

REPRESSION & SOLIDARITY IN BRISTOL



**A COLLECTION OF WRITINGS FROM ANARCHIST PRISONER
EMMA SHEPPARD & OTHERS – APRIL 2015**

INTRODUCTION

This publication has been produced by Bristol ABC and Bristol Defendant Solidarity to share the writings of local anarchist prisoner Emma Sheppard. Emma was sentenced to 2 years imprisonment on Tuesday 24th February 2015 at Bristol Crown Court for committing "Criminal damage recklessly endangering life". The charge relates to criminal damage of police cars in the Bristol area.

We encourage you to write to her and support her through her time in prison. She may be moved during her sentence, so check the Bristol ABC website before writing.

The zine also contains articles about repression in Bristol including 'Operation Rhone', the police's ineffective attempts to intimidate and prosecute anarchists in Bristol.

BRISTOL ABC

Bristol Anarchist Black Cross is a prisoner support organisation based in the South West UK. We practically support prisoners by writing letters, sending books and magazines, and where possible or needed financial contributions to those inside. We publicise specific prisoners cases, campaigns and struggles and support and publicise other individuals, campaigns and resources involved in prisoner solidarity and anti-prison work.

www.bristolabc.wordpress.com
Email: bristol_abc@riseup.net



WRITE TO EMMA

Emma Sheppard A7372DJ
HMP Send
Ripley Road
Woking
Surrey
GU23 7LJ

To check Emma's address visit:
bristolabc.wordpress.com/support-emma

BRISTOL DEFENDANT SOLIDARITY

Bristol Defendant Solidarity is an independent group run by local volunteers, formed after the Stokes Croft riots in April 2011. We aim to provide effective, lasting unconditional support and solidarity to anyone arrested or imprisoned as a result of demos, riots, direct action and escalating class war. We take a clear stand against state repression and police brutality.

www.bristolabc.wordpress.com/
defendant-solidarity
Email: bristoldefendantsolidarity@riseup.net

STATEMENT AGAINST POLICE HARASSMENT

October 2014

Police in Bristol appear to be stepping up their so far fruitless efforts to find individual anarchists and those that they think are responsible for property destruction actions over the last few years in Bristol. One year after their firearms training centre at Portishead was burnt down, they have turned to desperate measures to try and get any scrap of useful information.

They have made a number of arrests, detained people at airports, and raided people's homes. The majority of people targeted have not even been charged with a crime, and we do not know of anyone who has been successfully prosecuted.

Further, officers from CID have recently visited people at their homes under the pretext of having "a friendly chat". Not surprisingly, they have been met with a resounding wall of silence with no cups of tea involved, as most good people understand the importance

of not getting drawn into conversations with the police. Even if any one of the people recently harassed by these visits knew anything about these actions or the people involved, we are confident that common sense and solidarity would prevail and the police would get the sum total of zero information. Anything else would be working for the police.

These home visits, arrests, searches and requests to snitch are not just about information and evidence gathering. They have

as much to do with a concerted effort to

intimidate and divide us all

A big part of their plan is

to scare people

into inaction and to create

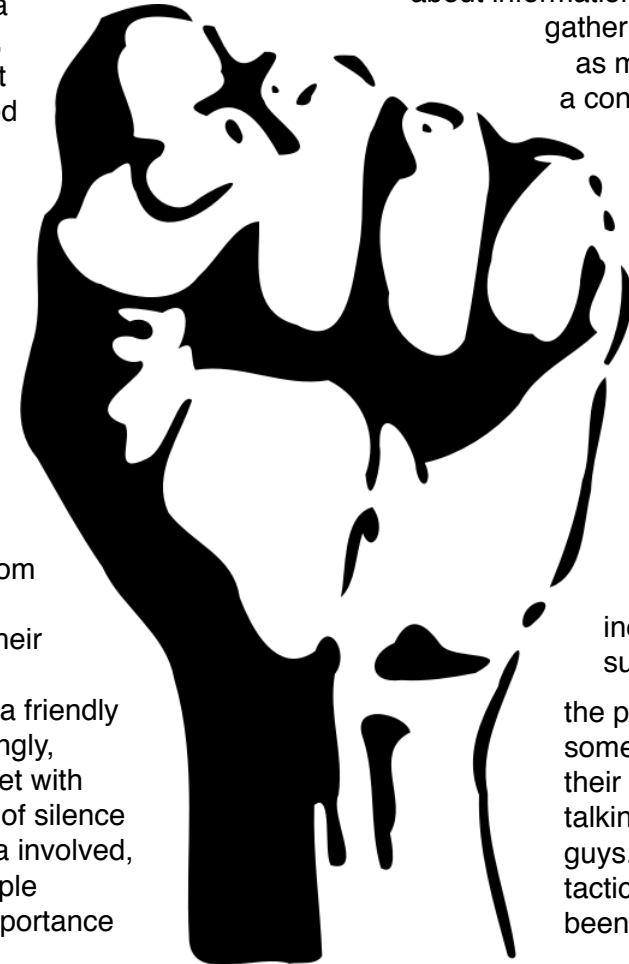
divisions between us.

They hope to get us

blaming each other for

increased surveillance to

the point where someone falls for their lies and starts talking to the bad guys. These are tactics that have been used against



social movements in countless places and times.

But they won't work here in Bristol. None of us will ever co-operate with those whose job it is, all in the name of "security" and "safety", to defend the rich and powerful while keeping us down.

We know that we are not the only people who face repression from the police – in no way do we want to compare what is happening to us to the things they are doing to others, for example their systematic use of anti-terrorism powers against people they see as Muslim.

We oppose all police brutality and harassment, whoever they do it to. We also understand the need to stick together in the face of state control and repression. Anarchists and others targeted by the police have a wide range of opinions and preferred tactics,

but we know who our comrades are and recognise the enemies at our front doors.

Signed:

- Bristol Defendant Solidarity
- Bristol Anarchist Black Cross
- South Wales Anarchists
- Bristol Solidarity Network
- Bristol Legal Observer Network
- Bristol SolFed
- Kebele Social Centre
- Riot Ska Records
- Rising Tide
- Spanner
- Bristol Hunt Saboteurs
- Empty Cages Collective
- Bristol AFed
- Bristol Animal Rights Collective
- Bristol Anarchist Bookfair Collective



OPERATION RHONE AND THE BADGER HUNT

When Bristol anarchist Huw 'Badger' Norfolk legged it somewhere in late-August 2011, word spread fast across Bristol's anarchist & radical communities. His decision to absent himself from all and any police investigations was immediately apparent to the many friends he'd had no time to say good-bye to. No doubt many suspected this escape to somewhere would be short-lived. Instead nothing, just the one shout-out from online anonymity(1) two months later, in which he stated his non-compliance bluntly.

Fast-forward to December 2014 and Badger's face is staring at us from every national and many local media outlets. Crimestoppers and Avon & Somerset Police's Operation Rhone announce a £10k reward for information, whilst forcing his parents in north-west Bristol into the media spotlight too(2). Badger is wanted for two specific actions, although no evidence is cited for either. It's made clear the Badger hunt, and the two actions, are just a part of their investigation into over 100 actions by 'persons unknown'(3) over the last four years.

So why the sudden flurry of police & media attention? In reality the police have been active all the time, supported by their slavish media-hounds at the Bristol Post. We, at Bristol Defendant Solidarity(4), have a timeline of their activity since August

2011, when victims of an unproductive police raid on a Bristol squat contacted us for support and advice. Since then police activity has ebbed & flowed, nothing for months, then intense activity, such as the last 6 months of 2014 – triggered it seems by forces from outside the area(5), which resulted in Operation Rhone being formally set up. As well as finding and arresting suspects, the aims of this operation include gathering intelligence on "the threat from domestic extremism" and to "maintain public confidence".(6)

It is clear the police know nothing. No leads beyond Badger's identity and statements posted online by 'persons unknown'. So like a man blind-drunk in a dark alley, they've lashed out at anyone they think could be intimidated, or entrapped. There've been numerous arrests leading to extended police bail, and even taggings, with at least 6 since June 2014, but no convictions; searches of homes & vehicles; visits to homes & work-places for a 'chat'; phonecalls to private mobile numbers;



harassment of individuals' current & former partners; stops at airports; endless requests that people snitch; and no doubt countless incidences of covert surveillance. All to no avail, and at huge cost. There has now been one arrest and guilty plea relating to



anarchists & radicals involved in public activity, musicians, and mere acquaintances – who clearly know nothing at all. On the other hand, the reality is that large numbers of people have a complete distrust of, and hatred for, the police. Whatever

personal views people have on the validity of actions by 'persons unknown', they won't be co-operating with the police – they are the enemy, the heavy-handed arm of the state, and they have a long list of previous. Hence the many who supported a public 'Statement against police harassment'(7). In addition to the timeline, Bristol Defendant Solidarity has published advice for people facing police harassment, and helped those who contacted us to get together and plan a response. Among other things, this group organised a protest at the headquarters of Bristol CID, which upset the police so much that they responded with armed officers and a dog unit. (8)

One harassed individual's statement sums it up: "One morning a few months ago, I woke up and found my house full of police. When I say full I mean literally – it was hard to move around! They had already arrested the person they'd come for. He was released a bit later with no charges and has now had the case against him dropped completely. If they didn't even have enough evidence to charge him, I don't see how they can justify raiding my house in the first place – I don't think they had anything on him at all. Anyway, as well as taking electronic stuff (like a hard drive and laptop), they seemed to be bagging anything that looked political..."

So why the wall of silence, and why the lack of police success? On the one hand they are harassing people –

It is generally accepted the police exist to maintain the status quo – the rule of the few over the many. Their history of fit-ups, and denial of what limited rights we have, is endless. Their support for the bosses against workers struggles is continual. Their sexism & racism institutional. Their violence well documented as they kill with impunity(9). Their surveillance powers out of control. Their weaponry &

equipment ever more militarised. Their undercover officers act as agent provocateurs and coerce individuals into relationships(10). Their corruption is breathtaking. Complaints against them and investigations by the IPCC are rising, even the Chief Constable is suspended and the subject of an IPCC investigation(11). Why on earth would anyone, never mind the anarchists & radicals, have anything to do with them?

By Bristol Defendant Solidarity

Notes/Resources:

1. 325.nostate.net/?p=3297

2. <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/dec/05/hunting-badger-police-offer-10000-pound-reward-after-bristol-anarchist-attacks>
3. <http://personsunknown.noblogs.org/post/2014/11/12/since-the-bristol-riots-communications-from-the-fai-elf-and-other-attacks/>
4. <https://bristolabc.wordpress.com/defendant-solidarity/about/>
5. <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2644814/Who-Bristol-anarchist-responsible-50-attacks-4-years.html>
6. https://www.whatdotheyknow.com/request/operation_rhone
7. <https://bristolabc.wordpress.com/2014/10/15/statement-against-police-harassment/>
8. <https://bristolabc.wordpress.com/2014/11/18/action-report-back-at-ya-police-harassment/>
9. <http://www.inquest.org.uk/statistics/deaths-in-police-custody>
10. <http://www.theguardian.com/uk/undercover-with-paul-lewis-and-rob-evans>
11. <https://www.ipcc.gov.uk/investigations/chief-constable-investigation-avon-and-somerset-police>



OPERATION GRHONE

THIS CARD MUST BE DESTROYED AS CONFIDENTIAL WASTE AT THE CONCLUSION OF THIS EVENT



A - Marcus Catlin



B - Andy Bevan



C - Matthew Ford



D - "Louise"

PUBLIC EYES ONLY - DO NOT COPY

LETTER FROM EMMA AFTER HER SENTENCING

Saturday 28th February 2015

I just watched myself on TV, which I hope is an experience I never repeat. It cheered everyone up on the wing though! I thought I'd write to try and process some of the stuff that's been happening. But I'm not feeling at my most eloquent (plus I'm obviously limited by my surveillance) so I thought I'd use some of the quotes that have inspired me since being in prison.

Dolly Parton said, "If you want a rainbow, you've got to put up with a little rain." I feel really lucky to have so many folks in my life to weather the storm with and I am happy to have less rain than I thought I would. It saddens me that this may be due to my portrayal as a 'good girl gone bad'. Why can't empathy and anger co-exist? To me they are all part of solidarity. I am not special. I just do what feels right for me. I think its because of my gender (and maybe my class) that these distinctions are made.

"When you've been afraid of something for long enough and it comes to pass, the terrible thing is a release. For in the belly of the badness there is no more fear."

- Lionel Shriver

It wasn't until after sentencing that I realised quite how much I had been dreading it. The media, the horrible 'good vs. bad character' discussion,



my 'regrets'. The whole thing disgusts me. But now I feel a weary calm.

They say I am 'too intelligent' to dislike the police, and that my actions stopped the police from dealing with the causes of domestic violence and child abuse. Do they not realise how many women are in here with me due to these issues being systematically ignored? The whole thing is rotten to the core!

I was unsurprised, but angry, to see that the court focused on my expressions of solidarity with folks in Jackson and Greece but ignored my very real issues with the police in this country which I listed at length: the deaths in custody and on the street, the immigration prisons and institutional racism, the stop and searches, use of tasers, I could go on and on.

I also tried to highlight my own experiences of police violence (targeting myself and my comrades), repression and attempts at infiltration.

But I can see why they chose to ignore all these points and divert attention elsewhere.

I regret getting caught and the impact this has had on my family and others I care about. I am determined never to come back here, and I know that as a marked woman I will have to stay on the 'right' side of the law. But I am already thinking of lots of ways to support people facing the prison 'estate'. Not just because I care about other people, but because I'm angry.

I'll leave you with one of my favourite quotes from Dylan Thomas:

*"Do not go gentle into that good night,
Old age should burn and rave at the close of day,
Rage, rage against the dying of the light"*

Solidarity, love, rage and tomorrow's chip wrappers,

Em X



Razor Wire Riddle

I am a terrorist, and a liberal
I am a man, and a misguided woman
I am considerate, and reckless
I am an anarchist, and not an anarchist
I am intelligent, and foolish
I am regretful, and defiant
I am alone, and well supported
I am queer, and discriminatory
I am sad, and unremorseful

What am I? I am me, Em (allegedly).

Since New Year I have been called all these things and I am sick of other people's judgements. Of the crawling game of the courtroom, which suffocated me. Of other prisoners who question and threaten me. Of my 'comrades' who write me off. Of the media who construct an image of me. Of the police who are 'concerned for my welfare'.

I have never disguised the contempt I have for the police. I have tried to minimise the impact my arrest has had on those I care about without selling myself out.

I am still an angry anarchist with a defiant heart. But I am weary. I do not want sympathy. I will keep my chin up and my head down.

PRISONS DO NOT WORK FOR ANYONE – EXCEPT THOSE WHO PROFIT FROM THEM

Letter from Emma Sheppard, March 2015

Last night I saw the moon and a star. It was the first time in a long-time. It made me think of all my friends, old and new, and wonder what they were doing under its glow. I feel so lucky to be part of a wide network of people. Anything seems possible when you know you have support. But whilst these thoughts make prison bearable, I will never forget the violence of the system.

The prisons are nearly full. So they are building more. From Topshop to Tesco, DHL to Lend Lease, and Virgin to Geoamey, there is a lot of money in the prison regime. Now private 'Community Rehabilitation Companies' are running the probation service. Christopher Grayling has announced another 'rehabilitative initiative' for the Ministry of Justice. Prisoners will create sandbags, fence posts and kit for the Armed Forces, in order to 'learn important new skills' and the 'value of a hard days work'.

The word rehabilitation is never far away inside these walls. But prison has a long shadow – it isolates, separates and destroys lives. Much has been written recently about women in prison. Even Vicky Pryce – ex-wife of a Tory

Lend Lease



Geoamey

MP has called for change. But whilst women in prison certainly have, to use the language of the screws, 'complex needs', calls for reform on gendered lines oversimplify the problem. Prisons do not work for anyone – except those who profit from them.

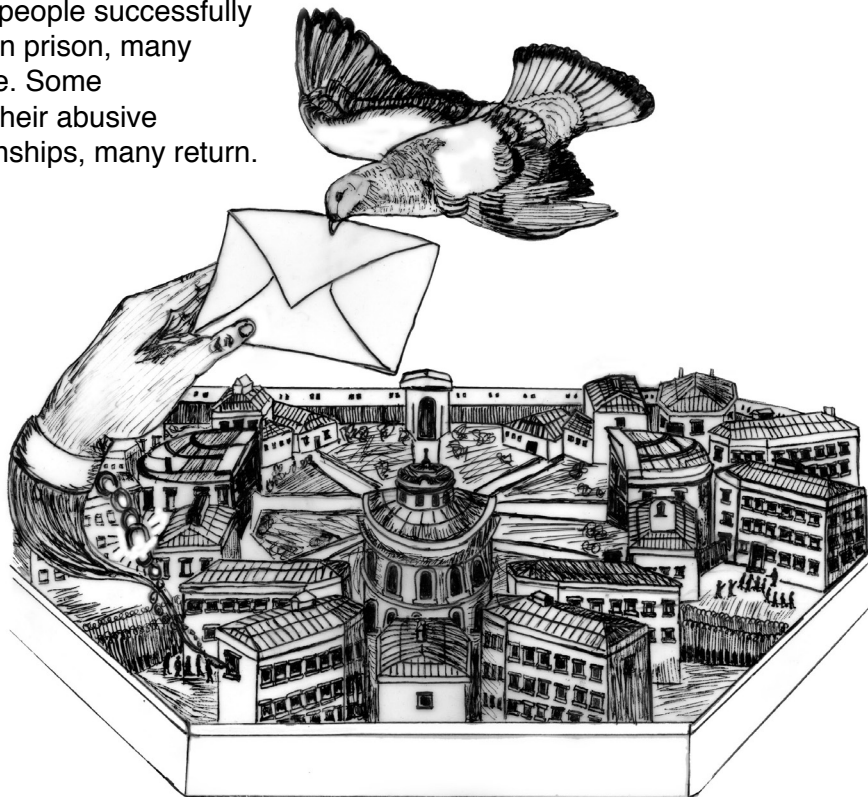
And what does 'rehabilitation' even mean? Repenting for your crime? Bowing down to supposedly benevolent systems which are offered to us as 'choices'? Rehabilitation is used like a carrot we are meant to chase. But I will not participate in a

race to make sandbags. There is no rehabilitation in an IPP, CSC or seg. When people are shipped out without warning. This is not rehabilitation.

Assata Shakur described one of the many show trials she was subjected to. Whilst I am not in any way comparing myself to her, the sentiment really resonated with me:

“Participating in the New Jersey Trial was unprincipled and incorrect. By participating, I participated in my own oppression. I should have known better and not lent credence to that sham. In the long run, the people are our only appeal. The only ones who can free us are ourselves.”

Some people successfully detox in prison, many relapse. Some leave their abusive relationships, many return.



Just like the myth of ‘protection’ the police perpetuate, ‘rehabilitation’ is a convenient facade which hides systemic violence. The decisions people make in prison may benefit or harm them.

But any positive changes the individual makes happen in spite of, not due to, the ‘opportunities’ we receive. I will never forget the razor wire and the sound of the key in the door. but even though you lock me in, I am not alone.

SURVIVING THE FIRST FEW DAYS IN A WOMENS PRISON

Prison can be a daunting place. Especially if like me you end up there on remand quite suddenly. Though after 2.5 days in a cop shop I was at least relieved to leave the ‘bad hotel’.

Here are my top 20 tips for getting through the first couple of weeks inside a women’s prison. In no particular order:

1. Take anything the prison offers you. Even if you don’t want it, you can trade it, or find a new use for it. Sanitary towels are a great way to clean your floor. Prison issue clothes can be extra padding to your thin mattress if you don’t want to wear them. Not to mention the million uses for toothpaste.

2. Keep your cell clean. It gives you something to do, plus most women in prison have strict standards of cleanliness. Especially clean your cell if you are sharing or if you get moved. No one else likes cleaning someone else’s ming and it is other prisoners who will have to sort it out.

3. Avoid asking too many personal questions. No one likes to be interrogated. In remand prisons its quite common to be asked “What ya in for?” But less so in longer term prisons. Don’t ask this straight away unless really necessary.

4. Never say you can’t talk about your crime. People will assume its something to do with children and then you better watch your back. The best policy is honesty - but saying as little as possible. Most lies get out in the end - especially with people getting folk to check outside to check online, or watching the news. If you want to say as little as possible (especially sensible if on remand and pre-plea) then just say the charge and then try to change the subject. People often like talking about themselves in prison so hopefully you can just listen.

5. Be kind to yourself. If you have self-respect then you are less likely to get drawn into prison politics and bad mouthing other people. Be as consistent as possible - try not to be ‘sometimesish’ (nice then narky).

6. Don’t make promises you can’t keep. Its better to be a bit lonely in the first few days than try to buy friends with promises. People respect you more in the long run.

7. Be careful what you sign up for. After a long ‘induction’ period it can be tempting to agree to anything just to get out of your cell/off the wing. But think about the long game. How can you try to get as much as possible out of this situation? If you can say you will do something than change your mind

you may get put on basic or not be able to do what you wanted. Take time to chat to people who are doing education/work you are thinking about, don't just take the word of the prison staff! If you want to refuse to do work or education - try to find out what the implications are (loss of 'privileges' etc). You should still be allowed for 'exercise' and use the library but you might lose your visits and not be allowed to the gym.

8. Stay away from the screws as much as possible. Quite a few girls suck up to the them and its gross. The screws don't give a shit about you and they lock you up several times a day. If you need something - ask don't beg. Try to ask other prisoners like wing mentors, insiders or people on your wing for as much info as possible. You might be slower to get settled this way, but you'll draw less attention to yourself. Ask mates outside to find out about support services for prisoners.

9. If sharing a cell, be considerate to your padmate. Keep your stuff tidy. Try not to dominate the TV and chat through issues about going to the toilet etc - some people don't mind smelly poos, others go mad! Be upfront about any issues you have with your padmate. Don't bad mouth them on the wing. Take time to get to know them, you'll have plenty of bang up together so just take it slow.

10. Never, ever grass. There are no excuses. Don't get involved. Don't make shit up. The screws may offer you some crumbs in exchange for

information but you will always have to look over your shoulder. It's common in prisons for wing staff to make it difficult for those they perceive to be trouble makers. Don't add fuel to their persecution. If you are being bullied try to talk to safer custody, 'Insiders' or listeners first, as they are all fellow prisoners. Only talk to the screws as a last resort as they mostly don't care - especially if it creates more work for them.

11. Get outside whenever you can. Even if you don't feel like it (likewise with the gym). Try to drown out the sound of other people by concentrating on the wind/rain/birds.

12. Don't despair if your first visit leaves you feeling quite upset. They do get easier! Your family and friends wouldn't come if they didn't want to. Accept that they care. The quicker you do this, the better for everyone.

13. Be careful what you say: not just in your letters and phone calls but to other prisoners. Trust no one. Try to keep chat general, especially for the first while. Its amazing how much mileage you can get out of a conversation about prison food, the officers, or TV. If you didn't watch soaps on the out, adapt one for your time inside. Play pool if you can, or ping pong or cards if chatting is too much.

14. Think about safe and respectful sex. A lot of girls shag about. This is an emotional and physical minefield. Be careful, especially in the first few weeks while you get to know people

and their histories. If its all too confusing, have a wank!

15. Avoid getting into debt. No one likes someone who takes the piss. If someone does you a favour, they will remember. And folk talk, so don't think that just because you have taken stuff from different people they won't realise. Likewise, never steal from other prisoners.

16. Pick your battles. Prison is a bitchy, tribal, cliquey place. Sometimes it can feel really claustrophobic and oppressive. Every time you hear a discriminatory comment, take a deep breath and think about the best way to deal with it. Calling someone out in front of their mates will probably just get their back up. Try chatting to people one to one but remember, you have to live together. If you call out every comment you might find yourself in quite a lonely spot. Sometimes it's ok to walk away.

17. Be careful if you are giving advice. Prisoners often love to comment on each other's cases, social services, probation etc. This can be extremely upsetting for the individual. Every case is different. Its best not to comment or at least, only describe what happened to you - don't generalise or repeat rumours you've heard.

18. Get silly! If you can, crank up National Prison Radio and dance around your cell. Try doing something new - drawing, writing... and go to the gym.

19. Observe. Observe. Observe. Its amazing how quickly you'll get to know the faces of your wing. You'll work out who will help you and who to go to when you need things. It might seem overwhelming trying to remember everyone's names, but you will get there eventually!

20. Remember - it will get easier. Sleeping might be tough and weekends always drag. Get a good book out of the library. Phone a friend. Write some letters. Make a plan of things you want to do when you get released.

Hopefully this list is helpful. Obviously I can only speak based on my experiences, but based on chats with other prisoners I think they are fairly universal at this moment in time.

I don't normally write in the style of telling people what to do do, but wanted to share random thoughts incase my experiences could be useful. One thread which runs through pretty much all my points is: speak up for what you want. If you don't ask, you don't get. If you do ask you probably still don't get - but its important not to let the prison get away with being slack. There are other comments I'd like to make that might be helpful but I don't think they would get through the prison postal system!

If you have other comments on surviving in a women's prison please write to Bristol ABC as we are working on a more detailed survival guide for later in the year.



Bristol ABC
c/o Kebele, 14 Robertson Road,
Easton, Bristol, BS5 6JY,
bristol_abc@riseup.net
bristolabc.wordpress.com