

PROGRESS REPORT II

Blundeston

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MOST VISITORS to Blundeston, knowledgeable about prisons or not, remark how unlike a prison it is, and how light and airy the buildings are, giving a feeling of spaciousness. For these remarks to be made about a maximum security prison is high praise indeed for the design. For the staff here, the buildings are a most pleasant working environment but I would add there are also some difficulties in the layout and design.

There are four buildings: —

1. The Administrative Block forms part of the security boundary, and contains on the first floor, offices for all staff except the Tutor Organiser, and the Staff Rest Room, with the gate lodge, visiting rooms and reception on the ground floor.

2. The Workshops and Stores which are built as one block with each Workshop and Store a self-contained unit.

3. The Hospital, a T-shaped unit, the eight hospital rooms, a ward for eight patients, forming the cross-piece of the T, with the upright containing the Doctor's surgery, treatment room, drug store, dental surgery and optician's room.

4. The main prison, which is H-shaped with the cell blocks at

each end of the H and the cross-piece being the centre block which carries the educational facilities, canteen, library and barber's shop on the ground floor; the kitchen and four dining rooms on the first floor and the two chapels on the second floor. Off the corridors, which form the uprights of the H, are on one side a multi-purpose hall (theatre/cinema/ gymnasium) and on the other side the punishment block. The cell blocks, where 76 men are accommodated, are T-shaped. Off the three landings are three short sections containing seven, eight or 10 cells on each section, except on the upper two landings where one section is a dormitory for eight. Toilet facilities are adjacent to the staircase, on each landing, so that men do not have to wash in their cells. On the ground floor of each block there are recreational rooms, a quiet room, bath room and Staff Offices.

Each block can be self-contained and each section of a landing can be gated off if necessary. It is therefore possible to run the prison as four separate units with minimal contact between them but this is to exert constant control and supervision by staff, which would necessitate a much increased Discipline Officer Staff.

If one of the problems for long term prisoners, on release from prison, is once again to think for themselves, then the more it is possible in prison to place responsibilities, however small, on the prisoner, the better equipped he will be to deal with real life demands. Imprisonment for anyone is unreal compared with normal living but the closer the demands on the prisoner are in prison, the easier will be the transition from the prison situation to normal living on release.

It was this and the design of the prison which suggested that, within the H of the prison, freedom of movement was both possible and desirable. Desirable because one could place small responsibilities on prisoners who previously had had to be directly supervised by staff most of the time. In this situation the responsibility for having a bath or going to evening classes, or other recreational facilities, or changing a library book, etc., was placed on the prisoner and not on the staff to see that the man did these things, but this implies a change of role for officers who work in prisons of this design.

How then to fit staff, whose previous experience was in a very different physical situation, to meet the stresses, strains and demands of this type of design?

We were fortunate as a staff, in having two weeks in which to prepare ourselves and the prison before the arrival of prisoners. The

programme, for this period, consisted of a daily staff meeting of one hour, with the remainder of the time equally divided between the technical aspect of the job and social work skills. The technical aspect consisted of familiarising ourselves with the layout of the prison, searching (important in a new building, for contractors leave many items which are security risks on the site), fire precautions, learning about the mysteries of the PABX telephone exchange, and a dummy run at shifts and duties, in an attempt to get timing right. The aim was to familiarise staff thoroughly with the whole prison. On the social work skills side, there were talks on the development of personality, case work, group work, interviewing techniques, and group work sessions.

The Staff were divided into four sections and on any one day each section had two sessions on the technical side, one talk and one session which was an unstructured group situation. The aim was to enlarge our understanding about people and thereby increase our skills in handling prisoners and groups. The learning, mainly by experience, was a situation to which most Staff were unaccustomed. It was for all, confusing and tiring, yet it seems to have been effective.

The daily staff meeting helped us to get to know each other and accelerated the change from being a set of individuals to becoming a

body. It also gave us an opportunity, in discussion, to hammer out a common philosophy of what we were aiming to do with prisoners when they arrived. I think it would be true to say that we all benefitted from this training period and would hope that our colleagues, in similar circumstances, will have the same opportunity.

The common philosophy which evolved was that, as far as is possible in prison, we would reproduce the demands that are made on every one at freedom; that prisons tend to be places ridden with fantasy and we would try to deal with facts; and that what happens to a man in prison should be related to what he will do on release.

We had to establish first of all a routine, to get workshops functioning and to build up the organisation. In all this, as might be expected, we had our teething troubles, some of which still persist. At the same time it was necessary to establish a policy of rehabilitation. This we planned to do in three ways.

First, that each officer should be responsible for, and develop a case-work type of relationship with a small group of prisoners, not more than 10 in number. The officer would assist each prisoner to plan his future on release and what he did in prison would be geared to this end. The officer would record information which would be of assistance to the after-care associate in his dealings with

the man on release. Also, the officer, with his close knowledge of the prisoner, would attend at Hostel and Home Leave selection boards in support of the prisoner.

Secondly, each officer would meet with his small group weekly to discuss the problems of living together. Alongside this we would try to establish a meeting of each wing at regular intervals to discuss the problems which arise in large groups of men living together.

Thirdly, within the limits of security and provided that a committee was formed with a staff member who would be the liaison officer, any activity which the prisoners wished to start would be permitted.

So came our first receptions from Chelmsford — 25 Preventive Detention prisoners in all. On the evening of arrival we met them and talked freely about the problems of living in this new-design prison and their responsibilities in making the sort of régime visualised, work. This meeting was not a nice, comfortable, social chat, but one with plenty of heated verbal interaction. Nevertheless it was surprising that, having been able to ventilate what they felt about Blundeston and tested out our reactions to their feelings, on the whole they were able to accept the less acceptable parts of it, and to get down to the task of settling in.

As each group of prisoners has arrived, the same procedure has been used, although, not unnatur-

ally, many of the difficulties which were present initially have been ironed out, or, because they have been accepted by most prisoners, are more readily accepted by those who come now. By the end of the first month our roll was 162 living in three wings and in 10 weeks all four wings were open and the roll was 213. This was a testing period for us all, as little seemed to go right and the pressure on all the staff was very high.

How far have we been able, in the 11 months we have been working, to achieve what we set out to establish? Not very much as compared with what we still hope to do. Officers have handled awkward and difficult situations with a great deal of tact, understanding and forbearance. The response to this varies from prisoner to prisoner, but generally they have responded well. I think it would be true to say that they are beginning to realise that projecting their attitudes to members of the staff does not work, so they are faced with examining their own attitudes. In the same way, as a staff we have to examine our attitudes if we are to continue handling prisoners and situations effectively. This calls for training to be a continuing process. We meet this by keeping communication as free as possible and by specific staff training.

There is a daily meeting of heads of departments and Principal Officers in charge of wings. Initially

this was essential for co-ordinating administrative action, solving administrative problems and disseminating information. While these areas are still covered, much more time is now spent on staff-prisoner relationships and our own attitudes.

Each Thursday for one hour the whole staff on duty attend a staff meeting, the nature of which varies. It can be a formal information-giving session about a subject which affects the whole staff, i.e. giving details about the visit of a television unit and the procedures to be adopted; or a formal session with an agenda which is to be discussed, i.e. *The Report of the Working Party on Communications*; or an informal session where feelings and attitudes can be expressed, but in practice this often fails to produce much in the way of discussion.

From last November to April, staff study groups were run on two evenings a week. The staff were divided into four groups and each group met fortnightly. Initially we discussed and practised interviewing techniques, including some use of a tape recorder, and discussed individual cases. Towards the end these groups developed into unstructured group sessions. Each month there was a visiting speaker, two sections of the staff off duty attending these talks, plus any staff on duty who could be spared. Speakers who were experienced in the fields of mental health, after-care, and criminology

were much appreciated by the staff, who valued their interest in travelling long distances to come to us. I think these training sessions were helpful to staff both as a learning process and, perhaps more importantly, as a forum for expressing attitudes and feelings which enabled them to cope with the difficulties which arose in their day to day work with prisoners.

Quite recently the *Report of the Working Party on Communications* has stimulated the need for a Staff Consultative Committee. As a result of this a demand has been made for a regular monthly meeting and a sub-committee has been set up to examine the report on the "drills" which exist in the prison, to make recommendations for any changes in present procedure, and for the setting up of new drills where required.

The establishing of a policy of rehabilitation has been slow in developing. Review boards were commenced with the object of registering the plan made by the prisoner, with his officer, about his future on release, in order to keep a check that what we and the prisoner are doing is as close to reality as possible.

Starting with those due for release in 1965 we hope to work right through and then to review each plan every three months.

Counselling has yet to become an activity in which all are engaged, but further staff training in this is to commence in the autumn.

Wing meetings have met with varying success. In some wings they are becoming established, in others they are more sporadic.

The formulation of Committees to control activities has been surprisingly successful, although they can still be, and are, used by the more manipulative prisoner to indulge his own personal needs. Against this, there are more responsible actions by committees which suggests that they are aware of their responsibilities as well as their rights. Elections to committees are held every three months. The structure and rules of committees are still very much in the evolutionary stage, but minutes are kept by every committee of their meetings and it is to the credit of the prisoners that so much activity has developed in so short a time.

That a prison of new design, with a population from three different prisons can be accepted and so readily used by both staff and prisoners suggests that basically the design was right and that human beings are more ready to change than sometimes seems possible.

If little has been said about religion, work, education, physical education, this is in no way to minimise their importance, but they are common to all prisons. This has been an attempt to show how, because of the design of the building and the function of the prison, we have been enabled to think and perhaps, eventually, to operate more effectively.