

Annual Report for 2008-2009

By Peter Stanford, Director of the Trust

Lord Longford was not a man who always took the most orthodox approach to the issues he campaigned on throughout his long life. Not always may indeed be understating it. He was a great one for innovation, forever trying new approaches and avenues. It is what led him to set up two charities – New Bridge in 1956, as the first voluntary organisation to work with (rather than for) newly-released prisoners, and New Horizon in 1968, a pioneering attempt to address the needs of young homeless people on the streets of London long before their presence became a political hot potato.

So the Longford trustees felt there were plenty of precedents for their own modest attempt to innovate with the 2008 Longford Lecture. With prison overcrowding, rocketing recidivism rates and a criminal justice system bursting at the seams high on the political agenda and national worry-list, the trustees took the view that this was the year to stage a debate where those dealing with these issues every day would be invited to take a step back and reflect on how things might be done better.

The panel of four speakers who gathered at Church House, Westminster, on Wednesday November 12 couldn't have been more distinguished: Sir Ian Blair, the Metropolitan Police Commissioner, speaking in public for the first time since news of his resignation had rocked the political world; Phil Wheatley, director-general of the National Offender Management Service (which brings together prisons and probation); Baroness Helena Kennedy QC, the distinguished human rights' lawyer; and (more innovation) Jason Warr, one of the trust's Longford Scholars. Jason is an ex-prisoner who had been supported by the trust through his degree at the London School of Economics and who was now at Cambridge doing a PhD in criminology.

Jon Snow, as ever, did the honours at chair and our valued sponsors, the Independent, once again made the whole evening possible. It was an engrossing and enlightening session, enjoyed by an audience of 450.

There was also the presentation by Lady Antonia Fraser, Lord Longford's eldest daughter, of the annual Longford Prize, organized in association with the Prison Reform Trust. The judges had awarded it to HMP Grendon, commended for its therapeutic, humane and safe regime which offers a beacon of hope in the prison service nationally.

2008-2009 has been another year of growth for the trust with our Longford Scholarships programme in the forefront of our efforts to tackle the blight of reoffending by ex-prisoners. By the summer of 2009, five years after launching the programme with just two scholars, we have supported a total of 45 young ex-offenders with grants and mentoring as they have continued their rehabilitation by studying for degrees. Eighteen are still at university, 15 have received degrees, and four have left without completing but have taken jobs they wouldn't have got without their studies. Our 'failure' rate is 17.5 per cent – though I would argue that the experience of going to university, however short-lived, is always beneficial. If you compare that 17.5 per cent against the reoffending rates for young prisoners, which stand at between 60 and 80 per cent depending on what measure you use, our programme is undeniably making a difference.

I am particularly indebted to Tom Pakenham for his hard work on this scheme. And in 2009, with the help of the Monument Trust, we were able to appoint a scholarships' manager to extend the reach of this programme. Long-time supporters of the scheme, the Rank Foundation, remain stalwarts of the programme, as do our band of dedicated volunteer mentors.

My thanks go to all our trustees and patrons for their enthusiasm and support for this still young charity; to the Independent newspaper and in particular its managing director, Ivan Fallon; to Gracia McGrath OBE of Chance UK for her work in training our mentors; to Nat and Hannah Billington for their on-going work on improving our website; to my colleagues in administering the trust, Magdalen Evans, Jill Dale and Matt McGinn; to Countess Dominique de Borchgrave for her work on our Patrick Pakenham Educational Awards; and to the following major benefactors during the period under review – Lord Archer, David Astor CBE, Bridgewater Associates Inc, Shirley Conran, Dolly Costopoulos,

Harriet Cullen, Lady Antonia Fraser, Orlando Fraser, Jefferies International Ltd, the trustees of the late Lord Parmoor and the University of Westminster.