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Islington Tribune

REVIEW

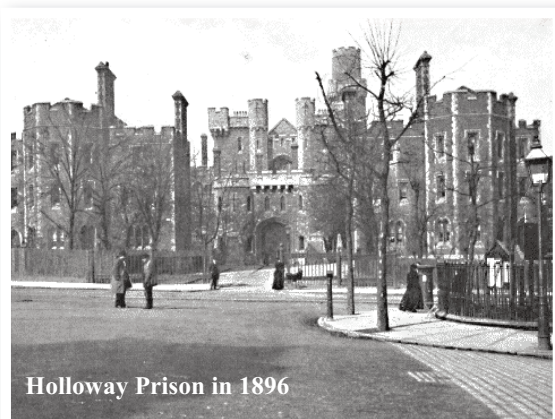
WITHIN THESE WALLS

On a July morning in 1960, the “queen of the underworld” escaped from Holloway prison. Born into poverty in 1928, Zoe Tyldesley – later Zoe Progl – started stealing at the age of six and would find herself working at a nightclub as a teenager.

In one of the seedy clubs she met burglar Billy the Cat who taught her everything she needed to know to become the country’s top female burglar. However, she kept getting caught and her many brushes with the law saw her imprisoned repeatedly at the Camden Road prison. She hatched a plan with her boyfriend Barry and her poodle Fifi to scale the 25-foot wall. She wasn’t going to be caged in any more. (She was recaptured five months later.)

Caitlin Davies’s new book, *Bad Girls: a History of Rebels and Renegades*, offers many great tales of those who called the now-closed Holloway prison their home for either long or short stretches of time. Once the largest women’s prison in Europe, the four-hectare site has many tales to tell and Caitlin delves into every conceivable story.

Caitlin was finally allowed access to Holloway’s archives after



Holloway Prison in 1896

What was it like for a woman to be behind bars in Holloway prison? A new book provides some answers, says **Emily Finch**

a new governor took over the prison’s management a few years before its closure two years ago.

“I used the archive to flesh out the stories of some of the women who escaped and the borstal allocations in the 1950s. I viewed governors’ journals and what the register said when Diana Mosley’s husband Oswald arrived and how they filled it in,” she said.

During the Second World War the government faced a conundrum – how to deal with Nazi sympathisers. Locking them up was one solution but how to deal with those of influence such as Diana Mosley? Being the daughter of a baron and related to Winston Churchill’s wife, Ms Mosley found herself in a powerful position and one solution was to lock her in Holloway prison but with privileges – her husband.

It’s hard to imagine what life in a women’s prison

would have been like unless you’ve had the misfortune of stepping into one. For those living in the shadow of Islington’s Holloway prison the imagination has run wild for years, concocting images of terrible conditions. Caitlin offers a comprehensive and much-needed answer. The study of Britain’s first female-only prison

offers a sympathetic view of the thousands of prisoners and their guards who have spent time within the hulking fortress. Through well-researched accounts of the lives of notable and notorious prisoners, Caitlin asks us to question the role of prisons in society itself. A hefty

Circled above: Surveillance photograph of suffragette prisoners taking exercise in the yard of Holloway prison
PHOTO: MUSEUM OF LONDON



Caitlin Davies

section of the book examines the place of the prison in the suffragette movement, a welcome addition to this year’s centenary celebration of the women’s right to vote.

Caitlin writes about the little-known individuals such as Mary Leigh, a teacher from Manchester, who was one of the first suffragettes to endure force-feeding in 1909. Her description of the ordeal caused public outrage. Just a year later suffragettes were given first-division treatment and could now bring their own food and wear their own clothes.

Caitlin, who has written 10 books during a varied career that saw her train as a teacher at Holloway prison to editing a newspaper in Botswana, grew up less than a mile away from the prison and her compassion for the inmates has produced a must read.

● *Bad Girls: A History of Rebels and Renegades*. By Caitlin Davies, John Murray, £20

● *Votes for Women*, a free exhibition dedicated to the women who fought for the vote, runs until January 6, 2019, at the Museum of London, 150 London Wall, EC2. www.museumoflondon.org.uk

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