

MEET HENRY SINGLETON

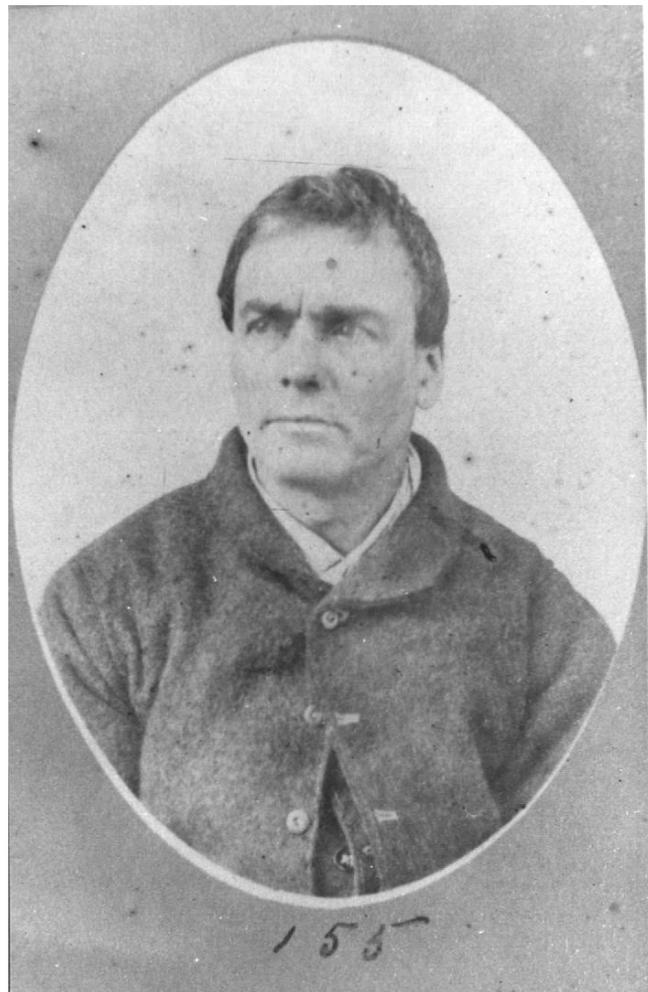
“I made the keys and can escape from the prison with them whenever I like.”

Drunken and incompetent warders were easy prey for the enterprising Henry Singleton. When they gave him access to keys, he saw his chance.

Henry Singleton arrived on Norfolk Island in 1851, sentenced to 14 years for stealing shirts. He was ‘a bad character’, constantly in trouble for refusing to work, being dirty and disobedient, talking and having money improperly in his possession, insubordination and using threatening language. He received many short sentences of hard labour or solitary confinement. Sent to Port Arthur in 1853, he continued to refuse to work, and to be disobedient and insolent, and received more spells in solitary for his pains.

After a brief period of freedom, he was tried again in 1860 for stealing five pigs, and sentenced to four years at Port Arthur. Free again, he then broke into a building to steal and was sent back to Port Arthur for five years. While in the Separate Prison, he was caught with a crowbar trying to break out with another man, and received three more years’ imprisonment, including a year in the Separate Prison with 30 days in the punishment cell.

Later that same year Henry was contemplating a solo escape. He had got hold of a set of keys; drunken warders gave them to him so he could let them back into the Prison when they were incapable, and he made his own set. But his nerve failed him, and he handed the keys in. He was not punished but the warders involved were sacked. By 1875 he was free with a ticket of leave. After two more offences, larceny and a burglary that earned him 14 years’



*Henry Singleton circa 1873-4, photograph attributed to Boyd
Reproduced courtesy of Queen Victoria Museum and Art Gallery*

imprisonment, he disappears from the records. By then he would have been 65 years old.

The Separate Prison was built so that prisoners could be reformed through solitary contemplation of their sins. Visitors today can experience the profound isolation in which prisoners were held there.

AMAZING STORIES, EPIC HISTORY