Quakers in Criminal Justice

Shining a Light in the Darkness



Newsletter 120, Spring 2025

Contents

1. A Message from the Editor – Melanie Jameson
2. Introducing Our New Committee – Mike Nellis
3. Response to Westminster MH Police Raid – Mike Nellis & Melanie Jameson
4. Poem: Ammerdown – Melanie Jameson
5. Conference Report – Martin Schweiger
6. Reflections on Phil Bowen's Contribution – Noel Staples
7. A Heard Voice – Tim Newell
8. A Letter from Don Nichols
9. Welcoming All to Quaker Meetings – Simon Ewart
10. Writing to the Ministry of Justice – Sue Johnson
11. Update on IPPs – Melanie Jameson
12. Central England Quakers Remember Prisoners' Families – William Waddilove
13. Alternatives to Prison – Noel Staples
14. Remembering Glebe House – Mike Nellis
15. "I complained about a judge's behaviour" – Rona Epstein
16. Recalls: The Bee in my Bonnet – Melanie Jameson
17. Walking Together with Hope: Connecting CJ priorities of the Christian churches – Jonathan Ranger
18. Remembering Martin Wright – Jonathan Ranger

A Message from the Editor

Dear Friends

After eight years in the editor's seat, Jonathan Wilgenbus-Lamb has now stepped down. He will be a hard act to follow. Having finished my 2nd triennium as QICJ clerk, I have rashly offered to take on this BYM edition, while the committee seeks someone to take over the role. Please consider if this is a service you could offer. Steve Martin has designed this issue, and chose the quotes after the articles; Jonathan Ranger edits the layout, prints and distributes the Newsletter as usual.

QICJ is pleased to announce that our major piece of work 'Welcoming All to Quaker Meetings' is now being disseminated as widely as possible. We have even had interest from other faith groups, and it will be the topic of our BYM Special Interest Meeting. You will read about this and other topics in the context of our recent conference, 'Unheard Voices and the Future of the Criminal Justice System', in this newsletter, and find all the supporting documents on our website: https://www.qicj.org/events/2025con.html.

There have been two significant losses since our last newsletter – our Friend Martin Wright, whose contribution to restorative justice and penal reform has been immeasurable, and the closure of Glebe House. Both are covered in this edition.

I hope you will find the newsletter interesting, and will spread the word about Criminal Justice issues and our discernment on welcoming prison leavers to Quaker Meetings, which you can find here: https://www.qicj.org/doc/Welcoming All.pdf

Do keep in touch, and let us know of any criminal justice initiatives that deserve to be better known.

Melanie Jameson
Interim Editor



"Every stage of our lives offers fresh opportunities. Responding to divine guidance, try to discern the right time to undertake or relinquish responsibilities without undue pride or guilt."

Introducing the New Committee



It is with great pleasure that I welcome three new appointees to the committee of QICJ – Sheila, Karen and Steve – each of whom will bring vital new experiences, strengths and perspectives to our work.

Such moments create an opportunity for a committee to refresh its mission. We do so at a particularly challenging time for the overstretched, unduly punitive criminal (in)justice system in England and Wales, with whose many casualties members of QICJ, in greater or lesser degree, are readily acquainted.

I am glad that our committee retains the established and inestimable skills of Sarah, Sue, Robert, Jonathan, Simon and my predecessor Melanie. There is no-one here whose gift is not required. For myself, it is an unexpected honour to serve as clerk of QICJ. I will do my best.

Mike Nellis

"When choices arise, do you take the way that offers the fullest opportunity for the use of your gifts in the service of God and the community?"

Response to Westminster MH Police Raid



The Clerks of QICJ and the Justice Interest Group wrote to the Head of Worship and Witness, Oliver Robertson, as follows:

Dear Oliver,

Police Raid on Westminster Meeting

The Metropolitan Police raid on Westminster Meeting House, and the arrest of six women from Youth Demand, was a very concerning development. News of this came our way just an hour or so before a committee meeting of Quakers in Criminal Justice (QICJ) was due to begin. We only had time at that point to give it brief attention, and, of course, at that moment facts were few, but we would like to contribute to whatever discussions are going on about this, as we are sure they must be, at Friends House.

The most salient fact, on the face of it, is that this was a raid at all, rather than a knock on the door and a civil request to enter. Whatever business the police had with Youth Demand, we must assume they knew full well that they were entering a place of worship, and chose to do so aggressively rather than politely. There were, presumably, other ways of making contact with these women – so why a raid on Quaker premises? Unless some new fact convinces us otherwise, we think this "show of force" has to be read as a calculated act of intimidation towards Quakers. We think it should be responded to in these terms, and the Metropolitan Police asked to account for their behaviour towards us.

Is the Religious Society of Friends now on a police watchlist of suspicious or subversive organisations, because of the groups we rent space to, and the fact that some Friends themselves have been prosecuted and imprisoned for taking part in environmental protests? The Metropolitan Police should be asked directly about this. They may not tell us, but we should ask them all the same.

At some point, Friends might need to consider a Freedom of Information request, but not in the first instance. We may not be comfortable if the police do tell us we are indeed on such a list, but, as Friends have traditionally been "conscientious objectors" to bad government policies of one sort or another, we should not, perhaps, be unduly perturbed if we are once again put in this position.

Lastly, there is a simple free speech question. If Quaker Meeting Houses cannot be safe spaces in which people of faith and citizens more generally cannot discuss non-violent protest, or air concerns about genocide, what spaces will be safe? This is a question with which all Friends could usefully engage, among themselves and in collaboration with other concerned bodies.

We are heartened by the outpouring of support from all quarters and the plan to form a circle round New Scotland Yard on Thursday, in the manner of a Quaker Meeting for Worship. *SEE BELOW*

QICJ would be happy to engage in further discussion with you pertaining to the raid.

In Friendship,
Mike Nellis, Clerk QICJ; Melanie Jameson, Clerk JIG

Note from Melanie My friend attended the Scotland Yard witness, and writes:

The vigil today was a strong message (of peace and love). From what I heard, the estimated number was 400 with a lot of support from climate and Palestine activist groups as well as the Quakers, of course. I did some stewarding, and the passing public were very supportive – some had heard about the arrests, and some hadn't. They all appeared concerned about such actions by the police, but also smiled when they heard today's vigil was about sending love and peace, as well as voicing an objection.

Westminster Meeting invited us back there afterwards, which was a nice social opportunity.

I never heard if anyone from Scotland Yard came out to say anything.

Witness took place at around 25 Quaker MHs that day – this raid has raised our profile considerably!

"Respect the laws of the state, but let your first loyalty be to God's purposes. If you feel impelled by strong conviction to break the law, search your conscience deeply. Ask your meeting for the prayerful support which will give you strength as a right way becomes clear."

’Ammerdown’ by Melanie Jameson



Our conference venue this year lends
Itself to simple needs of Friends:
The peaceful ambience in the air,
The wholesome vegetarian fare,
The spaciousness of the estate,
The daffodils that us await
And greet us as we saunter past,
Admiring relics of the past.

We have not come here to relax
And meditate, but to face facts;
And as we try and contemplate
The justice system, all the weight
Of its dysfunction is displayed,
And we are left distressed, dismayed.
What can we do? We are so few.
So many chops and changes, new
Reviews, Commissions, Legislation,
Tagging, rather than Probation,
A lack of Rehabilitation,
Victims’ grief so raw and long,
Prisoners’ families struggling on.

Friends, could there be another way?
As Quaker Light comes into play,
And goes against the current fashion,
With ‘Restoration’ & ‘Compassion’,
Each prisoner’s a child of God,
Someone of worth, so spare the rod.
In QICJ we don’t find
That out of sight is out of mind.

“Do you foster the spirit of mutual understanding and forgiveness which our discipleship asks of us? Remember that each one of us is unique, precious, a child of God.”

Ammerdown 2025 Conference Report

Martin Schweiger reflects on our weekend together at Ammerdown, seeking to listen to unheard voices, and considering the future of the Criminal Justice System.



Friday's opening session from Phil Bowen, Director of the Centre for Justice Innovation, informed us about tensions being generated by efforts to 'manage' the different crises rather than seeking to resolve them. The political attraction of being seen to be 'tough on crime' persists, making new 'technical fixes' appear very attractive. SMART tags can monitor the movements of someone on probation, and alert staff to drug or alcohol consumption. Can Artificial Intelligence mitigate problems, or will it simply make things worse in the long run? Devolution to the local level, community responsibility, redemption, rehabilitation and restoration have a lot to offer; and this was what Phil saw as the way forward.

The **Update Panel** on Saturday morning provided an opportunity to hear more about issues that have been raised previously. Liz Bridges, founder of the Wandsworth Prison Improvement Campaign, told us that the prison now has a new, more approachable governor and a sum of £100 million available to do upgrades to its crumbling infrastructure. Some progress is being made - the fact that only one rat was seen on the last inspection was taken as progress, but much remains to be done, such as dealing with roasting temperatures indoors in the summer, and poor sanitation. The Campaign, which is pressing for better conditions for all users of the prison building, has been covered on Channel 4 TV, who maintain an interest.

UNGRIPP's – United Group for the Reform of Imprisonment for Public Protection (IPP) – Ann Horton shared her experiences of pushing to abolish the discredited IPP sentence. The Government simply refuses to re-sentence these prisoners, as recommended. Meanwhile levels of stress, mental illness, self-harm and suicide increase amongst those with an IPP, and their families continue to suffer.

Mike Nellis spoke about increasing reliance on technology and AI, and the reduction of human interaction with Probation. He mentioned the Just Algorithm Action Group, with which QICJ is now partnered.

Katie Fraser, Head of Practice at Women in Prison, called for women on probation or in prison to be managed by a service designed for women not men. Too many women subjected to domestic abuse end up being criminalised rather than helped. Many women in prison require trauma-informed care that they don't get. For pregnant women, there are particular risks which are often overlooked.

Small groups were given time to consider some of the unheard voices: victims' experiences [See pages 11-13], a more in-depth consideration of women in prison, and the voice of a family member struggling to support her imprisoned grandson. Some excellent work is being done by dedicated people; the term 'relentless botheration' was celebrated which recalled the pioneering work of Elizabeth Fry at Newgate Goal in the 1820s.

On Saturday evening, with a change of tone, we were treated to a concert by 'Nudges & Winks'. Mark Waistell is a singer-songwriter from Devon who bases his songs on Advices and Queries. Another popular feature of the conference was the morning yoga sessions offered by Selina Sasse of the Prison Phoenix Trust.

On the Sunday morning, we were led in a consideration of the considerable amount of work done on welcoming former prisoners into local Quaker Meetings. A number of former prisoners have been rejected by Quaker Meetings, even when they have benefited greatly from our form of worship while in custody. Complications arise for people released with licence conditions which place certain restrictions on them. The QICJ Working Group has developed a resource for Meetings that lays out considerations and responsibilities. [See page 14.]

There was a great sense of unity as the conference came to a close. Quakers do have a commitment to humanising the Criminal Justice System and listening to more of the unheard voices. In 2026 the QICJ Conference will be in March at Hinsley Hall in Leeds, providing an opportunity for those present to think more about Quaker involvement with important aspects of the CJ System in the UK.

"In worship together, we can find the assurance of God's love, and the strength to go on with renewed courage."

Noel Staples: Emergent Technologies

Noel Staples summarises key issues arising out of our plenary session on emergent technologies.

Phil Bowen's talk on *The Future of our CJ System* was a mix of gloom – *plus ça change, plus c'est la même chose* – with an attempt at optimism, though whether any optimism is justified is hard to imagine. He noted how the Rt Hon David Gauke MP's new *Interim Sentencing Review* highlights the problems. Phil pointed to the growing prospect of the use of advanced technology such as electronic surveillance, facial recognition cameras and tagging to create "prison in the community" – cheaper than building and staffing prisons. He remarked a conflict of interest among policy makers – 'some of whom directly benefit from the capital invested in emergent technology'.

> *The debate about technology is the natural outcome of a system that prioritises expedient, punitive measures over thoughtful, human-centred and evidence-based reform.*

Using such emergent technology risks losing the valuable human relationships that experienced probation officers can have with offenders, replacing them with algorithm-controlled, so-called artificial intelligence (AI).

Algorithms are mathematical programmes. Reducing the variability of human interactions to mathematical formulae is impossible. The database on which an algorithm operates is only good up to the time it was created.

The algorithms humans (mostly male) create come with their creators' prejudices and values. Phil noted:

> *Evidence is discounted that says humans can change when other humans demonstrate to them that they are valued and loved . . .*
>
> *We should never forget that, as a society, we choose what we punish. The law's insistence on identifying and proving the culpability of individuals, its insistence on regulating the behaviour of the poorer in society, and, conversely, its inability to deal with the harms caused by corporations – crimes of the powerful – reveals the wider truths behind neo-liberal attitudes.*

(You might need to read that twice …)

Since the austerity policy of 2010, there has been constant erosion of government services. Criminal justice systems have been drastically affected, with lengthened sentences and a 40% reduction in the number of courts, leading to long waiting lists and longer remands in custody. The probation service never recovered from "Failing Grayling's" attempted privatisation and the consequent loss of many experienced probation officers. Grayling (Justice Secretary, Sept. 2012 to May 2015) greatly reduced prison staff too, disastrously losing experienced officers to early retirement and redundancy.

Although new recruitment is gradually catching up, new prison officers have only six weeks training, with nothing on management of trauma or of the mental ill-health of over 50% of prisoners (Norwegian prison officers receive *two years training*). New prison officers seldom stay more than a year. When government recently announced the early release of 1700 prisoners, no mention was made of the shortage of probation officers, already with unmanageable caseloads, to supervise them.



On the more optimistic front, Phil told us:

> *A promising vision for reform lies, in part, in devolving power, and trusting in and enabling communities to become more, and not less, involved in justice.*

He would like to see

> d*evolving decision-making power to communities, [so that] local residents can actively participate in shaping policies and practices that reflect their values and experiences, and recognise the need to balance competing priorities.*

Restorative justice principles are important so that a better balance is achieved between treatment of offenders and their victims. Local communities are best placed to decide punishment of offenders and help with rehabilitation. Technology *can* help here, analysing data to identify patterns and especially underlying factors contributing to criminal behaviour. More resources will be needed. However, until sufficient change in the criminal justice system has been achieved to allow at least one prison to be closed, there will be the need for greater funding. Keep your eyes open for those winged pigs!

It's unclear how public perception of penal policy could be changed from punishment towards rehabilitation. It seems that, once having left mainstream education, only a relatively small proportion of the population is open to new ideas, and continues learning throughout life. Many people resist being "told" things, especially by authorities. The predominantly right-wing media attacks rehabilitation policies as "soft" on offenders. Politicians see no votes for themselves in the next election if they espouse such policies. Most public know little about penal policy unless a family member or relative is affected – and then the truth will out. A mission for QICJ?

Noel refers us to Resisting AI: An Anti-fascist Approach to Artificial Intelligence *by Dan McQuillan (Bristol University Press) because it illustrates a particular problem of algorithms in relation to criminal justice (pp. 33-34).*

"Be discriminating when choosing means of entertainment and information."

A Heard Voice

Tim Newell writes about the shortcomings of the service offered to victims.

Our conference at Ammerdown was very full and focused. We heard from voices that are usually in the background of QICJ deliberations. I was asked to help bring the voice of a victim of crime to the event. I asked my fellow trustee of Escaping Victimhood if she would be willing to speak of her experience, and she immediately agreed. Other unheard voices were from women in prison and families of prisoners.

Amandip Kaur described herself as a victim of crime. Her father had been murdered in India, and her brother was murdered in England. The murder in London had impacted her more, and she had to commit herself to supporting her mother through this time of trauma, helping her to understand the various

processes involved in the experience of 'justice'. The perpetrators were arrested soon after the brutal murder of her brother. By then the family had a Family Liaison Officer (FLO) (a specially trained police officer) allocated to keep the family informed about progress and what was likely to happen. This had been a very helpful support through a stressful time.

Amandip spoke about how the family felt that the defendants had privileges and how the family had been restricted during the trial. One of the defendants was a woman; the family were told not to use the toilets nearest the court, as this defendant was using them, and they should not meet, so the family had to walk some distance to use another loo. This happened every day, 9.30 til 4.30, during the trial which lasted 5 weeks. Similarly, the family felt inhibited during the trial by being told not to cry openly during the horrific evidence as that might over-influence the jury and thus disrupt the trial. She had had to move in with her mother whilst normally she would be in her own household.

The conviction and sentencing of the main defendants were discussed with the FLO, who indicated that now the trial was over, the family would achieve 'closure'. The services of the FLO came to an end, and the family were referred to the National Homicide Service (part of Victim Support), which provides support for families bereaved through homicide (murder and manslaughter). Amandip and her mother got help from the Homicide Service, and her mother was referred to Escaping Victimhood [https://www.escapingvictimhood.com], the Quaker-recognised body that provides residential psycho-educational workshops for people bereaved by homicide. Amandip went to Sheffield for the workshop to support her mother, and felt it had met their need to understand the impact of the trauma on them, and to learn to manage events with greater confidence and less anxiety. She felt more resilient about managing her life as a mother, wife and daughter. Her commitment as a trustee was to ensure Escaping Victimhood maintained a regular service for victims of serious crime – knowing how effective it is; this is described in the independent research carried out by Bath University https://www.escapingvictimhood.com/downloads/bathresearch.pdf

Escaping Victimhood would welcome some help from Friends. EV has found it lately very difficult to raise funding for our workshops – that's the only thing we spend money on. Grant Making Trusts look for developed forms of post-intervention support when assessing charities working with people affected by trauma. EV has never had any post-workshop support apart from one follow-up day two months after this mother's workshop to check on any outstanding issues and to learn about progress after a brief reminder of the key issues covered in the workshop.

Given that most of our participants come from the Homicide Service (who provide a lifelong commitment to give support when needed), there is little need for further support in our experience – though we always give a commitment to help if needed.



Friends may be aware of possible sources of funding for this work with some of the most badly affected victims of crime in the justice system. Our main costs are incurred because the workshop has to be residential to provide the focus on the issues worked upon, as well as developing a sense of community that the workshop is dependent upon for safe learning. We want to continue to provide this service, which has clearly been of great help to over 300 families.

Please let me know about any possible sources of financial help that we could approach. Sadly, the need for our work continues to be there.

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

A letter from Don Nichols, March 2025

Dear QICJ Friends
I was very pleased to hear from various sources that the 2025 conference was well attended and the subjects covered were full of substance to get plenty of discussions going amongst you.
I really appreciated the card signed by you all at the conference.
Plus many, many thanks for the wonderful thoughts of a collection and the amount you raised to send me. I certainly spend wisely, such as buying some new clothes.
If any of you wish to have any information about how things are going with regards to my situation, please don't hold back from asking Simon as he is in regular contact with me and has my permission to pass on any relevant information.
Once again, many thanks for all the support you show me.
In Friendship,
Don

Welcoming All Into Our Meetings

Simon Ewart updates us on the outcome of the QICJ working group's discernment on how best to encourage a dialogue with Local Meetings.

Just who or what are we afraid of, Friends?

It came as a shock prior to the QICJ annual conference held in Launde Abbey 2024, that many prison leavers did not find a welcome into the worshipping communities of local Quaker Meetings. So, a small group of us were tasked by QICJ to work on a document to encourage Friends to look at all the aspects of welcoming Friends who have left prison.

This work was presented at our recent 2025 conference at Ammerdown and, with one or two slight tweaks, was accepted. It is now published for all to see on the home page of our website: https://www.qicj.org/doc/Welcoming All.pdf

Do take a look, and you will see that we have laid out a number of resources, helpful contacts and safeguarding considerations.

All members and group supporters have also received this document via our circulation list, and we hope to reach more Friends through our forthcoming Special Interest Meeting at BYM (May 2). We do hope that this will help your Meeting, or Meetings within your Area Meeting, to see that, with the right structures to support both Meeting and prison leaver, a safe welcome is possible for all.

WELCOMING ALL

The Discernment of the Quakers in Criminal Justice Working Group looking at Quaker Meetings & safely integrating former prisoners



"How can we make our meeting a community in which each person is accepted and nurtured, and strangers are welcome?"

Voicing a concern.
Sue Johnson writes to the Ministry of Justice

Sue Johnson was concerned about the government response to the riots and demonstrations in Manchester following the Southport stabbings of three young girls. She took this concern to her Social Justice Group (within Manchester and Warrington AM) and was asked to prepare a letter to the Ministry of Justice (MoJ). This was shared with the group, and also more widely within the AM, before being dispatched to the Secretary of State, Shabana Mahmood.

This well-researched communication delves into many aspects of criminal justice, from loss of liberty becoming regarded as the punishment so that prisons can focus on therapeutic interventions and rehabilitation, to the counterproductive nature of short sentences, the imprisonment of mothers, child prisons and the over-use of recall. Sue also criticises Prevent, and highlights the injustice of Imprisonment for Pubic Protection (IPP), a long-standing concern of QICJ.

Her communication begins with an analysis of the unrest, which is identified as two distinct streams, as follows (quoted directly from the letter):

1) General anger against authority, which is a type of hatred-driven unrest and can include violence and an expression of racism. There is abundant evidence in *The Spirit Level*, a book by academics Wilkinson and Pickett, that this type of unrest increases as levels of inequality widen. Sadly, policies of past governments have widened inequalities of wealth, health, education, and accommodation.

2) The second type is an ethically and politically driven unrest caused by protestors wishing to influence and change government policies. It is driven by deep concerns which include climate change, the war in Gaza, freedom of speech, and the rights of juries. Unfortunately, the entrenched response to both types of unrest has been to double-down on prison as punishment and deterrence, which is an increasingly inadequate solution.

We want to encourage the government to introduce the following evidence-based changes to the Justice System. We believe that these can be implemented within a relatively short timescale, and lead to a reduction in recidivism and prisoner numbers as well as providing more humane working and living conditions for both prisoners and staff, and provide much needed hope in an area of such social anguish.

The bland response from the MoJ reiterates the usual narrative of 'removing dangerous prisoners from the streets', but moves on to 'serving your sentence in clean and human living conditions' (have they visited many prisons?) and 'striking the right balance between punishment and rehabilitation'.

The points about short sentences and maternal imprisonment were conflated in the response, which listed the negative outcomes we know too well. As regards young people, the role of poverty, special needs and adverse childhood experiences were all acknowledged, calling for a multi-agency approach. So it would appear the MoJ is well aware of these factors. The letter finished by outlining the measures to support IPP prisoners to progress, and the eventual termination of their licence. (Though QICJ welcomes the latter, we have little evidence of the former.)

Is it worthwhile communicating with the MoJ, by letter or through submissions to consultations, as the Justice Interest Group has done on our behalf? I would argue that it is, so that they continue to be exposed to arguments that challenge the punitive narrative from much of the media, and hear from those advocating tried and tested approaches such as Circles of Support & Accountability and Restorative Justice.

Sue Johnson and Melanie Jameson

(contact Melanie for the full text of both letters)

Update on Imprisonment for Public Protection

As I write this update, the Private Members Bill on IPP is making slow progress. It is now up to the Committee stage, with many more stages ahead. The Bill calls for resentencing, something that both main parties have firmly rejected. In fact, there is little expectation that it will be successful and enter into legislation, but this does not seem to disappoint the Centre for Crime & Justice Studies which have been deeply involved in this work. In their recent briefing session, they stressed the importance of using the progress of the Bill and a forthcoming debate to get valuable media attention.

My main concern has always been IPP prisoners rather than those in the community. I am not alone in mistrusting the IPP Action Plans, priority access to courses, 'timely high-quality preparation for release', consultation with family boards and staff training – all promoted as helping the IPP prisoner progress through the system.

A crucial comment was made (off the record) at a government Round Table on IPP: "if we had more resources, we could get them through more quickly." Meanwhile IPPs are directed towards courses which may involve lengthy waiting times and changes of establishment – both stressful for people with autism, which, in my experience, affects a considerable number of the IPP population.

The Centre for Crime & Justice Studies has asked me to write up my autism concern and what actions I have taken (ie. providing my good practice info to the HMPPS IPP lead and, via him, to the Parole Board). I shall also mention that even though X's autism was documented, my experience as an Observer during his recent parole hearing was that autistic factors were simply not taken into account. We are pushing for this to be taken into account in parole hearings.

Melanie Jameson

Central England Quakers Remember Prisoners' Families



On Saturday 25th January, Central England Quakers Area Meeting held an activity fair where some organisations in the Meeting were invited to put on a stand.

The exhibition was available to visit over the lunch period, when those involved in the various projects could promote and illustrate their work and activities in the Area Meeting.

The photo shows a table. On the left is the **Quaker Christmas Parcels** stand.

The 'Christmas Parcels' are a group within the Area Meeting that originally gave a bag of nice food items to the families of serving prisoners.

The project currently packs over 1,000 parcels each year. In December 2024, they distributed about 700, through the Probation Service, to the families of serving prisoners, and 300 to other organisations, mainly those supporting refugees or migrants.

Each bag contains about 20 items. The Christmas Parcels project of the Area Meeting has just completed 63 years of service, so that is about 60,000 parcels. The little laptop on the table is showing a film of some parcels being given out in Coventry at the Food Hub.

Carriers of Hope (https://carriersofhope.org.uk/) is another similar organisation who have teamed up with St. Marks Church Coventry and Youth With A Mission (YWAM) to establish the World Foods Food Hub: https://carriersofhope.org.uk/world-foods-food-hub/

It operates weekly, and the aim is to provide culturally relevant food to members and their families (Refugees, Migrants or Asylum Seekers residing in Coventry).

On the right half of the table is the **Central England Quakers Community Justice Group**'s literature, showing what we do. Essentially, we are a small steering and support group of Chaplains and those who are involved in related activities. Also, from time to time, we organise public meetings on subjects of interest.

I'd be pleased to provide more info if needed, as I seem to have a finger in all camps!

William Waddilove

"Children and young people need love and stability. Are we doing all we can to uphold and sustain parents and others who carry the responsibility for providing this care?"

Alternatives to Prison



Noel Staples reflects on the way we incarcerate vulnerable people and how things might be done differently.

Prison is absolutely NOT the place for the mentally ill! It is not the place for anyone who needs help to integrate properly into society. Only serious, violent offenders need locking up for public protection. We imprison more people per head of population than almost anywhere in Europe, and twice as many as Scandinavian countries or Japan. We are second only to the USA and Russia!

This view may seem idealistic, but it is very sound. Education helps people gain self-confidence and develop better self-insight. Done well, it's surprising what one can teach real thugs.

I remember once at a bail hostel talking ad hoc to a small group of young men, one of whom was there for ABH – he'd thrown someone through the pub window. This bloke was big – over 6' and he towered over me – and I started talking to them about body language, NVC (non-verbal communication) and even cognitive dissonance. They were really listening, asking questions! Another resident approached and, seeing me, hesitated; the big bloke just said, "Come on, he's sound."

I used to take minibus loads out cross-country walking and, again, it's surprising what you can freely talk about while crossing a field of cows! None of these big blokes had ever been in a field of cows and, with genuine trepidation, asked if they might attack us. "If the bag between its legs has no udders on it, it might!"

Our prison system is a disgrace to a civilised country. How we treat our most vulnerable and disadvantaged is a measure of our civilisation. Senselessly, recent governments have polarised wealth, further disadvantaging the poor, stigmatising them as feckless scroungers and so on.

If our society is willing to spend £50,000 a year on an offender, then there are much better ways than banging them up in a closed institution like a prison, with lots of other offenders into whose warped society they will have to try to integrate if they are to survive.

Many of the offenders serving prison sentences have failed to integrate adequately into 'normal' society. They have likely had any or all of the following features in their lives: physical and sexual abuse as children; mental ill health; addiction; unemployment; inability to establish sustained adult relationships; inability to set up a stable home. Almost certainly they are a product of a cycle of deprivation in which all those issues were present in the family background. Such people, already un-integrated into mainstream society, will become totally dis-integrated from society in a prison, where all autonomy is removed from them.

What is needed is a plan of action for a convicted offender helping them to develop more accurate insights into themselves and address the real issues in their lives which have already prevented them integrating successfully into society. If one starts by incarcerating them, one sets out on entirely the wrong foot. Of course, there are violent or psychopathic offenders from whom society needs protection – but they are by no means the majority.

Since qualifying as a probation officer in the 1990s, I've wanted to see society offer offenders sentenced to terms of one or two years in prison (or even longer perhaps) the choice between serving the prison term or agreeing to one or more years' intensive education in the community. Although a prisoner sentenced to 12 months will only serve 6 months, this scheme still releases some £25,000 to finance a year's intensive education. However, until alternative sentencing enables closure of a prison, no money is actually saved.

Politically, the main problem is society's apparent need to see the offender 'punished', as much for deterrence as for vengeance, though there is little evidence that punishment deters recidivism. Revenge is not a nice or useful concept, though politicians all too readily appeal to it! Politicians run a mile from anything the media might portray as a "soft option". The media are primarily responsible for getting the best possible return on their shareholders' capital. They only publish what they can sell to the public for the greatest profit.

There is a range of issues surrounding the achievement of this alternative to prison:

1. There needs to be very good evidence of the offender's commitment to a period of intensive education tailored carefully to his or her needs.
2. Assessing the commitment of an offender faced with custody is difficult. Offenders are good at telling assessors what they think they want to hear, in order to avoid custody. Seasoned probation officers know this.
3. If genuine commitment is apparent, then a very careful assessment is needed of the offender's abilities.
4. Careful assessment is crucial because it must be a condition of accepting the alternative course of intensive education that the offender successfully completes any or all prescribed courses. Failure results in the custodial sentence being served in full.
5. Assessors and ongoing supervisors must be well educated, with clear insight into their own values and prejudices. Such people are expensive and, I suspect, not numerous. But it is a crucial role in this suggested alternative to prison. The supervisor must establish a relationship of trust and openness with the offender, so that the offender knows he or she can rely on appropriate help, fairness and objectivity.
6. In legal terms, courts must have available, at the point of sentencing, the possible alternative, with assessment of the offender's suitability already established.
7. Any offender accepting the alternative to custody must be willing to seek help as soon as there is a problem. They must be capable of developing insight into themselves to realise they have a problem before it becomes too great. Part of the assessment process will be to establish if an offender could be capable of developing insight into his or her self.

This can only be the broad outline of an alternative to custody. To succeed, it would need the support of society at large. That in turn involves educating society to change attitudes: indeed, a big ask, given our predominantly right-wing media.

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

Remembering Glebe House

Mike Nellis looks back over the unique mission of Glebe House, and regrets its closure.

Glebe House, a therapeutic community, was founded by Friends in the 1960s and evolved into a unique service for boys and young men who had a history of harmful sexual behaviour and/or had been victims of it. Sadly, after Ofsted had raised concerns over its safeguarding practices in November 2023, which led to the suspension of its services, its Quaker Trustees made the decision to close it permanently in November 2024. Its passing should not go unremarked.



Formally known as the Friends Therapeutic Community Trust, Glebe House was a registered care home and charity, set – *unfenced* – in three acres of attractive Cambridgeshire countryside. In its earlier days it took younger boys, but latterly focussed on 15-19 year olds. It only took seventeen at any given time, a mere fraction of the number of young people in Britain who would have benefited from its services.

Over the years, referrals came from educational, health and social work services: it was never just a resource for criminal justice agencies. Typically, its young people had “developmental deficits and relational trauma caused by neglect, lack of care, physical, emotional or sexual abuse, violence and significant loss”. They had problems with emotional self-regulation, were insecurely attached and untrusting of adults, displaying “distorted beliefs and destructive behaviours”. It was Glebe House’s mission “to repair some of the worst effects of early adverse experiences”.

Evaluations proved it successful. One highly reputable longitudinal study in 2014 showed that of 43 young men who had been in its care only 16% had reoffended ten years later, compared to 44% of a comparison group of 43 young people who had been referred to Glebe House but never became residents.

How did it achieve this? Its core was an intensive intervention programme run for a minimum of two years, plus follow-up for people after they left. Therapeutic practice varied over the years as the evidence-base changed, but essentially it followed Robert Rappaport's "cornerstones" model. This blended communalism, democracy, tolerance and reality-confrontation into a wrap-around regime in which rules were discussed, negotiated and agreed among staff and residents together, and harmful behaviour responsibly faced up to. In 2022 there were three community meetings per day, weekly small groups and one-to-one sessions. Crucially, young residents were empowered to chair the meetings.

Staff – unlike trustees – were not required to be Quakers, although some were. They were mostly qualified in residential work, social work and therapeutic work, clinicians to post-graduate level. Funded originally by Friends, its operational income came from the authorities who referred its young residents. But Friends periodically supported aspects of its work. Southern East Anglia Quaker Meeting, for example, financed a partnership between Glebe House and Circles UK, which introduced Circles of Support and Accountability (COSA) into Glebe House's follow-up programme.

Glebe House originated in the mind and heart of Quaker Geoffrey Brogden, a Suffolk probation officer. He was influenced by Quaker David Wills (1903-1981), a psychoanalytically trained social worker who had pioneered and publicised a number of small therapeutic communities for young people (largely under non-Quaker auspices). As early as 1935, Wills wrote to *The Friend* championing non-punitive responses to juvenile offenders, and encouraging Friends to take up such approaches. Weighty Quaker magistrates at the time were quite out of sympathy with what they saw as Wills' permissive ways of working with young people, and he was always more respected outside the Society of Friends than within it. Brogden sensed a genuine need for a Wills-like project with contemporary young people, although, like Wills, he was not specifically focussed on sexual harms.

Discernment over time led Quakers to support his vision, set up a working group and secure funding. Glebe House opened in 1965. Brogden died in 2021, aged 90. In *The Friend* 18th October 2024, his daughters, Annaliese and Nicola, were concerned about the decision to close Glebe House: "Has the decision been made with the same trembling before the Spirit as the decision was to found it?" they pertinently asked.

We must not forget Glebe House. In terms of the practical impact it had on individuals, families and society over 60 years – the victims it healed and the victims it prevented – it may be the single most important "justice" intervention undertaken by post-war British Quakers. But its achievements were largely unsung, even in its heyday, even among Friends, even in QICJ. As far as I know, its full story has never been told. There is an archive, there are survivors …. and someone should do this.

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

"Wot I ses is ... Life ain't all you want, but it's all you 'ave. So 'ave it.
Stick a geranium in yer 'at, an' be 'appy."
(a favourite Norfolk saying of Geoffrey Brogden)



See next article

I complained about a judge's behaviour

Rona Epstein, Honorary Research Fellow at Coventry Law School, Coventry University, writes about her challenge to the decision to imprison a vulnerable woman

Anti-social behaviour (ASB) takes many forms: shouting, screaming, banging doors, swearing, playing loud music at night, disturbing the neighbours, allowing rented property to become dilapidated, urinating or defecating in public.

Once ASB has been found by a civil court (a County Court), the court may impose an ASB injunction. If the injunction is breached, then the issue may come before the County Court again. If the Court finds the allegation proved, the judge has very limited options: to adjourn the hearing; take no action; impose a fine or impose a term of imprisonment of up to two years, either suspended or immediate. None of the protections found under the criminal court are available: no pre-sentence reports; no probation support; no community orders.

Using the publicly available judicial site from January 2019, I have noted 410 cases. I found that sentences of imprisonment were imposed on very vulnerable people: on those found begging; sleeping rough; the mentally ill; some whose breach caused no 'harm or inconvenience to any person' and some whose misbehaviour appeared to be trivial, like feeding birds. Half the defendants had no lawyer to speak for them.

There was some judicial concern, and an inquiry. The Civil Justice Council report listed many cases of very vulnerable people, not present in court, and not represented, being sent to prison, in one case a woman for asking a traffic warden for 50p. The report pointed out that there were no statistics on the numbers of such imprisonments and no judicial oversight of the decisions. They made 15 recommendations; none were implemented.

No oversight of the courts

The process of quarterly review of imprisonment for contempt of court, instituted in 1830, continued until it was revoked by a decision of Chris Grayling in 2012. The protection provided by the review procedure then ceased to exist.

But you can complain about a judge's behaviour: On 14th March I did so.

https://www.gov.uk/complain-judge-magistrate-tribunal-coroner

A recent decision at Peterborough County Court on 18th December 2024 ordered immediate imprisonment imposed on a homeless woman who had breached her injunction by entering proscribed premises and staying there. This concerns

a woman who, one can be sure, has had a traumatic past. She has experienced drug dependency, she's sometimes been violent, she's been in and out of prison. In December 2024, she was sent to prison for 78 weeks. She had recently been in prison for the same breach, and, immediately on leaving prison, she once again entered the YMCA and stayed there. She is long-term 'No Fixed Abode'.

The sentence imposed was 18 months immediate imprisonment. This is an outrageous sentence, and follows a line of harsh sentencing of vulnerable people that simply should not happen. By way of comparison: Luton Crown Court recently imposed 14 months imprisonment on a man who admitted causing death by careless driving and causing death while uninsured or unlicensed.

And at Swansea Crown Court, on April 25 2024, a man was sentenced to 15 months in prison for assaulting his partner while she was pregnant and threatening the welfare of her unborn baby.

My complaint: THE CASE

On 18th December 2024, at the County Court at Peterborough, Peterborough Combined Court Centre, District Judge Falvey sentenced Jaqueline Reilly to an immediate custodial sentence of eighteen months for contempt of court. The basis of that sentence was that Ms Reilly, who has previous served sentences of imprisonment for similar breaches, on or shortly after her release from the most recent sentence returned to the YMCA, and slept in the common parts of the building, in breach of an injunction prohibiting her from doing so.

DISRESPECT

Disrespect was shown in imposing a sentence of 18 months for the breach of entering proscribed premises and taking shelter there; in my view the judge's behaviour was seriously disrespectful. The state of being long-term no fixed abode is both a social problem and a personal tragedy. Imposing a relatively long prison sentence in these circumstances demonstrates a total lack of respect for the reality of the lives of those in our community who have been unable to secure housing. It is disrespectful to both the person in court for breach and to society in general to impose imprisonment in these circumstances.

The reply

'We cannot accept your complaint. Your complaint concerns judicial decision-making, which … falls outside our remit'.

"Try to discern new growing points in social and economic life. Seek to understand the causes of injustice, social unrest and fear."

Prison Recalls: The Bee in My (Quaker) Bonnet

Melanie Jameson gets to the bottom of why we have such a high rate of recalls to prison, with the help of the Centre for Crime & Justice Studies and Catch22

For some years there has been a big bee buzzing around in my bonnet: the high rate of recalls to prison. Other countries do not recall former prisoners to this extent, whizzing them back into custody, so why do we? With prison places now over £50,000 per person per year is this really how the Ministry of Justice should be spending our money? And why is it happening at such a high rate when levels of crime have actually fallen?


The Revolving Door Syndrome

The QICJ submission to the Independent Sentencing Review was not the only organisation to flag up this issue. The Centre for Crime and Justice Studies (CCJS) was also concerned. They quoted the current number of recalled prisoners in this country as 12,920 – a figure which is projected to rise, whereas in 1993, it was less than 100. Another angle on this is comparison with other European countries: Spain's recall figures for 2023 were 247, whereas in the UK they had already exceeded 12,000.

So what is going on? Unlike many European countries where the judiciary or parole board become involved, in the UK the decision to recall lies with Probation – an under-resourced and overstretched service. Are they recalling without just cause? There is another more likely cause: looking behind the recall figures, CCJS identifies an increase in offences which include the element of community supervision, and highlights the role of a digital tool called the Effective Proposal Framework (EPF). This generates a list of licence conditions, which may be complicated and overly restrictive. It is obvious that the wider the range of licence conditions, the higher chances of breach and recall.

Catch22 has its sights set on another aspect of the overall problem: Fixed Term Recalls (FTR). This measure, which returns someone to custody for either 14 or 28 days, was designed as a "short, sharp shock" to mitigate risk of serious harm,

keep the public safe and reintroduce compliance when someone on probation fails to adhere to their licence conditions". Catch22's newest Insights Paper *Fixing Fixed Term Recall* looks into the impact of FTR on those at the receiving end, and on the CJ system. They report that that FTR is on the rise, with thousands of prison leavers returning to custody for minor breaches of their licence conditions, causing further strain on a prison system already at breaking point. In 2023 there were enough FTRs to fill a prison for a year - over 6,600!

Moreover, FTR does not address the underlying reasons why people breach their licence conditions. Three quarters of breaches were in the category 'non-compliance'; those leading to further criminal charges had dropped to 17% of the total by 2023 (in 2018 it had been around a third). So, what are the causes of this massive non-compliance? The most frequently quoted are 'failure to keep in touch' (with Probation), 'failure to reside' (i.e. at a specified residence), and the effects of poor mental health and substance dependency.

As you might expect, FTR often exacerbates existing issues, erecting additional barriers to rehabilitation, due to the disruption of community-based support and the short time back in prison when nothing worthwhile can be achieved.

The Catch22 Insights paper calls for:

1. Better alternatives to FTR: investment in more community-based rehabilitative options, such as treatment programmes and mentoring. Prison leavers facing homelessness should be exempt from FTR.

2. Better continuity of rehabilitation: where FTR is deemed necessary, the 2 or 4 weeks back in custody should be used productively (but what chance is there of this in our over-burdened prison system?) and with closer communication with Probation.

3. Better transparency and data sharing around the use of FTR: publication of comprehensive, regular data on FTR figures, costs, and reasons for their triggering, in order to ensure evidence-based decision-making.

The conclusion reached by both organisations (and readers of this newsletter, no doubt) is that the cycle of recall and re-release traps individuals in a revolving door, reducing their chances of successful long-term resettlement by the disruption that it causes. We must break our 'addiction' to prison recalls, and go with the evidence of what makes for successful rehabilitation.

https://d1mdc3nx9zxju4.cloudfront.net/prod/uploads/2025/02/Executive-Summary-Fixing-Fixed-Term-Recall.pdf

https://www.crimeandjustice.org.uk/time-rethink-recalls

Walking Together with Hope
Connecting CJ Priorities of the Christian Churches

Jonathan Ranger and Josephine Rado describe a memorable evening

QICJ was represented by Jonathan Ranger and Jo Rado at this year's Harold Hood Memorial Lecture on March 24 in the City of London. Bishop Richard Moth, the Catholic Liaison Bishop for Prisons, led an evening of discussion about issues raised in a document specially produced by PACT (Prison Advice & Care Trust: Andy Keen-Downs, Chairman; Julia Corcoran, Head of Faith in Action) and compiled by Polly Wright of the Harold Hood Charitable Trust**.** A summary of *Walking Together with Hope* and the discussions that arose from it follows.

After a comprehensive review of the State of the CJ System, the document identifies ten Priorities which the CJ System, and churches/organisations working within it, need to grapple with.

1. Care of, and Listening to, Victims of Crime. This encapsulated what should be the ethos of criminal justice, and what most victims would prefer: the effective reform and rehabilitation of offenders, combined with appropriate punishment, so that offending is not repeated. It acknowledges that many people in prison have been victims themselves, pointing out that 27% have suffered childhood abuse rising to 53% of women prisoners.

Almost 100% of offenders / prisoners have suffered 3 or 4 Adverse Childhood Experiences – known to be a strong indicator of future involvement in the CJS. Caring for all victims is critical for their welfare and the future wellbeing of the wider community. Raising anyone's low self-esteem transforms their stability.

2. Rehabilitating Rehabilitation. Bishop Rachel Treweek, Anglican Bishop for Prisons, calls for more therapy, education, purposeful activity and developing healthy relationships for prisoners as essential parts of the process. Both Bishops suggest that 'Transformation' would be a better term, coupled with Redemption, as returning an ex-offender to where he or she was before, only returns them to the dysfunctional state they had been in when they offended. The call is for rehabilitation to be evidence-based and take account of desistance theory.

The Porticus Foundation supports 'SparkInside', which coaches prisoners *and* prison officers to be better people and leaders, with an 81% behavioural improvement in wellbeing, future outlook, decision-making and problem-solving skills, empathy and emotional intelligence, resilience and confidence.

They assist with 'Elevate CJS', a lived experience leadership programme run by the CJ Alliance and Prison Reform Trust. This Foundation works tirelessly towards changing society's attitudes by respectfully sharing and applying knowledge gained locally through their worldwide activities.

Circles of Support and Accountability were recognized as very successful, but they need more volunteers to cope with demand. www.circles-uk.org.uk.

3. Restorative Justice. Recommendations for greater use of the Sycamore Tree Programme with offenders came from the Free Churches and the Prison Fellowship, which teaches RJ principles. The General Synod stressed that eye-for-eye retribution is outdated, and that only repentance and forgiveness promote effective rehabilitation.

Prison should not necessarily be the first consideration if alternative sentences (especially restorative, therapeutic and transformative treatment) can safely be pursued in the community.

4. The Independent Sentencing Review. The Gauke Review still emphasises punishment, rather than rehabilitation, with little appreciation of the need for increased therapeutic input, whether in or outside prison. The Leveson Review has long-term aims to 'reduce demand on Crown Courts and reduce lengths of remand', but there is little likelihood of any immediate improvements. A new Women's Justice Board is looking to 'inform' a new strategy for women in the CJS.

Bishop Rachel and others call for 'a new expert advisory body to provide evidence-based advice and to ensure greater transparency in non-political decision-making, as well as financial implications of policy-making.'

The Probation Service needs to be reformed and fully funded to cope with alternatives to custody.

5. Fair Justice For All.

Racial Justice: The Racial Justice Advocacy Forum points to systemic discrimination, and advocates complete equality across the CJS. Catholics point to disproportionate numbers of Gypsy, Roma and Traveller prisoners, and the Free Churches call for the Lammy Review to be part of all considerations.

Women: 80% of women (on non-violent charges) should be released immediately. The churches state, "There should be a statutory presumption to avoid custodial sentences for non-violent offences."

On-site social workers should be employed in all women's prisons to support connection between mothers and their children.

Older Prisoners: Incarceration of over-60s has increased 82% in the last 10 years and is still increasing – many as a result of alleged historic sex offences. The churches have asked the government to find alternative and effective strategies for 'rehabilitating' older offenders, preferably outside prison.

6. Prison Environments. Quakers, similarly to others, submitted: "Easing overcrowding, (better) staff training, and well-maintained buildings are a prerequisite for achieving the key aim of successful rehabilitation/ transformation." Human dignity cannot thrive in present conditions. More and better-trained prison and probation staff are essential, requiring proper funding. Staff-prisoner relationships are generally perfunctory and transactional, rather than effective and trusting. 77% of prisons are rated poor.

"Prisons are becoming *more* unsafe. Last year saw a 15% *increase* in self-harm, 18% *more* assaults, and 89 suicides – more than 1 per 1,000 – and a staff leaving rate of 11.4%. 60% of male and 80% of female prisoners suffer from mental health problems." The 2025 Mental Health Bill enforces a 28-day limit for transferring prisoners to a hospital where needed.

7. Early Intervention. All agreed that looking to the complex reasons for crime, and early intervention, rather than merely punishing the results, are crucial to overhauling the current situation. Bishop Rachel stated, "What we spend on education, health and social care, especially in early years, (affects) who does, and does not, enter the CJS."

The Catholic church joins calls for a "public health response, with focus on building more resilient families and communities. Mental Health and Wellbeing awareness are among factors affecting crime and re-offending." Quakers emphasise "community crime prevention, diversion, and support of those at risk of criminalisation." The police are primarily responsible for *preventing* crime, but these days mainly respond to crime committed.

8. Challenging Public Discourse. All called for "a shift in the public narrative, to foster public support for a culture of rehabilitation (transformation) rather than vengeance and punishment," highlighting "the destructive role of the media in creating a moral panic." Sentencing policies must become individually relevant and "insulated from media and public pressure."

9. Support for Children and Families. "The important role of family in supportive rehabilitation," and "helping to keep prisoners' families together." Chaplains play a vital role in enabling family contact, with PACT usually working through them;

"their role should be recognised within the new 'performance measure' for maintaining family ties." "Hidden victims of crime include children affected by parental imprisonment," who need much more very specific support.

10. Role of the Churches and Voluntary and Community Sector. The recent 'Faith And The Prison System' review stresses that "faith-based initiatives represent a different and better CJS, focusing as much on crime prevention and rehabilitation as on punishment and deterrence." Ensuring reliable and regular chaplaincy services in prisons, and working with 'the knowledge and expertise held within the voluntary and community sector,' is important. Churches are key to supporting resettlement and rehabilitation.

All the Christian churches share "a consistency of message and thus a strength of voice – a unique opportunity for the church to speak as one, to speak truth to power."

To conclude, we feel that this event has put QICJ firmly on the map and into the minds of some of the major Christian organisations supporting those who operate at the coalface of criminal justice.

All present expressed interest in seeing QICJ's **Welcoming All** document [See page 14] – which complements The Welcome Directory's 'Guide to Welcoming Prison-Leavers into Your Faith Community', which covers all faiths, and accompanies their Register of faith communities declaring their commitment to this.

The event was based on Matthew 25: 36 (31–40) –
"Whatever you do to the least of these (anyone), you do to me (Jesus/God)."

"While remaining faithful to Quaker insights, try to enter imaginatively into the life and witness of other communities of faith, creating together the bonds of friendship."

"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."

Remembering Martin Wright

Funeral and Memorial Quaker Meeting for Dr Martin Wright

Tuesday 11 March 2025 was a joyous occasion. At 2pm precisely, a cardboard coffin containing the mortal remains of Dr Martin Wright entered St Leonard's Church in Streatham, and one of the most wonderful funeral services I've been to took its time – including a period of Silence.

St Leonard's, some might remember, was the huge church in the centre of Streatham that was burnt out in 1975, then rebuilt over the next few years, coming under new and positive leadership. There have been three Rectors since then, and it was the current incumbent, Rev'd Canon Anna Norman-Walker, who presided at Martin's service. This has been his dear wife Lisa's church for many years, and almost the entire family were there to pay their last respects.

After the Welcome, we sang *Dear Lord and Father of Mankind* to the tune Repton – which just happened to have been Martin's Old School. Then, after Canon Anna had read from *The Beatitudes* in St Matthew's Gospel, Martin's brother James read Rabbie Burns' *Epitaph to a Friend* (most appropriately):



An honest man here lies at rest
As e'er God with his image blest;
The friend of man, the friend of truth,
The friend of age, and guide of youth:
Few hearts like his, with virtue warm'd,
Few heads with knowledge so inform'd …

and his other brother Edward read St Paul's encouragement to the Philippians – and to us – to live according to these precepts and the example Jesus set in the Beatitudes and elsewhere.

The Very Rev'd Nicholas Frayling, a long-standing friend of Martin and Lisa, who had begun his prison work in the deep end at Pentonville, and is now Dean Emeritus of Chichester (and whom I knew from his earlier musical activities) gave us Two Movements and a Coda – or Two Acts and an Epilogue – in the form of an Appreciation, an Address and an Epitaph: the first was a detailed and fascinating explanation of Martin's long and varied life and career; then he looked at how that had so consistently been a working-out in practical living and example of precisely the way we should all follow The Way that Jesus set out for us; and his final words were a quote from Martin himself, when asked a final question at a seminar some years ago:

"**If you want to find the most intelligent person in the room … look for the kindest**."

There followed a respectful – and reflective – Silence.

Love divine, all loves excelling, to the thoroughly Welsh tune Blaenwern, probably brought tears to any eyes not already leaking. Martin's sister Ellie followed that with an Anonymous and deeply felt poem:



Not: How did he die, but how did he live?
Not: What did he gain, but what did he give?
These are the units to measure the worth
Of a man as a man, regardless of birth.
Not what was his church, nor what was his creed?
But had he befriended those really in need?
Was he ever ready, with word of good cheer,
To bring back a smile, to banish a tear?
Not what did the sketch in the newspaper say,
But how many were sorry when he passed away?

Which summed him up exactly.

Canon Anna lead us in a few well-chosen prayers and The Lord's Prayer, and Nicholas Frayling, with his hand over Martin's heart, commended his old friend to God's love and care. We sang heartily and aptly *For all the saints who from their labours rest* (to the rousing Sine Nomine tune), Canon Anna sent us out with a Blessing, and Gabriel Fauré's *In Paradisum* from his *Requiem* elicited more teardrops as the coffin was borne out for the family Burial on Thursday in a Woodland Grave near Guildford.

The generous Reception in the spacious Church Hall next door afforded an opportunity to meet and greet. Marian Liebmann had travelled up from Bristol for the occasion, so we were two QICJ Members to represent us – the family and many of Martin's colleagues were very pleased to meet us. So was Andrea Coomber KC, CEO of The Howard League, of which Martin had been Director; we agreed to continue working more closely, and she gave me to understand that she had recently had promising talks with the MoJ, indicating that positive changes to their thinking were beginning to take shape at last. Others also agreed that the government need to be persuaded to find the courage to convince 'the media' that bringing restrictions-with-treatment out of prisons into the community is not only '*being* tough on crime' but will actually be far more *effective* – which, crucially, is what is needed – and less expensive into the bargain.

One thing I hadn't realised was Martin's dedicated involvement with Restitution in the aftermath of Bhopal. Or the similar involvement of a friend of mine from near Oxford, the author Annie Murray, whose presence in the seat in front of me was completely unexpected! The founders, in 2018, of Action for Bhopal were Martin, Annie, her husband Martin Lloyd, and Alick Munro who was there too with other members, including Ulrika Tabbert who will miss Martin's experienced participation in her work on Restorative Justice in Germany.

Martin also worked tirelessly with the Bhopal Medical Appeal (of which Annie is now a trustee), and was disappointed (furious) that the current Dow Inc (successor to Union Carbide) shareholders voted 'against any involvement in aid to Bhopal'. Profits before life.

Three and a half weeks later, on Saturday 5 April, many fFriends gathered at the Wrights' regular Streatham Quaker Meeting, Redlands Way, for a Memorial Meeting. Most of the family were present. Mike Nellis had travelled from Glasgow – and had to return the same evening! He spoke eloquently about his old friend Martin, and left us with some pithy thoughts. Adrian Smith was our only other QICJ representative, having crossed London from Chelmsford.

Lisa regaled us with a legendary story: In Cambridge, where they lived at that time, she was taking visitors to Great St Mary's Church, and passed a selection of 'gentlemen of the street' who stood up, waved their bottles and called very respectful greetings to her, enquiring after Martin's well-being, and she calmly had a short friendly conversation with them in passing. The visitors, looking quite stunned, quietly asked what all that had been about … whereupon one of her small sons informed them, "Oh, those are Daddy's *friends*." Remember the above verse? Martin used to do the regular 'soup run' there, late at night, and helped many of them, as an active member of the Simon Community. Such was the man, as well as his academic prowess.

Ministering was fairly constant for most of the hour, demonstrating how respected and much missed Martin was, with about 10 minutes of profound silence at the end. Members of the Meeting provided an excellent spread of home-made cakes and sandwiches, and we enjoyed relaxing and chatting in the peaceful, sunny gardens until we gradually drifted away.

In respectful memory of someone I wish I'd known better and for longer,
Jonathan Ranger

The Restorative Justice Council, of which Martin was a founding member, describes him as an influential RJ author and practitioner who made an outstanding contribution to the RJ sector, nationally and internationally. He has written extensively on the topic, but not content with contributing academically and through his advocacy, he trained as an RJ facilitator, volunteering for CALM and Lambeth Mediation Services. Martin's wisdom and clarity of thought have made a lasting contribution to many areas of penal reform. His presence and insights will be much missed in QICJ. Melanie

"Are you able to contemplate your death and the death of those closest to you? Accepting the fact of death, we are freed to live more fully. In bereavement, give yourself time to grieve. When others mourn, let your love embrace them."

Please send articles for future newsletters to
qicjnewsletter@gmail.com

To contact QICJ

qicjclerk@gmail.com

Skewjack Barn, St Levan,
Penzance, TR19 6NB

"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."