



Prisons were often in old buildings, such as castles. They tended to be damp, unhealthy, insanitary and over-crowded. All kinds of prisoners were mixed in together, men, women, children; the insane; serious criminals and petty criminals; people awaiting trial; and debtors. Each prison was run by the gaoler in his own way. He made up the rules. If you could pay, you could buy extra privileges, such as private rooms, better food, more visitors, keeping pets, letters going in and out, and books to read. If you could not, the basic fare was grim. You even had to pay the gaoler to be let out when your sentence was finished.

Law and order was a major issue in Victorian Britain. Victorians were worried about the huge new cities that had grown up following the Industrial Revolution – how were the masses to be kept under control? They were worried about rising crime. They could see that transporting convicts to Australia was not the answer and by the 1830s Australia was complaining that they did not want to be the dumping-ground for Britain’s criminals.

Discovering your ancestor in prison records doesn’t necessarily make them a hardened criminal, nineteenth century law was harsh and children as well as adults were imprisoned for minor misdemeanours . These records are often very detailed and can include physical descriptions of height, weight and eye colour.

John Amor

	Surname	Given Names	Age	Trade or Occupation	Degree of Instruction			
Accused	Amor	John	60	Shoemaker	read and write imperfectly			
Birth Year	1810							
	Surname	Given Name	Title	Address				
Committing Magistrate (1)	Fowle	T. E.	Esq.	Chute Lodge, Andover				
Committing Magistrate (2)	Gale	J. H	Rev,	Milton, Pewsey				
Committing Magistrate (3)	Rogers	W. L.	Esq.	Rainscomb, Marlborough				
Court	Devizes							
Date of Warrant	1870	30-Sep						
When Received into Custody	1870	30-Sep		Date of Trial	1870	19-Oct		
Offence as Charged in the Commitment	Receiving a gold ring and a half sovereign well knowing the same to have been feloniously stolen, the property of Charles Waite at Pewsey, on the 15th August 1870							
	Surname	Given Names	Title					
Before Whom Tried	Lopes	R. L.	Esq					
Verdict of Jury	Guilty of receiving stolen property							
Particulars of Previous Convictions Charged in the Indictment and Proved in Court								
Sentence or Order of the Court	Imprisonment with hard labour for nine calendar months in the Prison at Devizes							