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**The Prison and the Public**

# Work in the Prison Exhibition

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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.

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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

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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

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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].