

# Consumer Reports

*We reproduce in the following pages two contrasting accounts of experience in our prisons in recent years.*

*The first consists of extracts from an article first published in Encounter for May 1958. The pseudonym J. F. N. 1797 concealed the identity of Mr. Frank Norman and the article consisted of excerpts from a larger work which was subsequently published by Messrs. Secker & Warburg under the title "Bang to Rights" at 15s. 0d.*

*The second is an article published in the Walthamstow Guardian for 29th July 1960. The identity of prisoner 15480 has not been revealed.*

*We are indebted to Mr. Frank Norman, Messrs. Secker & Warburg and to Encounter for permission to reprint the first article; and to Prisoner 15480 and the Editor and publishers of the Walthamstow Guardian for permission to reprint the second.*

## "CORRECTIVE TRAINING"

### An Unofficial Report

J. F. N. 1797

"THE PRISON COMMISSIONERS have come to the conclusion that you will benefit from a period of corrective training; this is also the opinion of this court. I therefore sentence you to three years C.T. in the hope that you take advantage of all that will be done for you."

The screw touched my arm and I turned around and walked down the stairs to the cells under the court. As I came along the passage leading from the court to the cells a screw shouted.

"One lagging C.T."

The princable officer, who was sitting at his desk at the end of the passage nodded his head and

recorded the sentence in his book.

That was how it started, and now it is over, and I am out again. I am corrected.

"Alright you get in the second peter on the right, theres two more in there to keep you company, till the meatwaggon arrives. You go to Wandsworth O.K. in."

"Just a minute," I spluttered. "Has my bird showed up yet?"

"GO ON IN", he shouted.

"Will you try and see if she's here?" I asked.

"No I can't what do you think I've nothing to do all day but chase after your f . . . bird, not that I would mind that . . ."

As he was still rabiting the P.O. came walking along the passage. As he walked past I called to him. He was an oldish man and I expect he had been in the prison service for many years and new every answer in the book.

"Yes son what can I do for you?" He asked quite kindly for a screw.

"I just wonder if you could find out if my bird has showed up yet? Her name is Miss Billie Dixon."

"Alright son", he said and turned and walked away.

I went into the peter while the screw stood looking daggers at me. The door swung shut locking it's self as it did so automatically, which is I believe perculiar only to the nick. The two other chaps in the peter were a spook and some geezer, who as he told me about two seconds later, had been captured on a blag down the west. So when we got swaged into the meatwagon I asked another geezer the strength of him, and the strength was that he'd got nicked for ponceing off his old woman who was a brass on the game down the Baze. He was still shouting the odds about this blag, which was as I have said nothing but a dirty great romance, when the screw opened the door and called me out telling me to folow him.

I asked him what for and if my bird had shown.

"Yes she's here and you can see her for ten minutes, and THAT'S ALL!"

So I folowed him along another passage and up some stone steps. As I walked, I felt that feeling of fear mixed with misery; fear because no thief and tearaway shows no emotion just because he has got a capture, and has got

a lagging to do, all he does is say b . . . to the law and the prison chaplain is an old c . . . I felt the tears welling up inside me. God please do'nt let me cry. By this time we had reached the visiting room and there was Billie.

"Hello Darling," she said.

I could'nt say a word I just looked at her and looked away again.

Now then Frankie boy, this is'nt what a tearaway does, come on your a villain not a sniveller.

"How yer going sweetie pie?" I grinned and then fell silent, as I just didn't know what to say. In fact I was so scared to say anything else in case the words choked me.

"Oh my Darling, I love you so much I'll wait for ever and . . ."

I can't stand much more of this. Can she see that tear in my eye? Come on boy do your stuff, here goes.

"Now listen to me, I dont want you to wait I'm going to be gone a long time and it's best we scrub it right now".

"ALRIGHT TIMES UP!"

"Can I kiss him goodbye," asked Billie.

"O.K. but make it quick, the meatwaggon's waiting outside."

I closed my eyes as I felt her lips on my'n, so soft and warm. How many times had we kissed like this, a thousand times a thousand, but never like this. It suddenly came to me in a flash that this was the end, I had a lagging to do. Tomorrow when I wake up I'll be in a peter somewhere in Wandsworth all on my jack. Did she know then that this was to be the last time that I would hold her in my arms like this? I like to think that she did not know.

I was amazed to find myself begging her to wait for me. What had happened to the hard case?

"Darling I love you more than anything in the world, I just couldn't do this without you, please wait for me I'll all ways love you, as long as I live."

The screw shouted again and so we parted. I was lead back along the same passage, but this time I was told to take the second turning on the right, which I found led out into the yard at the back of the court. The meat waggon was waiting to take me to Wandsworth. Everyone else was already inside and I was the last one.

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Eventually after a lot of messing about I had a call up and was told that I would be going to Chelmsford prison, the next day . . .

Chelmsford Nick is not as large as the nicks in London, but it smells much worse, the peter I was put in had a large brown patch on the wall where, whenever it rained, water came in with remarkable ease considering the wall was built of solid stone.

Although this nick was easier to get along in as the disipline was not quite so strickly administered, and one could also get away with more in conciquence. The morning after my arrival I was called up to see the Governor. When I arrived in his office I went through all the same game as before, name, number, sentence, etc. I was put to work in the mailbag shop, that afternoon it is said that prisoners doing C.T. are not suposed to sew mailbags except whilst on punishment, as this is a very soul-destroying job. The reason being we are not in prison to have our

souls destroyed but corrected. This of course does not happen very often as nobody very much wants to be corrected, in any case the people who are supposed to be showing us the light, are just not capable of doing so. What is more they know that they are incapable I have asked more than one screw about this matter of correction and I have been told not to talk so bloody silly, or else answers like (i.e.) What do you think I am, a bleeding probation officer or some thing. I could not agree more? no man can correct another while there is this feeling of distrust between jailer and convict and until this barrier can be removed, there will remaine this feeling of dispondance on one side and hate and fear on the other.

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Corrective training was an invention which was invented by a bodey of geezers, in the Home Office, when they brought out the new criminal justice act, whenever that was. When they had got it all nicely written down on paper, they handed it to the Home Secretary who presented it to the house. And they made a law, it was then handed to the prison commissioners who handed it down to the prison governors, who in their turn told the chief officers about it and they told the princeable officers, who ordered the screws to carry it out. This is all very nice except the only difference is they havent got the first iden what it's all about. And in any case couldn't care less. The other people who are told all the ins and outs of it are the judges and magistrates, and now that it has been going for about ten years or so, they are beginning to under-

stand what it is all about. But this doesn't stop them from giving it to geezers who it isn't going to help.

It was getting near to the time of my discharge, not near enough for me to worry about it to much, but near enough for the governor's to start asking me all the same old questions that they had asked me when I had first got my bird. One day I got a call up for the quack I had the usual wait and then he called me into his office.

"Well Wilson it won't be long now before you go out, have you thought about what you are going to do?"

The quack wasn't a bad geezer, and I quite liked him even though he was universally hated by one and all, the reason for this was his sense of humor which was very corstic, when you went sick, he nearly always made some dry remark which would make you go potty, because you had no deffence against it, but even so I quite liked him. So I desided to talk to him and see what happened.

"I don't know yet sir; and that's the truth."

"You must have some idea, are you going screwing as soon as you get out?"

"No sir."

"What then?"

"Do you mind if I speak frankly sir?"

"Not at all," said the quack, "I wish you would."

"Well you asked me what I am going to do when I get out. This is supposed to be corrective training at least that is what the judge said when he sentenced me. This being the case when I came here I expected something, I don't know what, but something. The two

years that I have done I might just as well have done in an ordinary nick. I have been cheated and I'll tell you why. If you become eligable for C.T. that is when you have done three or more inditeable offences on your record, the prison commissioners then deside wether or not you will beniffite from a period of this corrective training. If they deside that you will and they usualy do, you will nearly always get it, no matter what the crime is you have committed wether it is big or small. Also it doesn't matter how long you have been out of trouble you are still just as likely to get it as a geezer who only got out of nick the day before. Now then, once they have desided wether or not they think you will beniffite from it, you go to court. For arguments sake let us say there is two geezers and one has got done for a comparatively minor crime, stealing a bottel of milk off some ones door step, and the other geezer has got nicked for a serious crime like nicking a lorrie load of wiskey. The geezer who has nick the bottel of milk has been recommended for C.T. and the geezer who nicked the lorrie load of wiskey has'nt. So the milk bottel geezer goes into the dock and the judge tell's him that he is going to give him a chance, he then sentences him to three or maybe four years C.T. Then the lorrie load of wiskey geezer goes into the dock and the judge tells him that he is going to deal with him very servely, and send's him to prison for two years. This all sound's very nice except the difference between Corrective Training and ordinary bird is none egsistant.

"The question I asked you," said the quack "was what are you

going to do when you get out."

(I don't think this barstard heard a word I said.)

"I told you I don't know yet what I'm going to do."

"Alright that's all, you can go now; but think thing's over, the next time you get into any trouble

you'll get a very long time and don't make any mistake about that."

"No sir I wont forget."

I got up and walked out, and that was it, always the same, they ask you what you think about thing's, so you tell them and they always get the needle.

## NEW FACE ON THE PRISON STORY

Man who 'went down'—then and now

Prisoner 15480

*Earlier this month a 45-year-old Chingford man came out of gaol after his third—and what he promises will be his last—term in prison. "I didn't suffer at all during my stay in prison, but my wife and son did," says this former R.A.F. gunner. "There have been some tremendous changes in prisons over the years. I had a pretty easy time of it. But the neighbours were pretty hard on my family. I wouldn't want them to go through that again." Just how easy a time Prisoner 15480 had this time—he prefers to remain anonymous because of repercussions on his family—can be seen from his story, told to reporter Tony Snow. But as you can see prisons are still not that good.*

FOR THE THIRD TIME in my life the black iron doors of one of Her Majesty's prisons clanged shut behind me. I had spent my 21st birthday in the Scrubs during a four-month term inside for rifling a cigarette machine in 1935, six months in Pentonville just after the war for stealing a raincoat—and now I was beginning yet another term.

I was in Pentonville again for a "spur of the moment" wages snatch in a Lyons tea shop. The temptation had been just too much. I had been out of work for

five months. I was in debt. I had a bag and a shopping list in my pocket and I had just tried unsuccessfully to borrow money from a friend in Wanstead to pay for the provisions.

The only vacant seat in the tea shop was right next to the cashier's desk and as I sat there she stacked up piles of notes and put them into a wallet. I decided to have it—but it didn't come off. I was caught.

Now I was in Pentonville (the 'ville) again and I wouldn't be seeing the outside for six months—or so I thought. In fact, it was only

a matter of days. And that wasn't the only surprise I was in for.

The whole attitude was different. In the twenty-five years since my first taste of bird there had been some fantastic changes. I was amazed to find that I was *asked* to do things. On both the previous occasions instructions had been barked at me—and they were orders to do this or that, quick!

Now I was allowed to talk to my fellow prisoners and even smoke as we queued for our uniforms and were checked in. How well I remember the bleak welcome I got when I entered the Scrubs in 1935. I wasn't exactly pushed but we all had to stand facing the wall in a long line. We weren't allowed to say a word to any other prisoners or even turn our heads.

And the uniform I got. It consisted of a rough flannelette shirt, a brown jacket and knee-length knickerbockers. That pair of broken-down left-off shoes they gave me nearly crippled me.

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This time I got new shoes, a navy blue battledress-style uniform that they offered to change for me, after a couple of days if it didn't fit properly, plus a supply of socks, underwear and shirts. In all the time I was in there I never saw one man not adequately dressed—and some of them looked quite smart.

But the biggest thing was the food—oh that lovely food! I had been dreading it as soon as I knew I had copped it again. Food is important in prison. You can never get enough of it. During my first term inside I had been given chokey (bread and water) for stealing extra food. The food itself

had been nothing much either. Served in a two-layer battered diet tin, it consisted of potatoes—cooked in their jackets and all black inside—and cabbage in the top and some sort of stewed meat in the bottom. It was pretty grim.

But when I went down to my first breakfast this time I gasped. We were each given an aluminium tray divided into a number of compartments, and the meal was porridge, bacon, beans, bread and butter and tea—and pretty well cooked, too.

Dinner was even better, roast beef—yes you could recognise the meat—baked potatoes, cabbage and peas.

Then came the greatest surprise of all. I saw the outside world again. I was taken to the Governor's office and asked a few questions like: "Would you run away if you were on an outside working party?" Then I was put aboard a coach and taken to Holloway Prison, where I worked during the daytime for the rest of my sentence. The coach picked us up each morning and brought us home each night. We had dinner at Holloway, cooked by the ladies there and their food was even better than in the 'ville.

For this work we were paid 2s. 8d. a week. We didn't get a penny in 1935, and in '46 it was 9d. a week. With this 2s. 8d. I used to buy half an ounce of tobacco, a packet of prison cigarette papers and a box of matches. I am a bit of a heavy smoker and it was a bit difficult at times to make it last the full week, but I didn't want to get into the hands of the Tobacco Barons. They lend you tobacco for half-again interest—and once you start borrowing you can't get straight.

But half an ounce a week was a great improvement on half an ounce between eight of us in 1946—and in '35 it was strictly No Smoking. I don't know how I got through that four months.

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I was one of the few prisoners who could appreciate the changes. There weren't many there who had been in prison in the old days. I went round in a daze for the first couple of days. I stared at prisoners carrying newspapers, magazines, and with pens in their top pockets. None of these had been allowed before. And I couldn't believe my ears when I heard a prisoner call one of the screws (prison officers) "Guv'nor". It would have been considered insolence before. They always had to be addressed as "Sir" and nothing else.

The Prison Governor said "Good morning" to me as he passed me working—he was a thorough gentleman, he was.

They made me feel like a man, whereas before I had just been a number. I had always felt somehow degraded in my first two sentences, but now everything possible was being done for my welfare.

You might say that this encourages crime a little. But with most men it makes them realise that they are somebody. It makes them keep their self-respect—and the encouragement they get makes them all the more determined to make something of their lives when they get out.

We saw a film every week—yes, a film. If anyone had told us back in 1935 that this would be the case one day we would have laughed at them. It would have been like hearing about men flying to the moon.

In '35 a prisoner used to come round with a few odd books and push one through the bars of your Peter (Peter and Nell—cell). You had no choice. It might have been "Alice in Wonderland" or Shakespeare you didn't have a say in the matter. This time I was given a library ticket for seven books a week, and that library was as good as any public library outside.

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Some men—serving longer sentences—could watch T.V. in the evenings, and some of them even had pet budgerigars. Things had certainly changed.

VISITING: It used to be once every eight weeks and separated by a wire grille. Now it was once a month in a contemporary-styled room with comfortable chairs and a cosy atmosphere.

"CHOKEY": You really have to do something bad to get that now, and only the toughs and the hard-nuts who were determined to be awkward were ever given it.

AND REMISSION: It used to be a sixth of your sentence off for good behaviour. Now it had jumped up to a third. So I was out of the 'ville just four months after starting my sentence.

And it's getting better all the time. Probably if I went back there in a few months' time I'd find more improvements—but I'm not going to. All I want now is a job—and if I could find one I'd grab it with both hands.

Even if they were to put a T.V. set, carpets, a three-piece suite and all the smokes you wanted in every Peter, there'd still be one thing lacking—freedom. Believe me, the air you breathe in there may be the same stuff but it doesn't taste half as good as it does out here.