

Crimes, Criminals and Punishments

Jersey has never been a crime-free island. Perhaps the most obvious question to ask is how high crime levels were, and what types of offence were most commonly committed? Criminal statistics in any period are likely to be a very imperfect indicator of crimes committed, and this imperfection might logically be expected to become more marked when criminal statistics rely on court records from three or four centuries ago.

The recording of crimes in Jersey commenced when the court system began to record arrests by the honorary police and the sentencing by the Royal Courts in approximately the mid-1500s. Over the centuries, both crimes and punishments in Jersey have not differed greatly from that of European nations. Theft, assault, murder, fraud, prostitution, intemperance are all constant crimes committed here throughout the centuries.

The House of Correction given to Jersey by George Carteret in 1646 was the place that the Constables with their officers were ordered, in their respective parishes to apprehend:

- All swearers and blasphemers of God's Holy Name
- Profaners of the Sabbath, whether by playing games or frequenting taverns or those who neglected to come to Divine Service and listen to the sermons
- Children rebellious to their parents
- Indentured servants who quitted their employment before their period of indenture had expired
- Those persons, male and female who have neither a house nor a family but are capable of ploughing the ground of those who are compelled to stop indoors, and those who refuse to let themselves be hired out at reasonable wages
- All men capable of working in the fields, if they be found knitting with women and girls in public places, other than in the houses where they live
- All beggars in the parishes not possessing a licence to do so from either the Rector or the Constable and the Principals, it being understood that no one will be licensed unless he is incapable of working for his living

- All slanderers and disparagers of persons holding esteem, and propagators of false rumour.
- Those persons who have a family and threaten to leave it or those who do not wish to work for the upkeep of their family
- All taverners and bakers who have been forbidden to carry on their profession and who continue notwithstanding

Criminals who were arrested for the crimes of theft, assault, riot and the like were arrested by the Constables and Centeniers but held at Mont Orgueil Castle before the Charing Cross prison was built in the 1690s.

Between the years of 1814 – 1829, the Gloucester Street prison held 1,000 people awaiting trial and while many were cleared or bailed, an equally large number were punished. Nearly a quarter of them were arrested for theft and suspicion of theft, a third were arrested for being riotous, committing assaults or being disorderly while a further quarter of the admissions were habitual offenders. Among the offences in these years were 29 people arrested for 'return from transportation', 13 arrested for refusing military service, 11 arrested for murder, 7 for bigamy and 23 for forgery or fraud. There were one or two people arrested for the following reasons: refusing relief to family, receiving stolen goods, highway robbery, trespass, importing French cows, contempt of court and perjury, riding on carts contrary to the law, buying a soldier's shirt, breaking out of prison, furious driving, attempting to poison their master, insulting courts, attempting to set fire to own house, stabbing and shooting, and other misdemeanours.

From 1534 until 1811, hanging was the punishment for:

Theft

Witchcraft (where they were not only hanged but burnt as well)

Murder

Piracy

Bestiality

Highway Robbery

Around 131 people were hanged in Jersey, more for theft and witchcraft than for murder.

1500s

- October 23 1542 - A Frenchman called Pierre from Coutances was tried and sent to the Castle, following his confession, for stealing a silver cup, during the night from Thomas Le Marchant; the same night he took three silver cups from Andrien Aubyn, and on another occasion took another silver cup and a taffeta cap from Jacques Amy and in so doing damaged all three houses; the silver cups were found in an earth bank where he had hidden them. He escaped from prison and took refuge in St Helier cemetery where he was made to promise that if allowed to go free to return to Normandy on the first boat available and never to return to Jersey.
- 27 January 1550 - John Whith and Bernabe Le Quesne were convicted as pirates. John was hanged at St Catherine's and Bernabe was hanged at Noirmont where they were left to rot as a warning to other pirates.
- In 1556 - Collas Coutanches was condemned to be hanged for stealing from the King's granary and his 15 year old brother was to be whipped till blood ran. Their goods were confiscated and inheritance made null and void. The following year, their mother was also hanged for her participation in the robbery.
- 18 December 1593 - Jehan Le Vavassuer, a blacksmith was hanged for making a false key. Jean Trymaillys was also hanged for using the false keys to steal English soldiers' clothing.
- 1596 Leonard Picot was put into the stocks as a punishment for his dog killing a sheep.
- 25 January 1598 - Richard Huelin was beaten for milking cows at night.

1600s

- 27 January 1624 - Philippe Marin was whipped for stealing a horse.
- 16 December 1619 - One criminal was accused of adultery but was discharged after one day in prison.
- 1631 - Timothy Huelin stole some geese and his punishment was to be chastised by his father in the presence of the Constable.
- 20 October 1620 Edouard Leonard confessed to sorcery and was executed without trial. This was one of many witchcraft trials held during the 1600s. Anyone convicted of sorcery and witchcraft was usually hanged and burnt.

1700s

- 23 April 1725 - Edouard Orange, Jean Le Goupil and Elizabeth Le Goupil, nee Orange, appeared in the Royal Court for exporting a great quantity of wool against the Act of Parliament and they were subject to port penalties.
- 28 September 1745 - Philippe de Gruchy and Amice Gotterel were sentenced to death for theft however, the hangman refused to carry out the sentence until he was paid. The two convicts seized their chance and escaped before the he was paid!
- 18 October 1768 - Charles Handouin, a stranger, was banished from the island for life for debauchery and having a 'suspect character'.
- 10 May 1768 - Michel Le Brun and Julienne Robin were found guilty of issuing false money (fraud). Julienne was flogged and banished for life, however her husband was condemned to carry out the flogging for no fee and then to be imprisoned for month.

- 11 May 1784 - Philippe Novion and his wife were found guilty of receiving stolen goods and participating in the stealing of the goods. The husband was imprisoned for a month on bread and water with his legs in irons whilst the wife was banished for three years.

1800s

- Reverend John Robinson, alias Raven returned to Jersey from transportation on 14 January 1817 and was punished with 1 month's solitary confinement and a further five years transportation.
- 30 January 1817 - Francois Ahier junior who was sentenced to imprisonment for highway robbery 'escaped from prison thro bars'.
- 21 August 1817 - James Elliot was banished from Jersey for life for the crime of refusing military service. A note by his name records that he was a Quaker.
- 27 August 1817 - John Bunlyn was transported for five years for the crime of bigamy.
- 10 September 1817 - as opposed to normal transportation, Sophia Machon, wife of Bonnel was bailed *not* to leave island.
- 19 December 1817 - John Ingouville arrested for the crime of theft, was punished by being 'made executioner'.
- 21 January 1819 - Thomas Patourel, arrested for the crime of theft 'broke out thro the wall of his cell and made his escape over the railing . . . '
- 10 March 1819 - transportation was generally to England, Guernsey or France. However by the order of the Commander in Chief, George Brown, William Breffet, John Reed and Thomas Moran were sent to England to be transported to Botany Bay. It is still a mystery what crime they committed.

- March 1820 - Francois Noel, Francois Anquetil and Peter Rabe were arrested for importing French cows. The three of them did not receive any punishment; Francois Noel escaped court and Francois Anquetil and Peter Rabe escaped from prison.
- May 1820 - the crime of murder did not always warrant a death sentence. Thomas Thompson of the 19th regiment, arrested for murder received a sentence of six months imprisonment.
- May 1822 - John Lockart was arrested for the murder of Marguerite Devon his wife, but was acquitted by a jury.
- October 1824 - Charles Le Sueur received a sentence of four months imprisonment for murder.
- October 1829 -Thomas Webber arrested for theft, found that the prison was not very secure for he 'escaped from prison by breaking lock of his cell and getting over the bars'.
- October 1829 - Philippe Jolin, convicted of killing his father in a drunken argument, was hanged. He was the last person to be hanged in public at Gallows Hill.
- On 26th February 1846, George Le Cronier, a Centenier went with a colleague to a house in Patriotic Street to arrest a couple who were accused of keeping a house of ill-repute. He had already arrested 11 of the prostitutes in the house on the previous Sunday and he now returned to arrest the husband and wife. When the two men arrived only the wife, Marie Le Gendre, was at home and, as the Centenier was about to arrest her, she suddenly seized a carving knife and stabbed Le Cronier in the stomach. She then threatened the other honorary policeman who promptly beat a hasty retreat. As Le Cronier staggered into the street he cried –“Oh mon garcon, je suis stabbe”. He died the following day from his wound. Marie Le Gendre was initially found guilty of premeditated murder, which would have meant that she would have been hanged. However, subsequently on appeal this was reduced to a

lesser charge, which meant that she was banished from the island to New South Wales, Australia, for life (interestingly she subsequently re-married – to a man called Le Cronier!).

In order to learn more about Crimes in Jersey, visit or contact Jersey Archive:

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Jersey Archive is open to the public on Tuesdays, Wednesdays and Thursdays only (late night last Thursday in month and third Saturday of month). Further details are available from our website.

www.jerseyheritage.org