

## Army Museum of Tasmania

Anglesea Barracks  
HOBART

Information Sheet No 13

# The Military Prison 1847

The development of military prisons was, in part, a response to a campaign to see the end of corporal punishment in British regiments, which was often very severe. Punishment of soldiers was primarily based on the *Mutiny Act* and the *Articles of War*, approved through the British Parliament. Flogging and branding were common punishments however after 1823 transportation and imprisonment became approved alternatives. Convicted soldiers sentenced to periods of imprisonment were sent to civil prisons. Many soldiers were also transported to New South Wales and Van Diemen's Land through this policy. Other punishments included being drummed out of the service and execution.

Over 3200 of the convicts sent to Australia were soldiers serving various periods of transportation. The convict with the longest period of detention in Australia was Dennis Doherty, who at 19 years of age, was transported for desertion in 1833. He was finally released from Port Arthur a broken man in 1876. During those years his resistance to authority resulted in over 3000 lashes, long periods of solitary confinement and working in irons.

Sgt Thomas Morris, 2nd Battalion, 73rd Regiment, 1812 – 1819 observed, "... the average amount of punishment for slight offences, was three hundred lashes. It is an extraordinary fact, that, horrible as this mode of punishment is, it seems to have no effect whatever, in reforming the character; - it invariably makes a tolerably good man bad, and a bad man infinitely worse."<sup>1</sup>

The Colonial Times on 19<sup>th</sup> December 1843 reported that the Band played the '*Rogue's March*' as a soldier of the 51<sup>st</sup> Regiment was drummed out of military service for petty theft. Several days later he was committed for trial for stealing a constable's Watch Coat in the Hobart Town Court.

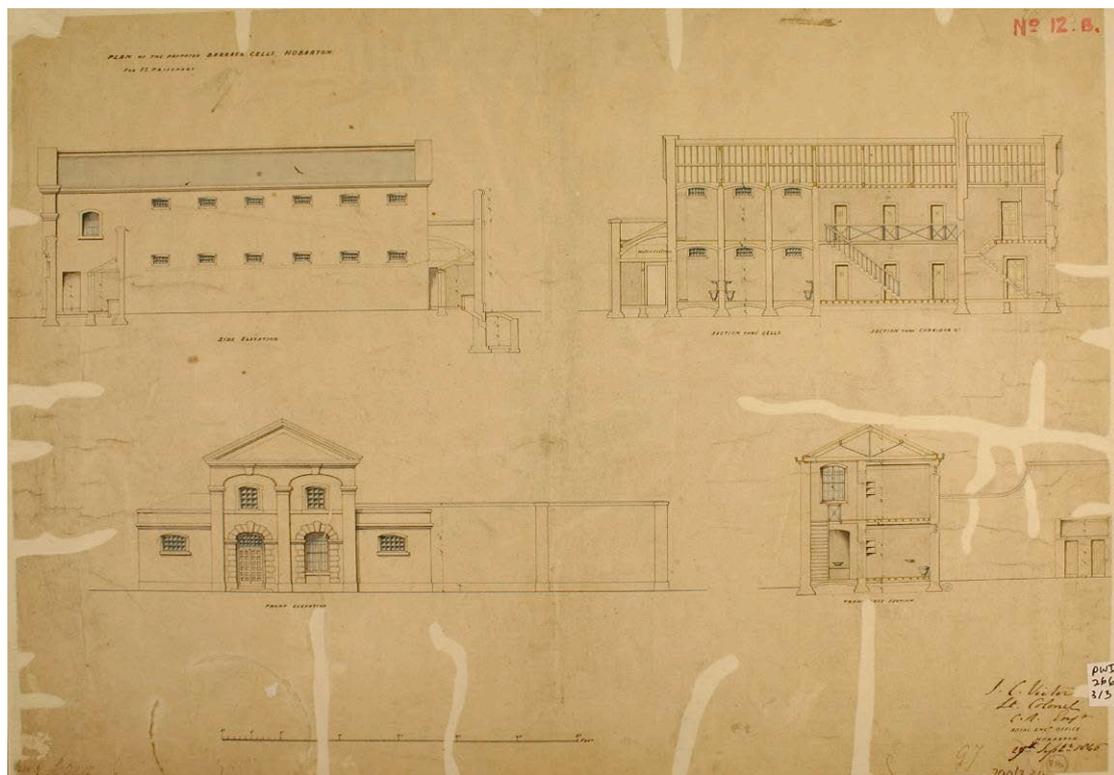
In 1836, a Royal Commission into military punishment recommended the establishment of military prisons. It was believed that convicted soldiers should be held in close proximity to their military contemporaries so they did not forget the rules against which they had transgressed. It also meant soldiers could be segregated

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<sup>1</sup> From, Recollections of Sergeant Morris edited by John Selby

from other convicts, although the transportation system effectively allowed this practice to continue.

A Royal Commission in England led to the construction of Military Prisons and this building was designed by Major Conway Victor, Royal Engineers in 1847 as a result of that enquiry. The plans were for a building on a level site; however site constraints required a stepped construction. The original design was 'flipped', which placed the exercise yard on the western side. The building could accommodate 14 prisoners and the Provost Sergeant. There was a black hole beneath the floor, and the lower cells had water closets. All were centrally heated using a hypocaust system.



*Plan of the proposed Barrack Cells, Hobart*  
(Archives Office of Tasmania, TAHO, PWD 266 313)

A report from *The Mercury* in 1909 provides some detail on the construction and operation of the prison.

*.. All the cells are provided with a lock, opened by a key, and each one has, in addition, a heavy bolt, the massive part of which was secured by a padlock. There is a little glass peep-hole in each door, covered by an iron slide .... Just inside the front door of the building is a trap, which opens over an ominous-looking dungeon, said to have been the 'black hole,' into which refractory prisoners were dropped until they returned to a better frame of mind. ... The bottom corridor communicates with a small yard, about 60ft. square, surrounded by high brick walls, where the prisoners*

*did their 'shot-drill' and 'pack-drill,' and the other forms of punishment that were meted out to the contumacious Tommies of those days. The stone for the building was apparently obtained just alongside the old prison yard, for there are the remains of an old quarry there, which has since been filled in with ashes and rubbish. It gives one rather an eerie feeling to go over these old cells, and imagine how many sinful soldiers must have been left there to leisurely repentance. Perhaps some of them soliloquised in the words of Kipling:-*

*'But I've had my fun of the corporal's guard,  
And made the cinders fly;  
And I'm here in the clink, for a thundering drink,  
And blacking the corporal's eye.'*<sup>2</sup>

The Military Prison built at Anglesea Barracks was part of this new approach, which saw similar buildings erected in major garrisons across the colonies. By the mid-1850s there were also 10 military prisons in Britain.<sup>3</sup>



Examples of graffiti left on cell doors by soldiers

<sup>2</sup> *The Mercury*, 24<sup>th</sup> December 1909, p.5

<sup>3</sup> Hilton, P., (June 2010), *Branded D on The Left Side: A Study of Former Soldiers and Marines Transported to Van Diemen's Land: 1804-1854*, p.80-106