

# Debtor Prisoner Maths

## With Ely Museum

The building that is now home to Ely Museum used to be the old gaol, a type of jail. People who committed crimes (**criminals**) in Ely or the surrounding villages would be sent to the gaol.

However there was a second type of prisoner kept in the gaol known as a **debtor**. This was a person who owed money to someone and was unable to pay them back. Unfortunately there was a catch. While the person was in the jail they were charged money for their time spent there. This meant their debt would increase. So what chance did they have to pay off their debt?

We know how much money they were charged in Ely Gaol from a document published in 1794 by the bishop of Ely. Here is a list of the prices.

<b><i>Garnish fee on Arrival</i></b>	<b><i>1s 4d</i></b>
<b><i>Food for 1 week</i></b>	<b><i>4s</i></b>
<b><i>1 week's rent for a room with a bed made of straw</i></b>	<b><i>1s</i></b>
<b><i>1 week's rent for a room with a bed made of planks</i></b>	<b><i>1s 6d</i></b>
<b><i>1 week's rent for a room with a bed made of iron with sheets</i></b>	<b><i>2s</i></b>
<b><i>Discharge fee on leaving</i></b>	<b><i>16s 8d</i></b>

## S's and d's

The prices are all in shillings and pence. S's are shillings and d's are pence. We still use pence today but not shillings.

Our money system was changed in the UK in 1971. It changed to a **decimal** system and shillings disappeared.

In 1794 however the pennies looked very different from our pennies. They were **9 times heavier than a modern penny and much thicker**. In 1794 King George III was on throne so his face was featured on the coin.



Penny coin of George III

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**12 pennies made a shilling**. In 1794 a shilling was a small coin made of silver. Money had a higher worth in 1700s than it does today.

Despite only being worth 12 pence it would have the same buying power as a £5 note today.



Silver Shilling coin of George III

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Finally, **21 shillings or 252 pennies made a gold coin known as a guinea**. A guinea is no longer a coin in circulation but it was a large gold coin produced between 1663 and 1814 and was the precursor to the pound coin.



Gold Guinea coin of George III

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There were lots of other coins used in the 1700s including coins worth 2p (tuppence), 3p (threepence), and 4p (groat).

There were even half penny and quarter penny (farthing) coins.

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## Questions

### Key

12 Pennies = 1 Shilling

21 Shillings = 1 Guinea

252 Pennies = 1 Guinea

### Question 1 (Easy)

How many pennies are in 2 Shillings?

### Question 2 (Easy)

If you start with 2 Shillings and have to pay the Ely Gaol *1s 6d* (1 shilling and 6 pence) for 1 week's rent for a room with a bed made of planks how much do you have left over?

### Question 3 (Easy)

If food for 1 week is 4s (4 Shillings) how much is food for 4 weeks?

### Question 4 (Medium)

How many pennies are in 5 Shillings?

### Question 5 (Medium)

If a debtor can pay off his debt at 4 pennies a week how long will it take him to pay off a debt of 2 shillings?

### Question 7 (Hard)

There was a coin known as a groat. It was worth 4 pennies. How many groats would a guinea be worth?

### Question 8 (Hardest)

When a prisoner arrives he has to pay a garnish fee on arrival of 1s 4d (1 shilling 4 pence). He stays for 3 weeks with a room with a bed made of planks costing 1s 6d (1 shilling and 6 pence) per week. To leave the goal he has to pay a discharge fee on leaving of 16s 8d (16 shillings and 8 pence) how much money has his stay in the gaol cost him?