

BOOK REVIEW

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Barry Godfrey and David J. Cox, *Policing the Factory: Theft, Private Policing and the Law in Modern England*. London: Bloomsbury, 2013. 208 pp. £65 hardback. ISBN 978-1-4411-0752-7

Godfrey and Cox's *Policing the Factory* is a rigorously researched examination of workplace 'appropriation' in the worsted industry, primarily in the nineteenth century, but with some overlap into both the eighteenth and twentieth centuries. The term 'appropriation' is defined by the authors as all those activities where employees 'converted to their own use materials which they had access to by virtue of their work' (3). At the outset the authors set themselves a number of questions that frame their study. The first is whether workplace appropriation which was widespread in the eighteenth century domestic industries continued within the more disciplined environment of the nineteenth century. They then seek to interrogate the forms which appropriation took and which groups within the worsted workforce were responsible for it. Additionally – and of considerable interest to scholars with an interest in policing and social control – they seek to examine how workplace appropriation was controlled with legal and organizational mechanisms, and which internal and external agencies were involved in its control. Also of considerable interest to historians of policing, is an examination of the private policing functions of the Worsted Inspectorate, and how the Inspectorate interacted and influenced the emergent public police during the nineteenth century. Grounded in extensive archival research, *Policing the Factory* is the most detailed and nuanced study of workplace theft in the nineteenth century undertaken to date.

The narrative of the book commences with an outline of historiographical debates, then moving on to alert readers to the powerful legal tool employers had at their disposal to control appropriation, three eighteenth-century Acts collectively known as the Worsted Acts. While these Acts collectively increased penalties for removing materials, the 1777 Act importantly established an employer-organised policing and prosecution agency which was financed for Yorkshire, Cheshire and Lancashire manufacturers by a rebate from duty paid on soap used in the manufacturing process. This legal framework forms an important backdrop to subsequent chapters. In Chapter 3 the authors address the question of who was responsible for workplace appropriation and what motivations underpinned such acts. While the authors concede that the partial archival record can shed light on only some corners of the question, their detailed research presents a fascinating, if complicated, picture. While in

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some cases workplace appropriation was clearly motivated by poverty and survival and functioned to supplement meagre wages, other forms of appropriation were considerably more organised and large-scale and, the authors, did in fact represent a very real threat to the economic viability of manufacturing enterprises.

Perhaps the most fascinating chapter in the book is chapter 4, which considers how the factory was ordered and disciplined to prevent appropriation. Internal power structures, most clearly in the person of the foreman, in conjunction with a plethora of internal regulations and rules, sought to control the industrial workforce. Underlying these regulations was often a nineteenth century form of what contemporary criminologists would call situational crime prevention. Rules that forbade movement from room to room within the factory, for example, were often framed with intention of preventing material being secreted throughout the factory for later removal. Architecture too was mobilised in the interests of crime prevention, with perimeter fences and iron gates constructed where once factories had bordered open fields or streets – a move calculated to prevent the egress of materials. Alongside such architectural controls there were also physical punishments and more subtle punishments such as the blacklisting of employees. This is a fascinating chapter, as it does call into question Foucauldian theorizations that might see such disciplinary controls as exclusively an exercise in ‘soul surgery’. Many such controls, the authors demonstrate, were firmly grounded in the pragmatics of crime prevention, even if the refashioning of subjectivities was a consequence.

Chapters 5 and 6 then cover the private policing body, the Worsted Committee. The Worsted Committee, the reader learns, performed detective functions and in the years up to 1853 was responsible for hundreds of prosecutions under the Worsted Acts. The most intriguing part of the story of the Worsted Committee is its contribution to the history of policing. As the authors indicate, the history of private policing remains a scantily researched area. Through the story of the Worsted Committee, however, Godfrey and Cox are able to destabilise what has become an axiomatic narrative for many police historians, namely that the establishment of the public police was championed by manufacturers who viewed them as a means of disciplining the industrial working class. At least in relation to the Bradford borough force and the West Riding county force examined by the authors conclude that manufacturers ‘did not gleefully welcome ever increasing legions of blue-coated workers; rather they saw the police as a necessary evil to be tolerated’ (142). Put simply, they resented paying for another police force when they already had one of their own specifically tailored to their own purposes. While this evidence may not overturn the general validity of the overall arguments regarding

the formation of the 'new police', it does point to the great value of detailed local history in providing nuanced accounts.

The final two chapters deal with the question of the composition of the magistracy and the issue of customary rights. Despite individual anomalies located in the historical record, the authors, perhaps unsurprisingly, suggest that manufacturers and magistrates spoke 'a common disciplinary language' (157). Moreover, again unsurprisingly, where a textile manufacturer was on the bench those charged with appropriation were more likely to be convicted. In the final chapter the authors address the issue of customary rights and whether this was a plausible reason offered for appropriation. They suggest there is scant evidence for this, for although those charged with appropriation would often invoke notions of equality and morality, they seldom invoked notions of custom or tradition.

Policing the Factory is at its strongest in presenting a wealth of archival material that carves a detailed and illuminating historical narrative, touching on important questions of capitalist development, labour discipline and socio-legal history. In the best traditions of English social history, each section is animated by archival examples that breathe life into the story being told. Nevertheless, *Policing the Factory* is not without weaknesses. I found the argument and theoretical framework somewhat inconsistent and erratic. At various times the authors discuss the factory in relation to the birth of a surveillance society, and in relation to notions of social control advanced by authors such as Melossi and Foucault. But these discussions remain underdeveloped and appear rather incongruous amidst the archival richness of much of the book. Additionally, there did appear to be some disciplinary confusion about who the audience for the study was. There is a rather strange detour, for example, on page 107 into contemporary private policing that is rather at odds with the historical material presented. This is echoed at the conclusion of the book where the authors claim that the study has 'helped to focus criminological attention' on the subject of appropriation. While it may seem purely semantic, there is an important difference between 'historical criminology' – which essentially projects contemporary criminological concerns backwards – and 'criminal justice history' which is firmly grounded in historiographical traditions. In my opinion *Policing the Factory* is certainly the latter, and might have more confidently and successfully positioned itself firmly there.

These minor disciplinary reservations aside, *Policing the Factory* is a rigorously researched and insightful study of workplace appropriation. In its attention to ambiguity, acknowledgment of the partiality of the archival record, and questioning of simplistic historical models of the development of law, social control and capitalism it is an outstanding

study. It demonstrates just how important the study of the local is in contributing to sophisticated and nuanced understandings in criminal justice history. As such it is a study that should of great interest to criminologists, social-legal scholars and historians concerned with temporal perspectives in criminal justice.