

Profile of a Prison Population

Sentence and Social Background of 890 Women in Holloway Prison, 1959/60.

by

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*May God preserve the City of London, and make this place
a terror to evil doers.*

—Inscription on the foundation stone of Holloway, laid 1849.

IN THE YEAR 1852, the House of Correction at Holloway, described by Henry Mayhew¹ as "a noble building of the castellated Gothic style" was completed by the City of London Corporation at a cost of £92,700. It was planned to accommodate 400 prisoners in single cells, 288 men and 112 women and juveniles. Fifty years later, the House of Correction, which had been enlarged, was converted into a Female Prison. The remaining men were transferred to Brixton Prison, and all the women then in Wormwood Scrubs, a contingent of 300 together with their female staff, were moved to Holloway. On that first night of exclusively feminine

occupation, October 24th, 1902, 820 women were locked up within its walls.

At all times and in all countries, women criminals are fewer than men. Yet instead of their smaller and more manageable numbers being an incentive to research and to penological experiment, they have largely been ignored. Wootton² has pointed out the gaps in our knowledge about women serving prison sentences, particularly in this country. The large-scale investigations of Fernald³ and the Gluecks⁴, on U.S. reformatory populations, were undertaken nearly 30 years ago. Apart from Lombroso's⁵ historical survey and the more recent work of Pollak⁶, female

criminality as a special study has attracted little interest. There are descriptive accounts of women in prison by such observers as Size⁷, Banks⁸, and Pailthorpe⁹; no survey comparable to that of Roper¹⁰ at Wakefield has ever been done. The Criminal Statistics, which provide basic data, must by their nature remain impersonal. What follows is an attempt to illumine some of the statistics from within, and to give a more detailed picture of a sample of women prisoners today.

Definition of Material

Holloway, with current accommodation for 828 inmates, combines the functions of a local, regional training, and central prison, together with a Borstal Recall Centre, and receives all types of women offenders. The material of the present survey comprises all convicted individual women who were sentenced during the twelve month period June 1st, 1959, to May 31st, 1960. No women re-admitted on a second or subsequent sentence was included.

The total turnover of the prison

for the twelve month period was 2,598, of which 890 or thirty-four per cent were sentenced individuals. Excluded from the survey were all prisoners on remand; temporary transfers (as for example, special psychiatric observation); those released the same day or next by Order of Court; those paying a fine the same day or the next. (An arbitrary "cut-off" at forty-eight hours was imposed; those who paid after this time were included. This group were mainly "habituals"—the alcoholics, prostitutes, and an occasional debtor), Girls sentenced to Borstal training and Borstal recalls from Licence were excluded, as also H.M.P. patients sent to Broadmoor Hospital.

All data were obtained from the Nominal Register. When items of information were missing, a search (not always successful) was made in the individual records, but the 890 records were not otherwise studied

Courts from Which Sentenced

Holloway Prison serves not only the County of London but eighteen Counties in Southern England. The

TABLE I

Courts from which sentenced, 1959/1960		
Court	Number	Per Cent
London Courts	527	59
Courts in Home Counties (Essex, Kent, Middx., Surrey)	177	20
Other Courts in Holloway Catchment Area (Hants., Berks., etc.)	164	18
Courts elsewhere outside C. Area	22	3
TOTAL :	890	100

majority of prisoners are committed from Courts in the London area.

The last category, transfers after sentence from more distant prisons such as Manchester, mainly consists of women with long-term or preventive detention sentences.

Nature of Offence

The total number of offences listed is greater than the number of individuals, since 153 women had more than one charge (and several had more than two). Common examples of this were larceny and forgery, receiving and obtaining goods by false pretences, etc.

Larceny continues to be the predominant female crime (eighty point three per cent of all indictable

of self-service stores multiplies the opportunity and the temptation to steal. Writing sixty-six years ago, long before these techniques of merchandising had been devised, Lombroso observed that "the huge shop, with its manifold and various seductions, betrays women into crime". What would he have said of the seductive emporiums of today?

Frauds too have taken a different character. The Welfare State, with its many cash benefits, offers new opportunity for fraud and forgery to the thousands of women holders of Family Allowance, Pension, or National Assistance Books. Post Office Savings Books, also widely held, are another temptation

TABLE II

Indictable Offences. 1959/60		
Offence	Number	Per Cent
Larceny	347	55
Frauds and False Pretences	167	26
Violence Against the Person	50	8
Receiving	25	4
Breaking and Entering	20	3
Other Offences	17	3
Robbery	6	1
Sexual Offences	1	—
TOTAL :	633	100

offences by females in 1959) but has changed in character with the changes in industrial society. Domestic servants, a vanished race, no longer exist to steal from their employers; the "expert pickpockets" of Mayhew's day have given place to a regiment of expert shoplifters. The growth in recent years

to dishonesty. In comparison to men offenders, the "white collar" crime of the great majority of these women in Holloway is of a very minor nature, related to their domestic experience and, in the case of "false pretencers" their allegedly female traits of dissimulation and deceit. Crimes involving

real violence or gang participation are comparatively few (the category "Violence Against the Person" Table II above, included seventeen cases of illegal abortion, a common type of female crime). It is of interest to note that only one case of attempted suicide was actually sentenced during the twelve month period, compared to ten during the two years 1954 till 1956 reported by Epps*¹¹. This indicates that Magistrates are making more use of the mental health services for these disturbed women, and that the proposal for new legislation to remove attempted suicide from the list of offences had an effect in advance of its adoption.

The figures shown for soliciting and drunkenness are a considerable understatement since (for this analysis) all re-admissions were

excluded, likewise those who promptly paid their fines. The actual proportions of this recidivist group where offenders are frequently given the option of a fine, are much higher. Some alcoholics, for example, had from eleven to seventeen prison sentences within the twelve-month period. The increased penalties of the Street Offences Act, which came into operation on August 16th, 1959, were only becoming noticeable during the second half of the survey.

Although recidivist women drinkers still present a large and discouraging problem in Holloway¹², their numbers are indeed modest compared with half a century ago. The old Nominal Registers for 1902, when total prison turnover was vastly greater than today, show that out of 2,623 receptions in January and

TABLE III

Non-Indictable Offences. 1959/60		
Offence	Number	Per Cent
Offences by Prostitutes	170	55
Drunkenness	72	23
Disorderly Behaviour (includes obscene language, obstruct P.C., etc.)	25	8
Cruelty to or Neglect of Children	10	3
Traffic Offences	10	3
Offences v. Aliens Restr. Acts	9	3
Brothel Keeping	8	3
Offences v. Vagrancy Acts	7	2
Offences v. Revenue Laws	1	-
Unlawful Possession	1	-
TOTAL :	313	100

* Epps' two year series comprised 100 consecutive admissions, ninety-four on remand and six already sentenced. In the twelve months 1903/04, 228 attempted suicides were remanded to Holloway.

February of that year, 1,622 or sixty-two per cent were on charges of drunkenness. This social change towards temperance has been paralleled by a change in the treatment of children. Cruelty and neglect sufficient to incur a prison sentence are now rare (ten cases only in 1959/60), but in the first two months of 1902 thirty-eight women were sentenced for this, with an additional sixteen found "drunk in charge of a child".

The Welfare State too has been responsible for the disappearance of begging in our time (fifty-eight prison sentences for this offence in January/February 1903), and for the disappearance of those unfortunates stigmatised as "Disorderly (or Refractory) Pauper" (eighteen sentences, January/February 1903). Destitute women no longer roam the streets: their successors occupy the benches of the National Assistance Board. The seven convictions under the Vagrancy Acts in 1959/60 were mainly elderly women "tramps" who refused to accept accommodation in Reception Centres which the police would have arranged.

Non-Criminal Prisoners

Compared with men, the proportion of women committed under

Civil Process is small (Prison Commissioners Report¹⁸, 1959, Appendix 8, Table IX), nor do they figure largely in Holloway's population.

The many sentences for debt give cause for concern. These women are not calculating imposters, running up bills for goods and services which they never intend to pay. They are, with a few exceptions, muddled housewives who have got in tangles with hire-purchase or other domestic commitments, often without their husband's knowledge. They may have resorted to fraud or to selling unpaid-for articles, in an attempt to stave off the eventual day of reckoning. Those with a large family of children, trying to manage on a marginal income, are particularly liable to find themselves in difficulties. Here are two cases from one morning's Reception Board at the prison.

Mrs. A., sentence seven days for debt. Has five children at home, says her husband works for the G.P.O.

Mrs. B., twenty-one days for debt (of forty-two pounds). Stands silently crying, shakes her head miserably when asked if she's going to be able to pay off any of the debt. Is separated from her husband, has five children

TABLE IV

Civil Prisoners, 1959/60	
Debtors	56
Contempt of Court .. .	12
Forfeit Recognisance .. .	6
Default Sureties .. .	3
Non-compliance with Court Order .. .	1
TOTAL:	78

aged nine years to eighteen months, and is again pregnant.

In a third case, debt, fraud and folly are compounded:

Mrs. C., sentence twelve months for stealing washing machines. She obtained one from a salesman, got behind on her instalments, obtained another machine from elsewhere, sold the first one for twenty pounds to meet her original instalments. She has eleven children, aged thirteen years to three months.

For the record, it may be noted that eleven of the seventy-eight Civil Prisoners were members of the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament—sisters in spirit of their Suffragette predecessors in Holloway fifty-six years ago.

Length of Sentence

The time spent in prison is less than would appear from Table V below. This analysis is based on maximum sentences: in practice one third is remitted on all non-civil sentences over a month

provided the offender has been of good behaviour. Furthermore, some of the short-sentence women pay their fine and leave before the sentence has been completed (all those paying fines *after* forty-eight hours were included in the analysis).

Women offenders as a whole receive shorter sentences than men (Prison Commissioners Report¹⁸, 1959, pp 19/20), and Holloway is called upon to deal with an enormous number of these short-stay transients. As Table V shows, a quarter of the women in the sample stayed less than fifteen days; four fifths less than six months. The six months to two years group, where training and re-education can be effective, comprised only one-fifth of the entire sentenced population.

To present ways of thinking, a maximum security prison like Holloway is not a suitable place

TABLE V

Length of Sentence, 890 Individual Women, 1959/60		
Sentence	Number	Per Cent
7 days and under	66	18
14 " " "	97	
Over 14 days and up to 1 month	173	62
Over 1 month and up to 2 months	117	
Over 2 months and up to 3 months	132	
Over 3 months and up to 6 months	131	
Over 6 months and up to 9 months	40	10
Over 9 months and up to 1 year	53	
Over 1 year and up to 2 years	51	8
Over 2 years and up to 3 years	19	
Over 3 years and up to 4 years	6	1
Over 4 years and up to 5 years	1	1
Over 5 years and up to 7 years	3	
Over 7 years and up to 10 years	1	
TOTAL	890	100

for these petty offenders with seven and fourteen day sentences. Apart from debtors and contempt of court cases, the short-sentence women are the flotsam and jetsam of society—alcoholics, vagrants, prostitutes, the homeless, etc. Many are mentally subnormal or mentally ill. The prison can do little for them other than providing food and shelter and a minimum of medical care; nor does the sentence have a deterrent effect as the high rate of recidivism shows (Woodside, *op. cit.*).

Although we may deplore the position today, a look back over Holloway's history, shows the change that has taken place in sentencing policy since the beginning of the century. For example, during the month of January 1903, when 1,863 women were admitted to the prison, 884 or more than half had sentences of fourteen days or less*. Of these, 308 were for seven days, 240 for five days, and seventy-five for three days. 215, or sixteen per cent were for

one month. At the upper end of the scale, only thirty women had sentences of six months and over (twenty of the thirty were for six months). Prison in those days can have differed little from the workhouse casual ward; and the task of the clerical staff, transcribing all this coming and going, must have been immense.

Age

Middle-aged women from forty to forty-nine contribute the largest group to the female prison population (Prison Commissioners Report¹⁸, 1959, Appendix 8). They are closely followed by women of thirty-five to thirty-nine, with an earlier peak at twenty-one to twenty-four. The Holloway sample shows a similar distribution.

The first three groups contain a large number of young prostitutes; housewives, mainly dishonest, predominate in the middle three groups (more than half of Holloway's population); and some fifty old-age pensioners bring up the rear. This wide range of ages

* No sentence was recorded in 155 cases.

TABLE VI

Age Groups, 890 Individual Women, 1959/60		
Age	Number	Per Cent
17 and under 21	70	37
21 and under 25	162	
25 and under 30	97	
30 and under 40	214	44
40 and under 50	189	
50 and under 60	105	12
60 and under 70	34	5
70 and over *	19	2
TOTAL:	890	100
* Includes 2 over 80 and 1 of 78		

and interests, all within one institution, makes it extraordinarily difficult to plan any comprehensive programme of rehabilitation.

Marital Status

The findings in this and several following sections must be interpreted with caution. Legal and administrative data are carefully checked and scrutinised before entry in the Nominal Register;

may be tired or harassed, with a long queue of new admissions still to book in). These difficulties must be mentioned though they only apply to a small proportion: the over-all picture derived from the Nominal Register is broadly correct.

As one would expect from the age distribution of the group (Table VI) almost three-quarters of the women are or have been married. The number of "separ-

TABLE VII

Marital Status, 890 Individual Women, 1959/60		
Status	Number	Per Cent
Married	441	50
Single	262	29
Widowed	75	8
Divorced	56	6
Separated	52	6
Not known/not stated	4	1
TOTAL:	890	100

social data, unchecked, is transcribed from the information given by the woman herself on arrival at the prison. Circumstances then are not always propitious for communication: it may be late in the evening, after a long day in Court or transfer from an outlying area. Women are tired, may be cross or tearful, suffering a "hang-over", in a "so what" mood (especially prostitutes, alcoholics, other habituals). They may be disinclined or too upset to give complete and accurate particulars. Some may not even speak English. Receptions Officers do their best (but they themselves

ated" is likely to be an understatement: women may say "married" on admission when in fact they are living apart from their spouse. Those cohabiting also tend to say "married"; further error is introduced by differing statements on different admissions. Such discrepancies, confirmed by other prison sources, were noted in the study of one recidivist group (Woodside; *op.cit.*). They apply, though in lesser degree, to statements of religious persuasion.

Birthplace

Published data on the country of origin of prison population, male

or female are not available*. This item for technical reasons, was not computed in the Wakefield survey (*Roper*, personal communication); and the analyses of birthplace of Borstal boys are not of a comparable population (Mannheim and Wilkins¹⁴; Rose¹⁵).

It seems that the London-born are comparatively law-abiding and immigrants greatly at risk. A fifth of this prison sample comes from countries elsewhere, the largest contingent being that of Eire—nine per cent†. In view of the allegations made about the anti-social behaviour of West Indian

immigrants, it is of interest that only seven West Indian women were in the sample. The category of Foreign Born included a number of girls who had contravened the Aliens Regulations and were recommended for deportation.

Religious Registration

On arrival at the prison, every woman is asked to state her religion, and what she says is recorded in the Register. It is not possible here to assess the degree of interest (or disinterest) in the religion professed, nor to ascertain the number (certainly small) of

TABLE VIII

Birthplace, 890 Individual Women, 1959/60		
Place	Number	Per Cent
London	261	30
Home Counties	142	16
Rest of England (includes Channel Islands, Isle of Man)	244	27
Eire	80	9
Scotland	68	8
Wales	28	3
Northern Ireland	10	1
British Commonwealth	25	3
Foreign Born	27	3
Not known/not stated	5	—
TOTAL:	890	100

* The study by McClintock and Gibson, "Robbery in London" had not been published when this paper was written. They found 15% of offenders were born in Ireland.

† The position appears to have been the same 100 years ago. Henry Mayhew who attended a service in Holloway prison chapel in 1861, conjectured that "many of the inmates, from their arched eyebrows and peculiar features, were of Hibernian extraction".

those who decide to change their profession on different admissions to prison. (This change does not imply conversion: it is usually some secular reason of fancied advantage.) Once in prison, everyone is expected to attend one religious service each week unless they obtain special permission not to go.

Despite the limitations of these findings, it seems desirable to record them for comparison with other studies of religious affiliation in delinquent populations. Fernald, the Gluecks, Munnheim and Wilkins, all found an excess of Roman Catholics; a similar excess appears in the Holloway sample. This is related to place of birth (Table VIII): Irish (and to some extent Scottish) Roman Catholic immigrants to this country, lacking roots and often in relative poverty,

demonstrated against nuclear armament.

Occupation

As all previous studies have shown, the poor, the unskilled, the unstable and the handicapped, make up the great bulk of any female prison population. Lacking opportunity for training, or ability to profit thereby, the occupations these offenders follow are mostly of a lowly order. This is seen to be so in Holloway, among those for whom an occupation had been

TABLE IX

Religious Registration, 890 Individual Women, 1959/60		
Religion	Number	Per Cent
Church of England (includes 'Protestant' (4), 'Anglo-Catholic' (3))	532	60
Roman Catholic	250	28
Church of Scotland	19	2
Church of Ireland	1	—
Nonconformist (includes Methodist (17), Baptist (13), Presbyterians (4))	36	4
Quaker	10	1
Jewish	6	16
Salvation Army	4	
Evangelist (1), Pentecostal (2), Universal (1)	4	
Spiritualist	1	
Hindu	1	
Nil/no religion	26	3
TOTAL :	890	100

are more likely to drift into crime than their settled neighbours.

Another similarity with the findings of other investigators is the very small number of Jewish delinquents in Holloway. The number of Quakers (10) may appear surprising: it was swollen by civil disobedience prisoners (famously known in prison as "the atom bomb girls") who had

stated: although previous employment could not be ascertained for the numerous "Housewives" recorded, prison experience suggests that their social background is similar to the rest of the sample.

Those who said they had no occupation were usually girls sentenced for soliciting: there were also a few young ex-borstal girls who had never held a job. Domestic

work was casual or institutional: none of the seventy-seven were in private service. "Housekeepers" and "Hostesses" were a dubious category, likewise the large number of Waitresses (this appears to be the intermittent occupation or "cover" adopted by many convicted prostitutes).

Although the employment experience of this present Holloway sample is limited and

by poverty and delinquency, is revealingly shown by a look at the occupations recorded for January 1903. (Occupational distribution in subsequent months was much the same).

Some of these occupations, e.g. Hawkers, have now disappeared; others, such as laundry workers, have dwindled away (what countless back-breaking hours, bent over steaming washtubs, this legion of

TABLE X

Occupational Groups, 890 Individual Women, 1959/60	
	Number
Hotel, Canteen and Cafe Workers (including "catering", cooks, barmaids, and waitresses (56))	130
Domestic work (including cleaners)	77
Workers in factories	74
Clerical and Office Workers (including telephonists)	61
Workers in shops	31
Nursing (including trained, assistant, childrens)	26
Workers in Entertainment Industry (including hostesses, singers)	21
Dressmaking/Hairdressing (and other personal service)	16
Housekeepers	16
Laundry workers (including ward maids/orderlies)	12
Professional occupations (other than nursing, including teachers)	7
Miscellaneous (mainly unskilled)	45
	516
Housewives	300
Nil	57
O.A. Pensioners	14
Not known/not stated	3
TOTAL:	890

unbalanced, there is evidence of great advance compared with a generation ago. The change which has taken place in the condition of women, even in those singled out

women must have spent). "Charring" too has been transmuted with the years: women willing to do this work are either Cleaners on a regular wage or sought-after

Daily Help. Not a single office worker or shop assistant was among the 1,362 prisoners in 1903, compared to ninety-two in 1959/60. We may note that nine women admitted to earning their living by prostitution: such frankness is not met with at Receptions today, even

lated hours in deplorable conditions (such as the "sweat shops" of the East End clothing trade), without security for illness or unemployment, should seek to blot out their cares in drink.

Social Class

The assignment of social class

TABLE XI

Occupation Groups, 1,363 Women, Holloway, January 1903						Number
Laundry, Washerwomen, Ironers (52)	....	....	....	....	....	302
Charring	....	....	....	....	....	258
Lawyers	....	....	....	....	....	152
Dressmaking, other needle trades	....	....	....	....	....	118
Servants	....	....	....	....	....	92
Factory workers, machinists	....	....	....	....	....	77
Cooks	....	....	....	....	....	36
Waitresses	....	....	....	....	....	9
Prostitutes	....	....	....	....	....	9
Barmaids	....	....	....	....	....	7
Housekeepers	....	....	....	....	....	7
Field Workers	....	....	....	....	....	7
Actresses	....	....	....	....	....	5
Miscellaneous (mainly unskilled)	....	....	....	....	....	24
						1,103
Nil/no work	....	....	....	....	....	247
Not stated	....	....	....	....	....	13
TOTAL :						1,363

among prostitutes with repeated convictions. Unfortunately, there is no way of discovering how many of those listed as having No Work could be equated with the Housewives of 1959/60. The old Nominal Register does not record marital status, and the description "housewife" must be a modern usage since it does not appear in 1903. In general, it is easy to see why these women fifty-nine years ago, doing ill-paid work for long unregu-

lated hours in deplorable conditions (such as the "sweat shops" of the East End clothing trade), without security for illness or unemployment, should seek to blot out their cares in drink. for any population containing married women is bound to be unsatisfactory and incomplete (data on husband's occupation is rarely if ever available), and in Holloway, a further subtraction has to be made of the single women who said they had no occupation. For these reasons, it has only been possible to analyse the social class distribution for approximately two-thirds of the sample. As already noted in relation to employment

(p.85) the remaining third are unlikely to differ in any significant way. The classifications used in Table XII are those of the Registrar General.

This analysis errs if at all on the generous side: the benefit of doubt was given (for example) to women listed as Nurses who may in fact have been assistant nurses or even nursing orderlies (both lower classifications). The group in Social

characteristic of other upper-class offenders in Holloway are embezzlement, false pretences, debt and contempt of Court. Eccentric isolates may find themselves in trouble with the law; so too may high-principled pacifists.

Previous Convictions

A prison sentence does not usually follow a first offence unless the charge is a serious one, e.g. manslaughter, assault, fraud involving

TABLE XII

Social Class, 890 Women, Holloway, 1959/60			
Class	Number	Per Cent	Greater London Census 1951*
I	3	.6	4.9
II	27	5.0	16.6
III	228	42.2	54.7
IV	139	25.7	10.7
V	125	23.1	13.1
Retired	15	2.8	-
Students	3	.6	-
Total Known	540	100.0	100.0
Not Known	350		
TOTAL:	890		

* Males over 16 only

Class III is inflated by the inclusion of "club hostesses" and the large number of waitresses (fifty-six). Though they must be so assigned, this status, in the prison setting, is a misleading one.

Of the thirty women in Social Classes I and II, a number were mentally disturbed, alcoholic, or addicted to drugs. In more fortunate circumstances, their behaviour would have led to psychiatric treatment in hospital or institution, rather than to prison. Offences

large sums, etc. The greater part of the prison population will therefore be found to have earlier acquaintance with crime, dealt with then by fines, probation and occasionally conditional discharge. In 1959, the proportion of all women received under sentence into prison with no previous proved offences (other than Liquor Law offences) was thirty-two per cent; sixty-eight per cent had been previously convicted. (Prison Commissioners' Report, 1959, p.45). When we exam-

ine the Holloway sample a similar distribution appears even though all types of offences are included*. Only 285 women (thirty-two per cent) had no previous convictions recorded in the Nominal Register, against 605 who had (sixty-eight per cent).

A study of the figures reveals the sad inefficacy of existing penal methods in reforming a minority recidivist group. These women, mainly alcoholics, prostitutes, petty thieves (or a combination of all three) have run the gamut of sanctions perhaps from Borstal on, seemingly unaffected in their anti-social careers. Here are some examples taken at random from the Register:

14 fines, 9 imprisonment, 2 probation;
97 fines, 21 imprisonment, 1 probation;
59 fines, 27 imprisonment, 5 probation;
118 fines, 32 imprisonment, 6 probation;
1 Borstal training, 3 probation, 20 fines,
15 imprisonment (age 56); 3 probation,
1 mental hospital, 13 fines, 4 imprisonment.
(age 32)

One woman, an elderly alcoholic, had the astonishing total of 518 fines and 65 prison sentences on her record. For habituals like this, Holloway is a familiar haven, almost the only home they know. Officers are greeted as old friends, certain duties (such as Wing Cleaner) are claimed as by right, and disappointment expressed if the favourite cell is not allocated.

Transfer to Open Prison

There are now three minimum security prisons for women, Hill Hall in Essex, Askham Grange in Yorkshire, and the recently-opened

(November 1960) Moor Court in Staffordshire. All prisoners with a "Star" classification, i.e. those serving their first sentence, are eligible for transfer: in addition, a number of recidivist women prisoners thought suitable for training in open conditions have also been transferred. For the past two and half years, women who have reached the third stage of a Preventive Detention sentence have been sent to Askham under the Hostel scheme, which is working very satisfactorily there. "Stars" selected from Holloway have gone mainly to Hill Hall, as and when places are available.

In practice, a number of exclusions are made: the grossly physically unfit and the mentally unstable; women who are in advanced pregnancy or under treatment for venereal disease; women judged likely to abscond. Habitual prostitutes are not sent, nor women convicted of brothel-keeping. Length of sentence is not a factor in selection: a woman may go if she has only a few weeks to serve. The over-riding principle, so far as possible, is to avoid contamination or corruption by known hardened offenders.

Of the 890 women in the 1959/60 sample, 171 or nineteen per cent were transferred to open prison (169 to Hill Hall, 2 to Askham)*. The main prison, with its most hopeful material thus "creamed off", is left with rejects and recid-

* A total of twenty-two women went to Askham from Holloway during the twelve month period. The other twenty had been sentenced before the survey began.

* The Nominal Register does not distinguish between different types of previous offence.

ivists and required to frame a training programme suited to their needs. Contrary to what might be supposed, "Stars" are not always enthusiastic over the prospect of transfer. Some dislike the added responsibility of open conditions, or fear they may be tempted to run away. Many dislike sleeping in dormitories and would prefer the privacy of a prison cell. Some, while awaiting their place, get settled on the First Offenders' Wing, make their friends, don't want to move again. Others fear that relatives will not make the extra effort to visit at a distance. "Women are not very fond of change" was the verdict of the experienced Assistant Governor who has frequently to deal with this reluctance when she breaks the news of the move.

Comment

Prisons, unlike hospitals, cannot choose whom they will admit or whom they will send elsewhere. Nor, again unlike hospitals, can they decide the length of stay. All who come from the Courts to Holloway must be received: old and young, sick and well, the bright and the dull, women who are pregnant or with infants in arms, the psychopathic, psychotic or normal. They may be sent for any length of time, from two weeks to many years. Some leave a trail of problems outside; the problems of others are emotional and carried within. The complexities—legal, administrative, medical and social—involved in dealing expeditiously and appropriately with this constant stream of human material

can scarcely be appreciated by those outside the prison service.

In their recent report¹⁸, the Prison Commissioners deplore the amount of staff time and energy which, in a large local prison, is taken up by the transient population and diverted from any more constructive function. They also point out that the task of training convicted prisoners is hampered by the large proportion serving short sentences. This situation is all too evident in Holloway: during the twelve month survey period, two-thirds of receptions were women on remand, together with those who paid fines or were otherwise dealt with.* Among the one-third of sentenced individuals, eighty per cent had sentences of less than six months, and of these, eighteen per cent less than fourteen days. Women in this latter group, 163 of them in 1959/60, have barely settled after admission procedures when they start their interviews for discharge.

A prison sentence, however short, remains a punishment. But, from the reformist point of view, it is open to question what is being achieved and whether, in some cases, the social upheaval so caused is proportionate to the gravity of the offence. For example, sentencing mothers of young families for debt would only appear to diminish their chances of repayment, while society meantime bears the cost of keeping their children in care (a cost which in the financial year 1959/60 averaged £8.11.5d per child, per week, for children in the care

* See Definition of Material, p.2.

of local authorities). Experience at Holloway causes one to hope that the recommendations of the United Nations Report on Short-Term Imprisonment¹⁶, suggesting constructive alternatives for short sentences, will gradually be adopted in this country.

The Prison Commissioners' plans for breaking down Holloway into a number of smaller units are to be welcomed. Although within the existing institution different types of offender are segregated as far as possible, the emphasis on security and the totally unsuitable buildings make it difficult to create a therapeutic regime, however enthusiastic the staff. Architects of the 19th Century designed prisons in accordance with the penal philosophy of their time; to-day, modern concepts of penology call for the re-socialization of delinquents in carefully selected groups, under conditions of minimum security. When the new institutions for women are built, it will be possible to carry out these aims, and at the same time, attract the qualified specialist staff who will be needed.

The social class distribution of the Holloway sample invites some tantalising sociological speculations. Is the under representation of the upper social classes a reflection, as Wootton (op.cit) suggests, of the tendency of Judges and Magistrates to feel that prison is more suitable for the lower classes? Are upper class women more often put on probation? (they are certainly more likely to have medical "protection" for offences related to drug addiction and alcoholism, and for attempted

suicide). Are department stores, for public relations reasons, reluctant to prosecute the upper-class non-professional shoplifter? Then too, there are differing levels of temptation: upper class women (unless their behaviour is psychopathologically determined) are unlikely to pilfer foodstuffs and articles they can easily buy; lower class women, in comparative poverty, may be impelled to this type of theft by envy or necessity. Women sentenced for soliciting (another large prison group) rarely have an upper or middle class background.

One would not have expected that a study of this Holloway prison population would throw light on the social advancement of women. Yet there, in the copper-plate handwriting of the old Nominal Registers, is evidence of the revolution which has taken place since the beginning of the century. Women's emancipation from domestic servitude and the trend away from the home; eating out in canteens and restaurants, clothes ready-made, launderettes and vacuum cleaners, the simpler style of living generally and the new kinds of women's work available: all these emerge from comparison of prisoner's occupation in Edwardian days and in our own. The destitution and widespread drunkenness, commonplace fifty-nine years ago, has disappeared; workhouses have been turned into hospitals or homes; the number of women sent to prison is but a fraction of what it used to be. When Henry Mayhew visited Holloway exactly 100 years ago,

he saw women inmates under strict rules of silence employed in picking oakum, laundry work, or knitting. Today in addition to domestic activities, women in Holloway have evening classes in a wide range of subjects, amateur dramatics, a library service, psychotherapy and group counselling. Progress has not ceased: women's prisons fifty years from now may well be quite unlike our present institutions, and embody new ideas and methods making more effective their work of reform.

Summary

Data relating to the offence and social status of 890 individual women sentenced to Holloway prison during a twelve month period were extracted from the 1959/60 Nominal Registers. This group comprised thirty-four per cent of total receptions during the period.

Fifty-nine per cent came from Courts in the London Metropolitan area. Larceny accounted for over half of the Indictable offences; soliciting over half and drunkenness almost a quarter of Non-Indictable offences. A large number of the imprisonments under Civil Process were for debt.

Short sentences preponderated: four-fifths were for less than six months. Nineteen per cent were transferred to open prison.

Middle-aged married women made up the majority of the prison population; their occupations were largely domestic and unskilled. A quarter had been born elsewhere than in England.

The distribution of social class

and religious affiliation differs from that of the general population.

Some problems of a multi-classification women's prison are discussed; comparison with the Nominal Register of 1903 induces reflections on social history.

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