

## Book Reviews

### **Alexander Paterson: Prison Reformer**

By Harry Potter

Publisher: The Boydell Press

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*Reviewer: Lewis Simpson is a Lecturer in Criminology at Leeds Beckett University.*

Potter's book of the life and work of Alexander Paterson is an outstanding contribution to understanding the values that were held by a historic figure in the history of prisons in England and Wales. The book examines many elements of Paterson's life, recognising how his youth and studenthood had informed his philanthropic and humanitarian ambitions in life. The book then expands into a detailed and deeply interesting explanation of his political and managerial endeavours in punishment and criminal justice. Having always been an admirer of Paterson's penal agenda, this text only reinforces the reason why he was so respected and continues to be by students of prisons. Potter not only offers a masterclass in the practices of a historical criminologist but writes to inspire action to the contemporary issues we face with punishment and imprisonment. Readers could enter this book with no knowledge on Paterson, and still walk away feeling inspired to engage in prison reform.

Patterson is no doubt an influential prison reformer, his time in the Prison Commission has left a lasting legacy and longing for a similar approach, with authors still referring to the 'Paterson era'. This is particularly poignant as he was never chairman of the Prison Commission, yet his influential values are now synonymous with

the period between 1922-1939. Not only did he impact adult prisons, but his reach and influence saw the transformation of the Borstal systems promoting that 'it cannot train them in an atmosphere of captivity and repression' (p. 243). For those who are unfamiliar with this period of prison reform, Potter details Patterson's ambitions, determinations, and ethos of punishment in great detail. Using a wide range of evidence from people witnessing Patterson's reforms first hand make this text an anthology of voices as well as a narrative of development. Potter brilliantly presents the Patterson era, addressing how and why his libertarian and humanitarian views became central to his work on prisons and punishment.

Potter details many areas of Paterson's life, exploring his values, perspectives, and moral campaigns through a fantastic use of letters, stories, and cross referencing to historical publications. This produces an insightful way of presenting Paterson's life and ambitions and gives voice to those who were able to speak to, witness, and interpret their own thoughts on his work and manner of supporting people. I believe that Potter, through this approach, recognises the complexity in Paterson's interests as he sought to increase the quality of life with all those around him. The early chapters clearly present his alma mater and humanist crusades that eventually lead to his work and focus on the Borstal system and to prisons. In the early chapters, the author presents some excellent foreshadowing, showing the reader how Paterson's experiences would lead towards future works in charities and within criminal justice. This not only hooks the reader further, but also

emphasises the manifestation of Paterson's value basis which would later lead to his most memorable qualities when working with offenders. Indeed, Potter claims that Paterson often presented himself as an observer of the world, where he recognised inequalities, injustice, and made calls for change through a distinct approach. This approach is characterised by the author as 'descriptive rather than prescriptive, to state the problem not to solve it, although he did suggest many ameliorations' (p84). It solidifies the view of Paterson as an observer first, intervener second.

I found particular interest in reading around Paterson's early life and career, as Potter truly frames and builds a clear representation of the values and moral commitment that he held. This excellent building of his character is seen throughout the book, with the author constantly recollecting changes, ambitions, and goals that Paterson set for himself. The mid to late chapters on his work during the Prison Commission further capture his strong philosophical and penological stance. I find this difficult to represent in a review, as the quality and quantity of detail that Potter provides does more than highlight actions and events, but an ethos for punishment and penal action that are elsewhere seen in penological writing. The ability to forget about the Paterson I read as an undergraduate and to learn his values anew, is evident of the author's outstanding contribution to understanding a specific time of penal reform. Potter then leaves the reader with an account of Paterson's legacy, acknowledging his contribution to prisons and Borstals whilst also addressing the lasting impact he made to penal reformers. Whilst Potter

acknowledges that Paterson's work can no longer be directly recognised in contemporary imprisonment, one cannot help but feel impassioned to strive for change and reform, using the same values and frames seen during the Paterson era.

This text represents the importance of good historical methodology in criminology. Potter not only presents a strong overview of Paterson's work but also demonstrates detailed work that is not usually seen when reading about the history of prisons and reform; making this book the central text to understand the work of Paterson. I can see this text holding great interest for those fascinated in the history of imprisonment, and for those who seek to share the moral and philosophical views that Paterson developed and established with those working in, living in, and studying prisons. Readers should be aware this text cannot be simply read as a biography, a history, or a manifesto for penal reform. It is all of these things, making this unique, comprehensive, and incredibly personal to its readers.

### **Minority Ethnic Prisoners and the Covid-19 Lockdown — Issues, Impacts and Implications**

By Avril Brandon and Gavin Dingwall

Publisher: Bristol University Press (2022)

ISBN: 978-1529219555 (Hardback) 978-1529219562 (EPub)

Price: £47.99 (Hardback) £16.99 (EPub)

*Reviewer: Martin Kettle is an inspector with HM Inspectorate of Prisons*

The rhetoric of 'we're all in this together' has so shaped narratives about the Covid-19 pandemic that the differential impacts on certain minority populations may have been persistently underplayed. In the community, the worse outcomes for racialised people are

well established, and it is timely that Brandon and Dingwall have shone a light on how this played out in prisons. They focus on 'minority ethnic' prisoners, foreign nationals, and those from the Irish Travelling and Roma communities. The study covers all the UK nations, and the Republic of Ireland.

The research was conducted while the pandemic was still at its height, so it is not based on face-to-face interviews in prisons. The authors give a summary of the impact of the pandemic and its management, citing dozens of inspection reports and a rich variety of quotes from prisoners. They do justice to the successes arising from close collaboration between prison leaders and the public health bodies, including the remarkable work of Dr Eamonn O'Moore and his public health team; but they also set out evidence of the negative impacts of restricted regimes on prisoners' mental health.

Black, Asian and minority ethnic prisoners are the first group examined (the authors are alive to the difficulties of labelling). The community realities are well known — in the UK, when age was taken into account, Black people were 4.2 (males) or 4.3 (females) times more likely to die than White people (p.30); while after adjusting from a range of other variables, Black people were still almost twice as likely to die a COVID-related death. The possible causal factors are helpfully rehearsed, as is the over-representation of Black, Asian and minority ethnic people in prison. HMIP is cited as saying that 'there had been little or no monitoring of the impact of Covid-19 on various prisoner groups' (p.34).

The authors consider the COVID-related death rate among prisoners with Black (4 per cent of deaths) or Asian (9 per cent) heritage, compared with 87 per cent White; the difference in age profile between these sub-populations is probably relevant.

They then move to the tricky issues of mental health, saying 'it may be argued that minority ethnic groups are no less likely to experience mental health problems, but ... may be less likely to receive diagnosis and/or treatment' (p.36). They cite useful evidence from the Zahid Mubarek Trust, and also commend the work of chaplaincy staff in maintaining in-person pastoral support throughout.

Evidence of differences in staff-prisoner relationships is then considered, extending to incentives systems, access to prison jobs, release on temporary licence, complaints, and access to the discrimination incident reporting process. Little evidence is cited linking inequitable outcomes directly to the pandemic, but in general the inequities are acute, and the claim that 'the impact of the Covid-19 lockdown in prisons has . . . differentially affected minority ethnic groups' (p.50), though hard to evidence, is not implausible.

Among foreign nationals, there may well have been greater impacts from Covid-19 in the community. In prisons, those who did not understand English were inevitably disadvantaged in a fast-changing situation where health and regime information was being pushed out in English on almost a daily basis, and where clear information on arrival in prison was vital; additionally, this group may be less likely to disclose risk factors such as mental health problems (p.58). HMIP Scotland drew attention sharply to some of these issues, while in the Republic of Ireland, chaplaincies were commended for providing interpretation. Some prisons ensured that Covid-19-related information was translated — for example, at HMP Bedford the governor's weekly newsletter was translated into 25 languages in 2021 (p. 64), with similar examples in the other jurisdictions such as a

fortnightly newsletter in eight languages delivered to every cell in the Irish Prison Service. The fast rollout of video-calling in all the jurisdictions also made a difference to foreign nationals, especially at HMP Huntercombe (p. 65). In staff-prisoner relationships, the same types of differential outcomes applied as with Black, Asian and minority ethnic people (above), while the anxiety of many foreign nationals about their immigration status was exacerbated during the pandemic by the increased difficulty of contact with Home Office staff, or with external support agencies.

In the community, the Irish Traveller and Roma groups have been particularly impacted by the pandemic. The Taoiseach's office has said that 'existing vulnerabilities of the Traveller and Roma communities in health and accommodation put them at particular risk of contracting the virus' (p.77f). This applies equally to mental health: 'for members of [these] communities, who are already disproportionately impacted by mental illness and suicide, the impact of isolation may be critical' (p.81). ZMT research supported this, citing reduced access to culturally appropriate support and advocacy services. Chaplaincy support again comes through as a strength.

The inability to see family has hit these prisoners hard. Traveller families often have less access to technology and internet than most settled-majority people, and a requirement for proof of address caused difficulties initially.

Finally, the book considers the fast-changing issues of moving out of lockdown. The authors mention 'video visits' as a real gain, but they assert, controversially, that 'a pre-pandemic regime is not what post-pandemic prisons need'.

The book's conclusions in relation to the minority groups which it studies are modest. The impacts common to all prisoners are increased by existing vulnerabilities

of these sub-populations and by patterns of (mainly indirect) discrimination. There are some redeeming factors, such as video visits, though even they have downsides, for GRT people in particular. The book presents its evidence concisely, and is as valuable for its summaries of the general impacts of Covid-19, and of experiences of discrimination, as for the case which it presents for differential impact of the pandemic on specific minority groups.

### **Prisoners' Families, Emotions and Space**

By Maria Adams

Publisher: Policy Press (2022)

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(EPUB)

*Reviewer: Lynn Saunders*  
*OBE is Professor of Law and Social Sciences at the University of Derby*

As the title suggests this book explores the experiences of prisoner's families. It considers the experiences of family members visiting three Scottish prisons, before, and during Covid restrictions. Family members are interviewed and the emotional impact that visiting prisons has, is explored. The book gives a rare voice to family members and their experiences of visiting prisons, how they deal with the process and impact of a period of imprisonment, featuring the themes of space, emotions and identity.

The author had experience of working in prison as a playworker and her analysis is much focused on the implications of the restrictions to visits on the emotional wellbeing of family members, and the limitations of visiting areas in prisons. She also explores how the attitude and approach of prison staff impact on the experience of visiting a family member in prison.

She argues that emotions are a neglected area in the sociology of prisons research. The book offers insight into how the experiences of visitors to prisons influence both the organisation of the institution and its policy.

The book is based on a PhD study and explores a number of themes which are divided into chapters. These include, how prison visiting rooms can sustain relationships, how strict body searches and security checks are an example of social control of prisoner's families, how the extensive periods that family members need to wait at a number of stages in their visits are further exercises in control, how families manage adversity, and how the space allowed for visits to prisons is often a matter of local policy.

The introduction explores the context of the research on which the book is based and outlines the nature and necessity of the visiting restrictions as a result of the Covid pandemic. She also explores the phased resumption of visiting arrangements describing them as 'sterile' (p. 9) and challenging for visitors. Researched in three prisons in Scotland, the book explores the varying architectural designs and how they had an impact on the visitors' experiences. In particular, the theme of 'waiting' (p. 68) is explored and how this is a feature of a number of aspects of the visit. She explores the implications of the length of time it takes for visitors to travel to prisons, and when prisoners are moved with very little notice how unsettling this was for family members. The author suggests that 'waiting' is a form of social control experienced by visitors that leads to shame and fear.

The author suggests that families' survival of the incarceration process involves both resilience and time, and that family members adopt a range of coping strategies. These include 'keeping

busy' and 'activism' which she describes as 'subtle changes that contribute to improving families' confidence and self-esteem'. (p. 91)

Chapter 2 focuses on how gender is an important contribution to understanding the experiences of prisoner's families and how a caring role can provide coping mechanisms for families to deal with a period of imprisonment. The author focuses on the subject matter from a Feminist perspective exploring the relationship between space, place, and the focus of power. She comments on the importance of visits while also acknowledging their limitations as a substitute for the home environment.

The role of visiting rooms in sustaining relationships for prisoners and their families is explored in Chapter 3. The author discusses whether the visits room is a 'place of care or a place of confinement' and explores the role and function of children's' visits sessions describing them as 'artificial home life'. (p. 28) She concludes that children's visits cannot replicate the home environment, but that they play an important role in the maintenance of contact between prisoners and their children. Chapter 4 then documents families' experiences of space dominated by social control and how space for families is regulated by prison authorities.

The recurrent theme of 'waiting' both during the prison visiting process and in the wider criminal justice process, is discussed in Chapter 5, and whether this is an exercise in social control. However, the practical management of the visiting processes are not considered in the discussion. The author argues that waiting is a significant part of families' lived experience of visiting prisons. One research participant states that they are 'doing the sentence with them'. (p. 71)

Chapter 6 entitled 'Surviving the Incarceration Process', explores how incarceration affects families and the importance of the role of social support in improving their resilience. The importance of 'space' in determining the experiences of families is examined in Chapter 7. The author concludes that 'space, emotions and identity' and criminology and geography are important lenses through which to analyse the experiences of prisoners and their families.

The book is an interesting exploration of the first-hand experiences of family members in a much under-researched area. The emotional impact of a prison sentence on family members and the effort required to maintain relationships is something that both prison managers, and policy makers should bear in mind when designing visiting areas and services for visitors.

### **What we fear most: Reflections on a life in Forensic Psychiatry**

By Ben Cave

Publisher: Orion Publishing Co

ISBN: 9781841885544 (Hardback)

Price: £18.99

*Reviewer: Ray Taylor LL.M. is a security policy official at His Majesty's Prison and Probation Service.*

What we fear most is an apt title for a work that explores, not just a life in forensic psychiatric medicine, but the social environment that nurtures the conditions such medicine has developed to treat. In his autobiography, Ben Cave explores and reflects on his own background and environment as much as he does that of his patients and the other people around him. Unlike most autobiographies, however, the book does not merely track the humdrum events of the subject's lifetime. This one takes a more detailed and contextual look at the

author's life, reflecting on all he has learnt of his profession. It starts with the author's formative years living within a dysfunctional middle-class family, and how his early experiences helped him to find his calling as a doctor specialising in psychiatry. It continues by providing an insight into some of the conditions he has treated through the experiences he has shared with his patients.

For in Cave's work, the focus of the narrative is on the relationship between patient and psychiatrist and how this has assisted in developing a greater understanding of the conditions the author has treated over the decades. The 'fear' in the title is, if I understand the author correctly, one of the typical aspects of presentation noted in the book. This should be no surprise to anyone who has spent any time working in carceral environments or those who have interacted with people dealing with some form of mental distress or illness, whether diagnosed or not. See a person arrive in prison for the first time and you will often see fear in their eyes, their behaviour, and their interactions with others. For those convicted of a violent offence in which an unbalanced state of mind was a causal factor, the part fear may have played is all too evident in the case studies cited by Cave. These 'cases' are explored through conversations with the patient and the observations of one who is clearly a prominent expert in such presentations.

*What we fear most* is accessible and the narrative engaging. It takes the reader on a journey through the learning of one individual as they progress through knowledge gained from experience. There is undoubtedly an important element of commitment on the part of the young man who progresses through the early stages of his career in medicine. I don't know from experience, but I can't imagine many junior doctors voluntarily

remaining overnight in a hospital after their shift has completed, for instance, to get closer to the patient and their environment.

Cave's learning discussed in the book often comes as much through error, as it does from getting things right from the start, which adds to the humanity and accessibility of the narrative. On one occasion, for example, the younger Dr Cave prescribes certain medication for symptoms that include shaking hands, a known side-effect of medication the patient had previously been prescribed. Cave later sees the man selling the medication in a bar, clearly demonstrating that his unwitting doctor has 'been had'.

There are thankfully more examples of Cave getting it right than getting it wrong. Although one might expect an element of self-congratulation in an autobiography such as this (one reason I don't often read them) Cave's examples appear to be genuinely illustrative. They help the reader gain insight into some of the clinical conditions discussed in the book.

If the book is an accurate depiction of the author's experiences and relationships with patients, it is one that provides a model of empathy and emotional

intelligence. Cave, it transpires, is not afraid of forming an emotional connection with a patient. On the contrary, it seems that, during his career, Cave has embraced the need to connect with his patients and clearly found it as clinically informative as it was emotionally satisfying.

Crying together with a distressed patient for instance. Or in understanding that, by successfully treating a patient who was convicted of killing her own child, he also brought to her the realisation of the enormity of what she had done. 'So, this [knowledge of what she had done] is my punishment?' the patient asks him. Would it have been kinder to the patient to leave her in blissful ignorance of her actions or was it more important to treat her and bring her to the realisation, not just of the reality of her actions but also (Cave hopes) the understanding that they resulted from an illness and (in light of the theme of the book) from an incapacitating fear.

This book also includes some very useful reminders, such as the rarity of a successful plea of insanity. Given media perceptions of mental illness being used as an 'excuse' for some crimes, it provides a timely reminder that few people escape conviction for a violent

offence simply because of their clinical condition. Experiences discussed in the book include providing clinical evidence to courts and tribunals. Not all his patients were offenders, however, and each of the people (suitably anonymised) and their conditions discussed helps to provide understanding of their presentation and the importance of 'fear' to many clinical conditions.

One of the 'cases' Cave discusses deals with the difficult subject of the person's ultimate suicide. Not an offender, not a patient, but a clinical colleague. A harrowing account that provides a useful reminder of our responsibility to listen to those around us and to give them the care and support they need when it is needed most. It is also a timely reminder of the thin line that may be drawn between those of us who are recognised as having a clinical mental disorder and those who live without the kind of help that may be provided by an appropriate diagnosis and treatment.

Highly readable and certainly more accessible than your average book about psychiatry, *What we fear most* is packed with anecdotes and little Quality-Street-wrapped excerpts from Cave's life and career as a psychiatrist.