



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.

William Bartlett 1911

	Surname	Given Names	Age	Trade or Occupation	Degree of Instruction			
Accused	Bartlett	William	46	Carpenter				
Date of Birth	1866							
	Surname	Given Name	Title	Address				
Committing Magistrate (1)	Neale	E.	Esq.	Chippenham				
Committing Magistrate (2)	Tristram	L. B.	Captain	Chiseldon House, Chiseldon				
Court	Devizes							
Date of Warrant	1911	13-Nov						
When Received into Custody	1911	06-Nov	On Remand	Date of Trial	1912	02-Jan		
Offence as Charged in the Commitment	Offence as charged in the commitment:- Being a person relieved in the Workhouse of the Chippenham Union and chargeable to the Common Fund of the said Union, did on the 6th November 1911, refuse, whilst an inmate of the casual ward of the said Workhouse, to do the work prescribed by the local government board, and contrary to the form of the Statute in such case made and provided, he having been previously convicted before this court, viz.:- on the 2nd day of November, 1910 of being an idle and disorderly person; and on the 16th day of December, 1910, and the 16th day of January, 1911, respectively, of being a rogue and vagabond, and by reason of such convictions the said William Bartlett was this day deemed to be, and was convicted of being an incorrigible rogue with the meaning of Sec. 5 of the Act of 5 George 4th chapter 83							
	Surname	Given Names	Title					
Before Whom Tried	The Most Honourable the Marquess of Bath, of Longleat, Warminster, Chairman							
Verdict of Jury	No verdict was written							
Particulars of Previous								

Convictions Charged in the Indictment and Proved in Court					
Sentence or Order of the Court	6 Calendar months Hard Labour				
Other crimes Committed	15 times summarily, Viz:- (refusing task in Unions 8; begging 1; absconding from Union 1; Wilful damage 1; Sleeping out 4)				