

Styal Prison & Young Offender Institution for Women

What makes this category 'C' semi-secure prison unusual is its setting. Apart from the high-wire perimeter fence it looks rather like a small country village with houses, lawns, tree-lined roads and a black and white timber framed church. Originally built in the 1880s as a children's home for Manchester orphans it was converted to a prison in the 1960s.

Apart from the segregation block, a family atmosphere still prevails with inmates living in self-contained houses with dormitories, dining room, sitting room, kitchen and bathrooms, only the external doors being locked.

We were struck by the warmth, friendliness and caring attitude of the staff. 114 of these are uniformed and fifty six are civilians. One the day we visited, there were 197 inmates ranging from young offenders to 'lifers'. New inmates are assessed on arrival and young offenders are housed with older women who the staff consider are sensible and reliable. We were told this has a stabilising effect on the youngsters.

All prisoners have to work or have education for up to seven hours a day, five days a week. Jobs range from cooking, gardening, cleaning and clerical work to making shirts for British Nuclear Fuels in the fully equipped workshop which is run on factory lines. Here the women are trained to cut out, sew, press and make-up garments by civilians from the commercial field.

In the 'school' inmates have tuition for G.C.S.E. and 'A' levels, open learning, Open University, computer and word processing courses. Mothers with babies in the prison learn home economics, child care and cookery.

All inmates are paid for either work or education. An orderly earns £2.95 per week, plus overtime at week-ends, and an education student receives £1.95 per week.

A separate house for mothers and babies accommodates up to twelve mums and their infants. It includes a lounge with toys, playpens and baby walkers, a kitchen with bottle sterilising equipment, a bathroom with baby baths and a laundry. A nursing sister is on duty 24 hours a day to deal with emergencies and give advice on breast and bottle feeding, nappy changing and any other problems. Mothers can provide their own prams if they wish, and supervised walks are often taken outside the prison to the local village and post office. The emphasis is put on equipping young mothers to care for their offspring on their release from prison.

Pat Lawrence is a journalist, researcher, reporter, broadcaster, media consultant and magistrate.

East Sutton Park Prison and YOI

Three ISTD members comment on what they found during their visit.

One of the most striking things about East Sutton Park is the beauty of the old English manor house and the attached park and farm lands. The

inmates appear happy and the atmosphere is relaxed. No-one need ever know that in other prisons riots were taking place.

The establishment has capacity to hold eighty four women of all ages from seventeen upwards, in open conditions. The present population is seventy seven, of which three are young offenders and thirty five are foreign nationals awaiting deportation following drugs related offences. The absence of any graffiti, vandalism and pornography was quite marked in contrast to other, particularly male, prisons. Over 40% of the inmates are from ethnic minorities and 20% of those are deportees.

The one common complaint from the inmates was of lack of privacy, being brought from other single cell prisons to share rooms with up to seven other inmates was a shock for most of the women. But only between twelve and twenty inmates abscond each year.

East Sutton Park is a working prison and inmates work on the farm, the gardens, building maintenance, and a range of other jobs. Education courses are provided and new computers have recently been acquired for use on the Business Skills course. Evening classes are also offered in a range of subjects.

Cindy Rymer, National Association of Citizens Advice Bureaux

East Sutton Park is the only women's open establishment in the south eastern region. I found my visit there to be one of great satisfaction insofar as it was refreshing to see once again a penal establishment that was intent of helping the inmates to come to terms with a better way of life rather than to be incarcerated in an enclosed prison. The present governor and his deputy appear to lead their forthright but caring staff into making sure that the women in their care are given ample opportunity of realising that they are on trust during their stay in this open prison but nevertheless realising that they have not as yet obtained full freedom in the outside world.

Thirty six women are generally employed in the farm within the grounds as well as in the nursery areas. Nearly half of the inmates are black and whilst there appears to be little tension between the black and white inmates, there is evidently a great deal of animosity and tension between the Africans and West



Mike Abrahams Network Photos

One of the many activities at East Sutton Park

Indians. A positive sign however is that all of the inmates appear to react favourably to the governor, deputy governor and staff and it is pleasing to note that those in authority are available to be seen by any inmate that may have a particular grouse or problem that they wish to discuss.

During an informal discussion with the governor it was reassuring to be told that the prison has an excellent rapport with the local community, even to the extent that people running businesses in the locality consider and are prepared to employ some of the women from East Sutton Park. This is a step in the right direction.

The annual budget is in the region of £1m. In my opinion this is not too high a price to pay to educate men and women who receive custodial sentences rather than taking the attitude of 'lock 'em up and throw away the key'.

David Garson is a freelance journalist.

Incarceration in an exquisite sixteenth century oak panelled house in the beautiful county of Kent, is still deprivation of liberty. East Sutton Park is an open prison for women with no perimeter security. The grounds and garden appear to be the best kept in the prison system.

Education rather than penal measures are encouraged so that these 'ladies of the state' can acquire feminine skills in soft furnishings, home economics and commerce. Physical recreation is very popular, not only for the ladies' health and physical fitness but also perhaps because the P.E. Instructor is a man. The young 'ladies of the state' have a right to continuing education. As captives within the system they have a fine opportunity to catch up on wasted years. Education may enable them to reintegrate more easily with their peers who stayed out of trouble rather than to keep company with the new friends acquired in custody. Article 40 of *The Draft Convention on the Rights of the Child 1989* safeguarded the rights to a fair trial of a child who has offended. Art. 40(4) provided alternative measures to incarceration. The 'Beijing Rules' Art. 26(2) enumerated what juveniles in institutions should receive. What all policy, instruments and convention should also spell out is the quality of education for the young 'ladies of the state'.

As it is an open prison, the urge to make a break for freedom occurs now and again. More often than not a 'lady of the state' likely to abscond is a mother trapped by young children. She becomes desperate when she hears that her little lamb received into care 'is up for adoption' on a number of specified grounds (see s16 (2) (a) (c) (d) Adoption Act 1976.) She risks losing remission of twenty eight days, but her ewe lamb risks being adopted.

Perhaps, the UK could adopt a policy like some European countries whereby agreement is reached between the offender and the institution on a specific date when the prison term should start running, so she could make arrangements for the care of her offspring.

Another problematic area of institutional life usually rich in failure is feeding time. Provisions have to be made for ethnic minority diets, for vegans, for those who require extra vitamins, those who need special diets: fish free, milk free, egg free, cheese free, pork free, salt free, oil free etc. The ladies said they were generally satisfied with the meals only that 'you dared not be late for them'.
Effa Okupa. LL.M. Postgraduate student, Juvenile Justice, UCL

Bullwood Hall

I had asked earlier in the year to visit a prison as much of my work in an Intermediate Treatment centre involves keeping young people out of prison, and I was unsure what I was keeping them from. Bullwood Hall is a female prison and Young Offender Institution and is situated in a pleasant rural setting, close to Southend.

My first impression was one of surprise to see the high wire fence and walls. Before entering we were greeted by four inmates who were performing duties outside the prison. One joked about 'Dying for the want of good food'. We were then ushered into the main building and introduced to our guide for the afternoon.

The prison was scrupulously clean - it was hard to imagine that there were 250 inmates. We saw very few people on our tour, which included the school block, the library, the kitchen and other facilities.

We did meet one inmate - a middle-aged Jewish woman. She complained about a card coding system which was operated in the prison, which made an individual's religion known to all with obvious repercussions; this woman had experience anti-semitic remarks.

I asked our guide about the coding, but it became quite obvious that it was part of the system - and institutions are managed by systems.

The cells were very small and the toilet facilities crude (a bucket) considering the cell was home for three inmates. The basic human need of discharging bodily functions becomes a humiliation.

Inmates were allowed to visit the tuck shop once a week to spend £2.00 on extras to subsidise meagre meals (I remembered the comment about dying for the want of good food). We also saw a workshop where the inmates worked making shirts for the prisons service; it was very repetitive work.

Relaxation time came in the form of associations which meant two hours an evening for inmates to mix socially. Associations only went ahead if there were enough prison officers available.

There was no segregation between young offenders and adults. The Jewish woman we had spoken to earlier complained about loud music which the younger girls played. Association was perhaps not as relaxing as hoped.

52% of the inmates were black. I voiced my concerns and my guide informed me that many of the black inmates were drug smugglers the Home Office imprisoning many of them in Bullwood Hall fearing they would not pay (but see p.10 - Editor) for their crimes if they were repatriated.

The guide was informative and we were shown around all the facilities which apart from the lack of toilets seemed adequate; but I left feeling that beyond superficial improvements (ie clean conditions) little had changed to the prison system itself to avoid the obvious risks of mixing young offenders with older more experienced offenders.

The Y.O.I. seems to offer little more to rehabilitate young people back into society than its predecessors.

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