



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.

Albert Adam 1912

	Surname	Given Names	Age	Trade or Occupation	Degree of Instruction					
Accused	Adam	Albert	25	Labourer						
Birth Year	1887									
	Surname	Given Name	Title	Address						
Committing Magistrate (1)	Stevens	A. M.	Esq.	Chippenham						
Date of Warrant	1912	06-Aug								
When Received into Custody	1912	01-Aug	On Remand		Date of Trial					
Offence as Charged in the Commitment	About the hour of four in the night, unlawfully did attempt and endeavour, feloniously and burglariously to break and enter the dwelling house of Sir George Coope Helme, situate in the Parish of Chippenham Without, with intent to steal the goods, chattels and moneys, of the said Sir George Coope Helme, in the said dwelling-house then being on the 1st August 1912									
	Surname	Given Names	Title							
Before Whom Tried	The Marquess of Bath									
Verdict of Jury	Confesses attempted Burglary									
Particulars of Previous Convictions Charged in the Indictment and Proved in Court										
Sentence or Order of the Court	9 Calendar Months (Hard Labour									