

Book Reviews

Alexander Paterson: Prison Reformer

By Harry Potter

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Potter's book of the life and work of Alexander Paterson is an outstanding contribution to understanding the values that were held by a historic figure in the history of prisons in England and Wales. The book examines many elements of Paterson's life, recognising how his youth and studenthood had informed his philanthropic and humanitarian ambitions in life. The book then expands into a detailed and deeply interesting explanation of his political and managerial endeavours in punishment and criminal justice. Having always been an admirer of Paterson's penal agenda, this text only reinforces the reason why he was so respected and continues to be by students of prisons. Potter not only offers a masterclass in the practices of a historical criminologist but writes to inspire action to the contemporary issues we face with punishment and imprisonment. Readers could enter this book with no knowledge on Paterson, and still walk away feeling inspired to engage in prison reform.

Patterson is no doubt an influential prison reformer, his time in the Prison Commission has left a lasting legacy and longing for a similar approach, with authors still referring to the 'Paterson era'. This is particularly poignant as he was never chairman of the Prison Commission, yet his influential values are now synonymous with

the period between 1922-1939. Not only did he impact adult prisons, but his reach and influence saw the transformation of the Borstal systems promoting that 'it cannot train them in an atmosphere of captivity and repression' (p. 243). For those who are unfamiliar with this period of prison reform, Potter details Patterson's ambitions, determinations, and ethos of punishment in great detail. Using a wide range of evidence from people witnessing Patterson's reforms first hand make this text an anthology of voices as well as a narrative of development. Potter brilliantly presents the Patterson era, addressing how and why his libertarian and humanitarian views became central to his work on prisons and punishment.

Potter details many areas of Paterson's life, exploring his values, perspectives, and moral campaigns through a fantastic use of letters, stories, and cross referencing to historical publications. This produces an insightful way of presenting Paterson's life and ambitions and gives voice to those who were able to speak to, witness, and interpret their own thoughts on his work and manner of supporting people. I believe that Potter, through this approach, recognises the complexity in Paterson's interests as he sought to increase the quality of life with all those around him. The early chapters clearly present his alma mater and humanist crusades that eventually lead to his work and focus on the Borstal system and to prisons. In the early chapters, the author presents some excellent foreshadowing, showing the reader how Paterson's experiences would lead towards future works in charities and within criminal justice. This not only hooks the reader further, but also

emphasises the manifestation of Paterson's value basis which would later lead to his most memorable qualities when working with offenders. Indeed, Potter claims that Paterson often presented himself as an observer of the world, where he recognised inequalities, injustice, and made calls for change through a distinct approach. This approach is characterised by the author as 'descriptive rather than prescriptive, to state the problem not to solve it, although he did suggest many ameliorations' (p84). It solidifies the view of Paterson as an observer first, intervener second.

I found particular interest in reading around Paterson's early life and career, as Potter truly frames and builds a clear representation of the values and moral commitment that he held. This excellent building of his character is seen throughout the book, with the author constantly recollecting changes, ambitions, and goals that Paterson set for himself. The mid to late chapters on his work during the Prison Commission further capture his strong philosophical and penological stance. I find this difficult to represent in a review, as the quality and quantity of detail that Potter provides does more than highlight actions and events, but an ethos for punishment and penal action that are elsewhere seen in penological writing. The ability to forget about the Paterson I read as an undergraduate and to learn his values anew, is evident of the author's outstanding contribution to understanding a specific time of penal reform. Potter then leaves the reader with an account of Paterson's legacy, acknowledging his contribution to prisons and Borstals whilst also addressing the lasting impact he made to penal reformers. Whilst Potter

acknowledges that Paterson's work can no longer be directly recognised in contemporary imprisonment, one cannot help but feel impassioned to strive for change and reform, using the same values and frames seen during the Paterson era.

This text represents the importance of good historical methodology in criminology. Potter not only presents a strong overview of Paterson's work but also demonstrates detailed work that is not usually seen when reading about the history of prisons and reform; making this book the central text to understand the work of Paterson. I can see this text holding great interest for those fascinated in the history of imprisonment, and for those who seek to share the moral and philosophical views that Paterson developed and established with those working in, living in, and studying prisons. Readers should be aware this text cannot be simply read as a biography, a history, or a manifesto for penal reform. It is all of these things, making this unique, comprehensive, and incredibly personal to its readers.

Minority Ethnic Prisoners and the Covid-19 Lockdown — Issues, Impacts and Implications

By Avril Brandon and Gavin Dingwall

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The rhetoric of 'we're all in this together' has so shaped narratives about the Covid-19 pandemic that the differential impacts on certain minority populations may have been persistently underplayed. In the community, the worse outcomes for racialised people are

well established, and it is timely that Brandon and Dingwall have shone a light on how this played out in prisons. They focus on 'minority ethnic' prisoners, foreign nationals, and those from the Irish Travelling and Roma communities. The study covers all the UK nations, and the Republic of Ireland.

The research was conducted while the pandemic was still at its height, so it is not based on face-to-face interviews in prisons. The authors give a summary of the impact of the pandemic and its management, citing dozens of inspection reports and a rich variety of quotes from prisoners. They do justice to the successes arising from close collaboration between prison leaders and the public health bodies, including the remarkable work of Dr Eamonn O'Moore and his public health team; but they also set out evidence of the negative impacts of restricted regimes on prisoners' mental health.

Black, Asian and minority ethnic prisoners are the first group examined (the authors are alive to the difficulties of labelling). The community realities are well known — in the UK, when age was taken into account, Black people were 4.2 (males) or 4.3 (females) times more likely to die than White people (p.30); while after adjusting from a range of other variables, Black people were still almost twice as likely to die a COVID-related death. The possible causal factors are helpfully rehearsed, as is the over-representation of Black, Asian and minority ethnic people in prison. HMIP is cited as saying that 'there had been little or no monitoring of the impact of Covid-19 on various prisoner groups' (p.34).

The authors consider the COVID-related death rate among prisoners with Black (4 per cent of deaths) or Asian (9 per cent) heritage, compared with 87 per cent White; the difference in age profile between these sub-populations is probably relevant.

They then move to the tricky issues of mental health, saying 'it may be argued that minority ethnic groups are no less likely to experience mental health problems, but ... may be less likely to receive diagnosis and/or treatment' (p.36). They cite useful evidence from the Zahid Mubarek Trust, and also commend the work of chaplaincy staff in maintaining in-person pastoral support throughout.

Evidence of differences in staff-prisoner relationships is then considered, extending to incentives systems, access to prison jobs, release on temporary licence, complaints, and access to the discrimination incident reporting process. Little evidence is cited linking inequitable outcomes directly to the pandemic, but in general the inequities are acute, and the claim that 'the impact of the Covid-19 lockdown in prisons has . . . differentially affected minority ethnic groups' (p.50), though hard to evidence, is not implausible.

Among foreign nationals, there may well have been greater impacts from Covid-19 in the community. In prisons, those who did not understand English were inevitably disadvantaged in a fast-changing situation where health and regime information was being pushed out in English on almost a daily basis, and where clear information on arrival in prison was vital; additionally, this group may be less likely to disclose risk factors such as mental health problems (p.58). HMIP Scotland drew attention sharply to some of these issues, while in the Republic of Ireland, chaplaincies were commended for providing interpretation. Some prisons ensured that Covid-19-related information was translated — for example, at HMP Bedford the governor's weekly newsletter was translated into 25 languages in 2021 (p. 64), with similar examples in the other jurisdictions such as a