

TUESDAY, 20TH AUGUST, 1878.

Hon. W. H. REYNOLDS, M.L.C., examined.

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663. *The Chairman.*] As you have for a long time been a Visiting Justice of the Dunedin Gaol we wish to get your evidence, Mr. Reynolds. Do you consider the gaol satisfactory in construction?—No, I do not.

664. Is there sufficient room for prisoners?—No.

665. Is there any means of classification?—No, not sufficient. In certain cases we can classify to a certain extent.

666. Can first offenders be kept separate from older and other offenders?—By dint of a great deal of scheming it has been done in certain cases.

667. Is it done always?—No.

668. In your opinion, can the Visiting Justices check any internal abuses in the gaol if there were any?—I do not think they could satisfactorily do so.

669. Have you heard complaints as to the discipline or administration of the gaol from the prisoners?—Yes, complaints have been made; but upon investigation we generally found them to be unfounded.

670. Are prisoners confined more than one in a cell?—Yes.

671. How many?—I can hardly tell you. When we had the Maori prisoners there were sometimes as many as fifty in an apartment.

672. But as to ordinary prisoners?—Sometimes two, sometimes three. I do not know any case of there being more.

673. At what work are the prisoners employed there?—Generally roadmaking, and in work for the Government. They used to be employed a good deal at the Botanical Gardens, in forming and laying out the grounds.

674. Do you think they could be advantageously employed in reclamation or some other big work?—They have been doing that; they have been taking down Bell Hill.

675. Is there any harbour work that would last a long time at which they could be employed?—Yes, they are now working at reclamation in the harbour.

676. I understand the prisoners are divided into several gangs?—Yes.

677. That involves a good deal of expense?—It is expensive.

678. What I wanted to know is, whether there is any large work about Dunedin harbour at which all the men could be employed profitably without their being separated into gangs?—I do not think it would be advisable to have all the men working together, if there are many of them. It might be attended with an evil result.

679. Are any trades taught them in prison?—Not that I am aware of.

680. Could they not be profitably employed in learning trades?—Of course, shoemakers are put to work at their trade; they make boots for the gaol, for the lunatic asylum, and the hospital. So with blacksmiths, tailors, and carpenters; they are each put to their respective trades. I do not know about teaching trades.

681. Is the gaol healthy?—Yes.

682. Are there any means of dealing with fire should it occur?—They have got plenty of water laid on—they have hose. Oh, I think so.

683. Are the Prison Regulations at present in force carefully adhered to?—I do not know as to the last six years. I have not been a Visiting Justice for six years. They were in force when I was a Visiting Justice.

684. You cannot speak as to the mark system?—No. When I joined the Government I ceased to attend as a Visiting Justice, and my place was filled up. I think the Regulations are carried out well, and I may add that, but for the Gaoler being a good man, it would be very difficult to work the gaol at all.

685. Is there a Prisoners' Aid Society in Dunedin?—Yes.

686. For the purpose of assisting men when they get out of gaol?—Yes.

687. Do men find it difficult to get work after they come out of gaol?—Yes, there is a little difficulty; but it has been in a great measure the fault of the class itself. Some men, when they have got employment, have behaved so badly, that a great number of people are now afraid to give them work.

688. Is there in Dunedin, so far as you have been able to judge, a criminal class; that is, men who are habitually committing crimes and being sent to gaol?—I think there is no doubt of it.

689. In your opinion, is there any danger of first offenders allying themselves to this criminal class from the connections they form in gaol?—I think it is the case very often. I should say it is the rule rather than the exception. They get hardened and callous to loss of character, and associate with these men.

690. Have you heard of their being followed up, when they have left gaol, by their late associates, when they wished to avoid them?—Yes, I have.

691. In your opinion, ought provision to be made for keeping first offenders absolutely separate from the other class?—I think it would be very advisable to do so; but I do not see how it is possible in Dunedin Gaol.

692. Do you think that gaol is fit for keeping long-sentence penal-servitude men and first offenders altogether?—They can be kept safely enough; but the gaol is not suitable, because you cannot classify.

693. *Mr. Seymour.*] Do you think the prisoners could be profitably employed in enlarging the gaol, so as to bring it into such a state as would allow of classification?—I do not think it is possible at Dunedin Gaol. You must recollect it originally was a very small gaol, and it has been patched and patched, till it has become almost impossible to enlarge it further. The ground is nearly all occupied now. Still, I think the prisoners are quite able to build a gaol on some other spot, if you could secure it. You might easily put up a gaol with concrete walls by prison labour.