

EVIDENCE OF MORRIS LANDERS,¹ GAOLER AT NEWCASTLE
JANUARY 1820.

1. How long have you been in your present situation?
About ten months.
2. Are you a prisoner?
I am a prisoner for life.
3. What is your pay or allowance?
I have no pay, but I have a ration and a half and the indulgence of a government man.
4. How do you employ the government man?
He works for a settler who allows me seven shillings per week and he [the settler] gets his [the convict's] ration.
5. What is the number of prisoners now confined in the gaol?
Sixty six and of these twelve are sick.
6. Is this the ordinary number?
It is, sometimes I have more and sometimes less.
7. Is it the custom to confine prisoners in the gaol gang for some time after they arrive till their characters are known?
It is when they arrive with bad characters from Sydney or have long sentences.
8. How many persons are employed under you in the gaol?
Three but I formerly had four.

9. Are they all prisoners in the settlement?
They are.
10. How many rooms are there for the prisoners?
Four for the male prisoners and one for the females.
11. Who keeps the keys of the gaol?
I do in the day time and the Chief Constable at night.
12. Who visits the gaol during the day?
The public clerks visit the gaol at noon, day and day about to see the provisions issued out and to make a report to the Commandant. The Chief Constable visits the gaol at sunset to muster the gaol gang.
13. Are prisoners confined in the gaol for punishment?
They are committed to sleep in gaol at nights for punishment and are sometimes confined in solitary cells.
14. Are there any trucks [truckle beds] or garbets [?] in the gaol for the prisoners to sleep upon?
None.
15. Then they sleep on the floor?
They do.
16. Are they allowed to go out at night to the privy?
They are not. They use tubs.
17. Do they complain of being much crowded?
They do sometimes.

18. Do they bring bedding with them?

Some few do so. In the winter the Commandant allows them straw.

19. Where do they cook their provisions?

In one of the rooms, which is the largest, where also the corn mill is. They use, however, all the rooms for their private cooking.²

20. How often is the gaol washed?

Three times a week at least.

21. How often is it white-washed?

Once a month.

22. Does the Commandant often visit the gaol?

Frequently, at least once a month.

23. Have the prisoners in your time ever broke[n] out of the gaol or attempted to do so?

They have never broken out, but reports of attempts have frequently been made but the truth never ascertained.

24. Do the prisoners inform against each other?

They do. To get out of the gaol, they will almost say any thing.

25. Have they the same allowance of provisions in the gaol as they have out?

They have except the cell prisoners and they are always, except in cases of sickness, to be fed on bread and water.

26. Do you conceive that the walls of the gaol are sufficiently strong?

I do not.

27. Do the prisoners wear their fetters in gaol?

They do except in cases when the surgeon orders otherwise.

28. How often does the surgeon attend the gaol?

Once a day regularly.

29. How long is it since the gaol patients have had trestle beds to lie upon?

About a fortnight ago.

30. Have they always had bedding?

They have.

31. Are vegetables ever sent to the prisoners in the gaol?

The Commandant frequently sends both fish and vegetables.

32. Do you observe that it is a common practice amongst the prisoners to tie cords round their limbs to produce swelling and so as to be exempt from work?

I have observed it often especially in overhauling their irons at night.³ I have frequently detected them.

33. Are delegates⁴ sent from the gaol gang to attend the issuing of their provisions at the Commissary Store?

I attend at that time with two delegates and two cooks.

34. Are the delegates changed?

They are every day.

35. Has there been a great want of clothing lately in the gaol?

There has until very lately.

36. Do the prisoners gamble for their clothing?

They do out of gaol but not in it. When I was a constable in the settlement I used to detect it.

37. Were you here when the gaol was built?

I was.

38. Was much expedition used in building it?

There was. It was finished just before Captain Wallis went away.

39. Do you think it was strongly built?

I do not think it was. I do not think the people who built it were equal to such a work.

40. Who were they?

A man named Jos. Norton and Jos. Richardson. The latter is a stone cutter and the former is a labourer.

41. Have you ever been overseer at this settlement?

I have been employed in that capacity when an overseer was absent.

42. Do you think that the convicts labour harder here than they do at Sydney?

I don't think they do though they are more constant in their attendance.

43. What do you think is the difference between the labour of a convict at this place and the labour of a free man elsewhere?

About one half.⁵

44. Do you think that their present allowance of food is sufficient?

I do not think it is.

45. Do you think that if they had a breakfast in addition to their present ration that it would be sufficient?

I think it would.

46. Have you observed any drunkenness in the settlement of late?

Not of late. In Captain Wallis' time I did.

47. What has prevented it?

Captain Wallis used to allow the overseers and mechanics who exerted themselves a certain portion of rum and they sold it - at present no rum is allowed to those persons.

48. What indulgence is now substituted?

A government man is allowed and he is hired out to a settler who pays the master in the produce of his farm in corn or wheat.

49. Is not butter frequently sold by the settlers in the town to convicts?

It is.

50. At what price?

At two shillings and six pence per pound.

51. Do not many of the convicts come up from Sydney with a good deal of money?

They do.

52. How do you think they spend it?

They generally buy a house and commence dealing and make money.

53. Is it not much the practice for the prisoners to consume their weekly ration on one or two days?

They did formerly, some of them have such craving appetites. Now their ration is issued twice a week⁶ and the practice is much prevented.

54. Do you think that the settlement is in better order now than it used to be?

It certainly is, it is quite a different place.

55. Are there many female prisoners committed to the gaol?

There are.

56. For what crimes?

For neglect of duty and disobedience of orders.

57. Do you not frequently find that the soldiers on guard below converse with the women confined in the women's room above?

They do. But as I am a prisoner myself, I find a difficulty in interfering with the military.

58. Do you find that the prisoners in the gaol are given to swearing and quarrelling?

Very much.

59. Do the prisoners attend church?

They do not. The Clerk of the Church says prayers on Sundays at noon to them in gaol and the Chief Constable attends at that time.

60. How many military sentries are posted in the town at night?

Six.

61. How many constables?

The same number of constables.

62. Is the hour cried?

By the sentries the word is passed but not by the constables. They only walk about.

63. Is every body taken up who is found in the streets after eight and lodged in the gaol?

They are.

(Signed) M. Landers.

REFERENCES

1. Bonwick transcripts, Box 1, pp. 513-520.
Morris Landers arrived in New South Wales on the Frederick in 1816, having been sentenced to transportation for life. He was again convicted in 1817, probably at Windsor, and sent to Newcastle for three years. He received a conditional pardon in 1821 and was then appointed to be an under-gaoler at Sydney in June 1822. (Sydney gazette, 21 June, 1822, and 1828 Census, p. 150.)
2. I.e., for cooking any food they may obtain apart from the normal rations.
3. It was part of the Gaoler's duties to check the fetters of his prisoners every night, (Government order, 25 July, 1818, regulation 4).
4. Delegates were representatives of the prisoners whose responsibility it was to ensure that full rations were issued and that thefts did not occur during the preparation of the food.
5. C.f. Evidence of John Allen, q.77.
6. Prisoners in the gaol received their rations more frequently than those living outside.