

Crusaders by Richard T. Kelly.  
faber and faber 2008.

This terrific first novel has strong echoes of the television series *Our Friends in the North*, and *The Rotters' Club* by Jonathan Coe. In *Crusaders* we follow the life and professional career of John Gore, a diehard old-style Socialist and recently ordained Anglican priest, who is sent back to his native Newcastle to set up a new church in a rundown neighbourhood.

Gore's travails are many, caused by his new congregation, his colleagues, a local MP on the make, his sister – now a high powered and politically indiscriminate lobbyist – and a neighbourhood hard man with a soft heart, among others. Set principally in 1996, one year before Tony Blair's spectacular accession to power, but with flashbacks to earlier times, *Crusaders* portrays the decline of Old Labour and the rise of New, the demise of the Tories and the upward trajectory of evangelical Christianity, as well as the despair and amorality that are common bedfellows on sink estates in areas of serious post-industrial decline.

Kelly writes with humour, pace, and a wonderful ear for the dialogue of his native North-East. His characters are real and exude authenticity and the story he tells is engaging, funny and moving.

*Crusaders* cries out to be made into a television series, and indeed to have a sequel. John Gore's life between 96 and 2008 needs to be told, and will, I suspect, be rich in incident. Bring it on!

Rabbi Dr Charles H Middleburgh