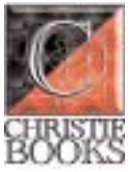




# New from **ChristieBooks**

Published 5 December 2006



## John Barker **Bending the Bars** *Prison Stories*



John Barker was arrested in 1971 and sentenced to ten years imprisonment at the Old Bailey for his part in the 'Angry Brigade' conspiracy trial. It was the longest trial in English legal history. He was released in 1978. 'Bending the Bars' is his account of those seven years.

'Wild guys inside the fish-tank; Bending the Bars is a unique voice of prison life without gangster chic.'

**Peter Kravitz**, *Edinburgh Review*

'Prison books often offer readers moral platitudes...likewise books by and about political prisoners are sometimes deliberately designed to build a hierarchical cult around wronged martyrs...John Barker's book is different since he uses a class rather than a moral perspective. Barker writes about his own subjective experiences of prison, but by repeatedly signalling his awareness of the multiplicity of views he's heard other cons express about incarceration, he deftly avoids privileging his own take on this matter over that of anyone else.'

**Stewart Home**, *Mute magazine*

**T**his book is an obviously selective memoir of being in maximum security prisons between 1971 and 1978. I went in at 23 and came out at thirty. It was written in the form of stories towards the end of the sentence and finished soon after my release. The impetus for writing came from the stories of 'Brownie' that had started to appear in *Republican News*. Written from inside Long Kesh prison, they had a humanist, political wit to them. Now it is known that Brownie was the pen name of Gerry Adams, and that in retrospect these stories were part of the long haul by Gerry and other Kesh graduates like Gerry Kelly (who makes an appearance in this book) to pull the Irish Republican movement out of the rut of a military-only Catholic nationalism. My stories have no such significance, nor should they be taken as a picture of how prisons are now. I can say with no laughter that my time inside was the golden age of such prisons. In the 'Labour' chapter a Chief Officer is described as 'a smiler, a relic from the future

**ISBN:** 1-873976-31-3  
**Pages:** 198  
**Size:** 129mm x 196mm  
**Publisher:** ChristieBooks  
**Published:** 5 December, 2006  
**Binding:** Paperback  
**Price:** £7.00  
**Market:** Memoir

wherein, it is wrongly assumed, prisons among other things, would become progressively more liberal'. Since that time we have endured Mrs Thatcher, Michael Howard and Tony Blair, all keen on punishing people who are not 'Hard-working families who play by the rules' as Blair put it. Prison is almost exclusively for working class people who do not 'play by the rules'. The introduction of 'Prison Works', a system of reward and punishment that is both formal and arbitrary pre-dates New Labour but is wholly suited to its authoritarian moralizing. Prison 'privileges' as they are laughingly called are only for those who play by the rules, unwritten rules as to your behaviour, demeanour, your very way of being. In the wider world it is matched by New Labour's No Rights without Responsibilities slogan. As Mark Barnsley (maximum injustice for 8 long years) has described, it is like an experiment in social control for which New Labour no doubt have targets and league tables. Its purpose to destroy what remains of collective solidarity among cons after years of 'Thacherite' individualism and too much heroin. Under New Labour there are even cells under permanent CCTV watch. At the same time competitively repressive New Labour Home Secretaries have made their own further contributions to worsening conditions. Pile Them High! Perhaps it is their fanatical pro-Americanism that wants them to match US imprisonment rates. But with ever rising numbers and cut budgets there is no longer even the pretence of education and rehabilitation. These days it is strictly Punishment Only. And not so heavy on Responsibilities when it comes to screws or the care that is supposed to be demanded of prisons. This was shockingly shown up by the racist murder in HMP Feltham. Feltham has been described as terrible by various Prisons Inspectors but nothing changed. Nor at Wormwood Scrubs. One damning report after another was met in the same way. 'Oh that report was three months ago, you should see the changes we've made since then.' In reality we have no chance of seeing anything or, therefore, of challenging this glib irresponsibility. As it is New Labour's solution to damning reports is to undermine and then get rid of the Prison Inspectorate. If things are so much worse why then publish this memoir now? For one thing opportunity. Some of the stories appeared singly in *Edinburgh Review* and *Passport*, but as a book I have until now been fucked over by a spectrum of 'left wing' publishers. But also because there is an irony to the 'golden age' for there was plenty of punishment then too. Plenty of it, but resistance too and this book is an unsentimental celebration of the class spirit and solidarity of many cons. It is still great when 'resistance gets its own reward,' life would be too hard if not. Fighting the right fights with cunning and solidarity, and winning, that possibility has not been finished off in these repressive times. It is amazing that still now, convict solidarity and resistance still continues in some prisons at some times.

**John Barker**, September 2006

**ChristieBooks**



Distribution: **Central Books Ltd**  
99 Wallis Road, London E9 5LN  
Tel: 0845 4589911  
Fax: 0845 4589912  
email: [orders@centralbooks.com](mailto:orders@centralbooks.com)  
[www.centralbooks.com](http://www.centralbooks.com)

Representation: **Troika**,  
United House,  
North Road,  
London  
N7 9DF  
Tel: 020 76190800  
email: [kate@sellbooks.demon.co.uk](mailto:kate@sellbooks.demon.co.uk)

**ChristieBooks**  
PO Box 35  
Hastings  
East Sussex  
TN34 2UX  
Tel: 07818416851  
email: [christie@btclick.com](mailto:christie@btclick.com)