

# insidetime

the National Newspaper for Prisoners & Detainees

a voice for prisoners since 1990

August 2018 / Issue No. 230 / [www.insidetime.org](http://www.insidetime.org) / A 'not for profit' publication / ISSN 1743-7342  
An average of 60,000 copies distributed monthly Independently verified by the Audit Bureau of Circulations

## Crackdown on crime in prison

Justice Secretary announces new security measures and incentives programme to kick-start reform of prisons

- Digital profiling
- Airport style scanners
- In-cell telephones

### Inside Time report

David Gauke MP, the Justice Secretary, has announced a £30million package to tackle organised crime in prisons and introduce incentives for good behaviour. New technology will be used to identify, target and disrupt 'Criminal lynchpins' who orchestrate gangs from behind bars.

safety, security and decency across the estate, a new digital tool will enable prisons to build a more detailed picture of the kind of risk a prisoner is likely to present - including the likelihood of involvement in organised crime. Following a successful trial, the digital tool - which assesses information from various law enforcement databases to create a central 'risk rating' for each prisoner - will be rolled out across the country over the next year, at a cost of £1million.

Mr Gauke said: "We must make it clear to these gangs that criminality stops at the

offenders coordinating drug supply from the inside and moved them to other prisons to cut them off from their market. This includes people using drones and visitors to smuggle drugs and mobile phones into prisons, and those seeking to corrupt prison staff and coerce other prisoners - through intimidation or fear - to get involved in criminal activity. Removing these individuals disrupts supply routes and, just like any organisation, this lack of leadership paralyses the gangs and stops them from getting business done."



Credit: BBC

"I think I did about sixteen months, but the reason I got out, and a lot of people don't know this is because..."

Ricky Tomlinson reflects on his time as a prisoner

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"Take a look around and you will see that we are all being 'manipulated'."

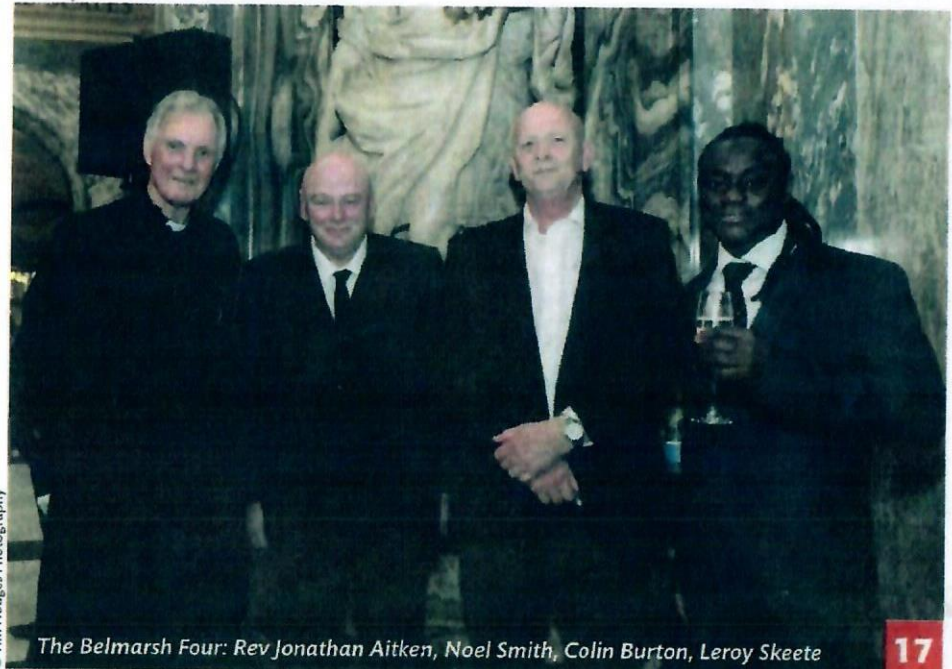
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"A journey of a thousand miles starts with the first step. Twenty-four months to go..."

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The Belmarsh Four: Rev Jonathan Aitken, Noel Smith, Colin Burton, Leroy Skeete

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## From prison cell to prison chaplain

The extraordinary transformation of Jonathan Aitken

# MICHAEL PURDON SOLICITOR

# A good trip to the Old Bailey

Old prison landing colleagues celebrate a new beginning with chilled wine and humility



Noel Smith

I first met Jonathan Aitken, ex-Conservative Chief Secretary to the Treasury and Member of Parliament for South Thanet, on a dirty prison landing at HMP Belmarsh in 1999. He was serving 18-months imprisonment for perjury and looked far from the suave, expensively-dressed figure he had cut at the Old Bailey for sentence on the TV news the evening before. Despite the fact that I was already a hardened villain from a working-class background with socialist leanings, and he was an Eton-educated ex-Tory Minister, we got on famously.

I found Jonathan to be an extremely spiritual man, very calm and accepting of his lot. It was rumoured in the prison that during the time spent in his cell alone he was actually studying the Bible and learning Aramaic! Of course to a lot of people, the media in particular, this was the classic ploy of the convict suddenly finding religion in order to impress the Parole Board. But Jonathan didn't have to face the Parole Board as he was not serving a long enough sentence. In the end, it was

Greek that Jonathan was studying along with his Bible, and his was no convenient prison conversion.

Fast forward almost 20-years and both Jonathan and I had left the prison years behind. I was now a writer and journalist, working for this paper, and Jonathan was about to be ordained as a deacon at St Paul's Cathedral and will become an unpaid prison chaplain. Myself and a couple of the old Belmarsh boys, Leroy and Colin were invited to attend the reception after the ordination, in the main hall of the Old Bailey on a very hot summer's afternoon.

*“As Jonathan himself says, prison does not have to be the end for anyone; it can be a new beginning.”*

To enter the Old Bailey Central Criminal Court through the front door was quite a novel experience for me. I never realised just how elegant and luxurious the Main Hall of this building is, you don't normally get much sense of that when you are trapped in a narrow cell deep in the dirty and fetid bowels

of this centre of British justice. The bright colours of the gilded paintings and tapestries, the deep glow of the bronze and marble busts the very opulence of this, the public face of British justice, jarred with my memories of the graffiti-covered, food-stained and peeling walls of the cells below, and even the utilitarianism of the actual courtrooms. This really was a different world.

My wife and I met many people at the reception from the world of politics, church and prison. As we sipped our chilled wine and listened to Jonathan giving his speech of thanks, his plain black robe and white collar in stark contrast to the attire of his pre-prison life of Savile Row suits and handmade shirts, I couldn't help but smile a little bit inside. Time can heal us all if we let it. There is life after prison for those who want it. As Jonathan himself says, prison does not have to be the end for anyone; it can be a new beginning. Who would have believed that prisoners like us, standing on the landings of HMP Belmarsh back in those days, would one day be drinking wine at the Old Bailey, and without a jury in sight! It truly is a funny old world.



© Tim Hodges Photography

Rev Jonathan Aitken behind the Rt Revd and Rt Hon Dame Sarah Mullally DBE, Bishop of London. Former prisoner, turned Deacon: "honoured, humbled and delighted"

## 'The luckiest man alive'



Reverend Jonathan Aitken

Prisons and prisoners will always have a special place in my heart. That is the real reason why I have felt called to become an Ordained Prison Chaplain.

I expected my 18 month sentence for perjury, which I served in HMPs Belmarsh, Standford Hill and Elmley, to be a grim experience. Not so. Of course there were bad moments, but the negatives were far outweighed by the positives.

These positives included new friendships; warm companionship; frequent laughter; respect for many fine prison officers; and an enduring empathy for the roller-coaster ride of prison life.

I also discovered as monks have known for millennia that cells can be great places to pray in. And I found that prison is the most challenging of environments in which to practice that great commandment: "Love your neighbour". Sometimes the neighbours can seem unlovable. That's exactly the challenge to the prison community - from cellmates to chaplains.

With love, the worst of sinners can be rehabilitated and redeemed. Look at me! Back in 1999 when I stood in the dock of the Old Bailey to be sentenced I was public enemy No 1 in the eyes of the media. Defeat, disgrace, divorce, bankruptcy and jail was my trajectory.

Today I feel the luckiest and happiest man alive. I enjoy my chaplaincy work on the wings at HMP Pentonville - a tough nick but full of spirit. The calm professionalism under pressure of the senior officers is impressive.

While I learn my trade as a chaplain I need to wake up the outside world to be more generous in offering second chances to those who want to climb the path to rehabilitation. Watch this space!

Best wishes to all readers of Inside Time from this happy new chaplain!

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