QUAKERS IN CRIMINAL JUSTICE

WINTER 2024 EDITORIAL

Response to my request for material for this newsletter has been fantastic with a wide range of articles, reviews, poems and general thoughts. Articles are as always from a mixture of practitioners and those with lived experience of the CJS.

In the cold winter months, there is nothing better than getting wrapped up warm under a nice blanket or by a warm fire and reading a good book (or 4) until the days get brighter, warmer and longer once again. You'll find quite a few book recommendations from your fellow members to help out with that.

You'll find some overlapping thoughts with two separate articles on the Balinnie Unit and several other recurring themes that have been on the minds of writers over the last few months.

Many of you will have been upset to hear that our long-term and highly respected member Don has returned to custody. We have an open letter from him explaining what happened and we know that you all will be keen to support him at this difficult time.

It is now, with a somewhat heavy heart that I can advise that after 8 years in the role, I will be stepping aside as editor of the newsletter after the 2025 conference and a new, much better qualified person will be taking over at that point. You only need to look to the right of this text to see the shear volume of individual contributions recieved for this edition and it is humbling that you have made this job so easy. I've almost never had to beg or bother folk for material. You are all so passionate and committed to the work and vision of QICJ that the articles just kept coming.

I'm super excited for a new adventure within my paid job that will be starting soon and this winding down will make space for that.

Enjoy the Winter Edition and I'll see you all again in the Spring.

Jonathan Wilgenbus-Lamb
Editor



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THE GOOD, THE BAD & THE UGLY

Adrian Smith

This well known film title was adopted for QICJ's contribution to Prisons Week 2024 (without the splendid theme tune, unfortunately). I took it as a good sign that the three webinars attracted people I had never met before - the QICJ witness is becoming known! Friends joined us on zoom from all over the country, the miles between us did not matter. Mike Nellis spoke to us about 'the Good' which turned out to be the Barlinnie Special Unit in Glasgow which operated from I973 to 1994, 'a rehabilitation programme so good it was cancelled'. It handled just 36 prisoners in its 2I years' existence, mostly violent lifers, considered incorrigible, who a few years earlier would have been hanged.



Barlinnie SU was conceived as a therapeutic community, inspired by HMP Grendon and Ingleside Hospital. Within the wing, doors weren't locked. The prisoners included Jimmy Boyle, then 29, who was the first to respond to Joyce Laing, Scotland's first trained art therapist, who arrived at the Unit on a motorcycle. Jimmy found he had a talent for sculpture, was allowed to visit Edinburgh Gallery and got commissions for public sculpture which caused outrage in some quarters - - how did this equate with punishment? In I982 an art exhibition foreshadowed the Koestler exhibitions of later years. (Indeed, the work I bought at one of the exhibitions hangs on my wall – so many prisoners show talent!)

But how can rehabilitation be delivered in the current prison system which is bursting at the seams?

For 'the Bad' we heard Liz Bridge, former Quaker Prison Chaplain at HMP Wandsworth. She told us that the prison was built (like many others) before the days of electricity or running water and faced the basic problems of overcrowding, underfunding, and a tremendous 'churn' (men on remand now form one-fifth of the total prison population – 800 at Wandsworth). The water supply is uncertain, men are often unable to wash or shower or receive a change of clothing. Sewers are overloaded, providing channels for vermin and cells on the ground floor are flooded after heavy rain. There is no communal space, no private areas for confidential talk and men are banged up 23 hours a day, some behaving aggressively when finally unlocked. The staff are young and inexperienced, and don't stay long. Some days only 40% of those scheduled to work turn up for duty. Conditions have been condemned by the Chief Inspector of Prisons and the Independent Monitoring Board leading to ‘urgent notification’.

Liz, with a concerned group has set up the Wandsworth Prison Improvement Campaign (WPIC) with the following aims:
(i) to see that prisoners receive their medication on time, and attend hospital appointments
(ii) to campaign against vermin
(iii) to institute an effective maintenance programme
(iv) to combat inadequate hygiene, by facilitating changes of clothing / dependable laundry
(v) to ensure easy access to books.
So far there has been progress with (i) but the target for refurbishing showers is 2029!
The only education course running is 'English as a Foreign Language', but even that is undermined by a lack of staff.

Prisoners considered a suicide risk should be checked every 15 minutes, but hard-pressed officers often tick the list without doing the checks and Support Officers receive just two weeks additional training, which does not include First Aid. One, left in charge of a wing of 250 men singlehanded at night, discovered that one man had hanged himself. The WPIC always attends inquests from Wandsworth; it is always the same coroner, clearly disgusted by what he hears. One third of the men are mentally ill and half suffer from addictions. 'Listeners ' are often unable to operate as there is no-one to unlock them nor a private space. £3-08p is allowed for food per man per day with poorer inmates unable to afford top-ups.We also heard that Probation Officers can now recall on their own authority, and may do so 'to play safe', as many are young with crushing caseloads.

The starting point for 'the Ugly' was the relentlessly negative portrayal of prisoners in the tabloid press; recently there was an outcry when men released early under the ‘reducing overcrowding scheme’ were seen celebrating outside the prison gates. Hopeful signs include the appointment of James Timpson as Prisons Minister and the announcement of an Independent Review of Sentencing. QICJ Clerk Melanie Jameson led this session and stressed that this Review MUST include sentence deflation – we are out of step with the rest of Europe – and accept that deterrence doesn't work, whereas rehabilitation and desistence do.

Three Friends were asked to speak on ‘answering that of God in everyone’. Tim Newell spoke of the therapeutic prison, a space to reflect on the seriousness of what you have done. Sarah Lane. former QPC, noted that only I% of prisoners receive any help for unresolved grief. The silence of a Quaker Meeting, and the spirit of acceptance found there, is greatly appreciated. Hugh



McMichael spoke last, pointing out that violent homes breed violent children. People who score 4 or more Adverse Childhood Experiences are 30 times more likely to attempt suicide. Stress in childhood modifies our brains – something picked up by Sally Chester, who said those affected are continually scanning for threats. Lesley Chandler stressed the need to speak not about 'bad people' but bad BEHAVIOUR.

We moved on to the QICJ's concern for welcoming former prisoners into Meetings. One option for those with certain license conditions is attending a midweek Meeting, without children. Arrangements should be made at Area Meeting level, involving the Safeguarding Coordinator. A Receiving Group should be appointed. Guidance is being prepared by QICJ. Concluding remarks were made by Ben Jarman, this year's Swarthmore Lecturer. He stressed the implications of exclusion and the need for Friends to get close enough to learn directly from prisoners.

Book recommendations
The Barlinnie Special Unit - Art, Punishment and Innovation
Ed. Kirstin Anderson Pub. Waterside Press Ltd
A Sense of Freedom (Jimmy Boyd's memoirs) Pub. Ebury

GIVE THEIR WORDS WINGS

Frances McCann

If we really want to know about the lives of people who are labelled "criminal" then we should do, as Ben Jarman (Swarthmore Lecture 2024) suggests, listen and hear deeply the telling of their lives, and let their lives change ours.

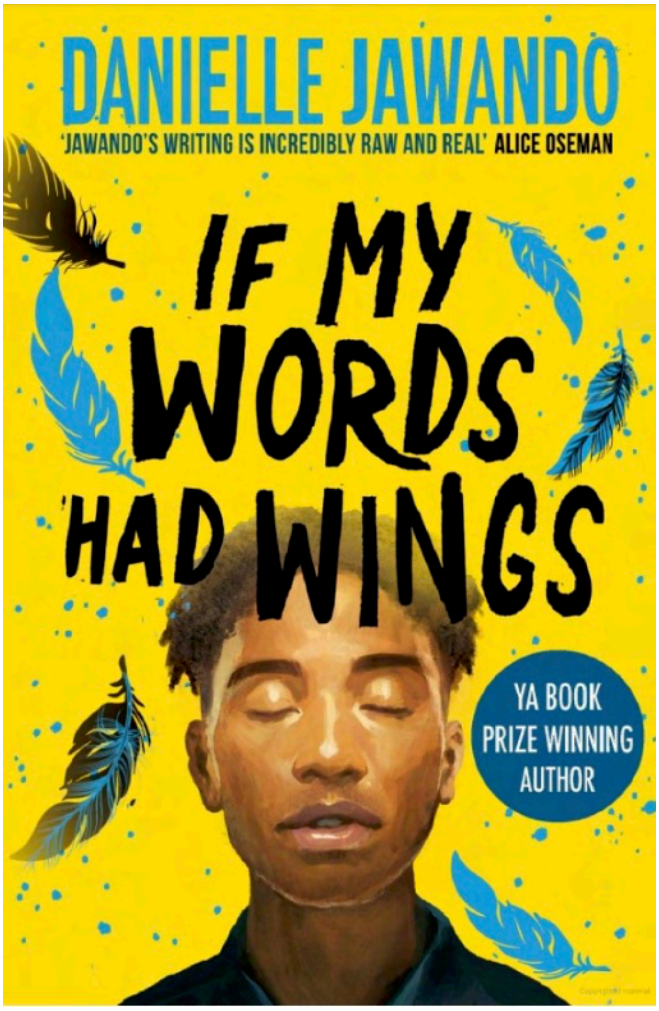
In response to this I am recommending Danielle Jawando's latest book " If my Words had Wings" because I want to give this book wings, and ask you to pick it up and read it for yourself. As in her previous books Danielle is writing about the community she herself grew up in and is still deeply connected with. Through the narrative of her protagonist, Tyrell Forrester, she channels the harshness of the current British criminal justice system and she highlights the vulnerability of young people, particularly black young people, caught up in the institutions of the state.

Teenager Tyrell tells the story of how he thought he had found safety, affirmation and brotherhood in a peer group of other young men. Over time they strayed into anti-social behaviour and then committed a robbery for which they were charged, convicted and given custodial sentences. Tyrell does not question the fairness of his punishment, he knows he has caused harm. His story is of what happens to him once he has been sent down. From him we hear of the physical brutality and psychological humiliation that he endures as he serves out his time in a young offender institute. We follow him on his journey post-release during which he is under the continual threat of recall, and suffering from post-traumatic distress as a consequence of events that took place during his time inside.

While inside, as a way to fill time, Tyrell decides to attend a poetry workshop, and through his ongoing attendance at the sessions he discovers the power of words as a way of expressing his pain, his anger and his aloneness. In the workshops he is introduced to the performance poetry of Black writers, and begins to discover the richness and power of contemporary music and culture. This gives validation to his own cultural identity. The power and operations of institutional racism also begin to come into focus. From Dadir, a friend he makes on his block, he learns how a video on Dadir's phone, that he had shared on social media, had been used as evidence to convict him of murder as part of a " joint enterprise" conviction, and although having

no direct involvement in the killing of a young man, he had been given a 15 year sentence. Dadir was also under a treat of deportation once his sentence had been completed, despite having lived in the UK since early childhood.

On his release Tyrrell returns to his family and starts to rebuild his life supported by his probation worker, who is able to balance the rigour of her professional responsibilities with a deep understanding of Tyrell's situation. He also finds cultural and campaigning connections that enable him to see his experiences within both a wider and a local context. As he gains greater awareness of the factors that contributed to Dadir's conviction we learn about the "Manchester 10" campaign in relation to "joint enterprise convictions", whereby young people have been found to be "guilty by association" even when they have had no direct involvement is a crime. We also learn how music, lyrics and videos that are part of youth music culture are being used to create narratives of criminal intent.



The author has been extremely thorough with her research, and provides useful links for the reader to follow up the issues raised through the telling of Tyrell's experiences. Follow these links not just for information … but to take action.

Kids of Colour is an anti-racist youth work organisation, committed to racial justice for young people of colour in Greater Manchester.
https://kidsofcolour.com/resources/
This link will take you to the site page with material about the "Manchester 10" and information about how the common law doctrine of Joint Enterprise is being used in youth crime prosecutions. .

Art not Evidence campaign
https://artnotevidence.org/
The mission statement of the campaign is:
"to fight for a fairer criminal justice system by advocating for a restriction on the use of creative and artistic expression as evidence in criminal trials."

Both these matters were introduced into Parliament in early 2024 as Private Members Bills but could not be moved forwarded because of the dissolution of Parliament in May 2024.

In September 2024 the following Early Day Motion was introduced into Parliament.
https://edm.parliament.uk/early-day-motion/62481/the-legal-dragnet-joint-enterprise-report

If my Words had Wings. (2024) Danielle Jawando. Simon & Schuster

https://www.simonandschuster.co.uk/books/If-My-Words-Had-Wings/Danielle-Jawando/9781398514034

TO ALL MY FRIENDS IN QICJ

Don Nichols

An open letter to the QICJ Members

To all my Friends in QICJ

This is a letter I never dreamt that I would be writing. As I do write this, only a certain few of you know what has occurred in the last few months and I feel it is only right that I should inform all QICJ members as to what has happened.

For thouse of you who were at last year's conference, you may recall that I made a disclosure concerning my actual past offending which resulted with me being given a life sentence of which I served 18 years before being released on parole in 2015, I was given the life sentence in 1997.

During my life sentence I disclosed to the police similar offences that I had committed in 1984, after police made their enquiries, I was sent a letter that no further action was being taken, but that my confession would be kept on file.

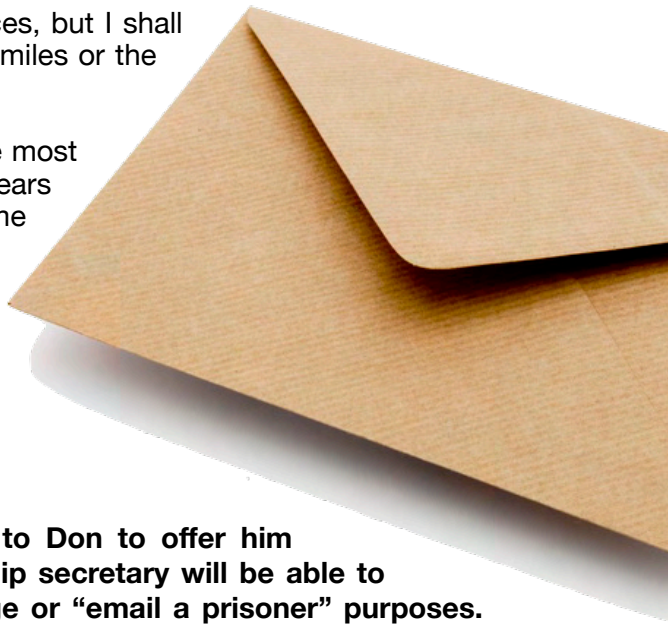
When in early 2024, I was questioned about these historical offences, I made a full statement and pleaded guilty to the charges.

Although the parole board and MAPPA team where aware of these charges I was not recalled back to prison and allowed to remain in the community until I had to attend court.

On the 10th of July 2024 at my plea hearing the judge remanded me in custody. On the 13th of September 2024 at Winchester Crown Court. The Judge sentenced me to 17 years in prison.

I have had a lot of support from people who were aware of the situation, namely the QICJ committee.

Dear Friends, I shall miss seeing you all at the conferences, but I shall never forget any of you. I shall never forget any of your smiles or the lovely kind words of greetings and encouragement.



Finally I can say to all of you the one thing hat helped me most to stay in the community without re-offending for nine years was knowing that Friends were always there to support me through my journey of rehabilitation.

To each and everyone of you, I say thank you.

In friendship

Don

Editor's Note: Many of you may wish to reach out to Don to offer him support at this challenging time. If so our membership secretary will be able to provide Don's current address and details for postage or "email a prisoner" purposes. simonofskewjack@gmail.com

MEMBERSHIP UPDATE

Simon Ewart

Our membership as we come towards the end of 2024 stands at around 33 group members and 140 individual/joint members. That is up about 6 individual members and 3 group members since the end of 2023. We have though lost 10 individual members and 2 group members since the start of the year. So, we are just about holding our own. We do not actively recruit members other than hoping that the work achieved by members will in itself act as a recruiting mechanism. Do what you can to stimulate interest and direct Friends to our excellent website https://www.qicj.org/ then they will be hooked !!



We only have at present 6 members who are resident in the prison service. Again perhaps if you have contact with a prison resident you might mention that membership is open to serving prisoners. They will receive our newsletters and the committee will always be open to hearing of their lived experience.

One such resident is our well respected member and contributor for nearly a decade to QICJ conferences, Don Nichols. He has been (as you will have read from an article by Don in this newsletter) recalled for an historical offence of over 40 years ago. As individuals some of us are trying to get this injustice referred to the Court of Appeal, and or, to the Ministry of Justice. I am sure Don would appreciate correspondence please contact me at my personal email if you would like Don's present details simonofskewjack@gmail.com

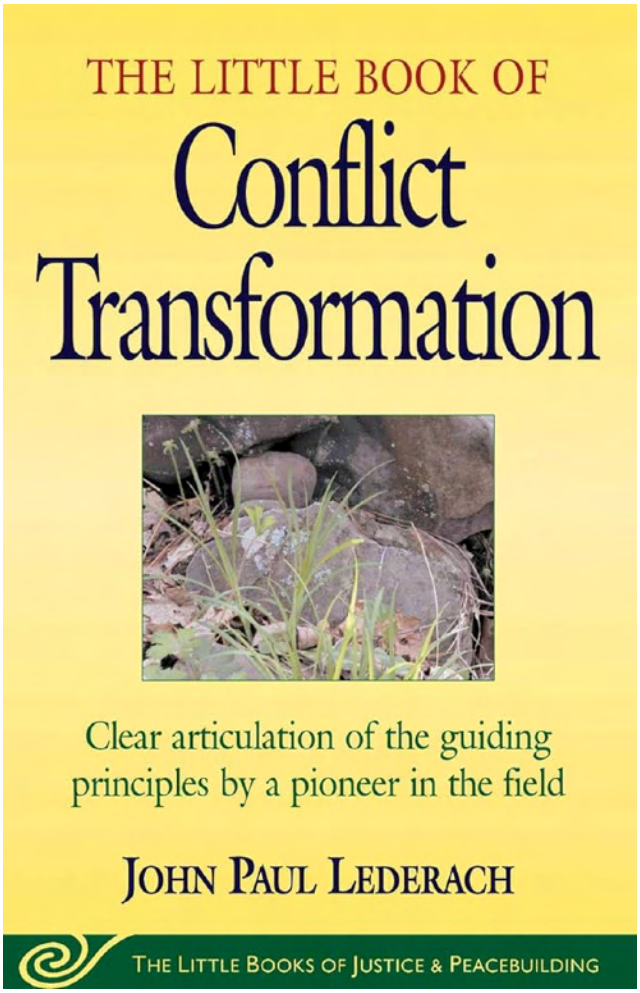
As membership secretary I must give particular thanks to our long suffering assistant membership clerk, Jonathan Ranger who keeps our membership lists up to date through his knowledge of how to use a spreadsheet. As you will have realised, from my membership figures above, I am still using an Abacus.

CONFLICT TRANSFORMATION

John Paul Wootton

An Article based on "The Little Book of Conflict Transformation" by John Paul Lederach

Conflict Transformation recognises that conflict is an ongoing reality in the world and, rather than being a destructive force, it can be an instrument of change when directed towards positive outcomes. Key to Conflict Transformation is approaching problems from three perspectives: that of the immediate situation; that of underlying patterns and context; and that of the conceptual framework.



An example of a family dispute over dishes can illustrate this. First we can look at the immediate situation which on this particular occasion is the argument itself. Then we can carry out an analysis of the underlying patterns and context. This would be to ask questions like, 'who has washed them in the past?' 'Who will wash them in the future?' and indeed as an extension, 'who normally determines who washes them?' Through these we can examine the core nature and quality of relationships. The conceptual framework then involves creating an approach that addresses the content, context and structure of the relationship between the immediate situation and the underlying patterns and context.

The objective is to create processes for constructive change. This can be done by identifying a number of goals. Personal goals focus on the potential for growth and wellbeing for individual people at physical, emotional, intellectual and spiritual levels. Relational goals seek to minimise poor communication between people and maximise understanding. Structural goals analyse the root causes and social conditions that give rise to harmful expressions of conflict. They promote nonviolent methods to reduce confrontation and minimise or eliminate violence, and they foster structures that meet basic needs (substantive justice) and maximise inclusion in decision making processes (procedural justice). Finally, cultural goals attempt to generate understanding of cultural patterns that encourage violent expressions of conflict.

Practically, it is important to develop abilities within ourselves, for example, the capacity to defy the urge to act instantaneously, to resist the urgency for a quick solution and avoid being frozen by the demands of the immediate issues. For this, it would be useful to be able to see beyond them, to cultivate an empathy that enables you to understand others' situation but avoid the inertia created by their fears, and to create responses that take seriously the immediate, but are not driven by the search for a quick fix.

Another important ability would be to think and plan both short- and long-term, and to work with a variety of timescales, with targets that can be acted upon within days, weeks or even years. This would involve dispensing with an "either/or" approach to short-term relief and long-term strategy, and instead adopting a stance that envisions dealing with "A" while at the same time building "B".

Of course, conflict situations can be incredibly complex. This can seem overwhelming at times, but an acceptance of this complexity can generate a multitude of possibilities for creating change. If we choose to embrace this, we can be the kid in the candy store. We can trust that complex systems will indeed generate options, and we can then pursue those that hold greatest promise for constructive change.

Finally, voices of identity can sometimes become lost and often these issues are at the root of conflict. Identity can shape the expression of conflict as it goes to the heart of how people see themselves and how they relate to others. Despite this fundamental relationship to conflict, it is often missed when possible solutions are being constructed.

A transformative approach to conflict has the potential to serve as a good grounding for efforts to create a global society that has moved on from violent and destructive interrelations. Educating about it, and encouraging its implementation, could pave the way for the adopting of a creative approach to solutions which are responsive, constructive and, ultimately, nonviolent.

PAINTED WITH MY HAIR

Jenny Copsey

"Digging where you delve, in solitary confinement, into the unconscious, I found a pool of mythic images and painted them with my own DNA i.e. with a brush fashioned out of my own hair" Donny Johnson had been given a 10 year sentence for 2nd degree murder in California and this was extended to solitary confinement lasting 25 years following a violent incident against two prison guards.

This powerful vimeo about Johnson's life in prison has been an inspiration. He describes being "buried alive and you dig for your life" with creativity, because it is the only means by which he could feel a semblance of control over his environment. His mother movingly describes his cell where he had no pictures, calendar, clock, window, just a bunk, table and toilet. She was allowed limited visiting and of course they could only converse through glass.

A leading civil rights lawyer Charles Carbone who is acting for Donny explains that In America there are 70,000 prisoners in solitary confinement, and he believes that the purpose is to maximise sensory deprivation to break the person psychologically. He goes on to say that one personality type under these circumstances will not last long at all due to the toxic impact; others will slowly decompensate sometimes leaving them with permanent damage: and the third group will go somewhere else in a transformation of themselves. Fortunately for Donny, a psychotherapist chose to start writing to him and when the latter was particularly low, the suggestion that he paint how he was feeling made sense to him. He describes how art had dramatically changed his life and widened his scope, helping him “to see more, feel more and do more than I have ever done before since I started splashing these colours around”. The colours came from a process of melting M&Ms in water. “Sometimes I have an idea in my mind, sometimes I don’t, shapes come naturally. I can’t sleep when I do a piece for some reason. I am wired and I can’t sop thinking about what to do next.” “Music has always been a refuge in my life, the need for raw edged well done electric guitar is at my core, pain pushed me away from my potential. The vision of art has pulled me back into it.”

Donny had grown up with an abusive father and when he left, his mother had a huge struggle to bring up her children alone with little income. Both mother and son point out the continuing threat of cold cement walls, as reflecting the cold system of incarceration, the lack of physical contact, the lack of humanity and love and what little there is available has to be conveyed through glass. Donny’s drift into drink and drugs at the age of thirteen , he describes as the time when he became disconnected from himself and his family. Prison reinforces this, but art reconnected him. He read Joseph Campbell and uses the symbol of the egg to epitomise his search for growth from seeds and the potential for life.

I saw this vimeo at the suggestion of Mike Nellis and the book he has co-edited about the Barlinnie Special Unit is pertinent to this year’s Swarthmore Lecture. I recommend both the viewing and the reading. The searchlight is shining on the state of our prisons at the moment maybe this is an appropriate time for Quakers to be heard in our call for reform?



Editor’s note: The video in question can be viewed on https://vimeo.com/800572000 and is well worth the hour or so of your time.

PRISON PHOENIX TRUST UPDATE

Selina Sasse

At a time when overcrowding and the extreme challenges of our justice system is making the headlines The Prison Phoenix Trust has been providing its unwavering support to those living and working in prisons and secure settings.



Many of those engaging with us find their own sense of hope and clarity emerging from the chaos of their former lives. It is clear how resilience develops by time dedicated to meditation and yoga and those living and working in the thick of all the challenges can find it a time for change and personal growth.

With the support of many Friends, we are glad to have been able to respond to all those who reach out for help and have provided over 2000 in-cell study resources so far this year. These are particularly needed as the chief inspector of prisons reports in 2024 more than two thirds of people are spending most of their day locked in their cells with little to do.

Time out of cell in group classes is vital for social development, wellbeing and importantly to equip people for reintegration back into the community when the time comes. It is reassuring that during the first 9 months of the year our in-prison classes grew by over 30% to 135 classes a week across the UK and Ireland.

We have been awarded 10 contracts for service provision from the Ministry of Justice's competitive tender system over the last few years and have found this to give important stability of provision to students and teachers.

In September we were delighted to have been highly commended for supporting the health and wellbeing of people in prison in the 2024 Inspire Justice Awards.

This prestigious awards programme is dedicated to recognising the achievements of the entire criminal justice sector. The PPT was praised highly for its innovative use of yoga and meditation to support the mental health of prisoners during the Covid-19 pandemic and beyond.

TV broadcaster Clive Myrie presented our team with the award, saying: “Their work represents the best of us.”

Helen Judge, Area Executive Director HMPPS, recognised The PPT’s work with ‘some of the most troubled in society’.

It’s great to be recognised for the work we have been doing since our foundation in 1988. Across our 35 years, The Prison Phoenix Trust has become the UK’s leading provider in expertise in yoga and meditation in prisons. We support around 5% of the prison populations of the UK and Ireland with mentoring, in-cell study resources and peer support; and we provide accredited training to prison yoga teachers on behalf of The British Wheel of Yoga.

We receive letters each week from people telling us they are turning things around and come out of prison in a better place with more self-respect and self-esteem and feeling more positive about their lives.

This letter from Keith in HMP Littlehey is typical:



“I have been practising yoga for roughly two months now. I have noticed my digestion and rate of my metabolism have improved. In addition to eating healthily, my levels of stress have lowered and I have found myself dealing with frustration a lot better.
“I never would have thought that just doing yoga could have improved all of that but I am glad it has, so I am even more glad I started doing it.
“I cannot wait to see what else yoga can offer me. I want to expand my knowledge on yoga to practise on my own and possibly teach others on my wing.”

So thank you to all our Friends, volunteers and supporters who make this possible. Here’s to helping more people in 2025 and beyond!
www.theppt.org.uk/donate

DEAR QICJ

Dear QICJ

My local MP is Heidi Alexander, who has been on the radio asking for thoughts on alternatives to prison. Talking about house arrests as a potential option.

I would love to have information/thoughts from your committee or even an individual Friend who might have some suggestions for Heidi. You might send this to her directly (heidi.alexander.mp@parliament.uk) , but I would also wish to write to her, perhaps with the support of my local meeting.

Thanks.
In friendship,
Rebecca Bellamy
rebeccabellamy@hotmail.com
Swindon LM

———————————————————-

Howdy,

My name is Devon Kurtz, and I am an American Quaker studying prisons at Cambridge. Back in the U.S., I lead Quaker worship groups in prisons.

I recently wrote a book, Sketches from Behind Prison Walls, which was published by the Quaker Institute for the Future with support from New England Yearly Meeting. The book was written in collaboration with incarcerated Quaker artist Rein Kolts and many incarcerated poets and writers. The book was part of a multi part project funded by NEYM that included a gallery show, book, concert, and vinyl recording all related to the American prison system. I have attached some links below with more information.



This project grew out of my work at Southern State Correctional Facility with Hanover Friends Meeting. Unfortunately, the American prison system has taken poorly the criticism of its institutions found in the book. They have moved to suppress the book, namely by terminating my ability to volunteer in their prisons. I am working with Cornell Law School's First Amendment Clinic to push back on this censorship but in the meantime I am very motivated to amplify the work of these men behind bars.

To that end, I would welcome any opportunity to share the artwork, book, or facilitate discussions about prisons and prison reform with other Quakers while I am in England. I have been following closely the political debate over how to ease overcrowding in Britain's prisons, and I would be happy to discuss those issues as well.

I would be grateful for any support you can offer to help raise awareness of both the

great art coming out of prisons and the unjust systematic suppression of their voices.

Thank you,
Devon Kurtz
devon.kurtzz@gmail.com

More information about the project can be found at the following links:

https://vermontjournal.com/arts-entertainment/faces-of-mass-incarceration-at-gallery-at-the-vault/

https://www.thedartmouth.com/article/2024/07/q-a-with-devon-kurtz-20

https://m.sevendaysvt.com/arts-culture/an-upper-valley-vocal-sextet-brings-meditative-songs-to-the-mens-prison-in-springfield-41495327

ART, PUNISHMENT & INNOVATION

Pete Clarke

'The Barlinnie Special Unit – Art, Punishment and Innovation'
Edited by Kirsten Anderson 2024, Waterside Press Ltd

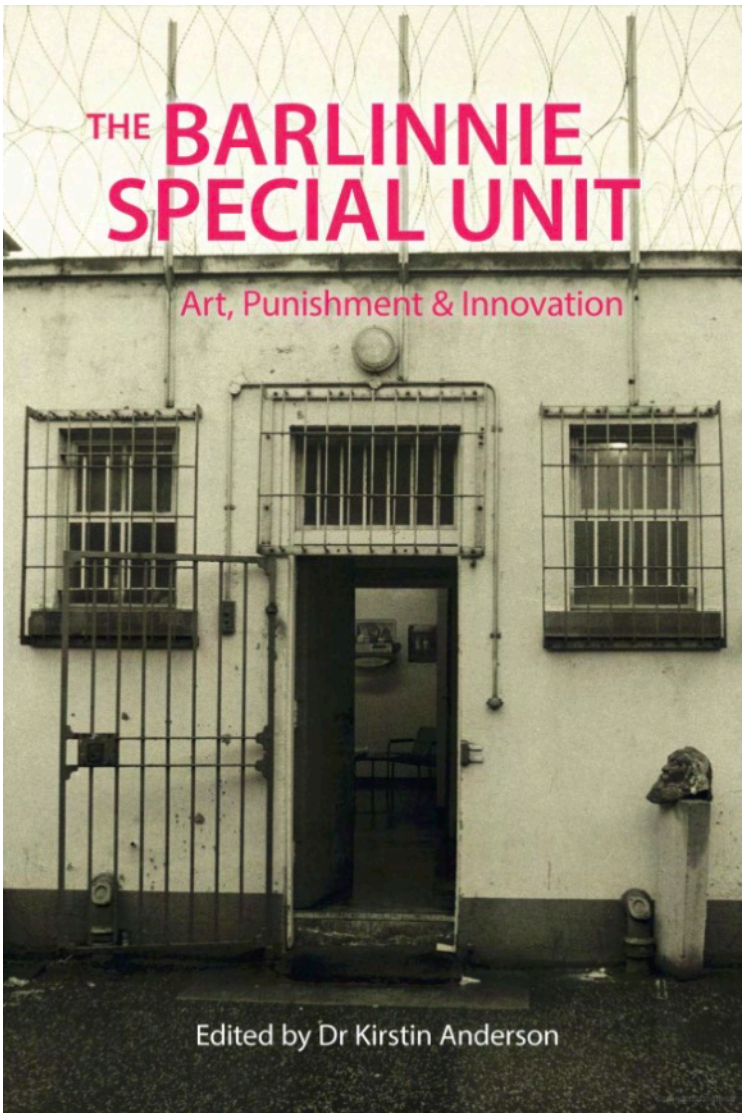
The Barlinnie Special Unit (BSU) (1973-1995) was a little like Marmite – it was either loved or loathed. Generally loved by prison reformers, loathed by most prison officers and many managers in the Scottish Prison service (SPS).

This new book seeks to show today's readers what the unit aimed to achieve, what it accomplished, how it was done, why it closed and importantly - why it was so controversial. Contributors vary in their personal involvement with the Unit from the start, and some in its later years. There is an emphasis in the book on the role of 'art therapy' within the unit, but less well described is that art therapy played less of a significant role for many prisoners in the unit, 'We're not into all that arty farty stuff' (Sparks R in Anderson K p188). Instead, and less well covered in the book, is the role of individual and group therapy and the therapy of the 'community'. However, therapy was central in the operation of the BSU and in the presentations of individual accounts in this book.

The unit was devised by a Scottish Prison Service working party in 1971, whose remit had been to find a response to a small group of prisoners who were unmanageably violent towards staff in the mainstream prison system. Solitary confinement in the infamous and inhuman 'cages' of HMPs Inverness and Peterhead had failed to either control or rehabilitate prisoners. Outside of the BSU violence by both prisoners and prison officers was the norm – it had become clear that the status quo of brutal and brutalizing behaviour could not continue.

A small therapeutic Special Unit was devised to address these behaviours, intended, over time, to render prisoners manageable enough to return to mainstream prison. HMP Grendon in England, and Dingleton psychiatric hospital in the Scottish Borders were the early models of therapeutic communities which the BSU drew on. Initially all the unit's staff were volunteers

drawn from a small number of officers and other professionals who wanted to break with the brutalising practices prevalent at the time. Key were Ken Murray (prison officer), Ian Stephen (SPS forensic psychologist) and Dr Peter Whatmore (consultant psychiatrist). Later, and central to the books title and focus, Joyce Laing joined the unit as an art therapist. The book's structure is partly built around accounts by, or about, these key staff who put their careers and reputations on the line to establish and develop the BSU in the face of real resistance from colleagues, managers, media, the public and some politicians.



The Special Unit was a genuine attempt to create a therapeutic community, where imprisonment was informed by psychiatric and psychological need. As part of the concept of 'community' regular meetings took place in which staff and prisoners together discussed issues of living and working in the Unit and resolved often stormy conflicts with talk – a very new experience for all involved given the generally accepted norm of confrontation in the mainstream prisons of Scotland at that time. Outside of the community and individual therapy sessions it was necessary to devise ways of filling prisoner's time. In the early days of the BSU and due to the work Of Joyce Laing, art became a 'therapeutic' pastime. Later education, craft work and other creative activities came to play a vital part in a regime where pointless 'work' (which was the mainstay of normal prison life), was rejected.

Jimmy Boyle was the first of many prisoners in the unit to discover he had a real talent for sculpture and writing. In addition, he went on to become a novelist, Diarist and community worker in his role with the Glasgow Gateway Exchange, (Trevelyan in Anderson p157). Boyle's celebrity proved to be both a benefit and hindrance to the BSU and other therapeutic communities as he was portrayed as either having been rehabilitated by the unit, or conversely had 'beaten the system' he hated so much through his use of the unit and its opportunities. This 'Marmite' figure did though demonstrate beyond argument that some people who had both suffered and carried out terrible violence could change for the better using therapeutic techniques now more widespread in the prison service. Nonetheless, there was relentless political and media pressure, and a continued public misunderstanding of the unit and its methods to close it down Politicians, the media and the public continue(de) to see prison simply as a place of confinement and 'punishment'

And close it did. This book describes how the unit in its later years had lost some of its early impetus, and although it continued to take in unmanageable prisoners, and artists continued to work there, over time it was subject to managed decline. The academic evaluators commissioned by the Scottish Prison Service (SPS) to review the unit's function agreed that it had faded somewhat but argued strongly that it should be revitalised. The SPS terminated it anyway, to the frustration of one journalist who wrote - "So good they closed it down".

This book brings to our attention how the Barlinnie Special Unit challenged many preconceptions about what prisons could and should be. In addition, and importantly it contains a clear narrative about class and the preconceptions there were, and are, about working-class men and how they should be treated upon conviction. The treatment of prisoners in Scottish prison system of the time reflected an extreme of brutalisation, negative stereotyping and oppression – but this was not confined to prison. Society, the CJS and politicians supported the idea that working class men were to be 'controlled' and 'contained'.

Clearly the BSU was never a solution to every penal problem and was never accepted as more than an experiment by the SPS and Government.

This book is an insight into the BSU as well as the dominant conceptions around class and gender. It may leave some readers frustrated in wanting to know more about therapeutic communities and how therapy can not only be a more humane way of dealing with offending behaviour, but how it can also genuinely change that behaviour. Acknowledging this, in the words of Dr Kirsten Anderson speaking at the launch of this book, 'one book wasn't ever going to be enough'.

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THE BARLINNIE UNIT: SOME THOUGHTS

Tim Newell

In Mike Nellis' review in The Friend 22 September, of the remarkable book The Barlinnie Special Unit, (edited by Dr Kirstin Anderson), he calls for Quaker renewal in seeking 'new thinking on the art of penal possibility'.

There are many Quaker Chaplains working in prisons which have creative and challenging regimes in English Prisons, and it would be good to hear from them. The English prison system has been epitomised as 'broken' - mainly as a result of many large Local Prisons suffering the worst of overcrowding and staff shortage – yet there is an underlying story of excellence within our Training Prisons. These are the places where the bulk of prison sentences are served.

Barlinnie Special Unit was a democratic therapeutic community, and was a safe place for exploration and development because of that. Several English prisons contain democratic

therapeutic communities for personality disordered offenders and addiction therapeutic communities for serious substance misusers.

The idea of Therapeutic Communities in England started through a Quaker initiative at the Retreat in York in 1796. Treating the insane as normal as much as was possible and giving them useful occupation was shown to effect improvement in their mental state.

Fortunately, through the efforts of many and the support of the staff there are 17 Democratic Therapeutic Communities (TCs) in English prisons - sixteen for men one for women. Six are at Grendon Prison, Five at Dovegate Prison, three of them are for people who have an intellectual (learning) disability (IQ less than 70). Democratic TCs in English prisons treat 600 people at any one time.

There are also 3 addiction Therapeutic Communities for men, treating 190 residents.
Key features of therapeutic communities which challenge traditional prison culture include

- A flattened hierarchy - so that all (staff and inmates) are members of the community
- Democratisation - voting by all on most decisions
- Public confrontation of behaviour by members and staff and also often of staff behaviour
- Communalism with all working together - cooking, cleaning, eating, policy making and shared responsibility for daily living

These practices and approaches appeal as reflections of our testimonies to equality and truth. They have proved to be successful in reducing recidivism and in creating a positive culture of growth and mutual respect in prisons. The role of prison officers in particular within such communities deserves recognition and respect as it did in Barlinnie. The key component of sitting together and talking with each other epitomises the nature of cooperation and commitment within the community. The power of belonging to such a community brings about healing and change.



LETTER TO MY MP

Celia a QICJ Member

For a while I have toyed with the idea of submitting an article for the Newsletter. My particular concern and interest is in unspent convictions, particularly for what is termed 'Benefit fraud'. Those claimants who have, often inadvertently, received or drawn benefit, to which it turns out they were not entitled, have a whole lifetime of the huge burden of carrying multiple convictions which are never, ever wiped off one's record.



I took the step of writing to my newly-elected Labour MP for Macclesfield - I never got anywhere with our previous Conservative MP. To date, he has not got back to me, which is very disappointing. I therefore felt the time had come to share this with QiCJ members. There has been a lot of publicity and outrage very recently, regarding those who care for someone in their family, who have been 'caught' in this trap. Often these essential carers, receiving Carers' Allowance, earned as little as 50pence too much, or their savings slipped over the cut-off amount. They now find themselves charged with fraud and liable to paying back the total amount of benefit they received during the whole time the discrepancy occurred. This can run into thousands (sometimes, tens of thousands) of pounds. In these recent cases, it has come to light that the DWP had actually known about these lapses by the claimants for many years.

It has struck me, since joining QiCJ and being involved, that the emphasis is almost all on prisoners. I realise that Fair Checks is the platform which is trying to bring about change in the area of life-long convictions, but our group is for Quakers in Criminal Justice - so the remit ought to be wider than the prison system and those in prison or ex-prisoners. I feel that the injustices towards all offenders or ex-offenders needs to be covered more widely by QiCJ - maybe this has happened in the past and I am just not aware of it - sorry if this is the case, but there may be other members of QiCJ who share my concern for reform in this area.

Please find below letter to my MP

In Friendship

Celia

This is a letter I sent to my local, newly-elected Labour MP on September 9th 2024. Italics replace the original wording. To date, I have not had a response from my M.P.

Dear MP's name,

My name is Celia surname and I am one of your constituents. I am writing to you today because I am concerned about the UK's criminal records system. I believe the current disclosure system is unfair and stops people who have already received their punishment from moving on. This is something that's particularly important to me because, and this is difficult for me to say, I am affected by this. Because I got overpaid by the DWP, I now have a criminal record which comes up on every enhanced DBS check which I need as I work, unpaid, for the NHS and also for my Quaker community. The conviction happened in 2015, (I am now 76 years old) but I still cannot get house insurance, get credit, e.g. buy online from Argos without paying upfront, etc.

I have to endure risk assessments at 'work' and need to explain again and again why I have 4 counts of criminal convictions as I was overpaid, without my realising this, for some time.

I am writing to request that you, firstly, reply to this letter and, hopefully, have time to meet up with me to explain why this issue affects so many people and why there needs to be reform in this area. Perhaps you would feel able to write to the Home Affairs and/or Justice Committee about criminal records reform?

In the meantime, if you would like to know more about this issue, I recommend you visit the FairChecks website at www.FairChecks.org.uk. FairChecks is a movement calling for the government to reform criminal record checks so that people have a genuine chance to move on. FairChecks is calling for a full review of the UK's criminal records disclosure system and has three key asks for a fairer system:

- No automatic disclosure of cautions on criminal records
- Wipe the slate clean for childhood offences
- Stop forcing people to reveal short prison sentences or suspended sentences forever.

Plus reform should also include the following:-
Stop the DWP charging claimants with multiple offences just because the overpayment lasted more than one week. This means the charges look multiple e.g. 4 offences equals drawing 4 weeks benefit, whereas someone stealing one million pounds is classed as one offence and this is wiped off their record after 10 years.

I look forward to hearing from you.

Best Regards

Celia

GLEBE HOUSE

Tim Newell

Friends were shocked to recently read the Announcement –

The Trustees of the Friend's Therapeutic Community Trust (who run Glebe House) have taken the difficult decision to voluntarily close Glebe House with immediate effect. Following the orderly closure of the charity Trustees intend to apply the remaining assets to other charities to further the intentions/ founding principles of the charity.

Glebe House in Cambridgeshire was doing internationally renowned specialist work supporting teenage males with a history of harmful sexual behaviour (victims and/or offenders). It was set up in the 1960s as a "therapeutic community for the treatment of children and young people who are unstable and maladjusted and in need of assistance." Several Quakers played key roles in establishing the home, including Probation Officer Geoffrey Brogden, Psychiatrist David Clark and Educationalist David Wills (experienced in therapeutic communities in practice). Quakers have continued to serve as trustees ever since.

Therapeutic Community principles were in practice – communalism (living and working together), permissiveness (difficult issues can be explored, though boundaries have to be set), reality confrontation (facing up to the impact of destructive behaviour) and democracy (how to contribute to a consensus and abiding by decisions taken). Together these provide a safe environment for the exploration of difficult issues to support change and pro-social behaviour. Trustees, consultants, staff and residents all create a partnership with a culture and value system that is expressed through these four cornerstones.



This is a sensitive environment and as I knew from Grendon days called for all – staff and residents – to be aware of the need to maintain the culture within the boundaries of the overall setting. So new procedures were introduced with caution and consultation and external pressures of inspection and management worked at

within the principles of the community. Given the nature of the group in Glebe House safeguarding would have been very significant and the emphasis on safety paramount.

The Trustees announced their decision after concerns raised by Ofsted in 2023. Sadly, the inspectorate found "widespread shortfalls in management" at the home around a lack of records relating to their oversight and decision making leading to the situation where "leaders and managers did not have the full information" about incidents at the home. An internal investigation found that safeguarding practice had not been good enough for a number of months.

Over the years hundreds of young men have been helped to restore confidence and relationships through the work of Glebe House. Friends remember this creative work, recognising the sensitivity of the experience of the young men attending the setting and the outstanding work over the years of the staff and trustees - holding all in the light.

A SURFEIT OF TIME

Lesley Chandler

where she now lives
there is no respite from shouts / screams
the banging of doors

where she now lives
eating is communal with survivors who foraged from bins
she does not complain

where she now lives
she is permitted two visits a month
four after eight weeks

where she now lives
regulations state thirty minutes exercise daily
weather and staff permitting

where she now lives
she is a teacher of card games and
english to her struggling cellmate

where she now lives
she battles to find beauty in the natural world
save a handful of magpies and pigeons

where she now lives
she can just catch beyond the razor wire
the changing colour of the leaves

where she now lives
is not home separated from family / friends
by england's courtly sanctions

where she now lives to await release
she has a surfeit of time
pondering pollution and poisoning

catastrophe and chaos
protests for peace
bedtime stories for grandchildren

This is a single set of reflections based on the shared thoughts of one of the record number of climate activists imprisoned this year (2024). The length of their sentences is extremely punitive for nonviolent actions related to worsening climate crisis. This Friend is currently serving a twenty month sentence.

THE PRISON PSYCHIATRIST'S WIFE

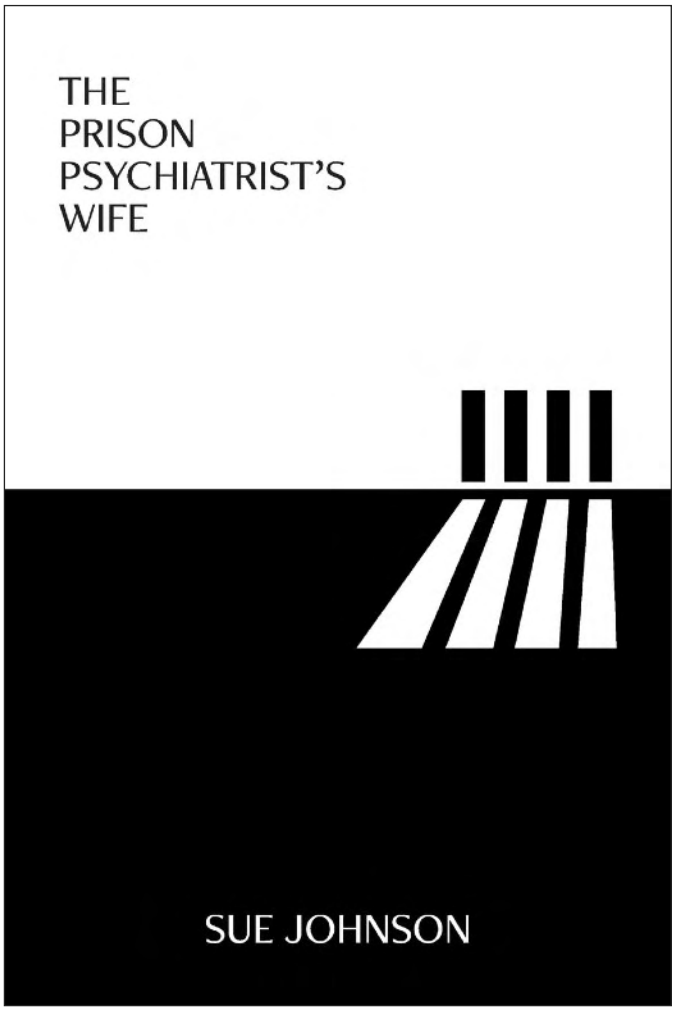
Martin Schweiger

The Prison Psychiatrist's Wife by Sue Johnson.
Published by Waterside Press. £16.50p

Hazel Arthur of Carlton Hill Meeting put this book in my hands and said I would find it interesting. She was right. I had heard Bob Johson talking at Easter Settlement some years ago but had not really taken on board what he was saying.

The book is a very personal account of Sue Johnson's experiences of being alongside a psychiatrist working at Parkhurst Prison on the Isle of Wight. Bob and Sue have Quaker connections and had a Quaker wedding. Bob's work with the prisoners on C Wing was transformative. Digging into motivations and influences affecting seriously disturbed men, who had all killed people previously, Bob Johnson exposed cruel upbringing and other terrors in childhood. By helping the prisoners to recognise their past and face it now as adults brought about positive change.

The results of his approach upset many colleagues and the Prison system. It also deeply upset the then Home Secretary, Michael Howard, who wanted to show that a tough incarceration policy worked. The video tapes he had carefully collected demonstrated the changes that could be achieved with some very violent men. Significantly C Wing became a quieter place with fewer alarms and difficult incidents. None the less Bob had to resign his post at Parkhurst. Sue had accompanied Bob through all the difficult times and a court case that followed. She also was able to see a number of the prisoners after they had been moved to other prisons and could report on lasting change in them.



A moving forward to the book was written by Charles Bronson, one of the most violent men ever imprisoned in the UK.

Definitely recommend this book for anyone who ever thinks about both the harm and the good that people can do to each other.

CIRCLES - 30 YEARS ON

Tim Newell

The conference celebrating this remarkable work of healing took place in Friends House in November. The need for the process of supporting and holding accountable high risk high need sex offenders was described by our friend Sir Terry Waite in a moving address. The conference featured and celebrated the expanding application of a process begun by a Mennonite Church in Canada thirty years ago, taken up by Quakers in Britain 22 years ago and now spreading to several countries in Europe. The work in Britain was in response to a nasty media campaign and subsequent attacks on innocent people mistaken for paedophiles. I remember taking the issue with Helen Drewery to Sufferings to get agreement that we would lead on the issue with the support of the Home Office. The first project began in the Thames Valley Partnership, the outstanding community justice group in Buckinghamshire.

The conference was told by Harry Nye of the Mennonite Church about how the first circle started responding to the need of Charlie Taylor, a high risk, high need offender, released from prison with no community support. Five men and five women from the Mennonite community formed ‘Charlie’s Angels ‘and met daily in some form either individually or together and won over the support of the local police in so doing. Charlie died at home after 12 years of successful community living. The model spread slowly in Canada and through various write ups about the process British Quakers took the issue to the Home Office. With their financial support Sufferings agreed to take the matter forward. A small committee of interested parties including members of groups working with victims of sexual crime met in the Thames Valley. The experience of the Lucy Faithful Foundation in already trying out similar support groups helped progress the commitment to starting Circles locally. The appointment of two outstanding Thames Valley Probation Officers to lead the work was critical and they are still involved today.

There was resistance from the popular media to the idea, but the work started with recruitment of volunteers and their preparation. Needless to say, there had to be safety protocols and procedures established to ensure support for the volunteers. Remarkably many people came forward and still do.

The conference heard about the progress from the original pilot groups (flourishing still) and several European countries about the introduction of Circles in their processes. The simple idea of befriending a lonely, isolated, vulnerable and potentially risky person in the community through the power of personal contact, interest and concern was shown to be the safest way to integrate and support high risk, high need people within the community. Behind the simple idea is a mass of carefully developed protocols, procedures and training to maintain safeguarding of all involved.

The work continues and the high numbers of people currently being convicted of sexual offences shows the need for such effective support in the future. The success of Circles in reducing recidivism and keeping communities safe is clear and calls for our continuing support.

2025 CONFERENCE UPDATE

Melanie Jameson

2025 Conference at Ammerdown, March 7-9

This year we shall take as our themes: **Unheard Voices and the Future of the CJS**. The Unheard Voices are those of a Prison Officer, victim of crime and the family member of an IPP prisoner. We shall also be given an overview of the direction of travel within the CJS involving greater use of technology.
Further details and booking form in next newsletter, meanwhile contact Simon for registration qicjmembership@gmail.com

A DEEP DIVE INTO THE CJS

Melanie Jameson

Melanie Jameson takes a dive into the Criminal Justice System

In this article I shall take a broad sweep across various parts of the criminal justice system (CJS), including an update on the on-going scandal of Imprisonment for Public Protection (IPP), the growing numbers of protesters in custody, the Independent Sentencing Review, and QICJ's on-going concern: to facilitate the welcoming of former Prisoners into Meetings.

Maybe the place to start is the funding of Ministry of Justice (MoJ), usually reduced year on year as MoJ is a not a 'protected department'. However this time there is an increase of 4.3% for 2025-26 for day-to-day spending, along with a rise in the capital budget of 14.9%. But, as observers have pointed out, this is still a reduction in real terms compared with the period before 2010.

So what do we expect to see funded? The biggest slice goes on extra prison spaces (£2.3 billion) - there is talk of 14,000 additional places. Then there are measures to keep prisons 'safe and secure', followed by 'maintenance' of prison & probation services. £500 million has been allocated to recruit thousands of new staff (but what can be done to retain them, they are leaving in droves!) and deliver thousands of new electronic tags.

You may recall that SERCO failed to provide enough tags for the early release scheme, not the first time it has fallen short. How many of us recall the fraud perpetrated by SERCO and G4S around 10 years ago when they claimed millions for tagging when some of the individuals they listed did not even exist? I always thought that fraud was a criminal offence, but in this case both SERCO and G4S have been rewarded with ever more government contracts.

Imprisonment for Public Protection (IPP) Update

The IPP situation drags on, with a Private Members Bill making some progress. Although politicians on all sides of the House agree that this sentence was rightly abolished, there is deep disagreement regarding those still imprisoned. Expert groups still call for re-sentencing, as does the Bill, but neither main party will countenance this. Meanwhile the good news is that the IPP sentence has finally been terminated for former prisoners who have been in the community for five years or three years after a successful parole hearing. This took place from Nov 1st; I was relieved to receive confirmation from a QICJ member with lived experience of IPP. The Centre for Crime & Justice Studies, with whom we work closely, continues to be the main mover on IPP injustices, involving the families. Their website will always get you up to date: www.crimeandjustice.org.uk/search/node/IPP

Activists in prison

Another imprisoned group that I have become increasingly involved with, is the 'Whole Truth Five' climate activists now in custody, with the longest sentence being five years for Roger Hallam, co-founder of Extinction Rebellion and Just Stop Oil, who describes himself as 'influenced by Quakerism'. Currently the three women are together in HMP Styal whereas the men are both in HMP Weyland. Quakers who have been imprisoned for climate activism describe how their presence witnesses to prisoners and officers alike, who are surprised at their sentences and are sympathetic. Regular vigils ensure that the 'Whole Truth Five', who were forbidden to mention the climate crisis during their trial, remain in the public eye. Appeals against the sentences are underway but unable to proceed due to court backlogs, so it seems unlikely they will be released any time soon.

As more protesters are prepared to face arrest and imprisonment in desperation at government's refusals to take viable measures to halt global warming, we shall see this cohort increasing. They are joined by others who have crossed the line in their support of Palestine.

A Judicial Critique

You will have heard about the Howard League's initiative in convening a group of Lords Chief Justice and other experts, to undertake a 'judicial critique' of sentencing. This makes the point, as we have long argued, that sentence deflation must be part of any review of sentencing policy. The following figures are often quoted: a prison population of 40,000 in 1991; today one teetering on the edge of 88,000.

The Chair of the group stated: "If prisons are to become places of rehabilitation and restoration to citizenship, places where prisoners can receive the support and interventions needed to return safely to the community and desist from offending, there needs to be a fundamental shift in the drivers of sentencing policy.
"We call for an honest conversation about what custodial sentences can and cannot achieve; their human and financial costs; and urge a return to more modest proportionate sentences across the board." Hear hear!
https://howardleague.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/09/Sentencing-inflation-a-judicial-critique__September-2024-1.pdf

You may recall that I called for sentence deflation in our last newsletter, in addition to reducing recall to prison and cutting numbers of remand prisoners (again due to unprecedented court backlogs). In the long term, these multiple issues would be best addressed by reinstating the Royal Commission on CJ. A more immediate, albeit limited, approach is an Independent Review of policy. So, read on…

The Independent Review of Sentencing

An Independent Review of Sentencing is now confirmed, chaired by one of the better former heads of the MoJ, David Gawke. This has three core principles:

Ensuring that 'prison sentences punish serious offenders and protect the public' and that there is always prison space for 'the most dangerous offenders'

Looking at what more can be done about rehabilitation and keeping the public safe by reducing reoffending

Exploring 'tougher punishments outside of prison'

Evidence from the UK and abroad will be taken into consideration. The latter will surely highlight that we are an outlier in locking up so many people for such long periods – and have a 'trigger-happy' approach to recall. More detail here:

https://www.gov.uk/guidance/independent-sentencing-review-2024-to-2025

I note the following exclusions: IPP sentences and administration; use of remand; youth sentencing; out-of-court resolutions and the murder sentencing framework, all out of scope.

What is Shabana Mahmood, now MoJ Secretary of State, saying about the prison crisis? Well, she won't be drawn on reducing numbers, apart from the early release scheme. And I see nothing to effectively tackle the combination of appallingly squalid living conditions, neglected maintenance, staff absence, lack of 'purposeful activity' and resettlement work, over-crowding and despair, all described by the former Quaker Chaplain at HMP Wandsworth, speaking at our recent QICJ Prisons Week event. (Recordings of The Good, The Bad and The Ugly, are available at www.qicj.org/events/2024pw.html)

The New Futures Network

Are there any indicators of success? Well, how about the New Futures Network, introduced by the previous government, to improve the low levels of employment of ex- prisoners. Judging from a conference I attended during its early days, it appeared to support a limited number of vocational areas – entrepreneurship, at which a number of talented neurodivergent people excel, was not among them. The mainstream media recently reported on Greene King which, through the New Futures Network, is training 60 prisoners a year in prisons. Although small scale, their efforts are admirable, and so far 260 men have gained employment with them. But far more employers need to be engaged. With 87,726 currently incarcerated (June 2024 figures) there is a long way to go. On the current early release scheme, we learn of people being released without accommodation, let alone jobs.

Welcoming Former Prisoners (WFP)

Finally let us come to QICJ. Our WFP working group continues to seek experiences of welcoming (or deciding NOT to welcome) former prisoners into Quaker Meetings.

In a document which we hope will form the basis of guidance for the Society of Friends, our aims are listed as exploring issues that can arise, laying out a systematic way of considering them, and directing Friends to resources and sources of support.

It has helped our deliberations to finally get a reply to key questions to the lead Prison Chaplain, who has clarified the position as to whether Chaplains have a responsibility to connect those who request it with their local worshipping group. Furthermore, we have learnt that there is a formal Prison Service Instruction, Faith and Pastoral Care for Prisoners PSI 05/2016 that talks of using the nationwide network of churches and other faith

communities to support successful resettlement on release [section 15.5].

We are looking at licence conditions in more detail, leading to contracts between the authorities and a small Quaker 'Receiving Group'. Considerable support is available. By the time this newsletter is out, both the QICJ Committee and our Justice Interest Group will have improved the draft which will then be ready for comments from the BYM Safeguarding Officer and our membership. Please engage with this initiative to 'answer that of God in everyone.'

QUAKERS & ABOLITION: A CONVERSATION

John Tranter

This publication is the outcome of a 'conversation' organised by the Scottish Community Justice Network in April 2024 held in Glasgow Meeting House. However, it is more than a write-up of papers and presentations.

Places of incarceration are invariably surrounded by impenetrable barriers, dissociating the unfree from the free in more ways than just the physical. They are places that remove people from families and communities, as well as cultural interactions and everyday experiences of the natural world. A joy of this account is its use of a zine format with content that includes quotes from those incarcerated, poetry, art and prose, and articles. It is an approach that feels in harmony with and celebrates that of God in everyone. Using a zine style also echoes the pamphlets used in the 17th century when Quakers were more than radical; they were revolutionary. The quotes provided span a period from 1918 to this decade. They are immensely poignant and provide a first-hand critique of the prison regime. Reading them brought to mind the work of the American legal academic James Bronsther, who argues that long prison sentences are not just costly and ineffective but also constitute torture, torture as the denial of an individual's humanity.

Abolition, including prisons and policing, is, for many, too far-fetched a concept. Participants in the conversation were challenged to set aside conventional wisdom and 'imagine radical approaches.' As the articles explore, fundamental to being open to considering an abolitionist approach is the recognition that reforming the current system will never remove the inequalities in our society and, indeed, historically, have worked to reinforce injustice. Whilst Quakers are widely known for their work in prison reform and humanitarian work, the writers remind us that Quakers, notably Fay Honey Knopp, were also active in the early days of the prison abolition movement.

Reversing the approach of saying yes to abolition, Mike Nellis writes that the Quaker testimony of being against or saying no to practices of injustice makes 'space for something better to emerge'. As Kirstin Andersen explains, abolition questions the system that produces incarceration and the acceptance of the over-punishment of the most marginalised. Abolition is a practice that challenges the status quo, just as those campaigning for climate justice do.

Returning to the humanising approach of the zine, Pete Clarke gives an account of the use of the Therapeutic Community model as an example of an alternative approach; prisons as a form of punishment are counterproductive when applied to those who have experienced trauma in their lives. The account of TC is hopeful and challenging, recognising the individual as having agency in their personal development. That is not to say that words such as therapy and treatment are not without their problems when used in a criminal justice context. The publication includes a helpful reading list that includes European perspectives. I would also recommend the Abolitionist Futures website and their reading groups for those wanting to continue their exploration. (https://abolitionistfutures.com/reading-groups)

This brief review may have foregrounded the articles in the publication, but my overall takeaway was how powerful (and beautiful) it was to experience the mix of contributions throughout. It is an accessible, engaging and worthwhile read.

John has just completed an MA in Postcolonial Studies. His dissertation was entitled: 'Reform or abolition: How might Quakers respond to the British neoliberal criminal justice system?'.

https://www.quakerscotland.org/sites/quakerscotland.org/files/documents/AbolitionPublicationDigitalVersion.pdf

The People's Tribunal on Police Killings: first session 4-5 April 2025

The People's Tribunal on Police Killings has emerged as a radical grassroots initiative led by families of those killed by the police in the UK. With more than 3000 deaths at the hands of the police over the past 50 years there have only been 4 successful prosecutions that led to police officers being convicted and going to prison. It is an international initiative with a 10 year plan of actions that aims to deliver the justice that every family has demanded. The organisers are inviting people to 'Come as a supporter, come as a witness, come to be the agent of change'.

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