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Skilled Workers at the Port Arthur Penal Settlement, 1830-1836 ¹

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In 1988 the *Convict Workers* project demonstrated that the convicts transported to New South Wales (NSW) between 1817 and 1840 were ordinary English and Irish workers whose labour was efficiently and productively employed in the colonies.² Further, that cross-section of the British working class included 'an upper stratum' of skilled workers who were efficiently matched to positions which utilised their skills and so 'did well out of the penal system'.³ *Convict Workers* paved the way for a raft of more nuanced investigations of the management and experience of skilled convict labour.⁴ However, we wonder how skilled workers fared at the penal settlements of NSW and Van Diemen's Land (VDL). Those 'colonial gulags', being 'zones of extra punishment' intended to buttress 'the preservation of law and discipline in the convict colony', bred workplace situations that were exceptional and distinct from other sections of the colonial economy.⁵

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- 1 This research is supported by the ARC Research Project, *Landscapes of Production and Punishment: The Tasman Peninsula* (DP170103642), administered by the University of New England.
 - 2 S. Nicholas (ed.), *Convict Workers: Reinterpreting Australia's Past*, Cambridge, 1988. For the historiography, see D. A. Roberts, 'The "knotted hands that set us high": labour history and the study of convict Australia', *Labour History*, No. 100, 2011, pp. 33-50.
 - 3 S. Nicholas and P. Shergold, 'A Labour Aristocracy in Chains', in Nicholas (ed.), *op. cit.*, pp. 98-108.
 - 4 H. Maxwell-Stewart, 'The rise and fall of John Longworth: work and punishment in early Port Arthur', *Tasmanian Historical Studies*, Vol. 6, No. 2, 1999, pp. 96-114; W. M. Robbins, 'The Lumber Yards: a case study in management of convict labour 1788-1832', *Labour History*, No. 79, 2000, pp. 141-161; C. Fredericksen, 'Confinement by Isolation: Convict Mechanics and Labour at Fort Dundas, Melville Island', *Australasian Historical Archaeology*, Vol. 19, 2001, pp. 48-59; B. Dyster, 'Bungling a courthouse: a story of convict workplace reform', *Journal of the Royal Australian Historical Society*, Vol. 93, No. 1, 2007, pp. 1-21; R. Tuffin, "'Where the Vicissitudes of Day and Night Are Not Known": Convict Coal Mining in Van Diemen's Land, 1822-1848', *Tasmanian Historical Studies*, Vol. 13, 2008, pp. 35-61; R. Tuffin, 'Australia's Industrious Convicts: A Reappraisal of Archaeological Approaches to Convict Labour', *Australian Archaeology*, Vol. 76, No. 1, 2013, pp. 1-12; R. Tuffin, 'Convicts of the "Proper Description": The Appropriation and Management of Skilled Convict Labour', *Labour History*, No. 114, 2018, pp. 69-92.
 - 5 D. A. Roberts, 'Colonial gulag: the populating of the Port Macquarie penal settlement, 1821-1832', *History Australia*, Vol. 14, No. 4, 2017, pp. 588-606. On the evolution and definition of penal settlements, see L. Ford and D. A. Roberts, 'New South Wales Penal Settlements and the Transformation of Secondary Punishment in the Nineteenth-Century British Empire', *Journal of Colonialism and Colonial History*, Vol. 15, No. 3, 2014, np.

In this article, we consider the example of the Port Arthur penal settlement on the Tasman Peninsula in VDL. Pursuing a notion that the value of skilled convict labour was more localised or situational than Nicholas and Shergold admitted, we ask what skills were considered the most valuable or useful at Port Arthur, in terms of the particular character and purpose of the settlement. We identify and assess the nature of the settlement's skilled workforce, and we consider how well that workforce suited or matched the needs of the settlement. This article hones in on the settlement's formative phase, from 1830 to 1836, when considerable importance was placed on convicts skilled in certain construction and manufacturing trades. That is also a period for which we have exemplary administrative records pertaining to work and production on the settlement, including a remarkable set of Statistical Returns which evaluated and measured the work performed in various occupational categories. Using data provided by the *Landscapes of Production and Punishment* project, as well as trade-related data harvested by the monumental *Founders and Survivors* project, we investigate the experience, management and value of skilled labour in this infamous workplace.⁶

* * *

Nicholas and Shergold claim that, in NSW, convicts skilled in construction trades — bricklayers, brickmakers, carpenters, plasterers, sawyers, slaters, stone cutters and stone masons for example — were highly likely to be employed in a similar capacity in the colony, often in government workplaces where they forged 'some familiar degree of job autonomy or independence' and found considerable scope for earning a decent living.⁷ That was an important contribution to understanding the application of British work skills to the early Australian labour market, contrasting with the bleak assessment of Noel Butlin who rued the 'massive obstacles to any attempt to compare skill/industry characteristics in Britain and Australia'.⁸ The problem, which Butlin evidently appreciated, is that the definition of a skilled worker is highly situational and may change according to time and place. Workers who are valued in one context might not be so in

⁶ Founders and Survivors <www.foundersandsurvivors.com> (3 January 2020).

⁷ Nicholas and Shergold, *op. cit.*, p. 107. They determined this through an analysis of literacy levels, literacy being 'a major characteristic of the artisan elite'. See also S. Nicholas, 'The Convict Labour Market', Nicholas (ed.), *Convict Workers*, pp. 111-126.

⁸ Butlin felt that 'efforts in this direction are at best pointless and at worst seriously misleading'. N. Butlin, 'White human capital in Australia, 1788-1850', *Working Papers in Economic History*, No. 32, Canberra, 1985, p. 36.

another. This was also the case within the colony itself. As Richard Tuffin put it, a convict's 'value as a productive unit was entirely dependent upon their workplace situation'. An individual who 'appeared to have a valuable set of skills could end up toiling in situations where their skills were of little use'.⁹

In other words, there were localised definitions of value and usefulness, shaped by the key policies, purposes and priorities governing a specific workplace.¹⁰ Nicholas and Shergold vaguely acknowledged the possibility of variances between 'one geographical area to another', but importantly their own study (of 1,389 skilled convicts in NSW at the time of the 1828 Census) does not include individuals under colonial sentence at any one of the colonial penal settlements.¹¹ In the closed, punitive environments of penal stations such as Port Arthur, 'power, punishment and penal labour' operated in exceptional ways.¹² The work undertaken was highly dependent on local needs and priorities, often orientated around major forms of extraction, production or manufacturing. The workers were more highly regulated and closely supervised than elsewhere, and preferential treatment and privileges were broadly discouraged.¹³ The privileges that skilled workers enjoyed elsewhere were presumably upset and diminished in these extra-penal environments.

Alternatively, as Tuffin and Gibbs have demonstrated, industry and labour at Port Arthur can also be seen as complex and dynamic, with the industrial and manufacturing emphases changing over time.¹⁴ Port Arthur went through a number of distinct phases in its early years, beginning as a hub of timber extraction and processing (felling, sawing and shingle-splitting), diversifying from 1832 into forms of manufacturing, especially shoemaking but also the making and

⁹ Tuffin, 'Convicts of the "Proper Description"', p. 72.

¹⁰ For an example of how deference and adaptability were more important than skill see D. A. Roberts, 'Masters, magistrates and the management of complaint: The 1833 convict revolt at Castle Forbes and the failure of local governance', *Journal of Australian Colonial History*, Vol. 19, 2017, p. 60.

¹¹ Nicholas and Shergold, *op. cit.*, p. 100.

¹² R. Evans and W. Thorpe, 'Power, Punishment and Penal Labour: *Convict Workers* and Moreton Bay', *Australian Historical Studies*, Vol. 25, No. 98, 1992, pp. 90-111.

¹³ See, for example, A. Maconochie, *Thoughts on Convict management and Other Subjects Connected with the Australian Penal Colonies*, Hobart, 1838, p. 9.

¹⁴ R. Tuffin and M. Gibbs, 'Early Port Arthur: Convict Colonization and the Formation of a Penal Station in Van Diemen's Land 1830-35', *International Journal of Historical Archaeology*, Vol. 23, 2019, pp. 568-595.

exporting of laths, spars and cartwheel parts, followed by coal mining and shipbuilding. There was also a raft of internal construction and maintenance activities. By the mid-1830s, the local authorities required a diverse workforce including sawyers, shoemakers, masons, lime and charcoal burners, blacksmiths, brickmakers and bricklayers, gardeners, miners and boat-builders. So, was Port Arthur's convict workforce well adapted to the settlement's changing industrial and construction needs? What skills were considered valuable and useful at Port Arthur, and did the value and use of particular trades change over time in line with the diversification of local industry during the 1830s?

* * *

Colonial sentencing practices in the 1830s appear to have supplied the Port Arthur settlement with a considerable number and variety of workers, in terms of the skills and occupations which individuals claimed to possess at the time they arrived in Van Diemen's Land. The Port Arthur population rose from 68 in 1830, to 938 in 1836, with 2,002 convicts sent during this period.¹⁵ A sample of that workforce has been constructed for this article, consisting of 700 individuals (35%) who arrived at the settlement between 1830 and 1836, for whom trade-on-arrival data can be procured.¹⁶ We have compressed the wide-ranging terminology given in the various statements of trade-on-arrival, although we acknowledge that the many levels of specialisation and skill identified in that terminology were important to contemporaries as markers of economic and social status.¹⁷ Our compression of terminology also removes designations such as 'boy', 'lad' or 'apprentice', where the term is used in conjunction with a named trade. Admittedly those terms are also important in considering skill level. Nevertheless, the purpose here is to capture trades or occupations, broadly defined, rather than level of skill or expertise.

¹⁵ 'Number of Convicts Remaining at Port Arthur', *Statistical Returns of Van Diemen's Land: from 1824 to 1839*, Hobart, 1839, Enclosure 37.

¹⁶ This cohort was identified from numerous sources, including bundles in the Colonial Secretary's General Correspondence 1824-1836 (CSO1), containing population and labour returns from the formative years of the settlement. See especially CSO1/484/10749, CSO1/511/11180 and CSO1/731/16936, Tasmanian Archives (TA). Other sources include 'Returns of convicts shipped to Port Arthur', 1834-1836, Tasmanian Papers (TP) 131, Mitchell Library (ML), Sydney. Details of trade-on-arrival are mostly gleaned from the Appropriation Lists of Convicts, 1822-1847, CON27, TA, with special thanks to Trudy Crowley for extracting that data.

¹⁷ The terminology distinguishes, for example, between a 'bricklayer', a 'bricklayer's labourer' and a 'bricklayer's boy', between a 'gardener', 'garden labourer' or 'kitchen gardener', or between 'sawyer', 'top sawyer' and 'pit sawyer'.

By this method it can be shown that the sample of 700 convicts sent to Port Arthur up to the end of 1836 possessed at least 110 different occupations at the time they arrived in the colony. Figure 1 presents 44 trades or designations which were claimed by three or more individuals. What is most notable, looking at the categories with the greatest representation (at the base of the table) is the extraordinary preponderance of unskilled labourers. On these figures, they appear to have featured disproportionately among the numbers sent to Port Arthur. The high number of shoemakers and tailors at Port Arthur reflected a specific government policy, as will be discussed later. Also notable is the strong presence of professional or 'educated' convicts, not easily construed as members of the labouring class. As in NSW, a place was sought to herd and hide those 'gentlemen' who were inclined to 'sow sedition and to excite bad feelings', even if they were not under a formal colonial sentence.¹⁸ There were at least 26 clerks, 4 surgeons, a dentist and a surveyor sent to Port Arthur between 1830 and 1836. Also notable is the high number of sailors/mariners, and also ploughmen ('the aristocrats of rural labour'),¹⁹ whose trades were not so well suited to the immediate needs of Port Arthur, at least during its founding stages.

However, most of the remainder of the station's workforce, when categorised by trade-on-arrival in the colony, possessed (or professed) trades associated with construction and manufacturing, broadly defined. Figure 2 is based on our adjusted version of the Nicholas-Shergold skills classification system, applied to the sample cohort of 700 convicts sent to Port Arthur between 1830 and 1836. This shows that around 42% (294 individuals) were, at the time of their arrival in the colony, skilled or semi-skilled in trades and occupations associated with construction (13%) and manufacturing (29%). Figure 3 provides a further breakdown of that 42% of convicts in our cohort classified by Nicholas-Shergold as belonging to the construction and manufacturing sectors, this time using broad occupational categories as per the 'Historical International Standard Classification of Occupations' (HISCO) system (here reduced to the 'two-digit' or 'minor group' level).

¹⁸ Arthur, Lieutenant-Governor, to Goderich, 15 February 1833, in Colonial Office, Original Correspondence Tasmania, CO 280/39, pp. 154-156, National Library of Australia (NLA); D. A. Roberts, "'The Valley of Swells': Educated convicts on the Wellington Valley settlement, 1827-31", *History Australia*, Vol. 3, No. 1, 2006, pp. 11.1-11.21.

¹⁹ W. A. Armstrong, 'Labour 1: Rural Population Growth, Systems of Employment, and Incomes', in J. Thirsk (ed.), *The Agrarian Question of England and Wales, Vol. 4: 1750-1850*, Cambridge, 1989, p. 675; B. Reay, *Microhistories: Demography, Society and Culture in Rural England, 1800-1930*, Cambridge, 1996, p. 27.

Figure 1: Sample of Port Arthur Convicts 1830-1836, showing Trade on Arrival in the Colony

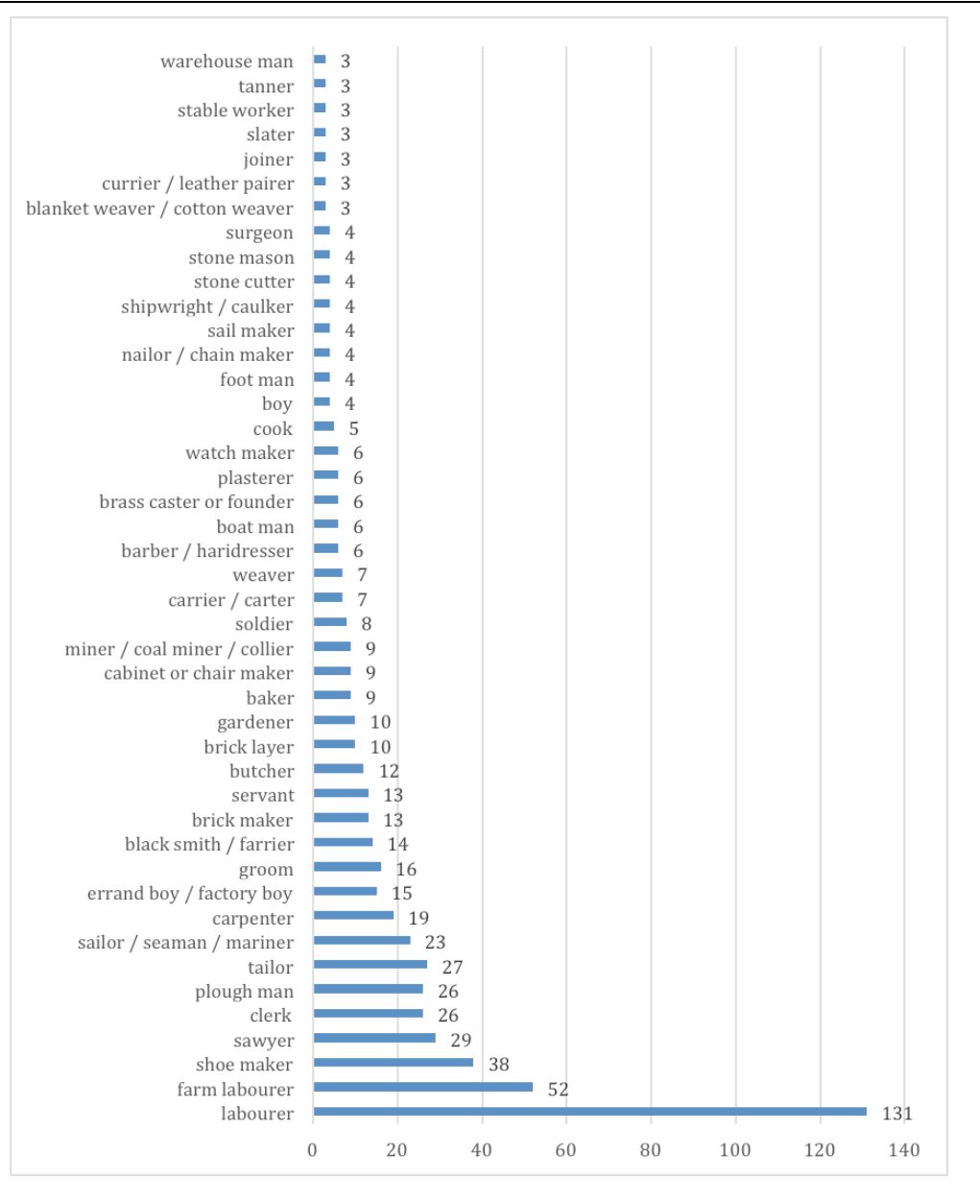
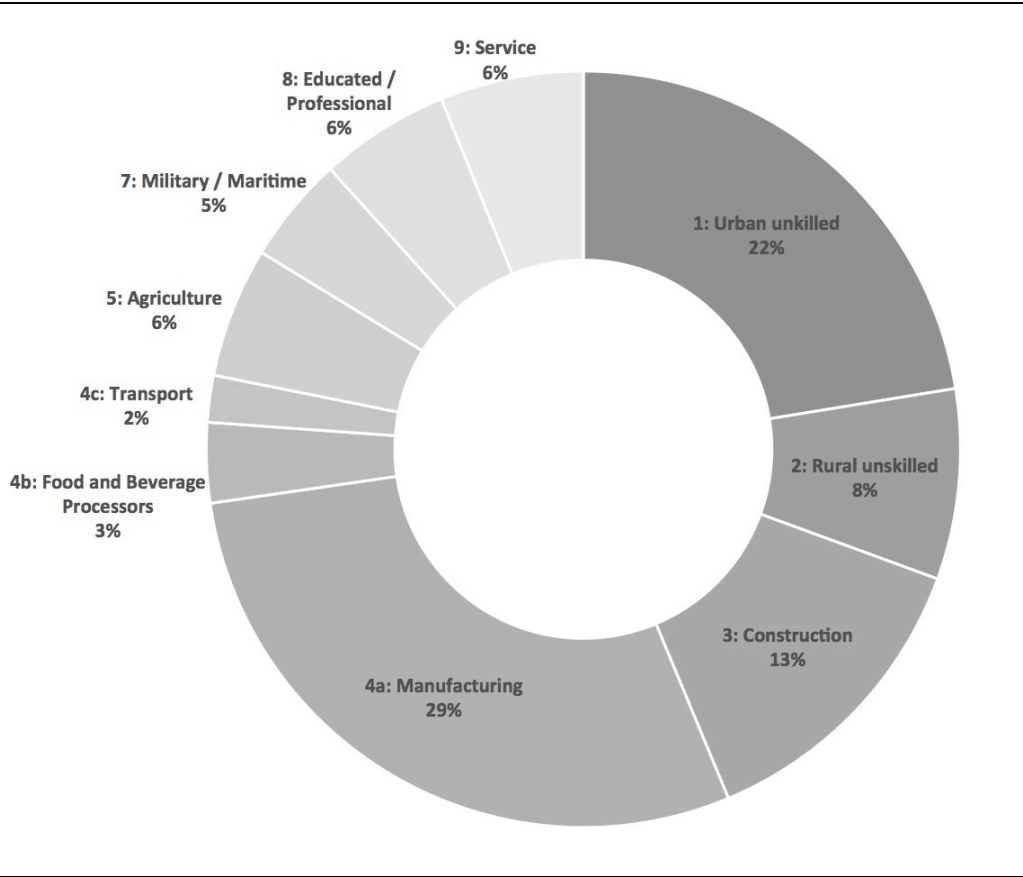


Figure 2: A sample of 700 convicts at Port Arthur, 1830-1836, showing trade-on-arrival in the colony, categorised using the Nicholas-Shergold skills classification system (adjusted) *



- Nicholas and Shergold (*op. cit.*, pp. 223-224) adapted the Brown-Armstrong skills classification system, creating more categories (9 in total) in order to better distinguish between urban and rural skills, and to separate workers in the fields of construction and manufacturing/transport. We have further divided Manufacturing/Transport (their Category 4) into the subcategories: 4a: Manufacturing; 4b: Food Processors (butcher, baker, miller, confectioner); and 4c: Transport (bargeman, boatman, carrier, carter).

In the graph above 4a: manufacturing includes: awl blade maker/sickle maker; barber/hairdresser; bell hanger; blacksmith or farrier; blanket weaver / cotton weaver; boat builder; book binder; brass caster or founder; button plater; cabinet or chair maker; carder; carpet weaver; compositor; cooper; cordwainer; cotton manufacturer; currier or leather pairer; dish maker; dyer; engraver; fellmonger; file cutter; file grinder; glazier; gun finisher; hammer man; iron founder or refiner; jeweller; lath render; letter press printer; linen draper; marble polisher; miner/collier; nailor/chain

maker; painter; pencil/pocket book/comb/button maker; picture frame maker; plane maker; quarrier; saddler/harness maker; sail maker; shipwright or caulker; shoemaker; tile maker; tailor; tanner; tinker; tobacco cutter; umbrella maker; upholsterer; warehouse man; watch maker; weaver; well sinker; wheelwright; whitesmith; wood pump maker; wool comber

Figure 3: Port Arthur convicts 1830-1836, possessing manufacturing trades on arrival in the colony, using Historical International Standard Classification of Occupations (HISCO) system at 'Minor Group' Level

Occupational Grouping	HISCO	No
Bricklayers, Carpenters and Other Construction Workers	95	55
Shoemakers and Leather Goods Makers	80	41
Tailors, Dressmakers, Sewers, Upholsterers and Related Workers	79	34
Blacksmiths, Toolmakers and Machine Tool Operators	83	27
Spinners, Weavers, Knitters, Dyers and Related Workers	75	17
Cabinetmakers and Related Woodworkers	81	14
Miners, Quarrymen, Well Drillers and Related Workers	71	10
Wood Preparation Workers and Paper Makers	73	29
Glass Formers, Potters and Related Workers	89	15
Metal Processors (brass and iron)	72	8
Machinery Fitters or Assemblers and Precision-Instrument Makers	84	7
Tanners, Fellmongers and Pelt Dressers	76	7
Hairdressers, Barbers, Beauticians and Related Workers	57	6
Printers and Related Workers	92	5
Production and Related Workers Not Elsewhere Classified	94	5
Clerical and Related Workers Not Elsewhere Classified	39	3
Jewellery and Precious Metal Workers	88	3
Stone Cutters and Carvers	82	4
Metal Preparers and Erectors	87	2
Painters	93	2
TOTAL		294

This allows us to further dissect construction and manufacturing into twenty subcategories, showing the preponderance of 'Bricklayers, Carpenters and Other Construction Workers' (Figure 3).²⁰ At least some of these trades would in Britain have been considered elite and, nominally, can be imagined to have enjoyed high levels of value and usefulness in the colony. So, our questions are, how well were those trades matched to the needs of the Port Arthur settlement, and how useful or valuable were they in the context of the industries that were prioritised at particular points during these early years?

* * *

Some answers to these questions are provided by the immense bureaucratic infrastructure devised to support the convict system in Van Diemen's Land in these years. In 1836 the Port Arthur authorities compiled detailed reports which sought to define and quantify the 'rate' and 'value' of the work undertaken by labourers and mechanics in various occupations, as well as of the value of various goods and materials exported from the settlement. These Statistical Returns, devised by the Commandant in consultation with the station superintendent and 'competent mechanics', offered a formula by which 'the value of labour could be rendered at once concise and intelligible'.²¹ This was done by assigning a weekly value to each of the various fields of work undertaken on the settlement.²² Thirteen occupations or 'denominations' of labour were identified, ranging from those assigned the highest value — namely 'carpenters, turners [and] wheelwrights', as well as shipwrights — down to those of the lowest value, being tailors, gardeners and, at the very base, the 'chain gangs and other labourers' (Figure 4).

The estimated value of labour was then multiplied by the 'number of days' (also articulated as weeks) of work undertaken in each

²⁰ Historical International Standard of Classification of Occupations <historyofwork.iisg.nl> (3 August 2020)

²¹ Booth, Commandant to Montagu, Colonial Secretary, 8 August 1836, CSO1/869/18399, TA. Some of the original statistical returns are missing from the Colonial Secretary's papers but were among 46 documents published as *Statistical Returns of Van Diemen's Land: from 1824 to 1839*, Hobart, 1839. We are indebted to Dr Richard Tuffin for his input and assistance in analysing the Statistical Returns.

²² *Ibid.* In some cases that was based on an average of the estimated worth of labour performed by the different classes of work or worker in each particular field. So, for example, the labour of carpenters was assigned a value of 18 shillings per week (Figure 4), being the average of the estimated value of work performed by 'first', 'second' and 'third class' carpenters which ranged from 24 to 12 shillings per week.

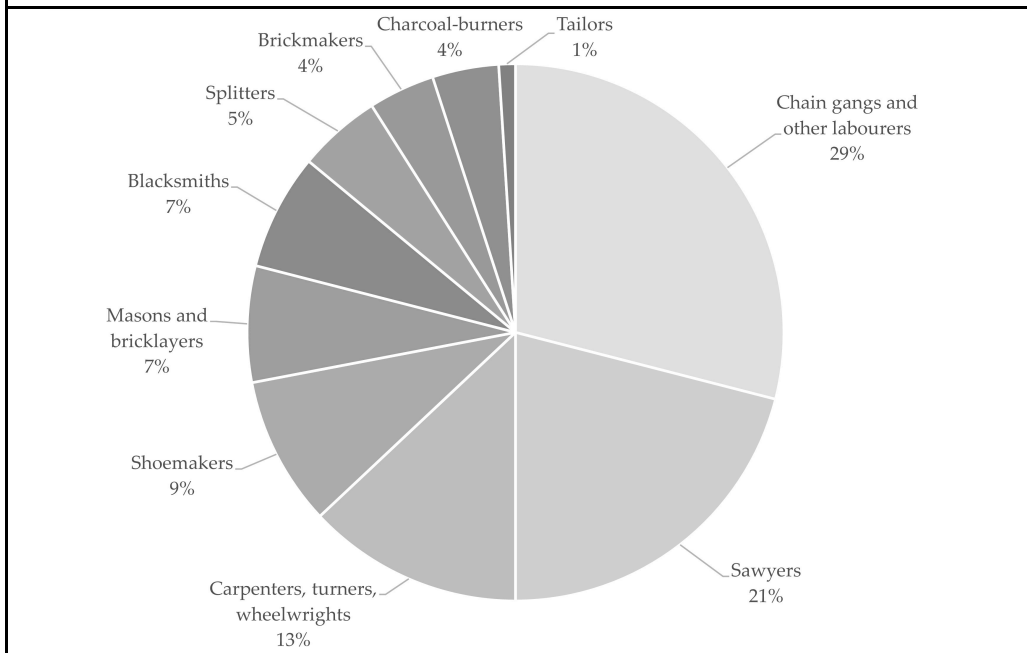
occupation, to arrive at a total monetary value of the labour performed in each occupation. This was apparently based on an estimate of the number of people employed in a particular occupational category across the course of each year. In 1832, for example (see Figure 4), sawyers, each valued at 15s per week, were given as performing 1,248 weeks of labour, seemingly based on an estimate that twenty-four sawyers were employed per day on average across 52 weeks that year. That amounted to £936 worth of labour in 1832. In the same year, splitters, given as being worth the lower value of 10s each per week, and engaging only nine workers across the year for a total of 468 'labour weeks', produced £468 worth of labour. The simplest interpretation of these statistics might be that that sawyers were more valued than splitters at Port Arthur in 1832, in terms of both the estimated daily/weekly value of their labour and the number of workers assigned to that field of work.

Of course, these statistics defy simplistic interpretation. The total annual value of the labour calculated for each category is not, on its own, particularly useful to our analysis. Note, for example, that in 1832 (Figure 4) the highest annual value of labour was attributed to the 'chain gangs and other labourers', even though a ganged labourer was assigned the lowest worth at 4s per week. The annual value is skewed because ganged and general labour accounted for the (overwhelmingly) largest number of workers (befitting the penal nature of the settlement) and thus also provides the highest collective measurement of 'labour in weeks'. As illustrated in Figure 5a, between 1831 and 1835, ganged and other labour generated between 28% and 33% of the estimated annual value of work at Port Arthur, yet accounted for around 60% of the workforce. In contrast (Figure 5b), bricklayers formed a much smaller percentage of the workforce (between 2% and 4%) but, with the weekly labour of each being valued at 15s, their contribution to the total value of labour at settlement was disproportionately higher than that of ganged labourers. Ganged labour was of more value to the settlement overall, but blacksmiths were more valuable than labourers per head and in terms of their relative contribution.

Figure 4: Estimated Value of Labour in the Statistical Reports, Port Arthur, 1832.

Occupation	Value per week (shillings)	Estimated Value of Labour, Port Arthur, 1832		
		No. employed*	Labour (weeks)	Labour (value)
Carpenters, turners, wheelwrights	18s	12	624	£234
Shipwrights	18s	0	0	£0
Blacksmiths	17s	7	364	£309
Masons and bricklayers	15s	8	416	£312
Sawyers	15s	24	1248	£936
Brickmakers	15s	5	260	£195
Miners	15s	0	0	£0
Shoemakers	11s	14	728	£400
Splitters	10s	9	468	£234
Charcoal-burners	10s	7	364	£182
Tailors	8s	1	52	£20
Gardeners	7s	0	0	£0
Chain gangs and other labourers	4s	123	6396	£1,279
		210	10,920	£3,774

* The number employed is not stated in the Statistical Returns but it was evidently the basis for calculating 'Labour in Weeks', based on one labourer per day across 52 weeks.

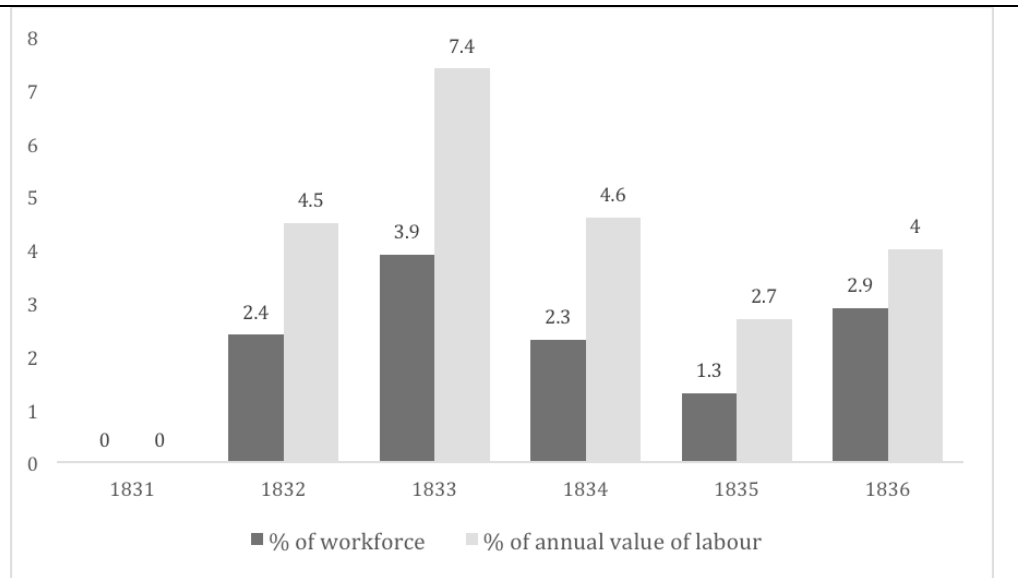


Source: Return No.41 in *Statistical Returns of Van Diemen's Land: from 1824 to 1839*, Hobart, 1839.

Figure 5a: Chain gangs and other labourers as a percentage of workforce, Port Arthur, 1831-1836.

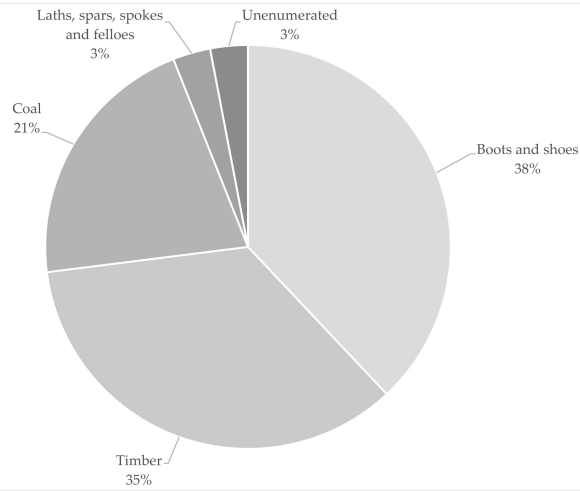


Figure 5b: Bricklayers as percentage of workforce, Port Arthur, 1831-1836.



Source: Return No.41 in *Statistical Returns of Van Diemen's Land: from 1824 to 1839*, Hobart, 1839.

Figure 6a: Value of goods (£) exported from Port Arthur, 1831-1836, as a %



Timber (firewood, sawn timber, shingles)	£6967.55.0
Boots and shoes	£7727.6.0
Coal	£4329.95.0
Laths, spars, Cartwheel spokes and felloes	£611.2.0
Unenumerated	£574.0.0

Figure 6b: Value of Goods (£) Exported from Port Arthur, 1831-1836 by Year



Source: 'Return, Showing the Value of Exports from Port Arthur ...', Return No.45 in *Statistical Returns of Van Diemen's Land: from 1824 to 1839*, Hobart, 1839.

The problem, we assert, is that the statistics are at least partially fictitious. The methodology informing the Statistical Returns were highly tendentious, as the Port Arthur authorities admitted.²³ Cross-checking with quarterly returns of labour provided by the settlement authorities in 1831-1832 shows that the estimations of numbers working at a particular trade, as provided retrospectively in the Statistical Returns, were just approximations and guesswork. Further, it is unclear how the weekly value of each labour category was arrived at, being significantly lower than contemporary wage rates.²⁴ Nor is it certain how, or even if, the value of labour was tied to the value of exports, or to the value of the labour directed towards the construction and maintenance of the settlement itself. The Statistical Returns also calculated the value of materials and goods produced at and exported from Port Arthur between 1831 and 1836 (see Figures 6a and 6b), but again it is likely that the volumes and values assigned to such things as the quantity of timber cut or the amount of 'produce' vegetables cultivated were quite arbitrary and approximate.

Nevertheless, although the Statistical Returns were clearly a bureaucratic contrivance, they *were* figured for the purpose of measuring output and productivity in relative terms. So, although we cannot rely on them arithmetically, the Returns allow for basic comparisons of value across labour categories, measured in estimated earning rates, in the labour allotted to particular fields of work, and in the calculated volumes and value of materials produced both for export and internal use. That is, they give some indication of how value and usefulness was defined by Port Arthur administrators. They allow us to see differences between, for example, the labour of blacksmiths, who made and repaired a wide variety of tools, compared to charcoal burners whose labour had some export value (bags of charcoal from Port Arthur being sent to the Engineers Department in Hobart Town).²⁵ In 1832 both enterprises employed seven labourers throughout the year, yet the annual value of the blacksmiths' labour was rated as significantly (1.7 times) higher than that of the charcoal

²³ Booth, Commandant, to Montagu, Colonial Secretary, 8 August, 1836, CS01/869/18399, TA.

²⁴ Emigration literature advertised that 'common mechanics' such as blacksmiths, carpenters, coopers, joiners, sawyers, stone masons and shinglers could, in New South Wales and Van Diemen's Land, earn ten shillings a day in the early 1830s. See *The Emigrant's Guide to New South Wales, Van Diemen's Land, Lower Canada, Upper Canada and New Brunswick*, London, 1832.

²⁵ Mahon, Commandant, to Burnett, Colonial Secretary, 26 June 1832, CS01/509/11138, TA.

burners (Figure 4). Such differences in value could be reflected in real decisions concerning the organisation of labour at the settlement. The local production of charcoal suffered in 1832, for example, because, as Commandant Mahon explained, local labour shortages made it 'impossible to furnish charcoal for the Engineer Department without diminishing an equal quantity of labour of *a more valuable description*' (emphasis added).²⁶ In short, it was sometimes necessary to sideline lower-value and less urgent labour. But further, the Statistical Returns tell us that what was considered valuable and useful changed over time, as explained below.

* * *

Port Arthur was established as a timber getting station, so unsurprisingly an early labour structure emerged in which the most valuable trades were those associated with timber, especially sawyers. The extraction and movement of timber was also fundamental to the punitive aims of the settlement, 'as the getting of heavy logs and carrying the sawed timber from the saw pits to the settlement' was considered 'the severest description of labour'.²⁷ In 1831, timber-based materials — firewood, sawn timber and shingles — accounted for just under 97% (£981) of the £1,014 worth of products exported from Port Arthur, mostly earned from 210,000 feet of sawn timber worth £836. The 3% (£32) of export value derived from 'unenumerated' goods most likely, in this phase, consisted of the mimosa bark that was procured from the felling operations. Then there was, in addition, the materials produced and labour expended on establishing the settlement's internal infrastructure, notably the construction of barracks and workshops, which made use of another 249,000 feet of sawn timber in that year. The carpenters, turners, wheelwrights, sawyers and splitters accounted for 39% of the total value of labour at the settlement in 1831.²⁸ By all measures, the timber-related trades were thus more valuable than brick making and charcoal burning in terms of the needs and wants of the settlement, at that time.

²⁶ Mahon, Commandant, to Arthur, Lieutenant-Governor, 6 March, 1832, CSO1/483/10748, TA.

²⁷ Gibbons, Commandant, to Burnett, Colonial Secretary, 5 March 1833, CSO1/477/10639, TA. See also Gibbons, Commandant, to Burnett, Colonial Secretary, 10 November 1832, CSO1/498-10934, TA.

²⁸ 'Return Showing the Amount of Labour Expended', *Statistical Returns of Van Diemen's Land: from 1824 to 1839*, Hobart, 1839, Enclosure 37.

By 1833, however, an important shift was underway in the type and value of labour at Port Arthur. This was caused by a significant influx of shoemakers to the settlement. Following a complaint from the Inspector of Roads that shoemakers and tailors in the chain gangs at Hobart and Bridgewater were being illicitly employed for private profit, it was agreed they should be removed to Port Arthur. As they were 'not much likely to enhance the value of a sawing establishment', it was proposed a shoemaking operation be established on 'a large scale' on the settlement, and orders were given for all leather in the ordnance store in Hobart Town to be immediately forwarded for that purpose.²⁹ A 'tailors' gang' was proposed for Port Arthur shortly afterwards, in September 1832, although it was slower to develop.³⁰ A 'tailor establishment' was reportedly operating by May 1835 (independent of the similar work now being undertaken at the boys' prison of Point Puer) 'for the making of the sheep skin clothing', although it was at that stage hampered by the want of thread and needles (see D'Gluyas' article in this volume).³¹ Our data shows that very few of the tailors sent to Port Arthur in this period were employed at their trade. Rather, they were put to work as labourers, water carriers and, in the case of Thomas McCann, as the settlement's flagellator.

Shoemaking, in contrast, thrived quickly at Port Arthur. In September 1833, 32 shoemakers (in addition to 6 'boys and learners') made 47 pairs of boots and shoes for local officers and administrators (as well as their wives and children), and 422 pairs of laced boots for the ordnance stores in Hobart Town, in addition to repairing boots and shoes in the settlement itself.³² In the following month, children's shoes were being crafted from the leftover pieces of leather from kip hides (or untanned hides, probably from young calves), the products

29 O'Connor, Inspector of Roads, to Burnett, Colonial Secretary, 7 July 1832, and Mahon, Commandant, to Burnett, Colonial Secretary, 11 July, 1832, CSO1/477/10639, TA; Memorandum by Burnett, Commandant, 8 October 1832, CSO1/477/10639, TA. For a study on the shoemakers at Port Arthur see C. Martin, 'Shoemaking and Reform Agendas at Port Arthur Penal Station', BA(Hons) thesis, University of Tasmania, 2006.

30 Gibbons, Commandant, to Burnett, Colonial Secretary, 23 September 1832, CSO1/613/13997, TA.

31 Booth, Commandant, to Montagu, Colonial Secretary, 11 May 1835, CSO1/484/10750, TA.

32 'Return of Prisoners at Port Arthur from the 1st to the 28th February 1833 showing their trades, and the number of each', 28 February 1833, CSO1/511/11180, TA.

being sent to the orphan school at Hobart.³³ According to the Statistical Returns, in 1833 shoemakers accounted for nearly 10% of the labour performed on the settlement (given as the equivalence of 1,924 weeks of labour, or the work of 37 men across the year). There were more shoemakers at Port Arthur in 1833 than sawyers, whereas in the previous year sawyers had outnumbered shoemakers by nearly 2 to 1.³⁴ While the value of their labour was not as high as that of the sawyers or carpenters (Figure 4) shoemakers generated considerable value in terms of their exports. The 'men's strong lace boots' and 'women's and girls' shoes' produced by Port Arthur shoemakers accounted for almost 40% of all exports from the settlement during this period (Figure 6a).³⁵

There was another change between 1833 and 1835. This was primarily due to the rise of two new industries: shipbuilding and mining.³⁶ Some form of boat building was conducted at Port Arthur in its early years. In 1833 there were four boatbuilders at the settlement who finished work on a four-oared whale boat and a new schooner.³⁷ In 1834 the dockyards were formally established under the Master Shipwright, John Watson, although the operation was delayed by a lack of facilities and by the removal of some of 'the best hands' back to Hobart Town.³⁸ Nevertheless, the operation soon expanded to include the making of oars, masts and keels, and the Master Shipwright requested an efficient cooper to assist in making buoys wanted for the Tamar River (Launceston).³⁹ By January 1835, the shipwrights were employing 6 of the 22 pairs of sawyers at the settlement, meaning there

33 Booth, Commandant to Montagu, Colonial Secretary, 9 November, 1833, CSO1/678/15003, TA.

34 'Return of Crown Prisoners at Port Arthur showing the number of each Trade for the month ending 30th September 1833', CSO1/511/11180, TA.

35 'Return, showing the value of exports from Port Arthur from 1831 to 1835', *Statistical Returns of Van Diemen's Land From 1824 to 1839*, Hobart, 1839, Enclosure 45.

36 For studies of shipbuilding and mining in Van Diemen's Land see M. Nash, 'Convict Shipbuilding in Tasmania', *Papers and Proceedings: Tasmanian Historical Research Association*, Vol. 50, No. 2, 2003, pp. 83-106; Tuffin, "'Where the Vicissitudes of Day and Night Are Not Known'", pp. 35-61.

37 'Return of Crown prisoners at Port Arthur ... July 1833', CSO1/511/11180, TA; 'Return of Work done by mechanics at Port Arthur in the month of September 1833', CSO1/511/11180, TA.

38 Diary of Charles O'Hara Booth, 12 April 1834, in Bonwick Transcripts, Vol. 25, ML, p. 21; Booth, Commandant, to Montagu, Colonial Secretary, 15 December 1835, CSO1/726/15795, TA.

39 'Return of Work done by Mechanics and others at Port Arthur during the month of May 1834', CSO1/511/11180, TA.

were not enough remaining top sawyers to complete requisitions from the Civil Engineer.⁴⁰ In 1836, the dockyard constructed twenty-three boats valued at £705, in addition to undertaking various alterations and repairs to other vessels, estimated to be worth another £780. Although there were concerns about the 'great expense' of the establishment it was deemed viable for 'as long as the timber lasts'.⁴¹ Like mining, beginning in 1833 after coal was discovered nearby at Sloping Main (later Coal Mines), shipbuilding brought significant productive qualities to the settlement. By the mid-1830s, shipwrights, shoemakers and miners were worth more to Port Arthur than sawyers and carpenters (Figure 6b).

Beyond the quantifiable value of labour and the price of exports, the importance or usefulness of particular skills and trades within a particular workplace is evidenced in the demand for specific types of worker. Although the composition of Port Arthur's workforce was determined largely by colonial sentencing practices, the settlement receiving whomever the courts and certain public officials thought deserving of punishment, many convicts actually arrived following requests for additional and certain types of labour. Correspondence on the subject clearly indicates which trades were most needed and prized at particular times. In September 1831, for example, Commandant John Mahon requested 'about twenty able body men, free from rupture ... also a cooper, a carpenter, and two or three brickmakers, and some top sawyers'. With these, he said, 'the profits to be derived from this establishment would be much increased'.⁴² In March 1832, Mahon requested another one-hundred men to be 'employed ... in furthering sawed stuff, shingles, bricks and charcoal', again expecting 'the profit ... would be very considerable'.⁴³ At the same time, many sawyers were being returned to Hobart Town on account of good behaviour and expiration of sentence. When that threatened the fulfilment of requisitions from the Engineer's Department at Hobart Town, the Lieutenant Governor ordered that 'Sawyers & Splitters must not be

⁴⁰ Booth, Commandant to Montagu, Colonial Secretary, 20 January 1835, CSO1/477/1069, TA.

⁴¹ 'Return of Shipwrights Work at Port Arthur In 1834 and 1835', *Statistical Returns of Van Diemen's Land From 1824 to 1839*, Hobart, 1839, Enclosure 46; Booth, Commandant, to Montagu, Colonial Secretary, 19 November 1835, CSO1/726/15795, TA.

⁴² Mahon, Commandant, to Burnett, Colonial Secretary, 23 September 1831, CSO1/477/10639.

⁴³ Mahon, Commandant, to Arthur, Lieutenant-Governor, 6 March, 1832, CSO1/483/10748.

withdrawn from Port Arthur'.⁴⁴ Such was the importance of industry at Port Arthur that good behaviour sometimes became an inconvenience.

Aside from demand for the labour of particular trades within a penal environment, we can ascertain what trades were of particular importance through the level of investment in them. Shoemaking was considered economic and had considerable export value, and so investment in it was increased in 1834 with plans for a new and 'far more extensive' shoemaking workshop.⁴⁵ The salary of the superintendent of shoemakers was also to be raised and a second overseer appointed, for it was expected that the return would increase proportional to the number of men employed'.⁴⁶ On the other hand, the relative value of sawyers appeared to decrease. Until the mid-1830s, sawyers were undoubtedly among the most valued workers at Port Arthur, producing 873,600 feet of timber in 1835. But in 1836 this dropped 57% to 373,728 feet,⁴⁷ and sawyers in that year made up only 7.5% of the total value of labour on the settlement, less than the bricklayers and masons, and down from 33% in 1832.⁴⁸ In these ways, the organisation of convict labour at Port Arthur shifted, evidencing how the value and usefulness of skilled labour was in fact highly situational and subject to change. How then did skilled workers fare in this localised and fluctuating environment?

* * *

We have ascertained that the station's workforce consisted of a high number of individuals who arrived in the colony possessing trades associated with construction and manufacturing. But were these skills applicable and well adapted to the particular and changing needs of the fledgling settlement of Port Arthur? As a penal settlement, Port Arthur's labour force was mostly predicated on sentences awarded for crime and misconduct, rather than a matching of skills to the industrial

⁴⁴ Gibbons to Burnett, Colonial Secretary, 5 March, 1833, CSO1/477/10639.

⁴⁵ Arthur, Lieutenant-Governor, to Montagu, Colonial Secretary, 5 May 1834, CSO1/716/15655, TA. A description of these workshops can be found in Lempriere, *op. cit.*, p. 110.

⁴⁶ 'Minutes of the Executive Council', 9 June 1834, and 26 June 1834, EC 4/3, TA.

⁴⁷ 'A Return, showing the quantity of timber cut, and its distribution, at Port Arthur, from 1830 to 1835, both inclusive; likewise the three years ending 1836, 1837, & 1838', *Statistical Returns of Van Diemen's Land From 1824 to 1839*, Hobart, 1839, Enclosure 43.

⁴⁸ Returns No. 42 and 45, in *Statistical Returns of Van Diemen's Land From 1824 to 1839*, Hobart, 1839.

requirements of the settlement. Moreover, workers were constantly coming and going according to the terms of their sentences. There were, for example, complaints about the withdrawal of shipwrights, highly specialised workers in a trade that required considerable practical skill and technical knowledge. The authorities were able to replace them with the likes of William Grant and William Pearce, shipwrights by trade who were convicted together for stealing pine boards belonging to the Crown.⁴⁹ However, frequent complaints from the Port Arthur authorities about the quality of workers and the many requests for additional workers with particular skills and trades, suggests that the settlement's role as a punishment station did not always suit its economic and industrial aims.

Of the sample compiled for this study — 700 convicts for whom we have a statement of trade-on-arrival in the colony — 350 individuals, precisely half, can be matched to a particular form of employment at Port Arthur in the study period, sometimes to different employments at different times during the period under study. This subset encompasses 91 different trade categories (of the 110 identified in the larger dataset, illustrated in Figures 2 and 3). Some of our findings are presented in Figures 7, 8 and 9. Figure 7 shows the employment of fifty individuals who, at the time of their arrival in the colony, professed construction-related trades. This data shows that there was a reasonable degree of success in setting skilled convicts to work at their trade at Port Arthur. For example, five out of seven men who identified themselves as carpenters on their arrival in the colony were later working in that trade at Port Arthur (as were four men who had claimed to be cabinet or chair makers). The correlation was more pronounced for the sawyers. Nineteen men who had professed to be sawyers were all employed in that work at Port Arthur, some of them as overseers of sawyers, although Edward Pyzer worked as a shipwright. The only two exceptions were William Hewitt, who was an invalid, and Cornelius Brisnahan who joined the shoemakers. Four of the five stonemasons and stonecutters worked at their trade, at some point. Unsurprisingly, nearly all of those who had stated they were shoemakers were employed at their trade at Port Arthur, many having been sent there for that specific purpose, as noted above.

Other specialised skills were found useful too. William Moore was put to work at his old trade of file cutting, while another file cutter,

⁴⁹ Conduct Records, William Grant per *Strathfieldsay*, CON31/1/16, and William Pearce per *Emperor Alexander*, CON31/1/35, TA.

George Crossland, crafted nails at Port Arthur. Sometimes the terms of sentencing to Port Arthur actually specified that an individual was to work in his field of expertise, a caveat inserted by the Lieutenant Governor and applied particularly to skilled workers in the fields of carpentry and metalwork but also to some other manufacturing and construction trades.⁵⁰ Menassah Booth, for example, was sent 'to be employed at his trade as a cooper' after his seven year sentence of transportation was extended by three years in late 1831.⁵¹ Robert French, a brickmaker sentenced to two years imprisonment by the Chief Police Magistrate in Hobart, was ordered to Port Arthur to 'be employed at his trade in chains'.⁵² There were uses also for convicts whose former occupations were not immediately germane to the settlement's key industries. Soldiers, for example, were put to work in what might be considered cognate pursuits such as flagellator, watchman and constable (Figure 8).⁵³ These were roles which, although not assessed and evaluated in the Statistical Returns, could be considered crucial and privileged within the settlement's hierarchical structure.

British and colonial sentencing practices, however divorced they were from the actual onsite operations at Port Arthur, nonetheless managed to provide the settlement with many of the skills that were needed or useful in the context of the industries that were prioritised there in these early years. Yet naturally there were many men sent to Port Arthur whose trades were not immediately useful. For example, there were six individuals known to have professed the trade of a brass caster or founder. They were set to work as labourers, sawyers and shingle splitters. The former blanket weaver, James Cross, was employed as overseer of the quarrying gang. The coachman Edward Wakelin was set to work splitting shingles. The hairdressers Thomas Addy and John Green became labourers, as did the former fellmonger, Henry Weston, and the pencil maker Mordecai Cohen. There being no role for a Presbyterian clergyman, the convict Duncan McGraig was made a watchman, a position that involved trust but little training and spared him from the rigours of manual labour.

50 The caveat is evidenced in a number of sentences for individuals, some of whom are not in the current sample. See for example, 'Returns of convicts sent to Port Arthur, 1834-1841', TP 131, ML.

51 'Two Monthly Return of Convicts at Port Arthur from 1st March to 30th April 1832 inclusive', 30 April 1832, CSO1/511/11180, TA.

52 *Ibid.*

53 H. Maxwell-Stewart, *op. cit.*, p. 98.

Figure 7: Sample of convicts who arrived in colony professing construction trades and their subsequent employment(s) at Port Arthur 1831-1836			
Trade on Arrival (no.)	Employment at Port Arthur		
bricklayers (7)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. bricklayer 2. bricklayer 3. labourer in felling gang; overseer of lime burners 4. labourer; learning to split shingles; shingle splitter 5. labourer; sawyer; pit sawyer & labourer 6. lime burner; pit sawyer & labourer 7. overseer of labourers 		
brickmakers (7)	<table style="width: 100%; border: none;"> <tr> <td style="width: 50%; border: none;"> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. brickmaker 3. labourer; brickmaker 5. overseer of labourers 7. shoemaker </td> <td style="width: 50%; border: none;"> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 2. brickmaker & labourer 4. labourer & quarryman 6. shoemaker </td> </tr> </table>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. brickmaker 3. labourer; brickmaker 5. overseer of labourers 7. shoemaker 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 2. brickmaker & labourer 4. labourer & quarryman 6. shoemaker
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. brickmaker 3. labourer; brickmaker 5. overseer of labourers 7. shoemaker 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 2. brickmaker & labourer 4. labourer & quarryman 6. shoemaker 		
carpenters (7)	<table style="width: 100%; border: none;"> <tr> <td style="width: 50%; border: none;"> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. carpenter (houses); carpenter & boat builder; overseer of carpenters 2. carpenter 4. rough carpenter 6. labourer; woodcutter </td> <td style="width: 50%; border: none;"> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 3. carpenter 5. carpenter 7. labourer </td> </tr> </table>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. carpenter (houses); carpenter & boat builder; overseer of carpenters 2. carpenter 4. rough carpenter 6. labourer; woodcutter 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 3. carpenter 5. carpenter 7. labourer
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. carpenter (houses); carpenter & boat builder; overseer of carpenters 2. carpenter 4. rough carpenter 6. labourer; woodcutter 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 3. carpenter 5. carpenter 7. labourer 		
plasterers (3)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. sawyer 2. plasterer 3. labourer; pit sawyer & shingler; bricklayer; turner 		
sawyers (19)	<table style="width: 100%; border: none;"> <tr> <td style="width: 50%; border: none;"> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. sawyer; pit sawyer 3. sawyer; pit sawyer 5. top sawyer 7. top sawyer 9. top sawyer 11. sawyer; boat builder; top sawyer 12. labourer; pit sawyer, rough carpenter 13. overseer of sawyers Point Puer 14. sawyer; pit sawyer; top sawyer 15. labourer learning to saw; sawyer; pit sawyer; top sawyer 16. sawyer; broom maker; invalid 17. invalid </td> <td style="width: 50%; border: none;"> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 2. sawyer; top sawyer 4. sawyer; top sawyer 6. top sawyer 8. top sawyer 10. overseer of sawyers 18. shipwright 19. shoemaker </td> </tr> </table>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. sawyer; pit sawyer 3. sawyer; pit sawyer 5. top sawyer 7. top sawyer 9. top sawyer 11. sawyer; boat builder; top sawyer 12. labourer; pit sawyer, rough carpenter 13. overseer of sawyers Point Puer 14. sawyer; pit sawyer; top sawyer 15. labourer learning to saw; sawyer; pit sawyer; top sawyer 16. sawyer; broom maker; invalid 17. invalid 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 2. sawyer; top sawyer 4. sawyer; top sawyer 6. top sawyer 8. top sawyer 10. overseer of sawyers 18. shipwright 19. shoemaker
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. sawyer; pit sawyer 3. sawyer; pit sawyer 5. top sawyer 7. top sawyer 9. top sawyer 11. sawyer; boat builder; top sawyer 12. labourer; pit sawyer, rough carpenter 13. overseer of sawyers Point Puer 14. sawyer; pit sawyer; top sawyer 15. labourer learning to saw; sawyer; pit sawyer; top sawyer 16. sawyer; broom maker; invalid 17. invalid 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 2. sawyer; top sawyer 4. sawyer; top sawyer 6. top sawyer 8. top sawyer 10. overseer of sawyers 18. shipwright 19. shoemaker 		
slaters (2)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. bricklayer building chimneys & plastering; plasterer & shingler 2. boat crew 		
stonecutters (1)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. overseer of storemasons 		
stonemasons (4)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. wood cutter and water carrier 2. stonecutter 3. stonemason 4. labourer in felling gang; stonecutter & labourer; quarryman 		

Figure 8: Sample of convicts who arrived in the colony as former mariners and soldiers, with their subsequent employment(s) at Port Arthur 1831-1836	
Trade on Arrival (no.)	Employment at Port Arthur
sailor / seaman / mariner (10)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. boat man 2. boatman; coxswain 3. boatman; overseer of boats crew 4. gardener 5. invalid 6. labourer 7. labourer; boat man 8. overseer of no.2 launch 9. pit sawyer 10. pit sawyer & labourer
soldier (8)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. broom maker; watchman in prison barracks, invalid 2. constable 3. flagellater; hospital messenger; labourer in felling gang 4. labourer; charcoal burner 5. labourer; wood cutter 6. overseer teaching Boys shoe making 7. schoolmaster & office messenger; overseer of labourers gang 8. shingle splitter

'Educated' convicts like McCraig were typically placed into situations of privilege and responsibility in the colony. As noted above, that concerned Arthur so much that Port Arthur was used as a place to remove them from sight and temptation. While their skills — as clerks and writers particularly — were greatly needed at Port Arthur, the local occupational hierarchy admitted only a limited number of elite positions. Figure 9 shows that many, like McCraig, were employed as watchmen and overseers, although at least some were made to labour, including the clerk, Charles Smith, who was among those explicitly precluded from the indulgence of a privileged position at the settlement as part of his colonial sentence.⁵⁴ In May 1834 there were reportedly eight men at Port Arthur placed into their own 'educated

⁵⁴ Smith was ordered 'to be removed to Port Arthur with directions that he be employed at hard labour but not in chains'. In 1832 he was in the felling gang. 'Two Monthly Return of Crown Prisoners at Port Arthur, from the 1st January to the 29th April 1832 inclusive', CSO1/551/11180, TA.

gang'.⁵⁵ A visitor in 1833 described them being 'occupied in manual labour in the settlement gardens' and tending to 'feel their degradation greatly'.⁵⁶

Figure 9: Sample of 'educated' convicts, with their subsequent employment(s) at Port Arthur 1831-1836	
Trade on Arrival (no.)	Employment at Port Arthur
attorney (1)	1. overseer of labourers
clergyman (1)	1. watchman
clerk (17)	1. clerk 2. clerk; acting superintendent 3. clerk; labourer & commissariat clerk 4. cooper 5. invalid 6. labourer 7. labourer in felling gang; assistant clerk 8. nailer; labourer; wardsman in boys' barracks; assistant schoolmaster 9. overseer of timber wharf 10. overseer Point Puer 11. watchman 12. watchman 13. watchman 14. watchmen 15. writer at Point Puer 16. writer in Commandants Office 17. writer in Commandants Office
dentist (1)	1. labourer; storeman
draftsman (1)	1. overseer of charcoal gang; overseer at hospital Point Puer
engineer (1)	1. overseer of carpenters
merchant (1)	1. overseer of invalids; schoolmaster; overseer of tools
surgeon (3)	1. constable; overseer of hospital & schoolmaster; acting superintendent & overseer of hospital; acting surgeon 2. constable; watchman; labourer; shingle splitter; storeman in Engineers stores 3. hospital dispenser
surveyor (1)	1. labourer; overseer of lime burners; overseer of masons' gang

⁵⁵ 'Return of Crown prisoners at Port Arthur...during the month of May 1834', CSO1/511/11180, TA.

⁵⁶ J. Backhouse, *Extracts from the Letters of James Backhouse: Whilst Engaged in a Religious Visit to Van Dieman's Land, Vol. 1*, London, 1838, p. 10.

Others skilled workers were made use of in ways that bore no relationship to their former occupations because, although they may have arrived in the colony possessing trades that ought to have been useful at Port Arthur, there was limited local demand for them. There were, for example, more men professing the trade of blacksmith than was required for the settlement at any one time, and so Cornelius Donovan was put to work as a shingle-splitter, and Alexander McDermid joined the felling gang. Similarly, few butchers were required in a period when there was limited local slaughtering, so Samuel Hall therefore worked as a servant, while William Sprong was employed as a hospital attendant. Only a certain number of men were needed for the settlement's boat crew, and so the boatmen Robert Wood and John Turner were put to work as a gardener and feller respectively. Men who once professed the occupation of a groom, servant or footman tended to be worked as labourers, including labouring in the felling and jetty gangs, as did those who arrived in the colony as farm labourers.

Of course, the skills which convicts professed on their arrival were not always to be relied on anyway. In December 1830 Commandant Russell complained that 'a man calling himself a rough Carpenter' (almost certainly Walter Simpson who had described himself as a nineteen-year old apprentice boat builder when he arrived in the colony in 1819) was 'totally ignorant of the business, not knowing how to use Carpenters tools of any description'.⁵⁷ Despite his apparent incompetence, he continued to be employed as a rough carpenter for the next two years, suggesting that however bad he was, he could not be dispensed with.⁵⁸ Similarly, in May 1835 additional coopers were requested for the shipyards, as there were 'only two of that trade here at present, and they are found to be quite unfit for the service required, being totally unacquainted with Cooping [sic] work of a heavy description'.⁵⁹

Further, there were strong complaints from the Commandant that many of the prisoners sent professed useful construction and manufacturing trades but were, in reality, 'disabled men, boys and

⁵⁷ Russell, Commandant, to Burnett, Colonial Secretary, 2 December 1830, CSO1/483/10748, TA.

⁵⁸ Spode, Superintendent of Convicts, to Burnett, Colonial Secretary, 3 January 1831, CSO1/477/10639; 'Two Monthly Return of Crown Prisoners at Port Arthur, from the 1st January to the 29th April 1832 inclusive', CSO1/551/11180, TA; Conduct Record, Walter Simpson per *Surrey*, CON31/1/38, TA.

⁵⁹ Booth, Commandant, to Montagu, Colonial Secretary, May 1835, CSO1/477/10639, TA.

cripples'.⁶⁰ A return of employment in August 1832, for example, gave twenty men (or roughly 10% of a workforce of 196 individuals at that time) as 'invalid', occupying minor roles on the settlement such as broom-makers, washermen, stonebreakers, or fishing and looking after poultry.⁶¹ Also, while we have suggested that around 42% of Port Arthur convicts were versed in skilled or semi-skilled trades and occupations associated with construction and manufacturing, some of those were in fact only 'boys' or 'lads', many of them not having been in the colony long enough to have developed further expertise and training.⁶²

The key solution to this problem at Port Arthur was through adaptation and reskilling. Thus, the former farm labourers James Wisby, Joseph Saunders, Richard Copperwaite and Thomas Luck, worked with the top sawyers at Port Arthur. Former weavers such as Thomas Unsworth and Alexander Brooks were engaged in key pursuits such as boat building and sawing. Upholsterers and watchmakers became constables, servants and cooks. Further, a high degree of adaptability was evidenced in the extent to which some individuals served in multiple occupations while at Port Arthur. There was in fact a high rate of transitioning between different roles on the settlement. Of the 339 prisoners at Port Arthur between 1830 and 1832, 103 (30%) changed jobs while at the settlement.⁶³ Sixty of those initially worked as labourers but were upskilled to become sawyers. There were also numerous examples of cross-skilling, or moving from one skilled trade to another. For example, quarrymen became brickmakers, and rough carpenters became wheelwrights and turners. James Williams, a baker, was set to work as a shingle splitter before returning to work as a baker. John Stott, also a baker when he arrived in the colony, was employed as a sawyer at Port Arthur in 1831, but in the following year was allowed to return to his trade as a baker. Edward Brown, a printer by trade, initially laboured with the bricklayers, was then appointed as a wardsmen before being sent to learn shoemaking. Perhaps the most varied 'career' at Port Arthur was experienced by

⁶⁰ Mahon, Commandant, to Arthur, Lieutenant-Governor, 6 March 1832, CSO1/483/10748, TA.

⁶¹ 'Return of prisoners at Port Arthur from 1st to the 31st march inclusive', CSO1/551/11180, TA.

⁶² Our sample of 700 Port convicts includes 62 individuals who, at the time of their arrival in the colony, were described as 'boy' or 'lad'. Most of these, however, were not associated with skilled occupations and trades.

⁶³ This is based on data collated Hamish Maxwell-Stewart and is kindly provided by the *Landscapes of Production and Punishment* project.

George Green who learnt to be a blacksmith, became a nailer, then went back to smithing before finishing as a pit sawyer.

* * *

The value and usefulness of particular skills and trades within a particular work place may also be evidenced in the treatment of specific types of worker, for example in the form of rewards and punishments. For now, we have only enough space left to consider the latter. Numerous historians have suggested that skilled convicts at Port Arthur enjoyed lower rates of flogging,⁶⁴ although there were of course other forms of punishment at Port Arthur. To test this, we have analysed the conduct records for 227 individuals from our cohort of 700 (32%), detailing 728 offences committed at Port Arthur up to and including 1836.⁶⁵ We have categorised each of these individuals as being involved in either skilled or unskilled work, or as holding positions of trust.⁶⁶ As illustrated in Figure 10, of the 227 individuals punished, 114 were skilled, 75 unskilled, 23 were in a position of trust. Another 15 were employed as both skilled and unskilled workers at different times.

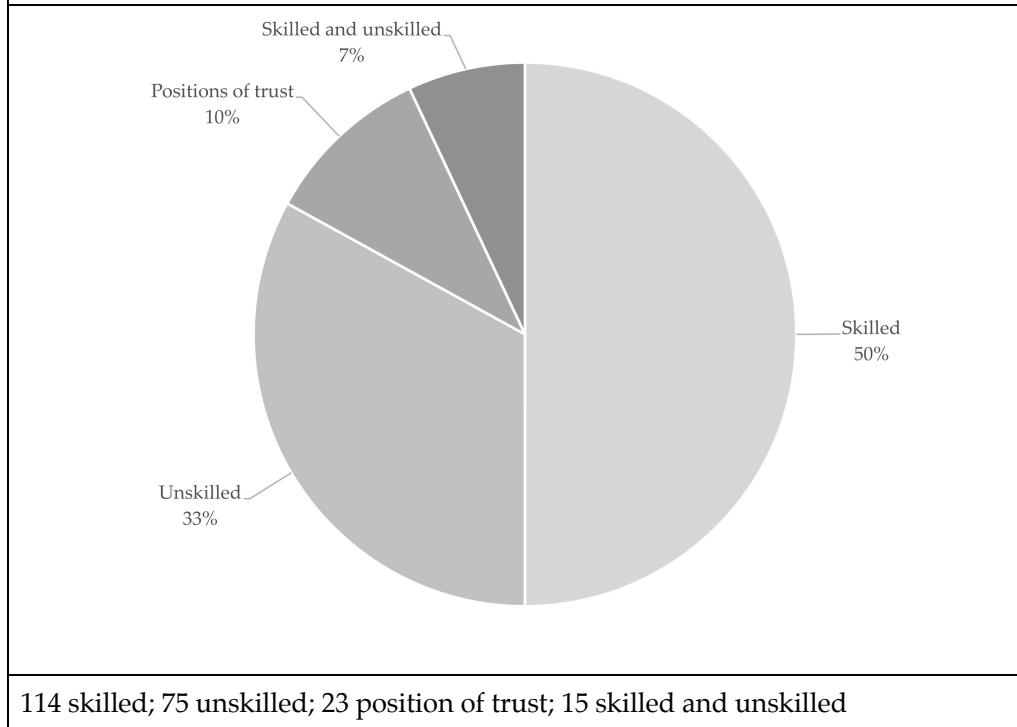
The data allows for interesting comparisons between the offending and punishment of skilled and unskilled workers. As Figure 11 shows, our sample captures more offences committed by skilled workers — 391 offences, compared to 337 recorded for unskilled workers. That simply reflects the higher number of skilled workers in our sample (114 against 75). Resorting to averages, we find that unskilled workers were in fact charged more frequently than skilled workers, but only marginally — skilled workers were charged at a rate of 3.4 times per person, compared to 4.5 charges per person for the unskilled workers. Acquittal rates were greater among skilled convicts, at 15%, which was 50% higher than the one-in-ten acquittal rate for unskilled workers.

⁶⁴ For example, Maxwell-Stewart, *op. cit.*, pp. 103.

⁶⁵ Our data is extracted from a larger set that is being used to 'repopulate' the Port Arthur landscape. R. Tuffin and M. Gibbs, 'Repopulating Landscapes: Using Offence Data to recreate landscapes of Incarceration and Labour at the Port Arthur Penal Station, 1830-1877', *International Journal of Humanities and Arts Computing*, Vol. 13, No. 1, 2019, pp. 155-181.

⁶⁶ A convict's employment is taken from early recorded employment records at Port Arthur as well as from the offences themselves. Thus, statements such as 'absent from the saw pit' or 'privately working in the shoemakers shop' are taken to indicate the type of work the individual was assigned to.

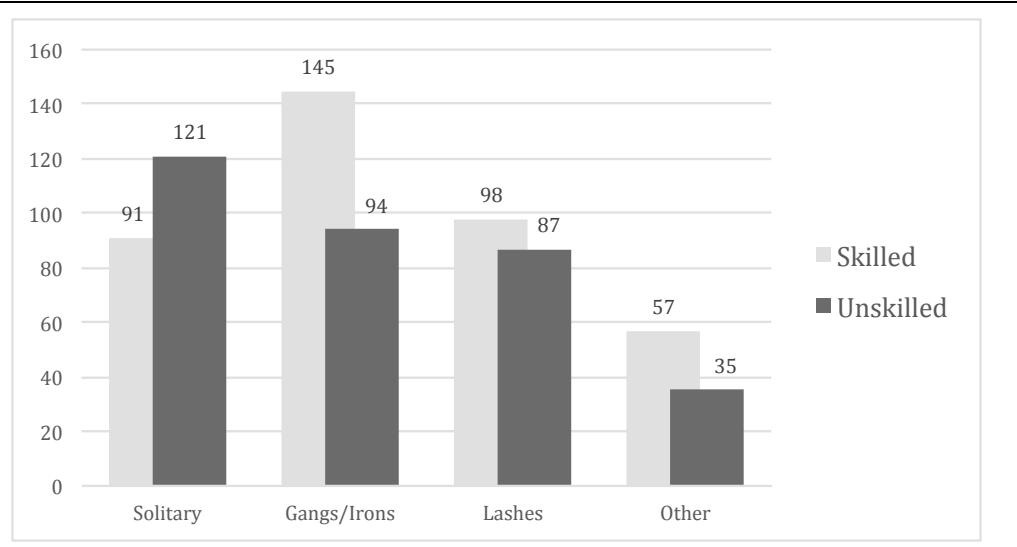
Figure 10: A sample of 227 offenders at Port Arthur, 1830-1836, categorised as either skilled, unskilled, skilled and unskilled, or holding a position of trust.



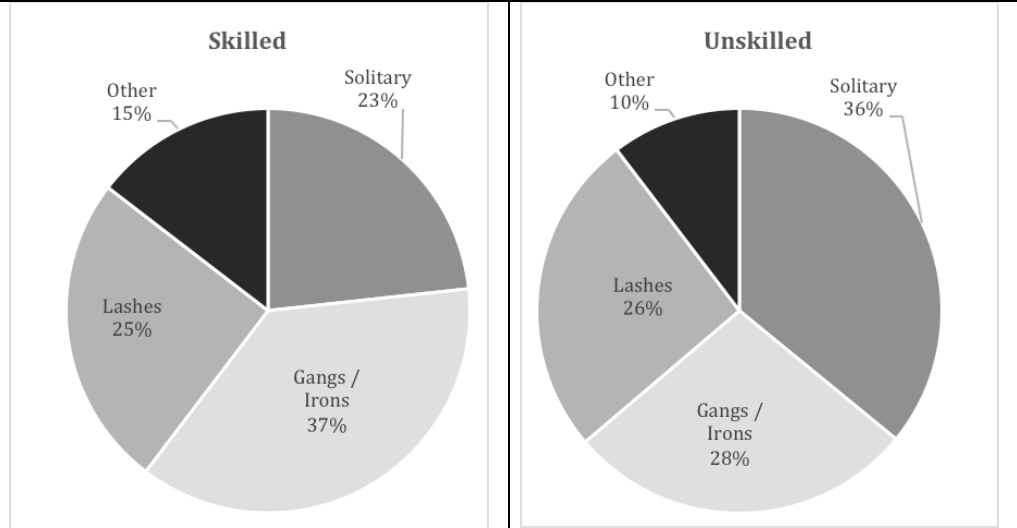
However, it is *how* individuals were punished that is of most interest. The data suggests, unsurprisingly, that the severity of punishment reflected the seriousness of an offence as well as levels of recidivism, irrespective of the skill and employment of the offender. Punishments were tailored, as we would expect, to suit both the nature of each particular offence *and* the character and record of each convict. There were, however, perceptible differences in the *types* of punishment awarded to skilled and unskilled workers, and those differences are *not* evident when we only look at corporal punishment. Both groups of workers — skilled and unskilled — were flogged at the same rate; that is, flogging represented 25-26% of the punishments meted out to each (in a period when the authorities were consciously seeking punishment options that were 'infinitely less revolting').⁶⁷

⁶⁷ Arthur, Lieutenant-Governor, to Goderich, Secretary of State, 15 November 1831, CO 280/30, p. 292, NLA. The Commandant was expected to 'seldom find it necessary to resort to corporal punishment'. Burnett, Colonial Secretary, to Russell, Commandant, undated, CSO1/483/10748.

Figure 11: Number of charges/punishment episodes involving skilled and unskilled convicts (from a sample of 728 episodes and 227 individuals).



	Solitary	Gangs/ Irons	Lashes	Other *	TOTAL
Skilled	91 (23%)	145 (37%)	98 (25%)	57 (15%)	391 @ 114 individuals: 3.4 per person
Unskilled	121 (36%)	94 (28%)	87 (26%)	35 (10%)	337 @ 75 individuals: 4.5 per person



* 'other' represents either a reprimand, acquittal or a sentence that was not a standard punishment, such as extra tasks, or 'To be deprived of the 3 next Saturday afternoons'.

But there are differences when we consider solitary confinement and punitive labour. As shown in Table 11, unskilled workers were subjected to higher rates of solitary confinement than the skilled workers: 36% compared to 23%.⁶⁸ However, this was reversed when the sentence involved being sent to a chain gang or to work in irons, with skilled workers receiving that sentence in 37% of cases, compared to 27% for the unskilled.⁶⁹ Possibly, that was because many unskilled labourers were already working in gangs and so were more liable to solitary confinement, whereas for skilled workers a demotion into ganged labour was a punishment that at once reminded them of their privileged working status and labour conditions while ensuring that some labour continued to be extracted from them. Removing a skilled convict from his work could have discernible ramifications for the settlement in terms of labour and industry, especially detrimental to smaller operations such as those conducted by the coopers and blacksmiths. But if he had to be punished, then at least in a gang the skilled worker could be made to do something productive.

Importantly, it also seems that punishment had little lasting effect on the utilisation of convict skills, in circumstances where those skills were valued. Thus, Jerimiah Murphy, a shoemaker, committed 17 offences at the settlement in three years, attracting 131 lashes, eight months in chain gangs, four months working in irons and 26 days in solitary confinement.⁷⁰ Yet he was continually returned to his valuable employment as a shoemaker. This in fact was the rule rather than the exception. Punishment rarely resulted in a lasting change of employment. John Clark, who recorded his first offences at Port Arthur while working as a labourer, was promoted to the role of sawyer in June 1832. He evidently proved his worth in the sawpits, for he was never returned to the lowly rank of labourer despite offending another 22 times.⁷¹ John Godfrey was dismissed as an overseer in May 1836 for

⁶⁸ In this period there were limited facilities for an effective system of confinement and separation at Port Arthur, although there was a small timber building erected for that purpose in 1834. 'Return of Work done by Mechanics', 31 March 1834, CSO1/511/11180, TA. The punishment, in Russell's words, consisted of 'being placed in close confinement in a gaol of small dimensions without the possibility of obtaining the smallest portion of provisions more than the rations'. Russell, Commandant, to Burnett, Colonial Secretary, 10 November 1832, CSO1/498/10934, TA.

⁶⁹ In a wider sample, up to and including 1840, the same results are evident. See N. Beer, 'Convict Labour Hierarchies and Punishment at Port Arthur 1830-1839', unpublished MA thesis, University of New England, 2019, pp. 53-54.

⁷⁰ Conduct Record, Jeremiah Murphy per *William Miles*, CON31/1/29, TA.

⁷¹ Conduct Record, John Clark per *Earl St Vincent*, CON31/1/6, TA.

'Privately working under suspicious circumstances' and was sentenced to a chain gang for two months, but he was reappointed as an overseer after serving that sentence. In short, our sample revealed that Port Arthur was not a place where the authorities relaxed punishments for the skilled workers, but simultaneously punishment was not allowed to disrupt the profitable application of convict skills to any excessive extent. Punishment and economy were not dichotomous at Port Arthur.

* * *

We have emphasised that in this first phase to 1836, the application of skilled labour at Port Arthur was situational and fluid, flavoured by evolving circumstances and changing priorities. Some trades were more useful than others, and skills which were utilised elsewhere were not necessarily useful here. Moreover, what skills were considered valuable and useful on the settlement could change over time. It is true, as the contributors to *Convict Workers* claim, that many skilled workers were transported to Australia, but then convicts worked within labour systems that were localised and liable to change. This was certainly the case in the closed but complex penal environments such as Port Arthur.

We have demonstrated that the Port Arthur settlement was, in its early years, supplied with a great number and variety of tradesmen, many possessing skills associated with construction and manufacturing. We also found that there was a reasonable or even strong correlation between the trades which convicts professed on arrival in the colony and those that occupied them at Port Arthur. The alignment was not always neat, judging from complaints about the quality, behaviour and health of many skilled workers. On the closed penal station with its limited workforce, adaptation and reskilling became important; a convict printer could become a stone cutter, a shingle splinter morphed into a carpenter, a sawyer became a shoemaker, and a baker could learn blacksmithing. But on the whole, early Port Arthur was well served by the skills of its convict workforce, and those skills were appropriately and profitably deployed by the settlement authorities.

That much tends to support the observations of Nicholas and Shergold with respect to the utilisation of skilled workers in the colony. The extra-penal nature of Port Arthur did not subvert the importance of skilled workers who, as elsewhere, were vital to the

processing and manufacturing of resources as well the construction and maintenance of facilities. On the question of their privileged treatment, however, the evidence from Port Arthur is less certain. We found no obvious evidence that punishment regimes were less harsh for skilled convicts at Port Arthur, although certainly they were charged less frequently and were more likely to be acquitted. Yet when charged they were flogged just as frequently as the unskilled worker and were more likely than the unskilled to be sent to a chain gang rather than solitary confinement. Notably, they were disciplined in ways that did not necessarily hinder their contribution to work and production on the settlement.

In 1841, the introduction of the probation system, with its aims of exchanging an uncertain punishment for a certain one, ultimately changed many of the circumstances and trends at Port Arthur, described above. The old system, which often prioritised the identification and use of convict skills, made way for a (supposedly) measurable and standardised system of punishment and reformation based on separation and classification.⁷² But before that, in the 1830s, Port Arthur was a complex and dynamic place that balanced convict punishment with the need to secure solid economic and industrial outputs. Skilled workers, especially those in construction and manufacturing trades, were a prominent and critical component of that project.

⁷² I. Brand, *The Convict Probation System: Van Diemen's Land, 1839-54*, Hobart, 1990.