



The Curious Mr Howard: Legendary Prison Reformer

Tessa West

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John Howard's curiosity about prisons goes without saying, as his own writings show, including his iconic *The State of the Prisons in England and Wales*. As a self-appointed inspector of prisons - and the first to carry out such a task - Howard would knock on the door of penal establishments, mostly unannounced or uninvited. Once inside, he would observe, listen, and make copious records of events behind prison walls. John Howard (1726-1790) was a curious individual altogether: restless, eccentric, and, above all, singular. Forever concerned with minutiae, not without friends, but lacking close social contacts, the workaholic Howard frequently travelled alone and in dangerous places for months on end. Always restless and forever retracing his steps, he was equally at home in foreign countries as he was pursuing his carefully planned routines in and around Cambridge and London. A perfectionist wherever he went, Howard brought his influence, genius, and reputation to bear, seeking to improve prisons and other institutions, and, as this book shows, he deserves to be remembered as a far greater and more important figure in British and European social history than many people might suspect. This book breaks fresh ground in looking at John Howard's immense legacy in terms of prison reform, as well as his fascinating character and personal life. Based on extensive research, it provides a vivid picture of the man and his times.

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