

Rotary

Club of Bodmin



Freedom and Captivity

Freedom definition: the power or right to do or say what you want without anyone stopping you

Captivity definition: the state of being kept as a prisoner or in a space that you cannot escape from

Freedom is a word that means many things to many people and in many different contexts and has been the inspiration for many artists through the centuries. If you Google 'Freedom images' you will see it expressed in many ways such as a bird flying from its cage, people running through fields or along beaches with outstretched arms, people standing on mountain tops and many more.



Freedom and Human Rights

Living in the UK, we are very fortunate to live in a society that allows us a high degree of freedoms. Many of these we take for granted and would find it hard to imagine life without them.

But not all countries allow individuals the freedoms that we enjoy and some of these restrictions can be of the things we would consider to be fundamental rights, like the right to have a child. However, as recently

as 1979, China introduced a law that said that you were only allowed to have one child and if you had more you would be punished by fines. This was done to control overpopulation and ensure everyone had enough to eat.

Different cultures have different laws and freedoms. In the UK, our rights and freedoms began to be documented in 1215 with the Magna Carta, and have changed enormously over the centuries and our now enshrined in the Human Rights Act 1998 , based on the European Convention of Human Rights. This sets out the rights we all have to the most fundamental important of freedoms.

- Article 2: Right to life
- Article 3: Freedom from torture and inhuman or degrading treatment
- Article 4: Freedom from slavery and forced labour
- Article 5: Right to liberty and security
- Article 6: Right to a fair trial
- Article 7: No punishment without law
- Article 8: Respect for your private and family life, home and correspondence
- Article 9: Freedom of thought, belief and religion
- Article 10: Freedom of expression
- Article 11: Freedom of assembly and association
- Article 12: Right to marry and start a family
- Article 14: Protection from discrimination in respect of these rights and freedoms
- Protocol 1, Article 1: Right to peaceful enjoyment of your property
- Protocol 1, Article 2: Right to education
- Protocol 1, Article 3: Right to participate in free elections
- Protocol 13, Article 1: Abolition of the death penalty

Freedom Fighters

Looking at this list we find it hard to believe that people lived without these rights but many of these freedoms were only won after hard, and often bloody, fights. Many people lost their lives and liberty to fight for the rights we now take for granted. We learn about people like Nelson Mandela, Mahatma Gandhi, and Martin Luther King as leaders fighting against injustice and discrimination against groups of people.

Many men from Bodmin lost their lives in the Prayer Book Rebellion in 1549, following Henry VIII's religious reforms and further religious changes introduced by his staunchly Protestant son, Edward VI. These changes included a Prayer Book to be written in English rather than the Latin used in the Catholic mass, or service. Although very few ordinary people understood Latin, they objected to being forced to change the way they worshipped.

Back then, religion was a much more important part of everyday life and religious leaders were enormously powerful and wealthy. However, the rebellion was also the result of poor economic conditions partly caused by enclosure of common land by members of the gentry which caused hardship among the peasant classes. It is estimated that around 5500 men from Cornwall and Devon lost their lives in five battles. They did not win the freedom to worship and the English Prayer Book remained in use and far worse religious persecutions were to follow.

The Suffragettes were women who fought for women's right to vote in the UK at the end of the 19th Century. They were routinely abused, imprisoned and force fed in prison and some paid the ultimate sacrifice.



But none of us are free to do exactly as we wish. We cannot take another person's property or do them physical harm. We have laws which dictate how we must behave and to restrict our freedoms for the common good.

The Covid Lockdown

Most recently, laws have been passed to control our movements to prevent the spread of the Corona virus to others, and especially to those elderly and vulnerable members of society. Not everyone has followed these rules and we regularly hear about people who have parties and flout the rules in other ways.

The word 'Lockdown' originated in the 1970s to describe the confinement of prisoners to their cells following a riot or other disturbance. Many people have struggled with these restrictions and the isolation that has resulted for many people and of course the financial impacts of jobs lost and failing businesses.

We may probably remember the strange things that people did like hoarding toilet rolls and the Thursday evening ritual of clapping for carers and the NHS. The teddies and rainbows in windows that showed solidarity and were a way of connecting with the strange quiet world outside our homes.



In the USA, we have seen armed crowds take to the streets to protest against the Covid-related Stay at Home Orders.

What is right and wrong, and what is a right, is a complex and often controversial political and social issue. One man's freedom fighter is another man's terrorist.

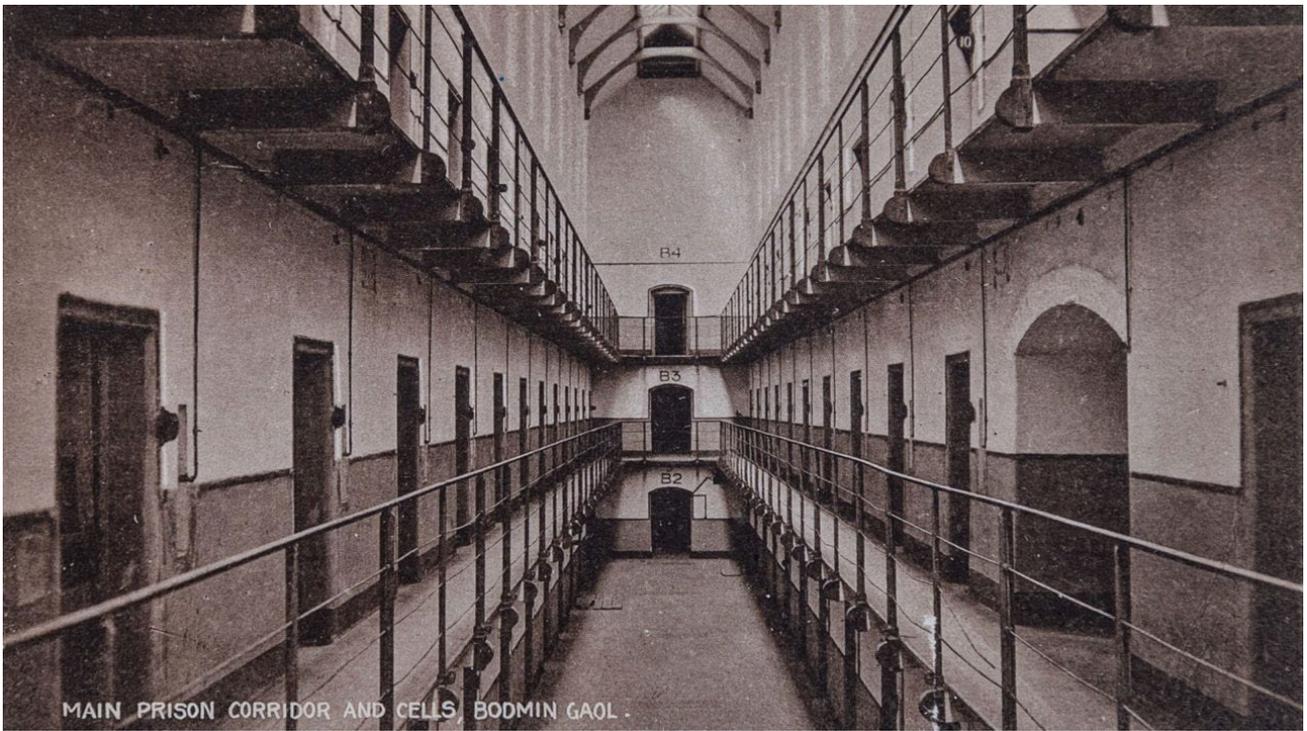
Bodmin's prisons

We have used captivity as a punishment for people who break the law for centuries. The first prisons existed in ancient Egypt and we still use prisons today to punish and protect society from people who have broken the law.



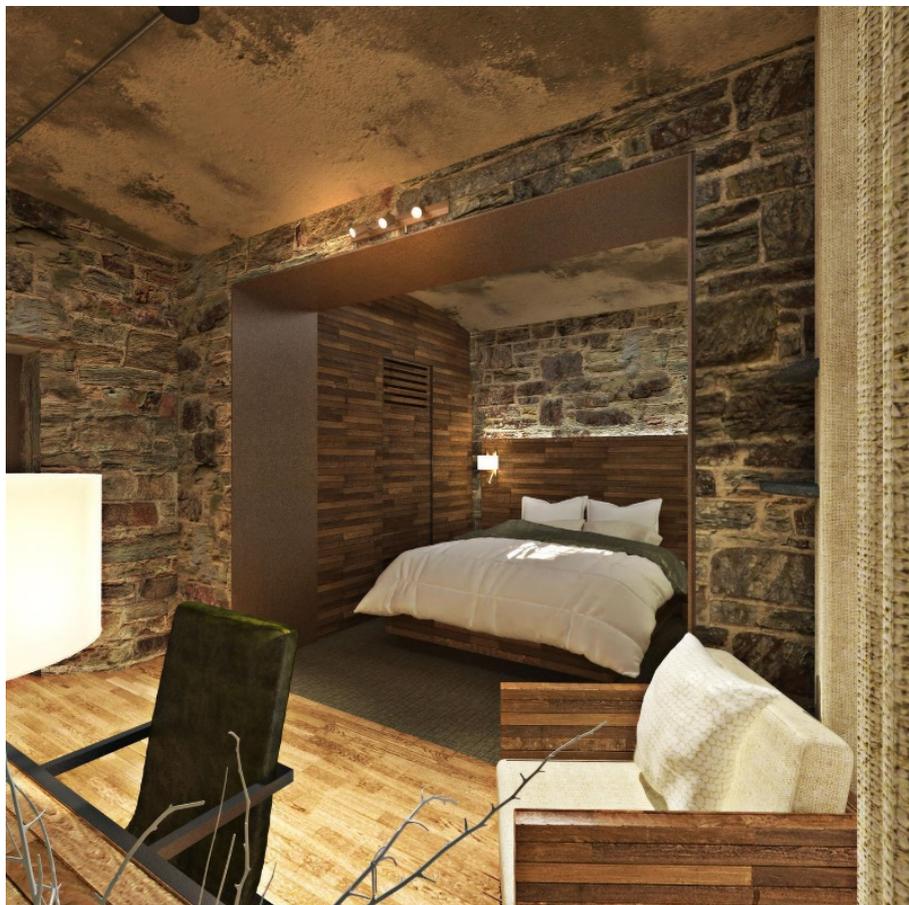
Bodmin has, in its past, been the site of two prisons. Between 1749 and 1779 there was a Debtors Prison in Bodmin. There is a plaque on the wall of the Hole in the Wall pub where this used to be. The pub's name came from the hole in the wall that was there for people to pass food through to the poor people who were crowded together in cold wet cells, in dreadful conditions. We find it strange to believe that people who were in debt to others were put in prison until they could pay their debt.

This prison was closed in 1779 when Bodmin Jail (formerly known as Bodmin Gaol) was built. It was the only purpose-built prison erected in Cornwall and it remained in service until 1927. The Jail itself was the first prison in the Country to hold prisoners in individual cells though by today's standards conditions were harsh. Prisoners were kept in strict confinement and absolute silence, were fed only bread and gruel, a thin watery soup, and had a hard plank for a bed.



Prisoners held in Bodmin jail were held for a variety of crimes including capital offences and the Jail itself saw over 50 executions which in the 19th Century were public executions and which at the time society viewed as a form of public entertainment. Trains often brought hundreds of spectators and the hangings were often watched by thousands of people.

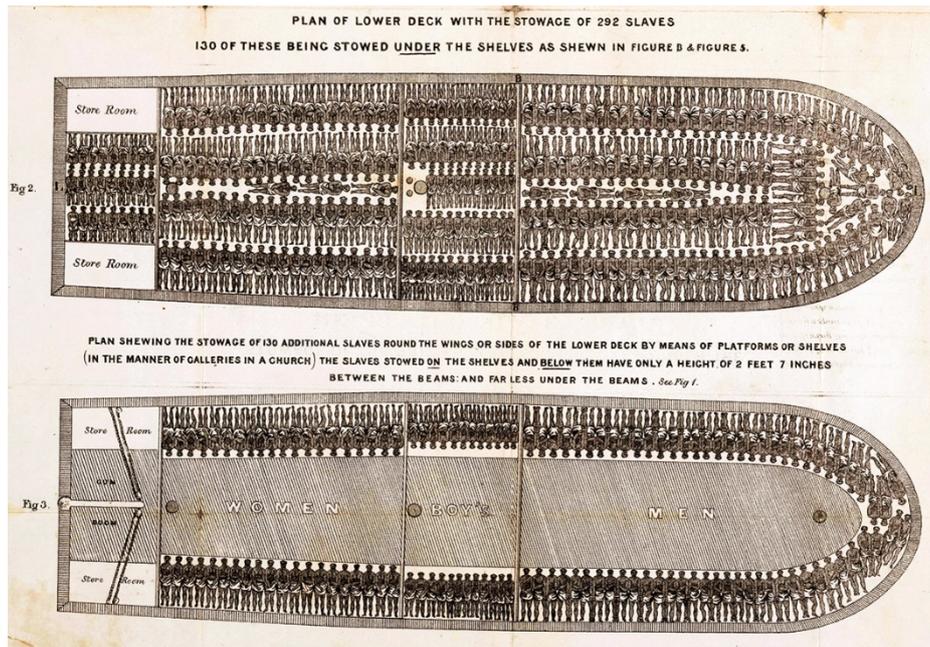
The buildings, much of which had been left to fall into ruins, have now been transformed into the new Jail Attraction and the luxury Bodmin Jail Hotel and Resort. The cells look very different now!



Slavery

But captivity is not only a form of punishment in our legal system. Perhaps the most abhorrent form of captivity is that of slavery. Slavery is a practice as old as civilisation itself. People have captured others and enslaved them to work as forced labour for millennia. The Romans used galley slaves to row their fighting ships and Victorian English grew wealthy using slaves to grow and process sugar cane.

This famous image of the slave ship *Brookes* shows the brutal way that slaves were transported from Africa to the plantations of the Caribbean, on voyages of one or two months. This image was used by the abolitionists, the people trying to bring the practice of slavery to an end in the 18th and 19th centuries, to show how cruel and inhuman slavery was. It is easy to forget that people would not have had television or the internet to inform them and many were shocked to see this image.



These people had no freedoms at all and were considered the property of others. It would be good to think that this horrendous practice was no longer with us, but sadly people are still exploited in this way.

Animals in captivity

We keep animals in captivity in zoos. These began as status symbols for the wealthy and then became places of entertainment. Although zoos all over the world are now playing a vital role in saving species from extinction, keeping animals captive is a controversial issue that is increasingly unpopular among some animal rights activists.

It can be argued that animals live a better life in captivity as they are not hunted by predators, have medical treatment if they are ill and are never short of food. However, it is also about the conditions in which they are kept. The small bare cages used to house animals in most early zoos are being replaced by large enclosures that offer more space and things for the animals to do.



What does freedom mean to you?