



**WARWICK**  
THE UNIVERSITY OF WARWICK

**History, Arts and Public Engagement:**  
Prisoner Health Project  
at the University of Warwick



*“Can history bring something **new** and **fresh** to work with the arts in criminal justice settings?”*

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Cover image: *Lock Her Up*, installed at Tate Modern as part of Warwick Tate Exchange, June 2018. Image credit: George Blower

Left: *Disorder Contained*. Image credit: Andrew Moore

# Introduction from Professor Hilary Marland

During 2017-18, a Wellcome Trust-funded project *Prisoners, Medical Care and Entitlement to Health in England and Ireland, 1850-2000* undertook several public engagement projects in the UK and Ireland.

Partnering with arts and policy organisations, the project members based at four institutions were keen to take their research to new audiences, and to consider the ways in which they could showcase their research and findings in new ways. The project teams were also eager to consider how history could potentially influence policy and practice and encourage wider publics to think about the health and welfare of prisoners through the prism of history.

Why is history important? In what ways can the past speak to the present? Who writes, interprets and 'owns' history, and what responsibility lies upon those interpreting it? What kinds of historical evidence can we draw on in working with the arts? Can history bring something new and fresh to work with the arts in criminal justice settings? Can we, through history, open up new questions or explore difficult topics? Can history add something new when considering the relationship between prisons and health? These are just some of the questions pondered by the artists and historians involved in this project.

The University of Warwick team challenged people to work with and respond to our historical research in three key areas of prison health:

- + Mental health in prison, particularly around solitary confinement and the introduction of the separate system in the mid-19th century with its devastating impact on inmates' minds.

- + Women's experience of healthcare, both physical and mental, of childbirth while incarcerated, and of their relationships with their children while in prison
- + The role of food and nutrition in mental and physical health while in prison.

We were surprised, challenged, and ultimately thrilled by the work produced by and with our partner organisations and we were delighted to share some of the outputs at a one-day conference in December 2018, *Healthy Inside: Arts, History, Policy and Practice in Prisoner Health*. The conference considered the four co-produced outputs from Warwick.

- + Talking Birds' commissioned play, *Disorder Contained*, interpreted a mass of our research around the introduction of the separate system in the 1850s and was performed in Coventry, Dublin, Belfast and London.
- + Fuel's audio installation *Lock Her Up*, working with artists Sabrina Mahfouz, Rachel Mars, and Paula Varjack, and sound designer Gareth Fry, resulted in three audio pieces responding to our research on women's experiences of prison.
- + Geese Theatre's work with the women and staff at HMP Peterborough on the project *On the Inside* resulted in the creation of a piece of theatre of testimony, *Playing the Game*, juxtaposing lived and contemporary experience with historical materials.

- + Rideout's work in HMP Hewell and HMP Stafford, *Past Time*, took the subject of food in prison, and reflected and recreated history as the men became creative historical researchers and performers.

Three of the four projects above were based at the University of Warwick, the honourable exception being *Disorder Contained*, which was a thoroughly joint endeavour with Associate Professor Catherine Cox at University College Dublin.

The conference also acknowledged the complementary work carried out by the project's institutional partners at University College Dublin (UCD), Dublin City University and London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine (LSHTM). Across the four partner institutions our work covered an array of research strands. Alongside mental health, maternity care, and prison diet, the project team researched and developed innovative public engagement on the themes of prison reform and the role of political prisoners in shaping health in prison, the history of juvenile mental health, and the emergence and treatment of HIV/AIDS in prisons.

This publication draws together contributions to the conference from speakers and delegates, as well as interviews with the artists themselves, and conversations at other events hosted throughout 2017-18, to collate the very rich feedback from the four projects and share our experiences. We have also presented details of our methodology that underpinned the mutually fruitful collaborations with the artists.

We certainly don't think we have all the answers, but we hope that you find the reflections contained in this publication stimulating and we look forward to continuing the conversation.

## Public engagement work undertaken across the four institutions:

- *Disorder Contained: A theatrical examination of madness, prison and solitary confinement* (Warwick/UCD)
- *Past Time* (Warwick)
- *Lock Her Up* (Warwick)
- *On the Inside* and *Playing the Game* (Warwick)
- Warwick Tate Exchange (Warwick)
- Pop-up exhibition exploring the health history of Holloway prison (Warwick/LSHTM)
- *Positive in Prison*, audio documentary about the management of HIV/AIDS in Dublin's Mountjoy prison in the 1980s and 1990s (LSHTM)
- *The Trial*, a visual partnership with The Bridge Project for Kilmainham Gaol (UCD)
- *Health Inside*, a public art intervention around Dublin (UCD)
- Policy workshops: London and Dublin
- HIV Witness Seminar (LSHTM)
- 100 years of Maternal Incarceration, conference (Warwick)
- Diet and Nutrition in Institutions of Care: History and Policy, conference (Warwick)
- Extensive media engagement around the theme of political prisoners (DCU)
- *The Examination*, a theatrical piece created by UCD and Brokentalkers
- *Living Inside*, a photography exhibition curated by UCD at Kilmainham Gaol
- *Throw Away the Key*, an exhibition curated by Warwick using archives and images from the University of Warwick's Modern Records Centre

# Prisons Today

By Steve Eley, Deputy Head of Healthcare Inspection, HM Inspectorate of Prisons  
Taken from opening remarks at the one-day conference, *Healthy Inside: Arts, History, Policy and Practice in Prisoner Health*

Having worked in prison settings and closed institutions for many years, I know how important it is to challenge and refresh our thinking and practices, and having transparency and being able to embrace and learn from experience in history is critical.

I think that Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Prisons (HMIP) plays an important role in ensuring transparency about life in prisons and that it holds services and Government to account. There is a long history in this country, dating back to John Howard in the 18th century, of prison inspection and concern about prisons leading to the 1835 Gaol Act, which created the official Inspectors of prisons. Over time though I think the impact of those official Inspectors became more subdued, became less independent and part of the State's mechanisms and it was only after a series of prison disturbances in the 70s / early 80s that we saw the fully independent Inspectorate being established. This saw the creation of the Chief Inspector's role as a Crown appointee - which makes it quite difficult for the Secretary of State to remove them.

Our only statutory authority is the power to access prisons and places of detention and to produce a report to the Secretary of State on the treatment of prisoners and prison conditions. It's worth noting that the UK Government was a leading signatory to the optional protocol to the convention against torture and by doing so committed itself to

establishing an inspection regime in all areas where there are people who are deprived of their liberty, the so called NPM, National Preventive Mechanism.

Human rights are at the centre of the inspection regime. In the 1980s, HMIP developed a set of expectations or standards to create what we call a set of 'healthy prison' tests, which are clearly linked to the human rights requirements. So, what are we finding in our prisons today?

We're not finding hugely delinquent organisations, most people are committed, most people are trying very hard. But there are huge pressures in terms of staffing, in terms of an aged estate, in terms of increasing numbers, a change in the demographics of the prison population. We are seeing a huge increase in violence, including self-harm. There's too much availability of drugs in prison and many prisoners tell us they've developed a drug habit during their stay in prison. There are poor living conditions in a number of areas; the amount of time out of the cell that prisoners have is poor and the number of useful purposeful activities is insufficient. There's a huge increase in



Breakfast pack, HMP Hewell, March 2018.  
Image credit: Natalie Willatt

demand for mental health services and support, a frailer population, and an ageing population doing longer sentences.

When we go into prisons we make recommendations but unfortunately 49% of our recommendations last year were not achieved by the prisons. So the next stage was to establish what we call a UN Process (Urgent Notification Process), because we had particular concerns about Liverpool Prison and Wormwood Scrubs where conditions were so poor we felt we needed to do something to escalate that. This year we've seen the UN Process formally used in Nottingham, Birmingham and Exeter. Recently the Select Committee on Health found the Government was failing in its duty of care towards people detained in custody. So, it looks bleak, and it is, but it's not universally so. The women's estate, for example, generally scores relatively positively in our healthy prison tests.

In respect of healthcare, which we inspect with the Care Quality Commission (CQC) on a joint footing, lots of what we saw in terms of the overall provision of healthcare was broadly positive ('Reasonably good' in

our kind of jargon). But the CQC still found that 20 prisons out of 37 in the adult estate were breaching regulations mainly relating to things like staffing, waiting times, access to external hospital appointments, treatment of long-term conditions and, again, mental health, including support. So, quite a negative position but we did also see 68 areas of good practice.

I think it's inherent upon us that we do look and learn and take stock through different lenses, which is why this project's work is an important opportunity to see how reflecting on history using the Arts can contribute to our understanding.

*"Human rights are at the centre of the inspection regime"*

# Methodologies and collaboration: a reflection on the collaborative process by Professor Hilary Marland

**'This is all about relationships', concluded Andy Watson of Geese Theatre Company in his summing up of our day conference at the Shard. Relationships with research, I would suggest, formed the two key components of all our collaborations with the artists and organisations we worked with.**

From those first awkward meetings – between historians not quite sure what we were asking our Arts partners to do and artists who were not quite sure what we did or what we could bring to a collaboration – we moved to a position of interacting to take our historical research to a variety of audiences and to develop two sets of projects with people in prison. It has led to us working with amazing collaborators in the Arts, forming enduring relationships and friendships.

We were eager in all these projects to develop new ways of working with our material and innovative and impactful ways of reaching audiences. And indeed, in each of the projects the work started with the research. In fact, we waited two full years before appointing our public engagement officer, Ms Flo Swann (together with Dr Sinead McCann in Dublin) to support our public engagement work. We did this so that we would have a good understanding of the material that we wanted to work with and of the issues that the research was highlighting. So together with our team of postdoctoral fellows on the project, we worked our way through chaplains' and surgeons' journals, prison reports, a mass of official papers, prison memoirs, the publications of prison governors and doctors, and the archives of prison reform organisations such as the

Howard League. And then we started the conversations.

The first time Flo and myself met Saul Hewish of Rideout he was disappointed that we wouldn't be able to take original archival materials (that in fact are only very rarely allowed to leave the archive) into prisons and was anxious that the prisoners we would work with would be dismissive of photocopied material, print outs and images. We needn't have worried, but this highlighted the initial challenges and doubts raised in those early conversations. Several of the organisations we worked with had used history, but, with the exception of our long-term collaborators Talking Birds, they had not worked directly and closely with historians.

In each project, we worked in different ways with our research. On the Warwick side of things the resources collected and collated by Dr Rachel Bennett, Dr Margaret Charleroy, Dr Nicolas Duvall, and Professor Hilary Marland (Hilary working in close collaboration with Associate Professor Catherine Cox in Dublin) focused on the themes of mental health in prison, maternity and women's health care, and physical health, particularly prison food and diet. Our first project, *Disorder Contained*, with Talking Birds, would be our third collaboration with them producing pieces of

theatre based on the subject of mental health and confinement. So we were on safe ground here, having built up a close and very effective relationship and way of working with director and scriptwriter, Peter Cann, and Talking Birds.

As in the other productions we worked on, Catherine and I presented Peter with some of our material on mental disorder and the impact of solitary confinement in prison to get the ball rolling. When asked what it's been like working with historians, Peter responded 'It's great. One of the best things about it is you do all the research and it's just there ready for me to seek out what I consider to be important.' But he also says it's challenging: 'Our job was to make a piece of engaging and accessible theatre which remains faithful to the serious research.'

As historians we already did a fair bit of selecting before passing material on; we didn't give Peter everything or he'd be swamped. And then we talked, we had meetings, discussions – working with Janet Vaughan and Derek Nisbet, the artistic directors of Talking Birds – about the set, the format, the actors, and the kinds of issues we are interested in. But at no point did we really say 'we want you to address this, this is what we want you to talk about, this is what we want to come out in the play', but somehow they are able to distil, prompted by our conversations, the most intriguing research questions out of the material.

Catherine and I worked closely with the script produced by Peter, querying anything that didn't sound correct historically, suggesting small modifications. And that process continued as the actors are brought in and the characters start to be developed. Peter and the cast ask questions – these can often be things we haven't considered – and then we do our best to answer them, which might lead to more research. It's fascinating and important to attend the rehearsals, and to try to answer questions as they emerge, and

occasionally take the opportunity to make an artistic intervention! I suggested at an early rehearsal that one of the prisoner characters should be much younger; there was something about the way Gen (Genevieve Say) was playing him that reminded me of the descriptions of one of Oscar Wilde's poacher 'pals' and fellow prisoners. So the 30 year old shed 10 years!

Flo, with her background in theatre, had recommended Fuel Production Company after being impressed by their body of work, and we were excited when they accepted our commission to develop *Lock Her Up*. Fuel proceeded to recruit the three artists that we would work with, Rachel Mars, Sabrina Mahfouz and Paula Varjack, and we were also thrilled to be working with two-time Bafta winner, sound designer Gareth Fry. The idea was to select themes related to women's experiences of prison to develop into three 10-minute audio pieces, and together – Rachel Bennett and myself, the artists and Fuel – we came up with the subjects of solitary confinement, women's experiences of motherhood in prison, and women's agency and resistance.

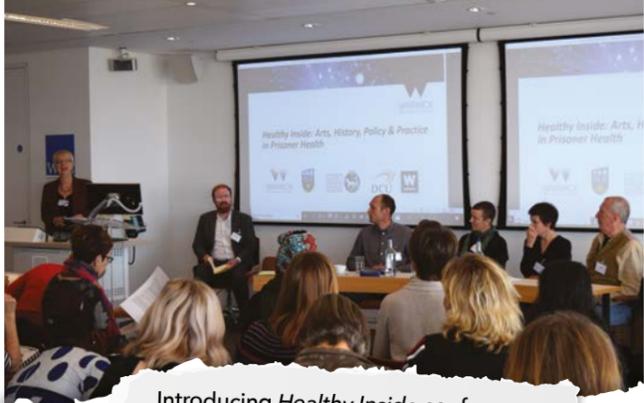
Again we talked to the artists at length about the many themes to emerge from our research and they responded with enthusiasm. Together we worked to sift and sort through the materials to identify themes and stories that resonated with them and that they wanted to explore further. Feeling inspired, the artists did some research of their own and we came back together (in person and via Skype) to address any questions that had emerged and to help the artists shape their pieces. But the guiding principle was that they would not closely represent or replicate our research but would produce an artistic response to it. For historians, this idea can be quite alarming, but we were delighted with the three pieces that transformed our research into beautifully crafted, engaging and thought-provoking pieces. The three audios were launched at the Tate Modern

(Warwick Tate Exchange) as part of a week-long intervention on the theme of *The Production of Truth, Justice and History*, and thereafter showcased at Latitude Festival and Tonight We Fly Festival in Leeds. The pieces produced extraordinary responses, including the ones that were perhaps the most exciting to hear:

- + 'I would never read anything about this stuff but to listen to it is fascinating.'
- + 'Really moving! I'd never thought about what happens to pregnant women in prison before, so this really got me thinking... Talking to the academics at the event was really interesting - giving me more understanding of the situation historically and today, and the complexity of this situation - there are no easy answers or solutions. I'll definitely remember this exhibition - it's got me thinking and feeling about something I'd never been aware of before.'

One thing that we learnt in doing collaborative work is that some things, inevitably, will go wrong when you are working on so many projects, with different groups of artists, often simultaneously. We also learned that most things can be fixed. We lost one of our original collaborators on *Lock Her Up*, and were at risk of losing one of the pieces, but were very fortunate to have another very talented artist join the project at a very late stage, shortly before recording. Thankfully she already had a strong background not only in working with women in prison but also had an interest in the issue of motherhood in prison and she hit the deck running! She produced a script and a challenging and richly crafted piece in an extraordinarily short space of time.

Our final two major projects, with Geese and Rideout, involved working on participatory projects in prisons, with HMP Peterborough's Mother and Baby Unit and the men of HMP



Introducing *Healthy Inside* conference, December 2018. Image credit: Sam van Strien

Hewell and HMP Stafford. In order to 'recruit' our project partners, we put out a call for proposals, asking the artists who applied to give their ideas on how they would develop projects working with historians, drawing on our historical resources. We were delighted with the response, and in the end struggled to make a selection. So we decided to work with two partners on two sets of projects, thus doubling our commitment too, and making us work hard to find the extra funding (which we did - the Arts Council and University of Warwick were incredibly generous). Rachel Bennett (with a bit of support from Hilary and Flo) took the lead in collaborating with Liz Brown of Geese drawing on her research on maternity in prison, while Hilary Marland and Margaret Charleroy worked with Saul Hewish and Rideout on the theme of food and prison diet.

Again there were many meetings, and Helena Enright was brought on board as a playwright and specialist in the theatre of testimony to work with Geese in producing a script that would be based on the historical research and interviews and conversations with the women of HMP Peterborough. Rachel and I attended workshops at Peterborough bringing in images and materials to stimulate conversations about the history of maternity care in prisons. This in itself prompted something of a learning experience for us as we combed through our research materials. Due to the often emotive nature of the subject area and its continued resonance with the experiences of women in prison today we

were very conscious not to take in materials that would be upsetting to the women participating in the project (including cases of the deaths of women or their babies in custody), but we were also eager not to direct the research away from difficult topics. As part of the creative process, the history fed into the interviews with the women conducted by Helena and Liz and together they became the basis of the script, which will be performed for the first time at the BEDLAM Festival in Birmingham in October 2019.

One of the many interesting aspects of weaving the contemporary with the historical for the script was that, in a similar way that previous artists had talked about the need to remain faithful to historical materials, the playwright needed to honour the contributions of the workshop participants alongside the historical content. And she wanted all participant voices to be heard equally. So finding a flow that worked for all these requirements was quite a challenge. But one well met, we think.

Saul was keen that the men became active researchers and collaborators in producing the performances in Stafford and Hewell. So we decided, definitely, there would be no lectures and that we would aim to provide opportunities in the historical sessions for the men to discover the material for themselves, to analyse and discuss it. They did this with gusto, with some of our 'seminars' lasting three hours, with a short tea break. The men produced excellent summaries and discussion points based on what they had read. They had lots of ideas and questions, and also a good deal of historical knowledge themselves, and the performances not only contained a rich selection of historical information on prison diet and discipline but the men's own interpretation of this history (as well as the cooking of historical prison recipes to accompany it).

What have we learned overall? A number of things. The importance first of all - if the budget allows for this - of having someone brilliant to act as Public Engagement Officer, who became coordinator, financial director and ringmaster. Over the course of two years we delivered four major projects and several smaller ones and we couldn't have done this without Flo's immense hard work, drive and enthusiasm for what we were doing. With busy and competing commitments, we also needed to be pushed occasionally to get something written, to get the material off to the artists, to keep everything moving forward. Flo's wide knowledge and deep enthusiasm for the arts was also essential, as well her commitment to developing the projects in prison, and she joined in many of the workshops.

In a similar way, we found it vital to join forces with organisations and individuals who have a vast experience of working in criminal justice settings, such as Rideout and Geese, when it came to the participatory prison projects, as they were able to steer us through the process of working in a prison environment. Rachel, Margaret and I found this to be an enriching and enjoyable experience and a valuable one in terms of making us think about how we carry out, interpret and communicate historical research.

We also discovered that it's a lot of effort (with many timetabling challenges) to conduct this work on top of everything else we have to do as academics. But above everything else, it's been tremendously interesting and rewarding, a true career highlight for us, and it's nothing short of exciting to see your historical research used in such varied ways to produce amazing work and to have the opportunity to work with such talented individuals - both those within and outside prison - and organisations.

# Interpreting history: *Disorder Contained: A theatrical examination of madness, prison and solitary confinement*

A play created by Talking Birds based on research by Professor Hilary Marland, Associate Professor Catherine Cox and Dr Nicholas Duvall

You can watch the film [here](#) or Google *Disorder Contained* Warwick.

## Background to the play by Professor Hilary Marland

*Disorder Contained* was performed in theatres in Coventry (Shop Front Theatre), Dublin (Smock Alley), Belfast (MAC) and London (Rich Mix) in 2017.

The script was based on our research into the history of the system of separate confinement, a form of prison discipline that can be traced to the rise of the modern penitentiary in the 1840s. During this period the separate system of prison discipline was imported from the Eastern State Penitentiary, Philadelphia to England. It was at Pentonville 'Model' Prison in London that separate cellular confinement was introduced in its most extreme form in 1842. In Pentonville specially selected prisoners worked, ate and slept in their solitary cells for almost 23 hours out of 24. Their curtailed movements outside the cell - to attend chapel and to take exercise - were rigorously controlled, and communication between prisoners forbidden on pain of severe punishment. The regime was described as 'testing' and an 'experiment', even by its strongest supporters. It was designed by means of rigorous discipline and moral training to produce model prisoners and to be a 'portal' to transportation to Australia after 18 months of solitary confinement. The system was extended to Irish prisons in 1850, and was rolled out

across the British Isles in the mid-19th century.

The prison reformers who introduced the separate system had an overriding faith in its ability to produce repentance and reform in the quiet of the cell, urged on by Bible reading, reflection and the ministrations of the prison chaplains. Reverend John Clay, Chaplain of Preston Gaol and a staunch advocate of separate confinement, explained how this form of discipline and the chaplain's role as 'father-confessor' would prepare the prisoner for redemption: 'A few months in the solitary cell renders a prisoner strangely impressible. The chaplain can then make the brawny navy cry like a child; he can work on his feelings in almost any way he pleases.... and fill his mouth with his own phrases and language.'

During their 18 months in separate confinement, prisoners would also be taught reading, writing and arithmetic and a trade to equip them for their new lives in the colonies. Opponents to the system were numerous and vocal. Charles Dickens, who had also observed the separate system in America, famously described the system as 'cruel and wrong', 'this slow and daily tampering with the mysteries of the brain'. *The Times* newspaper claimed that insanity would be a 'probable', even 'inevitable' outcome of the regime.

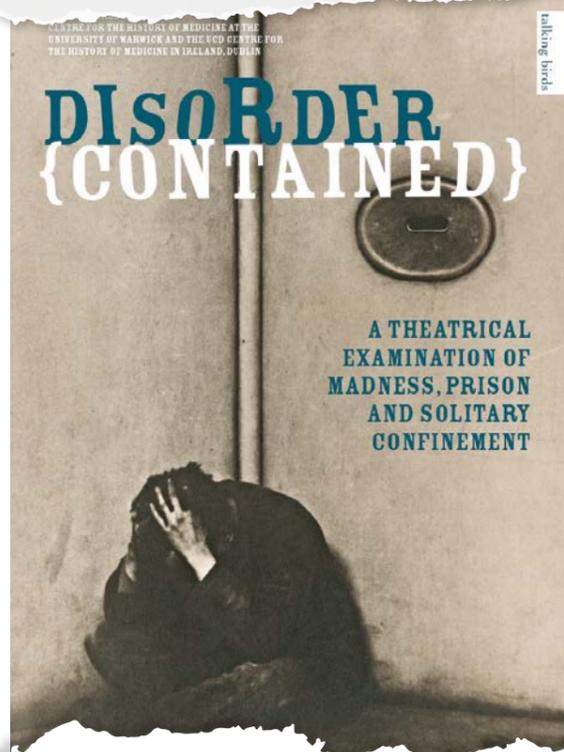
In practice the introduction of the separate system was marked less by reform than by high incidences of mental breakdown among prisoners. Prison records, including the notebooks kept by the prison medical officers and chaplains (drawn on extensively in the play), reported instances of delusions, hallucinations, depression, anxiety, mania, suicide and self-harm. Prisoners declared that they were visited by the spirits of the dead, that they were being poisoned, there were snakes coiled around the bars of their cells, and that 'things' crawled out of the ventilation system. Chaplain Kingsmill at Pentonville, initially a stalwart supporter of separate confinement, expressed his doubts about the regime just a few years after it was introduced. In 1849 he described one prisoner as 'excited, incoherent & strange in his manner. I am of opinion that his mind is likely to be injuriously affected by the discipline.'

Unlike Reverend Clay, it was not our purpose when developing *Disorder Contained* to put our impressions and our words into the mouths of our audiences. We made a conscious decision not to draw analogies with current day practices, though many of our audience members naturally enough made these connections themselves. But this quotation from the HMPI Report for 2015 and 2016 has very powerful resonances with the issues we explore in the play. The report concluded that 'Segregation units continued to provide impoverished regimes - they were inadequate in two-thirds of the prisons inspected, with little access to constructive activity.... Most prisoners were locked up for more than 22 hours a day with nothing meaningful to occupy them. Such isolation and lack of purposeful activity is almost bound to have a detrimental effect on the psychological welfare of prisoners.'

*Disorder Contained.*  
Image credit: Andrew Moore



Promotional flyer for *Disorder Contained*.  
Image credit: Andrew Moore, using an image from  
the Howard League for Penal Reform, Modern  
Records Centre, University of Warwick



**From conversations with Professor Hilary Marland, Associate Professor Catherine Cox (UCD), Janet Vaughan and Derek Nisbet (Talking Birds), Peter Cann (writer and director), Steve Eley (Deputy Head of Healthcare Inspection, HM Inspectorate of Prisons), Genevieve Say (actor), Professor Annie Bartlett (forensic psychiatrist), and Anita Dockley (Howard League)**

Naturally, questions were asked about the artists having to balance authenticity with theatricality when working from archival materials, especially with historians breathing down their necks! Was there a weight of accuracy or 'truthfulness' cramping your style? How did you each allow space for different expertise to shine? 'It's a great privilege to work with so much research, but as artists we had to decide how we were going to make this into a play' said Peter Cann. 'What are the main things we want to do with it; what do we need to communicate? We were lucky that

having read the materials our vision of what we wanted to communicate was very similar to Hilary and Catherine's so they gave us the freedom to be theatrical, and we respected their input as to any clanging inaccuracy or misrepresentation.'

'We did feel a great responsibility to the material', added Derek Nisbet, 'because it's serious and meticulous research. Our challenge was to be faithful to that authenticity but supply the particular kind of theatricality that Talking Birds specialises in.'

Peter continued, 'What's great is having researchers with you because that helps that organic process as well. I write the script, show it to Hilary and Catherine, and then when the actors come in, then we start playing with it, working on it and more changes come with working with the actors because the actors bring in their creativity. Some of our play script is taken directly from reports, either by chaplains, doctors or by prisoners themselves, but we created characters to then be able to present the ideas and the arguments dramatically.'

Catherine said, 'The other issue that came out is the role of the three characters, the chaplain, the medical officer and the schoolteacher, and how they are interacting, they're negotiating... It's not one single blanket imposition of a system, and there are those that are pushing back and those that are more enthusiastic, in this case obviously the chaplain.'

Peter agreed, 'One of the things the historians pointed out to us was the huge amount of influence that the chaplain had'. Hilary added, 'Many of them [the chaplains] genuinely believed that this system would reform the prisoners... they spent a lot of time in the cells, they really worked hard with the prisoners to produce confessions and to

converse with them. However, while having a variety of source materials, we had relatively few impressions of how prisoners experienced prison and solitary confinement. This provided rich opportunities in terms of interpretation.'

Doing a play about silence and solitary confinement also created particular challenges, Peter explained, 'One of the most important things for us was sound - we wanted to create a theatrical silence in the context of prison so we developed a soundscape which gave that silent feeling; silence doesn't actually mean silence, there are all kinds of strange noises, loud noises, quiet noises, very disturbing noises.'

Derek, who designed the sound, added, 'Part of the job of the sound designer is to create a version of the world that the play inhabits. I was thinking we know these were big institutions and so first thing I thought of was the footsteps of warders in these big, old buildings. But because Hilary was there, she was able to say actually the warders wore felt slippers as part of the regime. So footsteps wouldn't be factually right and we accepted that. What we're aiming for is truthfulness as opposed to the literal truth, whatever that is.'

Janet Vaughan continued the theme, 'We like working with historical materials because it allows us to examine the future in a way that we otherwise wouldn't because we're too close to it. But we're theatre makers not documentary makers so, although we work with the research, and are mindful of authenticity and using it responsibly, we want to put it out in such a way that we can engage in an emotional way with the audience.'

With such a wealth of written material given to them, did Talking Birds consider a verbatim treatment? Peter said he discounted it from the start, 'I think there are a lot of problems with things that purport to be verbatim theatre, because there's always a degree of

invisible editing and choice. Often things that appear verbatim are not, they are based on constructions of dialogue, making a character use stuff that you've taken from one place and changed it a little bit to fit the character. And then actors add things too. It's an evolving process. The approach we take is more about remaining true to the material and true to the people who were the originators of that material, not being slavish to language or necessarily to bald facts. The effect of things on people is what we're interested in. We took language and text as our cue; there were a lot of written reports which is not how people speak but do give you a clue to vocabularies used. So we could construct dialogue from that.'

Were the team worried about audiences viewing the piece as a 'historical recreation' with little to say to contemporary issues? Janet had a solution, 'If you set something in the present day, your audience immediately reads things totally differently because they instantly identify their day to day. Whereas if you set it removed from today, in the past or wherever, then it instead gives audiences indirect resonances, they can consider the piece much more truthfully than they would if they recognise more of the stuff that is there.'

Peter added, 'Re the design being "removed", it wasn't specific as to where it had been removed to, or to when. And this allowed much more liberty, as artists and an audience, to interpret things. It gave much more poetic resonance if you have the sense that, yes it is some time probably in the 19th century, but when? So actually this timelessness allowed resonance. And the cross-gender casting helped with that too - it was immediately clear that the audience had to believe in the various theatrical transformations we were about to deploy!'

'So, the cell is defined by the table, but it's not a cell until part way through the play', explained Janet, 'it's only been a table until then. And even then it's still a table, we just make you believe it's a cell. It's slightly smaller than an actual cell but it's not that far off so there was a dual aspect that was intentional.'

Derek elaborated, 'We didn't want to make conscious or heavy-handed analogies, but they are implicit and you can't avoid them, they're there. For example, in the play they talk about the effects of reductions in funding, the fact that the schoolmaster has 150 rather than 100 prisoners; a lot of the reports on the Pentonville experiment, and a lot of the deleterious effects, were also to do with the dilution of the system and the compromises which affected the mental health of the prisoners. So, obviously that has resonances with the effects on compromise and lack of funding today.'

Incarcerated people often use creative mechanisms - singing, drawing, writing, mental exercises - as a way of coping with their experience. Some audiences wondered if there is something intentional in the play about art, and people engaging with their experience through it (e.g. one of the prisoners in the play imagines a hare in his cell), that came through the research and that Talking Birds tried to connect with through the play? Peter said, 'Yes, in a way. The prisoner who imagines the hare, that is about imagination and it is what art is about. If you can imagine, you can imagine difference - you can imagine change. And that's one of the reasons why that character is the most ostensibly unaffected, or less deleteriously affected, by the system and manages to survive.'

Genevieve Say added 'The character I played was the youngest and actually the only one who comes out of it fine really without any sort of mental health issues, he uses his imagination which veers into hallucination and delusion as a coping mechanism.... He was in control mentally of what he was experiencing.'

Hilary described how, 'It was quite striking to us as researchers, not only to see the parallels with sensory deprivation, but when we were lucky enough to access prisoners' records and memoirs, actually the way that prisoners described themselves, their own experiences of being in a cell on their own in the 19th century did reflect and match very closely, incredibly closely, the sort of language that is used in reports today which is based on prisoners' testimonies.'

Annie Bartlett stressed, 'If you are subject to sensory deprivation for periods of time, and they may even be quite short periods of time, certainly not the 12, 18 months that we've just heard about, that is likely to have an impact on your mental health, and indeed you almost replace, potentially replace the things that you would ordinarily have sensed, that you would have touched, that you would have had... and actually your mind in a way plays tricks on you and so you invent companions in your cell with whom you can have conversations.'

The people who were behind the separate system genuinely thought it was a good thing, that it was a route to redemption for the prisoners. In a way they thought it was the best form of care they could offer prisoners, with real hope for change. Some audiences wondered whether contemporary segregation was simply solitary confinement by another name. Today we've generally moved from the language of 'confinement'

*"It's distressing for us to think that many people in prison still experience separation"*

to 'segregation', but perhaps that word still has some notion that those segregated are separated for their own good.

Hilary commented, 'It's distressing for us to think that many people in prison still experience separation or solitary confinement, although the conditions are completely different and the rationale behind it is completely different from the mid-19th century when it was introduced as a reformatory measure.'

Anita Dockley suggested, 'We do still have a semblance in our prison system today of the separate system as depicted in the play. We have segregation units and there's a deeper custody section in prisons, which are closed supervision units where segregation is exacerbated.'

Steve Eley added, 'There is a mix in terms of units and in terms of language but it's fair to say that, although we're critical of segregation, the staff who work in them tend to be people who want to work there, they tend to be people who want additional training and have positive day to day relationships, so that notion of care is often there.'

Another historical shift was in terms of the question of what happened to mentally ill people in prison because there was scope in the 19th century to move people to asylums,

though prisons were reluctant to do this as it signified the failure of prison discipline.

Anita stated, 'I think that's also what we saw in the play, that mental health deteriorates because of the system... and I think that's a very hard thing to tease out about what came first, were there issues prior to [imprisonment] or not, or is it just the environment they're held in and it's a coping strategy in dealing with things.'

The historians added, '[Historically] as today, many prisoners went into prison who already had mental health problems... it makes it quite tricky, as historical researchers... to figure out whether there were a lot of people who were mentally ill going into the prison system or whether the prison system made it worse. And probably it was both.'

We chose to offer post-show discussions after the performances because of our belief that theatre can create a space that belongs neither to the historians nor the artist nor the audience. It's instead a space where we can all meet equally to have an open conversation. We saw audiences feeling empathy and making the connections with the current day; we saw the opening up of conversations, which are normally quite difficult to have, about mental health. Derek found these invaluable, 'What I found extraordinary was that the stuff that happened after the show was as important as what was in the show. The post show discussions included many people who are "at the coal face" of this work but also those who are simply interested in history or theatre. What we got back from them all was immense, the conversation was enriching both ways. I found humbling the number of professionals in the field who came out to watch the show and talk about it. In Belfast there were so many people saying, "I work in



*Disorder Contained.*  
Image credit: Andrew Moore

the Irish prison service, I've been working in the prison service as a doctor for 40 years". It made me think that it's good that there's this situation where this dialogue is going on, and that we'd maybe galvanised a slightly more informal version of those conversations that probably happen professionally. It felt like we'd made a conversation starter and created the right conditions for those conversations to continue.'

Catherine explained that people coming to the play might not be aware of the problem of mental disorder in our current system or of its long history, 'So I think for broadening that out to a more general audience that maybe aren't aware of these issues, I think its actually been very interesting and very helpful.'

Hilary remarked, 'We've found that theatre is a really wonderful way of talking about

difficult subjects... theatre gives you this space, this place to talk about mental illness in a much more frank and open forum. Part of this process is to open up conversations about mental illness and what it's like and how it affected people in the historical past but also reflect on how it affects people now. By working with theatre you can amplify the historical research to make it more accessible to reach different audiences.'

Peter agreed, 'The discussions wouldn't have worked without the historical experts on the panel; if it was just the theatre company doing it, we wouldn't have had the expertise to be able to answer a lot of the questions that were being asked.' Hilary added, 'And without the theatre company, the people wouldn't have come and had a discussion with anybody, so that's what has been absolutely brilliant.'

## Inspired by history: Fuel, Lock Her Up

An audio installation created by Fuel with artists Rachel Mars, Sabrina Mahfouz, Paula Varjack and sound designer Gareth Fry, responding to the research of Dr Rachel Bennett and Professor Hilary Marland, exploring women's experiences of prison and particularly the themes of maternity, solitary confinement, and women's agency and resistance.

### Background to the piece by Dr Rachel Bennett

The prison project's public engagement work set out to explore how history can be looked at beyond the medium of the written word; many people encounter history through books or more traditional documentaries, but we wanted to challenge artists to go beyond just recounting what happened.

We wanted to use audio because we felt it could be really accessible and help generate conversations, and we wanted something which could easily travel and go into different spaces for people to experience it in different environments.

Following many lengthy conversations between ourselves, Fuel and the artists about the kinds of themes and stories that have emerged from our research and what they can reveal about women's historic experiences of imprisonment over the past two centuries, we identified three specific areas that the artists were very keen to explore further: solitary confinement; mothers in prison; and women resisting the terms of their incarceration. Working with Fuel and sound designer Gareth Fry to create three binaural pieces, Rachel Mars explored solitary confinement in *No Soft Place*; Sabrina Mahfouz considered maternity in prison in *This is How it Was*; and multimedia artist Paula Varjack looked at women's agency in *In the Time After the Raids*.

We had the fantastic opportunity to install *Lock Her Up* at Warwick Tate Exchange at Tate Modern in June 2018 as part of an intervention on *The Production of Truth*,

*Justice and History*. The pieces were experienced by a diverse range of visitors to the gallery from artists to schoolchildren, many with very little knowledge of or prior interest in prison history. We were overwhelmed by the responses to the work and by the extent to which visitors engaged with us and wanted to know more about the research underpinning their creation.

The portability of the pieces meant they could be exhibited at several other locations thereafter. Exhibiting the pieces at Latitude Festival in July allowed them to reach a wide and diverse range of people and installing them outdoors in a more open space provided a fresh way for audiences to experience and respond to them.

In addition, they were taken to *Tonight We Fly*, as part of Leeds Film Festival in October, on iPods so visitors could listen to them within the confines of the police cells under Leeds Old Town Hall. Visitors particularly spoke about the impact of experiencing the pieces within the atmospheric isolation offered by the cells and of how this helped them to imagine what life was like for those whose testimonies the pieces were inspired by. I also participated in *Wound Back*, a public conversation between artists and thinkers about the importance of being conscious of the past and of using history to prompt conversations about the present and the future.

We hope to release the three pieces online to ensure that they have an afterlife beyond the duration of our project and are accessible to the broadest possible audience.

In conversation with Dr Rachel Bennett, Professor Hilary Marland, Flo Swann (Public Engagement Officer), Kate McGrath (Artistic Director of Fuel), artists Sabrina Mahfouz, Rachel Mars, Paula Varjack, and Anna Herman (Artistic Director of Clean Break)

Fuel's roots are in theatre, and most of the work that they do is working with theatre makers but often in cross-artform ways. Often the work created is new and contemporary, and they have a track record of successfully working with academics to translate and respond to research. Kate McGrath explained, 'I think most interesting artists and academics are trying to explore and understand the world from different perspectives. The prison project commission connected with lots of other areas of work that we were doing around increasing representation of women on stage and behind the scenes and around feminism and gender so a lot of its research resonated with us. We always create some freedom for the artists to respond, to bring their practice and their interests to the process as opposed to using their craft to convey the information and the research, because that's how you get the most out of brilliant artists. We've done a lot of work using audio in different ways, headphone based or immersive projects, and in particular we've made three sets of podcasts which were connecting artists and scientists together in ten-minute experiences; it felt like there was a form that we were evolving.'

The prison project gave Fuel quite an open brief, to the extent that one of the artists did say, 'I don't know what you want us to do' and the historians said, 'We want you to do what you need to do with the material.' So did the artists feel any responsibility to be authentic? What's the nature of the relationship between 'truth' and their art? 'I was really concerned to check that it was alright for me to use an 'I' voice as it's not my experience', says Rachel Mars, 'A lot of my piece is based on

the experience of a woman called Florence Maybrick who published her memoirs in the early 20th century.'

Paula Varjack added, 'I wanted to honour the research, but I cheated in a way, because I deliberately set my piece in the future so I could link everything together. I was interested in the cycles and patterns of different practices and behaviours, and how history repeats itself and the idea of imagining things getting worse and worse and worse and worse. I was interested in Liverpool Prison in the late 19th century, where quite a lot of the inmates were young, uneducated, rural Irish women, and treated a certain way because of this. I really saw this parallel between the way these women were treated and the prejudices that they faced and the current UK conversation around immigration. I linked these two things and imagined events snowballing into an even more terrible future, because change can happen very subtly; all the greatest atrocities have happened largely because people don't pay attention and they think it doesn't have anything to do with them, and then suddenly it is very much to do with you, and then it's too late. So, I cheated, but with a sense of integrity by using all of this actual stuff that had happened. It's a prisoner memoir from the future!'

One audience member commented that they listened to a lot of podcasts and in the current fashion for true crime podcasts often the woman is the victim, she doesn't get a voice, it's very much about her perpetrators and about their motivations. They noted that *Lock Her Up* is a really important antidote, about how women encounter the criminal justice system and their frontline experiences - it's not heard very often.

'Yes', laughed Rachel Mars, 'I'm tired of the crunching snow that you get at the beginning of a podcast and then "Oh, frozen dead



*Lock Her Up*, installed at Tate Modern as part of Warwick Tate Exchange, June 2018. Image credit: George Blower

woman". I was particularly interested in a women's historical project - there are just so many lost voices that we don't have - but it was also about the challenge of finding the parallels between the historical research and what's happening now, and then finding my voice as an artist in that and thinking about using the intimate audio form to express women's stories.'

Rachel Bennett added, 'Historically, especially in a crime or a prison context, women often get bracketed into the mad, bad or sad kind of narrative; I think a project like this allowed us to move away from that. We're not just saying "Look at these poor women who have been put into this prison and they've had no agency". They've had very little but some women do really exercise their tiny bit of power and it does help to move away from the passive 19th-century woman. Of course, the women are experiencing a terrible ordeal, being placed in solitary confinement, but we do have women resisting that and we do have women who negotiate the system themselves, negotiating the terms of their imprisonment, sometimes through overt acts

of resistance but often through more subtle and minor attempts to survive and adapt to the daily realities of the regime. In creating these pieces we were interested in how the artists would bring this out and in turn how the audiences would respond to that.'

Paula explained how she used some of the archive materials, 'My practice has a social focus; it's largely interested in communities and what makes communities, but also identity and the politics of identity, and it generally has a research basis. The thing that I was drawn to really early was the gap in the women's history in terms of what isn't in the records and archives and so we started to imagine the stories within those gaps. Those were my starting points.'

Flo Swann added, 'For example, the records from Aylesbury Women's Borstal for young girls. Essentially, the record gives a photo with their name and biographical details, along with a few lines written by the medical officer who would examine them when they arrived. It was really illuminating.'

Paula expanded, 'If you imagine you were conducting a symphony of these notes it's, "Lazy, lazy, lazy, lazy, arrogant, lazy, thinks too much of herself, lazy, fat, arrogant", and then suddenly there's, "Needs someone to look after her", and then it's gone. So, you've got these tiny little kernels of information, which gave a sense of the nature of the person who's making these notes, as well as of the women who are coming in, who are largely 19 or 20, who are often there because of stealing. I was thinking, 'Why are they there for stealing? Are they there because they need something? What has led them to stealing?' And then there's this one woman who is recognised as needing someone to care for her amongst the pages of vitriol. What is the story of this woman? What is the story of this man examining her, and the others, and making his judgements. What is the culture that leads to all these young women ending up in this borstal?'

'We don't find the women's voices very often', said Hilary Marland, 'There are two particular memoirs, written by well-to-do highly literate women who talk about the experiences of the women in prison and see it as part of their role to speak for the female prisoners who can't speak for themselves, but these sorts of sources are scarce and that's why these gaps exist. That absence, it's perfect to spark an artist's imagination.'

She continued, 'Most historical research requires drawing from many different areas; you have to build a picture up from a lot of composite materials, which gives different perspectives and differing interpretations. The prison project used official reports compiled by governors and chaplains and medical officers to gain an insight into how they want to set-up and run the system and the tensions involved. We also tried to uncover the often concealed, or very heavily mediated, voices of the prisoners themselves through prisoner memoirs. Additionally we used newspapers, diaries, writing by journalists or social

*"Most historical research requires drawing from many different areas; you have to build a picture up from a lot of composite materials, which gives different perspectives and differing interpretations"*

reformers to gain an insight of the outside looking in, what people think prison should be, and then we contrast it with the reality of what prison is in practice. We want to draw out the tensions between the rhetoric and the reality of prison life.'

Rachel Bennett explained, 'For example, the Duchess of Bedford Report, which is 100 years old in 2019 has a lot of resonance with the Corston Report, which was 10 years old in 2017. After the First World War there was a government push to improve conditions in Holloway Prison, because there'd been some high-profile cases of women not receiving very good medical care in prison, including pregnant women. So, the Duchess of Bedford, who was a notable social reformer at the time who'd done a lot of work with women in the community, was commissioned by the Prison Commission to form a team and go into the prison and conduct an enquiry into medical care, but it actually turned mainly into an enquiry about maternity care offered to women and new mothers. Some of the issues that came out of it were around identifying pregnancy and the needs and choices of pregnant women and new mothers, and access to maternity staff and specialist care. Some big outcomes from the enquiry were that by the 1930s all of the hospital staff in

Holloway were trained midwives and that there were special places in the prison to observe and accommodate pregnant women to ensure they had access to emergency care should they need it. This century old report resonates with the Corston Report, which 90 years later was still talking about how women need a more holistic approach and something different to a prison system that was set up for men.'

Sabrina Mahfouz noted the strength of the resonances of the historical material, 'Even working with women in prison, I was shocked when I read the archival materials because so many issues are still rumbling on - situations that were the same, almost word for word. So with my piece I decided to try to get an audience comfortable by using a format they'd recognise [game show] and then within that mix up contemporary and historical information so that it was difficult to tell which time period an event was from - was it today or was it 100 years ago?'

Anna Herman experienced *Lock Her Up* at Tate Modern when it was in situ. As someone who works within the criminal justice system, did she think something like this can have an impact? 'Definitely. There's work with women in prison, or women in the community, and there's work with audiences. I think the more that we can bring those two together the better. What we do at Clean Break is have women with lived experience sharing not necessarily their personal experience but sharing, fictionalising, that experience and speaking directly to audiences. That's where, I hope and believe, a lot of real transformation on both sides can happen. Having that validation but also having that direct contact. When I experienced *Lock Her Up* at Tate Modern there was something about the confined space, just the delineation of where you could be, that added a powerful dimension to the audio. And there was something really powerful about having three interlinked but very different pieces all

looking at women's experience from different perspectives. In terms of what it opens up, I had so many questions after experiencing that it felt like a starting point to wanting to explore more. What resonated for me was this sense of women's strength, that feeling of resilience and strength was powerful in the pieces.'

Some audience members were concerned about inter-generational effects, about childhood experiences of maternal imprisonment undermining the health of future generations - whether that was being born and spending their formative years in prison or having one's mother imprisoned. Rachel Bennett gave some historical context, 'At the turn of the 20th century this became a big concern. There was a recognition that prison is a poor environment for early childhood development and that morphed into a moral stigma. And we recognise now that the impact of maternal imprisonment is often greater than paternal because in most cases the women are the primary carers; fathers being sent to prison obviously has an adverse impact on their kids too but they're much less likely to be the primary carer, so if the mother is imprisoned the kids have to move. Usually when the father is in prison the mother goes on looking after the kids in the family home.'

When mothers go to prison only 5% of the children stay in their homes and this has a profound impact on their relationships with family, friends, schools, with their neighbourhood. If these relationships are destroyed then the impact on a child's social and cognitive development are staggeringly costly, on a personal level but for all of us in society. Anna asserted, 'My perspective is don't lock up women or parents; there are better ways of treating and working with women in the community that would prevent that. I think there's a structural paradigm that doesn't allow for alternative solutions and I think we should broaden the debate to structure change in the justice system.'

Research shows that there is so much preceding disadvantage amongst those who are sent to prison that it's actually quite hard to disentangle the impact of that from the specific impacts of parental imprisonment on children. You are dealing with the very disadvantaged, people with mental health needs or extreme poverty. The biggest single category of offence for which women are imprisoned is shoplifting; often it's to put food on the table for their kids or to feed the father's drug habit when they're in an abusive relationship.'

Some audiences wondered if a background of sexual abuse was evident in historical records. Paula noted one particular medical report, 'It was about moving women from the prison to the asylum and mentioned transference; inmates would often be convinced that the warder was someone they'd been involved with in the past or was currently involved with, and even in some of the memoirs it comes up as something that's a projection. The way it was written was to give the sense that these women were mentally unsound and projecting, but we have no way of knowing if these are projections or true.' Hilary explained, 'Domestic and sexual violence is rather hidden in the records. You can read between the lines, which for historians can be challenging, less so for artists. The records are very interesting, because they're often describing delusions but in these delusions you sometimes find other pieces of evidence to show they may be based in fact. The Liverpool records are interesting because a lot of women who end up in prison on very short sentences, they're in and out several times, with many of them being sex workers. There was also some implication in several documents, including prison memoirs, that older women might commit a crime on purpose to go into prison and recruit younger girls for prostitution, and this was something reformers were very concerned about. So, it's there, but

it's very hard to tease out. In previous work we've done on asylums you also find this undercurrent of both domestic and sexual violence but it's very rare to come across explicit accounts.'

Many audience members noted that *Lock Her Up* created a strong emotional impact, perhaps more than the written word might, and noted that while Art might change your thinking it can certainly change your feelings in a way academic content would struggle to.

Some professionals asked how we captured impacts. Rachel Bennett said, 'We simply asked people about their experience of the pieces and started a conversation about whether it changed their opinion of what prison was and is and, very crucially, what is prison for? From all the feedback we do have evidence that artistic activities do change people's view. One of the most important and most interesting responses was that several people said "I never thought about this before. I never ever thought about women in prison or women who gave birth in prison." The pieces encouraged people to think, not only about these issues but to also consider how we as a society address them.'

'In a way, measurement of the impact was part of the impact itself', said Anna, 'There was definite added value through the engagement around the pieces - with the artists and the historians, and different people talking - there were lots of conversations that were, for me, part of the impact.'

Sabrina had the final word around impact, 'My experience in working with mothers in prison is that when you tell [external] people about women prisoners' situations, not individuals but the system, they are really shocked and engaged by the sense of unfairness and that that feeling stays with them, they can't quite shake it off. They haven't thought about it before, but once they have thought about it,

it really stays with them. Often we think of policy as being made in a faceless office and having nothing to do with "us" but when you hear about activists who did manage to influence change it's very empowering.'

Listening to *This is How it Was* by Sabrina Mahfouz, part of *Lock Her Up*, installed at Tate Modern as part of Warwick Tate Exchange, June 2018. Image credit: Fuel Productions



# Reflecting history: Geese, On The Inside

Workshops to create a piece of theatre of testimony, led by Geese and Helena Enright, at HMP Peterborough, bringing together Dr Rachel Bennett's historic research on motherhood in prison with Geese's 30 years of experience facilitating interactive theatre within the criminal justice system as part of the rehabilitation process.

## Background to the piece by Dr Rachel Bennett

When we think back to the fortress-like prisons created in the mid-19th century we often conjure up images of high walls and regimes of strict regulation intended to control people in body and mind. What is less easy to imagine is mothers and babies in this space.

My research explores women's historic experiences of health in prison, in particular their experiences of pregnancy, childbirth and mothering in these settings between the mid-19th century and the mid-20th century. It examines how the distinct health needs of this group of prisoners were identified and provided for in physical spaces and as part

of often obdurate regimes neither designed nor administered with their containment in mind. For example, it questions the impact of the system of separate confinement upon pregnant women who, along with their fellow prisoners, were locked in relative isolation for hours at a time. Our work on *Disorder Contained* showed the sheer psychological impact that this could have, but for pregnant women it deepened their level of anxiety because although they could call out to officers for help it was often the case that this wouldn't be responded to in time which led to women suffering miscarriages and giving birth alone in their cells with no medical assistance or support at all. An ex-prisoner described the practice of confining pregnant women in this way aptly as 'a refinement of cruelty that one could only ascribe to a lack of imagination on the part of those who are responsible for it'.

My research also illuminates the shifting but enduring debates about whether mothers and babies should be in prison at all and whether a prison sentence was an interruption to motherhood or an opportunity for medical and educational intervention, especially for women who lived in poverty and had limited access to medical care or welfare services in their community. This question has perennially troubled the criminal justice system and remains unanswered today. Early reform organisations argued that pregnant women should be removed to outside hospitals, initially to obviate the stigma of being born in prison but over time the debate shifted and

became more medicalised. There has also been increasing emphasis placed upon the question of the rights of the child, separate from their mother, and studies carried out on the impact of parental, particularly maternal, imprisonment on children who enter the prison with their mother or are left behind on the outside.

It was the case historically, and remains the case today, that entitlement to health on the part of mothers and babies poses difficult and complex questions and more definitive and consistent guidance on the availability and accessibility of medical care, and women's ability to be mothers in prison, remains something which organisations such as Birth Companions are campaigning for.

It is these themes and questions surrounding the reconciliation of a woman's identity as a mother with her status as a prisoner and the medical, legal, social and ideological implications of this that underpin and inspire the work we've been doing with Geese and the women in Peterborough.

Our project combines history with Arts practice and lived experience. As part of its creation we took the archival materials and testimonies from the past uncovered in our research into HMP Peterborough and we asked the women to respond to them and to pick out themes and stories that resonated with them. We found that working in this way facilitated an open dialogue in which we reflected upon the historical context of many of the issues the women identified as still facing mothers in prison today. The outcomes of these workshops combined with the historical materials and the interviews carried out by Liz and Helena underpin *Playing the Game*, a piece of theatre of testimony written by Helena, which will have its first full performance at the BEDLAM Festival in Birmingham in October 2019. Crucially the piece seeks to offer a creative way of not only understanding this subject's complex past

but we hope also offers a fresh voice to the ongoing discussion about where it goes in the future.

**In conversation with Dr Rachel Bennett, Liz Brown (Geese), Dr Helena Enright (playwright), Naomi Delap (Birth Companions), Lucy Baldwin (De Montfort University)**

We commissioned Geese, working with playwright Helena Enright, to produce a script developed by working with women in HMP Peterborough and its Mother and Baby Unit (MBU) using Dr Rachel Bennett's research on maternity in prison. Geese have 30 years' experience in doing this kind of work in criminal justice settings, and Helena is particularly experienced in working with theatre of testimony.

Liz Brown explained why they took the commission, 'It presented an opportunity for imprisoned women to influence policy and change it using their voice; it's not for us to speak for them, it's for us to listen and put down what it is that they are saying whether we agree or not - that's their experience. We wanted to hear their voice, their experience, their lived experience of being a mother in prison. And that's the importance of this piece of work.'

How did Geese and the women feel about using historical resource material? Liz explained, 'The prison project asked us what sort of materials we thought the women might be interested in, which is how Geese as a company works - we try to explore what is of interest to the people that we're working with. We often look at where they're at, where they want to be, and what are those things that are in between. So, specifically being able to look at the past even though it wasn't their past was really interesting because it was introducing them almost to another world of prison even though they are living in prison themselves. Once the workshops started then we could talk about what the conditions are



Mothers with their children, exercising at Tothill Fields Prison in the 1860s. Image credit: John Johnson Collection of Printed Ephemera

like and have been like, because that's what they're talking about - what their conditions are like, what their diet is like, what choice they have in how they decide to be a mother, do they breastfeed or not?'

Helena Enright noted how one participant remarked that the size of the cell hasn't changed it's just got more modern furniture and Liz was shocked at some of the resonances and stark similarities to a century ago, 'We had dietary scales from 1907 that stated what food women were given if they were pregnant and it's literally the same, it's exactly the same. A piece of bread, some milk, a piece of fruit and some raisins. That hasn't changed.' There were some things that had changed, for example we shared photos of female prisoners in the 1950s walking with their babies in buggies and our group were amazed because they are not allowed to walk around with their children. (NB: nursery staff take the babies out in town in buggies, to the shops, to give them normal experiences.)

Helena added, 'My first draft of the play had no historical material and just gave the women a voice, so the historians could consider how the contemporary experiences resonated with the historical because that's

their expertise. We needed to work out how to include the historical material in a way that didn't overshadow the voice of the contemporary lived experience. We worked with six women, two that were actually on the Mother and Baby Unit (MBU) at the time who both had their children in prison with them, one of whom who was going through a handout right in the middle of the project [her baby had reached 18 months and she was "handing her out" to her parents.]'

Helena mentioned this hugely emotional situation brought another challenge, 'When shaping the material for the script those two women's stories were huge, their narratives being particularly resonant with the research; but, because we had been working with other women who didn't have their children in prison with them when we went in to work with them, it was really important to get a balance in the script to ensure that all the women's voices are heard in as equal a way as the piece dramatically and theatrically allowed.'

To some extent, over time prisons did respond to the broader societal shifts in motherhood; for example, at the turn of the 20th century there's much national debate

about the war and national efficiency and the strength of future generations so there was an impetus to make mothers 'good' mothers. Prisons responded to this with courses trying to inculcate in women domesticity and motherhood, and by bringing in health visitors, doctors, and other people to try to educate women in prison to be 'good' mothers - in terms of broader society's idea of what that means.

Helena noted that the women on the MBU at Peterborough were allowed to make mothering decisions in some instances but not in others, 'They were allowed to cook for their children but because of health and safety they have to leave the child in the buggy at the door no matter what state that child is in while they cook because they are not allowed to bring them in their arms. In fact, they are not allowed to have their child in their arms as they move through the MBU, only in their room and in the bathroom. It's a really interesting paradox; they're encouraging you to be a mother in prison with your child but you really don't have any autonomy or agency in your own decisions over your child. It became very apparent to me that the MBU is there for the baby not the mother.'

One delegate at our conference told us of her lived experience in prison, 'The routine medical showed me to be pregnant. What is resonating with me from the research and the piece is the uncertainty - that doesn't seem to have changed over the period that you're looking at or in contemporary times. That not knowing. There doesn't seem to be a standard procedure for everyone so that everyone knows where they stand. I spent six months of my sentence thinking I might be there 10 years, thinking my mum was going to have to move out and live next to the prison and raise the baby. There were only a couple of MBUs, so not very many spaces, and all these different variables really caused me stress. It seems to have always been the case and I think it's quite depressing that there doesn't seem to be any resolution and that's because pregnant women shouldn't really be in prison in the first place so it's always going to be a problem.'

Liz Brown (Geese) and Helena Enright (playwright) read from the script generated by their project *On the Inside*, at *Healthy Inside* conference, December 2018. Image credit: Sam van Strien

At our conference, we were joined by a therapist who ran groups at Holloway's MBU for 20 years and is now elsewhere; she noted, 'I meet with the pregnant women and the mothers and babies each week and it's really difficult, it's emotionally difficult but also administratively very difficult. I'm not making any excuses for the prison but you have women coming in with very different concepts of mothering themselves. Trying to get mothers in the prison to breastfeed, or to go outside and use the garden... Women are entitled to have different views of motherhood but it's very very difficult... It's really very misleading to think it's the big bad prison and these idealised mothers...'

Some audiences noted the intrinsic dilemma of campaigning for good practice around mums and babies in prisons whilst really wanting to make the shift towards not having mums and babies in prison all. Rachel Bennett said, 'My research shows certain themes and rhetoric have shifted over time but others have simply endured. Why are the changes recommended time and again not being implemented?'

Lucy Baldwin says, 'Fundamentally, the prison system and estate is designed by men for men, and women have had to adapt around that. But it's also about getting the issues exposed - research on the men's estate seems to get coverage but where is the coverage of the research on the women's estate? It's allowed to stay on the backburner.'

Rachel Bennett continued, 'This is where we hope our public engagement work and the history might help to prompt conversations about what prison is actually for, what do we as a society want prisons to achieve? Then we might be able to move the debate forward in terms of mothers in prison. Some of the feedback that we got from *Lock Her Up's* audio piece *This is How It Was* by Sabrina Mahfouz, that explored mothers in prison,

was that this was a piece that people found very emotive and would say "I can't believe it, women in prison with babies". So I do think this is an area of change that the public would support.'

Naomi Delap pondered the dilemma, 'As an organisation [Birth Companions] specialising in this area, we do struggle with that dichotomy, of wanting to improve things in the here and now for women who are in prison, who are not getting the care that they need for themselves and their babies, or while they are pregnant or peri-natal, while at the same time arguing that they shouldn't be there, the majority of them, in the first place. While there is more public sympathy for that group of women, pregnant or with very young children, I don't think you can separate out that group from the larger population of women. What about those mothers who have children that are slightly older - don't they need their mother? I think it would be counter-productive just to say "Don't send pregnant women or very new mothers to prison" because it's part of a bigger piece of work; there's the risk that if you don't have babies in prison with their mother then authorities start to separate babies from their mother. And if you didn't sentence peri-natal women to prison what's the provision for them in the community?'

Liz believes we might be moving towards a more systemic shift in society's attitude, 'A lot of the women we spoke to talked about how their support needs before they ever get to prison are not being addressed but towards the end of this project there was an announcement that five new women's prisons were not going to be built and the £50m they were going to cost was going to be cut and become £5m to be put into a more supportive kind of hostel type residential premises for women. And that's the shift that has to take place, a more holistic approach.'

The Nursery, Holloway Prison.  
Image credit: Howard League for Penal Reform,  
Modern Records Centre, University of Warwick



*"The idea of offending against femininity and against maternity is something the historians came across a good deal in the late 19th century"*

Some people think there is evidence that women with children are more harshly punished by judges in some sort of double penalty because not only is a woman offending against the law, she is challenging the norms of femininity and maternity. The idea of offending against femininity and against maternity is something the historians came across a good deal in the late 19th century. They found it shocking that those ideas are still so current and influential.

Helena added, 'It came up with some of the women we worked with. One talked about how she had mental health issues, that was part of the reason for her going into prison, but she had been on remand for two years where she had been fulfilling all of her remand conditions - she had been attending support in the community, she had been going for therapy counselling, fulfilling it. She was 17 weeks pregnant on the day of sentencing, nobody thought she would actually get a prison sentence

because she had another year to do on the remand programme. She said she felt like the judge was punishing her because she had two boys outside, and it was very much "Well, you should have thought of that". Her barrister was in absolute shock that the judge had sentenced her to prison.'

Domestic violence is a factor in many women's cases said Helena, 'One of the mothers talked about how a smell can take her right back to 15 years ago when she was in an abusive relationship. These women, they are human beings they're not just prisoners. Through this project we hope to get people to recognise their humanity; we are all human and there before whatever grace go I.'

# Recreating history: *Past Time*

Workshops exploring the history of prison food, using drama and cookery at HMP Hewell and HMP Stafford, drawing on the research of Dr Margaret Charleroy and Professor Hilary Marland.

## Background to the piece by Professor Hilary Marland

Throughout 2018 and 2019 academics from the University of Warwick collaborated with Rideout (Creative Arts for Rehabilitation) to develop *Past Time*, a series of workshops running in HMP Hewell and HMP Stafford seeking to engage men in prison with historical research around prisons and food. Many people incarcerated in the UK have low literacy levels, so we knew that to even begin to interest the men we would have to do more than offer them a lecture and provide materials to read. Rideout are specialists in creating opportunities for active learning, and though the historical workshops centred around engaging with both historical texts and images and the input of the historians, the men were very actively supported to become creative researchers. They were encouraged to ask questions (in fact they needed little encouragement and often knew a great deal about the history of prisons!) that caused the historians to head back to the archives to find answers for them, thus feeding back into the academic research.

Prison food – perhaps more than any other form of institutional diet – has particular significance for the inmates who rely on the prison to feed them on a daily basis. While today in prison, prisoners have access to a diet that offers choices (including kosher, halal, and vegetarian and vegan diets), the food provided (at the time of writing) is limited by a daily budget per prisoner of £2.02 to cover the cost of providing three meals. Though many prisoners supplement this with food bought from the canteen (the prison ‘shop’), the food provided by the

prison takes on particular importance for people in prison in terms of nutritional value and health, variety, and taste.

In the past, prison diet was also dictated by cost and ideas of ‘entitlement’. It was widely believed that prisoners did not deserve as good a diet as even the poorest people outside of prison or in the workhouse. Prison diets were designed to maintain prisoners on as little food as possible while, at the same time, avoiding damage to health or even death. Diet was also a disciplinary tool exercised against prisoners who broke the rules and would be put on punishment diets of bread and water.

When Pentonville opened in 1842 some of the prisoners were put on such a ‘low’ diet, that many rapidly lost weight and there were reports of prisoners fainting in chapel. While the prison doctors advised against such a restricted diet, the commissioners responsible for Pentonville were keen to test how little the prisoners could survive on without damage to their health. Henry Mayhew and John Binny wrote a book on London’s prisons in 1862, and claimed that prisoners put on a punishment diet of bread and water could lose 1-3lbs (roughly 0.5-1.5 kilos) a day.

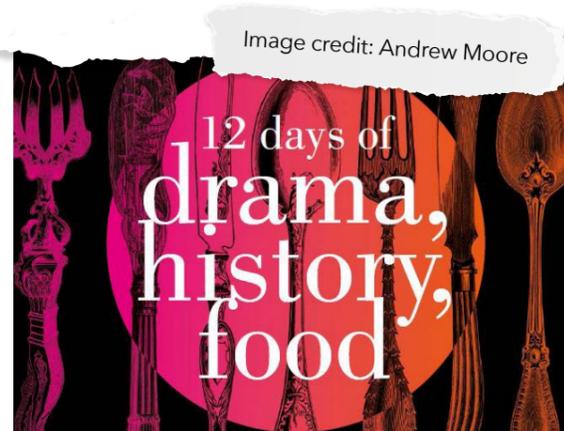


Image credit: Andrew Moore

A typical diet in a 19th-century prison would include bread, gruel or skilly (a thin porridge), potatoes, occasional meat, soup or cheese. In 1843 the Home Secretary, Sir James Graham, published an advisory ‘dietary’ (a precise list of food provided in prison, with weights, for different groups of prisoners) for local prisons and in 1864 a revised version was issued by the government. Yet many prisons disregarded or adapted these dietaries, and there was variation (variation between little and very little!) in the amount and types of food given to prisoners.

In 1878 this was tightened up further and a strict set of dietary scales was introduced, for male and female prisoners, those employed on hard labour, prisoners who were sick and those being punished, according to the length of the sentence. Health, discipline and deterrence were all considered important, and diet came to be seen more as an instrument of punishment. The types of food were restricted to bread, gruel, potatoes, suet pudding and meat in very small quantities.

Prisoners had the right to complain to the prison administration about their diet, but if the complaint was found groundless they risked punishment – often by a decrease in their already meagre diet! Adulteration of food was common in the 19th century and particularly in prisons, or prisoners claimed that food was mouldy or inedible. Others pretended that they were ill in an attempt to be moved to the hospital, where they would be fed a much better and more nutritious diet. Prison doctors also were concerned about prisoners ‘feigning’ insanity in order to be moved to a lunatic asylum, where the diet was much better than in prison.

Prison memoirs often discussed food and the feelings of hunger many prisoners experienced. As late as 1924 one prisoner noted that ‘supper’ arrived at 4.15pm, ‘a frugal meal’, consisting of ‘four ounces of bread with a pat of margarine, an ounce of cheese, and a

pint of “cocoa” This was supplemented at 7.30 in the evening by a half a pint of skilly.

*“Thin fare was the order of the day then, and no-one knew it better than the gaolbirds. They experienced every day the feeling which is foreign to the majority of people – in such a country such as ours, at any rate – what it is to be hungry.”*

In conversation with Professor Hilary Marland, Saul Hewish (Rideout), and Fran Southall (prison officer, HMP Stafford)

*Past Time* introduced men in prison to themes in history and food culture using theatre techniques to examine historical material and explore the changing nature of prison food and its effects on physical and mental health.

In each of the residencies, the men worked towards two qualifications in *Food Hygiene* and *Nutrition* and created a piece of theatre which was performed at the prison twice, once for the general prison population and then for invited guests including family. At both performances, audience members had the opportunity to sample food made by the participants.

A photographer documented the project, from workshop to performance, and the photographs were included in a publication and as part of Warwick Tate Exchange at Tate Modern in June 2018. A version of *Past Time* also subsequently ran at HMP Stafford as part of a year-long residency there.

Saul Hewish explained how the project came about, 'The Healthy Living and the Safer Custody Staff at HMP Hewell, a Category B training prison near Redditch, had asked if Rideout could create something specifically for men that were either self-harming, at risk of self-harm or at risk of suicide. For many years I'd been obsessed with an Italian book by a photographer who went into Italian prisons and spent time with prisoners talking to them about how they recreated their mama's recipes in prison and took photographs. There were all these extraordinary photographs of improvised ovens and stoves and I always thought that would be an interesting thing to do in England but I'd never had the opportunity, until this project came along.'

Hilary Marland added, 'Food is such a good topic to work with because it's important to everyone. As a historian, we can see that in institutions it's always been something of such vital importance because it connects to issues of health and wellbeing, relationships, community etc.'

Although we weren't able to take original historical materials in to the prison, the historians themselves did go and work with the men in prison and took in copies of historical materials and images and Saul thought this was crucial, 'It's really significant because it's saying to those men that we value them - that they are important enough for us to find professional historians, real experts, who really know what they are talking about.'

And the men asked all kinds of questions, grinned Saul, "'What does a historian do? How does a historian make a living? What is the point of a historian?'" so we started to explore with them what understanding history means in terms of your present place within the prison system but also the much more

*"Food is such a good topic to work with because it's important to everyone"*

complicated questions of "What does it mean in terms of you understanding who you are?" and "How does your personal history impact on your understanding of the world?"

What were the men interested in? 'Every set of workshops was specific to that group of men, and we wanted to find their interests to work around,' said Saul, "But we all talked a lot about food because in prisons food is a big thing - and historically food was the first thing that prisoners had the legitimate right to complain about. And prisoners often complain about the quality of the food - a particular discussion that amused us was about why all the chicken pieces are left legs - and it's true, we got a photo! - we wondered where all the right legs go and the rumour is that the army get them!'

Hilary added, 'Food historically is of huge importance in prison and if there's one historical continuity that you can rely on it's the huge interest in food by prison administrators and of course by people in prison experiencing the food. So, there's a huge array of documentation and we brought in a lot of images and photos as well as some quite dense documents, like official reports and parliamentary returns, which had dietary outlines for prisoners for different stages of imprisonment, for men and women, for men on hard labour. These are incredibly detailed but the men got very very interested in those and the different dietary scales and how those changed over time.

They were really surprised that the punishment diet, using food as a control measure through a restricted diet of bread and water, was not stopped until the late 1960s. One of the prison officers at Stafford, his father was a prison officer and his father talked about how he would put the men on bread and water.'

Hilary continued, 'The early history of prison food is very much about nutrition, it's about the value of that food and comparisons to the number of calories that you should be taking. We talked a lot about the fact that Victorian people's calorie intake was much higher than our current recommendations because people were working manually. But there are instances of food as a morale boost - e.g. plum pudding at Christmas. So there is an element of food used as a mechanism of control.'

Historically food in prison hospitals was better so people used to feign illness to try and get into the hospital to get better food. Hilary noted, 'The history of feigning is really interesting - part of one of the plays had a sketch about prisoners trying to get moved into the infirmary because they knew the food was better there and we've certainly come

across instances of prisoners trying to move from a prison to a mental hospital in the 19th century because they knew in the hospital they would get an enhanced diet rather than a very meagre diet.'

The men were really engaged with the historical aspect, said Saul, 'There was one moment when we were improvising a scene where three prisoners are in a prison and it's in World War II. So, inevitably there's going to be an air raid and that really stopped all of us because we were suddenly all thinking what actually happened in an air raid? Was there a bomb shelter in the prison?' The historians didn't know! So they had to do some research and discovered that it was considered that a prison cell was actually rather a good form of bomb shelter because they were very solid. So that's what we played with, being locked in a cell with the sound of the air raid going off. It was a very potent part of that first show.'

All three shows were a mix of the present and the past but the overwhelming thing that resonated was how food has changed in prison as well as changed outside and what had led to those changes happening. We also discussed the notion of choice around food in prison; in Stafford they cater for around seven different diets, including two vegan diets.

'We also talked about contemporary experiences of food,' said Saul, 'what were the group members' experiences of food culture? The first group talked a lot about food TV programmes so the cookery programme became the thing that held together the first show. The second run we did used adverts and we had music and singing as a way to hold everything together. In the most recent one run at Stafford, the history programmes was the motif *Back in Time for Gruel*, if you have seen any of those *Back in Time for School* programmes.'



Wormwood Scrubs Prison, London: Four cooks in prison uniform standing in a line in front of buckets and baskets Process print after P. Renouard, 1889. Image credit: Wellcome Collection



Live demonstration of prison cell cookery - Trifle - at HMP Hewell March 2018. Image credit: Natalie Willatt

Another important element of the workshops was the cooking from original recipes. In Stafford, the guys made about 9 pints of gruel and ate it all! But we also offered them additional ingredients to pimp it up, to make it more like something you'd buy in a fancy café outside at huge cost. The winning one was banana and agave syrup.

In the shows, the audience also got to eat plain gruel as well as the so-called 'vegetable soup' which has got beef in it! Saul, who is vegetarian said, 'If you were vegetarian then your diet was bread, potatoes, rice. If it was rice pudding you did get a little bit of sugar in there. We also had bread made to an original prison recipe, which I thought was better than the bread that you get in prison now, and a plum pudding which was like a 1940s bread pudding - sort of Christmassy kind of flavours - and one show offered the audience cold tapioca.'

Each show included something that the prisoners made in their cells. That tended to be a sweet thing, so there was a prison cell trifle made live, from bananas, Jamaican ginger cake, butterscotch Angel Delight, and a digestive crumbled over the top; another had fancy biscuits made by sandwiching shortbread biscuits with melted chocolate and jam, and the third had a cheesecake which was biscuit and a sort of condensed milk cream with white milk chocolate melted into it. Those all went down a bit better with the audience than the tapioca!

Prisoners now can supplement their prison diet with what they can buy in the 'canteen'. Canteen sheets now are five pages of different items and it's a real indicator of how a variety of different cultures are in prison now in terms of what you can get access to.

But Saul says, 'Actually, I think the biggest problem in relation to food in prison now is not necessarily to do with the quality of the food, it's to do with the experience of eating the food because everyone has to eat in their cells which effectively means you're eating in a toilet. Now there are pros and cons in terms of having prisoners eating food together but we talked a lot about how food does / can bring people together and how is it a place where you explore similarities and differences with each other because fundamentally eating food sat with other people is a real basic building block of human relationships.'

From a prison officer's perspective what's the value of this kind of creative work? Fran Southall is quick to answer, 'It is very valuable. Learning to work as a group is really important. We had an age range from 21 to 67 and a real mix of participants; we had one with dementia who worked really hard, he found it very difficult but really enjoyed it; we had a couple that needed a lot of help, with some behavioural problems; but they did all join in, worked really hard, and they all thoroughly enjoyed it. I really saw their confidence grow.'

Stafford is very proactive, we are moving along with the times, we're doing an awful lot with the men and we've got good relationships. It's about supporting, it's not about banging the door shut. It's not about not speaking to them, it's about getting stuck in. On visits, I go up when my lads are on visits and I speak to their relatives. It's about going the extra mile.

It's hard work, it's bloody hard work but I love my job. Respect is a two way thing and it's very difficult to get; I've worked in the prison service 17 years on the landing, I don't just open the doors and I don't just shut the doors. I never shut a door without speaking or open a door without speaking, I've always done that. I'm the first person and the last person they see, it's not an easy time for them. We're alright, we go home, even though we go back again the following day. We have to get a good relationship with them. Having Rideout come in, it's been absolutely fantastic.'

We commissioned an external evaluation of the work at Hewell using a combination of pre and post interviews and a psychometric evaluation. Saul explained, 'There's a different evaluation going on over our year at Stafford but we'd expect some of the same changes we saw evidenced at Hewell: decreased mental disengagement, suggesting participants' mental health had improved; increased acceptance of their situation, in coming to terms with their environment; a dramatic decrease in the use of substances such as drugs and alcohol, as participants began to focus on positive coping methods; a reduced focus on venting their emotion through violent or aggressive methods; the founding of new supportive friendships.'

An unexpected finding was that the men reported better relationships with their families, because there was a decrease in relying upon them for instrumental support, i.e. financial support. Why was that? Saul explained, 'Because the nature of what we're

doing is very intense, a lot of men said it wasn't like being in prison for that time. So we had to make sure that when we finished they'd got something to go to; I didn't want anyone being unemployed when we'd finished so we worked with the prison to ensure the men transitioned to paid jobs or activities after.'

So there was an effect on the participants, was there an effect on Rideout as artists? 'For Rideout, doing this work has been really important', said Saul. 'It was the first time we'd done something where we'd really engaged in any major depth with historians, working with historical resources. We loved it. But there was something really powerful I noticed, and I'm not sure if this is to do with what we were doing or whether it's a reflection of the state of the prison system.'

We had a photographer work with us at Hewell and she took some fantastic photographs, some individual photographs of men during the performance, during rehearsals, they looked great. We took them in and we said to the men you can have a choice of up to five photos each and we will print off copies and you can have them.'

I was really surprised that actually they didn't want the nice shots of them standing there on their own. What they wanted was the goofy shot of all us together at the end. The group shot. And it seemed to me that that was saying something very powerful about the need to remember a collective creative endeavour. A way of working with each other in a way which was not competitive, although we used a lot of games so there were competitive elements in it, but I guess, and those of you who have done this work a lot know that, in the end this is about achievement and a memory of that achievement.'

I think it's very powerful that the men wanted to remember this experience of connecting with other people and a lot of them said that it just reminded them that they were human beings.'

## Final reflections from the *Healthy Inside* conference

### Jamal Khan, performance poet and writer

I think there needs to be more of a focus on prisoners' personal development. I think we place too much of a focus on getting them to engage in external activities but we don't actually allow them to heal or allow them to focus on themselves. I think we could use creativity as a form of therapy and as a form of healing - we don't realise that if the prisoner isn't right within themselves they cannot engage in anything outside of them.

I remember when I had just started my sentence, I got a five year sentence and I did two and a half, for the first nine months I couldn't leave my cell because I was really depressed; I couldn't engage in any of the educational or employment activities. People need a form of healing, something to do with their own personal development. Writing was that for me; it helped me deal with my own experiences.

I started writing because I just felt like I had a lot to say at the time and there was no other way for me to express it. Writing allowed me to find my voice, to find a sense of healing for everything that I went through. To take control of the experiences rather than letting them take control of me. It became a form of therapy and it allowed me to heal and take the time to process everything.

After I came out of prison, I was lucky that a lot of organisations stayed in contact with me. The National Criminal Justice Arts Alliance (NCJAA) gave me a grant recently; Switchback is an organisation that I worked with in prison who help you to get employment afterwards; The Prison's Trust, they have stayed in contact with me; Project 507, they're really a good project that works

on the prisoner's self-development and leadership qualities. And also English Pen who actually got me into sharing my work and progressing my writing.

So, there is a lot of good work going on but it varies - the issue being funding. These organisations cannot scale their work into other prisons if they haven't got enough funding. There needs to be a systematic change but it starts with an individual and it starts with us as individuals and I feel that one thing that we can all do is to mentor someone who has gone through the criminal justice system or someone who is in the criminal justice system. They need support for when they come out. That one-to-one support is crucial; prison is not a one size fits all, you can't engage everyone in a classroom. You need individual support and you need more mentors, not just in prison, but when you leave prison as well.

### Andy Watson, Director of Geese and Vice Chair of the National Criminal Justice Arts Alliance (NCJAA)

Jamal sums so much of what we're talking about up here, which is that idea of working with people and their creativity where they are, not where we think they should be, and not with the culture or the creative methodologies or the language that we think they should be working with. So allowing people to find their own creativity. I think that's one of the key things that's come out of today for me - that we are all trying to create spaces for reflection and creation. Finding spaces for people to be all the other roles that we know that we play in our lives which people in prison feel have been stripped away from them. I love, and I think this is really important for this sector, the role that the Arts

can play in shifting not just the attitudes of the participants you might be working with or the public, whatever that means, but of people who work and live within those communities as well. Arts can play a beautiful role in illuminating, contributing and disseminating research.

The other thing I was reflecting on is that this is all about relationships; all of these projects are about relationships and I think that's at the core of this. About how we embed, or we invite systems to rethink, the role that good solid trusting relationships have in allowing the processes of change both individual and systemic. The fact that Fran says "Every morning I open the door and I say hello, I say "Good morning" I say "How are you?" It's so simple but it's absolutely at the heart of all of this I think.

### Person with lived prison experience

We know the Arts work; we know that it has an impact, but there's fundamental conflicts at work. We've got Arts organisations up against other Arts organisations, and we've got an institution whose job it is to take away the humanity of a person and Arts organisations whose job it is to put back the humanity in that person.

When a person connects with an Arts organisation they put themselves in a very vulnerable position because they've opened up to you. They've found something in you and in your organisation that they can connect to and what art is all about - what's inside, what are you feeling? When someone opens up, when an Arts organisation connects to someone who's inside who has decided that you are the person that I'm going to open up to, that's a brilliant thing but the problem comes when they leave the system. When that person leaves prison.

Suddenly, they're on their own. Some people have the confidence, like me, to be able to move forward; I've used my experience from what I learnt inside to do something useful with it but not everyone has that, whether it's mental, whether it's a level of education, not everybody has that confidence. What happens when people come out of the prison system is that they have to find a home and deal with what they've lost, so many emotional things. And they also lose the connections to your organisations, that they had inside. Six months down the line, a year down the line, they've lost all their connections.

What I would say to Arts organisations is that your work can't just happen inside the prison system, it has also got to happen outside.



Image credit: Howard League for Penal Reform, Modern Records Centre, University of Warwick



Delegates in discussion at the *Healthy Inside* conference, December 2018.  
Image credit: Sam van Strien

When someone leaves they need to know that they can carry on the positive experiences of all that they gained when they were inside. I was with a group called Good Vibrations, and one of the things that I'm really grateful for is that they stuck with me for 10 years. I've been out for 10 years now and I'm still in contact with them. They still help me when I need help.

I would ask Arts organisations, what are you doing to continue the work when someone has left the prison system? If someone experienced poetry as eloquent as Jamal's what can they do to carry it on? What programmes have you put in place so that when that person leaves they can carry it on? So that they can find other organisations or other groups? By doing that it will also help engage the public because you will enable these people be able to speak about their experiences.

We have so much fear around the prison system. When I came out of prison I was interviewed by *The Guardian* about Good

Vibrations and said what a fantastic, wonderful, organisation it was. When I told my Probation Officer that I'd spoken to the newspaper suddenly there was a major panic. You're up against an institution that is so scared and so frightened about any negativity that the public might express that they are doing everything they can to shut down the message around the positive work that is happening inside. Until we can combat the institutional negativity that the prison system has about the work that is happening, we're going to be in a stalemate situation.

#### **Carlotta Alum, Stretch**

I agree. In my experience, over the years I've seen some of these programmes do more harm than good because they start up stuff and then they lose the funding, and then all those relationships go and the vulnerable person feels abandoned all over again. So, I think it's absolutely vital if you're going into this, plan to stay and stick it out or just don't do it.

#### **Hilary Marland**

We definitely didn't want to go skipping into prison, do our thing and then leave again without the men coming away with some accreditation, some new skills, some new interests whether it was in the Arts or getting qualifications in cookery. We felt that having a lasting impact was a very important part of the project - we had a genuine concern that we should bring, even to a small group, some kind of useful follow up continuity from our projects.

The evidence already exists, gathered over quite a long period through the fantastic work that multiple organisations have been doing, that this work has huge benefits and it seems to me these benefits are also very cost effective in terms of Arts work improving people's mental health and their engagement, so why isn't this work properly funded in a sustainable way which doesn't

*"We felt that having a lasting impact was a very important part of the project"*

pitch all these organisations into competition with each other? Why isn't there a proper policy, a proper drive to encourage this kind of work?

#### **Saul Hewish**

One of the things that we've learnt from looking at history is that a lot of what we're talking about today has been talked about over many, many, decades. In the end we need complete systematic change. There's no way out. The time for tinkering around the edges has gone, we are in competition with each other - chasing after the scraps of funding. Until the people at the top of organisations start turning around and saying 'No, we cannot do more with less' nothing will change. There's a constant repetition of this term 'resilience' - but resilience isn't endless, an elastic band will snap eventually.

What I experience around funding my work in the prison system is pretty much what happens across the Arts sector generally. What is different with the projects we've seen at this conference is the partnership - the Universities partnering with Arts organisations to go into this work. I think alliances across all the different sectors are going to make a difference and make change.

#### **Professor Woody Caan, Professor of Public Health, Angela Ruskin University**

Listening today, I've been reminded of something that makes a huge difference in terms of freeing up resources - enthusiasm. You won't get the resources until you show the enthusiasm. Most of you will have heard of Ken Loach and his TV play *Cathy Come Home*. His Social Worker Adviser was my old colleague David Brandon, and the key thing

was authenticity in the drama. Everything that happened to the homeless mum, Cathy, was taken from the records of David's caseload.

Authenticity is vital to shift a policy. Good creative output makes a huge difference. Within a week of *Cathy Come Home* being broadcast both Shelter and Centrepoin had been set up. You can't just wait for Government and legislation change over the next three or four years. If we have good artists, good stories, historical stories with authenticity, and people with enthusiasm I'm quite optimistic that we can change the wellbeing of people in prison.

#### **Anita Dockley, The Howard League**

I'm the Research Director at the Howard League and it's been my pleasure over the last few years to be quite involved with the work that Hilary and Catherine have been doing. This project has taught me, as a researcher and prison reform lobbyist, so much about how relevant history is to my everyday work and how much it can influence what I'm trying to achieve in terms of change and impact on the justice system today. It's been a real joy to work with it.

In the work I do engaging in public policy debates I am seeing much more openness to change through creative methodologies, and creative things are catching people's imagination and changing hearts and minds. If the public starts changing their views politicians will shift too, because that's who they are there to represent, and I think bringing research and creative methodologies together has real strength and might actually be able to achieve change.

## Useful resources

### + Food in prison

#### *Past Time*

A publication created as part of our work at HMP Hewell, including recipes for prison bread and gruel amongst other interesting information about the workshops and their effects.

#### *Fish Custard Anyone: The food of healing and punishment*

An article exploring institutional food in prisons and hospitals.

### + General resources about prison

#### *Prisoners, Medical Care and Entitlement to Health in England and Ireland, 1850-2000*

This is the website for the project exploring many aspects of the history of health in prison including: mental health; maternal health and mothers in prison; food and nutrition; medical care; HIV/AIDS; juvenile offenders; political prisoners; reform and welfare organisations, with many useful blogs.

#### *Still searching for a prison system that really works*

An article exploring how the UK present-day prison system is deeply rooted in its Victorian predecessors.

### + Solitary confinement

#### *Disorder Contained: A theatrical examination of madness, prison and solitary confinement*

A short play was created with Talking Birds Theatre Company which explores the effects of the introduction of solitary

confinement. You can watch a film of the play **here** and read lots of supporting materials **here**. You can also read an article from *Prospect* magazine, **Over a century ago, Dickens said it was cruel, wrong and 'tampered with the brain'. So why is solitary confinement still allowed?**

#### *Prisoners of Solitude: Bringing History to Bear on Prison Health Policy*

by Dr Margaret Charleroy and Professor Hilary Marland in *Endeavour*.

### + Women in prison

#### *Disturbed Minds and Disruptive Bodies*

Explore how women prisoners resisted the ways prison officers tried to regulate their minds and bodies in the second half of the 19th century.

#### *'Why Should a Man Rule "The Castle"?' Early twentieth-century debates over the appointment of female governors and medical officers in women's prisons*

#### *'The Great Disgrace to our Age': Desperate women, crime, drink and mental disorder in Liverpool Borough Prison*

In the 19th century, Liverpool Borough Prison reputedly had the largest population of female prisoners in the country and possibly Europe.

All of the above materials can be found at the University of Warwick's Centre for the History of Medicine webpages by searching "Warwick Medicine Prisoners" and viewing the **Project outputs** page.

### + Reform

#### *Birth Charter*

Produced by Birth Companions, which sets out detailed recommendations relating to the care of pregnant women and perinatal women in prison.

#### *The Howard League for Penal Reform*

The Howard League is the oldest penal reform charity in the UK. It was established in 1866 and is named after John Howard, one of the first prison reformers.

#### *The Prison Reform Trust*

The PRT works to ensure UK prisons are just, humane, and effective. 'The state of our prisons is a fair measure of the state of our society.'

Bread proving at HMP Hewell.  
Image credit: Natalie Willatt



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*Disorder Contained.* Image credit: Andrew Moore