

## Crime and punishment

When **John Howard** became High Sheriff of Bedfordshire in 1773 he was shocked to discover the condition of prisoners at Bedford Gaol, which had become his responsibility. This started a life-time obsession with visiting and recording the conditions in gaols throughout the UK and continental Europe.

Before the establishment of the Bedfordshire Constabulary in 1840 villages like Clophill had a **Parish Constable** who was appointed each year by the Parish Overseers. It was an unpaid post with a wide range of responsibilities. As well as the apprehension of offenders and taking them before the magistrates, the Constable had to organise the Militia Muster, act as the Coroner's Officer, organise watches and searches, supervising beggars, vagrants and others in distress passing through the parish, organise the survey of those liable for tax and collect it. An arduous job with penalties for failing to execute the duties properly.

With the lack of a proper constabulary, it was down to individuals to prosecute offenders. This could be expensive so, in an attempt to prosecute more criminals, **Associations for the Prosecution of Felons** were set up. Potential prosecutors banded together in order to insure individual members against the financial burdens of going to court including the costs of hiring lawyers. Silsoe and Ampthill Association for Prosecuting Felons' first meeting was at the George Inn, Silsoe, on Friday 3<sup>rd</sup> October 1823. Gentlemen residing within eight miles of Silsoe or Ampthill could become members. Twelve people from Clophill joined, including the Rector who was obviously keen to see criminals brought to justice.

On the edge of The Green is the **Lockup and Pound**. This was built in 1851 by magistrate Captain Moore of Maulden Cottage who was a Justice of the Peace as well as a naval officer. Criminals would be held in the lockup until charged and fined or transferred to the prison in Bedford. Stray animals were put in the pound where their owners had to pay a fine to get them back. There is a record in the 1814 Quarter Sessions Rolls of a "*breach of the peace in the said parish of Clophill; for that the said James Odell did, with force and violence, break open the pound there, where his ass was impounded for trespass. Sentence: 10 Days in the gaol and fined one shilling*".



The present Bedford Prison Bedford prison was officially opened on 18th June 1801. The local Records Office holds the Bedfordshire **Gaol Register** for the period 1801 - 1901 which gives the details of the criminals, along with their crime and punishment, detained at the prison. It can be accessed online. There are 275 Clophill residents listed. Here is a selection of the records:-

1820 Robert Head, 68, Sheep Stealing, Death reprieved 12 Calendar Months Hard Labour  
1821 James Lincoln, 14, and Joseph Clarke, 14, Destroying a fence, 3 Days and to be whipped.

1831 Mary Clark, 25, Lewd Woman, 1 Year Hard Labour

1849 Joseph Hyde, 48, Stealing a Spade, 1 Calendar Month Hard Labour

1853 John Mitchell, 32, Deserting his family, 7 Days Hard Labour

1844 Robert Appleby, 19, of Clophill and William Peat, 19, of Maulden. Cutting and destroying fruit trees and shrubs, 14 Years and 7 Years **transportation** respectively

These last pair of entries in the Gaol Register give the basic details of their crime and extreme punishment. Other sources fill in the details.

At the 1844 Easter Quarter Sessions **Robert Appleby and William Peat** were charged with having maliciously cut, damaged and destroyed a quantity of trees in the grounds of Capt. Moore's house in Hall End, Maulden. Capt. Moore was away in the Royal Navy and the property was looked after by Francis Read who found the damage to a range of trees and bushes in the garden. The accused had been to the Flying Horse and later Constable Vincent Dogget found them at the Compasses. They had knives on them and a freshly cut stick. The pattern of their shoes matched footprints found in Capt. Moore's garden. With this evidence they were found guilty. Unfortunately for Robert Appleby, he had been in trouble twice before, once when Capt. Moore was the Justice of the Peace.

Why such severe punishments were proscribed for Appleby and Peat is hard to understand.

Robert Appleby was sent to Van Dieman's Land (Tasmania) on the vessel "William Jardine". It is not known if he returned after he had served his time there. Ten months later William Peat set sail for Van Dieman's Land on the "Marion" but died on the voyage on the 13 September 1845.

The punishments administered in the nineteenth century may seem extreme but, as there was no effective police force whose presence may have deterred criminals, it was hoped that the punishment would.