

The Penal Context and History

‘Don’t believe anyone who says that the contribution of Cat-C prisons is in any way easier or less important than that of other types of establishment’, declared Phil Wheatley, Director General of the Prison Service, at the annual conference of Cat-C governors, in March 2003. Category-C prisons, he stated were, ‘[the] workhorses of the service’. Closing the meeting, Wheatley summarized the condition of the estate and the challenges of the coming year. Foremost among them was overcrowding, a problem with multiple implications. With the system at full capacity, many prisoners would have to be located far from their homes. It would be harder than normal to transfer ‘difficult prisoners’ to other establishments. The need to free up places at the more secure end of the system would also mean that Cat-C prisons would be handling some men only recently held in high-security establishments, where staffing was much higher and regimes considerably more restricted. To keep the system functioning, governors would need to move prisoners to open conditions ‘pretty damn quick’ and ignore the temptation to hang onto their most compliant prisoners. According to one area manager, under such pressures, Cat-C prisons were becoming increasingly like ‘transit camps’.

The main risk of overcrowding was instability, and Wheatley emphasized the blend of measures that managers would need to take to reinforce compliance and secure control: the leverage provided by the incentives and earned privileges (IEP) scheme should be used to maximum effect; regimes should be predictable; prisoners should feel that they were benefiting from the treatment and training opportunities available in this branch of the estate; and, to avoid triggering discontent, fairness and positive relationships between staff and prisoners should be at the heart of daily treatment.

Meanwhile, Cat-C prisons would need to avoid being distracted from their other objectives. Resettlement work—the focus of the previous year’s conference—and ‘decency’—one of the

watchwords of the Prison Service since the late 1990s—were vital not only in the service of internal order, but as ends in themselves. Wheatley declared his vision for a ‘professional service’, treating prisoners humanely, making ‘evidence-based interventions’, and ensuring that staff felt rewarded and recognized. ‘Performance management’—the theme of the 2003 conference—remained the core mechanism of ensuring that prisons met these responsibilities. In a context of strained resources and private sector competition, it would be a ‘very interesting year’.

Wheatley had stopped at HMP Wellingborough en route to the conference, and drew upon the visit to illustrate his speech. Wellingborough, he commented, was managing a number of fairly recent Category-A prisoners. It was feeling the strain of acute overcrowding in the Midlands, taking disgruntled prisoners from beyond its normal ambit. It was suffering from staffing problems, in part because new recruits were being diverted to new prison accommodation, constructed to ease the overcrowding crisis. Wheatley noted that prisoners in Wellingborough were not only aware of this problem, they were ‘talking like the POA [Prison Officers Association]: “we’re short-staffed. What are you gonna do about it?”’. At the same time, he stated, the prison had ‘worthwhile staff, doing a wide range of work and working with prisoners better than ever before’.

In Wellingborough’s morning meeting two days later, the senior management team was briefed on the Director General’s visit and the conference. Jim Lewis, the prison’s governing governor,¹ reiterated the key messages of Wheatley’s speech. Deputy Governor Paul Cawkwell reported that he had described Wellingborough as a ‘very good prison that could be an excellent prison’ and had recognized its urgent need for more staff. Wellingborough’s concerns were partly defined by local issues, but these were framed by the context and issues that Wheatley’s speech had captured.

The Penal Landscape

By the start of the decade, chronic overcrowding had become the defining problem of the prison system, and the first issue on the everyday agenda of its senior managers. At over 73,000 in 2003,

¹ ‘Governing governor’ or ‘number one governor’: the governor in overall charge of a prison.

the average prison population was the highest then on record, around 28,000 more than a decade earlier, when numbers had begun to climb following a period of relative stability. Population pressures generated daily logistical crises in terms of cell provision and systemic efficiency. In addition, by stretching resources and moving prisoners to wherever space was available, overcrowding exacerbated the most damaging aspects of imprisonment, aggravated its normal frustrations, and hampered attempts to be humane and productive.

This rise in the prison population related more to an increase in punishment than an increase in crime, with longer sentences being applied for serious offences, and a greater use of custodial punishment for relatively minor convictions. Such trends were emblematic of the re-emergence of the prison in Western nations as a 'seemingly indispensable pillar of contemporary social order' (Garland 2001b: 14), reflecting a long-term transition from a culture of penal-welfarism to one of control, retribution, and penal populism.² The resurgence of the prison, and the form of its return, had not been expected. In the 1970s, penal-welfarism was the ideological spine of criminal justice, within a political discourse of social inclusion and citizenship (*ibid.*). Since the prison appeared costly, ineffective, and highly repressive as a mechanism of behavioural change and reintegration (Martinson 1974; Lipton *et al.* 1975; Bottoms 1995), if anything, the expectation was that its use would recede and its conditions would liberalize (Garland 2001a). But what began as a progressive critique of the failings of incarceration and the overuse of state coercion was quickly recast in a more retributive mould. Increasing public wealth, widening inequalities and declining social solidarities resulted in rising crime rates and a more punitive attitude towards those people who threatened the security and affluence of the prosperous. The professional middle classes, traditionally the natural allies of welfarism, felt besieged on the one side by crime and on the other by a tax system which seemed incapable of either aiding or regulating the unruly urban underclass (*ibid.*; Feeley and Simon 1992; Wacquant 2000, 2001a). Instead of becoming critiques of

² Needless to say, although some general patterns are discernible, penal trends are not globally uniform. There are substantial differences not only between the penal cultures and sensibilities of Europe and the US, but also within these continents (see e.g. Pratt 2002; Jones and Newburn 2006).

the prison's institutional existence, the failings of the prison led to a scaling down of its social ambitions and a shift in its means and conditions (Garland 1996).

The consequences of these shifting sensibilities have been complex. Garland (2001) suggests that while confidence in the prison's rehabilitative capacity has diminished, it satisfies more voluble demands that it incapacitates cheaply and effectively, and fulfils an expressive role as the symbol of collective reprisal (see also Pratt 2002; Feeley and Simon 1992). In part, it is argued, this reflects a change in the notion of the 'the criminal'. Offenders are less often perceived as victims of social deprivation who merit civic support and welfare interventions. Instead, they are more likely to be seen as dangerous individuals responsible for their own criminality and culpable for the suffering of others. With the interests of prisoners relegated below those of public security, treatment programmes and rehabilitative interventions are targeted less at the needs of the offending individual and his or her social conditions, but at safeguarding the public body (Garland 2001a; Robinson 2008). Strands of welfarism remain (Zedner 2002), indeed, they take on revised forms in practices such as restorative justice, 'resettlement' policies, 'offender management' and targeted interventions (Hutchinson 2006; Robinson 2008). But the organizing logic of the system has been reconstituted: from rehabilitation as a right of the offender, with the aim of social inclusion, to risk-management and social control in the service of the 'law-abiding majority'.

According to many accounts, then, imprisonment thus becomes a means of social exclusion rather than integration. Both physically and symbolically, the prison screens the lawful from the dangerous. Its increasing fortification helps to make sure that its occupants are expunged from the consciousness of the public. Ensuring that prisoners remain quarantined becomes more important than rendering them educated and employable (Feeley and Simon 1992). For Wacquant (2000, 2001a, 2001b), writing primarily about the US, this serves the interests of an economy in which the urban poor have become superfluous. That the American 'warehouse prison' does little beyond containment and control is indicative of its role as the primary means of managing and neutralizing an apparently irredeemable underclass (Simon 1993). Money is drained from welfare intervention to penal provision (Beckett and Western 2001). Accordingly, as the shield of the welfare state retracts, the

penal canopy is stretched over the domains and disorders that are no longer sheltered or treated by what Wacquant (2001b) calls the 'left-hand' of the state. The prison comes to function as a carceral depot for the mentally ill, the drug- and alcoholic-addicted, and for the ghetto inhabitants whose life chances have been devastated by the spirals of incarceration that have emaciated their communities (Garland 2001b; Wacquant 2001a).

The prison has also been subjected to a number of reforms focused around effectiveness and efficiency. These reforms are aimed not at the elimination of crime but at making it manageable through 'systemic coordination' (Feeley and Simon 1992: 455) and 'technocratic intervention' (Cheliotis 2006: 315). They stem from a view that penal-welfarism was an expensive failure based on misplaced ideological commitment to a *social* mode of governance (Garland 2001a; O'Malley 1999). This entailed a belief that crime had social roots and social solutions, and that prisons themselves were best governed by understanding the social energies of the inmate society—its relationships, forces and interests (Simon 2000). The replacement for this is a mode of governance whose core logic is *economic*. One part of this framework is a more forceful insistence on the financial accountability and frugality of government institutions. Imprisonment should be cheap, cost-effective and able to justify itself to a parsimonious public—hence the appeal of incapacitation over rehabilitation (O'Malley 1999). According to this logic, it should also learn from commercial practices or have its functions contracted out to the private sector if viable and economical.

Another part of this new logic employs the language and techniques of economic production to prison administration. Described as 'managerialism' (e.g. McLaughlin and Muncie 2000) or 'new penology' (Feeley and Simon 1992)—the differences need not be explored here—this is a 'pragmatic, future-oriented, technologically supported approach to the management of organisations' (Liebling 2004: 377), in which the primary organizational focus is shifted from ends and outcomes to processes, systems, and outputs. For prisons, this means new and intensified forms of self-scrutiny and measurement, most notably in the shape of performance targets and internal audits that check compliance with organizational standards. Aided by information technology, these targets are set according to national frameworks and are appraised from the organizational nerve centre.

Many commentators have argued that this performance culture limits the prison's moral ambitions, decoupling the institution from social ends and implications (Feeley and Simon 1992; Nellis 2001), or mollifying calls for alternatives to prison by making imprisonment seem like a painless, neutral, or moral practice (Cheliotis 2008). These critics claim that managerialism encourages an obsession with smooth efficiency and internal, measurable processes, evaluating what the organization *'does'*, rather than what, if anything, it *achieves'* (Garland 1996: 458, italics in original). Resettlement aims, for example, may be judged in terms of the provision of offending behaviour courses and work placements regardless of their quality or their impact on recidivism. Establishments become judged against their own standards, but the question of how these standards relate to moral questions and social goals may become obscured. However, performance management also carries a number of moral advantages. As Cheliotis (2006: 329) acknowledges, systemic efficiency may lead to the 'effective delivery of individuals' entitlements' and the minimization of discrimination in institutional decision-making. It places brakes on rogue management and can empower attempts to challenge traditional cultures. The defence of managerialism therefore argues that, if measures are set correctly and if a naïve fixation on targets can be avoided, it can be used as a means to humanitarian ends.

However it is regarded, the implications of managerialism for criminal justice personnel are the same. The centralization of decision-making, strict organizational oversight, and the tightening and formalization of guidelines means that both managers and their staff have less discretion to make localized decisions, to act against the grain, and to challenge or ignore the directives that come from above.³ The era of maverick governors and individual fiefdoms has passed (Bryans 2007; Liebling 2004).

This mode of governance also has consequences for prisoners. Feeley and Simon (1992) argue that, rather than being dealt with as individual cases and diagnosed according to clinical need, prisoners are managed and assessed as 'units' using actuarial, predictive techniques. These calculate risk and dangerousness at the level of aggregate groups, within which prisoners are located on

³ Although strictly speaking a singular noun, the term 'staff' is used as a plural form in this book.

the basis of personal variables. It is the management of the system, and the containment of risky sub-populations within it, that is prioritized. The neo-liberal logic that underwrites managerialism (and forms of 'governmental power' emerging throughout the field of crime control) is also applied to the discipline and reform of individual prisoners (Garland 1997; and see Foucault 1977, 1982, 1991). As fits the shift from welfarism to an ideology of individual responsibility and self-management, the prisoner is addressed as 'an entrepreneur of his own personal development, rather than an objectified or infantilized client upon whom therapeutic solutions are imposed' (Garland 1997: 191). Responsibility for the causes and solutions of offending moves from the state towards the individual (Hannah-Moffat 2005).

Within these trends are a number of contradictions: between the demand for public protection at any cost and the insistence on frugality (Garland 2001a); between discourses of authoritarianism and ideologies that stress the need for prisoners to 'self-manage'; and between systems that are explicitly punitive, those that are merely incapacitating, and those that continue to pursue rehabilitative goals. O'Malley (1999) argues that these inconsistencies are indicative of two discernible currents within modern penality. One is neo-liberal and stresses individual responsibility, enterprise, accountability, and efficiency. The other is neo-conservative, emphasizing discipline, punishment, and state authority. It is the friction between them that helps account for the volatile and unpredictable nature of penal policy development. This also leaves room for alternative forms of penal practice, such as those committed to rehabilitation (O'Malley 1999), and for ideological constellations that combine old currents in novel forms. Along similar lines, Hutchinson (2006) criticizes accounts of penal change that imply some kind of decisive break between two discrete eras of rehabilitation and punishment. Such accounts—he argues—underplay the elements and undercurrents of retribution/coercion that existed in the period of welfarism, and overstate the demise and disappearance of reformist ambitions in recent years. Certainly, whatever lip service was paid to rehabilitative ideals in the British post-war period, the reality of prison life was often brutal, austere, and deeply punitive.

That rehabilitative ambitions have persisted in UK penality is also a reminder that general trends in penal politics cannot account for the specific character of national jurisdictions (Garland 2001a;

Jones and Newburn 2006). The kind of broad description provided above is inevitably partial and schematic. In the UK, for example, incarceration rates have not risen on the same meteoric trajectory as in the US, nor has the penal net been cast so disproportionately over minority ethnic populations. Likewise, although the prisons of England and Wales serve as storage zones for a number of social problems that are inadequately addressed in the community—in particular, mental illness and drug addiction—domestic welfare structures have been stripped away to a much lesser degree than in the US. Furthermore, as Liebling states, ‘the reinvention of the prison has an internal as well as an external dynamic’ (Liebling 2004: 40). Imprisonment’s local terrain is shaped but not fully determined by the forces of macro-social change. It is also influenced by organizational politics, professional values, personal priorities, and historical contingencies.

The Local Terrain: The Prison System of England and Wales

The Strangeways Riot and the associated disturbances of 1990 provided the most significant point of departure for the formation of penal values and policy in the decade that followed. The period before the riots had seen the beginnings of institutional reform and increasing rumination on the aims and means of imprisonment (Bottoms 1990; Liebling 2004). Ironically, in Strangeways, the rise in prisoner expectations that regime improvements had brought about, and the placement of a reformist governor into a prison with a deeply intransigent culture, may have contributed to the disorder that followed (Carrabine 2004). But the extent of reform had been modest, and its value base unclear. Lord Woolf’s (2001) Report on the disturbances affirmed that prisoner grievances across the system were forged by chronic overcrowding, unsanitary conditions, and indecent treatment by staff. Woolf’s recommendations ranged from specific measures such as revised grievance procedures, improved sanitation, more constructive regimes, and better contact with families to an ambitious reform agenda, which would see a more integrated criminal justice system (CJS) and accredited standards throughout the Prison Service (Liebling 2004; Scott 2007).

Woolf also highlighted the need for clarity of purpose. Given that the aims of imprisonment—punishment, deterrence,

incapacitation, and rehabilitation—appear contradictory, and its operational goals—security, order, decency etc—also seem conflictual, it is unsurprising that definitional clarity is difficult to achieve, let alone to translate into practice. Woolf's formula was 'security, control and justice', the latter term referring to humanity, fairness, and due process. In a context of liberal penal thinking, it was around this term that political discourse and institutional practice crystallized. Woolf's recommendations were broadly welcomed by penologists and commentators, and were accepted by the government (Liebling 2004). Arguably, they were broadly in line with internal Prison Service thinking, as represented by Ian Dunbar's influential book *A Sense of Direction* (1985). Galvanized into a process of relegitimation, the Prison Service placed renewed emphasis on the need for positive regimes, humane conditions, and good staff-prisoner relations. Prisons were fitted with telephones; provisions and conditions for visits were extended and improved; home leave opportunities were expanded. Officers were given a clear message that prisoners should be treated with respect and civility, and that this was the means by which order should be achieved.

As Liebling (2004) shows, it was in this equation of order and justice that the seeds of the punitive backlash were sown. The notion of a more respectful and humane prison became conflated with lax indulgence. In some establishments, officers avoided conflict and stopped asserting their authority; the supervision of prisoners was minimal. Levels of drug use, assaults, and escapes escalated. When a number of escapes occurred from high-security establishments, it became apparent that they had been made possible by the chronic under-enforcement of rules, based on the fear of disorder and the desire to ensure 'good' relationships. Despite Woolf's insistence on the importance of security, the misapplication of his message meant that, in practice, containment was eclipsed by other concerns.

By the mid-1990s, the Conservative Home Secretary, Michael Howard, needed little persuasion that the system's value-base should be overhauled. His instincts were highly anti-liberal, and they now converged with the evident disarray of the Prison Service and with a political moment when public sentiments were ripe for punitive exploitation. A new phase in penal policy and ideology was established. There was to be less reticence about using the prison as a means of incapacitation, even if this led to

a significant rise in the population. In the service of deterrence, prisons were to be ‘decent but austere’, the latter word overriding the former. The balance of power was to be swung back to staff, without apology.

Liebling (2004) defines the ensuing period, from 1995–1999, as a time of recovery and safety, but one during which the politicized agenda of security of control continued to predominate (see Carlen 1998). It was in this context—on the basis of a remoulded penal sensibility—that a range of new policies was implemented. Woolf had proposed a number of situational measures, including smaller and more manageable wings, whose implementation was designed to prevent the outbreak and spread of unrest. These were now augmented with increased perimeter security, enhanced internal surveillance (e.g. CCTV), and further limits on prisoner movements around establishments. The prison ‘tightened up’ in other ways: prisoners were allowed fewer personal goods, visitors could no longer hand in property, and temporary release provisions became more restricted. Meanwhile, Woolf’s vision of a system of high basic standards and rights, with extra incentives on top, was reshaped into a ‘more punitive and restrictive’ system of ‘sticks and carrots’ (Liebling 2004: 30). Entitlements were redefined as privileges. This policy—a form of governmental power which will be analysed in Chapter 4—was typified by the IEP scheme, launched in 1995, which gave prisoners the opportunity to earn benefits (such as in-cell television, more visits, and greater private spending) on the basis of good behaviour. In a similar vein, the introduction of mandatory drug testing had a somewhat authoritarian bent, designed not to aid prisoner detoxification, nor merely to regulate prisoner behaviour, but also to discipline those whose conduct fell outside acceptable boundaries.

Informed by the messages emanating from the political centre, these years also saw a shift in the moral culture of imprisonment. Among prisoners, perceptions of fairness and justice fell (Liebling 2004). In some establishments, staff violence returned. In contrast to the preceding period, the signal events of the time—most infamously, a female prisoner giving birth while shackled to a prison officer—shocked the public not because they indicated penal laxity, but rather harshness and inhumanity. When Martin Narey took over as Director General of the Prison Service in 1999, under a Labour government, he sought to re-insert a moral vocabulary to the prison domain. Centred on the notion

of ‘decency’, this meant challenging staff racism and brutality, enhancing race relations among staff and prisoners, emphasizing the need for humane treatment, improving healthcare provision and standards of hygiene and treating prisoner suicides as a measure of the system’s failure or success.

It also meant defining the prison as a place of reformation. Under Narey’s stewardship, rehabilitation and ‘resettlement’ returned to the forefront of penal vernacular. Narey was a committed proponent of education and offending behaviour courses, and, on the basis of some initially encouraging research findings (Friendship *et al.* 2002), he expanded the number of cognitive behavioural programmes (e.g. the reasoning and rehabilitation (R&R) course). Within mainstream prison education, Narey promoted key skills and literacy. In the area of drugs, increased emphasis was placed upon detoxification and treatment. In 1999, a service known as counselling, advice, referral, assessment, and throughcare (CARAT) was placed in every prison in England and Wales. But this was not woolly liberalism, nor was it a return to the post-Woolf blueprint. ‘Failing prisons’ and their governors were managed robustly. Despite the increasing involvement in prisons of external agencies (in particular charities working on housing and employment issues), regimes did not ‘open up’ or liberalize. A preoccupation with issues of ‘risk’ meant that trust and innovation rarely trumped risk-aversion. From around 2002, resettlement began to take a backseat as public protection took the wheel of penal policy. Security remained a dominant concern—although senior practitioners argued that improvements in control and security enabled prisons to focus on decent treatment and reducing reoffending. As coming chapters will detail, there was no retraction of policies that sought to discipline prisoner behaviour, fragment collective interests, limit movements and possessions, and place upon prisoners much of the responsibility for their progression and conditions. Power remained firmly in the hands of the prison, with the principal goals being compliance, containment, and order.

The context of these developments is worth further elaboration. There was no shift in the *means* of prison administration. Bureaucratic managerialism had been the primary mode of operation since the late 1980s, and the main engine of organizational transformation. Performance targets had been established in 1992, to assist long-term planning, provide clarity for practitioners and

offer a standardized measure of institutional outcomes; biennial process audits were introduced in 1995 (Liebling 2004). By the end of the decade, there was no change in these methods or in the intended dynamic of perpetual improvement. If anything, under Narey, the pace and scale of reform accelerated. Private sector competition became all the more entrenched as a means of forcing union modernization and promoting innovation and efficiency throughout the service. From 2001, all prisons were gauged according to a 'weighted scorecard', based on performance data, costs and progress, and designed to generate internal competition. Underperforming prisons were threatened with market testing (bidding to maintain their own contracts against private sector companies), or performance improvement plans.

Attempts were made during this period to tailor targets to a more liberal-humanitarian agenda. From 1998, the basis of targets shifted somewhat from 'inputs' to 'outcomes'; and in 2003, targets were introduced in relation to healthcare and suicide reduction (Liebling 2004). Meanwhile, the Prison Service's Standards Audit Unit augmented its practices with a 'quality of life survey' that had been developed to evaluate the dimensions of prison life that existing measures failed to address—'softer' outcomes such as respect, humanity, fairness, and personal development (*ibid.*). At the same time, rehabilitative ambitions were circumscribed by the managerial framework and subsumed to other interests (Scott 2007). In education, the focus on key skills and certificated qualifications—rather than arts, citizenship and more complex forms of self-improvement—partly reflected this preoccupation with what could be demonstrated and evaluated. Similarly, the standardization and accreditation of offending behaviour groupwork was consistent with a managerial culture of promoting interventions that were quantifiable and measurably effective. Most courses had a cognitive basis and were designed to modify modes of thinking and behaviour (Wilkinson 2005; Tong and Farrington 2006). Understanding the individual and dealing with underlying psycho-social issues was not the prime concern; one-to-one counselling was rare. The growth in the scope and power of psychological expertise in prisons was not in the service of prisoners and their personal problems, but primarily in the interests of public protection (see Chapter 4). Reducing reoffending and keeping the public safe required that rehabilitation occurred within 'an appropriate punitive envelope' (Halliday

2001: ii). Increasingly, prisoners became sites of potential risk rather than justice (Feeley and Simon 1992). The language of individual rights was eclipsed by a language of administration.

In the sphere of criminal justice, there had been little change in the political climate. Both main political parties continued to scramble for the macho penal high-ground, creating a bi-partisan rhetorical chorus of 'tough' sentencing. The public was invoked simplistically as punitive and vengeful.⁴ The progressive strands of New Labour policy on crime and justice were stated quietly, with qualifications, or were given little public airing. In relation to prisons, the need to 'reassure the public' and avoid negative publicity were the paramount concerns. In the government's public pronouncements, 'prisoner rights' were subordinated to those of 'victims', 'the public' and 'the law-abiding majority', as if these were simple distinctions. There was no return to the language of 'austerity' or to the 'prison works' mantra of the mid 1990s; and the government recognized the need for the system to have some legitimacy in the eyes of prisoners. But nor was there any hint of decarceration—the reduction of prison numbers. Narey saw overcrowding and under-resourcing as obstacles to the system achieving its ends, but he accepted a need to be accountable to 'public opinion' and the constraints set by pocket-book voting. In his public declarations, he expressed considerable optimism about what the prison could achieve, both for the prisoner and for society at large in terms of reducing reoffending.

This phase of penal politics—the time during which the Wellingborough study took place (2002–03)—can be characterized in various ways. For its proponents, including many new-breed practitioners, it represented a moral version of managerialism. It satisfied external demands to contain prisoners securely and cost-effectively, while fulfilling internal ambitions by delivering entitlements and decency. It set clear standards and provided mechanisms of accountability that were vital in an environment that could so easily 'go wrong'. 'Show me a prison achieving all its key performance indicators [KPIs]⁵ and I will show you a prison

⁴ Research suggests that members of the public are not as punitive as newspapers and politicians tend to suggest, particularly when they are informed about the realities of criminal justice policy and are encouraged to reflect on matters of crime and punishment (see Hough and Roberts 1998).

⁵ KPIs: key performance indicators; KPTs: key performance targets.

which is also treating prisoners with dignity', Narey declared (2001: 5), embodying this position. For some critics—including many old-style liberal governors—the external demands on the prison and its humanitarian proclamations were contradictory. The Service might be committed to human rights, improving race relations, and reducing distress, but such ends were unachievable with a rising population, limited resources, and the ascendancy of security, compliance and control as the supreme requirements of the system. Managerialism fulfilled these latter demands more effectively than it guaranteed fairness and decency. For other critics, there was an inherent contradiction between managerial means and humanitarian ends, with the former always smothering the latter and lapsing into faceless, instrumental bureaucracy. From this perspective, Narey's equation was back-to-front: the focus should be creating decent prisons, and these prisons would meet well-toned measures. To chase targets on the assumption that this would deliver decency was a doomed exercise in bureaucratic myopia. How prisoners themselves experienced the managerial prison—or, to be precise, a particular prison of the era—is one of the main subjects of this book.

Summarizing the period, Liebling (2004) has used the terms 'effectiveness-plus' and 'neo-rehabilitation'. The first conveys the insistence on making the sentence 'effective' and the system efficient while re-legitimizing the prison through moral principles and practices. The second suggests that new versions of rehabilitation reflect the neo-liberal ideologies that have come to prominence throughout criminal justice and the wider political domain. Here, rehabilitation is conceived not as the responsibility of the state alone, or as something to be either imposed or merely offered, but something that the offender should take up willingly (Garland 1997; Hannah-Moffat 2001). But this definition of commitment betrays the complexity of this mode of rehabilitation, and exposes the coercive and instrumental means by which it is realized. As coming chapters illustrate, this is rehabilitation with edge.

In due course, the book will return to this form of governmental power, and to a more detailed analysis of how penal power has been reconfigured in practice by the developments outlined above. The purpose thus far has been to illustrate the context in which HMP Wellingborough operated: the values that framed its aims and the techniques used to achieve them. As Liebling notes (2004: 456), these have been combined in complex, conflicting and shifting ways: 'the

tensions and oscillations between bureaucratic-managerial, punitive, and humanitarian values throughout this period have been striking'. The contradictions between goals of custody, retribution, and rehabilitation are a perennial concern throughout the prison estate. But they are perhaps most apparent within the Cat-C system, where prisoners are geared up for release under conditions where trust and autonomy remain limited, and where the outside world feels increasingly tangible, but the walls and fences still loom large.

The Category-C estate

In 2003, with around 18,000 places in thirty-three establishments, the Cat-C estate managed the bulk of convicted adult males and almost a quarter of the prison population in England and Wales. The system of categorization was based on the likelihood and consequences of escape, with prisoners placed into four categories from A to D. Category-C prisoners were 'those who cannot be trusted in open conditions, but who do not have the ability or resources to make a determined escape attempt' (Mountbatten 1966). Prisons were allowed to hold prisoners of lower categories than their institutional designation, which meant that Cat-D prisoners could be held in Cat-C establishments if population pressures and logistical considerations required it.

Category-C prisons varied considerably in terms of age, size, design, accommodation type, and level of physical security. Some establishments were acknowledged to be more secure and restricted than others, and more capable of handling potentially disruptive prisoners.⁶ Relative to higher-security prisons, Cat-Cs had lower staffing ratios, lower costs (£20,060 per prisoner per year in 2002–2003, compared to £24,385 in category B prisons), and—despite

⁶ Research into a 1994 riot at HMP Wymott suggested that certain prisoners were more likely than others to commit disciplinary offences, and that disturbances were more likely in establishments where such prisoners formed a high proportion of the population. These prisoners, known as 'Score 3s' were men aged under 25 at the time of conviction, serving sentences for burglary or robbery, and sentenced to less than four years. The Prison Service assessed how capable each establishment was of holding Score 3 prisoners, based on accommodation type (cells, dormitories), ease of supervision (relating to design and sight-lines), internal security (i.e. gates and zonal fencing), site size and dispersal, and special programmes (Marshall 1997). A prison's rating determined the proportion of Score 3s it was allowed to hold as a percentage of its certified normal accommodation.

28 The Penal Context and History

a fortification programme since 2000—less imposing perimeter security (Dymond-White 2003).⁷

With the organization of the prison system based on security considerations and their attendant costs (as opposed to reintegration needs, for example), the existence of regimes that allowed greater autonomy was a by-product of other logics. Although, by definition, the security level of Category-C prisons differed from Cat-Bs, their official *remit* did not. The greater freedoms and opportunities found in these establishments derived from the aim to hold prisoners in facilities that were the least secure (and therefore least costly) as was possible given the need to prevent escapes. As Phil Wheatley, Director General of the Prison Service, explained:

It is about security basically, not about care and treatment. . . . It's not anything other than a cheaper way of delivering security. . . . It's very wasteful and very wrong to hold prisoners in higher security conditions than they need. [But] the judgment is about how we prevent people from escaping, that's what it really is about (Wheatley 2003).

It was consistent with this logic that the Category-C estate had only nominal 'functional management' (i.e. separate and dedicated management structure and oversight).⁸ According to Wheatley, such an approach would risk Cat-Cs becoming 'sealed off' from surrounding prisons. This would undermine attempts to manage smoothly the sentence progression of prisoners within their local areas, and would make it more difficult for area managers to deal with issues of security, control and population pressure within their jurisdictions. With Cat-Cs thus integrated into the rest of the prison system, senior managers believed that the expertise required to run them was no different from what was demanded elsewhere in the estate (Wheatley 2003). This belief was also indicative of the increasing standardization of prison governance in recent years.

For prisoners, the Cat-C prison represented a transitional point of the sentence. Compared to the Cat-B 'Locals' from which

⁷ Escapes from Cat-Cs were uncommon, with only two recorded across the estate in 2002–2003.

⁸ At the time of study, one area manager held the title of 'Category-C policy lead'. His responsibilities included monitoring performance and the impact of policies across the Category-C estate. However, the realities of overseeing a large area office meant that it was difficult to fulfil this role (Dymond-White 2003).

many prisoners were allocated, there were more opportunities for education, training, and personal development.⁹ Compared to the more secure Cat-B training prisons from which other prisoners had progressed, these opportunities were not necessarily better quality, but they did feel more relevant. Cat-C was the stage when prisoners could meaningfully contemplate re-entering the community or moving on to open establishments (Cat-Ds) where regimes offered much greater autonomy. Emphasis was placed on helping prisoners to find work and housing on release, and ensuring that family relationships could be maintained and developed. Prisoners were expected to demonstrate the personal responsibility and trustworthiness that less stringent security measures and lighter supervision required—for example, by developing life skills, addressing offending behaviour, and managing everyday conduct (e.g. getting to work on time, keeping cells clean) without the more oppressive oversight that characterized more secure conditions. In the Category-C estate in particular, the years before 2003 had seen a forceful assertion of the ‘resettlement agenda’ and a greater expectation that prisoners participated actively in their personal development and life management.

However, in terms of the freedoms that they allowed, and the amount of contact with the outside world that they permitted, Cat-C prisons were far closer to the Cat-Bs that supplied them than to the Cat-Ds they fed. External security was conspicuous, and had been enhanced in recent years not only to prevent escapes, but to stop drugs being thrown into establishments over perimeter fences. Concerns about drugs had also led to a greater use of CCTV, the introduction of a pin-phone system allowing greater scrutiny of calls, and improved intelligence links with local police forces. Internal security measures had also been strengthened to counter the threat of disturbances, particularly following a number of concerted incidents in the Cat-C estate in the 1990s. Compared to Cat-Bs, control was meant to be rooted less in the physical environment and direct supervision than in good relationships, active regimes, and ‘dynamic security’—‘security resulting from well developed staff-inmate relationships

⁹ Local prisons hold prisoners who are remanded in custody prior to or during trial, convicted prisoners with short sentences, and prisoners awaiting allocation to training establishments.

and an active regime' (Marshall 1997: 4).¹⁰ However, with so many measures to restrict prisoners' movements, monitor their behaviour, and reinforce to them their captive status, prisoners regularly complained that Cat-C conditions did not indicate trust (Dymond-White 2003), and that their distinction from Cat-Bs was negligible.

Cat-C staff across the estate complained about inadequate resourcing, population pressures which hindered programme delivery and destabilized the population, and performance pressures which encouraged income generation and a maximization of employment figures rather than constructive work and meaningful training (Dymond-White 2003). Managers identified a number of reasons why Cat-C prisons failed to meet their ideals: physical plants and facilities were often poor; training opportunities could not always be tailored to the needs of the local economy or the expectations of prisoners; the allocation of prisoners could not always ensure that they were located close to the communities into which they would be released (a problem exacerbated by overcrowding); and staff retention and recruitment was difficult, with high-quality middle managers in particularly short supply, such that ideas and inspiration tended to be concentrated at senior levels. Good principal officers and senior officers were often given too much work, or were promoted too rapidly (interview, area manager).¹¹ Many of these problems were salient in Wellingborough, although the form they took was shaped by the prison's history, and the particularities of its culture, character, and preoccupations.

HMP Wellingborough

At the time of study, Wellingborough was a medium-sized prison, with certified normal accommodation for 516 prisoners, a limit it met throughout the fieldwork period. There were seven residential wings. E-wing had been constructed in the early 1970s, and served as an induction wing. F and G-wings had been built in

¹⁰ Official documents also emphasized the role of 'meaningful incentives', such as improved accommodation, specialist programmes, work opportunities, and good facilities in securing consent.

¹¹ Principal officers are the highest-ranking uniformed staff, and are classified, along with senior officers, as 'middle managers'.

1999 and were used as the prison's voluntary testing unit (VTU). This VTU formed a separate block from the prison's main residential buildings, and had its own exercise yard. Wings A–E were housed in the prison's main building, linked by a corridor around which the education department was based. Most prisoners accessed the prison gym, workshops, kitchen, and visits room via this throughfare.

F and G were modern, quick-build versions of the classic Victorian prison design, with the landings and walkways visible from the centre. Although there were small areas at the end of each floor where phones were located and prisoners could sit around small tables, the main social areas were the ground floors, where there were pool tables, table tennis tables, and dart boards. Both F and G had three landings, and could hold ninety prisoners each in single cells. Wings A–D were designed in the shape of an H-block, with E-wing running separately below the bottom of the 'H'. Each had two residential landings, which could not be observed from other floors, split into three spurs. On these wings, the ground floor had no residential function other than one shared cell, but contained a food servery and small dining area, showers, staff offices, and recreational rooms for prisoners containing pool and table tennis tables. E-wing had two long landings, cut off from the ground floor where there were similar recreational facilities, a food servery, staff offices, and two rooms for induction training. The cells on A–E wings were smaller, darker and less well-ventilated than those on the VTU. All had internal sanitation (in-cell sinks and toilets). On E-wing, where most cells were shared by two prisoners, the toilet was in a small room separated from the main cell. On other wings, the toilet was located within the main cell-space. E-wing's capacity was around 100 prisoners. Wings A and B held up to fifty-eight prisoners each, and C and D up to sixty-six each, almost all in single cells. D-wing was for life-sentence and long-term prisoners deemed suitable for medium-security conditions.

In a 1997 Home Office research paper, Wellingborough was used as an example of establishments at the mid-point of the Cat-C security range: with 'moderate/good structural integrity, semi-secure or secure accommodation, and moderately dispersed layouts' (Marshall, 1997: 4). The prison's perimeter security was a metal fence (rather than a wall), topped with barbed wire and cameras. Prisoners were allowed to move unescorted from their wings to work and education, although

officers and operational support grades (OSGs) were positioned along the main route to supervise mass movement, and this route did not touch the prison's external boundaries. At other times, prisoners could move around the prison unsupervised, but only with approval from staff, and via locked gates that only staff could open. Exercise in the prison's two yards was overseen by stationary officers. During association periods, prisoners were obliged to stay on their wings unless going to the gym, chapel, or evening education classes.¹²

Wellingborough offered vocational training and qualifications of various forms, including construction, welding, motorcycle care, horticulture, and kitchen work. There were also workshops where prisoners repaired supermarket trolleys, recycled the prison's waste, and placed small toys into plastic eggs for vending machines. The prison also had an IT workshop and working kitchens. Education was provided full-time, part-time, and in evening classes, covering a wide subject curriculum including philosophy, yoga, and foreign languages. Physical education was provided as a full-time course and as a recreational activity. Wages varied from £5 to £16 per week, with the most being offered for kitchen jobs, followed by trolley repair. Prisoners were able to spend private cash of between £5 and £15 per week, depending on their privilege level.

All prisoners in Wellingborough were sentenced. The majority (61 per cent) were serving sentences of between two and six years. Ten per cent were on life sentences or sentences of over ten years, and 12 per cent were sentenced to less than two years. The most common offences were burglary (23 per cent), drugs offences (20 per cent), robbery (14 per cent), violence against the person

¹² The standard prison day was as follows: all prisoners were unlocked at around 8am. At 8.30am, those involved in work, education, or courses left their wings, or began their work as wing cleaners or painters. Unemployed prisoners were at this point locked back in their cells. This period finished at 11.30am, at which point prisoners returned to their wings, or were unlocked from cells, allowing them to socialize on the wing or spend half an hour on morning exercise. Lunch was served on the wings at around 12.00pm. At 12.30pm, prisoners were locked up for an hour, while staff took their lunch hour. Between 1.30pm and 4.30pm, prisoners returned to their main activity, before being locked up again for an hour. The evening meal was served at 5.30pm—at this point, 'breakfast packs' were also handed out—from which time prisoners were free to associate on the wings (or participate in off-wing activities) until shortly after 8.00pm, when they were locked up until the following day.

(11 per cent), murder, driving offences, and theft and handling. Almost 60 per cent of prisoners were aged between twenty-one and twenty-nine; over 30 per cent were between thirty and thirty-nine. Most prisoners were from East Anglia and the Midlands. Fifty were foreign nationals (less than 10 per cent). Of all prisoners, 48 per cent were Church of England or Catholic. Seventy-three per cent declared themselves 'White British'; 19 per cent were Black African, Black Caribbean or Black Other, and around 5 per cent were Asian Indian, Asian Pakistani, or Asian Other;¹³ 10 per cent were Muslim, 2.5 per cent Buddhist, and 1 per cent Sikh.

Institutional History and Development

HMP Wellingborough opened in 1963, on a 56-acre site on the outskirts of the small East Midlands town (pop. circa 50,000) from which it took its name. It was architecturally unobtrusive—visible from the dual carriageway that brought cars past the town, but otherwise an out-of-sight appendage to its suburbs. For twenty years, it operated as a borstal and then, in different guises, as a Young Offenders Institution until 1990, when it briefly held prisoners decanted from HMP Grendon, which was undergoing refurbishment. Thereafter, Wellingborough operated as a Cat-C training prison for adult, sentenced males.

These transitions set the terms for many of the problems of the following decade. As a borstal, Wellingborough had been 'extraordinarily traditional: reasonably humane, but [with] a very firm framework, with staff very much in control' (senior officer). Young offenders had been more boisterous than adult males, but also more deferential to authority and more respectful of the strict rules and boundaries with which the youth system operated. The therapeutic ethos of Grendon was highly alien to this, and the adult population that the prison held from this time was more recalcitrant in the face of staff authority.¹⁴ Staff were left 'in bewilderment' (former governor), uncertain about their role and nervous about how to deploy their power.

¹³ The term 'Asian' is used within this book to refer to prisoners whose ethnic origins were in the Indian sub-continent.

¹⁴ HMP Grendon is unique within the England and Wales prison system in being the only establishment that functions as a democratic therapeutic community across all wings.

Their eventual reaction was to dig in, ‘begin to develop an identity’ (ibid.) and resist management attempts to transform Wellingborough into a kind of vocational college within a custodial setting. When a new management team took over the prison around 1993, it gave staff little confidence or security. The team was led by an experienced and well-liked governor, who, in his opening address to staff, said that he had reached the peak of his ambition and planned to remain at the prison until his retirement. Officers resented governors who they perceived as careerists, using the prison as a springboard for personal gain (a tendency they associated with new-style managers). But they were also critical of managers who appeared to lack the ambition that careerism engendered. Some staff interpreted the new governor’s speech as a declaration that he was simply looking to ‘kill time’ (senior officer), and his management team failed to enthuse the workforce or impose its will on the prison.

As a consequence, power reportedly amassed in several areas: first, to a stratum of principal officers who exploited the lack of management oversight of staff detailing, and who were, by all accounts, ‘running the jail’ during this period.¹⁵ As one governor recalled:

You had people making decisions here that made the hair stand up on the back of my neck: a principal officer was signing a licence to put a prisoner out on licence.... It should be the governing governor or the deputy governor or a governor of equal grade..., but that kind of decision was made as a matter of course, and the principal officer would make the decision knowing that they had no intention of passing it up the chain: ‘[Their view was:] this is my jail and you’re not messing with my jail’. And a governor would walk into an area and they could openly challenge: ‘what are you doing here, what do you want?’ (Governor)

Second, power was apparently yielded to the prison’s POA committee, which became increasingly intransigent about reforming work practices and developing the prison regime. Third, it accrued to prisoners, who had been granted relatively free movement, but with little structure or oversight. One officer recalled that: ‘it got

¹⁵ ‘The Detail’ or ‘detail office’ was where staff rotas and leave were organized (‘detailing’). In the past, this had been done through a system of informal reciprocity: officers were given leave and time off on the condition that they were prepared to do late or weekend shifts. This informality—which reflected the ‘homely’ culture of the prison—contributed to accusations of ‘rampant cronyism’ and ‘corruption’ made by several officers when describing the mid to late 1990s. One member of senior staff claimed that it was ‘just accepted that people would basically pre-book sickness—[i.e.] “its your turn to have a day off today”’.

to be a dangerous place for inmates and staff. There were gangs of people roaming the corridors. Awful... awful it were. It surprised me that no one actually got killed.' Staff felt they had neither control nor support, and began to take unilateral decisions to lock off wings (and prevent free movement) to regain some sense of power.

The period also saw a number of escapes from the prison. According to one member of staff, escapes had occurred in the past due to attempts to 'push out' the regime, for example, by allowing prisoners to use the sports fields. This, he argued, constituted a 'balanced risk' between liberty and security (of the kind that was acceptable during the period, although unimaginable by the time of the study). The more recent escapes, it was claimed, occurred due to basic security lapses: 'There'd be mesh sheets that would be three metres [high], that you could put against the fence and climb up; there'd be just a dozen sheets of that lying in the yard, not tethered to anything.' In 1998, Wellingborough was declared a prison in need of 'special managerial attention', with the emphasis on its management. An Inspectorate report in March corroborated concerns about the prison's quality and performance. Shortly after, Edd Willetts took over as governing governor at Wellingborough.

The style of the outgoing governor had been 'soft and amiable'. Willetts, who had worked at Wellingborough as an Assistant Governor and as the Deputy Governor, was known as a 'fixer' and a firm leader. Brought in to turn the prison around, Willetts was given the authority to overhaul the prison's management team. 'We found a place that was completely and utterly out of control.... Out of control in managerial terms', Willetts recalled. Systems and structures were not in place, the regime for prisoners was poor, and personal officer work was not being conducted. Willetts prided himself on his leadership skills, motivational ability, and a robust management style. He did not present himself as 'a systems man', but considered himself capable of creating a culture in which systems would be established and maintained by others. Within a short period of time, he challenged lax and improper practices, increased positive activity for prisoners, and negotiated a new staff profile (precipitating a showdown with the prison's POA leader, who was subsequently removed from office by union members).

The staff who remained in Wellingborough during Willetts' tenure remembered him as authoritarian but effective: 'Not everybody agreed with him, and maybe people hated him [but] he sorted this place out, gave it direction, and [brought it] screaming and kicking

into the real world of what a prison should be' (senior officer). Officers saw his methods as tough, but most acknowledged that they were necessary and that the staff most hurt by them deserved their treatment. The majority felt that the prison had been transformed, that power had been restored to staff, and that practices and processes had been tightened up. A standards and security audit in June 2000 noted the significant effort that had gone into raising the prison's performance, while an unannounced inspection the following month commended the prison's governing team and staff on the improvements they had achieved. In the preface to this report, Chief Inspector Sir David Ramsbotham described Wellingborough as 'an example of all that is best about the Prison Service—dedicated staff doing their best for and on behalf of the public, based on assessments of what is likely to contribute most to a prisoner not re-offending on return to the community' (HMCIP 2000: 4).

Willetts left Wellingborough in May 2000. His successor was Peter Bennett, previously the Governor of HMP Nottingham and a Prison Service Assistant Governor since the mid-1980s. Bennett represented a generation of liberal-humanitarian governors who were primarily interested in the welfare of individual prisoners, and who used explicitly moral language to describe their work. A self-confessed 'woolly liberal', he had joined the Prison Service in 1983 with idealistic aspirations about what the job could achieve, but with deep ambivalence about entering what he saw at the time as a regressive organization: 'there were lots of associations with the Prison Service being racist, and being hard and cruel and everything else, [and initially] all of those stereotypes seemed to be totally and utterly confirmed'. Before entering the Service, he had completed a PhD in social anthropology, and he retained an air of benign academic eccentricity. His manner was thoughtful but confident, a style which some saw as friendly and 'fluffy' and others as reserved and inscrutable.

Bennett described his philosophy of staff management as follows:

I like to govern by means of a kind of invisible contract that you will do this for the prison and for me, and I'll make sure that you're a happy person and you'll be comfortable and that you're safe. I don't like the idea of people coming to work being scared or frightened or worried about what's going happen in the day.

It was this approach to leadership—one that emphasized support and personal relationships—that Bennett was asked to

deploy at Wellingborough. The prison's turnaround under Willetts had required firm management, but there were concerns that the governing team had been too bullish and autocratic, keeping too much power to itself, and leaving uniformed staff feeling bruised and untrusted. Bennett's aim was to 'consolidate and de-alienate': to soothe the feelings of the workforce, without allowing sloppiness or the over-assertion of staff authority. Officers on long-term sick were coaxed back into work, the system of staff reports was improved, and efforts were made to make uniformed staff feel more appreciated. Attempts were also made to formalize and make more transparent the workings of the detail office, which had become the most confrontational site in the prison—one of the places where the power struggle between managers and staff was most apparent.

Bennett was also briefed to strengthen the cultural components of the regime. With the prison back under management control and the POA 'stunned into quiet efficiency' (former governor), attention could be given to areas such as race relations, the drug and anti-bullying strategies, and the IEP scheme.¹⁶ This suited Bennett's inclination to be more 'culture-oriented' than 'systems-oriented'. He recognized the importance of performance management, and liked to 'latch on to that quite a lot to get things done'. At the same time, he was dubious about statistical measurement, believing that it could stifle creativity, and preferred to raise performance by changing a prison's overall ethos.¹⁷

A key part of Bennett's method was to 'use the drugs strategy to run the prison'. Despite his misgivings about target culture, he recognized the advantage of having a clear measure of progress around which all staff could energize, particularly at a time when rates of drug-taking were high. As well as providing

¹⁶ A Standards and Security Audit in Spring 2002 highlighted strengths and improvements in the prison's race relations policies, drugs strategy, sentence management and planning, and security procedures (HMP SAU 2002).

¹⁷ 'I've got to be measured to an extent, but in reality I want to rebel against it sometimes, and say, "well look, I can achieve that outcome, I can be successful, even though that doesn't measure very well and because I don't want to concentrate on how much bloody mail we respond to in seven days or whatever, and that's a lower priority for me"... Overall, I've delivered pretty well on the KPTs and so on, but sometimes I do put another priority in, instead of that.' (Peter Bennett)

a sense of purpose, the policy was aimed at making the prison safer and more ordered. Reduced levels of bullying and assault would be of mutual benefit to staff and prisoners. Meanwhile, with help from outside agencies, prisoners would be more capable of tackling the drug habits that lay behind many of their problems. Complementing this approach, which Bennett believed ‘covered the whole of the Prison Service mission statement’, he sought to build on the prison’s strengths in the area of security (including very good relations with the local police). This would reduce the flow of drugs into the prison and would be popular with uniformed staff. Bennett reasoned that, once staff and prisoners felt secure, the developments he desired most would be easier to implement and would compensate for a more secure regime:

Prisoners often say to me ‘this is a Cat-B prison’, in terms of security. What I would say is that by having a prison that is controlled, you can make it a much fairer prison, and you can introduce lovely things for prisoners where they gain self-esteem et cetera, et cetera. You can have good offending behaviour programmes, you can get your writer-in-residence, and you can have a Youth and Community project,¹⁸ you can introduce all these projects and allow all these initiatives to develop, and prisoners can do that simply because you feel fairly secure and safe and because staff feel better about it and are prepared then to develop the prisoner programmes more.

Bennett had been left with an able and confident management team, but its disintegration was the main difficulty of his tenure. While he was on holiday and without forewarning, two governors including his deputy left Wellingborough to join Willetts at HMP Holloway; two more were promoted to other establishments. The management team that remained—at one point, only four governors—was depleted and divided. Bennett brought in Paul Cawkwell as his deputy, a governor who he believed would complement his own strengths and weaknesses. In particular, Cawkwell was more performance-oriented than Bennett, and Bennett hoped that by placing him in charge of target delivery and financial planning, he would free himself to push his strategic vision for the establishment (in particular, the drugs strategy,

¹⁸ The Youth and Community Project used prisoners (and some ex-offenders) to give presentations to school pupils and college students warning them of the dangers of drugs and crime.

the HOPE project and the Youth and Community project).¹⁹ He also hoped that Cawkwell would manage some of the growing divisions within the senior management team. However, before Cawkwell started work at the prison, Bennett announced his own departure. The circumstances were unfortunate. Having pledged, in a full staff meeting, that he intended to remain at Wellingborough for at least two years, the following week he was offered the governor's post at HMP Grendon—the only job he would have taken at the time, and one for which his philosophy was well suited.

After a period during which Cawkwell took charge of the prison and pushed through a new staff profile, a new governor was put in place in October 2002 (when the fieldwork began). Jim Lewis came from Glen Parva Young Offenders Institution, where he had been the Deputy Governor and, for a period, the Acting Governor. Lewis had joined the Prison Service in 1986, initially as a basic grade officer, but with the intention of rising through the ranks to a management position. His father had been a prison officer, and, during the recession of the mid-1980s, Lewis had been attracted by the job security and conditions that he knew the Service could offer: 'There was nothing much [at the time] about a crusade, about prisoners or making things better; it was just going into a world that I knew something about, in very uncertain times.'

Despite the pragmatism of his initial motives, Lewis had soon become committed to the moral dimensions of his job: 'making sure that people have their rights, that people are treated properly, whoever they are, and [that] you do things for the right reasons and the right way'. His first post, at HMP Grendon, had convinced him of the value of respect and fairness in staff-prisoner relations. He also stressed the structural dimensions of decency: 'having enough sets of underpants, having enough time out of cell, not [sending] you up and down the country with no notice—very difficult things in the current situation [of overcrowding]'.

¹⁹ The High Offender Partnership Enterprise (HOPE) project was a multi-agency initiative involving the prison, and local police, probation and drug and alcohol services. It was directed at persistent offenders whose crimes related to drug abuse, and its aim was to help reintegrate these men through intensive treatment within the prison's VTU and then on release. In prison, participants underwent frequent drug tests and drug counselling, and were given advice on housing, employment and family support. Counselling, treatment and testing continued in the community on release, and were closely monitored by local police.

Members of his senior management team consistently remarked on his integrity and his commitment to the Prison Service's moral agenda.

Such values were reflected in Lewis's personal style. He was open, thoughtful and consultative, and his manner was low-key, but he was 'single-minded' in the pursuit of his goals and used target culture to pursue them: '[my style] does have underneath it a bedrock of performance—we still have to achieve what we are here to achieve'. Relative to Bennett, he was more performance-oriented and more convinced that targets could provide direction and help achieve moral ends: 'there is no doubt in my mind that, since performance management, we have become better at doing what we should be doing. In all the prisons I have worked in, the performance is better than it was previously because of this.' Likewise, Lewis was more systems-oriented than his predecessor—less focused on liberal projects and individual care than on the systematic delivery of a humane regime. Nonetheless, he was lucid about the limitations of measurement and the dangers of excessive managerialism, and was sceptical that moral treatment was achievable through targets alone. Although very comfortable with the aims and philosophy of the Prison Service, Lewis was also uneasy about the disparity between these ideals and what was achievable in practice given overcrowding and tight resourcing.

In his interview for the post, Lewis spoke to the national issues of the period, emphasizing the need to prioritize prisoner resettlement while maintaining a safe and predictable regime. Preparing prisoners more effectively for release meant addressing their needs and establishing greater links with outside agencies (police, probation, drug agencies, resettlement organizations), but the prison's custodial imperatives remained paramount. On local issues, Lewis had been briefed that the prison's performance had tailed off slightly, but that it was a relatively efficient and happy establishment. Once in post, he discovered a prison that was ostensibly friendly, with little overt conflict, but which harboured a range of problems and resentments that had sedimented over previous years.²⁰

²⁰ An independent consultant, brought in to gauge staff concerns, reported with surprise that the prison appeared a relaxed institution, but that the complaints he heard from staff were the same as those he heard when at large Local prisons with much more difficult populations, more complex tasks, and more dilapidated facilities.

The first of these was the state of the senior management team, which had little stability or confidence, and little corporate memory on which to draw. Most governors were new to their roles, and all were over-burdened with work due to the unfilled posts around them. In addition to the other recent changes in management, Bennett's departure had left officers feeling insecure and in need of direction. The incumbent governors were perceived by uniformed staff as 'nice people' with decent values and good intentions, but not the strong, purposeful leaders that they wanted.

Lewis had also inherited a serious staffing shortage. In March 2002, an external resources review had demanded almost £300,000 of efficiency savings. Most of this took the form of staff cuts. Governors acknowledged that, on paper, the prison could be run with fewer staff. However, with many officers already on long-term sick, the prison's active workforce was smaller than official figures suggested. The staffing predicament was exacerbated by a number of factors. First, recruitment was difficult. The area was economically vibrant, with low unemployment and high living costs, but no outer-London pay weighting. Second, the Prison Service had recently changed its recruitment procedures, allocating staff centrally instead of allowing establishments to shape their own staffing. Wellingborough had no new accommodation on which to base its appeal for a more generous staff allocation. Meanwhile, through the imposition of an unpopular work profile (in October 2002) and Cawkwell's strong management of industrial relations, Wellingborough was doing better than most prisons in keeping wings open, maintaining its regime, delivering against targets, and minimizing the hours of overtime it owed to staff. As one governor noted—and as I discuss in more depth below—the prison 'was a victim of its own success'. The impression it gave to its area manager was that it was coping with its staffing level. In truth, it was struggling, with staff feeling increasingly alienated.

A further set of difficulties was caused by the prison's recent management culture. Bennett had increased the amount of authority at lower levels of the organization, and had made staff feel more valued by senior managers. However, with governors reluctant to hand back control to uniformed staff, the devolution of power had been partial and cautious. Principal officers appreciated a more supportive culture, but remained frustrated at

being excluded from senior decisions. Many officers felt bullied and beleaguered. Under Cawkwell—whose style was polite but uncompromising—some claimed that the prison had reverted back to management by autocracy. This feeling was intensified by the firm style of the centralized detail office, whose power increased at a time of staff shortages, when shift and leave decisions were all the more significant for staff.

This situation had a number of effects. Officers and line managers felt over-managed, distrusted, and uncertain. They felt ‘browbeaten’ by managers, yet they had little stability at senior levels from which to take guidance. The result was nervousness about making decisions and using initiative, and a vacuum of power among the prison’s middle-management strata. Incoming governors were stunned by the kinds of judgments that senior officers consulted them on and the actions for which they asked permission: updating the rota for the Listeners scheme, for example, and deciding whether to admit visitors who had forgotten to bring identification.²¹ The absence of confident authority on the residential units was compounded by the nature of staff shortages. Middle management had been hit particularly hard by resource cuts. Senior officers now covered two wings rather than one when on duty, leaving many officers feeling adrift. With so many going sick, senior officers were frequently forced to ‘act down’ to cover basic grade responsibilities. In turn, POs and governors were assuming duties normally carried out by less senior staff. The residential governor, for example, was maintaining anti-bullying and suicide prevention strategies in order to prevent them from stagnating. With normal working structures in this way subsiding, and managers disillusioned, meetings went unarranged and systems of staff management and training faltered.

A second outcome was a decline in the morale of uniformed staff during the period of research, and an increase in their resentment about treatment and conditions (in particular, the difficulty of obtaining ad hoc leave). Much of this was directed at the detail manager and the deputy governor, who faced daily, overt antipathy. Discontent also took shape in an increasingly antagonistic POA committee, whose resurgence

²¹ The Listeners Scheme trains prisoners to offer confidential support to their peers, with backing and guidance from The Samaritans.

represented a return of suppressed sentiments. Bennett had left 'without having healed all the bruises' of the previous era, and his departure had left the skeletal management team vulnerable to resistance. Lewis had mistaken the POA's initial lack of resistance for assent: 'when in fact what I should perhaps have presumed was a build up of resentment and bitterness'. His style of caution and collaboration were at odds with the more direct methods of his deputy. The POA committee was left feeling distrustful and impatient, and was increasingly aware that divisions within the governing team could be exploited. When it began to vent its frustrations—many of which Lewis acknowledged as legitimate—it did so with considerable animosity, resulting in a number of fairly acrimonious battles about policies such as the staffing of evening exercise.

Low morale was expressed through staff practices and attitudes. On the wings, many staff retreated to the offices, and carried out their duties with little enthusiasm or attention to detail. Roll checks often had to be redone, disrupting the prison's routine. Security procedures were carried out casually. During the early phases of the study, the prison was dirty and littered. Practices on the wings were sloppy. Many staff felt that managers had little interest in their concerns or in the pressures and realities of their working lives. Bennett's priorities had lain beyond the residential areas of the prison, for example, in recreational education and the Youth and Community project. As he acknowledged, he had not been a particularly visible governor, and had spent less time on the wings than in some other areas of the prison. While the education staff had adored him, the uniformed staff were more ambivalent. Officers were impatient for clear, visible management, but also for nurture and appreciation.²² With Lewis taking time to find his feet and recruit more staff, officers continued to

²² One governor observed that uniformed staff seemed to carry a cultural memory of the time when the prison served as a total institution for officers, who lived in prison houses maintained by prison works staff, had their lawns cut by prison gardeners, and socialized in the prison mess. The prison was a place of nurture as well as work. Another commented that staff wanted 'to be pampered' and expected governing governors to be 'father figures'. It is interesting in this regard that maternal and paternal language is often used within prisons. Carrabine (2004), for example, mentions that HMP Strangeways was nicknamed 'The Lady' by its uniformed staff, and that governors often describe officers and prisoners as behaving like sibling rivals.

feel alienated and undervalued, and took little pride in their core responsibilities.²³

Once in post, Lewis therefore found himself fighting a number of unexpected fires and handling a far greater workload than he had envisaged. He was making decisions which 'should have been a matter of policy. At one point I just felt that everything was landing on my desk for the whole jail.' Although he knew that his role was to provide the prison's strategic direction rather than handle low-level logistical problems, he was keen to 'find out what was going on. [And] I didn't seem to have anybody else who was doing it.' On top of his initial aspirations for the prison, he had to recruit more officers, prevent existing staff from leaving, improve communication, bolster his governing team, rebuild basic structures and clarify lines of responsibility. Operationally, his main priority was to keep the regime going without locking down wings. However, staffing problems meant that 'it was very hard just to cover the basic work'. Doing so, and maintaining a predictable regime, meant taking officers from areas such as drug work, induction training, resettlement and sentence planning to work on the wings: 'everything is done at the cost of something else' (Lewis).

An Inspectorate report published in October 2003 summarized the state of the prison thus. Wellingborough was a safe and respectful establishment, with good reception and induction procedures, a strong education department, good security procedures, a relatively low rate of drug use (a positive rate of 5.4 per cent), some innovative programmes (such as HOPE and

²³ A staff quality of prison life survey was conducted by the author and colleagues in August 2002. Wellingborough's scores were contrasted with those of Highpoint South, a prison considered similar to Wellingborough. Wellingborough scored less well on all dimensions apart from 'safety and security', and 'sympathy for vulnerable prisoners'. Scores were notably poor on 'opportunities to use initiative', 'level of responsibility and authority', 'involvement in decision-making', and 'loyalty to the prison, governors and the Prison Service'. Perhaps most strikingly, officers reported higher levels of trust in prisoners than in governors, and said they felt more respected by prisoners than by line managers and governors. In their responses to open-ended questions, the most frequently-made comments related to poor communication, lack of respect from management, and lack of management continuity. In carrying out the survey, it was notable that officers were paranoid about issues of confidentiality, claiming that 'governors would do anything they can to trace it back to individuals'.

the Youth and Community Project), and a growing emphasis on resettlement work.²⁴

However, Wellingborough was not meeting its role as a training prison. Work spaces existed for 68 per cent of prisoners, but only half were in work or education at any one time. The rest were locked in their cells for long periods. Wages for education and courses were considerably lower than for menial workshop labour, discouraging prisoners from taking up more productive activity. The report acknowledged that the 'training' role was undermined by the rate of prisoner turnover: 43 per cent of prisoners were in the establishment for less than one month, and only 15 per cent for more than a year, making resettlement work difficult. But several areas of weakness directly reflected the prison's staffing problems. Race relations policy and procedures had been neglected, resettlement work had languished, and anti-bullying work was not being done effectively. Some officers had not been allocated time for personal officer work since November 2002, and almost 40 per cent of prisoners said they had never met their personal officer. The system for dealing with the needs of lifers had faltered, and town visits were no longer occurring. The CARAT team was understaffed. There were long delays in the handing out of property. Release on temporary licence was being underused (with only nine between January and June 2003), although Home Detention Curfew (HDC, or 'tagging') was being used more effectively.

The report also commented on staff-prisoner relations, which were described as 'relaxed and friendly'. Of prisoners, 70 per cent, had said there was a member of staff to whom they could turn for help and 65 per cent that staff treated them 'well' or 'very well'. At the same time, the report noted that 'there were few signs of staff initiating contact or challenging prisoners' behaviour in any

²⁴ 79 per cent of prisoners had never felt unsafe while at Wellingborough, a figure well above the average for training prisons (67 per cent). One in five prisoners had been victimized by another prisoner, primarily in the form of remarks, rather than physical abuse (which made up only a quarter of cases). 17 per cent reported having been victimized by staff, mainly through insults about where they were from or their race/ethnicity. No prisoners reported physical abuse from officers. Force was used relatively little, only fourteen times since January 2003, with control and restraint techniques employed on seven of those occasions.

positive way'.²⁵ Officers had told the inspection team that they felt themselves becoming merely 'turnkeys' (HMCIP 2003: 14). Reporting the Inspection team's initial feedback to a full staff meeting, Lewis stressed that there were many pockets of good practice but that the prison was not meeting its potential. Staff-prisoner relations remained fairly positive, he said, yet staff seemed unaware that the quality of these relationships constituted work of which they should be proud.

Conclusion

Students of the prison have consistently argued that its goals are mutually incompatible, and that the pursuit of any one aim is likely to compromise others. In the US, it is argued, as the prison has been re-invented as the essential institution not just of criminal justice but political governance in general (Wacquant 2001b; Simon 2007), rehabilitation has been discarded in the interest of cut-price containment and public retribution. Some of the more 'catastrophic' (Hutchinson 2006) announcements of the death of welfarism and the emergence of the 'warehouse' prison apply in some parts of the US and Europe more than others.

The UK terrain has been shaped in some distinctive ways. By the early years of the 2000s, a penal pendulum that had swung a number of times in the previous decade had slowed. It rested in a position that combined elements of neo-liberalism, authoritarianism, and welfarism. Prisons should be safe and constructive, and treatment should be fair, respectful, and legal. The institution should encourage prisoners to take responsibility for their offending behaviour, to tackle their addictions, and to prepare themselves for release. Yet the interests of the public pre-dominated. The need for the prison to justify itself to external stakeholders took precedence over its need to legitimize itself to its inhabitants.

²⁵ A quality of prison life survey, carried out with prisoners by the author and colleagues at the start of the fieldwork period in August 2002 suggested similar strengths and weaknesses. Wellingborough scored well on 'respect', 'safety', 'dignity', 'entry into custody', 'development (family)', 'drugs strategy', and 'care for the vulnerable', but poorly on 'trust' and 'development (programmes)'. Relative to three other Cat-C training prisons, including one high-performing establishment, one prison considered to be performing poorly, and one seen as relatively similar to Wellingborough, the prison was the second-best rated establishment.

The rights of prisoners were weighed up against increasingly stringent notions of public protection. Riots and escapes were publicly intolerable, holding the system hostage to political embarrassment, even when measures of security and compliance appeared increasingly restrictive and illiberal. Safety-first was the dominant principle of the estate. Interventions served the interests of 'reducing re-offending' as much as they targeted individual needs and wellbeing. Ambitions to reform and contain were to be met while budgets were increasingly scrutinized for potential savings, and without upsetting public demands that imprisonment should not be 'easy'.

In theory then, decency and legitimacy should rise *at the same time* as prisons should become more secure, more controlled, and more confident that those they released would not threaten public property and safety. And these aims should be met as the system moved steadily and predictably towards full capacity, and as heavier sentencing reduced the possibilities of efficiency savings (Brownlee 1998). In short, prisons had the task of achieving more, with greater numbers of people and tighter resources. Questions about the feasibility of these aims, their potential inconsistencies, and the appropriate trade-offs between them seemed to slide out of political debate and policy discourse. (Once concerns about security have ratcheted up relevant measures, it appears more difficult to ratchet them down.) There was little sense that the prison was practically and symbolically overloaded, and little public outcry from practitioners about the demands of their brief. As the chapter that follows suggests, governors felt unable to speak out against or challenge the increasing burdens of their post.

Wellingborough's priorities reflected shifts in national policies and priorities. Security procedures tightened, power was returned to staff, systems were stabilized, and matters of interpersonal and material decency returned to the agenda. These priorities were clearly prescribed and tightly managed from the organizational centre. The prison's problems likewise echoed those found across the prison estate: over-crowding, under-resourcing, conflict between uniformed staff and governors, changes in management personnel, an unstable prisoner population often located far from home, and the difficulties of fulfilling the functions of a 'training prison' within the constraints of policy and budget. Governors operated within fairly

narrow parameters. In Wellingborough, the styles and characteristics of individual governors—to caricature somewhat, the gentleman governor, the fixer-leader, the liberal-humanitarian, and the modern manager—were subordinate to national decrees and priorities in shaping the prison's strategic objectives. At the same time, the prison's everyday culture, ethos, and power dynamics were not reducible to national patterns. These features require further elaboration.