



BEHIND BARS

# I was banged up in the worst prison in the UK... Reggie Kray sent me a note on my first day inside – it was terrifying

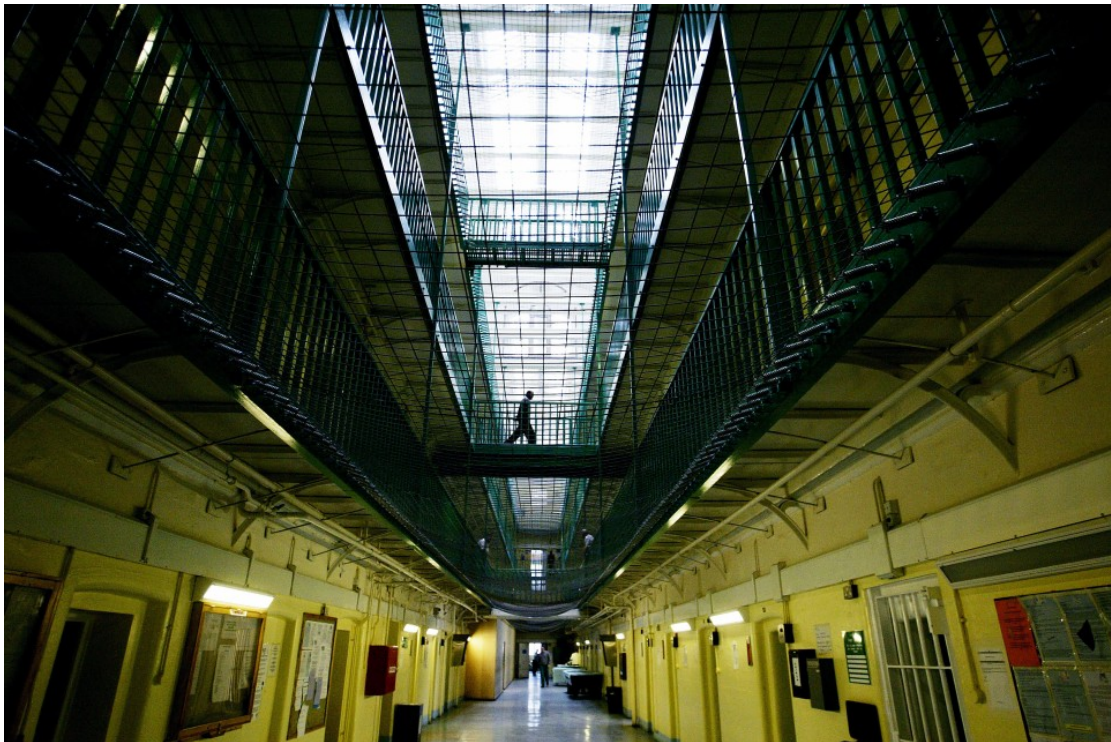
- [Harry Goodwin](#)

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**A FORMER cabinet minister who was jailed in Britain's "worst prison" has revealed how he received a baffling note from the Kray twins on his first day.**

Jonathan Aitken, 80, who was Chief Secretary to the Treasury under [John Major](#), was imprisoned in the "notorious" [HMP Belmarsh](#) after pleading guilty to perjury and perverting the course of justice in June



Belmarsh prison, which former inmate Jonathan Aitken says is Britain's worst Credit: Rex



The former Cabinet minister is now a chaplain at HMP Pentonville Credit: Getty



Aitken received a baffling note from the Krays on his first day in Belmarsh Credit: Getty

He revealed how he fell foul of [prison guards](#) after receiving a welcome from the [Krays](#) - before going on to help gangsters "Razor" Smith and Mickey Aguda turn their lives around.

Aitken told The Sun: "Belmarsh was notorious as a tough nick and was considered Britain's toughest prison.

"When I first arrived one of the inmates told me that Ronnie Kray had called from [Broadmoor](#) to wish me good luck in the prison.

"It was only when other prisoners angrily pointed out that Ronnie was dead that he checked and it turned out the message was from Reggie, who was still alive and in prison.

"Not long after I entered the prison I was in the mess hall queue, which was not exactly a parade of Guards.

"I wandered out of line and immediately a guard boomed over the tannoy 'Aitken, where do you think you're going?'"

"It was their way of showing the other prisoners that I was just another Belmarsh inmate and wouldn't be getting any favours."

He added: "Belmarsh was a rough and difficult environment, but I made some surprising friendships.

"The Mr Big of Belmarsh was [Noel "Razor" Smith](#), who had committed over 200 [armed robberies](#) and had earned his nickname for slashing a punter's face in a pub fight when he was a teenager.

"He was territorial and quite aggressive with a bear-like growl, and I found him scary at first.

"But we quickly developed respect, especially after I noticed his gift for the English language when he showed me something he'd written.

"I encouraged him and he later asked to interview me - I said 'Honestly, no thanks' but he put the heat on me and I gave way.

"Razor is loyal and so bright - we still see each other from time to time now he's out and a full-time writer.

"For all the bad things he's done in his life I regard him as what he would call a diamond geezer."

Aitken became popular with other Belmarsh inmates after using his knowledge as an MP to help an illiterate prisoner write a letter successfully appealing his family's eviction.

He said: "When I gave him the letter he held it up to the other inmates and said, 'This MP geezer has fantastic joined-up writing!'"

**I've seen the rough and tumble and never have a dull day - it's not without its risks although I've only been punched twice**

### **Jonathan Aitken**

"I soon ended up helping prisoners write letters about the most intimate subjects to their wives and girlfriends.

"One told me that my letters were having a fantastic impact on the girls of Brixton."

Aitken was later moved to HMP Stanford Hill in [Kent](#), after prison governors across Britain initially refused to host him.

He said: "My cell was next door to Mickey Aguda, a bank robber known as Spider because of his ability to scale scaffolding.

"Mickey was a lovely man with a great sense of humour, albeit a very serious criminal.

"He had been involved in a silver bullion raid where someone had grassed as always eventually happens, and they cut a deal with the [Met's Flying Squad](#) where they returned the silver to avoid prosecution."

Aitken was visited in Stanford Hill by several high-ranking politicians and Formula One legend [Frank Williams](#) - as well as his 88-year-old mother, who was nearly imprisoned herself after drinking nettle hooch made by prisoners and producing her camera to snap them.

The former minister later returned to prison as a chaplain at [HMP Pentonville](#), after being inspired by England [cricket](#) captain Charles Studd's claim "I want to run a rescue shop in the yard of hell".

**Once I was on duty on Christmas Day and said to the prisoners 'Look boys, now's your chance to escape - I'm the one who'll have to chase after you'  
Jonathan Aitken**

When he was ordained as a priest he brought bishops, MPs and old prison friends like Razor Smith together for a drinks party at the [Old Bailey](#), where he had been sentenced in 1999.

He said: "I know myself what hell prison can be, which helps me win the trust of prisoners.

"On my first day one shouted 'F\*\*k off, Pie at me' - 'pie and liquor' being prison slang for vicar."

"Many other prisoners expressed their doubts in rough language, but I was able to say 'Hang on, I used to be a prisoner' in the Beirut block in Belmarsh.

"I've seen the rough and tumble and never have a dull day - it's not without its risks although I've only been punched twice.

"Once I was on duty on Christmas Day and said to the prisoners 'Look boys, now's your chance to escape - I'm the one who'll have to chase after you."

"Pentonville is quite different from Belmarsh, which is without doubt the worst prison in Britain - but it is quite Dickensian, with crumbling walls and electrics and a gloomy atmosphere."

Aitken was inspired by his autistic friend Mickey Aguda to help set up a first-of-its kind neurodiversity unit at Belmarsh, where prisoners with special needs are given the attention and support they need - reducing violence within the prison as a whole.

He said: "I consider as a real son one prisoner called Dan Brown, who told me when I first met him in Pentonville that he had spent nine out of the past eleven Christmases in prison.

"Dan was basically a druggie and was doing time for a range of petty and not so petty offences - and later went back to prison after I baptised him and he smashed an offie up.

"But I didn't give up on him - he's now on the straight and narrow as a boiler repair man and in a few months I'm presiding over his wedding."



An aerial view of the 'notorious' prison

Aitken describes HMP Pentonville as 'Dickensian' Credit: Getty Images - Getty

