



Prison Registers in Institutions And Organisations

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.

Theft by George Ash Against Sidney Watts

	Surname	Given Names	Age	Trade or Occupation	Degree of Instruction	
Accused	Ash	George	62	Painter		
Birth Year	1809					
Court	Devizes					
	Surname	Given Name	Title	Address		
Committing Magistrate (1)	Parsons	W.J.	Esq.	Wootton Bassett		
Name of Victim (1)	Watts	Sidney				
Date of Warrant	1870	24 Oct				
When Received into Custody	1870	25 Oct	Date of Trial			
Offence as Charged in the Commitment	Receiving seven coats, two waistcoats, one pair of trowsers (sic) three hats, one tablecloth, one box of cigars, four pounds of tobacco, two pounds of tea, and eleven pounds of sugar, the property of Sidney Watts, at Wootton Bassett, on the 24th September 1870					
	Surname	Given Names	Title	Residence		
Before Whom Tried	Merewether	Henry Alworth	Esq.	Bowden Hill, Lacock		
Verdict of Jury	Pleaded guilty of larceny. Confessed previous conviction					
Particulars of Previous Convictions Charged in the Indictment and Proved in Court						
Sentence or Order of the	Imprisonment with hard labour for two years in the Prison at Devizes, and to be subject to the supervision of the Police for seven Years					

Court	
Other crimes Committed	Surrey Sessions 1861, stealing 4 bottles of sauce, three months