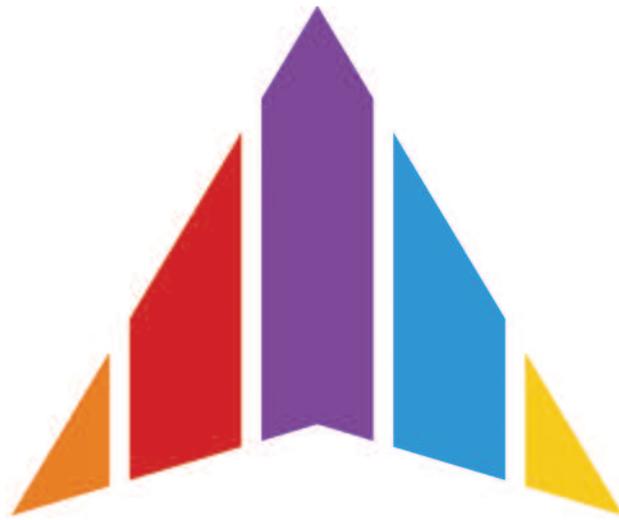


# PRISON SERVICE JOURNAL

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REHABILITATIVE  
CULTURE

prisoner returning our gaze reminds us that witnessing is never just about seeing, but is bound up with questions of power, access, accountability, pleasure and guilt' (p. 107).

Griffiths's work uncovers hidden and rarely considered aspects of penal practice, media consumption and film history. It reveals the contested values that are at play in penal practice and how the media is both a reflection of this and a means through which the institution is understood and made acceptable.

The intersection of the media and prisons is a contested and lively field. These two books offer very different approaches, focussing on different eras. Cecil offers an overview of the contemporary media landscape. Her book is an excellent primer but also offers some novel arguments, emphasis and takes some provocative positions. This all makes it a good read. Griffiths's work has less broad appeal, but for those with an interest in prisons and the media, it is a significant contribution. It opens up an under-researched area, takes

an innovative methodological and analytical approach, and all together is a dazzling achievement. Together these publications show the breadth and depth of this field. They also reinforce that our media choices are not simply meaningless entertainment, but are both the outcome and one of the constituents of the social world we inhabit: we are what we watch.

*Dr Jamie Bennett is Governor of HMP Grendon and Springhill.*

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## OBITUARY

### **William (Bill) Arthur Francis Brister CB, Prison Governor and Deputy Director General of Prisons**

From the end of the Second World War to 1985, the Prison Service in England and Wales faced exceptional challenges and pressures. The population rose from around 15,000 to 50,000 causing serious overcrowding of cells and deplorable conditions for both prisoners and staff. During the 1960s, high profile escapes especially that of the spy, George Blake, from Wormwood Scrubs Prison, forced the Government to set up the Mountbatten inquiry — the resulting critical report requiring major changes to the service. From 1969, destructive riots by prisoners and industrial action by the Prison Officers Association added to the miseries within prisons.

Against this challenging background, Bill — as he was known across the Prison Service — Brister built an exceptional career first as an operational Prison Governor and then in senior posts within Prisons Headquarters. Brister was a person of great integrity, a practicing Roman Catholic throughout his life. He demonstrated a determination to achieve improvements for staff and prisoners whether working in establishments or as part of the Headquarters team. He was exceptionally good at working with a very wide range of people — from prisoners and prison staff — including specialists such as doctors and chaplains — to politicians and civil servants. His briefings on complex issues were accurate and balanced; his judgements on what action was required was grounded on his considerable experience of prison operations,

Ashford Remand Centre, West London, an establishment with acute industrial relationships problems, was probably his most challenging post as an operational Governor. Brister showed great skill in confronting unreasonable demands from staff while at the same time doing all he could to improve both the living conditions for prisoners and the working conditions of staff.

He attracted loyalty from staff at many levels because of his integrity, his genuine interest in them and their families and his readiness to support those facing

severe difficulties. His commitment to the Prison Dog Service continued long after his retirement through his support for the annual Dog Trials, including awarding a Trophy.

In 1969, Brister was one of the first Governors to be brought into Headquarters to apply operational experience to designing and building new establishments. This rather tentative experimental move became a normal part of the career of many Governors because of the success Brister and his other pioneering colleagues achieved at Headquarters.

The 'troubles' in Northern Ireland required a Governor to be seconded to advise Ministers on how to manage extremely difficult and challenging prison problems. Brister was selected and his ability to balance operational experience and the different and wider demands at Headquarters enabled him to provide effective support and leadership to the Northern Ireland Prison Service for two very difficult years.

On returning to Prisons Headquarters in London, Brister headed up the Security and Control Division, charged with reducing escapes and more effectively handling disturbances and hostage incidents. He brought order and proper training to meet these challenges, gradually achieving improvements.

In some ways, the next phase of his career was the most challenging. It began early in 1979 when he was promoted to Chief Inspector with a place on the Prison Board. But Mr Justice May's Inquiry, set up by the Government in response to growing industrial disputes with the Prison Service, published its report in October 1979 — recommending many changes. This included the setting up of a new independent Inspectorate, effectively abolishing Brister's post.

After great controversy within the Home Office during 1980 about the wisdom and practicality of setting up an independent inspectorate able to publicly criticise the service, the Home Secretary, Willie Whitelaw, took the bold decision to implement. From 1981 a new

independent prisons inspectorate was to be created with the power to make unannounced inspections and entitled to publish reports into the state of the prisons. This decision was part of the process leading to today's normal practice — that very many public services — not just the prisons — are subject to independent inspection with reports available to the public.

The new independent Chief Inspector was to be a complete 'outsider'. The first appointment was Mr W Pearce, former head of the London Probation Service. Brister was asked to take on the role of Deputy Chief Inspector and help establish the new organisation. Some might have refused an apparent step down, but Brister undertook the task with distinction. It was complicated by the new Chief Inspector quickly became terminally ill, leaving Brister to cover his duties until a further appointment was made. Thus much of the success of establishing the Independent Inspectorate was due to Brister's work.

An important part of the 1980 reorganisation of Prisons HQ following the May Report was to create a new post of Deputy Director General, in effect the operational head of the service. The first incumbent, Gordon Fowler had to medically retire in 1981 and Brister was appointed as Deputy Director General in 1982, a post he held until his own retirement in 1985. Thus he completed his career as the senior operational person in the service, a fitting tribute to his ability and dedication.

William Brister was born in in Cairo on 10th February 1925, only child of Group Captain AJ Brister OBE and Velda Maria Brister. He was educated by the Benedictines at Douai School near Reading. He studied law at Brasenose College Oxford from 1942 — with a break for war service — completing his BA and MA in 1949. He served in the Intelligence Corps from 1943 to 1947 in Abbottabad, Delhi and Singapore.

He joined the Prison Service in 1949 at Lowdham Grange Borstal in Nottinghamshire as an Assistant Governor Class 2. This was also the year that he married Mary Speakman, who had been an undergraduate at Oxford with him. After service at the Imperial Training

School, Wakefield, as a Tutor, he was posted to Parkhurst Prison on the Isle of Wight. In 1957, he was promoted to Assistant Governor Class One and posted to Camp Hill Prison — also on the Isle of Wight — as Deputy Governor.

Further promotion to Governor Class Three followed in 1960 with a move to Manchester Strangeways Prison as Deputy Governor. In 1962 he was given his first command as Governor of Morton Hall open Borstal in Lincolnshire. About this time, he was awarded a Council of Europe Fellowship to Switzerland and Italy to study prisons and in 1966 a Nuffield International Fellowship to Canada and Mexico to study the treatment of prisoners addicted to alcohol and drugs.

In 1967 he was promoted to Governor Class Two and took charge of Dover Borstal and in 1969 was transferred to Headquarters to P1 (Buildings) Division. In 1971 he took charge of Ashford Remand Centre. His secondment to Northern Ireland followed from 1973 to 1975 with the title of Prisons Adviser to the Northern Ireland Minister.

In 1975 he was promoted to Assistant Controller in charge of P5 Division of HQ, a post he held until his appointment as Chief Inspector in 1979 when he also became a member of the Prisons Board. The move to the independent inspectorate followed in 1980 with the title of Deputy Chief Inspector. His final promotion was to Deputy Director General from 1982 to 1985.

He was awarded the CB in 1984.

After retirement, he worked for the Parole Board and with the Butler Trust, the organisation set up to recognise positive work by prison staff. He also contributed too many local organisations around Godalming, Surrey to which he had retired.

He leaves a son, Anthony, and a daughter, Anne — Marie, and three grandsons... His wife Mary pre deceased him in 2012 as did both his elder son David, in a climbing accident in the Himalayas with the Army in 1975, and a further grandson in 2009.

**William Brister was born on 10th February 1925.  
He died on 4th July 2017**