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*Cornton Vale was originally a small farm of thirty acres of heavy carse land between Stirling and Bridge of Allan*

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9. The consecration of the Cornton Vale Church and Chaplaincy Centre in June 1982 was an ecumenical event, embracing clergy of all denominations. With kind permission of Lady Martha Bruce.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This book had its origins in a lecture given by John Murphy to the Bridge of Allan Dr Welsh Historical Trust on Cornton Vale Estate as Colony, Open Borstal and Women's Prison, in May 1994.

After Dr. Elspeth King of the Smith Institute came across traces of my notes, she constantly urged me to commit them to print. I realised my knowledge was limited and dated, and I could not tackle the project on my own.

I called on C. R. Poor, a lifelong associate and friend, who recruited Charles Hills for Borstal, and Lady Martha Bruce for the Women's Prison. We could not have assembled a stronger team.

Lady Martha has an unparalleled knowledge of Women's Prisons, and first-hand experience of establishing the new Cornton Vale Prison. The architects and builders may have set up the physical provision, but Martha Bruce with advice and support from John Oliver, Inspector of Prisons, determined the philosophy and parameters of a new Modern Prison for Women.

Charles Hills sadly died half-way through our work. At eighty-five, his many years of services had been with Borstal Institutions, and his enthusiasm and devotion to the cause remained undimmed. A hundred years earlier he would have been amongst the great Reformers in ending Prison for Boys. As it was, his great contribution was The Six Circle, a new outreach movement for Borstal Boys to care and work with handicapped and deprived young persons. Charles's life was one of devotion to the Borstal Service.

Dick Poor, a veteran like myself, whom I have known as a colleague and friend for forty years, came to Scotland as Children's Officer, Stirling County, in the early Sixties when Child Care here was to say the least backward.

From there he became Director of Social Work, Argyll, conversant with the problems of rural Highland life, and then on Regionalisation, called in as Director of Social Work for the Lanark Division of Strathclyde. By this time Dick was recognised as a main authority on Child Care in Scotland.

To this he added experience on the Board of Carstairs Prison, and manager at Loaningdale School. He also advanced the somewhat neglected cause of Mental Health in Lanarkshire and Scotland.

Without Dick Poor as co-ordinator and moderator this book could not have been written. J. Malcolm Allan, a Strathclyde University Librarian, with his encyclopaedic knowledge of Bridge of Allan and District, made many helpful suggestions and provided information on the Cornton Vale model at the 1938 Empire Exhibition Glasgow.

Dr Elspeth King, after firing the starting pistol to make me jump, has provided facilities and maintained her inspiration. A Suffragette Manquee, she has a particular interest in Women Prisoners. All this has been done against a background of mounting major exhibitions in the Smith, some of national interest, and participation. Elspeth has been behind the scenes, but has played a major part in our project.

**J. S. Murphy**

## FOREWORD

What an interesting and important story is the history of Cornton Vale. In the last hundred years this piece of land in Stirling has been home to three quite different groups. It was first a brave Church of Scotland project for men with alcohol problems; then it was an Open Borstal; and since 1975 it has been a prison for women.

In each of these periods Cornton Vale was a pioneer. This excellent history illustrates the idealism and the determination which governed each of them. The most detailed - and perhaps the most interesting - part is the account of the beginnings of the prison for women. It is moving and inspiring to learn of the vision, the hope and the courage of those who created the new prison. In particular the enormous contribution made by Lady Martha Bruce in those years, to the values and to the management of the new prison, must not be forgotten.

John Murphy knows very well the world of criminal justice and of deprivation and addiction. He also knows what prisoners need. So he is able, in a kindly way, to identify the achievements of Cornton Vale in each of its three phases. Some of the problems were different (drugs was hardly an issue in 1975) but many are sadly familiar today.

As Mr Murphy points out, a Cornton Vale population of nearly 400, as it is today, was unimaginable in 1975. The story of more recent years is told in less detail, but it does recognise the pressures of today's prison; overcrowding, addiction, bad health, and histories of abuse.

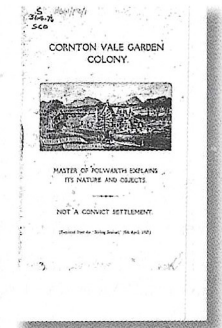
This most interesting history ends with some challenges to the reader. What constitutes successful punishment? Is the rise in number of female prisoners essential? Is prison the right answer for most of these inadequate offenders? These are questions which will not go away.

I hope this study finds a wide readership. It deserves it on account of the interest of the story it tells and on account of the humane values which lie behind its writing.

**The Very Reverend Dr. Andrew McLellan**  
**HM Chief Inspector of Prisons 2002-2008**  
**Moderator of the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland, 2000**

## Chapter I

## THE GARDEN COLONY



On a Saturday in 1907 the Master of Polwarth addressed a large turn-out of concerned citizens in Bridge of Allan Parish Church Hall on the Church of Scotland project to set up a training colony for down-and-out and alcoholic men from the cities.

This was not unlike the meetings which, 70 years later, preceded the opening of the Women's Prison, where the good citizens expressed their great concerns about the introduction of criminal, unruly elements to their midst.

The bland name of 'garden colony' did nothing to reduce their apprehensions. Colony was the label of the time used for such institutions as Palacerigg, Cumbernauld for mentally handicapped patients, or indeed the Royal Scottish National Hospital at Larbert.

Cornton Vale was for alcoholic, physically weak, mentally inadequate men from the cities. In 1907 the memory was still fresh of the poor physical state of the men from the cities called up for the Boer War. This was exacerbated by the slum conditions and alcoholism of the early 1900's. The Chairman, Rev. Dr. Cameron referred to the purpose of the mission as 'to rescue the perishing' a popular evangelical slogan of the time.

The Master of Polwarth was a leading Church philanthropist who pioneered reforms throughout Scotland, this one being under the aegis of the recently established Social Welfare Committee of the Church of Scotland. The Chairman remarked that the meeting had been called to dissipate the widespread erroneous ideas about the nature and dangers of the colony. He sketched the work of the various Homes run by the Committee of Social Welfare, and expressed pleasure that with the help of generous friends in the neighbourhood, Cornton Vale farm and lands had been acquired for £2,500, of which £1,000 was raised locally.

Thus the institution, Cornton Vale, to run for a hundred years in various guises, and more widely known in recent times as the Women's Prison, was born. While he was not a rabid 'Back to the Land' enthusiast, he recognised that if they were to rehabilitate run-down men from the cities, with a view to emigration to Canada, they had to select and train suitable men from the existing Homes with a will to do well.

They would not be including tramps, the vagrant population of the early twentieth century who went round the villages begging, and might come about the town. If any resident had criminal tendencies or intent they were more likely to go back to the city. He looked forward to one of Scotland's most interesting experiments with training in market gardening and farming which would provide men for jobs here and abroad e.g. by

emigration to Canada. A Superintendent and Local Committee had been set up, to whom complaints if any could be addressed.

Up until World War II, emigration to Canada or Australia was actively promoted by the government for the unemployed, and interestingly enough as a form of Child Care. This is dealt with in 'Child Migration to Australia' HMSO Cmnd 9832 of 1956 and in Anna Magnusson's 'The Village – A History of Quarriers 1984'.

Polwarth appealed to the Christian principles of his audience to do their bit to help these unfortunates, who were in their present position because 'they had been less fortunate in their surroundings than ourselves'.

To rescue such fellow men, it was not just preaching but help and sympathy that was needed. In conclusion he advised his audience to forget the idea that this would be a convict settlement, and prophesied if everyone gave their support, people interested in Reform would come to Bridge of Allan to study this Market Garden Colony.

In proposing the vote of thanks the Rev. Dr. Menzies Fergusson strongly affirmed that a greater anger and disgrace to Bridge of Allan than the colony was Sunday drunkenness, particularly amongst miners and others finding their way back along the Cornton road to Stirling – this as a result of liquor sold in Bridge of Allan under Seven Day Licenses. In these days on Sundays men tramped from one township to another, being denied drink by law in their own. They were styled 'Bona Fide' travellers.

The audience heartily applauded and the meeting was closed with the benediction and tea.

Dr. Fergusson's fulminations against the miners' Sunday drunkenness was not dissimilar to revelations sixty years earlier, by that noted Stirling Reformer, Peter Drummond, of Sabbath drunkenness in Cambuskenneth.

Apparently, large numbers of idle males crossed the ferry from Abbey Road over to Cambuskenneth, ostensibly to buy fruit from the extensive former monastic orchards. (Incidentally, the author of this chapter as a boy in the Twenties has memories of taking the penny ferry, now replaced by a footbridge, over to the same orchards.)

After sampling, if not buying, the plums etc, the lively crowds resorted to two public houses then in the village. As the afternoon progressed there were wild games and increased revelry to break the Sabbath peace.

The difference between the two good men was that Peter Drummond went down among the revellers to convince them of the error of their ways and reinforced his intervention by producing in 1848 the first of his great empire of Tracts, "The Sabbath" and having its 3000 copies distributed by his followers – in Cambuskenneth, the town of Stirling and surrounding villages.

About the same time another great Scottish philanthropist, Dr. Guthrie, arriving from Angus in Edinburgh observed that two thirds of the shops in the Grassmarket were for the sale of Whisky and Gin and open on Sundays and reported the concomitant drunkenness, degradation and deprivation.

Dr. Guthrie's response to this serious city problem, was to be the provision of residential schools to remove boys and girls from this poverty and squalor.

The misuse of alcohol has always been the curse of Scotland and as we have just seen, it was particularly acute in mid-nineteenth century life. In 1907 at the Cornton Vale founding

meeting it was no less pressing, and indeed in 2009 as we write, it is still serious enough to cause the Scottish government to be planning special measures.

At the 1907 meeting the Rev. Menzies Ferguson censured the miners for drunkenness and The Establishment generally blamed the working class. The working man, in turn, believed that the gentry and aristocracy imbibed even more liberally, but that their habits were better concealed. In fact, in contrast to the binge drinking by the affluent young of the twenty-first century, the excessive addiction of the early 1900's was comparatively widespread to include professional classes, shop-keepers and "respectable families".

In one parish known to us, the master tailor had a luminous "whisky nose", the beadle after a Saturday night would sometimes stumble on the pulpit steps carrying up the Bible for the Minister. The doctor and the dentist, with the half-crown fees for half a dozen total extractions under anaesthetic, were reputed to enjoy their emolument on a bottle of whisky behind the blinds. Alcoholic schoolmasters or ministers were quietly translated to some remote Highland or Island scene.

There were very few large families unaffected by the indulging habits of one member at least. The community responses were The British Women's Temperance Association for mothers and sisters, and The Band of Hope for children, all with a strong Temperance message in word and song. For men there was The Rechabites, which provided some insurance benefits and required temperate habits.

The Church of Scotland readily responded with Missions and Hostels in the Cities and such experiments as Cornton Vale. After the launch described above, what happened on the ground? Our picture is derived from "The Challenge of Need" by Dr. Lewis Cameron, the architect of the Church of Scotland's great Social Welfare activities, which were to develop beyond reform hostels for men and women into Eventide Homes, Approved Schools for Boys and Girls and more recently to Sheltered Housing to replace Eventide Homes.

Cornton Vale consisted of Farmhouse, Steading and thirty acres of heavy, clay, carse land. The accommodation for the men was poor with sleeping quarters in a coom-ceiled hayloft.

The farm was too small to give experience in general farming, and the market garden was unprofitable. Developing pig farming made the enterprise more viable. At this stage the population was older men, alcoholics and down and outs.

In 1914 the farm was requisitioned by the military and when they gave it up, the new regime was for younger men of eighteen to twenty-five. 'Prisoners or Paupers' were not admitted but first offenders or those on probation were taken.

In 1937, apart from the farmhouse, the old buildings were demolished and new premises were erected with capacious public rooms and smaller bedrooms. The new buildings with accommodation for thirty-eight men were opened in 1938 by George Nigel Douglas Hamilton, Commissioner for Special Areas, who said these conditions should help to rebuild men's health, self respect and confidence, undermined by prolonged unemployment and the misfortunes of life.

The new environment was stimulating, and while a high success rate could not be claimed, good food and healthy living rebuilt many, and gave them a better chance of work and survival.

Cornton Vale Church Farm was represented in the form of a model in the Church of Scotland building in the 1938 Empire Exhibition, Glasgow. Its virtues were extolled in the brochure:

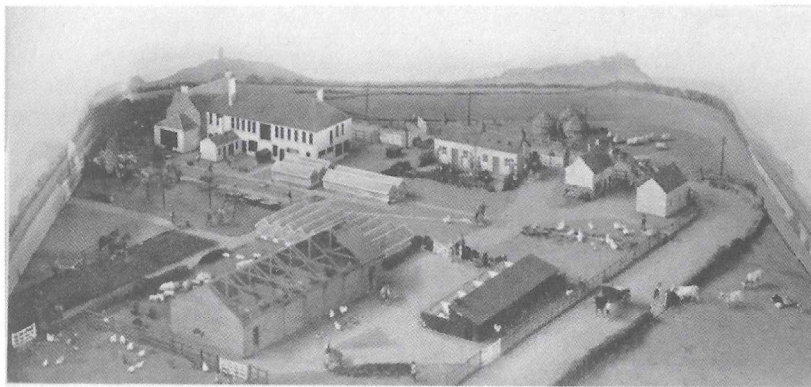
*Visitors will ask, What is the immediate connection between the Church and a farm?*

*The answer opens up another aspect of the Church's redemptive work. It is not generally realised that it engages in more "S. O. S." - social-service than any other agency in the land. Thirty-five institutions carry out its purpose - homes for girls and boys from the age of five; training homes for older girls; working lads' homes; young women's hostels (seven of these); a maternity home; rescue home and shelter; women's bureau; men's labour homes; men's lodging-house; a farm centre; eventide homes for aged folk. One can hardly overestimate the spiritual value of this kindly, compassionate service.*

*Here is the Church farm. Stirling Castle and the Wallace Monument in the background and the River Forth on the right denote the situation of Cornton Vale. Under a blue sky harvest has been gathered and ploughing has begun. These well-built residents' quarters accommodate more than thirty men who have been beaten in life's conflict and have sought the freedom of the open for renewal in body and soul. As the models of the piggery, pens, and glass-houses indicate, the main pursuits are pig rearing, poultry farming, and tomato growing. Children will be interested in picking out the many animals scattered about the grounds and may detect the rabbit and the hare scurrying across the field. Among the human figures is a minister who has evidently been making his customary visit.*

The fortunes of Cornton Vale fluctuated considerably until it was taken over in 1946 by the Scottish Home Department (Prisons Division) for an Open Borstal initially on a rented basis. After an experimental period of two years the land and buildings were sold outright in 1948 to the Home Department for £3,750.

The Kirk had doubled its money in forty years - by Good Works, and "Rescuing the Perishing".



2. The Church Farm at Cornton Vale

## Chapter II

# THE OPEN BORSTAL 1946 - 1975

Few people realise that Borstal, the name of the Kentish village, now absorbed into Rochester, is shorthand for an establishment catering for young men aged sixteen to twenty-one committed by the Courts. The full title is Borstal Institution.

In the nineteenth century politicians and establishment figures such as Gladstone, Shaftesbury and many others, inspired by their religious faith, were zealous and active for social reform and the rescue of the 'perishing classes'. This was quite a different ethos from the current beliefs in increased punishment and being tough.

This persisted into the Edwardian Age manifest in figures like Baden-Powell with his strong beliefs in the training of youngsters, and there were many keen on prison reform.

One such, Sir Evelyn Ruggles-Brise, a prison governor was concerned about the number of 'lads' of fifteen and younger sent to adult prisons and thrown together with the worst of older criminals, where contamination rather than education was the order of the day. Sir Evelyn mounted a persistent campaign, no doubt aided by powerful friends and sympathisers in Whitehall, Parliament and the Country. To this assault the Home Office finally yielded and gave him a disused convict prison at Borstal. They took over and adapted the old prison to their needs. And thus the 'Borstal Institution' was born in 1902 just before the Colony was launched at Cornton Vale. Other Borstal Institutions were soon set up throughout Britain and a Classification Centre for England was established at Wormwood Scrubs prison in London.

## Borstal Aims and Practices

An extract from a Probation Officers directory of the time states 'The aim of Borstal is to give the offender a new outlook on life, a standard of social behaviour, and respect for authority which will persist long after release'.

These ideals, and the progressive values of governors like Sir Evelyn were not always maintained in the first quarter of the century, and at times and in places were badly blemished by excessive corporal punishment. The Instructors, Petty Officers or NCO's from the services, used their canes liberally and were not averse to beating the boys on the buttocks with plimsolls - a punishment not confined to Borstals at that time.

Cold baths as a punishment/treatment were of course liberally used then in the Royal Navy and Public Schools. The influence of these establishments carried over into Borstal.

In Borstal, cold baths, sanctioned by the governor, were not uncommon. The baths were filled the night before up to five inches from the top and the boy was required, immersed up to the neck, to sit still there for five to ten minutes. In event of spillage the boy could be made to go in again.

All this was commonly observed by the Governor or one of his Assistants. This account is not from the stories of boys but from the testimony of John Vidler, Deputy Governor of Feltham in 1932.

Official Birching in Borstal was by 1939 quite a rare event, though the equipment for this was kept at every institution. The Birch was a bundle of thin birch twigs tied together, and this was administered to the bare buttocks, with the boy held down or tied down over a table or gym horse. It might be observed by other boys and after a number of strokes could lacerate the skin.

By the forties, these practices were largely discontinued after a distinguished Home Office Commissioner, Sir Alexander Paterson expressed strong disapproval with the words 'A boy is sent to Borstal as a punishment not for punishment'.

Borstal training made considerable advances under enlightened governors and inspired by Paterson, still venerated by those of us who joined Prison or Home Office Children's Departments in 1950. He was a man of few words but his various dicta on juvenile delinquency were still remembered and quoted.

### Scottish Borstal Service

In 1911, a former boarding school, Blair Lodge, was purchased at Polmont and the first Scottish Borstal Institution had been established there by the end of the year. Prior to the arrival of the first young offenders, a working party from Edinburgh Calton Jail was employed to adapt the buildings for their new purpose. In order to accommodate Girls sentenced under the same Act, a portion of the buildings at Dumfries Prison was set apart for them, classified as Jessfield Institution. In addition to classroom education there was instruction in cooking, laundry and sewing.

The running of the English Borstals was modelled on the Public School system with accommodation in named houses with Housemasters and Matrons. It was not until 1946 that Scotland introduced the Public School model with Housemasters and Matrons. Discipline staff changed from uniform to civilian clothes. The Criminal Justice (Scotland) Act of 1949 introduced the new criterion for trainees "that it is expedient for his reformation and the prevention of crime that he should undergo a period of training in a Borstal Institution." Apart from regular living, discipline and basic education, Borstal training consisted largely of work training in trades such as carpentry, bricklaying, engineering, painting and decorating and gardening.

These not only improved the boys' suitability for outside employment, but saved substantial sums of money, a feature which recommended it to the Government departments involved, not least the Scottish Prison Department of the time.

### Open Borstals

In this development we see again the hand of the guru Alexander Paterson who became a Prison Commissioner in 1922 and in particular his dictum, "You cannot train a lad for freedom in an atmosphere of captivity and repression".

In 1930 a group of staff and boys from Feltham Borstal, Middlesex, marched 150 miles across country to Lowdham Grange in Nottinghamshire. They took over this country estate and constructed further accommodation to form a new Open Borstal. Others followed in England.

In Scotland, the Cornton Vale farm colony was leased from the Church of Scotland in 1946 and our first Open Borstal was established. The venture was probably accelerated by war-time conditions where disruption of family life, absence of fathers etc led to sharp increases in juvenile delinquency in England and Scotland, and all over Europe including war-time Germany. High numbers at Polmont hastened the process.

Cornton Vale Open Borstal was followed by similar institutions at Castle Huntly (1948) and Noranside, Forfar (1963). Allocation to Cornton Vale, Castle Huntly, and Noranside was made on a variety of criteria, particularly nature of offence, length of criminal record, response to Approved School training and pre-sentence record. Other important factors were stability of home background, and reports by Probation Officer, psychologist or psychiatrist and discipline staff. All this was considered by the monthly Allocation Board chaired by the Governor. This was a progressive era in the Scottish Borstals.

Under Open Borstal conditions at Cornton Vale, after a period of work within the institution, the trainees went out to farms and factories. The farmers welcomed the reliable source of labour whose discipline ensured timely arrivals. Another source of employment was nearby McGrouthers Meat Factory where the boys were valued workers and one at least was kept on after release, with lodgings provided by the family of an older worker.

The opening of the Polmont Borstal in 1911, the setting up of Cornton Vale as the first open Borstal in 1946 and the building of the Women's Prison in 1975 have all paid tribute to the concept of Training For Freedom.

The biography of Rev. George Macleod refers to early examples of extramural work undertaken by Borstal trainees including the rebuilding of Fingalton Mill as a holiday/conference centre for the hard pressed families from Govan. Polmont also assisted on this venture as they did with the restoration of Iona Abbey.

The most interesting, however, was the part played by the boys and instructors in the construction of the new Women's Prison on the site. This was facilitated by the Polmont Vocational Training Courses. In the beginning the instructors and trainees travelled daily by lorry to Cornton Vale returning in the late afternoon. Later, overnight accommodation was provided for up to twenty-five boys. At least one boy was given employment by the overall contractor on release from Polmont.

A Prison Department report comments on this most favourably. "The Cornton Vale project is most interesting in that most of the work on site has been carried out by Borstal inmates. Many of the components used in the project - concrete slabs, windows, doors and roof trusses have been manufactured at Polmont and other penal establishments.

The standard of the work has been commented on favourably by officials in the building trade, and it is known that a number of inmates have obtained employment in the building industry following their release. The employment of inmate labour has had a significant influence on the level of public expenditure on this project."

Cornton Vale as a Borstal Institution took the first step on the road to open penal establishments and a commitment to Training For Freedom programmes. On becoming a fully secure Women's Prison in 1975 it too profited from the experience of the Training For Freedom policy that had been established.

The Polmont Open Borstal at Cornton Vale firstly met the practical needs of overcrowding and the establishment of a new Women's Prison in time. As importantly, it provided invaluable employment experience and realistic training for freedom.

It should be rated as a considerable success in Scottish penal practice and a great credit to the officers who organised it and those on the ground who carried it out.

### Chapter III

## WOMEN'S PRISON

Women's prisons were not a new feature of modern times in Scotland. In Glasgow there was a House of Correction for Vagrants and Dissolute Women from 1635-1726. This was extended in 1785 to a Bridewell for Women and Boys in Shuttle Street off the old High Street quarter where the ancient university was situated from 1451 till the 1868 removal to Gilmorehill.

In 1825 this was replaced by a new building in Duke Street for three hundred inmates, originally known as the Town and County (Lanarkshire) Bridewell, the latter title being superseded by the Jail Act of 1823.

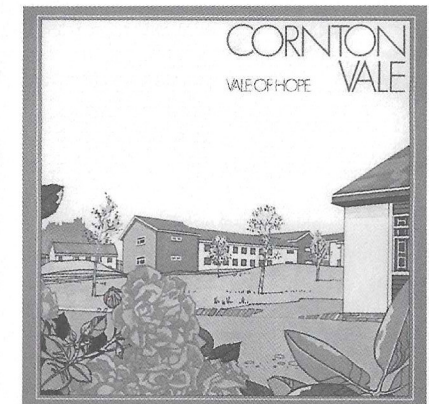
Duke Street Prison for Women continued till 1955, the last two Lady Superintendents being Hon. Victoria Bruce, who died in office, and Miss E Hobkirk CBE. Its functions were transferred to Greenock Prison where there was already a Borstal for girls. Thus the institution became unique in housing women prisoners, Borstal girls and later Young Offenders, plus a small contingent of male prisoners for heavy manual labour.

By 1966-67 it had been decided that a new prison for women was needed and a site and plans for a custom-built institution were under discussion. The prison had to be located in the central belt of Scotland, mainly because the bulk of its population came from that area and future policy was to close the women's Remand Units at Perth and Edinburgh and bring as many as possible to a central penal facility.

Stirling County Council were in agreement to have a new prison but could not come up with a suitable location, so the Prison Service decided to close the Open Borstal for boys at Cornton Vale and build a new prison on that site. Agreement was finally reached with the proviso that the building would not be any higher than two storeys and that the site would be tastefully landscaped.

Resources were allocated and a bold decision made that borstal boys be trained to provide the work force, and that most of the building materials be made by prisoners at Barlinnie, Perth and Peterhead. The Architect was Henry Causer and the Contractors were Gilbert Ash Ltd.

Running parallel was the planning of staff housing accommodation and facilities adjacent to the prison, for at that time, staff were required to live in quarters unless their homes were within ten miles of their place of work.



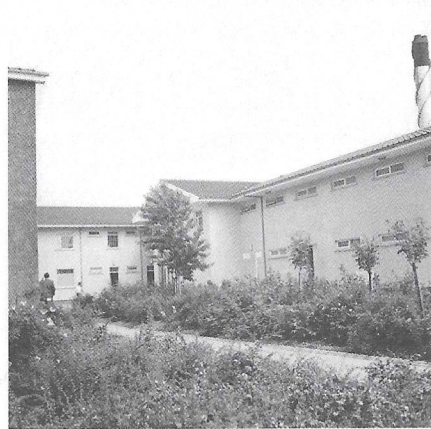
Miss Hobkirk retired in 1969. Her Deputy, Lady Martha Bruce was promoted Governor with Mrs. Agnes Curran as Deputy. In 1972 a working party, chaired by the Inspector of Prisons, John Oliver, was set up to examine the existing arrangements for the treatment and training of female inmates, and to make recommendations for their improvement and/or for the introduction of new methods.

John Oliver, the Controller of Development for Scottish Prisons and a former governor, was a forward-looking officer with progressive ideas largely influenced by his major Scottish Study tour of 1964 in Denmark and various trips to new developments in England. He and Lady Martha, with their practical experience of prison management, were the main influences of the working party and on the planning of the new Cornton Vale.

It may be noted here that the Denmark study tour of 1944, which included psychiatrists, sheriffs and one of the co-authors of this work, John Murphy as HMI of Scottish Approval Schools was a seminal occasion. While it was intended to study Youth Welfare provision, it resulted in much of the evidence given to Kilbrandon being strongly in favour of Scandinavian type Childrens Panels. It also gave the two Scottish Office Advisers, Messrs Oliver and Murphy, through shared visits and lodging arrangements, the opportunities to exchange views on modern institutional lay-out and night supervision for any new penal establishment or secure provision in Approved Schools being planned at the time.

It was hoped that the new institution would be ready for occupation between September and December 1973. The plan was to provide blocks of small units for seven women, self-contained with washing, cooking and recreational areas, electronically locked to allow for night sanitation – overall design capacity was for two hundred and twenty people. The accommodation block would surround a large central block housing all the places of work, further education unit, a gymnasium with stage, kitchen and laundry.

There would be a separate Health Centre and Chapel, a huge playing field and garden complex. The total population in custody in Greenock was well under two hundred and although rising, it could not then have been contemplated that the number would reach over four hundred. The design of the prison had been based on the study of the known needs of those in custody. Most women were on remand for further enquiries, or on short sentences of six months and under, or for non-payment of fines. They came from under-privileged backgrounds, were socially deprived,



4.

unable to budget and suffered from ill health or alcohol dependency. They needed basic education, counselling towards self-awareness and self-confidence, to learn a practical trade and how to gain employment on release.

The regime at Greenock under Miss Hobkirk was advanced in the methods of catering for these needs, but the new institution would give tremendous impetus for enlargement and, in order to prepare staff and experiment in development, various schemes came into operation. The Governor was allowed to close the small male hall, the male prisoners returning to Barlinnie. This hall was redesigned by works staff to be used as a self-catering unit for Young Offenders whose accommodation could then be available in a similar fashion for senior Borstal girls. The Scottish Prison Service approved the recommendation that the posts of full time Education Officer and Senior Social Worker be created. The Governor's house became their headquarters and was also used as an outside place of work and study for prisoners and inmates. On one occasion it held a prisoner's wedding reception catered for by Borstal girls.

For various reasons the date of completion was delayed but eventually, in 1975, an advance party of Agnes Curran, some staff and Borstal girl machinists arrived at Cornton Vale faced with the task of turning a building site into Scotland's only penal establishment for women. Finally, everyone was moved, including the hens, and next day the Secretary of State for Scotland paid a visit and was able to hear of the proposed implementation of the recommendations of the Working Party. There was no official opening but the effective date for the new prison was 1975.

Cornton Vale, a modern prison for women had arrived. Here was a chance to replace an old Victorian institution, not only by new buildings, but also by new regimes and treatments. At both Departmental and at Officer level there was a readiness, and indeed keenness, to exploit these opportunities. The national climate of opinion in Scotland was also favourable to reform. The great Kilbrandon Report had resulted in the highly progressive legislation for Social Work, and its enactments produced the much admired and advanced Children's Hearings in the Juvenile Justice field.

## Staff

Experienced Senior and basic officers are the backbone of success in a penal regime. They have the daily contact and influence on the inmates. Unfortunately, many trained staff were lost to the service because of the move, as they were unable to leave Greenock. Recruitment was a necessity as at that time mainly women officers worked in women's establishments. There were half a dozen male staff volunteers specially selected who worked with young offenders and Borstal girls, and they transferred to Cornton Vale but the staff complement had been increased and many more women officers were required. To add to difficulties, all existing custodial units for women in Greenock, Edinburgh and Perth had to remain open and the Contractor building the staff housing went bankrupt before the work was completed. An advertising campaign, however, went ahead. Open Days were held which led to a splendid response from potential officer candidates, who were selected, recruited and trained. The Governor grade complement was augmented by the welcome addition of two Assistant Governors and two more under training.

## Training

Programmes to promote social skills depended upon the assessment and duration of sentence for each person. The aim was to prepare women for responsibility whether for work or for bringing up a family. Incentives were built in through setting targets appropriate to personal capacities. Four steps were identified:

1. Student stage. Moving from assessment to a small unit and taking a basic education class.
2. Homemaker stage. Learning home-craft skills by taking turns to maintain the unit and also classes in homecraft, cookery, mothercraft, dress and design.
3. Breadwinner stage. Working throughout the institution in factory, laundry, typing pool, kitchen garden or farm.
4. Citizen stage. Entry into community service or Training For Freedom, or a responsibility in their own community such as Ration Stores, Offices, Restaurant, Hairdressing, Shop, Club activities, News sheet or Library.

The programme would be applied in conjunction with a training for leisure plans.

## Implementation

A programme of assessment and induction was introduced. As it was desirable to have as full a picture as possible, the individual was assessed by the full time team of professionals within the prison and Borstal: Prison and Borstal staff, Psychiatrist, Psychologist, Nursing staff, Social Worker, Assessment officer, Education officer and those in charge of a variety of work placements within the institution. To the Induction meeting, the home Social Worker was invited so that an up-to-date picture of the home was available. He/She was involved in the through-care during the sentence and could help prepare the individual for release. Having considered the contributions of all involved in assessment, a plan was worked out so that the girl might make the most of whatever potential she had as far as

length of her sentence and her response permitted. Immediately after the meeting the plan/programme was explained to the individual by the Governor. It was important to have the individual's co-operation if she were to benefit. It was necessary too, that she should appreciate her potential and be aware of her weaknesses. For those under 21 years of age a full time education course was provided for the first six weeks. Thereafter part-time class attendance might follow alongside an institution work placement in factory machining, kitchen, gardens etc. Following the



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appointment of a full-time Education Officer it was possible to hold day classes and extend the range of candidates for the Scottish Certificate of Education. Hitherto, education classes had been held only in the evenings three nights per week. The first presentations for the SCE examination had been at Greenock when six girls sat Ordinary Grade English and were much encouraged by six good passes! Presentations followed each year with satisfying success though not always 100%. Classes in ante-natal and post-natal Child Care were available.

This thorough Induction/Assessment procedure outlined by the Working Party brought satisfaction and benefit to all concerned. To be involved in the multi-disciplined team approach brought much job satisfaction to staff of all professions, and undoubtedly brought advantage and benefit to the girl whose time in custody was spent positively and purposefully improving her skills and self-image.

A similar induction meeting was introduced for long term prisoners. The appointment of a senior social worker contributed greatly to the thorough assessment of the women and girls, to the understanding of their home situation and to preparing them for release. As the end of the sentence approached, those deemed capable of benefiting from areas outwith the institution were considered for Training For Freedom. Consequently, work situations were found in Care Homes, Factories and the Scottish Police College.

There was a good response from the community to the idea of prisoners/trainees going outwith the prison walls to work or help with needy, disabled or disadvantaged groups in the community.

This good response from the community worked two ways: to prisoners going 'out' and to the community coming 'in'. Annual Sales of Work were introduced to which representatives from community organisations were invited. Goods and produce made within the institution were many and varied. Money from these events went to charities. Several Guide Dogs were paid for and monies distributed to many 'good causes'.

As Assistant Governor Lady Martha introduced a Ranger Guide Unit to the Borstal girls in Greenock and this carried forward to Cornton Vale, opening many doors to the outside world, by visiting other Guide Units or inviting them to coffee evenings. The Ranger Guides and some prisoners joined in Six Circle activities to their benefit and that of disabled children.

In 1968 Noranside Borstal had introduced as part of its Training For Freedom programme, selected trainees to spend the last six weeks of their sentence on parole helping residential establishments working with mentally and physically handicapped children. In 1969 staff and twelve trainees from Noranside joined with staff and twelve children in need of special care from the Camphill Rudolph Steiner School in Aberdeen



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for a two week holiday at the Royal Naval Boom Defence depot at Aultbea in Wester Ross. They were given as a souvenir, six rings of the Boom defence net. The rings were assembled so that each ring intersected the other five. This became the badge of the Six Circle Group whose motto is 'In meeting the needs of others, we meet the needs in ourselves'. Ranger Guides and Women Prisoners from Cornton Vale were a contingent at a later camp at Aultbea.

When Lady Martha addressed the prison staff prior to the move, she praised the staff for what they had accomplished and urged those who were going to Cornton Vale "to hold fast to what is good in the past, and discard all that might hinder or impede."

In this positive spirit the move was made and after a settling in period, staff enjoyed having modern buildings in which to work and implement all the good ideas already explored. Lady Martha and Agnes Curran had prepared the way to the heart of the new community by giving many talks to churches, groups and organisations. The good relationship between prison and community begun in Greenock continued, and was enhanced in Stirling/Bridge of Allan. Links were established with churches, the university, care homes and other organisations where work placements might be had for prisoners prior to release. The annual Sales of Work were extremely popular and well attended. Christmas concerts, too, attracted invited guests.

A Training Office was added to the work places within the institution where girls with office experience or potential could learn typing, book-keeping, computer studies and reprographic work. Orders were taken from the area of Stirling and beyond for syllabuses, tickets for events, church magazines and so on. Preparations for SCE, SCOTVEC examinations and Open University courses were established.

In 1975, and for several years, the education staff were employed by the local authority as they had been at Greenock. Later, that responsibility was transferred to Clackmannan FE College, to their mutual advantage.

### Links with Other Services and the Community

#### Visiting Committees

Two committees were needed, the first for adult prisoners. The members of this were Councillors appointed by their Councils, thus travelling from many parts of Scotland. They visited on a rota system and did not require to give notice. An annual meeting was held to prepare a report and elect a chairman. The second committee was for the Young Offenders and Borstal. Its members were appointed by the Secretary of State; they met monthly, visited regularly and became most helpfully involved in all aspects of the institution.

In addition to Education, other services, medical, psychiatric, hospital etc needed to be provided, as follows.

#### Medical

Pregnancy was of particular importance to the management of Cornton Vale as arrangements had to be made for pregnant mothers; for those who would give birth during their sentence and the resultant infants. The births would take place in the Maternity Unit at Stirling Royal Infirmary and close contact was maintained with the Matron of the unit. Many difficulties and risks had to be discussed before a baby was allowed to return with mother to the institution. In one case, Social Work provided a foster mother in Bridge of Allan, allowing the mother to go out unsupervised to visit and care for her child.

#### Psychiatry

Psychiatric services were essential for women and girls suffering through self-harming personality disorder, and mental illness. As part of the medical plan and additional to the continuing services from Douglas Insh Clinic, increased support from visiting psychiatrists was obtained. Five psychiatrists, one psychologist and an art therapist visited on a weekly basis. Close communication also existed with many psychiatric hospitals notably Royal Cornhill, Aberdeen; Royal Edinburgh Tipperlin House Adolescent Unit and Crichton Royal, Dumfries. Staff from Carstairs visited regularly and patients diagnosed as suffering a mental illness were transferred there.

#### Drugs/Alcohol Dependence

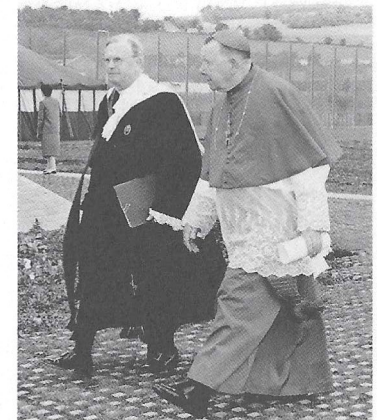
Up until 1983 there was practically no problem with drugs. In fact, such instances could be counted on the fingers of one hand; a packet thrown over the fence; drugs left in the visit area; pills concealed in toothpaste.

Drink was a different matter; over 60% of admissions on the adult side had a history of alcohol abuse either by themselves or members of the family. Members of AA had visited Greenock and continued to do so at Cornton Vale.

With the support of the Edinburgh Association for Alcohol Dependency a new course for those affected was developed. This proved most effective both to the individuals who participated, but also in retrospect to the ethos of the whole institution. In-service training for staff was constantly developing and the running of and interactive handling of these courses helped staff to augment their skills.

#### Chaplaincy

New local links with the churches had to be made and Chaplains appointed. Historically chaplains play a large part within the penal





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memorable service conducted by the Moderator of The General Assembly of the Church of Scotland and the Roman Catholic Cardinal. The interdenominational event received wide publicity. A beautiful stained glass window representing the elements, designed by an Icelandic student at Edinburgh College of Art, enhanced the building inside and out.



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## Community involvement

Some of the ways in which community involvement developed have already been mentioned but the first active assistance the institution gave was to cook for the local WRVS Meals on Wheels Service.

The organisation which was truly interested and helpful in spreading accurate knowledge about the prison was Cornton OAP Association.

The planning and great efforts involved in the establishment of Cornton Vale paid dividends in the first two decades and the Prison enjoyed a good reputation locally and nationally.

There were certain changes in the overall scene. New legislation made the Scottish Prison Service an equal opportunities organisation. Governors could no longer be recruited from outwith the service and women and men staff of all ranks became interchangeable, with men in female establishment and women in males. Alongside these lesser changes

system and this continued at Cornton Vale. Between 1975-83 there were two Church of Scotland Chaplains and a Deaconess (who incidentally also ran the Ranger Guides in the Borstal), one Roman Catholic Chaplain and several links with the parishes and youth fellowships concerned.

The Chapel had not been built by 1975, but this was rectified. A fine Chaplaincy complex was dedicated in a

there developed a different dimension which made the task of containment and treatment doubly difficult.

Through the Nineties numbers remained fairly static but the drug problem escalated resulting in bouts of self-harming and a series of suicides. This produced widespread adverse publicity in the media and affected the public perception of Cornton Vale. We cannot give an academic analysis here of the causes, which were, like other social problems, multi-factorial - a combination of drugs, mental health and deprived girls with little or no hope for the future.

It may be also that the training, treatment regime did not meet their particular needs.

A fatal accident enquiry into two of these suicides was held at Stirling from November 1995 to January 1996 before Sheriff-Principal John McGuire. He examined the evidence of Parents, Prison Officers, Medical Officers, Psychologists and Police, and issued a Determination. He (surprisingly) concluded that there were no defects in the system, nor any reasonable precautions that could have been taken to avoid the deaths. He made no recommendations. Details of these Hearings are contained in 'The Scottish Review' August 1996 Number 7.

In 1996 new programmes were introduced to meet these difficulties and the remand unit was totally redesigned. The ministerial statement in 2001 in response to HM Inspector's Report said, "I am pleased to see that he has found such a transformation in almost every area of the prison." In particular his comment regarding improvements in Ross House (Remand Unit) which he assessed as quite exceptional, and his view that a centre of excellence for care of women was being established in the new health centre, were extremely heartening.

Programmes involving the Samaritans and other outside agencies were developed and an accommodation block was re-designed with better overall observation to cope with these very disturbed girls.

Despite these serious problems the outward looking vision of the institution continued. In particular the facilities for family visiting and training for freedom were greatly improved and the Beechgrove Garden team redesigned the courtyard garden in the Central Block'.

One of the most significant pressures on the prison in recent years has been the rise in numbers from circa 180 at the start of 2001 to a new record of over 440 in September 2008.

To cope with the increases year-on-year, it was necessary to utilise accommodation at HMP Greenock for significant periods until, in the Summer of 2005, Wallace House (up to 100 spaces) was opened, giving the prison a modern modular building with showers in every room, a first in Scottish Prison Service.

Numbers alone do not fully explain the significant pressures placed on staff. The women admitted to the prison have experienced mental health problems (80%), drug and alcohol addiction (60%), a history of abuse (70%) and a history of self harm (50%). All these factors are additional handicaps to a population which usually carries a substantial number of women with low I.Q.'s and low achievements in the basic subjects of literacy and numeracy, which highlight the challenges facing staff on a daily basis.

Another serious problem has been recently (March 2009) identified by H. M. Inspector - the mixture of immature and vulnerable girls with older, hardened, more sophisticated women who can easily exploit and influence in a negative way these girls. No doubt some answer to effect separation will be found for this major difficulty.

To us, this comes as an echo of the problem identified by Rugles-Brise of his "lads" reform being vitiated by contamination from older hardened criminals. His answer was the first Borstal Institution.

Despite these pressures, the prison has been successful in developing significant initiatives to assist prisoners to address offending behaviour through accredited programmes and other interventions, and through the establishment of its Links Centre, excellent relationships with a wide range of agencies to assist women with employment and housing issues. Significant progress has also been made in developing appropriate education, training and work opportunities in the prison to enhance chances on liberation.

In recent years, the establishment of the 'Independent Living Units', in effect Cornton Vale's own 'open prison', has enabled suitable risk assessed women to access work and education places to help them with the transition between prison and the community.

Family links are very important to women in custody and the prison works very closely with other agencies to maximise family contact whilst also offering enhanced visits, particularly, for women with young children. The prison continues to operate a 'Mother and Baby' unit although the pressure of ever-higher numbers may impact on the prison's capacity to continue with this initiative.

### Success - What is it?

There is no doubt that the general public regard prison to be for punishment of crime and that prison should miraculously turn a criminal into an upright law abiding citizen. What are the steps that can be taken towards rehabilitation within a period of loss of liberty? Recognition of guilt, working through feelings of remorse and understanding of forgiveness (greatly helped by the influence of the Chaplaincy), personal advancement in self-discipline, health, improvement of employment prospects and sorting out of family relationships. Many prisoners leave with good intentions but without the stability to succeed and without access to effective supervision and support.

There is a place for voluntary mentors to assist in rehabilitation, but only if these persons accept statutory rules and are able to survive knock-backs and failures. To be successful a punishment must include an avenue of hope and a practical programme of reconstruction providing each person with an element of choice. This is what, against all odds, the Scottish Prison Service is trying to deliver. Is this substantial rise in the number of women in prison really essential or is 450 out of around 8,000 too little to worry about?

This history of Cornton Vale shows how it can lead the field with constructive ideas, but the basic problems of alcohol and now drug dependence have swamped the facilities.

Is prison the right answer for most of these inadequate offenders?

## SUMMARY

The thirty acres of heavy carse land bought by the church of Scotland over 100 years ago was a good investment and has provided a home for three very necessary and progressive ventures to deal with acute social problems of the time.

The initial use of Cornton Vale was a "Training Colony" for older men with serious alcohol and physical health problems to transform them into useful workers in Scotland or abroad. The present use as a Women's Prison by contrast is for younger women with serious drug and mental health problems, to point them towards a role as effective young mothers and break the cycle of their family addiction. The intermediate use was for young men with family and community problems, who needed the help of a liberal reforming regime to change them if possible from young criminals into effective young workers in the community.

Between 1907 and 1946 what did it achieve for alcoholic, mentally and physically run down men from the city slums? They were nourished, strengthened and found work - even though the providers' philosophy was governed by the current British ethos of maintaining a balance of Anglo Saxon population in the colonies through emigration on the one hand and a narrow temperance outlook on the other. For the Borstal boys, Cornton Vale was a freer milieu than Polmont and one more likely to promote growth and reform. Its achievements were two-fold. Firstly it gave the boys experience of useful work in the community - in agricultural, factory and most valuable of all, in building trade settings, with contractors who were otherwise unable to complete the new Women's Prison in time. Secondly, the successful Cornton Vale Open Borstal paved the way for similar developments in Scotland. The Open Borstal at Cornton Vale initiated by war time pressures and terminated by necessity as a site for the Women's Prison, can be regarded as a considerable success in Scottish penal policy.

Our historical survey of the Women's Prison by its nature lack sufficient depth to reach any firm assessments on success.

We do, however, conclude that a major research programme is necessary. Firstly, to weigh up the achievements and success of thirty-five years at Cornton Vale. Secondly, to make recommendations on the nature of the population for which a women's prison is suitable, and the alternative hospital, clinic or community treatments which should be provided.

In closing we register our admiration for the progressive work and treatments carried out often under great difficulties. We hope that this can correct somewhat the negative and sensational reports presented by the media.

## HMP & YOI GOVERNORS FROM 1975

Lady Martha V Bruce OBETD	1975 - 1983
W G Walker	1983 - 1983
W T Finlayson	1983 - 1985
J D Meiklejohn	1985 - 1989
A Thomson	1989 - 1991
P L Abernethy	1991 - 1994
R R H Glen	1994 - 1996
Kate Donegan	1996 - 2001
Stephen Swan	2001 - 2002
Sue Brookes	2002 - 2006
Ian D F Gunn	2006 - 2009
Teresa Medhurst	2009 -

## FURTHER READING

Kenneth Roy, *Lost Girls in The Scottish Review* (Carrick Press, Irvine) August 1996

Eve McDougall, *A Wicked Fist. A true story of prison and freedom* (Wild Goose Publications) 1999

Maureen Maguire, *Uncomfortably Numb. A Prison Requiem* (Luath Press) 2001

Alistair Findlay, *Dancing with Big Eunice: Missives from the frontline of a fractured society* (Luath Press) 2010