

**SACRO ANNUAL LECTURE – 23 NOVEMBER 2009**

**PLAYFAIR LIBRARY**

**“A STEEP LEARNING CURVE – MY INTRODUCTION TO SCOTTISH PRISONS”**

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**Introduction**

Good evening ladies and gentlemen.

Thank you Cabinet Secretary for that introduction.

Isn't it amazing to be in William Henry Playfair's architectural gem? In a bid to find some sort of connection between the Playfair Library and prisons I discovered that Playfair's Uncle William had attended the storming of the Bastille, in 1789. When he wasn't storming prisons he was inventing the bar chart and the pie chart; all very good reasons why I should not impose a PowerPoint lecture on you!

Playfair, the architect would also be rather surprised that a retired Brigadier, lacking a degree either from this ancient university or any other and probably most notorious for culling sheep in the south of Scotland is standing before such a distinguished audience talking about Scotland's prisons.

So it is a very great honour indeed to have been asked to give the Sacro Annual Lecture in memory of Professor Derick McClintock, the first chair of criminology at Edinburgh University. I think he would be proud that the criminal justice debate in Scotland is moving forward so rapidly and encompassing such a wide variety of discussion and action in an attempt to reduce rates of offending and of reoffending, and as a result, reduce the number of people in our prisons. It is therefore very appropriate that we have the Cabinet Secretary here to chair this event. And we have, Paul, much to thank Sacro for, not least for hosting events like this.

**Context**

I have been in this job for only five months. I am still in the asking questions stage, which I find rather peaceful as I don't have to produce the answers! But then it *is* my job to highlight issues and pose questions, not develop policy. That is an important distinction.

So, I thought what I would do this evening is put myself into context, and discuss some of the issues that I see in Scotland's prisons and how I intend to look at these issues.

### **The Chief Inspector Role**

So let's start by talking about the job of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector. I am appointed under Royal Warrant from the Queen. That warrant, and my statutory duty gives me independence from the Government, from the Civil Service and from the Scottish Prison Service. My duty is to inspect the conditions in which prisoners live and the treatment they receive. How I do that is up to me.

However, although my role is rather tightly defined, I am always one for pushing boundaries. It seems to me for example that the publication of the McLeish Commission Report presents an opportunity to go a bit beyond my remit when I address some of the issues that I have seen in Scotland's prisons. I have decided, therefore, to make greater use of thematic inspections to look more closely at the critical issues as I see them. We will, of course, continue with announced and unannounced inspections but I like the concept of the thematic inspection. This evening I am going to talk about some of the issues which lend themselves to thematic inspection and why I feel they are important at this time.

### **Lessons from the Military**

Forgive me for dipping in to my military career but it might give you a tiny insight in to what I have learnt in the military and how I might apply some of that to my new job. Already I am beginning to discover that applying my knowledge and experience in the Army to being Chief Inspector of Prisons is something different altogether – hence the title of this talk: “A Steep Learning Curve”.

I joined the British Army in 1971 at the age of 19 to become an officer in the Queen's Own Highlanders. I left the Army in 2008 some 36 years later as a Brigadier. One area that I soon learnt about in the summer of 1972, as I struggled to command 14 Platoon during Operation Motorman in the run down battlefield that was the Kilwilkie Estate in Lurgan, Northern Ireland, was what was then known as ‘man-management’.

I had to understand the 36 men in that platoon who came mostly from some of the wilder parts of the Highland and Islands, with a sprinkling from Glasgow, Liverpool, and the east of London. That need to understand these amazing men began an education into human kind, lasting for all my service. And that understanding I can tell you has stood me in good stead over the past few months as I have walked around our prisons. Talking to and listening to people, and understanding their concerns are central to my current role. I began to learn about this in a practical sense at the very start of my career.

I keep being told about the postcodes that provide the majority of our prison population. Yet some of the bravest men and women in our Armed Forces come from those same postcodes, or certainly not far away. What I am now trying to understand better is why is it that a particular postcode can provide a brave Corporal in the Royal Regiment of Scotland and yet at the same time, also provide residents for Barlinnie or Cornton Vale or Polmont? Hidden behind this, of course, are the very real issues of abuse and misuse: of drugs, of alcohol, of women, of children and of other family members.

Having served in a Highland Regiment all my working life and commanded a Brigade in Scotland, I could stand here and say “I come to this job with a real understanding of Scotland’s communities and the issues that they face”. In fact I am only now seeing the issues from a new perspective: the teeming cells below Glasgow Sheriff Court; the mother in Darroch Hall in Greenock Prison with her daughter in Cornton Vale; the screams and shouts in the segregation unit, the youngsters from our proud wee towns such as Elgin or Irvine or Dumfries who have terrible alcohol and drug abuse problems; the constant revolving door in and out of prison fuelled by “Bucky” and “Vallies”. I am glad I had 36 years in the Army to understand people better but there is a steep learning curve to understand better Scotland’s Criminal Justice System.

It will probably not surprise you that my background has taught me how organisations work, how they can thrive and how they can struggle and how leadership, good or bad can be the difference between the two. And so I have learnt about the need for modernising cultures. In this context I should stress that I do not see my current role as being to criticise the Scottish Prison Service, for whom I have great respect. I am here to provide objective criticism where it is warranted and highlight good practice where it occurs. Indeed, good practice is

something that needs to be communicated better between all of our prisons, public and private.

Let me talk about an example of culture change. When I commanded the Army's School of Infantry at Catterick I decided to look at our training culture, principally because I was worried about the perception of instructors bullying recruits. In many respects training for the infantry had not changed since I, myself, had been trained in the early 70's. The culture *needed* to change in order to get the best out of our modern-day youngsters. I wanted to see improved motivation and better one-on-one leadership. So we changed the culture, without changing the essential ingredients of infantry training. It's all very well introducing duvets but soldiers still need to fix bayonets and close with the enemy as we have seen only too recently in Iraq and now Afghanistan.

So I went to Professor Lew Hardy, a well-known and much respected Sports Psychologist at the University of Bangor in Wales. His methods of using what he calls transformational leadership completely changed the way that instructors and recruits interfaced, motivation being a key element of this. The result was better, more challenging training with greatly improved pass rates. In my view this is successful culture change.

My deduction from this experience is that change, intelligently applied and communicated can achieve the aim. But it needs careful thought. There is little point just banging on about change; you have to be clear about the desired outcome. Too often we do change for change's sake or just to save money. There is so much more that can be achieved if change is carefully thought through and communicated.

The final element of my military life that I intend to highlight is the experience I gained commanding Operation Peninsular, the operation to eradicate foot and mouth disease in Scotland in 2001.

During Operation Peninsula I learnt a lot about coordinating effort between various agencies in Scotland and ensuring that it works from the highest levels down to the front line. I attended a daily morning meeting at Pentland House in Edinburgh with the then Minister, Ross Finnie and his staff: I then went to Dumfries for meetings with the critical Agencies, Vets, National Farmers Union, Military Commanders, Police, Fire Brigade, Welfare,

Contractors and so on. And then I went to view the operation on the ground to ensure the correct communication and support was being given to the agencies at the cull sites: soldiers, vets, valuers, the National Farmers Union, welfare and contractors. Just the same organisations, but now at the point of delivery.

Scotland is a sufficiently small country for this type of coordinated operation to work well and we finished it in only six weeks, quicker than anywhere else in the United Kingdom. It is this coordination of effort at all levels that is so vital and can be achieved if the direction, leadership and support is given and followed at all levels to the point of delivery. It seems to me, therefore that the coordination of effort in the Criminal Justice System is also important if each and every individual that enters it is to be dealt with effectively. The counter-argument is: “Ah, but foot and mouth disease was a national crisis, so of course you had to cross bureaucratic boundaries to achieve cohesion”. But aren’t we in a national crisis now with drugs and drink and antisocial behaviour? Doesn’t it merit a similar well-coordinated approach? I know valuable work is being done on this and I applaud the efforts to try and drive it home. The prize really is worth winning.

### **The Issues**

Turning to Scotland’s prisons – what are the issues that I think we face? I have now visited all prison and young offender establishments in Scotland and have carried out one full inspection which has still to be published. I have also had the opportunity to visit a number of organisations who strive to help individuals who either offend or are offended against: Sacro, of course, and I much valued visiting Sacro’s Links Centre here in Edinburgh, Victim Support Scotland, the 218 Project in Glasgow, Turnaround in Paisley, Routes Out of Prison, Includem and Families Outside are but a selection who have helped me to understand some of the issues better.

And I have met some excellent staff in our prisons who are carrying out some superb work, for example:

- Uninformed staff going that extra mile to try and help.

- Addictions staff desperately, yet calmly, trying to solve drug and alcohol misuse problems.
- Mental health nurses dealing with complex and often distressing issues.
- Education staff, sometimes part-time, putting incredible effort into solving literacy and numeracy issues.
- Excellent chaplaincy support.
- The efforts to heal, to help, to inspire are indeed very special.

**But** as you know much better than I do, there are some stark issues which have to be tackled: it is these issues which I intend to look at more closely.

- Family Strategy. Firstly I am concerned about the way that the families of prisoners are treated. If the family, whatever that might mean, is to be seen as part of the solution and not as the problem we have to treat them better. In some prisons, visit rooms are worse than inadequate, visit times and periods can be short and inconvenient, and the process of visiting demeaning. For some families, the round trip from home to prison and back can be challenging and expensive. I learnt the other night about a mother trying to visit her young son in Polmont, on an almost daily basis, by public transport, from Dumfries. Now that's a challenge, and it's not cheap! The stigma of being the family of a prisoner can be reinforced, not reduced. Of course prisons must ensure that all visitors are searched and that visit periods are controlled. During my rounds I *have* seen good practice but also bad. And I am aware, having attended the Families Outside Conference last week, of attempts by Prison Governors to improve things. But the culture needs to change if we are to raise family participation in the integrated case management process from a very low, almost insignificant, base at present. There is a long way to go to improve this situation, and the new SPS Family Strategy may help, but a start must be made to get families included, not excluded.
- Drugs. We all know about drug abuse, but to see the results of it in prisons and outside in the projects such as 218 *is* a reality check. I actually think that is an understatement. The effects of drugs ruin lives, lots of lives and it costs money, lots of money. This is surely an area where the term 'prevention rather than cure' holds true. Five months ago, as an ordinary decent citizen, I would have been horrified to know that drugs are regularly

smuggled into our jails, possibly in some quantity. This is wrong in a number of ways, not least that it is illegal and that it makes prisons less safe. I will be looking much more closely at the security challenges that are at the centre of this complex issue.

- Preparation for Release, particularly for Longer Term Prisoners. Two essential parts of a prison sentence are “punishment” through loss of liberty, and “security” – knowing that the criminal is off the street. But, of course, there is a third part to the deal which I know the SPS really wants to solve: reducing the risk of re-offending. Everyone, victims included, want prisoners to be ‘turned around’.
- And there is so much to this. The need to address and deal with addictions; programmes to tackle offending behaviour such as violence or inappropriate sexual behaviour. Then there is the need to educate, to train for work or just to work in prison.
- Then, there is preparing the prisoner to simply survive back in the real world. This includes the work carried out in Links Centres: finding housing on release, finding a job or just ensuring that benefits are in place. And not just that, people need to know how to manage money, how to cook, how to relate to people, how to organise day-to-day life.
- All of this, if started early in a prison sentence, not just with four weeks to go to liberation, can work well. It involves outside agencies, social work Departments and so on. It involves matching need with the correct intervention – are programmes to address offending behaviour properly targeted? Do they work? How do prisoners fare on release (and this goes further than simply measuring reoffending rates)? But the figures and knowledge of this and the passage of information back to prisons is somewhat hazy.
- And there is more to this throughcare issue. I often ask when visiting Prison Education Departments how many prisoners suffer from learning difficulties such as Autism or Asperger Syndrome or Dyslexia. This information is not available yet surely this is a central issue when dealing with individual prisoners? I received information the other day that up to 14% of prisoners might be suffering from Autism Spectrum Disorders and this compares with 1% in the general population.

- There is a great deal for me to learn about preparing prisoners for release, and I am still considering how all of this can be inspected. But this is an important area and it needs attention.
- I have been saddened by the effect of overcrowding in prison, just as Andrew McLellan was. It reduces the opportunities to attend programmes, it reduces the opportunities to work, to be trained and to be educated; it causes friction between staff and prisoners and between prisoners themselves. So I will comment on this as long as it continues.
- This brings me to training and developing the SPS work force. My experience in the Army has made me realise that training and development is central to any professional organisation. That is why we can be so proud of our young soldiers in Afghanistan today as they fight an exceptionally complex counter insurgency campaign. Their performance is based on a number of factors, but good and challenging training is a binding factor. It is stating the obvious to say that locking up human beings and having to care for them is also a heavy responsibility. Yes, prison staff are well trained in many areas (and I have been impressed by the standards achieved at the SPS College), but I worry that after initial training, officers seem not to receive the depth of training to help them face very specific and specialised issues better. For example, spending long periods of service in segregation units, or dealing with mentally ill prisoners, or older prisoners. This seemingly low level of training and development in specific areas might be a matter of resource and time. And it looks as if these factors could get worse. But high standards of training not only raise operational standards they also ‘goldplate’ the ethos of an organisation and so I will be commenting on this aspect because it directly affects treatment of prisoners. But, and I want to make this point absolutely clear, I have a great admiration for the work that prison officers do. The public does not see this, nor I suspect appreciate it. But I do.
- I am also interested in prevention rather than cure. This covers a whole raft of issues, including the proposal to replace short sentences with more joined up community sentencing and work. I need to know more about this. But I also worry about the current generation aged about two to five years old. Will they be in prison in 15 years time? What should we, as a country do to reduce that risk now. What do we do to change the

culture of our communities at risk? How do we prevent youngsters joining the “Bucky and Vallies” society? How do we change our culture for the better? Although it is not strictly my business as Chief Inspector of Prisons, I can at least warn of the effects of prison on our most vital resource, that is our young people. I met with officials in the Scottish Government last month and was impressed by the emphasis put on programmes for young people in Scotland, so the issue *is* being addressed. But there is a long way to go if we are to change the balance of risk and improve coordination of effort.

- Let me come back to culture. How are we to change the culture of our country, to get our youngsters performing to their potential and not entering the Criminal Justice System? I strongly believe the answer lies in leadership and commitment in the community. Let me give you an example which concerns the excellent work of youth organisations in Scotland. Tonight I particularly want to mention the Lothian and Borders Army Cadet Battalion (in fact the Battalion’s Commandant, Colonel David McFadyen is in the audience tonight). It may be of interest to mention at this stage his battalion has three serving prison officers and three police officers as adult instructor volunteers. And these adult instructors are not only instructors, they are also role models.
- I want you to picture a visit to the cadet detachment, perhaps in its hut in your local area. It will be full of enthusiastic, excited youngsters. They are learning about values from adult role models we would all be proud of. They will be learning self confidence, self discipline and teamwork. Yes, they will be learning military skills, including how to handle and fire cadet rifles, but this is where they get their sense of responsibility. And it is competitive. Cadets want to win and they do win awards and prizes, sometimes they may have failed to do at school. And these youngsters aged between 12 to 18 do achieve, can become cadet NCOs and cadet instructors. And go on to full careers and jobs.
- Many army cadets are specifically recruited from areas with a history of crime. Let me tell you about Colonel McFadyen’s trial ‘Outreach’ programme which he is running in Bathgate and Hawick. Here the cadet battalion has been running week-long residential courses for up to 50 youngsters at the Cadet Training Centre at Drumshoreland.

- Grouped into teams, this course teaches teamwork, first aid fieldcraft, there's some 'dragon-boating' in the canal, A 10 km walk over the Pentlands, including an overnight camp and cooking by the youngsters! At the end of it the Lord Lieutenant and the parents come to watch the final competition over the assault course. I can assure you this course is *not* an Army 'Boot Camp'. This is not National Service army drill for the sake of it. It *is* a focused attempt to raise heads, build self confidence and self worth, engage using teamwork, communicate, set standards by example and so change the culture from a negative one to a positive one.
- Did I forget to say that the youngsters have been selected by the local cluster team to ensure only the most appropriate 12 year olds entering the secondary system take part. By "most appropriate" I mean those who are starting to show signs of low level criminality, or vulnerability. Low self-esteem is an example of that. In the case of Bathgate the cluster team includes the head teacher of Bathgate High School, the Head Teachers of the feeder Primary Schools Community Police and Social Services. This in my view is coordination of effort and it is working. Young people *are* being turned around, being given a sense of self worth and personal responsibility and taking positive control of their own lives.
- The problem is the trial is almost too successful. There just aren't sufficient adult instructors or cadet places. But what a good example of a youth movement working with local agencies to change cultures and to get youngsters out of the gang! And there are other youth organisations out there doing good work too.
- The effects of youth movements and community education programmes, to help inspire youngsters can change the culture in the community. I sometimes use the example of the El Sistema Orchestra in primary schools in the Raploch Estate, Stirling which you may well have seen on TV. The effects have changed many people's lives for the better. We need the leadership and talents of El Sistema and of our youth movements in our communities, not just playing classical music, or singing, or crashing across assault courses but playing sport, getting youngsters heads up, but also getting them out of the gang and interacting socially in a more positive way. This means more access to youth organisations and more community interaction. I know there is good work going on in

this area as I have said, but if we want to change the culture of our country we need to take this seriously. I passionately believe we have to change our culture. We can't go on wasting lives with drug and alcohol abuse, and we can't keep imprisoning people at the rate we are doing.

So, in summary, what has all of this got to do with the Chief Inspector of Prisons? Quite a lot actually. I inspect prisons, and prisons are there to house prisoners. Society wants prisoners to come out better people, less likely to hurt "ordinary" people. So one has to understand people to help change them. We need to know the experiences of prisoners, what influences them and their behaviour? How can we prepare them to be better citizens? And by the way, how can we stop their children also becoming prisoners?

So that's a big agenda for us all. If you are feeling a little overwhelmed by it, don't worry, at least we don't have to storm the Bastille.

Thank you very much.

Brigadier Hugh Monro  
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