



Prisons were often in old buildings, such as castles. They tended to be damp, unhealthy, insanitary and over-crowded. All kinds of prisoners were mixed in together, men, women, children; the insane; serious criminals and petty criminals; people awaiting trial; and debtors. Each prison was run by the gaoler in his own way. He made up the rules. If you could pay, you could buy extra privileges, such as private rooms, better food, more visitors, keeping pets, letters going in and out, and books to read. If you could not, the basic fare was grim. You even had to pay the gaoler to be let out when your sentence was finished.

Law and order was a major issue in Victorian Britain. Victorians were worried about the huge new cities that had grown up following the Industrial Revolution – how were the masses to be kept under control? They were worried about rising crime. They could see that transporting convicts to Australia was not the answer and by the 1830s Australia was complaining that they did not want to be the dumping-ground for Britain's criminals.

Discovering your ancestor in prison records doesn't necessarily make them a hardened criminal, nineteenth century law was harsh and children as well as adults were imprisoned for minor misdemeanours. These records are often very detailed and can include physical descriptions of height, weight and eye colour.

James Ball

	Surname	Given Names	Age	Trade or Occupation	Degree of Instruction		
Accused	Ball	James	19	Labourer	Read and write imperfectly		
Date of Birth	1857						
	Surname	Given Name	Title	Address			
Committing Magistrate (1)	Rooke	A. B.	Esq.	The Ivy, Chippenham			
Court	Devizes						
Name of Victim (1)	Isaacs	Thomas Walter					
Date of Warrant	1875	10-Sep					
When Received into Custody	1875	11-Sep		Date of Trial	1876	02-Mar	
Offence as Charged in the Commitment	Killing and slaying Thomas Walter Isaacs at Castle Combe, on the 5th September 1875						
	Surname	Given Names	Title				
Before Whom Tried	Denman		Justice				
Verdict of Jury	Not Guilty of Manslaughter						
Particulars of Previous Convictions Charged in the Indictment and Proved in Court							
Sentence or Order of the Court							
Other crimes Committed	Easter Session 1872 - House Breaking - 1 year imprisonment						