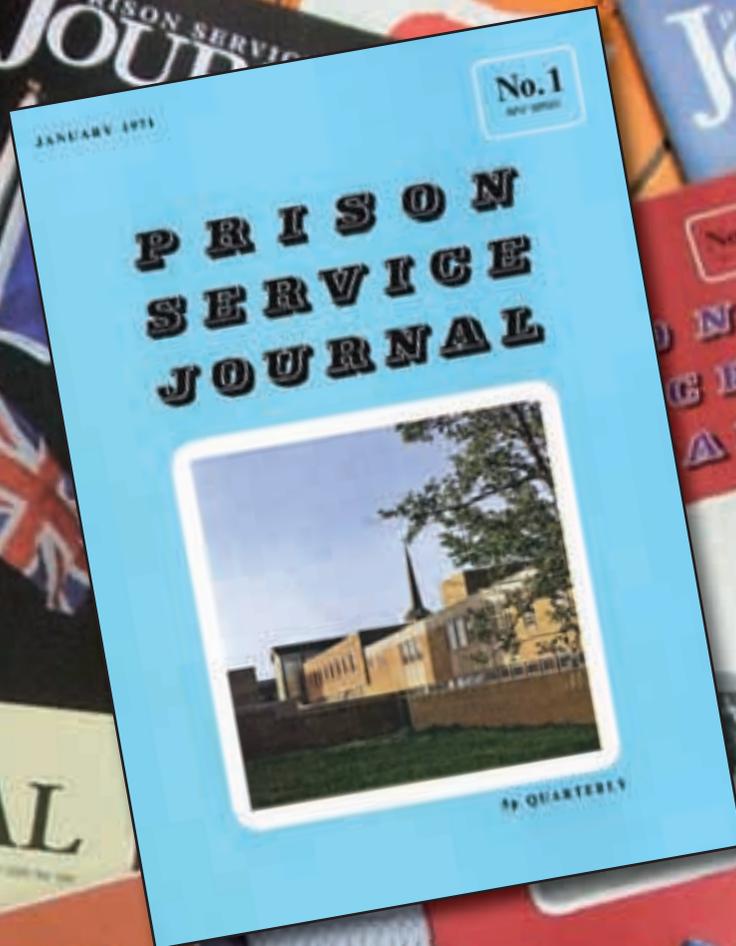


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Reflections on 'Making of Assistant Governors'

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The role and training of the assistant governor has changed beyond recognition in the 40 years since Frank Ainsworth outlined his reforms on the subject.² Ainsworth would neither recognise the current incarnation of the assistant governor, nor approve of their role or the training that they receive.

Assistant governors had their origins in the borstal system, where their role was to run a house, very much modelled on the public school housemaster. The Borstal Rules defined the task as:

A housemaster shall, with the assistance of a matron and such other staff as may be appointed, be responsible to the governor for the administration of each house, and for the personal training of the inmates in it.³

With the implementation of the 1967 Parole Act, from the early 1970s, assistant governors also increasingly came to be found working in adult prisons. There was no comparable definition of the task of the assistant governor in the Prison Rules, and the work was much more linked to the type of prison in which the assistant governor worked. At a local prison, the assistant governor tended to have more general administrative functions and a junior managerial job. Training prisons gave the assistant governor some general responsibilities but also a more specific focus on the treatment of inmates, casework, assessment and parole report writing.

In 1967, advertisements for the job of assistant governor suggested that the '*duties demand a lively interest in social problems, and a good understanding of*

modern methods of handling them'. Ainsworth described the work as providing 'oversight of a group of men or boys' and having three areas of responsibility: to the individual, to the group and to the community. At an individual level, this involved getting to know the prisoner, assessing the causes of their delinquency and their training needs, and providing personal advice and counsel. Fundamental to this philosophical approach was, in Ainsworth's view, that the assistant governor should focus less on 'our clients' delinquency' and more on 'developing our clients' good parts'. Reinforcing these 'good feelings about themselves' was viewed as the best way of rehabilitating prisoners, a fundamental aspect of the assistant governor's job. The Prison Service College made clear to new assistant governors, at that time, that there was 'both a statutory and traditional expectation that the assistant governor will have a primary concern for the treatment of inmates'.⁴ Assistant governors also had their own flock to care for: the residents of the wing or house on which they were located. Group dynamics and interpersonal relationships were their key concerns. They were expected to shape the ethos of their unit and act as a role model to their group of prisoners and staff. They had some responsibilities for the supervision and training of staff but this was primarily undertaken by the principal and chief officers, with assistant governors in a supporting role.

Ainsworth makes a strong argument that, in order to fulfil their role in relation to the individual, group and community, the training of assistant governors should replicate the training available in other professions which provided 'care, comfort and control' in a secure setting. He placed particular emphasis on adopting the training provision for probation and residential care

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1. My thanks to a number of former governors who kindly gathered in October 2011 to discuss Ainsworth's article. Colin Allen, Andy Barclay, and Arthur de Frisingh provided valuable insights into the governance of prisons over the last four decades, and the training they underwent as assistant governors in the 1960s and 1970s. Professor Alison Lieblich, as ever, brought academic rigour to our conversation and challenged our 'romantic' reflections on the past and our idealistic 'liberal humanitarian' perspectives and whose previous work inspired much of what is written here. They also kindly provided comments on an earlier draft of this article. The author is writing in a personal capacity and his views do not necessarily represent those of the Home Office.
 2. There have been very few articles or books written about the assistant governor and their training. Notable exceptions include: Conrad, P. (1959-60) The Assistant Governor in the English Prison, 10 *British Journal of Delinquency*. 245; and Waddington, P. (1983) *The Training of Prison Governors — Role Ambiguity and Socialisation*.
 3. Borstal Rules (1964), Rule 4(2).
 4. Training Manual- 26th Assistant Governor Course (1969).

staff, and proposed a two year training programme based on a 'sandwich' model, with training periods alternating between theory at the training college and practical application within the prison. Newly appointed assistant governors should, according to Ainsworth, be trained as 'caseworkers firstly and managers secondly'.

A number of prison officers, and occasionally other members of the Prison Service, became assistant governors but, in the main, successful candidates at the time came from outside the Service. Some joined the Service direct from universities, others after experience in a wide variety of occupations. Successful candidates under the age of 24 years old were required to serve as a prison officer for up to one year⁵. By the 1970s, the two year training provision for these new assistant governors was very similar to the model outlined in Ainsworth's article. The initial training course involved a theoretical course on: human growth and development; role theory and group dynamics; the sociology of institutions; social psychology; and criminology. Trainee assistant governors spent one day each week on attachment to a local probation office, learning offender casework practice. It was not until the end of the training period that 'modern' disciplines like management studies were taught. Periods spent in institutions were in a supernumerary capacity, which allowed the trainee assistant governor ample time to undertake limited routine duties alongside practising their casework skills on a group of prisoners. During their two year probationary period they were closely monitored and supported by an experienced 'supervisor'.

The role of the assistant governor began to change in the 1970s, not long after Ainsworth left the Prison Service to teach residential care at Dundee University. In 1972, advertisements began to give greater emphasis to the managerial aspects of the role and described it as 'Management with a social purpose... you are primarily a manager'⁶. There continued to be a genuine

commitment to casework and rehabilitation in Borstals and some training prisons. However, the context in which assistant governors worked elsewhere often involved poor prison conditions and regimes, unenthusiastic staff and an obviously disgruntled prisoner population⁷. The work of assistant governors in local prisons was overshadowed by the deterioration in regime conditions, including time out of cell, time spent in work, and access to facilities.⁸ So while they may have joined the Prison Service with a desire to 'change people' and make a difference, some assistant governors ended up being posted to decrepit local prisons.

'Fresh Start'⁹ saw the assistant governor role, in 1987, merged with that of the chief officer and the grade rebranded as 'governor 5' (more recently renamed as prison service manager or operational manager).¹⁰ Along with the name change, came a fundamental shift in their role, responsibilities and training. Assistant governors were, in the main, taken off the wing and located centrally. The transformation of the role of the assistant governor continued in the 1980s and early 1990s, as a consequence of the wider process of public sector transformation under successive Conservative governments¹¹. For the Prison Service, this manifested itself in exerting

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control of organisational costs and resources; exercising greater management over prison staff and their union; regulating staff practices; and driving up standards and conditions for prisoners. As a consequence, assistant governors took on greater managerial responsibilities, replicating the changes to the role of the governing governor during the same period.¹²

Assistant governors moved away from prisoners physically, operationally and emotionally. The assistant governor described by Ainsworth had their office on the wing or house, which enabled them to get close to both staff and prisoners. They were regarded as part of

5. Home Office (1972) *Report of the Working Party on the Recruitment of Prison Governors*, para.120.

6. Waddington, P. (1983) *The Training of Prison Governors — Role Ambiguity and Socialisation*, p16.

7. Liebling, A. (2010) 'Governmentality' and Governing Corrections: Do Senior Managers Resist?' in L. Cheliotis (ed.) *Roots, Rites and Sites of Resistance: The Banality of Good*. Pp. 220-245.

8. Fitzgerald, M. and Sim, J. (1979) *British Prisons*; King, R. and McDermott, K. (1989), *British Prisons 1970-1987*, *British Journal of Criminology* 29(2): 1-7-128.

9. 'Fresh Start' was the name given to a major change programme in 1987 that fundamentally changed the attendance system, working hours, pay rates, and management structures in the Prison Service.

10. For the purposes of this paper, the term assistant governor is used throughout.

11. Pollitt, C. (1991) *Managerialism and the Public Services: The Anglo-American Experience*.

12. See: Bryans, S. (2007) *Prison Governors: Managing Prisons in a Time of Change*; Barclay, A. (1988) 'Initial thinking on the role of the Governor under Fresh Start', *Prison Service Journal*, July: 5-6.

the small community and were able to shape its ethos and influence events on a daily basis. Their physical presence on the wing was both symbolic and acted as a control mechanism against staff excess. The paradigm shift in criminal justice in the 1990s, referred to as the 'new penology'¹³, with its emphasis on moving away from the individual, and their transformation, to greater emphasis on managing groups and aggregate risk management, led to further changes to the work of assistant governors. The number of assistant governors responsible for direct prisoner casework and staff management reduced. The wing based assistant governor was replaced with a single Head of Residence, who was expected to manage all accommodation areas. Other assistant governors moved to specialist functions such as security, audit, regimes, or planning. Day-to-day management of each wing fell initially to a principal officer and, following the implementation of further cost saving and flatter structures, to a senior officer.

The recruitment advertisements for today's middle manager (NOMS graduate programme) focuses on management and measurement; '*Could you work effectively with people from all walks of life, stay calm under pressure, meet targets, manage budgets, and make sure hundreds of people get their meals on time, can access education, and are kept safe?*' and describes one of the personality traits needed as '*someone who loves being set and beating targets*' and '*organising and maximising performance*'¹⁴. There is only a passing reference to respecting and caring for others. New recruits, on the two-to three-year graduate programme, attend a six week training course which aims to develop the skills that they will need for their first role on the programme: Prison Officer. Over the next 12 to 18 months, they gain further experience and responsibility as they progress from Prison Officer to Senior Officer. In the final year of the programme, they move into a middle management role as an Operational Manager.

The focus of the programme is on developing managerial skills and technical competence. Social work, organisational dynamics and casework have long ago been removed from the training curriculum. Lacking in the current training of middle managers is also any recognition of the broader international human rights

framework in which they should operate. The core curriculum for the training of middle managers in many prison systems throughout the world involves in-depth discussion of the UN Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners, European Prison Rules, various treaty obligations (such as the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, and the Convention against Torture and Other Inhuman and Degrading Treatment or Punishment), and the moral foundations of a prison system. Such a framework provides practitioners with a moral compass for navigating the complex waters of prison management. It reminds managers of the need to have normalisation, humanity and decency as the bedrock of any prison system.

There is no contemporary role similar to that of the assistant governor described by Ainsworth. There has been a slow but relentless transition in prison middle management from a focus on casework, to an emphasis on management and, more recently, to a concentration on measurement. Less emphasis is given by today's practitioners to 'harmony values' (human dignity, respect, relationships, cooperation, equality, opportunity and progress) than to 'security values' (order, stability, security procedures, and the rule of rules')¹⁵. Many assistant governors in Ainsworth's time joined the prison service from a background in social work, or with degrees in social science, and had explicitly reformist career motivations. In contrast, many of today's managerialist middle managers were attracted and recruited to the service primarily because it offered interesting opportunities to manage in a complex environment.

The liberal-humanitarian values that the direct entrant assistant governor of the past, on the whole, exemplified are less visible in today's middle managers. While no doubt today's middle managers are more liberal than many of their predecessors in terms of their espoused views about equal opportunities, sexuality and race relations, if only because the organisation expects them to be so, they are less articulate when it comes to concepts of care, welfare, compassion and social justice. It has been suggested that these managerialists are by no means indifferent to the plight of the prisoners but are more concerned with the general art of management than with the lot of the individual.¹⁶

It reminds managers of the need to have normalisation, humanity and decency as the bedrock of any prison system.

13. Feeley, M. and Simon, J. (1994) 'Actuarial Justice: The Emerging New Criminal Law', in D. Nelken (ed.), *The Futures of Criminology*.

14. <http://www.justice.gov.uk/jobs/prisons/on-offer/graduate-programme/index.htm>

15. Crewe, B. and Liebling, A. (2011) 'Are liberal humanitarian penal values and practices exceptional?' in J. Dullam and T. Ugelvik (eds) *Penal Exceptionalism? Nordic Prison Policy and Practice*.

16. Ibid.

Some would argue that such a shift has been of benefit to both staff and prisoners. There is no doubt that the quality of life in prison has improved since the late 1960s and that dishonest staff practices and physical abuse of prisoners has been largely eradicated. Prisons are today better managed, and conditions for prisoners are more humane.

However, it should not be forgotten that extraordinary financial resources were ploughed in to make this a reality. There was significant frustration from governors over many years that successive Governments refused to countenance the financial implications of putting an end to 'slopping out' or to provide the physical improvements to security that would make escape extremely unlikely. The riots and high profile escapes of the Nineties were a watershed — although not, perhaps, in the way that Lord Woolfe foresaw or indeed hoped. The growth of managerialism within the Prison Service did not bring about the dramatic changes that we now see but it certainly has been instrumental in maintaining and developing them. For example, it was impossible before the Strangeways market testing to create a competitive managerial environment within the Prison Service, because prisons were often insanitary and inadequate in the challenge of preventing determined escapes. For their part, middle managers often did not have the tools to make

prisons either efficient or morally acceptable; therefore they were expected to do their best with resources and conditions that politicians and senior officials recognised were severely lacking. Once resources were made available, escapes and episodes of serious disorder had largely been designed out of prisons, and the decency standards established, politicians expected prison managers to deliver on these, and rightly so. There were no more excuses.

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framework for the daily operation of the prison. In many cases, brutality and indecency were either deterred by the assistant governor's presence (both physical and ethereal) or quickly detected. Where assistant governors were not present (local prisons) prison officers were under-policed by their managers, allowing them to assault and abuse prisoners¹⁷. On the whole, assistant governors had an optimistic view of prisoners, saw them as redeemable, demonstrated sympathy, compassion, kindness and humanity, and flexed the rules to do the right thing. Today's middle managers can be criticised for sometimes being too

compliant and unquestioning and for not being especially exercised by moral and humanitarian questions.

The romantic liberal idealist assistant governors of Ainsworth's era were intellectually thoughtful, value driven and well-intentioned. They demonstrated and infused moral qualities and acted as the moral compass for their wing or house. While the Governor set the tone, ethos and direction of the prison, it was the assistant governors who ensured that it became a reality, as they had the relationships and day-to-day contact with staff and prisoners. They defined what interpersonal aspects of decency meant in practice. Their liberal paternalism, use of benign authority¹⁸, changing people by 'good example' or through social work techniques, and focus on individual casework and

'treatment', undoubtedly had a great impact on the lives of individual prisoners and member of staff.

Today's middle managers are recruited primarily for their skills and capabilities rather than their values, and have a clear focus on managerial issues such as neutralising risk, minimising prison incidents, and efficiency systems management, rather than wider social goals. They are able to have an impact on larger numbers of prisoners by managing in better conditions and managing out disorder. However, it has been suggested that they have little conception of prisoners as human beings, with complex needs and frustrations¹⁹.

17. Ibid.

18. De Frisching, A. (1975) 'The Prison Service — 10 years on', *Prison Service Journal*, 18, pp. 2-7.

19. Liebling, A and Crewe, B (2012, forthcoming) 'Prisons beyond the new penology: the shifting moral foundations of prison management', in J. Simon and R. Sparks (eds) *The Sage Handbook of Punishment and Society*, p20.

Prison is a *sui generis* institution, uniquely liable to abuses and distortions of power²⁰. It can lead those who wield it to do terrible things to those who do not, almost regardless of personality attributes or decent moral convictions.²¹ The trend to larger prisons, the removal of middle managers from wings, and the changed role of assistant governors, has created distance between middle managers, and their staff and prisoners. Contemporary middle managers know less than their predecessors about prisoners, what makes them tick, how to change them, and what is important to them. By focusing instead on aggregate risk management, tight regulation and 'sigma-type' values (efficiency) rather than 'theta-type' values (of fairness and due process),²² there is a danger that prisons will, as a result, become places of greater moral and emotional austerity and, as a consequence, less effective at caring for, and changing, prisoners. Middle managers should be wary of a preoccupation with management and efficiency that brings in its wake, moral indifference.²³

So far, managerialism, and particularly competition, has been the key to establishing efficiency, not least because it has entirely neutered the Prison Officers Association as a barrier to change. The jury is out as to whether competition can also be the author of a treatment culture that provides the degree of respect, attention and assistance that fellow human beings, who are often difficult, dangerous, with special needs, lacking in confidence and support, who can be vulnerable, volatile, dysfunctional and disordered, need in order to counter the intrinsic ill effects of imprisonment.

Middle managers today therefore need to be strong, both managerially and morally. They need to

have a sufficiently close relationship to staff and prisoners to act as role models, making clear what is, and is not, morally (as well as legally) acceptable behaviour and, where necessary, see 'resistance and limit-setting' as part of their professional role²⁴. In the words of the 1969 training manual for assistant governors:

In fact, the main elements of the dual nature of penal establishments, that is custody and treatment, are always reflected in the work of the assistant governor. He [sic] can never be simply a social caseworker or a groupworker, but must think in terms of treatment management, staff supervision and the effects of institutional factors. Nor can he devote all his attention to simple custodial requirements, but must again consider staff management and the needs of rehabilitation. In an obviously reduced way, the assistant governor's role is relatively as complex as that of the governor.²⁵

It is not unreasonable to expect today's assistant governors (middle managers) to adopt what Liebling refers to as 'moral dualism'²⁶, an equal commitment to 'soft values' like care and harmony, and to 'hard values' like safety, order, good power and efficiency. If performed well, the middle management role can make a key contribution to ensuring that our prisons are not only cost effective and secure, but also just, decent, caring and successful at rehabilitating our prisoners.

20. Sykes, G. (1958) *The Society of Captives*.

21. Liebling and Crewe (2012).

22. Liebling, A. (2010) "'Governmentality' and Governing Corrections: Do Senior Managers Resist?' in L. Cheliotis (ed.) *Roots, Rites and Sites of Resistance: The Banality of Good*. Pp. 220-245.

23. Liebling, A. (2012, forthcoming) 'Imprisonment and its values: The cost of cuts to prison legitimacy', *Prison Service Journal Special Issue: the Perrie lectures*.

24. *Ibid.*

25. Training manual — 26th Assistant Governor Course (1969).

26. *Ibid.* Liebling, A. (2012)