QUAKERS IN CRIMINAL JUSTICE

SPRING 2024 EDITORIAL

Having enjoyed the wonderful annual conference, this year held at Launde Abbey, you are likely brimming over with thoughts and ideas about our roles and responsibilities in ensuring a fair and transformative Criminal Justice System. There was certainly a lot of inspiration to draw on this year.

It was wonderful to be able to reconnect with so many of you and to also establish the beginnings of new friendships with first time attenders. I have a friend who is often heard to say that there is nothing quite as challenging as people, and I found myself challenged to think in new ways and to consider different possibilities through the discussions I had over that weekend.

It's clear from the content of this edition of the newsletter, that I was not the only one inspired, with not one, not two, not even three….but four reports and responses to the event finding their way into the pages that follow this editorial.

In addition to this we have material looking at issues such as the potential impact of Artificial Intelligence in the Criminal Justice System, finding an inner light through yoga and meditation in prison, ecocide, the Longford Lecture and two topics which resonated strongly with conference attendees: Parole Boards and welcoming former prisoners into our Meetings for Worship.

We also have an inspirational story of how one former prisoner was, due to the support he received from one of our own members, able to use his experiences to help others by setting up an African charity specifically focused on improving standards for prisoners and past prisoners, both in his own former prison and further afield.

This newsletter wouldn't be possible without you. Thank you for your contributions to this it and please continue to send future articles to my new QICJ email, which is qicjeditor@gmail.com

Jonathan Wilgenbus-Lamb
Editor



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DEAR QICJ



Dear QICJ

Please listen on Sounds to Cafe Hope - Radio4, 9 45 this Easter Monday morning. An inspiring, moving story of Faith in Action. This is available on BBC Sounds until at least March 2025 https://www.bbc.co.uk/sounds/play/m001xwqv (the title of the programme is "From Behind Bars to Bikes")

Regards

Jo Rado

EDITORS NOTE this programme will be available to listen to at this link for 12 months

MEMBERSHIP REPORT -SPRING 2024

Dear QICJ members

We have around 164 members in total, these being 134 individuals and 30 supporting groups. We have lost 15 members over the year but have gained therefore 27 new members since our last AGM. A net gain of 12. There have in fact been so many changes in members details that our assistant membership secretary has produced a new revised membership book which can be collected by members at the present conference and will be sent out to other members with this physically printed newsletter, if you haven't already been marked as having received one. [EDITOR'S NOTE} We thank the membership team for their work and it is really encouraging to see our numbers grow under their support.

With Best wishes for the year ahead,
Simon Ewart and Jonathan Ranger, QICJ membership team. qicjmembership@gmail.com

USING A.I. IN CRIMINAL JUSTICE

Mike Nellis

On April 18th (2024) I attended a four-hour online Westminster Legal Policy Forum seminar on "Next Steps for AI technology in the Criminal Justice System" in England and Wales. It was an excellent overview of current official thinking on artificial intelligence (AI) and criminal justice, and confirmed that major digital innovation is being anticipated in this sector (and in public services more generally), about which many people remain underinformed. While international scientific debate on AI is 70 years old, operational use of it in governance (military applications apart) only began in earnest, worldwide, in 2018, and was then accelerated in 2022 by the surprise advent of "large language models", aka "generative AI", epitomised by ChatGPT and its counterparts.



The seminar flagged up the "AI-powered changes" (to use the jargon!) that are coming to criminal justice, especially the police – the leader in the field - the judiciary and the legal profession. The 55 participants were largely senior people from a range of state agencies and professional bodies tuning in for "training" on developments which will imminently affect them in greater or lesser degree. Influential speakers were drawn from the Centre for Justice Innovation, the Police Foundation, the National Audit Office, the Criminal Bar Association (and its international equivalent), techUK (a trade organisation), the enchantingly(?) named Alchemy Machines (a tech start-up) - all of whom described their work in progress on AI - as well as the human rights defenders, Justice and Big Brother Watch, who urged caution.

My heart tended to be with the latter organisations. My own thoughts on infusing AI into criminal justice (and public service generally) tend to be more critical than the mostly mainstream views expressed here. I don't think AI-systems can plausibly be regarded as "neutral tools" which possesses easily identified "benefits" and "risks" that can with due care be mitigated and minimised, although this comprises the near universal, official Western view of what AI is. AI is not neutral because the start-ups and corporations (and governments) which sponsor it pursue agendas of their own regarding our collective western futures, and possess limitless resources for seducing consumers into thinking that this is vital to our prosperity, wellbeing and security.

But that's another story: here I will simply offer a condensed summary of what was said in the seminar.

Although the seminar used the shorthand term "AI" throughout, the point was regularly made that there are several variants of it, and multiple potential uses in research, governance and public service (including criminal justice), some arguably more contentious than others. Sometimes "advanced digitalisation" may more aptly describe the developments addressed here. But the more extensive datasets become and the greater the computing power used to process them the more "digitalisation" segues into territory that can legitimately be called 'AI', because it replicates human cognitive processes - but at incomparably vast scales and speeds, with the potential to revolutionise familiar patterns of administration and employment. "Machine learning" does better name software which becomes progressively more autonomous at "pattern recognition" across multiple datasets, which is essential for identifying risks, making predictions and then offering recommendations in specific contexts. While the seminar mostly addressed this "traditional" AI, new "generative audio-visual AI" is posing its own challenges, and the Criminal Bar Association referenced developing responses to AI-generated crime, notably deepfake alibis and nudifcation apps.



The Centre for Justice Innovation reported on a survey of attitudes towards using AI in criminal justice settings, among both relevant professionals, the general public and crime victims, informed by the perspectives it developed in its own (very impressive) Just Technology report in 2018. All professionals are understandably curious about AI's likely implications for them, but there are as yet relatively few developments on the ground – which is not to say there are none. Some police forces have experimented for a while with enhanced behavioural risk assessments (which shade into "predictive policing"), while their contentious use of facial recognition cameras is becoming more widespread, all of which require vast, speedily searchable data bases.

Questions about making AI trustworthy, transparent and accountable pervaded the seminar, alluded to by most speakers. These staples of "AI ethics" are being extensively debated across the world. There is widespread international agreement that both informal guidelines and legal regulation are needed in all settings where it is used – although there is a British twist on this emanating from Rishi Sunak's "AI Safety Summit" in 2023 (see below). AI-informed systems need to be effective, reliable and fit for purpose if they are not to do harm, and thereby win public trust. AI systems also need to be transparent: the algorithmic and statistical techniques used for generating recommendations (eg on risk, or for advisory sentencing) must not be technically opaque, especially when retrospective reviews of decision-making are required.

Some tech providers unfortunately demand opacity for reasons of commercial confidentiality. Lastly, agencies using AI systems and/or the companies selling them must always be accountable when/if things go wrong - "the computer made me do it" must never be an operative's excuse.

The National Audit Office (NAO) - which assesses "value for money" in government projects - has recently published an insightful report on existing and upcoming uses of AI in central government (but not local government or police forces). It envisages immense benefits in efficiency and productivity from AI - mostly cost-savings and "doing more for less" in public administration and service delivery. It encourages both the improvement of existing services and crucially, the development of entirely new services - eg new, automated ways of delivering once-personal services, via chatbots. To this end it identifies several strategic and operational obstacles to the expansion and intensification of AI use across government, namely; lingering investment in outdated "legacy systems"; the absence (as yet) of a coherent AI plan; anxiety in government about where accountability should lie; and continuing ambivalence about which standards, guidance and ethics to apply.

Although technically a spending watchdog, the NAO was foursquare with the bold ambitions of the junior minister and senior civil servant from the Ministry of Justice who spoke at the seminar. Both drew on the "AI Safety Summit" in 2023 in wanting "guardrails" rather than "tramlines" for AI's development, ethical guidelines which do not stifle the accelerating technological innovation which aims to make Britain a "world-leader" in this field. The minister said that merely using AI to improve "archaic practices" was insufficient: he wanted something "new", and was personally up for challenging pervasive risk aversion in criminal justice. LawTech UK, he announced, had been deliberately established to stimulate innovation at arm's length from "the dead hand" of government itself. Watch this space …….

Justice reiterated long-established human rights warnings about continuing risks of discrimination in AI systems because human prejudices can still be designed-into, and then reproduced by, the databases on which they draw. Big Brother Watch averred that, with digital applications, "just because you can, you don't have to" – not, I think, a widely held view in government. More appealingly, to me, Big Brother Watch also insisted on attending to what preserving "the human" might now mean in an AI-infused world. Don't just watch this space, Friends – work in it.

FROM NOTHING TO SOMETHING

Mayamba Geoffrey Kultela

I completed high school at the age of 19 years and had no means to go to college. I tried to engage in peace works but that never translated into anything meaningful. 4 years down the line desperation peaked in me. In exploring a lot of things, I was found in a company of wrong boys and unintentionally ended up being an accomplice in the commission of a crime. Little did I know that this was to separate me from society for a solid 10 years

I was handed a prison sentence which exacerbated

my vulnerability and completely shattered my future hopes. I despaired, felt a state of despondency, neglect, rejection by family and friends.

It was between 2001-2003 that I came across a Quaker magazine in the Mukobeko Maximum Security Prison. Reading through it I came saw a story by Martin Schweiger and a physical address there undersigned. I decided to write him, requesting friendship. This was before technology advanced and we solely relied on physically posted mail, therefore, my letter took weeks before I got feedback from him. I was so excited to read of the words of encouragement anchored on the Friends belief.

The burden of my prison walk started to be lightened, I was supported with more reading materials that killed my boredom, I received physical and monetary support. As we continued into our conversations, he asked me what I needed to do whilst in prison, my heart pointed me to further my education through distance learning. In no time, he facilitated my enrolment for



tertiary education and I opted for Project Planning and Management. He supported the recreation activities through jerseys, truck suits, volley balls and footballs.

Because of the good behavior and progress I was making in education, I a Presidential Pardon in 2007. Martin and the wife Liz helped me acquire a house, they bought the house for me which is still used as a transit home for ex-inmates. This family further nurtured me and supported me in finding something to do. They learnt from our correspondence that I had a passion for working with inmates. This was for an obvious reason that I walked that route, suffering many injustices and human rights violations. I was encouraged to go ahead in fulfilling that which I felt inside me, and ended up forming a non-governmental organisation called Prisoners' Future Foundation (PFF) responding to the needs of inmates and ex-inmates in 2008.

Since 2011 PFF has worked around; advocacy for prisoner's health rights in Zambia, campaigning against death penalty, tracking parole activities, empowerment, reintegration processes, exploring provisions of paralegal support and advocacy for improved prison conditions, advocacy for curtailing violation of human rights of remandees and convicted prisoners, advocacy for the reintegration of ex-prisoners through employment in the public services, support for ex-prisoners through transport, counselling and clothing, prisoners empowerment through skills training and paralegal services, support to the submissions on

prisoners' rights to vote, raising community awareness on the use of gender-based fast track court and providing legal aid advice and education at correctional facilities in Kabwe, improving access to Legal Aid services at correctional, police and subordinate courts, producing a policy on how to make Mukobeko Maximum male prison and its surrounding community environmentally sustainable, health, nutrition and skills building for inmates in Kabwe correctional facilities, establishment of a sewing (tailoring) shop for 15 ex-inmates. Additionally providing support to the tailoring shop with sewing materials, Prisoners Right to Health, partnerships, capacity building and interventions for health in Zambian prisons, a prisons voter education and information dissemination project and Civil Society mobilisation and advocacy for improved health in Zambian prisons.

PFF has a work force of 28 staff, I am always humbled that I now work with the very officers that once detained me. I sit on the Prison Health Advisory Committee in Zambia, I am the chairperson for the Council of Non-Governmental Organisations in Central Province of Zambia and am among the 12 Councillors for Zambia, I sit on the Steering Committee of the World Coalition Against the Death Penalty for which my membership fee was paid up by Martin, I'm the Chairperson of the Reintegration of Partners Organisation, Secretary to Southern Africa Network on Prisons, and participated in the 2 national researches on Prisons. PFF has both local and regional membership including formal and informal groupings like; Kabwe lead Advocacy group, Paralegal Alliance Network, Kabwe Child Justice Forum, Thomson Reuters pro bono services, Namati Legal Empowerment, Civicus, African Centre for Excellence to Access to Justice and finally Act Ubumbano.

All these achievements can be attributed to no other than Martin Schweiger. From Nothing to Something, hopelessness to hopeful and from ordinary to extra-ordinary. I am happily married and blessed with 4 daughters. This is how I describe my life journey.
While we depend on donor funding for our work, it is difficult to sustain our activities as such has limitations. We will need our own office space and probably a farm. We also welcome all those that would want to be part of our work in the Prisons.

SOME REFLECTIONS - QICJ CONFERENCE

Adrian Smith



I am always glad to attend the QICJ conference, as apart from the interest of the sessions, I have the chance to catch up with old friends, and make new ones. This year I was particularly glad to take part, because of the venue. Though I mourn the demise of Woodbrooke, where I have spent many happy weekends, I do like the Launde Abbey. I passed it on a cycle tour when I was still at school and thought "what a beautiful place". It is set amid the hilly sheep pastures on the borders of Leicestershire and Rutland. In those days it was a private house, now it is a christian conference centre, with a decidedly Anglo-Catholic flavour. While exploring the grounds (which I did as soon as I arrived), I found I was following the stations of the cross. Partly through the music of Bach and partly from my own contretemps with the criminal law. The story of The Passion has more resonance for me, than any other part of the Bible. The path I followed, brought me to a labyrinth, delineated by daffodils.

As I represent Essex Quakers on an ecumenical committee, I see it as part of my remit to share in other people's worship, when the opportunity comes my way. So I shared in the thoughtful, mood lifting early morning Eucharist, where the female celebrant offered me a blessing as an alternative to the bread and wine. There were several quiet pauses during the service for private contemplation. I did feel welcome at Launde.

The food was scrumptious. This was just as well as I found the sessions overpowering, not to say depressing. The timetable was very full, and the small groups which were supposed to provide relief, started late and didn't amount to much. The speakers were excellent, but they did not bring much cause for hope. The Criminal Justice System in the UK today is close to a total breakdown. There are three times as many people behind bars as there were 50 years ago, and plans are afoot to add an additional 20,000 cell spaces, which would bring the prison population to 114,000.



There is no evidence that imprisoning people deters or reforms; all it does do is keep them off the streets during their sentence, and sentences are getting longer. The futility and wastefulness of the system is ignored, as if the answer to a failing system is to expand upon it. The talk by Fergus McNeill on Saturday morning, aroused in me a feeling I can only describe as fury - so accurate was the analysis he gave what happened to me when I was in trouble with the law. Liz Bridge, a former QPM at Wandsworth, left us in doubt about the prevailing squalor there. I don't see how a change of socks and pants every six weeks contributes to developing more responsible attitudes in inmates. Judges and Magistrates should be required, as part of their training to experience life as an incognito prison inmate, so they understand just what is involved when they impose a custodial sentence.

In a separate session, I was surprised to learn that the Parole Board has 285 members. I had assumed 8 or 10, who sat more or less continuously. I am not surprised that most applications are refused. If the Board let too many people out, there would be an outcry in the "gutter press".

Oh yes, there are positive signs. the Shannon Trust is working in prisons, improving literacy skills, where capacity to read and write has always been a significant obstacle, preventing prisoners from finding work on release. Mike Nellis told us of "Champions", people who undertake to maintain contact with a prisoner after release. A panel from the Quaker Tapestry, which had been produced by men in HMP Long Lartin provided a moving centrepiece for the epilogue, in which Fergus sang, accompanying himself on a guitar. "The light shines in the darkness and the darkness has not been able to quench it".

The Sunday morning session was extraordinary. Three former prisoners related how they had been received back into their meetings after release. Are people attracted to Quakerism only ever convicted of sexual offences? It would be a relief to hear of a Friend "done" for shoplifting or diddling the DSS. I can't help but wonder why the people who engineered the 2008 Financial Crash, or the post office scandal, are not behind bars. I have heard some cynics say that if you

steal £1000 you go to jail, but if you steal £100 million, you get a knighthood. One of the three people who spoke, was convicted almost 50 years ago, and had had a much easier time than the other two, who offended more recently and found themselves subject to much harsher restrictions. If my own experience had been worse in that I had told which Meeting for Worships I could and could not have attended due to my criminal background, I'm not sure I would still be a practicing Quaker.

QICJ CONFERENCE 2024 - REPORT

Martin Schweiger

Annual Conference held at Laude Abbey, Leicestershire, from 22nd to 24th March 2024.

The theme was Gateways to Rehabilitation, a theme explored with some expert speakers, workshops, discussion and quiet Meetings for Worship. Experience of using the 12 Step Programme developed by Alcoholics Anonymous as used at Brixton Prison was shared. The good news is that is can be effective for other addictions as well as alcohol. It requires patience and a positive wish to work through the programme so not everyone can be helped by the 12 Steps, but it is a tried and tested model offering a way out of addiction, with respectful support.

A well thought out paper with a lot of reference to supporting evidence was shared by Fergis McNeill of Glasgow University. The starting point was the disintegrating effect of a prison sentence, breaking up not just the life of the person convicted but also the family and community around them. Rehabilitation and Reintegration into the community takes a lot of hard work and who is responsible for the different steps along the way is not always clear.



Kate Nickels shared her knowledge from working for the Parole Board and led us through its remit and the numbers it deals with. Expectations can be built up only to be frustrated for reasons that are not always clear to the prisoner or those supporting them. The brief is around mitigating the risk of reoffending when someone is released, so if the required resources are not in place parole cannot be granted.

Workshops explored issues of

housing, or the lack of it, for those leaving prison in Northern Ireland and the work of the Shannon Trust which on literacy and numeracy among the prison population. Failure to address these issues is strongly associated with a speedy return to prison among those released into the community. A third workshop covered the work of the Prison Phoenix Trust which has over 35 years experience of helping people in prison engage with their spiritual lives through breath based silent practice and yoga.



The conference also heard of the actions taken by Liz Bridge, an ex-Quaker Prison Chaplain, who has struggled with the appalling insanitary conditions and prisoner neglect experienced at HMP Wandsworth. Speaking out was not welcomed by the Ministry of Justice, leading to her expulsion, and may have repercussions for other Prison Chaplains. Liz has now formed a group whose membership includes mothers of incarcerated men. We shall keep in touch with Liz's group's campaign to raise awareness and push for humane conditions at Wandsworth.

The difficult issues of welcoming former prisoners into Quaker Meetings was explored in the final session. Resources are available to support Meetings through Friends House which is linked to a Christian safeguarding organisation called 31.8. Good practice does allow a welcome to be made but careful forethought is essential, a Meeting's Safeguarding practice may be severely tested.

Would Elizabeth Fry have approved of the conference? I hope she would, but she would probably also be telling Quakers in 2024 that there is a lot more to be done.

SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION - FEEDBACK

Mike Nellis

While Friends were unanimous that the conference sessions preceding each small group had given us tremendous food for the thought, these were wide-ranging and unfocused discussions.

Some questions were raised about why the proportion of people considered for parole but not given it was increasing. Most Friends seem concerned about increasing political interference with the once independent Parole Board (with perhaps more to come in current legislative plans). The practical point was made from Friends with experience of parole, that anxiety around the outcome of decisions affects family and friends not just the imprisoned individual, as does the onerousness or otherwise of licence conditions.

Some mention was made of engaging with public opinion, to reinforce and encourage those segments which are not unduly punitive, and to challenge the parts that are. The Six Quakers look at Crime and Punishment booklet, published in 1979, had called for this. It is easier said than done – at the time the booklet was the focus of much discussion within the Society of Friends itself, but not outside it.



Some Friends put some faith in the likely advent of a Labour government later this year as a source of more progressive penal thinking. Others doubted that this would happen. Even with ministerial goodwill (of whose existence we were uncertain), under conditions of inevitable financial stringency, Labour will simply not have the resources to improve the criminal justice system, against competing demands from the vastly more popular health, welfare, education and transport infrastructure sectors. Ruth Cadbury MP, in recent conversation with Melanie, has indicated that a future Labour Government might tackle “low hanging fruit” (notionally easy-to-solve problems) in this context, for example. improving the length of prison officer training (currently six weeks). With huge official MoJ projections of daily prison population increases (between 94,000 and 114,000 by 2027) this may not be so “low hanging” an issue after all – the prison service will simply be desperate for any staff it can get.

Whether deriving from actual practical experience of deteriorating prison regimes or from broader reflection on the state of the nation, when the observation was made in the second small group that the penal system was (quote) “funnelling down into catastrophe” no-one demurred. So what should Friends be doing in “dark times” like these? A lot of our practical and supportive work with prisoners and released prisoners is akin to relief work within a failing

system. Humanitarian relief work is always vital: it is something Friends have always done, in one context or another, in the aftermath of catastrophe. But is it enough? We pondered the experience of QPM Liz Bridges, sensing tension between her official role requirements in HMP Wandsworth and what she came to feel was necessary to meet acute human need. This resulted in her concluding that she may be more useful "making trouble" on the outside than trying to help in impossible circumstances on the inside. A tension for us all.

CRIMES AGAINST NATURE

Marian Liebmann and Mike Nellis

Friends have rightly been wary of criminalisation as a means of addressing socially harmful behaviour when other forms of resolution can be used instead. We oppose criminalisation which uses state power to erode democracy and suppress dissent. But we are not against criminalisation when it is based on the gravity of a particular harm, and a desire to prevent it happening. For instance, we have welcomed recent laws against drink-driving, smoking in public buildings, stalking, and rape within marriage.

An international campaign is underway to this effect. The campaign arose from a concern that certain nation states and corporations, in pursuit of economic growth and commercial profit, were inflicting environmental damage on such a scale that they were doing lasting harm to vital ecosystems and habitats, and doing so with impunity. Environmental resources are valuable, and integral to our collective human wellbeing and future, so their protection and restoration is warranted.



An independent panel of experts was commissioned to formulate a legal definition of ecocide. It called it 'unlawful or wanton acts committed with the knowledge that there is substantial likelihood of severe and either widespread or long-term damage to the environment being caused by those acts'. Paradoxically, there is already a crime of severe damage to the environment during armed conflict, but not in peacetime.

Any new law brings in its wake penalties for breaching it. A law against ecocide could result in the imprisonment of organisations' CEOs, or heavy fines (as already happens in some cases of pollution). But it could also include compensation and other restorative measures to put things right, including the voices of victims and commitments on future behaviour.

The panel's persuasive work has led to widespread endorsements. The Catholic Church and the World Council of Churches have done this. The EU is criminalising 'cases comparable to ecocide', and the Netherlands, Belgium, Brazil, Spain (Catalunya), Italy and Mexico are developing ecocide bills; Scotland is consulting on the subject. Quakers in England and Wales have been supportive but have not formally endorsed the campaign. Is it time to be more committed?
In Australasia, John Braithwaite has developed ways of combining restorative justice with 'responsive regulation', with a pyramid of escalating options. Deterrence and incapacitation are necessary options, but they do not usually deliver the best results – these are usually reached by restorative means, involving reparations and measures to prevent future harms.

So a law on ecocide could help establish the norms and values of the environment, with a framework of options to include restorative justice. We hope Quakers will take a positive role in supporting this.

HOW DENNIS FOUND AN INNER LIGHT

Selina Sasse

Dennis was in his prison cell when a letter arrived from his daughter. "Dear Dad, I love you," she wrote. "Why don't you give up this life of crime and drugs?"

Dennis had heard this many times before, but this time something got through to him.
"My daughter and her sisters didn't deserve this and neither did I," he recalls. "That was the catalyst for change."

Soon after this he was introduced to The Prison Phoenix Trust and with the charity's help began a journey away from addiction, crime and prison, supported by yoga and meditation.

"There weren't any yoga classes in the prison, so I did it from a book," he recalls. "The PPT sent me resources and newsletters and one of their volunteers, Ava, wrote to me regularly advising about yoga and meditation.



"I'd look forward to the letters from The PPT with anticipation. I responded and it was ongoing communication through letters that helped me through the early days of practising yoga and meditation.

"The sense of yoga for me is mind, body, spirit – all three coming together. That helped me move through the space I was in and into another space. I was still me, but different."

Now 75, Dennis[1] was released from prison more than 10 years ago, serving the last half of an 18-year sentence for drug smuggling on licence in the community. His life of drugs and crime had lasted nearly 40 years. It had started as a teenager when he ran away from home to London.

"There were five of us children and we had very broken family life, an alcoholic stepfather and a mother with mental health issues. I was dragged up rather than brought up," he says.

"I was a run-away and I ran into all kinds of things and all kinds of trouble. I was severely addicted to cocaine and heroin. The whole thing became my life. It was a big change for me to move away from a life of crime and drugs and prison.

"The Prison Phoenix Trust was a big part of it through yoga and meditation. It was inspiring for me to look at things in a different way.

In prison, he started a daily practice that he still does today, getting up around 6.30am for 30 minutes of yoga and 15 minutes of meditation. He found he was becoming open to different points of view and discovering new interests. He started going to art classes in prison and, during a talk as part of a course, sat next to someone who turned out to be the Quaker chaplain. This led to a deepening interest in his own spirituality, supported by the Quakers along with his yoga and meditation practice, and an outlet for his creativity in painting and calligraphy.

On leaving prison Dennis went to live in a Quaker community. Today he is an accomplished artist, with two fine art degrees and he works as a Quaker advisor in the chaplaincy team at a university.

"My life of prison is now in the past," he says. "I wish it didn't happen, but it did. I came through it, I'm still away from it now and I've no wish or reason to go back down that road."

There is a growing body of evidence of the rehabilitative impact on prisoners of contemplative practices of yoga and meditation. In February, The Prison Phoenix Trust director Selina Sasse recently shared latest research with Cambridge University's Contemplation: Theory / Practice

forum, which is a network of the university's Centre for Research in the Arts, Social Sciences and Humanities. It brings together the ideas, history and application of contemplative traditions from around the globe, exploring a rich diversity of theories and practices united around a particular set of characteristics.

Selina highlighted how neuroscience has shed light on the impact of meditation and yoga practice on brain development and nervous systems and how research in prison settings has shown this to improve positive mental states and reduce the negative states that lead to re-offending (Kerekes 2021) and increase ability to override impulse (Bilderbeck 2013).
She described how, in practice, how yoga enables people in prison to feel more responsible, focussed, less reactive, more relaxed and empathetic. The value of The PPT's prison group classes for social engagement and cohesion was highlighted and how its guidance and encouragement of contemplative practice through letter writing, had helped numerous people over the charity's 35+ year history.



For Dennis, the support he found in prison for meditation and yoga was a key that unlocked a journey of great personal growth.

"The inner light is fundamental to how I am now. The word 'God' has too much baggage for me and I avoid it. I try to follow the Quakers' guiding principles of peace, equality, simplicity, truth. Talking, listening anPPT d being is good. Whatever your age, if you're speaking to someone in truth, you can tell if this is right.

"I'd like to encourage other people, whoever you are. You might find a way through. You can't really imagine what's going to happen in your life. "The Prison Phoenix Trust is one of the things that helped me. Yoga and the letter from my daughter are the things that encouraged me to be open and more honest. I've lived the life but the whole fundamental thing and catalyst for all of it was a letter from my daughter and closely afterwards getting in touch with The PPT. "Now I'd like to be able to give something back to others who are recovering from prison, addiction, and crime."

If you would like to help people in prison to find peace through yoga and meditation, please contact Sebastian at events@theppt.org.uk for more information about fundraising or becoming a PPT Champion.

The Prison Phoenix Trust is a registered charity (1163558) that supports the spiritual development of people in prisons across the UK and Ireland. It depends on the generosity of individuals inspired to support this work. To find out more visit theppt.org.uk/donate or send a cheque payable to The Prison Phoenix Trust CIO, PO Box 328, Oxford OX2 7HF.

[1] Name and some identifying details changed to protect Dennis and his family's privacy

LAUNDE ABBEY CONFERENCE - A REPORT

William Waddilove

The Quakers in Criminal Justice (QICJ) conference is held in rotation in the 'North', the 'Midlands' and the 'South'. When Woodbrooke closed we had to locate to another suitable venue and Launde Abbey, a retreat centre run by the diocese of Peterborough was found. As a result the conference had to be held at a slightly later date than the usual end of February date.
The Abbey is in a delightfully quiet rural location although slightly remote for those relying on public transport.
The Abbey was founded in 1114 and has been continuously occupied since, although with many changes through the Dissolution and with other owners. At our welcome introduction by the Warden we were reminded that this had been a continually used 'house of prayer' for over 900 years! If anyone is tempted to go there they are very welcome. The café serves meals and afternoon tea plus they offer B&B stays in addition to conferences and meetings.



The conference theme was 'Gateways to Rehabilitation' and included a discussion on welcoming offenders into Meeting.
It brought to us many issues and discussions around safeguarding and what was meant by this and how it could be appropriate.

Our first speaker set the scene by mentioning the work that was being done in Brixton prison with accommodating and including and extending the 12 step programmes to all relevant individuals. Behind this he brought in the subject of the problems of 'low esteem' of individuals which was often a precursor to offending and various forms of addiction.

Another presentation was from a Parole Board member who explained the 'Held like a court' process, the Boards composition of members and the powers it had and did not have.

One of the other presentations featured several examples of good and very bad safeguarding examples. These varied from excellent situation assessment and appropriate care to gross professional indiscretions causing widespread problems.

Whilst it was agreed that there is the need for some form of ‘contract’ together with appropriate arrangements, it needed to be suitable and in proportion.

Examples were spoken about where the ‘contract’ was longer than the Home Office Prison licence documentation and all the individual had wanted to do was come to a Meeting where there were no children or vulnerable individuals!

Another example was where the individual was being ‘punished’ for an offence committed in their youth some forty plus years later and had since had an exemplary work record whilst working in a field not related to the offence and yet lost their job.

We all agreed that whilst ‘safeguarding’ was important it needed to be in proportion. It was pointed out that whatever arrangements were made they needed to consider four points of good practice.

- Safeguarding – both the individuals as well as others
- Permissions – it any arrangement were to be made they had to have full understanding and consent with relevant parties
- Points of contact – if any plan is put in place it must have a clear point of contact with a named individual
- Prior experience – the support group needed to have experience and knowledge of similar arrangements or knowledge in a related field.

Welcoming and safeguarding do have some overlaps but there are also some very important differences. These include the important differences between safe guarding ‘children’ and ‘vulnerable adults’.

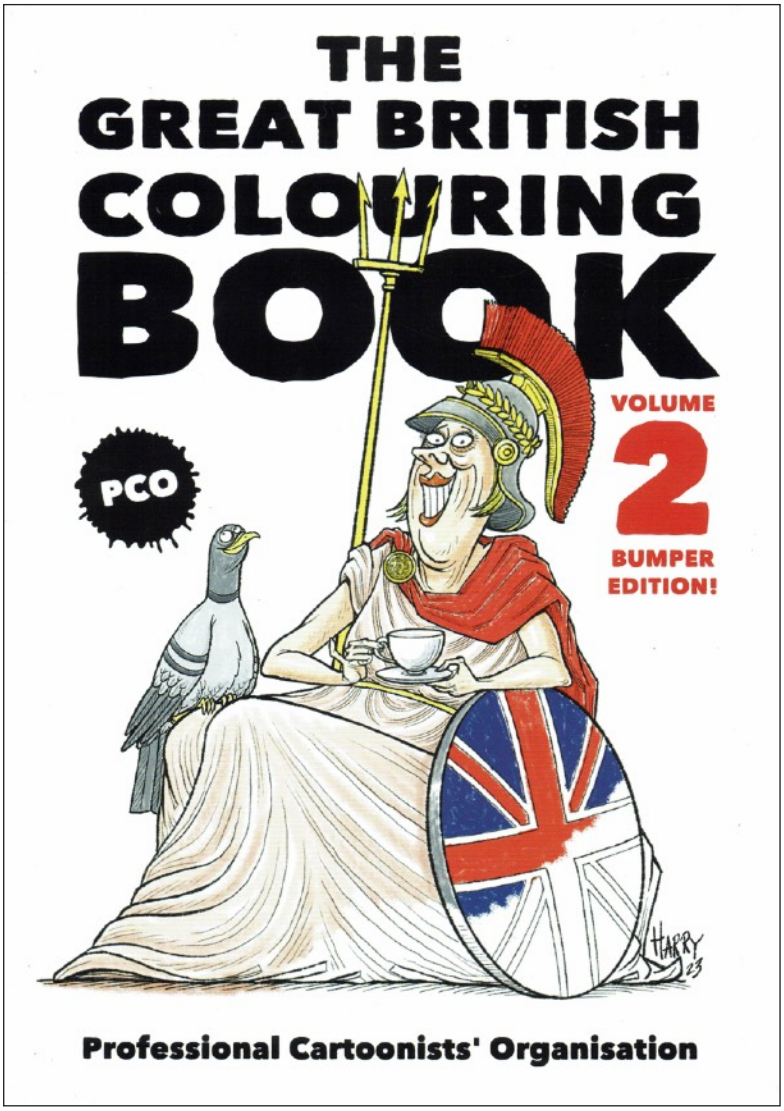
Many points were discussed and it is planned that QIJC should draft some model guidance notes and draft a basic arrangements document that consider the points and issues and be available for all Meetings.

During the Saturday afternoon, as is usual, there is free time. There were two planned offered activities. One was related to Prison Phoenix Trust that promotes yoga in Prisons and the other a visit to a local commercial windmill where I had been doing some work. Those that visited were able to buy Nigel Moon’s fresh stone ground organic flour and they returned to the Abbey suitably covered in flour dust!



THE GREAT BRITISH COLOURING BOOK

William Waddilove



I am, in a small way, involved and concerned about the situation of refugees and asylum seekers in this country. You may recall the story when the Robert Jenrick, the Conservative minister responsible for immigration affairs, visited a child refugee reception centre in the spring of 2023 and was horrified that some cartoon murals had been painted to make the place friendly and ordered them to be painted over immediately, well other people were upset too. So the PCO (Professional Cartoonist Organisation) decided to do something and created a special children's' welcome pack. As was commented "since when has being nice to children been wrong?"

I am sure that having pleasant surroundings even with children's cartoon characters on the walls made it nicer for the staff as well. Had these children really planned to escape from their home countries where they may have lost their homes, livelihoods family and possibly faced death to come to England to see cartoons on the walls of a 'prison'?

I asked if I could buy one of the books. I received their reply 'Thanks, but not yet'. I did get a reply that they had put my name, along with many others onto a list and we would be the first to know when they came available but I would have to wait.
They said that their priority was to distribute the books together with a pack of coloured pencils to the target group of children. I don't know how many there actually are but they have already given out 4,000 first editions.

Eventually I was able to order one and so I have had one from the next edition. Mine arrive just before Christmas.

All the artists have donated their drawings. Some guideline were given to them to ensure that no political or religious indiscretions were made and all had to feature some form of 'Welcome to Britain'.

The group providing the book are all professional cartoonists and there are a lot of familiar names. One of the problems the group soon faced was that they liked the idea but had no experience of mechanism for taking it further. Fortunately the campaigning organisation '38 Degrees' had. They took over the distribution.

So would you like one? Looking at their website it seems that they are not intending to produce any more. However I am pleased that I have been able to support this lovely initiative and the project.

THE EVOLUTION OF THE PAROLE BOARD - AND MORE...

Melanie Jameson

After the clear presentation on the functioning of the Parole Board at our recent QICJ conference, I felt ready to attend their 2024 annual conference. I had been invited as guest, due to my specialism in dyslexia etc in criminal justice contexts and came armed with handouts on how these conditions can disadvantage people during hearings. I hoped to ensure this information would go on their intranet.

I last spoke at a Parole Board conference in 2009, much had changed. The current leadership is young, female and determined to make the Board more efficient, while fighting off threats to its independence (inserted by Dominic Raab into the Victims and Prisoners Bill currently labouring through parliament). They are fairly confident that recent communications with the current Secretary of State, and amendments tabled in the Lords, will restore good sense. However they may well be stuck with the government's intention to refer 'top tier cases' to an Upper Tribunal for re-consideration; this is to ensure 'public confidence' (ie 'the demented outrage of the Daily Mail' which erupts every time a high profile prisoner is due for release) and should only happen if a different decision is likely. The Bill also clears the way for a victim to make a submission at a parole hearing, rather than just being allowed to observe. Guidance is

being finalised for board members in anticipation of changes in this Bill relating to IPPs (of whom more anon).

The Vice Chair outlined changes over the last 50 years. These comprised the vastly increased length of custodial sentences and far less judicial discretion due to tightened guidelines – he put this down to politicians wanting to be seen to be 'doing something', citing (often mis-informed) public opinion. For example, bringing a knife to the scene of a fatal stabbing, even if you do not commit the murder, can whizz you into prison at 18, to emerge in your early forties. There is NO link between the prison population and levels of crime. Two thirds of their work is recalls – which, as I always say, is something that no other European jurisdiction is so invested in.



What else? Most oral hearings are now virtual. The Board is aiming to be regarded as a court rather than 'court-like body', and to further increase transparency. They are prepared to use AI for sifting documentation but not for decision-making. They welcome the establishment of a multi-agency oversight group to increase efficiency and overcome poor communications. And OASys, the long-lived and most widely used risk assessment tool, is being replaced by Assessment, Risks, Needs & Strengths (ARNS) by 2026.

I attended a session on my specialist area, neurodiversity, and one on the next generation of accredited programmes in prisons. Entitled 'Building Choices', these claim to 'validate traumatic backgrounds' but are not 'the end of your story'. A life map is constructed with strengths as well as problem areas. Another session covered electronic monitoring, now used for eight different cohorts of people, the latest being DAPOL: Domestic Abuse Perpetrated on Licence.

We came together to hear three video messages: firstly from the Prisons Minister (who said nothing of note) then the Chief Inspector of Prisons who emphasised staff shortages, unavailability of accredited programmes and especially failings in resettlement: 90% of releases have nowhere to stay, leading to a high return rate to prison. Interestingly the new HMCI of Probation is the former head of the Parole Board – so someone with a paramount focus on risk. We learned that ¾ of probation services were rated as 'requiring improvement' or 'inadequate'; there is a lack of effective supervision and the majority of probation officers are inexperienced.
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There was a positive contribution on Approved Premises, in particular the three sites designated 'Recovery Focused', run by staff with a compassionate understanding of the problems faced by their residents: "A hurt is at the centre of an addictive behaviour". I did not get a clear answer on the gap between demand and supply but was pleased to hear that there will be more prison in-reach, better contact with families whose role is paramount in successful resettlement, and use of peer support.

But it was the final session that particularly drew my attention: a presentation by HMPPS on IPP prisoners, since this is a long-standing concern of QICJ. The small team appeared dedicated to do all they could to support IPPs via five strategy objectives:

- Ensure they are in the right prison to access any intervention on their sentence plan.
- Ensure they receive timely high-quality preparation for parole and release.
- Ensure they get assistance with community reintegration and effective management of their licence.
- Deliver continuous staff development and training on impact of an IPP sentence and associated processes.
- Ensure IPPs at risk of suicide and self-harm are identified and supported.

Feedback has been collected from an IPP focus group, recording that they feel they are the last to know about any changes; they dislike sharing cells, they find change very unsettling. Part of the revised Action Plan promotes direct staff engagement with and awareness of IPPs, with an IPP specialist pilot (whatever that entails) in the North-West.



The session concluded with input from an IPP on licence, who spoke most eloquently about his experiences. He has set up https://newwavetrust.com/ offering 'lived experience mentoring and consultancy'. I made contact with the head of the HMPPS team, sharing that a number of IPPs with whom I/QICJ have had communications are on the autistic spectrum, causing their behaviour to appear unreasonable and deserving of sanctions/recall. He replied that the new neurodiversity managers in prisons are being made aware of IPPs. I shall contact him with concerns raised in the recent CCJS and Howard League sessions on IPP and ask whether new initiatives are being fully funded and staffed by professionals with trauma-informed training.

In an earlier slot, a Parole Board official expressed dismay that IPP is still unresolved and was 'acutely aware of the moral imperative to help IPP prisoners progress'. The following question was posed: 'how do we help them to build evidence for their parole hearings?' There was an understanding that many caught up in IPP were vulnerable from the start – and are now much more so. Same figures that we are aware of were stated: more IPPs are being recalled than released and that 99% are over tariff. I had not realised that 250 are in secure hospitals. There are currently 1715 live parole reviews.

So a lot to digest, but an invaluable opportunity to observe the deliberations of this integral part of the CJS.

THE LONGFORD LECTURE

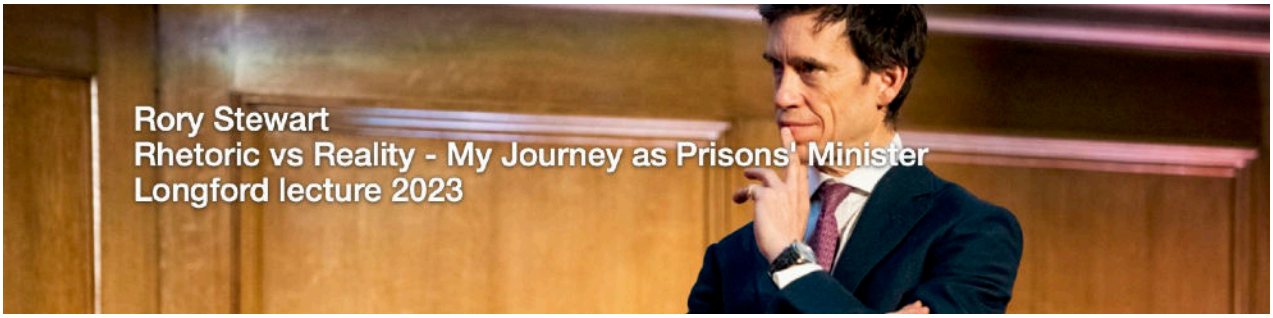
Alice Audsley

RHETORIC VERSUS REALITY by RORY STEWART

This lecture given at the Annual Awards Ceremony of the Longford Trust was invigorating. Rory Stewart was a Prison Minister in Teresa May's government for over a year. He spoke about his work in that role, what he learned about prisons and the political obstacles and attitudes that made it extremely difficult to get things done and he suggested how things could and should be improved.

He described how politicians have a 'surreal detachment' from reality. After all the hard work of getting into parliament and then struggling to get promoted to being a minister, they are driven not by any great interest in their department but by sound bites and market driven answers with no real interest in the problems at ground level. Very rarely do they remain in their departments for any length of time. The civil servants in those departments, experienced and knowledgeable as they are, seeing politicians come and go, have a tendency to remain rigid and bureaucratic. Politicians are interested in accountability and transparency which is OK for schools and hospitals, which most of the population knows a bit about, but not for prisons. Prisons are isolated islands, detached from the real life of most of the population. We know too that prisoners tend to be the most marginalised of the population, a high proportion grew up in care or failed at school and there is a high ethnic mix. The large majority of the general public is indifferent to what goes on inside prisons. The media play a big role in public attitudes to victims and contempt for prisoners.

Rory Stewart described politicians as 'floating free of reality'. They make statements and have debates without any sense of what life in prisons is really like. The real work on the landings and the care of prisoners' day to day living, goes on largely unnoticed, unrecognised and unappreciated.



He came up with three solutions. First, prisoners should be recognised as citizens and given the vote. There should be legally binding standards to force humane treatment like the amount of time out of cell and forbidding overcrowding of a cell. Prison Governors should be able to refuse to accept prisoners if they do not have the space in their prison.

Second, Prison Officers should be invested in. They should have a long training in a recognised staff college, a passing out ceremony, mentoring and proper recognition for the difficult job they do. And third, there should be a public culture of being able to visit prisons, school parties should be allowed to see the landings, talk to prisoners in their cells and the media should have more access.

Finally, he said that the way we treat prisoners is a litmus test for our society. He spoke of holding two opposites in tension – compassion and realism. On entering prison, prisoners should be able to expect that prison staff will treat them with respect, that things like call bells will work, that there will be clear rules and clear expectations on them as to how to behave. They should also be able to expect that their education, mental health and rehabilitation will be addressed. For their part, prison officers should be able to expect that prisoners will respond to instructions, turn up for classes and appointments and engage in their rehabilitation.

WELCOMING FORMER PRISONERS INTO MEETINGS

Melanie Jameson

Queries from several QICJ members has led us to launch an exploration of this area at our 2024 conference. More consideration is needed before we can produce guidance for our membership, but these are our findings so far, with the help of BYM Safeguarding Officer, Mark Mitchell.

When we know that someone is joining us from prison, we are obliged to take account of safeguarding procedures if s/he has committed a violent or sexual offence. These are embodied in 31:8, the Christian safeguarding agency, to which most AMs are signed up. (BYM also has its own 'corporate' service agreement with 31:8). This organisation provides resources and training https://thirtyoneeight.org/help-and-resources/safeguarding-helpline/

Furthermore, there may well be license conditions which will be explained to us by the ex-offender's Probation Officer – part of the multi-agency MAPPA team. This leads to a contract being drawn up between the individuals and a small group of Quakers taking on this responsibility. Restrictions will often relate to the presence of children at a Meeting.

This may lead to someone who has enjoyed a nurturing Quaker Meeting inside prison and longs to be integrated into his or her Quaker community outside, feeling frustrated and deeply disappointed. Hopefully Quaker Prison Chaplains (QPCs) will help to manage expectations, depending on the offence.

Some LMs have also signed up to the Welcome Directory, which maintains a database of churches etc who welcome ex-offenders. This organisation lists four requirements for those wishing to register https://www.welcomedirectory.org.uk/ .

1. A Safeguarding Policy that promotes an active safeguarding culture within your faith community.
2. Permission from a senior faith leader (or multiple faith leaders) depending on the structure of your faith community. 3. A point of contact, also known as a 'Champion' – someone with an interest and who is happy to be the main point of contact for prison leavers wishing to connect.
4. Prior experience with this kind of work, perhaps through working or volunteering in a prison or even helping with a local food bank or community project.

They also offer training, a three session Prison Awareness Course.

Establishing these guidelines is the starting point of a wider conversation within QICJ, which must involve QPCs, former prisoners and Meetings that are already undertaking this role.

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