



Moreton Bay

ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION CENTRE

Inspiring Champions for the Bay

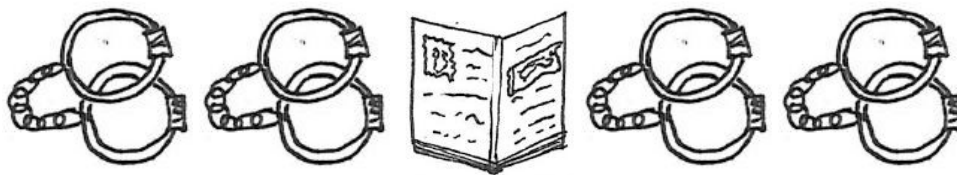
St Helena Stories

Birdcage of the Bay

Student Booklet



Being connected to place and engaging in hands-on experiences, inspiring curiosity and thinking is always best. We hope that you can join us on St Helena Island in the future to be transported back to colonial times for exploration and discovery in this historic place.



Students, in the role of historians will:

- ◆ Interrogate historical sources of information to determine Aboriginal and European use of St Helena Island
- ◆ Comprehend the significant events that led to the development of St Helena Island Penal Establishment
- ◆ Examine ways the St Helena Penal Establishment settlement changed the environment
- ◆ Analyse the diverse perspectives of different social groups in the Colonial period
- ◆ Evaluate the importance of St Helena Island as a significant historical site in Moreton Bay

Connecting to Place

Welcome to St Helena Island, one of the many fascinating islands located in the heart of Moreton Bay.

[View drone footage](#) to connect to this special place from above.



St Helena Island was home for up to 350 prisoners at one time during its 65 year operation from 1867 to 1932. The island housed many of the worst prisoners from the mainland due to the overcrowding of gaols in the settlement of Brisbane during the mid 1800s. What makes St Helena Island of particular interest to historians and the public alike is the fact that from its beginnings, the prison was totally self sufficient with its first prisoners constructing the walls from natural materials. The Moreton Bay Environmental Education Centre invites you to explore the remarkable stories of prisoners and warders who lived on St Helena Island to discover what life was like in Colonial Australia.

Colonial Australia Glossary

Find the words from the glossary below and read their definitions. These words will be used throughout this booklet. Feel free to add more words and their definitions to this glossary if you come across something you are unsure of.

R O U R S A I M Y T Z J L U T Y T Q M I D D E N V
M T N E D N E T N I R E P U S C R U B Y N D O P U
K P S R M E W V C E L U V Z I A A A U M O T W R T
V J L I G E A P M Q W D S F G R D R E I I R J T M
F K C D G V G A F O K L V E O I E A C F T P A C L
M D W P N N H Q U C H S F M L P N N R J A R N T S
I O U Y Y M I Z B W S E F J O S I T U P S H D Z F
G T P X N K P F K T E O I V E N L I O X I S A X S
R N M Q O T R M I S E D U W A O E N S V N M I I I
A O A H L E I C A C H D B R H C M E I B O R A N X
T O A K O O M A D N A U Q A C U I M G J L E R D Q
I G E W C V A N R O G N E S R E T K I T O D P B V
O O V E K I R T S I D D T R A T I O N G C R H Q D
N O V N M D Y R R A U Q K P I S E C O N D A R Y E
B N Z S E C N E D I V E D A K C O T S L F W B Q R

COLONISATION: the action or process of settling among and establishing control over the indigenous people of an area

TIMELINE: a list of important events arranged in the order in which they happened

QUARRY: a place, typically a large, deep pit, from which stone or other materials are extracted

ARCHAEOLOGIST: a scientist who studies the past to gather evidence to support our understanding

MIGRATION: movement of people to a new area or country in order to find work or better living conditions

QUARANTINE: a place where people arriving from elsewhere or exposed to contagious disease are isolated

MIDDEN: a sacred eating ground where evidence of past Aboriginal hunting and gathering materials are found, including bones and shells

WARDER: a guard in prison

SUPERINTENDENT: the person in charge of running and maintaining a prison

QUANDAMOOKA: Moreton Bay

NOOGOON: St Helena Island

EVIDENCE: a source of information which proves or disproves something

JANDAI: the traditional language spoken by Quandamooka tribes

CONSPIRACY: a secret plan by a group to do something unlawful or harmful

TRADE: a job requiring manual skills and special training

STOCKADE: an enclosure in which prisoners are kept

RATION: a limited amount of something that one person is allowed to have

SIGNIFICANT: important or meaningful

STRIKE: refusing to work as a form of protest often to improve pay or conditions

PRIMARY SOURCE: an immediate, first-hand account of a topic from people with a direct connection to it, e.g. ships' logs, artworks, newspaper articles, photograph

SECONDARY SOURCE: something that describes or explains a primary source, e.g. textbooks, criticism of art works

COLONY: an area under the full or partial political control of another country and occupied by settlers from that country

CHAPTER 1 – QUANDAMOOKA

St Helena Island has cultural and historical significance for the Quandamooka language group. For many thousands of years before European colonisation, Quandamooka men hunted, women gathered and the island was covered in Moreton Bay fig trees filled with flying fox.



Source 1: Aboriginals at work. Reproduced from T. Dick collection, The Australian Museum.

The Indigenous name for St Helena Island is 'Noogoon' which translates to 'place of the flying fox.'

Find out more about local Indigenous culture, traditions and lifestyle from Matt Burns, Quandamooka Cultural Officer

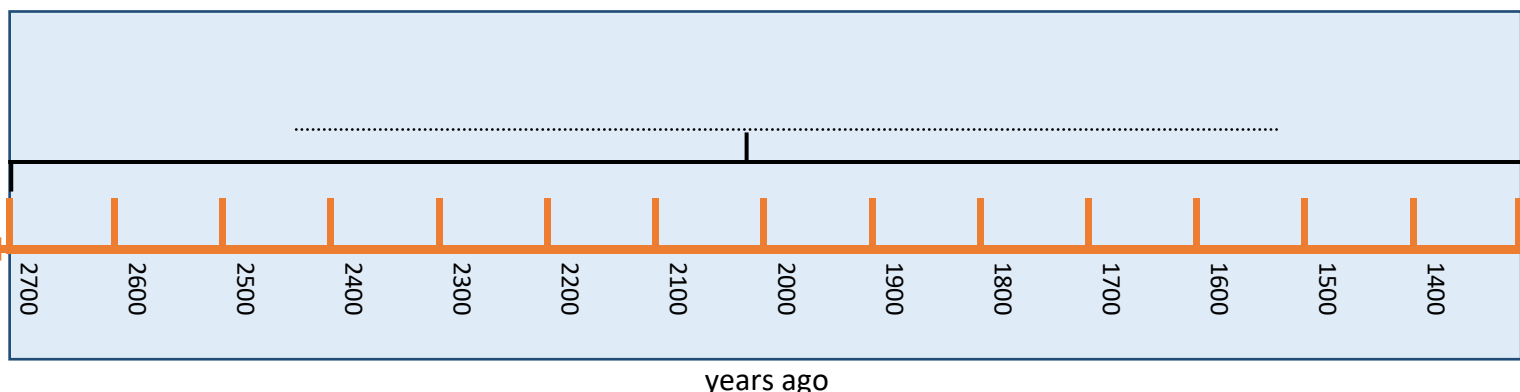
Pioneer explorer, Tom Petrie, recorded:

St Helena was a great camping place for them [flying foxes] in those days, and the blacks from Wynnum used to go across in their canoes to catch them there, watching for calm weather both to go and return. If the return was not delayed, they would bring back foxes cooked ready for their companions left behind, but they went prepared with fishing nets etc. as the wind might keep them there for some time.

Source 2: Petrie, C., Tom Petrie's Early Reminiscences of Early Queensland, Angus and Robertson, 1904, p.89

How do we know?

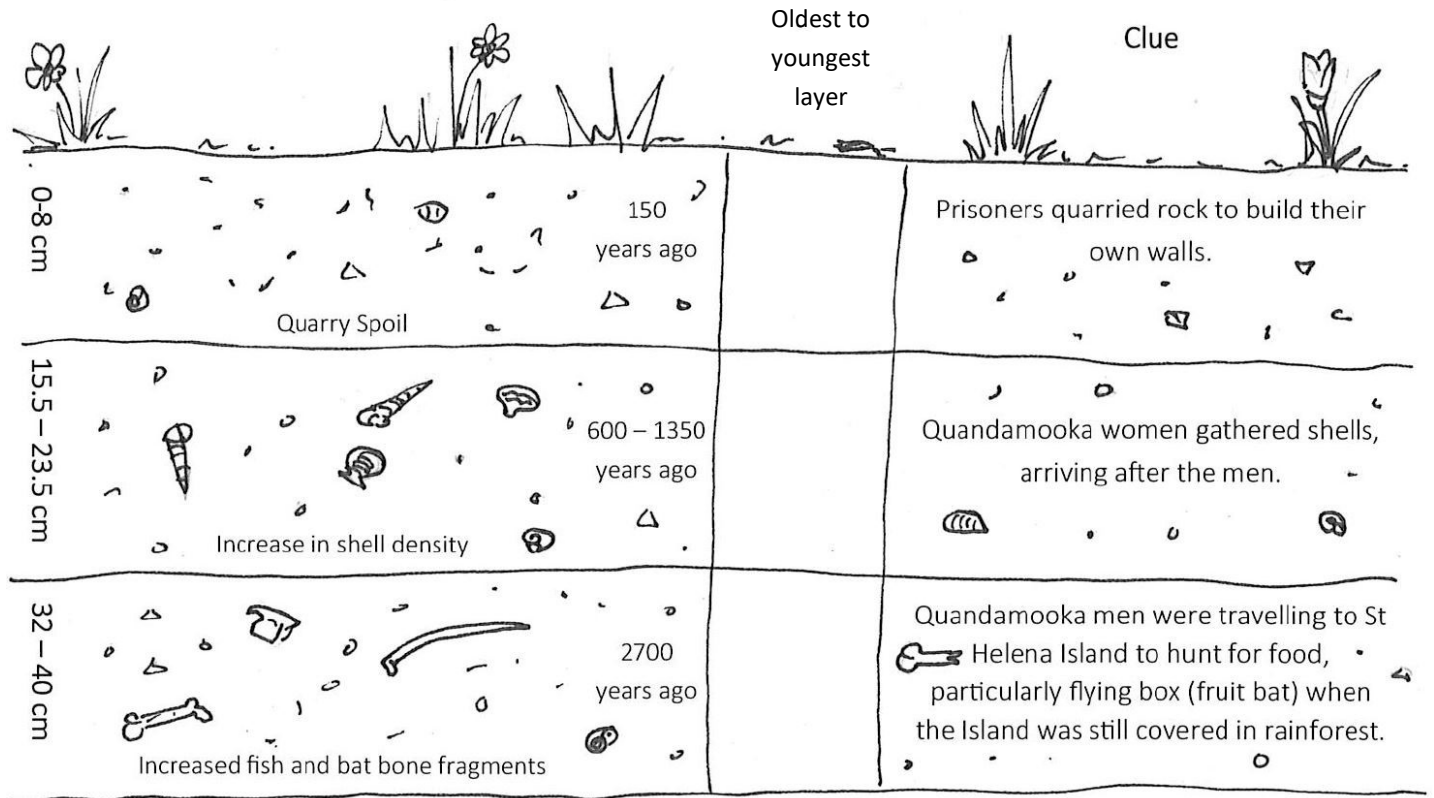
TIMELINE OF NOOGOON (St Helena Island)



Aboriginal Midden, St Helena Island Archaeological Report by Gillian Alfredson (Source 3)

A midden is a sacred eating ground where evidence of past Aboriginal hunting and gathering materials are found, including bones (jigil) and shells (gwambi). Take a look at the archaeological report summary in the table below.

Your Turn! Number the three midden layers from oldest (1) to youngest (3).



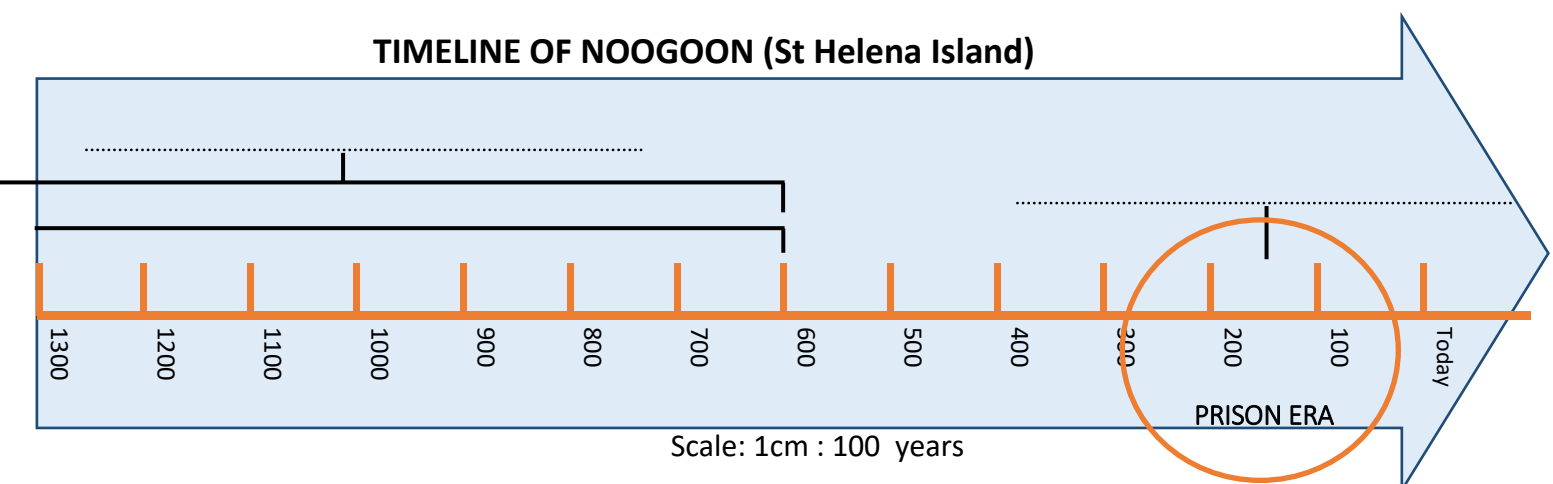
Jandai is one of the languages spoken by Quandamooka tribes, find the translation to complete this table.

| Jandai | English |
|-------------|------------------|
| Quandamooka | |
| | St Helena Island |
| | Shell |

Your Turn!

A timeline is a list of important events arranged in the order in which they happened. Fill in the blank spaces of this timeline using information from the Archaeological Report (table).

TIMELINE OF NOOGOON (St Helena Island)



CHAPTER 2 – COLONIAL AUSTRALIA DURING THE 1800S – PRE-PRISON ERA

There were a number of events that ultimately led to the building of St Helena Island Penal Establishment. Take a look at [page 19](#) and see if you can piece together the story.

Note: the timeline scale has changed. The Aboriginal use of the island spans a much greater time than the years following colonisation.

THE FLOW ON EFFECT

1850s

Quarantine Station

In 1865, St Helena Quarantine Station was built by convict passengers on board the ship, Proserpine. They began to clear the scrub to make room for buildings.



Source 6: Quarantine Station building plans. QPWS.

HOW DID ST HELENA GET ITS NAME?

An Aboriginal man from Dunwich on Stradbroke Island was nicknamed 'Napoleon' after the great soldier due to his striking resemblance to him. After stealing an axe from the Dunwich stores, 'Napoleon' was banished to an island close by known as Noogoon. After just a couple of days, he made a bark canoe and paddled back to Stradbroke Island! Thanks to Moreton Bay's 'Napoleon', his island of exile, Noogoon, forever became known as St Helena Island, named after the island in the South Atlantic Napoleon was exiled six years earlier.



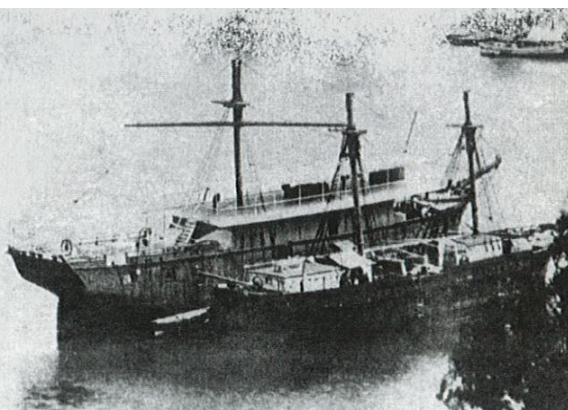
Source 8: Making a canoe. Reproduced from T. Dick collection, The Australian Museum.

St Helena Island Penal Establishment opened and housed some of the Proserpine prisoners who continued to build the prison. The prison's first superintendent was John MacDonald and 60 prisoners, 6 warders and 13 military guards were stationed there at this time.

1866

The Proserpine prison hulk, moored in the Brisbane River, early 1800s. As a prison hulk this ship housed some of St Helena's first prisoners.

Source 9: Hulk, Proserpine.
The St Helena Story, J. Finger.



CHAPTER 3 – DEVELOPMENT OF COLONIES – ST HELENA ISLAND PRISON ESTABLISHMENT

St Helena Island Penal Establishment paralleled development of a colony on the mainland. The maximum security prison housed up to 350 male prisoners at one time between **1867** to 1932. What makes St Helena Island of particular interest to historians is the fact that from its beginnings, the prison was totally self sufficient.

The first prisoners on St Helena Island were responsible for digging wells to access fresh water from underground,

clearing native vegetation, planting crops and constructing buildings. Once the land was cleared, crops such a maize (corn), vegetables and sugar cane were planted and sheep and cattle herds were

introduced for food.

Prisoners built their own cell blocks and other buildings such as a kitchen, hospital, underground water storage tank, stables, guard's quarters and superintendent's house. The stockade was also surrounded by a four (4) meter high hardwood fence and a cemetery was marked out.

As the prison became established, industries on the island grew and began to make money. As goods needed to be transported to the mainland, a stone jetty was built in **1879**. Expansion of the Stockade began in **1890** including a blacksmiths and carpenters shops and cow shed. Warders with trade skills trained prisoners to become saddle makers, boot makers, tailors, blacksmiths and carpenters for example. It was a win-win as prisoners had purpose in their lives and the prison made money to keep running. The workshops made items for the prison but also for the police force, orphanages and other government institutions on the mainland.

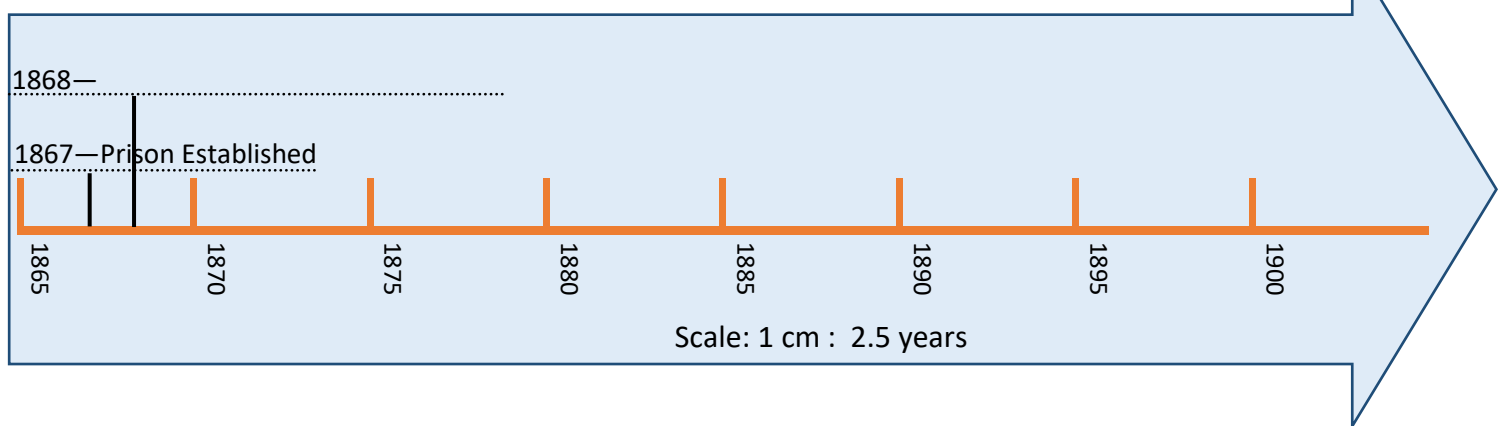
Source 10. Clearing of native vegetation by prisoners, 1868. John Oxley Collection.



Your Turn!

Add significant events and dates to the timeline using information above.

TIMELINE OF COLONY DEVELOPMENT—St Helena Island



Choose your own adventure!

View all of these or choose just one, it's up to you. (Source 11)

VIRTUAL REALITY TOUR

Follow along on this YouTube video tour of the prison stockade as it was in colonial times. What might it have been like to live here?

BIRDS-EYE VIEW

Follow the drone in this YouTube video. See if you can spot remains of any of the buildings mentioned above.

INTERACTIVE TOUR

Using Google Earth, find your own way around St Helena Island Prison as it exists today.

RECIPE FOR A COLONY

Cut out the **Ingredients and Methods** on page 20.

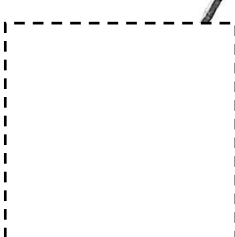
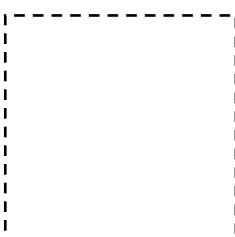
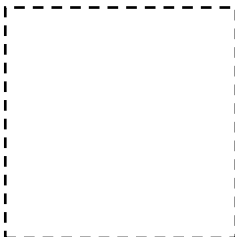
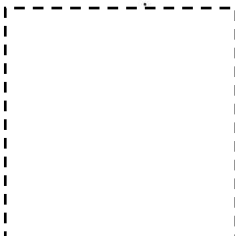
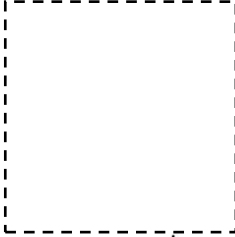
Match them up and glue them in the order they would need to be completed to establish a new colony.

INGREDIENTS

METHODS

IMPACTS

Most important



Clear fields for crops and find locally accessible food sources



Place the greatest impact at the top and order them from greatest to least.



Greatest impact

Least impact

Least important

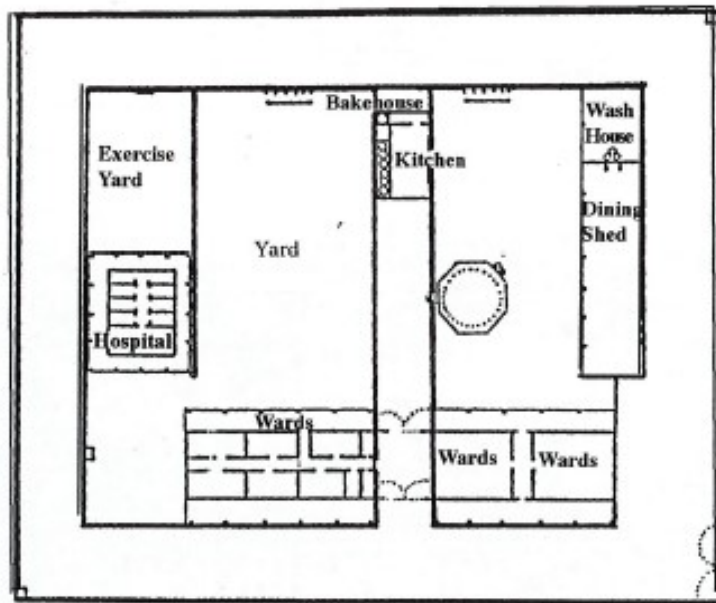
Justify why you chose to place the methods in this order.....

.....

.....

Plans Change (Source 12)

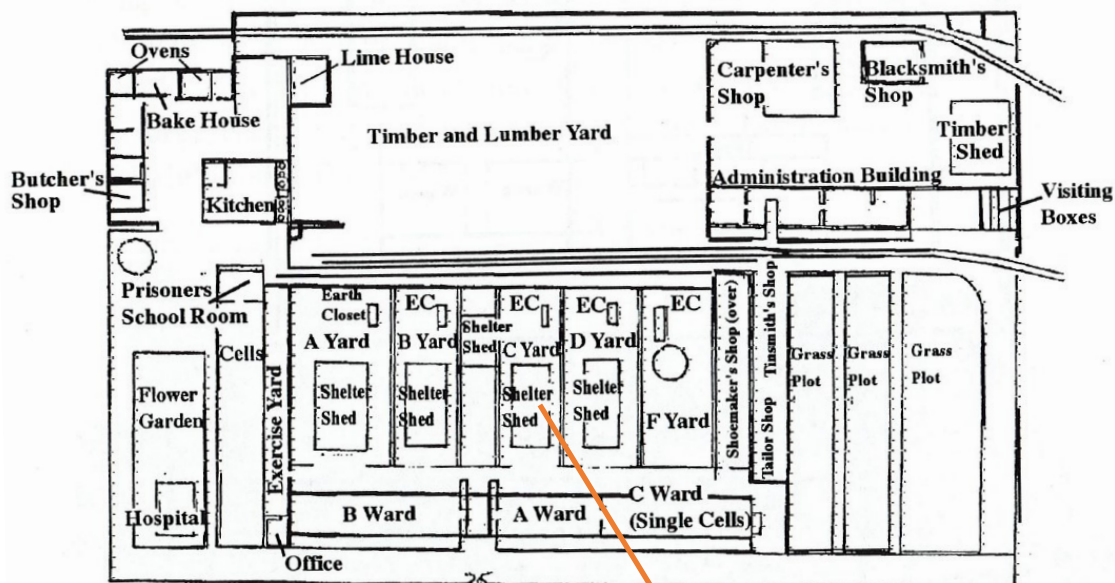
Plan of Stockade - 1867



Note: the stockade plans did not change significantly after 1894

From original plans, Votes and proceedings 1867. Courtesy QNPWS.

Plan of Stockade - 1894



From original plans Votes and proceedings 1894. Courtesy QNPWS.



Jackie (Mi Kolungara)
Crime: Murder

Administration no: 1514

Sentence: Death commuted to 15 years

Occupation: Native Trooper

Job in prison: fieldwork tending to crops

C yard was the exercise yard for coloured prisoners. This was narrower than the others and had nightsoil (human waste) from the entire prison in the middle.

What does this tell us about society's attitudes towards people of different cultural backgrounds during colonial times ?

Your Turn!

Take a look at the stockade plans from 1867 and 1894

How many years were there between the two stockade plans?

List the main changes you notice in the stockade plans between 1867 and 1894

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-
-

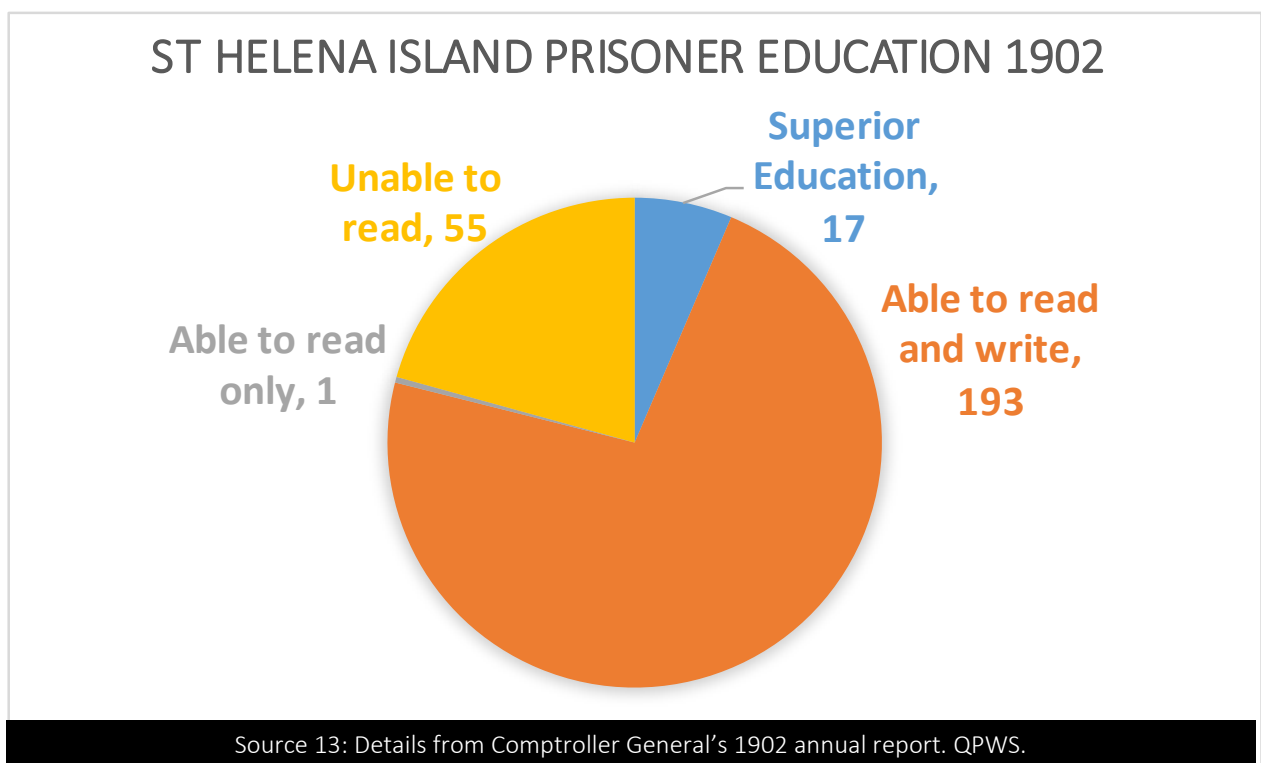
In 1867, St Helena Penal Establishment housed 60 prisoners. Using information from the stockade plans and graph, determine how many prisoners were housed in 1902.....

What changes were made to the stockade to allow for more prisoners to be accommodated?

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When the prison opened in 1867, many prisoners could not read or write. Did the education of prisoners improve over time? What evidence can you find from the stockade plans and graph to justify this?

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CHAPTER 4 – DAILY LIFE IN A COLONY

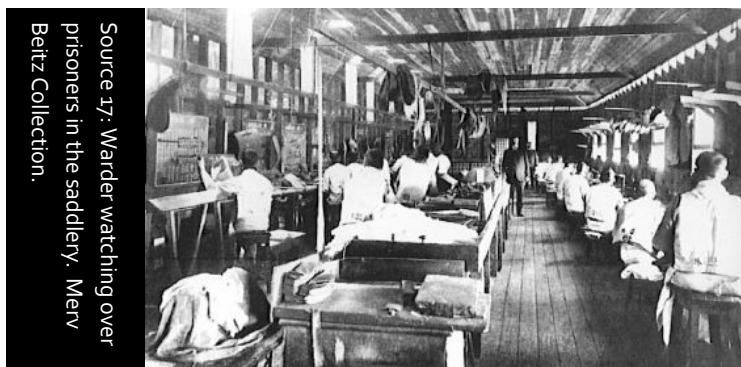
A day in the life of Warder Bob Murrie Snr (Source 14)

| | | |
|---------|--|---|
| 5.30am | Morning bell | |
| 5.45am | Wake up prisoners from their cells | |
| 6.00am | Breakfast | A warder's rations were similar to a prisoner with 10 pounds of flour, 8 pounds of meat, ¼ pound of tea, 2 pounds of sugar and 10 pounds of vegetables per week! |
| 6.30am | Muster. Complete roll call for workshop | Warders on St Helena Island had a range of duties including overseeing work gangs, manning sentry towers, instructing prisoners on their trades and completing night rounds of cells. |
| 11.50am | Bell for noon meal. March prisoners back to stockade | |
| 1.00pm | Resume overseeing prisoners at work | |
| 5.00pm | Evening Meal | |
| 6.00pm | Muster, roll call, march prisoners to their cells | When they weren't working, warders spent their time writing letters, fishing, playing tennis, billiards and cricket, sailing or bathing in the swimming enclosure. |
| 9.00pm | Complete stockade rounds | |
| 12.00pm | Retire to bed | For the first 25 years, certain warders had their families living with them in married quarters. Warders and their families lived in cottages on Warder's Row with 3 bedrooms, a sitting room, front veranda and kitchen. |

Rules: There were just as many rules for warders as there were for prisoners.

Warders were never allowed to:

- Speak to the press or take part in political affairs
- Sit down without permission
- Talk, read, use improper language or smoke in the presence of prisoners
- Wrangle or quarrel in the presence of prisoners
- Have alcohol on the island
- Remove anything from the prison without authority
- Gamble
- Have dealings with a prisoner or his friends or relatives



Watch the following video clips of historians sharing stories of warders (Source 16):

- * [The Telltale Clock](#)
- * [The Murder of a Warder](#)

A day in the life of prisoner William Hamilton

(Source 15)

Watch the following video clips of historians sharing stories of prisoners:

- * [Frederick Hamilton's Escape](#)
- * [Punishment of Walter O'Hara](#)

SCALE of RATIONS now issued to PRISONERS confined in Her Majesty's Penal Establishment, ST. HELENA.

| SCALE A. | SCALE B. | SCALE C. |
|--|-----------------|---|
| 16 ozs. Bread | 12 ozs. Bread | To all prisoners in solitary confinement, 24 ozs. bread and water |
| 16 " Meat | 6 " Meat | |
| 8 " Maize meal | 12 " Maize meal | |
| 8 " Vegetables | 8 " Vegetables | |
| 1 1/2 " Salt | 1 1/2 " Salt | |
| 1 " Soap | 1 " Soap | |
| 3 " Sugar | | |
| 1 " Tea | | |
| 1 1/2 " Tobacco | | |
| This ration is issued daily to prisoners actually employed at hard labor, and to no other prisoner, unless ordered by the Visiting Surgeon | | To all prisoners not employed at hard labor |
| | | When any prisoner reports himself sick, the Superintendent shall cause him to be placed on low diet until examined by the Visiting Surgeon. (Scale B, omitting meat.) |

| | | |
|---------|--|---|
| 5.45am | Morning bell | |
| 6.00am | Breakfast. Scale B rations | The quantity and type of food given to prisoners was dependent on their workload. |
| 6.30am | Muster. Roll call for working as a servant in Warder's Row | Workshops included the bakery, kitchen wash house, blacksmith, carpenters, quarry, tailors and saddlery. Some prisoners were responsible for loading boats at the jetty or working in the fields tending to livestock or crops. Other prisoners were assigned duties as Warders house servants. |
| 11.50am | Bell for noon meal. March back to stockade | |
| 1.00pm | Resume work | |
| 5.00pm | Evening Meal followed by recreation in exercise yard | In the early years, the prison only had two yards. Ward A for well-behaved prisoners and Ward B for "second-class" prisoners had often returned for their second sentence. In 1889, the yards were divided into A, B, C, D, E and F All yards contained a washroom and drop toilets. |
| 6.00pm | Muster, roll call, march back to cell | Prisoners spent time in the yards for lunch, relaxing, reading or schooling and again after work to wash, have dinner and gossip. Prisoners were allowed to write letters to family . Some prisoners chose to attend school or spend time in the library. |
| 7.00pm | Locked up in cell for the night | In each cell block was a hammock and a night soil bucket. |

Rules- prisoners must not:

- Disobey orders from their officers
- Swear, have indecent conversation, gamble, damage wards, cells or furniture of the prison, sharpen spoons or knives
- Light anything on fire
- Alter any clothing
- Complain about the quality and/or quantity of rations
- Leave school or divine service before being dismissed
- Talk at musters, meals, in dorms at night, during solitary confinement or while marching to and from work
- Be idle during the authorised hours of labour
- Jump, wrestle, sing or play games

Punishments

St Helena Island Penal Establishment had a reputation as an extremely harsh prison with cruel and violent punishments:

Cat 'O' Nine Tails (a whip with nine lengths of knotted cord on a wooden handle) was used in the early days for flogging prisoners.

Shot drill - a 12kg cannon ball being carried by a prisoners after his day's work for an hour and a quarter.

Solitary confinement or the "black holes" was cruelest of all. Prisoners were locked in tiny underground cells with little fresh air, total darkness and receiving only bread and water.

PRISON EXPERIENCES

Your Turn!

Compare the different experiences of a prisoner and a warder, identifying any overlapping experiences. Write or draw these in the Venn diagram below.

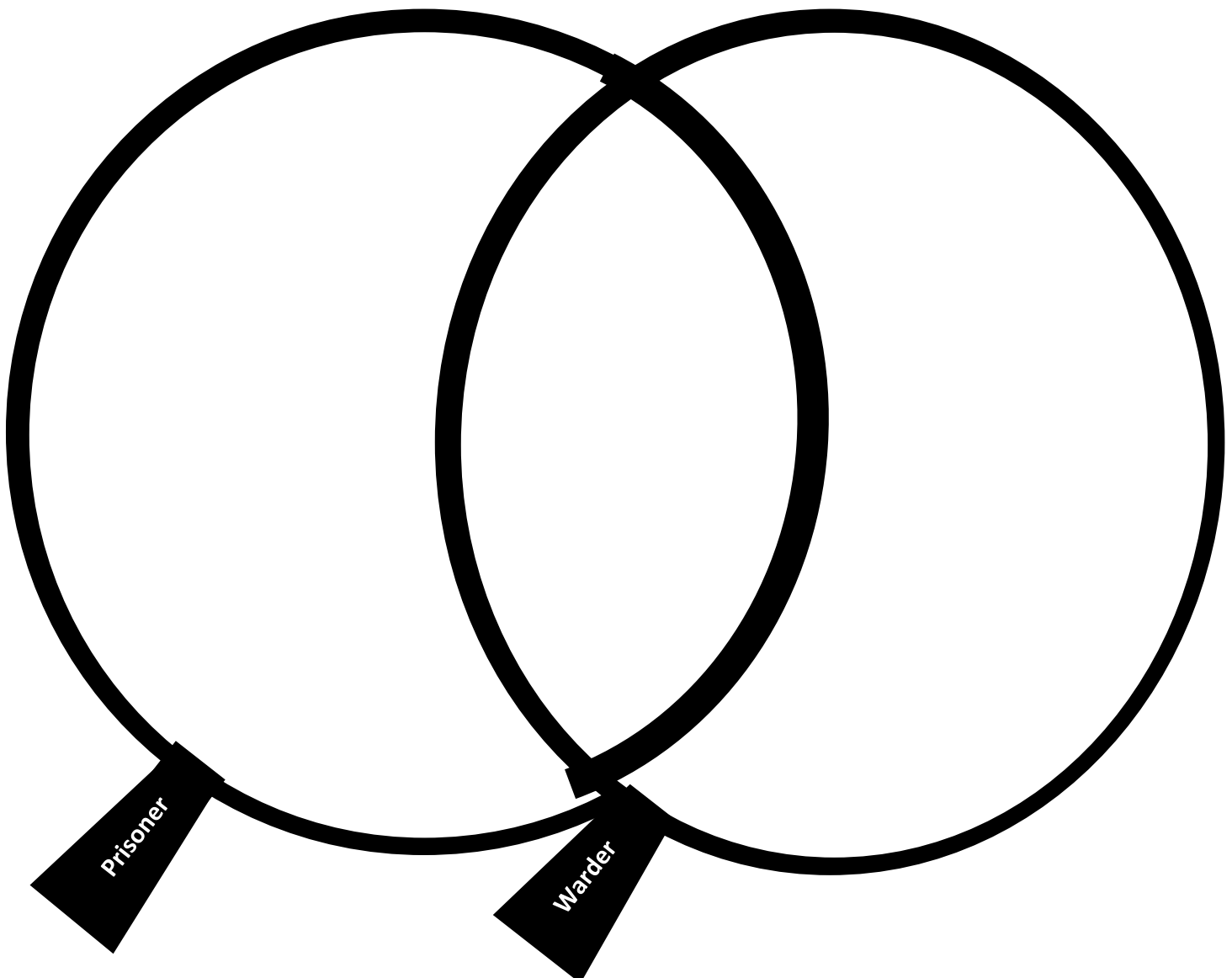
You may like to compare experiences relating to:

! FOOD

! RULES

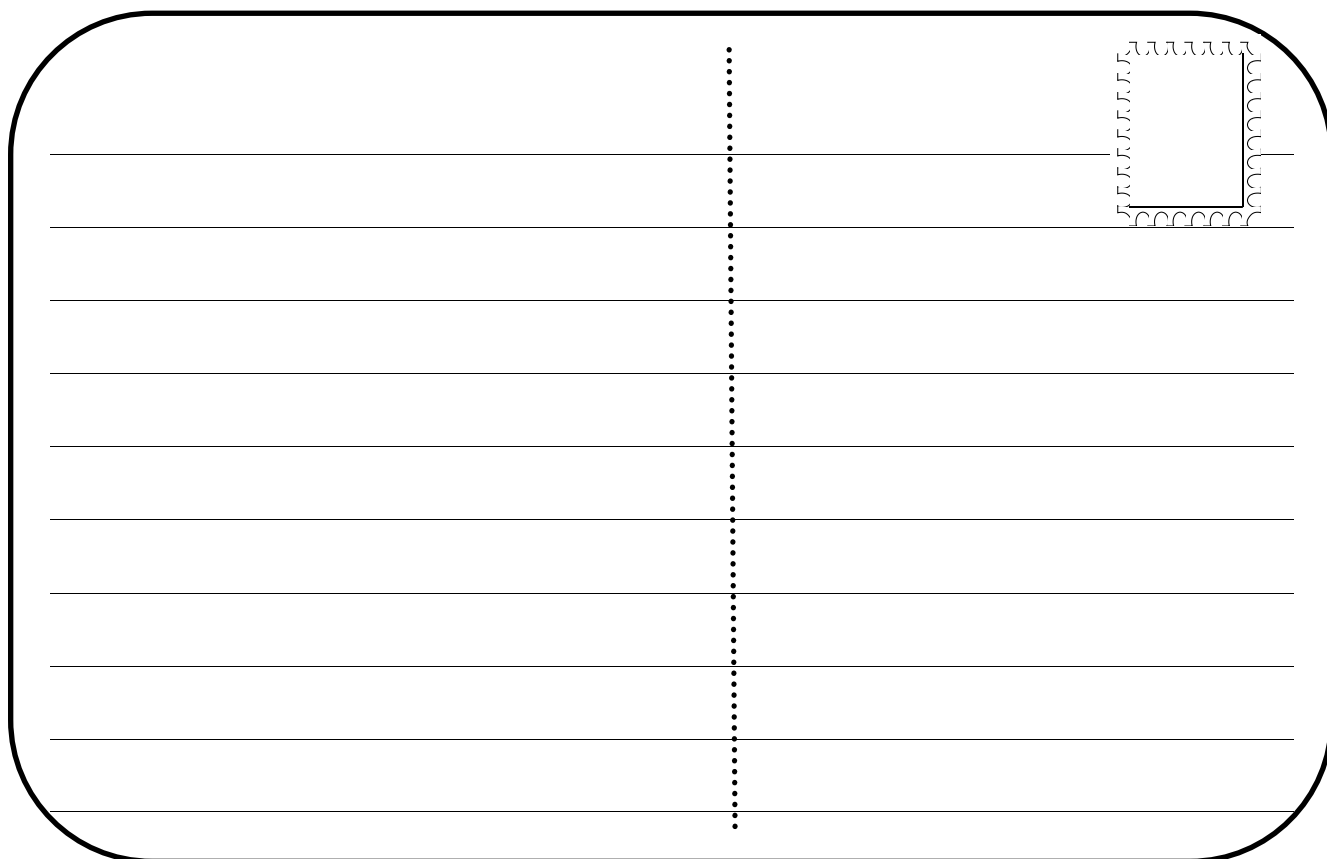
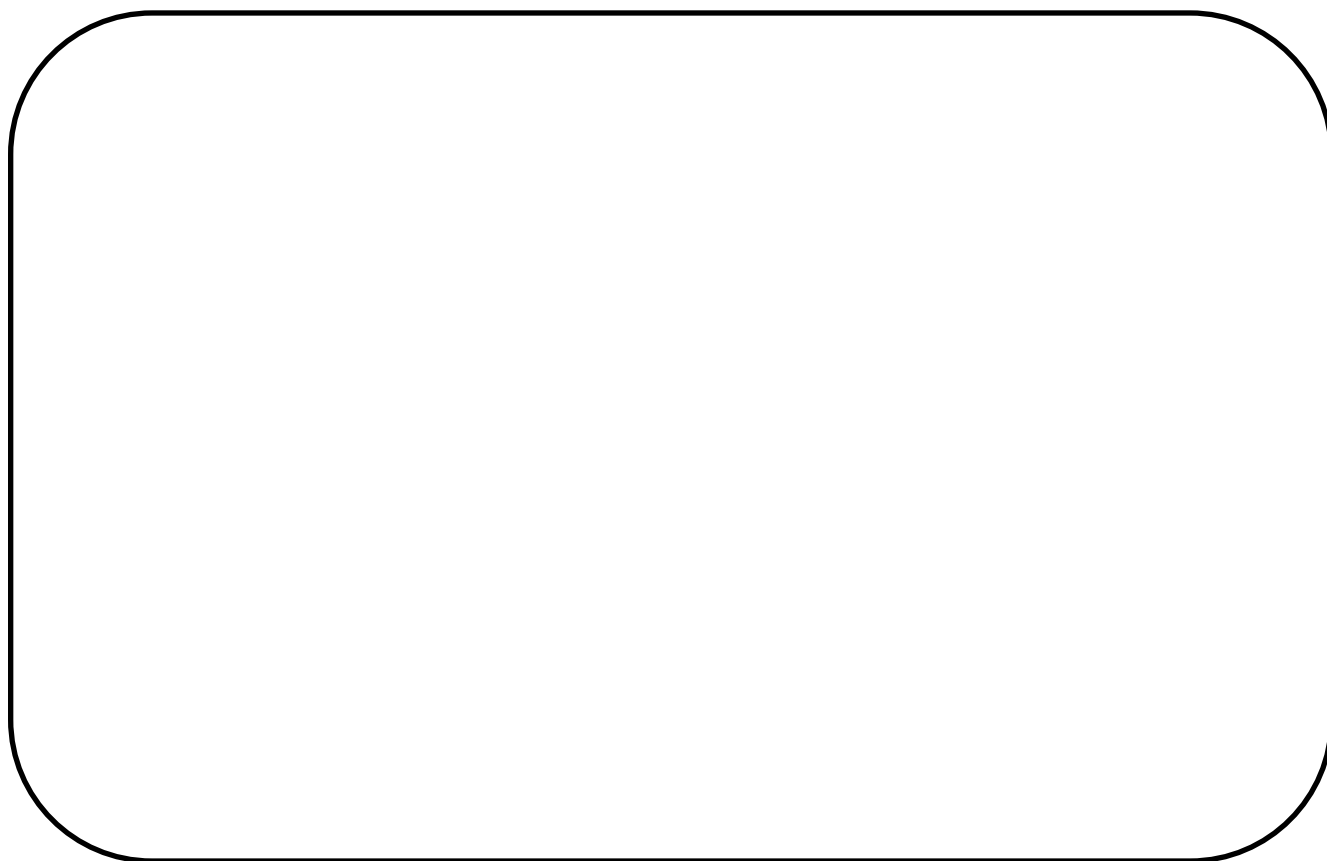
! RESPONSIBILITIES

! LEISURE



Your Turn!

Using the information you have gathered, **WRITE A POSTCARD** from the perspective of a prisoner. Don't forget to draw your experience on the front - what would it have looked like? Use your imagination and creativity.



CHAPTER 5 – SIGNIFICANT EVENTS AND PEOPLE IN SHAPING A COLONY – PEOPLE OF THE PRISON

The Shearer's Strike in 1891

A societal attitudes changed on the mainland, these translated to the prison establishment. The Shearer's Strike of 1891, demanded better pay and conditions for workers, causing a shift in the political climate of the time. This significant event led to the incarceration of political prisoners on St Helena Island.

Sheep Shearers refused to work until they received better conditions and wages. Parades and public protests occurred, leading to many arrests for conspiracy, rioting and sedition.

At Barcaldine in February of 1891, strikers blocked the arrival of 200 "free labourers" brought in by employers to do the work. Shearers harassed police and threw stones at them.

One of the ringleaders of the strike, William Hamilton, tried to restrain these unlawful acts but as the leader of the camp he was arrested along with 13 others and sentenced to 3 years at St Helena Island Penal Establishment.

William Hamilton was a significant individual during the colonial period, and upon release, helped



Source 18: Shearer's Strike Prisoners, 1891. Queensland State Archives.

to shape politics in Queensland.

Whilst on the island, Hamilton taught other prisoners how to read and write, study maths and philosophy, did step dancing, play chess and draughts, pitch balls and play the flute. Despite the intended isolation of these prisoners, support from the mainland remained strong.

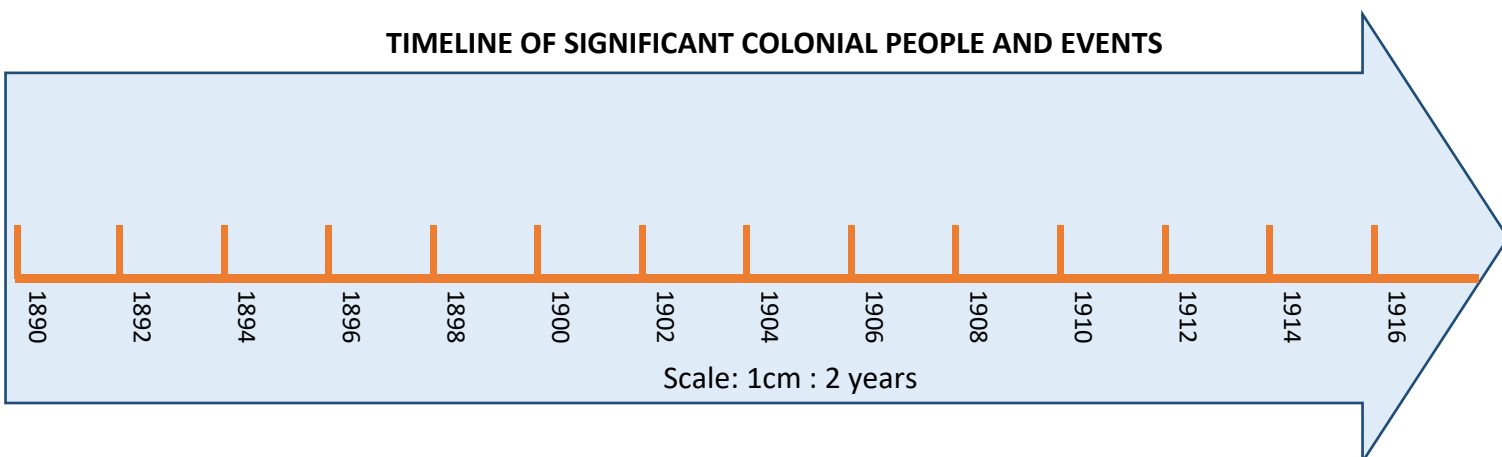
Members of Parliament back on the mainland pleaded with the men to admit that their actions were unlawful and in return be granted release.

Historians believe that the strike called for political movement supporting fair conditions for working people, leading to the formation of the Labour Party.

Upon release, William Hamilton entered politics and became an elected official of the Parliament of Queensland between 1896 and 1915.

Your Turn! Add significant dates and events to the timeline using the above information

TIMELINE OF SIGNIFICANT COLONIAL PEOPLE AND EVENTS



Your Turn!

Describe what you believe would have happened if the scenarios below had played out.



William Hamilton

Crime: Conspiracy

Admin no: 3869

Sentence: 10 years , released after 3 years

Occupation: Shearer, Union

Representative

Prison Job: Housemaids gang in Warder's Row

William Hamilton had admitted his actions were unlawful and was released from prison?

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William Hamilton hadn't been arrested?

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Free labourers had not been brought in to do the shearing?

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What if...?

The shearers had accepted defeat and continued to work under poor conditions?

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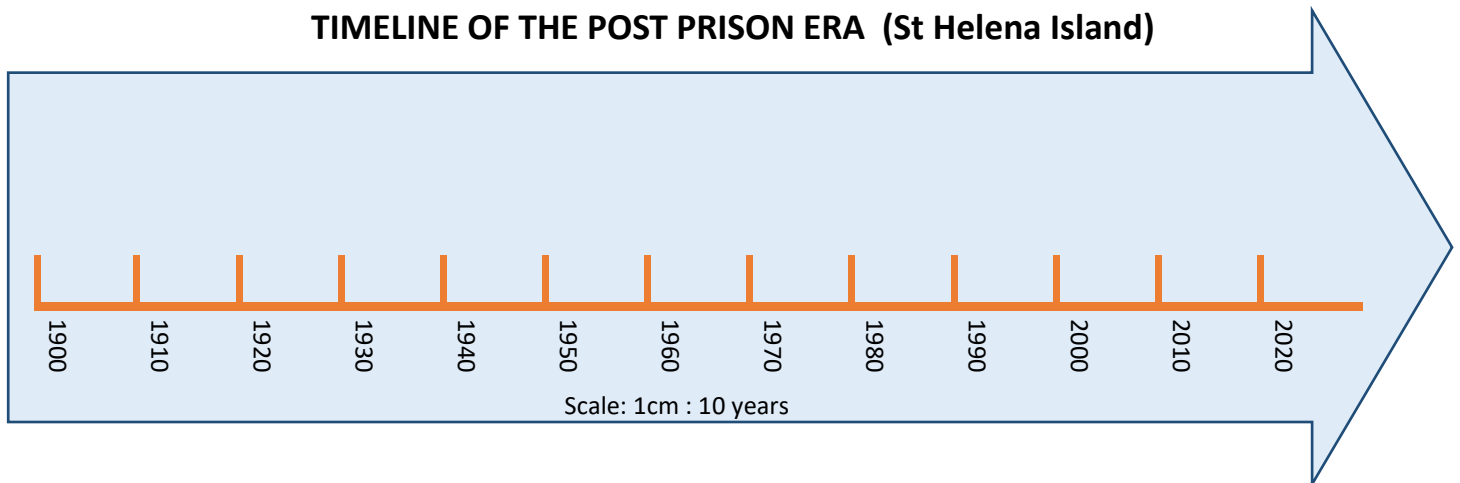
CHAPTER 6 – SIGNIFICANCE TODAY – POST-PRISON ERA

The colony of Brisbane changed significantly following federation in **1901**. St Helena Island Prison no longer fitted the Government's ideas, it had become expensive to maintain and operate due to its age and isolation. This saw long-term prisoners and trades workshops being transferred to Boggo Road Goal. The prison was down-graded to a prison farm in **1925** with inmates dismantling the prison. An honour system was introduced which allowed prisoners to take responsibility for their work while also improving attitudes and personal qualities.

The last prisoners left the island in **1932**. Afterwards the Island was used for a short time as a tourist destination and many years as a farm. In **1979** it was declared St Helena Island National Park. St Helena Island was proclaimed Queensland's first historic site in **1980**.

Your Turn! Add significant dates and events to the timeline using the above information.

TIMELINE OF THE POST PRISON ERA (St Helena Island)



SOURCES OF INFORMATION

| Type of source | Name of source | Primary or secondary? (hint: check glossary for definitions) |
|----------------|----------------|---|
| Photograph | | |
| Video | | |
| Quote | | |
| Diagram | | |

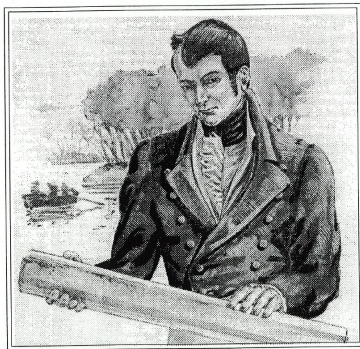
THE FLOW ON EFFECT

Cut out the **events and evidence** and glue them on the timeline in the order you think they would have occurred.

Hint: look for the dates!

Settlement in Brisbane

Settlement began in Brisbane in 1824, with the arrival of Surveyor General John Oxley. Free settlers were needed to migrate to Brisbane and increase the population.



Source 4: John Oxley.
Queensland Museum.

Migration

People from England, Ireland and Scotland migrated on ships to Brisbane with hopes and dreams for new opportunities. Some ships arrived in Australia with illness on-board such as typhus leading to the need for quarantine.



Source 5:
1850s Sailing
Clipper. Bill
Wood,
Museums
Victoria.



St Helena Island Penal Establishment

On 14 May 1867, Governor Bowen signed a proclamation declaring the island 'a place whereat offenders under order or sentence of hard labour or penal servitude may be detained'.



Source 7: John McDonald, St
Helena Island Prison's first
Superintendent.. L. Penny.

Increased crime and prisoners

While the quarantine station was being built on St Helena Island, unemployment was increasing and crime was rising (e.g. the Bread and Blood Riot) in Brisbane. Brisbane Gaols became overcrowded. St Helena Island's quarantine station was converted into a prison.

Brisbane's Bread or Blood Riot of 1866

In a protest of 500 people, a ringleader of the riot gave a speech outside the Treasury Hotel. During the chaos, protesters threw stones and attempted to break down the doors of the Government Stores.



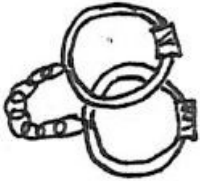
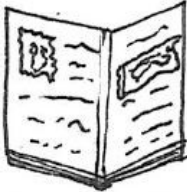

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RECIPE FOR A COLONY

Cut out the **Ingredients, Methods and Impacts**.

Match them up and glue them in the order they would need to be completed to establish a new colony.

Remember to place the greatest impact at the top and order them from greatest to least.

| INGREDIENTS | METHODS | IMPACTS |
|---|---|---|
|  | Develop rules and regulations and enforce them | Deforestation |
|  | Clear fields for crops and find locally accessible food sources | Disturb sacred eating site—midden |
|  | Provide sanitation to deal with waste and build a cemetery | Loss of food source |
|  | Provide a purpose for prisoners, teach them skills and help provide income for the prison | Loss of habitat |
|  | Find fresh water sources and dig wells for access |  |
|  | Build structures suitable for housing prisoners and warders | |