



English Learning for Curious Minds



**Member-only content
Transcript & Key Vocabulary**

Thank you - your ongoing membership makes Leonardo English possible.
If you have questions we'd love to hear from you: hi@leonardoenglish.com

Episode #108

Penal Colonies

20th Nov, 2020

[00:00:00] Hello, hello hello, and welcome to English Learning for Curious Minds, by Leonardo English.

[00:00:11] The show where you can listen to fascinating stories, and learn weird and wonderful things about the world at the same time as improving your English.

[00:00:22] I'm Alastair Budge and today we are going to be talking about [Penal](#)¹ Colonies, when Britain put hundreds of thousands of criminals on ships and sent them off to America and Australia for crimes as [minor](#)² as stealing a [loaf](#)³ of bread.

¹ relating to the punishment of criminals

² small or having little importance

³ bread that is shaped and baked in one piece



Penal Colonies

[00:00:39] Before we get right into that though, I want to tell you about something I'm really excited about, and it's a really cool new [feature](#)⁴ that's just launched on the website, on leonardoenglish.com.

[00:00:52] As you may know, you can get the subtitles and transcripts for all of our episodes on the website, but what you can do now is [hover over](#)⁵, or tap, on any of the harder words and immediately see what they mean.

[00:01:07] This makes following along with the audio even easier, it means you'll never miss a word, and will mean you'll learn a load of new vocabulary that you wouldn't have done otherwise.

[00:01:18] It's super exciting, so do go and check that out - the place to go is leonardoenglish.com.

[00:01:26] OK then, let's get started and talk about [penal](#) colonies, and the system of sending criminals thousands of miles away, to the other side of the world.

[00:01:37] The system, or idea, of sending people who have [committed](#)⁶ crimes away from society has existed throughout history.

[00:01:47] From a practical point of view, it makes sense.

⁴ a specific piece of functionality

⁵ put your mouse over for a short period

⁶ (of a crime) done



Penal Colonies

[00:01:50] If someone has [committed](#) a crime and you don't want them to do it again, you can either kill them, you [execute](#)⁷ them, or you put them somewhere that makes it harder to [commit](#)⁸ that crime again.

[00:02:03] That can either be in a prison or you can just send them away, so they physically can't come back and [commit](#) another crime.

[00:02:13] We have evidence from the Ancient Romans that [banishing](#)⁹ citizens, that not allowing them back into the city, was a common punishment for several crimes.

[00:02:25] Of course it doesn't just serve the purpose of removing them from the city so they're no longer a threat, it also acts as a [deterrent](#)¹⁰ to other people.

[00:02:36] If people know that they will be kicked out of a place for [committing](#)¹¹ a crime then they should be less likely to [commit](#) that crime.

⁷ killed as a legal punishment

⁸ (of a crime) do

⁹ sending away from a country or city as a punishment

¹⁰ something that makes others less likely to do something

¹¹ (of a crime) doing



Penal Colonies

[00:02:45] Until relatively recently, throughout Europe crime was met with pretty [harsh](#)¹² punishments, in order both to stop criminals from [committing](#) crimes again, and to [deter](#)¹³ others from [committing](#) them in the first place.

[00:03:01] Up until the 18th century in Britain, a large [proportion](#)¹⁴ of crimes were punishable by death, by [execution](#)¹⁵.

[00:03:10] Indeed, in 1777 there were 222 crimes in Britain that were punishable by death, and they weren't all what we could consider terrible, [capital](#)¹⁶ crimes today.

[00:03:24] In fact, most of them were some form of stealing, of [theft](#)¹⁷.

[00:03:31] At the time if you stole anything worth over 5 [shillings](#)¹⁸, which is today's equivalent of about €25, then you could be [executed](#)¹⁹, you could be killed.

[00:03:44] If you cut down a tree, if you stole a horse, or even if you stole a rabbit, you could be [executed](#), killed for your crimes.

¹² unpleasant, nasty and cruel

¹³ to stop someone from doing something by showing them that it will have bad results

¹⁴ the number of something, when compared to the whole

¹⁵ killing someone as a punishment

¹⁶ an offence punishable by death

¹⁷ stealing, taking without permission

¹⁸ a unit of money used in Britain until 1971

¹⁹ killed as a legal punishment



Penal Colonies

[00:03:56] This has led to the law of this period, of the 17th and 18th centuries, being called the Bloody Code, because of quite how little you needed to do to be [executed](#).

[00:04:10] It was also during this period that Britain had experienced the Agricultural and then Industrial Revolutions.

[00:04:19] Agricultural workers were being replaced by machines and better farming techniques, and they were [flocking](#)²⁰ to the city [in droves](#)²¹, they were moving to the city in large numbers.

[00:04:32] But cities in 17th and 18th century England were pretty horrible places.

[00:04:39] Living conditions were terrible, wages were very low, diseases spread quickly, there was a gin [epidemic](#)²² going on, and many people were reduced to stealing just to have enough food to survive.

[00:04:56] Crime rates increased dramatically, despite this Bloody Code that was intended to act as a [deterrent](#), to frighten people into not stealing.

[00:05:07] But when you have an empty stomach and the alternative is [starving to death](#)²³, I guess that really isn't much of a choice.

²⁰ moving in large amounts

²¹ in large amounts

²² the appearance of a disease or virus in large amounts of people at the same time

²³ dying through not having enough food



Penal Colonies

[00:05:17] The prisons that did exist filled up, and the British government started to use [warships²⁴](#), large boats, as huge floating prisons.

[00:05:28] These were normally old ships that were no longer in active military service, and they were kept just off-land, filled with prisoners in terrible conditions.

[00:05:42] Indeed, diseases such as [cholera²⁵](#) were [rife²⁶](#) on these ships, and prisoners died in large amounts. Although you might not be sentenced to death, being sent to one of these prison ships was a death sentence for many people.

[00:06:01] The ships were full, the prisons were full, and there was a growing movement from philosophers and public figures that just [executing²⁷](#) people for such small crimes as theft was morally wrong.

[00:06:18] But some punishment was required, otherwise there would be no [deterrent](#).

[00:06:22] You couldn't just [let people off²⁸](#) their crimes.

[00:06:26] Crime rates would go up. So something needed to be done.

²⁴ ships used for battle

²⁵ a serious infection of the bowels, normally caused by drinking or eating infected water or food

²⁶ if something is rife, it happens a lot

²⁷ killing as a punishment

²⁸ not punishing people



Penal Colonies

[00:06:30] The solution was what was called ‘transportation’, being sent in a ship far, far away.

[00:06:39] To begin with, criminals were sent to America, to the 13 colonies on the east coast of what is now the United States of America and Canada.

[00:06:50] This started actually in the 1610s.

[00:06:54] For crimes as small as stealing a [loaf](#) of bread you might be sentenced to be put on a ship and sent off to America for either 7 or 14 years.

[00:07:07] The ships were, as you might imagine, horrible, [rat-infested²⁹ vessels³⁰](#).

[00:07:13] If you did manage to survive the journey, you would in effect be sold to a [plantation³¹](#) owner in one of the new colonies.

[00:07:23] The working conditions when you got there were often terrible, it was forced labour for 10 hours a day, often alongside, and under exactly the same conditions, as the slaves on the [plantations³²](#).

[00:07:39] And even if you did manage to survive your 7 or 14 years, there was no free ticket back home.

²⁹ full of rats

³⁰ ships

³¹ a large farm, especially in the Americas, where a particular type of crop is grown

³² large farms, especially in the Americas, where a particular type of crop is grown



Penal Colonies

[00:07:48] You would have to pay for a ticket back to Britain, and given that these prisoners had been working as unpaid labourers for the duration of their time there, they had no money and no way to go home.

[00:08:02] They might find a job in the new colony, as a [jailer³³](#), or working as a servant, but it was very rare that they would ever be able to earn enough money for a ticket back to Britain.

[00:08:15] So in effect you were sent away for life.

[00:08:19] It's thought that anywhere between 60,000 and 120,000 prisoners were sent from Britain to America, which is up to 10% of the total migrants to America during that time.

[00:08:35] Now, part of the American founding story is that the founding fathers left Europe because they went in search for a better land, a home of the free, but the reality is that quite a large number of the early settlers were actually criminals, even if the crimes they might have committed were pretty [minor](#).

[00:09:00] This is something you certainly won't find taught in many American high school classes.

³³ a prison guard



Penal Colonies

[00:09:06] This continued until the American Revolution in 1776, when of course the Americans weren't so [keen](#)³⁴ on Britain using their newly independent country as an open jail, a place to [house](#)³⁵ British prisoners.

[00:09:22] So Britain needed to find somewhere else.

[00:09:26] It just so happened that 6 years earlier, in 1770, Captain James Cook had sailed from Plymouth, in the south west of England, all the way down the Atlantic, past the bottom of South America, around New Zealand, and then 'discovered' or rather he was the first known European to discover, Australia, which he [claimed](#)³⁶ as a British colony, [on behalf of](#)³⁷ the king, George III.

[00:09:58] It was decided that this new colony, on the other side of the world, was to be the next destination for British criminals.

[00:10:08] Indeed, one of the differences between how Britain viewed Australia and how it viewed America was that sending convicts to America was only a small part of its American policy.

³⁴ very interested

³⁵ (verb) to provide someone with a place to live or stay

³⁶ to say that something belongs to someone

³⁷ for



Penal Colonies

[00:10:22] With Australia, it was to be a **penal** colony, an island for prisoners, with convicts being an **instrumental**³⁸ part of the British plan to colonise and populate the island.

[00:10:36] So, Australia was to be the new America, the new destination for convicts, and on the 13th of May 1787 the first ships set sail for Australia, arriving 8 months later with 10% of the convicts on board dying during the journey.

[00:10:57] 10% actually turned out to be quite a good result - during later voyages up to 30% of the passengers, the convicts on board, would die during the trip.

[00:11:10] Of course, Australia is even further away from Britain than America, and if in America it was just very very hard to go back to Britain, from Australia there really was no going back.

[00:11:26] Conditions were just as **harsh** when you got there. The prisoners were set to work building new **settlements**³⁹. They were fiercely punished for any **misbehaviour**⁴⁰, and it was a cruel and hard life.

[00:11:41] Between the first voyage in 1787 and when the last convicts arrived in 1868 it's thought that more than 160,000 convicts, 160,000 prisoners, were transported from Britain to Australia.

³⁸ very important

³⁹ a group of houses built in a place where people didn't live before

⁴⁰ bad behaviour



Penal Colonies

[00:11:59] Indeed, now one in five Australians is the [descendant](#)⁴¹ of a convict, which is the subject of lots of rude jokes that Brits make about Australians.

[00:12:11] Of course, Britain wasn't the only country to have sent its prisoners off on boats or trains to far away lands.

[00:12:20] Other countries did it, and some, sadly, still do it.

[00:12:24] France used the [notoriously](#)⁴² awful Devil's Island, an island off French Guiana. If you've seen the cult film Papillon, that's where that took place.

[00:12:36]

[00:12:36] Devil's Island was also where Alfred Dreyfus was sent, the army officer wrongly convicted of treason, which [triggered](#)⁴³ The Dreyfus Affair.

[00:12:47] The Soviet Union transported millions of citizens from the West of the country to Siberia and the Central Asian states, places like Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, and Turkmenistan.

[00:13:00] These were mainly so called political prisoners, who were sent far away to be out of the way and not cause trouble in the west of the country, but also to start [settlements](#) in underpopulated areas of the Soviet Union.

⁴¹ someone who is related to you and born after you, e.g. child, grandchild

⁴² in a way that is well known for something bad

⁴³ caused



Penal Colonies

[00:13:16] If you want to learn more about that then you should check out the episode on the Aral Sea, the sea that disappeared.

[00:13:23] And North Korea still does it.

[00:13:27] [Granted⁴⁴](#), it's not sending prisoners off to the other side of the world because, well, it can't, but it's still sending unwanted [actors⁴⁵](#) far away to the other side of the country to work in labour camps.

[00:13:42] Britain started to stop sending prisoners to Australia in the 1850s, and the last British prisoners arrived in 1868.

[00:13:52] It ended over 150 years ago, but British culture and history is [peppered⁴⁶](#) with examples of people who were either sent to Australia, or who narrowly avoided it.

[00:14:06] If you've listened to the episode on the history of Harrods, the famous department store, you'll remember that the founder of Harrods narrowly escaped being sent to Australia for handling stolen goods.

[00:14:20] And perhaps the most well-known example of someone being sent to Australia is in the Dickens novel, Great Expectations.

⁴⁴ used when you know that something is true

⁴⁵ people

⁴⁶ filled, has large amounts of



Penal Colonies

[00:14:30] Pip, the small boy who helps a man at the opening of the book later discovers that this man, Magwitch, was a convict sent to Australia, who ends up making a lot of money, secretly sending it to Pip, and later returning to see what a man Pip had turned out to be.

[00:14:49] So, [penal](#) colonies, and the idea of sending prisoners to the other side of the world has left a lasting mark on the culture and history of Britain, on Australia, and even, although they wouldn't like to admit it, on The United States of America.

[00:15:08] OK then, that is it for today's episode on [Penal](#) Colonies, on sending prisoners to the other side of the world.

[00:15:16] I hope it's been an interesting one, and that when someone says something rude like 'Australia is full of criminals', then you'll know a little bit more about the history behind that.

[00:15:27] As a quick, final reminder, if you are looking to improve your English in a more interesting way, to join a community of curious minds from all over the world, and to unlock the transcripts, subtitles, and key vocabulary, then I'd definitely recommend checking out becoming a member of Leonardo English.

[00:15:45] We've just launched that super cool new [feature](#) that means you can [hover over](#) the words and discover their meaning right as you listen, so that's well worth a look, if you haven't done so already.

[00:15:56] The place to go is Leonardo.english.com



English Learning for Curious Minds | Episode #108

Penal Colonies

[00:15:59] You've been listening to English Learning for Curious Minds, by Leonardo

English

[00:16:05] I'm Alastair Budge, you stay safe, and I'll catch you in the next episode.

[END OF PODCAST]



Key vocabulary

Word	Definition
Penal	relating to the punishment of criminals
Minor	small or having little importance
Loaf	bread that is shaped and baked in one piece
Feature	a specific piece of functionality
Hover over	put your mouse over for a short period
Committed	(of a crime) done
Execute	killed as a legal punishment
Commit	(of a crime) do
Banishing	sending away from a country or city as a punishment
Deterrent	something that makes others less likely to do something
Committing	(of a crime) doing
Harsh	unpleasant, nasty and cruel
Deter	to stop someone from doing something by showing them that it will have bad results



Penal Colonies

Proportion	the number of something, when compared to the whole
Execution	killing someone as a punishment
Capital	an offence punishable by death
Theft	stealing, taking without permission
Shillings	a unit of money used in Britain until 1971
Executed	killed as a legal punishment
Flocking	moving in large amounts
In droves	in large amounts
Epidemic	the appearance of a disease or virus in large amounts of people at the same time
Starving to death	dying through not having enough food
Warships	ships used for battle
Cholera	a serious infection of the bowels, normally caused by drinking or eating infected water or food
Rife	if something is rife, it happens a lot
Executing	killing as a punishment



Penal Colonies

Let people off	not punishing people
Rat-infested	full of rats
Vessels	ships
Plantation	a large farm, especially in the Americas, where a particular type of crop is grown
Plantations	large farms, especially in the Americas, where a particular type of crop is grown
Jailer	a prison guard
Keen	very interested
House	(verb) to provide someone with a place to live or stay
Claimed	to say that something belongs to someone
On behalf of	for
Instrumental	very important
Settlements	a group of houses built in a place where people didn't live before
Misbehaviour	bad behaviour
Descendant	someone who is related to you and born after you, e.g. child, grandchild



Penal Colonies

Notoriously in a way that is well known for something bad

Triggered caused

Granted used when you know that something is true

Actors people

Peppered filled, has large amounts of

We'd love to get your feedback on this podcast.

What did you like? What could we do better?

What did you struggle to understand?

Let us know in the forum community.leonardoenglish.com

