

# Psychiatric Studies of Borstal Lads

*A review from the Assistant Governor's viewpoint.*

T. R. CARNEGIE

THIS BOOK COVERS only the preliminary stages of the complete inquiry—a later publication will deal with behaviour in the Training Borstals and After-Care. Obviously this type of investigation requires years to complete but its value lies in the fact that it is one of the few longitudinal studies dealing with a random sample of young offenders! The current fragmentary treatment of the young offender is spotlighted as there is little liaison between the three fields — diagnosis, institutional training and after-care. To some extent this is difficult as the statutory after-care period is only two years so that subsequent consequent feedback over a long period is virtually nil.

The random factor in itself is valuable; too often intensive professional examination has been reserved for the special type of offender. But as the aim of the inquiry was "to investigate the psychological and social characteristics of a group of Borstal Trainees and to set up criteria for use in follow-up studies of the relationship between mental abnor-

mality and subsequent criminal career," it was necessary to include this random factor. In fact the sample was obtained by selecting every alternate lad sentenced in the Metropolitan Police Area and who subsequently passed through Wormwood Scrubs Allocation Centre. This gave a total of 200—100 were examined in 1953 and 100 in 1955. Objections could be expressed concerning the limited location of the sample but these can be discounted by the fact that the London area provides a high proportion of Borstal Trainees (the author states this to be between a quarter and one third) whilst the Metropolis is the magnet for the drifters.

The relationship between mental abnormality and crime has caused endless discussion and confusion. Probably those working in Borstal Institutions link them too readily as our clientele exhibit so many negative characteristics. Not all psychopathic personalities are criminals; crime is only a part of total behaviour. An additional diffi-

culty is the acceptance of precise criteria regarding mental abnormality.

The crime for which the majority of Borstal Trainees have been convicted is related to property—usually stealing. In this respect the descriptions set forth by Rich are interesting. They are:

*Marauding Offences:* Usually carried out by three or four lads without a formally agreed plan of campaign; rather opportunistic.

*Proving offences:* To prove toughness or manhood.

*Comforting offences:* In which the theft represents a substitute for affection or is an aggressive act of resentment against those who are depriving him, e.g. impulsive or theft from parents.

*Secondary Offences:* The planned theft, taking precautions against detection, and with definite ideas of what can be stolen.

*Other offences:* Those not in the above category, e.g. being directed by an older person.

Obviously these are not rigid descriptions as the recidivist charts demonstrate there is an increasing number of secondary offenders whose initial offences fell into the other categories. As to be expected the comforting offenders present a real problem with their origin in early years when they suffered emotional deprivation—usually maternal rejection, or early parental separation.

The car thief is of particular importance—he may be involved

in attempting to demonstrate his masculinity or the act may have a high neurotic content. This is particularly so if the offence is repetitive with little attempt to avoid arrest. A further point to note is if the offence is committed alone, as research has found that there is a higher correlation between mental abnormality and the solitary offender.

The marauding and proving offenders were the most normal mentally whereas the comforting cases contained a high degree of mental abnormality.

The secondary offenders were mixed with a high proportion of problem cases suffering from social and personal maladjustment.

The converse of the solitary offenders—the gang members—were not particularly concerned with delinquency but with aggressiveness. Their satisfaction seemed to be found in fighting and being impressive—*vide* the gang fights outside dance halls and youth clubs.

The author reports that he found a willing co-operation in the discussion of sexual behaviour although it is admitted that there was evidence that some information had been suppressed. This, he explains, may have been motivated by the wish to avoid giving information about homosexual tendencies and experiences which might have influenced subsequent allocation. On this subject of homosexuality four groups are suggested:

1. *The Male prostitute*—has definitely declared intentions.

2. *Neurotic*—strong concealed tendencies; in fact may be married.
3. *Situational homosexuals* — aggressive character whose main interest is heterosexual.
4. *Schoolboy*—young immature lad with little interest in girls.

On a "broken-home" analysis it was found that among the suspected homosexuals nearly 50 per cent came from homes broken at or before, two years of age. Of the 200 lads studied, only 159 had homes in the London area and as already discovered (by Morris Ferguson and Sprott) these were products of delinquent areas. These areas of greater incidence are mainly in the old over-crowded slums and in the new re-housing estates situated on the outskirts. Over 50 per cent were living in the same area as the one in which they were born and indeed their friends were people they had grown up with. Herein may lie the emphasis of the "Manor"—a reflection of the limited social experience of Borstal Trainees. This may account for the development of the "gangs"—but it is noteworthy that those of a calculated criminal nature are led by an older man. The "gang" itself appeared to serve real needs—for self assurance and a sense of identity.

In the home the remarkable feature was the absence of abnormalities. This probably accounts for the all too frequent documentary reports which state "this lad comes from a good home and his

parents are interested in him." Probably this is a true statement of fact but the important information is omitted. What is relevant is the quality of home and parent, during the lad's formative years. Obviously this is difficult to ascertain as memories become blurred. But an analysis of parental characteristics produced evidence of marked degrees of mental abnormality, severe instability and serious physical handicaps. Lest the parents be blamed similar negative factors were present in the parent's own upbringing.

As to be expected, the author found an exceptionally high proportion of Borstal Trainees had a very disturbed background with such features as parental separation and divorce, the death of parent(s). Indeed, of the 110 parents now living together, in only 30 cases was the relationship assessed to be good. The most important parental attitude is that of affection and acceptance, yet in this category, only 12 fathers and 44 mothers exhibited warm acceptance. The fact that the inquiry is dealing with human beings produces complications—the lad and the parents may both be maturing plus the fact that the former is attempting to establish some form of independence. This desire for independence is encouraged by the parental tendency to regard their responsibility as ended when their son reaches his late teens.

Physical disease or injury have been accepted as important factors

in the development of criminal behaviour; their influence may fall into one of these categories:

1. Head injuries resulting in brain damage.
2. Industrial limitation or frustration.
3. Psychological consequences.

Often in childhood there is a history of a fall or accident, the consequences of which were headaches or blackouts. The fact that a lad is physically handicapped might well render him unsuitable to follow a career ambition. Such a disappointment may demand a high degree of adjustment which the lad is incapable of accepting. The psychological consequences however, may be the most important. Although the disease or injury may have been successfully treated, the psychological damage may remain.

A further classification of criminals suggested by Alexander and Staub are:

1. The neurotic — psychological aetiology.
2. The normal — sociological aetiology.
3. The organic — pathological aetiology.

The neurotic in this context refers to the psychopathic, hysterical or epileptic personalities. These exhibit intrapsychic conflict of personality—the genesis of which come from earliest childhood impressions.

The normal offender identifies with the criminal sub-culture although his psychic organisation

resembles that of the normal individual. There is still a great need for continuing work in this field of psychiatric investigation of the offender—and indeed the author produces ample evidence of such studies. The most difficult problem is to determine the difference between the “normal chronic offender” and the “psychopath.”

Reference is made to the psychoanalytical interpretation, i.e. partial failure in development of the three mental structures (Friedlander)—instinct, ego, and super-ego. The ego's malfunctioning being caused by weakness, and the super-ego lacking development, whilst the instincts are relatively unmodified. Healy and Bronner in their study were impressed by the emotional disturbances exhibited by offenders and drew up a chart consisting of eight dominant feelings—thus:

1. of rejection and deprivation.
2. of being thwarted in self expression.
3. of inferiority or inadequacy (real or imagined).
4. of discomfort in family relationship.
5. of sibling jealousy.
6. of unhappiness caused by deep-seated mental conflict.
7. of guilt caused by previous behaviour.
8. no strong emotional discomfort.

Of course an offender can experience one or more of the above discomforts. An American research project (by Jewell and Jenkins) suggested three main groups of

mental disorder—these concepts were later used (by Jenkins) in the study of incarcerated delinquents and he suggested these four categories:

1. the situational — essentially normal personality requiring very limited treatment.
2. the pseudosocial — socialised within a delinquent group.
3. the personality — delinquency caused by substantial inner factors.
4. the asocial—the most seriously disturbed whose personalities were integrated around a pattern of hostility and attack.

In Chapter XI when dealing with the psychiatric classification of the actual sample the author outlines the problem as faced by the field worker. The description of the home and community environment is stimulating for its clear exposition of the factors involved. The actual basis for defining mental abnormality tends to be rather vague, however, the author uses as his criteria personality, symptoms and mode of reaction. The positive indication being a history of psychiatric treatment or neurotic symptoms. The practical value of deciding abnormality relates to these two questions:

1. What type of institutional treatment could have been preferred to Borstal? and
2. How many of the samples required psychiatric treatment?

Indeed! this question of treatment is the same problem confronting the Assistant Governor, and

throughout the book there are several comments which ring rather ominously. Typical examples:

“institutional training postpones rather than solves the Problem.”

(reference to homosexuality).

“they rapidly show themselves incapable of living on their own...”

(reference to H.O.A.S. lads).

“some, especially of those who had been in approved schools, co-operate superficially but respond little, and slide through without trouble not allowing anyone to penetrate the institutional reserve.”

(reference to some Borstal Trainees).

“Institutional adjustment notoriously bears an uncertain relationship to behaviour after release.”

One real value of this enquiry is to present the real problem of criminality as it exists and it could stimulate fresh thinking in terms of training programmes. In this respect there is no real criticism by the author of Borstal Training; rather a suggestion that there could be a supplement to the current ideas. Indeed his remark concerning group counselling is encouraging in the light of the Circular Instruction on this subject.

The inclusion of case histories adds the very human element and not only do they adequately illustrate points under discussion but increase reader participation. Most Assistant Governors will be able to recognise parallel cases from their own experience.

The book is written in a free flowing style and without the irritating foot notes which tend to confuse and alienate the reader. Indeed the presentation of the subject, particularly the Tables, encourages reader interest—there is a singular lack of abstruse technical terms allied to a helpful single subject short chapter arrangement. This permits the book to be read sensibly in easy stages. At the end there is a comprehensive list of book references followed by author and subject indexes. A unique feature in the book is the

eight page summary setting forth the salient features in each chapter. The author has made every effort to sustain and encourage the reader throughout.

This book should be a valuable aid in the development of more progressive programmes and stimulate the creation of a professional approach consisting of diagnosis treatment, objective assessment and continuous feedback. Certainly this publication should be included in Staff Libraries and available to all those dealing with Borstal Trainees.

## A Psychologist's Viewpoint

V. P. HOLLOWAY

THOSE WHO ARE ANXIOUS to learn more about Borstal inmates in general should not suppose from the title that this book may be too specialised for them. The ordinary reader in the field of delinquency for instance, can expect to find numerous areas covered. He will find most of these of potential interest and well within his grasp; only a few chapters such as those on a particular personality test and a method of assessing physique expect a prior technical knowledge. On the whole, the coverage ranges widely rather than going to much depth in any particular area.

The presentation is generally straightforward; however, since

the approach adopted places the book within the scope of a wide range of readers, it might have been worthwhile to have explained briefly the simple statistics used, to have covered more fully in the text the details given in the Tables and perhaps to have considered whether some of the data in the Tables might not have been presented with more clarity in a different form (e.g. in graphs).

The details relate to 200 random Borstal receptions committed in the London area, half in 1953 and half in 1955. The approach is one which recognises that psychiatrists' judgments about crime and delinquents may well have been

formed too much with reference to special groups referred to them, and that, in order to establish what is normal for any particular section of the delinquent population, there is an urgent need to investigate unselected groups. Dr. Gibbens also does a great deal to discredit the idea that the psychiatrists' task is to distinguish those with traditional psychiatric symptoms and thereby imply that all the rest are of no psychiatric significance. The author is concerned to give appropriate consideration to information about disturbance and deviation in this sample which might more traditionally have been excluded.

Thus the book sets out categories of crime, kinds of motivation for stealing, quality of previous experience, the range of accessible sexual behaviour, present and past medical conditions and the environment and social structure from which inmates come; it assesses the quality of family relationships, assigns the degree of mental abnormality appropriate to each boy, it examines the operation of various psychological tests and procedures and seeks to relate many of these aspects to each other. It also looks at some special groups such as car thieves and homosexual offenders; instances of twins in trouble reported to the author, although outside the actual sample, were examined because they can sometimes be a special valuable source of information. One cannot hope to give many details here; the

summary at the end is a guide to those aspects which anyone may particularly wish to examine; for those who wish to be selective many of the chapters are self-sufficient and can be taken out of sequence.

Naturally, there are disappointments about factors not included. As this was a study which particularly set out not to ignore areas frequently excluded from traditional psychiatric classification, it would have been nice to have seen a greater examination of the relationship between patterns of interpersonal conflict and types of delinquent behaviour; indeed the author himself has explored this kind of thing in some instances, for example in his study of the underlying dynamics of car thieves, but as yet he does not show how such data might be unambiguously introduced into future practice or how it might be systematically used in the kind of follow-up study undertaken here.

It would be wrong to expect of a study initiated over ten years ago that it should include approaches only now reaching full development. However, as this was to be a long-term follow-up study, one would have welcomed a stronger attempt to differentiate specific training requirements, contrasting the operational needs of different groups in diversified ways. Possibly it was because Borstal Training was at that time seen as a relatively undifferentiated process, that little attention could

be given to the task of grouping those with similar training needs, in order to discover whether chances of success varied in relation to specified training measures.

Perhaps the item which gives rise to the most misgivings is that of the classification of physique, which offers promising possibilities for the future but which at present offers little chance of conclusive discoveries or of a practical "pay-off." The present work adds little to earlier studies of physique and one questions therefore whether it was worth the disruption it caused in the research. Dr. Gibbens carried out his investigations in Wormwood Scrubs when research workers were still a very unusual occurrence. That the community had difficulty in adjusting to this particular part of the research, the photographing of nude boys, is clear from reactions which are still mentioned in Wormwood Scrubs. In fact the frank admission in the text that some of the photographs were lost must come very close to realising the anxieties probably felt by those who were asked to participate.

The suggestion that Gibbens thus ventured too far in one particular instance contrasts with the more general tone of the book which is very cautious. Few could be offended by this book. One has to read very carefully to be certain about what it is that Gibbens is prepared to assert about the inmates' psychiatric needs and how far these are met. He believes the Borstal regime to offer the Abnormal group (27 per cent of

the total) more than anything generally available in the Health Service: "it is not a question of different regimes, but whether they need something in addition." This is more optimistic than a few pages later when he suggests that for two-thirds of the Abnormal Group some might be helped by the Henderson Hospital kind of community treatment, but that others presented problems which are hardly soluble at present. He sees the visiting psychiatrist as rarely able to suggest anything specific within the present framework of training. The summary on desirable treatment however, ignores the extent of this last difficulty but does state that for some a desirable combination of training and treatment is now available.

This book was written in order to show preliminary findings in a long-term project. Waiting for results can take a long time and it is often useful to have just the initial survey details in the meantime. However, in this case publication has been so long delayed that it has been possible to add some of the preliminary results as an Appendix. Much of the value of the initial survey can be lost in such a delay because there have undoubtedly been important changes in the Borstal receptions since 1955. It might now have been better to have waited a little longer in order to present the first follow-up findings fully integrated into the present text.



The preliminary results give some interesting indications. During the study the author separated Abnormal from Normal inmates (with a small problem group not classified as either). He then took each of these three groups and rated their chances of success. To do this he used clinical data but for the 1955 half of the sample he had full knowledge of actuarial predictions (Mannheim-Wilkins). His results show that to make this kind of discrimination for this population does improve significantly on Mannheim-Wilkins predictions alone. This particular way of dividing boys is not the only way they might have been usefully categorized according to the extent of disturbance; getting results which show that different groups have differential success rates is not the only criterion by which one judges the usefulness of the original discrimination; but it is very rewarding and not all that frequent for a clinician to show this kind of success.

The results of the Mannheim-Wilkins predictions are themselves illuminating. They show, for instance, that already by 1953/5 this sample of Borstal receptions was producing the bias towards the lower Mannheim-Wilkins prediction categories which is characteristic of samples today. Also the discriminating power of the predictions themselves seem to have declined in relation to the population in the study. Such data are interesting if only to dispel assumptions that the deterioration in the Borstal population, as Mannheim-Wilkins predictions, is of rather more recent origin.

In spite of a number of reservations, this book, *Psychiatric Studies of Borstal Lads*, T.C.N. GIBBENS (and others), Oxford University Press, 45s. 0d., contains much useful data and methods of classification, and I would particularly recommend it to those who have had little chance of seeing so far the extent of disturbance and deviation in the Borstal population.

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#### DATES TO NOTE

The Institute for the Study and Treatment of Delinquency holds a week-end conference at Felixtowe (April 17th) on "Is Prison any Use?" Speakers: C. H. Rolph, Tom Hayes, Prof. W. J. H. Sprott (Nottingham) and Mr. J. E. Hall Williams

The Institute will sponsor a Summer School in Holland (29th August-5th September). Cost, 14 to 27 guineas. Details from 8 Bourdon Street, London, W.1.

The 1965 International Criminological Congress will be held in Montreal. Details from Secretariat, 55 Parkdale Avenue, Ottawa 3, Ontario, Canada.