

IRA Old Bailey bomber turned Sinn Fein politician accused of cashing in on 'shooting prison guard' with book on his terrorist past

- **Gerry Kelly, 60, bombed the Old Bailey in 1973 and led the escape from HMP Maze in 1983**
- **Now he has written a book, The Escape, telling story of the prison break**
- **Kelly refuses to deny that he shot guard and describes pointing gun at him**
- **Prison officers' union says Sinn Fein spokesman is 'glorifying terrorism'**

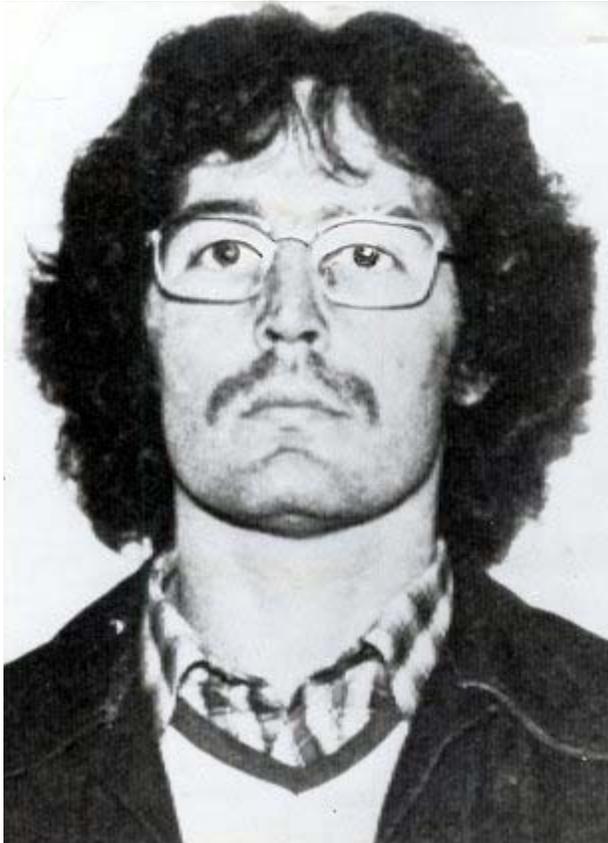
By [Hugo Gye](#)

PUBLISHED: 12:29 GMT, 30 October 2013 | **UPDATED:** 14:36 GMT, 30 October 2013

A former IRA terrorist who injured 200 people when he blew up a car bomb at the Old Bailey has been criticised for writing a book about escaping from the notorious Maze prison.

Gerry Kelly, who is now a politician in Northern Ireland and Sinn Fein's spokesman on policing, was one of the ringleaders of the 1983 prison break and has been accused of shooting a guard in the head.

Now he has published a book to celebrate the 30th anniversary of the escape, prompting critics to claim that he is 'glorifying terrorism' and has a 'twisted mind'.



Memoir: Gerry Kelly, pictured left as a politician and right during his terrorist days, has written a book about escaping from HMP Maze in 1983



Escape: Mr Kelly and 37 other prisoners broke out of the Maze, pictured, in September 1983

During a new interview, Mr Kelly refused to deny that he shot the guard, admitting that he pointed a gun at him and said: 'Do not move or I will shoot you.'

The 60-year-old became an IRA militant when he was just a teenager, and played a crucial part in the bombing of the Old Bailey in 1973.

One person was killed and nearly 200 injured when a car bomb went off outside Britain's top criminal court, in the City of London.

Mr Kelly was arrested and sentenced to life in prison over the bombing, and joined dozens of other IRA members on hunger strike in HMP Maze, near Belfast.

But on September 25 1983, he and 37 other prisoners escaped from the top-security facility, killing one guard and injuring 20 during the break-out.



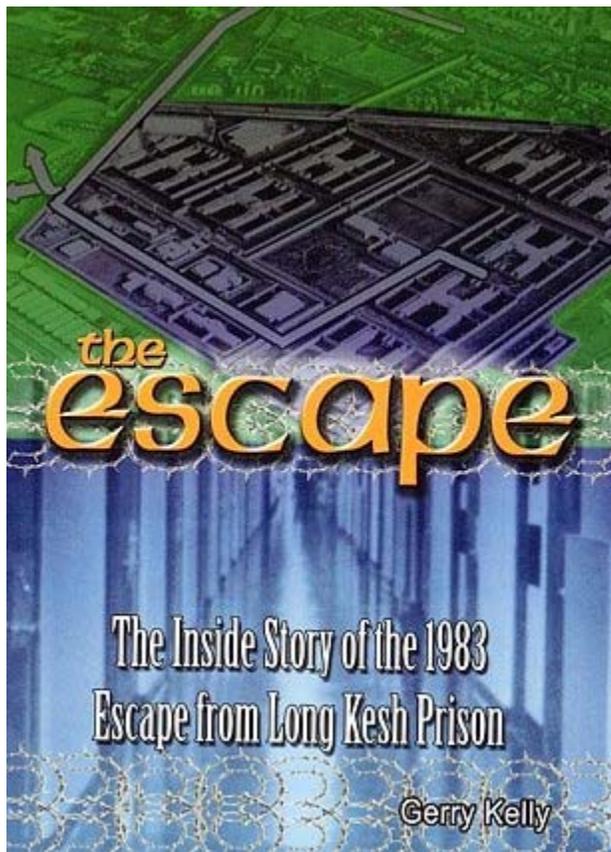
Return: The former bomber leaving the Maze in 1999 after meeting with IRA prisoners to discuss disarmament during the peace process



Unapologetic: Mr Kelly, pictured next to an IRA member at a republican event, has refused to say sorry for his role in the Maze prison break

In his new book, *The Escape*, Mr Kelly writes of the moment he confronted a prison officer, pointing a gun at him and saying: 'Do not move or I will shoot you.'

Two shots were fired at the guard - one of which hit him in the head, although he survived the shooting - and the official report into the escape named Mr Kelly as the gunman.



Book: Mr Kelly is publishing this memoir about the prison break at the Maze

This week he told the [Independent](#): 'There were two shots fired. There was myself and others there, so clearly it was a prisoner who shot him. But that is as far as I will go.'

Although he insists he has now renounced violence, he said that 'the struggle has to be defended', and described the Maze escape as 'a very proud moment'.

The chairman of Northern Ireland's Prison Officers' Association said that Mr Kelly's actions were not 'something he should be proud of', and accused him of re-opening old wounds.

'I don't think it's something he should be proud of – that he shot a prison officer in the head in an attempt to escape,' Finlay Spratt told the News Letter.

He added that prison officers had 'come to get used to these boys glorifying their terrorism', adding: 'If they say they're wanting to move on and put the past behind them, then they shouldn't be bringing up these acts of terrorism in the past.'

Unionist politicians reacted with fury to the news of Mr Kelly's book and called on him to apologise for the break-out.

'This is not something in any way worthy of celebration,' said Jonathan Craig, who represents the Democratic Unionist Party on the Northern Ireland Policing Board. 'Rather Gerry Kelly should be apologising to the victims and their families.'

'It is clear to everyone, even those who would be sympathetic to nationalism, that Gerry Kelly has a twisted mind when it comes to the past and the events of the Troubles.'



Carnage: The scene outside the Old Bailey in London following a car bomb detonated by Mr Kelly

Mike Nesbitt, leader of the Ulster Unionist Party, said that Mr Kelly was 're-traumatising many families' with his memoir.

'For his victims, his book isn't "a great yarn", but instead a nightmare relived,' he told the Belfast Telegraph. 'He can write as many books as he likes, but he won't rewrite history.'

But Mr Kelly told the Independent: 'I've tried to do what I did with integrity. People might balk at that, but I think I've come through life with some integrity.'

'You might think everything the IRA did was wrong, but I don't.'

Following the Maze escape, he was recaptured in the Netherlands and extradited to Britain, but was released in 1989.

He was considered a key point of contact between the IRA and Northern Irish politicians during the peace process, and was elected to represent Belfast North in the Northern Ireland Assembly in 1998.

Mr Kelly is now Sinn Fein's spokesman for policing and justice, and sits on the Northern Ireland Policing Board.

'THE GRAVEST ESCAPE IN HISTORY': HOW THE IRA BROKE OUT OF THE MAZE



Forbidding: The entrance to HMP Maze in County Antrim, site of the 1983 escape

The escape from HMP Maze on September 25, 1983, was described at the time by Margaret Thatcher as 'the gravest in our prison history'.

The jail in County Antrim, nine miles from Belfast, was notorious for housing paramilitary prisoners, and was regarded by many IRA members as a symbol of repression.

Many of the most feared terrorists were held in the specially constructed 'H-Blocks', where hunger strikes and 'dirty protests' became common.

Although the Maze was supposed to be the most secure prison in Europe, officers had apparently grown complacent in the months before the break-out after Gerry Kelly and other prisoners pretended to start co-operating.

Using six guns which had been smuggled in to the facility, IRA members took their guards hostage, preventing them from raising the alarm.

The prisoners then took over part of the jail and took the officers' uniforms, subsequently commandeering a lorry which was delivering supplies to the prison and using it to drive to the outer fence.

Although officers fought back, 38 prisoners made it past the fence and fled into the surrounding countryside as it took authorities nearly two hours to bring the Maze back under control.

20 prison guards were injured in the escape by being shot, stabbed or beaten, while officer James Ferris collapsed and died after he was stabbed with a chisel.

Half of the escapees were caught within two days of the break-out, but most of the others made it to the IRA stronghold of South Armagh and were offered the chance to build a new life in America.

Some - including Mr Kelly - were recaptured and returned to prison, while others were killed in clashes with British troops, but several escaped the authorities and two have never been tracked down at all.