

## A brief History of 40 years

In 1971 BACO was known as the **Discharged Prisoners Aid Society**. Its history dates back to the first record dated April 1948, when it was funded by the Brewsters Sessions and the individual subscription was one guinea.

The Discharged Prisoners Aid Society Annual Report of 1952 stated that *'prisoners have been assisted in all cases in which the Committee felt that assistance was desirable, the needs of each case being considered by the Committee before any aid was rendered.*

*Most of the prisoners committed from Magistrates Courts in Buckinghamshire are sent to Oxford prison and if a prisoner so desires he is allowed to come before the Executive Committee to state his case. The Committee meets fortnightly at Oxford Prison.'*

The Minute Books of the early period are meticulously written, some in copper plate, and the Committee members listed reflect a wealthy section of Buckinghamshire society.

In 1971 the name changed to Buckinghamshire Association for the Care of Offenders and it was registered as a charity in 1972, but sadly no documentation can be found. BACO aims to help offenders to break their cycle of criminal behaviour and re-integrate them back into society.

**There were 40,178 people in prison in 1971. Today there are 87,120.**

In the 1980s the annual subscription was £1 and an interesting grant that reflected the period was a second hand sewing machine for use by a *'group of nice girls'* run by Aylesbury Probation office. The subscription was raised to £2 in 1986 and the first BACO Newsletter, The LINK was produced. It was printed in the Print Works at HMP Springhill by prisoners and featured articles of special interest around criminal justice, details of BACO activities, and grant awards.

In the 1990s there were financial worries and references were made to the recession. Typical grants included trainers, radio cassette, travelling costs and, more unusually, a budgerigar for a prisoner in Wormwood Scrubs. Each grant request was circulated to the Committee and discussed at length. **In 1994, 50 grants were awarded totalling £1306.** By early 2000 the number of grants awarded had grown to 56, totalling £2610. **In 2010 this has risen to 271 grants, totalling £11,414**, and covering a wide range of subjects from household necessities to fees for an Anger Management course, to various University course fees and materials. One issue of concern has been the increase in the number of grants requested for basic subsistence for released prisoners waiting many weeks for their benefits.

The composition of the Executive Committee, the Trustees, had changed over the years and now included 'professional' members such as retired Probation Officers. They met round a kitchen table at the house of the Secretary. This was grass roots volunteering at its best.

BACO has always been fortunate in having the Lord Lieutenant for Buckinghamshire as its President, and it was first Lord Cottesloe who supported

the organisation until his retirement, followed by Sir Nigel Mobbs, and currently Sir Henry Aubrey-Fletcher.

The Executive Committee now has the luxury of meeting in the Boardroom of HMP Springhill, and is supported by prison staff. The Trustees come from a wide variety of experience and expertise, but share a common interest in the welfare of prisoners and their families. All now have access to computers and email, and communication has rapidly improved. BACO joined The Criminal Justice Secure eMail system in 2010 to ensure the secure transmission of information concerning serving prisoners and ex-offenders on probation.