

1 David Churchill, *Crime Control & Everyday Life in the Victorian City: The Police & the*
2 *Public*, Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2017; 290pp. ISBN 978-0-19-879784-5,
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7 When it comes to the study of crime you could be forgiven for concluding that there is history
8 and there is criminology - and never the twain shall meet. While repeated attempts have been
9 made to cultivate a more productive dialogue between the disciplines (Bosworth 2001), they
10 remain largely discrete intellectual enterprises, each '*with its own constituency, avenues of*
11 *publication, conferences and networks*' (Lawrence 2012, p.315). The impact of these distinct
12 disciplinary cultures can be seen in diverging attitudes towards temporality and the meaning
13 with which researchers imbue their work. But it is perhaps most pronounced in epistemological
14 debates which continue to contrast the 'ideographic' or 'descriptive' research of historians,
15 who seek to capture the uniqueness and complexity of their objects, with the 'nomothetic' or
16 'explanatory' research of social scientists who tend to prize parsimony and generalizable
17 research findings (Sewell 2005, p.3)

18 In this excellent book *Crime Control & Everyday Life in the Victorian City: The Police*
19 *& the Public*, David Churchill embraces the challenge of inter-disciplinary research and
20 demonstrates that, despite its many difficulties, a dialogue between history and criminology
21 can yield new insights. Presenting a social history of crime control in the Victorian city,
22 Churchill offers a critique of the 'state monopolization thesis' which, broadly speaking, holds
23 that between 1820-1850 the largely informal crime control mechanisms of the pre-modern era
24 were superseded by an increasingly professionalized police force as the State assumed a more
25 central role in the maintenance of social order.

1 The result is a powerful work of historical criminology. Churchill clearly possesses the
2 instinct and craft of a historian: this is a meticulous and carefully researched study, guided
3 throughout by a steadfast commitment to understanding the richness and complexity of the
4 social world. In the author's own words,

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6 '... we are only just beginning to appreciate the rich regional diversity of criminal
7 justice and penal practice... detailed research on the governance of crime is likely
8 to expose complex realities which cannot satisfactorily be subsumed within an
9 overarching narrative of state monopolization'. (p.251)

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11 However, this is also a work that is not afraid to grapple with questions of contemporary social
12 theory. Churchill draws attention to the shortcomings of official policing strategies and seeks
13 to re-centre everyday people as active participants in the production of a mixed economy of
14 crime control. In this respect, *Crime Control & Everyday Life in the Victorian City* offers a
15 powerful corrective to reductive and overly simplistic modernisation meta-narratives which
16 juxtapose the distinctiveness of post or late-modern crime control with what came before.

17 In seeking this balance Churchill eschews the usual conventions of historiography in
18 favour of an analytical structure that prioritises intellectual depth over chronology and mastery
19 of narrative. A number of trade-offs flow from this approach which are, on the whole, well
20 judged. First, Churchill restricts his focus to crime control and the immediacy of the 'criminal
21 encounter' rather than attempt a broader survey of deviance and social control under conditions
22 of rapid urbanisation. Second this is a study primarily concerned with crime control as it relates
23 to property offences, a decision which arguably promotes a less contested account of crime,
24 and power dynamics more generally, than one might expect to find in comparable studies on
25 the history of violence (p.8). Above all else this is a book that is orientated towards the everyday
26 interactions between the police and public, and Churchill adopts a limited geographical focus

1 encompassing Leeds, Liverpool and Manchester; three Northern English cities which
2 experienced significant growth and demographic change during the nineteenth century.

3 This inter-disciplinary exchange between history and social theory runs through the key
4 passages of this book. Part 1 documents the shift from the 'old' to the 'new' police during the
5 nineteenth century. Chapter 1 traces the organisation of the 'new' police as local administrators
6 struggled to operationalise a 'preventative principle' which sought to reduce the commission
7 of crime by means of a regular system of visible, deterrent patrol (p.98). Chapter 2 examines
8 the uneven development of policing as an institution that was primarily orientated towards
9 urban governance and the 'improvement' of public spaces. Chapters 3 and 4 unpick the limited
10 impact of emerging policing strategies as police administrators contended with limited
11 resources and the criminal opportunity of the Victorian city (pp.105-107).

12 In Part 2 the focus moves on to consider how the shifting contours of urban crime control
13 were navigated by everyday people. Chapter 5 explores the role of citizens and private security
14 markets in protecting property from crime, before turning to the role of the police and
15 journalists in promoting a 'responsibilization' agenda that was closely inter-twined with
16 Victorian conceptions of patriarchy and proprietary rights (p.141). Chapter 6 examines the
17 evolution of criminal investigation and Chapter 7 offers a fascinating overview of how
18 everyday people confronted criminal behavior in the Victorian City. Chapter 8 rounds off the
19 substantive sections of this book by reflecting upon the contested legitimacy of conflict
20 resolution as the State came to play a more central role in prosecuting and sanctioning breaches
21 of the criminal law.

22 Finally, Part 3 offers a thorough re-appraisal of the relationship between the police and
23 public in nineteenth century England. Chapter 9 explores widespread public resistance to police
24 authority and how the general public interacted with this new authority at street level. The book
25 concludes with a revisionist account of the mixed economy of crime control that emerged in

1 the Victorian city and considers the contemporary relevance of these findings at a time when
2 the pluralisation of policing and the governance of security remain highly contested within
3 contemporary criminological scholarship.

4 This is an accomplished work that will be of interest to police researchers, criminologists
5 and crime historians. The style is accessible, and Churchill clearly delights in his subject matter,
6 making excellent use of biographical details from the archival record to foreground broader
7 theoretical themes. We learn of William Gains -- a fishmonger from White Hart Lane, Leeds -
8 - who hides in his fish cart (for an extended period of time) in order to catch a prolific offender
9 rather than report the matter to the police (p.152). At a later point we encounter the unfortunate
10 case of Mary Turner who instantly regretted reporting her brother to the police for stealing the
11 families' savings upon realising that they would pursue criminal charges against him rather
12 than broker the informal resolution she was seeking.

13 In this respect *Crime Control & Everyday Life in the Victorian City* is at its most assured
14 when subjecting widespread academic theses to careful historical scrutiny. For example,
15 Churchill demonstrates that while the impact of the new police was operationally limited,
16 existing research has tended to underplay its subjective effects. In practice, the preventative
17 principle did help to promulgate a more generalised 'police consciousness' and an awareness
18 that one's every day conduct in public spaces was subject to sanction and norms of appropriate
19 conduct,

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21 The psychological imprint of policing was more nuanced than this; instead each
22 micro-level intervention on the street communicated something of the shifting
23 thresholds of official tolerance of public conduct. It was a key function of the police
24 to communicate these new norms of urban order, irrespective of whether they had
25 much hope of enforcing them. (p.121)

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27 Not every aspect of this project is quite so successful. For a study that aligns itself with the
28 tradition of a 'history from below' questions of race, gender, poverty and social class are

1 occasionally obscured by an archival record that centres, to a significant extent, upon public
2 life and the voices of powerful white men – chief constables, traders, fathers and civic leaders.
3 By focusing on the immediate criminal encounter, we gain only tantalising glimpses of the
4 broader political economy of crime in the Victorian city or how this shaped the politics of the
5 police at this time. Intriguing reference is made in the concluding remarks to a ‘left realist’
6 position without fully unpacking the implications of this claim (p.260). But this perhaps reveals
7 more about the reviewer’s adherence to the prevailing disciplinary conventions of criminology
8 and the social science tradition. Overall this is an impressive study that makes a very significant
9 contribution to contemporary police scholarship.

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11 **References**

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