

PRISON SERVICE JOURNAL

January 2014 No 211



Perrie Lectures 2013
**Contraction in an age
of expansion**

Editorial Comment

Prison Service Journal has a long-standing partnership with the Perrie Lectures. Each year, articles are published based upon the annual lectures. This is a partnership of which the *Prison Service Journal* is proud.

The Perrie Lectures is an annual event which has the purpose of stimulating dialogue between criminal justice organisations, the voluntary sector and all those with an academic, legal or practical interest in offenders and their families. It is hoped that the event will contribute towards improving the care of offenders, and advancing penal policy, in its broadest sense. The Lectures are named in honour of Bill Perrie, who retired from the Prison Service in 1978. He worked as a prison governor for 32 years, latterly at HMPs Hull, Long Lartin, and Birmingham. He was noted for his contribution to the development of hostels, working out schemes, and regimes for long term prisoners.

The 2013 Lectures took the title of 'Contraction in an age of expansion'. As the speakers illustrate, this question may be approached from a number of different perspectives. In particular, it may be asked what is expanding and what is contracting? It may be argued that the prison population is expanding and remains at a historically high level, albeit that it has ameliorated to a limited degree in recent months. It may be argued that it is the size of prisons that are expanding, with larger prisons such as HMP Oakwood, replacing smaller sometimes historically significant prisons. It may be competition which is expanding, with greater opportunities for commercial organisations to play a role in the delivery of prison services. Another perspective is the expansion of the carceral state, with the growth in immigration detention, the use of new technologies such as electronic monitoring, the increase in everyday security such as CCTV, gated communities and private security personnel. In contrast contraction may refer to the reduced resources available to public services following the financial crisis of 2008, the subsequent recession and the emergence of the 'age of austerity'. This may also refer to a more qualitative and moral judgment about prisons — whether there has been a contraction in the quality of care and the humanity of prison life.

The various speakers approach the issues from their own unique and distinct perspectives. Nick Hardwick, Chief Inspector of Prisons in England and Wales, directly considers the quality of the services provided to prisoners. He draws lessons from the report into the failures at Mid-Staffordshire NHS Foundation Trust where 'patients were routinely neglected by a Trust that was preoccupied with cost cutting, targets and processes and which lost sight of its fundamental responsibility to provide safe care'. Through careful analysis of the findings of the report,

Hardwick, argues that lessons can be drawn that can be applied to prisons in order to ensure that outcomes from prisoners are protected in an environment characterised by fluidity, risk and uncertainty. Ian Mulholland, Deputy Director of Public Sector Prisons, considers the Benchmarking programme, aimed at providing a structured approach to distributing reduced resources amongst prisons. He argues that this programme is being taken forward in order to respond to the challenging economic environment in a way that is systematic, sensitive to local pressures and attuned to the operational risks.

The third lecture comes from Andy Aresti, an academic who formerly served a prison sentence and is a founding member of the British Convict Criminology movement. He adopts a critical perspective, arguing that changes to prisons over recent decades have been driven by commercial imperatives and economic rationality. The consequences of this, he suggests, is the loss of a human quality in the prison and post-prison world that makes it difficult for those who have experienced prison to negotiate and sustain new identities that help them desist from crime.

The final two lectures explore the issues of prison architecture, design and size. Jason Warr, of User Voice and himself a former prisoner, offers a polemic critique of larger prisons. In particular he argues that larger prisons are characterised by more distant social relations that bring out the worst in prisons, prisoners and prison staff. Yvonne Jewkes, Professor of Criminology at the University of Leicester, discusses prison architecture drawing upon recent prison construction in England and Wales, and Norway. Through these examples, she illuminates how prison architecture reflects and realises in practice the wider social culture and values regarding imprisonment and the imprisoned.

The edition also features an interview with The Venerable William Noble, the recipient of the Perrie Award. This award has been presented annually since 1995 to the person the Perrie Lectures Committee consider to have done most to promote an understanding of the work of the Prison Service and pushed forward the development of penal policy. William Noble was recognized for his work leading the Prison Service Chaplaincy at a time of significant change when religion has been a prominent and sometimes controversial issue in prisons.

The *Prison Service Journal* is proud to publish these articles and to continue the partnership with the Perrie Lectures. The 2013 Lectures provide a vibrant, diverse and illuminating perspective on the critical issues facing those who live and work in prisons today.