

BRITISH CRIME HISTORIANS SYMPOSIUM
University of Liverpool, 26-27th September 2014
***Cerian Charlotte Griffiths*¹**

A well-attended and eventful two days, 2014's British Crime Historians Symposium saw a range of panels as well as a book launching session, an excellent key-note speech and a round table discussion. In all there were 43 papers, not including the key note speech, comprising over 14 panels. The first session of the symposium saw a range of panels: 'constructing crime and the criminal', 'theorising crime and policing', 'justice in the community' and a post-graduate panel considering emerging avenues of research in crime history.

Judith Rowbotham presented some nuanced findings on the causes of domestic violence in the interwar years, in particular the social attitudes amongst different classes to domestic violence and charges of 'cruelty' in the divorce courts. Alyson Brown treated the audience to a biography of a life-long criminal, 'Ruby Sparks'. Meanwhile, a post-graduate panel explored some emerging areas of research. Anna Jenkin's examination of the abuse of servant girls in the eighteenth century focused upon three fascinating examples from France and England and provided a contextualised insight into judicial abuses in pre-revolutionary France. Helen Churcher developed some of the work on criminal stereotypes from 1770 to 1870 and Cerian Griffiths introduced some explanations for the relative dearth of prosecutions of financial crime following the introduction of joint-stock companies in the nineteenth century.

A session dedicated to theorising crime explored a range of theoretical frameworks. Maryse Tennant focused upon the history of policing as theorised by Marxist thinkers including Bourdieu and Hobsbawm, drawing conclusions on the relationship between theory and practice in historical research. Sandra Walklate's paper also discussed the relationship between the theoretical and practical sides of criminological research.

The 'Justice in the Community' panel ensured that consideration of British crime history was not overly London-focused. Richard Ireland reminded the conference of the continued neglected history of criminal justice in Wales. In particular, Ireland stressed the need to

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consider the realities of the imposition of English law and legal custom upon Wales and how the Welsh circumvented and undermined this imposition through methods of local alternative dispute resolution. Elaine Saunders presented on frequently over-looked manorial courts, giving examples of these courts being used as mechanisms for imposing local government reforms well into the end of the eighteenth century.

The AHRC funded, *Digital Panopticon: New perspectives on criminal justice records and the practice of transportation* presented a panel detailing the progress of the project so far. All three presenters, Robert Shoemaker, Richard Ward and Lucy Williams addressed some of the difficulties, practicalities and opportunities of working with the Old Bailey Session Papers and some of the other data sources which are forming the basis of the project. Professor Shoemaker explored the wealth of available data relating to convicts from the eighteenth century onwards including: physical descriptions, literacy rates, character and health. The significance of such a change of record keeping policy was considered, such as why more details of convicts were collected, why some information was preferred over others and how this related to other forms of state kept records such as those of the military. Richard Ward and Lucy Williams then discussed how the project was using such a large collection of datasets and how these sets could be linked together in order to form a detailed narrative of convicts' lives.

Themes

The history of plebeian culture was a consistent theme throughout the conference and a number of excellent presentations considered such issues as the nineteenth century disapproval of public washing and nudity, the policing of drunkenness and the judicial shift in policy regarding the regulation of fist fights.

As expected of a crime history conference, there were a number of presentations which focused upon policing. A dedicated policing panel constituted papers with a twentieth century focus on policing across Great Britain. Less usually, there were papers on Scottish policing with Louise Jackson critiquing twentieth century policy in the Scottish Highlands and Andrew Davis presenting on 1930s Glasgow. Both of these papers reminded us that it is not only Wales that is frequently overlooked by British crime historians, but also Scotland.

As well as those from the Digital Panopticon project, contributors presented on convicts and transportation. Ruth Lamont introduced research on an otherwise greatly under-considered topic, transportation, marriage and the family. Lamont focused upon the legal position of

marriage once a spouse was transported and in what circumstances convicts could enter into relationships and marry post-transportation. Helen Rogers' paper demonstrated parallels with Ruth Lamont's research and concentrated upon the lives of boys who had been transported to Van Dieman's Land in the mid-nineteenth century. Like Lamont, Rogers considered the lives of the convict boys pre-transportation and how this impacted on their lives during and after punishment. Rogers also gave some fascinating examples of the tattoos of particular convict boys and how this related to their identities pre-transportation. Catrien Bijleveld presented on the convict women of Queensland using in particular the records from the Queensland Police Gazette of the end of the nineteenth century. This source seems to have revealed a range of important statistics and details of those prisoners released. Bijleveld's paper sparked some interesting discussion regarding the prevalence of Irish convicts and typicality of offences amongst the Irish.

The second day of the symposium started with a panel of speakers from the Leverhulme funded project, *After Care: Youth Justice and its Impacts, 1850-1945*. Pam Cox gave an overview of the project, its purpose and its development to date, as well as the difficulties caused by the source material. In particular, the difficulty of tracing the lives of women following their release from prison has become apparent during the progress of the project. Heather Shore highlighted the brutal experiences of some individuals in reformatories whilst Zoe Alker counterbalanced this with more positive life histories and gave a number of examples of individuals who went on to live successful and happy lives following their release from a reformatory.

The second panel of the day contained two fascinating papers on women and property crime. Catherine Horler presented on female coiners in Wales which nicely book-ended with Richard Ireland's paper from the day before providing some interesting analysis of counterfeiting and uttering in Wales.

Historians and the Media

The conference ended with a round table session on the topical issue of historians and the media. With so much experience in the room, the discussion was a lively one, addressing many of the problems and difficulties for historians conveying the more complex of their ideas to the public in ways which were engaging and easy to follow but without undermining the accuracy of their research. A number of academics with recent television experience including Professors Barry Godfrey and Pamela Cox gave some advice to those academics wishing to present their research and expertise through television. In particular, it was

suggested that researchers should discuss their work with non-academics more frequently as this will help shape a communication style suitable for any audience. Also, a number of practical tips were given regarding engagement with those making television programmes including the need to keep some control over the final output of the material to ensure that some context is given to researchers' inputs.

Clive Emsley presented the conference's keynote address on the subject of *Cops and Dockers: Redcaps and Wolf-Packs*. This presentation further developed Emsley's previous research into workplace appropriation by addressing, amongst other issues, appropriation of goods within the dockyards during the Second World War and how these appropriations were punished. Emsley came to some interesting conclusions concerning the use of alternative punishments available due to the war such as the movement of soldiers to less desirable fronts.

With so many fascinating parallel panels, it was sadly impossible to hear all the papers but certainly the British Crime Historians Symposium brought together a range of fascinating areas and papers and demonstrated the dynamism of research present in current crime history. The Symposium held a competition for the Clive Emsley prize for best post-graduate paper which was awarded to Jim Hinks of the University of Liverpool for his paper: *Detective fictions: 'Baby farming, detectives' the novel and the press 1867-1896*. As the standard of papers received was so impressive a secondary 'runners up' prize was also awarded to Ben Taylor of King's College London for his paper: *Information, Order, and Policing in Postwar Britain*.