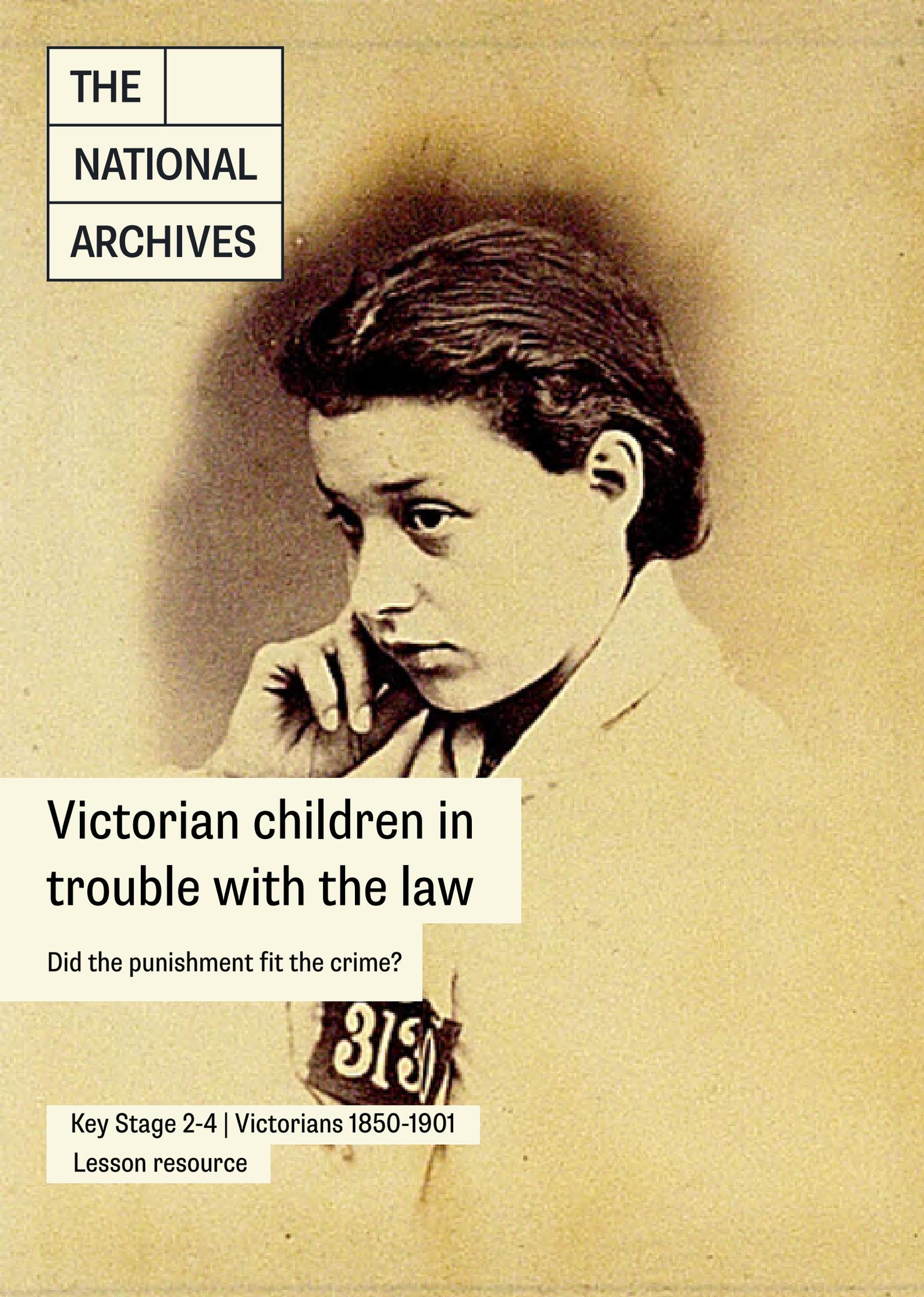


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Victorian children in trouble with the law

Did the punishment fit the crime?

Key Stage 2-4 | Victorians 1850-1901

Lesson resource

Introduction

Young people have always got into trouble with the law. What changes over time is how society deals with its young offenders.

Before Victorian times no distinction was made between criminals of any age. Accordingly, young children could be sent to an adult prison. There are records of children aged 12 being hanged.

The Victorians were very worried about crime and its causes. Reformers were asking questions about how young people who had broken the law ought to be treated. They could see that locking children up with adult criminals was hardly likely to make them lead honest lives in the future. On the other hand, they believed firmly in stiff punishments. In 1854 Reformatory Schools were set up for offenders under 16 years old. These were very tough places, with stiff discipline enforced by frequent beatings. Young people were sent there for long sentences – usually several years. However, a young offender normally still began their sentence with a brief spell in an adult prison. Use the sources in this lesson to find out how children were treated by the justice system.

Suitable for:

Key Stage 2-4

Time period:

Victorians 1850-1901

Connections to the Curriculum:

Key stage 3:

Ideas, political power, industry and empire: Britain, 1745-1901

Key stage 4:

Edexcel GCSE History: Crime and punishment in Britain, c1000 to present

OCR GCSE Schools History Project: Crime and Punishment c1250 to present

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Teachers' notes

In this lesson students explore two records, created in the 1873 taken from photographic registers of prisoners and habitual criminals. The judicial system was keen to compile photographic information of these people to assist detection. Students could also look at the 'Unboxing video' shown with this lesson to see these types of records as a starter to the lesson.

This lesson could be used for any scheme of work covering a history of crime and punishment, or studying an aspect of life in Victorian Britain. Crime and the treatment of offenders is always controversial, today as in the past. The pendulum of reform and rehabilitation versus punishment has swung throughout history.

The two child records and the transportation document listing of convicts sent on the Elphinstone ship for Van Diemen's Land, reveal the severity of Victorian justice, and how it was largely based on retribution and the notion of deterrence.

Sources

Image and Source 1 and 2 – PCOM 2/291

Source 3 – PC 1/2717 Lists of convicts embarked on the Elphinstone for Van Diemen's land

External links

Watch our '[Unboxing the Archive](#)' video¹ introducing these documents and Joseph Charman's story.

¹ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5TzECLoZa1U>

Background

Crime, and how to deal with it, was one of the great issues of Victorian Britain. In the first place there seemed to be a rising crime rate, from about 5,000 recorded crimes per year in 1800 to 20,000 per year in the 1830s. The Victorians had a firm belief in making criminals face up to their responsibilities and in punishment. Between 1842 and 1877, 90 new prisons were built in Britain.

Child crime shocked the Victorians. Dickens' account of Fagin's gang of young pickpockets led by the Artful Dodger, in 'Oliver Twist' published in 1837, played to this popular concern. In 1816, Parliament even set up a 'Committee for Investigating the Alarming Increase in Juvenile Crime in the Metropolis' (London). But how far should ideas of punishment, of making the criminal face up to their actions by a long, tough, prison sentence, apply to children?

A step towards treating children differently was the Juvenile Offences Act of 1847, which said that young people under 14 (soon raised to 16) should be tried in a special court, not an adult court. More far-reaching were the first Reformatory Schools, set up in 1854. Young people were sent to a Reformatory School for long periods – several years. The long sentences were designed to break the child away from the "bad influences" of home and environment.

Reformatories were as far as the government was prepared to go towards treating children differently for most of the 19th century. Attitudes began to swing towards reform in the early 20th century. From 1899 children were no longer sent to adult prisons. In 1902 an experimental school was set up at Borstal, in Kent. It was run like a boarding school, with lots of sport, staff not in uniform and a more encouraging attitude towards the children. Several more 'Borstals' were set up, but in 1982 there was a swing away from reform towards punishment and they were mostly turned into Young Offenders Institutes.

The documents are also interesting as an example of early use of photography in police records.

Tasks

1. Look at Source 1.

Source 1: Joseph Lewis, prisoner 5248. Catalogue ref: PCOM 2/291

Read through the document to make sure you understand what it is telling you.

- How old was Joseph?
- What offence had he committed?
- What was his sentence?
- Why do you think a photograph and description of this boy was included in his record?
- Why do you think he committed this crime?

2. Look at Source 2.

Source 2: Prison record for John Greening 5997. Catalogue ref: PCOM 2/291

Read through the document and compare it with the one shown in Source 1.

- How old was John?
- What offence had he committed?
- What was his sentence?
- Why do you think he committed this crime?
- Why do you think his sentence is so harsh?
- There are two parts to John's sentence. What do you think the Victorians thought was the point of:
 - Sending the offender to prison?
 - Sending the offender to the Reformatory?

3. Look at Source 3.

Source 3: List of convicts embarked on the Elphinstone for Van Diemen's Land 1842. Catalogue ref: PC 1/2717

Another form of Victorian punishment was transportation to a penal colony in a different country.

- What is the average age of these convicts who are being transported?
- What are the crimes that most of them have been convicted of? (Hint : Larceny means theft)
- How long is the average sentence?
- Do you think they were allowed to come home at the end of their sentence?
- Which of the following words do you think describes conditions at the penal colony? Explain why
 - hard
 - easy
 - frightening

Tasks

- simple
- tough
- boring
- interesting
- Why do you think these children committed these crimes?

4. Punishment of crime has a number of aims:

- punish the offender
- reform the offender so they won't do it again
- deter others from committing crimes
- protect the public

Which of these aims were being met by these sentences on Victorian young offenders?

5. What would happen to Joseph Lewis and John Greening if they committed the same crimes today?

6. What sentences would you pass on Joseph Lewis and John Greening? What are the reasons for your decision?

Source 1: Joseph Lewis, prisoner 5248.

Catalogue Ref: PCOM 2/291

77
4

26 April 73

Name N^o Joseph Lewis 5248

and Aliases.

Description

Age (on discharge) — 11
 Height — 4 ft 6 3/4
 Hair — Lt. Brown
 Eyes — Lt Grey
 Complexion — Fresh
 Where born — England
 Married or Single — Single
 Trade or occupation — None
 Distinguishing marks — Postmarked
 Scar right wrist



Address at time of apprehension — 32 Princes St Rotherhithe

Place and date of conviction — Greenwich 10 April 73

Offence for which convicted — Simple Larceny, s. 54
St 28 lbs of Iron = 3/

Sentence — 1 Cal Mo 14d

Date to be liberated — 9 May 1873

Intended residence after liberation — Same

Previous Convictions

Summary

By Jury

Remarks, antecedents &c.

Source 1: Transcript

Name No – Joseph Lewis 5248
and Aliases. _____

Description

Age (on discharge) _____ 11
Height _____ 4ft 6 3/4
Hair _____ Lt Brown
Eyes _____ Dk Grey
Complexion _____ Fresh
Where Born _____ England
Married or Single _____ Single
Trade or occupation _____ None
Distinguishing marks _____ Pockmarked Scar rght wrist

Address at time of apprehension – 32 Princess St Rotherhithe
Place and date of conviction – Greenwich 10 April 73
Offence for which convicted – Simple Larceny for st[ealin]g 28lb of Iron = 3/-
Sentence – 1 Cal[endar] Mo[nth] H[ard] L[abour]
Date to be liberated – 9 May 1873
Intended residence after liberation – Same Previous

Convictions:

Summary

By Jury

Remarks antecedents &c

Source 2: Prison record for John Greening 5997.

Catalogue Ref: PCOM 2/291

323
4

Name No. John Greening 5997 5 July 73

and Aliases.

Description	Age (on discharge) _____	11
	Height _____	4 ft 4 in
	Hair _____	Br. Brown
	Eyes _____	B. Gray
	Complexion _____	Fair
	Where born _____	Worlake
	Married or Single _____	Single
	Trade or occupation _____	None

Distinguishing marks.
Scar on forehead



Address at time of apprehension — 1 Senior Place, Northlake

Place and date of conviction — Richmond 18 June 73.

Offence for which convicted — Steal a lot of gooseberries (growing)

Sentence — 1 Cal. Mth. & 5 years Rep.

Date to be liberated — 17 July 73.

Intended residence after liberation — 13 Olyn Castle, East Ham Essex.

Summary

11 March 71 - Steal some coal f. O.A. 10 days & h. or 10/- Richmond

15 Feb 73 Steal coal }
Steal coal }

2 Cal Mos. & h. & whipped. Richmond

By Jury

Remarks, antecedents &c.
Ret. sent 5 April 73

Source 2: Transcript

Name No – John Greening 5997
and Aliases _____

Description:

Age (on discharge) _____ 11
Height _____ 4ft 4 1/4
Hair _____ Lt Brown
Eyes _____ D Grey
Complexion _____ Fresh
Where Born _____ Mortlake
Married or Single _____ Single
Trade or occupation _____ None
Distinguishing marks – Scar on forehead

Address at time of apprehension – 1 Senior Place, Mortlake
Place and date of conviction – Richmond 10 June 73
Offence for which convicted – St[ealin]g a Q[uar]t[er] of Goosberries (growing)
Sentence – 1 Cal[endar] M[on]th H[ard] L[abour] & 5 years Ref[ormitor]y
Date to be liberated – 17 Jul 73
Intended residence after liberation – Boleyn Castle, East Ham, Essex

Previous Convictions: Summary 11 March 71 – St[ealin]g coal J.O.A. 10 Days H[ard] L[abour] or 10/-
Richmond 1

5 Feb 73 St[ealin]g coal

St[ealin]g coal

2 cal[endar] mo[n]th[s] H[ard] L[abour] & whipped Richmond

By Jury

Remarks, antecedents &c
Rab. sent 5-April 73

Source 3: List of convicts embarked on the Elphinstone for Van Diemen's Land, 1842. Catalogue Ref: PC 1/2717

No.	NAME.	Age.	Crime.	Convicted.		Sentence.	Mar-ried or Single.	Read or Write.	Trade.	Gaoler's Report.	Character on board the Hulk.
				Where.	When.						
4207	Henry Bolam.	15	Steal a pair of shoes	Northw. Co.	30 Decr 1839.	7 yrs	"	R.	"	Convicted & given Whiff? a Dinner, & c.	Good
4208	James Campbell	14	Theft.	Glasgow.	9 Sept. 1840.	7 "	"	R.	"	Offen. Convicted. Bad character	In.
4214	Henry Johnston.	15	Larceny & from Conv.	Cont. Dist. Ct.	1 Feb. 1841.	10 "	"	H.	"	Before Convicted.	D.
4217	Andrew Schunder.	15	Larceny.	Cont. Dist. Ct.	1 Feb. 1841.	7 "	"	B.	"	2 Months H. Co.	Good
4218	Richard Taylor.	14	Larceny by a boat	Cont. Dist. Ct.	1 Feb. 1841.	7 "	"	B.	"	Not known.	D.
4219	Thos. Garrett.	14	Larceny by a boat	Cont. Dist. Ct.	1 Mar. 1841.	7 "	"	B.	"	D.	D.
4220	George Hambley	16	Larceny	C. C. Ct.	1 Mar. 1841.	7 "	"	B.	"	D.	Indiff.
4221	John Millesley	15	Stealing a coat	Elphinstone Convict	29 Mar. 1841.	7 "	"	H.	"	In prison before.	Good
4222	John Parkinson	13	Larceny.	Grantham.	2 April. 1841.	7 "	"	H.	"	Bad charct. comm'd from last boat.	In.
4223	William Shaw	16	Larceny.	Cont. Dist. Ct.	10 May 1841.	7 "	"	B.	"	3 Months H. Co.	In.
4224	Richard Pinnock	16	Steal a shirt & larceny	C. C. Ct.	10 "	10 "	"	H.	"	Not known	Good.
4225	Henry Hooper	14	Larceny	C. C. Ct.	10 May 1841.	7 "	"	B.	"	D.	In.
4226	Asst. Hood.	16	Larceny	C. C. Ct.	10 "	7 "	"	B.	"	Before Convicted	In.
4227	James Ferrone.	13	Larceny	C. C. Ct.	10 "	7 "	"	B.	"	Not known.	In.
4228	Joseph Williamson	14	Larceny for prison	C. C. Ct.	10 "	10 "	"	B.	"	A. M. H. Co.	In.
4229	Thomas Sawyer	13	Larceny & from Conv.	C. C. Ct.	10 "	7 "	"	B.	"	Before Conv? H. Co. of Hon	Bad.
4230	William Jones.	14	Larceny	C. C. Ct.	10 "	7 "	"	B.	"	Blackwell 21 days	Bad.
4231	Nathan Grant.	15	Steal a shirt & from Conv.	Portsmouth	5 April 1841	7 "	"	A.	"	Character very bad 11 times in Indif.	Indif.
4232	John Linsley.	16	Steal a pair of boots	Elphinstone Conv.	12 April 1841	7 "	"	B.	"	2 nd Conv. Bad charct. very disagree	Good
4233	George Debbes.	14	Steal a bag & 2 shirts & 3 7yrs conv.	New. S. Wales	12 Decr 1841	7 1/2 yrs	"	R.	"	2 nd Conv? very bad character.	D.
4234	Leslie Robertson.	14	Theft	Aberdeen	21 April 1841	7 "	"	B.	"	Conv? before. very bad character. Indif.	Indif.
4235	William Brown.	14	Theft	Aberdeen	23 "	7 "	"	B.	"	Bad character. quite despot.	In.
4236	Abat. Mc Donald.	13	d.	d.	25 "	7 "	"	B.	"	d. d. dishonably	Good

Source 3: Transcript

No.	Name	Age	Crime	Convicted Where	Convicted When	Sentence	Married or Single	Read or Write	Trade	Goaler's Report	Character on board the hulk
3997	Henry Bolam	15	Steal[ɪn]g a peice of Velveteen	Worcester	30 Dec 1839	7 yrs	"	R	"	Convicted & twice Whipp[e]d a common thief	Good
4020	James Campbell	14	Theft	Glasgow	9 Sept 1840	7 "	"	R	"	Often Convicted. Bad Character	In
4124	Jerty Johnston	15	Larceny & prev conviction]	Cen[traj] Cr[ɪmɪna[l] C[four]t	1 Feb 1841	10 "	"	N	"	Before Convicted	Ditto
4127	Frederick Schweder	15	Larceny	Cen[traj] Cr[ɪmɪna[l] C[four]t	1 Feb 1841	7 "	"	B	"	2 Mo[nth]s & 2 weeks H[ard] L[abour]	Good
4128	Richard Taylor	15	Larceny by a Serv[an]t	Cen[traj] Cr[ɪmɪna[l] C[four]t	1 Feb 1841	7 "	"	B	"	Not known	Ditto
4166	Tho[ma]s Garrell	14	Larceny by a Serv[an]t	Cen[traj] Cr[ɪmɪna[l] C[four]t	1 Mar 1841	7 "	"	B	"	Ditto	Ditto
4167	George Hambley	16	Larceny	Cen[traj] Cr[ɪmɪna[l] C[four]t	1 Mar 1841	7 "	"	B	"	Ditto	Indiff [eren]t
4185	John Hillesley	15	Stealing a Coat	Kingston on Thames	29 Mar 1841	7 "	"	N	"	In prison before	Good
4191	Job Parkinson	13	Larceny	Grantham	2 April 1841	7 "	"	N	"	Bad Charact[e] r col[?] poor but honest	Ditto
4217	William Shaw	16	Larceny	Cen[traj] Cr[ɪmɪna[l] C[four]t	10 May 1841	7 "	"	B	"	3 Months H[ard] L[abour]	In
4218	Richard Pinnuck	15	Ho[use] break[ɪn]g & Larceny	Cen[traj] Cr[ɪmɪna[l] C[four]t	10 ~"~ ~"~	10 "	"	N	"	Not known	Good
4220	Henry Hooper	14	Larceny	Cen[traj] Cr[ɪmɪna[l] C[four]t	10 May 1841	7 "	"	B	"	Ditto	In

Source 3: Transcript (cont.)

No.	Name	Age	Crime	Convicted Where	Convicted When	Sentence	Married or Single	Read or Write	Trade	Gaoler's Report	Character on board the hulk
4221	Joshua Mood	15	Larceny form[er] conviction	Gen[er]al Cr[iminal] Court	10 ~ ~ ~	7 "	"	B	"	Before Convicted	In
4222	James Jerrome	13	Larceny	Gen[er]al Cr[iminal] Court	10 ~ ~ ~	7 "	"	B	"	Not known	In
4223	Joseph Williamson	14	Larceny from person	Gen[er]al Cr[iminal] Court	10 ~ ~ ~	10 "	"	B	"	1 M[onth] H[ard] L[abour]	In
4224	Thomas Harper	13	Larceny & prior conviction	Gen[er]al Cr[iminal] Court	10 ~ ~ ~	7 "	"	B	"	Before Convicted H[ard] L[abour] often	Bad
4225	William Jones	14	Larceny	Gen[er]al Cr[iminal] Court	10 ~ ~ ~	7 "	"	B	"	Bridewell 21 days	Bad
4226	Nathan Hant	15	Steal[ing] a watch & former conviction	Pontefract	5 April ~ ~ ~	7 "	"	B	"	Character very bad 11 times in prison	Indif
4229	John Linsley	16	Steal[ing] a pair of boots	Kingston on Hull	12 April 1841	7 "	"	B	"	2nd Conv[ictio]n. bad character very disorderly	Good
4231	George Dubber	14	2 Indict[ment]s 7 years each	New Sarum	1 March 1841	7 7=14 "	"	R	"	2nd Conv[ictio]n very bad character	Ditto
4235	Leslie Robertson	14	Theft	Aberdeen	21 April 1841	7 "	"	B	"	Conv[ict]ed before. Very bad character	Ind
4236	William Brown	14	Theft	Aberdeen	23 ~ ~ ~	7 "	"	B	"	Bad Character quite dishonest	In
4237	Charles McDonald	14	Ditto	Ditto	23 ~ ~ ~	7 "	"	B	"	ditto ditto disorderly	Good



Why do our hyperlinks come with footnotes?

Our resources are designed to be printed and used in classrooms, which means hyperlinks aren't always accessible digitally. We include the full link at the bottom of the page so that you can type in the address without distracting from the main text of the lesson materials.

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