

“H and K” Wings, Wandsworth

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IN THE MIDDLE OF 1951 Mr. Richard Hauser obtained permission from the then Prison Commission to have full access to Wandsworth Prison for a period of time. He said that he wanted to do three things.

1. To see what was going on; and what a big recidivist prison really meant.
2. To see how far new ideas which had borne fruit in other Social fields, could be established in Prison.
3. To learn from Prisoners and Prison Officers.

What he found and what conclusions he drew he has written and spoken about elsewhere. I would like to write about what the “H & K” scheme (as it has come to be called) means to the prisoners and officers and prisoners’ families who have been associated with it.

Mr. Hauser started by having having fairly large separate groups of officers and prisoners. The prisoner groups were a random selection and met during working hours. The Officers met at first during working hours in the boardroom and then, later, as voluntary

groups in the evening. It was a time of questioning and a good deal of heat was engendered. Who are prisoners? How many are “criminal” and whether or not, why is the “holiday” in between sentences so short? What was happening to them during the sentence? Why should things ever be different? Why do people become Prison Officers? Are they special people? Apart from guarding, feeding and bathing a large number of men, what else did they do? Many of the questions were innocent but the answers were disturbing.

Within the walls of Wandsworth there is a small separate prison (formerly a women’s prison) which consists of three Wings G, “H & K,” built round a centre. Toward the end of 1959, it was decided that “H & K” Wings, holding about two hundred (200) men in all, should be the site of a pilot scheme to find out what further questions could be asked and if satisfactory answers could be given. The men in “H & K” were to be those with a sentence of eighteen months to four years (more about selection later) and

the officers in the wing were volunteers who had already taken part in discussions.

At this distance of time, it is not altogether easy to disentangle events; or to say precisely what developments in the Wing followed the ideas that emerged from the first Group Meetings, and what ideas were drawn from events which first took place in the Wing. I think it would be simpler if I outlined the ideas which crystallised during 1961 and were published as a booklet.

First of all, it seemed to us that Wandsworth Prison did not contain over 1,600 dangerous criminals. Some might be so classified but the number is very small. How many can be considered "Professional Criminals"? Nobody knows. What we do know is that they are all unsuccessful. The successful ones are not known to prison staff. It seemed to all of us, then and now, that we badly needed to sort out our population with the knowledge that one can gain from prisoners and officers. It is not enough to say "HE's an old customer, we've known him for years, etc." We want to know the pattern of his offences, whether the pattern has changed and why. We ought to be aware on our landings, what gaps a man has in between sentences, whether they are regular gaps or whether they have become shorter or longer. It seemed, to us, in short, that it was our job to get to know how adequate a man is in the ordinary

situations of life and to think of him in terms of adequacy in ordinary life, rather than someone who is simply "doing two and a half years."

In short, we as officers because we were in the right place, had a duty to sort out our population for ourselves; not so much on the artificial grounds of the gravity of an offence but on the grounds of the maturity or the adequacy of the prisoner. And if we do this, the question immediately arises as to whether we leave things as they are or see what we can do to bring about a change or improvement.

In discussions amongst ourselves, and with prisoners, it became clear that prison has a generally deadening effect and that Trade training, lectures and concerts, do little to relieve this. If anything constructive were to be done, it must concern itself with *ideas*—the ideas that a man has about himself and his life outside, and the ideas that other men have about him. Prisoners (and officers) need to be activated to think realistically about what Prison is concerned with. We ourselves had become used to the social ideas in Mr. Hauser's "Handbook of Group Studies," and it seemed a good thing to use this with groups of men, to see if it could start some "new thinking."

There was a general agreement that whatever the rights and wrongs of punishment might be, the victims of crime did not receive compensation for wrong done and

it was rarely possible for the prisoners to make any monetary return. What prisoners could do, was to repay society at large by their work and actions so that the balance was righted and prisoners gained in dignity.

The Hostel at Wandsworth, which formerly had been used by prisoners from Dartmoor during the last six months of their sentence, was taken over by "H & K" Wings. This Hostel has accommodation for thirteen men only, and it seems to us that going out to work normally should be a part of the sentence of the vast majority of prisoners provided they are properly prepared for it. This preparation has got to mean more than a series of lectures by officials. Men need information but they need much more a period of purposeful and constructive thinking.

Also, the opportunity to examine the sort of crises they will meet with on leaving.

Right at the centre of our thinking, is the belief that if it is to be effective a prison must be a place of help and not a hostile institution with Billiards and Table Tennis included. A man's wife and children should be the concern of officers from the moment he arrives in prison and, in the case of big recidivist prisons, in the middle of areas where prisoners live, a man should be able to look to officers for advice and help after he has left. In many cases, relationships have grown up over

the years and many officers and prisoners know each other well. From time immemorial, prison officers have shown kindness and consideration to prisoners as we all know well. But all this, stops short at the gate and the recidivist has no-one to turn to, but his fellow-lodgers in the Hostel.

During 1961 we summarised the views outlined above as follows. We thought of prison as a positive, helpful place and thought of men going through five phases in prison.

Five Phases

Phase 1.

Most men will pass straight into "phase two" after being "sorted out." This phase is the nursery of the violent anti-social, the deliberate non-co-operator, (it would have the following characteristics; not punitive, stronger staffing, group work as much as possible, endeavour to move men on.) Phase 1 will also receive men from other Phases when necessary.

Phase 2.

- (a) WORK. As hard and as long as the Officers' Bell Scale permits, Preferably for pay out of which to support family and save.
- (b) Active group work, using the Hand-Book. Stimulation of minds that have gone dead.

Phase 3. Preparatory to Hostel.

- (a) Under present prison conditions, men should move on to more interesting and

harder work which approximates more closely to work outside.

- (b) Group work continued.
- (c) Stimulating and purposeful contacts with outside world. Learn from visitors and in return, teach.
- (d) Do work of social value inside and outside the prison. Extend work by getting into employment outside. They will return to prison at night. Groups for men who are working under these conditions.

Phase 4. The Hostel.

Men will have learned something of what makes up Society and will have considered, too, what makes up criminal society. The persistent recidivist has never questioned the latter. He is a conformist; but in phase 3, he will have had this opportunity of using his critical powers and phase 4 should correspond with the period when he can further extend himself. This would naturally correspond with the Hostel period.

We believe that the Hostel should be much extended and (whether it is inside or outside the walls) should be phased. Restricted liberty at first, lead to almost complete freedom toward the end of the sentence. *Group work should be continued.*

Phase 5. After leaving Prison.

Men will have learnt something of the critical periods

after leaving prison. All will have met, of course, these periods before but, in the midst of their panic and discouragement, will not have recognised them as such. Those who wish to settle down will at least have some land-marks and will know how to summon assistance. *Most do not know how to do this at present.* Every crisis surmounted means a longer period out of prison and added confidence.

This then, was the direction that our thinking took between 1959 and 1961. What did this mean in practice?

From the end of 1959 till now, we have taken batches of men from the main prison. The only provisos were that they were doing between eighteen months and four years, had no recent prison offence on their record, were not escapers or homo-sexuals. "H & K" Wings contain therefore, an otherwise complete cross-section of the prison and as the men themselves say: "there are some right villains 'ere." Toward the end of 1961, the men suddenly became very energetic and in addition to the more serious groups which were concerned purely with the "Hand-book" and with rehabilitation, there came into existence a large number of groups and clubs. They all had their own Chairman and wrote their own letters to guests of their own choosing. There was nothing remarkable about these. (open training prisons could show the

same); what was remarkable was that the passive "no hoppers" of this "end of the road" prison showed considerable enterprise, imagination and maturity. It is sufficient to say that the judges, probation officers and M.Ps who have been the guests of these clubs, have taken part in a dialogue of a helpful and intelligent kind. The prisoners have done all this. The prison officers of "H & K" wings have helped to ensure that there was an atmosphere in which this could be done.

What I would prefer to speak of is the groups of enterprise which all hang together; which as a group are peculiar to this section of a recidivist prison and which would not exist as they are, but for the body of ideas which we have been able to follow. These enterprises are in accordance with the principles mentioned above—compensation, regard for prisoners when they have left and for their families whilst in prison, self-activation and help. They include:

Help to the community at large.

(Compensation).

Contact with men who have left.

The Wives' Group.

Recidivists Anonymous.

(self-help)

"H" Wing groups.

(self-activation)

Help to the community, I.V.S.,

Blind Recording, Toys, projects.

I.V.S.

In accordance with the idea of doing work of social value as compensation, six men went out to

work with the International Voluntary Work Association and Friends Work Camps Association. This has continued, on forty-five projects; up to the present two hundred and thirteen men have been out working on eighty-six week-ends making a total of eight hundred and twenty-six working days. At no time have the men been under supervision by the prison staff, and no man has ever absconded. The work consists of decorating the flats of old or blind people and of preparing children's playgrounds, etc. Letters have been received to say how much the work has been valued.

As a result of chance encounter, a blind man asked us if prisoners could do anything to help the blind. This was taken up with Mr. Eric Gillet of the R.N.I.B. (and after learning Braille had been dismissed as being impracticable) the Head Master of the Worcester College for the Blind sent us a tape recorder and this has been fitted in a cell in "K" wing. Since that time, men have been continuously recording text-books in their spare time and about 100 hours of tape have been returned to the College. This service needs extending as the worthwhile work is obviously of benefit to the men involved and the students at the College.

"H & K" wings started making hard and soft toys soon after the scheme started and each year make a gift of some hundreds of toys to the Mayor of Wandsworth for

distribution to children from the Borough. The wings have also adopted a Spastics Ward at a Hospital and a Children's Home, and supply toys on the children's birthdays.

Contact with men who have left.

We are not far from the time when a prisoner who thought of ringing up the "nick" after leaving, would have been thought out of his mind. In the past eighteen months, more than eighty men have got in touch with us by telephone, letter or by visiting the prison itself. Some men write to say that all goes well; more write or ring up about lost jobs, lost homes, or simply out of desperation. Sometimes it is enough just to talk. At other times, we use our wide and increasing network of probation officers, employers and personnel officers. We have the most cordial relationships with the N.A.D.P.A.S. and the C.A.C.A. I know that it is not unknown for ex-prisoners to contact a particular officer or other official at other prisons. We think it is different here because, as a staff in "H & K," we invite the contacts continually. We make a business of it.

Wing Groups.

In January 1962, we started the "Wives Group." This group of wives (whether married or not) can meet twice a month at a rented recreation room near the prison gates. There they can have tea in a relaxed atmosphere and meet one another at ease. They can exchange their problems or just

talk; the tea making and baby minding is done by a group of women, friends of the wing. Such women exist near every prison, and some of ours are gifted over problems such as Housing, Hire-Purchase, National Assistance, etc. It will astonish no-one to learn that prisoner's wives have difficulties of which their husbands know nothing, and the meeting is a time for the release of tensions. Many men feel more at ease when they know that there are people whom *they* know, who care for their wives and families. There are nearly 200 men in "H & K." Of these, forty only have a wife (are the remaining 160 casualties of previous prison sentences?). Of the forty, twenty-five are members of the group. We hope shortly to hold the wives group every Wednesday, although we are well aware that it should be every day! I wonder how many wives would be helped if these facilities were made available to the 1,400 men in the main prison.

"II" Wing Groups.

The whole business of raising lively questions about self and society, with small groups of ten and twelve men presented difficulties. It was not possible to hold groups during the working day; our Bell Scale made it difficult for officers to be present in the evenings. In October 1962, we started groups with prisoners reading from the Hand-Book and drawing others into the discussion. This succeeded far beyond our

expectations. What had been planned as an interim measure, turned out to be something which is of extreme value in itself and we shall try to preserve it. Some men are brilliant interpreters and can evoke responses in others; some find the whole thing a struggle. At the time of writing we have six officers who come in voluntarily because they think the job is valuable and they enjoy it. One great advantage of the Hand-Book is that an officer can take part in a group without previous knowledge, for he can be either a reader or can sit in simply as a member of a group. All officers can do this and the great advantage of officers taking part, is that they can provide the continuity which a prisoner cannot.

Recidivists Anonymous.

This group formed itself in order to give support to its members while in prison and after they had left. One practical step taken was when they received permission to start a fund from their prison earnings in order to make a grant to a needy member on leaving prison. Several men have received a grant of five pounds from this fund which has been built up from subscriptions of 6d. to a 1s. 0d. The fund now stands at over thirty pounds. At present, members are now getting as much information as they can on ways of starting a small hostel for men who have nowhere to go when they leave.

Outside Group.

This is a group of men who have left Wandsworth and meet together at irregular intervals. The purpose is to help one another and try to find jobs and accommodation for men leaving "H & K" wings.

I have outlined something of the practical workings of the scheme. Needless to say, it does not conform closely with the Phases mentioned above. The whole prison and the whole staff would have to be engaged in order to do that and we should need Hostel accommodation for 150-200 men instead of for *thirteen*. As it is, two hundred men are engaged and about thirty members of the staff who are in sympathy with the scheme, and give it full backing. We think that thirty out of one hundred and eighty is a large number and, in view of the recent P.O.A. resolution at Dover, we think that many officers all over the country would be glad to engage in work which is of first rate social value. We think that many officers would want such training, thus enabling them to participate in this work. This would entail meeting in groups with other people in the society engaged in parallel work (e.g. probation officers, teachers, approved school staff, mental hospital nurses, police, magistrates—people who are doing a job in this field) so that they can train one another. We think the Hand-Book an excellent means of stimulating discussion. Unless we can actually see prisoners as people

who think and feel, and who will soon be in the world with their families, we can do little except house them under comfortable conditions and leave them inert.

Different prisons need different Pilot jobs doing in them. We like to think that one day, the Main Prison might be involved in this work and that "H & K" wings might become the nursery for those remaining in Phase One. Even now, we can visualise younger single men going through six months training along these lines and then, on to an open prison for the latter part of their sentence. Again, men in central prisons who are far from their homes, could be trained in local prisons for their last six months. In this way they could be introduced to their new community. To those who work in recidivist prisons, the question may occur "how is discipline affected by this change?" The atmosphere is certainly more relaxed, and this is particularly noticeable to men who have come recently from the main prison. Reports are few and far between and the medical staff have commented on the small number of men "reporting sick." There is a much greater degree of confidence between officers and men and this, mainly, is brought about through officer-participation in groups.

Results.

As is to be expected we are often faced with the question: "But does this in fact work? Do people

not return to prison?" Our answer would be first of all that the wings have been in existence for only a short time and it is not easy to speak of success about any group of prisoners since follow-up methods are almost non-existent. We keep a record of men who return to Wandsworth after leaving "K" wing and we learn of others "on the grape vine." The record is of great interest to us and we are encouraged by it but it has no scientific validity *because* we have no central group. Mr. T. S. Lodge of the Home Office research department has shown great interest in the scheme and we are hopeful that he may be able to help us.

We think it of the greatest importance that if a man returns we should try to learn how the breakdown took place, what particular crisis produced it and what steps might have helped to prevent it, both in the man's case and in the case of others. We think it unhelpful for us, to strike moral attitudes, e.g. "Here he is back again. What can you do for these people? Its hopeless." We should learn from the situation and bring the man through the stages again. It would be helpful if a rational scheme existed in every prison so that it would make no difference where a man was sent to. Return to prison does not mean failure. Men who have never been free from institutional care since they were very young may return on a minor charge after eighteen months

instead of the usual six or seven months. This is success. Many with previous convictions for assault and violence may return for petty larceny. This may be part of a new pattern but we should be conscious (and the man should know that we are conscious) that moving out of the sphere of violence is success.

As things are, it is impossible to know what happens to people

when they leave prison unless they are recommitted or unless they get in touch with us. What we do know is, that of the many men who have kept in touch, several should (judging by their previous form) have been back in prison before now and, in fact, have *not* returned. Even if they *do* return eventually we believe that a great measure of success will have been achieved.



The stand at the July Liverpool Show.