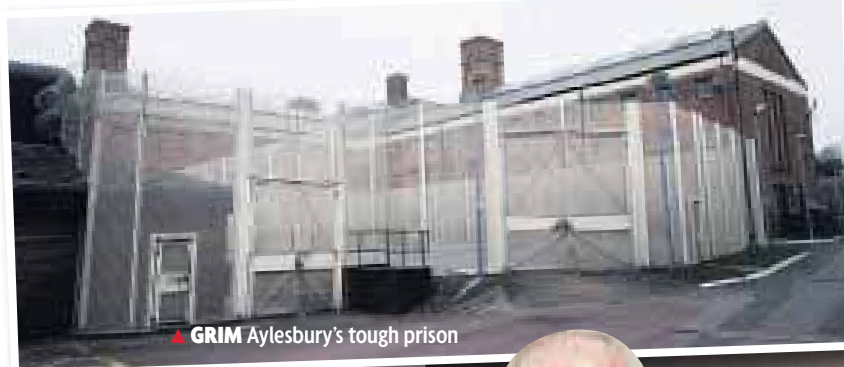


M DAILY **INVESTIGATES**



GRIM Aylesbury's tough prison

EXCLUSIVE

BY **TOM PARRY**
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KEY MAN
Warden Bob
on his rounds

A QUICK glance at the glass cabinet is all you need to realise you are about to mix with Britain's most dangerous teenagers.

Such a case in a school would be full of glittering sports trophies but in this forbidding Victorian jail it holds far more sinister mementos.

On display is an armoury of deadly weapons, made from seemingly harmless objects, found in cell searches. A stark warning to the prison's 185 wardens of the underlying violence that can surface at any time.

Among the vicious items are sharpened screwdrivers nicked from workshops and a blade, made by wrapping a severed tin can lid around a biro, perfect for what gang slang calls "shanking".

"Take care in there, lads," says a guard as we cross the no man's land between the gatehouse and the main prison wings.

Aylesbury young offender institution holds 400 of Britain's toughest young criminals - more than one in five are doing life for murder.

So, it is slightly unnerving to see 19-year-old gang killer Nathan holding a knife when I meet him. He is one of five lifers making chips in the sweltering staff mess kitchen.

Smiling as we shake hands, the polite Londoner readily admits he was an irresponsible thug when he was sent down five years ago for a gang feud killing. But now, Nathan insists, that is all behind him.

He says: "I was shocked I'd killed someone. I didn't know he'd died. I didn't think I was capable of something like that. It was just a fight. I'd been in that gang since I was 13."

"When I came to prison, it felt like there was no point living any more. It felt like my life had ended."

"First evening is the hardest: new surroundings, new noises, a different smell. It sounds silly but a different bed also affects you when you're so young. I was so scared and confused. I felt vulnerable for the first time ever. I'm a different person now, I've grown up since sentencing."

Surrounded by a 30-foot high wall, Aylesbury is as tough as any adult jail.

Of last year's 173 violent incidents, there were 29 serious assaults which ended up in hospital treatment.

Eight of those were on staff and four led to prisoners being prosecuted again.

Young offender institutions take kids from 15 but at Aylesbury they're all 17 - the age at which Nathan was transferred here - to 20.

And, like all of Britain's 134 jails, it has a drugs problem. Many inmates arrived with a habit and one lad was heard telling fellow prisoners his mum gave him a line of coke to celebrate his ninth birthday.

By the time we enter A Wing, Darren Owers, our prison officer guide, has unlocked and then re-locked a seemingly never-ending series of heavy metal doors.

On the lower landing, youths in prison issue grey jogging pants, blue T-shirts and grey pumps, play pool and table tennis. The warders join in and keep a watchful eye.

Many inmates have their hands down the front of their trousers, a gangland stance which, in the outside world, signifies they are carrying a gun. There is a gang "pecking



People here have done the sickest crimes, you have to distance yourself
WARDEN STEPHEN



PENNED IN
Mirror's Tom

order" in here, Darren says. Most inmates are still teens but as they spend an hour a day pumping iron in the gym, many have the physiques of fully-grown men. Others could still be in the school playground.

They may strut around the razor-wired exercise yard but deep down many are still boys who miss their mums.

"The hardest thing about being in here? I think when my mum leaves at the end of a visit," Nathan admits.

"Seeing her walk through those doors is probably the best thing though. I miss little things most people take for granted."

"I miss my mum shouting at me for leaving my laundry on the bathroom floor, breakfast with the family, eating around the dinner

WHERE TEEN KILLERS ARE LOCKED AWAY

DAILY ROUTINE..

7.50am: Cells unlocked.

9am-11.30am: Work (bricklaying, cookery and motor mechanics in a workshop backed by Toyota) or association.

12 noon-1.40pm: In cells.

1.40pm-4.45pm: Work or education

5pm: Evening meal.

5.15pm-7.15pm: Association.

7.15pm: Cells locked.

VISITING

Between 2 visits of 1 hour per month and 6 visits of 2 hours per month depending on behaviour.

I miss mum telling me off, family meals, my little brothers and shopping

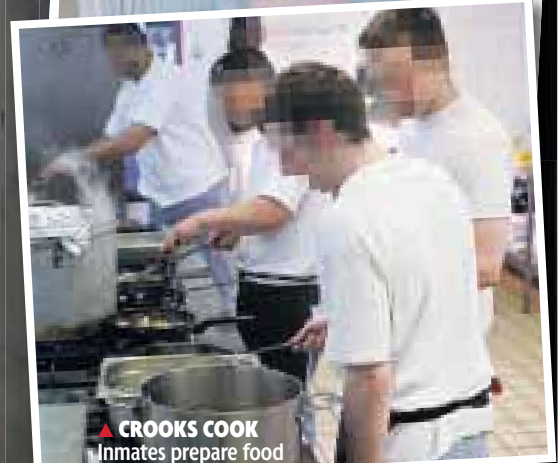
KILLER NATHAN SERVING LIFE



BANGED UP
Lads play pool on A Wing



DIM VIEW
Inmate in his cramped cell
Pictures: ROWAN GRIFFITHS



CROOKS COOK
Inmates prepare food

Knife fights and visits from mum..inside UK's toughest youth prison

table, my little brothers and being able to get up and go to the shop. The hardest part of the day is when the door closes and you hear that key turn in the lock."

Even with good behaviour Nathan, who was brought up without his dad, will be 28 before he is released. He has relied on prison officers to learn the vital lessons he missed out on at home and school.

HANGING

Warden Bob Stephen, 51, previously an officer at London's Wormwood Scrubs, says: "A lot of them are damaged when they get in here. Some of them need a lot of help. We are their family. They might have been sexually abused by half of their family, or they just can't cope."

"You have people here who have done the sickest, most depraved crimes you can think of, but you have to distance yourself from that."

"I don't know what most of these prisoners are in for, I don't have to know. I

just treat them all the same. At the moment it is quiet here. If you have different gangs in it can be difficult."

"We had a big problem last year with postcode gangs. One group would be from Tottenham and the other from just down the road in Wood Green."

"On New Year's Day last year there was a massive punch-up. I ended up in hospital with a big wound."

"You know if they want to turn against you they have a 10 to one advantage. They

can take us any time they want. So you never know what is going to happen."

Aylesbury has had two apparent suicides in the past four years, one of which Bob had to deal with. And there were 187 incidents of self-harm last year.

Bob says: "Five weeks ago a lad on E Wing cut his arm right through the vein. I'd just got myself burger and chips when I got called to the landing."

"Once the ambulance had arrived and I had changed my blood-soaked uniform,

I finished off my food. There was another guy on F Wing who would cut chunks of his flesh off."

"One Sunday evening a while ago I spoke to a prisoner through the slot in his cell door. Later the night officer found him hanging in his cell. We cut him down. He was dead. I was straight back to work the next morning though."

Convicted robber Stan, 18, from Essex, talks to me while sitting on the sagging bed in his cramped cell, which has a toilet,

a sink, a tiny table to eat on and a TV that turns off automatically at 1am.

But with only a tiny window covered by a wire grill and six iron bars, it is a depressing place to be cooped up in for 14 hours a day. Stan says: "Most nights you hear shouting across the landing. It can be hard to sleep before 2am."

Another inmate, Marcus, jailed for five and a half years for GBH with intent to kill following a nightclub stabbing, complains about Aylesbury's education programme. He says: "I feel I've been left behind by being in here. But I'm determined it won't derail me."

"You get used to being in your cell. You just lie down. I'm aiming towards getting a PlayStation 2, a privilege you have to earn. I've still got a way to go though."

"Some people think because you have a PlayStation in your cell that's making jail life easy. Jail itself is the punishment. It's hard enough as it is not being with your family and friends."



REFORMER
Mark Johnson

Civilised prisons make for civilised inmates

REHABILITATED ex-offenders have gone back to HMP Aylesbury to build a prison council.

It's a safe and structured way for inmates to make a difference and have their voice heard.

The scheme, User Voice, has

By **MARK JOHNSON**
of ex-offenders charity User Voice and Pride of Britain winner

let young prisoners get involved in more positive activities.

It is the first time many of them will have seen former inmates

accepted by the Prison Service. This encourages them to take responsibility for their actions and community, and encourages them to a crime-free existence on their release. For more details see www.uservice.org.

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