



Restorer's Workshop

CHAIN HANDCUFFS AND CHAINS

Restorer Martynas Kosas

The division of Kaunas Hard Labour Prison, which operated in the Ninth Fort during the interwar period in Lithuania (1924–1940), is reminiscent of both the authentic premises (for example, solitary confinement) that have survived in the fort and the preserved exhibits that reflect the daily life of the interwar prison. One of them, chain handcuffs and chains, arrived at the restorer's workshop.

Prisoner chains, iron shackles, chain handcuffs, etc. are the so-called iron bracelets chained to prisoners' arms or legs to restrict movement. Currently, in the police practice of democratic Western countries, shackling chains have been replaced by handcuffs. However, in non-democratic countries, especially in East or Asian countries, archaic chains of traditional design are still used to restrain prisoners.

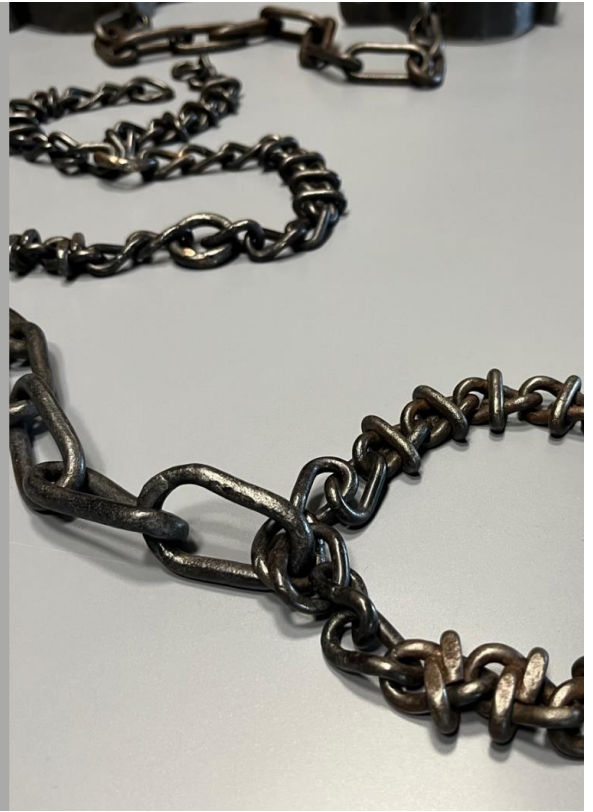
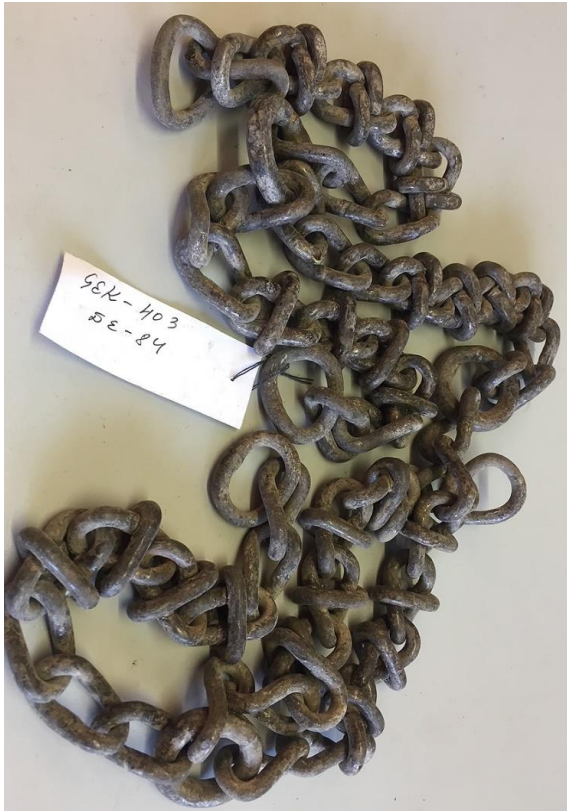
The first shackling chains appeared as early as the Bronze Age, when mass metalworking began in a smaller or larger scale. Assyrian bronze chains dating back to the 10th century BC were found in Nineveh (now Mosul, Iraq), and they are considered to be the oldest known shackling chains. The technology of shackling prisoners and making chains has not changed for centuries: chains and handcuffs were made by blacksmiths. However, at the beginning of the

nineteenth century, when precise casting technologies and metalworking machines were created, the work of a blacksmith shifted to a new technology, which made it possible to produce iron products faster and cheaper. The next stage of production appeared at the beginning of the 20th century when powerful hydraulic presses for stamping and cutting were developed, which caused a faster and easier metal processing.

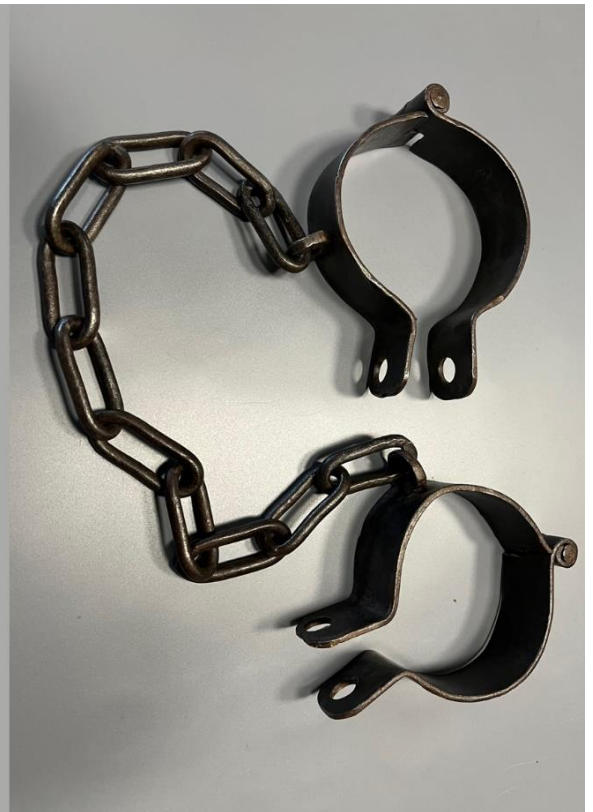
The collections of Kaunas Ninth Fort Museum contain chain handcuffs and chains used in the hard labour prison in Kaunas during the interwar period. It is a set of several kilograms, which consists of non-adjustable, rounded bracelets, which are attached to the wrists / ankles with a padlock or rivet and are connected to each other by a chain, and the chains connect the cuffs of legs and arms. The shackling chains were most likely made by local craftsmen under the order of the Prison Department. The chains are machine-made. It is very interesting that the constituent parts of the chains were interlocked and their ends are soldered with brass. For both durability and aesthetic reasons, the chain links were decorated by adding additional rings.

When the shackling chains arrived to the restorer's workshop in very poor condition. The dirt, corrosion, and previous "restoration" that had accumulated over the decades had consequences: the metal was "preserved" with grease and coated with fuzzy chemicals that caused corrosion. This was only detrimental to the exhibit and did not provide any aesthetic image.

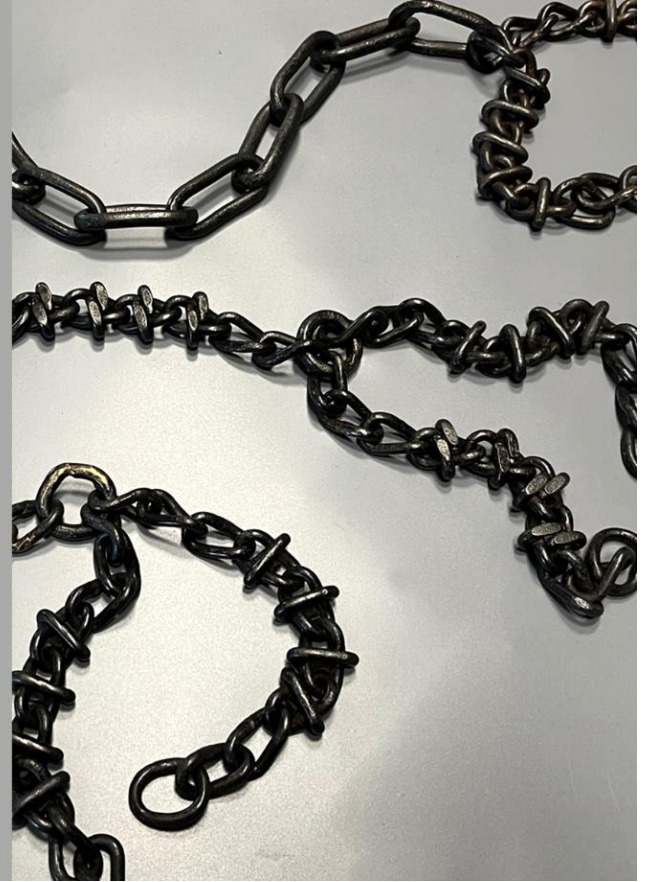
During the restoration of the exhibit, the metal surface was thoroughly cleaned, soaked and coated with preservatives. The result of the work is an exhibition image of an important exhibit reminiscent of the interwar prison times.



© KDFM / Martynas Kosas



© KDFM / Martynas Kosas



© KDFM / Martynas Kosas