

## London's earning..

SHOPPERS splashed out **£64.2BILLION** last year in London – more than anywhere else in the world.

The huge spend put it ahead of retail “super-league” rivals Paris, Tokyo and New York.

And the city also boasts more big-name shops than any other, hosting 138 of the world's main 250 brands.

Chris Simpson, of Kelkoo – who commissioned the study – said: “London is world-famous for its shopping.”

## Blaze 12 rescued

TWELVE people were rescued when an inferno ripped through three floors of a tenement.

Up to 30 firefighters tackled the “serious” blaze which started in the basement in Newington, Edinburgh, on Tuesday.

All of the saved residents were treated at the scene by medics.

Later five people and a dog were hauled from a burning block of flats in Granton, Edinburgh, and given oxygen. An electrical fault is being blamed.

# CRIME WRITERS MEET HARDENED CONS

# Jailhouse talk



INSIDE JOB . . .  
(l-r) Gordon,  
Alex and Tony at  
Barlinnie Prison

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**WeightWatchers**

By MATT BENDORIS

**THREE top crime writers came face-to-face with their fiercest critics this week – when they met hardened CONS at Barlinnie Prison.**

Alex Gray, Gordon J Brown and Tony Black went inside the tough Glasgow nick to give a talk to inmates about how to write books.

But **THEY** ended up taking tips from the prisoners.

Alex, 60, from Glasgow, said: “I wrote a novel called *Five Ways To Kill A Man*.

“But one of the inmates told me, ‘Listen, we could teach you a lot more than five ways to kill somebody.’”

The trio were invited into Bar-L by Deputy Governor Rhona Hotchkiss.

But Tony reckoned stepping through the front gates of the Victorian jail – built in 1880 – was like a scene from the 1994 prison movie *The Shawshank Redemption*, starring Morgan Freeman and Tim Robbins.

The 38-year-old from Edinburgh, whose book *Paying For It* is set to be turned into a film starring Robert Carlyle, said: “Even though it looks like *Shawshank*, I



MOVIE . . . *Shawshank Redemption*

couldn't believe how friendly the staff and inmates were.”

And Glaswegian Gordon, 48, who has penned *Falling and 59 Minutes*, said: “My late dad Morgan was a policeman, so he probably put a few people into Bar-L.”

“But it was my first visit and I was struck by how calm the atmosphere was.”

“The inmates were very friendly, one even asked if I ever get confused for the former PM Gordon Brown.”

“I told him I was doing a reading at Waterstone's when two goths said ‘You're not the Gordon Brown we expected – we were going to heckle you.’”

“They'd texted loads of other goths who all arrived expecting to give the Prime Minister a hard time and were instead met with a tall, ginger guy.”

Alex, 60, from Glasgow,

began visiting prisons when she was researching her 2008 best-seller *Pitch Black*. She explained: “The book starts with a woman who is accused of murdering her husband and ends up in Cornton Vale in Stirlingshire.”

“I asked the governor if I could visit, so I could write what it's like for a woman on her first night in prison.”

“What freaks first-timers out the most is the first night in a cell.”

### Choices

“But one of the prison officers said something which has always remained with me: *Remember this isn't a place full of bad people – it's full of people who've made bad choices*.”

Alex has talked at nicks across the country but visiting Bar-L took her back to a scary childhood experience.

The mum of two said: “The only murderer that has ever chilled me to the bone was Peter Manuel, who was a serial killer in the Fifties.”

“So it was really interesting for me to see the cell Manuel had been kept in the night before he was hanged.”

But she admits some of the current Bar-L inmates put her on edge.

She said: “There have been one or two I wouldn't want to meet on a dark night.”

But other lifers have opened up to the author about their violent crimes.

She said: “The person who really touched me was an ex-soldier who was in for shooting someone dead.”

“He had changed his ways and become such an avid reader he was also trying to write a novel.”

“I always try to show in my books the ripple effect a murder creates. It doesn't just harm the victim, but has a lasting effect on their families.”

“Most crime novels are all about right and wrong.”

“As one of the wardens told the inmates at the end of our talk ‘Remember lads, these bad guys always get caught’.”



BRING 'EM TO BOOK . . . novels

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“I wrote *Five Ways To Kill A Man*..one inmate said, ‘We could teach you more than five ways to do it’.”