Crime, Courts and Community in Mid-Victorian Wales: Montgomeryshire, People and Places

Rachael Jones, Cardiff, University of Wales Press, 2018, xv + 292 pp., £24.99, 9781786832597 hb; 9781786832603 ebook

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This finely grained and richly textured study of crime and the judicial system in a rural county is a self-described 'microhistory' that places the accent on personal experiences and the way individuals interacted with the forces of law and order and the courts, mainly during the 1860s and 1870s. County policing and the structure of different courts locally were the same as elsewhere in England and Wales, and the author meticulously analyses the operation of the different tiers of the legal system: the petty sessions, quarter sessions and assizes, as well as the legal representation of the accused (where it occurred), the role of expert witnesses and the professionalisation of the courts. However, the case study is sufficiently distinctive to provide insights into an interesting interaction between specific circumstances and generic structures. Some of the distinctive features of the area derive from the fact that it is a border county that abuts the English county of Shropshire in the east and stretches across mid-Wales to an estuary that connects it to the coast in the west. This was a rural county with pockets of industrial activity. Rachael Jones has a deep familiarity with the social geography of the county, its languages, cultures and topography, and she uses this knowledge to shed light on fascinating aspects of the study of law and order. A telling insight is that the comparatively small constabulary of one hundred men was stationed at key turnpike nodes, which facilitated the surveillance of movement around the county, while the resident magistracy was mostly located along the Severn Valley, which bisects the county in a roughly west–east direction. That magistracy was English-speaking and Anglican, in a county that was strongly Anglican and anglicised towards the English border, but more markedly Nonconformist and Welsh-speaking in the west and north. The study exhibits a keen understanding of the religious complexion and complex matrix of linguistic patterns that characterised the area.

The county police force is located in a Welsh and broader context of rural policing. Mostly working class in composition, this constabulary was primarily involved in policing the behaviour of women and men of a similar social background to constables, much as was done elsewhere in Britain. Yet Rachael Jones also reveals intriguing evidence of how members of the middle class could be controlled by the police. She skilfully unpicks the links between the press, newspaper editors and the police, an analysis that hints at a rural dimension to the ways in which the local newspaper press in industrial towns of the period engaged in the surveillance of the behaviour of the middle classes as well as that of working people, as shown in studies by historians such as Andy Croll. This study of Montgomeryshire, therefore, points in the direction of the potential for further investigation of the relationship between the press, the courts and surveillance of behaviour in other rural areas.

The book includes a revealing analysis of particular categories of crime, especially those relating to the theft of clothing and boots. The gendered nature of crime in Montgomeryshire is a key feature of the study, a topic discussed by the same author in this journal in 2016. She finds that women were less likely to commit crime in the more thinly populated areas of the county, indicating perhaps that a combination of landscape, social structure, culture and the deployment of police geographically shaped criminal behaviour and reported crime. A fascinating chapter on 'vice' and prostitution is a nuanced study of a theme most readily associated with towns and cities.

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This valuable study unravels the webs of relationships that turned around the legal system in a mid-Victorian rural area. In so doing, it underlines the significance of the county as a vector of rural relationships and demonstrates how a study of its legal institutions reinforces the county's significance as a meaningful unit of analysis. Among the strengths of the book is its insistence on the need to root the study of crime and the operation of the judicial system locally in the context of social class and gender relationships. The book will be read profitably by historians of nineteenth-century rural society who are concerned with the dynamics of criminality and how local power structures were embodied in the legal system.

T. S. Eliot and Organicism

Jeremy Diaper, Liverpool, Clemson University Press, 2018, xiii + 218 pp., £85, 9781942954606 hb; 9781942954613 ebook

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The Great War, which shattered the lives of men like Robert Graves and drove others like George Mallory to seek some form of redemption in the unsullied purity of high places, was succeeded in Europe by two distracted and febrile decades. In Britain, thousands of returning soldiers encountered a land less fit for heroes than they had anticipated, its towns and cities smoky and polluted and its productive farming landscape largely abandoned to the uncontrolled forces of free trade. If agricultural research advanced on a broad front in the 1920s and 1930s, most sectors of farming remained in the economic doldrums as imported foodstuffs arrived at British ports at prices below the costs of home production. The land, the nation's only *real* capital, was being sacrificed on the altar of economic expediency. In the longer term, many believed, this neglect would usher in a decline in soil fertility and, as people left the land, a soulless, desolate and dispirited countryside would remain.

To the small but influential group of ruralist landowners, writers and scientists who formed the nucleus of the early organic movement, this situation was intolerable; the land had to be revived, its 'spiritual values' reinforced and vibrant rural communities with their daily lives in contact with seasonal natural rhythms established. Meanwhile, the true agrarian community would only flourish with Christianity as its keystone. Destruction and decay would inevitably follow the abandonment of this principle. If a hard-bitten farming world viewed this notion with ill-concealed scepticism, the organicists looked upon harmony with nature as consonant with the Christian ethic and the restoration of a direct relationship between society and the land as a prerequisite for religious revival. Yet, one cannot help thinking that the rural labourer, back hunched against the freezing east wind as s/he picked Brussels sprouts in some bleak Bedfordshire field, might well have offered a different perspective on the much-vaunted 'spiritual values' engendered by work on the land!

In his thoughtful and occasionally provocative discussion of T. S. Eliot's poetry, journalism and cultural criticism, Jeremy Diaper explores the poet's deep engagement with organicist and rural revivalist movements. The city-dwelling Eliot readily admitted his ignorance of the *minutiae* of farming and harboured few illusions about the impracticability of a return to some sort of utopian rural past. Nevertheless, several of his essays reveal considerable sympathy with the idea of a rural community with God and the Church at its heart and suggest that such communities would somehow serve as a counteractive to the spiritual vacuity of city life. As a member of the Editorial Board of Faber (which published a number of seminal organicist texts), and friend of Philip Mairet,

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