

**Portlaoise Prison,
Portlaoise,
Co. Laois.**

**Mr. Michael McDowell,
Minister for Justice Equality and Law Reform,
72-76 St. Stephen's Green,
Dublin 2.**

VISITING COMMITTEE ANNUAL REPORT FOR 2003

We the Visiting Committee to Portlaoise Prison wish to submit our annual report for the year 2003.

It was with a great sense of loss that we learned of the death of the Chairman of our Visiting Committee to Portlaoise Prison Archdeacon H.H.J. Gray on 02/11/03. The Archdeacon was a member of the Visiting Committee for over 30 years and was Chairman for much of that time. He was a very conscientious and diligent member of the Committee who took his task very seriously. He was very well respected by members of staff of the Prison whom he came in contact with during his visits to the Prison. The experience he gained over those years was invaluable to newer members of the Committee. Prisoners who came with complaints or requests to the Committee were treated with the utmost respect. We express our deepest sympathy to his family and friends.

During the year 11 meetings were held on the first Tuesday of each month. In between meetings, two members were nominated to visit the Prison unannounced. Members of the Committee made themselves available to prisoners to discuss any problems they might have. We inspected the Prison on a regular basis and considering the age of the buildings they are kept in a reasonable condition. We met prisoners on an individual basis during our monthly visits. The complaints were mostly to do with transfer to other prisons, temporary release for special occasions, food and the quality of water and complaints about lack of medical services.

In January of this year we wrote to your office highlighting the problem of incell sanitation, the condition of D. Block and the deteriorating Medical Services for prisoners. We received a reply from Mr. Sean Aylward acknowledging our concerns. We note that major refurbishment work has been carried out on the Army compound and work is continuing on the new Gate/Control building. It is our opinion that the provision of incell sanitation should have got priority over the present works that are now in progress. We fully realise the constraints on public finances, but D Block which houses the working party prisoners should be closed down immediately as it is not fit for that purpose. This building was condemned as being unfit to hold prisoners 40 years ago. We were very happy to see that the area where the hostage takers from Mountjoy (commonly known as the defaulters) were detained was closed down and the

prisoners returned back to the main Prison block. Hopefully an area such as this will never be used to house prisoners again.

There were no major problems in the Prison during the year. Prisoners came to see the Committee with various requests and complaints. We were able to deal with most of the requests and in conjunction with the Governor and his staff we dealt with any outstanding problems.

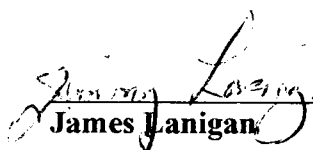
Again as in last years report we are not satisfied with the present level of medical services. More prisoners are now entering the Prison system with drug related problems. We are of the opinion that there should be a full time doctor in the Prison instead of the present arrangement. We welcome the appointment of a psychologist. This was long overdue.

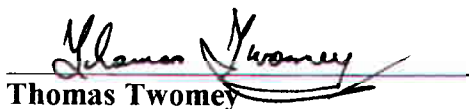
The highest possible standards apply in the kitchen in Portlaoise. In November the kitchen achieved the Q mark award.

The number of Visiting Committee members has now dropped to six from the original twelve. For a time this year we had only four members. We now request that the six vacancies which exist on the Committee be filled immediately.

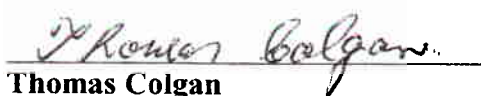
To sum up our report, we would like to stress again that E. Prison should be modernised to include toilets and wash hand basins in cells. We have highlighted this problem for the past few years but to no avail. D. Block which was condemned as unfit for prisoners 40 years ago is still in operation. Staff who work in these archaic conditions are to be commended. Prisoners who are housed in these conditions deserve better.

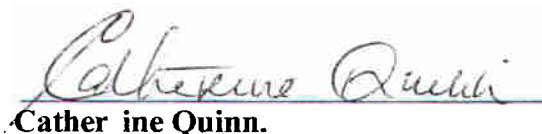
In conclusion we would like to thank the Governor and his staff for the courtesy shown during our visits throughout the year.

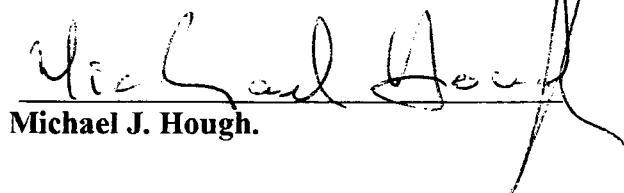
 Chairman
James Lanigan


Thomas Twomey

Mary Wheatley


Thomas Colgan


Catherine Quinn.


Michael J. Hough.