



Image © Edmund Clark.

## One day at a time

E Wing, Her Majesty's Prison Kingston, Portsmouth, is a jail devoted to the old. Home to up to 25 prisoners at a time, it's the end of the line for elderly lifers unable – or unwilling – to earn early parole. Some are over 80, some have already been in prison for more than 30 years. Many are old enough to have lost their teeth – as this image shows.

E Wing seems (and is) remarkable, but it's also a taste of things to come. Britain's aging population, and changes to parole and sentencing policy, mean that the number of prisoners over 60 is increasing. More and more will therefore spend their last days inside institutions that become, as photographer Edmund Clark has noted, a cross between an old people's home and a jail.

Clark photographed E Wing for two years, capturing the everyday reality of combining caring and incarceration. Originally intending to take portraits of

the prisoners themselves, he started to focus on their surroundings after deciding that personal shots were 'too easy'. 'They elicited a morbid, voyeuristic fascination in the people I showed them to, who wanted too often to know simply the nature of the crime or a case history,' he writes.

In fact most life prisoners are murderers, rapists or paedophiles, but as Clark's images show, they're not immune to the pathos of aging. He shows institutional toilets with usage guides for the senile, prison cells decorated with guides to decimal currency, and calendars ticking off the days of the prisoners' sentences – and remaining years.

Images from this project were first shown in The Frame Zero Gallery – and *BJP* – back in 2004 (*BJP*, 06 October 2004), but the work has deservedly been picked up by Dewi Lewis Publishing and turned into a thought-provoking book,

launched at The Photographers' Gallery on 01 November. The book includes essays written by writer and life prisoner Erwin James, and photographer Simon Norfolk who, he says, was left 'reeling' by what he saw.

'What leaves me so out of sorts,' writes Norfolk, 'is that I don't want to feel sympathetic to these people. In these days of electronic tagging and community service sentencing, you have to be real scum to be sent down for the rest of your natural life...

'But why are there bars on the window of a man who can't walk without a frame? What kind of escape plan can be hatched by a man who can't remember how to go to the toilet?

'It is because Clark's pictures pull me in these different directions, cleaving my half-baked prejudices, that they are so brilliant.'

**Diane Smyth**

### In print

#### ***Still Life Killing Time***

by Edmund Clark will be launched at The Photographers' Gallery on 01 November, and Clark will be present to sign copies. The book is published by Dewi Lewis Publishing (ISBN 978-1-904587-53-8), priced £17. For more information, visit [www.edmundclark.com](http://www.edmundclark.com) or [www.photonet.org](http://www.photonet.org).

***Still Life Killing Time*** will be on show next year at the Light House Gallery in Wolverhampton from 18 January to 12 March and at the Aspex Gallery in Portsmouth from 01 February to 20 March.