

Beyond the Cell - Early Attempts at Reforming

“There is a wide difference between a ‘home’ and a prison, even though the prison be conducted on the most ‘homely’ principles.”

- *Observer*, 20 March 1886

Prior to the establishment of formal organisations or government agencies, individuals and religious groups worked within Mount Eden Prison to improve conditions for inmates. Oftentimes these individuals were motivated by humanistic or religious ideals and worked to bring awareness to the public about the conditions of the prison or to help inmates from within.

These early examples of prison reform often contrasted heavily with the attitude of the Inspector of Prisons’, Colonel Arthur Hume. In 1881, Colonel Hume presented a report to the Minister of Justice, in which he outlined his recommendations. Colonel Hume concluded that current prisons were “neither deterrent nor reformatory.”¹ He suggested that corporal punishment should be introduced in prisons, that education was unnecessary, and that prisons should be made as unpleasant as possible.² Although, Colonel Hume also protested the detaining of inmates for offences they commit whilst in prison and the imprisonment of young offenders.³

¹ Arthur Hume, “Report of inspector of prisons”, *AJHR* H-04, 1888, 1.

² *Ibid*, 2

³ *Ibid*, 2

1881.

NEW ZEALAND.

REPORT OF INSPECTOR OF PRISONS.

Presented to both Houses of the General Assembly by Command of His Excellency.

The INSPECTOR of PRISONS to the Hon. the MINISTER of JUSTICE.

SIR,— Office of Inspector of Prisons, Wellington, 15th March, 1881.
Having completed my inspection of all the prisons in the colony, I have the honor to submit the following report for your consideration and information.

The chief evils that have come under my notice are, that the prisons, as they at present exist, are neither deterrent nor reformatory. I consider this is mainly due to the absence of any system of classification, owing to the very limited accommodation in most of the prisons; and I feel I cannot too urgently impress upon the Government the necessity of at once enlarging the chief gaols to admit of this classification. To effectually carry out this, there should be one large central prison, capable of accommodating 300 prisoners, to which all male offenders sentenced to penal servitude should on conviction be sent, and so kept entirely separate from hard-labour prisoners during the whole period of their servitude. The district prisons should be large enough to accommodate, each in a separate cell, all prisoners sentenced to hard labour, debtors, remands awaiting trial, and youths. These prisoners should have their meals in their cells, and be kept quite separate, except when on the works, at exercise, or at Divine service. The existing system of prisoners having their meals and spending their spare time in association is most detrimental to prison discipline.

The washing and bathing arrangements in most of the prisons require improving, and in some I found they had no means of weighing the prisoners. I need hardly point out that it is most necessary that every prisoner should be weighed on reception, and a record of his weight kept; and, further, that he should be periodically weighed in order to test whether he is losing or gaining flesh.

The foregoing remarks apply equally to female as well as male prisoners. All prisoners should be liable to undergo personal correction for prison offences, but as the law now stands corporal punishment can only be inflicted for repeated prison offences. A serious assault by a prisoner on an officer, for instance, is a case in which corporal punishment should invariably be resorted to (subject always, of course, to the medical officer's opinion as to the fitness of the offender to receive it); and if the law in this respect is not altered I fear serious results. I would also recommend that the birch rod be introduced in prisons, as it has been found in English prisons that birching, whilst being a safer punishment than flogging, at the same time, by placing the recipients on the footing of boys, has a humiliating affect, and therefore is deterrent, and a valuable addition to the cat as a means of punishment.

The system of endeavouring to educate prisoners is I believe a mistake, and I know that the assembling prisoners together for the purposes of school tends to great irregularity. I think it stands to reason that a man who has performed his day's allotted task of hard labour cannot possibly benefit by attending school in the evening, and I therefore beg to recommend that schooling in prisons be abolished; but the teaching prisoners trades is a subject that cannot have too much attention, and every prisoner who is not too old, and conducts himself well in prison, should have every facility afforded him to learn a trade during his term of imprisonment, whereby he ought to be enabled to earn an honest living on being discharged from prison.

All criminals should in prison be divided into classes, as follows: 1. Old and habitual criminals who have several previous convictions recorded against them. 2. Those against whom no former convictions are known. 3. Youths and boys sixteen years old and under. 4. Those under remand and awaiting trial. 5. Debtors, &c. Each of the above-mentioned classes being kept separate, both on the works, at exercise, and when in the prisons. To encourage good prison conduct I would beg to recommend that prisoners sentenced to hard labour or simple imprisonment be required to pass through the following classes: Probation, third, and second classes, after which they would be eligible for promotion to the first class, one-fourth of the whole sentence being passed in each of the three first-named classes; and the penal-servitude prisoners with long sentences should be required to pass through (a minimum period with good conduct and industry) one year in the probation, one in third, and one in second classes, after which they would be eligible for promotion to the first-class; and, as a still further incentive to good conduct and industry, they might for the last twelve months of their sentence be promoted to a special class. A scheme of classification based on the foregoing, which is the English system, is herewith enclosed for your information and approval, marked A and B.

In order that criminals on their discharge from prison should not be utterly destitute, I enclose

Report of Inspector of Prisons. AJHR, H-04, 1881, *Papers Past*.

Against this backdrop of harsh penal ideals, individuals started to suggest other means of dealing with people who commit crimes. Towards the end of the 19th century, various reform ideas started to emerge that were aligned with religious movements. These early reform attempts mainly focused on assisting prisoners once they left prison and did not consider questioning the existence of the prison itself. This article will focus on the early individuals and organisations working with inmates from around 1870 to the 1920s in Mount Eden Prison.

Polly Plum - A Women in Reform

Born in 1836, Mary Ann Colclough became a well-known feminist and social reformer.⁴ Mary Ann arrived in Auckland on the 12th December 1857, after a long and gruelling journey from London.⁵ She was penniless and alone, with her seventeen-year-old brother passing away after only nineteen days at sea.⁶ Six months after arriving in Auckland, Mary Ann sat the Teachers' Examination, and received the highest marks and was awarded a first-class first-grade teaching certificate.⁷ Mary Ann went on to begin her teaching career at the Roman Catholic School at Otahuhu.⁸

Branching out from her teaching career, Mary Ann started to write under the pseudonym of Polly Plum for newspapers. By 1869, Mary Ann's articles became a permanent feature of the *Cross* and *Auckland Weekly News*.⁹ Her articles covered topics such as women's role in society, marriage, her own struggles as a mother, and women's participation in politics.¹⁰

From 1871, Mary Ann started visiting female inmates at Mount Eden Prison, and wrote to newspapers about the necessity behind prison reform.¹¹ In 1871, Mary Ann wrote to the *Daily Southern Cross* describing the conditions at the women's wing of Mount Eden Prison. Mary Ann highlighted how the women's quarters were overcrowded, with only four sleeping cells, which six women were expected to share.¹² The women's wing was also used to hang washing from the prison, asylum, and hospital, which resulted in a "disgusting and pestiferous" stench that hung around for four days.¹³ Her articles were sensationalism and caused much distress for Prison authorities. In response, Mary Ann's visits to the female wing were restricted to specific days a week, which Mary Ann described as "interfering with the

⁴ Hayley Brown, "Jenny Coleman, Polly Plum. A Firm and Earnest Woman's Advocate. Mary Ann Colclough 1836 - 1885," *Women's Studies Journal* 31, no. 2 (2017): 129.

⁵ Jenny Coleman, *Polly Plum: a firm and earnest woman's advocate* (Otago: Otago University Press, 2017), 17.

⁶ *Ibid*, 17.

⁷ *Ibid*, 29.

⁸ *Ibid*, 29.

⁹ *Ibid*, 41.

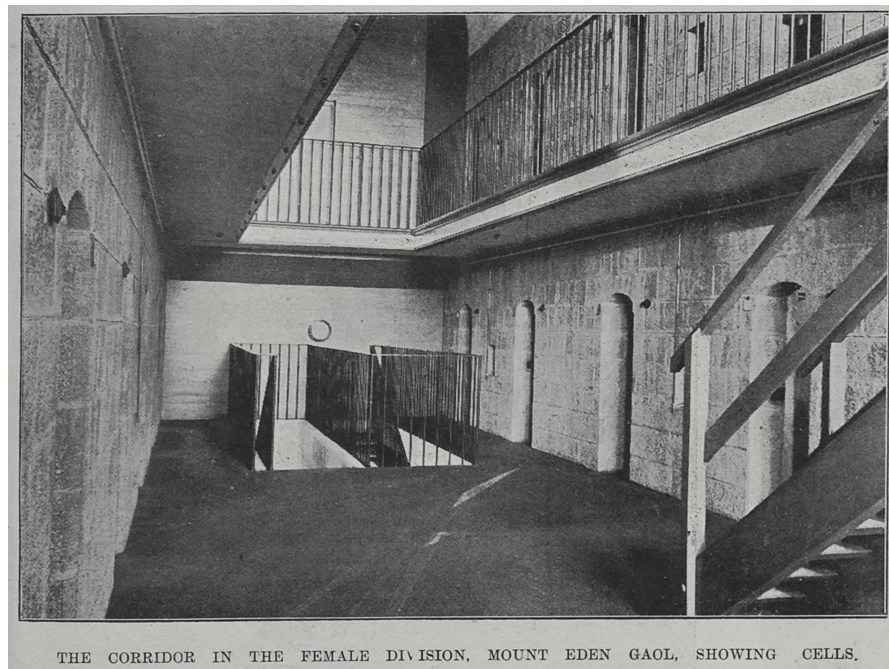
¹⁰ *Ibid*, 41.

¹¹ Mark Derby, *Rock College: An Unofficial History of Mount Eden Prison* (Auckland: Massey University Press, 2020), 57.

¹² Mary Ann Colclough, "A Scandal to our province: the women's department of the goal", *Daily Southern Cross*, 6 December, 1871.

¹³ *Ibid*.

liberty with the visitor” and “cramp my power of usefulness.”¹⁴ This restriction did not stop her from continuing to conduct her work in the prison and continue to publish in newspapers.



Photograph of a corridor in the women’s wing of Mount Eden Prison taken in 1900. *Auckland Libraries Heritage Collections*, AWNS-19000803-09-08.

Mary Ann was a staunch supporter of a women’s home, that was to be a “refuge for the repentant.”¹⁵ This woman’s home would be voluntary in nature, that would assist women in learning skills that would lead them to live honest lives.¹⁶ Mary Ann believed that young women needed to be entrusted to the care of the community, rather than prison.¹⁷ Furthermore, she argued that women needed to be separated from the men that led them down paths of crime, and who often went unpunished.¹⁸ Unsurprisingly, Mary Ann’s ideas often received criticism and were not given the credence they deserved. Whilst she did raise funds for this women’s house, prison officials and council members were not supportive of her endeavours.¹⁹

¹⁴ “The Daily Southern Cross,” *Daily Southern Cross*, 6 January, 1872.

¹⁵ “A Scandal to our province: the women’s department of the goal,” 1871.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷ Mary Ann Colclough, “Auckland Women’s Home: To The Editor,” *Daily Southern Cross*, 4 October, 1871.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁹ Derby, *Rock College*, 58.

Mary Ann left for Melbourne in 1874 where she went on to host lectures on women's rights and their role in society.²⁰ Although her proposal of a women's home was scoffed at, soon ideas around establishing a home for inmates began to take hold.

Prison Gate Home

In 1884, the Salvation Army opened a Prison Gate Home on upper Queen Street that acted as an early form of transitional housing.²¹ The Prison Gate Home was based on the model established in Britain and sought to aid inmates after their release from prison. Early prison reform efforts recognised the necessity behind providing support for inmates outside of the prison. A defining feature of these early transitional housing was the emphasis placed on labour and employment. Often aligned with Christian values, these Homes sought to lead inmates on a more honest and hard-working path.



Photograph of the Prison Gate Home in Epsom taken in 1945. *Heritage Centre & Archives of The Salvation Army NZFTS.*

In 1885 an ex-inmate described the Prison Gate Home as “quietly and ostentatiously working out in destroying evils.”²² The ex-inmate highlighted how often inmates would leave Mount Eden Prison “without a shelter or home, without a friend to guide or assist, without any

²⁰ Brown, *Polly Plum*, 129.

²¹ “Prison Gate”, Salvation Army, December 9, 2019, <https://archives.salvationarmy.org.nz/article/prison-gate>

²² “The prison gate home”, *Auckland Star*, 18 November, 1885.

flatterer but hope.”²³ The Prison Gate Home sought to help ex-prisoners and the homeless gain the necessary skills to find employment. As such, the Home hosted workshops for toy-making, carpentry, cabinet-making, and tailoring.²⁴ The skills of the ex-inmates were noted as being “expert mat-makers” and newspapers advertised courses taught by inmates on how to make wire mattresses.²⁵



Photograph of mat making at the Epsom Prison Gate Home c.1900s. *Heritage Centre & Archives of The Salvation Army NZFTS.*

Two years later in 1886 a Female Prison Gate Home was established in Mount Roskill, with the soup kitchen at the male Prison Gate Home used as a receiving centre.²⁶ The female Prison Gate Home mainly helped women find employment in washing and laundry work.²⁷ Another female Home was built in Parnell, which aimed at “converting incompetent women into skilled domestic servants.”²⁸ As was the case with the male Prison Gate Home, employment and labour skills were the main focus.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ “Rescue work”, *Auckland Star*, 3 August, 1903.

²⁵ “Page 8 Advertisements Column 4”, *Auckland Star*, 20 October, 1897; “Rescue Work”, 1903.

²⁶ “Untitled”, *New Zealand Herald*, 2 July, 1886.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ “Rescue Work”, 1903.

By 1903 the Prison Gate Home housed twenty-one ex-inmates, and the Female Prison Gate Home housed twenty-five females and nine children.²⁹ As was often the case with these early penal reform movements, the Prison Gate Home faced a future of insecurity. Funds were lacking and the government had a limited role in the running of the Home. In 1896, Alfred Weippert, secretary of the Home, took to writing to the newspapers urging for more funding. He stated that the “Prison Gate Home is at present exposed to serious embarrassment through lack of funds, and consequently much hampered in carrying on its undeniably eulogistic work of love and labour.”³⁰ Alfred appealed to Christian citizens, by arguing that to be Christian would mean assisting the “despised and forsaken” and aid in the restoration of these individuals.³¹ Whilst the Prison Gate Home struggled for governmental support and funding, a new way of conducting penal reform was needed.

Auckland Discharged Prisoners’ Aid Society

On September 21st 1899, in a public meeting at the City Council Chambers with Mayor David Goldie in attendance, it was decided that an Auckland Discharged Prisoners’ Aid Society (DPAS) would be created.³² The Auckland DPAS aimed to provide inmates with work, tools for their trade, blankets, clothing, and accommodation whilst looking for a job.³³ The Auckland DPAS marked a step towards a more formal approach to penal reform, in particular a more government friendly approach.

Based on the Dunedin DPAS formed in 1877, DPAS societies around New Zealand were each created to run independently.³⁴ The early Auckland DPAS had strong religious ties, and the Reverend E. C. Budd, who was the chaplain at Mount Eden Prison, was involved in the establishment of DPAS and its running.³⁵ Furthermore, representatives from the Roman Catholic and other churches assisted in the running of the DPAS.³⁶ Although the DPAS

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ “The Salvation Army Prison Gate Home,” *Auckland Star*, 15 December, 1896.

³¹ Ibid.

³² “Aid to discharged prisoners,” *Auckland Star*, 20 September, 1899.

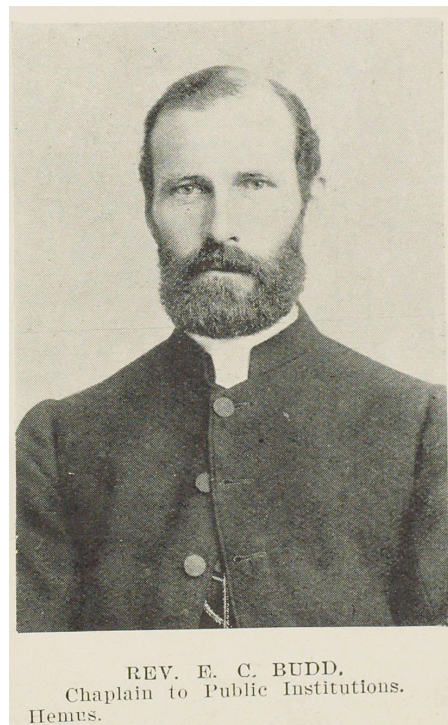
³³ “Discharged prisoners aid society,” *Auckland Star*, 14 September, 1900.

³⁴ Tina McGurk, *A history of the New Zealand prisoners’ aid and rehabilitation society to 1988*, (Wellington: New Zealand Prisoners’ Aid & Rehabilitation Society, 1989), 1.

³⁵ “Discharged prisoners aid society”, 1900.

³⁶ Ibid.

continued this tradition of religious involvement, it was acknowledged that something more than preaching was needed. The Auckland DPAS sought to facilitate more direct assistance for inmates in prison and outside of prison.



Photograph of Rev. E.C Budd chaplain in Mt Eden Prison taken in 1903. *Auckland Libraries Heritage Collections*, NZG-19030530-1517-07.

It was noted that after prisoners left Mount Eden Prison, they were often in need of “a wise and judicious friend by his side, a friend...who help him obtain employment, provide him with food and shelter, and a fresh start.”³⁷ In a similar vein to the Prison Gate Home, Auckland DPAS focused largely on employment and housing. However, there were often representatives that would visit inmates in prison to aid them in getting their affairs in order. These interviews with inmates would inform the assistance they needed once they had left Mount Eden Prison.

While the Prison Gate Home focused primarily on helping the inmates themselves, the Auckland DPAS went a step further. One of their main goals was “to grant relief to Prisoners’ dependents, wives or families either during imprisonment or afterwards.”³⁸ The annual

³⁷ “Aid to Discharged prisoners”, 1899.

³⁸ Auckland Discharged Prisoners’ Aid Society, *Annual Report and Financial Statement for the Period April 1st, 1938 to March 31st, 1939*, 10 AUC, Alexander Turnbull Library.

reports from 1939 to 1941, outline that clothing and food was distributed every Tuesday afternoon to prisoners' wives, families and dependents.³⁹ The Auckland DPAS also organised first aid classes, concerts in prisons, a prison library, Christmas festivals and vocational training and Anzac Day Services.⁴⁰ When looking at financial statements, it is apparent that most of the funds spent by the Auckland DPAS was spent on meals, beds, rent for wives and dependents, medicine, clothing, fares for travel and tools.⁴¹

The Auckland DPAS continued into the 1920s and 1930s, where the government started to offer small grants for the society.⁴² However, the government still played a small role in the DPAS. In 1932 the DPAS visited Mount Eden Prison 300 times, had 3354 interviews at the DPAS office, twenty-five attendance at courts, and 3127 cases dealt with.⁴³ Funding was still limited, and largely relied on donations from community members. Financial statements show that in 1931 donations and subscriptions averaged at £400, which struggled to cover most of the Society's expenses.⁴⁴

As DPAS moved into the middle of the 20th century, ideas around reform once again started to shift. This time the government started to play a more active role in the reform of prisons and profited off a mutual relationship with penal reform organisations. From the 1930s discourses around training and rehabilitation took hold. We now shift to understanding this change in penal reform, and what it meant for Mount Eden Prison.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Margaret Tennant, *Through the prison gate: 125 years of Prisoners' aid and rehabilitation*, (Wellington: New Zealand Prisoners Aid and Rehabilitation Society, 2002), 12.

⁴³ "Prison aid society," *Auckland Star*, 16 December, 1932.

⁴⁴ *Annual Report and Financial Statement*, 1939.

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