

PORT ARTHUR

useful facts

A BRIEF HISTORY ISLE OF THE
DEAD ESCAPE TRADES AND
INDUSTRIES CONVICT TATTOOS
PUNISHMENT THE SOLDIER'S LIFE
DAILY LIFE FOR POINT PUER BOYS
DAILY LIFE FOR ADULT CONVICTS
DAILY LIVES OF THE CIVIL OFFICERS

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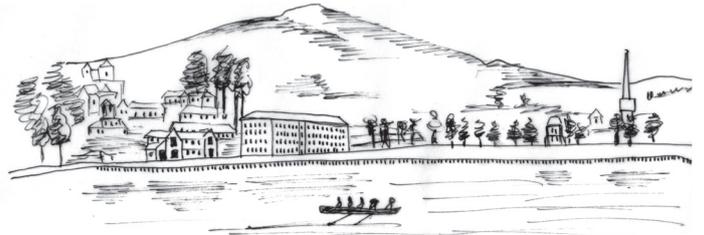
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WHY CHOOSE THIS PLACE?



Port Arthur was named after Governor George Arthur. Located on the rugged Tasman Peninsula, the ocean, forests and landforms made it a natural prison.

It was well-endowed with natural resources; the forests yielded valuable timber, the harbour was large and deep and it had a good supply of fresh water.

The settlement was established in September 1830 as a timber-getting camp, producing sawn logs for government projects. After 1833 it became a punishment station for repeat offenders from the Australian colonies. It also managed a number of outstations that produced raw material like food and timber.

AN AMBITIOUS EXPERIMENT

Despite all its cruelties, Port Arthur was founded on an idea that was then very new, that prisoners could be reformed while still being punished.

Governor Arthur designed a system that was built on punishment and discipline, classification and separation, religious and moral instruction, trade training and education. In combination, they were to provide the convict with opportunities to turn himself into a useful future citizen. For the man who did not want to reform however, life would be made very unpleasant indeed.

AN AMBITIOUS EXPERIMENT CONT.

Port Arthur therefore was an ambitious experiment. While its intentions were good, today its methods seem cruel, and many men were destroyed by their experience here. Some convicts were absorbed into other, later experiments, such as the Paupers' Depot, the beginnings of the modern welfare system, or the Lunatic Asylum, the beginnings of scientific treatment of mental illness. Other men did leave Port Arthur and make useful, law-abiding lives; for some, this was only possible because they had gained skills that otherwise have been beyond their reach.

Despite all its cruelties, Port Arthur was founded on an idea that was then very new, that prisoners could be reformed while still being punished. Governor Arthur designed a system that was built on punishment and discipline, classification and separation, religious and moral instruction, trade training and education. In combination, they were to provide the convict with opportunities to turn himself into a useful future citizen. For the man who did not want to reform however, life would be made very unpleasant indeed.

CONVICTS AND STAFF

Although there is no such thing as a typical convict, in general convicts were likely to be young men sentenced for what seem today to be minor crimes, like stealing or housebreaking.

Generally the offence that they were transported for was the last of a serious of minor offences. A journey of some five months brought them as far from England, Scotland, Ireland or elsewhere in the British Empire as it was possible to come. For many, transportation was exile for life from everything that dear and familiar, their family, their homes and their native place.

The men who ended up at Port Arthur were men who had committed crimes after they had arrived in the colonies; some of these crimes were serious, but they were more likely to be thefts or trying to escape. There were certainly vicious criminals among them but they were in the minority.

Port Arthur needed staff to manage all the record-keeping, tradesmen to teach their skills and soldiers to make sure no-one escaped. These free men often came with their wives and families, who tried to live normal lives. They held parties, literary evenings and regattas and their children played and went to school.

By 1840 over 2000 convicts, soldiers and free officer and their families lived here. It had become a major industrial settlement that produced shoes, ships, clothing and bells and furniture, among other things.



THE BOYS' PRISON

At this time Point Puer, located across the bay from Port Arthur, was another bold experiment. It operated from 1834-1849 and was the first juvenile prison established in the British Empire.

Point Puer was established to separate impressionable boys from the influence of hardened criminals and to teach these boys a trade that would give them an alternative to a life of crime. The authorities intended to reform the boys through education, trade training and moral and religious instruction.

Eventually the British government decided to keep these young prisoners in Britain, and Point Puer closed.



THE END OF PORT ARTHUR

Transportation ended in 1853 and from that time on numbers at Port Arthur began to decline. Gradually the station began to resemble an old men's home.

Paupers, who were ex-convicts who were too old or ill to work, were sent here from around the state. The Lunatic Asylum also received the mentally ill from the Peninsula and elsewhere in the colony. Eventually there were too few men to do the work necessary to keep the station running, it had become very expensive to keep it open and the authorities closed Port Arthur in 1877. Those men who remained were transferred to the asylum in New Norfolk, or the gaol or welfare institutions in Hobart.

The site was broken up into lots which were sold to private buyers, and gradually a small town grew up here. It was renamed Carnarvon, to disguise its past, but soon it became clear that this unhappy past was a goldmine. Tourism soon became the major economic activity, and this continues to this day.

THE CEMETERY

The Isle of the Dead is a small island located in the bay off Port Arthur. In 1833 it was selected as a burial place by the Reverend John Manton and was called the Isle of the Dead.

According to the Rev J.A. Manton 'This, it appeared to me, would be a secure and undisturbed resting-place where the prisoners might lie together until the morning of the resurrection'. Between 1833 and the closure of the penal settlement in 1877 some 1100 burials took place.

Even in death the strict social order was maintained. Free people were buried on the highest part of the island; their graves were marked by headstones that were carved by the convict stonemasons. The convicts, paupers, lunatics and invalids however were buried on the lower part of the island; they were not allowed any grave markers until the 1850s.



CAUSES OF DEATH

There were many different causes of death. Many were related to work or to status in life.

Convicts and soldiers died from diseases like pneumonia and dysentery or through the dangerous work that they did. For example a number of convicts died when felling trees. Since all transport was by water, drowning was also a common cause of death. Some diseases were caused or made worse by poor diet; scurvy claimed the lives of some of the convicts after the gardens were confiscated. Inadequate medical care also claimed people's lives. Women commonly died in childbirth and children succumbed to whooping cough and scarlet fever. As the convicts grew older so did the incidence of heart disease and stroke.

AN IDEAL PRISON



The natural advantages of the site, including its abundance of natural resources like timber, together with its isolated position on the Peninsula, made Port Arthur ideal for a secondary penal settlement.

The Tasman Peninsula is separated from the Forestier Peninsula by a narrow neck of land known as Eaglehawk Neck. A military guard which included a line of dogs kept constant watch on either side of the Neck to effectively seal the only possible land escape route for all but the most resourceful or desperate men. The dogs were chained close together and some of the dogs were placed on pontoons built in the water. The dogs were not there to attack the escaping convicts but to raise the alarm by barking.

A series of semaphore stations were built that could send a message to Hobart in about 10 minutes. The precautions taken at Eaglehawk Neck, combined with the isolation of Port Arthur and the semaphore system therefore made escape very difficult. Most of the absconders who left on foot were captured before they even left the Peninsula, but a few convicts did manage to swim past Eaglehawk Neck.

MARTIN CASH

Martin Cash managed to escape past Eaglehawk Neck twice. On the second occasion he escaped with two companions, Lawrence Kavanagh and George Jones. The three convicts secretly put aside food for several days before the escape. They bypassed the line of dogs by swimming across Eaglehawk Bay at night. The three men remained at large for several months, and Martin Cash became Tasmania's most famous bushranger.

ESCAPE BY SEA

Escaping by sea was also difficult but many convicts tried. Some convicts escaped using makeshift vessels which had been secretly constructed. Many of these vessels sank or capsized, usually drowning their occupants as few people could swim in the early 19th century.

Scipio Africanus, an African Bushman, drowned off Tasman Island while escaping with a companion in a home-made canoe. Francis Jones and Robert Birch were two convict overseers at Point Puer. On 19 December 1836, the day after they absconded, their raft washed back on shore, followed by the paddles. There was no trace of the two men until 7 January when the body of Robert Birch was discovered floating in the water. The body of Francis Jones was never recovered.

Convicts might also escape by sea using one of the settlement's boats. Around the waterfront security measures were put in place to guard against the theft of the settlement's boats but sometimes these measures failed. On one occasion five convicts (John Mitford, Edward Howard, Benjamin Stephens, Joseph Dyke and Robert Williamson) cut their way out of the barracks and stole a boat from the dockyard. Their freedom was short lived, as their boat was swamped and they had to take to the bush. Benjamin Stephens was arrested the same morning and the other four were arrested the following day.

TYPES OF TRADES

The workshops played an important role in the life of the settlement, as they provided trade training, essential goods for the settlement and also products that could be exported.

The government wanted Port Arthur to become as self-sufficient as possible. In the 1830s a range of workshops were constructed for blacksmiths and shoemakers. Later in the 1850s other buildings were constructed including workshops for coopers, wood turners, tailors, nailers and carpenters.



LEARNING A TRADE

A convict gained a number of benefits from learning a trade. He may have found it easier to get a job once he had left the settlement. Many convicts who were taught trades at Port Arthur successfully worked at these trades after their release.

Convicts that were good at their trade also received privileges like tea and sugar, and some skilled prisoners were even rewarded for good work with a ration of rum. Convicts who were skilled in their trades were also punished less often and less severely than the men in the gangs.

Employment in the workshops also provided access to commodities which could be traded on the black market. Convicts who worked in the shoemakers' shop, for example, often had the opportunity to do private work as the overseers had to leave the shop in order to cut the leather. A man who learned a trade was not required to do dangerous or physically demanding work, like the men in the labouring gangs.

TIMBER GETTING

Port Arthur was selected for this station largely because of its abundance of timber, which was needed for buildings, boats, fences and furniture. There were thick forests of enormous eucalyptus, mostly blue gum, stringy bark and swamp gum.

In the early years when the convicts first arrived they were assigned to work in the carrying gangs, unless their health prevented it. For the convicts this was the hardest form of physical punishment. They had to go out to the forest, fell huge trees, trim and cut them into logs and then drag or carry them to the nearest saw pits.

The saw pits were trenches which were 1.8 metres deep and about 4.6 metres long. The logs were laid along the top of the trench; one convict stood above and one stood in the pit below and each held one end of a long saw. They would cut along the length of the log, which would take about a day. This task became easier in the 1850s when a steam saw mill was erected. When the timber had been sawn, the carrying gangs had to carry the cut timber beam on their shoulders to where it was needed, which was usually a building site or the Dockyards.

Up to 70 men were positioned on each side of the log and they carried it on their shoulders. They became known as the centipede gang because from a distance they looked like an enormous centipede. If an overseer wished to make life unbearable for the men of the centipede gangs he could order them to stand with their backs straight, which meant that the tallest men would bear the enormous weight. The American Linus Miller was much taller than his fellows; he spent some time working in the gangs and he wrote

‘Had the ground been even, and the men of the same height, it could have been carried much easier; but the tallest laboured under a great disadvantage, inasmuch as they must carry the whole load or be crushed beneath it. I was the tallest man in the gang, notwithstanding which, I was required to stand upright.... We were allowed to rest only once on the way, and when we reached the settlement, I was nearer dead than alive’. (Miller, 1846, p332)

SHIPBUILDING

The Dockyards were originally established to repair ships that called in at Port Arthur. This changed however in 1834 when shipbuilding began. In 1835 the first convict-built vessel was launched there, the 97 ton Eliza.

She was built to chase prisoners who were attempting to escape in boats, and to carry despatches. The Dockyards operated for 15 years and during that time a large number of vessels were built, including government schooners as well as smaller boats for the whaling industry and general transportation. This was one of only three dockyards in the British Empire where convicts built both the dockyards and the boats.

The Dockyards complex was made up of docks, workshops, slips, sawpits, boat building and rigging sheds, wood steaming apparatus and a house for the Master Shipwright. It was hard work. Some of the convicts viewed the work as almost as hard as that of the carrying gangs. Some men had to work immersed in cold water up to their necks in order to complete the fitout of the vessels. The carrying gang also played a role in the building of the ships, as they were used to transport the masts and spars from the timber yard to the Dockyards.

Convicts who were skilled in range of trades were also required at the Dockyards. Blacksmiths made and repaired the tools and made the metal ships' fastenings. Coopers were also in demand for completing the buoys and skilled men were required to cut and sew the sails. The boats built here were fine ships and lasted for many years. After fifteen years the Dockyard closed for a number of reasons, including the lack of convict labour as transportation had ended, cost cutting measures by the government and petitions to government from private boatbuilders. They claimed that free convict labour was unfair competition for them, since they had to pay their workers and this made their boats more expensive.

SHOEMAKING

This was one of the first industries established at Port Arthur and it was soon being carried out on a massive scale. Skilled shoemakers were sent here from all over the colony to keep the convicts in boots and shoes.

Women's and girls' shoes were also made for sale. By 1835 more than 5,500 pairs of shoes had been made and the same number repaired. Eventually Port Arthur could make enough to supply the entire convict department and sell the surplus. One pair of Port Arthur boots was said to worth two or even three pairs sent out from England, as they were very hard-wearing. The raw materials were also sent from England at first, but then a tannery was built in 1847 to prepare kangaroo hides for shoemaking

Working in the shoemaking shop was a great opportunity for private profit. When the overseer had to leave the shop to cut out the leather, the men got to work on private jobs, which they sold or traded on the black market for food or tobacco. Occasionally the workshops were searched and large quantities of leather or half-completed shoes were found under the floorboards.



We know a lot about convict tattoos. The authorities recorded detailed physical information about all convicts, including any marks they had, to help them identify escapees.

The records indicate that many men acquired their tattoos while in gaol or on the hulks. Convicts got tattoos for a number of reasons. For some they were purely decorative, while for others it was a way of recording information, such as the date of their trial, date of transportation or the date when their sentence would expire. Another reason was to make a statement which may have been humorous, religious, optimistic and occasionally defiant. For a few, the tattoo became a memorial to and a reminder of lost loved ones.

COMMON TATTOOS

Amongst the convicts there were some symbols that were popular. The six most common symbols were an anchor, a woman, a cross/crucifixion (popular among Irish convicts and among the Catholic English), a heart, a man and a mermaid. The anchor was the most popular symbol, although most of the wearers had no association with the sea. This is because the anchor was a symbol for both hope and constancy and was often attached to a loved one's initials. A more familiar symbol for undying love or affection was a pierced heart with the initials of a loved one. The most frequent inscription that convicts had tattooed was their name or more often their initials. Sometimes they were combined with the initials of a loved one or with the initials of other family members.



PLACEMENT AND MEANING

The placement of a tattoo was also significant. For most of the year men and women working in Britain would have only their face and hands exposed and possibly their lower arms for a few summer months. Therefore, if they wanted a tattoo to be visible it would be located on these parts.

Some convicts had tattooed dots or stars on the back of their hands or in the webbing between their thumb and first finger. The meaning of these dots or stars however is not known. Tattoos that were above the elbow were for personal and intimate statements, as they were usually covered up.

By studying convict tattoos we can understand the individuals better. For example, a tattoo that combined initials with an anchor demonstrates to us that the convict was determined to hold onto his identity in the face of an uncertain future. Convict tattoos also provide details about their connection to other people, whether it be to family members or a partner. The slogans and words some convicts had tattooed also provide further clues to a range of hopes, fears and sentiments and gives as an insight into their minds.



PHYSICAL PUNISHMENT

In the early years, brutal physical punishment was inflicted on men who broke the rules. This was intended to break their spirits, and to warn others not to follow their example.

1. HARD LABOUR

The government relied heavily on the convicts' unpaid labour, firstly to establish the prison and then to continue its operations, including its many industries. Punishment and productivity combined when convicts were sentenced to hard labour. Up until 1850, newly arrived convicts were put to the hardest form of physical work in the carrying gangs. These unfortunate men carried logs, sawn timber, spars or shingles. Convicts who were well behaved would be assigned to lighter labour. Those who misbehaved would be punished with flogging, solitary confinement, heavy irons and after 1851, a spell in the Separate Prison. The men most dreaded being sent to work at the Coal Mines.

In 1845 a treadmill was built in the flour mill, later to become the Penitentiary. This treadmill turned the grindstones, and prisoners might be sentenced to work on it from dawn until dusk with two meal breaks. It was like climbing an endless flight of stairs, and could lead to exhaustion and serious injury.

2. LEG IRONS

Leg irons were used as a form of punishment; they also restricted movement and made escape even more difficult. They varied in weight from about 6 kilograms to 13 kilograms. The convicts wore them day and night and they could only be removed by being struck off with a chisel. Men who were wearing the irons had to turn up their trouser legs so that the irons could be examined to make sure that they were firmly in place. The men were also responsible for keeping the irons in good condition. Convicts were often sentenced to wear irons for a year or more.



PHYSICAL PUNISHMENT CONT.

3. THE LASH

In the first ten years offences against the settlement's strict regulations (for example, absconding, illegally possessing tobacco or rum, hiding clothes or refusing to work) were punished by the lash.



Flogging was commonly used not only on convicts but on soldiers and sailors. The prisoner would be tied to a wooden frame known as the triangle and in front of fellow prisoners he would be given the number of lashes prescribed for his offence (between 10 to 100) on his bare back. A rope whip made of nine knotted thongs attached to a handle, known as the cat-o-nine tails, was used to inflict the punishment.

The convicts put on a display of defiance at the triangle. Commandant James Boyd wrote that 'the more unflinchingly a prisoner endured flogging the more he was looked up to and applauded by the mass of his associates' (Brand, 1978, p.13).

The man responsible for inflicting the flogging was known as the flagellator. He was selected from among the convicts and was the most despised man in the settlement. The Medical Officer always attended the floggings and was responsible for putting a stop to it if the convict's life was endangered. In the 1840s flogging was not used very often; with the introduction of the Separate Prison in 1849 flogging was abandoned altogether, although it continued in the armed forces for many more decades.

PSYCHOLOGICAL PUNISHMENT

By the late 1840s, the authorities had realised that savage physical punishment only made men harder, and did not deter others from wrong-doing. So they introduced an even more savage form of punishment.

1. SOLITARY CONFINEMENT

In the 1830s and 1840s, men who were unmanageable or disruptive, or had broken one of the many rules, were sentenced to spend up to 21 days in separate cells behind the Prisoners' Barracks.

They would be allowed out each day for a short period of exercise and had to remain silent at all times. In later years, they would be accommodated in small cells in the Penitentiary, in heavy irons.

PSYCHOLOGICAL PUNISHMENT CONT.

2. SEPARATE PRISON

In 1851 the Separate Prison was opened. This represented a move away from physical punishment to a focus on psychological punishment. It was known as the Separate Prison because the prisoners were to be kept strictly apart from each other. This meant they had separate cells, separate exercise yards and separate cubicles in the chapel. Within the Prison there was total silence and solitude.

When a prisoner first arrived he was read the rules of the prison and issued with special clothing which included a metal badge with a number on it; from this time on they were to be known only by this number. The convicts were not allowed to communicate with each other in any way and could only speak to the guards when passing on essential information, or to the visiting clergyman. Apart from going to chapel (prisoners attended divine services four times a week), cleaning duty and an hour's exercise per day a prisoner spent all his time in his cell. This is where he ate, slept and worked. Work included shoemaking, tailoring, picking oakum, mat or broom making.

When a prisoner left his cell he had to wear a hood that came down over his face, with slits for his eyes. Even if he saw another prisoner they could not recognise each other. If he broke any of the many rules he was further punished by being locked in the 'dark cell', in total darkness and silence. A prisoner could be locked in here for between several hours to 30 days on bread and water. After 3 days he was taken for an hour's exercise each day.

A 19th century soldier might expect to do long periods of overseas service at distant outposts. It was not unusual for them to be away from home for many years.

A penal settlement however was not a popular posting, as there was no chance to win battle honours and no glory in guarding convicts. Most regiments posted at Port Arthur regarded it as a low point in their history. The military were stationed at Port Arthur from its establishment in 1830 until 1863, when the troops were withdrawn for service in New Zealand.

ACCOMMODATION AND DUTIES



The military were located next door to the Commandant's House on high ground so they could defend themselves and look out for trouble. From the 1840s they were accommodated in barracks; these were brick buildings located behind the Guard Tower. Their main responsibility was security. They watched convicts working in the bush, the stores, on the boats and at the docks and they pursued escapees.

DAILY LIFE

A soldier's experience at Port Arthur depended on his rank. The senior officers and their families at Port Arthur had the compensation of a busy social circle; they enjoyed dinner parties, literary evenings and cricket matches.

But the common soldier found life at Port Arthur almost as restrictive as the convicts did. There was little relief from duty. The soldiers were to consider themselves at all times on guard and to be ready to act at a moment's notice. Since they were always on duty they were not allowed to leave the military compound without permission or to enter the bakehouse, cookhouse, wash house, timber yard or any of the workshops unless on duty. They were more or less confined to the barracks which were generally overcrowded.

SOLDIER'S WIVES

Out of every 100 soldiers, 12 were allowed to bring their wives. The wives that were chosen were to be 'of the best quality and most likely to be useful to the troops.'

The women were expected to do the washing and sewing for all the men in their husbands' company. In return they received rations and accommodation behind a blanket curtain in one room with the other married couples. Life for the wives of the soldiers would have been very difficult.



Within the barracks there was to be no rowdiness; the soldiers had to be quiet. Recreational activities that the soldiers were allowed included fishing, hunting, playing cards and music; a ball court and a skittle alley are shown on plans but we do not think that they were ever constructed. There were occasional whale boat races. Illegal but popular amusements included gambling, fighting, stealing goods from the stores and food from the officers' gardens and trading with convicts.

ACCOMMODATION

The boys at Point Puer were divided into two groups; the 'general class' were the better behaved boys and the 'crime class' were the badly behaved.

The boys from the general class were housed in the Boys' Barracks, which was a whitewashed weatherboard building. There were two levels; there was a dormitory in the loft and on the ground floor was the mess room where the boys ate. 170 boys were accommodated here and they were given a hammock or a thin mattress, a blanket and a rug.

The boys in the crime class were housed in the goal section, located about 630 yards (576 metres) from the Barracks. The goal was made up of separate cells and could accommodate 200 prisoners. Also in this area were the solitary and separate cells for boys under punishment.

DAILY ACTIVITIES

Each day followed a strict schedule of chores, work, prayers, meals, play and school. The boys rose at 5 a.m., rolled and stowed their hammocks and assembled for prayers.

Then they were allowed to leave the barracks to wash and they had some free time before breakfast, which was at 7 a.m. In their free time boys were allowed to go fishing and swimming. They started work at 8 a.m. and worked all day until 5 p.m. stopping only for lunch. After work they had supper and then they attended school for up to two hours. This was followed by prayers and then bed.

On Saturday afternoons there was no work, as the surgeon came to examine all the boys to make sure they were not suffering from any disease and to see that they were fit for the work they were required to do. There was also no work on Sundays, as the day was devoted to religious services and school.

DAILY LIFE FOR POINT PUER BOYS

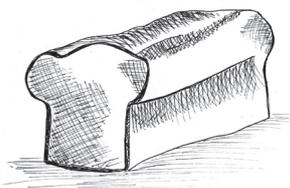
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WORK

The work that the boys were required to do depended on their behaviour.

When the boys first arrived at Point Puer they all had to work in the labouring gangs. This involved heavy work like clearing the land, carrying sawn timber from the pits to the workshops, constructing roads, cutting and carrying firewood, cooking, washing and barrack duties. If the boys behaved themselves and demonstrated that they were willing workers they were given the chance to learn a trade. Boys were trained as boot and shoemakers, blacksmiths, coopers, nailers, bookbinders, carpenters, tailors, bakers, kitchen gardeners and sawyers.

DIET



BREAKFAST

10 ounces (284grams) of bread

1 pint (0.568 Litres) of gruel

DINNER

3/4 lb (340 grams) fresh or salt beef or half a pound of salt pork

10 ounces (284grams) of pudding or one pint of soup

1 pound (450 grams) of cabbage or turnips or

1 pint (0.568) of soup made from the meat

8 ounces (226grams) of bread and half a pound of potatoes
if other vegetables were unavailable.

SUPPER

The same as for breakfast.

If the boys were well behaved during the week they were given a handful of raisins on Sundays. Boys that misbehaved however had their rations reduced; some were on a diet of bread and water only.

CLOTHING

Each year a boy was issued with two jackets, two pairs of trousers, two pairs of boots, two striped cotton shirts, one waistcoat and one cap.

PUNISHMENT

Behaviours that attracted punishments included fighting, general disobedience, being out of bounds, immoral behaviours, talking in the cells or barracks, disrespectful behaviour during prayers, destroying or losing property, stealing rations and being insolent. There were seven classes of punishment;

- 1 Confinement to the muster ground and deprivation of play period
- 2 Confinement for a number of nights in a silent apartment
- 3 Confinement in the gaol section, withdrawal from play and trade training, reduction of rations
- 4 Confinement in the crime gaol, being confined in chains and breaking stones
- 5 Solitary confinement in a small cell on bread and water for up to 14 days. The cells were 5 feet 6 inches (1.67m) by 3 feet 6 inches (1.06m). Boys might spend from 24 hours up to 14 days in the solitary cells .
- 6 Corporal punishment up to 36 lashes - the lashes were not on the back like they were for the adult convicts but instead the boys were lashed on 'the breech', that is, the buttocks.
- 7 Transfer to adult prison at Port Arthur

ACCOMMODATION

From 1850 onwards the convicts were accommodated in the Penitentiary. It had four levels; the bottom two levels comprised separate cells, which were placed back to back along the centre of the building.

These cells provided accommodation for 136 prisoners. Those on the ground floor were for the men in heavy irons and those on the next floor for those in lighter irons. The men in these cells slept in hammocks and were provided with a pair of blankets and a woollen rug. They also had a small stool, a keg of water and a tin drinking vessel.

The better behaved prisoners were housed on the top level of the Penitentiary, in a dormitory that could accommodate 348 men. These men were given a blanket, a rug and one thin mattress for bedding, as well as a spoon, a tin plate and a drinking vessel. The second level contained the Roman Catholic Chapel and a dining hall; this was also used as a school room and there was also a library containing several thousand books.

DAILY ACTIVITIES

When most convicts first arrived at Port Arthur they were assigned to a labouring gang; skilled men would be set to work at their trade, men too weak for the gang would be employed in the gardens or on other light duties.

After they had demonstrated good behaviour and a willingness to work they were given the opportunity to learn a trade.

The hours of work varied depending on the time of the year. During the summer months the convicts worked from 5:30 in the morning until 6 o'clock in the evening. In June and July they worked from 7:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. They had a break in the middle of the day for lunch which lasted an hour. After work they were able to attend school if they wished.

DAILY LIFE FOR ADULT CONVICTS

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DIET

BREAKFAST

1/2 pound (200grams) bread

1 1/2 pints (0.8 litres) of Gruel made of flour and sweetened by sugar.

DINNER

1/2 pound (200 grams) bread

12 ounces (400 grams) salt beef or 6 ounces (200 grams) salt pork

1 1/2 pints (0.8 litres) soup made with specified quantities of beef, vegetables and flour.

SUPPER

Same as breakfast

The convicts in the punishment gangs received the same rations with the exception of the sugar. Convicts under punishment in solitary confinement survived on a diet of bread and water. All convicts including those in solitary confinement received 1/2 ounce (14 grams) salt and 1/2 ounce soap daily.

CLOTHING

Every six months each man was issued one jacket, one waistcoat, one shirt, one pair of trousers, one pair of boots and one cap.

Originally convicts wore grey woollen jackets and trousers but they provided good camouflage for absconders, so they were replaced with clothing that was half yellow and half black. When a man was considered trustworthy and had been promoted to watchman or overseer he would be given a suit of grey clothing.

ACCOMMODATION

In the 1840s new houses were built for the free officers and their families. These new houses were of a higher standard than the old, small and badly built houses they had originally lived in near the Penitentiary.



In the 1840s new houses were built for the free officers and their families which were of a higher standard than the old, small and badly built houses they had originally lived in near the Penitentiary. They were now situated along Civil Row (refer to map) on high ground and as far away from the prisoners' accommodation as they could be. This was to provide them with some privacy and to separate their lives from that of the prison population. Most families however were still in daily contact with convicts, as they worked in their houses as servants and tutors for their children. Families were large, Mrs Lemprière for example had 12 children, and most houses had only 4 rooms.

SOCIAL LIFE

Even though they were living within a prison the senior civil officers enjoyed a cultured and varied social life.



The Commandant socialised with the other senior officers. Commandant Booth for example was great friends with the Lemprières and spent many evenings with them. Booth also entertained regularly, celebrating events like Christmas, the 20th anniversary of his entering the army in July 1835, the launch of the schooner Eliza in May 1835 and the Queen's birthday. He also entertained visiting guests, like the French explorer Captain LaPlace.

Men enjoyed hunting, excursions to other places on the Peninsula on foot or horseback, swimming and fishing. Sometimes there were regattas, picnics or cricket games. Many of the officers were amateur scientists, and they made botanical collections, studied the weather and the tides, or took up astronomy.

On Sundays the civilian officers and their children attended church and later in the day some of the families would take a walk together in the Government Gardens or to local beauty spots. Families would also get together to celebrate special events like birthdays. Some men and women were competent musicians or singers and entertained at small parties in one another's homes.

Women also enjoyed walks, swimming and scientific studies, especially seaweed and fern collecting. But the isolation of the settlement must have been strongly felt as they were away from the company of their friends and families. To deal with this, Charlotte Lemprière often made lengthy visits to town. When she was away Thomas Lemprière spent many evenings at the Rev. John Manton's house playing draughts or chess.

DUTIES

THE COMMANDANT

The Commandant lived in a house that was built high on the hill reflecting his high status. The house was isolated by its location and a high brick wall, so that it provided a degree of privacy and security for him and his family.

Originally the house was a small four roomed weatherboard cottage but over the years it was extended although it was always said to be draughty and inconvenient.

The Commandant's role changed during the occupation of the penal settlement. Originally the Commandant supervised the whole of the Tasman Peninsula, although he was not expected to interfere with the running of the Probations Stations which was the responsibility of the Superintendent of each station. Nor was he responsible for the soldiers at Port Arthur or at any of the outstations, this was the role of the Senior Military officer. The Commandant however did have to visit these stations to review security and to ensure efficiency in the farming of the Peninsula. His other duties included inspecting all buildings and the convicts weekly to see if they were clean, healthy and orderly.

The Commandant's duties changed in 1839, as the Lieutenant Governor restricted his duties to cover only Port Arthur and Point Puer, and the police and signal stations on the Peninsula. Most of the Commandants were soldiers, and only one, James Boyd, had ever had any experience of running a prison.

DUTIES

THE SENIOR MILITARY OFFICER

He was responsible for all aspects of the military establishments at all the stations on the Peninsula.

He and his men were charged with maintaining security, and with finding and bringing back any escapees. He was responsible for the good management and discipline of his men, and for their health and well-being.

Sometimes there were conflicts between the Commandant and the Senior Military Officer, when they disagreed about who was responsible for matters that seemed to overlap.

THE MEDICAL OFFICER

The Medical Officer was responsible for the health of the convicts, and he also treated the free people and the soldiers.

His duties included being in charge of the hospital, making weekly medical inspections of the convicts and making daily inspections of the men in solitary confinement. He also had to visit the convicts' living and working quarters at least once per week and check their bedding. When any floggings were carried out the Medical Officer also had to be present 'to ensure that no prisoner was given a greater number of lashes than he could stand without danger to his life or future health'.



DUTIES

MINISTERS OF RELIGION

The Anglican clergy were responsible for the spiritual well-being of every person on the settlement. They played an important role in the reformation of the prisoners, preaching fear of the pits of hell that awaited sinners and the joys that awaited the truly repentant.

They performed divine service twice every Sundays and also on Christmas Day and on Good Friday. They also had to read prayers every morning and night to the convicts of their denomination, and visit the sick and the men in solitary confinement on a daily basis. They also officiated at funerals and christenings.

The Anglican clergyman was also responsible for the school.

Catholics originally had to attend Anglican service, but the Reverend Edward Durham, a Church of Ireland clergyman, made no secret of his hatred of Catholics. In 1843, 163 Catholic convicts refused to attend his services in the Church. As a result, a space was set aside for a Catholic chapel in the Penitentiary, and a Catholic chaplain was appointed.

