

Convict Prisons, England 1863.

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Extracts from the "Report of the Directors of Convict Prisons for the year 1863"

SEPARATE CONFINEMENT

Every convict on reception is placed for nine months in strict separate confinement. Millbank and Pentonville are the only two prisons belonging to the Government in which this portion of the punishment of male offenders can be carried out. The former accommodates 726 prisoners in separate cells, the latter 561, making a total of only 1,287; and as the average number of convicts has exceeded 2,000 during the last three years, it has been necessary to rent cells at different county prisons, wherever spare accommodation can be procured.

The prisons at which cells are now rented are:- Wakefield 412; Leicester 140; Leeds 24; Northampton 40; Bedford 70; Perth 90; Aylesbury 50. Total 826.

The arrangement is far from satisfactory, and the Government is exposed to the great inconvenience of having its agreements with county prisons terminated at the most inconvenient periods.

PUBLIC WORKS PRISONS

Convicts on emerging from separate confinement have been sent, as heretofore, to the public works prisons at Chatham, Portland and Portsmouth.

The convicts at Chatham are employed mainly on the works connected with the extension of the dockyard, and we are glad to state that, with cordial cooperation between the engineers employed by the Admiralty and the Convict Department, the results of the year's work are very satisfactory.

At Portland the convicts have been employed quarrying and dressing stone for the various dockyards, for the breakwater, and on the Vern fortifications, excavating and scarping ditches and building batteries and bomb-proof buildings in connexion with the works of fortification.

At Portsmouth the convicts have been mainly employed in dockyard work, and even though there are many objections to this sort of employment for prisoners, it is satisfactory to state that during the past year, under very careful supervision, and with the cordial assistance of the Admiral Superintendent, a very large amount of useful labour has been performed by the convicts.

TRANSPORTATION

Two convict ships, the Clyde and the Lord Dalhousie, were despatched during the year with 590 convicts to Western Australia.

We suggested some important alteration to the Admiralty in the fitting and lighting of these vessels, which were fully carried out, and we believe that more perfect order and regularity can now be maintained among the convicts on board these vessels, especially at night. We should be glad if a permanent transport could be fitted for this purpose, as the arrangements in a merchant vessel, however carefully devised, must be always defective more or less.

One convict vessel was sent to Gibraltar with 210 convicts.

References and Notes:

The *Times*, 11 Aug 1864, p5

First Printed in *Convict Links*, Vol. 20, No. 2, June 2006 - Newsletter of the Convict Special Interest Group, Western Australian Genealogical Society Inc.