

ON THE RECORD

Rosemary Collins reports on the latest data releases and genealogy news

Website collates data on 19th-century prisons

Prison History aims to create an online record of the prisons in Victorian England, including where their archives are stored

The first online database of prisons in 19th-century England, with records of 843 institutions, is now available to search for free.

Prison History (prisonhistory.org) was created by Dr Rosalind Crone, senior lecturer in history at the Open University, after she carried out the research project 'Educating Criminals in Nineteenth-Century England', which ran from 2015 to 2018.

The aim of the project was to chart prisoners' instruction in reading, writing and arithmetic in the 80 years following the reforms in the 1823 Gaols Act. Dr Crone realised while carrying out the project that there was no single record of all of the prisons in England during this period. To fill this gap, Dr Crone and her research assistants compiled the database with funding from the Open University and the Arts and Humanities Research Council.

There were two main types of prison in the 19th century. Convict prisons, which were built for more serious offenders, were under the direct control of the Home Office, while local prisons were, until the 1877 Prisons Act, managed by different local authorities. Convict prisons could include penitentiaries, public works prisons and prison hulks, while types of local prison included gaols, bridewells and lock-ups, where prisoners were held before appearing in the magistrate's court.

The Government began keeping central records of prisons in England following the passing of the Gaols Act and the 1835 Prisons Act.

In total, the website contains records of 418 local prisons, 378 lock-ups, 30 prison hulks and 17 convict prisons. Visitors can browse all these prisons on a map of England, or search the database for an individual institution. The entry for each prison includes its exact location on a modern map; the type of

prison; alternative names; jurisdiction; county; the dates it opened and closed; and in some cases the number of prisoners it held. The location of the prison's surviving records is also included.

Dr Crone said that prison records can help genealogists break down brick walls. "In the 19th century we have got this expanding criminal justice system that's taking more and more people into its ambit. People who are interested in tracing their

“In the 19th century we have got this expanding criminal justice system taking more and more people into its ambit”

family history should be interested in prisons.”

She added that prison registers in this period are “some of the most detailed records for individuals we have”, including physical characteristics such as height,

and even how their family were finding financial support with the breadwinner in prison.

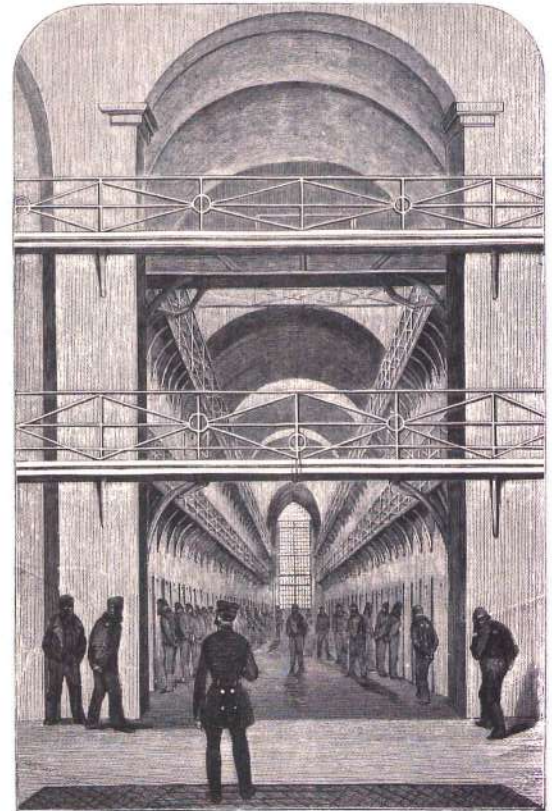
The organisers of Prison History are encouraging users to get in contact if they have any additional information about the prisons on the database.

They are also seeking feedback on how researchers use the site, and how they would like it to develop.

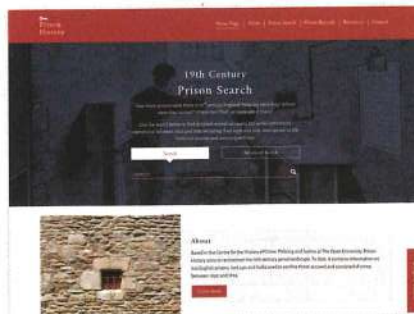
Prison History will receive its formal launch at Rediscovering

the 19th Century Penal Landscape, an event at the National Justice Museum in Nottingham on 6 July.

The data on the site is available as a free e-book in PDF format: prisonhistory.org/further-resources.



Wandsworth County House of Correction is included in the new website's database



The site is a useful resource if your English ancestor spent time behind bars