IMPRISONED FREEDOM:

A SOCIOLOGICAL STUDY OF A 21ST CENTURY PRISON FOR WOMEN IN IRELAND

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ABSTRACT

This thesis is a study of a penal experiment in Ireland which involved an innovative architectural design and a new regime aimed at addressing the specific needs of incarcerated female offenders. The underlying intention was to create an environment where women would have a level of autonomy that encouraged them to take greater responsibility for their own lives. The change highlighted the inherent tension between the concept of self-determination and the needs of security and control within a setting of captivity.

The focus of the study was to discover how the prisoners coped with their new conditions and how the officers reconciled the conflicting demands of the new regime with their more traditional role of discipline and control. Through a series of observations and interviews over a period of 30 months, the evolution of the experiment was tracked, from an initial period of turmoil and uncertainty created by the move, through a gradual period of adjustment to a state of equilibrium.

The study revealed that despite initial setbacks, many of the ideals underlying the philosophy were realised. The main contributing factors included, enlightened and consistent leadership and the continuity of senior staff; an absence of major crises; a willingness to take risks by experimenting with new initiatives; the relative autonomy of the prison and its freedom from political or overly sensational media interference; physical conditions which facilitated informality and fostered amicable relationships among the prisoners and between the prisoners and the staff and the provision of a variety of programmes tailored to individual needs rather than treating the women as a homogeneous group.

These findings contrasted with the outcomes of many other penal experiments and provide an encouraging example of how sustained commitment to an ideal can provide some level of success in an otherwise rather bleak picture of incarceration at the beginning of the 21st century.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

FIGURES AND TABLES

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Completing a PhD is a long and often lonely experience. To help me through the many challenges I had both the practical and emotional support of my husband Richard who acted as adviser, teacher, IT expert, counsellor and an unwavering source of encouragement particularly at times when my enthusiasm was failing. His faith in me remained undiminished and for that I am truly grateful.

CHAPTER 1   PENAL REFORMS REVISITED

INTRODUCTION

The 29th September 1999 was an important date in Irish penal history. The first new prison for women in almost 200 years was officially opened in Dublin. Called the Dóchas Centre (Dóchas is the Gaelic word for hope), the Justice Minister, John O'Donoghue, hailed the new development as one of the most modern prisons in the world that would help prepare female offenders to be reintegrated back into the community (*Irish Independent*, 29th September, 1999). The philosophy underpinning the development claimed to have the individual needs of the prisoners as its guiding principle and was reflected in its published Vision Statement:[1]

- *We are a community which embraces people's respect and dignity*
- *We encourage personal growth and development in a caring and safe environment*
- *We are committed to addressing the needs of each person in a healing and holistic way*
- *We actively promote close interaction with the wider community*

It was particularly interesting that the Vision Statement eschewed any mention of custody or punishment and appeared to concentrate on the idea of addressing individual needs rather than providing generic solutions.

The design was an important factor in supporting the aspirations of the new regime which aimed to encourage the women to take greater responsibility for their own lives in a setting of greater 'normalcy'. According to the *Draft Design Brief* dated the 1st December 1995, the specification was '*to create living accommodation arranged in a number of self contained houses to reflect, as far as possible, an urban domestic environment*' which was consistent with living arrangements on the outside. The design was also expected to allow for drug users to be housed separately from drug-free prisoners and to differentiate between those women who were sentenced and those on remand.

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[1] The Vision Statement is on public display in the entrance of the Dóchas Centre and in various other places in the prison.

The opening of this new prison presented an exciting and unique opportunity to study at first hand an experiment in penal reform, underpinned by a philosophy and design aimed specifically at the individual needs of incarcerated female offenders. Despite its size and small population (it was built to accommodate 80 prisoners), it represented a penological microcosm that included both sentenced and remand prisoners and covered the complete spectrum of ages, offence types, sentence lengths and backgrounds within a manageable setting. Up to this time, the treatment of women in prison in Ireland had followed the general pattern common in many other jurisdictions where, because of their smaller numbers, women were likely to have been marginalised within the penal system and subjected to prison accommodation, regimes and controls dominated by the needs of men. The new prison in Dublin was intended to break that mould. My interest was to find out if it would succeed.

At a general level, I wanted to discover if the ideals reflected in the vision could be realised or would they be compromised by the practicalities of running a penal institution or by other extraneous demands. I also wanted to discover the extent to which a prisoner's response to captivity was influenced by her social, physical and administrative environment and how power structures between officers and prisoners had to be renegotiated in the light of new living arrangements and a new empowering regime.

The focus of the thesis is the first 30 months of occupation of the Dóchas Centre. It aims to address the following specific questions:

- How were the new living conditions actually experienced by both prisoners and prison officers?

- How was the potential conflict between the greater freedom of movement inherent in the new design and the needs of safety and security resolved?

- How were the aims of a regime which emphasised personal responsibility and individual decision-making, as opposed to mandatory obedience to a disciplined routine, reconciled with the institutional demands of prison life?

- What were the consequences of the new approach on the social organisation of the prison?

- How did the changes affect personal and group behaviour and how did they influence the dynamics of interrelationships between prisoner and prisoner and prisoner and staff?

- As the prison population represented a wide range of diverse and complex needs, was it possible or even realistic to address such diversity within a setting of captivity?

Finally, it was important to consider if there were lessons to be learned from an innovative experiment in one small prison in Ireland that could contribute to the wider debate on penal policy at the beginning of the 21st century.

Theoretical Framework

To set the theoretical context of the thesis, I address two main bodies of literature relating to important penal developments that occurred during the 19th and 20th centuries – the first concerned with penal reforms in general, their aspirations and outcomes; the second concerned specifically with female offenders. It is clear that penal experiments exhibited a number of recurring themes. They suggest that the initiators of change had often been inspired by idealistic notions of reform that foundered on the practicality of implementation. Reformers frequently had unrealistic assumptions about offenders and their willingness or ability to change, coupled with misguided notions of their needs. Benevolent intentions produced some unexpected consequences over time. Architectural designs which aspired to provide humane facilities were often eclipsed by the competing institutional needs of economies, scale, security and control. Insufficient consideration was given to the vital role played by prison officers with over-optimistic expectations of their abilities and their commitment to change.

The literature also indicates that for at least the last hundred years, in many different jurisdictions, the rate of officially recorded offences for women was consistently lower than the rate for men and the nature of their offending was generally less serious (Heidensohn 1997; Blomberg and Lucken 2000; Hannah-Moffat and Shaw 2000; Gelsthorpe and Morris 2002). That picture still pertains to the present day although it

has been challenged from time to time.[2] It is also clear that women were seldom involved in crimes of violence and when they were, it was mainly directed at a family member – usually an abusive partner (Lloyd 1995; Walklate 1995; Shaw 2000; Hannah-Moffat 2001).[3] In addition, whereas deviant behaviour in men could be idealised (images of the Wild West, men sowing their wild oats, 'heroes' like the great train robbers or the Kray twins), offending women were more likely to be demonised as witches or harlots, pathologised as victims of their own biology or infantilised as inadequate or mentally unstable (Smart 1976; Carlen, Christina et al. 1985; Mandaraka-Shepperd 1986; Faith 1993; Heidensohn 1996). This combination of factors relating to theories of female criminality has, over time, been used as the rationale for conducting penal experiments, often with the laudable intentions of addressing women's particular needs.

The Dóchas Centre was an example of such an experiment and therefore, a perfect case study for exploring and contrasting a number of key issues and debates. The fact that it incorporated the full spectrum of offenders generated its own unique problems – for longer-term prisoners, the disruption and often resentment caused by constant turnover of both remands and those serving short sentences and for the staff, the particular difficulties of managing the expectations of such a diverse group. Referring to the range of male prisoners in Mountjoy (the equivalent of the female prison in Dublin), O'Mahony argued that "*this wide variation in sentence length and status has important consequences for the kinds of activities that can be organised for prisoners, for prisoners' psychological outlook, and for the general ambience and quality of the prison society*" (O'Mahony 1993 p163).

The perspective of the prison officers was also important as they have been mainly neglected in prison research in general and women's prison research in particular. Studies have frequently *mentioned* officers but the focus has been almost exclusively on prisoners. There were some notable exceptions - (Thomas 1972; Kauffman 1988; Finkelstein 1993; Sparks, Bottoms et al. 1996; Conover 2001; Liebling and Price 2001). All of these studies were of officers in male prisons. Staff in *female* prisons have been almost completely ignored as a central research topic. Perhaps that is not

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[2] For a more detailed discussion on this topic see (Naffine 1987; Walklate 1995; Heidensohn 1997; Soothill, Ackerley et al. 2003).

[3] It is important to mention that academic research on women offenders has tended to avoid discussion of female violence on the basis that because of its rare occurrence, it is more likely to be exaggerated and sensationalised by the media (Heidensohn 2000; Shaw 2000; Burman, Batchelor et al. 2001; Worrall 2002).

so surprising in that it is only in comparatively recent years that female *prisoners* came under sociological scrutiny (Walklate 1995; Heidensohn 1996; Rock 1997; Bosworth 1999; Hannah-Moffat and Shaw 2000). In Ireland, there is limited literature on either women prisoners or on prison officers. By using the microcosm of the Dóchas Centre and encompassing the perspectives of both, this study will add to our understanding of the dynamics involved in embracing (or rejecting) innovative penal ideas.

EXPERIMENTS IN REFORM

Penal developments over the past two hundred years have been characterised by the changing attitudes of society's opinion formers towards the punishment of offenders.[4] The attitudes of proponents of imprisonment have been heavily influenced by three main theories of punishment – deterrence, retribution and rehabilitation which, at various times, have been in the ascendancy. Deterrence was the prevailing theory in the 16th and 17th centuries and was manifested by the public infliction of harsh physical penalties. With the rise of the prison workhouse in England and many other parts of Europe the 'theatre' involved in the these public displays of punishment began to decline (Spierenburg 1991; Spierenburg 1998).[5] By the end of the 18th century, most penal reformers had rejected the idea of punishment as a spectacle and sought an alternative through religious conversion (Rusche and Kirchheimer 1939; McConville 1998; McGowen 1998; Blomberg and Lucken 2000). Their main aim was to concentrate on the notion of the rehabilitation of the offender. Despite this move, Jeremy Bentham, another 18th century reformer, continued to advocate deterrence. Bentham who was part of the Utilitarian School of thinking, looked to punishment as a way of discouraging not only the offender, but society at large, from breaking the law. Although the concept of deterrence did not prevail at that particular period, it later played a significant role in penal policy at

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[4] For example, the 19th century penal reformers believed that the infliction of physical punishment in public and the squalor of the existing prisons eroded respect for the law within society in general. However, because there was no public outcry against these abuses, it has to be assumed that this reaction suggested that *'the reformers took their own heightened sensitivity to physical cruelty as symptomatic of general social feeling'* (Ignatieff 1978).

[5] Prison workhouses were first established in England in the mid 16th century. Known as Bridewells or Houses of Correction, they were originally intended for the 'undeserving poor' – able-bodied idlers, beggars, vagabonds and prostitutes but they soon also housed petty offenders. Their main objective was to combat idleness through a process of strict discipline and forced labour (Spierenburg 1991). These prison workhouses spread throughout Europe and became particularly well established in Holland. During much of this time prisons were also used as places of detention pending prisoners' trial, sentence or transportation.

various times, particularly in the United Kingdom and the United States (Walker 1991; Duff and Garland 1994).

The Kantian theory of retribution, based on the philosophy of an 'eye for an eye', had its foundations in the religions of Judaism and Christianity. It was current for a time in the early part of the 18th century and reasserted itself during the latter half of the 20th century in the guise of what has been called 'just deserts' (Duff and Garland 1994). But it was the concept of rehabilitation that characterised penal experiments instigated by reformers beginning with the penitentiary movement, the most far-reaching penal reform of the 19th century.

Reform through Religion and Architecture

The penitentiary movement was spearheaded by John Howard and his non-conformist contemporaries. Because of their religious convictions they believed in the prospect of 'rehabilitating' the offender by introducing the notion of reform through solitude and contemplation (Smith 1962; Ignatieff 1978; Carlen 1983; McConville 1998; Bosworth 1999). Howard was very much influenced by what he saw in prisons and other institutions like schools, workhouses and hospitals, during his travels around the UK and many parts of Europe. He was particularly impressed with the emphasis on cleanliness, discipline, strict routine, constant surveillance and cellular confinement that characterised the prison workhouses (the Rasphouses) of Amsterdam and Rotterdam and these provided him with most of the discipline programmes set out in the Penitentiary Act of 1779 (Ignatieff 1978). Architecture played a decisive role. William Blackburn, Howard's favourite architect, considered that 'a rationally organised space would foster the development of reason and self regulation in its inmates' (McGowen 1998 p82). Reformers in America also advocated the use of architecture to help in the creation of 'moral change' – 'other things being equal, the prospect of improvement in morals, depends, in some degree, upon the construction of buildings' (Rothman 1998 p106). This same notion was still being echoed very much later by the architect, Leslie Fairweather, when, at the end of the 20th century, he said 'the design of the prison environment is crucial to its operation and to the impact it has on the achievement of correctional goals for inmates, staff and public users' (Fairweather 2000 p47).

Pentonville, designed by Joshua Jebb and opened in London in 1842, was the 'new model prison' which would put into practice the reforming ideals of Howard and his

contemporaries. It held 520 prisoners in separate cells. The construction, four wings radiating from a central 'circle' allowed for the constant observation of both the prisoners and the warders and the construction of the cells hindered any normal communication. *'Pentonville represented the apotheosis of the idea that a controlled environment could produce a reformed and autonomous individual'* (McGowen 1998 p92). With warders wearing slippers to muffle their footsteps, there was constant uncertainty and unpredictability of observation which meant that the 'controlled' were forced to exercise self control to avoid punishment (Hudson 1997; Rock 1997).[6] Referring to Holloway which was modelled on Pentonville, Rock wrote – *'almost everything of note could be seen from that central point, the Governor and his staff being able to subject prisoners to 'unobserved inspection' as they gazed down the straight unencumbered lines of the galleries around them'* (Rock 1996 p21). In addition to constant surveillance, the separate and silent system was also introduced in the UK with the opening of Pentonville. The purpose was to overcome the infectious nature of crime and to encourage a sense of remorse and a desire to reform. The ideas for this approach were borrowed from similar experiments practised in the United States and designed by John Haviland. The Auburn Penitentiary in New York operated the 'silent system' where prisoners slept one to a cell but came together to work and eat. In the Eastern State Penitentiary in Pennsylvania, prisoners were confined to their cells for the whole of their sentence under what was known as the 'separate system'. Proponents of the separate system looked to religion as an antidote to various ills afflicting the wider society at the time. Reform and rehabilitation and not deterrence had become the aims of incarceration.

Encouragement through Privilege

With the opening of Pentonville, Jebb also introduced the progressive stage system, a variation on the marks system devised by Alexander Maconochie in Norfolk Island in Tasmania in 1840, under which prisoners could earn improved conditions or early release. In Pentonville, the first stage maintained the fundamentals of the separate system; the second involved prisoners in arduous work for the benefit of the public; the final stage was conditional release (which, for many, meant release into transportation) based on good behaviour (Smith 1962; McConville 1998; McGowen 1998; Carey 2000). Bad behaviour forfeited marks already earned and could result

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[6] The idea of constant surveillance had originated with Jeremy Bentham the 18th century prison reformer.

in flogging, or, for very bad behaviour, the additional discomfort of living in chains. *'Energy, commitment and complete submission, were the supposed prerequisites of early release'* (McConville 1998 p123). This final stage gave rise to the greatest controversy. Because it used the device of encouraging the co-operation of prisoners in return for early release, it was seen by penal reformers and advocates of deterrence as a dangerous relaxation of prison discipline. However, prison managers recognised that prisoners would never become totally passive participants in any prison regime and would be more likely to respond to some form of incentive (Sykes 1958; Jacobs 1977; Sparks, Bottoms et al. 1996; Liebling and Price 2001). The issue of incentives and the controversy surrounding them is as relevant in today's 21st century Dóchas Centre as it was in the penitentiaries of the 19th century (see chapter 5).

Criticism of Reform

The introduction of the penitentiary philosophy raised the fundamental question of the purpose of imprisonment. On the one hand, it can be argued, that Howard's aspirations to reform the offender, were driven more by the notion of a smooth running institution than necessarily addressing any specific moral degeneration of an individual offender (Dobash, Dobash et al. 1986; McGowen 1998). On the other hand, Ignatieff concentrated on the benevolent spirit of the reformers. He argued that Howard, in particular, believed that criminals could be reformed because they, like all people, had a conscience, were capable of shame and could be susceptible to conversion given the right conditions. Howard's own conversion convinced him of the validity of this argument. *"If God could save a sinner like himself, could he not save the sinners in prison"* (Ignatieff 1978).

Foucault, disregarding Howard, believed that the new penitentiary architecture reinforced the move away from the public spectacle of violence against the body but replaced it by a more insidious punishment aimed at the 'soul'. He argued that a regime of discipline, work, isolation, contemplation and constant surveillance created a new power structure between the prisoner and his keeper. *'The agent of punishment must exercise total power, which no third party can disturb; the individual to be corrected must be entirely enveloped in the power that is being exercised over him'* (Foucault 1977 p129). However, Foucault ignored historical research and the nuances of context. He focused almost exclusively on Bentham's never-to-be-built panoptican or 'all seeing eye' design and appeared to accept, without challenge,

official rhetoric about programmes of surveillance and reform on the assumption they represented 'reality' (Morris and Rothman 1998). In his critique of Foucault, Garland considered that he pays too little attention to the humanitarian ideals of the reformers. His [Foucault's] overemphasis on seeing the new discipline purely in terms of power dominance ignored the genuine benevolence of the reformers as described in the writings of Ignatieff and Rothman (Garland 1990 p146). However, whilst acknowledging the benevolence of those who devised the discipline system of the penitentiary, Charles Dickens thought that it was unlikely that they had any idea that the execution of the system would inflict so much torture and agony. After a visit to the Eastern Penitentiary in Philadelphia he wrote "*I hold that this slow and daily tampering with the mysteries of the brain, to be immeasurably worse than any torture of the body...... those who have undergone this punishment must pass into society again morally unhealthy and diseased*" (Dickens 1972 p147). Despite the controversy surrounding the silent and separate systems of the penitentiary movement, the principles were adopted in many countries in Europe.

Harsh Reality

By the second half of the 19th century the rehabilitative ideals of the reformers were gradually being overtaken by proponents of greater severity. In the UK, Jebb was followed by Edward DuCane as Director of Convict Prisons. During his reign, the ideals of rehabilitation were replaced by the concept of uniformity of punishment based on the crude utilitarian assumption that criminals were motivated to minimise pain and maximise pleasure. The high-minded goals that had inspired the penitentiary regime became lost in a proliferation of rules and rituals. The threat of punishment hung over every activity of the day. The expectation that prison staff were capable of supporting the aims of the reformers was also misplaced. They were likely to have come from a military background and consequently were better suited to detecting and punishing infractions and managing large institutions by uniform means than contributing to the moral reform of the prisoner (Thomas 1972; McGowen 1998; O'Brien 1998).[7]

The concept of deterrence was again in the ascendancy. The consequence of this change was an intensification of harsh treatment intended to break the spirit of the

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[7] That is not to suggest that a military background *per se* was incompatible with reform. Walter Crofton, a prominent Irish Director of Prisons in the 1850s (see chapter 2) and Sir David Ramsbotham, the Chief Inspector of Prisons in England in the 1990s, were but two examples of men from a military background who advocated prison reform.

prisoners and instil discipline. Regimes were dominated by the use of the treadmill, the crank and the capstan which, combined with the provision of 'scientifically' designed diets sufficient to maintain minimum levels of health, emphasised the deterrent approach to imprisonment. To add a mental dimension to their punishment, prisoners had the galling and demoralising knowledge that their hard labour was completely without any benefit. This treatment had the effect not only of torturing the body but also of emasculating the spirit (McConville 1998). In other parts of Europe similar changes took place. Society was less interested in rehabilitation and wanted a system that would strike fear into the heart of the criminal. With the increased punitiveness of the separate system, prisoners suffered both bodily and mentally. Solitary confinement was 'symptomatic of a mentality .... which abandons the attempt to find a rational policy of rehabilitation and conceals this fact with a moral ideology' (Rusche and Kirchheimer 1939 p137). It was easy to believe that incarceration per se would result in the reform of the offender. "Thus the rhetoric of reform continued to cloak the prison with the mantle of legitimacy long after the reality of reform had disappeared" (Rothman 1998 p113).

The Re-awakening of Reform

By the end of the century, the harsh punitive treatment advocated by DuCane began to be questioned. The Gladstone Committee of 1895 urged the abandonment of useless labour and the introduction of better living conditions for prisoners. With the introduction of new professionals into prisons – social workers, probation officers, psychiatrists and teachers, the notion that people could be 'trained' out of their criminal habits took hold (Coyle 2001). This new approach to rehabilitation found expression with the establishment of training prisons and more significantly, with Borstals (McConville 1998; Coyle 2001; Watts 2001).

Borstals were a new type of 'reformatory' for sixteen to twenty-one year olds which aimed to break their offending cycle at an early stage. Based on the public school concept of houses, they were inspired by Sir Alexander Paterson, a liberal prison commissioner who was appointed in 1922. The length of time spent in a Borstal was dependent on behaviour and had the unexpected consequence of the indeterminate sentence. Because long sentences were seen as good for the inmate, there was an added incentive to extend the time served. Young people were retrained but it was not until they were considered ready to enter society to live a crime-free life, that they were released (Stern 1998). To help with the reform process, staff were expected to

interact with their charges, who in turn, would be given greater responsibility and control over personal decision-making. In this way Borstals were also intended as training grounds for staff. It was hoped, that by moving people between them and the adult prisons, the aspirations of the former would affect the latter. However, according to McConville *'subordinate staff could be hard to win for a reformatory approach to imprisonment, especially one based on the subtleties of personal relations and the keenest of expectations and highest of hopes faltered when faced by institutional inertia and the repressive miasma of the Victorian prisons'* (McConville 1998 p143). To some extent, a similar reaction was experienced immediately after the opening of the Dóchas Centre at the beginning of the 21st century (see chapter 4).

With the introduction of fines, probation and alternative facilities for the insane and the habitual drunkard in the early part of the century, longer prison sentences were considered necessary to deter the 'hard core' adult criminals for whom reform was not possible. The contradictory aims of reform [in Borstals] and deterrence [in adult prisons], coupled with the increase in crime after the Second World War, gradually led to disillusion with the ideals of rehabilitation although they did not really die until the late 1960s. Despite the availability of custodial alternatives in many Western European countries, penal populations began to expand from the late 1950s (O'Brien 1998 p199). In the UK and North America in particular, the theory of retribution gradually became more dominant, mainly due to the 'nothing works' doctrine expressed by Martinson in the 1970s (Ashworth 1997 p1098). This move led eventually to prison overcrowding which was to become the hallmark of the prison system in the late 20th century on both sides of the Atlantic.

The Pendulum Swing

The Woolf Report of 1991, initiated because of a series of prison riots in Manchester and other prisons, heralded the most important analysis of the penal system in the UK since the Gladstone Report of almost 100 years earlier. The explanations for the riots focussed on the intolerable conditions in which prisoners were living, many of whom were still housed in buildings that had changed little since they were built to meet the idealistic aspirations of 150 years previously. Architecturally they may have been appropriate for the purpose of operating the separate system based on single occupancy cells, but they were much less flexible when it came to meeting the 20th century needs of prisoner congregation, workshops and visiting areas. Woolf's focus

was on the concept of justice which included looking after prisoners with humanity, safeguarding their rights, providing them with opportunities to obtain skills and helping them as far as possible to prepare for life after release (Sparks, Bottoms et al. 1996; Downes and Morgan 1997; Stern 1998). The 1993 strategy document for the development of the Dóchas Centre took the Woolf Report into consideration and incorporated the same underlying principles:

> 'In the aftermath of the serious disturbances in British prisons in 1990, the Woolf report concluded that a main cause of what happened was that the balance being achieved between security, control and justice in the prisons, failed to give due weight to justice. This point is made to illustrate the importance to be attached to this need for justice/reasonableness/equity'.[8]

Interestingly, at the time that the Woolf Report was produced, concern was expressed about the absence of any focus on women in its findings. It transpired that this omission was deliberate as women had not played a part in any of the disturbances (Hayman 1996 p3). Notwithstanding their omission in this specific context, it was clear that over the last 150 years women had also been the subject of reform experiments but with a difference.

THE GENDERED DIMENSION OF REFORM EXPERIMENTS

Reform through Religion and Emulation

In the UK women did not escape the penitentiary movement of the 19th century. However, the implementation of the movement's ideals exhibited a gendered bias which was reflected in a subtle difference in actual treatment. By the moral standards of the day, female criminals were seen as the antithesis of compliant, obedient and docile domesticity. Their criminality exhibited a moral weakness that made them doubly deviant - not only had they broken the law, they had also failed to live up to the Victorian notion of 'appropriate' [middle class] female behaviour (Smith 1962; Carlen, Christina et al. 1985; Faith 1993; Heidensohn 1996; Zedner 1998). In the words of Henry Mayhew, a social commentator of the time, "In them [criminal women] one sees a most hideous picture of all human weakness and depravity – a picture the more striking because exhibiting the coarsest and rudest moral features in connection with a being whom we are apt to regard as the most graceful and gentle form of humanity" (Mayhew and Binny 1862 p466). According to Kennedy, this notion of being 'doubly deviant' continued to have an influence right up to the 1990s.

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[8] This quote is from the regime Strategy Document for the Dóchas Centre, 1993.

Describing how the judiciary viewed a female accused, she wrote – '*for a woman, the assessment of her worth is enmeshed in very limiting ideas. If she challenges conventions in any significant way, she is seen as threatening or, at least, disappointing. A mere hint in court that a woman might be a bad mother, a bit of a whore or emotionally unstable and she is lost*' (Kennedy 1993 p22).

During the 17th and 18th centuries, separate institutions for women in the form of Magdalen houses for 'repentant' prostitutes had spread across Europe. These institutions emphasised penitence and religious instruction to help 'fallen women' reform and return to their 'proper' female role in society (Matthews 1999 p15). However, the majority of female offenders were incarcerated with men in male prisons and treated similarly. It was not until the 19th century that reformers decided that women required different treatment and that their needs would best be addressed in separate prisons for women. As John Howard and his contemporaries became the champions of prison reform (in the UK) in general, Elizabeth Fry became the champion of female prison reform in particular. The appalling conditions that she witnessed on a visit to Newgate prison in 1813 provided her with the impetus to spearhead a campaign for the reform of prison conditions and of equal importance, of prisoners themselves (Smith 1962). With the help of her middle class female contemporaries, who came to be known as the 'Lady Visitors', Fry was committed to the notion of the positive effect of one-to-one relationships and the power of religion. She also wanted women to be supervised only by women, in the belief that 'respectable' female warders would act as a constant reminder of propriety and virtue and would also prevent sexual abuse (Smith 1962; Heidensohn 1996). There was an expectation that prisoners would embrace the disciplines of the institution if treated with gentleness and sympathy and in so doing, would co-operate willingly in their own reform (Zedner 1998 p301). Like Howard, she advocated constant surveillance under improved physical conditions of clean, warm, orderly surroundings and plain clothing as well as encouraging hard work and religious observation – she wanted women prisoners to be treated as human beings and not as animals.

'Reformed' Reality

In response to the ideals advocated by the reformers, far from emulating the example set by the 'Lady Visitors', many of the prisoners derided their enthusiasm and simulated penitence in order to attract praise or reward. Equally, it was almost impossible for the warders to meet the expectations placed upon them. In male

prisons which operated on a quasi-military style, officers enforced a wide body of rules strictly and uniformly. In the women's prisons, warders were supposed to interact with their charges and to maintain order by behaving with feminine decorum, patience and compassion and thereby winning their trust and loyalty. However, partly because of understaffing, but also because many warders were relatively uneducated and not up to the complex task of addressing the needs of a diverse group of women, these expectations were rarely fulfilled. Warders also resented the 'Lady Visitors' whom they saw as meddling amateurs who disrupted the daily routine and unwittingly encouraged dishonesty and jealousy among the prisoners (Zedner 1998 p300). In addition, whereas Fry's original intentions had been to improve living conditions and provide work and education, her later emphasis on constant surveillance and rigid discipline became more akin to the stricter regimes in the men's prisons (Dobash, Dobash et al. 1986 p61; Carlen 1998 p13).

Although not subject to the harsh physical labour of the men's prisons, women were obliged not only to obey the rules and regulations of the institution but also to behave in a manner appropriate to the Victorians' expectations of femininity. Under the female version of the 'privilege system' marks were earned, not for hard work and productivity like the men, but for honesty, propriety and 'moral improvement' (Smith 1962; Dobash, Dobash et al. 1986; Zedner 1998). Then, as now, women were considered far more difficult to manage than men (this issue was raised by prison officers on numerous occasions during the course of this research – see Chapter 6). One distinctive characteristic which illustrated the point was their tendency to 'break out' - engage in riotous or destructive behaviour aimed either at the institution or themselves. Such behaviour was considered to be peculiarly female as women were regarded as emotional creatures who were not capable of self-control and frequently gave in to hysterical outbursts to relieve their frustration (Zedner 1998).

Another aspect of behaviour that complicated the aims of 19th century imprisonment was that many prisoners, both men and women, regarded the prison as a refuge from an even worse existence on the outside. This was contrary to the principle of 'less eligibility' which was introduced in 1834 as an amendment to Poor Law of 1572. The Royal Commission of 1834 had decreed that the disease of pauperism was to be cut off at its roots by making the situation of the able-bodied pauper considerably less attractive than that of the independent labourer. *'Every penny bestowed that tends to render the condition of the pauper more eligible than that of the independent labourer, is a bounty on indolence and vice'* (Webb and Webb 1929 p62). Translated

into the prison context it was intended to reduce the living standard of the prisoner below that of the lowest class of the free population (Rusche and Kirchheimer 1939 p108). It was a difficult policy to sustain in the face of appalling conditions of poverty and deprivation experienced by many offenders on the outside. At least in prison they had food and shelter and an element of medical provision which encouraged them to commit offences in order to be admitted. (A similar practice was evident in the Dóchas Centre at the beginning of 21st century – see chapter 5).

Transatlantic Lessons

Around the time that Elizabeth Fry was involved in her reforming work in the UK, a similar move was under way in the United States. The first separate female prison was opened in 1835 at Mount Pleasant in New York and for a brief period in the 1840s, implemented a radical experiment in reform. Personal tuition was introduced; the staff were instructed not to rely on punishment as a method of control; the silent system which prevailed in all other prisons was abolished and visits from outsiders were encouraged. Critics of the experiment complained that the milder treatment of the women was likely to incite discontent among the male prisoners in neighbouring Sing Sing, a sentiment echoed by some of the male prisoners in Mountjoy in relation to the Dóchas Centre, over 150 years later. In a short time, the ideals of Mount Pleasant were abandoned and the prison was closed (Hahn Rafter 1990; Zedner 1998).

It was not until the opening of reformatories in the 1870s that women-only prisons became established in the United States. The development of reformatories was very much influenced by social feminists who campaigned for institutions to address the specific needs of women. Their interpretation of 'needs' were predicated on middle class notions of women's position in society, not dissimilar to those of Elizabeth Fry and her lady visitors. Prison was to prepare women to go back into the community as wives and mothers and regimes were to be designed accordingly (Hahn Rafter 1990 p33; Heidensohn 1996). This move was a 19th century phenomenon. Prior to that time, American society had considered that female criminals were particularly corrupt and depraved and they suffered similar and sometimes, worse treatment to men (Freedman 1981; Hahn Rafter 1990). Now they were thought of more paternalistically as having been 'led astray' and therefore, capable of being 'reformed' in much the same way as their sisters in crime in the UK. Campaigners wanted to rescue and change those who had 'fallen' – vagrants,

unmarried mothers and prostitutes who would have committed relatively minor offences for which they would have received a short term of imprisonment.

Uniquely, reformatories were not constrained by existing architecture but were brand new buildings designed with the aspirations of the reformatory ideals in mind (another similarity with the Dóchas Centre). They were usually set in rural areas and were based on a 'cottage' style approach where 'families' of about twenty women lived with a supervising 'mother' in charge. The idea was to create a domestic atmosphere where women could learn housewifely skills which would prepare them for domestic service on release. Their other development needs were addressed by the provision of education, workshops, gymnasiums and other leisure activities. Reformatories enjoyed a measure of success in the early stages. However, how they were run was very much influenced by the leadership of the Superintendent and the calibre of the staff. Finding competent staff willing to undertake the poorly paid and demanding work, proved an almost insuperable barrier and led to the most determined Superintendents having to revert to more traditional disciplinary methods of managing their prison (Zedner 1998 p318). Because it was so difficult to find qualified female staff to run the institutions, reformatories often succumbed to stagnation (Freedman 1981 p78). The imperative to reap economies of scale also militated against the individualised treatment which was inherent in the reformatory ideals. By the 1920s, reformatories had become overcrowded, sympathy for offending women had declined and many of the benevolent principles on which they had been established were abandoned (Smith 1962; Freedman 1981; Blomberg and Lucken 2000).

Reform in Decline

Back in the UK the reforming ideals of Elizabeth Fry and her contemporaries had been overtaken by the wider needs of uniformity and discipline that had been initiated by DuCane in the men's prisons. At the end of the 19th century, many women prisoners were repeat offenders imprisoned for minor offences allegedly caused by drunkenness or mental deficiency. The result was a new wave of innovation in the treatment of 'criminal' women. With the Inebriate Act of 1898, separate Inebriate Reformatories were introduced for both men and women. However, because alcoholism in women was much more socially unacceptable, their numbers in these reformatories far exceeded those of men. At the same time, those who were considered 'feeble-minded' and not susceptible to the disciplines of the normal

24

prison, were segregated in separate wings of existing institutions and supervised by specialist staff – a move, whose influence can still be seen right up to the present day.

By the early 20th century, on both sides of the Atlantic, innovative ideas for prison reform for women were in decline. In America, reformatories proved more expensive to run. By the time of the Depression they had to cater for more serious offenders. The existing buildings became overcrowded and there was no money to build new ones. Security became dominant and regimes were forced to become more punitive. Gradually the whole ethos of the reformatory movement was overtaken by more conventional custodial needs. In the UK a similar pattern emerged. By the 1920s, all the alcoholic reformatories had closed down, as had many of the women's wings of men's prisons which meant that, once again, women were confined in more conventional prisons like Holloway. A more significant change during this period, was the major decline in the actual number of people, both men and women, being sent to prison. With the introduction of alternative punishments like fines and even more importantly, probation orders, the number of women in prison in the UK reduced from around 33,000 in 1913 to less than 2000 by the 1960's (Smith 1962; Zedner 1998).

FROM TREATMENT TO EMPOWERMENT

The 'Treatment' Paradigm

The influence of science in the late 19th and early 20th century occasioned a reappraisal of the causes of offending behaviour. The new science of criminology was concerned to develop a factual knowledge of offenders based on observation, measurement and inductive reasoning and rejected speculative thinking about human character which had previously informed penal practices. In the UK, this resulted in the study of offending behaviour being heavily dominated by a medico-psychological approach which focused on the individual (Garland 1997). The consequence of the new scientific theories was a growth in the presence and influence of the prison professionals, especially psychiatrists. It gave rise to the medicalisation of crime and the introduction of treatment programmes particularly for female offenders (Hahn Rafter 1990 p54). The dominant discourse now beginning to emerge was that the majority of female offenders were 'mentally unstable' and more likely to respond to psychiatric intervention or therapeutic treatment (Pailthorpe

1932). Most of the research on female offenders was conducted by these professionals who came to the conclusion that their criminality stemmed from some kind of psychiatric disorder, encapsulated in words like inadequate, defective, disturbed or disordered. Without any dissenting voices to challenge this contention, it was hardly surprising that Holloway, as the main women's prison in England, would be the focus for a new experiment which would involve demolishing the old prison and replacing it with "*an establishment that will be basically a secure hospital to act as the hub of the penal female system. Its medical and psychiatric facilities will be its central feature and normal custodial facilities will comprise a relatively small part of the establishment*".[9] The new prison, the first to be built specifically for women, would be "*one of the world's most advanced and versatile penal institutions*"[10] – exciting, innovative and inspiring.

Bad to Mad and Back

The Holloway experiment of the 1970/80s, as the first major penal development for women in 20th century England, provided various bases for comparison with the later development of the Dóchas Centre in Ireland. The architecture was intended to resemble, as far as possible, living conditions on the outside in order to facilitate the reintegration of the prisoners back into the community on release.[11] The long wings, dominated by the 'circle' of the old radial design, were replaced by a more natural environment to encourage community living in small self-sufficient units, housing about sixteen occupants around a common or pond. At the time, it was envisaged that prisoners would enjoy a greater degree of freedom – they would have keys to their doors and would be able to move about unhindered, within a secure perimeter. Such freedom was considered therapeutic in the sense of creating a social order that fostered independence and personal growth. Rock later explained that the design brief envisaged that '*Free movement within the prison area will be allowed to all inmates except where their physical conditions preclude this. There will be a minimum of overt supervision and escorting of individuals and parties from place to place*' (Rock 1996 p123). Work in the new prison was to be therapeutically based

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[9] Statement of Home Secretary James Callaghan and quoted by Rock, 1996:107.

[10] *Evening Standard*, 1st October, 1970. Note the similarity with the statement of Justice Minister O'Donoghue at the opening of the Dóchas Centre in 1999 (see Chapter 1-Introduction).

[11] The design brief for the Dóchas Centre incorporated similar aspirations.

and control exercised, not by coercion and surveillance, but by informal social mechanisms and mutual support of staff for prisoners and prisoners for prisoners within 'community' groupings. The therapeutic emphasis was to be manifest by a progression system from hospital treatment to address medical, psychiatric or alcohol/drug abuse issues (initially on a residential basis, then on a day-release basis), then to the ordinary prison and finally, release (Rock 1996 p127).

The Holloway redevelopment project which began in the 1960s appeared to be blighted from the beginning. It took over 15 years to come to fruition. A host of problems, both internal and external, dogged the project - from planning issues to neighbours' complaints to industrial action. These were exacerbated by changes in personnel, organisation and funding as well as changes in Government.[12] More importantly, during this time, the 1970/80s, a whole new ethos in penological thought had developed in the UK. The size of the female prison population had begun to rise and they were now considered more dangerous, more criminal and more like men in their offending behaviour – the new female criminal had been born (Smart 1979; Chesney-Lind 1980; Hutter and Williams 1981; Carlen, Christina et al. 1985; Heidensohn 1997). The rise of terrorism in the 1970s, including female terrorism (especially the IRA), increased the need for greater security and confirmed the Prison Department's growing disenchantment with the therapeutic ideology. Increased costs caused by the continuing delays added to the concerns and gradually, the hospital accommodation which had been central to the original idea, was overtaken by increased provision for 'normal' accommodation. By 1975 the primary goals of containment and discipline as reflected in men's prisons began to eclipse all others (Rock 1996 p220).

The final move out of the old prison happened at the end of January 1977, nearly 17 years after the project started. It did not go smoothly as many of the prisoners and staff anticipated

> "I just remember a very disgruntled staff and a very disgruntled group of inmates because I was there the day we moved. I went around everybody that night to see that they were settled and there were a lot of people crying and there were a lot of people saying that this is awful – inmates. ..... I think they were mostly people who had been in prison before and felt somehow at home in the old building that they didn't feel in the new one. It was ghastly. They put plain glass in the windows and the first week end we were in there almost all the glass was smashed out .... And the women were climbing up and hanging

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[12] For details of the myriad of problems that arose during the building phases see Rock, 1996; chapters 5/6.

*out the windows and screaming at the flats and cutting, not a lot, but enough to
cause a public disturbance, cutting themselves"* (Rock 1996 p228/229).

After the move the prison continued to be dogged by crises. Amendments to the design resulted in a sense of claustrophobia instead of the light, calming and liberating spaces of the original plan. Noise levels from shouting and banging that had been contained within the sturdy walls of the old Victorian building now permeated the inside with its new fluid design and caused major complaints from neighbours on the outside. After a visit in May 1984, Charles Irving MP and Janet Fowkes MP said,

> *"The design has reduced the level of daylight to cells, no daylight to corridors and many communal areas and protuberances precluding observation by staff of inmates' behaviour; drab colours, low ceilings and little natural light giving a strongly depressing and claustrophobic atmosphere – the dog leg corridors and cell design make prisoner observation a nightmare – it is expensive on staff resources"* (Mama, Mars et al. 1987).

Prison officers felt vulnerable to attack because of hidden corners and blind spots which impeded their ability to keep their charges under proper surveillance. Prisoners also felt vulnerable and unsure without the clear boundaries and formal rules that had dominated life in the old prison. Distrust and fear grew and confrontation was avoided by an increase in the use of 'banging up'.[13] By the early 1980s, the original aspirations of moving from a prison-focussed institution to the more caring ideals of a hospital were reversed and gradually the ethos of discipline began to dominate.

Once again the importance of the influence of the prison officer was underestimated. Many were culturally resistant to the philosophical aspirations of the new Holloway and exercised that resistance to a level that eventually culminated in a strike and lock-out of prison officers. Older, experienced, maternal-type officers left and were replaced by others who had a very different style. They may have had more book learning but were inept at controlling disturbances. The new staff body lacked cohesion and stability. Resignations, absenteeism and sickness among officers became identified as endemic to Holloway (Rock 1996 p214/215).

The restructuring of Holloway was a penal reform experiment that never really had a proper opportunity to get off the ground. The delays and multitudinous problems that beset the building programme were matched by the severity of other problems

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[13] Locking the prisoners back in their cells.

relating to changes in leadership, the growth in prison numbers, the myth of the new criminal woman and the continuing presence of high numbers of 'disturbed' inmates. The original ideals that had reflected sensitivity and compassion for the perceived needs of criminal offenders, were overtaken by harsh practical realities. Interestingly, Colin Allen[14] said of Holloway at the Perrie Lectures in 2000 *"It appears that all familiar problems remain and that the spiral of decline is once more resisting the best efforts of the Governor and the many good people who are working there"* (Allen 2000 p16).

'Therapy' in Scotland

During the same period, a similar experiment to that advocated for Holloway had begun north of the border, in Scotland. A working party which included prison officials, a consultant psychiatrist and an academic social worker had been set up to develop recommendations for Cornton Vale, a new prison for women. Like Holloway one of the overriding assumptions that informed the group's thinking was that the majority of prospective inmates would be in need of some psychiatric intervention. The 'treatment' model would dominate and it was intended that the Health Centre would act as the hub of the prison. Little consideration appears to have been given to the fact that, in both cases, these prisons would have to cater for a wide variety of offenders (Cornton Vale is the only purpose-built prison for women in Scotland) whose problems and needs may vary enormously. When Cornton Vale opened in 1975 with a capacity of just over 200 women, its main objective was described as providing *'treatment for women and girls who are held in custody, such that on their return to freedom, they will be more able to deal with the pressures and complexities of modern life'* (Scottish Office 1995 p1). Like Holloway (and similar to the Dóchas Centre) it was built on the 'house' model with five individual houses separating different categories – remand prisoners, sentenced prisoners and those undergoing assessment. Each house was divided into family units accommodating seven women in single rooms, bathroom facilities for each unit and communal areas for eating and recreation. The houses were set among neat gardens and there was also a communal block that included the education centre, workshops, gymnasium, library and health centre. The whole idea was to make it as non-prison-like as possible. At various times it was described as a housing estate, holiday camp, university campus

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[14] Colin Allen was appointed Governor of Holloway during the 1980s and was instrumental in resolving some of its intractable problems. He subsequently joined Her Majesty's Prison Inspectorate.

or even Spanish hacienda, but by prisoners and social workers, as a concentration camp (Carlen 1983; Dobash, Dobash et al. 1986). The Dóchas Centre was also given numerous descriptions by both prisoners and staff but mainly on the 'holiday camp' theme.

The house concept at Cornton Vale was intended to foster the idea of a small 'family' unit in a rehabilitative setting. However, normal social intercourse was constrained by the constant presence of prison officers and because sociability in such a setting was so artificial, many of the women actually felt even more isolated (Carlen 1983 p102). They were also subject to petty indignities – for example, having to use a chamber pot if they were in one of the controlled units; forced to explain to a prison officer why they wanted to see a doctor; allocated ill-fitting dresses and subject to controls over when they could wash their hair, clothes and bodies. Far from fostering the ideals of rehabilitation, these constraints only succeeded in undermining their self respect even further (Carlen 1983 p107). The Health Centre which was intended to play a key role in the treatment of the women, was responsible for seeing all new prisoners on arrival and for organising appropriate therapeutic programmes either on a one-to-one or group basis. Research into the effectiveness of these sessions concluded that they were of limited value mainly because the constant presence of disciplinary staff impeded open discussion (Dobash, Dobash et al. 1986 p136). Another inhibitor to the success of 'therapeutic' treatment was that critical attacks or emotional outbursts caused by grievances or frustrations against the institution itself were disciplinary offences that were likely to result in punishment.

Disciplined Reality

An important factor that was evident both in Holloway and in Cornton Vale was the absence of any reference to discipline in the Development Documents for both institutions. However, Prison Rules provide the framework for controlling behaviour and ensuring safety and security in any prison and their infringement usually results in some form of punishment. Although not explicitly mentioned in relation to the new treatment model, in Cornton Vale the discretionary power of the prison officers in the application of the rules had far-reaching effects both on relationships between prisoners (for example, a gesture of friendship like offering someone a cigarette was an offence) and between prisoner and prison officer (perceptions of favouritism or discrimination). To add to this dilemma, a number of prison officers considered that the therapeutic regime, which concentrated on group sessions and drama therapy,

was 'too soft' and that the psychiatric staff had little understanding of the 'grass roots' problems of running a prison (Dobash, Dobash et al. 1986).

Because of the more recalcitrant nature of female offenders, conventional wisdom suggested they were more disruptive and difficult to manage and were likely to be put on report much more frequently than men (Hutter and Williams 1981; Mama, Mars et al. 1987; O'Dwyer, Wilson et al. 1987; Carlen and Tchaikovsky 1996; Heidensohn 1997; Bosworth 1999). However, it was assumed that the treatment model in both Holloway and Cornton Vale would result in fewer women being put on report. In the event, the opposite occurred (Dobash, Dobash et al. 1986 p148). In much the same way that Goffman observed that any act of hostility by the patient against the institution was interpreted by the staff as confirmation of a pathological symptom (Goffman 1961 p269), incidents such as self-harm, clothes-tearing or excessive shouting – all of which could be considered as *real* indicators of mental disturbance, were often viewed by officers in Cornton Vale as symptoms of attention-seeking and could be punished by being sent 'down the back'.[15] Twenty percent of the women in the 1980s study had been 'down the back'. One prisoner explained *"When tension gets too much, you crack – you start shouting, swearing, damaging furniture, people, yourself"* (Dobash, Dobash et al. 1986 p156).

The ideals of therapy dominated the discourse at the time when both Holloway and Cornton Vale were under development and had a major influence on the architecture of both establishments to the exclusion of any significant consideration of discipline and punishment. However, with the co-existence of the contradictory aims of therapy and punishment within a penal setting, it was almost inevitable that when conflict arose the demands of discipline and security would take precedence. The reality of Cornton Vale was that therapy had only limited success but at the same time, it had actually *'enlarged the net of discipline and woven it still finer by extending surveillance and control to even the most intimate and mundane aspects of daily life'*

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[15] 'Down the back' referred to two silent and two strong cells which were situated in two of the houses and contained only a mattress at night time. They had no windows and no colour and because they were stripped of furniture, food had to be eaten off the floor (Dobash, Dobash et al. 1986 p155).

(Dobash, Dobash et al. 1986 p158).[16] Carlen acknowledged that Cornton Vale was a modern, clean and pleasant environment and not an overcrowded and brutal institution. Nevertheless, because it was a closed prison accommodating every category of prisoner, all the women were subject to higher security and stricter regimes to satisfy the requirements of the few and to the detriment of the original aspirations. She concluded that this greater surveillance and the discipline techniques of a stricter regime increased the pains of imprisonment (Carlen 1983 p215).[17] With such a conclusion it is difficult to ignore Foucault's bleak conception of prison as '*an instrument of correction, not for the restoration of the juridical subject, but to shape the individual to become an obedient subject by habits, rules, orders and the continual exercise of authority around him and upon him*' (Foucault 1977 p128). Arguably, this accusation could equally be levelled at a more recent experiment which has taken place in Canada.

'Empowerment' in Canada

Feminism had a much greater impact on official penal discourse in Canada, culminating in another experiment that acknowledged the different needs of female offenders and accordingly, concentrated on developing a woman-centred approach to new facilities and regimes. The experiment was aimed at federally sentenced prisoners who, by definition, included all those who had been sentenced to a custodial period of two years or more. At the beginning of the 1990s, federally sentenced women were confined to the Prison for Women in Kingston, Ontario which meant that the majority were accommodated many miles from their families and communities. The plan was to replace this one big prison with a group of smaller prisons in various regions of Canada to provide a more convenient geographic location and facilitate the maintenance of family ties. The Task Force appointed to

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[16] In a visit I made to Cornton Vale in August 2000, I was in the control room where three people were engaged, full time, monitoring screens to see what was going on anywhere in the prison. The intercoms in the prisoners' rooms were connected to the control room and all telephone calls were also monitored. Those working there were proud of their ability to gather 'intelligence' which could be gleaned from cross-referring data on forms, intercom talks, telephone calls and other conversations. Apparently this 'intelligence' was needed to help prevent self-harm or suicides. (there had been a spate of suicides in Cornton Vale between June 1995 and December 1997 which had given rise to fundamental changes in the prison). They were also very proud of their ability to know at all times where everybody was.

[17] During my August 2000 visit to Cornton Vale, the Assistant Governor expressed concern about the security categorisation. Women were **assumed** to be category B, which meant they were subject to greater security arrangements – for example, they had to be escorted everywhere until they were reclassified to C or D. Remands were automatically classified as B.

spearhead this new initiative agreed that 'women in prison needed to be seen in the context of women's status in society and not as part of a male dominated correctional system' (Shaw 1992 p443). The principles underlying the new philosophy were based on women's alleged need for personal empowerment, meaningful choices, respect and dignity, a supportive environment and shared responsibility (Faith 1999; Hannah-Moffat and Shaw 2000; Hayman 2002). The new prisons would be staffed by specially trained officers who would be expected to engage with the women and help them to take responsibility for their own lives and would provide appropriate programmes aimed at the women's needs. However, Hayman noted that in the minutes of meetings reporting the development of the new prisons, there was relatively little discussion about staff, which she considered was an interesting omission, bearing in mind the vital role they play in any prison. She also noted that, because women in prison were seen as a 'safer' and less contentious group than imprisoned men, the Canadian authorities believed that their experiment would not attract much public debate (Hayman 2002).

Five new prisons of various sizes were opened in Canada during the 1990s, with capacities ranging from around 30 to around 80 women. Like Holloway, Cornton Vale and the Dóchas Centre, their architectural design was based on the house or cottage concept and initially they were surrounded by relatively low fences which were intended to convey to the community the low-risk nature of the women.[18] Accommodation in the houses included bedrooms, a living room, dining room, playroom, kitchen, a staff office/lounge and a counselling room. The houses were occupied solely by the women and were not permanently manned by staff. Each prison included an Enhanced Unit which was intended to provide extra security for women considered high risk and supposedly needing a more structured environment. The women were expected to run their own houses and resolve any disagreements through house meetings. There was an assumption that they would be able to respond to the new responsibilities placed upon them despite the fact that the Task Force had identified all federally sentenced women as being 'high needs' requiring a supportive environment.

When the first prison of the new prisons opened in the winter of 1995 it was far from complete. The main Administration building where most of the programmes were

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[18] An exception was the 'Healing Lodge' which was opened specifically for Aboriginal women and had its own special architecture and regime to reflect the different culture of the indigenous population.

scheduled to be run, was not ready. Instead, the programmes had to be run in the Enhanced Unit which was already overcrowded with high-risk prisoners. This meant that all women entering and leaving the Unit had to be strip-searched to prevent the passing of drugs. Within the first few months the new prison experienced a series of high profile incidents including assaults, escapes, slashings, suicides and a murder, nearly all of which occurred in the Enhanced Unit. These incidents led to a major media focus and huge public concern. In May 1996, the prison was temporarily closed to allow for security enhancements. When it reopened three months later, it was surrounded by a high wire fence topped with razor wire and the individual buildings now incorporated motion sensors and video surveillance. Pending a review of the future of maximum security females, no high-risk women were allowed to return but instead were accommodated in various male prisons throughout Canada (Hayman 2002).

The lessons from the first prison had a profound impact on the other new prisons. Despite the physical attractiveness of the buildings, all women were again forced to live under the higher levels of security which had now become the norm (Hannah-Moffat and Shaw 2000; Hannah-Moffat 2001). The modest size of the new prisons relative to the Prison for Women in Kingston that they were replacing, meant that the distinct needs of particular groups could not be met. This led to the concept of a multi-purpose/multi-level Enhanced Unit which became, in effect, a prison within a prison (Hayman 2002 p258). The women themselves had difficulty in coping with their new living environment. They had been used to the highly structured life of the Prison for Women where they were supervised by officers who were fully aware of their role. Coming from such an environment, the women found the style of the new prisons unnerving and frightening. They were now expected to conform to values more akin to living on the outside, for example time-keeping and what was taken to be appropriate decision-making, whereas it was the absence of such values that may have contributed to their offending in the first place (Hayman 2002). There may have been a case for inculcating those values but without first developing the skills, it was difficult for the women to take immediate advantage of their changed conditions. Their failure to do so was often seen by the staff as a *refusal* to do so.

The majority of staff recruited for the new prisons, although well-educated, were mainly young, had no previous experience in prison work and came from a background in social work or a related occupation. Faced with the women's perceived obduracy, many of the staff found it impossible to sustain their initial

34

idealism. A number of officers who had been very enthusiastic and dedicated began to exhibit symptoms of 'burnout' and post-traumatic stress. Because of their inexperience they had no collective memory of how incidents had been dealt with in the past and no awareness of the stress that is inherent in the job of any prison officer (Hayman 2002 p261 and 266). Consequently, they soon resorted to the more traditional ways of handling incidents which resulted in the adoption of a more stringent segregation approach to those women who were considered disruptive or risky (Shaw 2000; Hayman 2002).

The initiators of the Canadian experiment may have been over-influenced by the views of those on the Planning Committee who concentrated on inmates as victims to the exclusion of any concept of possible security issues (Hayman 2002). They were also naïve in their expectation that new, albeit well-educated but inexperienced officers could fulfil the demanding role of managing a volatile prison population who were themselves trying to cope with a major change in their conditions. Under the circumstances, it is not surprising that the empowering and healing ideals, despite having achieved some success, were gradually compromised by correctional bureaucracies that are almost inevitably resistant to change (Hannah-Moffat 2000 p30).

CONTEMPORARY REALITY

Numerous studies on both sides of the Atlantic have confirmed that women continue to be involved in less serious crime (mainly theft or other property related offences) and although their numbers may be rising, they still form a small proportion of the overall prison population. These studies have also shown remarkable similarities in the characteristics of female offenders. Women were likely to have had a poor educational background and be living on state benefit; the majority were young with dependent children living with them immediately prior to their imprisonment; many had been abused physically, sexually or mentally; a significant proportion had been in care; a large majority had been involved in drug or alcohol abuse and were likely to have self-harmed at some time and many were repeat offenders imprisoned for petty crimes (Scottish Office 1995; HM Inspectorate of Prisons 1997; Bosworth 1999; Carlen 1999; Owen 1999; Committee on Women's Imprisonment 2000; Hannah-Moffat and Shaw 2000; Kruttschnitt, Gartner et al. 2000).

Whilst acknowledging that male prisoners shared many of the same characteristics, particularly a background of poor educational achievement, economic deprivation and involvement with drugs or alcohol (Maguire 1997; Matthews 1999), studies of women have identified their needs as being quantitatively and qualitatively different. Because of the mainly non-violent nature of their offences, the fact that they rarely try to escape or become involved in riots, women did not need the same degree of security as men; they were disproportionately victims of domestic violence, sexual abuse and mental illness and were likely to require a higher level of support from counselling and other psychological services; their health care requirements were more extensive; pregnant women had particular needs and these increased significantly when babies were born in prison; they were also likely to have greater worries about their families, particularly their children, as a higher percentage were the primary care givers (Carlen 1998; Covington 1998; Garcia Coll, Baker Miller et al. 1998; Carlen 1999; Morris and Kingi 1999; Willmott 2001). In addition Garcia Coll *et al* argued *'that there is a whole body of knowledge generated, primarily in the last thirty years, that points out the existence in gender differences in behavioural, cognitive, moral and psychological characteristics that should have implications for the supervision and management of female inmates'* (Garcia Coll, Baker Miller et al. 1998 p13).

In recent years in the UK, a number of official reports have been produced, highlighting the different and *special* needs of women – *Women in Prison: A Thematic Review* by the Chief Inspector of Prisons in 1997; *Women Offenders: A Safer Way*, by the Scottish Office in 1998; *Justice for Women: The Need for Reform*, for the Prison Reform Trust in 2000. Although there may be arguments to suggest that strategies emphasising gender differences or similarities may be used to gain a particular advantage, there was sufficient evidence from the literature to support the position that women's needs *are* different. In addition, these reports were produced during a period when any notion of benevolence had been undermined by changing public attitudes to crime together with an increasingly retributive rhetoric by politicians which has seen the inexorable rise of prison numbers - increased from around 42,000 in the early 1990s to 75,000 by 2004. A recent study concluded that the main explanations for the increase can be attributed to longer sentences being imposed for serious crimes and custodial sentences now being used for offences that earlier would have attracted a community penalty or even a fine (Hough, Jacobson et al. 2003). Hidden within the statistics is the fact that the number of women being sent to prison, while still small, has outstripped men proportionately for the first time in

over a century. Between 1993 and 2001 the average population of women in prison rose from 1560 to 3740, a percentage rise of 140% as against 46% for men (Home Office 2002). Arguably this fact supports Carlen's contention that, despite all the research and all the reports that have been written, at the end of the 20th century women still continue to be held in extreme and discriminatory conditions and their special needs largely ignored (Carlen 1998 pviii).

CONCLUSION

This chapter has concentrated on the rise and fall of major penal experiments in the in the past 150 years. A number of themes have emerged. Benevolent intentions do not necessarily result in either benevolent or constructive regimes. On the contrary, they may have some unexpected results such as the mental torture of the silent system, the 'indeterminate imprisonment' of the Reformatories and Borstals or the increased levels of surveillance and control in Holloway, Cornton Vale and prisons in Canada. It is also essential to recognise that the prisoner's view of 'benevolence' may not necessarily correspond with the views of the initiator however well intentioned. Experiments specifically aimed at women were more likely to have been influenced by the perceived appropriate role of women in society - particularly their role as wives and mothers. Stereotypical assumptions about their criminality, their needs and how they can best be addressed would benefit from a recognition that female offenders, despite any ostensible similarity in characteristics, are not a homogenous group. As well as being different from men, their requirements range across the full gamut of physical, mental, social, educational and economic needs and are unlikely to be satisfied by one mono-focussed penal 'model' be it maternalistic, medical, therapeutic or empowering.

Idealistic reformers like Howard and Fry and charismatic leaders like Paterson can inspire but unless their aspirations are supported both by their superiors and the staff on the ground and the application of their ideals become the accepted norm, they are likely to be undermined. In the same way, political, economic and societal changes outside the control of the institution can gradually invalidate the most optimistic plans. The role of prison officers is vital in giving life to the aspirations of any new philosophy. Although they were generally neglected in the prison literature, it was clear that a combination of low pay, lack of appropriate skills, inadequate training and absence of consistent direction contributed to the demise of earlier reforms. More recent examples of penal experiments continued to exhibit a failure on the part of the

instigators of change, to anticipate, recognise and plan for the needs of the staff. In order to succeed, a prison regime is dependent on the mutual respect and co-operation which is manifested in the daily interaction between prisoners and officers (Towndrow 1969; Sparks, Bottoms et al. 1996; Liebling and Price 2001). Any experiment which ignores this basic fact has little chance of success.

'Penal history is littered with unfulfilled promises, abandoned hopes and discarded institutions' (McConville 1998 p117). However, failure is neither inevitable nor total. The Special Unit in Barlinnie Prison in Scotland, a more localised individual experiment aimed at the rehabilitation of long-term, violent prisoners, was described as 'demonstrating empirically that there is an alternative to the way in which we have traditionally dealt with the 'hard core' of the prison population' (Light 1996 p99). The specialised therapeutic regime of Grendon Prison in England, which sought to treat sex offenders, prisoners with serious mental disorders considered susceptible to treatment and certain long-term prisoners, also claimed a level of success. Research conducted there in the early 1990s concluded that 'it is possible to have a therapeutic prison which provides inmates with rehabilitative opportunities, without sliding inevitably and relentlessly into a state of tyranny' (Genders and Player 1995 p228). Reviewing the literature on penal experiments by definition involves the benefit of hindsight which leads almost inevitably to concentration on the general 'failures' rather than individual successes.[19] What would be the verdict on the Dóchas Centre?

Chapter 2 will summarise how the penitentiary and Borstal experiments in the UK affected Irish prisoners. It will set in context the changing patterns of crime in Ireland during the 20th century, the level of involvement of women and their treatment within the penal system with particular reference to the old Mountjoy prison. It will explain the circumstances and influences that inspired the new development and will describe how the underpinning philosophy was translated into a complementary architectural design. Chapter 3 concentrates on methodology; the reasons for

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[19] During the course of my research I found no evidence to suggest that those involved in the development of the Dóchas Centre had studied or taken into consideration any of these experiments referred to in the literature. Apart from visiting Holloway and a number of prisons on the continent to study the architecture (see chapter 2) no attempt appears to have been made either to emulate or avoid the lessons of previous experiments. In the words of the Governor of Mountjoy "we wanted an Irish solution for an Irish problem".

In a similar manner, the Canadian Task Force failed to take into account the experience of reforms in other jurisdictions. They wanted a Canadian solution to solve the problem of women in prison (Hayman 2002 p314)

choosing the approach taken; the difficulties encountered and what was discovered. Chapter 4 describes the findings from a brief period in the old prison and more importantly, the trauma of the first few weeks in the new. From the perspective of the prisoner, it looks at how the women reacted to the new architecture, particularly the arbitrary allocation to the houses and how they coped with the new regime. It then explores how the prison officers managed their new role in an environment in which they considered they were no longer safe and how a perceived lack of formal structure led to a period of great and unexpected instability.

Chapter 5 moves on to the settling down phase. It is devoted to the prisoners and how they survived the transition. It explores the impact of living in houses, the effect on group dynamics and relationships both with one another and with the staff; the coping strategies developed by the women to counteract the pains of incarceration and how, over time they adjusted to their new environment. Chapter 6 concentrates on the officers and examines how the issues raised in the immediate aftermath of the move were addressed. It examines how rising stress levels caused by uncertainty, overcrowding and the changing demands of their role led to staff turnover with all that it entailed; how the increase in male officers was viewed; how officers learned to manage the more relaxed approach to discipline and gradually began to reconcile the conflicting demands inherent in the new philosophy. Finally, chapter 7 concludes the thesis by contrasting the findings from this study with the outcome from earlier experiments explored in the literature and discusses the important lessons that the research has uncovered.

CHAPTER 2   THE IRISH PENAL CONTEXT

INTRODUCTION

In the 19th century, Ireland was part of the UK.   Consequently, penal developments followed a similar pattern to those on the other side of the Irish sea. A 'new model prison' was opened in Mountjoy in Dublin on 27th March 1850.   Built for 500 prisoners, it was a replica of Pentonville, with four wings of three tiers radiating from a central circle and incorporated the architectural principles of the separate and silent systems. It too operated a marks system but with some significant differences, which provided an early indication that Ireland was not averse to exploring more radical penal ideas. Called the 'Crofton' system (after Walter Crofton, one of the Directors of Prisons), it was Ireland's single most important contribution to penal history (Osborough 1975; MacBride 1982; Carey 2000). In contrast to the system which operated in Pentonville, during the initial stage of imprisonment the emphasis was on idleness rather than work. Crofton believed that work was detrimental to the prisoner's reformation as it distracted him from the contemplation of his sins and the prospect of eternal damnation. For a limited period, idleness could produce the desired results. *'The prisoner, having nothing to distract his thoughts, receives gladly and therefore, profitably, the exhortations of the chaplain and the instruction of the school master. The foundation is laid for the formation of two habits viz. willingness to receive advice and instruction and to labour'* (Four Visiting Justices of the West Riding Prison at Wakefield 1862 p40). Another difference was the ability for a prisoner to earn the privilege of being transferred to an open prison to complete the final part of his sentence.

The first female prison, built on penitentiary principles, was established within the Mountjoy complex in 1858 to accommodate 450 prisoners. Like their male counterparts, the women were subject to the separate system and to Crofton's scheme of earned privileges. However, it was considered that isolation would have a more adverse effect on them so their first stage period was limited to four months (as opposed to nine months for men) after which they were granted the privilege of having their cell door open; finally they were allowed work association in the laundry or elsewhere around the prison. Unlike the men, female prisoners did not have an opportunity of going to an open prison. Instead they were sent to the local Sisters of Mercy Refuge for Catholics or to the equivalent Protestant Refuge. Contemporary social mores dictated that they were taught domestic housework to prepare them for a job as a servant. It was hoped that because they were trained by the Sisters of

Mercy, they would be acceptable to respectable Irish families or alternatively, if they emigrated, the Sisters could use their extensive networks abroad to find them employment. A visiting German doctor of law who was studying the Irish convict system at the time, considered that the influence of the Catholic organisation on the character of the female offender was 'exerted in a spirit of genuine Christianity exalted far above any mere sectarian emulation' (Von Holtzendorff 1861 p426). After a visit to Mountjoy, Mary Carpenter, the English prison reformer, wrote in an article in 1863 that she considered that 'A grand experiment has been tried; the success has been indisputable and triumphant' (Carpenter 1863 p45). However, the reforming aspirations of the penitentiary were not welcomed by all prisoners. In an official report of 1866 the following observations were made:

> "there is a class of women among the prisoners who appear so depraved as to be beyond the reach of religious or moral influences" The Director

> "The position and construction of the punishment cells are, in my opinion, quite unsuited to the purpose sought to be gained. The voices of the prisoners from cell to cell can be so easily heard, that they can and do converse freely with each other, and this, to some of them, is a source more of enjoyment than punishment" The Medical Officer. (Directors of Convict Prisons 1866 p50 and 55)

Later in the 19th century the reforming zeal of the penitentiary movement declined and was replaced by the harsher realities of strict custodial needs. In 1880 the Irish Convict Rules were adapted to mirror the English rules and the catch phrase became 'hard labour, hard board and hard fare' (Carey 2000 p118).

During the early 20th century, Borstals were also introduced in Ireland but only for male offenders. Because of their very small numbers, young females were incarcerated in adult prisons where they were segregated from older women and received a form of borstal treatment (Osborough 1975 p113). At the same time, with the introduction of alternative penalties of probation and fines, prison numbers began to decline. 'Normal' criminal activity was overtaken partly by the advent of the Second World War but also by the turbulent years of political unrest during the Irish War of Independence and the civil war that followed. By 1922, when the British Government relinquished responsibility for the greater part of Ireland, there were eleven prisons in existence in the new independent country, with a capacity of 2,361 but fewer than 600 prisoners. In Mountjoy, with a capacity of 900, there were only 237 prisoners.

In 1928 the responsibility for prisons in Ireland passed to the Department of Justice. The number of prisoners continued to decline and more prisons were closed. Ireland, at that time, had one of the lowest imprisonment rates in Europe and that picture remained almost unchanged until the 1970s. The near absence of crime reflected a society that was devoutly Catholic, conservative and with a strong sense of community and respect for authority (Brewer, Lockhart et al. 1997). This applied particularly to women. In holy Catholic Ireland, DeValera's[20] 'comely maidens' were very strictly controlled within the family, within the school and by the Church and were unlikely to defy 'authority' by engaging in criminal activity (Beale 1986; Carey 2000). Emigration was endemic as both men and women sought to escape widespread poverty and seek opportunities elsewhere. In many cases those emigrants were the young, marginalised and disaffected members of society who, in the normal course of events, would have been considered likely candidates to fill the prisons. Female emigration was especially high as women sought not only greater job opportunities but to escape the suffocating social controls to which they were subjected (Carey 2000).

The low level of crime was reflected in official statistics. The main source of data on criminal activity in Ireland are the *Annual Garda Síochána Reports* that were first produced in 1947. In that year the number of indictable offences recorded was 15,000 (O'Mahony 1993 p22). This position remained almost unchanged until the 1960s (Brewer, Lockhart et al. 1997). Then a new picture began to emerge.

THE IRISH CRIMINAL LANDSCAPE – POST 1960

Crime Levels

Between the 1960s and the mid 1990s the overall trend in reported indictable offences increased from 14,818 in 1961 to 89,400 by 1981 and to over 94,000 by 1991 – an enormous increase of 537% (McCullagh 1996 p3). The first five years of the 1990s continued to show an increase, peaking at over 102,000 in 1995 and gradually declining to 73,276 by the end of the decade (Garda Siochana 2000 p79). However, 2001 showed a movement upwards and in 2002 the total stood at 106,415 (Garda Siochana 2002 p86) – see Table 1.

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[20] Prime Minister of Ireland over the period 1932 to 1959

Table 1   Indictable Offences Reported to the Gardai   1961 - 2002
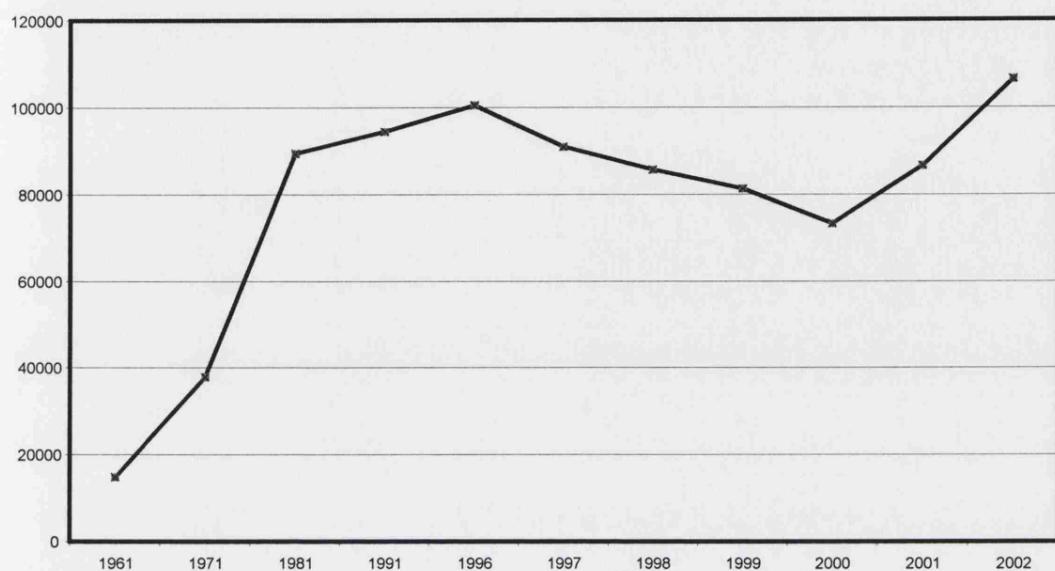
Source:1961 to 1991 McCullagh 1996 p3. 1996 to 1998 various Annual Reports of the Gardai.

Despite these increases, Ireland continued to have a comparatively low crime rate compared with other countries.   In 1998 with 2378 indictable crimes recorded per 100,000 of the population (Table 2), only Japan, Russia and Spain were lower. Scotland and England and Wales were just over 8,000 with Sweden highest at nearly 14,000.[21]

Table 2   Indictable Offences per 100,000 of Population   1961 - 2002
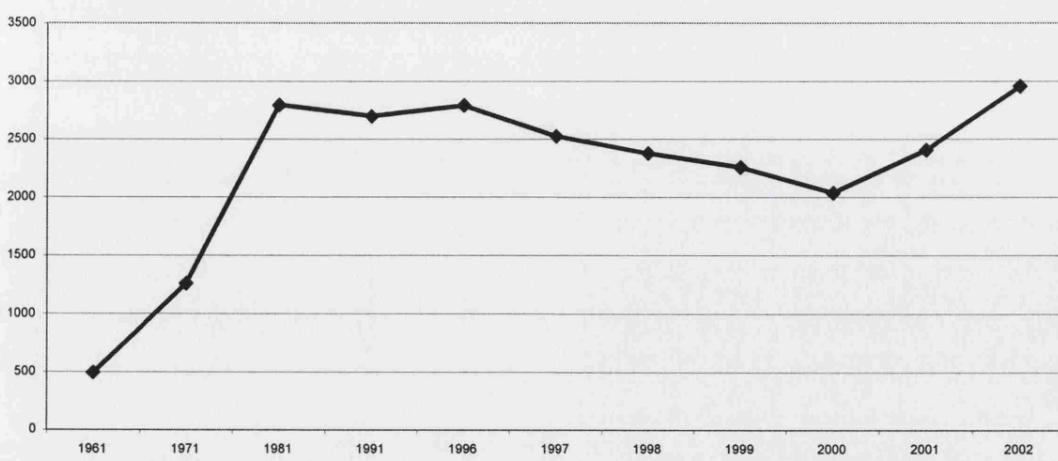
Population size estimated on the basis of data from Central Statistics Office (Central Statistics Office 2000 p 13)

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[21] These comparative numbers were taken from the International Comparisons of Criminal Justice Statistics cited in (O'Donnell and O'Sullivan 2001 p15)

Table 3 gives an indication of the major breakdown by offence type between 1961 and 1998.[22]

Table 3   Indictable Offences Reported to the Gardai by Offence Type   1961 - 1998

	1961	1971	1981	1991	1996	1997	1998
☐ Larcenies	10623	24929	57642	51990	55041	48390	46127
■ Offences against property with violence	3186	10654	28916	40676	43482	40252	37191
■ Offences against the person	701	1256	2478	1435	1541	1785	1907
☐ Other	308	942	364	305	361	448	402
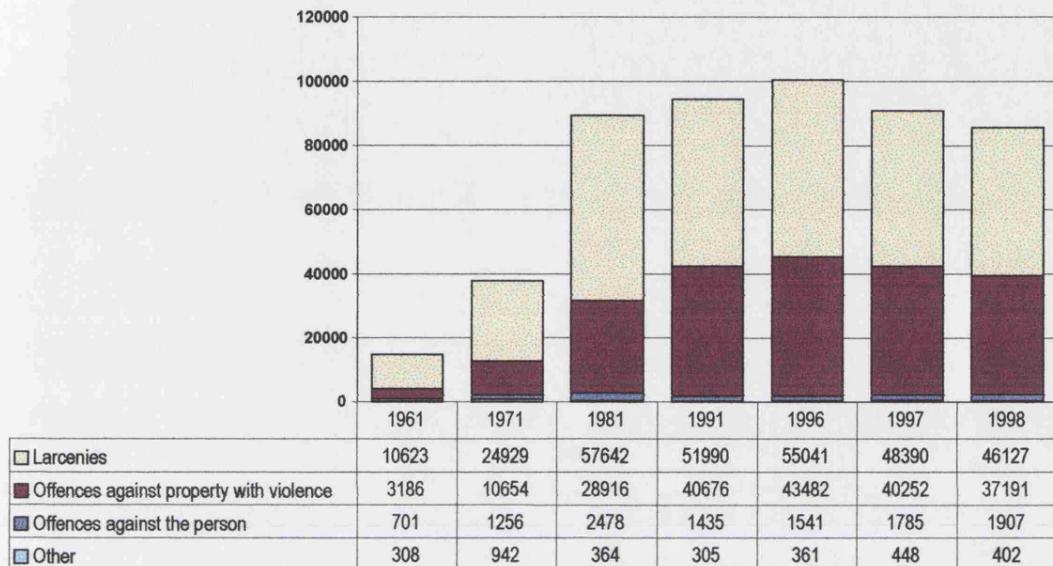
Source:1961 to 1991 McCullagh 1996 p3. 1996 to 1998 various Annual Reports of the Gardai.

Looking at the breakdown, it is clear that offences against property accounted for the vast majority of crimes recorded by the Gardai during this period – between 93% and 98%.   Offences against property with violence, which included mainly burglary, robbery and malicious damage, reflected the most dramatic increase.[23]   Larcenies, on the other hand, have shown a downward trend since they peaked at over 57,000 in 1981.   Drugs offences are hidden within the numbers and were not a separate category until 2000.

Despite these shortcomings, the overall picture for indictable crime in Ireland appeared, at face value, to be improving in the latter part of the 1990s but started to rise again in the first two years of the new century.   However, there are significant limitations on the reliability of official statistics (O'Mahony 1993; McCullagh 1996;

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[22] The Garda Siochana published statistics for 1999 were incomplete. In the year 2000 the offence definitions were changed and it was not possible to reconcile back to the old definitions. Hence the breakdown from 1999 onwards has been omitted.

[23] Interestingly, more recent Garda Reports indicated that reported incidents of domestic violence increased from 4,184 in 1997 (p88) to 10,877 in 2000 (p127) but it was not clear where these offences were categorised within the main Tables.

Brewer, Lockhart et al. 1997; O'Donnell and O'Sullivan 2001). They can underestimate the level of crime due to the public's failure to report or police failure to record offences that come to their attention. Other factors can also influence their reliability, for example, a change in police reporting methods or the introduction of new offences as happened at the beginning of the new century. Referring to official criminal statistics, Maguire argued 'so long as their limitations are fully recognised, crime related statistics undoubtedly offer a valuable aid to understanding and explanation ...... no conclusion should ever be drawn from any such data without a clear understanding of how they were compiled and what they represent' (Maguire 1997 p142).

Referring specifically to Ireland, O'Connell believed that although independent crime surveys indicated a high proportion of unrecorded/unreported crime, there was no evidence to suggest that this was any different from other countries. A comparison of the results of the British Crime Survey and the equivalent household survey in Ireland, suggested that the Irish recorded data captured a greater proportion of crime in Ireland than was the case in England and Wales (O'Connell 2002). Notwithstanding all the limitations of official statistics, there is no doubt that there was a significant increase in criminal activity in Ireland up to the mid 1990s. From 1996 the indications were that the trend had begun to reverse. However, the numbers for 2001 and 2002 suggest that the reversal may have been a temporary aberration.

Sociological Influences

In the latter part of the 20th century, Ireland had seen a steady increase in prosperity reflected in improved standards of living and the conspicuous consumption of high value goods (O'Mahony 1993). This increase in wealth has been linked to increases in crime, particularly property crime (O'Mahony 1993; McCullagh 1996). It has also been accompanied by a widening gap between the 'haves' and the 'have nots'. Unemployment became an almost permanent state for many people. In 1973 about 20% of the male unemployed had been unemployed for over a year but by the end of the 1980s, this had risen to 50% (O'Mahony 1993 p65). This phenomenon was further exacerbated by an increased demand for higher educational qualifications as a pre-requisite for obtaining employment which resulted in significant sections of the working classes being condemned to low paying jobs or being totally excluded from the workforce. McCullagh argued that 'the strain and frustration that this creates becomes both a motive for crime and a legitimisation of it' (McCullagh 1996 p51).

Major structural changes had also taken place in Irish society. Along with the increase in prosperity, the traditional social control mechanisms, mainly exercised by the Church, the family and the school (the latter almost totally dominated by religious institutions) had been considerably weakened. Writing about the social indicators of crime in Ireland at this time, Brewer *et al* argued that '*the easing of social controls embedded in the moral power of the priest in the parish, undoubtedly had an impact on everyday life and is part of the explanation for the increase in crime*' (Brewer, Lockhart et al. 1997 p97). In addition, respect for authority, which had been a hallmark of Irish society, had been undermined by scandals involving financial irregularities in political and business life as well as highly publicised sexual scandals within the Church. This undermining of fundamental social controls represented a classic example of Durkheim's anomie theory as described by Rock – '*people deviate because the disciplines and authority of society are so flawed that they offer few restraints or moral direction*' (Rock 1997 p236). The social control theory of the Chicago School also has some resonance in the Irish context. With the concept of 'zones of transition' the Chicago sociologists argued that high crime areas develop around the business section at the centre of the city as more successful citizens move to the suburbs leaving delinquency generating areas deficient in family and community controls (Shaw and McKay 1942). To some extent, this could be applied to Ireland, or more specifically, to inner city Dublin where the pace of change caused by the economic boom that became known as the 'Celtic Tiger', was widening the gap between the rich and the poor, creating 'pathological' neighbourhoods where criminal behaviour was regarded as a normal response to an abnormal situation. This notion was implied in early discussions with the Governor of Mountjoy when he referred to very specific areas of the city as the more likely habitat of the majority of his 'clients'. In his study of male prisoners in Mountjoy in 1996, O'Mahony discovered that the greatest concentration of current addresses of prisoners was in two areas of the inner city. These two areas, along with four others in socially and economically deprived parts of Dublin, accounted for the addresses of 56% of the male population of Mountjoy (O'Mahony 1997).

These various themes were echoed in a report published in 1997 entitled, *Tackling Crime*, which set out the Government's crime strategy.

> '*A disposition to wrong-doing is an element of the human condition, normally restrained by an accepted moral code, the force of societal norms and the threat of penal sanctions...... Much of the crime prevailing in recent times appears to be related to moral, demographic, social and economic change, especially the transformation of Irish society over recent decades from being*

mainly rural to being mainly urban and the concentration in the cities of growing numbers of young unemployed' (Department of Justice 1997 p52).

However, a more significant contributor to increased crime levels arose with the advent of serious drug abuse which began in Ireland at the beginning of the 1980s.[24] Ireland witnessed an epidemic of drug abuse, mainly, though not exclusively, in Dublin, that has spawned a highly lucrative import and distribution criminal network as well as a huge increase in property crime driven by the need to feed a drug habit (O'Mahony 1993; McCullagh 1996; Brewer, Lockhart et al. 1997; O'Donnell and O'Sullivan 2001). A study carried out in 1995, indicated that drug abuse had spread from the cities into the rural areas and had become a common-place feature of Irish social life particularly among the youth. The same study also indicated that millions of pounds worth of drugs were finding their way to Ireland, either for home consumption or for onward shipment to other countries. It led to the conclusion that *"a very considerable amount of the total is destined for other markets and that Ireland is being used as a convenient staging post in a drugs operation with global dimensions"* (O'Mahony 1996 p49). The huge profits to be made from drug imports and distribution attracted criminal gangs who used violence, coercion and intimidation to maintain their dominant position in their markets whilst at the other end of the spectrum, the economic imperative associated with addiction, led to increased levels of acquisitive crime.

Ireland's Response

The increase in criminal activity in Ireland was matched by a marked increase in the use of imprisonment. The total daily average of those held in custody indicated an inexorable trend upwards from 963 in 1973 to 3165 in 2002. Table 4 shows the movements over successive five year periods up to 2002.

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[24] Recorded offences under the Misuse of Drugs Act which cover only supply and possession increased from 2028 in 1988 to 5824 in 1998 (O'Donnell, Young et al. 2001 p61). However, it is important to emphasise that these figures do not necessarily reflect the true number of offences **caused** by drug abuse which are likely to be hidden in offences against property and against the person.

Table 4   Daily Average Population in Custody   1973 - 2002

	1973	1978	1983	1988	1993	1998	2002
Males	695	919	1143	1634	1943	2311	2859
Juveniles	246	239	267	284	184	228	202
Females	22	22	40	44	44	71	104
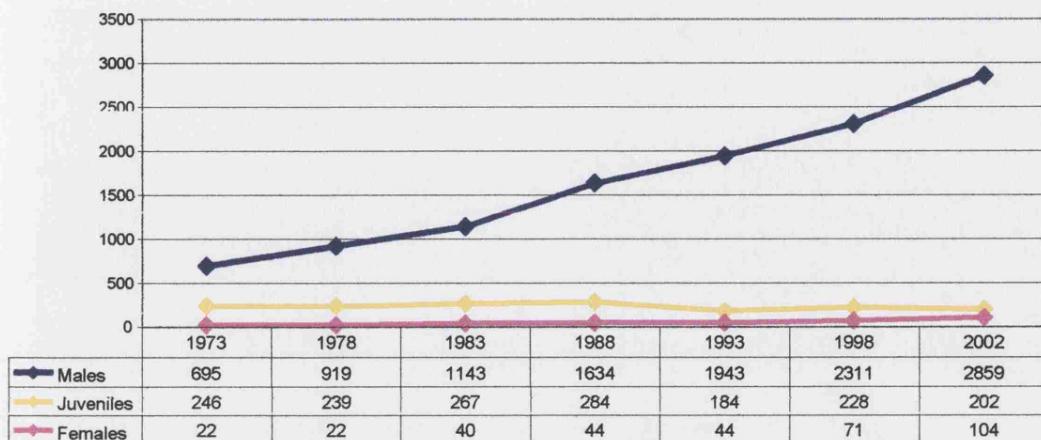
Source: O'Mahony 1993, p87 and Prisons and Places of Detention Reports 1994, 1995-98 and 2002

Committals to prison under sentence showed a similar trend until the mid 1990s with adult male committals over twice as high in 1993 as it was twenty years previously. However, since that time the trend has reversed.

Table 5   Total Committals to Prison under Sentence   1973 - 2002

	1973	1978	1983	1988	1993	2002
Males	2360	2120	3014	3524	5104	3942
Juveniles	682	570	979	883	1152	793
Females	204	129	176	290	329	301
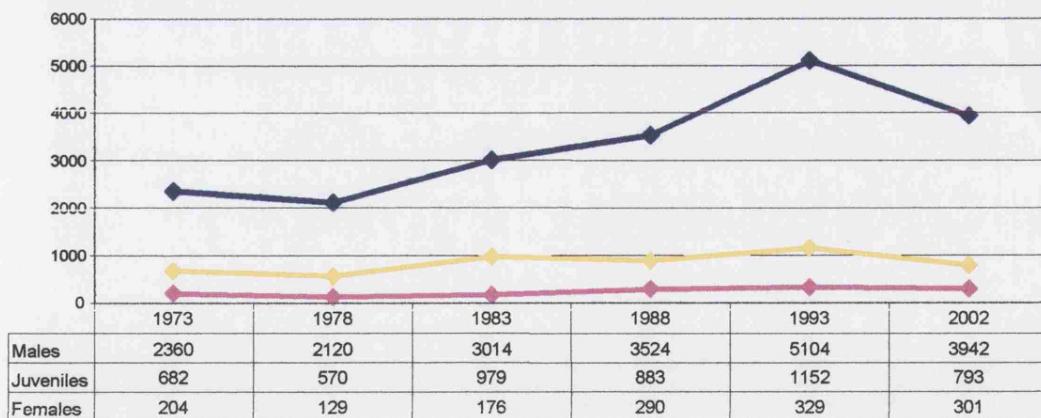
Source: O'Mahony 1993, p99 and Prisons and Places of Detention Reports 1993 and 2002

In interview in June 2000, the Director General of the Prison Service described the prison situation of the 1990s as "*suffering from the 'tyranny of numbers' in the sense that people were pouring in – there was vast overcrowding, particularly in Mountjoy ……. If you compared 1850 with 1990, the situation, if anything, had become worse for the ordinary male prisoner*".   By that time two or three people were sharing a cell originally intended for one. '*Mountjoy in the 1990s was an assault on the senses, an administrative nightmare and a logistical labyrinth*' (Carey 2000 p236).

Despite the Irish prison system being subject to a number of damning reports during the 1970s and 1980s, for example *The Examination of the Irish Penal System* (1973) and *The MacBride Report* (1980), little action was taken to implement any reforms (Vaughan 2001). It is not unusual for prisons to be low on a country's political agenda. Prison reform can be expensive and can prove controversial because of the discredited and invisible nature of the incarcerated population. During the 1980s, industrial relations within the Prison Service had also deteriorated. This, combined with the rapid increase in crime accompanied by a similar trend in imprisonment, resulted in the establishment of a powerful Committee to investigate the problem. The *Report of the Committee of Inquiry into the Penal System*, more commonly known as *The Whitaker Report*, was published in 1985. The terms of reference included an examination of the law regarding imprisonment in Ireland, with the objective of reducing the numbers and/or limiting the period of imprisonment; evaluating the adequacy and range of existing accommodation; examining all aspects of prison regimes and the facilities available post release. With echoes of Alexander Paterson, some sixty years earlier, the Report emphasised *'Nothing should be done to inflict hardship or punishment beyond that inevitably consequential on the deprivation of liberty involved in imprisonment'* (Whitaker 1985 p12). The *Whitaker Report* was a seminal document in Irish penal history, in many ways on a par with the *Woolf Report* published in the UK five years later. The recommendations were wide-ranging but implementation was slow. Plans were included in subsequent Reports – *The Management of Offenders* (1994) and *Tackling Crime* (1997) but did not come to fruition until much later.

It was not until the murders of Veronica Guerin and Detective Garda Jerry McCabe in 1996 that politicians began to take a direct interest in penal policy. Veronica Guerin was a journalist with the *Irish Independent* newspaper who was murdered whilst investigating major drug smuggling operations in Dublin. These murders led to an unprecedented barrage of legislation that changed the whole direction of the Irish Criminal Justice System (Walsh 1999). A punitive shift occurred in criminal justice policy which, to the extent there was one, had been mainly rehabilitative. A period of 'zero tolerance' commenced, accompanied by an expansive prison building programme and a decline in the belief in reform and rehabilitation (McCullagh 1999; O'Mahony 1999; O'Donnell and O'Sullivan 2001).

THE GENDERED DIMENSION OF CRIME IN IRELAND

Female Offending in Context

In Ireland, as in all other countries, crime is predominantly a male activity. The number of female convictions for indictable offences over the past thirty years has hardly changed, running at between 10% and 13% of all convictions. In 1973 female convictions constituted 11.5% of the total, or 1350 in absolute numbers (O'Mahony 1993 p60). In 1999, the last year for which the equivalent numbers were available, they were 12.2% and 1073 respectively - an almost imperceptible change (Garda Siochana 1999).[25]

Notwithstanding the position with regard to convictions, the number of females actually committed to prison under sentence during the 1970s fluctuated from year to year, but averaged about 150 with a daily average population around 20. However, by the late 1980s these figures had almost doubled with committals in 1988 of 290 and an average daily population of 44 (O'Mahony 1993 p87 and 99). Although these numbers are very small in absolute terms, they were significant in the Irish context and affected the conditions in which the women were held. The picture for the 1990s also indicates a fluctuation from year to year but the overall trend is upwards to a high of 455 in 1997 (Table 6). The majority of female offenders were held in Mountjoy but some limited space, 12 to 15 cells, was also available in the men's prison in Limerick.[26]

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[25] The 1999 numbers are from January to September only, which would explain the lower absolute numbers.

[26] Limerick is used to house short term prisoners from the surrounding counties and prisoners from Mountjoy who are sent there for disciplinary reasons.

Table 6 Female Committals to Prison under Sentence 1990 - 2000

	1990	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000
Mountjoy	169	193	158	281	299	310	278	347	288	263	262
Limerick	0	0	30	55	62	68	72	108	116	126	112
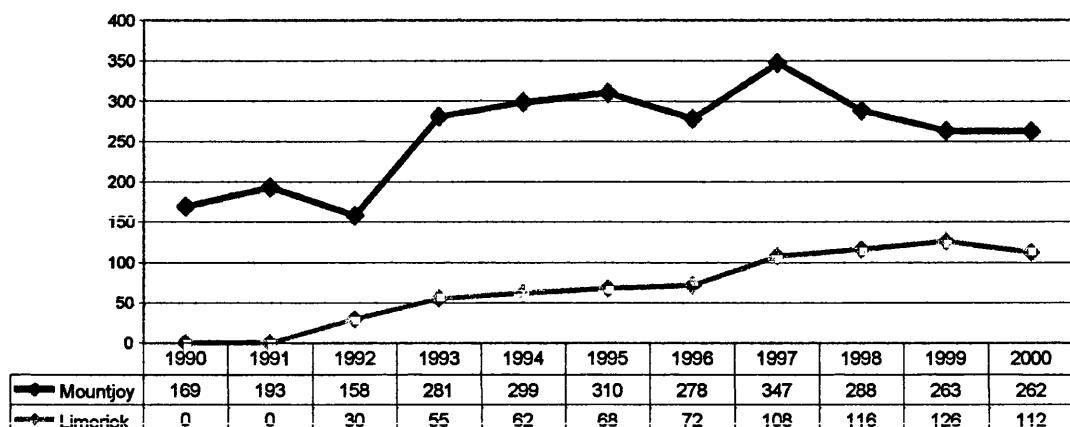
Source of data: General Register of Committals – Mountjoy and Limerick[27]

However, these numbers fail to reflect the true picture of what was happening within the prisons as

a) they do not reflect the incidence of Temporary Release (TR).

b) they do not include remands.

Temporary release (TR) appears to be a uniquely Irish phenomenon. The Criminal Justice Act of 1960 gave power to the Minister of Justice to release prisoners temporarily for a variety of reasons – as part of a rehabilitative programme to attend work or college; as a resocialisation exercise for long-term prisoners to help reintegration back into society; for compassionate reasons to attend funerals, christenings or other special events. However, because of increased chronic overcrowding (both in the male and females prisons, especially Mountjoy), prisoners serving sentences for non-violent crimes, were released early at the discretion of the Department of Justice, their only condition being to report to the prison and to their local Garda station on a weekly basis. *'What has become known as the 'revolving door syndrome'* [28] *is probably the most worrying symptom of the current chaotic state of the Irish prison system'* (O'Mahony 1996 p92). The result of this system meant that prisoners who had been sentenced to less than three months (the most popular

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[27] The 'official' published statistics for 1990 to 1994 (the last year for which the data was available) show slight differences from these numbers. Those in Table 6 were compiled by me from the Committal Registers available in each of the two prisons that house females. This point is covered in more detail in chapter 3.

[28] This expression had a different connotation in England where it meant that a prisoner was released but kept returning. In Ireland it referred to prisoners being released early in order to make way for new admissions.

sentence for females accounting for between 40% and 50% of sentences per year in the 1990s) often served only a few days or, maybe a couple of weeks and those with longer sentences could be released after serving less than half their sentence. It also completely distorted what would be a true daily average in that, if there had been sufficient accommodation, the daily average would have been much higher.

With regard to remands, in his study of the prison population from 1973 to 1988, O'Mahony concluded that because the total number of remands (male and female) ranged between 5% and 10% with an estimated stay of 10 days, *'the demand for new prison places arising from increasing unsentenced committals, has been relatively modest. Remands do not account, to any substantial degree, for the increase in the size of the prison population'* (O'Mahony 1993 p103). However, during my research, there was a very high committal of female remands which had a major impact on the demand for prison places within the increasingly limited conditions available for women. Table 7 indicates the trend in the number of female committals to prison during the 1990s.[29]

Table 7 Total Female Committals 1990 - 2000

	1990	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000
Sentenced	169	193	188	336	361	378	350	455	404	389	374
Remands	176	241	344	298	304	325	327	459	465	432	448
Aliens									26	54	95
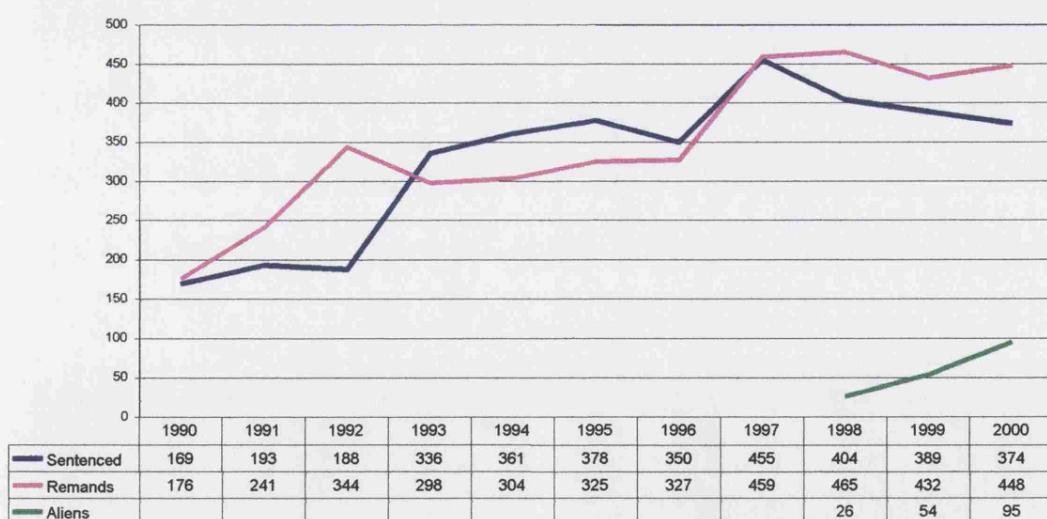
Source: General Register of Committals 1990 to 2000

The number of women committed to prison more than doubled in the last decade of the 20th century. A similar picture pertained in England and Wales (Devlin 1998; Gelsthorpe and Morris 2002) and in the US (Phillips and Harm 1998; Owen 1999). In the case of Ireland, it is important to note that the absolute numbers were still very

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[29] The addition of 'aliens' as a category will be discussed in chapter 5

small and that doubling the numbers in itself was not that significant. However, the importance of the increase was relevant in the context of the space available and the overall aims of the Dóchas Centre. It has a capacity for 80 people but, during the course of the study, the average daily population increased to between 85 and 95 (on more than one occasion there were 105 in custody on a given day). The impact of this change will be discussed in later chapters.

Female Offending Analysed

Irish female offending reflected many similarities with the experience of other western democracies. The kinds of offences for which women were incarcerated were mainly acquisitive with comparatively low levels involving violence (Naffine 1987; Faith 1993; Heidensohn 1996; Phillips and Harm 1998; Davies and Cook 1999). The official published statistics in Ireland, group offences into four main categories (for details see Appendix A). Table 8 indicates the pattern of offending of sentenced prisoners during the 1990s and the first two years of the new century.

Table 8   Total Female Prisoners by Offence Category   1990 – 2002
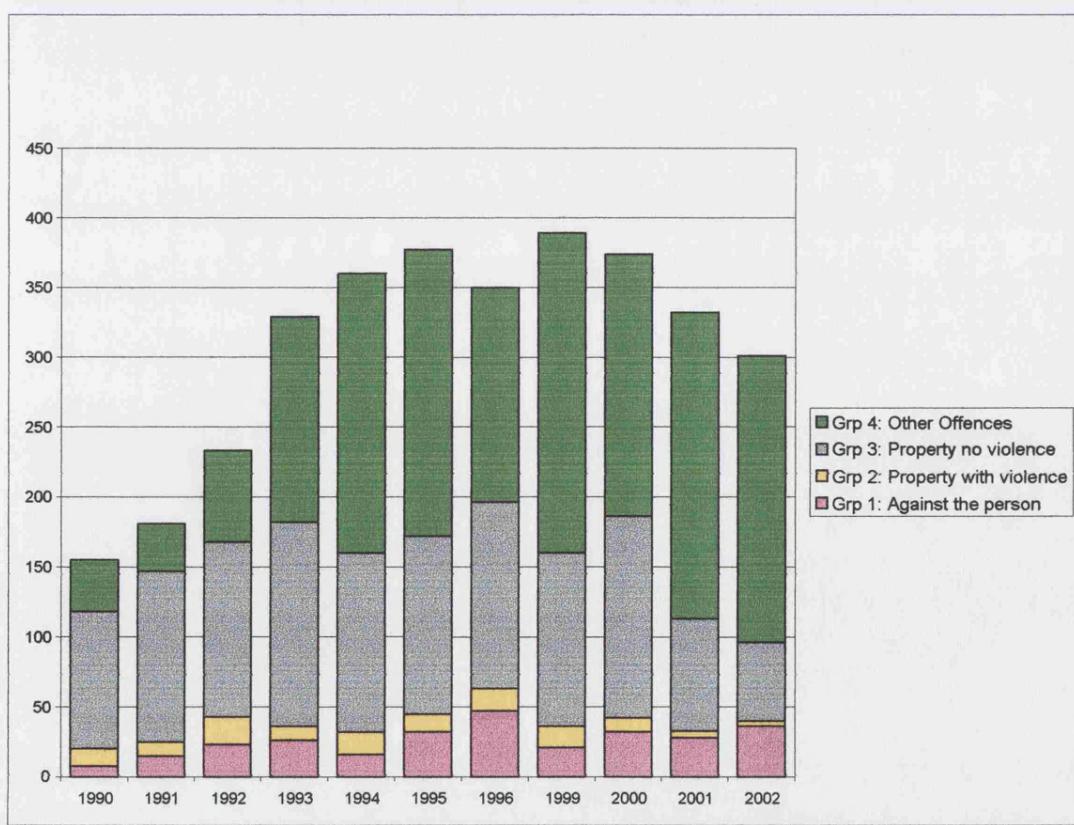
Source of data: 1990-1994 Prison Service Annual Reports; 1995-2000 Committals Register for Mountjoy and Limerick; 2001-2002 Prison Service Annual Reports

Offences against the person, although fluctuating from year to year, only rose above 10% in 1996 (13%) and 2002 (12%). In the majority of cases these offences were either assaults against another person or against the Gardai whilst resisting arrest. Some were minor in nature, attracting a sentence of less than three months but others were more serious with sentences ranging up to five years. A small number, three or four, involved a life sentence. Property offences with violence include burglary, robbery and malicious damage and although infrequent in absolute numbers, again attracted a range of sentences from six months to five years. Offences against property, mainly larceny, account for between 30% and 35% of the total but it is the Group 4 offences which have shown by far the biggest increase, from a low of only 37 in 1990 to over six times that number by 1999. These offences are mainly of a minor nature and could be interpreted as a manifestation of the 'zero tolerance' rhetoric that accompanied the punitive shift referred to earlier in this chapter. Because little or no analysis has been done on this category in any official publication, a rough estimate was completed by me, using the Committal Register. In 1995 Group 4 offences (205) represented 54% of all offences for that year. When these were broken down between Mountjoy and Limerick prisons, the following picture emerged

Mountjoy Prison (161)

33% No TV licence

17% Traffic offences

11% Various street trading offences (mainly not having a proper licence)

4% Sale/supply of drugs

3% Possession of drugs (minor offence, < 3 months)

3% Importing drugs (serious offence, > 3 years)

22% Miscellaneous

Limerick Prison (44)

61% Traffic offences including 5 sentences for illegal parking

18% No TV license

21% Miscellaneous

(By 1999 the number of women imprisoned in Limerick for Group 4 offences had more than doubled to 102 of which 67% were for traffic offences including 15 for illegal parking).

The number of females serving longer sentences increased over the decade but short sentences of less than three months were still the most common, representing anywhere between 47% and as high as 62% during that time. This appears to support the well-known conclusion deriving from research on women's offending in many jurisdictions that their offences are generally less serious in nature than those of men (Chesney-Lind 1980; Walklate 1995; Heidensohn 1996; HM Inspectorate of Prisons 1997; Stern 1998; Carlen 1999).

TREATMENT – IRISH STYLE

Forgotten in B Wing

During the first half of the 20th century the number of female prisoners declined even more rapidly than the number of males. Female committals fell from 1029 in 1929 to 137 in 1978. Their main offences were drunkenness, larceny, prostitution and begging (MacBride 1982 p51and 92). Because of their small numbers they were marginalised, forgotten, invisible. In 1956, the original 19th century female penitentiary was renamed St Patrick's Institution and was almost entirely occupied by juvenile males, many of whom had been transferred from the old Borstals. The women who were imprisoned were housed in the basement and the ground floor of B wing which, despite the name change, was still known as The Mountjoy Females. They were held in substandard conditions (according to those who had worked there, the physical conditions were appalling). There was no in-cell sanitation which meant that slopping out was still in operation. There were two baths to cater for between 20 and 30 women. They were entitled to a bath and a change of clothes once a week, on a Saturday, when they also received a bar of soap and one shampoo.

"If you got your periods on a Monday you were not permitted to have a bath until the following Saturday. In the Matron's office there was, like a tea canister, a silver canister and inside that canister, the old type sanitary towels with the belt were kept. They were taken out of the packet and put in there and underneath there was a little shelf with a bit of newspaper. And beside it was a book. And the woman had to come up and say to you, "I have my periods, can I have two sanitary towels please" and you walked into that office, took out two sanitary towels, wrapped it in the newspaper and you recorded her name and how many you gave her. The indignity of it". S20[30]

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[30] To preserve anonymity interviewees have been allocated a number and a prefix. Prefix S indicates a member of staff.

They were subject to a regime which, from the point of view of strict discipline, varied little from that which had operated a century before. There was little change in the management structure either. The prison was run by a matron and assistant matron (the highest posts available to female officers) who ruled both the prisoners and the staff with a rod of iron[31]

> "But it was still governed by the Governor of Mountjoy, who was a man, always a man. He would come up every day and visit. He NEVER interfered with the running of the prison. Whatever the matron and the assistant matron said was law in those days. You dare not query them. Sentenced women were provided with a large blue dress with buttons up the front – one size fits all. The remands had a green version. They were all given black shoes and a pair of tights and underwear - just unbelievably bad." S21.

In the 1970s and early 1980s the daily routine of the prison was mundane and monotonous, relieved only by school, which was limited to one subject, English, or work which was stereotypically domestic in nature consisting of either washing in the laundry for the whole of Mountjoy or general cleaning duties in the prison. Recreation was limited to one hour watching television and one hour listening to a record player. On Sunday afternoons at 2 o'clock the women were taken to the recreation room where they knelt down to say the rosary.

From the time it was built in 1858, the Mountjoy Females had been run by women and provided it was running smoothly, they were left to their own devices. The first female Chief Officer (CO) was appointed at the end of the 1970s to replace the role of matron.[32] This brought the position into the mainstream of the prison structure. Her appointment heralded many changes. She was young (23 years), relatively new to the Service and replaced a Matron who had been in position for many years and had been a strict disciplinarian. Things began to improve. Showers were installed, the rules were relaxed and the staff were encouraged to get more involved with the prisoners. "There wasn't the fear of God in people as it was before" S21.

It was during the 1980s that the situation in the prison began to change. Before that time there had been very little known drug abuse of any kind. 'Estimates at the time

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[31] It is interesting to note that when a woman was first appointed to supervise the Mountjoy Female Prison in the 19th century she was designated a 'matron', with its connotation of 'female respectability' and received only a fraction of a Governor's salary (Carey 2000). It was not until the 1970s that the position of Matron and Assistant Matron were replaced by that of Chief Officer and Assistant Chief Officer - the equivalent terminology of the men's prison structure.

[32] The running of the female prison by females was an inheritance from the original Mountjoy of Victorian times. It was not until the 1980s that men were permitted to work in the female prison. By 2002, two of the senior positions in the Dóchas Centre were occupied by men.

suggested that within two to three years of the introduction of heroin there were considerably more than a 1,000 seriously addicted opiate users in Dublin' (O'Mahony 1993 p67). For the first time, young women began to arrive into the prison who were heroin addicts. There was no treatment available and the staff had no idea how to tackle the problem.

> "I can remember one girl – we had a cell called the black hole and it literally was a black hole. It was a cell where the window had been boarded up; there was a wooden floor and a mattress on the floor. I remember this girl coming in and I still remember her name and she was a heroin addict and because there was no treatment, she spent, I would say, the first six or seven weeks in there suffering withdrawals. There was no methadone, no physeptone, nobody knew how to treat her". S20

Then the situation deteriorated further - from a position of having beds for 20 women, 50 women plus had to be accommodated. Bunk beds were procured but still the numbers continued to rise. By this time there were two women in a cell intended for one and one toilet to serve 40 to 50 women. At the same time, the women coming in were younger, more likely to be involved with drugs and the whole issue of physical and sexual abuse was surfacing. In 1985 the first case of HIV was diagnosed in a young man in the male prison. It was subsequently discovered that at least twenty of the female prisoners knew this man and were likely to have shared needles with him on the outside. When tested, twelve proved positive for HIV. Because of the level of ignorance at the time, these women were isolated in a Separation Unit at the back of the prison without physical or mental health care support[33] – "the door was locked behind you and it was like being imprisoned in a tomb" S20.

'Out of the Darkness'

The terms of reference of the Whitaker Report described earlier in this chapter, had included an evaluation of the range of existing prison accommodation particularly in relation to female and juvenile detainees. On the specific issue of women prisoners, covered in Chapter 8 of the Report, the Committee noted

> "There is no doubt that facilities for women prisoners have been neglected and that advances made in male prisons e.g. in the development of education, work and skills training, have not touched the women's prisons. The small size of the women prisoner population by comparison with the number of male prisoners and the difficulties with which the prison system as a whole has had to contend over the past fifteen years - riots in male prisons, the influx of subversives [political activists], overcrowding, bad staff relationships – may

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[33] An unexpected consequence of segregation was to encourage a belief among the women that they were 'different' and because of their perceived 'special status', they became more difficult to manage and more difficult to re-integrate back into the main prison.

have helped to induce this neglect. Whatever the reason the time has long since arrived for a more enlightened approach to the problem of women offenders" (Whitaker 1985 p74).

The authors of the Report noted that because of their overcrowded and neglected conditions, provision for a separate prison to accommodate 144 women had been included as part of the development plans for a prison for juveniles which was being built on the outskirts of Dublin. Interestingly, they also stated, that *"Clearly a prison of that size is far in excess of what would be needed for women prisoners".* Among over seventy recommendations the following two in relation to female accommodation are worth noting

Recommendation 2.23 stated

"Apart from replacing the existing substandard accommodation as a matter of priority, special attention should be given to the needs of women prisoners so that they will have optimum facilities for education, training, work, recreation and health care, with access, if desired, to women doctors. Most women offenders should be accommodated in an open centre" (Whitaker 1985 p14).

Recommendation 2.40 was even more specific regarding female prisoners

"The Committee considers that the present accommodation for women in Mountjoy is so unsuitable as to require priority replacement. Most women offenders should be accommodated in a suitable open centre and, for the remainder, one small closed institution, would suffice" (Whitaker 1985 p18).

Notwithstanding the recommendations from the Whitaker Report, the numbers of female prisoners continued to rise and at the same time, the women's section in Limerick prison was closed temporarily.[34] The result was that some cells in Mountjoy, with no integral sanitation, were now shared by four or even five women. The position was untenable.

"That in itself was terrible because at this stage they [the prisoners] had gone so demanding – they were drug addicts. We hadn't really been dealing with the addiction part of it at all. They would come into prison and get weaned off drugs and when they didn't have drugs they would do anything to get drugs. And then they would be in the rooms with each other. They used to cut each other. Then they would be in the hospital and get medication. And they would be up to all kinds of antics – demanding, demanding, demanding – more medication, more medication. That was the way it was with the drug addicts. But, of course, the addiction part of it wasn't treated. In the end they were getting detox but when they got detox they got nothing. And some of them could have been on maintenance outside. So it was only then there was the introduction of maintenance and little by little things came in. But you had to go through all the hardship and the trauma of dealing with them before all that". S21

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[34] There had been a few places available for women in Limerick prison. It was a dark and dingy place, even older than Mountjoy and prior to the 1990s had been used mainly to house female 'subversives' (terminology used by prison officers in Limerick to describe political prisoners).

Eventually the decision was made to renovate St Patrick's and the women were moved, temporarily, to the D wing to occupy two floors whilst the renovation took place. In this new wing there were about forty cells, each of which had a toilet and although not ideal as the women still had to eat in their cells, it was an improvement on where they had come from. By this time too, male officers were now working in the female prison.

Renovated Disaster

The renovation of B wing was seen as a disaster by those responsible for the female prisoners.

> "It was awful, just typical as they would revamp it for a man in prison. Everything in prison is designed towards male prisoners because the majority of the prisoners are men" S21.

This sentiment was a recurring theme in much of the literature on female imprisonment (Hahn Rafter 1990; Shaw 1992; Faith 1993; Walklate 1995; Carlen and Tchaikovsky 1996; Heidensohn 1996; Casale 1997; Covington 1998; Faith 1999; Owen 1999). Very little consultation had taken place. The new beds were made of concrete with a steel base equipped with ridges to allow the mattresses to breathe. These had replaced the tubular steel beds with a spring and a mattress. The yard was now tarmacadam.

> "There was always grass there in the old, old prison and it was always nice to sit down on it.[35] On Bank Holidays we would have sports week ends. It just gave that kind of an atmosphere – that is was kind of normal - grass was normal. Even though the walls were surrounding us there was something normal – like being at school when you had a sports day. But they decided to tarmacadam the yard and divide the yard in two – no shelter, no toilets. The heat beating down in that yard in the Summer time was something awful. The difference before it was renovated was you could sit up against the wall and have the shadow of the wall and you could get cool. Now where they had the yard and the way it was fenced in there was nowhere to go. You couldn't shelter under anything. There was nothing to shelter under – nothing". S20

In interview, Governor Lonergan explained that when he returned to Mountjoy at the beginning of the 1990s, there was no possibility of his countenancing the women

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[35] Longer serving staff and some prisoners referred to 'B' wing as the 'old, old prison' as opposed to the 'old prison' from which they moved to the Dóchas Centre.

moving back to the 'renovated' wing.[36] In his opinion the situation had gone from bad to worse. What was really needed was a new, purpose-built prison for women. As early as the 1960s alternative accommodation had been sought for female prisoners. A site in North Dublin had been identified but eventually abandoned because of local opposition. Another Dublin site was considered in the 1970s but was shelved, due to financial constraints. In the 1980s, plans were in place to establish a women's prison in Portlaoise, in midlands Ireland. Even then, Governor Lonergan had argued '*that for Portlaoise to succeed, the minister* [the Minister for Justice] *must be committed to a progressive regime there, be willing to take political risks and to experiment e.g. to accept that more open visits would be abused to an extent, for drugs etc'.*[37] However, by August 1985, the plans were put in abeyance pending the outcome of the Whitaker Report. Thus, by the beginning of the 1990s, with the number of prisoners continuing to increase, there was still no satisfactory solution to the problem of appropriate accommodation for female prisoners.

BRAVE NEW WORLD

The Dóchas Centre Conceived

In 1992, Máire Geoghegan Quinn became the first female Minister of Justice in Ireland. On her second day in office she visited Mountjoy and the Governor ensured that she would visit the women's prison and see the conditions for herself. She spoke to the staff as well as the prisoners (the first time this had ever happened). She accepted that the conditions for the women were unacceptable and sanctioned the establishment of a multi-disciplinary working Group to design and develop a new purpose-built prison. Two Committees were convened. The first was a Steering Committee, responsible for the overall direction of the project. This Committee included members of the Department of Justice, the Governor of Mountjoy, the Chief Officer of the Women's Prison and representatives of the National Council for the

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[36] Governor Lonergan had overall responsibility for both the male prison (Mountjoy) and female prison(the Dóchas Centre). He joined the Prison Service in 1968 and first served as Governor of Mountjoy in 1984 to 1988. After a period in Portlaoise prison in midlands Ireland he returned to Mountjoy in 1992. According to Carey (and to many people to whom I spoke as part of this study), his influence on the prison was immense. He introduced an open and humanitarian attitude towards prisoners and staff and was also known for his efforts in encouraging the outside world to become more aware, and where possible, participate in the life of the prison (Carey 2000).

[37] Minutes of a *Planning Meeting for Proposed Portlaoise Women's Prison*, Dept of Justice, 28th July 1985.

Status of Women and the Employment Equality Agency.[38] The second was a Working Group which consisted of people who were responsible for the day to day running of the project and was chaired by Governor Lonergan. The Working Group was interdisciplinary and included representation from the Medical Department, Social Welfare, Education, the chaplaincy, senior staff from the women's prison and the Department of Justice.

As part of a consultation process the Steering Committee published a notice in the national press seeking the views of interested parties on a range of issues relating to the new women's prison – see Appendix B. They received thirteen responses from around the country which included feedback from individuals and groups who were directly or indirectly involved with prisons or women's issues. The following themes recurred throughout the submissions[39]

- Women offenders are particularly deprived and vulnerable
- Prison may be their only hope of rehabilitation
- Regimes should be geared to individual needs
- Strong emphasis on personal development
- Accommodation to be in self-contained units
- Security to be minimised
- Provision for child care
- Preparation for release
- Particular needs of drug users

The first task of the Working Group was to canvass the views of prisoners and prison officers to identify what they considered were their needs. Twenty-five women who were in the old prison on Monday 1st February 1993 were asked their opinion on a broad range of topics including cells, the need for a pad (a padded cell), recreation facilities, work, dining, visits, library, reception, lock-up time, segregation, temporary release and the provision of services covering counsellors, welfare, community

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[38] The Council for the Status of Women was an organisation that was very active in the 1980s and early 1990s lobbying for equality issues for women and other female issues like contraception. The Employment Equality Agency was another organisation active in promoting women's rights and had been very concerned about the facilities for women in Mountjoy.

[39] This list was taken from a paper submitted to the Steering Committee in March 1994.

services, health and, very importantly, the school. The views of the prison officers regarding the ideal/optimum regime for a new prison were also sought. The results were summarised under the following headings – the rationale behind the regime; the physical structure; the needs of the women including work and training, life skills, counselling, distress in prison, other facilities; the needs of staff covering training, communication, uniforms, conditions of work; rules; after-care.[40]

The Working Group recognised that it was not possible to meet all the needs expressed by both the prisoners and the staff because that would require almost limitless funding and resources. Therefore, they created a framework of needs, incorporating principles underlying work that had already been undertaken in Ireland including the *MacBride Report* and the *Whitaker Report,* the *Woolf Report* in England and the *Council of Europe Prison Rules.* These principles were based on

- <u>Equity</u> of treatment of prisoners both in relation to one another and how people are treated in the wider society
- <u>Reasonableness</u> – restrictions imposed on prisoners have to be kept to a reasonable minimum consistent with safety, good order and security
- <u>Normalcy</u> – the need for the prison to mirror as closely as possible life on the outside
- <u>Purposeful development</u> reflecting the principle that, as far as possible, prisoners be encouraged to participate in activities or treatment that will help them live law abiding and self-supporting lives when they leave the prison.

Using the responses received by the Steering Committee, the feedback from the prisoners and staff and the principles guiding earlier studies, the Working Group developed a twenty-two page, gender-centred Strategy Document. From the beginning the emphasis was on the importance of addressing the particular needs of women in prison

> *"in many respects they are categorically different from those of men. Because there are so few women in prison there is the likelihood they will be thought of the same way as men when regimes, programmes, buildings etc are being planned and decided about. The emphasis was on adopting a women's prison perspective from the outset. The approach to be eschewed was to deal with the matter by asking what extras would be needed for a women's prison*

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[40] Details of these requirements, entitled *Prisoners' Viewpoints* and *Ideal/Optimum Regime for Women's Prisons* were included as appendices to the Strategy document developed for the Dóchas Centre.

regime. The implication of stressing a women's perspective in regime planning are expected to include increased emphasis on maintaining contact with family and children; dealing with the distress of being in prison and the need to talk with someone; increased emphasis on healthy living, diet, exercise and relaxation; providing for a high percentage of short sentences; reduced emphasis on custody provisions; emphasis on preparing people for situations other than employment after their release; emphasis on maintaining links between the prison and agencies who can provide continuing support after release". [41]

According to the then Deputy Governor of the Dóchas Centre who was a member of the Working Group[42]

"The type of women coming in had changed. We were learning more about the needs of the women and looking at them differently – treating them differently as well. That little bit of compassion and humanity was there. It was there in the old women's prison. People seem to think that everything just happened down here [that all the positive changes happened only with the move to the Dóchas Centre]. *It was up there but the structural facilities weren't there. The actual physical buildings weren't there. So it was a matter of trying to get both together. Women weren't handcuffed; women were going out a lot more on TR* [temporary release, described earlier in this chapter]. *And because of the way they were treated there was very little aggression in the old women's prison. Things had begun to get quiet; there was no such thing as women having to be thrown into the padded cells. That day had gone. So we said, if women don't need to be handcuffed, they don't run away so why do we need all the bars and locks and bolts and doors and all the rest".*

This position was also supported by the Director General of the Prison Service. In interview in June 2000 he stated that

"one of the things that you have to recognise with women is that there is dramatically less fear of violence from them, or fear of trying to escape or having confederates on the outside who try to spring them. Also there is an acknowledgement that a lot of them are very psychologically vulnerable and they need a kind of a therapeutic setting. That wouldn't universally apply to prisoners. Also they are small in numbers. So we were able to relax things a little and let the design provide the security rather than bars and bolts".

The Working Group considered it vitally important to underline their aspirations by a public statement against which achievement could be monitored. After much discussion the Vision Statement (see Chapter 1) was finally articulated and according to Governor Lonergan

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[41] This quotation is taken from the strategy document entitled *Women's Prison in Mountjoy: an Assessment of Needs and a Recommended Regime Strategy for Positive Sentence Management* dated February 1993.

[42] The Dóchas Centre was managed by Deputy Governor McMahon who was the most senior female in the Prison Service (she had been Chief Officer of the old prison). In November 2002, during the course of this study, she was promoted to full Governor – the first female to hold that position in Ireland.

"It really is the bedrock of what the Dóchas Centre is about so that things that are said, the visions that are in it, are fundamentally human visions. It is all around humanity and caring for people. It is a guide I suppose. And the fact that there is a bit of ownership around it, that most people that were in the women's prison at the time were involved in it. Many of them didn't agree with it but they were involved in the process of bringing it about. But all those things are meaningless unless the reality is being achieved outside on the floor". [43]

The concept of treatment in both the medical and psychological sense, did form part of the regime strategy but unlike previous penal experiments with women, was not a major influence. With the reconstruction of Holloway, medical considerations dominated – *'the new prison was to be a large, comprehensive, versatile and secure hospital; the punitive old fortress with its hospital would become a medical establishment with a carceral appendage'* (Rock 1996 p93). Similarly in Cornton Vale, therapy was the main aim as the Working Party believed that *'in any institutional setting for women or girl delinquents, because of the very high incidence of psychiatric disorder and emotionally disturbed personalities there are always likely to be more people who appear to require individual therapy than are able to get it'* (Dobash, Dobash et al. 1986 p126). The regime developed for the Dóchas Centre had, as its major focus, the specific needs of each individual, rather than concentrating on either a medical or therapeutic approach. With echoes of the thinking behind the 19th century penitentiary, the architecture of the Dóchas Centre was also expected to contribute to the achievement of the aspirations of this new experiment.

The Design Challenge

There were major discussions within the Steering Committee about the possible location of the site. As has already been mentioned, earlier attempts to locate a new women's prison had foundered for various reasons, including opposition from local residents. Eventually it was decided that the new prison would be built immediately outside Mountjoy prison on a site already owned by the Prison Service where houses for prison personnel used to exist. Although not ideal because of the limitations of space and shape, the reasons for the choice were both pragmatic (the level of local opposition was likely to be less vociferous because of the already existing prison) as well as philosophically desirable from the point of view of maintaining family ties. The location satisfied an important objective of ease of accessibility for visiting friends and

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[43] The Vision Statement was developed by the Working Group at a later stage than the Strategy Document and did not involve direct consultation with staff or prisoners.

families. When the site of the 'redeveloped Holloway' had been under discussion, the Governor at the time insisted it should be built in London. She argued that the idea of reform had previously favoured a rural setting because country living was considered good and healthy. However, she was convinced that such a move would cut prisoners off from their friends and families and also make it more difficult for visiting doctors, probation officers and solicitors (Rock 1996 p93). Similar arguments applied to the Dóchas Centre. In the event the site remained in central Dublin.

The overriding philosophy of the Design Brief was to build an institution that did not have the appearance of an institution. To help overcome these difficulties, the architect became involved at a very early stage and worked in close collaboration with the Steering Committee as the design developed.[44] He was requested to develop a design that would *'facilitate a regime that was humanitarian in outlook and geared to meeting the special needs of female offenders'*. The buildings were to reflect a domestic, non-institutional style, radically different from the conventional closed prison. The Brief specifically stated that

> *'living accommodation which will predominately be in single rooms, will be arranged in a number of self contained 'houses' to reflect, as far as possible, an urban domestic environment. The 'houses' should be arranged in such a way as allow groupings of offenders with similar requirements, and on the other hand, to facilitate separation of different categories of offenders for control and security purposes where so required. Security measures will be modest, unobtrusive and inherent in the design of the buildings while adequate to ensure the safe custody of offenders. Conventional prison security features e.g. high walls, wire fences, steel bars, grills and gates are to be avoided as far as possible. It is imperative to maximise open space within the complex for relaxation/recreation as it is considered that careful use of open spaces will assist significantly in creating the non-institutional environment required'. [45]*

The equivalent 'Brief' for the Holloway architects had stipulated that *'its outward and inward characteristics should epitomise its advanced role and contribute to the fulfilment of its purposes through the provision of suitable environmental influences'* (Rock 1996 p115).

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[44] The architect himself had no previous experience of designing prisons but worked in a section of the Office of Public Works which had responsibility for prison projects. His immediate boss, who was a member of the Steering Committee, did have previous experience in prison design.

[45] This is a quote from the *Introduction to the Design Brief* and is intended to provide a general 'flavour' of what was trying to be achieved.

As part of the preparatory work for the development of the Dóchas Centre, a small team which included Governor Lonergan, Chief Officer McMahon in charge of the females and the senior architect with overall responsibility for the project, visited Holloway in the early 1990s. There is no evidence to suggest they were familiar with the history of the Holloway development. However, their reaction to the architecture and design was decidedly negative. The first related to its size – it housed over ten times as many women as the old prison in Dublin. According to Governor Lonergan,

"It was mind-boggling to think that you could have so many. The second thing was the institution itself, the way it was designed or not designed. It was scattered all over the place, I thought. It was so massive. It seemed to be huge and no cohesion about the way it was built and no linkage. As well as that, the very regimented regime that was there. It was quite regimental as far as I could see – very compatible with a male jail. A lot of emphasis on security, a lot of emphasis on control – all that sort of stuff. [These features had not been part of the original design for Holloway]. *And we at that time were trying to move away from that – that jail thing, that institution thing, that male culture, to a far more relaxed culture. But, of course, the numbers they had and the security demands on them and the security level – the type of people they had were way, way higher security risk and status than ours".*

Whereas he was quick to emphasise that they spent only one day in Holloway, his first impression was – *"Not a place that I would recommend to anybody. It has all the defects of an old, badly planned, badly designed, male dominated institution that, I would say, from my own experience, would certainly damage people if they spent a long time there".* The architect with the group also considered that Holloway had too much of an 'institutional' feeling – *"everybody was being watched all the time. It was madly oppressive".* In Ireland, they wanted to move away from the concept of an institution.

In my interview with the architect on the 30th July 2002, the question of the houses and how they came about was discussed. It appears they were partly influenced by a visit to a rural prison in Sweden by members of the Steering Committee but mainly by the exigencies of the site because of its size and shape. He told me

"The shape of the site is very irregular. Traditional design of a prison had a couple of security elements which were, they used to have a sterile zone outside it, a big high wall, a sterile zone inside it, before you start with buildings at all. So with the size of that site it was completely impossible to implement that approach. The secure perimeter had to double as the accommodation. In most prisons, they are separate concepts, but here, they had to be the same thing. Otherwise the site wouldn't be usable in the way that was required. An important driver of the design was there would be the houses; they would be domestic in quality, two storey. So, if you start distributing that necessary accommodation around the limited site, it is inevitable that the secure perimeter actually becomes the houses or the houses become the secure perimeter".

The bedrooms within the houses were to be single occupancy with en-suite shower and toilet. The original requirement was to cater for 60 women but during the course of the project, this number increased to 80. Another important philosophical consideration was to facilitate positive interaction between the staff and the prisoners. Accordingly, the Brief stipulated that '*it is imperative that staff time and numbers are not unduly directed towards controlling the movement of offenders within the prison. Care is required in the design and layout to provide for ease of effective supervision without impinging on the overall environment*'.

One particular issue that gave rise to much debate was whether the showers should be observable by an officer through the 'spy hole' in the door. On the one hand was the argument that a woman might hang herself in the shower. On the other was the concern that the ethos of respect for the individual would be undermined. It was finally agreed that it was more respectful of the inmates' privacy if the showers were not observable from the outside.[46] Instead, a procedure was put in place whereby, if an officer were concerned about the safety of a prisoner in the shower, she could bang on the door and if there were no response, she could enter and check. In this way, an issue that had a philosophical and ethical dimension, particularly in relation to female prisoners, was resolved.

A comprehensive range of facilities, including education and training, recreation of various forms, dining, medical and health care, was also part of the Brief. Visiting facilities were expected to provide a comfortable informal environment with special emphasis on the needs of children. In addition, outdoor landscaped relaxation areas were required to incorporate gardens with seating and if possible, a water feature. The architect believed that this was a truly innovative project in that it was a building type that had not been developed before on such a tight, irregular urban site. Nothing remotely similar had been developed in Ireland, nor as far as he was aware, anywhere else. He said in interview

> "It hadn't been tried before. That meant there weren't models for people in the client body or for the public at large to reassure themselves about – its possibilities, its potential. It was very enjoyable because, as far as I know, it was completely innovative and it responded directly to all of the requirements, you know about the humane and progressive requirements – how it was to differ so much from the previous inappropriate accommodation".

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[46] During a visit to Cornton Vale in Scotland in 2000 it was noticeable that the shower area was observable from the outside

This position contrasted with the views expressed by Dunbar and Fairweather at a symposium on penal ideas and prison architecture - *'philosophy and buildings have rarely synchronised because of stop/go policies and the long lead time for designing and building prisons'* (Dunbar and Fairweather 2000 p17). This does not appear to have happened in the case of the Dóchas Centre. The Draft Design Brief was produced by December 1995. Later, there was a change of Government and the project was put on hold for approximately nine months. The building work actually commenced in May 1997. When the project was put on hold, the Working Group was disbanded and there was no evidence to suggest that it ever reconvened. This was to have serious consequences both in lack of preparation and co-ordination immediately prior to the move and a significant weakening of cross-functional commitment when the move finally took place (see chapter 4).

The building project itself was not problem-free. Issues arose over conflicting demands within the client group. The Prison Officers Association argued for fixed observation booths throughout the prison. This was contrary to the philosophy of a low security approach and had to be resisted. The official representatives of the local residents were mainly supportive; an unofficial group of residents were opposed to the development and caused some minor delays; contractors encountered unexpected problems with demolition and excavations; new financial procedures introduced in the Office of Public Works had tax implications for some contractors which took time to resolve; the project ran over budget due to insufficient preparation, construction contingencies and changes in scope (the addition of another house). Although the combination of these difficulties resulted in numerous delays to the schedule, the project progressed, to a large extent, in line with the Design Brief and culminated in the official opening by the Minister for Justice on 29th September, 1999.

'A Star is Born'

The contrast with the old prison could not have been greater. In place of the long tiered wing, lined with cells with heavy metal doors, gloomy interiors and basic sanitation, was an innovative architectural creation. The new prison did not *look* like a prison either from the outside or the inside. There was no high external wall, barred windows or barbed wire and no visible outside indication that this new complex was actually a prison. The red brick boundary walls of the buildings were the prison boundary walls. The heavy metal entrance door and the CCTV cameras provided the only hint that this was a 'secure' building. Appendix C which is in the

form of a 'pull-out' map, provides an overview of the Dóchas Centre and also indicates the proximity of the Mountjoy male prison which could never be mistaken for anything other than a prison.   Once inside and past the control area, the door opened onto a courtyard which boasted an attractive water feature[47]

Picture 1   Courtyard with water feature

To the right were a pair of large wooden gates and a small 'wicket gate' which provided access into the big yard.[48] This 'yard' was, in fact a garden, around which five of the houses, one side of the Health Care Unit and the dining/visitor's building were situated.

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[47] All of the photographs included in this thesis were taken by me with the permission of the Governor of the Dóchas Centre.

[48] The wicket gates assumed great significance after the move as will become clear from chapter 4.

Picture 2   A view of the 'big yard'

The houses, with one exception, were named after trees – Laurel, Hazel, Elm and Cedar. All, except Phoenix, the fifth house, were designed on similar lines. Each had individual rooms with en-suite facilities, a fully equipped kitchen on the ground floor and a comfortable lounge area commonly called the 'rec' on the first floor. The office for the staff was off the 'rec'. (See pictures below for an example of a recreation room and a prisoner's bedroom).

Picture 3   Recreation room
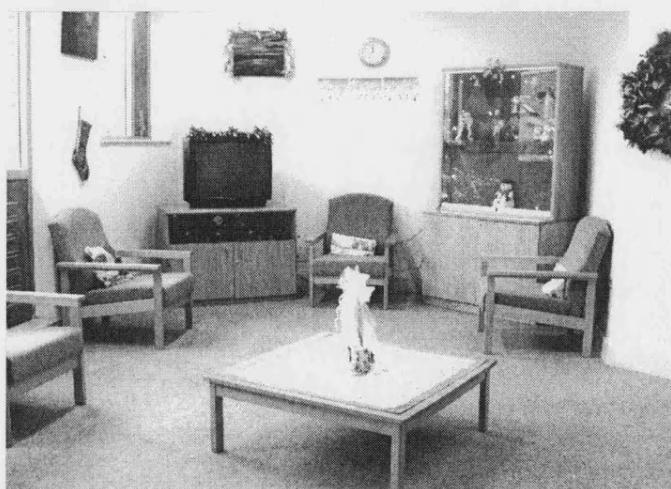
Picture 4   Prisoner's bedroom
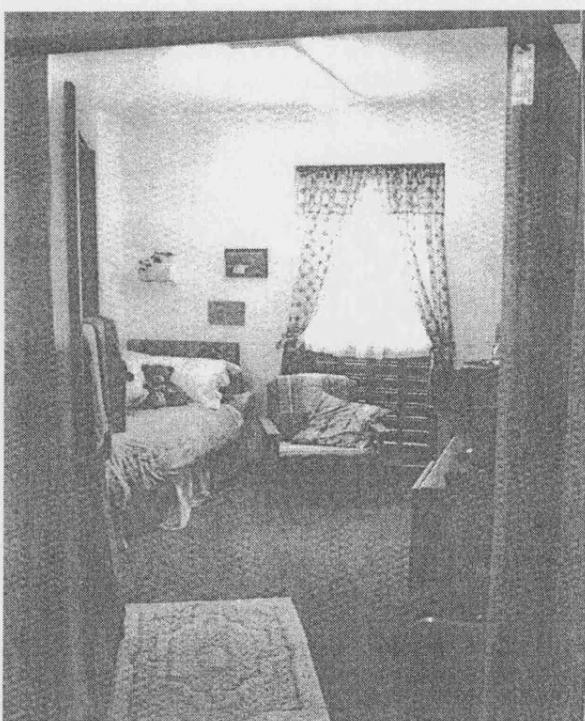
Laurel, Hazel and Elm accommodated 10 to 12 people, Cedar 18 and Phoenix seven. The latter was known as the pre-release house and provided private bed-sitter accommodation (which included a kitchen, dining and sleeping area plus a bathroom) intended for long-term prisoners who, in the months leading up to their release, usually went out to work every day. The Health Care Unit was purpose-built and incorporated all the requirements of a modern medical facility. It had bedrooms to cater for women who were sick and also contained two padded rooms (commonly know as the 'pads') where women who were either a danger to themselves or to others could be regularly monitored. The remaining building in the 'big yard' housed the main kitchen and two brightly-decorated, well-furnished communal dining rooms - one upstairs and one downstairs. The latter doubled as a visiting room and incorporated an outside area with swings and other items suitable for young children when they came to visit.

Picture 5   The upstairs dining room

(a member of staff volunteered to appear in the picture to give perspective)

Returning to the water feature in the courtyard – directly opposite was a door that led to the oratory, the chaplain's room and the library. The latter was extremely well-stocked with a wide range of new and modern books to satisfy most tastes. Slightly to the left of this building was another set of big wooden doors which incorporated another wicket gate, and led into the 'small yard'.   Built around this garden were two houses and the other side of the Health Care Unit (access was available from both gardens). The two houses in the small yard, Rowan and Maple, were of similar design to Laurel and Hazel and accommodated 10 people each.

Picture 6   A view of the 'small yard'

Returning once again to the courtyard, to the left of the small yard was another set of big wooden gates which were usually open. They led to an outdoor sports area which catered for a variety of team games. This area was bounded on two sides by the building that housed the school, gym and workshops and on the third side by the block that incorporated the laundry, reception, staff rest room and offices.

Overall, the architectural aspects of the Dóchas Centre fulfilled the requirement of the Design Brief. Referring to the architects, Governor Lonergan said

> "That was a thing that they were told – we know the site is very small but by proper usage of it and by proper design, let's see what we can do. In fairness to them, I think, we would have to say in hindsight, that they got it right. They did use a very restricted space with great ingenuity and great innovation to the extent that there is very little, if any, claustrophobic feeling in the place – either in the houses or in the grounds".

The conclusion of the architect who led the project was as follows

> "The primary measure of success was that the original guiding concepts of the project, namely humane, rehabilitative, non-institutional detention, were preserved, despite continuous pressure from within and without the client organisation. An innovative major public facility, having numerous stakeholders of conflicting interests, was completed to the substantial satisfaction of all of the stakeholders".[49]

The media response to the opening of the new prison was mixed. The Irish Times headline on 29th September 1999, the day of the official opening was 'Dóchas House 'refuge' gives inmates new hope' whilst the other main broadsheet, the Irish Independent led with 'New women's prison escapes the old mould'. Both papers then went on to describe the prison in some detail. The tabloid paper was more critical. Under the headline 'Four Star Joy' – luxury features in country's new jail', The Star compared the new prison with a four star hotel and featured a picture of a hotel bedroom alongside that of one of the prison rooms. That was the extent of the coverage at the official opening. When the move actually occurred later in the year it received no mention in the press (see chapter 4).

SUMMARY

The penitentiary movement of the 19th century also affected penal policy in Ireland. Mountjoy was opened in 1850 as its version of the new model prison and the

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[49] This statement is taken from a Higher Diploma in Building Project Management completed by the architect at Trinity College in Dublin. The pressures to which he refers have already been discussed.

progressive stage system implemented by Crofton was seen, at the time, as more progressive and more successful than Jebb's scheme in operation in Pentonville. Nonetheless, as in the UK, over time the idealistic aspirations of the Crofton experiment were overtaken by the harsher needs of custody and control. During the early years of the 20th century alternatives to prison were introduced and by the time Ireland gained independence in the 1920s, Mountjoy was operating at less than one third of its capacity.

The period from 1924 to 1962 was described as 'The Quiet Years' in the prison when nothing was happening (Carey 2000). This description could equally be applied to the overall 'crime scene' during that time. The low crime rate was a reflection of a society that was mainly rural, conservative, law abiding and subject to the strong influence of the Catholic Church. It was not until much later in the century that the picture began to change. The country experienced a kind of metamorphosis both economically and socially, encapsulated in the spirit of the Irish economic miracle which became known as the 'Celtic Tiger'. Wealth increased for many but the gap between rich and poor widened, fuelled by lack of the necessary skills which meant that the educationally disadvantaged found themselves either in very low paying jobs or unemployed (McCullagh 1996 p51). Alongside the economic boom, many traditional values were undermined, the drug scene became endemic, crime rates rose significantly, prisons became overcrowded and the rhetoric of zero tolerance took hold. Women were not immune from this change. Their prison numbers more than doubled and their physical conditions deteriorated, but their long-suffering, marginalised status within the prisons system had, at last, been acknowledged. Their needs were recognised and accepted in the early 1990s when the Dóchas Centre project was initiated. Despite the punitive climate resulting from the murder of Veronica Guerin in 1996 and the change of Government, the philosophical aspirations of the new penal experiment aimed specifically at female offenders, was given the green light. In interview in January 2004, Governor Lonergan explained

> "We were lucky that the main decisions around the development were made prior to that because women in prison in Ireland had no profile at all and would be regarded as totally insignificant in terms of numbers and issues. So, it was **politically insignificant** [my emphasis] and didn't attract any particular interest one way or the other which meant there was a vacuum and we were able to do a lot".

At the end of 1999 the move from the old world of the penitentiary finally gave way to the 'brave new world' of the Dóchas Centre. But what did that mean to those on the receiving end? How was this 'brave new world' experienced on a day-to-day basis

by those affected – the prisoners and the staff? That was one of the key questions this study set out to address. Was there anything special, new, unique, different that would distinguish this experiment from those that had gone before? The next chapter will explain how the task of finding out was conducted – I was 'going in', enthusiastic, determined and not a little apprehensive. It will describe what happened - the methods used and the reasons why; the difficulties encountered and the benefits of being an outsider on the inside with all that it entailed.

CHAPTER 3 'GOING IN' – THE RESEARCHER'S CHALLENGE

INTRODUCTION

In order to discover the reality of the new world of the Dóchas Centre I needed to study people in their natural, albeit evolving, setting (by 'natural' in this context, I am referring to the day-to-day experience of prison life by prisoners and staff) and explore and explain their behaviour over a period of time. When considering how best to embark on the task of finding out, I decided the qualitative approach was most appropriate. Creswell defined qualitative research as – *'an inquiry process of understanding based on distinct methodological traditions of inquiry that explore a social or human problem. The researcher builds a complex, holistic picture, analyses words, reports detailed views of informants and conducts the study in a natural setting'* (Creswell 1998 p15). Building such a picture could best be achieved by the ethnographic method described as being *'like an umbrella of activity beneath which any technique may be used for gaining the desired information and for processes of thinking about that information'* (Schatzman and Strauss 1973 p14). The 'umbrella', in this case, involved observing the daily lives of the prisoners and the prison officers over an extended period of time, conducting informal and formal interviews, reviewing documentation and compiling statistics. Each of these techniques could then be used to verify and/or supplement the information gathered by the others (Richardson 1965).

GETTING STARTED

Gaining Access

One of the problems facing any researcher but in particular, those wanting to conduct research in sensitive institutions like prisons, appeared to be the issue of access (Hammersley and Atkinson 1995). In discussing her experience of researching women's imprisonment in Australia, Grimwade noted *'gaining the approval of correctional authorities may mean that constraints and limitations are placed on the research and that the original research and design methodology may have to be revised and re-oriented to meet the demands of correctional authorities'* (Grimwade 1999 p294). Although the issue of access may sometimes be exaggerated, I had anticipated difficulties, as this research involved studying an institution in transition with all the potential pitfalls that might entail both for the researcher and the

researched (Hammersley and Atkinson 1995). However, during the entire course of my fieldwork, which was spread over a period of nearly three years, far from experiencing any obstacles to access, an attitude of welcome was all-pervasive.

It was suggested to me that I first meet with Governor Lonergan, the Governor of Mountjoy as he was the main 'gate keeper'. He was very supportive from the beginning. He welcomed people from the outside but also recognised that my work would be the only written record of the transition from the old to the new prison. It was also necessary to approach the Irish Prison Service. O'Mahony quoted the Association for the Prevention of Torture after their visit to Ireland in 1993 *'The most striking impression is that of a general lack of interest in prisons... this is true for public opinion in general but also for the political leaders and administrative agents'* (O'Mahony 1996 p120). It was not until the murder of the journalist, Veronica Guerin in 1996, mentioned in chapter 2, that the whole issue of penal policy moved to the forefront of the political agenda. This move could have had the effect of inhibiting access. It was not so. The new Director General of the Prison Service welcomed the research. Both he and his staff continued to be supportive and encouraging throughout the process, allowing access to documentation about the development of the Dóchas Centre as well as facilitating access to prison records.

As part of its core values, the new Irish Prison Service stated that it *'accepts that it is accountable for its actions and endeavours to demonstrate this accountability in public'* (Irish Prison Service 2001 p9).[50] Under the circumstances, the timing of the study was apposite. They wanted to be seen to be open and accountable. It also helped, on many levels, that I myself was Irish, albeit an emigrant. Having an Irish background was an advantage, not only in a cultural sense but also in the openness shown to me by so many people throughout the period of the study. When Anderson did his research in a black bar in down-town Chicago, he believed that his ready acceptance was due to the fact that he himself was black (Anderson 1978). My experience was similar.

Grappling with Ideas

I did not start out with specific preconceived theoretical ideas that I wanted to verify or challenge but rather approached the work on the basis of discovering theory from

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[50] In April 1999 an Interim Prisons Board was appointed pending the passing of legislation to establish the Irish Prison Service as an independent statutory agency responsible to the Minister of Justice, Equality and Law Reform.

the data (Glaser and Strauss 1967). I tried to avoid developing specific hypotheses or concepts *during the course of the research* in favour of waiting until the analytical stage for the themes and theories to emerge. But it proved impossible not to form interpretations as the work progressed. Ideas constantly changed over the period of the visits as new observations continued to challenge earlier conceptions. This caused considerable anxiety at the time. One particular example will serve to illustrate the point.

About a year after the move a group of prisoners were in the kitchen of one of the houses. They spent the entire morning complaining about life in the new prison. They were also extremely rude to and about the prison officers, swearing at them and refusing to tidy the kitchen when they were asked to do so. By coincidence, during that week, more facilities had been made available – the opening of a new library and beauty shop. Looking back at my field notes of the occasion, I had written *'It seemed to me that the new philosophy/regime had gone too far in favour of the prisoners'*. I was surprised at my reaction and found it difficult to cope with at the time. It was being overly judgemental and seriously questioned my objectivity. On later reflection I realised that the incident brought into focus the whole concept of 'less eligibility' (the insistence that criminals should not receive preferential treatment over non-criminals). This was a subject referred to briefly in the literature which I had not considered of any particular significance at the time of reading but now realised offered new insights into behaviour which were worth pursuing.

'AN UMBRELLA OF ACTIVITY'

'All Seeing' in a 19th Century Penitentiary

The planned move to the new prison had been delayed on a number of occasions. This turned out to be a major advantage as it allowed me time to observe in the old prison which provided a contextual perspective before starting my fieldwork in the new. In November 1999, I spent one full week there, arriving daily around 8.30 and staying till about 6.30 in the evening. One of the most important aspects of the old prison was its size, its compactness. It consisted of only one wing of the original Victorian radial prison - the ground floor which contained about ten cells, including two padded cells, and two upper landings with twenty cells each. Each floor had a 'circle' at one end, divided from the rest of the floor by bars and a gate. During that week there were around 55 women on the wing on any one day (assigned one to a

cell). The ground floor was the 'hub' of the action.   In addition to the cells, it contained the kitchen, where everyone had to come to collect meals, and the health care area where prisoners came to visit the nurse/doctor. Most importantly, it was the social centre, as it included the gym and the recreation rooms and was the general association area for all the prisoners on the wing. In this area it was possible to mingle freely with prisoners and/or staff or just stand around observing. Standing at the circle it was easy to understand the importance of Jebb's radial design. As Joanna Kelley, one-time Governor of Holloway noted, *"a single person could survey the whole prison from one spot"* (Rock 1996 p21).   From the vantage point at the circle, it was possible to observe everything that was happening in all the public areas on the wing.

The week spent in the old prison covered a combination of relatively formal meetings with various members of staff – the Governor, the Chief Officer, the psychiatrist and the nurse; informal meetings with prisoners or members of staff; chance encounters in the general association area or more deliberately engineered encounters by going into the laundry or one of the workshops and imposing myself. I found the latter particularly difficult and agree with the description of the presence of the researcher as *'potentially intrusive and impolite – a reminder to prisoners and staff that they do not own their own environment and that they can have people foisted on them whom they did not ask for'* (Sparks, Bottoms et al. 1996 p349). On one occasion in the laundry when I tried to engage in conversation with a woman I had met earlier, I received monosyllabic responses and it was clear from the body language of her colleagues that my intrusion was not welcome. On the other hand, the chance encounters were often the most rewarding in that they led to other opportunities – to share coffee with a group of prison officers during their break; to meet with a prisoner in her cell for a more private chat; to being invited into the kitchen where either prisoners or staff would come and sit, providing an opportunity to ask questions in a very informal setting.

One morning I arrived early to witness the morning 'parade', a daily event the importance of which, at the time, was not apparent. Before work commenced at 8am, the day shift officers met 'on parade' with the Chief Officer, to be allocated their duties and to be informed of anything special that needed to be communicated. After the move to the Dóchas Centre, when the 'parade' was under threat, it became obvious how significant its retention was considered by the prison officers. They saw it as their only opportunity to meet all together in one place and as shall be discussed

in chapter 4, its demise became a bone of contention when the staff were spread across several buildings.

The week in the old prison was spent chatting formally and informally combined with quite long periods of observing what was happening, even if that was nothing. Spending the time in this way had a number of distinct advantages. It provided an opportunity to get a feel for the old prison which later proved invaluable in helping to understand better the reaction to the new one. It allowed me to mingle informally with both prisoners and staff, explaining the purpose of the study and thereby, starting to gain acceptance and trust. There did not appear to be any suspicions about my spending time with one group or another. On the wing, prisoners and officers intermingled – everyone seemed to talk to everyone else. It was just as natural to be seen speaking to a prison officer as to a prisoner or, in many cases, I was in a group with both. The setting was informal to the extent that one of the concerns expressed by both groups regarding the move, was the potential loss of this community spirit. The fact of having 'experienced' the old prison, increased my credibility when the fieldwork started in the new. People did not feel it necessary to have to explain what they meant when they referred back to it. Reading or hearing about it would not have been nearly as fruitful as experiencing the environment, albeit for a very short time.

Finally, because of the layout, it was easy to strike up a conversation with prison officers as they were somewhere on the wing most of the time, particularly when the prisoners were 'locked back'.[51] They were willing to talk about their jobs and their expectations and concerns about the new prison. This was probably partly due to the fact that the study was a diversion from the otherwise fairly monotonous routine of their day. It was an opportunity for them to express their fears and apprehensions about the move (of which they had many) to a non-threatening outsider. Overall, that week proved especially beneficial later when both prisoners and staff continued to make comparisons with the old prison. It was an big advantage having had some first hand experience of what they meant.

Looking and Listening in the 21st Century

The move to the Dóchas Centre was completed on Christmas Eve 1999. The fieldwork that followed spanned the period from December 1999 to November 2002

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[51] The prisoners were locked in their cells at defined periods during the day, for example, for their meals.

and covered a total of twenty one visits.[52] The majority were for one week's duration. Some included a weekend or a night. The latter were mainly to conduct interviews with members of staff. All visits involved combinations of observations, interviews, researching documentation or compiling statistics. However, three were more social in nature – one to attend a special Mass, one to attend a play and one to attend a Christmas party. Although not strictly 'working' visits, these three were important in that they provided an opportunity to observe different elements of the philosophy of the Dóchas Centre in action. They represented some of the few occasions when it was possible to observe most of the prisoners and many of the officers intermingling in one place. The formal invitation to these events was made by the Governor but, in the case of the play and the party, a number of the women also extended an invitation. The fact that I travelled from London to attend these events added to my acceptance.

During the first year, my five visits of one week's duration were spent observing the transition and chatting informally with prisoners and staff to elicit their views and reactions to their new environment. It would be an exaggeration to describe the method as 'participant' observation. There was participation in the sense of shared meals or help given from time to time with various tasks. However, it was impossible for me to experience fully what it was like to live or work in a prison. I chose to be there. The prisoners did not. True participant observation in prisons is rare. My role could more aptly be described as that of friendly stranger observer (Sparks, Bottoms et al. 1996). The task in the new prison was more challenging than in the old. The ease of observation of Jebb's penitentiary design was replaced by the dilemma of where, how, whom and what to observe. The choice was almost endless in that there were seven houses, each with a kitchen and a recreation room (one had two recreation rooms) where people congregated, plus two gardens which were also a place of association during the warmer months.

I was constantly having to decide on my choice of location as it would affect the kinds of situations and events observed. There are arguments for staying for an extended period of time in one place as it allows for a greater understanding and familiarity with what is happening or not happening in that place. On the other hand, doing so can yield quite a narrow perspective although clues can be picked up about what is going on elsewhere (Schatzman and Strauss 1973). Because of the focus of my study, it

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[52] I made a couple of short visits later - in July 2003 and January 2004 to clarify a number of points.

was especially important to observe how the different houses operated and how relationships worked both within and between the houses. Consequently, I tried to spend as much time as possible in each house, knowing that this would sometimes result in missing something that may have been 'significant' for the research. During one morning spent in the school, quite a serious incident (a young woman was attacked) occurred in one of the houses. Although it was discussed later, it was disappointing not to have witnessed the incident nor to have observed the staff reaction. However, there are definite limitations to fieldwork when it comes to seeing the total picture. It is never possible to get a complete view, a constraint that I had to learn and accept.

The fact that the women were now in houses, made going in without invitation a very uncomfortable experience as it contradicted all the norms of social intercourse common on the outside. The ethos of the Dóchas Centre was to try to re-create 'normal' living conditions which was reflected in the notion that the houses were 'home' and therefore, private space. Under those circumstances it was difficult to overcome the discomfort of intrusion especially at breakfast time. The women had breakfast in their kitchen and it was contrary to all social conventions to go 'barging in' when they were still in their dressing gowns, sitting around smoking, chatting and drinking tea. On one particular occasion I felt distinctly unwelcome when I arrived in one of the houses. Eventually I was offered a cup of tea and gradually the barriers began to come down although the feeling of discomfort did not recede completely. The women's hospitality was not necessarily a sign of acceptance of the intrusion. It was more likely an acknowledgement of their powerlessness to do anything about it other than to leave. Some did. It was an uncomfortable reminder of the power imbalance which characterises prison life and is a common factor in research (Shaw 1992; Faith 1993; Carlen 1994; Sparks, Bottoms et al. 1996; Bosworth 1999; Liebling, Price et al. 1999). However, in order to understand their social world, it was essential to observe the group dynamics in as many situations as possible.

I endeavoured to spend periods of time in all of the houses during different parts of the day – this could entail being in the kitchen drinking endless cups of tea; in the recreation rooms talking to either prisoners or staff or both; in the prisoners' rooms, if invited (it happened frequently) or in the officers' office in the house. The environment of the Dóchas Centre was characterised by a level of informality that, from reading the literature and from personal experience, was unusual in a prison setting. About half of the prison officers did not wear a uniform (this was a

contentious issue which is explored in chapter 6). There was a high level of interaction between staff and prisoners. When sitting talking to a prisoner in a house, it would be quite natural for an officer to join in. Equally, when sitting with an officer in the office, it would not be unusual for a prisoner to come in and chat. On a nice day officers mingled with prisoners in the garden. The whole environment, most of the time, tended to be relaxed and casual.

Lunch provided an opportunity to chat informally and at the same time observe the women mixing with one another in one or other of the dining rooms. On warmer days it was easy to sit in the garden and to some extent, as had been the case in the association area of the old prison, strike up a conversation with whomever was around and observe what was going on in general. It was also possible to spend time in some of the workshops – in the craft room or the hairdressing room but access to the classrooms was discouraged by the head of education. She was concerned that the class might be disrupted by the presence of a 'non-student'. Sitting and chatting with the officers who worked in the school provided an alternative. During these periods I could not only observe the comings and goings, but also to talk to the women about what they were doing. All of these occasions allowed for different opportunities to ask questions and observe the day-to-day life of the Dóchas Centre. Sparks, Bottoms et al. faced a similar challenge when they were doing prison research. They spent time in as many different parts of the prison as they could and *'tried to be present at each of the moments by which the routine segments the day'* (Sparks, Bottoms et al. 1996 p346).

Going 'into the field' can be a rewarding, exciting and enjoyable experience. It can also be lonely, isolating and very stressful. There were occasions when it was difficult to motivate myself and go 'barging in' to houses where I might be met by strangers. It applied particularly to the small yard (the more secure yard) where there was a high turnover of prisoners and where, initially, because the level of supervision was higher, it instinctively seemed more appropriate to ask permission to go in. This entailed finding a senior officer who could be anywhere. It might also be necessary to provide an explanation to the officers in the houses if they had not met me before. Under these circumstances, there was a great temptation to spend too much time in the 'easy' houses in the big yard where I was more likely to be known. Staying in the 'easy' houses also posed the additional danger that instead of being a non-participant observer, I could become a non-observing participant (Richardson 1965). I had to make a conscious effort to overcome that problem. At one point I spent a

whole day in one of the houses in the small yard. It proved to be particularly exhausting – hearing sad stories, seeing the volatility of some of the women, listening to constant shouting and swearing or just being totally bored sitting in the recreation room when nothing was happening. Becker wrote that when nothing was happening, very often something very important was happening. He advised against concentrating solely on what we, as researchers, consider interesting or what the literature tells us is important. He argued that 'social scientists often make great progress exactly by paying attention to what their predecessors thought was boring, trivial, commonplace' (Becker 1998 p96). In the Dóchas Centre being there when 'nothing was happening' provided interesting insights into the routine of daily life and the interaction between prisoners and prison officers who were obliged to spend most of the day in the same house.

Preparing to Question

The experience of many researchers has proved that, despite best endeavours, observing was likely to be influenced by personal preconceptions and expectations and those observed can equally be influenced by the presence of the researcher and modify their behaviour accordingly (Richardson 1965; Genders and Player 1995). To overcome the problem I used the technique of triangulation which has the major advantage of comparing data produced by different methods to validate or illuminate inferences or themes (Hammersley and Atkinson 1995). In this way initial interpretations from observations could later be checked with responses to formal interviews or documentary evidence. During the observation period of the first year, I limited the interviewing to informal discussions with prisoners and staff. It was still a period of transition and whereas initial reactions were extremely invaluable, my focus was on the 'lived' experience within this new environment which required a period of consolidation after the early upheaval. Formal interviews did not begin until February 2001, just over one year after the move.

In preparing for the interviews, after a number of iterations I decided to address a series of topics with open questions which would act as prompts to tease out the data I was seeking – see Appendix D1 and D2. Using this technique was a more likely way to encourage a natural flow of conversation. The formality involved in following a pre-prepared list of questions could easily have destroyed this flow (Schatzman and Strauss 1973). The preparation of questions was partly influenced by the work of Liebling, Price *et al* on the appreciative enquiry method which encourages the

researcher to explore the more positive experiences of the interviewees rather than concentrating solely on the negatives (Liebling, Price et al. 1999). My aim was to understand both. It was also important to include questions on the same topics for both prisoners and prison officers in order to understand if and how their views differed.

The next challenge was to decide on the size and composition of the interview groups. Purposive sampling would help capture the different perspectives of the groups being studied. The Dóchas Centre accommodated 80 prisoners from diverse backgrounds, of different ages, with different experiences of the prison system. They were either on remand or serving sentences varying in length between a few days and life. Initially I had an over-optimistic expectation of interviewing a truly scientific sample. The practicality proved slightly different. It soon became clear that because of the turnover of prisoners and their preparedness or otherwise to participate, it was not always possible to choose the sample. (For example, there were two women I had planned to interview, one Irish, the other a foreign national. In both cases it took time to win their confidence. Unfortunately, when I decided the time was opportune to broach the subject of an interview, they had been released). To overcome the problem I developed a rationale which attempted to include a representative cross section as follows:

- At least two from each of the different houses
- People who had experienced the old prison and those who had not
- A range of ages
- A range of sentences as well as some remands (the latter was particularly difficult as the turnover was so high)
- A number of foreign nationals

In the event, I held formal interviews with 24 prisoners covering each of the different house - 16 had experience of the old prison; ages were from 19 to over 50; time into sentence when interviewed ranged from 2 weeks to 8 years; the numbers included 2 remands and 3 foreign nationals.

In selecting the staff I wanted to include officers who had worked in the old prison as well as those who had worked in other prison establishments. It was particularly important to include male staff in order to understand their perspective when it came

to working with women prisoners and the women's perspective coping with male officers (see chapter 6). 23 prison staff were interviewed out of a possible 75 to 80, covering a range of positions - prison officer, assistant chief officer, chief officer and governor, with a wide range of experience - the shortest eight months and the longest 27 years in the Prison Service at the time of the interview. Seven had worked in the old females and 12 had worked in other prisons (including the old females); another seven had worked only in the Dóchas Centre. Nine of the staff interviewed were male.[53] Interviews were also held with the Director General of the Prison Service, the architects involved in the Dóchas Centre, and representatives from the medical department, education, probation and the chaplaincy. In this way a wide spectrum of opinion was elicited to lend credence to the study.

The Reality of the Interview

I decided to start with the prison officers and use them as 'guinea pigs'. In the majority of cases, I asked during an informal chat if they would be prepared to participate in a more formal interview. Most, though not all, agreed. Two long-standing members of staff declined the request on the basis they did not want to be recorded. They may have been concerned about anonymity (one was very critical of the regime) or they may have considered that I was too closely aligned to the management. However, their willingness to talk informally was at odds with the latter interpretation. Interviewing them without the machine was not an option. It would have risked not doing justice to their input either because of not listening properly if taking notes or having to depend on memory if the write-up occurred later. On other occasions, interviewing one officer had the snowballing effect of leading to interviewing a colleague. Once officers had volunteered to be interviewed and were assured of anonymity, they were prepared to answer all of the questions. When she asked to interview disciplinary staff during her research, Devlin was greeted with both surprise that anyone would want to consult them and enthusiasm because they were going to be given an opportunity to be heard (Devlin 1998). Prison officers often feel marginalised, unappreciated and disillusioned and perceive that their needs and concerns are either minimised or ignored (Smith 1962; Towndrow 1969; Heidensohn 1996; Sparks, Bottoms et al. 1996; Shaw 1999; Liebling and Price 2001). That was also the case in the Dóchas Centre. From that point of view they welcomed the

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[53] The ratio of female to male staff varied over the period of the research. On average it was about 75:25. This subject is covered in chapter 6.

opportunity to participate in the research, particularly if they felt that it may have some influence in the future. Interestingly, some of the prisoners expressed a similar view.

The first prisoner interview was serendipitous – I was interviewing a male officer in the office in one of the houses when a prisoner came in. Her reaction when she realised what was happening was to say *"if you want to find out about this prison you should be interviewing me, not him"*. I immediately asked if she would be prepared to participate and she readily agreed. Subsequent prisoner interviews were arranged through the 'snowballing' effect, with the help of the prison officers, other prisoners or just meeting people casually and asking them. Irrespective of how the interview came about, I tried to adhere to the parameters of the selection criteria.

On the whole, the interviews appeared to proceed relatively smoothly at the time. (It was not until the transcribing stage that I realised how much better they could have been – how I could have probed more or controlled better). There were also many frustrations. Prison officers, depending on the location of the interview, were subject to numerous interruptions which interfered with the flow; prisoners agreed to be interviewed and when the time arrived they were in bed, locked back for some breach of discipline or had completely forgotten. On the other hand, it was amazing how open and helpful people were. The argument that this readiness to talk was a particularly female phenomenon (Oakley 1981; Finch 1993) was not borne out. Male interviewees were just as forthcoming. Liebling, describing the lessons she learned doing research in a men's dispersal prison, reflected on *'how obliging staff and prisoners can be and how open to interested outsiders'* (Liebling 1999 p154). They may have co-operated as well as they did because they did not feel threatened. They had got used to me being around the prison. Alternatively, their willing involvement could have been because it provided a temporary relief from the boredom inherent in prison life. Although of great importance to me, for them it was an incidental occurrence among other more pressing demands. I was a novelty, a new face, someone new to talk to.

I was conscious of the danger of people responding to my questions on the basis of what they thought was expected, particularly when interviewing staff. On a few occasions, I got the impression of being given the 'party line' rather than a true opinion. In one case, it may have been a desire not to criticise the management from a sense of loyalty; in another, it came across as slightly sycophantic. It may also

have been a question of who they thought I was, for example, was I a spy on behalf of the management? Becker argued that *'people who run institutions, being responsible for their activities and reputations, always lie a little bit, smoothing over rough spots, hiding troubles, denying the existence of problems'* (Becker 1998 p91). This argument was difficult to accept in the context of the Dóchas Centre. Some of the senior staff were surprisingly honest and far from smoothing over rough spots, were prepared to admit to many problems, even to some which were not evident from either observation or discussion. Less senior staff were inclined to be more reticent, probably because they considered they had more to lose. Liebling also took issue with Becker's argument. She accepted that some powerful officials do lie but, equally, so do subordinates. In her experience, most interviewees just want to participate and tell the truth as they see it (Liebling 2001 p476). On the whole, my experience supported that view.

"Every experienced interviewer will have a number of tactical measures for handling 'difficult' respondents: ways of stimulating the inarticulate, loosening the tongue tied, steering the 'runaways'" (Schatzman and Strauss 1973 p74). What of the inexperienced interviewer? These tactics had to be learned during the course of the research. Parker provided some very basic interviewing principles that were very helpful. One was to *'always remember the interview is about the other person and not about you'* (Parker 1999 p237). The importance of not giving personal opinions but tactfully guiding the interviewee back to the subject in hand was easy to theorise about. In reality, it proved much more difficult. Constant vigilance was needed to avoid doing so. Sometimes I failed. Transcribing the interviews was a salutary lesson. As well as being extremely time consuming and often boring, it was also a reminder of my shortcomings as an interviewer, particularly in the early stages, although it helped improve later interviews mainly in the area of encouraging interviewees to expand on various points or bringing them back to the topic in hand. However, the drawbacks of transcribing my own tapes were far outweighed by the advantages of being able to recapture the event and listen again to the nuances of the replies.

THE RESEARCHER'S DILEMMAS

A Question of Balance

Not long after I started the fieldwork I was allocated an office where I could write notes, make final preparations for interviews and on occasions, conduct the interviews. Although it had the potential of being seen to be too closely associated with the management, it did not appear to have affected people's perception of my position. The prisoners were not aware of this office and the prison officers knew it was a spare room that various visitors used and where it was safe to keep personal belongings. At one stage, it was being used by somebody else and I moved to the supervisors' office on a temporary basis. This proved unexpectedly fruitful. The photocopying machine which was used by the staff was situated in the room. This allowed for chance encounters that often had beneficial effects like being invited to some little event that might be happening in one of the houses; being able to get agreement to conduct an interview; being told about an incident that may have occurred. It was like the 'coffee machine syndrome' in any office or institution, where informal 'grapevine' communication gets disseminated. In his research in a government ministry in Canada, Rock described how the gossip exchanged at such public meeting places can be a valuable source of information for the researcher (Rock 1986 p58).

After my first week's visit, I was given a key which gave me access to both yards. It had the major advantage of ease of movement but the inherent danger of over-identification with staff or of being compromised if a prisoner asked for the gate to be opened. To overcome these problems, it was necessary to continue explaining my role to both prisoners and officers and emphasising that it involved eliciting the views of both groups. Liebling argued that '*it is possible to take more than one side seriously, to find merit in more than one perspective, and to do this without causing outrage on the side of officials or prisoners*' (Liebling 2001 p473). On the other hand, I was aware that my impartiality could become suspect if I were seen to be spending too much time with one group rather than the other. '*Research in prison which sets out to tap the perceptions of both staff (of all grades) and prisoners faces some particular problems*' (Sparks, Bottoms et al. 1996 p338). It was vital to show equal interest in both perspectives. During the course of my research this aspect had to be reiterated many times as I met new prisoners or new staff members. Although I had anticipated problems when it came to the perceived balance of views, I did not

encounter any *overt* criticism of what I was trying to achieve. On the contrary, most people were supportive and willing to participate for the reasons already stated.

Providing Explanations

The researcher's position in a prison is inherently problematic as he/she has no uniform and no defined role and is likely to invite suspicion and curiosity (Sparks, Bottoms et al. 1996). Initially everybody was very curious to know who I was and why I was there. It was important to provide an honest answer although the emphasis varied slightly depending on the audience. My student role was not difficult to explain despite my mature age. With the prisoners it was easier to talk about writing a book; with the officers I was more likely to talk about my thesis. In both cases I referred to the subject in general terms as a 'story' about the reaction to the Dóchas Centre both from the prisoners' and the prison officers' points of view. That explanation was accepted.

In addition to explaining my presence, self-presentation was also an important consideration. *'In overt observation where an explicit research role must be constructed, forms of dress can 'give off' the message that the ethnographer seeks to maintain the position of an acceptable marginal member, perhaps in relation to several audiences'* (Hammersley and Atkinson 1995 p87). From the outset the informality of jeans and a sweatshirt seemed the most appropriate dress as well as the most comfortable. Genders and Player, when conducting research in Grendon men's prison, had to avoid clothing that could be construed as 'overtly provocative' (Genders and Player 1995). Being a woman doing research in a female establishment, that particular problem did not arise. On the other hand, as the prisoners and many of the prison officers, were also informally dressed, a relaxed attire had some amusing consequences. On many occasions the question arose – 'what are you in for'? It was common to be mistaken for a member of staff and called 'Miss'; one prisoner insisted on introducing me to her fellow prisoners as a 'lifer'; other speculation included my being a social worker, psychiatrist and on one occasion, a nun.

Managing Interviewee Anonymity

The ethical issue of confidentiality gave rise to much soul searching. It was necessary to reassure participants that their discussions would remain anonymous. Using code numbers instead of names (PXX for prisoners, SXX for prison staff and

NXX for non prison staff) helped but because Ireland was such a small place and the number of people in the Dóchas Centre was also small, this dilemma was especially challenging. Burman *et al*, referring to their research on girls and violence, argued that '*a key issue* [for researchers] *is the inherent tension set up between the aims of research (to elicit information) and the ethical concerns (to 'protect' those taking part)*' (Burman, Batchelor et al. 2001 p449). The aims of my research did not specifically involve eliciting distressing personal accounts of prisoners' backgrounds or deviant behaviour requiring their protection. My concern about confidentiality was more to do with the potential ease of identity of individuals because the overall numbers involved were so small – for example, a foreign national who had spent time both in the old and the new prison would be relatively easy to identify; a male prison officer who had worked only in the Dóchas Centre would be difficult to disguise even if, after a while, people forget. I decided that if anonymity were in danger of being jeopardised, the answer was to ask for specific permission before publication.

Keeping a Distance

No amount of preparation or literature reviews can fully predict the reality of one of the biggest challenges to the researcher – remaining 'objective', not getting emotionally involved. There is an argument that in an effort to ensure that criminology is treated as a science, the emotional experiences that are so often part of the research process, tend to be ignored (Oakley 1981; Bosworth 1999; Bosworth 2001). In prison research, the emotional impact can be particularly intense and can be exacerbated if researching both the 'controllers' and the 'controlled'. It was reassuring to note Liebling's comment that '*research in any human environment without subjective feeling is almost impossible, particularly in a prison*' (Liebling 1999 p149). My experience in the Dóchas Centre involved a range of emotions – enthusiasm, confusion, turbulence, elation, anger, sympathy, sadness, frustration, humour, incredulity and even guilt. Although not obvious at the time at a conscious level, these emotions were, in themselves, part of the data to be used later for critical reflection and triangulation. This equally applied to reactions when personal beliefs or theoretical assumptions were challenged (Liebling 1999; Burman, Batchelor et al. 2001).

One particular reaction that initially caused me concern, was the feeling of 'doing all the taking' and giving nothing back. To overcome this problem, I developed a few simple reciprocal strategies. When spending time with the prisoners, as well as

asking questions of them I was prepared to answer their questions about me, even if they became personal. This included talking about my background, family and revealing that I was a magistrate. The latter point was important as it was only fair that people were aware of my involvement in the criminal justice system albeit in another country. It gave rise to interesting discussions, both with prisoners and prison officers, on the differences between the two systems, particularly their views on sentencing, which otherwise might not have arisen. It also resulted in lots of banter from the prisoners about my being 'a judge'. Hammersley and Atkinson pointed out, *'it is hard to expect 'honesty' and 'frankness' on the part of participants and informants while never being frank and honest about oneself* (Hammersley and Atkinson 1995 p91). Provided it did not detract from the aims of the study, answering personal questions was not an issue.

Another small way of giving something back arose when I was taking photographs of the prison and was immediately inundated with requests to take pictures of the women, either individually or with their friends. Once permission was granted, it proved an enjoyable activity giving rise to much laughter and many comments. Later, when the women were given the photographs, it contributed considerably to my acceptability and credibility. Many of the women were not used to having their photographs taken. In some cases they wanted to send them to boyfriends (who were often incarcerated in other prisons) or to their families. Others wanted to put them on display in their rooms. For the prison officers I offered to give them a copy of their interview transcript which they accepted with alacrity. I was surprised how pleased they were when they received it during a subsequent visit. (Initially, I also planned to do the same for the prisoners but changed my mind when one interviewee talked about her room having been subject to a 'spin' (a search) on the day before the interview).

The issue of bias was a recurring challenge. Becker argued that this dilemma is a myth. In his view *'the question is not whether we should take sides, since we inevitably will, but rather whose side we are on'* (Becker 1967 p239). During the fieldwork it was almost impossible not to influenced by the side with whom I was dealing at the time. However, it was not a static dilemma. The 'side' changed over time and in different situations. The important point was to produce a balanced account which was part of the recurring challenge. Liebling argued that perhaps the central problem in social research was managing the tension between objectivity and participation. She concluded that *'the more affective the research, in terms of shared*

feelings and experiences, the better the fieldwork gets done on the whole'. She qualified that statement by warning against the dangers of 'going native' (Liebling 2001 p475).[54] It was when it came to the analysis and writing up that it was necessary to be more distant and rigorous whilst at the same time, recognising that the opinions and views of both sides were equally important. The other danger of bias can arise from 'over-rapport' with one group at the expense of another (Hammersley and Atkinson 1995). From time to time I was aware of this danger. However, I had to recognise that uncertainty and ambiguity were inherent in prison research and must be *'lived with, thought about and incorporated reflexively into what one writes'* (Sparks, Bottoms et al. 1996 p354).

ADDITIONAL INSIGHTS

Complementary Words

Observation and interviews provided the principal source of data. However, under the 'umbrella of activity', official Government and non-Government publications, Research Documents, Discussion Papers and Minutes of Meetings, along with more informal sources, provided useful contextual background. Because of living in the UK, internet access to Irish newspapers was especially helpful to track the media representation of what was happening, not only in Mountjoy but in the country in general. Non-fictional literature about the drug scene in Dublin was also a good source of information for the non-resident, as were biographical and autobiographical accounts of life in Mountjoy. *'Provided they are not taken at face value, as accurate representation of social reality, such documentation can suggest themes, images or metaphors'* (Hammersley and Atkinson 1995 p161). On the other hand, these stories were likely to represent the social reality of those who had written them. (Interestingly, during one visit, an officer referred to what he considered was the *accuracy* of the account of drug-taking in Mountjoy described in one of these books). Ireland had changed so much in the previous twenty years that it was especially important to try and understand the new cultural milieu from which the women in the Dóchas Centre came. As I no longer lived there that knowledge could only be gained from extensive reading.

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[54] She maintained that because social research is an act of human engagement, becoming 'involved' is a key ingredient of the task. Although certain forms of ethnography have been criticised as too empathetic, she cited Sykes *Society of Captives* and Becker's *Outsiders* as examples of social research that has stood the test of time.

Plugging the Numbers Gap

In order to provide a quantitative dimension to the research, statistical data were essential. Whilst recognising the quantitative vs qualitative arguments in the literature (Glaser and Strauss 1967; Schatzman and Strauss 1973; Genders and Player 1995; Hammersley and Atkinson 1995; Creswell 1998; Bosworth 2001) they are not mutually exclusive. It was important to have quantitative data in order to understand the incarceration patterns of female offending in some detail, both before and after the opening of the Dóchas Centre. Even during its relatively short building programme of three to four years, the number of places requested had risen by one third, from sixty to eighty which necessitated building an extra house. It was important to ascertain if the statistics reflected an increase in female criminal activity, longer sentences or if there was another explanation.

The problem was the paucity of numerical data. The accuracy and reliability of numbers, particularly in relation to criminal statistics, has already been discussed in chapter 2. It was surprising to discover that the last official statistics published by the Irish Prison Service that included any level of detail, were dated 1994 (this research began at the end of 1999). O'Mahony argued that *the administration of the* [Irish] *penal system is characterised by a lack of direction, initiative, effectiveness and moral authority ..... gross neglect of research, lack of serious critical analysis and of any rigorous appraisal of performance lead inevitably to a paralysis, not just in long-term policy making but in the will to tackle the endemic deficiencies in the system* (O'Mahony 1996 p107/108). He also pointed out that expensive computer systems initiated in the late 1980s to replace the cumbersome, hand-written Victorian ledgers ended up as *'a wasteful embarrassment which nobody trusts to do the basic record-keeping job'* (O'Mahony 1996 p110).[55]

By the time this research started, some action had taken place to address the issue of the organisation and accountability of the Irish Prison Service. As mentioned earlier in this chapter, a Prisons Board had been established to provide direction to the new independent Prison Service. However, at a meeting with the recently appointed Director General, in April 2001, the parlous state of the prisons' record

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[55] He did not explain why this had happened and I did not pursue the issue as a new computer system was under development and nearing completion.

system was discussed. It became obvious that only *summary* data would ever be provided for the years 1995 to 1999. The first *detailed* publications from the new computer system were scheduled to begin in 2000.[56] This was another reflection of the low political priority (mentioned earlier) which had been given to penal policy in Ireland and to the provision of any data on management performance or accountability. It was also a major setback to the contextual setting of the research. There was no alternative but to compile the detailed data myself which I did for the years 1995, 1996, 1999 and 2000. (The computer system 'kicked in' in September 2000). Because of the amount of work involved, I compromised and used summary data only for the years 1997 and 1998. Although it was a major task, involving at least three to four months work (elapsed time), compiling the numbers proved to be an invaluable exercise.

Governor McMahon was especially helpful in arranging access to the Mountjoy Committal Register for the whole of the 1990s. This was the manually completed ledger which contained full details of every woman who was committed to the prison during that period. I transcribed the relevant, non-confidential data on to forms and using the spreadsheet programme Excel (which I had to learn), compiled the statistics in the same Table format as the earlier official publications. In this way it was possible to track, on a like for like basis, the patterns of offence types, sentence lengths and age profiles post 1994. In addition, because of having access to the full records, it was possible to 'get behind' the summary numbers and understand the profile of the prisoners in much more detail – for example, if Irish, were they from Dublin or outside Dublin; if non-Irish, their country of origin; their marital and employment status plus whether they had been committed for one or more offences. The detail of 'miscellaneous' offences which often hid interesting patterns of petty offending was also available (see chapter 2). The Committal Register was a treasure trove as it provided much greater insight into offending patterns than could ever be gleaned from official publications. It also meant that details of remand records could be analysed. This, too, was important as they constituted around 50% of committals for the years in question, and had a major impact on the operation of the Dóchas Centre. (The significance of the data will be explored in later chapters).

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[56] My experience of this system was very frustrating. Not only was it impossible to obtain the basic data to complete my own statistical analysis, the official data eventually published from 2000 onwards were less comprehensive than the earlier years which made comparisons difficult.

The exercise of compiling the numbers, was a good example of being able to use data collected by one research method to verify or illuminate data from another (Richardson 1965; Hammersley and Atkinson 1995). However, it also involved some major frustrations

- It transpired that the *official* statistics included prisoners in Limerick prison although the numbers were considered by the Prison Service to be so small as to be irrelevant. I discovered that whereas this was true for the early 1990s, Limerick prison began to be used more and more frequently as the decade progressed. It was, therefore, necessary to visit Limerick and compile their numbers also. This proved a less onerous task as they were small in absolute terms but growing in significance in percentage terms. (Being transferred from the Dóchas Centre to Limerick was used as a punishment for severe breaches of discipline, so care had to be taken to avoid double counting when this occurred).

- Because the Committal Registers (for both prisons) covered the whole of the 1990s, it seemed prudent to check the totals with the official publications for the early 1990s. Not surprisingly, there were a number of discrepancies. This presented a major dilemma about which numbers to use.

- During the year 2000, the manual register of Committals was replaced by the new computer system in September. The last three months data had to be produced from the new system and merged with the data already compiled, with all the potential pitfalls that entailed – for example, were the records like for like; were the cut-off dates compatible? It took many months and proved very difficult.

Although the workload was time consuming, frustrating and unexpected, the payback was worth the investment. The major advantage was my confidence in the numbers as I had compiled them myself and while doing so, officers who understood the detail were at hand to answer questions if I required clarification.

MAKING SENSE OF THE DATA

Having completed the bulk of the fieldwork I began the analysis with some trepidation. Initially, the extent of the data collected seemed overwhelming – how to decide what was relevant; how to organise it into manageable portions. On each of the visits I had taken copious notes which helped retain the context of the

observations and interpretations at the time. It had been inappropriate to take notes *in situ* as it may have been interpreted as a form of spying. It would also have acted as an inhibitor to normal social intercourse. Where possible I completed field notes every two or three hours when events were still relatively fresh in my memory but occasionally, for practical reasons, it was much later - for example on one occasion when I attended a play in the evening and participated in the social gathering afterwards my notes were not written until the following morning. As soon as possible after each visit, on returning home to England I typed the hand-written notes in Word and added an overall summary of my interpretations of the week's events. This was a method of ensuring that the data would be available in a more accessible and manageable format for later reflection and manipulation. The typing, although laborious, helped, in that it jogged my memory and allowed me to expand or comment on points observed or heard. There was always the potential danger of 'after the event' interpretation but as the field notes were not exactly contemporaneous, it was unlikely that these extra comments undermined their validity. Later, having re-read the field notes, I highlighted relevant sections of the data and transferred them to a new file in Word. Within this file I created 'categories of interest' which were further refined into typologies to be used for analysis alongside the other data.

As part of the preparation for the interviews, I had allocated a code number to each of the topics (see Appendix D/D1). When the transcripts were completed, each interview was reviewed and coded accordingly. This was not as simple an exercise as I had anticipated. The interviews themselves were semi-structured and despite attempts to control the sequence of the topics, the interviewee often jumped from topic to topic or actually answered one question by responding to another. It meant being careful not to overlook a topic or a response because it was not in the expected place. It also became clear that all topics had not been covered with all interviewees. (It was reassuring to note that other researchers have admitted to the shortcomings of their interview techniques, after the event). When the coding was completed it was possible to draw up a matrix which allowed me to quantify the answers. Having read through all the transcripts again and using a similar approach to the field notes, I extracted relevant quotes, transferred them to a new file on Word and created coded typologies which were further analysed during the development of the chapters.

Reading through the data, as well as seeking 'categories of interest' I was also looking for emerging patterns. In particular I was anxious to explore what caused periods of stability and instability and what narratives or observations challenged my preconceptions. An example of the latter was my surprise that some of the women expressed a strong preference for the old prison despite the vastly improved conditions of the new. It was only on subsequent reflection that it was possible to understand how much they missed the certainties and camaraderie of the old wing, a phenomenon that was also experienced in Holloway after the move from the old radial prison to the new building (Rock 1996). Even more surprising was the apparent lack of concern at being sent to Limerick.[57] Admittedly, this view was expressed by only two people, but having seen Limerick, an intuitive reaction suggested it was a place to be avoided at all costs. For those who came from that part of the country it may have been more attractive from the point of view of visits. It was also suggested to me by one prisoner that drug taking was not as closely monitored in Limerick and it was easier to be 'strung out' provided one behaved. This may have been true but I was not in a position to verify it.

I was interested in quantitative evidence of similarities or divergences between the views expressed by prisoners and prison officers on the same topic. One example was the issue of discipline. Twelve out of fifteen 'front line' prison officers expressed concern about lack of discipline. A typical response was – *"the discipline thing seems to have gone out of the window here. Sometimes, someone has to really go over the top before they are dealt with"* S05. Prisoners had a different view. Sixteen out of the twenty-four, talked about privileges being taken away for breach of the rules. One prisoner complained - *"you are put on report for just silly little things. I think they make the rules up as they go along, as it suits them"* P19. Although these responses could be interpreted as compatible and reinforcing, suggesting a growing nervousness about the application of controls, further analysis indicated an ambivalence about the subject of discipline which is explored in chapter 6.

The documentary element of the data, mainly statistics, Government Reports and minutes of meetings, combined with the above data, facilitated the use of the technique of triangulation. *'Data source triangulation involves the comparison of data*

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[57] There were twelve to fifteen cells in the men's prison in Limerick that housed female prisoners. As well as being used for short term sentences for local women, they were also used as a disciplinary tool for misbehaviour in the Dóchas Centre. The cells were almost unchanged since it had been built in 1822. At the time I visited in March 2002, they were dark and dingy with no internal sanitation.

relating to the same phenomenon but deriving from different phases of the field-work, different points in the temporal cycle occurring in the setting, or accounts of different participants differentially located in the setting' (Hammersley and Atkinson 1995 p230). A couple of examples illustrate the point. The first relates to the subject of space and time - the prisoners' perception of loss of freedom and the officers' concern about personal safety changed over time despite nothing *structural* having occurred (see chapter 4). The second relates to breaches of discipline - the data gleaned from the officers during interview contrasted with the statistical data analysed from the Discipline Register (see chapter 6).

Although the research was not aimed at proving or disproving any existing well defined theories, during the course of my fieldwork it was impossible to avoid being influenced by instant interpretations, preconceived ideas or views frequently expressed in the literature. When it came to the analysis it was necessary to reflect on the evidence and where necessary, challenge these ideas. The main concern was to avoid interpreting the data to fit these ideas but rather to manage the uncertainty and ambiguity and resist the temptation to rush to conclusions (Hammersley and Atkinson 1995).

SUMMARY

The fieldwork was undertaken with enthusiasm, determination and not a little apprehension. The purpose was to explore, understand and explain the social world of the new prison. The time spent in the old prison was an invaluable introduction. The experience in the new prison was more challenging. As Sparks, Bottoms *et al* noted *'doing research in prison is, willy-nilly, 'being there' as a physical and social presence, not an inert camera or 'fly on the wall'* (Sparks, Bottoms et al. 1996 p352). During a period of over twenty weeks in the Dóchas Centre it was possible to observe the impact of new developments and the introduction of new innovations. It was also possible to note what happened during periods of stability and instability and the ebb and flow of tensions that accompanied change. I spent long periods of time in the houses just observing or informally and formally interviewing prisoners and staff. Like the experience of many researchers, there were times when I was plagued by doubts – was I doing things correctly; were my observations fruitful; were my field notes comprehensive enough; were my interview techniques appropriate to the task? It was reassuring to read with reference to prison research, that *'the researcher's role is that of becoming, however, temporarily and peripherally, a kind of*

member of the 'prison community' and hence establishing a set of practices and proprieties and learning to live with the resulting anxieties' (Sparks, Bottoms et al. 1996 p353). Finally, embarking on the analysis involved the discipline of continuing to remain reflexive and recognising that personal and theoretical assumptions needed to be carefully dissected and explicated in terms of the effects of the research process (Becker 1967; Burman, Batchelor et al. 2001; Liebling 2001). The research process had begun many months previously. It started in the old prison a few weeks before the actual move took place.

The next chapter will concentrate on what happened. It will set the scene in the old prison and the expectations and apprehensions created about the new. It will explain how the prisoners responded to the move; how they experienced their new 'freedom' and how they coped with the concept of 'normal' living within the houses. It will discuss the prison officers' reaction to the new architecture and regime and the effect on their morale. It will explain how they managed this new environment, where personal responsibility and individual decision making by the prisoners, was to be encouraged. Finally, it will describe how the instability created by the upheaval of the move, gradually subsided to make way for a period of 'settling down'.

CHAPTER 4   THE TURMOIL OF THE EARLY WEEKS

INTRODUCTION

The 19th and early 20th century penal experiments reviewed in chapter 1 represented the authors' retrospective interpretation of events years after their occurrence. The expectations and consequences of change for those involved were explored and explained from an historical perspective. The literature on more recent experiments like Holloway and Cornton Vale were also written a number of years after the implementation of the new ideals. By contrast, the research in the Dóchas Centre involved witnessing a major penological change as it happened. Although not present all of the time, the visits were of sufficient frequency and duration to claim a more contemporary interpretation of the impact of the birth and early years of this 'brave new world'. Because of the significance of the change and its initial repercussions, this chapter will concentrate on the findings from the three earliest visits – to the old prison immediately prior to the move and to the new prison immediately after the move.[58] They provided an opportunity to explore and understand the expectations and fears of prisoners and staff generated by the impending change and to observe and discuss, first hand, their reaction in the immediate aftermath.

ANTICIPATING CHANGE

The Comfort of the Old

The layout of old prison was described in chapter 3. The regime in operation evoked echoes of the Victorian penitentiaries in the sense of being characterised by a rigid daily timetable, punctuated by regular locking and unlocking of cells (see Appendix E). On the other hand, a general atmosphere of friendliness and informality appeared to permeate the wing. The Oxford English Dictionary describes 'atmosphere' as *a pervading tone or mood*. Sparks, Bottoms *et al* emphasised the difficulty of unequivocal definition when it came to explaining 'atmosphere' in a prison context. They described it as relating to the way prisoners were treated by prison officers and *vice versa* which created a certain 'atmosphere' or 'climate' (Sparks, Bottoms et al. 1996 p 107). A similar explanation emerged from a study of Grendon

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[58] I spent one week in the old prison in November 1999. The move took place during December. I visited the new prison on Christmas morning and was there for one week during January 2000 - the third week of occupation.

prison where the *'non-authoritarian ways of working* [by prison officers] *fostered a relaxed atmosphere on the wing'* (Genders and Player 1995 p75). Such an atmosphere pervaded the old prison and was manifested in various ways. It was particularly noticeable during association periods by the level of interchange between the prisoners and the officers and the amount of chat and banter from both sides. Officers and prisoners were to be seen in small groups, laughing and joking and there were frequent interchanges of badinage when they passed one another on the stairs. These interchanges were no different from normal social intercourse in an informal setting on the outside.

The literature indicated that the use of humour between staff and prisoners, as reflected in such informal banter, was a common ploy to relieve tension and defuse potential conflict in a prison setting (Sparks, Bottoms et al. 1996). In discussing the motives of wit, Freud also talked about using laughter as a release from tension (Freud 1905 p 226). Mulkay developed the theme when he talked about humour within various social structures. He argued that *'joking takes place because the organised patterns of social life themselves involve contradictions, oppositions and incongruities which find expression through the medium of humorous discourse'*. By the use of humour, not only are the strains and tensions of the social structure eased, but the established social relationships within the structure are also maintained (Mulkay 1988 p 153). This theory echoed the findings of the anthropologists Radcliffe-Brown and Ford. They described the relationships created by marriage in various African cultures as a rearrangement of social structures regulated by custom. In the new structural situation created by the marriage, there were always possibilities of conflict. Joking was one of the means used to avoid, limit or resolve such conflicts (Radcliffe-Brown and Forde 1950 p 56-57). Interestingly, in the *'World in Brief'* section of the *Independent*, dated 30th April 2003, it said that the Corrections Department in Thailand was holding a laughter contest for its 250,000 convicts in an effort to relieve the stress caused by overcrowding in their prisons – a prize would be awarded to the best laugh and the best joke by a prisoner. Whereas this was an extreme example of the notion of joking as a means of relieving tension, the theory was no less relevant in the old prison, particularly during association. All the prisoners shared association at the same time. This created an artificial social milieu where disparate individuals were forced to share a limited space with people not of their choosing. The potential for discord and disruption was high. The use of humour provided an antidote that helped avoid conflict. It was not possible, at this early stage of the research, to decide whether it was used as a conscious ploy on the

part of the officers. Either way, it contributed to creating a general atmosphere of informality on the wing.

Another example of this tolerant atmosphere was illustrated by the officers' reaction to the constant presence of women at the 'circle', requesting or demanding various favours or answers to questions.[59] For the most part, they responded with patience or humour despite the often repetitive nature of the requests. If the women were not satisfied with the answer they received, they shouted and continued shouting until they got a satisfactory reply or accepted defeat. In the literature on women in prison, some authors interpreted such behaviour as an example of powerlessness and resentment on the part of the prisoners at their perception of being treated like children (Genders and Players 1987; Girshick 1999). Carlen referred to staff's explanation for this phenomenon – *women are more prone to relieving frustrations via talk than violence; because they are used to working alone in the domestic and personal presentation spheres, they are more reluctant to yield autonomy over the minutiae of everyday living to the prison'* (Carlen 1998 p 88). It could also have been interpreted as an expression of self identity and self confidence in an attempt to subvert the exigencies of daily life by small scale acts of resistance (Bosworth 1999). A more likely explanation of the women's behaviour at the circle, was a dogged persistence in continuing with their demands until a perceived need was satisfied, the type of behaviour described by Gottfredson and Hirschi as the frustration-aggression model manifested by exhibiting a low threshold of tolerance of frustration (Gottfredson and Hirschi 1994). It was inappropriate to pursue this question more vigorously with the prisoners at this point, as my level of acceptance had not yet been established. Whatever the motivation, officers referred to their behaviour as a good example of prisoners being constantly 'in your face', an expression used frequently during the course of the week.

Amicable relationships were also visible on other occasions when officers were being particularly solicitous to prisoners. For example, early one evening when a woman who had been granted temporary release (TR) had no place to go on the outside, an officer, on her own initiative, spent at least an hour telephoning various organisations to ensure she would have accommodation when she left. Another example was evident on the top floor of the wing where longer-term, slightly older prisoners were

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[59] The 'circle' on the ground floor of the old wing, divided the general association area from the section containing the offices and medical unit. The gate to the circle was kept locked at all times when the prisoners were unlocked.

housed. During association there was nowhere for them to sit and chat other than the television room or the video room neither of which was conducive to conversation. Although technically against the rules, the officer in charge of the landing permitted them to sit in one another's cells in order separate them from the younger women and allow them to socialise in more comfort (comparatively). This impression of amicable relationships was reinforced during discussions with the prisoners themselves, a number of whom commented on the level of help and support they received from the officers. These observations were also evidence that some of the 'humanitarian' principles underlying the regime in the new prison were already in operation in the old prison as explained by Governor Lonergan

> "The document you have [the Strategy Document] *that was drawn up in the old women's prison, some of that was actually implemented in the old women's prison. So that the openness thing, treating them with more humanity, more openness and friendliness and genuine support and that sort of stuff. We had women up there that came in, very high profile women that had been convicted of child abuse and child neglect, things like that in the 1980s and early 1990s – they were very high profile cases and I think, what I saw happening up there, the staff responded to those unfortunate women, befriended them and supported them – it wouldn't happen in most other institutions in the country, not to mention it happening in a prison".*

However, it was obvious that the physical conditions of the old prison were a major inhibitor to the achievement of the longer-term aims contained in the Strategy Document. Apart from a few minor improvements to sanitation, physical conditions were almost unchanged since it had opened in 1858. Theoretically, the move to the new prison would provide the necessary environment to implement the new philosophical ideals. However, much would depend on how these changes were viewed by those most directly affected – the prisoners and the prison officers.

Prisoners' Expectations

Opinions about the impending move varied. After the *official* opening in September 1999, everybody had been very excited by the prospect of the move. (The date had already been subject to numerous delays). However, nearly two months had passed and although the new prison buildings were mainly complete, they were still subject to a number of 'snagging' items. The plan was to accomplish the move by Christmas but many of the prisoners were sceptical that this would be achieved. Ten of the longer-term prisoners had been working in the new prison, under the supervision of one officer, for a couple of months, to help prepare for the big event. During discussions in their new, albeit unfinished, surroundings, they voiced their

enthusiasm for the new prison and their impatience to get there permanently. It was what they really wanted. They considered that the physical conditions were a major improvement and were looking forward to using all of the new facilities. Four prisoners who regularly spent time in the craft shop, were equally eager to move. They had very limited amenities in the Portakabin they were currently forced to use and wanted the opportunity to expand their creative activities in the bigger and better equipped workshop in the Dóchas Centre. The majority of the rest of women had either no opinion about the move as they believed they would be freed before the event, or were cynical because of the repeated delays and had become indifferent. The officers, on the other hand, were more vocal and willing to express an opinion.

Officers' Cautious Optimism

During the course of the week, discussions were held with most of the officers, all of the senior staff and one of the nurses. Overall, they were looking forward to the move. They found the current building claustrophobic with prisoners 'in your face' all the time. They liked the idea of the new facilities where the prisoners would have greater opportunities to get involved in education, crafts and other more positive programmes. However, they also expressed a number of concerns. Their main worry was the apparent lack of preparation. Some personal development training had been provided – about ten officers had attended a self-awareness course which used psychometric tests to help them identify their own personality traits and how to recognise and relate to others with different traits; four had been on counselling courses and others were doing a psychology course. This information was gleaned during an informal chat with a group of officers. They did not expand on why they had been chosen to go on the courses nor how, specifically, they were expected to apply what they had learned. However, the use of self awareness courses followed the pattern of recent management developments concepts in the business world where they were encouraged. Such courses were intended to help individuals recognise their own strengths and weaknesses and use this knowledge to facilitate mutually supportive relationships with immediate colleagues and other groups with whom they interacted. These concepts were equally, if not more applicable within a prison setting where relationships between staff and prisoners were the cornerstone of the institution (Sykes 1958; Sparks, Bottoms et al. 1996; McConville 1998; Liebling, Price et al. 1999; Liebling and Price 2001). Whether this had been explained to the officers was not clear. Of greater relevance was the fact that at this point, the officers were not aware when they were moving, where they would be

located, how the move was going to happen, in what sequence or who was going to be housed in which house. They had also experienced the numerous delays to the schedule of the move and like some of the prisoners, were slightly cynical. They had all been given an opportunity to visit the new prison and that had generated an additional set of issues .

The domestic nature of the architecture inherent in the new concept of houses, was a source of serious concern in relation to personal safety. On the current wing, officers were always within sight and sound of other officers. They were apprehensive about how things would operate in multi-buildings, especially as prisoners would be unlocked all day and although they [the prisoners] were not expected to have free access to the different houses, they would have total freedom within their own house and would have access to the school, the gym and the dining rooms. A number of officers considered that there were lots of vulnerable spaces in the new buildings despite the presence of surveillance cameras. This same issue had arisen prior to the move to the new Holloway prison in England – 'staff had forebodings about the small units and their need for heavy supervision, the short corridors and their difficult sight-lines, the dog-leg bends and their threats of ambush' (Rock 1996 p 222).

Apprehension about personal safety was also mentioned in the context of communal eating. Some officers feared that it could become a flashpoint for disturbances as prisoners were not used to eating together. The current practice was for the women to queue to collect their meals and take them back to their cells where they were locked in for a fixed period. In the new prison this routine would change. There were two dining rooms and whereas the women would still have to queue for their meal, they would be free to sit and eat wherever they wanted in the dining room. Both dining rooms would have to be supervised. The safety issue arose because the dining rooms would allow women from different houses to mingle and potentially, provide an opportunity to settle real or imagined inter-house scores and/or the women would have access to a variety of implements in the form of cutlery, crockery and glasses, not to mention hot food and drink, that could be used as fighting weapons.

Sparks, Bottoms *et al* in their research in two men's prisons, considered that '*the issue of food was a focus for a range of diffuse stresses and grievances. A prisoner's irritation over food, whether its quality or size of his own portion, may act as a catalyst for an outburst of frustration, manifested either against the staff or in*

antagonism with other prisoners' (Sparks, Bottoms et al. 1996 p 163). Whilst recognising that within a total institution there are many things that can provide a focal point for stress and grievance, a move from private to public eating was seen by the officers as especially problematic. Speaking at a later date, about her fears before the move, one officer encapsulated their reservations

"I had some thoughts that it mightn't be too bad but the regime they were talking about was alien to us – out at lunchtime, out for breakfast, out for tea and all we were saying was – we will never get a break; we will never get to see anybody. What are we going to do? We thought they would be having food fights in the dining hall and killing each other down there." S10

Officers' reservations about the prisoners' potential behaviour at meal time may have been symbolic if they believed that the old prison was so well ordered or it could be interpreted as another manifestation of fear of the unknown. An alternative view of the potential impact of communal dining was also expressed

"The communal dining – women not being isolated eating in their rooms on their own. That is very good because if you start eating on your own and then you go out and you have to leave prison, then you have to get used to eating with people again. That is something that you might take for granted, but if you walk into a restaurant and after eating for maybe four or five years in a room on your own, you are embarrassed to eat in front of people. That is something you have to learn how to do again". S19

This view reflected more accurately the new philosophical approach where normalcy was one of the guiding principles that informed the original Strategy Document referred to in Chapter 2. However, the comment also implied some trepidation about the potential impact of community *living.* Just as having to become accustomed to eating together, the women were going to have to become accustomed to sharing a house together. This, as they were to discover, would present a much greater challenge (see chapter 5).

The issue of communal dining had also arisen in relation to a move to a new men's prison, Blundeston, in England in 1963, which had many philosophical similarities with the Dóchas Centre and had involved moving from in-cell eating to communal eating. According to the Governor of Blundeston, '*having to dine together was one of the most difficult hurdles for them* [the prisoners] *to surmount, because so many men felt so strongly about it - most preferred to eat alone in their cells*' (Towndrow 1969 p 168). Only time would tell what effect communal eating would have on the women in the Dóchas Centre.

Officers also had misgivings about the new visiting area. In the existing Portakabin there was long table with a one foot high divider which separated the visitor from the prisoner and facilitated surveillance. This would be replaced by a more user friendly restaurant type layout with a play area for children which officers anticipated being more susceptible to drug passing and much more difficult for them to control. This fear had been exacerbated by a recent incident where drugs were passed during a visit which resulted in an officer having her jaw broken by the prisoner who had received the drugs and another officer getting a kick in the stomach. The incident had caused a major disruption in the prison which had taken four to five days to subdue. Although it was accepted that such an event was a rare occurrence in the old prison, officers were very concerned that it could become more frequent with the new regime where a more liberal approach to visits would be encouraged.

Nervous Apprehension

At this stage, it was impossible to gauge whether the fears expressed by the officers were purely fears of the unknown or whether they would prove justified. Although they were looking forward to the move they were also feeling apprehensive. The move involved change and change can be unsettling. This apprehension affected both staff and prisoners. With the Holloway move a former prisoner remembered *'there was tremendous anxiety about the move. You know if you move house they say it is one of the top stress levels. So, if you move an institution like a prison, the anxiety is high for everyone'* (Rock 1996 p 228). Those moving to the Dóchas Centre expressed similar anxieties. The prisoners' expectations were more uncertain. The officers were prepared to give it a go but they also emphasised that, although the building was new, the prisoners were still the same.

Governor McMahon's perspective was also worth noting. She had been involved in the project since its inception. In discussions with her after the event, about the period before the move, she explained that she was aware that her commitment was not universally shared with all members of staff. She had misgivings about the attitude of some of the officers – being too fixed in their ways; being resistant to change; being unwilling to take responsibility and wanting to be told what to do. On the other hand she emphasised that many officers were very enthusiastic and eager to embrace new ideas. With regard to the prisoners she explained –

> *"I suppose at the end of the day, we are not dealing with people who are going to move into a house and sit down and be very co-operative with the system. They don't want to be here anyway, regardless of how nice it is, even though it*

is a new place. But I suppose I did expect that they would go and live in the house and things would be reasonably normal".

She was under no illusion that the new prison would mean change for everybody and that problems would undoubtedly arise. In her view problems were there to be solved and could be overcome. Her conviction was about to be put to the test.

WELCOME TO THE 21ST CENTURY

Farewell to the Old

MOVING OVER!

This is my home now
I've come to terms with it somehow
These four walls combined is my bedroom
But I will be moving soon

This place is a case of what you see is what you get
But in the new prison everything is set
I'm moving into a new room with everything in tow
But to my standards its really low

Over there you won't know what to expect
It's common sense, a natural reflex
I like it here where I am. I would like to stay
But the move is getting closer day by day

Maybe the new nick won't be so bad
But to leave my home, leave all that I had
There is cameras all over the place
Even zoom right into your face
Its not that which is bothering me
I just hate to leave here do you see
Cause this is my home now
I've come to terms with it somehow

Prisoner   November 1999

This poem encapsulated the feelings of apprehension about the move but also reflected a recognition of the certainties inherent in the structured life of the old prison. Prisons are dangerous places but social order, characterised by the routinised reproduction of everyday life which constitutes the 'normality' of a captive society, is what helps to make them work (Clemmer 1958; Sykes 1958; Schrag 1966; Sparks, Bottoms et al. 1996). It is through the certainty of the routines that prisoners learn to adapt to the constraints of their particular circumstances. When these routines are interrupted or suspended the likely outcome is instability. The move to

the new prison heralded such a period of instability. How long that period would last, was yet to be established.

'Moving over' to what the poem described as 'the new nick' did not take place until nearly three months after the official opening as the Governor explained

"A lot of things weren't ready – furniture, a lot of the buildings weren't completed; there were certain things not completed at the time. So we aimed for the end of the year and we actually got them all done, the last of them went down on Christmas eve of 1999. So, while the September date was the official opening, it wasn't really ready in terms of all the facilities finished and the contractors off site. There was a snagging list – where they go in and check up all the buildings and check for a tap not working or a light not working or whatever. And all that work had to be done. It is not easy to do that sometimes where there are occupants in it. That is the reason for the delay".

Pressure was exerted to move before Christmas as the men's prison was suffering from severe overcrowding and prison space in Dublin was at a premium. The move finally took place in December 1999. About 20 of the more settled prisoners moved first. According to one of the nurses

"we kept the more chaotic ones up in the old prison until the last moment, especially those on methadone. We moved them all down in Christmas week in threes and fives. I think we had about eight on Christmas Eve coming down. Locked up shop at about 1 o'clock. It was actually very traumatic. [The last prisoner had the dubious privilege of closing the gate for the last time]. She was given the key to lock it and she said she spent so much of her life in here. It was quite sad to see it". N01

Rock noted a similar reaction in describing the move out of the old Victorian Holloway. He quoted one member of staff *"It was really eerie and all sorts of things .... Holloway had opened with men, women and children contained here and for the first time I was fully conscious of the full history of the place and the fact that the stones were really steeped in an awful lot of experimental prison practices that weren't particularly good"* (Rock 1996 p 225 - 226). These sentiments could equally have applied to the move out of the old women's prison in Mountjoy. However, there was one significant difference – that of timing. The Holloway move took place at the end of January 1977. The Mountjoy move occurred over Christmas and with even greater historical and emotional significance, it was the last Christmas of the old millennium – 1999.

Happy Christmas

My first visit to the new prison was to attend Mass on Christmas morning. About twenty prisoners and twenty officers were present together with a number of nuns, the chaplain and the governors of the Dóchas Centre and Mountjoy.[60] It was in this setting that the humanitarian philosophy of the Dóchas Centre was first demonstrated. One of the prisoners, a foreign national, was particularly upset as she was experiencing her first Christmas in captivity many miles from home. Her son who had been arrested with her, was serving his time in Mountjoy men's prison. Just before the Mass began he was brought in to join her and was later permitted to spend the rest of the day with her. Her delight was obvious.

The ceremony itself was very moving. The bishop who celebrated Mass had been a chaplain in Mountjoy for about fifteen years and knew some of the women by name. In his closing address he acknowledged the move and recognised the difficulties when he told the women – *"you will cling to some of the old"*. He referred to the future and how they, as first arrivals, would set the tone - *"what you do now will set the standard for the future – what is acceptable and what is not acceptable"*.

It was impossible during such a brief visit to gauge the reaction of the prisoners to the new prison. In mingling after the service, the mood was friendly but not surprisingly, tinged with sadness. Despite the smiles, a number of the women had been crying during the Mass, particularly at the point when they were invited to light a candle and remember those they loved. It brought to mind a repetitive theme in the literature which suggested that women in prison suffered increased pain because of worries about their family, especially their children (Carlen 1983; Genders and Player 1987; Liebling 1994; Richards, McWilliams et al. 1995; HM Inspectorate of Prisons 1997; Carlen 1998; Matthews 1999). How much greater must the pain have been at an emotional family time like Christmas with the added dimension of the upheaval of the move.

When visiting some of the houses after the service, many of the prisoners appeared in good spirits under the circumstances but there was an undercurrent of dissatisfaction. It *seemed* to stem from the perceived arbitrary nature of house

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[60] A number of prisoners had been allowed out on temporary release (TR) over the Christmas period. This practice is customary in Ireland both for male and female prisoners who are considered low risk.

allocation but because of time constraints, it was not possible to pursue the subject on that occasion. It was not until the next visit that the magnitude of the change and the instability created by the move became evident.

The New Reality

My second visit occurred in January 2000 – nearly three weeks after the move was completed. The experience was salutary. The overall atmosphere, far from being friendly and relaxed as it had been in the old prison, now exhibited an all-pervasive sense of discontent and disenchantment. Many factors contributed to this transformation. On entering the prison for the first time, the immediate impression was that the size was intimidating and the layout confusing. By comparison to the confined space of the old prison, it seemed vast. It took a number of days to adjust and become familiar with the various buildings. If that were the effect on an outsider, how much more disorienting and bewildering must it have been for the prisoners and staff who were used to the familiarity and security of the old wing? This sense of intimidation was aggravated by the, soon to become infamous, 'wicket gates'.

Chapter 2 included a detailed description of the layout of the Dóchas Centre (see Appendix C).[61] Because of their significance, it is worth re-capping the description of the wicket gates. The entrance courtyard was separated from the accommodation areas by high wooden gates.[62]

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[61] To assist understanding, it might help to keep this pull-out Appendix open when reading this and the following chapters.

[62] The high wooden gates to the big yard and the small yard were normally kept closed. Those to the sports yard were usually open.

Picture 7   The wicket gate

The wicket gates, (situated to the right of the larger gates to the big yard – (picture 7) and a sub-section of the larger gates to the small yard), were kept locked at all times and could only be opened by an officer. This was a major source of frustration and annoyance to the prisoners, particularly those in the big yard, who, in general, were considered more responsible than those in the more secure small yard.   Ostensibly, the main reason for keeping these gates locked was to separate the drug addicts in the small yard from the rest. (The subject of separation is explored later). However, it also meant that any time any of the women needed to go to or from the school building (which included the gym and the workshops), to the shop or reception, it was necessary to find an officer to open the gate. This could and did entail waiting for long periods of time (15 to 20 minutes in extreme cases) in the cold and the rain, for the gate to be opened.[63]   Shouting increased, tempers frayed, resentment rose, relationships soured.

To add to the frustration, the school was not fully operational and nobody appeared to know what classes were available, what times they were scheduled and most important of all, who was responsible for informing the women and ensuring they

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[63] I myself experienced frustration with the wicket gates. Although provided with a key, initially the gates had no handles which meant it was difficult to hold them closed in order to lock them. The wind had a habit of catching them. I broke a nail on the first occasion. Operating the gate to the small yard was more difficult as the rain had warped the wood and it was necessary to use brute force to open it.

attended.[64] There were also a number of irritants relating to the Health Care Unit (HCU). There had been a change to the medication time-table which meant that the women did not get their medication till after 11am when they used to get it before breakfast.[65] Those on a methadone programme were especially angry at this change as they needed the stability of routine to help them with their dependency. In the old prison the medical staff had been easily accessible. Now that they were in a secure building, to which neither officers nor prisoners had automatic access, they were *perceived* by both parties to be less than helpful. This contrasted with the previous image of the medical staff and had the potential for creating a gulf between the houses and the HCU.

There were other issues that contributed to the general sense of restlessness and instability. The rules forbade the women from one house visiting those in another. According to the Governor, initially inter-house visits were discouraged because of their potential for disruption. Later this rationale was extended because of thefts from the communal kitchens or house items being borrowed and not returned. The rules also stipulated that if women were not involved in activities in the school, gym or craft shop, they were to be 'locked back' in their room. 'Lock back' also applied to those who, for whatever reason, did not go to the communal dining room. However, from observation and feedback from both the women and the officers, it was apparent that these various rules were applied on an arbitrary basis which was a cause of increased resentment.

The question of rules was interesting. The literature indicated that prisons are governed by a strict and formal set of rules (Sykes 1958; Giallombardo 1966; Faith 1993; Genders and Player 1995; Sparks, Bottoms et al. 1996; Carlen 1998; Bosworth and Carrabine 2001; Liebling and Price 2001). In the Dóchas Centre there were no **visible** formal written statements of do's and don'ts. It subsequently transpired that in Ireland, *The Rules for the Government of Prisons, 1947*, was still the main statutory instrument regulating the management of prisoners (Whitaker 1985 p 69). The small booklet containing these Rules was not noticeable anywhere in the prison. I got a copy from one of the Assistant Chief Officers and discovered that many of the

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[64] The Head of Education explained that because the move had been delayed so frequently, the final date had come as a surprise and did not allow sufficient time for the appropriate preparation. Hence the school programmes and facilities were not entirely ready.

[65] It was not easy to discover the reason for this change at the time but as the distribution of medication later reverted to the original schedule, I did not pursue it.

rules in relation to the prisoners were no longer appropriate. The following examples illustrate the point:

Rule 68 states – A prisoner shall be guilty of a breach of prison discipline if he

(9) Converses or holds intercourse with another prisoner without authority.

(10) Sings, whistles or makes any unnecessary noise, or gives any unnecessary trouble.

(11) Leaves his cell or other appointed location, or his place of work without permission.
(Department of Justice 1947)

In research conducted in Mountjoy women's prison in the 1980s, a staff member commented *"The basic rules we don't deviate from at all – you've got some stupid rules like you can't whistle or sing. Now I consider that ridiculous"* (Lundstrom 1985 p 56). Twenty years later things had undoubtedly changed. Although technically, the Dóchas Centre was still subject to the 1947 rules, some, including the examples mentioned, were no longer relevant under the new regime and others had been added. There also appeared to be a wide measure of flexibility in their application, a subject explored in more detail in chapter 6. Sparks, Bottoms *et al* argued that *'a degree of discretion is inherent in the enforcement of rules in prison, notwithstanding any declared intention to achieve complete consistency'*. However, the degree of discretion was dependent on the model of imprisonment that the particular institution was trying to achieve (Sparks, Bottoms et al. 1996). In the Dóchas Centre, where the emphasis was on increased interaction between prisoners and staff, a bureaucratic approach to rule enforcement was discouraged. Changes were communicated either verbally or via notices pinned to notice boards in the 'recs' (recreation rooms) or the officers' offices in the houses. Despite the informality of this approach, the women seemed to know, in general, what was permissible and what was not.

The inconvenience of the wicket gates, the school not being fully operational, the change to the timetable for the distribution of medication and the inconsistent application of the rules combined to create an underlying climate of frustration and discontent among the prisoners that permeated the whole prison.

IMPRISONED IN HOUSES

At this stage, January 2000, only five of the houses were operational – Hazel, Laurel and Elm in the big yard and Rowan and Maple in the more secure small yard. Phoenix, the pre- release house, was not yet occupied and Cedar, the biggest house, had not received its fire safety certificate. The original philosophy underlying house allocation had been to separate the remands from the sentenced and the drug addicts from the drug free. This had not occurred. Instead, the exigencies of the move, caused mainly by the demand for space in the overcrowded men's prison, had resulted in a more pragmatic approach to house allocation. Assumptions were made, in discussions with staff, about those who were considered likely to relate better to one another and allocation was made on that basis. It was also decided that women deemed to have psychological and/or psychiatric problems who *appeared* to get on, could safely be housed together. Both these decisions had unfortunate consequences

'Freedom' in the Big Yard

The reaction to this initial house allocation approach varied depending on the house. The majority of the women who had worked together in the new prison prior to the move, were housed in Hazel as it was assumed that they would have the least problems adjusting. This proved not to be the case. When they had been *working* in the new prison they were at liberty to go anywhere. Now they were subject to the same restrictions as everybody else. One of the nurses in the Health Care Unit described their reaction – "*they felt that their territory had been invaded when the rest came on the scene – this had been **their** place*". Like the women in the other houses they also had to suffer the constraints of the wicket gate and technically, were forbidden to visit their friends or colleagues elsewhere. The term 'technically', is used advisedly as it was soon clear that the rule regarding visiting other houses was more often honoured in the breach than the observance and any disciplinary outcome was very much dependent on which officer or officers were on duty. However, for some of the women in Hazel who had become used to complete freedom of movement, they now felt more imprisoned than they had been in the old prison. One woman who had spent many years there stated that for the first time, she felt 'hemmed in' – "*I feel I am doing time for the first time*".

Laurel also housed mostly longer-term prisoners, some of whom went out to work. This group had mixed feelings about their new 'home'. They raised the issue of the wicket gate on numerous occasions as well as voicing their unhappiness about inter-house visits. However, their discontent was more related to lack of information about what was available in the school and to some extent, a concern for the safety of the prison officers. They considered that the design of the buildings made the officers more vulnerable to attack by prisoners they regarded as volatile, often because they [the volatile prisoners] were suffering from withdrawal from alcohol or had not yet stabilised on a methadone programme. In both these houses comments were made about the number of 'mad ones' in the other houses, especially in Elm which they had christened the 'Muppet House'.[66] At this stage, women who were deemed to have psychiatric problems or serious addiction problems or both had been allocated to Elm. However, it was necessary to be cautious about such labels as they may have been the result of categorisation by prison staff rather than any professional diagnoses (see chapter 5 for a fuller discussion on this subject).

Referring to this early period, in an interview with the Governor over one year later, she admitted that they made some mistakes when allocating to Elm house

> "Looking back on it, we put two people together who had psychological and psychiatric difficulties. Even though they could manage quite well in prison, they still had those difficulties. We put them into the one house because they got on well together. In fact, they fed off one another. Things like that ended up in rows that could have been avoided".

In addition to the disparaging remarks about the residents of Elm house, those in the other two houses in the big yard were also inclined to regard all of those in the small yard as 'druggies' irrespective of the validity of the accusation. (For example, one long-term prisoner complained how she was initially allocated to the small yard although she had never taken drugs). Thus, at this early stage, the arbitrary allocation to the houses was not only problematic but could also be interpreted as defining the person. In Goffman's parlance, those in the small yard constituted a sub-group within an already stigmatised community in that they were seen by the 'normals' (in Laurel and Hazel) to possess attributes that were deeply discrediting (Goffman 1963). Whether those in the small yard actually saw themselves in that

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[66] This derogatory term had also been used to describe the unit for highly disturbed women in the 'new' Holloway. Although a couple of the women in the Dóchas Centre had served time in Holloway, there was no evidence to suggest that the term was imported. Elm house, despite its occupants, bore no resemblance to the dark, damp, claustrophobic area in Holloway described by Paul Rock (Rock 1996 p 273).

light was debatable. Either way, their response to their new environment was not the same as the 'normals'.

Restrictions in the Smali Yard

The atmosphere in both houses, Maple and Rowan, was different to the situation in the big yard. Here the women were more aggressively vocal in their reaction to the new prison. Those allocated to these houses were mainly, although not exclusively, drug addicts, short-term remands and women who were considered to need more supervision because they had been involved in fighting or vandalism. The physical area was smaller, accommodating two houses as opposed to five. Both houses were subject to greater restrictions in that lock-back was earlier and the houses were permanently manned by officers. Those in Rowan were particularly resentful at being locked back at 7.30 in the evening when, in houses in the big yard, the women were free till 10pm. They expressed their concerns loudly and 'colourfully'. They were equally aggressive in expressing their views about and to the prison officers and openly used abusive language when talking to them. Goffman described this type of behaviour as secondary adjustment whereby the individual places a distance between the self and the social unit within which he/she is supposed to be participating. *'It is a form of self preservation which seems to happen with the very common forms of ritual insubordination, for example, griping or bitching where this behaviour is not realistically expected to bring about change. Through direct insolence that does not meet with immediate correction ...... subordinates express some detachment from the place officially accorded them'* (Goffman 1961 p276).

The behaviour of the women in Rowan followed this pattern. It was interesting to observe, on one occasion, how a particular officer on duty at the time, allowed the women to vent their anger and frustration. Despite the language used, she took no precipitate action. It immediately brought to mind research conducted at Grendon therapeutic prison in England where a key feature of staff working practices was the tolerance which officers extended towards behaviour that included the use of abusive language. In a more traditional prison it would have been treated as insubordination and punished accordingly. In Grendon the officers used alternative therapeutic strategies to address the problem (Genders and Player 1995). Similarly at Long Lartin and Albany men's prisons in England, staff talked about *'the necessity of declaring and enforcing a 'line' of acceptable and unacceptable behaviour. Yet, they also emphasised the fluidity of lines and rules'* (Sparks, Bottoms et al. 1996 p 152).

In Long Lartin where the regime was more akin to the Dóchas Centre, officers had a commitment towards *'defusing troublesome situations by various mechanisms such as the use of tact, humour and other interpersonal skills'* (Sparks, Bottoms et al. 1996 p 108).

The response of the officer in Rowan suggested what interactionists like Anselm Strauss described as 'negotiated order'. Strauss argued that the smooth running of any organisation or institution was accomplished through continual negotiations at all levels. In his research in mental institutions, he had observed that negotiated order on any given day included, not only the rules and policies of the institution, but informal agreements and understandings that allowed the daily work to get done (Strauss 1993). The action in Rowan illustrated that point. The officer continued to talk to the women quietly and responded positively to any questions they asked. She ignored the swearing and aggression. It was likely that she recognised the prisoners' disorientation and frustration with their new environment and avoided any escalation of the problem by not responding in kind. Her behaviour was also a manifestation of the symbolic differentiation between the unruffled staff and the volatile prisoner which helped re-enforce the legitimacy of the officer's role. The literature suggested that despite well intentioned moves towards prisoner empowerment, ultimately, the institutional needs demand that the power balance will always favour the officer (Carlen 2002; Hannah-Moffat 2002). How that power is exercised is very much dependent on the ethos of the prison and the skills of the prison officer (Genders and Player 1995; Sparks, Bottoms et al. 1996; Liebling and Price 2001). In this case, the officer was able to avoid conflict by holding her powers in reserve. Her tactic worked. Gradually everybody calmed down.

During the course of a morning spent talking to a group of women in Maple (the other house in the small yard), it became clear that they were similarly disillusioned with their new home. They complained that they were being treated like children because, for example, they were not allowed to visit their friends in the other houses, were forced to ask permission to use the phone or have the television on in the recreation room and had to consult an officer if they wanted to go to the school, the gym or the Health Care Unit. In addition, not only were they subject to the locked wicket gate, they were also more restricted by being in the small yard. This notion of grown women being treated like children was a common theme in the literature on women in prison (Hutter and Williams 1981; Carlen 1983; Lundstrom 1985; Hahn Rafter 1990; Shaw 1992). It was especially interesting to hear it expressed so

vehemently in a new prison where taking personal responsibility was an underlying element of the overall philosophy.

The women in Maple also felt more imprisoned and complained bitterly about being 'locked back' during the day if they were not involved in activities – school or crafts. (It transpired that but for my request to talk to them they would have been locked back). They were equally unhappy about not being able to mix with their friends in the other houses. They talked about inter-house disputes whereby if a woman in one house felt offended by something said or done by someone in another house, the whole house would gang up. It was interesting to note that despite their being arbitrarily assigned to a particular house they quickly formed a group identity (albeit a temporary one) when they considered one of their number was under threat. They attributed these disputes to their increased confinement which meant that minor irritants were likely to escalate out of all proportion. This point was illustrated during the course of the morning. One woman gave permission to another to take two cigarettes from her room and then accused her of taking more. The other girl was enraged by the accusation and voices were raised. A fight was narrowly avoided by the arrival of a senior officer who intervened in a non-confrontational way and restored calm.

Thus it appeared that at this early stage the use of the houses was being viewed by the prisoners as a method of compartmentalisation and control which fomented frustration and hostility. However, it was also clear that the feeling of disillusion and resentment was not confined to the prisoners. It was evident that the impact on the staff was equally traumatic. To many of them, the new environment confirmed their worst fears and justified their earlier apprehensions.

THE NEW STAFF WORLD

The Challenge of Space

The size and layout of the new prison, whilst being a source of disorientation to the prisoners, provided an even bigger challenge to the staff. From being detailed to work on one of three floors within the confined space of one wing, they were now spread across several buildings and in many cases, were out of sight and hearing of another officer. This change reflected similarities with the move from the old to the new Holloway where 'the new establishment was at first sensed to be disorientating,

120

bewildering and frightening, lacking an architectural structure and discipline' (Rock 1996 p 233). When writing about the influence of prison design, Fairweather argued that although there were no absolute design formulas, there were some elements common to most penal institutions. Among them he included *'the importance of the building environment, the location and size, the operational philosophy and the satisfaction and perceived safety of the staff and the relation of all of these to the design'* (Fairweather 2000 p 31).

At this very early stage in the life of the Dóchas Centre, the officers were very much exercised by the building environment. Their biggest concern, expressed on numerous occasions by many officers, was one of personal safety. There were too many blind spots in the houses and no cameras in the kitchens, recreation rooms or stairwells. Although there was an emergency alarm in their office in the house, they had not been issued with personal alarms and considered their radios an inadequate means of calling for help. In addition, their office was situated off the recreation room on the first floor which meant that it was impossible to monitor who was coming in and going out of the house. The visibility from the office was also poor and did not allow for a clear view of the recreation room. Because of faulty workmanship, the handles on some of the doors to the rooms came away in their hand. They believed that these handles could be used as a weapon or, more importantly, there was nothing to hold if it were necessary to pull the door closed on a difficult prisoner. In their view there had been more 'incidents' since the move than there had been during the last six months in the old prison. Rows had broken out; a pot of tea had been thrown at a wall, narrowly missing an officer; one prisoner had set fire to her cell and there had been a sexual attack on another woman, something, they maintained, which would never have happened in the old prison.[67] Although it was impossible to verify the claim that such an attack could not have happened in the old prison, it appeared credible as the level of surveillance had been much greater and the presence of the officers had been much more visible. It was also an environment that was familiar and consequently more reliable and likely to generate fewer problems at difficult times.

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[67] It was not until a return visit, after the fieldwork was completed, that I reviewed the 'Discipline' Book (for details see chapter 6). The total number of 'incidents' for the first year of occupation, far from reflecting an increase over the old prison, actually reflected a decrease – 377 in 1999 as against 336 in 2000, the first year of occupation. However, care must be taken with these numbers as the move **started** in the last few weeks of 1999 and it was not possible to identify in which prison the 'incidents' about which the officers were complaining had actually occurred, nor was it clear whether all such incidents were recorded.

The Governor later referred to an increase in 'incidents' immediately after the move.

"There were lots of little incidents, lots of them. I suppose that change - they say that the next most traumatic thing in your life after death is moving house.[68] And it wasn't about moving one person or four or five people. It was about moving – I think there was about 60 or 70 women. And then there was also the movement of the staff which was just as traumatic. I suppose it was just a combination of lots of tensions amongst everybody. The minute anything happened – there weren't any great systems in place. There were a lot of pressures from all different sections to have the place open. They needed spaces elsewhere and there were lots of things happening".

In the Dóchas Centre the officers felt isolated. They could spend many hours in a house without encountering another officer. A particular bone of contention, referred to in chapter 3, was the issue of the morning 'parade'. This had been the occasion, before their shift started in the old prison, when all of the officers congregated together to be allocated their duty for the day and where general information was exchanged. With the move, the 'parade' had been stopped. The reason appeared to be that it was too heavily associated with the stricter hierarchical nature of the old regime where a morning roll call was considered necessary and where officers were given their orders for the day. The concept behind the new regime was to encourage an ethos of greater self reliance and flexibility where officers could arrive for their shift and get on with their duties without further formality. For many officers, dispensing with the morning get-together added to their sense of isolation. They complained that they did not know who was working that day and had been deprived of the opportunity to have an informal social chat – they missed the early morning banter that had been so much a part of the old regime. It had been a relief valve and they had nothing to replace it. Staff in Holloway expressed similar misgivings after their move. They missed the traditional 'Centre' of the old prison where they used to gather and chat. Rock explained that *'staff of all disciplines and official visitors comment on the deprivations of casual meetings on the centre which they felt identified them as part of the institution and at which useful communication could occur'* (Rock 1996 p 250 - 251).

The cancellation of the morning parade was, in the view of the officers, symptomatic of a general breakdown in communication between the staff and the management. In any large organisation *'the system of communications must be organised by management as a set of definite 'drills' and not just left to happen haphazardly'* (Towndrow 1969 p 155 -156). He described 'drills' as clearly recognised procedures,

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[68] This is an interesting reiteration of the quotation from a former prisoner in Holloway mentioned earlier in this chapter.

in the form of local orders that all understood and which management checked to ensure that they were carried out. In the case of the Dóchas Centre these 'drills' were conspicuous by their absence which added to the feeling of insecurity and uncertainty.

The Fruits of Uncertainty

Lack of structure and absence of ground-rules was another source of dissatisfaction for the officers. There was, as yet, no defined routine for the day as there had been in the old prison. The school was not fully operational and because the women were unlocked all day, it was not clear what they were supposed to do. The rules about 'lock back' were vague (they changed during the course of that early week) and the question of women visiting other houses was enforced arbitrarily. Everything appeared to be based on trial and error rather than any specific overall plan. Although there had been some ostensible preparation for the transition (a series of one day off-site meetings for officers), procedures or instructions regarding the day-to-day operation appeared to have been missing. Under the new regime, where innovation and flexibility were encouraged, the officers were unsure of their new role and the limits of their responsibilities. In relation to English prison officers, Hay and Sparks considered that they *'have not been well served by those above them whose job it is ..... to provide them with a clear and consistent sense of identity and purpose* (Hay and Sparks 1991)'. In later research Liebling and Price concluded that *'the need for clarity* [of their role] *may encourage officers to adhere to a disciplinary or rule-orientation and to treat all prisoners alike'* (Liebling and Price 2001 p 40). At this early stage in the life of the Dóchas Centre the role of the officer was characterised by an almost total lack of clarity.[69]

The situation was exacerbated by the uncertainty and ambiguity of the new prison's role as an institution as seen from the perspective of the officers. Although the Strategy Document and Vision Statement clearly emphasised the rehabilitative nature of the new prison, faced with the day to day practicalities, the officers were ill prepared to put these aspirations into effect even if they had been fully aware of them. Many were not. There was confusion over what they were supposed to do and how they were to do it. For example, 'house' officers were responsible for updating various books to indicate who was in their house and their status. In many

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[69] It was not until many months later that an officer's Job Description was produced.

cases they did not know or they guessed. With regard to prisoners visiting other houses – some officers chastised them; others turned a blind eye. It seemed to be completely arbitrary and could vary from day to day. Whether prisoners were locked back in their rooms if they were not pursuing some activity depended very much on the house and the officer on duty at the time. The confusion between the aspirations and the practicalities reflected the perennial conflict between the rule-bound and the rehabilitative approach to prison regimes (Thomas 1972; Carlen 1983; Genders and Player 1995; Sparks, Bottoms et al. 1996).

A combination of all of these factors contributed to an overall sense of instability and discontent that at times, was almost palpable. It meant that minor problems became a major issue. One example was the irritation caused by a lack of bags for the house vacuum cleaners. In the normal course of events such an issue would have been resolved within a matter of hours but because of the confusion over who was responsible for what, it took nearly a week. The lack of resolution of relatively minor problems, in turn, had a knock-on effect on relationships – with the management on the basis that the officers felt ignored, unappreciated and misunderstood; with one another as morale was low and could be infectious; and more importantly, on relationships with the prisoners, who themselves had been unsettled by the move and were trying to readjust to an uncertain world. Rock when referring to the Holloway move, talked of *'the loss of the structure of the radial prison; the experience of a brief liminal period in which it seemed difficult for people to adapt; and profound dissatisfaction with the labyrinthine design of the anti-panoptican, worked together to engender an enduring sense of existential insecurity and anomie'* (Rock 1996 p 225). It would be an exaggeration to describe the initial reaction within the Dóchas Centre as anomic. Rock talked of *'a sustained period of anomie attended by violence, vandalism, assaults, graffiti, fire-setting, barricading and window-breaking'* (Rock 1996 p 229). Although, undeniably, there were a number of 'incidents' in the Dóchas Centre (unquantified), they were not on the scale that appeared to have occurred in Holloway. The Blundeston move had also been accompanied by a period of disruption, almost chaotic. When discussing explanations, after the event, the Governor of Blundeston had admitted *'my own inexperience and incompetence contributed largely to the situation. The attempt to develop a regime with which the staff were only briefly acquainted and even less prepared or trained to deal with, did not help them to operate effectively and delay in completing the buildings meant that they were not entirely finished when the first prisoners arrived and work was being completed around us'* (Towndrow 1969 p 167). This explanation bears a much

closer resemblance to what happened in the first few weeks of Dóchas Centre rather than the explosive impact that characterised the Holloway move.

In an interview with Governor McMahon, over a year later, she echoed similar sentiments to those expressed by the Governor of Blundeston

> "At the beginning it was total bedlam. I mean literally bedlam. I certainly wouldn't have moved at Christmas. That was really bad policy. It wasn't set up properly here. The workshops weren't opened up. The systems weren't in place. I could probably have made a better handle on the systems as such. I could have made a better handle on the routine of the day. If the time had been there, I probably could have put a little more work into the women. Like we had spoken to all the staff about the houses – the houses were totally new and how the houses were going to be run. I probably would have got a couple more people down here with me. I was down here on my own [prior to the move]. And the time of the year that was in it as well. Everyone was just moving their stuff down and nothing was set up. That was a recipe for disaster – having women hanging around the house, not knowing their way around; not knowing what was going on; introducing communal dining; having week-end visits – all of this so suddenly to 40 or 50 women who were accustomed to an old style of living. And I probably would have liked to bring five down first and then another five. I brought them down in fives alright but day by day they came down – hour by hour. I should have had the chance to bring down, maybe ten, five in each of two houses; maybe set up those houses and get them into a routine; move them in over a couple of months".

The feedback from prisoners and staff supported the Governor's view. The unsettled atmosphere in the new prison was manifest both verbally and behaviourally. One of the most noticeable differences was the absence of banter between officers and prisoners which contrasted sharply with observations in the old prison. The majority of the officers were dispirited and disillusioned and were forthright in expressing their dissatisfaction. They complained about their isolation, lack of safety, confusion about the rules and the absence of management communication and visibility. A number said that they had already applied for a transfer to other prisons. The prisoners too complained continuously. Despite the comparative luxury of the houses, they found fault with minor defects (for example, the water from the shower overflowed into some of the rooms; the washing machine in one of the houses did not work properly), the lack of response to requests and the fact that the education facilities were not available. They had little to occupy them and were stuck with the people in their own houses. Nothing seemed to run on time. Prisoners had to be called for everything. There were no published schedules of activities and there was no individual responsible for each house. All of these irritants fostered resentment and resulted in angry exchanges between prisoners and officers. In the first few weeks, everything was hit and miss – total bedlam.

CONCLUSION

Any institutional change will almost inevitably lead to a period of instability. The extent and duration of the instability will depend on a number of factors including the significance of the change; the timing; the level of preparation; the expectations of those affected and the response to the consequences. The significance of the move to the Dóchas Centre for those directly affected, was totally underestimated. They were faced with a change from a routine and familiar environment which was predictable and secure, reinforced by the panoptican design, to a new era of uncertainty in uncharted surroundings. Such a momentous event was bound to induce feelings of insecurity and disorientation. Prior to the move, expectations had been created and a level of optimism had prevailed despite some reservations and apprehensions. The timing was inopportune. The planning *immediately prior to the move* (my emphasis) was inadequate to the point of being almost non-existent. In the early stages of the project, multi-disciplinary meetings had taken place on a regular basis to agree the way forward. However, because the move itself was delayed so frequently (it had been on and off for over a year prior to it actually happening), these meetings had ceased.[70] When the issue of overcrowding in the men's prison became untenable, it forced the move to happen quickly. The result was inglorious.

The underlying philosophy of the Dóchas Centre was intended to be reflected in an architecture that eschewed the security and control trappings of a traditional prison. Paradoxically, the locked wicket gates that curtailed movement between yards and required the presence of a staff member to allow access to other areas of the prison, together with the prohibition on inter-house visits, had the unexpected consequence of creating a sense of increased imprisonment that only succeeded in fostering frustration and resentment. It is doubtful whether the consequences of the wicket gates could have been fully anticipated, either in the perceived restriction in freedom felt by the prisoners or the extent of the physical practicality of having an officer available to open and close them umpteen times a day. However, confusion and resentment could have been avoided if the rules about inter-house visits and prisoner lock-backs had been more clearly publicised and explained and more consistently enforced. Instead, the idealistic notion of providing greater freedom of movement was being circumscribed by gates and rules. If more consultation had taken place on

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[70] I saw no evidence of any detailed plans for the move. If they had existed, my only conclusion is that they must have been undocumented and very informal.

the question of house allocation, the stigma of the 'Muppet House' or the 'druggies' may not have arisen. The lack of structure to the day, coupled with the fact that the school programmes were not yet finalised and no alternative activities were provided, meant that prisoners had too much time on their hands and minor issues escalated out of all proportion.

Many of the officers were disenchanted with their new environment and of greater significance, felt ignored by the management. They considered that by contrast to the old prison, their concerns about personal safety and feelings of isolation were legitimate. Better management communication both before and immediately after the move could have avoided, or at least minimised, some of the problems experienced by the staff. In a 1964 English Prison Department internal study of communications it stated that '*it appears to be common experience of those who have tried to improve communications in large organisations that a very strong resistance to change must be expected. To change is to set out into the unknown. It is bound to cause extra work, at least until the new system has settled down*' quoted in (Towndrow 1969 p 156). How long would it take for the Dóchas Centre to settle down?

In retrospect, it seemed strange that such an exciting and forward looking venture should have been so neglected by the Prison Service hierarchy at the time it came to fruition. One possible explanation for this apparent neglect was that because the new prison was now *available* for occupation, the authorities considered that the problem of women prisoners was 'solved'. The regime in the old prison had not presented any major difficulties which may have led them to anticipate a much smoother transition. In addition, the physical move of 50 or 60 women to a new prison at Christmas time was unlikely to attract any media focus unless it resulted in a riot or a mass attempted break out. Neither occurred. Media interest had been satisfied at the time of the *official* opening, three months earlier. The Prison Service had more pressing issues, not least of which was the continued overcrowding in the male prisons, a subject which was much more likely to interest both the politicians and the general public. Those who worked in the Dóchas Centre would have to solve their own problems.

The bigger question posed by my January visit was whether the immediate reactions of both the prisoners and the staff constituted a short term setback or whether they had longer-term implications for the whole philosophy of the new prison. The following chapters will address that question - chapter 5 will concentrate on the prisoners and chapter 6 will focus on the officers.

CHAPTER 5 SURVIVING THE TRANSITION – THE PRISONERS

INTRODUCTION

Living in houses, although not a totally new concept in penal experiments for women (see chapter 1) was fundamental to the philosophy and vision of the new way forward for the Dóchas Centre. Within this more 'normal' living environment the women were expected to take greater responsibility for their own lives with the intention of being better prepared to re-integrate back into the community. How they experienced this transition is the main the focus of this chapter. It will explain how they survived the early turmoil of the move and how the issues raised during the first few weeks of occupation were addressed. It will then describe how things evolved over the following 30 months of the fieldwork and how, during that time, the women learned to settle down.[71] From about three months after the move, 'settling down' was an expression used frequently by both staff and prisoners. For many prisoners it meant participating in school programmes and other initiatives aimed at addressing their individual needs. It also involved the reality of sharing a house with people not of their own choosing and how the group dynamics within and between houses was affected by a new approach to house allocation. It encompassed the different mechanisms that the women employed to cope with their incarceration, the factors that influenced their modes of adaption and how the concept of time and timing qualified their responses. Finally, the chapter will explore how the women gradually adjusted to life within the new penological framework. Before embarking on this exploration it is important to provide a contextual framework for the women in the Dóchas Centre – their numbers, ages, offences and sentence lengths and how these had changed in the decade leading up to the move. It is also necessary to provide some insight into the prevalence of drug abuse and psychological vulnerability in order to understand their effect on the day to day operation of the new prison.

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[71] After the January visit described in chapter 4, I spent a further four weeks observing and listening in the Dóchas Centre during the year 2000 – in March, June, August and December. Formal interviews with prisoners and officers did not begin until February 2001 and they continued during a series of visits for the rest of that year, most of 2002 and part of 2003. In addition to the interviews, during all of these visits there were opportunities to observe and discuss developments as they unfolded.

Statistical Framework

The official Annual Prison Reports which contained detailed statistics on Irish prisoners were not produced between 1995 and 1999.[72] The tables printed below were produced as a result of personal access to individual records and subsequent compilation of the numbers (see chapter 3). Over this timeframe the number of women committed to the prison had more than doubled and the composition of the population also changed –Table 9

Table 9   Female Committals to Mountjoy   1990 - 2000

	1990	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000
Sentenced	169	193	158	281	299	310	278	347	288	263	262
Remands	176	241	335	261	272	286	301	409	432	396	411
Aliens									26	54	94
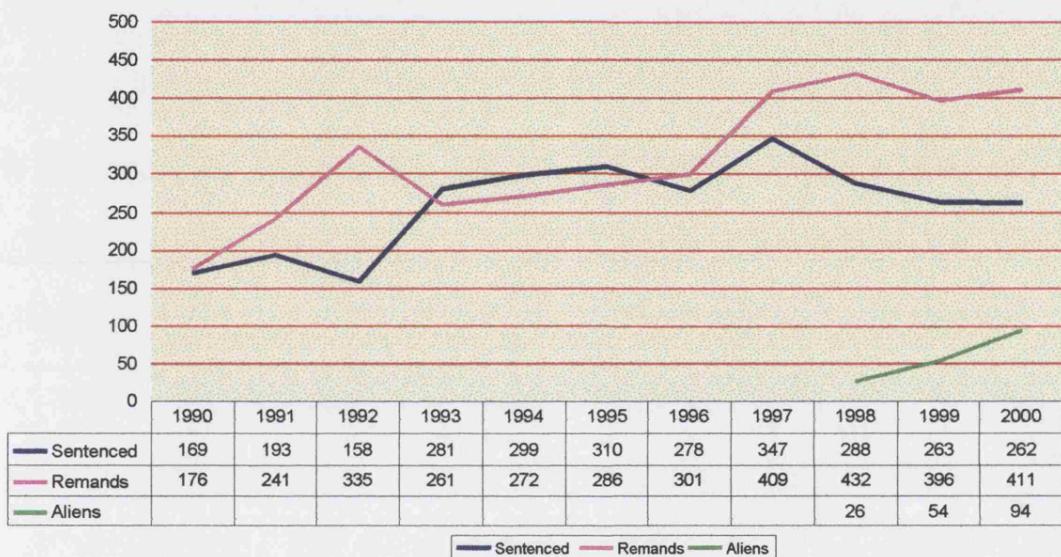
It is clear that the biggest increase was in the number of remands.[73] A possible explanation for this increase was a growing tendency for judges to use the remand option as a way of ensuring habitual offenders actually served time. It was common for women serving short sentences (< 6 months) for non-violent offences, to be granted temporary release (TR) to relieve overcrowding. TR was available only to sentenced prisoners which meant that repeat offenders of less serious offences (usually theft) might serve only one or two weeks of a three or six month sentence. Anecdotal evidence suggested that judges became aware of this anomaly when the

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[72] A one-off summary report was produced covering the years 1995 to 1998 but it contained limited data.

[73] At first sight, it seemed that the 1997 change to Bail Act in Ireland which allowed refusal of bail where there was a reasonable expectation that the person would commit further offences, may have accounted for the increase. However, as this change did not come into effect until the 22 May 2000 (Department of Justice 2002 p10), it could have had little or no effect on these numbers.

same women reappeared in court within a very short time after their release. To counteract the problem they increased their use of the custodial remand option. The anecdotal input to support this theory was compelling as it came from officers and prisoners on the inside and other interested parties on the outside.

Apart from the actual numbers, there were no other data relating to female remands. Using Ireland's 1993 imprisonment numbers (both sentenced and remand, male and female), O'Mahony calculated that the average period that a prisoner spent on remand in Ireland was approximately 12 days compared with 55 days for England and was highly divergent from the rest of Europe.[74] It appeared that this situation had not changed. To add to the committal problem, in 1998 a new category called 'aliens' began to appear. Under Irish law, 'alien' was the legal term to describe a person holding citizenship of another country or no citizenship (Grimes and Horgan 1988). They were mainly foreign nationals stopped at ports of entry who were held in the prison pending their deportation. There were 26 aliens in the committal numbers in 1998 and this increased to 94 by the year 2000. The numbers in themselves were not great and their expected sojourn was likely to be a matter of days. However, they had to be accommodated.

Of the sentenced population the vast majority of the women were aged between 21 and 39 although there was a significant minority in the 17 to 20 year old category – see Table 10. An average of around 55% had sentences of less than 6 months, many of whom would have been eligible for TR. However, those with long-term sentences of over three years, though still small in absolute terms, increased in the second half of the decade – see Table 11. Many of these were likely to be foreign nationals convicted of drug importation. The whole issue of foreign nationals was a new phenomenon in Ireland that began in the 1990s and is discussed in greater detail later in this chapter.

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[74] This was attributed to the fact that many prisoners remanded in custody awaiting trial were released within a few days after providing bail money or sureties that they were unable to provide in court or after a successful appeal to the high court against an original refusal of bail at a lower court (O'Mahony 1997 p 67).

Table 10   Mountjoy Females   Offences by Age   1990 - 2000

Legend: 50 +, 40 - 49, 30 - 39, 25 - 29, 21 - 24, 17 - 20, 15 - 16, <15
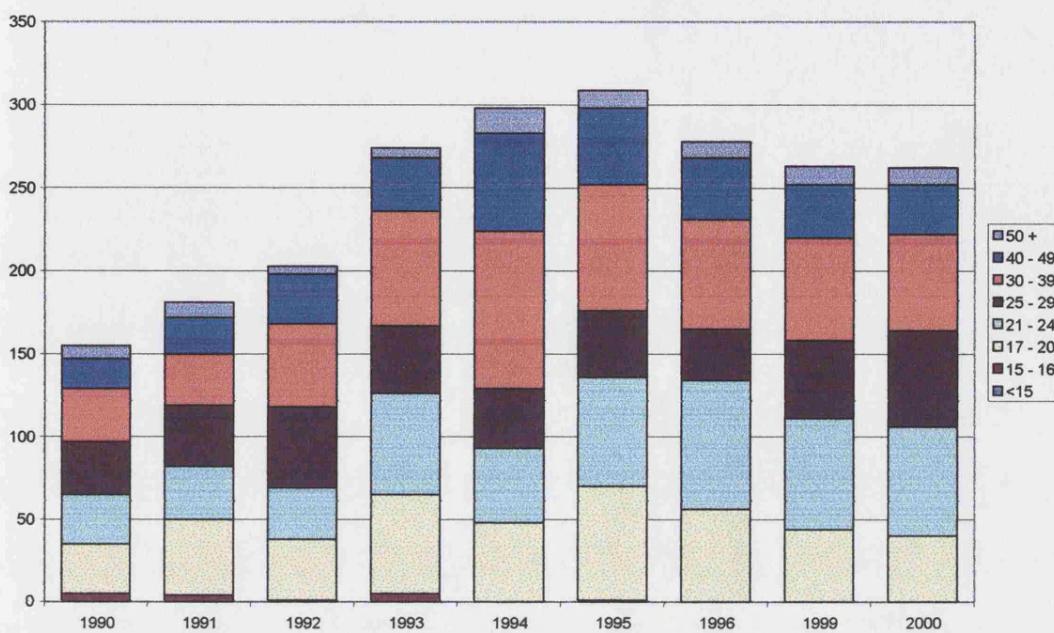
Table 11   Mountjoy Females   Offences by Sentence Length   1990 - 2000

		1990	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996	1999	2000
LIFE	(99yrs)	1	0	0	2	1	0	1	0	2
10 YRS +	(10y < 99yrs)	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0
5Y - 10YRS	(5y < 10yrs)	0	0	1	0	0	5	7	5	5
3Y - 5YRS	(3y < 5yrs)	0	0	0	4	1	9	21	8	7
2Y - 3YRS	(2y < 3yrs)	3	1	10	10	2	12	13	11	14
1Y - 2YRS	(1y < 2yrs)	25	37	31	35	35	36	45	38	30
6M - 1YRS	(6m < 1y)	53	45	37	61	42	52	58	48	59
3M - 6M	(3m < 6m)	18	23	26	44	32	31	22	42	44
< 3 MONTHS		54	75	98	118	185	164	111	110	101
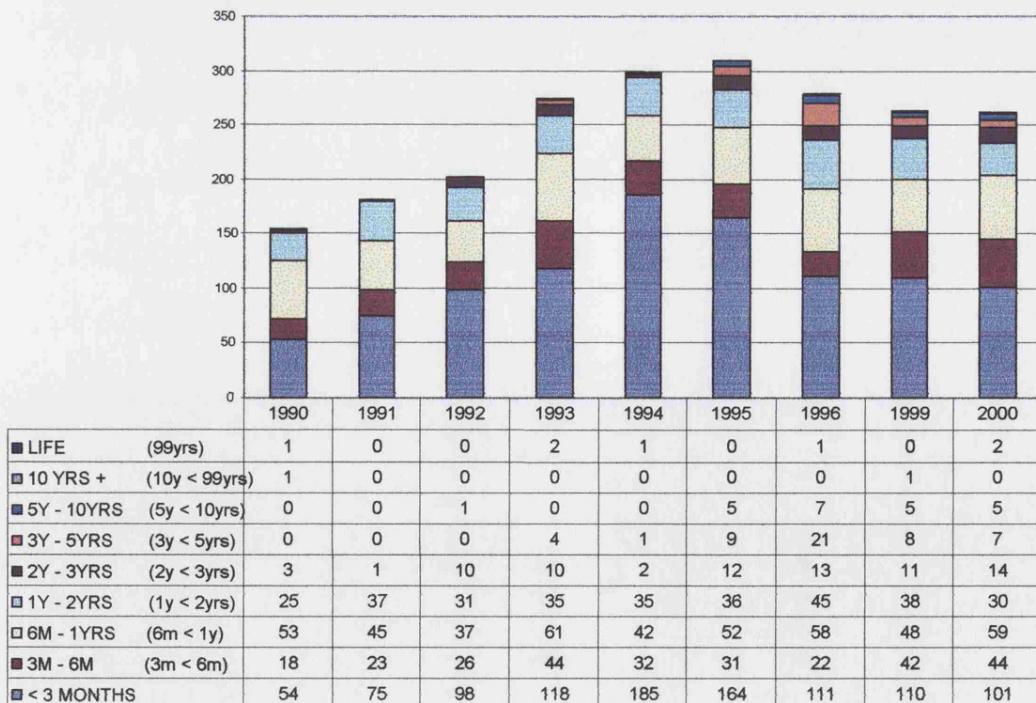
The high level of remands and short sentenced prisoners meant that more than half of the population could be considered transient. In addition, although the Dóchas Centre had been built to accommodate 80 women, during the course of the research the numbers varied from a low of 55 at the beginning when only five houses were in

operation, to a high of 105 on any one day.[75] The average over the total research period was between around 80 and 95.

The Prevalence of Drugs and Psychological Disorders

Within the population of the Dóchas Centre, as in many other prisons, the problem of drug addiction was a major issue. Although there were no up-to-date official data of the actual numbers of women involved in drug taking, anecdotal evidence and personal observation suggested that it affected between 60% and 80% of the women.

> "That is the main reason a lot of them are here [in prison]. The drugs is the major thing. They would be in for different charges. They would be in for shoplifting, for robbing, for soliciting, assault but what is at the back of it all is drugs – heroin. It has a lot to answer for. There are a few in here for alcohol, they won't touch drugs, it is just drink. Most of them – is all drug related – from what I can tell". S07

> "There are at least half of them here with a drug problem. The likes of Maple and Rowan [in the small yard], they are drug culture houses and if you went up into the likes of Elm and Hazel house you have drug people there. Although they are on drug programmes [methadone programmes] they were drug addicts as such". S04

These statements were supported by the results of earlier studies. In research undertaken by two medical practitioners in the old female prison during a six week period in 1994, they discovered that 60 of the 100 women interviewed had taken drugs at some stage in their lives; 59 of the 60 were still taking drugs when admitted to prison and over 90% were chronic addicts – they used drugs at least once per day. Although not quantified, the researchers also reported that the number of women in prison abusing drugs was likely to be higher than the general population (Carmody and McEvoy 1996 p3,7 and 18). A later study of the health of prisoners, in which a total of 777 prisoners participated of whom 59 were female, discovered that 83% of females had used drugs at some stage in their lives and the same percentage had used drugs other than cannabis and marijuana in the previous 12 months (Hannon, Kelleher et al. 2000 p37). As the vast majority of the prison population was male (98%) comparison with the general population was confined to males. In a study of

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[75] When the numbers increased, the overflow was accommodated during the night in the Health Care Unit where there were four single rooms originally intended for those who were ill. This meant that women were sometimes forced to share with three or maybe four others or, as a last resort, be forced to sleep in the padded cells as a temporary measure. During the day, if not involved in activities, they were able to use the kitchen and recreation rooms in the houses, usually Laurel house which was next door.

the prevalence of Hepatitis and HIV, conducted in both the men's and women's prisons in Mountjoy, 60% of women prisoners reported injecting drugs, mainly heroin (Allwright, Barry et al. 1999 p 1). The available data clearly indicated that many of the women in the Dóchas Centre, probably somewhere between 60% and 80%, could be categorised as drug users. [76]

On the question of vulnerability due to psychological or behavioural problems, the question of categorisation was less clear cut. It was based on either an initial assessment by one of the nurses from the Health Care Unit at the time of reception and/or a subsequent assessment by the medical staff or officers based on behaviour. Such categorisation could not avoid some level of fallibility. Labels like 'disordered', 'unstable' and 'disruptive' involved subjective judgements that often discounted the effects of imprisonment itself on a woman's sense of self and manifested itself in unacceptable behaviour (Mandaraka-Shepperd 1986; Faith 1993; Bosworth 1999; Matthews 1999). As for the prevalence of drug abuse, the anecdotal evidence was convincing

> *"There are women in Laurel House who wouldn't come out of it for weeks on end. They are just settled in there, doing their own thing. A lot of them aren't mentally well either. The regime here suits them". S10*

> *"Sometimes women come in and they may be mentally ill; maybe abused and very, very tender when they come in. So we have to put them into the Health Care". S04*

The study undertaken by the two medical practitioners in the Mountjoy females in 1994 mentioned above, also considered the issue of psychological problems. They found that 49 out of 100 prisoners had had psychiatric treatment in the past (no specifics were provided), with one in four requiring hospital admission. Of the 49 who had received treatment, 30 were drug users (Carmody and McEvoy 1996 p3 and 14). This latter point may suggest a causal connection between drug abuse and psychiatric disorders but there was no attempt in the Report to link the two, nor was there any indication as to how the experience of the women in the study compared with the general population. In the later study covering the health of the prison population, all mental health indicators were higher for females than for males. 75% of females as against 48% of males were identified as having a need for psychiatric intervention (Hannon, Kelleher et al. 2000).

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[76] There was no evidence to suggest from any of these studies that women had started to use drugs for the first time whilst in prison.

These findings were similar to results from elsewhere. Research among women prisoners in England and Wales in the early 1990s showed that 45% of women prisoners reported having had psychiatric treatment prior to their current term of imprisonment (Maden, Swinton et al. 1994 p 179) and in Scotland, 30% of the women interviewed had been seen by a psychiatrist as an outpatient and a further 20% had been treated both as an inpatient and an outpatient (Loucks 1997 p 104).

The combination of the increase and changed composition of the population together with the high incidence of drug addiction and psychological problems, was to have a significant impact on the requirements for accommodation, the dynamics within the houses and more importantly, on the overall ability to accomplish the philosophical aims. The significance was not immediately apparent but developed over time. A more pressing requirement was to attempt to address the issues raised in the immediate aftermath of the move.

A NEW ERA UNFOLDS

Implementing Routines

Over the course of the early months of 2000 (post January), most of the initial problems raised by the prisoners gradually began to subside. The wicket gates continued to be an irritant but not to the same level as they had been earlier. The women learned to adapt to their limitations by becoming familiar with the timing of events, for example, the school timetable and the dining hours, when they knew that officers would be available to open them. At other times they were opportunistic – if they saw an officer going through the gate or letting another person through, they would avail themselves of the occasion. New arrivals who had not experienced the old prison, were not aware of the perceived reduction in freedom experienced by their colleagues, so did not see the wicket gates as a particular issue. By the end of the second year, during which time everybody had become familiar with the rules about the separate yards, it was no longer considered necessary to keep the gates locked.

In the early weeks, one of the main problems had been a lack of structure to the day. Gradually, a more systematic daily routine was introduced. It was not as strictly regimented as in the old prison but was a recognisable structure as can be seen from Table 12.

Table 12 Dóchas Centre Daily Timetable

08.00	House doors/rooms unlocked
08.00 – 09.30	Receipt of medication; tidying the room/common areas; breakfast; getting showered and dressed
09.30 – 12.30	School/crafts/programmes/work; court visits; other appointments (doctor, hospital, legal); visits for remands
12.30 – 14.15	Lunch in dining room and leisure time
14.15 – 16.30	Repeat of the morning programme
16.30 – 16.45	Free time
16.45 – 17.30	Dinner in dining room
17.30 – 19.30	Leisure time and various other activities
19.30	House doors locked. Room lock in the 7.30 houses
20.30	Distribution of final medication
22.00	Room lock in the 10 o'clock house

Unlike in the old prison, the women were not bound to adhere to this routine, but as part of the new philosophy, were expected to exercise personal responsibility for organising their day – for example, they could decide what time they got out of bed, whether they went to school, whether to go to the dining room for their meals and what time they went to bed. Because of the relatively small population, this flexibility was manageable, although not always welcomed by the staff as will be explained in the next chapter. For many of the women, their life on the outside would have been largely unstructured. If the intention was to prepare them to return, it was important that they could exercise choice even if that meant doing nothing all day. If, on the other hand, the women wanted to change their way of life, adhering to a structure on the inside provided an opportunity to foster new habits which could assist them later.

The distribution of medication was undertaken in the Health Care Unit on a house rota basis between 8am and 9.30am every morning.[77] This was a vital aspect of the day for many of the women, particularly those on methadone programmes. According to one of the nurses, between 80% and 90% of the women were on some form of medication related to drug problems, alcohol withdrawal, depression, medical complaints or psychological difficulties. A similar pattern emerged from a healthcare

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[77] Medication was also distributed at other times during the day depending on need. Night time distribution took place in the houses.

study of the Irish prison population undertaken in 1999 which indicated that 37% of males and 83% of females reported taking medication (Hannon, Kelleher et al. 2000 p26). In the Dóchas Centre it was their choice to go for their medication. They also had the option of whether or not to have breakfast which they had to prepare themselves. School and other activities were provided during the morning and the afternoon and from 4.30pm the women were free until lock-up. Weekends were quiet times and many women took the opportunity to spend much of the time in bed. Visiting hours for sentenced women were restricted to Saturdays and Sundays (remands were allowed daily visits). It was also possible to receive an additional visit once a month with the permission of the Governor.[78] However, not everyone received visitors and for some, the weekends were the worst time and described as very boring. One prisoner commented *"there is absolutely nothing to do at the weekends. Everybody stays in bed"*. Some activities were provided but they were mainly limited to inter-house quizzes, gym or sports events.

As part of the notion of personal responsibility, involvement in the school and other programmes were encouraged though not mandated. In the early months, if the women chose not to get involved, they were locked back in their room and electricity to the room switched off which meant that they could not watch television. This rule, which was relatively informal, oscillated over time. When in place, it was a source of particular resentment to remands as they did not have access to the full school programme and there were limited alternative opportunities. Other women were either physically or psychologically incapable of concentrating for any length of time in a class-room and some of the older women considered that they were past the stage where they were interested in formal learning. Under the circumstances, if the women were not presenting any problems, the officers exercised their discretion when it came to lock-back.[79] Irrespective of whether the women took advantage of the opportunities on offer, the school and other programmes provided the major element of structure that had been missing in the early days of the move.

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[78] For those who did not receive regular visitors or whose family may have difficulty travelling to Dublin, there was a high degree of flexibility. I heard of exceptions being made for family members to visit during the week if domestic or work arrangements made it difficult for them to visit at week-ends. I also witnessed, on a number of occasions, families or friends of foreign nationals being allowed to spend the whole day in the Dóchas Centre. Every effort was made to facilitate maintaining family ties whether that be with parents, partners or children.

[79] During a much later visit in January 2004, I discovered that the lock-back rule no longer applied. This change was part of the ongoing evolution of the regime.

The Importance of Education

The school ran a varied and comprehensive programme that covered formal State recognised education courses up to and including University degrees (Open University); cookery courses which incorporated The National Certificate in Food and Cookery for those serving long-term sentences; computer training for all levels including the European Computer Driving License (ECDL) which is a pan-European qualification; art, photography and video production; music, woodwork, French, life and social skills; hair-dressing qualifications and physical education skills which would benefit anybody who wanted to pursue a career in the leisure industry. As part of their development, women with artistic or other talents were encouraged to exhibit and sell their paintings at outside exhibitions, to participate in literary competitions or to run courses like dancing, kick-boxing or jewellery-making during the summer months when school was closed.

The full range of courses was not necessarily available in-house. There were times when women were allowed to attend outside classes or other personal development programmes either on their own or accompanied by officers. From the prison literature it seemed that the degree of choice available in the Dóchas Centre was unusual. Education programmes for women in other penal institutions, particularly in the UK and North America, were often limited by financial considerations and in many cases, were geared to the traditional role expected of women in society (Carlen 1983; Faith 1993; Bosworth 1999; Morris and Kingi 1999; Owen 1999). Although some of these studies were relatively old, in her research in three women's prisons in England in the late 1990s, Bosworth concluded that *'the women were offered a limited range of work and education, much of which appeared to reflect traditional notions of femininity'*. She made particular reference to the subjects provided at evening classes in two of the prisons, which included flower arranging, silk painting, making soft toys, cooking and 'beauty' (Bosworth 1999 p104). Owen's work on the gendered implication of women in prison in the US discovered a similar pattern (Owen 1999 p91). In an article on prison education in general in England and Wales, Lustgarten described how the move to increased managerialism and the subcontracting of services, including education, led to a crass dictum of 'bums on seats' which made the underlying premise quite clear – *'the new dogma represented a subtle reaffirmation of expected social and class roles; instead of qualifying people in readily assimilable and marketable skills like IT and web design, with salaries that*

might compete with a criminal income, we gave them lowest common denominator qualifications that, on their own, are not likely to override the stigma of criminalisation for prospective employers' (Lustgarten 2001 p21-22). With the variety of opportunities, many of them geared to prospective employment, the Dóchas Centre was not following that trend.[80] The head of education pointed out *–"our emphasis wouldn't be on numbers. Our emphasis would be on the quality of the stuff we are doing with the women who are interested in education".*

Craft making was available to occupy those not involved in school programmes, in particular, short term remands and those not interested in more formal education. Teachers, working with officers, also ran outside adventure-type programmes that included abseiling, canoeing, hill walking and other similar activities that fostered team working. It involved taking groups of women to an area near Dublin and allowing them to participate with minimum supervision.

Encouraging Initiatives and Outside interaction

One of the most significant initiatives that was introduced during 2000 was the Connect programme.[81] It was run by a group of three specially trained prison officers who worked with groups of between five and eight prisoners at any one time. The first section, entitled Options, encouraged the women to identify their specific needs, be they educational, vocational, social, psychological or other personal requirements. Once identified and agreed, plans were developed to address them using either internal services or external agencies. The programme also covered a variety of topics from confidence building and self assertiveness to how to manage time and

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[80] Despite the variety of courses on offer, the Prison Inspector had a concern that, of the 23 subjects on offer to the women, none had a distinctively academic character. For example there was none on society, literature, philosophy, politics, history or women's studies. He considered that there may be some scope for expansion in the programme (Irish Inspector of Prisons and Places of Detention 2003 p81). It is also important to point out that the concept of 'managerialism' was not a feature of the Irish Prison Service at that time.

[81] Connect is a major European funded project which was implemented as a collaborative undertaking between the Department of Justice, The Irish Prison Service and the National Training and Development Institute of Ireland. It was directed at establishing clear and effective linkages between training and education in prison and progression to employment or training/education after release. According to the Minister of Justice (in a speech in November 2000) *"it is intended to move the offender from welfare to work, from a lifestyle of income dependency or worse, to a positive role in society"*. Its aim was to help offenders in prison to make well-informed choices about their future and to encourage them to use their time in prison to prepare for their return to the community and specifically, to the labour market. The project commenced in the men's prison in Mountjoy in 1998 and was extended to the female prison during the year 2000.

leisure and how to recognise healthy living. In addition, each group also had to complete a specific project.[82] At the end of the programme there was a 'graduation' ceremony, attended by the prisoners' families, representatives from various agencies and the women and the staff from the Dóchas Centre. These were followed by a lunch to which everyone was invited. For women who did not require the more intensive Options work, Connect helped with individual personal planning for the future. Follow-up support was available from the officers even after the women had been released.[83]

Visits to the prison from the outside world were encouraged. They included various guests – for example, Mary Robinson, the ex President of Ireland and the well-known author, Maeve Binchey. When Ireland joined the Euro-zone a speaker was invited in to explain what it meant in practical terms. Another female author officially opened the new prison library and became a regular visitor assisting the women with creative writing. Telefís Éireann (the Irish Television Broadcasting Company) broadcast midnight Mass live from the Dóchas Centre on Christmas Eve 2001. The production of an annual play which had been a feature of the men's prison since 1986, began in the Dóchas Centre during the second year and was open to the public. It was followed by a supper to which everyone was invited and provided an opportunity for members of the public to mingle with the prisoners.[84]

Other volunteers acted as 'befriender' to those women who did not receive visits and also helped provide various programmes when the school was closed during the summer months. Outside agencies visited to give practical help in the area of jobs, training, housing, counselling and other support. Representatives from all of these supporting areas were invited to an annual Christmas party which was held in the gym and included a four course meal followed by entertainment, all of which was

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[82] Examples of specific projects were the completion of an Induction Booklet for new arrivals in reception, participation in a debate with a group of male prisoners who were also involved in the Connect Project (I had an opportunity both to help coach for the debate and to attend) and the production of AIDS quilts in memory of a family member or a friend who had died as result of drug taking.

[83] I witnessed a number of examples where women who had been involved in the Connect programme continued to seek help and support from the officers after their release.

[84] I attended many of these events and witnessed the interaction between the prisoners and those from outside. On one occasion, a member of the public who had never been in a prison before, told me of his amazement at how ordinary the women were and how the visit had helped change his outlook.

organised and run by the officers and the women.[85] To promote closer interaction with the wider community (as per the Vision Statement) group visits were also encouraged to enable people from the outside to gain some level of understanding of what went on inside.

Whereas *individual* visitors were generally welcomed by the women, the constant stream of *group* visits, particularly school groups, was often considered an unacceptable intrusion. The women complained they were being treated like animals in a zoo. For some whose children were not aware of their incarceration, there was a permanent worry about recognition and disclosure. This worry was likely to arise from the stigma attached to being in prison. Goffman argued that whereas such information may safely be shared with other adults within the family, children could be seriously damaged by such knowledge (Goffman 1963 p71). Others, whose cases had been well publicised, felt particularly vulnerable to intrusive scrutiny and were forced to go into hiding during the course of such visits to avoid providing vicarious pleasure to the curious. In Goffman's terms they could be considered as belonging to an especially stigmatised group whose identity was circumscribed by their public image (Goffman 1963).

The combination of education, development programmes, various initiatives and outside visits helped provide both a welcome diversion and more importantly, a focus and a structure to the day that had been missing when the move had originally taken place. The other issue that had caused concern in the immediate aftermath of the move related to the perceived arbitrariness of allocation to the houses.

Introducing Privilege

One of the *original* aims of the design of the Dóchas Centre had been to facilitate the separation of remand from sentenced prisoners and the drug addicts from the drug free. It was interesting to hear the opinion of Governor Lonergan on the subject of segregation

> "A lot of the thought originally, would have been that the remand women and the convicted women were to be kept separate. Also the philosophy was that some of the girls would be disruptive and difficult to manage and they might abuse the freedom that was envisaged, the openness. There would be a facility there to divide and segregate. There is a great argument about that in law as well as in everything else, that you have to keep them separate. And

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[85] My husband and I attended two of these events which, apart from the absence of alcohol, were reminiscent of office Christmas parties on the outside.

while there are some legitimate arguments for it, I would say that the negatives outweigh it. There is a perception and belief that innocent people come in on remand and all the corrupt people on conviction. That is not true. You can have some of the most corrupt women on remand – there is no guarantee in the world that a person on remand is any better than a person doing a life sentence. I actually believe that a mixture of people sometimes is a far healthier thing than segregating them with all the difficulties that go around that".

When the Dóchas Centre first opened, only five of the houses were operational and as a matter of expediency, allocation to the houses had been mainly arbitrary. This had given rise to resentment by those who considered they had been allocated unfairly (see chapter 4). Within three months of occupancy, all seven houses were in use. By that time, it had become obvious that the practicalities of the *original* aims of the design were inhibited by the rise in the number of remands and the high proportion of drug addicts. In March 2000, a more 'sophisticated' approach to allocation was formally introduced which was intended to operate as a privilege system.

The notion of privilege is not new in penal thinking. The early years of Mountjoy had been dominated by the Crofton system described in Chapter 2. In 1863, the female prison reformer, Mary Carpenter, described how a woman's successful re-entry into society will depend "*not on her simply abstaining from the breach of prison rules, but on her absolute effort to overcome her vicious inclinations, and co-operate with those placed over her in the work of reformation"* (Carpenter 1863 p42). Despite the passage of years, the new privilege system in the Dóchas Centre had similar aims, albeit not expressed in such judgmental terms. The idea was to encourage good behaviour and participation in education or other programmes. It was also intended to provide an incentive for the more volatile drug abusers to stabilise on a methadone programme. In this way women could earn the privilege of moving from the small to the big yard. Once in the big yard, depending on ongoing behaviour they could eventually move to the more privileged houses, first Elm and then to Cedar. The new privilege system also involved an element of pragmatism in that short–term remands, irrespective of their status were likely to remain in the small yard and women considered more vulnerable, based on their emotional or psychiatric state, would be accommodated either in the Health Care Unit (if they were considered to be in danger of self harm) or assigned to Laurel House which was next to the Health Care Unit in the big yard. Phoenix, the pre-release house, was the smallest and most

privileged house and was mainly reserved for long-term prisoners nearing the end of their sentence, most of whom went out to work during the day.

All committals were drug tested on arrival at the Dóchas Centre although not subject to internal body searches. Many openly admitted their drug-taking habits. Those who were, or had been, on drugs became subject to regular urine tests and if they were in a higher privileged house and their test results were positive, they were meant to be moved to a lower privileged house as a punishment. Also, if a visitor was caught passing drugs, the prisoner lost privileges and was restricted for a time to screened visits only which meant being separated from her visitor/s by a large glass screen. Availability of drugs within the prison was recognised as an ongoing problem. The risk had been acknowledged by the original Strategy group. However, treating people with respect was part of the Vision and internal body searches and forbidding physical contact during visits was incompatible with that aim.

Notwithstanding the minor anomalies created by short term remands and vulnerable prisoners, it soon became clear that the operation of the privilege system was being compromised by the high incidence of drug addiction and the continuing increase in the number of committals.

THE REALITY OF PRIVILEGE

The Impact of Drugs

After the new concept of house allocation had been in operation for some months, opinions varied as to its equity and effectiveness. Allocations frequently had to be made on the basis of space availability irrespective of prisoner status. For example, a new arrival could be allocated immediately to Elm or Cedar house because a room happened to be vacant, or a woman could be moved to the big yard even if she had not yet stabilised on a methadone programme. The opposite situation also arose where a woman found taking drugs should have been moved to a less privileged house but was not. The following helps illustrate the point

> "We have a girl who has been moved out from Cedar into Elm house for using, but she has been using for months. So she wasn't moved out after the first three or four times – this has been going on for months. So the other girls have the attitude, "why should I bother, because they are leaving her there anyway. So I am not going to get a step up". So that means with the little bit of encouragement, that the reward is gone for them". SO5

"I was in the 10 o'clock house. I was thrown over here for one dirty urine for punishment. I fucked it up by one dirty urine but there are still people in there and they are on drugs but because I gave one dirty urine, I ended back over here in the secure unit" [the small yard]. *P18*

The Governor and other members of staff acknowledged that the privilege system was not operating as intended. A couple of months after it had been introduced, officers believed that drugs were everywhere, particularly in Elm which was ostensibly drug free. The allegation was confirmed by some of the women. There was also evidence of drug use in Hazel when one morning three women who had been called to the Health Care Unit for a urine test, admitted on their return, that their results had been positive.

Officers continued to express disquiet about how the privilege system was operating

"It is a good idea to work around but it is not really happening like that. We have loads of committals coming in so they are all put into the small yard so the girls there are moved into the big yard then. The better of them, the ones who are on maintenance [methadone] and stuff like that are on this yard whereas the drug users supposedly are in the small yard but the thing is that the drug users are in every house. They are all using all over the place. The idea is good but it just isn't happening because of the numbers". SO1

The anecdotal evidence on the level of drug abuse in the privileged houses was sufficient to conclude that the privilege system was being undermined. When Goffman described his concept of the total institution, he referred to privileges with a spatial dimension with *'one ward or hut acquiring the reputation of a punishment place for especially recalcitrant inmates'* (Goffman 1961 p 54). To some extent that is how the small yard was seen both by the management and the prisoners. It was used to house drug addicts when they first arrived and women were moved there from the big yard as a punishment. Although it is extremely unlikely that the women would have been aware of Goffman, for some, the small yard was reminiscent of his 'punishment place'.

"The last house I was in over in the small yard – Maple. That yard is really for punishment and when you first come in to get off drugs and things like that. And then you could be lucky and get promoted and put into the 10 o'clock house". PO8

Smith, discussing the workings of the privilege system operating in women's prisons in the UK in the 1800s, argued that it did not work very well because of lack of space and concluded that *'it depends rather on convenience and circumstances than on a settled principle'* (Smith 1962 p 95). To some extent this was true in the Dóchas Centre where the application continued to be problematic. The question of equity

posed an ongoing challenge but another, unexpected repercussion of the privilege system emerged over time – the reaction to foreign nationals.

The Issue of Foreign Nationals

The arrival of increased numbers of foreign nationals within Irish society in the 1990s was a new and controversial phenomenon which would merit a separate thesis in its own right. Ireland had been a country of sustained emigration until the economic boom created by Celtic Tiger in the 1990s (see chapter 2). It has its own indigenous ethnic minority – The Travelling Community, around 0.05% of the population, who have lived on the margins of society and have often been despised and ostracised (Heron, Barry et al. 2000).[86] Apart from the Travellers, Ireland was an overwhelmingly mono-cultural, Roman Catholic country with an insignificant number of foreign born residents. The prevailing attitude towards foreigners was probably less one of deliberate rejection or exclusion than an informally codified value system whereby those who were different *'knew their place'* (Mac Einri 2001 p 59). In James Joyce's Ulysses, the following exchange took place

> *"Ireland, they say has the honour of being the only country which never persecuted the Jews. Do you know why? .... Because she never let them in, Mr Deasy said solemnly".* (Joyce 1968 p42)

In a similar vein, the *European Parliamentary Committee of Inquiry on Racism and Xenophobia* (1991) took the view that Ireland was remarkably free from racism because *'there is not a large presence of foreigners'.* According to this report

> *'The number of known cases of racial harassment or violence is very small compared to other countries. However, precisely because of the insignificant foreign population, the few cases* [the report goes on to mention] *are indicative of some racism and xenophobia which could reach more dangerous levels if there were more foreigners, particularly non-Europeans'* (Casey and O'Connell 2000 p20).

In the event, this proved to be the case. In the early 1990s, a number of refugees had been allowed into the country, mainly from the former Yugoslavia, as part of a planned programme for political refugees. However, from 1994 onwards, the number making their own way to Ireland and applying directly for refugee status increased dramatically – Table 13.

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[86] The genetic origins of the Irish Travellers differs from that of their Romany and Gypsy counterparts and are generally more closely associated with the Irish settled population than other nomadic people (Heron, Barry et al. 2000). The prevalence of members of the Travelling Community in the Dóchas Centre was not part of this study. There were some who openly declared it but there did not appear to be any difference in their behaviour or the way they were treated.

Table 13   Applications for Asylum in the Republic of Ireland   1991 - 1997

Applications for Asylum in the Republic of Ireland, 1991-1997
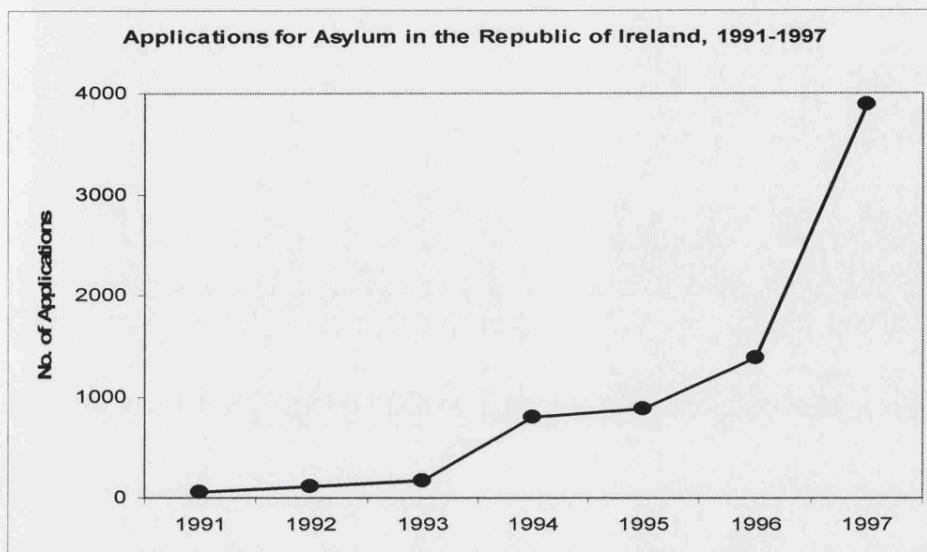
Source: (Curry 2000 p138)

Research carried out in inner city Dublin in 1998 concluded that the level of hostility to refugees arriving in Dublin was high. There was an assumption that all refugees were economic refugees and that they had come to Ireland to exploit the social welfare system (Curry 2000 p 151).[87]

Another research project aimed at understanding the role of 'acculturation ideologies' (the process that occurs when one culture encounters and reacts to another culture) was conducted among students of three universities in Ireland in 1997. The findings concluded that cultural insularity was the most significant single feature of Irish society and provided that students adapted to Irish cultural values, beliefs and social norms (for example, embracing the pub culture), they were accepted. However, black students began to experience a marked increase in verbal abuse from the mid-1990s with the arrival of refugees and asylum seekers from sub-Saharan Africa. They also experienced an increase in discrimination against them by public officials, particularly at airports and other points of entry (Boucher 2000 p 244 and 256).   In addition, although the number of refugees was comparatively small, media representation used the flood metaphor to describe them. They were portrayed as acquiring income by illegitimate means, exploiting the welfare system and engaging in begging (Curry 2000 p 146).

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[87] To add to this accusation, babies born to 'foreigners' were automatically entitled to Irish citizenship and more importantly, so were their parents. This situation also caused resentment.

The increased presence of foreigners in the country in general was reflected in an increase in the number of foreign nationals within the prison. Excluding women from the UK, the number of foreigners committed to the women's prison, either sentenced or remand in 1995 was 3. By the year 2000, this number had increased to 36 plus 95 aliens (there were no aliens recorded prior to 1996). It was against this background that a new dimension gradually evolved as a result of the privilege system.

Privilege and 'Foreigners'

In the early months of the research the only specific reference to foreign nationals was made by two English women and two black South Africans who told me they considered the Irish to be racist. Initially, my only overt evidence to that effect was one evening when two white South Africans were publicly subjected to quite aggressive name calling from a group of women in the big yard. Although there were officers within ear shot, there was no attempt at intervention. Later, during the formal interviews, the issue of foreign nationals became more explicit and arose most frequently in the context of house allocation.

Cedar, the most privileged house (often called the 24 hour house because the rooms were not locked), was the cause of particular controversy. Women were moved to this house for being drug free and unlikely to cause any trouble. Foreign nationals in particular, fell into this category. (Foreign nationals constituted between 20% and 25% of the total inmates of the Dóchas Centre at any one time during the research period). They were likely to be 'drug mules' but not drug addicts, serving long sentences – from four to ten years. They tended to be slightly older, with no known previous convictions and were usually model prisoners. Consequently, they quickly moved to Cedar house which, at one point, was referred to as South Africa house. Although Irish women also moved to Cedar, foreign nationals were in the majority – between 60% and 70%. This was a cause of particular resentment from the indigenous population. During the interviews at least 8 Irish women raised the subject either directly or indirectly. The following is a typical example of the sentiments expressed

> "They offer the 24 hour house to very few of my own, the likes of me. They are all foreign. I am not a racist or anything. They say that you have to work your way around – these girls didn't work their way around, they just walked into it. I think it is very unfair. It is resented by a lot of the girls. Because it disheartens you. You are told that you work your way into them and you do and you work and you clean for them [the staff] and you do this for them, and then you don't even see these people [the foreign nationals] – they haven't gone through the

system or gone around and next you see them walking out of the 24 hour house. I think that is wrong. P04

"Don't get me wrong, I say I am racist but I think Cedar gets a lot more than we do. Anything going in this prison, they get it. I know they are from a foreign country and this that and the other but what is thrown in our faces is – 'ah they are not on drugs'. That is always what is put down to us. It kind of pisses me off. It is making people who are not racist turn into being racist. If a contract[88] came in tomorrow they would be the first – oh yes, we can do it. They are not giving anyone else a chance". P06

The officers agreed that foreign nationals were likely to move swiftly to Cedar house but their perspective was very different to that of the prisoners

"Nearly all the foreign nationals are in Cedar and that is a big bone of contention with the other prisoners. You earn your way around is the theory but it is not the practice. Generally everybody in Cedar House – they are absolutely no problem. You know they are going to be fine there. In that respect it might just take them three or four days to get from Rowan to Cedar but you know from somebody coming in the door whether they are going to be good or not, or nice or not or work the system or not.[89] That is why they get there so quickly. There is no point in making them take months to get around to Cedar when you know that they are suitable for Cedar. A lot of Irish women would say – "if I was black I would get smokes" - not necessarily cigarettes but they get looked after and she doesn't because she is white and Irish and a drug addict. They would see that as unfair. But they wouldn't see the fact that there are not too many drug addicts over there or that they are fairly trustworthy. They never give you any hassle. They are pleasant, they are mannerly" S10

Because eight people expressed antagonism towards foreign nationals in the context of house allocation one cannot necessarily conclude that racism was a major feature of life in the Dóchas Centre. However, the force with which they expressed their views, coupled with the other earlier indicators, suggested it was not too far beneath the surface. Another possible explanation for antagonism towards foreign nationals who were mainly drug mules, was the notion of a moral hierarchy which is a common feature of prison society (Clemmer 1958; Sykes 1958; Irwin and Cressey 1962; Matthews 1999). There was no evidence to suggest that foreigners were looked down on by the Irish women from any sense of moral superiority. On the contrary, if any form of hierarchy were operating in the Dóchas Centre, it was more likely that the

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[88] She was referring to contracts for work, for example, sewing shoes or packing Christmas cards. It was often, though not exclusively, the foreign women who got those jobs.

[89] What the officer implied in this context was that if a new committal were drug-free it would immediately count in her favour. Officers were also likely to be influenced by a woman's demeanour and how she responded when questioned. Initially, it would be a very subjective assessment. Subsequent allocation to a particular house required input from a senior officer and approval by the Governor.

active 'druggies' would be relegated to the bottom of the pile as they were often disruptive and aggressive which could cause problems both within and between houses.

Interestingly, during an interview with a black South African, she maintained that she had not experienced any antagonism from the other prisoners but had from the prison officers.

> "The officers are not the same. I am sorry to say but they are racist. But some are OK. The racism here is a lot. It is not necessary to call people names. I am from South Africa. I know what racism is. I don't know how to put this but in South Africa the racism is better than this. There are officers in this prison – they still think that maybe black people are not human. There are officers here who are bad. Put it that way". P24

Governor McMahon acknowledged that there was ill feeling towards foreign nationals within the Dóchas Centre and explained that they were trying to counteract it through educating the women and the staff.[90] Efforts were also made in small ways to address the issue – for example, when a barbecue was arranged in the summer months, the different nationalities were encouraged to provide entertainment representing their own country; inter-country cookery competitions had been held; drama events were used as an opportunity to facilitate multi-country integration.

Although the issue of allocation continued to cause friction it would be an exaggeration to suggest that it was the dominating aspect of living in houses. Unlike in the old prison where the women were all together in one wing, they were now restricted to living with a much smaller group within each house. Notwithstanding the fact that the women could mingle in the school, the gym, the dining area and the gardens, being confined to one house had particular implications for community living.

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[90] Unlike the UK, Ireland has only comparatively recently been faced with the issue of race relations. The development of Government policy has been piecemeal and coordination among Government departments has been poor. Some progress has been made but slowly (Mac Einri 2001). On the specific subject of prisons, some time after the fieldwork was completed, a Report prepared for the Irish Prison Service by a firm of consultants, entitled *Research and Training Project for Intercultural Awareness* was published. This project had taken place in Wheatfield, one of the men's prisons in Dublin. The objective was to '*evaluate a research and training programme to determine the nature of intercultural awareness, communications and racial equality within the prison with a view to subsequently informing broader policy*'. The training was aimed at both prisoners and staff and was a recognition by the Irish Prison Service that a problem existed and needed to be addressed. The outcome proposed a series of recommendations which included the integration of an intercultural awareness programme as part of the induction training for both staff and prisoners.

THE DYNAMICS OF COMMUNITY LIVING

Household Tensions

From both formal and informal discussions it was clear that many of the women were pleased with the social interaction opportunities accorded by having their own kitchen and recreation area within the house. However, the enjoyment of these facilities was contingent on their relationship with the people with whom they had to share. Of the 19 women interviewed who had experienced more than one house, 18 acknowledged that the main difference had nothing to do with the privilege but everything to do with the other residents as the following examples indicate

> *"The houses are grand. It is just some of the girls they put in are – some of them are not with it, they are not the full shilling* [have not got all their mental faculties]*, some of them, you know ". P01*

> *"Just different people – that is all. It could be different because some of them are snobby and some of them are nice. Some of them are bossy or whatever so sometimes it is different and sometimes not" P09*

> *"It is all the same. It makes no difference. The difference is in the people, not in the houses".* [91] *PO2*

Relationships in the houses in the small yard were likely to be more problematic because of the volatile status of many of the occupants and the constant turnover. Although there was no data available on turnover it was likely that the majority of the occupants were there for a few days or maybe a couple of weeks. Prisoners on short-term remand posed a particular problem. They seldom attended school because they assumed an early release and were often hanging around all day with nothing to do. A woman in Maple complained to me

> *"Remands are disruptive. I mean, I am here a long time now compared to other people coming in for a week and getting out on bail. They are coming in but they don't give a care what happens here. They come into a room and they don't care if they smash their tele or write on the walls, as you can see, on the blinds and on the doors. Because they don't live here. They know they are going in a week's time. There is a few of us here a while and it is the likes of us who have to suffer by all this". P18*

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[91] When she says "it is all the same" she was referring to the houses themselves. They were structurally the same - Cedar was bigger, having three stories where the rest had only two. That was the only difference. The layout and facilities were the same in all except Phoenix, the pre-release house. (The latter was recognised as 'different' but was not the subject of resentment). The houses in the small yard were not maintained quite so well as those in the big yard because of the very high turnover of the population.

Because of the tensions, the slightest perceived offence could result in a fight. On one occasion when a group of women in Maple were chatting, a minor dispute arose and a fight was narrowly avoided by the arrival of a senior officer. The incident led to a general discussion about fighting. The consensus of opinion was that you cannot afford to be a 'shrinking violet' if threatened. It was necessary to be able to stand up for yourself, a notion that was raised again later during interviews

> *"It could be grand this week and next week all of a sudden there could be murder going on in the house.[92] You have to watch everything you are saying as well. That is a big thing in prison. And even though you are always walking around I do still kind of have to watch my back. I don't know it is me being paranoid or what. But I have asked a few of the girls and they said they were the same way. They don't know if someone is going to come up to them and say – you said this, just to start a fight. Also, an awful lot of girls ask me to hold back my medication* [retain it to pass on to them later]. *I would do it just to keep them away. I said it to the nurse and she used to stand there and watch me take it and then I could say to the girls – "I'm sorry but I am being watched". They would leave me alone then. It is part of sticking up for yourself". P08*

> *"There are a lot of girls in here, you get your mouths, they would eat the head off you but as soon as you fucking stand back up to them, they are, you know what I mean. If you let someone make a smart comment at you and you don't turn and answer the comment back, they take that as you are not willing to stand up for yourself, or who the fuck does she think she is? You always have to jump back. You have to have an attitude about you – like, fuck you, who do you think you are? They get tired of it. You don't have to bother with them then". P19*

The discussion about fighting also involved the notion of respect.

> *"Over here* [in the small yard] *we are all individuals and respect each other for who we are and what we have. Nobody is bigger than nobody and nobody is smaller. But there is some girls that could be two faced. They talk about you and carry stories and make a little thing that size into a big huge problem. Then there are arguments and fights and things like that". P11*

In a 1990s study of the specific milieu of Latino, African-American and Asian-Pacific female gangs in San Francisco, the notion of respect was more concerned with 'respectability', an important dimension of 'being feminine' and involved both appearance and conduct to signify status as a respectable woman. In this context respectability had connotations of class as working class girls were consistently categorised as dangerous and threatening and without respect but because they were also involved in street culture, they had to learn to stand up for themselves (Laidler and Hunt 2001 p 665). Recognising that one cannot generalise from one

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[92] The use of the word 'murder' refers to 'trouble'. The Irish have a tendency to use exaggerated words to emphasise a point. It happened quite frequently during the research and was an example of where cultural affiliations proved useful.

example, and that the women in the Dóchas Centre were not necessarily part of a street culture, the notion of respect in their social world within the prison demanded that they be *seen* to be able to stand up for themselves. At the same time, for women from well-known criminal families, their notion of respect was inextricably linked to the notoriety of their families.[93] They had to be seen to be tough and exhibited their toughness by verbal aggression both with other prisoners and with the officers. The notion of respect also arose in relation to drugs as one officer explained

> *"it could be a power struggle in relation to one or two people in the house having access to drugs and they would get respect in that way in that people would want to be their 'friend'. It would usually be, if they are your friend, when I get my hash or my heroin on the visit, I will share it with you. And when you get your hash or your heroin on your visit you share it with me. That can be the cause of conflict in some of the houses because there might be a power struggle thing going on with a couple of women in the house". S15*

The houses in the big yard were not immune from conflict, particularly Cedar. Because the occupants were mainly long-term and drug free they were distrustful of those who earned the privilege of moving in by overcoming their addiction. One [Irish] woman to whom this applied explained

> *"No it wasn't nice at first* [when she was first moved into Cedar]. *They* [the other occupants] *were so sweet to my face and yet they were saying they didn't want junkies in their gaff* [drug addicts in their house]. *They forget Barbara, they brought the shit* [drugs] *into the country. But they never were straight and never said it to my face. I stayed upstairs in the upstairs rec* [recreation room] *with X* [another ex drug addict who had moved to Cedar]. *We were the only two people in that rec, none of the rest came into us. Certain people didn't want us to come in. They think they have the right to choose who comes in and out. But they don't. This is a prison. But it is such a small prison everything gets back to you. Now I think they are kind of changing their tune. They have got to know me where they didn't know me and they are alright".*
> *P04*

The more generous spatial arrangement of the Dóchas Centre, paradoxically, could both facilitate and inhibit antagonistic groups avoiding one another. If they were in separate houses, it was relatively easy to keep them apart. It was more difficult if they were in the same house, particularly if that house was not permanently supervised. Avoidance was somewhat easier in Cedar because of its size but, as has already been mentioned, so much depended on the occupants and their willingness or otherwise to integrate. An older, long-term resident of Cedar had this to say

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[93] There were a number criminal families in Dublin who had a high media profile mainly in connection with violent crime and drug dealing. These families frequently featured in the newspapers and were the subject of non-fiction books.

"I think the long term prisoners should have a small house for themselves. There are 18 people here and it changes a lot. People who have to do a long time have problems with that. Because they [the younger ones] come in and then they are out in two weeks. That is difficult if you have to stay here for years and years. You have people here who have to stay for five years and they don't want to see them coming and put the whole lot upside down. Everything is a problem. They come in and annoy everybody and then they go. That is why most of us stay away then until they are gone again. Because it is difficult and it is not good to tell them anything because for them it is just fun".
P02

The sentiments expressed here raised two interesting points – one relating to length of sentence and the other to age. One of the basic deprivations that constituted the pains of imprisonment was loss of autonomy (Sykes 1958). On the one hand, doing time involved being forced to share limited and controlled space with people not of your choosing. On the other, in order to survive, interaction with other people was essential. For longer-term prisoners this was particularly important. Cohen and Taylor described the social/psychological needs of long-term prisoners in the security wing of a men's prison. Choice was restricted but having one or two friends could sustain the various functions which would normally be spread across several people on the outside – some one to talk to, laugh with, share personal histories and anxieties with. The dilemma arose when the friend was moved on (Cohen and Taylor 1972).

This dilemma was more evident in Cedar where the majority of the women were likely to be long-term.[94] Friendships developed which resulted in great sadness when one of the friends was released. It was especially noticeable for women over 40 as they were few in number and their choice of possible friends in their own age group was more restricted. They also had the added disruption of the temporary presence of younger women who, in their view, were constantly playing loud music or ignoring the house rules. A similar reaction was reflected in the result of research in two women's prison in the US where older women complained that younger women were difficult to understand and get along with (Kruttschnitt, Gartner et al. 2000 p 700).

Despite the difficulties, household dissensions were often short lived, particularly in the small yard where the turnover of prisoners was more frequent. Long term issues between people or among groups were more likely to be resolved by avoidance.

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[94] Length of sentence *per se* did not result in being allocated to Cedar. But, as already mentioned, it was more likely that long term prisoners were drug free and well behaved. There were also long term prisoners in the other houses and there were also occasions when women were moved from Cedar for breaking the rules.

Arguably such household tensions are a normal feature of everyday living in any household and as such a good preparation for life after release. A more common and all pervasive source of conflict was the mundane subject of cleaning.

Sharing the Chores

In the old prison, the day to day domestic chores required to maintain the wing, were allocated to prisoners and subject to a clear set of rules. As part of the new concept of community living, the women were expected to take responsibility for their own domestic chores within the house. It was up to them to decide how it was managed – to ensure that the communal areas were kept clean and tidy and that communal stocks of tea, sugar, milk and bread were replenished on a daily basis. This topic was a cause of disruption and dissent in all of the houses at some stage. Attempts were made to resolve it through house meetings with the Governor. Things would improve for a time but, because of the continuously changing population, it was never satisfactorily resolved.

It was interesting to note that a *lack of structure* to the day had been one of the main issues highlighted by the women when they first moved into the Dóchas Centre (see chapter 4). Paradoxically, trying to establish a structure for managing the household chores appeared to present insuperable difficulties. On reflection, it was not surprising. Domestic chores are seldom viewed as a desirable task in any community environment. Within most families, who does the household chores is frequently a cause for dissension requiring intervention by parents. In other forms of community living, for example, religious communities, the problem is overcome by virtue of the vows of obedience. In institutions like boarding schools, military establishments and traditional prisons, domestic arrangements are likely to be mandated. In settings of a more social nature, where groups live together on a temporary basis, say for holidays, without a strong element of cooperation, disputes or resentment over domestic arrangements are almost inevitable. Even for the kibbutz movement in Israel, where community living was characterised by mutual support and co-operation, sharing domestic chores posed a problem (Spiro 1956 p77). Failing to take one's turn doing distasteful tasks was considered unacceptable behaviour by the rest of the community and created tensions that were not easily resolved (Blasi 1986 p51).

Successful community living is dependent on adhering to a set of rules that require the co-operation of the participants irrespective of motive. Unlike in many other instances where people live together voluntarily, in the Dóchas Centre the women were not there by choice and without some form of coercion, had little reason to co-operate other than through a spirit of community. This was a difficult concept to instil within such a diverse group with no knowledge of their level of domesticity in their outside lives and even more difficult to maintain due to the transient nature of the population.

Women's lower level of offending have led to assumptions about their being more conformist generally and more prepared to adhere society's rules (Naffine 1987; Heidensohn 1996). This may be true in society in general but within the specific milieu of a prison, it was questionable. On the contrary, a common theme in the literature on women in prison was the extent of their non-compliance with prison rules (Carlen 1983; Padel and Stevenson 1985; Mama, Mars et al. 1987; Faith 1993; Bosworth 1999; Matthews 1999; Kruttschnitt, Gartner et al. 2000). There could be many complex reasons for this phenomenon but the issue of avoidance of house chores might be illustrative of a weak sense of conformity within the specific setting of a prison. On the other hand, emphasis on domesticity need not necessarily be viewed as perpetuating a gendered model of female imprisonment as suggested in much of the literature (Carlen 1983; Hahn Rafter 1990; Walklate 1995; Bosworth 1999). It could equally be seen as a small but practical application of the philosophy of encouraging women to take responsibility and more importantly, of learning to resolve issues among themselves which is a common requirement of everyday living on the outside. Generally, they succeeded but as already mentioned, the diversity of the population and the high turnover of occupants mitigated against a permanent solution to the issue of chores.

The high turnover of prisoners undoubtedly affected the dynamics of community living and how people within the houses were able or willing to integrate. Being in prison means you are forced to interact with people you might otherwise not choose to be with (Sykes 1958; Giallombardo 1966; Girshick 1999). The Dóchas Centre was no exception. However, despite the difficulties, overall the women appeared to succeed in getting on even if only on a superficial level.

Getting On

Because of the layout of the Dóchas Centre it was only possible to observe relationships in the houses on an *ad hoc* basis. I was therefore reliant on feedback from the women to gain a better understanding of how they considered relationships with one another operated overall. When formally questioned, 15 out of 20 women said that they got on well with everybody; two said they got on well with some people and the other three were non committal.

> "I get on great with everyone in this house. I get on great with everyone in the prison" P06

> "I get on great with every one of them. I have never had an argument with anyone in here" P23

> "We all get on great [in Elm]. The front door gets locked at half seven so we can't get out of the house. We usually sit in the sitting room at night and watch a film and have a bit of a laugh. If there is nothing on, sit in the kitchen, the whole lot of us and have a chat. We have a great laugh. There is never really fighting or bitchiness or anything between us here". P19

Elm did not always present such an ideal picture. During one period it was noticeable that one of the women there was particularly unpopular. She was perceived by the others in the house to be a 'rat' or a squealer, a sobriquet described by Sykes as the most serious accusation you can make about another prisoner (Sykes 1958 p87). Although she was not totally shunned, she was talked about in her absence and when she entered the room the conversation changed immediately and became more circumspect.

There was always a danger that interviewees provided answers to questions in order to please the interviewer or to show themselves in a good light. However, from observations it did appear that the women generally got on, albeit such observations were constrained both by time and by the option of spaces where interaction among the women could take place. Despite some reservations the indications were that relationships were amenable.

> "Well we get on with other people, mix in the yard. I have a few friends over in the big yard. There is a few people we clash with. But, I mean in this house, the way it is we have to live together, the whole lot of us not just in this house. The whole lot us have to live together so we may as well stretch it out and get on with it, the jail. A lot of us are going to be here for a long time, so we are practically room mates and house sharing. So we may as well get on with one another " P18

This 'getting on well' could be interpreted as the fraternalisation process whereby socially disparate people find themselves developing mutual support in opposition to a system that has forced them into intimacy and into a single equalitarian community of fate (Goffman 1961 p 57). Whereas there was an element of that at play, the sentiment voiced by P18 paints a more realistic picture – the women were forced to share a house with people not of their choosing so they might as well make the best of it. Whatever the reason, they appeared to get on surprisingly well. Evidence could seen in many acts of kindness and support – for example, sharing cigarettes, lending one another clothes, comforting and encouraging one another if upset. This contrasted with the literature on relationships in the houses in Cornton Vale women's prison in Scotland where social intercourse with fellow prisoners in the houses was constrained and made tense by the constant presence of officers (Carlen 1983). Dobash, Dobash *et al* went further when they said that '*one result of the constant monitoring and manipulation of the composition of the units* [houses] *was, ironically, the failure of people in them to form strong relationships with each other*' (Dobash, Dobash et al. 1986 p 186). It is fair to acknowledge that this research had been carried out in the 1980s. On the other hand, a series of suicides took place in Cornton Vale between 1995 and 1997 which suggested that things had not improved. The suicides led to a public outcry followed by an official inquiry and finally, to fundamental changes at the prison (Carlen 2001 p460)).

In the Dóchas Centre there was not the constant presence of prison officers to which Carlen refers, nor was there any overt intrusive surveillance. On the contrary, it was the absence of prison officers from the kitchens and the recreation rooms that was noticeable. The physical amenities within the houses and the gardens also helped as they provided normal settings for social intercourse. Over time, it was possible to observe many examples of supportive and lasting relationships among the women. However, the idea of 'getting on' had wider implications when it came to relationships as it led to the formation and reformation of cliques within the houses which had some interesting consequences.

Evolving Coteries

The development of cliques affected all the houses to different degrees and at different stages. It was especially noticeable in Cedar both because of its size and because most of the women were serving long sentences. In the early stages of occupancy, before the house was full, the social centre had revolved around the

156

kitchen and the first floor 'rec'. Over time, with the arrival of 'reformed' drug users who had earned the privilege of moving there, the dynamics changed. The new arrivals disturbed the equilibrium of the house. They were accused of failing to recognise their obligations when it came to completing the house chores and of encouraging 'undesirable' visitors from other houses who abused the hospitality by leaving the kitchen in an untidy state but more seriously, of taking food from the communal fridge.

> "Some girls are so nice for us we don't have any problems when they come for a visit, to visit their friends in here because we know that these girls have respect and don't take what they are not supposed to take. But others sometimes come here inside the kitchen, take what they want, put their feet on the table, smoking, make lunch and leave everything dirty. This is not fair because we need to clean. Then we spoke again with the Governor because we don't want everything from the kitchen taken, milk and bread and everything. We take it every day for our house and other girls come in because this is a big kitchen and treat it like stores – they think they can collect what they want from this kitchen for the other houses". P20

The sentiments expressed here were an illustration of the problems that arise when conflicts develop over the rules that are necessary for community living. Such conflicts have arisen in even the most supportive and egalitarian communities of which the kibbutz was a prime example (Spiro 1956 p98). Notwithstanding its lofty ideals, tensions arose in the kibbutz from ordinary everyday occurrences – for example, the shortage or lack of choice of food, the noise generated by the overcrowded conditions, the lack of social and psychological privacy. More relevant in this context were the tensions that arose from what was considered by the members, as a violation of accepted norms. In addition to the shirking of tasks in relation to domestic chores already discussed, other examples were – not working hard, getting money or luxury items from outside, disagreeable personal habits and dishonesty (Blasi 1986 p52).

It was the disagreeable personal habits of the guests, that was the issue in Cedar. It eventually resulted in a house meeting with the Governor at which it was agreed that the kitchen would be kept locked and accessible only to those living in the house. The consequences of this move was to replace the kitchen as a social centre for the house and create miniature groups centred either on an individual prisoner's room or, for one particular group, on an office on the ground floor which had been converted to an 'art room'. In so doing it illustrated how social groups mark off their own territory. The art room group varied between six and eight people, predominantly,

though not exclusively, foreign nationals. This same group at other times commandeered the first floor rec.

"People go into groups. In a way I think it [Cedar] is too big. In the other houses everyone was more together because they are smaller. In this house they are grouped. We have a rec [recreation room] on this landing so this landing kind of uses the rec here; on the top landing there is a rec and they usually use that rec. The foreign girls, from Africa and that, don't really be up in the rec at all. They are usually downstairs in someone's room. We don't really see much of them. I suppose everyone kind of divides into their little groups no matter where you go". P22

The appropriation of space was quite interesting. As far as the art room was concerned, entrance was almost by invitation. If someone stopped at the door to ask a question or to chat, it was made clear from the body language of the occupants, whether that person was welcome. The recreation rooms were also to some extent 'controlled' but to a lesser degree. Anyone in the house was entitled to use the recreation rooms, but if they were occupied by a particular clique, it was difficult for outsiders to intrude. Another example of territoriality was illustrated by one long-term prisoner who took it upon herself to enhance one of the recreation rooms with pictures and plants and to keep it clean and tidy. She then attempted to restrict access only to those people who treated the room with respect. If they did not she would chastise them or may even report them to the Governor.

It would be wrong to imply that the basis of the groupings in Cedar was fixed. It varied depending on the occupants. The 'art room group' was based on a common interest (it was worth noting that when the lead artist who was a foreign national, was eventually released, the art room closed and that group disintegrated). The foreign nationals, particularly the South Africans, tended to stick together – white and black separately and the remaining groupings were likely to be based on age. The art room group represented the apex of an informal power structure that had a significant influence over the running of the house. This in turn added to the antagonism from other houses, especially Elm, whose members felt excluded from the opportunity of progressing to Cedar because of the number and exclusivity of the 'sitting tenants'. However, the idea of cliques was not peculiar to Cedar. The cliques that formed in other houses were more likely to be based on long term friendships either inside or outside the prison, the ostensible camaraderie of drug addiction, participation in specific programmes or involvement in special courses or activities

like the annual play.[95] There was no evidence of cliques based on the notion of pseudo-families or lesbian marriage units that was a feature of earlier research on women in prison in the US (Giallombardo 1966; Ward and Kassebaum 1966). Lesbian relationships no doubt existed but not overtly. Lundstrom's earlier research in Ireland and Sweden, concluded that homosexual relationships was not a feature of prison life for women in either country (Lundstrom 1985 p 25). From observations and discussions with both prisoners and officers they did not appear to be a major feature of the Dóchas Centre either.

The drug abusers in the small yard tended to stick together. It was very likely they already knew one another from the outside. Many of the inmates of Mountjoy, both male and female, came from specific areas of Dublin (see chapter 2). It was reasonable to assume that a number of the recidivist women already knew one another and were therefore more likely to associate. One interpretation of this phenomenon was that those in the small yard represented a sub-community of social deviants – 'those who flaunted their refusal to accept their place and were temporarily tolerated in this gestural rebellion, providing it is restricted within the ecological boundaries of their community' (Goffman 1963 p 172). However, the concept of importation (Irwin and Cressey 1962) provided an alternative and more plausible explanation. The cliques in the small yard represented an extension of their cultural world on the outside that they had imported into the prison environment.

Cliques suggested a notion of exclusivity. However, with the continuous turnover of prisoners it was difficult for exclusive groups to survive for long periods. On the other hand, cliques did provide an important function. Apart from the purely social aspect of being a member of a like-minded group, they also provided emotional support and in some cases, a form of protection particularly for those who felt vulnerable. Five or six women openly acknowledged that they could not have survived their incarceration without such friendships and some continued to keep in touch even after release. For many women, being part of a clique was a fundamental contributor to their experience of day to day life within the prison. Incarceration was a traumatic experience. Coping with the realities was a continuing struggle

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[95] Every year a play ran for a week in the male prison. The acting was undertaken by the prisoners, both male and female, under the direction of outside professionals. These plays were open to the public and were an important event in the Mountjoy calendar. During the course of the research plays also began to be performed in the Dóchas Centre as mentioned earlier in this chapter.

COPING WITH IMPRISONMENT

Research in prisons indicates that women experience incarceration differently from men and their modes of adaption are also different (Kauffman 1988; Matthews 1999; Blomberg and Lucken 2000; Kruttschnitt, Gartner et al. 2000). In his study of a maximum security male prison in the US, Sykes characterised the pains of imprisonment as a series of deprivations that included not only that of liberty, but also of goods and services, heterosexual relationships, autonomy and security. He argued that these pains were alleviated either by a collective strategy that involved group cohesion and solidarity against officialdom or by an individualistic response whereby the prisoner seeks his own advantage without reference to the needs of his fellow inmates (Sykes 1958 p82). In the first detailed study of women in prison carried out in the US by Giallombardo in the 1960s, it was suggested that women suffered from many of the deprivations described by Sykes. However, in contrast to the adaptation strategies of group cohesion or individual rebellion adopted by men, the majority of women adjusted to the pains of imprisonment by *'establishing a homosexual alliance with a compatible partner as a marriage unit'* or by creating pseudo-families who provided support and help to its members (Giallombardo 1966 p163). The same theme was reflected in the work of Ward and Kassebaum who concluded that *'more inmates resort to homosexuality than to psychological withdrawal, rebellion, colonisation or any other type of adaption'* (Ward and Kassebaum 1966 p78). Dobash, Dobash *et al* believed that these earlier researcher's concentration on sexual orientation may have been a reflection of the bio-psychological theories of women's crime prevalent at that time (Dobash, Dobash et al. 1986 p6). Bosworth considered that the early US studies over-emphasised sex and sexuality and did not to accord with more contemporary analyses of women's imprisonment (Bosworth 1999 p22). However, everything is historically contingent and what may have been valid in the 1960s may no longer be applicable twenty or thirty years later.

As already mentioned in this chapter, homosexual alliances were not a visible feature of the Dóchas Centre nor was there any evidence of the creation of pseudo-families. The latter was not surprising bearing in mind the high percentage of women on remand or serving short sentences, coupled with the fact that the majority of women were from Dublin and likely to receive regular visits from their own families. On the other hand, it was apparent that different women used different coping mechanisms at different times to adjust to the prospect of 'doing time'.

Escape Mechanisms

Retreat was a common response, particularly in the early stages of a sentence. It manifested itself in various ways, the most common being to limit or avoid contact with the other women.

"When I first came in I wasn't moving out of my room at all. After losing my nanny [her grandmother had recently died] and ending up in here I just couldn't get out of the bed in the mornings. People were saying to me - 'that is not healthy'. I said, 'look I am the one who has the loss here, not you – just bugger off and mind your own business'". P03

"When I moved in first I used to go to my room early enough. I didn't really know anyone and I just kind of liked to be on my own for a while. But now, it is different. You know when you start to know people better, you would be in someone's room or you would be in the rec with everyone or whatever". P22

Sleep was another form of retreat. A number of women spent long periods of time in bed, often as a result of prescribed medication. This was more noticeable in Laurel house where a number of women with psychological problems were housed. One woman who spent time there had this to say

"There are a lot of girls in here [Laurel] on heavy medication. They don't get up out of the bed. They don't care. If you looked in the hatches they are all in bed". P04

When asked what was the best time of day for them, four out of 22 women said bed time. Sleep would help them to forget their problems for a few hours.

A more extreme form of escape involved self harm. The literature suggested that self harm is a phenomenon more prevalent among women than men, both inside and outside prisons (Liebling 1994; HM Inspectorate of Prisons 1997; Shaw 1999). In a major review of women in prison in England and Wales in 1997, 11% of women surveyed reported self harming (HM Inspectorate of Prisons 1997 p86). In Cornton Vale in Scotland, 17% of those interviewed admitted resorting to self harm at some time (Loucks 1997 p131). Although my study did not focus on the issue of self injury, statistics produced by the Health Care Unit indicated that during 2000, the first year of occupation, 8% of the committals (57 women) self harmed. This was an increase from 5% (38 women) in 1998 in the old prison and arguably a reflection of the turmoil caused by the change. During 2001 and 2002 the number of self harms had halved to 29 and 26 respectively (about 4% of the estimated committals). In 2003 the number increased to 43 (6% of committals) but 30 of the 43 incidents were by the

same three women.[96] Self harm continued to occur in the Dóchas Centre but the numbers involved were relatively small. This could be attributed to a combination of factors including the congenial surroundings, the relative freedom of movement, the opportunities to become involved in activities and the quality of relationships both with other prisoners and with the staff.

The preferred escape mechanism for some women was continued involvement with drugs which could be interpreted both as an expression of rebellion but also of retreat. As already discussed, the percentage of prisoners who were or had been drug abusers, was in the region of 60% to 80%. In research conducted in both the male and female prisons in Mountjoy, prisoners with a history of drug abuse admitted that the benefits of drug use were reinforced in the prison environment – drugs alleviated some of the problems of being in prison such as depression and boredom. They were an escape mechanism that helped them to cope with the pains of imprisonment (Dillon 2001). In her work in women's prisons in the UK, Malloch received similar responses (Malloch 2000 p110). Although the majority of drug addicts in the Dóchas Centre were on methadone maintenance programmes, a number were still actively involved in drug taking.[97] As mentioned earlier in this chapter in relation to the privilege system, the passing of drugs was recognised as a risk. Prisoners themselves spoke of using drugs to obliterate painful memories

> "I only know how to take drugs. I know other things but it is easier to take the drugs and live the life of drugs than it is to say no to them and live the life of facing the consequences of all the things you have done. It takes a stronger person. I don't know if I am that strong". P04

However, drug taking *per se* was not the sole coping mechanism. Active drug using created an informal social network which itself was seen as a supportive mechanism for the participants. 'Friendships' were based on reciprocal arrangements of drug sharing that involved special cliques described earlier. Despite their continued involvement in drugs, it did not necessarily mean that they were in a permanent state of rebellion. However, drug users were more likely to be argumentative and aggressive towards both staff and their fellow prisoners and to ignore the rules particularly when it came to completing domestic chores. It was not **only** drug users who exhibited rebellious behaviour. Other prisoners at various times were in breach

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[96] Committals used here excluded aliens as they would distort the numbers.

[97] Strictly speaking methadone is also an addictive drug. However, it was prescribed in the prison to help stabilise those suffering from heroin addiction or as a continuation of a programme started on the outside.

of the rules but there was no evidence of what Sykes described as group cohesion and solidarity against officialdom (Sykes 1958). On the contrary it was evident that most women did their time without causing any trouble either to other prisoners or to the officers.

Involvement

The majority of women tried to make the best of their situation and use the opportunities on offer. They participated in school activities, took advantage of the programmes provided by the Connect Project (described earlier), became involved in social opportunities offered through physical activities, Sunday night inter-house quizzes, annual drama events and other social initiatives. In this way they reflected the 'square John' model of inmate culture (Irwin and Cressey 1962). For many, these activities were a method both of avoiding trouble and surviving the pains of deprivation but were also an opportunity to realise personal potential or develop skills that could help after release.

> *"There is a good school, good education, if you are interested. It kept me going over the years anyway" P15*

> *"If I am down in myself I will either come back and stay in my room or if not I would go over and do the gym. That is my way of coping. If someone had said to me this time last year – you would be doing this, you would be telling kids about yourself or I would be sitting here talking to Barbara, I would have told them, you are mad; you are crazy.[98] There is no way I would have done that. In that way it is after changing me. I had no confidence in myself. Now I am starting to get confidence in myself where I can sit down and talk. I have got wiser and have learnt a lot". P11*

Taking advantage of the opportunities on offer applied especially to long-term prisoners many of whom were foreign nationals. However, their modes of adaption were likely to change over time. One who had begun her sentence in the old prison, had initially refused to learn English as she associated it with her court case and her imprisonment. She cried for the first year and then decided at the start of the year 2000 (after the move) that she would become more involved.

> *"I remember New Year 2000, everyone was screaming and I cry so much because everybody waited for 2000 and I can't hug my friend* [a compatriot who had been imprisoned with her] *at this time when it is 12 o'clock. It was so hard, it was hard.* [She then began to learn English and to participate in educational activities]. *I do everything in the school, everything I can do –*

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[98] As part of her development plan to help increase her confidence, this woman gave talks on the results of drug taking, to young people whose school studies included visits to prisons.

computer and other classes. The day is full and I work on shoes – because I need the money". [99] *P20.*

Her gradual acceptance had coincided with the move to the new prison which accorded her both greater freedom and an opportunity to pursue her artistic talent.[100] This *suggested* that environment and regime could influence modes of adaption as theorised in the literature (Irwin and Cressey 1962; Morgan 1997; Matthews 1999; Kruttschnitt, Gartner et al. 2000). It is impossible to know with certainty the extent to which environment played a role in her specific case. Suffice to say that the facilities in the old prison would not have allowed for her artistic pursuit which was her main coping mechanism.

Many studies have concluded that the greatest pain experienced by women in prison was their removal from family and children together with the greater geographical dispersal and consequent difficulty of maintaining family ties (Genders and Player 1987; Genders and Player 1988; Faith 1993; Carlen 1998; Girshick 1999; Matthews 1999; Owen 1999; Shaw 1999; Kruttschnitt, Gartner et al. 2000). A male officer in a female prison in UK commented – *'the greatest worry with male inmates is 'What is she getting up to while I'm inside?' whereas women are more concerned about domestic things, the house, the family, the children's education and what am I going to do when I get out?'*(Carlen 1998 p76). Because the majority of women in the Dóchas Centre were Irish and mainly from Dublin, they did not suffer from the specific problem of distances from the prison. However, like the foreign nationals, they continually worried about what was happening to their families on the outside. In order to cope, the women adopted the three *main* mechanisms described - retreat, rebellion and involvement. However, they were not the only methods employed nor did they remained static over time. On the other hand, a number of women actually welcomed imprisonment as a refuge from a far worse existence on the outside.

A Welcome Relief

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[99] There was an opportunity for the women to make money in their spare time sewing shoes for an outside manufacturer. This was done either in their room but more commonly, as part of a group in the recreation room in the house.

[100] This prisoner was a talented artist. After the move to the Dóchas Centre she was allocated an 'art' room in Cedar house (referred to earlier in this chapter in relation to cliques) where she spent most of her time painting. She also exhibited her work at outside exhibitions.

In the early 20th century nearly half the women committed to Mountjoy had been convicted more than twenty times. A republican prisoner said of one of her fellow inmates – *'She had no dread of coming back; she was actually encouraged to return, and it was the only home she knew'* (Carey 2000 p 140). A prisoner in 1940s Dublin echoed the same sentiments - *'many of these petty criminals have received scores of convictions, men who deliberately break a couple of glasses in a public house in order to get a fortnight or a month in their beloved 'Joy'* [Mountjoy]' (D83222 1946 p 79). The 21st century Dóchas Centre reflected little change in this respect. In an article in The [Irish] *Sunday Business Post* dated 8th October 2000, a prison study support group reported that *'11 women due for release in July said that they wished to stay in the new jail rather than face homelessness on release'*. Women frequently refused TR (temporary release) because the conditions they faced on the outside were so intolerable. Their main worries were homelessness and lack of money but they were also concerned about the avoidance of drugs

> *"I mean, we have it handy* [easy]. *I said to an officer once, if I could live here and go out doing my day things and go out at week ends, I would live here. That is the God honest truth. Maybe I feel safe in here and away from everything and away from the drugs. I start to panic a bit when I think I have to go back out again; I have to face the big bad world again with all the drugs in it. That is what I am thinking and I am afraid".* P10

> *"At the end of it all they are going to send me out to the same shit.* [101] *Bed and Breakfast is an option which I don't want that but I mightn't have any choice. I don't know if I am getting too kind of comfortable here. It is frightening me and it is not frightening me".* P04

The facilities offered in the Dóchas Centre brought into sharp focus the principle of less eligibility whereby conditions in prisons were intended to be more punitive than the worst conditions on the outside (Rusche and Kirchheimer 1939; Sykes 1958; McConville 1998; Rothman 1998; Matthews 1999). The notion of less eligibility may have had an undeniable logic but carried to extremes it could only result in excessively poor conditions within prisons. It also ran counter to Alexander Paterson's (a 20th century prison reformer) famous maxim that people are sent to prison as punishment and not for punishment. In the case of women in particular, penological developments as reflected in the reformatory movement, the ideals of medical and therapeutic treatment and more recently, the concept of prisoner empowerment, eschewed the notion of less eligibility. The development of the

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[101] She had come off drugs and had nowhere to go other than back to the area which had been the source of her problem in the first place.

Dóchas Centre was predicated on the assumption that the anachronistic conditions of the old prison would be replaced with a humanitarian environment more in keeping with the beginning of the 21st century. However, there were officers who believed that this thinking had gone a little too far

"But you do forget sometimes that you are in a prison. It doesn't feel like a prison; it doesn't look like a prison and I am scared that it has gone too far this way in that they have given the girls lovely rooms; bathroom en suite and they are not going to get this outside. It is tough going to keep that roof over your head. Their rooms are nicer than I am living in. It is not reality. I know it is not reality when you are in a prison but it is their reality because they are locked up. I am not into bars and stuff and I can see, OK take out the bars but – pine furniture and beautiful bed linen and everything. That is going too far. You have got to come to some sort of middle line. They have gone over that middle line". S13

It was undoubtedly true that the physical conditions in the Dóchas Centre were a vast improvement on the old prison but as the women continued to point out – they were still in prison. The view of many is summarised in the following quote

"No matter what prison we are in, we are still like can't go out the gate. Yes, it is comfortable but we are still locked in and that is it. The facilities I think they are good – school, there are loads of classes; the gym is there; even the visiting rooms are nice; it is nice for people to come up and see you. And there are plenty of things to do if you want to do them. You don't have to be sitting around all day long. That is good. They keep everyone occupied. But we are still locked in here no matter how nice it is". P22

However, despite the comparative luxury offered by the Dóchas Centre, nostalgia for the old prison continued to be expressed.

QUALIFIED ACCEPTANCE

Letting Go of the Old

Comparison with the old prison continued to be made although it declined over time. About a year after the move, a group of women chatting over breakfast, were bemoaning its loss. In later interviews, five out of sixteen women said they preferred the old prison (two of the five were from the breakfast group).[102] They acknowledged that physical conditions in the Dóchas Centre were better but believed the women

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[102] In the early months nearly all of the women in the Dóchas Centre had experienced the old prison. By the time of the formal interviews which took place mainly during the second year, 66% of the sample (16 women) had spent time in the old prison and whilst not a scientific sample, this was a reasonable indication of the proportion of the population that had experienced both places.

had been closer in the old prison. The main reasons given were that all prisoners had been free to mix together and time had gone more quickly.

"I would rather have the old prison. The time went a lot quicker in it. Because in the old prison you were locked up so many hours per day. Now, don't get me wrong, this prison is lovely; the rooms are lovely but there is an awful lot of trouble in this prison as well – story carrying and you are not allowed into each others house so you can't be with your friends, where in the old prison you were all together". PO5

"I would rather be in the old prison. The day flew in because of the structure – the number of times you were locked back. The weeks flew by. Also, prisoners stuck together. There was less bitchiness in the old prison". PO6

The idea that being locked back alleviated time appeared paradoxical. However, there were arguments in the literature that being in prison changed an individual's experience of time (Cohen and Taylor 1972 p90). In order to survive psychologically, it was necessary to concentrate on the immediate present and avoid excessive consideration of the past or the future. Although, in essence, prison was about time, it was often experienced as a form of timelessness encapsulated in expressions such as 'doing time' or 'killing time' (Galtung 1966; Giallombardo 1966; Matthews 1999). Rock described the waiting experienced by witnesses prior to being called to give evidence at a trial, as time passing slowly. He went on to say that '*a period of duration without obvious incident or structure can promote a sense of ennui or listlessness, a loss of grasp of time, an experience of time as 'drifting'* (Rock 1993 p280). For some of the women in the Dóchas Centre, the lack of a formal rigid structure and a defined routine which had helped segment the day in the old prison, made 'killing time' that much more difficult. However, as it was likely that their life on the outside was also unstructured, it could be argued that having to cope with the slow passage of time on the inside was an appropriate way to prepare for release. Alternatively, the notion of structuring their own day without the security of a set of clear rules may have presented an even less attractive proposition.

It was impossible to know whether the sentiments expressed by the women reflected a nostalgic view of the past or a genuine preference for the old prison. The Holloway experience also reflected a preference for the past. One prisoner said *"I much preferred it. It is not so much because as women we need to be disciplined, but in a totally unnatural environment, you need some sort of rules to go by, you need some guidelines, because it is just chaos otherwise, and that is how I find Holloway now"* (Rock 1996 p 260 - 261). There was an element of that thinking within the Dóchas Centre though it was by no means the dominant reaction. However, it was

expressed frequently enough to conclude that the level of freedom inherent in the philosophy was not unanimously welcomed. Kruttschnitt, Gartner *et al* when comparing women's reactions to imprisonment in two different types of institution in the US, one strict and the other more relaxed, found that most women interviewed preferred the latter. On the other hand, they also discovered that not all the women viewed strictness in negative terms. Several recidivists believed that serving time in the stricter prison had a greater deterrent effect (Kruttschnitt, Gartner et al. 2000 p 709). None of the women in the Dóchas Centre who expressed a preference for the old prison mentioned any notion of prison as a deterrent. On the contrary, all of them had been incarcerated on a number of previous occasions. Clemmer's theory of prisonisation or Goffman's notion of institutionalisation (Clemmer 1958; Goffman 1961) provided a more plausible explanation. The women had spent enough time in the old prison to absorb, to a greater or lesser degree, its mores, customs and general culture. However, this group represented a very small percentage of the Dóchas Centre population. The majority expressed no such attachment to the old radial prison.

Accepting the New

After the first six to nine months when the initial shock of the move started to subside, the women gradually began to adjust to their new environment. From early informal feedback and later formal interviews, it was clear that the physical amenities within the houses were particularly welcome. The following comments were in marked contrast to those made by the women who still hankered after the old prison

"We get what we want in here. As you see we have a radio, a television, shower and all. What more could you want in a prison? That is what I have to say". P12

"I love the room here. It is a lot cosier and it is real homely like. And I have it nice myself, well cosy enough. There is a tele in it like I would have at home and you can go in and watch tele on your own when you want. I have my radio, I got left in". P17

"I think it is good. It doesn't feel that it is a prison. It gives a more homely kind of effect, that you have your room you have a kitchen, you have a sitting room in a house. It is just like being in a hostel or sharing flats, like a load of people, a load of girls or whatever. It is not like prison, doors banging the whole time, steel doors or whatever". P22

However, living in houses meant more than adjusting to new physical conditions. Many hours were spent within the confines of the house, particularly during inclement

weather, which meant that the women were restricted to the company of the other occupants. They had to learn to adapt to their idiosyncrasies, to compromise and to continuously negotiate the challenges of sharing a confined space with a frequently changing population. Because they had responsibility for the running of the house they were also expected to resolve conflicts when disputes arose. Arguably these demands were akin to many of the demands of normal living on the outside and could be considered as reasonable preparation for returning to the community.

How life was lived was influenced by the women's physical and psychological state, the length of time they had to serve and their readiness to participate in the programmes on offer. A typical day was dictated by the Daily Timetable and involved the routine of getting out of bed, receiving medication, preparing breakfast, doing housework, attending school, work or other programmes, having meals and socialising. The days were repetitive and for some, boring. The monotony was relieved from time to time by events already described, for example, 'graduation' ceremonies, drama sessions or visits by outside speakers. They were also relieved by social interaction which was an important element in helping the women cope with their incarceration. Sykes argued that although the pains of imprisonment can never be totally eliminated, the rigours of confinement can be alleviated by patterns of social interaction among the inmates themselves (Sykes 1958 p82). However, living in houses meant that the quality of such interaction was contingent on the degree of compatibility with the other occupants. Being part of a clique helped, but as most houses accommodated such small numbers, between ten and twelve women, harmonious relations with *all* occupants could ease tensions. Sometimes women objected to being moved even if the move involved going to a more privileged house. This could be because they had got comfortable with those in their current house or because of concerns about having to adjust and adapt to a new set of occupants and mores in a different house.

There were numerous opportunities for interaction within the houses In the morning most of the women congregated in the kitchen, made tea and toast and sat around chatting and smoking. During a typical day, the majority were involved in activities and if not, were likely to be doing personal chores or hanging around doing nothing. In the evening, apart from the gym, there were further opportunities to socialise in the house. Conversations during periods of interaction revolved around the minutiae of daily life within the confines of a prison, for example, who was moving to which house, who was getting out on temporary release, who had been fighting with whom,

169

who had been caught with drugs, who had failed a urine test or any other of a myriad of stories arising from the immediacy of their confined world. On a more personal level, the women talked about their families, particularly their children, their health problems and their circumstances on the outside which frequently elicited sympathy and support from the others in the room. Their stories sometimes exhibited what Goffman described as the self-concern engendered by incarceration where the inmate develops a sad story line which he constantly repeats to his fellows to account for his present low state. Although staff may discredit these stories, inmate audiences tend to be tactful, suppressing at least some of the disbelief and boredom engendered by these repetitive recitations (Goffman 1961 p 66). There were many examples of this, particularly among those who spent most of the day hanging round. Socialising in the house in the evening was usually in the recreation room watching television or a video or with a smaller group in somebody's room. The pattern was not fixed but changed according to mood of the individual and the quality of relationships with the other occupants.

Eating in the communal dining rooms added a sense of normalcy and provided an opportunity for inter-house socialising. Officers frequently shared tables with the prisoners and it was not unusual to see the Governors or other senior members of staff doing likewise. The dining rooms were restaurant style. They were bright and cheerful, the tables were laid with attractive cutlery and crockery and the standard of food was high.[103] Efforts were made to satisfy special dietary needs and there was no element of the portion control philosophy which characterised English prisons. In her extensive research in women's prison in the UK, Carlen noted that prison food featured prominently as a source of complaint, particularly in relation to health, diet and body shape (Carlen 1998).[104] Some of the worst quality food was at Holloway where meals were cooked in a central kitchen and then served in the units by wing officers (HM Inspectorate of Prisons 1997). By contrast, the Dóchas Centre kitchen and dining area operated to a very high standard and prisoners working there automatically pursued a recognised catering course (Irish Inspector of Prisons and Places of Detention 2003).

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[103] The food was prepared, on site, by qualified catering officers supported by a number of prisoners. The Dóchas Centre was the winner of The Industrial Catering Category of the Food Safety Authority of Ireland in 2001.

[104] The issue of health and diet was an important one. In a later visit to the Dóchas Centre in January 2004, I discovered that as a result of requests from the women, the midday meal had been reduced from a full two course lunch to a lighter snack in recognition of health and weight considerations.

It was interesting to note in the literature that one version of the functionalist model of total institutions suggested that it was the coercive nature of the institution itself that was likely to influence the attitudes and behaviour of inmates and that variations in physical amenities had little or no impact on their lives (Sykes 1958; Goffman 1961; Kruttschnitt, Gartner et al. 2000). The reaction of many of the women in the Dóchas Centre was at odds with that view. From visiting their rooms and listening to what they had to say, it was apparent that their physical conditions did affect their attitude. For the most part they took pride in the appearance of their rooms and especially in the big yard, in keeping the common areas of their house clean, tidy and comfortable. It was from choice and not from coercion and could be seen as reflection of the weakening of ties with the old prison and a gradual acceptance of the new.

CONCLUSION

There was no doubt that the impact of the move had been underestimated both by the prisoners and the staff but more especially by the management. The implementation of a structure to the day helped to alleviate much of the initial confusion. The variety of school programmes along with the Connect project and other initiatives were important elements of the new structure and contrary to the experience of many other women's prisons, provided a wide range of non-stereotypical options to help address the women's needs. The arrival of people from the outside was generally welcomed, although not all were greeted with equal enthusiasm.

The move to a privilege system attempted to address the issues that arose from the arbitrary nature of house allocation. However, the prevalence of drug addiction combined with the increasing number of committals, constituted a significant inhibitor to achieving the aims of the privilege system and resulted in intractable inequities. Despite acceptance in principle, the reality of the privilege system continued to produce anomalies as well as having the unexpected repercussion of exacerbating an underlying ethnic tension which had become a feature of the 1990s social world on the outside. In an interesting departure from the norm, it was not the foreign nationals, but the indigenous Irish who considered themselves the subject of discrimination.

The concept of house living was intended to provide an environment that more closely reflected normal living on the outside and encouraged greater involvement by the individual in decisions about their daily life. To an extent, it succeeded and was an important element in preparing women for life after the Dóchas Centre. However, on the outside, sharing a house involved some notion of choice. On the inside this was not the case. With the new approach to house allocation, it became apparent over time that it was the people sharing the house rather than the privilege *per se* that was the most crucial consideration – compatible fellow residents superseded the attraction of privilege. Conflicts arose when individual occupants breached the accepted mores of the particular house and this, in turn, encouraged the formation and reformation of mini groups.

Sykes argued that being incarcerated meant being rejected by the outside as someone who must be kept apart from 'decent' society. To overcome this rejection and survive psychologically, mechanisms had to be developed whereby rejection and degradation could be warded off and rendered harmless (Sykes 1958). In the Dóchas Centre the women's coping mechanisms combined elements of retreat, rebellion and cooperation and very much influenced how they did their time. There was evidence of Irwin and Cressey's importation model in the continuing involvement with drugs and to some extent, the importation of social networks. On the other hand, although the majority of women 'co-operated', it did not necessarily mean that they conformed to Clemmer's prisonisation theory (Clemmer 1958). Because the regime was comparatively relaxed and not governed by strict rules, they were more likely to conform for pragmatic reasons coupled with self interest. With such a diverse and changing population, it was also unlikely that one strategy would be appropriate throughout their sentence. This was especially relevant to long-term prisoners for whom it was frequently necessary to re-assess and re-adjust to the demands of an evolving environment. There was also evidence that the quality of the physical conditions, the range of activities on offer and the rehabilitative nature of the regime contributed towards alleviating the pains of incarceration and helped the women to cope with the realities of imprisonment.

Despite the difficulties of the transition and the occasional expressions of preference for the old prison, the women adjusted surprisingly quickly. In the words of Governor Lonergan

"They felt that they knew where they were in the old prison – you were unlocked and you were locked up and you went for your dinner and you were

locked up again. I think now, I think it is fair to say, that by and large over the last year or so, the culture of the new prison is beginning to take over and people are now seeing it as the norm. They are beginning to forget – distance is building up between the old prison".

By the end of the first year the prisoners had overcame the initial turmoil created by the move and had gradually succeeded in settling down. Over the whole of the research period they continued to be challenged by the demands of incarcerated living and adopted their own strategies in order to cope. The 'settling down' period for the officers took much longer. The next chapter will focus exclusively on them – the extent to which the concerns they expressed in the immediate aftermath of the move were addressed; how they responded to the demands of the new regime and the uncertainties of their new role; how, under the new conditions, their relationship with the prisoners evolved; how they reconciled the dilemma created by the aspirations of the new philosophy and the institutional needs of discipline and control; how they coped with increasing levels of stress and absenteeism and how eventually over time, they too gradually began to 'settle down'.

CHAPTER 6 SURVIVING THE TRANSITION – THE OFFICERS

INTRODUCTION

The Dóchas Centre presented a much greater challenge to the prison officers. Unless they requested a transfer, they knew they were likely to be there for a long time. They were faced with a very different physical environment which had repercussions for how they carried out their duties and more importantly, on their perception of their own personal safety and security. They also had to cope with a new philosophy and regime based on the principle of addressing the individual needs of the prisoners and encouraging self determination. These changes, coupled with the increasing number of committals, militated against officers' early adjustment. For a long period following the move, their new conditions resulted in increased levels of stress leading to absenteeism and high staff turnover. To help understand how they gradually adjusted it is necessary to provide the contextual framework within which the Irish prison officer operated and how this affected how she or he responded to the change.

The Irish Prison Officer

Prison staff have been generally neglected in academic literature. When they have been studied, the research has concentrated mainly on male officers in male prisons, often high security prisons, with numbers of prisoners in the hundreds (Thomas 1972; Kauffman 1988; Finkelstein 1993; Sparks, Bottoms et al. 1996; Conover 2001; Liebling and Price 2001). McMahon tackled the subject of *female* officers in Canada but she was researching female officers working in men's prisons (McMahon 1999). Although these various studies had some relevance, it was often difficult to relate their findings to a small, semi-secure prison for women where 100 prisoners constituted overcrowding. In the Irish context, although there were some articles written about prison officers (McGowan 1980; O'Donnell 1999), the most comprehensive piece of research was McGuckin's MSc dissertation which focussed on the characteristics and attitudes of Irish prison officers. His work compared the attitudes of new recruits into the Irish Prison Service during the 1990s with those of established officers. He also made comparisons between Irish officers and those in the UK (McGuckin 2000). In the latter case, his findings indicated that one of the main differences between the two countries was the backgrounds of officers, as can be seen from Table 14.

Table 14 Previous Occupation of Prison Officers

Previous occupation	Irish	UK	Dóchas
Professional/managerial	15%	12%	14%
White collar	21%	13%	38%
Blue collar	53%	15%	38%
Armed forces	10%	51%	10%*

*unemployed

In the UK half the officers came from a military background.[105] The Irish officers showed a slightly higher percentage with a white collar or managerial background and of those interviewed in the Dóchas Centre, the percentage was even higher. Although the Dóchas Centre sample was relatively small – 21 people, the figures supported McGuckin's general findings that Irish officers were more likely to have come from more skilled occupations.

McGuckin also discovered that Irish officers were in full-time education for a longer period than their UK counterparts – 65% remaining in education until over 17 years of age compared with 11% in the UK and 25% remaining in education until aged over 20 by comparison with 2% in the UK. His work was not specifically intended to address gender issues but he also found that newly recruited Irish female officers had been in full-time education longer than the men. 7% of females had left with **only** Junior Certificate (completed aged 15 to 16) compared to an overall of 23%, whilst 41% had completed third level education (left school between the ages of 17 and 19) compared to an overall 30% (McGuckin 2000). Although my research did not include questions on educational qualifications, it became apparent that many officers were educated to a high standard.   During the course of general conversation, at least four of the female officers mentioned that they had a university degree. This raised the more interesting question – why had they chosen to join the Irish Prison Service in the first place?

The main motivating factor was financial. Of the twenty-one people asked, just over 50% admitted the attraction of pay and security. The remainder gave various

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[105] Finkelstein quoting Marsh *et al* (1985) indicated that 78% of all prison officers in UK had undertaken military service although only 10% entered the Prison Service directly from the military (Finkelstein 1993 p 7). Liebling and Price found that since the early 1980s, there were fewer direct recruits from the armed services (Liebling and Price 2001 p 31). In relation to Canada, McMahon concluded that promotions to higher positions in Ontario Corrections tended to favour men with a military training and outlook (McMahon 1999).

reasons, for example, drifting into it by accident or being recommended by a friend or relative. None responded with any 'social work' motivation.[106] The financial attraction was understandable in a country like Ireland which, prior to the 1990s, was subject to periods of quite severe economic difficulties and high unemployment. However, 62% of the sample had joined the Prison Service during the 1990s, a period of relative prosperity and wider job opportunities which one would have expected to reduce the financial attraction of the officer's job. This was not so. On the contrary, the Irish Prison Service continued to be a financially attractive occupation not only from the point of view of joining but also of retention.

In 1996 the cost of keeping a prisoner in Ireland averaged £46,000 compared to £25,000 in England and £20,000 in Canada.[107] This was due to the very high ratio of prison officers to prisoner (more than one officer to each prisoner compared with one officer to two to four prisoners in other jurisdictions) combined with a massive overtime bill (O'Mahony 2000 p46). In 1997, overtime amounted to €36.6m and made up 30% of Prison Service pay. In 2001 it was €55.4m and almost unchanged in percentage terms (Office of the Comptroller and Auditor General 2003).[108] By 2002 the cost of keeping a prisoner in Mountjoy (including the Dóchas Centre) amounted to €95,900 which was approximately £75,000 (Irish Prison Service 2002 p79). Although data on individual take-home earnings were not available, from talking informally to officers, it was obvious that many had become dependent on high levels of overtime.[109] In addition, working patterns inherent in the duty rosters provided reasonable flexibility for those with family responsibilities. A combination of these factors made the Irish Prison Service an attractive proposition both for recruiting and retaining staff even in times of economic growth.

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[106] It was interesting to note that when asked what aspect of their job gave them the most satisfaction, 13 out of 16 replied - 'helping people'.

[107] The Irish Prison Service, which had been established as an independent agency in 2000, had recognised that their costs were significantly out of line with other jurisdictions. 'Some of the factors which push up Irish costs, such as the design and age of prisons, are not amenable to short or medium-term resolution. However, other relevant factors, such as staffing levels, attendance arrangements and overtime working ...... are being addressed'. (Irish Prison Service 2001 p58).

[108] During a later visit in January 2004, I learned that the Government was in discussion with the Prison Officers Association on the subject of reducing overtime payments.

[109] It appeared this had been the situation as early as the 1970s. Research conducted at that time concluded that pay was not a source of grievance for officers. However, since they were frequently required to work overtime they made financial commitments based on an expectation of high overtime pay (McGowan 1980 p267).

Pay was not necessarily the only factor influencing the officers in the Dóchas Centre. Frederick Herzberg the management expert who specialised in the theory of job motivation, described pay as a 'hygiene' factor which he likened to an analgesic whose effect soon wears off. He argued that in order to sustain commitment to a job, 'hygiene' factors needed to be replaced by motivational factors such as personal achievement, management recognition or satisfaction in the nature of the work itself (Herzberg 1959, cited in Kennedy 1991). At the time of the move, these motivational factors were missing for many of the officers in the Dóchas Centre. Their dissatisfaction with their new reality had to be overcome if the philosophical aspirations were to be achieved.

ADDRESSING INITIAL CONCERNS

Combating Isolation

The design of the Dóchas Centre presented one of the biggest challenges to the staff. As explained in chapter 4, they had moved from the confined space of one wing of a traditional radial prison where officers were permanently within sight and hearing of other officers, to a situation where they were detailed to work in any one of several buildings, often on their own. In the immediate aftermath of the move, particularly during the first few months, this had resulted in officers feeling isolated and had engendered major concerns about their own personal safety. Throughout the first year, the views of the officers were almost polarised. At one end of the spectrum were those whose opinion had not changed since the time of the move – the old concerns about isolation, safety, lack of communication and confusion over boundaries were still there and they believed nothing much had been done about them. At the other end of the spectrum were those who considered that after the first three months, the situation had begun to improve, albeit slowly. They said that the management was listening to them; their responsibilities were becoming a little clearer and their morale was improving. They acknowledged that there was now some structure to the day for them and the prisoners and that rules were gradually being implemented. A senior officer summed up their views when he told me that *"there is more of a structure in place now and officers are clearer about their responsibilities"*.

By the middle of 2000, the specific issue of isolation had almost disappeared. Officers had become more accustomed to the new physical environment and had

overcome the problem by various stratagems – for example, using their radios or the telephone in the office in the houses as an alternative method of communication; making brief visits to colleagues in the other houses during quiet periods when most of the prisoners were in the school; in the warmer weather, congregating with both officers and prisoners in the garden. In addition, a variation on the morning 'parade' was re-introduced towards the end of 2000.[110] It was now used as a communication vehicle only. All the officers met together before the start of their shift, not only to receive feedback on any special occurrence from the previous shift, but also to exchange information of general or specific interest. It was also an opportunity to meet with colleagues and to be aware of who was on duty that day. The reintroduction of the 'parade' was welcomed by the officers and also helped alleviate their sense of isolation. During interviews carried out in the second year of occupancy, only one officer mentioned isolation

"I would have said isolation about six months ago, isolation from prisoners and isolation from staff. Six months ago when the numbers were down [of staff] and they wouldn't give us the right quota of staff, you could be in a house on your own all day and it's not good. You need that interaction even for the sake of passing your day". S03

Another officer referred to the subject obliquely

"Originally, we felt we were cut off from each other because in the old place, you had one wing and we would be passing each other or whatever. Once the staffing levels are kept up, you will have an assistant and you will go for a little walk to get something so you will make sure you keep your contact. You will make sure to get yapping [talking] or have a chat. They [colleagues] will come over to Rowan and a few of the officers will sit in the office for a few minutes. If you didn't, if you just stay in your house all day, you will only see the officer who is taking the shop orders".[111] S12

Although the issue of isolation may have diminished, the same could not be said about the other major concern which was personal safety.

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[110] The morning 'parade' had been a feature of the old prison. Officer gathered together before the start of their shift to be allocated their tasks and exchange information. Its demise with the move to the new prison, had been a bone of contention and according to the officers, had contributed to their feeling of isolation (see chapter 4).

[111] This was a reference to the officer whose responsibility was to visit each of the houses on a daily basis and take orders for the women for things like cigarettes, sweets, biscuits, toiletries and such like.

Worrying about Safety and Security

About three months after the move, the problem of personal safety was partly addressed by detailing two officers to work together in the houses that required supervision. It was not always possible, due to staff shortages, but the principle was acknowledged even by those who had been most vociferous in their complaints. Nevertheless, concern about safety continued to be expressed. It was raised in conversation five or six times during that first year. Some officers complained that they felt particularly vulnerable during the night as there were only three officers on duty plus a supervisor to patrol five houses (Cedar and Phoenix, the two most privileged houses, were not patrolled at night). Another officer commented – *"this prison is a joke"*. She believed that it was being run by the prisoners and no consideration or notice was being taken of issues raised by the staff. Similar concerns were expressed by the officers after the Holloway move and had serious repercussions culminating in a strike (Rock 1996).

Concerns about safety raised the more fundamental question of officers' perceived loss of control. In Thomas's history of the English prison officer, he concluded that reform for the officer did not only mean the potential pampering of prisoners but also involved the usurpation of control (Thomas 1972 p 189). This perceived loss extended to the loss of control over space. Space within a prison setting not only reflected and defined social relations, it was also a mechanism through which control was exercised and order maintained (Sparks, Bottoms et al. 1996; Matthews 1999). Rock's observation in relation to the new Holloway reflected this notion – in place of the informal social control engendered by the old building, the new anti-panoptican design created a special sense of unease. Officers complained that the new layout encouraged indiscipline and their overriding worry was how to hold security (Rock 1996 p 232/233). Similar concerns were expressed by the Dóchas Centre officers.

As well as the new layout of the building, worries about security also arose in relation to the perceived laxity of the regime. These were exacerbated by a number of security breaches. The first involved a member of a well-known criminal family who had been serving a long sentence and was allowed out on a training programme immediately prior to her release. Although accompanied by an officer she succeeded in absconding. She was recaptured within 12 hours but not before her action received criticism in the newspapers. *'Drug Dealer Back after L-plate Escape'* was the headline in the *Irish Independent* dated the 1st August 2000. This was a

reference to the fact that the prisoner had absconded when returning from a driving lesson that was part of a rehabilitation programme to prepare her for a contract cleaning job on release. The Director General of the Prison Service responded by pointing out 'Any outing of this kind has a degree of risk but a prison system without this degree of risk would have little or no rehabilitation function and society would be the loser in the long term' (The Irish Times, 1 August, 2000). In the second case, four women, accompanied by three officers, were visiting a hairdressing salon on the outside as part of a hairdressing course. They absconded. The feature in the Irish Independent dated 23 May 2002 began 'Jail staff were faced with a "hair today, gone tomorrow" dilemma when four inmates on day release escaped from their escort today'. In this case Governor McMahon faced criticism from within the Prison Service for underestimating the level of risk. However, three of the absconders returned of their own volition within a few days and the fourth, a little later.

More serious breaches involved two escapes from the prison itself. A woman carrying her child walked out with her family after a visit. She was quickly recaptured. As one officer commented

> "Security isn't a major issue here. I know one woman walked out. The fact that she held a baby in her arms that obstructed an officer's vision of her and she mingled with people. It was very simple. But you can't compensate for everything. If you want to have freedom of movement these things are going to happen – you are going to encounter that. It didn't get the media headlines. There was only a small paragraph in the evening paper". S04

The second escape posed a greater potential threat. Two young women gained unauthorised access to Phoenix House, broke a window and ran away.[112] One was quickly recaptured but the other evaded the authorities for much longer. Despite my being told that escapes had never occurred in the old prison where safety and security were an integral aspect of the radial design, it subsequently transpired that there had been one escape when a woman had walked out after a visit. However, in an attempt to alleviate the institutional nature of the new prison, safety and security were given a lower priority.

As part of the same objective officers were encouraged to dispense with the uniform. This presented another dilemma. Many welcomed the idea of wearing civilian clothes.

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[112] Phoenix was the pre-release house for trusted women who were coming to the end of their sentence. Those living in Phoenix normally went out to work every day. Access to the house was meant to be limited to the occupants only.

"I loved it from the start. I never wore a uniform. I stopped wearing the uniform when I got pregnant in March the previous year and I haven't worn a uniform since. The whole place here suits me. It is relaxing, easy going". S10

"In the old place, if a girl ever went to strike you the rest of the prisoners would back them up because they saw a uniform, whereas here, I wear my uniform an odd day and wear my civvies another day - everyone sees me as me – as a person. They don't see me as this figure of authority or anything like that". S05

However, dispensing with the uniform was not welcomed by everyone.[113] As authority is problematic in a prison setting, the uniform was seen by some as an assertion of their authority. In his study of Irish prison officers, McGuckin found that 46% of new officers and 27% of established officers in his sample, believed that the uniform gave them the authority to do their job. They also believed *'it visually expresses in a symbolic but nonetheless forceful manner, the role, authority and rank of the individual'* (McGuckin 2000). This was reminiscent of the argument put forward by Thomas that in a prison the uniform reaffirms the high status of the officer and the low status of the prisoner (Thomas 1972 p41/42). When researching female police officers, Heidensohn concluded that the uniform had even more layers of importance for them than for their male colleagues. The uniform represented a visible symbol both of their position and their authority (Heidensohn 2000). On the other hand, officers in Grendon therapeutic prison in England believed that the regime in operation there required different skills which relied more on their own personal resources rather than the authority of any uniform (Genders and Player 1995 p125). This was more akin to the ethos of the Dóchas Centre. Nonetheless, the question of the uniform continued to be raised specifically in relation to security

"Security would be a big problem in the event of some major happening. In training, you are taught things like walk behind a prisoner; never leave a door off its latch; never be with a prisoner on your own.[114] And some people would still be of that thinking. Also, the fact that not everyone wears a uniform – in the event of a riot you don't know who is who if it comes to pulling people off who. But you can't go through life saying this could happen, that could happen. There have been no incidents like that. But it only takes one. There are occasional fights; there have been officers assaulted, nothing serious". P12

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[113] About half the officers stopped wearing the uniform at a very early stage. By the end of the fieldwork period, very few officers were still wearing a uniform. By that time, the number of male officers had increased and for obvious reasons, the uniform was not nearly so important for them in a female prison.

[114] The national training for Irish prison officers was totally geared to managing male prisons. No special training was provided for working in a female prison.

Apart from one incident that had occurred in the first couple of weeks, there was no formal evidence of attacks on officers.[115] This does not mean that they did not occur nor does it negate the fact that some officers continued to *feel* unsafe. In relation to design, Fairweather argued that '*the perception of risk is almost as important an influence as the risk itself and will vary among prison users*' (Fairweather 2000 p32). Prior to the move, the perception of risk had been high because of the various buildings and the blind spots. Risk associated with communal eating had been especially strong (see Chapter 4). The fears proved unfounded as Governor McMahon explained

> "*Some of the staff said it is going to be bedlam in the dining room – they will all be fighting and this, that and the other. As you know yourself, Barbara, the dining room runs so smoothly and they don't even smoke in it which is a huge, huge plus. They are very respectful to the dining room*". [116]

Gradually, the issue of safety appeared to diminish. By the time of the formal interviews it was raised only twice and from two different perspectives

> "*It is a dangerous place to work in because of the layout – the architectural design. When you were on the landing you would have all officers and prisoners together. If anything happened you could all just come together within a couple of minutes. I am absolutely amazed that something hasn't been staged that all officers run to one house thinking there is a row and something really serious is going down in another place. Here you cannot find where the girls are half the time because they can wander in and out even though they are not supposed to. It is a very bad layout. It would be the only prison in the world where you don't know where people are*". S13

> "*The place here is run really well or has done really well so far, but the fact that tomorrow if something went wrong and if there was a riot or something in here, then I think it would be a lot harder to deal with than it would have been up in the old place. If the whole place went up at the same time – little things like that you end up thinking about. If it did go wrong it would go very wrong, or it has the potential to go very, very wrong. Whereas in the old prison it didn't have as much potential to do that*". S11

It was interesting to note that these two quotes were from officers who had not experienced the old prison and the issue of safety was raised in the context of the extreme conditions of a potential riot and not as had been the case earlier, in relation

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[115] There were no specific data available on the number of assaults on prison officers and apart from the one incident, none of the officers mentioned actually being attacked. See later in this chapter under, 'Maintaining Discipline' for a summary of the discipline reports.

[116] Originally the chairs in the dining room were fixed to the floor. In late 2003 (after the fieldwork was completed) new, free-standing chairs were introduced. This again gave rise to complaints from some officers about the potential threat to safety as they could be used in a fight. However, the chairs in the kitchens in the houses could also have been used in a fight but this did not happen.

to individual attacks. There was no history of riots in the old female prison. According to Governor Lonergan, on one occasion in the 1980s

> "They [the prisoners] *took over the recreation room one night and they had the staff in there for about half an hour and then released them. It wouldn't be a riot. I have no memory of a riot where the prison would be wrecked and an awful lot of damage done to people and property*".

In the view of the Assistant Governor, isolation and personal safety were the 'in' issues of prison officers in general at the time and were being used as an argument for maintaining staff numbers and high levels of overtime.[117] Any reduction could be interpreted as a potential threat to the exercise of control and to the status of officers in the contested world of the prison. This opinion may have been pure speculation as there was no means of proving it either way but because of the apparent financial attraction of the job as expressed by the officers and the inevitability of future changes as a result of changed status of the Prison Service, it could not be entirely discounted. However, officers in the Dóchas Centre had more pressing needs. In addition to coping with the issues raised by the new physical environment, they also had to adjust to the demands of their new role under a new regime.

MANAGING IN THE NEW WORLD

Regime Change

The regime in the old prison could best be described as humane containment. The daily routine was based on a strict timetable with little room for flexibility. As part of development of the Dóchas Centre, the opinions of both the prisoners and the officers had been sought and many of their ideas were incorporated in the Strategy Document (see chapter 2). However, these opinions had been expressed in 1993. It was now the year 2000 and officers, many of whom had joined in the interim, were experiencing the reality on a daily basis. One of the most significant changes in the regime was the amount of out-of-cell time that the prisoners were allowed. In the old prison they were locked in their cells at defined times during the day with final lock back at 7.30pm.[118] Lock-back time had provided an opportunity for officers to have their meal breaks together and to socialise. In the new prison, prisoners were

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[117] This was during the year 2000 when two new prisons were opened and more importantly, the new independent Irish Prison Service was developing its strategic plan which focussed on greater financial controls, especially on overtime.

[118] Lock up times in the old prison were 8.15 to 9.15 am; 12.15 to 2.15 pm; 4.15 to 5.15 pm (in essence, meal times) and final lock back at 7.30 pm.

unlocked from 8.00am until 7.30pm or later, depending on the house, which meant that officers had to be available for continuous supervision including mealtimes. Their breaks were now staggered and their time to socialise curtailed. In addition, with the new working environment of the houses, officers were expected to take a much more proactive role in engaging with the women.

A typical day in the life of a 'house' officer began at 8am with unlocking and organising the women to go to the Health Care Unit for their medication. The women themselves prepared their own breakfast during which time the officer continued to ensure that everyone got up from bed – not always an easy task. The next major challenge involved cajoling the women to finish their breakfast and complete the domestic chores. This could result in arguments and disputes which had to be handled with tact and diplomacy if major dissent were to be avoided. As well as ensuring the smooth running of the houses, the officers were expected to encourage the women to attend school or other activities (not mandated) or to ensure they were ready to attend court or hospital. They were also expected to be available to help them either with personal issues related to their physical or psychological wellbeing or with a myriad of practical problems – for example, contacting the Health Care Unit, Probation or the chaplain on their behalf, finding out about special visits, confirming the timing for their next visit to court or answering a whole variety of questions that could arise during the course of the day.

Officers were likely to be confined to the house all day either alone or accompanied by another officer. Depending on the occupants and how many were 'hanging around', the day could be quiet and boring with nothing happening or alternatively, extremely demanding with women continuously asking for favours, complaining about various things, requiring care and support because they were depressed, sad, upset or angry or needing help to resolve a myriad of different problems. Much of the time was spent on administrative duties, following up on requests from the women or responding to questions from other members of staff, probation or the Health Care Unit. If any of the women were confined to their bed for medical reasons it was necessary to perform regular checks to ensure they were alright.

Their day was likely to be punctuated by visits from officers from other houses or by the Governor or Chief Officer on their rounds and also relieved by informal chats over the telephone with colleagues. During the early evening, it was normal for house officers to socialise with their charges in the kitchen or the recreation room prior to

the final task of encouraging them to go to their room for lock up. Being a house officer meant becoming involved with a small group of women, getting to know them and trying to help and support them as much as possible. In the same way as it was for the prisoners, how the houses actually operated was very much dependent on who happened to be living there at that particular time. The following quotation from an officer makes the point

> *"There is a nice bunch of girls here* [in a house in the big yard]. *And it is a settled house. It means that you can actually do something. I love working in the small yard as well because there is so much variety there. They are nearly all remands there and they are in and out, in and out. But I think if I had to do a full year with chopping and changing, with a different person in each room every day, I would go mad. Whereas, here you can work with the girls together and on a one to one basis and you know when you come in in the morning there will be the same few faces there in front of you. Plus the fact that they are going to be used to seeing me around here and I will be used to seeing everyone. And on my days off I can say, well, how did you get on without me or whatever? Whereas, when you go back into Rowan or Maple house, after your days off, you don't have one person left that you had, so you have to get to know everyone again. And it is a lot harder to try and give people a hand, more than anything else".* S05

Another officer who worked in the small yard believed that the new regime was good for both the prisoners and the staff

> *"It is a very good idea – the fact that you are giving them back some of their independence. They have their own kitchen; they can make their own cups of tea whenever they want; they can get stuff from the kitchen and use the cookers to make food or whatever they want themselves. My own experience is the day is a lot quicker here. There is freedom to move round or you can go outside and talk to the girls if it is a nice day. It is just more flexible over here".* S14

It would be wrong to suggest that all officers saw their new role in the same light. Although initially they may have welcomed the increased responsibility, the following comment suggests that over time, their enthusiasm could be eroded

> *"Initially, I liked the responsibility. I liked the fact that I was handed a bunch of keys and I was given responsibility for ten people* [in a house] *– their needs whether it be a phone call, post; if they were sick make sure that they got to see a nurse or, if need be, a doctor. The girls got to know you and there was great rapport built up between us. It was brilliant. But, towards the end of it, any kind of days that I did overtime I was still brought in to that yard* [to the same house] *so I never got a break. That really drove me potty. You kind of lose interest. I would always be at the girls to clean and towards the end I was –'well, if you don't do it, you don't do it. It is your house. You live in it. I don't. I will keep my own area clean and that was it'. You just became totally disinterested with the whole thing. But it was basically the same shit, a different day. So when you have drilled into the girls – this is my routine, this is what we do and they are moved on. You have them for a couple of weeks and you start back at scratch again. But it was just an evil circle – going on*

and on and on. So you just kind of went — what is the point? Nobody is listening to you". S18

In the same way as living in houses had implications for relationships among the prisoners, the principles underpinning the new regime made increasing demands of the officers to foster good relationships with the women.

Re-establishing Relationships

Staff-prisoner relationships are at the heart of every prison system and the stability and smooth running of the prison depends on getting these relationships right (Sykes 1958; McGowan 1980; Sparks, Bottoms et al. 1996; Liebling, Price et al. 1999; Liebling and Price 2001; Woodman and Dale 2002). The *form* of that relationship will vary depending on the aims of the particular prison in question. In the old prison, relationships reflected a level of accommodation. There were formal routines, recognised rules and a tacit understanding of the boundaries between the controllers and the controlled. Association periods, which provided the main opportunity for interaction, were both limited in time and communal in nature. In the Dóchas Centre, the new physical arrangements, regime and expectation that officers would engage more with the women, changed the dynamics. 'Association' was now a more flexible concept. Prisoners were unlocked all day and if not involved in activities, could be around in the houses or in the gardens at any time. During the early months of occupation, their constant presence, coupled with the other issues highlighted in chapter 4, put a severe strain on relationships between staff and prisoners. Officers were concerned that there was a danger of a distance growing between them that had not been there in the old prison.

By about March 2000, three months after the move, the situation had begun to change. In a discussion with a group of officers, one explained that initially she had been very unsettled but now believed that working in a specific house allowed her to get to know the women better.[119] The others agreed. Similar sentiments were

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[119] Allocation to jobs was based on a combination of officers' choice and availability of job. Officers applied to be considered for a particular job or choice of jobs, for example, to work in a specific house, the school, the control room, the gym or Reception. Depending on the availability of the job they may get their first, second or third choice. Once allocated a particular post, they were likely to remain in that position for a year. However, this allocation system allowed for a measure of flexibility – for example, the gym officer worked in a house during the periods that the gym was not in operation. One of the attractions of the Dóchas Centre was this job flexibility.

expressed during later visits. Both prisoners and staff were gradually adjusting to the new living/working conditions and it was clear from observing the interaction between the two parties, that the informality of the relationship that had existed in the old prison was re-emerging. Evidence of this was to be seen with officers sitting chatting with women in the recreation room or in the gardens. Often when a woman was upset, she would disappear into the officer's room in the house to seek help or support – it may have been to talk through a problem or she may have wanted the officer to phone a mother, husband or other family member to resolve an issue. This would not be viewed by other prisoners as anything untoward. Like the situation at the circle in the old prison where there had been a constant stream of prisoners requesting favours of one kind or another, now, in the houses, the women continued to ask officers questions or favours. For the most part, they responded with tact and sympathy. Relationships between both parties were re-adjusting. The situation was helped by the clear visibility of the senior staff.[120] The Governor, Assistant Governor and the Chief Officer (separately) made a point of walking around the prison every day and talking to the women most of whom they got to know by name. In addition, it was not unusual for senior staff as well as the ordinary officers to share meals with the women in the dining rooms.

By the time of the more formal interviews, all of the officers responded that they considered relationships with the women were either good or very good.

"I think the houses are great. They build up relationships – relationships between me and the girls, between all the girls that are in the house". S05

"It is more relaxed here. Maybe just on a physical thing – the surroundings are different. Maybe I just feel, because it is a house, with bright walls and a TV that it is more relaxed. In the old place, if you were sitting in a recreation room, a cold room with a TV there, all the officers at the back. Whereas if you are watching TV with them it is nice and cosy in nice comfortable armchairs. So it is much more homely. So it is more relaxed. It is less supervisory". S12

"A lot of the day I find, maybe because I am an older man, that they [the prisoners] are inclined to talk to me and to be able to let them know that I am listening without shouting at somebody else or doing something for somebody else.[121] It is very important to them. I have to be able to give them the time and look at them straight in the face. Keep listening to what they are saying; not just appear to be but it is very important because, I suppose, it appears like they are whinging at lot of the time and it is very easy to dismiss them. And they are used to being dismissed". S02

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[120] The hierarchy consisted of the Governor, the Assistant Governor, the Chief Officer, six to eight Assistant Chief Officers and the officers.

[121] The question of male officers is discussed later in this chapter.

It was interesting that when the prisoners were asked about their view of relationships with the officers a similar pattern emerged. 21 (out of 24) replied that they got on well with the officers, with a few exceptions; two said that they did not have much to do with them and one had no time for any of them. The following examples illustrate the point

"They help us an awful lot. I don't care what the girls say but I am after getting an awful lot of help off prison officers mostly in here". P12

"I get on grand with all officers except one or two. I get on grand with all of them. They really care about the work and they treat girls with respect so you treat them back with respect. That is the way I like it, when you get treated with a bit of respect. You would be able to give it back". P14

"The officers are very, very understanding. You could talk to the officers about anything and it is like – they wouldn't go and make a laugh, you know the way they say over in the men's – don't tell them this, that is a scum bag. You can tell them anything. Some of them are genuine, very understanding – genuinely good " P18

This feedback contrasted markedly with the more common image of the relationship between officers and prisoners as being at best tolerant but cautious and at worst hostile and confrontational (Sykes 1958; Carlen 1983; Kauffman 1988; Sparks, Bottoms et al. 1996; Kruttschnitt, Gartner et al. 2000; Liebling and Price 2001). Even in a therapeutic or rehabilitative context, relationships were dependent on *'the degree to which officers and inmates are able to modify their traditional prison roles, in order to break down the social divide between the 'keepers' and the 'kept', and to facilitate co-operative relationships and alternative working practices'* (Genders and Player 1995 p122). The ethos of the Dóchas Centre was to facilitate the type of co-operative relationships to which Genders and Player refer. Whereas such a notion may have been a laudable aspiration, it was not universally accepted as can be gleaned from the following comment

"officers – the relationship [with other officers] *has changed down here because we are not as close a bunch. The camaraderie is not quite the same. But at the same time there is good camaraderie. Then again we have had a lot of staff and we were glad to see the back of them. They would spend their time just bitching the whole time and causing problems". S06*

Part of this 'bitching' related to the perceived lack of discipline in the new prison. Many officers considered the regime too lax and this, in turn, affected their relationships both with the prisoners and the management. If staff/prisoner relationships are at the heart of every prison system, the quality of that relationship is very much influenced by both the ethos of the institution and how its rules are

implemented (Genders and Player 1995; Sparks, Bottoms et al. 1996). How the rules were implemented or not implemented was an issue that arose frequently throughout the period of the research.

Maintaining Discipline

The subject of discipline is a recurring theme in the literature on prisons in general but on women's prisons in particular. Sykes saw the prison as a society within a society where the social order was maintained through a massive body of regulations which was meant to control the behaviour of the inmates. However, he argued that *'the authoritarian community of the prison does not need to be a harshly repressive one but the demand for more extensive control than is to be found in society at large will continue'* (Sykes 1958 p133). Whereas he was writing about high security prisons for men in the US, the sentiment could equally be applied to prisons in general. It was interesting to note that even in the more relaxed environment of Grendon therapeutic prison for men in the UK, the extent to which dissidence was tolerated was limited and carefully circumscribed. Despite the more informal relationships between officer and prisoner, staff retained full authority over all decisions that affected discipline and control (Genders and Player 1995 p 198). In Albany and Long Lartin men's prisons in the UK, irrespective of the different types of regime, staff spoke of *'the necessity of declaring and enforcing a line of acceptable or unacceptable behaviour'* (Sparks, Bottoms et al. 1996 p 152). Where that line was drawn was very much dependent on the ethos of the institution and what it was trying to achieve.

The literature on women's prisons indicated that the boundary between acceptable and unacceptable behaviour was likely to be more tightly demarcated than in men's prisons (see chapter 1). Staff may have been encouraged to become involved with their charges but at the same time, women were subjected to a wider range of petty restrictions than their counterparts in male establishments (Freedman 1981; Carlen 1983; Dobash, Dobash et al. 1986; Hahn Rafter 1990; Faith 1993; Heidensohn 1996; Carlen 1998; Zedner 1998; Kruttschnitt, Gartner et al. 2000). During the 19th century, women in UK prisons, although spared the men's harsh conditions, were subject to many petty rules in order to comply with society's conception of appropriate female behaviour (Zedner 1998). Carlen argued that at the end of the 20th century little had changed. She quoted a senior Home Office official – *"There is a negative culture in women's prisons and much of it is very punitive"* and a male Governor of a female

189

prison – "*I was shocked when I came here at the severity of female staff towards prisoners, much severer than male staff on male prisoners, much less tolerant*" (Carlen 1998 p 86/87).

The Dóchas Centre presented a different picture. One of the major complaints from the officers was what they considered, the *lack* of discipline and the *leniency* with which the women were treated when they were put on disciplinary report. Some considered that the new prison was too soft. However, documentary comparison with the old prison did not support this contention. The evidence from the Discipline Report Book suggested a remarkable consistency in the volume of breaches of discipline between the two. Table 15 summarises the main types of offences and their frequency. [122]

Table 15   Breaches of Discipline   1999 - 2001
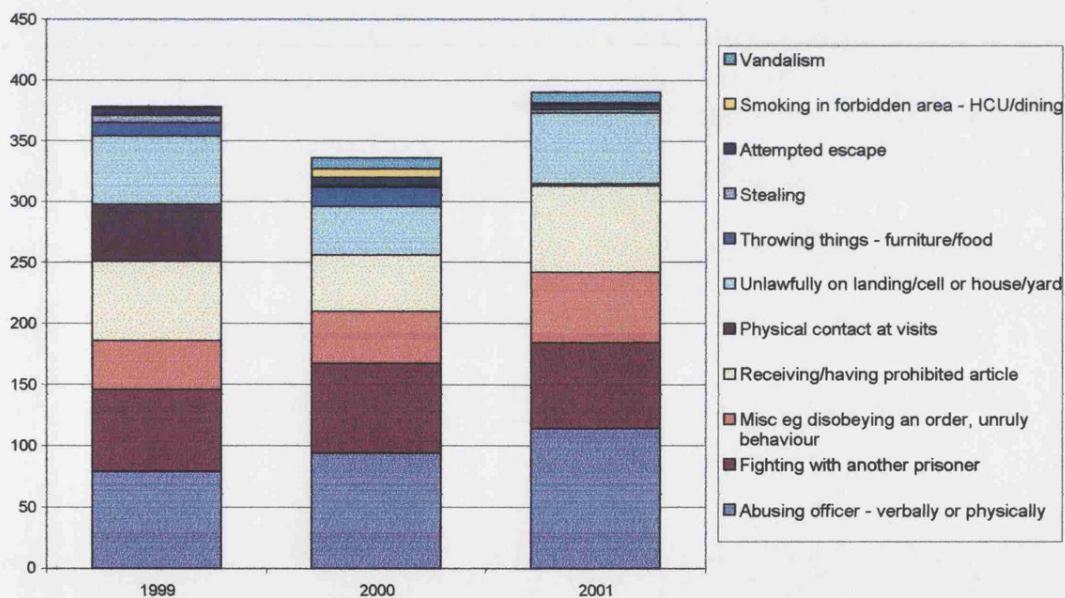
Source: Discipline Report Book in the Dóchas Centre

The number of women committed to the old prison during 1999 was 713 and to the new prison in 2000 was 767. Comparing the number of breaches against the total number of committals for the year –1999 showed a total of 377 breaches (0.53 per prisoner) and 2000 indicated 336 (0.44 per prisoner).[123] Despite the higher number of occupants in 2000, the number of disciplinary reports actually decreased to 336.

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[122] These statistics were compiled by me from the *Discipline Report Book*.

[123] It would be misleading to use the average daily population as an indicator as, in the old prison, it was distorted by the number of women on Temporary Release (TR).

As with any statistics, care must be taken with the interpretation of the data. It is well known that staff implement the rules selectively. Official numbers on discipline breaches reflect the end product of staff decisions and do not take into account the discretion of the officers in the application of the rules (Sparks, Bottoms et al. 1996 p124). How breaches of discipline were dealt with was of particular significance in the case of the Dóchas Centre and gave rise to a variety of different views.

Dealing with Breaches

The whole ethos of the new prison was to engage with the women and to help them take responsibility for their own lives. Managing by the rule book was the antithesis of this concept. At the same time, officers, like officers in any other prison, had to maintain order. Sparks, Bottoms et al defined order as '*any long standing pattern of social relations in which the expectations that participants have of one another are commonly met, though not necessarily without contestation ......* Order in prisons is maintained by *the use of routines and a variety of formal and informal practices – especially, but not only, sanctions'*. They also acknowledged that there was no neat fit between the demands of the prisoners and those of the staff (Sparks, Bottoms et al. 1996 p 119 and 303). This raised an important question of legitimacy of the prison's procedures. Legitimacy is defined in the Oxford English Dictionary as being 'able to defend with logic or justification' and was a key feature of the Woolf Report of 1991. The Report emphasised the importance of justice, reasonableness and equity in the treatment of prisoners and these concepts were incorporated as guiding principles underlying the philosophy of the Dóchas Centre (see chapter 2).

Officers were expected to minimise their use of formal sanctions and maintain order by alternative approaches, using their own initiative. Formal sanctions necessitated the officer completing a Discipline Report (Form P19), for a breach of discipline and the offender appearing before the Governor to receive her punishment. The main punishments were warnings or reductions in privileges, for example, loss of telephone calls, removal of television from the room, being locked back at 5.30 instead of 7.30. If found using drugs in a privileged house it could result in being moved to a less privileged house or if drugs were passed during a visit, the penalty was screened visits or a ban on the visitor who passed the drugs. The most severe

punishment was being sent to Limerick prison.[124] Although most women dreaded such a prospect not all shared that view as an officer explained

"The only other discipline they would have here is Limerick – send them to Limerick. That is the big discipline. A lot of them don't mind Limerick because it is like the old prison and it is familiar to them. Because there are people in here who don't like this prison. They just can't cope with the isolation. They need someone to be telling them to do something all the time. Because that is what they are used to from being in prison. And they can't cope with that little bit of independence they have".S03

Many of the officers believed that the punishments meted out by the Governors for breaches of discipline, were too lenient as the following examples illustrate

"You have your P19 [Discipline Report] but, the saying here is, why bother wasting the ink on your pen if all they are going to get is warned and advised. They will be warned, final warning, final warning, final warning. If somebody is in Cedar [the privileged house] and is being abusive either to staff or to another prisoner they should get demoted [to a less privileged house] but it is not happening. I have no problem if someone slips up once or twice – give them a chance. Everyone deserves a chance. But when it is constant I think they should be booted out [of Cedar] and have to start all over again. Because they are obviously not going to learn any lesson if they are going to be left in the house. The discipline thing seems to be gone out the window here. Sometimes someone has to really go over the top before they are dealt with". S05

"There is a lot more leniency down here than there would have been up in the old prison where the regime would have been a bit stricter. You get away with it a lot more down here but if you do something bad enough down here, then you will get punished for it. It can be frustrating a lot of the time because you are writing a report on something and you don't see a result or you don't see somebody getting the slap on the wrist and they think they can do it again then. Or you end up thinking what is the point of writing the report if you are not going to do something about it". S11

Other officers, irrespective of experience, rank or role, might agree about the lack of discipline but had a different perspective when it came to how the breach should be handled

"If they are abusive to you, hit you or do anything, you can put them on report. Personally I have done four Reports since I have been a prison officer which is nothing because I don't really get any stick [trouble]. They treat me correctly

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[124] Limerick is the men's prison in the west of Ireland used mainly for local women on short-term remand or on short sentences (see chapter 2/3). It was also used as a place of discipline for those in the Dóchas Centre who committed serious breaches of discipline, for example, attacking another prisoner. (The women and the officers saw Limerick as a place of punishment. The Governor viewed it as a help to relieve overcrowding). The regime was very strict and the facilities for passing the time were extremely limited. During the research period a refurbished wing was in process of being made available to accommodate the women. It was an improvement on their existing conditions but was nowhere near the standard of the Dóchas Centre. There was also a plan in place to build a new separate facility for women some time in the future.

*and I treat them correctly. I **ask** people to do something. I don't **tell** them. It is entirely the way you say it".* S13

"I very rarely put people on P19s. If I have a problem with somebody I would rather sort it out myself rather than have to go and bring the Governors in or the Chief in. I think they [the prisoners] respect that a lot more. If you have an argument with somebody and they come and apologise to you later on which, nine times out of ten, they do, you say OK fair enough, we'll forget about it. But sometimes if you find drugs in cells or syringes or things like that – you have no choice. You have to report that. But, petty little things like not doing what they are told or if they are abusive, you give them the chance and if they don't take the chance up to apologise, that is when you use the P19s. I would prefer to try and sort things out myself, if I can and when I can". S14

"To be honest with you I think it is very awkward to discipline. Since I have been here I have written about three or four P19s. I felt like, if it wasn't a serious matter, the Governor didn't really do anything and it was only, in many ways, undermining you writing it. If there was a fight or something like that I would write one – something serious. If one of them said to me to 'fuck off' or gave me loads of verbal abuse I wouldn't bother putting them on report. I would tell them it was unacceptable and if there was some kind of little punishment I could give them myself, I would give it to them. You are undermining yourself anyway, if you are always just running to the Governor. I think it is a hard kind of thing sometimes to figure out when it comes to disciplining them, how to discipline them. Officers obviously can't have too much power and I agree with that. It would be wrong if you could just throw them into a cell and just lock them. It would lead to abuse of power. At the same time, it is tough sometimes, if something did happen and it is just kind of brushed aside [by the Governor]". S08

These comments were quite interesting in that they suggested that the officers were prepared to waive sanctions in a way that highlighted their authority. It may not have been done at a conscious level but it was a reminder of the inherent power imbalance in any prison setting. Officers also recognised that repeatedly putting prisoners on disciplinary report can suggest that they are incapable of handling the everyday situations that arise. Those who maintain order by applying the strict letter of the law in the face of every minor infraction of the rules, become a burden to management and lose the respect of the prisoners (Sykes 1958; Sparks, Bottoms et al. 1996; Liebling and Price 2001). In McGowan's study of Irish officers in the 1970s, he concluded that supervisors did not see the good officer as one who obeyed the rules blindly. *'They expect him to exercise his discretion and by judicious use of reward and punishment, to keep the prisoners in order'* (McGowan 1980 p266). The following comment from Governor McMahon made it clear that this was still the case 30 years later

"Everybody likes to have this discipline – this set of rules and regulations. That is one of the MAJOR complaints. It had been a major complaint in the past,

about there was no discipline. I suppose it is about making decisions. I would sometimes say to the staff, if Marianne [for example] is not doing her cleaning or if she is abusive – she can't be abusive either. But there are ways and means. I don't believe in locking people up in their rooms. It festers. They then get very angry about the officer who has made the complaint about them. And sometimes a lot of the complaints – they can work both ways. A lot of them can be instigated as well. Somebody [an officer] can come in in bad humour in here and one word can trigger off something else".

The prisoners themselves did not consider that discipline was a major feature of their daily lives. When questioned on the subject, 60% indicated that there were not many rules.

"I don't think there are that many rules or regulations to be honest with you – just keep your house tidy; keep your own area tidy; don't give any cheek which is normal for anyone and anyway if you have any respect for the elders you don't give them cheek anyway. If you are really giving abuse to an officer, that is when you might get a P19. The likes of drugs as well. Someone was caught in the little yard last week and got a P19 because we are not allowed in the small yard. Apart from that – that is it really. You get away with an awful lot". P10

"I find them quite lenient actually because when you see a lot of prisoners, when they want something, the way they can ask for it – they can demand it or they can give back cheek or whatever. There are not really many, the rules like going into each others houses, well, I agree with that because things start going missing and other people are getting blamed. You know, so I do agree with that" P23

That is not to suggest that there were no complaints about the rules

"You are not to back talk to the officers. If you back talk, you are put on report which means that you lose privileges – like your shop order or your phone calls. You have to be in your house for ten past seven – get your stuff ready and in your cell for half seven. And if you are running around still at a quarter to eight trying to grab things, you are put on report. Just silly little things". P19

Other prisoners expressed similar sentiments but mainly in the context of being treated unfairly or inconsistently. The issue of inconsistency of treatment in relation to drugs and house allocation was covered in chapter 5. Other examples of inconsistency involved the use of discretion if found in the wrong house or when the rule was in place, failure to lock back if a prisoner was not involved in an activity. Wherever there are rules, the exercise of discretion is inevitable. A degree of discretion is *inherent* in applying the rules in a prison setting. The extent of the discretion is predicated on the ethos of the particular institution (Sparks, Bottoms et al. 1996 p151). The ethos of the Dóchas Centre was to avoid excessive use of the disciplinary procedures. Liebling and Price described the under-use of power involving the diligent and skilled use of discretion, as the best form of prison officer

work (Liebling and Price 2001 p 124). However, it is not without its hazards. There is always the danger that the under-use of power degenerates into unprofessionalism or at worst, dereliction of duty (Sykes 1958; Liebling and Price 2001). Staff and prisoners are mutually dependent to achieve the smooth running of the institution. When it comes to the rules, a certain level of tolerance is not only desirable but essential. Getting the balance right is the constant challenge that confronts prison officers on a daily basis. In a prison like the Dóchas Centre where rigid control was not a paramount concern, where rules were fluid and the regime was evolving, some officers believed that the balance had gone too far in favour of the prisoner

> "They are all into rehabilitation and not enough into discipline. I think a much harsher regime would work. I agree with rehabilitation and all the rest. You have to. Otherwise you are sending people out on the street and inevitably they are going to come back. But a deterrent would have to be a harsher prison as in – if they don't go to school, more severe punishment. Lots of them have school to go to but decline". S12

This comment encapsulated the ambiguity of the role of the prison officer and raised the perennial problem of the potential conflict between the ideals of reform and the demands of retribution.

The Dilemmas of the New Role

Galtung described the dichotomy of reform and retribution as 'probably one of the most frequently contemplated topics in the entire field of penological theory – the functional incompatibility of such ends as, for example, retribution and therapy'. He argued that there are inherent contradictions between the two philosophies – for example, you cannot at the same time, have a punishment **and** a treatment orientation; portray the prison to society in negative and deterrent terms **and** also as a positive symbol; hold a prisoner against his/her will **and** expect him/her to accept therapy willingly; expect relationships between officers and prisoners to be such as to discourage a closeness that could endanger operative efficiency in an emergency **and** encourage closer interaction between the two to facilitate the transfer of values from officer to prisoner. An institution that attempts to maximise both goals will be ridden with conflict (Galtung 1966 p122/123). In Thomas's incisive history of the English prison officer, he argued that the role of the basic officer was the 'product of a complex historical process which has its roots in the Victorian prison system' and it had remained remarkably unchanged for more than 100 years. He goes on to argue that despite the introduction of reformative or rehabilitative goals, the role of the officer has always been to control and his success or failure as an officer has been

predicated on his ability to achieve that (Thomas 1972). To a large extent this was still the case in Ireland at the end of the 20th century.

McGuckin discovered that it was easier for Irish officers to define what their role was not, than to define what it actually was (McGuckin 2000). When he summarised his findings on the subject, the results were as follows

Perception of Primary Role	New recruits	Established officers
Keep prisoners in custody	78%	59%
Lock and unlock prisoners	10%	15%
Help prisoners	38%	22%

NB It was not possible to establish why the percentages did not add up to 100%

His study, like so many others, concentrated on men's prisons. Liebling and Price referred to recent research in the UK, the US and Australia that suggested that officers may define their role differently, some preferring a mainly custodial interpretation, others having a 'treatment' orientation (Liebling and Price 2001). A similar conclusion was reached by Sparks, Bottoms *et al* in their work in two English male prisons with a very different ethos. They found that officers' perception of their role was quite different in the two prisons. Long Lartin (one of the prisons in the study), with its relatively relaxed approach, was a shock to those officers coming from a more rigidly structured prison. '*Such people typically talked of the transition as being 'huge', requiring a mental adjustment of attitude and expectation*' (Sparks, Bottoms et al. 1996 p 133/134). A senior officer who transferred to Long Lartin from Dorchester, a more traditional prison in the UK, had this to say:

> "*how to deal with people and how things were done, compared with Dorchester, where there was an expected routine and inmates knew what to do and how to toe the line. At that time my concept of order was to have a clear landing and people who were supposed to be behind locked doors were behind them. I controlled those on the landing and those going to visits. I'd got the power of the key. I found here* [Long Lartin], *you haven't got a key at all, even at lock up. You have to use your personality to get everyone behind their doors at locking time*" quoted in (Sparks, Bottoms et al. 1996 p 133).

This statement could equally have applied to an officer moving from the old women's prison to the Dóchas Centre. How things had been done at Dorchester were comparable to how things had been done in the old female prison. Of greater significance was the admission by the ex-Dorchester officer that the period of adjustment to the more relaxed regime in Long Lartin could take many months. This situation was all too obvious in the Dóchas Centre.

Officers' reluctance to embrace the new role expected of them raised the broader question of management expectation in an environment that puts increasing demands on that role. According to the literature, prison officers traditionally constituted the main barrier to change in prisons as they often saw experimenting with new methods as too risky (Smith 1962; Mama, Mars et al. 1987; McConville 1998; Carlen 2001). When the demands on the role were extended to embrace the rehabilitative aspirations of reforming experiments, the pressures to reconcile the conflicting aims of care and custody could become even greater (Towndrow 1969; Lundstrom 1985; O'Dwyer, Wilson et al. 1987; Sparks, Bottoms et al. 1996; Liebling and Price 2001). For many months after the move to the Dóchas Centre, informal feedback confirmed that such conflict existed. Governor McMahon admitted

> *"Because there was a certain group of staff who did not want the regime here, they disrupted it for everybody else for a long time. It was a constant battle – I don't mean a battle with me and them but there was always the undercurrents there. I knew there were undercurrents there even though to me they would say there was no difficulty. Some of them left because they just did not like the regime. The easiest thing in the world to do is to come in and not have to make a decision. Nobody likes to make decisions that are going to be controversial. And when you say to staff, right, use your initiative, very few like doing it".*

On the other hand there were those for whom using their initiative presented both an exciting and a rewarding opportunity.

> *"This place is open to suggestions and doing alternative stuff. You are not just opening and closing gates. If you have something that you want to do this place will facilitate it as much as possible. So if you have something you have in your head, you know that if it is a positive thing for the girls and there is any way they [the management] can manage it in here, they will let you go ahead with it. Because they are looking for answers too. They are looking for what is going to work. It is a positive, progressive prison. Anything that might occupy both officers and prisoners – anything that is there for prisoners to do, keep them occupied, keep them interested. The busier they are the less likely they are to get into trouble". S12*

> *"Over in Mountjoy [the men's prison] it is all run on seniority – the more service you have, you get all the cushy jobs. If you are only in the job a year or two you get all the dog's body jobs like standing on the gate or standing on the yard. Over here it doesn't work like that. You are an officer whether you have 25 years service or two days service. We are all here to do the one job and that seniority bullshit doesn't work. If you come up with a brainstorm of an idea and go to the Governor and say this might work to keep the girls occupied, if they think it will work they will say go ahead and organise it and they will give you the full backing. If you have ideas that you think will make the Dóchas Centre a better place for the staff and the prisoners the Governors will be more likely to listen to you over here". S14*

These statements also illustrate that the strict hierarchical boundaries that are characteristic of the military style organisation of traditional men's prisons was not a major feature of the Dóchas Centre. Staff initiatives were positively encouraged and some officers responded with enthusiasm. However, although many found their new role both rewarding and satisfying not everybody responded so enthusiastically. For some, the new demands resulted in high levels of stress.

> *"I would come in at 8am – call them* [the women] *for their medication. Then get them to start cleaning their house; then you have to try and get them to go to school or the workshops. It is impossible – it is just a nightmare, an absolute nightmare. I don't particularly like the houses because it is so stressful. And then the governors come round between 10 and 11 and I just find that so stressful. The governor is coming round and it is us that get the blame, not them, of course".* SO1

With the combination of the challenges of the new role and the increasing number of committals the issue of stress began to emerge. During the first year, officers began to complain about staff shortages. When two new men's prisons opened in Dublin and midlands Ireland towards the end of 2000, the staff situation was exacerbated. A number of Dóchas Centre officers who lived closer to these prisons took the opportunity to transfer. By the end of the year, staffing levels had replaced the safety issue as the major cause of grievance among the officers.

OVERWORKED AND UNDERSTAFFED

The problem of being overworked and understaffed was raised frequently throughout the research period. At the time of the move at the end of 1999, there were approximately 79 staff – including the Governor, chief officer and five or six Assistant Chief Officers. In the first three months of 2000, the number of prisoners was restricted to between 50 and 60 as only five of the houses were open. In March 2000, when Cedar and Phoenix became operative, there was accommodation for 80. Committals began to increase, particularly remands (see chapter 5). At the same time there was a reduction in temporary release and more aliens had to be accommodated. The average daily population grew to between 90 and 100 during the latter part of the year. (On a number of occasions it was as high as 105). The growing numbers combined with the demands of the new regime and the uncertainty of their role, resulted in rising stress levels among the officers, increased absenteeism and requests to be transferred to other facilities.

"Well, shortage of staff was the big thing. They conscripted ten females from Mountjoy [men's] to come over here on a full time basis – conscripted them.[125] *They weren't into it [they did not want to be there]. There were about three who were into it. We just didn't have the staff with the amount of people who were leaving, say to go to the Midlands – geographical things. I think there is nearly thirty odd staff in the last year who have left here – some for geographic reasons and some because they were just pissed off with the place. And then we just didn't have the staff which means that I couldn't get a day off; nobody here could get a day off. We couldn't even get your rest days off ". S03*

"An awful lot of them have left and all the senior staff have gone out of here – women with 14 or 15 years service and they have all gone to male institutions. They had worked in the old prison; they were there for years and they are all gone now. Some of them it is down to personal reasons that they were moving to areas that they were actually from – a lot of them were from the Midlands. But an awful lot of them have left because of the way the complex is being run." S04

Statements about the adequacy or inadequacy of staff numbers needed to be considered in context. When a prison is subject to strict routines and controlled by bars and locks, fewer staff are needed. Where there is generous association and staff are expected not only to supervise but are encouraged to engage with the prisoners, more staff are needed (Thomas 1972 p 163). This was the situation in the Dóchas Centre. Short of examining the individual daily records, it was difficult to know exactly how many staff were physically working in the Dóchas Centre on any one day. Because the men's prison was so close, officers were often sent over to fill in on a temporary basis. Sick leave statistics for the Prison Service indicated that between 1997 and 2002 the average number of sick days per staff member varied between 15 and 19 days. For Mountjoy it was between 16 and 18 compared to a general civil servant sickness absentee rate of 9 days. However, the Accounting Officer who produced the numbers warned that comparison with other public servants may be inadvisable due to the rostered nature of prison employment which can distort the figures (Office of the Comptroller and Auditor General 2003). Nonetheless, it was clear that the Prison Service did exhibit a higher level of sickness absence than their civil service colleagues and it is reasonable to conclude that the Dóchas Centre followed this pattern.

It was also true that many left, mainly voluntarily. One officer said *"in the last six months we have lost anything up to 50 staff out of here"*. There was no clear evidence to substantiate that statement. The only data available showed that the

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[125] 'Conscripted' was an interesting military term used by the officers to describe when it was compulsory for them to work either in a particular place or at a particular time.

number of transfers out between December 1999 and July 2003 was 45 of whom 42 were female and 3 were male.[126] Undoubtedly some very experienced officers were among that number. From personal feedback, at least five experienced officers left because they could not work in the new environment. However, the geographical pull was also important as Governor Lonergan explained

"We have been lucky that a number of staff that were disgruntled, that were in opposition and were undermining the thing, have left. They have gone off to other prisons and that is a plus. Then we lost some great staff as well because of location. It suited them geographically. They didn't want to leave the Dóchas Centre but they were forced to leave it because of their geographical and personal needs. But they are obviously a huge loss. It is very hard to get people who have enthusiasm and a good attitude and have the capacity to work in an environment like that. And then to lose them after putting a lot of work into their development as well is a bit frustrating".

Movement of staff also occurred after the relocation to the Blundeston prison in England referred to in chapter 4. There too, it was difficult to pinpoint the reasons. The Governor of Blundeston concluded *'that for nearly a quarter of the discipline staff to move in four years, is an indication of stress in a situation which some find difficult to bear'* (Towndrow 1969 p 177). The experience after the Holloway move was more extreme. Rock described how staff also suffered from low morale and very high levels of stress, sickness and absenteeism. He summarised their reaction – *'on one reading, staff felt defenceless, on another increasingly repressive and on a third, they had become very generally, and perhaps, indiscriminately, apprehensive and all were faces of the same beleaguered condition'* (Rock 1996 p 259 - 260).

Whereas there were significant issues in the Dóchas Centre for many months after the move, they never reached the extreme levels experienced in Holloway. Nonetheless, around 50% of the staff left within less than three years. An important caveat was the attraction of location, especially the midlands. Replacement staff were likely to be inexperienced, new to the Prison Service or in the case of male officers, new to working with females.

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[126] Email from Governor McMahon, dated 8 August 2003.

Staff and Female Prisoners

During the course of the research there was a noticeable increase in the number of male officers working in the Dóchas Centre. At the end of 1999, 9% of the staff was male (7 people). By 2003 it had increased to 25% (20 people). In his review of female prisons in England, Sir David Ramsbotham supported the idea of mixed gender staff on the basis of normalcy – it ensured that prisoners experienced relationships with both men and women. He also recommended that the ratio should be around 75:25 female to male (HM Inspectorate of Prisons 1997). However, it has long been acknowledged that working in a female prison was not the same as working in a man's prison. In the introduction to his book on the English prison officer, Thomas stated that *'The women's prisons deserve separate study. Although much of what I will discuss applies to them, they are and always have been, very different'* (Thomas 1972).

This difference was recognised from the time that separate prisons for women were first established (see Chapter 1). Regimes for female prisoners were frequently influenced by societal conceptions of 'femininity' and the expected role of women within the family as well as popular theories of female criminality that have been in vogue during different periods (Matthews 1999 p179). At the same time and influenced by the same concepts, *managing* female prisoners have also been considered different. One of the most important changes introduced in the UK in the 19th century, by the prison reformer Elizabeth Fry, was the management of female prisoners by women. When the question of separate female prisons was being debated in the US in the 1860s, the Mountjoy Female Prison in Ireland was taken as the model (Freedman 1981 p50). Management of women by women remained intact in Mountjoy until the 1980s. It was not until 1986 with the passing of the Equality Act that men were allowed to work in female prisons and *vice versa.*

From the time of the penitentiary, male prisons were generally operated on a quasi-military style where officers were required to follow set routines and enforce a vast body of rules strictly and uniformly (Sykes 1958; Thomas 1972; Kauffman 1988; Sparks, Bottoms et al. 1996; McConville 1998; Zedner 1998; Conover 2001). They were also expected to keep their distance from their charges. By contrast, it was not uncommon in female prisons, particularly during periods of penal experiments, for officers to be encouraged to interact with the women and by a combination of example, understanding, encouragement and support, help them to prepare for

reintegration back into society (Smith 1962; Freedman 1981; Lundstrom 1985; Faith 1993; Heidensohn 1996; Matthews 1999). This applied in the Dóchas Centre at the beginning of the 21st century and was a major culture shock for male officers who had no experience of the old prison. In addition to the domestic nature of the architecture, the principles underlying the regime were also predicated on gender. For male officers the biggest difference was in the level of interaction with the prisoners. [127]

> "Across the way the men wouldn't talk to an officer – there would be a big barrier. Here most of the officers would have a reasonably good relationship with the prisoners. To an extent there isn't half as much of a barrier. You can have a laugh and a joke with them. You are not watching your back the whole time. There is a certain amount of trust there to an extent, as much as you can trust them. It is more macho across the way. If one of the girls had a problem or got bad news and I would see her going into the room crying, you would go down and ask her what is the matter. And ninety nine times, she would talk to you. They would ask you what you think". S07

> "Here the women will just tell you everything about their life, absolutely everything. Sometimes that is a bad thing unless you are able to handle it. You don't want to be taking home somebody else's problems. At the same time there is a good regime here – you can touch stuff like that. You can maybe approach someone in the Connect,[128] or the Chief [the Chief Officer] and say – 'she has been raped or something and really has problems, can we do something to get her down to the Rape Crisis Centre or can we get her in a counsellor'? There is a lot more of that you can do for the prisoners here than you can do across there. It is completely different. I could sit out there and a girl could sit right next to me and talk to me. There is no way over in the men's jail that a man would come up and just sit down and talk to you. You might see a small bit of it down in the workshops, a very small bit. But guys would not look to you and say, my girl friend has broken up with me or I am having a bad day". S16

The expectation that officers become more involved with the prisoners presented its own difficulties and reflected the dilemma between reform and retribution described by Galtung mentioned earlier.

> "It is very hard if, at one stage, they tell you something kind of personal and the next time they are doing something on you [misbehaving]. It is very hard to change from being sympathetic and next thing you would be shouting and saying – 'stop that'. That is what I always find the hardest. That is why sometimes I think you are better off – but it is hard to stay aloof from them as

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[127] All of the male officers working in the Dóchas Centre had worked in Mountjoy males so when they referred to working in 'the males' they meant Mountjoy (only two of the female officers interviewed had actually worked in a male prison for any period of time). They also referred to it as 'across the way' or 'over there'. The male prison was situated only few hundred yards from the females and it was not uncommon for officers to be sent from the male prison to cover for absences in the female prison.

[128] 'Connect' was the series of programmes run by specially trained officers to address individual prisoner's needs (see chapter 5).

well. The way they are, they just kind of sit next to you and just start talking to you. They don't make it easy for you. In the end it is very hard because they just start talking to you. A normal human being, if someone starts talking to you, you can't be rebuffing them. It can be rude as well. You are not treating them like a human being if someone sits down to talk to you. There is nothing I hate anyway if you start talking to somebody and they turn around and give you the cold shoulder" [ignore you]. *S08*

The question of knowing where the boundary lies is not unique to women's prisons. In referring to relationships in male prisons, Liebling, Price *et al* pointed out that *'the balance had to be right between being in control, being civil, being human and being firm. Staff wanted involvement but they also wanted safety and respect'* (Liebling, Price et al. 1999 p87). McGowan talked of the need to *'be friendly but not too friendly; apply the rules but not in all cases; be informed but keep your distance'* (McGowan 1980 p266). The boundary was even more difficult to navigate in the Dóchas Centre as the whole ethos of the prison was geared to greater involvement between the staff and the prisoners.

A new male Assistant Governor who had been working in men's prisons for 18 years and was appointed to the Dóchas Centre during the course of the research, admitted that he fulfilled the *macho* stereotype of a male officer. He found the difference of working with women a revelation.

"When I was in the male prison, I wouldn't really care about a prisoner. I would make sure he had what was needed or whatever and I'd be gone. I would leave it [his job] at the gate and I would be gone. I never leave here. I work more hours here that I don't get paid for that I ever did in my life. And it is all because you are worrying about them [the prisoners]. Take D [one of the women] – I spoke to her last night and I was going to a meeting this morning and I said [to one of the officers] "make sure she is OK. If there are any problems, give me a ring". I never dreamed of doing that before. And every officer here does the same".

He described what happened when an officer was killed in an accident [129]

"The day of the funeral the women that day were brilliant. The staff were very upset over it. I wanted to maximise the number of people I let go to the funeral. I had eight staff here on the day. Eight officers was all I was left with and the CO [Chief Officer].[130] They [the women] didn't look for one thing over the day. We had no problem whatsoever with any of them. They all responded brilliantly to it. We had a Mass that weekend and women that never went to

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[129] This officer had been a member of the Connect team and was held in high esteem both by the women and her colleagues. She had moved to the Midlands prison because it was more convenient for her domestic arrangements and had been killed in a motor accident on the way to work one morning.

[130] He would normally have around 30 staff working during the day.

Mass went to the Mass. The staff who never went to Mass went just as a mark of respect but the women were brilliant. The whole community was united in grief over the girl. And at the end of this month we have a remembrance Mass for her. And the women want to plant a tree in the garden for the officer. Now you wouldn't get that to save your life, in the male prison". S23

His female predecessor who had worked in men's prisons was of the same opinion

"It is easier. Because they [male prisoners] are not as demanding. If they have a problem they are not going to tell you about it because it is not the man thing to do. Men won't talk to men about whatever the problems might be. They don't do it. Women do. That is what they are good at. If you have got a problem everybody is going to know about it within an hour. Men don't".

Evidence to support this assertion was provided by the prisoners themselves. In response to the question about their idea of a good prison officer, 17 out of 20 said that it was someone they could talk to. The next most important attribute, mentioned by 10 of the women, was to be treated with humanity or respect. Interestingly, although officers had highlighted the level of 'interaction with prisoners' as the most significant difference between working with men and women, when asked what constituted a good officer, only 6 out of 18 mentioned being a good listener; eight said, treating the women with respect, humanity or compassion; five considered being non-judgemental important and treating people fairly was raised by four. It is difficult to form any firm conclusions from a small sample but these responses indicated that irrespective of the gender of the officer, a willingness to listen was a very important attribute when working with female prisoners. However, as mentioned earlier in this chapter, men working in female prisons was a relatively recent development in Ireland and presented its own problems.

Adjusting to Male Officers

In view of the increase in the number of male officers in the Dóchas Centre (from 7 to around 20), it was important to understand how the women responded. Opinions varied. From a sample of 20 prisoners, nine had no problem with it; four were against it; five were against it at night time and two believed that it was more a question of character rather than gender. The main concerns revolved around male officers looking through the hatch (a small aperture in the door which facilitated

observation from outside[131]) and to a much lesser extent, their potential for becoming 'over friendly'. The following quotes provide an indication of the different viewpoints

"Male prison officers in a female prison – I don't mind because if you are in your room and you are getting dressed or whatever, before they look in they will knock and say, 'are you decent? It is not as if they look in at you" P17

"I don't really mind [male officers]. *Like, they are not allowed into your rooms anyway. The only thing I don't like is when I am getting dressed. I have to go into the bathroom to get dressed because they just come down and look in your hatch. They are not allowed into your room but they are allowed to look in your hatch to make sure that you are there. They have to check on you so many times a day. What happens is, you can't get dressed in there* [the shower room] *because the floor is soaking so you have to come here and get dressed. I have a yoke* [something] *on the back of the door. I put it out there and just say 'in the shower' so that they don't look in. They will knock. I think they should knock and call first. A lot of them just come in and open your door with their key".* P05

"Very uncomfortable. I do have to put a sign up on the back of my door when I am getting dressed or having a shower. One night last week I was in the shower and had the sign up on the back of the door and they came in with my medication. And there was a male officer standing right out there but when he saw I was in the shower, I ran amok. I said 'there is a sign up on the back of the door, you could have called me and I would have got something on'. They said ,'throw something on you now'. I ran amok. It is very degrading. I was very paranoid about my weight, you know, things like that. I had no respect for myself and it is only now that I am starting to get respect. But when it comes to things like that I go back into myself. It is horrible". P13

Male officers were not permitted in the women's rooms unless accompanied by a female officer. They were entitled to look through the hatch or open the door but on the understanding that they knocked first. From observations it was clear that some male officers did walk into women's rooms without knocking. Their behaviour could be interpreted as thoughtlessness as in all the cases I witnessed, it was during the day. On the other hand it could equally be construed as a symbolic affirmation of control – a manifestation of the inherent power of the officer by virtue of his role (Kauffman 1988; Faith 1993; Sparks, Bottoms et al. 1996; Hannah-Moffat 2001; Liebling and Price 2001). That is how it was perceived by one prisoner when we were together in her room one day and a male officer came in without knocking. She commented to me:

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[131] As part of the architect's Brief it was stated '*All bedrooms will have a suitably sized and positioned aperture which will permit observation of the total room area, excluding the toilet/shower area, from outside the room. The toilet/shower area shall be so designed as to prevent observation of offenders using the facility from outside the room'.* The question of the showers being observable from outside had been a point of major debate during the design phase (see chapter 2 - Design Challenge).

"He [the male officer] *came along three times and he didn't knock one of those times. I could have been discussing anything; I could have been very upset; I could have been showing you, God forbid, that I had a lump on my breast. It could have been anything. He didn't knock. That is what happens, that is what goes on. You get the odd one or two that you get on very well with that would have the respect and would knock. But that is very few. The women officers just push in the door. I don't find it as bad or as humiliating. I am weary with them now. It is not that I am afraid they will do anything to me – I just don't like it. Like I feel enough has been stripped off me without that as well. So that would be my view".* P04

In Carlen's extensive work in women's prisons in the UK, she concluded that whereas there was no objection *per se* to male officers in female prisons, the women were primarily concerned that they would be under surveillance by men when performing the most intimate details of their daily life (Carlen 1998; Carlen 1999). Among Canadian women prisoners Shaw discovered that, like in Ireland, there was a range of views about male officers. Generally, they were accepted provided they treated the women with respect. Some believed that male officers were kinder but others felt *'it would be intrusive, a temptation, that the men might make passes at them, that there was no privacy in the living quarters and that abused women needed to get away from men'* (Shaw 1992 p448).

This ambivalent attitude towards male officers was reflected in the responses from women in the Dóchas Centre

"I don't know – it is very hard to explain. You would be a bit wary about some officers. And some girls play up on it. They know they are good looking and what have you. They just hang out with them. I don't like that. I hate anything like that – it is seedy and disgusting". P10

"They are OK. They are not bad. You would probably get the odd few that would flirt with you if you wanted them to. If you were to flirt with them, which has never happened with me and I don't think it has happened with the girls because they have to be strict, the male officers". P16

The male officers also worried about potential allegations

"My biggest fear here would be an allegation – that I tried to come on to one of them or something. So far I have been lucky. And I think – maybe it is complacency. Initially, I am careful with girls until I get to know them and after a while I know the ones I can slag [tell off in a joking manner] *or make a joke or the other ones might need an encouraging word or someone you might have to be a bit off-hand. But you get to know them a lot easier. And it is in people's nature to be nice to other people – anyway that's the way I look at it".* S02

"You are encouraged to mix with them but there is no line there. You are encouraged in one sense but we are men and they are women so you are open to allegations and stuff like that. You do have to be careful. If you

wanted to chat to a girl in her room, you would have to have someone outside, prop the door open. A girl in this house has had many suicide attempts. One evening she asked me to drop into her room for a chat. I know the girl and I know she would never make an allegation. So I did and I propped open the door. There was no other officer around. All she wanted was a chat. I would be concerned from my point of view that, if that is all she wanted, to chat for five or ten minutes, I would go in and do that because the last thing I wanted when I'm on night duty is to come down and find that she has cut her wrists or that she was hanging. But there is no definite guidelines on that. You have to make your own judgement". S16

Female officers recognised there were ambiguities

"I think it is better. It is a nice mixture. I think it is good for the girls too. It could be dangerous in one way as the girls could say anything about male officers but a lot of the girls can speak to the fellas [male officers] about their fella [boyfriend] – they can relate. It is good for us as well – all females together can be very bitchy". S13

"I think it certainly does bring a lot of normality to the place. It is a more healthy relationship, male and female. Women do sometimes relate better to men. The other side of it is, a lot of the women would have had very bad experiences with men in their own personal lives. And they sometimes see men here in a totally different light which is good. In a positive light, of course. You certainly couldn't have a whole male population here on the staff. Because there are certain issues that are very, very delicate. Like there are reception issues when people come in and they have to be stripped. Men, realistically, cannot work in those areas.[132] And sometimes women come in and they may be mentally ill; maybe abused and very, very tender when they come in. So we have to put them into the Health Care. And sometimes they just wouldn't be up to dealing with men at that stage". S21

The problem of potential allegations against male officers is a recognised danger in any female prison. According to Sir David Ramsbotham *'Male staff are open to allegations of impropriety and there have, indeed, been such allegations which points to the need for careful selection of male staff, as well as better management and training'* (HM Inspectorate of Prisons 1997 p37). Despite the concerns, overall, the presence of male officers in the Dóchas Centre was welcomed but with reservations in relation to what Carlen described as *'the vulnerability of women prisoners' naked bodies or exposed sexual parts to the possible lusts, derision or merely, coldly casual inspections of their gaolers'* (Carlen 1998 p143). In recent research in Highpoint women's prison in England and Cornton Vale in Scotland, women were reported as having better relations with male staff (Loucks 1997). Notwithstanding the desirability of having male officers, the conclusions drawn by Sir David Ramsbotham have

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[132] Both male and female officers performed the same tasks with the exception of Reception. Strip searches could only be performed by females and during searches of a woman's room a male officer would have to be accompanied by a female. Similar rules applied in the men's prison in relation to female staff.

universal application in recognising gender difference. He argued that staff be selected, not on the basis of generic custodial skills, but on the basis of specific skills, knowledge and experience needed to work with women; all staff need far more training and support in working with women; male staff need additional preparation (HM Inspectorate of Prisons 1997 p36/37).

CONCLUSION

There is no doubt that managing within the new environment continued to present major challenges to the prison officers. Not everybody considered that their initial concerns had been addressed. Regime change involved a much greater degree of freedom for the prisoners and this put increased demands on the officers. The familiarity and clarity of their traditional role had been replaced by the uncertainty and flexibility demanded in the Dóchas Centre. This particularly affected house officers who, for much of the time, were confined to one house where it was necessary to manage in an environment where frequent turnover of occupants was the norm. Some welcomed the change and responded with enthusiasm. Others found it almost impossible to accept. There was no discernable pattern to explain their divergent responses in terms of years of service, position held or level of seniority. Their difficulties echoed responses to earlier reform experiments. Giallombardo studied a women's reformatory prison in the US and concluded that the major part of the officer's role was custody, despite exhortations to the contrary (Giallombardo 1966 p40). In the context of the Canadian experiment, Shaw talked of the stresses of staff who were often faced with contradictory, unrealistic and conflicting demands from administrators and the public (Shaw 2000 p67). In the same way, officers in the Dóchas Centre referred to unrealistic and conflicting demands which, especially in the early months, were exacerbated by inadequate communication and lack of specific training.

On the other hand, the relationships which had characterised the old prison and which had been undermined by the initial turmoil of the move, were gradually re-established. The question of discipline was an ongoing issue and was never likely to be resolved to the satisfaction of all concerned. The following quotation summarises the reality *'It is the collective force of thousands of daily and hourly personal interactions between inmates and officers that drives up tensions and hostilities or quells them, fosters resistance or compliance and engenders confrontation or co-operation in any prison'* (Gilbert 1997 p59). Flexible consistency is a paradox that

lies at the heart of keeping order and legitimacy in prison and is at the heart of 'right relationships'. But this can only be achieved as part of a wider vision that gives officers the confidence to exercise their initiative without fear of recrimination (Liebling and Price 2001 p143). During the research period, not all officers had yet achieved that level of commitment to the new vision. This was not helped by what they considered a shortage of staff, a situation that, paradoxically, was both relieved and exacerbated by the recruitment of new and often inexperienced officers. The increased numbers of male staff presented its own problems. They soon realised that managing women was very different from coping with men and had to adjust accordingly. On the other hand, the greater demands of involvement had its rewards

"Over here you can see the rewards for the effort that you put in. Over there [the men's prison] all you are doing is opening a gate and closing a gate; standing in the yard looking at them walking around in circles whereas over here it is such a better atmosphere. It is a close knit family and every one is talking to everybody and information passes back and forth. There is very good communication between us all here – both prisoners and staff". S14

Notwithstanding some ongoing concerns, it was interesting to note the response to the question about their overall satisfaction with working in the Dóchas Centre. During the formal interviews with officers which took place in the second and early part of the third year of occupation, of the 17 asked, the following is a flavour of their answers

In general it is grand
I wouldn't want to work here permanently*
I am satisfied with working here
I do enjoy working here. I am happy here
I am happy enough here
I like working here
Delighted. I really do like working here
I am happy working here
I am satisfied. It is a grand atmosphere to work in
I enjoy working here
I don't mind it – the variety is great
I enjoy it to a certain extent
I thoroughly enjoy working here
I enjoy what I am doing
I enjoy it
I love it [despite having expressed a lot of criticism]
I enjoy it

* He enjoyed working there but was concerned about getting overwhelmed by the women's problems

These responses suggested that the officers too had become acclimatised to their new environment and over time, had gradually begun to 'settle down'.

The next and final chapter will explore the main themes arising from the study. It will explain the important lessons learned from this experiment and relate them to the broader literature on penal reform. Finally it will assess the extent to which the aspirations expressed in the Vision Statement have been realised and the relevance of the outcome to the wider issue of penal policy at the beginning of the 21st century.

CHAPTER 7   REALISING THE DREAM

INTRODUCTION

Prisons and how they operate are shaped by their time and place in history (Clemmer 1958; Sykes 1958; Jacobs 1977; Mc Conville 2000). Sykes recognised the importance of the prison's articulation with its environment when he said that '*The prison is not an autonomous system of power; rather, it is an instrument of the State, shaped by its social environment and we must keep this simple truth in mind if we are to understand the prison*' (Sykes 1958 p8). The development of the Dóchas Centre coincided with an era of great social change as well as a period of unique prosperity in the history of the Irish State (see chapter 2). The drug scene had become a dominant factor in many marginalised communities, particularly in Dublin, and had resulted in a significant increase in the prison population, both male and female. The need for a new women's prison had been recognised for many years, but it was the conflation of increased prison numbers and economic prosperity which finally resulted in authorisation to proceed with the development of the Dóchas Centre being granted in 1993. Apart from a temporary setback in the mid 1990s the project progressed and the women moved into the new prison at the end of 1999.

This study has provided an insight into the transition and early years of this new penal experiment. Although small in size, the Dóchas Centre incorporated the full spectrum of offences, covering both remands and sentenced prisoners and encapsulated many of the diverse needs and problems that were a feature of female penal institutions elsewhere. The women also shared the same characteristics of their counterparts in other countries. The literature indicated that because of their low representation within the prison community, women prisoners in general, frequently had to endure conditions and regimes dominated by the needs of their male counterparts. On the other hand, mainly as a result of pioneering reformers, there have been periods, across different jurisdictions, when their subordinate status was recognised and they became the subject of various penal experiments aimed specifically at addressing their needs. The development of the Dóchas Centre was such an experiment. It was driven by the ideals of a small group of like-minded people spearheaded by the Governor of Mountjoy. It represented a new and innovative chapter in Irish penal history. The concept of female exceptionalism

dominated the discourse from the earliest stages and was a major influence on both the architecture and the regime.[133]

The aim of this research was to discover what happened in the first few years – how the new 'reality' was experienced in the daily lives of the prisoners and the staff, to what extent the ideals underpinning the philosophy portrayed in the Vision Statement were actually realised and whether the experience had the potential to influence the wider debate on penal policy at the beginning of the new millennium. This chapter will draw together the important themes and lessons arising from the findings and relate them to the findings from the academic literature that has informed the study. It will show that whereas there are a number of similarities with previous penal experiments, there are also substantial differences from which lessons can be drawn. Finally it will conclude that after a period of more than three years and despite an unpromising start, the fundamental philosophical aspirations that underpinned the vision for the Dóchas Centre, remained intact.

THE LEARNING EXPERIENCE

Underestimating Change

A vision is insufficient in itself to move an organisation forward unless it is communicated by the leader and shared by all those who have a stake in it (Kouzes and Posner 1987). Governor Lonergan was described by various people both within and outside the Prison Service as such a visionary. In the early stages of the Dóchas Centre project, he had assembled an interdisciplinary team from within the prison who shared his vision and had operational responsibility for bringing it to fruition. The staff and the prisoners had been consulted in the investigative phase in the early 1990s and their ideas for the new prison were incorporated in the Strategy Document for the development (see Chapter 2). However, due to the project being put on temporary hold around 1996, the interdisciplinary group was disbanded and not reconvened. Following a series of delays, the move to the new prison finally occurred at the end of 1999. By that time both the prisoners and the staff had

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[133] During the course of this study, work began on a project to redevelop the adjoining male site. It was interesting to note that many of the ideas from the Dóchas Centre were incorporated as part of the guiding principles of the new development both in relation to the design and to the regime and future potential was identified for sharing facilities and activities with the female prison (The Mountjoy Complex Redevelopment Group 2001). However, due to financial constraints, the redevelopment project for the male Mountjoy complex was abandoned in 2003.

become cynical about the timing and their early enthusiasm and commitment had been diluted. Many of the officers felt alienated, mainly due to lack of effective preparation and inadequate communication. In an earlier study of the outcome of changes in the Irish Civil Service, the authors had concluded that where staff participated in the initial analysis stage they were more likely to be committed but more importantly, *'where significant new working practices were introduced as a result of the change, the socialisation of staff had to be borne in mind if the change were to be accepted'* (Boyle and Joyce 1988). Although the staff had been involved in the early stages of the Dóchas Centre development, their socialisation had not occurred at the time the actual move took place. The consequence of this oversight led to confusion and discontent and an initial unwillingness on the part of many of the officers to accept the new working practices.

Early indicators were inauspicious. The decision on the move date was not the outcome of a logically planned process but appeared to be an ill-considered response to pressure for space in the men's prison. Although the official opening had occurred in September 1999, creating expectations of the imminent departure from the old premises, both prisoners and staff were left in limbo for three months. The precise timing of the move was unfortunate. It was completed on Christmas Eve. Christmas is an emotional time particularly if one is separated from family and children. The fact that it was the last Christmas of the 20th century exacerbated its emotional significance.

The preparations were inadequate and the impact of the change was underestimated. During the first few months, the new and more spacious design, with its promise of increased levels of freedom for the prisoners, only succeeded in engendering perceptions of greater constraint characterised by the locked wicket gates and the rules about inter-house visits. Because of timing, one of the fundamental design principles of separation had to be abandoned in favour of a hastily devised system of arbitrary house allocation which had some unfortunate results (see chapter 4). The anti-panoptican architecture created a new sense of unease for the staff. Working in houses made them feel isolated from one another, vulnerable to attack by prisoners and ignored by their management. The lack of proper preparation was in danger of undermining the whole philosophy. However, unlike the Holloway move so vividly described by Rock,[134] where the social order

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[134] See specifically chapter 8 (Rock 1996, chapter 8).

within its walls continued to be problematic, the atmosphere of disruption and instability that pervaded the Dóchas Centre in the immediate aftermath of the move, gradually diminished. Within three to four months the majority of prisoners were beginning to adjust to their new world. The timescale for the staff was longer – for some it was a question of nine to twelve months or more; others were not prepared to adjust and eventually transferred to other prisons.

In his history of the English prison officer, Thomas argued that before reforms can be implemented, it must be accepted that uniformed staff will be a constraint on what is possible. If they are to be instrumental in helping to achieve change, the effect of that change must be explored *with them*. Without their support, any attempt at change is doomed to failure (Thomas 1972 p221/222). In the first few months of the Dóchas Centre, there was a grave danger that Thomas's conclusion would be realised. In the event, this did not happen. Improved management communication, a better structure to the day, a willingness to adjust in the light of practical experience and the introduction of new staff to replace those who were disaffected, combined to overcome the initial problems. The main lesson to be learned from this exercise is succinctly encapsulated by the statement that *'people's behaviour does not automatically change in accordance with what is required or, indeed, what they themselves rationally believe to be right. Perception of individual roles is not simply a matter of intellectual classification, but involves the feelings and attitudes in the roles'* (Stapley 1996 p4). It is clear that the nurturing of staff is an essential ingredient in the execution of change. Other lessons also emerged that could have important implications beyond the confines of this experiment.

The Relevance of Architecture

Changes to prison architecture are frequently justified on the basis of '*a new penal philosophy or change in policy, management or regime, but the actual connection between policy and design is often tenuous and very much more difficult to establish'* (Dunbar and Fairweather 2000 p17). This was not so with the Dóchas Centre where the conceptual objective of the design brief to provide *'humane, rehabilitative detention in a non-institutional environment'* was largely accomplished. The well-equipped houses, built around open grassed courtyards were a response to the needs identified by the women themselves as part of the development of the project and were intended to reflect, as far as possible, community living on the outside. The houses offered a semblance of normality in that they provided an opportunity for

informal social interaction in relaxed and comfortable surroundings. The provision of non-observable en-suite facilities in all the rooms (unique in recent female prison experiments[135]) was an acceptance of the greater importance of privacy to women in the exercise of their most intimate bodily functions and a realisation of the Vision Statement's aim – 'to embrace people's respect and dignity'. Although privacy may also be important to men, for them communal bathroom facilities are an everyday norm whilst for women, they are a rare and unwelcome occurrence.

Architecture had played a decisive role in contributing to the original aspirations of the penitentiary movement (see chapter 1). The survival of the penitentiary design, up to the present time, is a testament to its resilience albeit the ideals that inspired its development have long been abandoned. The cottage style approach to female prisons that characterised the reformatory movement in the US, continued to reappear in various guises. The 20th century experiments in Holloway and Cornton Vale were predicated on a move away from the austere architecture of the penitentiaries to the more relaxed and informal setting of cottages or houses. However, although conceived on the basis of providing a humane medical and therapeutic alternative, the reality from the women's perspective, was an increased and oppressive level of surveillance and control (Carlen 1983; Dobash, Dobash et al. 1986; Rock 1996). The Canadian ideal of informal cottage-style living also foundered and as a result of a series of incidents, the low level security buildings became surrounded by high wire fences and intrusive surveillance within the prison walls became dominant (Faith 1999; Shaw 1999; Hannah-Moffat and Shaw 2000; Hannah-Moffat 2001; Hayman 2002).

Although similar moves did not occur within the Dóchas Centre it would be misleading to give the impression that living in houses was a panacea for all the ills of prison life. It was not. Whilst the provision of modern facilities was welcomed and alleviated many of the physical deprivations inherent in the old penitentiary style accommodation, living in houses had wider social consequences which acquired even greater relevance with the introduction of the privilege system of allocation.

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[135] When I visited Cornton Vale in August 2000, a new modern block for 50 remands was nearing completion. Although an en-suite lavatory was provided in each room, observation was still possible via a spy hole.

The Limitations of Privilege

The concept of privilege has had a chequered career in penal history since it was introduced in the 19th century. It was frequently seen by prisoners as a coercive force to ensure their compliance with prison rules and by reformers and advocates of deterrence as a relaxation of prison discipline (Freedman 1981; Carlen 1998; McConville 1998; McGowen 1998; Carey 2000). The privilege system as it operated within the Dóchas Centre, incorporated an element of coercion in that removal of privileges was used as a punishment for breaches of discipline. However, its main use was an attempt to introduce an equitable rationale into the process of house allocation by rewarding women who required minimum supervision and encouraging the 'difficult to manage', particularly drug users, to aspire to moving to the more privileged houses. It achieved some level of success but its application was compromised by increased numbers and the high incidence of drug addiction. It also had the unexpected consequence of fomenting ethnic tension (see chapter 5). It was impossible to conclude categorically that the privilege system of allocation *caused* the tension or whether it was used as an excuse to reveal covert racism. Foreign nationals were a new phenomenon both in Irish society in general but more specifically, in the Irish prison system.[136] The perceived unfairness of the privilege approach in the eyes of indigenous population, could be interpreted as a manifestation of an existing underlying prejudice against foreigners which was an emerging characteristic of life on the outside. More focussed research would be required to support or refute that interpretation.

On the other hand, it was clear from talking to the women that it was the people with whom they had to share rather than any concept of privilege, that was a much more important factor in coping with life in the houses. Because of the transient nature of the population and depending on the occupants, houses went through phases of being settled and unsettled. Groups formed and reformed. Women who were seen by their fellow residents as not conforming to the mores of a particular house could find themselves ostracised or bullied. Like-minded groupings, whether based on drug use, friendships on the outside or other common interests, were likely to result in more amenable interactions within the house. Willingness to share the domestic chores was a vital element in sustaining good relationships. Every house had an agreed roster of duties for the maintenance of the common areas. Failure to

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[136] In 1990, foreign nationals composed 1% of the imprisoned female population. Ten years later it had increased to around 20% mainly for offences of drug importation.

complete the allotted task was a frequent source of tension and was only resolved either by peer negotiation or staff mandate. However, being forced to live in close proximity with people not of one's choosing was an inevitable consequence of imprisonment. Co-operative relationships, not privilege, helped to make it work. The analysis clearly indicated that despite occasional difficulties, relationships among the women in the houses, were, in the main, amicable and supportive and for some, long lasting. The change in living conditions was accompanied by an equally significant change in the prison regime.

An Appropriate Regime

The new direction was aimed at encouraging women to take more responsibility for their lives by fostering the notion of individual choice. A similar concept had been an integral element of the philosophy of the recent Canadian experiment. Hannah-Moffat argued that prisons by their nature were organised to limit individual expression. They were sites of repression where the 'keepers' were reluctant to relinquish power in the interest of empowerment of the 'kept'. She concluded that far from restructuring relations of disciplinary power within the new women's prisons, the Canadian authorities added another dimension to existing relations by using empowerment strategies to make the women responsible for their own 'reform' (Hannah-Moffat 2001 p170). New treatment programmes for women in the UK during the 1990s advocated the same intentions. Carlen believed that the late 20th century discourse on women in prison recognised that the majority of female prisoners had been subjected to various forms of oppression on the outside. Programmes were established ostensibly to reverse this situation by encouraging ideas of personal responsibility. However, in her view, many of these programmes, far from empowering the women to resist oppression, *'were transformed into 'responsiblization' of prisoners .... which implied that not only were they solely responsible for their criminal choices* [which arguably they were] *but were equally responsible for the conditions in which these choices were made* [which arguably, they were not]' – my parentheses (Carlen 2002 p166/167).

The reality of daily life in the Dóchas Centre contrasted with these views. The biggest difference between the new and old prison (and many of the prisons described in the literature) was the level of freedom available to the prisoners. Instead of the militaristic approach of adherence to a strict routine of mandatory activities and fixed hours out of cell, the women were 'free' from 8am to 7.30pm or

later, depending on their house. They themselves decided whether and when to get up in the morning, although their choice was compromised to some extent by the need to attend the Health Care Unit for their medication. Breakfast was optional, prepared by the women and eaten in the houses. Other meals were served in the communal dining rooms but those in the more privileged houses could prepare individual or group meals in their own kitchen. The women had responsibility for how their house was run and more importantly, had a level of choice about how to spend their day. Not all women were able to cope with this level of freedom. Some were too damaged physically, psychologically or emotionally and required greater care and attention involving regular observation in the Health Care Unit or in Laurel House next door. They were also likely to be on strong medication which inhibited their ability to respond to the concept of self determination. However, during the research period I did observe at least five or six women who were initially heavily sedated but later were able to integrate into the normal life of the prison and begin to exercise some level of choice.

The option to decide whether to participate in the school or other programmes was an important aspect of the new regime. The rule about school attendance changed over time. In the early months after the move, it was mandatory. When that proved disruptive and unproductive, it was abandoned in favour of personal choice. School attendance varied between 55% and 75% of the women at any one time. Popular subjects like computer classes were consistently oversubscribed. Unlike in many other women's prisons portrayed in the literature, the school offered a comprehensive curriculum and included opportunities, not only to acquire qualifications that were recognised on the outside, but also to develop individual talents like painting, music and writing that nurtured a feeling of self-esteem. The Connect project catered for more individually-centred programmes aimed at addressing specific needs as well as facilitating personal contact with agencies on the outside to help in the transition from imprisonment to freedom (see chapter 5).

That is not to suggest that *all* needs were catered for and that *all* women took advantage of what was on offer. On the contrary, during the course of the research, apart from the provision of methadone, there were no in-house drug rehabilitation programmes and there were ongoing complaints both from prisoners and staff about the inadequacy of psychiatric and psychology services and the lack of counselling facilities. The latter was a particular cause for concern as many of the women had experienced traumatic events in their lives that required professional help. On the

218

other hand, innovations were continually being encouraged to improve the regime whether that be inter-house competitions, participation in drama or other social or educational activities. There was an ongoing willingness on the part of the management to facilitate experiments with new ideas particularly if generated by the officers.

The Importance of Staff

Earlier experiments have shown that staff are a vital ingredient in the outcome of any penal experiment (see chapter 1). The role of the officers in the Dóchas Centre continued to evolve. During the first year they had no job description and were expected to respond to the frequently changing demands of the new regime. On the one hand, they were expected to use flexibility and personal skills to encourage the women to exercise responsibility whilst on the other, to meet the institutional needs of order and control. At times this caused a level of ambivalence that reflected experiences in other prisons where regime change created expectations that officers would suddenly adjust their behaviour to support a new philosophy. The literature provides many examples of officers undermining efforts to move from their traditional role of security and control to meet the requirements of more rehabilitative models (Thomas 1972; Dobash, Dobash et al. 1986; Kauffman 1988; Rock 1996; Zedner 1998; Faith 1999; Shaw 1999; Kruttschnitt, Gartner et al. 2000; Malloch 2000; Shaw 2000; Carlen 2001; Hannah-Moffat 2002). The Dóchas Centre had its share of such officers especially in the early months. However, because it was part of the Mountjoy complex which included both a male and a juvenile prison, it was relatively easy for those who could not accept the new approach to transfer with no disruption to their domestic arrangements. The opening of the two new prisons, one in Dublin and the other in the Irish midlands, also facilitated the movement of staff (see chapter 6). Despite some difficulties, there were no major incidents of the type that characterised the officer's reaction to the Holloway experiment, nor was there a reversal to increased levels of security and control which overtook those in Cornton Vale and Canada. The disaffected officers in the Dóchas Centre did not permanently undermine the aspiration of the new regime. The majority supported the overall aims albeit they did not always agree with the methods employed to achieve them.

The issue of discipline proved particularly controversial. The Irish experience contradicted a general theme of the literature which indicated that from the time of the penitentiary, women in prison were subjected to a plethora of petty disciplinary

controls that often proved more restrictive than those applied to men (Carlen 1983; Dobash, Dobash et al. 1986; Hahn Rafter 1990; Faith 1993; Heidensohn 1996; Carlen 1998; Zedner 1998; Kruttschnitt, Gartner et al. 2000). In the Dóchas Centre there were very few rules. A number of officers complained that when they were broken, the response from the management was often too soft and if they resorted to the formal disciplinary procedure the punishments were over lenient. Others, whilst they may have agreed with that sentiment, developed their own personal strategies to address, what they considered unacceptable behaviour, without resorting to formal processes. This reaction reflected arguments propounded by Sparks, Bottoms *et al* that within a prison setting, both prisoners and staff have an interest in maintaining the structure and routines of the institution. Providing everything is running smoothly the issue of power is largely hidden. However, if challenged, officers may use their power to maintain order and in so doing emphasise their dominance. Generally, they would prefer to avoid such challenges although if there is a confrontation, it may be necessary to reassert their position. The avoidance of challenge itself requires flexibility and adaptation which allows for a subtle reconfiguration of power to take place. These contests and renegotiations are of vital importance to justify and sustain prison conditions and regimes (Sparks, Bottoms et al. 1996 p326). There was no evidence to suggest that within the Dóchas Centre the level of perceived leniency resulted in increased infractions or eroded the balance of power. Despite the limited use of formal sanctions it was clear to both parties that officers were still in control.

The conflict between discipline and rehabilitation has been a perennial problem for prison staff. Fry's penitentiary ideals attempted to combine the two and although they achieved some measure of success, lack of qualified and committed staff contributed to discipline and control becoming dominant. The nurturing spirit of the reformatories that were established in the 19th century in the US, was gradually undermined by overcrowding, inadequate funding, poor quality staff and a loss of belief in the ideals of reform, although this happened over quite a long period (Freedman 1981). In Carlen's study of Cornton Vale in the early years of its life, she concluded that despite the declared therapeutic aspirations of the regime, many of the staff wanted the prison experience to be painful (Carlen 1983 p215). Malloch's research carried out in women's prisons in England in the 1990s, found that *'the emphasis accorded discipline and security as a prime function of imprisonment is seen by many prison staff as their main objective. Other aims are often considered to be secondary and this is reflected in the organisation and operation of penal regimes'* (Malloch 2000 p141). McGuckin's research on Irish prison officers reached

a similar conclusion although his work was exclusively in male prisons. During the course of this study, despite incidents including prisoners absconding and escaping, the Dóchas Centre managed to avoid being submerged by the demands of discipline and security.

Staff engagement with the prisoners was actively encouraged. For many of the officers who had worked in the old prison, this was a more comprehensive extension of their former practice. For others, especially transfers from male prisons, it was a new skill which required time and experience to acquire. The increase in the number of male officers whilst not welcomed unreservedly, had the effect of creating a greater sense of normalcy which was recognised by both the prisoners and the female staff. Provided male officers avoided situations where they were likely to witness the more private aspects of the women's lives, they were accepted. The mixed reaction to male officers reflected similar responses by women in other prisons (Shaw 1992; Loucks 1997; Carlen 1998; Carlen 1999). Whereas Loucks found that the women in Cornton Vale had better relations with male staff and were more likely to talk to them, the conclusion of other researchers was more ambivalent. Unlike the findings from much of the prison literature, feedback from both the women and the staff in the Dóchas Centre indicated that, irrespective of gender, harmonious relationships were the norm.[137] One of the factors that undoubtedly contributed to the congeniality of relationships was size.

The Influence of Size

The Dóchas Centre was built to accommodate 80 women. Throughout the course of the study the numbers were generally between 85 and 95 on any one day, although in the first three months they were between 50 and 60 and later there were occasions when they were as high as 105. This had particular implications on house allocation (see chapter 5) and contributed to increased levels of stress for the staff. Despite these difficulties, small numbers were conducive to fostering a more relaxed atmosphere within the prison. This was helped by the cultural tradition of Irish sociability where a level of informality characterised many everyday interactions on

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[137] It was particularly interesting to note that during the complete course of the fieldwork, I never once heard the officers referred to as 'screws' even when the women were angry or complaining. By contrast, in a recent description of her life on the inside of Holloway and Highpoint prisons in England, Ruth Wyner, a middle class, mature prisoner, consistently referred to the officers as 'screws' (Wyner 2003).

the outside. Officers were encouraged to wear civilian clothes which added to the sense of informality. There was also a comparatively generous ratio of officers to prisoners which averaged between 1.0 and 1.5 prisoners to each officer – this compared with 2.05 prisoners to an officer in Holloway and 5.27 in Askham Grange open prison for women in England (Liebling and Price 2001 p28). As well as fostering more congenial relationships, size also contributed to the absence of obvious formal hierarchies, so characteristic of traditional prisons. Officers were expected to be able to undertake a variety of tasks from supervising in a house to monitoring visits, to escorting women on special day trips. Because of the relatively small population, it was also easy for the staff, up to and including Governor level, to know the women personally. The senior staff were frequently visible around the various buildings, in the yards or in the dining rooms and it was normal for them to engage in impromptu conversations with the women on these occasions (see chapter 6). The Assistant Governor who had worked in the male prison commented

"I can do my rounds in Mountjoy prison [in the men's prison] in less that an hour, covering maybe 200 prisoners. I can't walk around here in less that three hours. I have often sat in the summer on one of the garden benches. I could sit there for two hours and women would approach one by one or two or three –' what's the story here governor'? It is amazing".

The situation in Holloway was very different – 'the managers, from the Governor downward, were rarely, if ever, seen around the prison' (Ramsbotham 2003 p7). It is important to emphasise that Holloway catered for over 500 prisoners which would militate against a similar level of informality. It was also subject to the prevailing climate of managerialism. In a cogent article on the effect of managerialism on women's prisons in England, Carlen argued that 'Governors are governed by a maverick managerialism that manifests itself in a plethora of unprioritised and sometimes opposed policy directives which are often unmindful of the essential nature of imprisonment and the characteristics of the prison population' (Carlen 2002 p28). At the time of this study, the Irish Prison Service had escaped the new managerialism.[138] The absence of an all-pervasive bureaucratic set of imperatives facilitated informality.

Size also contributed to a certain level of autonomy for the prison. In relative terms it was small enough to attract minimum or no involvement or interference by the Prison Service headquarters. The management and the staff of the Dóchas Centre were

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[138] During a much later visit in January 2004 that position was beginning to change. Budgets at individual prison level were being introduced and other financial controls were under discussion.

free to experiment with new ideas and initiatives and providing they did not result in unwelcome media publicity (as, for example, when the women absconded), they were left to their own devices. The Canadian experiment also involved smaller prisons but the composition of the population was very different. They were all longer term prisoners many of whom were considered high risk. In addition, there was no continuity of leadership or of experienced staff. The experiment was more high profile and when things went wrong, the Correctional Services of Canada took immediate action to safeguard the needs of the prison authorities rather than the needs of the women themselves (Hayman 2002). In Ireland, the Governor had a greater level of freedom and was able to pursue new initiatives even if they sometimes involved an element of risk.

Acceptance of Risk

The design of the Dóchas Centre could be seen as an example of risk-taking by the Irish Prison Service, although the Director General acknowledged in interview that women did not pose a particularly high risk (see chapter 2). Notwithstanding the wide range of offences and the personal histories of the women, at the development stage, the Working Group had succeeded in ensuring that security remained moderate and unobtrusive. There were no external perimeter walls (the walls of the buildings formed the perimeter), no bars on the windows and no barbed wire fences. The most obvious sign of security was the main access gate which was remotely controlled and manned 24 hours a day. Once inside the prison, apart from the Health Care Unit, no other building was permanently secured. There were cameras in the yards and in the corridors of the houses but not in the recreation rooms, kitchens or bedrooms. They were also present in the visiting area for obvious reasons. However, unlike the situation I had witnessed in Cornton Vale, where the monitors in the control room were permanently manned (see chapter 1), those in the Dóchas Centre were viewed only on an *ad hoc* basis.[139] A number of officers did express concerns about personal safety, but lack of overt surveillance was not accompanied by increased violence, major disturbances or attacks on staff.

The doors to the houses were open all day and the women were free (unlocked) from 8.00am till 7.30pm or later, depending on the house. This level of freedom

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[139] I was told by one of the senior members of staff that the cameras were not there as a preventative tool but rather as a recording mechanism to be used to review an 'incident'.

contrasted sharply with the situation in Holloway where the Prison Inspectorate found, during a visit in 1995, that the women were frequently locked back for 23 hours a day. The situation was little improved during later inspections in 1996, 1998 and 2000 (Ramsbotham 2003). It is important to reiterate that Holloway accommodated around six times the numbers of the Dóchas Centre. On the other hand, it was interesting to note that when Colin Allen was appointed Governor of Holloway in 1985 to help resolve the major disturbances that followed the move to the 'new' Holloway, he ensured that the women were out of their cells from 7.30am till 7.30pm. He recognised the importance of treating the women with respect and trying to give them a degree of personal responsibility. Contrary to the fears of the officers, this resulted in a remarkable drop in the numbers of assaults on staff, self-harm and suicide attempts (Ramsbotham 2003 p205). During the same time-frame, when the Holloway officers went on strike, Rock described the period as 'a *self-conscious, co-operative and positive experiment in how to administer a prison regime with only the slightest of supervision*' (Rock 1996 p332). Whether that level of co-operation could have been sustained is impossible to answer, but the experience suggests that heavy-handed security measures are not always and necessarily a penal imperative, even if larger numbers are involved.

Risk was also inherent in that part of the Vision that actively promoted greater involvement of the outside world. People were welcomed as befrienders to those who were unlikely to receive any visits, particularly foreign nationals; 'graduation' ceremonies were frequently held to celebrate the completion of various programmes by the women and were attended by family members; drama events were open to the public and included the provision of food and an opportunity for outsiders to mingle with the prisoners. (Arguably it also presented an opportunity for drug passing). The underlying reason for welcoming the outside world was a pragmatic one. Prison was part of the wider community. Those who were incarcerated had come from the community and would return. [140] To help break down barriers it was important that the public had some understanding of what it was like within the prison walls.

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[140] In Ireland, 'community' would have more relevance than in many other jurisdictions. The population is around 3.6 million with nearly one million in Dublin. The 'community' to which the majority of the women were likely to return were specific areas of Dublin. By contrast, the UK's population is in the region of 56 million which means that the concept of community in this context is less significant.

On the other hand, the degree of openness and low emphasis on security did lead to a number of incidents of absconding and escaping (see chapter 6). Whereas one may have been considered an acceptable level of risk, the accumulation (two incidents of absconding and two of escaping) over a period of two years, posed a danger of undermining the whole philosophy of the new prison and derailing the experiment. According to Governor Lonergan, this did not happen because

> *"it* [women prisoners absconding or escaping] *hasn't as high a political consequence as if prisoners from Portlaoise escaped.*[141] *That would be seen as a weakness of State security and a political embarrassment. I suppose that is one of the plusses we have established from conditioning over a number of years, that there is an acceptance that the Dóchas Centre is not a top security prison.* [This is a reference to opportunities taken to publicise what the Dóchas Centre was trying to achieve via talks and discussions on television and radio. The live broadcast of the Christmas Mass on television was an example]. *I have always said to the public, it is not the worst thing in the world – where are they* [the women] *going; they are not going to kill anybody; they are not any risk at all, certainly not as much a risk as many people walking in O'Connell St* [the main street in central Dublin] *just now. My own experience is they have nowhere to go and they all come back. And they are all back. And they are all back in a few days and some of them come back themselves which is an amazing thing".*

However, he did point out that some of the outside initiatives that had been in place, for example, the 'outward bound' type courses (see chapter 5) had been stopped as a direct consequence of media reaction to prisoners absconding. In Canada, where the aspirations of Creating Choices mirrored many of those envisioned in the Dóchas Centre, after a number of escapes, suicides and self injuries in the early years, the objectives and priorities of the new prisons were reformulated through discourses of risk and public safety. *'These events were used to justify increased levels of static security and the building of fences around all the new facilities'* (Hannah-Moffat 2001 p183; Hayman 2002). This did not happen in Ireland. These incidents were accepted as risks that were the inevitable consequence of a regime that was intended to give women back some responsibility.

CONCLUSION

This study aimed to explore the extent to which it was possible or even realistic to fulfil the philosophical ideals underpinning the Vision Statement of the Dóchas Centre whilst at the same time reconciling the fundamental tension between the exercise of individual choice and the collective need for rules and controls that are an inherent

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[141] Portlaoise is a high security prison in midlands Ireland which housed political prisoners and serious violent offenders serving long sentences.

aspect of prison life. The literature on earlier penal experiments discussed in chapter 1, provided many examples of how the idealistic aspirations of the initiators were gradually eroded. Howard and Fry succeeded in alleviating many of the physical deprivations experienced by prisoners in the early 19th century and the humanitarian principles that underpinned their philosophies continue to have relevance today. However, their ideals of reform and rehabilitation gradually succumbed to the harsher demands of economics and a re-emergence of deterrence as the goal of imprisonment. Innovative regimes as characterised by the reformatory movement in the US and the Borstal movement in the UK met with various levels of success but were eventually compromised by lack of skills and resistance to change by prison staff as well as changing public attitudes to crime and punishment. The therapeutic ideals of Holloway and Cornton Vale were influenced not only by staff resistance, but in the case of Holloway, were subject to a myriad of extraneous problems that were never satisfactorily overcome. Political, economic and societal attitudes to law and order, particularly in the last decade, have led to idealistic notions of reform or rehabilitation becoming subservient to the rhetoric of deterrence and retribution. In the UK, the humanitarian aspirations of the Woolf Report were replaced by the 'tough on crime, tough on the causes of crime' mantra that has seen prison numbers rise to their highest level in nearly one hundred years. A similar picture pertains on the other side of the Atlantic. Ireland has also been affected by this move.

Despite the shift to tougher penal attitudes the Dóchas Centre has managed to avoid the pitfalls of earlier experiments and its ethos has survived. The reasons can best be summarised as follows:-

- Continuous and consistent leadership.[142]
- Adherence to the original ideals despite setbacks
- A willingness to adapt in the light of practicalities
- An openness to innovation and a determination to overcome obstacles
- Preparedness to take risks and tolerate adverse public responses
- Cultural attributes of sociability and informality
- Ongoing involvement of staff and prisoners in generating new ideas
- Staff commitment and flexibility
- The retention of experienced staff combined with new recruits

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[142] A reminder – Governor Lonergan, the head of both the male and female prison and Governor McMahon, the head of the Dóchas Centre were both part of the original Strategy team and were still in situ throughout the period of the research. This also applied to the Head of Education.

226

- High staff ratios compared to other jurisdictions
- Minimum political and media interference
- The small scale of the women's prison

The analysis of the findings from this study has shown that so far, the ideals underlying the Vision Statement have proved to be robust. Contrary to the scepticism often expressed by penologists in relation to innovative ideals, the Irish experiment has demonstrated that adherence to such ideals is possible given the right conditions. The new architecture played an important role in creating a degree of normalcy and in providing accommodation that supported the aspirational aims of respect for the individual. This judgement is subject to the caveat that living in houses created its own tensions and was not an overall panacea for the pains of imprisonment. The regime encouraged the women to take personal responsibility by providing a level of choice which appeared to exceed that which is available in many other female prisons. Programmes were implemented that were directed at the **specific** needs of individuals rather than treating the women as a homogeneous group although it is important to reiterate that the needs of all women were not and could not be met. Involvement by the outside world was encouraged and included not only active and practical support being provided by various agencies, but also more informal involvement by volunteers and members of the public. These were generally, although not universally, welcomed by the women.

The more fundamental question remains – does the Dóchas Centre work? There is no straightforward yes or no response to that question. It depends on what one is trying to achieve. Measured against the objectives of realising the Vision, considerable progress has been made. Recidivism is the more traditional measurement of success of penal reform programmes. O'Mahony's studies in Mountjoy male prison suggested that Ireland had one of the highest recidivism rates in the developed world (O'Mahony 2000 p74). However, there are no official data published on recidivism for Irish prisoners.[143] Although not a success criterion *per se,* committal rates can give some indication of general trends in prison rates from which conclusions may be drawn. However, despite the implementation of the new computer system, it was not possible for the Prison Service to establish with any accuracy, the Dóchas Centre committal numbers for the years immediately

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[143] A special project aimed at providing such data was initiated by the Irish Prison Service in collaboration with the Criminology Department of University College Dublin, at the beginning of 2004 but is expected to take three years to complete.

succeeding the move or to provide any detailed breakdown. A member of the Dóchas Centre staff gave me limited data for 2003 which indicated that the total number of committals had increased by 55% since 2000 (the first year of the new prison), from 767 to 1187. However, this number was distorted by an increase in aliens, from 94 in 2000 to 412 by 2003, a huge increase in Irish terms.[144] Discounting aliens, the number of committals had risen from 673 in 2000 to 775 in 2003, an increase of 15%. Because of the lack of detail, it is impossible to draw any conclusions from these changes.

Without statistical evidence, the effect of the Dóchas Centre can only be considered using less tangible and more subjective measures. The responses from the women themselves indicated a general level of satisfaction. They were particularly pleased with the physical conditions (for a few women the conditions were likely to *encourage* recidivism – see chapter 5). Many took advantage of the variety of educational opportunities on offer which helped, not only in the area of personal development and preparation for the job market on release, but also acted as a coping mechanism to help them do their time. Living in houses added a degree of normalcy. It demanded a level of self discipline and responsibility which was likely to be more akin to the demands of living in the wider community and in that sense, could be seen as a reasonable preparation for life after release. On the other hand, life on the outside was likely to present a variety of problems that no amount of preparation could totally alleviate, for example, lack of accommodation, lack of money or being forced to return to the area where they would be most tempted to re-offend.[145]

Arguably, the flexibility of the regime, the amount of out-of-cell time coupled with the quality of the relationship with fellow prisoners and the staff, contributed to the reduction in incidents of self harm (see chapter 5). The Connect programme achieved a measure of success in facilitating the transition of the women back into the community through engaging with outside agencies to secure accommodation, training or work opportunities. The officers involved frequently continued to provide support to the women post release. After many months of negotiation between representatives of the Dóchas Centre and various outside bodies, a halfway house

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[144] In 2000, aliens comprised those stopped at ports of entry. Since that time, there was a major focus on immigrants who were already in the country illegally. When apprehended they were held in the Dóchas Centre for any period up to 6 weeks, pending deportation.

[145] For a recent discussion on the experience of both male and female Dublin prisoners, after release see (O' Loingsigh 2004).

was established towards the end of 2003 (after my fieldwork was completed). It was run by a charity and catered for six women to help ease their return to the free world.

At an individual level, a number of validations are worth mentioning. Three repeat offenders (two of whom I had spoken to on various occasions during the research) who were self confessed drug addicts and had started their rehabilitation in the Dóchas Centre, managed to overcome their addiction and start a new life. They returned on a regular basis to speak on the subject to those still inside. Other released women were helping in treatment centres in the community. Another is a member of a Committee on the outside and works with a member of the Dóchas Centre staff plus others on a project aimed at helping reintegrate prisoners back into the community. A long-term prisoner who I got to know quite well, wrote to the Head of Education after her release and told her that she now had her own accommodation and a job. She explained "*I could never have achieved any of this without the support, opportunity and kindness shown to me by the staff in the Dóchas Centre and in the school*". The mother of a South African who visited the Dóchas Centre whilst her daughter was incarcerated, afterwards wrote to the Governor

> "*My mind and heart were bursting with gratitude. I left knowing that T [her daughter] was in the most professional and caring hands. With sincere and grateful thanks from T's family, her children her sisters and brothers and of course, especially from me, her mother*".

Finally a middle class, older American woman wrote from a prison in Connecticut to which she had been extradited, to one of the nuns connected to Mountjoy,

> "*Tell everyone at Mountjoy I think of the kindness they showed me often. They need to come to Connecticut to teach them [the authorities] about humanity*".

These examples by definition are selective and partial but support the general thrust of my empirical findings that the Dóchas Centre was fulfilling many of its original aspirations.

From the officers' perspective, after the early turmoil, they gradually adjusted to the new demands of their role. The conflict between individual choice and institutional needs did not prove insurmountable, and although they continued to have concerns about overcrowding and lack of discipline, there was clear evidence of general satisfaction with working in the new environment (see chapter 6). The point was summed up by a non-staff member who worked in the prison most days:

"I think people are treated humanely. They are treated with a certain amount of respect that I don't think in a lot of places that category of woman is getting from any particular agency at this moment. I think that the staff, in general, are a good resource. I don't think anything like that can operate unless you have committed staff of some sort or another. Not everybody is as committed as the next person and you always have your difficulties within a staff group. But I think in general terms, I think the Dóchas Centre wouldn't have come as far as it did unless the people who worked there brought it along that far". N06

It is too early in the life of this new prison to assess whether the ideals expressed in the Vision Statement will survive. Over the course of the study, the regime continued to evolve. The same leadership was still in place which ensured continuity and ongoing commitment to the original ideals. What happens if they move on? That question is particularly relevant to the Governor of the Dóchas Centre itself. She recognised the need for continued vigilance when she talked about the future

"A big challenge is to constantly support the whole team effort. Not just with the staff and all the other agencies involved but also with the women and have the women included as well. To encourage that all the time. It is about inclusion. That is a constant challenge all the time. And to keep the staff motivated – keep them included, keep them trained up. Empower them. Always to have that Vision of where you are going".

Her contribution and the part played by her staff and the ancillary staff (particularly the education team) in maintaining the spirit of the vision, should not be underestimated. Although Governor Lonergan was the main driving force that instigated the change, it was Governor McMahon and her staff who had the day to day responsibility for implementing the new ideas and maintaining the impetus. After more than three years in existence they have proved they had resilience. At the end of that period, Governor Lonergan had this to say

"I think we have achieved some of our Vision. We have put in place something that is different. With some minor exceptions, it has been trouble free generally. I think the benefits for the staff and the women prisoners and the community at large in the longer term are immense if we start making inroads into this whole thing of the limitations the women have in education, personal lives and in resources. If we could get better links into the community. We are trying our best to do that – to get the community in more and get involved more. But the end product is, can they [the women] be reintegrated into society – with the whole support system they need when they go out? Without an infrastructure in the community, without support and enthusiasm in the community, then you are never going to achieve the sort of levels you require. You can do what you like in-house in a way. Unless you have a longer term strategy of bringing back into the community and reintegrating into jobs, into housing, into family structures – that sort of stuff, you are at nothing.

The women themselves, because they have taken a bit of effort as well and time to make a transition from an old structured, conventional prison system to a completely new approach. All those things taken on board, I think it has

made a lot of progress. But it hasn't achieved anything like its potential yet. There is a huge long race. It is like a marathon – we probably have two or three miles run and we are still up there with the pace. But we still have 20 miles to go and I suppose, when we have 20 miles done, there will be more to do. So, I see it making a huge difference – a huge impact in terms of the people living there and with tremendous opportunity for the future".

The Dóchas Centre continues to face a number of challenges and could provide an interesting focus for future research to assess its longer term progress. Already there are potentially worrying indicators. The Irish Prison Service Headquarters, which had started re-organising during the course of this study, has since begun to introduce more stringent financial controls throughout the service. Capital investment in prisons has been curtailed. A new Minister of Justice was appointed in May 2003. In his first address to the Prison Officers Association on the 10th June 2003, he warned that overtime working by prison officers would be eliminated and replaced by an annualised system of contracted working hours (see chapter 6). What effect this new economic drive will have on the future operation of the Dóchas Centre is not yet clear. Staff selection practices could also have longer term implications for the women's prison. Promotions to positions of seniority are managed nationally. Officers apply to be considered for promotion and if accepted, are added to a panel. When vacancies occur anywhere in the Prison Service those at the top of the panel are offered the post. If they accept, they are appointed irrespective of suitability for the *specific* job. This practice has particular implications for the Dóchas Centre both in terms of sustained commitment to new ideals and the image of working in a female prison which, in the *macho* culture of the Prison Service, is not considered to be a 'real' job.

A much more worrying move was headlined in the *Irish Times* dated 11 February 2004 (many months after this study was completed) – *"Mountjoy women's prison may also be closed".* The article goes on to explain that at a recent Government Cabinet meeting, the decision had been taken to sell the site of the Mountjoy complex to a developer and rebuild the prison/s on a green-field site. This follows years of criticism of the appalling conditions in the main prison which have been condemned both nationally and internationally. It is ironic that once again, the fate of the female prisoners may be in danger of being overshadowed by the needs of the men. On a more optimistic note, it is also possible that the positive lessons learned from the Dóchas Centre experiment will act as an example to the Irish Prison Service and their counterparts in other jurisdictions, of what can be achieved with

commitment and dedication and will provide a more enlightened model for future prison development in the 21st century for both males and females.

APPENDIX A : OFFENCE TYPES AS SPECIFIED IN PRISONS AND PLACES OF DETENTION ANNUAL STATISTICS 1994
(with two additions made by the author)

CODE	OFFENCE DESCRIPTION
Group 1 Offences against the Person	**Group 3 Offences against Property without Violence**
101 Murder	301 Larceny
102 Attempted murder	302 Attempted larceny
103 Manslaughter	303 Trespass with intent
104 Shoot at with intent	304 Trespass and larceny
105 Wounding	305 Receiving stolen goods
106 Assault	306 False Pretences
107 Assault/resist garda	307 Forging/uttering
108 Rape	308 Taking vehicle without consent
109 Attempted rape	309 Allow self carried in stolen vehicle
110 Indecent assault	310 Unauthorised interference with veh
111 Indecent Exposure	311 Found enclosed
112 Other sexual offences	312 Other group 3 offences
113 Other group 1 offences	
Group 2 Offences against Property with Violence	**Group 4 All Other Offences**
201 Burglary	401 Drunkenness
202 Aggravated Burglary	402 Road traffic act offences
203 Robbery	403 Dangerous or drunk driving
204 Attempted robbery	404 Sale/supply of drugs
205 Malicious damage	405 Possession/production/cultivation
206 Arson	406 Import/export of drugs
207 Other group 2 offences	407 Forging/altering prescription
	408 Possession of explosives
	409 Possession of firearms
	410 Possession of house breaking tools
	411 Debtors/sureties/ contempt of court
	412 Offences under fisheries act
	413 Other group 4 offences
	415* Laundering Drug Money
	500* Aliens for Deportation

Note: the actual code numbers were allocated by me to assist analysis.
* These two codes reflect new categories appeared in the late 1990s.

APPENDIX B: STEERING COMMITTEE NOTICE FOR THE NEWSPAPERS

STEERING COMMITTEE ON THE NEW WOMEN'S PRISON

The Minister for Justice, Mrs. Maire Geoghegan-Quinn, T.D., has established a Steering Committee to advise her in relation to a range of issues in connection with the provision of the new Women's Prison including regime, facilities, services and design matters.

The Steering Committee Invites submissions from Interested groups and individuals on issues relevant to the above terms of reference. Submissions, in writing, should reach the undersigned not later than Monday, February, 14th, 1994.

John O'Neill,

Secretary to the Steering Committee, Department of Justice,

72-76, St. Stephen's Green, Dublin2.

**APPENDIX C:
DÓCHAS CENTRE
OVERVIEW**
(Pull-out map)

DÓCHAS CENTRE OVERVIEW

MOUNTJOY MEN'S PRISON

Entrance

Control Room

Reception

Phoenix House

Dining / Visiting

Cedar House

COURT YARD

Gate

BIG YARD

H C U & Library, Oratory & Chaplaincy

Gate

Gate

SPORTS YARD

Elm House

H C U

SMALL YARD

Rowan House

Gym

Laurel House

Maple House

School

Hazel House

School

NORTH CIRCULAR ROAD
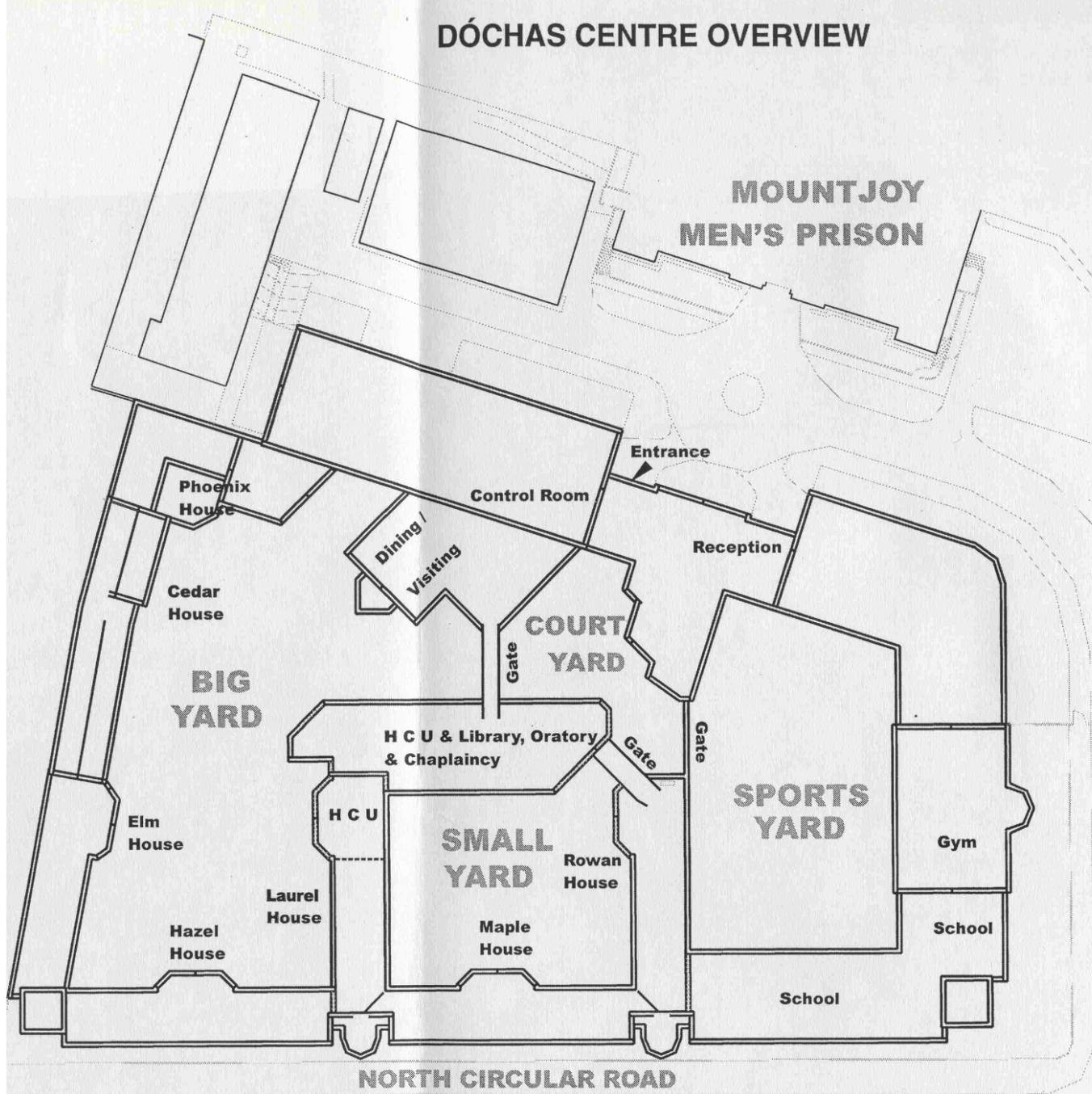
Source: The architect at the Office Of Public Works in Dublin

	House	Lock-back time*	'Category'	No of Rooms
Big Yard	Phoenix	Unlocked	Unsupervised	7/8
	Cedar	Unlocked	Unsupervised	18
	Elm	10.00 pm	Semi-Supervised	12
	Hazel	07.30 pm	Supervised	12
	Laurel	07.30 pm	Supervised	10
Small Yard	Rowan	07.30 pm	Supervised	10
	Maple	07.30 pm	supervised	10
Health Care Unit (HCU)				4 + 3 padded

* From March 2000

APPENDIX D: QUESTIONS FOR IN-DEPTH INTERVIEWS WITH PRISONERS

1.0 About you
1.1 Where are you from
1.2 Marital status
1.2.1 Children
1.3 How long have you been in prison
1.3.1 Is this your first time – how many times
1.4 Were you ever in the old prison
1.5 Any other prison

2.0 Your Day
2.1 Describe a typical day for you from when you get up to when you go to bed
2.2 Is every day the same
2.3 What, for you, is the best part of the day and why
2.4 What is the worst part of the day and why
2.5 What kind of things are on offer for you to do, or to help you
2.6 What happens if you don't take advantage of them

3.0 The Houses
3.1 How long have you been in this house
3.2 How do you feel about being in this house
3.3 What are the good things about it
3.4 What are the not so good things about it
3.5 Have you lived in any of the other houses
3.6 Were they the same or different
3.7 How are disputes in a house sorted out

4.0 Relationships
4.1 How do you get on with the other prisoners in this house
4.2 How do you think the prisoners in your house get on with one another
4.3 What are relationships like with people in the other houses
4.4 How do you get on with the prison officers
4.4.1 What do you think is a good prison officer
4.4.2 What are views about having male prison officers in a female prison
4.5 In general, how do you think prisoners and staff get on in the Dóchas Centre

5.0 Discipline
5.1 Are there rules in place
5.1.1 What are they
5.2 What happens if they are broken
5.3 What are the main discipline offences and what causes them

6.0 General
6.1 What were you expecting from the Dóchas Centre before you came in
6.2 What do you think they are trying to achieve
6.3 What is your view now
6.4 What are the best things about it for you
6.5 What are the worst things about it
6.6 Do you think that being in the Dóchas Centre has helped you in any way
6.7 How would you rate the Dóchas Centre by comparison to the old prison or any other prison you have been in
6.8 If you could change one thing about the Dóchas Centre it what would it be

APPENDIX D1: QUESTIONS FOR IN-DEPTH INTERVIEWS WITH PRISON OFFICERS

1.0   About you
1.1   How long have you been in the Prison Service
1.2   How did you come to join
1.3   What did you do before
1.4   Have you worked in other prisons
1.5   Did you work in the old prison

2.0   Your role
2.1   What is your role in the Dóchas Centre
2.2   For you, what is a typical day – describe it
2.2.1 What would you consider a good day and why
2.2.2 What would you consider a bad day and why
2.3   What do you believe are the most important aspects of your job and why
2.5   What are the elements of your job that give you the most satisfaction
2.6   What gives you the least satisfaction
2.7   In your opinion, what makes a good prison officer

3.0   The regime
3.1   What are your views about the new regime - the good and bad things about it
3.1.1 The daily routine, education, leisure, visits, health care, 'special' programmes
3.2   How do you think the prisoners are responding to it
3.3   How has it affected the way you do things

4.0   The Philosophy/Architecture
4.1   What are your views about the philosophy of the Dóchas Centre
4.2   What is your opinion of the overall layout and how has it affected you

5.0   The Houses
5.1   What are your views about the separate houses and how they are working
5.1.1 What are the good things about them
5.1.2 What are your main concerns about them
6.0   Discipline
6.1   Can you tell me about the discipline regime here – how does it work
6.2   What are the main discipline offences and what causes them

7.0   Relationships
7.1   In general, how do you think relationships are working in the Dóchas Centre (prisoners, colleagues, mgt)
7.2   What do you think is the ideal staff/prisoner relationship

8.0   General
8.1   What were your expectations of the Dóchas Centre before you came
8.2   To what extent do you think they been fulfilled
8.3   What changes have you noticed since you came here
8.4   In your opinion what is the Dóchas Centre trying to achieve
8.5   Overall how satisfied are you with working in the Dóchas Centre
8.5.1 What do you think are the most positive aspects
8.5.2 What do you think are the most negative aspects
8.6   If you could change one thing to make it better what would it be
8.7   How do you see the Dóchas Centre developing in the years to come

APPENDIX E: THE OLD PRISON – DAILY ROUTINE

08.10 – 08.30
Prisoners unlocked
Medication distributed at the circle on each floor
Breakfast collected and taken to the cells
(Prisoners not necessarily dressed at this time)

08.30 – 09.10
Lock back
Officers have their breakfast, in the office or outside
(This was a very quiet part of the day)

09.10 – 09.30
Prisoners unlocked to shower, dress, clean cells
Court escorts (courts started at 10.30)

09.30 – 12.15
School
laundry/crafts/sewing room, visits, association in the yard

12.15 – 12.45
Collect lunch

12.45 – 14.15
Lock back
(officers have their lunch from 1 till 2)

14.15 – 16.15
Unlock and repeat of the morning programme

16.15 – 16.55
Collect Tea

16.55 – 17.20
Lock back
(officers have their tea break)

17.20 – 19.15
Unlock for association - video, TV, gym, yard
Tuesday and Thursday - education
Thursday - volleyball
Library/AA/Samaritans

19.15 – 19.30
Collect supper and return to cell

19.30
Final lockup

20.30
Distribution of final medication

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