

# Centre for Buckinghamshire Studies

## Bucks Prisoners

The courts of Buckinghamshire have seen charges brought for all sorts of illicit activities. Between them the Court of Quarter Sessions and Court of Assize have punished the people of the county for a range of offences from the trivial to the capital. As laws have changed the character of the cases brought have altered with them. Some look slightly peculiar by 21st Century standards—few today would feel that Peter Horton of Iver's offence of keeping a bowling alley (for which he was fined £2 in 1690, worth around £175 today) is something that should be occupying the court's attention. Later convictions can bear the mark of desperation as much as delinquency; James Roads's conviction for the theft of bread and mutton in 1842 has the look of a man trying to feed his family more than a criminal mastermind at work. Standards of justice have also changed; it wasn't until the judicial reforms of the 19th Century (notably the Jervis Acts of 1848) that anything like modern standards were implemented. As late as 1746, justices were still being advised by judicial manuals to commit the accused for trial, even where it was apparent that the evidence exonerated them. Those tried and imprisoned could therefore be anywhere from debtor to hardened criminal to starving to entirely innocent. Exploring the records of the criminal courts are therefore potentially relevant to all family historians.

This guide will provide a brief introduction to crime and punishment in the county, and takes you through some of the sources at the Centre for Buckinghamshire Studies (CBS) you can use to discover more details about your family's criminal past.

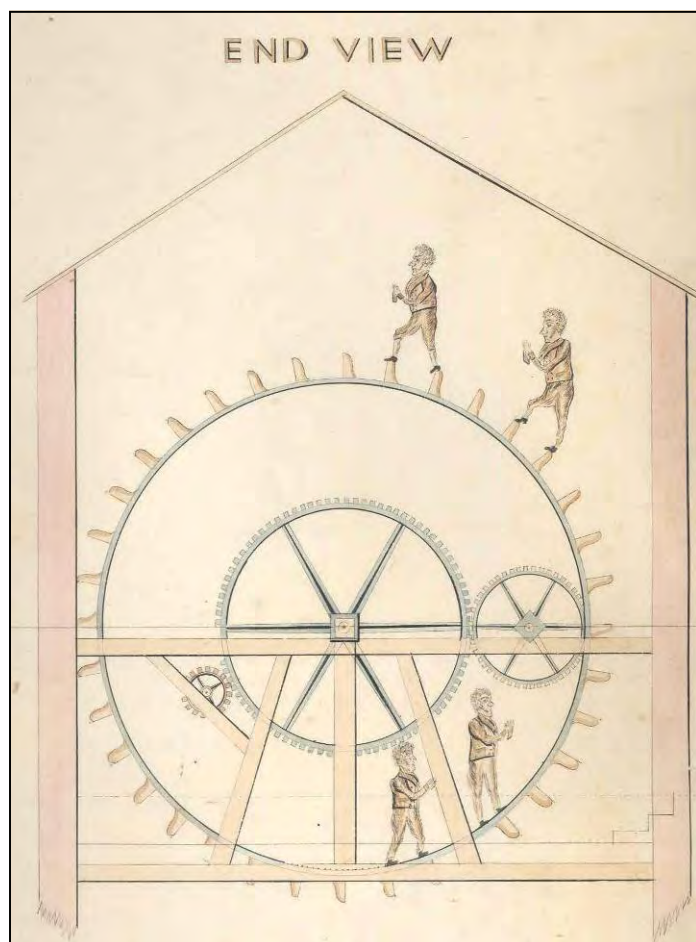


County Hall, Market Square, Aylesbury (ref: phAylesbury 3265). The Quarter Sessions were held here after the building was constructed in the 18th Century. This photo was taken in 1897.

## Buckinghamshire Prisons

The majority of those imprisoned in Buckinghamshire were held in the County Gaol in Aylesbury. There has been one in the town since the Medieval period, although little is known about it until the 18th Century when a new gaol was constructed behind County Hall. Building began in 1722, and was finished in 1740. This building was criticised by prison reformers including John Howard and James Neild, the latter describing it in 1812 as 'ill constructed for every humane purpose'. The report of the Inspector of Prisons in 1841 finally prompted action, resulting in the construction of a new, larger and cleaner prison on Berton Hill in the 1840s. It was administered by the County Quarter Sessions until 1878, when prisons were transferred to the Home Office. It became a women's prison in 1895, with a borstal being added in 1909. The building is now a Young Offenders Institute.

The Borough gaols (at Wycombe and Buckingham) and local bridewells at Newport Pagnell, Aylesbury and West Wycombe provided extra accommodation for prisoners, although between them they held only 2 prisoners at the time of John Howard's visits in 1782.



Prison Treadwheel (ref: Q/AG 46).  
Even at 21ft in width and a capacity of nearly 60 prisoners it still provided insufficient hard labour to meet the sentences of prisoners in the gaol.

Prison life was not pleasant for inmates. Conditions were dirty, cramped, poorly ventilated and badly heated. Prisons were afflicted by 'gaol distemper', a disease that killed at least 6 inmates in one year in the early 1770s. Sentences often included hard labour components. In the 18th Century, the Gaoler had set prisoners to work sawing timber and stone, selling the produce in specially established shops for his own profit. The practice died out, and by the early 19th Century the decision had been made to erect a treadwheel (left). It was heavily criticised for being unsafe; injuries and deaths were not uncommon among those working on it. It was also difficult to supervise properly resulting in inmates being able to smoke pipes without guards' knowledge.

Those sentenced to prison without hard labour were no better off. Little provision was made for exercise so long term inmates were liable to suffer from emaciation due to lack of work.



# EXECUTION

## OF JOHN TAWELL, AND FULL CONFESSION, TO HIS WIFE, IN A LETTER Of the Murder of Sarah Hart.

*Aylesbury.*  
*This morning, 8 o'clock.*  
At an early hour this morning, the sheriffs, with their usual attendants, arrived at the prison, and after partaking of some refreshment, proceeded to the condemned cell, where they found the reverend ordinary engaged in prayer with the wretched culprit.  
After the usual formalities had been observed of demanding the delivery of the body of the prisoner into their custody, Tawell was conducted to the press-room, where his irons were struck off. The executioner, with his assistants, then commenced pinioning his arms, which operation they skilfully and quickly despatched. During these awful preparations he sighed deeply, but uttered not a word. At a quarter before 8,



actions. After living 15 years in Sydney, he returned home, where he has been endeavouring to gain admittance as a member of the Society of Friends, to which body he belonged before his transportation, but they would not admit him. During his first wife's illness, the deceased nursed her, whence arose their illicit correspondence.

### COPY OF VERSES.

GOOD people all of each degree  
Attend to what I shall unfold,  
It is a dreadful tragedy  
Will make your very blood run cold.  
Your hearts alas with grief will bleed,  
When you this cruel tale shall hear:  
There's not been done so vile a deed  
Since the days of Courvoisier.  
John Tawell is my name 'tis true,  
In wealth and splendour once I've

Broadsheet from the execution of John Tawell in Market Square (ref: D/X 1433)

The subject of Tawell's confession was to remain a subject of controversy for some time; it had been made to his chaplain who refused to reveal the details. It was still being brought up at meetings of the court of Quarters Sessions eighteen months after the execution.

### Capital punishment

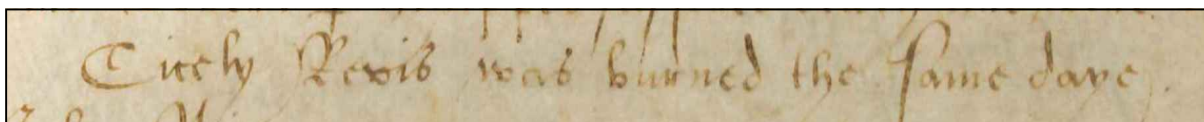
Those unfortunate enough to be sentenced to death were executed at a site on what is now the Bicester Road until 1810, near to the bridge then known as Stone Bridge or Gallows Bridge. Executions were then moved to a new 'drop' installed in front of County Hall in Market Square. The intention of the move was to spare the condemned the humiliation of being the subject of spectacle during their last cart ride from the gaol in town out to the gallows. Holding executions in Market Square did little to diminish the size of the spectacle of a public execution however. A crowd of 5,000 was reported for the executions of Solomon Sewell and Benjamin Tyler in 1830 and 10,000 for the final execution in Market Square, that of John Tawell in 1845 (see above). Only two further executions took place in public in Aylesbury; that of Moses Hatto in 1854 and Stevens in 1864, both at the new County Gaol on Berton Hill. The ban on public executions in 1868 brought a stop to the practice, with all further executions being carried out inside the prison.

### **Finding more information about an individual prisoner**

After discovering someone in prison (perhaps through seeing them listed in Aylesbury Gaol on a census), it can be quite challenging to discover why they were there. The surviving records are more likely to have been drawn up at court than at the prison, so you will need to establish which court tried the person. Offenders in the gaol will have been convicted by the Assizes, Quarter Sessions or Petty Sessions. The records held at CBS relating to each of these courts are outlined below. Prisoners convicted at the Assize or Quarter Sessions from 1791 to 1892 are also listed in the England & Wales Criminal Registers database available through [www.Ancestry.com](http://www.Ancestry.com). CBS pays for a subscription to Ancestry, accessible here and at any Buckinghamshire Library. These give the date, a very brief description of the crime, the court which convicted them and the resulting sentence.

### **The Assize**

The Assizes tried the most serious offences, including those carrying the death sentence. Cases were heard by royal justices on circuit, twice a year; at Lent and in Summer. The venue was variable, usually one of the county's larger towns but also at some more unexpected places. Little Brickhill held Assizes between 1443 and 1638 for instance. The struggles between Aylesbury and Buckingham for the status of county town meant the Assizes were split between the two in the 18th Century. An Act of Parliament in 1849 awarded both to Aylesbury. The justices retained the records of these courts, which are therefore now at The National Archives at Kew (<http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk>). Some Calendars of Prisoners for trial at the Assize are held at CBS and some of the Quarter Sessions Calendars refer to people Assize Prisoners still imprisoned in Aylesbury Gaol (see page 7 for further details.)



Extract from Little Brickhill register of baptisms, marriages and burials (ref: PR/26/1/1) reading 'Cicely Revis was burned the same daye'.

This entry, from the 26th March 1595, records of the fate of Cicely Revis, a prisoner at the Assize. It follows an entry concerning 10 other criminals who had 'suffered death and were buried'. No other records survive from the court at this period; we do not know what offence Cicely had committed.

### **Quarter Sessions**

The Court of Quarter Sessions were held four times a year; Epiphany (after Christmas), Easter, Midsummer and Michaelmas (in the autumn). In general, they dealt with less serious offences and handed down both custodial and non custodial sentences like fines, as well as corporal punishments like whipping. They were also able to transport certain offenders and continued to do so until the mid 19th Century. The last from Buckinghamshire was Hermann Franz Isenberg, transported in 1859 after being convicted by the Quarter Sessions in Midsummer 1857. The county Justices of the Peace heard the cases, and the records were retained locally. They are now held at CBS. The County Quarter Sessions were held at Aylesbury (records survive back to 1678), whilst Wycombe and Buckingham had the right to hold their own Sessions as part of their status as boroughs. Surviving records can be found in the Wycombe and Buckingham Borough collections, references B/Wyc and B/Buc respectively.



## Special Assizes

At the start of November 1830, the first Buckinghamshire landowners received letters from 'Captain Swing' threatening violence if they didn't cease their use of machines. It was the start of the so called 'Swing Riots' in the county, revolts against mechanisation that involved the then capital crime of destroying machinery. Much of the discontent was focussed on paper mills between West Wycombe and Loudwater, rather than the agricultural sites targeted elsewhere. Wanting to send a message and terrified of the potential leniency of local magistrates, the government appointed a Special Commission to try those involved. The Special Assize that resulted opened in January 1831, barely two months after the start of the disturbances. A flurry of those tried were sentenced to death, although many of these sentences were later commuted to transportation. A substantial quantity of records relating to the trials are held here, among the papers of the Clerk of the Peace (ref: Q/Uncat/X). These include a calendar of the prisoners tried by the Assize and papers relating to some of the cases. They are complemented by a series of stories in the local newspapers about the riots.

BUCKS CALENDAR.		
Special Assizes, 1831.		
No.	No.	No.
Atkins, Stephen . 43	Fowler, Joseph . 1	Ridgway, Joseph . 1
Allen, James . 78	Fisher, Thomas . 23	Reynolds, John . 17
	Francis, Ben. . 95	Rolfe, John . 49
Barton, James . 20		Redhead, David . 67
Barton, Edmund . 29	Gostelow, Daniel . 51	Russell, William . 91
Briant, William . 31	Gibson, John . 96	
Butler, William . 34	Goodall, Wm. . 113	Salter, Alfred . 22
Butler, John . 39	Gibbs, John . 119	Sawney, John . 25
Barnett, Charles . 104	Goodson, James . 129	Scott, Thomas . 12
Bates, Thomas . 71		Stretton, James . 28
Blizzard, Thomas . 90	Hopcraft, Robert . 2	Stone, James . 30
Burrows, Thos. . 111	Holland, Joseph . 6	Smith, William . 32
Bates, William . 121	Hillsden, George . 8	Stratford, Henry . 33
Barton, David . 122	Hughes, T. al. W. . 16	Shrimpton, Wm. . 40
Briant, William . 123	Hancock, Wm. . 36	Showler, George . 45
Briant, Joseph . 124	Holt, Moses . 38	Scotchings, Wm. . 46
Bowler, Thomas . 125	Hughes, Thomas . 55	Scotchings, Rich. . 52
Burrell, Thomas . 137	Howlett, Robert . 65	Scotchings, John . 56
	Hillesden, Wm. . 83	Stanley, John . 61
Copcutt, John . 14	Hall, James . . 93	Sawyer, Edward . 70
Cowell, Elijah . 15	Hounslow, John . 97	Summerfield, S. . 84
Carey, Rob. alias	Harpur, William . 117	Smith al. Budd J. . 92
Dell, John . 21		Shrimpton, Em. . 99
Carey, Robert . 42	Jarvis, Edmund . 3	Seals, William . 102
Carter, George . 54	Jarvis, Stacey . 10	Stapps, James . 103
Carter, Joseph . 62	Johnson, Edward . 69	Scott, James . 110
Coker, William . 72	Jarvis, Joseph . 88	Saunders, James . 120
Coles, Thomas . 82	Jolley, William . 135	Stevens, Samuel . 130
Crutch, John . 85		
Crook, John . 98	Kirby, James . 57	Turner, Pur. Cor. . 9
Clement, Charles . 100	Kirby, George . 58	Tack, Francis . 13
Chapman, James . 101	Keys, John . . 79	Turner, Moses . 74
Coleshill, John . 107	King James . 134	Tack, George . 77
Collins, John . 112		Venemore, James . 81
Clarke, John . 133	Launton, David . 116	
Clarke, John . 136		Walker, John . 18
Davis, Isaac . 7	Moody, John . 35	Weedon, Richard . 24
Dafter, John . 41	Moody, William . 37	Walduck, John . 44
Dewberry, Wm. . 47	Monk, John . . 48	Wales, John . 64
Dewberry, Jos. . 63	Miller, James . 50	Walker, William . 86
Daniels, William . 69	Mott, Richard . 60	Watson, Jonas . 89
Daniels, John . 76	Miller, John . . 63	Webb, James . 94
Decley, John . 80	Matthews, Thos. . 66	Wetherley, Hen. . 105
Dandridge, John . 87	Moore, John . 73	Wakefield, Rich. . 106
	Miles, George . 75	Watts, John . . 109
	Miles, James . 127	Wright, Arthur . 114
Evans, John . 4		Walker, Henry . 115
East, John . . 26	Norman, John . 11	Webb, Robert . 118
Edwards, William . 63	Nibbs, William . 27	Wingrove, Edm. . 126
Evans, William . 103	Priest, Joseph . 19	Woodward, Wm. . 131
Emans, William . 123	Piggott, John . 132	

The easiest way to approach the subject for family historians is through 'Buckinghamshire Machine Breakers' by Jill Chambers. The book includes an account of the riots and subsequent trials, tracking the cases of each individual involved through the records at CBS and those at the National Archives which record the later commutations.

A more general background to the riots can be found in Alan Dell's 'Buckinghamshire and the Swing Riots', in Records of Bucks volume 46 and 'Red Skies and Broken Mills; the Swing Riots in Buckinghamshire', a BA dissertation by Matthew Jones. Both are available in the Local Studies Library.

Calendar of the Prisoners tried by Special Assizes, 1831 (ref: Q/Uncat/X)

## Records of the Quarter Sessions

The earliest surviving records of the Buckinghamshire Quarter Sessions date from the late 17th Century. The order books are the formal record of the court, starting in 1678. Everyone convicted by the court should be mentioned in these volumes, and for some periods extra detail can be added from other records.

### Order books

The order books (ref: Q/SO) are large, weighty and written in a copperplate handwriting that needs a little care to decipher. The court had broad responsibilities, including many that would eventually fall to local councils. The order books cover all their business, not just the criminal cases, hence their size. The handwriting and the volume of text can make the search a time consuming one, even if you know the year of conviction. The records of criminal cases are comparatively brief, with typical entries noting little more than a person's name, their place of residence, a short description of the crime they are charged with, the verdict and the sentence (see right).

Epiphany Session 1678.					
Sevell James	Long Cruden	Larceny from the Draper and receiving	Not Guilty	Guilty	To be imprisoned in the stocks of Execution and kept to wear saddles for twelve days
Lidgate William	Dinton	Larceny from	Not	Guilty	To be like for one calendar month
Welford John the pinner		the Draper	Guilty		
Miller William			Not Guilty		
Massey Charles	Chepping Wycombe	Larceny	Not	Guilty	To be like for four calendar months
Mead Andrew	Hambleden	To be like	Guilty	-	To be like for six calendar months
Mortimer Thomas	Wardover	Larceny	Guilty	-	To be like for six weeks
Norton Robert	Amersham	Larceny from the Draper after a previous conviction for the same	Not Guilty	Not Guilty	-
Osborn John	Langley, Bucks	Larceny	Not	Guilty	To be like for three calendar months
Piper Charles	Etan	To be like	Guilty	-	To be like for three weeks

Quarter Sessions order book (ref: Q/SO 53)

### Sessions rolls

From 1705 the order books are supported by the sessions rolls. These rolls are a bound miscellany of the business of the court. At the end of the session, various pieces of supporting documentation were bound together in rolls, which were retained. The very earliest have been flattened but the majority are still in the original rolls. Their contents vary depending on what cases came before the court; they can include calendars of prisoners, sworn affidavits from county officials and presentments to the court on judicial cases. Finding extra information about a particular case can be difficult but they are a worthwhile avenue to pursue for the extra information they can potentially provide. The order books and sessions rolls have been published up to 1730, and are available online via the Buckinghamshire Record Society's website ([www.bucksinfo.net/brs](http://www.bucksinfo.net/brs)).

### Calendars of prisoners

The calendars of prisoners are lists of those to be tried at a particular session of court. They give slightly more information than the order books about the crime a person was charged with and usually list the sentence handed down as well. From Michaelmas 1838, the calendars list the people still in prison who had previously been sentenced by the Quarter Sessions or the Assizes. No names are given for those imprisoned by the Petty Sessions (see page 9) or for debtors.

The main series of calendars of prisoners sentenced at Quarter Sessions in CBS (ref: Q/SC) runs from 1789 to 1971. An index covering the years 1827 to 1842 is available in the Archives Searchroom. There are gaps in the sequence, most notably from 1855 until 1889. For other years, there may be calendars for only three of the four sessions. These can often be filled with records from other parts of the collections. From 1786 to 1827 calendars were entered into the Quarter Sessions minute books (rough notes from which the order books were written up, ref: Q/SM 8-23). It is worth checking the Sessions rolls for calendars for other missing years.

For those sentenced at the Assizes, there are calendars for the years 1783-1804 in ref: S/2/11. Ref: D/X 32 includes some scattered calendars from the 1810s, ref: D/LE a few from the 1830s and 1841. Another collection of calendars survive among the papers of the Clerk of the Peace (ref: Q/uncat G). Most are from the 1820s to 1850s, although there are a couple from the 1790s as well.

### Character Books and Receiving Books

For short periods in the 1850s and 1870s, we have Chaplain's Character Books (Ref: Q/AG/27-29) and Gaol Receiving Books (Ref: Q/AG/23-26). These records were drawn up when prisoners entered the gaol and cover all types of offenders. The character books cover October 1853 to September 1854, then December 1858 to December 1859 and finally February to December 1871. They contain entries relating to the personal circumstances, morals, religious beliefs and observances (with brief notes of offence) for each prisoner. The receiving books cover December 1870 to Jul 1874 then October 1877 to September 1878. They contain similar information, with entries relating to the personal circumstances, offence and sentence of each prisoner. The receiving book also includes photographs of some of the prisoners (right).



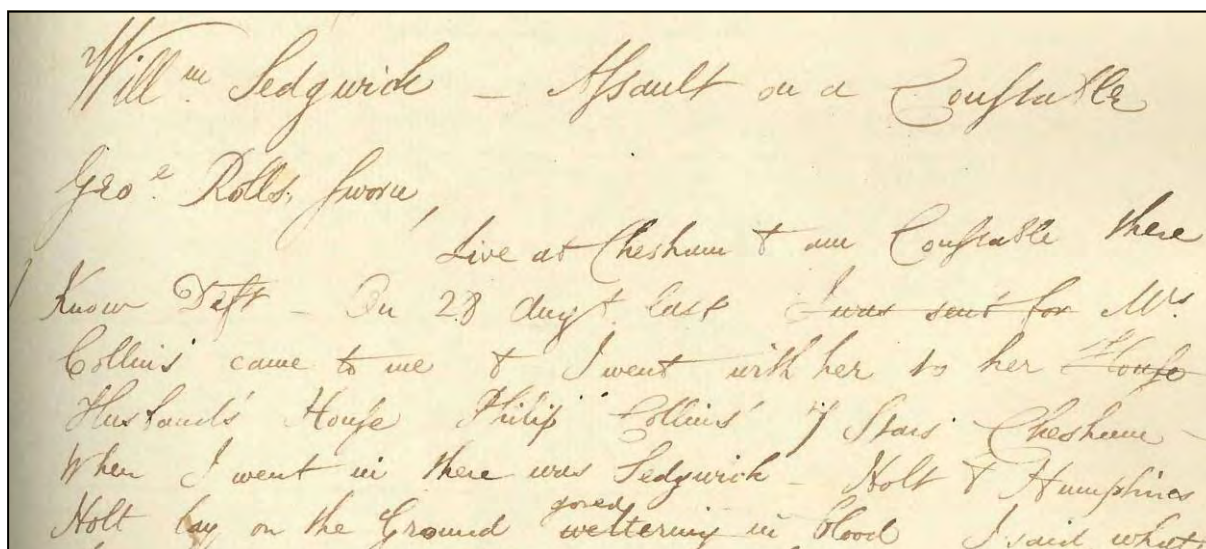
A database of the information extracted from these books is available on our website, [www.buckscc.gov.uk/archives](http://www.buckscc.gov.uk/archives).

Extract from gaol receiving book (ref: Q/AG 24) George Baldwin, aged 16, convicted of stealing milk in 1872.



### Judges' case books

The greatest detail about particular cases we have comes from the Judges' Case Books (ref: Q/JC). The case books are the notes made by the presiding judges at cases presented to the Quarter Sessions. Generally the level of detail given is high, although much depends on the individual judges. The writing is challenging in that it comprises scrawled notes taken as witness statements were given but is readable given time. They cover the period 1802 to 1834, though there are gaps in the sequence. A précis of the cases covered by each book is available in the Archives Searchroom or through Access to Archives ([www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/a2a](http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/a2a)).



Will<sup>m</sup> Sedgwick - Assault on a Constable  
Geo<sup>e</sup> Rolls, sworn, Live at Chesham & am Constable there  
Know Theft - On 28 Aug<sup>t</sup> last I was sent for Mr<sup>s</sup>  
Collins' came to me & I went with her to her House  
The Landl<sup>d</sup> House Philip Collins' of Spaw Chesham  
When I went in there was Sedgwick - Holt & Humphries  
Holt lay on the Ground <sup>dead</sup> weltering in Blood I said, what

Extract of statement of George Rolls against William Sedgwick from Justice's case book (ref: Q/JC/4). In this statement, Constable Rolls describes his arrival at the scene of a dispute where he was subsequently assaulted. Sedgwick was fined 1s. and given one month's imprisonment.

### **Newspapers**

Those cases with a more sensational angle were often reported in the local press. As today, the extent of the coverage depended on the type of crime and the space available to fill in the paper. Verbatim trial reports are not uncommon, especially for more serious offences. Several local newspapers for Buckinghamshire are held in the Local Studies Library at CBS, starting in 1820. Most are on microfilm. The libraries covering the northern and southern ends of the county hold the newspapers for their area. Digital copies of some other papers with Buckinghamshire coverage are also available. Access to Jackson's Oxford Journal, the Illustrated Police News and the Times are all available through Buckinghamshire Libraries Reference and Information Service ([www.buckscc.gov.uk/libraries](http://www.buckscc.gov.uk/libraries)). These are searchable from home with a library card, or at CBS using one of our People's Network computers.

### **Secondary sources**

Local history books rarely provide a great deal about individual convicts unless their crime was particularly notorious. Aside from those volumes dealing with particular towns and villages, the best source is Robert Gibbs's Local Events. Gibbs covers the period 1400-1880 and focuses on the more sensational cases, especially those that resulted in capital punishment. There are some errors and inaccuracies in his work, especially those outside his personal experience, but it is an interesting and useful source nevertheless.



## Summary convictions and Petty Sessions

Certain classes of offences could be dealt with summarily (without a jury) by local Justices of the Peace sitting outside of Quarter Sessions in different divisions for different areas. A Justice acting alone was able to try some offences (especially under the Game Laws) but other offences required more than one JP. Such sittings were known as Petty Sessions. Summary justice was of an extremely variable quality, especially where justices were acting alone. No formal court was required for hearings, so a variety of venues could be used. These included private houses, meaning convictions could take place in a JP's home, in private with scant evidence. This reduced the transparency of the court, potentially resulting in miscarriages of justice and opportunities for corruption. Convictions could involve either imprisonment or a fine, the former especially common for poaching offences. At points in the 19th Century a quarter of the inmates were convicted of poaching or other transgressions under the Game Laws.

The Petty Sessions Act of 1849 enacted a regular procedure for the sessions and a regular courthouse. Previously, Petty Sessions had been very informal, frequently taking place in local inns accompanied only by a justice's clerk. It is no surprise therefore that almost no records survive until the late 19th Century, when the Summary Jurisdiction Act of 1879 obliged the courts to keep a register. Notable exceptions in Buckinghamshire are in the Stony Stratford Petty Sessional division, where minute books survive for almost the entire 19th Century.

For late 19th Century prisoners, it is worth consulting the Petty Sessions records first. Kelly's Directories will tell you which Petty Sessional division a Buckinghamshire town or village is in if you are unsure which set of records to look at. For earlier periods, the best sources are the Quarter Sessions Order books. Reports were lodged with Quarter Sessions of all those convicted at Petty Sessions, and are listed as 'Convictions Certified to this Sessions'. Little detail is provided about the crime, and the sentence is rarely given (see image below). As with convictions at Quarter Sessions, it can be a time consuming task to locate the relevant entries due to difficulties with the handwriting and the amount of other



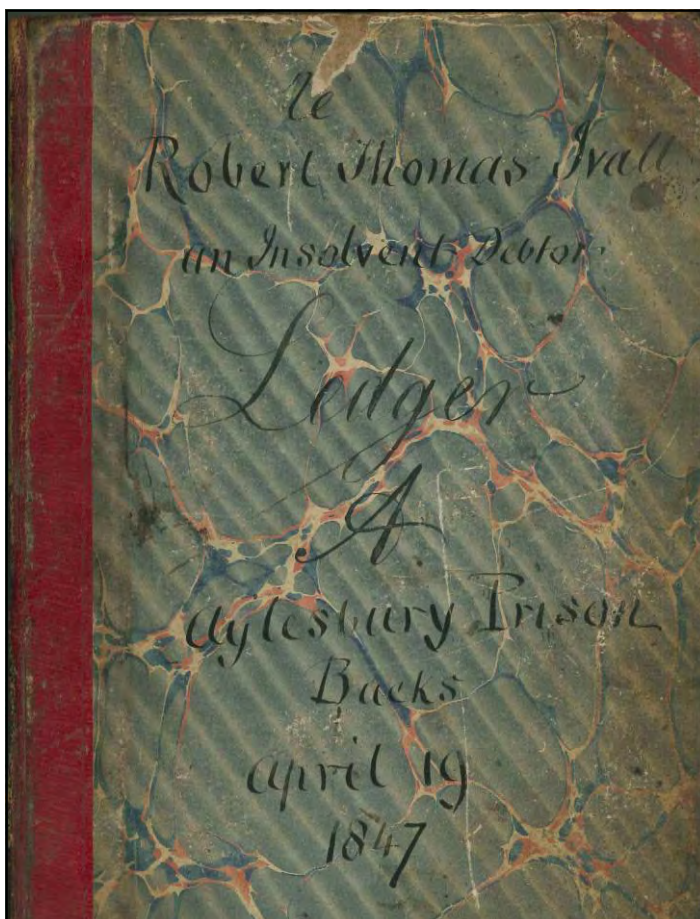
Quarter Session Order book (ref: Q/SO/40)

Conviction of William Terry of Worminghall in Petty Sessions for a poaching offence 'keeping and using a certain Engine called a Gun to kill and destroy the Game' as reported to the Epiphany 1829 Quarter Session.

## Debtors

Insolvent debtors made up a small minority of those in the gaol. Until 1869, debtors could be imprisoned until their debts were paid. A spell in prison easily interrupted the course of a business, making it difficult for the debts to be redeemed. Long spells in prison for debt were therefore not unusual. Actions against debtors are not generally mentioned in the main series of Quarter Sessions records like the Order Books so other sources have to be relied on. For Buckinghamshire, this can make identification of debt cases difficult because few debtors records survive. The series Q/SD includes a small selection of papers, mostly from the second half of the 18th Century. Another selection can be found in Q/DA, a group of records discovered in a cupboard in County Hall in 1967.

These are account books of debtors that came into the possession of the Clerk of the Peace because of his function of clerk to the Court for the Relief of Insolvent Debtors. They relate to just over one hundred cases, and cover 1807-1846.

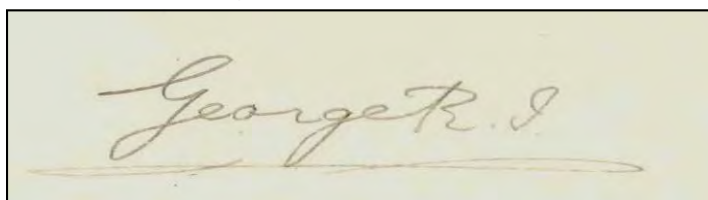


Front cover of account book of Robert Thomas Ivall, coachmaker of High Wycombe (ref: Q/DA 100).

Another option for tracking debtors are the petitions submitted to the Court for the Relief of Insolvent Debtors, kept at the National Archives (<http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk>). Notices from this court were published in the Gazette, searchable at <http://www.london-gazette.co.uk/>.

## Other papers

A further collection of miscellaneous items relating to the prison is D-X 1150. The collection includes orders sent to the Aylesbury Prison Governor, including pardons, lists of those given corporal punishment and orders for executions. They span the period 1842 to 1916. The pardons were granted by the monarch, who signed each personally. Most of them have had these signatures removed prior to acquisition by CBS but the majority of the information on prisoners has been preserved.



Signature of George V from pardon of suffragette Aileen Connor Smith (ref D/X 1150/4/9)

## HMP Aylesbury

The Prison Act of 1877 centralised control of prisons, taking them out of the jurisdiction of local Justices of the Peace and vesting it instead with the Home Office. At the time of the transfer of authority in 1878, it was renamed Her Majesty's Prison Aylesbury. Because the prison was no longer administered locally, there was no need for it to continue to predominantly imprison those convicted in the county. The link between local conviction and local imprisonment was therefore broken. HMP Aylesbury took those convicted all over the country, and Buckinghamshire convicts could be sent elsewhere as well. The prison was closed in the early 1890s, reopening as a women's prison in 1895. An inebriate reformatory was added around 1901 and a borstal in 1909. Records from this later period deposited at CBS predominantly cover the 20th Century and the majority are affected by guideline closure periods of 100 years. They can also cover more than one prison; a register of descriptions of inmates includes coverage of the period in the early 1890s when Aylesbury Prison was closed.

The best records for identifying prisoners and their crimes in this period are the nominal registers of convicts, covering 1909-1965 (with some gaps). For inebriates, a volume is available 1901-1916. Medical reception registers (again with gaps) cover the period 1909 to 1959, some of which contain photographs. Further photographs are in the albums covering 1912-1954. A full catalogue of the collection (ref: HMP/A) and indication of closure periods is available from staff in the Archives Searchroom.



Aylesbury Prison,  
c.1900.