

Imprisonment of young offenders

By 1900, psychologists and Christian reformers had convinced the government that improved treatment of young people was the key to improving society as a whole. From 1902 young offenders under the age of 21 went to their own type of prison; **Borstals**. They were by no means soft on offenders but they tried to educate the inmates and train them in skills that might lead to employment. In 1988, Borstals were replaced with young offender institutions. The age range of inmates is usually 18 to 20.

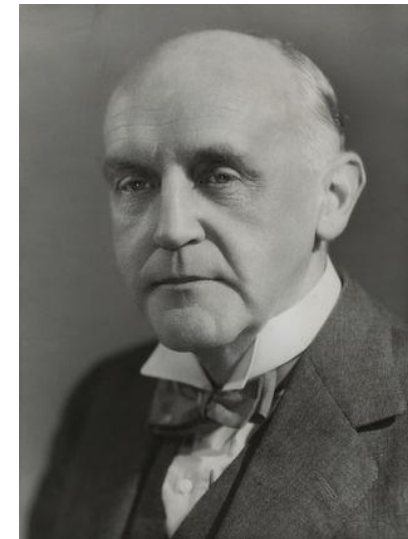
People disagree over how strict juvenile imprisonment should be. Some have favoured what is often called a 'short, sharp, shock'. This means the institutions were deliberately tough to stop the young person from offending again. However there is no clear sign that tough treatment was stopping people re-offending. Overall, the general approach to young offenders is to try and educate young criminals rather than merely punish them.



Adult prison reforms

It was not just young offenders who were affected by the reforming work, beginning with the abolition of the treadmill in 1902. The man behind many reforms between 1922 and 1947 was Alexander Paterson. He believed in rehabilitation and said that people 'are sent to prison as a punishment, not for punishment'. This view shaped the changes he made;

- The rule that prisoners should stay silent was relaxed.
- Prisoners didn't have to have their heads shaved
- Educational work in prisons was greatly increased.
- Prisoners did more meaningful work such as making mats.
- Prisoners were paid a small sum for the work they did.



Sir Alexander Paterson, 1939

Alternatives to prison - probation

People sometimes wonder whether prison really works. Most prisoners re-offend and return to prison where they learn more about crime and may become drug addicts. On top of this prisons are extremely expensive. A study in 2007 estimated it cost about £27,000 each year to keep someone in prison.

In 1907 the government introduced the **Probation service**. If a trustworthy person would take responsibility for his or her behaviour, a minor offender would not have to go to prison. At first the people looking after people on probation were unpaid volunteers but over the years the work has been taken up by well qualified professionals who use their skills to help offenders.

Alternatives to prison – parole system

In 1967 a '**parole**' system was introduced. It allows prisoners to be released before they have served their full sentence but only if they have behaved well.

Another alternative to prison is the **Community Service Order**. Candidates are required to do a number of hours unpaid work for the community rather than go to prison. The system has developed so that the offender can do education activities or drug/ alcohol treatment.



Alternatives to prison – electronic tags

Since **1990**, some offenders have been wearing digital tags to locate the whereabouts of prisoners who have been released. Other forms of tracking have also been introduced to coincide with the electronic tag, such as daily phone calls to wearers to ensure they are within the locations they are restricted to. If an offender is caught violating the terms of their tag, such as not meeting a **curfew** time or trying to remove their tag, they can be sent back to prison.

