

A Return of the number of children committed for trial under the Juvenile Offences Act during the years 1850 – 1853

QS0092/b/7

County of Warwick

Return showing the number of Children committed for trial, committed under the Juvenile Offenders Act and convicted for the last three years.

1850	Age	Committed	Acquitted
Epiphany Jno. Ellard enough —	15	X	
" ass'ty Wm. Norbury —	15	X	
Chas. Robinson —	15	X	
Sam'l Mac Donald —	15	X	
Tho. Henshaw —	14	X	
Easter Sep. —			
ass'ty —			
Mid's Sep. Sarah White —	14	X	
John Jones —	14	X	
ass'ty —			
Michael's Sep. Tho. Hawton —	13		X
Wm. Jones —	12	X	
Tho. George —	15	X	
ass'ty Richd. Croft —	15	X	
W. Arrowsmith —	15		
5. March —	6		
5. Oct —	5		

Com'd to the ass'ty

The extract displayed shows the number of children committed for trial under the Juvenile Offenders Act at the Warwick Quarter Sessions of 1850. It records the names and ages of children tried, as well as whether or not they were convicted.

The Victorians and Juvenile Crime

The Victorians were very concerned with crime and its causes. Many thought that industrialisation and urbanisation had led to increased crime levels. As a result, the government began a systematic collection of crime statistics, and this document is an example of the information which was collected. Juvenile crime was of particular concern. Charles Dickens' 1837 novel *Oliver Twist* reflected contemporary preoccupations through the characters of the Artful Dodger and Fagan's gang.

Juveniles and the Justice System

The early nineteenth century justice system made no formal distinction between children and adults, and they were not separated in prison. Many people felt anxious about the moral and physical danger which juvenile criminals faced by imprisonment with hardened criminals. Some courts would let juveniles off lightly on their first offence due to fears that they would be further corrupted in prison. On the other hand, many courts were ready to inflict harsh sentences upon children guilty of a second offence. Some reforms were gradually introduced. In 1847, the Juvenile Offenders Act allowed children under 14 years old to be tried summarily before two magistrates. This made the trial process for children quicker, and removed it from the publicity of the higher courts. A subsequent Act in 1850 raised the age limit to 16. It was not until 1908 that the Children's Act established a separate justice system for children.

Warwick Quarter Sessions and Juvenile Crime

The Warwick Quarter Sessions of 1850 demonstrated that juvenile crime would not be tolerated and took a dim view of juveniles who re-offended. The 15 year olds James Macdonough and Thomas George, were both convicted of larceny (i.e. theft) and sentenced to "hard labour" for four and three months respectively at the House of Correction (QS39/20, p. 194, 296). The House of Correction was an institution for vagrants and those who had committed minor offences; as such it represented a less severe punishment than prison. In contrast, William Norbury, also aged 15 was sentenced to be transported for seven years when he was convicted of larceny. Norbury's previous conviction for felony (i.e. a serious offence) was undoubtedly the trigger for this harsh punishment (QS39/20, p. 208-9).