

## Time to Think

Open University Journeys in British and Irish prisons during the years of conflict, 1972-2000

### Oral History interview clip transcript

Name of Interviewee: **Ronnie White**

Interviewed by: **Jenny Meegan**

Date of interview: **30/06/2016**

#### **Important**

Every effort is made to ensure the accuracy of this transcript, however no transcript is an exact translation of the spoken word, and this document is intended to be a guide to the original recording, not replace it.

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**Clip title:** A Prison Governor remembers the H Blocks

**Duration:** 00:02:16

**Clip start point in full interview:** 00:27:00

**Clip end point in full interview:** 00:29:16

**Interview identifier:** 099\_O\_01

**Description:** Ronnie White, Prison Governor, reflects on his time working as a Prison Officer in the H Blocks in 1985 and how working with Provisional IRA prisoners in a hostile situation made him want to understand their tactics and thus led him into becoming involved in education himself.

**Transcript:**

*You were in Belfast Prison from '79 until '84 and then in '84 you say you requested to go to Maze Cellular, H Blocks, whatever, Maze Cellular is your language. Tell me about that.*

Well that is when the education started to take off. So I realised “the only way I am going to make anything of myself is to get out of Belfast [Belfast Prison - Crumlin Road Gaol] and get down and get somewhere else” and the Maze [H Blocks the Maze and Long Kesh Prison] seemed to be the ideal place to go. Nobody wanted to go there because the Maze had come through a period of the Dirty Protest, Hungry Strikes and the Maze escape, so the Maze was kind of in free fall and hemorrhaging staff at a rate of knots.

And I spent two weeks on general duties and went in as Class Officer, initially in D Wing, which was, the Maze was a strange place, it had segregated Provie [Provisional IRA] Wings, segregated Loyalist Wings and a few what they call mixed Wings

*And this was 1985?*

Yes, so I initially went on to a mixed Wing and then at that point I was moved off and put into B Wing which was Provies and I worked there ever since both as an Officer and then Governor in the Maze. Initially I went in, I used to see the search team come in and wreck cells, wreck books, tear pages out of them and then when the search team moved off, well they weren't all doing it, some of them were doing it and when they moved off, because there was no record kept of who searched what cell at this point, when they moved off the Provies got back into their cells, we got it in the neck. At that point I had a really good PO [Principal Officer] who came down and supported the staff. What the Provies used to do was they would surround you and this was when my education started to, well, I was never led back to education I was prodded and pushed into it by a cohesive paramilitary organisation intent on the destruction of both the Maze and me and anybody else who stood with me.