

CONVICT VOYAGES LEARNING RESOURCE: BERMUDA

TEACHERS' NOTES

Overview and summary

Convict transportation was an extensive practice that many nations, empires and colonies used as a form of punishment for convicted criminals. This included Britain, which transported convicts to the Americas and the Australian colonies, during the period 1615-1868. Over centuries the British transportation process was heavily influenced by developments within theories of punishment and by the needs of its Empire. Other motivations for transporting convicts were often more complex and ranged from the removal of unwanted criminals, to strategic interests, the use of convict labour, and the expansion of power and control overseas.

One of the convict routes within Britain's larger imperial history in the nineteenth century stretched from Britain and Ireland to the small island of Bermuda in the North Atlantic Ocean, between 1823 and 1863. Its history is relevant to our understanding of the history of crime and punishment, including in Ireland, and of imperial expansion and unfree labour during this period. The material histories of the convict transportation system persist in many of the infrastructure projects built with convict labour, including in Bermuda, where convicts constructed the royal naval dockyard, situated on Ireland Island. The study of convict transportation to Bermuda is a key way of understanding many important aspects of history, including punishment, governance, and the supply of unfree labour to meet the demands of Britain's expanding imperial and strategic interests.

Key facts

- Bermuda is an island in the North Atlantic Ocean, and was a British colony between 1707 and 1949. Great Britain united with Ireland in the Act of Union of 1800 (which came into force in 1801).
- The island of Bermuda received around 9,000 convicts from Britain and Ireland between 1823 and 1863.
- All of the convicts were men. Most of them were transported for theft and for a period of 7 years.
- Some of the convicts were transported during the period of the Irish Potato Famine (1856-51), mainly for stealing food. A few Irish gentleman radicals were also sent.
- Initially, the convicts were kept on hulks, which were decommissioned naval ships, and moored offshore. In 1847, convicts started work building prisons on Boaz Island, and by 1852, almost of all them had been moved onshore.
- The convicts mainly worked on the construction of the dockyard, but also built the bridge that linked Ireland Island to Boaz Island (Grey's bridge).
- 1,260 of the 9,000 convicts died during their transportation, including during outbreaks of yellow fever in 1843, 1846 and 1856.
- Ex-convicts were not allowed to stay in Bermuda, and were returned to Britain and Ireland, or sent on to the Australian colonies, at government expense. However, a few local families on the island today are descended from guards who remained behind after 1863.

Learning Outcomes and Placement in Curriculum

This guide is designed to speak to three different levels of educational progression. These are: Level 1 - Early Secondary (roughly ages 12-16); Level 2 - Upper Secondary (roughly ages 16-18); and Level 3 - Undergraduate.

Level 1 – Early Secondary: At this level, discussions of convict transportation to Bermuda can constitute one element of criminal justice history, and Bermudian history. Students at this level can engage with the materials in such a way as to understand how transportation was used as a punishment, and how it served the labour needs of the British Empire and the royal navy. They can thus be encouraged to study at local, regional and/ or imperial scales, and if appropriate to consider the connections between them.

Level 2 – Upper Secondary: At this level, students can undertake more advanced studies of British and Irish social history, and the history of metropolitan and imperial repression and unfree labour more generally. Students can be asked to link significant individuals with events, developments and issues in the history of convict Bermuda. They can be encouraged to understand and articulate a range of appropriate historical perspectives on this history, for example via political, penal, and labour history.

Level 3 - Undergraduate: At undergraduate level, studies of convict transportation generally can be employed in many introductory history, geography, sociology and criminology/ penology modules. They can also be used in more specialised work on the history of punishment, unfree labour, empire, global history etc., as well as in area studies (regionally specific) history. The convict history of Bermuda provides an excellent case study in these areas, including its relationship to the history of Britain and Ireland, and to key features of imperialism and colonialism. The source base is particularly well suited for a social history approach, including the history of work, resistance, gender, education and religion. Interactive resources are ideal for seminar and workshop use, with students investigating both primary documents and the historiography to develop nuanced understandings of how penal transportation helped to shape the modern world, and how convicts experienced it.

Across all levels, students will:

- Understand the complex, multiple ways of understanding why the British used penal transportation as a punishment.
- Identify the importance of penal transportation in the history of contemporary globalisation, through the building of infrastructure vital for the expansion of British imperial interests in economy and trade.
- Appreciate some of the ways in which convicts experienced their transportation to Bermuda.

Key themes and links

Crime and Punishment: Includes the use of transportation to punish property crime, and specifically in the Irish context its use as a tool of political repression during famine years.

Imperialism and Naval Expansion: Includes the role of convicts in the construction of naval infrastructure overseas. Students can discuss the role of convict transportation in domestic (British) affairs including in Ireland (after the Act of Union with GB in 1801), and in expanding imperial power abroad.

Labour history: Includes the importance of convict transportation as a means of supplying unfree labour to Bermuda. The introduction of convicts followed the abolition of the slave trade in 1807, and continued after the abolition of slavery in 1833. Discussion can focus on the role of convict labour in providing an inexpensive way to augment or replace enslaved people in the Bermudian context.

Resources

Infographic: Penal transportation by the European powers (comparative, situates Bermuda globally) - http://www.historytoday.com/sites/default/files/convictmap_last.jpg

Essay: Convicts in Bermuda, 1823-1863 (by Clare Anderson)

URL: <http://convictvoyages.org/expert-essays/convicts-in-bermuda>

Statistics: ‘flows’ of convicts transported to Bermuda by year, and the number of convicts in Bermuda at any one time (‘standing numbers’)

URL: <http://convictvoyages.org/statistic/bermuda>

Brenda Mortimer, “Prisoners in Paradise,” *Ancestors* (February 2009): 40-44.

<http://issuu.com/penandword/docs/prisonersinparadise>

The National Archives - <http://discovery.nationalarchives.gov.uk> contains Bermuda convict ship registers. Click advanced search, and search as follows:
All of these words: Bermuda
Any of these references: HO8
AND/ OR Any of these references: HO11
AND/ OR Any of these references: CO37

For those who have a subscription to 'Findmypast':
Search The National Archives at <http://discovery.nationalarchives.gov.uk> as follows:

All of these words: Bermuda
Any of these references: HO17
This will bring up records of petitions from and on behalf of convicts in Bermuda. The National Archives catalogue gives summaries; click through to 'Findmypast' for access to the original documents.
NB: 'Findmypast' can be freely viewed at The National Archives.

Royal Gazette (Bermuda newspaper) online -
<http://cdm16347.contentdm.oclc.org/cdm/landingpage/collection/BermudaNP02>

John Mitchel, *Jail Journal* (Dublin: Gill and Son, 1913). Available on www.archive.org (google 'John Mitchel archive.org'). John Mitchel was an Irish national activist, 1815-1875, and was held transported as a convict to Bermuda.

State Library of New South Wales, 'Sketches of Convicts', c. 1860
http://archival.sl.nsw.gov.au/Details/archive/110341930?_ga=2.229765780.943880925.1500830079-1931116107.1500640619

National Museum of Bermuda - <https://nmb.bm/> - the Maritime Museum is situated on the site of the Dockyard, and this site contains interesting images and plans.

ACTIVITIES

Scaffolding and scaling of lessons

This teaching resource is predicated on a level-by-level increase in detail and focus in scale, encouraging teaching and learning in increasingly complex demonstrations of the history of convict transportation to Bermuda.

Level 1 – Convicts in Bermuda

Students at Level 1 (unfamiliar with any of the issues around convict transportation and penal colonisation) can study the history of transportation to Bermuda in its larger context, and focus on primary sources of convict transportation to the island. The goal of activities at this level is to encourage students to understand the connected histories of the UK and Bermuda in the 19th century. It also aims to develop students' skills in using primary sources.

The lesson can begin with the instructors' summary of the history of convict transportation to Bermuda. The Convict Voyages 'Bermuda' essay will be useful here (it includes maps and images that can be displayed). It might also be useful for instructors to show images of the convict-built Bermuda dockyard today, so that students can get a sense of what the site looks like today. The National Museum of Bermuda's website - <https://nmb.bm/> - has some good pictures.

The students can also read for themselves the short 'Prisoners in Paradise' article, by Brenda Mortimer, which contains lovely visuals.

Depending on how much time the instructors has to focus on this topic, s/he can also introduce the parallel history of convict hulks in Britain. See: <http://www.maritimeheritage.org/ports/england-The-Hulks.html>

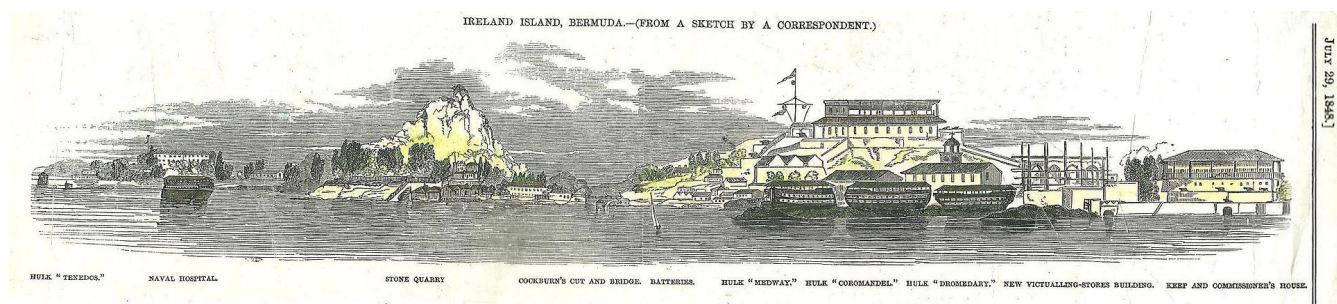
If the instructor wishes to extend this activity, primary source material on convict hulks in Britain might also be useful – see The National Archives: <http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/education/resources/19th-century-prison-ships/>

One idea for the subsequent activity is to encourage the students to look at and interpret the following set of paintings, kept at the State Library of New South Wales (Australia).

http://archival.sl.nsw.gov.au/Details/archive/110341930?_ga=2.229765780.943880925.1500830079-1931116107.1500640619

The students can be asked about, or be asked to answer written questions on the images, such as what are the convicts doing? How do we know who is a guard, and who is a convict? (A: their different clothing). What is written on their clothing? (A: the name of their hulk). How do you know they are on a ship? (A: rigging is visible). There is a child (juvenile convict) in one of the images; in another a convict holds a fish. What do these suggest about the nature of transportation? (A: children were transported), and how convicts experience it? (A: convicts were mustered and counted, but they also had some scope for activities not related to their punishment and work.) Note also that all of the convicts are white. This could prompt discussion given that Bermuda was a slave colony until 1833. Did convicts replace enslaved workers in colonial infrastructure projects?

A second activity could be the display of this view of Ireland and Boaz islands (dated 1848), and the instructor's invitation to the students to discuss or to write about what it can tell us about the organization of the convicts. Note for example the offshore hulks, the separate naval hospital, the stone quarry (where convicts extracted the materials necessary to build the dockyard).



Third, if the instructor is able to locate a petition written by or on behalf of a convict via 'Findmypast' (see above), they could present this to the class, and then encourage the students in a written activity to write an imaginative petition on behalf of a made-up convict. They could do this even if unable to locate this source, via a brief explanation of what a petition is. The students could work individually or in pairs. Topics for petitions might include: the convict's claim that they are victim to a miscarriage of justice, a request for release for an extraordinary reason (e.g. preventing a riot, saving a guard's life), and complaints about ill-treatment (too much work, poor rations [food] etc.)

Fourth, instructors could ask the students to locate a convict in The National Archives' registers (see above), and to make up a letter that this convict might have sent home to their wife or parents. In that letter, they might talk about their crime, and their everyday life as a convict in Bermuda.

Another excellent activity is to encourage students to work in groups to think about how these different kinds of sources can be connected together: e.g. hulk registers, paintings of convicts, petitions (i.e. a prisoner is registered in a ledger, goes to Bermuda where he is painted, works in the place represented in the plan (above), and writes a petition to complain about ill-treatment).

Level 2 – Convicts in Bermuda

At level 2, instructors can introduce the topic, and use some of the ideas and resources, as suggested above, but these can be extended in the following ways. Students can be encouraged specifically to think about what the history of transportation to Bermuda can tell us about the history of Ireland. In this activity, students can consider the ways that criminal justice and labour history connect to the history of British governance and repression (i.e. in Ireland, during the famine years). They can also engage in more in depth study of primary sources on the convicts transported to Bermuda.

Again, instructors can introduce the topic via the Infographic, Convict Voyages expert essay, and short article by Brenda Mortimer (or, they can ask the students to read and summarise these sources – verbally, or via the creation of a timeline or a list of key points).

Based on these resources, the instructor could encourage students to work in groups, to come up with a list of key terms, and a summary of the key points about the topic– its importance and relevance and why it is important to study it – this reflection can be tailored further to reflect specific learning outcomes if desired.

Another activity could be to ask students to look at convict hulk registers in The National Archives, and to undertake (individually or in groups) an analysis. E.G. Where are the convicts from? How old are they? What crimes did they commit? Depending on their skill level, they could be encouraged to construct basic graphs showing some of this information, e.g. with Excel. They could then explain it, verbally to the class, or in writing.

Most useful of this is the search ‘Bermuda hulks’ in the series ‘HO8’. Located here are Home Office quarterly returns. (These can also be viewed on FindmyPast). Students can find the records for individual hulks, like *Coromandel*, *Dromedary*, *Antelope*. Instructors could assign groups of students a hulk, and ask them to study it for a select year/number of years (how many convicts on board, their ages, where they are from etc.) and then to present what they have found to the class.

Once they have established their terms of enquiry, and gathered some basic information, the instructor could ask the students to look at the statistics on the Convict Voyages website. In this activity, they should focus on ‘flows’ (i.e. annual arrivals). The instructor should ask them to think about why relatively large numbers of convicts arrive in some years. (This is to do with the transportation of the Irish, during the great famine, but also more complicated factors like changes to criminal justice policy).

Finally, the students could be asked to search for mentions of convicts in the Bermuda newspaper, the *Royal Gazette*. Search terms could include ‘convict’, ‘hulk’ or combinations of words to capture themes. They can use what they find to think about local Bermudian perspectives on convicts and the hulks. One means of doing this is through the construction of a ‘compare and contrast’ approach in a piece of written work.

Level 3 – Convicts in Bermuda

The first activity in Level 3 is based on the framework of Problem Based Learning (PBL).¹ The students should read the following article, before class: Clare Anderson, ‘Transnational Histories of Penal Transportation:

¹ Those not familiar with PBL may wish to review the following document: Savery, J. R. (2006). Overview of Problem-based Learning: Definitions and Distinctions. *Interdisciplinary Journal of Problem-Based Learning*, 1(1). Available at: pdfs.semanticscholar.org/ccaf/5b96e849f85544876cfda698c3dad845dd57.pdf

punishment, labour and governance in the British Imperial World, 1787-1939', *Australian Historical Studies*, 47 (3), 381-97 (**open access**).

URL: <http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/1031461X.2016.1203962>

The instructor can introduce the topic, and the key facts (as above.) Students should then be presented with the expert essay on Bermuda, and the statistics for the Bermuda convict flows (see Resources List), and asked to read and consider them briefly. With only their base knowledge of convict transportation to Bermuda, the students' attention can be drawn to the peaks in convict arrivals. The instructor should then give them the challenge: to explain them.

The first stage of inquiry should consist of large group work to identify what kinds of things would need to be known to formulate an explanation. With the instructor acting as facilitator, students should think about various questions and considerations – for example: What were the other destinations at this time? What was happening with respect to changes in penal policy, and the history of punishment? What was going on in Ireland? Was there a change in what was considered 'criminal'? These questions should be roughly grouped together on a board/visual aid. Key to the students' understanding is an appreciation of contemporary British policy in Ireland – Irish men are transported for theft of food, alongside a few political 'gentlemen'. If students have access to wifi, they can carry out some basic internet research on the Irish famine.

Students should be broken up into smaller groups to look at primary source documents. These can include any of those listed in the resources section (above). Of particular interest is John Mitchel's *Jail Diary*. Mitchel was an Irish political prisoner, who served time in Bermuda before going on to Australia. Students can be encouraged to find out how and why he represented his experiences, and to think about the typicality or otherwise of his account.

Another good activity would be for students to search keywords on The National Archives' catalogue, where the Bermuda records in the series CO37 are indexed, often in great detail. (e.g. 'religion', 'mutiny', juveniles' etc.) This could help to build an analytical timeline of the history of the hulks in Bermuda.

Finally, where instructors have access to inter-library loans facilities, there is a fantastic convict-written account which would be a great way of introducing the topic from a convict perspective. William Sydes, "Account of Life on the Convict Hulks by William Sydes, alias Jones, One of the Prisoners," *Bermuda Historical Quarterly*, 8 (1951): 28-39.