QUAKERS IN CRIMINAL JUSTICE

SUMMER 2024 EDITORIAL

Hopefully your summer activities have been going well so far. The plan is to have this publication ready in time for the 2024 Britain Yearly Meeting, which many of our members and potential future members :-) will be attending. I hope it is a bonding experience for you all, a source for spiritual growth and learning and also that the QICJ involvement there is purposeful and effective.

This edition is a little different than our usual newsletter with a big focus on longer form articles. I've temporarily ditched the usual 1000 word maximum as a few of you had a lot to say and who am I to stand in the way of that!

The Quakers in Criminal Justice gang have clearly been very busy attending conferences, seminars, talks, lectures and events on all things criminal justice focused and have been kind enough to share their thoughts and learning with us here. For a small group of people, we certainly know how to get ourselves involved where a Quaker perspective is needed.

There is also a progress update on the discussions we had at our annual conference on welcoming former prisoners to worship with us in our local meetings and Tim Newell (himself a former prison governor) offers a book review of "The Good Prison Officer"

As always I have huge appreciation for contributions from those with personal lived experience of the criminal justice system and we have what may turn out to be the first in a series of articles on living the Quaker Testimonies whilst in a secure custodial environment. This one focuses on the Peace Testimony. Watch this space for more to come.

I realise I keep saying it, BUT….this newsletter wouldn't be possible without you. Thank you for your contributions to it and please continue to send future articles to my new QICJ email, which is qicj.editor@gmail.com

Jonathan Wilgenbus-Lamb
Editor



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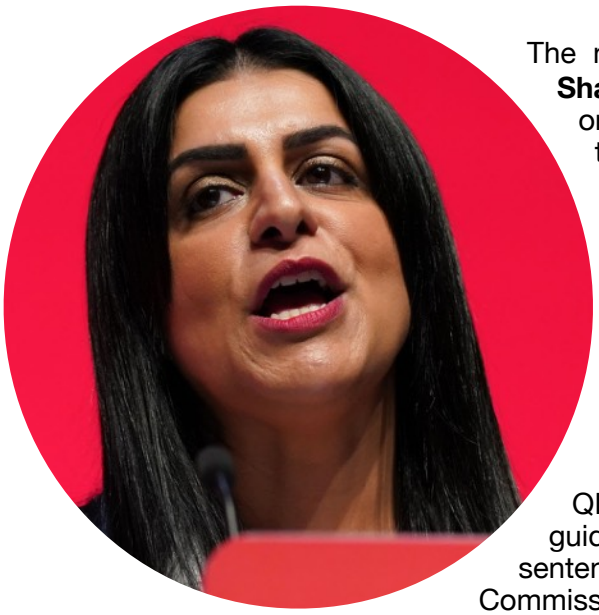
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WHY ARE WE AN OUTLIER IN EUROPE?

Melanie Jameson

We welcome the Prime Minister's early recognition that the prisons crisis requires urgent attention and his appointment of James Timpson as Minister for Prisons and Probation, a man who understands the rehabilitative value of prisoner employment.



The new Secretary of State at the Ministry of Justice (MoJ), **Shabana Mahmood**, cannot ignore a prison system teetering on the edge of meltdown after decades of neglect. At the time of writing, the Prison Governors' Association has warned that not only prisons, but 'the entire criminal justice system stands on the precipice of failure'.

There must be a change of direction from ever more offences and ever-lengthening sentences, which have become a shorthand at demonstrating that a political party is being 'tough on crime', pandering to a public which is assumed to be punitive but which in fact has other preoccupations.

QICJ calls for a reconsideration of Sentencing Council guidelines on what constitutes a 'just and proportionate' sentence, as part of a Royal Commission on CJ. The last such Commission appears to have been in 1991, focusing primarily on miscarriages of justice, although, the issue of a Royal Commission re-surfaced as a manifesto pledge in the 2019 election, even making it into the Queen's Speech. Staff were recruited but were later reassigned when this initiative was kicked into the long grass under the leadership of Dominic Raab. An MoJ spokesperson explained this as follows: Work on the royal commission was paused during the pandemic as we focused on keeping the justice system moving. What a success that turned out to be (!) with court backlogs now at an all-time high – calculated in the latest MoJ set of data (Oct -Dec 2023) to have reached 67,573 cases. This affects all parts of the CJ system, but especially our crises-ridden prisons.

But our prison system has long been outlier in Europe. Let's focus in on five areas to paint a fuller picture.

1. Remands Court backlogs lead to an unprecedented number of people on remand. According to the Offender Management Statistics Quarterly (April 2024) there are 16,458 remand prisoners - the highest recorded level - with hundreds being held over 2 years. Some plead guilty if their crime is minor, rather being held in limbo.

2. Recalls This practice of recalling prisoners, sometimes merely for administrative breaches, also makes us an outlier in Europe. Isn't the prison system already full to bursting point? The Government's own statistics reveal that 77% of recalls relate to 'non-compliance' rather than further offences. The charity Revolving Doors points out how recall is no longer a measure of last resort but a growing trend, up 85% from 2017. Their starkest statistic is this: one in three people on probation after release from prison are recalled to custody. The population affected is, as we would expect, largely comprised of people with overlapping unmet needs, including drug and alcohol use, mental ill-health and homelessness or housing instability – the last of which can make it difficult when unexpected crises arise, leading to a 'failure to reside' sanction.

3. IPP prisoners QICJ continues to be very concerned about this ‘stain on the justice system’. Whereas there is now a way forward for this sentence to be terminated for those released into the community, the key Justice Committee recommendation (re-sentencing everyone with an IPP so that they have a determinate sentence with an endpoint) has been rejected by both main parties. Recent contacts with the Parole Board and HMP team for IPP progression may be bearing fruit in a few individual cases, but many people with an IPP struggle to satisfy the Parole Board, because the damage directly caused by this never-ending nightmare has reduced these already vulnerable people to a state of acute mental distress.



4. Staffing: training, recruitment and retention Why do we in England and Wales think that a ten week course suffices to train Prison Officers? Elsewhere, the training reflects the complexity of the role, and the issues of recruitment and retention that plague us in the UK are therefore much less challenging. The problem can, in large part, be tracked back to the grave mismanagement under **Chris Grayling**, when the MoJ slashed Officer numbers. Even as these start to build up, there are insufficient experienced staff to mentor new recruits. Instead, they are thrown in at the deep end, often resulting in time off work due to stress and resignation.

Understaffing leads to long periods of lock up. The Chief Inspector of Prisons recently stated that 42% of people are locked in their cells for at least 22 hours a day, rising to 60% at weekends – so even ‘purposeful activity’ has been abandoned, let alone resettlement or rehabilitation work. Moreover, the service is continually having to bring in staff from elsewhere to plug the gaps, this has the twin disadvantages of being costly and transitory so that positive staff-prisoner relationships cannot develop. Meanwhile unrest and violence are countered by the training of more ‘Tornado’ riot officers, able to respond to increasing numbers of disturbances.

5. Overcrowding and Underfunding. The other problem areas converge on the key issue of cramming ever more people into our jails which are on the brink of full capacity. These facilities range from the dismal to the dilapidated, with broken windows, faulty showers, infestations and struggling sewage systems. How can this embody the core requirements of the prison service, which include standards on treating people with decency, ensuring personal safety, providing purposeful activity and managing transitions from custody to the community?

As an ‘unprotected department’, the MoJ faces year on year cuts. Instead of funding essential maintenance work and replacing outdated buildings, the budget is continually diverted to cope with operational emergencies. The overall situation continues to deteriorate.

How many times have we seen reports calling for a ‘rehabilitative culture’? What might it look like, in the wider context of a fairer, restorative CJ system? In 2016 this was encapsulated in a document by the QPSW Crime, Community & Justice Subcommittee that has stood the test of time and now sits on the home page of our QICJ website. ‘Vision for a CJS’ considers many aspects of the CJS and articulates what we, as Quakers, are for and against. For instance: ‘We are for the availability of restorative justice processes throughout our CJS’. We are against sentencing being based on the principles of retribution or reflection of public anger’. Do take a look at it and, drawing on its approach, become an advocate for positive, humane approaches and challenge punitive CJ rhetoric, whenever you encounter it.

POLICING & CULTURAL CHANGE

Jonathan Ranger

The Police Foundation – 'The UK's Policing Think-Tank' – is an independent body, assessing and commenting on the police forces of England and Wales, their policy and practices, and making recommendations to and about them. I attend many of their seminars, and will be reporting on them.



Dr Sarah Charman is Professor of Criminology, and Editor of The International Journal of Law, Crime and Justice. She is an expert in Sociology, Social Research – and the formation and development of the Association of Chief Police Officers.

In April 2024, interviewed by the Foundation's Director, **Professor Rick Muir RSA** (Strategic Review of Policing in England & Wales, previously Institute for Public Policy Research – public services, policing and criminal justice), she took 62 of us through her particular areas of interest:



Current issues with the Culture of Policing. This is a recurring theme at present, as the whole culture needs to be reassessed and cleaned up, institutional prejudices and embedded attitudes need to be effectively addressed and rooted out, and police forces need to re-establish their roles as part of the community, working with and for the community rather than for themselves.
Are we training officers to be the best leaders they can be? Which begs the question of whether they're actually leaders these days, or just servants of the public divorced from the very people they serve. There is The National Centre for Police Leadership – which is only for Superintendents and above, and for leadership within the force, not necessarily for respecting and being examples to the public.

Are we actually giving officers the best training generally for the job they have to do?
Are we recruiting the best people to join the police? Obviously not … so how do we change this?

Backgrounds, previous employment, character references, affiliations etc of potential entrants are often not fully collected – in the desperation to recruit enough personnel.
The increasing numbers of officers leaving police forces. Why? How do we deal with this?
Are forces prioritising and dealing with officers' mental and physical health and wellbeing? Not nearly enough, because there needs to be a seed-change in attitudes to officers as humans, employees, and often as emotionally vulnerable people having to deal with the most awful aspects of humanity.

Sarah and Rick, as well as various questioners, had more to say on these last two aspects.
Over 50% of officers nationally are now women – though more women than men resign – the issues are about retaining any of them. Leavers are increasing in numbers – but little information is currently co-ordinated about when or why they leave. Senior officers appear to be uninterested when officers leave; exit interviews tend to be informal, and exchanges are not recorded; only a third ever answer questionnaires about leaving.

One third of all officers currently have less than 5 years' experience. A potential 'Retention Team' of sergeants and officers was refused by the leadership hierarchy of senior officers.
Research with new recruits, in 100 'lengthy and emotional interviews', revealed that most felt "OK for now …" but 99% already complained about organisational injustice, poor leadership, inflexibility, the lack of a voice in all this, and the lack or difficulty of promotional ability and progression.

Far too many officers, including well-established ones, are concerned – not about pay – but about organisational failure, their unfulfilled desire to be the Police Officers they had originally wanted to be, being treated appallingly, not being allowed to speak up and give opinions … and disgust when chief officers ask for challenges and opinions but then ignore them.

When officers say they can't work night shifts, they find that police organisations denigrate them. Well, personally, wasn't that part of the job description when they enquired about joining? Surely, if they weren't prepared to work nights for a third of their time, at least during their first few years, they shouldn't have joined in the first place!

Which brings us back to recruitment strategies and training … and a dysfunctional culture overall (See the next seminar on Cultural Change in the Police).

Many remain in the police solely because of the excellent pension (only the banks have as good a scheme) – they may want to leave, but feel they can't. Many new recruits begin with high levels of organisational commitment and enthusiasm, feeling they're part of a team or family … but this lowers very quickly, and is not maintained because of negativity from above. Most recruits enjoy the initial 10 weeks of training with a 'tutor' – but say there's nothing good after that.

In the old days, there was the 'canteen culture' where officers were able to discuss the day's events, share experiences, support each other, calm down and 'debrief', without taking the stresses and strains home. But then the canteens were closed down (to save money, as they were subsidised) and there was no longer this ability – police stations ceased to be 'family', and became merely 'work bases'. Now there's the new danger of online sharing … and criticising!
The Police College at Bramshill, where senior officers from Inspector upwards trained, was sold off in a cost-cutting frenzy exacerbated by continuing government cuts – so officers no longer feel valued. Many sergeants and inspectors resent the lack of further training in contrast to new intakes, and don't get on with the cheaper modern online training. And many young graduate entrants are challenging the way things are done … yet 'the police service' pretends to be receptive to research and change, but tends not to do anything about it – it's easier to carry on in the same old ways.

All police officers, as other workers, need to be and feel valued, and expect recognition for the difficult work they do. The Leaving process needs to be made better, too – early leavers tend to be criticised for letting the force down, when actually it's almost always the force that's let them down and caused them to leave it. Others often wish they could leave too, but either have nothing else to go to, or cannot face the changes. Leaving Certificates for those who have completed full service are often posted instead of presented in person – often poorly produced so that they arrive with broken glass or even the name misspelt!

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Cultural Change in the Police

This was the theme of the May seminar, attended by 67 people, when two very senior police officers shared thoughts and experiences with two specialist psychologists who are taking their forces through an extended process of re-evaluation and change.



With a background in Sociology and Mass Communication, Security and Risk Management, **Jim Colewell** joined Devon & Cornwall Police 23 years ago, rapidly becoming one of their key investigating officers for major incidents. As Deputy Chief Constable since 2020, and Chief Constable for the last year, he's been delivering a transformational change programme across Dorset as well as Devon & Cornwall forces.

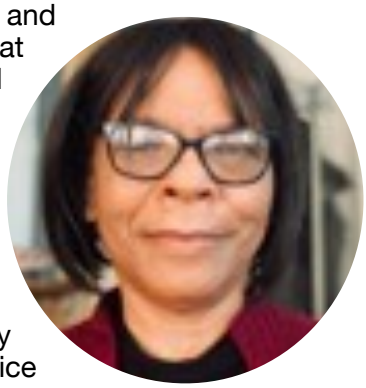


Amanda Blakeman served 27 years in West Mercia Police, rising from constable through Serious & Organised Crime Units, Head of Public Protection, Operational Support and Tactical Firearms, to be Deputy Chief Constable, then 3 years as DCC of Gwent Police, and now Chief Constable for North Wales for the last 2 years – and on the National Police Chiefs Council.

For the last 19 months so far, these pioneering police forces have teamed up with Senseia, a Cultural Change Consultancy, to use the latest insights from neuroscience and psycho-education in a 'journey of significant sustainable culture change'. And it's working – in terms of operational efficiencies and wellbeing … but they still have at least 3 more years to go.



Jason Langley, founder of Senseia, is a Psychologist specialising in the role of social power – the informal influences within friendship groups and cliques, which often determine organisational norms and culture to the detriment of structure and efficiency. Building on 15 years of working internationally within media and communications, he began linking power and story, and the power of story, as underpinning all organisational behaviour, which he also researches at LSE. "Embarking on 'culture change' without seeing the world through … our core humanity means driving your organisation into the future wearing a blindfold!" he says.



Psychotherapist and Coach **Joanna Taylor** is also an author and media producer helping organisations "craft new narratives that are authentic, value-led and purposeful." Bringing psychological and phenomenological insights into culture dynamics, she specialises in using Psychodynamic Psychotherapy to decode and remove the darker psychological forces that drive discrimination, bullying and harassment (rampant in many police forces). In this process she reveals and releases the tensions that bind up so much energy in organisational life, freeing personnel to reassess and change the way they operate and deal with others.

Her (now His) Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary has repeatedly highlighted disturbing and dysfunctional systemic issues within national police culture, and it's now a really urgent issue. These three forces have forced themselves to identify rigid systems and attitudes which induce stress and thus overwhelm officers at all ranks – and block the delivery of any cultural change. These forces have accepted, and are now addressing, the unintended consequences of a lack of psychological safety amongst officers and civilian staff, and an inability to recognise the benefits of a diverse workforce.

(Perhaps these two Psychologists could next deal with our Immigration Service and successive Home Secretaries, to persuade them of the substantial benefits of a diverse workforce in the UK.)

This seminar discussed issues around this process of change. How does (or can) cultural change happen in a police force? What are the obstacles? What has been (or is still being) learnt from this current change programme? What was any support like from officers, supervisors, general public and government? What is the impact and satisfaction from this

undertaking? Has it improves overall performance? Is it effectively impacting disproportionality? How long-term might the solution be …? Can other forces follow suit?

Jim Colwell began by stating, "It is how we treat each other and the workplace, that affects the way we treat the public." They have instituted 4-day Inclusive Leadership Programmes for ALL sergeants and officers – to complement the courses for senior officers only. "We have to understand what drives people. Much is sub-conscious – like most therapy, we have to bring it into the conscious to understand, deal with, and then remove the stress and overload to enable change."

Jason and Joanna explained that they listen to people's stories, compare them, consider 'in'-groups and out-groups and tensions between them, find where dysfunctions are, unpick the psychodynamics of interpersonal relationships, and try to find 'a place of safety' for each person rather than persisting with any existing 'blame and shame' culture. "The majority are good and hard-working. But the minority affects the rest disproportionately. The famous psychologist Dan Siegal worked with 'the window of tolerance', which closes when some are intolerant and resist change, especially if already overloaded, overwhelmed – they tend to go into 'fight or flight' mode. We try to encourage a wider line of sight, and ability to see what affects others – at all levels. It's in the frontal cortex of the mind/brain."

The quality of Organisational Justice is linked to, and affects, the quality of Procedural Justice. Members of an organisation need to feel safe in order to be safe.

Again, as in most therapies, it is our early influences that build our neural pathways; better relationships at home mean better at work; Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) adversely affect the rest of our lives and relationships of all kinds and at all levels. "So we ask officers who they hang around with, associate with, feel 'safe' with …"

"We need to be mindful of the language we use within an organisation, and encourage 'meaningful dialogue'. When under stress, we tend to exchange adult-adult conversation for adult-child critical and adversarial talk. We have to take time – during this process of change – to work with staff to maintain the adult-adult approach at all times; it's challenging, and not a comfortable process to go through. We're successfully changing the language that's used, right down to the ground. It affects our recruitment processes and our relationship with the public; there's already been a significant reduction in conflict … it's a long-term process, but effective." Jason reminded everyone that having a culture and sub-cultures is part of being human. What matters is moving into a place of understanding and acceptance of others and other cultures – putting in boundaries about what is and is not acceptable. We need to hone our people-skills to give the best of ourselves.

An interesting point was made in answer to a question. SATIRA is the way police investigate rape and other serious sexual offences. But we need more compassion. We're all human beings. We need to stop labelling people, and see the overlap between victim and offender in each person – almost all sexual offenders have already been victims themselves (ACEs again), and tend to repeat 'learned behaviour' when 'triggered' by some circumstance. So apportioning 'blame' is not as straightforward as is usually assumed. And treatment needs to take account of all this.

To end with, James confirmed that discussions are ongoing with The College of Policing and with The Fire Service and the Police & Crime Commissioners, among others, about these trial programmes of change. Sone forces need a longer way in, though, as their situation is already more complicated! "Test us on what you see, rather than on what we tell you," he suggests, and Amanda confirms that 'It's no use making a statement (about how we're changing) without the actual reorganisation behind it."

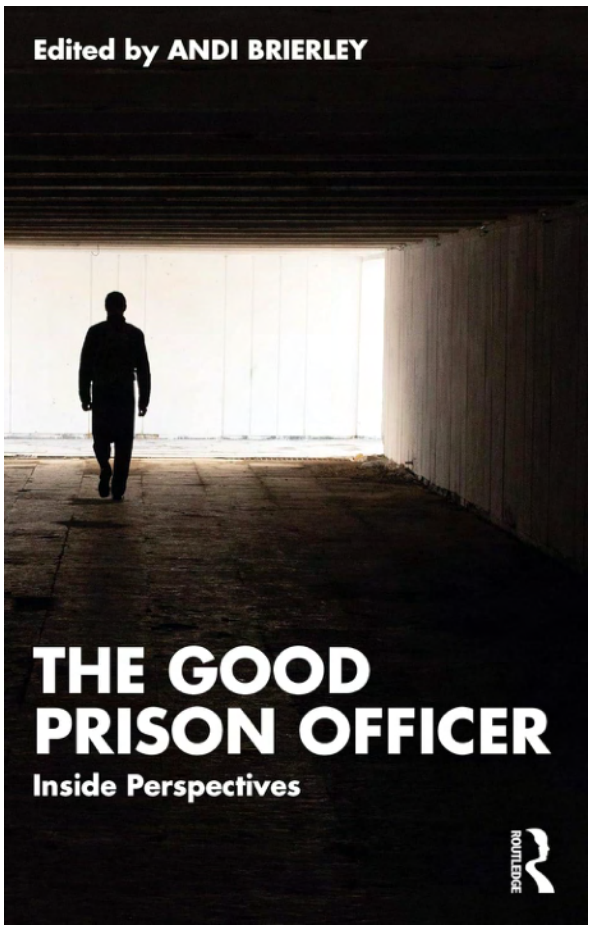
Jason answers a request for detailed reports by explaining that they don't publish reports, as they can so often be taken out of context and ruin the progress that's been made. But the College of Policing is now considering rolling this programme out to other forces.

THE GOOD PRISON OFFICER: REVIEW

Tim Newell

Review of The Good Prison Officer – Inside Perspectives
Edited by Andi Brierley
Routledge ISBN 978-1-032-39439-8

This is a book written by several past prisoners who are all now professional practitioners and educators in the criminal justice field. They draw on lived experience and the diverse literature on penal policy to explore good and bad examples of professional practice.



The premise of the book is that those with direct experience of custody and incarceration offer a vital perspective on the efficacy of penal practice. It is rare that such voices lead the conversation. The value of this perspective is clear when we recognise that we cannot change what happens in prison until we help those who are the structure of the prison system. The crucial relationship for most people in custody is the one they have or don't have with prison officers.

Referring in detail to themes such as using discretion, showing respect, supporting relationships, and exercising legitimacy it develops recommendations for best practice in developing a rehabilitative culture in prison.

Our training and support for prison officers has been functional rather than developmental and inspirational, as it could be. The resulting turnover of newly recruited staff is evidence of the limited expectations there is about the role. Several European countries seek entry prison officers with relevant degrees. This book looks in detail about how the role and context can be transformed. This insider perspective is detailed and valuable.

One of the contributors Daniel Whyte has established with a partner Ruth McFarlane a company, Doing What Really Matters, working through the gate to support and develop those in prison educationally. There is good progress taking place. He confirms that the little acts of kindness and encouragement within a harsh system can have the biggest possible impact on people in prison.

Those who help self-change are remembered with connection often made when something that is personal has an effect. Working with people not doing it to them reflects the restorative justice approach to communication and relationships.

The Norwegian experience of reducing crime has focused on job training programmes, encouraging employment, and discouraging crime with a focus on desistance. In the 1980s they had a reoffending rate of 80% but now it is reduced to 25%. The contrasting ideology in England and Wales is that with the planned increase of the prison population the same level of staffing is planned, with a culture of control.

The authors make some strong recommendations

1 Recognising that those in custody have been traumatised by ACEs implies that the use of force is kept to a minimum with enhanced communication skills.
2 Staff should be trained to degree level – whilst on the job.
3 Clinical supervision should be standard practice with at least one hour per month
4 Those with lived experience should be enabled to transition to support those in prison
5 Educational opportunities should be expanded
6 There should be a transition to one officer for every two prisoners.

These recommendations challenge our expectations but result from those who know what it's like to experience the inadequacy and risks of the present prison experience. This is an important challenge from those who have survived the present damaging system with remarkable resiliency.

WELCOMING FORMER PRISONERS

Melanie Jameson

QICJ has launched a process of further discernment on the whole issue of welcoming former prisoners into Quaker Meetings. As the last edition of the QICJ newsletter reports, we have learned of the role of the church safeguarding agency 31:8 and the approach of the Welcome Directory, which already lists a number of Quaker Meetings who have signed up.

But a wider conversation is called for, starting with the Quaker Prison Chaplains (QPCs) who may have nurtured someone over a number of years in a prison Quaker fellowship. To that end, I have spoken to the Team Leader of Quaker Life (the grouping within which QPCs sit) and asked the clerk of the QPC committee to circulate a number of questions relating to how a handover is managed from the prison worshipping group to the Quaker Meeting nearest to the resettlement location. Is a pre-release visit arranged? How do QPCs manage expectations when licence conditions are bound to limit normal interactions?



During our 2024 conference we heard moving testimony from those with lived experience of joining meetings, post-release. Some had found safeguarding restrictions to be over-burdensome, others felt that they had insufficient

input into the process of drawing up a contract between Probation and the Meeting (where there were licencing conditions to be taken into account). Further information has come in through a call to membership. We are especially interested to hear why some Meetings have decided NOT to welcome a former prisoner – most likely to be because they consider the safeguarding process involved to be too complicated or feel the Meeting is too small to cope.

It is the aim of QICJ to consult as widely as possible and then produce an outline of the process, possibly as a flow chart, to assist Meetings - rather than each one having to puzzle it out for themselves. To this end, a small working group within the QICJ committee is taking forward our process of discernment and consultation, in communication with our BYM Safeguarding Officer. Good practice suggests that Meetings should have their policy worked out in advance, especially if they are located in the vicinity of a large local prison. Hopefully, we can assist Meetings to this end.

QUAKERS & ORGANISED CRIME

Penny Peters

Do Quakers having something relevant to say about organised crime?

The theme of the 33rd UN Commission on Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice, from 13th to 17th May in Vienna, was 'Promoting international cooperation and technical assistance to address organised crime, corruption and terrorism'. Marian Liebmann, Hezron Masitsa and I attended on behalf of the Friends World Committee for Consultation (FWCC). It was good to work as a team and Hezron and I were thankful for Marian's extensive experience at such Commissions and her ability to network. In our preparations for going we had put together a leaflet – 'Restorative Justice Around the World – a brief guide', which we had researched



ourselves. We hoped this would prove a useful discussion point with other delegates and a reminder of all the benefits of using Restorative Justice.

On initial arrival I wasn't sure what we might have to say which was relevant to organised crime. On first impressions, the theme made us feel as if we were losing the human aspect of both the harm that crime does and of those involved in offending. The proliferation of data perpetuated this feeling. However, it soon became apparent that in addition to understanding the complex wider picture of how such crime can and does occur, there should be a clear focus on the needs of vulnerable and marginalised communities who are most often the victims of such crime and who can simultaneously be exploited and drawn into it through its many manifestations. There is a strong link with the need for social justice and promoting resilient and peaceful communities. Not criminalising the poor and disadvantaged but developing better ways of uncovering and prosecuting those ultimately responsible for organised crime is an imperative. As the week went on I felt more and more that we had much to contribute from a Quakerly perspective on these issues.

We had fruitful discussions with other delegates about the application and relevance of Restorative Justice (RJ) and distributed our pamphlet. This included at a side event about RJ in Indonesia. We followed up connections made last year with prison staff in Namibia who were keen to introduce Restorative Justice. We wrote a statement illustrating the benefits of RJ which Marian read out at a Plenary session. We renewed contacts with other NGOs and talked to a range of delegates both at side events and during informal opportunities. In addition to attending 23 very informative side events we took it in turns to observe the sessions of the Plenary and the Committee of the Whole. We also made available another leaflet, about Quaker work at the UN since 1985, outlining all that has been achieved by Marian, Nick McGeorge, Kimmett Edgar and others.

At several side events it was highlighted that young people, 42% of the world's population, are the most at risk in relation to organised crime. Grass roots organisations are often the 'first defenders', making communities more resilient but it was highlighted that there is a need to work in a more preventative way and to intervene with young people earlier in their lives (I think the BYM 'Peace at the Heart report', with a focus on teaching children peaceful ways of existing and co-existing from primary school age upwards is relevant in this respect). Several side events referred to the important work of Global Initiative – Transnational Organised Crime (GI-TOC), a large civil society organisation with close links to the UN which was founded in 2012 to promote innovative and inclusive approaches to tackling organized crime. Its website states: 'The world is facing a number of serious and often interlinked threats and challenges, including violent conflicts, climate change, growing inequality, the impact of rapid technological innovation and mass migration'. Mark Shaw, their director, states that 'organised crime both enables and profits from crisis and vulnerability'. One of GI-TOCs five strands of working is through the Resilience Fund, which gives grants of between 2,000 to 10,000 USD to 200 projects in more than 50 countries, helping grassroots organisations build community resilience in urban settings. Many of these projects focus on empowering young people and steering them away from crime. We also heard presentations from other grassroots organisations: the Uganda Youth Development Link has several similar nationwide initiatives and also Libera in Italy.



A common theme of several side events was the challenge of not criminalising marginalised communities and people. Some of the NGOs present were working in connection with The Global Campaign for the Decriminalisation of Poverty, Status and Activism, a coalition of organisations from across the world that advocates for the repeal of laws, reform of policies and change in practices, that target people based on poverty, status and for their activism. The unjust impact of fines on impoverished people, who are most likely to be women and young people who may then end up in custody, was highlighted. We heard arguments for decriminalising offences of drug use, in line with the human rights based approach advocated by the International Commission of Jurists 8th March principles. This would allow a public health approach to tackling drug use as has happened in Portugal. UN data indicates that 1 in 5 prisoners worldwide are imprisoned for drug use, many for offences involving personal use.



A growing area of focus for the UN and the CCPCJ is on the areas of Wildlife and Environmental crime. Two important reports were launched during the week on these themes. The picture is complicated with some behaviours being categorised as crimes in some countries and not in others. Some parts of the supply chain may be legal and others not. Differing laws and sanctions exist in different countries and regions with no consistency about implementation, making crucial cross border cooperation difficult. However, it was highlighted again that there is a clear need not to criminalise marginalised communities and to focus on those responsible elsewhere. There is a need for other economic opportunities to be available to those living in poor communities. A side event on illegal mining stated that 100 million people live from the proceeds of illegal mining and whilst many are just scratching a living there is also a connection with organised crime. The huge harms, both locally and globally, from all wildlife and environmental crime was described. These are concerns that Quakers around the world would wholeheartedly share.

Promoting effective and equitable solutions to tackling all areas of crime across the world is an important part of achieving social justice and is an area in which I hope Quakers will continue to have a strong voice.

UN CRIME COMMISSION

Marian Liebmann

Marian Liebmann, Hezron Matsitsa and Penny Peters represented FWCC at the 33rd United Nations Commission on Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice in Vienna 13-17 May 2024. The theme this year was 'Promoting international cooperation and technical assistance to address organised crime, corruption and terrorism'. Although many presentations were of a bureaucratic and statistical nature, about methods of collaboration and data collection, there were also some side events that focused on the more humanitarian aspects of crime (e.g. rehabilitation, reintegration, resilience) and we tried to concentrate our attendance on these.



We attended plenary sessions and discussions of resolutions, as well as side events on many aspects of dealing with crime. In addition to more traditional areas of crime, a growing area of concern for the Commission is crimes against the environment and wildlife. Two major UN reports on these areas were launched. This is a field that Quakers might want to engage with more in the future.



We were also able to present a statement to the Plenary session, on the importance of restorative justice as a process which can bring benefits to those harmed by crime and those responsible for committing it. We drew attention to a leaflet we had prepared for the event, 'Restorative Justice Around the World – a brief guide'. Our Statement was mentioned in the official report of the Commission, and can be viewed on the UN website. The leaflet and the Statement will also be available from FWCC.

THE PEACE TESTIMONY IN PRISON

Prince Jåidon Vivace Guida-Lumière

We do not live in an ideal world or perfect society. Conflicts and disagreements can occur in any environment. Conflicts are inevitable and must not be repressed or ignored, but worked through carefully, peacefully and mindfully.

The peace testimony calls on all of us to strive for harmony among all people, nations and individuals. We all have the light of peace within ourselves. Our inner voice will help tell us what course of action we should pursue, and the right action is the peaceful action. We all have a role to play in our daily lives. In our personal lives we continuously wrestle with the daily complexities of society, which can make it difficult to achieve peace and harmony. However, we must always start with our own hearts and minds.

Peace to me means to be free from anxiety and to remain calm and serene despite the challenging circumstances that may surround us. To be peaceful is to be encouraging of non-violence in our thoughts, words and in our actions.

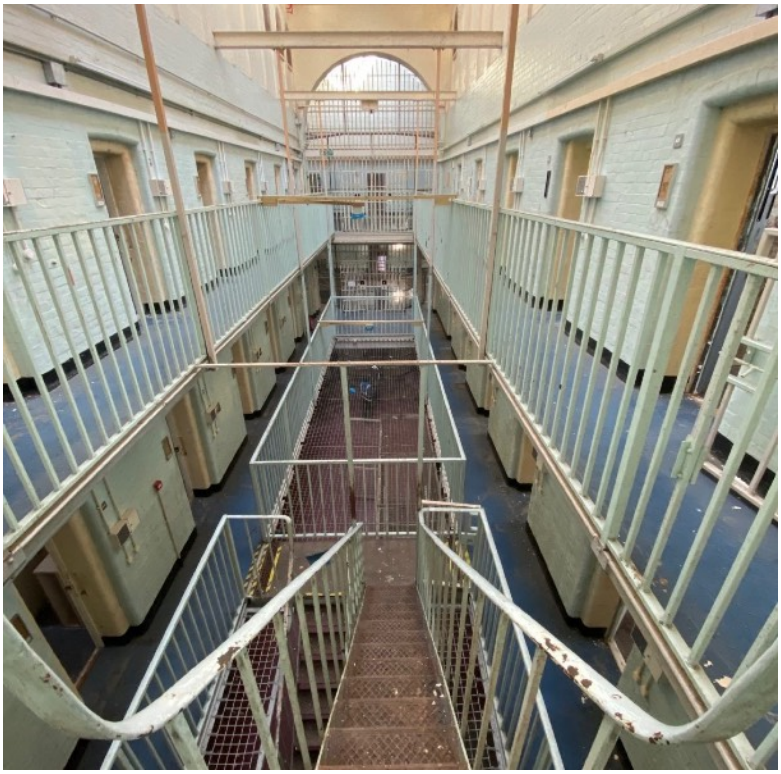


Being peaceful is a way of living, remaining calm, having peaceful thoughts, leading to peaceful action, leading to a peaceful environment. What we buy, what we use, what we read, whom we listen to, what we say, what we do, what we think about, it all matters.

Of course, there have been several examples I have observed within this secure environment where situations could have been handled differently. When a member of staff and resident both disagree on a particular issue, both parties must try to understand each other. If emotions are running high, then they must wait until emotions have simmered and they are both calm and then work together creatively to achieve a peaceful outcome. Handling conflict peacefully can be a force for positive change and is more than just winning and losing. Therefore, my message to everyone is that it is up to all of us to work together to reduce the potential for conflicts. When people are hostile towards us, we must never react back with negativity. This will only create more negativity and can escalate the situation. What we want to do is to diffuse situations, which means we must become peaceful ourselves first, only then will others become peaceful, which will then result in the environment becoming more peaceful. Not reacting back is actually a sign of strength of a person's character.

It is so easy to react back in anger and negativity, but someone who can remain peaceful despite the hostility from others, is someone who has reached higher level of being. We can learn to increase our understanding by looking at situations from another person's perspective. At other times we could remain silent and listen more intently. When emotions are running high, I recommend to never respond at that time because it is our ego wanting to win the argument, we never make the right decisions when our emotions are heightened. We must.remain calm and peaceful and only then will the most suitable solution arise. At other times we could walk away from a situation and try to learn the lesson that the divine curriculum of life is trying to teach us. I truly believe that in every interaction and every experience we have there is a lesson that we must learn. We are all on a divine educational experience and it is up to all of us to truly use the skill of introspection and try to understand the lesson that it being presented to us in each situation.

I do understand that certain situations can be incredibly challenging, however, we must always try to have the word 'Peace' in our hearts at all times. Allow me to explain. For me, as soon as I wake up, I say the word peace, not just verbally, but I say it through the heart, truly understand and deeply feel the word peace enter our body and every single cell in our body. This allows me to start the day on a peaceful note. As I walk, wash, clean up, eat food, go to work, study my educational course, play music, paint, work out, with every single movement and every breath, I try to have the word peace in my heart in my breathing, in every step I take. This really helps me to remain peaceful. It is part of my skill I have learnt of giving myself a lot of optimistic self-talk and using affirmations to become a better person. Each word has a vibrational energy. As we begin to visualise and think about the word peace, each cell in our body becomes peaceful.



My point is that our thought and words do have an impact on others, so it is important that we are careful and mindful in terms of the words we use for when we interact with others.

For me, I am just trying my best to promote world peace throughout the world and the universe. Yes, even when we are in our rooms sitting down, we can still move mountains and create world peace, just by our thoughts. When our thoughts are peaceful, they have a ripple effect on society. When others are impacted by our peaceful nature, they too will eventually become peaceful, this energy flows on to other people and before you know it, we have changed our community into a peaceful environment.

Whenever you are walking, working, eating, exercising, sitting, cleaning, always try to have peaceful thoughts. Thinking of the word peace, whilst carrying out any activity will help you to become peaceful.

On a final note, I would really like to share a Cherokee legend with you.

A grandfather was talking to his grandson about how he felt about a tragedy. The grandfather said, “I feel as if I have two wolves fighting in my heart. One wolf is the vengeful, angry, violent one. The other wolf is the loving, compassionate one". The grandson asked him "Grandfather, which wolf will win the fight in your heart?". The grandfather answered, "the one I feed”.

There is no end. There is no target. There is no victory. Peace is something we should do every day.

Prince Jaidon Vivace Guida-Lumiere is incarcerated at HMP Oakwood and is currently studying a STEM degree with the Open University.

CRIME REDUCTION & ALTERNATIVES TO PRISON

Jonathan Ranger

“Prison: Are there more effective ways of reducing crime, stopping people offending, or dealing with offenders? Are there viable alternatives to Prison?”
Woking Debate, 25 May 2024.

Woking Debates are a community rather than church activity, although held in Woking URC and organised by two Quakers, Keith Scott and Rob Searle.

The first Speaker to this topic was Alex South, a former Prison Officer for 10 years at high-security prisons before she’d had enough of ‘the system’! Her revealing book details her experiences and the problems of prisons – Behind These Doors. Perhaps we should all read it – it’s just out in paperback!

Alex described HMP Whitemoor, a Lifers’ prison, as quiet and clean … because prisoners spent lots of time out of their cells, engaged in purposeful activities and conversation. This was a ‘good’ prison, well run within the confines of horrendous budget cuts. The Criminal Justice Budget was reduced by 25% over the last five years, and now it’s been cut by a further 23% this year!

That’s almost half … and the government are spending £billions on building more super-prisons when they can’t even afford to staff them? The massive new super-prison in North Wales, constructed to hold thousands of prisoners … is only half open because of this. So it’s utterly useless for coping with overcrowding in other jails! What a short-sighted waste of public money!

Compare Wormwood Scrubs – infested with rats, chaotic, violent, prisoners locked up about 23/7, little provision for activity, so rampant self-harm, suicide and murder, where staff corruption and contraband are rife.

Then Alex ended her time at Belmarsh, London's Maximum Security Prison – equally poorly funded and staffed, with appalling lack of investment, overcrowding and minimal time out of cells.

No wonder that 'treatment programmes' and 'therapeutic courses' run in prisons are mostly ineffective, and there can be up to 70% re-offending after release. This is not helped by an over-stretched and divided Probation Service (ill-advisedly split in two, half privatised, by the recent government). Post-release, especially after increasingly longer sentences (another government innovation), ex-prisoners have to cope with unemployment, temporary or lack of housing, lack of social connections (and often hostile family and former friends) – the sort of deprivation and poverty that easily leads to alcohol and drug dependency as inappropriate coping strategies kick in.

Alex stressed that constructive activities, time and space for conversation, and above all Education, are what can change lives, enabling and enhancing confidence, curiosity and potential.

We discussed how ACEs (Adverse Childhood Experiences) affect every prisoner and are behind their offending behaviours; therapy and treatment in prison are usually voluntary, and many go through them because they have to show they've 'done something to address their offending' before their release – but only give the answers they think the psychologists and prison officers want to hear, while not taking the opportunities seriously … and that's where re-offending starts.
In my own presentation, I gave my background in science, police, restoration, theology, teaching adults and running LGBT and other support in prisons, and becoming a psychologist and philosopher, a writer and committee member of QICJ.

Back in 1967, "The primary object of an efficient Police is the Prevention of Crime." Page 1, Chapter 1, Section 1, Clause 1 of Police Orders (like the Army's General Orders). It continues: "… and the detection and prosecution of offenders IF crime has been committed." We had Bobbies on the Beat then – nowadays they're all in cars and vans merely responding to whatever's already happened, with few left on the streets to discourage criminals. Last year, something like 7% of reported crimes were solved. 7%. In my day, that % would have been for crimes NOT solved. (It was 2.7% in 2022 !)

Institutional prejudices, and poorly selected police officers antagonising the public or committing horrific crimes, bring the entire Police Service into complete disrepute. Occurrences of police investigating themselves, and failing to discipline or prosecute officers who would be imprisoned if they were ordinary citizens, are too numerous to mention.

(But see my Report on a Police Foundation seminar about efforts to address this on **PAGE 4**)

I then enlarged on several of Melanie Jameson's suggestions. Firstly, two sections of

society seem destined to head for prison: excluded pupils, and 'looked after' children, children in care. There needs to be far more awareness of the consequences of consigning children to these dustbins of society – and far more provision of specialist school staff who can pick up the root causes of trouble, deal with problems constructively, and prevent children sinking down and out. Why are children excluded? Shouldn't we be sorting out the mess in their homes, and their mental and emotional states, which lead to their dysfunctional behaviour? We shouldn't be punishing the children for what others have done to them.

Stop Recalls of prisoners released before the end of their official sentence. Far too often, fraught and prison-oriented probation officers 'Recall' them to prison for minor infringements of their 'Conditions', often with little or no investigation, usually without bothering to hear the ex-offender's side of the story. Getting them back into prison means that's one more off their over-crowded books, one less to find time for. The entire reason for letting institutionalised people out on Licence is to help them integrate into society in constructive and organised ways they may not have known or been able to manage before.

Properly organised, effective and timely recognition and treatment for Mental Illness within the community, people don't topple into prison, largely through situations not entirely their fault, because if they'd been picked up, helped and treated effectively before their condition and situation got poor enough – often within school years – they might not have got involved in anti-social or criminal activity.

Legalisation of drugs could keep drug provision out of organised crime. It's possible that the consequent absence of pressure on vulnerable people, especially the young, from illegal drug pushers might reduce the number of drug users … and the vast numbers of people being incarcerated for drug-related offences.

Reintroduce more youth clubs and services. Most young people – especially those who have had their lives disrupted or disorganised by the adults around them – respond positively and creatively to positive, creative input, especially if they feel they can trust the people providing it. Still too many parents and wider family either do not care or are incapable of caring – often because that's how they were brought up, and they know nothing different. Such sections of society can be very closed and resistant to change. And that is where most of the petty crime begins, as young people kick back against restraints and lack of love and care that they know were not right … but they don't have the learned mechanisms to counteract them, because the adults who should have taught and enabled them to be responsible and complete-in-themselves have not been able to do their job … because their own parents weren't able either … and so on back through the generations … and down through the next generations. The old 'youth activities' used to encourage children to stand on their own two feet, get along with and in society, play an active part, be responsible citizens … So why did we get rid of them?

Education in prisons – and equally during 'treatment within the community' – can enable changes for the good, and opportunities for a better life. 50% of prisoners have a minimal 'reading age' far below average; 70% are coping with autism, dyslexia, dyspraxia, PTSD, ADHD/OCD, mental health issues, medical needs, addictions, claustrophobia, anxiety-depression – things which hadn't been picked up, or because they were too busy coping with ACEs – Adverse Childhood Experiences of one sort or another, usually several sorts.

When prisoners begin to be able to read and write for themselves, their whole world changes. Once they see that there's something different, and once they have some psychological help, psycho-therapy, CBT (Cognitive Behavioural Therapy), they can begin to understand what has happened to them when young and vulnerable, understand how they've got where they are … and realise that there is indeed a different path they could now take, a different and better future.

So how can we best deal with situations people find themselves in – usually not entirely through their own fault or choosing, but usually because of what has already happened to them. The original Victim becomes the Offender – but no-one bothers to consider that victimhood, or to understand why and how it morphed into the opposite (apart from some prison psychologists). The natural inclinations to behave sensibly, kindly and responsibly towards one another have been destroyed by poor example or by direct assault on their emotional well-being and stability. ACEs.

As a society, as communities, we need to decide to be responsible for each other. "It takes a village to raise a child" – and to help each other keep to society's rules. Then prisons won't need to be filled with people who should never be there.

We know today's prison system is a self-perpetuating growth market of investment and return. Just like supermarkets and multinational businesses, the government is intent on building more and bigger prisons – with the stated aim of filling them with 45% more prisoners – tens of thousands! – by certain dates. What? Regardless of how many people do or do not commit more crimes we don't even know of yet? And we let them do this? Are we, the public, mad? How and why do we let them get away with this?

Our existing prisons are unsafe hotbeds of violence and suicide, overcrowded, more prisoners older, disabled, dying of cancer and MS, drastically understaffed, with prison officers leaving the job almost quicker than they can recruit new, young, often completely unsuitable, unvetted officers with minimal training of weeks rather than months. Is this what we want, what's needed?

I gave a lot of information about IPPs, and links for people to find further information.
Sentencing for the vast majority of offenders – except the irrepressibly violent, the actually dangerous, which costs the country over £50,000 a year per person – could best be dealt with by fines, prohibitions, confinement within their homes at weekends, for instance, like in parts of Scandinavia, so that they can continue to work and earn a living, support their families in every way – with the family and friends also taking a key role in helping the errant one to rehabilitate and start afresh.

Such offenders will need plenty of officially sanctioned, well-trained and experienced therapists, psychologists, counsellors and the like, to provide the necessary numbers of treatment courses so that the offender can voluntarily undergo enough well-organised sessions to understand where the trouble originated. It is only by understanding this, by going right back to the beginning, even to previous generations of trouble and poor influences, that the offender is going to be able to understand where things have gone wrong, put the past where it belongs, change thought patterns, and move forward into a new and better, safer future. It's not a 'Quick Fix' scenario – it can take years to undo

generations of dysfunction.

Unfortunately, most of this stuff is only available (free) through the prison system at present. Most probation officers now sit in an office, giving clients ten to thirty minutes of ticking boxes on a standard list of questions … instead of being out there with them, chatting over a cup of coffee and helping them find accommodation, and work, going to interviews with them, helping them get grants and social security payments so that they can make ends meet … knowing (as in the old days) they were supported and could confide in him/her whatever the problem is, knowing they can deal with it together.

Many ex-prisoners can't cope, and commit any sort of crime just to get back into prison where they feel safer than out in the world again. Sad, innit! Is this the world we want to be living in, to be responsible for?

THE BILL MCWILLIAMS LECTURE 2024

Adrian Smith

The 26th Bill McWilliams lecture was delivered at the Cambridge Department of Criminology on 27 June. Bill McWilliams was a gifted Probation Officer, and when he died a Trust was set up to provide an annual lecture in his memory. This year's was particularly well attended, and I noticed a number of probation trainees present. We were welcomed by Lorraine Gelsthorpe of the Justice & Social Research Centre. She pointed out that Bill McWilliams had emphasised the need for careful evaluation of probation work, while being auspicious of over-zealous management. She noted a groundbreaking report issued by the House of Lords in December 2023, advocating better use of community justice as an alternative to prison.



The speaker, **Helen Schofield**, is chief executive of the Probation Institute. Her title: "Probation: a local collaborative venture". She gave a very intensive address. Her starting point was, Should the probation service move back to a situation of more local control, and greater cooperation with other agencies. She noted that currently, in the UK there are 67,000 cases waiting to be heard in Crown Court. She believes no-one should go to prison who has not been involved in violence or drugs, yet the UK prison population approaches 88,000 and is planned to go much higher. 27% of prisoners are black or Asian. There is a lack of coordination between probation, prison and other social services, which increases the risk of reoffending. Helen envisages a time when local councils will have more responsibility for the resettlement of ex-prisoners.

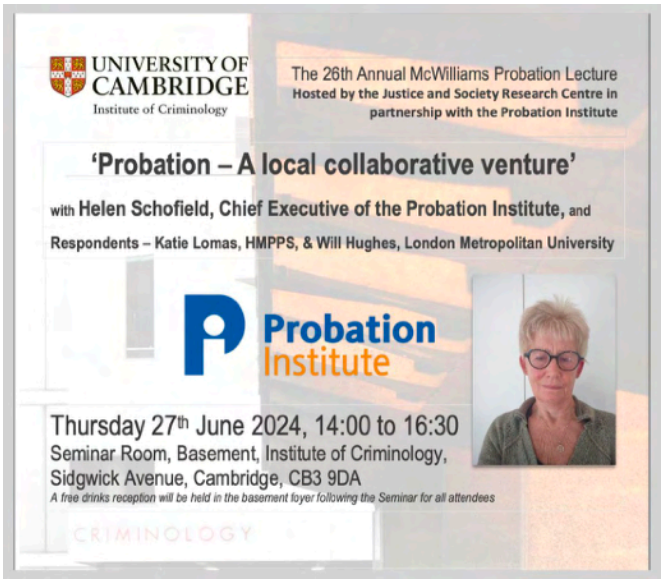
The 1980s saw the introduction of Community Service Orders, and the birth of the Association of Black Probation Officers. But the 1990s saw Michael Howards and his claims that Prison works', and the horrific murder of James Bulger. There was scant evidence that the Probation

service was reducing crime, but none at all that sending more people to prison was doing so. With the advent of MAPPA and managerialism, concern for 'welfare was replaced by anxiety about 'crimogenic Factors'. The probation officer's task was now to manage risk.

Achieving desistance involves recognising and developing people's strengths. Nobody in an offender and nothing else. Community Hubs represent a hopeful development. Nineteen hubs have so far been set up, 10 of then in Manchester (which, like Bristol seems a city that has originated many good causes.) The hubs are multi-agency enterprises which acknowledge that a person's needs overlap the factors leading to offending, and desistance is more likely when interventions are integrated. Four Intense Supervision Centres are pilot schemes that form part of the government drug strategy.

Womens Centres stand outside the criminal justice system. The police favour out-of-court disposals. Restorative justice methods are applied in some, eg. Brighton and Sheffield. There is a perennial lack of time and money; many voluntary sector projects operate without any government funding at all. Police & Crime Commissioners operator sixteen pilot schemes termed "Immediate Justice', to try and prevent a backlog of cases building up. The aim is to intervene in the 'Revolving Door' phenomenon: court appearance, prison, discharge, reoffending, court appearance, prison... 2022 saw the start of the Liverpool Experience Inquiry, which advocates solutions outside the criminal justice system to address the root causes of crime. Youth Justice is doing well, tho BARE youth is over-represented in youth custody.

Who is leading the call for reform? Is it the Ministry of Justice, the trade unions, the academics, or the campaign organisers 1 There have been three Further Offence reviews since 2020. Employers willing to take on ex-offenders include those in hospitality, construction, transport and retail. Nevertheless, 30% of former offenders struggle to find a job, and another 3 never do. Sent for a career guidance interview by the Dept of Employment after my release from prison, I was told, "You will never find paid work. Find something else to do with the rest of your life." This I proceeded to do, with total success, although the Dept initially put up a fight to prevent me -- officials felt uneasy with a benefits claimant who was doing voluntary work he WANTED to do. In fact my skills proved useful to the community even though. I wasn't being paid to exercise them. My career as a schoolteacher and an ex-prisoner equipped me to deal successfully in Chelmsford Night Shelter with the young never-do-wells who formed the main part of our clientèle, and my 34 years leading walks and cycling holidays utilised an aspect of my life which had been consistently positive. My experience is far from typical, but Helen emphasised that anyone who gets involved in the Probation Service must have lived experience and try to get to know the families of the offenders they are trying to help. When as part of my teacher-training year in the 1960s, I took on a group of disadvantaged boys on a Bristol estate, I found I was meeting their parents and siblings almost at once, as a matter of course. I was very aware of the gibe levelled at schoolteachers, that they go to school, and then to college, and then back



to school again and know nothing about real life. As a student I spent two weekends in a Borstal to counter this.

Two other speakers had been invited to comment on what Helen had said. Kate pointed out that the only thing that is constant in the Probation Service is change. Officers carry a heavy workload and lack the time to reflect on the work they do. Will warned that giving responsibility to the community can become a way in which central government shuffles off its obligations. It is easier to encourage the non-offending aspects of a person's character once you see them in their social setting.

There was time at the end for questions and comments from the audience. The first drew attention to the tension in probation work, between rehabilitation and the management of risk. A panel of the three speakers dealt with this. Dare I say it, the canker of managerialism has spread even within the Society of Friends. Rehabilitation involves building trust. The youth justice service has given a lead in bringing the Home Office and local authorities together. The NHS and mental health services should also be involved. Helen doesn't favour the police or prison service being included. The Cawston Report envisaged providing a total service for women but how much of it has actually been implemented? Probation workers complain not so much about the lack of funding, as of unreasonable workloads. Probation trainees find themselves overwhelmed with admin and paperwork. In the UK, the Probation Service is closed off, and offers no openings for volunteers. Yet to have credibility, it needs to engage the public. The service gets no publicity, compared to the Prison Service. We can learn from the experience of other countries, notably the Netherlands, which have already embarked on a collaborative venture in probation.

In conclusion, Lol Burke asserted that there was too much reliance on short- term solutions imposed by the whims of politicians who are driven by ideology rather than facts. Probation practice must be based on evidence of what works.

DEATHS IN CUSTODY: A CALL FOR HELP

Liz Bridge

I am part of the Wandsworth Prison Improvement Campaign, which is a small group of local people heavily engaged in lobbying for improved conditions in Wandsworth prison with a group of about 250 supporters and interested followers.

Following an unannounced visit which exposed the shocking conditions there, The Chief Inspector of Prisons issued HMP Wandsworth with an Urgent Notification on 8 May 2024 and the Governor resigned. Following the announcement of the general election, there will be no response to his notification and plan issued until we have a new Minister.

We already have a new Governor and in fairness, we are holding fire on publicity about how unpleasant and negligent the prison can be whilst he gets his ‘feet under the table’. In the

meantime, I am working on a project to look individually at deaths in custody in Wandsworth in the last four years, the circumstances of those deaths, and whether the coroner at any inquest made any recommendations to the prison about its inadequacies. The aim is of course to check what progress has ever been made on those recommendations. The topic will give us a picture of the failings of the prison if we need to write articles or go to the press with memorable stories about the misery for some prisoners. It will also provide the advice and views of an experienced coroner concerning the responsibility of care within the prison.

I need help from anyone with any detailed knowledge of the law around death in prison, inquests, and the availability of information. I can establish the numbers per calendar year, and the Ombudsman's site has inquest reports for some but not all and shows the names for the men that have died since Feb 2024. But inquest reports are very slow to be published and I don't know why. I want to know what rights I might have to see unpublished inquest reports, and to know the names of all the men who have died in the prison in the last four years. Only with their names can we track death certificates and causes of death and even find their families if that is ever necessary.

QICJ is a group where someone may have enough knowledge to teach me what I need to know?
Is it You?

WPIC starting a Facebook Group for relatives and friends of prisoners.
As we lobby for improvements in the care and daily conditions for men in Wanno we have been contacted by many mums with sons in the prison, often in great distress. We do not have the resources or time to run helplines and the prison is supported by PACT and has the usual website with 'useful' information -rather out of date – intended to guide visitors and families.
So, we are starting a Facebook group to which people can join by invitation, and which has modest rules to keep everyone safe, in the hopes that families can talk to one another and provide practical help and support to others in the same position as themselves. We will use it initially to offer advice and help about clothing hand ins and visiting hours and see where it goes. We have moderators who can remove posts and exclude people if that becomes necessary, but our experience so far is that families can help each other in ways that charities and formal advice centres cannot. One mum offered another a lift in her car, and they organized to visit on the same days. A wife gave explicit information to a girlfriend about what was useful in a clothing parcel.

It may be an idea that doesn't work -we can only try. It will certainly give us the ability to ask for firsthand information about the day-to-day conditions inside the prison without having to rely on the optimistic publicity put out by the HMP communications department. We will quickly learn if the water is running cold, or the heating has failed.

Finally, if you want to imagine a comic scene, it is watching us (none of us exactly spring chickens) wrestling with our new Facebook accounts whilst on zoom and attempting to screen share - proving you can teach an old dog new tricks, but it takes a while and we have to eat lots of biscuits.

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