

Ingenious objects co-produced and made with people living in prison

Gallery Guide Two



#NJIngenuity

nationaljusticemuseum.org.uk

Welcome to the *Ingenuity* exhibition. A sensitive and joyful exploration of ingenious creativity by people living in prison.

This interpretive guide is one of two, celebrating the carefully made objects and generously shared thoughts on display. Each guide reveals a different perspective on the exhibition. Use them in the way that feels right to you, to explore in the gallery or take home to reflect.

Here in 'guide two' you'll find information of a largely unprovenanced and evocative historical collection of objects ingeniously crafted in prison settings. Some objects we know where they were made and by whom, but for a large proportion their story has been lost, untold, or overlooked.

These ingenious objects illustrate a diverse range of creativity, mark making, construction and design. Demonstrating an unwavering desire to create and make to relieve the monotony of life in prison, to share or trade with others, or as gifts for loved ones.

We worked closely and kindly across 54 prisons throughout the UK, with activity in our local community and a series of artist commissions. This ambitious project has connected people in open and closed communities with compassion and creativity.

Understanding and witnessing the desire and necessity to create in spaces of confinement was poignant and affirming. As you admire the artwork, take a moment to reflect on the tenacity and ingenuity required to make something beautiful or necessary where materials are scarce.

“Many prisoners get really interested in some form of handicraft, in music, in drama, in some recreative activity and so learn to spend their leisure time usefully instead of doing nothing and getting into trouble. Moreover, by the cultivation of aesthetic interests and intellectual and emotional parts of their lives undergo a therapy which at least is a valuable process, and for some has meant the correction of crime and the beginning of a new life.”

Extract from the *Commissioners of Prisons Annual Report*, 1958 (p.34)

EMBROIDERY

Embroidery is the art of decorating material, primarily textile fabric, using a needle and thread. In the 19th century needlework was considered an essential part of a woman's education.

Samplers were produced as teaching tools to acquire the needlework skills necessary for decorating clothing and household furnishings as well as mending items. A typical sampler consisted of rows of practice stitches and repeating designs.

The History of Embroidery in Prison

Needlework has a long connection with prisons. **Elizabeth Fry**, renowned prison reformer, felt that men and women in prison should not be punished but reformed. She started the *Association for the Reformation of the Female Prisoners* in Newgate, 1817. The association brought in sewing materials for the women to learn skills that they could use after they were released to earn money. These improvements were taken up by prisons across England. She also gave sewing materials to women awaiting to be transported to Australia to make quilts during the journey, which they could sell once they arrived.

Although the introduction of needlework into prisons was aimed specifically for women, men in some prisons were trained in tailoring to gain skills for employment upon release.

Today people in prison can gain skills in needlework from *Fine Cell Work* a charitable organisation. Established in 1997 by prison activist **Lady Anne Tree** *Fine Cell Work* teaches people in prison to make high quality beautiful handmade products in prisons across the UK.

“Teaching prisoners high-quality needlework boosts their self-worth, instils self-discipline, fosters hope and encourages them to lead independent, crime-free lives.”

finecellwork.co.uk/pages/the-history



**Sampler embroidered
with hair**

1880

Cotton

Hair

This extraordinary sampler was embroidered by **Annie Parker** aged 33 in 1880. According to newspaper reports of the time, Annie was ‘never out of prison for more than two or three days.’ By the time of her death from consumption in 1885 Annie had been convicted over 400 separate occasions for drink related offences. Whilst in prison Annie would make beautiful pieces of embroidery like this one. Samplers were stitched more to demonstrate knowledge than to preserve skill. The stitching of them was believed to be a sign of virtue, achievement and industry, and girls were taught the art from a young age. Annie’s work shows extraordinary skill. What makes this crocheted lace edged sampler unique and ingenious is the material Annie choose to use for the embroidery, her own hair.

Use of human hair was not unusual in craft. Hailed as a unique skill of the world, hair embroidery is one of the gems of Chinese embroidery art. The use of hair in art gained popularity in the 17th and 18th century Britain, when infant mortality rates were high,

“keeping and saving of hair for future use in jewellery or other commemorative craft (such as wreaths) was common.”

Karen Bachmann in an essay in
Death: A Graveside Companion

Hair is the part of the human body that degrades the slowest and is rich in symbolic and sentimental meaning. Used as a single part to symbolise the whole person, hair art fossilises a frozen moment in time, acting as a physical and uniquely feminine record of human emotion and bonds.

Annie used cross-stitching to make the patterns. Because it is based on regular squares, it imposes a squaring-off of shapes and forms; making them more stylised rather than naturalistic.

Obituary of Annie Parker

“The death has just taken place in Greenwich Union Infirmary of Annie Parker, aged 35 [sic], who has been over 400 times charged before the magistrates at Greenwich Police Court with drunkenness, but never with felony, and has spent the greater part of her life in prison... She was always exceedingly well conducted in prison, and shortly before her death sent a letter to Mr Marsham, the magistrate at Greenwich police court, thanking him for kindnesses, and at the same time acknowledging that her life had been misspent.

She had a luxuriant head of hair, and on the morning of her death presented to Dr Dixon, the assistant medical officer of the infirmary, a lace-bordered sampler, on which was artistically worked, with her own hair, the hymn commencing *‘My God, my Father, whilst I stray.’* Another beautiful specimen of her hair work is in the possession of the Rev JW Horsey, for many years chaplain to the Clerkenwell House of Detention, and a third is framed in the parlour of Mr James, Old King Street, Deptford.

Annie Parker had received an excellent education, and a bad word never escaped her when before the magistrate. On one occasion a lady took her to Canada with a view to her reformation, but she could never resist intoxicating drink.”

Illustrated Police News, 29 August 1885



Stitched Note

Date Unknown

Paper

Cotton thread

This short and emotive message has been lovingly stitched using thread embroidered onto two pieces of torn pages from a book. The message

*‘My darling John goodnight,
from your loving Anne’*

is just as ingenious as **Annie’s** sampler. The maker using what materials were to hand, stained torn pages, thread and a needle, does not take away from the sentiment and intention behind the message.

We do not know whether **Anne** was the maker or recipient for this fragile fragment of someone’s love.

CARVING

Carving involves cutting or chipping away a shape, design or figure from a mass of stone, wood, or other hard material. Carving is a subtractive process whereby material is systematically eliminated from the outside in. There are several kinds of carving — bone, fruit, ice, ivory and stone carving.

Carving can help to get rid of stress, anxiety, and feeling isolated. Creating patterns, textures, adding colours, and the actual carving can help a person shift their mind set, and connect with the whole tactile process.

The History of Schrimshaw

Scrimshaw is derived from the practice of sailors on whaling ships originally referring to the making of tools out of the by-products of whales, only later referring to works of art created by whalers in their spare time from whale bones. Scrimshaw is a form of folk art practiced primarily by whalemens but also by people in prison in the 19th and early 20th centuries. The name comes from the British slang “scrimshanker” meaning one who wastes time.

On the whaling ships the Scrimshaw engravings were crafted with a pocket-knife or if the sailor/whaler was lucky he would get a discarded needle from the ships sail maker. With the knife or needle the sailor would cut and/or scratch a picture into the polished surface of the bone.

The History of Bone Carving in Prisons

Prisoner -of -war work is the name given to a whole range of artefacts produced in England. In the early 19th century French prisoners taken captive during the Napoleonic Wars (c1801–1815) carved a wide variety of items from intricate ship models and automatons to games, including dominoes, which might have been used to while away the hours. They were made out of beef and mutton bone. It was plentiful in the kitchens and would be cleaned, boiled and bleached by less skilled residents in the prison for the use of those that were good with their hands. They were permitted to sell their wares at the prison gates to pay for tobacco and other luxuries.



**Bone Carved
Penknives / Manicure
Set**

1880s

Bone

Brass pins

These intricate bone carvings from 1880, have been described as pen knives, but whilst sharing the objects in workshops inside prisons many participants viewed them as small manicure sets. The bone would have come from the food waste from the prison kitchen.

Only the leg bones are suitable for carving, as the walls of the bone are thick enough to carve; other bones are too thin and brittle. Such objects would have been carved and whittled in their prison cells, day rooms or exercise yard.

These carvings are no more than 5.5 cm in length, beautifully and carefully crafted with unknown tools. One has a small, raised fist at the end of it.

The raised fist has become associated with the **Black Power Movement**; but it has a long history as a global symbol of *solidarity, strength, hope* and *defiance* or *resistance against oppression*. It's been used by socialists, republicans, anti-fascists, feminists, and really any oppressed group or revolutionary social cause around the world. So many of these fights are intertwined, and the fist is a symbol that binds them in a common struggle. Today, the raised clenched fist salute has become iconic and globalized and represents one of the world's most popular and powerful symbols employed of all forms or expressions of political resistance.

The History of Soap Carving

In America the soap company *Proctor & Gamble* made soap carving popular in the 1920s and 1930s through annual competitions. These were a marketing ploy. Children did not like being washed with *Proctor & Gamble's* ivory soap, and if they didn't like it as kids then they wouldn't buy it as adults. Inspired by an artist using soap as a cheap alternative to wax for sculpting the marketing executive for *Proctor & Gamble* launched the soap sculpture competition with cash prizes.

A year later 23 million children in public schools across America were carving soap as a creative outlet. This promoted soap carving as a therapeutic craft. Embraced across the country this new cheap craft led to books, manuals and pamphlets being produced.

“Proctor & Gamble even ran Ivory soap-carving lessons in local newspapers, complete with a short tale about the carved subject, steps on how to carve the image—and, of course, a well-placed reminder that your mother can use Ivory soap to clean dishes, clothes, and other pretty things.”

blog.mam.org

Although there is little evidence as to when soap carving became popular in the UK, there is an object in the **Imperial War Museum** of a Bryant & May's "*Scottish Bluebell Matches*" match box from the First World War. Inside the drawer of the matchbox is a piece of flat blue soap which was carved with the Pioneer Corps badge depicting crossed pickaxe and rifle.

The History of Soap Carving in Prison

Soap is the archetypal material used in prison to make sculptures. Technique requires prison issue soap and any firm item that can be turned into a carving tool, pencils, pens, spoons. With such basic tools anyone can sculpt a face, a flower or animal.

During some of the workshops delivered in prisons another technique was shared between the participants. Grating and scraping the soap into small pieces and then moulding them into a bigger ball of soap that can be carved into larger more three dimensional sculptures.

ASMR and Soap Carving

There is a growing community of people that use the **Autonomous Sensory Meridian Response (ASMR)** as a tool to relax and switch off. They use certain repetitive motions joined with the sound of those movements to create a moment of serenity. The sound of the cutting of soap with the visual repetition is said to relax people in a hectic world.



**Soap carving
of a man in a
ball and chain**

Date Unknown

Soap

This soap carving of a 19th century man in prison holding a ball and chain was made by someone in prison and exhibited at the **Koestler Arts Award Exhibition** in 1992.



Soap Carving

Date Unknown

Soap

This small face, possibly a self-portrait, shows the scratch marks made by its creator.



Soap Carving

Date Unknown

Soap

The scent of the soap of these carvings is still evident today giving a sensory connection to the unknown maker.

MATCHSTICK MODEL MAKING

Matchstick models can be made from ready-made kits or from scratch. This art form is limited only by the builder's imagination.

The History of Matchstick Modelling

Matchstick model building is a relative newcomer to the world of hobbies and is thought to have originated as a pastime of naval prisoners during the early 18th century.

Though the complexity and designs differ for every model and type, there are key factors that are the same in any matchstick design.

The matches are cut by means of a sharp implement and fixed together using glue, often being held in place by paperboard “formers” until the glue is dry. While the smallest gaps can be filled with glue, larger ones can be filled with specially carved matches. A number of hobbyists prefer to build their models from scratch, though many kits are available, consisting of instructions, pre-cut card formers and sufficient modelling matches for the project. Regular matches are not used, however, but a special modelling type which do not have the combustible heads and can be bought from art and craft shops.



Violin made from matchsticks

Date Unknown

Matchsticks

Glue

Varnish

Guitar strings

Horse hair

This beautifully constructed matchstick violin was made by someone in HMP Sudbury and entered into the **Koestler Arts Awards Exhibition**, unfortunately we don't know which year. It was awarded 3rd prize. The maker has used guitar strings on the violin and horsehair for the bow.

Notice the use of barrels from *Bic* pens as fixtures to hold the violin in place, we chose to use this display technique to reflect the creative and resourceful use of found materials in the objects exhibited.

This model was shared on an object walk with a member of staff at Rock City, Nottingham.

“I’m really surprised at how ornate it is. It’s inspiring to see something so colourful coming from what I imagine to be a rather ‘grey’ environment.”

ENAMELLING

Enamelling is an ancient process and widely adopted technique that has been used for thousands of years, dating back to the 6th century B.C. Throughout history, the process has been used to add colour in place of precious stones in ceremonial objects.

This decorative technique gives metal objects or surfaces a glasslike glaze. It is an art form noted for its brilliant, glossy surface, which is hard and long-lasting.

This effect is created using fine particles of glass applied to metal by dry sifting the particles onto the surface or by wet packing them into channels or depressions in the metal. Once applied, the enamels are heated, using a kiln or torch, until they soften and flow.



Enamel Round

Date Unknown

Metal circular disc

Glass particles

A mesmerising cacophony of colour exploding across the surface of this enamel round. We have no evidence as to when this was made, or which prisons ran workshops in enamel work. This does not take away from the artistry of melding bold colours and subtle shapes to create this object.

This type of artwork would have been done within an art workshop as part of prison education. Educational courses can range from literacy courses to vocational education and non-formal activities such as arts and crafts.

ENGRAVING

Engraving has a rich history which dates back through millennia. Engraving is the act of carving written words or images into hard or semi hard surfaces resulting in an engraved piece of work that is resistant to most forms of wear and tear.

Engraving requires skill, a careful eye for detail and a steady hand. In London in the 1700s–1800s, engraving was big business, and many traders took on apprentices to train and pass their knowledge to.



Engraved washbowl

1961

*Aluminium washbowl
Wiggle tool*

This intricately engraved prison issue aluminium washbowl is one of three that we have in our collection that were embellished by someone in HMP Gloucester, 1961. Due to the technical aspect of the work and access to appropriate engraving tools this would most likely have been made as part of an engraving workshop or training course. A white rose is repeated across the bowl. It traditionally represents purity and innocence – but to Yorkshire people it always means home.

On close inspection of the bowl you can see the marks are tiny zig zags or wiggles. They've been incised by a specialist engraving instrument called a wiggle tool. Wiggle work is a technique used on metal that was established in the UK around the 1600s and was first used as decoration on pewter ware.

DRAWING ON SLATE

For centuries, artists made their preparatory drawings on tablets made of slate, wood, or wax. These tablets were often thrown away or reused.

Slate occurs in a range of grey tones warm to cool. It has a chalky, relatively opaque surface and contains thin slivers of mica (a shiny silicate mineral with a layered structure) within its structure that produce a soft glowing quality. Working on slate, artists could easily achieve a broad colouristic range with fewer pigments.

Slate

Date Unknown

Slate

Chalk/pastels

Wood

Metal brackets



This drawing is of the alter scene in the chapel at HMP Parkhurst, depicting scenes such as the last supper and Christ's crucifixion. Whether this drawing was done of the alter scene or was a preparatory sketch for the alter we don't know. On the back of the slate is another drawing that has been rubbed to blur the faces in the illustration.



Reverse of slate.

PAINTING ON OBJECTS

As the following objects were used as the canvas for the makers' creativity it could be argued that as such they were inadvertently creating *'Found Art'*.

In the 1950s and 1960s, artists began to transform everyday objects into art through the use of different mediums such as painting and sculpting. The chosen objects were normally undisguised but modified to create something new or present interesting concepts.

In the case of the following objects the makers used whatever objects were to hand – small glass jars and phonecards.



Painted Ink Bottle

Date Unknown

Glass jar

Acrylic paints

Painted glass ink bottle and lid with an impressionistic image of roaming fields.



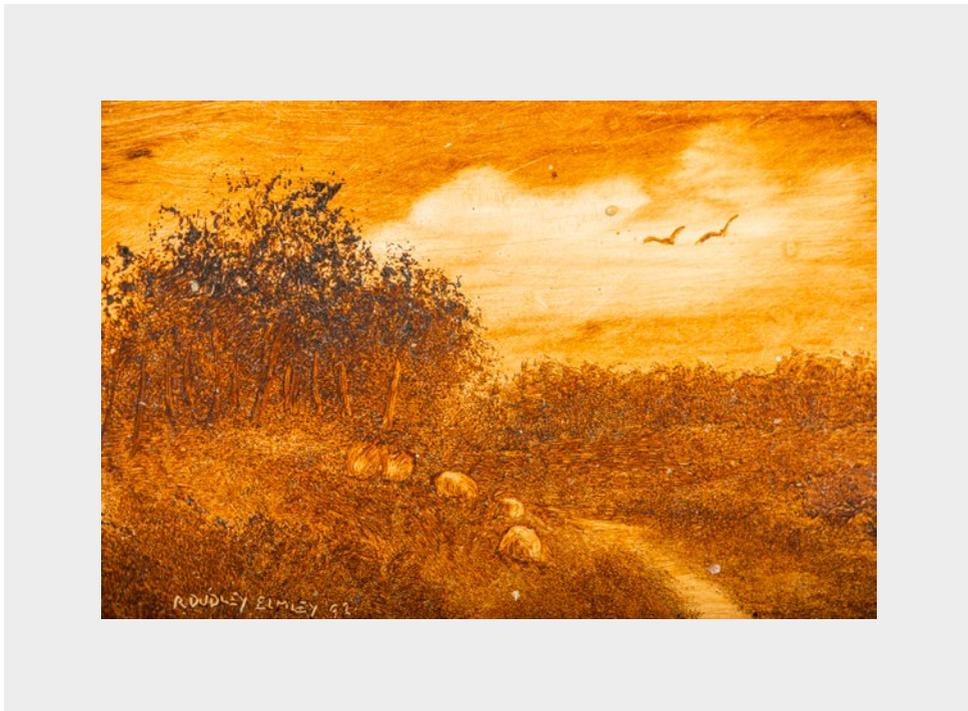
Painted Glass Jars

Date Unknown

Glass jar

Acrylic paint

These painted jars, possibly made by the same person, show scenes of the countryside. Perhaps places that were special to them. The smaller jar was most probably an ink bottle, but the others' content is unknown. Whatever their original purpose, the maker made use of these discarded items creating something beautiful out of something practical, possibly to gift to someone or just to pass time.



Painted BT Phone Card

1992

BT phone card

Paint

A scenic view of birds flying over a river intricately painted on a *British Telecom (BT)* phonecard. Created by someone in prison at HMP Elmley and sold in their Charity shop.

BT telephone cards were used within UK Prisons between 1987 and 2003–4. The phonecards were issued so that men and women could call their families and friends.

Early phonecards were for general public use, but later the cards were specially encoded for use only in prisons. This was to prevent them from being smuggled into prisons and traded between people as currency and at inflated prices.

POTTERY

Pottery comes in different shapes and sizes and can be decorated in different ways and styles. The relationship between hands and clay is the basis of ceramics. Putting your hands to clay, brings about the natural inclination to shape, form, mould and create something from the fine-grained soil. Hand-built pottery items can be created by pinching balls of clay, joining clay slabs together, or creating coils.



Vinegar bottle

1980s

Clay

Glaze

Ceramic vinegar bottle with a round stopper, white with black spots, made by someone in prison during handicrafts education at HMP Kingston. By using striking contrast between the black shapes on the white background the maker has reduced this piece to its simplest form so that the focus is on its pure physical elements. It makes a bolder statement, creating more depth, and making the patterns and designs more dramatic.



**Ceramic letter
or toast rack**

Date Unknown

Clay

Glaze

An intriguing object that could be a letter or toast rack. Carved into the slabs are the words 'Elvis' and 'I love Lorraine', perhaps the names of loved ones of the maker.

This letter/toast rack would have been made using rolled out slabs of clay. Once the clay has dried and become firm the pieces/shapes can be cut out and joined together by scoring and applying slip (a mixture of clay and water) to the edges of the pieces.

Handicraft classes introduced in the 1930s in prisons were regarded as:

“part of the arrangements for the continued education of prisoners. The principal aims are to provide an alternative form of education, particularly for those who are unable to profit by literary and other classes and to teach useful hobbies as a means to employing leisure time.”

Standing Order, 1936, (p. 430)

These handicraft classes included clay-making and pottery, and such classes are still available in various prisons in the UK.



Ceramic chess set

1985

Clay
Glaze

Ceramic chess pieces, based on a *Lewis* set. The original *Lewis* chess pieces date from the 12th and early 13th century, and were found on the beach at Uig, Lewis in Scotland in 1831. They were made from walrus ivory and sperm whale tooth.

This ceramic version of a bishop, queen, and two pawns were made in the handicrafts education department by someone in HMP Kingston. Look closely and see the fine decorative lines on the surface of the pieces and the facial expressions of the bishop and queen.

“Prisoners... are permitted to pursue certain recreations in their cells. For example a prisoner may draw or paint in his cell; or have crossword puzzles, acrostics, jig-saw puzzles and chess or draughts problems and boards; or if he is a member of a handicraft class he may, on his instructor’s recommendation, continue his handicraft work in his cell”

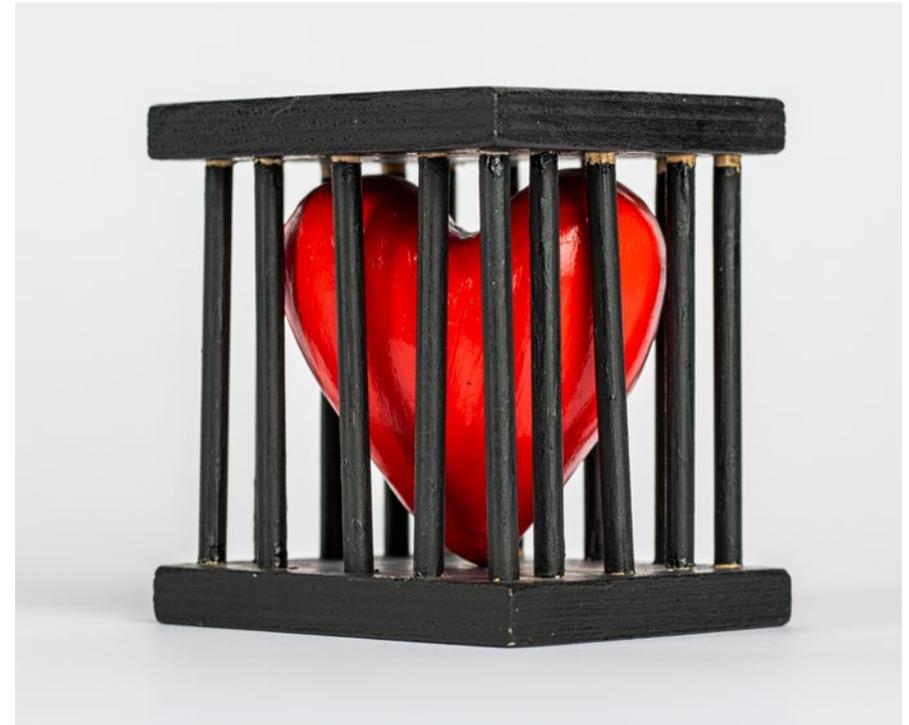
Extract from the *Commissioners of Prisons Annual Report*, 1960 (p. 33)

Today people in prison, depending on their incentive level and progression to rehabilitation can have craft supplies provided. These include paint brushes and canvases, embroidery, knitting and sewing kits and modelling match kits. Most people living in prison are allowed to own pens, pencils, sketch pads and scrapbooks, playing cards and jigsaws.

WOODWORK

Woodworking is the process of making decorative and useful objects from wood, like cabinets, fine tables, instruments, bowls, and more. It encompasses techniques like wood carving, joinery, and woodturning. Woodwork can have a significant impact on the maker's self-esteem and confidence and is a medium for makers to express their creativity and imagination.

Using wood to make children's toys was introduced in the 1700s in Germany. These wooden toys were often handmade for special occasions. This concept of wooden toymaking spread across Europe with dolls and animals being popular handmade crafts at the time. See the colourful toy car made by someone in prison.



Sculpture
'No Escape'
1997
Wooden cage
Ceramic heart
Paint

Sculpture of a ceramic heart encased in a wooden cage entitled '*No Escape*'. Made by someone in HMP Bullwood Hall and submitted to the **Koestler Art Exhibition** in 1997.

“The results of the work done in art and handicraft classes lend themselves particularly for presentations to the public... and attracted great interest. The fact, too, that a prisoner's work may be selected for exhibition provides an additional incentive to produce good work”

Extract from the *Commissioners of Prisons Annual Report*, 1957 (p. 26)



Bookends

Date Unknown

Pine wood

Glue

These bookends, made of pine with dog like figures were crafted in the woodwork department by a resident at HMP Thorn Cross. They look like they may have been made for a child's bookshelf due to the cute animal characters!

Woodwork classes were introduced in to prisons around the 1930s along with other handicraft classes. In the report of the *Commissioners of Prisons Annual Report* for 1959 it states that

“Classes with a practical or craft bias are popular. These include woodwork, metal work, basketry, clay-modelling, pottery, sculpture, wood carving, leather work, light handicrafts such as toy making, lamp shade, embroidery and knitting, weaving, rug making. The general standard of work is high and, in some instances, exceptional. At many establishments an exhibition of articles made in these classes result in very favourable comment by visitors.”

Extract from the *Commissioners of Prisons Annual Report*, 1959 (p. 34)

Access to art based creative workshops are just as popular and necessary in prisons today as demonstrated by the number of creative objects and responses you can see in this exhibition.



Toy Car

Date Unknown

Wood

Metal fixings

Wooden toy car made in a *NACRO* workshop at HMP Wandsworth and sold through a prison charity shop. On the underside of the car is a price ticket for £7.00.

NACRO is a social justice charity based in England and Wales. Established in 1966 from the previous *National Association of Discharged Prisoners' Aid Societies*, it has become the largest criminal justice-related charity in England and Wales.

We shared this object with visitors around the museum. Here are a couple of responses:

“It is a positive thing that the prisoner has spent time and care to make the toy for a child. The prisoner’s crime would not stop me buying the car.”

“Would not buy children’s toys unless I knew what the crime was.”

TEXTILES

A textile is something made by knitting, weaving, or crocheting fibres together and can be used for furnishings, upholstery, or clothing. Textiles are made from many materials, with four main sources: animal (wool, silk), plant (cotton, flax, jute), mineral (asbestos, glass fibre), and synthetic (nylon, polyester, acrylic).

The textiles used in these two objects are of a practical and soothing nature, both providing comfort.



Slippers

Date Unknown

Felt

Thread

Glue

A pair of slippers, made of scraps of grey, black and blue felt stitched and glued together by hand. Most probably made in a workshop due to the materials required to make them such as glue and industrial needles.



Koala

Circa 1970s

Fake fur

Cotton thread

Wadding

Glass eyes

Ribbon

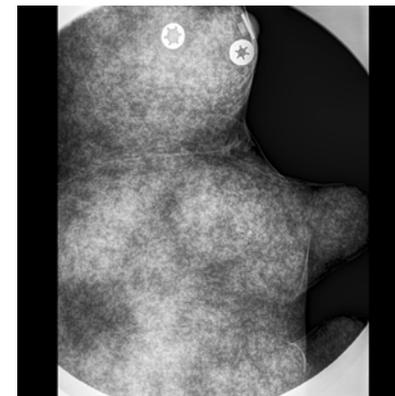
Plastic nose

This heavily padded cuddly koala toy was made in HMP Stanford Hill in a soft toy making workshop. He is one of many cuddly toys that were made at HMP Stanford Hill as seen in the image below.

He is very heavily padded, so we named him '**Mr Heavy Wadding**'. We were also curious to see whether there was something more than just his wadding inside him. We had him x-rayed at the Conservation Department at the University of Lincoln. Look at his x-ray below and see if you can see an indistinctive shape in his chest!



HMP Stanford Hill (image from the museum's HM Prison Service photographic collection)



X-ray.

ILLICIT OBJECTS

There is a variety of items that are not permitted in prison due to them having some ingenious alternative uses.

Chewing gum for example is banned in prisons for several reasons, aside from having the potential to make a mess on floors the more ingenious residents in prison might use it to make impressions of officers' keys when planning an escape attempt. It can also be used to block up locks on cell doors. Notebooks with spiral bindings are also banned to prevent the wire being crafted in to improvised weapons or used to unpick locks.

The following objects have all been made out of found materials and items to create something else.



Improvised key

Date Unknown

Copper

Cotton thread

A beautifully improvised key made from an intricately twisted piece of copper and wrapped with cotton thread. Originally considered to have been made from a bedspring the Conservation Department at University of Lincoln undertook some tests to discover that it is actually made from copper wire.

Symbolically keys can represent knowledge, success and growing up. They are also a symbol of freedom and liberation. In the case of these improvised keys made by people in prison they were crafted to aid escape.

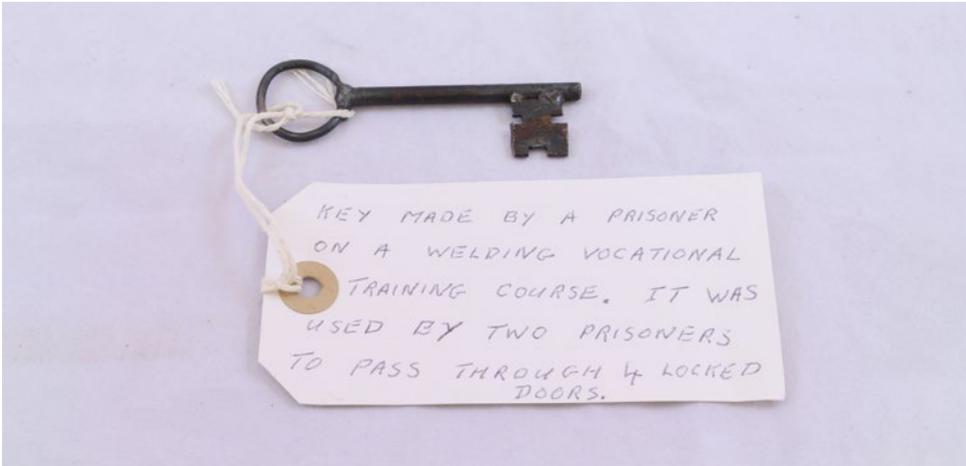


Improvised key

Date Unknown

Steel/iron

Large metal improvised key, with a key mechanism at one end and a flat plate on the other.



Improvised key

Date Unknown

Steel/iron

This improvised key was made by someone in prison during a welding vocational training course. Records indicate that it was used by two men in an escape attempt, getting through four locked doors before being apprehended.



Improvised key

Date Unknown

Wood

Steel/iron

Cotton thread

This unusual shaped improvised key is made of wood and metal. The metal 'teeth' are tied on with string.



**Improvised Key
Moulds**

Pre 1980s

Rubber foam

These improvised key moulds were carved out of rubber foam. Made by a young adult male in HMBI Feltham Borstal. Such moulds would probably have been used to make copies of keys in an attempt to escape. Any material that is pliable such as chewing gum is contraband in prison as it can be used to make a mould of a key.

Timpson have invested in several specialist training academies, all of which are located within prison premises. Their training academies mimic their High Street stores and enable people living in prison to be trained in all the services they provide, except key cutting!



Improvised Headphones

Date Unknown

Rubber heels

Foam

Wire

Canvas

Metal

Our documentation shows that these improvised headphones were used in an escape attempt. The maker created these out of the heels of prison issue shoes, electrical wire, pieces of foam and metal covered in canvas. How these were used as part of an escape is unknown maybe as part of a disguise, or even if the escape was successful.

We have been informed that the cabling on the headphones is braided fabric which was in common use up until it started to be replaced with PVC covered cables in the 1960s. This potentially dates the headphones to around the 1950s.



Sock and mirror

Date Unknown

Woolen sock

Piece of mirror

In the case you'll notice a prison issue sock and a piece of mirror. Both are pieces, or parts, of a functional whole object. A protective pair of socks and a piece of mirror for self-care. They came into the museum collection together, the prison issue sock wrapped around the piece of mirror so it could be held without causing harm to a hand.

As an object it's ambiguous and we know nothing of its history. The shard of mirror is sharp and could have been used for cutting, carving or scraping into a surface, or for personal defence, protection, self-harm, or harm towards another person. It's likely that it was confiscated by a prison officer.

The objects presented in this exhibition have been made for many reasons, check the text on the gallery pillar where people have shared their reasons to make. The challenges faced in society as a whole are reflected in prison communities, and violence and self-harm play a traumatic and complex part in this. We talked extensively with our partners about this particular object along with some of the other less joyful and more 'challenging' objects. We agreed to not ignore this part of the collection and the reality of life in prison. And to tread gently to avoid evoking upset or sensationalising any of the objects.



Improved Pipes

Date Unknown

Wood

Matchsticks

Glue

Paint

In this case you will see a collection of small intricately carved wooden pipes, mainly made from wood and matchsticks. Elaborately designed and illicitly made by people in cells for their own use, to self soothe or to trade.

Check the text on the pillar that shares facts from the Prison Reform Trust on incidents of self-harm and deaths. Communities living in prison face the same challenges as communities outside and self-medicating and drug use plays a part in the challenges faced by people.

Prison staff are instructed to confiscate prohibited items according to the *Conveyance and Possession of Prohibited Items and Other Related Offences 2021* under the following graded lists:

List A items: drugs, explosives, firearms or ammunition and any other offensive weapon

List B items: alcohol, mobile telephones, cameras, sound recording devices (or constituent part of the latter three items)

List C items: any tobacco, money, clothing, food, drink, letters, paper, books, tools.



Pill in a Pen

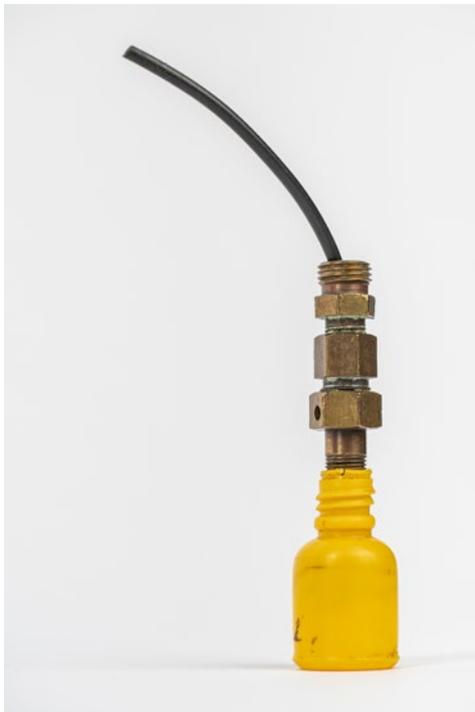
Date Unknown

Pen

Tablet

A tablet of Penbritin hidden inside a Papermate pen. The maker has demonstrated real ingenuity in adapting a mundane everyday item to hide something that they need.

Penbritin is a brand name for Ampicillin an antibiotic used to treat various infections caused by bacteria. These include ear infections (otitis media), sinusitis, chest infections such as bronchitis and pneumonia and urinary tract infections.



Improvised Pipe

Date Unknown

Plastic bottle

Rubber tubing

Brass fitting

Improvised drugs pipe made from a small yellow plastic bottle and brass fitting.



Improvised Pipe

Date Unknown

Plastic bottle

Pen

Foil

Metal tube

This improvised pipe has been made from a brown plastic container formerly used for holding condiments. The maker then utilised the barrel of a Bic pen attached to a metal tube topped with foil. An example of making from found materials.

DRAWING

Modern drawing in Europe began in the 1400s in Italy, during the period known as the Renaissance. The production of drawings also increased steadily. This was because paper had become easier to obtain and because of the new importance attached to drawing.

The following objects have been crafted from found scraps of paper and card which should not detract from the ingenious use of the materials to create something practical and playful.



Card Chess Pieces

Circa 1978

*Card
Paint
Pen*

This graphically styled chess set constructed from cardboard, was made in HMP Wormwood Scrubs. The holes at the top of the pieces are thought to have been used to hang them on a wall mounted board to play. Displayed in the case to illustrate how effective this method of playing chess would be allowing people to watch the game unfold.



Deck of Cards

Circa 1978

Paper

Handmade ink

This handmade deck of playing cards was crafted from scraps of paper and pieces of envelopes. We don't know which prison this was made in, but the simplistic nature of the construction resonates with an inherent need to make something that would provide a means of play.

“Cards for the purpose of playing patience are permitted only in prisons where prisoners are located in single cells, and will be issued and withdrawn at the Governor's discretion.”

Prison Service Orders 1963, section 4(b)-2

CASTING

Casting is used for making parts of complex shapes that would be difficult or uneconomical to make by other methods (such as cutting from solid material). It has been used for over 5,000 years to create art and tools.



Lead Gun

Date Unknown

Lead

Nothing is known about this particular object, where or why it was made. Its form is rough and rudimentary but recognisable.



Moulds

Date Unknown

Brass (Gorilla)

Lead (Crocodile)



These moulds were probably used to create animal figures as part of a manufacturing workshop. Die casting is a metal casting process that is characterized by forcing molten metal under high pressure into a mould cavity. The mould cavity is created using two hardened tool steel dies (in this instance the shape of a gorilla and crocodile) which have been machined into shape and work similarly to an injection mould during the process.

After a period of cooling the final form is created. This solidified part, known as a casting, is ejected or broken out of the mould to complete the process. The finished figures were possibly sold on to toy shops.

Although we don't know which prison used to make these animal figures, we do know that at HMP Lancaster they made metal toy soldiers and painted them as seen in the image below.



Toy figures being made in a prison workshop (image from the museum's HM Prison Service photographic collection).

These largely unprovenanced historic objects have raised more questions than we could answer but they have garnered more responses than we could have imagined.

They have inspired creative workshops delivered in over 54 prisons across the country, out in open communities, and in the museum. Giving the objects another strand to their history and narratives. The level and variety of creativity has been exceptional, demonstrating that the need to create and craft objects is as much as a necessity in prisons today as it was in the past.

Objects crafted by people living in prison first came to light in British prisons at the time of the Napoleonic War (c 1801–1815). The Board of the British Transport Office allowed Napoleonic prisoners of war to make and sell objects, so long as their craft supplies didn't cost the British government anything. Therefore, discarded bones from food were used and transformed into extraordinarily beautiful but fragile models.

From these rudimentary beginnings using found materials to transform into delicate decorative objects, prison settings have provided access to handicraft classes since the 1930s to a range of tutor led art-based workshops today. Prisons have been a conduit for ingenious creativity whether making objects illicitly in cells or in art-based workshops. The motivation and need to create is evident, from trading or offering as a gift to self-soothing and protection.

With thanks to

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