Original Research Article

'Flash houses': Public houses and geographies of moral contagion in 19th-century London

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Abstract

'Flash houses', a distinctive type of public house associated with criminal activity, are a shadowy and little-studied aspect of early 19th-century London. This article situates flash houses within a wide perspective, arguing that the discourses on flash houses were part of concerns about the threat of the urban environment to the moral character of its inhabitants. The article draws on an original synthesis of a range of sources that refer to flash houses, including contemporary literature, newspapers, court documents, and government papers. It demonstrates that flash houses were part of both popular intrigue about the perceived 'criminal underworld' and official concerns about the collusion between police officers and suspected offenders, since police officers allegedly frequented flash houses to gather criminal information. A detailed examination of this term reveals anxieties about the state of the metropolis, poverty, and criminality that were central to the early 19th-century consciousness. However, the discussion of flash houses in this context also demonstrates a powerful connection in contemporary minds between the physical spaces of the city and the risks that they posed to inhabitants' morals. While associations between the physical environment and morality have been drawn throughout history, flash houses represent a paradigmatic moment in this dialogue. This is because different moral concerns coalesced around the discourse on flash houses: anxieties about the criminal underworld, the potential for moral degradation of young people who frequented these spaces, and the corruption of police officers through contact with known or suspected offenders.

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Introduction

An 1840 pamphlet entitled *The Flash Mirror, or Kiddy's Cabinet* by an anonymous 'Regular Slangsman' noted that 'London may well be termed a theatre of infamy, since it has scarcely a bye-street or alley where the unprincipled have not a meeting house' (*The Flash Mirror*, 1840: 3). This article is concerned with this kind of 'meeting house', or, more specifically, 'flash houses'. These were public houses and beer houses frequented by known offenders, and thought to be the sites from which they plotted future criminal activity and exchanged stolen goods. The history of these murky, underworld spaces in 19th-century London, however, is largely unknown and very unclear (see Radzinowicz, 1956; Shore, 2003, 2015). The idea of a public house associated with criminal activity was not unique to the first half of the 19th century, but the term 'flash house' was used almost exclusively in this period. It was therefore not necessarily a new type of drinking place, but certainly a distinctive trope. This article reveals how these sites, which police officers allegedly used to gather criminal information, highlight the complex negotiations over policing roles and reforms in this period. However, the implications of the flash house phenomenon resonate beyond the policing context. Flash houses were a focal point around which anxieties about the criminal underworld, growing criminal activity, drunkenness, and disorderly public houses coalesced with specific 19th-century fears of the connections between the moral condition of the city's inhabitants and the physical spaces of the city. This article provides an interdisciplinary perspective, combining the histories of policing, crime, and drinking spaces with conceptual frameworks from historical geography, sociology, and criminology to illuminate the ways in which flash houses were conceived as sites of moral and criminal contagion.

Flash houses were shadowy spaces, which appeared to operate with the tacit awareness of the authorities, but were also imaginatively constructed as part of romanticised visions of London's criminal underworld. The term *flash*, understood to mean gaudy or showy in the 18th and 19th centuries (as *flashy* is today), was connected with criminality from the 17th century to indicate the ways in which those accused of criminal activity were seen as ostentatious in their deception and deviance (Oxford University Press, 2020; Partridge, 1972: 324). Flash house, however, was a slight contradiction in terms, as these buildings were portrayed as hidden, secret spaces. These shadowy spaces threatened to disrupt the 19th-century ideal of a visible, orderly society, but were simultaneously conceptualised by police as effective sites for covert surveillance. We cannot know whether these spaces existed, and whether they were really frequented by known offenders for their criminal dealings. However, their adoption as part of the popular imagination about the criminal underworld and their inclusion in the discursive framework of moral regulation is more significant here (see Hunt, 1999). The discourses on flash houses combined anxieties about policing, criminality, and poverty into an issue of morality, demonstrating the powerful connection drawn in contemporary consciousness between the urban environment and immorality in the early 19th century.

Throughout human history, contemporaries have drawn connections between the physical environment and the morality of the people, and the concern that the urban environment is connected with immorality has deep roots. As Lees (1985: 6–9) explains,

'Biblical and other early Christian writers regularly excoriated the city as a symbol of man's estrangement from God and as the theatre of man's spiritual degeneration', and writers through time continually returned to the idea that the city was associated with immorality. However, within this wider context, scholars have characterised the 19th century (particularly the latter part) as an era of particular moral reform, in which reformers and government officials were concerned with improving the 'moral geography' of the urban environment (Beckingham, 2017; Driver, 1988; Kneale, 1999). Contemporaries drew connections between the physical space of the metropolis and the moral character of its inhabitants (Layton-Jones, 2016). The city was conceptualised as a body, a living organism, as reformers believed that opening up the streets of the city and sweeping away slums would dispel 'both physical and moral miasmas', and that parks and green spaces were the 'lungs' of the city, facilitating improved circulation (Daunton, 2000: 5; Jones, 2018; Winter, 1993). This was an era in which the social problems of poverty, poor public health, and sanitation were conflated and viewed as an overwhelming moral concern, which threatened the nation's moral virtue (Stedman Jones, 1971: 1–16). These concerns were reflected in the construction of model institutions, in attempts to improve the spatial organisation of urban slums and rookeries, and in reforms to the number and internal layout of public houses (Beckingham, 2017; Crook, 2019; Driver, 1988; Kneale, 1999). The reform projects related to Michel Foucault's 'disciplinary society', where well-ordered space and opportunities for official surveillance were key (cited in Kneale, 1999: 334). The hidden, shadowy flash houses appeared to hinder this ideal and are paradigmatic of the emergence, from as early as the start of the 19th century, of a connection between space and morality, a trope traditionally associated with the later part of the century. They were conceptualised as physical sites that created and magnified criminality and immorality, by sheltering suspected criminals and encouraging their illicit activities.

Within this broader context, the drinking spaces of the city are powerful sites for understanding the connection between space and morality. Public houses and beer houses, especially those frequented by the lower classes, were, as Beckingham (2017: 17) explains for 19th-century Liverpool, characterised as sources of 'moral contagion'. In the later 19th century, Liverpool's reformers directly connected the numbers of public houses in poorer neighbourhoods with wider problems of disease, high mortality rates, and poverty, and produced maps depicting the number and distribution of public houses to cement the connection between space and immorality in the public and official imaginations (ibid.: 87). Anxieties about public houses were heightened by the 1830 Beer Act, which provided for a relaxed licensing process for public houses selling only beer and cider, and prompted widespread concern about the risks of disorderly and drunken behaviour in the new 'beer shops' typically frequented by the lower orders of society (Clark, 1983: 336; Jennings, 2007: 64). This article relates flash houses to these wider moral concerns situated within the specific sites of public houses, but particularly examines how the police interacted with these spaces, connecting them with more specific concerns around criminality.

The moralising discourses on flash houses discussed here suggest that both the 'customers' and the police officers who frequented flash houses could be corrupted

and potentially persuaded into a life of crime. This related to the historical 'slippery slope' understanding of criminality, whereby individuals were drawn gradually into escalating criminal activities (Churcher, 2017: 6; Dodsworth, 2013; McKenzie, 2007), but it also relates to the 19th-century temperance movement, which increasingly promoted complete abstinence from alcohol, viewing even moderate consumption as a slippery slope to drunkenness (Yeomans, 2014: 50). We can also see parallels with the modern criminological understanding that social and environmental risk factors make individuals more likely to commit offences and may have escalating effects (Farrington and Welsh, 2006). Despite the common trope of connecting drunkenness and drinking with crime, few scholars have drawn connections between the history of drinking and historical and contemporary criminology. This analysis of flash houses, in drawing on a variety of different disciplinary scholarships, offers new insights into perceptions of deviant behaviour over time.

The connection between flash houses and the early 19th century speaks to the appropriation of this term in an era of intense anxieties about crime and social change to promote policing reform. While these anxieties were not unique to this period, as successive societies have been particularly concerned about crime in their time (Beattie, 2001; Lemmings and Walker, 2009), they were unusually and intensely heightened. The concerns of the early 19th century were connected with rising prosecution rates after the end of the Napoleonic Wars in 1815 (Harris, 2004: 87; Reynolds, 1998: 105) and anxieties about the connections between poverty and criminality, in the form of the 'dangerous classes' of the lower orders of society and the emergence of ideas of a 'criminal class' (Bailey, 1993; McGowen, 1990). The idea of a 'criminal class', categorised by Mayhew (1861: 111) as a distinctive 'race' composed of the poorest members of society, shows that contemporaries believed that environment and socio-economic background played substantial roles in causing criminality. Combining this historical context with a moral geography framework suggests that flash houses were a source of concern in this period as they represented this connection between environment and criminality, as spaces that facilitated individual and collective criminal activity.

Such anxieties about growing criminality were directly connected by contemporaries with the need for improved policing provision. Patrick Colquhoun, magistrate and social reformer, anticipated with dread the period after the Napoleonic Wars in his *Treatise on the Police of the Metropolis* (1796: iv), when 'much additional strength will be given to the phalanx of criminal delinquents now upon the town, by the return of a multitude of their associates in iniquity'; he sought an improved police force to protect the inhabitants from 'the alarming consequences to be dreaded from the existence of such an atrocious and criminal confederacy'. This was a period of extensive debate over policing and reform; the establishment of the Metropolitan Police in 1829 was only the most noticed of a series of reforms at local levels in the metropolis (Harris, 2004; Paley, 1989; Reynolds, 1998). As Shore (2003: 152) argues, the presence of flash houses in streets and neighbourhoods was viewed as a key marker of an area associated with criminality; concern about crime was expressed in terms of localities more than individual criminals. In addition, the 19th century was a period of explosive growth in cities in the Western world more widely, which generated new anxieties about the urban environment (Lees, 1985: 1). In this context, the concept of flash houses was appropriated by

social commentators and those involved with criminal justice reform to express their concerns about how to police criminal activity and the potential of spaces of the city for moral contagion, and to encourage reform and improvement.

This article first situates flash houses themselves, defining the terminology, the precise period in which the term was used, and the activities that allegedly took place in flash houses. Secondly, it moves back to illuminate the place of flash houses within wider changes in drinking culture and drinking spaces in the first half of the 19th century. The subsequent main sections of the article are concerned with examining the uses of flash houses within 19th-century discourse: firstly, public discourse and secondly, official discourse. The flash house trope was used as part of the wider critique of policing and criminal justice practices in an era of reform. Flash houses exemplified concerns about the potential of urban spaces for moral degradation, as they were melting pots for anxieties about corruption, criminality, poverty, and immorality.

Sources and methodology

This article presents an original synthesis of the uses of the term 'flash house' in contemporary literature, newspapers, and government documents to argue that the flash house concept represented an important moment in early 19th-century metropolitan society. The research was conducted through historical analysis of the uses of the term 'flash house' in sources identified mainly through keyword searching in the following online databases: *Gale Primary Sources* (filtered for Newspapers and Periodicals), *Eighteenth Century Collections Online*, *Nineteenth Century Collections Online*, Google Books, *UK Parliamentary Papers*, and *Old Bailey Proceedings Online*.[1] The results generated through the keyword searching were analysed quantitatively, for the evidence of the period in which the term was used, and qualitatively, for the substance and context of the references to flash houses. While there are some limitations with the methods of digitisation of these resources, which do not guarantee complete accuracy or that all possible references can be identified, these digitised resources contain vast quantities of digitised print material and so facilitate the synthesis of a greater range of material than was previously possible (Tanner, Muñoz, and Ros, 2009). In addition, two original archival sources, in the form of handwritten lists of flash houses, were examined, but no additional archival documents were identified. These sources suggest that flash houses were an urban phenomenon, and associated almost exclusively with London specifically; hence the focus of this article.

Situating and articulating flash houses

As noted above, the flash house trope represents a valuable window into the debates and concerns around criminality and the moral condition of society in this period because the term was used almost exclusively for a very short period, primarily in the years between *c*.1810 and 1840. The first reference to *flash* as relating to 'the class of thieves, tramps or prostitutes' identified in the Oxford English Dictionary is from *A New Dictionary of the Terms Ancient and Modern of the Canting Crew* (1699), where 'flash-ken' is defined as 'a House where Thieves use, and are connived at' (Oxford University Press, 2020).

However, scholars have suggested that *boozing ken* was more commonly used to describe drinking places frequented by members of the criminal underworld in the early modern period, and that 'flash house' was most associated with the first half of the 19th century (McMullan, 1984: 163; Tobias, 1967: 101–5). Partridge's *Dictionary of Historical Slang* (1972: 324) suggests that 'flash-house', as a 'lodging-house or tavern frequented by thieves and illegally favourable to them', is a term associated with the 19th century. The earliest reference identified in this research was in the Ordinary of Newgate's Account in 1754, in which it was recorded that convicted felon William Wilson 'robbed a man at a house in Chick-lane, an old resort for such sort of people, called in their cant term, a flash-house'.[2] The Ordinary (or chaplain) of Newgate prison recorded and published biographies of those condemned to death at the Old Bailey (Emsley, Hitchcock, and Shoemaker, 2018). This indicates that the term may have been used on occasion in oral communication in the 18th century, but it was certainly not regularly used in written documents. A reference to suspected thieves being arrested at a 'flash house' based on a warrant was identified in the *Oracle* newspaper in December 1799 ('Police', 1799: 3). While these were isolated early references, they do demonstrate that the idea of public houses populated by convicted and suspected criminals was not a new concept in the early 19th century. However, the term flash house was heavily associated with a specific period.

The vast majority of digitised newspaper references to flash houses identified in this research date from between 1810 and 1840, and the decades with the highest numbers of references are the 1820s and 1830s.[3] The popular works identified here with references to flash houses were all published between 1821 and 1840, and the references to flash houses in the *Old Bailey Proceedings* date from between 1820 and 1848.[4] The ten Select Committee reports that reference flash houses date from the years between 1816 and 1838. While we must note the limitations of the keyword searching method used to identify these references, even allowing for some omissions, there is a striking temporal cluster of references to flash houses. The period between 1810 and 1840 was a period of intense concern about crime, criminal justice administration, public houses, and drunkenness. In this context, the flash house concept was used to express concerns about criminal networks, the efficacy of policing, and the potential of drinking spaces for moral degradation.

It is apparent that the term flash house stopped being widely used in the 1840s or 1850s, and references identified in newspaper articles after this period suggested that flash houses were a feature of previous times. An article in the *Times* in December 1864 claimed that 'thieves are no longer so gregarious in their habits, that they do not congregate, as they once did, in certain quarters, or meet so regularly at certain "flash houses"' ([Untitled article], 1864: 6). In his *London Labour and the London Poor*, Henry Mayhew (1862: 344), while he referenced 'hundreds of low public-houses, beer shops, coffee-shops, brothels and other places of bad character', did not explicitly use the term flash house. It seems unlikely that the spectre of public houses believed to be frequented by known offenders vanished in the 1850s and 1860s, but rather that the terminology changed. However, the coalescence of fears and anxieties around the discrete term 'flash house' make this a valuable tool for analysis of perceptions of the urban environment in the first half of the 19th century.

To illuminate where flash houses were and what allegedly took place in them, one key source is an anonymous manuscript entitled *A List of Houses of Resort for Thieves of Every Description*, which lists 67 flash houses with comments on the nature and occurrences in each house.[5] The author's tone is factual and official; this is not a sensationalised guide for public consumption. Radzinowicz (1956: 298) suggested that this source demonstrates that there was some institutional knowledge of flash houses; its location within the Home Office Domestic Correspondence file, among letters written to the home secretary, Viscount Sidmouth, supports this allegation. It is difficult to recover more context for this document, which is does not contain any information beyond the list, nor is it located in the archival file next to any explanatory letters. However, Henry Grey Bennett, the chair of the 1817 Select Committee on the State of the Police in the Metropolis, was likely referring to the anonymous *List of Houses of Resort* when he explained that his information on flash houses came from 'a list, which, though it professes to contain more precise information than what perhaps anyone is able to give', had 'undoubted' authenticity (Committee on the State of the Police of the Metropolis, 1817b: 540; Shore, 2003: 161). The list's inclusion in the Select Committee report reflects the ways in which this discourse on flash houses shaped official concerns about policing practices and public houses.

The institutional knowledge of flash houses is corroborated by John Silvester, Recorder of London's notebook, which contains a list of 86 'Houses of Resort for Footpads and Housebreakers'.[6] There are some public houses common to both lists, but Silvester's account does not contain any detailed descriptions of the houses. Using the references to the names of flash houses and the streets that they were located on in the two lists, alongside additional references in newspapers and Select Committee reports, it appears that the highest concentration of flash houses in a small area was in the streets around St Giles and Covent Garden, including Seven Dials, Drury Lane, and Charing Cross: these accounted for 63 of the 163 flash houses (38.7%). There were also significant clusters around Whitechapel (20 or 12.3%) and around St George's Fields in Southwark and Kent Road (23 or 14.1%). These areas of London correspond with slums associated with poverty and criminality in this period (Shore, 2003: 153). While we cannot be certain whether such public houses actually existed at these street locations, these documents reflect the high official levels of concern about flash houses and their role in the official and regulatory imagination by connecting them spatially with areas of the metropolis that were the established focus of anxieties around poverty, criminality, and drinking.

The anonymous list suggested that flash houses provided spaces for drinking, lodging, and gambling, and that the landlords typically received and sold on the stolen goods.[7] An article on 'The Machinery of Crime in England' in the *New Monthly Magazine* ('The Machinery of Crime in England', 1834: 489) corroborated this, and noted further that some flash houses were associated with illegal fights, which provided opportunities for gambling and pickpocketing. As the *List of Houses of Resort* detailed, different flash houses were associated with different types of criminal activity. For example, at the Sun in Brownlow Street, Drury Lane, there are 'Men (wearing Leather Aprons) who work at smith's Work, and who Manufacture the Implements for Housebreaking and also Screws or Skeleton Keys and other Keys required which they make from patterns

given to them in Soap'.[8] Some flash houses were apparently more popular with younger customers, such as the Magpie in Skinner Street, Bishopsgate, which was frequented by '50 to 60 Boys and Girls very Young but very desperate so much so that they are in no dread of the Watchmen whom they knock down if the least molested'.[9]

The *List of Houses of Resort* makes frequent references to the interactions between police officers and offenders in flash houses, and the bribery and negotiations that characterised their relations. The interactions between police officers and suspects are at the crux of wider official concerns about flash houses, which will be discussed in greater detail below. The author of the *List of Houses of Resort* noted of the Dover Castle on Dover Street, Blackfriars Road, that 'officers seldom come here on account of the Number and desperate description [of the customers]'.[10] In contrast, at the Hampshire Hog on the Strand, 'officers come here almost every Evening and are very intimate with Hart [the landlord], buying articles of him, and receiving Liquor of him'.[11] There are frequent references to bribery, such as at the King's Head in Hampstead Road, where 'the Matter [referring to an accusation of criminal activity] is compromised' between police officers and suspects through financial bribes, or by the landlord offering an officer 'a Bottle or Spirits or a handsome Handkerchief'.[12] At the Hog in the Pound on South Molton Street, the officers 'always drink what they please free of expense as the more they drink the sooner they get intoxicated and then the Business of the House goes on confidently'.[13] In other words, the officers were less likely to observe stolen property changing hands, or to arrest known offenders, if they were drunk. At the Jane Shore in Shoreditch, the landlord was a parish officer, and frequently sheltered suspects; 'the officers never come here, and he [the landlord] being a Parish Officer there is no suspicion'.[14] This source provides a valuable overview of the activities and depredations associated with flash houses, and crucially also introduces the theme of concerns about policing corruption through the interactions between police officers and suspects in these spaces. This was part of wider concerns about the potential that these spaces offered for moral degradation, for police officers, as well as for the suspected criminals who frequented them.

Flash houses and the history of public houses

This article provides a valuable bridge between the generally disparate histories of public houses and crime, and demonstrates the parallels in perceptions of deviance and morality between these areas of scholarship (see Beckingham, 2017). To fully understand the flash house phenomenon, we need to situate these spaces within the wider history of drinking spaces. Flash houses were a part of the changing landscape of public houses and popular drinking culture, and both reflected and affected broader concerns about connections between criminality and drinking in the lower orders of society. The period between *c.*1810 and 1840, when flash houses were most extensively discussed in popular and official discourses, was a period of wider change in public houses, alcohol licensing, and wider drinking culture. However, few have connected this history with the history of crime.

As scholars of public houses and drinking culture have recognised, drinking houses have occupied 'a central place in the nation's imagination, expressing its very identity'

(Jennings, 2007: 15). Public houses, in their various forms, played crucial roles as social institutions, where a range of business and social activities were conducted (Clark, 1983: 14). Harrison (1994: 38) argues that drinking was widespread in the 1820s, particularly 'among those social groups who could least afford it', because public houses were a place to socialise, and also where wages were distributed in some industries. In contrast, the respectable increasingly chose to drink at home or in private members' clubs rather than in the public houses (ibid.: 46; Jennings, 2007: 39). This social segregation was further fuelled by the growth of illicit beer houses, dram shops, and spirit shops, for those who could not afford the pricier public houses (Clark, 1983: 310; Jennings, 2017). This was symptomatic of the growing social stratification in leisure activities of the 19th century, and provides a useful context for understanding why the concept of the flash house was so concerning to the upper orders of society, who were decreasingly less likely to frequent the same spaces as the lower orders.

While there have long been connections drawn between criminal activity and drunkenness in drinking spaces (Salgado, 1977), it is clear that this was a source of intense concern, both private and official, in the 19th century. A letter in the *Times* ('Abuse of Spiritual Liquors', 1830) from an anonymous 'Homo' claimed that 'the worst cases of murder, street robbery, housebreaking, seduction and suicide, may all be traced to this horrid source' (alcohol). As Clark (1983: 256) noted, from the late 18th century, crime waves were connected with growing numbers of unregulated public houses, and especially those that sold only spirits. Since the 'gin craze' of the mid 18th century, 'though no causal connection between gin and crime figures was or ever could be proved, the two were linked together in the public mind', and these concerns re-emerged when the duty on spirits was reduced in 1823 (Harrison, 1994: 68). This long-standing connection between drink and criminal activity in the minds of commentators has also been noted by Yeomans (2014: 168), and Nicholls (2009: 249) argues that, more widely, drinking was connected with the threat of social disorder.

However, many of these concerns about the connections between drinking and criminal activity came to a head in the debates over public house licensing in the 1820s and 1830s. As Jennings (2007: 55) notes, there were growing concerns in this period about abuses of magisterial discretion in issuing licenses to public houses, and fears that large-scale brewing companies exercised undue control over public houses. The *First Report From the Committee on the State of the Police in the Metropolis* (1817a: 16) focussed on the licensing of public houses, and the report summary claimed that brewers consorted with magistrates to keep disorderly houses open. The growing free trade movement culminated in the 1830 Beer Act, which removed the extensive licensing legislation for premises that retailed only beer and cider, and meant that these publicans needed only an excise permit (as opposed to a licence granted by a magistrate; Clark, 1983: 335). It is likely that many so-called flash houses were beer houses after 1830, as it was easier for landlords of dubious character to obtain an excise permit than go before a magistrate. However, this act prompted widespread concerns about drunkenness, unrest, and subversion in the growing numbers of 'beer-shops', which were generally frequented by the lower orders of society (ibid.: 336; Jennings, 2007: 64). The 1834 Select Committee on Inquiry into Drunkenness was called in response to concerns about growing disorder prompted by the new beer shops. Its report argued that the growth of

intoxication was believed to cause 'the spread of crime in every shape and form, from theft, fraud and prostitution in the young, to burnings, robberies and more hardened offences in the old' (Select Committee on Inquiry Into Drunkenness, 1834: vi). The growth of the temperance movement from the 1820s, which increasingly promoted abstinence from alcohol, was an additional manifestation of these growing concerns about drinking (Yeomans, 2014: 7). These discourses reflect the strength of concern about connections between drunkenness and descent into criminal activity down the 'slippery slope'.

These debates over, and changes to, drinking houses and alcohol licensing provide some context for flash houses, but it remains unclear where the flash houses fit in the changing landscape of drinking spaces. In fact, scholars of public houses and drinking have not examined them in great detail. Clark (1983: 310) suggests that 'only a minority of small licensed premises – the so-called flash houses – specialised in a poorer clientele and these were often associated with crime and prostitution'. He suggests that these flash houses were bucking wider trends in the 1820s, as 'the broad focus of criminal activity seems to have been moving away from the public house' (ibid.: 318). Clark's assertion that the flash houses of the 1820s and 1830s were a relic of older patterns of behaviour, and not a current concern, seems contrary to the evidence that is presented here of this period as the height of concern about flash houses. It seems most likely that the public houses and beer houses characterised as flash houses included both licit and illicit premises. It is likely that many flash houses were transient places, as they were closed down by the authorities and landlords moved between different public houses.

Despite the confusion over the place of flash houses within the different types of drinking spaces in this period, the scholarship on drinking and public houses provides valuable context for the flash house. Given this wider context of concerns about the connections between criminal activity and drinking, which came to a head with the 1830 Beer Act, it is unsurprising that the 1820s and 1830s was the peak of the flash house phenomenon in popular and official discourses. The discourses on flash houses played into the anxieties about drinking and drunkenness, and about wider social change, poverty, crime, and policing.

Popular discourses

Now we will turn to an examination of the ways in which flash houses were characterised in contemporary sources, as part of the popular imaginings of the criminal underworld. The popular sources referenced here include newspaper articles and other printed works published for the general public. Firstly, flash houses were used to create a sense of intrigue around the idea of a criminal underworld, which reflects underlying concerns in the moral condition of the lower orders of society. An anonymous author, in discussing the 'flash public house', wrote that 'to these dens of infamy all persons of propense nature to crime resort, in order to find companions, friends, instructors, trainers, and capitalists or master thieves to direct their labours' ('The Machinery of Crime in England', 1834). George Smeeton's *Doings in London* (1850[1828]: 1) is framed as the account of a young man, Peregrine, being shown around London by 'Mentor'. When they visited Covent Garden, Mentor explained that 'the most depraved characters

visit the flash-houses, which are open at all hours, for the most flagitious purposes. Robbers, and gentlemen, and watchmen, and bawds, and bullies, and prostitutes, are all received upon equal terms' (ibid.: 103). While Mentor was warning Peregrine of the dangers of the flash house, the tone of the piece is clearly one of intrigue and sensation. This piece is part of a comparable genre to the guides to brothels published in 19th-century London and New York, which offered knowledge of these illicit urban spaces, presenting an idealised 'man about town' persona (Howell, 2001).

Similarly, *The Flash Mirror, or Kiddy's Cabinet*, by 'a Regular Slangsman' (*The Flash Mirror*, 1840: 3) stated that its purpose was to educate and entertain, describing flash houses as 'these haunts where villainy nightly assemble'. The work goes on to detail the names of low lodging houses, or 'snoozing kens', and three 'Principal Boozing Kens', or flash houses, including 'the Flash Coves' Parliament' at the Crown Coffee House, Drury Lane (ibid.: 4–5). Characterising 'flash' as anything concerning criminal activity or swindlers, the work also detailed 'flash doings' and 'the art of dressing flash' (ibid.: 5–7). These works, while claiming to educate and encourage caution among their readers, are clearly also portraying a romanticised criminal underworld, aiming to intrigue the reader, using the trope of flash houses. While Dickens did not explicitly reference flash houses, these themes can also be seen in the criminal underworld experienced by Oliver Twist in Fagin's den of thieves, and the ease with which young boys could descend into criminality (Dickens, 1838). As Shore (2003: 155) argues, the underworld was characterised as 'something separate, detached from respectable society', and the descriptions of flash houses identified here reinforced this 'otherworldliness'. However, it was also, as the title *The Flash Mirror* suggests, a mirror of respectable society, which highlighted the potential for moral degradation and the tensions below the surface of polite society. This reflects a latent anxiety for the moral condition of society, and the threat that the underworld was seen to pose to moral virtue.

However, newspaper articles expressed dismay at this sensationalism of criminality, with an article in the *Morning Chronicle* ('Olympic Theater', 1842: 3) commenting that 'we are literally sick of seeing the exploits of thieves, and the foul debauchery of flash houses dragged upon the stage and exhibited in all their revolting hideousness, not as a beacon to warn, but as an example to attract the reckless and ignorant boys'. There was a long tradition of dramatisation of criminals, reflected in 18th-century works such as John Gay's *The Beggar's Opera* (1728). Clearly, there was a concern that these popular descriptions of flash houses, like the spaces themselves, could entice impressionable youths and cause degeneration into criminal and immoral activities.

Alongside the creation of a sense of sensation and intrigue around ideas of criminality and criminal communities, discussions of flash houses also played into more direct anxieties about criminal activity, particularly that insufficient action was being taken by those in government and law enforcement to deal with the 'problem' of crime. For example, an article in the *Times* ([Untitled article], 1828) claimed that the Select Committee on the Police of the Metropolis of that year should have probed more deeply into the causes of criminality, asking, 'What is the reason that people frequent flash houses … more industriously now than their ancestors did before them?'. This reflects a concern that criminality was growing worse, and sufficient measures were not being taken to address this problem. In a sermon published in 1837, the Reverend John Harris bemoaned

the lack of morals and Christian beliefs in contemporary London and connected this with criminal activity. Harris (1837: 62) suggested that flash houses frequented by groups of young offenders were widespread and that, while 'the police know these haunts of young depravity well', they were not taking sufficient action to address the problems. As Smeeton wrote in his *Doings in London* (1850[1828]: 104),

> It is admitted universally … that houses of this description, and the houses of receivers of stolen goods, hold out the greatest encouragement to the perpetration of the most desperate villainies, and it is well known to the police magistrates, that an effectual check can be given to both sorts of abominations.

Smeeton proceeded to detail the lack of action taken by police officers who encountered flash houses. He wrote that watchmen 'are always at the command of the landlord', and that 'there are also to be seen, sprinkled about the bars and parlours of the flash-houses, watchmen, whose silence is purchased with gin' (ibid.: 105, 255).

The idea that the police were corrupt, and therefore did not take sufficient action to deal with flash houses and the criminals harboured there, is repeated in other works and newspaper articles. An article in the *Morning Chronicle* ([Untitled article], 1822: 2) about 'the Defective State of the Criminal Law of this Country' argued that the police were motivated by fees, so it was in their interests to promote crime, and foster relations with offenders to secure rewards for convictions. The author suggested that the individual police officer cultivated 'his flash houses, in which a brood is kept in continual readiness for him' (ibid.). As the author of an article in the *Standard* ([Untitled article], 1829: 2) alleged, 'Every body who knows any thing of London knows that one of the eight police establishments, if its functions were administered with zeal and fidelity, is sufficient to break up all the flash houses in the metropolis, and thus at a blow extinguish the great manufactories of criminals'. As these examples have revealed, contemporaries connected concerns about flash houses with wider concerns about criminality. They argued that the alleged prevalence of flash houses reflected the laxity of policing measures in the era before (and in some cases also after) the establishment of the Metropolitan Police. This was clearly a period of complex consternation about criminal justice, and the flash house concept was co-opted for this cause. This consternation was expressed in terms of criticisms of flash houses as sites of corruption for police officers and as reflective of the inadequacies of the criminal justice system. However, concern was also reflected more indirectly by the sensationalism and intrigue that characterised discourse on the criminal underworld, and demonstrates wider concern with the moral condition of the lower orders of society. There was a moral tone to the discussions of flash houses, which suggested that these spaces could cause the moral degradation of both the police officers and the suspected criminals who frequented them. This demonstrates the complex ways in which discussions of flash houses were part of a wider connection between the spaces of the city and the moral condition of its inhabitants.

Official discourses

At the same time as the popular discussions of flash houses, the flash house trope was also used in official government documents and works written by magistrates to express

concerns about criminality, the criminal underworld and the moral condition of the lower orders of society. These official discourses demonstrate the significance of flash houses as a trope around which these anxieties coalesced, reaching the level of the magistracy and government. For example, Randle Jackson, a Surrey Magistrate, expressed his concerns about the increase of crime, and how this could be prevented, in a work published in 1828. He argued that one of the causes of the increase of crime in the 1820s was 'the existence of unlicensed wine-rooms, flash-houses and other receptacles for known thieves and loose women' (Jackson, 1828: 11). At the Committee on the State of the Police of the Metropolis (1816: 67), John Thomas Barber Beaumont, a Middlesex magistrate, opined that 'low public houses, flash-houses, and gin-shops, compose the foundation and hotbed of nearly all the vices and crimes which disturb the metropolis'. The Select Committee on the Police of the Metropolis (1828: 18) was concerned that

> of all the evils that prevail in counteraction of every plan and regulation that has for its object the improvement of the habits of the lower classes, none works with more dreadful certainty than the obscure houses which are opened in every part of the town under various designations, but better known under the comprehensive term of 'Flash houses'; they are the resort of notorious thieves, or professed gamblers, of idle and dissolute persons of both sexes.

This account suggested that flash houses were spaces that corrupted, and contributed to the moral degradation of, the lower orders of society. Those in authority were also concerned that sufficient action was not taken by the police to combat the problems of flash houses. George Mainwaring, MP and magistrate, in his Observations on the Present State of the Police of the Metropolis (Mainwaring, 1821: 101), argued that police officers could take action against flash houses in a straightforward manner, by watching them and making it difficult for convicted criminals to enter. He stated, however, that flash houses endured as they were profitable for landlords and police officers alike. Mainwaring's account hinted that this was a corrupt system.

The flash house trope was used to express concerns about the fraternisation between offenders and the police, reflecting a concern that these spaces offered opportunities for corruption and moral degradation for all involved. Shore (1999: 164) indicated that flash houses were an environment in which police officers 'had recourse to… multi-layered systems of negotiation' and contact with suspects, and this is clear in evidence from Select Committee reports. Using public houses as sites to gather criminal information was an established part of the policing role for many, such as the Bow Street officers, in the 18th century (Beattie, 2012: 68). From as early as the 1774 Westminster Watch Act, legislation sought to prevent police officers (in this case watchmen or patrols) from entering public houses while on duty, and landlords were fined for harbouring police officers.[15] A Metropolitan Police Constable was not permitted to 'enter any public house, except in the immediate execution of his Duty', and the 1872 Licensing Act reinforced these earlier stipulations.[16] This legislative provision, therefore, shows that police officers entering public houses to drink with known criminals and gather information, as the accounts detailed below attest to, was not permitted. It was viewed by many contemporaries as a corrupt and immoral activity.

In the period between 1816 and 1839, there were ten Select Committee reports on policing published, reflecting an intense concern with policing provision. At the heart of these concerns was the perceived corruption of police officers, through their acceptance of rewards for successful prosecutions and their interactions with suspects to gather information in spaces such as flash houses. While the use of flash houses in this context may appear similar to the popular discourses discussed above, the discussions of flash houses in Select Committee reports reflect genuine and detailed policing knowledge, rather than popular and perhaps at times imaginary allegations. Select Committee reports are a valuable source because they represent the best approximation of direct accounts from police officers for this period, albeit refracted through the leading questions of the interviewers (see Allen, 1821: 3; Philips and Storch, 1999: 119; Ritchie, 1976: 149). The concerns about the potential for corruption of police officers through their interactions with offenders in flash houses were constantly tempered by police officers arguing that flash houses provided them with valuable opportunities for important police work and information collection. Flash houses were complex spaces, hosts to competing demands and concerns. This was also a period of flux in policing practices, which can be seen as a bridge between 18th-century policing based on rewards (Lemmings, 2011: 116; Paley, 1989) and the 'new police' of the mid 19th century. Flash houses thus expressed a tension between established policing practices, and the incorruptible professional image that the new Metropolitan Police sought to project.

Some magistrates and clerks recognised that flash houses played a role as sites for collecting information and finding suspects, and suggested that policing agents should actively frequent them. As John Strafford, chief clerk of Bow Street, expressed, although he was concerned by the 'evil tendency' of flash houses, 'the Officers may go and look into those houses, and by that means they get a knowledge of the persons, of those who are suspected, that they otherwise may not obtain' (Committee on the State of the Police of the Metropolis, 1816: 40). Magistrate Robert Raynsford was concerned that 'many of the most notorious thieves would escape if it were not for those particular places of rendezvous', while a fellow magistrate, Daniel Williams, explained that 'I consider it to be their [police officers'] duty, if a criminal is to be apprehended, immediately to go to the most likely places to find him' (ibid.: 57, 103). These witnesses acknowledged the role that flash houses played in facilitating the collection of information about criminal activity, despite their concerns about the close contact between policing agents and offenders. Their views reflect the complexities of these spaces and the moral ambiguities of police methods of collecting information about suspects.

Police officers questioned before the Select Committees confirmed that flash houses provided them with information about suspects. As John Nelson Lavender, police officer of Queen Square explained, flash houses 'are certainly a necessary evil; if those houses were done away we should have the thieves resort to private houses and holes of their own, and we should never find them' (ibid.: 147). When asked, 'When you go into the flash-houses, is it your custom to associate with the persons there?', he replied, 'Yes; and a man must do that for a good while before he will be able to gain any information' (ibid.). Other policing agents agreed that flash houses made the task of finding suspects more straightforward. John Vickery, a Bow Street officer, stated that flash houses 'often furnish the means of detecting great offenders; they afford an

opportunity to the officers of going round, and knowing the suspicious characters, or of apprehending persons described in advertisements' (ibid.: 178).

It is clear, however, that committee members were concerned about the associations between policing agents and offenders. Samuel Taunton, a Bow Street officer, was asked, 'Is it your custom to go there, to sit down at the table with thieves of that description?' (Committee on the State of the Police of the Metropolis, 1817b: 393). He replied that 'yes, we do it sometimes; nearly the whole of us, I believe; we obtain many informations in consequence of so doing, and find out many returned transports, who go in their company' (ibid.). The leading questions asked of witnesses led some policing agents to agree that flash houses represented potentially dangerous spaces. Samuel Furzman, constable and round-house keeper of St Giles in the Fields and St George's Bloomsbury was asked, 'Do you think the permission of flash-houses to be necessary for the apprehension of thieves?', and replied, 'I think not' (ibid.: 362). He was then asked, 'You think, of course, that they harbour more thieves than you ever apprehend', and replied, 'I do'. This appears a very blatant leading question: it is suggested to Furzman that he should believe 'of course' that flash houses were not an effective mechanism for capturing suspects. James Bly, senior police officer at Queen Square, explained that 'I do not think very respectable officers can long bear to be in the company of the lower class of thieves', but that occasional associations with them in flash houses can be valuable for gathering information (ibid.: 364). This differentiation of 'respectable' officers may be significant, since Bly was implying that some less respectable policing agents may have been more closely associated with offenders.

Policing agents clearly continued to use flash houses to gather information, and magistrates were questioned about the relationships between offenders and police officers (Select Committee on the Police of the Metropolis, 1828: 18). Richard Birnie, Bow Street magistrate, was asked, 'Are the Committee to understand, that in no case the officers ever employ a man to mingle with the thieves, and get knowledge of their schemes and plans?', and replied that 'I do not know that they do; I have heard of such things, but I never could trace it home to them' (ibid.: 42). Similarly, John Rawlinson, justice of Marylebone, was asked, 'Have you any reason to believe that there is any collusive understanding between the police officers of your establishment, and those notorious offenders?', and replied, 'Not collusive understanding. I think police officers are always better acquainted with thieves than one would wish them to be; although if they were not acquainted with them to a certain degree, they would never detect them' (ibid.: 63). Rawlinson's comments reflected an inherent tension in policing between knowledge of suspects and convicted offenders and collusion with these individuals.

Attempts to manage associations between policing agents and offenders, particularly in flash houses, continued, and it seems apparent that this remained a challenge throughout the period. The 1834 Select Committee on the Police of the Metropolis report stated that 'the association of the Police Constables with low and infamous characters as a means of obtaining information, is not a necessary part of a system which has for its object only the prevention and detection of crime' (Select Committee on the Police of the Metropolis, 1834: 21). The committee believed that the Metropolitan Police represented a new form of policing, that removed the need for any collusion between policing agents and offenders. This reflects the contemporary tensions and negotiations around the

nature of the policing role and the interactions between police officers and those whom they policed: continental European police forces were viewed as 'spies', and the preventative and uniformed Metropolitan Police force was created in conscious opposition to these models (Smith, 1985: 65). In 1837, Edward Gibbon Wakefield, a politician and author of a work on punishment, claimed that the new Metropolitan Police officers 'seem to have less connexion with criminals, to be less acquainted with them; amongst the old police it was very difficult to distinguish the thief from the policeman.…The new police being a different order of men and not having this intercourse with thieves, have, no doubt, been of service in the way of detection' (Select Committee on Metropolis Police Offices, 1837: 121). Wakefield was not an impartial observer of the criminal justice system, since he was himself imprisoned for three years in Newgate in 1827 for abducting and marrying an heiress, having been pursued and apprehended by a Bow Street officer (Cox, 2010: 196–7; Moss, 2004). It was therefore likely that he would favour the new police officers over the former policing agents, since he was arrested by a former policing agent.

However, John Clark, clerk of the Central Criminal Court, asserted in 1838 that 'the detection of crime is only to be learned by considerable experience, and by inquiries in places which nothing but long experience will enable a man to find out; he must make inquiries at flash houses and public houses where thieves associate, and among women of the town with whom they live' (Select Committee on Metropolis Police Offices, 1838: 133). Clark's view reflects an enduring belief held by some that relationships between policing agents and offenders were a fundamental part of policing. While politicians and reformers sought to erase close associations between policing agents and convicted offenders, and bring in new, incorruptible policemen, others argued that this did not provide for arrests and prosecutions of all those who had committed offences. As Robinson (2016: 15–16) demonstrates for Brighton at the end of the 19th century, police officers continued to frequent public houses despite official stipulations to the contrary and the reports for such misconduct show policing awareness of illicit side and back entrances of local public houses, which were associated with criminality and prostitution. This reflects an inherent tension between corruption and professionalism in investigative policing.

The use of flash houses to collect valuable policing information is also evidenced in newspaper reports of trials, and in the *Old Bailey Proceedings*, throughout the period under examination here. A report in the *Oracle* ('Police', 1799: 3) stated that 13 defendants were brought before Bow Street magistrates, 'having been apprehended the preceding night at a celebrated flash-house, called the Buck's-Heal in Cow Cross, Smithfield' by Bow Street Officers, who went to the public house with a search warrant based on information received about a recent robbery. This demonstrates that in the late 18th century, flash houses were sites for the collection of policing information. At the trial of Robert Grew and Charles Smith for pickpocketing in 1820, police officer Thomas Garton stated that he took the victim and a witness to 'some flash houses, and found upwards of thirty at the Cross Keys, public-house', including the defendant Grew.[17] William Wadham Cope, City Marshal, recounted at the trial of George Coney and Richard Smith in 1833 that he went to 'the White Horse public-house, Clare-market, which is a flash house' to collect information and find defendant Coney.[18]

In fact, even a convicted offender, James Hardy Vaux, recounted in his memoirs that police officers used flash houses to gather information. Vaux, who was transported to Australia three times in the early 19th century for felonies, recounted that 'this fondness for flash-houses, as they are termed, is the rock on which most persons who live by depredations are unhappily split....For the police officers, or traps, are in the daily habit of visiting these house [sic], where they drink with the thieves &c in the most familiar manner; and I believe, often obtain secret information by various means from some parties respecting the names, characters, pursuits &c of others' (Vaux, 1819: 25). Clearly, Vaux was not an official voice, but his account corroborates the use of flash houses by police officers to gather information. These examples have revealed the complexities of flash houses in official discourses; there were concerns that these places represented sites for corruption, but equally police officers argued that they provided places where valuable information could be gathered.

Alongside the concerns about policing corruption and the need for policing reform, the 1810s and 1820s was also marked by growing concerns about juvenile delinquency. Such anxieties were particularly focussed on fears of hardened and persistent young offenders (Shore, 1999: 3). In this context, flash houses were viewed as sites that had the potential to corrupt young people living in poverty, transforming them into hardened criminals. Shore (ibid.: 24) writes that there were concerns that juvenile offenders were trained up in these 'nurseries of crime'. Mr Poynder, clerk of Bridewell Hospital, stated in 1817 that 'flash-houses and other receptacles for thieves are highly dangerous to society, from their affording opportunities of concerting schemes of depredation, and the means of corrupting youth, upon the highest scale' (Committee on the State of the Police of the Metropolis, 1817b: 335).

However, such sites also threatened to corrupt the morals of young people through the intermingling of young men and women. This played into prevalent juvenile offending stereotypes: young female offenders were typically associated with prostitution, and young male offenders with property offences (Shore, 1999: 9–11). Flash houses offered opportunities for mixing between the sexes through dancing and gambling. The anonymous *List of Houses of Resort* explains that some flash houses were frequented by young girls, alongside the men and boys who exchanged stolen goods and plotted future criminal activities. These girls allegedly engaged in prostitution and one unnamed house had a 'cock and hen club' once a week, at which 'the diabolical scenes cannot be described'.[19] The concerns about promiscuity of young people in flash houses reflect the ways in which juvenile delinquents, of both genders, were conceived as particularly threatening because they did not represent the expected innocence of childhood, but instead were characterised as exhibiting adult behaviour and activities (ibid.: 3).

William Crawford, who was involved with the Refuge for the Destitute, which took in destitute young people who had been released from prison, stated that 'a considerable number of boys' resorted to over 100 'flash houses' in the metropolis, when giving evidence before the Select Committee on the State of Gaols (1819: 169). Crawford gave an account of a young offender, referred to as 'JD', who 'became acquainted with bad characters by gambling with them in the streets', and 'went by invitation one night to a public

house, called by them a flash house, which was at that time a celebrated house of resort in Drury-Lane, and on his arrival was introduced to a large gang who frequented the house' (ibid.: 170). 'JD' quickly became absorbed into a criminal world, and soon 'this boy knew twenty flash houses, to which he had access' (ibid.: 170). This illustrates the 'slippery slope' trope in writings about juvenile delinquency and crime more widely; that those who were corruptly influenced could quickly descend into criminality, and from petty crimes to serious offences (Churcher, 2017: 6).

This idea was also supported by a piece written by the Governor of Cold Bath Fields prison on the 'Practices of Habitual Depredators', which stated that 'when a young thief commences picking pockets … he becomes united to a 'mob'.…He frequents the flash houses, where he is taught to drink, dance, smoke and gamble' (Constabulary Force Commission, 1839: 206). There was also a suggestion that offenders turned to flash houses, and the criminal networks that they offered, when other options for earning a living had been exhausted. For example, convicted offender John Pike explained at the House of Lords Select Committee on Gaols (1835: 391) that after he failed to enlist in the East India Company, 'I went then to the Flash Houses, where I met some of those Men with whom I had been acquainted in Coldbath Fields'. Pike stated that he ascribed the 'ruin' of many fellow youths to flash houses, and other places where they could associate with offenders (ibid.). These examples demonstrate the particular concern that flash houses corrupted the young and contributed to the problem of juvenile delinquency, which was believed to be increasing.

The use of flash houses as part of official discourses about crime and criminality in 19th-century London is therefore complex. Flash houses were part of a debate over policing practices, and specifically over how police officers should relate to those whom they policed. They were also part of extensive concerns about policing corruption, and used by those who advocated policing reform in the first half of the 19th century to demonstrate their concerns with old policing styles. The trope of the flash house reflects the climate of debate and anxieties over criminality and criminal justice reform in this period. However, it also reflects the growing engagement in this era with spaces of moral contagion, and particularly the connections between drinking, criminality, juvenile offending, and immorality. Flash houses were viewed as potential sites of moral degeneration for all those who associated with them.

Conclusion

By synthesising this evidence on flash houses for the first time, this article has provided a window into a significant aspect of the zeitgeist of the early 19th century. While anxieties about crime, or about public houses associated with criminal activity, were not new to this period, this was a time of heightened concerns about crime in which connections were drawn between morality, criminal behaviour, and the physical spaces, such as drinking spaces, of the city. The flash house phenomenon, whether a physical reality or an element of contemporary moral and criminal discourses, was a melting pot for moral, spatial, criminal, and social fears. In this era, crime was believed to be increasing beyond the control of existing law enforcement agencies, and criminal activity was

thought to originate mostly in poverty-stricken streets and neighbourhoods. The flash house trope was used to express popular intrigue about the criminal underworld, and the underlying concern for the moral condition of the lower orders of society who made up the underworld.

This was a period of growing concerns about juvenile delinquency, and flash houses were part of these debates, as it was feared that the young were corrupted through contact with hardened criminals in these spaces. In fact, flash houses were a site in which twin 'slippery slopes' united: that of criminality and that of drinking. By drawing together histories of drinking and crime, flash houses reveal the parallels in ways of thinking about deviant and immoral behaviour in this period. An interdisciplinary approach here, combining historical understandings with contemporary scholarship, demonstrates that this reflects enduring perceptions and understandings of human behaviour; environmental and social factors are seen by criminologists and psychologists today as influencing the likelihood of individuals engaging in deviant behaviour, and these factors can have cumulative and escalating effects (Moffitt, 1993).

However, the flash house concept also speaks to contemporary perceptions of the urban environment itself. This article argues that flash houses were part of a wider concern about the power of spaces to corrupt moral character. Here we can see the value of drawing connections between history, historical geography, and sociology in understanding the nature of urban environments and their impact (or perceived impact) on their inhabitants. Public houses, as Beckingham (2017:17) demonstrates for Liverpool, were seen as sites of moral contagion, and reformers sought to improve areas of the city by reducing the numbers of public houses. Flash houses, however, were a type of public house with particular potential for moral degradation; not only were they, like other low public houses, associated with poverty and drunkenness, but they were also viewed as sites for the moral degeneration of juveniles into lives of crime and the corruption of police officers through contact with criminals. There is clear potential for further fruitful research on the connections between spaces of deviance and understandings of morality in the urban environment to build up a more detailed picture of how this phenomenon operated. The flash house concept, clearly, is paradigmatic of a trope that became more familiar in the later 19th century: the symbiotic relationship between the spaces of the urban environment and the moral character of its residents.

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Notes

1. *Gale Primary Sources* has over 18 million digitised newspaper pages; *Eighteenth Century Collections Online* has over 180,000 titles; Google Books has 40 million titles; and *Old Bailey Proceedings Online* has the full text of over 197,000 criminal trials.
2. *Ordinary of Newgate's Account*, 1 April 1754, *Old Bailey Proceedings Online*, OA17540401, available at: https://www.oldbaileyonline.org/browse.jsp?id=OA17540401&div=OA17540401#highlight.
3. This evidence was found by keyword searching for 'flash house' in *Gale Primary Sources*, filtered for Newspapers and Periodicals, between 1700 and 1900. A total of 629 results were identified, of which 263 related to the period between 1810 and 1840. Of these, 116 dated from the 1820s and 108 from the 1830s. It is noted that a minority of these references relate to unrelated usage of the term 'flash house'.
4. Six references to flash houses were identified in the *Old Bailey Proceedings* by searching on *Old Bailey Proceedings Online*, and one additional reference was found in the *Ordinary of Newgate's Account* (see note 2).
5. *A List of Houses of Resort for Thieves of Every Description*, *c*.1815, The National Archives (hereafter 'TNA'), Home Office: Domestic Correspondence, HO 42/146.
6. Notebook of John Silvester, *c*.1812, British Library, Add MS 47466.
7. *List of Houses of Resort*.
8. Ibid., p. 24.
9. Ibid., p. 14.
10. Ibid., p. 2.
11. Ibid., p. 5.
12. Ibid., p. 6.
13. Ibid.
14. Ibid., p. 7.
15. *Act for the Better Regulation of the Nightly Watch and Beadles Within the City and Liberty of Westminster 1774* (14 Geo III, c. 90). London: HMSO.
16. 'Instructions to the Force', 1829, TNA, Metropolitan Police: Office of the Commissioner, MEPO 8/1, p. 41; *Act for Regulating the Sale of Intoxicating Liquors 1872* (35 & 36 Vict, c. 94). London: HMSO.
17. Trial of Robert Grew and Charles Smith, 28 October 1820, *Old Bailey Proceedings Online*, t18201028-85, available at: https://www.oldbaileyonline.org/browse.jsp?div=t18201028-85.
18. Trial of George Coney and Richard Smith, 14 February 1833, *Old Bailey Proceedings Online*, t18330214-1, available at: https://www.oldbaileyonline.org/browse.jsp?div=t18330214-1.
19. *List of Houses of Resort*, p. 5.

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