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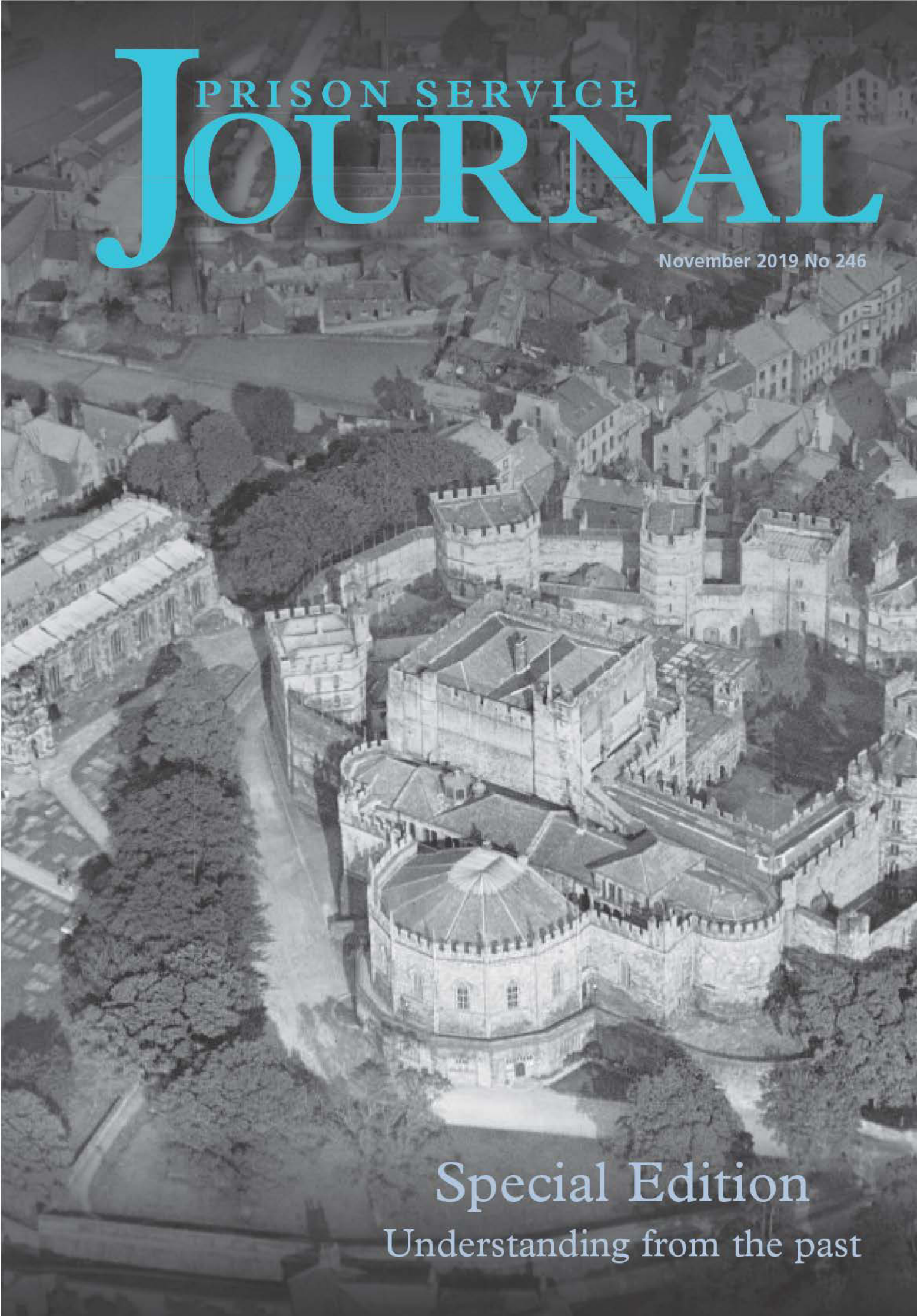

Special Edition
Understanding from the past

Editorial Comment

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Beginnings are tricky. The search for origins can seem like such an existential task that it is best evaded or perhaps given a cursory metaphorical nod. Historians assert that we evade thinking about past evolutions, developments and roots at our peril. So, what are the risks in ignoring the past? We might lapse into thinking about our past like another country where others thought and felt and experienced very differently to us. We might walk blindly into supposedly 'new' ideas and policies without caution, reserve or safety nets. Forearmed historically, we are better placed to acknowledge when a genuinely different perspective or advance is being offered. We can be better placed to comprehend the development of existing social structures, processes, systems and institutions, as well as their achievements and deficiencies. Historians endeavour, but can struggle, to obtain clear perspectives on the past among complex and contradictory voices and the eccentric survival of records. The attainment of understanding is a common and collaborative endeavour between those who seek to know the past and those who seek to know the present. It is a task never completed and never perfected. This edition of the *Prison Service Journal* offers a contribution to historical perspectives on the prison and criminal justice issues locally, nationally and indeed internationally. The range of articles included here which covers over three centuries, even by itself, highlights abiding, longstanding and determining influences: ideological forces and what 'reform' can mean in practice; financing systems that primarily punish and incarcerate the most socially deprived; the pains of confinement; and distortions within representations of an institution that a minority of the population experience first-hand.

In the lead article, **Allan Brodie** presents his analysis of English prison planning in the 1700s, examining the significant social and penal changes that took place between the late 18th and mid-19th centuries. Focusing specifically on the years between 1780 and 1850, he argues that growing urban populations and new forms of government during this time, led to the transformation of England's prisons from small scale, locally (and inconsistently) managed institutions to larger, centrally administered organisations. Moreover, significant changes took place in terms of prison architecture and geographical location, with new prisons being built on the outskirts, rather than in the centres, of towns and cities, where they had traditionally been situated. However, in some instances old historic castle sites, within the centre of towns, remained in use. Brodie explores the practical, fiscal and symbolic factors that shaped judgements about the location of prisons and the decisions to abandon or retain and redevelop castle prisons.

Maintaining the focus on historic castle prison sites, in the following chapter **Rhiannon Pickin** examines the everyday experiences of prisoners in the 19th century York Castle gaol, discussing suicides in the prison during the period 1824 to 1836. As Pickin rightly notes, there is a lack of research on historical prison suicides, mainly due to scarcity of original source material. By drawing on both contemporary newspaper articles and the York Gaoler's journals — written by two gaolers, James Shepherd and John Noble — Pickin explores the emotional experiences of those incarcerated in York gaol, they ways in which suicides were reported by gaolers and the media, and how the bodies of prisoners were treated in the aftermath of self-inflicted deaths. Despite the denial of Christian burial rites afforded to those who committed suicide, she concludes that there was often genuine sympathy from both prison gaolers and the broader public for those who took their own lives in prison.

Keeping with the theme of vulnerable prisoners, **Craig Stafford** discusses the cases of female drunkenness in Strangeways Prison, Manchester, between 1869 and 1875. During the 19th century there was considerable disquiet around the problem of drunkenness in the growing towns and cities, and female drunkenness specifically was the cause of heightened concern. Drawing on Strangeways Prison Registers for females and using the borough of Salford as a case study, Stafford analyses how these concerns were manifest at a local level. He looks at the impact of committals for drunkenness for the prison system and, moreover, at the social and economic factors that impacted on those women who were imprisoned for drunkenness related offences. Despite the fact that

women's insobriety was constructed as a moral issue, in reality their incarceration was driven by the combined factors of poverty and intensive policing.

Bringing the discussion of women prisoners into the 20th century, **Chris Holligan** examines the experiences of suffragette prisoners in Perth Prison, Scotland, between 1909 and 1914. Historical studies have tended to focus on the suffragette movement in London, effectively 'silencing' the experiences of suffragettes outside of the capital. Using prison files for Scottish suffragette prisoners Holligan focuses on the cases of four women — Maude Edwards, Arabella Scott, Frances Gordon and Janet Arthur — discussing other ways through which suffragettes were 'silenced' by the state. 'Physical' silencing occurred via their imprisonment and the communicative isolation (ie. the denial of the right to associate with other prisoners and the withholding of written communication with family and comrades outside the prison) that was imposed upon them. Additionally, the construction of the suffragettes as degenerate and threats to the national wellbeing, served to symbolically isolate and silence them further.

The focus then shifts from experiences of incarceration, to popular *representations* of imprisonment. In his article **Alex Tepperman** discusses the importance of Hollywood portrayals of prisoner uprisings, during the 1930s, in shaping a collective memory of prisoners as (a)political actors. Whilst many Hollywood writers attempted to present 'real life' depictions of prison life, Tepperman argues that, aside from a small number of exceptions, they misrepresented prison disturbances as apolitical actions instigated by escape attempts, rather than as meaningful efforts by prisoners to improve standards and conditions within the prison. Further, he discusses how this misrepresentation had a significant impact upon cultural understandings, obscured prisoners' appeals for systemic improvements and absolved state officials of responsibility.

The penultimate article in this edition, by **Thomas Guiney,** examines the 1959 white paper, *Penal Policy in a Changing Society.* Guiney argues that this paper represented the pinnacle of the 'rehabilitative ideal' in post war criminal justice policy in England and Wales. He looks in particular at the impact of the rehabilitative focus on the subsequent prison building programme during the late 1950s and 1960s. He examines the policy making process, from the practical and ideological considerations that justified investment in new prisons, to the penal policy debates and socio-economic conditions that shaped the delivery of the building programme in practice.

Helen Elfleet's article on gender responsive governance in women's prisons provides a fitting conclusion to this edition. She examines both the work of 19th century penal reformer Elizabeth Fry and the 21st century report on women prisoners with vulnerabilities by Baroness Jean Corston (2007), providing an analysis of the ideological and discursive continuities between the proposals of these two influential female reformers. Specifically, she identifies: how women prisoners were, and are, constructed as having intrinsic deficiencies that must be addressed for reform or rehabilitation to occur; how gender specific reformist / rehabilitation regimes were and are presented as 'gentle' or 'benign'; and that women prisoners were, and are, expected to take personal responsibility for their own reformation by embracing and endorsing these regimes. She concludes that such regimes, whilst rendered as 'personally empowering' for women, in effect serve broader social, economic and political interests.