Quakers in Criminal Justice

Shining a Light in the Darkness



Newsletter 123, Autumn 2026

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Editorial

Greetings, Friends

In this edition, you will catch up on our 2026 conference and see that the next one is well advanced in its planning – so save the date: **March 19-21, 2027**. As always, our newsletter contributions are diverse, with familiar subjects, such as an update on the Wandsworth Improvement Campaign and the work of the Prison Phoenix Trust, alongside new contributors. If it all gets a bit too much, Tim Newell advises us to look into the many benefits of allotments. He also reminds us, in a separate piece to "Never forget the Victims." This edition also contains two very different contributions from prison – a letter from a Conscientious Objector in 1942, and a poem from a serving prisoner.

We are thinking ahead to Prisons Week 2026 (October 11-17) which has the theme 'All Are Invited'; this links directly to our 'Welcoming All' initiative to help integrate former prisoners into Meetings. We shall circulate further details nearer Prisons Week, but meanwhile, please download https://www.qicj.org/doc/Welcoming All.pdf and familiarise yourself with it. If Friends know of an Area or Local Meeting who would like a presentation, do get in touch with qicjclerk@gmail.com.

'Welcoming All' continues to develop. Simon Ewart, Robert Wilson and I have made a number of presentations both locally and further afield. We hope more Meetings will sign up to the Welcome Directory as being prepared to accept former prisoners. Do take a look at their website: www.welcomedirectory.org.uk Having become aware that there is a lack of confidence in welcoming this population in other churches, I have now produced a version of 'Welcoming All' which is suitable for other Christian denominations, and another for mosques.

Moving on to aspects of the criminal justice landscape: firstly, plans formulated under the previous Justice Secretary to scrap juries for certain trials and to have a judge sitting alone to conduct the hearing appear to have been dropped.

No-one will be unaware of the prison capacity crisis. The response includes converting storage cupboards and laundry rooms into cells (!) and the plans to 'fast-track' the freeing up of prison spaces by (1) increasing the deportation of foreign nationals from UK prisons, (2) seeking an early resolution to Imprisonment for Public Protection sentences – no clarity on how - and (3) repurposing some women's prisons for men. The announcement of the above are a desperate attempt to row back on 'early release' measures in the Sentencing Act, which led to media outcry based on the incorrect assumption that sentences will be terminated prematurely (see Item 6).

We are pleased to hear of an Independent Review of the Prison System led by Amber Rudd. The call for evidence has sought views on (1) the biggest challenges to prisons (England & Wales) and (2) opportunities to improve outcomes over 5-15 years. This is less than the Royal Commission on the CJS, announced in a Queen's speech several years ago, then dropped. But let us hope it will move things in the right direction.
So, a lot to get your teeth into in this edition…….

Melanie Jameson, Newsletter Editor

2. QICJ 2026 Annual Conference: Care, Support, and Therapy within the Criminal Justice System

William Waddilove *reflects on and summarises our annual conference*

A total of 35 Friends, including speakers, attended at Hinsley Hall from March 20 to 22. As usual, it was quite an intensive programme, starting Friday evening and continuing until lunch on Sunday.

The venue is a delightful place, built originally as a Methodist training centre and now managed by the Roman Catholic diocese of Leeds. The basic building is a large quadrangle, and one side is dedicated to the diocesan offices. At the back is a small chapel. The Hall is set on a fairly large site, and around are various small alms houses for retired priests.

The conference started in an interesting way. If you are dealing with people under stress, who have suffered some form of trauma, then you need to recognise it and acknowledge it. Well, I suppose most people, when put into prison or detention, will suffer in some similar way. So we started in a very dimly lit room with a session led by Selina Sasse of PPT (Prison Phoenix Trust) and were talked though some simple basic stress-relieving exercises, all based upon sitting on a chair.

There were five plenary sessions overall, two with outside speakers. One session was an update on general concerns which had been covered by past conferences, including those from the Wandsworth Improvement Group. You may recall the publicity around the ‘not fit for anybody’ concern about Wandsworth Prison, where rats were seen everywhere and the Quaker Chaplain who publicised the concern was ‘dismissed’. Things have improved a bit, but there is still lots to do.

We also had an update on the situation of Don. We had met him at past conferences, and although he had been assured that some past offences would not be proceeded with, sometime after his release from prison they were resurrected and so he is now again in prison. Out of the discussion about him, a number of issues were mentioned. For instance, when someone is arrested, who cares for their property? Apparently, no-one. So if you have no friends or relations to step in and take care of things, everything you own may be sent for scrap whatever its value!

We also had a fairly similar case at Hartshill Meeting, where a support group was established but the subject was recalled to prison, so it is possible that his recently bought car just sat on the street somewhere and then was scrapped along with anything else. Another issue (as someone put it) is that the moment you leave prison, you are likely to be breaking the law! You need public transport, but you have no way of paying for it. The buses do not take cash, and you have no credit or Oyster card. The Wandsworth Improvement Group try to raise money so that discharged prisoners can at least be given an Oyster card with money on.

We were given a history and update on ‘Therapeutic communities’ by Chris Holman, who had been the last superintendent at The Retreat. He spoke about how therapeutic communities would help members confront their problems and develop an awareness of interpersonal consequences. He said how The Retreat had been a forerunner of a different approach to mental health, where all patients were, from the very beginning, treated in a normal, respectful manner. This was a vast change from the ‘standard’ approach where they were classed as lunatics and kept restrained. You may be aware of Grendon, but there are and have been other examples of therapeutic wings in prisons. From our perspective, they have been very effective, and some ex-members have worked very hard to help individuals avoid further convictions. However there is, in some sections of society, a lot of resistance; parts of the press also promote the ’Lock ‘em up and throw away the key’ approach.

During the conference, we were often reminded of the cost-effectiveness of keeping people out of prison. But all we see is the rather sad information about the increasing prison population numbers.

There were three workshops, and as usual there was only time to attend two.
The first one I attended was ‘Lessons in Criminal punishment and restorative practices from Aotearoa, New Zealand’ and the way the Maori peoples are such a high proportion of the prison population.

The other one I attended was ‘The Value of Art Therapy.’ This was led by Rose Verny, who works in Grendon, talking about how workshops can be run without any need for verbal expression or literacy, and how this is often very helpful for some people. Other groups there run Music and Psychodrama sessions.

The third workshop (which I did not attend) was on ‘Trauma and Restorative Practices in Special schools and other settings’ – all of which have one thing in common: an experience of various aspects of trauma. This was led by Jo Everett, who said it was important to help a person begin to notice what they feel, and to understand why they respond the way they do; this can help them discover that their inner life is navigable, not just overwhelming, and how this is a prerequisite for healthy relationships. (This included words and thanks to Howard Saunders who attended.)

As always, we enjoyed being together and welcoming new faces to the QICJ family.



‘‘Are you working to bring about a just and compassionate society which allows everyone to develop their capacities, and fosters the desire to serve?”

3. Never Forget the Victims

Tim Newell *writes from his experience of involvement with Escaping Victimhood*

As a faith community, we have shown a commitment to those incarcerated for offending. Our history of being held in custody made this a shared lived experience. This work continues to dominate our concern for justice.

Having taken an interest in restorative justice, we have sometimes forgotten that the needs of the victim are the first issue for consideration in the triangle of needs and participation – victim, offender and community. We are becoming a less crime-affected society, fortunately – from the latest statistics. However, the issue of crime is never far from media attention, and there is no let-up in the punitively angry response to any change in our arrangements for sentencing offenders. Our rate of imprisonment continues to be the highest in Europe.

Much of the anger from victims comes from the fear of continued offending, but also from the impact of the trauma experienced by victims following an offence. We are led to think that the offender having been sentenced should lead to closure for the victim, but all the evidence is that trauma does not dissipate so easily. Trauma-informed practice would lead us to take the issue more seriously than we do.

Our experience from the Quaker-inspired **Escaping Victimhood** work with families affected by homicide has shown that it takes careful work and processes to reduce the fear and anxiety remaining after the tragedy, analysing the dynamics of how fight / flight responses remain dormant unless worked through within a safe setting.

https://www.escapingvictimhood.com/

Escaping Victimhood has shown that, when taken seriously, victims of homicide in families begin to feel restored and able to place the experience in a context which does not dominate their being. They can begin to return to living a life of employment, family support and creativity, never forgetting the lost loved one. We rely on fundraising and donations so please consider whether you or your Meeting can support us.

Unless we learn to focus on victims of crime seriously, and provide them with responses to work with, the likelihood is that we will continue to have polarised attitudes about sentencing. Not meeting the needs of victims of crime through a justice process is unjust. But this takes time to be taken seriously. We don't have a justice system that takes time for victims, and so it remains unjust.

"Seek to understand the causes of injustice, social unrest and fear."

"Are you alert to practices here and throughout the world which discriminate against people on the basis of who or what they are, or because of their beliefs?"

4. A-Z of Prison Nursing

Rebecca Thackray *(Prison Nurse at HMP Brixton) shares her alphabet*

Acceptance – a basic need, whether it's being reconciled with a partner, or finding a role within your tribe.
Beds – top or lower bunk, they're still old, metal, standard length & width and don't help back problems.
Cooking in a kettle – a cookbook many a prisoner could write.
Dentist – is in big demand following neglect and assault.
Education – too often missed through undiagnosed ADHD, dyslexia, abuse, trauma or life in transit.
Faith, Family, Food – whatever stops despair.
Games – pool, dominoes, soccer provide occasional healthy distraction and interaction
Hours – I asked a man to wait: 'Have you got five minutes?' 'I've got six years,' he said. 'Doing Time' demands a change of pace.
Individuals – some adapt well, others cope by obsessive compulsive behaviour, or seek oblivion via drugs. Some get skills, get fit, get out and get a new life. But there are infinite variations, and we can never assume.
Job, accommodation & community ties – the three main factors affecting whether someone returns to prison.
Keys – lock me up along with the patients.
Laughter – "It's one thing they can't take away from me, and they've really tried, Miss!"
Methadone – daily dosing a clientele with many a tale to tell.
Night-time – there are no nurses available. Nursing is over-ridden by any security issues. The Justice system trumps healthcare.
Optician – the list is long.
Podiatry – the list is longer still.
Quiet – around 12.30 lunchtime when the prison roll is checked and correct and all are 'banged up'.
Release date – which patients long for and dread in equal measure.
Suicide – we may have to explain our nursing practice in a coroner's court.
Telehealth – for specialists to diagnose remotely and advise the GP, saving on escorting people to hospital.
Unjust – patients are quick to spot unfairness in their sentence, their medical treatment, their cell conditions, the prison regime or other inmates, and to threaten to sue, self-harm or 'kick off '.
Vulnerable – as much the bully as the victim; many were abused or 'looked after', lacked positive role models, self-medicated and acquired addictions.
Wages – for work in the kitchen, cleaning the Wing or attending a horticulture course – £4 - £10 a week.
Xrays – of fists that have hit walls, fracturing their own knuckles in frustration.
Yoga – 'We're all doing time; a guide for getting free' by Bo Lozoff, free to anyone in prison by The Prison Phoenix Trust.
Zzzzzz – A confined space, old bunk bed, too hot, too cold, locked in from 6pm, away from the familiar with fear, sadness and a snoring cell-mate doesn't make for a calm night's sleep.

5. Quaker Service Northern Ireland

New developments in Northern Ireland as Alexsey Janes takes the helm of QS.

***Alexsey Janes**, the new Executive Director of Quaker Service, introduces himself.*



Dear Friends,

I am very pleased to be writing to you with an update about the work of Quaker Service in Northern Ireland. There have been some exciting and important developments for our Charity over recent months, and it is my pleasure to be sharing them with you.

New Executive Director

It was a great privilege for me to take up this position back in mid-February. Before coming to Quaker Service, I spent ten years with Ulster Wildlife as their Community Engagement Manager, helping people connect with nature, and championing community involvement in environmental work. During my career I have been fortunate to lead a number of youth and community development programmes in North Belfast. I also come to Quaker Service having previously headed up two other Northern Ireland-wide charities; The Young Farmers' Clubs of Ulster and the Reminiscence Network NI. I have been a member of the Society of Friends for over 20 years, and I am therefore very grateful to have been given this opportunity to be of service to Quaker Service. Since starting, I have been enjoying getting to know our staff, volunteers, Board members, and supporters. I've been struck by their warmth, dedication, and compassion. I've also been excited to meet some of those who take part in, and benefit from, our activities. This has allowed me to see firsthand the positive difference we are making in the lives of people and communities across Northern Ireland.

Exciting developments at Frederick Street.

Our office base has relocated from rooms above our Charity Shop on the Lisburn Road to Frederick Street Meeting House on the northern outskirts of Belfast City Centre. Geographically this puts us in close contact with underserved communities and neighbourhoods in North Belfast and a growing student population linked to the ever-expanding Ulster University campus across the road. The setting of the Meeting House also adds to the spiritual connection between our work and the Quaker values that underpin them. Our Community Development Worker, Alex, has done a great job working with local Friends to engage over twenty charitable organisations who now regularly make good use of the recently refurbished Meeting House.

The refurbishment of the disused caretaker's apartment at the back of the Frederick Street Meeting House is one of our next big projects. Again, working with local Friends and groups that are now using the Meeting House, we aim to transform the building into a multipurpose community event and exhibition space. This will then be used by the local community as well as providing a great setting for future service delivery by Quaker Service.

Supporting people in the criminal justice system.
As I am sure you know, Quaker Service has a long history of working with prisoners and their families. Our Quaker Connections programme began with volunteer-based befriending of isolated prisoners. This work continues to go from strength to strength creating a wide range of positive outcomes. In recent times we worked with a long-term prisoner to develop an "alternatives to violence" programme. This has now been co-delivered by that inmate to his peers at both HM Prison Maghaberry and HM Prison Magilligan. A new pilot pre-release programme called 'Step Up, Step Out' is currently being delivered by our staff and volunteers at Maghaberry Prison, helping prepare prisoners for the challenges of reintegration. Time-limited befriending on release is also being put in place to reduce the chances of course participants ending up back in prison. We are also working with the Probation Service for Northern Ireland and the Youth Justice Agency to provide meaningful placement opportunities for people issued with Community Service Orders.

A new chapter for Quaker Cottage
In partnership with local community organisations, work is underway to look at how our Quaker Cottage and Family Centre facilities on the side of Black Mountain can be bought back to life. It's unique location, stunning views and flexible accommodation would make it a fantastic venue for a wide range of community and charity-led activity.

A request for your help and support
We are extremely grateful for the ongoing practical and financial support we receive every year from individual Friends and Meetings across Britain and Ireland. This is what enables us to deliver the kind of important work that's outlined above. Without this generosity we would not be able to do so. Therefore, please forgive me for ending this update with a request for your help and support. Thank you for any contribution that you can provide, as this will go directly towards making a real difference to people who face multiple challenges and barriers to their inclusion and wellbeing.

Please do get in touch with me on alexey.janes@quakerservice.com if you would like to know more about our work and about opportunities to get involved.

Details on how to donate: https://quakerservice1.enthuse.com/cp/53339/fundraiser#!/

In Friendship,



"Do you give a right proportion of your money to support Quaker work?"

6. The Sentencing Act and Recalls



Melanie Jameson *looks at the Sentencing Act 2026 and factors contributing to recall*

There has been a massive media outcry at the prospect of prisoners being released at an earlier stage in their sentence and being free to 'roam the streets committing further crimes'. The Saturday Times goes further, referring to 'thousands of killers and dangerous criminals' being let loose. But what is really going on here as the Sentencing Act 2026 comes into force?

The controversy arises due to the new Progression Model (initially the Earned Progression Model, but the incentive element, whereby good behaviour is rewarded, has since been discarded). It affects Standard Determined Sentences which will now be divided into thirds, as follows, starting with the custodial element. Part 1: In prison for the first third; Part 2: Intensive supervision outside prison with new restrictions, eg a driving ban, very restricted movement enforced by electronic tagging; Part 3: Remaining on licence till the end of the sentence – so the individual is still serving their full sentence. There will be ten tranches of release (with increasing categories of exceptions) beginning Oct 1.
The government has made this announcement to stress just how punitive 'early release' will be: World-first crackdown to restrict offenders' freedom and give it back to victims – GOV.UK

Andy Burnham has contributed to the outrage with his comment "*I fully appreciate the anguish of Andrew's (PC Harper) family and, more broadly, of all those victims and their families who may see those who caused them such harm not serve their full sentence"*. This relates to a *different* measure whereby *another* category of prisoners are released into community supervision at the halfway rather than the two thirds stage. Since it is clearly impossible just to pick out and exclude the young men involved in PC Harper's death, it follows that all cases of manslaughter will have to be exempted, along with other groups which are highly sensitive, and this is what has now transpired. There will be a victim support package of £10 million – which I hope can be used wisely.

Another change, this time from March 2026, is the assumption against a sentence of 12 months or less; these will be suspended – *not* abolished - and for up to three years. A further measure is greater use of Deferred Sentences, whereby the individual undertakes requirements known as Deferment Orders.

Let us now look at changes to Recalls, an area in which QICJ has representation as part of the Recall Coalition. Numbers of people recalled to prison have risen from 6,000 to over 13,000 in the last seven years, forming almost 1/6 of the prison population – so something is clearly going wrong. The new measure relates to Fixed Term Recalls for those serving four years and less, which used to be of 14 or 28 days duration but are now 56 days, with the aim of providing more time for pre-release planning. Anecdotally, there are now *higher* recall rates, with underlying problems *still* unaddressed.

Probation continues to struggle – one can only hope that the proposed 1,300 new trainee Probation Officers (as part of a £700m investment) can make some headway. It is more than likely, however, that the bulk of the funding is destined for electronic monitoring, which has a mixed record not least due to the flawed provider, SERCO. The consensus amongst the voluntary sector is that enforcement is being prioritised above support for a population that is often vulnerable, and that the crisis will simply shift from prison to the community.

Both CLINKS and the Recall Coalition are making proposals to the new government which will include an ending of the all-too-common use of recall for administrative breaches of licence conditions. Both will call for more investment in community services. Meanwhile NACRO has launched a report with the aim of establishing a more proportionate use of recall to custody, stressing that this would free up as many spaces as the Progression Model described above.

https://www.nacro.org.uk/rising-rates-of-recall-what-are-the-solutions/

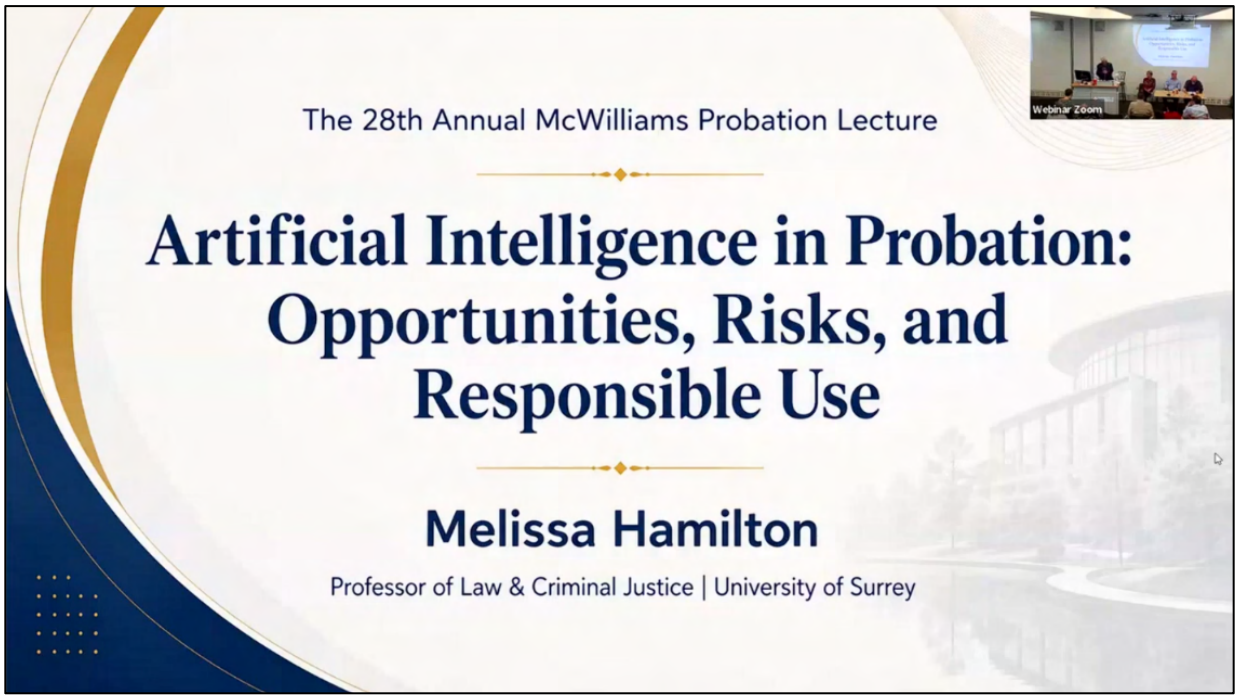
NACRO's report highlights the following key statistics:

- Nine out of every ten prison beds freed by people being released were filled by someone recalled to custody in 2025/26.
- We estimate that the government are spending £750 million a year on recalls, with £590 million of this spent on people *not* facing new charges.
- More than 51,000 people were sent back to prison following recall last year; this compares with around 47,000 following sentencing.
- There are currently 9,900 people in prison who were recalled for reasons other than facing a charge for further offending; reasons included failure to reside at a specified address or to attend probation meetings.

Crucially, NACRO made recommendations which include better and more timely referrals to relevant services; plans to meet the target in reducing prison-leaver homelessness; introduction of a clear framework for decision-making for probation practitioners, with levels of interventions for people who commit minor breaches of their licence. Conclusion: recall to custody should be a *last* resort.

Our Justice Interest Group has also fed into the recall debate on behalf of QICJ during a Round Table at the Ministry of Justice in June. Liz Bridge attended, and noted: neurodivergent people are often left confused about license conditions and the reasons for recall; some women related that their health and pregnancies were affected; there's a lack of housing / suitable housing; approved premises can be targeted by dealers and often found unsafe by people trying to get back on track; implications of sofa surfing and lack of fixed address were not taken into account; appointments were set over large geographical areas for people who had limited funds and were inexperienced with public transport. Finally, something that I have come across recently: noticeable increases in recall when regular probation staff were ill or on holiday and replacements were unfamiliar with the person concerned and were unwilling to 'risk it'.

7. The 2026 Bill McWilliams Lecture



***Adrian Smith** shares his notes on this annual event*

This lecture is given annually at the Cambridge Institute of Criminology, to honour the memory of a gifted probation officer. Bill McWilliams' widow, Brenda, had died since the previous lecture.

The 2026 lecture was delivered by Melissa Hamilton, professor of law and justice at the University of Surrey. Her title was:
Artificial Intelligence in Probation: Opportunities, Risks and Responsible Use.

I have to admit, as a dinosaur, I am instinctively on my guard as regards AI. It is new, and will require me to learn new skills. I found the lecturer difficult to follow, as she didn't use a microphone, and much of what she said was too technical for me to appreciate, but I pick out a number of useful points she made.

AI can help in probation work because it employs programmes built up in consultation with the Service, not just delivered to it. It can be useful in capturing and organising information for search-and-retrieval when records may be fragmented, and, in an actuarial role, to calculate the risk of future offending. We must recognise that AI has potential for reinforcing ethical and class disparities. Programmes are likely to enshrine the presumptions and prejudices of those who devise them. Too often, AI gives false positives, leading practitioners to be overcautious and risk-averse. Far too many prisoners released on licence get recalled to jail through minor infringements, such as missing appointments though a bus not turning up. Any recall imposes an additional charge of £1,000 per week on the taxpayer.

It is risky to delegate assessment entirely to AI. We come across atypical cases where consequences do not work out in the way we expect. Traditional predication methods may fall down if an offender has unusual motives, if his character does not fit the usual pattern, or if he responds poorly to the idea of deterrence. We can recognise acute risk with the help of AI: warning signs include heavy drinking, rising anger, fatalistic feelings, a change in general demeanour. Proper assessment facilitates information sharing, targets interaction and hence reduces risk. We do need to be able to identify escalating risk patterns. But probation work is and always has been a human endeavour; we must not let ourselves be taken in by fashion, or dazzled by technical possibilities.

Instead of the question and answer session I expected to follow the lecture, two other people were asked to offer responses to it. Both spoke at length, but unfortunately were almost inaudible. However, some points I did hear were:

- The whole criminal justice process must have a human element
- Recalls are a source of anxiety to everyone concerned
- AI can easily lead to a managerial approach to probation
- AI is difficult to argue with; it erodes the human dimension
- AI represents part of the struggle towards the next phase in the history of the Probation Service

I came away feeling that while AI may become a useful adjunct to many human activities, we must never let it become our master.

The 28th Annual WcWillaims Lecture 2026. - YouTube
www.youtube.com/watch?v=zon_3hX3vVI

"Consider which of the ways to happiness offered by society are truly fulfilling, and which are potentially corrupting and destructive. Be discriminating when choosing means of entertainment and information."

2027 QICJ Conference @ Launde Abbey

March 19th-21st

Planning for this event is well underway, with the theme identified as 'Organisations for Change'. We are looking forward to hearing from the CEO of the Howard League, and the Prison Chaplain faith lead, to explore external and internal work for change. Workshops will include community engagement, youth services and disability accessibility.

"Worship is our response to an awareness of God. We can worship alone, but when we join with others in expectant waiting, we may discover a deeper sense of God's presence."

8. No let up in the HMP Wandsworth Improvement Campaign

Liz Bridge updates us on recent activities – but there is still much to do

As friends may remember, I am the chair of trustees of a charity called Wandsworth Prison Welfare Trust, and I also work with others in a group aimed at improvements in Wandsworth Prison known as the Wandsworth Prison Improvement Group – so I have news from two fronts concerning HMP Wandsworth.

The charity aims to buy things which will improve conditions for everyone inside the walls, prisoners and staff where needed. We believe that sometimes life in prison can be cheered, sanity retained, and violence reduced with small donations. This year we have worked hard with officers to have a release cupboard which can dress men at release so that they can leave the prison with a warm coat, a hoodie, jogging bottoms, waterproof trainers, and underwear. They can also be given a loaded oyster card that will get them on to public transport, and a basic working mobile phone.

Other things we have paid for in the year are
£1500 for sleeping bags for men going out homeless
£1500 towards a new carpet for the prison mosque
£2000 for Rubik cubes and fidget toys for the neurodiverse unit
£800 for craft and painting stuff for the new Scandi wing
£1500 towards a refurbishment of the children's area in the visits hall, toys, and furniture – we shared the cost with another charity
£400 for women's clothes, and make-up for our trans prisoners
£500 for foreign language dictionaries for the foreign national prisoners
£300 for Flash cards and dictionaries for the Shannon Trust teacher who is teaching peer to peer reading
£3000 for wind up radios for men with no TV, or who are in the segregation unit.

We have begged help from other charities for free goods. Trinity Hospice sell us very cheaply the sort of men's clothes they can't sell; Wimbledon Championships gave us last year's stock of the clothes they sell, and a great many indoor plants that had been used to decorate the championships; the Queen Mother Clothing Guild have bought us new underwear and men's coats; St Raphael's Hospice sell us vast quantities of jigsaws very cheaply.

The hard part is getting overworked officers to be explicit about what they need, and to clear it through security, and to persuade them that they can hand it out generously, and that we will raise the money for more – somehow. Often they are lazy or reluctant to be open-handed in case they are overwhelmed, or just so overworked that anything beyond the bare essentials of 'bang up 'is beyond them.

Soon the charity will start its Christmas appeal for funds, and we have focused on the men going out homeless because the phones and oyster cards are our biggest regular expense, and at Christmas it may draw in funds! SEE www.wpwt.org.uk

So, what about the Wandsworth Prison Improvement Group? Well, they are a feisty lot. Currently we are five busy bodies and email one another most days with documents to read that have been issued about prison conditions, or with drafts of our responses and papers we are writing. In addition, there are another five or so people who give us help on issues that interest them. We have a first-class supporter who looks at deaths in custody, and another who knows a great deal about fire precautions and procedures. Between us we attend every inquest for the prisoners who die in custody at Wandsworth because it reveals what has gone wrong in the care and safety of men held there. We have help from ex-officers who have left the service from Wandsworth, and ex-occupants who have left the prison determined not to be silent about conditions. We also have a lot of contact from families and friends of prisoners, who describe what is going wrong and ask for help.

We are invited into prison about twice a year by the Governor, who is keen to show us how hard the staff are trying to improve the place.

It is fair to say that the staff are trying hard to improve standards. It is also true to say that prison is a dreadful shock for all who enter, and that with current staffing levels, life in prison is unpleasant and fairly miserable. Large numbers of the men in Wandsworth are on remand awaiting trial, and large numbers are foreign nationals awaiting trial, deportation, extradition. A man we know who arrived in April to await trial, had clothes sent in by his friend which have still not been given to him. The children's area of the visits hall has been closed throughout August (Summer holidays) despite its refurbishment, because the padded wall areas were never completed. During the heatwaves, the heat has been appalling in a prison where the hot water pipes run through cells and there are no opening windows.

The best way to see what we do and say is to look at our website www.wandsworthprisoncampaign.co.uk Open up all the 'thumbnails' and read the latest newsletter. We were delighted to be asked by the House of Lords Justice and Home Affairs Committee for evidence when they were doing a short investigation into fire safety in prisons, based on our experience at Wandsworth, and have now dispatched our response to the Review of Criminal Justice being undertaken by Amber Rudd.
https://www.wandsworthprisoncampaign.co.uk/post/wpic-response-to-rudd-review

We often feel depressed, and wonder at the lack of progress. Our resolution is simply to keep going, and to make sure that if anyone finds any money, or has an idea for change, HMP Wandsworth will be on their list and will never be as abandoned as it felt in 2020. We are delighted to say that we now know Charlie Taylor (Chief Inspector of Prisons till 2027) Adrian Usher (Prison Ombudsman), Pia Sinha from the Prison Reform Trust and Andrea Coomber of the Howard League quite well, along with our MPs and those members of the Lords interested in prison. They know that we can always give them examples of cases from our own prison, and that because we are committed, noisy, and unpaid by anyone, we are fearless.

Full details of our work on www.wandsworthprisoncampaign.co.uk

"Bear witness to the humanity of all people, including those who break society's conventions or its laws."

9. Prison Phoenix Trust- New Resource Pack

***Chris Holt**, Development Lead of the PPT, reaches out to Quaker communities*

A new resource pack from The Prison Phoenix Trust is now available to Quaker communities who would like to support people in prison through yoga, meditation and spiritual practice. The new pack includes stories, posters and a short film that can be shared in newsletters or at meetings. A copy can be downloaded or received through the post via this link: https://bit.ly/Quakerpack

Supporting people in prison through yoga and meditation
As we know, prisons can be noisy, stressful and isolating environments. Through yoga, meditation and reflective practice, The Prison Phoenix Trust (PPT) helps people in prison find moments of quiet, reconnect with their inner strength, and begin a journey of personal change.

Each year, The Prison Phoenix Trust supports more than 5,000 people in prisons across the UK and Ireland, providing:

- Free yoga and meditation resources for people in prison
- One-to-one written mentoring and guidance
- Access to spiritual support rooted in compassion and non-judgement
- Encouragement towards reflection, responsibility and rehabilitation

This gentle but powerful prison outreach work often offers something many participants have never experienced before: being listened to without judgement. For many, it becomes the first step towards lasting change and successful resettlement.

Dennis's story of inner transformation
While serving an 18-year prison sentence, Dennis received a letter from his daughter asking him to give up drugs and crime. That moment became the turning point in his life. He connected with The Prison Phoenix Trust and began practising yoga and meditation in his prison cell. He relied on the charity's written mentoring and free resources to build a daily practice. Slowly, he began to change how he related to himself and his future.



Through yoga, meditation, and later support from the Quaker community, Dennis discovered what he calls his *"inner light"* – a steadier, more peaceful way of living, guided by honesty, responsibility and self-respect. Now aged 75 and more than ten years after his release, Dennis lives a completely different life. He is an artist, serves as a Quaker adviser within a university chaplaincy team, and continues his daily yoga and meditation practice.

While in prison, a Quaker chaplain once told him: ***"Walk in the light. Be in the light."*** At a time when Dennis felt hopeless, those words reminded him that his inner light was still present – even in the darkest moments. Through yoga and the quiet presence of

Quaker chaplaincy, he began reconnecting with that Light and allowing it to guide his choices, one day at a time.
See YouTube film: https://youtu.be/uXsYX7cp1_0?si=-6Bu4Se9sblb14Ao

Partner with The Prison Phoenix Trust
Quaker Meetings can help expand access to yoga and meditation in prisons across the UK and Ireland in the following ways:

- Holding a collection at your Quaker Meeting
- Featuring The Prison Phoenix Trust in your newsletter
- Sharing Dennis's story through your community networks
- Requesting a fundraising pack to help your Meeting get involved

Funds raised through Quaker communities directly support the creation of spaces of stillness within prisons, helping people find hope, resilience and inner change – even in the most challenging circumstances. Together, we can continue supporting rehabilitation, spiritual wellbeing, and positive change for people in prison through yoga and meditation.

Selina Sasse, CEO of The Prison Phoenix Trust, says:
"We are deeply grateful to the Quaker community for its long-standing support. We would love to continue growing this relationship by inviting your Meeting to hold The Prison Phoenix Trust in the Light."

"All of us need to find a way into silence which allows us to deepen our awareness of the divine and to find the inward source of our strength. Seek to know an inward stillness, even amid the activities of daily life."

A Quaker Blessing

Our Friend and former prison chaplain, Mary Brown, writes in The Friend (21-08-26) on the subject of blessings. Initially unsure how to respond when a prisoner asked for a blessing, she received the following inspiration, which she used in her work: "Dear child of God, you are blessed. The God within you blesses you from within. Allow yourself to accept this blessing. May you find the peace you need".

Thank you, Mary.

"Remember your responsibilities as a citizen for the conduct of local, national, and international affairs. Do not shrink from the time and effort your involvement may demand."

10. A Conscientious Objector Writes Home

Letter from Winchester Prison on 19 February 1942 (thanks to Becca Thackray)

My dear Mother,
Jolly lucky this time – 3 sheets of paper and plenty to say. But first, many thanks for your 2 letters and for the book – very well appreciated, which the chaplain handed to me yesterday.

My last letter was written at the earliest moment and was probably pretty incoherent – it was simply to let you know where I was, and I stated the truth when I said I was in a bit of a daze – not a daze of unhappiness, but just, as you say, a certain amount of reaction after what has been a very hectic 3 weeks, and actually something of a strain – I was glad to get it all over. Now, however, my 15th day (only another 108 to do – I come out, provided I get no remission cancelled for breaking rules, early in the morning of Thursday May 28th) sees me well settled, and if not what you might call 'happy', at least both reconciled to this circumscribed life and making a fairly satisfactory job of it. I have certainly settled down, got into the hang of things, and if only (granted a big if!) I could read books worth reading. Yours has been most acceptable and of course I have a bible to read along with it, but unfortunately the gospels are torn out. In the evening after the day's work, incarceration is certainly not as unpleasant as it appears – for a short period.

That is my prime desire; secondly a darned sight more food; the sight and conversation of friends – gosh how one does miss them – people I love, not only the family (that goes without saying!) but the amazingly numerous people I know. The week's postponement, though tiresome to me who was already tired of the whole business, did enable me to enjoy friendship and food with friends – they were all frightfully kind and the memory of that last evening is pleasurable to think of.

My cell is quite cosy and homely looking. 2nd floor up, tastefully painted white (top) yellow (lower half), with a green stripe dividing the two. It is comfortably warm, except during the last few cold days when it has been just slightly 'parky'. The light is good. Small mat.

There is this little matter of freedom. Countryside means so much to me, as Music does to the others and I miss it. Here again, memory and the imagination provide excellent substitutes. I can stand at my window on my chair, look down on where I think Winchester lies, and imagine the Youth Hostel and the beautiful wall round the school and cathedral and by the river.

So much on the deficit side, the antithesis of Anthony Eden's (or was it Roosevelt's) 4 freedoms. I ought hardly to mention these things – they are obvious anyway – much less grumble (though I'm not grumbling), for after all this is punishment, not a rest cure. So, on the positive side, there is a lot to be thankful for, and I'm neither unhappy nor self-critical over the business. I couldn't do anything else. You want a few details of my life? Here they are.

Up at 6.0. (Just imagine!) Wash, clean out cell. The cells are kept very clean, and I've had neither lice nor bugs, though they do exist here. So far so good. It may be because

I haven't had a mattress, but I've got one today for the first time, and am I looking forward to going to bed tonight! Empty jugs and get fresh water at 6.15 or it may be 6.30. (All these times are guesswork. I haven't brought in a single chattel except my false teeth - everything else was deposited in the Reception place.) I with 5 others who are food orderlies go out to get the breakfast, ie carry it to our floor, C4, where there are about 30 of us. The breakfast is very good porridge, in quality and quantity, good brown bread, good margarine and quite drinkable tea.

There follows an hour for reading, sewing the old mailbag, thinking or just sitting. At 9.0 off to work. I work in the laundry. Never having done honest manual work in my life before (except on the Fire Squad I had a certain amount) you can imagine. There's plenty of work. I scrub away. The chap I share a table with keeps me very amused with an astonishing keen line of Glasgow humour. The 2 hours go very fast. Then half an hour parade. Walking round and round a small area. Walk in twos and talk if you want.

Due to the naval detention barracks at Portsmouth having been bombed, this place is inundated to the tune of perhaps 80% with sailors, who are here chiefly for having been absent without leave – in many cases desertion, but not I think from cowardly or CO motives, but simply because they are fed up or something rankles, e.g. been to sea for 18 months, and then told off to go on another draft without opportunity of seeing wife and family. There are some curios amongst them, but the vast majority are very decent likeable fellows and hardly any of them are 'criminals'. The real criminals are (some of them) very good to get on with, others are pretty poor specimens.

Continuing: dinner at 12.0. Potatoes cooked in jackets, a bit of greens, a bit of meat or fish or sloppy soup. 1½ hours shut up in cell. (One has one's meals in one's cell too.) 2.0 to 3.30 Laundry. Half an hour exercise. 4.0 tea. Cocoa with brown bread, and marg. With occasionally cheese or jam. At 4.0 you are shut up for the night and so you have 5 hours (lights out at 9.0), in which to read, sew mail bags etc.

That's the life. Nice, steady, regular, unexciting. How I would have appreciated just two or three days of it during the last few years – what with meetings, fire squads, WEA's etc. I did have a pretty busy life. Glad to say that they discovered today – a little late perhaps – that I didn't get hard labour after all!

Good old Gladys Johnson – nice of her to write – a Unitarian Quaker like myself – a kind sort of girl – a real 'Aunt Fanny'. Has Harold gone to sea yet? Gosh I envy him. I hear they are sending a lot of nurses out to Africa so tell him to be careful not to go and get engaged – at least to the Wrong Sort – I'm told one can get very sentimental by the light of the Southern Cross, and a Ship's Surgeon's rigout is rather becoming I should imagine. No Quaker chaplain has turned up yet, though I've asked. Would you select 2/- worth of good Non-Fiction Pelicans – Philosophy, Religion, Sociology, History, and send me them?

My very best love to you all – not forgetting Aunt Fanny.
Your (cheerful) son, Ernest. (*Known in adulthood as Lawrence Thackray)*

"If pressure is brought upon you to lower your standard of integrity, are you prepared to resist it? Our responsibilities to God and our neighbour may involve us in taking unpopular stands. Do not let the desire to be sociable, or the fear of seeming peculiar, determine your decisions."

11. Allotments and Wellness

***Tim Newell** shares his experience of working on an allotment, & looks into their history.*

Moving to a new town in 1990, and starting to work in a different prison – Grendon – I knew things were stressful. We had bought a house with a small garden which was my wife's territory, but I was lucky to hear of some allotments nearby, so I wandered up one evening and met two men working on their patches. I made an application, and fortunately was asked to view the possible patch the next week – ten poles, quite enough to feed a family! The basic rules were explained – mainly keep it working! The bloke next to me was very helpful, letting me know what did well and what did not. He gave me some cuttings of a fruit bush that seemed to do well, and they are still (30 years since) giving me jostaberries annually. Good to go in a mixed fruit jam!

For those lucky enough to own or rent space to grow fruit and vegetables, whether that be in a back garden or an allotment, the health benefits are numerous. Allotments can provide a friendly, social community space for like-minded people to get together and share ideas, produce, or just have a catch-up. This has been crucial in alleviating loneliness, and providing a lifeline during periods of isolation such as the Covid-19 pandemic. Recent letters in the Guardian sing the praises of allotments, citing the 1932 setting-up of the allotment scheme in Scotland for the unemployed. Plots were provided as well as grants for seeds and tools. The writer calls on governments to provide such facilities now.

One hour's exercise in the open with some gentle work, hoeing and weeding, in addition to regular fruit and vegetable growing, makes a difference. Allotment holders often volunteer on their association committee, giving up time to help manage and maintain allotment sites, providing additional opportunities for social interaction.

Growing fruit and vegetables can help maintain or increase fitness, particularly more labour-intensive tasks like digging and weeding! It can help strengthen muscles and improve balance, and regularly visiting an allotment plot or vegetable garden will top up vitamin D levels, crucial for healthy bones, teeth and muscles. An allotment or vegetable garden can supplement the weekly food shop and provide an individual or family with fresh, seasonal fruit and vegetables. These are likely to be more delicious and, if grown organically, free from the chemicals found in supermarket produce.

The friendship of fellow allotmenteers makes a whole difference to the experience. One of our members worked on the site most days, and had two main aims – to take something home each day! And to leave some work for the next day! Growing food from scratch can be an immensely rewarding experience. New knowledge and skills are gained, and growing all year round helps people learn more about the natural world through the behaviour of bees, insects and birds. The proximity to nature is often a great source of inspiration, and can help provide a new and exciting environment to teach children about food and the ecosystem. Fruit and vegetable growing also gives people the opportunity to get creative and—sometimes intentionally, sometimes not—it can throw up a few surprises like new varieties or strange shapes!

Grow your own: The origins of allotments

Allotments are small parcels of land rented to grow fruits, vegetables and plants. Some people even use them to keep bees and smaller animals like rabbits and hens. They can vary in size, but the most common is ten rods or poles, which is an old Anglo-Saxon measurement roughly equal to 250 square metres. Allotments have their origins in the late Anglo-Saxon/early medieval period when huge fields – some could be hundreds of acres – belonging to villages or manors, would be divided into thin strips for individuals or families to grow crops. This was known as the open-field system.

By the late 1500s, these large fields or 'common land' would be divided up into plots to be used only by the owner. They were then enclosed with hedges during a process known as 'the enclosures' that would take place over the next few hundred years, through a series of Acts of Parliament. In compensation, 'allotments' of land would be attached to tenant cottages; this is said to be the first written reference to allotments in the UK. Unfortunately, these allotments would not help the very poor in society, some of whom starved because of the enclosures. Allotments as we know them today stem from the General Enclosure Act of 1845 that made provision for 'field gardens' to be used by the landless poor—although very little enclosed land was actually set aside for this purpose. The later 'Small Holdings and Allotments Act' of 1907 and 1908 imposed responsibilities on councils to provide allotments if there was a demand for them.

There was a huge increase in allotment use during the First and Second World Wars, as blockades resulted in a shortage of imported food. Disused railway land, public parks and private gardens were all utilised to grow fruit and vegetables. The famous 'Dig for Victory' campaign during the Second World War produced 1.3 million tonnes of food from nearly 1.5 million allotment plots.

Quakers had a significant historical connection to allotments, primarily through our social welfare work during periods of economic distress. In the 1920s and 30s Quakers led a major programme to provide unemployed people with access to allotments. The Quakers Allotment Gardens for the Unemployed scheme was one of the most successful initiatives to alleviate the impact of unemployment. The programme started in South Wales in 1926 and spread quickly across Britain, with some Government and charity support. By 1932 the scheme had helped over 61,000 people, and by 1936 the value of the produce was estimated to exceed a million pounds each year. Beyond the plots, Quakers helped support horticultural shows which gave people a chance to exhibit their skills, participate in a social event and raise the standard of their produce.

There was a steady decline in allotment use after the wars, but during the 1970s TV shows like *The Good Life* inspired interest in food production and self-sufficiency. Since the 1990s, there has been something of an 'allotment renaissance' as concerns about global heating and an interest in organic produce led people to be more concerned about where their food came from. Unfortunately, this rise in interest has not been met by supply; in some urban places, waiting lists for allotment plots can be several years.

Hidden benefits are sometimes found by allotmenteers. One writes, "my allotment is not only a safe place, but also one that helps me get to sleep. Reviewing the day's planting, weeding and harvesting works better for me than counting sheep."

"Try to live simply. A simple lifestyle freely chosen is a source of strength

12. Making Correct Moves

Contribution from a serving prisoner on the Alternatives to Violence Project



Before coming into jail,
My trauma, a nightmare untold
Done things, said to be so bold
Life, far from being real
I hadn't yet, started making correct moves

Committing too heinous a crime,
I'm rightfully doing the time.

My life limitedly ranged
Once off the drugs
Swept old life under the rugs
Old me has now changed
I'm beginning to start making correct moves.

My previous decisions, simply impulsive,
Behaviour, deemed to be repulsive.

My value on life, much greater
Progressing towards my eventual release
Refusing to do things, just to appease
One day, I'll meet my creator.
Until then, I pray. I've been making correct moves.

13. Supporting the IMB

***Richard Seebohm** reminds us to consider the Independent Monitoring Board*

Quakers have long been concerned about the criminal justice system at the political level, and, as chaplains, about the personal state of prisoners. To me, concern for prisons as institutions seems equally important. The entry point for this is membership of an Independent Monitoring Board (IMB).

IMB members are likely to visit their prison some two or three times a month. They report what they find, attend disciplinary hearings, and receive direct complaints from inmates – with no interception by prison staff. (These are often about non-receipt of personal possessions after arrival from a different prison.) IMBs can send reports direct to Ministers if there is an important point to make.

The reason for this note is that there is now a window for recruitment (at imb.org.uk) until 12 October. In spite of vacancies, the Secretariat has not recently been seeking applications. I could say much more, not from personal experience, but my wife and also a cousin have served, and found it rewarding as well as effective.

14. Membership Update

Jonathan Ranger, Membership Secretary, updates us on our current position

We now have 186 members, which includes 29 Local and Area Meetings, 4 Quaker organisations, and 9 serving prisoners – which is encouraging because two more have thought it worthwhile to belong since our last edition. We also distribute Newsletters and other information to 14 other organisations and individuals with an interest in CJ.

A memo, therefore, to anyone who has dealings at any level with prisoners. I'm sure it would be worth telling them about QICJ, showing or giving them a sample Newsletter so that they can see some of what we do, and asking them if they'd like to become a member. It's free, they get three Newsletters a year, they can write to us, they will be supported as best we can, and we continue free membership after release until they are settled and can afford a subscription.

Also – to any existing member – please do mention us to your Friends at your Local and Area Meetings, and suggest that they might also like to join us. Our subscription level is far less than most organisations these days, and they can become as much or as little involved or active as they prefer. The more members we have, the more weight our voice and recommendations will carry when we contact / liaise with others within the CJ System.

At the AGM, a decision was reached, regarding the format of our Members' List booklet; i.e. to exclude personal addresses from the information published. New Data Consent Forms will soon be sent to all members, for you to state which info you would like included. It is essential that you respond, please! The booklets will then be updated, printed and circulated around the time of our next Conference and AGM (see page 12).

Here's a lovely bit of Autumn, 'Season of mists and mellow fruitfulness …'



15. Reduction in Prison Education

CLINKS (the umbrella charity for voluntary CJ groups) has analysed data on planned core education hours, prison-by-prison, published by Ministry of Justice, March ’26.

The data reveals a 21% drop in planned core education hours between the final six months of the old Prisoner Education Framework (April to September 2025) and the first six months of the new Prison Education Service (October 2025 to March 2026), with a further 5% drop planned for 2026/27.

The median change across prisons was a 22% reduction, which is more than a fifth, with wide variation:

Note that the data reflects planned rather than actual hours delivered.



In addition, CLINKS have published their **Manifesto on Reforming the Criminal Justice System** and forwarded it to government. This has 6 elements , as follows:

1 - Funding reallocation: establishing a Community Justice Investment Fund via a justice reinvestment programme.
2 - Local approaches: implementing a truly local approach to probation governance, commissioning and partnership working.
3 - Reduction of remand and recall: (see Manifesto document for details).
4 - Community provision: increasing investment in community provision including through an expansion of community accommodation services, diversion schemes and universal coverage of Community Sentence Treatment Requirements.
5 - Strengthened resettlement: establishing an accessible resettlement pathway from custody into the community, including the embedding of genuine ‘earned progression’ into sentence planning.
6 - A Whole Systems Approach for women: implementing a whole systems approach to women in contact within the criminal justice system

SEE CLINKS’ Manifesto on reforming the CJ system:
https://clinks.org/publication/clinks-voluntary-sector-led-manifesto-reform-criminal-justice-system

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"Be patterns, be examples in all countries, places, islands, nations, wherever you come, that your carriage and life may preach among all sorts of people, and to them; then you will come to walk cheerfully over the world, answering that of God in every one."