# INTER-WAR CRIME AND PENAL POLICY IN ENGLAND

## The Dartmoor Convict Prison Riot, 1932

Alyson Brown

Inter-war Penal Policy and Crime in England

*Also by Alyson Brown*

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Alyson Brown
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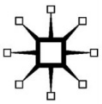



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*To my darling Megan*

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# 1
# Introduction

This book examines the causality, process and impact of a major prison riot which occurred in Dartmoor Convict Prison, Devon, on 24 January 1932. This disturbance, in which the prisoners took over control of the prison, albeit for a short period of time, attracted extensive political, media and public attention. The riot was one of the biggest media events of the year, resulting in headlines in all the popular newspapers and newsreels by Pathé News and Movietone being shown across the country. It also tested the strength of the prevailing direction of penal policy and focused political and public attention on the persistent offender. The Du Parcq Inquiry was immediately established in order to examine the causes of the outbreak and its report, after only five days of work, was eagerly awaited by the press. Investigators from the Criminal Investigations Department then began to collect evidence for use in the prosecution of individuals for their role in the rioting, and ultimately charges were brought against 31 Dartmoor inmates. Proceedings were also brought against two convicts for assaults against prison officers in the days before the riot. A total of 99 years was meted out in additional sentences to these 33 Dartmoor defendants; sentences which contemporary officials accepted were exemplary.

The drama and rarity of the Dartmoor riot have meant that a large amount of primary material is available for historical analysis, although a significant part of this, for example the papers relating to the Du Parcq inquiry, has been subject to a 75-year closure. While the records held within the prison at the time of the riot were destroyed, the post-riot collection of evidence to enable the prosecution of Dartmoor defendants resulted in a valuable archive which includes the individual criminal convictions records of most of the inmates incarcerated at the time of the riot. Dartmoor Convict Prison held a total of 442 convicts on

24 January 1932, at a time when the total daily average prison population in England and Wales was around 10,000. Dartmoor was one of only two prisons in England designated for serious and/or recidivist offenders, the other being Parkhurst. Therefore, this is an extremely valuable archive for the examination of serious crime in the decades prior to 1932.

In addition, transcripts of the special assize established after the riot, although not unproblematic, give a rare voice to convicts and, to a lesser degree, prison officers. While the constraints and distortions of testimony in the courtroom have to be taken into account, this evidence gives valuable insight into the emotional environment of the prison. Nevertheless, there are frustrating gaps in the archive. For example, there are allusions to letters written by convicts to Herbert Du Parcq as part of his investigation. Mention is made by Justice Finlay, the judge at the trial of the Dartmoor defendants, about anonymous letters received by him. Unfortunately, none of these appear to have survived.

Surprisingly, this major inter-war event has attracted little attention from historians. The analyses of prison disturbances undertaken by criminologists have tended to be restricted to the post-war era. Nevertheless, their research has established the basic precept that prison riots are complex entities. As Carrabine asserts, '[a]ny convincing explanation [of prison riots] needs to be attentive to the structural circumstances of confinement (material conditions, institutional diversity, power relationships and state organization, for example) whilst recognizing human agency (prisoner anger, official indifference, administrative struggles, charismatic personalities and so forth)'.[1] Carrabine's approach certainly resonates with the findings of this analysis of the major prison riot which broke out in Dartmoor Convict Prison in January 1932 which illustrates not only the extent to which his schema is historically relevant but also the enduring nature of the structures and tensions maintained within the prison estate. As Carrabine himself notes, 'it is important to recognise that a prison, like any other complex organisation, will be a place possessing a unique history, with a distinctive tradition that informs the actions and beliefs of the keepers and the kept'.[2]

There has been little in-depth historical academic analysis of prison riots. Indeed, the statement by Emsley in 1996 that the 'whole field' of penal policy in the twentieth century remains 'largely unexplored' by historians remains largely true.[3] This is especially the case for the inter-war period. Published work on the Dartmoor riot has tended to cater to a popular readership and to be quite descriptive and broad, giving

only basic facts of the events.[4] However, the much more useful work of Joy and Dell has begun to consider causality and consequences, albeit largely as related directly to internal prison conditions.[5] Academic works which have considered the Dartmoor riot have tended to be either rather brief and/or distorted by a focus which is considerably broader than the disturbances themselves. An example of the former is Harding et al.'s *Imprisonment in England and Wales: A Concise History* which devotes less than a page to the riot. That publication attributed the Dartmoor riot to problems arising when prisoners heavily outnumber prison staff 'in a tense, repressive environment', and asserted that 'an uprising of that kind would have been virtually impossible before 1898'.[6] This observation appears to be based on an assumption that major disturbances have historically been circumvented by the separate system, a system which was unevenly implemented both across the prison system and chronologically.[7] In the public works prisons where convicts laboured in association, as part of the three-stage progressive system, large-scale disturbances occurred during the 1850s and 1860s – including a major riot in Chatham Convict Prison in 1861.[8] In local prisons, large combined disturbances appear to have been rare but were more likely to have been inhibited by the short sentence lengths served by prisoners than the supposed rigours of separation. Indeed, the reach of the separate system into many local prisons was patchy at best.[9]

Adams's analysis compares prison riots in Britain and the United States, and categorises the Dartmoor riot as 'traditional'. This is because it was, he contends, 'an isolated incident associated with an escape attempt which went wrong, in which the grievances of prisoners were to be inferred rather than spelt out and communicated to non-rioters either inside or outside the prison'.[10] This perspective is rather vague, and in the case of the Dartmoor riot the association between an escape attempt just prior to the disturbance and the riot is not clear. Also, there is no consideration of whether this implies a level of planning by convicts. In addition, some evidence suggests that the riot may initially have been an attempt to communicate grievances to the Prison Governor but within his definition of 'traditional' Adams notes that prisoners resisted 'the immediacy of imprisonment, with no wider implications: they "simply" rioted'.[11] However, the 'immediacy' of imprisonment and the regimes and conditions relate inextricably to broader philosophies and policy and cannot be extricated from context. In other respects, Adams largely follows Priestley's conclusions on the riot that it broke out following 'an attempt to reintroduce an older notion of discipline after the relatively liberal governorship of Gerald Fancourt Clayton'.[12]

Yet this makes Roberts, Governor of Dartmoor when the riot broke out, a paradox and a rather one-dimensional aspect of the causality of the riot. Roberts cannot be taken as simply implementing traditional disciplinarian principles and practice. Not only was he a product of training through the new borstal system but he had no previous experience of convict management and was also one of a new breed of prison governors who had risen through the ranks of the prison service. The extent to which this in itself lent instability to his regime was one of the issues debated during the Du Parcq inquiry in the aftermath of the riot. One of the doctors in the prison at the time of the riot later commented that

> At the time prison Governors were almost always of the upper class often they were retired officers from the armed forces. Any Governor who had risen from the ranks might be vulnerable to lack of confidence from the staff and suspicion from the inmates.[13]

The appointment of Roberts was an experiment, but unfortunately what precise kind of experiment he represented is not clear. Other factors were also important. These included a broad context of reformative rhetoric which made the conditions in Dartmoor seem relatively more deprived to prisoners and prison officers. This may have been exacerbated following uncertainties accompanying Governor Roberts's arrival and an impending reduction in the war bonus of prison officers, in effect a pay cut, as well as rumours that Dartmoor could be closed as an economy measure in difficult economic times. In other words, Priestly's conclusions are useful but have a focus which is too narrow. Adams's viewpoint is a development of that of Priestly's but is insufficient to explain the Dartmoor riot, given its significance, scale and rarity.

In another brief but valuable account of the Dartmoor Convict Prison riot, Thomas offers a perspective which is framed within an analysis of the history of the prison officer since 1850 but which is again based on the move away from the disciplinary regimes of the nineteenth century. Thomas is clear about the cause of the Dartmoor riot. Ultimately, he concludes, it was the inmates who were culpable – inmates whose capacity to communicate, organise and revolt had been enhanced by contemporary prison reform. According to Thomas,

> Dartmoor prison in 1932 was a very different place from what it had been thirty years before. The reforms which had been introduced had created an inmate community, able to communicate, and thus able

> to organise. The origins of the mutiny lay in the social dynamics which association initiates. New stresses arise among prisoners, and between prisoners and staff, which are difficult to ease in the secure prison. There has to be an outlet.[14]

So for Thomas the explanation is clear: reforms which allowed a greater level of association meant that inmates would inevitably combine and create trouble. This perspective is not without merit in that unrestricted association or loosely supervised incarceration can create stress and dissatisfaction and, as Carrabine points out, '[p]risons are clearly dangerous places'.[15] Nevertheless, Thomas has overdrawn the extent to which conditions in the prison had changed in the decades preceding the outbreak. More recent analysis has suggested a much slower pace of change not only in convict prisons but across the prison system as a whole. Indeed, Bailey maintains that the pace of prison reform between 1895 and 1922 was 'glacial'.[16] Although there were some notable achievements in the inter-war years, these remained limited in scope and application especially regarding the convict prisons. The impact of such measures on those prisoners in Dartmoor perceived as dangerous and irredeemable was at best only ameliorative. Some minor relaxations were introduced in Dartmoor Prison but they did not represent a reformative ideal which would threaten the primary disciplinary role of prison officers. Thomas's analysis of the causes of the riot resonates with the tone and perspective of articles in the pages of the *Prison Officers' Magazine*, because it is underpinned by an assumption of considerable reforms having taken place. However, many of the complaints made in the magazine relate to the pay and conditions of prison officers and fears for the future.

What is evident from the pages of the *Prison Officers' Magazine* is perhaps a declining level of understanding, sympathy and shared ethos between prison officers and the Prison Commission. Prison officers perceived themselves as a bulwark against any deterioration of disciplinary standards and penal certainties. An article published in the magazine in March 1929 asserted that 'there is a distinct policy of drift' and another in November of that year observed that at 'Head Office we have one or two old type prison administrators. In addition we have the reformers and idealists'.[17] The Dartmoor riot lent credibility to criticisms that had been voiced in the magazine for some time which suggested that prison officers were distrustful of, and powerless under, the influence of those who were disparagingly referred to as the 'long-haired, water-drinking reformers'.[18] Ultimately, such comment reflected

a limited faith in reform, as later observed by a Doctor in Dartmoor during the riot: 'I don't think that any member of staff expected anyone to be rehabilitated in prison, least of all at the Moor.'[19]

The pages of the *Prison Officers' Magazine* often reflect faith in older, semi-mythical but more certain and static regimes in which, by implication, major disturbances did not occur.[20] Certainly detractors within the prison system at this point gained little sympathy from the Prison Commission which had Parliamentary support underpinned by a general belief that progress was being achieved, although this confidence was severely dented by the riot itself.[21] Post-riot, in the February and March 1932 editions of the *Prison Officers' Magazine*, criticism was quite specific and highlighted staff reductions, lack of trust in prison officers and a policy which located recidivist offenders in one prison.[22] These criticisms reflected the broader penal policy purview of the magazine, examining causality from a perspective which nevertheless ultimately placed responsibility in the hands of a new kind of modern criminal.

> The trouble at Dartmoor was primarily caused by communist activity, its gangs and leaders. The prison … contain[s] many desperate men who will not stop at anything in an effort to gain their liberty …. The prison population has lost the old 'hatchet-jaw' and often brainless criminal, but he is substituted by a cunning, dangerous and desperate man.[23]

There appears to be no evidential grounds for inferences about Communist sympathies but these weren't only drawn in the *Prison Officers' Magazine*. Such references were more likely to have been an illustration of social fears than about genuine affiliations, although the latter cannot be discounted completely.

The reformative ethos of the period asserted the need for greater categorisation and separation of offenders as a key part of training and rehabilitation. As has been pointed out by Rose, the extensive debates on forms of classification at this time were based on a concept of individualisation which posited that if the correct grouping could be established, then the worst influences emanating from the hardened persistent offender could be removed, segregated and diffused.[24] Dartmoor Convict Prison, Parkhurst Prison and the system of preventative detention at Camp Hill Prison, near Parkhurst on the Isle of Wright, were the primary means by which this could be managed, although by the 1930s the most serious offenders were directed to Dartmoor.[25] In this respect, the conclusions of Major Grew, who served as a Governor at

Dartmoor during the 1920s, are interesting. He highlighted a persistent uncertainty surrounding Dartmoor:

> Dartmoor has been under the shadow of its own eventual death penalty for many years. It has had a reprieve in post-war years only because there is a growing need for isolated prisons for persistent criminals. To convert Dartmoor into an up-to-date prison suitable for modern needs would involve fantastic sums of money and perhaps it would be less costly in the long run to pull it down and start all over again. There is an atmosphere of bitterness and despair about Dartmoor that is even more penetrating than its mists. The archaic buildings, the insanitary cell blocks, and the memories that haunt this grim old place cry aloud to be destroyed. Against such an atmosphere the small reforms that I saw introduced and the many that have been made in recent years are as a few drops of rain in a vast Sahara.[26]

Despite such later pessimism there was considerable optimism at the time about a 'new spirit' observed in prison administration.[27] The Howard League welcomed the annual report of the Prison Commission for 1922–23 as of 'first rate importance in the history of Penal Reform in this country'.[28] Yet descriptions of the reforms achieved demonstrate their limitations, especially in the face of limited resources during the depression. In the 1920s the period of initial separation was finally ended and the convict crop and the broad arrow removed from prisoners' dresses, although Dartmoor may have been the last prison where the 'broad arrow' was worn.[29] Provision for visits, shaving and visiting the toilet was improved, as were educational facilities, with an educational advisor being appointed for each prison, although not for Dartmoor.[30] The silence rule was apparently relaxed, although again evidence regarding Dartmoor suggests that this measure was circumvented meaning that men were not punished for talking but for disobeying an order if ordered not to talk. The use of prison visitors was also extended but again this was to prove problematic in a prison as remote as Dartmoor. Other reforms concentrated on the extension of borstals. Efforts were made to increase the availability of productive work, but this was soon affected by Government cuts which reduced demand for prison-made products from government departments so that at Dartmoor cell work was comprised largely of sewing mail bags.[31] Indeed, many of these reforms were not only quite limited generally but did not apply to Dartmoor.

According to Rose, conditions in Dartmoor and Parkhurst improved more slowly than elsewhere and there 'remained a strong underlying feeling that convicts were so brutal and lacking in all vestige of moral decency that attempts at reclamation were bound to fail. Or perhaps it was that the authorities felt themselves bound to be severe'.[32] Hence any claims of reformative progress were problematic, particularly regarding prisons which held more serious offenders. In fact the stated ultimate objectives of the Prison Commissioners were ambitious but also somewhat vague; 'to construct a system of training such as will fit the prisoner to re-enter the world as a citizen', 'the removal of any features of unnecessary degradation in prison life, and the promotion of self-respect'; and finally 'to awaken some sense of responsibility by the gradual and cautious introduction of methods of limited trust'.[33] In any case during the inter-war period the conditions and discipline at Dartmoor Convict Prison remained far below these aspirations.

To reconstruct the aetiology, events and impact of a riot about which so much evidence remains is a complex and labour-intensive task. In order to attempt to recognise the relative importance given to particular issues at the time this book is structured so that each chapter considers the riot from differing trajectories or perspectives. One disadvantage with this approach is that it has resulted in some reiteration of evidence and issues which are important to more than one perspective. However, such reiteration has served to emphasise effectively and from different angles crucial aspects of evidence and discussion on the riot and to fully explore its consequences. For example, this is the case with the role and influence assigned in multiple primary sources and indeed later secondary material to a small number of serious offenders held in Dartmoor, referred to variously as 'motor bandits' and 'gangsters' and perceived as representing a new, more threatening kind of criminal.

Chapter 2 focuses on the outbreak and scrutinises the process of the riot and what the events can say about the culture and conditions in the prison. It then goes on to assess the riot by making extensive use of the transcripts from the trial of the Dartmoor defendants, and highlights areas of contention. Broader economic contents and their repercussions on discipline in Dartmoor Prison are also considered. Chapter 3 begins with a consideration of the significance of one individual who has been seen as the leading light of inter-war penal reform efforts, Alexander Paterson. This chapter not only reviews his, in many ways, remarkable career but also suggests that post the Dartmoor riot, his influence, particularly on the Du Parcq Inquiry, resulted in debate on the riot being

closed down so as to head off any challenges to reformative penal policy for which he had worked for so long. In that sense the *Du Parcq Report* can be seen as a form of crisis management intended primarily for public consumption. Various lines of investigation were followed in the Du Parcq inquiry, but there was greater focus on two main subjects: the behaviour and credentials of the Governor, Mr Stanley Norton Roberts, and the presence and influence of certain inmates. Following the publication of the Report, it became more difficult for observers and critics to broaden culpability for the riot beyond these narrow themes, to include recent reforms, reformers or the political administration which was seen to support them.

Chapter 4 deals with the newsprint media responses to the riot. The context of intense press competition and a circulation war[34] heightened the value of the large-scale riot in Dartmoor as press property. This was a story guaranteed to attract public interest not only because it was an explosive and unusual occurrence but also because it momentarily opened out for public scrutiny a notorious and penal institution. However, for the most part there was little challenge from the press to the narrative constructed by the *Du Parcq Report*, which was largely accepted as an accurate and successful investigation of the riot. Therefore the riot was largely put down to reasons specific to Dartmoor, especially its inmates, avoiding the conclusion that its troubles were systemic. Chapter 5 concentrates on the small group of inmates which attracted much attention after the riot. Their activities prior to the riot may well have contributed to the destabilisation of the prison regime, but it is questionable whether they were responsible for the outbreak in the sense that they planned and directed the disturbance from the outset. Nevertheless, the assigning of culpability for the riot to them served to shift attention from the prison regime and contemporary penal policy to the dangerousness of the inmates. This also constructed a relatively simple narrative which was accessible and attractive to the media. Chapter 6 offers an examination of methodology – a microhistory. This approach has enabled a more narrative form of writing style to be used which will hopefully open out this book to wider public interest. Personal experience can be given greater priority in order for the perspective to be more grounded, and in that respect more concrete, bringing the subjects of the narrative closer. However subjects and indeed events, such as the ones explored here, must also be located within the multiple layers and dimensions of social experience, layers and dimensions which not only elicit differing perspectives but also interrelate and overlap in significant ways.

# 2

# The Dartmoor Convict Prison Riot, 1932: Wild Happenings on the Moor

No major historical event occurs in isolation. Even though this chapter seeks to focus closely and directly on the prison riot that broke out in Dartmoor Convict Prison on Sunday 24 January 1932, to restrict examination to the events of the riot itself would be so limiting as to distort and possibly mislead. Large-scale prison disturbances, such as a riot, have contexts, precursors or triggers as well as repercussions which help to illuminate the individual, institutional and social tensions which compose the backdrop to the main event. In the days immediately before the Dartmoor riot, one harrowing assault best illustrates some of the elements within the prison's internal interpersonal relationships and cultures which served to increase tension and insecurity. Indeed, a prison doctor at Dartmoor was later to suggest that the assault intensified the existing strained atmosphere in the prison.[1]

## Events before the riot

The victim of the serious assault which occurred in Dartmoor Prison on the Friday before the riot was Prison Officer Ernest Birch, a man with 29 years service. His testimony to the CID investigation following the riot gives his perspective on the incident. This CID investigation was conducted as part of the prosecution of 33 Dartmoor convicts for their part in the riot or in two cases for assaults that occurred just before the riot. The brutal assault by convict 341 Davis resulted in Birch being hospitalised until 6 February so that he was actually absent from the prison on the day of the riot while Davis was in the punishment cells awaiting adjudication. A chaplain at Dartmoor later claimed that the injuries sustained were so severe that they ended the officer's prison service career.[2] The assault was witnessed by many prisoners but none

attempted to intervene. In his testimony taken on 8 February, Officer Birch describes the assault on him as follows:

> I collected the Party [of convicts] from the parade at 1-40 pm and marched them to the exercise ground, between the twine shed and C. Hall. I was alone and gave the order to those who wished to closet [toilet] to break off and the remainder to circle around. Those who wished to closet broke off and went to closet. I heard a lot of talking coming from there and went to see where it was coming from. As I did so, someone jumped up on my back and said, 'Take that you f—ing bastard. I'll murder you.' I managed to break away and found that the person was 341 Davis, otherwise Spiegles, and that I had been slashed and was bleeding from both cheeks. I drew my baton and struck the prisoner. Officers East and Russell came to my assistance and he was overpowered.[3]

Officers' East and Russell gave similar testimonies including a description of Davis's weapon which was 'a safety razor blade half of which was in the split of a piece of wood about six to eight inches long. The blade was securely bound to the wood with pieces of mail bag thread and about half of the blade protruded from the end whilst the edges of the other half of the blade were sticking out from each side of the stick'.[4]

However, at the trial before which this assault was heard a rather different account was given by another convict, Ibbesson, who was due to be tried for his part in the riot. The following quote is taken from coverage of the trial in the *Manchester Guardian* on 28 April 1932:

> 'I saw Officer Birch catch hold of Davis by the shoulder,' he said, 'and give him a tug. I could see no reason why he should have done that. Davis turned on the officer and his hand flashed up, but I did not realise what had happened until I saw the blood on the officer's face. Officer Birch drew his stick and made a blow at Davis, who stepped back. Two other officers rushed up. Davis was hit once on the back of the head by Officer Birch. That blow knocked him down and two other officers hit him while he was on the ground with their truncheons. Altogether Davis was stuck three times. All the other prisoners shouted out, "stop that. He has had enough." The officers then dragged Davis away.'

According to Ibbesson, safety razors were used for betting purposes in the prison and to settle debts between prisoners, so they were often

carried around in their pockets, although this does not explain why one might be tied into a piece of wood long enough to act as a handle. Another inmate, who was not a defendant in the trial of the Dartmoor rioters, gave evidence that he had known dozens of similar instruments made in the prison suggesting that a climate existed in which inmates felt the need to carry some form of ready protection. In further convict testimony it was implied that Officer Birch and Davis had not been on good terms and that Birch had a reputation for discriminating against individual convicts.[5]

There was no doubt that a serious assault had been committed. Therefore, discussion in court concentrated on intent. Davis's defence lawyer maintained that while Davis did have a 'grudge' against Officer Birch, the attack was 'an impulsive act without any premeditation' in response to Birch's behaviour described as 'vindictive' and 'malevolent'. In a trial which was held immediately before the main Assize trial of the Dartmoor prisoners charged with offences relating to the riot, Davis was sentenced to 12 years penal servitude. This was in addition to the ten-year sentence he was already serving for wounding with intent to do grievous bodily harm. At his sentencing the Judge stated the seriousness of the case and asserted to Davis that 'you yourself said that you intended to mark the man whom you attacked, and to mark him for life'.[6]

In the Judge's summing up he reminded the jury that they were not trying any prison officers, 'Still less are we engaged on any sort of inquiry into the prison administration of this country in general or of the administration of Dartmoor Prison in particular'. This approach was to be maintained for the main trial of the rest of the Dartmoor defendants which sat from 28 April to 13 May 1932 at an estimated total cost of £4000.[7] It was an approach which placed the onus of investigating the causes of the riot solely on the Du Parcq Inquiry which was established immediately after the riot in order to 'hold an inquiry into the whole of the circumstances connected with the recent disorder at Dartmoor Convict Prison'.[8]

Other events during the run up to the riot reveal more about the internal environment and tensions within the prison. Clearly prison officers made use of informants from amongst the prisoners. One informant helped to uncover various materials intended for use in an escape attempt in which two other convicts, Jackson alias Robb and Wilson alias Sparks, were implicated and for which they were sent to the punishment cells to await adjudication. A Deputy Prison Governor in Dartmoor in the late 1920s was later to confirm this strategy of using informants

was commonplace and asserted that many 'escape plots were nipped in the bud before they became dangerous, mainly because of the informer, or "grass" as he is called among the prisoners'.[9] One favoured means of 'shopping' a fellow prisoner was 'to write the information on a piece of paper and post it with one's mail in the normal way. All mail was read by the censor and no information was allowed to pass without careful investigation. In this way, a man was exposed without even he or the authorities knowing who had informed on him'.[10]

The inmate informing on Jackson and Sparks was probably Ernest Collins who, after the riot, applied unsuccessfully to the Prison Commission for remission as a reward for information about escape attempts given to the Governor and for remaining loyal during the riot. Apparently, Collins had received remission on two previous unspecified occasions for information given to the police. On this occasion, his request was denied because it was felt that he had done nothing of merit during the riot .[11] In addition, he was probably not the only informer. During the testimony of Dartmoor's Governor, Roberts, at the Assize trial he stated that in the six months prior to the riot there had been 'numerous' preparations made to escape and two attempts, and that '[r]opes and coshes, and a jemmy and skeleton keys' had been 'discovered in various parts of the prison'.[12]

Collins was liberated on licence at the end of January 1933 but within sixteen months he had received a further sentence of five year's penal servitude and was returned to Dartmoor. Ironically, in October 1934 he was one of two convicts who escaped. While at large these men committed a robbery during which they hit a van driver on the head with an iron bar. For that offence Collins was sentenced to serve a further three years penal servitude and to 12 strokes of the cat.[13] On 27 November 1934 Collins tragically hanged himself in Dartmoor Prison, apparently due to his fears of being flogged, although a letter left to his sister and read out during the coroner's hearing suggested he was an unstable and troubled man.

> The strain has now finished off my heart. It was sad before, and I feel if I live through the beating I would die before all the years go by, for I have felt very sharp pains over my heart to just below the shoulder at left at back. My head goes just like a clock before it strikes, and I shake awful then .... The policeman in my head keeps lashing me every night .... My head is awful with all this worry .... I cannot rest or sleep. Keep staring up feeling the lash across my body. My mind is in agony. God help me.[14]

Certainly convict informers in prison ran a considerable risk of retribution from other inmates should their activities become known. As a Deputy Governor noted about informers during his service in Dartmoor during the late 1920s: 'If once discovered by his fellow-prisoners "the grass" leads a most miserable life, for he is shunned by the prisoners and often goes about in fear of an attack. At one time a favourite means of "doing" an informer was to trip him off the stairs of an upper landing or over the sides of the rails, while the officer's attention was diverted elsewhere'.[15]

On the Friday before the riot in Dartmoor, the same day as the assault against Officer Birch, complaints were received by the Governor about the porridge and other food served in the prison so that on several occasions thereafter alternative food was given. According to the Governor, the porridge had been 'tampered with' and this problem persisted into the day of the riot. The day before the riot, Saturday 23 January, there had been some noise from convicts banging on their cell doors but chapel was ordered to proceed as normal albeit a little later than usual. Governor Roberts addressed inmates in the chapel and received a hostile reception. Convicts whistled and shouted until he managed to get them to listen regarding the steps he was taking to address the problems with the porridge. Later, the chaplain observed that the tension was 'bowstring-taut'.[16]

Roberts communicated the problems he was having to the Home Office. In his evidence to the Du Parcq Inquiry he stated that on the day before the riot he spoke to Major Lamb at the Prison Commission and advised, 'I am sorry to have to say there is a state of grave unrest in the Prison and I should be glad if you would allow me to call in the Police if it is considered necessary'. According to Roberts, Major Lamb said – 'Yes, but only in case of absolute necessity'.[17] Of course, 'absolute necessity' is difficult to judge and calling the police was likely to attract considerable public and political attention. Roberts may well have been aware when he did call for reinforcements that he was in effect preparing to abdicate. Assistant Prison Commissioner, Colonel Turner, arrived that same evening from London to lend assistance. On that Saturday, Roberts also rang Mr Wilson, Chief Constable of the City of Plymouth Police Force, and Major Morris, Chief Constable of Devon, to alert them to the possibility that he may have to call upon them should serious trouble break out. Major Morris, who was also a previous Governor of Dartmoor Prison, arranged to come out to the prison the following day.[18]

## The outbreak

In the early hours of Sunday morning the men in the prison were very noisy and in uproar although that simmered down after breakfast. However, a controversial incident then occurred which was a direct result of the unrest in the cells that morning. This was an alleged assault on Prison Officer Udy by a convict called Brown but which some convicts seem to have believed to have been an assault upon a convict called Cunningham. In his evidence to the Du Parcq Inquiry, Arthur Cunningham maintains that he was removed from his cell but that he went quietly and was not treated brutally as was later rumoured.[19] In Prison Officer Udy's evidence, he states that on that Sunday morning he was ordered to remove a prisoner, Brown, from Hall B2 for causing a disturbance. Brown had refused to come out of his cell and shouted, 'You come in and fucking well get me'. Udy went in and placed his hand on Brown's shoulder. 'He had a safety razor blade on a short piece of stick, and he struck at me. He just missed my right wrist'. He jumped back out of the cell and called for help. Udy stated that he opened the door again and following a brief verbal exchange, 'I drew my staff and made a play at the hand he had the razor blade in. As he went backward and forward, the Officer who was behind me gave him a tap on the head, and he was stunned. He gave no yell and made no sound. He was carried to the hospital'.[20]

The evidence given by other prison officers is more confused, for instance about whether Brown had one or two razor blades during the violence. However, according to Officer Udy some of the inmates had mistakenly thought the convict he had struck in defence was Cunningham, who was variously referred to as 'barmy' or 'a little simple'.[21] However, in his evidence to the Dartmoor trial reported in *The Times* 18 March 1932, Udy appears to suggest that some confrontation involving Cunningham also took place. Certainly, an alleged assault on Cunningham by prison officers was cited by convicts during the Dartmoor trial as a trigger or catalyst or as one newspaper claimed, as the 'signal' causing the main riot that day.[22] There is little direct evidence that the riot was organised, but rumours about this incident depicted as an assault on a vulnerable inmate were a significant aspect of the climate which led to the outbreak of the riot. One of the Dartmoor defendants during the trial asserted:

> having been knocked about myself, and on previous occasions ill-treated, or I consider ill-treated, and the urging of the mob about the

> man who had been knocked about, I felt it my duty as a man to stand by my fellow prisoners.[23]

The nature of this 'assault' could largely have been the noise of the confrontation between Brown and several prison officers reverberating around the tense environment of the prison as suggested by Colonel Turner in his evidence to the Du Parcq Inquiry.[24] But there is also some controversy about the nature of the confrontation between Officer Udy and Brown with convict evidence at the trial suggesting unwarranted brutality against prisoners.[25] As with the assault on Officer Birch, this case was also tried separately, after the main trial of the Dartmoor defendants. Reports in *The Times* reveal that David Brown was a traveller and relatively young at 24 years of age. He was charged with attempting to wound or cause grievous bodily harm. Unfortunately, there is little information on the basis of the verdict, but surprisingly Brown was not found guilty; the verdict alone suggests serious questioning not only of the evidence but also of the integrity of the prison officers involved.[26] The CID described this verdict as a 'moral victory on the part of the convicts' brought about because the jury had believed the evidence of convicts, 'who as can be understood did not hesitate to deny the evidence for the prosecution in what appeared to be a straightforward, simple case'.[27] Clearly, the jury did not perceive the case to be straightforward.

So a series of incidents in the run up to the riot suggests a tense environment in which accusations of brutality against prisoners persisted and at least one serious assault was carried out on prison officers. Accusations of brutality undermined the legitimacy of authority within the prison and degraded the quality of the relationships which maintained that authority. In such an environment the decision on the Sunday morning to allow prisoners to go on parade was a crucial one which placed most of the inmates simultaneously in the open and in association. This was not the kind of lockdown policy with inmates individually secured in their cells that might be expected if a serious breakdown in order was thought to be imminent. Indeed the decision to allow parade to go ahead appears contradictory in the light of Roberts's report to the Prison Commission of 'grave unrest' and the Prison Commission's decision to send Colonel Turner to support Roberts.

One conclusion is that although a level of unrest and instability was recognised, it was not thought sufficiently serious to break out into open rioting. Large-scale riots in English penal history have been rare and despite conjecture afterwards about the Dartmoor riot being planned

it seems unlikely that the scale of the riot which occurred was premeditated. As one contemporary journalistic account contended: 'the dimensions of the outbreak astonished even the mutineers'.[28] Once the riot had begun, it had an unpredictable and forceful momentum. However, there is another important point to be made. Governor Roberts recognised the seriousness of the unrest but felt it was most likely that trouble would show itself in chapel rather than on the parade ground where, according to Colonel Turner, previous unspecified disturbances had always failed. According to Turner, Roberts was anxious to identify those whom he felt were leading the trouble and thought that during a 'demonstration' in chapel they might 'give themselves away'. Turner is quite explicit, 'It never crossed our minds that it would happen on the parade ground' all the 'plans we laid were for a row in Chapel'.[29] This may have been accepted wisdom at the time since a previous governor, Major Morris, stated to the Du Parcq Inquiry that '[o]n parade we have a greater number of warders. If we expect trouble on a Sunday morning, we should lay our plans for trouble in the chapel and not on parade.'[30] The chapel was clearly the traditional and accepted scene for disorder to occur, which was described by Du Parcq as a 'curious fact'.[31]

One factor about which there can be no doubt is the seriousness of the Dartmoor riot not only in the context of penal history but also for a Government struggling to cope in the depths of economic recession. From about 6 am on the morning of 24 January 1932, prisoners began to shout and bang on their cell doors creating so much noise that it could be heard from outside the walls of the prison. After a while and following the removal of two convicts, Cunningham and Brown, from their cells the decision was made by the Governor and Assistant Commissioner Turner to allow exercise on the parade grounds to go ahead. During exercise, at about 9.20 am or possibly a little earlier an amorphous group of around 40 convicts broke from their ranks. They raced around the other parade grounds accumulating further prisoners until an estimated 150 or more inmates were out of control. Very quickly all semblance of prison discipline collapsed. The prisoners seized effective but chaotic control of the prison for about an hour and a half. Extensive physical damage was done to the prison, especially the central offices, and personal and official records were intentionally set alight. Reinforcements from Plymouth police force were needed to re-establish control and armed force was used when they, with the assistance of prison officers backing them up, retook the prison in the face of no organised resistance.[32]

The situation within the prison became serious very quickly. Shortly after the riot began, two officers were each given a message to deliver to the main gate, duplicates prepared the previous day. The Governor and his deputy were soon forced to flee the Governor's office, but in any case the messages were not necessary as on seeing trouble break out the officer at the gate telephoned Plymouth for assistance. This Officer, Dowse, stated to the Du Parcq Inquiry that when he arrived on duty at about 9.20 am that morning, he saw the seriousness of the situation and, without authority, rang Plymouth Police and then Crownhill Barracks. He did receive the two notes from inside the prison but whilst he was actually telephoning.[33]

The force of numbers was on the prisoners' side and the breakdown of order so substantial that little constructive action appears to have been taken to reassemble the groups on parade once in disarray. When asked what was done to prevent prisoners breaking ranks, one officer admitted 'there was a general commotion on the parade: I cannot say that any attempt was made to stop them'.[34] According to the *Du Parcq Report*, 'The whole of the staff appeared to be split up into small parties of ones and twos and were unable to deal with the men'.[35] Predictably a more critical perspective of this came from a convict although not one who was imprisoned in Dartmoor. Nevertheless, it suggests the manner in which the scene may have become depicted among inmates in the prison system. In his well-known and politicised account of his prison experiences, Wilfred Macartney asserts that the only time prison officers 'stuck together . . . was when, at the beginning of the Dartmoor mutiny, they fled in a terrified bunch through the prison gates to safety'.[36]

However when prisoners broke ranks and ran, officers got as many as possible of those remaining on the parade grounds, and willing to be shepherded, into the halls.[37] In one instance, prisoners once in their hall refused to be locked back in their cells because they feared what would happen if rioters entered.[38] Once inside Hall B2 officers took a roll call which amounted to 75 names, but this was taken only after about half an hour. In court it was admitted that some prisoners could have come into the hall after the roll was taken and also that there may have been some inmates on the second floor not included in the count.[39] On at least two occasions, officers took prisoners to halls but had been unable to gain access. One gave evidence that he and a fellow officer had taken 15 prisoners from the kitchen where they were working but could not get into Hall B, 'We could not take them anywhere; we could not get into the hall, so we left them there'.[40]

Many officers were making their way to the main gate during the riot. Similarly, some prisoners also made their way to the main gate but saw officers with carbines and turned back.[41] Additional prison officers were brought in for duty but were given little support or direction, as one noted 'I was simply ushered into the main gate and told to get on with it.... It was perfectly hopeless to do anything' [and] 'I had my own self to look after'.[42] No record was kept of officers retreating to the guardroom at the prison gate or of officers to whom guns, Enfield Sniders, were issued there.[43] These weapons were usually carried by officers guarding outside working parties or when hunting for escapees.[44] According to the Deputy Governor, Alfred Richards, soon after prisoners began running from the parade grounds they gathered in front of the central buildings. It was later claimed by defendants at the trial that this was intended to form a demonstration to the Governor. Seeing the men gathering, Richards telephoned the main gate giving instructions for ten officers armed with rifles, to position themselves at the gate. He also ordered all available officers to the prison to help restore order but not to enter. He was certain that had officers attempted to enter the prison and use violence against inmates they 'would have been overpowered with loss of life. The Officers were scattered in ones and twos, and the men were in 40s and 50s.'[45] It was this order that seems to have been followed, although it may have been similar to that contained in the messages sent by the Governor. Chief Officer Smale also claimed to have given a similar order when things were 'getting ugly'; he apparently stipulated that there should be 'as many men as possible' at the gates with carbines. Additionally, however, he detailed that a number of these armed officers should keep out of sight for strategic purposes. 'These officers were to be kept out of sight and if anything happened they could be rushed out quickly'. According to the officer at the gate, Dowse, who arrived on duty at about 9.20 am, officers with carbines were already posted on the outside gates.[46]

Thus, overwhelmed by concerted and aggressive action by a large number of prisoners, the routines and organisation of the prison quickly fell apart and the primary strategy became to maintain perimeter security. The seeming powerlessness of officers was itself given as a rationale why some individual defendants had done nothing to prevent violence. A prisoner asserted, 'Why should I stay in the kitchen when my own Officers ran to the front gate. I think I was entitled to run. The two Officers in charge did not even stay there to protect us'.[47] In a similar vein, another claimed that as officers had lost control, his priority was his own safety because:

> like a sailor on a sinking ship – the officers had lost control – I had the right to look after myself . . . I saw the whole place afire, and it was not in my power to do anything with it. I was like the officers. If they cannot do anything, I could not do anything.[48]

The basic unfolding of the riot, its general geographies, destructiveness and chaos were not in dispute at the trial, it was individual behaviour and motivation that were scrutinised primarily and in the court arena versions of events and their meaning were contested. Indeed, one facet of prisoner testimony represented the riot not as violent and threatening but as more of a carnival of liberties, crossing and breaking boundaries, driven by the enjoyment of freedom from the rigours of penal restraint and long hours in cells but without the established rituals evident in carnivals in outside society.[49] It was, as a prisoner observed, 'rather exciting that day'. When one inmate was released by others from the separate cells he was told: 'You never saw such a sight in your life; all the screws have guyed [run]'. Opportunities were taken to have a 'feed' from the kitchen – 'I had two raw eggs, a rice pudding, a pint of milk, and some bread and cheese', one said, 'Then the band came up, and we were dancing in couples outside the smoking shed'. A lawyer interjected: 'Luncheon and dancing afterwards?'.[50]

Cigarettes were looted from the officers' mess providing an abundance of a usually scarce and valued commodity. In a few cases cigarettes were even offered by prisoners to prison officers. However, only one member of prison staff, Dr Battiscombe, is on record as feeling able to freely accept a cigarette. Indeed, convicts chaperoned him when he walked across the prison to treat a man who had been shot. During this journey, convict John Jackson (alias Alexander Robb), said to him: 'You appear to be the only one among the staff with any spunk in him', 'Oh rubbish, Jackson' was the reply 'they would not hurt me, I am a doctor'.[51] Evidently, unlike the main grade officers, he was perceived more as a 'non-combatant' than as part of the disciplinarian authority of the prison. Certainly in his evidence to the Du Parcq Inquiry, Dr Battiscombe stated: '[p]ersonally the men have always been decent to me and I have never had any trouble from any of them'.[52]

## The trial and legal procedure

With respect to more violent incidents, the destructive and riotous behaviour the trial had been set up to examine, the consequences of a guilty verdict underpinned the evidence of each defendant and, of

course, the jury knew full well that those in the dock were already criminals due to the nature of the trial and its surrounding publicity. In the courtroom, prisoners looked smart in their civilian clothing and were orderly but sat in rows with a prison officer at either end and other officers at intervals between the men.[53] Moreover, while prisoners had succeeded in obtaining permission to wear civilian clothes in court, to aid identification large numbered cards (1–31) were hung above the head of each defendant. The consequences of not guilty verdicts would have had a serious impact on the credibility of prison staff and indeed of the prison authorities, whose reputation and careers were at stake in this very public trial. Amongst other things the importance of the trial was signalled by the position of foreman of the Grand Jury being taken by Sir Archibold Bodkin, former Director of Public Prosecutions who had retired to Devon and Sir Boyd Merriman KC MP, the Solicitor General who prosecuted for the Crown.[54] Some officers were on the defensive, 'It has been suggested that I disappeared', observed one, 'but I disappeared in the right direction – to my exercise ground',[55] and some were uncooperative. The CID noted that some officers were not good under cross-examination but put this down to 'the fact that most of them have never given evidence before'.[56] However, in his evidence to the Du Parcq Inquiry, Deputy Governor, Richards, admitted it was 'difficult' to get officers to report on one another due to a 'feeling of loyalty'.[57]

The perceived loyalty of prisoners also became an important issue during the trial; specifically the extent to which prisoners had remained 'loyal' in some way to authority rather than indulging in the chaotic atmosphere of the riot. Interpreting the behaviour of some of the prisoners in the midst of the riot as loyal impacted on the perceived culpability of individuals and on identification of those individuals against whom legal action was taken. The Du Parcq inquiry into the causes of the mutiny made use of a structure of culpability offered by the prison doctor, Battiscombe, which was accepted because it derived from what was seen as an expert and professional source. In the aftermath of the riot he categorised prisoners into five groups.

1. 'The absolutely loyal', who went into halls.
2. 'Loyal men who remained outside'.
3. 'Men who remained out partly from curiosity, partly through intimidation, partly mischief, but were against violence'.
4. Men who joined in with enthusiasm, 'probably very active in destruction'.
5. 'Finally – the real vicious brutes who were definitely out for blood'.

A rather less defined classification was given to the Du Parcq inquiry by an inmate, Donovan. He observed that the actual 'mob', the 'real serious ones' numbered about 50 men with 'a certain number behind egging them on' making the total about 150 men.[58]

In some respects, in the midst of a prison riot it is the conduct of those who do not take part that is more difficult to understand. A journalist later surmised that the prisoners on the parade grounds who remained loyal did so because they were 'timid, or the more thoughtful section, convinced of the futility of the outbreak, or determined not to forfeit their release when, within short periods, their sentences expire'.[59] However, as far as can be determined, there appears to have been no correlation between length of sentence or period left to serve and involvement in the riot. The defendants at the Dartmoor trial were serving a range of sentence lengths and had various periods left to serve. As with Dartmoor's inmate population as a whole, about half of these defendants were serving the minimum penal servitude sentence of three years. Since the late nineteenth century sentence lengths given by the courts had been shortening. According to Edwin Sutherland, in the convict system sentence lengths were reduced from an average of 6.5 years in 1880 to 5.3 years in 1893 and 3.8 years in 1930.[60]

Prisoners who returned to and remained in Hall B with officers and had their names listed on the roll were the most straightforward to designate as 'loyal' prisoners. During the riot, convicts outside the hall shouted 'blacklegs' and 'yellowmen'.[61] The term 'loyal' was interpreted as submissive, even emasculating, by John Jackson, who defended himself at the trial and was therefore the most direct and loudest voice among the defendants:

> I do not claim to be a nice boy, a good prisoner – I do claim to be a man, and I should fear that it would be thrown in my face that I was a loyal prisoner – loyal to my thin porridge and plank bed. Was ever such a phrase coined before – loyal prisoner![62]

Indeed, the rioting itself seems to have occasionally been depicted as manly, courageous rebellion. In his evidence to the Du Parcq inquiry, Prison Officer, Rowland Kelly, stated that two prisoners on his parade ground ran to join other rioters shouting: 'Come on boys, they are fucking men. We are not if we stop here' and many others joined them.[63]

John Jackson was articulate in his criticism of several aspects of the Dartmoor regime:

> When we are sentenced to penal servitude, the object – the rightful object – is to segregate us from our fellow men. We were not sentenced to be deliberately badgered into insanity and killed with bad food; and when I say bad food I do not mean distasteful food, I mean food unfit for human consumption, in many cases. Nineteen hours in the cells, and the prison system which makes it a crime for one convict to say 'good morning' to another. Those are the things which drive men to revolt.[64]

Certainly the grievances about the quality of the food at Dartmoor, and not just the porridge, arose in convict evidence to the Du Parcq Inquiry. One convict, Edward O'Donnell, described the food as 'nothing but cold messes'.[65] By airing such grievances and recriminations in court, the defence were trying to elicit sympathy even though the causes of the riot were not under judgement.

In the aftermath of the riot, evidence was accumulated not only regarding active participation in the riot but also about 'loyal' convicts who provided assistance to prison staff during the disturbance, often at risk to themselves. The prison authorities were cautious and required corroborative statements from prison staff before accepting the claims of prisoners about their fidelity. Assistance from prisoners ranged from hospital orderlies giving aid to casualties arriving at the prison hospital, men employed in the officers' mess who helped to collect stock and cash and put ladders, ropes and so on in a place of safety to hiding an officer in the boiler house. After this latter act the prisoner concerned asked to be transferred from Dartmoor as he had been threatened by other men. One convict, Graham, who had helped an officer get away from a 'mob' which had him 'to the ground', according to that officer 'received a severe beating for it which put him in hospital'.[66] Remission of their sentence was received by some of these men, for example three months for one of the men employed in the officers' mess. Following the riot this man, Garrity, had been transferred to Manchester at his own request as a result of alleged intimidation.[67]

Some of these 'loyal' convicts became marked men victimised in Dartmoor and in Parkhurst where many Dartmoor convicts were later sent. One convict who had been in Parkhurst asserted: 'It is going to take a long time before the part played by these convicts who were "loyal" during the mutiny is forgotten'; they became 'marked men'. Due to threats made against him one convict, who received six months remission for his role in helping prison authorities during the outbreak, was held in the punishment cells when he was transferred to

Parkhurst. According to this account, another informant from Dartmoor was attacked and seriously wounded by one of the Dartmoor defendants sent there.[68]

Decisions on remission of sentence for those convicts accepted as 'loyal' were based on two considerations: 'the value of the services rendered' and 'the risk at which such services were rendered'. No attention was paid to length of sentence being served or the seriousness of the crime for which they had been convicted. Indeed the inmate who was recommended to receive the greatest remission had the longest sentence of any convict in the prison. George Thomas Donovan had been given the death sentence for murder at Lewes Assize in July 1928 which had been commuted to penal servitude for life.[69] For his part in the riot and, in particular, the help he gave to Colonel Turner when he was vulnerable to attack by convicts, his sentence was to be treated as though it was 15 years penal servitude meaning that with good conduct he would be able to earn release after 11¼years. Fifteen prisoners were given periods of remission for their 'meritorious conduct' during the riot, most were awarded three months but five men received six months. A further ten men were released on licence, but no information is given on what period was remaining of their sentence.[70] Final decisions on remission were left pending until after the trial of the Dartmoor defendants, in case evidence in the court threw light on the men's conduct. In addition, some of these men were to be called as witnesses. The Prison Commission intimated that the delay was important so it would 'not be possible for anyone to say that they have been influenced by the prospect of reward'.[71] Alternatively, convict witnesses for the prosecution would have realised that their testimony was under scrutiny and could affect their prospects of remission.

Loyal convicts were not the only people in Dartmoor at the time of the riot who were afterwards threatened and intimidated. Although it has become almost a truism to state that the voice of the prisoner has been lost to history, research has begun to tackle that deficit. Historically, the voice of the prison officer has probably been even quieter. According to the family of one of the prison officers serving at the prison during the riot, he suffered intimidation afterwards so he was transferred by order of the prison authorities to Lewes Prison, Sussex.[72] This man, Prison Officer Traske, Engineer Officer Class 1 and Foreman of the Works, may well have been one of the first to open fire among the officers defending the perimeter of the prison. Prisoners may have believed, as does his family, that while defending the prison's perimeter Traske shot Mitchell, an inmate, in the throat causing him to fall off the roof of a building.

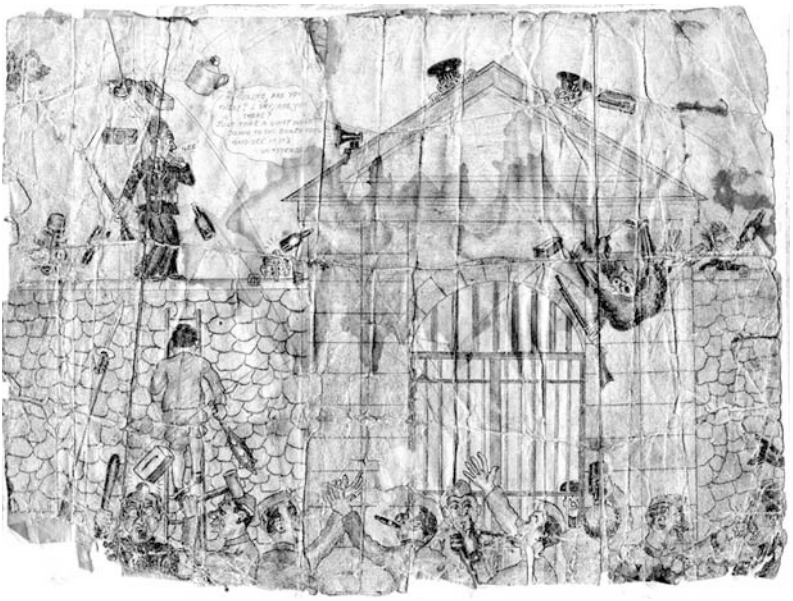

*Figure 2.1* Scan of sketch of the Dartmoor riot drawn on toilet paper by a Dartmoor convict after the outbreak

*Source:* Reproduced by kind permission of the family of Mrs Foukes, the daughter of Prison Officer Traske. He was one of the officers serving at Dartmoor Prison in January 1932.

Mitchell was the person most seriously injured during the riot which left him partially paralysed. Due to his position at Dartmoor, Officer Traske wore a collar and tie with his uniform which made him clearly recognisable. Traske is also the only officer named in a sketch of the riot by a convict which was discovered and preserved after the disturbance (see Figure 2.1). The speech balloon on the sketch calls out to Officer Traske: 'ARE YOU THERE, I SAY ARE YOU THERE?' According to Traske's evidence at the trial of the Dartmoor defendants, immediately after the riot he was asked by the Chief of the Fire Brigade to accompany him to help put the fire out, but he refused because he felt it was unsafe for him to go into the prison. He did, however, enter the prison once the prisoners had been rounded up.[73] Thereafter whenever he entered an area in which there were convicts they would rise to a man, pick up stools or chairs and wave them at him and shout threats.[74]

The difficulties of determining individual loyalties, movements and culpability were recognised by the judge at the trial of the Dartmoor defendants. In his summing up, Justice Finlay[75] explained carefully that

a man 'may physically be in a crowd, one may accidentally get into a crowd, and yet one may be taking no part in the crowd or in its designs', that he could be 'among them, but not of them'. 'On the other hand, if there is a crowd, and if that crowd is demolishing a building riotously, then anyone who is present there and who is co-operating with the general object of that crowd, is guilty'. It followed, therefore, that a defendant could form part of a crowd that damaged or destroyed buildings and be guilty of destruction even if he did not actually assist with his own hands. In effect, it was necessary for the defence to prove that their clients were not part of the motive force of the rioting. Several convicts claimed that they were caught up in crowds and swept along. In one case, an officer and prisoner both agreed that a small group of prisoners was swept along by the 'mob'. Other prisoners said they just followed the crowd because they didn't know what else to do. According to one, when others broke ranks, he 'did not want to go for a minute, but seeing a lot go naturally I got mixed up and I did not know where to go, so I went where most of them went'. This raises the issue of choice in an institution holding men serving long-term sentences and used to following orders. The disciplinary vacuum, chaos and momentum of crowds of men must have been compelling. Prisoners not in a crowd at the outset of trouble were in a situation more favourable to choice. Not all convicts released from the separate cells chose to leave; at least one deliberately remained in his cell and two others did not go outside the block.[76]

The initial location of the convicts and their movements throughout the riot were influential to the way events and individual roles were presented, perceived and judged in the court. Repeatedly, questions from both prosecution and defence, as well as testimony given, suggested that the smokers' shed and the yard next to it were the places where people kept out of the way and in some cases were left or told to go by officers. But during the riot individuals came and went freely from this area making such movements an important part of courtroom debates and leaving open to question the definition of this as a space for 'loyal' prisoners. This was discussed in a later journalistic account of the trial which observed that the smokers' shed and yard became a rendezvous not only for men who wanted to play no part in the riot but also for those 'who want to see all that is to be seen, perhaps have a hand in it, and yet from time to time keep in touch with the loyalists, so that they, too, when the time comes, may be classed as loyalists'.[77] Therefore this was liminal space during the riot. However, conflict between prisoners affected the use of this space. One defendant claimed that he could not go to

the smokers' shed because another prisoner, Boxer Brown, 'a man with whom I had personally had words' was there. Boxer Brown had a reputation amongst prisoners as dangerous, one officer noted: 'he knocked some of them [prisoners] out, and I suppose that was their ground'. Also, there was 'a bit of a disturbance in the smokers' hut; there were two people wanted to fight about one or two things between themselves there'. Despite the fact that location was an important part of post-riot deliberations on guilt, it was a highly problematic guide and the court took little or no cognisance of the impact of conflict between prisoners.[78]

When the convicts helped officers or were violent towards them, issues of power, responsibility and interpretation were raised. There is no doubt that threatening, aggressive and violent language and behaviour were used against staff, although usually vehemently denied or interpreted in a different light by the prisoners in court. Officers were accused convincingly by convicts of conspiring, referred to by one prisoner as supporting the 'fraternity and brotherhood of the officers' and collaborating over their evidence in the immediate aftermath of the riot.[79] These accusations were rarely commented on by the Judge and received no mention in his summing up so that no allowance was made by him for the possible impact of pre-existing internal cultures in the prison. However, while Dartmoor was often depicted as an unforgiving and brutal environment, paradoxically it was also depicted as one which encouraged and even nurtured 'comradeship' between officers and convicts and in which prisoners, apart from the 'really depraved', had a sense of fair play. In his evidence to the Du Parcq inquiry, Major Morris, Governor of the prison until March 1931 and Deputy Governor between 1923 and 1926, observed that Dartmoor was 'entirely different from other places':

> There is the isolation of this place, and the great depression of the fog, and that forms some peculiar sense of comradeship between the Officers and prisoners. There has been fraternising with the wrong type of offender. The best type of Officer knows exactly where to stop, and he is the Officer who is respected by the convict .... It would really be true to say that there was comradie [sic] between the warders and convicts the same as between Sergeants and Colonels in the Army when on an isolated station.[80]

Another perspective on this would be that Dartmoor Convict Prison was an unpopular location for both the officers and convicts so that they shared a sense of stoic masculine toughness and respect for the rigors

of the harsh discipline and climate which was further embedded by the isolation.

Courtroom scrutiny crystallised around violent behaviour and it was clear that sentences would be affected by conclusions about this. Nevertheless, while testimonies of prisoners and prison staff suggest considerable animosity and aggression, including assaults, they also highlighted cooperation between inmates and officers and even some 'friendly feeling'. Officer Hinds remarked that near the Governor's office, he saw Prisoner Greenhow, who said to him: 'Don't you go over there', 'I made a move as if to go in from where the smashing was', and he said: 'Don't you go over there, you will get killed'.[81] In a few cases, prisoners put their own safety at risk for officers. One officer explained:

> Three men got in between us and told us to run for it – we took their advice. The mob followed us throwing stones. We came up the drive and the officers at the gate covered us with their rifles . . . I had to leave the loyal men to themselves. I was thinking of myself then.[82]

Officer Kelly was struck with pick shafts and knocked to the ground by two inmates, Bullows and Conning, but another convict shouted to leave him alone; 'he has been with us all the morning; he is all right', further prisoners then got in the way of Kelly's attackers enabling him to escape.[83] Officer Kelly also later wrote a letter attesting to the behaviour of prisoner Graham who came to his assistance and showed 'pluck and courage' when a mob of prisoners had him on the ground. Graham managed to get him away from them and as a result received a 'severe beating' which put him in hospital.[84] Convicts also argued amongst themselves at such times, in one incident it appears two prisoners, later identified as being members of the same London gang, averted violence. Officers Palmer and Milton were both in the school office when it was broken into and prisoner John Jackson screamed: 'Mr Palmer, you get outside'. An argument ensued between the convicts whether to let the officers go because 'they are not so bad' or to 'do the bastards in' – it was settled by an order from prisoner Ruby Sparks, whose real name according to his police record was John Wilson, 'All right, you two, you get outside then'. The officers stated in court that they believed Sparks saved their lives.[85]

In the aftermath of the Dartmoor riot, a special assize trial was set up at Princetown, the village adjoining the prison, to try those identified as prominent or ringleaders.[86] Home Office and Prison Commission officials were extremely interested in prosecution, and it was felt that

'action of a markedly deterrent character was called for'.[87] Two main courses were open to achieve that end, to treat the rioting as intenal breaches of discipline with the likely consequence of a long series of corporal punishments or to bring criminal proceedings against those identified as ring leaders and, as was later admitted, award exemplary sentences.[88] The Home Office and Prison Commission chose the latter option. In part this reflected the direction of penal policy at that time, as one Home Office noted later, there was a feeling that prisons should be run on 'moral not physical force'.[89] This perspective could also be seen in contemporary debates on capital punishment. According to Victor Bailey the peak of the inter-war abolitionist campaign had been reached in October 1929 with the first full-scale debate in the House of Commons on the abolition of the death penalty. This led to the appointment of the *Select Committee on Capital Punishment* which reported in 1930. Although the Labour majority on the Committee proposed the total suspension of capital punishment for a trial period of five years, there was criticism that the report did not reflect the views of its members and the Labour Government, until it fell in August 1931, consistently refused to grant Commons time to the discussion of the report. Nevertheless, between 1930 and 1939 there was an average of only 8.2 executions per year.[90]

Certainly, there was no widespread call in the popular press for the use of corporal punishment against the Dartmoor 'mutineers'. With regard to a forthcoming prison governors' conference, Alexander Maxwell, the Chair of the Prison Commission, questioned in September 1931 whether 'the time has yet come when we can get rid of corporal punishment, or, whether at any rate we cannot so reduce the number of cases that corporal punishment may come to be a weapon held in reserve but hardly ever used', his rationale being that it was a form of punishment which contrasted 'violently with the general spirit of our methods'.[91] However, in the post-Dartmoor riot climate, the mood among prison governors was defensive and at their conference in June 1932 they were unanimous that corporal punishment should be retained albeit limited to the most serious assaults on officers. Abolition, it was felt, might increase the anxiety of prison officers and thereby precipitate violence.[92]

The decision was also influenced by pressure from outside of the Prison Service and the Home Office. The Howard League lobbied on the subject and has generally been seen as having a major influence on inter-war penal reform.[93] A letter dated 17 February 1932 from Cicely Craven, Secretary of the Howard League, to the Home Secretary, Herbert Samuel, accepted that the Home Office must 'protect the prison staff

in the fulfilment of their duty' but reaffirmed their belief that 'flogging, while it may deter some from violence, causes more evil than it prevents'.[94] In Parliament, on 23 March 1932, MP Buchanan observed about the Dartmoor convicts that 'it may be that their character is indefensible; but the worse they are . . . the more defenceless they are, and, therefore, the greater is the need to see that you are fairer with them than you would be with anyone else'.[95]

Aside from Thomas Davis, who was charged with wounding with intent to murder, and David Brown, who was charged but found not guilty of attempting to wound (the former immediately before and the latter immediately after the main trial), the remaining 31 inmates against whom criminal proceedings were brought were charged as follows:

> FOR THAT THEY on the 24th day of January 1932 at Princetown in the County of Devon being riotously and tumultuously assembled together to the disturbance of the public peace feloniously unlawfully and with force did demolish pull down or destroy or begin to demolish pull down or destroy a building devoted to public use or erected or maintained by public contribution. Contrary to Section II of the Malicious Damage Act 1861.[96]

Additional charges were brought against certain individuals. Eight men, including Jackson and Sparks, were charged with setting fire to a public building: contrary to Section 5 of the Malicious Damage Act, 1861.[97] Thomas Bullows and Joseph Conning were also charged with assault occasioning bodily harm and Thomas Bullows with wounding with intent.[98]

Prisoners deemed to have committed less serious offences in relation to the riot were dealt with internally by the Board of Visitors. In discussions about the punishment options available under this form of adjudication there was a major problem. The Board of Visitors could mete out punishment up to and including corporal punishment, but this option was not open to the criminal court before which those perceived to have committed more serious offences in relation to the riot would be judged. This was highlighted in a letter of 25 February from the Prison Commission to the Chairman of the Board of Visitors:

> Under the Statutory Rules the Board have power to order corporal punishment for any prisoners who are found guilty of mutiny or incitement to mutiny, but the Board will, no doubt, recognise that

> special considerations are raised by the fact that the convicts who took leading parts in the riot are to be prosecuted and that the Court has no power to order corporal punishment for persons found guilty of riot or arson. In these circumstances it would on general grounds of equity and public policy be undesirable that corporal punishment should be ordered for those convicts who are to be brought before the Board of Visitors because their offences appear to be less serious than those of the convicts who are to be prosecuted.[99]

To make sure that the Board adhered to this guidance, a copy of this letter was also forwarded to the new Governor of Dartmoor, Major Pannall[100] with the emphasis that:

> [i]f there is any hesitation on the part of the Board of Visitors in recognising the force of the considerations set out in this official letter, will you please inform the Chairman that you understand that in the opinion of the Home Secretary the considerations set out in that letter are so strong that the Home Secretary would be unable to confirm orders for corporal punishment if such orders should be made by the Board.[101]

Thus, should the Board be so wrong-headed as to go against the 'advice' of the Prison Commission, any sentence of corporal punishment which required the approval of the Prison Commission before it could be carried out would be withheld.

Delays in informing prisoners of the nature of the charges against them caused tension, especially as all of those against whom charges of any kind were to be proffered were held in close confinement, resulting in what the Medical Officer described as 'mental strain' expressing itself in complaints, talking from windows and singing. These cases were not dealt with until the end of February or early March; even then adjudication by the Board of Visitors of the final cases was delayed until mid-March due to a suicide attempt by Cunningham and four prison officers being on the sick list. Twenty-one men in total were brought before the Board of Visitors; charges against eight of these men were dismissed. An example of the kind of charges brought include, against ten men, that they did: 'feloniously rob Albert George Wilkins of a packet of tobacco and a carton of cigarettes, CONTRARY to section 23 (1) (a) of the Larceny Act, 1916'.[102]

For the 31 prisoners charged with more serious offences relating to the outbreak, riot was defined in court as requiring 'the presence of not

less than three persons' with a 'common purpose' in that they had a purpose which had induced them to assemble. Riot was also defined as including intent for rioters to help one another against opposition, by force if necessary, and finally that force or violence should have alarmed 'at least one person of reasonable firmness'.[103] Twenty-three of the Dartmoor Defendants were found guilty of offences related to the riot and received exemplary sentences totalling over 99 years. Sentences ranged from ten years for James Ibbesson and Joseph Conning to six months for Sydney Tappenden and William Gardener. Crucially, emphasis was placed in court on determination of a 'common purpose' in terms of outcomes carried out 'in common' rather than the legitimacy of any purpose which may have led prisoners to assemble in the first place. Concentration was upon damage caused and violence used rather than prisoners' justification for rioting. In its journal, the Howard League asserted that it was 'appalled at the Princetown sentences'.[104]

The Dartmoor defendants were allowed legal aid under the Poor Prisoners Defence Act 1930 and facilities for preparation of their defence. Following preliminary hearings in March they had been committed for trial at the next Exeter Assizes, although because of the particular circumstances of these cases and security considerations a special Assize was held at Princetown, the small town where the prison was located. The attendance of the prisoners at court was clearly crucial and care was taken to ensure this. The new Governor of Dartmoor, Major Pannall, was instructed that even if one of the convicts was taken ill 'he must attend at Court unless the Medical Officer is of the opinion that such attendance may seriously endanger his life'.[105] In the run up to the trial, Dr Battiscombe reported in a memo to the Prison Commission that on his orders the defendants had been supplied with cigarettes for their 'nervous tension'. Sedatives were also given although it is not made clear which ones were employed or to which prisoners they were given. However, Battiscombe explains that in his opinion: 'quite a number of the accused men would have become definitely unstable, mentally, had not cigarettes and other sedative treatment been employed'. He also reports that some of the men went on hunger strike 'for a day or two'; one man persisted but was expected to give up very soon. The only explanation given for such behaviour was that the defendants were 'nervous and excited'.[106] In the event all the defendants appeared for trial, although Gardener pleaded guilty to riotous malicious damage and was not required to sit through the whole trial.

There may have been attempts to undermine the credibility of the defence. One of the defence lawyers, James, who represented 23 of those

in the dock was instructed on behalf of the Prison Reform Society, a society condemned by the CID as 'a more or less bogus concern' and described in Parliament as 'not a reputable body'.[107] This assertion seems to have been largely on the basis of an individual, Cecil Baines, who claimed to have connections with the Prison Reform Society. According to Chief Inspector Howell, CID enquiries had been made about Baines (real name William Jackson) and revealed that he had ten previous convictions for fraud and was suspected of 'trying to get hold of young women for immoral purposes'. He was identified as a persistent 'reformer', 'rogue and penman'.[108] In a letter from the Prison Governor at Dartmoor, Pannall, to the Prison Commissioners it was asserted that the appearance of Mr James and also another lawyer from Arthur Dabbs & Co had caused disruption. Arthur Dabbs & Co had made arrangements with convicts Davis, Brown, Jackson and Sparks and sent letters offering services to other Dartmoor convicts awaiting trial, some of the letters were returned without reaching the defendants concerned. Major Pannall claimed that until some prisoners discovered that they had not received these letters they had been 'perfectly content' with the solicitor designated to them following their application for legal aid. It was decided that prisoners should be allowed to instruct another solicitor but that did not include those employed by the Prison Reform Society; an aim that was clearly not achieved.[109] In further instructions to the Governor from the Prison Commissioners regarding 'VISITS OF SOLICITORS', he was advised:

> Please report immediately if any Solicitor or Barrister purporting to act on behalf of the Prison Reform Society calls at the prison. You should not, however, refuse facilities to any such person provided the convict or convicts in question have not otherwise provided for their Defence and have expressed a wish to see them.[110]

A handwritten note preserved with the memo on this subject observes that 'Touting' by solicitors cannot be permitted: 'the first move should come from the convict'.[111]

Such controversy surrounding the Prison Reform Society extended to the barrister, James's, defence which, it was implied by the police, amounted largely to politically motivated 'criticism of, and attacks upon, the Prison System'.[112] The Prison Commission was wary, especially over the issue of defence solicitor's interviewing and taking statements from prisoners whom the accused wish to call in evidence. In such circumstances it was determined that prisoners could see the

solicitor in the sight of, but out of the hearing of, a prison officer. One reason for this measure, which was seen as generous, was to limit as far as possible any grounds for complaint by the defence, especially that working for the Prison Reform Society:

> It is clear from the character of the Society which has made itself responsible for the defence of these men, that every possible attack will be made on the Prison Authorities, and it therefore is particularly desirable, in my view, that full opportunity should be afforded to the Solicitors preparing the defence, as, if for no other reason, by doing so, they will be deprived of the opportunity of magnifying the matter into a serious grievance.[113]

During the assize trial, several defendants made allegations of staff brutality. However, as Justice Finlay reminded the jury repeatedly, they were there to judge the prisoners and not the prison administration. He reiterated in his summing up: 'it matters not, from our point of view, whether the Prison administration is good or bad, whether there are reforms which might advisedly be made in it, or whether, with reference to Dartmoor in particular, there were things done which ought not to have been done'. He further added, 'the history of the previous few months at Dartmoor … becomes of little importance'.[114] Indeed Justice Finlay admitted, the case he had to judge lay 'within a very narrow compass' constituted by the charges laid against defendants in particular that they:

> being riotously assembled together to the disturbance of the Public peace by force demolished or destroyed or began to demolish or destroy certain buildings, to wit, offices and other buildings belonging to the King or devoted to Public use or erected or maintained by Public contribution.

Despite this 'narrow compass', defendants claimed their actions, at least initially, were a non-violent protest to the Governor.[115] Several convict testimonies described a general culture of staff brutality, lack of confidence in the complaints systems and inadequate food.[116] One stated that having fought against brutality 'on active service for four years', he had a 'right to fight against it in His Majesty's Prison'. Defendant John Jackson asserted that those who made repeated complaints were victimised and accused Governor Roberts of encouraging quarrelling and informing among prisoners.[117]

Therefore, protest by prisoners was depicted in their defence as legitimate in the face of what was perceived to be illegitimate treatment by prison staff, including the Governor. One asserted that prison officers were:

> at liberty to do whatever they please. They take the law into their own hands. When a Prisoner is apprehended or reported, before he is taken to the Governor he has to go through a certain amount of punishment in addition to what he receives from the Governor . . . On many occasions, if he shows the slightest opposition they enter his cell and use their truncheons on him.[118]

There certainly had been a history of informal punishments being meted out to returned escapees in the separate or punishment cells, and during the Du Parcq Inquiry it was described as 'a place with its own traditions'.[119] A description of the punishment cells in a journalistic account from the period left the reader in no doubt as to what the reporter believed had been occurring: 'there are really no lights at all. There is a kind of box within a box, apparently to prevent other prisoners knowing what is happening when the warders come in to mishandle you'.[120]

Major Morris, a man with considerable experience in the prison service, including as Governor at Dartmoor Convict Prison, was defensive about the use of force by prison officers but recognised the impact it could have. He confirmed that when an officer had occasion to hit a convict in self-defence or to prevent escape, it caused resentment among prisoners.[121] One of Dartmoor's doctors, Battiscombe, interpreted such practice in a more nuanced and carefully phrased manner. When asked about brutality in the prison, he remarked that there was not more violence than 'you would expect in an excitable lot of men' and denied that there had been an increase under the recently appointed Governor. However, the doctor accepted that the perspective on incidents differed between prisoners and prison staff:

> Down in the Separate Cells [where men were sent for punishment], if there has been a fight with an officer, the truncheons are used. Of course, the men do not call it a fight. The officers call it a fight.[122]

Despite such accusation being made, the nature of the charges brought and explicit instructions of the presiding judge meant that defendants were judged only in terms of damage caused and violence used. Evidence

of alleged illegal practices and provocation within the prison prior to the riot was not part of the narrow remit of the trial. Nevertheless, the defence still tried to influence the jury and possibly attract press coverage by questioning the legitimacy of the system prevailing in Dartmoor Prison before the riot and by highlighting its perceived deficiencies and injustices. However, because allegations of improper practices at the prison before the riot were largely left unexplored, this has inevitably impacted upon the level of certainty that can be given to such testimonies.

## The aftermath

Sentencing of those Dartmoor defendants found guilty in the Princetown courtroom took place on Friday 13 May 1932. Each man was brought to the dock and sentenced separately; this was in part so that the prisoners did not know the judgements made on the other defendants. Following receipt of their sentence, the prisoners were divided into small batches and distributed nationally to a number of different prisons although the intention ultimately was to gradually absorb all or most of them back into either Parkhurst, the only other prison in England specifically designated for recidivist convicts, or Dartmoor. The eight defendants found not guilty were also dispersed. Dartmoor's Governor was ordered to arrange with the stationmaster at Exeter to have a complete coach with at least six compartments ready on a siding where prisoners could be held waiting for their train to arrive. Extra police were also ordered to cover roads around the station.[123]

In addition to this dispersal of the Dartmoor defendants, there had been an earlier stage of transfers on 23 March 1932 of 16 convicts described as 'troublesome'. This was following a disturbance at Dartmoor Prison on 20 March when some convicts refused to return to their cells at the proper time and requested to be allowed to talk at exercise. Governor Pannall went into the Hall and ordered the men to return to their cells; they then obeyed but were given dietary punishment for their initial disobedience[124] Eight of these men were among those who had already been taken before the Board of Visitors for internal adjudication on their actions during the riot.

The reasons for dispersal of the Dartmoor defendants in this way was to discourage any further communications between inmates to attempt to break up any existing gangs and also, it was intimated, to deprive the convicts of visits by locating them at some distance from their homes. By the end of 1932, most of the convicts appear to have been transferred

back to either Dartmoor or Parkhurst.[125] A minority experienced multiple transfers. For example, McDonald was dispersed from Dartmoor to Manchester and from there to Liverpool and then to Oxford. Following some trouble at Parkhurst, those Dartmoor men transferred there after the riot or via an intermediate transfer were warned that 'in the event of trouble' they would be transferred to a local prison.[126]

In the aftermath of the riot, the *Du Parcq Report* asserted explicitly that the direction penal policy had taken over the previous decade or so was not to blame for the disturbance. There is much to question about this report (see Chapter 3), but its conclusion that penal reform in Dartmoor was not the primary cause of the prison's instability is supported by other evidence. If anything it was the lack of reforms in Dartmoor that merited consideration by Du Parcq. Whether news of reforms introduced at other prisons, quite widely and effectively publicised by the Prison Commission, had an impact on the atmosphere at Dartmoor is an important issue, but as far as Dartmoor itself was concerned, change came very slowly.[127] For example, in the late 1920s, the no talking rule still held sway at the prison. According to one Governor's account 'Eyes to the front . . . was still the order of the day, and at work, at exercise and elsewhere prisoners mechanically turned their heads away from each other to avoid being accused of talking'.[128] During the late 1920s there was some relaxation of this, although only in the workshops, and there was a great deal of room for interpretation and discretion by prison officers. It remained possible for an offender to be reported for disobeying the order to stop talking when ordered to do so. As ex-Dartmoor Governor, Major Grew, observed, the Home Office was aware of the 'ambiguity' surrounding the supposed relaxation of the no talking rule and 'the fact that the "spirit of the law" was not really being put into in effect in certain prisons'.[129] Therefore, despite assertions by the Prison Commission, communications between prisoners at Dartmoor and elsewhere continued to be restricted. Discussing his own incarceration during the inter-war years, ex-convict and Irish Nationalist Jim Phelan stated:

> No man was punished for talking in all my time in the English jails: it was illegal to punish people for such acts. What happened was that a man spoke, a warder told him to stop, he spoke again, and was reported: not for talking, but for disobeying an order.[130]

A Dartmoor convict's statement to the Du Parcq Inquiry made a similar point that part of the problem at Dartmoor was not the talking but the checking for talking.[131]

Several sources suggest that reform moved slowly at Dartmoor, and official and public perception of the nature of its population may have ensured that implementation was slower than at some other prisons where the inmates were seen as more redeemable. Rose suggests that there was little significant change in either Dartmoor or Parkhurst during the 1920s. Indeed, the position at Dartmoor may have become relatively worse as, for example, its isolation inhibited the involvement of civilian prison visitors at the prison. Prison visits were instigated at Dartmoor by Toc H at Tavistock and the Rotary Club at Plymouth but not before 1927 and these appear to have been curtailed by 1932. A similar situation existed with regard to educational classes.[132]

In 1926 prisoners in Dartmoor still wore the broad arrow convict dress. Although this was abolished at the prison in the following few years, this was a gradual process 'because as the new grey uniforms were issued at other prisoners the discarded ones were sent to Dartmoor to wear out their service'.[133] Convicts at Dartmoor were then the last in the country to wear the broad arrow.[134] Incarcerated within Dartmoor Convict Prison were the most hardened, recidivist offenders and the contemporary view from the prison service as well as many prison reformers was that they should be treated firmly because they had proven themselves incapable of redemption and in order to prevent the prison authorities as being seen as weak.[135] One ex-Dartmoor inmate observed, '[n]o waste words, No chances, No pseudo trust. That is and was the Moor' and the 'code of progress, humanitarianism, reform and modernization [was] …so much waste paper'.[136] Some criminals less inured in crime could be reasoned with but others were 'past it all, and upon whom efforts [would] be wasted'. For many in the prison service such inmates were already taking advantage of the 'new movement'.[137]

In reality, the vision of inter-war penal reform promoted by individuals such as Prison Commissioner Alexander Paterson, which included well-ordered prisons with training workshops and industries, well-stocked libraries and educational lectures, prison visits from individuals who might also help to re-establish individuals once their sentence was served and more refined, effective classification was fragmented in its implementation and under-funded. Furthermore, it was a policy direction that was not pursued or necessarily thought to be as appropriate for Dartmoor as compared to other prisons. After the riot the Howard League discussed the prison commenting that the isolation of Dartmoor made reform difficult.[138] One ex-Dartmoor convict claimed in March 1932 that inmates at the prison were confined to their cells for all meals, experienced an effective working day of only five hours and spent about

16 hours per day in total in their cells.[139] Cicely Craven, Secretary of the Howard League, concurred with this view. During a discussion in the *Saturday Review* instigated by the riot she asserted that

> Constructive reform . . . has not failed at Dartmoor; it has scarcely been tried. I understand that only about a third of the total number of inmates have received visits from unofficial visitors or attended classes. Stagnation and idleness of body and mind are the curse of Dartmoor. The men spend from 18 to 19 hours a day in their cells, the cell task is a joke, and on wet or foggy days, which are frequent, the men of the outdoor parties lounge about powdering stone with hammers or listlessly pulling over the fibre of old mattresses.[140]

In many respects Dartmoor's regime at this time benefited little from reform that concentrated on younger and less-hardened offenders and it maintained tough sub-cultures among both staff and prisoners. These serious problems were exacerbated by the new Governor, Stanley Norton Roberts, who arrived at Dartmoor in April 1931. Roberts reduced the flexibility of prisoners to change their work details and, according to one ex-convict's account, curtailed educational classes and visits.[141] There was also an accusation that he had increased the use of the punishment cells.[142]

In addition, Dartmoor suffered from a problem that was often complained of by the Prison Commission. As with much of the prison estate Dartmoor had been constructed, or rather renovated, during the nineteenth century within philosophies which emphasised silence and separation. Thus the discipline, management and administration of Dartmoor were confined within systems and routines developed a century before and into a building that was even more archaic. This presented architectural, administrative and philosophical problems. On this broad issue, groups which were often in contention with one another shared at least some agreement. One contributor to the *Prison Officers' Magazine* observed rather vaguely in March 1929: '[w]e have made the mistake of reforming within the existing order of things, instead of tackling the root of the problem, we should have pulled out the old foundation and built on new'.[143] Reformers expressed similar frustrations about older frameworks that were perceived to be obstacles to progress. For example, A Fenner Brockway, one of the authors of the major enquiry into prisons published as *English Prisons Today* (1922), was later to assert that 'reformative effort as is taking place within our prisons is still based on wrong premises, it is using the old system

with ameliorative features added'.[144] One ex-Governor commented acerbically that reform was being attempted within limits imposed by a prison system that was 'itself the prisoner of a civilization that knows no better and would not pay the total bill for it if it did'.[145] At the same time prisoner autobiographies denounced public complacency over the state of prisons fuelled by 'official pronouncements that the system marches steadily forward from reform to reform'.[146] Criticisms, even by supporters of reform, revealed that many adult prisons remained too large with little constructive labour, little developed from the nineteenth century and in some cases with worse sanitation.[147] Nevertheless, Alexander Paterson, a prominent and influential member of the Prison Commission, was optimistic about what could be achieved and had the support of successive Prison Commission Chairmen and Home Secretaries.

Faced with practical difficulties, considerable reliance was placed upon prison staff whose 'personality and spirit', it was asserted, overcame 'the anachronism of century-old buildings'.[148] However, this reliance had a flavour of naivety, determined optimism or disingenuousness when considered in relation to the opinions being voiced in the pages of the *Prison Officers' Magazine* and in statements made by prison officers at Dartmoor. Following the Dartmoor riot, the *Daily Express* (29 January 1932) quoted an officer there as saying: 'Here in Dartmoor we have under our charge the worst scum of humanity – men who are beasts mentally and physically, and yet we have to be kind to them'.[149] The bland assurances coming from the Prison Commission and prison reformers caused resentment and even frustration among prison officers which was sometimes interpreted as uncooperative self-interest, lack of commitment to reform and resistance to modernisation.[150] Articles in the *Prison Officers' Magazine* indicate not only the existence of an ethos of duty and fairness but also fears that reforms were undermining discipline and 'pampering' prisoners. Prison Officers complained about their difficult and harassing job and insufficient pay.[151] Pay cuts and fears of job losses undoubtedly lowered morale at Dartmoor where service was unpopular and isolated on the Devonshire moor and where, according to the *Du Parcq Report*, officers under suspicion of offences at other prisons may have been sent.[152] In his evidence to the Du Parcq Inquiry, Prison Officer Lamb asserted that service at Dartmoor Prison was 'regarded as a great punishment' and that the 'surroundings and place' were 'terrible'.[153]

The administration of Dartmoor was vulnerable to structural changes wrought by national economic problems, declining inmate numbers and emphasis on younger and more reformable offenders. Twenty-nine

of a total of 56 prisons had been closed since 1914 and Dartmoor was, according to the Home Secretary, an 'exceptionally expensive' prison to run.[154] From autumn 1931, economy measures meant that prison officers leaving the service were not replaced which, due to falling staff numbers, resulted in reductions in hours that prisoners spent in associated labour. Economies in government departments also meant a decline in demand for prison made goods. Inmates were not only spending more time working in their cells but this comprised largely sewing mailbags for the General Post Office. At the same time Chelmsford Prison was reopened specifically for younger convicts, not more than 30 years old, re-routed from Dartmoor.[155] Furthermore, from November 1931 men sentenced to terms of penal servitude, not exceeding three years, were to serve their sentences in local prisons. It was envisaged through these policies that more room could be made at Parkhurst to transfer further convicts from Dartmoor.[156] Cumulatively these developments added up to significant reductions in the inmate population of Dartmoor Prison and there had been no new admissions since 19 November 1931. During a visit to the prison by the Home Secretary, Herbert Samuel, on 31 December 1931 he felt it necessary to state explicitly to the press: 'My visit has nothing to do with reports that have been circulated about the possibility of Dartmoor Prison being closed', although he did not deny that closure was being considered.[157] On 24 January 1932, the day of the riot, there were 442 inmates in a prison that had 935 cells.

Some convicts in Dartmoor blamed discontent among prison officers for the riot. During a preliminary hearing a piece of paper was thrown to the press gallery the contents of which, much to the chagrin of the Prison Commission, were reported in the *Western Evening Herald* (22 March 1932). This claimed that rumours of staff reductions some 'four or five months back' had made officers intolerant so they goaded prisoners into mutiny. The report asserted that because Dartmoor Prison was vital as a local employer so this conflict constituted 'a bread-and-butter war'.[158] The note, according to the report, claimed that prisoners had been making reasonable demands and that Mitchell, the man shot off the roof of a prison building, 'was shot whilst trying to get in touch with the public and not in an attempt to escape.' One official source believed that the note had been thrown by a convict named Mullins and that its publication by the *Western Evening Herald* probably constituted contempt of court. Although the incident was brought to the attention of the Director of Public Prosecutions action was not considered warranted.[159]

## Conclusions

An examination of the major riot that occurred in Dartmoor Convict Prison on 24 January 1932 reveals the complexity of attempts to construct a post-event diagnosis of its causal and exacerbating factors. What is clear is that such an examination must operate at multiple levels and over a significantly longer term than the immediate outbreak and duration of the disturbance. This analysis emphasises the value of microhistory to look at the issues in close-up and to lend the individual personalities and decision-making real texture. Sparks et al. have highlighted the importance of individual prison environments and the extent to which they are legitimate in explaining why disorder occurs. They suggest: 'the nature, level, and intensity of the "control problems" that do emerge in different prisons at particular times can, in our view, usually only be properly understood in terms of pre-existing relationships, conflicts, and accommodations embedded in the routine practices of each prison'.[160] This examination has highlighted the importance of the history and image of Dartmoor Prison and its inmates, the economic context, government cuts and their effects on prison regimes as well as the pay and morale of prison officers. Other important factors were the tough internal culture of Dartmoor, the build-up of prisoners' grievances and the arrival of a Governor who tightened up some aspects of the discipline. However, none of these factors were considered at the main assize trial of the Dartmoor defendants for their part in the disturbance. Prosecution of the Dartmoor defendants was based on post-riot interpretation of behaviour in the face of contested evidence. Convicts did commit assaults and destroy records and the fabric of the prison but defendants were disadvantaged by their status in court as criminals. The trial was asserted in one journalistic account to be 'in accord with the dignity and scrupulous fairness of English justice' and to have treated the convicts 'as ordinary citizens facing an accusation in court for the first time'.[161] Yet, the judge placed little credibility on challenges to prison officers' evidence and was unwilling to consider the impact of pre-riot prison sub-cultures. Post-riot emphasis was placed on the role of a small number of criminals of the 'motor-bandit class' that were present inside Dartmoor and the gangs believed to perpetrate many of these kinds of offences. Placing much of the blame on such criminals operated to dissipate pressure on the prison authorities and the Government and to undermine calls for a change in the direction of penal policy.

The riot itself was a major event in English prison history and probably the largest outbreak since that which occurred in Chatham Convict Prison in 1861. As such it posed a challenge to the direction of penal policy and those in the Prison Commission who directed it. A full exposure of the circumstances surrounding the riot would also have posed a threat. So the Du Parcq Inquiry into the causes of the riot (the focus of Chapter 3) and the assize trial of the Dartmoor defendants were designed in large part to close down debate and re-establish the legitimacy of the prison authorities.

# 3

# A Man Seeking Closure: Alexander Paterson, Du Parcq and Inter-war Penal Policy

The Dartmoor Convict Prison riot of 24 January 1932 was a serious blow to the prison authorities and indeed to the Liberal Government of the time. In response to the serious disturbance in Dartmoor Prison, which at a time of economic and political unrest seemed to reflect broader problems, the Government established an investigative inquiry. This chapter will consider the extent to which the inquiry, headed by Herbert Du Parcq, and its consequent report were intended as a form of crisis management and designed primarily for public consumption to allay fears and support the existing prison administration. The report produced by the Du Parcq investigation had a major impact on public opinion about the riot and its causes although the inquiry itself was conducted in private. The conduct of the inquiry attracted a great deal of public interest but the extent to which it could be termed independent was compromised by Prison Commissioner, Alexander Paterson, being one of the two primary investigators. In contrast, the work of the CID in gathering evidence to enable prosecution of rioters, which began immediately after Du Parcq's work, received very little public interest. As has been noted about official inquiries generally, a process of production was undertaken, but it is one of the aims of this chapter to scrutinise not only what was produced but also how and why? The complexity and interpretive nature of this production process has been described as follows:

> Retrospectively formulated accounts are shaped by interpretations, some of which are shared and some of which are contested, by interactions and by the overall purpose of the inquiry, as well as by the personal qualities and professional occupation of the person

> [or persons] leading it. The uncertainties of meaning are lost in the officially organised account . . .[1]

The intangibility of some aspects of this are clear and are, if anything, a greater challenge regarding analysis of inquiries which occurred many decades ago. However, this perspective does highlight the need to unpick statements made and to be alert for contested versions, vested interests and underlying rationales. Ultimately, the formulation of conclusions in such inquiries is a selective and subjective process, but the reductive power of the final report can be compelling and that was certainly the case with the *Du Parcq Report*.

According to John Pratt, the shape of penal power concentrated in the hands of the Prison Commission by the end of the nineteenth century was not seriously questioned or challenged.[2] While the Gladstone Committee (1895) and subsequent legislation in 1898 brought about reform and a shift towards greater humanitarianism, they also operated to close down debate generally. Although the extent of the actual reform achieved is debatable, Pratt's assertion that thereafter and at least until after the Second World War, 'the battle for prison truth was over' is persuasive. Indeed, what the prison authorities said about prisons in the context of the level of expertise they claimed had to a large extent 'become accepted and acceptable discourse on this subject'. This strength was used by the Prison Commission during the difficult period following the Dartmoor riot. According to Pratt, for much of the twentieth century, when scandals emerged 'it would not be of sufficient weight to disturb the equilibrium of the prison establishment . . . nor make existing prison arrangements unduly problematic for most sections of the public'.[3] Nevertheless the seriousness of the Dartmoor Prison riot and the level of public attention it received constituted possibly the greatest challenge to the prison authorities during the first half of the twentieth century. At this key juncture confidence in contemporary reformative discourse on the prison was severely dented. To what extent did this unquestionably serious outbreak affect the stability and equilibrium of the prison authorities or was the strength of the accepted discourse, reflected in the narrative produced by the Du Parcq Inquiry, sufficient to stifle debate and controversy?

On Monday 25 January 1932, the day after the Dartmoor riot, Herbert Du Parcq, Recorder of Bristol, accepted a request to head the Dartmoor inquiry. Its terms of reference were rather broad, to inquire into the 'whole of the circumstances connected with the recent disorder at Dartmoor Convict Prison'.[4] Du Parcq was an experienced silk,

a senior barrister, who was called to the bar in 1906, became recorder of Portsmouth in 1928 and recorder of Bristol the following year. He was described in *The Times* (26 January 1932) as 'one of the leaders of the Western Circuit' who had 'interested himself in prison questions'.[5] His report of the riot suggests that he was aware before arriving at the prison on 25 January that he would be working closely with one of the Prison Commissioners, Alexander Paterson, during the investigation and that Paterson would meet him there. Certainly, some statements had already been taken before Du Parcq's arrival. Although there is no evidence that these two men were friends, it is likely that they were at least on familiar terms. Du Parcq had recently been appointed onto the Committee on Persistent Offenders (reported May 1932), before which Alexander Paterson gave evidence.[6] Both Paterson and Du Parcq had given evidence before the Committee on Capital Punishment in 1930 and in their youth they had served simultaneously as undergraduate officers of the Oxford Union. The Du Parcq investigation was crucial for the Government. The riot not only had caused considerable destruction of government property but it was also was a blow to political and public confidence regarding the direction of penal reform. It provided an opportunity for opponents to claim that the disturbance was the inevitable consequence of misguided leniency towards criminals. There were even calls for the resignation of the Home Secretary, Herbert Samuel. Clearly an experienced, trustworthy, reliable and Liberal hand was required to undertake the inquiry into the disturbance.[7]

There's no evidence that Alexander Paterson had a role in nominating Du Parcq for this position. At about 5 pm on the day following the riot a telephone call informed Dartmoor's Governor of Du Parcq's appointment and he was asked to inform Paterson. The only recorded reason for Du Parcq's appointment was that the Secretary of State decided on that morning it would be 'desirable to arrange for an enquiry by someone not connected with the Home Office'.[8] Du Parcq was an outsider to the Home Office but in recent years had been called upon several times to contribute to Government inquiries on penal matters suggesting that he well may have been perceived as a reliable hand. Claims to independence were undermined, however, by the appointment of Paterson to assist Du Parcq. Paterson arrived at the prison before Du Parcq but on the same day (25 January), interviews by the two men began on 26th and were concluded on 29th January.[9]

A report was published but the investigation was conducted in private and the evidence upon which conclusions were based remained closed.[10] That the inquiry was held in private caused consternation

and objections were voiced from The Independent Labour Party, The Labour Party and the Trades Union Congress.[11] The evidence collected by Du Parcq and Paterson and which informed their conclusions was not opened to the public until 2008 and is not complete. This evidence contains reference to interviews, materials, letters, notes and so on, which are not enclosed in the surviving records. Intriguingly, during his questioning the Governor, Roberts, handed to the inquirers 'certain notes on toilet paper' which were 'found in the grounds', sadly these are not in the file.[12] Further specific deficiencies in the surviving evidence include material relating to the over 50 representations Du Parcq says he received from suspected convicts during the inquiry and a further large number received after it was finished.

The *Du Parcq Report* placed the bulk of the blame for the riot squarely on the shoulders of a small number of prisoners who were identified as particularly dangerous and who had, it was maintained, significant influence over other prisoners. What was known about these men fitted with prevailing fears about motor bandits and organised crime and served to shift blame from recent reforms thereby dissipating pressure on Government and undermining calls for a change in the direction of penal policy. This was the explicit tenor of the *Du Parcq Report* and it was criticised on that basis as well as others. Defending the Report in Parliament, Home Secretary Samuel asserted that the inquiry was established to ascertain the 'facts' but continued, '[w]e must protect the governors and the warders of our prisons in the administration of the very difficult task that devolves upon them'. The prominence of Paterson in the investigation did not go unnoticed. The *Daily Mail* (28 January 1932) commented that his involvement was unfortunate as Paterson was 'himself to some considerable extent responsible for the system in force'. Certainly, Paterson brought to the inquiry not only insider knowledge but also insider interests. The Du Parcq Inquiry served largely to support the existing penal philosophy and practice and to endeavour to close down debate, thereby shoring up the legitimacy of the contemporary prison system. Its main task, as Burton and Carlen have observed with regard to official enquiries in general, was to 're-establish the image of administrative and legal coherence and rationality'.[13]

## Alexander Paterson

Alexander Paterson was, and remains, the individual most identified with inter-war prison reform. His life resonates with the origins, aims

and achievements of a body of influential men at this time with liberal ideas and experience of social work and war service, some of whom became reformers within state institutions. It is, therefore, appropriate in this context to consider his life in some detail in order to understand the influence he had. Although he was never appointed to Chair the Prison Commission he has nonetheless been seen as its driving force in this era. In many respects the Dartmoor riot threatened much of what he had worked for and he had a direct interest in protecting the reforms that had been undertaken by 1932. Praise for Paterson and his work out-weighted criticism from his dissenters, but reform was inevitably paralleled by some criticism even from within the prison service. However, this was often perceived as marginal or the rumbling of outmoded, old school ideals. One prominent example of the flavour of that criticism came from an ex-Governor who published his memoir in 1932 and framed his concerns in two ways. The first bemoaned the decline of discipline which had 'messed' up the best prison system in the world through policies originating in a Prison Commission run by 'impractical idealists'. The second was to cite the lack of service experience as in large part to blame for the state of things, 'There is not at present a single Commissioner who has governed a prison, nor an Assistant Commissioner who has governed for any length of time'.[14]

During his lifetime and since his death in 1947 Alexander Henry Paterson has often been described as a great man.[15] His landmark book, *Across the Bridges or Life by the South London River-side* (1911), was based on 21 years of involvement with the Oxford and Bermondsey Medical Mission (later the Oxford and Bermondsey Boy's Club) begun as an undergraduate at Oxford University. It was reprinted 11 times and influenced, among others, Clement Atlee, Basil Henriques and Stephen Hobhouse.[16] The latter described the publication as, 'the greatest inspiration of my life'. Barclay Baron, friend and co-founder of Toc H, originally a Christian movement for soldiers, with Paterson, said that the book was written 'from the heart and from the head of a man who understood and loved the neglected world he lived in'.[17] In idealist terms, the 'bridge' of the title was claimed to be the bridge to realisation that there was a great need and a bridge that would bear the better off to help those in need.[18] Paterson's dedication to social work was demonstrated by his living for many years among the local community in a dilapidated tenement on the river-side in Bermondsey.[19] His commitment influenced others to also vacate relatively comfortable residence in the various settlement institutions for housing more similar to that

experienced by the poor.[20] That his work gained recognition was evident in his being asked to advise on the Bill that became the 1908 Children's Act, although the social connections of those working at the Bermondsey Mission no doubt facilitated this.[21] In 1909, he was involved in the Central Association for the Aid of Discharged Prisoners and reportedly made a practice of inviting offenders to be guests at his home during their first few days of liberty.[22] In 1911, he became Assistant Director of the organisation and in the same year he was also made Assistant Director of the Borstal Association which was at that time in its infancy.

On active service during the First World War he was awarded the Military Cross and was twice recommended for the Victoria Cross. The serious wounds he received while rescuing a comrade caused him pain for the rest of his life. A memorial to Paterson published after 1960 suggests that during his time in the prison service he once defended himself against an accusation of being a sentimentalist by alluding to his war experience asserting, '[t]o the sight of blood and the sounds of pain . . . I am alas accustomed. In the name of duty I have enforced the shooting of a man in my own Company. For the sake of discipline I did not, on another occasion, waver in sending the best of friends to his death'.[23] Although he left the service as a Captain, he is said to have initially refused a commission in order to join the local territorials with 'his' lads (22nd Battalion of the Queen's) and, according to Barclay Baron, 'carried many a [boys] club member with him'.[24] Post-war he was a founder member of the Toc H movement which promoted values of friendship, public service and social unity and perpetuated the ideals of fellowship developed at Talbot House, a soldier's club in Belgium during the war. He remained a devotee throughout his life and was instrumental in encouraging the involvement of Toc H members as prison visitors and with discharged prisoners.[25]

Paterson was on the Prison System Enquiry Committee which worked to inquire into and report on prison regimes before and during the First World War and which resulted in the publication of *English Prisons Today* (1922).[26] Hobhouse, one of the editors of the publication, admitted that the report was 'expensive and unwieldy' but it was read by Maurice Waller a reformer who took over as Chairman of the Prison Commission in 1922. It was Waller who appointed Paterson to the Commission. Hobhouse's autobiography notes that Paterson supplied material for the section on borstals in the report and his general summation on Paterson is interesting not only because it highlights Paterson's personal

influence but also because it emphasises the considerable practical problems he faced. Paterson was described as:

> the guiding and most beneficent spirit of that powerful body [Prison Commission], revolutionising a large part of prison treatment by substituting educational methods for the rigid and stupid punitive regime and thus bring hope and healing to many thousands of offenders. He would undoubtedly have done more, in spite of the popular prejudice against the 'pampering' of criminals, had not the Treasury and the economic shortages of our time drastically limited the amount of public funds available, especially as regards the provision of qualified staff and the substitution of pleasant and hygienic buildings for the penal grimness of the antiquated cellular penitentiaries that have still to be used.[27]

Perceived as a progressive, Paterson was appointed to the Prison Commission in 1922, the same year much of the criticism of the contemporary prison system was crystallised in *English Prisons Today*.[28] The *Manchester Guardian* surmised that '[p]robably the recent unfortunate incidents at Portland and elsewhere largely account for his appointment', referring no doubt to several escape attempts and one suicide that had occurred soon after Portland became a borstal institution in 1921.[29] Paterson was particularly interested in the Borstal system. He instigated reforms on the model of public schools, which emphasised loyalty, obedience, self-reliance and corporate spirit, self-discipline rather than merely that imposed by authority and enabled the celebrated march to establish Lowdham Grange in 1930. According to an ex-Governor, Paterson had said to him that 'Most bad boys . . . had a measure of goodness if we knew how to find it and if we searched hard enough'.[30]

Paterson is believed by many to have been the dominant influence in the Prison Commission and his time as a Commissioner from 1922 until 1946 has been labelled as the 'Paterson era' or the 'Paterson years'.[31] He has been described as a modernist, and one of the 'greatest prison reformers of all time'.[32] In 1939, criminologist Herman Mannheim referred to Paterson as 'one of the greatest English experts in criminal justice'.[33] Harold Scott, Chairman of the Prison Commission between 1932 and 1938 called Paterson 'one of the most remarkable men I have ever met' who was behind the transformation of imprisonment not only in England but also throughout the world.[34] The focus in this chapter is domestic but Paterson observed and reported on prison systems in Italy,

Belgium, Holland, Burma, North America and the West Indies and visited many more including Devil's Island (Cayenne in French Guiana), Somaliland, Aden, Canada, Malta and Gibraltar.[35] He was the Vice President (1938) then the Acting President (1943) and emeritus President d'Honneur (1946) of the International Penal and Penitentiary Commission from 1938 and was active in the preparation of the Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners for the League of Nations, which were later endorsed by the United Nations.[36] Shortly after the Second World War he was knighted.

Therefore, Alexander Paterson has been eulogised by many, although this has occasionally taken an eccentric turn. For example, one writer said that in the portrait of Paterson at University College by Edward Halliday, he looked 'not unlike a Roman proconsul or emperor reflecting with melancholy disenchantment on the vanity of human life'[37] A more personal and affectionate description of his appearance can be found in the account by an ex-Prison Governor, Major Grew, who first met Paterson in 1922. The meeting was instrumental in Grew's decision to join the prison service:

> The man I shook hands with was of a medium build. He had a kindly face and a most disarming smile. His hair was receding, giving great depth to his already high forehead. His shrewd and penetrating eyes were the eyes of a man of compassion, a man to whom one could appeal and not in vain. I found him as good a listener as he was a talker.[38]

Paterson's reputation, however, was confined largely to the realms of social work and criminal justice. In 1951 the 'impressions of certain great men' by Ronald Selby Wright were broadcast by the BBC and later published in book form. Alexander Paterson was included as one of the six great men of the first half of the twentieth century who were 'not as widely known as they ought to be except within their own sphere of leadership'.[39] This publication claimed that three words, '*Across the Bridges*', summed up Paterson's life's work: 'An outstretched hand of friendship is no bridge unless there is a hand to grasp it. But when Alec Paterson stretched out his hand only a bridge could follow it'.[40]

There is more that could be said but the above establishes his credentials firmly and undeniably as a man of belief, sympathy and energy; characteristics accepted even by his few detractors. There are, of course, comments which could be made with hindsight about his influencing 'his' lads in Bermondsey to join up during the First World War or

his attempt to translate to borstals a model of education and training designed for the sons of the wealthy, in other words to those who would never have similar advantages or life chances. How appropriate was the nurturing of virtues underpinning the continuation of the *status quo* for those at the bottom of the social ladder? How useful was an ethos which was aimed at training boys to become members of a group brought up to guide and even control the work and thought of others?[41] What seems clear is the social value of extending the idealised unquestioning loyalties of the public school to 'a disruptive, challenging and sometimes chaotic section of young male society.'[42] Yet, how did this square with an approach that also aimed to increase the thinking and questioning faculties in borstal boys?[43] Perhaps the answer lies in Paterson's advocacy of a system 'designed to brace and stiffen the soft, the weak and the lazy'.[44] This evinces Paterson's paternalism but does not detract from his commitment or sense of mission since he aimed to rescue the young from wasted, criminal lives and believed in their capacity to make positive decisions. He promoted boys' clubs, the provision of play grounds and open spaces and hostels for hikers. In short the 'provision of means whereby the quick witted lad with restless legs and arms may spend his leisure inexpensively' which he perceived to be a 'saner project than the setting of iron bars in cement for the delinquent of later years'.[45] This motivation was also outlined in *The Principles of the Borstal System* (1932) where the dangers of street corners for 'the idle lad' were emphasised as the beginning of a route to them becoming 'the enemies of society'.[46]

Paterson's beliefs and motivations were rooted in philosophically idealist principles integral to new liberal thought in England where its broad precepts and inspirational tone could be found across voluntary and public organisations.[47] According to Harris, philosophical idealism reached a kind of 'cultural hegemony' during the inter-war period when many social theorists were attracted by its 'altruism', organic community and 'ethical rationality' in which individuals would seek fulfilment in service to society.[48] These ideals gave Paterson and others a vision through which social reconstruction could be attained and active citizenship nurtured; they justified actions in which people and policies 'were the means to the end of attaining perfect justice and creating the ideal state'.[49] Paterson demonstrated his commitment to moral restoration and improvement through voluntary community work and public service within state institutions of various kinds which was also no doubt marked by his experience of war. For Paterson, co-operation between public and voluntary sectors was a key to reform within the prison system, hence his advocacy of prison visiting on an organised and

national basis but with continued emphasis on voluntary and personal influence even within state institutions.[50] The Borstal model exemplified this. As Forsythe has suggested, these institutions 'embodied the faith in paternalism, education, moral and physical development and close personal ties between the classes which was at the heart of the assumptions underlying the new liberalism and the social policies which it spawned'.[51] For some, like Alexander Paterson, this was infused with Christian optimism about the capacity to reshape environments and people.[52] According to Forsythe, Paterson advocated:

> social/group living in which representatives from all the classes would interact with and learn from one another. The ethos would be the pursuit of the noblest of ideas of moral example, self-sacrifice, endurance for the good of the group, leadership, and the harnessing of everyone's human energy in pursuit of intellectual, moral, physical, and spiritual excellence.[53]

The other side of this argument has been highlighted by Bailey who notes that 'the insistence on individual responsibility invigorated the classical philosophy'. In other words, this philosophy 'reinstated retribution as the key justification for punishment'.[54]

Paterson's experience and credentials meant that he was well able to wield his influence in efforts to manage any political fall-out in the aftermath of the Dartmoor Prison Riot of 24 January 1932. The Dartmoor riot has been referred to as 'the greatest crisis' which 'the Commissioners, staff, and reformers ever faced.'[55] Confronted with such a challenge, Paterson must have been keen to defend his achievements and preserve the direction of penal reform for a greater objective. Idealist philosophy emphasised a greater focus on the ends; the good of society, justice and the State, rather than the means. One method of doing that was to frame the narrative of the riot in particular ways. Ultimately, the conclusions of the investigation into the causes of the Dartmoor riot which were published in the *Du Parcq Report* helped to ensure that prison reform continued in the direction already being pursued.

## Investigation

Herbert Du Parcq was instructed to 'try and find out the cause of the trouble', but although the terms of reference appear to be broad in fact the circumstances dictated some important constraints. As was later to be observed in Parliament, it was expected that Du Parcq's report would

be 'followed by judicial and disciplinary proceedings' so the purpose of Du Parcq's investigation was not to try the cases of the rioters. The same must also have been true regarding any corrupt behaviour by prison officers. Therefore, on the one hand Du Parcq had to tread carefully not to implicate any officers or indeed to undermine the authority of officers at the already unstable prison. On the other hand, because Du Parcq could not 'prejudice the course of future proceedings' he was unable to guarantee prisoners, who may have wanted to speak to him confidentially, immunity from prosecution. According to the Home Secretary it was therefore essential that the inquiry be conducted in private; that the names of convicts were omitted and that the evidence be withheld from the public. In that context it was somewhat disingenuous for the Home Secretary to state that Du Parcq was able to assure convicts that their 'statements would be treated as confidential'.[56] Furthermore, the investigation was coloured by conclusions about the roles and responsibilities of particular prisoners which rested on disciplinary decisions made immediately after the riot and which seem to have been readily accepted. According to the *Du Parcq Report*, post-riot prisoners were divided into two groups: (A) 'Those upon whom no suspicion of complicity in the disorder rested' and (B) 'Those who have been closely confined since the disturbance, upon all of whom more or less grave suspicion of participation in the disorder rests'. Some prisoners in group A had volunteered written statements and the investigators selected eight of them to interview. Eight or nine prisoners from group B were apparently spoken to by Du Parcq and Paterson in their cells; no written record or reference to these exchanges survives in the evidence.[57]

Du Parcq and Paterson questioned the witnesses together. At only one point is Paterson's name attached to a question or interjection, in every other instance no interviewer's name is given. The questions were often leading or in a few cases little more than an outline of what the investigators stated were important factors about which they wanted the interviewee's observations.[58] Aspects of reforms and prison discipline were discussed but not in depth. The interviewees were persistently steered back to broadly two main lines of investigation that focused on the behaviour and credentials of the Governor, Mr Stanley Norton Roberts and on the presence and influence of certain inmates. However, there were lesser issues which came up repeatedly such as the behaviour of prison staff, the possibility of corruption, the possible lax behaviour of junior officers, the practice regarding talking and the nature of communications between convicts. It is clear throughout that Du Parcq and Paterson were working from statements already submitted to them and

which some witnesses were aware of. For example, in his testimony Chief Officer Smale remarked that he corroborated the Governor's statement regarding the tensions within the prison prior to the riot. The direction of the questioning suggests that the investigators had in large part already made judgements about the causality of the riot and that rather than conducting open and exploratory interviews it was evidence and clarification that was sought.

At the beginning of each interview, individuals gave a brief career history but the most extensive in the report was that of Governor Stanley Norton Roberts. In 1894, at the age of 16 years, Roberts enlisted in the Royal Scots Greys. He served in the Boer War, left the military in 1902 as an acting Sergeant Major and was transferred to the Army Reserve. In May 1909, he joined the Prison Service as a warder at Wandsworth and in 1911 was transferred to Feltham Borstal until 1915 when he rejoined his regiment. He remained in Britain for the duration of the War and in 1917 was given a commission to Second Lieutenant in the Royal Defence Corps to look after German Prisoners of War. In 1919, he reentered the Prison Service and was appointed as clerk and schoolmaster at Holloway Prison. In December 1919, he became Governor of Swansea Prison, which was a small local prison. In June 1926 he was promoted from there to Leeds Prison as a second class governor and in 1929 he was again promoted, this time to First Class Governor at Birmingham Prison until April 1931 when he was transferred to Dartmoor Convict Prison. The transfer to Dartmoor was his first appointment to a convict prison. What is important in this detailed career profile is that he was, unusually at this time, a Governor who had risen through the ranks of the Prison Service. Roberts was perceived as a product of reforms within the prison service which encouraged broader recruitment by merit and experience. As the chaplain at Dartmoor later observed, 'Roberts was an example of the new type who was increasingly finding a career in the prison service'.[59]

Governor Roberts's career, character and behaviour prior to and during the riot were scrutinised and the inquiry's conclusions must have underpinned the decision by the Prison Commission to first send Roberts on leave and then to post him to the Governorship of the local prison at Cardiff. On the concluding day of the inquiry, Roberts was replaced by Major J.C. Pannall D.S.O and M.C, Governor of the Borstal Institute at Camp Hill on the Isle of Wight. According to an article in the *Morning Post* (29 January 1932), Roberts suffered a 'breakdown in health' due to 'extreme mental strain'. Major Pannall, it was stated, had been Sergeant-Major to Alexander Paterson when he was a private in

VI Volunteers Battalion of the Royal West Surrey Regiment (The Queens) during the war. Both Major Pannall and Paterson gave evidence to The Committee on Persistent Offenders and Du Parcq sat on that Committee. A later account by a junior doctor serving in Dartmoor at the time observed that Pannall was 'Alex Paterson's special choice'.[60]

Possibly the single most revealing statement made to the inquiry came from Colonel Turner, the Assistant Commissioner who had been visiting Dartmoor when the riot broke out. Turner asserted '[w]e knew that when we sent Roberts here [Dartmoor] it was an experiment.' It has 'never been so well run before'. This is interesting not only for the fact that, at least formally, it was the Home Secretary not the Prison Commission that had responsibility for appointing 'superior' officers but also because this suggests an explicit attempt to effect change through Roberts's appointment.[61] Furthermore, he was perceived initially to have been succeeding in bringing about such unspecified but beneficial change. It soon became clear that Roberts had been an experimental choice in several respects. He was promoted as being a reformer and therefore an advocate of the reformative agenda headed by Paterson. According to the *Guardian*, he was noted for his 'advanced views on the treatment of prisoners holding that this should be based on the individual psychology of the man'.[62] However, the changes he brought about were not improvements in education or training and were not alleviations of the prison's regime. He was perceived as someone without previous experience in convict prisons who would break some of Dartmoor's entrenched traditions. Indeed, Roberts's own career had challenged tradition. He was unusual within the prison service of the time in that he had risen through the ranks and crucially his background differed from most Governors in terms of social class. Furthermore, although he had war service on his record, his rank of Second Lieutenant was achieved for service in the Royal Defence Corps.

These aspects of Roberts's background and career arose again and again in the Du Parcq investigation. Major Morris, Chief Inspector of Devon and a previous Governor of Dartmoor Prison, made reference to Roberts's 'manner' which, he suggested, caused offence, and observed that

> Roberts is the only one who has risen from the ranks that I have ever had dealings with. I don't think the convicts were prepared to give him a fair run as he had been promoted from the ranks, and I am afraid he received rather less support from his officers. I have never heard any reflection on his efficiency.

Morris further noted that 'It is possible that Roberts has stiffened and improved things since I've gone and they have resented that'.[63] From early in the enquiry it is evident that the changes made by Roberts did not operate to alleviate conditions at the prison but to tighten up the discipline.[64] Colonel Turner observed that '[w]e hoped that Roberts would tighten things up . . . get more efficiency out of the labour. In fact he did improve things. He improved the out-puts from the various workshops'.[65] But these changes were, suggested Major Morris, resented by the prisoners.[66]

Prior to Roberts's appointment it was a convention that convict prison governors had to have experience in the same (convict) system, usually as a deputy governor. Major Morris asserted the traditional position that 'it would be most difficult for a local [prison] Governor to take charge of a Convict Prison unless he has been a Deputy Convict Prison Governor', as he himself had been.[67] Morris was Deputy Governor at Dartmoor between 1923 and 1926 and then returned as Governor in 1930 although he was the governor for only four and a half months before taking up the post of Chief Inspector of Devon Police. However, he was not the only witness before the inquiry to remark on Roberts's inexperience in this regard.[68]

The tightening up of discipline was clearly noticed internally. One inmate's account claimed that Roberts reduced the flexibility of prisoners to change their work and also curtailed educational classes and visits.[69] In his evidence to Du Parcq, Prison Officer Lamb asserted that not permitting men to change their work parties was a 'big grievance' and that this approach may have been wrong at Dartmoor because of the monotony. A 'letter' referred to by Du Parcq and Paterson also made reference to a tightening up of the silent rule and to longer hours in cells. Roberts admitted this was the case, '[t]hey do have to stay in their cells rather longer than they used to [he estimated 14–16 hours in cells], but it is on account of the hours out-side being reduced owing to the reduction in staff'. He also blamed staff reductions for enabling convicts to assemble materials for escape attempts, such as skeleton keys, hacksaw blades and a jemmy in the few months prior to the riot.[70]

References to Roberts's social class were also made. A prison visitor, an ex-military officer, noted a feeling of resentment about Roberts's background and that he did not enjoy the respect that might be held for a Governor 'who has the qualities and position of a higher social standing'.[71] This certainly revealed not only class prejudice but also perhaps a difference between deferential responses to a Governor exuding military pragmatism and confidence and a Governor having neither

convict prison experience nor an understanding of the hardships of daily convict life. Chief Officer Smale implied that resentment from officers was partly because Roberts had succeeded a popular Governor in Major Morris, it was he suggested: 'a matter of temperament'.[72] Roberts's consciousness of such attitudes and pride in his achievement may have exacerbated his situation, as one prison officer noted:

> Mr Roberts is a thorough gentleman, and he is very fair and just, but there is one failing, I don't know whether it affects the prisoners, and that is egotism. We knew before he came here that he had risen from the ranks. When he first came here he addressed us, and told us that he had risen from the ranks, and that every one of us had the same chance. That was all right, but on many subsequent occasions the same thing always came out, and in time it irritated the men.[73]

In his own evidence, Roberts accepted he had at first experienced prejudice because he held a 'high and responsible' position yet was not of 'commissioned rank' but maintained he had been 'able to over-ride all that sort of business'. Interestingly, he states that while prisoners realised the authorities had confidence in him the warders were 'a somewhat different problem', although he is vague on precisely what this meant. He denies there was any insubordination except that they may have discussed him with prisoners so that when he arrived he had to tighten up 'several things'.[74] There were some suspicions about one or more corrupt prison officers voiced in the inquiry. In one case, an officer against whom there was some suspicion was said to have a lot of 'callers' and had money to enable him to visit Plymouth often.[75] However, there was more about indiscreet behaviour among younger officers, particularly that officers discussed the Governor and the Deputy Governor with convicts. 'Some of the younger Officers talk. They are only in charge for an afternoon, and they are anxious to "keep sweet" with the men', a convict observed, 'I have heard the young Officers discussing the Governor and have heard them discussing his attitude towards them'.[76] Witnesses largely put this down to lack of training

Roberts located prisoners' dislike for him not in his class position but his prison service experience and so revealed his resentment against the inmates he believed were behind the disturbances at Dartmoor. According to Roberts, 'the more difficult type of recidivist' disliked him because of his authority and because due to his rising through the ranks he knew 'all their tricks'.[77] However, Roberts was not alone in alluding to this possibility, Medical Officer Battiscombe contended that Roberts knew 'too

much . . . a great deal more than the ordinary Governor does. He knew what they were like and knows what they are like now'.[78] Several others who gave evidence felt that the Governor was especially unpopular with those who had been 'very dangerous outside prison'.[79]

The evidence given to the Du Parcq Inquiry is by no means consistent; Roberts had his supporters and his detractors. However, aspects of his background, career and manner rankled with some and his undoubted tightening up of discipline was provocative in a convict prison which held inmates for long periods of time. Such a strategy of change challenged long-held traditions within Dartmoor and threatened both staff and inmate subcultures. Under long-term imprisonment, change and instability bred grievances and discontent. Perceived to have been less popular or at least different from the Governors that preceded him at Dartmoor, Roberts was in a difficult position. Furthermore, he took over the prison when reformative discourse and policy were strong but this concentrated on younger, less confirmed criminals and the finance to implement reform was curtailed in the midst of economic depression when staff numbers and staff pay were being reduced. Finally, the late 1920s and early 1930s appear to have been a period of particular flux regarding senior prison staff at Dartmoor. The chaplain, Chief Officer and Deputy Governor had all arrived within a year of the riot. In his evidence to the Du Parcq Inquiry one of the inmates, Donovan, remarked that he had been at Dartmoor three and a half years and in that time there had been four different Governors.[80] The first of these was Captain Morgan who had been at the prison since 1922 but retired through ill health in 1929. His Deputy, Major Grew, had in effect acted as Governor for several months before that. Major Grew handed over to Captain Clayton in April 1929.[81] Clayton already had some experience of Dartmoor as he had briefly taken charge there in 1920.[82] By the end of 1930 Clayton had taken over as Governor at Parkhurst Convict Prison where many Dartmoor defendants were transferred after the riot. Captain Clayton was replaced briefly by Major Morris until March 1931 when he became Chief Inspector of Devon Police. In April 1932, Roberts took over at the prison.[83] Not once during the inquiry was it suggested that this continued change of management was itself a problem although Major Morris observed at one point that 'Dartmoor does not like change'.[84]

These issues linked to a further line of questioning about the presence of certain kinds of offenders in Dartmoor Prison. Major Morris confirmed that all the young and intermediate class of prisoners had been transferred to Parkhurst in November 1931 so that it was 'entirely the

recidivists who were left behind'.[85] Du Parcq and Paterson asked Morris specifically about 'the bandit'. Morris maintained this kind of convict was likely to be 'a difficult sort of prisoner . . . not usually submissible to discipline. The man, whom I am told was responsible for this rising, was here when I was'. Alexander Paterson then interjects, the only time a comment is specifically attributed to him, naming the individual as 'Jackson' who he explains was serving ten years and was described by the Metropolitan Police as 'the most dangerous motor bandit in London'. Morris adds that 'Jackson became a little God on his admission. He would stop at nothing' and 'had to be dealt with very carefully. He is a leader of men and can instil fear into the other convicts'.[86] Given that Morris was clearly familiar with Jackson's career, it is puzzling that Paterson made a point of expanding on his criminality, unless it was to influence Du Parcq as to the importance of this man.

The evidence of Archibald Kennedy Wilson, Chief Constable of Plymouth, regarding underworld activities and prisoners' connections with 'bandits' and other organised criminals outside was more enthusiastic than substantive. He explained:

> definitely that in all probability, and as a result of enquiries we are making, it might be possible to obtain information on this point, there are one or two very bad gangs in London who have one or two of their members here making arrangements to release their comrades, and would in all probability go to the extent of bribing a warder.
>
> My Detective Inspector was in London last Saturday and he met a Scotland Yard man he knew and in the course of their conversation he stated that some trouble was to be expected at Dartmoor prison and that when it did come off a convict named Robb [Jackson] would be the ring-leader. This man is apparently Alexander Robb. Obviously this Detective Officer had heard rumours.

When asked if this information was acted upon, he responded that he didn't see his Inspector until after 'the business' was over so in effect this evidence was conjecture.

A few witnesses did name individual convicts, particularly Jackson who was referred to as a car or motor bandit.[87] Unlike the Governor, aside from listing those in the punishment cells at the outset of the riot, Deputy Governor Richards was not asked about, and did not name, individual convicts. Yet in his evidence to the CID after the Du Parcq

Inquiry, Richards concurs with Roberts that the attempted escape of Jackson, Mullins, Cox and Sparks prior to the riot was a tributary cause of the disturbance, 'these men are determined and dangerous criminals who would stop at little, all are notorious motor bandits' and he highlighted Jackson as particularly 'daring and reckless'.[88] Roberts reiterates claiming that '[t]he class of prisoner here is the worst I have ever had to deal with. We have two gangs here and I can definitely say that it is to two of these [unspecified ] men that I attribute the trouble'. Principal Officer Kelly asserted: '[t]here are too many of the same gang in this prison. A few years ago, two brothers, or two men of the same gang would not be allowed in the same prison. To-day we have brothers working in the same shop, and five or six of one gang in the prison'.[89] The ramifications of concentrating the most serious offenders in Dartmoor was questioned in later Parliamentary ruminations over the riot. Herbert Samuel accepted that the disturbances in Dartmoor Prison emphasised 'the risks of concentrating in one establishment any considerable number of convicts of the specially dangerous type'.[90]

To one interviewee, Officer Lamb, Du Parcq and Paterson outlined their framework of the risk structure of the Dartmoor inmates. Most were, they observed: 'a low type of prisoner, but fairly easy to manage', then there were those who were probably 'very easily led if there was any disturbance, but not so much included to start it themselves', then a 'certain number who are more or less desperate characters' who, Lamb concurred, 'would stop at nothing'.[91] This schema ordained that at the 'bottom of this trouble' was 'a comparatively few determined men', whose removal, it is implied, could have averted the riot. Hence, emphasising not only the central role of relatively few convicts but also that decisive action by senior staff could have prevented trouble.

The Du Parcq Inquiry revealed a level of uncertainty about who was actually in charge on the day of the riot and this ambiguity caused doubt and indecision among senior staff which was telling in the face of serious challenges from inmates. Assistant Commissioner, Colonel Turner, maintained that he was on site only in an advisory capacity, while Governor Roberts and the Chief Officer suggested that Turner had to be consulted in decision-making. This difference of emphasis was highlighted in a journalistic account published in 1933, 'From the time of Colonel Turner's arrival, he was regarded as being in a sense in charge of the prison. Technically the governor was still fully responsible, but on all questions of policy he may be overruled by the Prison Commissioners, and is the subject of censure if he does any act of which they

disapprove'.[92] According to the *Du Parcq Report*, when trouble first broke out Roberts stated 'more than once' to Turner that the police should be sent for but Turner advised delay and Roberts took his lead no doubt with the wider and probably very public implications of that move at the forefront of his mind. The Report suggested that Turner was 'probably wrong' in this decision but quickly moved on stating that the question was 'academic'.[93]

Prevarication and hesitancy by Roberts was partly a result of his communications with the Prison Commission. Evidence to the inquiry is confused as to whether, during a telephone conversation on the day before the riot, Prison Commissioner Lamb had given the Governor permission to call in the police in the event of trouble. Certainly, these two individuals seem to have come to differing conclusions about this so much so that Major Morris asserted that the Governor believed that Commissioner Lamb had denied permission. In order to throw light on this matter, Du Parcq and Paterson called for a written account from Commissioner Lamb but unfortunately the original copy of this evidence has neither survived nor is it commented on during the interviews. Major Lamb's 'version' is 'set out', and in effect supported, in the inquiry report but it is incomplete. This states that Lamb 'authorised' the Governor to call in the police but 'expressed the hope that this would be unnecessary and that, in order to avoid undesirable publicity, he would be able to manage with his own staff'.[94]

Interestingly, Turner opted initially for a different strategy in dealing with the rioters. Rather than calling for the police he went out on his own to talk to the rioters (or 'demonstrators' as some referred to themselves in the trial), believing possibly that by force of his character and courage he could restore a semblance of order. Indeed, he asserted that he was 'firmly confident' he could 'talk them round' and even stated '[i]f I had been Governor I would have gone out' suggesting that Roberts was lacking in either courage or character or both.[95] Instead, fearing personal attack, Governor Roberts and his deputy, Richards, had to hide in one of the halls. To Roberts's detriment this judgement on his character was included in the final Report even though Roberts himself was not asked about this and Turner had failed in his efforts to quell the outbreak necessitating his rescue by prisoners. Thus, in two important instances differences over what was said in a telephone conversation between Commissioner Lamb and Governor Roberts and on Roberts's decision to hide from the rioters, the judgement taken by the Du Parcq investigators supported members of the Prison Commission against the Governor.

A further issue also undermined the Governor's position during the inquiry. Despite Roberts claiming later that a small group of convicts was at the heart of the trouble, it was clear that he was actually not able to identify these men at the time. Colonel Turner insisted that he had tried to locate the trouble makers, but Roberts had been unable to identify them beyond saying there were more than six, possibly 30 or 40. If Turner was correct, this suggests that in his evidence to the Du Parcq Inquiry Roberts was undertaking a *post hoc* reconstruction of his understanding of the situation before the riot. Roberts states to Du Parcq that '[w]e have two gangs here and I can definitely say that it is to two of those men that I attribute the trouble'. The next question posed is 'Would it be right to say that you have your 4 particular bad ones . . . ?' Roberts could say little about the riot itself since for much of the duration he was rather ignominiously holed up in an old part of the prison and thereafter had only one or two days in which to review the situation before appearing before the Du Parcq Inquiry. Nevertheless, Roberts names Sparks, Cox, Mullins and Jackson as those culpable, and he legitmates his allegations by basing this opinion largely on their efforts to escape and complaints they had made prior to the riot. Immediately after describing the failed escape attempt of these men, Roberts relates briefly the attack on Officer Birch by Thomas Davies on the Friday before the riot. By doing so he implicitly relates this incident with the escape attempts and the other four men. Although he gives no evidence of a connection in their actions immediately before or during the riot, he would probably have known that these men had associated with each other prior to and during their imprisonment (see Chapter 5).[96]

As one of only two primary investigators Alexander Paterson had a significant influence over the process of the inquiry and conclusions made in the *Du Parcq Report* which explicitly denied that recent reforms were to blame for the riot. Rather blame was placed predominantly on the personal inadequacies of the Governor and in particular on what was claimed to be a new and more dangerous kind of prison inmate, the 'bandit' or 'gangster'. In an isolated prison reserved for serious and serial offenders, these men had, according to the Report, 'great powers for evil'. They had many years of 'monotonous imprisonment facing them' and were willing to take risks.[97] These were the kinds of men whose selfish and immoral ends were perceived as having perverted the smooth running of the prison through their influence on the majority of prisoners who were described as weak and of 'low intelligence'.

Much has been said about the qualities and beliefs of Alexander Paterson. He was a man of his times, a moral man who devoted his

life to public service. In the face of political and public fall-out in the aftermath of the Dartmoor riot he may well have wielded his influence to defend the prison reforms identified with him. This was reflected in the Du Parcq Inquiry. As one of only two main investigators, the other long known to Paterson and a trusted contributor to several Government enquires on penal affairs, he was in a position to steer the course of questioning which determined or at least coloured the conclusions. Historians have criticised the outcome of the Inquiry to the extent that Thomas asserts that the *Du Parcq Report* offered 'no explanation for the mutiny'. In fact, contends Thomas, explanations for the mutiny were to be found in recently introduced prison reforms, particularly those which enabled association between inmates.[98] This was certainly not the conclusion of the Du Parcq Inquiry which explicitly denied that reform was itself culpable. Unfortunately, the final report was based as much upon supposition and intimation as on proof and substantiation and so reveals more about official and individual interests than about the causes of the riot.

The appointment of a reforming Governor from a non-commissioned officer background who had risen through the ranks and had no prior experience of convict management was an 'experiment'. Despite his prison career, which included service in Borstals, Roberts was an experiment whose primary objective was not to alleviate the harsh prison environment of the notorious prison on the moor but to break long-standing traditions. If Roberts had longer term aims to alleviate or improve the regime in Dartmoor circumstances conspired against any realisation of them. The *Du Parcq Report* referred to Roberts having risen through the ranks and his lack of experience in convict prisons as detrimental to his personal authority at Dartmoor. Of course criticism of Roberts was phrased in an understated manner, but the following comment by Du Parcq conveys much; 'a man of exceptionally strong character might have been able to quell the growing disorder by the force of his personality. It is, I hope, not a severe criticism of Mr Roberts to say that he has not this rare gift'.[99] Of course, highlighting Roberts's flawed character did undermine his credibility. His lack of convict experience may have been resented, perhaps more than his rise through the ranks, by officers in a prison with a tough reputation who no doubt took pride in being a part of that reputation. Sent to Dartmoor Prison to tighten up the discipline he was also resented by prisoners.

Criticisms of reforms were made by witnesses who feared the dangers of relaxing the silence rule, the perceived intrusion of prison visitors who could, according to one acerbic officer, 'come into the prison and

do what they like',[100] and the concentration of the worst prisoners in one prison. In addition, evidence of poor training of prison officers didn't reflect well upon prison administration in the context of reformative rhetoric. Yet where such issues were taken up in the final report they were framed in a manner which deflected attention from the general direction of penal reform. For example, relaxation of talking was stated to have occurred a decade before and disagreement among prison officers about the importance of this was highlighted. The training of officers was not mentioned in the final report although the existence of corruption among prison staff was. It was asserted that officers had to be of 'the highest character and reliability' and some criticism was made that Dartmoor may well have been used as a posting for officers under suspicion. However, emphasis was laid on measures already taken to endeavour to make service at Dartmoor more attractive by appointing officers from the locality, by paying 'inconvenience money' and by allowing transfer after ten years.[101] For the most part staffing issues were represented as specific to or at least more serious at Dartmoor which was regarded, and possibly intentionally treated by the Prison Commission, as a punishment posting.

The Du Parcq Inquiry was not the public investigation that the Labour Party and ILP had pressed for. Indeed Buchanan, MP for Gorbals, referred to the report as 'melodrama' and asserted that it had 'shove[d] it all on to the prisoner'.[102] James Maxton urged, 'you have to find the cause of that trouble, not in the characters of individual prisoners, but in something about the administration of that prison at the beginning'.[103] The *Du Parcq Report* largely did the former and as far as the administration was examined it was largely the specific conditions and environment of Dartmoor Convict Prison that was scrutinised. Culpability was awarded to a small group of inmates, the inadequacies of the Prison Governor and the structure, traditions and location of the prison itself.

## Hardened offenders and penal policy

The depiction of Dartmoor Prison as a unique penal institution for serious and serial offenders far from the heart of reformative efforts enabled blame to be placed in particular ways which directed attention away from contemporary reforms as a possible cause of the disturbance. Indeed those incarcerated in Dartmoor in many senses represented the incentive for society to invest in younger and more redeemable offenders. In the context of reformist rhetoric and what were hailed as the positive and practical achievements of Borstals and training for those

less inured in crime, the inmates in Dartmoor were the other side of the reformist coin. That other side composed a limited and pessimistic view of what could and should be done with hardened offenders. The Prison Commission had worked to promote, support and make public what was being implemented for younger, less experienced offenders. However, the Dartmoor riot served to thrust into the limelight the whole issue of more hardened, long-sentenced prisoners.[104]

Discussion of how to deal with adult persistent offenders remained distinctly located within classical ideas about individual choice and rationality and was perhaps the least thought-out area of penal policy.[105] The almost inevitable fall-back position for most, including the Committee on Persistent Offenders, which was appointed in April 1931,[106] was the necessity to incarcerate persistent criminals for long terms but under less penal conditions (although it did recommend a new sentence of corrective detention for younger persistent criminals before they deteriorated into confirmed habitual offenders).[107] The principle behind this was that 'in proportion as the offender persists in breaking the law so the consideration of the protection of the public from his law-breaking must in proportion become increasingly predominant'.[108] This may have been a philosophical dead-end, but it was justified by the ethos not being penal but preventative. It was assumed that the need for long-term detention would become gradually smaller consequent upon the success of a broader training and treatment-oriented prison system.[109] The extensive debates on forms of classification at this time were based on a concept of individualism that, as Gordon Rose suggests, posited that if the correct groupings could be established then the worst influences emanating from the hardened persistent offender could be removed and segregated.[110] This would prevent contamination of younger offenders and theoretically enable regimes to be more targeted.

Those in Dartmoor were often perceived as unable and unwilling to be educated in the obligations and responsibilities of citizenship. Despite optimism about the potential for institutional, social and also psychological reform and assertions that the lawbreakers should be treated as individuals rather than merely as deterrent examples, it was believed that there would always remain a proportion of offenders who were irredeemable.[111] This view was reflected in the conclusions of the *Departmental Committee on Persistent Offenders* which reported later in the same year as the Dartmoor riot.[112] The Committee recommended repeal of the system of preventive detention for those designated by the courts as habitual offenders, as introduced in 1908, and its replacement by two new sentences. Persistent offenders less habituated to crime, especially

those aged between 21 and 30 should, it suggested, receive a sentence of two to four years while prolonged detention would be reserved for those over 30 and more inured in crime, in particular the professional criminal.[113] For some reformers this logic seemed self-evident 'It is obviously necessary to segregate individuals who have a dangerous tendency towards violence, and, if necessary, they should be confined for life'.[114] This trend towards longer preventative sentences had been clear since the *Gladstone Committee Report* 1895 which recommended that a distinct long-term sentence be introduced to incapacitate persistent offenders and had been heralded as signalling a shift towards more progressive penal policy.[115] Preventive detention was introduced under an Act of 1908 which allowed for a sentence of penal servitude to be followed by a sentence of preventive detention under less penal conditions. However, this was not a success and after the First World War the numbers sentenced to preventive detention remained low.[116] From the end of the nineteenth century and throughout the inter-war period the policy of preventive detention was 'a tale of disappointment'.[117]

Hamblin Smith and others suggested optimistically that over time and with better education, social conditions and psychological investigation and treatment the problem of recidivism would diminish. However, for the small minority '[i]ndefinite detention' would still have to be resorted to, possibly in the colonies, under conditions which were 'as little penal as is possible'.[120] The approach to the serial or persistent offender was, therefore, fatalistic; they 'will always be with us' so that the primary aim was therefore to protect the community from their 'anti-social conduct'.[121] Even those critical of the conditions in Dartmoor concurred.

> Into this prison are gathered men, all with evil records, who know that they are looked upon as well nigh hopeless; over a period of years their treatment is designed to hold them down, never to lift them up. It is the only prison at which there was at the time of my visit no official chaplain; the only one at which the prisoners are almost openly regarded as irreclaimable and hopeless, and officers armed with carbines guard men at work outside the prison. For each of these things there is no doubt a reason. I can well believe that every exceptional measure of security that is taken is absolutely necessary. Even so, I cannot think that any prisoner is improved by Dartmoor and I can easily believe that many are made worse. The solution cannot be merely to make conditions more pleasant . . . If we believe that no suffering should be inflicted uselessly, are we not driven to the

> conclusion that these men should be given kinder conditions, but that they should be permanently secluded in some place where they shall no longer be able to prey upon the community?[122]

Alexander Paterson himself observed that persistent criminals had 'neither respect for the law nor fear of punishment' and preyed 'with cunning and brutality on rich and poor alike'. They were 'callous in court' and inured to prison: '[n]othing but their indefinite detention can protect the honest citizen against such men'.[123]

With the increasing diffusion of psychiatry into everyday awareness and language, offenders were often depicted as subnormal individuals of 'low intelligence' faced with adverse environmental conditions and unable to compete with their normal neighbours. They were described as members of the 'social problem group'.[124] These individuals were sometimes called 'feeble-minded' but the Prison Commission and the Home Office rarely used such a pejorative term, in part because classification was problematic and in part because it would have accepted a medicalised solution to the problem such offenders posed. There continued to exist competing explanations of the origins of criminality including 'degeneracy, mental defect, hormonal imbalance, organic injury or deficiency, and poverty'.[125] During the 1930s, increased facilities were given to individuals with expertise in medicine, psychiatry and criminology, such as Norwood East, John Landers and Hermann Mannheim, but the Prison Commission remained sceptical.[126]

In May 1932 the Executive meeting of the Howard League sent a letter to the Home Secretary about the Dartmoor defendants recently found guilty at the Princetown Assize. The letter referred to information given in the press, but the Howard League also had direct involvement in the Dartmoor trial through one of the convict defendants, Del Mar, who was a former patient of Dr Marjorie Franklin, a supporter of psychoanalysis. Dr Franklin personally offered £5 towards Del Mar's defence and a further £20 was offered by a doctor at University College London. In addition, barrister Dingle Foot accepted the brief to defend Del Mar on an expenses-only basis.[127]

The letter from the Howard League did not challenge the sentences handed down to the defendants but asserted that many of the men were 'mentally subnormal' and urged the establishment of an independent Medical Commission. This would consist of psychiatrists and specialists in psychotherapy outside the Prison Medical Service brought together to examine and advise on these cases. Even partial success, the letter claimed, would signal a 'memorable advance … in the rationalisation

of our penal methods'. While sympathetic with the League's view that merely shutting these men up was not a solution, the response from the Home Office rejected the idea that psychiatry could 'provide any curative treatment for offenders of this type'. Furthermore, the response continued, such a commission would have less experience than prison medical officers and 'independent persons who have no administrative responsibilities are not the right people to advise the Secretary of State on the treatment of individual prisoners', that was the responsibility of the Prison Commission. The only way to progress was to 'pursue the present policy of encouragement of prison medical officers to keep themselves acquainted with modern psychological knowledge and to give as much attention as possible to the psychological study of prisoners'.[128] Thus, a gradualist and institutional approach was advocated.

For the most part medical discussion about offenders was distinct from a more populist rhetoric about modern dangerous criminals, the motor bandits and gangsters highlighted by the *Du Parcq Report*. These more organised and calculating urban offenders, the elite of their kind, were described as intelligent professionals and leaders of men, responsible for a high proportion of crime. They were men who could make another kind of living but chose not to. There is even a hint of admiration at the nerve and audacity of such men, who were supposed to meet 'a fresh sentence with courage and philosophy'.[129] The definitions of this professional class of criminals varied from a small minority exemplified by supposed gangsters such as John Jackson with convictions for serious, violent offences to recidivists with over ten previous sentences, habituated to crime and irreclaimable. The latter group actually made up the majority of men in Dartmoor.[130] For some, the real distinction was made by the institution itself. In 1928, following a visit to Dartmoor, the then Conservative Home Secretary, Sir William Joynson-Hicks, a devoutly religious man, stated to the press that the men in Dartmoor had little hope, '[i]t is really the cesspool of English humanity'.[131] Nevertheless, even Joynson-Hicks suggested that Dartmoor Prison was not particularly suitable for confining convicts. Indeed, Dartmoor had been under threat for several decades but continued in use because it provided an isolated position for persistent criminals. This need, according to one ex-governor of the prison, was doubted only in the face of the rapid expansion in motor vehicle ownership; a realisation that figured in the *Du Parcq Report*.[132]

On the one hand, Dartmoor was asserted to be an isolated prison the position of which no longer provided a defence against possible help

from the outside criminal world; implying that motor bandits were not only mobile but also organised. In the *Du Parcq Report* these experienced modern criminals were pitted against the laxity of inexperienced junior officers and the inexperience of Governor Roberts in the convict prison system. On the other hand, Dartmoor's isolation posed serious problems and delayed the arrival of outside help should it be required.

Most of the factors that the *Du Parcq Report* identified as being important in the causality of the riot were narrowly specific to Dartmoor Prison; its location, its inmates and its staff. Roberts appears to have been put in place primarily to break traditional practices and cultures at Dartmoor, which entailed tightening up the discipline. However, this tightening up and the frustration caused by successfully preventing escape by prominent members of the prison community undoubtedly played a part in destabilising the regime at Dartmoor. Hence Thomas maintains that it was the Governor of Dartmoor who 'precipitated the mutiny' by his actions.[133]

The *Du Parcq Report* established the official 'truth' or discourse on the riot and defined its causality for the press and public. Following the publication of the Report it became more difficult for observers and critics to broaden out culpability for the riot to recent reforms or the political administration that was seen to support them thus acting defensively to nullify alternative 'truth accounts'.[134] No suggestions or insights into the formation of future penal policy were offered as there was no significant criticism of existing policy. Not only were recent penal reforms exonerated but also Du Parcq stated explicitly that Paterson had 'scrupulously abstained from any endeavour to influence my judgement'.[135] As Thomas suggests, this is unlikely. He observes that 'outsiders' find it difficult to get information in prison and in this 'vulnerable situation' it would have been 'very strange if a personality as powerful as that of Paterson made no impact on Du Parcq'.[136] The choice of investigators, the process, speed and conclusions of the inquiry suggest that its primary function was to frame the narrative of the riot and defend the reformative stance of the Prison Commission. This narrative was conclusive not only in closing down political debate but also in leading and shaping media coverage.

# 4

# Dartmoor Gaol Battle: The Dartmoor Riot as a National Media Event

On the first day of January 1932, the *Daily Mirror* and the *Manchester Guardian* published the same photograph of a visit made to Dartmoor Convict Prison by the Home Secretary, Sir Herbert Samuel. Several officials were walking towards the camera; in the background was the distinctive clock tower of the prison's main administrative block.[1] Just over three weeks later (Monday 25 January), many newspapers published dramatic aerial images of smoke and flames billowing out of the same administrative block, which had been set alight by rioting convicts.[2] The *Daily Mirror* claimed that their image of the chaotic scene was 'an exclusive picture taken from a "Daily Mirror aeroplane" which took photographs of scenes "without parallel in the history of this country"' Figure 4.1.[3] The *Daily Mail* promoted the speed with which reporters travelling by airplane could arrive on the spot.[4] In response to intimations of problems at the prison, the first *Daily Mail* 'special correspondent' had arrived at the scene on the day before the riot, also by airplane. The dramatic view was vividly described, a 'TALL column of smoke climbing into the air directed my aeroplane to the heart of Dartmoor, where below me lay the grim fortress of the Princetown convict settlement'.[5] On 25 and 26 January newspapers showed the crumbled remains of the distinctive clock tower and central block, the unstable remains of which had to be pulled down. A debate had also begun in the pages of the press on the causes and contexts of the largest riot in an English prison since the 1860s and perhaps, the *Daily Mirror* claimed: 'the fiercest of its kind ever known in this country'.[6] The extensive media coverage produced by the 'small army of journalists and press photographers'[7] that descended on Princetown, the village adjoining Dartmoor Convict Prison, helped to make the riot of that Sunday 24 January 1932 into a genuinely public and national spectacle.[8] This

*Figure 4.1* Photograph from the *Daily Mirror* published 26 January 1932, Dartmoor Prison

was heightened by vivid and jingoistic Movietone (the first on the scene) and Pathé News newsreels being shown in cinemas across the country.

In the wake of the riot, people flocked in their hundreds or thousands, depending on which newspaper is consulted, to the 'great prison' which had 'added so greatly to its notoriety in the past few days'.[9] Dartmoor was a well-known and even infamous prison housing the most serious and recidivist offenders. Coverage of the riot in the newspapers cemented Dartmoor's image as brutal, sinister, isolated and unforgiving; a place where desperate and dangerous criminals were incarcerated. According to the *Daily Mail*, '[n]o more appropriate setting for yesterday's grim events could be imagined than the cruel, granite stronghold which lies in the bleakest and most desolate town in the country, and from which the moor stretches on every side'.[10] Press coverage of the riot and its immediate aftermath fed on Dartmoor's forbidding reputation and its darkly glamorous, brooding moorland presence.[11] This presence served to heighten the drama and vividness of press depictions in a manner sometimes reminiscent of fictional representations in Conan Doyle's, *The Hound of the Baskervilles* (1902). References to such a backdrop also helped to reinforce negative and

simplistic moral presumptions about the inmates and the reasons why they were incarcerated. Certainly, there could be few better sites in which to construct the melodrama of a good news story. Photography and, in particular, aerial photography, encouraged the public to share in the excitement from a safe distance yet offered an immediacy regarding the action. As an article in the *Listener* in 1930 explained; '[p]icture papers have great circulation because pictures are the simplest method of giving us the feeling we are "in the know", sharing in the exciting drama which is always going on just outside our direct perception'.[12]

The context of intense press competition and a circulation war[13] heighted the value of the large-scale riot in Dartmoor as press property. This was a story guaranteed to attract public interest not only because it was an explosive and unusual occurrence but also because it momentarily opened out for public scrutiny a largely closed institution. As Clive Emsley has pointed out, the news print media are

> required by its managers and owners to make a profit, to maintain audience interest and to entertain, as well as to inform. Crime narratives in the media, as a consequence, tend to focus on the exceptional, the scandalous and the violent, rather than on the everyday . . .[14]

Coverage of the Dartmoor Prison riot in the contemporary press must, therefore, be situated in the marketplace. However, newspaper coverage not only reflected events in the context of market competition but they also constructed and narrated them within contemporary social conventions, ideologies and the constraints of newspaper production.[15] These pressures and perspectives meant that the riot tended to be portrayed in a particular manner and with a considerable degree of consensus across different newspapers. What resulted was that most newspapers accepted the conclusions of the official inquiry into the causes of the Dartmoor riot. Interestingly, many of the key issues were discussed in the press prior to the actual publication of the *Du Parcq Report* as journalists drew on interviews with individuals from both the prison and police service. This measure of acceptance of Du Parcq's conclusions was important because most people obtained an understanding of the Dartmoor riot and its causes from the newsprint media.

The purpose of this chapter is to examine the manner in which the press reported on the riot and to consider the extent to which media

interpretations of events sympathised with assessments by the official inquiry report. The press offered an interpretation of reality and, as has been stated elsewhere, if press interpretations 'have a public reality of their own', if they come to represent reality 'for all practical purposes', we should at least be aware of the way in which they are constructed and the influences that direct the process.[16] Certainly, the dramatic and violent imagery used in press coverage served to further enhance the newsworthiness of the riot and prolong its media lifetime. However, what underlay these representations of the Dartmoor riot were moral judgements reflecting and illustrating social anxieties 'beliefs, values, and understandings'. As Chibnall has suggested:

> [t]here is, perhaps, no other domain of news interest in which latent press ideology becomes more explicit than in what we may term 'law-and-order news'. Nowhere else is it made quite so clear what it is that papers value as healthy and praiseworthy or deplore as evil and degenerate in society. Nowhere else are the limits of newspaper values such as neutrality, objectivity and balance revealed with such clarity.[17]

According to Scraton et al., such coverage could also help to legitimate official responses that place responsibility for such disturbances with 'a minority hard core of violent men whose objectives are to disrupt the regime, intimidate other prisoners and injure prison officers'.[18] In such an event involving offenders convicted of serious crimes, finding those who could be portrayed as evil posed no difficulties. However prisoners who came to the aid of prison officers were similarly convicted but presented something of a paradox through their 'good' behaviour.

This chapter concentrates on the press reports in the immediate aftermath of the riot. Although ownership of radios (and the purchase of ten shilling radio licenses) had expanded rapidly during the 1920s, by the early 1930s, unlike newspapers, they were still present in a minority of households and the BBC provided the only service.[19] The newspapers examined include a range from those which dominated the market both in terms of sales and, as Bingham has observed, stylistically; the *Daily Mail*, the *Daily Express*, the *Daily Mirror* and the *Daily Herald*.[20] These and other papers examined here, *The Times*, *Manchester Guardian* and *Observer*, *Daily Telegraph*, *Evening News*, *Daily Worker* and the Sunday newspaper the *News of the World*, also represent a spectrum of political perspectives from the broadly conservative *Daily Mail*, *Daily Express* and

*Daily Mirror* to the Labour Party supported *Daily Herald* and the Communist Party supported *Daily Worker*. Concentration is upon coverage of the riot and its aftermath and so does not include coverage of the trial of the Dartmoor defendants. This is because the stance of the newspapers towards the prison and its inmates is evident from direct coverage of the riot and also because the trial is scrutinised in a previous chapter albeit not with a focus on reportage.

Unfortunately, what examination of these newspaper reports cannot give us is direct insight into how the reader responded and interpreted press stories or their emotional investment in them, although it is clear that readers invest imaginatively in what they read.[21] What can be suggested is that vivid and dramatic press coverage catered to calculations about readers' demand and helped to set the agenda or framework for the content of everyday conversation. According to Bingham, the national daily newspapers symbolised the new mass society and furthermore while 'on one level manufacturing an ephemeral, daily publication, in a deeper sense these Fleet Street journalists were forging a long-lasting cultural product'.[22] The inter-war years were crucial in this development and have been described as 'the years during which national daily newspapers became part of everyday life' and were 'perhaps the most important channel of information about contemporary life'.[23]

## Reporting on the riot

Initial press stories about the Dartmoor riot were dramatic. Typical front pages ran: 'DARTMOOR PRISON FIRED BY CONVICT MUTINEERS' or '300 CONVICTS MUTINY AT DARTMOOR, TROOPS READY IN WAR EQUIPMENT WITH MACHINE GUNS'.[24] While rumour and speculation as wild as the way convicts were asserted to have behaved composed part of the reporting, there was also a significant degree of accuracy as well as repetition across different papers. Indeed press coverage prompted a letter from Sandringham stating that the King (George V) was

> greatly perturbed at the very full accounts which (in addition to the official statement issued by the Home Office) have appeared in the newspapers regarding the recent serious trouble at Dartmoor. It seems to His Majesty that every facility and most exact information must have been supplied by the Prison Authorities to the Press . . . . The King cannot help feeling that it is undignified and unwise thus to make public our troubles.[25]

The Home Office reassured the King that the prison authorities were giving no more information to the press than 'absolutely necessary' and received in response the sympathy of the King regarding their difficulties 'in restraining the imagination of present day reporters!'[26] A later commentator suggested that the Dartmoor riot was 'reported in great detail, and with much embroidery'.[27] It's clear that the Prison Commission were being inundated with press enquiries so they began, belatedly, to prioritise keeping journalists, and the BBC, informed about, for example, the arrangements being made to bring criminal prosecutions against some prisoners for their actions during the riot. However, this was not done until after the initial inquiry into the riot had reported.[28] In contrast to official handling of later major prison disturbances, the prison authorities in the early 1930s were clearly not adept at news management.[29] Development of such media related skills had been directed more to promoting the reformative activities and incremental achievements of the Prison Commission, particularly regarding Borstal development. This was a different challenge from that posed by having to deal with assertive, demanding and critical journalists responding en masse to a single major event.

In the context of what seems to have been quite generally perceived as the humane 'modern spirit' of contemporary penal reform, initial reports on the riot exuded amazement or denunciation or both. The riot seemed to 'belong to another age, or at least to some other country'.[30] Suddenly, it was observed in the *Daily Herald*: 'we are faced with a condition of affairs which we believed could exist only in the United States'[31] and was elsewhere described as 'American-like'.[32] For the *Daily Mail* this was a 'page which might have been taken from the history of American prisons [but] written on bleak Dartmoor'; prior organisation of the riot was assumed and referred to as the 'American plan'.[33] American prisons had recently experienced a wave of riots in response to appalling conditions. These were not marked by the involvement and leadership of organised gangsters who remained a small minority of prisoners.[34] Several newspapers compared the action to that of Hollywood movies or surmised that in some way films such as *The Big House* encouraged imitation, except 'here was a real-life drama far more spectacular, far more thrilling, and – because it is happening in England – far more incredible'.[35]

Home Office statements were not at first forthcoming about possible causes of the disturbance, although a statement with an outline of what had happened was issued.[36] This described the riot as merely a 'somewhat serious disturbance',[37] a fine example of 'official reticence'

of the kind that Mark Benney, an ex-criminal turned criminologist, later saw as marking the prison system generally. This reticence was enabled by the Official Secrets Act which was designed to prevent 'enemy agents from learning the true strength of the nation's defences' but instead was used, contended Benney, to protect vested bureaucratic interests from the public no matter where the public interest lay.[38] According to a contemporary journalist's account it wasn't until 6 pm on the day of the riot that prison authorities received press representatives and 'vouchedsafed anything in the nature of news'. Most important for the 'official mind' was, by this account, to minimise as far as possible 'the magnitude of the outbreak, and to be as sparing of information as possible'. In fact this reticence served to fuel sensational coverage.[39]

Inevitably perhaps, press coverage of the riot became mired in morally laden assumptions based on the criminal careers of Dartmoor's inmates. The *Daily Mail* soon focused on what was described as a 'group of about 20 men, some of them the most desperate and notorious criminals in the country, [who were] believed to have been responsible for the trouble which led to the mutiny on Sunday'. The report continued with an exaggerated portrayal of all those inmates in the punishment cells as guilty of serious assaults on prison officers: 'one of the first things done by this group was to liberate all the men who were in punishment cells for assaults and savage attacks on warders'. Thus, within a few minutes of the revolt, the worst possible elements within the prison had run riot.[40]

One of the only two prisons designated specifically for serious and repeat offenders, by 1932 Dartmoor certainly did hold the older and more persistently criminal offenders.[41] However, concepts of persistence and dangerousness were quickly conflated although the *Observer* attempted to make some distinction:, '[i]t would not be very wide of the mark to say that every convict at Dartmoor is either a confirmed criminal or a dangerous criminal, or both'.[42] Moreover, length of sentence was automatically associated with violence of crime and violent conduct during the riot. Scrutiny focused on the alleged determining influence of a minority of the most dangerous among the prisoners. Several newspapers held a small band of 'desperadoes – a handful of the worst types in the underworld' responsible, some of whom, according to the *Daily Mirror*, which proceeded to blur dangerousness, savagery and sexual offences, were 'sentenced for the most revolting of crimes'.[43] *The Times* quoted 'a police official' who called for 'the sternest measures' against the 'gang' of desperate men who led the mutiny and

behaved 'worse than wild beasts' on this 'day of terror'.[44] This was embellished with a claim that a 'number of desperate characters now in Dartmoor were formerly members of gangs living in London'.[45] While the *Manchester Guardian* had associated long-term prisoners with the violence, *The Times* and the *Daily Mirror* took several speculative steps further. The worst and most dangerous convicts in Dartmoor had become members of a London gang and the ringleaders of the riot; ringleaders who, according to the *Daily Mirror*, were 'without exception ex-Borstal boys'.[46] In a later article, the *Daily Mail* commented that there was

> a general belief that such [criminal] gangs are often formed in prisons and it may be added that many police officers are of the opinion that the Borstal prison so far from being a deterrent of crime is a place where young malefactors learn from other prisoners the worst features of crime.[47]

In fact, even amongst those 31 taken to trial for their actions during the riot, only 12 were ex-Borstal boys.[48]

The idea of organised crime raised the threat that convicts could have networks outside the prison enlisted to aid escape and that the riot had been 'carefully planned' in advance.[49] The *Daily Herald* claimed on the 26 January that ex-convicts had been seen near the prison that afternoon and on the following day and that the 'possibility of an attack on the prison walls by dynamite from outside . . . [had] also been seriously considered'.[50] In the *Daily Mail*, the 'rescue plot' behind the Dartmoor riot was backed by 'plenty of money and organized by the most skilled brains of the underworld'. In an attempt to convince, evidence was given in the form of a story from a garage owner who had seen an American saloon type of car with a tuned engine like a racing car holding tough looking men.[51] The *Evening News* went further claiming an attack was to utilise 'CAR LOADS OF ARMED CRIMINALS FROM LONDON'.[52] In some cases, this approach was fuelled by statements alleged to have come from prison officials. A special correspondent for *The Times* claimed that the 'trouble' in Dartmoor had come 'as much from outside as inside' and that this had been confirmed by Governor Roberts who had apparently stated that 'when a convict attempted to escape last week there were three motor-cars waiting for him outside'.[53] Specifically, the outbreak on the parade ground early that Sunday morning was said to have been a 'pre-arranged plan' and that trouble had been 'smouldering' for some time.[54] Attacks on two officers and an

attempted escape in the previous week were highlighted as was the Governor being shouted down when he had tried to address convicts in chapel the day before the riot.[55] In the *Daily Mirror* it was reported that 'a Princetown resident' and others in the town had known for over a week that trouble was pending, and the night before the riot had been 'a night of terror'.[56] Such reasonably accurate coverage, albeit exaggerated and sensationalised, certainly suggests that prison staff and/or their families were talking to the press.

By 27 January most newspapers, including *The Times*, *Daily Mirror*, *Daily Telegraph* and *Daily Herald*, presented the idea of a premeditated conspiracy with the aid of forces from outside the prison as a known fact. The retention of troops and police at the prison was depicted primarily as a precaution against external attack and dubbed the 'siege of Dartmoor'.[57] Hyperbole was perhaps most evident in descriptions of the extent and nature of the external threat and the forces put in place to meet that. The *Daily Mail* asserted misleadingly that on 26 January 'ARMED TROOPS [were] IN CHARGE AT DARTMOOR' and reported that late on the Monday night and 'with the greatest secrecy', a detachment of armed soldiers from Crownhill Barracks, Plymouth, had arrived at the prison 'in full fighting order' including four machine guns posted on the outskirts of the prison. In addition, '[s]pecially picked officers of Scotland Yard were [supposedly] scouring London's underworld' for information on a gangster conspiracy.[58] The *Daily Telegraph* informed its readers that the

> authorities are convinced that armed gangsters in London and other large towns had arranged to render active assistance to the mutineers, and were waiting with their motor-cars in the vicinity of the prison to carry off all the desperadoes who broke through the line of defence.[59]

The ringleaders, according to the report, were 'notorious gunmen serving long terms of penal servitude'. One of the 'bandits' was even named as Jackson, who had attempted to escape in the week prior to the riot.[60]

The *Daily Mirror* attenuated these conspiracy theories further to include the possibility of a 'gigantic' and 'secret' 'COMMUNIST PLOT TO FREE CONVICTS' en masse.[61] Similarly the *Daily Mail*, with its recent history of hysteria about Communism, claimed a 'DESPERATE "RED" PLOT' and referred to an unfortunately unnamed convict with 'well-known Communist aims' who was one of the ringleaders of the riot.[62] 'He has got into touch with friends outside the prison through the ordinary channels of convicts leaving when their term of imprisonment has

expired' and that as a result 'the authorities have little doubt that a widespread organization is out to wreck law and authority'.[63] There certainly was a military presence in the area surrounding the prison for days after the riot as soldiers in uniform from Crownhill Barracks were called in for security purposes. The rationale for this was explained in a Home Office statement which made it clear that 'a company of infantry' was posted outside the prison on the night of Tuesday 26 January because expected additional prison officers had not arrived. In addition, information from 'loyal' convicts had intimated that an attempt at rescue would be made by outside friends in cars and that it was anticipated that these forces would be armed. However, as Alexander Paterson pointed out, even if such a conspiracy existed, 'the detection of any suspicious characters' would be difficult because as a result of the riot Princetown was 'thronging with cars, with sightseers, and journalists.' A statement to that effect was issued to the press.[64]

In the aftermath of the riot there was continued unrest among the inmates, many of whom were held in close confinement pending investigations. Such instability exacerbated fears and increased the credibility of speculative stories that the Home Office came to recognise as unfounded. No evidence other than rumour and supposition appears to have been forthcoming about plans for an attack by external agencies upon the prison. There was also little evidence regarding prior preparation except the discovery of improvised weapons. In an early report *The Times's* special correspondent felt that in order to prove prior organisation by convicts it was sufficient to describe the viciousness of the kinds of weapons that had been found following the retaking of the prison, notably knives and 'a duster containing about 2lb of nails' and pickaxe handles thrown over the wall, 'presumably with the idea of using them as weapons if they managed to escape'. Two days later, this correspondent gave the discovery of ten butcher's knives under flagstones in the kitchen as evidence that this was a 'premeditated and well-planned attack'.[65] Similarly, reports in the *Daily Mirror*, *Daily Telegraph* and *Daily Mail* on the 25 and 26 January immediately associated weapons with preparation so that '[v]arious weapons' found in cells proved that the outbreak 'had been planned weeks ahead'. Knives were found with 'all kinds of improvised weapons', a handkerchief with half a pound of nails in it and another convict had 'in his possession a lump of lead covered over with his prison handkerchief'. This evidence was taken as conclusive that by some unexplained means a 'skillfully organised plot' had been managed.[66] The *Daily Mail*, it was claimed, had also obtained information about weapons during an interview with

Superintendant Mead of the Plymouth Police: '[o]n all the low roofs of the sheds there were groups of convicts, who had armed themselves with table legs, axe handles, stockings filled with handfuls of nails, handkerchiefs in which handfuls of nails had been bound, and brick bats'.[67]

Coverage in the *Daily Express*, *The Times*, *Daily Mirror*, *Daily Telegraph* and *Manchester Guardian* concurred that the fact weapons were found meant mutiny had been premeditated.[68] However, all of these reports referred only to knives, a prison handkerchief with nails in it, a lump of lead, also in a prison handkerchief, and vague phrases such as 'all kinds of improvised weapons'.[69] As evidence of prior planning, this was weak and the Home Office quickly responded that although 'improvised' weapons were found in the aftermath of the riot 'so far as can be ascertained at present' there had been 'no previous preparation' by convicts 'for furnishing themselves with implements'.[70] A book on Dartmoor Prison published in 1933 commented with hindsight that knives convicts had obtained by breaking open locked kitchen cupboards were used for 'no more serious purpose than the cutting of meat and bread for sandwiches'.[71]

There was less continuity of reporting with regard to other details of the riot. There was even basic disagreement in initial reports about numbers involved and injuries sustained. *The Times* said 'over 100 men' were involved in the riot, as against the *Daily Mirror* and *Daily Herald's* 300 'mutineering' convicts and the *Manchester Guardian* and *Daily Telegraph*'s estimate of 'between 200 and 300 men'.[72] The *Daily Express* gave contradictory figures on the same page of between 200 and 300 and then 400 men.[73] The same difficulty was clear with regard to injuries. On the day following the riot, *The Times* stated that about 20 men, none of whom were officers, had been injured and suggested that the low number of injuries in itself reflected credit on 'the steadiness and self-control of the prison officers'.[74] The *Manchester Guardian* asserted that between 60 and 70 convicts were injured, 'many' warders had heavily bandaged heads and four warders had been attacked by 'convicts'.[75] The *Daily Mirror* and *Daily Telegraph* concurred on between 60 and 70, with some officers being 'seriously mauled' and 'Five in hospital'.[76] The *Daily Express* gave a particularly dramatic and specific front page headline: '84 CONVICTS SHOT AND HURT IN DARTMOOR' and on page two, 'ESCAPING DARTMOOR CONVICT SHOT ON ROOF' and 'several' convicts 'injured in this way'.[77] The *Daily Mail* concurred with 84 convict casualties and described an 'amazing reign of terror' in which 'the great majority' of the 400 convicts were 'out of control'.[78] The chaos of

the riot and its immediate aftermath as well as the limited information coming from the Home Office facilitated a creative approach to stories giving the number of those injured. However there was more accurate reporting of the most serious injury received during the riot by a convict called Mitchel. As early as the day following the riot, the *Daily Mirror* and *Daily Mail* published an eye witness account of this incident which said that a convict on the roof had been shot and he had been seen 'crashing 60 ft to the ground'.[79]

A Home Office Statement confirmed firearms had been used but gave no statistics on injuries and was vague, bordering on disingenuous, about the convict who fell from a roof after being shot.

> Determined efforts were made by the prisoners to get over the boundary wall. These efforts were frustrated by officers stationed outside the wall, who were compelled to use their firearms. No serious casualties resulted from their use.

The statement noted that a full report had not yet been received, although it was understood that the most serious injury was of a 'prisoner who fell from a wall and is suffering from concussion'.[80] The *Du Parcq Report* itself was conservative, stating that a total of 23 inmates received baton wounds, seven shot wounds, two were injured by fellow prisoners and nine had general bruises, lacerations and so on, although with regard to the latter two categories it was accepted that there were probably more unreported injuries.

In some newspapers the emphasis on intent to escape paralleled stories about convicts playing musical instruments and drinking alcohol raided from the prison officers' canteen. In the *Manchester Guardian* mutineers sounded the 'Charge' on a bugle whereas the *Daily Express* reported that convicts played musical instruments and sang 'The Red Flag'.[81] The latter claim, which was also reported in the *Daily Mail*, was an attempt to discredit Communism by associating its adherents with gangsters and violence but was denied in evidence to the Du Parcq Inquiry.[82] Central to the drama were attacks by convicts on the Governor and Assistant Prison Commissioner, Colonel Turner, both in the prison when rioting broke out. The account in the *Daily Express* reads almost like a *Boy's Own* adventure and was an embellished and fictionalised account of a few basic facts:

> One convict of exceptional strength, who stands more than six feet high, broke the window of the governor's office, hurled through it a

> great stone which narrowly missed the governor, and tried to climb through to continue his attack. Colonel Turner ran from his room into the turmoil of the square and there, with great courage, tried to address them. Nobody listened . . . . Three men sprang at the Colonel. He struggled with them, and they were pulled away by two convicts who remained loyal.[83]

The *Manchester Guardian* and *Daily Herald* even named the convict 'lifer', Donovan, who was identified as having helped Turner and covered the story in equally dramatic terms:

> Donovan rushed in between the Commissioner and a band of convicts who had bars and other things as well as bludgeons. It looked as if either Donovan or Colonel Turner, or both, would be laid dead, but Donovan turned them. It was a brave thing. Other stories of the pluck of loyal convicts are being told.[84]

All of the newspapers considered here printed stories of the heroism or 'pluck' of these 'loyal' prisoners, defined by *The Times* as those 'instrumental in saving property and, in all probability, life'. Their criminal careers became less important than their courage whereas those presented as actively involved in the rioting became almost personified by their criminal status. The *Daily Mirror* suggested erroneously that these 'loyal' prisoners were mostly men near the end of their sentences. But, for example, Donovan's death sentence for murder was commuted to life only in 1928.[85]

Coverage of the retaking of the prison was framed as heroic forces of the law narrowly defeating greater numerical forces of disorder and violence. There were hand-to-hand battles between police and prison officers and a 'howling mob of convicts' who, according to *The Times*, shouted '[c]ome in and get it'.[86] Extensive use was made of eye-witness accounts including from anonymous prison and police officers or a 'high prison official', Colonel Turner, who was quoted extensively in the *Daily Mail* along with the driver of the omnibus who conveyed some of the police to the prison.[87] In the *Daily Mirror*, the omnibus driver, who did not enter the prison himself, drew an emotive and imaginative scene: '[c]onvicts were driving the warders back and were gradually gaining complete control as the police charged through the courtyard and tackled the mutineers. I have never seen such a ghastly hand-to-hand fight even during the war. Men were knocked out right and left'.[88]

Much emphasis was on the threat of what might have happened had the police not arrived just in time. The *Daily Mirror* quoted an eye-witness who claimed that had reinforcements 'been ten minutes later nothing could have stopped 300 desperate convicts escaping from the roof and terrorising the countryside'.[89] Similarly, the *Daily Express*, *Manchester Guardian* and *The Times* maintained that only the arrival of the police saved the situation. The *Daily Mail* added a further important factor, the moorland weather. Had 'one of the thick mists, for which Dartmoor is notorious, settled down over Princetown on Sunday it is certain that nothing could have prevented many of the convicts from escaping'.[90] Furthermore, according to 'a police official' *The Times* reported had the 'mutiny' succeeded, 'men broken out of Dartmoor, it would have meant the sack of Princetown. Not a man, woman or child would have been safe'. The implication being that the sole purpose of the mutineers was to escape and that extensive violence would inevitably have followed.[91]

In the days following the riot, the press gleaned any information that helped to sustain an atmosphere of alarm and potential threat. Accounts of forces held in reserve or on standby lent an air of suspense to coverage as did hints and rumours of continued convict aggression and uneasiness among residents of Princetown.[92] The *Manchester Guardian* struck possibly the most moderate tone. It reported on security measures but by the 26 January was also suggesting that all was quiet in the prison and published the assertion by Alexander Paterson that '[e]verything is quiet and orderly . . . and the situation is completely under control'.[93] On the same day, *The Times* and *Daily Mirror* emphasised only continued security arrangements – a 100 soldiers from the Worcester Regiment in full battle dress 'suddenly rushed to Princetown from Plymouth' as opposed to the *Manchester Guardian*'s 100 soldier's 'moved out from Crownhill to Dartmoor last night'.[94]

On 27 January, the *Manchester Guardian* noted sentry boxes at the prison gates were now manned by police and not soldiers and that soldiers from the first battalion of the Worcester Regiment had been withdrawn that morning. Two hundred warders from London prisons had arrived to relieve those at Dartmoor and the prison was described as all quiet although there was talk of demonstrations.[95] The *Daily Mirror* spoke of the threat of further outbreak as long as 'secret convict organisation' existed and until the ringleaders were punished. The atmosphere was said to be 'terrible'. Troops had been withdrawn but barriers across the road were manned by armed police. Ex-Dartmoor convicts had been seen in the vicinity and hotel and boarding house proprietors were told to be vigilant.[96] An erroneous story about a missing master key first

covered in several papers on 27 January was resolved one way or another in reports the following day. The *Manchester Guardian* reported that officials denied that such a key existed while the *Daily Mirror* noted that after a long search all master keys had been accounted for.[97]

Many newspapers were reluctant to let go of such a dramatic and gripping story and continued to capitalise on any material available. On 30 January, the *Manchester Guardian* reported that, aside from the continued truculence of a few 'ringleaders', the trouble was really over but the *Daily Mail* maintained that prisoners were 'still defiant' and that before 'ordinary routine' could be 'safely restored' large numbers of prisoners would have to be transferred.[98] In fact, 16 convicts described as 'troublesome' had been transferred from Dartmoor on 23 March and further transfers were to take place in May following the trial of the Dartmoor defendants.[99] Therefore, some press reports were accurate in reporting continued trouble but this was used to maintain an impression of unrelenting danger. Similarly, the *Daily Telegraph* reported continued disorder by 'ringleaders' in their cells.[100] As late as 2 February, the *Daily Mirror* observed that the atmosphere was still very tense and 'one theory' was that a desperate prisoner might make an attack on the gasworks.[101] Grasping at straws by 3 February, the *Daily Mail* hinted that the authorities had not yet 'ruled out the possibility that friends of convicts' were still 'lurking on Dartmoor watching for a chance to help men escape'. The article reported that lights had been seen on the hillside and from the prison suggesting signalling.[102] Sulkily, the *Daily Telegraph* admitted by the 4th that 'Dartmoor almost resumed its normal aspect', although a reminder of the mutiny could still be seen in the bandaged heads of some of the convicts at exercise.[103] Even lack of news became news but always with attempts to insert an underlying menace, with assertions such as 'ALL DARTMOOR CONVICTS AT WORK AGAIN' but 'no chances are being taken'.[104] The Dartmoor riot and its aftermath continued to attract journalistic interest for many years. Whenever inmates convicted for their involvement in the riot were released or reconvicted the opportunity was taken to relive the drama of 24 January 1932. The press, and no doubt the public, had become sensitised to associate almost anything relating to Dartmoor Prison with the riot.[105]

## Discussion of the causes of the riot

The press reports were quick to pick up on prisoners' grievances about the quality of food, specifically the porridge, in the days running up to the outbreak, but doubts were also expressed that this would

have been sufficient to cause an outbreak of such dimensions. *The Times* discounted such supposed grievances as a mere pretext while the *Manchester Guardian* observed that there were probably 'deeper discontents' suggesting that prison life which 'numbs or enrages' was a factor. Convicts, it was asserted, had little to lose as they had 'already endured the harshest punishment other than death that in a civilized community is inflicted on those who disobey the laws'.[106] Colonel Turner, Assistant Prison Commissioner, who had been inside the prison during the riot, was cited regarding the difficulties, if not the impossibility, of adapting 'old-fashioned prisons' that dated 'from another century' to 'modern ideas on the reformation of criminals'.[107] The *Evening News* maintained that something was 'radically wrong', not only with Dartmoor but also with the 'whole system of penal restraint'. The present system, the report continued, was 'a jumble of the traditional and the scientific' and outbreaks such as that at Dartmoor exposed 'cracks not merely in the plaster, but in the foundations'.[108] In a stance patently unsympathetic to the professed direction of penal reform, the *Daily Mirror* stated that discipline had become lax and too much notice was 'taken of the well-meaning philanthropists who . . . encouraged more humane treatment for prisoners' but were 'deluded in their hope of reforming such debased natures'. According to the paper, prison officers, and this was certainly borne out by articles in *The Prison Officers' Magazine*, felt that 'increased liberty and movement . . . has given the toughest customers more opportunity of grousing together and plotting' and that the truncheons 'warders' carried were of 'little real use in sharp encounters'.[109] The *Daily Mail* concurred and published an article entitled 'Are we Pampering Our Worst Men? The Facts About Life in Princetown Prison' in which it was maintained that life in the prison had changed a great deal during the previous 15 years. This was accompanied by the misinformed assertion that all convicts in Dartmoor enjoyed 'jam for their tea, tobacco to smoke, books to read, lectures to hear, concerts to enjoy' so that provision for these men was compared favourably to that of the unemployed.[110] These kinds of stories reflected what *The Manchester Guardian* summed up as broadly two 'quite incompatible' but confused accounts of the mutiny which were sometimes even published in the same newspaper

> One is that the outbreak was internal in origin: that it was inspired by grievances, real or fancied, against the officers of the prison and expressed a genuine discontent, enhanced according to some accounts, by the persuasions of a few prisoners with a revolutionary

> turn of mind. The other story is that the mutiny was planned outside the prison by 'desperate crooks,' 'motor bandits,' 'leaders of the underworld,' or the like, with the deliberate object of freeing certain prisoners whose services they required. We have seen, so far, no direct and tangible evidence of such a plot, though it is possible to deduce, from the statements of officials and from the summoning of troops, that, to say the least, the prison authorities believe that such a plot might exist.[111]

The coverage in the *Manchester Guardian* reflected the first of these accounts, although without the suggestion of revolutionary influences. The two differing accounts suggest, rather than directly reflect, a political divide between support and antagonism regarding contemporary penal reform. Evidence could be interpreted according to differing perspectives, for instance stories in the *Daily Herald* concurred with *The Times* and the *Daily Mirror* that staff reductions were a causal factor behind the Dartmoor outbreak but maintained that this had resulted in not less but more rigid discipline.[112] Hence, Gordon Rose has suggested that the riot and its coverage did 'substantially sharpen the tone of the debate between those who thought that the courts and the prison authorities were being too soft with offenders' and those who believed in more 'constructive training' and by implication supported the direction of contemporary penal reform.[113]

A special correspondent for *The Times* maintained improvements and alleviations in prison discipline had been 'abused' by 'the hardened convict of the worst and most desperate type', the ringleaders who had 'incited the less evilly disposed men to kick against all regulations'. This, it was claimed, was also the stance of police and prison officials.[114] Two days after the riot it was noted perceptively in the left wing *Daily Herald*, 'already the "treat-em-rough" school are raising an outcry of excessive humanitarianism . . . the Dartmoor insurrection will doubtless be used as a plea for more rigorous discipline in all prisons'. A day later, a facetious *Daily Mirror* editorial obliged:

> one would have thought that the cause of Prison Reform – if by that phrase is meant a softening and lightening of the conditions of punishment – would hardly receive *encouragement* from this violent episode. And yet we see that an esteemed [likely to be the *Daily Herald*] contemporary is of opinion that the bleakness, isolation and depressing appearance of Dartmoor Prison are enough to account for the desire to escape from it. Are we to conclude that desperadoes will grow docile in buildings designed as palaces or casinos?[115]

On the day following the riot, a *Daily Mirror* editorial was already suggesting that a factor in the riot had been rumours that many of the convicts were to be removed from Dartmoor to town prisons. Two days later it was reported that within the previous year staff at the prison had been reduced by over 40 per cent, that the resident chaplain, who had left some time ago, had not been replaced and further that 'nearly half of the convicts there have been transferred to other prisons'.[116] The *Manchester Guardian* noted that before the War there had been over 1,000 convicts in Dartmoor, which had accommodation for 1,200. There had been a 'big clearance' during the war and more recently younger criminals had been transferred to other prisons and preventative institutions with Dartmoor being utilised increasingly for what the paper called 'old-timers'. Since that change of policy numbers in the prison had rarely exceeded 500. This depiction of Dartmoor as containing predominantly 'old lags'; 'old criminals' having served perhaps 'four or five terms of penal servitude' and therefore likely to be docile and obedient differed from the more directly menacing portrayals in the *Daily Mirror*, *The Times* and *Daily Express* of the convicts as seriously dangerous and threatening.[117] Yet the *Manchester Guardian* was itself inconsistent and had reported earlier that long-term prisoners were 'naturally violent' and hardened and assumed also that the primary aim of these brutal, hardened convicts was to escape.[118]

The *Daily Express* maintained that trouble had been brewing at the prison in part due to 'a certain number of men having been drafted away to Parkhurst and other prisons, leaving Dartmoor with some of the worst offenders in criminal records'.[119] For the *Daily Mail*, this was only the most spectacular mutiny of many that had occurred at the prison precisely because it was a place of confinement for 'the most hardened and desperate criminals' implying that violence from such men was inevitable but giving no evidence to substantiate the claim of multiple major disturbances. Furthermore, it was maintained, there 'has for many years been a standing arrangement with the military that an armed guard should always be available for duty at Dartmoor on receipt of a telegram from the governor'.[120] This was the case but it wasn't unique to Dartmoor.

## Response to the *Du Parcq Report*

The official inquiry into the 'whole of the circumstances connected with the disorder' was announced in the press on 26 January and began that day.[121] The aim, according to the *Manchester Guardian*, was for

the inquiry to proceed as 'expeditiously as possible', in addition the 'knowledge that convicts will be allowed to give evidence' was linked to a quieter atmosphere in the prison.[122] Objections from the broadly centre and left of centre press to the announcement that the inquiry would sit in private were published soon after or in the case of the *Manchester Guardian* on the same day.[123] Resolutions from meetings of the Labour Party and the Trades Union Congress called for a full, exhaustive and public inquiry.[124] These calls were reiterated in the *Daily Herald*, part owned by the TUC, which stressed that it was not only Dartmoor on trial but also 'the whole prison system'.[125] A whitewash was predicted by the Communist paper, the *Daily Worker*, which asserted that the inmates were victims not only of poor conditions but also of capitalism: '[a]ll that is likely to be published is a summary of findings, calculated to whitewash the administration and to laud the heroism of the warders (armed) who held the convicts (unarmed) at bay until the police arrived'.[126] Speculative, 'wild talk' of plots was designed to distract attention from 'the scandalous conduct of British penal establishments, aggravated by the "economies" of the National government'.[127] An editorial in the *Manchester Guardian* called for a public inquiry to address the fear and uncertainty bred by the riot. In such an atmosphere it reflected, 'almost any story can find credit, and sober truth has hard work catching up with fevered fancy'.[128]

The inquiry was highly selective and certainly expeditious concluding on 29 January; Du Parcq and Paterson left the prison on the afternoon of the following day.[129] The report was issued on Saturday 6 February as a White Paper (Cmd. 4010, price 6d) so that the Sunday papers were first able to cover it expansively. Copies were not intended to go to the press until 12 noon after MPs had received it but the Vote Office had apparently not received notification of this and were making copies available to Reuters and other representatives of the press who asked for it. Indeed, the press was described as besieging the Stationary Office.[130] A short piece on the *Du Parcq Report* appeared in the *Evening News* that morning (6 February). However, as early as 2 February, the *Daily Herald* claimed to have information as to the contents of the report which was then in the hands of the Home Office.[131] This matter of a possible leak to the press was referred to the Director of Public Prosecutions but no action was taken.

Most newspapers published a substantial summary of the *Du Parcq Report*. The *Observer* commented that the 'main drift' of the report was clear, the regimen was humane and there were no substantial grievances. Indeed, it was denied explicitly that 'the more humane and reformative

treatment of prisoners which has been the aim of prison administration in this country for many years conduces to disorder'. While the prison officers were commended, a small number were believed to have been guilty of 'irregularities and worse', perhaps smuggling in hacksaw blades. Du Parcq's criticism of Dartmoor's Governor, Roberts, for not having the 'character' to quell the disturbance inserted an aspect into the discussion of the causality of the riot that had until the Report been rarely voiced in the press. The *Daily Worker*[132] had claimed that a mutiny had occurred under Governor Roberts at his previous prison, Winson Green, and the *Manchester Guardian* had criticised Roberts decision to allow the prisoners to parade on that Sunday morning.[133] However for the most part the sympathetic coverage of Roberts's position had continued even when he was ousted on the pretext of needing rest as a result of the strain of events.[134] Newspapers also followed the lead of the *Du Parcq Report* in blaming the dangerous 'modern' criminal for which Dartmoor was unsuitable. Specific mention was made of the 'motor bandit' and 'gangster' serving long sentences, usually 'young, determined and adventurous'.[135]

*The Times* leader on the Monday judged Du Parcq to have concluded with 'admirable dispatch' not only producing a 'thorough and dispassionate' report but also a largely 'reassuring' one which made 'the ill-considered clamour for a public inquiry' look 'foolish'. Much of the information, the leader claimed, could never have been extracted in open court and publication would have been prejudicial to those who may have to stand trial. Du Parcq had left the 'present theory and practice of British prisons administration intact'. The causes of the 'mutiny' were to be found 'on the spot' to the extent that *The Times* suggested the riot was 'almost an accident in the general record of prison administration'. But for a newer type of criminal, it was asserted, the riot would not have happened, the existence of this modern criminal made 'an outbreak of some kind sooner or later . . . nearly inevitable'.

> The era of the War, the film, and the motor has created another class of criminal and convict. It belongs, as statistics show, to a younger age group. The typical 'gangster' is able-bodied and intelligent, vicious beyond reclamation, and contemptuous of society while determined to live at its expense. He knows the use of the car and the gun, will take most risks, and does not shun violence. He is rebellious against any restrictions on his good pleasure in or out of gaol.[136]

There was, according to *The Times*, no question of reversing humane tendencies in prison administration but that society 'which contrived to

rid itself of the garrotter' must now find means to extirpate an equally pestilent type of criminal, the product of our own age.[137]

The report in the *Daily Mail* suggested that the inquiry was completed with '[s]urprising speed' but the content was described as 'admirably frank' although also 'disquieting'.[138] Within the context of their already stated concerns about modern criminals, it was the 'the ingenuity, daring and initiative of the young motor-bandit class of criminal used to modern firearms and treating life with careless regard' that was emphasised and labelled as the 'GANGSTER CONVICTS PROBLEM'.[139] Following comments made in the *Du Parcq Report* about the isolated position of Dartmoor Prison being a problem, the *Daily Mirror* remarked that 'swift motor-car services' made Dartmoor an undesirable location. In line with its earlier coverage of the riot, the newspaper proceeded to exaggerate the role of London 'gangsters' in the disturbance, – 'Something like 75 per cent of the convicts are men well known to the underworld of London, and it is a simple matter for them to organise plans of escape with the co-operation of friends outside'.[140] A report in the *Daily Mail* observed that in the absence of the solution enjoyed by previous generations – Botany Bay, greater use should be made of urban prisons like Pentonville, Wormwood Scrubs and Wandsworth, which could be more efficiently guarded and provide more humane conditions for prison officers.[141] The logical conclusion was then: 'DARTMOOR TO BE CLOSED AS SOON AS POSSIBLE'. The only immediate evidence that could be cited for this assertion was rather vague: 'M.P.s consider that it is intended to close Dartmoor as soon as possible' but the article went on to suggest that the prison could be converted for use as a reformatory.[142]

The *Manchester Guardian* took the opportunity to denigrate such press coverage, especially that which dramatised the possibility of organised attacks from outside the prison. These 'tales' it was maintained, received little support from Du Parcq, apart from 'vague reference to' grounds for suspicion that persons outside have been in touch with some of the more dangerous convicts. In general, *The Report* was seen as confining itself narrowly to 'circumstances to do with the prison, organisation & personnel' that made the outbreak possible.[143] The *Daily Herald* made suspicion about trafficking by prison officers its front page headline but then focused unusually on the Scotland Yard investigation that was begun after Du Parcq and Paterson had completed their work. The CID investigation was perceived to be of greater importance. It was no doubt also perceived as such by the Dartmoor inmates who were prosecuted on the strength of evidence collected

by that investigation. The police report would state, the *Daily Herald* claimed, that 'at least 16 officers have been engaged for a considerable period in breaches of prison regulations' trafficking tobacco and correspondence, 'between a gang outside the prison and certain known leaders of the revolt'. However, no evidence was given to support this claim. The paper also reiterated that there was evidence that the riot 'was definitely planned with outside aid'.[144] But it was in large part the CID which actually laid such suspicions to rest for the prison authorities.[145]

The *Manchester Guardian* appeared more sceptical of *The Du Parcq Report* in line with its previous assertions that most prisoners had done little more than 'lose their heads and behave extravagantly'. Yet the newspaper was also inconsistent as it accepted the image of those portrayed as ringleaders as 'real vicious brutes', synonymous with the 'dangerous modern type', 'intelligent, entirely unscrupulous, with a capacity for leadership.' These were presumably not the 'old-timers' who were described in the newspaper as docile and obedient after having served perhaps four or five terms of penal servitude. The report was even imbued with a certain misjudged nostalgia for this latter 'traditional' kind of criminal who was supposedly lacking in 'imagination' but had 'a queer kind of respectability'. Finally, Du Parcq had, for the *Manchester Guardian*, disposed of the 'absurd suggestion' that the riot was a consequence of 'the general existing tendency to humanise prison administration'.[146]

Unlike *The Times*, *Manchester Guardian* and *Observer*, the *Daily Mirror* did not give over extensive column space to a summary of the Report but, with some insight, criticised Du Parcq, who for 'reasons left unexplained' was much more explicit about what did not cause the riot than what did. Indeed under a heading "'VAGUE" REPORT', the *Daily Mirror* recounted that there was a 'feeling in many quarters' that the official report on the Dartmoor mutiny was 'unsatisfactory on account of the vagueness on some material points'. The specific 'material points' that were felt to be insufficiently examined were whether persons outside had been in touch with the more dangerous criminals inside Dartmoor with a view to helping them escape and also that a small number of officers were guilty of irregularities.[147] These were aspects of the press coverage of the Dartmoor riot on which the *Daily Mirror* had speculated with some enthusiasm. The Editorial suggested that the public would not find the 'somewhat woolly document' convincing as it said little of what really happened, 'behind the prison scenes'. It observed that

> if the four very desperate criminals cited, thought to break free by organising a shouting match, committing arson and thereby concentrating the whole forces of law and order on Dartmoor, their methods were singularly inept. The Dartmoor Report is too vague. It assumes too much and reveals too little.[148]

The perspective of this summing-up may have been politically informed but the basic conclusions highlighted the extent to which the *Du Parcq Report* evaded close examination of the internal prison regime while almost automatically defending the direction of contemporary penal reform. An earlier *News of the World* report by 'ex-convict No' had also been sceptical that escape was the primary purpose of the disturbance, especially on a Sunday when there were no outside work parties. Perceptively it was asserted that the idea that the riot was planned with help from criminals from the 'London under world' was 'foolish and ridiculous' because the majority of 'old lags' in the prison had 'few friends'; the Dartmoor mutiny was, the article maintained, 'spontaneous'.[149]

## Conclusion

The potential for sensational and even extravagant reporting of the Dartmoor riot proved irresistible to all of the newspapers considered here. Aside from the *Daily Worker*, a Communist Party supported newspaper which depicted the prisoners as victims of capitalism, all the newspapers examined here associated offenders serving long sentences with dangerousness and violence. This was the case even though repeated offences of theft and breaking and entering appeared a great deal more often than crimes of physical violence in the criminal careers of the Dartmoor inmates. In most newspaper reports escape was assumed to be the primary aim of the rioters despite simultaneous coverage that the riot had an almost carnivalesque aspect with smoking, eating, drinking, dancing and musical instruments being played.

While reports in the *Manchester Guardian* and *Daily Herald* located the disturbance primarily to more institutional causes such as the age of the prison and longer sentenced convicts having little to lose, they still indulged in dramatic depictions of the violence and the violent. Across the news print media creative and speculative stories of conspiracies and outside plots were more prominent and expansive than any consideration of the penal policy context. The conservative newspapers

owned by press Barons Lord Rothermere and Lord Beaverbrook were especially colourful in this respect, namely the *Daily Mail*, the *Daily Mirror*, the *Evening News* and the *Daily Express*. In the *Daily Mirror* the riot was used to critique prison reform and the deluded philanthropists that pervaded 'soft' policies. The mutinous ringleaders of the riot were reckless and dangerous desperadoes convicted of revolting crimes whose activities had been facilitated by reform. Furthermore, they were ex-Borstal boys, and London gang members with Communist leanings.[150] However, precisely because of this emphasis on Dartmoor's inmates as particularly dangerous and as the worst in the prison system the conservative press was unable to mount an effective critique of contemporary penal policy as the former approach marked out Dartmoor as an exceptional institution and so not representative of the impact of prison reform. Dartmoor was portrayed as a distinct institution with particular kinds of offenders whose activities were behind the disturbance and therefore explained the outbreak. This approach dissipated any scrutiny of Dartmoor's problems or conditions as being the result of internal conditions or any factors which could be perceived as systemic. This approach implied that the problems that caused the riot could be remedied by administrative action which the public could 'safely leave in the hands of the authorities'.[151]

The strongest story to come out of contemporary press reports and indeed the official investigation into the riot was that responsibility for the disturbance was attributed firmly to a small number of convicts in Dartmoor of the 'dangerous modern type'; cited in the *Du Parcq Report* as the 'motor bandit' and the 'gangster'. The strength of this narrative reflected contemporary social concerns about motor bandits, organised crime and communists. There is no doubt that coverage of the riot staged and rehearsed a public debate on the direction of penal reform. As Gordon Rose has suggested, the riot and its coverage did sharpen the tone of the debate between those who felt the direction of penal reform was introducing unwarranted leniency and those who advocated greater classification and constructive training. Fortunately, for the prison authorities the former were less influential and the Prison Commission enjoyed the support of the Home Secretary. Other contextual factors also offered some protection. Firstly, the press were more interested in the drama and destructiveness of the riot and this overshadowed consideration of policy and undermined the ability of the conservative press to mount a sustained and effective critique. In addition, the fact that policy was

explicitly reducing the population at Dartmoor, which encouraged speculation that the prison would be closed, as well as the establishment in April 1931 of the Persistent Offenders Committee meant that scrutiny of policy regarding recidivists could be evaded or at least postponed.[152]

# 5

# The Elephant and Castle Gang and Criminal Careers of Dartmoor Prison Inmates

The narrative of the Dartmoor riot was written in media reports and in investigatory and legal documents emerging in the period following the disturbance. However, it was reinforced in the public consciousness through personal accounts of the 'mutiny' published as late as 1961. These are important because they not only offer the experiences of some of those in the prison at that time but also tend to embed more fully a perspective on the riot as being caused by a defined range of factors. Perhaps most prominent among these factors was the supposed influence of a small group of 'motor bandits' and 'gangsters' before and during the disturbance. This chapter examines the evidence relating to these prisoners and their role in the riot. These men had been convicted of serious offences, some of them had been known to one another prior to their imprisonment at Dartmoor and indeed had committed crimes together. Their activities immediately before the riot may well have contributed to the destabilisation of the prison regime, but it is questionable whether they were responsible for the outbreak in the sense that they planned and directed the disturbance from the outset. Nevertheless, the assigning of culpability for the riot to them operated to shift scrutiny from the prison regime and contemporary penal policy to the dangerousness of the inmates. This constructed a relatively simple narrative which was also accessible and attractive to the media.

In 1956 the Chaplain and Church Army Evangelist, Reverend Ball, who had been serving at Dartmoor Convict Prison at the time of the riot, published his autobiography *Prison Was my Parish*.[1] No doubt with sales in mind, a significant part of this was taken up by his contemplations on the riot and its causes. Ball offered not only a view based

on direct experience, albeit from over two decades before, but also a populist summary of the context which included inaccuracies:

> Not only was Dartmoor going through difficult days, on account of the country's adverse economic conditions which were helping to breed more and more crime, but the new Governor was asked to reduce his staff, just when the number of prisoners he was accommodating was increasing. In November [of 1931], we had one of the biggest batches in my time. Some forty men, mostly smash-and-grab gangsters, including the notorious Ruby Sparks, arrived, to add their quota of discontent to the atmosphere of unrest that was already fermenting.[2]

While Ball acknowledges other contexts, he places most emphasis upon the arrival of specific inmates, even naming one individual. In fact the inmate population of Dartmoor Prison had been declining more or less since the war, although Ball was correct in his assertion about staff reductions. By 1932, measures had been introduced to keep younger offenders under 30 years old from incarceration in Dartmoor and it was calculated that this policy would enable more space to be made at Parkhurst in order to transfer further convicts from Dartmoor.[3] Cumulatively these developments resulted in a declining inmate population in Dartmoor Prison. There had been no new admissions since 19 November 1931.[4] With regard to crime rates, Reverend Ball was voicing a prominent social concern of the time about the statistical increase in some forms of crime. Of particular concern was the statistical proliferation of forms of crime perceived to be 'most typical of professional criminals'; those classified as 'offences against property with violence' which included housebreaking, shopbreaking and burglary.[5]

In a contribution to the important *New Survey of London Life and Labour*, published in 1935, Ruck considered the criminal statistics specifically for 'Crimes against property involving breaking and entering' in the Metropolitan Police District, which had increased from 770 in 1927 to 1731 in 1932. These were among the kinds of crime discussed in the press using the distinctly more evocative terminology of 'motor bandits', 'smash-and-grab raiders' and 'gangsters'; a range of new, more calculating and dangerous criminals emerging to threaten modern society. However, some criminological literature, including that by Ruck, offered alternative explanations for this statistical increase – improved recording of crime by the police, increasing numbers of shops and houses per head of the population and also that far more 'shops' were in

fact merely lock-ups and so less secure. It was also suggested that due to the current relatively low imprisonment rate, the public were less convinced that crimes were being 'brought home to their perpetrators than formerly'. Nevertheless, Ruck accepted that an increase in these crimes had occurred but stressed that an 'increase of crime does not necessarily mean that existing penal sanctions are ineffective' a perspective in sympathy with his friendship and support for Alexander Paterson at the Prison Commission.[6]

Reverend Ball was certainly in tune with the conclusions of the official investigation into the causes of the Dartmoor riot, published in the *Du Parcq Report* (1932).[7] The Report located much of the responsibility for the Dartmoor riot firmly with members of the 'motor bandit' or 'gangster' class who had been making their appearance in the prison but highlighted the importance of their appearance during 'the last few years' rather than the last few months as emphasised by Ball.[8] Ball's assertion regarding recently arrived 'gangsters' was reiterated in an earlier publication. Major Grew, who had been a Deputy Governor at the prison during the 1920s published his autobiography, *Prison Governor*, in 1958. He stated that the 'mutiny of 1932' was 'ugly proof' of what could happen when control was lost over 'dangerous elements among the prisoners'. The main 'troublemakers', he contended, were 'comparatively new arrivals from the big cities where, as gangsters and brutal young thugs, they had been convicted for their part in gang wars, organised smash-and-grabs and hold-ups, which were so prevalent at the time'.[9] Rather less dramatically, Du Parcq accepted the view of Dartmoor's Governor, Roberts, that these kinds of offenders were exceptionally dangerous, although the number of men referred to was much less than Ball's 'forty men',

> The Governor's view, which is borne out by the opinion of many witnesses, is that a small number of prisoners (he put it at four only), whom he was able to identify as members of 'gangs,' were the worst prisoners he had ever had to control.[10]

At another point in the Report this became six men. The published version of the *Du Parcq Report* omitted the names of any convicts implicated as being prominent in the riot but a version submitted to the Home Office, and not open to the public, had surnames handwritten in the text or margins. Interestingly, the 'four' men sighted by the Governor were in this version given as Cox, Mullins, Sparks and Jackson. Criminal proceedings were not taken against the first of these men and there is

little about him in the material relating to the riot.[11] Cox had multiple convictions for burglary and in December 1930 he received a sentence at the Central Criminal Court of ten years penal servitude for 'Shooting at 2 police officers with intent & possessing housebreaking implements by night'.[12] None of his recorded crimes were committed in association with Mullins, Sparks or Jackson.

Comment made during the summing up and sentencing stages at the Assize trial of the Dartmoor defendants portrayed the following as the main ringleaders: James, Jackson, Sparks and Davis, with significant mention also being made of John Mullins. Although proceedings were taken against Mullins, he was not found guilty. At a later point in this annotated Home Office version of the *Du Parcq Report*, three men referred to as present when prison staff were forced to open the separate cells were described as 'probably among the most dangerous men in the prison'; the handwriting alongside the printed text denotes these as Jackson, Davis and once again Cox.[13]

Police evidence in court prior to sentencing identified some Dartmoor inmates as being part of a gang operating from the Elephant and Castle area of London. As in the *Du Parcq Report*, this evidence defined and gave a rationale to the prominence of particular inmates. Importantly it associated the role of these inmates in the riot more directly to their previous criminal records. This 'gang', it was stated, committed 'housebreaking and offences of that sort with the aid of motor-cars, and smash-and-grab raids as well'.[14] The five people identified by the CID – Edward James, John Jackson (alias Robb), Charles (Ruby) Sparks (alias Wilson), Victor Kendall and Thomas Davis – were all defendants at the trial and three of them had been included in the annotated version of the *Du Parcq Report*. It was not always straightforward for the police to identify the real names of offenders as alias's were so widely used at this time. At least 60 per cent of those held in Dartmoor prison at the time of the riot had used an alias of some kind. The Assize court held at Princetown tended to use the name under which the individual had received their last conviction.

It cannot be determined whether or which inmates arrived at the prison in November of 1931, timing highlighted by Ball, although it is known that no more inmates were received after 19 November. Unfortunately, as all the prison records were destroyed in the fire during the riot, there is no evidence surviving about when particular convicts arrived at the prison. However, Reverend Ball's timing is unlikely and this is important because he depicts their arrival so soon before the disturbance as adding significant impetus to bringing it about. His motive may have

been to increase public interest in his story or simply the consequence of flawed memory. Certainly, his descriptions of Sparks were colourful and in sympathy with contemporary images of the professional London gangster – cleverer and more confident than ordinary offenders and representing a kind of criminal elite. Sparks has been described as a 'sharp-featured Cockney' and an 'ace crook in the underworld' who had begun his criminal career at the age of only 16. Ball capitalises on his personal connection with Sparks and presents himself as knowing the real man behind the 'notorious' criminal, the 'quiet, unassuming chap, never boasting of his prowess' or, as so many prisoners did, that he knew all the answers.[15] He was, Ball continued, 'courageous' and 'generous to a fault . . . without any malice toward anyone. Only too well aware of his spiritual shortcomings, he always welcomed my counsel and admitted that crime was a mug's game'.[16]

Ruby Sparks published an account of his life in 1961 which has become well known. A recent review described it as the 'idiosyncratic confessions of one of the last century's most colourful villains'.[17] The account is ghost written by Norman Price so there has to be some scepticism about its absolute accuracy, but it does state that he arrived at Dartmoor while the prison was still under Governor Clayton who leaves soon after Sparks's arrival.[18] Clayton moved on to take over Parkhurst Prison at the end of 1930. If this is correct then Sparks was at Dartmoor before November 1931. Clayton's own autobiographical account is unhelpful. While he comments extensively on the Dartmoor 'mutiny', he doesn't mention any contact with Sparks until Clayton had taken over as Governor of Wandsworth Prison. He does say that Sparks visited him there; 'with the nonchalance of a man about town, [Sparks] offered me a cigarette from a heavy silver case. He looked prosperous. He wore a suit of excellent make and cut. He could have been a well-to-do city merchant.'[19] Initially, Clayton suspected Sparks had come to 'touch' him for a loan. Instead, Sparks thanked Clayton for the treatment he, and other Dartmoor convicts transferred to Parkhurst after the riot, had received: 'You gave us a bit of rope. But you saw that we didn't hang ourselves. And because you did that you saved some of us from getting into more trouble and serving more years in prison'.[20]

According to his official criminal record, Sparks was convicted under the name of John Charles Sparks at the Central Criminal Court on 28 May 1930 of 'conspiracy, larceny, shopbkg [shopbreaking], receiving and Hab.Criminal [designated by the court as an Habitual Criminal]'.[21] Both his own ghost-written account and an article in the *Daily Express* place Sparks in Wandsworth Prison in June 1930. A story in the *Daily*

*Express* about the escape and recapture of a convict, James Turner, from Wandsworth on 30 June make exciting reading narrating a drama 'which read like a detective "thriller"' including external accomplices and help by an unnamed woman.[22] According to the article, the escape had been planned with 'John Charles Sparks, a jewel thief and companion of the underworld, who occupied the next cell in the prison' and who had attempted but failed to escape with Turner. A warder had managed to catch hold of Sparks's foot as he was half way up a wall on a rope ladder and dragged him down.[23] According to Sparks's account 'Jim Turner' had driven for Sparks on some of this smash-and-grab raids and when they met up again in Wandsworth Prison they had planned to escape.[24]

Sparks already had a reputation for his escape bids. He had notoriously escaped from Strangeways Prison, Manchester, in August 1927, once again with an accomplice. Sparks was in Strangeways following his conviction at Manchester Assizes with Victor Kendall and another man for three cases of housebreaking and for receiving. Kendall was stated to be the brother of Sparks's girlfriend, Lilian Rose Goldstein. Lilian Goldstein had been Sparks's partner and driver for some years. She gained notoriety as a female bandit and was popularly known as the 'Bobbed-Haired Bandit' no doubt named after Celia Cooney a 1920s New York offender who robbed a string of grocery stores and made national news in America.[25] Sparks was described at that time as 26 years old and 'of fresh complexion, with dark brown hair, blue eyes, and a mole on his back . . . 5 ft 7¼ in. in height [and] by trade a ship's officer . . . [he had] scars on the back of neck, forefinger, and ring finger'.[26] His account explains that he received the scars from flying glass resulting from his smashing jewellery shop windows during raids.[27] Evidence given at the trial of the Dartmoor defendants described Sparks as 'a determined criminal of the motor bandit type who does not hesitate to use violence and has not the slightest regard for other people's lives or property'.[28]

Interestingly, a letter to the Director of Public Prosecutions from Alexander Maxwell, Chair of the Prison Commission, which is among material collected for the prosecution of the Dartmoor defendants, also links John Jackson (as Alexander Robb) to Turner's escape but gives the date of his escape inaccurately as November not June 1930. During the trial of the Dartmoor defendants, John Jackson (the name by which he is known throughout the trial) queried why he was on the 'escape list' before the riot when he had in fact not attempted or succeeded in escaping, suggesting maliciousness on the part of the prison authorities.

The response of Maxwell to this was somewhat vague; that police had [unspecified] information to the effect that Jackson and his associates had engineered the escape of Turner and that his own escape from Pentonville was also planned but never transpired. For this Jackson was placed on the escape list at Pentonville and this designation followed him to Wandsworth and Dartmoor Prisons. At no point had Jackson been informed of this rationale. Indeed, during his evidence at the Dartmoor trial he asserted: 'Still I do not know. I have been punished for nothing; therefore the reason I could put on it was the result of a police report. I claim that was sheer vindictive malice on their part'.[29]

According to the *Police Gazette*, Jackson was liberated on licence in February 1927 for a conviction handed down in July 1922 for 'Robbery with violence . . . and stealing motor car' for which he had been sentenced to six and three years penal servitude to run concurrently and to being flogged (15 strokes with the cat).[30] If his convictions' record held in the Dartmoor archive is correct, and newspaper articles about this prominent criminal suggest that it is, Jackson wasn't convicted again until November 1930, which places him outside of the prison when Turner escaped. Therefore he could not have played a part in the internal planning of the escape. This is important because Jackson felt that well before the riot he was a marked man in the eyes of the prison service and was not in court in consequence of his behaviour during the riot. Jackson is convicted in November 1930 for receiving a motor car as well as a safe and its contents and being found in possession of a pistol and ammunition with the intent to use it.[31] Predictably instead of strengthening his case at the Dartmoor trial, Jackson's challenges to the prison authorities with respect to his being placed on the escape list rebounded negatively on him. Jackson was commended for his abilities in defending himself, the only convict to do so, but the judge later observed that it would have been better if Jackson had not been so bitter and that he 'displayed the wickedness and venom characteristic of him'.[32]

A journalistic account of the time describes Jackson's presence in the courtroom:

> Still under forty, he dons from time to time horn-rimmed spectacles or pince-nez. He is what in ordinary life would be described as 'an insignificant little man.' Only 5 ft. 1¼in. tall, he has not the smallest claim to a commanding presence, yet he is acknowledged to be a leader of men, exercising great influence over his fellows . . . . He talks well, has a fairly wide vocabulary, and a fluent delivery.[33]

His profile in the *Police Gazette* states that he was born in 1893 and confirms that he was perceived to be a dangerous career criminal:

> A clever and dangerous thief, member of a gang of violent criminals of whom he was the recognised leader. He arranged and engineered a number of serious robberies which were carried out by means of motor cars, the latter having been stolen from garages or whilst left unattended in the streets. Windows of jewellers' shops were smashed and jewellery seized. Other premises were broken into and safes and money stolen. Any person who attempted to stop him was assaulted and escape was always effected by the stolen cars, which were generally abandoned in the street. On one occasion he escaped from custody while awaiting trial at Police Court.[34]

Furthermore, the evidence of Inspector Hambrook CID at the Dartmoor trial reiterates this profile and his dangerousness. Hambrook does note that Jackson was in 'honest' employment between March 1929 and October 1930, but also asserts that he had

> a remarkable influence over his fellow criminals who seem to regard him as outstanding . . . . Many young men have imitated them [motor bandits gangs], and there is no doubt the present wave of motor bandit crime is brought about through men of Jackson's description. He belongs to a powerful and dangerous gang of motor bandits who frequent South London. Some of his colleagues are in Dartmoor at the present time.[35]

Jackson's associates listed in the *Police Gazette* in 1927 do not include any of the group with whom he is linked by the police at the Dartmoor trial. As far as can be traced in historical records, the criminal connection between Jackson and Sparks and/or his associates is therefore fairly tenuous and it cannot be determined when Jackson arrived at Dartmoor although we know that following his conviction in November 1930 he spent time at Pentonville and Wandsworth before Dartmoor. In Sparks's account he refers to 'Alec Robb' as another fellow inmate in Dartmoor with a history of housebreaking and firearms offences, but this refers to their relationship within rather than outside of the prison.[36] When the prison was retaken, Sparks's account accuses prison officers of shooting at inmates once they had been lined up by the police:

> We all fell down – some being hit and others wishing to seem hit so they could get cover under the bodies. It must have looked funny,

> with me and Speedles [Davis] and Golly-Eyes, Alec Robb and big Arthur Cox, all smacked up with baton bruises and shotgun pellets, scrambling about trying to sort out which of us was shot and which wasn't, so we could get underneath.[37]

Linkages between some other offenders before their incarceration in Dartmoor by 1932 are clearer, particularly between Ruby Sparks, Victor Kendall (real name according to his police record Henry Smith), Edward James (real name according to the police Reginald Dickenson), Bernard Raynor and Thomas Davis. Victor Kendall was the brother of Sparks's criminal and sexual partner, Lilian Goldstein. He was convicted with Sparks (as John Wilson) and Bernard James Raynor (who was probably the 'Golly-Eyes' referred to above) in July 1927 for housebreaking and larceny. In October 1930 he was again convicted for similar offences, this time with Edward James and two others in a stolen motor car in which they had left London for Plymouth a few days earlier. For this latter conviction, Kendall received three years penal servitude and James five years penal servitude, sentences which placed them both in Dartmoor at the time of the riot.[38] James was described in the Dartmoor trial as a 'desperate criminal':

> Belonging to the powerful gang I have already mentioned in connection with Sparks and Jackson. They have all been associated, and Davis . . . are all the same gang. They belong to the vicinity of the Elephant and Castle.[39]

On his conviction for a previous offence, stealing motor cars and breaking into houses, James was described as 'the mastermind' and a 'particularly wicked and dangerous man.' His sentence of seven years penal servitude had clearly been exemplary because 'this class of offence by gangs of young ruffians was on the increase'.[40] Raynor, described as 'an expert driver and motor mechanic', appeared in the Central Criminal Court in May 1930 with Sparks both receiving sentences for conspiracy, larceny, shopbreaking and receiving for which Sparks received a sentence of five years penal servitude plus five years preventive detention, and Raynor received five years penal servitude.[41] These sentences both placed them in Dartmoor at the time of the riot.

The other man linked by police to this perceived gang is Thomas Davis (often referred to as 'Speedles' or 'Speadles'), his convictions record is not one of those included in the Dartmoor archive. Separate trials were held at the Princetown Assize to try Davis and also David Brown for

assaults on prison officers, which suggests that their records may have been removed from the main documentation for that purpose and were not returned, along with the other 13 missing individual criminal conviction records. Davis, aged 32, was found guilty of wounding Prison Officer Birch with intent to do grievous bodily harm. According to police evidence at his trial Davis had five previous convictions. The conviction which placed him in Dartmoor at the time of the riot was for throwing 'corrosive acid' into the face of a prostitute for which he was given ten years penal servitude in October 1930. Davis had been living with, and living off the woman, Fanny Simmonds, and he became violence when she left him. The final attack was the culmination of several incidents in which Davis had threatened her with both a gun and a razor.[42] While in prison Davis had made it clear to a Medical Officer that he interpreted his own actions as revenge against the woman for cheating him and spending what he perceived to be his money, presumably her earnings through prostitution, on another man. He had explained that it was 'his code' to 'mark for life' anyone who 'wronged him'.[43] Thomas Davis was also mentioned by name in a letter from the Howard League to the Home Secretary following the Dartmoor riot and was referred to as 'thoroughly dangerous to society'. According to the letter several of his fellow prisoners, who had visited the offices of the Howard League, presumably since the riot, felt that Davis was 'mentally defective'.[44] In court Davis was described as 'one of the worst pests in the West End of London' and a 'danger to society', a 'blackmailer' who went to dog races and was 'never known to do any honest work'.[45] Sparks recounts both his friendship and antagonism with 'Speadles' whom he said 'used to be one of my smash-and-grab team' and that 'everybody in London's underworld knew him'. In prison he was in constant trouble and may well have 'practically lived in the punishment block',[46] a view confirmed during the Dartmoor trial.[47]

To return to the issue of when these men arrived at Dartmoor, which has implications not only for the veracity of the detail in Ball's account but more importantly for his suggestion that the timing of that arrival was an important factor in the causality of the riot. Within dramatic newspaper coverage of the exploits of these offenders were the events which led up to the death of a convict when he attempted to escape by jumping from a train transporting him and other prisoners to Dartmoor Prison. The article was headlined 'CONVICT'S JUMP FROM TRAIN'.[48] The convict in question, Tom Fern, had been one of the two men convicted with Kendall and James of housebreaking and larceny in October 1930. According to the coroner's inquest into his death, Fern was killed

when his chest hit railway sleepers as he jumped from the train 'in a desperate attempt to escape'.[49] He was one of a party of convicts being transported from Winchester to Dartmoor, '[t]o each prisoner was attached a wrist cuff, which was then attached with a lock to the gang chain'. By some unknown means the convicts had obtained a key to the lock of the chain and freed themselves. In the ensuing struggle with prison officers, Fern opened the carriage door and leapt out. None of the other convicts had attempted a similar escape. The jury verdict was '[a]ccidental death due to misadventure'.[50]

Unfortunately there is no indication in the press who the other convicts being transported were, but a journalistic account published in 1933 maintains that the four men sentenced together remained together for their journey to Dartmoor. If correct this means Kendal and James arrived at Dartmoor not in November 1931 as suggested by Ball but a full year before. Furthermore, an article in *The Times* suggests that those convicted of serious offences were moved to Dartmoor, or Parkhurst, fairly quickly. Importantly, this suggests that the Reverend Ball was mistaken in suggesting a direct link between the arrival of a group of motor bandits at Dartmoor in November 1931 with the causality of the riot. If Fern was being sent to Dartmoor only a month after his penal servitude conviction why then would the transportation of men with similar criminal careers, and no identified physical or mental problems highlighted at their trial, be delayed? At least some of these men were likely to have been in Dartmoor before indicated by Ball thereby weakening the link made directly between them and the riot.

Of course, the Reverend Ball was only one of the many, including Prison Governor Roberts, who attributed the Dartmoor riot at least partly to the influence of particular kinds of inmates using what would be referred to by twentieth-century criminologists as a 'toxic mix' approach. In other words; that a combination of different types of difficult prisoners held in the same institution are so troublesome in a variety of ways that they significantly undermine discipline and stability.[51] In his evidence to the CID following the riot, Chief Prison Officer, John Smale, criticised the accumulation of men at Dartmoor who were 'all desperate London characters'. Smale names not only Jackson, Sparks, Davis, Kendall and James but also Mullins (also referred to as 'Dodger') and De Core (otherwise known as Boxer Brown, convicted January 1931). No reason is given for linking the last two with the others named, although there are similarities in their criminal records including multiple convictions for housebreaking. John Mullins had convictions for warehousebreaking and had been categorised as a

Habitual Criminal. Testimony from Mullins at his Liverpool Assize trial in June 1929 for the offence which landed him in Dartmoor during the riot is reported in the press. It suggests geographical mobility and that he had at least sought legitimate employment:

> Mullins, on oath, stated that from August to December 1926, he worked casually for bookmakers and also as a potman at public-houses in Leeds. He could not get a regular livelihood because of this past character. On his discharge from Parkhurst, last April, he came to Liverpool because an official of the Discharged Prisoners' Aid Society had suggested he should go to sea, but he was told at Liverpool that it was most difficult for a man to get a job at sea without experience.[52]

During his war service, Mullins had been convicted of murder and sentenced to death. This sentence was commuted to life, although he was formally discharged from the Army in October 1918.[53] Dodger Mullins also appears in recent personalised accounts of intergenerational involvement in gangs in London and Los Angeles by McDonald, *Elephant Boys* (2000) and *Gangs of London* (2010). These accounts associate Mullins with an East End gang headed by Arthur Harding and describe him as follows; he was 'totally bad, the sort who would steal anything whether he had a use for it or not.... He had a gang which terrorised East End shop keepers, mostly for free meals, smokes and booze'.[54]

Two other individuals described in *Elephant Boys* as members of London gangs can also be located in Dartmoor Convict Prison in January 1932 (the month during which the riot occurred). These two men, John and Arthur Philips, were brothers who may have been associated with several London gangs, but they are not linked to Sparks or his associates. Neither were defendants in the trial following the Dartmoor riot nor do their criminal records suggest that they had persistently worked together. John Phillips had a criminal record beginning in 1912 as a juvenile and totalling 18 convictions, largely for theft and various assaults. His brother Arthur had a shorter and less serious record of nine convictions dating back to 1918 including four convictions for being a suspected person. They were only convicted together once and that was for the sentence which placed them in Dartmoor Prison at the time of the riot.[55] It is also that crime which is referred to briefly in *Elephant Boys* where it is stated that the brothers were asked to 'talk' to Sewell, an ex-boxer and 'thug.' Apparently the brothers 'misunderstood' the 'request',

> and got a team together from the Elephant and Castle to go looking for Sewell. They found him and Baxter in the Admiral Duncan pub in Old Compton Street, Soho. What followed finished Sewell as a force and got the Phillips brothers long prison sentences. Six men took the pub apart, with Sewell and Baxter being cut to ribbons. The viciousness of the attack brought John Phillips five years and Arty three.[56]

The sentences were for bodily harm and malicious damage.[57] Press coverage of their trial at the Central Criminal Court in April 1930 was headed GANG RIVALRY IN SOHO, an area long known for vice and drugs[58] and confirms some of the details given in *Elephant Boys*:

> The charges were the outcome of an affray in the bar of the public-house [sic] during which, it was stated in evidence, two men, George Sewell and Sidney Baxter, were badly cut on their faces with the jagged edges of broken glasses. During the hearing of the cases reference was made to the Sabini gang, and the Recorder remarked that he thought that gang was broken up. Detective-sergeant Wheatly remarked that there were still some rival gangs in London .... After passing sentence the RECORDER warned the relatives and friends of the prisoners that if they used violence towards the friends or relatives of the witnesses in the case they would be brought before that Court and condignly punished.[59]

So evidence about the criminal careers of a small number of Dartmoor convicts mounts, including some of a gang-related nature. However, contentions made in the trial of Dartmoor defendants about a key named group of these men working together in the same gang are not born out.

One factor which was prominent in investigations into the causality of the riot and which relates to several of the aforementioned convicts is escape. Certainly this was perceived as a particularly heinous breach of prison discipline and it challenged the primary purpose of the prison which remained security. Escape attracted public attention and embarrassed the prison authorities, reflecting badly on prison staff at all levels. Escape not only prompted public anxiety about lax security and 'uncontrollable prisoners'[60] but also evinced a drama and even romance about the plight of the convict on the run against the odds. There were intimations that in Dartmoor Prison returned escapees were dealt with severely both formally and informally. One of these dates from before the First

World War when Alexander Paterson described the 'age-long tradition' that when an escaped convict was recaptured he would be taken to a separate cell and 'beaten indiscriminately'.[61] Another refers to the inter-war period when it was claimed that unofficial beatings were 'the order of the day' for a variety of offences including escapes.[62] In Mullins's evidence at the trial of the Dartmoor defendants, he observed that escaping 'seems to be an unforgiveable thing at Dartmoor'.[63] Following the escape and recapture of 'Dodger' Mullins and another convict from Dartmoor in 1931 (so clearly Mullins was at Dartmoor before the end of 1931), the *Prison Officers' Magazine* (March 1931) referred to the escaped convicts as 'cunning unmitigated villains' and was in 'no doubt' that 'they will be well looked after in the future'.[64]

One of the factors that increased the visibility of particular inmates within the prison system was their attempted and/or successful escapes. Sparks was a well-known criminal who had made repeated escape attempts during his several committals, escaping successfully from Strangeways in 1927.[65] In the weeks prior to the riot, an informant helped prison staff uncover various materials intended for use in an escape attempt, Jackson and Sparks were implicated in this which explains why they had been sent to the punishment cells before the riot broke out.[66] The CID claimed that Jackson, 'and his failure to escape on the Monday before, were contributory factors to, if not direct causes of, the mutiny'. This view had also been asserted by Prison Governor Roberts before the Du Parcq Inquiry.[67] Significantly, John Jackson asserted in the trial of the Dartmoor defendants that he was not facing charges because of his behaviour during the riot but in large part due to his previous escape attempt which he felt had made him a marked man in the eyes of the prison service.

> I am going to suggest in all seriousness that the real reason I was charged and appear before you today is, first, because I am on the A Escape List – that is why I have referred to it so often. Secondly, that I was wounded on the 24th January, and that wanted some explanation, perhaps. Thirdly, I had actually attempted to escape six days before this outbreak, and was under special guard on the 24th January.[68]

Deputy Governor Richards believed this latter escape attempt was to be aided from the outside with the use of motor cars, although the only evidence to support this was that 'on the day the attempt was made, several suspicious cars were seen in the vicinity until a late hour'. Richards also

asserted that since the riot, or 'mutiny' as he termed it, prisoner informants had said that a further attempt on a much larger scale was to be made from the outside 'to secure the liberty of not only these, but other prisoners en masse, very probably in the form of an armed raid'.[69]

In any case, the escape attempt during the week before the riot probably helped to destabilise the prison especially as testimony at the trial alludes to Jackson and Sparks having some prominence within prison inmate hierarchies. The CID claimed Jackson, 'and his failure to escape on the Monday before, were contributory factors to, if not direct causes of, the mutiny',[70] but no direct evidence is presented that they had organised the riot that Sunday morning. Unsurprisingly, at their trial the prisoners themselves emphasised other factors as causing the riot; poor food, harsh discipline and brutality by prison officers. At the Dartmoor trial James, Sparks and Jackson were charged and found guilty only of malicious damage, and for James the jury recommended leniency on account of evidence that he had protected officers in the separate cells. He received a relatively light sentence of 18 months imprisonment compared to Sparks's four and Jackson's six years penal servitude to be served after their existing sentences had expired.

These men were not young in 1932, although their records don't give precise dates of birth. Sparks was about 31 years of age, Jackson about 39 years old, Edward James about 30, Victor Kendall 29 and Thomas Davis 34. None of them had been inured in their current sentence of penal servitude for a lengthy period; all had been committed within the previous two years. They had not yet been impaired or dulled by the effects of the monotonous, dull mechanisms of prison discipline emphasised in the important *English Prisons Today* as being a consequence of long sentences.[71] In particular, the behaviour of Jackson, Sparks and Davis in prison, their punishments and antagonistic relations with prison staff, does not suggest that they had assumed the fatalist acceptance of the routine and ritual of the regime that Carrabine identifies as generating stability in modern prisons.[72] These prisoners did more than utilise the 'weapons of the weak' observed by Scott (1985), which in prison might include having small prohibited items, working slowly or talking when not allowed, they actively challenged authority and contested, verbally and physically, the strategies, legitimate or otherwise, prison officers used to attempt to control them. However, they had not reserved this behaviour for Dartmoor Prison but had carried with them a history of such behaviour both within and outside of prison walls. The behaviour and reputation of these

men prior to the riot and their influence with the inmate subcultures operated to make them visible and perhaps inevitable targets for official blame. As far as can be ascertained, they did not all arrive at Dartmoor within two months of the riot, as intimated by Reverend Ball, suggesting that they were not the catalyst or the driving force of the outbreak. Such men, categorised variously by Ball as 'heavy-fisted bag-snatchers and smash-and-grab types' or 'thugs' and 'desperadoes', were not the harbingers 'of the scenes of violence and riot'.[73] Indeed, Ball's own account accepted that an 'atmosphere of unrest' existed in Dartmoor Prison outside of, and apart from the influence of these men. Ball also cites rising crime rates as a consequence of the economic depression and the attendant reduction in staff as significant.[74] Ball's emphasis in an account published over two decades after the events was perhaps skewed by social anxiety about such criminals throughout the inter-war period and indeed about post-war crime levels. This social anxiety was reflected in press coverage invested with an American flavour as contemporaries feared that 'gangs of armed desperadoes' were 'endeavouring to introduce into London some of the worst features of Chicago banditry'.[75]

## Stereotypes and characterisations of convicts and criminals

A scathing counter by an ex-convict to official and public judgements on the riot stressed that despite the 'great play' that had been made regarding 'gangsters', 'motor bandits' and 'planned escapes' as the cause of the trouble, gangsters were not new to the prison system and neither, of course, were escape attempts; '[t]here have long been gangsters in prison who have planned escapes, but this did not lead to the burning down of a prison'.[76] Yet, the inter-war period has been described as the heyday of the motor bandit[77] who became inextricably linked with the idea of the modern professional criminal and the gangster. This kind of criminal had so firmly entered public consciousness that they had developed a 'typicality'. Hence, an account of the housebreaking and larceny for which Fern, James and Kendall were convicted in October 1930, described in some detail the tools used in housebreaking as 'a typical example of a motor bandit's equipment',

> It [the car] bore a false number .... There were two other sets of false number plates in the car .... The Road Fund licence of the car had been chemically treated and carefully altered to correspond with the number plate. A bottle of nitric acid for testing metals, jemmies,

> a cold chisel, a short-handled combination screw-driver, a wrench, a shifting spanner, an electric torch, and kid and chamois leather gloves were included.[78]

This kind of criminal was perceived to be exceptionally clever and organised to the extent that one account wondered 'how some of them ever got caught'.[79] As has been pointed out by Clive Emsley, the image of the professional criminal was 'someone of ability who had made a rational choice in his way of life and who skilfully used the expanding opportunities provided by faster communication and new technology', most notoriously the motor car.[80]

The term 'motor bandit' was often used quite generically in relation to any criminal who made use of motor cars during and/or after their crimes. However, the implication was that this form of crime required a level of organisation which made criminals inherently more dangerous. Most commonly, targets were private houses or jewellers' shops on which smash-and-grab raids were undertaken and a swift get away achieved by motor car so there was also a strong association between the terms smash-and-grab and motor bandit. Indeed, Ruby Sparks's colourful ghosted account described in depth the development of his own technique and claimed, erroneously, to have invented the smash-and-grab raid.[81] According to a Central Conference of Chief Constables, the term 'motor bandit' was also used in sensational and sometimes fabricated stories in the press, lending to the crimes the kind of charm and excitement long associated with highway robbery.[82] In addition, the contemporary glamour of the American gangster was appended.

Toughness and perhaps a form of hyper-masculinity was another facet of the image that developed of the professional criminal associated with the labels of motor bandit, smash-and-grab raider and gangster. This was a characteristic that was visible to prison observers, ex-Governor Clayton judged that it was part of the 'twisted psychology of the criminal' that he considered himself 'tougher than other men'.[83] This was in part a product of the background of many of these men, poor working class districts where, as Jerry White maintains, '[t]here was the construction, among men of all ages but especially the young, of a hierarchy of masculine self-esteem based on physical strength, courage and daring rather than on work culture'.[84] This is reiterated by Emsley who suggests that 'old ideas of a masculinity dependent on physical prowess and strength continued to predominate'.[85] Similarly, Ruby Sparks portrayed himself as representing a particular form of tough, underworld masculinity; the kind of man who scorned law-abiding 'mugs', was

always ready to avenge insult, take women when he wanted and be generous with his money.[86] This was part of the foundation of the 'wide man'; a construction made popular during the Second World War but interwoven with images and characterisations of the motor bandit, smash-and-grab raider and gangster style criminals. The 'wide man' was described by Mark Benney, a well-known reformed offender, who in his reincarnation as a crime analyst wrote a report for the Howard League in 1945. According to this report the wide man

> must not work in the conventional way for his upkeep and he must have a tolerant contempt for those who do . . . . His cunning and his luck are what he relies on to give him his fill of the good things of life; and whatever he acquires by these means must be spent extravagantly. Complete freedom of movement is essential to him . . . . While his relations with the overworld are characterised by guile, within his own circles the wide man must be simple and straightforward and, above all, physically courageous . . . to allow no insult to pass unavenged, to face the longest prison sentence cheerfully and without implicating his confederates – all this is expected of the wide man.

Although seldom consciously realised, Benney claimed that such representations influenced 'the pattern of criminal behaviour and relationships'.[87]

Reverberations of the humorous side to this kind of construction can also be seen in a sketch drawn by a convict on prison toilet paper in the aftermath of the Dartmoor riot. The sketch survived thanks to being preserved by the family of one of the prison officers. It was apparently found within a few weeks of the riot and given to Officer Traske as he is named in the drawing.[88] Indeed, the text in the speech balloon could be interpreted as a threat; 'MR TRASKE, ARE YOU THERE? I SAY, ARE YOU THERE? JUST TAKE A QUIET WALK DOWN TO THE BOILER HOUSE AND SEE IF IT'S UNATTENDED'. As an engineer, the Boiler house would have been part of Officer Traske's responsibilities. This rare and valuable image gives us a form of 'independent testimony' which in some respects can inform more vividly than text.[89] The content is more considered than the snapshot of a photograph and because it is drawn by an inmate it offers a particular perspective. Unfortunately, there is no evidence who the convict artist was or about his role in the riot so it cannot be determined how much he actually witnessed. Nevertheless, research into the Dartmoor riot does facilitate achieving a 'sense of the

past' so that the prison in which the sketch was made is not unknown country.[90]

The sketch is a comic rendition of the midst of the riot and portrays prison officers as afraid and ridiculous. The convicts are all Al Capone look-alikes and the violence and injury is caricatured so evading the issue of harm.[91] These images of convicts could have been taken from popular movies of the time like *Little Caesar* (1930), *The Public Enemy* (1931) or *Scarface* (1931) which portrayed the notorious careers of authentic gangsters.[92] There was also the 'prototype' American prison film, *The Big House* (1930), to call upon for imagery. The film includes scenes of prison rioting in which, Doherty suggests, the prisoners were more 'unnerving' than the gangster at liberty because though 'caged' they could not be subdued.[93] Such films also tended to presume that stern institutional injustice was a cause underpinning insurrection.[94] In the sketch it is a prison officer who falls from a tall building and not a convict as was actually the case. Prison officers and convicts are firmly on opposing sides; there is no blurring of roles or positions by the so-called loyal prisoners. The comic prison, it seems, has been taken over by a community of rebellious and revelling gangsters. Whether this concentration in the sketch is a comment on the prominence of these kinds of criminals in the prison in terms of prison hierarchy, those actively involved in the rioting or in terms of their numbers in the prison cannot be determined. Indeed, the sketch could be interpreted as ridiculing the official conclusions made about the riot in the *Du Parcq Report* and its emphasis on 'the "motor bandit" or "gangster" class'.[95] Such conclusions must remain frustratingly tenuous yet what is clear is that the sketch presents a very different view of the riot than that presented in official evidence or in much of the press.

Other convict representations of the riot also offer alternative depictions. One of the best known, in the account of Ruby Sparks, describes quite brutal encounters with prison officers in response to overtly challenging behaviour by himself and Davis. He suggests that this was 'just in the normal way of nature for lags like Speedles [Davis] and me. It was how we broke the monotony' so of itself had a predictability about it.[96] What changed the dynamic was apparently the arrival of a new governor who made the prison officers nervous so that 'harmless lags' were targeted. According to Sparks, this was exacerbated by the Governor's failure to listen to complaints so that 'all the lags grew uneasy'.[97] The attack on Officer Birch ('Sampson' in his account) by Davis was therefore an attempt to address his bullying although it also served to increase tensions. Emphasis was upon what he maintained was an increase in

brutality under the new Governor; the quality of the food was not a major issue, '[t]here was always blood among the damp puddles along the cell corridors' he embellished.

By Sparks's account the riot was the consequence of an unplanned release of tension and an expression of prisoners' grievances; 'both exercise yards just blew up at the same time'. Nevertheless, Sparks admits that he initially saw the outbreak as an unexpected opportunity to attempt escape but was prevented by the security cordon of armed officers outside of the prison walls.[98] During the trial of the Dartmoor defendants, several convicts justified the initial outbreak, describing it as a 'demonstration', 'grievance' or 'complaint' that deteriorated into riot. Therefore, at least for some convicts, the disturbance may have had a rationale to challenge what were perceived as abuses. This was maintained not only by convicts implicated in the rioting. George Donovan, who had protected Assistant Commissioner, Colonel Turner, from other convicts during the riot denied that any 'big attack' had been planned but that 'it was generall [*sic*] arranged amongst them [the convicts] that when they went to chapel, they were going to ask the Governor to get up, and they were going to put their grievances before him'. Another convict, Edward O'Donnell, was asked by Du Parcq what he believed to be the cause of the riot. He responded '[h]onest to God, I think that it was grievances'. He maintained that he had 'never yet been in a prison where it would [have been] possible to work a thing up. 95 per cent of the prisoners are always on the side of the authorities'. Therefore, by the Saturday before the riot prisoner grievances were such that it only needed a spark, 'to set things alight'.[99]

Interestingly, Sparks suggests that only about 30 convicts were actively involved in the riot, although they were probably the toughest, but their behaviour is depicted by him as 'more like a riot of schoolboys than of dangerous men'. At the end of the riot when the police retook control, Sparks claims to have commented to a police officer: '[i]f you could have seen this yard only half an hour ago, with music going and lags dancing, fistfuls of cigarettes and cocoa-mugs frothing with beer – bonfires – a proper party spirit abroad – you'd never have thought they expected to see another care in the world!'[100] For Sparks at least, an awareness of the consequences of an officer's death operated as a constraint, 'I did not want to dangle. Ten years is one thing, but hanging is irredeemable'. Recognition of this resulted, he claimed, in his telling his 'team' who were with him not to be physically violent to officers; '[i]f a single screw gets killed in this, you know what'll happen to us all. We're the ringleaders'.[101] Alone, such an egocentric and dramatised ghost written

account offers rather a speculative view but in important respects, such as prisoners' views of the causes of the riot, it is reinforced by evidence from the trial. The use of the term 'ringleaders' in Sparks's account is confusing given that he maintains that the riot was not planned. However, throughout this publication, Sparks and his associates are depicted as being sufficiently powerful in the prison, especially once authority was overwhelmed during the riot, to direct action and even prevent violence. This is not an admission of a role in organising the outbreak. Furthermore, this account was written some years after the events when Sparks' is endeavouring to make commercial use of his reputation as a Dartmoor mutineer but not stain that reputation with responsibility for the violence that did occur during the riot. If anything this publication maintains a light and even humorous tone when narrating violence.

There is considerable evidence from the trial depositions that inmates defended prison officers from harm albeit that such behaviour was not always later designated as demonstrating loyalty. One important incident here will suffice, it is important in part because it involves convicts later highlighted as ringleaders during the riot. This concerned a group of prisoners, including Sparks, James and Kendall who soon after the disturbance broke out headed for the separate cells with the intention of releasing inmates held there under punishment. Prison Officer Winter suggested that some of these convicts were armed with pick shafts and one with an iron bar. According to Officer Winter one convict yelled, 'Do these fucking bastard screws in down here' and rushed at him with a raised pick shaft. In order to prevent violence, Edward James quickly jumped between them and shouted to the crowd, 'Now, you bastards, if any of you hit these screws down here I will fix you'. Winter concluded, 'Undoubtedly, Prisoner James saved me from being hit with a pick-shaft' and may have saved other officers there. James then said to him 'Guvnor, you will have to do what they want . . . so you will have to unlock the men'. Afraid of being struck and his keys taken anyway, he did as asked, with James acting as bodyguard.[102] Prison Officer Tucker concurred that James may have saved lives and added that a few days later a petition for James was signed by the officers at the separate cells 'because of his actions in helping us'.[103]

The evidence regarding this incident is not uncontended and even Victor Kendall denied that real violence was threatened. Instead Kendall recalled Winter saying 'If there is no violence I will unlock them [the gates]' and James's response being 'All right, there will not be any violence'.[104] However, the Judge accepted the officers' view of this 'remarkable incident' and so confirmed the accumulating interpretation

of James as having some power and influence over other convicts.[105] As well as preventing violence this scene demonstrated to the court one member of a 'gang' obtaining the release of another two members of the same gang, John Jackson and Thomas Davis, from the separate cells.[106] The men in the separate cells do appear to have been of some importance. Deputy Governor Richards observed to the Du Parcq Inquiry that at the start of the riot some prisoners congregated in front of the central offices (and Governor's office) shouting; 'the only thing I could distinguish was "We want the men from the [separate] cells" '.[107]

## Sentencing and remission debate

The Dartmoor 'mutineers' received exemplary sentences as did Davis for his assault on Officer Birch. That these sentences were exemplary was acceded by the Prison Commission in later discussions about remission. However, even the Howard League for Penal Reform had not protested against the length of the sentences incurred by the Dartmoor defendants.[108] The Dartmoor rioters or 'mutineers' received sentences of between six months and ten years which were to be served after the sentences they were already serving in the prison. John Jackson and Ruby Sparks received six years and four years penal servitude respectively. Five of the Dartmoor defendants were found guilty of riotous assembly, 17 of malicious damage, including John Jackson, Edward James and Ruby Sparks. Ten men, including Victor Kendall and John Mullins, were found not guilty.[109] According to a Prison Commission memo, prior to his sentencing James was to be recommended for 12 months remission due to his defence of prison officers in the separate cells during the riot. However, as the Judge in the Dartmoor trial stated that due to James's defence of prison officers he had already been lenient, the Prison Commission withdrew their recommendation; James was sentenced to 18 months. Thomas Davis received 12 years penal servitude for grievous bodily harm.[110]

These were significant and exemplary sentences but despite the attention and sometimes dramatic descriptions Sparks, Jackson and James in particular attracted they did not receive the heaviest punishment. Of clear importance here were judgements about violent and destructive behaviour. Hence, Davis received the heaviest sentence for a severe assault carried out just before the riot. Other than Davis, the prisoners who received the longest sentences were James Ibbesson and Joseph Conning who both received ten years penal servitude. Their heavy sentences were due to witness evidence that they had been prominent

is setting fires and that Conning had been physically violent, including butting an officer in the face and threatening violence to Officer Winter in the separate cells. Evidence also suggested that Ibbesson had attempted to escape by putting a ladder against the prison wall.[111] Yet despite their sentences, these men received much less attention during investigations into the riot and police evidence against them is less condemnatory even though they were serial offenders with convictions for shop, house or warehousebreaking. Conning also had a conviction for robbery with violence.[112] One key difference between these men and those about whom there was so much rhetoric and anxiety was that they were not London based; Conning was Liverpool-based and Ibbesson distinctly mobile having convictions in the north-west, south and Wales as well as London. In addition, Conning and Ibbesson did not appear to have associated with criminal gangs, did not make use of motor vehicles in their crimes and indeed for the most part their criminal records exhibit a profile of rather low-level recidivism from a young age. Furthermore, as far as can be determined, these men appear not to have been particularly troublesome in prison.[113]

Escorted by two prison officers, each of the Dartmoor defendants were sentenced separately in order to prevent each knowing the punishment received by the others. According to the *Manchester Guardian,* each convict received his sentence 'quietly and without protest.'[114] Following sentencing the men, including those found not guilty, were separated into small batches and distributed widely to prisons across the country. This dispersal was for an unspecified number of weeks with the intention that they would thereafter be gradually absorbed into Parkhurst Prison or reabsorbed back into Dartmoor.[115] In many cases defendants were dispersed to prisons distant from their homes no doubt affecting visiting from family and friends. Six of these batches were to go on the 12.15 pm train from Exeter. The Governor of Dartmoor was ordered to ask the stationmaster to arrange that a coach with at least six compartments be kept in readiness on a siding where men could be held until the train arrived. Additional police were also posted on roads around the station. Furthermore, while the sentences were being pronounced,

> a small fleet of cars and taxi-cabs were lined up in the neighbourhood of the Princetown Hall. Accompanying the cars was a squad of police officers with motor-cycles. As each prisoner left the court he was quickly escorted to a car which, preceded and followed by a police officer on a motor-cycle, drove out of Princetown.[116]

The authorities were clearly fearful that the prisoners would make trouble. The *Manchester Guardian* suggested that this 'extraordinary amount of careful organisation' was undertaken to ensure that dispersal was effected 'without anything in the nature of a demonstration'.[117] Only one unidentified convict seemed to have made any active resistance in transit,

> One of the convicts made a scene at Tavistock railway station. Throwing himself on to the platform, he rolled about, while an excited crowd gathered around him. He abused prison officers and Dartmoor Prison, and shouted: 'Long before I have finished people of my class will be on the bench handing out sentences like that which I have received.' He was dragged to his feet and tumbled into a carriage as the train came in.[118]

Unsurprisingly, those convicts who had been described as associating outside of the prison and even as constituting some kind of gang were all initially sent to separate institutions. Ruby Sparks was dispersed initially to Liverpool Prison, Jackson to Durham, James to Birmingham, Kendall to Lincoln and Davis to Parkhurst.[119]

There is little further information about either the transfer or absorption of men into Parkhurst and Dartmoor although in a memo of 18 August 1932 addressed to 'relevant' Prison Governors, the Prison Commission recommended that no more 'Dartmoor men' be sent to Parkhurst until the 2nd Battalion of the Hants Regiment had returned to barracks in September and that all transferees should be 'warned that they will be transferred to local pris[ons] in event of trouble'. This was done in response to a memo from Governor Clayton at Parkhurst. Paterson had informed Clayton that the remaining Dartmoor 'ringleaders' were to be sent to Parkhurst. Clayton clearly had misgivings as, he states, the Dartmoor men had already 'tried to stir up trouble, so far with little success', furthermore, he asserted, there were a lot of 'sub-normal' men at Parkhurst, 'easily led, and at any time something serious might arise'.[120] According to Clayton, when the 'ringleaders' of the Dartmoor mutiny were to be sent to him, the Prison Commission instructed him to arrange for a platoon from the nearby regiment to march around the prison in full battle dress 'so that the whole prison might realize what they were up against if they got up to mischief'. Clayton resisted on the grounds that it would enhance the prisoners' feelings of self-importance and the Commission gave way. Nevertheless, he claims that the situation got so bad that he

was forced to warn the nearby regiment that their assistance might be required. News of this leaked out and reporters came to the prison 'in force'.[121] Some of the backlash from the Dartmoor riot was clearly experienced at Parkhurst Prison where men expressed their resentment at the exemplary sentences meted out to them. Clayton himself interpreted their behaviour as the consequence of the additional sentences which made the Dartmoor defendants 'hopeless and at the same time reckless'.[122]

The exemplary sentences handed down to the Dartmoor defendants were later justified by the Prison Commission on the basis that they had 'produced their effect'. During the years following the riot discipline in the convict prisons had 'been well maintained'.[123] A Prison Commission memo of November 1936 noted that since the 'mutiny' there had been only two 'concerted attempts at disorder', at Chelmsford in December 1932 where there had been general shouting and smashing of furniture and at Parkhurst in 1935 where there had been a protest at the decision not to grant remission on the occasion of the Jubilee. In 1937 the issue of remission for those Dartmoor defendants remaining in prison was raised. No mention was made of disturbances at Parkhurst following the Dartmoor riot. However, it was observed that the conduct of the Dartmoor men had not been good; almost all had been guilty of prison offences, some serious. Special remission was supposed to be for 'exceptionally meritorious conduct'. Furthermore, it was maintained, remission for these men would break the hitherto strict rule which provided a firm disciplinary lesson that remission lost for misconduct was not restored. The Commissioners were clearly not in favour of remission for the Dartmoor men. Nevertheless, should the Home Office over rule their advice, the Commission reflected that remission should not be given about the time of the Jubilee to avoid any association with that celebration. The Commission also advised against remission being given in the immediate future 'lest it be seen as influenced' by the recent book *Walls have Mouths* and the publicity it had received.[124] Certainly this publication by Wilfred Macartney, sentenced as a spy in 1927, had been directly critical of prison conditions and of the conclusions of the Du Parcq inquiry asserting that

> One might have hoped the Dartmoor mutiny would suggest to the public conscience that something was seriously wrong with the prison system, but officialdom was allowed to camouflage the whole business with wrong explanations of it.[125]

The Prison Commission memo focused on the position of the 'man named Sparks'. Ruby Sparks had been sentenced to four years penal servitude for his part in the riot, to be served consecutive to his existing sentence of five years penal servitude followed by five years preventive detention. In October 1937, he was near to completing both penal servitude sentences and it was advised by the Home Office that it was 'questionable' whether he could now legally be made to serve his preventive detention. It was suggested that this part of his sentence be 'remitted in any event'.[126] This was not an unsolicited act of leniency stemming from the Home Office but no doubt influenced by a complaint from Sparks in a petition submitted in 1937. This may have been the catalyst behind the discussion of remission for all those Dartmoor defendants remaining in prison. Sparks was released on licence on 20 October 1937 which was in his own words 'a lucky break for me'.[127] Soon afterwards the decision was made to remit one quarter of the sentences of those men who were still detained in prison in connection with the Dartmoor mutiny. It was also confirmed that if any of these men should be reconvicted they would not have to serve the remaining part of his sentence prior to being granted remission. Ironically, this latter issue arose regarding Sparks who was reconvicted on 10 February 1939 and sent once again to Dartmoor.[128]

## Dartmoor criminals

The Dartmoor defendants attracted considerable official and public attention, but the 33 men who appeared at the Assize in Princetown constituted only a small proportion of the 442 inmates in the prison on the day of the riot. Fortunately for history, as part of the police investigation and the prosecution process following the Du Parcq investigation and in the run up to the Dartmoor trial, Superintendent Hambrook, who headed up CID investigations, ordered the reconstruction of the criminal records of the men in Dartmoor. The blaze in the prison during the riot had destroyed all of the records held there. As Hambrook stated, in anticipation of 'a number of convicts being called as witnesses I arranged that the records of all the 442 inmates of Dartmoor Prison at the time of the mutiny should be prepared'. To achieve that had necessitated contacting 18 other police forces.[129] Unfortunately, only 427 of the individual conviction records collated at the time survive at the National Archives. Of course, these records don't offer a complete picture of the criminal records of those in Dartmoor on the day of the riot as they include convictions only up to early 1932. However, they

do offer what appears to be a reasonably accurate profile of individual records, at least regarding more serious offences, up to that point. Summary offences, especially those incurred as adults, often tend to be given in a total number at the end and are therefore difficult to verify. At best there is a short statement, such as, '27 times Drunk, Assault, wilful damage, obscene language etc' or 'and 15 summary convictions for begging, sleeping out etc', which suggests that Hambrook was more interested in the seriousness of the criminal careers of the Dartmoor inmates than their small-scale offending.[130]

What is immediately evident from these records is the level of recidivism among the inmates at Dartmoor. For example, 24 men had 20 or more convictions and a further 194 had 11–20 convictions. Of the 427 convicts whose records have survived in the archive just over half, 230 (54%), had been sentenced to the minimum term of three years penal servitude.[131] This reflected the national pattern with a high proportion of penal servitude sentences being for the minimum term. Of 1,467 men in convict prisons on 31 December 1931, 718 (49%) had received the minimum three year penal servitude sentence.[132] Only 54 (13%) of the 427 convicts confined in Dartmoor at the time of the riot were serving sentences of seven years or more and only 19 (4%) were confined for terms of ten years or more.[133] The longest sentences were reserved either for the most serious crimes, namely murder, attempted murder, manslaughter, rape, indecent assault of minors and some forms of firearms offences or for those who already had multiple sentences of penal servitude on their records. One of the exceptions to this general practice attracted rather oblique coverage in *The Times*. This offender had four relatively minor offences against him for which he had been given sentences of imprisonment. His fifth conviction was for demanding money with menaces and conspiracy, for which he was given three sentences of 15 years penal servitude and a further of two years imprisonment all to run concurrently. Although not mentioned in the newspaper article, the fact that the offender's previous conviction had been for soliciting for immoral purposes suggests that this blackmail case may have involved homosexual entrapment.[134]

Thirty-six per cent of the sentences served by these Dartmoor offenders during their sometimes long criminal careers were for three months or less and 50.5 per cent were for six months or less.[135] In many cases, the lesser sentences are weighted towards earlier convictions in individual records but more serious offences were also sporadic among the relatively mundane. This indicates that there was no clear convict class from which Dartmoor inmates were drawn, despite occasional

intimations to this effect, and that Dartmoor prisoners had moved between local and convict prisons depending on their offence and sentencing. Many of these criminal profiles disprove stereotypes about criminals remaining with their own familiar kind of crime. One journalistic account erroneously asserted: '[m]odern crime is an industry with each section of workers fulfilling their self-appointed and allotted task. There is very little overlapping'.[136] Nevertheless, these basic profiles of the Dartmoor inmates confirm the greater proportion of longer sentences served by Dartmoor offenders. The Prison Commission's Annual Report for 1931 states that as a proportion of all prison sentences nationally, 77.2 per cent were for terms of not more than three months and 89.6 per cent were for terms not more than six months.[137]

There are about 47 years between the first and the last conviction recorded in the Dartmoor conviction records. Chronologically, the earliest conviction recorded among these offenders is against Jeremiah Sullivan in 1884. All of the 11 court convictions detailed against Sullivan were received in South Wales, except for the one across the border in Hereford. His convictions were mainly for assaults and wounding, four times against police officers, but he also had ten summary convictions for 'assault, drunkenness, obstruction and obscene language'. The sentence that placed him in Dartmoor at the time of the riot was ten years penal servitude in 1924 for wounding, which meant that assuming he had not lost remission for prison offences he was due for release only a few months after the riot. The individual with the most previous convictions is Henry Darlington. His conviction record prior to the Dartmoor riot began in Bolton Petty Sessions in 1904 with a two-month sentence of imprisonment for stealing a 'watch, clothing etc' and ended with his 33rd conviction at Worcester Assizes in 1931 for storebreaking for which he received three years penal servitude and five years preventive detention as an habitual criminal. Darlington was very well travelled in his offending, with convictions in Bolton, Rochdale, Lichfield, Stafford, Salford, Lancaster, Saddleworth, Manchester, Blackpool, Liverpool, Preston, Haslingdon, Macclesfield, Kirkham, Fleetwood, Derby, Market Harboro, North London, Wednesbury, Newport Pagnall, Great Yarmouth, Spalding, Todmorden and Worcester. His criminal behaviour was also eclectic and included theft, loitering, arson and malicious damage, wounding, housebreaking, false pretences, office and storebreaking.

Such offenders give insight into the extent to which most crimes, even those committed by those seen as being serious and/or dangerous offenders, were in fact quite mundane. As Gatrell states, '[m]ost reported crimes have been banal, distressing for their immediate victims

though they might be'.[138] In addition, glimpses into the personal plight of some of these offenders can occasionally be obtained from newspaper reports. In coverage of the Worcester Assizes for June 1931 at which Henry Darlington received three years' penal servitude and five years' preventive detention, the sentence which put him into Dartmoor for the riot, *Berrow's Worcester Journal* reported a statement by the defendant. Apparently on the morning after Darlington had broken into the store of Pyx Granite Company at Malvern and stolen 'certain items', he had handed himself into the Ledbury Police, admitted his guilt and asked for something to eat. According to the report, following a previous arrest he had been asked 'why he had been leading such a life of crime'. Darlington had responded, 'Hunger would drive you to anything, but the real reason is that I have a grievance against the country. I have fought in four campaigns, and they will not allow me a penny. Now they have got to keep me. If they don't keep me, I shall go on doing this kind of thing'.[139]

Although there are a significant proportion of serious offences on the records of the Dartmoor inmates, most offending was non-violent and relatively low level without necessarily demonstrating a linear progression from less to more serious crime. Seven of Jeremiah Sullivan's 11 convictions about which we have full details were given a sentence of two months imprisonment or less and for his first conviction in 1884 he received 12 strokes of the birch as a juvenile offender. It is for his three wounding offences which occurred at disparate periods of time that he received his major punishments of imprisonment (18 months in 1901) and penal servitude (four years in 1893 and ten years in 1924). Of Henry Darlington's 33 convictions, 25 were given penalties of six months imprisonment or less; usually considerably less (only two of these penalties were for six months and the lowest penalty was for two days).[140] He does have three penal servitude sentences on his record, again quite far apart in chronological terms, in 1906 and 1920 for arson and in 1931 for storebreaking. It was no doubt on the strength of his extended recidivism that in 1931 he was designated an habitual criminal and given five years' preventive detention to serve after his penal servitude.[141]

For the most part these criminals derived from lower class communities and their victims from their own social milieu where pickings were easier. As Gatrell notes, '[g]reat robberies have been as infrequent as great murders'.[142] In a speech to the Manchester Luncheon Club at the Midland Hotel, Manchester, in June 1932 Alexander Maxwell, Chair of the

Prison Commission, noted broadly that the 'great majority of our prisoners . . . are such insignificant people that they could never get into the newspapers'.[143] If such a picture has relevance regarding the offenders in Dartmoor, the most serious and dangerous criminals in the prison estate, then it is not surprising that the small proportion of offenders whose records did denote a more intentioned, organised and violent (whether against property or the person) approach to crime stood out. These offenders attained a level of official and public notoriety. They were well known to the police and in some cases troublesome and challenging to prison authorities. Furthermore, evidence relating to the Dartmoor trial suggests that some of these men did have influence within prison inmate hierarchies. Such a hierarchy undoubtedly existed. According to one well-known criminal account, 'everyone [in Dartmoor] wanted to be regarded as belonging to the highest rank of the criminal fraternity . . . the inmates have a tendency to only associate and talk to men of their own standards of professional behaviour'.[144] In some respects this reinforces what has been maintained in criminological work for some time, that prison subcultures can sustain and reinforce or intensify negative aspects of offending behaviour; masculine aggression and violence have been highlighted in particular.[145]

Writing in the 1990s, Joe Sim noted that the existence of a clear hierarchy in long-term male prisons had been well established by research with the armed robber and the professional criminal at the apex.[146] As has been pointed out elsewhere, the extent and nature of the 'pains' of imprisonment vary in relation to the culture that people bring with them into prison and this in turn influences internal prison cultures.[147] However, focus within the prison institution will be upon those perceived as 'uncontrollable'; prisoners who challenge and disrupt order and regulation.[148] Historically it is difficult to contend, due to the lack of evidence, that concentration on such troublesome prisoners allowed other forms of prison violence to be seen as legitimate.[149] Nevertheless, it is clear from the Dartmoor archive that focusing on a small number of troublesome and notorious offenders constructed much of the debate about the causality of the riot in terms of their criminality and pathology and relieved prison staff, prison conditions and penal policy of considerable scrutiny or questioning. The rhetoric around the Dartmoor riot reveals the earlier formulation of a narrative that by the 1990s had become a 'traditional' assumption that 'the troubles in British prisons are derived from and orchestrated by the words and deeds of a handful of pathologically violent men'.[150]

Although the rhetoric around these men was colourful and dramatic, the evidence provided by their criminal records and associated press coverage as well as the Dartmoor trial does suggest that some social and criminal connections were made outside of the prison and continued within, although that may have been more likely for London-based offenders. Whether this can be constituted as organised crime being perpetuated in prison, including continued communications with their associates in the criminal underworld, cannot be determined. The small number of such offenders, in particular Sparks, James, Kendall and Davis, considered here suggests long-term criminal associations and the development of group experience and skills. Nevertheless, these appear to have been quite loose affiliations based on fragmented networks and friendship.

Gatrell rightly argues that despite contemporary fears about a new kind of more organised and resourced modern criminal, the bulk of crime continued to be low level as was the extent of continuity in professional criminal practice and organisation.[151] According to Gatrell, what appears to have changed is our 'sensitivity to inter-personal violence, and, even more, the political and cultural capital and media profit which can now be extracted from it'.[152] He even suggests that an 'anxious search for large-scale and systematic villainy' which was largely fantasy anyway was orchestrated 'by experts and officials' because there were few other targets left which could plausibly be represented as dangerous. In fact, he asserts, the 'professionals' turned out to 'differ little from the pathetic procession of the needful who took up most police and court time'.[153] Nevertheless, there is a caveat to be included here. While the construction of the modern dangerous criminal and their separation from communities was indeed overdrawn, a point also made about persistent offenders by Godfrey, Cox and Farrall,[154] it would be a stretch to describe criminals such as Ruby Sparks, John Jackson or Edward James as 'needful' or 'pathetic'. It is that difference, characterising a minority of offenders held in Dartmoor, that marked them out rather than evidence which suggested that they were culpable for the riot.

## Conclusion

In the aftermath of the Dartmoor riot the role of a small number of well-known criminals was emphasised not only in the *Du Parcq Report* but also in CID investigations, the consequent prosecutions and the press. This was the strongest narrative around the causality of the riot and it was retained and matured in personal accounts published into the

1960s. Evidence does suggest that these men may well have had disproportionate influence within inmate cultures and in two instances were able to prevent violence against prison officers. Yet there is scant evidence beyond the assertions of prison staff, most notably the Prison Governor, whose own behaviour was under scrutiny, that these men had planned the disturbance or indeed that the riot had much organisation behind it. Indeed, the assertions of the Governor largely relate to the influence of these men with other prisoners and their criminal careers rather than their culpability regarding the riot. The emphasis on these men reflected not only contemporary fears and stereotypes of motor bandits, smash-and-grab raiders, gangsters and their like but also the utilisation of these undoubtedly serious criminals as a distraction from the deficiencies of the Dartmoor regime and, more broadly, the continued chasm between the rhetoric of reform and everyday life in prisons. There is no doubt that these men committed serious and sometimes violent criminal offences. Furthermore, some of them were troublesome and challenging inmates whose behaviour may have helped to destabilise the regime at Dartmoor, but this cannot be equated with determined and organised direction of the outbreak and process of the riot; that narrative was a distinct misrepresentation of events.

At the same time it is important not to fall into the error of simplifying contemporary discussions and conclusions about the causality of the disturbance. Other factors were contained in the conclusions of the *Du Parcq Report* including the remoteness of Dartmoor, deemed unsuitable due to its isolation from reinforcements but having new motor-driven accessibility to criminals; again alluding to a modern dangerous kind of criminal. Du Parcq also commented on the possibility of corruption among prison staff, although little overt action seems to have been taken regarding this suggestion. The Prison Governor, who had appeared inadequate in the face of concerted challenges by prisoners, and who in turn perhaps most avidly placed the blame on a small group of criminals in the prison, was the only other person to suffer significant criticism; for his misjudgements and lack of character. Apparently this modern style governor was deemed inadequate in the face of the modern criminal.

Officials in the Prison Commission and the Home Office were conscious of the power of the media in moulding public opinion, particularly in the context of colourful stories on crime. It was pointed out in 1933 that 'the growing sensationalism of the popular Press, in which a criminal is now a "gangster", a shopbreaker a "smash-and-grab raider" and a robber a "motor bandit" . . . has created in the public

mind an impression that present-day crime is worse than it is and has assumed alarming proportions'.[155] The general identification of the 'motor bandit' and the 'smash-and-grab raider' class of criminal and the specific focus on members of a 'gang' of such offenders as having influence in Dartmoor and as responsible for the riot were both a consequence and cause of social concerns and excitement about what was reported as a new kind of more dangerous criminal. These criminals made use of widening car ownership and appeared more threatening in their mobility, stealing and/or receiving stolen cars, committing robberies and breaking into private and commercial properties.

# 6
# Microhistory and the Modern Prison

The previous chapters of this study of the riot which broke out in Dartmoor Convict Prison on 24 January 1932 have concentrated upon differing perspectives on the same event. The chapters have examined the riot, the official responses to the riot, post-riot investigations and prosecutions, newspaper representations of the disturbance as well as the small group of men often cited as being the main cause of the trouble. In this chapter a more explicitly theoretical perspective is taken in that examination of selected aspects of the riot will be viewed through the lens of microhistory. Microhistory as a methodology legitimates a close-up, intimate angle of view in order to pose particular kinds of questions and obtain glimpses of interior life. The use of primary sources in this chapter is therefore quite narrow, since evidence may concern very minor incidences, but also broad, as examples straddle laterally across subjects and evidence covered in other chapters, thus offering a flexibility to explore opportunistically. The point is to examine further aspects of the riot and its aftermath and also to use this examination of the Dartmoor prison riot to investigate the advantages and disadvantages of using microhistory for a study of the prison.

In his seminal work, *The Hanging Tree* (1994), Gatrell uses a microhistory approach to assess the quality of justice 'particularistically'.[1] According to Gatrell, this perspective is 'rooted in neighbourhood and community, playing to a sense of place, and of incident' with 'the microcosm illuminating the universal'. He emphasises the lived 'experience' and 'textures' of the past.[2] That work has not only shown the energy of a microhistory 'from below' but also shown how useful that approach is for an examination of institutional life. In this examination of the Dartmoor prison riot which occurred in January 1932, a microhistory approach has been fundamental to scrutinising inter-relationships at

the heart of events and to questioning some of the assumptions and judgements made in the aftermath of the disturbance. Despite Gatrell's advocacy of a microhistory perspective, he is less of an advocate of explaining in detail his methodological approach. He maintains that the best microhistories 'assert a creative independence of academic ratiocinations'.[3] Certainly, extensive attention to methodological discussions can intrude on and even overwhelm this kind of work, and the strength of microhistory actually resides in the power of its narrative. However, some methodological consideration is necessary in this examination of the Dartmoor Convict Prison riot because one of the claims made for microhistories is that they are a microcosm of wider forces and relations. With regard to the prison this has to be qualified since prisons impose a particular form of lifestyle not experienced outside involuntary institutional life.

Gatrell usefully refers to the 'narrow universes in which most people experience the exactions of power' which acts as a reminder within the context of Dartmoor prison not to treat individuals as experiencing a life so alien, so different to any other that they themselves become less subjects than objects. The necessary balance is a difficult one to attain and doubtless there have been times when I have not adhered fully to my own warning in this respect. Like Gatrell's community of Coalbrookedale in 1829, there were 'webs of custom', 'hidden assumptions', 'value systems' and an 'official morality' which impacted upon the course, direction and outcomes of the Dartmoor prison riot.[4] Unlike the previous chapters, this is an attempt to bring together some of the happenings which were significant laterally across the chapters of my examination of the riot but which can only be fully examined by keeping the methodological perspective to the forefront. In this way actions which seemed unimportant in other respects, to the extent that they have not been discussed elsewhere, can be given their appropriate significance. Of course, in many senses the whole of this book which focuses on one major event could be depicted as a microhistory due to the scale of its overall perspective. Nevertheless, this chapter in particular attempts to pick up the glimpses of understanding that can be had from the minutiae; the brief exchange of words in a chaotic and hurried walk across the prison, the scrap of paper tossed across the courtroom and the vulnerability of a man once well respected as forging a new kind of career in prison management.

As Sean McConville and others have observed, until relatively recently work on the modern prison has largely interrogated or developed the theoretical ground laid by Foucault in his *Discipline and Punish: The*

*Birth of the Prison* (1977) or furrowed the realms of policy and administration most prominently covered by writers such as Radzinowicz and Hood (1986) and McConville (1981, 1995).[5] Many of the interesting examinations of local prisons fall into this latter category since their purview is often broad and their main purpose tends to be as building blocks towards a national picture of prison development, for example DeLacy (1986) and Forsythe (1983). However, more recently there have been publications which explore important issues, such as prison disturbances or regionality and the relationship of the prison with its community, in greater theoretical depth.[6] Microhistories have flourished generally in crime history, although their definition as such has not always been made explicit, but they have been less evident in histories of the English penal system.[7] This has largely been a consequence of the nature of much of the vast primary sources available emanating from official bodies. Especially since the nationalisation of the prison in 1878, official sources became marked by standard formats and frameworks encouraging homogenisation of information and a policy-focused analysis. Creative use has, for example, been made of prisoner autobiographies as a counter discourse although more could be done to develop this work beyond the exposition of fundamental themes, particularly about sexuality, language and identity.[8] The advantage of examining such an explosive but admittedly rare occurrence in an English prison, such as a large-scale riot, is that sources generated specifically because of the unusual nature of the event can be drawn upon and at the same time the prison's routine operation can be exposed in multiple ways. This can enable a different approach to examining internal workings and cultures to be undertaken; that is what has been attempted here.

## What is microhistory?

Perhaps the first point to make is that a wealth of detailed evidence including that regarding personal and/or working relationships and negotiations is essential for a microhistory approach precisely because the focus is small. As is suggested by the label 'microhistory', the perspective of such work is limited in scale. Hence, words like 'microscopic', 'intensive', 'minute' or 'close-up' and 'circumscribed' have been used to describe this approach.[9] More recently Brewer has lent another name to microhistory, 'refuge history' which he describes as 'close-up' and as having its emphasis on 'a singular place rather than space, the careful delineation of particularities and details'.[10] As Ginzburg, an important

proponent of microhistory, points out, it is a scale that sits well with an awareness of 'the limits of existence' and an understanding that 'any social structure is the result of interaction and of numerous individual strategies, a fabric that can only be reconstituted from close observation'.[11] For two admirers of Ginzburg, it is a method that enables appropriate significance to be given to what might otherwise be rejected as trivial, a practice they claim, 'tantamount to writing history first and investigating it afterwards'.[12] The emphasis is, therefore, on intensive analysis of inter-personal relationships and negotiations and the 'operation of human free will'; the human stuff of social structure.[13] In such priorities, E.P. Thompson's work and his emphasis on the agency of the poor and weak have been influential. Brewer argues that such 'humanist' work 'places agency and historical meaning in the realm of day-to-day transactions'.[14] Although some, like Magnusson, have looked to post-modernism in their microhistory approach, for many others (perhaps most notably Ginzburg) the turn to microhistory has been a search for concreteness and away from a post-modernism that seemed to lend little support in the exploration of causality and 'offered no particular standard of judgement to replace the seemingly more rigorous and systematic approaches that had predominated during the 1960s and 1970s'.[15] For Ginzburg, microstudy was about getting the researcher closer to the active human agent and closer to reality.[16] In this respect, a microhistory approach is a particularly valuable tool to enable researchers of penal and other institutions to reach underneath the mask of official discourses for perspectives that have not yet been brought to the surface or given sufficient emphasis. Indeed, the impact of the actions of prisoners themselves has, I believe, not been considered fully in prison histories and even work which makes extensive use of prisoner autobiographies has tended to view them less as active agents than as largely passive absorbers of discipline and policy.

Two broad orientations have developed in microhistory, albeit with blurred boundaries – social and cultural (the former has been identified with Levi and Grendi and the latter with Ginzburg), although the extent of divergence in these orientations has been questioned.[17] This difference has been described as the difference between those who have sought 'explanations' and those who have sought 'interpretations'.[18] Generally the former has tended to be guided by evidence and issues associated with social history whereas the latter has been influenced by cultural considerations of language, meaning and interpretation. Perhaps less helpfully, such differences have also been seen in terms of systematic or episodic approaches. A systematic approach being one

that, for example, entails extensive examination and reconstruction of individual and family social relationships within a restricted geographical space and episodic which entails meticulous scrutiny of an event or encounter in order to illuminate aspects of a past society and culture that 'resist disclosure through more conventional historical methods'. This latter distinction makes the difficulties of defining in such terms evident in that more mixed approaches to microhistories, including my own, may also focus on an episode or event. In short these two orientations of social and cultural offer only broad, and not always helpful, categorisations of the varied forms of research and writing which take a microhistory approach. My exploration of the Dartmoor Convict Prison Riot of January 1932 has been led by meticulous study of a wide range of primary sources. For example, where possible close examination of the language used in the testimony to the trial of the 31 Dartmoor defendants has been made in order to uncover the meaning behind the text, which has after all been recorded in an official and therefore constrained and distorted context.

## Microhistory and the modern prison

So to address the main issue directly, how suitable is a microhistory approach for analysis of the prison? Certainly, prison by its very nature prescribes and limits the existence of inmates and therefore might be thought of as a good subject for analysis that prioritises consideration of the limits of existence. The prison environment magnifies and intensifies the significance of everyday activities. But the problem of perspective and distortion levelled at microhistory generally could be more evident for a study of the prison where, for example, the ownership of a forbidden item, no matter how small, can be seen as important to prisoners and officials alike in such a contested disciplinary context. One of the most important aspects of the development of the modern prison has been the increasingly sophisticated records kept. Minor breaches of discipline for secreting forbidden items for a variety of reasons as well as personal autonomy, no matter how limited, are common in such records. They list items such as scraps of paper, nubs of pencils, pieces of string, items of food and scraps of tobacco which seem trivial but their ownership and transfer express a degree of confrontation. Degree is important here since the ownership and concealment of forbidden items might be evidence of a low-level and relatively harmless desire for communication or part of a planned escape attempt that would be a direct and serious challenge to the primary

purpose of the prison, security, and to those employed to maintain that security.

Escape represents most vividly a clash and confrontation in the identities and social locations of prisoners and prison officers which is why so much tension, in some cases almost a mythology, surrounds those who have the audacity to attempt escape, especially when they succeed. Ruby Sparks and John Jackson were two such individuals at Dartmoor. The intensification of meaning surrounding escape attempts, which were an important aspect of the run up to the Dartmoor disturbance, is important because that concentration of anxiety distorted perspectives and may have affected decision-making prior to the outbreak. The Prison Governor's focus on inmates with a history of escapes or attempted escapes may have resulted in a distorted perspective that the activities of these men would not only operate to challenge the discipline of the prison but would also by implication have the potential to bring about the total breakdown of order by planning a riot.

Appreciation of the impact of the intense nature of prison life has to be accompanied with the recognition that this is partly an institutionally driven distortion of daily life. An introspective view of long-term imprisonment, in particular, is likely to have a claustrophobic feel to it.[19] In this examination of the Dartmoor Prison riot, as with microhistory generally, caution is needed regarding claims for what can be obtained from microstudy. My own examination of the Dartmoor Riot could neither be taken as wholly representative of everyday life in twentieth-century English prisons nor could it claim to demonstrate the way individuals and groups behave in riots *per se*. This examination of one prison riot has most to say about prison life, in at least a part of the prison estate, during the inter-war period and also about the characteristics and processes of prison riots in modern Britain. This latter claim can be made because prisons are in many respects relatively static environments, yet they also reflect broader cultural changes and shifts in penal policy. To give a basic example, in contrast to the inter-war period early twenty-first century English prisons tend to be over-crowded and hold a greater proportion of inmates with long sentences or even indeterminate sentences, who also have access to radios, televisions and computers. Yet their daily lives are in many respects similar to those of inter-war convicts, they complain about similar aspects of prison life: coping with the monotony, the quality of the food and access to resources such as tobacco.

To reiterate, this examination of the Dartmoor Convict Prison riot has much to say about the phenomenon of riots in prisons and this will

be explored further in Chapter 7. Unlike the major riot in Strangeways Prison, Manchester, in 1990 the Dartmoor Riot did not occur when the prison was overcrowded. Indeed, the Dartmoor riot occurred in a context of low prisoner numbers and fears that the prison might be closed. That one rather obvious difference between the two major prison disturbances challenges a commonly accepted precept for trouble in prison. Examination of a situation in which overcrowding was not part of an identified crisis can offer a greater balance to explorations of the causes of prison riots and other forms of disturbances.

## Examining the detail

So scrutiny of small or seemingly trivial actions or statements can highlight meaning and open out the nature of prison life, assumptions, prejudices and tensions. To take this assertion further by example; during the Dartmoor riot prisoners broke into the officers' mess apparently found no alcohol but looted, amongst other things, cigarettes (Black Cat and Ardath). Some prisoners offered cigarettes to officers remaining in the prison whose responses indicated the complexity of what was going on and provided a glimpse into internal hierarchies. One officer refused outright and when questioned in the trial following the riot asserted that by this action the prisoner was intentionally 'trying to lower' him 'in the face of 150 other men [he wouldn't] . . . offer me a cigarette in the ordinary course of events [he asserted]'. It was, the officer maintained, 'taking a mean advantage'.[20] In contrast, another officer rejected the offer of cigarettes but accepted the cigarette coupon. However, the prison doctor had no compunction about accepting a cigarette offered to him by a prisoner. This was an indication not only that he had a different role from that of prison officers, although also part of the broad disciplinary mechanisms, but also that this was recognised and accepted by at least some of the inmates. Indeed in the *Du Parcq Report* he was described as a 'non-combatant' and his own testimony intimates that he didn't expect, nor was any physical aggression directed against him during the riot.[21] Nevertheless, a measure of hostility was expressed towards him. In the doctor's evidence to the Du Parcq Inquiry he notes that his first realisation that trouble was imminent was as he walked down the main drive of the prison early on the Sunday morning of the riot. He passed 'various gangs of men and there was a certain growling', when he passed several others they were 'ostentatiously polite'.[22]

The tension over tobacco and the offering of it by prisoners highlights the scarcity and value of tobacco in contemporary prisons which

led to its use as a form of currency at a time when smoking was a common male habit. In the ghost-written account of Ruby Sparks it is noted rather starkly about inter-war prisons that a 'convict will do a knifing for not much more snout (as we call it) than gets left in any hotel ashtray'.[23] Thus the significance of obtaining and offering a cigarette was enhanced in the context of the disturbance in that it represented an inversion of usual power structures and relationships and perhaps even compounded the vulnerability of prison staff. This echoes the symbolic interactionism of Goffman (1961) in his sociological study of another carceral institution, the asylum. As Goffman found, small actions take on much greater meaning and performative value in confinement. In a carceral environment like the prison, triviality may be more of a contested concept than usual in microhistory.[24]

This aspect of the riot revealed not only a part of the internal economy of the prison but also linguistic evidence of a militaristically imbued perspective of the riot in the use of the term 'non-combatant'. More obviously this can be seen in the frequent use of the word 'mutiny', in addition to nouns such as riot or outbreak, in official and media descriptions. As has been highlighted elsewhere, the choice of language in official reports and the media both reflects and shapes perceptions about the way in which events will be understood.[25] The word mutiny invoked strong and violent images of illegitimate collective action which had particular resonance not much more than a decade after the ending of the First World War. Despite the suggestion of a level of organisation, the term served to withdraw justification to resistance against the state and located the prison and prison authorities as defenders of public security. Hence considerable emphasis given to the danger posed should any of the convicts have escaped from the prison. While in directly military contexts there has been a reluctance to use the word mutiny, in relation to the large-scale prison riot in Dartmoor it had value as it identified the disturbance as a direct challenge to legitimate state authority in contravention of orderly behaviour which the state, the image suggests, had a right to expect. As has been observed by Rose, '[m]utiny is antithetical to an ethos whose fundamental tenets are duty, loyalty, honor, and patriotism'.[26] The continued use of the word mutiny reiterated that convicts had none of these attributes and that their actions were particularly illegitimate in the context of reformative criminal justice rhetoric. Moreover, the depiction of the riot as a mutiny evoked sinister images of the 'enemy within' reflecting wider social anxieties not only about crime but also about economic wellbeing, social stability and the perceived threat of Communism.[27] The term mutiny also

suggested the rarity of the event but that it therefore must be identifiable as someone's fault; invariably, as Rose, points out the commanding officer.[28] One analysis of 30 largely naval historical mutinies maintained that in many cases 'leadership was detached from the daily lives of the lower echelons'.[29] In this case the Prison Governor, Roberts, had extensive experience and statements to the Du Parcq Inquiry suggest that this gave him inside knowledge of the covert practices of prisoners. However, crucially this experience was in local not convict prisons, very different institutional entities, and this may have actually undermined him not only with convicts but also with the prison officers. Previous governors at Dartmoor all had experience of working in convict prisons. Certainly, the actions of Dartmoor's Prison Governor were scrutinised closely and were subject to criticism in the *Du Parcq Report*. His removal to another, smaller and local prison was also an indication that in a semi-militaristic organisation responsibility for order and discipline, the 'organisational norms', lay ultimately with the commanding officer/governor.[30] Historically the legal position of mutiny as a crime has also been clearer than that of rioting which has, for example, carried with it an aspect of the moral economy or a rationale as 'ballot boxes of the poor'.[31] Additionally, in Britain 'mutiny' has carried with it a tradition of being founded in conspiracy, a clear aspect of post-riot official examinations.[32]

Evidence of varying attitudes and behaviour towards different prison staff suggests that, contrary to what might be expected, the element of human individuality may become not less but more crucial to understanding behaviour in prison, precisely because it is very circumscribed. Choices and decision-making are of greater significance because institutional life gives fewer avenues for personal preferences which may then loom larger. So, for instance, one of the causal factors of the Dartmoor riot was that a relatively new Governor (appointed April 1931) curtailed the flexibility of prisoners to change their work details (from every three months to once a year). Given that the Governor was a man of considerable experience (in the prison service since 1909, with a break for war service) who had worked his way up through the ranks, unusual for a Governor at that time, this may have been an attempt to stamp his authority. His testimony at the trial following the riot makes it clear that he thought that output from prison workshops was too low. However, his prior service had largely been in Borstals or local prisons; he had no direct experience of the way tensions could build among long-sentenced men and the importance for them of choice. Prisoners complained about this change of practice because, according to the Governor's testimony, 'some had an idea that it was their perfect right to

change their party every three months if they wished to'.[33] Actions such as these did not gain him prisoners' respect. Furthermore on the morning before the riot he tried to address prisoners in the chapel and got a hostile reception with whistling and shouting from inmates.[34] Standing in front of the prisoners at chapel to explain the measures that had been taken to deal with immediate problems about the quality of the food may have exposed Governor Roberts as weak or at least as not impervious to the pressures and stratagems prisoners could utilise to express their grievances without exposing individuals to punishment.

Choices and their consequences are, of course, highly contextual and a good illustration of this is the issue of why some prisoners seemingly chose not to riot. In the trial following the riot, some inmates claimed that they were unwillingly caught up in the crowds. In one case, an officer and prisoner both agreed that a small group of prisoners was swept along by the 'mob'.[35] Others claimed that they followed the crowds because, when officers fled, they didn't know what else to do.[36] Choice was problematic in an institution holding men serving long sentences used to following orders. On the one hand, the disciplinary vacuum of a rioting crowd proved compelling to those in the thrust and chaos of disorder. On the other hand, not all convicts released from the separate cells chose to leave; at least one deliberately remained in his cell and two others did not go outside the block.[37] These men, already under punishment and perhaps with a reputation for rebelliousness felt able to refuse to join the disorder. Elsewhere some prisoners who were anxious to avoid involvement in the riot were led by officers to another block, but they refused to enter or be locked in cells for fear of what rioting prisoners would do if they came in. These men clearly felt more vulnerable in the choice they had made. They were shouted at from outside the block and called 'blacklegs' and 'yellowmen' by other prisoners.[38] A micro-approach to examining the prison can therefore lend insight into difficult questions that have rarely been touched upon, so not only why do prisoners riot but also why they do not riot when they have the option to. Social action is therefore not just the consequence of social pressure or 'normative reality', such drivers leave open the possibility for 'an individual's constant negotiation, manipulation, choices and decisions'.[39] Therefore, individuals can act differently due to their circumstances, or perception of circumstances, no matter how slight those differences may appear, and/or interpret their circumstances differently and hence make different choices with different consequences.

As will hopefully be clear by such analysis, microhistory is not only about using small-scale investigations to illustrate or reinforce

hypotheses established through broader studies. Indeed, in some respects it also reflects dissatisfaction with macroscopic analysis or meta-narratives. Microhistory's resurgence in the 1970s helped to reinforce a shift from the dominance of such historiography between the 1950s and 1970s.[40] But it is important that at least some questions and answers are located at this local level or scale of analysis so that microhistory generates something new.[41] The strength of microhistory is found where it is not simply passive to the macroscale. As Levi states, the unifying principle of all microhistory is the 'belief that microscopic observation will reveal factors previously unobserved'.[42] Microhistory is about approaching small-scale study 'in and of itself' rather than being a form of case study to test hypothesis derived from a broader perspective.[43] What microhistory can help reveal is about 'interiority and intimacy rather than surface and distance'.[44]

At the same time what can be achieved should not be exaggerated; although for the most part advocates of microhistory have been careful not to promote a view of relationships or events that suggest a fully formed and coherent narrative is obtainable or can explain all questions posed at this local level.[45] Therefore, while close examination of institutions, in this case the prison, can illustrate their contingent and fragmented nature as well as their inherent resistance to change, it is perhaps less helpful in explaining the strength and persistence of large-scale contextual developments such as institutionalisation and bureaucratisation. But then not all questions can be answered by one approach or indeed by one study, no matter how meticulous.

An approach which often seeks out conflict and dislocation not only reveals the Marxist, or at least left leaning, roots of many microhistorians but also may serve to distort and exaggerate the fragility of large institutions.[46] In my own research on the prison, I have capitalised on events, like riots, which have generated greater, more varied and more detailed evidence which enables microhistory to be undertaken. This is done in the belief that such events not only expose internal social dynamics in times of stress but that they also reveal something broader and deeper about the exercise of power. As Sykes pointed out in his early sociological examination of prison life in 1950s America, power 'unexercised is seldom as visible as power that is challenged'.[47] This principle can, of course, operate on many levels, which illustrates the importance of plural contexts for microstudy. Contrary to the admitted danger that a microhistory approach, especially one which has concentrated upon prison disturbances, could potentially exaggerate the fragility of institutions, this study of the Dartmoor Riot highlights the ultimate resilience

of the prison authorities and the profound influence of policy-makers such as Alexander Paterson. In the face of serious challenges to contemporary penal policy and his own work as a result of the riot, he was instrumental in working with Herbert Du Parcq during the post-riot investigation which effectively shut down debate and brought a measure of closure to scrutiny of the penal context.

As with all history, the rational questions that can be asked are restrained and dictated by surviving evidence. Unlike social scientists, who have the capacity to generate their evidence through, for example, interviews and questionnaires, for the most part historians depend on what has been left by chance, intent and policy by preceding generations.[48] Hence in relation to microhistory Gregory observes, 'the nature of one's sources dictates (often frustrating) limits about how much, and what aspects, of lived human experience historians might reasonably hope to reconstruct'.[49] The availability of sufficiently rich primary sources is, of course, one of the deciding factors for all historians, and issues around selectivity and significance should be continually raised.[50] However, microhistory tends to require particularly intensive and detailed sources regarding inter-personal relationships. Hence, they tend to concentrate on extraordinary events which have attracted official and public attention, thus generating a greater record. Nevertheless, as in the case of the Dartmoor riot such concentration can illustrate the operation of formal institutions under stress, uncovering hidden practices and giving these events wider application.

As a corollary to the tendency of microhistories to concentrate on the extraordinary, there is often a focus on 'outliers' rather than average individuals, those who might be considered isolated, strange and/or dangerous. Certainly, this criticism could be levelled at my analysis of Dartmoor since riots have never been common or representative events in English prison history and convicted criminals do not make up the majority of the general population. Indeed, with regard to Dartmoor, the convicts incarcerated there made up only a small minority of the prison population as a whole at that time. In 1931, only 15 per cent of receptions into prisons in England and Wales were for periods exceeding three months. In the same year those sentenced to penal servitude constituted only about 1 per cent or 511 of 53,043 receptions of convicted male offenders.[51] Nevertheless, as Ginzburg and Poni observe, some kinds of deviancy constitute normal behaviour among those on the social margins and so can be representative of their social milieu.[52] This, of course, poses interesting questions for crime historians and in the context of the prison can help to contest as reductionist the image of

prisons as merely social dustbins holding the inadequate dregs of society. Microhistory may well take us further and enable a more insightful connection and understanding of those from the past who lived in communities on the margins, which is not necessarily the same as asserting a positive affinity with them.

Official reports in the aftermath of the Dartmoor riot largely assigned responsibility for the outbreak to a small number of 'motor bandits' and 'smash-and-grab raiders' who were seen to be not only an exceptionally dangerous new kind of criminal but also the worst prisoners Dartmoor's governor had ever had to control. A well-known account by one of these, Ruby Sparks, reveals a criminal family having some status in their own community. Sparks's mother considered the family to be 'very respected' in the neighbourhood. The neighbourhood was Tiger Yard in Camberwell, where according to Sparks, 'in 1908 some of the best thieves in London used to come visiting my mother to sell her the results of their efforts'. His father was also well respected as a tough fighter because he could 'lick any man his size in Camberwell'.[53] Mark Benney, another offender who later wrote about his experiences, claimed of his criminality that if 'law-abidingness is acting according to the dictates of the community you were born into, there never was a more law-abiding person than myself'.[54] So criminals may in one respect be represented as proverbially 'at war with society' but in another may behave in a way acceptable or at least tolerated within their own communities. One of the points here is that context in relation to micro study must be perceived as plural, indeed Revel states that one of the characteristics of microhistory is that it lacks a unified, stable, homogeneous context to help explain why choices are made.[55] Revel observes that 'every historical actor participates in processes – and is therefore inscribed in contexts with different levels and dimensions'.[56]

The concept of the clue, elucidated by Ginzburg (1989), is helpful to understanding how linkages can be tested although this idea also highlights many of the issues and problems in microhistory as a methodology. Following a clue in Ginzburg's terms can encourage reaching for deeper, more intensive and creative understanding, perhaps even uncover a hidden truth, but it can also be critiqued as speculative and highly selective. Peltonen defines a clue as follows:

> On the one hand a clue is something that does not quite fit in with its immediate surroundings, something that seems odd or out of place. It is in certain respects discontinuous with its environment. On the other hand a clue leads thought to somewhere else, reveals

> connections, exposes some secret or crime. So there is continuity, too, which is equally important.[57]

The precise application of this idea is contestable, but the significance is that one seemingly small and perhaps unlikely action, or indeed lack of action or misunderstanding, can suggest to the researcher more significant issues and interpretations. I return to research on the Dartmoor riot to provide an illustration of following a clue, albeit a more obvious one than may be suggested by Ginzburg's work, and open out its multiple contexts. This clue consists of a note thrown by a prisoner to the press gallery during the preliminary hearing of the Dartmoor rioters and could so easily never have surfaced in the surviving historical record but for the fact that, much to the chagrin of the Prison Commission, this note not only found its way into a journalist's hands but was published in the *Western Evening Herald* on 22 of March 1932. The note claimed that rumours of staff reductions had made officers intolerant so they goaded prisoners into mutiny. The riot, it asserted, was 'a bread-and-butter war'. These claims impel a broader contextual perspective, which reveals a prison for recidivists with a tough reputation and high running costs in the midst of a new vision and rhetoric of penal reform and a national economic crisis. The prison was under threat of closure with only 442 of its 935 cells occupied on the eve of the riot and there had been no new admissions since 19 November 1931. Economy measures meant prison officers were experiencing pay cuts and those leaving the service were not replaced, which, due to falling staff numbers, resulted in reductions in hours prisoners spent out of cells. Economies in Government departments also meant a decline in demand for prison-made goods leaving sewing mailbags for the General Post Office as the main cellular work. In this context one ex-prisoner declared that in respect to Dartmoor the 'code of progress, humanitarianism, reform and modernization [was]…so much waste paper'.[58] The fears and discontents of prison officers were patently clear in the *Prison Officers' Magazine* in articles which bemoaned not only the standard of their pay and conditions but also declining standards of discipline. The contents of the note thrown in the courtroom within the broader structural and economic context infer that the Dartmoor riot could in part have been one of the indirect consequences of policy driven by the depression. Thus, one scrap of historical evidence raises the drawbridge on questions about the wider significance of the Dartmoor Prison riot of 1932. Unfortunately, conclusions based on these kinds of hints about historical interconnections and reverberations must in most cases remain tentative to say the

least as they are reliant on little more than fragments of the historical record, enticing but precarious.

Microhistories can enable the researcher to ask different questions, use new evidence or existing evidence in a new way, and can generate fresh perspectives. As a more narrative form it can also be written in a more accessible and powerful way and so broaden out history to the public. In its prioritising of personal experience, microhistory gets closer to the ground and in that respect could be said to be more concrete or real and can bring the subjects of the narrative closer. All of these attributes have helped to enable a close-up study of the Dartmoor Convict Prison riot which occurred in January 1932. Of course, as with other methods there are pitfalls, in particular there are dangers that the new perspectives offered can be distorting and less capable of explaining big questions, such as, why in the light of all of the problems experienced at ground level in institutions has the force of institutionalisation remained so strong? As Gregory suggests, the key is in knowing which map or method we need to employ in a particular instance.[59] Perspective is an issue which should be kept in mind regarding microhistories of institutions since it could serve to intensify an already intense setting. Nevertheless, the potential for a perspective which maintains that the meaning of institutions is given in the interaction and negotiation of social actors who embody them inevitably asserts the merits of a microhistory approach.[60]

# 7
# Conclusion

This examination of the Dartmoor Convict Prison Riot of 24 January 1932 demonstrates the complexity involved in attempting to construct a diagnosis of the causes, process and impact of such a disturbance. It is true that while such major incidents are rare in English prisons, the unusual amount of evidence they generate can serve to reveal the operation of regimes normally hidden from view. This was especially so at Dartmoor which attracted public attention and notoriety but little understanding. At the same time it must be recognised that Dartmoor was an institution unusual in its remoteness and with a specific history, culture and inmate population. Yet an in-depth exploration of this prison, even at a time of unusual stress, offers to test the reformative rhetoric of the period and illustrates the varied and fragmented nature of its implementation as well as the continuing diversity of prison experience. This examination has intimated the importance of external as well as internal pressures on prisons, questioning therefore the extent to which they operated as closed institutions. Even in the case of a prison like Dartmoor, which confined offenders sentenced to longer prison terms and so didn't have the same level of social bustle of inmate in-and-outflow experienced in say a large local prison, the prison staff, prison authorities and policy-making existed within a broader economic and social context. For instance, government retrenchment, staff reductions and cuts in prison officers' pay impacted negatively upon morale and discipline within Dartmoor Prison. However in the aftermath of the riot greater attention was given to the role of a small number of convicts who were seen to represent the worst in contemporary criminality: ruthless, calculating and more dangerous due to the mobility afforded them by the motor car.

Certainly, there were inmates who had serious and violent convictions on their records and who associated with one another, whether before or during their sentence in Dartmoor. These were men whose reputations were compounded, or in some quarters it could be said enhanced, by their incarceration in Dartmoor, an institution notorious for its tough regime. There is also evidence to suggest that they influenced significantly inmate cultures and that they were particularly troublesome. Some of them were involved in an escape attempt shortly before the riot, which no doubt impacted upon the stability of the regime. Nevertheless, there is no direct evidence to suggest that they planned or organised the riot, which may well have begun as a demonstration of grievances by a minority of inmates but quickly exploded into a great deal more to the surprise of staff and convicts alike. Historically, it has been convenient to blame prominent and troublesome prisoners for major prison disturbances, explaining some of the hyperbole. This response has also operated to dissipate the pressure on prison authorities and shift attention away from penal policy. To a considerable extent the news print media co-operated in highlighting the nature of Dartmoor's inmate population as responsible for the riot. In an era of fierce commercial competition the riot was presented as dramatic and exciting. Press reports derived much of that excitement from the drama and violence of the riot and their characterisation of inmates, rather than from an informed examination of the causes or from questioning the conclusions of the all too brief official investigation. Journalists throughout the industry generally posed little challenge to the narrative offered in the *Du Parcq Report*.

It is interesting that significant attention was paid to the role and abilities of Prison Governor Roberts during the Du Parcq Inquiry. Evidence to the investigation conducted by Herbert Du Parcq and Alexander Paterson reveals that Roberts's appointment was an 'experiment'. Although the nature of this experiment is not made clear, he was unusual in that he rose through the ranks and had not worked in a convict prison prior to his appointment at Dartmoor. When the experiment ultimately failed, ending in riot, Roberts was vulnerable. Emphasis placed on his personal failures in the *Du Parcq Report* was not only critical of his character and decision-making but also served to divert attention from the system within which Roberts was trained and promoted.

Other factors outlined as causes of the riot tended to be specific to Dartmoor itself: it's location, inmates, and it's staff, all of which were highlighted as being unusual and therefore not a representative part of

a prison estate undergoing reform. Not only did it hold the most serious offenders but also the prison was unusually remote. There were suggestions that the prison had become a posting for prison officers who were under suspicion elsewhere; some may have been corrupt, bringing in illegal implements which aided prisoners' attempts to escape. An examination of the inmate population of Dartmoor has given a more nuanced profile of the offenders held there at the time of the riot. Many of these prisoners would be best described as recidivists or serial offenders rather than criminals guilty of serious offences. Thirty-six per cent of the sentences handed down to inmates present at Dartmoor on 24 January 1932 were for three months or less and 50.5 per cent were for six months or less.[1] Indeed, the failure to make a distinction between serial and serious crime reflected a tendency which had already undermined the operation of legislation regarding the designation of persistent or habitual criminals under the Prevention of Crime Act in 1908. This issue was also part of deliberations by the Persistent Offenders Committee which reported later in the same year as the riot. The Committee recommended that a range of institutions be established, from minimum to maximum security, to incarcerate persistent offenders in a system which would recognise the varied seriousness of their activities and enable more diverse regimes.[2]

A microhistory approach has been taken in this publication which has facilitated both a close scrutiny of behaviour and events as well as an examination of the multiple layers of social action and inter-action which shaped the form and context of the Dartmoor Convict Prison riot. This approach has enabled an in-depth, textured and nuanced explanation of the Dartmoor riot to be offered which is closer to the ground so that subjects of the narrative can become more vivid and substantive. It is a perspective which maintains that the meaning of institutions is given in the interaction and negotiation of social actors who embody them. Certainly a fuller examination has been offered here than in any previous publication, but this major prison disturbance has thus far attracted surprisingly little academic attention. The structure of this book which examines distinct but related perspectives on the same event has inevitably resulted in some overlap. Nevertheless, the reiteration within different kinds of contemporary sources, particularly with regard to targets for blame, enables insights into the method and means by which penal policy and administration are perpetuated.

To take this analysis forward, the conclusions reached have the potential to offer insights when applied to prison disturbances across time. If the riot at Dartmoor Convict Prison in January 1932 is placed within

a different dynamic, shifting focus away from the penal context of the inter-war period and towards considering prison riots in England as a distinct phenomenon, can this help to highlight basic continuities or shifts regarding major disorder in prisons and the way in which the authorities respond? Whilst further research is needed, the following offers some tentative observations. A brief comparison of the Dartmoor Prison riot with an earlier major outbreak in Chatham Convict Prison in 1861 noted that, in the aftermath of both outbreaks, specific groups of male prisoners were identified and received most of the blame for disorder. These men were supposedly the most desperate, the least liable to reform and had the least to lose by their actions. At Chatham, concern centred on the threat posed by unrest supposedly reckless and desperate long-sentenced convicts would cause in prison and the ticket-of leave system (early release on license). This reflected broader social concerns about the demise of transportation to Australia and the domestic retention of serious offenders.[3]

As in the aftermath of the Dartmoor Prison riot, the same kind of narrative undermined consideration of any legitimate grievances. However, the repercussions of these riots were rather different. In both cases the authorities acted decisively and swiftly to clamp down on rioting, but the longer term consequences differed. The furore surrounding the Chatham Convict Prison riot in 1861, as well as other prison disturbances in the late 1850s and early 1860s, was an important factor in the shift of penal policy towards deterrence. In contrast, following the Dartmoor riot there was a brief backlash but for the most part the tide of penal policy continued to move in a reformative direction, limited and fragmented though that was.[4] A broad comparison can be made with the Strangeways (Manchester) prison riot of 1990 and its aftermath. One source has suggested that the trials which followed the Strangeways riot 'did not embrace the real issues of policy that lie behind prison conditions but concentrated instead upon who did what to whom'[5]; this claim has real resonance with the trial of the Dartmoor defendants. In a series of trials in 1992–93, 23 men were given exemplary sentences totalling over 140 years for their part in the riot.[6] However, post-Strangeways, Lord Woolf, a judge with a particularly liberal reputation, was appointed to lead what has been seen as 'the most far-reaching prison riot inquiry in British penal history' and a ground breaking report was produced.[7]

The depth and range of the report into the prison disturbances of April 1990 [hereafter the *Woolf Report*] serves to emphasise further the relatively scant examination undertaken by Du Parcq and Patterson.

The inquiry into disturbances in Strangeways and other prisons lasted five months compared to the five days taken by the inquiry into the Dartmoor riot and was conducted in public. Woolf emphasised one 'principal thread' in his analysis – that in order to ensure stability, a balance had to be maintained between 'security, control and justice'.[8] In that context, security referred to the prevention of escapes, control referred to the prevention of disturbances and justice referred to the 'obligation on the Prison Service to treat prisoners with humanity and fairness'.[9] The report drove improvements in prison conditions but progress was affected by: an expanding prison system, the imperative of maintaining control, and, according to Adams, a lack of 'timetabled prior commitment to the resources required to benefit prisoners substantially'.[10] In both prisons, inmates later claimed that their actions were a means to demonstrate against legitimate grievances. However, it was only following the Strangeways riot that the official investigation by Lord Woolf into the disturbance asserted that deficiencies in regimes were a key factor behind the disturbances. These included overcrowding, poor sanitation, poor relationships between prisoners and prison officers, ineffective grievance procedures and the practice of incarcerating prisoners far from their homes.[11] In one respect the riot in Strangeways prison was unexpected because it occurred in a local prison. Prior to this most major disturbances had been in prisons which held serious and/or violent offenders which made it easier to attribute the trouble to the inmates. The response of prison and political authorities to prison riots is crucial and to a large extent explains not only the impact of prison riots on public consciousness but also on the direction of penal policy. Carrabine maintains that the major riot and consequent siege which began in Manchester Strangeways prison on 1 April 1990 and lasted for 25 days 'came to signify the chronic problems inherent in the prison system' largely because of 'the reactions of the authorities to the protest'.[14] Because of the wealth of primary material on the Dartmoor disturbance, more useful observations can be made in comparison with Strangeways than regarding the 1861 disturbance at Chatham. Certainly the riots in Dartmoor and Strangeways achieved prominence in public consciousness, although awareness of the Dartmoor riot was overtaken by trouble in prisons during the 1960s and 1970s.[12] As has been pointed out by Adams, the 'Dartmoor mutiny of 1932 was the incident in British prisons which, prior to the 1960s, attracted the most attention'.[13] In the 1990s and into the twenty-first century it is the riot in Strangeways prison that has come to exemplify major prison disturbances and indeed to overshadow and distort

public perceptions of trouble occurring in prisons as a whole. The riot and siege at Strangeways was followed by a wave of serious disturbances in other prisons, including Dartmoor, Glen Parva, Cardiff, Bristol and Pucklechurch. Indeed, the description of Dartmoor Prison in the *Woolf Report* suggests that the prison's formidable image was retained into the late twentieth century, 'Dartmoor has an awesome reputation. Its buildings are affected by damp. It has a long tradition of bad relations between officers and management. The staff are regarded by prisoners as being illiberal, the regime as rigid . . . both staff and inmates referred to Dartmoor as being the dustbin of the system'.[15] As in 1932 when the Dartmoor riot was followed by trouble in Parkhurst, where some of the Dartmoor defendants and other inmates had been transferred, unrest post-Strangeways could in part be explained by the transfer of inmates between prisons which in some cases exacerbated overcrowding.[16] However, news of the Strangeways riot also seemed to act as a catalyst for trouble which extended to prisons that had not been in receipt of inmates from Manchester. According to the *Woolf Report*, the Strangeways riot 'acted as a beacon which provided the signal for unrest and disturbances across many parts of the prison system'.[17] The main disorder in both Dartmoor and Strangeways erupted on Sunday morning, the latter living up to an assumption, already established by the 1930s that such trouble would be most likely to break out in the chapel. That both disturbances occurred on a Sunday also confirmed the observation in the *Du Parcq Report* that 'it is a matter of common knowledge among prison officials that if there is to be disorder Sunday is the day on which it is most likely to occur'.[18] Historically in prisons staffing and therefore facilities, activities and time out of cells have been reduced on Sundays resulting in greater tension. This being common knowledge meant that the judgement of Dartmoor's Prison Governor and Colonel Turner who allowed exercise as normal that January Sunday morning, was later seen as questionable in the light of the consequent outbreak.

In both Dartmoor and Strangeways prisoners quickly gained control due to the withdrawal of prison staff. At Dartmoor, this withdrawal was legitimated as enabling a focus on protecting the perimeter. In the *Woolf Report* staff at Strangeways were criticised for vacating the centre of the main prison as well as other areas 'prematurely' and at a point when no 'hostile action had been taken by any prisoner towards prison officers there.[19] Testimony from prisoners in both disturbances expressed a measure of surprise at the relative ease with which they were able to overrun the prison. Roof space was attractive but in the case of Dartmoor vulnerable to gunfire from armed officers on the

perimeter. This prevented attempts to communicate with people outside Dartmoor but in any case the prison's rural location meant that it was less useful in this respect than the roof space of urban Strangeways. However, at both institutions the media soon arrived in force so that inmates at Strangeways were able to communicate and/or 'perform' for the cameras eliciting front page pictures of disguised prisoners gesturing to the press. In both cases press coverage was almost totally focussed on the drama and violence of events as well as the dangerousness of the inmates and their potential to commit harm. The long-running siege at Strangeways provided greater opportunities for press exploitation of the events compared to the short and decisive retaking of Dartmoor.[20] Hence, the exaggeration and sheer conjecture of the coverage was extreme regarding Strangeways. For example, the *Daily Mirror* on Tuesday 3 April 1990 headlined with 'CARNAGE IN THE CAGES' and claimed 'Drug-crazed lynch mob torture and murder as they go on the rampage'.[21]

Newspaper stories about Strangeways were so excessive that an inquiry by the Press Council ensued.[22] It's report blamed in part the reticence of the Home Office about 'what goes on in prisons' so that journalists sought out other, unofficial, sources for information about the riot, an assertion that was also made regarding the Dartmoor riot. Yet, broadly speaking newspaper coverage on the Dartmoor riot was clear about the evidence on which journalists were drawing. In the case of press stories on the Strangeways riot, the press was criticised for not making it clear that they were using unofficial sources so that readers were presented with information as if it were factual when in reality the source was subjective and sometimes conjectural.[23]

At both Strangeways and Dartmoor there were instances of informal co-operation between prisoners and between prisoners and prison officers. As during the Dartmoor riot, prisoners in Strangeways made decisions about how to respond to the outbreak:

> some stayed in their cells, or only left them to find their way out of the prison and to the authorities. Others set about destroying the fabric of the institution, whilst others watched, enjoying the display and destruction of despised surroundings. A good many prisoners were terrified.[24]

In both prisons, inmates wanting to leave faced locked exits and in Strangeways bombardment from missiles from the roofs so that they had to be protected by a cordon of shields held by prison officers.[25] During

both disturbances, prisoners targeted administrative records setting fire in particular to prisoner records.

Unlike Governor Roberts at Dartmoor, who was in the prison when trouble began on the parade grounds so that he was rather ignominiously forced to retreat to an old part of the prison for the duration, Governor O'Friel was off-site and arrived at Straangeways prison about an hour after the disturbance broke out. Governor O'Friel, one of the most experienced and respected Governors in the service, was keen for action to be taken as early as possible as the longer they waited the more opportunity prisoners had to reinforce their defences.[26] A successful attempt was made late on the first day of the riot to retake one wing (E) but the next day officers had to retreat in the face of resistance. Governor O'Friel spoke to the Regional Office to say that he intended trying to retake the prison early the following morning.[27] At 7 am that morning an estimated 142 prisoners were still inside the prison.[28] Following discussions, Control and Restraint units entered the remand section of the prison and retook it without difficulty and seized six prisoners. By 2 pm O'Friel and his commanders had worked out an agreed plan.

Interestingly, in the case of disturbances at both Dartmoor and Strangeways there were decisive conversations, the content of which was later disputed, which had inestimable but significant impact on the outcomes in both prisons. In the case of the Strangeways riot, a telephone conversation occurred between Governor Brendan O'Friel and the Deputy Director General of the Prison Service, Brian Emes, over O'Friel's plans to retake the prison on the day following the riot. By this time, as Woolf notes, units were already in position for the attack.[29] According to Governor O'Friel, his plan and 'the prospects of success' were 'properly discussed' in this conversation, according to Emes they were not and a note in which he later recorded the conversation suggested a misinterpretation of the Governor's stance. O'Friel was denied permission to go ahead with the main plan to retake the prison. However, he received permission, partly on the ground of the damage to morale he felt would be caused by the main attack being stood down, to go ahead with a smaller and consequently successful plan to attack the kitchen in an attempt to cut off food supplies to the prisoners.[30] Regarding Dartmoor, aside from some confusion about who actually was in charge at the prison once Assistant Commissioner Turner was on site, there was deliberation in evidence to the Du Parcq Inquiry over whether, in a telephone conversation between Prison Commissioner Lamb and Dartmoor's Governor Roberts, the former had given his permission to call in the police in the event of trouble. Lamb and Roberts came to

differing conclusions on the matter. The consequences of this may have been that Roberts hesitated calling for the police and this was not done until after serious disorder had broken out. Roberts had delayed as he knew full well how that would reflect on him especially as he believed he had not been given permission to do so by the Prison Commission. In order to throw light on this matter, Du Parcq and Paterson called for a written account from Commissioner Lamb which was accepted by Du Parcq as 'substantially accurate'.[31] In Lamb's account he had 'authorised him [Governor Roberts] to call in the police, but expressed the hope that this would be unnecessary and that, in order to avoid undesirable publicity, he would be able to manage with his own staff'.[32]

In both of these key incidents the issue revolved around who had the ultimate responsibility for decision-making within individual prisons, the Prison Governor on the spot or the central Prison Service executive body. The perspective of these two bodies differed. The Governors' primary focus was internal, on the prison and the maintenance and/or re-establishment of order. The perspective of the central body was not only the prison but also the wider consequences of any precedents set, the importance of hierarchical procedure and the impact of the publicity that would undoubtedly be attracted. According to Carrabine, in the case of Strangeways this exposed to the Woolf inquiry the extent of the organisational crisis in the Prison Service, 'which was characterised by a very strong top-down structure with a high level of centralised control'.[33] Evidence from 1932 regarding the Dartmoor riot suggests that such a top-down structure was already in existence for prison management but was in effect side-stepped by police authority on the spot which appears to have made no effort to communicate with central prison authorities. In a major respect, quick and decisive action could be taken in response to the Dartmoor riot due to the level of local autonomy that was retained by the police at that time. The Chief Constable of Plymouth City Police, Archibald Wilson, was able to take the initiative and control of the situation without, as far as can be determined, consulting with the Prison Commission or the Home Office or indeed more senior police authorities. Soon after his arrival on site and following a brief unsuccessful attempt to get the prisoners to surrender, Wilson ordered his police officers and any available prison officers into the prison. He ordered his men into the prison because in his opinion, '[s]omething had to be done and done quickly'.[34] He accepted full responsibility, 'I gave the orders' he later asserted.[35] His authority appears not to have been questioned,

and he in part relied upon the accepted seniority of the police service over the prison service. For example, in his evidence to the Du Parcq Inquiry, Chief Inspector of Devon Police, Major Morris, who was a previous Governor at Dartmoor, stated 'when a Governor asks for permission to call in the Police it is indicating that he is prepared to abdicate'.[36] Crucially, Chief Constable Wilson was able to act decisively and with relative freedom in his decision-making precisely because he was operating from outside of the prison service at that point.

Governor Roberts's hesitation at Dartmoor suggests a lack of confidence to act, in part no doubt generated by the rather bureaucratic response he had received from the Prison Commission to his request for advice. In the *Du Parcq Report* this was portrayed as a reflection of the lesser personal authority and charisma of a man who had unusually risen through the ranks and had no experience of convict service. At that time the fact that Roberts was different from the traditional prison governor who was a senior military figure with class and social status made him vulnerable in front of investigators who may have been endeavouring to divert responsibility for the riot from the contemporary bureaucracy and authority. This reinforces historically the assertion of Carrabine that 'the dynamics of prison disorder are by no means solely determined by the actions of the protesters. In fact much depends on the reactions of the authorities'.[37]

Carrabine notes that there is little doubt that the protest at Strangeways was planned but by no more than a dozen men who went into the chapel intending to create a disturbance to highlight their grievances. He suggests that it is 'extremely unlikely that they intended taking over the whole prison, yet this was achieved remarkably easily. Other prisoners felt, with some justification, that they had been abandoned by staff'.[38] In both Dartmoor and Strangeways rather limited initial protest was supported by a much larger proportion of the prisoners, otherwise the disturbance would have petered out before gathering any serious momentum. This suggests that there were grievances or tensions that were more widely felt. At Strangeways the impact of overcrowding was important. There were 1,647 prisoners held in the prison. The certified normal accommodation for Strangeways was 970.[39] Nevertheless, overcrowding itself was not a sufficient explanation for the riot since the prison space in Dartmoor was significantly under-utilised. Both of these prisons were understaffed, conditions were poor and inmates experienced extended hours in cells. In both prisons there had been

recent improvements in conditions and then a withdrawal or reduction of these improvements in the period shortly beforethe riots. These two major disturbances were also based in prisons with a reputation for tough inmates and harsh regimes. Both of these riots were labelled as the most serious prison disorders in British history and left an enduring impression on the public and political consciousness.

# Notes

## 1 Introduction

1. E. Carrabine (2005) 'Prison Riots, Social Order and the Problem of Legitimacy', *British Journal of Criminology* 45: 896.
2. E. Carrabine (2004) *Power, Discourse and Resistance: A Genealogy of the Strangeways Prison Riot* (Aldershot: Ashgate), p. 182.
3. C. Emsley (1996) 'Albion's Felonious Attractions: Reflections upon the History of Crime in England', in C. Emsley and L.A. Knafla (eds), *Crime and Histories of Crime: Studies in the Historiography of Crime and Criminal Justice* (London: Greenwood Press), p. 78. However, recent work has begun to fill the gap in twentieth-century crime history, for example, J. Carter Wood (2010) 'The Third Degree: Reporting, Crime Fiction and Police Powers in 1920s Britain', *Twentieth Century British History* 21 (3): 464–85; C. Emsley (2008) 'Violent Crime in England in 1919: Post-war Anxieties and Press Narratives', *Continuity and Change* 23: 173–95.
4. See, for example, R. Sanderson (1970) *The Prison on the Moor: The Astonishing Story of Dartmoor Prison* (Plymouth: Westway Publications).
5. R. Joy (2002) *Dartmoor Prison: A Complete Illustrated History, Vol. 2: The Convict Prison 1850–Present Day* (Tiverton: Halsgrave); S. Dell (2006) *Mutiny on the Moor: The Story of the Dartmoor Prison Riot of 1932* (Newton Abbot: Forest Publishing).
6. C. Harding, B. Hines, R. Ireland and P. Rawlings (1985) *Imprisonment in England and Wales: A Concise History* (London: Croom Helm), p. 223. Another example of a rather limited approach to analysis of the Dartmoor riot can be found in M. Fitzgerald (1977) *Prisoners in Revolt* (London: Penguin), pp. 121–9.
7. See, for example, U.R.Q. Henriques (1972) 'The Rise and Decline of the Separate System of Prison Discipline', *Past and Present* 54: 61–93; M. DeLacy (1986) *Prison Reform in Lancashire 1700–1850: A Study in Local Administration* (Manchester: Manchester University Press).
8. A. Brown (2003) 'Legitimacy in the Evolution of the Prison: The Chatham Convict Prison Outbreak, 1861', *Criminal Justice History* 18: 107–19.
9. For an excellent early consideration of this, see U.R.Q, 'Rise and Decline of the Separate System'. Also see M. DeLacy, *Prison Reform in Lancashire*.
10. R. Adams (1994) *Prison Riots in Britain and the USA*, 2nd ed. (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan), p. 115.
11. Ibid., p. 105.
12. P. Priestly (1989) *Jail Journeys: The English Prison Experience since 1918* (London: Routledge), p. 180.
13. Dr Guy Richmond (1975) *Prison Doctor: A Dramatic Insight into Our Penal System and the Critical Need to Seek Reform* (British Columbia: Antonson Publishing), p. 22.

14. J.E. Thomas (1972) *The English Prison Officer since 1850: A Study in Conflict* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul), p. 159.
15. Carrabine, 'Prison Riots', p. 896.
16. V. Bailey (July 1997) 'English Prisons, Penal Culture, and the Abatement of Imprisonment, 1895–1922', *Journal of British Studies* 36: 321.
17. *Prison Officers' Magazine*, March 1929, XVIII (3): 69.
18. Ibid., April 1932, XXI (4): 104.
19. Richmond, *Prison Doctor*, p. 14.
20. For an analysis of prison disturbances in England between 1850 and 1920, see A. Brown (2003) *English Society and the Prison: Time, Culture and Politics in the Development of the Modern Prison, 1850–1920* (Woodbridge: Boydell Press).
21. W.J. Forsythe (1991) *Penal Discipline, Reformatory Projects and the English Prison Commission 1895–1939* (Exeter: University of Exeter Press), pp. 189–90.
22. *Prison Officers' Magazine*, February 1932 XXI (2): 35 and March 1932 XXI (3): 75.
23. NA HO144/20647/71A letter from the editor of the *Prison Officers' Magazine* to Sir Herbert Samuel, Home Secretary, dated 1 February 1932.
24. G. Rose (1970) 'Penal Reform as History', *British Journal of Criminology* 10 (4): 348–71.
25. For more on Camp Hill Prison, see Forsythe, *Penal Discipline*, Chapter 6.
26. Major B.D. Grew, Order of the British Empire (O.B.E.) (1958) *Prison Governor* (London: Herbert Jenkins), p. 66.
27. G. Rose (1961) *The Struggle for Penal Reform* (London: Stevens & Sons Limited), p. 110.
28. Ibid.
29. Grew, *Prison Governor*, p. 60. Grew suggests that as new grey uniforms were issued at other prisons, the discarded ones were sent to Dartmoor to 'wear out their service'.
30. Rose, *Struggle for Penal Reform*, p. 116.
31. Parliamentary Papers (PP), *Annual Report of the Commissioners of Prisons*, 1931–32, Cmd 4151, xii, pp. 804–5.
32. G. Rose, *Struggle for Penal Reform*, p. 114.
33. PP, *Annual Report of the Commissioners of Prisons and Directors of Convict Prisons*, 1922–23, Cmd. 2000, p. 395.
34. See J. Curran and J. Seaton (2010) *Power without Responsibility: Press, Broadcasting and the Internet in Britain* (London: Routledge), Chapter 5.

## 2 The Dartmoor Convict Prison Riot 1932: Wild Happenings on the Moor

1. Dr Guy Richmond (1975) *Prison Doctor: A Dramatic Insight into Our Penal System and the Critical Need to Seek Reform* (British Columbia: Antonson Publishing), p. 22.
2. Rev. B.P.H. Ball (1956) *Prison Was My Parish* (London: William Heinemann Ltd), p. 123.
3. National Archives (hereafter NA), ASSI 24/18/4, pp. 296–7. CID investigation in preparation for the prosecution of Dartmoor convicts.

4. NA ASSI 24/18/4, pp. 298–9, 300–1.
5. *Manchester Guardian*, 28 April 1932.
6. *The Times*, 14 May 1932.
7. *Manchester Guardian*, 14 May 1932, p. 11. Preliminary hearings were conducted, however, in order to get fullest possible picture while avoiding repetition it is largely the evidence relating to the main trial which resulted in convictions and sentencing which is discussed here.
8. *Report by Mr Du Parcq on the Circumstances Connected with the Recent Disorder at Dartmoor Convict Prison* PP 1932 Cmd.4010, VII, 23 (hereafter *Du Parcq Report*).
9. Major B.D. Grew (1958) *Prison Governor* (London: Herbert Jenkins), p. 72.
10. Ibid.
11. NA, HO144/19791/20.
12. NA DPP2/72, trial transcript *R v Beadles* (hereafter *R v Beadles*), 19–20.
13. *The Times*, 27 November 1934.
14. Ibid.
15. Grew, *Prison Governor*, p. 72.
16. Rev. B.P.H. Ball, *Prison Was My Parish*, p. 124.
17. NA PCom 9/254 evidence of Major Roberts to the Du Parcq Inquiry.
18. NA PCom 9/254 evidence to the Du Parcq Inquiry. Morris also commented that he had also heard rumours through the police of possible trouble, although also observed that there were always rumours.
19. NA PCom 9/254 evidence to the Du Parcq Inquiry.
20. Ibid.
21. NA PCom 9/254 evidence of Officer Udy to the Du Parcq Inquiry.
22. *Morning Post*, 29 January 1932.
23. *R v Beadles*, pp. 843, 855.
24. NA PCom 9/254.
25. *The Times*, 7 May 1932.
26. *The Times* and *Manchester Guardian*, 14 March 1932.
27. NA MEPOL 2/4959/15a.
28. A.J. Rhodes (1933) *Dartmoor Prison: A Record of 126 Years of Prisoner of War and Convict Life, 1806–1932* (London: John Lane The Bodley Head Limited), p. 167.
29. NA PCom 9/254 evidence of Colonel Turner to the Du Parcq Inquiry.
30. NA PCom 9/254 evidence of Major Morris to the Du Parcq Inquiry.
31. *Du Parcq Report*, pp. 14, 21.
32. See, for example, Rufus Endle (1979), *Dartmoor Prison* (Bodmin: Bossiney Books).
33. NA PCom 9/254 evidence of Officer Dowse to the Du Parcq Inquiry.
34. *R v Beadles*, p. 488.
35. *Du Parcq Report*, p. 23.
36. W. Macartney (1936) *Walls Have Mouths: A Record of Ten Years' Penal Servitude* (London: Gollancz), p. 111.
37. *R v Beadles*, pp. 167, 219.
38. Ibid., pp. 95–6.
39. Ibid., p. 101.
40. Ibid., p. 438.

41. NA PCom 9/254 evidence of Chief Officer Smale to the Du Parcq Inquiry. These guns were described in the *Du Parcq Report*, 7 as of an 'old pattern'.
42. *R v Beadles*, pp. 547–8.
43. Ibid., p. 259. A previous Deputy Governor at the prison had criticised these guns as being 'little more than a glorified blunderbuss, for its cartridges, filled with buckshot, sprayed red-hot pellets over a wide area, but its range was less than forty yards'. See Grew, *Prison Governor*, p. 68. For the use of guns in Dartmoor Prison also see A.W.B. Simpson (2005) 'Shooting Felons: Law, Practice, Official Culture and Perceptions of Morality', *Journal of Law and Society* 32 (2): 241–66.
44. Grew, *Prison Governor*, pp. 68–9.
45. NA PCom 0/254 evidence of Deputy Governor, Alfred Roberts, to the Du Parcq Inquiry.
46. NA PCom 0/254 evidence of Chief Officer Smale and Officer Dowse to the Du Parcq Inquiry.
47. *R v Beadles*, pp. 703–4, 679–81.
48. Ibid., pp. 758–9, 763.
49. M. Cozart Riggio (ed.) (2004) *Carnival: Culture in Action* (London: Routledge).
50. *R v Beadles*, pp. 652–4, 722–3, 974, 977.
51. Ibid., pp. 622, 897, 977 & 619–20.
52. *Du Parcq Report*, 30 and NA PCOM 0/254 evidence of Dr Battiscombe's to the Du Parcq Inquiry. However, in a well-known prison autobiography, it was suggested that Dr Battiscombe, 'had a Bad Name Among Lags, who recounted blood-curdling stories of the things he had done to the suffragettes', J. Phelan (1940) *Jail Journey* (London: Secker & Warburg), p. 113.
53. A.J. Rhodes, *Dartmoor Prison*, pp. 224–7.
54. Ibid., p. 227.
55. *R v Beadles*, p. 234.
56. NA MEPOL 2/4959/15a.
57. NA PCom 9/254 evidence of Deputy Governor Richards to the Du Parcq Inquiry.
58. NA PCOM 9/254 evidence of Donovan to the Du Parcq Inquiry.
59. A.J. Rhodes, *Dartmoor Prison*, p. 187.
60. E.H. Sutherland (1934) 'The Decreasing Prison Population of England', *Journal of Law and Criminology* 24: 882. Although Sutherland also noted that in the few years before 1934, the severity of sentences seemed to be increasing, p. 887. Also see, S.K. Ruck (1932) 'The Increase of Crime in England: An Analysis and Criticism', *Political Quarterly* 3: 215.
61. *R v Beadles*, pp. 123, 161.
62. Ibid., p. 995.
63. NA PCOM 0/254 evidence of Prison Officer, Rowland Kelly, to the Du Parcq Inquiry.
64. *R v Beadles*, p. 1000.
65. NA PCom 9/254 evidence of Edward O'Connell to the Du Parcq Inquiry. Also see evidence of Slade, Weston and Bardsley.
66. NA PCom 9/254.
67. NA PCom 9/256.

68. Red Collar Man (1937) *Chokey* (London: Victor Gollancz), pp. 100–4.
69. See *The Times*, 31 July and 31 July 1928.
70. NA PCom 9/255 minute to Governor Pannall, 21 May 1932.
71. NA PCom 9/255, memo 29 March 1932.
72. Most of the evidence regarding the sketch and what happened to Officer Traske has been handed down within the family, although some information has been corroborated in the *Prison Officers' Magazine*. The sketch itself is not referred to in any of the surviving records about the riot, but the provenance is good.
73. NA DP2/72 Prts 5–9, *R v Beadles*, 072.
74. This information was received from Officer Traske's grandson.
75. See entry on Finlay in the *Dictionary of National Biography* by G. Rubin.
76. *R* v *Beadles*, pp. 13, 236, 778 & 494.
77. A.J. Rhodes, *Dartmoor Prison*, p. 197.
78. *R* v *Beadles*, pp. 898, 906, 496, 499 & 887.
79. Ibid., p. 854.
80. NA PCOM9/254, evidence of Major Morris to Du Parcq Inquiry.
81. *R v Beadles*, pp. 264, 317, 845.
82. Ibid., p. 270.
83. Ibid.
84. PCOM 9/254.
85. *R v Beadles*, p. 414.
86. Preliminary hearing and Grand Jury deliberations were also held at Princetown.
87. NA HO595645/94/192 Letter from Prison Commission 13 November 1936. H. Scott to Under Sec of State.
88. Ibid. Also see, NA PCOM 9/254 Letter to Under S of S, 13 November 1936 from Prison Commission regarding remission for Dartmoor convicts brought to trial after the riot remaining in prison.
89. NA HO45/24535, minutes 29 September 1933.
90. V. Bailey (2000) 'The Shadow of the Gallows: The Death Penalty and the British Labour Government, 1945–51', *Law and History Review* 18 (2): 5.
91. NA HO45/24535 Letter from Maxwell, 30 September 1931.
92. NA HO45/24535 Report on Prison Governor's Conference June 1932.
93. For examples, see G. Rose (1961) *The Struggle for Penal Reform: The Howard League and its Predecessors* (London: Stevens & Sons Limited); E.H. Sutherland (1934) 'The Decreasing Prison Population of England', *Journal of Criminal Law and Criminology* 24: 898.
94. NA HO546730/29.
95. *Hansards* 1931–32, 5th series, Vol. 263, col. 1149.
96. NA PCom 9/255.
97. The other six men were Conning, Del Mar, Ibbesson, Mason, Moore and Smith.
98. See, for example, *The Times*, 27 April 1932.
99. NA PCom 9/255.
100. NA PCom 9/255, memo of 3 March 1932 from Governor Pannall (Major J C Pannall D.S.O M.C) indicates that Pannall was Alexander Paterson's

Sergeant-major when Paterson was a private in The Queen's (The Old VIth Volunteers Battalion of the Royal West Surrey Regiment).

101. NA PCom 9/255.
102. Ibid.
103. *R v Beadles*, summing up 7–14.
104. *Howard Journal* III (3) 1932, editorial, 9.
105. NA PCom 9/255.
106. NA PCom 9/256, memo from Battiscombe, 30 May 1932.
107. NA MEPOL 2/4959 /15a, Report of CID investigation into the Mutiny at Dartmoor Prison; *Hansards*, Vol. 262, 3 March 1932, col. 1258. Also see NA HO595645/94/169.
108. NA HO595645/80 & 94.
109. NA HO595645/94 & 113.
110. NA PCom 9/255, memo 2 March 1932.
111. NA PCom 9/255.
112. NA HO595645/169 letter from Superintendent Hambrook of CID, 8 June 1932.
113. NA PCom 9/255, memo 2 March 1932.
114. *R v Beadles*, pp. 14, 35.
115. Ibid., pp. 690–1, 643–4.
116. Ibid., pp. 662–3, 852; A. Smithe (19 March 1932) 'Prison', *New Statesman and Nation* III (56): 355.
117. *R v Beadles*, pp. 878, 60–1.
118. Ibid., pp. 643–4, 655–7.
119. NA PCom9/254, evidence of prison visitors, Bryan and Perry to Du Parcq Inquiry.
120. Rhodes, *Dartmoor Prison*, p. 169.
121. NA PCom9/254, evidence to the Du Parcq Inquiry.
122. *R v Beadles*, pp. 757–8.
123. PCom 9/256. Also see, Rhodes, *Dartmoor Prison*, pp. 230–1. The prisons to which defendants were dispersed were given as Parkhurst (Davis), Pentonville, Winchester, Gloucester, Shrewsbury, Durham (Jackson), Lincoln (Kendall), Wandsworth, Liverpool (Sparks), Manchester, Swansea, Birmingham (James), Bristol, Dorchester and Leicester.
124. Locations for this dispersal included prisons at Shrewsbury, Norwich, Leicester and Bedford, NA PCom 9/256.
125. NA PCom 9/256.
126. Ibid.
127. For example, see G. Rose (1961) *The Struggle for Penal Reform: The Howard League and its Predecessors* (London: Stevens & Sons Limited), p. 115.
128. Grew, *Prison Governor*, p. 58.
129. Ibid., pp. 58–9.
130. J. Phelan (1940) *Jail Journey* (London: Secker & Warburg), p. 16.
131. NA PCom 9/254, Evidence of Edward O'Connell to Du Parcq Inquiry.
132. See Rose, *Struggle for Penal Reform*, pp. 115, 168. Also see, R. Calvert (13 February 1932) 'The Lesson of Dartmoor', *The New Statesman and Nation* III (51): 191.

133. Grew, *Prison Governor*, pp. 59–60.
134. Except with regard to the arrow traced in hobnails on the soles of the boots issued to those who worked on farms, on reclaiming bogland or quarries outside of prison walls.
135. Grew, *Prison Governor*, pp. 60, 65, 74.
136. J. Phelan, *Jail Journey*, pp. 99, 121.
137. ONLOOKER, 'Suggestions in Prison Reform', *Prison Officers' Magazine* XVIII (3): 69.
138. Howard League Minutes MSS1613/1/1/1 of 117th Meeting of the Executive Committee held 5 February 1932.
139. Smithe, 'Prison'.
140. *Saturday Review* 153 (3981): 175.
141. Ruby Sparks (1961) *Burglar to the Nobility* (London: Arthur Barker), pp. 84–5. Also see, Howard League Minutes MSS1613/1/1/1 of 117th Meeting of the Executive Committee held 5 February 1932.
142. Howard League Minutes MSS1613/1/1/1 of 117th Meeting of the Executive Committee held 5 February 1932.
143. ONLOOKER, 'Suggestions in Prison Reform'.
144. Fenner Brockway (1928) *A New Way With Crime* (London: Williams and Norgate), p. vi.
145. G.F. Clayton (1958) *The Wall Is Strong* (London: John Long), p. 126.
146. G. Dendrickson and F. Thomas (1954) *The Truth about Dartmoor* (London: Gollanz), p. 209.
147. Clayton, *The Wall Is Strong*, pp. 182–3.
148. S.K. Ruck (1951) *Paterson on Prisons* (London: Frederick Muller), p. 68.
149. 29 January 1932. Ruck was assistant director of the Borstal Association, friend of Paterson and later Secretary of the New Survey of London life and Labour.
150. J.E. Thomas (1972) *The English Prison Officer since 1850* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul), pp. 157, 164.
151. See, for example, *Prison Officers' Magazine*, XVIII (3) March 1929; XVIII (10) October 1929 and XVIII (12) December 1929.
152. *Du Parcq Report*, p. 8.
153. NA PCOM9/254, evidence of Major Morris to Du Parcq Inquiry. Prison Officer Lamb, representative.
154. *Hansards* 1931–32, Vol. 262, 25 February 1932, col. 537 and Vol. 261, 8 February 1932, col. 500.
155. Chelmsford has been described at this time as 'a model prison, dealing with the "violent and adventurous" type of young criminal', see M. Benney (1936) *Low Company* (Horsham: Caliban Books), p. 320.
156. BPP, *Annual Report of the Commissioners of Prisons* 1931–32 Cmd. 4151 xii: 804–5.
157. *Times*, 31 December 1931.
158. Interestingly, it has also been suggested that cuts which were adversely affecting the overtime of prison officers at Hull Prison in the mid-1970s were one of the underlying causes of the riot there in 1976. See J.E. Thomas and R. Pooley (1980) *The Exploding Prison, Prison Riots and the Case of Hull* (London: Junction Books), p. 81.

159. NA HO595645/94 & 169, letter from Superintendent Hambrook of the CID, 8 June 1932.
160. R. Sparks, A. Bottoms and W. Hay (1996) *Prisons and the Problem of Order* (Oxford: Clarendon Press), p. 37.
161. Rhodes, *Dartmoor Prison*, pp. 227–8.

## 3 A Man Seeking Closure: Alexander Paterson, Du Parcq and Inter-war Penal Policy

1. N. Hancock and A. Liebling (2004), 'Truth, Independence and Effectiveness in Prison Inquiries', in G. Gilligan and J. Pratt (eds), *Crime, Truth and Justice: Official Inquiry, Discourse, Knowledge* (Cullumpton: Willan Publishing), p. 91. The authors are referring here directly to investigations into suicides in twenty-first century prisons.
2. Although formally reported as the Commissioners of Prisons and the Directors of Convict Prisons, they were one body which now administered both convict and local prisons.
3. J. Pratt (2004), 'The Acceptable Prisons: Official Discourse, Truth and Legitimacy in the Nineteenth Century', in G. Gilligan and J. Pratt (eds), *Crime, Truth and Justice*, p. 86.
4. Report by Mr Du Parcq on the *Circumstances Connected with the Recent Disorder at Dartmoor Convict Prison*, PP 1932 Cmd. 4010, VII (hereafter Du Parcq Report).
5. Also see his obituaries in *The Times* and *Manchester Guardian*, 28 April 1949, which suggest that he became widely known to the public as a result of the Du Parcq Inquiry and Du Parcq's entry in the *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* by G.R. Rubin.
6. PP Report of the *Departmental Committee on Persistent Offenders*, 1931–32, XII.
7. Du Parcq had, for example, completed a four volume biography of David Lloyd George, Life of David Lloyd George. The *Daily Mail*, 26 January 1932 stated 'He is a Liberal.' Some years later in 1945, Du Parcq again demonstrated that he could be a trusted and pragmatic hand when he presided over the investigation into the actions of the Channel Island government regarding German occupation. Rubin comments that with regard to the issue of collaboration, Du Parcq may have 'sought to avoid the dire legal consequences, for members of the establishment, of his initial inquiries after the liberation'. See G.R. Rubin's contribution on Du Parcq to the Dictionary of National Dictionary Biography.
8. NA PCOM9/254.
9. The Du Parcq Inquiry papers, recently (2008) opened to the public, reveal a great deal about the conduct of the investigation, see PCom 9/254 and PCom 9/255. See Du Parcq Report.
10. See NA PCom 9/254 for the testimonies collected as part of the Du Parcq Inquiry.
11. *Hansards*, Vol. 263, 23 March 1932, cols 1149–50, 1170.
12. See, for example, the *Manchester Guardian*, 26 January and 28 January 1932.

13. F. Burton and P. Carlen (1979) *Official Discourse: On Discourse Analysis, Government Publications, Ideology and the State* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul), p. 48.
14. Lieut. Col. C.E.F. Rich (1932) *Recollections of a Prison Governor* (London: Hurst & Blackett Ltd), pp. 46–7. Also see, A. Brown (March 2011) 'Class, Discipline and Philosophy: Contested Visions in the Early Twentieth Century', *Prison Service Journal* 194: 3–5.
15. See, for example, H. Scott (1959) *Your Obedient Servant* (London: Deutsch, pp. 178–9 stated that Paterson died 'in harness, at the age of sixty-three, having worn himself out in the service of his fellow man'. *The Times*, 11 January 1947, MR ALEXANDER PATERSON'S RETIREMENT; Barclay Baron January 1948) 'Across the Bridges: In memory of Alexander Paterson', *Toc H Journal* XXVI: 1–11.
16. Atlee (1920) also wrote a later and less successful, less personal book on social work, *The Social Worker* (London: G. Bell and Sons Ltd). Basil Henriques worked with boys clubs in the East End and became a magistrate in the juvenile courts. Stephen Hobhouse was a pacifist and prison reformer. Alexander Paterson did not leave an autobiography although after his death a personal friend (S.K. Ruck) of Paterson who had also been connected with the Borstal Association collected and published some of his writings. This was later published as, S.K. Ruck (1951) *Paterson on Prisons: Being the Collected Papers of Sir Alexander Paterson M.C., M.A*, with a forward by Clement Atlee (London: Frederick Muller Ltd). For information on the gestation of this book see NA PCom9/1309.
17. Baron, *The Doctor*, p. 164. By 1920, Atlee was able to utilise the phrase 'Across the Bridges' without having to explain its meaning to an audience interested in social work, see *The Social Worker*, p. 188. In his autobiography, Stephen Hobhouse (1951) referred to the book as 'Deeply Moving', *Forty Years and an Epilogue* (London: James Clarke & Co. Ltd), p. 133.
18. Baron, *The Doctor*, p. 164.
19. In 1953, a park in Bermondsey was named in his memory at an opening ceremony by Clement Atlee, and it retained his name after it was re-landscaped in 2007. R.S. Wright (1951) *Great Men* (Books for Libraries Press: New York), p. 29 also refers to a Paterson Square named after him in Bermondsey.
20. For example, see Hobhouse, *Forty Years*, pp. 133–4.
21. Hawkins, *Alec Paterson*, pp. 5–8. Wright, *Great Men*, pp. 30–1, claimed that Paterson added 30 amendments to the Bill. B. Baron, 'Across the Bridges', p. 6 states Paterson proposed over 30 amendments.
22. Hobhouse, *Forty Years*, p. 134.
23. Hawkins, *Alec Paterson*, p. 17.
24. Baron, *The Doctor*, p. 165.
25. See, for example, *The Times*, 5 June 1935; 27 September 1938 and 20 November 1947.
26. S. Hobhouse, *Forty Years*, pp. 174–6. Included on the Committee were, Sir Sydney Olivier (Chair), Sidney and Beatrice Webb, George Bernard Shaw, Laurence Housemann, Margery Fry, T. Edmund Harvey, Lily Dougall, and an ex-prison chaplain. Sir William Clarke Hall was a private advisor. In Autumn 1918, Hobhouse became secretary and an editor of the report.

About 50 prison staff completed questionnaires – governors, chaplains, doctors and warders.

27. Hobhouse, *Forty Years*, p. 179.
28. S. Hobhouse and A. Fenner Brockway (1922) *English Prisons Today* (New York: Longman, Green & Co). This assessment of the contemporary prison system was the product of an inquiry by the Labour Research Department and was in part a consequence of the imprisonment of conscientious objectors, including the two authors, during the First World War.
29. See articles in the *Manchester Guardian*, 20 October, 3 November 1921 and 16 February 1922. The extent to which Paterson's reputation has already been established is evident from the last of these articles which reports Paterson's appointment to the Prison Commission.
30. In addition, Paterson contended that what was required for the changing ethos in the borstals was 'men strong enough in character and patient enough in their ways' to be schoolmasters, the aim being to 'teach wayward lads to be self-contained'. Major B.D. Grew (1958) O.B.E, *Prison Governor* (London: Herbert Jenkins), pp. 13–14. Inspiration for the celebrated marches to open Borstals at Lowdham Grange and North Sea Camp may well have derived from the pilgrimages undertaken in Toc H, see B. Baron (1946) *The Birth of a Movement* (London: Toc H), pp. 41–5.
31. V. Bailey (1987) *Delinquency and Citizenship: Reclaiming the Young Offender 1914–1948* (Oxford: Clarendon Press), Chapter 8: I. Brown (2007), 'A Commissioner Calls: Alexander Paterson and Colonial Burma's Prisons', *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* 38 (2): 294. Also, labelled the 'Paterson Regime' by *Cross, Punishment, Prison and the Public*, p. 29.
32. Captain G.F. Clayton (1958) *The Wall Is Strong: The Life of a Prison Governor* (London: John Long), pp. 18–20. Also see Patersons's obituary in *The Times*, 10 November 1947.
33. H. Mannheim (1939) *The Dilemma of Penal Reform* (London: George Allen & Unwin), p. 16. Also see, I. Brown, 'A Commissioner', p. 293. Thomas, *English Prison Officer*, p. 152, describes Paterson as 'one of the giants of prison reform'.
34. H. Scott (1959) *Your Obedient Servant* (London: Andre Deutsh, p. 67. Forsythe has noted: 'contemporary accounts, whether eulogistic or hostile, describe Paterson as the major influence on the direction of the [prison] commission during the inter war years', W.J. Forsythe (1991) *Penal Discipline, Reformatory Projects and the English Prison Commission 1895–1939* (Exeter: University of Exeter Press), p. 175.
35. See Brown, 'A Commissioner Calls', pp. 293–308 in which it is suggested Paterson's achieved 'relatively little' in Burma. A. Paterson (1934) *The Prison Problem of America* (Maidstone Prison).
36. Hawkins, *Alec Paterson*, pp. 23–4; Hayes and Penn, 'Alexander Paterson', p. 63.
37. Hawkins, *Alec Paterson*, p. 15.
38. Grew, *Prison Governor*, p. 13.
39. Wright, *Great Men*. Wright was Minister at the Canongate (Church of Holyroodhouse) and Edinburgh Castle.
40. Ibid., p. 28.

41. Paraphrasing of a 1908 quotation from H. Bompas Smith, headmaster of King Edward VII School, Lytham, cited in M. Rosenthal (1986) *The Character Factory: Baden-Powell and the Origins of the Boy Scout Movement* (London: Collins), p. 91.
42. Rosenthal, *Character Factory*, pp. 92–5.
43. V. Bailey, *Delinquency and Citizenship*, Chapter 8.
44. Paterson (13 April 1932) 'Youth and Crime', *The Listener* (170): 7.
45. Ibid.
46. *The Principles of the Borstal System* (London: Prison Commission, 1932, pp. 5–6). The substance of the initial sections of this book was also published in articles written by Alexander Paterson in *The Times* on 4 August 1925.
47. See J. Harris (May 1992) 'Political Thought and the Welfare State 1870–1940: An Intellectual Framework for British Social Policy', *Past & Present* 135: 116–41.
48. Ibid., pp. 135, 128.
49. Ibid., p. 126.
50. W.J. Forsythe (1989) 'Reformation and Relaxation in English Prisons 1895–1939', *Social Policy & Administration* 23 (2): 162.
51. Ibid., p. 165.
52. K. Downing and B. Forsythe (2003) 'The Reform of Offenders in England, 1830–1995: A Circular Debate', *Criminal Justice History* 18: 152.
53. Ibid., p. 152.
54. V. Bailey (1997) 'English Prisons, Penal Culture, and the Abatement of Imprisonment 1895–1922', *Journal of British Studies* 36: 311.
55. Thomas, *English Prison Officer*, p. 157.
56. *Hansards*, 8 February, Vol. 261, cols 500–1.
57. Du Parcq Report, p. 3.
58. NA PCom 9/254 evidence of Admiral Bryan and Captain Perry to Du Parcq Inquiry.
59. Rev. B.P.H. Ball (1956) *Prison Was My Parish* (London: William Heinemann Ltd), p. 118.
60. Dr Guy Richmond (1975) *Prison Doctor: A Dramatic Insight into Our Penal System and the Critical Need to Seek Reform* (British Columbia: Antonson Publishing), p. 26.
61. By this is meant governors, chaplains, medical officers. The Prison Commission appointed 'subordinate' prison officers. See M. Benney (March 1938) *The Truth About English Prisons* (London: Fact), pp. 47–64.
62. 23 February 1932.
63. Evidence of Morris to Du Parcq.
64. This perspective was also given in a renowned autobiography of ex-convict and convicted spy, Wilfred Macartney (1936), *Walls have Mouths: A Record of Ten Years' Penal Servitude* (London: Gollancz), p. 239.
65. NA PCom 9/254 evidence of Colonel Turner to Du Parcq Inquiry. Turner noted one area of concern – hours of work were eight per day in local prisons but only five and a half at Dartmoor.
66. Evidence of Major Morris to Du Parcq Inquiry.
67. NA PCom 9/254 evidence of Major Morris to Du Parcq Inquiry, Evidence certainly suggests that prior recent appointments to Governor at Dartmoor

had convict experience, for example Major Morris. Also, in 1926 Major Grew was transferred from Borstal Rochester to Dartmoor as Deputy Governor under Captain Morgan, 'At first some of them [convicts] regarded with suspicion my Borstal methods of approach in trying to know them and to understand something of their problems, for it was new to them, and an attitude which they mistook for soft-heartedness'. Major B.D. Grew, O.B.E, *Prison Governor*, pp. 40–1.

68. See the evidence of Chief Officer Smale and Principal Officer Bax to the Du Parcq Inquiry NA PCom9/254.
69. R. Sparks (1961) *Burglar to the Nobility* (London: Arthur Barker Limited), pp. 84–5. Also see NA PCom 9/254 evidence of Donovan to Du Parcq Inquiry.
70. NA PCom 9/254 evidence of Major Morris, Officer Lamb and Governor Roberts to Du Parcq Inquiry.
71. NA PCom 9/254 evidence of Captain Perry to Du Parcq Inquiry.
72. NA PCom 9/254 evidence of Chief Officer Smale to Du Parcq Inquiry.
73. PCom 9/254 evidence of Officer Lamb to Du Parcq Inquiry.
74. NA PCom 9/254 evidence of Governor Roberts to Du Parcq Inquiry.
75. NA PCom 9/254 evidence of Officer William Watley to Du Parcq Inquiry. Also see evidence of Dr Guy Eaton Richmond, Deputy Medical Officer, Chief Officer Smale, Officer Lamb and Chief Constable Wilson.
76. NA PCom 9/254 evidence of Edward O'Donnell to Du Parcq Inquiry, PCOM9.254. Also see evidence of Deputy Governor Richards, Chief Officer Smale, Officer Kelly, Officer Udy and Officer Bax.
77. NA PCom 9/254 evidence of Governor Roberts to Du Parcq Inquiry.
78. NA PCom 9/254 evidence of Dr Battiscombe to Du Parcq Inquiry, PCOM9/254. Also see evidence of Rev Ball and also Chief Officer Smale who suggested that Roberts was particularly unpopular with 'the bad characters'.
79. NA PCom 9/254 evidence of Principal Officer Rowland Kelly and Deputy Governor Richards to Du Parcq Inquiry,
80. NA PCom 9/254 evidence of Donovan to Du Parcq Inquiry.
81. Major B.D. Grew, O.B.E, *Prison Governor*, p. 75. Also see, G.F. Clayton (1958) *The Wall is Strong: The Life of a Prison Governor* (London: John Long), p. 108.
82. G.F. Clayton, *The Wall is Strong*, p. 109.
83. NA PCom 9/254 evidence of Major Morris and Governor Roberts to Du Parcq Inquiry.
84. See references to changing governors in *The Prison Officers' Magazine*, April 1929 XVIII (4): 106; October 1930 XIX (1): 303 and March 1931 XX (3): 67. For ex-convict's opinions on Morgan and Clayton, see J. Phelan (1940) *Jail Journey* (London: Secker & Warburg), p. 84; Macartney, p. 107.
85. Intermediate or Ordinary convicts were those who were neither 'Star' class convict prisoners, those 'not previously convicted or not previously convicted of serious offences and are not of criminal or corrupt habits' nor 'Special' class convict prisoners, 'men under the age of 30 who are serving a first sentence of Penal Servitude, have previous convictions or records which show that they are not suitable for the "Star" class and are not of poor physique or mentality'. pp. 1932–33 [Cmd. 4295] *Report of the*

*Commissioners of Prisons and Directors of Convict Prisons for 1931 (Annual Report)*, pp. 435–6.

86. NA PCom 9/254 questions and answers during interview with Major Morris to Du Parcq Inquiry.
87. NA PCom 9/254 evidence of Chief Officer Smale and Principal Officers Marsh and Bax to Du Parcq Inquiry. Marsh and Bax also suggested that Jackson has been in touch with friends outside the prison.
88. The CID investigations began on the 30 January 1932 and were headed up by Chief Inspector Hambrook, see Ex-Detective Superintendent Walter Hambrook C.I.D (1937) *Hambrook of the Yard* (London: Robert Hale & Company).
89. NA PCom 9/254 evidence of Governor Roberts and Principal Officer Kelly to Du Parcq Inquiry.
90. *Hansards Parliamentary Debates*, 8 February 1932, 1931–32, Vol. 261, col. 500. Samuel went on to say that he proposed to 'consider the best arrangements for meeting this situation'.
91. NA PCom 9/254 interview of Officer Lamb in Du Parcq Inquiry.
92. A.J. Rhodes (1933) *Dartmoor Prison: A Record of 126 Years of Prisoner of War and Convict Life, 1806–1932* (London: John Lane The Bodley Head Limited), p. 179.
93. Du Parcq Report, p. 23.
94. Ibid., p. 17.
95. NA PCom 9/254 evidence of Colonel Turner to Du Parcq Inquiry. This view of the character difference between Turner and Du Parcq was further confirmed in the Du Parcq Report, 25 which stated that 'the reputation which Colonel Turner has earned for his ability to handle men was such as to justify this confidence [that he could quell the riot]'.
96. NA PCom 9/254 evidence of Governor Roberts to Du Parcq Inquiry.
97. Du Parcq Report, p. 6.
98. Thomas, *English Prison Officer*, pp. 158–9.
99. Du Parcq Report, p. 33. Interestingly, *The Prison Officers' Magazine*, March 1932 offered a different perspective, 'Personality does not count where communists and bandits are concerned. The only "personality" they respect is lead or cols steel'.
100. NA PCom 9/254 evidence of Officer Kelly to Du Parcq Inquiry.
101. Du Parcq Report, p. 8.
102. *Hansards*, Vol. 263, 23 March 1932, cols 1149–50.
103. Ibid., col. 1170.
104. G. Rose (1961) *The Struggle for Penal Reform: The Howard League and Its Predecessors* (London: Stevens and Sons Limited), p. 173.
105. E. Cadogan (1937) *The Roots of Evil: Being a Treatise on the Methods of Dealing with Crime and the Criminal during the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries in Relation to Those of a More Enlightened Age* (London: John Murray), p. 289.
106. PP, *Report of the Departmental Committee on Persistent Offenders* Cmd. 4090 XII. 553. Appointed April 1931. Herbert du Parcq was already a member of this Committee when he was appointed to investigate the Dartmoor riot. Alexander Maxwell (Chairman of the Prison Commission)

and Dr Norwood East (Prison Medical Commissioner) were also on the Committee.

107. W.J. Forsythe, *Penal Discipline*, p. 184.
108. E. Cadogan, *The Roots of Evil*, p. 267.
109. And, of course, relatively inexpensive compared to standard convict imprisonment. See R. Hood and A. Roddam (1999) 'Crime, Sentencing and Punishment', in A.H. Halsey and J. Webb (eds), *Twentieth-Century British Social Trends* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan), p. 675.
110. G. Rose (1970) 'Penal Reform as History', *British Journal of Criminology* 10 (4): 348–71. In some publication, the factors that should determine such groupings were quite vague. For example, 'individual character, experience and need', see E. Roy Calvert and T. Calvert (1933) *The Lawbreaker: A Critical Study of the Modern Treatment of Crime* (London: George Routledge & Sons Ltd), p. 149.
111. E. Calvert and T. Calvert, *The Lawbreaker*, pp. 15, 18, 20.
112. PP Report of the *Departmental Committee on Persistent Offenders*, p. 553.
113. Ibid., p. 553. Also see J.C. Spencer (1953–54) 'Some Recent Developments in the English Prison System', *British Journal of Delinquency* 4 (1): 40–1. These recommendations were included in the Criminal Justice Act 1948.
114. Fenner Brockway (1928) *A New Way With Crime* (London: Williams & Norgate), p. 151.
115. PP *Departmental Committee on Prisons*, 1895 (C. 7702), LVI. 1.
116. W.J. Forsythe, 'Reformation and Relaxation', p. 167. In L.W. Fox (1934) *The Modern English Prison* (London: George Routledge & Sons Ltd), p. 174, it is noted that between 'the date when the Act came into operation in August 1909, and 31st December, 1928, 901 sentences of Preventive Detention have been passed, of which 735 were for the minimum period of five years and 34 for the maximum period of 10 years … in recent years the average number of sentences has been for men 31, for women 0.6 each year'. Also see, V. Bailey (March 1985) 'Churchill as Home Secretary: Prison Reform', *History Today* 35: 10–13; A. Brown (2003) *English Society and the Prison* (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press), pp. 119–20.
117. W.J. Forsythe, *Penal Discipline*, p. 78.
118. Fenner Brockway (1928) *A New Way with Crime* (London: Williams & Norgate), p. 153.
119. H. Mannheim (1939) *The Diemma of Penal Reform* (London: George Allen & Unwin), p. 28.
120. M. Hamblin Smith (1934) *Prisons and a Changing Civilisation* (London: John Lane), p. 143. Also see, Margery Fry (1951) *Arms of the Law* (London: for Howard League for Penal Reform by Gollancz), p. 207; A. Fenner Brockway, *A New Way with Crime*, p. 151; L. Page (1937) *Crime and the Community* (London: Faber & Faber Limited), pp. 74, 203, 245–5; Calvert & Calvert, *The Lawbreaker*, pp. 146, 163; H. Scott (1959) *Your Obedient Servant* (London: Andre Deutsch), pp. 99–100.
121. Hon Edward Cadogan, *The Root of Evil*, p. 289.
122. L. Page, *Crime and the Community*, p. 203.
123. Alexander Paterson (13 April 1932) 'Youth and Crime', *The Listener*, issue 170.
124. Calvert & Calvert, *The Lawbreaker*, p. 48.

125. C. Valier (1995), 'Psychoanalysis and crime in Britain during the inter-war years', The British Criminology Conference: Selected Proceedings. Vol. 1: Emerging Themes in Criminology. Papers from the British Criminology Conference, online), http://www.britsoccrim.org/volume1/012.pdf (accessed 3 October 2011).
126. See W. Norwood East and W.H. de B. Hubert (1939) *The Psychological Treatment of Crime* (London: HMSO); J.J. Landers (November 1939) 'Observations on Two Hundred Dartmoor Convicts', *Journal of Mental Science* 84: 960–79; H. Mannheim (1940) *Social Aspects of Crime in England Between the Wars* (London: George Allen & Unwin LTD).
127. MSS1613/1/1/1 Minutes of Executive Meeting of Howard League 18 March 1932 and 27 May 1932. Dingle Foot was the brother of Labour politician Michael Foot.
128. NA HO595645/94/167 Letter from Howard League to Sir Herbert Samuel and response. Also see discussion in NA HO45/24955.
129. L. Page, *Crime and the Community*, pp. 99–101. Page also described this kind of offender as practical, callous and selfish.
130. L. Page, *Crime and the Community*, p. 89.
131. Major B.D. Grew, O.B.E, *Prison Governor*, p. 66.
132. Ibid.
133. Thomas, *English Prison Officer*, p. 160.
134. J. Pratt and G. Gilligan, 'Introduction: Crime, Truth and Justice – Official Inquiry and the Production of Knowledge', in G. Gilligan and J. Pratt (eds), *Crime, Truth and Justice*, p. 7.
135. Du Parcq Report, p. 34.
136. Thomas, *English Prison Officer*, p. 162. The appointment of Paterson also forms part of a common practice of insiders being prominent in prison inquiries, as Thomas and Pooley note: 'Those conducting prison inquiries frequently have a vested interest in the outcome and are, therefore, judging the behaviour of their colleagues in a system of which they are a part'. J.E. Thomas and R. Pooley (1980) *The Exploding Prison, Prison Riots and the Case of Hull* (London: Junction Books), p. 15.

## 4 Dartmoor Gaol Battle: The Dartmoor Riot as a National Media Event

1. The clock tower was described as 'somewhat picturesque, not beautiful but traditional' by the chaplain Rev. B.P.H. Ball (1956) *Prison Was My Parish* (London: William Heinemann Ltd), p. 136.
2. For example, *The Times, Daily Mirror, News Chronicle*. The *Manchester Guardian* published a pre-mutiny photograph. The *Illustrated London News* coverage appeared on 30 January.
3. 25 January, The *Daily Mirror* was known for its pioneering photo-journalism.
4. 25 January 1932.
5. *Daily Mail*, 25 January 1932.
6. The *Daily Telegraph*, 25 January, referred to the 'mutiny' as 'without parallel in the history of English prison life'. See A. Brown (2003) 'Legitimacy in the

Evolution of the Prison: The Chatham Convict Prison Outbreak, 1861', in L.A. Knafla (ed.), *Criminal Justice History*, p. 18 and A. Brown (2008) 'Challenging Discipline and Control: A Comparative Analysis of Prison Riots at Chatham (1861) and Dartmoor (1932)', in H. Johnston (ed.), *Punishment and Control in Historical Perspective* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan). Of course, the seriousness and violence of the Dartmoor riot was overtaken by other disturbances post war.

7. *Manchester Guardian*, 26 January.
8. In an article in the *Daily Herald*, 26 January, J.R. Clynes, former Home Secretary, observed that 'the Press has treated this revolt as something in the nature of a national event'.
9. The *Manchester Guardian*, 28 January, claimed hundreds of people, whereas *The Daily Telegraph*, 25 January, stated 'thousands of people were attracted to Princetown during the day'. Dartmoor had a history of attracting day-trippers, a report on this problem in 1925 explained that 'parties of day trippers have long been a nuisance at this prison in the summer, and in recent years the multiplication of motor char-a-bancs has made it worse. They do not leave the roads, but the public roads run by or through the prison estate, and it is impossible to prevent the convicts from being seen from the cars'. See NA HO45/20083.
10. 25 January 1932.
11. For more on this, see A. Barton and A. Brown (2011) 'Dartmoor: Penal and Cultural Icon', *The Howard Journal* 50 (5): 478–91.
12. 10 September 1930 (87): 394; Kingsley Martin, 'What is News?' offered a journalists view on what constituted 'human interest'.
13. See J. Curran and J. Seaton (2010) *Power without Responsibility: Press, Broadcasting and the Internet in Britain* (London: Routledge), Chapter 5.
14. C. Emsley (2011) *Crime and Society in Twentieth-Century England* (Harlow: Pearson Education), p. 109.
15. S. Chibnall (1977) *Law-and-order News: An Analysis of Crime Reporting in the British Press* (London: Tavistock Publications Limited), p. ix.
16. Ibid.
17. Ibid., p. x.
18. P. Scraton, J. Sim and P. Skidmore (1991) *Prisons under Protest* (Milton Keynes: Open University Press), p. 118.
19. Davies (1994) 'Cinema and Broadcasting', in P. Johnson (ed.), *20th Century Britain* (London: Longman), pp. 265–9.
20. Bingham (2004) *Gender, Modernity and the Popular Press in Inter-War Britain* (Oxford: Clarendon Press), p. 13.
21. For an examination of this, see J. Carter Wood (2009) ' "Those Who Have Had Trouble Can Sympathise with You": Press Writing, Reader Response and a Murder Trial in Interwar Britain', *Journal of Social History*, Winter: 439–62.
22. Bingham, *Gender, Modernity and the Popular Press*, pp. 3–4.
23. Ibid., pp. 1, 3.
24. *Daily Mail*, 25 January and *Daily Herald*, 25 January.
25. HO144/595645/10. Letter from Sir Clive Wigram dated 26 January. *Prison Officers' Magazine*, January 1931 XX (1): 8 – 'the various Press stunts cause us some amusements, and save us the need of having a weekly comic paper'.

*Prison Officers' Magazine*, May 1931 XX (5): 130 – believed prison service winning public confidence, unlike in the United States where Paterson currently touring, occasional 'fly in the ointment', 'the gutter press'. *Prison Officers' Magazine*, August 1931 XX (3): 225 – 'It seems that the Prison Administration of this country is getting quite into the good books of the Press and the Public. It is all to the good'. MSS1613/1/1/1 Howard League Minutes Executive Committee 28 October 1932, agreed to add para to annual report on reactionary character of the letters published by the press.

26. HO144/595645/10, letter from Sir Clive Wigram 28 January 1932. Interestingly, some 36 years later in 1968 Lady Paterson returned to the Prison Commission photos taken of the prison after the Dartmoor mutiny which she had obtained when 'drafting the Radzinowicz Committee report'. She comments that '[o]ne shudders to think what would now happen in the days of television'.
27. G. Rose (1961) *The Struggle for Penal Reform* (London: Stevens & Sons Ltd), p. 174.
28. NA PCom 9/255, memo dated 8 March 1932.
29. Scraton, Sim and Skidmore, *Prisons under Protest*, pp. 108–26.
30. *The Times*, 25 January 1932. Hereafter all newspaper dates are for 1932.
31. 26 January. There had been a wave of violent prison riots in the United States in 1929–30, see R. Adams (1994) *Prison Riots in Britain and the USA*, 2nd ed. (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan), pp. 63–5. Harold Scott (1959) *Your Obedient Servant* (London: Deutsch), p. 73, who took over as Chairman of the Prison Commission not long after the Dartmoor Riot affirmed that the outbreak 'was soon quelled by the prison staff with the help of the police from Plymouth, without any of those pitched battles so frequently staged in American penitentiaries'. In 1930, *the Prison Officers' Magazine* XIX (1): 2, asserted: 'We never have in this country mutinies and serious outbreaks such as in foreign countries'; refer to Auburn and Colorado: 'No, these things do not occur in our Prisons and Institutions. It is due not so much to the adequate staffing, but due to a well-trained staff using common sense in dealing with difficult men'. *Howard Journal III* (3): 1932, Editorial, 5 – 'The Dartmoor riot gave a rude awakening to those who regarded prison mutinies as a plague peculiar to the U.S.A., and one from which English prisons were immune'.
32. *News of the World*, 31 February 1932.
33. *Daily Mail*, 25 January 1932. Despite the well-publicised violence of the Dartmoor riot American films critical of their own penal system such as *I Am a Fugitive from a Chain Gang (1932) and Each Dawn I Die (1938)* were required by the British Board of Film Censors to state in writing before the beginning that such penal systems did not exist in Britain, see J. Richards (1981) 'The British Board of Film Censors and the Content Control in the 1930s: Images of Britain', *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television* 1: 95–116.
34. R. Adams (1992) *Prison Riots in Britain and the USA* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan), pp. 60–5.
35. *Daily Mail*, 25 January 1932; *Daily Mirror Editorial*, 25 January; *Daily Express*, 25 January; also see *Illustrated London News*, 30 January. See, A. Davies

(2007) 'The Scottish Chicago? From "Hooligans" to "Gangsters" in Inter-war Glasgow', *Cultural & Social History* 4 (4): 545–58 and other papers in this edition for consideration of the extensive attention paid to the American gangster in the British press.

36. See, for example, The *Daily Telegraph*, 26 January 1932 and also NA PCom 9/254 memo 25 January 1932.
37. As *The Times* (26 January) reported regarding the Home Office statement released that day: 'no explanation of the causes of the disorder is yet forthcoming'.
38. M. Benney (1948) *Gaol Delivery for The Howard League for Penal Reform* (London: Longmans, Green and Co), p. 1.
39. A.J. Rhodes (1933) *Dartmoor Prison: A Record of 126 Years of Prisoner of War and Convict Life, 1806–1932* (London: John Lane The Bodley Head Limited), pp. 238–9.
40. 26 January.
41. Du Parcq notes that after 1923, the younger and less persistent offenders were held at Parkhurst. Du Parcq Report on the *Circumstances Connected with the Recent Disorder at Dartmoor Convict Prison*, BPP, Cmd. 4010, February, 5–6. At the time of the riot, therefore, Dartmoor was 'almost without exception a prison for "recidivists"'. Of course, emphasis upon the inmates did not only come from the press, Leo Page (1937), a barrister, noted in his book *Crime and the Community* (Faber & Faber), 'the prisoners who are sent to this prison are the most dangerous as well as the most persistent criminals who have been awarded sentences of penal servitude, and no fair judgement upon the system at Dartmoor is possible if we fail to bear in mind the type of man for who safeguard it is designed'. Leo Page described the prison system as 'designedly penal and deterrent' but cells warm and food good, no 'intentional or conscious brutality', pp. 194–6, 202.
42. 7 February, p. 15. Almost word for word this sentence appears in the Du Parcq Report, p. 6.
43. *Daily Mirror*, 1 February also 26 January. In fact, 56 of the 427 inmates for whom criminal records are available had convictions for what could be termed 'sexual offences'. For the purposes of this analysis, these include, attempted and actual: rape, sodomy, buggery, carnal knowledge, indecent assault as well as incest, brothel keeping, importuning, living on the earning of a prostitute and one 'unnatural offence with a cow', see NA DPP2/72 Part 13.
44. *The Times*, 27 January and 26 January.
45. *The Times*, 27 January. *Evening News*, 8 January 1932, claimed that a gang was known to exist at Dartmoor.
46. 27 January.
47. *Daily Mail*, 8 February 1932.
48. Memo 9 March 1932 regarding information required by the Home Secretary on this subject, see NA PCom 9/255.
49. See *The Times*, 27 January and *Daily Mirror*, 25 January. Also, *Daily Herald*, 25 January noted that the mutiny was apparently 'carefully planned beforehand'.
50. 26 and 27 January.

51. *Daily Mail*, 26 January 1932. The only major incident of this kind had occurred in December 1867 when Fenians had attempts to rescue fellow activists from Clerkenwell Prison. See, for example, *The Times*, 20 December 1867 and the Era, 22 December 1867.
52. 29 January 1932.
53. 26 and 27 January.
54. *The Times* special correspondent 25 January. The *Daily Mirror* (25 January) suggested that rumours of unrest had been circulating for about a fortnight.
55. *The Times*, 25 January; *Manchester Guardian*, 25 January 'our correspondent'; *Daily Herald*, 25 January; *Daily Telegraph*, 25 January.
56. 25 January; also see *Manchester Guardian* 'our correspondent', 25 January and *Daily Telegraph*, 25 January, which reference an 'eye-witness'.
57. *The Times*, 27 January and *Daily Mirror*, 27 January; *Daily Herald*, 28 January and 1 February, also claimed that additional security measures were being taken at London prisons.
58. 26 January.
59. 27 January.
60. 27 January.
61. *Daily Mirror*, 27 January, Article by special correspondent, F.N. Byron. The *Daily Herald* claimed on the 26th January that the 'origin' of the mutiny had been traced to three ringleaders, 'one of whom it is alleged, is a Communist'.
62. For more on the *Daily Mail* and the popular press at this time, see M. Engel (1997) *Tickle the Public: One Hundred Years of the Popular Press* (London: Indigo), pp. 111–41.
63. *Daily Mail*, 26 January 1932.
64. NA PCom 9/254, memo from Chairman of the Prison Commission 26 January 1932. Also see, for example, *The Times*, 27 January 1932.
65. *The Times*, 25 and 27 January.
66. *Daily Mirror*, 25 January (Editorial); *Daily Telegraph*, 25 January. The article also claimed that 'the entire colony of felons arranged first to conceal weapons and then to smash the furniture in their cells and use the planks of their beds as battering rams'. Also see, *Daily Herald*, 25 January.
67. 25 January 1932.
68. *Daily Express*, 25 January; *The Times*, 27 January; *Daily Mirror*, 25 January; *Daily Telegraph*, 25 January; *Manchester Guardian*, 25 January.
69. The *Manchester Guardian* report (25 January) did also mention 'bars of iron'.
70. *The Times*, 26 January; *Manchester Guardian*, 26 January; *Daily Mail*, 26 January.
71. Rhodes, *Dartmoor Prison*, p. 202.
72. *The Times*, 25 January; *Daily Mirror*, 25 January; *Manchester Guardian*, 25 January; *Daily Telegraph*, 25 January; *Daily Herald*, 25 January.
73. *Daily Express*, 25 January.
74. 25 January.
75. 25 January.
76. *Daily Mirror*, 25 January; *Daily Telegraph*, 25 January.
77. 25 January. *The Daily Herald*, 25 January, suggested 85 convicts were taken to hospital.
78. 25 January 1932.

79. *Daily Mirror*, 25 January. Also see, *Daily Telegraph*, 25 January, which said some spectators had also claimed there was a prisoner standing on the clock tower when it collapsed.
80. Reported in *The Times*, 26 January and *Daily Herald*, 26 January.
81. *Manchester Guardian*, 25 January; *Daily Express*, 25 January. Also see, *Daily Mail*, 25 January 1932; *The Times*, 25 January; *Daily Mirror*, 25 January; *Daily Herald*, 25 January; *Daily Telegraph*, 25 January.
82. 25 January 1932.
83. 25 January. Also see, for example, *Daily Herald*, 25 January.
84. *Manchester Guardian*, 25 January. *Daily Herald*, 25 January. Also see, *Daily Herald*, 26 January for a short history of Donovan and that there were doubts about his conviction. He served in France, was awarded a Military Service Medal and reached rank of Sergeant Instructor during the war. This incident was confirmed in a Home Office Statement which noted that Colonel Turner had tried to address convicts and had to be protected by several other convicts, *The Times*, 26 January. Also in a report of 29 January in *The Times*, a 'time-expired' convict was reported as speaking about this incident and the help given to Colonel Turner by Donovan. According to the report, Donovan also put out the first fire lit in the administrative building but was then knocked unconscious, 'Officers took Donovan to hospital and kept him there, so there should be no risk of reprisal'. *The Daily Telegraph*, 25 January also published an article specifically on the alleged saving of Turner by Donovan.
85. *The Times*, 25 January; *Daily Mirror*, 25 January; *Daily Express*, 25 January; *Manchester Guardian*, 25 January.
86. 25 January, this same phrase was also reported in *The Daily Telegraph*, 25 January.
87. 25 January 1932.
88. 25 January. The headline for the article was 'HAND-TO-HAND BATTLE'. Also see *Daily Express*, 25 January; *The Times*, 25 January; *Manchester Guardian*, 25 January; *Daily Telegraph*, 25 January. The account by the omnibus driver appears in all but The Times.
89. 25 January.
90. 26 January 1932.
91. *Daily Express*, 25 January: *Manchester Guardian*, 25 January: *The Times*, 26 January.
92. Hence, *The Times* (26 January) noted on the 26 that 'The temper of the convicts is revealed in the fact that many of them, as they pass a policeman, hiss at him, saying, "Wait until you go" '.
93. 26 January.
94. *The Times*, 26 January; *Daily Mirror*, 26 January; The *Manchester Guardian*, 26 January.
95. 27 January. The figure of 200 cannot be verified but it certainly seems excessive.
96. 27 January also see *The Times*, 27 January.
97. *Daily Mirror*, 27 January; *Manchester Guardian*, 27 January; *Daily Mirror*, 28 January, also see *The Times*, 28 January. *The Times* stated that there was no foundation for the rumour that a master key was missing: 'though it is

not denied that several keys of minor importance were captured by convicts on Sunday'.
98. 30 January 1932.
99. Locations for this dispersal included prisons at Shrewsbury, Norwich, Leicester and Bedford, NA PCom 9/256.
100. 30 January.
101. *Manchester Guardian*, 28 January: *Daily Mirror*, 28 January: *Manchester Guardian*, 30 January and *Daily Mirror*, 2 February.
102. 3 February 1932.
103. 4 February.
104. *Daily Mail*, 4 February.
105. *Manchester Guardian*, 4 January 1933; *The Times*, 5 January 1932. For similar references, re convicts see Observer, 12 March; *Daily Mirror*, 27 June 1933; *Manchester Guardian*, 30 August 1934; *Manchester Guardian*, 5 February 1935; *Manchester Guardian*, 14 March 1935; *The Times*, 8 May 1936; *The Times*, 14 July 1936. Also see, *Daily Mirror*, 17 November 1932; also see *The Times*, 23 October 1934; *The Times*, 25 January 1937; *The Times*, 10 February 1932; *Daily Mirror*, 2 January 1933; *Daily Mirror*, 15 June 1932.
106. *The Times and Manchester Guardian*, 26 January.
107. *Manchester Guardian*, 26 January. The report also commented that the Prison Commissioners had been trying to introduce such ideas for the last eight years.
108. 1 February 1932.
109. 1 February; 25 January (Editorial); 26 January and 27 January (Editorial). A letter asserting that prisons were too soft and that this led to violence and escapes was also published in The *Daily Mirror*, 26 January. An Editorial in The *Saturday Review* 3979, 30 January 1932 maintained: 'convicts are desperate men, and must be treated as such. No doubt our sentimentalists will urge us to abolish prisons all together as the surest means of preventing a repetition of the mutiny, but in our opinion the lesson to be learned is that risks cannot be taken with impunity'. Indeed, the Dartmoor riot sparked a debate in the Saturday Review, January–March 1932 on prison reform.
110. 27 January 1932.
111. 'Fog Over Dartmoor', *Manchester Guardian*, 27 January: 8.
112. 26 January.
113. Rose, *The Struggle for Penal Reform*, p. 175.
114. 27 January.
115. *Daily Mirror*, 27 January. The esteemed contemporary referred to here is most likely J.R. Clynes, who wrote an article in the *Daily Herald*, 26 January and was also covered in The *Manchester Guardian*. Clynes was Home Secretary from June 1929 until August 1931 when Samuel replaced him. The *Daily Mirror*, Editorial 25 January, also asserted that the riot was a 'foolish and fruitless endeavour' that would serve only to tighten up prison regulations: 'for the mutinous malefactor can never hope to win the sympathy of the general public'.
116. *Daily Mirror*, 25 January and 27 January.
117. *Manchester Guardian*, 29 January.
118. 26 January and 29 January. Also see *Daily Mirror*, 27 January.

119. 25 January. In addition, the *Daily Express* informed its readers that in the December before the riot 500 prisoners had been transferred to Portland Prison 'under a scheme for the better classification of prisoners'. Given this context, in the wake of the riot both the *Manchester Guardian* (29 January) and the *Daily Mirror* (27 January) conjectured 'on good authority' that 'the permanent closure of Dartmoor Prison was being considered'. The evidence of Major Morris, a previous Governor of the prison, to the Du Parcq Inquiry confirmed that 'All the young and intermediate class was transferred to Parkhurst. It was entirely the recidivists who were left behind'.
120. 25 January 1932.
121. Although *The Times*, 26 January, announced initially it would begin the following day, it corrected in a report of the 27 January saying that after his arrival at the prison Du Parcq decided to open his inquiry the same day. According to the *Daily Mirror*, 28 January, the inquiry was open on the 26 January after Paterson's arrival at the prison that morning and his beginning to interview prisoners in their cells. The *Manchester Guardian*, 26 January and 28 January gave a brief and very positive biography of Paterson and Colonel Turner and also reported that Paterson would be aided by another Assistant Commissioner, Colonel Rogers.
122. 28 January.
123. In the edition of 26 January, it was reported that Clynes, the previous Home Secretary, wanted the inquiry to be more open. Also see *Daily Mirror*, 27 January, for call for a public inquiry from Alfred Short, Parliamentary Under-Secretary to the Home Office in the last Labour Government, he stated that there was a clear demand for a public inquiry and that 'Even convicts do not mutiny for the fun of it'.
124. Quotation is from a resolution of a joint meeting of the National Executive of the Labour Party and the Parliamentary Labour Party (*The Times*, 28 January). Also see *Manchester Guardian*, 28 January; *Daily Mirror*, 27 January; *The Times*, 29 January. A full inquiry was called for 'in order that the causes of this outbreak may be thoroughly probed to the satisfaction of the country'.
125. 26 January. This call was also made in the form of an article by J.R. Clynes published in the *Daily Herald* on 26 January and in the edition of 28 January.
126. 9 February 1932.
127. *Daily Worker*, 26 January 1932; 28 January 1932; 9 February 1932.
128. 'Fog Over Dartmoor', *Manchester Guardian*, 27 January.
129. *The Times*, 30 January; *Daily Mirror*, 30 January.
130. NA HO144/595645/42.
131. Page 3.
132. 28 January 1932.
133. *Manchester Guardian*, 26 January; Observer, 7 February. The *Daily Mail*, 8 February 1932 picked up on criticism of Roberts made in the Du Parcq Report and a headline stated 'GOVERNOR'S ERROR OF JUDGEMENT'.
134. *The Times*, 29 January; *Daily Mirror*, 30 January; *Manchester Guardian*, 29 January.

135. *Observer*, 7 February. To cope with the new modern kind of criminal the prison itself should be 'in design and structure several things that Dartmoor is not'.
136. *The Times*, 8 February.
137. Ibid.
138. *Daily Mail*, 30 January 1932; 8 February.
139. Ibid., 8 February 1932.
140. *Daily Mirror*, 30 January.
141. *Daily Mail*, 8 February.
142. Ibid., 9 February.
143. *Manchester Guardian*, 8 February.
144. *Daily Herald*, 8 February.
145. NA MEPOL 2/4959. Also see *Daily Herald*, 13 February; 15 February.
146. *Manchester Guardian*, 8 February.
147. 8 February. Lieut. Col. Rich (1932) *Recollections of a Prison Governor* (London: Hurst & Blackett), pp. 275–6, also felt that the Du Parcq Report was excellent but unsatisfying as it appeared to make no attempt to 'diagnose the root causes which led to the appalling happenings of that Sunday morning'. Wanted to know more about prior plans and how organised. Also not very satisfying to be told that reason for outbreak was that Dartmoor was unsuitable place for modern convicts. 'I should think it is perfectly correct to say that the modern leniency in treatment and the entertainments and so forth did not cause the Dartmoor mutiny. They did, however, give the opportunity of preparing it, which is equally important'.
148. *Daily Mirror*, 8 February.
149. Ex-Convict No-, *News of the World*, 31 January 1932.
150. Such accounts were later (post Princetown Assize) discounted, for example, in *The Howard Journal III* (3): 1932, Editorial which stated: 'We may discount the more sensational tales of desperate criminals within, taking concerted action with equally desperate colleagues outside, as well as the more lurid stories of official brutality told by ex-convicts', although suggests probably an elements of truth in both. This article also asserted that 'Dartmoor was an anachronism and that it was sheer hypocrisy to claim that any serious reformative or educational work could be done there'.
151. *Morning Post*, 8 February 1932.
152. Rose, *The Struggle for Penal Reform*, p. 175.

## 5 The Elephant and Castle Gang and Criminal Careers of Dartmoor Prison Inmates

1. Rev B.P.H. Ball (1956) *Prison Was My Parish* (London: William Heinemann Ltd).
2. Ball, *Prison Was My Parish*, p. 122. The year given in this quotation is 1932 which is plainly an error since he is referring to the arrival of Sparks prior to the riot. He then goes on to refer to the assault on Officer Birch by Thomas Davis which he states happened shortly after the riot but which actually occurred on the Friday before the disturbance. For clarity of analysis, I have accepted that the intended date was 1931.

3. For example, Chelmsford Prison was set aside for younger penal servitude offenders. Chelmsford was described at this time as 'a model prison, dealing with the "violent and adventurous" type of young criminal', see M. Benney (1936) *Low Company* (Horsham: Caliban Books), p. 320.
4. BPP, *Annual Report of the Commissioners of Prisons, 1931–32*, Cmd. 4151, xii: 804–5.
5. S.K. Ruck (1932) 'The Increase of Crime in England: An Analysis and Criticism', *Political Quarterly* 3: 206–25. Also see C. Humphries and R.E. Dummett (1933) *The Menace in our Midst* (London: Chapman & Hall Ltd).
6. S.K. Ruck (1940) 'Developments in Crime and Punishment', in L. Radzinowicz, J.W. Cecil Turner and P.H. Winfield (eds), *Penal Reform in England: Introductory Essays on Some Aspects of English Criminal Policy* (London: P.S. King & Son Ltd), pp. 19, 24. Also see, E.H. Sutherland (1934) 'The Decreasing Prison Population of England', *Journal of Criminal Law and Criminology* 24: 898.
7. BPP, *Report by Mr Du Parcq On the Circumstances Connected with the Recent Disorder at Dartmoor Convict Prison* PP 1932, Cmd. 4010, VII: 6 (hereafter *Du Parcq Report*).
8. Hereafter, *Du Parcq Report*.
9. Major B.D. Grew O.B.E (1958), *Prison Governor* (London: Herbert Jenkins), pp. 74–5.
10. *Du Parcq Report*, p. 12.
11. NA HO144/595645/39 Confidential copy of *Du Parcq Report*.
12. NA DPP2/72 Part 13. Also see, *The Times*, 13 October 1930, 'Alleged Shots at Police'.
13. NA HO144/595645/39 Confidential copy of *Du Parcq Report*, p. 29.
14. Hambrook, *R v Beadles*, p. 170.
15. Ball, *Prison was my Parish*, pp. 192–3.
16. Ibid., 194.
17. *Observer*, 3 July 2011, 'Criminal Confessions'.
18. R. Sparks (1961) *Burglar to the Nobility* (London: Arthur Barker Limited), pp. 79–85.
19. G.F. Clayton (1958) *The Wall is Strong: The Life of a Prison Governor* (London: John Long), pp. 168–9.
20. Ibid.
21. NA DPP2/72 Part 13.
22. Sparks, *Burglar to the Nobility*, pp. 75–9 and the *Daily Express*, 5 July 1930.
23. *Daily Express*, 5 July 1930.
24. Sparks, *Burglar to the Nobility*, pp. 75–6.
25. See, S. Duncombe and A. Mattson (2006) *The Bobbed Haired Bandit: A True Story of Crime and Celebrity in 1920s New York* (New York: New York University Press).
26. *Manchester Guardian*, 15 August 1927.
27. Sparks, *Burglar to the Nobility*, pp. 32–4; NA DPP2/72 Part 13; *Manchester Guardian*, 28 July and 15 August 1927.
28. NA DPP2/72 Part 9.
29. NA DP2/72 Parts 5–9; *R v Beadles*, p. 209.
30. NA DPP2/72 Part 13 and the *Police Gazette* Supplement A, 11 March 1927, XIV (5). The *Police Gazette* was a weekly magazine produced by Scotland

Yard giving details of crimes committed and criminal profiles (including mug shots) as well as information wanted by the police. It was sent to every police force in the United Kingdom.

31. NA DPP2/72 Part 13.
32. NA HO595645/94/192/169 Letter from Superintendent Hambrook, 8 June 1932.
33. A.J. Rhodes (1933) *Dartmoor Prison: A Record of 126 Years of Prisoner of War and Convict Life, 1806–1932* (London: John Lane The Bodley Head Limited), pp. 282–3.
34. *Police Gazette*, Supplement A, 11 March, XIV (5): 1927.
35. NA DPP2/72 Part 9.
36. The other inmate referred to in this context is Arthur Cox.
37. Sparks, *Burglar to the Nobility*, p. 96.
38. NA DPP2/72 Part 13.
39. By Inspector Hambrook. NA DPP2/72 Part 9.
40. *The Times*, 12 December 1924.
41. NA DPP2/72 Part 13 and *Police Gazette*, 7 March , XVII (5): 1930. The sentence of preventive detention introduced under the 1908 Prevention of Crimes Act for the first time sanctioned a punishment which operated to anticipate future criminal behaviour. In actual fact, this legislation was not well used and in 1910 Churchill, the then Home Secretary threatened to repeal the act if were not properly restricted to those who were a danger to society. Until then the punishment had largely been used against lower level recidivists. See V. Bailey (1985) 'Churchill as Home Secretary: Prison Reform', *History Today* March 38 (3): 10–13. Gatrell has referred to this legislative action as 'part fantasy anyway' as 'professional criminals' were hard to find. The numbers designated as Habitual Criminals and sentences to preventive detention remain low until the legislation was supplanted in 1948. See V.A.C. Gatrell (1990) 'Crime, Authority and the Policeman-State', in F.M.L. Thompson (ed.), *The Cambridge Social History of Britain 1750–1950 Vol.3: Social Agencies and Institutions* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press).
42. *The Times*, 6 October 1930, p. 11 and 28 April 1932.
43. NA HO144/20648.
44. Ibid., letter from Cicily Craven, Hon Secretary of the Howard League for Penal Reform 6 June 1932 to Sir Herbert Samuel, Secretary of State for Home Department.
45. *The Times*, 6 October 1930, p. 11 and 28 April 1932.
46. Sparks, *Burglar to the Nobility*, pp. 86–89. Also see Rhodes, *Dartmoor Prison*, p. 288 for further description.
47. NA DP2/72 Parts 5–9; *R v Beadles*, evidence of officer winter, p. 234.
48. *The Times*, 21 November 1930.
49. Ibid.
50. Ibid.
51. M. Cavadino and J. Dignan (2002) *The Penal System: An Introduction*, 3rd ed. (London: Sage), pp. 11, 17–18.
52. *Liverpool Echo*, 19 June 1929.
53. NA DPP2/72 Part 9 and Part 13. Also see the *Leeds Mercury*, 6 January 1927, 'WAR-TIME MURDER'.

54. B. McDonald (2000) *Elephant Boys: Tales of London and Los Angeles Underworlds* (London: Mainstream Publishing), p. 142. Also see B. McDonald (2010) *Gangs of London: 100 Years of Mob Warfare* (Wrea Green, Lancashire: Milo Books); R. Samuel (1981) *East End Underworld: Chapters in the Life of Arthur Harding* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul).
55. NA DPP2/72 Part 9.
56. McDonald, *Elephant Boys*, p. 136.
57. NA DPP2/72 Part 9.
58. P. Jenkins and G.W. Potter (1998) 'Before the Krays: Organized Crime in London, 1920–1960', *Criminal Justice History* IX: 214. As Jenkins and Potter state the drugs trade at this time primarily concerned cocaine as in Britain addicts were prescribed opiates.
59. *The Times*, 3 April 1930.
60. See Mason (2006) cited in A. Barton and A. Brown (2011) 'Dartmoor: Penal and Cultural Icon', *The Howard Journal* 50 (5): 486.
61. S.K. Ruck (ed.) (1951) *Paterson on Prisons: Being the Collected Papers of Sir Alexander Paterson* (London: Frederick Muller Ltd), p. 11.
62. G. Dendrickson and F. Thomas (1954) *The Truth About Dartmoor* (London: Victor Gollanz), pp. 72–5.
63. NA DP2/72 Parts 5–9, *R v Beadles*, pp. 24–25. In John Mullins's evidence at the Dartmoor trial, he observed that in the separate cells were men on dietary punishment and for those who had tried to escape. He described the existence of what he refers to as silent cells that were ill-lit and which had a door which was 'a kind of box inside a box, a kind of Chinese puzzle affair' which he surmised was 'to stop the other prisoners knowing what is happening in there while the officers are manhandling you'.
64. Mullins was recaptured after three days and the other convict, Gaskins, after five days. See *Prison Officers' Magazine*, March 1931 XX (3): 66.
65. *Manchester Evening News*, 15 August 1927.
66. MEPOL 2/4959 Report of the CID into the riot at Dartmoor.
67. NA MEPOL 2/4959/15a Report of the CID into the riot at Dartmoor.
68. *R v Beadles*, p. 996.
69. To CID investigation which began after Du Parcq.
70. MEPOL 2/4959/15a Report of the CID into the riot at Dartmoor.
71. S. Hobhouse and A. Fenner Brockway (1922) *English Prisons Today* (London: Longman, Green & Co).
72. E. Carrabine (2005) 'Prison riots, social order and the problem of legitimacy', *British Journal of Criminology* 45: 904–905.
73. Ball, *Prison was my Parish*, p. 98.
74. Ball, *Prison was my Parish*, p. 122.
75. W. Hambrook (1937) *Hambrook of the Yard: The Memoirs of Ex-Detective Superintendent Walter Hambrook CID* (London: Robert Hale & Company), p. 193. Also see Colonel Rich in *Observer* 30 October 1932, in which he refers to 'these young men who are running about in cars and holding up people at the point of the pistol'. Also see, for example, *Daily Mirror*, 3 May 1932; 30 April 1930; 17 August 1932.
76. W. Macartney (1936) *Walls have Mouths: A Record of Ten Years' Penal Servitude* (London: Gollancz), p. 241.

77. C. Emsley (2011) *Crime and Society in Twentieth-Century England* (Harlow: Pearson Education), p. 99.
78. Rhodes, *Dartmoor Prison*, pp. 280, 279–282 for further detail.
79. S. Horler (1934) *London's Underworld: The Record of a Month's Sojourn in the Crime Centres of the Metropolis* (London: Hutchinson), p. 29.
80. Emsley, *Crime and Society in Twentieth-Century England*, p. 87.
81. Sparks, *Burglar to the Nobility*, pp. 27–50. Also see, A. Brown (January 2011) 'The Smash-and-Grab Gangster', *BBC History* 12 (1).
82. Emsley, *Crime and Society in Twentieth-Century England*, p. 99.
83. Clayton, *The Wall Is Strong*, p. 107.
84. J. White (1986) *The Worst Street in North London* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul), p. 186. White is referring specifically here to inter-war Campbell Bunk in North London, Also see R. Hood and K. Joyce (1999) 'Three Generations: Oral testimonies on Crime and Social Change in London's East End', *British Journal of Criminology* 39 (1): 136–60.
85. Emsley, *Crime and Society in Twentieth-Century England*, p. 46.
86. Sparks, *Burglar to the Nobility.*
87. M. Benney (1948) *Gaol Delivery: For the Howard League for Penal Reform* (London: Longmans, Green and Co), pp. 18–20.
88. Thanks go to the daughter and grandson of Officer Traske for this information.
89. P. Burke (2010) 'Interrogating the Eyewitness', *Cultural & Social History* 7 (4): 437.
90. Ibid., p. 440.
91. Al Capone was well known by this time and had been imprisoned in 1931. In 1930, he made the cover of *Time Magazine*. See T. Doherty (1999) *Pre-Code Hollywood: Sex, Immorality and Insurrection in American Cinema 1930–1934* (New York: Columbia University Press), p. 139.
92. Doherty, *Pre-Code Hollywood*, p. 146.
93. Ibid., p. 158.
94. Ibid., p. 169.
95. *Du Parcq Report*.
96. Sparks, *Burglar to the Nobility*, pp. 88–9.
97. Ibid.
98. Ibid., p. 90.
99. NA PCom 9/254 evidence of George Thomas Donovan and Edward O'Connell to the Du Parcq inquiry.
100. Sparks, *Burglar to the Nobility*, p. 98.
101. Ibid., p. 92.
102. NA DP2/72 Parts 5–9, *R v Beadles*, pp. 477–95.
103. Ibid., pp. 513–50. Also see reference to this petition as being signed by all five officers in the separate cells, NA PCOM 9/254.
104. NA DP2/72 Parts 5–9, *R v Beadles*, pp. 727, 776.
105. NA DP2/72 Parts 5–9, *R V Beadles* summing up, p. 73.
106. NA DP2/72 Parts 5–9, *R v Beadles*, p. 230. Sparks who had been in the separate cells was on exercise when the riot broke out.
107. NA PCom 9/254 evidence of Deputy Governor Richards to the Du Parcq Inquiry. Also see evidence of Chief Officer Smales.

108. NA HO144/20648, letter from Cicily Craven, Hon Secretary of the Howard League for Penal Reform 6 June 1932 to Sir Herbert Samuel, Secretary of State for Home Department.
109. The 'Dartmoor defendants' here includes Davis and Brown whose charges were heard separately. Also, before the main trial William Gardner pleaded guilty to a minor damages charge which was accepted. One individual was guilty of both Riotous Assembly and Malicious Damage and so is counted twice.
110. NA PCom 9/255, memo dated 21 May 1932. According to Prison Commission records, see NA PCom 9/256, before receiving their sentences for their role in the Dartmoor riot the earliest release date, including remission, would have been for John Jackson 17 May 1938, for Charles (Ruby) Sparks 14 July 1934, although he then had a sentence of five years preventive detention to serve, and for Edward James 3 November 1935.
111. NA DP2/72 Parts 5–9.
112. *Liverpool Echo* 14 April 1931; *News of the World* 10 July 1927; NA DP2/72 Parts 5–9, *R V Beadles* summing up.
113. NA DPP2/72 Part 13.
114. *Manchester Guardian*, 14 May 1932.
115. NA PCom 9/256, according to Prison Commission records, in batches of three the Dartmoor defendants were dispersed, for example, not only to Wandsworth, Parkhurst, Birmingham, Liverpool, Manchester, Leicester but also to Dartmoor. However, later memos suggest that there was some confusion about where some Dartmoor inmates were actually sent and efforts were made to tighten up the records in this regard.
116. Ibid.
117. *Manchester Guardian*, 14 May 1932.
118. Ibid.
119. NA PCom 9/256.
120. Ibid. Clayton felt that at this time Parkhurst was the most difficult convict prison to administer because of its mixed population including elderly convicts and convicts deemed to have some kind of mental weakness or disorder. See Clayton, *The Wall Is Strong*, pp. 143–4.
121. Ibid., pp. 148–9.
122. Ibid., p. 159.
123. NA PCom 9/256. Prison Commission memo.
124. NA PCom 9/256. Also see NA HO595645/94/192 Letter from H. Scott at the Prison Commission 13 November 1936 to the Under Secretary of State regarding remission.
125. Compton Mackenzie in Macartney, *Walls Have Mouths*, p. 97.
126. NA HO595645/94/192 Draft memo 12 October 1937.
127. NA HO144/22545 petition from Sparks under the name of Charles Watson, the name in which he was convicted on that occasion, written in his own hand dated 20 November 1940 and signed 'John Sparks'.
128. NA HO144/22545 Ruby Sparks file.
129. Letter from Superintendent Hambrook CID, dated 8 June 1932 NA HO595645/94/169.
130. NA DP2/72 Part 13.

131. Included in this figure are multiple three year sentences which ran concurrently, those which had any additional preventive detention sentences and those that had licenses forfeited.
132. BPP 1932–33 [Cmd. 4295] *Report of the Commissioners of Prisons and Directors of Convict Prisons for 1931 (Annual Report)*, p. 500.
133. Included in this figure are multiple three year sentences which ran concurrently, those which had any additional preventive detention sentences and those that had licenses forfeited.
134. *The Times*, 24 and 25 May 1927.
135. This includes instances, for example, where several sentences were given at the same trial ran concurrently or consecutively but were all three months or six months. Where, concurrent or consecutive sentences were of differing lengths the longest was taken as representing the seriousness of the offences dealt with at that trial. Please note that this includes all prison sentences and not various alternative sentences such as bound over, fines or institutions for juvenile offenders. Also excluded are sentences given at Courts Martial since they were not necessarily criminal. Also note that these statistics also include a small number of convictions under the Prevention of Crimes Acts which set conditions for convicts released on licence.
136. Horler, *London's Underworld*, p. 29.
137. BPP 1932–33 [Cmd.4295] *Report of the Commissioners of Prisons and Directors of Convict Prisons for 1931 (Annual Report*), 425. Also see, A. Brown (2011) 'Crime, Criminal Mobility and Serial Offenders'.
138. Gatrell, 'Crime, Authority and the Policeman-State', p. 264.
139. 'OLD SOLDIER'S GRIEVANCE', *Berrow's Worcester Journal* 6 June 1931.
140. In four cases, Darlington is convicted for multiple offences and given penalties to run concurrently of one case consecutively, for the purposes of the point being made here it is the length of the sentence that has been emphasised and taken as one conviction and sentence.
141. NA DP2/72 Part 13.
142. Gatrell, 'Crime, Authority and the Policeman-State', p. 265. Also see, for example, an article by Commissioner Lamb of Salvation Army, in the *Listener* issue 210, 18 January, 97 which suggests it must be admitted rather vaguely that 'a close study of the recent outbreak in the convict prison at Dartmoor shows clearly that nearly all the mutineers grew up in an unhealthy social environment where, in their childhood, home arrangements were unsatisfactory'.
143. *Manchester Guardian*, 28 June 1932.
144. R. Samuel, *East End Underworld* cited in Gatrell, 'Crime, Authority and the Policeman-state', p. 301.
145. For example, see J. Sim (1994) 'Tougher than the Rest? Men in Prison', in T. Newburn and E.A. Stanko (eds), *Just Boys Doing Business? Men, Masculinities and Crime* (London: Taylor & Francis), pp. 100–17. Also see P. Scraton, J. Sim and P. Skidmore (1991) *Prisons under Protest* (Milton Keynes: Open University Press).
146. For example, see Sim, 'Tougher than the Rest?', pp. 100–17.
147. J. Young (1999) *The Exclusive Prison* (London: Sage), pp. 89–90 cited and discussed in K. Hayward and J. Young (2007) 'Cultural Criminology',

in M. Maquire, R. Morgan and R. Reiner (eds), *The Oxford Handbook of Criminology*, 4th ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press), pp. 105–6.
148. For example, see Sim, 'Tougher than the Rest?', p. 112.
149. Ibid., p. 103.
150. P. Scraton, J. Sim and P. Skidmore (1991) *Prisons under Protest* (Milton Keynes: Open University Press), pp. 77, 115. Also see Sim, 'Tougher than the Rest?' p. 103.
151. Gatrell, 'Crime, authority and the policeman-state', pp. 293–5.
152. Ibid., p. 296.
153. Ibid., pp. 306–7, 310.
154. B.S. Godfrey, D.J. Cox and S.D. Farrall (2007) *Criminal Lives: Family Life, Employment, and Offending* (Oxford: Oxford University Press), pp. 40–1.
155. E.R. Calvert and T. Calvert (1933) *The Lawbreaker: A Critical Study of the Modern Treatment of Crime* (London: George Routledge & & Sons Ltd), p. ix.

## 6 Microhistory and the Modern Prison

1. In terms of the 'fairness of outcomes in practice', V.A.C. Gatrell (1994) *The Hanging Tree: Execution and the English People 1770–1868* (Oxford: Oxford University Press), p. vi.
2. Ibid.
3. Ibid., pp. 447–8, 422–4.
4. Ibid., pp. 448–9.
5. See, S. McConville (2005) 'Review of A. Brown, *English Society and the Prison* (2003)', *American Historical Review* 110 (1): 221; and also B. Godfrey, P. Lawrence and C.A. Williams (2008) *History and Crime* (London: Sage), pp. 150–1.
6. For example, A. Brown (2003) *English Society and the Prison: Time, Culture and Politics in the Development of the Modern Prison, 1850–1920* (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press); R.W. Ireland (2007) *'A Want of Order and Good Discipline': Rules, Discretion and the Victorian Prison* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press).
7. And in social history generally, microhistory was recently referred to as 'the flagship of contemporary social historians', István Szijártó (2002) 'Four Arguments for Microhistory', *Rethinking History* 6 (2): 209.
8. Examples of this work include, A. Brown and E. Clare (2005) 'A History of Experience: Exploring Prisoners' Accounts of Incarceration', in C. Emsley (ed.), *The Persistent Prison: Problems, Images and Alternatives* (London: Francis Boutle Publishers); S. Morgan (1999) 'Prison Lives: Critical Issues in Reading Prisoner Autobiography', *Howard Journal of Criminal Justice* 38 (3): 328–40; J. Pratt (2002) *Punishment and Civilization* (London: Sage), Chapter 6.
9. C. Ginzburg (Autumn 1993) 'Microhistory: Two or Three Things That I Know about it', *Critical Inquiry* 20: 23.
10. J. Brewer (March 2010) 'Microhistory and the Histories of Everyday Life', *Cultural & Social History* 7 (1): 89.
11. Ginzburg, 'Microhistory', pp. 15, 33.
12. F. Egmond and P. Mason (1997) *The Mammoth and the Mouse* (Baltimore, MD: John Hopkins University Press), p. 34. They are also referring here to the use of metanarratives.

13. D.A. Bell (2002) 'Total History and Microhistory: The French and Italian Paradigms', in L. Kramer and S. Maza (eds), *A Companion to Western Historical Thought* (Oxford: Oxford University Press), p. 263.
14. Brewer, 'Microhistory', p. 87.
15. Bonnell and Hunt (2003) in S.G. Magnūsson (2003) 'The Singularization of History: Social History and Microhistory within the Postmodern State of Knowledge', *Journal of Social History* 36 (3): 707.
16. Ginzburg, 'Microhistory'. That is within a recognition that the research process itself is constructed, that is, the identification of the object, event or case, the use of categories of analysis, the chosen criteria of proof and the narrative forms by which the results are transmitted. Also see, E. Muir (1991) 'Introduction: Observing Trifles', in E. Muir and G. Ruggiero (eds), *Microhistory and the Lost Peoples of Europe* (Baltimore, MD: John Hopkins University Press), pp. xiii–xiv. Also see, I. Szijártō (2002) 'Four Arguments for Microhistory', *Rethinking History* 6 (2): 209–15.
17. See S. Cerittu (2004) 'Microhistory: Social Relations Versus Cultural Models?', in A. Castren, M. Lonkila and M. Peltonen (eds), *Between Sociology and History: Essays on Microhistory, Collective Action and Nation-Building* (Helsinki: Suomalaisen Kirjallisuuden seura), pp. 17–35.
18. Banti in Cerutti, ibid., p. 17.
19. See, for example, S. Cohen and L. Taylor (1972) *Psychological Survival: The Experience of Long-Term Imprisonment* (Harmondsworth: Penguin).
20. *R v Beadles*, p. 276.
21. BPP, *Report by Mr Du Parcq on the Circumstances Connected with the Recent Disorder at Dartmoor Convict Prison* PP 1932 Cmd. 4010, VII, 30 (hereafter *Du Parcq Report*) and NA PCom 9/254 Evidence of Dr Batiscombe to the Du Parcq Inquiry.
22. NA PCom 9/254 Evidence of Dr Batiscombe to the Du Parcq Inquiry.
23. R. Sparks (1961) *Burglar to the Nobility* (London: Arthur Barker), p. 41.
24. Concisely, Goffman sought 'explanation for action in its meaning for others rather than in its causal origins', see T. Burns (1992) *Erving Goffman* (London: Routledge), p. 3.
25. P. Scraton, J. Sim and P. Skidmore (1991) *Prisons under Protest* (Milton Keynes: Open University Press), p. 115.
26. E. Rose (Summer 1982) 'The Anatomy of Mutiny', *Armed Forces and Society* 8 (4): 563.
27. For a discussion of images of crime during the inter-war period, see H. Shore (2011) 'Criminality and Englishness in the Aftermath: The Racecourse Wars of the 1920s', *Twentieth Century British History* 22 (4); C. Emsley, *Hard Men: Violence in England Since 1750* (London: Hambledon), pp. 15–36.
28. Ibid.
29. R.W. Coye, P.J. Murphy and P.E. Spencer (2010) 'Using Historic Mutinies to Understand Defiance in Modern Organizations', *Journal of Management History* 16 (2): 278.
30. Rose, 'The Anatomy of Mutiny', p. 563.
31. See, for example, E.P. Thompson (1991) 'The Moral Economy of the English Crowd in the Eighteenth Century', in E.P. Thompson (ed.), *Customs in Common* (London: The Merlin Press); P. Bachrach and M. Baratz (2005) *Power and Poverty*, cited in E. Carrabine, 'Prison Riots, Social

Order and the Problem of Legitimacy', *British Journal of Criminology* 45: 896–7.
32. Coye, Murphy and Spencer, 'Using Historic Mutinies', p. 271.
33. *R v Beadles*, p. 34.
34. Ibid., p. 22.
35. Ibid., p. 236.
36. Ibid., p. 778.
37. Ibid., p. 494.
38. Red Collar Man (1937) *Chokey* (London: Victor Gollancz), p. 104.
39. G. Levi (1991) 'On Microhistory', in P. Burke (ed.), *New Perspectives on Historical Writing* (London: Polity Press), p. 97.
40. Ginzburg, 'Microhistory', p. 17. Of course this parallels the increasing strength of social history. However, the emphasis within academic history may be moving back towards macrohistory, partly in response to pressures to make the discipline more publicly relevant and politically influential, see lecture by J. Vernon (2011) 'Distant Strangers: How Britain Became Modern', Annual Social History Conference, University of Manchester.
41. Szijártó, 'Four Arguments for Microhistory', *Rethinking History* 6 (2): 209.
42. Levi, 'On Microhistory', p. 97.
43. P. Hudson (2010) 'Closeness and Distance: A Response to Brewer', *Cultural & Social History* 7 (3): 381.
44. Brewer, 'Microhistory', p. 89.
45. See, for example, article by Eustace discussed by S.G. Magnūsson (2006) 'Social History as "Sites of Memory"? The Institutionalization of History: Microhistory and the Grand Narrative', *Journal of Social History* 39 (3): 902.
46. D.A. Bell (2002) 'Total History and Microhistory: The French and Italian Paradigms', in L. Kramer and S. Maza (eds), *A Companion to Western Historical Thought* (Oxford: Oxford University Press), p. 109.
47. G.M. Sykes (1958) *Society of Captives: A Study of a Maximum Security Prison* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press), p. 53.
48. The obvious exception here is, of course, those historians working on the recent past.
49. B.S. Gregory (1999) 'Is Small Beautiful? Microhistory and the History of Everyday Life', *History and Theory* 38 (1): 107.
50. E. Muir (1991) 'Introduction: Observing Trifles', in E. Muir and G. Ruggiero (eds), *Selections from Quaderni Storici* (Baltimore, MD: John Hopkins University Press), p. xiv.
51. BPP 1932–33 [Cmd. 4295] *Annual Report of the Commissioners of Prisons and Directors of Convict Prisons for 1931*, pp. 418–25.
52. Muir, 'Introduction: Observing Trifles', p. xiv.
53. Sparks, *Burglar to the Nobility*, p. 7.
54. M. Benney (1981) *Low Company* (Horsham: Caliban Books), pp. 9–10. Also see, for example, R. Samuel (1981) *East End Underworld: Chapters in the Life of Arthur Harding* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul).
55. Cited in F. Egmund and P. Mason (1997) *The Mammoth and the Mouse* (Baltimore, MD: John Hopkins University Press), p. 38
56. Ibid., p. 44.
57. M. Peltonen (October 2001) 'Clues, Marhins and Monads: The Micro-Macro Link in Historical Research', *History and Theory* 40: 357.

58. J. Phelan (1941) *Jail Journey* (London: Secker & Warburg), p. 121.
59. Gregory, '*Is* Small Beautiful?', p. 109.
60. Ibid., p. 104.

## 7 Conclusion

1. These proportions refer to the 427 offenders of the total of 442 for which conviction records survive. This includes where several sentences were given to run concurrently or consecutively but were all for three months or six months for example. Where such sentence lengths differed the longest was taken as indicative of seriousness. Excluded are sentences given at courts martial and alternative sentences such as fines, reformatories etc.
2. C.M. Craven (1932) 'The Report of the Departmental Committee on Persistent Offenders', *Howard Journal of Criminal Justice* 3 (3): 69–72. Also see, *Report of the Departmental Committee on Persistent Offenders* 1931–32 Cmd. 4090, xii: 553, Chapter V.
3. Brown (2008) 'Challenging Discipline and Control: A Comparative Analysis of Prison Riots at Chatham (1861) and Dartmoor (1932)', in H. Johnston (ed.), *Punishment and Control in Historical Perspective* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan), pp. 199–214.
4. Ibid.
5. N. Jameson and E. Allison (1995) *Strangeways 1990: A Serious Disturbance* (London: Larking Publications), p. 11.
6. Ibid. Exemplary sentences were also handed down to inmates following the riot in Hull Prison in 1976. See J.E. Thomas and R. Pooley (1980) *Exploding Prison: Prison Riots and the Case of Hull* (London: Junction Books).
7. R. Adams (1994) *Prison Riots in Britain and the USA*, 2nd ed. (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan), p. 165. Also see, W. Player and M. Jenkins (eds) (1994) *Prisons After Woolf: Reform Through Riot* (London: Routledge), p. 1, which describes the *Woolf Report* as the 'culmination of an unprecedentedly wide-ranging and open inquiry into the prison disturbances of April 1990' and a 'landmark' in penal history in England and Wales.
8. H. Woolf and S. Tumin (1991) *Prison Disturbances April 1990* (London: HMSO), Cm1456.1, 17 (1.148) [hereafter the *Woolf Report*].
9. Ibid (1.149). Also see, S.L. Resodihardjo (December 2006) 'Wielding a Double-Edged Sword: The Use of Inquiries at Times of Crisis', *Journal of Contingencies and Crisis Management* 14 (4): 202.
10. Adams, *Prison Riots*, p. 169.
11. *Woolf Report*, pp. 16–27.
12. Most notably the major riot in Hull Prison in 1976 where interestingly the riot was preceded by a tightening up of the regime. See, for example, Thomas and Pooley, *Exploding Prison*.
13. Adams, *Prison Riots*, p. 115.
14. E. Carrabine (2004) *Power, Discourse and Resistance: A Genealogy of the Strangeways Prison Riot* (Aldershot: Ashgate), p. 152.
15. *Woolf Report*, p. 9 (1.72–1.74).
16. Ibid., pp. 7–16.
17. Ibid., p. 3 (1.18).

18. *Du Parcq Report on the Circumstances Connected with the Recent Disorder at Dartmoor Convict Prison*, BPP, Cmd. 4010 [hereafter *Du Parcq Report*], p. 14.
19. *Woolf Report*, p. 5 (1.30).
20. Carrabine, *Power, Discourse and Resistance*, provides an excellent analysis of the course and impact of the disturbances and the official report on the riot and associated disturbances.
21. The Press Council Report was later to comment that, the *Daily Mirror*'s 'favourite words were "mob", "carnage" and "rampage"'. See, *Press at the Prison Gates: Report of the Inquiry by The Press Council into Press Coverage of the Strangeways Prison Riot and Related Matters* (London: The Press Council, 1990), p. 9.
22. See, *Press at the Prison Gates*.
23. Ibid., pp. 23–4.
24. Carrabine, *Power, Discourse and Resistance*, p. 158.
25. *Woolf Report*, p. 5 (1.38).
26. Carrabine, *Power, Discourse and Resistance*, pp. 161–7.
27. Ibid.
28. *Woolf Report*, p. 7 (1.51). By 5 April probably not more than 25 prisoners still in the main prison.
29. Ibid., p. 78 (3.250).
30. Ibid., p. 6. Also see Carrabine, *Power, Discourse and Resistance*, pp. 161–7.
31. *Du Parcq Report*.
32. Ibid., p. 17.
33. Carrabine, *Power, Discourse and Resistance*, p. 165.
34. NA PCom 9/254 evidence of Chief Constable Wilson to the Du Parcq Inquiry.
35. Ibid.
36. NA PCom 9/254 evidence of Major Morris to the Du Parcq Inquiry.
37. Carrabine, *Power, Discourse and Resistance*, p. 166.
38. Ibid., p. 175.
39. *Woolf Report*, p. 3 (1.21).

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