

Benjamin Horne's report on Point Puer Boys' Prison, to His Excellency Sir John Franklin K.C.H. and K.R. Lieut. Governor of Van Diemen's Land, Point Puer, March 7 1843.

Edited extracts from Archives Office of Tasmania document C0280/157/520

Sir,

Before entering into details, I shall premise a few general observations regarding the objects of such Establishments as Point Puer and Parkhurst and the principles upon which they should be conducted. They are intended to be places where criminal boys may for a certain period undergo the punishment to which they have subjected themselves by their crimes, and where at the same time they may be so instructed in religious and moral duties and so trained in habits of order and industry that there may be a considerable probability of at least a portion of them becoming good and useful members of Society after the period of their punishment has expired.

Any Establishment for criminal youth in which the arrangements are not both of a penal and reformatory nature cannot fulfill the intentions of the Law on the one hand, nor the expectation of the Christian and Philanthropist on the other. It is important for the interests of religion and morality that the criminal should not find that he has improved his condition by breaking the laws of God and Man and becoming the inmate of a prison, the discipline therefore to which he is subjected should be of a penal character; and as it is no less important to Society and to himself that every effort should be made to reclaim him, the discipline should be of a reformatory nature.

Among the principal penal arrangements to which criminal youth should be subjected, may be mentioned that deprivation of liberty and subjection to the will of others implied in the term "Prison Discipline" which of course cannot be carried on without efficient Buildings. Without Buildings well adapted to the purpose, it is impossible to subject the criminal to that degree of restraint which his case requires either as a punishment for past crimes or as a means of preventing him from committing new ones. The consequences of imperfect buildings are, a constant recurrence of punishment for faults which might have been prevented and which tend to degrade and harden rather than reform the complete or partial association of individuals who are only likely to corrupt one another and increase the general depravity as it were by casting individual contributions of vice into one common stock, and, above all, a great increase in the number of impediments which lie in the way of religious, moral, and intellectual improvement.

. . . Among the reformatory means to be employed religious, moral and intellectual training holds the first place. No appearance of reformation can be depended upon which has not religion for its basis. The Chaplain of a Prison should therefore be instant in season and out of season. He should not only perform religious Services in public but must instruct and admonish privately, - visit the prisoner under confinement in his cell, - talk familiarly with him, and use every proper means to instruct and reclaim him. In the silence and seclusion of a separate cell, the most depraved individual has moments of reflection and penitence in which a zealous minister of the Gospel may do much good because the prisoner is then in a condition to receive his instructions and admonitions with gratitude and respect.

The juvenile prisoner however is in general deplorably ignorant of religious and moral duties, incapable of comprehending the public addresses of the Chaplain, or of reading and understanding good books which may be lent him to peruse. In this case, besides the labors of the Chaplain, it is obvious that those of the Schoolmaster are required. In almost all well conducted jails and houses of correction one or more teachers are now employed.

Instruction in trades and various industrial employment is valuable both as a means of reforming the juvenile delinquent and of preparing him after his liberation to preserve his subsistence by honest labour. An aversion to regular employment and a love of wandering from place to place have led a great number of apprentice boys into crime in the first instance, and many juvenile criminals have since been usefully employed. It is obvious therefore that they should be kept steadily to such labor as will be useful to them in after life until they have become habituated to it, and have acquired such skill as will enable them to earn their own living without returning to a life of vagrancy and crime.

Every means should be used to arouse in them the almost dormant feeling of self-respect. They should be continually cautioned against the use of slang language and against low habits of any sort, and trained to neatness and cleanliness of dress and person as far as circumstances will permit. A poor dress may be kept clean, and a poor man is not necessarily a sloven. Military drill and daily inspection of dress and person are found in all juvenile Establishments to be among the most effectual means of promoting habits of order, cleanliness, and prompt obedience.

After these general observations I now proceed to my remarks upon Point Puer . . .

The Institution for Convict Boys at Point Puer was opened about the beginning of 1834 with 66 Boys, and has been gradually extended with the increasing number of Prisoners sent out. There are now 716 Boys in the Establishment.

Locality To any person of practical knowledge who visits the Establishment now, the situation must appear very ill chosen . . . In a moral point of view, the close connection between Port Arthur and Point Puer is very injurious to the latter . . . Great pains is (sic) taken to prevent communication between the Boys and the Prisoners at Port Arthur except such as are employed as Constables and Overseers at Point Puer, but under present circumstances this is impossible. While provisions, water, firewood, and many other articles used at Point Puer, are daily brought over in boats by Port Arthur Prisoners and carried from the Jetties by the Boys, the most efficient Officers could scarcely prevent communication, and we cannot expect the prisoner Overseers will always make the attempt. Besides, boys and men are frequently out as absconders at the same time and may meet then although they had no other means of communication. Very lately, no fewer than 6 men and 10 boys were missing from the two places on the same evening.

. . . Among the natural defects of the small peninsula of Point Puer may be reckoned the want of water and a very poor sandy soil. The former defect has (sic) been attempted to be remedied by bringing Water from the mainland in an open ditch, but from the porous nature of the soil this could scarcely have succeeded, and during the summer months when water is most wanted the fountain head is dry. At present water is brought from Port Arthur by sea at a great expense of labor. The natural poverty of the little land cultivated is to a certain extent remedied by considerable quantities of manure formed of sea weed, night-soil, etc., but with less expenditure of labor much greater returns could be had in many other parts of Van Diemen's Land, the wood on the Point is exhausted and firewood is also brought from the penal Settlement.

. . . An apparent advantage consists in the prisoners at Port Arthur being employed in bringing over quantities of rough wood for the use of the Sawyers and Carpenters, and in quarrying and bringing over Stone for the Stonecutters, as well as water, firewood, etc., for domestic purposes, but this is more than counterbalanced by the disadvantage of their having the chance of holding any communication with the boys, and had the locality been better chosen these services would not have been necessary as the boys could have supplied themselves.

Buildings . . . There are at present three principal buildings occupied by the boys; and I may say all are crowded. 1st The Establishment near the Point, which consists of a Barrack for the boys, and the principal Work-shops, cookhouse, bakehouse, etc: 2nd the building used as a Chapel and School, at a distance of about 280 Yards from the barrack, now used also as a residence for more than 100 of the younger boys: 3rd the Jail, at a distance of 350 Yards from the School and about 630 from the barrack, consisting of three different buildings, one of which is called the "New Buildings" and appropriated to prisoners under sentence for faults which can scarcely be considered criminal, and the second and third called the "Old and Crime Jails" to which boys are sentenced for more serious offences, such as theft, absconding, etc.

These three jail buildings have brick-walled yards in front, and the crime jailyards have a sort of separate stalls with a chain running through them to which prisoners are fettered and employed in breaking stones. The barrack and School Yards are merely enclosed by common palisading. There are also some small detached buildings near the jail, formed into cells opening into an inner passage, for separate confinement, and some wooden erections resembling sentry boxes for what is commonly called solitary confinement. As to their strength and adaptation to the purpose I can only say that two boys are sometimes found in one of the separate cells in the morning, and that I have heard the boys in the solitary cells keep up a conversation at the full pitch of their voices during the middle of the day. They sometimes break out of them and abscond, and at other times remove boards so that provisions may be conveyed to them from without. In short the whole is a

mockery of separate or solitary confinement.

The only part of the Establishment penal in its arrangements, except the separate and solitary cells, is the Jail, and that only nominally, for the prisoners mix freely together, except such as are fettered to the Chain during work hours, and even these can converse with ease. In the different rooms they sleep on the floor almost as closely as they can lie, work on the land together in gangs, and take their meals in the same apartments.

In the barrack and school room the only attempt at classification is that the younger boys reside at the school room, and that some separation of the elder boys takes place at night in the barrack. The various regulations of the different buildings are enforced by the Overseers who with two exceptions are convicts.

The consequences of imperfect buildings and arrangements are that some of the boys leave their Yards and work gangs, stroll over the Point, even when they do not properly speaking abscond, and steal anything they can lay hands upon from the Officers' Gardens and quarters and the gardens of the Establishment in broad daylight. At other times they find an opportunity of evading the vigilance of the Overseers and Constables, and betake themselves to the bush where they can exist only by plundering gardens, or by procuring supplies of food from their companions at home who use every effort to secrete their own food, or some which they may have stolen, and get it conveyed out and hid in places where it may be found at night by their companions "in trouble" as they call it. This is a fruitful source of crime and punishment for boys are often detected in attempts to steal and secrete food for those who are out as absconders.

In the sleeping apartments lights are kept burning during the night, and they are constantly watched by Overseers, but the efficiency of this system must depend wholly upon the moral character and vigilance of these Officers. Sometimes the Overseer relaxes in his vigilance and falls asleep, and, if he is not a favorite with the boys, they put out the lights and invert and empty a night-tub over his head and shoulders. This trick which is called "Crowning an Overseer" has occurred once during my visit.

Officers Besides the Commandant who may be considered Governor of the Establishment as well as Visiting Magistrate, the free Officers are a General Superintendent, a Catechist who has also charge of the School, a Superintendent of the Jail, a Master Cooper, Shoemaker, Tailor, Carpenter, and Gardener, a Clerk, two Overseers, one of whom has been a prisoner, though now free, and a Boatbuilder who holds a Ticket of Leave.

. . . The two Schoolmasters, the Blacksmith, the Overseer of Sawyers, the Stone Cutter, the Quarryman, the Baker, the Cook, the Storekeeper, the Bookbinder, the Bricklayer, the Overseer of Washing, and 30 Overseers, Watchmen, Constables etc., employed about the Point, are all prisoners and with three exceptions have been selected from the penal settlement of Port Arthur.

In this list of Officers extensive as it may appear, two very important omissions are to be observed, 1st A Chaplain of the Established Church, and 2nd Free well trained Schoolmasters.

. . . Domestic Arrangements - Daily Routine

The daily routine for the General Class is as follows:-

5 o'clock	Rise, roll up beds, and wash at tanks, yards, muster ground, or where they can.
6 o'clock	Prayers.
½ past 6	Breakfast.
½ past 7	Musters.
8 to 12	Workshops and General Labor.
12 to 1	Play and washing for dinner.
1	Dinner
¼ to 2	Muster for School and Work.
2 o'clock	One half goes to School and the other half to work on alternate days from 2
to ½ past 5.	
½ past 6	Supper
7 to 8	In summer play. During the winter Months they are mustered earlier, and some time is spent in reading aloud to them in their barracks, etc.

8 O'clock General Muster in the different buildings. After this reading the scriptures and Prayer.
By 9 O'clock All are in Bed.

Bathing in the sea takes place between 5 and 6 in the morning when weather and tide will permit.

Saturday afternoon is a half holiday with the boys of the General Class, and School is on this day attended by the Morning from 10 to 12.

Cleaning rooms takes place during work hours by gangs under the charge of Overseers.

At the Jail the Routine differs a little. School is kept from ½ past 6 to ½ past 7 every morning, and the boys there are expected to labor about 2 hours longer than they do in the General Class.

... Domestic Arrangements – Dietary

The rations for the General Class are as follows:

Rations [daily]

1 3/4 lb flour 3/4 lb fresh
or salt meat.

1 lb green vegetables, or
1/2 lb. potatoes.

1/2 oz salt.

Dinner [lunch]

1 Pint Soup 12 oz. meat,
reduced by boiling & ex-
traction of bone to 6 oz.

9 oz. bread.

6 oz. dumpling.

Supper [dinner]

1 Pint gruel

9 oz. bread.

The green vegetables are boiled down in the soup. When potatoes are given they are steamed and served out with the meat, and when vegetables cannot be obtained ration of 4 oz. flour is substituted in lieu of them. In the Jail the dumpling is not allowed but 2 oz. of bread additional is served out at each meal instead of it.

Clothing The clothing at Point Puer consists of Jacket and trowsers (sic) made of tanned Sheep Skin, a waistcoat of the common grey cloth, a Striped Shirt, a leather or a Scotch Cap, and Strong boots. On Sundays the boys of the General Class wear a blue cloth Jacket. Neither Stockings nor Socks are allowed, but a slovenly substitute for the latter is sometimes found in the towels which they carry for the purpose of drying their hands and faces when they wash.

Cleanliness is said by some to be next to Godliness, but this maxim does not appear to be acted upon by many of the boys, for which reasons may to a certain extent be found in the scanty supply of pure water, and the want of proper arrangements for washing. As might be expected, the most worthless boys in point of character are in general the most ragged and dirty.

Their bedding consists of a piece of coarse sacking or Canvas resembling a hammock, two blankets, and a rug which they make up in rather a peculiar manner every evening upon the floors. At one time they slung their hammocks, but this has been discontinued for a considerable period partly because the space became too small from the increase of numbers, and partly because the cording of the hammocks was often pilfered for fishing lines. . . . Their appearance at night sleeping upon the bare floor can be compared to nothing but that of a horde of gypsies in a large barn, the only difference being that the said gypsies have generally a little straw under their blankets which the Point Puer boys have not.

. . . Sanitary Condition The health of the boys appears to be remarkably good, and few deaths occur except from accident or hereditary predisposition to disease. The number of deaths last year was three out of an average of 700 boys, which is less than The Northampton Table of Mortality would give for the same average and number in Britain.

From the crowded state of the buildings at night, this is a result which could scarcely have been expected, but it may be accounted for from the following circumstances, - the climate is very healthy - the boys are almost always in the open air except during the sleeping hours - and the rooms are kept remarkably clean and well ventilated. In fact the cleanliness of the rooms, considering the numerous uses to which they are appropriated is surprising and reflects the greatest credit upon the Officers.

Discipline . . . The punishments are 1st Confinement to the Muster Ground or to that part of the Jail called the New Buildings, which merely amounts to a deprivation of their usual hours of play, and confinement to a more limited space than the General Class is allowed, - 2nd Sleeping, for some nights in a silent apartment which is also understood to include confinement to the cell except during the hours of labor, - 3rd Confinement to the Old Jail which prevents them from mixing with the General Class at Trades or at School, and restricts their play. They are taught for one hour in the morning, employed during the day in breaking up new ground or in working on the land and during their spare time confined to the Yards. They are expected to labor about two hours a day longer than the General Class, and no dumpling is allowed them at dinner, but an equal weight of bread is given instead of it. - 4th Confinement to the Crime Jail where they are under the same regulations as in the Old Jail unless they are sentenced to the Chain. In that case they are fettered to a Chain in separate stalls and employed during the day in breaking Stones. - 5th Solitary confinement on bread and water for any period not exceeding fourteen days. - 6th Corporal punishment to the extent of 36 lashes. - 7th In very bad cases, Transferred to the Penal Settlement of Port Arthur.

Capt. Booth attends daily except on Sundays, generally about 12 O'clock when every case, even the most trifling, is examined by him with a degree of patience and attention which merits the highest commendation. The names of the boys for trial have previously been reported and entered upon a Slate in the Office by the Overseers and Constables, and both accuser and accused attend as in a Court of Law. Capt. Booth may be said to punish in the twofold capacity

as Governor of the Establishment and as an ordinary Magistrate of the Colony. Trifling cases and breaches of the Rules of the Establishment he dispatches in a summary way in his former capacity, and they are entered in a book called the Minor Record, but the more serious cases of theft, absconding, insubordination, etc., he is obliged by the Convict Laws to try as a Magistrate and record in a Book called the Major Record, the crime and sentence being also entered on a piece of parchment called the prisoner's "Police Character".

The number of Offenders brought up daily varies very much. Sometimes not more than 10 or 12 are for trial, at other times not fewer than 50 or 60 . . .

A removal to the Jail is very little feared by a bad boy, - he has as much food as before, - his labor although of longer duration is not more severe than that of the others and is performed in the open air, -he associated with companions of the same character as himself, and does not consider separation from his class in the School any great loss. This punishment has therefore very little deterring influence but I am afraid it is efficient enough in doing harm. A boy who has perhaps a little moral principle remaining is sent to the Jail for two or three Months, associates daily with other boys still worse than himself, and returns to the General Class thoroughly corrupted. More than one boy has committed faults since I have been here, evidently with the view of getting back to his old companions in the Jail.

Corporal punishment has the same effect here as elsewhere. It tends to degrade and harden, and after having been twice or thrice inflicted is evidently useless. Some boys take a pride in enduring all that can be given them, and consider flogging a manly sort of punishment as it is generally inflicted upon grown up Convicts. When anyone seems to feel its severity he loses caste in the eyes of his companions who jeeringly tell him that they could take as much upon their faces.

Solitary confinement is a punishment which seems more severely felt when of any duration, as the diet is merely bread and water and communication with their companions is as much as possible prevented.

Industrial Department. . . . The branches include:

- Shoemakers
- Tailors
- Sawyers
- Coopers
- Carpenters
- Blacksmiths & Nailers
- Stone Cutters
- Quarriers
- Boatbuilders
- Bookbinders
- Bricklayers
- Laborers, gardeners

School Instruction The School is under the "Superintendence" of the Catechist assisted by two prisoners who are called Schoolmasters, and about 40 Monitors chosen from among the boys themselves without regard to any other qualification than that of being rather more advanced in the rudiments of knowledge than their companions.

One half of the General Class attend School for 3½ hours in the afternoon on Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays, the other half for 3½ hours on the afternoons of Tuesdays, and Thursdays, and 2 hours on the forenoon of Saturday. The crime class attend School in the Jail for an hour every morning, and a Sunday Class is formed in both places from 3 to 5 in the afternoon.

With the exception of the Holy Scriptures the Class books are such as have been laid aside in good Schools in Britain for several years. There are no apparatus for illustrating lessons except one very small black-board seldom used, and although Geographical names occur in the daily lessons from the Bible and in the library books lent the boys to peruse there is not so much as a Map of the World or Palestine in the School. In the more advanced classes the only book used for reading lessons, except a spelling book, is the Bible which is read and spelled over in the good old way from Genesis to Malachi and from Mathew to Revelations under Monitors

Reading The School is divided into 32 Classes, besides some subsidiary ones for Tables, Catechism, etc. In 16 of these the boys profess to be able to read either in the Bible or New Testament, and in the remaining 16 they read in Spelling Books, Primers, etc.

In very few instances however, except in the first and second Bible Classes, can the pupils read without such an amount of blunders and spelling as totally obscured the sense, and no pains whatever appears to have been taken to teach them to understand what they read. In many cases I found the more advanced boys ignorant of the meaning of comparatively easy words and phrases, and in a few instances could I obtain correct answers to very simple questions. When I did obtain a correct answer it appeared to me to be the result of an uncommon exertion of the intellect at the moment and not the consequence of former instruction. In the merely mechanical art of reading so little progress has been made by many that I found, in the Primer Classes, boys who had been two, three, and some even upwards of four years at Point Puer who could not read easy words of one syllable without spelling them.

Writing The writing is in general very poor . . .

Arithmetic Comparatively little progress has been made in this branch of knowledge and if there had it would have closely bordered on the miraculous. The boys sit with Slates at the desks for some part of the time daily, and scrawl a few figures or work a few sums from a book; but they are never taught collectively nor instructed in the first principles of the science. One of the prisoner teachers goes round indeed to show sums as it is called, and a boy thus stands the chance of receiving the benefit of his instructions at the rate of one two hundredth part of an hour once in two days.

Singing Singing is not taught, and the consequence is that this part of Divine Service is very badly conducted. In fact the screaming is almost intolerable to any person whose ears have not been rendered callous by hearing it continually.

Religious Instruction The religious knowledge of the boys is extremely meagre and unsatisfactory. Of Scripture History they are almost totally ignorant although they read the Bible daily, nor are the doctrines and precepts of Christianity exhibited to them in any very systematic form. A Methodist Catechism is put into the hands of some and the Church Catechism has been learned by many in a very imperfect way, but from want of explanation and illustration the same ignorance of what they profess to know is as common in the religious instructions as in the reading. It was with considerable difficulty that I got through the ten Commandments in an advanced class one Sunday afternoon. When I asked the third or fourth I sometimes got the eighth, and in fact it seemed to be expected that I should give them the first word or sentence of the answer as well as the question. There is never I believe any attempt made to give them a lesson orally, or to teach them to apply the doctrines and moral precepts of the Gospel to their own case, except in the printed Sermon which is read on Sundays.

[Prison culture] . . . The boys have been able over the whole Institution to establish a sort of

tyranny of public opinion among themselves to which every boy in the place is a slave and to which he must submit almost at the peril of his life. It may easily be imagined that this combination is not very favorable to good order in the Establishment nor to good conduct among its members. Its principal law seems to be that nothing must be complained of to the Officers and that no boy must give information against another however much he may be injured by him. A weaker boy has perhaps lost some part of his Clothes, his shoes or his Cap, and knows very well who has got the Article; but although he is himself sure to be punished for the loss, he dares not report the Offender to the Superintendent who must find him as they best can. Needles, thread, leather, etc., are stolen in the workshops and found by the Overseers who search the boys on leaving, but although it is often suspected that they are compelled to bring them out for others, they are punished of course without giving a single hint of the influence which has been exerted over them. A boy is detected with a bloody nose or the marks of a severe beating, but it is impossible to find out who did it, unless one of the Officers has witnessed some part of the occurrence, and even in that case the injured individual solemnly declares that it was only play. If one admits that he has committed some act of disorder of which four or five are suspected and for which one or all must be punished, you are by no means certain that the self-accuser is the real culprit, for he may either be an individual foolhardy enough to undertake the punishment for the others or he may have been selected to bear the blame, and no one would dare to offend his companions and hazard their resentment for fear of undergoing the most severe punishment which the Law permits a Magistrate to inflict.

Lastly, were a case of a very serious nature to occur, no boy would give evidence against another, or if he pretended to give any it could not be relied on, for it seems to be a maxim of the whole fraternity that every one must tell as many lies as may be necessary for himself and for the community. If this fidelity to one another had been spontaneous notwithstanding its bad effects in the Establishment, it would have deserved some respect as a sort of savage virtue and "honor among thieves", but as it is the result of the fear of kicks and blows, it can only be described as cowardice caused by brutal tyranny. A case which will illustrate this occurred very lately. One of the boys who is a Monitor in the School could have given some evidence which would have convicted another of being the ringleader in beating one of the Overseers unmercifully, but he told the Officers that if he gave evidence he must be prepared to leave Point Puer instantly for he could not consider himself safe a moment after he had done so, even although the other boy had been removed to Port Arthur.

Among the more obvious indications of a low state of moral feeling at Point Puer may be mentioned low language, lying, taking the name of God and our Saviour in vain, disorderly conduct at Church, etc., several cases of which I have seen brought up for trial while here.

In conclusion I must add that great pains is (sic) taken by the Superior Officers to detect such offences and that Capt. Booth is very strict in punishing them, but it is to good instruction only that we must look for improvement in this respect, and before the Establishment assume a healthy moral appearance the system must undergo a Radical reform.

