

# **Supervising Offenders in the Community**

**Maurice Vanstone**

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## **Book review by Sally Ramage**

This book is based on a doctoral thesis. It consists of 8 chapters, these being:

1. The Origins of the Probation Service: the Orthodox Accounts
2. The 'Crusade' begins: the Origins of the Probation Service Revisited
3. Early Practice: Redemption, Pledges and Terrible Warnings
4. From Awakening the Conscience to Providing Insights
5. Folk Theories, Practice and the Heyday of Treatment
6. The Emergence of Doubt: the Non-Treatment Paradigm and Alternative Therapy
7. The Rise to Dominance of Evidence-Based Practice
8. Conclusion: Back to where we started.

This book pieces together the history of the probation service in the United Kingdom, from its underside. In Chapter 1, Maurice Vanstone states that the case *Commonwealth v Chase* is the earliest discussion of the subject of probation. He discusses the Church of England Temperance Society, which was founded in 1862. By 1906, a movement calling for probation officers was formed- The Howard Association- and the probation system was founded in 1907.

Chapter 2 tells us that probation in the Victorian Penal System of 1865-1895, brought tariffs of sanctions. By the year 1908, many persons were treated, including inebriated women, termed "criminal inebriates", who were detained for life out of respect for the "purity" of the streets and "public morality and public decency".

In Chapter 3, Maurice Vanstone explains how the probation system dealt with convicts. Holmes (1902) believed in the hereditary nature of crime, by 1915 he had changed his attitude, and thoughts to include the concept that criminality could be learnt by example, as well as being hereditary. By this time, most probation officers were former police officers. In 1913 there was published a journal for the National Association of Probation Officers, illustrating the professionalism that was beginning to take place in the probation service.

There began the belief that criminal offenders were a symptom of moral failing but also of psychological defects and so reasons for those defects were sought. Medical officers were appointed to examine offenders. Courses were devised to teach probation officers in order that they would become qualified as such. These courses developed to become the CETS Diploma Course.

In Chapter 5, Vanstone explains the growth of professionalism of probation officers. He states that by 1948, trainee probation officers were being taught social psychology at the University of London.

Chapter 6 details the rise of alternative therapy.

Chapter 7 deals with the centralisation of probation evidence-based practice,, motivated by an efficiency drive. Here is discussed the superficiality of probation supervision as confirmed in studies by Davis (1974) and contradicted by Willis (1980,1983). Willis researched the ineffectiveness of probation and the low probation officer confidence in the probation order. Willis found plenty of evidence that there was much concern with practical help and concluded that probation officers were making an impact in the probationer's environment.

Thereafter was devised the Offending Behaviour Model, which is said to be the first attempt in the United Kingdom to respond to the allegations that nothing works with offenders.

In Chapter 8, Maurice Vanstone concludes that the Probation Services have largely not dealt with the structural problems faced by probationers. He asserts that the concept of probation was political in origin and states that the modern aim of probation (as did Carter, 2003) is to reduce prison population and to be seen to demonstrate social justice. Vanstone pleads that probation should prove to reduce harm, both to the offender and to the wider community.

This book is essential reading for a deep understanding of the evolution of the present probation service and is a good prelude to other books on the subject of offenders on probation today, two of these being

“Persistent young offenders”, by David Loble and David Smith (2007) and “Corporate Crime”, edited by Sally Simpson and Carole Gibbs, the latter including an Offending Behaviour Model for corporations, thus pushing the boundaries of supervision of offenders in the community to another level. Much attention is given to the investigation, prosecution and sentencing of crime but at present in the United Kingdom, there is little attention given to the vital topic of supervision of offenders, this being still treated as an add-on to the criminal justice system. Therefore, Maurice Vanstone’s book brings necessary awareness to this subject.