

From the Watchtower - Looking to the Future

“For the Government to merely expand existing prison services in the form of jails and hope for reform was to continue down a road that had already proven worldwide to be a colossal failure.”

- *Press*, 1989

As we move into the 21st century, prison reform has started to take on a different form. Organisations such as the Salvation Army and the New Zealand Prisoner Aid and Rehabilitation Society (PARS), continue to operate in the sphere of penal reform. Ideas around what penal reform should look like have continued to evolve. New movements around Māori involvement in penal reform and the rethinking of prisons have taken hold. These ideas continue to grow and merge into a modern penal reform movement. A modern penal reform movement continues to borrow its ideas from the past and will continue to be shaped by the actions of those in the past. What this means for the future is an interesting point of discussion.

This article will summarise the key stages of penal reform encountered within Mount Eden Prison and Tāmaki Makaurau. How far we have come since the development of these penal reform movements and what the future of penal reform looks like is the next area of focus.

A Summary of Penal Reform

The start of penal reform in Tāmaki Makaurau saw a strong tie with religious organisations and movements. This first stage of penal reform relied on individuals that had strong links to City Missions and often these individuals were the first to bring up questions around penal reform.¹ For many of these early organisations and movements there was little governmental and public support, as seen in the case of the Prison Gate Home and the experiences of Mary Colclough. Furthermore, these organisations and individuals largely focused on the lives of the inmates and how to assist them. The inmates' families were largely forgotten.²

¹ Margaret Tennant, *Through the prison gate: 125 years of prisoners' aid and rehabilitation*, (Wellington: New Zealand Prisoners Aid and Rehabilitation Society, 2002), 11.

² *Ibid*, 11.

Towards the end of the 19th century, with the creation of the Auckland Discharged Prisoners' Aid Society (DPAS) a new stage of penal reform was established. The DPAS maintained the religious focus of early organisations, with the involvement of Reverends and religious representatives. However, it marked a more unified approach to penal reform. It generated greater public support for penal reform, and was better able to appeal to the public, with articles featuring their good deeds being circulated. Furthermore, it assisted inmates beyond just finding housing and employment. The inmates' families became an integral part of their work and how they worked with inmates after prison.



Photograph of Mount Eden Prison from Lauder Road taken in 1986. *Auckland Libraries Heritage Collections*, 1052-K04-13.

Following World War II, a national approach was taken to penal reform with the establishment of PARS. This period saw a closer relationship between PARS and the Department of Justice, which meant more support and funding for penal reform attempts. From the 1950s onwards there was a greater push towards visiting inmates in prison and focusing on principles of rehabilitation.³ Training, rehabilitation programmes and ethics became a larger part of the work that PARS was doing. Towards the end of the 20th century, a 'partnership' approach was taken to account for the high number of Māori incarcerated.

³ Ibid, 17.

However, it wouldn't be until the 21st century that more productive steps were taken to account for Māori incarceration rates.

Te Pā - A Kaupapa Māori Organisation

The latest evolution in prison reform is the establishment of Te Pā in 2022. Following the restructuring of the Auckland branch of New Zealand PARS in 2012 into PARS Inc T/A People at Risk Solutions, there was a greater drive to recognise Te Tiriti o Waitangi.⁴ In 2019 the branch launched Te Pā Tūwatawata, a model designed to reaffirm their commitment to Te Tiriti o Waitangi, tikanga and mātauranga Māori.⁵

With the development of this new model, PARS set out a new vision “to provide a living, thriving, ecology of care, that heals, restores and transforms our people.”⁶ This new vision of PARS saw a renewed drive to place the whanau at the forefront of services for people that come in contact with the criminal justice system. Furthermore, it recognised the indigenous rights of Māori as tangata whenua. In 2020 changes to the constitution of PARS were approved, which resulted in the creation of a new strategic plan. This strategic plan sought to strengthen “the cultural, social, economic and political imperatives of whanau.”⁷

⁴ “Te Whakapapa o Te Pā,” Te Pā, accessed February 18, 2024. <https://tepaa.nz/te-whakapapa/>

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid.



Photograph of Te Pās' vision and goals for the future. Taken by author, December 20, 2023.

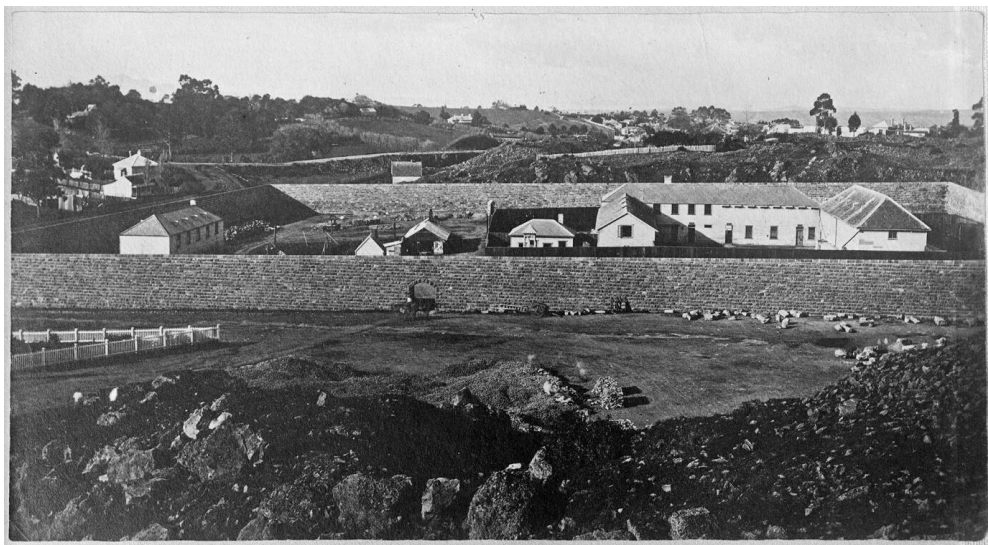
In May 2022 Te Pā was officially launched at Te Noho Kotahitanga Marae. Te Pā signifies the shift from dominant euro-centric discourses around penal reform, to acknowledging the need for practices centred on kaupapa Māori. Te Pa offers a range of services for those incarcerated, their families and communities.

Te Pā housing services include; providing long-term sustainable housing to those that have been released from prison and their families. Education services involve providing holistic, wrap-around services that serve to further the goals and aspirations of the person. The employment services worked with the released person to help them achieve sustainable employment. Te Pā also provides a child travel fund, that helps families of inmates visit them in prison, to encourage strong familial ties.

Whilst Te Pā shares similar features to many of the previous prison reform attempts, its recognition of Māori as tangata whenua represents a new shift in penal reform. As we continue to move through the 21st century, penal reform and services offered to those incarcerated, are expected to take on a more well-rounded approach. Moving from a euro-centric, religious focused approach into one that is more aligned with the multi-faceted nature of Aotearoa New Zealand.

In 2011 a new Mount Eden Prison was constructed. Replacing the dark, dingy and drab prison that had stood for over a hundred years, this new state of the art facility was seen to mark a transition from old penal policies. However, this shift has yet to be realised. Although prison reform has changed significantly from that of the 1800's, many of the same issues are still a point of focus. Unfavourable conditions, lack of support for inmates and disregard for their human rights, continue to plague prisons in Aotearoa New Zealand.

The work conducted by those early individuals and organisations have laid the groundwork for future penal reform movements. Although much has changed since the opening of Mount Eden Prison, the work that continues to be done by these individuals is still needed. By understanding these past penal reform attempts, it helps us to better understand how far we have come and how far we must go. Our history can reveal much of our own future.



Winkelman, Henry. Photograph of Mount Eden Prison taken in 1876. *Auckland Libraries Heritage Collections*, 1-W0236.

Bibliography

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