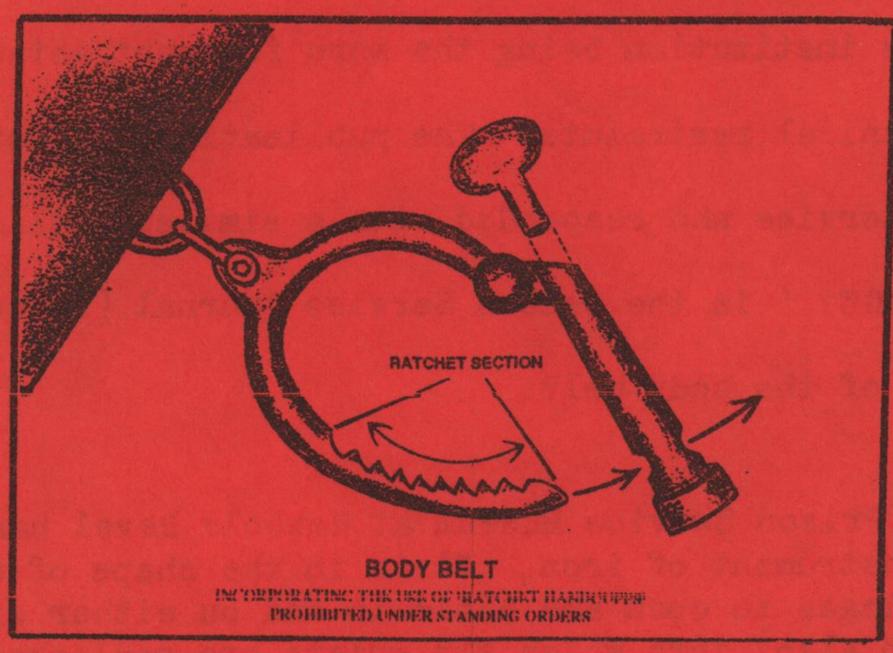


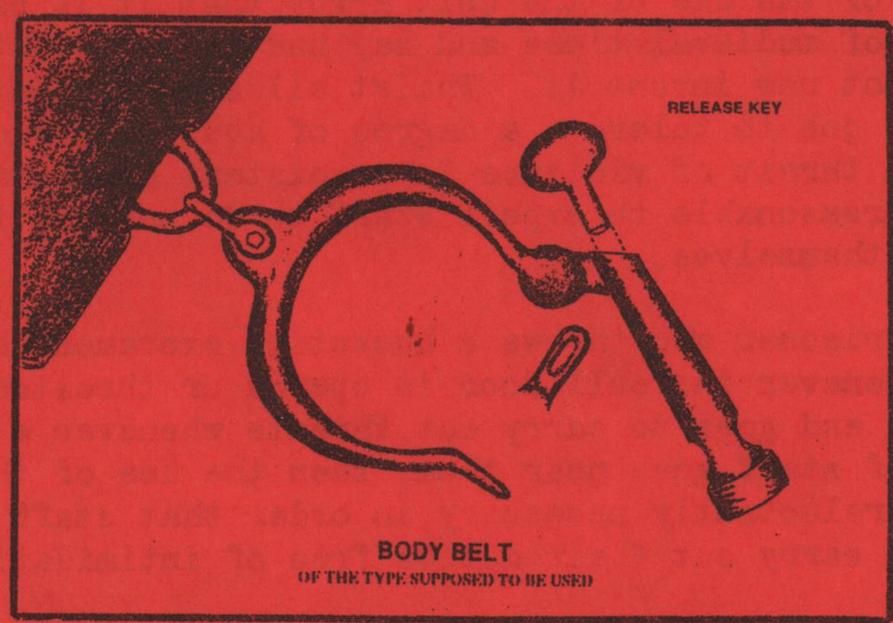
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MECHANICAL RESTRAINTS:

THE MEDIEVAL LEGACY.

PATRICIA FORD & PAUL D. ROSS



In 1993 the PRISON REFORM TRUST published an article titled ' INHUMAN BONDAGE '. The publication highlighted the excessive use of mechanical restraints, FULL SUTTON, WORMWOOD SCRUBS, BRIXTON prisons, and FELTHAM young offenders institution being the more frequent establishments to resort to mechanical restraints. The publication was not well received by the Prison Service who responded with a similar publication titled ' INHUMAN BONDAGE? ' in the Prison Service Journal (issue 91) espousing the merits of the body belt:

In the Prison Service Museum at Newbold Revel hangs an ugly instrument of iron. It is in the shape of a band with hinges to open and close it and on either side rings of iron also, into which the wrists are padlocked. This particular belt was used in the mid 1700s and similar belts were applied up until the 1800s. They were used to prevent escape from what in those days were insecure prisons. The ironing of prisoners, as it was called, was discontinued as prisons became more secure.

Such belts, modified by the use of leather rather than metal, remain in use nowadays only for short periods of time and not to prevent escape but to control extreme violence when all other methods have failed. The belt may be used more now since doctors became less willing to order forcible injection of drugs to control violent behaviour. Rightly doctors feared both the damaging side-effects of such medication and the threat that such forcible injection posed to any chance of subsequently working with the patient towards any long-term therapeutic goal.

Critics of the use of the belt argue that it is barbaric, a relic of medieval times and say had it not existed we should not now invent it. Whilst all staff expect as part of their job to tolerate a degree of abuse and violence, when the threat of violence is persistent and extreme it is unreasonable to expect staff to do nothing to protect themselves.

To the prisoner who throws a bucket of excrement at staff whenever the cell door is opened or threatens violence and goes to carry out threats whenever a member of staff goes near them, then the use of the body belt is reluctantly necessary in order that staff continue to carry out their duties free of intimidation.

Neither is it good for the prisoner to feel he cannot be restrained. That only feeds the fear behind the violence. Perhaps handcuffs could do the work equally well? Apart

from the advantage that handcuffs do not have the medieval tag, they offer less protection to any victim and do not allow the prisoner the opportunity to have one hand released in order to eat and drink while still being restrained.

The critics point out that the use of the belt is not uniform throughout the service and quote Hansard to show that Brixton, Feltham, Full Sutton, Pentonville and Wormwood Scrubs lead the field.

Aside from the usual inaccuracy of figures collected centrally in a routine way and in too broad a category to mean much, for example, local records show that at Pentonville a body belt was used only once in the time quoted and at Full Sutton on four occasions, two of which were prisoners received in restraints from another prison, it is remarkable that there should be differences between similar prisons. It would be helpful if the Chief Inspector of Prisons could take this up in a thematic review, not only to look at the number of cases but the reasons for use and how some prisons facing similar situations respond differently and whether the outcome of alternative responses is less or more damaging than the use of body belts.

But the way to reduce the use of the body belt is to eliminate the situations in which the need for it arises. That's what was done in the Nineteenth Century when as a consequence of building more secure prisons the belt ceased to be used for routine imprisonment. We should not abandon the use of the belt and leave staff and prisoners defenceless in the face of extreme violence but find ways of dealing with the source of the problem which do not create more victims.

(Prison Service Journal ' Comment ')

This was neither accurate or objective. The ' modernised ' body belt incorporates the use of ' ratchet handcuffs ' which are expressly prohibited under Home Office standing orders which provide:

' Ratchet handcuffs may be applied temporarily if, following a violent outburst, it is necessary to remove a prisoner from one part of the establishment to another. ' (SO 3E(1))

It further provides:

' The use of ratchet handcuffs in such circumstances must be regarded as exceptional. ' (SO 3E (2))

The use of body belts are invariably applied in conjunction with special accommodation meaning a cell stripped of all furnishings, including

mattress, and sound - proofed. The dangers of such physical restraint in conjunction with special accommodation such as this are obvious. The following account is provided by a prisoner who was formerly detained at Full Sutton's segregation unit:

' ... The cell door burst open and three warders came charging in clothed in riot equipment. One was carrying a shield and slammed me against the back wall whilst two others grabbed my arms and forced me to the ground where my arms and legs were twisted up behind my back. I was eventually lifted up and carried down to the strong box [special accommodation] where I was again held to the ground whilst my civilian clothes were literally cut from my body with a pair of scissors, all this time my limbs were held twisted behind my back with my wrists in so called 'locks', meaning bent almost double. I was screaming aloud in pain which merely appeared to anger one of the warders who shouted in my ear, 'Shut up or you'll get some more,' and applied more pressure causing me to scream even louder. A body belt was brought in and applied to my body. As they left the cell one of the warder's actually laughed, though at what I'm not really sure. It was about ten minutes before I could even move my body due to the pain I was in. As I struggled to get to my feet one of the handcuff's clicked tighter [ratchet handcuffs]. The pain was excruciating and I started to panic. Within minutes my wrist was completely numb and began to turn bluish. There was nothing I could do, not even press the cell bell, although I did try to press it with my head but could not do it. I had to sit there on the floor naked, and shivering for about three hours until I was eventually unlocked for tea and the handcuff was loosened. It was a horrible experience, and all because I had told a warder to 'F*** off' and spat on the floor at his feet after he refused to let me have a shower, it had been a whole week since I'd last showered. '

Another prisoner, recently reallocated from a young offenders institution gave the following account of his experience, he was aged just 17 at the time:

' I'd got some bad news from home and was really depressed and threatened to cut my wrists. Well they threatened to put me in a strip cell unless I pulled myself together. Anyway, I ended up in this bare cell and they took all my clothes, it was freezing. I started to bang my cell door demanding to be let out. I was banging for about 15 minutes when all of a sudden the door flew open and three officers came rushing in dressed in combat gear. One had a plastic shield. The one with the shield charged me and knocked me to the floor with the shield. What chance did I have, I'm only five foot four and nine stone, they were built like

bulldozers. They ripped all my clothes off again [plastic clothes issued to prisoner's in strip cells] twisted my arms and legs up my back and brought this massive leather belt in with handcuffs on each side and stuck it on me. One of the officer's must have had it in for me as before he went out the cell he clicked one of the handcuff's tighter. They were a bit like police handcuffs. '

Many prisoners who have been subject to mechanical restraint have reported partial loss of sensation in one or both hands lasting over 2 - 3 weeks. In addition there have been instances of permanent scarring as a consequence of protracted and unnecessary use of body belts. Neither are such restraints restricted to controlling ' extreme violence ', they may, and frequently are, used for diverse reasons, as the above accounts illustrate. The Prison Service Journal quotes two cases of prisoners received under restraint from other penal establishments. Prisoners transferred under restraint are invariably transferred under the provisions of IG. 28. 93 (known as a ' lay-down '). Such transfers are conducted under conditions of high security on a parallel with category A escorts, regardless of security classification. Such escorts comprise a transit van, more often than not a category A van, and a minimum of five warders. The procedure for transferring such prisoners is to ' double - cuff ' them. This involves the prisoner's hands being handcuffed together at the front of his body by a single pair of handcuffs, a further pair of handcuffs are used to ' cuff ' him to one of the escort warder's. Occasionally, three sets of handcuffs may be used so that the prisoner is handcuffed to warders on both sides in addition to being handcuffed in front. The use therefor of body belt is unnecessary.

The Prison Service Journal goes on to state that the way to reduce the use of the belt is to ' eliminate the situations in which the need for it arises ', but, in the interim promotes its continued use on the grounds that to discontinue its use would leave staff and prisoners defenceless in the face of extreme violence. Between March 1993 and February 1994 there were at least three criminal investigations by the police authorities into allegations of brutality at various prisons, Wormwood Scrubs, Full Sutton, and Holme House. This is excluding the copious civil litigation the prison service is currently embroiled in covering a diverse range of allegations, assault, misfeasance in public office, missing / destroyed property et cetera. The full extent of such litigation

is unknown as no records are kept by the central prison administration.

The application of mechanical restraints was the comparatively recent focus in a highly critical report by Dr F J ROBERTS, Consultant Forensic Psychiatrist who observed:

' Restraint is a very potent form of stress for both men and animals. It can produce physiological changes which can be life endangering, and in man psychological changes which may threaten his sanity.

The physiological changes have been studied mainly in animals and because of the deleterious effects produced by these experiments they have since the 1960's been largely discontinued.

The changes that have been noted include alterations in the cardiovascular system; the blood pressure rises, the pulse quickens, the pulse may become irregular as the mechanisms controlling the heart's regular beat fails to function properly, and the hormonal systems of the body alter their outputs. Sudden death is usually associated with disorderly action of the heart or to the rise in blood pressure and in an ensuing cerebral haemorrhage. A more prolonged threat is posed by acute, leading to chronic ulceration of the stomach.

The physiological response to the stress of restraint appears to be similar in man and in animals. Men alone report their intense emotional response to restraint. The circumstances which lead to restraint being applied almost invariably produces emotional arousal which is not quietened by the restraint. The experience becomes one of intense and helpless anger with feelings of humiliation and degradation.

The distress and impotent violence which occurs immediately after the restraint is applied is often used as a justification for the procedure.

The deleterious effects of restraint have been the subject of concern in psychiatry for many years. Quite apart from the effects of the individual's view of himself, and the relationship between the individual and those who applied the restraint, there has been the recognition that restraint can cause physical changes even to the extent of death (Comprehensive Textbook of Psychiatry - IV, edited by Kaplan & Sadock, Williams and Wilkins 1985).

When a body belt is applied in prison it is usual for the person restrained to be secluded, naked or partially clothed, in a strip cell, behind two closed doors. The environment in a present day strip cell has most of the characteristics which were extensively explored in the sensory deprivation experiments in the 1950's and 1960's. '

NOTES ON THE EFFECTS OF MECHANICAL RESTRAINT BY A BODY BELT & OF SOLITARY ISOLATION, June 1993, F J ROBERTS

The reference to prison doctors reluctance to order ' forcible injection ' for the purpose of control is misleading. The forcible medication of prisoners was once a routine practice within most prisons, the authorisation for such practices frequently being made retrospectively in the absence of doctors. The reasons for doctors reluctance to order forcible medication does not arise from any ethical considerations but rather from fear of litigation. There have over the years been a number of civil actions brought against the PMS (prison medical services) as a consequence of this practice, although the practice has not become obsolete, there are establishments that periodically still resort to this.

There is clear and understandable concern from many individuals and organisations about the use of the body belt, particularly in the light of the comparatively recent death of Joy Gardner who died under mechanical restraint whilst in police custody. ' INQUEST ' a campaigning organisation has expressed increasing concern about the use of the body belt maintaining it is time that this barbaric medieval legacy was consigned to the history book.

Paul D Ross & Patricia Ford

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