

# PRISON SERVICE JOURNAL

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*Special Edition*  
**The Prison and the Public**

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The Editorial Board wishes to make clear that the views expressed by contributors are their own and do not necessarily reflect the official views or policies of the Prison Service.

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# Editorial Comment

## The Prison and the Public

*Dr Alyson Brown is a Reader in History at Edge Hill University and Dr Alana Barton is a Senior Lecturer in Criminology and Criminal Justice at Edge Hill University.*

Superficially, the terms 'prison' and 'public' seem to have obvious meanings and to some extent the modern 'prison' is defined as not 'public'; that inmates are withdrawn by the state from public life, although certainly not to enjoy a private life. Paradoxically the enjoyment of a private life is one of the privileges taken away on entry into prison. In recent decades the words prison and private have increasingly been used together not to describe conditions or the experience of imprisonment but prisons being contracted out to 'private' operators on a commercial, for [private]-profit basis. On the other hand, the 'public' is a term often used vaguely to refer to the people or the community or anything connected with them. Incarcerated offenders are commonly perceived as anti-community or even at war with society with the 'public' being, economically and/or personally, victims of their depredations. Hence, the prison, its prisoners and the public have often been portrayed as opposite and opposing entities.

Historically prisons have aroused considerable public curiosity. The concealment of their internal worlds has kindled the imagination and inspired a desire for knowledge about their isolated, unknown spaces. At the same time, and paradoxically, the powerfully symbolic external structure of the prison — built to intimidate and deter — has arguably provided the public with a sense of familiarity and even comfort at the certainty of punishment. But despite this interest, the public have had little familiarity with the modern prison. This is not due to a lack of sources of information. On the contrary, media depictions of prisons and prisoners proliferate. However, as Cheliotis has argued, the public preference for 'immediacy' rather than 'complexity' shapes the nature of mediated representations.<sup>1</sup> On occasion this has fed into a fascination, verging on the salacious, with punishment and suffering. Thus, despite the abundance of popular sources (both 'factual' and fictional) which claim to expose the 'realities' of prison life, these are frequently misleading and decontextualised depictions which, when coupled with a harsh political rhetoric, serve primarily to consolidate misinformed, superficial and punitive public perceptions about prison, prisoners and punishment.

Media representations aside, in contemporary society, there are other means by which the public can be connected to the prison. Prison heritage sites and museums allow the public to experience the prison more directly, in some cases permitting them to physically enter the institution. Alternatively educational programmes and

projects can provide the public with constructive and contextualised meaning to the prison experience. However, all methods of connecting the public with the prison are inherently entwined with political and economic meaning and thus achieving 'authenticity' is challenging. This special edition of the *Prison Service Journal* attempts to challenge or at least problematize one-dimensional perspectives through examinations of the relationship between the prison and the public. It is hoped that these articles will not only demonstrate how earnest and positive these connections can be but also that, just like prisons in the early twenty-first century, historical prisons were diverse, fluid environments in which inmates tested and pushed the boundaries of their existence. Some prisoners, who were accepted at the time or later as being incarcerated for political reasons were best placed not only to imprint their own identities on their carceral space but on national politics of their times to the extent that the prisons which held them became identified with their morality and their suffering.

This themed edition will examine some of the ways in which the public can be connected to the realities of incarceration, past and present. Three of the papers have an international scope, discussing penal establishments and projects in a range of countries including Northern Ireland, South Africa, Australia, Tasmania and the USA. Contrasting this we have three articles that take a more localised perspective, focusing on prisons and schemes in England. But the edition begins with an examination of methodology and the ways in which the public, rather than relying on mediated representations, might *directly* investigate the lives of prisoners in the past. When French historian Arlette Farge recommended embracing the 'art' (as well as the 'science') of historical research, she was encouraging the researcher to negotiate the 'ebb and flow' of archival material, arguing that when situated in their appropriate contexts, even 'small glimpses eventually consolidate into patterns... which, when pieced painstakingly together, illuminate the everyday life of the distant past'.<sup>2</sup> In the first article **Helen Johnston, Barry Godfrey, David Cox and Jo Turner** demonstrate how this project might be achieved using digitised archives. Access opportunities for researchers (both academic and independent) have expanded with the exponential increased availability of digitised historical records. Their research, which carefully pieced together the lives of 650 individuals released from prison during the nineteenth century, used a plethora of digital resources including birth,

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1. Cheliotis L (2010) 'The Ambivalent Consequences of Visibility: Crime and Prisons in the Mass Media', *Crime, Media, Culture*, 6(2): 169-184.  
2. In Bosworth, M. (2001), 'The Past as a Foreign Country: Some Methodological Implications of Doing Historical Criminology', *British Journal of Criminology*, 41/3, 435.

death and marriage records, census records, military records, online criminal registers, newspaper trial reports and prison licenses. The paper explains how, from such broad data, intimate details of particular lives can be reconstructed and also reflects upon some of the problems and challenges that such methods potentially pose.

The edition continues with a selection of articles that examine the ways in which the public can connect with the internal world of the prisons and prisoners of the past. Three of these papers have an international flavour.

**Eleanor Casella's** article establishes a theoretical framework for the analysis of the physical construction of, and the use and negotiation of space within, penal establishments. As noted above, architecture can play an integral role in the disciplinary function of institutions and can be used, not only as a means to impress ideological meaning externally but also to encourage and establish social control and discipline internally. Taking a material perspective, she highlights the significance of prison design and by drawing on archaeological research conducted on a range of penal institutions (including prisons, POW camps, asylums and other detention facilities) she examines the role played by architectural spaces and artefact collections in the construction of everyday institutional lives. Acknowledging that power is 'capillary'<sup>3</sup> she examines how the disciplinary intentions of physical spaces can be disrupted, resisted and rejected by those who inhabit them. In the next article, **Laura McAtackney** examines the way in which prison heritage sites might be used and interpreted in the context of societies in post-conflict transition, specifically Northern Ireland and South Africa. Presenting a comparative case study of Long Kesh / Maze prison, which remains closed to the public, and Robben Island, which was transformed into a museum and then a world heritage site shortly after its closure as a prison, McAtackney argues that the decisions taken over the use of such sites strongly denote how societies manage the political and moral complexities and implications of their difficult pasts. The paper examines the issue of the value decisions taken in terms of which narratives are emphasised in such sites. Clearly, for societies in transition, the silencing of particular voices can carry important political meaning and consequences. The Port Arthur penal station in Tasmania is the focus of **Hamish Maxwell-Stewart's** paper. The station has attracted tourists for over a century, becoming one of the most famous museums in Australia, and life in the penal colony has been colourfully recounted via literature and films. However the original tourist focus of the site presented a sanitised, official version of the past which obscured the realities of transportation and incarceration and excluded the voices of those subject to these penalties. Maxwell-Stewart examines the intentions behind, and development of, a new tourist venture, entitled the 'Lottery of Life' interpretation gallery, at the Port Arthur site. The article demonstrates how careful and meticulous historical research can be used to present a meaningful, complex and powerful representation of past lives.

The edition moves on to two articles that present a more localised focus. In his paper **Nicholas Arber** provides us with a history of Norwich Castle, used as the County Gaol for Norfolk from the mid-fourteenth century until its closure in 1887. Arber charts the long public interest in the prison that followed its closure and its shift to a formal tourist attraction. He examines the 'dungeon' tours that took place in the 1950s and 60s, largely sensationalised affairs which focused primarily on the violence and brutality of the prison but with little broader context. The paper draws on Arber's PhD research, exploring the changes in the way the prison has been presented to the public in recent years. With interactive exhibitions, a reconstruction of an original cell and 'real life' accounts of actual prisoners, Arber discusses the balance that is struck between detached objectivity and the ever popular, yet salacious, presentations of the past. **Lindsey Ryan** and **Elisabeth Chard** take Preston House of Correction as their focus. The article reflects on the influential work of Reverend John Clay, chaplain of the institution, and discusses the nature of the labour undertaken by prisoners in Lancashire prisons during 19th Century. The specific focus is a museum exhibition, which was inspired by research conducted by Ryan, scheduled to open in 2013/14. The exhibition, which uses a series of portable 'pop up' banners, compares the prison of the past with contemporary institutions in Lancashire. Specifically, the display covers the introduction of work into the prison regime, the rehabilitative methods used in prisons, the impact of early reformers including John Clay, and some themes of continuity and discontinuity in terms of crime causation. The aim is to link historical and twenty-first century prison practice to encourage debate about reformative methods and what can be achieved.

The articles thus far have primarily focused on how the public might be better informed of the realities of prisons and prisoners of the past. The final article in this collection presents an interview conducted by **Michael Fiddler** with Saul Hewish, founding member of Geese Theatre Company and co-director of 'Rideout' Creative Arts for Rehabilitation project. In this interview Fiddler and Hewish reflect on how the public can be connected to the experience of contemporary prisoners. Hewish discusses his work on two Rideout projects. The first, entitled 'the Creative prison', focused on the physical prison environment and was undertaken in conjunction with staff from HMP Gartree. As part of this project prisoners and prison staff were involved in the reconceptualisation of the internal landscape (in terms of both physical structure and regime) of the prison. The second project, entitled GOTOJAIL, featured a touring 'pop up' cell installation that toured festivals, shopping centres and other venues. What these schemes reveal is a vital optimism about the potential for change in the future. The response to the Creative Prison showed a serious interest in considering better, more creative penal alternatives. The engagement with GOTOJAIL suggests that there is a 'public' that wants to know what the 'prison' is and why its operation should be constantly questioned.

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3. Foucault M (1980) *The History of Sexuality Vol I: An Introduction*, Vintage, New York.

# Reconstructing Prison Lives:

## Criminal Lives in the Digital Age

*Helen Johnston*, Senior Lecturer in Criminology, University of Hull, *Barry Godfrey*, Professor of Social Justice, University of Liverpool, *David Cox*, Senior Lecturer in Criminology, University of Wolverhampton and *Jo Turner*, Lecturer in Criminology, University of Chester.

### Introduction

In the past few years the expansion of digitisation of historical records has allowed increasing access to family history records, census records, military and employment records and newspapers databases through the internet. In many ways this has allowed much greater access to this historical material, hitherto buried in archives, spread across the country where perhaps only the specialist researcher or the most committed family historian might dare to tread. As historians of crime and punishment, our access to criminal and prison records available through the internet has also increased significantly, particularly through the use of sites such as [www.ancestry.co.uk](http://www.ancestry.co.uk) and just recently (March 2013) the website [www.findmypast.co.uk](http://www.findmypast.co.uk) announced the release of over half a million criminal records in addition to the existing material already on their website database through collaborative projects with the National Archives. As well as the national court and punishment records available through such subscription websites like the *Criminal Registers 1791-1892*, a number of large projects or local archives have placed databases or digital criminal records or photographs online — for example, *The Proceedings of the Old Bailey 1674 to 1913* ([www.oldbaileyonline.org](http://www.oldbaileyonline.org)) or registers of prisoners or criminals, for example [Aylesbury Prison](http://www.buckscc.gov.uk/sites/bcc/archives/ea_libp_risoners.page) ([www.buckscc.gov.uk/sites/bcc/archives/ea\\_libp\\_risoners.page](http://www.buckscc.gov.uk/sites/bcc/archives/ea_libp_risoners.page)). Our recent ESRC funded project on the costs of imprisonment has used some of these records and many more to uncover the offending and prison lives of 650 convicts who were released from prison during the mid to late nineteenth century. This article will use a case study of one female convict we encountered to illuminate the rich historical material that is available on the prison lives of these offenders and will discuss some of the pitfalls in using such materials and the surprising, perhaps unintentional aspects of the records which also bring the prison to life.

### Convict Prison Lives

Our project was partially concerned with the financial costs to the country of maintaining a large prison estate from 1853 to 1940; and partly to establish what the results of imprisonment were in terms of re-offending rates and the general impact on individual convict's lives over that period. The costs of building and running convict prisons were considerable, and arguably they did little to address the problem of recidivism. However, this article focuses on the individual convicts. In order to examine the impact of imprisonment on offenders' lives we relied heavily on official sources and we extensively used online digital resources wherever possible. For example, in order to establish where and when an individual convict was born we used [www.FreeBMD.com](http://www.FreeBMD.com) and other country-based births, marriages and deaths websites. We used the same sources for the dates and places of marriages, birth of children, death, and death of the individual's spouse and other relations. The censuses gave us their occupation, address, and familial structure every ten years between 1841 and 1911; and military websites gave us additional information (although few of our convicts served after release, some had served before entering into prison). We also searched for every time the individual found themselves in court. The online criminal registers (available in *Ancestry.com*) and the trial reports available in online newspapers websites (British Historic Newspapers Online, for example) provided us with information about an individual's interactions with the courts, notably when they were sentenced to custody. Our primary objective was to examine when individuals had started to offend; when they first went to prison; how many convictions they had; how many times in their lives they were sent to prison and for how long; whether the use of imprisonment accelerated or stopped their offending or whether the length of the sentence had an impact on their personal and family lives. However, we were fortunate to find a set of records, some of which are now online, which substantially added to our understanding, not only of individual convict lives, but also provided us with a mass of information about convicts' experience of prison life and details of the daily workings of individual prisons and regimes.

We were therefore able to provide a fine-grained analysis of a sample of 650 male and female convicts sentenced to penal servitude in the mid to late Victorian period.

### The Prison License System and its Records

During the demise of the use of transportation to Australia in the 1850s the British government set up the system of convict prisons. These convict prisons, mainly located in the South of England, were established to hold long term prisoners, who would have previously been transported, under a sentence of penal servitude. Long term sentences of penal servitude were put in place to replace a sentence of transportation, for example, initially seven years transportation was replaced with four years penal servitude. A sentence of penal servitude consisted of three parts; a period of separation, often at Millbank penitentiary, the second part was served in a public works prison where the prisoner would pass through certain stages or classes and a final part of the sentence would be release under license. This policy of remission (or early conditional release or parole) on license (or ticket of leave) operated as a regularised part of the system for those serving longer sentences and contrary to popular belief, meant that the Victorians did not 'lock people up and throw away the key' as is sometimes claimed. This system of release on license had been widely used in the Australian colonies and aimed to provide a pool of labour to grow the Australian colonies, and which incidentally helped a number of offenders to reintegrate into society. The UK government continued to operate the license for those convicts sentenced to serve their penal servitude on British soil (roughly from the 1850s onwards). Convicts released on license were subject to conditions, to keep a copy of the license on them at all times, they could reside where they wished but must report to the police station within three days of release and then monthly. Failure to report, leading an irregular life or committing an offence would result in the revocation of the license and immediate return to prison for the remainder of the sentence. This was felt to encourage ex-prisoners to gain employment and to resume a law-abiding life. Between 1853 and 1919 over a thousand prisoners per year were released on

conditional license, which was the equivalent of a quarter of the sentenced convict prison population, and each one left a bureaucratic record (a document which was typically composed of between ten and one-hundred pages of information). The Prison Commission files which hold the licenses are kept in The National Archives (PCOM 3 and 4 are prison licensing papers and penal records for male and female convicts, 1853-1887). In total there are about 42,000 licenses which have survived (many of the female licenses and some of the male licenses are available digitally on [www.findmypast.co.uk](http://www.findmypast.co.uk) and [www.ancestry.co.uk](http://www.ancestry.co.uk)). Although we used the digital online sources for female offenders, we also visited the National Archives in order to photograph a large number of male licenses. It would have been much

. . . these prison records give a wealth of information on the administration of the licensing system and the internal operations of the prisons.

easier and cheaper to have all of these records digitally available, and, indeed, they are a superb source of information for genealogists and family historians to use, so that may happen in time. For the moment, however, the National Archives lack the financial resources to carry out too many large-scale digitization projects at any one time — and they rely on commercial partners in order to finance some digitization projects — the 1901 census, for example, which was constructed in partnership with Find My Past. As well as the standard details of the individual

offenders that are often found on Victorian and Edwardian criminal records — name, photograph, age, marital status, height, weight, distinguishing marks, conviction and previous convictions, these prison records give a wealth of information on the administration of the licensing system and the internal operations of the prisons. The penal record contains all the details of every prison that the person has been committed to, released from and when; all of the 'marks' that they obtained (at this time convicts had to pass through marks system of progressive stages, they were required to earn marks each day and through time served and the accumulation of the required number of marks to move to next stage); any punishments that they received during their period of imprisonment; details of the letters which they sent out and those that were sent to them and any visitors that they received. In addition the files sometimes contain letters that have been suppressed by the prison. Records are also made of the prisoner's health and comments from Medical

Officers', any special requests or petitions to the Governor or to the Home Office. All of this provides a fascinating insight into the experiences of convict prisons and to the surveillance of prisoners inside prison and beyond the prison walls in the mid to late nineteenth century.

We compiled a 'life-grid' for each of the 650 people in our sample. The grids comprised three columns, and a number of rows (one for each year, starting with the year of birth of the convict); the next column held all information on family events for that year (i.e. birth of a child, death of a father, marriage, and so on); and the last column contained any court-prison based interactions that happened in that year. So, for example, the last column contained all court appearances, but also when a convict was punished inside of the prison, when they changed prison labour, when they were moved to a different prison, and so on. This method pioneered by Godfrey *et al'* allowed us to correlate events in order to see if they appeared to have a relationship to each other, that is did the death of a father and mother seem to propel some people into a life of crime? When offenders got married did they tend to stop or slow their offending? Did having children before or after imprisonment persuade offenders to cease committing crimes? Our next step was to enter the information into a machine-readable database so that we could run some quantitative analysis (simple cross-tabulations in the main); and lastly, we produced illustrative vignettes, or case-studies, in order to get a more rounded and immediate view of the lives of our sample of convicts. The case study of Bridget O'Donnell, for example, fleshed out some of the details of her life, and experience within the penal system.

### Case Study: Bridget O'Donnell

This is the case of Bridget O'Donnell (or MacDonald or McDonald). She has several aliases or misspellings of her name in various records but our research suggests that the prison administrators, aided by records of police surveillance of ex-convicts, licensees, and habitual serious offenders, were fairly

good at identifying people despite their numerous aliases. We have referred to her as Bridget O'Donnell because that is the name she used when she entered the convict system to serve a sentence of seven years penal servitude in 1868. Prior to this, Bridget had accumulated over fifty summary convictions for drunkenness, prostitution and fighting. She also served another two short prison sentences for theft, six weeks for stealing a shawl in 1856 (her earliest conviction which happened when she was in her mid-teens) and twelve months for stealing a watch in November 1866. All of her offences thus far were committed in the Liverpool area where Bridget lived, although she had been born in Roscommon in Ireland

in the early 1840s. It appears that her family moved to England during the distress of the Irish famine. Her previous offences caught up with her in 1868 when, because she had two felony convictions by the time she was sentenced for stealing another watch, she received a sentence of seven years penal servitude at Liverpool Sessions. At Liverpool's Walton Prison awaiting her trial she was confined under separate conditions (essentially this meant being kept alone in a cell, where she carried out prison work, ate, slept and was only allowed outside the cell for periods of exercise or to attend

chapel). Her conduct was good, but she made no progress in her education (being required to learn basic literacy in a schoolroom).

In March 1869 she was transferred from Walton to the convict system, specifically to Millbank Penitentiary in London. At this time Millbank was a convict assembly prison, where all convict prisoners were received for assessment and then, according to their gender, were moved onto to other prisons for completion of the separation stage. Here Bridget continued her separate confinement, working as a knitter in her cell, her conduct was good and she made some progress at school. The first stage of penal servitude was completed by July 1869 and she was moved to Woking female prison for the second stage; there she was held in association working again as a knitter. Bridget spent from July 1869 to October 1873 in Woking prison and during this time

All of this provides a fascinating insight into the experiences of convict prisons and to the surveillance of prisoners inside prison and beyond the prison walls in the mid to late nineteenth century.

1. Godfrey B. S., Cox, D. C., and S. D. Farrall (2007) *Criminal Lives: Family, Employment and Offending*, Oxford: Clarendon; Godfrey, B. S., Cox, D. J. and S. D. Farrall (2010) *Serious Offenders: A Historical Study of Habitual Criminals*, Oxford: Clarendon.

she committed seven prison offences. In December 1869 she was punished for quarrelling and using bad language and received three days in close confinement; she also had to work an extra 180 marks in her class and lost 56 remission marks. During the next four years she committed further offences against the prison rules; showing her temper and breaking her cell window; fighting; rudeness and using foul language; receiving a parcel from another prisoner; breaking her cell windows and gas glass; making a falsehood, using bad language and breaking her cell windows. As a result of these offences, she spent a total of thirty-two days in close confinement and lost ninety-seven days' remission. Bridget was released on license before her whole prison sentence was completed, but as a result of the loss of remission marks it was not nearly as early as it could have been. She was released from Woking on 13 October 1873 with 34 months of her 84 month sentence unexpired, and intending to go back home to Liverpool.

During her time in Woking prison, we also discovered a little of her family life. Her next of kin is given as John O'Donnell, probably her father, and another good indication that her surname was indeed O'Donnell. Whilst the entry for 'number of children' on the prison form was left blank, letters out of the prison show her writing to her daughter Mary Ann, who was in Kirkdale Industrial School, probably having been committed there due to her mother's imprisonment. Bridget tried writing to a John McDonald and also an Owen O'Donnell at an address in Lace Street, Liverpool, but both the letters were returned. She continued to write to Mary Ann but again she did not receive letters back from her daughter.

After leaving Woking prison on license, Bridget's freedom was relatively short lived as in August 1874 she was sentenced to seven days for being drunk and disorderly in Liverpool. Unfortunately this was deemed sufficient to activate the license and a letter duly arrived from the Home Office to Walton prison revoking her license due to this conviction. Five days later she was back in Millbank prison. Again after a period of separation at Millbank she was removed to Woking and was discharged on the expiration of her sentence at the end of August 1876. Bridget continued to write to Mary Ann, but this time her letters are answered. As with previous incarcerations,

All prisoners were given a form on entry to the convict system which stated their name and in which prison they were being held . . .

she continued to offend in prison, this time insolence, bad language and singing in her cell (12 hours in penal cell and 12 remission marks lost); quarrelling and fighting with prisoner Coggins (lost her 360 class marks) and being noisy and abusive to the Matron (placed in the penal ward for 28 days). After her discharge, having completed the remainder of her sentence, she again returned to Liverpool.

Bridget was not convicted of any further offences in the next few years, but then on Christmas Eve 1883 she was received at Liverpool prison having been committed by the court on theft charges. In the New Year (7 January 1884) she was convicted at the Liverpool Session on two counts; larceny from the person after a previous conviction for larceny and stealing a bag and money from the person. For these

offences Bridget received her second sentence of penal servitude, this time for five years. Now aged in her early 40s, Bridget was again transferred to Millbank. She was well used to the convict system by now, and seems to have wanted to negotiate some of the reception processes herself. All prisoners were given a form on entry to the convict system which stated their name and in which prison they were being held and which they could have sent to someone they knew either family or friends to let

them know of their location — Bridget declined this form, perhaps indicating that her father was no longer alive or that she had lost touch with other family members — her second penal record notes 'no relatives' under next of kin. Her first record had recorded her as having no trade, but now she was described as a hawker.

A couple of months after transfer to Woking in July 1884, Bridget was excused from carrying during work due to weak lungs. Her previous records had just indicated she was of 'good' health or sometimes it was noted as 'indifferent' but it now was recorded that Bridget had a defect in her eye which clearly affected her ability to read and write. The Chaplain commented that she was unable to receive proper instruction due to pains in her head which were the result of a fall. She had waited for sixteen months for treatment and the Chaplain thought she would never be able to write. The Medical Officer supported this stating that 'this prisoner is rendered incapable of learning from an injury to her head by a fall'. This may mean that letters written and sent to her daughter (noted above) were written with the

assistance of the Chaplain or possibly the Schoolmaster. Letters sent out during her second sentence were all to other women, perhaps friends, Mrs Campbell, Mrs Martin, Mrs Smith, all in the Scotland Road area of Liverpool (a very poor area of town). As a convict prisoner, the police routinely checked the recipients of letters in order to assess whether they were suitable people for the prisoners to be writing to, if the recipient was found to have a criminal record or to be 'known to the police' (often a consequence of being thought a prostitute) then the letters would be prohibited or suppressed. All of these letters from Bridget were returned either because the addresses were not found or the recipients could not be traced by the police. Bridget did not appear to write to her daughter, unless she was one of the married women listed above (this is certainly possible as she would be of marriageable age by now) and her record stated that she had no children. Whatever the circumstances, it appears that Bridget did not really have any family or constant friends around to support her.

During her second penal servitude sentence she also committed a further five prison offences. In January 1885 she was placed in close confinement for three days on a reduced diet, reduced from class three to probation class so that she had fewer privileges in prison, spent fourteen days in the penal ward and lost forty-eight remission marks for 'interfering when another prisoner was checked for speaking in the airing yard, refusing to have her cell door shut, rushing out and attempting to strike' the Assistant Matron, using bad and threatening language, throwing her pint at the Assistant Matron. She was punished again the next day for using obscene and threatening language to the Matron and lost a further twenty-four remission marks. Seven months later she was again in trouble for disobeying orders, slamming her cell door, throwing down her stool, falsely accusing the Assistant Matron of mistreating her and she was punished by three days close confinement and the loss of remission marks. The following month she was discovered quarrelling with fellow-prisoner Daley, using vile language and screaming and shouting and she received two days close confinement and lost more remission. In February 1886 Bridget was moved to Fulham Refuge (this was a actually convict prison despite the term,

As a convict prisoner, the police routinely checked the recipients of letters in order to assess whether they were suitable people for the prisoners to be writing to . . .

refuge) and five months later she received her first class status (the highest grade of privilege she could receive). However, seven weeks later she was found quarrelling with and pulling the hair of Ann Dawson and causing a disturbance in the laundry and wash house. Fortunately for Bridget, this time she was merely admonished for her behaviour. Eight days later, Bridget was released from Fulham on conditional license. A number of refuges had been set up for women convicts and as the system developed this meant that women convicts could be released either to be 'at large' (but still under the strict conditions of the license) or on a conditional license to a refuge until they were deemed suitable for release; this system only applied to women.

Bridget was sent to the East End Refuge in Finchley, on conditional license. She had served just over half of her five year sentence and had twenty-eight months of the sentence still unexpired. She spent a further nine months at the Refuge before the Directors of Convict Prisons gave her permission to leave on 1st June 1887. Perhaps unsurprisingly given what we know about Bridget's life she was difficult to trace after her release, she cannot be found in the Criminal Registers at least for the next five years which perhaps indicates she did not have any further convictions. Bridget was

in her mid 40s on release, she had little means of support from the evidence we have about her life, she may have continued to try to earn a living through street-selling. In total she had a criminal career which had lasted for over 27 years (and if we include prison offences in then her criminal career lasted for 29 years and 10 months).

As perhaps can be seen from Bridget's case, we were able to find out a huge amount about the experiences of convicts in our study, both within prison, and on the outside. This has allowed us to consider the individual circumstances of the convict's offending and prison experiences — deaths of parents, poverty, alcoholism as routes into criminality and well as marriage, finding employment, having children as possible routes out of offending — this is in addition to answering some broader questions about whether or not licensing aided their desistance from crime or increased the probability of them returning to prison. However, there are some pitfalls to this kind of research. We may have simply made

mistakes in wrongly-attributing court appearances to Bridget (or whoever we are searching for) or we may have missed some information whilst trawling online-sites. Female offenders were particularly difficult to trace due to name changes through marriage or the using partners surname during co-habiting, for example. Some data does not exist, was never collected, or is wrongly recorded (the data is from official documents which may have omitted uncomfortable allegations or poor-behavior on the part of prison officers). These are the common problems encountered by all historians. Reconstructing people's lives using historical records is a difficult task. We may have wrongly connected together information into a misleading story, though we have been keen to point out that some events (marriage and cessation of offending) are correlated, not causally connected. In other words, they seem to be connected but one might not have caused the other. Again, all historians make connections; historical research would be impossible without doing this. So too, modern researchers of crime and offenders make the same kinds of assumptions. Just because one can talk to a living breathing prisoner (or anyone!) does not mean that the things they tell you are unfiltered, uncensored, and unvarnished. All researchers, modern or historical, have to proceed with caution.

Online digital records do offer specific problems, however. They allow us to accumulate a lot of data very quickly and we can be more-easily persuaded that we have caught the truth of a person's life. Research that is conducted more slowly (and with more difficulty) might allow us a chance to breathe and think a little bit more deeply as we go about our work. This is just something to watch for; it does not invalidate the significant advantages of speedy research (in terms of cost, amount of data collected

and scope of the project). The second problem is an ethical one. We now have access to detailed personal knowledge about thousands of prisoners, and can put that information together, and disseminate it, very widely and (again) very quickly. As online historians working in this area, we probably need to do a little more thinking about the ethical implications of this kind of work (see Godfrey 2013).<sup>2</sup>

Whilst these online digital records, together with the prison licenses, have allowed us a unique insight into the internal organisation of the prison from the prisoners point of interaction, the lives of the people who worked in these prisons and who interacted with these offenders on a daily basis remain oblique. The records are marked by the comments of prison officials such as Medical Officers, Matrons, Governors and Chaplains, who would no doubt have been surprised that 150 years later their comments on the individuals under their charge would be so accessible on the internet. But the officers who unlocked and locked up the prisoners, day in, day out; oversaw the wings and supervised the work and spent large portions of their own working in the Prison Service doing so, still remain relatively invisible.<sup>3</sup> This historical project has allowed us to examine the 'whole life' of an offender and their various interactions with the criminal justice system, usually unachievable with contemporary criminological research. Will this same opportunity be possible for historians of crime and punishment in the future? Will the official systems used today to record the offending and prison lives of our current prison population offer us the details and insight that these historical records have; or will the computer-dominated world that has given us the opportunity to uncover and reconstruct these individual lives ironically result in the deletion of current records, erasing our histories...

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2. Godfrey, B. (2013) *Crime in England 1880-1945: The Rough*, Routledge.

3. There is a small body of research on prison officers for example: Thomas, J.E. (1972) *The English Prison Officer since 1850 — A Study in conflict*, London: Routledge & Kegan Paul; Johnston, H. (2008) 'Moral guardians? Prison officers, prison practice and ambiguity in the nineteenth century', in H. Johnston (ed.) *Punishment and Control in Historical Perspective*, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, p77-94; Johnston, H. (2008) 'Reclaiming the criminal: The role and training of prison officers in England, 1877-1914', *Howard Journal of Criminal Justice*, Vol. 47, No. 3: p297-312; Johnston, H. 'Gendered prison work: female prison officers in the local prison system, 1877-1939', *Howard Journal of Criminal Justice* (forthcoming).

# Endless Privations:

## Archaeological Perspectives on Penal Heritage

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**How would an explicitly material perspective contribute new understandings of penal heritage? Drawing from recent archaeological research on historic prisons, POW camps, asylums, and detention facilities, this paper explores the materiality of incarceration to illuminate how these architectural spaces and artefact assemblages play a central role in the creation of institutional lives. As multi-purpose places developed for punishment and exile, rehabilitation and education, deterrence and neutralisation, heritage prisons demonstrate the ideals of disciplinary intention perpetually adapted through insubordination and pragmatic compromise. Archaeological perspectives reveal how these carceral worlds become materially fabricated through the interplay of three distinct modes of social power: domination, resistance, and ultimately, negotiation. As Oscar Wilde observed:**

*For prison life with its endless privations and restrictions makes one rebellious. The most terrible thing about it is not that it breaks one's heart — hearts are made to be broken — but that it turns one's heart to stone... And he who is in a state of rebellion cannot receive grace ... for in life as in art the mood of rebellion closes up the channels of the soul, and shuts out the airs of heaven.<sup>1</sup>*

How do people experience the materiality of confinement? With scholars, reformists, philanthropists, social engineers, clinicians, and politicians writing about incarceration since the late eighteenth century, a vast interdisciplinary literature exists on the institutional landscape. While historians and architects have examined how early communal forms of social welfare and punishment transformed into the stark penitentiaries and fortified compounds of the nineteenth century, criminologists, legal theorists, and philosophers have debated the relative civic effects of imprisonment as a mode of punishment, deterrence, and retribution.

Others from sociology, anthropology and culture studies have considered the lived experience of

institutionalization by exploring the psychological impact of the custodial environment on inmates, staff, dependent children and families, and even the researchers themselves. Finally, archaeological perspectives have illuminated the material and spatial conditions of the modern institution. This work has revealed a profound dissonance between ideal designed landscapes of disciplinary intention, and embodied landscapes of insubordination and compromise. Ultimately, places of confinement are fabricated through the interplay of three distinct modes of social power: domination, resistance, and negotiation.

### Disciplinary Spaces

The years between 1770 and 1850 witnessed a rapid emergence of institutional confinement as a uniquely modern form of social management. The movement began with John Howard, an English county sheriff who conducted inspection tours of existing gaols and debtor's houses across England, Wales and Ireland. His influential 1777 report *The State of the Prisons* offered a meticulous account of the scandalous conditions behind the perimeter walls of Britain's prisons: subterranean dungeons contaminated with human filth, male and female prisoners freely associating in a state of perpetual drunkenness, desperate paupers starving in chains unable to pay the bribes required by corrupt gaolers. Governed primarily by local customs and medieval laws, the vast majority of traditional civic punishments assumed a corporeal form — involving periods of public humiliation administered through the stocks or pillory, or sanguinary retribution such as flogging, branding, and increasingly over the eighteenth century, public hanging.

Howard's relentless exposure of these penal horrors to Parliamentary Committees eventually resulted in a new 'reformed' penitentiary architecture. Working in close collaboration with Howard, the English architect William Blackburn perfected four influential 'reformed' designs intended to not only improve the ventilation and sanitation of prisons, but also introduce a strict regime of spatial order, classification, and segregation upon all inmates. A decade later, the early industrialist and utilitarian

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1. Wilde, O (1897) *De profundis and other writings* (1986 edition) Harmondsworth: Penguin.

philosopher Jeremy Bentham published his radical designs for the Panopticon — a cylindrical model devised to emphasize a disciplinary self-reform of the prisoner’s soul over corporal punishment of his flesh. Based on new technologies of surveillance fabricated through the spatial medium of architecture, the Panopticon subjected the male inmate to constant (yet unverifiable) judgmental observation. Encased within a ring of cells around a central observational hub, prisoners were exposed to ‘a state of conscious and permanent visibility that assures the automatic functioning of power’.<sup>2</sup> Further, Bentham’s penitentiary introduced the solitary cell as a primary mechanism for both isolating inmates from contaminating associations, and encouraging rehabilitative moral self-reflection. By the 1790s, Bentham’s fearful design offered a rational, humane, and yet entirely brutal machine for ‘grinding rogues honest’.<sup>3</sup>

When Bentham’s principles of surveillance and isolation were merged with Blackburn’s radial plan, a dreadful carceral landscape was born. Consisting of a series of cellblock wings arranged around a centralized custodial hub, penitentiaries of the early nineteenth century were open internally from ground floor to skylight roof, thereby providing unhindered visual and auditory surveillance over all inhabitants. As guards perambulated the cast iron balconies of these silent wards, their footfalls muted by the soft leather soles of their specially designed boots, all stray noises were amplified along the long empty corridors. Spy holes were installed into each cell door. Covered by a hinged metal flap on the external side, the mechanism exposed the cell interior to routine inspection while limiting views of the adjoining corridor. Walls and grated windows circumscribed all sensory experiences of the external world. A perpetual disciplinary regime choreographed all movement throughout the institution, with segmented stalls and enclosed exercise yards maintaining inmate solitude even during daily periods of recreation and chapel attendance.

Textures remained similarly prescribed. To both humiliate and discipline the male inmate, expressions of self-identity were restricted through the provision of an identity number and institutional uniform of coarse wool and cotton. Sparsely furnished with an identical

set of artefacts, prisoner cells each contained a tin cup, bowl and spoon, an iron or wooden cot, a wool blanket, a white earthenware chamber pot, a broom, a Bible, and a framed list of institutional rules and regulations.

Over the 1820s, as a ‘carceral enthusiasm’ swept the young American Republic, two distinct and competing models of penal management achieved international acclaim. The ‘Separate System’ of the Eastern State Penitentiary at Cherry Hill, Pennsylvania (1829) assigned inmates to solitary labour at leather boot manufacture within their isolated cells. Conversely, the ‘Congregate System’ of New York’s Auburn State Penitentiary (1823) collected inmates into communal workshops for silent assembly-line work. Two decades later, Imperial Britain established its own infamous

‘Separate System’ penitentiaries for men at Pentonville, England (1842), Port Arthur, Tasmania (1847), and Mountjoy, Ireland (1850). Thus, by the 1850s the institution had emerged as a rehabilitative landscape, one designed to forge a progressive and internalized transformation of the male criminal.

Britain has retained its Victorian era prisons throughout the twentieth century. Reflecting the gradual modernization of living standards and social rationale behind ‘imprisonment’, penal facilities have been periodically updated with new

security features (reinforced skylight and window glazing, CCTV cameras, high tension wire mesh between floors) and social amenities (expanded visitation rooms, learning facilities, gymnasiums, multi-faith chapels). Nonetheless, as the prison population reached crisis levels over the 1990s, incarceration has all too frequently transformed into a daily routine of 23 hours of lock-down within a dangerously overcrowded cell.

In the United States, as state authority became increasingly centralized over the early twentieth century, modern technologies of imprisonment continued to perfect the construction of disciplinary space. Established under the Department of Justice in 1891, the federal prison system developed a particularly severe form of penitentiary architecture. These forbidding monuments consisted of two separate structures: a three to five storey block of adjoining rows of individual cells, all encased within a massive stone,

## When Bentham’s principles of surveillance and isolation were merged with Blackburn’s radial plan, a dreadful carceral landscape was born.

2. Foucault, M. (1977) *Discipline and Punish*. New York: Vintage Books, p. 201.

3. Evans, R. (1982) *The Fabrication of Virtue*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, p. 198.



Figure 1: View looking south from third level guard station. Cell Block 'B' on the left, and Cell Block 'C' on the right. Alcatraz Island Federal Penitentiary, California. (US Library of Congress, Historic American Buildings Survey, California [HABS CAL, 38-ALCA, 1-A-20]).

steel and concrete façade (Figure 1). A landscape of complete surveillance, iron bars (and later, clear reinforced plastic) replaced solid cell doors, and free-standing watch towers guarded the fortified perimeter boundaries. In a stark departure from the optimistic rehabilitative philosophies of the nineteenth century, these 'total institutions'<sup>4</sup> were designed to enforce imprisonment as a painful form of civic retribution. Currently in operation, Leavenworth Penitentiary, Kansas (1895) continues to serve as the largest American maximum-security facility, with approximately 2,000 male inmates incarcerated.

### Resistance and Insubordination

Despite the disciplinary weight of this carceral world, not all inhabitants yield to institutional conditions. Since power exists as both forces of compliance and forces of action, resistance is born at the same moment as domination. Further, the shared experience of incarceration frequently cultivates a unique social cohesion amongst inmates, with various studies revealing a distinct 'society of captives'<sup>5</sup> within the penal environment. Through these alternative social worlds, inmates actively challenge the penal order by materially deploying acts of both individual and collective resistance.

While recalcitrance does take the extreme form of riots and open rebellions, typical expressions are carefully designed to thwart, rather than conquer,

systems of domination. Providing means for a gradual erosion of authority, resistance operates as a loose constellation of daily activities undertaken by inmates for 'working the system to their minimum disadvantage'.<sup>6</sup> As a result, insubordination tends to address the worst pains of imprisonment: deprivation of liberty and freedom of movement, deprivation of goods and services, deprivation of personal identity, deprivation of autonomy, and deprivation of personal security.

Archaeological studies have observed that institutional zones related to 'unfree labour' frequently provide a focal site for inmate subversion. Originally established in 1838, the first Rhode Island State Prison adopted the 'Congregate System' with the 1845 addition of a communal industrial workshop to its fortified compound. Through archival research, James Garman linked the failure of an ambitious scheme for the prison manufacture of decorative ladies' fans to intentional inefficiencies, or 'foot-dragging strategies', adopted by inmate workers along the assembly-line.<sup>7</sup> Additionally, his work mapped collective patterns of resistance across excavated architectural features by locating 'intra-institutional' offences from 1872 through 1877 according to specific activity zone. Results demonstrated a clear focus of recalcitrance. Ranging from challenges to the code of silence and refusing to work, to outright destruction of prison property, approximately 60 per cent of the infractions occurred within the penitentiary workshops — that

4. Goffman, E. (1961) *Asylums*. New York: Anchor Books; Casella, E.C. (2007) *The Archaeology of Institutional Confinement*. Gainesville, FL: University Press of Florida.
5. Clemmer, D. (1940) *The Prison Community*. Boston: Christopher Publishing House; Casella, E.C. (2000) 'Doing Trade: A sexual economy of nineteenth-century Australian female convict prisons' in *World Archaeology* 32(2):209-21.
6. Hobsbawm, E. (1973) 'Peasants and Politics' in *Journal of Peasant Studies* 1(1):3-22.
7. Garman, J.C. (2005) *Detention Castles of Stone and Steel*. Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, p. 146.

exact institutional space, in other words, specifically designated for inmate congregation and communal labour.

Of course, the most admired form of spatial resistance entails a total rejection of the penal landscape. Material evidence of escape attempts can be found throughout places of confinement. At Johnson's Island (1862-5), an American Civil War prison camp for captured Confederate Army officers, archaeological excavation of the latrine features revealed numerous escape tunnels dug into the rear of privy vaults, particularly those nearest the stockade's western perimeter wall. Probable escape tools were additionally recovered in association with some latrine tunnels; these objects included a large iron bar, a table knife, and the worn distal end of a bovine long bone.<sup>8</sup>

A similar escape attempt was recovered from Kilmainham Gaol, Dublin. With the incarceration of anti-Treaty and Irish Republican Army (IRA) activists during Ireland's Civil War (1922-3), female political prisoners were confined within the recently decommissioned prison on the western edge of Dublin. By March 1923, 'B' Wing inmates developed plans for an escape tunnel. After establishing a roster, and disguising their digging activities with noisy handball games in the adjoining exercise yard, the women commenced excavation with spoons stolen from the prison kitchen.<sup>9</sup> When a matron discovered their plot one month later, the inmates had created a hole four feet deep — an 'archaeological' feature still preserved within the Kilmainham Gaol museum. To pass on the benefits of their stymied efforts to future prisoners, inmate and dedicated nationalist Sighle Humphreys inscribed the plaster at the base of her cell wall with a pencilled message:

Tunnel begun  
in basement laundry  
inside door on left  
may be of use to successors  
good luck, S.

Requiring a substantial degree of organization and subterfuge on the part of inmates, these escape

attempts materially represented a fermentation of collective resistance and inmate solidarity, as communicated through their dramatic physical rejection of the prison itself.

### Negotiated Worlds

Nevertheless, the experience of incarceration cannot be reduced to a simple oppositional struggle between 'staff' and 'inmates.' Recognizing the limits of traditional binary models, an increasing number of scholars have interpreted power as a social relationship characterized by plural, varying, and circumstantial moments of opportunity. Offering the term 'heterarchy'

to emphasize the lateral, nested, and transient structures of power, this theoretical approach supports an exploration of how the austere penal landscape becomes re-shaped, negotiated, modified and compromised.<sup>10</sup>

Within the carceral setting, a primary arena of negotiation involves the architecture and basic layout of the institution. As extensively demonstrated by Michel Foucault, disciplinary technologies function by standardizing institutional inhabitants — separating them into isolated, yet fully identical, units. Thus, elements of the built environment that deviate from the standard institutional

. . . elements of the built environment that deviate from the standard institutional template represent a form of compromise, an acknowledgement of diversity, and a limit to disciplinary power.

template represent a form of compromise, an acknowledgement of diversity, and a limit to disciplinary power. The presence of 'Secure Wards' within modern penitentiaries demonstrates one such architectural negotiation. Established for the 'protective custody' of disenfranchised inmates (such as former police or prison employees, disabled, elderly, young, or gay prisoners, recovering addicts, informers and pedophiles), these 'prisons within prisons' reveal the hierarchies, violence, tensions and vulnerabilities that internally fracture inmate society.

While material evidence of clandestine adaptations do exist within institutions, most large-scale architectural modifications require some degree of staff collusion. Excavations at Sarah Island (1822), a nineteenth century British colonial penal settlement on

8. Bush, D (2000) 'Interpreting the latrines of the Johnson's island Civil War military prison' in *Historical Archaeology* 34(1):62-78.

9. McCoole, S. (1997) *Guns and Chiffon*. Dublin: Government of Ireland, p. 50.

10. Ehrenreich, R.M., C.L. Crumley and J. E. Levy (1995) *Heterarchy and the Analysis of Complex Societies*. Archaeological Paper No. 6. Arlington: American Anthropological Association; Casella, E.C. (2005) 'Prisoner of His Majesty: Postcoloniality and the archaeology of British penal transportation' in *World Archaeology* 37(3): 453-467, Casella, E.C. (2007) *The Archaeology of Institutional Confinement*. Gainesville (FL): University Press of Florida.



Figure 2: Detail of modified cellblock and recycled brick features, Gaol interior. Sarah Island Archaeology Project, 2010. Photograph by E.C. Casella.

the remote west coast of Van Diemen's Land (Tasmania), exposed a particularly impressive negotiation of disciplinary architecture inside the establishment's Gaol. Constructed by 1827 for the solitary punishment of secondary offenders, this brick structure originally contained a row of six isolation cells along an access corridor, each measuring 7 foot (2 metres) by 3 foot (1 metre), with floorboards and ceiling height of 9 foot (3 metres). The single entrance to the Gaol was located in the short eastern face of the structure, and opened into a large timber-floored guard room at the front of the building.

Demolition debris lay across the surviving remains of the brick internal wall that separated this guard room from the first solitary cell. Removal of these soil layers revealed a curious modification — at some point during the Gaol's use-life, the brick wall had been partially dismantled, with the component bricks recycled into a free-standing stove and chimney built inside the first solitary cell (Figure 2). Since these bricks had also been reused as floor paving within the guard room (creating a cosy hearth feature in front of the tiny stove), this structural adaptation had most likely occurred during the final years of this penal settlement (1846-47), when the derelict Gaol no longer retained its original wooden floors. In his July 1846 report to the Comptroller-

General of Convicts, the Visiting Magistrate observed that 'two or three' of the Gaol's cells were to be reconditioned for solitary punishment of recalcitrant convicts.<sup>11</sup> Meanwhile, the front of this disciplinary structure had been quietly transformed into a collective space for socialising, cooking and personal warmth.

Gender has also necessitated a compromise of the ideal disciplinary landscape. Since its origins in the eighteenth century, the carceral landscape has functioned as a distinctly masculine environment — with the presence of women as both inmates and custodial staff posing an enduring set of difficulties. In particular, penal administrators have struggled to provide secure and hygienic accommodation for the dependent children of female inmates, with various solutions proposed and rejected over the last two centuries. From the 1830s, when the first dedicated female prisons were established in the British penal colonies of Australia, designs for women's institutions were modified to include separate Nursery Wards.<sup>12</sup> By the 1870s, this architectural practice was globally extended as independent female prisons were constructed in Britain and the United States.<sup>13</sup>

Archaeological excavations at the Ross Female Factory (1848), a women's prison established in the Van Diemen's Land penal colony, revealed architectural

11. Archives of Tasmania (AOT) Misc 62/16/A1103/5087, 24 July 1846, Visiting Magistrate to Comptroller General, report on Macquarie Harbour Probation Station.

12. Casella, E.C. (2002) *Archaeology of the Ross Female Factory*. Records of the Queen Victoria Museum, No. 108. Launceston (Australia): QVMAG Publications.

13. Rafter, N.H. (1990) *Partial Justice*. New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers; Zedner, L. (1991) *Women, Crime and Custody in Victorian England*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.

remains of the Nursery structures and adjoining Work Room.<sup>14</sup> Despite formal regulations intended to enforce a strict separation of this ward from the prison dormitories and work rooms, artefact assemblages recovered from the underfloor deposits contained a substantial number of labour-related artefacts: bone, ferrous metal and shell buttons, copper-alloy sewing pins, copper-alloy hook-and-eye wire fasteners, copper-alloy thimbles, and (surprisingly) part of a bone lacework bobbin.

The assemblage also included three cloth bale seals, stamped into lead. Clamped by a strap around a finished bale of woven textiles, and into the cloth itself, these bale seals hindered the pilfering of off-cuts, and thereby ensured the secure transmission of these manufactured commodities across the British Empire. Of the three lead examples recovered from the Ross Female Factory, two were corroded. The third displayed a detailed insignia (Figure 3) identified as that of the Royal Army Ordnance Corp, or that division of His Majesty's army charged with provisioning the Imperial exiles. As part of their carceral regime, female convicts were required to produce uniforms for distribution to inmates throughout the penal colony, in addition to a prescriptive range of clothing items for sale to the civilian population. Thus, the presence of these unique artefacts within underfloor deposits may have indicated that prison authorities stored valuable work materials within the Nursery Ward at times when the infant population was low.

nine months, women were returned to the main wards and henceforth separated from the infants to prevent the transmission of vice through maternal contact. Thus, the presence of textile-related artefacts offers material evidence for an unofficial negotiation of penal guidelines. Despite rigid orders issued by the Comptroller-General of Convicts, perhaps Ross Factory inmates were quietly permitted to complete their mandatory labour duties while in the company of their infants — and thereby enjoy some limited degree of affective contact and maternal connection with their children within the confines of the prison Nursery.

A final arena of material negotiation has involved the presence of illicit black market networks across all carceral institutions. This 'sub-rosa' exchange of contraband mobilizes four generalized types of desire: the embodied longing for food, personal safety, or sexual activity inadequately provided through official channels; the addictive craving for cigarettes, alcohol and drugs; the social desire for solidarity, reciprocity, and obligation amongst inmates and complicit staff members; and the strategic quest for influence and social status within the penal environment.<sup>15</sup>

Requiring a degree of staff collusion, black market networks circulate valuable commodities through both recreational and functional modes of transaction. Representing the first centralized state apparatus in the New World, the Walnut Street Prison of Philadelphia was established during the early 1790s to cultivate inmate rehabilitation through constant industry, religious

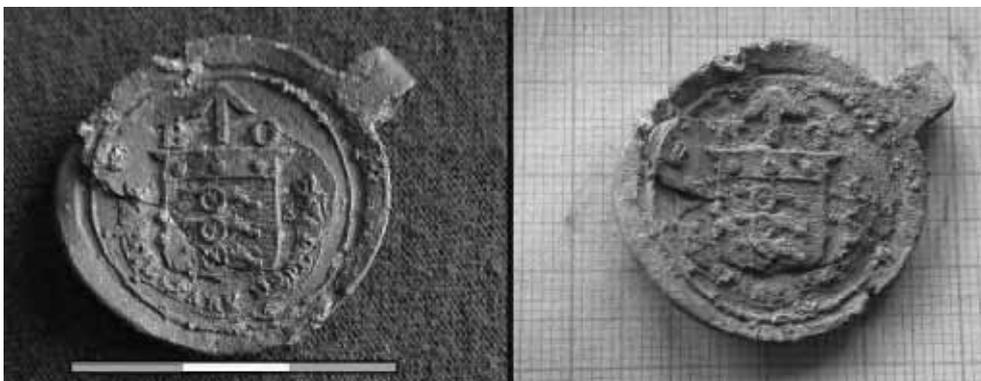


Figure 3: Detail of excavated lead bale seal, Ross Factory Archaeology Project, 2007. Left: artefact (special find 20) after conservation treatment. Right: artefact after field recovery. Photograph by E.C. Casella.

Alternatively, the frequency and sheer diversity of sewing-related artefacts within this assemblage also suggested a degree of quiet circumvention of the strict separation between the Nurseries and adjoining Work Room. While temporarily accommodated with their infants before enforced weaning, convict mothers were not required to undertake official taskwork duties. After

instruction, and moral supervision. During the spring of 1973, excavations sampled from two of the prison workshops.<sup>16</sup> Evidence from the bone assemblage indicated a frequent co-option of institutional resources for clandestine forms of production, with 14 small fragments carefully worked into cubic and rectangular shapes. Since two artefacts had been inked with dots,

14. Casella, E. C. (2012) 'Little Bastard Felons: Childhood, affect and labour in the penal colonies of nineteenth-century Australia' in B. Voss and E.C. Casella (eds) (2012) *The Archaeology of Colonialism: Intimate Encounters and Sexual Effects*, pp. 31-48. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

15. Williams, V.L. and M. Fish (1974) *Convicts, Codes, and Contraband*. Cambridge: Ballinger.

16. Cotter et al. 1988 Cotter, J.L., R.W. Moss, B.C. Gill and J. Kim (1988) *The Walnut Street Prison Workshop*. Philadelphia: The Athenæum of Philadelphia.

the items demonstrated that a covert manufacture of bone dice occurred within the prison workshops. Providing a mechanism for both personal amusement and prohibited gaming activities amongst inmates, these illicit objects suggested that alternative social networks cut across the disciplinary landscape.

Similar contraband was recovered from Hyde Park Barracks (1819), an early Australian accommodation and administrative facility for male felons in the British penal colony of New South Wales. This assemblage consisted of handcrafted bone and ceramic gaming tokens excavated from underfloor deposits located below the stairway landings. While gaming served as a recreational diversion, it also provided a structured functional mechanism for the illicit circulation of desired goods and services throughout the penal environment.

A distinct spatial focus of these clandestine activities was archaeologically revealed during excavations at the Ross Female Factory (1848) of Van Diemen's Land (Tasmania). Although contraband appeared throughout the inmate dormitories of the main penal compound, the greatest concentrations of illicit artefacts (coins, olive glass alcohol bottles, and tobacco pipes) were recovered from the earthen floors of the Solitary Cells.<sup>17</sup> As places of ultimate punishment, these isolation cells were architecturally fabricated to discipline repeat offenders — those women located at the apex of the 'sub-rosa' economy who were best able

to exploit its operation to their own benefit. Thus, the high frequencies of contraband indicated the shadowy dynamics of an alternative inmate landscape within this institution, with covert pathways of internal trade negotiating the disciplinary force of incarceration.

## Conclusions

A uniquely modern human experience, incarceration reveals the simultaneous operation of three material forms of social power. From the eighteenth century, penal architecture has sought to elaborate, if not perfect, the imposition of self-discipline and social control. Institutional inmates have responded in kind, undertaking material acts of insubordination designed to reject the penal landscape. But binary models of domination and resistance limit our understandings of incarceration. With the ideal disciplinary template architecturally modified to accommodate a myriad of diverse inhabitants, inmates further negotiate penitential structures by forging their own alternative material worlds of collusion, exploitation, obligation, and object exchange. Analysis of the archaeological elements of these penal sites has exposed how dynamics of spatial order, social practice, and insubordinate agency shape the heritage of imprisonment. Thus, the carceral landscape ultimately represents a complex world of built intention perpetually negotiated by lived compromise.



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17. Casella, E.C. 2000 'Doing Trade: A sexual economy of nineteenth-century Australian female convict prisons' in *World Archaeology* 32(2):209-21; Casella, E.C. (2002) *Archaeology of the Ross Female Factory*. Records of the Queen Victoria Museum, No. 108. Launceston (Australia): QVMAG Publications.

# Dealing with Difficult Pasts:

## The Dark Heritage of Political Prisons in Transitional Northern Ireland and South Africa

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**Neil Jarman has suggested as society moves from conflict to peace the ability of prisons to symbolise both the power and vulnerability of the state and those incarcerated means that there are often opposing desires for their future usage.<sup>1</sup> This is particularly evident in the cases of South Africa and Northern Ireland. In both contexts difficult recent pasts have resulted in very different visions of how the materialisations of conflict, and carceral environments in particular, are dealt with. Both countries have had relatively recent societal transitions — in South Africa as a result of the ending of Apartheid in 1994 and in Northern Ireland after the political negotiated cessation of the conflict known as ‘the Troubles’ with the Good Friday Agreement (GFA) in 1998. The role that prisons have played during these conflicts — and as potential dark heritage sites — is important. As former political prisoners have played prominent roles in both societal transitions how once infamous prisons have been dealt with and understood in their post-functional context can be revealing of underlying issues with the role of memory, ownership and engagement with the past in transitional states. Ultimately, the evolving treatment and role of these places of dark heritage reveals how society is dealing with difficult recent pasts.**

### Case-studies:

#### Long Kesh / Maze, Northern Ireland and Robben Island, South Africa

Long Kesh / Maze and Robben Island are both internationally infamous examples of political prisons active during the 20th century, but their histories and roles in the societies that created them have as many divergences as commonalities. Robben Island has a longer history as a place of political imprisonment dating back at least three centuries in comparison to Long Kesh /Maze’s first introduction as a make-shift internment camp in 1971. Robben Island had been used as a place of exile long before Europeans controlled this location. During the

colonial era it was initially used by the Dutch settlers as shelter from local tribes, before being used to hold local dissidents, progressing later to being a broader site of incarceration for political opponents throughout the African and South Asia area.<sup>2</sup> Under British control in the late 19th century it continued to be used as a prison but this was later expanded to a general place of exile. There are *in situ* remains of accommodation and burial sites for those with leprosy, mental illness and chronic sickness. During the Second World War the island’s role refocused to military defence and remnants of airstrips and large artillery remain *in situ*. In 1960, twelve years after the National Party came to power with Apartheid policies, the island reopened as a prison and political prisoners were transferred from the mainland. Robben Island ceased to operate as a political prison in 1991, finally closing in 1996 before reopening as a museum in 1997. It was placed on the World Heritage List in 1999.

There are at least five separate prison structures that remain *in situ* on Robben Island, all dating from the last 150 years of occupation as a penal settlement. The most famous structure is the Maximum Security prison (1963-1996), which held political prisoners until 1991. The Medium B security prison held common-law prisoners from 1974-1990, the common-law prisoners were then transferred to the Maximum Security prison until its closure in 1996. There are also remains of a common-law prison dating from 1956-1960 and from an earlier prison station dating from 1866-1921. Lastly, the remains of the house of a political prisoner held in isolation, Robert Sobukwe, are still standing. This house was reused after Sobukwe’s release as a kennel for the prison service dogs but has been restored to represent its former state since the site reopened as a heritage site. The Maximum Security prison has the most in common with Long Kesh / Maze as it includes a number of structures that are formulated in a ‘H’ plan, similar to the H-Blocks famously replicated in the Northern Irish case-study. However, the scale and internal arrangement of these two H-Blocks differed considerably as the wings at Long Kesh / Maze were designed as single cell accommodation in contrast to the communal wings in Robben Island. The only single cell accommodation at the Maximum Security prison on

1. Neil Jarman, ‘Troubling remnants: dealing with the remains of conflict in Northern Ireland’. In John Schofield, William G. Johnson, & Colleen M. Beck. *Matériel Culture: The Archaeology of Twentieth Century Conflict*. (2001) (London: Routledge) 281-295, 290.
2. Kate Clark, ‘In small things remembered: significance and vulnerability in the management of Robben Island World Heritage Site’. In J. Schofield, W.G. Johnson & C.M. Beck. (eds) *Matériel Culture*, 266-281, 268.

Robben Island was one corridor — Section A — which was attached to the administrative area where the leaders were segregated.

Long Kesh / Maze also has a direct link to World War II as the site was initially utilised as an airfield during that conflict and was largely vacant until the introduction of internment necessitated opening a 'temporary' mass holding centre. Long Kesh / Maze Internment camp opened in August 1971 utilising the remnants of Nissen huts that had been standing on the site since it was last used during World War II. After it became clear that the Troubles were not going to swiftly end, and prisoner control of these communalised structures could not be ignored any longer (especially after the burning of the camp by Republican prisoners in October 1974), a new addition was added to the site.

From 1975 to 1978 eight H-Blocks were added to the prison landscape. These structures were intended to institute a new regime, to hold prisoners without granting them the special category status associated with the internment camp. Unlike Robben Island, where criminal and political prisoners were held in separate prisons, from this time the prison authorities did not recognise 'political' offences. Public attention moved to the H-Blocks as they swiftly became the focus of prisoner protests relating to this change of status. These culminated in the Hunger Strikes of 1981, when 10 republican prisoners starved to death. Long Kesh / Maze retained its profile after this time due to other events, including the largest mass prison escape in the UK in 1983 and highly public negotiations between politicians and prisoners in facilitating peace processes. The GFA allowed for the last prisoners to be released or transferred during 2001 and the prison closed in September of that year. To date the prison has been maintained as a high security site, the majority of its standing structures have been demolished and a proposed Peace Building and Conflict Resolution Centre has received planning permission. It remains closed to the general public.

### **From functional prison to site of dark heritage**

Dark tourism as a concept has been the subject of academic discussion since John Lennon and Malcolm Foley first coined the term in 2000. In their seminal

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monograph, *Dark Tourism: The Attraction of Death and Disaster*, they argued that the existence and interest in sites linked to death and disaster was a manifestation of the public appetite for consuming sites connected to death, disaster and destruction as a result of the western consumerist circumstances of the late modern world.<sup>3</sup> Carolyn Strange and Michael Kempa have further developed these concepts by exploring prisons as dark heritage through the case-studies of Robben Island and Alcatraz.<sup>4</sup> Whilst it might be assumed that prisons have a number of innate characteristics that lend themselves to becoming sites of dark heritage, Strange and Kempa have argued that there is no inevitability in such a transition. They state 'that they [prisons] have remained historic sites suggests that the cultural and political conditions that

contribute to their preservation and historic interpretation remain operative'.<sup>5</sup> This contemporary relevance is particularly apt in the cases of Northern Ireland and South Africa, which have both undergone recent societal transitions where prisons, and ex-prisoners, played a prominent role. In both societies this has resulted in the heightening prominence of former functional prisons maintaining a public interest and shaping their dark heritage potential with and without government intervention.

The transition of historical prisons in both contexts have diverged considerably and reveal very different perspectives on how both societies have addressed the role of the difficult recent past. As briefly detailed in the short descriptors of the two case-studies above, Robben Island has transformed extraordinarily quickly from being a site of imprisonment to becoming not only a prison museum of national importance but an internationally recognized World Heritage Site. The connections of the site with the ruling ANC party and, specifically, the charismatic leader of the first post-Apartheid government, Nelson Mandela, has undoubtedly been a factor in this seemingly smooth transition. In contrast, the protracted processes of negotiation that resulted in the GFA had no unifying figure emerging from Long Kesh / Maze. The more morally complicated nature of the Northern Irish conflict has ensured that political imprisonment was, and remains, a controversial issue. It was one of the most divisive elements of the GFA negotiations and the releasing of political prisoners as a condition of the agreement was

3. Malcolm Foley & John Lennon. *Dark Tourism: The Attraction of Death and Disaster*. (2000) (London, Cengage Learning EMEA).

4. Carolyn Strange and Michael Kempa, 'Shades of Dark Tourism: Alcatraz and Robben Island'. *Annals of Tourism Research* (2003) Vol 30. No. 2: 386-405.

5. Strange & Kempa, *Shades of Dark Tourism*, 397.

highly contentious. It has been argued that to facilitate the settlement of the conflict between the main political protagonists there was a need to deliberately avoid divisive points of principle. Cillian McGrattan has enumerated these as: 'how the North should be administered, how and indeed whether past injustices should be dealt with, how victims' needs can be met and how the past should be remembered and explained'.<sup>6</sup> In contrast to the deliberate openness of the new South African's 'Rainbow nation' to truth and reconciliation initiatives it has been argued that the longstanding and intractable nature of the conflict in Northern Ireland limits the ability to achieve such a wide-ranging political forgiveness. Mark Amstutz has argued that in contrast to South Africa the aim of the Northern Irish peace process could only ever be to reduce, not eradicate, hatred and distrust.<sup>7</sup> In such disparate contexts the retention of political prisons as heritage sites can have very different meanings and implications.

Prisons in transitional societies are material remnants of the recent past that can be used to facilitate and encourage the articulation of past injustices as part of a healing process (as in South Africa). However they can also be uncomfortable material reminders of the past in societies that have engaged difficult, and unresolved, issues about the past conflict (as in Northern Ireland). In such different contexts prisons as sites of dark heritage can have multiple meanings and provoke very different responses. However, one must remember the latent agency of heritage sites to change meanings, often in unforeseen and unintended ways. Strange and Kempa have enumerated the changing meanings of their case-studies including examples of enhancing (and masking) of specific narratives and the role of political (particularly governmental) intervention in directing public meaning.<sup>8</sup> In examining these two prisons in tandem it should be explicitly understood that prisons as dark heritage not only has multiple meanings but these can change over time due to a number of factors both internal and external to those who control them, interpret them and / or choose to visit them.

That prisons as heritage exist in particular locations suggests an unusually heightened relationship between periods and places of incarceration and wider society.

Martin Carver has argued that archaeological heritage is largely assumed to comprise monumental remains whose value is self-evident and immutable. Therefore, 'archaeological heritage' tends to self-perpetuate as those elements that are assigned protection, and therefore are valued, often mirror existing heritage.<sup>9</sup> Clearly, relatively recently constructed, and abandoned, prisons are not automatic choices as national, and international, heritage. That prisons as heritage exist in particular locations suggests an unusually heightened relationship between periods and places of incarceration and wider society. Clearly, both South Africa and Northern Ireland have longstanding associations with periods of mass political incarceration that date up through living memory.

Despite the prominence of political incarceration in these societies, for a prison to become heritage remains relatively rare. This is because even the most famous, or infamous penal institutions, create such strong reactions that destruction is frequently the first reaction to their initial closure. John Carman has written extensively about the role of value in national heritage creation and has suggested five stages in the process of changing value from functional to cultural: firstly the field is surveyed to determine quantity and quality of remains, it is then evaluated, valuation criteria are applied, selection for preservation occurs if the object is selected to become heritage and lastly controls are put in place to maintain the newly ascribed heritage.<sup>10</sup> These processes of heritage creation highlight that, at a national level, heritage creation is highly political. Therefore, the transition of a prison from a functional to heritage value is interconnected with contemporary politics of power and identity. No archaeological remains have 'innate' value, those that are selected are elevated to this status because they answer a contemporary need as much as illuminate an historical event or understanding. Therefore, prisons that have been retained and preserved tend to be unusual in having a link between imprisonment and political power or have achieved a level

6. Cillian McGrattan, 'Order Out of Chaos': the Politics of Transitional Justice'. *Politics* (2009) 29 (3) 164-172, 164.  
7. Mark Amstutz. *The Healing of Nations: The Promise and Limits of Political Forgiveness* (2005) (Oxford: Rowman and Littlefield), 166.  
8. Strange & Kempa, *Shades of Dark Tourism*, 388  
9. Martin Carver, 'On Archaeological Value', *Antiquity*. (1996) Vol. LXX: 45-56, 23.  
10. John Carman. *Archaeology and Heritage: An Introduction*. (2002) (London: Continuum Press), 23.

of prominence with wider society that has ensured a public desire to retain them.

As many of the key figures involved in the transitions of both societies — from revoking of Apartheid laws in South Africa to facilitating the peace process in Northern Ireland — were imprisoned for varying time periods it is not unexpected that the physical material of the prisons takes on heightened meaning. This is particularly true in relation to Robben Island and Long Kesh / Maze, which were high-profile prisons that held the most prominent political prisoners, often for extended periods, and were associated with high-profile events. So synonymous is Robben Island with Nelson Mandela that Roy Ballantyne defined it as 'Nelson Mandela's island prison'.<sup>11</sup> Whereas in Northern Ireland the long shadow of the 1981 Hunger Strikes, in which 10 prisoners starved to death over the issue of special category status, still dominates understandings of, and emotional responses, to the prison.

#### **Prisons and ex-prisoners in transitional societies**

One important issue in explaining the elevated status of previous political prisons in transitional societies, is the often high-profile status of ex-prisoners. In both Northern Ireland and South Africa ex-prisoners have successfully — if at times partially — contributed to mainstream constitutional politics post-imprisonment. In South Africa the African National Congress (ANC), who constituted a significant number of the prisoners held during Apartheid, has been the majority party since the first democratic elections in 1994 and in Northern Ireland Sinn Féin have been the largest nationalist party since the first elections after the GFA in 2001. Sinn Féin first emerged into national politics in the early 1980s, but the election in 2001 was the first time that they gained more seats and percentage of the vote than their more moderate nationalist counterparts, the SDLP. However, the electoral success of some ex-prisoners in both Northern Ireland and South Africa does not reflect broader electoral success by all groups of ex-prisoners who have chosen to enter politics after imprisonment. In both contexts electoral success has been dominated by one particular party representing one faction of ex-prisoners: Sinn Féin as the electoral wing of the Provisional Irish Republican Army (PIRA) and the ANC. This has meant

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that other prisoner groups — including republican parties such as the Workers Party (originating from the Official IRA) and loyalist parties including the Progressive Unionist Party (PUP) and Ulster Democratic Party (UDP) (dissolved in 2001) in Northern Ireland and Inkatha Freedom Party (IFP) and Pan Africanist Congress (PAC) in South Africa — have been increasingly marginalised politically. Such a situation is not only reflected in the context of constitutional politics but also in their engagement and representation in prison heritage.

#### **Prison heritage and singular interpretations of the past**

One of the key criticisms of the interpretation of Robben Island is that it reinforces and maintains associations of the prison solely with the ANC.<sup>12</sup> Whilst the prisoners of other political parties are not overtly dismissed it is clear that the most mediated elements of the site relate to ANC prison experiences and particularly those of their leaders. Section A of the Maximum Security Prison was the only part of the prison that contained single cells and many of the important post-imprisonment ANC figures such as Nelson Mandela, Walter Sisulu and Tokyo Sexwale served time in these cells. It is their stories

that form the most in depth, and personalised, interpretation across the prison site. The interpretation of the cells includes four elements: a photograph of a past inhabitant, an associated artefact, interpretation panels and an oral recording of the ex-prisoner. Needless to say, having a photograph taken in 'Nelson Mandela's cell' is a necessity for the majority of tourists visiting the site. However, this very focused interpretation contrasts with how the more ordinary prisoner experience of the site is comparatively ignored. This is emphasized by the underuse of the Visitor Centre, which includes the stories of women visitors as well as Namibian prisoners. It is often locked and bypassed by visitor groups as they are bussed through the entrance gates to the prison complex.

Whilst Long Kesh / Maze is not yet open to the public as a heritage site there has been ongoing debates regarding what it means and whose meanings will be included in its presentation. The retained elements of Long Kesh / Maze — a representation sample of one H-Block, one Compound, the Administration Block, the

11. David Uzzell & Roy Ballantyne. *Contemporary Issues in Heritage and Environmental Interpretation: Problems and Prospects*. (1998) (London: Stationery Office), 7.

12. Including Harry Garuba, 'A Second Life: Museums, Mimesis, and the Narratives of the Tour Guides of Robben Island'. In N Murray, N. Shepherd and M. Hall (eds) *Desire Lines: Space, Memory and Identity the Post-apartheid City*. (2007) (London: Routledge) 129-144.

prison hospital, one watchtower, a cross-denominational church and a section of wall — have not yet been interpreted. However, in a recent report to the cross-party committee of the Office of First Minister and Deputy First Minister it is clear that the government intention is to embrace broad multivocality in its interpretations of the site. A member of the Strategic Investment Board asserted that there are 'about 33' different narrative strands identified and that each story would be told 'with sensitivity and equality'.<sup>13</sup> Laudable as this official policy is, it is clear that the ever increasing over-identification of the site by republican prisoners — in contrast to other stakeholder groups — is perceived as an issue that is becoming increasingly problematic. Graham and McDowell argued in 2007 that the government was creating 'essentially a sum zero heritage site' as it was already being 'claimed' by Republicans and had little to offer loyalist prisoners and communal conflict resolution.<sup>14</sup> Perhaps this situation may be changing as recent interviews with ex-Loyalist prisoners have indicated an interest in actively including their narratives. One stated in 2011: 'It's not just about Republicans, you know'.<sup>15</sup>

In both contexts there is a notable absence in the presence of another major stakeholder from the functional prison — prison officers. This is understandable in the context of South Africa, where the prison officers acted as representatives of what is universally considered a morally-reprehensible Apartheid state. It is to be debated whether the ex-prisoners or ex-prison officers would desire their inclusion in the interpretation of the site, despite the added balance and new perspectives that this would bring. However, their lack of presence from the more muddied waters of the Northern Irish conflict is less desirable. 29 prison officers were killed by both republican and loyalist paramilitaries during the course of the conflict. Whilst they will undoubtedly be included as one of the 33 narratives of interpretation in the eventual heritage site, Sara McDowell has argued that there is currently a lack of recognition of the deaths and suffering of prison officers and their families. The only public memorial for the Northern Ireland Prison Service is located in the National Memorial Arboretum in Staffordshire,

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England. McDowell argues that this absence of localised memorialisation reflects a continuing displacement of prison officers from the physical landscapes where they served and died and marginalizes their narratives from emerging communal memories of the Troubles.<sup>16</sup>

### Economics and prison heritage

In transitional societies, the economic costs and benefits of stability and peace are frequently presented as reasons for continued engagement with often difficult transitions. The economic benefits of improved tourism figures and international investment are consistently highlighted. Cal Muckley has estimated that the incremental costs of one contemporary terrorism-related facility in Northern Ireland would be 'equivalent to £3.69 million pounds sterling in 2009 prices' to the economy.<sup>17</sup> In this respect dark heritage sites such as Robben Island and Long Kesh / Maze have both positive and negative aspects. They are sites of interest for tourists who wish to know more about the recent conflict but the retention of their material remnants can act as unsettling reminders of the past. For dark heritage sites such as Robben Island and Long Kesh / Maze to transition from functional prisons to heritage sites there needs to be public interest,

governmental support and also economic viability. It would be difficult to imagine Robben Island moving so swiftly from an island prison to World Heritage Site, or Long Kesh / Maze continuing its protracted transition to a peace and reconciliation centre, without the promise of economic benefits to accompany them. Robben Island is the primary visitor attraction in South Africa with visitor figure that have risen from 100,000 in the year it opened in 1997 to 350,000 in 2002.<sup>18</sup> The future of Long Kesh/Maze has consistently been couched in economic terms of regeneration and peace dividends rather than in cultural, social or emotional needs.

Clearly the relationship with economics and prison heritage is multifaceted. It not only relates to how much money tourists will generated at the site — either directly through visiting or indirectly through purchasing associated merchandise — but also how much money is

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13. Mary McKee, 'Maze/Long Kesh Site: Departmental Briefing. Committee for OFMDFM'. (16 May 2012) ([www.hansard.com](http://www.hansard.com))
  14. Brian Graham & Sara McDowell, 'Meaning in the Maze: the heritage of Long Kesh'. *Cultural Geographies*. (2007) 14 (3): 343-368, 363.
  15. PS (2011) ex-Loyalist prisoner from Long Kesh / Maze compounds.
  16. Sara McDowell, 'Commemorating dead 'men': gendering the past and the present in post-conflict Northern Ireland'. *Gender, Place and Culture*. (2008) 15 (4): 335-354, 346.
  17. Cal Muckley, *Terrorism, Tourism and FDI: Estimating a Lower Bound on the Peace Dividend in Northern Ireland* (October 8, 2010). (Available at SSRN: <http://ssrn.com/abstract=1689510> or doi:10.2139/ssrn.1689510), 9.
  18. See visitor figures <http://www.robben-island.org.za/departments/directorate/annual/annual.asp>

invested in interpretative elements and the impact they will have on the site's meaning and understanding. The custodians of Robben Island have had to react to its geographical isolation by developing substantial infrastructure around the movement of tourist to, from, and, indeed, around the island. One has to buy tickets for a ferry then be transported by bus to different elements of the site, at the discretion of the guide. This ensures that the tours are highly directed with the Maximum Security Prison being the highlight of the visit. Other stop-off points can vary to include the visitor centre, Robert Sobukwe's house, stone quarries that had been worked by prisoners, leprosia, remnants of criminal prisons, graveyards (including a Muslim shrine), World War II armaments and impromptu wildlife safaris. The itinerary can directly impact on the understandings of the island that the tourist can extract from the visit. Likewise the development of a large number of narrative strands and unrelated structures at Long Kesh / Maze whilst attempting to broaden understandings of the site could end up diluting or confusing the significance of the site. The Royal Ulster Agricultural Society has recently relocated to the site and there are plans to involve the Ulster Aviation Society to develop the World War II airfield history.<sup>19</sup>

At Robben Island the necessity of having a guided tour of the extensive site means that tourist interactions with the island are controlled and the designated guides control interpretation, some of which are ex-prisoners. This personalised form of interpretation has been supplemented by interpretation boards, which litter the site and tend to either show factual developments or display archive and relatively contemporary photographs of ex-political prisoners interacting and engaging with the site since their release. Narratives that have been downplayed include the other aspects of exile experience on the island, the final years of the Maximum Security Prison when it held 'criminal' prisoners transferred from the Medium B Security Prison (which has now been converted into a community centre) and the stories of the 'criminal' prisoners. One can question whether decisions to exclude the stories of criminal prisoners, and regress

the buildings to a 'golden age', are limiting the narratives of the site. Likewise, one can question if the inclusion of so many short-lived — and even unrelated — elements to the reformulated site of Long Kesh / Maze and the exploring of so many narrative threads is actually skewing the meaning of the site? Allen Feldman has argued that the higher profile, numbers and greater involvement in prison protests by Republican prisoners ensures that they will remain at the centre of any investigation of the site.<sup>20</sup> Perhaps treating each of a multitude of narrative threads 'in equality' will dilute the most significant narratives from the site so that interpretation of Long Kesh / Maze is no more representative than the dominant narratives of the ANC is at Robben Island?

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### Contestation of dominant narratives

As political prisons are dark places, often physically and symbolically, to enable a transition to a place that also aims to educate and entertain there is often a change of emphasis, if not a selective interpretation of the site. These post-functional interactions with the site, whether they be preventative, creative, restorative or destructive have the potential to move beyond the aesthetic and impact on how the site is interpreted and understood. Whilst some form of intervention is needed to allow a functional prison to be utilised as a tourist attraction, at the very least for health and safety reasons, these

changes often become entangled with value decisions on what should be emphasized and what can be forgotten. Like the curation of museum exhibitions, decisions regarding alterations to facilitate tourist engagement reveal what Fratz calls, 'judgments that help create hierarchies of merit and importance'.<sup>21</sup> At Robben Island as well as the decision to highlight high profile ANC ex-prisoners in the interpretation of the site there have been a number of structural changes made to the prison buildings to allow easier access for tourists. In the Maximum Security prison a wall has been removed post-closure to allow access to the yards around the prison building (it is retained sufficiently in place to allow movement back to its original position if so desired in

19. Karl Alexander. Maze/Long Kesh Site: Departmental Briefing. Committee for OFMDFM. (16 May 2012) ([www.hansard.com](http://www.hansard.com))

20. Allen Feldman. *Formations of Violence: The Narrative of the Body and Political Terror in Northern Ireland*. (1991) (London: University of Chicago Press), 148.

21. Corinne Fratz, 'Rhetorics of Value: Constituting Worth and Meaning through Cultural Display'. *Visual Anthropology Review*. (2011) 21 (1) 21-48, 21.

future). On a very different scale the vast majority of the standing remains of Long Kesh / Maze have been demolished in order to allow interpretation of a representation sample of the site.

Such interventions with the material remnants of the prisons have been the subject of contestation. Concerned at the lack of progress towards retaining and opening the site of Long Kesh / Maze to the public, the Republican former prisoner group, *Coiste na n-larchimí*, held a conference on the issue of the future of the site. Its resultant report detailed their case for the prison to be preserved as a museum. In their conclusion they overtly engaged with the dark heritage potential of the site: 'Heritage is about sites of importance and not simply about the architectural value of buildings'.<sup>22</sup> Such a standpoint on the importance and value of the site has been contested by both unionist politicians and academics, including Graham and McDowell, who have countered Republican claims about the site and its exceptionalism. Objections have centred on fears of the site becoming a 'shrine to the Troubles' or, more specifically to the hunger strikers of 1981. However, Graham and McDowell have questioned the significance of the site 'In heritage terms, there is nothing unique about the Maze. Prisons, sites of conscience, sites of pain and atrocity and sites of symbolic value are well-established concepts in heritage lists'.<sup>23</sup> Their concerns centre on its potential to maintain, if not enhance, its divisive and singular identities, heritages and potential claims of victimhood through the material structures. They do not suggest that such narratives will be unavoidable: 'their 'sentience' will be represented by meanings and by the hulks of the prison buildings'.<sup>24</sup>

At Robben Island there is also evidence of increasing discomfiture with the ANC-dominated narratives of the prison. Harry Garuba's recent studies on ex-prisoner guides at the site uncovered a difficult relationship existing between those who were previously incarcerated and their new role as tourist guides.<sup>25</sup> Whilst one of the major selling points of Robben Island is the use of ex-prisoners as guides — as key to authenticating the visitor experience — the guides have increasingly protested their lack of ability to articulate their own understandings of the site and how this connects to the wider experiences of disenfranchisement by ex-prisoners in South Africa. With guides effectively portraying themselves as continuing to

exist 'behind bars' due to their self-perceptions as being poorly treated and restricted in their interpretation of the site there is clearly an ongoing tension existing in the relationship between those who were previously incarcerated and its new role as a place of tourism. In both cases, despite government control they retain the potential for any official interpretation of place to be contested.

## Conclusions

Prisons as dark heritage illuminate a heightened and highly public connection between society and imprisonment. They are not natural choices as sites to be retained and remembered and the decision to maintain them is often connected to contemporary political and societal needs. As such all sites of prison heritage reveal their own specific narratives of transition and political intervention that is particular to time and place. However, they also tie into broader narratives of power, identity and economic realities of tourist potential that are more universal. Such sites tend to be particularly poignant in revealing the politics of heritage creation and selection, including the degree of societal engagement with the difficult recent past, what it means and who owns /claims it.

Long Kesh / Maze and Robben Island reveal a number of communalities as well as divergences in how these sites continue to function in the context of a wider transitional society. In both cases the importance and selection of interpretative narratives are directly linked with issues of identity and power that are salient to society and political elites as historical understandings of place. Whilst the relationships of both sites with their wider societies are individual there are a number of key issues that are held in common. This includes the link between the elevation of the prison to site of dark heritage and reciprocal elevation of ex-prisoners within political society. They also reveal the often-unmentioned connection between the retention of these sites and the economics of addressing tourist desires in transitional societies. Lastly, the role of contestation of dark heritage narratives is central in revealing disenchantment with interpretative narratives of the sites, and indeed the difficult recent past.

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22. Coiste na-larchimí. *A Museum at Long Kesh or the Maze?* Report of conference proceedings. (2003) (Belfast: Coiste na n-larchimí), 32.

23. Graham & McDowell. *Meaning in the Maze*, 373.

24. *Ibid*, 374.

25. Garuba. *Museums, Mimesis, and the Narratives of the Tour Guides of Robben Island*.

# 'The Lottery of Life':

## Convict Tourism at Port Arthur Historic Site, Australia

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**This article will explore the design process behind the 'Lottery of Life' interpretation gallery opened at the Port Arthur Historic Site, Tasmania, in 1999. A penal station designed as a site of discipline for secondarily convicted and recalcitrant convicts, Port Arthur operated from 1830-1877. Following its closure as a corrective institution it became a significant tourist destination. As such it has a long history of prison tourism. Prior to the opening of the 1999 exhibition, a number of prominent Australian historians and writers attacked the interpretation of convict and institutional life in this ultra-coercive penal station. The local criticism levelled at the site shared much in common with wider critiques of heritage tourism in the English-speaking world. The construction of a new visitor centre and interpretation gallery presented an opportunity to try and address some of the concerns levelled in the local and international literature. It also provided a rare chance to turn academic findings into an interactive display that could communicate a complex picture of penal station life to a diverse audience.**

Port Arthur is something of an enigma — a cluster of sandstone, pink brick and weatherboard buildings scattered along the edge of a picturesque cove. There are fewer buildings now than there once were — the result of a series of bushfires that swept through the former penal settlement in the 1890s. Locals completed the destruction, quarrying much of what was left for building materials, creating in the process a set of scenic ruins. Yet, even when the site was in full operation it looked beautiful. The American convict, Linus Miller, who was sent there in 1840 double-ironed in the vomit strewn hold of a colonial brig, described it as 'one of the most pleasant and romantic places' in Van Diemen's Land, although he added that '*man* has converted it into a home of woe, sin and shame'.<sup>1</sup>

From 1830 until its closure in 1877 Port Arthur operated as the principle place of secondary punishment for the colony of Van Diemen's Land. It is the word secondary that is important here. Between 1803 and 1853 around 59,000 male and 13,500 female convicts were transported to Van Diemen's Land, yet of these only a handful of women and perhaps 12,000 men and boys

served time in the place, that in Miller's words, 'stamped gloominess, despair and death, upon every object'.

Port Arthur owes its existence to the simple fact that Van Diemen's Land was not a prison, indeed the penal colony has often been described as a panopticon without walls. Before 1840 newly arrived convicts were sent to work for settlers, the majority being used as farm hands. The system was referred to as assignment because property rights in the labour of convicts were temporarily assigned to private masters. Although, after 1840 convicts had to first undertake a period of probationary labour in a government gang, when this was completed they were eligible to be hired out to the private sector. It was precisely because the system was so open that a place of secondary punishment was needed — somewhere where those who abused this Antipodean version of a community work order could be sent. Penal stations in this sense were machines for extracting labour, as well as places for punishing the recalcitrant. Their aim was to ensure that the majority of convicts bent their backs and kept a still tongue in their head — an objective they sought to achieve through the graphic punishment of those who, like Miller, had been tried for a second offence and lagged to their remote confines.<sup>2</sup>

In the nineteenth century all official communication with Port Arthur was by sea. The only land connection, the route that terrestrial absconders would have to take, passed through two narrow necks. Lines of dogs, whose bark gave away the presence of all would be escapees, were used to seal these. The Tasman Peninsula was thus a natural prison. What's more, as Port Arthur was equipped with a fine harbour and the surrounding hills were thickly wooded, it was a place where convicts could be productively punished. Prisoners were primarily employed in the extraction of timber.

Port Arthur always had its critics. Some of the problems associated with its management went right to the heart of the convict system. The partnership with the private sector delivered punishment on the cheap saving the colonial government a substantial bill in rations, clothing and accommodation. It was not, however, without its drawbacks. Masters could not be persuaded to take on all convicts. Although they did not have to pay wages, they did have to train their unfree charges as well as clothe, house and feed them. The very young,

1. Linus Miller, *Notes of an Exile to Van Diemen's Land* (New York, 1846), 326–7.

2. Hamish Maxwell-Stewart, *Closing Hell's Gates: The Death of a Convict Station* (Sydney, 2008), 139–63.

injured and otherwise impaired were often left unassigned, there being nothing that the state could do to induce the private sector to act as *de facto* gaolers for prisoners who were unlikely to generate anything in return by way of a profit. At first such rejects accumulated in the Hobart prison barracks, but increasingly they were sent to penal stations in periodic clear outs. The problem was officially recognised in 1834 when a separate boy's institution was constructed across the bay from Port Arthur. Known as Point Puer it purported to train its young charges, providing them with practical skills. In practice it was a place run on strict disciplinary lines and the levels of punishment meted out compromised its capacity to instruct its inmates.

There were other problems too. Although masters were not permitted to physically punish their charges, they could take them to a magistrates' bench. As this involved time and expense, they were more likely to prosecute the unskilled — in other words those that were most expendable. Some observers alleged that settlers used the bench to get rid of difficult and unprofitable convicts in the hope that the replacement the state was bound to supply would prove a better deal. As the critics of transportation pointed out, convicts sent to the Australian penal colonies tended to be punished according to how useful they were and not according to the severity of the crime that they had been transported for.

Thus, while the official line was that only the worst convicts were sent to Port Arthur, this was not always true. Prisoners were shipped there for all sorts of reasons. Willem Pokbass, a Khoi transported from the Cape Colony for stealing cattle, ended up at the settlement because he was unfit for labour elsewhere, his right arm having been crippled in an attack by a lion.<sup>3</sup> And, of those who were ordered to the settlement by a court, many were status offenders who had been convicted of breach of the rules and regulations of the convict department rather than for breaking the criminal law. Miller, for example, was sent for absconding.

For the penal station to function, however, it was important for the colonial administration to stress the debased nature of all who passed through its doors, no matter how they ended up there. The easiest way to justify the extraction of pain, and much of the labour undertaken at Port Arthur was indeed painful, was to criminalize its inmates.

Three years after the last transport vessel arrived, the colony officially changed its name from Van Diemen's Land to Tasmania. Shortly after the final group of seven prisoners was transferred to the gaol in Hobart in 1877, Port Arthur too was erased from the map. Henceforth it was officially known as Carnarvon.<sup>4</sup> Yet the past, so painful for some, attracted others to the colony. Tourists came to Tasmania in increasing numbers drawn in part because of the island's past reputation as a penal colony, the latter proving far more difficult to expunge than place names. Fiction also helped to exhume what respectable Tasmanians attempted to bury. Port Arthur featured prominently in Marcus Clarke's *For the Term of His Natural Life*, first serialised in the *Australian Journal* between 1870 and 1872. This dark tale of wrongful conviction, cannibalism and the lash was adapted for the stage in the late nineteenth century and was subject of three feature films released between 1908 and 1927.

In 1927, the same year that Norman Dawn's adaptation of Clarke's novel hit Australian and American cinema screens, the Tasmanian government bowed to the inevitable. The name Carnarvon was dropped and Port Arthur restored. Just over a decade later the management of the former penal station passed to the state run Scenic Preservation

Board. Various attempts to maximise the tourism potential of the site culminated in an impressive federally funded project to stabilise the site structures. Many of the smaller buildings, which had originally served as quarters for officers and officials, were renovated as part of this initiative. By the early 1980s Port Arthur had become big business — Australia's most famous open-air museum.

Historians were unimpressed. While the site had been conserved, they complained that little was done to explore its history or to place its role as a penal station within the context of the nineteenth-century debate over transportation and the related rise of the prison. The focus instead was on structures — on what paint scrapes revealed about past tastes in interior design, or the story that long lost drains and bricked-up doors told of building modifications.<sup>5</sup> It seemed, in Richard Flanagan's words, that Port Arthur remained a place where 'a history of people is too dangerous to be contemplated'.<sup>6</sup>

A notable absence was the convicts themselves. While the exterior walls of the penitentiary were stabilised, little was done with the cells. It was almost as

## By the early 1980s Port Arthur had become big business — Australia's most famous open-air museum.

3. Tasmanian Archives and Heritage Office (TAHO), Con 18/21 and Con 31/35, p.82.

4. David Young, *Making Crime Pay: The Evolution of Convict Tourism in Tasmania*, (Hobart, 1996), 32.

5. Grace Karskens, 'Engaging Artefacts: Urban Archaeology, Museums and the Origins of Sydney', *Humanities Research*, 9, 1 (2002), 11.

6. Richard Flanagan, 'Crowbar History: Panel Games and Port Arthur', *Australian Society*, 9, 8 (1990), 35–7.

though they were too ugly to be worth bothering with, in contrast to the neat cottages that had served as accommodation for the settlement's officers. As Kay Daniels noted, the meta-message was that all that is bad 'emanates from the convict. All that is good comes from above'. The point was driven home by a caption in the site museum:

*No aspect of Port Arthur's history has been more distorted than the punishment and treatment of prisoners. Most of the horrifying stories that abound have no basis in fact and the cases of brutality that did occur seem to have been committed mainly by convict trustees against their fellow prisoners.*

As Daniels wryly added: 'No brutality or barbarism from above. No solidarity below'.<sup>7</sup>

Flanagan and Daniels' criticisms echoed wider concerns amongst historians about the rise of the heritage industry. Heritage interpretations, many argued, ignored problematic issues presenting the past as trouble free. Such rose tinted spectacled views were worrying, at least in the eyes of the heritage industry's detractors, since they reinforced a conservative view of history. As David Lowenthal argued, the problem was that site interpretation often collapsed the past into a single frame of reference. Doing so eased the task of comparing by-gone years with the present and therefore assisted the interpreter's aim of connecting visitors with the array of attractions that a site might have to offer. A reliance on everyday objects provided a simple means of facilitating this trick.<sup>8</sup> Thus, the kitchen attached to the Commandant's Quarters at Port Arthur was fashioned into a familiar space by equipping it with mid-nineteenth century domestic utensils. While the knife grinder in the corner may be less familiar to visitors, scales, breadboards and a dresser lined with blue and white tableware helped to connect the past to their own lives. It may not be what they expected to see at a site of secondary punishment, but it helped to normalise, and thus rationalise, the past.

The emphasis on convict living conditions, Daniels argued, did much the same. Interpretations that concentrate on the details of daily routines, the types of

uniform worn and the amount of calories the ration supplied tread safe ground. Convicts were better off at Port Arthur, the guides argued, because the ration that they received was superior to working class British and Irish diets. Convicts were also taught a trade and educated, so once released back into colonial society they stood a better chance of obtaining legitimate employment. The emphasis was placed squarely on reform. Port Arthur may have been characterised by a regime that was strict by contemporary standards, but as a place, it was fair. As Daniels wrote in 1982:

*With the visitor, Port Arthur plays an elaborate game. It says: you are here because you thought this was a terrifying place. You came to be horrified, to be confronted with the evidence of brutality. You came because you believed this was Devil's Island, a place of inflicted pain. Instead what we intend to show you is a place of humane and quiet justice.<sup>9</sup>*

Convicts were also taught a trade and educated, so once released back into colonial society they stood a better chance of obtaining legitimate employment.

A worry with this approach was that it threatened to close the cell door more firmly than was ever historically possible. In part this is because Port Arthur was never really a prison — penal stations functioned more like labour camps. It is true that the site acquired a carceral institution

in the shape of the separate prison. This building, constructed in the years 1849 — 50, was built on the Pentonville model and was designed as a place where newly arrived convicts, and those found guilty of breach of settlement regulations, could be isolated from their peers. Subject to a silent regime, inmates spent 23 hours a day in solitary confinement and were ordered to wear a mask whenever out of their cell.

Yet, Port Arthur had been in existence for two decades before the separate prison opened. It operated in the later years of the settlement when the number of convicts was in decline. It is true that over time the amount of cellular accommodation increased. The settlement flourmill and granary was converted into a penitentiary in 1857, for example, but even after the change inmates spent the bulk of their day at work in the open air. The aim of a penal station was to extract labour from the bodies of its inmates. In the case of Port Arthur,

7. Kay Daniels, 'Cults of Nature, Cults of History', *Island Magazine*, 16 (1983), 6.

8. David Lowenthal, *The Heritage Crusade and the Spoils of History* (Cambridge, 1998), 137–43.

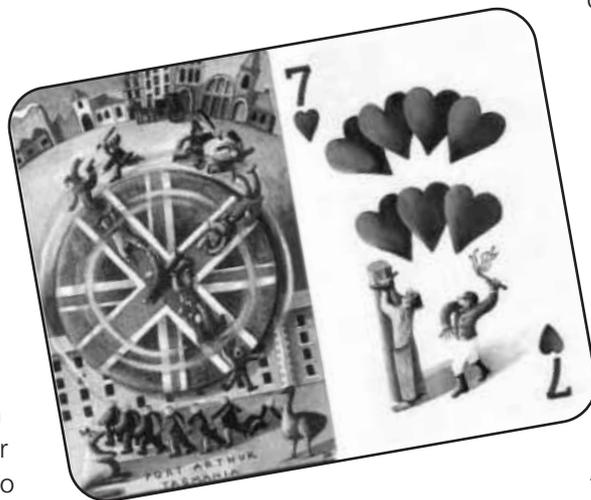
9. Daniels, 'Cults of Nature', 5.

this meant cutting and transporting timber, quarrying stone and coal, cultivating potatoes, building ships and boats and manufacturing articles such as furniture and shoes.

There is a related issue. Interpretations that emphasise the 'hardened' nature of Port Arthur's convicts peddle a line that closely resembles the rhetoric of nineteenth — century penal managers. The restraints that were historically placed on convicts were not all physical. Like other systems that utilised unpaid labour, some of the chains that shackled those lagged to Australia were ideological. The fact that all convicts had been found guilty by a court of law was used to justify their deployment as unfree colonial labour. The doubly degraded state of those condemned to penal stations facilitated the use of even greater levels of force in the process of labour extraction. In short, an emphasis on the 'hardened' nature of convicts disguised the similarities between penal transportation and other unfree labour migration schemes, notably slavery and indenture. The same logic was used to dismiss convict protests. The prisoner who attempted to challenge, or in other ways ameliorate their condition, merely confirmed their status as a 'hardened' offender.<sup>10</sup>

In 1998 I was asked by the Port Arthur Management Authority to help shape the content of their new interpretation gallery. The challenge was to design something that would appeal to visitors while simultaneously addressing the criticisms that historians had levelled at previous site interpretations. It is one thing to knock the attempts of others, but the acid test of the critic is could they do better.

The interpretation that I designed in conjunction with the then site interpretation manager, Dorothy Evans, and the Hobart architectural firm of Robert Morris Nunn and Associates, used an everyday object as its starting point. Our aim was to engineer interpretation strategies that relied upon familiar associations. Our intention, however, was not to flatten the complexity of the past, but to create a route by which historical interactions could be broken down into something that was, quite literally, child's play. To do this we used a pack of cards (see front cover) — a device with which we reasoned the vast majority of visitors to Port Arthur would be familiar.



Our approach was built around one of the key criticisms levelled at transportation by its nineteenth — century opponents — that the fate of the convict depended not on the severity of the crime that they had committed, but the use to which they could be put in the Australian colonies. In 1838 a British parliamentary committee highlighted the issue by characterising transportation as a 'mere lottery'. Cards provided a means of suggesting that chance might play a part in dictating the fate of a convict. It also gave us the opportunity to engage in some deck rigging of our own.

The interpretation we designed was based on a study of over 2,000 convicts who spent time at Port Arthur penal station in the 1830s. As the life of every convict landed in Australia was recorded in extraordinary detail, we were able to amass a considerable amount of information about this cohort of penal station inmates. We literally knew the colour of their eyes, their place of birth, the skills they claim to have acquired prior to transportation and the nature of the offence for which they had been lagged to the Antipodes. Crucially we could also determine the reason why they had been shipped for a second time to Port Arthur.

We were also able to determine how the labour of each prisoner had been deployed at the penal settlement. By tracing convicts as they were moved between gangs or were selected to work as sawyers, bakers, blacksmiths, watchman, overseers and constables, we could reconstruct the process by which labour was extracted from prisoners on both an individual and collective level. We documented the distribution of floggings and sentences to solitary confinement, as well as noting those convicts who were listed on the monthly list of prisoners in receipt of tea and sugar — luxuries that were doled out as incentives. As we also had access to death records, we could measure the impact of punishment on convict bodies. The death rate for convicts in gangs was four times higher than those who served in skilled or supervisory positions for example.

From the 2000 convicts in the wider study we selected 52 whose lives were representative of experience at Port Arthur during its formative years as a penal station. Each visitor to the site was provided with a card illustrated with a detail drawn from one of these

10. Hamish Maxwell-Stewart, "'Like Poor Galley Slaves': Slavery and Convict Transportation', in M. Suzette Fernandes Dias (ed.) *Legacies of Slavery: Comparative Perspectives* (Newcastle, 2007), 48–61.

lives. That card determines the route they would be instructed to take around the interpretation gallery. If they chose to play the game (we hoped that many would not) they become captive to the hand they had been dealt. At various points red cardholders were directed in one direction and black in another. At others visitors are divided by suite. Our aim was to split tourists in the same way that transportation split convicts from family and friends. As they progressed through the gallery, the convict life behind each visitor's card was slowly revealed. Each was thus provided with the opportunity to explore one convict's experience. The lives revealed through this process, however, differed widely.

The value of each card determined the experience that a visitor would be exposed to. The twos and threes (designed to be given to children) explored the lives of boys who served time at Point Puer. The cards with values from four to nine were used to reveal the conditions experienced by the predominantly unskilled prisoners detailed to work in timber hauling or other gangs. Many of these were sent to Port Arthur for comparatively minor offences, commonly for absconding. Regardless of why they had been directed to Port Arthur, once there the unskilled bore the brunt of the punishment. In this way penal stations mirrored the operation of the convict system as a whole.

The cards valued ten and higher revealed the stories of convicts who had an easier time. The king's, for example, were all blacksmith's — skilled metal workers who were employed repairing tools and closing the rivets of the irons that prisoners in the chain gang were forced to wear. Some were sent to Port Arthur for burglary, yet despite the serious nature of their offence, their value as workers protected them from worse aspects of the penal station regime. It is perhaps not surprising that skilled prisoners disproportionately appeared on the settlement's incentive list.

There is a lot packed into the interpretation gallery. In effect it walks visitors through a research project. The display explores the diversity of convict backgrounds. One of the 52 convicts was born a slave in Spanish Town, Jamaica, another was a medical student from Paris. If you were to read every life you would discover who was sent to Port Arthur for homosexual offences, which routes absconders were most likely to take, the convicts that were likely to be selected as constables and why it was

better to work as a top, as opposed to a pit, sawyer. Yet, our intention was not to reveal all but to start a conversation. We deliberately devised a strategy in which we told visitors different, often contradictory stories, since we wanted them to argue about Port Arthur and the lives of the convicts that were sent there. One reason for this was that visitor's centres in themselves are problematic. At their worst they insert an unwelcome interface between the tourist and the thing that they have come to see.

It was for these reasons that we chose to concentrate the story that we told on the Port Arthur of the 1830s. Not much of the site survives from its first decade as most of the early buildings were of timber construction. We tried to reign in the focus of the visitor's centre so that it explored what the visitor would not see when they went out on site. Port Arthur has always relied on guides, who are predominantly Tasman Peninsula locals. We wanted to reinforce their role rather than undermine it. We attempted to do this by equipping visitors with questions that would make a guided tour a more rewarding experience.

Did we succeed? The interpretation was criticised by some academics who charged us with trivialising the past by making a game of it.<sup>11</sup> There may be truth in this, although we would counter that the game that visitors play takes them on a journey that reveals much about the inner workings of transportation. In this sense it is far from superficial. On a wider front, the exhibition has been a success and is still popular fourteen years after it was installed. It has now been viewed by over 2 million people, an indication that it is indeed possible to create interpretations that successfully convey complex views about the past. At least some of those who have seen it were sufficiently intrigued to purchase the more detailed book that accompanies the exhibition. *A Pack of Thieves? 52 Port Arthur Lives* is now in its sixth edition having sold over 30,000 copies. It explores the lives of the convicts who feature in the gallery in greater depth, using each to illustrate a different aspect of the transportation process. The most rewarding feedback, however, has been supplied by the descendants of convicts. Whatever its faults the 'Lottery of Life' puts inmates centre stage, exploring the forces that impacted on their lives and the ways in which they tried to ameliorate their circumstances.

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11. John Frow, 'In the Penal Colony', *Australian Humanities Review*, <http://www.australianhumanitiesreview.org/archive/Issue-April-1999/frow3c.html> [accessed 30-5-2013]; Carolyn Strange, 'From "Place of Misery" to "Lottery of Life": Interpreting Port Arthur's Past', *Open Museum Journal* Volume 2: Unsavoury histories, August 2000, <http://hosting.collectionsaustralia.net/omj/vol2/pdfs/strange.pdf>, [accessed 30-5-2013]. This article contains a number of factual errors, for example, leg irons were used in the display at Port Arthur, not a ball and chain as alleged. The irons are also correct weight.

# Presenting Prison History at Norwich Castle

*Nicholas Arber is a Museums Designer.*

**This article falls into two main parts. The first part contains a brief history of Norwich Castle as the County Gaol for Norfolk up until its closure in 1887 and conversion to a museum. The second part will look at the way this history has been presented to the public since that date.**

In 2000-2002 the Museum buildings were refurbished. Galleries were stripped out revealing traces of cells and dayrooms, presenting a unique opportunity to record, previously unknown, detailed information about the buildings. Following this, two displays on the history of the Gaol were produced. The first display set up in 2002 was replaced in 2009-10 by another, more complex one, informed by my PhD research on the later history of the gaol. An account of this project will be included in the second part of the article

## The Norfolk County Gaol

From the early-twelfth century the Castle stood as a prominent symbol of Royal and County power, the seat of administration and justice. Built as a sumptuous royal palace, the great stone tower was probably finished in 1121 when Henry I spent Christmas in Norwich. However, by the middle of the fourteenth century much of the extensive outer defences had decayed and the Keep was uninhabitable. It is from about this time that the building began its life as the County Gaol for Norfolk. Over the following centuries it was adapted to the needs of the prison. The roof and floors were removed and exercise yards created at basement level. Accommodation for prisoners was built against the inside of the outer walls and above the basement strong-rooms. In the eighteenth century the gaol was rebuilt following the work of John Howard and the establishment of new standards for the management of prisons and design of their buildings. This new gaol, incorporating the shell of the Norman Keep, was designed by John Soane in 1789. However, it soon became overcrowded and inadequate for the recommended classification and separation of prisoners current in the early-nineteenth century. A larger and more complex building replaced it in 1822-27, designed by William Wilkins jnr. Although well received when

new, it proved difficult to adapt to the constant experimentation in prison regimes that characterised the nineteenth century. In 1887 the prison closed and the prisoners were transferred to a new building outside Norwich.

## From Prison to Museum

Following the closure of the prison the Castle became the property of the city. Mark Knights, a local reporter and writer of historical and topographical books, toured the empty prison and published an account of his visit. He writes that,

*Years ago a glimpse of the interior of the lodge aroused the curiosity of the many promenaders of the walk. They cast furtive glances into it should the door happen to be opened as they passed; for there then hung upon its walls objects which suggested the horrors of a prison — waist and leg irons, and various kinds of shackles.<sup>1</sup>*

Even after the regular use of irons and ‘shackles’ had declined, the collection had become part of a Black Museum within the prison, presumably valued for its psychological impact on those entering its doors.

Following closure, John Gurney suggested using the redundant Castle prison as a new home for the Norwich Museum and this idea found widespread support. Local architect, Edward Boardman, carried out the conversion by gutting the cell blocks to form galleries and demolishing the central gaoler’s house to create a garden.<sup>2</sup> This done, the prison blocks retreated behind a veneer of studwork and plaster, their outer walls clothed in creeper.

In c1883 the chains had been loaned out for an exhibition by Mr Haggard, the chairman of the Visiting Justices for the prison. He accompanied his consent ‘with an expression of the hope that the borrower would ‘improve the occasion’ by ‘making it understood by the public that the *utility* of their exhibition is to exemplify the more humane system of punishment existing now to what then used to be’.<sup>3</sup> However, when

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1. Knights M., *Norwich Castle As It Was*, Jarrold and Sons, London, c1888, p.2. The ‘walk’ was the top of the mound around the outer wall of the prison, popular for its views over the city.  
2. Southwell, Thomas, F.Z.S., *The Official Guide to the Norwich Castle Museum*, 3rd edition, Jarrold & Sons London, 1903, 13.  
3. *Ibid*, 209, 210.

the prison closed, the chains became the main focus of Dungeon tours in the museum and any higher philosophical aspirations faded into the background.

Until comparatively recently the written history of the Castle was almost exclusively the history of the Norman and medieval period. The following centuries of prison history were often reduced to a few brief notes, any associated objects being merely curiosities. The 1903 museum guidebook describes the display of chains and other irons as being in a dungeon room in the basement of the Keep. Outside the dungeon was displayed part of Mr Stark's phrenological collection including 'casts of the heads of several murderers, idiots, etc.' with recent additions that 'appear to be the effigies of those who have attained an unenviable celebrity by (to use a significant expression) dying in their shoes'.<sup>4</sup> These death masks were added after the original collection was presented to the Norwich Museum in 1839. Therefore, objects relating to the history of the prison were reached by passing by this 'ghastly-looking collection' no doubt raising the pulse rate of the visitor ready for the 'fearful fetters' and 'terrible iron bars' awaiting in the next room.<sup>5</sup>

### Dungeon tours

Most information on the history of the prison was delivered in the form of 'Dungeon' tours which by the 1950s and 60s had become a familiar part of museum life. Museum front-of-house staff acted as guides, basing their scripts on tried and tested stories of torture and incarceration. The extensive collection of chains from the old Black Museum formed the backbone of the displays. The emphasis was on the violent and ghoulish. It drew on received wisdom, influenced by stories from the Tower of London and Newgate, with a few notorious local criminal cases. This said little about the nature of the Norfolk County Gaol. Experience showed that tried and tested stories of notorious inmates or brutal torture were guaranteed to elicit a favourable response from visitors. 'We tell them what they want to hear' was the policy of one 1970s tour guide. Entertainment was the overriding criteria. Little mention was made of the later gaol (except perhaps the tread mill); no 'ordinary'

prisoners' lives were considered interesting. This predilection for the sensational can also be seen in local press coverage relating to the prison. Even the article on the new prison displays in 2010 was headed 'Exhibition gives grisly insight into prison life'.<sup>6</sup> Although undoubtedly more balanced than some of its predecessors, the article still favours aspects of the display about grim conditions and the executed murderers and omits to mention sections dealing with the staff or prison reformers.

### Changing attitudes

By the 1980s attitudes had begun to change. Against a background of the growing interest in family history and a greater emphasis on 'bottom up' social history, the lives of prisoners in the castle gained some currency. There was a growing willingness of families to accept a convict ancestor. In Australia convicts transported on the 'first fleet' were gaining almost aristocratic status. Descendants came to visit the Castle wanting to know what life had been like for their relatives in prison. Most of the enquiries concerned later eighteenth- and nineteenth-century inmates. Initially these questions were difficult to answer as little local research had focused on the

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County Gaol and no history of the later prison had been published.

Whilst working at the Castle I had undertaken some informal research to answer enquiries about the gaol and in 2002 I was encouraged to formalise this in a PhD programme, choosing to look at the period 1764 — 1887. Most surviving prison buildings on the Castle mound originated from that period and a large part of my research was aimed at placing them in a wider historical context. My subsequent study showed that in the eighteenth century the Norfolk magistrates had been in the vanguard of reforms. Despite the dilapidated state of the Castle they had installed 'airy rooms for the sick' in the Keep in 1764, some years before Howard's visits and subsequent legislation.<sup>7</sup> Other reforms included an early Penitentiary style regime in Wymondham Bridewell, cited by a group of Pennsylvania Quakers as an example of best practice.<sup>8</sup> It

4. Ibid, 206.

5. Ibid, 207, 208.

6. *Eastern Daily Press*, Friday, December 3rd, 2010.

7. Howard, J., *The State of the Prisons in England, Scotland and Wales*, 4th edition, London 1792.

8. *Report of The Society for Alleviating the Misery of Public Prisons*, Philadelphia, 1790.

was also clear that in the early-nineteenth century the powerful London evangelical and Quaker lobby had played an important part in the rebuilding of the Castle prison in 1822. At that time contacts existed between Norfolk and members of the London pressure group, The Society for the Improvement of Prison Discipline. Members such as Samuel Hoare and Thomas Fowell Buxton had married sisters of Elizabeth Fry (née Gurney of Earlham Hall near Norwich). Their friend and fellow society member, Edward Harbord, in his role of Norfolk county magistrate, took a close interest in the design of the new prison and worked hard to overcome opposition to rebuilding.<sup>9</sup> The new prison was more extensive than its predecessor, encompassing the entire top of the Castle mound. Three-storey cell blocks radiating from a central gaoler's house were connected at their outer ends by two-storey blocks arranged in a ring, broken only by the Castle Keep. Although incorporating state-of-the-art design, the buildings soon became obsolete as first the Silent and then Separate systems were introduced. Both staff and magistrates strongly influenced the running of the prison. For example George Pinson (governor from 1843-1877) had definite views on managing his gaol, rejecting the use of dark cells and the crank, and professing a preference for open seating in chapel rather than the iconic Separate system layout surviving at Lincoln Castle.<sup>10</sup> Norwich Castle prison had its own unique history that warranted interpretation to the visiting public.

In the 2000-2002 refurbishment prison interiors hidden for over a century were exposed when some of the museum galleries were gutted. Floors were also removed revealing the foundations of ground floor rooms and cells. Questions that had been previously difficult to answer could now be addressed. For example, the extent to which the Separate System had been introduced into the gaol was not clear from the documents. From the 1850s onward dayrooms were converted into cells and fixed iron-beds removed and replaced with hammocks. These could be packed away during the day, creating more space in the cells for working in solitude. In 2000 hammock loops were found in two of the main radial wings suggesting that much, if not all, of the convicts' side of the buildings had been converted. Only that part of the buildings for prisoners awaiting trial remained unchanged. Here the

beds seem not to have been removed or the dayroom converted into cells, suggesting that they were not subjected to solitary confinement. I was able to record many of these features and feed this new information into my PhD study, providing a rich store of material for future interpretation of the prison.<sup>11</sup>

### The new displays

In 2002 following the refurbishment, the Castle Keep underwent a radical redisplay. For the first time information about the history of the prison was included in the displays. Although light-weight, the display brought the history of the gaol out of the dungeons and into the main museum galleries. Subsequently, this display was dismantled and an opportunity created for a more complex approach to the history of the prison in partnership with the University of East Anglia and funding organisations. This took the form of conventional case-based displays, interactive material and animated film. The target audience included children from seven or eight years upwards and adults. The display area needed to be able to accommodate small groups of adults and school parties as well as wheelchair users.

The new display is located in the southern half of the Keep basement. The room was not a 'blank canvas'. The gallery layout had to take account of a variety of pre-existing structures and two entrances. Opening off this space is one of the original twelfth-century 'dungeon' rooms. This had been set up as a reconstruction of a medieval dungeon in the 2002 display and has been retained. The various display elements had to be worked around these features; for this reason a topic based approach was adopted.

The display content naturally divided into three main subject areas. The first period, covering the pre-nineteenth-century prison, up to the building of Soane's new gaol in 1789-94; a second, small, section about his gaol and the third, and largest, section dealing with the 1822 — 1887 prison. There was also a 'postscript', mentioning the conversion to museum and bringing the Castle prison story up to date. Within the main subject areas displays deal with topics relating to the life and work of individuals associated with the prison. When planning the displays a conscious effort was made to base the information around real people,

Norwich Castle  
prison had its own  
unique history that  
warranted  
interpretation to the  
visiting public.

9. Bacon, R.M., *A Memoir of the Life of Edward Third Baron Suffield*, Norwich, 1838.

10. Pinson's evidence to the *Select Committee of The House of Lords on Gaol Discipline*, PP, 1863 (499), IX, 1 3931-4058.

11. Arber, N. J., *The Norfolk County Gaol 1764-1887: 'A good and sufficient prison'?* Unpublished PhD, University of East Anglia, 2009.

and where possible objects were selected which related directly to them. Most of the material available was in the form of documents, such as gaol books, hand bills, calendars of prisoners for trial or newspaper articles. Where appropriate these documents were mounted in the displays to provide detailed information, enabling introductory texts to be kept to a minimum. Thereby, visitors could read the prisoners' stories in the original rather than second-hand in a museum label. The museum collections also contained objects suitable for the displays including prison staff memorabilia, paintings, the chains from the prison Black Museum and architectural details such as windows and doors from the old buildings. It was impossible to ignore the stories relating to the executed murderers as the bulk of the prison collections related to these individuals. This was an interesting area to display given that there was a rich narrative to present to the visitor but a balance had to be found between objectivity and the 'Dungeon' experience mentioned above.

Models are also included. They represent the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century buildings and are of a robust construction that can be handled, enabling visually impaired visitors to share in an appreciation of their layout. Because none of the original cells has survived anywhere in the buildings, explaining what they were like demanded a leap of imagination for the visitor. Therefore it was decided to attempt a full size reconstruction of a typical cell. Following the 2000-2002 building work, information was gained from the exposed prison fabric providing dimensions and detailed layout of the cells. The basement ceiling where the prison displays are located is a little over two metres high, which is lower than in the original cells. However, the floor is of Yorkstone slabs similar to the original cell floors. In the Norwich cells the windows were larger and lower down than later prison examples. Ceilings were not vaulted but flat, composed of large slabs of stone spanning the width of the cell and supported on a ledge in the walls, the whole cell block resembling a house of cards. In 2000 one cell threshold was found below the northern radial floor. It had been whitewashed, preserving the imprint of the door frame and thus enabling the width of the doorway to be measured. After his visit to the Castle, Knights described the interior of a cell, mentioning a 'small table, projecting from the wall'.<sup>12</sup> Socket holes for

It was impossible to ignore the stories relating to the executed murderers as the bulk of the prison collections related to these individuals.

timber supports were found in two of the cells indicating that the tables were in fact small, fixed shelves some 470 mm wide and probably about 300 mm deep; just big enough to take meals on and robust enough so as not to be easily broken. As has been mentioned above hammock loops also survived and were recorded. From this and other information we were able to reconstruct a replica of a cell close to the size of the originals, given the slightly lower ceiling. The cell is fitted with a hammock as it might have been in the mid-nineteenth century. The window is a copy of a surviving original from the former radial wings and is backlit with a light box. Visitors are encouraged to enter the cell and try the hammock. The doorway was too narrow for wheelchairs, the original cell doors being only about 660 mm wide. To enable wheelchair access

a sliding panel was built into the side wall of the cell, which when closed maintained the feeling of enclosure. For children to dress up in, reproduction male and female prison dress is located nearby. No reconstruction can ever completely reproduce 'the real thing', but interactive activities such as this can be memorable for visitors of all ages and certainly raise awareness of prison history.

Complex buildings can be difficult to explain especially when they have undergone dramatic changes over time.

Many museum visitors have little time to grapple with intricate cut-away diagrams or lengthy texts. Therefore, to complement the conventional museum displays an animated film was created. It was hoped that it would provide a visitor-friendly medium through which to tell the prison story. It was made in collaboration with the computer regeneration specialists at the University of East Anglia, and includes both stills and 3D computer-generated reconstructions of the buildings. The film is subtitled for visitors with hearing impairment and is unified by a continuous voice-over commentary, which also serves to provide information for the visually impaired. The museum curatorial staff prepared the story line and script for the voice-over. My primary role was the creation of reconstructions of buildings and interiors based on my recent research. This information was then used to inform the computer animations. From a very fruitful working relationship long-lost buildings began to emerge which could be examined via fly-through sequences. Given the obvious limitations of computer graphics on a modest budget, it was still

12. Knights M., *Norwich Castle As It Was*, 8.



A still from one of the fly-over sequences from the Castle prison animated film showing the reconstruction of the 1822 gaol buildings. Norfolk Museums and Archaeology Service and Virtual Past.

possible to get a real 'feel' for what the nineteenth-century buildings were like. Visitors can see how the Castle changed from a palace and fortress to the County gaol. The sequences take them over and into the buildings to see the prisoners in chapel or at work on the treadmill. They are shown how, in the 1822 prison, the Governor, John Johnson, surveyed his charges through his house windows as they exercised in the yards outside; and visit William Cole, an aged debtor, in his room in the western-radial wing. It was hoped that by the use of this medium the gaol could be brought to life as a real working institution.

### Epilogue

Of those families who have visited the Castle to see where their ancestors were incarcerated one deserves special mention. In the 1960s members of the Kable family in Australia began researching a family story that their ancestors, Henry Kable and Susannah Holmes, had been imprisoned in Norwich Castle in the 1780s. Here the nineteen-year olds had fallen in love

and whilst awaiting transportation to Australia, Susannah gave birth to a son, Henry, born in the gaol. Subsequent research confirmed the story and since then several family members have visited the Castle. Henry and his family were transported on the first fleet to Australia and once there he established himself as a leading business man in the colony. Their story was ideal for inclusion in the display as the museum has an eighteenth-century bible from the gaol with entries of baptisms for children born there.<sup>13</sup> Although Henry jnr. is not included amongst the entries, here was an opportunity to introduce the subject of births within the Castle and by extension, the contact between the sexes in the unreformed gaol. The last case in the room contains modern Kable family material bringing their story up to date.<sup>14</sup> The invitation to visitors here is to share their family stories with the museum, to build up a database about the prison and its people. Although still in its infancy, this collection is growing, firmly establishing the history of the prison within the museum collections.

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13. Norwich Castle Bible NMAS, 647.969.

14. The Kable story has been told in many forms including a folk ballad opera *The Transports* by Peter Bellamy, recorded 1977.

# Work in the Prison Exhibition

*Lindsey Ryan* is a former Post-Graduate Student at Edge Hill University and *Elizabeth Chard*, is Curator in Industrial History and Technology for the Lancashire County Museum Service.

Lancashire in the first half of the nineteenth century was home to four prisons: Lancaster Castle; Preston House of Correction; Salford; and Kirkdale. In these prisons it was expected that prisoners would work, but this was not usually the case. It was not until the 1779 Penitentiary Act that work within prisons became commonplace. The 1779 Act stipulated industrial labour should be adopted within prisons, and many did so. This industrial work was favourable to the local authorities for it provided them with an income to help with the running costs of prisons. Many reformers encouraged this industrial labour for they believed it would lead to the reform of prisoners. The act was based on the proposals of the reformer John Howard, who thought a labour regime should be incorporated within all prisons. According to McConville, Howard stated the labour should be profitable, 'arduous and servile'.<sup>1</sup> The purpose for using profitable labour was to provide prison officials with a salary, rather than resorting to abuses to provide themselves with a wage. This was because in the eighteenth century local authorities allowed private individuals to become gaolers, whose sole purpose was to make a profit. There was little if any interference from local justices. Therefore prisons were squalid, disease ridden and prisoners were left in complete idleness. Howard's research and visits to prisons across England and Wales shamed many local authorities, but some were keen to reform. This exposure and the 1779 Act led to many prisons being built or re-built in the late eighteenth century. Preston prison was one such prison and was built in 1790 at a substantial cost. Lancashire's magistrates emphasised that labour would need to be profitable in an attempt to repay this expenditure. As Lancashire was the hub of the cotton textile industry, work in manufacturing was readily available. However, according to Margaret DeLacy, Lancashire's industry was subject to the booms and slumps of economic cycles so there were periods of high unemployment during which crime rates rose.

This in turn increased pressure on county finances, justices and prison governors to pay for and manage constantly rising prisoner numbers and drove the need for prisons to be productive and generate an income. In the late 1820s and early 1830s Preston Prison was famous for the amount of industrial work it undertook for the cotton mills.<sup>2</sup> A number of other regional prisons, including Manchester and Lancaster, did likewise, although to a lesser extent. What was unusual at Preston was the scale of the work undertaken. It operated like a small factory with close links to industry outside the prison walls.<sup>3</sup>

The use and effectiveness of industrial labour within prisons was a subject of debate amongst nineteenth century reformers and later among modern penal historians. Reformers debated whether work undertaken by prisoners should be useful and reformatory or if it should be a harsh deterrent against a continued life of crime. One reformer who believed in the reformatory prison was the chaplain of the Preston House of Correction, the Reverend John Clay. It is Clay's famous and comprehensive reports which provided a valuable source for this article and also a related museum exhibition. The work of prisoners within Lancashire's early nineteenth century prisons will be discussed here, with particular reference to the Preston House of Correction. Also to be considered is how this material will be communicated to the public in the form of a museum exhibition scheduled for 2013/2014. This exhibition will open up the world of work in nineteenth-century prisons to the public, and its relevance will be demonstrated through similarities with prisons of the early twenty-first century.

The concept of the exhibition draws upon research by Lindsey Ryan. Elisabeth Chard, curator of the Lancashire Museum Service, considered this to be an interesting area for a public exhibition, as well as having potential for further research. As discussions for the exhibition developed, it was decided to contrast past prison work with the work opportunities offered to inmates in Lancashire today.<sup>4</sup> The Lancashire Museum Service holds nationally recognised cotton industry collections so the theme of the exhibition was highly

1. S. McConville, *A History of English Prison Administration Volume 1 1750-1877* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul Ltd, 1981), p.80.
2. DeLacy, p 226, and p.103.
3. 'PRISON DISCIPLINE' *The Lancaster Gazette and General Advertiser, for Lancashire, Westmorland, &c.*(Lancaster, England),Saturday, October 20, 1821.
4. The preparation of the exhibition was assisted by Sarah Kirkham, a long term volunteer for the Museum Service.

relevant. The exhibition will be hosted at various museum sites and emphasis will be on presenting the subject matter in an engaging and accessible format for families; schools; subject specialists and enthusiasts alike.

To make the exhibition more attractive to a wider public and set of host venues, the content was expanded to reflect not just Preston but other Lancashire prisons. In response to the team's aspirations, the exhibition has been designed to tour using pop up banners. This will allow for it to be easily transported, adapted and hard wearing. In the context of limited resources, the in-house museum designers have successfully achieved their tough design brief to allow one person to transport the exhibition in a small car. It is anticipated this exhibition will have a life expectancy of at least five years, travelling around various host locations, especially community spaces throughout Lancashire. These will include: libraries; magistrate's courts; young offenders institutions; community centres; civic buildings; and possibility even doctors' and dentists' surgeries. The Lancashire Record Office has agreed to host the exhibition and display some of the research materials used in the original study.

The design of the eight banners comprising the exhibition has taken into account the wide range of users. The exhibition is available free of charge to any venue which chooses to accommodate it. The first site to host the exhibition will be the Museum of Lancashire, which reopened in 2012 and is situated next to Preston Prison. The museum already includes a gallery dedicated to law and order alongside others that explore themes such as work, play and war in Lancashire.

### The Exhibition

The first banner will provide a general overview of the themes to be explored and discuss the early history of the prison. The banner will explain that prison was where prisoners learned trades and carried out work whilst serving their sentence. The public are then encouraged to think about what activities prisoners undertook inside an early nineteenth century prison and how this may be different today for example

recreational activities and formal support programmes. The banner begins by discussing how in 1575, Parliament passed a law which stated that every county should have a House of Correction. It took until 1618 for The Preston House of Correction to be opened, and then it contained only a few cells. If there was a shortage of space within the prison some of the petty criminals would be whipped and then released. During the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries prison conditions were atrocious, disease and sickness were rife causing many fatalities. Prisoners could pay for improved conditions, although many could not afford to do so. Indeed some prisoners were charged a fee by the gaoler so they could be released at the end of their sentence. Many of the gaolers did not receive a salary

and so earned their living any way they could. Activities undertaken by the prisoners varied from prison to prison. In some the prisoners worked, but in others they were left to get drunk and learn further criminal behaviour from other prisoners. These abuses highlighted by John Howard, led to many reformers and local authorities embracing the principles of the 1779 Penitentiary Act to improve conditions.<sup>5</sup>

A number of significant penal reforms took place between the 1770s and the 1850s and they are outlined in the second exhibition banner.

They were important for they led to the development of the modern prison, and marked a change from punishment of the body such as whipping to a more evangelical reform of the soul. This focus on evangelical reform led to a prominent role for the prison chaplain. Penal reformers also campaigned for punishments to be more effective in preventing re-committals and to deter others from becoming criminals. Many reformers were critical of the 1823 Gaol Act for they believed it did not go far enough, including Preston's chaplain John Clay. The 1823 Act only legislated for the classification of prisoners but did not stipulate the enforcement of the separate system of discipline. Many chaplains like Clay believed in the reformatory element of the system which was perceived as a means not only to reform but also to address lax discipline.<sup>6</sup> The separate system was based on the belief that convicted criminals had to face up to themselves and their crimes.

During the  
seventeenth and  
eighteenth  
centuries prison  
conditions were  
atrocious, disease  
and sickness were  
rife causing many  
fatalities.

5. DeLacy, pp. 25-26 and pp.34-35.

6. R. McGowan 'The Well-Ordered Prison: England, 1780-1865', in *The Oxford History of The Prison: The Practice of Punishment in Western Society*, ed, by N. Morris and D. Rothman (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), p.91.

They were kept in solitary confinement for most of their day, and were only let out to attend chapel or to take exercise. Even in chapel they sat in special partitioned seats and/or wore masks so that they couldn't see or talk to other prisoners. This reformatory separate system was preferred by Clay over an alternative system of strict discipline which was also popular, the silent system. The silent system forbade prisoners to talk to each other and chapel was attended in complete silence. Prisoners were given hard, laborious tasks which were often pointless as this was thought to deter them from committing crime in the future. One example of these tasks was cranking a handle a set amount of times, or walking in a treadmill. The treadmill was introduced in many prisons following the 1823 Act, as an exacting hard labour device.<sup>7</sup>

The third banner explores the work of reformer John Clay in more detail, it discusses the impact he had on the Preston Prison and on wider penal reform. Clay's career as Preston's chaplain began in October 1823 and continued until his retirement in 1858. He was famous for his reformatory endeavours, extensive reports, and helping to improve the wider community of Preston and Lancashire. His reports considered the behaviour of prisoners and investigated the causes of crime. Clay considered the impact of industrial strikes on criminal behaviour and he believed idleness tempted men to drink, which led them to commit crime due to the influence of alcohol.<sup>8</sup> Hence, Clay was an active member of the Preston Temperance Society established in 1832 which campaigned against alcohol consumption and drunkenness.<sup>9</sup> Clay believed that ignorance, especially among juveniles, was also a major cause of crime. Therefore he encouraged large mill owners to take a role in educating their workforce. Clay was particularly impressed by one mill, Catteralls, which ran an evening school for just under 200 workers, although his encouragement of other mill owners to do likewise met with little success.<sup>10</sup> However, arguably Clay's proudest moment occurred in 1842 when he was finally able to introduce his new system of

Prisoners were given hard, laborious tasks which were often pointless as this was thought to deter them from committing crime in the future.

discipline within the prison, The Preston System. The Preston System was mainly based on the separate system of discipline in which prisoners were kept in their solitary cells. However this was not feasible within Preston's architecture designed for classification rather than separation, so the Preston System incorporated elements of the silent system.<sup>11</sup> This allowed prisoners to work, attend chapel, and take exercise together but in complete silence. Clay frequently visited the prisoners in their cells to provide them with individual spiritual guidance and is quoted as saying that as a result of the new system, reoffending rates were four times lower. Clay and the Prison Governor worked with the most promising prisoners to help them gain employment in the local mills upon release. In 1854 Lord Shaftesbury established the Prisoners' Aid Society which provided support to prisoners on their release, and to assist them to lead a respectable life. Clay unsuccessfully attempted to introduce such a society in Preston.<sup>12</sup>

From this point onwards the exhibition explores the types of work and activities undertaken within prisons. It compares these activities and the themes discussed in the nineteenth century prison to those found in modern prisons. The weaving and cotton work undertaken in early nineteenth century Lancashire prisons is the focus of the fourth banner. As a centre for the production of cotton textiles, Lancashire was able to provide local prisons with work. By the 1820s, weaving was generally one of the largest industries found in the region's prisons. The scale of this work in Preston made the prison unique. Owing to the skill required, only those prisoners serving terms of six months or more would be trained to weave. Other prisoners were given the more monotonous task of cotton picking. In the 1820s Preston Prison had 150 hand looms working at any one time. The majority of the looms were made by prisoners in the carpenter's shop. They worked for ten hours a day in silence in a factory-like system. Weaving was a favoured task for prisoners, many of whom already had experience working in local mills.<sup>13</sup>

7. 'Prison Labour', *John Bull*, 6 October 1823, p. 317. The treadwheel (sometimes referred to as treadmill) composed of a series of steps on a giant wheel, like an everlasting staircase.

8. W. L. Clay, *The Prison Chaplain: A Memoir of the Rev. John Clay, B.D.* (Cambridge: Macmillan and Company, 1861), p.499, and 495-6.

9. 'Preston Temperance Festival', *Preston Chronicle*, 8 April, 1837; and, 'Temperance Festival', *Preston Chronicle*, 31 March, 1838.

10. Lancashire Records Office (henceforth LRO) QGR/2/42, Chaplain Report, 1849.

11. Clay, p.333.

12. LRO QGR/2/42 & QGR/2/33, Chaplain Reports, 1848 and 1846.

The weaving work in Preston Prison was treated like a small business. This provided an income for the county, and is the focus of the fifth banner. In 1819 a total of 150 to 170 prisoners were taught to weave annually within the prison. There were two loom shops and also a general workshop for batting, picking or preparing the cotton. Prisoners would usually be locked in the workshops until the end of their shift, and conditions were very dirty and dusty. Preston Prison undertook work for local cotton mill owners including: Mr Horrocks; Messrs Leighton and Co; and Messrs Pollard and Co. who would supply the cotton and then buy back the woven cloth. On their release, the prisoners received a quarter of their earnings, a quarter went to the Lancashire Justices and the rest paid for the prisoners' food, clothing and general running of the prison.<sup>14</sup> The approximate earnings of the prisoners in Preston Prison was £2149 13s 5d in the year ending May 1821, the majority of which was earned by weaving and cotton picking. In Lancaster, producing pieces of cotton earned them £860 for the last year, and in Manchester earnings up to July 1820 for one year were £2056 6s 10d.<sup>15</sup>

Other work apart from weaving, which was historically undertaken in prisons, is presented in the sixth banner. It discusses the shift from public hangings as the primary form of punishment to the extensive use of the prison as a sentence of the court. This banner also discusses how the decline of Transportation and a rising prison population strained the system and county finances. The Lancashire justices saw prison work as a good way to help cover the costs incurred. Prisons became mini factories, prison labour included: making sails; sewing; printing; dying cloth; and, unpicking rope to make cordage. Indeed, during the 1800s some tradesmen complained that prisons were undercutting their profits. Prisoners were also made to keep the prison clean and tidy, make maintenance repairs to the prison, or were sent out to work on road maintenance or ditching.<sup>16</sup> Some Lancashire prisons explored the potential of the

Prisons became mini factories, prison labour included: making sails; sewing; printing; dying cloth; and, unpicking rope to make cordage.

treadmill. At Preston it was used to power a set of grinding stones to grind flour. The Governor and his staff would buy the corn at market and sell on the flour to locals at the prison gate.<sup>17</sup>

The penultimate banner contrasts historical forms of prison work with the forms of rehabilitative work common in prisons today. Historically and in modern times not all those convicted of a crime have been sent to prison. Currently in Lancashire, there are over 225,000 hours of community service undertaken every year by offenders. A community service sentence can include anything from disposing of litter to environmental projects such as cleaning graffiti or decorating a community space. The Community payback scheme covers a range of projects and prison staff look to develop prisoners' skills in order for them to successfully re-enter society.<sup>18</sup> Prison industries are working with businesses and the voluntary sector to reduce reoffending. Within the prison service, there are over 300 prison workshops nationally providing experience to over 10,000 prisoners each week. Prisoners receive a wage for the work they do and can work for up to 40 hours a week.<sup>19</sup> This is to provide a sense of routine and the reality of working in the outside world, and for them to gain valuable experience. Workshops have been modernised, today's equivalent

of weaving is printing and metal working. Prisoners also complete training courses in construction skills, laundry, mechanics, and animal welfare. Textiles are produced into finished articles and sold. For example in 2011, 1.3 million items for a supermarket chain were produced in prison workshops. Education is a major part of prison life and offenders can gain qualifications such as NVQs, which will help their employment prospects. One-One Solutions is a scheme that provides opportunities for prisoners to acquire skills such as I.T, business studies and building a CV. In order to prepare for their release prisoners attend life skills courses and the prisons collaborate with other agencies to ensure support is

13. *The Inquirer*, Vol 1, 1822 (London: Ongman, Hurst, Rees, Orme, and Brown Publishers, 1822), Article VI. p.99, and pp.93-94.

14. British Parliamentary Papers (henceforth BPP) *Report from the Select Committee on the State of Gaols and c.*, 1819, pp. 360-361.

15. *The Inquirer*, p.100.

16. DeLacy, p.208.

17. BPP *Report of the Inspectors of Prisons of Great Britain. II. Northern and Eastern District*, Second 1837, Fourth 1839, Sixth 1841, & Eighth 1843.

18. 'Community Payback Lancashire', in Lancashire Probation Trust, <<http://www.lancashireprobation.co.uk/unpaid-work-community-payback/default.php>>, [Accessed 25.2.13].

19. 'Remunerative Justice', in *The Economist*, <<http://www.economist.com/news/britain/21572201-government-wants-prisoners-be-more-productive-their-release-well-after>>, [Accessed 25.2.13].

available. These include health care professionals, local authorities and housing providers.<sup>20</sup>

The final banner of the exhibition encourages the public to link the historic themes with life in prisons today. The banner summarises the impact of early reformers such as John Howard and Elizabeth Fry, who have shaped the modern prison of today. Connections are made between historic causes of crime and current thought, for example Clay believed there was a link between alcohol and crime, and this holds true today.<sup>21</sup> The banner also reflects the work of Elizabeth Fry who worked with prisoners and the homeless, and considers the dilemma between being homeless or resorting to crime.<sup>22</sup> The debate as to whether prisoners should be paid to work and if so, how much they should earn also resonates over time. Under the Prisoners' Earnings Act of 2011 a proportion of the wage for low risk prisoners preparing for release can be automatically taken away to fund support services for victims of crime. The act is seen by the government as a way to get prisoners to take responsibility for their crimes something Clay supported.<sup>23</sup> Lastly, the banner poses the very topical questions whether prisoners should be given the right to vote, and if they should receive priority for housing on their release. This encourages the public to consider

their viewpoint, and may also assist to widen the debate on prisons.

This museum exhibition has been designed through the use of these eight banners to provide an historical perspective on Lancashire's prisons. One of the aims of this exhibition is to link historical practices and trends with early twenty-first century prisons. The purpose is to encourage the public to consider the wider debate and alternative perspectives on modern prisons and criminals. The early development and reforms undertaken within Lancashire's prisons, in particular Preston are opened up to the modern public through this exhibition. The issues which resonate across the centuries include reform, the purpose of prison labour, and the opportunity for prisoners to learn a trade. There has been much debate in the twenty-first century and in the past about what could be perceived as undue leniency shown to criminals and their access to facilities that many working class people may not be able to afford, for example, education.<sup>24</sup> Historically, many prisoners have received a level of education they would never have been able to afford outside. For some, prison ensured stability, a roof over their head, a bed, and three meals a day.

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20. 'Prison and Young Offender Institutions in Lancashire plus reoffending rates' in *Lancashire County Council*, <<http://www.lancashire.gov.uk/corporate/web/?siteid=6111&pageid=36780&e=e>>. Also, 'Prospectus 2012', in *One3One Solutions*, <[www.ONE3ONE.justice.gov.uk](http://www.ONE3ONE.justice.gov.uk)>, [Both Accessed 25.2.13].

21. LRO QGR/2/42, Chaplain Report, 1848.

22. 'Elizabeth Fry 1780-1845', in *Quakers in the World*, <<http://www.quakersintheworld.org/quakers-in-action/13>>, [Accessed 28.2.13].

23. 'Prisoners Earnings Act', in *Gov.UK*, <[https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/162392/prisoners-earnings-act.pdf.pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/162392/prisoners-earnings-act.pdf.pdf)>, [Accessed 28.2.13].

24. S. Coughlan, 'Tuition fees set to rise again next year', in *BBC News*, <<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/education-18984938>>; and 'A Degree of Change', in *Prisoners' Education Trust*, <<http://www.prisonerseducation.org.uk/index.php?id=299>>, [Both Accessed 28.2.13].

# Interview: Saul Hewish

*Saul Hewish is one of the founders of Rideout (Creative Arts for Rehabilitation) and Geese Theatre Company. He is interviewed by Michael Fiddler, a Senior Lecturer in Criminology at the University of Greenwich.*

**Saul Hewish was a founding member of the UK Geese Theatre Company in 1987. This was set up to conduct theatre and drama-based work in prisons and the criminal justice system more broadly. It was during his time with Geese that Hewish met Chris Johnston, who was then running the Insight Arts Trust. After a period of working for Geese in America — where it had originated — they began working together on a series of workshops at Swinfen Hall. This saw the beginning of Rideout in 1999.**

Our conversation was centred on two major Rideout projects. The first, The Creative Prison, saw Rideout collaborate with staff and prisoners at HMP Gartree, along with artists and architects, to re-imagine a prison. This project received a wide range of mainstream press coverage and was the subject of a touring exhibition. Secondly, and more recently, Rideout have toured GOTOJAIL, an 'inhabited' cell that 'pops up' in shopping centres, festivals and arts venues. As with other Rideout projects, it seeks to challenge popularly held views of prisons and punishment.

Additional commentary appears in italics.

## The Creative Prison: beginnings

**MF: Where did the initial idea for the Creative Prison<sup>1</sup> come from?**

**SH:** The Creative Prison really grew out of the frustration that we experienced for many years working in prisons. You're working in spaces that are not designed for what we're doing. I mean, we're coming in as artists so we want to do a theatre or a dance project, whatever it is. You're looking around the prison for space in which to do that. And, inevitably, where you end up is in the chapel or, in the worst cases, the gym. Gyms are a nightmare to work in. So, it got us thinking about 'what is the design of prison?'

You spend a lot of time talking to prisoners and staff and, inevitably, the physical environment of prison is an issue. It struck us that the prison environment was not really contributing to helping people change, but also it was actively mitigating against it in some situations. So, that's really where we came from with the Creative Prison. Also we wanted to do another public project that was in some way a provocation,

both for the public and for those at the top of the prison service. Putting it very bluntly, if you build something to be bombproof, people will try and bomb it. Rather, let's build and create something that is more human, more humane. People will begin to treat it with respect. But that only works if the regime does that as well.

**MF: People either live up or down to their environment.**

*There is a quote attributed to Oscar Wilde that provides some context to this idea. During a visit to America, Wilde was asked why he thought it was such a violent country. He replied: 'America is such a violent country because your wallpaper is so ugly.' Now, we might read this as a typically Wildean witticism. However, Stephen Fry has an interesting comment on this.<sup>2</sup> He sees Wilde's remark as being in line with the broader tenets of the Aesthetic Movement. In essence, that suggests that if we surround ourselves with ugly objects and environments then we may come to internalise that ugliness. We will think ugly thoughts of ourselves and others. Alternatively, a creatively or emotionally engaging environment might encourage us to respond in a like-minded manner*

**SH:** Exactly, exactly. The point about it was 'let's go and talk to the people that really know about prisons'. And who really knows about prisons: prisoners and prison staff. They're not designers and they're not architects. They're the people that work or live there everyday.

*Hill<sup>3</sup> poses the question of who has the authority and knowledge to change architecture. Is it the client, architect or user? The client, through policy, determines the parameters by which the architect designs the building which the user must inhabit. However, the user may subvert the intended function of the space that has been created for them. So, function can be set by architect and client, but this can then be made afresh by the user. The flexibility that can be designed into the building offers the potential for a dialogue between architect and user. In this regard, there is an homology between author-text-reader and architect-building-user. The 'text' of the building, as 'written' by the architect, can only reveal so much. It is how it is 'read' that speaks to the everyday experience of that space and the ways in which the user makes it into place.*

1. [http://www.rideout.org.uk/creative\\_prison.aspx](http://www.rideout.org.uk/creative_prison.aspx)

2. <http://www.stephenfry.com/forum/topic/3is-there-a-text-version#post-59731>

3. Hill, J. (2001). The use of architects. *Urban Studies* 38, 2, 351-365.

**MF: How did Will Alsop<sup>4</sup> become involved?**

**SH:** We wanted to work with a big-name architect because we wanted to create a sufficient level of interest in the project. That's how we came to approach Will Alsop. We knew Will's work through The Public in West Bromwich. We also knew that Will was very invested in listening to the potential users of his buildings.

Eventually we got a team put together. The team was ourselves, Alsop and Wates<sup>5</sup> construction. Wates were interested because they wanted to get a different perspective on their prison design work. As part of that, Wates also made a commitment to provide some in-kind materials to help with the project. Then we had Jon Ford the sculptor, Shona Illingworth<sup>6</sup> who is a video and visual artist, and a company called Squint/Opera<sup>7</sup> who make architectural films.

One of the other people involved in the Creative Prison, working *pro bono*, was a guy called Peter Mellor at Capita Symonds.<sup>8</sup> Peter's designed a lot of prisons. If you look at prison design, security is not something that you can ignore but also at the same time it becomes like 'this is what we have to do.' Rather than, let's deal with some other things and then address security afterwards. We wanted to make sure that when we were doing the designs, that what we were designing wasn't a complete utopia. That could be dismissed. So we were able to take it to Peter and he would give feedback. We also shared it with — outside of Gartree — heads of security, for them look at it.

**MF: How did you run the sessions with staff and prisoners at Gartree?**

**SH:** The idea was to spend quite a long time in the prison, consulting with prisoners and with prison staff on all aspects of prison design, focusing on the basic question: 'if you could design a prison from scratch, whose function was rehabilitation and education and creativity, what would that look like?'

We had a core team of about 8 prisoners and about 12 staff. We deliberately ran some sessions that were just prisoners or just staff and other sessions that were mixed. What was really interesting was the fact that the gripes and the potential solutions were pretty

What was really interesting was the fact that the gripes and the potential solutions were pretty similar from both teams.

similar from both teams. So it wasn't like the prisoners were complaining about one thing and then the staff would say something else.

When Will asked the prisoners to start doing drawings of the prison that they might like, effectively all they drew was something a bit bigger than what they'd already got. Now, that apparently isn't unusual. Will's job was to come back at them with that.

*There are some interesting similarities and dissonances here with Canter and Ambrose's<sup>9</sup> study. They found that, perhaps unsurprisingly, prisoners and staff thought about the use of space in prisons differently. As Sparks et al. put it, 'prisoners were more concerned with conceptualising their space in terms of personal and group activities, whereas staff tended to think about space in terms of achieving staff goals:*

*moving prisoners easily, being able to monitor their behaviour for control purposes, and for prisoners to have appropriate facilities'.<sup>10</sup> So, more space would allow for a greater range of personal and group activities, whilst potentially coinciding with the staff's goals as well. Driving down into this reveals an individual's highly nuanced engagement with space.<sup>11</sup>*

In the consultations we came up with the designs, but then we had to talk about what would the regime be like? What would the rules be in this prison? We let the prisoners work out what the rules were going to be. Effectively, what they talked about was a therapeutic community. When we reflected that to them they went 'no, no, it's not therapy'. Therapy was a big 'no no'.

**MF: Were those core prisoners taken from the therapeutic community at Gartree?**

**SH:** No, no. They were all regular lifers. They weren't interested in therapy. They weren't at that point in their lives, not at all. That, for us, was a very interesting outcome in terms of their thinking. We had to challenge them. The issue of sex offenders came up and what to do with them. Their initial response was 'no, no sex offenders'. But you have to talk it through. There were rules on violence, on drugs, but there were no rules about nature of offence.

4. <http://www.all-worldwide.com/>

5. <http://www.wates.co.uk/sectors/public-sector/law-order>

6. <http://www.shonaillingworth.net/>

7. <http://www.squintopera.com/>

8. [http://www.capitasymonds.co.uk/expertise/all\\_expertise/architecture/our\\_team/justice-1.aspx](http://www.capitasymonds.co.uk/expertise/all_expertise/architecture/our_team/justice-1.aspx)

9. 1980 cited in Sparks, R, Bottoms, A and Hay, W (1996). *Prisons and the Problem of Order*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.

10. *Ibid* p.229.

11. See Fiddler, M. (2006). *The penal palimpsest: an exploration of prison spatiality*. Unpublished PhD. Keele University.

## The Creative Prison: reactions

### MF: What was the press reaction like?

**SH:** Because of Alsop's involvement in it, before we'd even put a press release out, we had press about it. Will knows lots of people! He talked to various journalists. We had coverage in the architecture press very early on. Then, when we launched it, we had the *Guardian*,<sup>12</sup> the *Independent*<sup>13</sup> and the *Daily Express*. All along we'd been waiting for this sort of tabloid response and then, I think, we got off pretty well. There wasn't as much flak as perhaps I'd thought we were going to get, given that the design concept was radical and it looked kind of unusual. In the main, the kind of coverage we got picked up on was the design side of things.

Interestingly, if you look at the legacy of the Creative Prison, I think that there are certainly some design features and principles that we talk about that have definitely filtered into the conceptual thinking of architects.

**MF: I was looking at the Squint Opera video on YouTube<sup>14</sup> and the comments were completely polarised. Is that something you expected?**

**SH:** Everyone has an opinion about prison, no question. Their opinions are informed by the media and what they hear from other people. The belief is that punishment teaches people something. But when you start to examine that, what does it teach you? Does it teach you to change? Now, in some situations, punishment might prevent you from doing something again. But our argument has always been that for the vast majority of people in prison, particularly the ones that go back again and again and again, punishment ceased to be effective a long, long time ago. It doesn't work. So, you have to find something different.

Also, that is the reason why we called this HMP Paterson,<sup>15</sup> after Alexander Paterson. He was the Commissioner who first said that the punishment of prison is the restriction of liberty. That is the punishment. You don't go to prison for more punishment. Part of the reason why we did the project,

and again why we moved on to GOTOJAIL, is because in order to really explore that, you have to debate it. You have to have discussions with people about it.

## GOTOJAIL

**MF: How did you originally develop the idea of GOTOJAIL?<sup>16</sup>**

**SH:** In part it came out of the empty shop network and pop-up art. There's quite a big movement around the country for artists working in empty shops. We were thinking about what we do if we had a shop? Well, it was obvious! Build a cell.

We had early ideas about locking people in the cell. Then we started worrying that if there's a problem, we'd have to give them a way out and then it's not a cell. In the end, we decided not to do that. You can close the door, but the Chub lock has been deactivated.

**MF: What is the experience of GOTOJAIL?**

**SH:** GOTOJAIL engages people at an emotional level. You get to experience both what a contemporary prison cell looks and feels and sounds like. Also you get to talk to prisoners, albeit actors, but they are actors who have been in prison so they can draw on real experience. Obviously with the Creative

Prison, it's slightly more of an intellectual exercise and you're asking people to think of the prison as a whole. GOTOJAIL is a very specific experience. If you look through the responses, that's what comes up over and over again. People talk about claustrophobia or some of them talk about smell. It makes it a much more visceral engagement.

It's interesting where we've had people who have gone in and have had a difference of opinion with the people they're with. That's when it gets most engaging because then those people are starting to have the debate about prison. So, I remember there was one situation where there were some people saying 'it's a luxury' and then there was an old woman saying 'I wouldn't even put my dog in there'. That's what a good piece of art should be doing. It is engaging people both emotionally and intellectually. The most powerful

Everyone has an opinion about prison, no question. Their opinions are informed by the media and what they hear from other people.

12. Arendt, P. (2006). Revealed: Will Alsop's 'creative prison'. *The Guardian*. Available at: <http://www.guardian.co.uk/artanddesign/2006/may/30/architecture.prisonsandprobation>

13. Brown, H. (2006). Can design change the world? *The Independent*. Available at: <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/this-britain/can-design-change-the-world-415997.html>

14. Unavailable at time of writing.

15. Name suggested and researched by Alyson Brown.

16. <http://www.gotojail.info/>

experiences have been where people have visited the cell and it's enabled them to talk about other experiences. The number of ex-prisoners that have come has been quite astonishing. We never anticipated that. But then what you realise is that a lot of people have been in prison, even if it was for a very short period a long time ago. Or you get people who have got family members or friends in prison. It has given them a place to talk to someone about that experience.

**MF: Have you seen a difference in the responses to The Creative Prison and then with GOTOJAIL?**

**SH:** Doing GOTOJAIL has been different from the Creative Prison for a number of reasons. It's a different kind of project. Where you put something is going to get different responses. Obviously the Creative Prison went into places that were galleries or museums, whereas with GOTOJAIL part of where it really works is in shopping centres. So you're going to get a different type of response.

**MF: What were the experiences of the 'prisoners' themselves as they engaged with the public?**

**SH:** Really interesting. I remember going in there — once we'd got it set up and everything was working — closing the door and thinking that this is really quite uncanny. The real test was somebody who had spent proper time behind the door. All of them said it definitely feels like being back in prison. Now, we wanted to make sure that people were OK around that and that it wasn't distressing. In the main, they've all been OK, knowing that they can walk out of the door at the end of the day. There was some very interesting context-specific activity and learning. In London, one of the characters is played as being unable to read or write. Somebody came, learnt that, came back and basically wanted to start teaching him to read.

**MF: What privileges were the 'prisoners' allowed?**

**SH:** What we've done is that you can vote for privileges that go in or out based on your conversations with the prisoner. We were interested to see what people thought should be allowed in cells. Now,

interestingly, I don't think that the PlayStation has ever been voted in, even though that is something that if you're an enhanced prisoner you can get access to. The thing that's always been voted in, which you can't get in a real prison, is the complete set of Encyclopaedia Britannica. Which tells you something about what people think prisoners should have access to. Clearly access to a source of knowledge and information is seen as really important. Also toasters and kettles have been in and out. A guitar was the other thing, but I know some prisoners have got guitars in their cells.

The television is always the one item that people have balked at. I think there's something about the fact that there are still people who see a television as a luxury item. I personally don't. Televisions seem pretty ubiquitous. But I remember a conversation with one woman who was outraged that they'd got a TV.

*This interview took place in September 2012. In April 2013, the Justice Secretary Chris Grayling set out his plans to reconfigure the 'incentives and privileges' scheme. This would see prisoners having to 'work actively towards rehabilitation and help other prisoners' in order to access privileges.<sup>17</sup> Grayling stated that 'it is not right that some prisoners appear to be spending hours languishing in their cells watching daytime television while the rest of the country gets out to work.'*

*It is interesting that television is the pivot point around which several discussions revolve. As an object, it has now become central to age-old debates relating to less eligibility and prison labour. It has come to represent both privilege and indolence. Alternatively, television provides a key line of communication to the public about the function and purpose of imprisonment.<sup>18</sup> As Saul goes on to suggest, a principal aim of GOTOJAIL is to inform the public by offering a sense of the lived experience of imprisonment that is not possible through conventional print and television representations.*

GOTOJAIL is about challenging people to think about incarceration, the function of imprisonment and the reality of imprisonment. So, what people *think* goes on in prison, what *really* goes on in prison and what

. . . the Creative Prison went into places that were galleries or museums, whereas with GOTOJAIL part of where it really works is in shopping centres. So you're going to get a different type of response.

17. Travis, A. (2013). Prison perks :inmates must wear uniforms as Grayling cracks down. *The Guardian*. Available at: <http://www.guardian.co.uk/society/2013/apr/30/prison-uniforms-perks-chris-grayling>

18. Kearon, T (2012). Alternative representations of the prison and imprisonment — comparing dominant narratives in the news media and in popular fictional texts. *Prison Service Journal*, 199, 4-9.

*should* go on in prison. We think it's really important that that debate is kept alive. So, from that perspective, there is an element that we're advocating for reform at that level. Also, because we come at it from an arts perspective, as artists, we're interested in how art informs people's perspectives. I think it's important to take the cell to places where you would not normally expect to find a piece of art. So people stumble upon it and that there is a blurring of the boundary. When it's been in the shop, people can potentially get very confused as to what it *is*. Some people say 'well, what *is* this?' And you explain to them, 'well, it's a replica of a prison cell and there are some actors and you can go and talk to them', but then they'll still be asking, 'yes, but what is it?' If you say, 'it's an installation' then people can frame it and understand it. We put TV screens in the front of the shop that had a feed from the cell. It was amazing the number of people that would come and watch that, but then not come in. So you have to encourage people to come in. But once you've got people in the shop, looking, then people come in.

**MF: Crossing the threshold acts as a nice metaphor for the thing itself.**

**SH:** Of course. And the whole thing around surveillance and CCTV is that there's a level of voyeurism. People want to see and have that sense of being unseen when they're watching.

**MF: In much of the feedback that you have received, many of the members of the public thank you for the experience.**

**SH:** There's such a mystique about prison. There's obviously stigma around prison. But if you don't work in a prison or if you haven't been in prison, because it is behind closed walls, closed doors, people have lots of questions. There's a mystery. And so, the only thing that they have to gauge on is what they read in the papers or what they see on TV or in films. There are lots of prison documentaries now. Some of them are very good and some of them are not so good. That's how people are a passive recipient of the information. The thing about GOTOJAIL is that it allows them to interact with it, to respond to it and to sometimes challenge it. I mean there have been people who have come in and challenged the guys and said 'well, you did what you did and you deserve to be in here'. It's not all been completely one-way. Also, when we did it in Wolves, we ran it with a woman in there as well on some days.

I think that's something that would be good to revisit. Gender obviously makes a difference in the ways people respond. So that's why I think you get this thank you for the experience. It's something that they've never had the opportunity to do in real life. So, we allow them to have that opportunity, even if it's only for 10 minutes.

If you want to move to a culture that is more about trying to help people change, then ultimately you've got to address some of those perceptions that people have.

**MF: Looking back within the prison walls, what is Rideout's philosophy for achieving this change?**

**SH:** Part of Rideout's philosophy and core is about challenging people to use their imaginations and be creative. That comes from a belief that if you're someone who has arrived at a point in your life where you're using strategies to survive which end up hurting people, then maybe you need to try some alternative strategies for living your life. Now, a lot of the cognitive skills stuff is about teaching people how to solve problems. One of the steps of solving a problem is imagining consequence. But, if you're someone that thinks that they can't use their imagination or that their imagination has not been stretched, then your facility to be able to imagine is still potentially limited. That is why coming at it from an arts perspective is about being creative. It's about collective working. It's about trying to solve problems in different ways. We might set artistic problems that we've got to solve, but actually what we're practising in there is problem solving. We're practising engaging in an activity where you have to take responsibility for what you do. We're looking at where their skills lie, rather than where their deficits lie. It's about trying to see themselves in a different way. In the end, that's what prison needs to do. It needs to be able to offer people the possibility of seeing themselves and other people in a different way. If you're someone who has framed your life with a particular narrative and that narrative involves crime and prison, then you've got to create a new narrative. That's a real challenge. That's a challenge for anyone. How can we use different arts processes to help people create those new narratives? That really underlies everything we do. It's about new narratives for people in prison.<sup>19</sup>

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19. Rideout's latest project is the Talent 4... programme. It uses creativity to develop participants' skills, talents and motivation. Details can be found at <http://www.talent4.org/>

# Behind the Scenes of Her Majesty's Prison: Aylesbury

## Interview with Kevin Leggett

*Kevin Leggett is Governor of HMYOI Aylesbury and is interviewed by Dr Jamie Bennett who is Governor of HMP Grendon and Springhill.*

**Kevin Leggett has been Governor of HMYOI Aylesbury since 2010. He joined the Prison Service in 1988, working as an officer at Aylesbury for five years before becoming a manager through the Accelerated Promotion Scheme. He has subsequently worked in a number of prisons in senior positions, including being Deputy Governor of HMP Grendon and Springhill and Governor of HMP Huntercombe.**

In 2013, HMYOI Aylesbury was the subject of the latest instalment of the Wild Pictures *Her Majesty's Prisons* series, which have been screened on ITV to audiences of between five and six million, making them amongst the most watched prison documentaries of recent years. Previous entries in the series have included *Holloway* (2009), *Wormwood Scrubs* (2010) and *Strangeways* (2011).

HMYOI Aylesbury occupies a site that has been used as a prison since 1847.

It holds up to 444 young men aged 18-21, serving sentences between two years and life.

**JB: How were you first contacted about the Aylesbury documentary?**

**KL:** The Ministry of Justice Press Office contacted me in order to say that Wild Pictures who had filmed the *Her Majesty's Prison* series were interested in making a further instalment looking at young offenders. They said that everyone involved felt that HMYOI Aylesbury would be a good subject for the film. I was asked to meet with the production team and discuss how they would do this. I took the opportunity to speak to some colleagues who had been through the experience of filming in order to find out what that was like for them. My colleagues reassured me that the process would not be that painful and we would be able to control to a reasonable degree what was finally aired. I was also reassured about what would happen with the footage, how it would be stored and so on.

**JB: Had you seen the other films in the series? What had you thought of them?**

**KL:** I had seen them. *Holloway* was the one that had the biggest impression on me because of the subject matter including self-harm. I was offered the option to see them again before committing to the

project. They were entertaining for the public and seemed like high quality productions but I was wary about how they would decide what to show, what themes and agendas would be emphasised. I was trying to understand the mechanics of how they got to the final cut and how much I could influence that.

**JB: What were the discussions and agreements with the film producers and press office about access and content?**

**KL:** It was set up that there were three people involved and there would be two cameras would be in the prison. They were granted full access, so we would not limit what they would film but we would have a veto over what made the final cut. Press Office reassured us about the granting of 'access all areas'. We did see the final episodes and offered comments on the content, including what we were and were not happy with.

**JB: What discussions took place with staff and prisoners about content and access?**

**KL:** We let people know what would be happening, including telling staff at a full staff briefing. Notices were also posted around the prison. The production crew, having been involved in similar work, drew upon that experience and spent about a month walking around the prison talking to staff and prisoners, obtaining consent notices. They also were trying to get a feel for the place. They said that they didn't have any agenda, but did have some ideas about what they might find. A lot of their time was spent trying to identify the people they considered to be the 'characters' in the prison, both staff and prisoners. They decided to follow those people around rather than generally filming in an unstructured way. They spent that month reassuring people. By walking around with a camera, albeit turned off, was a way of trying to desensitize the place to those cameras. They had clear guidelines from Press Office about who they were content could be seen in the programme, for example restricting those that raised sensitive victim issues. We had to work through a list of prisoners they were interested in and then we had to say who we were and were not willing to be filmed.

**JB: Were staff and prisoners given the opportunity to consent to their involvement? Was**

**there any assessment of their fitness and suitability to participate?**

**KL:** They tried to talk to every member of staff and establish whether or not they gave consent and then there were prisoners that they thought may feature in the films in interviews or incidents and they sought consent from them. It was a show-stopper if they did not give consent. Of course, we are looking after people in our care. We have to apply maturity tests and on some occasions we sought advice from mental health in-reach in order to ensure that consent was given with full understanding of the potential ramifications, including what might be said to them or about them should they feature in the programme. We had to ensure that the interests of individuals were protected and consent appropriately given.

**JB: What consideration was there of the views of victims?**

**KL:** Everybody who had significant victim issues was excluded from being part of the programme. They were some of those blotted out if they came into shot. This included for example people who had committed murder or sexual offences. The producers did make a case that one of those featured in episode two they wanted to make an exception for. They therefore wanted to seek consent from the family of the victim. The production company made contact with the family of the victim, visited them and explained why they wanted this consent. The family said that they were content for the image and words to be shown as long as the victim was not named. That was signed off and agreed.

**JB: How did the filming proceed during the time they were there, was there any ongoing supervision of what they were filming?**

**KL:** No, we had a rough idea of what they were doing on a daily basis as we met with them at the start and end of each day. I had a media liaison officer who was the primary contact who would hold these meetings and feedback. However, we did not have anyone escorting them around; they were given key clearance and had a remit to go around. They carried radios so that they were aware if anything was happening. This was to ensure that they were safe, but also provided them with the opportunity to film incidents as long as it was safe. There were two cameras in the prison for three months, going around

the prison, which generated some 210 hours of footage.

**JB: Did you get to see the film during editing and did you or anyone else have any say in that process?**

**KL:** Yes. Myself and my media liaison officer were invited to the offices of Wild Pictures to see the first cut of episode one. There were also members of the Press Office there. We watched the film in its entirety but made notes about any concerns we had, or any areas where we felt a narrative was required to explain what had been depicted. The first version I felt was disappointing. I accused them of lazy editing as they filmed hours of footage but the episode appeared to be incident after incident after incident. That wasn't representative of Aylesbury, so we wanted them to

rebalance that by showing some of the better work that we do. They focussed on the hostage incident which they filmed and permission was given to show that but we then wanted to balance that. As a result they incorporated the scenes of a prisoner having a fathers' day visit, interacting with his family. We saw that episode three times. The second time it was more balanced and the third time included the narration. We also had to ensure that the depiction of the hostage incident was assessed so that we weren't disclosing tactics. A representative from the Ministers' Office also attended, watched the film and represented their views. In the end it was more

I accused them of lazy editing as they filmed hours of footage but the episode appeared to be incident after incident after incident. That wasn't representative of Aylesbury . . .

balanced but we had to accept that sensational element in order to prevent people channel hopping at the start, it's a bit like a *Die Hard* movie where you have all the action at the beginning to attract people in and then settle down. With episode two we only saw that twice as they had better understood our expectations from the first episode, so it was only fine tuning required.

**JB: What did you feel when you first saw the programmes? How do you feel it represented Aylesbury?**

**KL:** I felt the staff came across very well. They came across as knowledgeable about prisoners, quite caring, dynamic in their approach to dealing with problematic people, whilst also explaining that it is only about 20 per cent of the prisoners that cause 80 per cent of the problems, whilst the vast majority of prisoners get on with their sentence, try to develop

themselves and move on to the adult estate or the community.

**JB: The first programme revolved to a great extent around violent incidents including a hostage incident? Is that an accurate representation of the prison and prisoners?**

**KL:** We do have more than our fair share of problematic and damaged people. That seems to be our role within the YOI estate, although every other YOI governor probably says the same thing. In relation to the hostage incident, we don't have hostage incidents every day; they are few and far between. They had been in the prison for two months and nothing of significance had happened. I remember having a conversation with the producer about the problems that could cause them because they were concerned it would not be a gripping programme that the general public would want to watch. Then, fortunately for them, they filmed the initial arrival and induction of the prisoner who then led the hostage incident and they were there at the time when he and his accomplices pushed their way past an officer into a cell and started the hostage incident. It was almost manna from heaven for the crew. It isn't representative but happened to be a stand out incident that they were very keen to show as part of the programme.

**JB: What ethical concerns or questions did you have, if any, about the filming of an ongoing hostage incident?**

**KL:** The cameras were there for the initial start of the incident and were then withdrawn as we didn't want their presence to agitate those involved. Hostage incidents are very sensitive and the slightest thing such as a noise or a bang can set you back or cause a problem for the perpetrators or negotiators. Once we knew they were there, we withdrew them. The ethical issue then was that if it was shown, our duty of care to the perpetrators and hostage because much of what they felt about what had happened was in the programme. We had significant concerns about the hostage, so we did a lot of follow up with him, including through the psychology department. He had moved on since the incident so we had to make him aware of what the content of the programme would be, make sure he was okay with it, and ensure that the staff where he now is were aware that he was the hostage. I understand that he chose not to have the TV

in his cell that night as he did not want to watch it. We made follow up contact in the weeks after in order to ensure he was well. It was the same with the perpetrators, ensuring that the prisons holding them were aware and could manage the risks.

**JB: The films did not show very much rehabilitative work such as education and training. Is that an accurate representation of Aylesbury?**

**KL:** No. We have a lot of rehabilitative work going on, including one wing that focuses exclusively on rehabilitation, working with those who are about to be released or moved to the adult estate. We also have an active education department. Unfortunately, there wasn't much footage taken on the rehabilitation wing and unhelpfully our education provider at that time said that they did not want to be part of the filming. They refused to sign the consent form. In the last week of filming they said that they were reassured but by that stage it was too late. It was unfortunate that was not there. It didn't give a fair representation of the work we do here.

**JB: How did prisoners and staff respond to the film?**

**KL:** Wild Pictures brought the final version to the prison and showed it to staff that were significantly involved a couple of days before it aired. This meant that they didn't have to hide behind the couch, it gave them a heads up as to what would be in the show! The staff were reassured by that and pleased with their own involvement. Prisoners were aware of the broadcast date and many watched the programme. A few got a bit of stick about what they had said on camera. One of the guys saying he would stab someone up was one of my race equality representatives and was wearing his official t-shirt! He is someone who is not involved in any gangs or violence, so I don't really understand why he said that. There was also someone who said 'welcome to Hell' as he walked towards the camera, he ended up on 'own protection' in the segregation unit because of the jibes he was getting from other prisoners as a result of the grief they were getting from their families. Many families were saying, 'you need to get out of Aylesbury' and prisoners were explaining that it is not like it was shown and that it is in fact a good prison that they want to stay in. There were a lot of prisoners on the Tuesday morning asking to ring their parents to

Many families were saying, 'you need to get out of Aylesbury' and prisoners were explaining that it is not like it was shown and that it is in fact a good prison that they want to stay in.

reassure them. We even had some staff getting calls from their parents!

I felt that the second episode, focusing on self-harm, was more hard-hitting. Staff were very proud of this, in general. I had a lot of emails from people saying how brave they thought we were showing that kind of material, how it represented work they were doing and how they felt proud to be part of the Prison Service. We had lots of press interest and in general this reflected positively upon the staff working in prisons and recognised the hard job they do.

There was criticism of the sensationalism and violence. They had filmed some incidents but they could not show them as they were the subject of criminal proceedings. We gave them historical footage, which they then edited together into a montage, which made it look like we are having a fight every minute. I was disappointed by that as it wasn't explained or placed in context.

**JB: Did you have any contact with prisoners' families or victims after the films were broadcast?**

**KL:** No. We didn't have formal contact. I did have some contact from prisoners who had been at Aylesbury many years ago. There was one man who wrote in saying he had been a prisoner here thirty years ago and he wished that the caring staff depicted in the programme had been around when he served his sentence as he felt it would have been a more positive and rehabilitative experience. I thought that was kind. He also wanted to apologise to an officer he had assaulted in the early 1980s. I had another prisoner who had been a cleaner for me when I was an officer at Aylesbury in 1990, saying how pleased he was that I

was the Governor and how he enjoyed the conversations we shared all those years ago and how they had helped him to stay on the straight and narrow. That one card I was very proud to receive and made it all worthwhile.

**JB: How did the local community and media respond?**

**KL:** Similar to the main tabloid press. There was interest reflecting the press release and observations on the programme. I had a few letters from local people who weren't previously aware of the work we do and were complimentary about the staff. We also had a couple of people saying that they hadn't expected prison staff to be so caring and felt that the work we did with people who were self-harming, was something that they weren't aware that staff had to deal with or the emotional impact that such work has.

**JB: What would your advice be to a Governor approached to host a film crew in their prison for a documentary?**

**KL:** You have to get yourself personally involved right from the start. There has to be clarity about the objectives and assurances about how they will work. If it is Wild Pictures guided by Ministry of Justice Press Office, there shouldn't be too many problems as that partnership is well established. I didn't have to go through the pain that other colleagues have had to in getting film crews to understand the environment. I would also say that you can put a lot of trust in the Press Office being able to guide, cajole and if necessary be robust in managing the production team and shaping the content that is finally aired. You do have the ability to police the final cut.

# Reviews

Book Review

## ***Punishment***

Thom Brooks

Publisher: Routledge Taylor and Francis Group (2012)

ISBN: 978-0-415-43181-1

(hardback) 978-0-415-43182-8  
(paperback)

Price: £95.00 (hardback) £25.99  
(paperback)

Thom Brooks is a Reader in Law at Durham University. In this book he sets out to address the central question 'How should we punish crimes?' through the exploration of theory. To do this, he provides a critical guide of the leading theories of punishment to engage readers with the strengths and weaknesses of each theory of punishment.

Brooks discusses the general theories of punishment (retributivism, deterrence, rehabilitation and restorative justice), acknowledging the aim of each approach to the justification punishment. He then approaches hybrid theories that seek to bring together elements of the traditional theories of punishment, which aspire to justify punishment on the basis of more than one aim. This is an important discussion, which draws attention to the need to be able to acknowledge that in practice, more than one justification could and should be sought to explain punishment. The hybrid theories discussed include the mixed theory, expressionism and the unified theory and Brooks successfully provides a critical analysis of each.

In the final part of this book, Brooks sets out useful case studies which set the different approaches to punishment in the context of different offences including capital

punishment, juvenile offending, the punishment of domestic violence, rape and child sex offences. The use of such case studies make clear to the reader the necessity for the adoption of both traditional and hybrid theories to explain and justify different types of punishment and gives the reader a more detailed understanding of how these theories work in practice.

Urging philosophers to accept the unified theory of punishment, Brooks argues that it is the most compelling theory of punishment and suggests that it can provide an important revision of restorative justice. He argues that this revision can address the non-punitive nature of restorative justice by implementing a 'punitive restoration' approach, thus restoring public confidence in what has so far proven to be a cost-effective alternative to competing approaches to punishment.

This book has the ability to speak to a wide audience about the theoretical and practical issues surrounding the discussion of punishment. It's illustration of the application of general and hybrid theories to case studies of different types of crime allows the reader to understand how such theories can be applied and discussed in practice in contemporary western society. It should be seen as being particularly useful to students, politicians, legal practitioners and policy makers as well as those who are new to the topic, or indeed already engaged in this field.

***Helen Nichols*** is a PhD Student at the University of Hull.

Book Review

## ***The American Prison: Imagining a Different Future***

Edited by Francis T. Cullen, Cheryl

Lero Jonson and Mary K. Stohr

Publisher: Sage (2014)

ISBN: 978-1-4522-4136-4  
(paperback)

Price: £22.99 (paperback)

In their impressive work on 'public criminology', Ian Loader and Richard Sparks<sup>1</sup> argue that criminologists use there are a range of strategies deployed by criminologists in order to engage with public opinion, public policy or the intellectual imagination of readers. They maintain that this helps to shape not only the immediate landscape of crime and penal policy, but also plays a role in creating a better politics through what they called 'democratic under labouring'. This edited collection by three distinguished American academics expressly and directly articulates positive alternative approaches for the future of American prisons. In doing so, they are explicitly attempting to inspire the reader and create a better politics.

As the introduction to the book highlights, we are currently at a moment where there is an opportunity to reconsider the penal populism of recent decades which has seen dramatic increases in the prison population, increasingly harsh sentencing and calls for more restrictive conditions. That moment has arisen, the authors argue, due to the confluence of three factors. The first is increasing evidence of the harmfulness of imprisonment which has undermined confidence in this as a solution. Second, there has been a consistent and sustained reduction in crime, including violent crime,

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1. Loader, I. and Sparks, R. (2010) *Public Criminology?* Abingdon: Routledge.

which has reduced the immediacy of law and order as a political issue. Third, the financial crisis and subsequent recession has led to the need to curtail public expenditure and has therefore reduced the feasibility of mass incarceration as a policy option.

The book has seven parts which draw out different approaches to custody including restorative, therapeutic, green, and faith-based prisons. The book also addresses how the needs of women and minority ethnic communities can be better met, and how the harms of imprisonment including health and personal safety can be minimised. There are chapters exploring approaches to achieve change including accountability, effective management, smaller prisons and an ethical approach to competition.

The chapters are by turns inspiring and frustrating. There are a number that present their cases effectively, drawing upon real examples of prison practice that make their propositions appear grounded and achievable. That is particularly the case with the chapters on the green prison and the faith-based prison. However, others remain too detached from lived examples to be convincing. In this regard, the chapters on the therapeutic prison and the restorative prison are disappointing as there are outstanding examples to draw upon, including in the UK where prisons such as Grendon<sup>2</sup> and Whatton<sup>3</sup> have attracted particular attention and restorative justice has been given close consideration.

It is also worth considering the strategy of this book. It clearly makes the case that prisons are harmful and that this harmfulness can and should be minimised. This liberal-humane strategy is one that seeks to ameliorate the effects of imprisonment and promote parsimony in its use without calling

into question the fundamental power structures that underpin the use and practice of imprisonment. This is particularly clear in the chapters on the needs of women and minority ethnic communities. In both of these cases, there is a growing and convincing body of critical criminology that draws attention to the role of criminal justice in creating and maintaining power and inequality. Such work highlights a need for wider and more radical social change.

It is to be applauded that the editors of this book have attempted to explicitly and directly to articulate a liberal-humane agenda for penal reform at an important moment. However, the ambitions of the editors are to a degree limited. Their aim is to ameliorate rather than overthrow and to reform rather than revolt. The fact that they have adopted a relatively cautious approach may mean that it is realistic and achievable, but also means that it is limited in its scope and imagination.

**Dr Jamie Bennett** is Governor of HMP Grendon & Springhill.

#### Book Review

#### ***If You Sit Very Still***

Marian Partington  
Publisher: Vala Publishing  
Cooperative (2012)  
ISBN: 978-1-908363-02-2  
(hardback)  
Price: £15.99 (hardback)

'To say, 'My sister was murdered, she was one of the Wests' victims' makes my throat ache'. 'Most of Lucy's bones, her poetry and something of her spirit survived.' Two sentences from Marian Partington's prologue. If you read this book, you will not forget it.

It encompasses, with a remarkable combination of directness and delicacy, a range of reality beyond both ends of the normal spectrum to which we limit ourselves in order to cope — for as T S Eliot said, humankind cannot bear too much reality.

At one end of that spectrum of honesty are the physical realities of loss. The ache precisely located in the throat, the bones counted out, the younger sister's skull held tenderly when it was found, the skeleton incomplete, 20 years after the murder. At the other end, running through the whole book is a minute and intensely lyrical delineation of the tides and waves of emotion, washing constantly against rocks of bitterness and self-pity but always letting go of them. Bereavement, so often chunked out into crude stages by cheap psychology, emerges as a key part of a lifelong journey of maturation, sympathy and self-discovery.

Marian's tale has been long distilled — 20 years of waiting, not knowing, and a further 18 years since the wound of knowing everything followed. To read her story is to guess that finding the right words, at every turn, has been at the heart of her healing. For the criminal justice student, theorist or practitioner, her painfully but beautifully articulate tone may seem remote from the mundane struggle which victims — including the many offenders who are victims — wage against despair and vengeful bitterness, and in search of justice, closure, some kind of non-destructive perspective on what they and their loved ones have suffered. And yet she glosses over nothing — certainly not the 'murderous rage' which possesses her at some points along the road.

Memories, dreams and reflections (the title of a book by Jung, which is no coincidence) come

2. See for example Shuker, R. and Sullivan, E. (eds) (2010) *Grendon and the Emergence of Forensic Therapeutic Communities: Developments in Research and Practice* Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell.  
3. See *Prison Service Journal* no. 208 (2013) *Special Edition Whatton — Prison of change?*

together in Marian's journey for the weaving of a net in which she can, finally, hold and contain the mystery of the obscene evil which took root in the Wests. Her writing is most powerful and evocative when a minutely described physical object — the little bag that Lucy made for her out of scrap sheep's wool, for example, or something in nature — becomes the occasion of a profound reflection on meaning and emotion. The book is very much her life story: the potent shadow of the murder so overwhelmed her that other life struggles became subsumed — and were extraordinarily resolved — through the quest to find her way out of its darkness. The story ends very positively, and that not through finding a way to move on, but through all the positives which eventually came directly, as she tells it, from the tragedy itself. The teaching and the company of

Quakers and of Buddhists turned out to be central to this journey.

Four parts make up the book, their titles drawn from analysis of a fourteenth-century 'dream vision' text. Crisis — the disappearance, the long uncertainty, the discovery, the 'unearthing and re-earthing', tones and textures of experience told with piercing directness. Confessing — two chapters 'Enfolding the dark' and 'Finding a voice', tracing with harrowing honesty how by facing and facing again the anguish and rage, the dumb hopeless paralysis of grief was lanced and Marian first wrote her tale in 1996. Comprehending — again the chapter titles 'peeling away the layers', 'fresh earth', 'suffering and healing' give some notion of how meditation in traditions close to the good earth was a major resource. Finally Transforming — as Marian began to be able to make the fruits

of her healing and learning available to others, not least others who were victims and others who were in prison.

There is no psychobabble, and no rehashing of weary themes about the possibility of forgiveness. An understanding of that possibility emerges at the end of the book, but only as the final fruit of this long quest. The writing, never less than luminous, has a liminal feel, inhabiting a shoreline between the granular particularity of prose and the lyrical fluidity of poetry. It is not a perfect book — it is in a way too personal for that — but its startling and deeply considered honesty more than compensates for any imperfection.

**Martin Kettle** is Home Affairs Policy Adviser for the Church of England.



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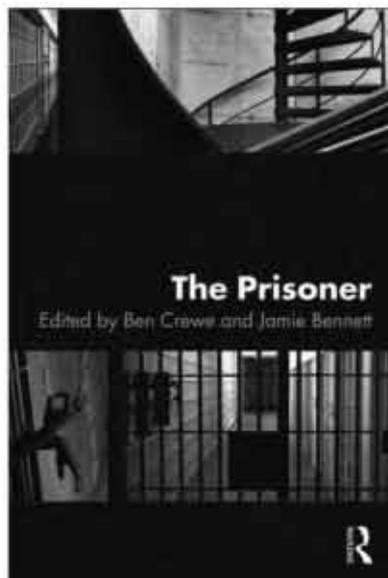
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