

Convict Punishments

Convicts had many rules to follow in the colony, and discipline was harsh for those convicts who didn't follow them. Good behaviour attracted rewards such as extra food or free time. Convicts who misbehaved, however, were punished. Convicts were punished for a variety of reasons. These included turning up late for work (or not turning up at all!), being disrespectful to guards and other people of authority, attempting to escape, or drunkenness.

Solitary Confinement

One common punishment for minor crimes was being locked in a small cell away from other convicts. Minor crimes included returning late or being drunk in the barracks. The cells were dark, cold and very uncomfortable for the convict. A convict could spend weeks in the cell, receiving only bread and water.

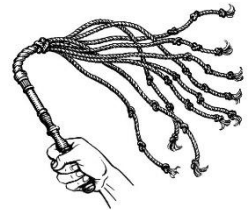


Chain Gangs

For more serious crimes, convicts were given time on the chain gangs. This meant that convicts were shackled in leg-irons and given back-breaking work such as road construction. These leg-irons were very heavy and made walking painful as the iron rubbed against the convicts' bare ankles. When it was time for the leg-iron to be removed, a blacksmith would hammer it open while it was still being worn.

Flogging

Another common punishment was flogging. The whips had nine knotted leather cords which would cut into the flesh of the person being whipped. These whips were known as the cat-o'-nine-tails. Enough strikes of the whip would cut through to the bone. The convict who was to be flogged was usually tied to a triangular frame. Floggings could only be ordered by a magistrate or the Governor. Flogging was a physically tough punishment to administer. For this reason, the job of flogging was often given to other convicts, under the watch of a guard. One of the problems of flogging was that the convict flogged was often unable to work the next day due to injuries. Sometimes these convicts were then punished again for missing work! Many convicts required medical treatment after they had been flogged. As well as a punishment, flogging was also used to try and get information from convicts.



Treadmills

Walking the treadmill was another torturous punishment. Convicts given this punishment were forced to step continuously on large treadmills. Their steps provided the power which rotated the treadmills. This was a physically exhausting punishment. As a medical precaution, the weight of each convict was recorded before they went on and after they got off. This punishment was helpful to the colony as the treadmills ground grains that fed the convicts.

Penal Colonies

Convicts who committed more serious crimes or continued to reoffend were given longer sentences or sent to isolated prisons or penal colonies such as Port Arthur, Moreton Bay or Norfolk Island. Here, convicts were forced into back-breaking tasks such as cutting timber, clearing land and other agricultural work.



While female convicts also faced punishments for bad behaviour, the punishments were often different to those of the male convicts. Leg-irons and floggings were not usually punishments handed down to women. Female convicts who broke rules were sent to female factories where they were forced into jobs such as sewing, straw plaiting or even rock breaking. Female convicts who continued to misbehave were sent to solitary confinement.

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1. What was a 'chain gang'? _____
2. Who had the power to order a flogging? _____
3. List three jobs convicts did in the female factories. _____
4. What jobs did convicts do in the penal colonies? _____

5. Why do you think convicts were weighed before and after the treadmill? _____

6. Why were convicts often given the job of flogging other convicts? _____

7. What is one problem the author suggests about flogging as a punishment? _____

8. Which punishment do you think was the most beneficial to the new colony? Explain.

9. Which punishment do you think would have been the worst? Explain. _____

10. Choose two punishments and compare them. Use a Venn diagram if you like.