

James P. Organ, the ‘Irish System’ and the Origins of Parole

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Summary: In 1854, Walter Crofton introduced what became known as the Irish system in the governance of Convict Prisons in Ireland and management of convicts serving penal servitude sentences. In the later stages of their sentences, convicts who had met the requisite standards of behaviour were transferred to ‘Intermediate’ prisons. These institutions provided pre-release education and training, tested the prisoners by way of temporary, task-centred release and provided supervision when inmates were granted full release to take up employment. James Patrick Organ, a Dublin adult education teacher, was appointed as lecturer and Inspector of Released Convicts in 1855 at Smithfield and Lusk Prisons. He devised the new Intermediate system, and championed new ways of providing training and work placements as well as individual support and supervision in the community. The Irish system, especially the Intermediate Prisons, preparation for release and post-custody supervision elements, was extremely successful and lauded internationally. This paper provides an overview of the political and social context within which the Irish system developed and the contributions made by key players. It is timely that on the 150th anniversary of James Organ’s death, we look back at the innovation of the 1850s, remember the learning and practice still relevant today and acknowledge Organ’s remarkable legacy.

Keywords: Prison, punishment, reform, parole, criminal justice, resettlement, post-release supervision, rehabilitation, individualisation, criminology, Ireland, Irish system.

Background

From the early 19th century in Great Britain there was a drive for prison reform, informed by the work of John Howard, Jeremy Bentham and others as well as the persistent horrors and injustice of the prisons and the failure of the transportation system (Henriques, 1972). Beccaria’s argument that the ‘end of punishment is no other, than to prevent the criminal from doing further injury to society, and to prevent others committing the like offence’

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(cited in McConville, 1981: 81) was influential, as were the moral reclamation aspirations of the religious evangelists (Rogers, 2016).

In England, the 1830s proved to be a time of significant change in penal policy and approach. William Crawford, an Inspector of Prisons, was commissioned to visit and report on new penitentiary systems in America: the separate system in Philadelphia and the silent system in Auburn, New York in particular (Crawford, 1839). Both systems implemented a process described as 'moral punishment' wherein the individual would reflect on the error of their ways under moral and religious instruction. The separate system isolated prisoners in individual cells, while the silent system in Auburn maintained isolation by rules and punishment. Crawford advocated and championed the use of the separate system in English prisons (Henriques, 1972).

With the support of Whitworth Russell and Joshua Jebb, Pentonville was opened as a model prison in 1842 with one cell for each prisoner. Convicts bound for transportation were to be subjected to 18 months' isolated 'reformatory treatment', which, in the words of Crawford on the American system, 'induces habitual submission' (Irish University Press (IUP), 1970: 17–18). It was intended that, the prisoners, on arrival in Australia, would be more subservient to authority and discipline (Carroll-Burke, 2000: 54). In his role as Commissioner at Pentonville, and Director of Convict Prisons from 1850, Joshua Jebb was pragmatic and politically sensitive (McConville, 1981: 217). He evolved his own version of the separate system based on a mark and classification scheme¹ to reward compliance with privileges. The separate system and the Pentonville model became the new standard for Convict Prisons in the United Kingdom. Mountjoy Prison in Dublin, based on the design of Pentonville, opened in 1850 as the second model Convict Prison.

Just as Mountjoy Prison was opening, however, a major change was under way in sentencing, punishment and prisons. Transportation had been a favoured form of sentencing for criminals from the early 17th century onwards (Maxwell-Stewart, 2010). Rapidly expanding after the Transportation Act 1718, transportation for seven years or more was an alternative to hanging and used increasingly as capital punishment declined. Convicts were transported to the colonies in the Americas and the Caribbean, and from 1787 to Australia, to serve their sentences (Shaw, 1966). It was, initially, a relatively cheap way of removing undesirables from society and providing labour in the colonies.

¹ The mark system was developed by Alexander Maconochie in the 1840s at the notorious Norfolk Island penal Colony in Australia. Marks were earned for good conduct, hard work and study, and could be denied or lost for indolence or misbehaviour (Clay, 2001).

However, there were concerns during the 1830s that transportation was corrupting the colonies and no longer a deterrent to crime at home. As result of the graphic and persuasive Molesworth Report in 1838 describing maltreatment of the convicts, moral corruption of the Australian colonies and the high costs involved in the use of transportation, public opinion began to shift in favour of halting it. In addition, the presence of convicts was making it difficult to promote the government's policy of assisted free working-class immigration (Maxwell-Stewart, 2010). With the beginning of the Australian gold rush in 1851, gold-seekers from around the world poured in, changing the course of Australian history. By 1853, only Western Australia continued to receive a small number of convicts (McConville, 1981: 197).

As transportation options reduced in the late 1840s, Joshua Jebb, using his experience in the Royal Engineers, promoted the use of convict labour on public works such as fortifications and harbours in his English Convict Prison system after the initial period of separate confinement. Marks achieved for good conduct merited reduced work and better conditions. Mitigation of sentence, or early release, was permitted only in exceptional circumstances.

In the absence of transportation as an outlet for convict population and growing numbers, the government was obliged to act. The Penal Servitude Act 1853 (16 & 17 Vict, c.99) substituted sentences of penal servitude in home (UK) prisons for terms of transportation to Australia, and enabled convicts to be released part way through their sentence on a 'conditional licence' similar to the 'ticket of leave' system in Australia (Newman, 2005). The conditional licence was not officially applied in Ireland until 1856. The Penal Servitude Act 1857² (20 & 21 Vict c.3) effectively ended transportation to Australia.

The Irish convict system

The work of John Howard (1772: 203–7) and Jeremiah Fitzpatrick (MacDonagh, 1981) documented the corrupt and abject state of Irish prisons in the late 18th century. There were fitful attempts at reform in response. The first major change came with the Prisons Act 1826 (7 Geo IV, c.74), which consolidated the laws on prisons in Ireland, incorporated the results of investigations and introduced a board of superintendence to oversee the conduct of prisons. It introduced a 'prison system', although almost all prisons remained under local management.

Through the 1840s, Irish prisons' problems echoed many of those in the English system but they also had their own unique crises. The Great Famine of

² <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/Vict/20-21/3/enacted>

1845–50 resulted in social chaos and Convict Prison overcrowding due to rapid increase in the number of prisoners sentenced to transportation. In addition, Australian colonies complained that Irish prisoners received were unfit for work and 'rebellious' (Carroll-Burke, 2000: 59–60). The need for a new, well-ordered convict depot in Ireland led to the construction of Mountjoy Prison in Dublin, the second model prison based on the design of Pentonville Prison. However, the early years of Mountjoy Prison did not go well.

In 1853, the Irish government, in response to an application for additional prison accommodation, was advised to conduct an inquiry on future needs. The Lord Lieutenant appointed Captain Walter Crofton, with C.R. Knight, H.R. Harness and J. Corry Connellan, as Commissioners to conduct it. Their first brief report was completed in December 1853, with follow-up reports during 1854 (Commissioners' Reports, 1854).

The Convict Prisons (Ireland) Act³ quickly followed in August 1854. It was the most important prison reform in Ireland since the ill-fated 1826 Act. It established Convict Prisons for prisoners sentenced to penal servitude, created Directors of the Convict Prisons for Ireland and assigned them wide-ranging authority and powers (Von Holtzendorff, 1860: 24–34). In his commentary, Franz Von Holtzendorff, an eminent German and international jurist, highlighted the independence of the Irish convict system from the English system and applauded the centralisation of the executive administration (p. 24). Walter Crofton was appointed chairman, with John Lentaigne and Captain E.S. Whitty as directors, of the Convict Prisons for Ireland.

Captain Walter Crofton was a scion of a notable English military family with significant land interests in Ireland. After retiring from his military career, he had returned to Wiltshire as a county magistrate. He was chairman of the Board of Directors of Convict Prisons for Ireland between 1854 and 1862. There is little doubt that his innovations in Ireland were influenced by developments in Europe. Bavaria had introduced supervision of released convicts as early as 1812. Obermaier and Mittermaier in Germany, Ducpétiaux in Belgium and Montesinos in Spain had been seeking to humanise and liberalise prison regimes on reformatory principles from the 1830s (Hoefer, 1938; Lithner, 1968; Vanhulle, 2010). The first International Penitentiary Congress was held in Frankfurt am Main in 1846, attended by leading experts from Belgium, England, France and Germany. It was an opportunity to exchange ideas and views, and established the Congress series that followed.

³ <http://www.irishstatutebook.ie/eli/1854/act/76/enacted/en/print.html>

As chairman of the Directors of Convict Prisons, Walter Crofton came to the post with a vision (ARDCPI, 1854: 8–22) and quickly set to work on his ‘Irish system’ (Von Holtzendorff, 1860; Carpenter, 1872; Dooley, 1981), building on the English experience and his own considerations. In Jebb’s English system, convicts spent up to 18 months in the first penal stage in separate confinement. This was followed by a second stage in public works labour. There, progress and reward for compliance earned a better regime, increase in gratuity and easier work through a mark system.

Crofton, in his Irish system, reduced the first penal stage of separate confinement to no more than nine months (ARDCPI, 1854). High rates of mental distress and breakdown among prisoners in the more consistently enforced separate system in Pentonville and Mountjoy Prisons had become a matter of serious concern (Cox and Marland, 2018).

The key differences between the Irish and the English Convict Prisons systems were the introduction in Ireland of an intermediate stage preparing convicts for release and post-release supervision in employment.

Crofton and Jebb, following Maconochie’s work on Norfolk Island (Clay, 2001), both used a mark system to visibly incentivise and reward good behaviour during the second stage of prison. The system was transparent and, in most cases, focused the convicts’ attention on progression and compliance.

During the public works labour, Crofton permitted convicts to achieve promotion to Intermediate Prisons in preparation for release. His second stage was said to be more demanding and severe than that implemented by Jebb in England.

To achieve the new intermediate stage in Ireland, convicts had to work hard to achieve sufficient marks to move up through a series of classifications to merit promotion (Carpenter, 1872: 6ff.). In Jebb’s model, marks were rewarded by an easier regime alone.

In the third, intermediate, stage, convicts were no longer subject to the rigid mark system. They were held in small groups with minimal supervision, and expected to co-operate in their own amendment. The officers worked with the convicts and were not solely custodians. They were expected to engage with their charges (Carpenter, 1872: 10ff.). Convicts were given additional training along with tests of their readiness, including unsupervised errands in the community.

Two Intermediate Prisons were established, at Smithfield and Lusk (ARDCPI, 1856). Smithfield had been an old prison opened in 1801 and was in a poor state. Lusk was set up by enclosing a part of the Lusk Commons and

installing two large temporary iron huts with capacity for 50 prisoners each. Smithfield held tradesmen and older and less able prisoners, while Lusk held prisoners capable of agricultural work. Two other proposed centres in Cork were not continued (Carpenter, 1864; Von Holtzendorff, 1860).

From the beginning, Crofton emphasised the importance of education in reformation of the criminal and ensured the engagement of capable head schoolmasters (Carroll-Burke, 2000: 161ff.) in the Convict Prisons. He particularly advocated the value of employment on release (ARDCPI, 1854: 20–1). In the final stage, from 1856, convicts with employment were permitted 'ticket-of-leave' early release, supervised in Dublin by James Organ, the lecturer at Smithfield Prison. Outside of Dublin, local police supervised the conditional release (Dooley, 1981).

Crofton and Jebb differed aggressively on the value of supervised conditional release. Jebb, as Director of the English Convict Prisons, had viewed himself and his new English Convict System as the model for others, and did not easily accept question or challenge. He viewed Crofton and the public lauding of his Irish system with great disdain, saying there was no such thing as an Irish system, but a bowdlerising of his system (Chichester, 1863; IUP, 1970).

In Jebb's opinion, supervision stigmatised the released convict and made him a second-class citizen. He strongly disapproved of the practice. As the Irish system received praise and recognition at home and internationally, Jebb's criticism became both personal and unrelenting in official reports, papers and publications (IUP, 1970; Dooley, 1981: 91–3). He attributed the perceived success in Ireland to a lenient Irish attitude to criminals, the ease of finding work, a high level of emigration, miscalculation and the personal and charismatic influence of James Organ. The criticisms were challenged and disputed by the Irish authorities and others (IUP, 1970; Chichester, 1863; Carpenter, 1864: 71–80; Von Holtzendorff, 1860). Despite Jebb's virulent opposition, there is no doubt that the Irish system's influence on penal philosophy was long-lasting (Dooley, 1981: 93).

Education and training for release

In their first annual report, Crofton and his fellow Directors cited 'ignorance and destitution' as the principal causes of crime in Ireland and recommended that, in view of the 'inefficient state of the educational departments of the Convict Depots', the prison schools should be placed under the inspection of the National Board of Education (ARDCPI, 1854: 5). In addition, they

appointed head schoolmasters with 'great experience in *training* as well as *teaching* amongst the class of persons from which the criminals may be expected to emanate' (ARDCPI, 1854: 6; emphasis in original).

In detailed planning outlined in the first report, the Directors highlighted measures in operation in Convict Prisons in England for 'the establishment of habits of steady industry, and in most cases, a determination to lead an honest life, and a desire to obtain a respectable position in society' (ARDCPI, 1854: 19). They did not see difficulty in attaining those objectives in Ireland, where 'the character of the Irish convict is in very many cases, less seriously depraved, their crimes having been produced, in some measure, by extreme distress and the want of industrial employment' (ARDCPI, 1854: 20).

In their second annual report, the Directors elaborated on the purpose and activities in the Intermediate Prisons at Smithfield and Lusk, and reported early results from their overall regime changes. 'A difference in their [convicts attending school] conduct is already apparent; they are more orderly and obedient to the rules, and make efforts to exercise that self-command, the want of which has so often led them into crime' (ARDCPI, 1855: 6). In addition, the Directors emphasised that '[the] subject that on which we have felt great anxiety and to which we alluded as of the utmost importance in our last report, is the employment of the well-disposed convict on discharge'.

To address and support that objective, the Directors decided that 'tickets of licence' would be issued to prisoners of eligible character and length of imprisonment (ARDCPI, 1855: 13). Smithfield prison was designated for 'prisoners who, from length of service and good conduct, are considered worthy of consideration for discharge on tickets of licence'. Their 'reformation and eligibility will be here further tested, and an accurate register kept of those who are offered employment, where they go, and every particular that it is possible to obtain; thus enabling us, as we consider, not only to weigh our recommendations, but also to trace the career of the prisoner after he has left'. In a further development, they announced the engagement of 'Mr. Organ, a gentleman highly recommended by the National Board' to 'give such lectures and lessons as shall be practically useful to the prisoners' (ARDCPI, 1855: 17).

James Organ

James Patrick Organ was born about 1823 to a poor Catholic family at 3 Walls Lane (now part of Carman's Hall) in the Liberties area of Dublin. At the time, Walls Lane was already an impoverished tenement area with some

limited, small-scale businesses. Little is known of Organ's early years, though he was clearly an assiduous student in the Model School and had become well known in adult education in Dublin by the 1850s (Organ, 1855).

In 1855, *A Plea for the Education of the Working Classes through the Medium of Evening Schools and Educational Mechanics' Institutes* was published anonymously by 'a late pupil of the model schools' (Organ, 1855). James Organ later acknowledged himself as the author (Organ, 1865). In the book, Organ expounds many of the principles that were to underpin his later work as lecturer in the Intermediate Prisons:

by educating the adult, and inculcating in his breast the principles of morality and industry, you save him from the wretched misery and disgrace of the felon's dungeon and the pauper's home. (Organ, 1855: 9)

teachers appointed to the management of Evening Schools, should divest themselves of that imperative tone of voice and set aside the airs that so frequently mark the man of petty authority ... It behoves every teacher to gain ... on the affections of his pupils by his kindness and affability. (16)

No teacher but one ignorant of human character will attempt to exact obedience from adults by force. (17)

Prior to his appointment in February 1856 as lecturer in Smithfield Prison, he had been 'superintendent of the adult evening schools in Dublin' (House of Lords, 1863: 372). In the introduction to his book of lectures (Organ, 1858: v) he said that 'During the twelve years before the date of my appointment ... I had been constantly engaged as a teacher of adults.'

Already by their third annual report, and after only his first year in Smithfield, the Directors were praising his work. 'We cannot express our sense of the value of Mr. Organ's services too highly, his untiring energy and devotion to his duties, fully entitle him to the highest commendation' (ARDCPI, 1856: 14). In that same report, Organ provided his own 43-page Lecturer's Report from 'Smithfield Institution for Exemplary Prisoners' (ARDCPI, 1856: 79-121). In it, he described his task as 'the development of their [convicts'] minds, and to give them matter for thought, through the medium of useful and interesting lectures suited to their capacities' (ARDCPI, 1856: 80).

In his 1857 report, Organ outlines how, in his view, 'the prison teacher should act as the parent and the friend as well as the teacher' (ARDCPI, 1857: 121).

'The prison teacher must not only teach – he must convince ... Advice, accompanied by sympathy, has a great effect even on the incorrigible prisoner, if prudently and wisely given ... We should not expect the effect all at once, but continue the medicine at proper intervals, and in proper doses, and the results will soon manifest themselves' (ARDCPI, 1857: 122).

From the beginning, James Organ emphasised that his evening lectures to the prisoners were the most important 'phases in the system of educational and moral training pursued in Smithfield' (ARDCPI, 1857: 124ff.). In his reports, he listed the diverse range of themes and topics including temperance, conduct towards superiors, Canada, disease and longevity of plants, emigration, air and water. There were daily lectures in Smithfield and Lusk Prisons followed by a competitive examination each Friday (Von Holtzendorff, 1860)

His advice to lecturers addressing prisoners was that they should 'talk to them, rather than at them' and that he had 'found when once we had got to understand each other, my audience and myself never differed in our appreciation of the subject, or in a community of interest and feeling' (Organ, 1858: viii; emphasis in original).

James Organ's lectures were 'to explain common things in plain and simple language'. He sought 'not to speak down to the level of intellect of my audience, but to draw on them day by day, until they came up to the level of ordinary capacity'. His chief aim was, 'to arrive at the mind, by exciting the curiosity; to arrive at the heart, by showing the men that we all feel a desire in common to receive those who have erred from the path of rectitude; and, having thus identified myself with my audience, I have been enabled to individualize them; and thus ... I have been successful in measuring the reliance which could be placed upon the appearances of reformation evinced' (ARDCPI, 1856: 87).

Speaking on 'moral subjects' or morality, he was careful not to 'infringe upon the duties of their respective chaplains' (ARDCPI, 1856: 82). Organ particularly acknowledged, in keeping with mainstream Victorian views, that religion 'should form the basis of reformation' and was an 'all-powerful agent' when brought to bear on the heart of a ticket-of-leave/licence man.

Individualisation

James Organ stressed that 'the importance of individualisation of prisoners cannot be overrated'. In his view, 'To deal with them in the mass would be to commit a grievous error, and to act unjustly both towards the prisoner and the

public.' He was sufficiently realistic to understand that he could be deceived but believed that, in most cases, he could 'arrive at the natural character of the prisoner'. Without individualisation, 'all efforts at reformation ... must of necessity, lose half their effects' (ARDCPI, 1857: 129). Day after day, in the workshop or in the field, in the prison and in the outside world, James Organ sought, in his own words, to 'observe the ways of the prisoners, hear their tales, listen to their grievances and become acquainted with their hopes and fears', to obtain an intimate knowledge of them and to use that to assist and support them (ARDCPI, 1857: 130). In this, he highlighted the value of obedience and self-reliance inculcated by training in the intermediate stage (ARDCPI, 1857: 131).

James Organ's approach and practice anticipated Saleilles's *The Individualization of Punishment* over 50 years before its English-language publication in 1911, and is a remarkable landmark particularly worthy of note in penal history (Finnane, 2002).

Employment and supervision

James Organ, from his commencement in the Intermediate Prisons at Smithfield and at Lusk, undertook a 'self-imposed duty' to 'endeavour to secure employment for the men before they were permitted to leave the institution' (ARDCPI, 1856: 87). He was concerned, however, that because they were not 'first-class tradesmen', earnings were low, and labourers unaccustomed – having been in prison – to hard labour could not readily compete with more competent men. He advocated they not be released until they were as 'acquainted with their trades' as 'ordinary' men (ARDCPI, 1856: 84).

Obtaining work for released convicts was 'a labour of great difficulty' for Organ (ARDCPI, 1856). On his appointment, he compiled a list of possible employers in the county of Dublin and set out to see them, persevering in the face of many early refusals. On securing employment for a prisoner, he visited both prisoner and employer fortnightly, preferring to visit prisoners at their own home. Slowly, he built up a body of employers who supported him and encouraged others. He reported that 'in many cases they [prisoners] take a greater interest in their employment than ordinary workmen do, because they know that the employers have taken them out of prison, and thrown ... a cloak of protection over them' (Carpenter, 1864: 108). In his view, 'employers invariably prefer the ticket-of-leave men to convicts who are unconditionally discharged because they are under more control' (Carpenter, 1864: 110). In

his 1856 report, Organ was already able to quote employers pleased and satisfied with men recommended by him (ARDCPI, 1856: 85).

During 1856, 112 men were released on tickets of licence, 41 in Dublin. James Organ, from his home at Mespil Cottages, 'carried out a system of weekly visitation of every man employed from the institution in Dublin, and within a circuit of twenty miles' (ARDCPI, 1856: 83). In addition, he established a loan fund that featured 'ticket-of-leave men becoming security for each other'. The fund was flourishing and approved by the government registrar (p. 84) in December 1856 (ARDCPI, 1856: 83).

In the following years, Organ provided copious and detailed annual reports. In 1857, he described the process of how 159 men were released on tickets of licence. In the Dublin area, he personally supervised 61 of these men in employment, on whom he provided twice-monthly reports. Local constabulary reported monthly on men outside the Dublin area (ARDCPI, 1857: 120ff.).

Emigration

Baron Von Hotzendorff, in his review of the Irish system (Von Holtzendorff, 1860), noted how in James Organ's lectures, emigration featured prominently in reference to the future life of the convict. Voluntary emigration to a colony was a desirable termination of imprisonment, saving the convict from a hard struggle at home for a livelihood. The lectures on emigration must have been expected to assist in that choice, as would the lectures on geography and the English colonies in Canada, Australia, and the Cape of Good Hope – each presenting prospects of success to the convict-emigrant (Von Hotzendorff, 1860: 127).

The Directors in their 1857 Report (ARDCPI, 1857: 19ff.) unambiguously stated that 'we cannot too highly prize, as an important element of reformation, the voluntary emigration of the well-disposed criminals when free, to lands where labour is scarce, or advocate too strongly its beneficial effects'. Nevertheless, they appreciated that many remained in Ireland and that the numbers under supervision 'induce the most satisfactory conclusions ... employers of high respectability after long experience, retaining those in their situations, and still offering work to others of the same class, is the strongest and perhaps the most satisfactory testimony we can adduce for the system' (ARDCPI, 1857: 19).

Compliance

Convicts who had passed through the testing Intermediate Prisons system were, as described, supervised in the Dublin area by James Organ as the Inspector of Discharged Convicts. Outside Dublin released convicts were supervised by local police. In their 1859 report, the Directors said that between March 1856 and March 1860, 1250 convicts were conditionally released. Only 77 of these had their licences revoked and of those, 28 were for cases of irregularity, not criminal reasons. 828 convicts were released unconditionally during the same period, and only 20 been recommitted to government prisons (ARDCPI, 1859: 7–8).

James Organ believed that the state had saved £30,000 over those early years by the intermediate system, society had been protected, and visitation and supervision had shown the criminally minded that it was impossible to follow crime as a profession (ARDCPI, 1859: 90). In 1862, 12 convicts had their licences revoked, nine for non-observance of supervision regulations (ARDCPI, 1862: 7).

Recognition and acknowledgement

Walter Crofton was the Director of the Irish convict system and attracted praise and appreciation, despite trenchant opposition, for his radical restructuring of the system and the attendant positive results. James Organ, through his practical work and concrete results, was also hailed for his achievements. Such was the success of the Irish system in practice and his personal commitment that Organ had the respect and patronage of the Lord Lieutenant of Ireland, Lord George Howard, 7th Earl of Carlisle, who visited Smithfield Prison many times. In 1861 Prince Albert, consort of Queen Victoria, visited, endorsing the work of the Irish Intermediate Prison System and James Organ (Davenport-Hill and Davenport-Hill, 1878, 414–15). Many jurists and reformers followed in his footsteps. Following the death of Lord Carlisle in 1864, James Organ published an address delivered at the prison eulogising his patron, 'to whom the success of the Irish Convict System owes much' (Organ, 1865: 36).

In 1856, Matthew Davenport Hill, a noted jurist and penologist, visited the Irish Convict Prisons to learn more of the reported success of the innovations in Ireland. He was so impressed that he regarded his paper for the 1857 Social Science Congress as 'by the far the most important' he had written (Davenport-Hill and Davenport-Hill, 1878: 199): 'in my humble judgement,

the Board of Directors of the Irish Convict Prisons have practically solved the problem which has so long perplexed our Government and our Legislature – *What shall we do with our Convicts?*’ (quoted in Carpenter, 1864: 23).

The 1850s and 1860s was a time of particular enquiry and innovation by social reformers in Victorian England. The National Association for the Promotion of Social Science (NAPSS), often known as the Social Science Association, was founded in 1857 by Lord Brougham to pursue and promote issues in public health, industrial relations, penal reform and female education. The annual meeting of the association featured presentations on jurisprudence, punishment and reformation.

Sir Walter Crofton and James Organ were active members and contributors. They outlined the objectives and achievements of the Irish convict system on many occasions and addressed the challenges and critiques. In 1861, for example, Crofton explained that a convict’s liberty in England and Ireland under the 1857 Act was conditional but ‘in Ireland the conditions indorsed [sic] on the licence mean something. They are in all cases strictly enforced’ (*Transactions of The National Association for the Promotion of Social Science* (TNAPSS), 1862: 422). He was strongly convinced of the effectiveness of post-custody supervision of convicts and firmly defended its purposefulness and implementation by James Organ and the police.

James Organ also stated his case. In 1864 he presented a paper at the York Meeting on ‘Convicts without the Prison’ in which he described the detail of his supervision and his personal conviction that ‘the great majority of convicts can be amended and reformed’ (TNAPSS, 1865: 315).

In addition to their own presentations at meetings, Crofton and Organ’s work was repeatedly championed and supported by social reformers and jurists including Matthew Davenport Hill, Mary Carpenter and Baron Von Holtzendorff (TNAPSS, 1857–1870).

International recognition

In 1863, Gaylord Hubbell, Warden of New York’s Sing Sing Prison, visited to examine the Irish system and, on his return to America, recommended its adoption (Champion, 2005: 204). Franklin Sanborn, in 1865, published his special report to the Massachusetts Board of Charities on Prisons and Prison Discipline. Sanborn was most impressed by the efficacy and success of the Irish system and praised James Organ as a man ‘full of zeal, benevolence and intelligence’ for his ‘discourses on subjects calculated to make the prisoners

thinking beings' and for his 'judiciously and praiseworthy exercised supervision' of discharged convicts (Sanborn, 1865: 24–30).

Sanborn championed the work of Crofton and Organ to the American penal reformers of the time, including E.C. Wines and Zebulon Brockway, founder of Elmira Reformatory based on the Irish system. E.C. Wines convened the first American Prison Congress in 1870 in Cincinnati, where the declaration of principles advocated a reformatory approach, classification of prisoners after the Irish system, individualisation and social training of prisoners (Wines, 1871). 'The most valuable parts of the Irish Prison system – the more strictly penal stage of separate imprisonment, the reformatory stage of progressive classification, and the probationary stage of natural training – are believed to be as applicable to one country as to another – to the United States as to Ireland' (quoted in Dooley, 1981: 94). While cautious of the ticket-of-leave system, Sanborn saw no difference between it and the new United States probation system as, in both, prisoners could be returned for breaking laws or keeping bad company (Dooley, 1981: 95). Developments thereafter included supervised parole, also based on the Irish system.

James Organ's work at Smithfield and Lusk was the forerunner of the American parole system and is widely acknowledged as such in American penal history (e.g. Barnes and Teeters, 1951: 780–1).

Demise of the Irish system

It is ironic that as the Irish system gained recognition in America and internationally, it was coming to a close at home. During the 1850s, it had been subject to a barrage of political and other criticism led by Joshua Jebb (Chichester, 1863; IUP, 1970), as cited earlier. In 1862, Walter Crofton retired, due to ill-health, as a Director of the Convict Prisons for Ireland. The prison population had fallen. In 1854 there were 4278 convicts in the Irish prisons; in 1862, only 1314. There was no longer pressure on prison places.

In addition, the ticket-of-leave system in England and Wales had been targeted for attack in the 'garrotting crises' of the mid-1850s and early 1860s by newspapers blaming an increased fear of crime and assaults in England and Wales on released ticket-of-leave men (Sindall, 1990). Public opinion increasingly believed that prisoners should be broken by a tough regime and punished (Sindall, 1990).

The Earl of Carnarvon chaired a House of Lords Select Committee in 1863. Its report stressed the importance of punishment over reformation. Many of

its recommendations were included in the Penal Servitude Act 1864 and the Prisons Act 1865 (Report 1863). Sir Edmund du Cane, appointed Assistant Director of Prisons in 1863 and Director in 1870, single-mindedly championed this severe and punitive approach, hastening the discontinuation of the Irish system in Ireland over the following years.

In 1885 Sir Walter Crofton wrote to the Prison Congress at Rome:

I wish it to be known at the Congress that I have had nothing to do with the Irish prisons for many years, and that I am entirely opposed to the system pursued by the present Directors. The evils of that system are shown in the Report of the enquiry recently made by the Royal Commission. (quoted in Tallack, 1896: 166–7)

Notwithstanding the hostile political climate and increasingly restrictive and punitive legislation, James Organ continued in his duties as lecturer and Inspector of Discharged Convicts. In his 1867 Report, his objective is 'to teach the men to *think*, and when they have learned to do so to give them what I consider the best food for thought' (emphasis in original). He continued:

by the growing confidence that employers repose in my men, and the increasing demand for their labour ... I can now say that after a period of thirteen years practical, and by no means unimportant experience, that the prejudices of the public against the convicts are everyday diminishing ... no well-disposed prisoner ... can plead want of honest employment as an excuse for the pursuit of a life of crime. (ARDCPI, 1867: 51)

In the 1869 ARDCPI (1870: 7), the Directors acknowledged the death of 'James P. Organ, Inspector of discharged Convicts in the Dublin District'. 'As the passing of the Habitual Criminal Act 1869, makes considerable changes to the supervision of released convicts ... it was considered unnecessary to appoint an officer to the post which Mr. Organ had held.' The report went on to say that 'to Mr. Organ much of the success of the Intermediate phase of the Irish Convict system, in its early days, was due'. James Organ's grave at Glasnevin Cemetery is in the Garden Section (Fitzpatrick, 1900: 114–15), but is no longer marked.

His unexpected and premature death, on 11 November 1869, at the age of 46, was a distinct loss to the reformatory system. While Walter Crofton was the innovator in policy and political terms, James Organ was the person on

the ground, providing concrete guidance and practical support in the reformation, supervision and settlement of ex-convicts in the community. He led the way and provided the model for the development of parole, particularly in the United States.

By the 1940s, little remained in Ireland of the 'Irish system' apart from the class or prisoner grade names (D83222, 1946: 126–7). All trace of the Crofton and Organ pre-release preparation and testing for penal servitude prisoners had gone. It is a sad and disappointing reflection that, while the Irish system is remembered in American penal history, James Organ's groundbreaking endeavour is unknown and unheralded in Ireland. In this year, the 150th anniversary of his death, it is fitting that we recall and acknowledge his achievements as the world's first parole officer (Inspector of Discharged Convicts) and forerunner of the Probation Service and its work.

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