This activity will take you on a fascinating tour of some of the key crime and punishment sites in the town's history, before ending up at the Ruthin Craft Centre café for a game of hangman.

Before you start

How to get there

This adventure is based in Ruthin town centre, and you start off outside Ruthin Gaol on Clwyd Street. Parking is available in a long stay pay and display car park at the bottom of Clwyd Street (it is sign posted from the road). There are picnic tables and toilets in this car park. The Gaol is just one minute walk up the hill from the car park. There are two disabled parking spaces available at the Gaol itself.

Postcode:

LL15 1HN (this takes you to the pay and display car park).

Public transport:

For public transport options, call Traveline Cymru on 0871 200 2233 or National Rail Enquiries on 08457 48 49 50.

Activity starting point:

Start the activity outside the right hand side gates of the Gaol, looking in towards the Gaol building itself.

How long will this activity take?

The walk through Ruthin should only take you 10 mins, but its up to you how long you want to play hangman for at the end!

What you need

Pen and paper.

Let's get started

Standing outside the Gaol, with its high, imposing walls, barred windows and heavy, studded doors, you'll see it was certainly no hotel for the villains, thieves and those who were simply just down on their luck, who stayed there over the years.

It was a **prison (carchar)** until 1906 and if the Gaol is open, you can wander through into the main courtyard with its bleak stone walls and look up towards the main tower, where the guards would have kept an eye on the inmates.

If the Gaol's closed, you can still peak through the big iron gates on the main road, to get a view of this impressive building. **(1)**

Although home to some formidable criminals in its time, only one hanging actually took place here, in 1903 (and you can find out more about that in the Gaol museum). Many more were held in a much more public space in the centre of town, which is where you can wander to now.

If you set off up the hill, along Clwyd Street, you'll spot a number of ancient timbered buildings. It was on this road in 1822, in a pub called the Red Lion, that a notorious hangman nearly met his death, when a demonstration of his grizzly art went wrong.

Samuel Burrows was well known in the region as a 'rope for hire', a freelance executioner who plied his trade across North Wales.

At the start of the 1800s, people could be hung for a huge range of **crimes (trosedds)**, from the serious, like murder, to the trivial, such as picking a pocket. **Executions (dienyddiads)** were also very popular public affairs, with huge crowds turning up in this square, often jeering and shouting at the hangman.

Perhaps this is why Burrows also developed a reputation as a hardened drinker. He was a man who enjoyed his beer, especially the night before an execution, so it's likely he was a bit worse for wear on that fateful night in the Red Lion.

The next day he was due to hang **highwayman (carnleidr)** John Connor and the story goes that other locals in the pub egged Burrows on to show them how he went about his deadly trade.

Hangmen were usually secretive characters, who avoided the public glare for fear of reprisals from the friends and families of those they had left dangling. But Burrows was different, He was a showman and was used to playing to the crowd.

Attaching his rope to the ceiling, he climbed up on to a stool and showed his audience how to tie a noose and then, for good measure, put his own head through it. Just as he did so, a fellow reveller kicked the stool away, leaving Burrows hanging by his neck. Thankfully, another patron was quick to cut him down before he went the same way as his victims.
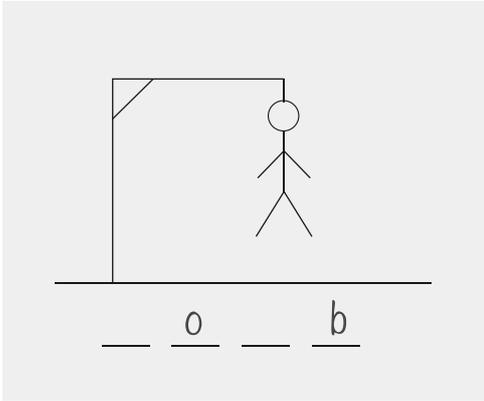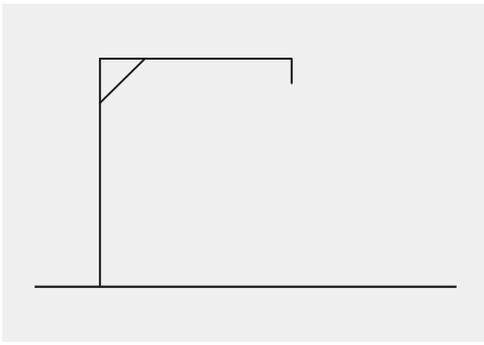
It's said Burrows carried out 58 executions in total but alcohol finally got the better of him in 1835 and he died of liver disease, aged 63.

Keep walking up the hill, and you'll arrive at St Peter's Square. Stand by the clock tower and take a look round the town's historic heart, where felons were flogged or hung and thieves found themselves in the stocks.

The black and white building on one side of the square, which is now the NatWest Bank, was once the old court house. If you can find the green plaque on the front of the building, then you'll be standing in the very spot where many people were once hung. **(2)**

Now, if you're ready for a sit down, a drink and a game of hangman, take Market Street (the road off the square by the HSBC Bank) down to the café at the Ruthin Craft centre. You'll find it off to the left of the main roundabout. This is a busy main roundabout, so take care, and look out of the purple 'Croeso' sign – this is the centre. And the Wifi's great here too, so you can visit www.digitaldenbighshire.mobi and search for this activity (you'll find it under the Ruthin activities). Here you can listen to some of the 'sights and sounds' that are available in the after you've finished section.

No-one really knows how the game of hangman got its name but it's quick, easy to learn and, of course, loads of fun.

Firstly, you need to decide who's going to be the executioner and who's going to be executed. Draw a **gallows (crocbren)** like the one on the left and write out the alphabet at the top of the page.

The executioner then chooses a word for the other player to try and guess. Why not try to think of a word related to they story you've just read, about Burrows the executioner?

Draw a dash for each letter of your chosen word on the paper.

The other player then guesses a letter. If that letter is in the word, then write the letter in every space where it appears.

If the letter isn't in the word, then add a body part to the gallows. There are six to add in total – head, body, left arm, right arm, left leg, and right leg.

The game continues until the body is completed, or the word has been guessed.

What did you think?

Tell us what you thought about this activity on the Discover Denbighshire Facebook page.

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Don't miss

Whilst you're in the area, there's lots of other great places that you could visit...

Nant Clwyd y Dre

Parts of this intriguing building, which is one of the oldest town houses in Wales, date back over 700 years, and it's the story of the way in which different owners have altered, renovated, extended and redecorated the house that's central to its 'Seven Ages' tour. Look out for the ornate French four poster bed bought by the wealthy Jacobean owner Simon Grey, and the Georgian bedroom, with its panelled walls and incredible Chinese wallpaper.

Nant Clwyd y Dre is on Castle St, Ruthin, LL15 1DP

For more information, visit: www.denbighshire.gov.uk/heritage or call 01824 709 822

Ruthin Gaol

A 'House of Correction', where vagabonds and the unemployed were put to work, has stood at the bottom of Clwyd Street since 1654. Over the centuries the building has been radically altered as views on how inmates should be housed have changed.

In 2002, the Gaol re-opened as a museum and today you can visit and see at first hand how the villains and rapscallions of Denbighshire once lived.

The Gaol is at 46 Clwyd St, Ruthin, Clwyd LL15 1HP

For more information, visit: www.denbighshire.gov.uk/heritage or call 01824 708 281.