



The regular newsletter of the **SVP Working with Prisons Special Work**

For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you made me welcome, lacking clothes and you clothed me, sick and you visited me, in prison and you came to see me.

Matthew 25: 35-36

St Vincent de Paul Society (England and Wales)

Issue 36 • Summer/Autumn 2022

SVP 2022 National Meeting Special

Working with Prisons 'Special Work' in proud attendance!

Representatives of the core group of 'Working with Prisons' (WWP), the SVP's newest 'Special Work', were delighted to be in attendance at the 2022 SVP National Meeting, held recently at the Hayes Christian Conference Centre near Derby.

Led by WWP Deputy Prisons Lead Anna Frank-Keyes, the group included Secretary Kevin McKenna, HMP Berwyn Lay Chaplain Anne Coleman and John O'Sullivan. Together the group manned an all-new Working with Prisons display stand, handed out leaflets and networked for all they were worth, making some fantastic new contacts from the many attending VIPs and delegates!

The 2022 National Meeting was another triumph for SVP and a credit to everybody involved, both from National Office and from the Conferences. The setting was lovely, the speakers were inspiring, the assembled stands were outstanding and we were even treated to the added excitement of an emergency fire alarm in the wee small hours of Saturday morning!

Anna F-K took notes of the meeting and is kind enough to share her personal thoughts with us now, as follows:



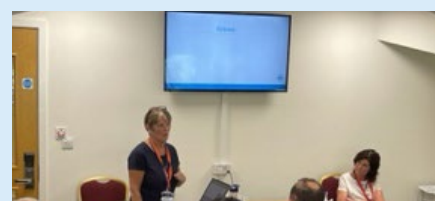
A short reflection on SVP National Meeting



It was a real privilege to participate in the National Meeting in beautiful Derbyshire after such a long time. I came back home tired in body but renewed and spiritually restored, ready for more challenges in our chosen paths of working for the common good in our communities.

Sadly, it was time to say the final goodbye to Helen O'Shea, who brought so much revival and energy to the SVP Society in most challenging times. Your leadership and input will be always remembered, Helen. With new hope we greeted our newly elected President Elaine Hayworth, whose proven management skills will open new doors and more growth of the Society.

The main theme running through the presentations of outstandingly good speakers was that the world has irreversibly changed around us and that we have to change with it to become more relevant and more embracing.



Jenny Sinclair, the founder and director of the charity Together for The Common Good, reminded us that in the era of individualism, post-modernism and immense loneliness the only way forward to rebuild the broken communities is LOVE, which comes directly from God, and before justice.

Sr Judith Russi (Sister of St Mary of Namur) gave a powerful address that pointedly reminded us that our future and success lies in young children and adults (average age of SVP members is 69!) who have a very fresh and unbiased look at the world and have a great deal of courage to tackle the problems.

Anna Dobos and Marlena Bartic from Romania movingly described the immediate response to Russian aggression on Ukraine by going to the Russian/Romanian boarder with a great deal of help, and describing the work of only 23 SVP Conferences in the whole of the country in very difficult circumstances. (The number of active SVP Conferences in our country is 825). Their commitment to bringing help to communities in many different ways was truly admirable.

I am hoping that our small contribution to Working with Prisons made some of the delegates interested in our work and more SVP members will join us in our future Zoom meetings.

With many thanks and gratitude to all organisers and delegates.

Anna Frank-Keyes, Working with Prisons, Deputy Prisons Lead

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Welcome Una!

SVP Working with Prisons has a new Treasurer

We are absolutely delighted to be able to announce the appointment of a new Treasurer, to help us in our new 'Special Work'.

Una Devlin is a Chartered Secretary by profession and has worked for a variety of organisations both in Manchester and London. She has been an active member of two parishes in Stockport, where her involvement and roles have morphed, "as my family grew up," she says.

At the moment Una is also a School Governor and the Treasurer of a Home Office-approved Community Sponsorship Scheme, supporting a refugee family (phew!).

Una joins the Working with Prisons group at a most timeous juncture, as we have recently been allocated funding by SVP to further develop our Special Work.

Una Devlin ✉ unadevlin@icloud.com

A Tale of two locations...

Fr Paul at the Chester High School and at Wrexham's HMP Berwyn

Friday 22nd July, last day of the Summer Term in the Catholic High School here in Chester. The School wanted two end-of-year Masses, one with three years groups (about 450 pupils) and one with two (about 300). On the last day of term. What, I thought to myself, could possibly go wrong? High as kites and climbing up the walls? And that would just be the teachers...



But I couldn't have been more wrong. They were superb, and full marks to them for getting to the end of what's been the most "normal" school year for them in the last three. Precious years that they'll never have again, home-schooling, lessons online, bubbles, masks, social distancing, all just rapidly fading memories now. I told both groups that I was going into HMP Berwyn the following day for the usual Saturday Morning Mass. And how my favourite part of the Mass – if one can have such a thing – was the Penitential Rite at the beginning, calling to mind our sins, not "them" and "us", them sinners in prison clothing, us saints in our normal gear. No, only "us", everyone of us who's ever done anything wrong. In other words, all of us.

Year Nine at school seemed to find this particularly intriguing, and a little group of them stayed on for a chat

after Mass. "What are they like?" one lad asked; "those prisoners?" "A bit like Year Nine", I told him, "only much nicer". "Thanks, Father," they murmured as they shuffled off, grinning. Then one of them slipped back: "Can you say hello to them from us?"

I did just that the following morning. One inmate in the front row asked me afterwards how old these boys would have been. "Year nine? Fourteen or fifteen." His eyes went moist. "I've got a fifteen-year-old lad myself. Can you say hello to all those kids at school from me?"

We're either one family in this crazy Church of ours, or we're nothing.

Do you agree?

Fr Paul Shaw ✉ werburgh465@btinternet.com

Editorial

It is a pleasure to be back in harness with our prison visits and other work. The reports coming in from Conferences and Members throughout England and Wales (see following article) clearly illustrate an increasing level of interest and activity in Working with Prisons and this is encouraging for our vital but still fledgling 'Special Work'.

For my part, recent attendance at HMP Styal in south Manchester has re-emphasised the different kinds of requirements and needs of women in prison, the majority of whom have suffered abuse of one form or another, and often from men.

The statistics for women in prison make for particularly disheartening reading. For example:

76% of women in prison report problems with their mental health.

60% of women who offend have experienced domestic abuse.

17,000 17,000 children are affected by maternal imprisonment each year.

Women are more likely than men to:

- Report feeling suicidal on entry to prison – 25% to 12%.
- Report feeling depressed on entry to prison – 55% to 37%.
- Report other mental health issues on entry to prison – 40% to 25%.
- Report having a problem with drugs or alcohol on entry to prison.



- Many women in prison have been victims of much more serious offences than those they are accused of committing.
- 53% of women in prison, compared to 27% of men, report experiencing emotional, physical or sexual abuse as a child.
- There are strong links between women's offending behaviour and their experience of domestic abuse, coercive control and sexual abuse.
- Research by the Disabilities Trust with 173 women at HMP Drake Hall found almost two-thirds (64%) had a history indicative of brain injury. For most this was caused by domestic abuse.
- Only 9% of children are cared for by their father when their mother goes to prison. Yet nearly three-quarters of children live with their mother when their father is imprisoned.
- Gypsy and Traveller women account for approximately 6% of the prison population but an estimated 0.7–1% of the general population.

We have lots of work to do.

John O'Sullivan ✉ john@johnosullivan.co.uk

Reports from around and about

Working with Prisons is receiving an increasing number of really inspiring reports from Conferences and Members engaged and active with their local prisons and institutions. Clearly there is impressive breadth and depth to the widespread work being undertaken and we publish the reports to exemplify and encourage others to get involved, however and in whatever ways they possibly can.



Anne Clayton from HMP YO1 Wetherby and the SVP Conference in Wetherby: Over the last six weeks I have been visiting a 17-year-old with another OPV on the Keppel unit. He is not overly communicative and suffers from aggression, from what we can make out.

The last two visits we have played a game with him which has seen him relax more and we discovered a bit more about him yesterday.

Unfortunately during the visit another inmate accessed the room and flew at our boy, quite an aggressive incident and cut our visit shorter than it needed to be. We went to see him at his cell door and he apologised and asked if we were ok. From the level of communication, we have had from him this was amazing.

Sadly, we are unable to see him next weekend but will go see him the weekend after.

Wetherby SVP had made funds available and I agreed with the Chaplaincy to purchase some games for the boys. We spend approximately £90 on board and card games and these have been gratefully received.

Anne Marie Brister reminds us that, "We are not members of SVP but a group of parishioners from Our Lady, the Immaculate Conception, Devizes go to mass at HMP Erlestoke every week."

The churches in Devizes will be holding a face to face meeting for Prisons Week on 12th October at 7.00pm in Sheep Street Baptist Church. The theme is Erlestoke: our closest prison, our concern? There will be speakers from The Friends of Erlestoke Prison, Prison Fellowship and PACT.

Mark Thompson from Manchester Central Council tells us that SVP members from Manchester CC have begun quarterly meetings with the Catholic chaplains from HMP Manchester and HMP Forest Bank with a view to closer liaison between all parties. The 'Out There' Vincentian charity supporting the families of prisoners is also involved.

To-date plans have focused on purchasing helpful spiritual literature. A first tranche of material has been supplied. Next steps include release packs for people leaving custody. Members are looking forward to development of the work.

Bernadette Hughes from Edinburgh reported some sad news. Annie Farley-Kijowska was called to her home with the Lord last week. The SVP offers support for HMP Edinburgh as throughout the pandemic, with the provision of clothes and so on as requested by the prison chaplains. The connection with the SVP in the Cathedral parish is our only connection with the Society involved with offender care in Scotland.

Des Murray is "glad to report that visits to HMP Holme House have recommenced." Fr Ian Westby says two Masses on a Wednesday morning, one for the general inmates and a later one for the vulnerable.

There are two sets of prisoners who must be kept apart for their own safety. The main prison population will often attack those who have been imprisoned for sexual offences or offences against children. These are known as vulnerable prisoners and access to where these prisoners are or are travelling is restricted by the prison staff. Therefore it is necessary to have two masses so that all prisoners can have access to chaplaincy and the religious services.

Three SVP members of St. Patrick's Stockton Conference attend to help with companionship, reading at Mass, and music. "After Covid our numbers are well down on pre-Covid levels but we hope to increase them over the coming weeks as word of the services spreads. We are awaiting a new Catholic chaplain who has been appointed but is waiting for clearance to take up his post."

Wendy Hardinge reported from Hollesby Bay and Warren Hill Prisons that Antoinette Askin (a previous Chaplain) sadly died about 18 months ago. Simon Ashendon has support from Christine Quinn, who is with the Aldeburgh Conference, plus of course the Anglican and other chaplains.

We have been giving Simon a few Rosaries and other Catholic literature. We will be getting packs of Christmas cards for the men.

It is a bit difficult, as I feel that not all our members have the same interest as some of us.

Anne Oxley is at the two Approved Premises (APs) in Newcastle

and reports that, "My role as Strategic Manager involves liaising with the Ministry of Justice and SVP to manage contracts, AP costs and staff procedures to accommodate adult men whose offending has caused serious harm to others.

Each AP has a Manager and there are 27 permanent SVP staff and approximately 13 casual staff across both sites. As a minimum there must always be at least two members of staff on duty and Management support is in place 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

Probation Practitioners refer and direct men to live in the APs for a maximum of three months. The purpose of the residence is for AP staff to monitor the men's behaviour and compliance with prison release licence or court conditions which are put in place to protect victims of their behaviour. The maximum length of stay for a resident is three months. All staff follow the SVP ethos to turn concern into action and support rehabilitation through engaging and building meaningful, respectful relations with residents.

Each resident receives a full induction on the day of their arrival and a weekly key work meeting with an identified member of staff. Other staff will organise and facilitate purposeful activities which are discussed with residents in the weekly house meeting.

Residents are encouraged to be involved in the routines and activities and to have a voice they can volunteer to become a resident representative or mentor where they can also attend area wide diversity meetings with other Approved Premises to share good practice and discuss any issues that may arise.

Due to the nature of the men's offending one of the biggest challenges for our residents and staff is finding suitable move on accommodation in the community."

Ingrid Phillips reports that HMP Send is back to normal. The volunteers, I am the only sole member of the SVP amongst them, do not have to wear masks, because there is no Covid in the prison.

We still do our "Making Connections" courses with the ladies," Sycamore Tree" course is going 3 times a year and other courses like "Living with Loss" and the Forgiveness course, the Parental courses, etc.

We now have PACT working in HMP Send.

We also transfer the ladies to their destination on release, if they are nervous to make the journey alone, and if parents or friends don't pick them up.

We work in the chaplaincy. If no transport is available, the ladies get a rail warrant from the prison, and sometimes an escort for them is provided, because they have too much luggage to take home.

Marie Atherton from Leeds Central Council

reports that whilst we are still some months away from Christmas and in the midst of a heat wave, we have started to think about how we can help prisoners at Christmastime.

Several of the secondary school agreed before the summer holidays that they will make cards for the adult conferences to take to the prisons. The Mini Vinnies will be contacted as soon as the autumn term begins about doing similar.

The adult conferences will be asked by the Central Council to donate a small amount (£25 -£30) each to the District Council so that we shall be able to provide gifts for the prisoners. The lay chaplain in each of the 4 prisons within the Central Council will be asked what are the most suitable gifts for that particular prison. Then they will be taken in to the prison at a suitable time.

In the meantime it has been established that each of the prisons has started to have Mass again. Some of the lay chaplains are keen for SVP members to attend the Masses and even provide music for the Mass. "I have not had any success in finding anyone prepared to do this yet. I shall keep trying!"

Mark Turnbull from 'Out There' reminds us that the charity "supports families across Greater Manchester who has a family member in prison.

Marks says, "We reached a big milestone in May, marking 15 years of work to support families through our work. Our summer has been busy as usual offering:

- **1-1 support to family members** practically and emotionally
- **Welfare support** such as white goods and beds etc. for families
- **Support with prison visits** - we are particularly grateful for support from SVP volunteers with recent requests
- **Wellbeing support** - over summer we delivered 50 wellbeing packs to family members to help them with the anxiety that imprisonment can cause
- **A summer of family activities**, including family trips to Chester Zoo and Blackpool

The cost of living is hitting hard and we welcome the continued kindness of friends in the SVP."

Eileen Casse has been visiting New Hall Women's Prison

in West Yorkshire regularly since Easter. It is so lovely to hear real success stories of changed lives and successful integration back into the outside world. Such stories are so difficult to achieve in reality.

Sheila Torabi and three others from SVP in Shropshire started working with 'Yellow Ribbon' in April 2022. Training in boundaries, mentoring and befriending was set up for four SVP members who wished to volunteer. This was followed up by a meet staff and clients morning. Sheila chose to take up a volunteer mentor role, working with specific clients.

At present she is working with two males, meeting up one morning a week looking at training and employment opportunities since these are her areas of expertise.

JW became President of a small conference in Westminster Diocese some fifteen years ago and has been involved in many client cases and internal SVP activities. He says:

"I will never forget my current client, Michael. His case is a good illustration of the SVP's greatest strengths. With our national network of conferences, modest financial support for clients, our time and our friendship, we can support clients in ways which uniquely distinguish us from other support agencies, and which no local group within a single parish could achieve.

Michael (in his forties) was in prison when he was first brought to my attention in August 2021, with an email from National Office. I was contacted because my Conference was the nearest one to Michael's "home base." However, the story quickly unfolded to be a lot more complicated than that. The SVP had been contacted by Michael's probation officer because he had no relations and only one close friend, an elderly lady who had been a good friend of Michael's (deceased) mother. Michael was due to complete his prison sentence in November 2021 and very little progress had been made by the prison re-settlement service in arranging his discharge. The landlord of the flat which he had occupied prior to his incarceration had repossessed the flat and confiscated his personal belongings. Michael had spent most of his life in Middleton (Kent) and so the local Borough Council (BC) had the statutory obligation to help him find accommodation. After a series of expensive temporary measures, the BC had arranged for him to be housed in a flat in Hertfordshire; hence the connection with my SVP Conference.

I visited Michael twice in prison but was unable to help in any way with his discharge arrangements. In the event, these were very badly handled and he faced the prospect of becoming immediately homeless. Following his discharge, he attempted to get to Middleton but his efforts were thwarted. The BC were slow to react and various short term emergencies resulted. Eventually, (after about 3 weeks, and just coming up to Christmas) he was offered hostel accommodation in the Midlands and travelling expenses to get there. With no contacts in the Midlands, Michael was reluctant to accept, but if he had refused the offer he would have been deemed to have made himself homeless and the consequences would have been dire.

Through the SVP, I was able to make local contacts in both Kent and the Midlands. We have provided friendship and financial support to him and he is now in regular touch with two SVP members in the Midlands. Throughout, I had the benefit of advice from various SVP members and national officers with greater experience and knowledge than I have.

Michael has health problems and subsists on Universal Credit, but he is not work-shy. He has not yet managed to find employment, but has a clean driving licence and is keen to re-build his life.

I believe there are many lessons to be learned from this case. Many problems and much expenditure could have been avoided with better communications between the probation service, the prison re-settlement service and the Borough Council. There appears to be an urgent need for an investigation into how hostels and social housing are regulated. Personally, I have gained new insights into the under-belly of society, the systems which govern it, and some of the dark forces which feed off it."

Anne Coleman SVP Voluntary Chaplain at HMP Berwyn

reports, "Things at Berwyn are slowly changing back to pre-Covid working however there is one aspect I fear will now never return. Of an evening after their meal the men were given two hours of socialising on the wing. They could chat in each other's rooms, play cards, snooker and generally move around the wing area uninhibited.

Since Covid this has been stopped, initially I think due to ongoing staff issues but now it would appear the Prison Officer's Association have decided that it will no longer take place. It is mainly due to the reduction of Officer's being attacked during the Covid period and now they wish that to continue. It may not be the sole reason, but it goes some way to explaining the fact that the men are locked up as soon as they have picked up their evening meal.



This is leading to an increase in the lack of social skills for some of the younger men and mental health issues for many who saw this time as a way of being out of their cells and having some freedom to chat to other men in the same situations. Many of the men are frustrated as they have little to occupy their time. It is ok to do some word searches, puzzles, jigsaws and cross stitch but you can't fill 23 hours a day with just those things to occupy yourself.

Today I met a lady called Kerry who will for the next 12 months be looking at the 'Health & Wellbeing' of the men and staff. She is interested in getting the local Churches involved with donating items to make up release bags for the men. She is hoping to contact them and work it like a food bank but for toiletries etc. She will be able to provide them with a list of items that will be useful. I have given her the information on the release bags we produced to work on.

Also, she is interested in beginning work with animals and we are hoping to set up a Bird Sanctuary and the men can learn Falconry. Apparently, they have a Sanctuary at Altcourse and the gentleman who runs it there is more than willing to help start and support one here. Some of the men in Berwyn are already trained and could get involved. I did advise Kerry if she needed funding, we may be able to help. It would depend on the cost. I also mentioned chickens and rabbits. Apparently, we have 2 guinea pigs, but nobody knows where they are!!!

In other news, we now get an average of 60 men at Mass on a Saturday, which is about our limit. We have about 120 on the list and currently we have 450 Catholics in Berwyn. This of course means a lot of pastoral work which unfortunately we don't have time to do. Wally not only has duties as the RC Chaplain, but he has work allocated daily which is multi faith based with the added work the other Chaplains pass to him for his role as the RC Chaplain. He really needs support I can no longer provide so in September/October on my return from the Holy Land, I and the other volunteers here will be going out to local parishes to attempt to encourage people to join us either just as volunteers, or even with a view to join the SVP but that joining the SVP is not a prerequisite for working as a Chaplaincy Volunteer.

St Thomas More SVP Conference Report within HMP Manchester

James Gallogly, Managing Chaplain at HMP Manchester reports that it is taking a long time to move away from the restrictions imposed by the Pandemic. "We are a long way from the normality that has returned to society outside the walls. Still, as you know, the SVP is a robust organisation and we maintain a presence nonetheless.

The Conference President wears many hats within the Prison. One is his role as Chapel Orderly on a Sunday morning. He helps prepare the Chapel for Services and is on hand to liaise with the Men as they arrive for Service. This allows him time to gauge the mood and bring to attention any concerns or worries that might otherwise be missed.

When SVP work is discussed in Homilies or Post Communion reflection he is on hand to provide tangible examples of his work as a Wing SVP Representative. This might be specific help for someone in need of a shower gel or a brew pack or perhaps the making of time for a chat.

Group Meetings are still quite limited but a Rep can still be a positive presence. Often this is in the form of an early warning system for the Staff or the Chaplaincy Team when there is a crisis. At others it can be a way to locate and encourage the lapsed. Reps are a wonderful conduit of spiritual reading and prayer materials. Sometimes the fact it comes from a fellow Inmate improves the value of this opportunity. The hope is an eventual return to the weekly SVP meetings we had prior to the Pandemic which tried to mirror the experience of any Parish Confraternity.

To this end a drive is underway to recruit and develop further Wing Reps. There has been some real interest and hopefully this will bear fruit in the Autumn.

The SVP Inside is clearly quite different. However, the spirit and principles are the same and we are grateful of your solidarity with us."

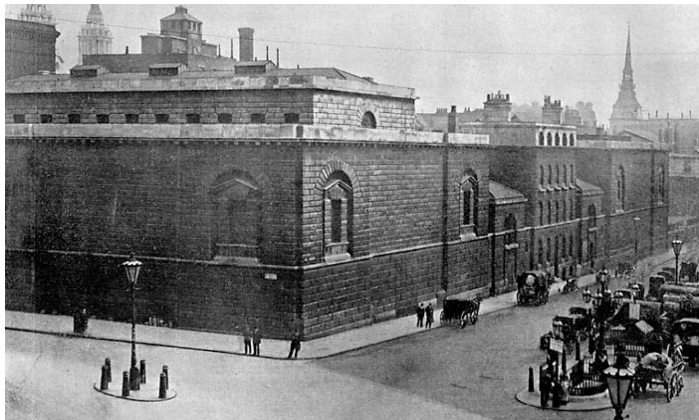


Dickens and Prisons IV: *Barnaby Rudge*

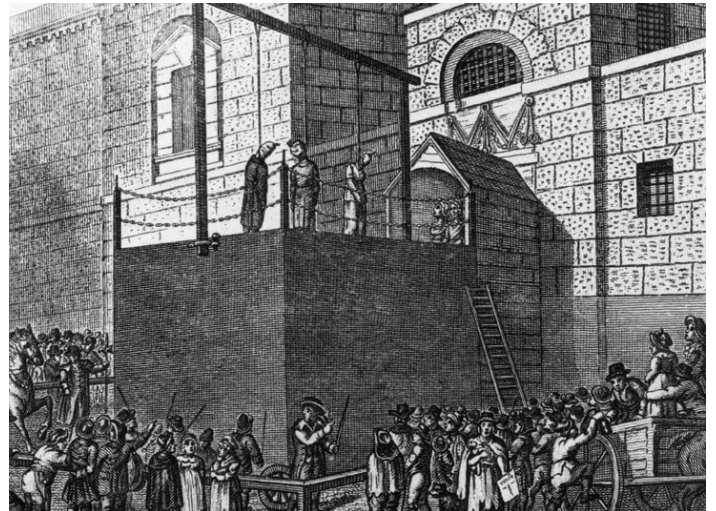
Dickens wrote two historical novels, *The Tale of Two Cities*, which we looked at last time with reference to the storming of the Bastille and the start of the French Revolution in 1789; and *Barnaby Rudge*. Both feature prisons, and both have dramatic accounts of the sacking of those gaols. The Bastille in Paris was a symbol of the hated old regime, and especially for the number of political prisoners it housed, men and women incarcerated for decades for no other offence than opposing the corrupt government of the time. Not hard to see why attacking these walls would be the first priority of the angry, revolutionary mob.

Barnaby Rudge, written in serial form in 1841, is set at the time of the Gordon Riots of 1780. Of particular interest to us in the SVP, perhaps, these were vicious anti-Catholic disturbances, and began on 2nd June with the looting and burning of several Catholic Chapels in London, including those of the foreign embassies of Catholic countries such as Spain and Portugal. The immediate cause of the riots was the Papists Act of 1778, which sought to mitigate a few of the harsher discriminations of the 1698 anti-Catholic laws. Many Catholics of the 1770's were against this repeal, fearing it would stir up antagonism against them, which is exactly what happened.

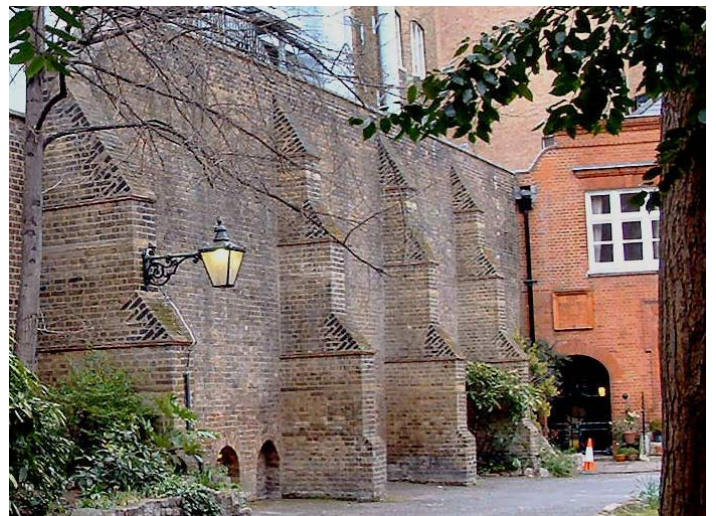
The riots soon grew out of hand, and the target became not so much the Catholic Chapels as the hated Newgate Prison. Built in the Middle Ages, next to the New Gate into the city, it was destroyed in the Great Fire of London (1666) and rebuilt to designs by Sir Christopher Wren. It was almost finished when the Gordon Riots burnt it to the ground once again. Rebuilt in 1782, it closed in 1902. Here it is just before its closure:



London's main prison, it became the scene of executions, moved there from Tyburn in 1783. Hangings were public events until 1868, and Dickens himself attended more than one such:



Nauseated by the spectacles he witnessed, he became one of the most vociferous campaigners against. All that remains of Newgate today is remnants of a wall near to the Old Bailey, just up from St Paul's Cathedral:



Once you've visited there, do read the chapters in *Barnaby Rudge* describing its sacking in 1780, some of the most marvellously vivid writing Dickens ever penned.

Next time: Fagin in Newgate prison awaiting his execution, one of the final scenes in *Oliver Twist*.

Fr Paul Shaw  werburgh465@btinternet.com

In brief...

News and snippets from the Criminal Justice sector

A major new publication is due out in September which brings together the voices of a range of contributors interested in the many varied experiences of women in criminal justice systems, and who are seeking to challenge the status quo. The Routledge Handbook of Women's Experiences of Criminal Justice includes chapters specifically concerned with resettlement. More information is available here:

 **The Routledge Handbook of Women's Experiences of Criminal Justice – 1s**

Further research is being undertaken by Charlotte Brooks, on behalf of the charity Unlock, exploring the impact of a criminal record on access to university. To find out more about participation and background to the project visit the website:

 **Call for participants: university applications – Unlock**

The Directory of Social Change publish an extensive range of titles aimed at making you and your organisation stronger. One such is the recently updated Charity Trustee's Handbook. You can find details of this and others at:

 **Directory of Social Change – Key Guides: The Charity Trustee's Handbook (dsc.org.uk)**

Making Every Adult Matter (MEAM) is a coalition of national charities working together to support local areas to develop effective, coordinated services that directly improve the lives of people facing multiple disadvantage. They have just published their second report on how Government and other stakeholders can make funding work better for people facing multiple disadvantage. You can read the full report here:

 **Making-funding-work-report-2-Aug2022.pdf (meam.org.uk)**

Koestler Arts is the UK's best-known prison arts charity, encouraging people in the criminal justice system to change their lives by participating in the arts. They are currently We are looking to recruit a group of ex-prisoners to invigilate their national exhibition at Southbank Centre from 27th October to 18th December. If you know of anyone who might be interested here's some more information:

 **Jobs and volunteering – Current vacancies at Koestler Arts**

Volunteer work in prisons: Are you able help us?

Whilst SVP Working with Prisons is still very much a young and developing 'Special Work' it is clear that volunteering work with and in prisons can take many forms. The following article has been included to demonstrate the wide variety of opportunities for volunteer involvement for SVP Conferences and Members.

It is also intended to provide prospective volunteers with some essential 'rules' to be observed, together with simple tips on 'Best Practice'.

Volunteering opportunities

1. **Visiting prisoners on a regular basis, as an official Prison Visitor (to an individual prisoner) or as a Volunteer, to help the chaplaincy team with Services and other gatherings. Most people come in once or twice a week.**
2. **Helping with special services or events for prisoners, with the Chaplaincy. These can include Rosary or Bible classes, which can sometimes take place during the day or in the evenings.**
3. **Assisting with Education, as many prisoners struggle with basic numeracy and literacy.**



4. Helping with trade skills or other kinds of courses, such as Living with Loss, Keeping Families Together, Managing Debt and so on.

5. Writing letters to people in prison. This is a new aspect to our work. More information will be available in future newsletters.

How to get involved

In most prisons where volunteers are welcomed, you can usually make one or two initial 'informal' visits without going through the formal induction processes.

However, If you wish to get involved more seriously or frequently, either as an individual or as a member of your SVP Conference, for all kinds of volunteering work you will initially need to contact the Governor or Head of Chaplaincy to register your interest. He/she will almost certainly be delighted by your interest but will definitely want full personal details, together with a couple of referees that he/she can contact.

The Chaplain will invite normally you in for a brief chat and will let you know where your help is needed.

If your initial application accepted, a vetting procedure will then need to take place, at which security forms will have to be submitted with ID photos and your passport taken in to be photocopied. It might take three or more months from initial application to starting, as the Prison Service is now much stricter on security clearances. If you have any criminal convictions, however minor, it is always best to declare them, as the Police check will identify them.

Basic rules and etiquette

You will be advised of how you are to conduct yourself in the prison by the Governor or Chaplain.

There are some more formal (mostly common sense) rules on behaviour and conduct. However, if you are not sure about anything, ASK.

Safety for everybody is paramount

- ✓ Avoid physical conduct of an intimate character – shake hands etc. but remember that physical contact can be misread.
- ✓ Never ask a prisoner why he or she is in prison.
- ✓ Never take anything out of the prison for a prisoner – not even a note or a letter.
- ✓ Never bring anything in for a prisoner. If there is some innocent thing you want to give to a prisoner, a Christian book for example, always give it to the Chaplain to give to the prisoner once it has been approved by Prison Security.
- ✓ Never write down any details to give to a prisoner on a receipt or other piece of your own personal paperwork.
- ✓ Never give a prisoner your full name, address or telephone numbers.
- ✓ Under no circumstances give prisoners money.
- ✓ If there is something you are worried about, always report it to the Chaplain or the Prison Security.
- ✓ If something goes missing that could in any way be considered dangerous or potentially dangerous, report it immediately.
- ✓ Never take a mobile phone, penknife or scissors, etc. into prison. These are banned items. Each prison will let you know what you can or cannot take in.
- ✓ Never take off a jacket nor leave personal possessions in your pockets.
- ✓ If you give out pens make sure you count them out and back in again.



Tips on 'Best Practice'

After some years of experience, we suggest these bits and pieces of friendly, informal advice:

- Do your best to attend any events you are invited to – these can include Easter and Christmas services, Governor's 'Thank You evenings' to volunteers, etc.
- Try to build good relationships with the prison officers and other members of prison staff.
- Remember that the Chaplain is your most important and influential prison contact. Every chaplain has a huge workload and will need as much encouragement as the men and women we are visiting.
- Please try to keep in mind that prison is a challenging environment. Remember that you are in a prison and try to be wise in your words and your actions.

Next time: The role of the Chaplain.

Winter Newsletter

The next SVP Working with Prisons newsletter is the Winter 2022 edition, due for publication at the end of December.
All articles, items and photographs are welcome.

Please send to John O'Sullivan, St Werburgh's Chester Conference.

 john@johnosullivan.co.uk

**If you would like more information on the SVP Working with Prisons 'Special Work',
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