

TROUBLE AT T'VILLE



With no disrespect intended to the other contributors to the last newsletter, the most striking item by a country mile was the first page and a half of Bob Duncan's regular feature, entitled "Your Letters", so much so that I had no hesitation in placing the item very early in the newsletter as the piece just had to be read. I have no doubt that fellow retired colleagues were as shocked as Bob to discover just how much HMP Pentonville has deteriorated in recent years, resulting in a 2015 HMCIP report that was even worse than the one for the 2013 visit, which itself had cast doubt on the future viability of the gaol. This he contrasted with a report from April 2000 which was hugely complimentary. Bob was

far too polite and far too modest to mention that he was in his third year as Governor of Pentonville at the time of that report. Those of us fortunate enough to have worked under Bob and been exposed to his unique brand of leadership would have expected no less. Equally Bob is not the sort of man to tell anyone who is listening that "the service was better in my day", because as we all know it was in some ways but definitely not in others.

No-one would want to go back to prisoners slopping out or hiding drunken officers in empty cells until the lunchtime session had been slept off. On the other hand many of us believe that the modern service is the worse for privatisation, performance targets and political correctness. It is certainly worse for paring down staffing to private sector levels, but that was the price trade unions paid to avoid contracting out. Prison service top management cannot be held responsible for a Government policy of slash and burn, but how can anyone with an ounce of humanity defend the 2013 reduction in Pentonville's food budget from an already miserly £2.10 per day per head, to £1.96? You can just hear the echoes of Marie-Antoinette. I understand that for senior civil servants and in-charge Governors the only alternative to implementing austerity is to resign. Integrity comes with a high price if there is a mortgage to pay, (although of course you have to have it in the first place) and not everyone can find a niche with the Prison Reform Trust. However senior civil servants can and should be held responsible for allowing far too many staff to take voluntary severance without a comprehensive recruitment strategy in place. The blame must also be laid at Directorate level for the intolerable burdens piled on pared-down management teams in prisons from central bureaucracy. The beast must still be fed. Nevertheless, HMCIP were caustic about leadership failings and all the resources in the world will not remedy that deficiency.

Over...—>

I don't know the current incumbent of Bob's old chair at Pentonville, nor his predecessor who was about to move to Wormwood Scrubs at the time of the 2013 inspection. It would be wholly wrong of me on that basis to make any adverse comments about them as individuals. I do know Bob's two immediate successors, the late Gareth Davies and the workaholic Nick Leader. Gareth would have been the first to give credit to an SMT that contained some stellar talent. Nick sadly was driven into the arms of the private sector when, despite being rightly cleared of any involvement in the notorious Wandsworth/Pentonville prisoner swap of 2009, he felt that the service had played politics with his reputation. Like Bob, Nick Leader was a beacon of integrity that NOMS could ill afford to lose.

Readers may not be aware that Bob has written histories of two of the establishments that he governed during a long and distinguished career; "Here We Go Round the Mulberry Bush: House Of Correction 1595 - HMP Wakefield" and "Peerless Priceless Pentonville: 160 Years of History". I'm not suggesting that Governors should write histories of establishments to prove their devotion to the job, but I would venture to suggest that those who viewed our profession as a vocation have been steadily elbowed aside in favour of those who view governing as a mere staging post en route to greater things. Reaching senior civil servant status requires compromises with personal and professional integrity, in that it demands discreet silence, always being 'on message' when permitted to speak, and a general willingness to operate within the narrowest intellectual tramlines. MOJ recruiters should stop and ask themselves whether as a consequence they are getting the service they deserve rather than the one the public needs, if, as appears to be the case, the days of people putting their heads above the parapet and using the dignity of their office to speak on behalf of prisoners and staff have long gone. Can anyone imagine a modern Governor doing what Bob Chapman did in 2000 when he went public about the squalid nature of the Health Care Centre in the establishment he governed, HMP Brixton, and went on to lambast the Home Office for failing to provide the necessary investment? The answer of course is "No." In some respects Bob Chapman got away lightly in that he was only transferred and smeared. A modern Governor could expect to meet the same fate as a Lewes prison officer did recently as a consequence of speaking out. The Chief Inspector of Prisons is also contemplating his fate, the non-renewal of his contract. Dismissal is now the penalty for pointing out that the Emperor has no clothes. In this kind of climate there can only be more Pentonvilles.

PAUL LAXTON, EDITOR

P.S. At only 24 pages long this issue will probably feel a bit on the thin side. This can only be resolved by readers getting on their laptops and sending me contributions. There is no other way to keep the newsletter alive.

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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.

The Future of the RPGA: A Discussion Document - Crucial Reading

The function of the Management Committee of any Association is to ensure that the membership are receiving the best possible service and that the range and level of this service is in accordance with the aims and constitution of the organisation, while of course ensuring that the association remains financially solvent.

The Committee of the RPGA are acutely aware of their responsibilities in this area, and, as a matter of course, the service provided to the membership is regularly under review to ensure that it offers good value to the widest possible range of members.

As part of the process of review the Committee are always looking for new services to offer, and, in particular, are constantly seeking to ensure that these services include sound advice across a range of subjects, for example pensions, welfare benefits and computers, as well as offering information and a forum for keeping up-to-date on the whereabouts and welfare of former colleagues and friends. It is also fair to say that the Committee are also conscious of the need to constantly scrutinise the range of services we offer, in order to ensure that they remain relevant for both existing and future members.

It has always been an aim of the Committee to be able to offer members' services which are based on financial savings, including holidays, electrical goods and insurance. The stumbling block to this has been that we have not been able to broker benefits of this type, simply because, having such a small membership, we do not have sufficient negotiating power with companies which are looking to balance the cost of any discounts they may offer against a significant increase in business.

As members will know, there is also the position of the Association's membership and finances to consider. The Treasurer has previously indicated the problems associated with a membership that is at best static, and a membership fee system that is based upon the fact that members pay at the rate in place at the time of joining, which means that our income is not growing. Consequently, with all of these factors in mind, there has been considerable discussion, and not inconsiderable soul-searching, by Committee members on how to progress these issues. Following this year's AGM at Newbold Revel, a possible solution appeared as the result of inviting a guest speaker from the Civil Service Pensioners Alliance (CSPA). Don Makepeace, Vice Chair of the CSPA, gave a talk in which he outlined the work that the CSPA do in lobbying on a whole range of issues relating to pensions and welfare issues, and in particular with regard to Civil Service Pensioners. In addition to the lobbying work of the CSPA in protecting and defending the values of pensions and campaigning on issues that matter to pensioners they also provide for members:

- Free Legal and Financial advice
- Unbeatable Travel Insurance
- Discounts on Car and Household Insurance via the Civil Service Insurance Society
- A Discounted Travel Club/Agency
- Free Computer support
- A Quarterly Magazine, 'The Pensioner' and
- A Network of active local groups

Don also explained how the CSPA were in negotiations to significantly improve the range of benefits available to their members, in particular the range of financial discounts and special offers available. Finally he explained that it was one of the aims of the CSPA to align itself with some of the larger Trade Union and Staff Association-based groups, such as Retired Probation Officers, Retired Police Officers and Retired Customs and Excise and that much work was in hand to push this forward.

In conversation after the meeting, it became clear that whilst the RPGA and the CSPA vary greatly in the size of their membership (CSPA membership currently stands at approximately 55,000), the aims of each with regard to serving their members are very similar. This in turn led to informal discussions regarding the possibility of the RPGA tapping into the benefits available to CSPA members. One way to do this is of course for members of the RPGA to join the CSPA, and indeed some already are members of both.

However, the issue was also raised whether or not there was a way in which members of the RPGA could be affiliated with the CSPA in order to be able to enjoy the full range of benefits. Don Makepeace undertook to take this issue back to his Committee and to make contact with us again regarding the outcome of those discussions in order to give the RPGA committee an idea of what could be possible.

On the 1st October 2015, a small working group of the RPGA committee met with Don Makepeace and Ralph Groves, Deputy General Secretary of the CSPA, in Manchester so they could outline what they felt the CSPA could offer to the RPGA.

The basic summary of what the CSPA had to offer and the RPGA Committee proposal is as follows:

Affiliation of the RPGA with the CSPA with full membership rights and benefits for RPGA members. This would require RPGA members to join the CSPA, if they are not already members. Cost £2/month deductible directly from pension. The RPGA would be a stand-alone branch of the CSPA with full voting rights and representation at national level. As a Branch, the RPGA would retain its current membership criteria and would retain its' own Committee. The RPGA would be able to set its own Branch membership fee and continue to function in much the same way as it does now. Branch fee to be £5/year and the option of a PGA diary would be discontinued. As a Branch, the RPGA would be entitled to publish 4 branch newsletters/year funded by the CSPA.

At the RPGA Committee Meeting held on the 20th October 2015 it was agreed that this issue would be put to the membership at the 2016 AGM. It was also decided that, as this matter has an impact on all members, then a full vote of the membership would be held in advance of the AGM in order to give every member the opportunity to vote.

If the membership did vote in favour of this change, ratification of this would still be needed from the full PGA Conference, as the RPGA is effectively still under the constitutional control of the PGA.

Because this is a significant development for the RPGA, the committee has decided that we should consult you as members to see if you are in favour of this proposed change. Accordingly, we would ask you to complete and return this slip before 4 April 2016. Please return to:

Ray London 14 James Court Eynesbury St Neots Cambs PE19 2QQ

Alternatively E Mail Ray London on raymond_london@hotmail.com which will allow you to give your views in more detail

....NAME

I _____ am / am not

In favour of the RPGA becoming a Group within the Civil Service Pensioners Alliance.

PRISON GOVERNORS ASSOCIATION CONFERENCE OCTOBER 2015: A FLAVOUR

After 11 consecutive years of being staged at the Palace Hotel, Buxton, the PGA NEC took the decision both to change the venue and shake up the format. I suppose for those of us who attended annually part of the attraction was the faded gentility of the hotel standing just above the charming and scenic peak district town. Unfortunately the attraction was not shared by potential delegates. When I chaired the 2014 conference there were less than seventy people in the room, and when one subtracts the NEC, the Chair and Standing Orders committee, the PGA's office manager, the conference scribe, and sundry Distinguished Life Members in the body of the hall, then the number of delegates entitled to vote numbered around forty-five. Even assuming that all delegates were from prisons (which they were not), that equated to only around one third of establishments being represented. As a situation, that was clearly untenable, and indeed had the potential to get even worse, given the Government crackdown on facility time. The NEC had to act decisively and they did.

As a result the 2015 conference was held at the Radisson Blu Hotel at East Midlands airport. The hotel is modern, conveniently located, and has good conference facilities. Compared to the Palace which we normally had to ourselves, the public areas were a bit of a goldfish bowl, but anyone desperate to know who we were would have to have gone wandering off to the conference halls. The NEC also changed the format. Traditionally conference started after lunch on a Tuesday and finished at lunchtime on a Thursday. This year conference began at 09.45AM on the Tuesday and concluded at 15.30PM on the Wednesday, thus making it possible for the vast majority of delegates to spend only one night away from home, and one day less away from work. Effectively conference was no more than about ninety minutes shorter, despite being reduced from four sessions to three. The number of guest speakers was reduced to the bare minimum: the Prisons Minister, Chief Executive of NOMS and a spokesman for this year's charity, the Chris Donovan Trust. In another break with tradition, black-tie formality at dinner was scrapped and smart casual dress permitted. Loyal toast, raffle and guest speaker, however, were still on the menu. I'm not party to the PGA NEC review of the 2015 conference, but I would guess they would judge it a resounding success. There were ninety-seven delegates present, more than double the number the previous year, and some one hundred and twenty people in the room during business. Very few people disappeared at lunchtime on the second day. It shows that given the right format and the right venue, the membership can be energised. An order paper consisting of sixty-two resolutions after compositing lends further support to that view.

Retired colleagues will be familiar with the main themes even if the acronyms have changed over the years. Pay and conditions, an unfit-for-purpose appraisal system, abuses of the mobility clause, and the general failure of NOMS to follow its own rulebook when dealing with its own staff loomed large on the agenda as one would expect, but possibly the most illuminating segment of conference was the presentation of the work-life balance survey carried out on the PGA's behalf by Dr Steve French of Keele University. 40% of the membership, a remarkably high figure, responded to the survey. Here is a selection of the findings:

- 46.3% of respondents were stressed at least half of the time
- 61.0% of respondents had suffered stress-related ill health
- 79.3% of respondents had come to work when ill
- 21.1% had received medical advice to cut their hours
- 66.5% of respondents had cancelled annual leave because of work pressures
- 28.5% of respondents believed that requesting flexible hours would harm their career
- 61.0% of respondents said that their employer was no help when it came to stress
- 10.5% of respondents admitted to making a serious error under pressure
- Just 34.4% of respondents said that they had their workload under control
- 41.3% of respondents worked more than 48 hours per week (i.e. in excess of the European Working Time Directive)
- 42.5% of respondents would consider a career change if conditions stay as they are

The report, not unsurprisingly, found that there was no meaningful work/life balance. Prison Governors had no ability to regulate their workload and there were no effective policies to address that. Behind the statistics, there were the human stories of unsympathetic managers further up the food chain, the implicit and sometimes explicit threats to people's careers, and the neglect of matrimonial and family responsibilities. Some Governor grades had covered night time bed watches, as otherwise deployment within the prison would have dropped below MSL. It should also be noted that more than half of PGA members are over 50 years of age, and 4.8% (a number that will inevitably grow) are over 60.

I'd like to be able to report that NOMS was suitably contrite and ashamed. Sadly there is more chance of spotting flying pigs. All of this is driven by Government policy to extract the maximum out of the public sector for the least possible investment. The period of austerity has seen 11,000 front-line staff taken out of prisons. The number of operational managers (Governor grades to you and me) has been cut by 15.5%. Those who remain have seen their pay held down and their pension contributions increased. The overall prisons budget has been cut by 24%. Prisoner numbers have not, of course, fallen. Indeed the number of sex offenders in custody grew by 700 in the year 2014-15, and inevitably many of these prisoners are older, in one case over 90 years of age, as historic offences are pursued. Levels of self harm remain disturbing and deaths in custody have inevitably increased as vulnerable prisoners disappear under the radar of hard-pressed staff. Overall, assaults occur at about the same rate, but the level of violence employed has grown exponentially. Partly this is due to the continuation of the gang culture in custody. The other key contributor is the unpredictable effect of so-called "legal highs" which have rapidly moved ahead of cannabis as the drugs of choice in prison. The acronym for these is NPS, which stands for Novel Psychoactive Substances. Speakers reported some incredible outbursts of violence from prisoners under the influence of these newly fashionable narcotics. Both the minister and the Head of NOMS recognised the urgency of tackling the NPS problem. It is not difficult to see why people's resilience has been stretched to breaking point.

Conference has not had a visit from the Secretary of State since Ken Clarke held the office. Chris Grayling never came near PGA conference and the new Secretary of State, Michael Gove, also delegated the duty to the Junior Minister for Prisons. For the second year in a row this fell to Andrew Selous, who most unusually survived the transition from one Secretary of State to his successor. Mr Selous is a Conference Chairman's delight. Polite and affable, he did not exceed his time slot, left plenty of time for questions and answered all of them briskly and succinctly. Every delegate who wanted to ask the minister a question was able to do so. He stressed the government's determination to drive down re-offending and tackle the new drug culture that is evolving. The Chief Operating Officer of NOMS, Michael Spurr, of necessity spoke at greater length, not least because it falls to him to give a much broader overview as the Executive Leader. Mr Spurr spoke about looking to give in-charge Governors greater autonomy as part of the strategy to tackle re-offending, which went down well with delegates. I got the impression that industrial relations between NOMS and the PGA had improved and it was interesting to note that Mr Spurr explicitly recognised the role of the PGA and spoke of "constructive tension" between the employer and employee representatives as being a healthy thing. As ever the proof of the pudding is in the eating, but it represents considerable progress from his predecessor, who when the unions rejected so-called workforce modernisation back in 2009, spoke of implementing it "without the Vaseline."

So yes, the mood remained downbeat, and with the NOMS budget unprotected during the rest of this parliament, the end of austerity is nowhere in sight as regards the Prison Service. The upside appears to be that the PGA, of which we were proud to be members, continues to be vibrant, influential and relevant. The PGA now has its first female President in the hugely impressive Andrea Albutt, who will not look out of place amongst her distinguished predecessors. The retirement of Paddy Scriven as General Secretary in 2014 after being on the NEC since the PGA was founded in 1987, marked the end of an era, rather like the retirement of Sir Alex Ferguson at Manchester United. I am pleased to report that the three new part-time National Officers who have replaced the full time General Secretary under the new structure, have embraced the challenge with relish and made the transition appear seamless (unlike Manchester United). The PGA continues to punch well above its weight.

PAUL LAXTON



Can you identify the prison in this cropped picture?

WHAT ON EARTH DO YOU FIND TO DO IN RETIREMENT?

Just before I retired I received a message from someone who had been a Deputy Governor at my first establishment, and who finished his career being Director General of the Prison Service and then the second Chief Executive of the National Offender Manager Service after it was formed. In fact I worked with two Director Generals and a Deputy Director General as well as the first CEO of the Border Control Service during my first 7 years of Service. You would think some of that talent would have rubbed off on me wouldn't you? Not a bit of it I'm afraid but it didn't stop me enjoying my 35 years of Service one bit.

The message included the phrase "... retirement gives you the freedom to follow what you really want to do." And that is very true. For some that means going to visit exotic parts of the world, perhaps climbing mountains, going on walking holidays or just generally exploring; for others it means skiing holidays during term time or spending more time pursuing hobbies that they had taken up before retirement in preparation for that final working day to arrive. For me it was a collection of things. Most of you know I like my cricket so wandering the country following my beloved Lancashire playing in such delightful venues as Taunton and Cheltenham was always going to be part of my retirement agenda. I have an interest in my local rugby club so helping out more both at an administrative level and hands on would keep me busy and benefit them. But one thing I had done as a young man that I always wanted to take up again when I had the time was acting; the smell of the greasepaint and the roar of the crowd has always enticed me towards acting from being a young boy and I therefore decided this was the ideal time to take up the cudgel again. At school I had won prizes for my acting and did consider taking it up professionally. But life comes along and gives you a kick up the backside just when you are ready to do something else and it never materialised. Then I got married, soon had mouths to feed and a career in the Prison Service beckoned and, well, you know the rest.

I had, two years before I retired, sowed the seed for this activity and joined my local Amateur Dramatic Society. I am not going to mention their name and you will understand why when you have read a little further into my account. I also joined an agency for film and television extras in the hope that I could get days out AND be paid for the privilege. And it worked, but there was usually one snag; there are not a lot of professional casting directors that cast from generic agencies; they tend to go to individual agents representing specific artists (I am allowed to call myself an 'artist') – but a lot of students studying film and theatre do. But students do not offer paid roles, as I quickly found out. I retired on 1 August 2013 and joined the first agency on 1 November that same year. The Am-dram Society I told you about earlier I joined on 1 October that same year. They had meetings twice a week when they would cast roles for the 10 plays a year they put on. I attended for a month and soon found that being new to the group left me as an outsider. That was to be expected but I was an outsider both for consideration of parts in their productions and socially afterwards in the bar. It was terribly cliqued and I soon told them that I would not be renewing my subscription. If I wanted to be ignored I could stay at home thank you. So trading the boards at a local theatre was out for the time being.

Now most actors are young and adventurous when setting out on their chosen path and therefore I was not part of the main demographic. I had the good sense and even better

grace to realise this very quickly and therefore all my energy went into seeking parts that categorised me as what I am; old, slightly larger than average but with a characterful face (I reprised on my CV!!). Believe me there are not a lot of well paid jobs with criteria such as that!! But I was not reliant on income from acting for my living – not like those young aspiring better looking types who were competing for all the advertised roles. On the contrary, after a lifetime of working in the Civil Service I had earned a final salary pension, was in receipt of a State Pension and could pick and choose what I applied for. It did not matter if I failed an audition; my wife would still have bread and jam on the table and I could still keep the house warm in the winter as well as pay my council tax. The word ‘comfortable’ comes to mind and it was just that. There was no pressure on me and that relaxed me enormously as I started to navigate my way through the world of agents and auditions. The other criterion to consider was of course that I didn’t want to appear in a long theatre run lest it interfere with me watching rugby and drinking beer on a Saturday afternoon at my rugby club, where I have been President for the last two years, or watching cricket for days at a time in the summer at some sun drenched venue whilst sipping the odd G & T on the pavilion balcony. Call me picky but I do have priorities.

I soon discovered which agencies would provide the best service for what I needed. Now at first I was under the impression that you could only register with one agency. This will be true if you are in the ‘Helen Mirren’ class of actors but agencies for ‘extras’ or ‘supporting artists’ as they are known are not that fussy. If you are an ‘A’ list actor you will usually have an agent within a top flight agency who will deal with you personally; and you pay 20% of your fee for the privilege, sometimes up to 35%. For the rest of us mortals we pay a fixed fee, either quarterly or annually, to the agency and they will supply us with jobs as and when they spring up. My main agency posts jobs on a daily basis; and it will not surprise you to know that most of the jobs are London-centric. But, the BBC has in the last three or four years invested heavily in Manchester and MediaCity now houses ITV and BBC studios as well as the BBC Sports Department and three huge sound stages that are in regular use.

Having joined my first agency I began applying for jobs that were advertised as both paid and non-paid. Some were advertised as just supplying expenses and the pay range for paid jobs varies from £10 per hour for a two hour job, to which you have to make your own way to £150 for the day and a ‘buy out’ rate if it is an advertisement which can be up to £3500. And not all are local. I live just outside Manchester so anything in the North West is suitable, and I might even stretch to Yorkshire and Birmingham if the pay is right. And if you do consider all types of jobs on offer you could find yourself very busy but out of pocket. A balance has to be struck and I think, two years in, that I have found my balance. I still sometimes think that I should really strive for an agent and go for it at full pace but then I think long and hard and go back to doing what I’m doing.

My first audition came just before Christmas 2013. Now you don’t always have to audition for a role and Skype is a great addition to the technical revolution if you don’t want to travel to Cardiff or London for an audition. In this case the advertisement was for a number of roles in a film called ‘Mudblood’. Basically it was a Harry Potter spin-off and was going to be a feature film. I applied to be one of the Ministers (for the uninitiated Potters out there it is the equivalent of a House Master at a boarding school complete with gown) and for my audition had to learn a piece from a Harry Potter Movie. Now I was at a disadvantage

because I had never seen a Harry Potter film and was not a keen admirer of the genre. But if I hadn't seen a film then how did I know I wasn't a fan? But I had seen excerpts because it was a cinematic phenomenon and just guessed it wasn't my type of film; I'm not into sci-fi anyway. This is where I discovered another great technological advancement of our age called 'YouTube.' I found I could type in anything into my search engine and it would produce a clip of what you had typed. I am a fan of the actor Michael Gambon and knew he had taken over from the late great Richard Harris the role of Dumbledore, the headmaster of the school 'Hogwarts, which Harry Potter attends. I was a great fan also of Richard Harris, that great Irish Rugby fan and one-time drinking pal of Richard Burton, so I thought I would learn a piece spoken by Dumbledore. I prepared well and the audition was at a studio in Manchester. I wore a shirt and tie with suitable flannels and sports coat (what does one wear to an audition I thought, and what's more didn't even dare ask) and arrived ten minutes early.

I was invited into the studio and was surprised to be greeted by the Director, the producer and the casting Director as well as three HD cameras; one in front of me and two at a 45 degree angle on either side. A chit-chat ensued and then I was asked if I was ready. I said yes and launched into it. I do have an advantage that I can make my voice travel a fair distance without any effort and I have a natural timbre to my voice which carries a smooth rich dark velvet tone with it (or at least that is how I describe it in my blurb on the agency website). I remembered all my lines and although it only lasted about three minutes it felt like a lifetime. When I finished I looked at the three of them and they just started clapping. Even the cameramen joined in the applause. Now I am not such a person as to believe they were doing this just for me. It was my first audition and I thought this must be the norm and they clapped everyone. So when the Director said they really enjoyed that I asked whether it was the norm to clap. Goodness gracious no they said and I believed them. Whether I still do now I don't know but two weeks later they rang me to say I had got the part. This venture is a 'crowd-funded project' which means that they wait until people invest in the film before shooting; and we are still waiting for it to be filmed. But the director keeps in touch and it is still a goer, having recently received the blessing of J.K. Rowling and Warner Studios to go ahead. Watch this space.

The months went by and I applied for non-paid roles for students at Manchester and beyond and enjoyed some good productions in which I either played a leading role in a short film or an extra in a lengthier episode. Then came the decent offers; I started applying for voice over roles and radio drama parts. My voice seemed to be in demand for this type of work and I became rather successful financially for the next 12 months. This brought me into contact with other voice actors and you start quizzing them about what agency they are with and how much work they get; whether it's paid and where the jobs are. And then I got two breaks into ITV series - The Syndicate by Kay Mellor and Black Work with Sheridan Smith. When they were aired I got a lot of phone calls and texts; but to be fair I had texted everybody to tell them I was on!!

One episode of the Syndicate was filmed in Scarborough and I had to be there for 7 a.m. It's a long way from Manchester and it was in November – bloody cold. The other episode was a week later in Bramham House just outside Wetherby (the venue for the Leeds Music festival – a country house with massive grounds); again an early start and a late finish from 7

in the morning until 8.30 at night, but really enjoyable. I acted with Anthony Andrews, Simon Williams, Melanie Hill and Lenny Henry and it was a real experience.

Latterly I have filmed an advertisement on one of the big sound stages at MediaCity for a betting firm, re-creating a scene from the Wolf of Wall Street where I played a broker. And last Monday I was sat on an Airbus A330 filming a Thomas Cook commercial with Kim Kardashian, Kanye West and Lady Gaga. I am sorry to tell you that these people are just as glamorous in real life as they are on screen; not really these were just lookalikes but very impressive.

I still comb the agency jobs and apply on a regular basis. I have applied for over 1000 jobs with one agency alone so if you cannot handle rejection it is not something you should get involved in. But I like it and its fun. Next time I will tell you more about the things I've done and the categories the extras fall into, including those that never stop talking about themselves and who they've acted with. You need a lot of patience or a deaf ear for those people.

DAVID TAYLOR

MEMBERSHIP REPORT FEBRUARY 2016

Membership has seen another fall down to 445, a loss of 6 since October, so if anyone out there knows anyone who would like to join please let me know. We are however pleased to welcome new members since the last magazine - Brian Hirons, Alan Holman, Paddy Scriven, Sian West, Ivy Brown (widow of Malcolm), Bill Pike and Mike Poselay.

We are sorry to announce the deaths of the following members - Derek Brisco, Malcolm Brown, Don Drew, Harry Walsh, Roger Brandon, William Smeaton and Sylvia Smith. Our deepest condolences go out to their family and friends. We have also been informed of the deaths of John Whetton, Gareth Davies OBE, Philippa Gale and David Brookes who, although not members, were well-known to our membership. Our deepest condolences go out to their family and friends.

We have also had a number of resignations: Muriel Allen, Pat Bester, Phil Richards, Brenda Guthrie and Gay Atrill and one member Alan Champion, whose newsletter was returned as no longer there, so if anyone knows Alan's whereabouts then please let me know and I will put him back on the membership roll.

You will be aware that I have now taken over the Email Register from Mick Roebuck, so if anyone wishes to join the Email list then you can contact me via Email at h_brett@sky.com. If you wish to contact me by post or telephone about any general matters concerning membership, then my details are: 202, Kentmere Road, Timperley, ALTRINCHAM, Cheshire, WA15 7NT and 0161 980 8127.

Your Letters

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Belated very good wishes to everyone for 2016.

Good to hear from so many colleagues and from so far afield, but sad to hear of the loss of so many.

Firstly, news from **Doreen Driscoll** in far-away Australia, who writes in response to the last edition, 'It is with great interest and pleasure that I receive the Retired Prison Governors' Newsletter. Since moving to Australia and after the death of my husband this has been a connection to a life we were once part of, as well as letters from retired colleagues who are close. Imagine my distress and shock when I read in issue 73, an accusation from **Jonathan Uzzell** about book burning at the Prison Staff College, Wakefield, attributed to my husband.' I have spoken to Jonathan, who had expressed his comments in rather flowery language. He is sorry if it caused distress, but in his own way was trying to make a slightly humorous point. I have both written to Doreen and spoken on the phone at some length over the matter and her concern.

It remains abundantly clear to all those who knew Bill well, that his standing as an eminent member of the Service is in no way diminished. He was a tutor at the college when I joined. His lectures were outstanding, and everyone wanted to be in his tutorials group. I was sent back to Liverpool during one of its troubled periods, and I also took over at the college when Bill was promoted: he could not have been more gracious, kind and helpful. He always invited me to any event he was organising when he was Regional Director. It was people like **Bill, Brian Eames, Bill Brister, Ian Dunbar, David Gould** and **Colin Honey**, who were in command positions but also operational people, who set the standard and moral climate of the Service we all worked in and loved. We are hardly likely to forget either them or the leadership they provided.

Brian was also contacted over the matter, but unfortunately was not clear about the time being talked about. He phoned me to let me know what had happened and said he would also be in contact with Doreen. So I can report that Brian is well but not venturing so far afield on the exotic holidays they used to take.

As Bill Brister has been mentioned, I can confirm that he too is well and reaches 91 this year. He is still managing well at Holt House, though he does have to see the Doctor more frequently now for checkups. His one slight regret is that he has had to give up driving; using taxis is not quite so convenient. Bill wishes everyone to know that he took a formal decision that he would not be sending Christmas cards this year, or next, but sends his best wishes to everyone. This is a slightly different approach than that of my friend, **Alan Rawson**. About 3 years ago I did not hear from Alan, so asked him about it. 'Oh,' he said, 'I got as far as the C's and had enough!' That explains why Bill got one and I did not.

It is always a pleasure to hear from my stalwart correspondent **Mike Selby**. He has sent another interesting prison story. This is printed in its entirety at the end of the 'jottings'. Thank you Mike, another facet on that peculiar world of prisoners.

News from **Abi Sheikh** who writes, 'Reading your letter brought back fond memories and for a few minutes I was lost in thoughts of good times and fun I had with most of my colleagues and staff.' Unfortunately neither **Abi** nor his wife **Zarina** are in good health, though after a long battle with the health authorities Zarina was given a special injection which has helped her back problem considerably. Abi has had a series of trial and error periods of medication which have not really helped and have now had a reaction to his feet which might require surgery.

On a more cheerful note he has had a good year in his garden. He successfully grew 2 new tropical shrubs, the Lantana as well as the tropical Hibiscus with some beautiful colours. For the first time he was less successful with his tomatoes.

Always good to hear from **Ron and Sue Curtis** who record that they had a few days in Yorkshire, visiting Wakefield where we spent 8 years in the 70s. In part a sentimental journey (the prison, Lupset Park), they also visited for the first time the Barbara Hepworth Art Gallery in what is now called 'Wakefield's Historic Waterfront', not quite how we viewed the River Calder in the old days. They say, 'Orkney was the highlight again (we go every other year). It's just like returning home when the ferry approaches Stromness. What a joy to find that for the first time Scapa Distillery was open to the public; and if you only know Highland Park as the Orkney Whisky, spread your wings and try Scapa 16 year old!'

Ron has long been interested in Edith Cavell, the English nurse executed by Germans in occupied Belgium in 1915. He continues, 'This year was the anniversary of her death and we attended a number of commemorative events, including a graveside service in Norwich (her body was returned to England after the war), attending the Radio 4 Sunday Service broadcast from Norwich Cathedral, a very moving drama also in the Cathedral and a village commemorative fete in Swardston where she spent her childhood; we were fortunate enough to be invited look round the house where she was born by the present owner.'

Short messages from a variety of colleagues: **John and Jean Childs** who spent Christmas with their daughter and family, whereas last year Simon and family joined them from Hong Kong, and in February this year David and wife who in Tokyo are visiting them in February for a few weeks. **Veronica Bird** is well but remains busy as a speaker in demand. She has given up her Spanish property but still likes travelling. **Steve and Lesley Metcalfe** are well but claim to be showing signs of old age. Steve has just had his second hip replacement, so no more of that. He states he is very content to potter around in his little fishing boat, to fossil hunt on local beaches, and to help out with safety boats for the yacht club on race days. Good to have a chat with **Margery Marchant**, who was asking after **Alan Rawson**, but also concerned, as were others, about the late arrival of the PGA Diary. **Bernard**, who is now rather frail and not very mobile, was fretting about the dairy as he has a lot of medical appointments to record. **Danny and Joan Ozanne** are keeping reasonably well all things considered, though Danny has difficulty writing now. They keep busy, Danny with a little lay preaching and Joan helps out with meals for the elderly and for the homeless. Their daughter has now retired from teaching, which makes them feel old now. They do find they need a little rest between tasks. Season's Greetings received from **Dave Simons, Gerry Ross and Tom Johns**, so we know that they have all drawn another year of pension.

There is more news from **Sheila and Jim Blakey**. Jim and his son Paul were off to America in late November to attend the main Daytona Beach Turkey Run, which is in fact a vast number of American Classic Cars, all of which are owners' pride and joy. Jim was reluctant to go and leave Sheila, but she persuaded him it would be a good bonding exercise. Also Sheila gave Jim a long list of items to buy at her favourite craft shop, 'Michaels'. (I hope Jim did not have to pay for excess luggage on the way back!)

Sheila continues to have problems with Rheumatoid Arthritis, and in an effort to get it under control she has to have a series of infusions over the next 18 months.

I also had a message in So on his return in early December, Jim sat with Sheila in hospital for 8 hours starting at 8am, while Sheila had a version of Chemo dripped into her system, then had it all again a fortnight later. Sheila bravely says she must not grumble it could be worse: but does add, 'Growing old is not for wimps.' I am sure there are many who agree with that.

Our members are an intriguing group, always suddenly surprising you! **Iris Clark** writes that we met some years ago at a re-union, and she was encouraged to write an article about life in the service as a wife. Well, some seeds sown take longer to germinate than others! But the article has materialised, sent from Australia, as Iris was visiting there with her son, and via the PGA office. What a wonderful technological world we live in! It really is a very good read and views the Service from a different perspective. Thank you so much Iris. It is printed in full at the end of the jottings, and after Mike Selby's contribution.

I had a further missive from **Jonathan Uzzell**, this time about the loss of **Joanna Kazubska**. He writes, 'I was shocked to read of the death of Joanna in the Autumn Newsletter. I first met Joanna in 1974 when she attended the AG1 course I was running at PSC Love Lane. Subsequently I visited her at Bullwood Hall where she was having a rough time as Deputy to **Joy Kinsley**. We met again in 1979 when we were both interviewed as prospective managers of a new secure unit at Aycliffe Special School. I withdrew from the process realising I could not work with Dr Houghubi the school Director. Joanna got the job. We again met by accident in 1982 in Bloomsbury (where else!). She had left Aycliffe as she also could not work with Houghubi. She had started her own company dealing with recruitment and interviewing. This was a great success and she was awarded the 'Young Business Woman of the Year' jointly by the 'Financial Times' and 'Management Today'. I remember her as an elegant, intelligent, outgoing young woman. I feel her loss.'

I received a lovely little letter from **Pat Bester**, widow of **Stanley Bester** who retired in 1980, and passed away in 2012. She thanks us for continuing to send her the Newsletter. However as she says, time marches on and she remembers very few of the names now, and as her sight is deteriorating she is having to cut down on reading. So she asks to be removed from our mailing list, but wishes to send her regards to anyone 'who still remembers my dear Stanley and myself.' I suspect there are quite a few who remember you both.

It is sad to have report the loss of so many dear colleagues during 2015, including **Malcolm Brown** who died on the morning of 21st November. His funeral was in Bath. **Graham Mumby-Croft** commented that it was sad news, and that Malcolm was his first Governor when he joined at Norwich in 1976. I calculate that Malcolm was 88, indeed a good age. He also served at Medomsley prior to Norwich and at Gartree. Due to his rosy complexion and rather rural drawl he was nicknamed 'Farmer Brown' by some. Whilst at Gartree it is alleged he did not climb to the 3's landing that often; on one occasion when he did, he stood gazing out at the countryside, and then turned to a young officer and said, 'Now young man which is the way down from here?' I remember him as a generous, cheerful, outgoing character, ready to help anyone.

Gareth Davies OBE also died suddenly on morning of 21st November. Gareth was a Major in the army prior to joining prison service in 1980, where his first posting was to Pentonville. He also served at Scrubs and Canterbury as well as Head Office. He took over from me at Pentonville when I retired in 2000. He always greeted me warmly when I returned for Pentonville re-unions, and I remember well his love of singing with a strong clear voice.

December from Martin Smith about the death of his step mother, Mrs **Sylvia Smith** who lived in Swanage. He says she enjoyed receiving the Newsletter as did his late father, **Stephen Smith**, who served in the Service in the 60s and 70s after retiring from the Nigerian Police.

Don Drew died on 4th December. Don had been a Principal Officer at Pentonville which is where **Gerry Ross** knew him. He says Don was a true gentleman and was widely respected. He retired from Shrewsbury and Gerry attended his retirement. I knew Don when we were both at Scrubs, and agree very much with Gerry's assessment. I happened to be a member of his Chief 1 Promotion Board, and can clearly relate he got it on merit. He and Iris were loyal supporters of both RPGA re-unions and the Pentonville re-unions. Don also persuaded me to give a talk to his brother's Rotary Club. He was a true friend and I will miss very much meeting up every so often.

Chris Harder kindly advised us of the loss of **David Brookes** who died in hospital on 4th December. David served at Dover, HBC, Low Newton, Durham and North Regional Office. He then decided to move to the private sector and was at Blakenhurst. I first met David when I was posted to Dover. He and Derek Aram were close mates and shared a love of jazz. I do believe David played a round of golf every so often.

News has come from Tim Walsh (son), of the death on 18 December of his father **Henry St George Walsh**, more commonly known as 'Harry'. He was a member up until recent years. He retired from Bedford Prison after many years in the service. The funeral was held at Kettering.

Also news from his widow, of the death on Saturday 2nd January of **Roger Brandon**, at the age of only 67. As **Paul Laxton** wrote, 'News about Roger's death has come as a shock, 67 is no age'. Roger began his career at Nottingham, followed by Parkhurst, Highpoint, Regional Office, Bristol and Erlstoke, where he was the youngest Governing Governor to be appointed at that time in 1985, then Channings Wood, a brief spell at the training school and finally Ford. He took early medical retirement in 1998 (the effects of his kidney transplant in 1992). The funeral was held in Newton Abbot, South Devon.

There are probably not many who remember **Kate Warburton** as she was when she was part of the 1964, 21st staff course. Kate left the service when she married **Brian Lomax**, who as a probation officer had connections with the Service, particularly Manchester and Onley. Sadly Brian died of throat cancer in November 2015, at only 67 years of age. He had led a full life. He had read theology at Cambridge University and was a charming down-to-earth character with a fine sense of humour and it was always a pleasure to be in his company. After retiring from the probation service he was Chief Executive of a charity helping former prisoners to reintegrate in society.

Brian effectively changed the face of British football by championing the unlikely idea that fans could help to run their clubs. He showed the way by founding the first Supporters' Trust at Northampton Town in 1992: the development was so successful that there are now Trusts at 203 clubs across Britain.

He discovered the power of the fan at an early age. His father had taken him to see Manchester United in 1956 when the 'Busby Babes' were the kings of English football, but Brian chose to support his local team, non-league Altrincham FC. He cycled all over Lancashire attending matches and was often the only Altrincham fan at away games. When a particularly dismal run in 1960 brought the club to the brink of relegation and bankruptcy, Brian, then aged 11, wrote an impassioned letter to the local newspaper, pleading for someone to save the club. Two business men, Noel White, who later became a Director of Liverpool, and Peter Swales, who went on to become Chairman of Manchester City, were so impressed that they bought the club. The experience taught Brian that a fan's passion could be turned into real influence. It was that lesson he remembered in 1992 when Northampton Town, now his local club, were near bottom of the 4th division league and heavily in debt. Brian was then instrumental, when talking it all over with a few friends at a post-match pint, in setting up Northampton Town Supporters Trust, the first of many that would be set up. The club was saved and Brian served as a Director for seven years.

He was a passionate Liberal for his sins, and stood unsuccessfully as a Liberal candidate in general elections on 4 occasions, but was a Lib Dem councillor on Daventry district council. He will be sadly missed by many.

John Berry has been in touch and writes, 'Like many retired prison governors I have kept an 'eye on the Service' both from the point of view as a Magistrate and Mental Health Act Manager for Nottinghamshire and Leicestershire and more recently as a member of the Independent Monitoring Board for HMP Leicester.

Having been retired for 8 years I decided that I was distant enough from the Service not to run into any old governor grades I had known in the past. (Interesting - but I have been retired 15 years and still come across them!) Never having worked in Leicester, but visited on a number of occasions whilst working as a prison governor and Head of Welfare Services, I had some insight into the place. The change in the prison is significant, with around 30% less staff than they had 4 years ago. They have recently received an intake of 30 New Entrant Prison Officers which can make for an interesting time in any prison but for one as small as Leicester it does cause management problems - blind leading the blind!! Still they have a very good Governor, but he has very little control over the budget, it all apparently being controlled by the 'centre'. Like many prisons it needs a significant amount of capital spend to bring it into a good state of repair, but as there is little that around I suspect we will continue to manage with 'make and mend'. What is of concern is the substantial number of prisons where a major capital bid is required to repair them: Glen Parva springs to mind where the north end probably needs demolishing and rebuilding. It was built by prisoners from Ashwell so that may account for some of the problems, although not all of them. It is not inconceivable that Leicester could be closed and rebuilt as part of the refurbishment of Glen Parva - if there is any money around as part of the Gove reforms. I don't see Leicester site attracting the same interest as Oxford prison, but with King Richard 111 as our latest attraction you never know. (It is likely to get worse now that the entire 'Works Department' has been taken over by Carillion, who appear more concerned about arguing over what is in the contract than doing any work!)

There are certainly significant problems with illegal highs and, with fewer staff searching, this is an ongoing problem. Prisoners are regularly rushed across the road to the Leicester Royal Infirmary either having taken drugs or reacted badly to them, or having had their drinks spiked. The prison also has to deal with an increasing number of prisoners with mental health problems, predictably some caused by drugs. With the shortage of places in the NHS mental health service, prisoners may have to wait to be transferred for treatment, with the inevitable pressure this brings onto the staff trying to manage them in a prison setting.

I have also heard (yet to be confirmed) that New Entrant officer training is to be increased to 10 weeks, which if true, will at least give the new officers a bit more training before they hit the landings. With poorer salaries, lower pensions which you pay more for and a working age which is forever moving towards 70, retirement on my part was a good decision! It is however interesting that a number of Governors (and Area Managers) have continued to work beyond 60, so it cannot be all bad.

Other than this, my work with the MOD Veterans Committee is going well and I find the work with the local FA Disciplinary Committee and as a Director of an Academy fascinating. If colleagues are interested in joining then contact your local FA committee: they are always looking for people with experience of handling disciplinary cases. The only downside to retirement has been my wife's ill health, although had I been working, I would probably have had to retire to look after her.

It is good to see so many names I recognise still working and writing about their interests/exploits to the letter section.

Regards to All.

John R Berry OBE, MBA, MSC, MA(Ed), PGD Law, Chartered FCIPD, JP
Assistant Director Wellbeing Solutions

Thank you John for your insight into the current Service, you certainly keep busy. We all hope your wife's health will not deteriorate. As John has raised a number of current issues, I will take the opportunity to mention another. Officers are no longer issued with a Number One best uniform, so on formal occasions such as a funeral of a colleague who has passed away whilst in service, the establishment has to draw on a 'buffer stock'. Elmley had cause to use this 'service' recently for a full staff turn-out to line the route at the crematorium. Despite some senior staff still having No1 uniform, using the so-called buffer stock only managed to dress 20% of the staff, so that the route was lined by a variety of dress.

Colleagues will I am sure recall occasions when a full staff turn-out, everyone in best uniform, provided a fitting, dignified and impressive 'farewell to a dear colleague'. Obviously the powers-that-be do not regard this as significant! We are a disciplined Service, and neither the police nor the forces would put up with such nonsense. It was not acceptable to the staff, or to me. In my capacity as IMB member, I have written to the head of NOMS setting that out. I await a response. I would be interested to hear colleagues' views.

From far away Thailand. **John Ship**, ex Dover, The Mount and Pentonville, sends the following intriguing missive.

‘I was at a ‘do’ here in Thailand a couple of weeks ago when a friend and former colleague, Arthur Littler, gave me a copy of the Retired PGA latest Newsletter.

I very much enjoyed reading it, especially your musings and the updates from former colleagues. It made me think that I ought to contact Harry Brett about signing up and I ought to drop you a line. (So glad you did)

I enjoyed Your Letters, especially the reference to Bill Brister. He was my first Governor: he was a Governor 2 when I arrived at Dover Borstal from the OTS in 1968. I always admired and respected Bill, and was delighted to read that he is still around and taking an active interest in current events. I last saw him when he visited The Mount to open the unit named in his honour. I introduced myself to him, explaining that he was my first-ever Governor some 30 years earlier. I was delighted when he called me by name, though the fact that he’d glanced at my badge hadn’t slipped my attention.

I also read the reports about Pentonville: on one hand I am proud of what the staff continue to achieve against all the odds, though on my last visit I was disappointed to see that it was beginning to show its age, but it is over 170 years old.

Life goes on here in Bangkok, just about. Ice and I went to Singapore for a long weekend last year to attend a Masonic function. Just before we left she advised me to buy travel insurance for the weekend. I would not normally bother for a few days away but she insisted and so, as always, I did as I was told: it cost me less than £20.

Whilst there I felt a bit ‘peaky’ so we retired early. At about 03.00 I woke up with chest pains. I thought they would go away but they did not. This woke Ice up and despite my protests that I was OK and not to worry, she called an ambulance: 30 minutes or so later I was being resuscitated at the Singapore General Hospital. I will never forget those words, ‘He’s back’.

Whilst I was being resuscitated the staff had Ice cornered and were searching through her handbag for a credit card to guarantee payment. They took £2,500 off her and she could see her shopping trip planned for later that day cut short. They wouldn’t have let me die but they did want their money. They fitted a stent into one of my two blocked arteries and I remained there for further week and then had to stay in Singapore for a further three weeks until we were cleared to fly home. My final medical bill was in the region of £16,000, but thankfully my travel insurance reimbursed me most of that. (A very good £20 investment).

The Masonic community were brilliant. They supported Ice whilst I was in hospital and offered us accommodation until we could fly home. One of Ice’s friends flew down from Bangkok to give her some support. I have had a second stent fitted on my return and am now on the road to recovery.

Not sure if our future is here or in the UK: it was always an option I could fly home and take advantage of the NHS if I were sick. That wouldn’t work in the case of a heart attack or if I had an accident and in any case the Government have moved the goalposts and withdrawn the facility of free NHS access to UK taxpayers/expats, in fact we are now liable to be charged 150% of the actual cost of treatment.

I am one of many expats who are weighing up their options. I may have to swap the temperate climate and political instability of Thailand for the not-so-temperate climate of the UK but with NHS cover, an unfrozen pension and a bus pass. Ice and I are discussing it at length; it would be a massive move for her though she is quite upbeat about it.

A few months ago I was walking along my local soi when I bumped into **Brodie Clarke**, small old world. We met up a few days later for catch up, must say he is looking really well. We meet up with a number of colleagues here on their travels, **Jeanne Bryant and Debbie Groves** to name but two.

We have been to Europe twice in 2015, spending time in London, near you in Staplehurst, and my home town of Eastbourne. If we did move back Eastbourne would be our favoured option, even though **Mark Schito** lives there. We met up with **Jeanne Bryant** in Greenwich, and spent time in Paris and Amsterdam.

All the very best for 2016.’

Glad it worked out so well health wise and good to know that you are getting back to your old self. Do keep in touch.

As we have not managed to meet up this year, only brief news from **Paul Wailen**, who states he is now fairly well-settled in his new place but still has some interior decorating to do.

Roger Outram keeps busy with a range of matters, including the Shannon Trust where we are both volunteers. He has not been cruising of late as his partner has had to undergo treatment for cancer.

Brendan O’Friel has been in contact re developments on the Isle of Man, and in conclusion he writes, ‘Keep up the good work – Arthur would be delighted to see RGN still flourishing.’

‘W H O A’ Submitted by Mike Selby

Christmas Day in 1980 was fine and crisp as I walked to work. My task included attending Morning Service in the Chapel of Brixton Prison. As Governor of this Prison I was a reluctant attendee but it was my duty.

The congregation of about 40 inmates huddled together in this vast building were those accused of crime, who were there on remand or awaiting trial. Furthermore, there were also members of the Hospital wing present who were psychotic, ill or on cold turkey from drugs or alcohol. Guarding us was a handful of prison officers--chins thrust out.

The Chaplain entered and pattering behind him, the Assistant Chaplain--recently joined. We stood and the service meandered along. Christmas Services in Prison are usually miserable events and in Brixton particularly so, because the lawyer has been unable, despite most eloquent effort, to persuade the Judge to grant bail on this "very special occasion."

The Assistant clambered up to give the sermon. My concern was aroused because I was indirectly responsible for his original selection. He had been transferred to us, he told me, from his initial posting because "I haven't done very well". He was a bachelor in late middle age who had spent all his working life in Missionary work in Africa and now sought work in England. How would this gentle, sensitive, cultivated man -absent from England for so long - perform?

He surprised us all by his opening question. **"We all like horses don't we?"**

The reaction exceeded his expectation--up jumped an Irishman, shouting in lung bursting voice "Yes, Your Reverence - 6 to 4 the field-I'll take the odds!"

As the guards eased their way towards this outburst the Assistant Chaplain said, "Oh dear me, I don't mean that, please do sit down" and the Irishman did.

Now the mistake. Instead of developing the subject, he repeated the question. At this, up jumped the Irishman again in vociferous form, offering even more generous odds. This was too much for the guards who jumped him and hustled him out. We heard the body as it bumped down the spiral staircase.

Pause

"Oh dear, what I wanted to ask is what do we say to a horse when we want it to stop?" No reply.

"We say, '**whoa!!!** Don't we? And that spells W H O A, and WHOA stands for....."

and for the life of me I cannot remember the rest but it remains in my recollection as the worst sermon I have ever heard.

The life of a wife in the Prison Service (1953-1978) By Iris D Clark

My husband Wally Clark started with the Prison Service as a Borstal Officer at Latchmere House in Kingston-upon-Thames in 1953. This attracted a princely wage of £5.78/ week. He felt it would offer stability and a pension in a time of job uncertainty. A big plus was that accommodation was included in the package. We were provided with a prefabricated house under the walls of the "big house." The delight for me was a small but reliable refrigerator, a real luxury at that time. This was located next to Ham Common; a delightful place which engendered long walks through into Richmond Great Park.

Our children went to the very good Latchmere Primary School; a walk of about a mile. Many of the Officers were ex-servicemen and their wives had gone through fairly recent war-time experiences. This provided for a culture of comradeship and mutual respect at the Officers and Wives Clubs. Kingston-upon-Thames was a short bus ride away with all the facilities one could want. We enjoyed our stay for three a half years at Latchmere. If only I had known what was to come. . .

After a fairly short notice we re-located to Hewell Grange in Warwickshire, near Tardebigge, in between Redditch and Bromsgrove. This was also a Borstal which occupied what had been Lord Plymouth's 18th. Century country seat. Again a prefab. was provided, located near to the man-made lake. Well, what can I tell you? The fridge took most of day to clean and rest of the prefab. was in a similar state. My son still remembers the period of time he waited before he was permitted to use the loo. This place was in the absolute sticks and we did not have a car. It was a half an hour's walk up steep hills to the main road, a single small corner shop and the bus into Redditch took a further half an hour. The local village school and the attached church were an hour's walk away.

My children absolutely hated the village school almost as much as the other children hated them. So we had to send them to a school in town. Although I did not have any retail experience I managed to start a part-time job with Boots the Chemist in Redditch and this allowed me to pick up the children on my way home. I was seriously criticised for doing this by the Officers wives! Apparently, women were not supposed to work. Another officer's wife was working in Redditch so naturally we became great friends. I must have set a trend because it was not long before they were all going to work. Soon we were able to buy a car and this made life very different for us, plus my bonus paid for our holidays.

We grew to love The Park with its lake, wonderful views, landscaped gardens and extravagant old country seat. One of the rooms of the old house had been painted by commission to reflect Beethoven's pastoral symphony; this reflected the deep country setting and our taste in music at the time. Eventually new houses were built near to the main road and we were allocated the house we wanted.

It had been suggested to Wally by one of the Assistant Governors that he would make a good AG. This meant undergoing a gruelling, high failure rate, entry process and tests, before going on a long training course at Wakefield. Bear in mind Wally had left school without formal qualifications but received technical training in the RAF. After his remarkable course entry success, we then had a tough six months of life without a husband/ father or the car. In total we had spent nearly eight years at Hewell Grange. We felt very much at home, partly as my sister lived relatively close at the other side of Birmingham; but it was time for another complete change for the family.

Wally's first posting as an AG was at Ford Open Prison in Sussex. We lived in splendid isolation the other side of the aerodrome from the prison in one of a group of five houses which had originally been for the senior officers of the Fleet Air Arm. I loved the house from day one. It stood in its own grounds with a large garden which later yielded lots of fruit and vegetables. Of course all our friends were again left behind and initially I felt quite isolated. My daughter was lucky enough to finish her O'levels in Redditch and matriculate as it was called in those days and go straight to Chichester High School for Girls. My son on the other hand had some significant challenges, with a radical change in syllabus, culture and teaching styles at the local school. After some years and an uphill struggle he went to Chichester High School for Boys.

I soon found a job in Chichester where a large store was opening. The social scene was very different, with many coffee mornings and charity events, as the Governor's wife was very keen on helping the inmates' wives. There were two prison compounds each with their own chapels and chaplains. We were requested to go as a family to the services. One of the chaplains was very much involved in Chichester theatre and we became very good friends. At Christmas time the inmates decorated their huts and the Governor's wife and I did the judging. One hut, I still remember well, had made a large sandy desert with a superbly arranged nativity scene. Again over time we became very settled with many friends, and were a very happy family. However, suddenly everything changed yet again.

Wally was posted to Brixton to provide him with the experience of a closed prison, thus enabling the path to future assignments. After fairly short notice I found myself in an allocated house just off Streatham High Road. My daughter was helping me clean the kitchen. There were lovely tinted glass cabinets along the walls. We suddenly realised the glass was not tinted just dirty.

As we were close to London, we enjoyed the theatre, the Albert Hall and its' many other attractions. Wally was promoted to Deputy Governor. We were only there for two years and then moved on again to the Isle of Sheppey, which I detested at first. It was a very bleak place with cold North Sea winds. I turned to flower arranging, took my City and Guilds qualification and subsequently taught a class at Sheppey. After four years and with Wally now being due for retirement within six months, we had to buy our own property. Although accommodation had been provided throughout Wally's service, the terms of his employment and frequency of moves had effectively precluded the purchase of a house prior to this point. The house needed to be nearby and we bought a property in Rainham, Kent. At last we had our own permanent base and so ended my life as a wife in the Prison Service.

So in summary, we have had ups and downs and thus our lives have not been different from most people. I now have lived in the same house for nearly forty years, and although sadly Wally passed on in 1998, I have many happy memories.

THE SHANNON TRUST

There is a charity called the Shannon Trust, which trains prisoners whilst in custody who can read, to teach others who cannot. I have been involved with the Trust since about 2001, and was for 4 years Chair of Trustees. Others such as **Veronica Bird**, **Ron Curtis** and **Philippa Lowe** have also been involved in the past, and **Roger Outram** is currently also involved.

Eric Allison is an ex-prisoner, who took to a legitimate way of life, and is now a crime correspondent with the Guardian newspaper: he is also a Trustee of the Trust.

Christopher Morgan was in an exchange-of-letters scheme, and wrote over many years to a life-sentenced prisoner called Tom Shannon. He published a book called, 'The Invisible Crying Tree', and wanted to use the royalties to assist life-sentenced prisoners, but Tom persuaded Christopher of the need for literacy training amongst prisoners: hence the name of the Trust.

After 30 years Tom has been released, and Eric has written a summary of what has been achieved. I share it all with you.

Bob Duncan

HOW ONE PRISONER'S LETTER LED TO A NATIONAL JAIL READING SCHEME

July 1992, the first letter Tom Shannon had received since starting a life sentence seven years earlier.

'Dear Mr Shannon, I received a letter today from the Prison Reform Trust saying you would welcome having someone with whom to exchange letters. I'm afraid you have drawn my name out of the hat. It is Christopher.'

It was an unlikely match. Christopher Morgan, ex-industrialist, wealthy farmer and old Etonian, and Tom, a semi-literate orphan, who was surviving prison by standing up for himself. But the pen friendship blossomed and Morgan was impressed by Shannon's vivid description of life behind bars. In 1995, Morgan published a synopsis of the letters in a book, *The Invisible Crying Tree*. It sold well, creating royalties. Morgan did not need the money and Shannon could not take it in jail, so Christopher put it to good use. Shannon had written about the appalling literacy rates in jail, with nearly half the prison population unable to read.

Morgan had the idea of getting prisoners who could read to teach those who could not. He approached the prison service head, Richard Tilt, who commissioned a pilot study at Wandsworth prison. With the help of Neil Lodge, an enthusiastic prison officer, it eventually took off, and in 1997 the Shannon Trust was born. Since then the Trust has enabled prisoners to teach upwards of 50,000 fellow travellers to read and write across every prison in England and Wales.

Morgan died in 2011, but what of the prisoner the charity was named after? In 1985, he got into a drunken row with a friend, a fight ensued and the friend was killed. The prosecution offered him the option of manslaughter but, full of remorse, he pleaded guilty to murder. The judge ordered he serve a minimum of eight years, but he was 'inside' for 30 years (initially as he as by his own admission was a trouble maker) and he was only released in January 2015 from Oakwood prison near Wolverhampton. The Prisoner's Advice Service represented him at the parole hearing and facilitated his move to a care home in the West Country, run by the Langley House Trust.

The first thing that strikes me when I meet Shannon, now aged 77, is his size; he is around five foot three and weighs around six stone. Yet this is the man who fought his way through the first years of his sentence. In one letter to Morgan, he wrote of having 40 prison adjudications for attacking staff and prisoners and wrecking cells.

I ask where the rage came from. He talks of his early life. Born in London in 1938, he never knew his father and cannot remember his mother. She moved to Glasgow soon after he was born and was drowned in the Clyde when Shannon was two years old. A relative later told him his mother was a prostitute. He was sent Smyllum Park Orphanage, Lanark, run by nuns. I ask about his life there and he turns away in silence, then he refers me to a poem he wrote and sent to Morgan, about life in the orphanage.

I switch tack and ask him about the first, troubled years of his sentence. 'Where did that come from?' 'All my life there were bullies and you have to stand up to them. Prison was no different. If you let one get away with it, they will queue up to take advantage of you.' He says a lot of his troubles stem from guilt and remorse. 'There was not a day went by that I did not think of Fred (the victim). I still do, even today.'

Why did he serve so long, when he was given a relatively short tariff? 'At the start, I stood up for myself, like at the orphanage, just lashing out. This meant long spell in segregation. Then I settled down. I think writing to Christopher helped, it gave me an interest, something different in my life.'

But why 30 years? He says he could not engage in the parole process. 'I didn't want to talk about what I had done, so my parole kept getting put back. After that, he adds, I think they just forgot about me.'

But 30 years: why did he not protest legitimately, did he not want to come out? He goes quiet again, 'I think part of me said I had taken Fred's life, I should spend the rest of my life in jail.'

Later I research Smyllum Park and uncover a horror story. Former residents describe beatings from nuns as an everyday occurrence. And in the corner of the St Mary's Church lie dozens of small mounds of earth, the unmarked graves of the hundred or so children who died at Smyllum between 1864 and its' close in the 1980s.

Aged 11, Shannon moved to another orphanage run by the Catholic Church, 'That was better; I got to work on the farm and grew a love of nature. But there were still bullies, there always are and I fought them, as I always have.'

Tom says he helped some prisoners to learn to read before the Trust was set up in his name. He remembers with pride a short letter one pupil sent him: 'Dear Tommy, see how I can write now.' But he never got involved in the formal reading programme once the Trust was up and running. 'I didn't want the fuss,' he says.

But he is clearly proud of what his friendship with Morgan achieved, though he gives the latter all the credit. 'I just wrote a few letters,' he says.

He had one jail visit from Morgan. 'I could have had more, but it was uncomfortable. I couldn't talk with him, but when I wrote, the words poured out.' Does he know how many prisoners have been taught to read under the scheme? 'Maybe a few thousand,' he replies.

When I tell him that it is more than 50,000 and counting, he seems genuinely astonished.

What of the future? He has just had an operation to remove cataracts and is waiting for new glasses. 'Then I will get back to reading and learning,' he says. His prospects are uncertain: council adult services pay for his accommodation and it is unclear whether it will continue to fund his stay at the home.

'I would just like to be settled, to know where I am. All the rage has gone now, I just want some peace,' he says.

Finally, I ask him where the title of the book of his published letters came from. He refers me to a letter he wrote to Christopher, which says, 'Thank you for being there, for hearing my bleets (sic) my invisible crying tree.'

This man of a few words is quiet again, then he says; 'At Smyllum Park, there was a sycamore tree in the grounds. When I was beaten in a fight, I would climb it and cry. Then I would come down, find the lad who had beaten me and fight him again.'

I am sure we have all come across someone like 'Tom' in our careers: not all have had such a profound outcome. I find it a moving story, and a salutary reminder that we should never give up on any of our residents however difficult they may be. Christopher Morgan was an exceptional character. In about 2001, I agreed to meet him, not knowing what to expect. We 'gelled', we became friends, and when his wife died he asked me to take over from him for a year. Almost 7 years later I am still involved. Some of the happiest memories were when we used to meet at his house in London, and over a light lunch provided by Ann, plan how we might move the Trust forward. Christopher had such drive and determination and an assured belief that literacy was so important and could change people's lives that the Trust could not fail. It took a lot of work and effort, but is now well-established and held in high esteem.

Bob Duncan

5/2/2016

NEWS FROM THE ISLE OF MAN PRISON

The Isle of Man Prison has been working in partnership with The Rotary Club of Onchan and other local organisations to support the most vulnerable members of the community.

Vegetables grown in the prison garden and polytunnel are being used to make warm and nourishing soup for people who visit the homeless charity Graih. Two tons of vegetables are grown annually at the Prison which saves money there and provides a healthy diet for the inmates and staff.

Graih operates a drop-in centre on Broadway, Douglas providing hot food, a place to socialise and somewhere to sleep at night on an emergency basis.

Prisoners are helping to turn some of the fresh vegetables grown at Jurby into soup which is then chilled and delivered to Graih once a fortnight on a Friday evening.

Onchan Rotary Club has stepped in to support the initiative by donating a new soup cauldron to reheat the soup ready for serving and plastic storage containers for keeping and moving the soup.

Kenny Best, Chairman of Graih said "We are very grateful for the support provided by The Rotary Club of Onchan, the IOM Prison and Probation Service. Our service users feel the benefits of a hot meal, particularly at this time of year and the soup has been very well received".



Prison Management

Special Edition of the Prison Service Journal, Number 222 - November 2015

This note is to alert colleagues to the recent publication of a special edition of the PSJ about "Prison Management". **The edition can be found easily on line, just Google Prison Service Journal 222.** Some of our readers may find this of interest!

The PSJ continues to be edited by Jamie Bennett, Governor of Grendon. This edition includes the following articles:-

- Governing Governors – by Ben Crewe and Alison Liebling
- Managing Prisons in an Age of Austerity
- Interviews with a number of Governors including European Governors
- Book reviews

My focus is on the article on "Governing Governors". In it, Crewe and Liebling report on recent research they have conducted into Governors, commenting that Governors have been subject to considerably less research than either prisoners or uniform staff. They note a dearth of recent memoirs about Governors' working lives. They give three examples of such memoirs (Kelley 1967, Clayton 1958, Grew 1958) but do not include "If Freedom Fail" by John Vidler – MacMillan & Co 1964. "Paterson on Prisons" also has relevant material. But these are older books, perhaps less well known to the present generation of practitioners and researchers.

It was refreshing to read some of the critical points made in this article:-

- Governors are emotional about their work and wish the organisation were more emotional about them
- The organisation, and Governors' experience of it, is gendered
- Trust matters
- Governor have power as symbols and moral translators

The article reflects the impact on Governors of difficulties with staff behaviour, including verbal abuse and damage to cars. Retired Colleagues will know – to their cost – that this is not unique to the present generation but also reflects the experience of some now retired. The Prison Governors Association records contain too many difficult personal cases where Governor Grades were abused – not just by staff but sometimes by politicians!

Two further extracts are worth reproducing -

- Some Governors are engaging in forms of "creative compliance" in which they operate in accordance with the organisation's stated values but in a way that is not completely consistent with its procedures
- For many the feeling of not being trusted as a professional serves to compound the frustration of having less power to do the job

This article has stimulated me to reflect and ask questions! Has the essentials of Governing changed much over time? Shortages of resources have been a feature of running prisons for centuries – John Howard's findings in "The State of the Prisons" reflected – among other problems - an unwillingness to spend local money on criminals! New technology has created much more effective ways of keeping track on prisoners (and much else) – many of us will recall the dreadful tangles staff faced trying to keep paper records of prisoners in high-turnover local prisons. But new technology is largely a boost to efficiency. So too, was the arrival of improved communication systems – there was a time (pre-1982) when we did not even have radio pagers – let alone mobile phones - to alert senior staff about urgent problems!

But the key to making prisons work has always been the relationship between staff and prisoners and the craft of Governing has been to get the best out of both groups, living and working together, often in demoralising and challenging conditions. Paterson set out the simple principle of good administration in a prison, "If you want to exert an influence on human beings, you must call upon men capable of exerting that influence". Today, he would have said "people" or "staff" – but those were the days before gender equality! So selection and training of staff is – and was - critical.

Another interesting question is about Governors' autonomy and the extent of their supervision by HQ. Chairman Du Cane – through the timetable he imposed on each prison – was able to boast around 1880 that he knew at any hour of the day what his Governors were doing. So attempts by the centre to micro-manage Governors are not new. Many of us saw swings from centralisation to decentralisation and back again within a few short decades of service. What issues and information did Governors refer up the line to HQ? Some Governors were adept at not asking for advice or direction if they knew the answers would not be helpful!

The challenges faced by each generation of Governors seem particularly difficult at the time. But we should not forget what has gone before. Governors of the nineteen- twenties faced a huge closure programme with half the prisons closed. Governors during World War Two endured enemy bombing and very demanding war conditions with few staff. Between 1945 –1956, there was the first wave of cell overcrowding, the opening of a considerable number of mothballed prisons and other make-shift facilities to house the doubling of the population. The last decades of the twentieth century saw staff industrial action and prisoner unrest on an unprecedented scale. A Governor's lot was never a happy one!

This stimulating edition of the PSJ might have been even better if it had gone back a little further to explore the way that each generation of Governors has had to face substantial challenges. Tackling challenges usually involve managing this key relationship between staff and prisoners. To do this effectively, Governors need sensitive support from HQ and to be left with real discretion about how they govern.

BRENDAN O'FRIEL