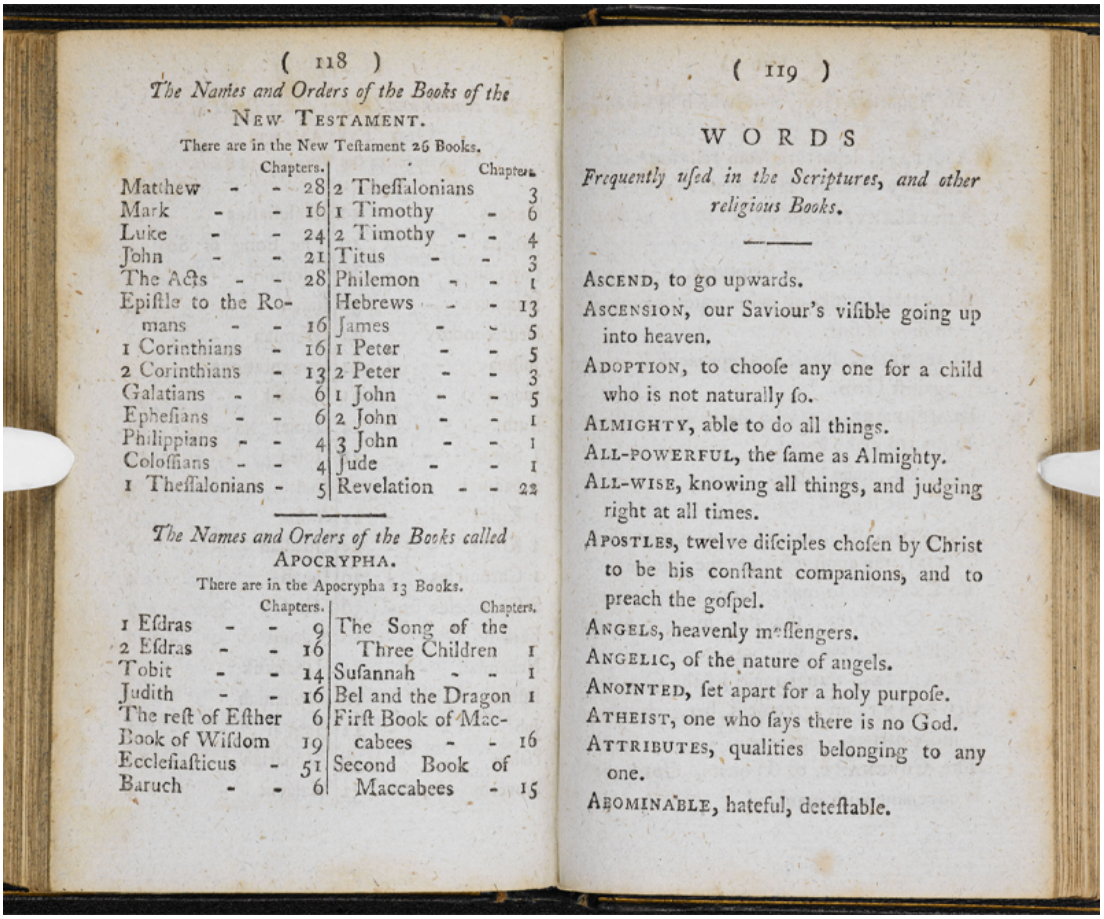
They ſhould make haſte to School, and not ſtand to ſee things in the ſtreet.

It is a ſad thing to loſe time when work is to be had.

Boys and Girls who will not work when they may, will go in rags all their lives.

There are ſix days to work in, and one day to go to church.

In ſix days you ſhould do all the work you can.



(118)

The Names and Orders of the Books of the
NEW TESTAMENT.

There are in the New Teſtament 26 Books.

	Chapters.		Chapters.
Matthew	28	2 Theſſalonians	3
Mark	16	1 Timothy	6
Luke	24	2 Timothy	4
John	21	Titus	3
The Acts	28	Philemon	1
Epiſtle to the Romans	16	Hebrews	13
1 Corinthians	16	James	5
2 Corinthians	13	1 Peter	5
Galatians	6	2 Peter	3
Epheſians	6	1 John	5
Philippians	4	2 John	1
Coloſſians	4	3 John	1
1 Theſſalonians	5	Jude	1
		Revelation	22

The Names and Orders of the Books called
APOCRYPHA.

There are in the Apocrypha 13 Books.

	Chapters.		Chapters.
1 Eſdras	9	The Song of the Three Children	1
2 Eſdras	16	Suſannah	1
Tobit	14	Bel and the Dragon	1
Judith	16	Firſt Book of Maccabees	16
The reſt of Eſther	6	Second Book of Maccabees	15
Book of Wiſdom	19		
Eccleſiaſticus	51		
Baruch	6		

(119)

WORDS

Frequently uſed in the Scriptures, and other religious Books.

ASCEND, to go upwards.
ASCENSION, our Saviour's viſible going up into heaven.
ADOPTION, to chooſe any one for a child who is not naturally ſo.
ALMIGHTY, able to do all things.
ALL-POWERFUL, the ſame as Almighty.
ALL-WISE, knowing all things, and judging right at all times.
APOSTLES, twelve diſciples choſen by Christ to be his conſtant companions, and to preach the goſpel.
ANGELS, heavenly meſſengers.
ANGELIC, of the nature of angels.
ANOINTED, ſet apart for a holy purpoſe.
ATHEIST, one who ſays there is no God.
ATTRIBUTES, qualities belonging to any one.
ABOMINABLE, hateful, deteſtable.

Figures 8 and 9 Mrs Timmer's *Charity School Spelling Book* was a frequently used primer. It was designed for children who attended charity schools. There were adapted alphabets for copying, spelling lessons, moral messages told in words of one syllable, and definitions of words found in the Bible and transcripts of prayers.

The convict prison chaplains also approved the acquisition of schoolbooks to support lessons in history and geography. Again, the titles and content of these books reveal the emphasis that was placed on the acquisition and recitation of facts. For example, women at Brixton Convict Prison made use of Wilson's *Catechism of Modern History* and Wilson's *Catechism of Geography*. Gleig's *School History of England*, which contained a chronology, tables of sovereigns and questions for examination, was popular at male convict prisons (Crone, 2022, ch.4).

Activity 3 Case study: Reading Gaol

Allow approximately 20 minutes for this activity

Figure 10 The new gaol at Reading. Illustration for the *Illustrated London News*, 17 February 1844. Built in the neo-gothic style, Reading Gaol was meant to look like an imposing castle, a symbol of authority overlooking the town of Reading. It cost three times the original estimate to build. The architect, Sir Gilbert Scott (1811–1878) was also responsible for the design of the Midland Grand Hotel at St Pancras Station, London.

In 1840 the new chaplain at Reading Gaol, the Rev. John Field, campaigned for the introduction of the separate system. The county magistrates, who were in charge of the prison, agreed and a new prison, resembling a medieval castle, was built in its place. The building survives, although the prison was closed in 2014.

From 1844, prisoners who arrived at the new gaol were confined in separate cells. They were given no work, and if they asked for something to do they were given a Bible to read. If they could not read the Bible, the schoolmaster was sent to their cell to teach them. All the male prisoners attended school in the partitioned chapel as well. Female prisoners were excluded from school because of the burden of the prison laundry, but by the late 1840s attempts were made to give them some instruction too.

Field's scheme was based on the memorisation of passages from the Bible. If a prisoner could successfully recite the lessons he had learned, he was given labour in his cell – typically oakum picking (picking out the fibres from old rope) – for 'relaxation'. Field believed that rote learning could turn prisoners into non-offending Christians. The county magistrates in charge of the prison thought that rote learning was a form of punishment more irksome than some types of hard labour (Crone, 2012).

Prisoners who could read and who had shown evidence of reformation were either taught, or allowed, to write. Field asked these men to complete examinations to test their learning. Below is a copy of one of the examinations completed by I.N., a prisoner who had, at this stage, been imprisoned for three months. Field set a question, and then asked I.N. to respond using what he had learned in the prison.

Some prisoners at Reading Gaol were entitled to send letters home. This one was written by J.I., who was sentenced to 18 months imprisonment, to his sister, in February 1848. Read it and compare it with the exam script above it.

Now read and compare I.N.'s exam script and J.I.'s letter using the following questions:

- What similarities stand out?
- Can you spot any differences?

- Both were written by prisoners – how authentic are they?
- Are these the voices of prisoners?

Exam script

Give reasons why we should not frequent the public house:

1. Because we can get no good there. Luke xi. 4.
2. Because we should not go into bad company. Psalm i. 1. 1 Thess. v. 22. Proverbs i. 10.
3. Because we should not set a bad example. Luke xvi. 28. James iv. 17. Psalm cxl. 11.
4. Because we can employ our time better. Ephes. V. 15, 16. Titus ii. 11, 12. 2 John xi. 11. Psalm xc. 12.
5. Because we shall have to render a strict account of our lives at the day of judgement. Luke xvi. 2. Proverbs xxix. 1. Eccles. iii. 15, 17.
6. Because we should not encourage drunkenness, folly and vice. 1 Cor. vii. 31. Psalm ix. 17. Proverbs iv. 14, 15.

(Field, 1848, II, pp. 121–2)

Letter

The particular [sin] is drinking, which brought me very low; and if you read the following verses, you will see that I have proved them. Prov. xx. 1; Prov. xxiii. 21 & 32; Haggai. i. 6; Prov. i. 31; Prov. xiii. 15-21; Prov. xi. 21; Isaiah xlviii. 22; Jer. xxii. 21. And now my dear sister, seeing I have proved this, I do heartily pray that you will correct your son betimes, and he will give you comfort and joy … if you read the following Scriptures, you will see that your thoughts cannot stand. Ezekiel xviii; Colos. iii. 25; Mark xvi. 16; Luke xii. 3 & 5; Psalm ix. 17; Psalm xi. 6. This shows us plainly that all who don't repent must suffer the vengeance of eternal fire. Read St John's gospel, and there you will see that Jesus died for sinners.

(Field, 1848, I, p. 298)

Provide your answer...

Discussion

Comparing the exam script and the letter, the first thing you may have noticed was that both contained references to parts of the Bible – that is, specific chapters and verses. This emphasises the importance of the Bible in the instruction given at Reading Gaol. You might have also been impressed that both men were able to recall specific passages to support particular points. This shows how rigorous drilling and memorisation was at Reading Gaol. Both made reference to the sin of drinking alcohol, and its relationship to criminal behaviour. It is clear that Field was attempting to train them to avoid the pub when released from prison.

You may have thought that the main difference between the two texts was that the letter warns that those who do not mend their ways will not only end up in prison (like J.I.) but will 'suffer the vengeance of eternal fire'. In other words, they will go to hell, unless they repent and believe in Christ.

Were these authentic voices of prisoners? The first was written under exam conditions, and I.N. obviously wanted to show that he had learned something at the

prison school. J.I. would have known that his letter would be read by the chaplain before it was sent to his sister. Both prisoners might have hoped that by showing Field they had reformed that they might gain something. Indeed, Field had, in the past, argued for the early release of prisoners who had performed well under his scheme, so this could have motivated the authors of these sources.

Alternatively, you could argue that the methods of instruction used in the prison – drilling, memorisation, writing copies – meant that these prisoners, when given pen and paper, were hardly equipped to write anything else. J.I. in particular would not have wanted to pass up the opportunity to write to his sister. In 1850, when prison inspector Captain Williams interviewed prisoners at Reading Gaol about the instruction they had received, he found they could repeat verses from the Bible perfectly but did not understand the meaning of what they had learned (Inspectors, Home District, 15th Report, 1851, p. 63).

Finally, it is important not to underestimate the message of hope contained in the Bible. Instruction focused on soul-saving. Many of these men would not have wanted to return to prison and they were being told they would not have to if they could live as good Christians. Reality of life outside the prison may have suggested otherwise, but it does not mean these prisoners were not sincere when they wrote these pieces.

5 Prisoners as scholars

It is difficult to tell how the prisoners felt about these methods of instruction. Did they want to:

- attend the prison school?
- learn how to read and write, or to do some sums?
- be drilled to memorise Biblical passages?

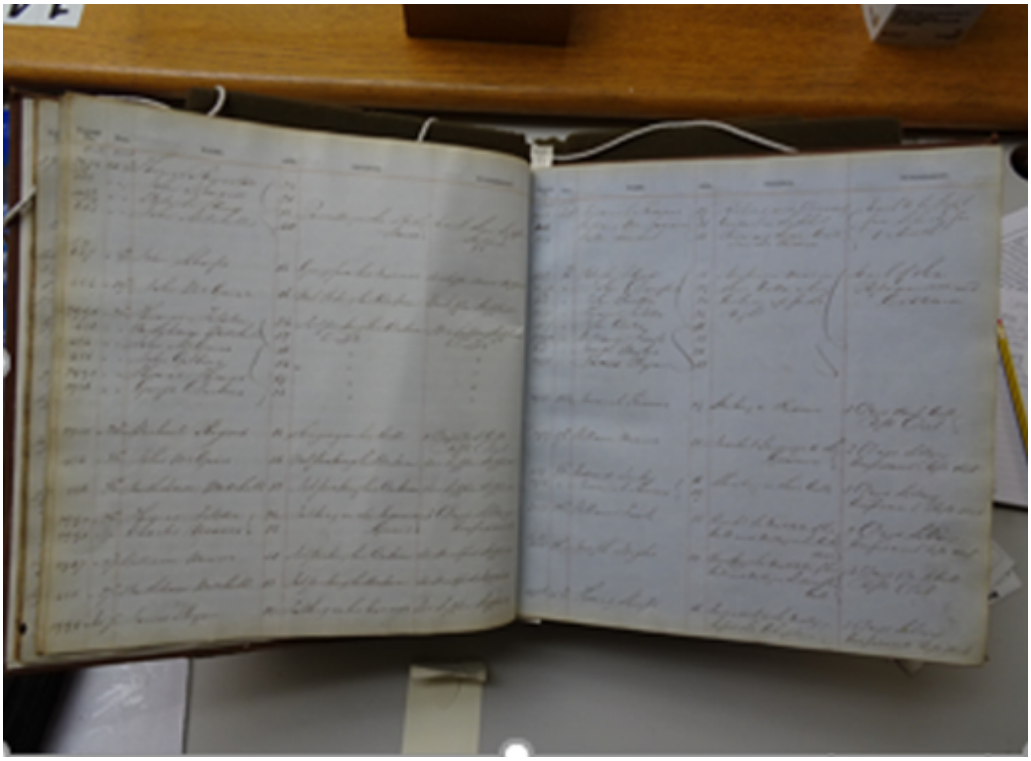


Figure 11 Misconduct book from Chester City Gaol. The pages shown include, in November 1852, the following: 'Jeremiah Kearnes (19), William McCormack (21) and Walter Lambert (18), for riotous and disorderly conduct in the school room and throwing coals at another prisoner. Each to be kept from school for one month.'

The sources from Reading Gaol that you looked at in Activity 3 suggest some level of engagement, but they do not tell us much about the willingness or motivation of the prisoners as learners. Annual and inspection reports from local prisons in England and Wales overwhelmingly emphasise the eagerness of prisoners to attend lessons, their attentiveness during instruction, and their gratitude which was expressed in conversations with officials.

Relatively few reports described prisoners as indifferent or obstructive. This might have been because most schooling in local prisons was voluntary – the prisoners had to want to be there. At some prisons, attendance was limited to those who behaved well, and at most prisons misconduct in the schoolroom led to expulsion. The local prison authorities were keen to ensure that education was regarded as a privilege.

At convict prisons, however, attendance at school was compulsory. It is here, then, that we might look for some alternative perspectives, but where can we find them in a system which was set up to suppress the voice of the prisoner? One possibility is to look at records of prison offences, which ranged from acts of violence to attempts to

communicate with other prisoners. Could committing an ‘offence’ in prison be regarded as a form of protest?

Activity 4 Misconduct records at Pentonville Prison

Allow approximately 20 minutes for this activity

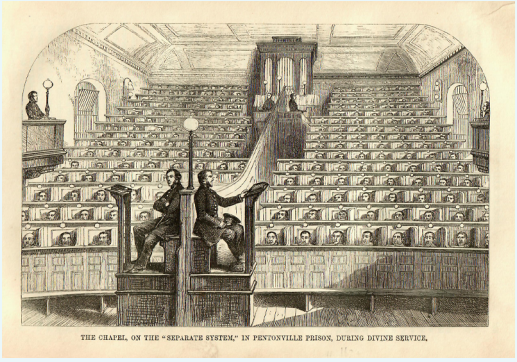


Figure 12 The chapel, on the ‘separate system’ at Pentonville Prison. The partitions placed between prisoners were meant to prevent communication but soon became covered in graffiti, and had to be stripped and cleaned. Warders placed at inspection points could not prevent prisoners from drawing on the stalls. Sometimes this was because they fell asleep on duty.

Pentonville was a convict prison. It had been constructed in 1842 to provide a new stage of punishment in the convict prison system. Men found guilty of serious offences and sentenced to transportation (exile to Australia) were sent to Pentonville for 18 months (later reduced to 9 months) if the authorities believed they had the potential to be reformed. If they behaved well at Pentonville, they were given conditional pardons on arrival in the Australian penal colonies. If not, then they risked being assigned to a chain gang to labour on public works in Van Diemen’s Land (modern day Tasmania).

Pentonville operated on the separate system. Its designers hoped it would be a model which other prisons would follow. The men were confined in cells and let out only to attend chapel and school (which was held in the chapel). The chapel had been fitted with partitions to keep prisoners separate. The men exercised alone in separate yards. When out of the cell, convicts had to wear a peaked cap to preserve their anonymity. Absolute silence was the rule at all times.

The following tables appeared in Pentonville’s annual report for 1852. Table 1 contains a summary of all the offences committed by prisoners in 1852 for which they were punished. Table 2 tells us how many prisoners committed these offences – some prisoners committed multiple offences, while others committed no offences.

Take a look at the tables now and try to answer the following questions:

1. How many offences occurred at, or were related to, the prison school?
2. From the information given, can we draw any conclusions about the character of these offences?
3. Can you find the number of prisoners who did not commit a prison offence? What conclusions might you draw from that number?

Table 1 Prison Offences at Pentonville Prison during the year 1852

Offence:	*Number of times committed:*
Communicating and attempting to communicate by writing	66
Obscene communications and drawing obscene figures on books, stalls, &c.	17
Communicating or attempting to communicate verbally or by signs at exercise	39
Communicating or attempting to communicate in school or chapel	70
Communicating or attempting to communicate by knocking on cell wall	20
Communicating or attempting to communicate through the water taps	7
Dancing in chapel, mimicking Chaplain, and other misconduct during divine service	6
Misconduct in school, and insolence to schoolmasters	9
Using threats, oaths, or obscene language, or attempting to assault officers while on duty	37
Using threats, swearing at and assaulting fellow prisoners, whole working in association	10
Wilfully spoiling work material and cell furniture, cutting their clothes, shoes, &c.	56
Disfiguring their persons by cutting of their hair	2
Disobedience, insolence, refusing to work, &c	57
Disturbing the prison by shouting, whistling, and singing obscene or other songs	24
Boring holes in cell windows and ventilators	11
Insubordinate conduct, breaking open well in trap door, cursing medical officer, and assaulting warder	1
Projecting a written plan of escape, and attempting to escape	2
Misappropriating prison property	12
Purloining and exchanging provisions, when employed in bakehouse, &c.	10
Attempting suicide by hanging	2
Attempting clandestinely to send a letter out of prison	1
Refusing to take food	1
Having tobacco in possession	1
TOTAL	461

Source: Directors of Convict Prisons Report, 1852-53, pp. 17-18.

Table 2 Prisoners Punished at Pentonville during the year 1852

Prisoners punished --	*No. of Prisoners*	*No. of Punishments*
Once	192	192
Twice	51	102
Thrice	19	57
4 times	15	60
5 times	3	15
6 times	1	6
7 times	3	21
8 times	1	8
TOTAL	285	461
Prisoners not punished	993	
Total population	1278	

Source: Directors of Convict Prisons Report, 1852-53, p. 18.

Provide your answer...

Discussion

1. First, you may have found nine offences described as ‘misconduct in school, and insolence to schoolmasters’. You may have also seen that there were 70 offences described as ‘communicating or attempting to communicate in school or chapel’. Arguably, there are other offences in this table which might be connected with the school. You might have noticed there were a further 17 charges for ‘obscene communications and drawing obscene figures on books, stalls, etc’. The reference to books and stalls – partitions used to separate prisoners in chapel – could mean that some of these offences occurred at school. In any case they relate to the tools of literacy or acts of writing. There were also 66 charges for communicating and attempting to communicate in writing – again, showing prisoners’ use of the writing skill, if these offences did not happen in the schoolroom. Altogether, these add up to a lot of charges – 162 of a total 461.
2. The overwhelming number of these school-related offences are attempts to communicate with others, rather than acts which could be interpreted as a protest against the school and the instruction given within it. Assembling prisoners for school offered a golden opportunity for prisoners to attempt to communicate, as did the provision of pens, paper and books. It is a testament to the sociability of humans more than anything else. That leaves just nine instances of misconduct in school. The table does not explain what ‘misconduct’ was.
3. 993 prisoners did not commit offences for which they were punished. That is a substantial majority of the total number of prisoners. This, and the nine cases of misconduct, suggest that most prisoners did not object to school.

It is possible that there was more misconduct in school which went unrecorded and unpunished and, apart from ‘insolence to the schoolmasters’ (in other words, talking back), it is not clear what was meant by ‘misconduct’. The table produced for the year 1855 provides a little more detail – 12 men were punished for ‘disturbing school, [by] talking aloud, shouting, whistling, [and] mimicking schoolmasters’. In 1854 one case of misconduct in school was brought to the attention of the prison’s visiting director (or manager on behalf of the government), Captain Donatus O’Brien. The details were recorded in the Commissioners’ (i.e. Directors’) Visiting Book:

1 May 1854. A question has arisen respecting the case of a [Roman Catholic] prisoner who interrupted the school on a doctrinal subject. The Governor has suggested that the [prisoner] should be deprived of attending school for a fortnight. The chaplain would be glad if he were absent entirely; but it is stated to me that the prisoner’s object is to avoid school. I see the prisoner, who says he will not stand by and hear the doctrines of his church found fault with. I warn him that he must attend school, that whether he does or does not like what is taught he must not interrupt the schooling; and that if he does interrupt the schooling it must be treated as a prison offence and he will be punished accordingly.

(Pentonville Prison, Commissioners’ Visiting Book, 1843–1854, entry for 1 May 1854)

Many prison chaplains believed that the route to redemption lay in the doctrines of the Church of England. Other denominations, such as Roman Catholicism, were sometimes disparaged during instruction, and some prisoners openly objected to this. But many did not. They might have seen school as a break from more irksome activities, or they might have been able to extract what they wanted from the curriculum and ignore the bits that were unwelcome.

Like the example of Reading Gaol earlier this session, there are also hints of a darker side of prison education. The prisoner here is forced to attend school, even though he doesn’t want to. Education had a disciplinary function. It could be punishing as well as enlightening.

6 This session’s quiz

Well done – you have reached the end of Session 3. You can now check what you’ve learned this session by taking the end-of-session quiz.

Session 3 practice quiz

Open the quiz in a new tab or window by holding down Ctrl (or Cmd on a Mac) when you click on the link. Return here when you have finished.

7 Summary of Session 3

Figure 13 Women who had given birth shortly before entering prison or who gave birth in prison were permitted to stay with the child. This illustration from the late 1850s is of the 'nursery' at Brixton Convict Prison for women which accommodated children up to the age of 4.

In this session, you have looked at what prisoners were taught in prison schools between 1823 and 1855. Curriculum expanded in many prisons during this period, perhaps in ways that surprised you. Yet most, if not all of it, was geared towards the development of religious knowledge. You also looked at forms of evidence which reveal prisoners' perspectives on learning.

You should now have an understanding of:

- the ways in which prisoners' experiences of education can be recovered and the challenges of interpreting what they mean
- what was taught in the prison school, how it was taught, and why it was taught
- the intentions of educators and how the methods they used to instruct prisoners affected the usefulness and value of the education received by individuals.

Deciding what should be taught and the best ways to learn have been matters of debate for centuries. For much of the 1800s learning was seen as a way of getting information into people's heads. You might agree that some information is useful to memorise. For example, if you are asked to subtract any whole number from 10 it is likely that you can instantly give the answer. You don't have to use a tool, such as your fingers or a calculator. However, this does not demonstrate that you know about mathematics.

The same is true of learning extracts of the Bible by heart, as prisoners were forced to do. This did not necessarily mean they understood the meaning of what they had memorised, or that this equipped them to read other texts and reflect on them. Sometimes reflection was not the intention, as instruction was used as a tool for discipline – to make prisoners docile (submissive).

Still, at least some prisoners recognised the value of the skills they learned and were able to make use of them, inside and outside the prison. Education could be transformational,

in spite of the methods used and the conditions under which it was experienced. You will consider the results of prison education more broadly in Session 5. First, in Session 4, you will explore another form of education available inside the prison: the provision of books for self-instruction and the birth of the prison library.

You can now go to Session 4.

Session 4: Education outside the prison school

Introduction

Education in prison did not begin and end with the prison school. In this session, you will look at other forms of learning available to prisoners in the 1800s, specifically the provision of books which prisoners were able to use for self-improvement.

Figure 1 Prison library at Strangeways, Manchester, 1910.

Throughout the 1700s, the openness of the prison to the outside world meant that reading matter could be taken to prisoners. Efforts were made to provide Bibles and Christian tracts. Some politically radical pamphlets and sheets containing pictures and songs about executions also found their way to prisoners. Legislation in the early 1800s gave control over books in the prison to the chaplain and the prison authorities.

At the same time, the penal reform movement gave new importance to books in the prison, and acts of reading by prisoners. While chaplains almost universally acknowl-

edged the great potential that books offered for self-improvement, their attempts to control the effects of reading were constantly challenged.

By the end of this session, you should be able to:

- identify other forms of learning and self-improvement outside the prison school
- discuss debates about the suitability of reading matter for prisoners
- describe how prisoners accessed and used the books available to them.

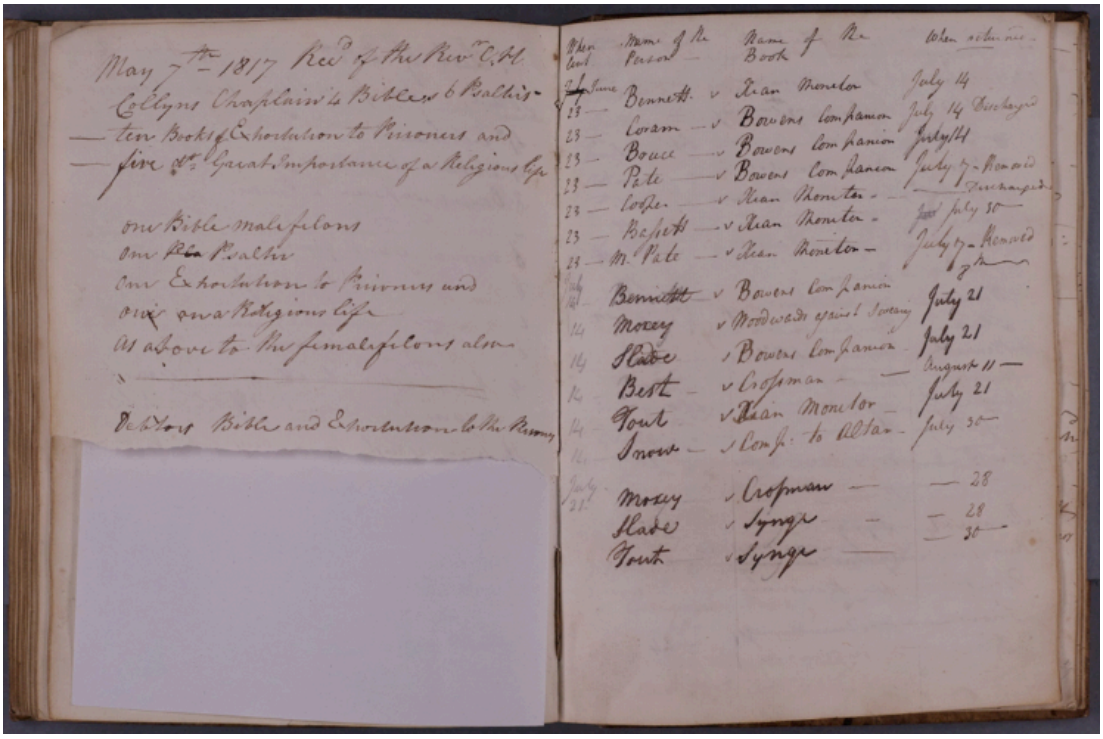
To begin with, watch this video in which Rosalind Crone describes the prison library at Lincoln Castle Gaol in the 1800s. Consider what books prisoners had access to, and the evidence that survives on how they used them. It will be useful to reflect on this case study during this session. Please note that in the video, where Rosalind says 'Captain Cook, who circumnavigated Australia', this should say 'Captain Cook, who circumnavigated *the east coast of* Australia'.

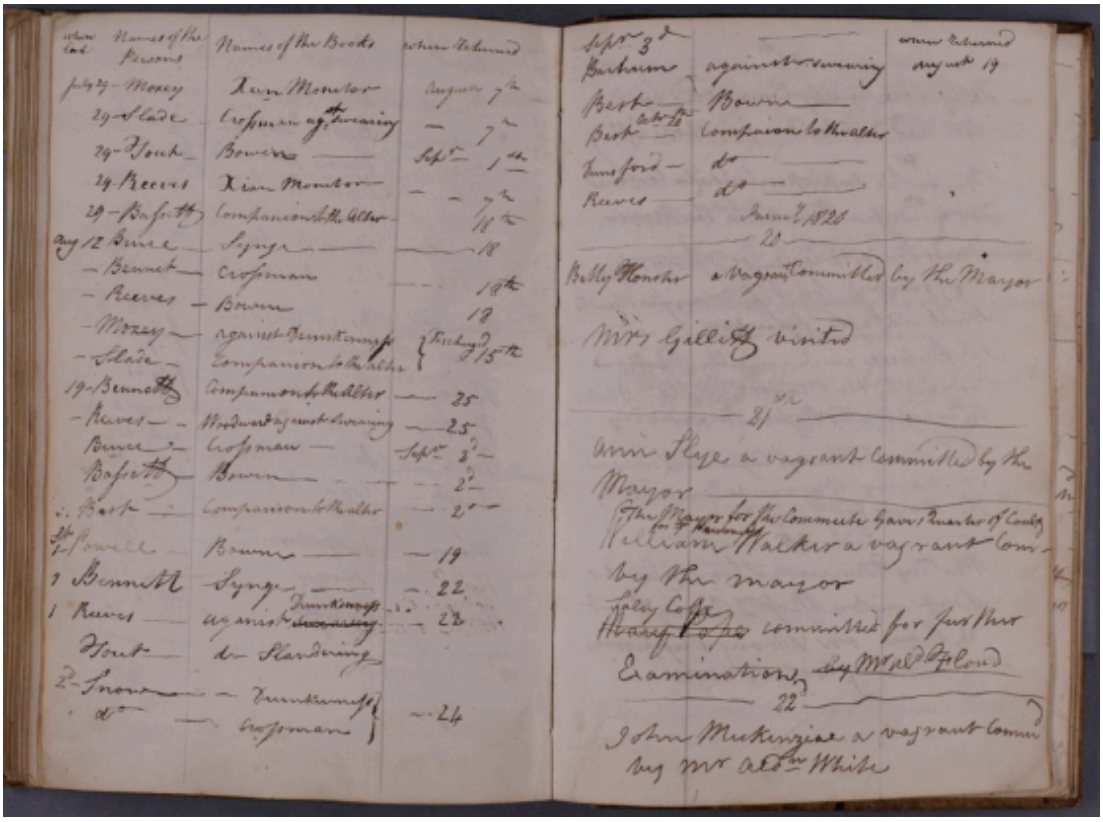
Video content is not available in this format.

1 Books behind bars

An alternative form of education and self-improvement in the prison was provided through access to books and time to read them. Deliberate schemes to provide prisoners with books date to the early 1700s.

In 1698, an English clergyman, Thomas Bray, established the Society for the Promotion of Christian Knowledge (SPCK) to spread Christianity through the distribution of Bibles and religious tracts (small books or pamphlets) in Britain and abroad. In 1702, the SPCK began to supply Newgate Gaol with Bibles, prayer books and tracts. Soon after, the SPCK sent a packet of tracts to every county gaol in England and Wales (Fyfe, 1992, pp. 3–6).





Figures 2 and 3 The ‘Southgate Prison’ book, from Exeter City Gaol, contains a record of loans of religious books from the chaplain to prisoners in 1819.

As the number of paid prison chaplains grew and interest in soul-saving in prisons expanded, there was a greater demand for appropriate reading matter for prisoners. The

1823 Gaols Act gave prison chaplains in England and Wales authority over the acquisition and distribution of books (*Gaols Act 1823*, section 30).

Governors, in their annual returns to the Home Secretary, had to declare whether prisoners were supplied with Bibles and other books. Rules for the new Penitentiary at Millbank stated that the chaplain should be supplied with books from the SPCK and that he should distribute them among the prisoners as he saw fit. The SPCK continued to be the main supplier of books and reading matter for local prisons in England and Wales. Sometimes the SPCK sent packages of tracts for free, other times the prison authorities paid for them. By the 1830s, there were very few prisons at which prisoners did not have access to Bibles, prayer books and religious tracts.

Often chaplains distributed the books freely among prisoners. They handed out copies of tracts to individuals on arrival, or they left tracts, Bibles and prayer books in the day rooms for prisoners to pick up and read. According to the chaplain at Horsemonger Lane Gaol in 1832, prisoners were well supplied with religious books: many read them, some neglected them, and others tended to destroy them (*Gaol Act Reports*, 1833, p. 242).

Tracts were often flimsy publications which could fall apart if passed through many different hands. There are many examples in the primary sources of prisoners using pages torn from Bibles to roll tobacco, to make playing cards, and to curl their hair. Several chaplains restricted the supply of religious books to prisoners who requested them and promised not to mutilate them.

Activity 1 Bible reading at Reading Gaol

Allow approximately 15 minutes for this activity

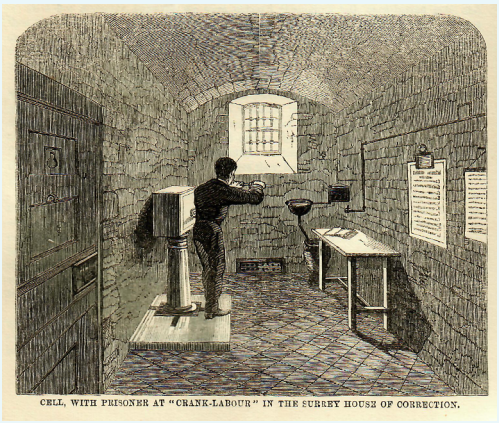


Figure 4 A prisoner working at ‘crank labour’ in his cell in the Surrey House of Correction, in the late 1850s. The invention of the hand crank allowed hard labour to be brought into prison cells, limiting further opportunities for prisoners to leave their cells. A prisoner would turn the crank until he had completed the number of revolutions set for him by the taskmaster. The resistance of the crank could be tightened to increase the pain. In this image, there is an open book on the table in the cell indicating that the prisoner might have used the opportunity to read during breaks.

Part 1

You looked at the regime established at Reading Gaol in the mid-1840s in Session 3. Using the knowledge you acquired then, read the following extract from the journal kept by the prison governor which was included in the 1845 report of the Home District inspectors of prisons and try to answer the following questions:

- What do you think the prisoners were reading?
- What evidence is there to suggest that they were enthusiastic readers?
- How might we interpret the prisoners' enthusiasm for reading?

> March 16th 1845. – I went through the male prison at 7.30pm, and looked in upon every prisoner through the inspection slides, 97 in number, and found them *all reading but* 12, ten of whom were walking about, and two warming their hands over the gas light; … [I] have made numerous similar inspections of prisoners at all hours, and have invariably found about the same number in proportion reading.
>
> (Inspectors, Home District, 10th Report, 1845, p. 34)

Provide your answer...

Discussion

1. The prisoners observed by the governor were most likely reading the Bible. You might remember from Session 3 that prisoners arriving at Reading from 1844 were given Bibles to read when they asked for work. Alternatively, some of these prisoners might have been reading other religious books – prayer or hymn books, or maybe tracts. The Rev. John Field liked to give prisoners a copy of an SPCK tract, *The Divines of our Blessed Lord*, as well as one authored by himself: *Friendly Advice to a Prisoner*. Secular (non-religious) books were rarely distributed to prisoners at Reading Gaol in the 1840s and 1850s (Crone, 2012).
2. According to the governor's account, 85 of the 97 prisoners appeared to be reading. It is possible that the 12 men who were not reading were taking a break from reading, to warm their hands or to exercise. It is also possible that the 12 men could not read (i.e. they had not yet learned how to read).
3. You might have remembered from the activity in Session 3 that Reading Gaol had recently been rebuilt to allow for the separate confinement of prisoners. There was a hint in the extract – the governor observed each man using the 'inspection slide'. The men spent most of their time in cells by themselves. They might have:
    - felt able to pick up the religious books left for them without having to suffer the jeers of their peers
    - been reading the Bible because there was nothing else to do
    - heard the governor approaching and decided to pretend to read their Bibles in the hope of looking penitent and gaining some kind of reward.

The source does not speculate on this, but clearly there are many reasons why the prisoners might have appeared so studious.

Part 2

Read the below statement made in 1848 by a prisoner to the Rev. John Field, chaplain at Reading Gaol. In Session 3 there was some consideration of personal testimony. What do you make of this evidence?

> What a blessing it is that I was put into a cell with nothing but my Bible, and could not get away from it! For the first three or four weeks I used to take it up and throw it down again, and curse it; but I could not help taking it up; and what a blessing it has turned out! I seem to have been brought here that I might read the Bible, and now I believe it. I shall forever bless God that I was brought to this prison.
>
> (Field, 1848, I, p. 331)

Provide your answer...

Discussion

It further illuminates the governor's report of three years earlier and suggests that prisoners could be reformed through reading the Bible. However, this prisoner's response has been filtered through the chaplain. We may not be reading exactly what the prisoner said and we cannot tell if the prisoner sounded sincere.

2 Reading in seclusion

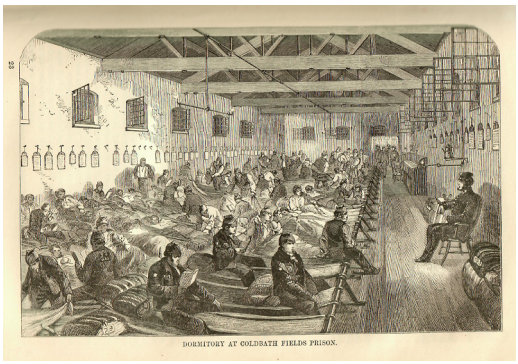


Figure 5 The dormitory at Coldbath Fields Prison, London, in the late 1850s. Coldbath Fields operated on the silent system. Prisoners were kept under close surveillance by guards and those who broke the silence were punished, sometimes severely. This engraving shows several prisoners are taking the opportunity to read before lights out.

The imposition of silence and separation in British and Irish prisons from the mid-1830s gave books new importance in the penal regime. Reading the Bible and other religious books was a key component of the reformatory project. Chaplains wanted prisoners to read the Scriptures for themselves.

Reading was also a useful activity to fill long stretches of time when prisoners were not working or sleeping. Idle prisoners were not just an annoyance to officials (who believed that idleness was a cause of crime), but idleness, in the context of extremely limited contact with other humans, was potentially dangerous. It could cause mental health problems – and the authorities were keenly aware of this. Prisoners were subconsciously aware of the dangers too. Faced with soul-destroying boredom, prisoners who could read picked up the books made available to them.

The 1839 Prisons Act for England and Wales specified that all prisoners confined in separate cells should each be provided with a Bible and Common Prayer Book – as part of the standard ‘cell furniture’ – as well as ‘additional books’. Annual and inspection reports from the late 1830s and 1840s suggest that formal libraries were being established at an increasing number of local prisons. At the same time, libraries became commonplace at convict prisons. By the 1850s, libraries could be found on every convict prison hulk (Crone, 2022, ch.3).

3 Expanding the prison library

At first many libraries consisted of collections of religious books already in the prisons.

As early as 1823, concerns were expressed that the exclusive diet of Bible reading and religious tracts at Millbank Penitentiary had led to feelings of depression and low spirits among the convicts serving long periods of separate confinement there (*Select Committee on the Penitentiary at Millbank*, 1823, p. 4). Despite the enthusiasm of the prisoner quoted in Activity 1 (Part 2), similar concerns were raised about the programme of Bible reading at Reading Gaol in the late 1840s when prison health statistics showed a worrying increase in the number of prisoners being sent to the asylum (Crone, 2012).

Moral, secular tracts were added to prison libraries, as were educational works which could expand upon the subjects taught in the schoolroom, such as history, geography and mathematics. Additions at some prisons also included books on natural history (studies of wildlife and plants), practical works to assist with learning a new trade or skills for a new occupation (such as domestic service), and self-help books, including those on managing personal or family finances.

Figure 6 Frederic Hill (1803–1896), prison inspector for Scotland (1836–49) and for the

North of England (1850–1). Frederic Hill was the son of a schoolmaster, brother of Rowland Hill who established the penny post, and brother of Matthew Davenport Hill who was one of the leaders of the reformatory schools movement. On becoming inspector of prisons for Scotland, Frederic Hill campaigned for the improvement of prison libraries. In 1837 he completed a survey of towns in Scotland which showed that crime was higher in places with poor library facilities. In 1843, he compiled a list of books which should feature in a prison library and sent it to prison governors in his district.

From the late 1830s, some prison chaplains, and the inspector for prisons in Scotland, Frederic Hill, began to argue that prison libraries should also include some lighter literature. Hill believed that amusing but moral stories would encourage those who could not read to make efforts to learn (*Inspectors, Scotland, 7th Report*, 1842, p. 8). The chaplain at Glasgow Prison argued that prisoners on long sentences in particular needed to be kept cheerful, by reading entertaining books as well as books of a serious character (Fyfe, 1992, p. 48).

The expansion of the prison library led to a vigorous debate about what was appropriate reading material for prisoners – what could encourage them to reform, what risked easing the pain of their imprisonment, and what had the potential to make them more criminal.

Activity 2 The dangers of reading

Allow approximately 10 minutes for this activity

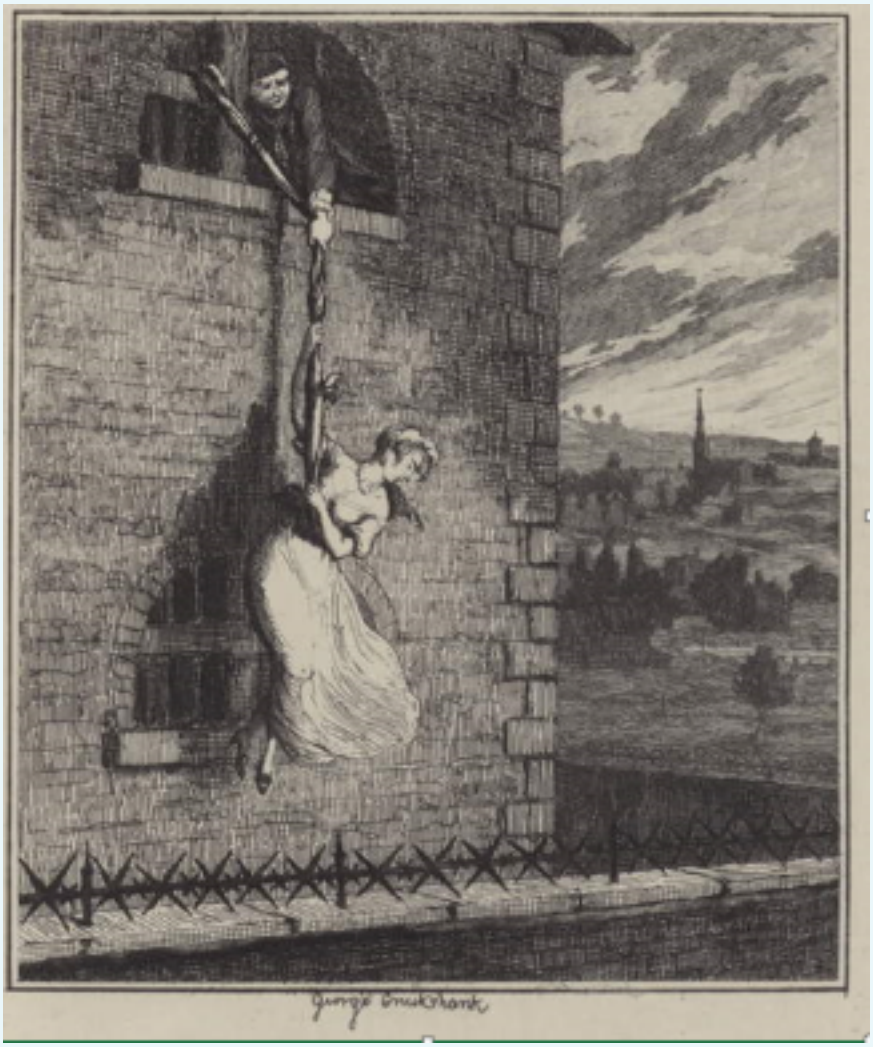


Figure 7 Jack Sheppard with Edgeworth Bess escaping from Clerkenwell Prison in London. This is one of the many illustrations of Jack's exploits which appeared in the novel written by William Harrison Ainsworth, published in instalments between January 1839 and February 1840. The great popularity of the novel meant that cheap, pirated versions quickly appeared in the market.

In the late 1840s, the journalist and social investigator, Henry Mayhew, organised a meeting in the schoolroom of the British Union School in Shadwell, London. He put up a notice inviting thieves and vagabonds (the homeless) who were under 20 years old. One hundred and fifty attended the meeting. Mayhew used the opportunity to talk with them about their lives and habits.

Read the extract from Mayhew's account of the meeting, and consider the following questions:

1. What does Mayhew suggest led these boys into a life of crime?
2. Do the boys agree with him?

> Respecting their *education*, according to the popular meaning of the term, 63 of the 150 were able to read and write, and they were principally thieves. Fifty of this number said they had read *Jack Sheppard* and the lives of Dick Turpin, Claude du Val, and all the other popular thieves' novels, as well as the *Newgate Calendar* and *Lives of the Robbers and Pirates*. Those who could not read themselves, said they'd had *Jack Sheppard* read to them at the lodging houses. Numbers avowed that they had been induced to resort to an abandoned course of life from reading the lives of notorious thieves, and novels about highway robbers. When asked that they thought of *Jack Sheppard*, several bawled out "He's a regular brick" – a sentiment which was almost universally concurred in by the deafening shouts and plaudits which followed. When asked whether they would like to be Jack Sheppards, they answered "Yes, if the times was the same now as they were then."
>
> (Mayhew, 1968 [1861–62], p. 419)

Provide your answer...

Discussion

1. In this passage, Henry Mayhew suggests that the reading of tales about thieves had led the boys into a life of crime. Having the ability to read and write was no protection against criminal behaviour. If anything, possession of these skills made the boys vulnerable to the effects of romantic tales about famous thieves such as Jack Sheppard – a burglar who escaped from prison four times before he was hanged at Tyburn in 1724 – and Dick Turpin – a highwayman (or street robber), active in the 1730s, who was hanged outside York Castle Gaol in 1739. The suggestion is that the boys hoped to emulate these famous thieves and lead equally exciting lives. Interestingly, the corrupting influence of such literature was not restricted to those who could read, as others were able to indulge in these stories by being read to.
2. Mayhew writes that many boys said they had been encouraged to commit crime through reading about notorious thieves. Perhaps Mayhew had already suggested this idea and the boys readily agreed because it offered an easy way out. Explaining criminal behaviour and the causes of crime is complex and often painful, especially for individuals. When Mayhew asked if they would like to be Jack Sheppard, they said they would if the times were the same now as they were then. This suggests the boys did not take the tales as seriously as Mayhew believed they did.

4 Censorship

Mayhew's was one of several studies of the pernicious effect of reading fiction – especially stories about famous criminals – published in the 1840s and 1850s. The Rev. John Clay, chaplain at the Preston House of Correction, and Captain Williams, prison inspector for the Northern and Eastern District, also conducted interviews with juveniles in prisons in which *Jack Sheppard* was identified as a dangerous book (*Select Committee on Criminal and Destitute Juveniles*, 1852, pp. 406–22, 422–5). Close attention was paid to the content of stories acquired for the prison library to ensure that books were devoid of any representations of criminal activity, even when those books had been written by leading or highly respected novelists (including Charles Dickens).

Concern about the effects of reading on prisoners was not limited to the novel, or 'crime fiction'. In 1856, a senior official in Her Majesty's Stationery Office, the government department which supplied books to convict prisons, objected to instructions he had received from Sir Joshua Jebb, chair of the Directors of Convict Prisons, to supply Portsmouth Prison with two copies of *Treatise on Law of Banker's Cheques* (a text of which there had been many editions since its publication in 1799). The official wrote:

> Now one would naturally suppose that the majority of convicts know a great deal too much of the arrangement of Country and other Banks, and that the less they are acquainted with these matters and with the law of cheques, the safer private property is likely to remain.
>
> (Fyfe, 1992, p. 85)

On this occasion, Jebb successfully argued the case, and the books were subsequently dispatched to Portsmouth.