

The Retired Prison Governors Newsletter

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

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HMPPS IS NOT A HAPPY SHIP

I'm obliged to Brendan O'Friel for both the theme and much of the content of this editorial, as it was he who brought to my attention to the Operational Workforce Survey, commissioned by the House of Commons Justice Committee, and published on the 23rd of June this year. Around 25% of staff in bands 2-5 responded to the survey, so the findings will be pretty representative. For those so long retired that Bands 2-5 is a foreign language, they cover the uniformed grades that we knew originally as auxiliaries, through the ranks to PO, now known as CM for Custodial Manager.

The findings make grim reading, particularly on staff safety. Only a quarter of prison officers felt safe in Category A and B establishments, and as little as 19% in male Young Offender Institutions. A staggering 65% of surveyed staff in Y.O.I.'s felt strongly that their establishment was unsafe. Unsurprisingly staff felt at their safest in male and female open prisons. Staff felt twice as safe in female establishments where the highest security women were held, than their counterparts in the male high security estate. It will not come as a surprise that 43% of staff are planning to leave in the next 3-5 years. 75% of staff in bands 3-5 felt they were not valued, 81% complained of low morale, and 71% felt stressed several times a week. 84% of staff in bands 3-5 felt that there were not enough staff to provide purposeful activity. Staff were almost as negative about their own training and career development. I need hardly add that staff felt underpaid and that a retirement age of 68 was far too high.

Although Governor grades were not included in the survey, it is difficult to believe that findings would be vastly different except perhaps in relation to their personal safety. I think most of us will be very sad at these findings, and the devastation wrought on the service that we loved. There seems to have been no recovery from the slash and burn of the Grayling years that saw prison officer numbers decline by up to 30%, and experienced staff by far more as they raced to take the exit packages.

HMPPS has also suffered the public humiliation of a daring, but preventable escape from Wandsworth prison. Until the inquiry is complete we will not know whether this was an error on the day, or something that could have happened on any day because of poor compliance with procedures and inadequate supervision. Mercifully, there does not seem to be any real suggestion of staff corruption. We also do not know how this prisoner came to be on remand in a Category B local prison, rather than in the High Security estate given the nature of the charges he was facing. All this will come out in the wash in due course, but right now HMPPS is facing another yet another population crisis as numbers reach a record high of over 88,000 prisoners. I refer you to Andrea Albutt's Presidential address on P45.

PAUL LAXTON, editor

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The Committee is looking to co-opt volunteers on to the committee. This is to provide cover for existing post holders and also as an aid to succession planning. Interest from new members of the RPGA is as welcome as interest from long standing members.,

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.

A RUSSIAN VISITS AN ENGLISH PRISON

Reading in the spring edition of the Newsletter, John Ramwell's account of a visit to a Russian prison has prompted me to record the other side of the coin, a visit to an English prison by a Russian.

It was in the late 1980's, I was the governor of Littlehey Prison, which I had opened two or three years earlier and which was, at that time, the only prison in Cambridgeshire.

One morning I received a phone call from a Chief Inspector at Cambridge police HQ. He was after a favour. It seems that Cambridge Council (I think) were entertaining a delegation of Russians. The next day they were scheduled to visit a sugar beet factory but one of the delegation, a very senior Russian policeman, had said he did not want to do that but wanted to see something more in his line of work. Would I, the Chief Inspector asked, accommodate a visit, which I said I was happy to do.

So next morning the delegation arrived. In those days, stereotyping and cultural assumptions were not particularly frowned upon so I can say the Russian. I cannot member his name if indeed I ever knew it, so for the purposes of this piece I shall call him Ivan, who was exactly what I had expected, pudgy, coarse featured, grey complexioned, and wearing a very badly made suit. He was accompanied by the chief inspector and an interpreter, a small, very lively lady in her early sixties, immaculately turned out and, as I was soon to find out, assertive to the point of being aggressive.

We started with pleasantries in my office where I provided tea and biscuits. In those days there were grotesquely mean and detailed rules about such things. I could provide at public expense, tea and biscuits, but not a meal, to a foreign dignitary, but the cost was limited to some tiny and precise amount, let's say £0.42p per person, and public servants on duty could not be offered refreshment at public expense, so none for the chief inspector (you will be glad to hear I was never one for blind obedience to the rules). Who had engaged and paid the interpreter I was not clear, so whether she was a temporary public servant, and so to be tea-less, I never found out.

We then set out to tour the prison. Littlehey was designed and built by the public sector before the introduction of private design and construction. It was quite lavish even by the standards of the time. It has (or at least had, like the rest of us time may not have treated it kindly) attractive buildings, extensive grounds and large workshop and educational facilities. It was for medium and long term Cat C prisoners, with a large number of serious sex offenders and slightly more good honest criminals, (a category we had in those days, bank robbers, lorry hijackers, protection racket gangsters etc.) serving sentences of over 4 years, and some in the middle of much longer sentences including lifers. There were some tasty characters among them! During the unlock day there was free movement within the grounds and, so on a fine summers day as this was, large numbers were around and about the grounds.

I could see Ivan's immediate impression was one of bafflement. This was in the days of the real USSR, pre-Gorbachev. Ivan was a very senior policeman, in charge of a chunk of some bit of the USSR although I was never clear exactly what his role was and the degree to which prison management formed part of it. Things were not helped by the interpreter. She was a Russian-born lady, with Russian as her first language, who had lived in the UK for a long time. She was very obviously a stern critic of the regime in the USSR and was not going to miss her chance to tell a representative of that regime exactly what she thought about many of the things it did. Speaking no Russian I had no idea of what she was saying to Ivan, but it was obviously from his and her body language that her views were very critical and expressed with considerable force. Ivan looked very uncomfortable and was clearly wondering why this women was not in a gulag somewhere.

As an aside, the chief inspector told me that, as they were driving to the prison, Ivan had pointed to a largish farm house just off the road and asked what that was. When told it was a house where people, probably farmers, lived, he asked to go and look inside it. When it was explained that this was not possible, in the UK a policeman could not just turn up at a house and demand to look around, Ivan had seemed surprised at such a lack of proper authority for an officer of the state.

I had told Ivan he was going to be shown a prison for serious offenders, and this seemed to him to be some sort of resort. We visited the large gym and the extensive education facilities. He clearly thought we were either part of some huge deception designed to give him a particular view of the capitalist west, or we had simply taken leave of our senses. I was interested in John Ramwell's account when he described well resourced educational and rehabilitative facilities in the Russian prison he visited. It was very clear that Ivan would have had no truck with such nonsense.

As I have said it was a nice summer day and prisoners were walking around in T shirts, shorts etc. This displayed the many tattoos many of them carried. Ivan was fascinated by tattoos. I have learned since that tattoos play an important part in the Russian criminal subculture and what you have tattooed on your body indicates who and what you are in that world. So whenever we passed a prisoner with a tattoo that sparked Ivan's interest he would grab him, pull the tattooed limb close, point at it and say something in Russian. Clearly this would have been a perfectly normal way to behave in a Russian prison, but the average con in what was a fairly relaxed UK jail was not used to this and liable take offence. I was terrified that if he grabbed the wrong con he would end up on his back and I would end up in the middle of a very awkward diplomatic row. Surprisingly, or perhaps not surprisingly as it was obvious to all that the man was a foreigner with ways different from our own, the cons took it in good, if bewildered, part. And perhaps we were lucky and just didn't bump into the wrong con.

We toured the workshops. Being close the shoe manufacturing area around Northampton, Littlehey had been set up a with a large workshop full of very expensive and sophisticated equipment that heated and cooled and bent and glued various types of rubber and fake leather into slip-on shoes for issue to prisoners throughout the service. The shoes were pretty dreadful, prisoners hated them and they had an average working life measured in weeks. Ivan was very interested in this, and was greatly taken with the shoes. I asked one of the prisoners working there to estimate his shoe size and produce a pair that might fit him, which he duly did. Ivan was delighted, removed his own shoes immediately in the middle of the workshop with 30 interested prisoners looking on, put on the prison shoes, pronounced himself pleased with them, and completed the visit wearing them.

In the final chat in my office Ivan thanked me, via his persecutor, and said it had been very interesting. The Chief Inspector seem happy with the way things had gone. In due course they left. Ivan and I never got to discuss penal philosophy. Had we, I think it fair to say that it would not have been a meeting of minds.

I don't know what the rest of the party made of the sugar beet factory, perhaps less of a culture shock for them.

STEVE TWINN



SPEECH BY THE RT HON SIR JOHN MAJOR KG CH

PRISON REFORM TRUST

THE OLD BAILEY

TUESDAY, 9 MAY 2023

It's a great privilege to be here this evening – and in such historic surroundings. I'd like to thank Alistair King for making it possible – and Edward Garnier for encouraging me to enlarge publicly upon what I have said privately. Edward – apart from his legal and political career – is a Trustee of the Prison Reform Trust, now Chaired by James Timpson, whose actions match his family's long concern for prisoner welfare. The Trust itself, until recently under the guidance of Peter Dawson and now, Pia Sinha has worked for reform with the same persistence as those early campaigners – John Howard and Elizabeth Fry. I would like this evening, to add a few thoughts of my own.

One of the virtues of age is having the time to reflect on what you have left undone with – no doubt – some regrets along the way. It is such reflections that have brought us together this evening. I am conscious that, where I criticise, many of the problems are long standing and I, together with predecessors and successors, must each take our share of the blame. Let me begin with some reassuring news. Violent crime has been falling for nearly 30 years – although the extent of public interest when some horrific crime occurs makes this a deeply held secret for many people. Despite this long downward trend, legislators have been far more active in framing policy to punish crime than in action to minimise the cause of it. Many citizens who have faced – or fear facing – serious or violent crime strongly approve. They are clear that they – and their families – are safer if criminals are taken out of society. And, in one sense, they are entirely right. And yet this instinctive – very human – response ignores the obverse of punishment, which must be rehabilitation.

Stern sentences for violent crimes are necessary, and the instinct to protect the public is laudable – but we should beware that excessive zeal to be tough on crime does not lead us into unwise policy. We are told “prison works” and – to the extent it holds the worst of criminals in custody, it does – but I do not believe our justice system is well served if it also imprisons those who could better be punished by non-custodial sentences. Even to use the word “rehabilitation” is taken by many as code for being “soft” on crime; for being gullible; a “do-gooder” who cares more for the villain than the victim. I certainly do not intend it in that sense. Indeed – as I shall argue shortly – I believe such an interpretation ignores the public interest. When society sends people to prison we are, in reality, “shutting the door after the horse has bolted”: the crime has been committed. Retribution follows: but, upon release, it is surely in the wider interest of everyone that the crime is never repeated. That is the purpose of rehabilitation – together with turning around the life of the released prisoner. If we wish to live under a penal code of which we can be proud, then we must not only punish, but act to reform and re-educate offenders. I don't claim that is easy. But I do say that it is sound policy to reduce the risk of re-offending upon release.

We send people to prison – most of them, deservedly, but some not. Either which way, to prison they go. And, to many, that is the end of the matter. Justice is done and the victim has closure. But – future victims do not have closure if the prisoner re-offends. Prison is at its best when it rehabilitates, and, at its worst if – instead of providing a route out of crime, it provides an education into it.

PRISONERS AND EDUCATION

- It is instructive to consider the overwhelming characteristics of adults committed to prison:
- nearly two-thirds of them have used Class A drugs;
- many are illiterate, or innumerate, or both;
- almost half have no educational or vocational qualifications whatsoever;
- the intellectual assessment of many prisoners equates to that of a primary school pupil.

Two-fifths of those in prison were either expelled or excluded from school; three fifths were frequent truants; many were taken into care as a child; or observed violence in the home; or suffered abuse; sometimes even all of the above. All of this is a truly wretched preparation for adult life. We cannot be ignorant of the fact that failures in the early years of life are a serious driver towards crime and anti-social behaviour. There is education and training in prison, but its availability – and value – is mixed. After the (Sally) Coates review in 2016 improvements were expected. Yet, seven years on they have not materialised. There are reasons. Poor education contracts; lack of funding; unsavoury prison conditions; and – of course – the impact of Covid, have all stood in the way. As has over-crowding, and the resultant churn of prisoners being moved from prison to prison. If we wish to attack the causes of crime, better education – in and out of prison – is an essential component.

PRISON POPULATION

Forty years ago, when Willie Whitelaw was Home Secretary, I was a humble Parliament Private Secretary to the two Ministers of State, Tim Renton and Patrick Mayhew. They were shocked – Willie was apoplectic actually – when the prison population reached 40,000. Today, it is more than double that.

A range of reasons contribute:

- our national population has grown;
- indeterminate sentences boosted prisoner numbers;
- as has legislation increasing terms of imprisonment for many crimes; and
- a greater range of misdemeanours may lead to prison.

Comparisons with overseas do not reflect well on our penal policy. The UK has the highest imprisonment rates in Western Europe – and yet I find it hard to believe we British are uniquely criminal. So – were our predecessors unduly lenient in sentencing – or are we unduly harsh? And why – since our prisons are heavily over-crowded – have suspended sentences been declining?

In the year to June 2022, 43,000 people were sentenced to a term in prison. Of these, less than two in every five had committed a violent offence. Was prison the correct (or fair) sentence for all the 26,000 non-violent offenders? Some, perhaps ... but all? I am not sure that it was. The punishment of prison is to lose liberty, but the prisoner may lose much else besides: their job, their home, their relationships. That is a high cost – not only for the prisoner, but for society as a whole. The full costs may not be justified. We might be wise to be more selective.

When prisoners have served their punishment we don't wish them to be so alienated that – through spleen or necessity – they return to crime. That is in no one's interest – and especially not the public at large. Many prisoners – far too many, I believe – are sentenced to short-term imprisonment when other sentences would be preferable. In some cases, care and medical attention are called for rather than prison. Should the mentally ill be imprisoned, or should they be treated in secure wings of mental hospitals? Surely the latter. More radically, should non-violent mentally ill prisoners even be the responsibility of the justice department: would not the Department of Health be more appropriate? I appreciate such a move would not be welcomed by the Health Department, but the Government's responsibility is to provide the most effective and humane punishment. Imprisoning people who may be incapable of self-control is simply wrong. They require care, not incarceration. Of course, mentally ill prisoners who are dangerous or violent must be held securely to protect the public, but they, too, require care as well as custody.

Moreover, should low-level drug offenders – street dealers for example – who are highly likely to be of limited intelligence as well as being addicts themselves – be sentenced to prison, or given an appropriate community sentence? To be blunt – my suspicion is that many short sentences are pointless and that a non-custodial sentence would be more effective and, perhaps, more fair.

WOMEN

There are over 3,300 women in prison in England and Wales. More than half will serve less than six months. No doubt some are irredeemable, but I suspect most are not. Over two-thirds of women sent to prison have committed a non-violent crime: at present more are imprisoned for theft alone than for criminal damage, arson, drug offences, possession of weapons, robbery or sexual offences. I do question whether prison for many of these women does not cause more problems than it solves. Some have mental problems, or histories of trauma or abuse. Some 50 babies a year are born to women in prison, and reports suggest women in prison are seven times more likely to suffer still birth. That statistic alone should make us question present policy: whatever the mother may have done, the baby is innocent. I accept – male or female – we are all equal under the Law, but commonsense and practicality suggests we should look very carefully at community sentence alternatives, before sending vulnerable women offenders to prison.

THE PRISON ESTATE

Reports by HM Inspectors on the state of our prisons do not make for happy reading. Time after time, the conditions of prisons are found to be unsatisfactory. In some they are intolerable. Many of the old Victorian prisons – Wandsworth, Pentonville, Norwich, among others – were built to hold one prisoner per cell. 150 years later, these cells may hold two – or even three – prisoners, sleeping on bunk beds and essentially – forgive my putting it this way – living in a lavatory. To have inmates held in worse conditions than in Victorian times is an indictment of policy that is hard to ignore. Last year, 301 prisoners died in custody – 74 of them by their own hand. This rate of suicide is six times higher than among the general population. Many suicides are within the early days of custody. It is hard to escape the conclusion that the sheer shock of imprisonment – which, I reiterate, may be for a non-violent crime – is a principal cause of the desperation that leads to self-destruction. Self-harm in prison has risen by two and a half times over the last decade – most notably by women, but there is also a significant rise in the incidence of male self-harming. I would like to know – why? I would suggest that prisoners who kill or maim themselves are people in despair – not hardened villains.

Of course, the Government knows all this. In 2015, the Government announced a new prison reform programme to build nine new prisons – and committed £1.3 billion to create 10,000 new prison places by

2020. This well-meaning plan – let me put it kindly – faltered. The Public Accounts Committee reported that, despite these pledges, only 206 new places were delivered with 3,500 places still underway. Meanwhile, prisoners continued to be held in unsafe and over-crowded conditions. A revised plan followed in 2019 – also to create a further 10,000 places. This was updated in 2020 when £4 billion was allocated to deliver a total of not 10,000 but 18,000 places – in England and Wales – by the middle of this decade. The plans included the expansion of four prisons; the completion of building at two more; and refurbishment of the Prison Estate. Last month, a Parliamentary Question revealed that only 3,100 of that 18,000 target had yet been provided, and only one new prison had been opened in Wellingborough – although I believe a second, Fosse Way, is due to open this year. Progress? Yes. But 2025 is only two years away, and there is still a very long way to go to turn what was promised into reality.

Prison staffing is an allied and deep-rooted problem. The turnover of staff is a ruinous 15% a year – which delivers its own message about the job's lack of appeal, and the toll it must take. Despite efforts to attract people to become prison officers, there are over 700 fewer officers than there were 12 months ago, and front line staff are 11% below the staffing level of 2010. This does not suggest a modern prison service is anywhere near delivery.

REMAND

It is said that “Justice delayed is Justice denied”. And yet, the congestion in our Courts does delay justice. Consider the remand system. Remand may be used for accused people before their trial, or those convicted and awaiting a formal sentence for their offence. Within that bland reality lie many complexities, and some injustices. At present – partly as a result of Covid delays – the number of people on remand is at its highest level for decades: around 14,500. Typically, two-thirds are awaiting trial, while the remainder are awaiting sentence after conviction. Of those awaiting trial, one in two are subsequently imprisoned – even though accused of non-violent offences. Although individual circumstances will differ, I do not believe the case can be made that they should all be jailed. My belief is reinforced when I learn that – at their trials – one in ten remand prisoners are judged to be innocent of any crime, and a yet higher number are convicted – but sentenced only to a non-custodial sentence. The need for reform seems evident. Other factors reinforce that judgement. Nearly one-third of remand prisoners are held longer than six months before trial, and an unlucky 5% for over two years. That is over 700 remand prisoners held for over two years, before quite possibly being found to be innocent. They not only lose their liberty but their reputation and their income too, which may well also punish their families. This cannot be acceptable. Nor is it the fact that, last year over one-third of suicides in custody were by people on remand. I do not think we can be proud of that.

PAROLE BOARD

Parole for prisoners found guilty of serious and violent crimes is inevitably contentious. In practice, the Parole Board deals only with a minority of prisoners – less than 10% – and decisions “for” or “against” their release or transfer to an “open” prison can be complex and controversial. Thirty years ago, a House of Commons Select Committee advised that “release should be an entirely judicial decision – independent of the Executive”. Although this was initially resisted, Parliament did subsequently accept that principle and – in my view – rightly so. Prisoners also gained the right to present their case for parole to the Board. This ended years of parole decisions taken in secret as a result of evidence that was never challenged. That was an approach which honoured neither democracy nor equity, and was a blot on our system. The present more open system does ensure that decisions are taken after a proper presentation of arguments. This seems to have been effective. One quarter of those considered for release by the Parole Board were successful. Of those, only 1 in every 200 prisoners released re-offended within the next three years. This would suggest that the Parole Board is not a bunch of gullible “softies”.

Over the years, the Parole Board has evolved from its modest beginnings in the 1960s: with only a handful of Board members, no hearings to consider evidence, and with the final decision being taken by the Home Secretary. Today, the Board – nominally at least – is independent of Government, and has amassed years of experience and expertise, enabling a level playing field for decisions upon release, without the hype and pressure that would be bound to accompany political involvement. In the thousands of decisions to be made each year, there is no way that Ministers could possibly match the experience and knowledge of the 350 Parole Board Members. It is therefore surprising – and worrying – that, over the last year, recommendations by the Parole Board to transfer prisoners to an “open” prison have suddenly, and sharply, been rejected by the Justice Secretary. In 2021-22 – 94% of the Parole Board recommendations were accepted but, thereafter, that fell to 11%. It is hard to believe that does not result from an unannounced change of policy that is instituting a harsher regime.

VICTIMS AND PRISONERS’ BILL

The victims of crime have long needed more support than they receive, and there are elements of the proposed Victims and Prisoners’ Bill that are eminently sensible – and long overdue. As I understand it, the Bill was originally intended to cover the interest of victims only, and the prisoners’ element is a late addition. I believe this addition is a political misjudgement that may put much needed reforms at risk, and will come to that in a moment. I welcome the proposal to enshrine the Victims’ Code in Law, which should ensure that greater support is delivered. But, if theory is to become reality, funding will be needed for specialist support and, thus far, there is no evidence that this will be provided. I can only hope the Justice Secretary has secured agreement for funding from the Treasury, or the Bill will fail to meet its purpose.

I understand that the former Justice Secretary sought the power to veto decisions made by what is allegedly the independent Parole Board, to release prisoners convicted of serious crimes. The problem with this is that I do not see how (or why) the Justice Secretary would be able to reach a more just decision than the Parole Board. Any single Government Minister – however able or well-meaning – would be far more vulnerable to public campaigns and, under pressure, to make a harsher decision to appease them. This is a very slippery slope. I do not think that any politician should have that power, and I hope the new Justice Secretary will reconsider or – if he does not – that Parliament will deny it.

IPPs

There is one area of the penal code that is over-ripe for action to correct legitimate grievance. Until 2003, the only indeterminate sentence available to Judges was a life sentence, which was only for the gravest of offences. But, that year, the Government introduced a new concept: that of indeterminate imprisonment for public protection – so-called IPPs. It was intended for people considered “dangerous”, but whose offence did not justify a life sentence. It passes a minimum tariff but offers no stated maximum. Release could only be authorised by the Parole Board. It seems that this scheme went wrong from the outset. It was applied far more widely than expected (or intended), with lower level offenders receiving this harsh sentence. The number of IPP cases far outstripped expectations, and amendments to the legislation were approved by Parliament in 2008. But shortcomings remained, and the power to issue IPP sentences was abolished in 2012. But – and it is a BIG “but”: when it was abolished, no action was taken to determine a just – and definitive – sentence for the prisoners already serving for an indeterminate time. This was an extraordinary omission, which remains the case eleven years after abolition.

Nearly 3,000 offenders, still imprisoned – including those who have never been released and those recalled back to custody – were sentenced to a minimum term of imprisonment, but not a maximum. They are all serving sentences that have extended years beyond their minimum tariff and – without Ministerial action – may never end. This is soul destroying for prisoners and their families, and is

emphatically not justice. I believe that, without any further delay, justice should be served by Government agreement to the Justice Committee's recommendation of a re-sentencing exercise – backed by the establishment of an expert committee to guide on the practicalities – for everyone still serving an IPP sentence.

I was brought up to believe that we, in Britain had one of – if not the – most just and civilised penal codes in the world. Some of what I have learned in preparing this speech has truly shaken that belief. People who commit crimes have deservedly forfeited much but – in our country – not, I hope, the right to be treated fairly. There are many good causes that attract support, and hundreds of thousands of activists plead the case they most care about. But it is not so easy, or attractive, to plead for people who have committed crimes, and are responsible for their own misfortune. They do not so easily attract sympathy. Nor, very often, is it politically comfortable for “active” politicians to plead for convicted criminals. In the rough and tumble of politics, compassion and consideration can too easily be derided as “soft” or “weak” – terms which can define as well as defame. It has ever been thus.

In many ways, it is odd to plead for a more empathetic penal code on the site of Newgate – one of the most notorious prisons in our long national history. But views evolve. In pre-Christian days, prisons were not a place of lengthy incarceration but merely of safe custody until a more savage sentence than loss of liberty could be carried out. Those days, thankfully, have gone. In Saxon times, prison was occasionally used as a means of punishment and – by the 13th Century – to facilitate a sentence of life imprisonment imposed by the Church, which was unable to pass a harsher punishment. It was when offenders defaulted in payment of a forfeit to the Crown that prison became a convenient inducement to pay – and then became of wider use as a punishment. I have argued that its use needs to evolve further if it is to become a better instrument to deliver justice and reduce crime.

So, let me summarise my concerns:

- We over-use prison and under value alternative sentences;
- too many vulnerable people – including the mentally-ill – are jailed;
- education and rehabilitation in prison is inadequate;
- much of the Prison Estate is out of date and unsuitable;
- too many accused are remanded in prison pre-trial;
- the Justice Secretary should not remove powers from the Parole Board;
- IPP prisoners should be re-sentenced.

These practices, these problems have grown up over many governments.

In my layman's view, it is time they were addressed – and put right.

ENDS...

Sir John Major (1943 -) is the United Kingdom's oldest living former Prime Minister. Prior to becoming Prime Minister in 1990 after the fall of Margaret Thatcher, he had served as Chief Secretary to the Treasury, Foreign Secretary, and Chancellor of the Exchequer. The Conservative government led by him was defeated in the 1997 General Election . As well as leaving Downing Street, he also resigned as Conservative Party Leader. He was made a Knight of the Garter in 2005 by the Queen.

As plain Mr Major, he represented the constituency of Huntingdon from 1979 to 2001, when he left Parliament.



MY TAKE ON PSYCHOLOGY

I sort of fell out with a guy from my college days that I'd lost touch with. His sister, by chance, became a friend on Facebook and worked out the connection and put us in touch. The comms between us, though lengthy, was innocuous enough... until we disagreed on the issue of free speech which, to me, exposed him as a 'right winger.' We ended up by defending our own case and I could see we're likely to end our relationship ... until I wrote him the following...

"Your current email is quite psychologically biased which I find so interesting. Human behaviour, our interactions with each other, have always fascinated me. I would have taken up psychology at Uni had I had the opportunity but then fate decreed otherwise. So I've made an amateur study of the subject. One conclusion I believe I've come to is that Homo Sapiens are rarely fully responsible for their actions. Should they be successful or failures or, like the majority of us, somewhere in between, we are rarely masters of our own fate.

Whether you believe in the forces of nature or nurture, we're all born with a personality and the lucky ones amongst us will make the most of their lives. With an innate strength to cope and with the right opportunities, they'll succeed. This is definitely not the lot of many. The most important ability we all have is the one that stops us all from taking matters too seriously. Often those who can and do make the most of their time on earth have, unquestionably, been lucky. Conversely those who end up as basically sad have not. I've cared for people who've lost everything, their families, their self respect. And yet they've been able to bounce back. Whereas those who apparently have everything such as family and materials are never able, for reasons I find quite unfathomable, to be truly contented with their lot.

In my own case, I left school at 16. Here I was made to feel an abject failure. Not that I felt any resentment against the school per se. I accepted the situation and started my working life from a low base. I certainly did not feel sorry for myself. I simply saw no other way than to get on with it. This meant that anything good that came my way at any time throughout my life was not taken for granted and was appreciated. It's funny how often somethings, whether simple or complicated, start off badly then end up okay. The opposite can be the case too. How often I've started a task that appeared easy but then fell to pieces.

Our differences of opinions are healthy as long as they remain just this. So often it's human nature to hold grudges and families and friends find themselves on different sides of a divide that, unless patched up quickly, can become so wide that loud voices are not heard across it. (I like these words! I know I shouldn't say so. My mother used to have a saying; 'self praise is no recommendation.' I used to counter this by saying that if I didn't congratulate myself, no one else ever would. I'm seriously rambling so will close... but only for the time being."

JOHN RAMWELL



STRANGWAYS RIOT PART THREE -- GRAHAM MUMBY-CROFT

There was a period where the situation developed into a bit of a psychological war of wits. It had been suggested that one way to persuade prisoners to surrender was to play them messages from people they knew telling them to surrender. I am not sure that many relatives volunteered their services but there were several female members of staff who provided very acceptable substitutes for wives and mothers. As part of this the Works Department were asked to provide a sound system powerful enough to be broadcast throughout the prison. The solution was found in the staff club where we “liberated” the sound system that was used on the stage for when a band was playing.

We set this up at the main entrance to the wings at the end of F wing at the point at 2’s level where you come onto the Centre. Of course there was a huge barricade at this point, almost 10 feet deep and mostly formed of the huge scaffold that had been erected, and which was now in-filled with beds, cell doors and prisoners lockers and anything else that could be ripped out and used. From this point for several nights female voices would be beamed into the prison, targetting specific prisoners and telling them “Ronnie-its me-Mum, time to come out now son”.

We also discovered that if you turned the amplifier up to full volume, and the microphone input also up to maximum, and then put the microphone in front of the speaker, you achieved the most horrendous feedback howl, that was so awful and powerful it would strip paint. For several nights we pumped this sound into the prison with the idea of ensuring that the prisoners could not sleep. However we had to stop after the neighbours complained, as it seems the prisoners were not the only ones who could not sleep because of the awful racket. I believe that head office were also unhappy, as the press spread the story that we were engaged in psychological war against the prisoners.

Then of course there were the fireworks. Someone came up with the idea of throwing bangers into the grounds, and certain parts of the establishment during the night, in order to keep prisoners awake, and to play on their nerves. It was soon discovered that these were much easier to throw if you stuck them in an apple. So we ended up with the “night of the exploding apples”. Not a huge success, and for a while afterward everywhere smelled like Cider.

The barricade to the centre was the next problem to be tackled and again the Works Department were tasked with finding a solution. What we came up with was simple, but very effective. One of the fitters was tasked with producing a heavy steel plate with a ring attached that was then firmly bolted to the floor, and a hand-powered winch was attached to the ring. The cable from the winch was fitted with a heavy duty hook, and staff, protected by C&R lookouts, would identify a piece of the barricade, connect the hook to it and by sheer brute force that piece would be winched out and disposed of. Several large skips were brought in to deal with the debris being removed and over the course of a few days these were filled several times over as the barricade was slowly dismantled.

Of course as we worked to reduce the barricade so the risk of prisoners trying to escape into the grounds via that route increased, so staff had to be permanently stationed there as a precaution. This tied up a lot of staff resources, and so as the situation dragged on, and of course costs mounted, a decision was made to install CCTV to cover some of the external areas which would allow staffing levels to be reduced. This meant several hours of work for me with the hydraulic platform providing access for staff to fix brackets, cameras and cable to the perimeter wall to provide the required coverage.

When it got to the point that there were only 6 prisoners left inside the prison the decision was taken that enough was enough and that we would now take back the establishment, or what was left of it. If I recall correctly a G4, John Slater from Wakefield, was appointed as the C&R Commander and tasked with putting together an intervention plan for approval. By this time the work and involvement of the Works Department had been recognised as an essential part of any plan and therefore my line manager, Mick Bell, was part of the team working with John to plan the action to recover the prison.

The basis of the plan was quite simple in that it involved 12 C&R Teams entering the establishment at 5 different points directed to gain the highest and lowest points of access as quickly as possible. Once this had been achieved the teams were to move forward slowly sweeping through the prison, and with all possible routes of escape blocked off, in order to slowly push the remaining prisoners toward the chapel area. The plan included teams of Works staff being integrated into the C&R Teams to provide logistics such as scaffolding boards to bridge gaps in the landing decking, and heavy tools for cutting away debris and obstructions, and to gain access, by whatever means was needed to areas that were locked off, or barricaded.

The plan also included the use of all four Green Goddess Fire Appliances being used to direct water jets into various strategic locations making it difficult, and very unattractive for the prisoners to try to retreat to certain areas. As I mentioned before, during this phase it was said that we were pulling so much water from the mains that the Water Board could not keep up the supply to the surrounding area, and asked us to stop or at least drastically reduce the pumping.

The day started early, with a briefing at 06:00, meaning that I left my home at just after 5 in the morning. Following the main briefing my time was then taken up by ensuring that all the Works staff were prepared and that all tools and equipment were checked and double checked. At 09:00hrs we began the final assault to regain Strangeways.

It is said that battle plans only work until the first engagement with the enemy, but the plan on that day worked very well, up to a point. The problem was that once the assault began the remaining five prisoners, (one was captured, or surrendered, very quickly), took to the roofs, but in order that they could be seen by both their families and the press they chose to stay on the front side of A wing, and on the chapel roof. It was here that the work started in trying to contain them to that area and to prevent them from making their way back into the prison. The problem that we had was in those days HMPS did not have the expertise in dealing with incidents at height that they now have. Therefore the instructions to all staff was that we were not under any circumstances to venture out onto the roofs ourselves, in order to tackle any of the prisoners, as there was a real risk of staff, prisoners, or both, falling.

As it happened the prisoners chose to congregate on the chapel roof toward the front end where they could be seen and heard in the streets outside the prison. The decision was then made to attempt to keep them there, and in order to do so we set about opening up the roof behind where they were located, in order to prevent them from making their way back onto the main prison roofs, where it could have taken days to corner, and eventually capture them. I was therefore tasked with leading the team with instructions to break through the chapel roof and open up a gap for the full width of the wing, wide enough to prevent anyone from being able to leap across it. Whilst the Works Department at Strangeways was a large one, for the assault that day we had been strengthened by the addition of Trades Officers from several establishments across the North of England including Leeds, Liverpool and Risley. So with plenty of available staff, the first task was to build a scaffold platform to work from, and once we had this in place to start to dismantle the roof.

As I explained at the beginning of this piece, when I described the rooftop incident that had occurred the week before the major event, the chapel roof, and indeed all the roofs at the prison had sheets steel mesh secured on top of the rafters, and under the roofing felt and battens for security. This meant that

access to the roof from underneath was very restricted as the mesh was very similar to the reinforcing mesh used in concrete. This is a 2.4m by 1.2m sheet with 8mm bars welded in a 150mm square mesh and firmly fixed to the rafters. This meant that from the ridge to the eaves there were approximately 50, 8mm steel bars that needed to be cut using a disk cutter as we could not use a cutting torch due to the fire risk. As a result the work was slow and difficult, especially as we were working overhead and in some places laid on our backs.

However we soon achieved a breakthrough so that we get a view of what was going on, and of course this drew the attention of the prisoners. At one time it seemed that they had worked out what we were trying to do, and that they were either going to attack us, or move back toward the main prison. However, they did not, and apart from some gesturing towards us they remained fairly static, as I think they understood that there would be no direct attempt to fight, or capture them on a high roof.

Negotiations with the remaining prisoners started, and it soon became clear that the incident was over, all bar the shouting. With the benefit of hindsight, which is always a wonderful thing, I now realise that in all likelihood the remaining prisoners knew the end game was being played out, and they had already decided that they were going to surrender. They had chosen the location on the roof that was the most prominent, visible from all the surrounding streets, and of course in full view of the TV cameras. They also chose their time, almost bang-on 6 o'clock, timed to hit the main news bulletins.

In the meantime we just kept on ripping the roof off the chapel in order to create an impassable gap, and we carried on with this right up until it was announced over the network that they were surrendering, and going to come down. It was decided that, for many reasons, it was too dangerous and risky to bring the prisoners into the prison through the roof, and therefore the trusty hydraulic platform that had been the workhorse throughout had one last task to perform as it was used to bring the prisoners down to ground level.

Once all five prisoners were down, and in custody, we could stop our demolition of the chapel roof, but for many of us on the Works Department there was much work to be done in making areas safe as it was starting to get dark, and there was no power in the prison. Therefore we worked late into the night to ensure that all the staff who had been deployed were safely out of the buildings, and that warning signs and barriers were erected in areas where there was a real danger from missing landing decking, no handrails and of course potential booby traps.

Our work was halted for a short while during the evening when word went round that a visit from the Home Secretary was imminent. He duly arrived, and was gracious enough to make his way along the line of staff, hastily drawn up to meet him, shaking hands, having a brief chat, and breathing whisky fumes in our faces. However the best part of the evening was when we were eventually stood down for the evening. The Staff Club had prepared a large pot of curry on a turn up and help yourself basis, to be washed down with a beer, or two.

I have one very clear memory from that final day, specifically about what I did and felt as the day progressed. In the early afternoon, as we worked hard to open up that gap in the roof, for the first time in my life, I hit the brick wall that people talk about, in terms of mental and physical capacity.

From leaving home at 5 that morning, I had been running on almost pure adrenalin for about 8 hours when the moment came that I just had to stop, as I literally did not have any energy left. Not just physical energy, I suddenly found that I could not compute information, and no matter what I did I could not get my brain to work, even to make simple decisions. Luckily my manager, saw this and stood me down to rest, have a drink and something to eat, and about 30 minutes later I was back and ready to go again. However it was a feeling that I had never felt before, and thankfully have never felt again, but a very sobering moment.

The following day the work started to clear up the prison, and very early on the decision was made that whilst the prison was in a complete state of destruction, and would need major work simply to repair the damage, it would not close completely for prisoners and the new hospital wing, that had remained secure and undamaged throughout, would retain a small number of low category prisoners. It was also decided quite quickly that the opportunity would be taken to completely refurbish the establishment starting with what was the Remand Wings and spreading out across all the wings in a refurbishment programme that at 1990 prices would cost tens of millions of pounds.

Throughout the whole of the disturbance I harboured a secret that only a few people knew about. You will recall that at the beginning of my story I explained how I had come to be posted to Strangeways, and of the problems of buying a house and moving my family ready for the start of the school year.

The house that I bought needed work, including a new kitchen, that my wife had set her heart on. Together we had agreed on what we wanted, and having measured up we went off to a branch of MFI just up the road from Strangeways, and ordered and paid for the kitchen, complete with all the electrical appliances. The price was a good one, too good to miss, but I was not ready to install it, so with my managers agreement it was delivered by MFI into the Works Stores, to be held there until I could arrange leave, and fit it. It was delivered 2 days before the riot kicked off, and spent the whole time in the Works Stores, while mayhem reigned all around.

About 2 months after the end of the disturbance I managed to book a week's leave in order to fit the new kitchen. On the first day I hired a skip, and ripped out the old kitchen, hacked all the tiles off the walls and at the end of that day all that was left in the kitchen was the stopcock for the water, and the electrical outlets, everything else was gone.

Because Strangeways was to be effectively reduced to no more than 10 prisoners in the hospital wing, and the rest would become a building site, staff were deployed on detached duty far and wide, and all Strangeways staff were offered the opportunity of a posting of their choice, an offer that for many was too good to be missed. Unfortunately, my wife and family had never really settled to life in Manchester, and the worry and concern to them from my involvement with the disturbance did not help the situation. In addition, I had not been able to sell my house in Lincoln, and whilst HMPS were paying the interest on my bridging loan, I was unable to get insurance cover as I was considered a financial risk, so I felt very exposed financially.

I had heard that an additional PO (Works) position had been created at Lincoln, where I had moved from, and had made enquiries through the personnel department at Strangeways regarding a move back there.

As I stood in my, by now completely stripped kitchen in Bury, the phone rang, and my wife called to say that it was the prison. It was in fact personnel, calling to tell me that my posting to Lincoln was approved, when did I want to take up post? I now had a choice, install the new kitchen, and never get to use it, or cut my losses. I immediately contacted MFI and explained my situation to them, and they agreed that they would give me a full refund on any unopened boxes, and as I had not opened any of them, that was a full refund. Having returned this to them, I then purchased a cheap contract kitchen from B&Q and fitted this instead.

Two weeks later myself and my family returned to Lincoln, and moved back into the house that we had left, and never sold. My children returned to the school that they had left a year earlier, back into the same group of children they had grown up with, and they and my wife were happy. I too was happy, but tinged with a good deal of sorrow as I had enjoyed my time at Strangeways, and not just the disturbance. It was a great place to work, and I enjoyed every minute of the 15 months that I worked there, so there was also an element of regret on my behalf.

As it turned out we lived in the house in Bury for 365 days. I was however still in the same financial situation. As you will appreciate, the early 90's saw a real slump in the housing market, and as a consequence just as I had been unable to sell the house in Lincoln, I now found that I could not sell the house in Bury, and therefore clear the bridging loan. My move back to Lincoln was a paid move, but it took considerable explanation, and negotiation to sort out the financial package. The bank suggested that the simplest thing to do was to continue to pay the mortgage, and bridging loan, on the house in Bury, and sort out the finances when the house sold.

I did not manage to sell the house in Bury until late 1992, two and a half years after moving out of it, and by the time I did sell it I had moved on from Lincoln, having been promoted to Governor 5 as Head of Works at HMP Stocken. In order to sell the house I had been forced to reduce the price to £15,000 below what I had paid for it. So to be able to clear the mortgage on that house, and repay the capital of the Bridging Loan, in 1993 I needed to mortgage the house in Lincoln, that technically I owned, for almost £20,000 more than I had taken out as the original mortgage when I first bought it in 1983. Despite several promotions and posting that followed, I never again moved house, and indeed I still live in that very same house in Lincoln.

I did return briefly to Manchester, when I was called as a prosecution witness in the trial of four of the main perpetrators of the disturbance, and I have been since and visited the city. But from the day I walked out of Strangeways to return to Lincoln, I have never returned to the prison. However, it was a pleasure, and a privilege to work there and it is a prison that will always have a place in my heart, and in my memory.

It is funny how you hang on to certain keepsakes in life, often for no other reason than the fact that you are loathe to part from them. For my part, I have for years maintained a small file containing some memories of that period in 1990, when for 26 days everything just went mad. I have a copy of the plan, drawn up by John Slater, for retaking the prison. I have copies of the memo's that I submitted after the event, and a copy of the transcript of my debrief. I also have an A4 sized pencil drawing created by a member of staff at Strangeways, and given to me when I left. I sometimes just look at it, and smile at the memory of those days.

GRAHAM MUMBY-CROFT



The last five rioters come down in the cherry picker

YOUR LETTERS

Welcome to your letters page which sadly contains a lone, but very welcome, contribution from my good friend Bob Duncan, who I am sure many of you will remember from his many years of service as a Governing Governor. I do hope that you are following the serialisation of his autobiographical treatise in another place in this publication.

Here is Bob's contribution to Your Letters page....

The departure of any colleague is a sad occasion but also a chance to think back and remind oneself of what you remember of that character and what they contributed to the Service. Those on Harry Brett's email service will have noticed the passing now of almost all of the 'leaders' at the period when we served. The list includes Bill Brister, Brian Emes, Bill Driscoll, David Gould, Colin Honey, and a non-governor, Gareth Hadley. Those who were Governors were excellent in their leadership. Whatever each of us thought of them in their then more senior role they were dedicated and committed to achieving a Service dedicated to reformation and rehabilitation. I kept in touch when I could with many of them, and most were involved in their local community.

To give two examples of what they were trying to achieve: Brian Emes was determined to introduce higher grade industrial workshops and more trade training workshops. He was not totally unsuccessful as contracts were secured for laundry washing for many hospitals and a number of commercial laundry companies. This naturally required some financial investment to upgrade the technology in some cases. Also introduced was work on garment manufacture, some of this was at the mundane level: though at one point a prison was producing all the shirts for a well-known brand of shirt (unfortunately I cannot recall which firm.) Within a few years the department decided it no longer wished to go down that road. A prison that had a contract with a large London Hospital, and who were very pleased with the arrangement, was advised that they could not bid for a new contract!

In addition, all Borstals had a wide range of trade training workshops, which had to be undertaken if it was specified on the individuals 'Training Plan' if he wanted to obtain an early release rather than serve the full two years. The incentive disappeared when Headquarters decided they should all become 'mini prisons' and they were released automatically under the standard prison rules. The second example was David Ramsbottom who added at the end of every Inspection Report I have read advised Headquarters that more trade training should be introduced. The advice was ignored.

Why I do see this as an issue? Well, recently a prison's minister had a superb idea; he would introduce more trade training and industrial workshops which would revolutionise a downward rate in the reconviction rate of discharges from prison. Very good, but why wait 20 years when it could easily have been established if the commitment and finance had been forthcoming when Brian Emes was attempting to do exactly that. In hindsight the Prison Board made one slight error in the allocation of the overall Budget, it devoted quite a lot to the removal of tattoos, now you cannot be a top rate professional footballer unless you are covered in tattoos.

The saga does not end, when I first went to Elmley as member of the Independent Monitoring Board, it had two hair dressing salons training inmates in hairdressing, a bricklayers course which lasted 16 weeks and trained to a very high standard, and a forklift drivers course; all leading to offers of employment.

All Governing Governors now receive from Head Office a priority task list for the year and are judged on it in respect of their Annual Report. It did not include a question on training courses; instead, the requirement was for every inmate to be engaged in 'purposeful activity', during the working week. In large Local Prisons holding up to 2,000 inmates due to the population explosion, many are living 3 in a cell meant for 1. There was always going to be severe pressure on space especially as no additional workspaces were ever provided. As in the Bricklayers Shop, with space for bricks, mixers, and areas to construct example mini buildings, only 16 could be accommodated. As a more basic workshop undertaking mundane work sorting and packaging, probably 40 at least could be housed.

I have been reading a book written by two psychologists who were employed by a counselling firm and given a contract to offer psychotherapy to prisoners at a large local prison, not named but probably in London, for two years. They tell of the resistance they were originally shown by staff, including the Governor who would not allocate them an office so had to carry all their papers etc... around with them. It is quite moving and worth reading as I was convinced that what they claimed they achieved was true. I had a sad moment of regret because I was privileged to sit with the Psychologist Counsellor at Elmley. It was quite moving, but Elmley only had that service for one day a week and there always many who could not be seen.

I could not believe it when I read in the paper that there are 3,000 prisoners still serving indefinite sentences (IPPs) under the Act passed in 2005 but abolished in 2012 but not retrospectively. Their release has to be sanctioned by the Parole Board. That took me back to when that system worked well. When it was introduced, it was prison centred apart from life sentenced prisoners which were dealt with by Headquarters. The local panel consisted of the Governor, Chief Probation Officer, and an independent member, invariably the Chairman of the Board of Visitors as they were then. There was little cost except for travel expenses when claimed. I am mindful of the other great advantage was as all reports on the inmate had to be read in advance giving the Governor a chance to review the quality of the reports written by the staff. In addition, the entire panel had some knowledge of the establishment and some of the inmates. Then in about 1990, Headquarters decided it wanted to review the parole process. And ultimately Local Review Committees were abolished. They came to Gartree to observe a panel at work and then interviewed the entire panel individually. I advised them strongly of the value of Local Review Committees. Now they are all paid a fee (£400 a day currently when sitting, which adds to the cost of the system.) Whether it was good innovation is very questionable, as the Probation Service has received criticism in the media and some MPs for poor supervision of discharges and some parole decisions.

In my role as an IMB member an inmate requested to see a Board Member. He explained he had been returned from a Cat 'D' establishment to a Cat 'B' as a result of an adjudication. He admitted he was not a 'model prisoner', but the adjudication never took place. He was very concerned as he had a parole hearing due very soon at it would not help his chance of being successful. I advised him I would firstly

check his Record to find out about the 'Adjudication' and reason for transfer. He was correct; there were no recent adjudication details in his record. That meant the reason given for transfer was also fabricated! I phoned the open prison and spoke to the governor, who displayed little interest; I said to validate the reason for transfer the paperwork and the reporting officer need to here and clear the matter up. I doubted I would see any action and did not. I discussed this with the inmate; he thanked me and then asked if I would attend his parole hearing, just to listen as he suspected that it would turn negative, and he did not think he would be in a mood to take it all in. I replied I would approach the Chairman of the panel and ask if I might sit in to observe. On his next visit I put the request to the Chairman; he replied 'we do not have observers.' I pointed out that the inmate concerned had been returned on a false pretence and there was a big difference in being considered as a cat 'D' and a cat 'B', and he suspected his establishment report would now be negative.

The chairman pondered for a few minutes, then reluctantly said 'Yes', but on no account can you speak. I accepted that and thanked him. The panel met and it was clear they had not all read paperwork in advance. On the day of the hearing, I went to the room holding the parole reviews, the clerk came out and explained that the Board were holding reviews on other cases, and I was to wait outside until his case came up and she would then call me in. It was a fairly large room with a raised platform at one end where the panel sat and looked down on the inmate sat in a chair in the middle of the room looking both anxious and lonely. It was clear that they had not all read the paperwork. The panel continued their discussion for a few minutes then turned to the inmate and asked a few initial general questions; a member of the panel then addressed the chairman and decreed that the 'Home Circumstances Report,' was not in the pack. (We were accustomed to this happening regularly and this just delayed the hearing whilst chasing it up.)

The chairperson, despite having a Senior Probation on the panel glared at the clerk and instructed her to obtain the phone number and name of the relevant Chief Probation Officer. He then phoned and berated said Officer in a tone that was like a Headmaster verbally chastising a pupil. He then alerted the Panel to the fact that they commenced the hearing; the same panel would be required to conclude it. So, as we watched they all consulted their diaries and eventually agreed on a date 6 weeks hence.

I advised the clerk that as soon as the Home Circumstances Report arrived, I would like to see it. I read it and it was very positive. I then looked forward to the resumed hearing; conscious that the inmate had waited and would be paroled 6 weeks later than he could have been. To my surprise the Panel granted parole, I was clearly pleased with the outcome but more so the inmate, I was for a short period his 'hero.' One should not project how one panel operated to all panels, but I suspect there is an element of it in other panels. To my mind the review of the system was not an improvement.

What used to be known as 'Grisly Risley' when it was a Remand Centre, was much improved when it became a 'Cat C prison. Apparently, it has seriously slipped backwards according to a recent Inspection Report. 'The low-security jail', which is meant to focus on training and resettlement so inmates can find a job when released, was still not fulfilling its function, with many prisoners locked up for 22 hours a day. It was holding at the time of the Inspection, 1,032 prisoners of whom 404 were serving sentences for sexual

offences.

There were still no accredited programmes for sex offenders despite the Inspectorate having raised this seven years ago. In addition, it reported that preparation for releasing prisoners were often not good enough. Living conditions at the prison had deteriorated since the previous inspection with parts of the building 'now beyond repair'. It blamed Prison Service bureaucracy for hampering progress.

The Prison Service official response in its usual form stated as always 'We accept improvements must be made and we are already taking decisive action to address the serious issues raised in the report.' I think I have heard that one before!

Harry Brett is an ardent supporter of Manchester City Football Club, who won the European Champions League this summer. I made contact to congratulate him and asked if went to watch the match live in Istanbul. He said he was tempted; the cost would have been over £1,000. Linda said they could have a good holiday for that. He said his son went and said the behaviour of the local supporters after the game was dreadful and quite threatening. Harry and Linda are now going on a cruise to Canada as they find it a fascinating country. He will be back (icebergs avoided) to distribute the 'Newsletter'. What would we do without him?

Had a long chat with Mike Poselay, he is still keeping busy as defence barrister. He agrees that the courts are in a mess, I am sure he said there was a backlog of 60,000 cases. He attends cases referred to him wherever they are located. All defendants have to report to the Court by 10am; but legal personnel just do not turn up. Some offering the excuse that Fire Safety measures and evacuation procedures are unsafe! They are often held there to 4pm in case other legal personnel do turn up eventually and the judge or magistrates are prepared to extend the normal working hours. A sorry state of affairs all round.

Mike governed Bullwood Hall and took a great interest in how female prisoners were treated. He felt the automatic strip searching of woman was unacceptable, he undertook a survey and found that rarely was anything found, and when it was, it was usually an item that did pose of any kind of risk. As he had a brother who was a senior police officer, he also encouraged the police to follow similar procedures. He has also recently been to India, the Punjab area to discuss policy with them, and visit prisons there. He says in India female prisoners can have all their children up to 6 years with them. He observed that but did caution that on the whole the children were a bit wary of the officers.

I was sad to hear of the death David Roddan, he was the General Secretary of the PGA, and I was a member of the Committee. Later we both lived in March, Cambridgeshire. He was devastated when his wife passed away. Initially he appreciated the support offered to him, but gradually he became more insular and withdrew into himself and avoided contact. He was a user of the computers in the local library and as a regular borrower of books I was able to have a chat with him. He spent hours planning trips into various parts of Europe by train and then went exploring.

So, there you have it, stop grumbling and put a smile on your face (despite feeling pretty rotten) there are no wimps amongst us!

Had a chat with Dave Simons, who is keeping well and has avoided any more accidents! He informs me the Prison Department has resurrected the plan to build a large 'Local Prison' opposite Gartree. It was first mooted in 1988 when I was at Gartree. I opposed it; Gartree is built on former farmland and the road to it is more a country lane leading to the picturesque village of Foxton and the nearby famous Foxton canal locks. The road, apart from staff living off site and the villagers, it is mainly used by tourists wanting to visit Foxton and the locks. Gartree has been largely accepted by the local community, including the estate agent when I was inquiring about property, 'do not worry about the big sports centre as it has lights on at night as it is very busy.' I asked if she told everybody that, 'yes' she said, and was a bit taken aback when I revealed that I was the new Governor of Gartree Prison. The Department did not on that occasion carry out its plans after all. Such a prison would not enhance the beauty of the local area. He also mentions that Market Harborough was expanding fast as there is housing development going on at a pace.

BOB DUNCAN

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

Brendan O'Friel has Emailed me with the following information about the availability of his book 'Prison Governor's Journal' which was reviewed by me in the Spring 2021 Newsletter

"Prison Governor's Journal is increasingly available via public libraries for those wishing to read it. For example it is available in the public libraries in Manchester, Liverpool, Wakefield, Stafford and Newport, Isle of Wight."

RPGA WEBSITE

Just to remind members that the RPGA website, set up and lovingly maintained by Roger Outram, can be accessed by googling rpga.homestead.com. There is no password required. It contains significant archive material, and thanks to Brendan O'Friel, a number of newsletters from his time as editor. If anyone is in possession of hard copy old newsletters from prior to Autumn 2012, it would be good to borrow them and let Roger work his magic and add them to the digital archive. Roger's address can be found further up this page.

Thanks. Paul Laxton, editor.



FROM THE CHAIR

Hello and welcome to the autumn edition of the RPGA newsletter edited and produced by Paul Laxton, our thanks to Paul as ever. It does not seem that long since the Spring edition. Your contributions are always welcome.

I write this mid-September and you will want to know the weather up here on the Pennines is wet and windy, a typical day in these parts. Still the cricket was good this year [we was robbed at Old Trafford] and Huddersfield Town have hit the ground running.

We were in the middle of the Atlantic cruising to New York when Sky News reported a certain young man legged it from Wandsworth prison thus embarrassing the minister. I suspect the subsequent inquiry will find that staff didn't follow their own procedures. There was no mention of the Service's excellent delivery on escapes in recent years. No change there then!

I want to mention the "Civil Service Pensioners' Alliance" [CSPA] which the RPGA established a formal link with a few years ago. Harry Brett and Paul Laxton both hold area positions in the CSPA and this benefits the RPGA by keeping us informed on current issues and campaigns affecting retired civil servants. The CSPA autumn magazine covers issues such as the Triple-lock, which ensured our 10.1% rise in pensions this year, social care policy and the establishing of a "Pensioners' Manifesto" etc. Have a look at their website and think about joining.

The RPGA AGM is due to be held 9th October in tandem with the PGA Conference and I hope a few members may attend in person or on line. Our thanks to the PGA for facilitating our event again. I expect the current committee will as necessary stand again for election and we always welcome new committee members. If you would like to join us call me 07788 430702. A special formal welcome to the committee for Kevin Billson and a thank you to Ray London who has had to retire from the committee for health reasons after a number of years as RPGA secretary. Well done and best wishes Ray, Jan Thompson picks up the role.

Keep safe and have fun.

GRAHAM SMITH, RPGA CHAIRMAN



OVER THE WALL (PART ONE of THREE)

Sat astride the top of the inner fence of the Cambridgeshire top-security Whitemoor prison, was an inmate in the process of trying to escape. As unarmed staff arrived in an attempt to stop him, the inmate pointed a gun and shot one of the pursuing officers in the leg. That was the frightening reality of an incident that unfolded at ten minutes past eight one evening in September 1994. This more than illustrates that escapes by dangerous inmates from British prisons may be portrayed as dramatically thrilling for consumption by the general public but

within the Service they are no joke. To non-prison people there is something romantic about escapes from custody that are often glamorised by movies and TV dramas. Films portraying escapes are made out to be exhilarating and fun, but for those charged with keeping prisoners safely behind bars, there is nothing enchanting about 'one away.' The 1980 film about John McVicar's escape from Durham starring Roger Daltrey and Adam Faith; the 2008 *The Escapist* starring Brian Cox and Joseph Fiennes; the 2005 TV series *Ronnie Biggs – the Great Train Robbery* and the 2017 film *Maze* starring Tom Vaughan-Lawlor, are all good examples. There are many more of course but we don't need to go to the movies to appreciate the drama of escapes, given that a number of high-profile breakouts in our own British prison system over the years, have given us more than enough to chew on. It is worth remembering however that for every serious prison escape, there are dozens that have been successfully foiled by staff. Since the second World War there have been countless escapes, but I would argue that only around fourteen have been, what might be termed, notorious ones.

A good starting point from the 1950's is the escape by **Alfred George Hinds (Alfie)**. Highly intelligent and eventually becoming a member of Mensa, Alfie had a tough upbringing. When seven years old, he experienced the death of his father when his criminal Dad died in custody during the process of receiving 10 lashes from a 'cat-o-six tails' as a punishment. After being brought up in a children's home, he was into crime early. His first custodial sentence as a delinquent was served in a Borstal from which he escaped - that was not difficult in those days. Becoming a consummate and persistent safe breaker, it was not long before the law caught up with him and he was sentenced to 12 years imprisonment in 1953, aged 36. He had been accused of taking part in the celebrated robbery of the prestigious Maples furniture store on Tottenham Court road. It is probable that he was wrongly convicted for that crime and had actually taken no part in it.

For his alleged role in the Maples store robbery, he was first sent to Wandsworth prison and then onto **Nottingham**. Two years into his sentence, he planned an escape along with a burglar from Islington called Patrick 'Patsy' Fleming. It was July 1955 on a Saturday evening when the two men gained access to an old padlocked stoke hole (a shute down which coal was sent to a furnace) on their wing with a duplicate key. They lowered themselves down the shute, through a grate and out into the yard. Finding two doors stacked against a wall, they balanced one on top of the other and used that to scale the wall and drop 20 feet to the street below. By pre-arrangement they linked up with an accomplice driving a lorry loaded with loose oranges and after burying themselves in the fruit they managed to pass through a manned police road block and away to the Brixton area of London. Alfie lived a relatively normal life in Ireland until he was arrested by Scotland Yard's Flying Squad, having been at liberty for 248 days.

During his trial whilst on remand, he attended the High Court at the Old Bailey, escorted by two prison officers. His brother Albert who was not in prison, had managed to fix a hasp and staple to one of the Court lavatory doors, just before Alfie's attendance at Court. With some cunning subterfuge, Alfie managed to lock his two guards into that toilet with a padlock that Albert had hidden close by. He casually wandered through the court and out into Fleet Street and away. He was only free for five hours, before being seized in Bristol whilst trying to catch a plane to Dublin. Being regarded as a serious risk, he was designated a Class A escaper and placed in a prison uniform, which at the time had large white patches both on the trousers and upper tunic. Later in prison service history, white patches were replaced by yellow. He ended up at the then top security Chelmsford prison, but it wasn't long before he fashioned a further escape in June 1958 with a fellow prisoner called George Walkington. In his mid-30's, George was serving a seven-year sentence for what was known as 'jump-ups'. In the 1950's, goods were often transported on open flat bed lorries with low sides. Along with an accomplice, people like George would jump up onto the back of these wagons at traffic lights or as they rounded corners and throw off boxes of cigarettes for example, from the moving lorry before jumping off and retrieving the booty. Back in the prison during the more relaxed Sunday routine, the pair tricked their way onto the lower ground floor that gave access through the clothes store, onto a corridor and eventually out into an open yard. They had a duplicate key for a set of gates that led direct to the perimeter wall, but the key did not work. In the open yard there was a coal bunker and close by there were two wheelbarrows. They stacked them on top of each other and managed to reach the top of a wall. Alfie slipped at one point and broke his glasses. Despite this handicap the pair worked their way along the wall and eventually reached the main perimeter, that was covered in barbed wire. The wire was eventually negotiated with a 25-foot drop to the ground outside. The wall base was wider than the top and as Mr Hinds tried to clear the base, he tumbled and seriously damaged his leg. Limping badly, the pair made their way through an adjacent school at the back of the prison but were seen by a caretaker who phoned the jail. The alarm was raised, but it was too late in that they managed to rendezvous with an accomplice driving a Morris Minor that carried the pair to London. Mr Hinds then caught a boat to Belfast and evaded capture for two years before being caught in 1960 and sent to Parkhurst. Mr Walkington avoided arrest for 32 months but was eventually arrested at Wimbledon dog track.

Mr Hinds escape history was sensational at the time and he earned himself the sobriquet 'Houdini Hinds.' The papers covered his exploits in lurid detail with such headlines as 'Escaper Extraordinary.' A TV programme covered his Chelmsford escape in a 1980 drama. He was eventually released from Parkhurst in 1964, becoming somewhat of a celebrity where he adopted a career challenging many aspects of criminal law as well as trying to take the Prison Commissioners to court. He died in St Helier hospital Jersey in 1991 aged 73, and even earned a small obituary in The New York Times.

* * *

The first of the Great Train robbers to escape from prison was the handsome, bookmaker **Charles Frederick Wilson (Charlie)**. The sequence of events in the train robbers case was that they hi-jacked the train on the 8 August 1963, the gang were captured and then tried in April 1964 and Charlie escaped from **Winson Green in August 1964**. Charlie was born to a decent family in 1932 but decided to follow a criminal career with one crime following another. That was until he hit the big time with the huge theft of £2.6 million from the Glasgow to London mail train, as it travelled between Leighton Buzzard and Cheddington at three o'clock one Thursday morning. (£2.6 million in 1963 was equivalent to around £50 million today.) Charlie, along with most of the other 14 gang members, received 30 years and was sent to

Winson Green awaiting onward transmission to a more secure jail. For a suitable payment there was no shortage of fellow criminals who were more than willing to help the train robbers with their escape plans. Perhaps Charlie's escape might be described as the most disturbing. The authorities could never be absolutely certain how he got out, but the preferred theory was that a gang of three climbed over a low wall into the grounds of Birmingham prison. With a rope ladder they scaled a higher wall that gave access to the living units. With a set of the correct keys, they successfully made their way through the main prison to Charlie's cell block. Located on the ground floor, the gang opened the door to his cell with the correct key. They gave him a roll-neck sweater, some black trousers and a balaclava and the group left the way they came in. A night patrol Mr Nichols was coshed and left unconscious, bound and gagged with a head wound as the escapees departed locking the gates behind them. The balaclava for Charlie may have been a means of avoiding identity if the gang had been spotted by staff. By avoiding being identified, it would have been the devil's own job to find out who had actually escaped given that all the cell doors and windows were intact. Such escapes sound exciting, but for the prison staff involved, there is little excitement in being seriously assaulted. There would be no excitement either for the Governor having to pick up the pieces. It was never known from where the keys came, with one unproven theory that it was an 'inside job' involving a member of staff.

At the time of the train robbery, Charlie was 31 years of age. His escape took him to Canada and after four years on the run he was eventually captured in January 1968, living a normal family life with his wife and children in the small town of Riquard, 40 miles from Montreal. He was returned to the UK and remained in custody until 1978 having served a number of years in Durham. He became the last of the train robbers to be released after which he went to live in Marbella and reputedly got mixed up in the drugs trade. A hit man visited his villa one day and shot him next to his swimming pool. He was aged 81.

Ronnie Biggs was the next of the train robbers to make his escape eleven months after Charlie. This time it was **Wandsworth prison** and the escape was subsequently turned into a film. Ronnie was born in London in 1929 and joined the RAF from where he was dishonourably discharged for desertion. He lapsed into crime and during one term of imprisonment at Wandsworth, he met Bruce Reynolds, generally reputed to be the master mind behind the train robbery. After release and with a wife and three children, he tried to quit crime. But, in need of money for the deposit on a house, he happened to meet an old train driver who knew how to bring a train to a halt without raising an alarm. The plot for the Great Train Robbery began to materialise. Interestingly enough, the old train driver who allegedly inspired the robbery in the first place, was never identified.

With enough money to persuade others outside and inside prison to be part of the organised heist, his escape was well planned. At around three o'clock on a Thursday afternoon in **1965**, as ten inmates were out on one of the exercise yards, a stocking-masked head appeared over the wall and uncoiled a rope ladder. This was the signal for Ronnie's departure, but before he could get to the ladder, two other inmates who were not part of the plot beat him to it and scaled the wall first. As Ronnie made his way up the ladder followed by an accomplice, the remaining inmates on the yard forcibly held back the four officers overseeing exercise. One inmate called Brian Stone who was in on the plan, told his story many years later in 2014, confessing that he had prevented the officers from stopping the escape. For his troubles, he got 12 months added to his sentence. **Robert Anderson** aged 27 serving 12 years for robbing a post office and **Patrick Doyle** aged 23 serving 4 years for conspiracy to rob, were the uninvited ones to make it over the wall. **Eric Flower** aged 37 serving 12 years for armed robbery who had been part of the escape plan, was the fourth of the men to make it onto the top of a pre-planned furniture lorry parked

against the perimeter wall. All four dropped into the main compartment of the lorry and made it to a couple of waiting cars, one of which was the famous green Ford Zephyr. A shot gun, amongst other things, was found in the lorry and presumably would have been used if regarded as necessary. A prison officer's wife in one of the prison houses overlooking the prison wall, saw much of what went on and was a useful witness in describing events of the immediate getaway. The logbook that recorded Ronnie's movements whilst at Wandsworth went on sale for £1000 in 2022, logging the fatal days exercise period that started at 2.30 that afternoon, but obviously with a missing entry for his return. Michael Gale was the unfortunate Governor at the time, but the subsequent report attributed no blame to him and he went on to become a member of the Prisons Board.

One of Ronnie's fellow escapees was Eric Flower who went over the Wandsworth wall with him in 1965. He was subsequently arrested in Sydney and returned to the UK in 1966. It was suspected that Eric had been in close contact with Ronnie in Australia, but the police were never able to track the great train robber down before he left for Brazil. After 36 years at large and on account of failing health Ronnie returned to the UK and was formally re-arrested in May 2001. He was released from prison on compassionate grounds in August of 2009 and died four years later in a nursing home in December 2013 aged 84.

* * *

The case of **George Blake** in the 1960's is very well known. He was born in 1917 Rotterdam to a Jewish family with the surname Behar. For what the family thought was ease of integration into British wartime society, his mother changed the family name in 1944 to Blake, a year after George arrived in England from working with the Dutch resistance. By the time of his arrival in England he had already been partly radicalised to communism by his older cousin whilst living for a time in Egypt, although he kept this side of his sympathies mostly to himself. During the Korean war, he was captured by the North and spent three years in the early 1950's in captivity. It was during this period that he agreed with his captors to work for the KGB undercover, becoming a double agent. His work for the Soviets was eventually discovered and in 1961 he was given the longest sentence in British criminal history of 42 years. Any notion that Blake's story might be a romantic jape can be dispelled by the fact that over nine years as a double agent, it is alleged that his betrayals accounted for the death of at least 40 MI6 agents.

During his imprisonment for spying, he was regarded with some favour by the authorities at **Wormwood Scrubs** due to his co-operative behaviour. In **1966**, along with a fellow Irish inmate called Sean Bourke, he planned an inventive escape. Sean was released leaving behind a walkie talkie radio for George. A short time later on the agreed day, George slipped unseen through a broken landing window during an evening association period one Saturday night, shielded by a blanket casually draped over the landing rail. Staff and inmates were watching a film on the wing that evening. There were no bars on the Scrubs landing windows at that time. He dropped down into the grounds to await the arrival of a rope ladder over the wall. Sean was held up by a courting couple snogging under the wall at the point over which the ladder was meant to be thrown. As George was about to give up, the ladder suddenly appeared. Climbing down the other side, George accidentally fell the last few feet, broke his wrist and was momentarily knocked unconscious. Despite George's mishap, Sean drove his captive away in the get-away car, but bumped into a stationary vehicle. Not wanting to hang around for an explanation, he sped off to avoid capture. As can be imagined, there was a huge outcry that such a high-profile prisoner had managed to escape. Lying low for two months in the accommodation of his various London communist sympathisers, George's defection to the East was helped by a couple pretending to go on a continental holiday in a camper van.

With two of the 'campers' children and George concealed in a false compartment he made it to the border with East Germany where he gave himself up. The USSR were delighted to see him. He lived in the Soviet Union for 36 years and eventually becoming almost blind, died at the age of 98 in 2020. Such a serious escape resulted in Lord Mountbatten being called in to lead an Enquiry. His report was delivered to Parliament in December of 1966.

* * *

I'm going to stop using just the Christian name for the next batch of escapers because that almost matey tone is not appropriate for the much more unsavoury group that follows. I don't want to appear as though I have any sympathy for them by seeming to be over familiar. Roughly three years after Ronnie Biggs escaped from Wandsworth, an intimidating inmate, **John McVicar** 'had it away' from **Durham**. Despite a relatively normal upbringing by his parents who ran a newsagents shop, Mr McVicar was into criminality at a young age. As a 16-year-old in 1956, his thieving got him sent to a Remand Home from where he made his first escape. Following on from this was a two-year spell in Borstal, and on release he turned his attention to violent robberies. In 1964, a further armed robbery earned him a 15 year sentence which he was due to begin at Parkhurst. It's important to remember that up until 1993 when the security firm Group 4 took over the escort of inmates, prison officers escorted inmates in normal contracted service buses with civilian drivers. Along with 12 other prisoners who had been attending Winchester Assizes, at a pre-arranged signal, the handcuffed inmates attacked the seven uniformed escorting staff and the bus driver. Despite there being an armed police car following the bus, nine of them made it away into the countryside, including Mr McVicar. Only two got clean away, one of whom was Mr McVicar. He remained on the loose for four months and during that period, he continued with further armed robberies, eventually being apprehended. With his original 15 year sentence he got another eight on top, making 23 years in total. He was allocated to the famous 24 cell high-security E wing at Durham which at the time was regarded as escape proof and housed some of the most difficult prisoners in the system. The wing was in the middle of Durham prison, but in 1972 it changed its role to accommodate convicted females and became known as H wing.

Now aged 28 and having only been at Durham for eight months, Mr McVicar planned an escape along with two other prisoners, Walter 'Angel-face' Probyn and Joseph Martin. He had built up his strength from regular sessions in the prison gym and at the same time he began work on removing bricks from a shower wall that gave access to a ventilation shaft. The work of removing bricks was concealed by patching up the ever-enlarged hole with papier-mache in-fill. Once the hole in the shower room was big enough, the prolific offender Mr Probyn, who had assisted Mr McVicar from the start, made his way into the shaft, but found it led into a long empty old cell below with a barred window. More work was needed before any escape because of the need to cut some old bars with a hacksaw blade that Mr Probyn had secreted in his property from another prison. To make it to the ground from the disused room, a rope needed to be secured from an adjacent window that happened to be the library. When it was possible for a body to squeeze through the bars and then down into the yard, Mr McVicar decided to make his break on the **9 October 1966**. The three men chose a normal Tuesday evening. With the help of pre-formed knotted sheets and a makeshift grappling hook, they went down the shaft, into the old cell and squeezed through the cut bars of the window and lowered themselves into an open yard. One inmate from E wing who had hoped to be part of the escape team began screaming abuse at the three from his cell window and the staff began to appear in numbers in the grounds. The lifer Mr Martin was caught first on the ground whilst the other two climbed onto a series of roofs. As Mr McVicar managed to find himself high up near an accessible point to the outside wall, Mr Probyn was captured.

Any former plan had to be abandoned and Mr McVicar luckily made it to a roof area near the old Courthouse at the front of the prison. Given he was only 9 feet from the wall top, he was able to negotiate the barbed wire boundary wall with the help of a prison jumper, from where he then dropped down into the street below. It had been a bit of a chaotic escape, but over a couple of days he managed to get well away from Durham to a small village somewhere near Chester-Le-Street. He made telephone contact via a public red phone box, organising a couple of fellow criminals from London to drive north to a prearranged pick-up point. Good fortune saw him avoid capture by minutes. Dishevelled and exhausted, he just managed to rendezvous with his accomplices and was driven to London where he was able to evade capture for some time.

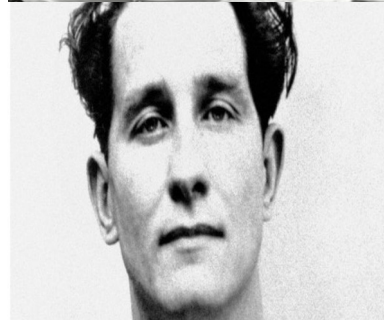
Although the movie “McVicar” with its slightly fanciful script, was released in 1980 about the Durham escape starring Roger Daltrey, Mr McVicar himself seemed not to be a particularly endearing character. His mother described him as ‘difficult’ and other comments about him suggested he mostly held humanity in contempt. He apparently was not a very pleasant individual and it would be misguided to see him as any kind of hero.

He was paroled early in 1978. During his years in prison, he took advantage of advanced educational opportunities and branched out into journalism when released, having gained a range of academic qualifications. Much to Mr McVicar senior’s disappointment, his son Russell followed his father off the rails in a major way and ended up with a lengthy sentence for amongst other things, stealing an £800,000 Picasso from a gallery. In his later years, Mr McVicar led a lonely life. With two failed marriages and estrangement from his only son, he ended up living on his own in a caravan with his dog, behind a pub in Essex. He died of a heart attack in 2022, two years after George Blake.

.PETER ATKINSON, former Governor

Below are pictures of some of the escapologists whose exploits were detailed by Peter in his piece. Anti-Clockwise from top left to top right:

Alfred Hinds, George Blake (with Kim Philby in the USSR), Ronnie Biggs and John McVicar





DAVID RODDAN: AN AFFECTIONATE TRIBUTE

I first met Dave when he arrived at Whitemoor in 1991 as a Governor 5. He struck me as somehow younger than his years and self effacing....a nice bloke. As time went by I came to see that there was much more than met the eye. Sadly that was a little too late to change my nickname for himso I continued to call him 'Rodent' for as long as I knew him. If he behaved himself it was sometimes elaborated to 'Rodentis Maximus'. Dave was very keen on the PGA and rather stunned when I suggested he should stand as General Secretary....he just didn't think he could pull it off. In the event he was encouraged by his partner Denise to go for it.

Denise was his long term girlfriend with whom he bought a Victorian semi in March [the town]after they married. Given that I lived fairly close with mine own partner we enjoyed the odd visit/dinner/bottle of wine. On the first occasion our Jack Russell went doo lally in the yet to be tended Victorian Garden, Dave panicked a bit since the Victoran pond water was so green he was afraid ' Jemima ' would fall in and drown. As he spoke Jemima launched herself into the air and splashed down....swam a circuit...and galloped straight for us now a bright [s]lime green.....grrrrrr...He and Denise were very polite.

Dave was a great General Secretary. I came to admire him for his ability to relate to everybody... up to and including the Director and Home Secretary. His absolutely unassailable integrity and total lack of prejudice became evident. I well remember a Senior Governor making jokes about me in an after dinner speech he was invited to make to the PGA. Said jokes were a leetle beet ...sexist. I expected nothing less from this particular person, he was too stupid to realise that the jokes would not be well received. The Rodent was incensed. He stood up and strode out of the dinner. The 'speaker' was so worried he sought out Dave and found him with me assuring him that I was OK. Senior idiot commenced to grovel to which Dave replied " I don't have to listen to your shit".

I lost contact with Dave after he left his role as General Secretary. This followed the death of Denise at only 51. I am not sure he ever recovered from her loss. I remain sorry that I did not get to see him again. It is days like this that make me wish that he and Denise could meet again to make up for lost time. Fare well my old friend. Thank you for your service to your colleagues, you will be missed. **David Roddan R.I P.**

LYNNE BOWLES



Editors Note: The picture of David Roddan in the top left hand corner of this page was taken in 1996 when he was General Secretary of the Prison Governors Association.

RPGA Autumn Quiz 2023

- 1) By what other name do we know the Somers Islands?
- 2) C is the symbol for what chemical element?
- 3) Cab is a shortening for which word?
- 4) Californian and Stellers are types of what?
- 5) Can you name a hydrocarbon fuel?
- 6) Cecil Beaton won Oscars for his designs in which 2 films?
- 7) Charlie Hungerford was the father in law to which enforcer?
- 8) Chemically pure gold contains how many carats?
- 9) Chukkas are playing periods for which sport?
- 10) Cleopatra supposedly bathed in the milk of which animal?
- 11) Cliff Richard and Marty Robbins had different songs with the same title?
- 12) Cold meat and cold potatoes can produce which dish?
- 13) Concord is the capital of which USA state?
- 14) By what nickname was the criminal Albert De Salvo better known?
- 15) Called a trailer in America what is it better known as in the UK?
- 16) Called a hood in the USA what do we call that part of a car?
- 17) Called a thumb tack in the USA what do we call it in the UK?
- 18) Carol Hersey was the most seen person on British TV, where was she seen?
- 19) Chartres cathedral in France is famous for what feature?
- 20) Complete Lord Acton's phrase "All power tends to corrupt___?"

GRAHAM SMITH

(Answers on the back page)



DOVER BORSTAL (continued...)

Each living unit had a staff of a housemaster (assistant governor 2) 4 officers and a matron. Mine was Miss Graham, a real Scot who liked a dram or two, or some nights a bit more and you knew to stay clear unless something was urgent. She looked after clothing and first aid. Plus there was a night patrol. This was to cover 7 days a week, 52 weeks of the year. Officers in Borstals did not wear uniform but were in civvies, which did a lot to emphasize that this was a training and

rehabilitation sentence.

Some idiot in Government decided in 1982 that officers should be in uniform, as they were changing the whole ethos and creating 'mini prisons' for the under 21-year-olds, and the that they would have 'determinate sentences' and not Borstal sentences which were open-ended and meant the trainees had to earn their release by how they applied themselves to both work and education and their perspective on criminal behaviour. What the Gladstone Committee of 1895 had firmly laid in statute and enshrined was first that there should be individualization of penal treatment and that secondly there should be special reformatory prisons for young offenders which were put into effect in 1908 when the Chatham Prison was converted to hold only young offenders and was named after the village where it was situated, Borstal. From that, a whole system of establishments evolved with their own Rules and Regulations, aptly known as the Borstal System. What had been firmly established with such reforming insight and zeal was to be lost forever by rather a bland and uninspiring system that did little for the staff or those for whom they had responsibility. This has deteriorated even further as most young offenders now serve their sentences in adult prisons and are a major element in the increase in violence.

The housemasters worked a 12-day fortnight with alternate weekends off. The working hours were in theory morning and evening with at least 2 afternoons off duty, but in reality, one rarely had an afternoon off, as outside personnel visiting usually wanted to see you in the afternoon, and workload was such that you went in any way to keep on top of it.



Administration Building in Winter

I was lucky in that I had one of the best officers at Dover (Brian) and I learned a lot from him. Another officer, Freddie was nicknamed 'Fearless Fred', this came about as officers had every so often stand in as night patrols, and as explained the house units were dormitories so the inmates had freedom of movement to wander around. One night in Hastings house a group of lads attempted to obtain the keys from Fred to prevent that he took his keys off and threw them out of the unit so that he remained locked in the unit, and their attempt to escape was foiled. When available the Orderly Officer came to the unit retrieved the keys and made sure Fred was OK.

All lads had to take part in sporting activities at weekends, and this included the unit football teams who turned out in full kit to play in inter-unit games. They all paraded ready for action on the Parade Square for a roll check before those going to the Sports Field were marched there as it was outside of the establishment. Freddy was not the best organized and apparently had been the last to assemble his unit on several occasions. One particular weekend the Governor was personally on duty, I suspect the Orderly Officer in charge of the parade advised the Governor that Hythe House were regularly late when Fred was in charge. The Governor 'had words,' Fred argued about lack of football boots, the Governor became irritated and sent Fred off duty and told him he was suspended. When I returned to work on Monday there was no Fred, and no one seemed clear as to what the position was. So I had to enquire of the Governor where Fred stood. The Governor advised that he just wanted to make the point very clear, and I could see him and advise he could now return. So I had to go to his house and advise him of the situation and escort him back to the establishment, he did seem most relieved. For the next few months at least, there no problems on Fred's weekend on duty, re:boots, and Hythe were always the first on parade.

Alan was a bit of a makeweight but was a pleasant man, and he was in charge of the outside party of lads who went to Dover Castle every weekday to maintain all the castle grounds. I must say they made a good job of it, but I doubt that few of the residents of Dover knew who was keeping the grounds so tidy. Big George was big in stature and believed he was 'the bee's knees' in all he undertook until one night when he was undertaking night patrol duties in the old Hastings House. Once they were all in bed and seemingly asleep, he decided to settle down to some paperwork. He became so engrossed that he failed to notice that some of the lads were finishing off cutting through the bars in the far dormitory. Worse than that he did not realize 21 lads had absconded until he undertook the statutory roll call before handing over to the day staff in the morning. It was the 'largest escape ever from the establishment.' George had to eat humble pie and did not seem so large for long after the event.

Mentioned earlier was the fact that lads managed to 'escape.' How they managed to overcome the 30-foot dry moat, especially as we tried to convince them a fierce badger was living down there, I still do not know. The training workshops (painting and decorating, woodwork, plastering and light engineering) were in a separate gated compound reached by an internal bridge but was not encompassed by the moat, just a steep decline to the valley. One morning in work time the patrol officer spotted that the security fence had been cut, he saw a lad loitering in the area and just assumed he had been let out of the workshop for some fresh air. The officer shouted to him to run to the Orderly Office and advise there had been an escape and for them to do an immediate roll check, while I see if I can any trace of who has escaped. The lad did as instructed. The roll call resulted in identifying that no one was missing, which was a bit puzzling!

As the lad who was sent to raise the alarm was from my house that evening, once the majority had gone to evening education or the gym, and the rest were in the recreation room, I had him brought discretely to my office and explained that I wanted to know a bit more about the incident that morning, thinking he must have seen more of what had occurred.

He looked at me a bit startled, I said I would go out on a limb and guarantee that no disciplinary action would be taken whatever the facts, but there was a need to know what occurred. After a little hesitation, he said, 'it was me, I cut the fence.' I said 'you had opportunity why did you not take it?' He replied 'I had not realized it was Officer X on patrol; he is a good officer and treats us well, so I did not want to get him in trouble.' It was a sobering reminder that treating one's charges decently does not go unnoticed.

In the Summer the Borstal held a Sports Day where the 6 houses competed against each other. This was held on a Saturday and every lad attended the sports field (outside the establishment with no security) and their parents and relations were invited to attend and bring a picnic to have with their lad. One of the oddities of Borstal life was that though lads tried to abscond at various times in the year, In the 4 years I was there not a single lad attempted to abscond on sports day. It was almost an unwritten code that you did not jeopardize a privilege and possibly spoil it for others.

One of the events on sports day was a cross country race over the hills of Dover and back on a circular route. As my house wished to perform well on sports day, I allowed those competing to be in the cross-country team to undertake practice runs in the light evenings over the same course, but I always ran with them. Some were clearly fitter than me and though I exhorted them to stay as a group, some would scamper on ahead, which was a worry, but convinced myself that they would not let me down and I knew they would have to wait for the rest of us to get back in the Borstal. When the main group got back there was still no sign of the missing two. I went to the Orderly Room to advise that it looked like we had 2 absconders; they were about to raise the alarm when the phone went, and the gate announced that they had two lads there who claimed they had been on the cross-country and got left behind. What they had done was to race ahead and then moved off the route and hidden and once we had gone past they were going to follow behind, to make me think they had absconded, then join back on as we neared the end. They had hidden so well and were busy talking, that they missed us running past, but eventually realized we must have passed but had left it too late to catch up.

In the summer months, in particular, every weekend I was on duty, I took a group of 15-20 more trusted lads on a Sunday walk over the cliffs from Dover to St Margaret's Bay and back. We always started from Dover Castle, to which we had free access, I would let them loose to wander around but insisted they reassemble at a certain time and at this point as I would remain there. Some were invariably late, so returnees would offer to go find them; I said, 'no, I would keep those who had returned.' On every occasion eventually all returned. There was a strict rule that no bathing costumes could be taken on these outings, as health and safety even ruled then. We walked to the bay on the cliff tops but returned whenever possible on the lower level. On a hot summer's day after a long walk, despite my earnest protestations, you try and keep a group of teenagers, who are now only a yard from the sea, from disrobing to their baggy issued underpants and diving into the sea: not a pretty sight. They had no towels, just dried off in the sun. They all said how great it was and never did anyone of them put themselves in danger by doing something stupid.



A selected group of lads on a weekend walk along the Dover cliffs

BOB DUNCAN

(The 7th installment of Bob's memoirs will appear in the Spring 2024 issue.)



The road to the Borstal in Winter



MY TAKE ON PUTIN by JOHN RAMWELL

This Sunday morning, the 25th June, 2023 we woke to the news that the Wagner Battalion under Yevgeny Prigozhin is no longer posing an immediate threat to President Putin. This being the case we can continue on as before. At least for the time being. You'll remember that I wrote about Russia and the Russian people when the current war between them and the Ukrainians started over a year ago. Here's what I said... "I have three conclusions

regarding the possible consequences of this 'strategic military exercise' undertaken by President Putin. My first conclusion is that he has lost, or is losing, his mind. History shows that many of those who take on really politically powerful positions often succumb to such power in bizarre ways. For example, it's too easy to be convinced that you are right, despite the facts showing otherwise, whilst still pressing ahead with seemingly counter productive policies. My second conclusion is that President Putin cannot lose this 'military exercise' against Ukraine, without it becoming the finish of him both at home and internationally, and that, inevitably, he will come to understand this. Once he does, my third conclusion kicks in. My third conclusion is that, just as Adolf Hitler did when he lost WW2, he will commit suicide; but unlike Hitler, who died in a bunker, Putin will die in one of his palaces with his finger on the nuclear button.

None of the foregoing demands much in the way of imagination, insider knowledge or education (none of which I profess to have in any abundance whatsoever) and is a conclusion most of us will have come to but are not prepared to discuss. There's nothing to be gained by pondering over such possible outcomes and so we plod on regardless; those of us who are able to plod, that is. And so we're able to breathe again as Putin has, seemingly, regained control. He's clearly 'damaged goods' though and we watch the near future as it unfolds before us. But what of the Russians themselves, the ones who, like ourselves, are simply plodding on. I had the privilege of spending time in western Russia back in 1992. I got to know several citizens well and am still in contact with a couple I call friends. I can reassure you that they are basically just like us. They are kind and generous whilst being quite capable of demonstrating opposite behaviour when provoked but they have one fundamental problem. They are fearful. They're all born into fear. Of each other, of officialdom and of the state. Where as we here in the west take our rights for granted: the rights to protest, the rights to justice and fairness, etc. I can tell you that the average Russian citizen lives in a culture of fear. This fear is so deeply instilled in their make up that they're basically unable to question anything or anybody and have built up a certain resilience to what occurs around them. Hence they're easy to control and manipulate. Hence their apparent belief in what ever they are told by the State. The important word here is 'apparent' as deep down, in fact, not that deep at all, they know what is what. They may be frightened but they're not unintelligent.



FROM THE TREASURER

Treasurer's Report: Financial Year ending 31/12/2022

My treasurer's report for this year contains the usual facts and figures regarding the accounts for the past year, and as always a reminder that in order to synchronise with the main PGA accounting period these accounts cover the period January to December 2022, so almost 9 months old at the time of publication.

As well as reporting the accounts I give some background to some of the underlying issues with the financial structure of the association, and some thoughts on what the future may hold, and what we may need to think about as an association, as inflation continues to make the cost of everything climb to new and dizzying heights. Since I took

over as treasurer from Jim Blakey, a constant subject for discussion by the committee has been how we can maintain the levels of membership of The Association, and what happens to the finances if we fail to maintain the membership numbers. These discussions have taken place against a background of needing to face the reality that almost by definition, any group or association that exists solely to serve a membership of people who are retired, must accept that without attracting new members there will be an inevitable decline in the membership.

In my financial reports to the committee I have always tried to make sure that I provide a financial forecast to them which I base on how long I think that The Association could remain financially viable if we did not recruit any new members, and in effect the membership reduced year on year. At present, and I must say to the surprise of many, our membership figure has remained fairly constant over the past two years with the decline in numbers due to the passing of members still relatively low. However, there has been no great influx of new members either. As an association we have only a single source of income which is Membership Subscriptions, and in turn we have only two main costs directly related to providing a service to the membership. They are the production of The Newsletter and the cost of running the Association, which are mainly the cost of the committee, plus some other costs that include the donations that we make to charity in the name of deceased members.

One factor that I need to take into account when making these calculations is the effect of inflation. For several years inflation remained low, and as a result the costs, and in particular the cost of The Newsletter, remained reasonably stable. However, as we are all so painfully aware, in the past year inflation has pushed the cost of everything upward, sometimes at an alarming rate, as with the cost of energy. As a by-product of increased energy prices has come an increase in the price of commodities that are energy hungry, such as paper.

The result of this is that when added to all their other overheads printers costs have increased significantly. However, the committee has always been in agreement that as The Newsletter forms the single most important element of membership of the RPGA that we should not compromise on either the quality, or content. Therefore we continue to have The Newsletter printed on good quality paper, and the only limit on the editor, Paul Laxton, with regard to the size of each edition, is how much you the membership, submit for publication. Paul is always happy to receive items for inclusion and the only time he has to apply discretion, with regard to restricting content, is in order for The Newsletter to always consist of an even number of pages, and to avoid blank spaces. So far, we have never felt the need to set a restriction on the size, simply to keep the costs down. I know that Paul appreciates this, and it allows him to concentrate on making sure that the magazine is open for anyone who wishes to submit an article.

Another factor where increased costs are showing through is in postage. Although much of what we do as an association, and certainly as a committee, is carried out electronically and online, we still post out The Newsletter, and diaries to those who chose to have them. As you will all appreciate the cost of postage has increased significantly, and in my view the service had declined even more significantly. These increased costs are reflected in the 2022 costs for printing and distributing The Newsletter, which increased by £701.77p year on year, and the postage costs also increased with the Spring 2023 Edition costing an additional £35 postage than the Spring 2022 Edition. The cost of posting the diaries has also increased by £154.59 based on an almost identical number of items sent. Remember, these figures are for the financial year 2022, and as we all know, prices in 2023 have continued to rise sharply, especially at the beginning of the year. As a consequence there will no doubt be an increase in both the printing and postage costs in this financial year (2023) equal to, or perhaps in excess of, the increase in 2022.

However, as our income is holding up at the moment, and in the last two years we have run a surplus, I see no reason to increase the basic level of subscriptions and we are in a relatively comfortable position regarding financial reserves. That does not of course mean that we should not be prepared for what may happen in future, and one possible option to reduce costs would be to distribute The Newsletter electronically to those able, and willing, to receive it in this format. One of our overseas members has already agreed to receive The Newsletter in this way, and of course we already publish both the latest version, and back copies on the **RPGA Website (<https://rpga.homestead.com/>)**.

There is however one area that we may need to look closely at whether we increase subscriptions and that is for those people who opt to receive a PGA Diary, for which we pay the PGA, and we also pay the cost of postage. The cost of the diaries is going up, as is the cost of postage and I believe that this year the Association will actually lose money on each and every diary we provide. This poses the question, and one I hope will be raised at the AGM of whether or not the cost of providing diaries to members should be subsidised from general subscriptions, or should we look to increase the subscription to reflect the true cost of providing this service to some members.

The problem that we have in making any adjustments to subscriptions was very clearly highlighted just a few years ago when I undertook to adjust the levels to a simple 2-tier structure. Unfortunately, despite writing to every member, a significant proportion failed to respond, either to the letter, or by changing their standing order to the new amount. I am certainly not keen to try that again! In the short to medium term I believe that The Association can continue to function, in much the same way as it does now, without the need to increase the basic level of subscriptions.

At present we have a healthy bank balance, but as costs increase this will start to come down, hopefully in the next 2/3 years, quite slowly. I am however confident, that given the current level of funds in the bank, The Association could remain viable way beyond my tenure as Treasurer, and indeed beyond my time here in this world. The financial figures for the year 1st January 2022 and 31st December 2022 are printed below. These have been certified by the PGA Auditors and should any member require clarification or explanation on any point I am happy to respond. The full audited accounts are available for inspection by any member of The Association and should you wish to exercise this option then please contact me. My contact details are shown below and I am happy for you to contact me by email or phone.

GRAHAM MUMBY-CROFT, Treasurer

graham.mumbycroft@gmail.com

Tel: 07597 397425

Retired Prison Governors Association

Treasurers Report Financial Year 1/1/22 to 31/12/22 (Current Account)

Barclays Community Account (Current)

Carried Forward on 1/1/22 £15,218.76

Income from 1/1/22 to 31/12/22

Subscriptions	£5,498.00
Donations	£50.00
Interest	£0.00
Other	£0.00
Other	£0.00
Sub Total	£5,548.00

Expenditure From 1/1/22 to 31/12/22

Newsletter	£4,002.27
Admin Costs	£108.01
Travel/Subs	£138.60
Refunds	£0.00
Diaries	£624.00
Donations	£25.00
Miscellaneous	£0.00
Room Hire/Catering	£0.00
Post/Phone	£326.95
Total Expenditure 2021	£5,224.83

Totals

Carried Forward on 1/1/22	£15,218.76
Income 1/1/21 to 31/12/22	£5,548.00
Sub Total	£20,766.76
Expenditure 1/1/22 to 31/12/22	£5,224.83
Sub Total	£15,541.93
Bank Statement Balance at 31/12/22	£15,541.93
Surplus/Deficit for financial year 2022	+£323.17

Total Income 1/1/22 to 31/12/22

Barclays Acc	£5,548.00
Total Income for year ended 31/12/22	£5,548.00

Cash Balance @ 31/12/22

Barclays Account	£15,541.93
Total Current Account Cash Balance	£15,541.93

Breakdown of Costs and Year on Year Comparison.

Annual Income	2022	2021	Variation
Barclays Acc (Subs)	£5,498.00	£5,475.00	£23.00
Other	£0.00	£10.00	-£10.00
Donations	£50.00	£260.00	-£210.00
<u>Total Income</u>	<u>£5,548.00</u>	<u>£5,745.00</u>	<u>-£197.00</u>

Annual Expenditure	2022	2021	Variation
Printing (Newsletter)	£4,002.27	£3,300.50	£701.77
Stationary	£0.00	Included in Admin	
Post/Phone	£326.95	Costs	£326.95
Travel/Subs	£138.60	£145.41	-£6.81
Refunds	£0.00	£17.00	-£17.00
Diaries Postage Costs	624.00	£469.41	£154.59
Admin Costs	£108.01	£297.44	-£189.43
Donations	£25.00	£525.00	-£500.00
Miscellaneous	£0.00	£0.00	£0.00
Room Hire/Catering	£0.00	£0.00	£0.00
Total	£5,224.83	£4,754.76	£470.07
<u>Balance Income/Expenditure</u>	<u>£323.17</u>	<u>£990.24</u>	<u>-£667.07</u>

I certify that these accounts are correct and include all transactions.

Signed G.S. Mumby-Croft Treasurer Retired Prison Governors Association.

Date 23rd February 2023

RETIRED PRISON GOVERNORS' ASSOCIATION

RULES AND CONSTITUTION

RULE 1. TITLE.

The title of the Section shall be "The Retired Prison Governors' Association - a section of the Prison Governors' Association", hereafter referred to as the "RPGA".

RULE 2. STATUS.

The RPGA shall be part of the Prison Governors' Association (PGA). Whilst a section of the PGA, members of the RPGA shall not enjoy the rights, benefits or the responsibilities granted under Trade Union legislation.

RULE 3. OBJECTIVES.

The objectives of the RPGA shall be:

- (a) To promote, protect and further the interests of members of the RPGA.
- (b) To provide a conduit for those members who so wish, to able to maintain contact with other members and to keep the membership informed and updated on relevant events. This can include one or any of the following methods of communication:
 - i. Publication of a regular Newsletter.
 - ii. Post, Email and electronic communications.
 - iii. Through the creation and maintenance of an RPGA Website.
 - iv. Social events and meetings.
- (c) To provide advice and assistance to members (or their spouses) who may need assistance and, where possible, offer appropriate guidance and support.
- (d) To establish and maintain affiliations to pension related organisations and links with other relevant organisations, particularly those catering for the needs of the retired.
- (e) To maintain links with serving governors, principally through the PGA.
- (f) To provide services where appropriate if resources allow.
- (g) To collect, maintain and administer funds for the above Objectives.

RULE 4. MEMBERSHIP.

(a) Membership of the RPGA shall be open to all those who would have met the eligibility criteria for membership of the PGA during the course of their career with HMPS, and such other persons as the Annual Conference may, from time to time, determine.

(b) Full members of the RPGA are required to pay an annual subscription, which is set at differential rates based on whether the member opts to receive a PGA diary each year or not. The annual subscription rates will be proposed by the Management Committee and subject to approval by members vote at the

Annual General Meeting.

(c) 'Associate' membership of the RPGA should be open to the surviving partner of former members of the RPGA. Associate members will not be charged a subscription but cannot be members of the management committee nor vote at the RPGA Annual General Meeting.

(d) The subscription will entitle RPGA members to such benefits as set out in Rule 7 of these Rules.

(e) A full and accurate list of all members will be maintained by the membership secretary, in compliance with General Data Protection Rules.

RULE 5. MANAGEMENT AND ADMINISTRATION.

The management and administration of the RPGA shall be vested in the RPGA Annual General Meeting and the Management Committee in that order. The interpretation of these Rules shall be vested in the PGA NEC.

(a) There will be one RPGA Annual General Meeting each year. If circumstances dictate, this may be held virtually. The chosen virtual method must be capable of allowing all members to be seen and heard.

(b) A Quorum at the AGM will be the attending Management Committee plus any other RPGA attendees.

(c) Members attending the Annual General Meeting may claim their travel costs in accordance with the current PGA travel rate for attending conference.

(d) The Management Committee will be elected at the RPGA Annual General Meeting for a period of four years. Half of the committee will retire every second year, thus providing continuity. Retiring members may seek re-election.

(e) The Management Committee shall then elect from within its own membership a Chair, a Secretary and a Treasurer.

(f) The Management Committee may appoint, from time to time, other ad-hoc sub-committees and functionaries, e.g. Membership Secretary, Newsletter Editor and Website Co-ordinator. Persons appointed to such committees and positions need not be members of the Management Committee.

(g) Any member seeking election to the Management Committee must be a full member and, in other than exceptional circumstances, be in attendance at the RPGA Annual General Meeting.

(h) The Management Committee shall normally meet on 3 occasions per year, of which one meeting will be at the time of the AGM. Management Committee meetings may be either "in person" or "virtual, via an online link". With the exception of the venue for the AGM, committee meetings that take place in person should be held at a location that is agreed by committee members to be as convenient and cost efficient as possible.

(i) In exceptional circumstances these meetings may be held virtually. The decision to do so shall be minuted at a Management Committee Meeting. The chosen virtual method must be capable of allowing members to be seen and heard.

(j) All minutes of virtual Meetings shall be posted as if a "Hard Copy".

(k) The management Committee will hold corporate financial stewardship and will report to the RPGA Annual General Meeting.

RULE 6. FINANCE.

The financial year of the RPGA will be from 1st January until 31st December, each year.

(a) The RPGA subscriptions will be held in a separate bank account to the main PGA account and will be managed by the RPGA Management Committee.

(b) The Management Committee shall appoint a Treasurer from within their number.

(c) The Treasurer will be authorised to carry out all required financial transactions including the monitoring of the association's Current Bank Account and the payment of invoices and expenses claims. Payments will be through a combination of the issuing of cheques, and through the use of online banking. The disbursement of funds however will be a corporate responsibility upon the whole Management Committee.

(d) The Managing Trustees of the Prison Governors Association will also undertake that roll with regard to oversight of the finances of the Retired Prison Governors Association.

(e) The RPGA accounts shall be audited annually by the PGA auditors as part of the audit of the PGA accounts in accordance with Rule 7 (g) of the PGA Rules and Constitution. It is the responsibility of The Treasurer to present the accounts for audit within the appropriate time frame to coincide with the audit of the PGA accounts.

(f) A Statement of Account shall be published annually in good time for presentation at the RPGA Annual General Meeting. Any member shall have the right to inspect the account books, at a place of convenience to the Treasurer, within fourteen working days of having signified his/her request in writing to the Treasurer.

RULE 7. BENEFITS OF MEMBERSHIP.

Any benefit which is available to members in accordance with the aims set out in Rule 3 (a to e) of this constitution, apply equally to both Full and Associate members. The Management Committee reserve the right to determine that some benefits and services may apply only to Full Members.

RULE 8. DISSOLUTION.

(a) Dissolution of the RPGA will require an amendment to the PGA constitution.

(b) Upon dissolution such funds as are available will revert to the PGA main account.

RULE 9. AMENDMENT OF THESE RULES.

(a) The annual conference of the PGA will approve a set of Rules for the organisation and management of the RPGA.

(b) The RPGA Annual General Meeting may propose such amendments to the Rules as it sees fit. This will be by simple majority vote of those present. Any amendments proposed by the RPGA will be notified to the PGA NEC and put to the next PGA Annual Conference.

(c) Any proposed changes to these rules must be notified to the membership in writing at least four weeks prior to the RPGA Annual General Meeting. Any member may propose an amendment(s).

d) In extreme and exceptional circumstances the Management Committee may seek PGA NEC approval to amend the Rules before seeking formal approval at conference.

RULE 10. GENERAL.

(a) When on RPGA business the Management Committee, and such members as are appointed by the Management Committee to carry out Association business, shall be entitled to the reimbursement of expenses at the PGA NEC rate.

(b) The RPGA shall not engage in any form of party political activity or affiliation other than for matters pursuant to Rule 3 (d) above

MEMBERSHIP REPORT OCTOBER 2023

Membership continues to decline unfortunately and now stands at 376, down from 386 in the March Membership Report. However, we are pleased to welcome new members – Tracy Goddard, Sir Martin Narey, Ben Mnyama, Nicola Smith, Richard Swann, Terry Witton, Ria Rys-Reuton, Stacey Tasker and Lyndsey Dovell (widow of John). Unfortunately, we have to announce the deaths of Colin Stewkesbury, David Hedley, Royston Clarke, Neville Joseph OBE, Daphne Jones, Martin Kealy, Steve Goddard, Grenville Barnard, John Dovell and Peter Quinn. Our condolences and best wishes go out to their families and friends.

We have also been informed of some non-members who were either ex-governor grades or staff well known to many; they are – Gareth Hadley, Stuart Terry and David Roddan, again our condolences and best wishes go out to their family and friends. As usual we have a few whose Newsletters were returned as they are no longer living at that address. They are : Margaret Tweedie, Marie Knight, David Alderson and Margaret Wilkinson, so anyone who knows their new address please let me know and I will put them back on the mailing list. We have also had a few resignations, Ann Shore, Mary Feather, Kevin Bartlett and Graham Lawrence.

I continue to do my bit for the Civil Service Pensioners Alliance, currently the Regional Representative for the Northwest. I am also looking after Groups in the Midlands, as they have been unable to recruit a regional rep, so I keep myself busy between cruises.

**HARRY BRETT
MEMBERSHIP SECRETARY**



Another mystery man (1918-88) with a Prison Service connection for you to identify.

He was born in Scotland, lived in Oldham after World War 2, and emigrated to South Africa when his career ended.

JOHN DOVELL R.I.P.

We have recently received the sad news that John Dovell, one of the founding members of The Prison Governors Association died on the 23rd September. He was 84 years old.

John joined the Merchant Navy at Training Ship Conway when he was 14, leaving the navy in his mid-twenties to join the Prison Service as an officer at HMP Lewes in February 1966. He became an Assistant Governor in September 1968, and after training at PSC Wakefield, had a long and varied service, being posted to Wetherby, Long Kesh N.I., Exeter, Lancaster, Head of South East Regional Office Manpower Team, Send as governing Governor, Parkhurst as Deputy Governor, first full-time General Secretary of the PGA (for which he subsequently received Distinguished Life Membership of the PGA), Lifer Management at Headquarters, Governor of Haslar Immigration Removal Centre and finally as governing Governor of HMP Kingston which specialised in life-sentenced prisoners at the time, from where he retired at the age of 57 in 1996.

Jenny Adams-Young has written:-"I had the privilege of working for John for a short period when he was working at S.E.R.O in the early 1980s. I found him to be a delightful, kind, caring, hard-working and decent man with a lovely sense of humour, and I am grieved he is no longer with us".

It was John's express wish that he should have no funeral service.

Our thoughts are of him, and his family at this time.

John Dovell R.I.P.

PETER QUINN R.I.P.

Shortly before going to the printers I received news of the death of Peter Quinn in hospital in York where he lived in retirement. At this stage, unfortunately, I have no funeral details, but as soon as they are released to us, they will become available to those of you on the Email register.

Peter was a notable contributor to this newsletter. His articles were laced with cricket metaphors, (when he wasn't writing about the game itself), and he was a keen and witty observer of the life of a prison governor.

Denis Healey observed that politicians should have what he called 'hinterland.' My view is that this should also be applied to prison governors. I can't claim to have known Peter that well, but it was very clear that Peter had hinterland in spades. They don't recruit people like him any more.

Peter Quinn R.I.P.

Editor's note: If any member is able to provide a fuller obituary for John or Peter I will be pleased to publish them in the Spring 2024 edition of the newsletter. A photo would also be appreciated. Their departures from this life deserve to be marked.



PRESIDENTIAL ADDRESS TO THE 2023 PGA CONFERENCE

Over the years, my conference speech has waxed lyrical about the issues facing the Service. I gave an address to the All-Party Parliamentary Group on Penal Affairs (which I shared with the membership) in the Houses of Parliament back in June of this year, cataloguing the disastrous impact Government Policy has had on the prison system since 2010. With the exception of one or two of the MP's in attendance and those in the public seats, it was not warmly received, in fact it was received with a bit of a stunned silence. I would have hoped that this group who allegedly have a keen interest in the penal system, would have shown more interest and emotion. I won't bore you with the suggestions put forward by them to make it better – they were so embarrassingly low level and nondescript that I gave up the will to live – there was no idea of the reality of our situation.

Sadly, I am of the firm belief, that our political masters do not have a hunger and verve to make our beleaguered Service better. The PGA is an apolitical organisation, as am I in the role of President. I listen to the rhetoric of other parties and unfortunately, the tough on crime mantra follows the same pattern. We are on our own to make a difference in what is the most challenging of times regardless of who governs the country.

As President and National Officers of the PGA, we often get bogged down in the more depressing side of the Service; it is rare that members contact us to tell us of all wonderful work which is being achieved in an organisation which is constantly running hot. It is important that I acknowledge there are many prisons out there doing great things, changing lives, and protecting the public against all the odds, and I am in awe of you.

Unfortunately, for far too long, we have been working in a two-tier system, those who have and those who have not. It feels like the system is paralysed to make a difference for prisons who are completely unable to pull themselves out of the mire. Not even urgent notifications from HMIP can deliver sustained improvement. You just need to look at HMP Exeter & Bristol with their double UN's and inability to make sufficient and sustained progress, which impacts on the wellbeing of their hardworking and dedicated leadership teams.

The last year has been particularly challenging. We have a government intent on locking up more people for longer and making it more difficult for them to be released. It feels like monthly a minister is telling the media that some crime will now face a prison sentence, or

another will see an increase in sentence, or more people will receive a whole life tariff. Under David Gauke and Rory Stewart there was a will to change our sentencing policies. They were making the brave decision to change legislation on the use of short-term sentences, but unfortunately, we know what happened to them when there was a change of party leader! The right-wing lurch by Government has resulted in a populist rhetoric on prisons and we are now bust on prison places.

I was utterly astonished to hear the current Secretary of State for Justice at his party conference last week, state that Government is looking at renting prison cells abroad – if this doesn't demonstrate a system which is completely broken, I don't know what does. To publicly state we're unable to look after our convicted citizens in their own country is an admission of abject failure. MoJ states that the facilities, regime, and rehabilitation must meet British standards. This is rather ironic considering a German court in early September refused to extradite a man accused of drug trafficking because of concerns about prison conditions in Britain. The statement is so ridiculous and beyond the pale. It seems to me it was a headline grabbing piece of nonsense which requires legislative changes, so not a short-term fix for our capacity crisis. I hope it will disappear into the annals of history, rather like the Rwanda policy and the empty barge in Portland harbour.

The prison population has risen by approximately 6500 in a year, currently sitting at around 88,000 at a cost of £46,000 per prisoner per year! This is the highest prison population we have ever had; what a record to break. MoJ projections are that the population will be over 100,000 this decade. These are mind boggling numbers to take in, especially as in March 2021, it stood at 78,068. We have a capacity build programme which is unable to keep up with demand, and we have planning permission for these large new behemoth prisons rejected for some sites. At best this means there will be a delay in building, whilst appeals are lodged, at worst, they will never be built and what does that mean for prison places? O

Once again, the latest Justice Secretary at his party conference, peddled the well-used statement of increasing capacity and building 20,000 extra modern prison places, but failed to mention that none of our 150-year-old (and in some cases younger), outdated, not fit for purpose prisons will continue to be filled to capacity, offering little benefit for those living in them.

We are unable to recruit, develop and retain the staff we need to care for the current prisoner population, how on earth are we going to find the staff to open these new establishments when they get built, many of which are in rural, expensive areas of the country? We are fishing in the same pond as the Police and Border Force, who offer a better and safer working environment with an improved pay and reward package.

These double whammy crises have been the only show in town. We stumble through each week in the hope that accommodation from new prisons, opening of refurbished wings and rapid deployment units will save us for another couple of weeks. We sit with our fingers crossed, hoping we will have seasonal dips in population to survive another spike. We have a buffer zone of approximately 1400 spaces to allow for unexpected accommodation issues which is now used as business as usual; at the time of writing this speech, we have but a few hundred male adult spaces left and this figure includes Cat D places, not easily accessed.

Prisons under the cosh, where once we would have reduced the population to help stabilise them are now being asked to reopen that accommodation to meet the demand. The health and safety of those living and working in these prisons is secondary to the need for spaces. Violence and self-harm are on an upward trajectory, as is the presence of drugs and their associated risks, it seems a forlorn hope to expect this pattern to change in the medium term, because, as we all know, prisons which are underfunded and full every day are not calm, safe or decent places, let alone rehabilitative; it could be argued that the current operational capacity of some prisons is already too high. This is not how to run a vital public service.

Added to our population pressures, we now have the issue of RAAC concrete. Who would have thought we would all become an authority on such a thing.? Unfortunately, many buildings, both accommodation and ancillary were built in an era when RAAC was readily used. We know, because we are all experts now, that RAAC needs to be maintained and we know, because we have lived it, that our prisons are not maintained, and we know, because we see it every day, that we have very poor FM contracts that often fail to deliver planned preventative maintenance. The survey work is underway, and I personally live with a very real fear that critical RAAC will be found. If found and we need to decant, we have literally nowhere to put prisoners because all our prisons are full to bursting every day. Although this may be a blessing in disguise by bringing the population crisis to a head.

Recently, Charlie Taylor, Chief Inspector of Prisons publicly stated that one in ten of our prisons should be closed, particularly old crumbling Victorian Prisons. If only that were a possibility, but it is not and probably will not be for many years. These unmaintained prisons, with decades of disinvestment will remain in use and will only crumble further, due to the demand for every single cell in England and Wales to be in use.

Despite all this drama, HMPPS is expected to deliver £37 million in savings during the spending review period through the One HMPPS change programme. There is absolutely no hope of any of this being re-invested in the frontline, which will have to continue delivering on a wing and a prayer.

In recent weeks, the Prison Service has remained at the top of the hour across all media outlets for reasons I won't touch on here, but I know every one of our membership is totally supportive of our colleagues caught up in this incredibly difficult situation. The one positive from this, is that during the media frenzy, we were able to get onto the airwaves and highlight the wider issues facing us for these few days.

Now the dust has settled we are once again the forgotten Service full of truly hidden heroes. We know that those working in prisons deliver a vital role which requires a multitude of skills, carried out with a sense of pride and commitment, but it is tough. Prison staff and our members do not get the recognition they deserve.

I get very irritated when I read social media commentary from individuals who have little concept of governing today. The very words they write or say criticising our Service ooze complete lack of understanding of governing in the modern era with not very modern tools. As is always the case, life moves on, people move on, and change comes with a new energy and commitment to make things better. Now is the time for change!

This is my valedictory address to Conference. I am retiring from the Service at the end of March and look forward to a new future of adventure in the next phase of my life. I am excited, but also leave with a degree of sadness, missing the friendships I have forged and the madness which is the Service we live, sleep, and breathe every day; 34 years is a long time to be part of something quite unique. As I reflect on the past decades, I struggle to find a time when we weren't in a state of reform, flux, change or spend thrift! It seems to me the lunacy that is our Service is the very thing that keeps us motivated, enthused and determined to keep going, no matter how tough the race is. In recent years, we know that the odds have been stacked against us in almost everything we are trying to achieve. What is it about a prison governor that means we never give up? I will leave you to contemplate that question. However, I do genuinely believe we come from a very special mould and only a small number of incredible people fit into it.

The special part of being an elected official is the opportunity to support members at their lowest ebb, or during traumatic events within the workplace. Of all the years of working for the Association, this has given me the most joy, upset, laughter and many other emotions, but it is what we are here for. We are your confidante, your critical friend, your crutch to lean on and anything else you may wish us to be to ease you through your difficult times. It has been an absolute privilege to serve you and a period in my career which brings both a tear and a smile to my face.

As a strong woman and a feminist, I hope I have played some part in the Service acknowledging there is a cultural problem for women. Remember women, you are amazing even when going through the menopause!

Finally, it's time to say goodbye, but to the vocal doubters and criticisers of my magnificent members, I give you the following quote, (slightly changed to make it gender neutral), from Theodore Roosevelt, 26th President of the United States.

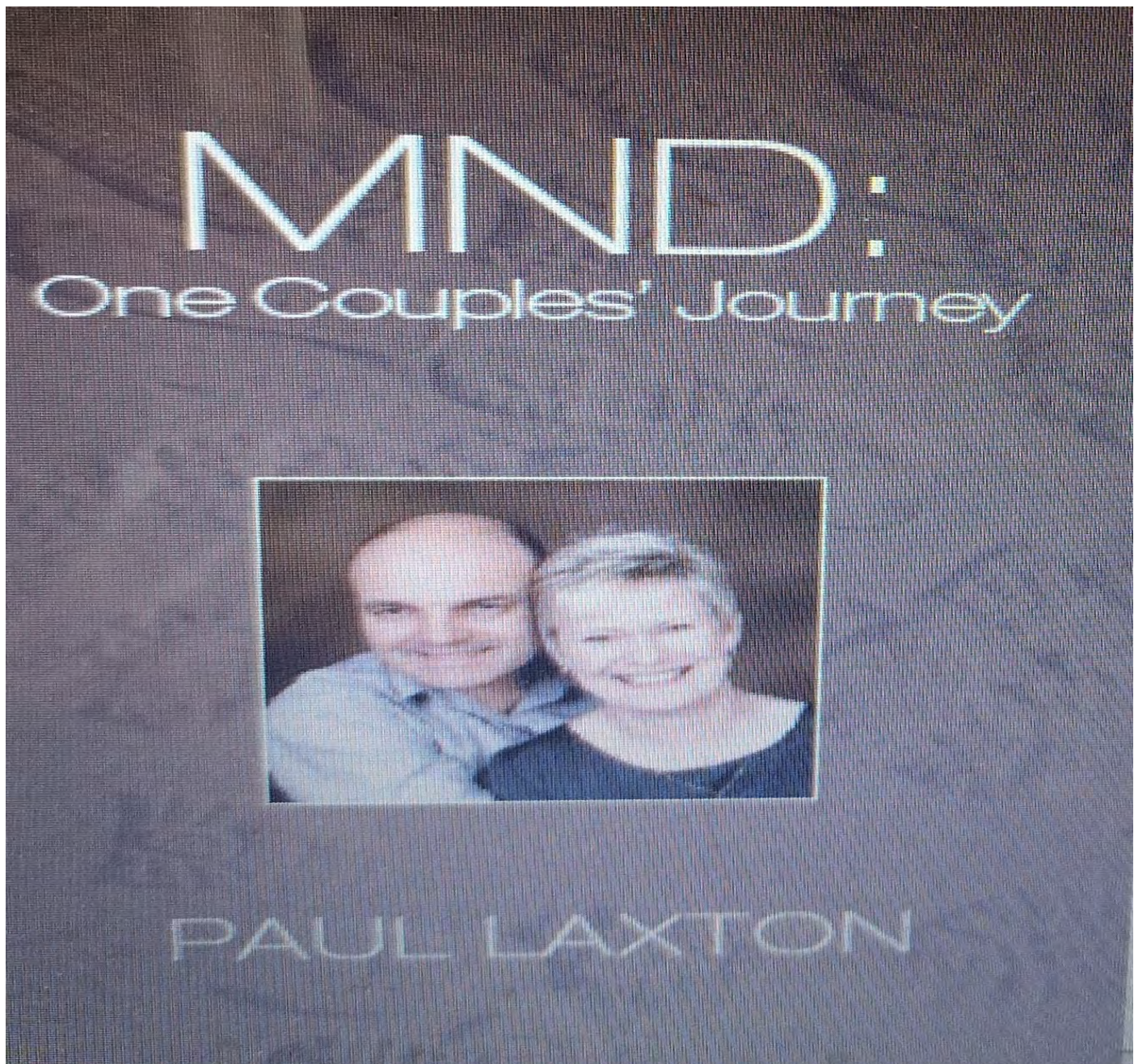
"It is not the critic who counts, nor the person who points out how the strong person stumbled, or where the doer of deeds could have done them better. The credit belongs to the person who is actually in the arena; whose face is marred by dust and sweat and blood; who strives valiantly; who errs and comes short again and again; who knows the great enthusiasms, the great devotions, and spends themselves in a worthy cause; who, at the best, knows in the end the triumph of high achievement; and who, at the worst, at least fails while daring greatly, so that their place shall never be with those cold and timid souls who know neither victory nor defeat."

Thank you and good luck in all you do and most of all enjoy Conference!

ANDREA ALBUTT

I'm sure I speak for everyone in wishing Andrea and her husband, Mitch, who is also leaving the service next March, a long and healthy retirement. Andrea was the PGA's first female President, the longest serving at nine years, and one of the most distinguished. Hopefully we will be welcoming Andrea and Mitch into the ranks of the RPGA next year.

Paul Laxton, editor



In 2021 the PGA NEC kindly granted my request for the MND Association to be that year's conference charity after the loss of my wife to Motor Neurone Disease. At Conference, delegates raised £5000 for the MND Association, then a record amount raised for any charity at PGA Conference.

Motor Neurone Disease is a vile affliction that gradually robs the sufferer of all their independence and dignity, locking both invalid and carer into a death spiral. This book charts one couple's journey and its brutal physical and emotional impact. Despite being an always fatal condition, MND enjoys only Cinderella status in respect of both research funding and charitable giving.

Hard copies of this book can be ordered your local bookseller, price **£7.99**. or from online retailers. Electronic copies, which should be available shortly, retail at **£4.99**. The book is short at 81 pages, but you will be supporting a charity that needs every penny to help fund research that will someday find an effective treatment for this dreadful disease. Please feel free to review the book and spread the word through your friendship networks. Don't lend it, tell people to buy their own and support the MND Association. Please feel free to post reviews on Amazon.

ALL MY ROYALTIES WILL BE DONATED TO THE MND ASSOCIATION

CONFERENCE GALLERY 2023



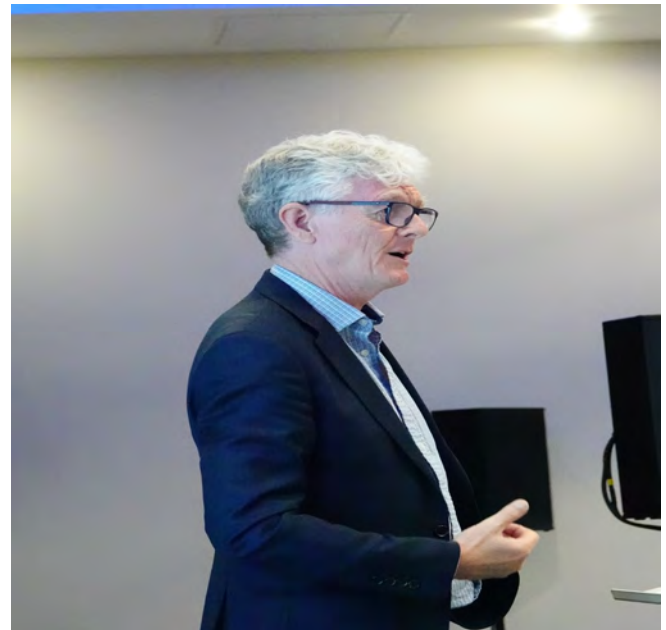
Farewell, Andrea and Mitch.



**CHARLIE TAYLOR, HIS MAJESTY'S CHIEF
INSPECTOR OF PRISONS**



**DAVE DYSON, NEC... AUDITIONING FOR
THE NEXT NETFLIX SERIES OF THE CROWN**



**SIMON SHEPHERD, DIRECTOR OF THE BUTLER
TRUST**

RPGA Autumn Quiz 2023 Answers

- | | |
|---|---------------------------|
| 1) Bermuda | 11) Devil Woman |
| Devil Woman | 12) Carbon |
| 2) Bubble & Squeak | 13) Cabriolet |
| 3) New Hampshire | 14) Sea-lions |
| 4) The Boston Strangler | 15) Coal, gas and oil |
| 5) Caravan | 16) Gigi and My Fair Lady |
| 6) Bonnet | 17) Jim Bergerac |
| 7) Drawing pin | 18) 24 |
| 8) On the BBC colour test card | 19) Polo |
| 9) Stained glass | 20) Ass |
| 10) 'absolute power corrupts
absolutely' | |

THE NEXT AGM OF THE RETIRED PRISON GOVERNORS ASSOCIATION WILL BE HELD ON: MONDAY 07 OCTOBER 2024 AT 13.30 HOURS

THE VENUE WILL BE THE DELTA HOTELS NOTTINGHAM BELFRY NG8 6PY

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.

Paul Laxton