

The Retired Prison Governors Newsletter

Founded by Arthur Williamson in 1980 - Now in its 43rd year of continuous publication

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PENSIONERS UNDER SIEGE?



Many of you will have seen the outrageous suggestion from a 'think tank' called the Adam Smith Institute that state pensions should be denied to those pensioners whose wealth measured in terms of pensions and property exceeds a million pounds. I was immediately struck by the contradiction of a free market think tank advocating a socialist wealth tax. At best its assertions are misleading, and sometimes downright untruthful. Take first of all the assertion that 'only' 18% of pensioners live in poverty. How does this square with the fact that nearly half of state pensioners do not pay income tax, in other words have an annual income of less than £12,570? Living off an income that low cannot be anything other than exceptionally challenging if you live alone.

The Adam Smith Institute would no doubt argue that there are numerous pensioners living in high cost homes in London and the Home Counties, along with other property hotspots, and that is how they arrive at that figure. No doubt many of those pensioners bought their homes in places like Barnet and Bromley fifty or more years ago, when it was still possible for people on average salaries to get on the property ladder in desirable suburbs. It is not their fault that quite ordinary homes routinely sell for a seven figure sum.

So what are these pensioners supposed to do to replace state pension income? That question is not answered by the authors, but in my view there are only two possibilities. One is equity release, which I venture to suggest is already used by low income pensioners. The other option, a move to a lower value home in a cheaper area, smacks of a form of ethnic cleansing. In reality it is not an option at all, since the surplus cash generated would still be part of your wealth for state pension eligibility purposes. You could hardly think of a better disincentive to downsize and free up family homes.

That takes me on to the key questions. Is there the political traction to bring this about and will we be affected? The answer to the first question is 'no' at this stage, but the political landscape could change. According to the Intergenerational foundation 27% of pensioners are millionaires when their pension and property assets are added together. Consequently it will require the remaining 73% to broadly uphold the principle of universality. 85% of pensioners vote in elections, compared to 67% nationally, and just 47% among the 18-24 age group. However, once the pensioner vote is not seen as monolithic, it appears at first sight to present a political opportunity. As better off pensioners, we would be vulnerable, but fortunately it would be very difficult to devise a formula given that the inflation figures used to uprate the state pension are not known from one year to the next. The same problem applies to our civil service pension, which is funded from general taxation rather than an accumulated 'pot'.

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The Daily Mail has its own formula for calculating public sector pensions, which is equally misleading and intended to fuel only envy and division. Typically the paper assumes 25 years of pension payments, but builds in an allowance for inflation before coming up with a figure that looks astronomical, but in fact has no more purchasing power than a static calculation. It is even more misleading if the public sector worker still has a substantial time left to retirement. This is the sort of thing we are up against when defending our civil service pensions.

However, returning to the theme, there is another difficulty in making this idea work, one that should have been obvious from the start. The fact that a substantial number of pensioners will not survive anything like 25 years after retirement makes it virtually impossible to devise a scheme that cuts off your pension when you reach pensionable age, unless of course your house has already reached the magic million in value. Oh, and what happens in the event of a property crash? In their enthusiasm to raise what they see as a £25 billion annual bonanza, the ASI doesn't seem to have considered the administrative nightmare that would ensue. The 'think tank' doesn't seem to have done any detailed thinking.

Does that mean we can ignore the threat of attacks on our living standards? Changes to the inflation proofing of our civil service pensions would require primary legislation and I have seen nothing to suggest that there is any appetite to change the settlement reached in 1972. The triple lock is another matter. However much we might feel entitled to our state pensions, the fact remains that they are defined as a benefit under the 1947 National Insurance Act. This means that the government can make changes via the budget, which by convention cannot be challenged in the Lords.

My own suggestion is that come the next election as many pensioners as possible should be badgering the candidates to promise to protect the triple lock. I can see no other way to preserve it not only for ourselves but for future generations who will not have the benefit of the more generous occupational pensions that we enjoy. Joining that campaign is not an act of selfishness. Indeed it could be argued that older people have a duty to protect and enhance the rights we enjoy so that our children and grandchildren are not disadvantaged.

PAUL LAXTON, EDITOR

RPGA: E-MAIL REGISTER

The E-Mail register has been operating for around 13 years and has proved itself to be an effective means of rapid communication between members. It offers updates on current prison service developments and allows members to keep in touch with each other.

Joining the RPGA does not automatically place you on the register. If you would like to join the register then please send an E-Mail from the address you wish to have registered to **HARRY BRETT** at

harry-brett@hotmail.co.uk. E-Mail addresses may not be passed to third parties without permission from the person(s) registered to that specific E-Mail address. Please remember that if you change your E-Mail address you must inform **HARRY BRETT**, otherwise you will cease to receive further updates.

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THE STAND OF SHAME

I went to a fairly prestigious school, St. Bede's College, Manchester. It was here I learnt to deal with failure. I'll explain why and how in a moment. First I need to explain the 'Stand of Shame' that was employed at the end of every term. Here's how it worked. As the term neared its end we were all tested on how effectively we had learnt the subjects arraigned before us including Latin and Religious Education (RE) as well as the regular subjects like Mathematics, English, French, Biology, Physics, History, etc. This testing, or the end of term

examinations, were marked and turned in to a table of ranking from top student to the bottom one.

Then, on the last day of term, the day we dispersed for the forthcoming holiday, the whole school would assemble in Form Groups in the large hall to be informed of the ranking achieved by each student. Up to this point no-one but the Form Master of each Form, eg. The Lower Third I, II, III and IV, etc. would know the results achieved by each student. After the religious procedures - it is a Roman Catholic College - the first form was called, until, form by form we had all been exposed to this same treatment.

Whilst stood in our form groups, the name of the student who had scored the best marking would be read out and that student would sit down. Then the second highest students' name would be read out and he would sit down to be followed by the third, fourth, until there would be a small group of 'thickos' left standing with the last in the class left on his own, covered in shame, humiliated beyond belief, left feeling bereft of any support, to take it on the chin, to 'suck it up buttercup.' I know exactly how this felt as I was, more often than not, that last student left standing. Of course this was not the end of the matter. Obviously parents, relatives and friends would want to know how you'd fared on your return home. I somehow used to dodge this questioning but the real day of reckoning came with the arrival of the letter from the school to the parents indicating how well or, as in my case, how badly you had performed. Then the 'sh one t' would hit the proverbial fan. I well remember having my Christmas breaks just about ruined as I waited for the inevitable 'Sword of Damocles' to inevitably descend. This was and, maybe still is, (it certainly was when my nephew went to this same college some many years later) the system employed to encourage attainment; the system I've called the 'Hall of Shame.'

This piece has been prompted by a BBC Documentary on the need to prepare teenagers for failure.

To assist with its composition I've dug up material from the ubiquitous internet and have found the tip of an iceberg... an 'iceberg' full of such amazing and voluminous facts and figures describing how to diagnose, how to treat, how to care for troubled youngsters that, in truth, you're not any the wiser for attempting to digest the vast majority of it at all. Perhaps the best advice for anyone responsible for

caring, in the widest possible sense, for a troubled teenager, is to start by understanding the impossibility of comparing yesterday, when we were starting off in life, with today.

At my ripe old age I can relate to the need to accept a low base from which to spring from. The 'Stand of Shame' as described above left me with little self worth to the extent I was prepared to be content with very little. There's no self pity implied nor intended here. I didn't discuss how I felt about myself with anyone else. Instead I simply 'got on with it.' 'It' being life itself. I didn't concern myself with how I measured up against others. I accepted the fact that, on leaving school and home simultaneously at the age of 16, I had to survive. In other words, my education (or lack of it) and the 'Stand of Shame' taught me to accept failure in its entirety and to accept all that came my way, good and bad, as inevitable and, more often than not, a bonus. I've never doubted nor questioned my rights to a 'good life'. Fate dished itself up and I accepted, from a very early age, that mostly life was its own bonus.

I occasionally think back to my school years and wonder how my contemporaries and friends have fared. Some, inevitably, will have done as well, some may have struggled but I can tell you this ... no one has done any better. I was groomed to fail by my school and after almost 70 years of life beyond school, I can tell you that this was the greatest advantage they could have provided.

JOHN RAMWELL





Brian Emes Eulogy: Presented by Dominic Emes

Funerals are by nature sad affairs but in the case of Brian it is as much a celebration of a long and fulfilled life. Brian was nearly ninety on his passing, and by anybody's measure he succeeded in filling these years with an exciting childhood, highly decorated career and active retirement.

Brian was born in North London in 1933 and as so many of his generation, spent his formative years under the blitz of the second world war. He would regularly regale us and his grandchildren with stories of life in London at the time. Collecting spent ordnance from the streets, watching the squadrons of planes overhead or sleeping in the bomb shelter built by his father in the basement of their house.

After his secondary education, Brian was awarded a place at the LSE University to study Sociology, but his attendance was postponed as he had to undertake National Service. However, unlike many of his compatriots, Brian was spared two years of mundane uniformed service due to a misunderstanding by the recruiting staff. On seeing that Brian's initials were B A Emes, they believed he must already be in possession of a Bachelor of Arts degree and so he was posted to Berlin for two years to teach soldiers English and Maths. He was to arrive during the partition of the city by the four powers and was to experience life around checkpoint Charlie.

On his return from Berlin, Brian undertook his course and it was whilst at university that he met a fellow Sociology student. The rest as they say is history and Marion and Brian were married in 1962.

After graduating, because of his interest in the rehabilitation of offenders, Brian joined the prison service. His rise through the ranks was rapid and so followed a nomadic lifestyle for his family as we travelled from prison to prison across the UK. However, such a lifestyle ensued we were never bored and we were kept amused by Brian's antidotes of prison life. One such, was the time that having just arrived at Wormwood Scrubs prison, Brian declined the invite to visit Blake, the soviet spy and a recent inmate. A wise decision as it proved, since Blake escaped that same day.

Brian's career continued to flourish and he was soon appointed the youngest class 1 governor in the service. This was followed by Regional Director and Brian reluctantly retired just before his 60th birthday as Deputy Director General of the prison service. A career on the road had at least prepared Brian for choosing his retirement location. Having been posted to Yorkshire on a number of occasions, he had fallen in love with the county.

Brian quickly settled into retirement, he split his time between his four main passions: travel, gardening, ornithology and working in the community. Marion and Brian spent many years travelling to far flung parts of the globe, more than once to the consternation of their children as they seemed to have a penchant for war zones or areas that would soon become war zones on their departure.

Brian thoroughly enjoyed being part of the Haxby community and joined many local groups such as Victim Support, the Breakfast club and the Third world group. He also particularly enjoyed participating in the life of this church.

Brian led a life of compassionate service, he will be greatly missed by his family and to all whose life he touched.

May he rest in peace.

FRESH START

In the late 1960's, as a 22 year old Direct Entry AG 2 (I may have to add a glossary of archaic Prison Service terms to this article), I remember crusty old senior governors complaining bitterly that the Service had gone to the dogs and me thinking what silly old dinosaurs they were. Sadly, it seems to be the fate of each generation of bemoan how things have slipped and how much better they did things in their day. But I find myself often at odds with the good-old-days sentiments often expressed in articles in the RPGA magazine. I am firmly of the belief that, generally and overall, the Prison Service got steadily more professional, more efficient, more humane and more managerially competent over the 40 years I was associated with it. Of course, it went down some cul de sacs, some things did not work out as intended, progress was patchy and glacially slow, but progress there was.

So I was interested to read Peter Atkinson's balanced and impartial summary of important events in the post war history of the service. While he was right to name me as the first Director of The Wolds, I was more interested in his mention of Fresh Start and three of the leading lights (I would argue one leading, two following and a couple missing) and, at Peter's suggestion, have refined here a letter I wrote to him in response to his article. While privatisation was, in my obviously not impartial view, an important and useful development in how prison services were delivered, it was not, again in my view, as profound a change as Fresh Start. Unless FS had happened to greatly level the IR playing field, privatisation might not have happened.

I was right in the centre of Fresh Start from the beginning, leading a P6 Manpower team (another delightfully archaic title and concept), working at an operational level, but with clear sight of what those leading and those attempting to sabotage FS were doing, saying and thinking.

It has always surprised me that no one has ever made a proper study of FS as an academic treatise or a piece of serious journalism. It was a piece of organisational reform of huge breadth and scale, given the size, age and resistance to change of the organisation it changed, the breadth and depth of the change and the number of powerful enemies it faced. It must be one of the most impressive pieces of organisational re-engineering and would, I would have thought, be worthy of detailed academic study which would then become required reading on any decent MBA course.

I find it interesting to view the Brexit process through the FS prism. The key feature of both, that Eric Caines, Boris and David Frost all grasped but most others could or would not, is that there is no hope of forcing through change of that profundity, and with so many powerful enemies, with a fully worked out scheme, every i dotted and every t crossed. By the time you get there, if you ever can, the issues will all have changed and the opposition will have had too long to dig in. What you have to do is to identify the essential elements of the change you are trying to achieve and force them through at speed, leaving many second tier and subsidiary issues to be sorted out later. Thus the Northern Ireland protocol and the Wandsworth strike are parallel tidying up events, full of sound and fury at the time, but in the long term signifying little.

The key issues of FS, in my view as always, were the abolition of paid overtime, the move from two, very old, entirely rigid, inefficient, centrally determined shift systems to a broad set of rules within which shift systems were a matter for local decision and negotiations. A natural consequence of this, although not one of the stated objectives, was a move from staffing levels being determined nationally to them being determined locally.

A number of beneficial changes came along with FS, the change from an outdated two-class, military-style (to be historically accurate probably naval style) grade structure to a more modern unified structure, some rationalisation around the payment for allowances and a new management structure within establishments, but these were not essential to the success of FS, merely incidental bonuses. The general sale of quarters to staff, something from which I am not ashamed to say I benefitted personally, was a sensible modernisation and economy, but while not a key issue it was an extremely useful bribe to longer serving members of staff who might otherwise have been much more hostile than they were.

And of course with so many powerful enemies ranged against it - FS was opposed, even though not all the opposition was overt, by many on the Prisons Board, many of the affected politicians, many if not a majority of governors, the POA and, separately many staff. You have to play dirty to have any chance of success. Thus, Eric Caines and Boris were both prepared to misrepresent and mislead, without actually lying (debateable I know), and promise what they knew perfectly well could not be delivered, in order to get where they needed to be. They will have considered the ends justified the means, and I would agree with them, but you cannot avoid the fact or the consequences, of the strokes they had to pull. I was once sent to meet with Gordon Lakes, then the much-revered DDG, with an almost-explicit brief to con him over a particular aspect of FS that he had got his teeth into. I am not in the least ashamed to say I succeeded and that it wasn't very difficult.

It is a pity FS has never been properly and independently documented. Some of the fairly small group who were involved have now died, and it appears from Peter's article that others have no interest in their legacy. There are a few left, Harry Brett being one, and I am sure Francis Masserick is around somewhere, but even as FS implementation was drawing to a close, people were starting to re-write history. When I returned to the service after 10 years in the private sector, for most people I then worked with, FS was something in the dim and distant past they'd heard about, and a few of the old timers would mention, but no more than that. The folk memory of the pre-FS days had moved a long way from the reality. Bulletin 8 was still mentioned by some, but all had forgotten, if they ever knew, that it was intended to be what its title suggested, a newsletter, one, if I remember rightly, of about 14, just updating the service on how the proposals were developing. It was never intended as the founding document and tablets-of-stone rule book for FS that it became. I was involved in its drafting and indeed wrote several chunks of it, but there were issues that were too unclear at the time or considered too incendiary, and we were instructed by Lex Gold, then head of P6, to either fudge them or leave them out. We did a bit of both.

My clear view then, as now, is that FS was, by some distance, the most beneficial change, and the largest, the service saw, since WW2. It succeeded where previous attempts to do much the same, less ambitiously and on a smaller scale, had failed miserably and for the first time in my career enabled and required governors to control, direct and properly manage their institutions rather than simply presiding over them. It was a disappointment but no surprise that so many resisted doing so for so long afterwards.

STEVE TWINN



LAST OF THE AG's

On 5th September 2022 I retired following a career within the Prison Service that lasted just 25 days short of 36 years having joined in 1986 on the 44th and final Assistant Governor Trainee scheme. Although I am two years short of the Classic scheme retirement age of 60, in 2021 I realised that the Grayling 'austerity years' followed by severe staff shortages in the Covid years had taken their toll. Several deaths in custody during my time as duty governor in Nottingham and then Stocken had been particularly distressing and I had reached the point that just getting through each day had become the new normal. The swings of emotion and disturbed sleeping pattern induced by stress and anxiety led me to realise that I needed to call it a day

for the good of my health and everyone else's sanity that were having to put up with me!

That decided, I then had the tough decision as to whether to make a clean break and end ties with the Service completely on retirement. Initially this was an attractive prospect, however as I got closer to my leaving date I reflected on my time as a member of the PGA NEC (around 15 years in total) and the great colleagues that I have met and worked with as a result of this. I couldn't in all good conscience just walk away from it as if it had never happened and so membership of the RPGA seemed a good way of retaining contacts and the many happy memories of my PGA work. I was quickly convinced to join the Committee while at the PGA Conference in October and now, nearly six months into retirement, I'm so glad that I did.

My career has been largely based in the East Midlands. Because I was under the age of 24 when I was selected during a 'country house' weekend (a set of interviews, tests and group exercises with other hopeful graduates) I had to serve for a year as a prison officer posted to my local prison, HMP Leicester. I found this a real 'shock to the system' having gone straight from being a student to the long hours of overtime dominated pre-Fresh Start Service. The training Principal Officer at Leicester, Bill Cowie, noted on my annual report that I had 'survived' my year as a prison officer! My AG training at Wakefield was then condensed into one year because with the onset of Fresh Start Assistant Governors had become a thing of the past.

I had asked for a posting to London for no other reason than it got me close to my beloved Arsenal FC (I went on to have a season ticket at Highbury for the following decade) and loved my time at Wormwood Scrubs. There was a great social life for a young governor grade to be had in London, so many other governor grades used public transport to travel to and from work so a pint or three in my local, The Goldsmiths, was often enjoyed with colleagues. In 1992 it was time to settle down and I returned to the Midlands with a posting to HMP Gartree and moved in with my girlfriend Shirley (now my wife of 28 years). I have since had two postings to Nottingham, two to Glen Parva and two at HMP Stocken and also a very enjoyable 18 months at HMP Sudbury.

In addition, following a secondment to both Nottinghamshire and Derbyshire Police as part of those two county's MAPPAs teams, I specialised as the Public Protection Officer for the East Midlands based at Regional Office in Leicester.



And here is a picture of the young Kevin Billson...

I think I was always destined to play some role or other in the PGA with Paddy Scriven being group governor during my Prison Officer training at Newbold Revel and then Charles Bushell being my Dep at Gartree and Governor at Glen Parva. It was Graham Mumby-Croft who subsequently encouraged me to stand for election to the NEC, holding the post of Membership Secretary for the last five of those years. I was honoured to be awarded Distinguished Life Membership of the PGA in October 2022.

I currently live in the town in which I was born, Melton Mowbray in Leicestershire (and yes, I do love pork pies!). I am a former chair and current member of the local branch of CAMRA (Campaign for Real Ale) a keen walker and regularly attend Melton Town FC matches (my lifelong addiction to Arsenal Football Club is largely satisfied from a comfy chair in front of the TV these days).

I am delighted to be a member of the RPGA committee and hope to serve our association for many years to come.

KEVIN BILLSON

THE NEXT AGM OF THE RETIRED PRISON GOVERNORS ASSOCIATION WILL BE HELD ON:

MONDAY 9 OCTOBER 2023 AT THE RADISSON BLU HOTEL, EAST MIDLANDS AIRPORT AT 13.30 HOURS.

AS USUAL OUR AGM WILL BE HELD USING A FACILITY BOOKED BY THE PGA FOR THEIR ANNUAL CONFERENCE.

PLEASE NOTE THAT THE DATE AND VENUE ARE SUBJECT TO CONFIRMATION BY THE PRISON GOVERNORS ASSOCIATION WHEN HMPPS HAS FORMALLY APPROVED THEIR FACILITY TIME.

YOU CAN ALSO ATTEND THE AGM via ZOOM AND DETAILS OF THE LINK WILL BE GIVEN BY GRAHAM MUMBY-CROFT TO THOSE MEMBERS WHO ARE ON THE E MAIL REGISTER NEARER THE TIME.

ANY MEMBER PLANNING TO ATTEND, PLEASE E MAIL ME AT relaxpaul@btinternet.com FOR CONFIRMATION OF ARRANGEMENTS.

PRESS RELEASE by the PRISON GOVERNORS ASSOCIATION

WEDNESDAY 15 FEBRUARY 2023

PRISON CAPACITY AND OVERCROWDING

On the 30th of November 2022, the Prison Governors' Association (PGA) released a statement in response to the commencement of Operation Safeguard, the use of police cells due to the prison system reaching near capacity with a population of 83,000. Three months later, and Government does not have a plan in place to address this dangerous crisis and the population continues to grow.

The prison population is rising exponentially week on week and the system is now full. This constant upward trend is driven by several factors, including an increase of 23,000 police officers, an increase in custodial sentences, an increase in length of sentences and an increase in recalls into prison who stay for longer. The remand population is the highest it has been since records began; there are now insufficient spaces to meet demand.

For several years, the PGA has voiced concern over Government's "tough on crime" agenda and the impact on an already stressed system, which has suffered from lack of investment for well over a decade. Many of our prisons are not providing a safe, decent, and rehabilitative environment; under-invested prisons do not work to reduce re-offending and protect the public from crime.

A rigorous process was carried out in 2022 to look at the maximum number of prisoners any establishment can hold to maintain safety, decency, order and control. This risk assessed project was done by expert senior operational leaders within His Majesty's Prison & Probation Service, taking into consideration the uniqueness of each prison. This maximum number is called the operational capacity and when filled, a prison is full. Currently most of our prisons are full, and we are now using police cells for the overflow. Where there are spaces, it is in the lower category open prisons, and Government policy has made it much more difficult to move prisoners into these conditions.

Any further increase in overcrowding will have significant ramifications on the health and safety of those working and living in prisons. We have a prison officer recruitment and retention crisis, with a current shortfall of 1,500. To increase prisoner numbers against this backdrop will lead to an increase in austere regimes, resulting in more disorder, violence, suicide, and self-harm; loss of accommodation due to concerted indiscipline is a real threat in these circumstances. The health and well-being of staff will be further compromised in such a toxic environment.

The PGA are clear that they are totally opposed to increasing overcrowding in prisons. Our members must not be put in a situation where they are told to hold more prisoners than it is safe to do so. This dangerous situation is due to reactive Government policy which has failed to ensure sufficient prison places for the demand they have created. The political rhetoric, rather than being tough on crime, has created a situation where further overcrowding will turn our prisons into little more than warehouses of despair, danger, and degradation, with staff refusing to work due to their health and safety being compromised. Government is failing both the people prisons hold and community they serve.

YOUR LETTERS

I struggle to keep up with the number of dear colleagues who have passed away this year, so my list of contacts is contracting. One of the latest is Colin Honey; he was very wise and personable and fully committed to whatever role he currently held. I had quite a lack of contact with him when he was Head of Personnel and in those days all postings were strictly controlled by Headquarters. Whenever you were directed to somewhere you did not want to go, probably due to schooling of one's children you could ask for a personal audience with him. He had always thought out his reasoning and explained it carefully. Although never fully convinced, I always felt re-assured that there was logic to it, and felt better for being in his presence as he was committed to what was best for the Service. We kept in touch for awhile after he retired and it was always a pleasure to talk to him.

The other notable person to pass away in December was General Lord Ramsbotham, Chief Inspector of Prisons. He was a far better appointment than his predecessor; Judge Tumim, who on his inspection of Wakefield had raised the issue that the prisoners' phones installed had no screens. I responded, nor had the public ones at King Cross Station, and the noise level there was far greater than in the prison. We eventually had them fitted.

I had overlooked that he was the son of a Bishop of Wakefield; therefore, he had a rounded background. He was always confident and sure in his decision making, he also cared about the troops under his command. Michael Howard, then Home Secretary, had expected him to be less inclined to take the prisoner's part than Judge Tumim. His terms of reference required him to report to the home secretary on the treatment of prisoners. Anxiety amongst senior staff rose rapidly after a series of damning reports on conditions in certain prisons in the first 18 months of his appointment.

Why do I write about him? I feel I got to know him. Everyone knew of him by reports in the Newspapers. It was the Whitemoor escape that was to be my first encounter with him. I went as NEC member of the PGA to support all the Governor Grades who were to be interviewed. He greeted me and said 'do ask any question you want.' His tone was friendly but firm. I sat through all interviews and watched the video recording. It was clear that the three staff allocated to carry security checks on all movements to from the wings to the recreation and back area were just allowing free flow with no checks being undertaken. The Governor grades were as appalled as was I when the evidence was produced. Rambo remained calm, never raised his voice and you sensed he was sympathetic to a degree, but in a top security prison, management had a high priority to ensure that all security procedures were strictly enforced.

An Inspection at Pentonville was scheduled for late 1999. Although the staff had worked hard to improve the regime we were just as apprehensive as any other prison. The team duly arrived and the Chief Inspector said 'Good to see you again but under different circumstances this time.' He then introduced

his inspection team, but then added that Branwen Jeffreys, the BBC TV Education Editor, would be with us throughout, but is not as an inspector. I never did find out why this occurred, but she was quite chatty and fed back in general terms how the inspection was going.

I had been contacted by Christopher Morgan who was endeavouring to install the Reading Plan for Prisoners into every prison, to join him in the endeavour, which I did and along with Ron Curtis we developed a national structure. It led to me being appointed to the official Steering Committee. On his retirement from the Inspectorate, Christopher also recruited David Ramsbotham; he had also just been appointed to the Lords. As usual he gave his time enthusiastically to both. He attended meetings and the conferences organised for the volunteers and knew contacts who would donate to the cause. So I believe I got to know him very well and admired him. Wherever he served he cared about and wanted the best for those who served under him. The Prison Service gained so much during his time. So it was not just that he gave Pentonville such a good Report, Which I cannot resist repeating:

‘There is a refreshingly ‘can do’ attitude’ throughout HMP PENTONVILLE that is in marked contrast to what we have found in a number of other large, overcrowded, under-resourced, inner city, local prisons. This does not just happen, and I hope that the Governor and his staff will take pride in this very good report, which records the outcomes of their work in considerable detail. That a prison with such daily problems should win the Elton trophy for the best workshop in Prison Service, pioneer education for dyslexic prisoners, make successful advances in the recruitment of minority staff and develop suitable arrangements for foreign nationals, to name but four, is remarkable in itself, but also an indication of how the positive attitude is spread throughout the establishment. If this can be achieved in PENTONVILLE there is no reason why it cannot be achieved elsewhere.’

He always concluded his reports by resorting to the Prison Department to invest more financial support for rehabilitation programmes where he believed it was necessary.

Had a long chat with Jim Blakey on the phone; some will recall he suffered from pain in both his shoulders, which clearly affected his golf, but also made him anxious going up and down stairs. Fortunately he had a good Doctor who referred him to the local hospital for surgery. Jim says it was like a miracle having full use of both shoulders with none of the pain; it gave him a new lease of life. This was just as well as he remains the Chair of the committee for the local bowls club; during the long hot summer all the grass turned yellow and weeds sprung up. It all had to be finely raked and weeded. As the other members are not that enthusiastic, he had to set an example. He said he would make contact with Dave Simons and try to visit him. Dave advises me that ‘Just getting going and then tested positive for Covid. It knocked me sideways. Still not fully recovered although just passed clear again’. We all wish you a full recovery and our thoughts are with you.

Ron and Sue Curtis wrote in December that they were delighted that life was returning to normal, and then discovered that at Christmas travel restrictions prevented them from joining the family in the Netherlands to celebrate Christmas. So on Christmas day they were on their own. They then joined Ron's family in Chichester for the youth theatre's production of 'Wind in the Willows'. This is a family tradition of many years which Ron's sister always arranged. As mentioned previously she was tragically killed last year in a road incident. This came to Court in the summer and the woman responsible found guilty of death by dangerous driving, and given a suspended sentence, not least because she was 94 years of age. They have returned to their travelling again including Orkney which they love, it was as beautiful as ever, although still not recovered fully from the lockdown as regards facilities for visitors; and Newquay. Despite the dry summer Sue has kept the garden looking very colourful and receives many compliments on it. Sue has joined a local play reading group, and Ron a current affairs discussion group.

Their two grand children are now working; Matthew in a care home for experience and then he hopes to train as a paramedic. Joe is temporarily a waiter at Gleneagles Hotel (he does look smart.)

Mike Poselay sent a reminder that it is the 7th Anniversary of his new a career in the legal profession after he retired. He works as a consultant solicitor and enjoys trials in Magistrate Courts. My daughter Reena is also a lawyer but in family law. He still lives in the same house in Walsall, which Chris Scott used to call 'Poselay Towers.' He has been in contact with Chris and it appears his dementia has not worsened, but when he goes shopping he is given a written list, but still forgets it is there!

Sue and Colin Tanswell write, 'Another year rolls by, where does time go?' They say they are both suffering age wearying; 'Sue has never recovered from the side effects of chemotherapy or arthritic knees and is very restricted as to how far she can walk. I am suffering still from my fall off the ladder, four years ago, with balance problems which put me at risk of tripping or falling.' (I have much the same problem). Colin states he can still manage a gentle two mile walk twice a week; a far cry from lunch time running at PSC. 'We all had Covid quite recently but got over it quite well.'

'My son Gareth has now lived in Canada for almost nine years, and is the General Manger of a Golf Course. My eldest son Martin still lives with us; it looks like he is here to stay! We were all hoping to go to Canada in September but were put off by the post Covid chaos at Heathrow. We re-arranged to go next spring but this is now delayed as our daughter in law has become pregnant, we are of course overjoyed to become to become grandparents for the first time. We hope to be able to visit this autumn. We all hope that the autumn trip will come to fruition.'

I hear that Veronica Bird has been approached by another film company to be an adviser on a prison documentary they are planning. More details as they emerge.

Let us hope the Government continues to bring down inflation, settles all the strikes, and those elected start to act professionally in the interest of the country and not like 'little tin gods' pursuing their own interests. Well, we can all wish.

BOB DUNCAN

Dear Friends and Colleagues.

Good news . I have received a letter and it prompted me to write a letter myself so here they are at the end of the usual contribution from my/our very good friend Bob Duncan. Hopefully you are also following his serialised story of his autobiographical book to be found elsewhere in this publication.

Letter from: Jeff Woolhouse

The Strangeways Riot and My Even Smaller Part In It

I was reading with interest Graham Mumby-Croft's account of his role in the Strangeways riot during 1990. It reminded me of the small part I played at the start of the riot. I was watching the 9pm news on April 1st when the first item was the story of how the prisoners at Strangeways had managed to get on the roof of the prison and set alight to the wing. It showed flames and fires on the roof and several prisoners with masks demanding reform. The prisoners had taken over a wing causing extensive damage. I was at that time a works P.O serving at Full Sutton Prison. As I watched at the devastation taking place at Strangeways the phone rang. It was my area Manager, Graham Harper, informing me that the staff at Strangeways had lost the prison and staff were being drafted in from around the region. The boiler house had shut down and there was no heating for the staff. At Full Sutton we had around 50 heaters that had been placed in the new quarters before the prison opened in 1987 and were now in storage. He asked could I get the works van and take the radiators to Manchester where they were to be used to heat the accommodation in the staff stand down area. Seeing this as a bit of an adventure, "ok", I said, "I'll be there in around 4 hours". "Good", he said, "there'll be staff there waiting for you".

I arrived at Full Sutton just before it was locked down for the night at 10pm. After collecting the van from inside the prison I went to the works which is positioned outside the prison to load the radiators in the van. Off I started with 50 radiators rattling away in the back of the van over the Pennines to Strangeways Prison. All roads to Strangeways had been closed with Police control and on approaching the prison I was stopped by the police and told I had to turn around as there was a major incident at the prison. I said who I was and had been instructed to deliver radiators to the prison. "Oh! Mr Woolhouse", he said, "we've been expecting you, follow the police car." I suddenly felt very important following the police car with blue lights flashing to the back of the prison. On entering a yard in the prison I was surrounded by works staff unloading the radiators and fitting three pin plugs to the radiators without plugs.

“Thanks mate”, they said “we’ve been waiting for these.” I was there for just 10 minutes and set off back across the moors to York wondering what would happen with the riot. It turned out the riot lasted 25 days with 1 prisoner killed, 147 officers and 47 prisoners injured. It was the longest prison riot in British prison history. Many reforms came out from the riot in the Woolf Report, including ceasing slopping out, in cell sanitation, single cells and the introduction of wing phones. All of which took many years to introduce. Whenever I hear about the riot at Strangeways, I always think of the works van with 50 radiators clattering away in the back going over the Pennines at midnight to do my very small part in the Strangeways Riot.

Another interesting event I can recall is hearing Graham Mumby-Croft at a works conference in the 1980’s (year not known). It was at the annual Works conference at Loughborough during September which was attended by senior staff from works departments. I remember Graham standing up holding which must have been the first prototype of a laptop which was like a small suitcase. He gave quite an inspiring talk about how computers were to be the future and we should all embrace this new technology. I was most impressed with Graham’s speech. I think Graham reverted to discipline later to become a Governor. However it was some 15 years or so later before a computer appeared on my desk.

JEFF WOOLHOUSE, Ex GOVERNOR V, FULL SUTTON

A contribution from your letters editor

The Strangeways Riot. My Minor Part in it

Having read the comprehensive contributions from Graham Mumby-Croft and now Jeff Woolhouse who describes his “Even Smaller part in it” I feel obliged to make my own insignificant but nevertheless exciting, to me, contribution, not to the riot but more to the immediate consequences of it.

On the 1st April 1990 I was gainfully employed in the Prison Service Information and Technology Group (PSITG) Installation Group and on that day I had made my way to HMP The Wolds where the team had just completed the installation of the Local Inmate Database System (LIDS). I was about to instruct the staff there in the mystical and wondrous workings of this new administrative tool replacing the previously wholly inadequate acetate and chinagraph system specifically designed in the 19th century for the warders and also the more sophisticated parchment and quill technique of recording applied by the treasury grades. Governors were either fully up to speed on all systems or generally mystified and reliant on uninformed advice.

As I arrived my paging device, which had lain dormant in my briefcase, alerted me to its presence, this sounds strange now in 2023 but in 1990 it was as mysterious a device as was LIDS, I responded, and it was my illustrious team Leader David Pike (G4). I should explain the dynamic of “The PSITG North Team” It

was made up with a G4 Team Leader, a G5, 2 PO's, 2 SO's, 2 HEO's, and 2 AO's, a team of 10 and all performing the entire range of installation functions within the team and all specially selected on their limited knowledge of computer systems and workings. Our objective was to install a working LIDS system into all the North Region Prisons and train both the uniform staff and administrators in its use.

I was one of the Senior Officers in the team and the paged telephone call was to inform me that HMP Manchester prisoners had gone on the rampage and that all staff had evacuated the prisoner areas. While the prisoners were still contained in and on the building all normal functions were ceased. We the "North Team" had only weeks before installed LIDS at Manchester, and it was now the source and electronic repository of all inmate information. The plan was for me to recreate a functional discipline office in a room at Manchester Regional Office. I was told that a lorry was on its way to Manchester with ten computer workstations, a base station (Central Processor) and all the wiring and peripheral equipment etc... necessary to allow me to build a replica discipline office in regional office. Before I could do that, I needed to gain entry into HMP Manchester and download the data from their base station and take it to regional office and then load it onto the system I had assembled there.

To that end I was to make my way from HMP The Wolds (Nr Hull) to HMP Manchester in all haste. To facilitate this, I was told that a police escort would meet me on the slip road to the M62 (just a mile from the prison) and they would escort me to the exit off the M62 where a police motorcycle escort would then take me the rest of the way. This is exactly what happened, and it was probably the most exciting eighty-mile drive of my life.

When I arrived at the prison, I needed to get to the base station computer which was located in the muniments room that was part of the outer wall of the prison. The access to it was from inside the prison grounds just a hundred yards from the main gate and directly below where the prisoners were occupying the roof space and in missile range. To get me to the muniments room they had to escort me there safely so the staff formed a Testudo (Latin for Tortoise) and I hid under it as they marched up to the door and let me in. All would have been well except for the valiant roof fighters had found some tins of powder paint and managed to get a direct hit on the shield directly above me and managed to spray my almost new sheepskin coat with powder blue paint.

Having been left alone I made myself comfortable in the muniments room and set the computer off downloading its system files and data which took about three hours to complete.

During the time spent in waiting for the computer to do its thing, I was in the muniments room and as a lowly Senior Officer from HMP Leeds I had no idea what a muniments room was or contained so the inquisitive ex-Security SO bit of my brain took over and I looked about and found a heap of old "Governors Journals". I looked for the oldest and read them with great interest. I remain proud of myself

in that I didn't secrete one in my briefcase as a souvenir of my unusual access to such magnificent treasures. In any event my curiosity came to an end when a PO appeared with the Testudo and the question 'did I know anything about fax machines?' The assumption being that I was the only techie on site and might know something about fax machines. As it turned out I had recently set one up and that's just what was needed. So, I left my computer doing its work and was escorted to the main building and to what was the prison telephone switch room. The only space with a working telephone line had become the base of silver command (the redoubtable Brendan O'Friel) and there was a need for access to a fax machine. They had a machine but no one to set it up and I was delighted to be able to do so.

When I was returned to the muniments room the computer had completed its work. I was escorted back to the gate and off to the regional office where the lorry load of equipment had been unloaded into a good-sized room. I recall that I was met by Arnie Stapleton (Area Manager) who I knew, he had been my AGII Tutor at Wakefield Officer Training School sixteen years earlier. Apart from being well provided with mugs of tea the rest is a blur of sweat and swearing (all mine). I was charged with getting a replica of the Manchester discipline office ready for the discipline staff to get to work updating the database the next day, and that was achieved.

Before I close this tale of daring do, I would like to make separate mention of Brendan O'Friel who I hold in the highest regard. Before this catastrophic event the PSITG Team had installed the new LIDS system at Manchester towards the end of 1989, and I had been on that team. During the installation my wife was diagnosed with cervical cancer and taken into Leeds Hospital for major surgery. David Pike (The Boss) sent me home to look after my two young children and I didn't return to Manchester until January in the new year when our work had been completed with little left to do. On the morning of my return, I went to the mess for breakfast and Brendan was there having his own breakfast. When he saw me, he called me over and asked how my wife was. I had no idea that he knew who I was, why would he, but he did, and he knew she had been ill and cared enough to pause his breakfast to enquire after her. So, a belated but nonetheless sincere 'Thank you Brendan and keep well.'

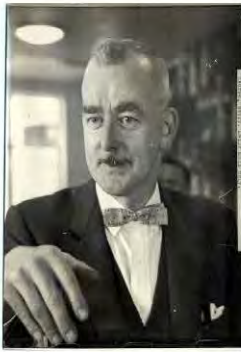
ROGER OUTRAM



As ever please take time to write something that will be of interest to all your retired friends and colleagues and send them to me. Nice short chatty letters will be published in this section of the newsletter, longer with more specific content will be considered for a separate entry in the Newsletter.

Address to use is:

roger@rsoutram.co.uk or Roger Outram, 12 Grove Park, Magazine Lane, Wisbech, PE13 1LF



Can you identify this mystery man?

Here are a few clues to assist you:

By coincidence he suffered what would prove to be a fatal stroke on the way to the funeral of his predecessor.

His biography was written by a prison officer.

You would have to be into your 80's to have encountered him in a professional capacity

MEMBERSHIP REPORT

It is sometime since I produced a membership report and I apologise for that. Unfortunately the numbers continue to fall and presently stand at 386, down from 394 on my last report 2 years ago.

The main reason for this is that last year Graham Mumby-Croft and myself did some reconciliation work comparing my list of members and his list of payers. Unfortunately, this resulted in us removing 9 members who were no longer paying, and despite being emailed, written to and even sent a personal copy of the Newsletter, together with a letter from me (and a new subscription form) to no avail. What I would say though was we started off with more than the 9, so we did re-sign up a few.

Since my last report, we are pleased to welcome new members – Jerry Petherick, Daphne Smith (widow of Ron), Mike Conway, Daniel Yarrow, Valerie Robson, Graham Weale, Gareth Cheetham, Margaret Tweedie (widow of Gordon), Jean Childs (widow of John), Gerard O'Donoghue, Margaret Hatton, Ian Rodger, Alan Williams, Steve Lawrence, Joanne Sims, Kevin Billson, Peter Smith, Marion Emes (widow of Brian), Allan Tallentire, David Hayes and Brian Coffey. We are sorry to report the deaths of Ron Smith, Muriel Keast, John Childs, Gordon Tweedie, Gerry Fagg, Mike Watson-Jackson, Jean Marsden, Alf Kirby, Mel Dickinson, Sylvia Brown, Anne Martin, Ken Vipond, Colin Honey, Brian Emes, Dennis Sutton, John Rumball and Bill Martin. Our deepest condolences go out to their family and friends. We have also been made aware of the deaths of some ex-governors who were not members – Steve Metcalfe, Bob Howard, Linsey Arnold, Dave Gant, Ann Simons, Graham Clark, John Wilson, John Prince MBE, Ifor Smout, Audrey Davies, Gerry Adams, Merrion Williams, Ron Oliver, Terry Saunders, Jack Atherton and Steve Hyams. Our deepest sympathies go out to their family and friends. We have also lost contact with Ben Hart, Anthony Burrows and Margaret Tee, so anyone who knows their new address then please advise me and I will put them back on the list. I can be contacted either by email harry-brett@hotmail.co.uk or by telephone 01477 549216/07999 874864.

I continue to be involved with the Civil Service Pensioners Alliance; an organisation well worth joining. I currently hold the post of Regional Rep for the Northwest, which gives me a seat on their NEC. I also sit on the EC of the National Pensioners Convention. The CSPA have direct contact with the Cabinet Office, and as such ensure that our pensions are protected. They continue to fight for retention of widows pensions on re-marriage or co-habitation, have been involved in persuading the Cabinet Office to either cancel overpayments of pensions discovered in a recent re-look at pension payments, one of £27,000 and even when not able to have the debt cancelled have persuaded the CO to set repayments over a longer period, as some of the overpayments went back longer than 10 years. They recently badgered the Treasury, ensuring that a statement was eventually issued to say that Civil Service pensions would increase in accordance with CPI rate of inflation. The CSPA also offer free legal advice, IT support, car, and travel Insurance (through the CSIS) and various discount shopping cards and opportunities, currently offering up to 30% off a new car. The monthly subscription is only £3 per month and can easily be 'earned' back by use of the discount cards. Anyone interested in joining then please email me and I will send you the details.

HARRY BRETT

Wisden Writing Competition: Introduction

Roger Outram suggested I might write another piece for the Newsletter. I promised an article, once again about cricket but accessible to those who don't know the game. Wisden Cricketers' Almanack, 'the cricketers' bible', has been published annually since 1864. It holds a competition for non-professional writers who are invited to submit anything about cricket in 500 words or fewer. I entered last year and while not winning, was 'commended'. The following article appeared in Nightwatchman, Wisden's quarterly journal, last summer. It is reproduced here with permission of the publishers.

For those who are unfamiliar with cricket's history, Brian Statham, Cyril Washbrook and Roy Tattersall were Lancashire and England cricketing giants of the 1950s and 1960s. Those who remember our annual visits to Ecclestone Square or Cleland House to be interviewed for promotion, will understand, from the following article, that my preparations for the inevitable results started early in life.

ON NOT BEING PICKED

Ten years old, having already played for England so many times in front of my bedroom mirror, it could only be a matter of time before Old Glossop Juniors recognised my skills. Every evening, homework half-completed, it was but a short trek across the field behind our house to the precious turf of Manor Park Road ground. There, god-like and 'Mr' to us youngsters, stood our coach Graham Allsopp, already a veteran of the First Eleven at 19. No coaching qualifications or criminal record checks in those days. You just had to be good, like Mr Allsopp.

Junior nets meant running in with the grace of Brian Statham and driving, cutting or sweeping with the elegance of Cyril Washbrook. Briefly, those evenings, I was Brian Statham and Cyril Washbrook. All that stood in the way of following in their footsteps was being selected. There were perhaps more talented juniors, including Mr Allsopp's younger brother who always got picked but I had my own bat, gloves and Roy Tattersall's autograph. That, surely, counted for something. Then came the pre-match ritual of visiting Bennet Greensmith, the newsagent.

The Club team sheets appeared in his window, a short walk from home. Every week, there it was. Eleven players, two reserves and ... no mention of me. How could it be? 'Mr Greensmith, are you sure that's the right list?' 'Yes, lad, that's the right list.' 'Not last week's list, Mr Greensmith?' 'Not last week's list, lad,' and the walk home seemed twice as long.

There was still one finger-crossing chance. I didn't necessarily wish harm upon those selected but what if some mystery illness were to strike before the match? Then, hurrah, I would come to the rescue. It never happened but at last, my name did appear in the window. As Second Eleven scorer.

History can cruelly repeat itself. My parents moved house and I changed clubs. I was eventually chosen for Glossop Juniors, then occasionally for the Seconds and at last and just once, the Glossop First Eleven. It was Wakes Fortnight, the mill workers' holiday, and many regulars were away. The day before the match and excitedly anticipating the forthcoming pinnacle of my career, I was approached in the nets by the much revered Archie Cadman, whose father, Sam, had played for Derbyshire. 'A quiet word. It's for the good of the Club. I know you'll understand. Graham Allsopp has just joined us and I'd like you to stand down.'

Some said the experience would be character forming but I hadn't wanted my character formed. I had just wanted to play. Why couldn't Graham Allsopp have left it only one more week? Hardly hiding my disappointment, I did, of course, agree. For consolation, I returned home and retrieved Tatt's autograph from my desk drawer. He played for England 16 times and yet I read of the days when he, too, found it difficult to get selected. Time to think positively. There's always next season, isn't there Roy?

PETER QUINN

MY 'FRESH START'

Reading Peter Atkinson's recollections of Fresh Start led me to recall my own experience of it and the change it brought to my career path in the Service. When Bulletin 8 was published I was Head of Management Services (or Admin Officer as I care to remember the role title) at HMYOI Castington at Higher Executive Officer level. The reaction to Bulletin 8 among us Treasury grades was (naively) to request that we too should be amalgamated into the proposed new staff structure. Whilst it seemed fairly obvious that as Treasury grades were already modestly salaried and had no opportunity for overtime there was no need or benefit to the Service for us to be amalgamated into the new staff structure. The turning point for me personally was the Service stating that whilst they would not be including Treasury grades in the new structure we would nevertheless be granted, I quote, "Parity of esteem"

Whether that was designed to insult I will never know but it certainly had that effect on me to an extent that I began looking for other opportunities within the Service. Quite what opportunities might exist I had no idea but when recruitment to the North Region LIDS team was advertised I jumped at the chance to move on. The LIDS team was a multi-disciplinary team made up of 2 x Governor grade, 2 x Principal Officer, 2 x Senior Officer, 2 x HEO and 2 x EO and the team was mainly tasked with the installation of the LIDS computer system into prison establishments. Whilst I thorough enjoyed my time working with the team the impact on domestic life of being away from home Monday to Friday was not good with my better half having to look after two small boys all week and then doing all my laundry when I got home at the weekend.

At some point whilst on the LIDS team, and I seem to recall spending just over a year on the team, the Service announced, for all managers in the Prison Service (out with existing Governor and uniformed grades) a one-off competition to become Governor grades within the new Fresh Start structure. Without any great expectation and with no clear exit from the LIDS team I once again 'threw my hat in the ring.' My recollection of the competition is somewhat hazy though I do recall a written exercise, conducted simultaneously at various locations nationally, which acted as an initial sift of what at the time was believed to be 300 or so applicants. The second and final part of the selection process took part over three days at the staff college Wakefield and consisted of what I assumed to be 'Country House' type tasks/activities.

I was fortunate enough to be one of 12 or 13 successful applicants although one chose to remain in his SEO HOMMS post. Training at the staff college totalled, I think, about 5 weeks, and aimed at giving us some idea of the new world we were about to enter (adjudications, Duty Governor, R 43 and so on.)

My initial posting was to HMP Durham and whilst I would not have been surprised if there had been one or two comments or nods in my direction as the new "Queue jumper who has never walked a landing" I found the staff very supportive. The Principal Officer on the first 'sentenced' wing I worked on was very helpful and supportive with information and direction. I would meet him later as a G5 colleague at HMP Frankland! I can still remember later taking 'prisoner applications' on the remand wing and being quietly guided to a response by the S.O in attendance as I had little or no knowledge of some remand issues.

My next posting was to Frankland and was preceded at Durham by tales of difficulty and danger due to the types of prisoner housed there. Of course it turned out to be nothing of the sort and again I found the staff to be very much united in mutual support.

After Durham I was posted to HMP Acklington where I later served under Peter Atkinson. I found Peter to be a caring and thoughtful leader who would always try to carry the staff with him and I think it was Peter who reinforced in me the belief that we managers were nothing without our staff.

On the assumption that Peter is reading this I should perhaps take this opportunity to explain something that I think may have confused Peter.

Peter always chaired a meeting of Governor grades on Wednesday afternoons and invariably all the governor grades had assembled in the boardroom before Peter took the chair. I'm fairly sure that on at least one occasion Peter entered the room and wondered why the seats either side of me were vacant as they so often were. The reason for the vacant seats was that I had a reputation for surreptitiously carrying out a prank during the meeting on anyone who found themselves unable to avoid sitting next to me. Enough said.

One final posting saw me return to Frankland and then retirement.

So Fresh Start changed my working life.

I have many happy memories of my time as a governor and it's fair to say it was a time that was far more challenging but far more rewarding, not only financially, than the earlier years 'flying a desk' in Admin.

BOB RUSSELL

A WINTER WORLD OF WOKE

We received about 4 inches of snow yesterday and ...

8:00 am: I made a snowman.

8:10 - A feminist passed by and asked me why I didn't make a snow woman.

8:15 - So, I made a snow woman

8:17 - My feminist neighbour complained about the snow woman's voluptuous chest saying it objectified women everywhere.

8:20 - The gay couple living nearby got upset and moaned it could have been two snowmen instead.

8:22 - The transgender person asked why I didn't just make one snow person with detachable parts.

8:25 - The vegans at the end of the lane complained about the carrot nose, as veggies are food and are not used to decorate snow figures.

8:28 - I was being called a racist because the snow couple is white.

8:30 - I used food colouring to make one of the snow couple a different colour and be more racially inclusive.

8:37 - Then I was accused of using a black face on the snowperson.

8:39 - The Muslim gentleman across the road demanded the snow woman be completely covered.

8:40 - The police arrived saying someone had been offended.

8:42 - The feminist neighbour complained again that the broomstick of the snow woman needed to be removed because it depicted women in a domestic role.

8:43 - The Council Equality Officer arrived and threatened me with eviction.

8:45 - TV news crew from ABC showed up. I was asked if I know the difference between snowmen and snowwomen? I replied "Snowballs" and am now a sexist.

9:00 - I was on the news as a suspected terrorist, racist, homophobic, and sensibility offender, bent on stirring up trouble during difficult weather.

9:10 - I was asked if I have any accomplices. My children were taken by social services.

9:29 - Far left protesters offended by everything marched down the street demanding that I be arrested.

9:45 - The boss called and fired me because of the negative association with work that had been all over social media.

10:00 - I cry into my drink because all I wanted to do was build a snowman

Moral: There ain't no moral to this story. It is what this world has become because of a bunch of snowflakes.

PAUL LAXTON

A VISIT TO A RUSSIAN PRISON AUGUST 1992

I recently led a six week expedition to Arctic Russia, part of the Commonwealth of Independent States. The purpose of this expedition was to allow British young people, average age 17-18 from schools all over the UK, to experience six weeks of living together in the outdoors under canvas. Activities included haymaking, trekking, diving and a comprehensive programme of scientific research.

J J Ramswell, is a governor in charge and serves at H. Hindley, Lancashire.

Tempting as it is to tell you of the adventures of the expedition, this account is of my visit to a prison in the vicinity of our expedition area, the north-west corner of the White Sea known as Kandalaksha Bay, part of the Murmansk Region.

I asked about a visit to a local prison. I fully expected to be ignored, at best given a polite refusal. After all, we were in the heartland of Gulag country.

The expedition was over and we had virtually finished a briefing for the local press 'And what do you do for a living?' they wanted to know. I told them I was a civil servant but they weren't satisfied. 'I am a manager'. 'What do you manage?'. So I told them. 'I'm a manager in the English Prison Service'. Well, this seemed to grab their attention and I went on to tell them a little about the sort of work I did. How much of this ever got published I'll never know as the reports appeared in the papers after we had left.

One of the reporters seemed to be quite influential and, on the grounds 'nothing ventured, nothing gained', I asked about a visit to a local prison. I fully expected to be ignored, at best given a polite refusal. After all, we were in the heartland of Gulag country. The Solovetsky Island in the White Sea, a little south of us, was used as a Penal Island until only recently. Earlier I had visited the Monastery on this Island and saw at first hand the results of Stalin's mania. Thousands from this prison alone

had died of overwork and starvation whilst building the Belomorsk Canal linking the White Sea with the Baltic. Until very recently the whole area north of St Petersburg was difficult to access and Kandalaksha was a restricted area in terms of egress as well as access.

A few hours after our press briefing I received a note. Be at the Town Hall the next day at 2 o'clock, it said.

I tried to tidy myself up a bit. Dug down to the bottom of my rucksack and found a clean shirt, borrowed a tie and spat on my shoes and turned up promptly. I was met by an 'official' interpreter (for reasons which escape me I was not invited to bring my own) and the driver of a big black Lada, fairly new at that, in total contrast to the relics that cling to life as they are driven at breakneck speeds over roads riddled with potholes.

We sped out of town, at great speed, they seem to 'aim and fire' rather than drive. Policemen at a control point leapt to attention as our official car passed. An hour later and we drove through a small village before reaching the prison. We entered through an arch which opened onto a courtyard. In front was the entrance to the prison itself, to the left some low rather decrepit-looking buildings. We pulled up outside this building and were met by some rather stern-looking soldiers who were clearly expecting us. We were ushered into the Commandant's office. He was also in military uniform. We sat down after the handshakes. By now I wasn't sure whether this visit was such a good idea anyway. I was somewhat nervous.

But I needn't have worried. The Commandant turned out to be as friendly and reassuring as one's favourite uncle. It

"The Commandant turned out to be as friendly and reassuring as one's favourite uncle. It so happened that he was being visited by his 'Area Manager' from Murmansk."

so happened that he was being visited by his 'Area Manager' from Murmansk and he sat, looking very stern, by the Commandant's side. Later I found him to be equally friendly.

Tea was brought and I was invited to ask questions. I didn't take notes at the time, they may have become suspicious; but I did write up my visit in some detail later the same day.

Soon it became clear why I had been given the OK to make this visit; they had absolutely nothing to hide. There was no evidence (apart from which there hadn't been time) that any special arrangements had been made. I believe I saw everything at 'face value'. I visited the prison, there I saw the living accommodation, a workshop, exercise facilities and the hospital. I was allowed to chat with prisoners. They were

"A good gauge of any prison service is the level of medical services it offers. I was not disappointed."

well-fed, polite and communicative. Yes, the staff treated them well. Well, of course they would say that, but I spoke to a couple out of the presence of all but the interpreter and I believed them. Confirmation came when the Commandant was seen to be clearly approachable by the inmates. Staff too were confident in his presence. I later learnt he had previously been in charge of a children's home in Estonia.

I asked about security. There had only been one escape in the last two years. Previous to this, the prison had been closed for two years. I think that originally the prison had been a 'political prison' but I did not press enquiries about this. There is a degree of sensitivity about the past. Incidentally, our escaped prisoner had soon been recaptured.

Security was very much in line with

a closed low category prison. There was electronic locking at the gate complex. I understood that prisoners were 'shipped out' for bad behaviour including escape attempts and that alternatives to this particular prison were not good!

A good gauge of any prison service is the level of medical services it offers. I was not disappointed. A clean and functional hospital that was well staffed. Apparently staffing is not yet a problem, apart from which, when I asked about 'local trades union agreements' they did not understand the question! The dentist's drill reminded me of 30 years ago when we also used cord-driven drills. With a gross shortage of drugs, analgesics are rare and the patient in the chair was not comfortable!

I was told that the provision of medical care exceeds that in the community. Local hospitals are used for the occasional prisoner in-patient, including Murmansk Hospital for serious cases which is over 600 miles away.

What about the regime? Prisoners could work day shifts or night shifts. The day started at 0900 and ended at 1600 hours while the night shift started at 1600 hours and ended at 0100 hours. They do not change shifts. In return for work the prisoners received a salary. Some of their earnings went to family, some they could spend on a few basics and the rest was returned to the prison authorities for their upkeep. The bulk of the work was building; the whole prison had been rebuilt over the past two years by prisoners. The construction work did not bear close scrutiny, but then neither did any other building erected over the past 70 years whether it was in or out of prison.

No work, no salary. This is not because prisoners decline to work. They don't get the choice. If no work is available they simply do not get any pay, and consequently neither do their relatives. As

"In return for work the prisoners received a salary. Some of their earnings went to family, some they could spend on a few basics and the rest was returned to the prison authorities for their upkeep."

there is no state allowance when the 'bread-winner' is in prison, this can be tough.

Exercise and association is on offer. The prisoners are currently building their gymnasium. Religious Services? - well, again they didn't understand the question! Things are changing, though. On the day of my visit a group of Hymn singers from Finland arrived to entertain.

The Russians allow conjugal visits. I had read that this was the case. Three-day visits. Apparently there were few if any criteria to be satisfied before these visits were allowed. Other visits were allowed but

"These visiting arrangements seemed to be designed to cause the greatest amount of frustration but my Russian friends did not agree."

only up to six per year. These visiting arrangements seemed to be designed to cause the greatest amount of frustration but my Russian friends did not agree.

The prison houses 500 prisoners and serves the whole north-west of Russia. The prisoners are all male and are aged 18 and upwards. They were all clothed well - grey trousers and thick blue anorak-style jackets. I saw the four pm labour parade. It was not terribly military at all - very relaxed,

"After the visit we returned to the outside compound and to the mess where I was entertained to a fish soup - a local delicacy."

in fact. Though, like all buildings in Russia, there was a run-down, neglected appearance, there appeared to be order and basically the interiors were clean and reasonable well maintained.

I asked about staff. Are they all military? Yes, but are permanently assigned to the prison service where most will make their career. It is not well paid work and it is difficult to find sufficient recruits. I asked about staff reliability, staff morale and staff training. I was re-assured by positive responses.

In short, I was very impressed. Of course they have problems and in true Russian fashion, they weren't going to share these with me. On the face of it, I could have been in any western European low category prison.

The Commandant and his visiting boss were keen to learn about the British Prison Service. I told them all I could. 'We share many problems, that is why we both have grey hair' laughed the Commandant. His boss did not share the joke ■



From the Chair

Welcome to this spring edition of the RPGA newsletter edited by Paul Laxton in his usual professional way. Items always welcome from you.

I just reviewed my comments in the last edition reference strikes, NHS, airport delays etc. and things have not improved in fact it is much worse so goodness knows where we will be in the next 6 months. Hope it is not spoiling your retirement plans too much. I don't comment on the politics of it all.

It was disappointing that no members attended the AGM last October either in person or via ZOOM. We did have 5 apologies but it would help to have a few at this year's AGM to reassure the committee that we are on the right track

The AGM 2022 headlines are that we are financially stable, membership is holding steady and Roger Outram was re-elected as our IT committee member for another 4 years. The rules and constitution have been updated and following endorsement from the PGA approved at the AGM. See them on our website www.rpga.org.uk .

I am pleased to report that Kevin Billson has joined the RPGA committee and he has provided his biography in this newsletter. We would welcome another couple of volunteers for the committee, think about it and let's talk, give me a call 07788430702.

I have to report that I have been diagnosed with Parkinson's a couple of months ago and am on one tablet a day which minimises the symptoms. The consultant assures me it won't kill me and I intend to stay on as chairman subject to things stabilising. I am sure we have other members with it too.

Keep safe and have fun!

Graham Smith, RPGA Chairman

RPGA Spring Quiz 2023

- 1 Who wrote the opera “The Barber of Seville”?
- 2 Which city hosted the 2004 Olympics?
- 3 What name is given to the young of a Badger?
- 4 In the computer acronym URL what does the U represent?
- 5 Which fruit is used to make the drink Kirsch?
- 6 What is the capital of Latvia?
- 7 Which British Prime Minister took the title “Earl of Stockton” in 1984?
- 8 On a standard Monopoly board what is the cost of a station?
- 9 In which sport did Barry Sheene gain fame?
- 10 Which Royal family member lived at Highgrove House?
- 11 Which group released the album “Rumours”?
- 12 Which British overseas territory has the capital “Hamilton”?
- 13 Which stone in Ireland is kissed to receive the gift of “The Gab”?
- 14 Which film poster in 1979 had the tag-line “In space no one can hear you scream?”
- 15 What is the country previously known as Persia now known as?
- 16 Which herb is used to make pesto?
- 17 On which river is Niagara Falls?
- 18 Which country is the largest producer of cheese?
- 19 Which was Walt Disney's 2nd animated film?
- 20 What is used as the basis of Tequila?

ANSWERS ON THE BACK PAGE



DOVER BORSTAL

After the Christmas break, we returned and were advised we would soon be going on a second short attachment. I was allocated Dover Borstal with Howard, not my favourite person; but as we were to go straight from college to Dover, the one advantage was that he owned a car. He was also 'an expert on good food!' and an ex-marine who trained in Deal. For the whole dreary journey, he kept telling me about the intricacies of 'double de-clutching' and how good he was at it. As I did not drive it was all lost on me! This was interspersed with a description of all the 'posh' restaurants we could visit in the area.

Dover Borstal is sited on the Western Heights, the hill directly opposite Dover castle; in between is the valley which is Dover town and port. Dover Castle is Norman whereas the fortification which became the Borstal was constructed in the 17th and 18th centuries as a lookout and initially a defence against Napoleon and was always known as the Citadel. It is located high above the seaport on the white cliffs of Dover overlooking the English Channel. On a clear day, from the administrative offices overlooking the sea; one could read the clock in Calais. It was surrounded by a brick-lined dry moat, some thirty feet deep and thirty feet across. It included a vast system of tunnels, forts and underground dormitories all linked to protect the country from invasion and to protect the port of Dover. In all, it was reputedly reported to be the strongest and most elaborate fortification in the country. The army withdrew from the forts gradually from 1956-61. I explored the whole of the underground tunnels and forts in my early days in Dover; they were impressive, to say the least. Not long after that, the entrance was boarded up as it was decreed they were unsafe.

The Borstal element was a moated garrison with a drawbridge entrance and central parade square and 4 large dormitories below ground level carved out of the chalk: each capable of housing fifty lads. There were also two more modern dormitory units set above ground. The housemaster I was shadowing decided to take some leave within a couple of days of my arrival and left me temporarily in charge. The staff were very helpful, and I volunteered to play rugby with Borstal team who had an away match against a local team. On one occasion when I was at home in Whitstable but dashing back to play rugby with the Borstal team, Leonard joined and played as well. I liked all I had seen at Dover and as our mother was now living in Whitstable it was more than ideal, especially with Dover station being at the foot of the Western Heights.

Soon after our return to college, each tutor saw us individually to discuss their recommendation as to our first posting; that would then be conveyed to the personnel representative from Headquarters who

would also see us and make the final decision. My tutor told me of his recommendation; I cannot even remember what it was. I said I wished to go to Dover, he replied 'there are no vacancies!' I advised him I would still ask for it. When I met the headquarters representative from personnel, he advised what my tutor had recommended. I replied 'I know but I want to go to Dover, I have been on attachment there and I was made most welcome and was impressed with what they were striving to achieve.' He pondered for a minute, checked his notes, and said 'we do hold a lot of credence as to what your tutor recommends but we do have vacancies at Dover, so in your case, that is where you will be allocated.' I was overjoyed but it also reaffirmed my belief that 'the experts' do not always use the power and Influence as they should, and you have to stand up for yourself. In fact, two of us were posted to Dover.

I took up my post at Dover in April 1965 along with another colleague, also a Bob. We were made welcome by the Governor, David Gould, who explained the philosophy of the establishment and that the 'lads' were housed in 6 separate units, called houses and named after the Cinque Ports, and each held a slightly different type of lad. He told Bob he would be taking charge of Walmer House, which held the less sophisticated and better educated and I would take over Hythe, which held the more sophisticated, more heavily convicted and more violent group. The one advantage of Hythe was it was a new purpose-built unit on the far side of the parade ground and adjacent to the education centre and the chapel, and no longer below ground, whereas the original 'casemates' were all dug out of the chalk and underground and comprised 3 long chambers, 2 as dormitories and the centre one a staff office and recreational area for the inmates. The accommodation was all in dormitories and each unit held 50 lads. In the 'casemates' this was 25 per dormitory, but in Hythe, it was four dorms of 13 beds in each. Before my time at Dover, one of the Bonham-Carter's was on the staff as a housemaster. Apparently, he was pretty hopeless in the role and had been encouraged to look elsewhere for work. He declined and carried on. So Governor instructed that no more lads were to be allocated to his unit. So when the last of his current lads had been discharged, he finally got the message and resigned.

The Governor had attended a Senior Course in criminology at the Institute of Criminology in Cambridge, which had as one of its themes, the rising re-conviction rate of discharges from Borstal. This had led to a proposition from David that Dover should be directed by Cambridge as to its reformatory programmes and then evaluated as a research project. David believed that training at Borstals tended to have regimes which were a mixture of Home Office official policy modified a little by individual governors, whereas he believed there was a need for individualization of training. This fitted closely with the view of F. H. McClintock, Fellow of Churchill College, and lecturer in Criminology at Cambridge. David received support from him and that led eventually to funding from the Home Office.

Every establishment has what is called by prisoners, 'The Block' or 'Seg' which is a separate group of cells set aside for those undergoing punishment for acts of indiscipline. The Deputy Governor, Bill Fingland, was in sharp contrast to the Governor being a dour Scot, but he was a caring man, and they made a well-balanced pair. The lads gave him the nickname 'Down the Block Jock' as he was a stricter disciplinarian than the Governor.

All staff in those days were entitled to a quarter, they were free in theory but we all had some money docked from our salary, it was called 'rent in lieu.' Only the civil service could make something so mundane seem incomprehensible. The housing provided varied in size and quality according to rank. Technically I was entitled to a 3-bedroom house; fortunately, there was what was termed a 'matrons flat' available, only 50 meters from the Borstal gate, with 2 bedrooms, a sitting room, kitchen and bathroom. It also came with free coal and a free allowance of so many units of electricity. As there was an 'officers mess' just 50 meters away where I could obtain a cooked lunch, I was well set up. The town was $\frac{3}{4}$ of a mile away and down a very steep road, which was technically closed due to an unsafe tunnel, but as it was the shortest route I used it as the alternative road twisted and turned and was much longer. All a bit tiresome when dragging shopping back up, so the only other necessity was a car, but as I did not have a driving licence, that had to wait. I was very comfortable in my flat and never had to pay a fuel bill. That changed. Two years on a Canadian called Tom arrived having come to England to make his way in the English Prison Service, and after training was posted to Dover and was living in the officer's mess. We would meet up at lunch; I knew the mess conditions were not good, so after a while, I offered him the spare room in the flat, which he gratefully accepted. I was aware that Canada was a cold country in winter. However, I discovered I had suddenly started to receive electricity bills. I started to investigate this unwelcome development only to discover that Tom was leaving the electric heater in his bedroom on all day, even when he was on duty. We had a few words and adjustments were made accordingly.

The son of a member of staff repaired and sold damaged vehicles. He had a 600cc Renault 8 for sale, so I took a few driving lessons and then took my driving test in Folkestone, so had to be well versed in hill starts. Having passed I had to find the money, and then I owned my first car. Fortunately, traffic was lighter in those days, even in Dover, so there was plenty of opportunities to embed my new skills in driving.

The Governor was very much a self-educated man and very ambitious. He was also very brave as he had personally climbed halfway down the high chalk cliff to rescue a Borstal boy who was trying to escape but had been trapped on a ledge and was fearful of trying to climb down any further. (Technically he was only absconding as the Home Office had decided that young offenders only absconded. In reality, you could only abscond from an open prison, but this was applied to all young offender establishments. No doubt it made the Home Office figures look better.) He was posted there in 1959 from Latchmere House

Allocation Centre for Young Offenders as a Governor 3, but because the inmate population held at Dover had increased the Department proposed to upgrade the post, David had passed his Board for Grade 2 so asked to stay at Dover in the higher grade. This was granted.

The original agreement with Cambridge had stipulated that the after-care provision also needed to be part of the reform and research. The Prison Department took ages to decide whether it would back the initiative but removed the after-care element as it claimed it was too big a task to take on, but gave support and funding for the in-house reforms which placed all the emphasis on the staff at Dover.

Every new arrival had a dossier compiled from the information in his record and an initial interview. These were locally known as 'Joca's' taken from the file cover they were kept in. Every member of staff was involved and had an allocation of lads to interview and write up. All this was in addition to the existing monthly review by house staff which counted towards the four steps progress through the grades each lad had to go through to earn his discharge. Each step was formally recognized by a different colour tie, (blue, red, green, brown.) and verbal feedback had to be given each month to every lad by the housemaster in a private interview. Clearly, the two schemes overlapped to a degree and fed into each other. The whole scheme was taken seriously by the majority of staff. The Institute appointed a research assistant (an ex-Probation Officer called Tony Bottoms) to the establishment and he visited regularly both to advise and monitor the programme. I got to know him well which was to be very useful in later life, though I did not know that at the time.

BOB DUNCAN

Dover Borstal to be continued in the Autumn Edition, which will be part 6 of Bob's memoirs





FROM THE TREASURER

I do hope that this correspondence finds you all well and managing to cope with everything that life has to throw at us these days. Is it me, or does every day seem to bring more misery and bad news? My biggest sadness is, how as a nation we seem to be sliding down a very slippery slope towards complete intolerance of everything and anything that is different.

When I sat down at this time last year to write my piece for the Newsletter I was bemoaning the fact that my Smart Meter was racking up the cost of Gas and Electricity at an alarming rate, and dreading what the coming year might bring. I also bemoaned the fact that not only were prices going up at an unprecedented rate, but the package size of many items was also decreasing, thereby applying the juxtaposition that shrinkage was adding significantly to inflation.

Unfortunately my pessimistic outlook was, if anything, understated, as the reality is that prices for everything have continued to rocket ever upward, with only a few glimmers of hope, fuel prices having fallen back slightly. However, the latest “event” that we all now face is the shortage of fresh fruit and vegetables in the shops, leading to all the major supermarkets introducing rationing of these items to their customers, blaming the weather in Morocco of all places. Who would have believed it?

Of course if you are a user of Twitter then you will have seen that this latest situation has led to everyone, and anyone with an opinion to take to their keyboards and vent their anger at whoever they feel is to blame, and I have to say that I find it very disappointing that so many conversations on Twitter very quickly go downhill, almost as if it is a natural process to find the lowest common denominator as quickly as possible. I had to smile at the story of the woman who took to Twitter to complain that her local Aldi had refused to let her buy 100 cucumbers, as she had a legitimate use, making sandwiches for her cafe. That’s a lot of cucumber sandwiches!!!

Anyway, all this leads me to the fact that it is that time of the year when once more I sit down with the RPGA accounts and prepare them for audit by the Prison Governors Association’s auditors. I have literally just finished them, and they sit beside me ready to go into the post tomorrow. Therefore, as they are unaudited as yet, I am obviously not in a position to give you the accurate audited figures for the 2022

financial year. These will be published in full in the Autumn edition of the Newsletter, following the 2023 AGM.

However what I can share with you is that our finances continue to look in a healthy condition with a cash reserve in the bank of just over £15k. Income for the year, which is almost entirely from membership subscriptions is slightly up on 2021. The one exception to income being entirely from subscriptions, was a donation made to the RPGA by the family of John Childs, as a thank you for support to John, and to them, following his death in December 2021. Thank you to John's son Simon, and the family, for their generous donation.

As expected, our costs for the year have increased, particularly in the printing and distribution of the Newsletter. Since the lockdown the RPGA has been managed and operated remotely with committee members emailing each other, when we have a need for sharing information, and meeting on ZOOM, as and when required. Therefore our operating costs, including travel costs are minimal with only attendance at the AGM incurring any travel costs. As a consequence the Newsletter is now our biggest single cost, and forms the centrepiece of the RPGA as an association. With this in mind the committee are of the view that we should maintain the quality and content of this for as long as we possibly can, and that cost is not the most important issue.

Luckily, as income is holding up, and we have a good cash reserve, I feel confident in being able to say that at the AGM in October I will not need to put forward a proposal to increase subscription rates. I believe that we are in a position to be able to continue to absorb the cost of any reasonable increases in production and distribution of the Newsletter for the foreseeable future.

As always the message is that the Newsletter relies almost entirely on you, the membership for its content, so no apologies from me for once again pushing out the message, on behalf of Paul the editor, to not be shy in coming forward to share your stories, we really would all like to read them.

Best Wishes to you all

GRAHAM MUMBY-CROFT

Treasurer



The Strangeways Riot and My Small Part In It (Part Two of Three)

In the first part of my memories of the events at Strangeways in 1990 I shared with you some of the things that I had been involved in and how I had found the whole time to be a defining moment in my career in the prison service. As the situation went on for 26 days you will not be surprised to learn that I have enough memories for a further instalment beyond this one. You will recall how it was watching a documentary programme on the Strangeways Riot that sparked me, after all those years to put pen to paper, so to speak, and write down my experiences.

When watching the documentary on TV I was struck by the part where Pete Hancock was explaining about the negotiations that started with one of the ringleaders, and how this prisoner had been persuaded to come down from the roof to meet with Pete in an office, and that some Young Offenders would also surrender at the same time..

I remember at that time being called to the Hospital wing and briefed that this prisoner was going to be brought down through the wing and into the hospital wing to engage in negotiations. My instructions were to go up to the 4's landing on E Wing and to escort this prisoner down to the hospital, and it was emphasised to me that he was to remain unharmed throughout. At the time I thought this was rather strange, but as I made my way up to the 4's it became clear to me that word had got out to staff what was happening, and there really was quite a hostile atmosphere as I passed by groups of staff.

When I arrived on the 4's I found that the prisoner was having cold feet, as he suspected a trap, and I think that he too could feel the atmosphere amongst the staff. He was eventually convinced to come down by the fact that he knew that I was a Works PO at the prison, but because I did not work on the wings he was persuaded that he could trust me as being neutral.

On our way down to the hospital we had to descend the spiral staircase at the end of the wing. This stairway was encased in steel mesh, but during the course of the rioting had been pierced several times by scaffolding poles thrown from the top landing. One of these was still in place and had pierced the mesh at face height. I had ducked under it on my way up but on the way down the prisoner was in front of me, but looking all around expecting to be jumped at any time, and he did not see the scaffolding pole.

Just as he was about to walk into it I shouted to him, and he literally just skimmed it. I still wonder how I would have explained that one if he had actually walked into that pole, as it would have been quite a serious injury to his face, and it may have been hard to rely on, "he walked into a scaffold pole".

What had started off as a major disturbance quite quickly settled into a stand-off, and staff slowly but surely started to regain control over different areas of the prison, until eventually we controlled everywhere but the main prison wings. As part of this process there was a system put into place for carrying out a thorough search of all areas that had been under the control of prisoners, in order to ensure that we were not at risk of being compromised by prisoners being able to outflank us, and to determine that there were no booby-traps to catch out the unsuspecting. There was also the added element and indeed the more gruesome task, of ensuring that there were no dead bodies.

By this time, the Chapel, where the whole thing had started, had now been completely cleared of everything. This included the suspended ceiling, as prisoners had attacked some staff by entering the roof space above the suspended ceiling and then dropping heavy items through, in a serious effort to kill or maim staff. The suspended ceiling was removed using a fire hose to knock out the tiles, which being made of pulped paper ended up as nothing but a soggy mess on the floor. At the same time all the pews and benches were removed. These were all made of solid oak, fitted into cast iron end pieces that secured them to the floor. The end of each pew was chain-sawed through, close to the cast iron bracket, and the wood then thrown through a window to the ground below. The brackets were then smashed with a sledge hammer and also removed leaving the area completely clear.

The interesting thing was that after the incident was over, we never did find any those solid oak pews that had been thrown out of the windows.

There were three areas that we searched that I remember in particular, each for different reasons. Everyone knows Strangeways by its most distinctive feature, the tall tower in the centre with its ornate topping. Many believe this is a chimney, and in a way it is, but not for smoke. It is in fact the exhaust outlet for hot air from the plenum heating system. As with many Victorian Prisons the heating system worked on the principle of warm air being drawn up through ducts built into the inner walls, into each cell via a secure grille, across each cell and then up the outer walls, again in built in ducts into the roof space. In the roof space the air was drawn toward the centre hub where, as it is cooled and dropped down a shaft into an exhaust tunnel that led to the base of the flue, then up the flue to be exhausted.

The area of tunnels and ducts that existed as a basement level at Strangeways was known as The Undercroft, and was very extensive. These tunnels and ducts ranged from some, near the centre, large enough to easily drive a car through, and as you move further from the centre toward the end of the wing everything got progressively smaller until the smallest ducts were only a matter of 150mm square.

I was tasked to be part of a team detailed with searching the Undercroft Areas, and following a report that someone had been seen at the top of the exhaust flue, this included a climb to the top, up the stone spiral staircase built into the wall of the tower. The climb was very interesting as the inside of the tower is dark, and as I remember it, lit by a single light bulb that hung in the centre, but was not working anyway as the power had been cut. We had powerful torches but you had to be very careful with these to avoid blinding someone, as there was no balustrade to the stairs, and no handrail on the outside of the steps. The eerie thing was the constant flow of air upwards passed your face, which was even worse going down as it gave you the illusion of descending faster than you were.

At the top we found no conclusive evidence that prisoners had managed to venture this far, but we did get a magnificent view from above of the damage that had been caused to the prison, and of course a view over the whole of Manchester. This was also the first time that I got any real idea of the number of people in the surrounding streets, and down on the Bury New Road who were watching events. Including several hydraulic platforms with TV cameras perched on them looking down into the prison.

The search of the Undercroft was a long, hot and very exhausting process with each tunnel and duct having to be searched and declared free of prisoners. Because of the unknown risk with regard to prisoners being able to access these areas we were all dressed in full C&R equipment and were at team strength of 12. Some of the staff in the team were from other establishments and were not known to me, and one guy in particular stood out, because he was huge. I don't mean fat. I mean he was built like the proverbial brick s*!#house.

As the search progressed we took it in turns to crawl down the ducts, until they got too small. We had reached one that was just about big enough for my large friend, lets call him "Hulk", to crawl down. Hulk did not look happy, and the reality was he only just fitted into the duct, but give him his due, he was game. So off he went, and when he was about 2m in he let out an almighty scream, and literally flew out out of the duct, as if fired backward from a cannon. He was closely followed by a hissing, spitting, scratching and very angry ball of fur. He had of course come face to face with one of Strangeways many feral cats, and there is no doubt that on that occasion The Cat well and truly beat The Hulk.

Once we were able to declare that the Undercroft Area was free from prisoners we needed to ensure that it was made secure so that they could not gain access, and thereby save the job of repeatedly needing to search the areas. Securing the area was achieved through the simple use of Dannet, (better known as Razor) Wire. Several dozen coils of this were taken into the Undercroft area and laid in a manner that blocked off all possible access and once we left we felt that should any prisoner ever find their way into the Undercroft all we would need to do was recover his corpse, as no one could survive getting caught up in all that wire, and in the pitch black as well. I can personally vouch for just how lethal this stuff was. Carrying out the work I was wearing heavy gloves and protective equipment, and I still came out looking like I had gone ten rounds with one of the feral cats, with cuts and scratches all over, and bits of ripped clothing hanging off me, especially round my arms.

Some time into the incident it was decided that action needed to be taken regarding the kitchen. The catering staff had been in the process of preparing Sunday lunch for over 1600 prisoners when they had to abandon everything in order to safely withdraw, as prisoners swept through taking control of every area of the establishment. To my mind the kitchen was a shining example of proof that the events of that day were unplanned, totally uncoordinated and simply an act of mindless vandalism.

On gaining access to the kitchen prisoners had run rampage through it and had destroyed everything that they could. All the meat had been taken from the cold rooms and dumped onto the floor, as had all the dairy and fresh food. The meal that had been cooking was destroyed and spread all over the walls, floor and ceiling. The only evidence of food being taken for later use was dry goods. The prisoners had of course broken into cupboards and cabinets and taken items such as utensils, and knives. However there was little evidence that food had been taken. We would later discover that they had in fact been much more interested in breaking into the treatment rooms for the drugs, and the canteen and stealing sweets such as Mars Bars, and of course tobacco. Everything was about instant gratification and I certainly never saw any evidence of planning, either short or longer term.

However the current problem to be addressed was that all the food that had been spread around the kitchen, and left to rot, had by this stage started to go rancid, and the flies and rats were becoming a serious health issue. Therefore action needed to be taken to remove all the rotten food in sealed containers for disposal at an approved site. To add to the problem the work needed to be done under full C&R protection making what was far a from a simple job in the first place into a quite complex and drawn out process. All the perishable food in the kitchen was considered to be a health risk so everything was removed and destroyed.

When watching the TV documentary I had to smile when one prisoner told his story of how they had discovered the “prime cuts of beef that were obviously reserved for staff”, and how they had taken these onto the wings and enjoyed a barbecue. My experience was that very little food was taken from the kitchen and the prisoners who had first arrived there had simply run rampage and literally destroyed everything and anything that they could get their hands on. Sheer wanton destruction.

One of the “perks” of being the weekend PO on the Works was that you could bring your car in through the main gate and park inside the prison, in the spots usually reserved in the week for “Senior Management”. Not all of us used this facility, but my colleague Dennis Ellis was particularly keen, and when it was his weekend on duty he always used to park his pride and joy, a new Skoda 100E inside. Those of you who can remember this particular model of car may also recall that in the 80’s and 90’s Skoda cars had a terrible reputation, and indeed were the butt of many jokes. However they were cheap and were many peoples first “new car”. Dennis was the duty Works PO on the day the riot started, and on that morning he had made use of the facility to park inside the prison. Unfortunately for him, and of course the others who had parked inside the prison, when it all kicked off, and prisoners made it to the roof, they took great pleasure in using these parked cars for target practice with bricks, slates and whatever else came to hand. As a result, all the cars parked there took quite a pounding.

Sadly for Dennis he was unable to rescue his car, and it sat there for over three weeks. By the end it looked a very sorry sight indeed, with several slates sticking out of the roof and body panels, much of the glass broken, dents all over and covered in dust and debris from standing exposed for so long. When Dennis was able to have the vehicle recovered, of course many of the old Skoda jokes came to the fore again, the best one being that when his insurance assessor came to look at the car he decided that all the pieces of slate sticking out of it, and the damage caused, had in fact increased the value by a fiver. However, if I recall correctly the actual situation was that his insurance company refused to pay out on the grounds that he was not covered against Civil Disturbance, and the fact that he was parked on Crown Property anyway made his policy “Null and Void.” He was eventually reimbursed by HMPS. An infinitesimal element of the overall costs of the riots.

As well as the Green Goddesses the other major item of equipment that I was heavily involved with was the lorry mounted hydraulic platform that was hired in very early on in order to give access to roofs, windows and anywhere where it was safer to use than ladder access. I had the advantage that I had an operating qualification for a hydraulic platform and therefore if I was on duty and anyone needed high level access, then a call on the radio was all that was required for me to leap into action. I prided myself

on having become quite proficient at driving it, and on the fact that if I was asked to get the platform into a space, as long as the lorry would physically fit, then I would get it in there. Of course the platform's moment in the limelight came at the end of the riot when it was used to bring the remaining five prisoners down from the chapel roof after they surrendered. I was not the driver at that time, being otherwise occupied.

As time dragged on, and the number of prisoners still in the prison steadily decreased the balance shifted from the prisoners effectively controlling events, to the staff starting to take some control of what happened. As a result there were several forays by staff into various areas of the prison in order to test the response from prisoners, and to gather intelligence about levels of damage, where prisoners were living and congregating, and about what might be the best routes to use when the time came to retake the prison.

Usually for these reconnaissance mission missions there would be a diversionary event staged away from where the real activity was going to take place. I recall on one Saturday afternoon I was tasked with being the diversion for something that was going down involving a team entering the prison. Amongst the equipment that had been hired in, or in some cases simply requisitioned from contractors, was a machine called a Bobcat. This is actually a manufacturers name and the proper term is a "Skid Wheel Loader" but in essence it is a small 4-wheeled machine that you sit in and steer with two levers rather than a wheel, and with a hydraulic powered bucket on the front.

One Saturday afternoon I was called to take the "Bobcat" round to the exercise yard between A Wing and B Wing and using it I was to dig a big hole and to make it look as if I was working to some sort of master plan. The aim was to make as much noise as possible, and to draw as many inmates as possible to the windows to see what was going on. So, as per my instructions I then spent the next hour or so digging a large hole in the middle of the exercise yard, with a couple of other members of staff looking on and seeming to give me instructions on what to do, before a radio message told us that the entry team had finished their work and were safely out of the prison. This was my signal to add to the confusion by then filling in the hole, and driving off.

GRAHAM MUMBY-CROFT

Part Three of Graham's Strangeways memoir will appear in the Autumn edition of the Newsletter in which Graham describes the 'war of wits' with the prisoners as the riot dragged on, and the meticulous planning to retake the prison and get the last remaining prisoners down safely into custody. Finally he describes the 'endgame' and his own feelings when Britain's worst ever prison disturbance was over.

RPGA Spring Quiz 2023 Answers

1 Rossini 2 Athens 3 Cub 4 Uniform 5 Cherry 6 Riga 7 Harold Macmillan
8 £200 9 Motorcycle racing 10 King Charles 11 Fleetwood Mac 12 Bermuda
13 Blarney Stone 14 Alien 15 Iran 16 Basil 17 Niagra 18 America
19 Pinocchio 20 Cactus

CONTRIBUTIONS TO THE NEWSLETTER

If you wish to have a piece published in the Newsletter please E mail it to:

relaxpaul@btinternet.com

I would prefer items to be formatted in word, and typed in Calibri font size 12.
Thanks in anticipation.

PAUL LAXTON, editor

NOTICE OF THE PERRIE LECTURES 2023

The 2023 Perrie Lectures will be held at Prison Service College, Newbold Revel, from 10 AM on Wednesday 14 June 2023. Registration is from 09.15.

This year's subject is '**Culture at a Crossroads.**'

'For some years, the prison service has been working on its culture – a positive culture for staff, and a rehabilitative culture for those in prison.

Meanwhile, we have experienced high staff turnover, weathered a pandemic, and now HMPPS is working to build closer relationships between prison and probation services.

How has this influenced life in the criminal justice system, and where next for prison and probation culture?'