

**Crime and Consensus**  
**Elite Perceptions of crime in Sheffield:**  
**1919-1929**

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Abstract

This is a study of prevailing perceptions of crime during the 1920s. By focussing on the enunciations of the Sheffield elite some of the key factors shaping dominant attitudes to crime throughout Britain during this period are identified. Emphasis is placed on the necessity of a historically specific approach. A detailed analysis of contemporary newspaper coverage and other literary sources reveals such perceptions to be shaped by the complex interplay of broad social currents and more immediate concerns. It is argued that in the decade following the Great War crime formed a relatively minor topic of debate. There also prevailed a low-key response to offending and a markedly progressive view about crime. This optimistic conception of crime owed much to the apparent rehabilitative capacity of the offender and the perceived successes in reducing illegality through positive measures of state welfare. Yet, emphasis upon the specificities of the period reveals the primacy of contemporary political urgencies in shaping attitudes to crime. Though crime was an infrequent focus of discussion the discourse of progressive criminal reform offered one of the few areas of consensus in a society characterised by conflict. Elite enunciations about crime were intimately related to their mission of forging social consensus. Key individuals in the city repeatedly played down the extent of crime and praised the law-abiding character of ordinary people. Here is rejected the conviction that crime panics are an inevitable concomitant of economic and social crisis. Despite the profound anxiety that gripped the middle classes during this turbulent period, there prevailed amongst the Sheffield elite a markedly relaxed view of crime and criminals. Criminal and penal policy offered an exemplary model for broader welfare intervention and constructive political engagement between contending classes.

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Introduction  
Politicising the past

This is a study of elite attitudes to crime in the period between the Great War and the Great Depression, 1919-1929. A historical survey from a sociological perspective, it is concerned with the perceived causes and scale of crime and the range of solutions offered by the Sheffield elite. The term 'elite' is used to refer to those individuals who occupied leading positions in the economic, political and cultural life of Sheffield. More than this, however, it concerns those individuals who actively pursued leadership during a period of especially intense social and ideological conflict both in the city and throughout the country more generally.<sup>1</sup>

I commence with the recognition of the complexity of elite sensibilities about crime and of the interdependence of these and broader social issues. A key tenet of the study is that these attitudes can only be understood with reference to the economic, political and cultural circumstances of the period under scrutiny. It is upon this premise that the following case study will provide insights into prevailing attitudes to crime during the 1920s, not only within Sheffield but also outside. Though geographically compact, Sheffield was a place of sharp contrasts. Nestling in the leafy folds to the South West of the city lay the residences of some of the country's most powerful people. The blackened slums to the North and East were home to some of the nation's most wretched. It was the latter area of the city that inspired Orwell to describe Sheffield as 'the ugliest town in the Old World' (Orwell, 1937, p.95) and is perhaps what Mencken had in mind when he talked of 'the putrefying parts of England' (Mencken, 1998, p.394). Such social and geographical polarisation was reflected in the political morphology of the town where the ideological struggle between Capital and Labour waged across the nation at that time was often experienced at its most intense. During this decade, local residents witnessed social changes that impacted upon the lives of fellow countrymen outside the city boundaries. These included the rise of social welfare, the breaking up of slum neighbourhoods, the beginnings of mass migration to the

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<sup>1</sup> I use the term recognising that these men and women rarely defined themselves as an elite. The term did not become widely used in social and political writing until the 1930s in Britain (Bottomore, 1964). More important, Sheffield's leading individuals, believing that authority and prestige were to be earned through active participation in municipal affairs rather than aloofness, were likely during the 1920s to have rejected such a label.

suburbs and the rise of the nuclear family. Just as noticeable to the interested viewer was the arrival of new methods of committing crime and new techniques of apprehending criminals. As will be detailed later, such changes were accompanied by the fragmentation of former social customs and certainties, most notably the erosion of relations based on paternalism, the attenuation within the wealthier classes of the old ethos of respectability and the consolidation of mass democracy. In sum, by focussing on Sheffield during the 1920s I offer an insight into the key factors shaping perceptions of crime not only of the local elite but also across the nation more generally, during an important decade that writers unfortunately have tended to ignore.

As noted above, an adequate grasp of the factors shaping prevailing attitudes to crime is attainable only with reference to broader social circumstances of the period in question. All too often, however, perceptions of the interwar years have been shaped and remoulded by the priorities of the present. Indeed, over recent decades discussion of crime in Britain has frequently been underpinned by comparison to this period (Carson & Wiles, 1975; Dennis, 1993; Dennis & Erdos, 1992; Dixon & Fishwick, 1984; Dunning et al., 1987; Gatrell et al., 1980; Gurr, 1981; Marshall, 1985; McClintock & Avison, 1968; Pearson, 1983b; Pearson, 1984; Pearson, 1994; Scruton, 1988; Sked, 1987). A common assumption, particularly amongst leading figures on the right of the political spectrum, has held the inter-war years to be a golden age for law and order. Commentators point to the shared respect for property rights and for the traditional institutions of authority, while the existence of well-established communities and a shared sense of responsibility are said to have provided the basis for social stability. The ability of the individual to 'leave the back door unlocked' has been sorely missed.

This lament for the alleged tranquillity of the inter-war years is prompted very much by contemporary concerns. Mounting rates of recorded crime and industrial and civil disorder in the last quarter of the twentieth century encouraged the conviction that such phenomena were unprecedented in British society. Rather than an inevitable consequence of unemployment and poverty, as suggested by advocates of traditional welfare reform, such increases expressed a fundamental moral collapse. The alleged coexistence of social harmony with poverty and unemployment in the past has served to underscore the criminality of the present. Responding to the urban riots in the North East of England in the early 1990s, for example, one editorial remarked typically: 'There was massive unemployment in the North East during the thirties. Men marched, but they

didn't riot or burn buildings.'<sup>2</sup> Echoing those to the right of the political spectrum, some radical criminologists have deployed the popular imagery of a largely crime-free 1920s to indict present-day levels of criminality. In their efforts to counter those who explain crime as either moral panic, or a legitimate response to poverty or unemployment, the Left Realist School have suggested that the high rates of unemployment in the inter-war years together with low rates of crime invalidate the claims. As Lea and Young declare, although '[t]he amount of unemployment in 1933 and 1981 was roughly equal, the rate of serious crime per 100,000 population in 1981 was over fifteen times as great' (Lea & Young, 1993, p.90).

Such views have provoked a predominantly critical, though often equally skewed, reaction. Some have challenged the supposed novelty of contemporary crime patterns by elevating the normality of crime and disorder in the past. Property crime, riots and violence, it has been alleged, were regular feature of life in inter-war Britain (Humphries, 1981b; Humphries, 1981c; Stone, 1983; White, 1983; White, 1986). A related area of debate has focussed not so much on the extent of offending but the subjective attitudes of powerful social groups to crime and criminals, and it is this debate that approximates to the main focus of the present study. Here it is possible to point to two broad strands of discussion within the literature. The first relates to accounts concerned with understanding the history and practice of penal and criminal reform, the second to the sociology of moral panics.

### 'Penal welfare' and crime panics

Discussions about early twentieth century crime have tended to focus on criminal justice policy and the treatment of offenders. In this regard attention has come to focus upon the ideology and practice of what Garland terms 'penal welfarism' (Garland, 1985; 2001) This refers to the way in which dominant attitudes to crime have during the during the course of the twentieth century been intimately tied up with the emergence of the welfare state and the broad social commitment to welfare reform. I utilise the term penal welfarism to refer to the mode of thought and set of institutional arrangements that came to predominate during the 1920s in matters relating to the control of crime and treatment of the criminal. An important part of my study is to examine, with reference to

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<sup>2</sup> Editorial, Sunday Telegraph, 8 September 1991.

the 1920s, the complex interplay between attitudes to crime, criminal justice policy and broader welfare strategy. In so doing I am able to draw from an impressive body of literature that aims to understand the origins and practice of criminal and penal reform. A consensus that has emerged within such accounts is that there prevailed amongst the professional middle classes sympathy for the plight of the offender, an optimistic view of the possibilities for institutional reform and rehabilitation of the offender and a relaxed attitude to crime.

These accounts run counter to a second group of, predominantly radical, writers who maintain that elite attitudes to crime are typified, especially during periods of economic dislocation, cultural transition and political conflict, by panic and alarm (Barlow et al., 1995a; Bottomley & Coleman, 1984; Hall et al., 1978; Hickman, 1982; Marshall, 1985). 'Crime panics', claims Stuart Hall, are 'most likely to occur at moments of social tension, when uncertainties about the future or fears about the polarising nature of social conflict' are at their height (Hall, 1975, p.87). Such panics provide one of the principal mechanisms for legitimising the 'increasingly coercive measures on the part of the state' (Hall *et al.*, 1978, p.221). In the pages below I describe how the 1920s was also a period of 'social tension', one that, when measured in terms of the degree of social conflict and economic adversity, was comparable to anything experienced during the post-Second World War period. Living in what contemporaries referred to as one of the 'distressed areas', and a 'storm centre of industrial unrest', the inhabitants of Sheffield experienced these difficulties at their most intense. Indeed, I reveal a situation where acute social dislocation was manifested in a tremendous degree of anxiety amongst the middle classes.

One is therefore offered two seemingly contradictory approaches to understanding elite attitudes to crime – one that suggests crime panics to be the inevitable response to political and cultural tension, another where a relaxed and positive approach is alleged to typify the outlook of the political classes. A central task of the study will be to determine which of these corresponds to the outlook of the Sheffield elite. Was panic a significant feature of elite responses to crime – if so, what were the factors that gave rise to this? Did the local municipal leadership exhibit a sympathetic regard for the offender and a relaxed attitude to crime – if so, why? In this case an important task would be to ascertain why the profound social tensions and anxieties of the period did not surface in the form of crime panics.



Cutting across these lines of debate one can identify a related area of contention concerning elite perceptions of crime. The focus here is upon the motivations of the ruling elite. One pole of this debate, which I term the 'Whig-evolutionist' approach, views elite ideas about crime as the expression of an increasingly civilised society, one marked by a gradual improvement in standards of behaviour and a compassion for the plight of the poor. These changes, it is suggested, encourage an altruistic desire to rescue the fallen and more humanitarian methods of dealing with the offender (Radzinowicz, 1966; Rose, 1961). Confronting this approach is the 'revisionist' grouping of writers, who maintain that prevailing views about crime are shaped by motivations of power and class rule. They suggest that the ideology of penal welfare and the discourse of anxiety express a more fundamental desire for social control on the part of those in the upper echelons of the social hierarchy (Foucault, 1978; Garland, 1985; Platt, 1969).

As I argue in Chapter One, such accounts have again been influenced by the politicised concerns of the present, serving to reveal more about contemporary ideological trends than interwar views about offending. It is clear that the initiative for much of this work has arisen from the need to account for the demise of the 'rehabilitative ideal' (Allen, 1981).<sup>3</sup> The assault upon the ideology of reform provides a unifying theme in both conservative and radical discourses on crime. While conservatives have rebuked the 'Progressive era' for unleashing a tide of moral decline and rising crime, in the eyes of radical critics it stands equally condemned as subtly intrusive. Yet sensitivity to the specific features of the 1920s reveals a picture altogether different from these accounts, one that suggests neither malign intrigue nor naïve compassion to be the basis of middle class views about crime. While the Sheffield elite promoted an approach to crime and the offender that owed much to its broader ideological and political outlook, I show this to have arisen more out of prudence than conspiracy. What is especially significant in shaping such views, I suggest, is the desire on the part of the Sheffield elite for consensus in the midst of social conflict. The municipal leadership's efforts to forge a model of constructive civic engagement – ultimately through the phalanx of institutional initiatives that made up the embryonic

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<sup>3</sup> An important target of the New Right offensive launched during the 1980s was the prevailing ideology underpinning criminal justice policy. When Norman Tebbit denounced the 'valueless values of the Permissive Society' in which 'criminals deserved as much sympathy as their victims', he revealed the ethos of welfare reform as much as the activities of offenders to be the object of political intervention. Quoted in Sked (1987, p.16).

welfare state – provided the key factor in shaping ruling class perceptions of crime and criminals. Recognising the need to narrow rather than widen existing social divisions, leading members of the Sheffield middle classes, I argue, endeavoured to promote an image of the working classes as fundamentally passive and law abiding.

### The 'Twenties'

Despite the recent battles waged over the ideology and practice of penal welfare, remarkably little of this has anything to say about the subject in the decade following the First World War. There are a number of reasons for this. First, the politicised character of such debates has ensured that it has been the more turbulent and seemingly eventful moments that mark the birth and alleged recent demise of the Progressive era that has attracted the attention of writers (Allen, 1981; Bailey, 1981a; Bottomley & Coleman, 1984; Carson & Wiles, 1975; Garland, 1990; Garland & Young, 1983; Gatrell et al., 1980; Ignatieff, 1978; Stone, 1983; Wiener, 1990). In a century loosely bounded by the 1879 Summary Jurisdiction Act and the 1982 Criminal Justice Act,<sup>4</sup> the 1920s sit more or less equidistant between the emergence and final moments of the 'rehabilitative ideal'. The 1920s is also suitably distanced from the spate of post-Second World War criminal justice legislation erected on the foundations of earlier reforms. This relative indifference to the 1920s, however, arises less from the simple passage of time and more from how that time was experienced by contemporaries and subsequently regarded by their descendents. Though only a few years separated the 1920s from the burst of penal reform following the ebullient Gladstone Committee Report of 1895, few people experienced these years as a time of gentle transition. The cataclysm of the Great War embedded in the minds of contemporaries a pervasive sense of dislocation with the period prior to 1914, a year, it has been suggested, that signifies the true end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth (Hobsbawm, 1994). It is a date that also tends to mark the furthest point reached in the accounts of those concerned with the origins of penal and criminal justice reform.

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<sup>4</sup> Probation, the first elements of which were initiated by the 1879 Summary Jurisdiction Act, was perhaps the defining institutional expression of the era of rehabilitation, and the beginning of a bipartisan political approach to criminal and penal issues. The 1979 election of the Conservative Party and its 1982 Criminal Justice Act just as readily signalled an end to this bi-partisanship, and the launch of a series of explicitly coercive measures in the realm of law and order.

An additional factor that may account for the relative neglect of the twenties by writers concerns the subsequent characterisation of the decade itself. In the general historical literature it is regarded variously as one of transition, a temporary respite between the two great world wars (Carr, 1961; Taylor, 1961); or a period marked by introspection in the realm of ideas and conservatism in social policy (Fraser, 1984; Stevenson, 1977). In comparison to the subsequent decade, the 1920s has been regarded both by popular and scholarly opinion as relatively uneventful. The work of historians and the impact of recent highly charged political debates have been to privilege, in the general consciousness, the events of the 1930s as iconic of that period. Perhaps the enduring resonance of the Second World War within British culture accounts for the attention directed to what is generally regarded as the formative decade of that conflict. In this regard the 1920s is held to be no more than a gentle incline towards the 'Dark Valley' that was the 'Thirties' (Brendon, 2000). Although Britain in the 1920s witnessed no less turbulence in political and social affairs as the following decade, it has not become quite so lodged in the popular consciousness of the interwar years. Instead, the monochrome imagery of peaceful though subdued unemployed workers provides the most enduring motif of this period. Yet, as a number of writers have subsequently remarked, it is an image that was in many ways constructed by the authorities to mask the reality of violent confrontations. The picture of stoical forbearance depicted in the staccato newsreel footage of the period owes much to censorious manipulation, just as the image of nobility in defeat owes much to the social realism of contemporary art (Sumner, 1994). Pearson suggests that it is perhaps because the working classes were not yet so firmly under the heel during the 1920s that the authorities were able only in the following decade to portray a convincing image of social peace (Pearson, 1983b). These facts, as much as anything, should warn us against accepting traditional representations at face value.

Despite this, as I discuss in Chapter 2, the 1920s saw significant changes in the way crime was understood and offenders treated. The decade saw both innovations in the realm of criminal justice policy and in the scientific, particularly psychoanalytical and psychological, understanding of crime. Despite a few notable exceptions, (Bailey, 1987; Forsythe, 1991; Forsythe, 1995; Garland, 1988; Garland, 1994; Valier, 1995), these developments have endured relative neglect.

## Perceptions of crime

The relative academic indifference to the 1920s is even more marked when it comes to the study of public perceptions of crime during this decade, the explanation being that interest in public attitudes to crime is a remarkably recent phenomenon. Even though the threads of what might be recognised as a systematic study of crime began to emerge in the late eighteenth century it is only within the last thirty years or so that writers have deemed perceptions of crime worthy of serious attention (Ben-Yehuda, 1986; Best, 1989; Carson & Wiles, 1975; Chibnall, 1977; Christensen et al., 1982; Cohen, 1987; Cohen & Young, 1973; Garafalo, 1981; Hale, 1996; Hall et al., 1978; Hickman, 1982). During the earlier decades of the twentieth century the interest of scholars and social policy makers was upon the aetiology of crime and treatment of the offender. As I explore in some detail in Chapter Two, this reflected the central role accorded to the relationship between the state and the offender, and the transformative potential of progressive social intervention. As Morris has argued, in the half-century before 1945 'public attitudes were more frequently articulated with respect to offenders than to the abstract notion of crime' (Morris, 1989, p.68). The fragmentation of traditional solidarities, the growth of social individualism, the waning of grand political programmes and the rise of the 'victim' have, in more recent years, played their part in focusing the attention of policy makers and academics on social attitudes to crime (Mawby & Walklate, 1994; Young & Mathews, 1992). The term 'perceptions of crime' is utilised in order to articulate a set of concerns wholly different to those that animated their forebears. It is commonly employed with reference to the everyday impressions the general public has about crime as distinct from what are judged to be the more mediated conceptual and ideological formulations of the political classes. My focus of interest is upon the Sheffield elite, a social group who saw themselves not as victims but authors of their own destiny and had a view of crime, as will emerge below, that was intimately tied to their wider social position, ideological assumptions and political goals. They strove to attain a scientific appreciation of contemporary social problems and played a large part in promoting a conception of crime that was at the same time received as common wisdom. By 'perception', I therefore refer to not only the immediate impressions the Sheffield elite had about crime but also the conceptualisation of the subject and the range of solutions that they advanced.

The notions of 'elite' and 'crime' are no less subject to shifting political and cultural preoccupations. A prominent feature of contemporary debates regarding elite views about crime, whether considered in the form of Home Office announcements or media representations, is that they are regarded as a monolithic and illegitimate imposition. There has arisen a conviction that the traditional approach to understanding public views of crime has tended to ignore the voices of the less powerful members of society. Girling *et al* remark how 'much previous academic criminology and, still more, much of our contemporary political language has tended to flatten some of these complexities and to reduce the 'public' to the status of ciphers so far as the concerns, needs and desires in respect of crime are concerned' (Girling *et al.*, 2000, p.34).

Given the proclivity of mainstream writing to disparage the realm of elite ideas and seek what is regarded as the more authentic realm of lay opinion, the focus of this study may appear unfashionable. Despite this, a premise of the present work, and one examined in some detail in Chapter 2, is that elite ideas about crime cannot be understood simply as an expression of the sectional interests of a dominant social group. Rather they are the highly mediated outcome of developments in the realms of culture, politics and science over which the governing elites often have little control. 'There is something in the nature of historical events', writes Butterfield, 'which twists the course of history in a direction that no man ever intended' (Butterfield, 1944, p.103). The storm and stress of war, economic and political turmoil and the sporadic, unforeseen events of daily life ensure that if the governing elites play a large part in shaping dominant attitudes towards crime they do so on terms not always dictated by themselves, nor in ways initially intended. Equally untenable is the belief that the general public's perceptions of crime are theirs by self-design. Hughes asks how 'only a small number of individuals are actually responsible... [for] the enunciation and development of the ideas that will eventually inspire... governing elites' (Hughes, 1979, p.10). In a similar vein, I suggest that it is with the governing elites that responsibility for ideological leadership of society in any period resides and that it is in the enunciations of the governing elites that society's prevailing attitude to crime is most clearly expressed.

The above formulation is important because it directs one away from a technical understanding of this social group towards recognising it as an evolving social relationship that was moulded by a range of ideological and social factors. It suggests that attitudes were not simply dictated by economic and political status or relative

position in the social hierarchy – though these may be important associated factors. Accordingly, in this study I lay particular emphasis upon the realm of ideas, suggesting that the elite's prevailing attitude to crime was shaped by their attempt to negotiate a range of pressing social and political issues.

In this study I present a history of ideas rather than a detailed analysis of the institutions and practices within which these ideas unfurled. Yet, the range of practical possibilities and limitations presented within the institutions of criminal justice necessarily operated to circumscribe or at least influence the range of ideas that came to govern the actions of individuals involved with these agencies. Bauman remarks that the way human beings understand the world is always praxeomorphic. That is, dominant ideas are 'shaped by the know-how of the day, what people can do and how they usually go about doing it' (Bauman, 2000, p.56). With this in mind, and particularly in relation to Sheffield, considerable attention is directed to the personnel and agencies comprising the criminal justice system, in particular the probation service, magistrate's courts, and the police. I examine the motivations of individuals who occupied key positions within the criminal justice and related welfare institutions and the way in which their beliefs came to be implemented in both policy and day-to-day operational activities.

'Crime' is a legal term that, in its broadest usage, denotes any behaviour upon which the state, through the courts, may lawfully impose punishment (Glaser, 1978, p.155). Yet, it is rarely the case that technical definitions and dominant notions of crime converge, and it is with the latter that this study is concerned. 'Crime' is a highly abstract term; one that may be readily suffused with symbolically loaded meaning. As the broad but influential school of social constructionism has made us aware, such meaning owes as much to the range of factors prevailing within society at any one time as the objective character of crime itself (Aronson, 1984; Ben-Yehuda & Goode, 1994; Berger & Luckman, 1966; Douglas, 1970; Jacobs & Henry, 1996). Thus, during the last quarter of the twentieth century, the disintegration of the post war welfare consensus and the politicisation of law and order played a major role in associating crime in the popular mind with street violence, urban decay and the plight of the victim. In my study, I describe how perceptions of crime among members of the Sheffield elite during the 1920s were similarly moulded by the specific social conditions and range of concerns

that prevailed during the period. I direct particular attention to the role of class in shaping prevailing attitudes to offending and the offender. This was a time in which individuals were anchored to institutions and ideologies arising from the politics of class, which in turn gave shape and solidity to social life. A marginal role was subsequently accorded to the plight of the victim, and emphasis was placed instead upon the need to reform the offender by means of state sponsored measures of social amelioration.

Too often, though, elite attitudes to crime during the period have been conceptualised as part of the unfolding of a grand historical theme, or the inevitable outcome of particular economic or political circumstances. For the stewards of 'penal welfare' the decade has often been held to be just one moment in the emergence of enlightened social reform (Grunhut, 1972; Radzinowicz, 1966; Radzinowicz & Hood, 1990; Rose, 1958; Rose, 1961). For their part, radical commentators have directed attention to the continuity in elite anxieties about crime, or the exercise of class power. Yet, the focus upon overarching themes in the analysis of elite attitudes to crime has frequently been at the cost of historical specificity. I suggest that prevailing views about crime and the criminal can be understood properly only with reference to the array of cultural, economic, and political conditions that converge always in a novel form within each period under scrutiny. This is not to suggest that the historical roots of elite sensibilities during the post-Great War years are of no significance. On the contrary, I devote considerable attention to tracing the roots of important contextual themes, such as class rivalry, fears about social degeneration, the prestige accorded to medical science, the key role accorded to state intervention, and the privileged status bestowed upon interwar youth. As Garland remarks, 'the present is continuous with the past in some respects, and discontinuous in others. It is the historian's job to identify the process of transmutation which characterises change and, in particular, the generation of the differences which characterise our modernity' (Garland, 1994, p.25).

The arguments developed in this study seek to establish the mediations between these broader social and political currents and the character of elite enunciations regarding crime and its control. With reference to the principle of historical specificity I aim to reconcile the alleged primacy of 'cultural' phenomenon in certain instances and of 'economic' factors in others in shaping attitudes to crime and, in so doing, avoid the vulgar determinism which parcels out the economic and the cultural into discrete spheres

of 'base' and 'superstructure'. To that end I draw evidence from the enunciation and practice of key individuals that help build a picture of elite conceptualisation of crime during the 1920s and the social and political context within which these ideas were framed. I examine elite attitudes towards crime at the level of the local media, police, judiciary, education and voluntary and welfare agencies. At the same time I draw upon a rich body of established work devoted to exploring the economic, cultural and political history of the city.

For generations of Sheffields, crime in the 1920s has been synonymous with the 'Sheffield Gang Wars'. The violent struggle amongst a number of street gangs for control of the lucrative gambling rings and the response of the Sheffield Police force has entered into local folklore. What remained the preserve of local narrative has, more recently, been brought to the attention of a wider audience by Bean (1981; 1987) and Harvey (1973). Their accounts of the street gangs are complemented by other writers who have sought to remind us that violent street crime is not peculiar to modern living (Dunning et al., 1987; Jenkins & Potter, 1988; Pearson, 1983b; Samuel, 1981). The Sheffield gangs feature prominently in this study, but are explored primarily in relation to elite debates about the topic and only so far as this serves to reveal more fully the character of elite attitudes to crime. What emerges in the course of the study is the restrained response of leading figures to the violent activities of the gangs, despite an active Press campaign. Even more marked is the subdued reaction of the professional elite to the 'social' crimes of the poor. Key individuals in the city repeatedly played down the extent of crime and praised the law-abiding character of its citizens, even in the face of evidence to the contrary. Explored in the study are what I deem to be other, equally important aspects of local debate. For example, I examine the declining purchase of former notions of respectability and negative moralisation and the difficulties experienced by organisations such as the Sheffield Police Force and the temperance associations in their attempt to negotiate these changes.

An important task is to chart the interaction between social context, at both the 'national' and 'local' level, and the experience of prominent individuals within Sheffield, and thereby step outside the frequently sterile counter-position between the merits of broad national studies on the one hand and the detail offered by particularist, local investigations on the other. In so doing I aim to trace, in their various concrete manifestations, the working out of broader ideological currents through the lived



experiences of members of the Sheffield elite. At the same time I examine the interaction between these local experiences and debates about crime at the national level. For example, a central concern of the study is the way in which Home Office beliefs about the trajectory of crime rates and the treatment of the criminal were taken up and disseminated by municipal leaders. At the same time an equal degree of attention is directed to examining how the experience gained within the factory, party politics and on the bench was imparted by the local elite to their metropolitan counterparts. In so doing I attempt neither to generalise to other geographical locations from the local study, nor to suggest that the ideas dominant within a single locality are governed by laws internal to itself. While a local case study may reveal previously unobserved features of social life, its primary utility is to elicit a better understanding of the conceptualisation of crime both at a local and national level.

### Newspapers and crime

In my quest to establish the principle features of elite perceptions of crime in Sheffield during the 1920s, Press representations of crime in Sheffield provide a key resource. Crime news has attracted a substantial amount of research over recent decades (Antunes & Hurley, 1977; Barlow et al., 1995a; Barlow et al., 1995b; Bunting, 1992; Chibnall, 1975; Chibnall, 1977; Christensen et al., 1982; Cohen & Young, 1973; Davis, 1952; Hall et al., 1978; Hickman, 1982; Humphries, 1981a; Reiner, 1997; Scheingold, 1984; Scheingold, 1992; Schlesinger & Tumber, 1994; Sheley & Ashkins, 1981; Windhauser et al., 1990; Wiseheart, 1922). Yet, the focus of interest has been largely upon contemporary material to the exclusion of historical resources. Emsley notes how, 'there has been no systematic study of crime reporting in the [British] press' prior to the Second World War (Emsley, 1994, p.154). The recent explosion of work devoted to media representations of crime perhaps owes less to the discovery of a body of hitherto unexplored material than the emergence of crime as a key social issue. The politicisation of crime during the 1960s and 1970s directed the attention of radical sociologists to understand the specific processes of public communication and to expose the media as organs of political manipulation. Accordingly, the principal focus of interest here has been the influence of the media on public perceptions– the area of so called 'media effects' – rather than media representations of crime. In sum, research into newspaper

reporting of crime has neglected a wealth of historical material dating from before the Second World War. However, I suggest that newspapers provide a useful resource for determining elite views about crime. Through a systematic analysis of crime coverage in the editorial and letter's pages of two Sheffield newspapers, the Sheffield Daily Telegraph and the Sheffield Daily Independent, I intend to establish an insight into the broader attitudes towards crime during the 1920s and a basis for more detailed study. For example, Goode and Ben-Yehuda suggest that '*[d]uring a moral panic* letters are written to the editors of local newspapers *not* with unfocussed, idiosyncratic messages, but in large numbers, with consistent themes. Editors become convinced that their newspapers and magazines should publish articles about a given fearful subject...' (Goode & Ben-Yehuda, 1994, p.141, emphasis in original). If what they suggest is true, then examining the crime coverage of these two genres should provide an insight into the presence or otherwise of moral panic.

The structure of this study reflects its aims. That is, my objective is to examine and explain elite attitudes to crime during the 1920s. During the course of the study I move from a discussion of abstract, theoretical propositions to a more concrete presentation of the findings. I begin with a review of the relevant literature, particularly focussing on debates concerning the ideology of welfare and the sociology of moral panics. In Chapter 2, I trace the historical threads and specific developments that contributed to the shaping of dominant perceptions of crime during the 1920s. Drawing upon debates and commentary from the Home Office and a range of other Metropolitan professionals, I trace a various scientific, cultural and political changes that occurred in the years leading up to the Great War. I also explore the impact of this conflict and the stresses it unleashed upon the conceptualisation of crime and treatment of offenders.

In Chapters 3 and 4 I discuss, respectively, the methods and findings of the analysis of crime contributions in the editorials and letters of two newspapers, the Sheffield Daily Telegraph and Sheffield Daily Independent. The primary objective of the newspaper analysis is to determine the main features and patterns concerning attitudes towards crime in Sheffield, providing a platform for more detailed study. Laying emphasis upon the outlook of the Sheffield elite during the 1920s, in Chapter 5 I re-examine a number of possible explanations for their low key and optimistic attitude to crime. Utilising findings of the previous chapters and with reference to the cultural and political

dynamics predominating in the city I suggest that they provide an important, though not complete explanation of prevailing elite views about crime. In this chapter I ask exactly why, at this time, in the midst of protracted and deeply felt anxiety amongst the middle class, crime was viewed as a source of optimism rather than unease.

My aim in Chapter 6 is to explore in more detail the Sheffield elite's view of crime and, in the process, answer some of the questions raised in the previous chapter. To that end I place particular emphasis on the local elite's attitude to broader social questions and their practical involvement in the extensive network of voluntary and state-led institutions in the city. I examine the way in which the twin goals of welfare provision - those of political inclusion and moral improvement of the lower orders - engendered a disposition on the part of the local elite to regard crime and offenders in a positive manner. In Chapter 7 I explore how the Sheffield elite's optimistic view of the trajectory of crime and their sympathy to the offender was most clearly manifested in their approach to the issue of juvenile delinquency. By examining the commentaries and activities of leading professionals in the city I establish how and why youth work served as a key arena within which the elite could put into effect its ethos of moral reclamation and display its commitment to the project of progressive social change. In the final chapter I explore some of the practical consequences arising from this consensual approach to crime and offenders for two groups of moral entrepreneurs in the city. I chart the response of the local temperance organisations and the police to shifting cultural sensibilities regarding alcohol and gambling. Also examined are the attempts by these agencies to operate in a secular and politically charged climate that was increasingly sensitive to negative moralisation.

## Chapter One

### Understanding elite perceptions of crime

For the greater part of the twentieth century, an ethos of reform and rehabilitation has guided official attitudes to criminological and penal questions. Correction rather than punishment, rehabilitation rather than ostracism has directed theoretical and practical intervention on the part of those charged with the task of dealing with crime and criminals (Blom-Cooper, 1974; Grunhut, 1972; Radzinowicz, 1966; Rose, 1958; Rose, 1961). In more recent years revisionists have criticised this approach (Foucault, 1978; Garland, 1985; Garland, 1990; Gillis, 1974; Hay, 1975a; Hay, 1975b; Platt, 1969). It has been described as a self-serving, elitist imposition, functioning to hide a more insidious strategy of domination. The first part of this chapter is devoted to exploring the traditional and revisionist approaches, and to determine whether they provide useful conceptual guides to understanding perceptions of crime in the 1920s. I suggest that both the dominant and rival accounts of the emergence of what may be described as the 'reform project' have tended to adopt an ahistorical approach. Radical critics have attacked an account of penal reform which, it is alleged, offers a myth of seamless historical continuity. However, in its place is advanced an equally timeless account of domination and control.

These debates have mirrored a process within which a social consensus around the need for a progressive criminal and penal policy has given way to the politicisation of crime. One outcome has been the elevation of anxiety as the defining feature of society's attitude to crime. Accordingly, writers have tended to transpose this contemporary preoccupation with fear when analysing attitudes to crime during previous decades. The second section of the chapter provides an overview of some of these debates. My objective is to examine such concepts as 'anxiety', 'moral panic' and 'moral enterprise' and to determine whether these are useful in understanding attitudes to crime during the 1920s.

#### Understanding the discourse of reform and rehabilitation

Modern social historians and historical criminologists have tended to view 1920s Britain as a place where a relaxed attitude to crime and a lenient approach to offenders prevailed

amongst the professional elites (Bailey, 1987; Dunning et al., 1987; Garland, 1985; Pearson, 1983b). Bailey has drawn attention to an ascendant 'progressive centre' of the British political class, a group that disseminated an optimistic account of the causes and correctives of delinquency and crime during the decade (ibid.) Radzinowicz sees the period as one in which a 'very optimistic approach towards crime and its control' came to predominate (Radzinowicz & Hood, 1986, p.778). By the end of the First World War, remarks Garland, 'reform' had become the 'central and predominant signifier in the new penal discourse' whereby 'criminals are presented as individuals to be pitied, cared for and, if possible, reclaimed' (Garland, 1985, p.27). Such writers have viewed this optimistic attitude to crime and criminals as the expression of the ideology of criminal and penal reform. This relates to the broad ideological commitment and a set of institutional measures directed to improving the methods of dealing with offenders and removing the causes of crime. During the first half of the twentieth century a belief in the efficacy of correctional rather than punitive penal policies and rehabilitation of the offender rather than his ostracism became the cornerstone of government policy. Early to mid nineteenth century policy, it is generally agreed, had relied upon punitive policies that were impersonal, sought to maximise the social stigma of incarceration and held reformation to be subsidiary to the goals of deterrence and retribution. Following the 1895 Gladstone Committee Report a number of legislative and institutional changes were implemented, which came to have a major influence on the practice of criminal justice during the 1920s. These changes privileged the individualised treatment of the offender with a greater emphasis upon his rehabilitation upon leaving prison. These reforms were also directed to the removal of the first time offender from the contaminating influence of prison and the improvement of the young offender's immediate surrounding. The latter were to be accomplished either indirectly through supervisory visits by the probation officer to the home of the young offender and through broader measures of social welfare, or more directly through his removal to the surrogate home of the reformatory and industrial school. These policy initiatives were put into effect during the Edwardian years through a number of key institutional measures. They included the Probation of Offenders Act (1907), the Children Act (1908) and the Prevention of Crime Act (1908) which, among other changes, brought about the abolition of penal servitude for children and young people, restricted imprisonment to young persons between 14 and 16 and initiated Borstal training.

Yet while a broad equanimity can be discerned regarding the character of such changes, little agreement exists as to the motivations for this new rehabilitative discourse. Traditional accounts have tended to explain this in terms of a deep-seated and progressive change in public sensibility. A growing awareness of a broad range of social issues served to influence middle-class attitudes to criminal and penal issues. In his history of the penal reform movement, Rose (1961) locates the origin of this approach in the change that occurred in the attitude of respectable people to the plight of poorer sections of the population. During the mid-nineteenth century there gradually took place, he argues, 'a growth of thought, which had not existed before, for human life and for human beings' (p.15). The manner in which crime came to be perceived and prevented was therefore part of an emerging awareness on the part of the privileged for the suffering of the disadvantaged. The history of the penal reform movement embodies this progressive tide. For Grunhut, the idea and practice of reform arose from

a broad humanitarian movement [which] comes to demand that human rights and dignity must be respected even in the offender... It substitutes rational penal and reformatory treatment for blind reaction and petrified tradition (Grunhut, 1972, p.1).

The dominance of reformatory views about crime during the 1920s represents, for a number of writers, no more than the flowering of a humanitarian impulse that had began to unfurl during the previous century. Radzinowicz attributes the optimistic approach towards crime and its treatment to the movement away from a reliance on incarceration and a growing distrust of the 'asylum theory'. Accordingly, the 1920s was the beneficiary of a progressive penal and criminal policy. The most avid proponents of such accounts have often been those involved in the administration and implementation of criminal justice policy during the high-tide of penal reform in the 1950s and 1960s. This period offered a vantagepoint from which writers could look back on the history of criminal justice policy as one of steadily unfolding progress made possible by enlightened stewardship.

With the subsequent politicisation of crime from the end of the 1960s there also occurred a questioning of the efficacy of the reformatory programme and a re-evaluation of the history of criminal justice (Blom-Cooper, 1974; Downes & Morgan, 1994; Morris, 1989). This Whig-evolutionist view of the emergence of the project of criminal

and penal reform came under sustained criticism on two fronts. Those on the right of politics indicted the reformatory ethos for its leniency to criminals and responsibility for rising crime. Their protagonists on the left held the same outlook to be a positivistic imposition that privileged the role and outlook of the institutional elites, while ignoring the interests of the offender and broader public.

### The Revisionist Assault

For critical or 'revisionist' historians, the rhetoric of reform and rehabilitation was expressive of a process altogether different from that suggested by traditional interpretations. Rather than a manifestation of a gradually unfurling humanitarian impulse on the part of the ruling elite, the vocabulary of reform served altogether ulterior motives. Increasingly from the 1960s, revisionist historians and radical criminologists interpreted both crime and the methods brought to dealing with offenders as the product of social, particularly class, conflict. While crime was judged to be the inevitable outcome of social inequality, penal institutions served as the instruments for enforcing ruling class discipline. Both punishment and reform were predicated on the particular ways in which the ruling class chose to operate this disciplinary apparatus. Of particular influence during this time was the work of the Marxists Rusche and Kirkchheimer (1939). Modern penal methods, they suggest, are directly related to the dynamics of the labour market in the capitalist economy. When times are hard and work is scarce, penal institutions adopt punitive regimes. Similarly, the strength of reform is dependent upon the cost of labour power rather than a consequence of social progress.

Rusche and Kirkchheimer's thesis provided the inspiration for a number of similar studies (Platt & Takagi, 1981, Melossi 1981). But while generally receptive to such work, many writers have been critical of its determinist thrust. A number argue that the history of criminal and penal methods is not reducible to economic impulses. Instead, they direct attention to the ideological motivations of the ruling elite. For example, Douglas Hay argues that the resort to either punitive or benevolent sentencing during the eighteenth century was contingent upon the need of the ruling class to extract deference from the lower orders. While the draconian capital statutes operated on a symbolic level to reinforce the authority of the ruling elite, the use of pardon and the prerogative of mercy 'allowed the rulers of England to make the courts a selective instrument of class justice' (Hay, 1975a, p.48). The criminal law was thus employed as part of 'a class

conspiracy' calculated and designed to 'vindicate or disguise class interest' (ibid. pp.52, 56). The role of conspiracy can be seen in accounts of related spheres of criminal justice. An example is Gillis' study of the historical development of the categories of youth and adolescence in Britain (Gillis, 1974). He suggests that the policy of reform pursued by a range of voluntary and statutory organisations was motivated by the requirement on the part of the authorities to curb juvenile freedom. In his study of the child saving movement in the United States, Platt (1969) similarly observes that reformers worked to an agenda that operated to consolidate the grip of the ruling class rather than ease the lot of the child.

Again, this approach has been subjected to criticism from a number of sources. Whilst Rusche and Kirkchheimer were criticised for their economic determinism, these studies have been rebuked for their stress upon the conspiratorial designs of a ruling elite. The work of Hay and other writers have become a regular first port of call for those who have wished instead to emphasise the makeshift and pragmatic nature of criminal and penal policy (Bailey, 1981b; Langbein, 1983; Rose, 1961). It is argued that, rather than being the product of manipulation and design, punitive methods were often demanded by, and served the interests, of the lower orders. As Langbein argues '[t]he criminal law and its procedures existed to serve and protect the interests of the people who suffered as victims of crime, people who were overwhelmingly non-elite' (Langbein, 1983, p.97). Bailey suggests that suspicion or indeed hostility often characterised the response of substantial sections of the elite to the centralisation and professionalisation of the criminal justice system (Bailey, 1981a). In place of the theme of social control his emphasis is upon the 'tentativeness, variability and complexity of developments in the procedures and developments of nineteenth century criminal justice' (p.18).

### Reform and Anti-modernism

The vocabulary of reform and punishment, it is argued, cannot be reduced to the teleology of ruling class conspiracy or the gradual unfurling of benign humanitarianism. Yet out of these radical critiques has emerged a new consensus. In line with the more general re-evaluation of enlightenment notions of progress and rationality that has taken place in recent years it is argued that the reformatory ethos had little to do with human progress. One of the central arguments is that the reformatory movement of the late



eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries held little regard for the criminal *per se*. Rather, it was an antipathy to the arbitrariness of the *ancien régime* that motivated middle class advocates of progress. Their goal was uniformity, proportionality and efficiency in the treatment of criminals. Rarely was it the cruelty of the law that aroused their indignation as reformers had little time for the plight of the accused. 'It was rationality that was the goal, not kindness' (Gatrell, 1994, p.327). Such rationality could work to favour capital punishment in the minds of the most liberal of reformers.<sup>5</sup>

It is perhaps in the work of Foucault that the ideology of benign humanitarian reform is subjected to its harshest critique (Foucault, 1978). Behind the rhetoric of humanitarianism lurked more insidious forces. What the reform movement represented was a process whereby old mechanisms of power were discarded in favour of more efficient, more intrusive, and subtler techniques of social control. The target of the reformer's zeal was not the cruelty of punishment. Instead, 'reform' was the ideological cloak that disguised a 'new strategy for the exercise of power to punish', the primary objective of which was 'not to punish less, but to punish better... to punish with more universality and necessity; to insert the power to punish more deeply into the social body' (pp.81-2). The vocabulary of reform and correction provides a façade for the 'disciplinary society', whose goal is the impregnation into every pore of the 'social body' mechanisms which exist to observe and control. 'Reform' became the norm in the first half of the nineteenth century because this served to facilitate the most efficient means through which to exercise power. "'Humanity" is the respectable name given to this economy, and to its meticulous calculations' (p.92).

Ignatieff is equally suspicious of penal and criminal reform. He views the latter as a project whereby 'humanitarianism was inextricably linked to the practice of domination' (Ignatieff, 1978, p.214). Utilising Foucault's notion of the 'carceral continuum', he argues that the penitentiary was just one element in a 'complementary and interdependent structure of control' whereby the school and factory as much as the prison were geared to ensuring moral compliance (p.214). The continuum also extends to the ideological practices associated with these institutions: 'The imperative to control,

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<sup>5</sup> Gatrell notes how evangelical reformers were likewise motivated in their demands for criminal and penal reform: 'As like as not when evangelicals deplored capital punishment, it was not in protest at the bodily terror inflicted but because hanging was an inefficient way of bringing felons to salvation... Some felt, if those about to hang could be forced to repent in fear, they might as well hang, their reward imminent' (1994, p.16).

to dominate, and to subdue is written deep into the structures of those ways of thinking we call the “human sciences” (p.218). Wiener’s account of the emergence of criminal policy during the nineteenth century is also critical of the role of the social sciences. He argues that the work of psychiatrists facilitated the insertion into the social body of a range of disciplinary techniques. By expounding a deterministic view of the causes of crime these scientists encouraged a ‘disbelief in the power and autonomy of the individual will’ and, in so doing, facilitated a greater scope for intrusion and control (Wiener, 1990, p.182).

The emphasis upon determinism in the realm of human sciences and conspiracy on the part of the institutional apparatus come together in the early work of David Garland (1981; 1983; 1985). Yet, whereas the latter accounts are set within a rather drawn-out historical time period, Garland supplies a rather more contextually sensitive account of the origins of the reformatory programme. He locates the emergence of criminal and penal reform in the complex set of political and social projects initiated at the turn of the century upon which was founded the modern ‘welfare state’. For Garland, the key aspect of the relationship between crime and the broader welfare project is the way in which the treatment of crime came to structure the latter. In other words, rather than the ‘liberal spirit’ of welfare shaping and softening the approach to dealing with offenders, the ‘disciplinary logic’ of penalty came to underpin the normative dynamic of broader social policy. In this way ‘progress’ provided a convenient idiom within which to disguise this coercive strategy (1981, p.30). Garland’s account of the rise of penal welfare and the discourse of reform, which he develops from some of the earlier works described above, is worth closer scrutiny, not least because of the attention he pays to the role of wider social and political factors in shaping prevailing views about crime and the criminal during the early twentieth century. I similarly argue for a historically specific analysis that takes account of wider ideological currents shaping attitudes to crime in Sheffield and nationally. Yet, as I go on to argue, Garland’s contextual specificity and sensitivity to the influence of wider social forces is more apparent than real. His is an ahistorical view of ruling class motivations where the primary determining factor is the exercise of power. Garland’s suspicion of elite subjectivity casts the discourse of reform and the sympathetic view of the offender as a malevolent cover for wider strategic ambitions. Rather than a nuanced and conditional response to

specific social factors, prevailing views about crime are, in Garland's approach, disembodied from their immediate social context.

### Garland's 'new structure of penalty'

Garland argues that between 1895 and 1914 a 'new structure of penalty' was established in place of the Victorian classicist system. Whereas the latter focused on the seriousness of the offence, and had at its heart the notion of individual free will, the new positivist discourse was based upon an endless differentiation of the offender according to 'criminal type'. This new approach incorporated a strong emphasis upon eugenic science and was directed towards mapping the character of the individual offender, selecting him according to his degree of mental defect, intellectual capacity, reformatory potential and incorrigibility. An elaborate institutional network of professional expertise comprising doctors, psychiatrists, and mental health experts, was established in order to carry out this programme. Concomitant with this was the establishment of a broader welfare strategy that provided a benign guise for the new range of criminal and penal policies. In this way, the more deeply penetrating levels of coercion and compulsion that were a necessary element in the policies of the segregation and treatment of habitual criminals, the congenitally unfit and intervention in the sphere of the family, were hidden from view. This emerging realm of penalty, suggests Garland, was complemented by economic and political policies aimed at incorporating the lower orders and minimising class antagonisms. This was accomplished by the expansion of the political franchise, and by an enlargement of the social responsibilities of the state such as the provision of pensions, insurance and other social reforms. These moves were complemented by an ideological redefinition of the relationship between the state and the citizen. Garland suggests that the provisions and benefits opened up by the state were conditional upon a guarantee that the individual would reciprocate by conforming to 'certain norms of conduct' (Garland, 1984, p.233). In other words, that he worked regularly, was sober, avoided prison and so on. What is important is that rather than expressed negatively in terms of coercion and compulsion, the contractual obligation was instead expressed in the politically neutral idiom of 'citizenship'. In this way 'citizenship' provided a positive 'rhetoric of equalization' in which political and class differences were elided (p.231).

Garland's approach is useful in a number of respects. In attempting to establish the origins of the 'modernist' project of penal reform, he succeeds in identifying a number of important developments that helped to shape the outlook of the intelligentsia and institutional elite during the interwar years and beyond. The period around the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries is rightly regarded as a key moment in determining the future development of criminal and penal policy. A number of critics have contested the extent to which the changes that occurred during this time amount to quite the abrupt departure that Garland claims. For example, Forsythe has argued that revolution in penal and criminal reform occurred at a date much earlier and so that, 'by 1865 [there] had occurred a growth of transformative methods which were wholly different to the practices of the 18<sup>th</sup> century' (Forsythe, 1995, p.263). However, while the late nineteenth century programme of changes was in some respects continuous with earlier reforms, this criticism fails to appreciate the qualitative breach that these reforms represented both ideologically and symbolically. These changes are expressive not only of a new relationship that had been forged between the state and the offender, but also of a fundamental reorganisation of the relationship between the state and civil society. Garland succeeds in locating the importance of wider economic and political developments of the period. Foremost of these is the recognition of criminal and penal as inseparably tied to a broader welfare project. He is equally sensitive to the importance of broad-based, though historically novel, developments. Whereas Foucault and Ignatieff set their analyses within sweeping interpretations of historical change, Garland provides a more precise insight into important contextual currents. These include, amongst other features, the onset of relative imperial decline, the greater reliance upon state measures, and the salience of domestic political pressures.

However, despite their many useful insights, it is important to note a number of difficulties within these 'revisionist' accounts of the ideology of criminal and penal reform. Foremost is the one-sided emphasis on the elements of coercion and domination. A common thread running throughout all of these theories is the assault upon individual subjectivity. From the prison to the holocaust, the repressive and barbaric features of modernity have been interpreted as the inevitable outcome of the actions of the unrestrained individual subject. As Emsley remarks, 'a more cynical and pessimistic age is also more critical of its institutions' (Emsley, 1994). A pervasive disenchantment with enlightenment notions of human-centred change has one-sidedly focused attention upon

the regressive aspects of the modernist project. As Lawrence Stone remarks of Foucault's work,

we find a denial of the Enlightenment as an advance in human understanding and sensibility, [and a] recurrent emphasis on control, domination, and punishment as the only mediating qualities possible in personal and social relationships (Quoted in Miller, 1993, pp.235-6).

This criticism can be levelled with equal validity at those other writers who, though critical of some of the specifics of Foucault's analysis, nevertheless adopt a similar epistemology. There is a familiar teleology implicit in the approach taken in these works. In place of the continuity of enlightened progress advanced by the 'modernists' we are offered in its place the equally skewed constant of domination and control. Garland displays some of these same traits. In particular, he privileges the element of conspiratorial design in the approach of the institutional elite. At the same time, the public are portrayed as unwitting dupes, blind to the intrusive and coercive character of such interventions.<sup>6</sup> It is important that one should be aware of the coercive character of those institutions and practices constituted through the project of welfare and penal reform. However, I also suggest that the attempt to reveal the apparatus of modern society as a regressive, authoritarian imposition effectively sidelines the very real commitment of the liberal elite to enlightened social intervention and progressive change, something I explore in more detail later.

By regarding the reformative project as an ideological imposition, Garland overlooks the possibility that the broadened scope of successive criminal justice and penal policies may have had a broader basis of support. In the revisionist literature the reformative programme has been regarded as a highly conscious political strategy involving mechanisms of control deployed by the elite to ensure moral compliance. Yet, I suggest, the consensus around criminal and penal policy that existed throughout British society and across political divisions during the 1920s was more than the fragile construct of a malign ruling elite. Of crucial importance was the ideological and institutional solidity of the English system of law. For example, what emerges in the chapters that follow is the remarkable degree of respect amongst the judiciary, magistrates, criminal justice

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<sup>6</sup> This discourse of reform, argues Garland, 'tends to undercut resistance... from the public, which sees only benevolence and compassion where once was cruelty' (Garland, 1985, p.250).

professionals and Home Office administrators for the integrity of the legal subject. This was reflected in the antipathy or at least suspicions directed towards determinist theories of crime. Despite substantial middle class support for eugenics during the 1920s, the Prison Commission remained stubbornly resistant to such ideas.<sup>7</sup> Not only does Garland overestimate the strength of eugenic ideas, but he fails to recognise the way in which the programme of welfare improvements did away with the need for such coercive intervention. As I argue in a later chapter, rather than eugenic ideas being strengthened by welfare reforms, the latter usurped the need for such policies. I also examine how the courts remained markedly reticent about employing the full powers handed to them. Forsythe notes that despite the considerable powers of preventative detention handed to the courts by the 1908 Prevention of Crime Act, 'the courts were persistently distrustful of it and the numbers of preventive detainees remained very small' (Forsythe, 1991, p.270). Magistrates remained equally reticent about intervening in the domestic sphere of family life, despite the power to do so handed to them by politicians.

In subsequent contributions, Garland (1990) and Gatrell (1994) re-evaluate the emergence of the reformative ethos in light of such criticisms. Garland explains the strength of the vocabulary of reform and rehabilitation not so much in terms of strategies of control but in terms of the culturally acquired facet of 'sensitivity'. The attitude to crime in modern societies is in large part the working out of an evolutionary 'civilising process' which 'has resulted in a cultural diffusion of civilised norms of behaviour' (Garland, 1990, p.223) One consequence of this has been the way in which the civilising process has led to the extension of sympathy to the offender: 'Thus the gradual but undeniable lowering in the intensity of punishment, the extension of charity to prisoners and offenders, the provision of social welfare measures in the twentieth century...might all be understood as aspects of this more general movement in sensitivities' (p.236).

One should note, however, that yet again no history of progress is advanced here. The rehabilitative ethos emerges as a finely crafted façade behind which are hidden more ignoble sentiments. Punitive ideas and emotions, though repressed, are never far beneath the surface, ever threatening to break free. The enduring thread in all of these accounts has been to indict any claim that the history of penal and criminal reform is one of

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<sup>7</sup> Forsythe notes how 'prison disciplinarians were unwilling to allow anything but the most cautious experimentation with these new ideas culled from mental science and the Prison Commission decisively rejected methods of crime control based on wholesale neo-Darwinian evolutionist eugenics' (Forsythe, 1991, p.270).

progress. Gatrell assures us that 'since Europe's history tells us what people even (or especially) like us are capable of no history of progress can be offered' (Gatrell, 1994, p.11).

More important, perhaps, is the removal of more specific contextual currents in favour of the ahistorical concepts of 'power' or 'culture', and the minimisation of the role accorded to political developments more generally. The defining characteristics of prevailing views about crime and punishment are seen to arise solely in developments around the turn of the century or in the more ethereal realm of evolving cultural sensibility. These changes are viewed as having a determinate impact upon perceptions of crime in the years after the First World War. In these and similar accounts little regard is given to influence upon elite perceptions of crime of broader, though historically specific developments. Too often ignored in the revisionist literature are factors such as the impact of the Great War and associated political and cultural upheavals, the role of intergenerational relationships and the dynamics of class politics, all of which, I suggest, played a crucial role in moulding perceptions of crime during the 1920s.

In spite of these deficiencies, a number of writers have recognised the importance of broader contextual dynamics in moulding elite views about crime during the 1920s. Geoffrey Pearson's study of the history of middle class anxieties is particularly sensitive to an 'unusual degree of sympathy towards offenders', particularly young offenders, and muted response on the part of respectable opinion and the authorities to increases in recorded crime (Pearson, 1983b, p.34). The 'altered moral terrain' upon which such crimes were greeted by respectable opinion arose, suggests Pearson, due to a number of factors. The broad sympathy that was directed to the poor at a time of mass unemployment helped to support the sentiment of tolerance. The 'quite extraordinary leniency' regularly displayed by magistrates, youth workers and even senior police officers is also explained as the outcome of the experiences of the First World War. The decimation of a whole generation

left a deep impression on the mental landscape of the inter-war years and helped to form the low-key response towards crime and hooliganism. An active sense of guilt for the generation that had been sacrificed encouraged the belief that there was a debt to be paid to the rising generation (p.43).

Pearson also explains the sympathetic approach to the plight of young and adult offenders in terms of the strength of the ideology of rehabilitation and the ascendancy of the progressive wing of respectable opinion. Victor Bailey (1987) develops this theme in his study of the liberal intelligentsia's approach to juvenile delinquency in the period between 1914 and 1948. He maintains that the 'progressive centre' of social policy and intellectual thought was 'instrumental in moulding interwar views on the explanation of deviance and on the strategies for eliminating delinquency'. In one of the few studies of the ideology and practice of juvenile justice during the inter-war period Bailey details the ascendancy of liberal progressive reformers and the marginality of the more punitive elements amongst the professional elite. In placing these reform workers in their ideological setting, Bailey usefully reveals how the sympathy shown to young delinquents was not such the malign construct that has often been portrayed. He notes the remarkable evangelical zeal with which boys' club workers, criminal justice professionals and Home Office administrators pursued the rehabilitative ethos. Believing in the essential decency of young offenders these professionals viewed delinquency as inseparable from the broader enterprise of child welfare.<sup>8</sup> Bailey's study tends to be descriptive rather than analytical, with an emphasis on a narrowly institutional to the exclusion of a broader contextual understanding of the factors shaping juvenile justice. Yet his sensitivity to the importance of ideological motivations shaping elite enunciations about crime in the decade following the Great War is particularly useful.

The assault upon the ideology of reform outlined so far provides a unifying theme in both radical and conservative accounts of interwar crime and its management. While the former have condemned the extension of disciplinary techniques of surveillance and control the latter have rebuked the welfare mode of intervention for unleashing a wave of disorder, crime and moral collapse. Eager to indict the post-Second World War era of welfare liberalism, during the 1970s and 1980s conservatives have contrasted the criminality of the present with a supposed pre-war respect for property rights and the institutions of law and order. This shared regard for property and authority was grounded, they allege, in stable communities and a shared sense of social responsibility. Sociologists and historians have been largely critical of what they regard as the

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<sup>8</sup> For useful accounts of the emergence of the child welfare movement and its impact upon juvenile justice reform see also Hendrick (1990; 1994).



falsification by conservatives of the history of interwar crime and criminal justice and have responded by pointing to the constancy of elite anxieties about crime.

### Elite perceptions - Concern, Anxiety and Fear

For a number of writers, fear and panic have provided the dominant motifs of elite attitudes to crime (Barlow et al., 1995b; Ben-Yehuda & Goode, 1994; Fishman, 1978; Hall, 1975; Hall et al., 1978; Marshall, 1985; Pearson, 1983b; Scheingold, 1992). They suggest that the concern expressed in the 1980s and 1990s about supposedly new forms of crime are but the most recent examples in an unbroken thread of protest about the decline in moral standards. During the inter-war years, just as today, crime served as the signifier of the breakdown of law and order. The activities of street gangs and the misdemeanours of other petty criminals serve as the focus for an unbroken series of moral panics during the period (Emsley, 1994; Pearson, 1983a; Pearson, 1983b; Pearson, 1984; Pearson, 1985). The pivotal work on this theme was Pearson's *Hooligan* (1983). Pearson begins with the reaction of the media and of respectable opinion to the riots of 1981. He then takes us back through the generations to uncover a 'seamless tapestry of fears about the deteriorating present'. During the inter-war years, as in every other era, respectable opinion consistently directs us to an earlier time, 'fifteen or twenty years ago' or 'before the war' when England was crime-free, happier and more stable. But if we go in search of this Golden Age we can find no time in which the decent citizen was thought to be free from the hooligan of the period (p.207).

The prominence of contemporary panics has stimulated a search for historical continuities. For Showalter, society's response to a broad range of alleged social problems has taken the form of a repetitious series of 'hysterical epidemics'. The cultural tensions that have arisen at moments of *fin de siecle* or millennial transition have been accompanied by panics that have fixed upon various targets (Showalter, 1997). For others, the source of such recurring anxiety is to be found in a range of alternative causes. The recognition that broader public attitudes towards crime bore little relation to the actual level of offending has directed attention to understanding processes located in the wider economic, political and social realm.<sup>9</sup> An enduring criminological concern has been the association that has often been drawn between periods of

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<sup>9</sup> Anxieties about crime are 'rarely a response to published statistics [nor are they] necessarily a reflection of personal or group experience' (Bottomley 1984, p.43)

heightened social anxiety and episodes of punitive 'law and order' campaigns and penal initiatives (Bottomley & Coleman, 1984; Hall et al., 1978). One important outcome has been the key conceptual innovation of 'moral panic' (Cohen, 1971; Cohen, 1972; Cohen & Young, 1973; Young, 1971). The work of Cohen and Young was directed towards understanding the process by which the minor activities of youth sub-cultures were transformed into issues of national concern.<sup>10</sup> The creation of a folk devil and the accompanying language of law and order acted to cohere society around the defence of traditional values. In this way moral panic was judged to serve the interest and moral agenda of the dominant social groups.

The most sophisticated application of the concept is provided in the work of Hall *et al* (Hall et al., 1978). Integrating interactionist and Marxist theoretical approaches, the authors dealt with the reaction to street robberies in England in the early 1970s. Hall usefully showed how the authorities actively constructed the 'black mugger' as a modern-day folk-devil. 'Mugging', and black youth in general, came to signify a threat to the traditional way of life, a symbol of the disintegration of the social order. As such it provided a focus for a broad range of latent anxieties. Cohen's model and Hall's subsequent elaboration of the concept have been enormously influential. They have been utilised by writers in order to gain an insight into the dynamics of both contemporary and historical crime panics.<sup>11</sup> In particular, the emphasis upon the artificially inflated character of alarm served the wider aim of challenging the way in which the authorities manipulated social anxiety to win consent for more coercive methods of policing and divert attention from social inequalities (Barlow et al., 1995a; Barlow et al., 1995b; Hall et al., 1978; Scheingold, 1984; Scheingold, 1992).

### Moral Panic reconsidered

For Hall, and other radical commentators, the key social constituency within which panics take hold and are propagated is the middle classes. In his study of nineteenth century crime panics, Sindall notes how middle class anxiety arose from their inherent

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<sup>10</sup> Cohen and Young utilised a number of sociological themes, in particular drawing upon insights from sub-cultural and interactionist theories. Cohen employed a deviancy amplification model to explain how the folk-devils were identified and blown-up into artificial threats to the social order. See Wilkins (1964).

<sup>11</sup> Moral panic has also been applied to analysing a divergent range of social problems: Witchcraft (Ben-Yehuda, 1985; Best, 1989; Hicks, 1991); AIDS (Fitzpatrick & Milligan, 1987); Child Abuse (Jenkins, 1992); and sexual politics (Watney, 1987) to name just a few.

sensitivity to economic and political change and its political volatility (Sindall, 1990).<sup>12</sup> 'Its politics,' declared Bechhofer, 'is the politics of survival' (Bechhofer, 1981, p.296). Accordingly the middle classes are constitutionally predisposed to articulate their response to crime in terms of anxiety and alarm. Their outlook 'is one of moral indignation and public outrage' (Hall, p.163).

A number of authors have drawn attention to the precarious economic position and volatile political outlook of the middle classes during the 1920s (Carey, 1992; Inge, 1926; Lewis & Maude, 1949; Masterman, 1922; McKibbin, 1991; McKibbin, 1987; Orwell, 1937; Searle, 1981; Stevenson, 1977). Sheffield was affected particularly badly by a combination of economic crisis, intense political conflict and the unnerving impact of four years of total war. In the pages that follow I describe how these conditions exacerbated the sense of isolation and insecurity amongst a local middle class that was characterised by intense social anxiety. However, if some of the accounts discussed above were to be accepted, crime panics would be expected to spring almost inevitably from such fertile soil. Yet a number of difficulties are presented in such accounts. First of all, in their discussion of crime panics, writers have tended to offer a history of seamless continuity. Such timeless manifestations of fear and anxiety do provide important historical insights. However, they can also work to mystify distinctive ideas and events in historically specific periods. As Pick notes, these overarching themes 'too easily suppress historical difference by petrifying discourses into apparently unchanging, age-old mythologies' (Pick, 1981, p.18). Secondly, the incorporation of structural Marxist approaches in the analysis offered by writers such as Hall *et al* (1978) and Barlow (1995a; 1995b) leads the authors to privilege the element of conspiratorial design. Hall's depiction of the moral panic as an overtly conscious political strategy, deployed by the state in order to divert attention away from the 'crisis' begs many questions. One concerns the way in which moral panic is portrayed as the direct consequence of economic and political crisis. If crime panics were the inevitable outcome of the 1970s recession, then during the 1920s, when industrial stagnation and social conflict were especially protracted, similar panics would surely be in evidence. As Downs and Rock ask rhetorically, 'was there a similar panic in 1925-6? Or, 1929-

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<sup>12</sup> The effect of social change is to leave the middle classes behind: 'They have remained relatively static in jobs, position, attachments, places of residence... These people have never had the upper-class rewards of wealth or the working class rewards of solidarity to compensate them for the sacrifices they have made to compete and succeed. All the rewards they have ever had are moral ones' (Sindall, 1990, p.163).

30? ... If not then the theory can be said to 'over-predict' social control' (Downes & Rock, 1982, p.263).

A further problem with the usage of the concept relates to the failure to specify adequately the necessary criteria for the presence, or absence, of a panic. A central tenet is the notion of exaggerated or irrational public reaction.<sup>13</sup> Yet, Waddington suggests that '[c]onceptually, the notion of moral panic lacks any criteria of proportionality without which it is impossible to determine whether concern about *any* crime is justified or not' (Waddington, 1986, p246). The criteria employed by Hall and others are markedly subjective and employed in an ideologically selective way. 'It seems virtually inconceivable', remarks Waddington, 'that concern expressed about racial attacks, rape or police misconduct would be described as a moral panic' (p.258). Furedi (1997) makes a similar point with regard to the use of the term more generally. He notes how

a double standard... permeates writing on the topic. Authors are clearly selective about which responses are treated as panics and which are not... This double standard often corresponds to the writer's social, cultural and political outlook (Furedi, 1997, p.46).

Both Furedi and Waddington suggest that the focus upon panic or anxiety owes much to the political and ideological predisposition of the writers.<sup>14</sup> Indeed, the popularity of the concept amongst radical academic writers has traditionally resided in its utility as a radical critique of the status quo. However, the collapse of economic and ideological alternatives to capitalist social relations has served to undermine the concept's attractiveness. Recent cultural changes have also revealed that anxiety or alarm about crime and other social problems are not necessarily restricted to the middle classes, but may become generalised throughout society.<sup>15</sup> The 1990s witnessed a growing conviction that perceptions of fear are not necessarily a bad thing. The growing literature devoted to the phenomenon of 'risk consciousness' suggests that it is the very

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<sup>13</sup> Stanley Cohen, whose book 'Folk Devils and Moral Panics' popularised the term suggests that moral panic exists when 'a reaction to what is observed or inferred is fundamentally inappropriate' (1972, p. 204).

<sup>14</sup> Furedi suggests that while liberal and feminist writers are sensitive to right-wing panics regarding family values and race, for example, they are oblivious to the many panics generated about the dark side of the family such as child abuse (Ibid.)

<sup>15</sup> This anxiety has been brought to public attention through a series of surveys and opinion polls. For discussions of national surveys see Maguire (1988) and for local surveys see Jones *et al* (1986), Last (1988), Bottoms (1987) and Kinsey (1985; 1986).

advance of human knowledge that lay behind the uncertainties and unpredictability of human intervention. In an age of 'manufactured risks' a heightened sense of danger is both rational and positive (Beck, 1992). Accordingly, when applied to understanding 'lay' perceptions of crime, the term 'crime panic' - in the sense of an irrational overreaction - is viewed as both pejorative and inaccurate.<sup>16</sup>

A growing body of literature has questioned the way in which terms such as panic, fear, anxiety, alarm and concern have been used interchangeably and often with little precision in their designation. The difficulty in matching 'risk' of victimisation to the subjective nature of the emotional response of individuals has directed attention to differentiate between different manifestations of public reaction (Ferraro & LaGrange, 1987; Garafalo, 1981). For example, Hale (1996) suggests that 'concern' about crime may be regarded as a positive rather than negative attribute, indicating an aspiration for affirmative intervention rather than a sense of vulnerability on the part of the individual or group. Similarly, Furstenburg (1971), Lotz (1979) and Garafalo (1978) advise that one should distinguish between 'crime concern' and 'fear of crime'. Agras *et al* (1969) have detailed the generational determinants of fear,<sup>17</sup> while Girling *et al* suggest that 'fear' may have multiple dimensions, involving vicarious as well as direct experiences and be open to varying conceptualisations, such as an expression of uneasiness, a judgement of government competence to deliver collective security and an expression of powerlessness and uncertainty' (Girling *et al.*, 2000, p.15).

Given the absence of any readily available index with which to calibrate public response to risk of victimisation, the attempt to determine whether the reaction to a problem is exaggerated or rational is often a forlorn one. So long as it is assumed that there is a direct relationship between the process of problematisation and the experience to which it refers, the concept of moral panic will be of limited value. However, the responses to social problems such as crime may be more readily understood by appreciating the nature of the historically specific circumstances within which these responses emerge. For example, elite responses to the activities of the Sheffield 'gangs'

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<sup>16</sup> As Lea and Young argue, 'wide differences in wealth, and in degree of social isolation and ability physically to resist personal violence' mean reactions to crime are often a rational response to differential personal risk and vulnerability (Lea & Young, 1993, p.96). See also Taylor (1981) and Young (1988b; 1992).

<sup>17</sup> They note how different fears are dependent upon age: fears of snakes, heights enclosed spaces and social situations are predominant at around age 20 while fear of crowds, death, injury, or illness become more prevalent later in life.

and to the offences perpetrated by the poor forms an important part of my study. However, it is not my intention to correlate the incidence of such misdemeanours with the subjective reactions of the local middle class leadership. Rather, my aim is to examine perceptions in terms of changing social and cultural relationships and ideological debates.

A number of writers are sensitive to the specifics of the 1920s, taking care not to force prevailing views about crime into a ready made conceptual box. In his 'Hooligan' (1983), Geoffrey Pearson notes the limited strength of alarmist responses to crime and punitive attitudes to criminals during the inter-war years. Running alongside the familiar discourse of complaints he notes both an 'unusual degree of sympathy towards offenders', particularly young offenders, and muted response on the part of respectable opinion and the authorities to increases in recorded crime (p.34). The extent of this 'low key emphasis in the inter-war years towards crime and punishment' is best illustrated, suggests Pearson, in the attitude towards street robbery – a crime commonly regarded as the most sensitive marker of public concern about crime. Despite the increases that took place in recorded offences of this type during the 1920s,

there was an insubstantial public reaction to these upsurges in recorded crime, and public opinion was not effectively mobilised around these issues in any significant law and order campaign (p.35).

The subdued response of the public towards crime was complemented by a marked sympathy on the part of the authorities to offenders. Street brawls and assaults on policemen were often viewed as a routine aspect of street life. Not only did the police regard these incidents as an accepted element of their duties but there was also a striking reluctance on the part of the authorities to prosecute the law with full vigour. The type of misdemeanour that in later decades would have provoked punitive measures on the part of magistrates was often met, suggests Pearson, by a surprisingly lenient response.

Dunning *et al* (1987) take a similar view. Their analysis of newspaper crime reports during the inter-war years reveals how fighting and other types of street crime were often presented as a form of entertainment. Such incidents, they suggest, were frequently 'considered to be an "interesting" or "exciting" aspect of everyday life and not something that was to be particularly feared or overly condemned' (p.34). Accounts of elite perceptions of crime during the 1920s such as those offered by Pearson and

Dunning *et al*, suggest that the notion of moral panic may provide a useful conceptual tool but only so long as due attention is directed to the historically specific setting.

### Moral enterprise

Directed to revealing the actors and processes involved in relatively infrequent, episodic events, the concept of moral panic may tell us relatively little about the less dramatic, more mundane processes involved in shaping attitudes towards crime. 'Moral enterprise' fills this conceptual gap, directing one's attention to the activities of particular individuals or organisations and their attempt 'to transform the public's attitude toward specified issues, change legislation, and/or attempt to "deviantise"' (Ben-Yehuda, 1986, p.496). As with moral panic, it is suggested that attitudes towards crime are actively constructed by the activities of particular actors: '...deviant behaviour is behaviour which people so label'. The rules which normally constitutes this 'are the product of someone's initiative' - the moral entrepreneur (Becker, 1973, pp.9, 147). For Becker, moral entrepreneurs come in two guises: rule creators and rule enforcers. The rule creator is typically a 'crusading reformer' concerned with 'ends rather than means', and motivated to change the existing rules because there is 'some evil which profoundly disturbs him' (p.147). For the rule enforcer, professional and bureaucratic interests predominate over value-based motivations (Dickson, 1968). Enforcement agencies and officials, particularly when they are seeking funds and resources, 'can be more vehement than anyone else in their insistence that the problem they are supposed to deal with is still with us, in fact is more with us than ever before' (Becker, *ibid*). As I will examine in more detail below, the dispute between the Sheffield Watch Committee and the Sheffield Chief Constable concerning the shortfall in manpower and resources during the early 1920s provides an interesting case study. I will examine whether, in line with Becker's reasoning, such disputes impacted upon local perceptions concerning the scale of crime in general and the problems of industrial and gang unrest more specifically.

While the functional activities and routine organisational role provides the source of the enterprise for the rule enforcer, the rule creator is driven by a different dynamic. This is often a combination of charismatic leadership and missionary zeal (Rock, 1986). For others, symbolic rather than instrumental or irrational considerations explain the behaviour of moral entrepreneurs. Gusfield (1967; 1963) locates the evolution and

subsequent demise of the American Temperance movement in terms of 'symbols of cultural dominance'. Abstinence became the symbol of social status of one cultural group against another. 'In symbolic behaviour the action is ritualistic and ceremonial in that the goal is reached in the behaviour itself rather in any state which brings it about' (1967, p.21). I suggest in a later chapter that Gusfield's formulation is useful in casting light on the activities of the local temperance movement in Sheffield and their disposition to crime.

### Perceptions of crime and recorded rates of crime

The relationship between attitudes to crime and recorded rates of offending provides a recurring and important theme of the present study and merits, accordingly, some preliminary comments. Perhaps the most important point here is to note that there is no simple and direct relationship between recorded rates and public perceptions of crime. Although I draw upon criminal statistics published during the 1920s, a degree of caution in dealing with such data is required. Numerous studies have demonstrated the pitfalls awaiting those whose research into crime rests upon an uncritical use of criminal statistics. Recent work has highlighted how traditional criminal statistics provide only a very imprecise index as to the extent of offences committed. The so-called 'dark figure' of hidden crimes reveals how a very high proportion of criminal acts fail to find their way into police statistics (Home Office Research Study, 1995; Hough & Mayhew, 1985; Lea & Young, 1993; Mayhew & Hough, 1991). Official measures of crime are similarly dependent upon public sensibilities. Public tolerance of crime and people's willingness to report criminal conduct inevitably plays a large part in determining the dimensions of the police returns (McClintock & Avison, 1968). Equally, differential power and vulnerability has been shown to influence the reporting to and subsequent action by the police with regard to crime (Hough & Mayhew, 1985; Kinsey et al., 1986; Stanko, 1990).

The official measure of crime as represented in police returns has been shown to be in large part a product of changing police priorities, the availability of manpower and the shifting focus of public concern. 'Criminal statistics', observes Gurr, 'are thus the consequence and the cause of official concern' (Gurr, 1976, p.20). Accordingly, a rise in recorded crime may reflect not an increase in offending behaviour but the activity of the



police force. The observation that criminal statistics reflect not so much objective changes in criminal behaviour but the shifting definitions and activities of the institutions of criminal justice has a long ancestry. For example, referring to the 1898 statistics for drunkenness, the head of the Home Office Statistical Branch claimed that, 'the number of charges for drunkenness depends largely on police action...the figures could probably in many places be doubled or trebled by more stringent instructions to the police, and the town with the largest number of convictions for drunkenness may sometimes be, not the most drunken town, but the town with the most efficient police force.'<sup>18</sup>

The sub-cultural dynamics of policing may also go some way to explain the disparity in the way police investigate particular offences and in their attitudes to victims of crime (Smith and Gray, 1983). Similarly, disparities in the collation and classification of offences, both between and within criminal justice agencies, can also have a major impact upon the pattern of criminal statistics. One example relates to the official approach to infanticide, discussed in some detail in chapter five. The tendency of the police to classify many infanticides as 'concealment of birth' rather than murder in the years before the passing of the Infanticide Act of 1921 resulted in a large disparity in the numbers of murders returned by the police and those of the coroners inquests (Sindall, 1990).

In sum, the subjective basis of that which is represented in the official statistics as 'crime' ensures that, as Gatrell and Hadden have observed, the criminal statistics 'can never reflect the "actual" extent of criminal behaviour in society' (Gatrell & Hadden, 1972, p.339). Yet, for the purposes of this study, the value of official statistics lies precisely in their subjective character. Such data may be of limited use in telling us about the objective scale of crime. Nevertheless, it was upon the criminal statistics that the local and metropolitan professional elites based their views about crime during the 1920s. Accordingly, observed Sindall, the statistics are useful as a measure 'not necessarily of what was happening, but of what people believed was happening' (Sindall, 1990, p.26). As I go on to explore in some detail in chapters 2 and 5, the criminal statistics were regarded by professional elites as an important index of the state

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<sup>18</sup> *Judicial Statistics for England and Wales*, 1898, p.32 (1900) Cd. 123 HO, Home Office Library. See also *Ibid*, 1901, p.17, Cd. 659.

of crime. Wholly convinced that it provided an indubitable picture of the moral health of the nation the media and enlightened opinion closely monitored such statistics.

I suggest that criminal statistics played a key role in conveying to the general population the professional elite's low key and positive perception of crime, a feature that says more about the outlook of the professional elite than actual changes in the incidence of crime. For example, what emerges in the course of the study is the way in which Home Office personnel and local criminal justice officials were aware of the significance attached to these statistics by the public. In his annual commentary on the latest police returns, William F. Farrant, head of the Statistical Branch of the Home Office during the 1920s, attempted to explain their meaning in terms of the immediate moral state of the nation and more long-term historical trends.<sup>19</sup> At the same time, I suggest that the compilation and interpretation of the statistics by officials could be readily influenced by their own subjective priorities and political calculations. Indeed, a key insight to emerge from the present study is the way in which Home Office administrators were as much affected by their belief in the necessity of adopting a positive view of the demeanour of working class behaviour as anything implicit within the statistics themselves. It is in the course of tracing these views that I intend to uncover the nature of the relationship between crime and other ideological and social currents.

### Historical Specificity

My approach to understanding elite beliefs about crime rests, primarily, on the principle of historical specificity. I emphasise the importance of immediate contextual factors, in particular the contribution of the prevailing political and social climate in shaping perceptions of crime. This is not to minimise the historical roots of elite sensibilities. On the contrary, I pay attention in detail to tracing the pre-war threads of important contextual themes, such as the discourse of social degeneration, the prestige accorded to medical science, the centrality of state intervention, the hallowed status of interwar youth and the salience of class politics. Nor is it to underestimate or ignore the importance of particularist factors in provided a fully rounded understanding of the conceptualisation of crime and criminals. Indeed, by examining representations of crime at the level of the local media, police, judiciary, education and voluntary and welfare

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<sup>19</sup> See *Criminal Statistics for England and Wales*, for years 1920, 1921 1922 and 1929.

agencies in Sheffield I aim to attain an appreciation of elite attitudes to crime during the 1920s that is sufficiently detailed and nuanced.

Local studies are useful in that they provide an insight into those aspects of social and cultural life that have tended to be overlooked by traditional approaches and offer a degree of focus to an investigation not open to purely national surveys.<sup>20</sup> As Samaha notes in his study of law and order in Elizabethan England, ‘only when analysing a restricted and compact area is it possible to speak at all precisely and with even a measure of accuracy’ (Samaha, 1974, p.7). Local studies can provide material that fills in the ‘macromediation’ of social processes by offering an insight into ‘the subjective perceptions of participants on events [and] the ways in which complex sets of factors interact to produce real life outcomes’ (see also Cooke, 1989; Platt, 1988, p.11). At the same time it is necessary that one should be aware of some of the potential pitfalls in using local studies. ‘In some guises’, note Driver and Samuel, ‘it can appear to be a deeply conservative project, mired in a particularistic and introverted vision of the past of places’ (Driver & Samuel, 1995, p.v). Yet its primary utility should be to elicit a better understanding of the conceptualisation of crime at *both* a local and national level. By charting the experience of prominent individuals within Sheffield, I aim to trace, in their various concrete manifestations, the working out of broader ideological currents. In so doing I attempt neither to generalise to other specific geographical locations from the local study, nor to suggest that the ideas dominant within a single locality are governed by laws internal to itself. While a case study may reveal hitherto hidden features of social life, its primary utility is to elicit a better understanding of the primary factors shaping the conceptualisation of crime throughout Britain as a whole during a key historical period. Accordingly, with reference to the principle of historical specificity one is able to differentiate the determinate from the merely contingent and thereby appreciate the nuance and complexity of ideas. To invert Hunter’s feelings on this topic (Hunter, 2000, p.230), instead of forcing particularity to the fore of investigation at the expense of commonality, one discovers particularity through commonality.

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<sup>20</sup> This is exemplified over recent years in the strong emphasis on the criminology of ‘place’. A renewed interest in the ‘ecological’ distribution of poverty, social disorganisation and victims of crime has been augmented by the increased focus upon the problem of order and the perceived breakdown of communities (Eck & Weisburd, 1995; Girling et al., 2000; Sherman et al., 1989).

## Chapter Two

### The National Scene

During the 1920s crime was regarded primarily as a psychological disorder arising out of a defective environment. It was a view that held crime to be less a response to evil drives than to unwholesome surroundings. This conception was as broad ranging as it was versatile. Unemployment, poverty, poor housing, ill-health, poor physique, mental conflict, parental neglect - all could be mobilised in explaining the origin of crime. Just as crime was regarded as a symptom arising out of inadequate circumstances, the remedy was perceived to lie in the removal or modification of these conditions through social reform. Intellectuals and professionals advocated an interventionist and progressive social policy as a remedy to crime. The same optimistic outlook that held that benevolent intervention could control crime also guided the way in which the criminal was to be dealt with. Reform and rehabilitation of the criminal was regarded as the central objective of criminal and penal policy (Bailey, 1987; Radzinowicz & Hood, 1990; Rose, 1961). The objective of this chapter is to establish a general historical and analytical framework within which the Sheffield newspaper contributions discussed in following chapters are to be understood. To that end this chapter sets out to trace, with references to developments both preceding and during the decade, some important currents that helped to shape the approach to crime during the 1920s.

#### Crime and post-war society

Of those features that one may judge to have characterised the decade following the Great War perhaps the most distinct was the degree of contestation in social and political life. The problems of incessant industrial unrest, unemployment, poverty, urban squalor and housing were the subject of intense and occasionally violent conflict. At the same time, the alternative remedies proffered by the various political parties resulted in a nation that was ideologically polarised along class lines. Given the extent of this social conflict, it is worth noting the remarkable political consensus concerning the issue of crime. If, as the analysis of the two Sheffield newspapers reveal below, crime was a relatively infrequent topic of debate, neither was it a focus of partisan political claims or a vehicle for enduring moral crusades. During the 1920s, the main political parties displayed in their day-to-day work a bi-partisan approach to law and order and a notable

reluctance to draw upon the issue in order to further sectional political interests. An analysis of the manifestos of the main political parties – Unionist, Liberal and Labour – reveals a comparable picture during election time. Of the 35 individual manifestos issued during the 11 elections between 1900 and 1935, there is only one, brief reference to law and order.<sup>21</sup> The reluctance to raise such issues during electoral campaign work was matched by the scarcity of legislative action by incumbent administrations and their successors. Whereas twenty major criminal justice and penal Acts were passed between 1896 and 1913, only two comparable pieces of legislation were implemented during the post-war decade. The consensus around crime and penal policy was especially evident in the large towns and cities like Sheffield where, as I discuss in the following chapters, the hardships brought about by poverty and unemployment were particularly intense and where adversarial political contestation was most keen.

### Perceptions of Declining Criminality

A number of factors contributed to this depoliticised and relatively low-key response to crime. The generally accepted, but perhaps not the most tenable, explanation focuses on the improvement that both contemporaries and later observers believed to have occurred in recorded rates of crime and in social order more generally. There was certainly a popular belief, reflected in official commentaries of the period, that crime was on a downward trajectory. Prepared by the Home Office Statistical Branch on an annual basis throughout the 1920s, the Criminal Statistics for England and Wales were keenly anticipated by civil servants, parliamentarians and middle-class opinion generally as an indication both of the progress of crime and the moral health of the nation. The criminal statistics covering the years of the Great War indicated that a large reduction in the level of crime had taken place.<sup>22</sup> The end of the war revealed a 16 per cent fall in the amount of adult crime, from 63,269 offences in 1913 to 53,541 in 1919. Committals for drunkenness exhibited perhaps the most marked decrease, having fallen by seventy per cent, from 204,038 in 1913 to 61,376 in 1919. In the same period, what

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<sup>21</sup> In the 1924 Conservative election manifesto appeared a brief espousal of the Party's commitment to the probationary methods for offenders. In an attempt to attract the new female vote, the manifesto also pledged to increase both the number of women police officers and the penalties for assaults upon women and children (Craig, 1975, p.57).

<sup>22</sup> During the early 1920s Farrant drew upon the number of 'persons tried' in commenting upon trends in the statistics, whereas during the second half of the decade 'crimes known to the police' tended to be used.

was described as a 'remarkable decrease' in larcenies also occurred, from 50,154 cases to 40,763 in 1921.<sup>23</sup> The improvement in the numbers sentenced to prison was no less dramatic. During the period 1903 to 1921 there was a 75 per cent reduction in total prison admissions, from 167,000 to 43,000 respectively. The significant decrease in the total number of persons prosecuted for both indictable offences and less serious offences that occurred between 1914-1918 was explained with reference to peculiar factors pertaining during that period. William Farrant, head of the Home Office statistical branch, noted the particular impact of the 'absence overseas of a large part of the male population, the reduction in strength of the police forces and the diversion of the police to special duties connected with the war'.<sup>24</sup> Farrant and his colleagues were similarly eager to highlight the long-term decline in crimes of violence against the person. Homicides, it was suggested, were notable by their exceptionally low incidence. No doubt sensitive to the prominence of a number of important cases in the press during the first half of the 1920s, Farrant was at pains to stress as 'remarkable' this English respect for life and limb:

Many people will be surprised to learn that whereas in 1857, with an estimated population of 19,256,516, the known homicides numbered 242, in 1925, with an estimated population of 38,890,000, the known homicides numbered only 318.<sup>25</sup>

The statistics demonstrated to contemporaries that post-war Britain was a good deal less violent than formerly, in spite of the unsettling experience of war: 'So far as such crimes [of violence against the person] are concerned the experience of warfare has not led to any increase of crime'.<sup>26</sup> Throughout the 1920s, Farrant suggested the rate of reported crime represented a long-term decline in the level of criminality. He argued that, since the late 1850s, there had been a substantial decline in the level of crime and that the annual figures during the 1920s were part of this more fundamental shift.

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<sup>23</sup> *Criminal Statistics for England and Wales* 1919, British Parliamentary Sessional Papers, House of Commons 1921 XLI pp 384-481.

<sup>24</sup> *British Sessional Papers*, 1919, Vol. xli, p.384.

<sup>25</sup> *Criminal Statistics for England and Wales*, 1925, p.6. See also *Ibid.* 1923, p8.

<sup>26</sup> *Criminal Statistics for England and Wales*, 1924, p.2.

Both the annual criminal statistics and Farrant's accompanying comments were closely monitored by a professional elite that was equally resolute in its conviction that society was on the upgrade. For social reformers like the London magistrate Cecil Chapman, reductions in violent crime were regarded as the product of an all round improvement in the moral fibre of the British public. 'Violence has largely disappeared' from British streets, he maintained, and Hooliganism was a 'thing of the past' (Chapman, 1925).<sup>27</sup> Another London Magistrate, Mr Ratcliffe Cousins, similarly remarked how 'the work of the court nowadays seemed to be not criminal, but statutory - dealing with selling chocolates after hours and things of that sort. The rough-and-tumble type of crime seemed to have almost disappeared.' Much of this improvement, he suggested, was due to the massive reductions in prosecutions for drunkenness.<sup>28</sup> It was also regarded as a vindication of the policy of progressive reform directed to dealing with crime. The Chief Commissioner of Prisons, Sir Evelyn Ruggles Brise, was also convinced that Britain was enjoying the dividend of a wise and just criminal and penal policy. He noted the 'almost complete disappearance of vagrancy...the despair and the problem of the prison and the social reformer'.<sup>29</sup>

The Howard League was no less convinced that the post-war years would continue the long-term decline in criminality. One prominent article declared that 'if we take as our standard...the total number of persons tried for all classes of offence, we find a perfectly steady drop in every quinquennium for the last 25 years'. The criminal statistics offered conclusive proof of the beneficial effects of more humane penal methods and the 'civilising methods of education'.<sup>30</sup> The sustained and dramatic diminution of receptions into prisons that had taken place since the turn of the century

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<sup>27</sup> Chapman also remarked how 'Southwark and Bermondsey were famous for some years as the headquarters of hooliganism...[but now it] seems to have disappeared in any serious sense' (Chapman, 1925, p.212).

<sup>28</sup> Mr Ratcliffe Cousins prefaced his comments by saying that, 'the diminution in the number of cases of drunkenness...was a matter of great gratification to a large borough like West Ham, with its 350,000 population, and it showed that the people of the borough had not abused the extended length of the hours during which public houses were now open.' *The Times*, 1 April 1922, p4.

<sup>29</sup> Ruggles-Brise (1921). The Prison Commissioner was reinforcing with his own personal experience Home Office statistical evidence. The figures published for 1919 were accompanied with the remark that 'it is noteworthy that offences against the poor laws, unlawful pledging, and begging and sleeping out, which were 6,256, 202 and 27,523 respectfully in 1913, were only 1,431, 54 and 3510 in 1919' *Criminal Statistics for England and Wales 1919*, British Parliamentary Sessional Papers, House of Commons, 1921, XLI, pp.384-481.

<sup>30</sup> *Howard Journal* Vol. 1; 4, April 1925.

served as conclusive evidence of the efficacy of earlier reforms. They were greeted with demands for the extension of these progressive methods:

The reduction in crime has synchronised with the more effective administration [of such reforms]...There seems no reason why there should not be a progressive diminution in the sad army of offenders if more care and vision were extended to the judicial procedure.<sup>31</sup>

The thrust of commentary on crime was to suggest that the nation stood at the head of a period of progress and that the problem of crime was well on the way to being overcome.

### The 'De-moralisation' of Crime

The political unity around criminality was, however, not simply a response to declining rates of crime and increasing social order. As I discuss below, the positive interpretation of criminal statistics was in keeping with a tendency to regard crime and the treatment of criminals in an optimistic light. During the 1920s, the Home Office and the professional elites more generally remained firmly reluctant to politicise or moralise the issue of crime, a policy maintained more or less until the mid 1960s.<sup>32</sup> This sanguine and consensual approach to crime reflected a number of fundamental ideological and social currents. One of these was the emergence of a de-moralised and politically neutral view about the causes of crime and its control. During the 1920s a medicalised approach to crime came to dominate. Crime was conceived primarily as a psychological disorder arising from the environmental or congenital circumstances of the individual offender. Accordingly, treatment rather than punishment, and 'a study of offenders in relation to their circumstances' were deemed necessary (Devon, 1912, p.12). The work of prison doctors, mental health experts and child psychologists revealed the criminal was weak rather than evil, the victim of circumstances over which he had little or no control (Wiener, 1990). The perceived decline in the size of the 'criminal classes' and the dangerous or predatory character of crime discussed above was accompanied by a predominantly scientific conception of the criminal. Whereas for much of the nineteenth century these criminals had provoked both awe and fear amongst the respectable classes,

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<sup>31</sup> Times Educational Supplement, *'The Prevention of Crime'*, 19 August 1922, p.385-6.

<sup>32</sup> See Downes (1994), Windlesham (1993; 1996) and Morris (1989).



the former now tended to be 'portrayed more as "social wreckage" than as social outlaws' (Wiener, 217). For many experts congenital factors such as physical defects, or mental impairment explained the predicament of the adult criminal (Goring, 1913; Hamblin Smith, 1922; Potts, 1921-22). For others, the primary causes of crime resided in the poor social conditions – namely poverty, unemployment, and slums (Bryan, 1936; Donkin, 1910; Le Mesurier, 1931). The Secretary of the Howard Association spoke for many liberal reformers when he suggested that criminals 'are the direct product of defective social, economic, industrial, educational and domestic conditions' (Holmes, 1912, p.41).

Whether innate or acquired in origin, all experts agreed that the anti-social career of the adult criminal began early in life. During the post-war decade, increasing emphasis was placed upon the connection between delinquency and the psychology of the adolescent as a distinct developmental stage in life. Following the work of Stanley Hall (1907), adolescence came to be regarded as a particularly capricious period, 'when the moral fibre is weaker and more yielding to temptation to crime' (Griffiths, 1911, p.465). The work of J. Sully (1916), William McDougal (1924), and Cyril Burt (1925) added to these studies by suggesting that delinquency arose from the maladjustment of the child to external circumstances. 'It is specially characteristic of the delinquent', noted the child psychiatrist, Rose Gordon, 'that he is badly adjusted to his environment' (Gordon, 1928, p.36). For the first-time offender, as for the habitual criminal, the offender was characterised by weakness, rather than wickedness.<sup>33</sup> It was during this period, remarked the Sheffield-based social reformer Arnold Freeman, 'at which most commitments occur, and when most criminal careers commence. The emotions are hot, the spirit of adventure strong... If circumstances do not provide for healthy expression of the youthful nature, it is forced into unnatural, viscous and criminal channels. Vice and crime, leaving lifelong effects, are born during adolescence' (Freeman, 1914, pp.105-6). Yet, the overall emphasis, and one that was consolidated in Burt's study, was upon the normality of the delinquent. 'We must assume', remarked Clark Hall, 'that the majority, at least, of

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<sup>33</sup> Clarke Hall remarked how, 'the old idea that a child's wrongdoing was due to inherent wickedness, which could only be driven out of him by the severity of the punishment inflicted, has been almost entirely abandoned' (Hall, 1926).

criminals are normal persons' (Hall, 1926, p.13).<sup>34</sup> The Departmental Committee on the Treatment of Young Offenders made explicit this view when it argued that they were not simply concerned with the young offender but with the welfare of the neglected child:

Our enquiry, however, is not concerned only with the young offender. There is also the problem of the neglected boy or girl who has not committed offences but who, owing to want of parental control, bad associations or other reasons, needs protection and training...[Neglect] and delinquency often go hand in hand and experience shows that the young offender is only too often recruited from the ranks of those whose home life has been unsatisfactory<sup>35</sup>

In depicting the criminal as a fundamentally normal individual, characterised by weak rather than predatory behaviour, the medicalised discourse was able to do two things. First, it served to furnish a markedly neutral view of crime and criminals. Where crime had been conceived formerly within the explicitly moral discourse of sin and individual depravity, or the politicised language of class, now it was presented within the secularised and politically neutral vocabulary of medical science and pathology. In other words, the advantage of the therapeutic approach to crime and its associated medical designations was that they were 'assumed to have a scientific basis and thus [we]re treated as if they were morally neutral' (see also Armstrong, 1993; Conrad & Schneider, 1980, p.35; Zola, 1975). This outlook benefited much from the increasing authority of the medical profession and the prestige attached to medical science more generally. The advances made in the identification and treatment of disease offered a particularly striking vindication of the Victorian promise of uninterrupted social progress. When set within the idiom of medical science, the approach to dealing with social problems such as criminality and deviance was presented as fundamentally progressive and beyond rebuke. As one of the principal figures in post-Second World social policy came to admit

Just because it is so much in keeping with the mental atmosphere of a scientifically-minded age, the medical treatment of deviants has been a powerful reinforcement of humanitarian impulses; for today the prestige of

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<sup>34</sup> Sir Norwood East similarly observed that 'crime is often due to motives which are both qualitatively and quantitatively similar to non-criminal motives, and it is generally just as biologically normal as ordinary behaviour' (East, 1949, p.4).

<sup>35</sup> *Young Offenders*, (1974, pp.5-6).

human proposals is immensely enhanced if these are expressed in the idiom of medical science (Wootton (1959, p.206).

A second feature of the medicalised view of crime was the way in which it served both to widen and legitimate state intervention into broader areas of social life. In this regard professional expertise played a particularly important role. Given the continuum between normality and abnormality, the causal factors underlying offending behaviour were held to be discernible only through scrutiny of the individual offender by expert investigation.<sup>36</sup> The practical insights of those experts dealing with criminals served to underline the fact that the origins of crime and its particular manifestation varied with each and every criminal. 'Crime in the individual', remarked Norwood East, 'is attributable to numerous causes and... no single cause is ever present' (East, 1949, p.7). Subsequent treatment was to be applied in an individualised and differential manner, according to the offender's particular character and social background.

In highlighting the mental or physiological wellsprings of crime, prison doctors and psychiatrists provided a bridge between the natural and social sciences, and between the identification of the individual manifestation of criminal or deviant behaviour and the attempt at preventative intervention on a wider, social scale. This scientific or causalist view of crime ensured a much greater role for intervention by the state.<sup>37</sup> Rather than the free-willed, responsible agent portrayed by their predecessors, the late Victorians perceived the offender to require guidance and training. This was particularly true of children and juveniles who were perceived to be constitutionally inclined towards criminality. That which inclined the child to commit criminal acts ensured that they were more open to remedial intervention, 'when happily human nature is more malleable and susceptible to improvement and reform' (Griffiths, 1911, p.465). In the decade or so following the Great War particular emphasis was placed upon prevention of crime through early intervention into the life of the potential or first time offender, and his removal from the contaminating influence of the prison or home environment. This was facilitated by an extensive array of institutional and legislative measures. Again, given the prestige of medical science, such coercive intervention was frequently articulated in

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<sup>36</sup> 'Crime, no less than physical disease, no less than insanity, deserves intelligent investigation and treatment at the hand of experts' Hamblin Smith Address, *Chief Constables Association Annual General Meeting*, 1 June 1923, PRO HO 438456/16.

<sup>37</sup> As Wiener remarked, 'if moralism was associated with the Victorian state, causalism came to be associated with the more expansive but less punitive twentieth century state' (Op. Cit. p.338).

the idiom of social positivism. It was an outlook that saw criminal behaviour as essentially akin to medical ailments affecting the body politic, requiring invasive measures by the state. Describing the work of those committed to dealing with the offender, Hamblin Smith remarked, '[w]e attempt to deal with a disease of the body politic, and we aim at its prevention. Our work is, really, a branch of preventative medicine' (Hamblin Smith, 1923). A few years later Dr. H. S. Bryan similarly wrote, 'just as the doctor explores the whole body to discover a sceptic focus, so we must explore the boy's whole life and environment in our search for the cause of his misbehaviour' (Bryan, 1936, p.23).<sup>38</sup>

When articulated through the vocabulary of scientific humanism rather than morality, criminal policy offered the potential for an unprecedented degree of intervention into hitherto inaccessible areas of social and private life. For example, the Probation of Offenders Act 1907 expanded the scope of intervention from first offenders to 'any reclaimable offender' and provided for the appointment of salaried probation officers for that purpose.<sup>39</sup> 'By introducing into the offender's life the probation officer', remarked Muirhed, 'it [was] not returning him to the precise conditions in which his wrong-doing occurred' (Leeson, 1914, p.7). By restricting the probationer's access to intoxicating liquor and facilitating his removal from his former residence, the Criminal Justice act of 1914 further expanded the scope of intervention. Such measures directed at the regulation of behaviour were both welcomed and demanded during the 1920s. An initiative that was universally accepted by all shades of opinion, probation was the key motif of enlightened intervention during the 1920s. The only criticism to be heard of these reforms, and indeed an easily earned credential for those who wished to be regarded as a progressive thinker, was that they had not been sufficiently extensive.<sup>40</sup> In this way throughout the decade similar cries were raised for the effective

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<sup>38</sup> It was characteristic of the time that medical and 'criminal' metaphors could often be used interchangeably. As Gordon remarked, 'in this era of preventative medicine, disease is in many cases held to be a crime and we are just beginning to wonder if it may not perhaps be that crime is a disease (Gordon, Op. Cit., 12). Similarly, one social hygienist wrote in 1894: 'If we could know the microbe at the source of each disease, its favourite haunts, its habits, its way of progressing, we might, with good medical supervision, catch it in time, stop it in its tracks, and prevent its continuing homicidal mission' quoted in Lupton (1995, p.36)

<sup>39</sup> The Probation of First Offenders Act 1887 limited intervention to first offenders with no provision for salaried probation officers.

<sup>40</sup> Hamblin Smith noted how 'the study of the criminal led, in former days, to pessimism and despair. Under the newer views it leads to optimism' Hamblin Smith Address, *Chief Constables Association, Annual General Meeting*, 1 June, 1923. PRO HO 438456/16.

implementation of non-custodial measures made available by earlier institutional and legislative reforms. Between 1896 and 1913, twenty major Criminal and Penal Acts were passed. These included the Inebriates Act, Prison Act and Vagrancy Act of 1898, the Reformatory Schools (Amendment) Act of 1899, The Youthful Offenders Act of 1901, the Probation of Offenders Act of 1907 and the Children Act of 1908.<sup>41</sup> In addition to these were established a whole range of supplementary reforms concerning the welfare of offenders.<sup>42</sup>

### The Progressive State

The emphasis placed upon prevention of crime ensured that, during the 1920s, criminal and penal policy was an integral element of broader social policy. In the eyes of the liberal intelligentsia, poverty, poor housing, health, nutrition and for many, defective congenital factors, were the immediate causes of crime, delinquency and vice. The recognition of the causes of such problems at the same time pointed to their solution. State-sponsored measures of social amelioration were required to improve social conditions for offenders and potential offenders alike. Yet, whereas intervention into the civil realm by the state was an implicit element of criminal and penal policy, until the last quarter of the nineteenth century social policy had been much more limited. The increasing role given to state measures of social welfare was very much tied to the perceived limits of laissez faire liberalism. During the final decades of the nineteenth century the perception of marked social improvement was countered by a growing recognition of the tenacity of a range of social problems and the necessity of state intervention as a solution to these. As Hawthorn explains, those

committed to progress, the self-consciously enlightened intelligentsia, saw such progress lying not so much in rational intervention to maintain the system as in rational intervention to control it and ameliorate its effects (Hawthorn, 1987, p.102).

By the turn of the century, laissez faire capitalism was seen as not simply flawed but morally bankrupt. For many it was the free play of economic forces that was

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<sup>41</sup> The Children Act established Juvenile Courts, Remand Homes for children and abolished the committal of children under the age of sixteen years to prison.

<sup>42</sup> See Garland (1985).

responsible for social problems such as crime. Leading liberal intellectuals such as Hobson suggested that unfettered capitalism was forcing increasing numbers of the population into the towns and in so doing bringing about 'a decadence of *morale*' of the worker (Hobson, 1901, p.342). The crucial point is that, in the eyes of the liberal and professional elite, the state acquired a qualitatively new character. Beneficent and benign, the role of the state was actively to foster social progress. As Leonard Hobhouse made clear:

The policy of the progressive state would be to use its corporate power to support, strengthen and enrich individual life by affording that security and those opportunities which lie beyond the reasonable limits of self-help (Quoted in Hawthorne, op. cit.).

Crucially, the state became the key agency through which successive governments began to address these social problems.

Complementary to the adoption of this brand of social positivism there arose a new moral philosophy that was articulated and promoted by a considerable body of the enlightened intelligentsia. A central element of what became known as the 'New Liberalism' grew out of the teachings of Thomas Hill Green at Oxford in the late 1870s. Green argued that social progress was an essentially evolutionary process that required the intervention of the state to maintain the 'social good'. By implementing a progressive social policy and by promoting 'Citizenship', men could be morally improved and the social good could be maximised. It was a reciprocal arrangement incorporating rights as well as obligatory responsibilities. Crucially, the relationship between the state and criminal was reformulated according to this concept of citizenship. The aim of punishment was the reform of the offender so that he was able to resume his rights:

If punishment is to be just, in the sense that in its infliction due account is taken of all rights, including the suspended rights of the criminal himself, it must be so far as public safety allows reformatory. *It must tend to qualify the criminal for the restoration of rights* (Green, 1924b, p.204, emphasis added).

The treatment of the criminal thus had a moral end, the good of both the community and the criminal himself - that of the resumption of rights. What is important is that the

attitude to the criminal was derived from the new view of the relationship between the state and the individual as active political agent. In this way the reform of the criminal became part of a broader process aimed at political inclusion of the industrial classes. At the turn of the century a range of new social policies was directed at the inclusion of formerly marginalised elements of the industrial working class.<sup>43</sup>

The ethos of citizenship also demanded an obligation on the part of the privileged. Their role was to improve morally the lower orders by helping them to attain full citizenship. Social reformers like Alec Paterson and Charles Russell propounded the merits of a voluntarist social ethic and the necessity of state intervention as the solution to crime. Having their origins in the 'settlement movement' of the early 1900s, they constituted what Victor Bailey refers to as the 'progressive centre' of the professional and administrative elite during the 1920s (Bailey, 1987). They believed that criminal policy and welfare policy 'could interact in the prevention and control of crime' (p.3). Their interventions were predicated upon the pacification of the poor urban districts by the agencies of more direct social control, most notably the police and the workhouse. At the same time, it is important to recognise the essentially benevolent rather than malign character of such intervention. Their attempt to reclaim the offender derived from the Victorian notion of uninterrupted social progress together with the 'principle of rehabilitation and redemption' (Himmelfarb, 1984, p.379). Added to this was the aim of morally uplifting the urban poor combined with a belief in the 'essential decency of the working class' (Bailey, Op. Cit.). It was an outlook which was to inspire the army of social reformers, voluntary workers, magistrates, medical personnel, administrators and officials who were to play a major role in shaping and implementing criminal and penal policy in the interwar years.

### Welfare and Determinism

Just as social reformers were inspired by an optimistic belief in the integrity of the urban poor, the crucial feature of the welfare approach to crime was its progressive and benevolent quality. Indeed, the centrality of the welfare character of criminal policy

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<sup>43</sup> Reforms in the spheres of health, child welfare, education, and housing were directed at promoting integration and national solidarity. For example, Frazer has noted how unemployment insurance provided a key mechanism with which to turn the disaffected away from insurrectionary doctrines. Churchill remarked 'with a "stake in the country" in the form of insurance against evil days these workers will pay no attention to the vague promises of revolutionary socialism' quoted in Fraser (1984).

owed much to its role as an alternative to the more deterministic and coercive variants of elite thinking. By the beginning of the 1920s the consensus amongst professionals and Home Office officials was that crime was a psychological condition that arose from a defective environment. Unemployment, parental neglect, poor housing, could all contribute to the creation of a fertile terrain within which the seeds of criminality could germinate. But behind much of the concern with the condition of the urban poor lurked fears, for considerable sections of the professional middle classes, of national and racial degeneration. Of particular concern was the perceived congenital inferiority of the lower orders and their resulting predisposition to crime, delinquency and vice. And yet, despite the prevalence of such views amongst the middle classes, at the level of social policy the more draconian recommendations tended to be sidelined. There prevailed amongst the professional elites a desire for consensus rather than confrontation. Below I explain how the prevailing discourse of welfare reform was able to provide a more politically acceptable representation of such concerns during the 1920s.

#### From insecurity to confidence

During the mid-Victorian years, the vocabulary of racial degeneration expressed a widespread insecurity on the part of the authorities at the prospect of social and political upheaval. The emerging body of work concerned with criminal anthropology was inspired by a range of prominent social concerns: the rapid growth of industrial centres, the rise of mass democracy and of political radicalism, and the perceived incorrigibility of a distinct criminal class. Medical professionals revealed the criminal to be the product of a range of social and congenital factors. During the first half of the nineteenth century increasing attention was paid to the biological and psychological classification of offenders. The 'sciences' of phrenology, physiognomy and craniometry were devoted to detailing and charting such distinctive features of the criminal class.<sup>44</sup>

One should note that almost as soon as these theories began to be propounded it became increasingly untenable to explain crime amongst the lower orders in terms of biological differences. There were a number of reasons for this. Primarily, scientists who found that they did not stand up to scrutiny contested such theories, based as they

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<sup>44</sup> These theories were directed to isolating mental processes with reference to external physical attributes (see Malik, 1996; Nye, 1984,1974; and Pick, 1981).



were on racial and biological grounds. As Barkhan explains, such 'typology was incapable of any consistent demarcations, and the classification quandary made formal taxonomy impossible' as it was repeatedly discovered that numerous groups and individuals did not conform to the specified categories. The absence of an epistemological foundation for these theories in turn 'led to endless irresolvable inconsistencies and contradictions' (Barkhan, 1992, p.3). Scientists and professionals charged with the task of dealing with criminals continually found that no such criminal type was to be observed.<sup>45</sup> Accompanying the increasingly indefensible claims of racial science were the practical limitations provided by broader political developments. The extension of the franchise to considerable sections of the urban masses in 1867, 1884 and finally in 1928, ensured that the idea of the congenital inferiority of this section of society could not continue in its old form. As Malik observes, '[t]he rise of political democracy modified the application of the language of racial inferiority' (Malik, 1996, p.117).

Sponsored by the developing array of penal and psychiatric institutions, the practical work of the medical profession acted to moderate some of the more eccentric theoretical claims. From the 1860s there emerged in Britain a distinct body of medico-legal science that was devoted to the study of the criminal (Garland, 1988; Garland, 1994). The relative political and economic stability helped to foster an empirically based and practically oriented scientific tradition (Anderson, 1974). As Garland notes, these penal and social institutions acted as 'a practical surface of emergence' for scientific knowledge about crime and the criminal. This contrasted sharply with developments on the continent where criminology existed in a more unmediated relationship with social and cultural anxieties.<sup>46</sup> In Britain the practically oriented work of psychiatric medicine

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<sup>45</sup> By the 1850s these theories were discarded by official and medical opinion alike only to see them adopted some decades later by their continental counterparts. It is perhaps fitting that at the height of imperial rivalry the merits of the English approach to crime should be lauded through contrast with the 'bigoted' approach of their European neighbours: 'Dr Lombroso, in his ingenious work *L'Uomo Delinquente*', noted Major A. G. F. Griffiths, Inspector of Prisons (1878-1896), 'found many attentive and appreciative, not to say bigoted followers...In England [the Italian School] stands generally condemned, because it gives no importance to circumstances and to passing temptation, or to domestic or social environment, as affecting the cause of crime' (Griffiths, 1911, p.464). See also Garland (1988; 1994).

<sup>46</sup> Lombroso's 'Criminal Man' and the degeneration theories of Le Bon and Morel were acclaimed in countries where 'the problem of creating loyal political subjects and moving from regional elites to a national governing class' proved to be the most acute (Pick, *Op. Cit.*, p.118). The difficulty encountered in overcoming these obstacles encouraged social theory to fill the gaps left by the failure of practical experience. See also Nye (1984, p.22).

served as a counter to untested notions and prejudice. Theorising about crime 'was not done in the abstract but instead was linked to professional tasks' (Garland, 1994, p.137).<sup>47</sup> Indeed, notes Garland, most of the major scientific works on crime produced in Britain until the 1930s were 'written by medics with psychiatric training and positions within the prison service' (p.135).<sup>48</sup> Their work emphasised the importance of a grounded psychiatric approach over the generalisations of foreign criminal anthropology. From the 1880s, the majority of prison doctors and psychiatrists believed the vast majority of criminals to be normal individuals. Dr. Bryan Donkin, medical advisor to the Prison Commissioners, rebuked the 'so-called science of "criminology" as ought else than a mass of imperfect and unclassified observations linked together by untested hypothesis'. He stressed instead, the dominant scientific view that '[l]aw-breaking, or criminality, is no unity. There are no special qualities, physical or mental, common to all criminals' (Donkin, 1910, p.19).

In focusing upon the impact of external circumstances and instinctive drives as manifested in the individual offender, psychiatric studies were able to displace crude biological explanations for more subtle variants. Maudsley expressed the shift that had taken place when he claimed that, 'no criminal is really explicable except by an exact study of his circumstances as well as his nature; when there is a struggle in him between social habits and savage instincts it will depend much on the surroundings which shall gain and keep the upper hand' (Maudsley, 1895, p.82). It was an outlook that came to predominate in the post-war years, a period when particular emphasis was laid upon the necessity of remedial intervention by the state, directed at social problems such as crime.

### Cultural determinism

One should be aware, however, that the idea of the 'criminal type' did not disappear. The problem with which professionals were faced was how to account for the persistence of social difference while at the same time leaving room for ameliorative intervention. From the last decade of the nineteenth century much of the debate

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<sup>47</sup> Pick has argued that, 'social theory was continually challenged not simply at the level of content but its very right to exist (Op. Cit., p.176).

<sup>48</sup> Among these were works by J.F Sutherland (1908), R.F. Quinton (1910), J. Devon (1912), M. Hamblin Smith (1922), W.C. Sullivan (1924) and W. Norwood East (1927).

concerning the possible causes of crime began to be couched increasingly in social and cultural terms. The notion of the criminally disposed individual was gradually displaced from the realm of biology to that of environment. In this way 'nurture' proved to be just as effective a means of explaining the predisposition of sizeable sections of society to crime. Established after the scandal concerning the poor physical quality of Boer War recruits, the Inter-Departmental Committee on Physical Deterioration of 1904 argued that environmental factors, primarily overcrowding, rather than congenital defect lay behind the problem. Yet, as Pick tells us, 'even as a physically determinist anthropology appears to be abandoned in the name of environmentalism, its terms reappear in the report's assumption of a given 'type'' (Op. Cit., 185). The problem was bound geographically and socially to the poor of the slums:

The evil is, of course, greatest in one-roomed tenements, the over-crowding there being among persons usually of *the lowest type*, steeped in every kind of degradation and cynically indifferent to the vile surroundings engendered by their filthy habits, and to the pollution of the young brought up in such an atmosphere.<sup>49</sup>

From the turn of the century discussion of crime was increasingly couched in terms of the cultural habits or the urban poor.

### Welfare versus Eugenics

'The First World War', notes Fraser, 'to an extent even greater than the Boer War', exposed through its deficient recruits the poor physical condition of the British people (Fraser, 1984, p.179). One influential school of opinion suggested this to be the inevitable result not so much of environment but of heredity. In the post-war years the eugenics movement, which commanded the support of a large section of the intellectual and professional elite, suggested that the tendency for inferior members of society to reproduce at a faster rate than the middle classes was leading to dysgenic consequences

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<sup>49</sup> Inter-Departmental Committee on Physical Deterioration, (quoted in Pick, Op. Cit, p.185, His emphasis)

for the whole nation.<sup>50</sup> Physical and mental defectiveness of the lower orders was the obvious symptoms of such degeneration. The Wood Committee of 1924 had been charged with the task of examining the extent of the threat.<sup>51</sup> A particular source of concern was the finding that mental defectiveness was to be found within 'a much larger proportion of insane persons, epileptics, paupers, criminals (especially recidivists), unemployables, habitual slum dwellers, prostitutes, inebriates, and other social inefficients than would a family not containing mental defectives'.<sup>52</sup> Accordingly, social problems such as poverty, unemployment, illegitimacy and crime were, it was argued, the result of the fecklessness and feeble-mindedness of this stratum of society, one they termed the 'social problem group' (Jones, 1982). The tense political atmosphere and insecure economic position of the middle classes in the post-war years helped sustain a good deal of effort to the cause of eugenic reform. As one prominent member of the Eugenics Society warned typically:

The intellectual middle class, numerically by the nature of the case a small body, will therefore be obliterated, giving place to the thriftless majority, and to a class that a breeder might designate as culls (Bateson, 1921, p.331).

By explaining crime as the inevitable outcome of congenital weakness, eugenic ideas served to naturalise social problems. In this way such a broad category as 'moral delinquency' (Gibbons, 1926; Le Mesurier, 1931) could be explained, with little corroborative evidence, as the result of degeneracy.<sup>53</sup> Through the conflation of social and moral categories the behaviour of the 'social problem group' served as the outward manifestation of such degeneracy. For eugenic advocates the problem of recidivism or 'habitual criminality' was sufficient evidence of the incorrigibility of the lower orders.<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> The Eugenics Society possessed an overwhelmingly middle class membership, whose philosophy appealed to middle class anxieties. Eugenics was 'a movement of the professional middle-classes, ideologically for the middle classes'. D. Mackenzie 1976, quoted in Searle (1981, p.220).

<sup>51</sup> The Committee was appointed jointly by the Board of Education and the Board of Control and, amongst other recommendations, argued for segregation of the unfit.

<sup>52</sup> The Lancet 19 May 1934.

<sup>53</sup> The category, 'moral imbecile', created by the 1913 Mental Deficiency Act, was accordingly able to incorporate those 'high grade defectives' where, observed Le Mesurier, the 'criminal appears unusually intelligent [with] complete absence of any moral perception or emotion' (Le Mesurier, 1931, p.45).

<sup>54</sup> 'This general theory of defectiveness as a general attribute of criminality may be regarded by some as confirmed by the fact that persons convicted of crime are mainly drawn from the lowest social scale; and it

The work of Dr. Charles Goring (1913) had concluded that criminals were physically and mentally inferior to the rest of society. For many advocates of eugenic policies this furnished hard evidence that crime was an inheritable condition. As the psychological expert to the Birmingham Justices, W.A. Potts remarked:

[C]riminality is a characteristic which can be inherited in the same way as the predisposition to tubercular disease or insanity. Therefore criminality is an inheritable condition (Potts, 1920-21, p.86).

Yet, whereas the majority of manifestly 'low grade defectives' were confined in institutional care and, accordingly, restricted from bearing children, 'there was', commented an editorial piece in the *The Lancet*, 'no such control exercised over the majority of the individuals who make up the majority of the social problem group'. The insidious threat of degeneration was emphasised by allusion to the equivalent menace posed by crime:

The most dangerous type of criminal is the one who turns in ordinary society and is accepted at his face value as a respectable citizen. So it is with the defect. The potential parent who carries the seed of defect, unknown even to himself until it is too late, constitutes a more intractable problem than the individual who is outwardly and manifestly defective (*The Lancet*, 19 May 1934, pp.1067-1068).

Moral and physical degeneracy, and hence criminality, it was argued, would continue to afflict society unless countervailing measures were applied. A number of state guided solutions were advocated ranging from segregation, control of marriage, and compulsory sterilisation of the unfit to measures designed to encourage births among the middle classes.<sup>55</sup>

Despite the support for eugenic ideas amongst influential members of the middle classes, incorporation of the former into social policy was limited. Such proposals

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is plausible to infer that physical and mental inferiority is allied to low economic scale of living' (Ruggles-Brise, 1921, p. 213). See also J.E. Marshall (1920).

<sup>55</sup> Many eugenicists criticised welfare reforms for allowing the less fit to survive longer. For example, the prominent eugenicist and statistician Karl Pearson warned that, 'social sympathy and State aid must not be carried so far within the community that the intellectually and physically weaker stocks multiply at the same rate as the better stocks' (Pearson, 1901, p.54). The Chair of the London School of Sociology and Economics, Leonard Hobhouse regarded a high infant mortality favourably, arguing that they served to 'weed out the sickly and the weaklings' while slums provided 'the natural environment of an unfit class and the means by which such a class prepared the way for its own extinction' quoted in Wohl (1983, p.335).

encountered considerable opposition, not least because they were believed to be impractical and undermined the position of those professionals committed to improving the environment of the lower classes. Responding to Goring's study, Thomas Holmes remarked, 'when for the bogey of physical stigmata he substitutes an inward and mental infirmity that has been passed down to the unfortunate criminal through the generations, why then he makes our last state worst than our first, for there seems to be less chance of a criminal's detection and less hope of his amendment' (Holmes, 1914, 28).<sup>56</sup> This was not simply a dispute between the relative importance of 'nature' and 'nurture' but between, on the one hand, deterministic theories such as eugenics and, on the other, an approach which left room for the ameliorative intervention of professional expertise. As Searle noted, 'most social reformers of all schools saw eugenics as an assault on all they held dear' (Ibid. p.229).<sup>57</sup> The solution to national and racial degeneration, it was argued, lay along the road of 'welfare work' that improved the position of the poor. The proper alternative course to avoiding physical and moral degeneracy would be

to raise by good wages and good housing the physical and intellectual value of our population and to base our quest for national prosperity on good births rather than on more births...Welfare work, pre-natal care, clinics, schools for mothers, all these are admirable things because they maintain life (George, 1920, p.460).

Sympathy for eugenic ideas and advocacy of welfare measures were not mutually exclusive. Often greater spending on health, nutrition and housing were advocated for their ability to reduce the reproduction of the lower orders. As Dr. Fred Wynne, Sheffield's Medical Officer of Health during the 1920s, explained:

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<sup>56</sup> Equally suspicious was the Prison Commission. It refused to endorse all of Goring's conclusions while Sir Bryan Donkin distanced himself altogether from the study. The dominant response was to emphasise clinical rather than statistical methods of analysis, an approach that could be more in keeping with the ethos of individually oriented methods of understanding and treating crime (See Garland, 1988, p.140).

<sup>57</sup> Paying attention to the experience of their German colleagues after the passing German Sterilisation Act of 1934, an editorial in *The Lancet* remarked, 'Since the passing of the Sterilisation Act it has been noticed that German doctors hesitate to diagnose schizophrenia and manic-depressive anxiety... People are beginning to be afraid of entering public institutions for the treatment of mental disorder, wherein they may be compulsory sterilised before discharge... More important than all this in the life of the community is the fact that the use of sterilisation as a compulsory measure will inevitably cause a stigma to be attached to the operation in exactly the same way that would happen if it were used as a weapon for punishing crime' *The Lancet* 9 June 1934, p1236.

the reduction of infantile mortality was not due mainly to the saving of the congenitally unfit, but to the virtual elimination of infantile sickness, which had comparatively little to do with congenital conditions...If children, when they were born, were permitted to die off like flies, the result would be reckless reproduction. The fact that a child had a good chance of survival exercised a restraint upon parents.<sup>58</sup>

What all of this tells us is that the specific social and political circumstances of the period were crucial in determining attitudes towards the criminal. Though eugenic and other, equally coercive, variants of social intervention enjoyed an enormous amount of support amongst the professional elites, the broader ideological circumstances of the period created a good deal of unease amongst those whose task it was to implement such measures. As I go on to explore more fully in my study of Sheffield, it was the political and practical aspects of social intervention that was foremost in the minds of the local elite. For them, the welfare approach was to prove a less coercive, more consensual and professionally sensible method of dealing with crime and other social problems.

### The Impact of the First World War

During the 1920s the prevailing approach to crime outlined above was not an invariable one. The impact of the Great War served to accelerate and consolidate pre-existing trends, but also to introduce new intellectual and social currents. The reformative approach to crime and its treatment that dominated professional thinking during the 1920s was, in many respects, a continuation of the trends that had been initiated during the late Victorian and Edwardian years. The upheavals of the First World War, notes Rose, 'accelerated and crystallised much that was inherent in the old regime' (Rose, 1961). The Great War provided a positive lesson for those engaged in the spheres of criminal and penal justice. It served to reinforce the already prevalent view that crime both had a social basis and that it was to be treated by the amelioration of social conditions through state intervention. For professionals like Ruggles Brise, the decline in prison numbers and certain types of offences such as drunkenness and larceny that had taken place was directly attributable to such intervention. The recognition that 'better housing and lighting, the control of Liquor Traffic, cheap food,

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<sup>58</sup> Fred E. Wynne, Sheffield Medical Officer of Health, Speech at the Royal Sanitary Conference in Hull, reported in Sheffield Daily Independent, 3 August 1923.

fair wages, and insurance' could all react indirectly on the state of crime had significant implications for future policy. In other words, it was through such 'social legislation' that one could best deal with crime:

The Great War - terrible and hard school of experience though it has been - has given us the great object lesson of what new conditions of life, resulting notably from the control of the liquor trade and facility of employment, can effect. A century of legislation directed to the changes of the penal code, or the methods of punishment, would not effect what social legislation, induced by the War, and affecting the daily habit and living of the people, has revealed during the last five years (Ruggles-Brise, 1921, p.xv1).

For Ruggles-Brice and his colleagues, these positive changes in the moral health of the nation seemed to justify the continued priority accorded to 'social legislation' - welfare reforms implemented by the state.

First hand experience of prison conditions by middle class professionals during the war led to renewed demands for reform. The revelations of conscientious objectors and, before them, the Suffragettes, Irish nationalists and 'gentlemen criminals' had a considerable impact upon the outlook of the literary and intellectual elite.<sup>59</sup> It spurred individuals, often previously indifferent to issues of criminal and penal reform, to take an active interest in such matters.<sup>60</sup>

The war impacted upon the criminal and penal system in other ways. Policies pursued diligently by administrators in the pre-war years were thrown into turmoil by the exigencies of national crisis. According to one account, for example, the policy of early release of borstal inmates initiated in 1915 and of conscription the following year meant 'that the entire system was overthrown...and it remained in a poor state after the war' (Forsythe, 1991, p. 53). The Great War had thrown all parts of the prison system into 'an inextricable confusion' (Ruggles-Brise, Op. Cit., p.55). At the same time, the penal system could not but be influenced by the post-war zeal for reconstruction. As Bailey

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<sup>59</sup> See Wiener (1990). As Rose notes '[t]he revelations of these often highly educated men and women aroused widespread indignation amongst progressive thinkers' (Rose, 1961, p.107).

<sup>60</sup> For example, the conscientious objector Stephen Hobhouse went on to chair the Labour Party's Prison System Enquiry Committee, whose report, *English Prisons Today*, had a large influence on reformers both within and outside the Prison Commission. Margaret Hobhouse, the mother of Stephen Hobhouse imprisoned as a conscientious objector, was moved to publish the pamphlet *I appeal to Caesar, 1917* concerning the plight of CO's. Stephen Hobhouse was also nephew of the Webb's, his experience providing inspiration for their *English Prisons Under Local Government*, (Webb & Webb, 1922). See Rose (Op. Cit., p.108).



notes, penal reformers 'pressed not only for the full implementation of the pre-war legislation but also for improvements to it' (Bailey, 1987, p.7). This post-war appetite for institutional change inspired the formation of the Howard League for Penal Reform, an amalgamation of the Howard Association and the Penal Reform League. In effect, the war galvanised pre-war ambitions towards the ameliorative treatment of prisoners. In the period between 1922 and the end of the decade, the first years of what became known as the 'Paterson regime' after Prison Commissioner Sir Alexander Paterson, a number of reforms were introduced. The convicts crop and broad arrows disappeared, the silence rule was relaxed and educational facilities were extended. In 1922 separate confinement - the motif of disciplinary moralisation during the 'Du Cane regime' in the nineteenth century - was abolished (Wiener, 1990, p.377). The period also witnessed a decrease in the number of local prisons, from fifty six in 1914 to twenty six in 1930 (Forsythe, Op. Cit., p.240). Admittedly, the 'axe' wielded by Geddes rather than humanitarian sentiment was responsible for at least eight of these closures in the early 1920s (Rose, Op. Cit., p.110). However, a falling average prison population confirmed perceptions that the period was one of improvement in crime and its treatment.

#### Economic Explanations of criminality

The experience of war also served to consolidate prevailing assumptions about the causes of crime. The events of 1914-18 and the slump that followed in 1921-2 convinced many of the links between the broader economic situation and the level of criminality. Even if more apparent than real, contemporaries were certain of a large decrease in the general level of crime during the hostilities.<sup>61</sup> Sir Evelyn Ruggles-Brise, Chairman of the Prison Commission from the turn of the century until 1922, was convinced of the connection between the high levels of employment and wages and this 'very remarkable decrease in every category of criminal offences' which took place during the war (Ruggles Brise, Op. Cit., 226). Home Office officials were of the same opinion. In surveying the record of criminality for 1919, W.J. Farrant, head of the Home Office Statistical Branch, noted the overall decrease in crime on previous years. This he

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<sup>61</sup> Writing during the early years of World War II, Mannheim suggested that the conspicuous fall in indictable and non-indictable offences was due to four main factors, namely, the decreasing eagerness of the population to prosecute, the preoccupation of the police with other tasks, the enlistment of males for the war and the falling consumption of alcohol. Taking these factors into account, 'the apparent decline in indictable crimes represents in fact a considerable increase. In other words, the crime rate of those sections of the population who did not enter the fighting services must have gone up' (Mannheim, 1941, pp.97-8).

put down to favourable economic conditions and the high levels of employment. Throughout the interwar years the Home Office held a strong conviction in the existence of a relationship between economic conditions and certain types of indictable crime. Larcenies were viewed as particularly sensitive to vagaries in the economic climate and, because these formed the bulk of indictable crimes, had a major impact on the overall crime rate. Commenting on the figures for 1919, Farrant stated that since 1917 there had taken place a 'remarkable' decrease in larcenies that, he reminded the reader, 'usually coincides with periods of high wages and plentiful employment'.<sup>62</sup>

While reduced levels of crime were explicable in terms of high levels of employment, increased crime rates were correspondingly attributed to a rise in unemployment and deepening levels of distress. Indeed the role of unemployment and poverty emerge as a familiar explanation for deviations in the level of crime throughout the 1920s.<sup>63</sup> The Introduction to the 1921 Criminal Statistics suggested that the increase in property related offences was attributable

to the bad trade year and hard times which prevailed during that year, and in all probability there would have been no increase of the offences under more prosperous conditions...[P]overty and distress were potent influences in determining the number of crimes and offences in 1921.<sup>64</sup>

The part played by economic factors in the causation of crime provided a recurrent theme of official and professional opinion throughout the 1920s. The annual reports of the Prison Commissioners attest to the conviction of the role played by unemployment as a crime-producing agency:

[I]t is probably right to say that unemployment is one of the chief contributory factors to the prison population of today, and, further, that its effect is cumulative, that is to say, a man becomes gradually demoralised by prolonged idleness and is more likely

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<sup>62</sup> *Criminal Statistics for England and Wales*, 1919, British Parliamentary Sessional Papers, House of Commons, 1921 XLI, p.384.

<sup>63</sup> In his Introduction to the 1923 criminal Statistics, Farrant continued the statements made in previous annual statistics: 'The figures for larceny commonly rise in hard times and fall when trade is good, and the unsettled conditions and widespread poverty resulting from unemployment which have prevailed of late years abundantly account for an increase in this offence' *Criminal Statistics for England and Wales*, 1923, p. 10.

<sup>64</sup> *Criminal Statistics for England and Wales*, 1921, p.5.

to drift into prison, either through debt or through committing some offence, after two years' unemployment, than he is after one.<sup>65</sup>

At the same time, however, there existed a good deal of unease in Home Office and wider professional circles in attributing crime simply to unemployment. First of all the crime figures had proved notorious in failing to conform to expected changes in line with observed economic and industrial developments. Mannheim admitted as much when he noted 'the frequent failure of the crime figures to follow the upward movement of unemployment' during the interwar years (Mannheim, 1940, pp.148-9). Indeed, it came as a surprise to many Home Office officials themselves when economic distress and rising unemployment rates occasionally failed to elicit a corresponding increase in crime, as in 1922. In the words of the Superintendent of the Statistical Branch of the Home Office, the absence of a rise in property crimes occurred '[i]n spite of the prevalence of unemployment and other conditions conducive to such crimes'.<sup>66</sup>

Secondly, the dominant outlook was marked by a strong antipathy to monocausal explanations of criminality. From the early decades of the nineteenth century the importance of such factors as unemployment and poverty in the causation of crime was widely recognised.<sup>67</sup> It was accepted that social conditions were critical in determining the moral and hence the criminal state of the nation.<sup>68</sup> To the extent that they dealt with *general principles rather than individual cases*, many in England believed that statistics could serve to map persistent features of the social landscape. Yet, it is important to recognise that this positivist approach to crime was able to coexist with home grown views regarding the centrality of the legal subject. That which could be accepted at the level of the general population found few adherents when such laws were applied to understanding individual motivations. 'It was a matter of social determinism – the laws

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<sup>65</sup> *Report of the Prison Commissioners, 1922*, p.6.

<sup>66</sup> *Criminal Statistics for England and Wales, 1922*, p 6.

<sup>67</sup> As Mannheim noted in 1940, 'a hundred years or more ago there was hardly any serious enquiry into the causes of crime in this country that would not have stressed, in general terms, the ruinous consequences of the lack of work' (Mannheim 1940, p.124).

<sup>68</sup> On the continent Quetelet and Guerry had sought to demonstrate through the use of social statistics how it was possible to 'count in advance how many individuals will soil their hands with the blood of their fellows, how many will be swindlers, how many poisoners...Here is a budget which we meet with frightful regularity – it is of prisons, convict stations and the scaffold' (Quetelet, 1968, p.92). This positivistic stress upon the use of social statistics to determine general social laws found its adherents across the channel.

which regulated the *rates* of crime – not individual determinism – the laws which regulated which individuals will commit crime’ (Radzinowicz & Hood, 1986, p.52). Even though correlations could be observed between particular social factors and crime at the level of the general population, it was rarely accepted that any one could be the exclusive cause of crime. Such an outlook accorded with commonly held assumptions concerning the centrality of the rational individual, acting according to his own free will.<sup>69</sup> A tension between determinist and individually oriented theories of criminal motivations undoubtedly existed. Nonetheless, those responsible for administering criminal justice during the 1920s remained dogged in their attachment to notions of individual responsibility, and the offence rather than the character of the offender as the basis for administering the law.

The antipathy to monocausal explanations is illustrated by the response of the Home Office to a report issued by the International Labour Organisation (ILO) in 1922.<sup>70</sup> *The Production Enquiry Report*, as it was entitled, emphasised a very strong connection between unemployment and crime and drew upon the English statistical evidence and commentary within Home Office publications to prove it. Farrant’s reply was highly critical of the report. Though conceding that crime could be induced by unemployment, he rejected the view that such a relationship could be reduced to one of cause and effect. For Farrant this smacked of a determinism that was as dangerous in terms of policy implications as it was difficult to establish empirically:

The conditions which give rise to fluctuations in the figures of recorded crime are so obscure and complex that the effects of a particular influence can rarely be satisfactorily established...[I]t is dangerous to assume that over a number of years the two phenomena remain in the relation of cause and effect.<sup>71</sup>

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<sup>69</sup> It was the very strength of English property relations and the stability of the state, notes Ellen Wood, that ensured the conception of free will remained at the heart of English jurisprudence (Wood, 1991).

<sup>70</sup> The ILO was a branch of the League of Nations. Though the bulk of the report was concerned with the relationship between production and the economic slump, a section of it was devoted, unusually, with the relationship between unemployment and crime.

<sup>71</sup> The report was circulated by Mr Oswald Allen of the Ministry of Labour to the Home Office for their views on this issue. It fell to Farrant to provide his specialist opinion. Farrant accepted that unemployment could on occasion play a major part in stimulating crime. The point of departure, however, was the ILOs insistence on the inevitable association between the two factors. The ILO report also failed, in Farrant’s estimation, to recognise that the types of crime which were induced by unemployment were usually of a specific character: ‘No reference is made to the essential fact in relation to a comparison of crime with unemployment that crime consists almost wholly of theft and other offences of dishonesty’. *Public Records Office (P.R.O.)* HO45/17928/429843, p.6.

A range of other factors was held to be just as conducive to criminal tendencies. Indeed the more investigators moved from the level of general populations and criminal statistics to investigating crime at the level of communities, families and individuals the more it was discovered that elements other than unemployment and poverty were at work. The practical insights of youth workers, doctors, penal reformers, and probation workers served to emphasise the formative influence of the immediate environment in which the offender lived. Increasingly it was recognised that crime was more than simply an outcome of the material exigencies provoked by poverty and unemployment. Relative discontent rather than absolute poverty could just as readily engender crime. R. G. Gordon, Psychologist to the Bath Clinic for Difficult Children commented how, 'crime is seldom resorted to from real want, while it is comparatively common amongst those brought up to expect and desire those things which are the prerequisites of a station in life just above that which they were born' (Gordon, 1928, p.16). Cyril Burt similarly remarked that, 'though most delinquents are poor, most poor people are nevertheless virtuous' and that 'poverty therefore, with all its attendant circumstances – ill-health, overcrowding, and general neglect – can only have an indirect influence' Quoted in Briggs (1924, p.106).<sup>72</sup>

The recognition that factors other than material deprivation played an important role in the causation of crime was of course nothing new.<sup>73</sup> However, the war itself had proved particularly significant in confirming the view that crime was the result of more than narrow material factors. The so-called problem of 'boy labour' was one that in the pre-war years had aroused the anxiety of those concerned with the moral and racial vigour of the nation's youth (Bray, 1907; Bray, 1911; Freeman, 1914). Wartime increases in juvenile offences seemed to verify such fears. Crime, it seemed, could arise just as much from too much money to spend as too little. Leeson was convinced that an important cause of delinquency, '[wa]s to be found in the high wages now earned by the lads, combined with the absence of adult direction in their disposal...Such lads have the wages of men, though lacking men's experience. Thus

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<sup>72</sup> London Probation Officer and leading reformer Thomas Holmes remarked, 'poverty itself is but rarely a decisive factor in the perpetuation of crime, though environment is...Even in the terrible slums of London, where poverty is intense, where misery and suffering abound, where thousands of men and women are but a single day in advance of starvation, where absolute destitution is always in evidence, the number of real and confirmed criminals does not exceed a fair proportion when the number of inhabitants are taken into consideration' (Holmes, 1912, p.43).

<sup>73</sup> See Introduction to *Criminal Statistics for England and Wales*, 1906 and 1908 and Devon (1912).

they tend to break loose now and then, and in this period of reaction offences are committed' (Leeson, 1917, p.32).

The large increase in juvenile crime during the war years and its equally abrupt fall at the end of the conflict underlined the role of parental guidance and home conditions more generally. 'The broken home', noted Gordon, 'is a factor which most constantly forces itself upon the notice of the student of the young offender' (Op. Cit., p.42). Burt was equally convinced that the 'moral condition of the family was more important than the material' and that the war had left 'many a home where the father is dead, where the mother has to go out to work, and where there is no older brother or sister to watch over the wayward child' (Burt, 1925, p.68).<sup>74</sup>

Farrant, too, recognised that quite large increases in the incidence of particular crimes and differential rates of criminality between age groups required an explanation that relied on more than simple economic or material motivations. In his *Introductory Notes*, much was made of the new types of crime and the unorthodox means by which they were carried out. 'Since the war', remarked Farrant, 'crime appears to have assumed new forms'.<sup>75</sup> For example, 'shop-breaking' exhibited large increases throughout the interwar years. Whereas 4,260 such offences had been committed in 1913, by 1919 this had risen to 6,742 and to 9,349 in 1927. During the war it had been suggested that the development of motorised transport for the war effort coupled with the redeployment and enlistment of police officers was responsible for this increase. The correlation between rising numbers of break-ins and the increased availability of motor transport was to remain a regular theme throughout the inter-war period: 'Breaking into unguarded shops and warehouses by night and removing the goods or merchandise in motorvans is a typical and frequent example. Crimes of this character have increased so extensively as to raise the total of all crimes.'<sup>76</sup> By 1928 the increase in break-ins was specifically laid at the wheels of the motor car: 'The motor car enables

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<sup>74</sup> Sir Robert Bayden Powell explained the war-time upsurge in juvenile crime in like manner: 'We find that Mr Hooligan is away at the front, while Mrs Hooligan is working early and late in a munitions factory, "to kill them Boches", as she puts it, "Never could put good in that boy," she adds, "when he aint a burgler 'e'e doin' highwayman." For all practical purposes he has no Father or Mother. *What he has got is the spirit of high adventure, with little field for exercising it*'. Daily Mail, 23 October 1916, (My emphasis). See also newspaper cuttings in P.R.O. HO 45/349554/63.

<sup>75</sup> *Criminal Statistics for England and Wales*, 1923, p.10.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*

the criminally minded in the great towns to travel faster and farther afield into regions where they are not known.<sup>77</sup>

However, it was not simply that the character of crime was different to pre-war years but that the motivation for such crimes was new. Increases in property and youth crime were of particular concern to Home Office personnel during the twenties. The former were explained as a result of the general impoverishment of the nation brought on by slump, but more particularly by the demoralising consequence of war. For example, an increase in indictable crimes during 1924 was put down a rise in 'crimes of dishonesty'. This was explained as a consequence

of efforts to maintain the same or even a higher standard of living than before the war upon means reduced by the general impoverishment of the nation, and to reckless attempts to live more or less luxuriously without rendering any services in return, which may also be traceable to experiences during the war.<sup>78</sup>

Mannheim referred to the 'discrepancy between expectations and fulfilment', of men expecting to return to 'a country fit for heroes' only to be disappointed by the reality of unemployment, poverty and homelessness (Mannheim, 1940, p.108). In the first four months after the Armistice 501 soldiers were committed to prison, of whom 286 were first offenders. This, explained the Prison Commission, was due to 'an apparent inability [of veterans] to conform readily to civilian life' (Quoted in *ibid.* p.10). The disregard for property, especially state property, was felt to be a direct outcome of military service. Robert Graves remarked how, like many former combatants, he retained during the 1920s the 'army habit of commandeering anything of uncertain ownership that [he] found lying about' (Graves, 1960, p.229).

What is surprising is that the more the First World War receded into the past the more it served as an explanation for increases in certain types of crime. Frauds, in particular, were explained in terms of the decay of commercial probity that originated in the profiteering climate amongst certain sections of the business class during the war

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<sup>77</sup> *Criminal Statistics for England and Wales*, 1928, p.32.

<sup>78</sup> *Criminal Statistics for England and Wales*, 1924, p.6.

years.<sup>79</sup> As the twenties wore on, occasional leaps in youth crime were similarly interpreted as a consequence of the debasing effect of war.<sup>80</sup> For example, while the increase in juvenile crime in the North towards the end of the 1920s was explained in terms of the consequence of industrial depression, commentators found it difficult to attribute a similar explanation for increases in crime in the South where there existed a relatively 'prosperous working population'. It was seen that whereas in the North the conditions arising out of the industrial depression resulted in crimes of 'picking and stealing' amongst the young, in the South where 'temptations and opportunities are greater' the relatively prosperous conditions tempted older youths and young men to commit 'crimes of adventurous lawlessness and violence' such as break-ins and bag-snatches. Whilst the crimes of Northern children were explained with reference to slump-induced poverty, crimes in the South were blamed on the ageing 'war juveniles'. It was this age group who had 'run wild during the war' and who were responsible for the increase in crime particularly amongst the 16-21 age group during the industrial conflict of 1926: 'Many of those who as juveniles had contributed to the huge rise in juvenile crime in 1917 broke out again under the stresses of events in 1926.'<sup>81</sup> It was on the shoulders of this wave of ill-disciplined 'war juveniles' that the Home Office laid much of the blame, suggesting that 'it may be a long while before some of the war juveniles cease to give us trouble'.<sup>82</sup>

The view that increases in juvenile crime were a consequence of economic difficulties or the vestige of war accorded with a belief that such increases were not a permanent feature of the social landscape but were by nature a temporary phenomenon. They were a passing feature rather than a symptom of insoluble moral corruption. Explaining the increase in juvenile crime in the North towards the end of the decade

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<sup>79</sup> Farrant's 'Introduction' for the 1923 Criminal Statistics assigned the perceived flourishing of frauds and commercial dishonesty that year, 'to the long continued debasing effects of the war upon conduct and character' *Criminal Statistics for England and Wales*, 1923 p.10.

<sup>80</sup> 'The effect of the war in weakening moral obligations', remarked Farrant in 1923, 'has not yet passed away', *Ibid.* p.8.

<sup>81</sup> *Criminal Statistics for England and Wales*, 1929, p.12

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.* p.13. Similar comments continued to be made during the 1930's. A Report by the London County Council Education Officer, published in 1937, explained juvenile delinquency thus: 'A great many of the present generation of fathers served during the war, when it became a widespread habit to 'acquire' by the simple process of 'winning'. 'Winning' an article was not considered on the footing of stealing it... This practice outlived the War period; it persists in all classes of people, and it persists in the homes of some of the children and young persons now considered' (quoted in Mannheim, *Op. Cit.*, p.113).



Farrant was of the opinion that the increase appeared to be 'the result rather of industrial depression than of any increase of juvenile depravity. It may be hoped that when trade and industry improve, crime may diminish.'<sup>83</sup> Such views reflected the outlook of professionals who, throughout the twenties, were predisposed to give youth the benefit of the doubt.<sup>84</sup> More than this, however, blaming 'trade conditions' or the relic of war-time circumstances served to alleviate the responsibility of offenders, particularly youthful offenders, for such crime. This derived partly from the perceived debt that was owed to the younger generation. It also resulted from the simple recognition that the accepted causes of crime pointed to its solution. The conviction that rising levels of offending were due to poor environmental conditions both issued from and also served to reinforce the belief in the necessity of collective, state guided solutions to crime.

### Psychology, Psychoanalysis and crime

The environmental approach to explaining crime was, as Bailey notes 'not a static one' (Op. Cit., p.13). Indeed during the 1920s a 'modified environmentalism' emerged which placed emphasis on the mental conflicts afflicting the child and the adult. The Great War served to accelerate and consolidate pre-existing trends, but also to introduce new intellectual currents. The increased importance attributed to subjective motivations rather than material factors during the 1920s derived from the impact of the war both upon science and culture. The First World War provided a major stimulus to both the theory and treatment of psychiatry and helped consolidate psychological explanations and methods of treatment for crime. A number of writers have noted how the experience of war neurosis, or 'shell-shock', had a major influence on traditional views regarding both mental illness and crime (Bogacz, 1989; Dean, 1993; Showalter, 1985; Showalter, 1997; Stone, 1985). The experience gained in treating shell-shock cases and a number of subsequent studies helped to popularise the hitherto marginal Freudian theory of psychoneurosis amongst medical and broader intellectual opinion. For W.H.R. Rivers, the foremost proponent of Freudian theories in Britain after the

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<sup>83</sup> *Criminal Statistics for England and Wales*, 1929, p.xv.

<sup>84</sup> 'The bad manners of the modern girl are no worse than those of the modern boy, and both can be traced in no small measure to the demoralising licences of the war period, which bred a taste for luxury and for low delights, a hatred of discipline and a contempt for authority. *In due time this will pass*' Mrs Philip Snowden, Sheffield Daily Independent, 26 January 1926, (emphasis added).

war, crime was explained as a symptom of 'regression' - a failure to control instinctive tendencies. This was manifested in the expression of infantile or more primitive characteristics. Where war neurosis was characterised by regression to infancy, crime, particularly violent crime, drew upon deeper, primitive drives (Rivers, 1922, pp. 148-9).<sup>85</sup>

The implications of these insights gradually diffused from the confines of psychiatric expertise into the consciousness of British society after the war. The publication of Burt's *Young Delinquent* in 1925 is illustrative of the way in which psychological explanations of crime became increasingly popular amongst the liberal and professional elite. Burt argued that criminal behaviour derived from instinctive drives and emotional conflict.<sup>86</sup> He utilised a developmental approach, locating the roots of adult crime in childhood experiences and of juvenile delinquency in unhealthy parental influence and other conditions in the home. Because of the importance of environmental considerations to English psychology, observes Bailey, psychological explanations were able to complement broader environmental accounts of crime. 'Burt's insistence that crime was a mental symptom with a mental origin was not held to be inconsistent with the belief in the causative role of unemployment and poverty' (Op. Cit., p.15). Similarly, R. G. Gordon was of the opinion that 'the delinquent is characterised by conflict between the ego and the environment...it is specially characteristic of the delinquent that he is badly adjusted to his environment' (Gordon, 1928, p.43). In directing attention to the specific manifestation of this conflict in the personality of the individual, the expert was able to determine why almost identical environmental conditions were able to produce offenders and law-abiding citizens alike:

This inability to adjust as a social being to his milieu explains why one child brought up in a one-roomed tenement turns to crime, while half a dozen others do not - why one indulged with everything that money can buy turns thief, while the brother and sister keeps within the law and dies full of years and honour (Gordon, 1928, pp.36-7).

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<sup>85</sup> Rivers (1864-1922) had been commanding medical officer at Craiglockhart War Hospital in Scotland, one of 6 special neurological hospitals established during the hostilities. Until his death he was a leading proponent of the 'diffusionist' school of cultural anthropology in Britain.

<sup>86</sup> Cyril Burt (1883-1976) was a member of the British Psychoanalytical Society from 1920 and from 1913 to 1932 was employed as an educational psychologist attached to the Education Department of London County Council.

The establishment of child guidance clinics during the 1920s demonstrated the influence of psychoanalytic explanations and treatment of crime. The Tavistock Clinic, for example, was founded in 1920 to provide psychotherapy based on concepts inspired by psychoanalytic theory (Valier, 1995, p.2). Its object was to discover the source of the emotional disturbance in the individual child so that he or she could be directed to more wholesome activities. The psychoanalytical discourse on crime reinforced the already prevalent view that crime was no more than 'everyday child naughtiness', and that differences between the delinquent and non-delinquent were simply a matter of degree.

This questioning of the traditional distinction between normality and abnormality provided one of the most striking manifestations of the 'diffusion' of wartime lessons in psychiatry. The topic was introduced into the public consciousness by the attention directed to a number of prominent criminal cases in the first few years after the war. The insanity defence had been raised against the charge of murder in the trials of Ronald True, Frederick Holt, and Horatio Bottomley. All the accused were ex-servicemen and, although only Holt had been diagnosed as suffering from shell shock, the cases served to focus attention upon traditional notions of responsibility and culpability before the law. Bogacz suggests that these cases, and shell-shock more generally, 'raised the most fundamental human questions; none more so than whether in their wake there were still firm moral laws governing a man's behaviour or whether one must now create a new ethics for each situation' (Bogacz, p.249).<sup>87</sup> Burt remarked: 'it was perhaps the First World War that most effectively brought home the artificiality of the distinction between the normal mind on the one hand and its abnormal conditions on the other...[I]t gradually became apparent that much of what had been considered abnormal might be discovered in the mind of the average man' (Quoted in Showalter, 1997, p.73).

While noting some diffusion of wartime developments in psychiatry into wider civil life, one should also recognise the tenacious regard by the judiciary for the traditional notions of responsibility before the law and the offence rather than the character of the offender as the basis for judicial procedure. Despite the popular sympathy directed to

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<sup>87</sup> For a critical appraisal of this view see Dean (1993).

the plight of the veteran, the judiciary proved markedly resistant to the expansion of the insanity defence (Dean, *Op. Cit.*). The bench was also successful in its opposition to an augmented role for the medical establishment in the courtroom. Indeed, the most common complaint of psychiatric professionals was that magistrates had proved unwilling to utilise medical expertise. The experimental Birmingham scheme headed by Hamblin Smith and W.A. Potts is a case in point. The scheme had been established for the assessment and special treatment of cases referred by the local Justices. Yet, in each successive report Potts complained of the refusal of magistrates to refer such cases. For example, in his report for 1924, he remarked that, 'during the last year only three cases were referred to me for examination...It is disappointing that once again the number referred is too small for any statistics or meaningful conclusions.'<sup>88</sup> What particularly frustrated Potts and Hamblin Smith was the courts' reluctance to refer less serious or 'high grade' cases of mental instability.<sup>89</sup> Yet, it was precisely the amorphous and ill-defined character of this condition that the Justices found problematic. The difficulty faced in determining who was or was not suffering from the condition was matched by worries about undermining jealously guarded notions of responsibility before the law. Home Office administrators remained equally dubious. For the latter, the continuity between mental instability and normality pointed not to the medicalisation of the courtroom but the suitability of traditional preventative methods.<sup>90</sup> Even more questionable in the estimation of the leading civil servants at the Home Office were psychotherapeutic procedures such as psychoanalysis. The latter, noted one official, was 'in a very embryonic stage' and 'very controversial.'<sup>91</sup> Adopting the prevailing view held by the British Medical Association, another official remarked that, 'psychoanalysis is no science', and that the best policy would be to 'neither

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<sup>88</sup> *Report to the General Purposes Committee, City of Birmingham*, Dr. W. A. Potts, 17 October 1924. P.R.O. HO 45/18736/438456/16.

<sup>89</sup> Potts remarked, 'In each of the last two reports I have pointed out that it would be a help to the magistrates to have a report on the physical and mental condition, with suggestions for possible helpful treatment in many of the less serious cases, especially for first offenders, and cases who are placed on probation. It was hoped, when the Birmingham scheme for examining delinquents was introduced, that all Mental Defectives would be fairly dealt with, and that in addition other cases with mental instability of a less marked kind would be studied with a view to treatment rather than punishment. So far the latter group have been almost ignored by the magistrates...This is not surprising when it is realised that several of the more definite group, actual Mental Defectives are overlooked' (*Ibid*).

<sup>90</sup> See P.R.O. HO 45/18736/438456.

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid*.

condemn nor uphold psychoanalysis but wait and see for time will show.’<sup>92</sup> While pragmatism rather than outright condemnation guided Home Office policy, other voices remained markedly hostile to both the legal and moral ramifications of this branch of applied psychiatry.<sup>93</sup>

### Exhausted Nerves

The vogue for psychoanalysis amongst leading professionals was in many respects a symptom of the questioning of former certainties induced by the shock of the Great War. The horrors of the conflict had encouraged amongst the intelligentsia both a loss of faith in the inevitability of progress and a belief in the irrationality of human nature.<sup>94</sup> Psychoanalysis, suggested The Times, was a product of ‘will-weariness, a tendency to turn away from order to disorder in search of an anodyne for exhausted nerves’.<sup>95</sup> The traumatic effect of the war was manifested in other ways. For every prominent murder and outrageous crime there were church leaders, doctors and even judges who stood ready to proclaim that times were not what they used to be and that the world was a more wicked place.<sup>96</sup> The immediate post-war years in particular provided material in abundance for those who might complain about falling standards and moral degeneration. The publicity directed to the crimes of shell-shock victims was part of a broader concern about the offences carried out by returning veterans. Dean has charted how, during the first six months of 1920, the London Press alerted their readers to a ‘crime wave’ of violence, post-office hold-ups, and motor banditry

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<sup>92</sup> HO 45/18736/438456/21. See also British Medical Journal 27 July 1929, pp67-270.

<sup>93</sup> ‘Psychoanalysis’, remarked a Times editorial, ‘dethrones the will’. ‘The astonishing thing is that so many modern thinkers, or perhaps, half-thinkers, do not appear to object to this idea... This is a state of matters which cannot be regarded as healthy. For civilisation, in the last issue, rests on self-control and personal responsibility; that is to say, on the exercise of will.’ The Times 23 September 1922. Lord Dawson remarked in a later issue of the same newspaper how ‘too many of its practitioners are fanatics who have no eyes for anything outside their narrow cult. Psychoanalysis induces and aggravates introspection, and is apt to produce morbid ideas’. The Times 17 October 1922. See also P.R.O. HO 45/18736/438456.

<sup>94</sup> Developments in the fields of cultural anthropology and Newtonian physics similarly challenged traditional certainties. See Kuklick (1991) Bernal (1965) and Johnson (1983).

<sup>95</sup> The Times 17 October 1922.

<sup>96</sup> The True and Jacoby murder trials aroused the indignation of many of those who remained to be convinced that morals were on the upgrade (See Chapter 5). Overshadowing the True case was the trial of fifteen-year-old Oxford boy Jack Hewitt. When found guilty of murdering Mrs Sarah Blake the Judge Sharman remarked to the jury that, ‘it was somewhat appalling to consider the number of crimes committed by young people. There were a great many of them at the present day... It seemed to be motiveless ferocity by young people’ (The Times 5 June 1922 p.12)

involving ex-servicemen (Dean, Op. Cit., p.76). Yet, it was not only criminal acts that provided a topic of middle class concern. A range of broader social and cultural change provoked the anxieties of a number of commentators (Marwick, 1965; Pearson, 1983b; Pearson, 1984). Prominent amongst these concerns was the perceived undermining of the integrity of the family by more than four years of unprecedented social turbulence. The large increase in wartime marriages was followed by a spate of equally hasty divorces. Between 1910 and 1920 there was almost a threefold increase in the number of divorces made absolute, a trend that represented a 'fundamental cracking in the cement of conventional society as the Victorians understood it' (Marwick, Op. Cit., p.151). The increased economic independence displayed by women provoked debates about the 'withdrawal from child-life of adult personal influence' and the ensuing threat of deterioration in home life and rise in juvenile delinquency (Leeson 1917, p.22-6).<sup>97</sup> A direct consequence of the war was the increased numbers of bigamous relationships, further provoking fears about the impending collapse of the family. Convictions for bigamy rose five-fold in the period 1913 and 1921.<sup>98</sup> One writer remarked, 'it was not unusual that quite young women married three times or so during the war'. Quoting from a Manchester Guardian article of January 25, 1917, she adds: 'Hundreds of marriages have taken place that could never have happened in any other circumstances. Young men and women have married very much 'above' and 'below' their former station in life.'<sup>99</sup> Then there was the increasing popularity of 'American' imports: cigarettes, the 'cinematograph', 'short skirts' and 'cocktail parties', all of which aroused suspicions that the nation's moral fabric was being steadily unpicked.

Such were the symbols of moral decline. They served as vivid metaphors for anxieties aroused by rapid social change. The figure of youth in this period, as in others before and after, served as the target for the condemnation of an older generation ( see Gillis, 1974; and Pearson, 1985). Yet, in the years following the war, those who voiced

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<sup>97</sup> One incident that provoked the anxiety of conservative opinion involved the murder of 16-year-old female, Grace Blackaller, by a Ernest Rhodes, aged 19. While the coroner had laid the blame upon 'parental neglect and lack of discipline', the Daily Mail stated: 'Our grandmothers would have been horrified at the idea of so young a girl as this being out late at night and allowed a latch key to come in at 12-30 and all sorts of hours in the morning. If such a girl went astray it was not to be wondered at'. The newspaper article went on to blame 'sex emancipation – a phase of modern life which obtained in modern times' Daily Mail 23 April 1925 p5.

<sup>98</sup> In 1913 convictions for bigamy stood at 117. By 1921 they had risen to 516. See *Criminal Statistics for England and Wales*, 1921; 1922.

<sup>99</sup> Playne, *Britain Holds On*, 1933, Quoted in Mannheim (1941).

such sentiments found themselves to be increasingly out of step with the dominant outlook. Indeed, much of the commentary during the immediate post-war years displays a remarkable sensitivity to the plight of youth. It was an outlook that ran directly counter to the widespread anxiety and occasional hostility that featured before and during the First World War. Rather than a source of unease and a target for condemnation, throughout the 1920s the younger generation tended to be lauded by their older contemporaries. Youth served, for many, as a vindication of civilisation rather than the source of its downfall. Again, the Great War and the heightened political animosities that followed played a large part in this conciliatory regard for both youth and juvenile delinquency.

### Flower of Youth

At the turn of the nineteenth century, the aspiration and dynamism of a generation of youth and adolescents had been marshalled behind the banners of Empire, King and country. The period witnessed a scramble to enlist boys of the lower social orders in such organisations as the Boys Brigade, the Boy Scouts, Church Lads Brigade and the YMCA. These groups were formed at a time when concern about the unpredictable stage of 'adolescence' and the delinquent activities of the 'Hooligan' were at their height (Davis, 1990; Pearson, 1983a). Coexisting with this outlook was a belief that such youthful energies would best be channelled in a more constructive, militarist direction (Gillis, 1974; Hendrick, 1990).

When the Armistice was signed the ideals of militarism had been fundamentally discredited. Militarism led to war and war had decimated the younger generation. According to one estimate, 30.58 per cent of all men aged 20 to 22 and 28.15 per cent of those aged 13 to 19 were killed in the war (Stevenson, 1984, p.94). The grim reality of trench life had, temporarily at least, rendered patriotism both ideologically and practically redundant. 'Patriotism, in the trenches,' remarked Graves, 'was too remote a sentiment... A new arrival who talked patriotism would soon be told to cut it out' (Graves, 1960). In the minds of the intelligentsia the war had exposed the bankruptcy of the traditions with which the former had been associated. Notes Rich, '[D]uring the course of the hostilities between 1914 and 1918, a considerable undermining took place of the imperial ideal' (Rich, 1986, p.35). The decimation of this generation on the Western Front was felt by many commentators to discredit these ideas and those who

advanced them.<sup>100</sup> The elites felt such a loss of faith most keenly, not least because of the disproportionate losses suffered by this section of society. Disillusionment with the former ideal of romantic patriotism was manifested in other ways. For example, through such measures as conscription, the hugely extended reach of the state provoked not only anti-war feelings but also a disdain among sections of the intelligentsia for 'un-English', militarist developments.<sup>101</sup>

A further outcome of anti-militarist sentiment during the twenties, notes Hynes, was the creation of 'two cultures, separate and mistrustful of each other, a conservative culture that clung to and asserted traditional values, and a counter culture, rooted in rejection of the war and its principles' (Hynes, 1990, p.283). Yet, the most conspicuous feature of conservative opinion was its marginality. Whilst the more extreme ideologues were confined to the political fringe, the more moderate strove for a consensual formulation of traditional ideas. One consequence was the attempt to construct a more modest and inclusive national identity as an alternative to the more bellicose pre-1914 variety. Rich observes how, under the stewardship of Prime Minister Stanley Baldwin, conscious attempts were made to foster a romantic, rustic national identity based on small town village life. By emphasising the homogenous and placid nature of English society, this formulation, 'served as a consoling theme to those seeking to confront the horrors of the First World War [and] to neutralise a political conception of class warfare' (Rich, *Ibid*, p.37-8).

Yet, it was their orientation to the issue of youth that provided perhaps the most striking manifestation of the elite's loss of confidence. During the latter stages of the war a perception grew that youth could no longer be viewed in the old manner. The 'cult of youth' that distinguished the inter-war years was, noted Lewis and Maude, 'mainly a middle-class aberration'. It arose in large measure from the profound sense of guilt which after losses on the Western Front. Yet it had deeper roots than this:

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<sup>100</sup> Although the intelligentsia began to turn away from the imperial ideal one should be careful not to overstate its discrediting amongst the general public. With an Empire expanded and an enemy defeated 'victory in war had confirmed rather than diminished the status of Britain and the Empire' in the public mind (Mackenzie, 1986, p.7).

<sup>101</sup> Virginia Woolf noted in her diary how she and her Bloomsbury friends all thought that 'the war which had begun in opposition to militarism, was militarising England and taking away some of the outstanding liberties of the British people'. Quoted in Lee (1997, p. 345).



Middle class ideals were on the defensive...it was almost a matter of course for the middle-class younger generation to be brought up on the misdeeds of the middle-classes in the nineteenth century. Not only was there a century of ugliness and misery to expiate; there was the Great War which was the result of that dreadful century...This was not mere politics, though it had a political dénouement; it went even deeper. It expressed a desire to recover the freedom and emotionalism which were supposed to characterise proletarian life; the wisdom that all wisdom reposed in the masses germinated in the persuasion that only through rebirth in the masses could salvation be achieved (Lewis, 1949, p.81).<sup>102</sup>

Thus, by the end of the war, there arose a realisation that those who had once been so eager to chastise youth were now in the dock having led them to such slaughter. A social group that had recently given so much in blood could not, it seemed, be so readily condemned. A series of exchanges in the middle-class house journal, The Nineteenth Century, provides an insight into the changed perceptions of youth that the war had brought about. As one commentator observed, 'some young men feel contemptuously indignant with their elders whose alleged stupidity sent so many thousands to death and maiming, while they themselves remained secure'.<sup>103</sup> There were, of course, those who were critical of youth. Yet, it is striking that the dominant tendency in the early post war years was to emphasise the qualities of the younger generation rather than its vices. Any extravagances were understandable given the sacrifices of war. As one commentator remarked, 'To crowd every possible hour of the day with gaiety and distraction was the inevitable reaction from months and years of toil, privation, horror and danger.'<sup>104</sup> Any deterioration in manners that may have occurred was but a passing phase having, if any, only a superficial impact:

Stronger evidence is required than seems to be forthcoming to justify the complaint that, in real essentials, the old and time honoured relations between parents and their children are fundamentally altered. Too much must not be made of manifestations that have proved to be passing phases. At the end of war there was a marked deterioration in the social manners of youth. Dropped cigarette ends, for instance, littered our floors, burnt holes in our carpets, blistered our tables, scarred our mantelpieces. We need not

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<sup>102</sup> The authors add that this 'was not merely a rejection of common sense; it amounted to a rejection of reason as well as intellect, of responsibility as well as leadership' Lewis (1949, p.81).

<sup>103</sup> Street (1920, p.1137).

<sup>104</sup> Ernle (1920, p. 930).

allow them to sear our memories. The decay was temporary. It has passed away (Ernle, 1920, p. 930).

If any evidence of moral decline was to be observed, then the dominant response was to stress its fleeting character.<sup>105</sup> Others rejected outright the idea that any deterioration in the behaviour of youth had taken place, many going so far as to suggest that the present generation was, in moral attributes, superior to their predecessors. There has been, noted one observer, 'a great deal of criticism of the young generation, that it is aggressive, that it is rude, that it is overfree in speech and so forth. I do not believe it. I find young people better mannered with their elders than they were when I was young.'<sup>106</sup> Such comments indicate an awareness of the potential dangers arising from a confrontational attitude to the younger generation. Many thought it particularly unwise to inflate the rift between youth and age given the presence of broader social animosities.<sup>107</sup> The spectacle of young people abandoning the emblems of national unity was regarded as especially perilous in view of the polarised ideological situation. The elites were acutely aware that youth, dissatisfied with old ideas and politicians, could be drawn to dangerous political creeds. In such a situation it would be foolish to highlight the threat posed by the youth:

In these critical days it is unwise to exaggerate differences. Youth and age cannot afford to draw off into hostile camps. The more closely they unite the better for both and for country. The nation's need for their co-operation is overwhelming. Abroad we see chaos and confusion; at home, class warfare, strife and bitterness (Ernle, p.930).

In the pre-war years the cause of national unity was pursued by channelling the virtues of adolescence in the direction of militaristic endeavour. In the immediate post-war

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<sup>105</sup> Remarking on the publicity surrounding a spate of serious crimes in the South East of England in the Spring of 1924, *The Justice of the Peace* observed: 'There has been within the last few weeks a rapid succession of serious crimes for which, we imagine, there are few precedents in recent years... But no explanation is needed. Spectacular crimes often occur in "runs" which, however, do not affect the average occurrence of crime any more than the run of a particular colour affects the probabilities at roulette'. *The Justice of the Peace* 10 May 1924, p.308.

<sup>106</sup> Street (Op. Cit., p.1138).

<sup>107</sup> The belligerence in political and industrial life appeared particularly regrettable given the national unity witnessed during the four years of war: 'The common sacrifice of the battlefields was seemingly forgotten in the universal selfishness of industry. Rival combinations of Capital and Labour denounce each other, but the mentality of employer and employed is astonishingly similar' Tilby, *The Nineteenth Century*, p. 674.

years an appeal to youth provided, for some, a similar opportunity to overcome domestic strife and regain a semblance of former harmony. The bitterness displayed on both sides of the political divide was frequently equated with the worn out ideas of those who made the war. The former Official War Correspondent Sir Philip Gibbs<sup>108</sup> was in no doubt that the belligerent 'dead-heads' must make way for the flower of youth:

I have met men and women of all classes who are inspired by a desperate will to break the old spell of evil which now prevails and to establish a new order of things which shall fulfil in some degree the hope and ideals which come to them in the agony of war - the destruction of militarism...a resistance to the old men who made the war. The world awaits for the coming of youth - the new men with the new ideas born out of the convulsions of youth. Dead heads must go (Sheffield Daily Independent, 14 January 1921, p7.).

In the appeal to the universality of youth an attempt was made to overcome class strife and reconstruct national unity. The cause of the younger generation was a torch held by the elites as a way out of the darkness.

### Crime as consensus

The conciliatory approach to juvenile deviance and crime was just one outcome of wider efforts to overcome social conflict and construct national unity. During the post-war years fears of 'Bolshevism' gave added urgency to the need for a consensual approach to social problems. Welfare policy was actively promoted as a means of winning over those sections of the urban poor who may have been attracted to dangerous political theories.<sup>109</sup> That welfare measures would lead to a reduction in crime was something advanced fairly persistently by those who sought to improve the social conditions of the urban poor.<sup>110</sup> Criminal policy was viewed as an integral component of wider social

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<sup>108</sup> Philip Gibbs had been official war correspondent on the western front for the *Daily Chronicle*. He was, remarked Hynes, 'probably the most widely read and most influential of English journalists during the war'. His anti-war tract, *Realities of War*, written in 1920 was widely read and contributed to the shaping of post war imaginations in England. See Hynes (1990, pp.283-291).

<sup>109</sup> As one cabinet official explained to Lloyd George: 'Bolshevik propaganda in this country is only dangerous in so far as it can lodge itself in the soil of genuine grievances...A definite reiteration by yourself of the government's determination to push forward with an advanced social programme is the best antidote' (Quoted in Fraser, Op. Cit. p.181).

<sup>110</sup> After welcoming Neville Chamberlain's Housing Bill, which laid out plans for slum clearance and subsidised housing, one Leading article in The Times was typical of many when it concluded that 'good

policy. And yet, for the political classes, it was also much more than this. What is particularly striking is the exemplary role accorded to criminal policy during the 1920s by middle class advocates of welfare reform. The polarised ideological climate that prevailed in the post-war years impelled the elites to search for a common discourse of social and political engagement. This fostered a tendency on the part of the elite to emphasise the essential integrity and honesty of the urban poor. Secondly, the perceived success in dealing with crime and criminals was utilised by the professional elites as an affirmation of the necessity of measures of social improvement. The alleged victory of criminal policy served as a model for broader welfare reform and the political and institutional collectivism all that implied.

The Home Office articulated this outlook perhaps most clearly. Civil servants adopted a markedly optimistic view of the trajectory of crime during the 1920s. This was partly due to positive statistical evidence that pointed to a long-term decrease in rates of recorded crime. Yet, whether up or down, variations in the rate of recorded crime tended to be greeted with equal confidence. The optimistic response to observed *increases* in crime rates during the decade suggests that crime and criminal policy played an important ideological role. For example, the criminal statistics for 1920 pointed to an increase in crime on the previous year and were published at a time when concerns about the debasing consequences of the war on former combatants were at their height. Yet, W. J. Farrant concluded that such an increase provided no basis for alarm. The rise in persons tried for indictable crimes, he maintained, represented 'a reversion to normal figures consequent upon the return to civil life of the large portion of the population which during the war was serving with His Majesty's Forces'.<sup>111</sup>

During each of the subsequent five years, the *Introductory Notes* offered a picture showing little variation in the number of persons tried for indictable offences, and a distinct rise in those offences 'known to the police' in England and Wales (See Chart 2.1). However, Farrant's view was that the figures represented a definite decline in the

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housing and a decent standard of life make for good citizenship and the decline of crime' The Times 27 April 1923, p.17. The previous year Mr Justice Greer had commented on the connection between the amount and nature of offences and the 'dim, gloomy, grimy nature of the city'. He suggested that [a]n improvement of the slum areas will be followed by some diminution in the amount of crime' The Times 24 November 1922. In a subsequent article Dr. Jervis, Medical Officer of Health agreed: '[T]he criminal tendencies which are found in certain people, if not induced are certainly encouraged by the gloom and the grime in which they have to spend the greater part of their days' The Times 27 November 1922, p.22.

<sup>111</sup> *Criminal Statistics for England and Wales*, 1921, p.5.

level of criminality. He arrived at this conclusion by comparing the post-war statistics with a more long-term survey of crime from the mid to late nineteenth century. Farrant argued that, since the late 1850s, there had been a substantial decline in the level of crime and that the annual figures during the 1920s were part of this more fundamental shift. For example, though showing little change from the previous year, the conclusion drawn from the figures for indictable crime during 1922 was far from equivocal:

[T]hese figures do not furnish a reliable indication of the progress of crime [but if] the survey is extended over a sufficient period, there is a substantial diminution in the number of persons for trial for indictable offences.<sup>112</sup>

Small variations in the crime figures in either direction could equally be taken as evidence of the continuation of this drawn out reduction in crime. A slight decrease in the number of indictable offences for the following year was greeted in a similar way - the figures disclosed 'a definite tendency to further diminution' over a prolonged period of time.<sup>113</sup> That such a decline occurred in the midst of a severe industrial depression no doubt served to consolidate views within the Home Office that such changes were part of a more fundamental decline.<sup>114</sup> Such comments expressed an outlook that was determined to regard social change in a positive light, despite anxious claims to the contrary.

While successive annual statistics produced during the first half of the 1920s were judged to show little change in the overall rate of crime, those produced during the second half of the decade pointed to a definite increase. However, what is perhaps surprising is the way in which, in his *Introductory Notes*, Farrant almost always tended to draw positive conclusions from these figures.

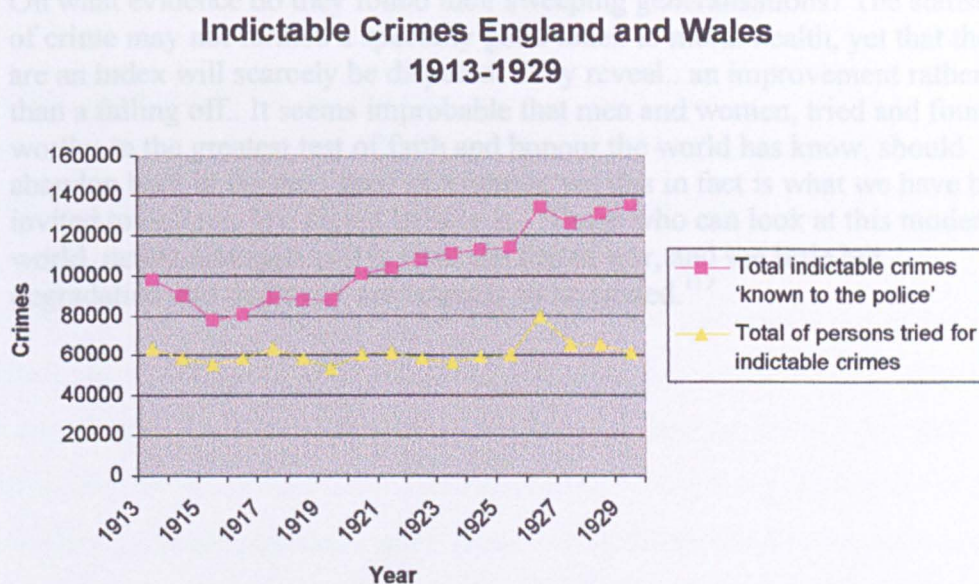
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<sup>112</sup> *Criminal Statistics for England and Wales*, 1922, p.6.

<sup>113</sup> *Criminal Statistics for England and Wales*, 1923, 5. A very similar point was made in the report for the previous years figures. The *Introductory Notes* for the 1925 statistics stated that 'the crime-rate has fallen greatly since 1857' (*Ibid.* 1925, p.6).

<sup>114</sup> 'The annual fluctuations of the total of all crimes are determined by the rise and fall of crimes against property (mainly acts of dishonesty), which make up more than five-sixths of the total. In spite of the prevalence of unemployment and of other conditions conducive to such crimes, crimes against property have shown no tendency to increase, but are actually fewer than formerly' (1922, p.6).

Figure 2-1<sup>115</sup>



First of all, when discussing the police returns, he again adopted a long-term view, positively comparing the figures since the end of the war with statistics recorded sixty years previously. In this way crime during the 1920s was viewed as part of a more protracted and, by implication, incontrovertible period of decline in criminality. Secondly, those increases that were admitted were explained as blips on an otherwise downward trajectory - the temporary effects of war, industrial unrest and economic slump.<sup>116</sup> The perceived improvement in both crime rates and the 'criminal character' were portrayed by the professional elites as a vindication of the new measures of state sponsored welfare reform. Accordingly, crime served not as a source of anxiety but as a confirmation of social and moral progress. Against those who may have suggested crime to be marked by regression rather than improvement, statistics could be wielded as conclusive evidence to the contrary. Not only did they demean a nation's sacrifices, but such Jeremiahs ignored evidence that proved society to be morally on the upturn.

<sup>115</sup> Taken from relevant *Criminal Statistics for England and Wales*.

<sup>116</sup> Farrant noted that the rate of indictable crime for 1927 was the 'highest recorded' since 1908. He suggested, however, that 'it does not necessarily follow that this indicates a more or less permanent tendency of serious crime, *under normal conditions*, to increase. The rise that culminated in the high rate of 1908 followed upon, and was no doubt in part due to the Boer War; the rise now apparent began, similarly after the Great War; and the continuance of a high rate in 1927 may be due to some extent to lingering effects of the General Strike'. (*Criminal Statistics for England and Wales 1927* p.2, emphasis added).

Responding to cries about the immorality and depravity of the modern world, an editorial in The Times asked,

On what evidence do they found their sweeping generalisations? The statistics of crime may not furnish a specially good index to moral health, yet that they are an index will scarcely be disputed. They reveal...an improvement rather than a falling off.. It seems improbable that men and women, tried and found worthy in the greatest test of faith and honour the world has know, should abandon both in the very hour of triumph; yet this in fact is what we have been invited to believe. We do not believe it... Those who can look at this modern world, newly emerged as it is from the fire of war, and see little but degradation and depravity are scarcely to be envied.<sup>117</sup>

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<sup>117</sup> The Times, 27 April 1922, p.15.

Chapter Three  
Research methods

Newspaper Representations of Crime

To gain an insight into dominant attitudes to crime in Sheffield during the 1920s I examine representations of crime in two Sheffield newspapers, the Sheffield Daily Telegraph and the Sheffield Daily Independent.<sup>118</sup> The primary objective of the newspaper analysis is to determine the main features and patterns concerning attitudes towards crime in Sheffield, providing a basis for more detailed study. By analysing crime coverage in specific sections of the newspapers I aim to identify prominent aspects in the way crime was viewed and discussed. This will highlight some of the main influences shaping perceptions of crime during the research period and will therefore point to areas that require closer scrutiny. To that end I utilise two specific sections of each newspaper – the editorial column and the letters to the editor (LTE). I suggest that editorials provide an insight into the outlook of the ‘opinion makers’ or elite views of crime. LTE’s offer a means to determine the views of the ‘articulate minority’ of public opinion. Newspapers have served as a widely used resource for those seeking to determine the influence of the media on public perceptions of crime - the study of so-called media effects - rather than media representations of crime. I suggest that newspapers in general, and newspaper editorials and letters in particular, may provide a useful foundation from which to gain an insight into the broad shape of views concerning crime during the 1920s. Below I begin by outlining some key considerations involved in the analysis of crime coverage in newspapers.

Newspaper representations of crime have attracted a substantial amount of research. Yet the bulk of this work has been directed towards determining the effect of the media on the public’s attitude to crime. The newspaper’s role in imposing upon an impressionable public false account of crime has occupied the attention of researchers; the notion that the newspaper may serve as material simply for gaining an insight into

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<sup>118</sup> Henceforth referred to, respectively, as the SDT and the SDI.



prevailing notions about crime has, unfortunately, not proved so popular. Since the interwar years, when content analysis of American newspapers on a serious scientific footing first began, findings have pointed to the lack of symmetry between crime news and official crime rates (Davis, 1973; Harris, 1932; Wiseheart, 1922).<sup>119</sup> Secondly, it was suggested that the amount of crime news rather than the actual level of crime proved most influential in shaping public opinion about crime. Then, from the 1950s onwards, a number of studies showed how the mismatch between crime news and criminal statistics arose out of the bureaucratic processes of news selection (Antunes & Hurley, 1977; Chibnall, 1975; Jones, 1976; Roshier, 1973; Tuchman, 1978).<sup>120</sup> By the late 1960s, the bulk of research had concluded that the public derived most, if not all, of their knowledge about crime from the press and that press accounts tended to present an image of crime often greatly at variance from recorded crime levels.

In the politically charged climate of the late 1960s and 1970s an emerging body of work suggested that the media put forward a view of crime that tended to represent the narrow interests of the ruling class. Moreover, the newspaper was implicated as an integral tool in the propagation of moral panics (Cohen, 1980; Hall et al., 1978; Young, 1971). What emerges in all these accounts is that newspaper representations of crime are held to reflect primarily the interests of the elite rather than the reading 'public' and that they offer a familiar, but limited repertoire of explanations, solutions and views about crime. It is a view that has dominated accounts of the role of both editorials and letters to the editor (LTEs). I suggest that, to the extent that these opinion pieces are alleged to represent elite views of crime, these accounts provide a useful service. At the same time, and for reasons explained above, accounts premised on a notion of top-down control and manipulation inevitably provide a skewed understanding of media representations of crime. Accordingly, I suggest that the editorial and the LTE not only

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<sup>119</sup> Wiseheart (Op. Cit., p.557) suggested that newspapers may increase their crime coverage out of all proportion to increases in crime in the belief that a crime wave is occurring. A decade later, Harris confirmed that 'crime news appears to be concentrated at irregular and unpredictable times' (Op. Cit. p.5). In his study of crime news in Colorado newspapers Davis found 'no consistent relationship between the amount of crime news in newspapers and local crime rates' (1973, p.133).

<sup>120</sup> This type of journalistic selection explained the primacy given to certain types of crime, notably those involving sex and violence. For Chibnall, 'the importance of occupational ideology and source relationships' were a vital factor in shaping crime news (Chibnall, 1975 p.63). Both the special relationship with the police and the institutional dynamics of the newsroom played a crucial part in the construction of crime news.

provide an insight into elite views of crime, but prevailing attitudes to crime more generally.

### Letters to the Editor

Though LTEs appear in many publications, they have been subjected to little systematic analysis.<sup>121</sup> The LTE provides the public with a relatively recognised and formalised channel for articulating its opinions and concerns (Morrison & Love, 1996) and functions at the interface of the public and private domains (Kress, 1986) each of which are subject to ideological, institutional and commercial influences. Whereas the views and attitudes of the public appear in other sections of the newspaper in a more or less diluted guise, the LTE presents the 'readers' opinions in their least mediated public form' (Hall et al., 1978, p. 120). To what extent does the LTE provide a valid representation of public opinion concerning crime? Two considerations need to be taken into account - the extent to which the letters reaching the editor are representative of public opinion and the role of the editor in selecting letters.

### LTEs, Public Opinion and Crime

Studies concerning LTEs have reached different conclusions about whether or not they provide accurate representations of public opinion. Traditional accounts have concluded that letter-writers are older, wealthier, better educated, more rooted in their community and more politically conservative than those who refrain from putting pen to paper (Forsythe, 1950; Foster & Friedrich, 1937; Grey & Brown, 1970; Renfro, 1979). Until recently the majority of subsequent studies have tended to conclude with Foster and Friedrich (1937) that the LTE serves as a poor instrument for measuring the attitudes of the public to social and political issues. In their study of the 1964 American presidential election, Converse *et al* (1965) found that two thirds of the 'politically relevant' letters had been written by fewer than one half of one per cent of the population. These studies seem to have validated George Gallup's assertion that letter writers are the 'articulate minority' of the general public (Gallup, 1958). Because of the seemingly atypical nature of those who write LTEs, most studies have concluded that, in the words of Grey

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<sup>121</sup> Hall's work (1978) remains the most thorough attempt to analyse both the form and function of this particular genre and to relate it to broader public attitudes towards crime.

and Brown, 'the letters columns are clearly not representative of public opinion' (1970 p.454).

More recent studies have indicated that the LTE may, after all, be more reflective of general public attitudes. Whereas the older studies were based on relatively small samples, research using large national samples has shown that letter writing is on the increase and that letter writers are not significantly different from the rest of the population (Buell, 1975; Hill, 1981; Verba et al., 1967). Hill found a close relationship between opinions expressed in letters and public opinion generally, suggesting that 'letter writers share the opinions of their neighbours who do not write letters'. He suggested this to be a recent phenomenon, resulting from the likelihood that an overall increase in the number of letters written increased the chances of a more representative selection of public opinion. Where the public is provoked into writing fewer letters, the greater the chance such letters are unrepresentative (Hill, 1981, p. 385).

The extent to which the LTE is representative of public opinion may also be linked to the type of issue addressed. An issue that provokes a greater quantity of mail will increase the likelihood that a representative sample of the population will advance its opinions. Conversely, particular issues may appeal to a specific section or interest group and, in turn, provoke letters from an unrepresentative cross section of the public. Additionally, as Hill notes, the 'importance' of an issue may influence the type of responses. Whereas the views of letter-writers on established issues tend to be straightforward and polarised a 'less visible, emerging issue is likely to inspire fewer letter writers, and those who do write may express opinions which are ambiguous or idiosyncratic until the issue's battle lines are clearly drawn' (Ibid, p.391)

Others argue the necessity of first understanding the nature of 'public opinion'. For Cohen and Young, public opinion about crime is foremost a product created out of the 'manufacture of news'. News representations of crime serve to define for a diffuse and segregated audience

what the consensus actually is and what is the nature of the deviation from it...They [the mass media] conjure up for each group with its limited stock of social knowledge, what 'everyone else' believes. They counterpose the reification of 'the average man' against the reality of individual group experience (Cohen, 1973, p.83).

Similarly, for Hall *et al*, public opinion does not simply exist ready made, from which the media can draw views and ideas. Rather, public opinion represents the crystallisation of a process whereby knowledge, rumour and lay opinion - which are already 'penetrated' by the dominant ideologies - are selectively taken-up and structured by the communicative networks of the media. 'The more such an issue passes into the public domain, via the media, the more it is structured by the dominant ideologies about crime' (Ibid. p.136). For Hall *et al* LTEs, then, serve to shape rather than simply represent public opinion. Moreover, the LTE is mobilised as part of a broader effort to mould public debate. This particular medium is all the more powerful, 'because it appears to be in the readers keeping and done with his or her consent and participation' (p.121). Furthermore, by aiming for a certain 'balance' in the spectrum of letters published, the newspaper can sustain the belief that it is open to views about which it does not necessarily approve. In this respect letters form a part of the 'democratic image' of the press, which serves to disguise an underlying manipulative agenda (ibid.).

### The Editor as 'Gatekeeper'

A number of writers have highlighted the role of the editor as 'gatekeeper', manning the point between the private domain of the letter writer and the public domain of institutional interest. Whilst the editor has little control over the number, variety and content of letters submitted, the 'selection of these letters is ultimately in the hands of the Editor' (Hall, 1978, p.120). Typically the editor selects concise and well-written contributions (Ericson et al., 1989). However, again, a more manipulative role has often been attributed to the editor in the selection of letters. Grey *et al* conclude that 'whatever feeling was discernible in print reflected less that of the community, or possibly even of the majority of letter writers, than that of the editors' (1970, p.453). True to type, Hall attributes a more sinister role to the editor in his dealings with the reader's letter. The newspaper deploys letters in order to lend weight to its own interpretation of events. Their principal function is 'to help the press organise and orchestrate the debate about public questions' (Hall *et al*, 1978, p.121). For Hall *et al* the LTE is employed as part of a broader, covert endeavour by the press and hegemonic institutions under which the press is held in sway. Letters are manipulated, opinion is orchestrated. Dominant ideas about crime are reproduced in a top down manner. In this

way, those LTEs dealing with crime are chosen for their 'traditionalist' approach to the issue of crime and punishment. Those which explain crime and disorder in terms of individual depravity as opposed to 'structural' causes and which demand measures directed to reinforcing 'law and order', are the kinds of LTE that will be selected by the editor.

Subsequent studies have tended to question this conspiratorial characterisation of the relationship between the editor and reader's letters. Several writers have shown how the themes dealt with in the LTEs are just as likely to reflect those issues which have been dealt with in previous newspaper editions - particularly those appearing on front page and editorials (Davis and Rarick 1961; Romanow *et al* 1985; Ericson *et al* 1989). For Morrison and Love, the LTE offers an important 'site for the articulation of new groupings and objectives...forming their own voice distinct from the "ventriloquizing" of the political leadership' (Morrison & Love, 1996, p. 67-69). In his analysis of letters to the editor of the Times concerning the conduct of the First World War, Reeves (1996) suggests that LTEs 'provide[d] the means by which the ordinary people - the relatives of those killed in particular [were able to] express their views'.

#### The 'editorial' or 'leader' column

Like LTEs, editorials have also been the subject of little systematic analysis. A number of writers have directed their attention to the content patterns of editorials (Fowler, 1991; Hynds, 1990; Windhauser, 1973; 1983) while others have been concerned with editorial coverage of specific issues, notably politics (Davis & Rarick, 1961; Myers, 1968; 1970). However, few accounts have dealt with editorial portrayal of crime.

The content of the editorial column reflects its specific function as the voice of the newspaper and the more obvious institutional, commercial and political interests therein represented (Hall, Op. Cit.). The editorial has both an explanatory and judgmental role. In the former case, the editorial may have recourse to various explanations about, for example, crime and sentencing. In practice, however, a number of factors operate to restrict the range of accounts from which editorials choose to draw. For Hall, implicit theories of human nature and society provide the template upon which such rationalisations are constructed. Accordingly, editorials tend to offer volitional as opposed to structural explanations of crime and in so doing serve to reproduce the dominant power relations (Barlow *et al.*, 1995a; Scheingold, 1992; Wykes, 1995). In

editorials, as in LTEs, traditionalist or 'law and order' solutions to crime are given precedence over those that advance ameliorative or reformatory treatment of offenders.

Editorial content also operates on a subtler, textual level whereby deviance is censured and, in turn, traditional social norms are reinforced (Wykes, 1995; Young, 1994; Young, 1988b). The editorial achieves this by employing a common repertoire of 'discursive strategies' that serves to construct the newspaper and leader column's claimed authority. As Fowler tells us, although all texts are discursive constructions offering values and beliefs, what is distinctive about the newspaper editorial is that it 'employ[s] textual strategies which foreground the speech act of offering values and beliefs' (Fowler, 1991, p. 209). This range of techniques, as Fowler notes, works by 'mak[ing] salient the illusion of utterance by an authoritative speaker, addressing a particular kind of reader embraced in an 'us' relationship and taking a particular marked stance in relation to the persons ('them') and topics referred to. In this way the editorial serves to both represent the more narrow interests of the paper and reproduce the broader ideologies of society' (Ibid. p.221).

The editorial column provides the means by which the editor can express his belief that 'something should be done' about crime. Major news stories provide the primary material for most editorials. The fact that editorials deal with the issue of crime is itself revealing of the newspapers' regard for the importance of this issue. As Hall et al remark '...the decision to produce an editorial at all is some indication of the significance accorded to such stories by the newspapers' (Op. Cit. p.89). However, possibly just as instructive is the absence of discussion about crime. Like 'the dog that didn't bark,' the editor who declines to address the issue of crime may tell us much about the significance attached to it.

### Editorials, LTEs and Perceptions of Crime

Editorials and LTEs, I suggest, offer an insight into the both the conceptualisation of crime amongst the local elite and dominant attitudes to crime more generally. One does not have to hold to the conspiratorial conception of the media advanced by Hall *et al* to recognise that the media does tend to reflect elite ideas about crime. Editorials are characterised by an imperious and judgmental view of events and issues. They are also conspicuous in their promotion of sectional interests, be they related to those of class,

politics or religion, for instance. Accordingly, in their biased representation of particular views, the editorial provides a useful device by which to observe elite views of crime. For its part, the LTE represents the outlook of the 'articulate minority' of the public and perhaps the sectional interests that they may strive to advance through the medium of the LTE. At the same time, I suggest that editorials and LTEs are also representative of dominant attitudes to crime more generally. While many studies have asserted the element of bias, 'structured representation', and selectivity in the character and content of editorials and LTEs, I take a more balanced approach. A central organising principle of this study is that newspapers do not simply determine the ideas of the public but are themselves partly a manifestation of broader perceptions within society. It is important to recognise that the ideas and opinions advanced by the newspaper editorial are constrained by the range of available ideas and concerns of that same public. In other words, press coverage and editorial opinion that is sufficiently out of step with the outlook of the readership will be judged negatively in the market place. As John Whale observes, '[t]he broad shape and nature of the press is ultimately determined by no one but its readers' because newspapers must reflect their readers views and wants in order to survive in a competitive market-place' (Whale, 1977, p.85). Editorials and LTEs reflect sectional views of crime, but they also necessarily represent important strands of public opinion more generally.

Though the media do represent the dominant outlook of the elite, it does not necessarily follow that they also promote a 'volitional' as opposed to 'structural' view of crime. Nor do I support the claim that newspapers in general, and editorials and LTEs in particular, promote an alarmist view about the extent of crime or demand punitive solutions. Rather, I suggest, particular attitudes about crime in any period can only be determined by analysing the precise articulation of such views in their historic and contextual specificity. It is this approach that I adopt in my effort to outline the perceptions of crime in two Sheffield newspapers during the 1920s.

### Content Analysis of Newspapers

Those engaged in the analysis of media content have been able to draw upon a wide body of 'content analysis' techniques. Holsti defines content analysis as the use of 'systematic techniques for the objective study of characteristics of messages' (Holsti, 1969). Traditional analyses of media content have adopted quantitative techniques in the

belief that they provide 'a way of obtaining data to measure the frequency and extent, if not the meaning, of messages' (Berelson, 1971, p. 15). Quantitative techniques have proved particularly attractive to those interested in determining the influence of the media on public perceptions of crime. Accordingly, quantitative measures of data have usually been compared to external referents such as recorded crime rates (Davis, 1952), police clear-up rates (Marsh, 1991) or opinion polls and surveys (Williams and Dickenson, 1993). In this way, content analysis translates the 'frequency of occurrence of certain symbols into summary judgements... the greater the space and/or time, the greater the meaning's significance' (Starosta, 1984, p. 185). For many researchers, these techniques offer 'an objective and quantitative estimate of certain message attributes, hopefully free of the subjective bias of the reviewer' (Dominick, 1996, p. 106).

More recent contributions have questioned the 'positivistic assumptions' concerning the degree of objectivity within quantitative approaches. For many, quantitative methods serve merely to impose the constructs and categories of the researcher on the material they are investigating (Cicourel, 1968; Dale, 1988; Garfinkel, 1967). Rather than offering a valid picture of the world, their efforts serve only to distort it. As Reiner remarks,

they are neither randomly plucked out of thin air, nor do they miraculously reflect some singular structure of meaning objectively inherent in the texts analysed. They always embody some theoretical presuppositions of the researcher about criteria of significance (Reiner, 1997, p. 193).

Quantitative techniques have also proved insensitive to the contextual dimension of the documentary material. In other words, the attempt to relate newspaper representations of crime to broader issues has been marked by several limitations. For example, little attention has been directed towards understanding how newspaper representations of crime may be influenced by attitudes towards issues unrelated to crime. Where this has been attempted, the approach has been rather mechanistic. For example Barlow *et al* sought to determine the influence of changes in the condition of the 'political economy' on the newspaper representation of crime (Barlow *et al.*, 1995a). By charting alterations in the economic cycle to changes in the way newspapers explain crime and advance measures to deal with criminals they suggest that newspaper representations of crime reflect changes in the economy. Unfortunately, this approach



ensures that the relationship between the newspaper portrayal of crime and broader issues remains rather deterministic.

A further weakness of many of these studies results from the criteria employed for the selection of crime reports. The report is inevitably chosen on the basis that it be completely or substantially about crime (Scheingold, Op Cit; Barlow *et al*, Op Cit; Hall, Op. Cit.). However, this approach has the effect of excluding those references to crime which, although a secondary element of the news item, may nevertheless provide us with important insights into the way crime is perceived by the public. For example, crime may provide the ancillary theme or subsidiary issue in a newspaper item directed predominantly to the issue of housing reform or unemployment. Yet, the portrayal of crime may just as likely be shaped by the attitude towards the perceived evil effects of slums or the lack of work as it is by the attitude towards crime itself. In other words, the subject of crime may be drawn upon to support claims relating to the primary issue of the opinion piece. By excluding these items from analysis, one is denied access to a potentially important resource for determining perceptions of crime. A number of writers utilising quantitative techniques have attempted to address these limitations. A common solution has been to devise categories where the aim is to take account of the contextual nature of crime reports.<sup>122</sup> Such an approach has been adopted in this study.

### The Data Sample

Table 3.1  
Letter and editorials coded for the study sample

	SDT	SDI	Total (%)
LTE	114	142	256 (68.3)
Editorials	56	63	119 (31.7)
Total (%)	170 (45.3)	205 (54.7)	375 (100)

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<sup>122</sup> For example, in his study of the politicisation of street crime Scheingold (1992) distinguished between two types of crime reports: 'straight crime reports' and those that raised 'policy issues'.

Two local daily newspapers were chosen for this study: Sheffield Daily Telegraph (SDT) and Sheffield Daily Independent (SDI). Pearson Chi-squares were calculated to assess the degree of association among a range of key variables.<sup>123</sup> The analysis also utilised simple percentages to determine comparative values. Because the analysis drew upon the whole population, a significance level of  $p < .05$  was used. A total of 375 references to crime were coded. Of these 119 were editorial comments and 256 LTEs. The Sheffield Daily Telegraph accounted for 170 articles while the Sheffield Daily Independent accounted for 205 references to crime.

The newspapers were selected for their consistency - they appeared for six days of the week, Monday to Saturday, for each of the eight years studied, with daily letter and editorial columns. Each maintained a large and regular readership throughout the 1920s. Both newspapers published an average of eight reader's letters daily, the majority of which went in without cuts, unless otherwise stated, representing just a fraction of the many letters received by the editor and available for publication.<sup>124</sup> Given that each newspaper had a circulation approaching a hundred thousand one can assume that neither felt the need to concoct their own letters<sup>125</sup>. The years 1921 through to 1928 were chosen for analysis. This period was selected for the simple reason that although the decade of the 1920s forms our general period of investigation, analysing all the newspaper editions for the full ten years (approximately 6,240 editions) would have entailed a claim on resources for data collection greater than were available. A period of eight years promised to be more within the reach of the project's resources without having any negative impact upon reliability.

The findings of a pilot study indicated a low frequency of references to crime throughout the selected time period. Therefore it was decided that consecutive time

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<sup>123</sup> *SPSS for Windows* was used for the analysis.

<sup>124</sup> The task of reading and compiling these letters fell to the Assistant Editor. By the turn of the century, 'as many as sixty of these letters [would] come in a single day' to the offices of the Sheffield Daily Telegraph (Leng, 1893, p. 12).

<sup>125</sup> Veteran journalist and former Editor of the Sheffield Star, Peter Harvey wrote that, to his knowledge, all of the letters that were published in the Sheffield newspapers were largely genuine and unedited: 'The myth about journalists concocting bogus letters to the editor is just that: a myth... The fact is that when a newspaper has a sale of 100,000...the problem it has is not attracting readers' letters but trying to get a reasonable proportion of them into print. They all don't get in by any means...In short, you can be 99.9 per cent certain that the readers letters in both the Telegraph and the Independent were genuine, and in the 1920s, the chances are that most of them went in as written, without cuts. The only cuts would have been because something was possibly libellous, or in doubtful taste' (Harvey, personal correspondence).

periods should form the basis of the analysis as opposed to the use of a sample.<sup>126</sup> Although this entailed the analysis of every newspaper edition (approximately 5,000), it helped to maximise reliability. Furthermore, because I was interested in a time-series analysis of the content of the individual newspapers, I required a relatively large number of consecutive time periods for which there existed news-crime data. I therefore adopted an approach similar to that utilised by Pritchard *et al* (1991) creating a series of 32 three-monthly intervals - January through March; April through June; July through September; October through December - from the start of 1921 to the end of 1928. Again, such an approach facilitated the maximisation of coding resources while retaining data reliability.<sup>127</sup>

A central organising principle of the study is that of historical and contextual specificity. That is, the concepts and categories that one employs in order to organise and make sense of the empirical data must derive from the specific context under investigation (Wood, 1991; Young, 1988a). It is a principle that I have applied to formulating the categories used in the content analysis. In addition to a thorough grounding in the historical and social context of the documentary material, it was necessary to avoid becoming trapped in the analysis by using pre-set categories. Accordingly I adopt what Altheide calls progressive theoretical sampling - 'the selection of material based on emerging understanding of the topic under investigation' (Op. Cit. p.33-4).

A data collection protocol was constructed to provide both numeric and narrative data collection categories for (a) *newspaper* - whether SDT or SDI; (b) *date* of newspaper contribution; (c) *source* - whether letter or editorial; (d) *location* of the crime referred to; (e) type of *crime*; (f) *crime rate* - whether judged to be increasing or otherwise; (g) whether crime viewed as a '*problem*'; (h) *issue* - whether crime main or subsidiary theme of contribution; (j) *action* - whether or not it is argued 'something should be done' about crime; (k) kind of *measures* demanded.

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<sup>126</sup> Preliminary analysis indicated that discussion of crime in editorials and reader's letters was often concentrated at irregular intervals in response to the incidence of events or previous newspaper contributions. Yet a simple random or stratified sample would fail to pick up these infrequent and uneven references to crime.

<sup>127</sup> In their study Pritchard *et al* utilised 96 four-monthly intervals from 1948 to 1978.

A 'reference to crime' is defined, after Windhauser *et al* (1990, p. 72-3), as any item concerning law breaking by adults or juveniles and those items referring to crime, criminals, crime prevention, prosecution and increases or decreases in crime rate. I define 'crime' as the infraction of officially defined rules appropriate to the 1920s, i.e. 'crime' refers to that which was recorded as such by the Home Office during the period under scrutiny. I also construct a number of categories of 'crime' which are derived from the accounts within letters to the editor and editorial comments. Examples are '*gang affray*', '*riot*', and '*sexual*' crime. The criteria for allocating an illegal act to a particular category are determined not by the outcome of any judicial or criminal process but by the portrayal of the act within the LTE or editorial. For example, a case referred to in an editorial as one of drunkenness may be officially defined as vagrancy and accordingly charged or tried as such in court. However, the perception of crime with which we are concerned is that of the editorial. The category '*general*' deals with crime where no specific reference is made to the particular type of crime involved. '*Other*' refers to those crimes not included in any of the above officially defined categories.

The same consideration of specificity was taken into account when devising categories for geographical location of the reference to crime. The categories utilised were similar to those employed by Windhauser (Op. Cit.), but modified to suit the British context. The crime was coded according to its origin: '*Local*' (within the Sheffield County boundary), '*National*' (outside Sheffield but within the United Kingdom but excluding Ireland), '*International*' (crime outside the United Kingdom). It was decided that the two categories '*Local*' and '*Elsewhere*' employed by Scheingold (1990) were too narrow to account for the range of references to crime that the pilot study indicated were present. A further consideration when choosing the appropriate categories for the content analysis is that they are applicable to both editorials and LTEs.<sup>128</sup>

The analysis was directed at crime coverage in letters to the editor and editorial comments. All other crime coverage in the remaining sections of the newspaper was excluded from this analysis. An editorial is defined as 'an unsigned institutional opinion

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<sup>128</sup> For example, in his analysis of letters in 100 local British newspapers, Pearson (1975) classified each LTE according to 'comments and polemic', 'adverse criticism', 'favourable criticism', 'reactions' and 'others'. While possibly of use when employed in analysing letters to the editor such categories are of limited use when directed to analysing the content of editorial contributions.

on an issue or event that appeared in approximately the same place on the editorial page each day' (Hynds, 1990, p. 303). A letter to the editor refers to those readers' contributions that appeared in the letters column of the respective newspaper. The content analysis of the news-piece was undertaken as follows. First, the item was categorised according to whether the reference to crime was the '*main*' or '*subsidiary*' theme of the contribution. Where the first category indicated the extent to which crime was believed to warrant attention in its own right, the second category highlighted the degree to which the issue of crime was mobilised in order to draw attention to other issues. Where crime was the subsidiary theme a further series of categories allowed us to determine the type of context within which crime was discussed and the type of demands advocated in the LTE or editorial. The categories covering the types of changes demanded included '*criminal justice*' and '*legislative*' solutions implemented through '*remedial*', '*punitive*' or '*due process*' measures. Two further categories were created in order to determine whether it was believed crime was or was not a problem, and whether crime was increasing. Each of these consisted of straightforward '*Yes*', '*No*' and '*Neutral*' responses.

### Qualitative Techniques

While quantitative-based approaches provide a basis for the identification of *general* contextual themes, subsequent analysis is directed to the more detailed textual analysis of the material. Much of this utilises less formalistic methods of enquiry, with an emphasis upon the more literal interpretation of the material. Such qualitative document analysis techniques accordingly facilitate the possibility of attaining a more concrete level of analysis.

Qualitative techniques of content analysis have been utilised by those seeking an alternative to the 'positivist' assumptions of traditional newspaper analysis. Qualitative analysis lays particular importance upon the role of context in determining the precise meaning of the newspaper content. Accordingly, it is concerned with 'understanding the meaning of communication that is manifest and latent within the context of the [writer's] own frame of reference' (Mostyn, 1985, p. 118). Context refers to the social situations within which the document is placed. This may refer to the organisational factors involved in the creation of the newspaper piece, as discussed above. It may also involve an appreciation of the political and cultural influences upon the newspaper contributors

and editors. For example, the backdrop to the two Sheffield daily newspapers that I examine below was marked by intense contestation across a range of political and moral issues.

The major function of qualitative document analysis', remark Glazer and Strauss (1967), 'is to capture the meanings, emphasis, and the themes of the messages'. A range of techniques has been developed in order to narratively describe the content of the contributions. This may proceed either by establishing general themes and areas of interest from the material. It may also involve the use of more detailed semiotic or lexical methods of analysis. It is important to bear in mind, however, that quantitative and qualitative techniques are not mutually exclusive. Though recognising the limitations of quantitative techniques, it 'does not mean', Reiner argues, 'that analysis of content is impossible, or that quantification is necessarily misleading'. He suggests that any reading of content implies some degree of quantification. What is important is that the concepts utilised should be acknowledged to derive from the observer's frame of reference, according to specific criteria. 'They need to be interpreted reflexively and tentatively as one possible reading' (Reiner, 1997).

Altheide offers a bridge between both quantitative and qualitative approaches by utilising a number of useful methodological tools. Primarily these include the schematic interpretative categories 'frames' and 'themes', both of which 'are crucial in defining situations and provide much of the rationale for document analysis' (Altheide, 1996, p. 31). Accordingly, I suggest that quantitative-based approaches still offer a useful avenue where the analysis of crime reports in newspaper has the relatively modest aim of providing a platform for the identification of *general* contextual themes associated with the perception of crime. Similarly, qualitative document analysis can provide valuable insights and raise interesting questions about newspaper opinion pieces.

Altheide notes that 'any attempt to look backwards from a text towards the author's motivation is rich with problems' (Ibid, p.8). Following his work, I suggest that analysis should proceed on two levels. First, an understanding of the historical and social setting, independent of the content of the document itself, is required. For example, it is necessary that one should gain an insight into the organisational and ideological interests of the newspaper and be familiar with the characters of its contributors and proprietors. At the same time it is necessary to view news content reflexively rather than statically, constantly to revise categories by recursive processes of reviewing data. Altheide

describes this as the 'double-loop of analysis' - or more prosaically, the need to revisit what seem useful data in order to clarify and develop one's concepts and categories:

These meanings and patterns seldom appear all at once, however; rather, they *emerge* or become more clear through constant comparison and investigation of the documents over a period of time (Altheide, 1996, p.10)

In order to assemble and interpret the data, a number of categories were constructed according to conceptually relevant criteria. I utilise what Altheide refers to as 'frames' and 'themes'. A frame is a 'schematic of interpretation' that enables the analyst to locate, perceive, identify and label 'occurrences of information' (Goffman, 1974, Quoted in Altheide, Ibid, p.31). As such the frame provides a 'focus, a parameter or boundary, for discussing a particular event' (Altheide, p.31). The term 'theme' refers to interpretative frames. Crime may be placed, for example, within the 'criminal justice', 'class', or 'medicalised' frame. 'Degeneration', 'progress', and 'anxiety' provide possible examples of themes. Frames are a kind of 'super-theme' while 'certain themes become appropriate if particular frames are adopted' (Ibid. p.32). For example, the criminal justice frame may imply a discourse of punishment. Accordingly, themes of sympathy, leniency, and optimism may seem inappropriate. The same frame may just as readily imply a discourse of care, and rehabilitation. In such a case the themes of moral anxiety, fear, and reaction may equally seem out of place. What is important is that both categories are defined according to explicit criteria and are drawn from the specific context under scrutiny.<sup>129</sup>

### The Newspapers

From the mid-nineteenth century until the 1930s two local companies dominated Sheffield newspapers. The first, headed by Robert Leader and sons, published the Sheffield Daily Independent and, from 1920 to 1928, an evening paper, the Sheffield Mail. The 'Independent' was, founded in 1819 by Henry Arthur Bacon. Under the leadership of Thomas Asline Ward, a Unitarian and ardent Benthamite, the paper

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<sup>129</sup> In this regard Altheide is surely mistaken when he suggests that the criminal justice frame inevitably 'implies a discourse of punishment' (Ibid. p.31) The point is that this is only so in historically given circumstances and that an awareness of the contextual nature of the material is required in order to determine this.

established itself as a champion of religious freedom, free-trade and local improvement. This commitment to political radicalism and religious non-conformity was sustained and intensified when in 1829 the Leader family acquired the paper.<sup>130</sup> Under the direction of Robert Leader Junior the 'Independent' established itself as Sheffield's biggest selling paper, becoming a daily on 1 October 1861. Although they continued to be major shareholders of the Independent Group of newspapers, the Leader family relinquished control of the 'Independent' and retired to North London when *Sheffield Independent Press Ltd* was formed in 1895. During the inter-war decades the editorship passed through several hands.<sup>131</sup> In the pages of both the Independent and its sister paper, the Mail, the Leader family displayed a sustained and partisan commitment to the Liberal Party. At the same time the Independent adopted a strident opposition to both the parliamentary and municipal varieties of coalition Liberalism during the post war years. They were Methodists and ardent temperance advocates, firmly opposed to any relaxation in the licensing laws and strident campaigners against the social problems that inebriety was believed to encourage.

Those who controlled the rival newspaper, the Sheffield Daily Telegraph and its evening paper the Yorkshire Telegraph and Star proved equally firm champions of the Conservative Party and anti-temperance causes. The Telegraph had been established in 1855 by Joseph Pearce and was the first penny provincial daily in England. In 1863 the paper was sold to Mr W.C. Leng and Mr Frederick Clifford, each of whose sons were to control the company until the mid 1920s. With Leng as the dynamic force, the Telegraph had established itself as an equally strident champion of various causes. It was Leng who was largely responsible for the uncovering of a range of violent, though hardly novel, trade union practices that became known as the Sheffield 'Outrages' in the mid-1860s. His moral crusade against these activities led to the securing of a Royal Commission

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<sup>130</sup> Robert Leader senior acquired the Independent in 1829, which passed to his son Robert Eadon Leader four years later. Leader was a Congregationalist and became Secretary of Sheffield Anti-Corn law Association. From 1886 to 1892 he was a Liberal town councillor and a parliamentary candidate in 1892 and 1895. As Read notes the 'paper was more radical than either of its two contemporaries [the Manchester Guardian and the Leeds Mercury], just as Sheffield was more truly radical than either Manchester or Leeds... In Sheffield the structure of the cutlery trade encouraged a more genuine and persistent radicalism' (Read, 1961, p. 177).

<sup>131</sup> In 1909 William Wilson Chisholm (1853-1935) succeeded John Derry as Editor. He maintained this position until 1919, and a year later became the founding editor of the Independent's sister paper, the Sheffield Mail, a position he maintained until 1923. Valentine Heywood became editor of the Independent in 1923, until succeeded in 1925 by George Victor Rose.



(Pollard, 1971).<sup>132</sup> Throughout its existence the Telegraph proved a loyal and vociferous supporter of the Conservative Party, a fact that did not go unnoticed by the Party leadership.<sup>133</sup> In 1902 the Telegraph organisation was set up as a private limited company under the name 'Sir W.C. Leng and Co. Ltd'. On the Board of Directors were the two sons of each proprietor, Christopher David Leng and W. St. Q. Leng, Major Arthur Clifford and Colonel Charles Clifford.<sup>134</sup> George Edward Stembridge was appointed General manager and Secretary.<sup>135</sup> By the time the control of the paper was passed on to the sons in the early 1900s the Telegraph had become one of the largest and best-equipped newspaper offices in the country. Though a provincial newspaper, it was one that, like its rival, aspired to national importance. Telegraph editorials were devoted almost exclusively to national and international affairs, tending to avoid the triviality of local issues. By the late nineteenth century the Telegraph had on its list 240 correspondents. It also maintained a large London office on the corner of Fleet Street and Fetter Lane which, as Guthrie has noted, 'kept the Sheffield offices in close touch with Parliamentary affairs, London and foreign news and advertising' (Guthrie, 1970, p.55). The London premises also served as a despatch office for the 7,300 parcels of papers that were being sent off each week from Sheffield to the rest of the country. The newspaper was widely read and, asserted its proprietor, 'was valued by keen politicians in and out of parliament, all over England' (Leng, 1893, p. 20). During the 1920s the Board of Directors ensured that the Telegraph maintained its tradition of unwavering loyalty to the Conservative Party, a policy actively pursued in the public work of the proprietors themselves.<sup>136</sup> As chairman of the Brightside Division, Colonel Sir Charles Clifford took a leading role in the activities of the Conservative Party during the 1920s. His role as a political leader complemented his work as a political writer. As his obituary

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<sup>132</sup> A subsequent tribute to Leng proclaimed that he 'relieved Sheffield of the terrorism under which it had been almost spell bound for so long' (Leng, 1905, p.45).

<sup>133</sup> Lord Salisbury referred to the SDT in 1884 as 'that admirable newspaper which has done so much for the Conservative cause' (Leng, 1894, p.20).

<sup>134</sup> Sir Charles Clifford (1861-1936) was Chairman of the Telegraph and former Commander of the Sheffield Territorial Artillery in France. Christopher David Leng held a number of public responsibilities including that of Children's Court magistrate

<sup>135</sup> An active Wesleyan Methodist George Edward Stembridge was also Conservative member of the Citizen's Association and councillor for the St. Peter's Ward in the city. He was appointed magistrate in 1917 and, in 1923, joined the Sheffield Rotary Club of which he became a leading member.

<sup>136</sup> Colonel Sir Charles Clifford was active worker for the Conservative Party being Chairman of the Brightside Divisional Association.

noted, '[a]lthough chiefly concerned with the business side of the paper, Mr Clifford also took a prominent part in moulding the policy expressed in its editorial columns'.<sup>137</sup> The editorial column of the paper provided a forum for expressing his political views, and his regular daily meeting with the editor helped to ensure that this would be the case.<sup>138</sup>

During the 1920s the editor of the Telegraph was John Oakley. He had risen from the reporting staff of the Sports Department, which he joined in 1899 to become, as his obituary subsequently claimed, 'one of the best known editors in provincial journalism'.<sup>139</sup> In 1905 he was made Assistant Editor whereupon he commenced to write the daily column *Current Topics*, a duty he faithfully attended throughout his period as editor of the newspaper, a position he attained in 1912 taking over from Mr D.M. Sutherland. The column took the form of a polemical editorial, or 'leaderette', a style that functioned to advance to political views of the newspaper but in a more strident and parochial tone than the sober editorial comments. Through his column, Oakley championed the interests of the Conservative Party and big business in the city and proved a vehement opponent of the Liberal and socialist causes, continually provoking the wrath of each.<sup>140</sup> His ability to translate his impassioned political convictions into effective prose first brought him on to the staff of the Telegraph. His first position was as an assistant to cover the General Election that was pending and since that time, as his obituary noted, 'he was at his best during an election fight'.<sup>141</sup> 'Mr Current Topics', as his opponents knew him, also advanced a strident municipal patriotism, one that gave

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<sup>137</sup> Sheffield Daily Telegraph, Friday 6 March 1936, p.7.

<sup>138</sup> In his tribute to Clifford John Oakley wrote in "Current Topics", '[f]or many years we met him practically every day. It was his custom to wait until we came in to start a night's work in order that he might discuss that day's paper and talk over that for the next day. Sometimes the interview might last ten minutes, or it might run to more than an hour, but it was never missed unless one or the other happened to be away'. Sheffield Daily Telegraph, Friday 6 March 1936, p.6.

<sup>139</sup> A Norfolk man by birth, Oakley began his career with the Cheshire Advertiser and Echo, published by the Cheshire Daily Echo, after which he became a sub-editor at the Stockport head-office. In 1899 he joined the sports staff at Sheffield Telegraph publications and subsequently was associated with the Weekly News and Sunday Telegraph – also publications of the Leng company. Obituary Sheffield Telegraph and Star, 15 January 1945.

<sup>140</sup> Oakley's obituary noted that 'his work was... sufficiently vigorous to draw to himself the wrath of the leaders of the Liberal Party in Sheffield.' Sir William Clegg, leader of the Liberals, declared the Current Topics column 'a disgrace to local journalism' (*Ibid.*). For their part the Socialists and Communists regarded the paper with particular distaste, manifested in the events during the 'Black Friday' disturbances of 12 August 1921 when radicals and unemployed workers attacked the 'Telegraph' offices in the High Street (see Chapter 5, Sheffield Daily Telegraph 13 August 1921).

<sup>141</sup> *Ibid.*

voice to, and in turn buttressed, the ordinary Sheffielder's belief in his town's untrammelled superiority.<sup>142</sup>

During the 1920s the Independent boasted a daily circulation of 90 thousand, while the Telegraph countered with similar figures.<sup>143</sup> The decade was marked by intense competition within the newspaper industry and consolidation inevitably followed. In 1925 the Telegraph passed into the hands of Lord Kemsley's Allied Newspapers. Traditional rivalries between the two papers continued into the next decade. However, these proved incapable of preventing further moves towards consolidation, and in 1938 the Independent finally merged with the Telegraph.

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<sup>142</sup> This particular idiosyncrasy struck George Orwell during his visit in the 1930s: 'Sheffield, I suppose, could justly claim to be called the ugliest town in the Old World: its inhabitants, who want it to be pre-eminent in everything, very likely do make claim for it' (Orwell, 1937, p. 95).

<sup>143</sup> These figures should be treated with some caution. Official circulation figures were not collected and maintained in the UK until the Audit Bureau of Circulations was established in 1932. Accordingly, there are no officially recorded figures available for 20th century newspapers prior to 1932. Most national newspapers and the majority of the major provincial and regional papers tended to maintain their own figures and use them in advertising and promotion, although some simply used the number of issues printed rather than the net sales in adverts. The "Newspaper Press Directory" for 1924 gives the figure of 90,000 per day for the 'Independent' (certified Net sales, three months ending June 1923). No figure is given for the 'Telegraph'.

## Chapter Four

### Research Findings

Below, I present the findings of the analysis of crime content in the editorials and letters of two Sheffield newspapers: the Sheffield Daily Telegraph and the Sheffield Daily Independent. I reveal how, in quantitative terms, crime was a marginal issue of public debate. Less than one per cent of the contributions examined referred to crime in their discussions. Editorials were nevertheless five times more likely than their readers to discuss the topic, and were less punitive in the range of solutions advocated. More detailed, textual analysis further revealed a number of distinctive sub-themes, or interpretative frames, within which letter writers and editors advanced their claims. Broader issues of degeneration, progress and class played a large part in shaping discussions of crime, while the articulation of punitive or remedial sentiments was usually determined by orientation to these broader political and social issues rather than a narrow support of humanitarianism or punishment *per se*. At the same time, the orientation to the traditional discourse of respectability and the emergent discourse of therapeutic state intervention provided a more telling index of the characterisation of crime within the contributions. The first part of the chapter is devoted to a presentation of the findings of the quantitative analysis, while the second section presents the findings of the more concrete, textual analysis of editorials and LTEs. A concluding section will then summarise the main findings in terms of the stated objectives

#### Findings of the Quantitative Analysis

In the course of the analysis an enormous amount of information was generated. The following method of presentation was therefore adopted. I commence by presenting the frequency of contributions and discuss the relative importance attributed to crime. I then consider the ways in which crime was characterised, specifically, whether crime was viewed negatively or positively, the extent to which it was believed that 'something should be done' about crime and the type of measures advocated. I then compare letter writers' attitudes to crime with those who wrote the editorials and the attitude of the nominally conservative 'Telegraph' with that of the more liberal 'Independent'.

## The Frequency of Crime-Contributions

The first point of note is how relatively few LTEs and Editorials discussed or made reference to crime. Just .84 per cent of contributions referred either incidentally or substantially, to this issue.

**Fig. 4-1**  
**Editorials and LTE's as a**  
**Percentage of total contributions**

Contribution	%
Editorials	2.38
LTE's	0.64
Total	0.84

From a total of approximately 40,000 readers' letters examined only 256 (0.64%) referred to the issue of crime.<sup>144</sup> The corresponding figure for the 5,000 editorials studied was 119 (2.38%).<sup>145</sup> Although twice as many LTEs than editorials discussed crime-related issues (256 as against 119 respectively), as a proportion of each opinion piece discussion of crime was more frequent in editorials than in LTE's. In other words, the editors of the two papers were almost five times as likely to discuss crime-related issues as the letter-writing readership.

## The characterisation of crime

A further point of interest relates to the extent that crime was regarded as a problem and the kind of measures advocated by editors and letter writers. If the editorials and letters of both newspapers are analysed as a whole, one finds that crime tended to be regarded only marginally with concern. Just over half of newspaper contributions (51.5%), depicted crime as a problem, i.e., regarded it negatively, while the remaining 48.5 per

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<sup>144</sup> On average, eight letters were published daily for each of the two newspapers. Accordingly, over the eight-year period the total for each newspaper amounted to almost 20 thousand LTEs ( $8 \times 6 \times 52 \times 8 = 19,968$ ).

<sup>145</sup> Editorials appeared on a daily basis over the eight-year period. The total of editorials for each paper amounts to 2,496 ( $6 \times 52 \times 8$ ).

cent of contributions consisted of those who responded in an optimistic fashion (16.8%), or did not advance an opinion on the issue (31.7%).

The majority of editorials and LTEs (56%) did not advance any views as to whether they believed that crime was increasing or easing in frequency. Of those that did so, almost seventy per cent of contributions did not believe crime to be increasing. The majority of contributions (63 %) asserted the need for some sort of action with changes in the realm of the criminal justice system and some type of legislative change accounting for 51.1 per cent and 30.7 per cent respectively. These were divided more or less equally between punitive and lenient (reformatory or due process) solutions.

When editorial and LTE contributions were examined according to the type of crime discussed one finds the following general pattern:

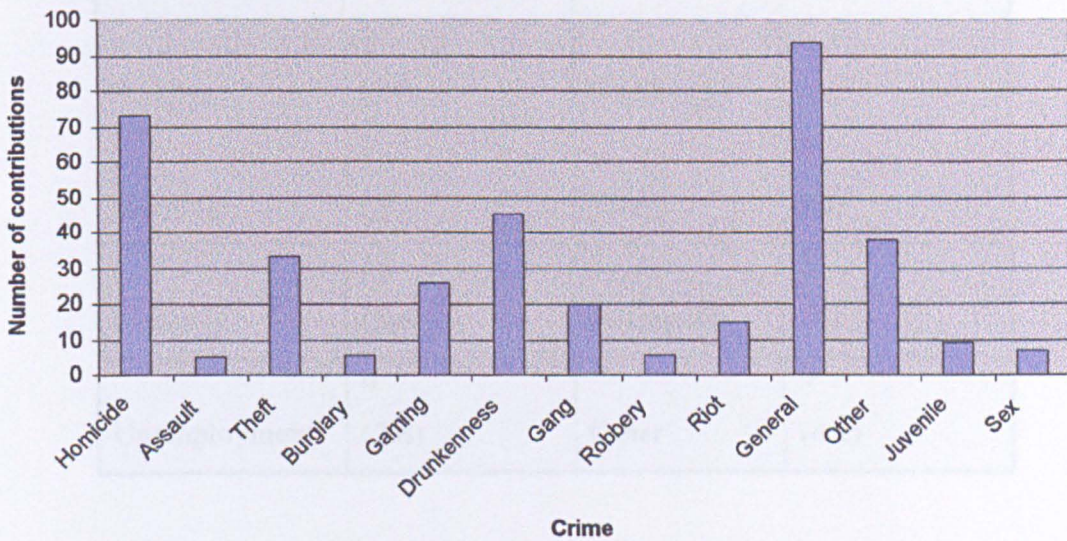
**Table 4-2**  
**Contributions according to the type of crime**

<b>Crime</b>	<b>No. Contributions (%)</b>	
Homicide	71	(18.9)
Larceny	33	(8.8)
Burglary	6	(1.6)
Gaming	26	(6.9)
Gang	20	(5.3)
Assault	5	(1.3)
Riot	15	(4.0)
Robbery	6	(.6)
General	94	(25.1)
Drunk	45	(12.0)
Sex	7	(1.9)
Juvenile	9	(2.4)
Other	38	(10.1)
<b>Total</b>	<b>375</b>	<b>(100)</b>

Those crimes falling within the categories ‘General’ and ‘Homicide’ were the most frequent, accounting for 44 per cent of the total. ‘Drunkenness’, ‘Larceny’ and ‘Other’ crimes account for a further 30.9 per cent of the total. In all, just five of the thirteen crime categories account for almost 75 per cent of contributions. Combined, those crimes within the categories ‘Burglary’, ‘Assault’, ‘Robbery’ and ‘Sex’ account for little over five per cent of the total.

**Chart 4.3**

**Types of Crime  
(both SDT and SDI)**



The contextual character of crime

The aim of determining whether crime formed a primary or ancillary topic of the contribution (labelled ‘Main’ and ‘Subsidiary’) was to establish the importance attributed to crime and the way crime was characterised in relation to the broader context. Where crime was the primary topic of the article the views expressed were expected to be more direct, polarised and opinionated. Crime as the subsidiary issue was expected to provide an insight into the everyday, taken-for-granted assumptions about crime.

**Table 4-4**  
**Crime context**

<b>Category</b>	<b>No. Contributions (%)</b>	<b>Category</b>	<b>No. Contributions (%)</b>
Criminal Justice System	108 (50)	Temperance	54 (25)
Education	3 (1.4)	Politics	11 (5.1)
Religion	4 (1.9)	Gambling	2 (.9)
Housing	2 (.9)	Youth	0 (0)
Media	12 (5.6)	Recreation	5 (2.3)
Unemployment	6 (2.8)	Other	9 (4.2)

Crime was more frequently discussed in the context of another issue (57.6 %) rather than as the main theme of the discussion (42.4%). Those issues concerning the criminal justice system and temperance related issues tended to predominate, accounting for 50 per cent and 25 per cent of the contributions respectively. There was a significant tendency for crime to be regarded in a much more favourable light when it formed the subsidiary rather than the main aspect of the contribution. In other words, where crime formed the ancillary theme of the letter or editorial crime tended not to be viewed as a problem ( $r = .28, p < .001$ ), as decreasing ( $r = .22, p < .001$ ), and for reformative measures to be sought ( $r = .43, p < .001$ ). There was an emphasis upon the implementation of legislation directed towards remedial change. It is also worth noting that although the issue of youth was frequently discussed as an ancillary theme to debates about crime,



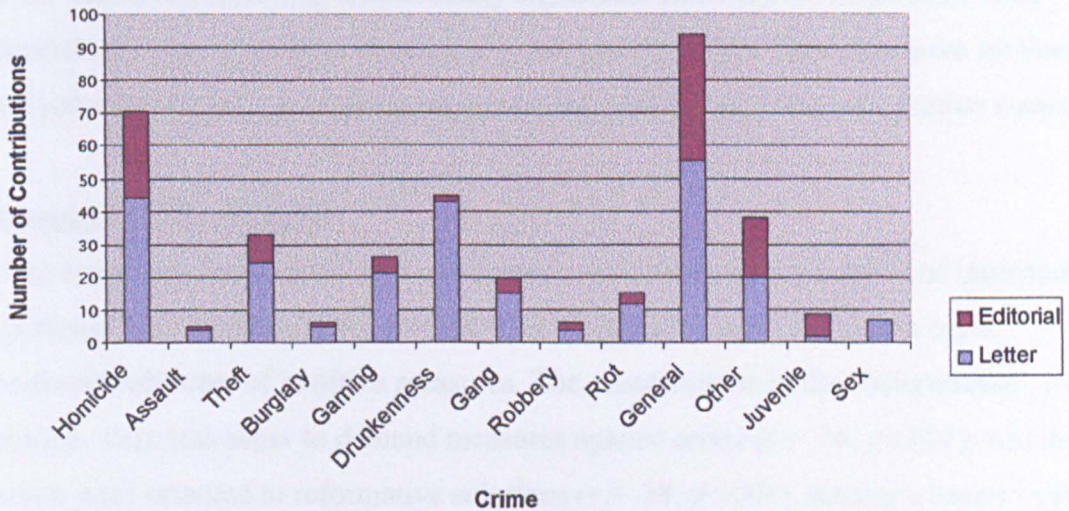
the latter was never mentioned where youth provided the primary issue of the contribution.

Representations of crime according to newspaper brand and opinion piece

In this section I examine the association between, on the one hand, the particular representations of crime and, on the other, the type of newspaper genre (LTE or Editorial) and publication (SDT or SDI). Findings from the analysis suggested that editorials tended to address the offences of homicide and juvenile crime. Discussion of crime as a general issue, as opposed to specific offences, also tended to feature in editorials rather than readers' contributions. The latter, by contrast, tended to focus on specific crimes, such as larceny, burglary, gambling, and drunkenness.

**Chart 4.5**

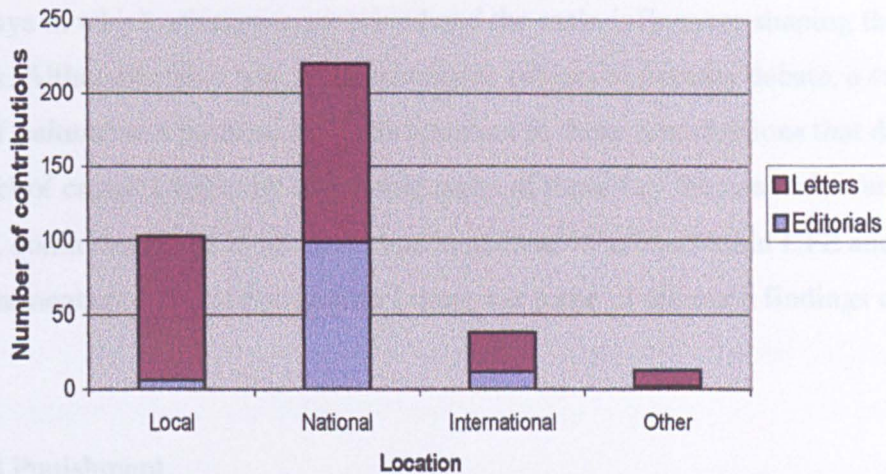
**Crime by LTE or Editorial (both SDT and SDI)**



Both 'gang' and sex-related offences were also featured in LTEs rather than leader columns. Although the majority of contributions directed their attention to offences committed outside of Sheffield, (58.7 per cent), this was most pronounced in the case of editorials. LTE's, by contrast, tend to be more concerned with local crime ( $r = .37$ ,  $p < .001$ ).

**Chart 4.6**

**LTE and Editorial by Location  
(both SDI and SDT)**



Crime tended to feature most frequently as the ancillary theme of both editorials and LTEs. However, there was a statistically significant tendency for LTEs more than editorials to view crime with concern ( $r = .14, p < .05$ ). LTE's were also more inclined than editorials to declare crime as an increasing problem and demand punitive measure.

Newspaper (SDT and SDI)

When responses between the two newspapers were compared, a number of statistically significant features were again evident. The 'Telegraph' appeared to be a more vociferous advocate of punitive measures. The contributions in the 'Independent', by contrast, were less eager to demand measures against crime ( $r = .16, p < .001$ ), and those chosen were oriented to reformative solutions ( $r = .38, p < .001$ ). Reader's letters in the 'Telegraph' displayed a greater tendency to demand action compared to both its own editorials ( $r = .40, p < .001$ ), and those letters that appear in the Independent ( $r = .25, p < .001$ ). Similarly, while LTE's were more inclined than editorials to regard crime as increasing and demand punitive measure, this feature was more pronounced in the 'Telegraph' than the 'Independent' ( $r = .20, p < .001$ ). At the same time, the tendency of editorials to argue for reformative and due process solutions was particularly pronounced in those of the 'Independent' ( $r = .51, p < .01$ ).

## Qualitative Data Analysis

In this section I undertake a more detailed, textual analysis of the findings outlined above. Using selected examples by way of illustration, I examine in some detail the principal ways in which crime was perceived and the main influences shaping these perspectives. Although crime was not a prominent subject of popular debate, a common repertoire of cultural and political issues is apparent in those contributions that did refer to the subject of crime. I begin by discussing some of these key themes and, where appropriate, comment on the distinctive representations of crime within LTE and editorial commentary. In the final section I draw out some of the main findings of the analysis.

### Reform and Punishment

Laying out the results of the quantitative analysis above I noted how criminal justice formed a recurrent contextual theme for many letters and editorials, while homicide provided one of the most common crimes. The high incidence of such contributions, particularly during 1922 and 1923, coincided with series of high-profile murder cases. The trials of Frederick Holt, Ronald True, Horatio Bottomley, Henry Jacoby and Edith Thompson featured prominently in the both the national and local press. They provided a recurrent topic for editorial and readership debate within which can be discerned a number of distinct though changing narratives about crime.

The murder cases and the subsequent judicial hearings attracted the interventions of both liberal reformers and conservatives concerning the merits of capital punishment. While abolitionists tended to wrap their arguments in the language of humanitarian concern for the welfare of the offender, the plight of the victim or the necessity of effective deterrence were utilised by their opponents.<sup>146</sup> Readers' contributions were distinguished from their editorial counterparts in that the former were inclined to offer a less mediated account of homicide and crime in general. Readers tended to be more explicit in their opinions, more punitive in tone and less tolerant of crime and criminals than their editorial counterparts. In the following LTE, the issue of capital punishment is

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<sup>146</sup> For letters that argued for the abolition of capital punishment on grounds of humanity see Sheffield Daily Independent 21 January 1921 and Sheffield Daily Telegraph 17 April 1925; 15 August 1928. On grounds of deterrence see "Capital Punishment" by "C.K.S.", SDT 11 January 1923 p3; Due Process see "The Ethics of Capital Punishment" by "One of a Minority" 15 January 1923 SDT, p3

addressed in terms of the alleged leniency of magistrates and the need for the “Cat” – recurrent concerns for letter writers throughout the 1920s:

I think we want a bit of Spartan blood in the veins of our magistrates, they are too lenient. Men have been brutalised with being at the war, and human life seems of no account. Perhaps they think that they have only once to die, and hanging only lasts a minute? Why not use the cat? Half a dozen floggings would deter men from murdering innocent men and women, apparently without cause. I wish our judges would try it<sup>147</sup>

The issue of capital punishment also provided a focus for editorial intervention, though their emphasis usually lay on the side of humanitarian reform. In one of a series of editorials concerning the True and Jacoby cases, examined in more detail below, the SDI rebuked Edward Shortt, the Home Secretary, for his failure to live up to the humanitarian ethos of the day:

Mr Shortt may have proved that in the True case he acted only as the cold legal position allowed him to act. He has also, in our opinion, proved that in the Jacoby case he failed to act as the humanitarian feeling of the present generation would have him act. Punishment must admittedly be deterrent in its effects, but we fail to see how the majesty of the law is helped by the hanging of an abnormal boy of eighteen<sup>148</sup>

The discourse of humanitarianism provides a recurrent ideological tenet in many of the editorials analysed, one that was tightly wedded to a notion of progressive welfare reform. As in the above example, the complexities and ambiguities of often highly controversial cases were ironed out in favour of an appeal to the implicit wisdom of contemporary humanitarian sensibility. Before I examine these in more detail it is necessary to explore a number of other sub-themes that thread through both editorials and letters. For example, the issue of homicide and capital punishment provided the immediate context for discussion of crime. Yet, the contributions reproduced above indicate the existence of a number of more broad-based concerns running through these opposing camps. While many readers argued the merits of hanging and leader columns demanded, in turn, an end to the procedure, in reality the lines of debate were not so clear-cut. Animating these debates was not so much the rights and wrongs of execution

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<sup>147</sup> “A Plea for the Cat” by J. Mottram, Sheffield Daily Telegraph, 20 March 1922, p.2.

<sup>148</sup> Editorial entitled “Tue and Jacoby”, SDI, 14 June 1922.

or the specifics of the actual crime, but a number of more fundamental issues. Amongst the most prominent were concerns about the instability created by war, political militancy, industrial unrest and friction between classes more generally. Additionally, there arose the related theme of social degeneration, manifested in concerns about mental defectiveness and the impressionable character of the reading public.

### Crime and degeneration

One of the most striking themes to emerge was that of the mental instability of the offender. The expression “abnormal boy” in the above LTE hints at the way ideas about crime were often articulated in the medicalised idiom of mental defectiveness. For many commentators the spate of high profile murders gave weight to the belief that the nation was passing through an unprecedented time of turbulence and disquiet. The issue of mental illness and insanity formed a common theme in several of these cases, and served as a metaphor for the broader anxieties of the time. The increased prestige of Freudian theories of human behaviour amongst the middle classes and the debate about “shell-shock”, or neurasthenia, reflected and in turn reinforced the cultural turbulence of the early post-war years.<sup>149</sup> This ‘flight to the subconscious’ as Bernal has termed it, was symptomatic of a broad based questioning by the middle-class of former certainties (Bernal, 1965). One of the most prominent cases was that of the trial and subsequent execution of Frederick Holt, an ex-Army Lieutenant who had suffered shell-shock during the war. In December 1919 Holt was charged with the murder of a young woman. After medical examination he was found to be of unsound mind, a fact that was used in his defence at the trial. Dubbed the ‘Sandhills Murder’ by the Press the case aroused widespread debate, more so upon the failure of Holt’s appeal and his execution on 3 April 1920.

The issue of mental instability took on further prominence some two years later when, at the murder trial of Henry Jacoby, the defence again pleaded mental impairment. Despite a strong recommendation of mercy by the jury that convicted him, he was sent to the gallows. His execution on 8 June 1922 provoked a wave of protests. These protests were intensified when, on the following day, another convicted murderer

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<sup>149</sup> See the accounts of Stone (1985), Bogacz (1989) and Showalter (1985; 1997). They have each examined how the impact of “shell-shock”, or neurasthenia, gradually diffused from the confines of psychiatric expertise into consciousness of British society after the war.

by the name of Ronald True was reprieved on the grounds of insanity. In recurrent letters the question of abolition was framed in the language of mental imbalance. As one letter asked:

The probability of Jacoby being insane leads one to think that all murderers may be insane. This being so, would it not be better to abolish capital punishment altogether from a civilised community and devise some other means of punishing a person who is found “guilty” of murder? The country is calling out for the hanging of True, on the grounds that “if Jacoby was hung then True should be hung also”. It is better to say, “if True did not hang then no other man shall be hung”.<sup>150</sup>

### Class anxiety and Press Sensationalism

The True and Jacoby cases revealed a further powerful current shaping discussions of crime and related criminal justice issues. With the reprieve of True, the central issue of the murder cases rapidly shifted from mental instability to that of class. Jacoby, a hotel pantry-boy, had been executed for the murder of Lady White, a wealthy heiress. Ronald True, by contrast, came from a privileged background and had admitted killing a prostitute named Gertrude Yates. It was the social context of the two cases that led to a volatile debate and exposed the defensiveness of the authorities to claims of class bias. As Carswell observed, ‘the Metropolitan Press, from the highest to the lowest, fell into a paroxysm of fury. The Home Secretary’s head on a charger was demanded... [Jacoby] was only a working man’s son, and he had killed a knight’s widow, and therefore had to hang; while a moral monster like True, who happened to be well connected, and whose victim was only a poor outcast, was sent off to enjoy the amenities with which life at Broadmoor was supposed to be surrounded’ (Carswell, 1925, p. 43). The issue provoked an equally prominent response from the letter writers and editors of the Sheffield Daily Independent and the Sheffield Daily Telegraph. At the forefront of many of the contributors’ concerns was the incendiary character of the debate given the presence of wider social animosities. The Press came in for particular rebuke, serving, in the minds of many observers, to aggravate an already charged political situation. On this issue, one contributor had the following to say:

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<sup>150</sup> Letter entitled “*Capital Punishment*” by “Rational”, Sheffield Daily Telegraph 15 June 1922, p.3.

...But the most serious aspect of the True case is the way in which a section of the Press has made use of it as a stunt. A daily paper, with a much boosted circulation, has allowed itself to foster and stir up a public opinion based upon a misrepresentation of the facts, which, had it chosen, it could have corrected. Leading articles have been written, sensational headlines have been devised, correspondence by the yard published, and all with the result that the misapprehension has become greater, class prejudice has been introduced, and our legal system has been in many minds discredited. The Jacoby case has nothing to do with the True case, until some misguided or malicious person introduces it in order to promote class hatred...It is unreasonable to let our natural abhorrence of a shocking crime obscure our capacity for grasping facts; it is abominable when well informed persons, in the Press or otherwise, help to befog others less well informed. Is the object a political one?<sup>151</sup>

Such comments mirrored a national debate about the role of the Press in the coverage of murder trials.<sup>152</sup> Unease with the way a sensationalist media was able to manipulate and inflame public passions drew upon deep anxieties regarding the impressionable character of the reading public. The concern displayed by local commentators about a politicised public drew upon more long-established fears about the nature of mass society and the place of the intelligentsia within it.<sup>153</sup> The city 'crowd' or 'herd', prone to irrational, unpredictable outbursts of emotion and violence had been a regular focus of middle class debate since the turn of the century.<sup>154</sup> The taste for stories of vice and crime were characteristic of a public whose pleasures were of a 'deplorably low type':

[T]he love of reading about vice, crime and fatal accidents is surely proof of a morbid state of mind. We may perhaps be thankful that the working man is so absorbed in vicariously breaking the Sixth and Seventh Commandments that he has less attention to give to the agitators who urge him to break the Eighth; but there must be something pathological in the taste which feeds by preference on such garbage.<sup>155</sup>

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<sup>151</sup> Letter entitled "*The Press and the Case of Ronald True*" by L. H. Barber, Sheffield Daily Telegraph 15 June 1922 p.6.

<sup>152</sup> For example Donald Carswell, in discussing the Holt and True cases, despaired at the way in which 'popular bewilderment was inflamed to passion by the Press with a recklessness as foolish as it was discreditable' "*Insanity and Criminal Responsibility*" Fortnightly Review Vol. CX11 1922, p.319.

<sup>153</sup> See Carey (1992).

<sup>154</sup> See Mastermann (1909); Trotter (1916).

<sup>155</sup> Inge (1926, p.284).

Such anxieties were prominent in readers' letters that argued for the abolition of capital punishment. Indeed, the perceived demoralising impact of such practices upon the lower orders proved an enduring theme within the campaign for criminal and penal reform more generally. This sentiment was neither confined to Sheffield, nor was it new.<sup>156</sup> It was against what was believed to be the demoralising content of newspapers that men like William Ralph Inge, Dean of St. Paul's, a leading eugenicist and champion of the alarmed middle classes, paraded their objection to capital punishment. Inge offered his reason for abolition in an article in the Independent:

For days or weeks the public gloat over the case. The streets are placarded with the name of the accused, a name perhaps, hitherto honourable. All the latent savagery of the popular minds finds a vent in following every detail of the hideous drama...The change which I advocate would, I believe, remove...a source of demoralisation from the public of this country.<sup>157</sup>

The demoralising impact of capital punishment provided a unifying theme for both the progressive and reactionary wings of abolitionist campaign. Local readers responded in a similar vein, advancing their pro-abolitionist arguments on the grounds of preventing the details of the crime and the execution reaching a capricious public. In the following LTE the Press is rebuked for 'making a big splash' about murders committed amongst the wealthier class of people, a trend which the writer believed not only failed to educate the masses but served to foment class bitterness. Given the unpredictable nature of the masses, the Press had a particular responsibility in the reporting of murder trials:

That people who conduct a healthy and sane policy newspaper serve the country in a far more useful manner than statesmen is evidenced at the present time. The small murders that can be told in twenty lines are made into two columns by reporters with "great" imagination. These sorts of reports do not educate the masses. Why in heavens name some newspaper people like making

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<sup>156</sup> In his study of the history of public executions in Britain Gatrell noted how these same concerns drove the middle class elite to demand an end to such practices during the nineteenth century: 'To exclude the crowd from the ceremony was the most urgent reason why public executions were abolished' (Gatrell, 1994, p.390-1).

<sup>157</sup> Dean Inge "*Should Capital Punishment be Abolished?*" Sheffield Daily Independent, 30 June 1922, p.4. In a review of Inge's book "*Lay Thoughts of a Dean*" (1926), Sylvia Lynd wrote 'If he is opposed to capital punishment as it exists at present, let it not be suspected that this is from any motive of humanitarian interference' (Lynd, 1926, p.182). In his biography of Inge, Helm noted that the Dean was both 'a friend of Sir Francis Galton' and 'a member of the council of the Eugenics Society from the time of its organisation' (Helm, 1962, 34-5)



a big splash about the private affairs of people in society is questionable. These kind of reports lead to class hatred, and the sooner some of the “worst offenders” in the newspaper world realise it, the better newspapers we may have<sup>158</sup>

These cases made headline news against a local backdrop of intense political and industrial conflict, together with the perceived instability created by the war. The sensational reporting of crime, particularly homicide, was considered to have a debasing effect on the minds of the mass of people, weakened during a peculiarly strained period:

As one who has made a study of the details of psychology, is it in the public interest to publish in full, details connected with the many recent murders and cases of suicide? It is a well known fact that there are numerous people today whose minds are temporarily below normal, weakened for the time being by the strain of the abnormal times through which we are passing. A close study of some of the cases before the courts at the present time makes me wonder if the power of suggestion is not stronger than is generally allowed; and that the dwelling on facts, forming in some cases a vivid mental picture, does not lead to the commission of crime<sup>159</sup>

It is worth noting here that fear of demoralisation provided the dominant frame for those LTE's that discussed crime within the context of Press or Cinema sensationalism, identified in the quantitative content analysis. For the author of the following letter, abolition of capital punishment appears to be of urgency less out of respect for the sanctity of life than the potential demoralisation of the ‘citizens of the future’. The motif of the innocent child was often deployed by those concerned at the demoralising impact of the publication of details of murders. One should note the textual proximity and ensuing linkage of the terms, ‘children’ and ‘murder atmosphere’:

We have just destroyed two lives, who, had we preserved them, would have assuredly saved much trouble and heart burning, two whom would possibly have lived to expiate their crime, and possibly have done the State some service beside. Worse than that, and of far greater significance, the children have not escaped the influence of the murder atmosphere created by their elders. They have taken a keen interest, they always do. Such unlovely thought as this cannot fail to have an evil impression upon the child character. And if citizens of the

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<sup>158</sup> Letter by Cyril B. Lowe, SDT, 29 April 1922, p.5

<sup>159</sup> Letter entitled “*Publication of the Details of Crime*” by “B” of Nether Edge, Sheffield Daily Telegraph, 29 April 1922, p.3.

future are to be nurtured on acts of violence it is a sick sign for Merrie England.<sup>160</sup>

The above referred to the case of Edith Thompson, one of the executed 'Ilford Murderers'. The case led to a spate of letters on the issue of capital punishment. The following, again, links capital punishment with moral deterioration, though a number of other themes are evident:

All decent men teach their boys to be chivalrous to women, but the State, aided by disgusting particulars published in the Press, shows them how to drag an unconscious or semi-conscious woman to the scaffold and snap her spinal cord by a violent jerk. In the name of civilisation, will you start a Press campaign for the abolition of capital punishment, or will the Press continue the moral deterioration so evident since August 1914?<sup>161</sup>

Here, the dissolution of traditional values, such as chivalry to women, is combined with the theme of press sensationalism in support of the abolition of capital punishment.<sup>162</sup>

It would be wrong to view these displays of moral concern as representative of all newspaper contributions. While LTEs offered a more explicit articulation of middle class anxiety, editorials tended to express a much sober and less alarmist assessment of these issues. For example, responding to the spate of murders during 1922, the nominally conservative Sheffield Daily Telegraph remarked,

the occurrence of a series of deeds of violence is not unprecedented; these things, for some reason, tend to happen in groups; but the sequence of crimes, actual and suspected, that has been recorded in the papers since the Christmas holidays began has been rather unusual. One "sensation" has followed another... We shall no doubt be told that it is deplorable that the newspaper should give so much attention to these horrible topics. But the public interest in mysteries of violence, which the newspapers merely reflect, is not due to any morbid appetite for the brutal or the sordid. An ugly commonplace crime, with

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<sup>160</sup> Letter entitled "*The Crime Atmosphere*" by "Contra Brutus", Sheffield Daily Telegraph 12 January 1923, p.6 (emphasis added).

<sup>161</sup> Letter by "I.B.K." SDI, 12 January 1923, p.3

<sup>162</sup> In a letter to the 'Independent', Josiah Oldfield, a prominent member of the Society for the Abolition of Capital Punishment, similarly exploited common fears about the perceived extent of gambling when he asked 'what can be said of the "deterrent effect" of capital punishment upon a class to whom the gambling instinct so greatly appeals'. Letter by entitled "*The Penalty of Death*", SDI, 8 June 1922, p.3.

no obscurity about it, creates only a momentary stir which is confined to the locality in which it happens...<sup>163</sup>

In contrast to many readers' contributions, this editorial offered a defence of press coverage of violence and acknowledged the public interest surrounding such events. The editor was forthright in his opinion that it was not so much the violence that afforded much of the fascination, but rather the social context of the offence, the mysterious circumstances in which it occurred and the subsequent hunt for the criminal.

This relaxed discussion of crime was typical of editors who, moreover, were inclined to present a far more mediated account of such issues than their readers. In the following extract from a Telegraph leader, the issue of criminality is presented not in the vocabulary of reactive anxiety, but of medical science and progressive institutional reform.

[T]here is no such thing as a born criminal. Now we look further back than the crime to the criminal's past – his environment, his temptations, his motives. Heredity may play a minor part in the manufacture of felons, but if children are reared in an atmosphere of crime, or in circumstances that make it easy, that amounts to much the same thing as being born with a taint. Consumption may not be inherited, but a child born of a consumptive parent and housed and brought up in conditions that favour the acquiring of the malady might as well have been born with the seeds of it in his baby body. So with environment in the creation of criminals...Reliance on the birch alone is not facing the question. What we have to see is that the child is removed and isolated from the causes that lead to criminal action.<sup>164</sup>

The above contribution usefully demonstrates how leader columns tended to present crime in terms of its perceived 'structural' as opposed to volitional causes. In the editorials of the two provincial newspapers during the 1920s, there was no 'attempt to suppress the possible mediations between environment and crime' (Hall et al, 1978, p.101). On the contrary, crime was presented in terms not so much of individual depravity but in the idiom of environment and welfare. Through the textual linkage of crime with key signifiers, such as 'reform', 'environment', 'science', 'youth', and 'progress', discussion of crime was removed from the realm of interpersonal and individual experience and placed in the domain of social practice. The editorial was able

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<sup>163</sup> 'Violence and Mystery' Editorial Sheffield Daily Telegraph, 4 January 1922. See also SDT Editorial entitled *Juvenile Depravity*, which offers a similar account of the debates around the Jacoby case.

<sup>164</sup> 'Juvenile Delinquency', 18 September 1923, Editorial, Sheffield Daily Telegraph.

to mediate the transformation of individual subjectivity 'from that of the private individual to public and social subject' (Kress, 1986, p.396).

At the same time, it is important to recognise that the credibility of such accounts of crime had their basis not so much in the particular textual construction of the editorial but because they reflected a culturally pervasive view of crime. In other words, the strength of such representations derived not from the particular discursive techniques employed but, fundamentally, from the specific social circumstances existing more broadly. For example, in many of the editorials the politically abrasive notions of the 'born criminal' and conservative demands for the birch were contrasted with the implicitly progressive themes of 'environment', 'reform' and 'scientific' intervention. Such representations were endowed with a high degree of authority due to the configuration of the wider social and political terrain. Given the broad prestige of reformatory intervention and medical science during the period, attitudes to crime thus articulated were implicitly progressive and ideologically neutral. The authoritative style of editorial representations of crime was further augmented by a focus upon national debates rather than local issues. By intervening in contemporary debates and drawing upon the latest statistics and reports, the leader column strove to ensure the credibility of its opinions.

### Punishment and lenience

So far I have identified a number of key sub-themes threading through editorial and readership commentary. Here, issues of class, social degeneration, therapeutic intervention and welfare reform played a crucial part in moulding representations of crime. While the latter were often only incidental to the main areas of debate, the advocacy of either punitive or remedial solutions was also dependent upon the writers' orientation to broader social issues. For example, while the promotion of criminal rehabilitation was often linked to the issue of class, the latter could equally encourage a punitive response on the part of some contributors. In the following extract the much-publicised case of Horatio Bottomley provided the focus for punitive demands of one writer. Bottomley was a wealthy society figure, tried and found guilty of theft in 1922, but whose defence had been based on the grounds of mental instability. In the letter that follows Mary Wilson, one of the few local female magistrates and a radical Labour councillor, replied to pleas for leniency by fellow readers:

I for one would not sign a petition to reduce Bottomley's sentence as suggested by the Rev. S. Claude Tickell, but I would use all my powers to counteract such a petition, should one be attempted. Horatio Bottomley has been found guilty by law, and the sentence is light. His activities have covered a much longer time than his period of rest will be and he must have fared sumptuously every day, as we are told he will suffer without his daily bottle of champagne...He has been the winner for so many years...perhaps the lean years are necessary for his soul as well as his body<sup>165</sup>

For the author of the letter, Bottomley's sentence was light by comparison with the excess of his crime and his privileged lifestyle for which he stood equally condemned. A sympathetic approach to the plight of the poor was often underscored by a corresponding antipathy to the crimes of the more powerful.

One also finds the privileged social standing of the offender the key factor in provoking the occasional demand on the part of editorials for punitive measures. The conviction of the financier Gerard Lee Bevan to seven years penal servitude for fraud at the Old Bailey on the 5 December 1922 provoked the following response from the *Independent*:

The responsibilities of finance often lay financiers open to temptations such as do not assail any other class of men, unless, perhaps, politicians. But if the financier's temptations are often great, the consequences to the homes of others, in misery, ruin and the loss of savings of years, are, quite as often terrible to a degree that justifies the exemplary nature of even the harshest justice. Bevan may even consider himself lucky<sup>166</sup>

The issue of class provided a prominent sub-theme of the contributions examined. Yet it seems that the utility of the vocabulary of reform derived precisely from its ability to transcend such vexed issues. Affirmation of the project of criminal justice reform and humanitarian concern, most coherently and consistently articulated by editors rather than readers, served to denote the newspaper as part of a broader progressive and inclusive tide. The merits of 'treatment' rather than punishment of criminals, particularly juveniles, were strong themes of many leader columns. Those of both newspapers

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<sup>165</sup> Letter entitled "*Bottomley's Sentence*" by Mary Wilson, *Sheffield Daily Independent*, 11 July 1922 p.3.

<sup>166</sup> Editorial entitled, "*A Just Sentence*" *Sheffield Daily Independent*, 6 December 1922 p.3.

frequently commended the value of probation and borstal. For example the Independent remarked how 'the reformation of the criminal should be the dominating aim of punishment, above all in the case of the young'.<sup>167</sup> Through its avid promotion of therapeutic intervention and institutional reform, the conservative Telegraph was able equally to project an image of progress rather than reaction. The following editorial contribution illustrates how, for enlightened, progressive thinkers, the focus of criminal and penal policy was not the victim of crime, the traditional subject of outraged middle class opinion, but the criminal as victim:

It is now generally conceded that our criminal population is mainly drawn from mental and physical weaklings...The criminal, perhaps, may stand in more need of protection than the society whose code he has outraged...The way of the transgressor is hard in any case; it is infinitely worse when he is the victim of circumstances over which he has no control, or which, with proper precautions, might be removed from his path.<sup>168</sup>

### Respectability and Demoralisation

Although both editorials and LTEs were, in their discussions of crime, motivated by common concerns, the latter tended to articulate these in a much more unmediated fashion. While editorials placed emphasis upon environmental factors as determinants of behaviour and sought to contextualise crime with reference to central ideological tenets, their readers exhibited no such obligations. The letters page provided a well-trodden platform for the articulation of individual grievances and the promotion of particular campaigns. Of the many causes advanced by the 'articulate minority' of the local population the issue of temperance was perhaps debated most intensely. While the letter's page of the Independent provided the main forum for both prohibitionists and anti-temperance campaigners, the corresponding column of the Telegraph also proved a popular forum for the articulation of contending views. Though discussed relatively infrequently in these debates, contributors occasionally drew upon crime in order to affirm the validity of their claims. Yet what is significant is the way in which these temperance discussions tended to locate crime almost exclusively in terms of respectability and demoralisation. Whereas the majority of editorial contributions and

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<sup>167</sup> Editorial entitled "Borstal Ideals" Sheffield Daily Independent 30 August 1921, p.3 (See also editorial of 26 October 1927 in the same newspaper)

<sup>168</sup> 'Our Penal System', Editorial, Sheffield Daily Telegraph, 5 December 1922.

also some of the other readers tended to view crime through the prism of medical science and welfare reform, temperance advocates were more inclined to regard it as an explicitly moral issue:

I have worked for 30 years among the artisan and poorer classes in Sheffield as city missionary...After close observation during this lengthy period I wish to assert that the influence of the public house is, without exception, a baneful one, destroying home happiness, depreciating the character of consumer and seller alike, seriously imperilling youthful life, and inciting to crime of every kind.<sup>169</sup>

The themes of respectability and demoralisation were also prominent in the letters devoted to the issue of gambling. Appeals for a restriction of gambling were often advanced on the basis that, as with drunkenness, the activity was not only in certain circumstances a punishable offence but also a source of more serious crime. Moreover, it seems that the campaign against betting, like the crusades against drink, was subject to much the same process of claims-making and frequently involved the same personnel. The authors of the following appeal for a halt to the spread of commercial greyhound racing were also leading temperance advocates.

The proposal to erect a sports stadium at Owlerton is one which deserves very careful thought. It is almost universally admitted that the fascination of this greyhound racing lies mainly in the opportunity it affords for betting...[E]xperience shows how often betting and gambling prove but the prelude to crime. On those grounds we feel we must utter a warning against the danger of a "sport" so much bound up with this vice. So far from believing that any extension of greyhound racing would benefit the city, we fear it would increase dangers too ready to hand<sup>170</sup>

The most striking aspect of the debates around liquor and betting was, as the above letter indicates, the relatively alarmist depiction of crime. It provided an important means through which campaign groups sought to emphasise the fragility of traditional moral values. Religious leaders tended to utilise the issue of crime and its control as a warning of the scale of the problem at hand. For example, the author of one letter rebuked a fellow cleric for believing that the nation was becoming more Christian. As evidence to

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<sup>169</sup> LTE by Robert Wright, Sheffield Daily Independent, 13 March 1922.

<sup>170</sup> Letter by J.H Darbyshire, Vicar of Sheffield; Ernest Hamson, President of Sheffield Free Church Council, Frank Cox, Chairman Wesleyan District Association, Sheffield Daily Telegraph, 4 January 1928.

the contrary he suggests that, '[i]t is a fact that we have empty churches and full prisons. The baptizers of penitents are unemployed, but the judges, juries, magistrates, yes, and even the hangman, are working overtime.'<sup>171</sup>

### The Sheffield Gangs

The perceived fragmentation of traditional values featured in letters written about the activities of local gangs. During the war the growth of working men's wages combined with a diminished opportunity for recreational endeavour encouraged a growth of illegal gambling in Sheffield. The 'pitch and toss' gambling rings in the city offered a means for relatively large sums of money to be made very quickly, control of which inevitably fell into the hands of local street gangs. The deep economic recession of the early 1920s unleashed a violent struggle between two of these gangs for control of the rings, which was brought to the attention of a wider audience by the local Press (Bean, 1981; Bean, 1987; Fry, 1976; Harvey, 1973). Just over five per cent of, predominantly readers', contributions about crime discussed the so called 'gang wars' in the city. However, there is little indication that the response amounted to anything like a 'crime panic'. Certainly, there were calls for the constabulary and magistrates to adopt more stringent methods in dealing with the antics of the gang members. The alleged leniency of magistrates and the ineffectiveness of the police provided a target for complaint. For example, the failure of the local justices to refuse bail to a gang member provoked a reader to ask

...Now what is the good of police if they are not to be backed up by the magistrates? Do they really want to stop these gangs? I doubt it. It appears to me these gangs have a bigger membership than the public really believe<sup>172</sup>

Yet rather than a vehicle for the articulation of punitive sentiments, a number of themes are evident in the discussions about the gangs. For example, readers' concerns were more commonly expressed in the demand for the employment of administrative or formalistic techniques of justice. Typical here were requests for a stipendary magistrate, a larger police force and an end to the traditional paternalistic approach of some elements of the local authority to public displays of violence:

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<sup>171</sup> Letter by Arthur Stables, SDI, 8 September 1924.

<sup>172</sup> Letter by "Disgusted", SDI, 21 September 1923.



It is a public scandal the way in which these gangs are allowed to operate in Sheffield. There is not another town or city half the size of Sheffield but what has a Stipendary Magistrate, and if the City Council or Magistrates won't apply to the Home Secretary for the appointment of a Stipendary, I suggest a strong petition being signed by the citizens and presented to the Home Office direct. I lost faith in our local Bench last year when one of our magistrates invited two members of "these gangs" to go into a field and "fight it out". I very nearly cut that out of the "Telegraph" and sent it up to the Home Secretary. We must have a Stipendary Magistrate for Sheffield and our police force wants strengthening by at least 200 more men.<sup>173</sup>

Such demands often expressed a parochial desire on the part of residents for the judicial trappings appropriate to such a large city rather than any expressly punitive sentiment.<sup>174</sup> They also highlight the growing intolerance on the part of the authorities towards behaviour that might previously have been ignored or tolerated. As I suggest in Chapter 8, the reaction to the 'gang wars' was, if anything, tied up with the broader trend towards the regulation of working class life and the formalisation of social conduct within the public sphere.

While these reactions hardly indicate a 'soft' or lenient attitude on the part of the authorities to the gangs, it is difficult to attribute the term 'panic' to such responses. Not only was there an absence of 'focussed [and] consistent theme[s]' in such contributions (Goode & Ben-Yehuda, 1994, p.141), but also relatively few letters and editorials were written on the subject of the gang wars. From 1921 to 1928 only 15 letters and five editorials referring either incidentally or wholly to the gangs were published (5.9 per cent and 4.2 per cent of total crime contributions respectively). Four of the five editorials appeared in the *Independent*, while nine of the 15 LTEs appeared in the *Telegraph*. Evidently, then, the local Press encountered no avalanche of letters. Similarly, aside from the relative degree of interest shown by the 'Independent' compared to its rival, neither was the Press, through the editorial columns, particularly eager to assert its own view about the gangs.

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<sup>173</sup> Letter by "A Citizen", SDT, 18 April 1925.

<sup>174</sup> The local industrialist Charles E. Vickers wrote the following letter: 'May I suggest to "Current Topics" ... that as a means of putting an end to the ruffianism in the Sheffield streets, the "something to be done to suppress them" should be: to strengthen the hands of the Police Force and the magistrates by the appointment of a stipendary magistrate with as little delay as possible'. Letter by Charles E. Vickers, *Sheffield Daily Telegraph*, 17 April 1925.

## Progress

An enduring theme within discussions about crime, especially in editorial contributions, was that of social improvement. Whereas the spectre of crime was occasionally summoned up by readers when relaying their concern about the threat of demoralisation and social degeneration, within editorials crime tended to be articulated in the idiom of humanitarian progress. Crime and the treatment of criminals served as proof of society's transition from less to more civilised ways. The following editorials commented on the way crime was then dealt with compared to former years, and in so doing underscored the idea of contemporary society as fundamentally progressive:

Our prisons...were noisome disgraceful dens, permeated with vice, where disease had permanent lodgement...In days past we treated them as social outcasts, bestowing little or no thought to the twin problem of why they were in custody at all and what was to become of them when once more they were let loose on society. With us we are entitled to claim credit for leading the way in search of a solution. Especially it is true in our treatment of first time and juvenile offenders<sup>175</sup>

The Independent similarly noted:

How far the age in which we live has advanced in humanity beyond the ideas which were prevalent a century ago may be gauged by glancing at the savage sentences dealt out for what are, after all, comparatively minor offences...Nor were such offences any less frequent in proportion to the population then, for all the stringency with which justice was administered.<sup>176</sup>

The aim of the editorials was to reassure us not only that the problem of crime and the criminal been largely overcome but that the nation stood at the head of a period of progress. The past was presented in a manner that served to vindicate the present, rather than condemn it. Instead of pointing to an earlier, crime free and more civilised period the past was denigrated for its criminality and its treatment of criminals.

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<sup>175</sup> (Ibid).

<sup>176</sup> Editorial entitled "*Stiff Sentences*" SDI, 26 April 1922, (See also editorial, SDI, 10 November 1922, for similar remarks)

## Summary and Analytical Comment

### Summary of results from the quantitative analysis

One may advance a number of general observations from the quantitative analysis. First, crime appears to form a relatively infrequent subject of discussion for editors and letter writers. Of the total number of editorial and readership contributions, less than one per cent discussed the issue of crime. The evidence seems to support the findings of previous work that crime was a comparatively minor topic of interest during the 1920s. Although crime formed a relatively infrequent subject of discussion there were notable differences in the interest displayed between editors and readers. Indeed, newspaper editors were five times more likely to examine the topic than their 'articulate' readership.

An equally important element of the analysis, however, was to determine the actual representation of crime in these contributions. Given the character of editorials and readers' letters - that they are written in order to provide a personalised and often provocative opinion - and the way traditional accounts have perceived crime as a morally-loaded public issue, then one would expect crime to be regarded with concern and for punitive solutions to be demanded. However, on the whole, this appears not to be the case. Indeed the results indicate that crime tended to be regarded in a positive and generally relaxed manner.

Whereas traditional studies utilised only those contributions wholly or substantially about crime, my findings seemed to confirm the merits of addressing those references to crime that feature as an ancillary topic of the contribution. Analysis of these contributions served to uncover the more enduring and taken-for-granted representations of crime, exploited by the writer in order to substantiate broader claims. The degree of unease displayed towards crime was dependent upon whether crime was raised as the main issue or as an ancillary topic in the discussion. Where crime formed the predominant issue of the editorial or letter there was a significant tendency for these crimes to be viewed with concern and for punitive measures to be advocated. On the other hand, where crime provided the subsidiary theme of the contribution, there was an emphasis upon the implementation of legislation directed at remedial change and for crime to be regarded in a much more favourable light. It seems that where the issue of crime particularly animated the contributor, the former tended to be regarded negatively.

However, for the majority of contributions crime was discussed as a subsidiary theme, and in this respect was viewed in a more favourable light.

The topic of crime was most frequently discussed in the context of debates about criminal justice and temperance related issues. Other issues were of relatively minor significance. Moreover, editors and the readership espoused markedly different opinions about crime and the criminal. Editorials adopted a relaxed view of crime and argued for the implementation of remedial criminal justice and legislative measures. This feature was most pronounced in the editorials of the Independent, a paper that tended to promote a positive approach to crime. Letter writers, by contrast, tended to view crime with unease and argue for punitive measures. This was most pronounced in the letters published in the Telegraph - the paper that views crime with the most concern. LTEs focused upon the more interpersonal categories of crime – such as larceny, burglary, gaming and drunkenness. Editorials, on the other hand, tended to address those crimes that impacted on broad social or policy debates – such as homicide, juvenile crime and crime as a general topic of discussion.

#### Summary of results from the qualitative analysis

Textual analysis of editorials and readers' letters revealed a number of features not apparent in the quantitative analysis. Threading through the various debates relating to crime and its treatment a number of more fundamental issues and ideological concerns can be identified. The analysis revealed, first, how the series of highly publicised murder cases and the issue of capital punishment served as a focus for broader concerns about mental deficiency and social degeneration. Also prominent within many crime-related contributions was the theme of class. Again, the unease expressed by readers about the sensational reporting of murders and the subsequent trials owed much to the anxieties associated with the turbulent industrial and political scene. The third major theme to be revealed, one that was manifested most clearly in the editorial discussions of crime, was that of social progress. These three themes - of class, progress and degeneration - were essential components in shaping perceptions of crime during the 1920s and provide key foci of investigation throughout the remaining course of the study.

An additional finding of the qualitative analysis relates to the particular manifestation of the above-mentioned themes within specific contributions. Though all

three were present to some extent in both editorials and letters there was a significant divergence in the type of coverage given. Readers' contributions tended to express middle class concerns in a relatively unmediated fashion and, on the whole, were alarmist in tone and punitive in the range of solutions advocated. Editorials, on the other hand, tended to offer a more relaxed and sober view of such issues. Yet, the evidence also points to the complexity of sentiments such as of leniency and punishment, and that some care is therefore necessary in understanding their use. For example, the demand by readers' for the abolition of the death penalty was often driven as much by fears about national degeneration as any humanitarian impulse. Similarly, punitive sentiments could just as readily be expressed by erstwhile liberals when a wealthy individual or privileged class provided the object of their animosity.

Although readers tended to be more punitive than their editorial counterparts, it was their respective orientation to the traditional discourse of respectability and the emergent discourse of therapeutic state intervention that provided a more telling index of the divergence between the contributions. This is most clear in those contributions, predominantly reader's, devoted to the issues of temperance and gambling. Here, crime was most often portrayed as an explicitly moral issue, set firmly within an ideological realm governed by traditional notions of respectability and demoralisation. Editorial representations of crime were, by contrast, shaped by their commitment to the ideology of criminal justice reform and therapeutic intervention. In explaining crime editorials emphasised its environmental rather than individual origins. And though frequently the same issues animated editors and readers alike, the discourse of criminal reform allowed editors to articulate some of these concerns in a much more progressive and constructive manner. It is to this project as perceived by the middle class elite in Sheffield that I turn in the following chapter.

Chapter Five  
Progress and Degeneration

In previous chapters I suggested that, during the 1920s, crime was regarded in a sedate, though progressive, manner. Judging from the number of letters and editorials devoted to the topic, crime formed a relatively insignificant issue for the Sheffield middle classes during the 1920s. Although the public may have enjoyed reading about crimes in other sections of the newspaper, it was not an issue that they felt compelled to write about in their letters to the editor. For their part, editors were more likely to put pen to paper on the issue of crime, yet even then only a small percentage of editorial columns discussed the subject. These findings seem to concur with those of Gurr et al who conclude that since the mid-nineteenth century, crime has 'rarely been more than a secondary concern for most of the elite or public at large' (Gurr, 1976).

My objective in this chapter is two fold. First, through an analysis of the Sheffield elite's discussions about crime during the 1920s, I explore the basis for such representations. I examine the way in which perceptions of declining crime rates and improving social order contributed to the progressive, yet low key, response to crime. Also considered is the role of other factors, such as the extent to which middle class residential and cultural detachment from the lives of the poorer sections of the populace may have bred a lack of concern about the subject. As in the previous chapter, I suggest that these offer an important, though incomplete, explanation for prevailing attitudes to crime. Despite perceptions of improvement there existed clear evidence of increasing rates of local crime during the 1920s, while the relaxed approach displayed by the middle classes to crime occurred at a time of intense social discord. My second objective in this chapter is to examine in some detail the character of this social conflict and the anxiety that ensued amongst the middle classes in the city. I suggest that perceptions of crime were related to these broader social conflicts, though not as a focus of complaint. Despite protracted and deeply felt concern amongst the middle class at the time, crime was viewed as a source of optimism rather than unease.

### Sources of information

The range of statistical data about local crime available to the Sheffield public during the 1920s was limited. Perhaps owing to administrative tradition or an absence of external pressure, neither of the two Chief Constables that reigned in the city during the decade provided to the Watch Committee statistical data or annual reports relating to crime figures in the Borough.<sup>177</sup> The Chief Constable supplied to the Home Office on a regular basis a detailed breakdown of local police returns. However, this information was hidden away in a summarised form within the annual criminal statistics for England and Wales. Not surprisingly, this failed to provoke any significant local discussion.

Information relating to the trends and character of local crime derived instead from three other sources, all of which were presented in the pages of the local press. First were the debates relating to national policy regarding crime and penal issues and which played a major role in shaping views about local crime. Just as the composers of editorial columns and letters to the press tended to focus on news originating outside the city, so too did these issues often stimulate local discussions. The city's educated public similarly derived much of its knowledge about local crime from broader deliberations about penal reform, capital punishment or the perceived trajectory of national crime rates. Such debates offered a common repertoire of ideas and meanings with which the local public were able to interpret local crime related issues.

The two other key sources of information about crime in the city were primarily local in origin. Followed in close detail by the Sheffield Press was the work of the local police courts, quarter sessions and the assizes. Cases brought before the courts were scrutinised by journalists, as were the accompanying commentaries offered by a local magistrate or Recorder. It was here that trends in the local pattern of crime were relayed to the public, as were the legal profession's often prosaic views about the state of public morals. Municipal elders and professional experts, such as probation officers, church leaders and politicians, were also influential in shaping the content and course of local public debate about criminal justice issues. Such individuals were often presented by the Press, and generally accepted by the public, as authoritative voices on crime issues.

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<sup>177</sup> Lieutenant-Colonel Hall-Dalwood took up his position as Chief Constable of the Sheffield Police Force in 1912. Captain Percy Sillitoe succeeded him in 1926.

Yet, as I will later show, it was a view of crime that was shaped as much by their prevailing ideological outlook as any observed trends in criminal statistics.

### Perceptions of improvement

Looking back to the previous century, seasoned observers were struck by the marked improvement in the conduct of the Sheffield populace. The perceived reduction in crime and criminality provided emphatic evidence of such improvement. Remarking on the recently published national crime statistics for 1925, a Telegraph editorial made the following comment:

Taking crime in general and of all descriptions, it appears from this report that the people of this country are becoming more and more law abiding. One would expect that, of course, for a variety of reasons. The nation is increasingly better educated, more comfortably housed, and, in the matter of social services, more liberally provided for. There is a vast improvement in the environment and a clearing away of the conditions that may produce what may be termed lowbrow criminals.<sup>178</sup>

The above editorial was typical of many during the twenties in which the terms 'progress' and 'crime' formed an inseparable couplet. Throughout the decade observers testified to the remarkable respect for life and property. What particularly struck observers was the perceived reduction in violent street crime.

Another Telegraph editorial voiced the opinion that 'the criminal in our midst, always a mere fraction of the population, tends to become fewer year by year'.<sup>179</sup> Canon Odom, Vicar of St. Paul's Church in the Heeley district of the town and prominent resident, noted how serious crime had greatly decreased since the mid-nineteenth century. He noted that '[s]ixty or seventy years ago the lonely part by Heeley Bridge was the scene of frequent highway robberies. The isolated walks from Sheffield to Upper Heeley by way of Bramall Lane or by Leadmill Road and Strawberry lane were extremely perilous...The locality was the scene of more than one murder' (Odom, 1917, p. 48).

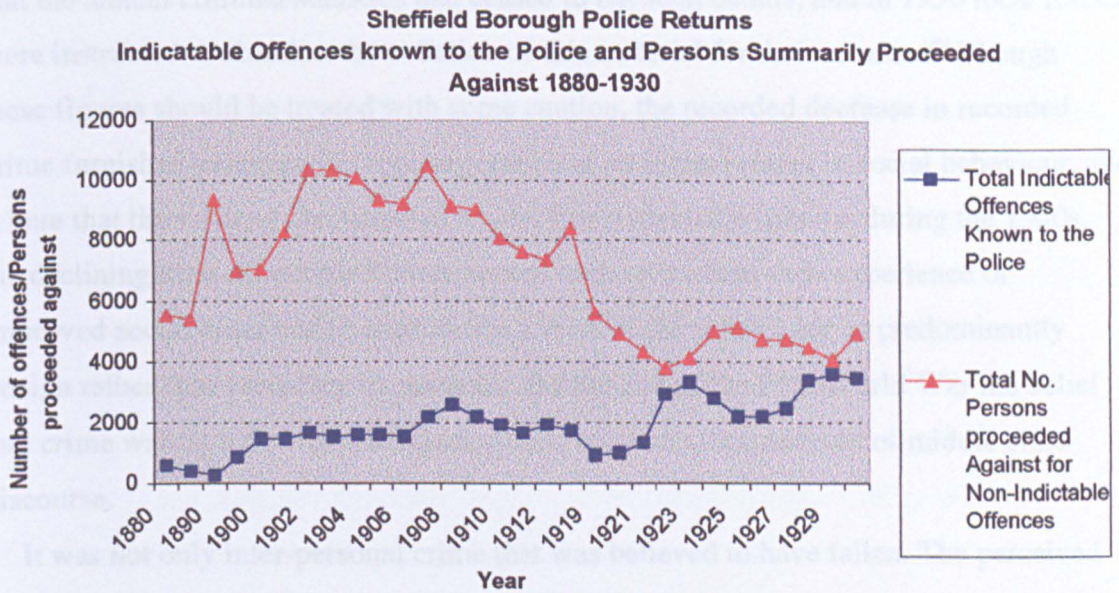
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<sup>178</sup> Sheffield Daily Telegraph, 16 March 1927.

<sup>179</sup> Sheffield Daily Telegraph 1921, p.5



Fig. 5.1<sup>180</sup>



The statistical evidence seemed to confirm the validity of these perceptions of improvement. Whereas in 1854 29 people per ten thousand of the Sheffield population had been tried summarily for assault, by 1924 the corresponding number was eight per ten thousand, amounting to almost a fourfold reduction.<sup>181</sup> Of interest here was the reduced incidence of assaults upon police officers. Between 1900 and 1904 on average 11,474 persons were summarily convicted for such offences nationally. The corresponding figure for the period 1926-1930 was 3,555.<sup>182</sup> In 1853, 149 people were summarily convicted for assault upon Sheffield policemen – almost as many as there were officers in the town.<sup>183</sup>

The decline in the size of the class of ‘habitual criminals’ was equally conspicuous. Whereas in 1885 the local constabulary had thought it necessary to register 589 ‘known offenders and suspected persons’, fifteen years later the numbers had been reduced by

<sup>180</sup> As noted previously, the published statistical records detailing the state of crime in the locality, unfortunately, have neither any figures for indictable offences proceeded against, nor as opposed to simply known Taken from the *Judicial Statistics for England and Wales, 1878-1930*, Home Office Library.

<sup>181</sup> *Criminal Statistical Returns of the Sheffield Police, 1845-1862*, Sheffield City Libraries (S.C.L.); *Criminal Statistics for England and Wales, 1924*.

<sup>182</sup> *Criminal Statistics for England and Wales, 1921 and 1933*.

<sup>183</sup> *Criminal Statistical Returns of the Sheffield Police, 1845-1862*, SCL. On occasion such assaults could prove fatal. For example, in July 1855 a crowd estimated at a thousand strong descended on six policemen after they arrested an Irishman in the centre of the town. A stone was hurled from the crowd hitting P.C. William Beardshaw who subsequently died of his injuries (Bean, 1987, p. 51)

more than half to 236 persons. By the end of the First World War the fall had been such that the annual criminal statistics had ceased to list such details, and in 1930 local forces were instructed to abandon the collation of this material for their returns.<sup>184</sup> Though these figures should be treated with some caution, the recorded decrease in recorded crime furnished evidence for contemporaries of an improvement in social behaviour, and it here that the value of the statistics reside. For respectable opinion during the 1920s, the declining rates of recorded crime served both to confirm their experience of improved social order and to consolidate a view of the urban poor as predominantly benign rather than predatory in character. By the end of the First World War the belief that crime was on a downward trajectory had become a central tenet of middle class discourse.

It was not only inter-personal crime that was believed to have fallen. The perceived changing level of sobriety offered equally firm evidence of the moral improvement that had taken place in the behaviour of the masses. 'All recent evidence', observed the *Telegraph*, 'points to the fact that we are becoming a more and more sober nation'.<sup>185</sup> William Odom, Canon of St. Paul's Church, had first entered Sheffield in the 1860s. Looking back some fifty years later, Odom was struck by what he viewed as a remarkable feature of the town's overall transformation.

Sheffield in the 'sixties'! How surprisingly different from the Sheffield of today...At almost every corner there were flaring gin palaces, and the large number of drunken men and women in the streets startled me. I am glad to say that many of these places of temptation have gone, and so far as I can judge drunkenness in the streets has greatly decreased.<sup>186</sup>

That a religious leader renowned for his conservatism could voice such a statement testifies to the strength of this outlook. For many Sheffield observers the general picture presented was that drunkenness and the general moral condition of the municipality had vastly improved. Personal certainties about progress seemed to be confirmed by the

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<sup>184</sup> Memo to Sheffield Police Force from E. Blackwell, Under Secretary of State, Home Office 16 December 1930. See *Papers Relating to Crime Statistic 295/C*. Sheffield City Archives.

<sup>185</sup> *Sheffield Daily Telegraph*, 20 September 1923.

<sup>186</sup> Odom (Op. Cit. p.5).

annual criminal statistics and the reports of the annual Licensing Sessions.<sup>187</sup> These figures offered hard evidence of the moral health of the city's population, announcements of which were keenly anticipated by professional and lay opinion alike. In his *'Survey of Licensing in Sheffield'* published in 1931, Dr J.N. Reedman remarked that, over the past 100 years, the scene was one of overwhelming improvement. Since the passing of the Beer Act in 1830 when, 'Sheffield was notorious for the intemperance of its citizens', the habits and condition of the people had so much altered that the city now 'compare[d] favourably with most cities in the country' (Reedman, 1931, p.3). The positive tone of local opinion concerning the character of contemporary morality found an echo in the observations of commentators outside the city. William Inge, Dean of St. Paul's and doyen of the conservative establishment noted, 'with gratitude the...marked decrease of drunkenness, which can no longer be called a national vice' (Inge, 1926, p. 284).

#### Geographical and Cultural Detachment

An additional factor that contributed to the perception of improved social order and the low-key response to crime relates to the growing residential differentiation of the town's populace. Crime was a relatively minor aspect of respectable discourse due to the gradual cultural and geographical separation of the wealthier classes from the lower orders. During the middle decades of the nineteenth century the concern displayed by the well-to-do towards the conduct of the labouring poor had been necessarily heightened by the residential proximity of the two.<sup>188</sup> As the century progressed, the increasingly prosperous middle-classes were able to separate themselves geographically and culturally from those they feared. As Fraser remarked, '[m]iddle-class wealth made suburban residence possible, giving rise to residential zoning based on economic class, which produced a diverse rather than uniform experience for different classes' (Fraser, 1984, p. 6-7). Increasing prosperity allowed the middle-classes to move from the congested inner areas to the more wholesome suburbs to the South West of the city. While these wealthier families migrated to their newly constructed villas, the less prosperous were restricted to the tightly packed houses, clustered around the light

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<sup>187</sup> In Sheffield the annual Licensing, or 'Brewster' Sessions were held in February and where the annual number of convictions for drunkenness were announced.

<sup>188</sup> See Smith (OP. Cit., p. 256).

cutlery workshops near the city centre and the large steel manufacturing concerns to the East of the city. Here, home, work and recreation were often located in the same few narrow streets, which served, in turn, to nurture an outlook that was characterised by both its independence and its parochialism. The residential polarisation that existed in the city served to augment the lack of social intercourse between the urban poor and their more prosperous neighbours. Both Sims (1997) and Pierce (1977) have observed that by the 1920s, geographical mobility, strengthened institutions of law and order and access to compensation had enabled the professional middle classes to separate themselves from the lower classes and insulate themselves from crime. As result of the residential and cultural division, the misdemeanours of the latter provided a minor aspect of middle class interest.<sup>189</sup> 'Removed from the likelihood of becoming victims', middle class concern with crime was correspondingly diminished (Sims, p.20).

### Differential responses to crime

A third factor which may go some way to explaining the relative lack of interest in crime shown by middle class residents is in their proclivity to ignore or overlook certain crimes. In other words, criminal activity provided the focus of middle class interest only when it intruded directly upon the respectable mind-set. On most occasions such acts tended to either to be ignored or to provoke little debate. There are two main types of crime that may have been viewed in this way, 'street crime' and 'domestic crime'.

### Street Crime

In their study of perceptions of violence as a social problem in Britain, Dunning *et al* (1987) have directed attention to the middle class regard for the 'street' as a culturally distinct forum of working class life. In this respect they argue that although crime, particularly violent crime, was an integral aspect of street life, it was not a subject of particular interest because it did not intrude upon middle class sensibilities. The 'street'

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<sup>189</sup> By the same token, when respectable individuals crossed paths with their poorer neighbours their behaviour was often the subject of heated discussion in the local press. Though residing in different parts of the city, the recreational pursuits of both classes often brought them into close contact. For example, the notoriety of the 'race-course gangs' arose to a large extent from the observation of the more well-heeled race-goers attending the same events. Similarly, the excursions of thousands of people into the hills surrounding Sheffield each summer was frequently the occasion for complaints from their more respectable neighbours. See, for example, readers' letters in the Sheffield Daily Independent, August and September 1927.

was viewed as a public space within which middle class precepts had limited jurisdiction. In assessing the reaction of the Sheffield middle class to similar types of street crime, much of the evidence seems to accord with this conclusion. Street violence and disorder provided a fairly regular item for press reports and articles, even if seldom a topic of discussion in readers' letters and editorial contributions.<sup>190</sup> Such violence was frequently portrayed as exciting or interesting, a colourful interlude within the monotony of daily life.<sup>191</sup> Toleration, rather than fear or condemnation, provided perhaps the more usual response of the local middle-classes to such incidents.

Observers considered violence an inevitable outcome of the gathering of large numbers of people, particularly where these involved some element of unsupervised or independent activity. For example, the attempt by people to continue the Armistice celebrations begun in 1918, which had involved bonfires throughout the city, was increasingly discouraged by the authorities in the years after the war. In reporting the events of one such night in November 1923, it is worth noting that the central focus of the article was not so much the violent but festive character of these incidents. In Fitzwilliam Street,

A number of persons decided that Armistice night must be observed as on previous occasions with bonfires and evidently assumed that the licence which marked the event in 1918 would still hold good in 1923 and that bonfires would be tolerated in the streets. A quantity of old bedding was gathered together and fires were started. One at the corner of Fitzwilliam Street and Button Lane and another in Hodgson Street which soon attracted large crowds of people.

The report described how rowdy scenes soon developed. When a police constable told the crowd to extinguish the fire he was attacked, receiving an injury that required several stitches:

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<sup>190</sup> Of the 256 LTEs published in the two Sheffield morning newspapers only 1.56% were devoted either substantially or partly to the issue of assault. A smaller number of editorials discussed the issue.

<sup>191</sup> Sheffield newspaper reports during this period provide many such examples. One article was headlined 'LOOTERS ATTACK DETECTIVES', 'BOTTLES AND CROWBARS', 'NIGHT BATTLE IN GOODS YARD AT SHEFFIELD'. It described how, after a series of raids on wagons in the Brightside Lane sidings, two detectives were placed on over-night patrol. The article began, 'An exciting story of a fight between two railway detectives and fifteen armed men came to light yesterday... The fifteen men were armed with bottles, staffs and shunting poles, but the two detectives fought until both were placed out of action'. When the two detectives attempted to arrest the raiders, they were 'laid out within a few seconds'. Both were subsequently found the next morning unconscious, 'suffering from scalp wounds, cut arms and slashed faces', the raiders escaping with a large quantity of goods. Sheffield Daily Independent 28 August 1923.

Constable Winder...was struck on the back of the head with a bottle or other weapon and received a nasty cut. He drew his baton and a nasty struggle ensued...Despite the resentment of the crowd the fire brigade put out the fire. There were several bonfires in various parts of the city on Saturday night and, at more than one, lively free fights took place...<sup>192</sup>

The markedly neutral tone that greeted such events is evident in the many other reports where policemen were subjected to violent assault. As Critchley notes in his history of the police force, the respectable citizenry received attacks upon the police with particular aplomb. At the turn of the century an inspector of the Sheffield City Police told a Select Committee, as though it were a matter of course, 'that three men had recently been seriously injured - one with a bullet in his neck, the second with an eye cut out in a drunken brawl and the third - representing the new hazard - run over by a motor car' (Critchley, 1967, p. 173). Bean (1987) describes similar incidents where police officers were the unfortunate victims of mob violence. He notes how 'violence was an accepted part of everyday life' in Sheffield, and how small fights, often between Irish immigrants, 'frequently deteriorated into pitched battles among large numbers of people who, upon the arrival of the police, forgot their quarrels with each other and turned on the common enemy' (Ibid. p.50). During the twenties respectable opinion responded to equally violent assaults upon members of the public and the police in a similarly muted fashion.

Dunning and other writers have highlighted the quite common tendency at the time for members of the public to intervene in order to frustrate police arrests (Bean, 1987; Dunning et al., 1987; Pearson, 1983a; Pearson, 1983b; White, 1983; White, 1986).<sup>193</sup> One incident, typical of many during the 1920s, involved a gang attack upon a police constable. The Sheffield Evening Mail described it in the following terms:

Police Constable Turton said that at about 8.15 last night he noticed a disturbance in Furnace Hill, West Bar. There were a number of men fighting

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<sup>192</sup> Sheffield Daily Independent, 12 November 1923, p5.

<sup>193</sup> It is worth noting that collective, public intervention could, on occasion, be undertaken in aid of the authorities. The Telegraph reported one such incident when a soldier, on his way to the railway station under military escort, fled from his guard in the city centre. 'A large number of passers-by, seeing what happened, gave chase, and the runaway darted up Leopold Street, pursued by the military and a large crowd of about a hundred'. The report went on to relate how he was subsequently overtaken and caught by one of the followers. But, 'to the great astonishment of the people behind the man let his captive go. When he was questioned by the others as to his surprising action, the man said the hunted man pleaded with him to let him go for the sake of his wife and family'. Sheffield Daily Telegraph 22 May 1922.

and quarrelling. Turton tried to arrest one man and the prisoner kicked him in the stomach. He had to release the man he was taking into custody. While on the ground he was kicked by another man. Police sergeant Scranny said he turned out the mounted police to the disturbance. There was a crowd of about 300 which appeared to be hostile.<sup>194</sup>

What is remarkable about this report is both the lack of importance attributed to it by the newspaper - the account appeared on the fifth page with more column inches given over to cricket scores and the newspaper's football prize - and the muted response of the public. This incident, and many like it, received equally restrained accounts in both the Independent and the Telegraph, and provoked no letters in response. For his part, the magistrate imposed upon the accused 'a fine of £1 or one month imprisonment for being drunk and disorderly [and] three months for assaulting [the police constable]'. Indeed a frequent response of the police court was to impose non-custodial sentences for such assaults. For example, at the end of a case involving an assault by miners on two policemen in the city's Attercliffe district, the magistrates, Sir Henry Hadow, vice-chancellor of Sheffield University, and H.B. Sandford, a local solicitor, imposed fines of £2 for the assault and £1 for breaking a window.<sup>195</sup> An examination of Sheffield Police Court records reveals a similar picture. During 1921, for example, a total of 42 persons were tried summarily and convicted for assault upon police officers. The offenders were dealt with by magistrates in the following manner: twenty persons sentenced to one and six months Hard Labour; twenty fined between £1 and £5; two persons bound over. Six of those handed custodial sentences were dealt with as a result of the unemployed riots of August 1921.<sup>196</sup> These responses indicate not so much that the judiciary and their peers condoned assaults upon the policemen, but a more general resignation to the rugged character of daily life in the poorer districts of the city. Similarly, individuals convicted of assaulting ordinary members of the public frequently received fines amounting to less than that for drunkenness and street betting.

For their part the police often gave as good as they got, and, as White has observed, the violence handed out by both sides 'was generally considered to be within the

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<sup>194</sup> Sheffield Mail, 10 January 1925 p5.

<sup>195</sup> Sheffield Daily Telegraph, 8 March 1923.

<sup>196</sup> I have collated these figures from the relevant Petty Sessional Records of Sheffield City Magistrates Court. *Petty Sessional Records*, MC/4/11-13, Sheffield City Archives.

rules'.<sup>197</sup> The ritualistic character of contact between police and the public indicates the authorities' recognition both of the stubborn brutality of public street life and of the limits beyond which they would not intrude into the public sphere. It also shows the way in which violent street disorder could be tolerated so long as it kept to mutually agreed rules of conduct. It was an etiquette that regulated not so much the degree of violence but the manner in which it was dispensed. While serious incidents of public disorder could attract a relatively muted response from respectable opinion, violations of the accepted customs of resolving public disputes would inevitably bring forth a chorus of rebuke from the same people. For example, while the use of fists was regarded by middle class opinion as a valid means of resolving differences, the use of knives and firearms was typically viewed as unacceptable and un-English. The response to one violent incident in February 1921 when locals set upon a group of Indian workers in Attercliffe is of particular interest. The incident, described by the press as a 'racial riot', began outside the Windsor Hotel in Princess Street when some remarks were passed between some locals and two Indian workers. A fight ensued in which the Indians stabbed two Sheffield men. A crowd soon collected, whereupon the migrant workers were chased back to their lodgings in nearby Corby Street. In a short time the lodging house was surrounded by a violent mob of 600 people armed, it was stated in court, with 'hatchets, choppers and pokers', shouting "'Burn the black \_ like rats, blow up the \_ house'". Inside, four Indians, the landlady of the lodging house and her husband had taken refuge in the garret, whereupon one of the immigrant workers fired a revolver out of the window in order, it was subsequently alleged in court, 'to frighten the crowd'. At that moment the police arrived and arrested the four Muslims. All four were charged and appeared in the police court.<sup>198</sup> The presiding magistrate, Dr Hargreaves, stated that 'the carrying of firearms and knives was a great temptation and it was not customary in England. When necessary, Englishmen relied on their fists.'<sup>199</sup> It seems that the authorities could more readily tolerate a savage fight involving fists and pokers than the display of firearms or knives.

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<sup>197</sup> J. White *Oral History* Vol. 2 No.2, p.37.

<sup>198</sup> The defence asserted that 'the Hindoos would have been lynched if the crowd could have reached them. It was clear that the Englishmen were more to blame than the prisoners. The latter were British subjects and entitled to justice. The case was one of colour prejudice, attributable to English insular ideas'. Sheffield Daily Independent, 25 February 1921, p5.

<sup>199</sup> *Ibid.*



Respectable observers could display a good deal of ambivalence to guns or knives, despite a general antipathy to the use of such weapons. The Firearms Act of 1920 was in large measure directed to the control of the huge numbers of military weapons that had found their way into public circulation after demobilisation. Heightened political tensions and the lessons learned from the unfortunate experiences of European authorities proved additional factors in the move to curtail access to firearms. Sheffield Police Court records and the local press are littered with cases involving the possession or discharge of firearms, particularly during the early post-war years. On one occasion the explosion of war ordinance, possibly hand-grenades, rocked a suburb of the city.<sup>200</sup> However, the response of the press and the judiciary to those caught in the possession of firearms tended to be low-key. A small fine and confiscation of the weapon was the typical punishment handed out by Magistrates to offenders in such cases. The Press, in turn, tended to allot such incidents relatively restricted space in their columns. Rather more attention was directed to the possession or discharge of firearms while committing a criminal act. The carrying of pistols by burglars and shop-breakers was not uncommon. For their part, some members of the Sheffield Gangs seemed to prefer the revolver to the cutthroat razor. Yet, while the use of guns by thieves furnished exciting, though relatively restricted, coverage in the press, middle class observers again remained largely unperturbed by such incidents. And while the use of firearms by local hoodlums received rather more coverage in the local newspapers, the notoriety of these gangs owed as much to their brazen indifference to the law as the methods they employed.

### The Sheffield Gangs

Bean's (1981; 1987), Harvey's (1973) and Fry's (1976) useful accounts of the 'Sheffield Gang Wars' describe how the conflict arose out of a turf war between two gangs for control of the gambling rings.<sup>201</sup> Between 1923 and 1925 the press brought to the public almost weekly reports of beatings, stabbing, shootings, razor-slashing and, on one occasion, murder. Although gang violence in the city was not particularly novel, the

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<sup>200</sup> The Times 5 April 1923.

<sup>201</sup> The affluent war years had enabled the Mooney gang to prosper on the proceeds of the rings. While full employment and high and disposable income ensured good profits for all the gang members rivalry was kept at a minimum. The unemployment arising from the early 1920s slump, and consequent fall in revenue spurred a struggle for the dwindling spoils. In early 1923 Sam Garvin, a former member of the Mooney gang and colleague of George Mooney formed the Park Brigade and fought to take over the rings (Bean, *Ibid.*).

orchestrated character of the incidents and the fact that those involved seemed brazenly indifferent to public sensibilities drew the attention of local newspapers. Encouraged by the opportunity for political and financial gain, the Independent and its sister paper the Mail proved the most vocal critics of the response of magistrates and the Watch Committee to the hoodlums.<sup>202</sup> When the 'Gang Wars' erupted onto the streets of Sheffield in the summer of 1923 the local press brought the often-daily events to the city residents.

Although the leading gang members had achieved notoriety in the early post-war years, it was not until 1923 that the local press began to take particular notice of the activity of the two main gangs described above. What is particularly striking is the way in which the Liberal press led the campaign against the gangs in contrast to the relatively muted reaction of the Conservative rivals. On the morning of the 26 June the Independent ran a prominent piece and was followed that evening by its sister paper, the 'Mail'. For the next 3 years these two papers, particularly the Mail, continued to demand action be taken against the malefactors. Though those behind the 'Telegraph' and their colleagues at the Yorkshire Telegraph and Star were to eventually call for more effective action by the police and the courts, during the first year or so their response was remarkably moderate by comparison.

One possible explanation is to be found in the circulation wars of the 1920s. Launched in 1920 under the editorial stewardship of William Chisholm, The Sheffield Mail was an attempt by the company to maximise revenue and dislodge the Sheffield Telegraph & Star from its position as the city's sole evening paper. Unfortunately, the fledgling paper was released onto the market just at the time when the post war slump began to bite. Inevitably, the Mail struggled to attain anything approximating the impressive circulation of its rival. In an attempt to reverse its downhill slide, the Mail was relaunched on 19 March 1923 with Sir Charles Stormer as the new editor. Only

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<sup>202</sup> As stalwarts of the Independent Liberal cause, these two papers clearly made most of the opportunity to assail the incumbent Citizen's Association and its representatives on the Watch Committee. From May 1923 until the hanging of the Plommer brothers in December 1926 the two papers directed a stream of criticism towards the inaction of the Bench and their associates in the council. For example in July 1923 the Independent stated 'one cannot wonder at the growing indignation of the public, and the blunt charge which is heard on all sides, that the authorities are afraid of the gangs. It is freely stated in private on behalf of the police that the attitude of the Bench in the past has been one of the greatest obstacles. Then the public is entitled to ask the Watch Committee what steps it is taking to appeal against an attitude by the magistrates which is handicapping it in keeping order' *Passer By*, Sheffield Daily Independent 10 July 1923.

weeks later, largely as a result of the coverage in the pages of the newspaper, the 'gang wars' was brought to public prominence both locally and nationally. During the next few years, the Mail took the lead in demanding that something should be done about the hoodlums.

The local newspaper groups were not just commercial rivals, but political competitors too. The issue of the gangs offered an opportunity by which the Independent and the Mail, as staunch supporters of Independent Liberals, could take a swipe at the incumbent Citizens' Association.<sup>203</sup> Indeed, the reaction of the politicians bears this out, the Liberal and Socialist councillors tending to adopt a more indignant attitude to the gangs. For their part, the Citizens' Association was markedly dismissive to these attacks, a number of its members purposely adopting a nonchalant attitude to gangland violence. It is important to recognise the way in which the broader political circumstances of the period played a large part in shaping this differential response to the gangs. As representatives of an administration that was desperate to assert its ability to rule over the city, the Conservative Press refused to admit that Sheffield was in the grip of gang terror and consistently played down their influence.<sup>204</sup> For the Liberal Press, however, the response of the authorities to the 'ruffians' was depicted as an indictment of the 'anti-socialist alliance'.

Yet, on the whole, no 'crime panic' can be discerned in the response of the middle class leadership to the gangs. While the liberal Press took the lead in demanding 'something be done', the evidence suggests that most respectable commentators maintained a relaxed attitude to the gangs. Some, like Alderman Cattell, leading Conservative in the city, even treated the Press campaign with derision. And, notes Fry, 'the efforts of the local papers had little effect on Ald. Cattell's colleagues. There was no change of policy, no tightening up by the authorities and the gang trouble's continued unabated' (Fry, 1976). After granting bail to the members of a gang involved in a shooting incident, Mr A. W. Shepherd, the presiding magistrate and leading member of the Citizen's Association, suggested that 'it would be better to put the rival gangs in a

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<sup>203</sup> It is important to note the division of labour that existed between the editorial section of the Independent and the more iconoclastic *Passer By* column. The latter frequently adopted a populist, reactionary tone in its approach to the local gangs, while on the same page the editorial tended to support the broader programme rehabilitative rather punitive than measures.

<sup>204</sup> For example, see *Current Topics*, Sheffield Daily Telegraph 2 may 1925.

field and let them clear each other off the earth'.<sup>205</sup> Though such comments provoked criticism from those who wished to see firmer measures taken against the gangs, these demands were often accompanied by reminders about the social basis of such behaviour. For example, Percy Medcraft, a prominent religious leader in the city, remarked that it was high time the magistrates gave very much stronger support to the city police: 'I have discovered in dealing with these gangs that there has often been an extraordinary reluctance to convict, and even where convictions have been recorded paltry fines have been imposed instead of a term of imprisonment.' Yet, this punitive note was tempered with the observation that poor social conditions lay at the root of these problems and through the removal of poverty was to be found the only true remedy:

[P]erhaps, some of these men are more to be pitied than blamed. With such appalling housing conditions as exist in our midst, conditions which compel children to spend so many hours in the streets, what wonder is it that lads drift into these gangs.<sup>206</sup>

'In the gangs we have in Sheffield,' remarked another religious leader, 'we have poor lads who have nothing to fall back on. They have never been taught about Christianity'.<sup>207</sup> When, only a few days after the murder of Plommer, the Independent discussed what should be done about the Sheffield gangs, the paper rejected the use of corporal punishment: 'The plain truth is that flogging brutalises both those who receive it and those who administer it...[The] gangs must be put down, but let us beware lest in our zeal to suppress violence, we bestialise justice herself'.<sup>208</sup>

### Domestic Violence

Middle class observers were equally unmoved by the violence arising out of neighbourhood quarrels and domestic disputes. The many cases of assault brought before local magistrates arose out of such quarrels. Sheffield Police Court records detail how a large proportion of the cases involved fights between women living in the same

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<sup>205</sup> *Sheffield Daily Independent* 27 June 1923 p4. *Sheffield City Magistrates Court, Petty Sessional Records – City of Sheffield Division* 21 June 1923.

<sup>206</sup> Percy Medcraft, Superintendent of the Sheffield Wesleyan Mission, Report, *Sheffield Daily Independent*, 11 May 1925.

<sup>207</sup> Father Ommanney, Vicar of St. Mathews, Report, *Sheffield Daily Independent*, 22 April 1925.

<sup>208</sup> Editorial, *Sheffield Daily Independent*, 8 June 1925.

street, frequently in groups and often in retaliation for a minor assault upon a child or some other petty disagreement.<sup>209</sup> White's (1986) account of London street life offers an insight into the types of crimes and misdemeanours poor neighbourhoods furnished for the police court during the interwar years. Many other cases brought before magistrates involved complaints of violence levelled against husbands by their wives. Yet, again, it is striking that very little of this type of crime provided the subject for middle class public discussion. In the face of Garland's emphasis upon the coercive character of state intervention into the hitherto private realm of the family, it is important to acknowledge the reluctance on the part of the authorities to intrude into the private sphere. Despite the increased scope for intervention made available by a whole series of welfare and criminal justice legislation, there still prevailed a belief that the institution of the family should remain inviolable.

Middle class observers appear to be equally ambivalent in their response to offences against children perpetrated in the home (see Hendrick, 1994, p.59). Despite the acceptance of limited intervention into family life, both social reformers and the broader public remained reluctant to pry too deeply into the domestic life of the poor. The approach to infanticide and child neglect serves to demonstrate the point. Both offences were punishable under a range of laws. Yet very few of the accused were ever prosecuted, despite the interventions of various child welfare organisations. For example, of the cases investigated by the Sheffield branch of the NSPCC between 1919 and 1930, no less than 95 per cent were found to involve some form of neglect, ill treatment or assault. However, throughout this period on average only 1.75 % of these resulted in prosecution.<sup>210</sup> The Infanticide Act of 1922 was introduced ostensibly so that a woman charged with killing her child could be convicted of manslaughter rather than murder, hitherto the only option available to the Bench.<sup>211</sup> Despite the powers made available by this Act, it remained exceedingly rare for subsequent offences of Infanticide to come to the attention of the police or the Justices.<sup>212</sup> At the same time, the infrequency

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<sup>209</sup> *Petty Sessional Records*, MC/4/11-13, Sheffield City Archives

<sup>210</sup> Calculated from the *N.S.P.C.C Annual Report - Sheffield and District Branch 1919-1935*. SCL.

<sup>211</sup> Out of sympathy for her plight the mother was rarely found by the jury to be guilty of murder. The Act was introduced primarily so that the law could be brought into line with public sentiment and judicial practice and accordingly safeguard the credibility of the law. See Tooley (1941) and Rose (1986).

<sup>212</sup> No specific figures for infanticide in the city are available, as they were listed in the annual criminal statistics under the joint heading 'manslaughter and infanticide'. However, given that the numbers within

of such cases brought before the criminal justice authorities bore little relation to the far greater numbers suspected by welfare professionals.<sup>213</sup> For example, the maternity and child welfare work of the women visitors often revealed a 'suspiciously' high level of still-births that could not be easily explained by susceptibility of the mother, identified either by case history or the effects of unemployment and consequent lack of nourishment. Alice White, Sheffield's Chief Maternity Inspector, commented on the 142 such cases of stillbirth in 1922:

the most striking feature is that in 62 cases the mother had only living children...In none of these cases had the mother previously had a still-birth, and one cannot help thinking (1) that the present unemployment with its consequent result of constant worry and lack of nourishment has been a factor. (2) That in many cases there is no apparent cause, which is very suspicious and very unsatisfactory.<sup>214</sup>

These inklings, however, remained primarily within the confines of private rather than public discussion. Such facts illustrate both the refusal of professionals to intrude too deeply into the realm of domestic life and a more general disposition on the part of the professional classes to tolerate, within certain limits, the more unseemly manifestations of working class life.

### Gloss on a grim picture

So far in this chapter I have sought to account for the low-key attitude to crime that was evident in the analysis of newspaper editorials and letters. To that end I have examined the role of a number of possible factors, such as perceptions of declining criminality and indifference on the part of respectable citizens to the misdemeanours and violent conduct of their poorer neighbours. At the same time, the evidence suggests a more

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this joint category never exceeded more than five in any single year during the decade (5 were recorded in 1929 and 1930), it is reasonable to assume that the number of cases of infanticide recorded as such by the police was very small.

<sup>213</sup> This sentiment was by no means novel. Testifying to the 1904 Inter-Departmental Committee on Physical Deterioration, Mrs Greenwood, one of the Sheffield Sanitary Inspectors alluded to the extent of cruelty towards, and suspicious death of, children in the city. She noted that 'there are a large number of cases of neglect' and that Sheffield was 'considered rather a bad place for cruelty to children and animals'. She also testified that 'the number of non-certified deaths [of children] is higher than in any other town in England. From 1<sup>st</sup> January, 1904, to 6<sup>th</sup> February, 1904, there were 43 non-certified deaths, 16 of children under 1 year, 3 of children 1-5 years.' *Report of the 1904 Inter-Departmental Committee on Physical Deterioration*.

<sup>214</sup> *Sheffield Medical Officer of Health Reports*, 1922, p.47. SCL

fundamental institutional and ideological basis for the panic-free response to crime, one that is not sufficiently explained in terms of changes in the level of crime or factors relating to the residential and cultural aspects of social relations. To begin with, both the published criminal statistics and the turnover at the local Assizes and Quarter sessions furnished evidence throughout the 1920s that crime was not maintaining its downward trajectory. For example, the fall in convictions for drunkenness that had taken place over a protracted period was halted during the decade after the war and even began to climb again towards the end of the decade. There was also a leap in other offences, such as violence against property, particularly shop-breaking. Occasionally, the increase succeeded in drawing the attention of criminal justice professionals. Speaking at the Quarter Session in January of 1924 the Recorder, William James Waugh, warned that 'crime was not on the decrease'. The Telegraph reported his concern regarding the increase in the number of persons committed for trial and that 'he was very sorry to see that the cases chiefly consisted of shop-breaking. As he said before, it was a very serious offence in a city like Sheffield, and he was determined to discourage it by the sentences he passed, as much as possible.'<sup>215</sup> Similar comments continued to be made at the Assizes and Quarter Sessions on a regular basis throughout the post-war decade.<sup>216</sup>

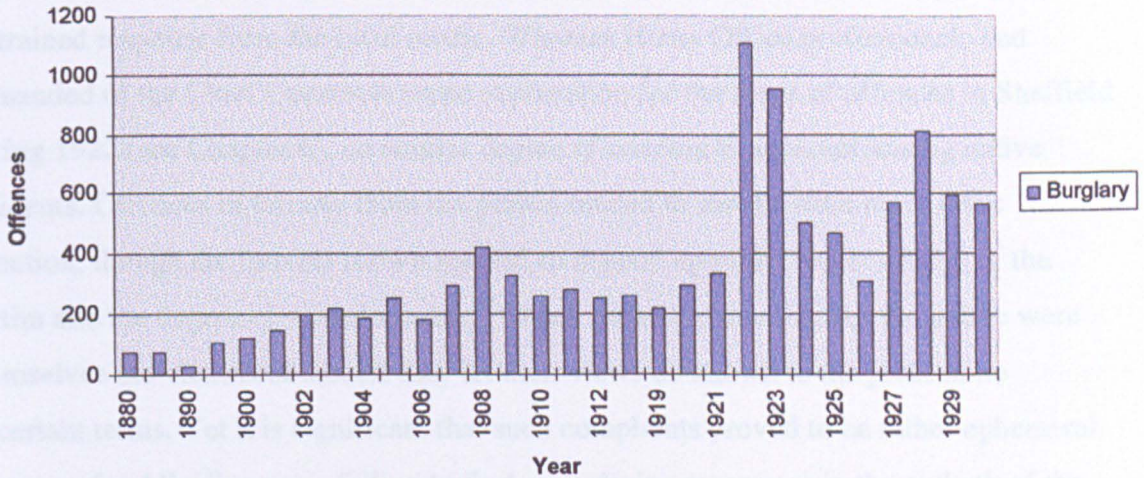
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<sup>215</sup> Sheffield Daily Telegraph 3 January 1924.

<sup>216</sup> For example, later the same year the Telegraph reported how the Recorder gave another warning to house and shop breakers...Nine out of 15 prisoners had to answer charges of "breaking and entering". He repeated that if the sentences passed were not a sufficient deterrent, more serious steps would have to be taken'. Sheffield Daily Telegraph 15 July 1924. At the October Quarter Sessions of 1927, Mr Waugh remarked on 'the very considerable increase in crime' on the corresponding quarter of the previous year. He stated that he was 'very sorry to see that the bulk of the crimes committed are housebreaking, shop-breaking and warehouse-breaking. These are serious crimes and materially affect the welfare of the city' Sheffield Daily Independent 11 October 1928, p.3.

Fig. 5.2.<sup>217</sup>

Sheffield Borough Police Returns  
Offences of Burglary known to the Police  
1880-1930



Yet it is significant that despite such warnings, the increase in shop-breaking, house-breaking and burglary during the decade provoked a muted response from commentators.<sup>218</sup> These offences featured in less than two per cent of newspaper editorials and LTEs. Moreover, when local newspapers did choose to cover such offences in their reports, their emphasis, as with the Recorder William Waugh, was upon the pecuniary menace to local business rather than the moral depravity of the culprits.<sup>219</sup> Even then such coverage was rare, while the punishment handed out to individuals tried summarily was often less for those found guilty of drunkenness or

<sup>217</sup> The category 'Burglary' includes 'Burglary', 'Housebreaking' and 'Shopbreaking'. *Judicial Statistics England and Wales 1880-1930*. Home Office Library.

<sup>218</sup> Bearing in mind the above mentioned limitations of such statistics and the fairly arbitrary time periods involved, a comparison of recorded offences of burglary during the 'disorderly' mid-nineteenth century and the supposedly law-abiding 1920s is perhaps worth noting. In the four-year period 1859-1862, the earliest period for which records exist, recorded burglaries averaged 5.9 per ten thousand of population. During the period 1921 to 1924, the corresponding figure was 14.5. *Criminal Statistical Returns of the Sheffield Police 1845-1862*, SCL; *Criminal Statistics for England and Wales, 1921 to 1924*.

<sup>219</sup> For example, the Telegraph ran a report on a spate of shop-breaking in a poor residential area of the city under the headlines 'ROBBERY TERROR', 'SHALESMOOR FEARS'. "We are terrified", remarked one tradesmen to a reporter. 'We daren't even leave our shop doors open during business hours. They are at it nearly every night up and down'. The article went on to note the 'innumerable robberies' that were taking place at the small shops and how this particular shopkeeper had been the subject of two or three attempts of robbery within the same week. What is striking, however, is the minimal space given over to such incidents located as they were in the poorer quarters of the city. *Sheffield Daily Telegraph*, 4 January 1924.



gambling offences.<sup>220</sup> It is interesting to note that when burglaries and shop-breaking increased more than fourfold in 1922 the opinion pages of local press and the broader public received the news with disinterest.<sup>221</sup>

The rise in cases of simple larceny during the early 1920s attracted an equally restrained response from the local media. Whereas Home Office professionals had demanded of the Chief Constable some explanation for the surge of offences in Sheffield during 1922 (see Chapter 6), no similar degree of concern is apparent among native residents. Offences of larceny from the person tended to merit a little more press attention, though the interest shown seemed to depend upon the respectability of the victim and the degree of violence used.<sup>222</sup> When reputable members of the public were themselves the victims of assault they let their views be known to the press in no uncertain terms. Yet it is significant that such complaints proved to be rather ephemeral features of public discourse, failing to find an enduring resonance in the outlook of the middle-classes. Until the activities of the Sheffield Gangs were brought to public prominence by the press in 1923, robbery with violence and common assault tended to be largely ignored.

Neither does the geographical separation of the middle class from the lower orders adequately explain this low-key response to crime. In noting the existence of such segregation, one could draw the opposite conclusion. In the absence of that knowledge and experience derived from first-hand contact, the middle classes were often forced to rely upon rumour and myth. One study has stressed 'the importance of reputation and its effects' as a feature of communal perceptions of crime not only between working class

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<sup>220</sup> For example, the Mail reported how two young men aged 20 and 21 were arrested while breaking into a confectioners shop. Both men were fined the same day £1 at Sheffield City Police Court. Appearing in the same court was a 22-year-old man charged with betting on the road in which he lived. He stated to the magistrate that he 'could find no work when he left the army' and had taken up betting 'to earn a shilling'. He was fined £5. *Sheffield Mail* 8 May 1922.

<sup>221</sup> Some trained observers were of the opinion that the incidence of burglary was inherently unstable, large fluctuations being an inevitable outcome of the fact that many such offences arose from the activities of a tiny minority of criminals. Responding to a Parliamentary question concerning the number of cases of burglary in Sheffield during 1921 and 1922, the Secretary of State for Home Affairs stated that 'three of the persons arrested in 1922 were undoubtedly responsible for nearly all the burglaries committed'. *Hansard Parliamentary Debates House of Commons*, 12 July 1923 Vol. 166, p.1555.

<sup>222</sup> A number of violent assaults upon respectable individuals received press attention during the 1920s. For example, see readers letter, 17 August 1921; newspaper report, 6 January 1922 (*Sheffield Daily Telegraph*). On one occasion four young men aged between 18 and 20 years of age, were convicted of robbing and seriously injuring a gentleman on Leopold Street in the city centre. See *Sheffield Daily Telegraph*, 28 May 1924 p.7, and subsequent LTE, 30 May 1924.

areas and more 'respectable' neighbourhoods but also within them (Bottoms et al., 1989, p.74). Other writers have revealed how, in contemporary societies at least, 'metaphors and meanings of crime are relayed through the representation of places and the creation of place myths' (Girling et al., 2000, p.10). Such local myths indicate the propensity of a community to view crime with anxiety, or at least for the issue to feature prominently within its inventory of concerns (Goode & Ben-Yehuda, 1994, p.108). Cultural and political polarisation between largely self-contained communities inevitably nurtured rumour and the hardening of stereotypes.<sup>223</sup> Indeed, as I show below, the residential and cultural polarisation that existed between the wealthy and the labouring masses during the 1920s acted to inflame middle-class anxiety at that time. However, it is striking that, despite the profound unease that gripped the middle-classes, this was not manifested in a widespread concern with crime. It is to the manifestations of this conflict and anxiety that I devote the final section of this chapter.

### The Sheffield Middle Classes

[C]oncern about law and order may be a symptom of anxiety and resentment about the consequences for everyday life of deep rooted social changes in British society (Bottomley, 1984, p.55)

Many writers have identified public concern about crime as an enduring symptom of general social anxiety (Barlow et al., 1995a; Barlow et al., 1995b; Ben-Yehuda & Goode, 1994; Chibnall, 1975; Clemente & Kleinman, 1977; Cohen, 1972; Cohen & Young, 1973; Davis, 1980; Furedi, 1997; Hall et al., 1978; Hickman, 1982; McClintock & Avison, 1968; McRobbie & Thornton, 1995; Pearson, 1983a; Pearson, 1985). Crime serves as a focus for a range of concerns that have their origins in broad shifts and cleavages in society. Because of their relative social individuation, the middle classes, particularly the lower middle classes, have been viewed as particularly sensitive to social change and for this to be expressed through concern about crime (Hall et al., 1978, 256). In the decade following the First World War, the outlook of Sheffield's lower middle

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<sup>223</sup> Throughout the 1920s attempts by philanthropists and social workers to venture into the streets and courtyards of the congested inner city areas was often directed at exploring the reality of such myths. As Owen remarked in his social survey of housing conditions in the city at the end of the decade, within the poorer residential areas there existed, 'an every day life which is completely unknown - so different is it in character is it to that of the majority of working class and middle class people - to nine out of ten who pass along the main streets behind and between which the people of the slums live' (Owen, 1932, p. 37).

classes was characterised by anxiety in what was perceived to be a hostile world. For a social group already hurt by desperate economic circumstances, the bellicosity of the conflict between capital and labour appeared to confirm the malevolence of forces apparently beyond control. The relatively small size of the city's lower middle class and their lack of integration compounded the feelings of insecurity and unease. A local economy that rested upon a very narrow industrial base, a restricted hinterland and poor communications had given rise to a small professional social strata (Elliott, 1969; Pollard & Holmes, 1976; Tweedale, 1995). This numerical weakness was heightened by the absence of a developed cultural sphere that other major industrial centres took for granted.<sup>224</sup> Lacking established forums of civic and cultural intercourse, the 'white collar' middle class was characterised by its lack of integration and a heightened sensitivity to events perceived to be outside of their control. This was particularly evident during the economic downturn of the early 1920s, which badly affected many professional occupations. Elliott has noted how the Sheffield Council of Social services reported many reluctant applications for help from unemployed 'black-coated' workers. He quoted the manager of the Sheffield Unemployment Exchange, Mr R. J. Stanley, who stated that 'there were a great many in the city who used to earn excellent salaries who were forced to take up chance work and door to door selling' (Ibid. p.17).

Smith (1982) has suggested that the lower middle classes were characterised by their high degree of 'anomie'. Yet it was not so much normlessness but social individuation that set this group aside from the owners and managers of the heavy industries of iron and steel manufacture and also the lighter industrial concerns. Tweedale has noted how the predominantly small scale and parochial character of the metalworking industry 'nurtured a close-knit community of shared values' (Tweedale, 1995). While a high degree of paternalism between master and workers served to militate against industrial conflict, the integrated character of industrial production fostered a high degree of interdependence between the proprietors of these firms. Facilitated by a network of civic institutions and a commitment to the ethic of welfare intervention some leading

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<sup>224</sup> This was a subject that provided a continual source of perplexity for both local and visiting commentators during the 1920s. During his tour of Northern towns the critic William-Ellis noted that, apart from the cinemas and the 'mild civilising influence of the University', Sheffield was distinguished by its cultural poverty: 'There is a somewhat wilting theatre - I am not sure if Sheffield is a second or third-class tour, and there is no large hall in Sheffield, either private or municipal, which is suitable for concerts'. *The Spectator*, 26 April 1924, 663-4. Elliot remarked that Newcastle, with a population half that of Sheffield, supported 4 Repertory Theatres, while Sheffield had only one (Op. Cit. p.108).

professionals in the city were able to achieve a high level of cohesion. And, as I discuss in the following chapter, through such a strategy they aimed to resolve a range of pressing social and political concerns. On the whole, the lower middle classes possessed no such degree of integration and, arising from the broader political and social currents during the period, displayed a besieged mentality during the post war years. However, below I suggest that, despite this unease and a history of anxiety about the criminal propensities of the working class, there is little evidence that crime was anything other than a peripheral topic of interest amongst the lower middle classes during the 1920s.

### Middle-class anxiety and the lower orders

During the middle decades of the nineteenth century, the cultural habits of the lower orders provided the predominant focus of middle class concern. The traditional independence of Sheffield artisans and their resistance to middle class precepts was regarded with concern by both local and outside observers. Indiscipline in the workplace, prostitution<sup>225</sup> and trade union militancy<sup>226</sup> earned Sheffield a reputation for immorality and violence.<sup>227</sup> The subsequent 'rediscovery' of poverty and disease during the 1870s encouraged the view that such problems were the product of the habits of a demoralised section of the population (Himmelfarb, 1984). By the turn of the century governmental and municipal enquiries into the condition of the working class of Sheffield served to confirm respectable suspicions regarding the close association between poor living conditions and criminality. Frequently driven by eugenic and racial concerns, these enquiries relied on the evidence supplied by a swelling body of professional investigators. They revealed in vivid terms the close link between slum conditions and moral fecklessness of a section of the population

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<sup>225</sup> Prostitution provided the source of a good deal of consternation for the middle class residents. As one complained: 'a man can scarcely walk the streets in the evening without seeing or being molested by such pitiable beings, some as young as fourteen' (Freeholder, 1835, pp.4-5).

<sup>226</sup> A history of violence had accompanied trade union attempts to prevent the introduction of new technology and maintain bargaining power from at least the 1840s. However, it was during the 1860s after the instigation of a special government Commission of Inquiry that the town achieved national repute as a stronghold of lawlessness. The Outrages, as they became known led to special measures to regulate the activities of the unions (Pollard, 1971; Tweedale, 1995).

<sup>227</sup> Writing in Dickens' journal *Once A Week*, the social reformer Harriet Martineau remarked, 'The mere mention of Sheffield brings up the image of much recklessness in the minds of those who hear the name. The low regard for human life and the propensity to violence for which the working population are renowned...It is impossible to remain many days in Sheffield without perceiving how low and wild are the habits of a portion of the population' (Quoted in Saunders, 1853, p. 23).

of which crime was but just one symptom. Ill health, unemployment, illegitimacy, poor housing conditions and a high infant death rate served as proof of the moral indolence of the lower orders. As Jones has observed, the target of social reformers during the first three decades of the twentieth century was as much concerned with the nation's morals, as with its health:

[T]he goal of cleaning up underprivileged social groups in the interests of the nation's health expanded from the actual state of cleanliness of the individuals' bodies to a concern with their morals, education and conduct.<sup>228</sup>

One of the first Sheffield women sanitary inspectors, Mrs Greenwood, testified to the Committee on Physical Deterioration the intimate relationship between the high infant death rate in the city, insanitary conditions and the 'habits of life...conditions more or less within the control of the people themselves'.<sup>229</sup> When confronted by the Chairman's rhetorical question, 'Do you see any way to get rid of those habits, don't they prefer to pig it?' Mrs Greenwood replied

A great many of them do. They would not live in better houses if you provided them. As soon as one very unhealthy area is pulled down containing very insanitary surroundings they move into the next place, a shade better perhaps.<sup>230</sup>

Mrs Greenwood could well have had in mind the resettlement of the inhabitants of the notorious Crofts area of tenements, demolished in 1898. Populated almost exclusively by Irish immigrants, the warren of alleys and courtyards covered 5 \_ acres on the northern edge of the city centre and had, like its inhabitants, acquired a reputation for lawlessness, vice and squalor.<sup>231</sup> Irish immigrants seem to have

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<sup>228</sup> Jones (1980, p.34).

<sup>229</sup> Wife of a local doctor, Mrs Greenwood was one two women sanitary inspectors appointed in 1899. By 1901 the number of such inspectors had risen to six and in 1906 two more women were appointed. Their brief was to 'improve standards of cleanliness in poor working class homes and advise on the feeding and rearing of young children' (Shaw, 1993, p.100).

<sup>230</sup> *Report of the 1904 Inter-Departmental Committee on Physical Deterioration*. Vol. 1, pp 309, 8104, 8105. Cd. 2175.

<sup>231</sup> 'These homes', remarked one observer in 1839, 'are the scenes of wretchedness that could not be surpassed by anything in Ireland' (Holland, 1839, p. 104). Almost the only major slum clearance undertaken during the period and amongst the first Corporation re-housing schemes in the city, the demolition of this area was embarked upon under the 1890 Housing of the working Classes Act. The slums were replaced by 181 tenements housing 700 people, though many of the original families, unable

provided a particular focus of police activity in the middle decades of the nineteenth century. For example, the criminal statistics published during the 1850s included a special category for offences committed exclusively by the Irish. The same criminal statistics show how, during the years 1860 to 1862, Irishmen accounted for 18 per cent of all those arrested by the Sheffield police.<sup>232</sup> During the same period they probably comprised little over five per cent of the town's population (Pollard & Holmes, 1976).

Such areas had become firmly established in the middle class purview during the late nineteenth century as places of vice, immorality and crime. Most notorious were the warren of streets, alleyways and courtyards in the city centre periphery - particularly the Park and Ponds districts to the East and the Crofts, St. Philips and Scotland Street districts to the North. These areas contained some of the worst slums in England, that consistently furnished the highest birth and death rates together with the highest incidences of disease to be found anywhere in the city.<sup>233</sup> Poor housing conditions were attributed partly to the inferior housing stock and partly to the habits of a demoralised class of Sheffield's populace. During the second half of the nineteenth century when the population of the town doubled in size, the common lodging houses that catered for new arrivals and transitory residents became the object of particular concern. Despite efforts towards their removal, by the beginning of the Great War there were still approximately 500 sub-let and lodging houses which then Sheffield Medical Officer, Dr Harold Scurfield, described as 'much the worst and most filthy accommodation in the city' being inhabited by 'the most derelict class of the community, who have come down through drink and misfortune'.<sup>234</sup>

Such explicit reference to disease and pestilence served to denote the slums as a source of both moral and physical contagion. Just as the sanitary reformers and housing officials believed that the slums were the breeding grounds of disease that threatened to

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to afford the higher rents, had relocated to other areas of the town, in particular the St. Philips area immediately adjacent which itself had acquired a similar unenviable reputation. William Blackshaw, the founder of the Croft house settlement in Garden Street, occupied one of the newly erected flats from 1901 to 1911 (Blackshaw, 1939, p.198; see also Gaskell, 1977; Owen, 1931; Spencer, Undated).

<sup>232</sup>Of the total of 2,787 persons taken into custody in 1860, 576 of these were Irish. The corresponding figures for 1861 and 1862 were, respectively: 3,065:502; 2,784:453. *Criminal Statistical Returns of the Sheffield Police 1845-1862*, SCL.

<sup>233</sup> See Owen (Ibid); *Sheffield Medical Officer of Health Reports 1913-1929*, SCL.

<sup>234</sup> Ibid. (p.14).

contaminate those outside, crime was regarded by the social reformers and other officials as a pathological condition which required invasive intervention, isolation and treatment. Supervision of the common lodging houses by the civic authorities was matched by police surveillance of such areas.<sup>235</sup> In accordance with the statutory requirements, the annual returns from the Sheffield Chief Constable provided, until the First World War, a statistical summary of such 'houses of bad character' frequented by 'habitual criminals', together with the total number of habitual criminals known to be at large.

### Post war turbulence

It is evident from the above that crime and the criminal classes provided a regular focus of concern for the Sheffield middle classes during the Victorian and early Edwardian years. It is therefore especially striking that in Sheffield during the twenties there predominated amongst both the middle classes and the municipal leadership a markedly low key approach to crime. What became known as the Sheffield 'Gang Wars' certainly aroused a good deal of public interest and debate. Yet, as I described earlier, the predominant response of the municipal leadership was to maintain a relaxed view of the problem. Moreover, pace those who claim an inevitable association between social crisis and the orchestration of crime panics by the governing classes, neither were there any serious efforts to fuse law and order themes. As I show below, economic slump, industrial friction and political conflict generated a tremendous degree of concern amongst the lower middle classes in the post-war decade. Yet it appears that this anxiety was instead most commonly expressed through the medium of other social issues.

For example, during the 1920s the risk to the health of the better off sections of the population arising from periodic outbreaks of disease in the poorer quarters of the city served to give form to wider middle class concerns. While epidemics of cholera and typhoid had caused apprehension amongst Sheffield's middle class during the nineteenth century, such diseases as influenza, smallpox and 'sleepy sickness' continued to give form to similar anxieties during the post war years. 'Sleepy sickness' was the common name attributed to *Encephalitis Lethargica*, a disease that appeared in Britain during the

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<sup>235</sup> The lodging houses in those areas were subjected to regular visits by police officers on their beats. *Three log books of an unnamed police constable 1912-1924*. SCA.

1920s.<sup>236</sup> Few urban areas were untouched by the condition. However, the incidence of the disease was much lighter in most centres of England and Wales than in Sheffield, where it was alleged to have reached 'epidemic' proportions.<sup>237</sup> The disease aroused a considerable degree of public concern in the city, with the Sheffield newspapers providing regular updates on the spread of the disease and the latest fatalities.<sup>238</sup> A characteristic feature of the condition was its prevalence amongst young persons and its association with a number of behavioural disturbances. It was these alleged characteristics that led a number of observers outside Sheffield to speculate about the link between criminality and sleepy sickness, and to demand that appropriate measures should be adopted accordingly. As the child psychiatrist Rose Gordon explained,

Certain diseases affecting the brain are notoriously associated with delinquency. Of these by far the most interesting is encephalitis lethargica - sleepy sickness. In many of these cases there appears as a sequel to the acute attack a moral deterioration which leads too commonly to delinquency.<sup>239</sup>

Despite the utterances of some national commentators, the alleged criminogenic consequences of the disease were mentioned infrequently. Instead the predominant, though largely euphemistic, theme that was alluded to in such debates was the latent threat posed by the urban poor. This feature was particularly noticeable when an outbreak of smallpox subsequently occurred in Sheffield. In 1925 and 1926 a small number of cases of the disease were notified to the medical authorities. When an outbreak occurred in the East End of the city in January and February of the following year, in the words of Fred Wynne, the Sheffield Medical Officer of Health, 'the public became thoroughly alarmed and very large numbers of persons sought vaccination'. It

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<sup>236</sup> The condition came to public and professional attention in the form of a global epidemic in the years after the First World War, following the influenza epidemic, with which there appears to have been some crossover. For an excellent account of the rise of the condition see Sacks (1976).

<sup>237</sup> In the spring of 1924 there occurred a serious outbreak in the city, when, of the 337 notified cases, 40 subsequently died. Of these 56 per cent were under the age of 21, while 58 per cent were males. *Sheffield Medical Officer of Health Reports*, 1924, p.15. During the following year the incidence of cases was far lighter - 54 cases and 21 deaths.

<sup>238</sup> See the *Sheffield Daily Telegraph*, April and May 1924.

<sup>239</sup> Gordon (1928, p. 65). Typical of many was an article in a national paper headlined, "Is Crime A Disease. Is Crime the Outcome of Disease?" The article went on to suggest that, 'Sleepy Sickness weakens the will and may bring startling changes in moral character... In some case sober, respectable men and women have become thieves and vagabonds. In other cases they have developed murderous tendencies' *Sunday News* 28 September 1924.



was the concentration of cases in the congested industrial suburbs of Attercliffe and Darnall, which showed 'a tendency to spread along the tram route' that served as a focus for middle class anxiety.<sup>240</sup> In a letter to the Sheffield Daily Telegraph, one reader conveyed the feelings of those living in the more affluent suburbs concerning their neighbours in the East of the city:

As public conveyances are one of the chief items in the spread of virulent disease, such as smallpox, may I through your valuable paper make a simple suggestion? The Tinsley trams come out to Millhouses and are a constant source of danger to those who use them living in the Southern district of Sheffield. The Darnall trams go through the city from Handsworth to Nether edge in a similar manner. Why not turn them around at a city terminus and keep them solely to the infected districts?<sup>241</sup>

The Sheffield Daily Telegraph and its sister publication, the Yorkshire Telegraph and Star, played a particularly prominent role in the campaign to alert its readers to the threat.<sup>242</sup> Many of those living in middle class neighbourhoods, well away from the infected areas, were the first to demand effective vaccination measures. In total, one hundred thousand people, more than one fifth of the population of the city, were vaccinated.<sup>243</sup> In the event, only 100 cases of the disease were notified and there were no fatalities.

Such incidents offer an insight into the unease felt by many middle class residents towards their poorer neighbours. During the 1920s the physical distance between residents polarised residentially along economic lines heightened such anxieties. This cultural polarisation was for many visitors one of the city's most striking features. One commentator observed in the mid 1890s: 'I know of no manufacturing town where the contrast between the dwelling places of the rich and poor are so strongly marked, or the

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<sup>240</sup> *Sheffield Medical Officer of Health Reports 1927*, p.11

<sup>241</sup> Letter to the Editor entitled 'Trams and disease' by 'A Doctor'. Sheffield Daily Telegraph, 18 January 1927, p.3.

<sup>242</sup> The Chief Medical Officer gave special praise to the efforts to each of the two editors: 'I have to thank the editors of the staff of the Sheffield Telegraph and Yorkshire Telegraph and Star for their valuable support in promoting the essential measures.' *Sheffield Medical Officer of Health Reports 1927*, p.11. See also Sheffield Daily Telegraph 11 January 1928.

<sup>243</sup> *Sheffield Medical Officer of Health Reports 1927*, p.11

separation between them so complete' (Quoted in Smith, Op. Cit, p.236).<sup>244</sup> Residential segregation augmented the cultural polarisation between the middle-class citizens and their poorer neighbours. Often forced to pass through these neighbourhoods on the way to work, professionals could exhibit feelings of loathing and fear. In his novel *The Amazing Sanders* published in 1927, Eric Simons provides a fictional account of a respectable white-collar employee of a large steel manufacturing concern in the town of 'Sheffham'. In it he describes the eponymous hero's view of the industrial neighbourhood of 'Atterley' in which both the hero and the author worked:

He looked at it and hated it, yet he saw that it was alive. It teemed, it swarmed, it proliferated...[It presented] the spectacle of a vast, unregulated growth, a gathering force of dark and fitful forces that might one day well up and brim over into the pleasant, spacious suburban life beyond.

Of its inhabitants he wrote:

The Atterley houses were sordid, squalid, dirty outside and often dirtier inside...[T]heir inmates stood, slatternly and unashamed, in the doorways of their dwellings. They gossiped without restraint in backyards and streets. They shouted criticisms of one another across low brick walls...They were equally unreticent concerning their drink, which they fetched in jugs or bottles. They were not ashamed to do crude, primitive things to one another in full view of their fellows. They were unafraid of life because it had no meaning for them (Simons, 1927, pp.50, 93-4).<sup>245</sup>

These lines reflected a long held belief on the part of the lower middle classes of the slovenly character of the urban poor, sentiments that were further invigorated by the turbulent upheavals during the First World War and the subsequent decade.

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<sup>244</sup> The few attempts to locate working class housing in the western regions of the city met with local hostility. Gaskell notes how the proposal at the turn of the century to erect working class housing in the 'respectable' High Storrs area provoked fears about "the bringing of wild Irishmen into the district" and that "the persons who would be accommodated would go to the public house and create a disturbance", Gaskell (1977, p. 190-1).

<sup>245</sup> Simons worked as publicity Chief for Edgar Allen & Co., a large industrial concern in the Attercliffe district of the city. For similar accounts of middle class fears regarding their poorer neighbours see Masterman (1922, p.54) and Mckibbin (1991, pp.259-302).

## War and Middle Class Anxiety

The war of 1914-18 and the domestic turmoil that it unleashed came to have a major impact upon respectable opinion in the years following the Armistice. The slaughter of youth, the growth of political animosities, the perceived flouting of old conventions and the impact of changed routines – all provided a source of concern for the middle-classes during this time. Such anxiety was compounded by a number of broader social changes that had been initiated by the war. The entry of large numbers of women into local industry, the departure of men to the front, the influx of some four thousand migrant workers spoke of an unprecedented fluidity of the Sheffield population. Moreover, there was a perception amongst the middle class that formerly stable institutions and conventions were being undermined. The changing habits of women were source of particular consternation amongst leading members of the Sheffield middle class.<sup>246</sup>

Church leaders proved particularly sensitive to the perceived dissolution of social habits and articulated these anxieties most persistently during these years. It is also worth noting that the same individuals were the most inclined to express these concerns by chastising the Sheffield flock for their proclivity for vice and crime. The war had highlighted the gulf between the religious authorities and the bulk of the population. Those who were deemed in the greatest need of moral guidance turned out to be the most estranged from the churches.<sup>247</sup> The perception of change in the post-war period was all the more intense given the patriotic solidarity that marked the early stages of the war. The conflict had brought to the surface those ideals that municipal elders had long held in reverence. The upsurge of national unity in the early years of the war had confirmed the enduring superiority of the values of self-sacrifice and service and the truth of the claim that, 'it is not what a man gains that makes him great, it is what he

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<sup>246</sup> As Robert Holmes remarked in 1923, '[t]here was never a time when girls were found parading the streets and frequenting picture house or music-hall, or dancing salon in such numbers, in season, out of season, as they do today. It is unfortunate that to the modern girl almost everything old fashioned seems disagreeable. Few, church organisations, for example, however beneficent their past activities, retain their old grip. This is all to the bad... What must trouble any thoughtful observer is the number of girls permitted to grow up ignorant of domestic duties, and consequently unfit to become wives and mothers. The resultant misery is demonstrated in an alarming increase in applications for maintenance or separation orders...' (Holmes, 1923).

<sup>247</sup> See *The Army and Religion - An Enquiry and its Bearing upon the Religious Life of the Nation 1919*; (Wilkinson, 1978).

gives' (Odom, 1917, p. 83).<sup>248</sup> Yet as the conflict progressed the local middle classes began to view with unease the intensity of transformations that had occurred in all areas of social life and the spectacle of a population that had been aroused by the adversity of war. The troops would return home, warned the Sheffield social reformer Arnold Freeman,

far more embittered against the old routine of drudgery and the old environment of slum. And they will come back more detached from the existing order of things; less willing (and indeed less able) to accept the pre-war circle of ideas and ways; less docile in behaviour; more ambitious in outlook; vaguely but intensely feeling that they have a moral right to the England they were called upon to save (Freeman, 1919, p.12).

Freeman's concerns were shared by many of his peers in the city and intensified by the industrial conflict that had flared up at home. The radicalism of organised labour that had marked the pre-war years returned in a more intensely politicised form during the last years of the war.<sup>249</sup> Those who had praised the sacrifice in the trenches greeted such unrest with alarm. For the Bishop of Sheffield the display of sectional animosity was of particular concern, given the 'duty and loyalty... and heroic self sacrifice that they had witnessed during the war.' The sudden evaporation of these qualities was regarded as particularly treacherous:

[I]t will be surely a truly pitiable sight if the memorials erected in honour of the great deeds of one generation should look down upon the lazy indifference and cowardly selfishness of their immediate successors.<sup>250</sup>

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<sup>248</sup> That so many of the youth within his congregation in the Heeley district of the city had rallied to the call of duty was a source of particular satisfaction for Odom. Of the twenty boys that had served in the choir in 1908, sixteen were serving in the armed forces when he wrote his book in 1917 (Ibid. pp.83-4).

<sup>249</sup> Reacting to a range of grievances, local munitions workers and skilled engineers waged their own war at home. Militancy erupted primarily as a result of the favourable leverage open to unskilled workers arising from the demand for labour, the dilution of the skilled engineering trades arising from the influx of migrant labour, and to the coercive nature of the Defence of the Realm Act.

<sup>250</sup> Lord Bishop of Sheffield, *Sheffield Diocesan Gazette*, May 1920, p.6. In his visit to Sheffield to receive honorary citizenship, Lloyd George attempted to invoke the recent patriotic sacrifice of the town's populace as a counter to the immediate conflict at home: 'If the battered shield of Prussian militarism lies rusted and rent on the ground, you will find on it the dent of Sheffield steel everywhere'. Lloyd George then implored his Sheffield audience to 'get rid of the war conditions between Capital and Labour. What is the use of peace in international affairs if it is replaced by a deadly, senseless, brutal, idiotic war at home'. Lloyd George, speech at Victoria Hall, 16 October 1920, *Sheffield Year Book and Record*, 1920, Sheffield City Libraries.

This mounting political and industrial turmoil formed the principal factor stirring middle class unease during this period. Whereas during the second half of the nineteenth and early twentieth century middle class anxiety had been expressed in terms of perceived cultural particularities of the lower orders, '[i]t was not until the First World War and the years immediately after that a more specifically *political* conception became predominant' (McKibbin, 1991). In the popular middle class imagination of the 1920s the lower orders came to be distinguished above all by their industrial and political belligerence. The crucial point to be made is that during the decade following the First World War it was this politically derived conception that furnished the predominant source of middle class unease. As Bonham observed, 'the political characteristic of the working man is that he is in a constant state of bargaining with his employer, with the strike weapon as the final argument' (Bonham, quoted in McKibbin, *Ibid*, p.271). At the height of the first wave of post-war strikes in 1919 the Lord Mayor, Alderman William Irons, expressed something of the exasperation of the middle classes:

In Sheffield they had a baker's strike, a cabmen's strike, a threatened police men's strike, a miner's strike, a railway strike and now they had a moulder's strike and what the next strike would be he did not know, but he thought they had had enough as all these matters did cause a great deal of anxiety<sup>251</sup>

In the years following the war, Sheffield acquired a national reputation as, one Home Office official remarked, a 'storm centre of industrial unrest' (see Chapter 6). Of prime concern to municipal leaders was the prospect of this belligerent class achieving political power. That they were sooner or later to obtain a greater role in determining the course of political and social affairs was almost universally accepted. The concern of the local middle classes was to ensure that this power was administered in a responsible and agreeable fashion, and frequently articulated this concern in an anxious manner.<sup>252</sup> A

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<sup>251</sup> Sheffield Telegraph and Star October 21, 1919. See also Sheffield Rotary Club Minutes, SCA.

<sup>252</sup> Eager to gauge the likelihood of the workers reacting 'intelligently or violently', Arnold Freeman, Warden of the St. Phillips Settlement, undertook a survey in 1917 revealingly entitled "The Equipment of the Workers". The survey found three-quarters either "Inadequately-equipped" or "Mal-equipped" to participate 'intelligently' in political and industrial affairs. The latter group, he concluded, 'without definitely knowing what they want, and without much willingness to self-discipline and patient endeavour, will *violently* react against a continuation of the of the pre-war industrial and social order or of any approximation to it'. One survey-worker described a typical "Mal-equipped" worker thus: 'Opinion of education: none, any more than he has an opinion of Hindostani - Spends his evenings in the pub etc., Home: Very dirty; swarms of dirty children; dirty wife, much of his calibre. Reads only the football and

characteristic feature of the municipal elite, by contrast, was their determination to put in place positive measures of social amelioration as a solution to political extremism, a theme I return to in the next chapter.

### The Politics of Disorder

Throughout the 1920s, Sheffield suffered some of the highest levels of unemployment in the country (Benton, 1976; Owen, 1932). Heavily dependent upon a narrow manufacturing base and government expenditure, the local economy was devastated by the slump that followed the cessation of war-time military spending. As one of the Distressed Regions, unemployment never fell below 40,000 during the decade. The contraction of both profits and household finance resulted in a series of strikes and lockouts that were equalled in intensity and bitterness only by political rivalries in the city. On one side stood the ruling Citizens' Association, an alliance of Liberals and Conservatives that had acceded to power in the first post-war municipal election held in 1919 (Mathers, 1979a; 1979b). An overwhelmingly middle class organisation, the Association's leadership was committed to the exclusion from office of those socialists and communists who faced them from the other side of the political divide. Yet as the twenties wore on, growing popular disapproval was the price the alliance paid for economic slump and policies directed to fiscal stringency. At the same time, an increasingly well-organised political opposition accelerated the Association's diminishing hold on power. Labour was successful in three local parliamentary divisions at the General Election of 1922, and their share of seats in the Council Chamber continued to increase at each November local election until the municipal Labour victory in 1926. The Communist Party was also relatively strong and active in the city. A local branch had been formed in 1920, the members of whom were active in organising the unemployed, striking workers and campaigning against household evictions.

The political loyalties of the professional elite as a whole were by no means tied to the Citizens' Association. Rather they were divided between the mainstream political parties with an increasing number of influential and progressive individuals joining the swelling ranks of Labour supporters. As I explore in the next chapter, the professional elite displayed a markedly sympathetic approach towards the problems faced by the

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racing news in the papers. No knowledge or interest in politics. - Looking at that stupid, animal-like face, I felt I was looking at the face of a Stone Age man' (Freeman, 1919, emphasis in original). See also, Hayward (1919); and Albaya (1977). For a critique of Freeman's survey see Masterman (1922).

urban poor. Despite this, however, the more evangelical Conservative supporters made some limited attempts to fuse political and law and order themes. The miners' strike of 1921 and the lockout of engineers the following year were accompanied by mass picketing, demonstrations and, often violent confrontations between the police and unemployed. These provoked alarm and indignant protests from those who claimed to speak for the city's middle classes.<sup>253</sup> It was during the bitterly contested municipal election campaigns that a more explicit fusion of political and law and order themes took place. The disorderly scenes witnessed during ward hustings provoked the Conservative press and the ruling Citizens' Association to compare the disruptive tactics of communist and socialist opposition with street 'hooligans'. But it was after the activities of the Sheffield Mooney and Park gangs came to public prominence in mid 1923 that an increasingly desperate Citizens' Association and their supporters took more conscious steps to discredit their opponents. As one contributor exclaimed to the Sheffield Daily

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<sup>253</sup> What the Sheffield Daily Telegraph described as a 'riot' and a 'city hold up' took place on Friday 12 August 1921, when thousands of unemployed took to the streets in the town centre. Traffic was brought to a standstill for several hours, and when elements of the unemployed attacked the offices of the 'Telegraph', the constabulary guarding the building responded in kind. Writing in his *Current Topics* column, Oakley described the occurrence as 'one of the most deplorable incidents in Sheffield's history', and blamed the attack on the 'dark and sinister designs of those who are trying to bring about revolution' through 'communistic lawlessness'. Sheffield Daily Telegraph 16 August 1921. Middle class observers condemned other, equally violent, disturbances that they held to be the work of communist agitators. A week after 'Black Friday', six thousand demonstrators marched past the courthouse in Castle Street during the trial of two of those previously arrested. Missiles were thrown, and a police baton charge resulted in the arrest of a further seven demonstrators. In June of that year the Court House had again been the scene of a disturbance, described as a 'riot' by the press, involving 'hundreds of Communists and unemployed'. The occasion was the hearing of a charge against Bernard Brennan, a young Irishman, of attempting to solicit arms from soldiers stationed at Hillsborough Barracks in the city. According to the 'Telegraph', the demonstrators attempted unsuccessfully to rush the doors of the Courthouse. When Harry Fisher, one of the magistrates came out of court he was 'mobbed'. Sheffield Daily Telegraph 24 June 1921. The Communist Party was also heavily involved in the Engineers lockout of 1922. A series of violent confrontations between the police and workmen took place outside the Jessops plant in Attercliffe. In one particular incident on 15 May 1922, which the press again described as a riot, 3,000 workmen clashed with a large body of mounted and foot police and a number of injuries and arrests were the result.<sup>253</sup> During the same year a large number of police clashed with 400 demonstrators attempting to prevent the eviction of a family from a property in the suburb of Walkley. Many demonstrators were hurt, one subsequently dying from his injuries. The incident occurred in Providence Road on 7 June 1922. One police Constable present during the affray described in his logbook how 'the crowd became very hostile and the police had to draw batons'. The demonstrator who subsequently died was John William Baker, 5,000 attending his funeral. Two of those arrested and committed to the assizes were the Councillors A. E. Butcher and A. Smith. *Log Book of Police Constable DOT Bridgett of F Division, May 1922-April 1923*, Sheffield City Archives. See Sheffield Daily Independent 30 June 1922 p.5. Of the local Press, the 'Telegraph' was the most inclined to highlight the lawless character of the city's political militants. When Peter Hanan, a well known local Communist, was arrested for the assault and robbery of Mr Charles Cooper, Director of the local firm Messrs Cuthbert Cooper and sons, the paper gave a good deal of attention to the incident. Mr Cooper was attacked in a city sub-way and robbed of £35. Though committed to the Assizes, Hanan was subsequently discharged. Sheffield Daily Telegraph 27 May 1922.

Telegraph, the hooligan gangs ruling the streets and the political gangs wrecking the local election meetings were one and the same:

Wherever these hooligans have shown their barbarous work by carrying in their pockets razors, bottles and hammers and used them at political meetings, it now lies in your power, ladies and gentlemen, to remove this savage attack on respectable citizens by recording your vote in the ballot-box. Then the losing candidate will realise how he has lost his seat. Then he will explain to the hooligans at the next election to be British.<sup>254</sup>

Although there are no recorded instances of attendees at such meetings ever carrying weapons or engaging in anything other than minor scuffles, this did not prevent the Conservative press from invoking the imagery of the street gangster as a warning of the political threat facing the municipality. As public support for the incumbent administration fell away, so the tactic of equating political disorder with street crime proved an increasingly attractive option. Following the murder of William Plommer in a gangland attack in April 1925, John Oakley took the opportunity to remind his readers, still in guarded language, of a political dimension of the gangs. Comparing their work to the 'American gangs', Oakley remarked that, 'the Sheffield gangs are quite different from that. We do not know that they are ever used in politics, though some of the disorderly scenes that have been witnessed might almost suggest it'.<sup>255</sup> The 1926 municipal elections witnessed the defeat of the Citizens' Association and its replacement by the first Labour administration in the country. Despite this, and sensing the scale of the threat during the preceding election campaign, the ruling alliance again alerted the electorate to the scale of the threat by fusing the themes of political militancy and street ruffianism. One election manifesto warned of the unholy trinity of 'Communism', 'Hooliganism' and 'Socialism'.<sup>256</sup>

Despite the hostility of industrial and political confrontations, however, the views of the Press and public spokesmen were, on the whole, markedly restrained in tone. Seeking consensus rather than conflict, the authorities strove to maintain a sympathetic disposition to the grievances of the unemployed and disaffected workers. Accordingly, the professional elite endeavoured to avoid the criminalisation of individuals involved in

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<sup>254</sup> LTE from 'Ex-serviceman', Sheffield Daily Telegraph 29 October 1924.

<sup>255</sup> Sheffield Daily Telegraph 30 April 1925.

<sup>256</sup> Sheffield Daily Telegraph 30 October 1926.



such disturbances. At the same time they aimed to drive a wedge between what they considered the legitimate grievances of the ordinary worker and the malign ambitions of the political agitator. The Telegraph 'sympathised with the grievances of the unemployed', but warned that they would 'gain nothing from association with Communistic lawlessness'.<sup>257</sup> And although the violence of the gangs was utilised as a means of discrediting the political opposition, it has to be remembered that this proved to be an exceptional tactic rather than the rule. It was one undertaken by an increasingly marginal and desperate administration, and often couched in cautious language for all that. As noted above and explored in more detail below, the policy of conciliation towards the grievances of the poor and incorporation of their political demands proved to be a more prudent strategy for the municipal leadership.

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<sup>257</sup> Sheffield Daily Telegraph 16 August 1921.

## Chapter Six

### Building consensus

The aim of this chapter is to explore in more detail the Sheffield elite's view of crime. I begin by outlining a number of key features that characterised this group. Closely-knit, yet remarkably well attuned to pressing social issues, it was distinguished primarily by its domination of decision-making bodies, its pursuit of political and moral leadership and commitment to welfare intervention. While political unrest provided a constant source of unease for the middle classes, their close involvement in an extensive network of voluntary and statutory institutions tended to mitigate such anxiety. Through a survey of these local forums and other arenas of debate, I explore elite perceptions of crime and related social issues. I suggest that although crime was a relatively infrequent feature of discussion, it nevertheless served an important function. Crucially, as integral elements of welfare liberalism, criminal and penal policy were utilised by the elite as a vindication of the efficacy of progressive social intervention. Fundamentally, the twin goals of welfare provision - the political inclusion and moral improvement of the lower orders - engendered a disposition to regard crime in a positive manner. Despite protracted and deeply felt anxiety amongst the middle classes at the time, crime was viewed as a source of optimism rather than unease. Sympathy for the plight of the offender together with a marked tendency to downplay the extent of crime characterised the Sheffield elite's attitude towards the criminal and his crimes during the 1920s.

#### The Sheffield Elite

The Sheffield elite was drawn from across the range of industrial, commercial and professional groups that comprised the broader middle-classes examined above. I use the term 'elite', after Von Wiese and Becker, to refer to those individuals who occupied leading positions in the economic, political and cultural life of the city.<sup>258</sup> In addition to this formulation I suggest that the active pursuit of ideological and moral leadership was as much a valid criterion for membership of this group as their possession of corporate

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<sup>258</sup> 'Whenever persons join or otherwise enter into a plurality pattern they almost invariably take their places in an implicit or explicit hierarchy, and consciously or unconsciously expect the fact that there are ranks above and below them', Von Wiese & Becker, *Systematic Sociology*, 1932, 355.

and political power or relative position in the social hierarchy. Many of the most powerful and wealthy individuals in the city took little interest in local affairs, while some of the most outspoken and influential individuals possessed modest political and business interests.<sup>259</sup> Indeed, the level of involvement in the political and civic life of the community often appeared to be in inverse proportion to their economic and commercial weight. It was the quest for such ideological leadership through involvement in a network of civic forums that fundamentally distinguished this body of individuals.

In his study of the history of the steel industry in Sheffield, Tweedale notes how the city was home to some of the country's largest industrial concerns and most powerful industrialists - men like Douglas Vickers, Robert Hadfield, Arthur Balfour and Albert Harland (Tweedale, 1995). Given the size and strategic importance of their corporations such individuals often maintained close relations with government.<sup>260</sup> Yet professional intimacy with Whitehall was often matched by reluctance to engage in wider political affairs. Devoted primarily to their business, few of those in charge of Sheffield's heavy industrial concerns ventured into the civic or political realm, often proving a source of frustration to their more publicly engaged associates. For example, Smith observes that, 'when Conservative candidates were needed for Parliamentary elections they could not be found amongst substantial local citizens' (Smith, 1982, p. 234). There were exceptions, though the few heads of large-scale enterprises who maintained interests outside of business tended to confine themselves to local affairs and even at the local level, the majority of these individuals often subordinated public life to their business interests.

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<sup>259</sup> Individuals who are nominally members of an elite group but who maintain a low profile or possess a retiring personality would, suggests Robert Reiner in his study of Chief Constables, in practice not merit such status (Reiner, 1992, p.43).

<sup>260</sup> 'Whitehall, the City of London and the Carlton Club' rather than Sheffield provided the focus of activity for the directors of some of the largest enterprises (Tweedale, *Op. Cit.*, p.261). See also Smith (*Op. Cit.*, p.235). Two of the most prominent individuals in this respect during the 1920s were Robert Hadfield and Arthur Balfour. Robert Hadfield (1858-1940) was Chairman and managing director of a large factory in the East End employing 7000 workmen and was also director of Sheffield Gas Company. As 'Sheffield leading spokesmen at the time' (Smith, *Op. Cit.*, p.236), both were of international distinction in the realm of commerce while Balfour was a prominent member of the government committee on Industry and Trade. Although this level of influence was exceptional amongst the city's industrial elite, what it does show is the extent to which Sheffield industrialists had widespread commercial and political connections. Such national prestige and worldly awareness ensured that their views and opinions eagerly sought after by the Sheffield media. And, despite their general avoidance of local concerns, they occasionally made forays into local debates, offering learned guidance on a range of industrial, political and moral issues.

The owners, directors and managers of the smaller industrial and commercial concerns were, by contrast, much more active on the local civic scene. In 1921 small firms made up nearly seventy per cent of Sheffield industrial undertaking in the metal trades and those who ran these operations took a prominent role in local political, industrial and religious affairs. Despite Sheffield's relatively small professional and commercial class, this group nevertheless managed to establish an intimate relationship with the local industrial community and succeeded in exerting a powerful influence upon Sheffield affairs during the early twentieth century. 'Because Sheffield', noted Binfield, 'is neither a mercantile nor a provincial capital its commercial and professional networks are smaller, perhaps less cosmopolitan, than in cities of comparable size and they are more intimately connected with its defining industry' (Binfield, 1997, p. 291). Amongst the most prominent participants in political and civic affairs were members of the legal profession. Indeed, whereas 'Sheffield had no steelmaking MP before 1914 and very few knights' (Tweedale, *Ibid.*), the legal profession was able to acquit itself in both areas quite respectably, and continued to do so after the war.<sup>261</sup> Prominent within the ranks of the local elite were individuals from the educational sector. Most notable amongst these was H.A.L. Fisher, key force behind the 1918 Education Act and Henry Hadow, Vice Chancellor of Sheffield University and a leading national spokesman on educational reform.<sup>262</sup> Although much of their time would have been spent outside of the city, they were what might be described as a local elite by assimilation, naturalized by dint of their professional expertise and social prestige.

Leading figures behind the local Press also played a prominent role in civic affairs. Despite the political and commercial rivalry, these individuals occupied overlapping spheres in local affairs. For example, John Oakley, editor of the Telegraph, was elected

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<sup>261</sup> Most prominent among these included Sir William Clegg, solicitor and leader of the Liberal party in the city, Arthur Neal, Liberal MP for Hillsborough and a Junior Minister in the 1919-22 Coalition Government and Sir Samuel Roberts, Conservative MP for the Ecclesall constituency until 1922 when, the following year, he became the MP for Hereford. Other leading politicians and dignitaries from the legal profession included Michael J Hunter, William Irons, Henry B Sandford, Robert Styring and W B Esam.

<sup>262</sup> Herbert Albert Laurens Fisher (1865-1940), Vice Chancellor of Sheffield University 1912-16, M.P for the Hallam Division of the city from 1916 to 1918, President of the Board of Education 1916-1922, Governor of the B.B.C. 1935-1939. Sir William Hadow (1859-1937) succeeded William Ripper as Vice Chancellor of the University in 1919, where he remained until 1930. Author of the Hadow Report of 1926, which firmly established the notion of a division at eleven between elementary schools and the secondary schools. As Justices of the Peace both Hadow and his predecessor established themselves as forthright personalities on the local bench. Hadow took his seat in 1922. Ripper had been sworn onto the Bench in 1917.

a member of the Education Committee in 1918, served on the Council of the Chamber of Commerce and was a member of the Council of the University of Sheffield. He was, moreover, appointed justice of the Peace in 1922 and a Licensing Justice twelve years later. Close and friendly relations with the town's leading businessmen and dignitaries, often maintained in the face of intense political rivalry, accompanied this kind of public work.<sup>263</sup> Their newspapers serviced the needs of the local middle class both for local and national news and aimed not simply to provide a leading voice in local affairs but also aspired to establish themselves on the national stage.

Like the middle-classes from which it was drawn, this elite was, in many respects, a heterogeneous formation (Smith, 1982; Wilson, 1999). Yet, while diverse it was also remarkably cohesive. The cross-denominational nature of religious affiliation provided a striking manifestation of the interlocking character of the Sheffield middle class leadership. This relative ecclesiastical harmony was, in turn, reflected in the ecumenical character of civic activity, with both Anglican and Free Church initiatives in local affairs often taking a co-operative form. (Binfield, 1997). The closely-knit character of the business community played a large part in the emergence of an elite that was fluid yet cohesive, forming 'a close knit community of shared values'. These linkages were reflected socially 'by intermarriage and a complex networking of families' that extended into the financial, banking, legal and professional scene of the city (Tweedale, *Op. Cit.*, p.145).<sup>264</sup> Smith has also noted the role of informal and familial contacts, though he has attached less importance to the role of civic forums.<sup>265</sup> Yet a striking feature of the Sheffield elite in the 1920s was its internal cohesion, that was manifested in its participation in a complex array of institutional forums. Some of these functioned as more obviously exclusive institutions. While the Company of Cutlers and the Chamber of Commerce provided the traditional venues of the business community, the Sheffield Club, and the Literary and Philosophical Institute also provided an important consolidating role (Mackerness, 1993, p.432). White has noted how the Sheffield Club

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<sup>263</sup> For example, despite the political differences and Sir William Clegg's dislike of the Telegraph both he and Oakley were, according to the latter's obituary, 'the firmest of friends' (*Op. Cit.*).

<sup>264</sup> The legal profession, for example, exhibited a striking degree of involvement and networking with the industrial side of the community. The Hunter's and the Robert's, the Esam's and the Styring's all had particularly close industrial connections.

<sup>265</sup> He suggested that the professional and business elite were 'integrated, loosely, through a web of private and semi-private ties rather than through participation in public and professional associations' (*Op. Cit.*).

‘was the main institution through which the elite came to be integrated’ (White, 1990, p.4). These institutions served as important, opinion-making forums, allowing members of the elite to associate, exchange ideas, and air individual and collective grievances.

It is important to recognise that such integration was achieved not simply through the durability of traditional associations. Indeed, as I described above, during the decade following the Great War bitter political division racked the middle class. The alliance that was forged between the Liberals and Conservatives in the form of the Citizens’ Party was accomplished only at the expense of deep divisions within both. As a consequence, the Liberal Party was effectively destroyed as a political force in the city while the Conservative Party was condemned into relative obscurity (Mathers, 1979b). What proved to be the most powerful factor in cohering members of the elite was a political climate that, in the first few years after the war, affirmed the necessity for unity. And it is their recognition and response to the political situation that provides the distinctive feature of the Sheffield elite.

The Sheffield Rotary Club is a case in point. Formed in July 1919 in the midst of a general strike, the Club exemplified the desire amongst the city’s professional middle class to increase their influence over the outcome of events, rather than be buffeted by circumstances as they arose.<sup>266</sup> Involvement of the middle class in institutions such as the Rotary Club was motivated by a concern to provide a lead concerning urgent social and civic questions. However, the exclusive character of such organisations limited the ability of the leading members of the local elite successfully to command either political or moral leadership in the city. The town’s leading individuals were convinced that authority and prestige were to be earned through dint of example rather than aloofness. Much more than the above institutions, it was the elite’s involvement in a extensive network of welfare institutions that offered a means to dispense both moral and material sustenance to the lower orders, contain their political demands and maintain political authority. It is this orientation to broader social questions that, as I show below, proved crucial in shaping the elite’s approach to crime and criminals.

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<sup>266</sup> The membership of the Sheffield Rotary Club was almost exclusively lower middle class. The inaugural meeting of the Rotary Club was held on 23 July 1919 in the West Street office of Mr Alfred Peters, an optician. Of the twelve founding members there were, besides Mr Peters, a solicitor, an optician, two Chemists, a dentist, a doctor, a bank manager, an insurance manager, a local printer and two steel manufacturers (*Minutes of the Sheffield Rotary Club*; SCA)

### The elite and the offender

In Chapter 4, I outlined how one section of elite opinion, in the form of newspaper editorials, approached the issue of crime and its treatment. I suggested that crime was viewed predominantly in progressive, positive terms and that an ameliorative approach was adopted with regard to the handling of crime. Originating in the general reconfiguration of society's approach to a range of social problems during the late nineteenth century it was an outlook that was shared by the bulk of the Sheffield elite. Just as important, it was a view of crime that was consolidated and given added importance in the social and political conditions prevailing during the 1920s. Imbued with the ethos of leadership and service, the professional elites directed their energies to the construction of political consensus on the domestic front. As the key element in this enterprise, the project of welfare intervention offered a common goal for the ruling elite, the pursuit of which gave both direction and definition to social life. Unlike their more individuated lower-middle class colleagues, there existed little basis for anxiety to take hold and flourish amongst those committed to this project.

At the core of this outlook lay the self-confidence of a class that remained convinced of the possibility of progressively transforming society and eradicating its most desperate social problems. Allied to this was a belief in the centrality of Christian brotherhood and the capacity for redemption of the most morally abject citizens. This ethos was more than an ideological construct. It found expression in the array of welfare institutions, both voluntary and statutory, within which members of the municipal leadership were closely involved. During the previous century such individuals had become benefactors to, and active participants in, a range of initially voluntary institutions that had as their goal the moral uplift and material amelioration of the urban poor. It was within these numerous voluntary bodies that sympathy for the poor and an evangelical desire to ease their plight was most clearly manifested. At the forefront of such intervention were the religious agencies, particularly the various nonconformist churches. Here, Settlement and Mission work provided a particularly important area of middle class, voluntarist involvement in the lives of the urban poor.

It is important to note that intervention was directed at the very heart of the most notorious districts in the city. In the early 1900s a number of settlements were purposely established in some of the poorest and most difficult areas. The Croft House Settlement was established in 1902 at Garden Street, located in the notorious 'Crofts' area of the

city, under the auspices of Rev William Blackshaw.<sup>267</sup> Four years later, Dr Helen Wilson established the Neighbour Guild Settlement at Rutland Hall while the North Sheffield Settlement was set up under the auspices of Rev. Thomas Tucker Broad of Burngreave Congregational Church.<sup>268</sup> Despite the minority status of the Anglican Church in the city, it too was the sponsor of a range of local social initiatives.<sup>269</sup> The Sheffield Educational Settlement, founded by Arnold Freeman, was one of the most conspicuous.<sup>270</sup> These institutions combined moral and spiritual uplift with an altruistic desire to ease the plight of the poor in the form of a wide range of social provisions.<sup>271</sup> As a number of writers have observed, this ethos provided a vital component of the burgeoning welfare role of both voluntary and statutory agencies (Fraser, 1984; Stedman Jones, 1971). A tradition of muscular, voluntarist intervention provided the model for many of the child welfare, health and housing reforms implemented by the municipality during the period. The elite's attitude to crime can be viewed, at least in part, as an extension of this orientation to a broader social policy. As Blackshaw commented

Destitution, crime, and disease are being viewed more from the standpoint of prevention than repression. Increasingly they imply a growth in the sense of social responsibility. Behind the whole movement is a deepened sense of human and personal values which cannot but be regarded as evidence of cultural, and even spiritual progress (Blackshaw, 1939, p.111).

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<sup>267</sup> William Blackshaw (1866-1953) was a pioneer of welfare work in the city. He was minister of Queen Street Congregational Church from 1899 to 1919 and warden at Croft House 1901-1913. In 1914, Miss Edith. B. Spencer, known as 'Sister Edith', became Warden of the Settlement. The 'Crofts' were a particularly 'difficult area' where the Warden 'very often ended up a busy Sabbath by stopping fights outside the flat where she lived' (Spencer, , p.1) SCA.

<sup>268</sup> A native of Cornwall, Rev. T.T. Broad (1863-1935) was involved in a wide range of public duties, in addition to his work at the settlement. He left Sheffield in 1916 after 22 years service but returned to the region in 1919 when he became a coalition Liberal M.P. for the Clay Cross constituency. *Obituary Yorkshire Telegraph and Star* 30 January 1935, p7; *Sheffield Telegraph* 31 January 1935, p4. See also Binfield 1993, Op. cit.; *Sheffield and District Who's Who*, 1905. Sheffield City Library.

<sup>269</sup> The Y.M.C.A. and Boy's Brigade were amongst a number of important organisations established by the Anglican Church in the city.

<sup>270</sup> See Albaya (1977).

<sup>271</sup> For example the Croft House Settlement offered a soup kitchen and a canteen, an unemployed men's centre where the unemployed 'made toys [and] mended shoes' for a small wage. Adult education was provided during the 1926 strike. The institution also functioned to provide jobs for school leavers and the Warden took to hospital children suffering with tuberculosis. The Settlement also boasted an operatic society, a swimming club and the city's first Boy Scouts troop; (Spencer, ); William Blackshaw *Obituary Sheffield Telegraph* 29 July 1953, p.3.



A characteristic tendency of the Sheffield municipal leadership was that the same individuals would involve themselves in a large number of voluntarist bodies. Those agencies devoted to dealing with the offender offered a key channel through which the local elite was able to put into practice its ethos of service and bring moral and material uplift to the urban poor. An important position, in this respect, was that of Justice of the Peace. Cecil Chapman, London Magistrate and prominent social reformer, believed that,

the work of a magistrate could not consist merely in punishing the guilty; it must also concern itself with helping the fallen and doing what was possible to trace the causes of disaster and the effects of punishment (Chapman, 1925, p.23).

Many of Sheffield's most prominent individuals occupied the Bench during the 1920s.<sup>272</sup> Perhaps no family was more actively involved in the welfare of offenders in the city than the Wilsons.<sup>273</sup> The Bench offered for the family an opportunity to undertake at home the kind of missionary work they had pursued abroad.<sup>274</sup> As with the Board of Guardians, the School Board, and seats in the Town Hall and Parliament, the position offered an opportunity to administer moral and material improvement to the poor.<sup>275</sup> The guiding principles of those who resided on the bench were service to the community and sympathy for the offender. Remarking on the appointment of a new Clerk to the City Justices, Henry Joseph Wilson remarked that he was '*very anxious to*

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<sup>272</sup>To take one year as an example, of the 111 magistrates serving in the Borough of Sheffield during 1927, 48 per cent were local industrialists while individuals from the commercial sector accounted for a further 34 per cent. (Taken from the data provided in the 1927 issue of *The Sheffield Red Book*. Sheffield City Library).

<sup>273</sup> See Wilson (1960), Fowler (1961) and *Biographical Notes Relating to Sheffield*, SCL.

<sup>274</sup> The family had been prominent campaigners in the anti-slavery movement and continued to maintain a strong interest in foreign missionary work. His youngest daughter Gertrude served as a missionary in India, while Henry Wilson consistently intervened on imperial issues. Foreign missionary work also engaged the attention of his brother, Mr J. Wycliffe Wilson and nephew, Mr Talbot E. B. Wilson (1865-1950) in the form of work for the Sheffield Auxiliary to the London Missionary Society. A daughter of Wycliffe Wilson, Rosalie, married and became an industrial missionary in Papua New Guinea. As Fowler notes the Wilson family was committed to fight 'the internal restrictions of temptation as well as the external restrictions of oppression' (Op. Cit. p.29)

<sup>275</sup> Mr J. Wycliffe Wilson took a leading role in the reform of the Poor Law and, as a member of the Board of Guardians, he pioneered the introduction of scattered homes for children in the 1890s, *Sheffield Biographical Notes* SCL. For Cecil Henry Wilson (1862-1945) politics seemed to offer just as fruitful a platform for missionary work. He served as a magistrate from 1907 and as a Liberal councillor until 1916, when he joined the Labour Party. In the same year, 'he and his wife left their pleasant, roomy house in Pitsmoor and went to a small house in the working-class district of Attercliffe, so as to be among those with whom he was associated in his political and religious life.' In fact the new residence consisted of two ordinary houses run together. *Local Pamphlets*, Vol. 269 No.3 SCL.

have a man who in addition to his experience... [has] added *sympathy* with poor people'.<sup>276</sup>

As one of the 'great unpaid', material reward or public recognition counted for rather less than the desire to fulfil the ethos of service directed at realising the twin goals of individual redemption and social reform. The considerable investment of time and resources that many magistrates undertook in these and other voluntary duties was often to the detriment of their business activities, an inevitable consequence of an outlook that held 'public service [to be] more important than personal riches' (Wilson, 1960, p.169). H. J. Wilson's belief in the value of the bench as a platform from which to administer both moral benefaction and justice was passed on to his offspring, several of whom became prominent magistrates. Fowler has noted how his children were instilled with such ideas:

As a J.P. problems were discussed with the children, and they were asked what they would have done if they had been on the Bench themselves. The children learnt the rules of evidence, how to sort out fact from fancy, and how to temper justice with mercy... Thus prepared for lives of service, it is not surprising to find that three of the children were themselves to become Justices of the Peace, and all of them rendered service in public life in various capacities (Fowler, 1961, p.118).

Imbued with the ideals of service and sympathy for the lower orders, all three children became Justices and took up prominent positions in a number of areas of public service in the city. The oldest daughter, Dr. Helen Wilson, became an eminent Sheffield magistrate and was a leading figure behind many voluntary organisations. Like many of the increasing number of women who were admitted to the bench after the First World War, Helen Wilson was selected predominantly on her record of voluntary social work. The Sex Disqualification (Removal) Act 1919 came into force on 23 December of that year, followed by the first appointments of women magistrates at the beginning of 1920.<sup>277</sup>

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<sup>276</sup> Quoted in McWilliams (1983, emphasis in original).

<sup>277</sup> On 26 January 1920 Eleanor Barton became the city's first woman J.P., followed in August of that year by Frances Stephenson, Helen Mary Wilson and Anne Jane Marsh. Edith Osborn and Anne Frances Styring followed on 13 February and 16 August 1922 respectively. See *Sheffield Commission of the Peace 1848-1974*, City of Sheffield, 1981.

The Wilsons, like many of their colleagues, administered justice much like they ran their businesses – both as a family endeavour and in a fashion that was strict yet paternalistic.<sup>278</sup> The Wilson family exemplified the way in which the generally small-scale character of industrial production gave rise to an environment where a ‘family business culture predominated’ (Tweeddale, Op. Cit., p.135). Their attitude to their employees had a direct bearing on their approach to offenders and discharge of judicial responsibilities. Considerable emphasis was placed upon personal and business rectitude, particularly in the realms of punctuality and honesty. Faith in the moral integrity of the workforce was essential in those businesses that, like the Wilsons’, involved the handling of valuable precious metals. At the same time the owners and their wives took much interest in the welfare of individual employees and their families, while worker loyalty was actively encouraged and reciprocated by the owner. In his book, *Them That Fall*, the Sheffield Police Court Missionary Robert Holmes noted how in their roles both as employer and as magistrate, industrialists and their wives often took a personal interest in the well-being of individuals who may have strayed (Holmes, 1923, p. 11-12).

In the same book, Holmes lays out the results of a survey of businessmen regarding their employees’ honesty. Holmes consulted the owners of ‘steel, cutlery and engineering works, and merchants and manufacturers in other industries, shop keepers, publicans, stockbrokers, lawyers and newspapermen’. He concluded that almost all of the businessmen were convinced of the integrity of their workmen. All were ‘emphatically opposed’ to the belief that they were dishonest:

An employer of fifty years standing who had seen employees grow from twelve to six hundred, could remember finding no more than seven dishonest. Another could recall only five out of four hundred in forty years. A third, chiefly employing women and girls, had during a similar period experienced the good fortune of finding only two out of five hundred. Much of the same story was told by the rest, the total number of thieves found by the employers of about

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<sup>278</sup> Sir William Henry Ellis (1861-1945) was Director of John Brown & Co. Ltd, the large iron and steel manufacturers based at the Atlas works in the East End of the city. He was born in Sheffield and became a city magistrate in 1915. Obituary, *The Sheffield Telegraph* 5 July 1945. Made a justice of the peace in 1906, Harry Fisher (1840-1924) was born in Sheffield. He was described in his obituary as, ‘Sheffield made both haft and blade’. He was ‘a striking personality, a forceful and fearless speaker, and an enterprising and successful business man... Mr Fisher had the habit of hitting out straight from the shoulder’. Obituary *Sheffield Daily Telegraph* 27 March 1924.

five thousand work people being sixty in from thirty to fifty years (Holmes, 1923, p. 11).

Holmes informs us that on those occasions when dishonesty was uncovered, the habit of Sheffield industrialists was to offer the offender an opportunity to redeem himself. As one industrialist put it, 'you are far more likely to turn a man into a habitual thief by refusing to trust him again after a first offence than do yourself harm by giving him another chance' (Holmes, 1923, p.155-6). The paternalistic nature of workplace relations helped to foster an attitude that regarded dishonesty in the workplace as rare, but when discovered, to be dealt with through informal disciplinary measures. As one manufacturer of electroplate insisted, '[of] course, if thieving by employees was prevalent in a business like mine drastic steps would have to be taken. Fortunately it is not prevalent. I haven't lost a hundred pounds that way these fifty years. Which says something for my treatment of those who did forget themselves and more for my work-peoples honesty' (Holmes, 1923, p.158-9). Both Holmes and his industrialist colleagues were eager to emphasise the infrequency of theft and embezzlement by employees and that the worker could be relied upon to carry out his duties honestly.

### The Voluntary Sphere and Intervention

Those agencies devoted to dealing with the offender offered a key channel through which the local elite was able to disseminate its ethos of social responsibility and citizenship and bring moral and material uplift to the urban poor. The intimate association with the lower classes offered by the Bench, the Police Court Mission and the Discharged Prisoners Aid Society, for example, ensured that these were central institutions for elite intervention. As the London magistrate and leading reformer Cecil Chapman noted, the Police Court offered a 'unique opportunity of assisting to raise or depress the character of those with whom he has to deal' (Chapman, 1925, p.11). The Police Court formed the site where the most intimate and also the most brutalised aspects of ordinary life could be subjected to public scrutiny and regulation:

Such courts are not less important because they deal with the infinitely little, for it is in that sphere that germs of corruption are engendered which poison the whole of society (Chapman, p.9).

Sympathy for the plight of the offender allied to the goal of moral and spiritual reclamation formed the guiding ethos of the Sheffield Police Court Mission for Men. At the same time, the body offered an unrivalled facility to intervene in the lives of the urban poor. The body was founded in 1899 by the Sheffield Christian Temperance Association under the tutelage of Robert Holmes, Police Court Missionary and Sheffield's first Probation Officer.<sup>279</sup> The work of such Missionaries had initially been directed at exhorting offenders to give up drink and indeed much of their duties had been taken up with work outside the police court. However, their work in the courts expanded rapidly after the 1879 Summary Jurisdiction Act. The provisions of this Act allowed magistrates to involve missionaries in the supervision of offenders, while the 1887 Probation of First Offenders Act gave the Missionary responsibility to undertake per-sentence enquiries of the offender. The Probation Act of 1907 further extended the power of the probation officer by allowing the supervision of the offender at home and the payment of a salary to the Missionary.<sup>280</sup> Despite the overly conspiratorial thrust of a number of accounts of such intervention (Garland, 1981; Garland, 1985; Platt, 1969), it is nevertheless important to recognise the way in which this increasing level of supervision was closely tied to the notion of sympathy towards the accused. Specifically, leniency was administered at the expense of greater intervention into the life of the offender. As McWilliams remarks,

Special pleading was of the essence of the missionary effort in court, and the essence of the plea itself was for mercy. If the court could be persuaded to show mercy to the penitent accused, the missionary would have the opportunity to work with him to encourage and guide his reformation (McWilliams, 1983, p.137).

Supervision by the Missionary and scrutiny of his home life was the price paid by the offender for the mercy of the state, while the mission accrued from the state the benefit of institutional recognition and funding. Of vital significance in all of this was the voluntary character of the work carried out by the Police Court Missionary. Given

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<sup>279</sup> Robert Holmes (1869-1951) was Associate of the Borstal Association, prominent in the Central Association for the Aid of Discharged Convicts, and a leading member the Sheffield Discharged Prisoners Aid Society. He also represented the Diocese of Sheffield in the National Assembly of the Church of England and was the author of a number of novels. Originating from outside Sheffield, in 1934 he retired and moved to London. *Sheffield Daily Telegraph* Obituary 13 March 1951; *Who's Who* 1926.

<sup>280</sup> The Criminal Justice Act of 1925 finally made the appointment of a probation officer a statutory obligation on every petty sessional division throughout the country.

the intrusive nature of the duties it was important that he and those who underwrote the work of the mission appeared free from the taint of coercive political intervention by the state.<sup>281</sup> The voluntary character of the Police Court Mission, the Discharged Prisoners Aid Society (DPAS) and the magistrate's Bench allowed these agencies and their patrons not to 'be looked upon as spies but as persons to be referred to for help and advice' (Chapman, 1925, p. 78). Accordingly, these services facilitated a degree of intervention not open to the purely statutory bodies. As William Blackshaw, the founder of the Croft House Settlement, noted, 'the social service which voluntary societies may perform can penetrate more deeply into the lives of men than statutory social service' (Blackshaw, 1939, p.73). It is mainly for this reason that attempts to professionalise probation duties fully met some resistance from the local bodies, the workers of both the Men's and Women's Police Court Missions continuing to combine temperance and probation work (see McWilliams, Op. Cit). For example, it was not until 1 March 1935, when Miss Kate E. Fowler was appointed Principal Probation Officer, that the Sheffield Women's Christian Temperance Association agreed to release one of their members from Police Court Missionary work to undertake Probation work on a full time basis.

### Reintegration through Employment

It is important that one should see the relationship between the probation service and the accused during this time, in intent if not in practice, as mutually beneficial rather than purely coercive. It was a reciprocal arrangement whereby the wayward individual was reintegrated into society and the social contract between state and individual renewed. Where the social bond had been severed, as upon the commitment of a crime, the work of the missionary was directed at reconstituting that bond. In this respect, the provision of work for those deemed capable of rescue was seen to play a particularly crucial role. As Churchill remarked during his tenure as Home Secretary before the Great War, one of the 'unfailing tests of civilisation' was the 'desire and eagerness to

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<sup>281</sup> From its establishment in 1899 until the mid 1930s, and possibly afterwards, much of the work of Police Court Mission was funded by donations and subscriptions from members of the local middle classes. After the Probation of Offenders Act, 1907 Robert Holmes probation duties for the men's mission were part-funded by the Home Office.

rehabilitate in the world of industry all those who have paid their dues in the hard coinage of punishment'.<sup>282</sup>

Much of the work of Robert Holmes was taken up with the search for suitable positions for placing delinquent men and boys in work. Of the 7,720 that had been dealt with by the Mission in the 24 years until 1923, 4,693 of these had been 'given chances in fresh situations through its agency.'<sup>283</sup> Many of the boys were found berths in the mercantile marine while others, particularly those of a 'feeble constitution' were sent to work in the country, either in England or in the Colonies. The majority of offenders, however, were offered positions in local industry. Owing to the fact that many of the same magistrates before whom the accused were brought were also industrialists, most of those who had fallen and deemed worthy of a second chance were placed back on their feet in a local factory or workshop. As one of Holmes' main tasks was to place those referred to him by local magistrates in the employ of local businessmen, close and regular contact with such employers was necessary. This was particularly so when the economy was depressed and competition for work was intense. As Holmes declared, 'my favourite recipe for curing a lad of a tendency to steal being to put him to work where little or no temptation lay, I could have done nothing without the abundant assistance given to me' (Holmes, *Ibid.* p.88). The Missionary therefore maintained particularly close relations with local industrialists who provided both funds and positions in their factories for the delinquents.<sup>284</sup> As confirmation for contemporaries that intervention at an early age was the most effective means of reclamation, Holmes was able to declare that whereas only twenty per cent of the men dealt with by the Sheffield Discharged Prisoners Aid Society had not re-offended, as many as 85 per cent of those dealt with by the Mission had been placed in employment and had not re-offended.<sup>285</sup>

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<sup>282</sup> Winston Churchill, 1910 (quoted in Radzinowicz & Hood, 1990, p.774).

<sup>283</sup> *Sheffield Red Book* 1923, SCL. Robert Holmes estimated that in 35 years of Police Court work he helped 25,000 people. Obituary, 13 March 1951 Sheffield Daily Telegraph.

<sup>284</sup> Holmes stated that 'where I have succeeded it has been because no man had ever better friends. Was it money that was required to equip a lad for farm or sea? I had only to ask and receive. Was it work in a city manufactory or outlying colliery? If it were possible my need was satisfied off hand. The labour market overstocked, I was never kept waiting beyond my turn' (Holmes, 1923, p.88). Before taking up his position as Court Missionary, Holmes had himself been engaged in a department of a local steel manufacturers. Obituary, 13 March 1951 Sheffield Daily Telegraph.

<sup>285</sup> *Sheffield Red Book* 1923 230 SCL Robert Holmes estimated that in 35 years of Police Court work he helped 25,000 people. Obituary, 13 March 1951, Sheffield Daily Telegraph.

As with the Police Court Mission, placing men and boys in work took up much of the work of the Sheffield Discharged Prisoners Aid Society. The organisation was managed by prominent local dignitaries and had subscribers from across the middle classes. Its Chairman was the businessman, magistrate and philanthropist J. G Graves, the Vice-Chairman was W. S. Nunn, Conservative councillor, magistrate and Rotary Club representative, while the Hon. Secretary was Henry Michael Elliott.<sup>286</sup> The reintegration of the offender and the restoration of citizenship through the provision of employment formed the central objective of their work:

The man who had been in prison was the man who was not complete in his sense of citizenship. To start with he was below the level of his fellow men and he therefore needed strength...As men are idle so they so they are open to temptation, and as men who have been in prison are no longer so afraid of the consequences – their character being already stained in any case – they are more likely to return to crime and imprisonment unless usefully and legitimately occupied.<sup>287</sup>

### Elite Intervention and the Family

Hitherto, I have detailed how the Sheffield elite's perception and approach to crime was shaped by their broader commitment to effecting thoroughgoing social reform. Sympathy for the offender was closely tied to the dual project of responding to the plight of the poor and containing demands for radical political change. An extensive network of social and political institutions within which the local elite was closely involved facilitated this project. Yet, until the closing decades of the nineteenth century, the family remained largely beyond the reach of state intervention. The value of the Police Court Missions and other agencies that were devoted to dealing with offenders, particularly youthful offenders, was that they had established a bridgehead into the jealously guarded domestic sphere. Again, the voluntary character of such intervention was regarded as especially important.

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<sup>286</sup> Mr H. Michael Elliott was also youth worker at the Button Lane Club for juvenile offenders. The Agent and later Secretary of the D.P.A.S. was W. H. Blackburn (1870-1951), while the Committee comprised such philanthropic-minded persons as Dr. Helen Wilson, Fred M Osborn and S. Eric Osborn, Albert Harland and Charles M Hadfield. Its list of subscribers and benefactors included individuals from across the industrial and commercial middle classes. See *Annual Report of the Sheffield Discharged Prisoners Aid Society* 1929, pp.18-22. SCL.

<sup>287</sup> Report of Conference held by D.P.A.S.; *Annual Report of the Sheffield Discharged Prisoners Aid Society* 1930 p.14-15. SCL.



The necessity of intervention into the revered institution of the family ensured a central place for the work of such agencies as the D.P.A.S. and the Police Court Missions, especially the Women's Police Court Mission. The latter had been busy several years before their male counterparts. Indeed, female temperance missionaries had been active in the poorer quarters of the city since at least the mid-1860s.<sup>288</sup> The Mission was set up by the Sheffield Christian Women's Temperance Association in 1882 and had as its aims the moral reclamation of unmarried mothers, prostitutes and inebriates.<sup>289</sup> The goal of moral reclamation of the urban poor was pursued just as vigorously during the 1920s. During this time Dr Ruth Wilson, Charlotte's niece, and a Mrs Barber served as joint superintendents of the Women's Mission.<sup>290</sup> The Mission employed two full-time probation officers and operated a division of labour with their male counterpart under the guidance of Robert Holmes.<sup>291</sup> While the latter was concerned with the welfare of male offenders, the former was devoted to both female offenders and also the female victims of domestic assault and child abuse (Dunkley, 1991, p. 236). The duties involved in this type of work opened up for public scrutiny some of the more brutalised aspects of family life. It is for this reason that the work of the Women's Mission rarely came into the public eye. Seldom was the issue of domestic violence or sexual abuse mentioned in either press or middle class discussion of crime. Rather, the subject was broached by way of euphemism - parental fecklessness, 'slum-life' and 'overcrowding' serving to denote the existence of a problem that few were willing to admit openly to existing. Yet, the essential function of the Women's Mission was to intervene in family life in order to buttress rather than undermine it. As the Worcester Police Court Missionary Walter Stanton argued

The severance, either legally or voluntarily, of the bonds which bind them, often leads to the forming of irregular alliances which lowers their morals,

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<sup>288</sup> See for example B. J. Taylor 'A Croft in Sheffield by An Eye Witness', 1867 Local Pamphlets Vol. 118, SCL.

<sup>289</sup> The Sheffield Women's Christian Association was founded in 1874 by, among others, Mrs Charlotte Wilson and her sister-in-law, Mrs J. Wycliffe (Sarah Ruth) Wilson. *Biographical Notices Relating To Sheffield*. SCL.

<sup>290</sup> In 1916 the role of Superintendent of the Mission passed to Ruth Wilson the daughter of J. Wycliffe Wilson and to a Mrs Freeston. In 1919 the latter gave way to Mrs Edwin Barber. (*Sheffield Year Book and Record*. SCL).

<sup>291</sup> During the 1920s Miss Edith Robinson worked with women offenders in the Police Court, while Miss Kate E. Fowler worked in the Children's Court.

degrades their manhood and womanhood and nullifies their marriage vows to love, honour and cherish. Any work which has for its aim the prevention of such desecration of married life, is one which angels may well look upon and smile (Stanton, 1935).

The aim of the Police Court Missionary was to ensure that 'once more husband and wife recognise their mutual dependence upon each other [so that] the wheels of domestic matters run more smoothly and their lives are lifted to a higher plane'. (Stanton, 1935, p.48).

Much of the work of the Sheffield Discharged Prisoners Aid Society was also taken up with the giving assistance to the offender's family, both during and after his release from confinement. Care for his wife and children would serve, it was argued, to make him more responsive to the reformatory influences while undergoing sentence and also make him more responsive to the reintegrative influence of the D.P.A.S. and other agencies upon his discharge. In this respect, much of the work of the Association was directed at maintaining the integrity of the family. For the increasing numbers of men who had been sent to prison for arrears of maintenance, the urgency of the task was even greater. In the period April 1921 to March 1927 24,702 warrants were issued, 2,942 commitments made, and 289 persons were sent to prison as a result of the failure to pay their rates (Sheffield, 1982). 'Every time a separation can be avoided or a reconciliation effected, an immense saving accrues to the community, as well as a benefit to the individuals.'<sup>292</sup>

### Intervention by Invitation

Again it would be a mistake to see the interventions of these various welfare bodies as simply intrusive and coercive. Of course, non-compliance with the Missionary could ultimately invoke the sanction of the state. Yet, to those whom it was directed, intervention found an increasingly receptive audience. For example, the services of Court Missionaries were increasingly accepted by the urban poor, if not exactly welcomed with open arms. Stanton noted that during the whole of his long service as a Police court Missionary, only on two occasions had he been denied admission to a house when information has been given him that his intervention was needed (Op. Cit.

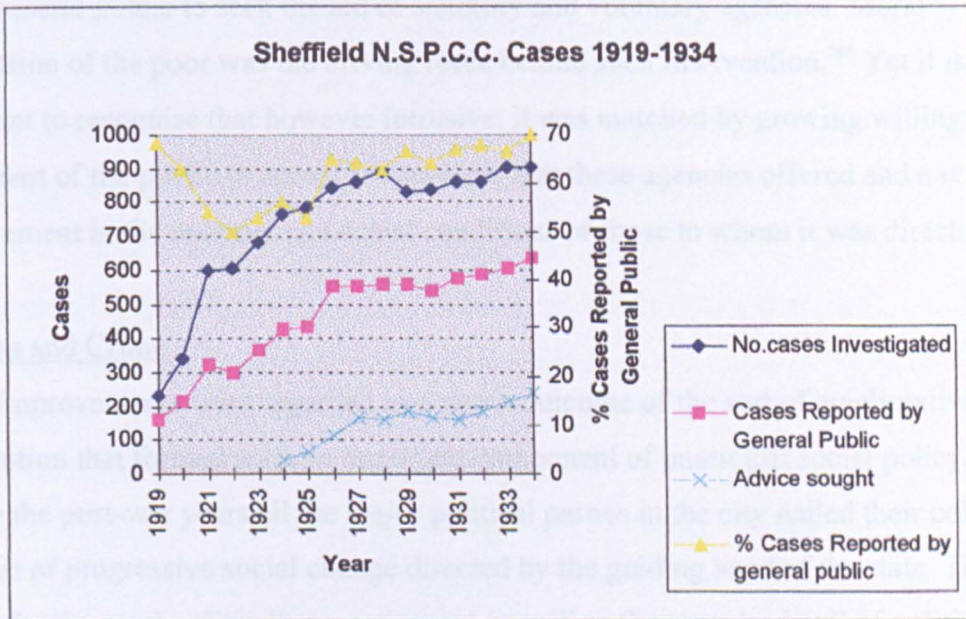
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<sup>292</sup> The high levels of unemployment during the 1920s ensured that an increasing number of local men were imprisoned for Bastardy Arrears under the Married Women's Act, *Annual Report of the Sheffield Discharged Prisoners Aid Society*, 1929, p.6. SCL.

pp.43-4). The education authorities and other child welfare organisations encountered a similar response from the public.<sup>293</sup> The Sheffield Branch of the National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children is a case in point.

**Fig 6.1**<sup>294</sup>

**Cases Handled by the Sheffield Branch of  
the National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children  
1919-1934**



Throughout the inter-war years the Society recorded a continuous increase in the numbers of cases it investigated. However, this increase arose not as a consequence of a declining public regard for the welfare of children but due to an increased willingness by the general public to report such cases. As one report made clear:

<sup>293</sup> As Gillis notes, the increased family investment in schooling of their children ‘required safeguards that parental sacrifice would not be forfeited by mis-spent youth, and thus a growing number of families were eager to take advantage of the facilities for supervision offered by public and private child welfare institutions and organisations’ (Gillis, 1975, p.117).

<sup>294</sup> Figures relating to ‘advice sought’ prior to 1924 are unavailable. From the *N.S.P.C.C Annual Report, Sheffield and District Branch*, Sheffield City Libraries.

[L]est the increases should be thought to denote a growing disregard for the welfare of children, attention is drawn to the fact that there has been a diminution in the number of cases of neglect and ill-treatment, the two principal forms of child wrong. The explanation of these increases is to be found in the happier and encouraging fact that there were fifty more cases than in the previous year in which parents of their own accord sought the society's advice in regard to their children.<sup>295</sup>

Despite severe unemployment, housing shortages and overcrowding, gradually improved standards of living contributed to a decrease in the worst cases of child abuse and neglect. At the same time, the increase in cases reported to the N.S.P.C.C. indicated an improvement in the status of such agencies and an increasing willingness on the part of the general public to seek the aid of statutory and voluntary agencies. Moral reclamation of the poor was the driving force behind such intervention.<sup>296</sup> Yet it is important to recognise that however intrusive, it was matched by growing willingness on the part of the public to accept the services that these agencies offered and a real improvement in the material and social conditions of those to whom it was directed.

### Progress and Crime

These improvements were regarded as a direct outcome of the sort of ameliorative intervention that formed such an important component of municipal social policy. During the post-war years all the major political parties in the city nailed their colours to the mast of progressive social change directed by the guiding hand of the state. This was as true for the most politically 'reactionary' as well as the most 'radical' of political parties in the municipality. Indeed, before 1926 the Sheffield Citizens Association – the name adopted by the ruling Unionist-Liberal coalition - staked much of their claim for their continued mandate on their record of slum clearance, house-building and general welfare improvement.<sup>297</sup> Their Socialist opponents met such claims by challenging the

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<sup>295</sup> Op. Cit., 1927, p.4. It is worth noting that Supervision Visits by N.S.P.C.C. inspectors increased fourfold in the same period.

<sup>296</sup> One plea for the financial support of the middle class public made this clear: 'When once the public understand the work of the Society, its influence on home life, how it reclaims drunken and idle parents, enforces domestic responsibility, and saves children from pauperism and crime, it is certain there will be no lack of funds to carry on the local organisation', *N.S.P.C.C Annual Report Sheffield and District Branch* 1919, p.6.

<sup>297</sup> See *Sheffield Citizen* August 1923 no. 3, p1. As their hold on municipal power became increasingly tenuous during the 1920s the more did they appeal to the evidence of progress in the realm of local welfare initiatives. For example, see *Sheffield Citizen*, November 1926, No. 26, p.7.

extent of such reforms.<sup>298</sup> Aside from the relative validity of each side's assertions, it is important to recognise that both sides were fundamentally drawing upon the vocabulary of progress and welfare reform with which to substantiate their rival claims. Political legitimacy depended to a great extent upon the declared public commitment to such reform, however partially this was put into effect. Social reform provided the elite with a mechanism to contain working class political demands and resolve eugenic and similar concerns in a politically acceptable language.<sup>299</sup>

To the educated public within Sheffield during the 1920s, the perceived success in tackling crime served as testimony to the effectiveness of social reform. The criminal statistics published by the Home Office and reproduced in the local and national press provided the predominant source of information regarding the pattern of crime for the Sheffield middle classes. Both the Annual Criminal Statistics for England and Wales and the associated comments by the Home Office were followed in close detail by the local newspapers. It is important to be aware of the high degree of credence that was attributed to these statistics. The Home Office proclamations offered an authoritative and incontrovertible statement regarding the causes of crime and the moral health of the nation that was regularly drawn upon by both the papers and local spokesmen alike. Additionally, criminal statistics provided an important medium from which the middle classes were able to formulate, as Sindall remarked, 'a picture of the crime which surrounded them but which they rarely encountered' (Sindall, 1990, p.29).

Accordingly, the local newspapers portrayed criminality in much the same way as their metropolitan counterparts - that it was on a firmly downward trajectory and decreasing in violence and intensity. For both the Sheffield Daily Telegraph and its rival, the Sheffield Daily Independent, there predominated in the decade after the First World War a markedly positive opinion of the extent of crime. Throughout the 1920s, the dominant tone of the local press echoed the regular Home Office promulgation that crime was easing in its intensity and seriousness. As one Independent editorial typically remarked, '[t]he people of Britain were never more law abiding than they are now. The latest statistics of criminality prove this.'<sup>300</sup>

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<sup>298</sup> See Sheffield Forward; Mathers (1979); Sheffield (1982, p. 10).

<sup>299</sup> As Lloyd George reminded the Cabinet in 1919, "Even if it cost a hundred million pounds, what was that compared to the stability of the state?" (Fraser, 1984, p. 181).

<sup>300</sup> Sheffield Daily Independent 3 July 1925.

In line with Home Office thinking, increasing rates of a particular crime were interpreted as the temporary effects of war and the passing strain of industrial hardship. For example, responding to a recent case of motor banditry involving a woman in London, the Sheffield Daily Independent argued that

As a nation we are less criminal than we used to be... If there is a substance of fact in the gloomy narratives we now hear and read, are we not entitled to count this as an effect of a cause which goes rather far back in these days when memory is so short? The young criminal of today was the impressionable youngster of ten years ago. We were then in the period when elusiveness was a virtue and necessity made much commendable which wears a different guise today.<sup>301</sup>

### Creating consensus

So far in this chapter I have argued that the Sheffield elite's approach to crime was in many respects a manifestation of its orientation to broader social policy. A conviction that improved living conditions would remove the causes of crime and the provision of employment could facilitate the reintegration of the offender were closely tied to the Sheffield leadership's commitment to the project of welfare reform. Moreover, the picture that was presented of falling levels of serious crime testified to the progress that was manifest in all areas of social life. Throughout this study I have also advanced the need for a historically specific conception of factors shaping perceptions of crime and welfare reform more generally. Most important, I have offered a predominantly political conception of elite motivations, one that was recognised by contemporaries if not within recent academic debates. Though characterised by neither unremitting coercion nor naïve benevolence, welfare reform for the liberal elite during the 1920s was nevertheless a predominantly ideological endeavour, the aim of which was to construct in the midst of class warfare social consensus on a firm institutional footing. In this final section of the chapter I suggest that elite views concerning crime were equally influenced by broader political concerns, though, again, not in the way traditionally portrayed. Specifically, the ideological contestation that formed so prominent a feature of social life during the 1920s was a principal factor in the local elite's low-key attitude to crime and sympathetic view of the criminal. Moreover, the consensus that had been

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<sup>301</sup> Sheffield Daily Independent 26 August 1926.

reached in the realm of criminal justice policy was utilised by the elite as an exemplary model for broader social policy. While the Sheffield elite's view of crime owed much to its stance towards broader welfare issues, it was not simply the case that the liberal ethos of welfare reform coloured the approach to crime. A striking feature of elite perceptions is the way in which criminal and penal policy was utilised as a vindication of the efficacy of progressive social intervention. One finds, time and again, the alleged success in tackling crime and reforming the offender drawn upon in order to emphasise the importance of, and commitment to, broader welfare reform. Throughout the 1920s the issue of crime was utilised by the local elite in order to assert the need to engage adequately with the welfare project. Crime was presented as evidence that social problems could be tackled through appropriate welfare measures. In other words crime was not only integrally linked to the broader issue of welfare but advanced in such a way as to promote the necessity of increased welfare provision. How did this come about?

The explanation is to be found in the remarkable consensus that existed amongst all shades of political opinion concerning criminal and penal reform. Although the elite actively promoted state measures of social welfare as a point of political consensus and, fundamentally, political containment, many areas of welfare intervention nevertheless remained the subject of intense contestation. The failure of incumbent administrations to live up to their initial policy commitments in such areas as housing and employment ensured that social provision by the state and municipality served as a continual source of conflict. Criminal justice issues were, by contrast, marked by their freedom from such discord. This consensus across all shades of political opinion reflected the success of the governing classes in removing the issue from the site of ideological altercation. Both radical and conservative opinion accepted the commitment to what appeared to be a politically neutral enterprise administered by philanthropic voluntarism and a benevolent state. Moreover, the most radical thinkers often accepted the moral, racial and eugenic concerns that underpinned these reforms.<sup>302</sup> The significance of the

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<sup>302</sup> Writing in a local trade union paper, E. Roy Calvert, Secretary of the National Council for the Abolition of the Death, stated that capital punishment should be abolished as much for 'the demoralising influence of morbid press publicity' on the general public as redemptive thoughts for the accused: 'There is a gladiatorial element about murder trials, because the victim is fighting for his life, and the consequent temptation to give the morbid details wide publicity is most dangerous and certainly leads to imitative crime'. E. Roy Calvert, 'Should We Abolish the Gallows' The Sheffield Forward January 1926, No. 57, p.2. Even the most militant of local radicals felt impelled to articulate their philosophy in the popular

criminal justice discourse was that it furnished an idiom within which the mutual concerns and ambitions of a broad spectrum of political opinion could be expressed. At the same time it offered a politically neutral vocabulary with which the elite was able to assert its commitment to both progressive social intervention and political leadership. When the Sheffield leadership discussed a crime related issue, it was often employed in an exemplary fashion, serving to promote the broader project of welfare reform and political cooperation.

There were two main ways in which this was manifest. First, the apparent success in dealing with crime in the recent past was actively utilised as a means of asserting the necessity of continued reform in the present. In other words, the actual record of crime - namely the alleged protracted fall in the rate of crime since the mid-nineteenth century - was portrayed as a startling confirmation of social improvement and was promoted in such a way as to assert the need for continued efforts at social reform. Accordingly, one may understand, as the content analysis of the two local newspapers revealed, why previous generations were condemned for their treatment of criminals and the viciousness of its citizens. The past was drawn upon in order to vindicate, rather than condemn, contemporary social policy.

While some observers may have interpreted reported increases in crime as evidence of plummeting moral standards, the overwhelming response of the municipal leadership was a positive one.<sup>303</sup> Progressive thinkers often utilised such negative outbursts as an opportunity to restate their belief in the certainty of moral improvement and, in the process, indict the very same pessimists. For example, the cinema provided a favourite target for condemnation of those who believed it was undermining the nation's youth and was responsible for a good deal of juvenile crime. Yet, such fears were eagerly chastised:

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language of racial decay. The leader of the wartime Shop Stewards Movement in the city, Jack T Murphy, remarked that, 'we desire the mass of men and women to think for themselves, and until they do this no real progress is made, democracy becomes a farce, and the future of the race becomes a study of race deterioration' (Quoted in Smith, 1982, p.247).

<sup>303</sup> Referring to a recent reported increase of property crime, the nominally conservative Telegraph remarked, 'after war periods have in the past almost invariably been marked by an epidemic of crime, as much against the person as property. The late outbreak, so terrible in its horrors, must have unsettled many minds that in normal times hovered on the verge of the criminal. Grave murders and other manifestations of violence there have been, but by no means on the scale that many feared would be the case when men returned from scenes that tried the strongest...[S]igns are wanting of an epidemic of crime of any sort...Looked at all round, we may pride ourselves that we are by no means decadent; indeed, that we are actually well on the up-grade' Sheffield Daily Telegraph 19 March 1924.



“The Cinema”, says Lord Leconfield, “is the worst misfortune that has ever befallen England”. A somewhat startling statement, to say the least of it, yet to those who can remember the first bicycles and the first motors, it will have a curiously familiar ring. It is in fact but the latest form of “O Tempora! O Mores!” the perennial cry of conservatives holding up its hands in dismay at the effacing of old pictures by the onward moving pageant of the world. It is perhaps a pathetic cry, but not a very sensible one, for the most sensible attitude towards any new thing which has come to stay, is that which accepts the inevitable and tries to turn it to the best account.<sup>304</sup>

A further manifestation of the exemplary role of criminal justice was the way in which the elite tended to downplay the extent of crime in Sheffield and praise the law-abiding character of its citizens. Throughout the turbulent post-war decade the issue of crime was utilised in order to illustrate that ‘things were not so bad in the balance’. Set against the backdrop of industrial strife and political animosity, the level of crime was continually drawn upon in order to praise the orderliness of the residents. For example, in the midst of the industrial stoppages of 1921, the Sheffield Daily Independent reported how the Recorder at the Quarter Sessions, Mr William James Waugh, had ‘congratulated the city and the Chief Constable’ on the absence of crime during the coal crisis. It noted how he ‘was agreeably surprised to find that the number of cases committed for trial was below the normal...[I]t reflected great credit on all parties and established the fact that the people of Sheffield were law abiding’.<sup>305</sup> In the corresponding Quarter Sessions the following year, the Recorder noted an increase in cases of breaking and entering.<sup>306</sup> However, for the Sheffield Daily Independent, the increase served to prove the absence of serious crime in Sheffield. What was

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<sup>304</sup> Sheffield Daily Independent, 23 July 192. The conservative Telegraph was also characterised by its progressive view of the moral state of the nation and its dismissal of those who may have challenged this view: ‘The responsibility of the cinemas for youthful misdoings is undoubtedly a good deal exaggerated, just as the responsibility of the “penny dreadfuls” used to be.’ Sheffield Daily Telegraph, 23 December 1922.

<sup>305</sup> Sheffield Daily Independent 25 June 1921. When, on another occasion, magistrates arrived at the Police Court to find an empty dock, the same newspaper observed thus: ‘It is a gratifying thing to find at least one court day pass by in such a big city as Steelopolis without a solitary delinquent. Not that our calendars are, as a rule, heavy. They are not. As a matter of fact I should think that Sheffield stands well in the list of big towns on account of the rare occurrence of very serious crime. There have been busy periods in the courts as in other places, but happenings of truly dreadful moment are rare.’ *Ibid.* 18 July 1921.

<sup>306</sup> W.J Waugh suggested that although the increase might be due to unemployment, it could not be accepted in a commercial city like Sheffield: ‘Of course unemployment might account for the [increase] but breaking and entering in a commercial city like Sheffield was a very serious offence and measures must be taken in order to suppress it’ Sheffield Daily Independent 5 July 1922, p.6.

remarkable, it was suggested, was the lack of serious crime given that the city was in the midst of an industrial and political crisis:

Sheffield's recorder yesterday expressed regret that there was an increase in the number of certain types of offences in the city. It is to our credit that his remarks should serve to accentuate our comparative freedom from serious crime than to call attention to any very alarming increase. All things considered the people of the district have much to congratulate themselves upon the city's record during an exceptionally trying period.<sup>307</sup>

Throughout the 1920s, the Quarter Sessions and Police Court hearings provided evidence in abundance of the crime that was generally accepted to be linked to the widespread unemployment and distress. Attacks upon police, the ransacking of goods trains and the increase in cases of breaking and entering and of larceny were widely reported in the local press and commented upon by criminal justice officials. The theft of precious and other metals was a particular cause for concern during this period. In 1923 the Sheffield Chief Constable, Colonel Hall-Dalwood, and number of local businessmen attempted to alert the wider public to the extent of the problem. In a letter sent to the Home Office on 8 March 1923, the Chief Constable attempted to explain to his superiors the increase in cases of larceny in the city during the previous year. One of the explanations offered was the 'absence of a local act making it an offence to be in possession of property for which no satisfactory account can be given'. Whereas towns such as Manchester and Birmingham had the benefit of such a provision, Sheffield had none. The result, suggested the Chief Constable, was that an

increasing number of young unemployed men have discovered that they can with impunity steal property and unless they are caught in the act, run very little risk of prosecution. Moreover, many of the articles manufactured in Sheffield, such as cutlery etc., are not only enticing and easily portable, but after the owner has become dispossessed of them it is practically impossible for him to identify them from others which may have been sold in the ordinary way of business.<sup>308</sup>

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<sup>307</sup> Sheffield Daily Independent, 5 July 1922, p.5.

<sup>308</sup> PRO HO45/17928/429843/2.

This assertion came only three days after an almost identical statement was issued at a meeting of the Sheffield Committee of the National Union of Manufacturers.<sup>309</sup> The meeting was followed up by an apparently well-orchestrated campaign that included a number of letters written to the Editor of the Sheffield Daily Telegraph published on 8 March 1923.<sup>310</sup>

In spite of these pleas it is striking how there prevailed a markedly lenient approach to the issue of crime, particularly crimes against property. Commentators continually testified 'to the "wonderful courage" of the great mass of the unemployed and impoverished in the city', and the relative absence of crime in view of the economic and political circumstances.<sup>311</sup> As an editorial in the Sheffield Daily Telegraph remarked typically in 1925, 'the wonder ought to be, not that some classes of criminal have become more common, but that they are not infinitely more numerous than they are'.<sup>312</sup> The following year the same newspaper argued that

[i]t must be granted that the outstanding social influence of 1926 was the nation's straightened circumstances. But it is precisely in hard times and serious disturbances that crime and lawlessness may be expected to increase; and last year there was a stricter observance of law and order.<sup>313</sup>

The tendency to praise the behaviour of the town's populace may have expressed the relief of some individuals that high levels of unemployment and industrial dislocation had not given rise to more illegality. Just as significant, the comments also reveal a pronounced tendency of the members of the elite to avoid confrontational rhetoric when discussing social and political issues. In other words, it is evident that the lenient approach to crime that was manifest throughout the 1920s arose, at least in part, from the

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<sup>309</sup> The Committee called the attention of the City Council, 'to the inadequate provision existing in Sheffield for dealing with persons found in possession of property presumed to be stolen, where, if no identification can be established, as in the case of scrap metal, the police are powerless to effect an arrest, and to remind the City Council of the provisions operating in Manchester and Birmingham'. Sheffield Daily Telegraph 6 March 1923 p.4.

<sup>310</sup> One of the letters complained that 'Sheffield manufacturers need protection, especially in those industries where the constant handling of precious metals is involved. Thefts of metal in all forms are numerous... This sort of thing puts a premium on crime'. LTE by 'Manufacturer', 8 March, 1923 Sheffield Daily Telegraph.

<sup>311</sup> Speech by Mr Arthur Neal, Sheffield Daily Telegraph 17 January 1928.

<sup>312</sup> Sheffield Daily Telegraph 7 May 1925

<sup>313</sup> Sheffield Daily Telegraph, 31 March 1927.

recognition by the elite of the need to narrow political divisions through conciliatory dialogue, rather than widen the gulf by open antagonism. There were certainly those who believed crime to be the inevitable outcome of an inviolably degenerate class, to be tackled, like political disorder and industrial unrest, only through unwavering repression.<sup>314</sup> At the same time, it is important to recognise that, however strongly held, the majority of middle class professionals viewed with discomfort such publicly voiced statements. Expressing the opinion that crime and other social problems were the result of an irredeemably villainous class was regarded as too provocative and insensitive, especially in the politically fraught decade of the 1920s. In the context of an intense ideological contestation and a battle for the political allegiance of ordinary people, it was generally believed that a sympathetic approach to social conditions was the more sensible option. As Percy Medcraft, following a provocative speech by the local coal baron, Charles Markham, declared,

Communism must be combated, not by locking up a dozen leaders - that merely gives it an advertisement – but by muzzling men like Mr Charles Markham and changing unjust and inhuman conditions.<sup>315</sup>

The local municipal leadership viewed with discomfort any statements that held the local population to be lawless or morally disolute. For example, when giving evidence to the 1923 Select Committee on Betting Duty, Superintendent Denton of the Sheffield Police Force stated that ninety per cent of the population of industrial areas engaged in betting:

Probably 90 per cent are betting today... that is of the adult working class in the lower quarters of the city... Women in Sheffield backed to a very large extent, using relief and unemployment money. At the relief stations one could see eight out of every ten consulting sporting papers.<sup>316</sup>

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<sup>314</sup> The Chief Sanitary Inspector of one town suggested that ‘an appreciable percentage of the occupants of slums are born slum makers. This viscous class can be considered the core of the slum problem. It consists of people of varying degrees of viciousness: drunkards, hooligans, and loafing idlers down to the hardened criminals and moral degenerates; men and women who are monsters of cruelty and who are sodden with drink, who prefer to live lives of filth and crime (Martin, 1935, pp. iv, 74).

<sup>315</sup> Sheffield Daily Independent, 14 November 1925.

<sup>316</sup> *Report from the Select Committee on Betting Duty, Minutes of Evidence 1923*, House of Commons Papers Vol. 5; See also Sheffield Daily Independent 25 July 1923 p5.

Denton's statement was almost universally rebuked by the Press and by leading Sheffield figures. While Mr James Blossom, magistrate and vice-chairman of the Ecclesall Board of Guardians regarded the claims as 'exaggerated',<sup>317</sup> the Independent described Denton's claims as 'preposterous' and a 'slur on workmen'.<sup>318</sup> In this and other cases the local elite went out of its way to defend publicly the moral integrity of the working man.

### Maintaining consensus – Exchanges between the Home Office and the Sheffield Chief Constable

In his exploration of the post-war discourses of race in Britain, Malik observes a divergence in public and private views of the ruling British elites. He suggests that while in public representatives of the governing classes tended to avoid overt expressions of racism, in private the same individuals often retained an unreconstructed attitude to racial issues (Malik, 1996, pp.18-19). It is important to recognise that, during the 1920s, certain sections of the local and national elites were similarly able to maintain a lenient and conciliatory public view of crime that could diverge from privately held opinions.

The differential character of private and public enunciations about crime is illustrated in the perceived relationship between political agitation and the incidence of property offences. As noted in Chapter 2, most strands of opinion accepted the link between unemployment and crime during the inter-war years. Government and professional spokesmen anticipated that an increase in the rate of unemployment would have an inevitable impact on the incidence of crime. Given the severity of the recession in the early 1920s and the widespread concern for the moral and political demeanour of the urban population, both the Home Office and the Ministry of Labour were keen to scrutinise the crime statistics during those years. They were therefore taken by surprise when it was observed that, over the country as a whole during 1921 and 1922, there was practically no change in offences of petty larceny - the category judged most sensitive to changes in the employment rate. However there was one notable exception to this. Of considerable interest were the Sheffield Police returns. Not only did these diverge from the national picture, but they pointed to a doubling of offences of simple larceny. A

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<sup>317</sup> Sheffield Daily Independent, 26 July 1923.

<sup>318</sup> Sheffield Daily Independent, 25 July 1923.

letter sent by the Ministry of Labour to John Anderton, the Permanent Under Secretary of State, expressed the opinion that it was

very difficult to make any definite deductions from the comparison [of offences of simple larceny and the economic situation], except the negative one that on the whole these offences do not show the increase that might have been expected having regard to the prolonged unemployment. The Sheffield figure is extraordinary (619 in 1921 and 1291 in 1922).<sup>319</sup>

The figures tended to suggest the increase in offences in the city was due to factors other than unemployment. A spokesman for the Ministry of Labour continued:

Conditions there [in Sheffield] have, of course, been very bad, but I think there must be some other explanation because in the adjoining borough (Rotherham) the figure of 232 for 1921 dropped to 176 in 1922. Industrial conditions there are very much the same and unemployment has, I should think, been equally bad.<sup>320</sup>

In order to resolve the puzzle, Anderton requested that J. R. Buckland dispatch a letter to the Chief Constable of Sheffield Colonel Hall-Dalwood, asking him if he could suggest any possible explanation for the anomaly. In his response Hall-Dalwood argued that the increase in petty larceny had a number of causes. Of the contributory factors, he remarked 'undoubtedly the chief factor is the large number of unemployed (averaging 40,000 during the year) with a small number of police to deal with the situation so far as prevention and detection of crimes is concerned'.<sup>321</sup> However, the Chief Constable recognised that this explanation was unable to account for the inconsistency between the figures for Sheffield and other towns, such as Rotherham, where unemployment was just as desperate. In an effort to resolve this he ventured the opinion that, 'the larger the mass of population and the greater the number of unemployed, the higher will be the proportion of moral degeneration and the resorting to committing of crime' (ibid.). It is interesting to note that Farrant not only agreed with Hall-Dalwood's claim that

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<sup>319</sup> Letter to Sir John Anderton, Home Office, from M. Wilson, Ministry of Labour, 5 March 1923, PRO HO45/17928/429843/2. Sir John Anderton was Permanent Under Secretary of State, 1922-32.

<sup>320</sup> Ibid.

<sup>321</sup> Letter from Colonel Hall-Dalwood to Home Office, 8 March 1923, PRO HO45/17928/429843/2.

unemployment was a major factor behind the unusual increase in crimes of petty larceny, but believed, crucially, that communist rhetoric was the key ingredient:

Of the causes suggested by the Chief Constable I think that only unemployment had a dominating effect in increasing crime. The distress arising from such a large amount of unemployment, coupled with a flood of inflammatory communistic oratory would be conducive to a great increase of dishonesty. Furthermore, Sheffield appears to have been a storm centre of industrial unrest in 1922, and the nature of some of the elements of crowds which have demonstrated in Whitehall and the morose character of some of the promoters of hunger marches suggest that the conditions which prevail in Sheffield attract persons of criminal tendencies from other places, with the consequent effect of increasing crimes against property in the vicinity. This view is strengthened by the fact that the total of crime has not increased, but that the local distribution has varied.<sup>322</sup>

That communist and other agitators played a large part in property crime such as larceny was a conviction shared by other Home Office officials. In assessing Farrant's reply, Buckland noted the inescapable association between the doctrine 'property is theft' preached by agitators and the activities of their followers who were determined to reimburse the losses:

An increase in the number of the unemployed and an increase in the number of agitators who preach to them from the text 'la propriété c'est le vol' must lead to an increase in the number of larcenies...The Ch[ief] Constable's opinion that the striking increase in the number of larcenies in Sheffield covering 1922 is mainly due to the above causes carries much weight.<sup>323</sup>

Clearly then, the Sheffield Chief Constable and Home Office officials saw political agitation as having an important influence on the level of property crime, particularly in the major industrial areas where discontent was more protracted and the socialist and communist radicals were more active. Yet it is striking how this view remained the preserve of internal discussion. Rarely in the local press or in the public declarations of criminal justice and Home Office personnel was there made explicit a link between the activities of left-wing agitators and the rate of crime.<sup>324</sup> These exchanges demonstrate

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<sup>322</sup> Minute by Farrant, 15 March 1923, PRO HO45/17928/429843/2.

<sup>323</sup> Minute by J. R. Buckland 20 March 1923 PRO, HO45/17928/429843/2.

<sup>324</sup> One of the few explicit references was voiced by the Sheffield Daily Telegraph. In attempting to account for the increase in larcenies across the country in 1925, the newspaper suggested that '[o]ne

both a belief amongst leading officials of a connection between political agitation and crime but also a refusal to criticise openly the moral demeanour of the industrial classes, given the broader political context. Their publicly aired views tended to be more in keeping with the sentiments expressed by people such as Robert Holmes:

We may congratulate ourselves upon the good sense and right feeling of the community, and particularly upon the behaviour of that section most heavily hit by adverse conditions. Taking them all round, working folk (by which definition I mean the great bulk of our fellow countrymen) have shown a strong abhorrence of dishonesty and meanness and violence, and have handed on the same high instinct to their offspring. It is good to know that in a city where, out of a population of half a million souls, as many as forty thousand men and lads were counted among the unemployed month after month for two years, little more than the normal amount of wrong doing was recorded during this period (Holmes, 1923, p. 95-6).

It seems that while such comments ran counter to the private views of influential members of criminal justice institutions, they helped to ensure that crime was located firmly within the discourse of progress rather than degeneration.

The local elite's optimistic view of the trajectory of crime and sympathy displayed towards the offender was most clearly manifested in their approach to the issue of juvenile delinquency. 'If proof were needed', remarked Holmes, 'that the young folk of today are, on the whole, a law abiding generation, it would be found in their gratifying abstention from crime during a period of seriously disturbed trade and grave social discontent' (Holmes, 1923, p.95). It is to an examination of the perceptions of juvenile crime as enunciated by Holmes and his associates that I now turn.

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possible explanation is that the stirring up of class hatred has put predatory ideas in peoples minds'. Yet, even here other, equally viable explanations were advanced: the wartime legacy of a weakening of commercial morality and the impact of the Depression in reducing the ability of getting rich by legitimate means. Moreover, the dominant note struck was one of improvement in crime. Sheffield Daily Telegraph 16 March 1927.



## Chapter Seven

### Youth and crime

Bend aright the supple twig. To wait till the branch grows tough is hard both for branch and bender; often useless too (Holmes, 1918a, p.ix).

The Sheffield elite's progressive approach to crime and the offender was perhaps most clearly exemplified in their attitude to juvenile delinquency. The city's leading dignitaries displayed a clear sympathy for the plight of the young offender, expressed through their involvement in a broad range of youth organisations. Significantly, youth work offered a key arena within which the elite could put into effect its ethos of moral reclamation and display its commitment to the project of progressive social change. During the 1920s there existed in Sheffield a whole network of bodies and institutions geared towards dealing with the city's rising generation. As in other areas of social policy, intervention was guided by both an optimistic view of the ability to bring about social reform and a fear of the consequences should reform not be put into effect. The motivating factor for these organisations was a belief in the essential malleability of a social group that was vulnerable to both good and evil influences. Despite the underlying fears, a positive view of welfare of the city's youth tended to predominate.

By 1914, juvenile delinquency was seen to arise less from poverty than from the psychological and environmental conflicts of adolescence. The latter was viewed as a period of turmoil and unrest, a phase of life when the young person was judged to be especially vulnerable to outside influences. As Freeman claimed in his study, adolescence

is the period at which most commitments occur, and when most criminal careers commence. The emotions are hot; the spirit of adventure strong; the chafing of the expenditure of the inner life against authority and restriction is never so galling; self control is not yet established...Vice and crime, leaving lifelong effects, are born during adolescence (Freeman, 1914, pp.105-6).<sup>325</sup>

Failure of the home, school and work to direct these inner drives in a healthy manner could force the young person to take the first steps into a criminal career. It was the

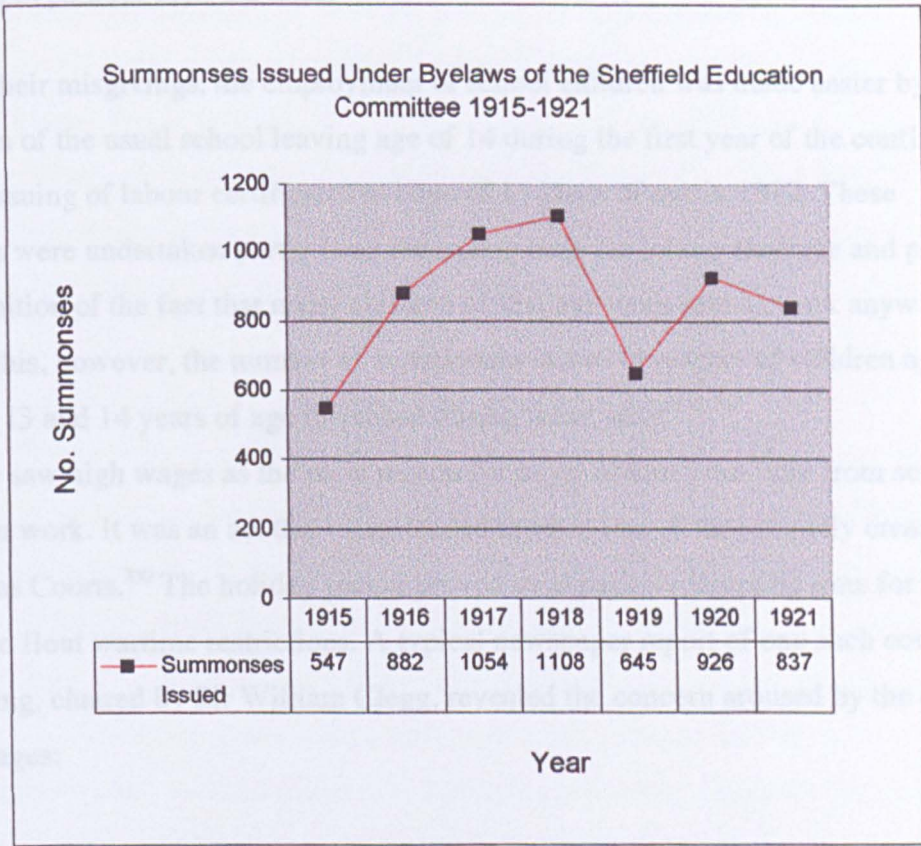
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<sup>325</sup> See also Gillis (1975); Springhall (1986.). For the most important monographs see also Hall (1907); Bray (1907; 1911); and Russell (1917).

perceived shortcomings of these vital formative influences that were thrown into sharp relief by events during 1914-18. Observers were startled to find that over three months spanning 1915/16 compared with the corresponding period a year earlier there had been a 34 per cent increase in children (persons aged under 14) and young persons (persons aged between 14 and under 16) charged with punishable offences. There had also occurred almost a fifty per cent rise in larcenies and increases in charges of assault, wilful damage and gambling amongst young people. What is more, those children responsible for the jump were nearly all boys (Leeson, 1917, p.15). In his report on the phenomenon to the Juvenile Organisations Committee, a body established with the specific task of explaining and resolving the apparent increase in youth crime, Cecil Leeson, Secretary of the Howard Association and native of Sheffield, described the increase as a 'plague'. Attention was directed to a number of causal factors: the preponderance of working mothers and the absence of male authority, both at home and in the classroom; the rise in casual labour and high wages earned by lads; the evil effects of the cinema; the reduction in police numbers and the effect of darkened streets as a result of the Emergency Powers Act; and the interruption in Boys' Club work (Ibid.). He recommended a number of measures as a solution to the problem, many of which were to be later adopted by the Home Office and municipal authorities. A dominant note struck in Leeson's report was his intolerance for displays of leniency to the young offender. While a certain amount of sympathy was understandable, he remarked, 'this sentiment was a false one'.

Despite Leeson's concerns there is little evidence of a corresponding degree of anxiety concerning juvenile crime in Sheffield over the same period. During this time, the attention of the local elite was directed to the plight of children who, due to the absence of fathers on active service and of mothers in munitions or other work, were believed to have been unleashed from former disciplinary restraints. Particular concern was expressed at the large number of children failing to attend school.

Fig. 7.1<sup>326</sup>



Between 1915 and 1918 the number of summonses issued to parents for their children's non-attendance at school more than doubled. No doubt some of this was due to a greater urgency on the part of magistrates and the Education Committee to enforce parental obligations.<sup>327</sup> Part of the problem, as the authorities saw it, was the increased number of women who, now engaged in remunerative employment, tended to retain their children at home for domestic work. However, the main cause of the difficulties, it was suggested, arose from the increased availability of work for those older children of 13 and 14 years of age owing to wartime labour shortages. As one Education Committee Report made clear:

The disinclination on the part of many parent to send their children to school after attaining the age of 13 years has been unfortunately strengthened by the

<sup>326</sup> *Sheffield Education Committee Annual Reports, 1913-1922*. SCL

<sup>327</sup> The 1918 Annual Report of the Education Committee welcomed the efforts of the magistrates to impose the maximum fines 'The magistrates have supported the Committee in their efforts to secure improved school attendance and have the maximum penalty of 20/- in 201 of the cases heard as compared to 133, 68 and 20 in previous years'. *Ibid.* 1918, p.45.

ease with which employment could be obtained for children, and the high rates of wages paid for their services.<sup>328</sup>

Despite their misgivings, the employment of school children was made easier by the relaxation of the usual school leaving age of 14 during the first year of the conflict and the issuing of labour certificates to boys of 13 years of age in 1917. These measures were undertaken partly in an attempt to ease the labour shortage and partly in recognition of the fact that many children of that age were sent to work anyway. Despite this, however, the number of summonses issued in respect of children aged between 13 and 14 years of age increased during these years.<sup>329</sup>

Many saw high wages as the main reason for boys' absence not only from school but also from work. It was an act that often landed them in one of the specially created Munitions Courts.<sup>330</sup> The holiday period proved an especially tempting time for youths willing to flout wartime restrictions. A typical newspaper report of one such court proceeding, chaired by Sir William Clegg, revealed the concern aroused by the extent of boys' wages:

A number of boys and youths were summoned for absenting themselves from work on December 27, all of these cases being brought by one firm. The excuses some of them advanced were varied and very quaint - bad arms, bad legs, headaches and so on, until the Chairman, in dismissing the cases against such boys as had not excused themselves, said it was marvellous what a number of illnesses came on at holiday times. Evidence in other cases showed that two lads of 16 years of age were earning 35s. 3d. and 34s. a week, and others of 14 years old were earning 23s and 27s. The Chairman expressed astonishment on the high wages the boys were earning - men's wages. A defendant: A lot of it's for overtime. The Chairman: We're all working overtime - some of us get paid for it and some don't.<sup>331</sup>

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<sup>328</sup> Ibid.

<sup>329</sup> In 1918, 538 (38 per cent) of the summonses were in respect of children between the ages of 13 and 14 years. In the previous year the corresponding figure had been 484. Ibid.

<sup>330</sup> Munitions Courts were set up in most industrial areas during the war. Though similar in many respects to Magistrates Courts, they differed both in their composition and remit. These courts owed much to the wartime efforts of industrial arbitration, each court having employer's and employees representatives, and were presided over by a magistrate.

<sup>331</sup> At this one hearing fines imposed on 29 defendants varied between 10s and 40s Sheffield Daily Telegraph 1 January 1917, p.3.

The effect of newspaper reports like the one above was to confirm in the minds of middle class residents the danger of such extravagant wages. As Hilton observed, social reformers disliked 'the urban working-class boy's arrogant precocity and moral and financial independence' (Hilton, 1995, p.602). Those youths who had left school after 13 or 14 years of age and taken up employment were the focus of a good deal of anxiety amongst the local authorities. It was this age group that was believed responsible for the increase in recorded rates of juvenile crime throughout England and Wales during the war.

No corresponding figures for juvenile crime in Sheffield during the war are available.<sup>332</sup> However, an unpublished study by Barbara Lewis commissioned by the Juvenile Organisations Committee in 1919 included Sheffield in its exploration of the relationship between unsupervised juveniles and crime. The study examined the case reports of 7,000 juvenile offenders in the boroughs of Sheffield, Liverpool, Manchester and West Ham. The aim was to examine the 'connection between the condition of the home and the behaviour of the child', with particular attention directed to the relationship between parental absence and juvenile offending. Commenting on the figures, the author remarked upon a number of features relating to Sheffield. First, while there was considerable variation in the age of the offenders between different towns, the juvenile offenders in Sheffield, remarked Lewis, tended to have recently left school. Whereas in Liverpool and Manchester most of the lawbreaking was performed during the later school years, 'in Sheffield and West Ham during the years after leaving school there is a considerable increase. The ages of boys and girls correspond in this respect.'<sup>333</sup> Secondly, Sheffield had the lowest rate of parental absence as a result of work or military service. Whereas in Liverpool and West Ham the percentage of working mothers was 16 per cent and 14.5 per cent and absent fathers 33.6 percent and 20.4 per cent respectively, in Sheffield the corresponding figures were 9.3 per cent working mothers and 19 per cent absent fathers.

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<sup>332</sup> Separate statistics for juvenile crime in Sheffield are not available until 1927. Moreover, due to the vagaries of wartime conditions, the annual criminal statistics for England and Wales issued during the hostilities were published in a summarised format. Accordingly, for the period 1914-18 no statistics are available either for juvenile or adult crime in Sheffield.

<sup>333</sup> Barbara Lewis (1919) *Report on an Analysis of the Case Sheets of 7,000 Juvenile Offenders Brought Before the Courts of Liverpool, Sheffield, Manchester and West Ham August 1917 to August 1919*. HO Paper No. 54, p.2. PRO HO45/349554/53.

**Fig 7.2**

**Parental Absence for Juvenile Offenders in Several Industrial Towns**

**August 1917 to August 1919**

	<b>% Mother Working</b>	<b>% Father Absent</b>
<b>Sheffield</b>	9.3	19.06
<b>Liverpool</b>	16	33.6
<b>West Ham</b>	14.49	20.4

Thirdly, Lewis found that proportionately, 'Sheffield boys were the best paid - 35% earning over £1.00 a week, while in Liverpool only 16% did so'.<sup>334</sup>

After examining the evidence from all of the towns, Lewis ended by rejecting any possible link between juvenile offending and parental absence. Instead, she laid emphasis upon the relationship between poverty in the home and the tendency of children and juveniles to resort to crime. This was confirmed, suggested the author, by the prevalence of larceny amongst those crimes committed by juveniles and by frequency of thefts of food. Of those who committed larceny in Sheffield during the two years, 43 per cent of these were found to be below the poverty line compared to 26 per cent who were deemed to be above it. Lewis concluded that 'while there is more theft than any other form of law breaking, this is markedly so among those from very poor homes. A great deal of theft is of food, and it is not too much to believe that some of these growing boys would not have fallen to dishonesty if their appetite had been reasonably satisfied.'<sup>335</sup>

These findings, however, went against the grain of prevailing opinion and tended to be sidelined. Most observers tended to view poverty as a relatively minor factor in fostering juvenile crime. Instead, the majority of commentators remarked that those responsible for the spree of wartime offending were distinguished by their high wages and generally superior standard of living. It was the 'substantial wage to be laid at his own caprice' that most directed the attention of observers (Freeman, 1914, p.125). The

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<sup>334</sup> PRO HO45/349554/53.

<sup>335</sup> Ibid. p.8

combination of high wages, parental absence and youthful energy provided the dominant explanation advanced both by national and local observers.<sup>336</sup> As Charles Russell, the Boy's Club worker and Chief Inspector of Reformatory and Industrial Schools observed,

[F]or many reasons opportunities for misapplied energy on the part of young people are much greater than before the War. There is more energy also to respond to the opportunities, for boys living in the crowded districts are in general, owing to the immensely increased wages of their parents, better fed, better clad, and consequently healthier and more physically vigorous than they were. At the same time many of the ordinary restraining influences upon irregular displays of physical vigour have for the time vanished.<sup>337</sup>

### The Impact of War upon the Perception of Youth

Despite the unease displayed by many metropolitan observers to youth crime during the war, the response of their Sheffield counterparts was strikingly relaxed and positive in tone. While the former exhibited a good deal of concern at the apparent increase in juvenile offending, Holmes' opinion was that youth crime in Sheffield was distinguished by its absence: 'While elsewhere much has been said of increased crime among youths, here we have nothing such to mourn' (Holmes, 1917). Few were seen as more qualified in their ability to offer a learned opinion about crime, particularly youth crime, than Robert Holmes. Holmes occupied a lofty position in what Becker has referred to as the 'hierarchy of credibility' (Becker, 1967). He was 'Sheffield's first', and only, male probation officer during a period when probation served as the motif of progressive and benevolent social intervention. Many years experience in dealing with offenders further ensured that his views engaged the respect of a broad range of opinion. At the same time, his work with a number of voluntarist bodies and avoidance of overt party political affiliations imbued Holmes' opinion of crime and criminals with an added degree of intellectual probity.

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<sup>336</sup> Arthur Norris, Chairman of the Home Office Juvenile Organisations Committee, summarised the cause of war time increase in delinquency thus: '[The] absence of parents at the front or on munitions work, the use of certain public elementary schools as hospitals which entails the working of the other schools in two shifts with shorter hours thereby throwing the children more onto the streets, the failure of certain children's organisations due to their leaders being on military service and other causes *have led to lack of control of the natural activities of the child with the result that these have developed in wrong directions*'. PRO HO45/349554/78 dated 18 May 1918, (My emphasis).

<sup>337</sup> *Juvenile Organisations Committee Papers* PRO HO45/349554/53

Far from juvenile labour being the cause of juvenile offending, for Holmes youth employment served to explain the city's freedom from the wartime leap in offences. 'I believe the fact that this Mission has given a start at sea to one hundred and ninety-two [youths], to have much to do with Sheffield's happy freedom from what is termed juvenile crime.'<sup>338</sup> Holmes commenced his work as a Sheffield Probation Officer in the city in 1891, a role undertaken on a part-time basis while employed in a department of a steel manufacturer. During that time he had engaged in experimental efforts directed to place into employment those delinquent youths whose homes were deemed of evil influence. Farms in Canada, Africa and Britain, berths in the mercantile marine and positions in local factories were the destination for many offenders. A 'firm believer in regular employment as a safeguard against criminality', Holmes established the Sheffield Police Court Mission for Men in 1899, which enabled him to continue this work on a more systematic footing.<sup>339</sup> The task of procuring positions for boys during the Great War had been made easier by the demand for labour (Holmes, 1917).<sup>340</sup> During 1916 Holmes had introduced into fresh employment 102 men and boys and facilitated reinstatement in former positions for 31 others.<sup>341</sup>

Much of the delinquency that exercised the minds of less experienced observers was, for Holmes, nothing more than youthful boisterousness. He took the view that 'most so-called crime on the part of lads of fourteen to sixteen to be little more than rebellion against a humdrum life they were little fitted for, suppressed immediately, and turned to youthful enthusiasm'.<sup>342</sup> The belief that juvenile crime was in reality misdiagnosed youthful exuberance was a recurrent argument advanced by Holmes and his contemporaries.<sup>343</sup> His demand that much juvenile crime should be regarded as no different from the normal mischievous pursuits of respectable children was motivated not only by sympathy for the plight of the children, but also by a recognition of the

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<sup>338</sup> Ibid.

<sup>339</sup> *Who's Who*, 1926; Sheffield Red Book 1923 p.231.

<sup>340</sup> Holmes remarked, 'I suppose any man not an idiot can get work now; if he is able and willing to do it, he will not find folk unduly inquisitive about his history' (ibid).

<sup>341</sup> Ibid.

<sup>342</sup> Ibid.

<sup>343</sup> 'We can take the juvenile delinquent too seriously. In the majority of cases he or she is only a rather naughty boy or girl who in a good home would be sent to bed, or have pocket money stopped'. *The Justice of the Peace*, Vol. LXXXIV, 4 September 1920, p.376.



dangers of criminalising adolescent boisterousness. The Telegraph reported a speech given by Holmes to the Sheffield Sociological Society:

Mr Holmes prefaced his remarks by warning his hearers against statistics dealing with juvenile crime. They were most unreliable, he said, for there was a great deal that was classed as juvenile crime which was not crime at all. No doubt it was very objectionable for boys to play pitch and toss but he could not agree that it was criminal.... Such a boy should not be hauled before the court as a little criminal. Offences of that kind should be dealt with in some other court than one dealing with criminal offences.<sup>344</sup>

For Holmes, such criminalisation inevitably led to a misplaced and unnecessary increase in public alarm. If adolescents were brought before magistrates only for those cases of real gravity

older folk... would not be in so much danger of imagining that children grow terribly wicked. It would be plain that the bulk of those most neglected and apparently most evil are neither better nor worse at heart than the boys of highly placed folk whose pranks nobody dreams of bringing to the notice of the bench<sup>345</sup>

In this regard, the Police Court Missionary's sympathy for the young offender and his tendency to downplay the extent of youth crime reflected the broader criminal policy goal of avoiding the entanglement of juveniles in the criminal justice system. More than this, however, it illustrated the impression the war had made on the local elite's view of youth. During the war and after, Holmes made much of the fact that many of his reformed delinquents made excellent material for the armed services. For Holmes, it was a source of extreme pride that 'so many once rebels against society have made common cause with right these four years, fighting like heroes or dying like men (Holmes, 1918a, p.ix)'. Accounts of those 'saved for service' are to be found in his nine semi-fictional

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<sup>344</sup> Article by Robert Holmes entitled '*Juvenile Crime - Mr Robert Holmes and the Police Courts - New System Required*' *Sheffield Daily Telegraph* 10 December 1919.

<sup>345</sup> This view was in keeping with the view of experienced metropolitan observers also believed that the problem of juvenile crime had been exaggerated. For example Charles Russell suggested that '[T]he word 'crime' is an altogether incorrect description of the majority of the acts which are bringing young persons and children to the notice of the police and before the courts. There is really no indication that the boyhood of the nation is forming definitely anti-social and criminal habits'. PRO HO45/349554/78

novels, in addition to various magazine articles and official reports.<sup>346</sup> By the end of the war, somewhere between a third and a half of those former rebels whom Holmes had placed in the mercantile marine, or who had volunteered for active service had been killed or drowned; 1,672 in total.<sup>347</sup> Accordingly, it is no surprise to find that the enthusiastic and active part played by Holmes in a war that led to the death of many of his former charges impacted upon his approach to youth. The effect was twofold. First, the war confirmed to Holmes the essential integrity of the delinquents with whom he had dealt. Their sacrifice served as a rebuke to those who may have questioned the moral fibre of the younger generation. It was a view that Holmes was eager to press home at a time when he, and many like him, was exposed to the rebuke of anti-militarists. Accordingly, in the post-war years Holmes sought to become a vociferous champion of youth against detractors who, in reality, were few in number and influence. At the same time, the band of wartime conservatives and critics provided a focus of retrospective disapproval. During the war, noted Holmes a few years later,

Scores of lads came to my room week by week bearing the marks of toil too heavy for their years, always cheerful, even when scanty rations told eloquently in pinched faces and bony frames. There was seldom a complaint more serious than that days dragged so wearily they feared the war would end before a recruiting office opened its doors to them. A good deal was said at the time concerning the effect of absurdly high wages paid to lads in the absence of men serving abroad. It was felt by many that the combination of unaccustomed freedom from parental control and a dangerous amount of pocket money was causing boy's to run wild. As for increased wickedness I did not notice it. As for extravagant rates of pay, the fault did not rest with them...For myself, I do not remember one solitary case of a youth reluctant to exchange big wages in office or workshop for the pittance paid to a soldier of the king (Holmes, 1923, pp.78-9).

The war impacted in a second way. It underscored both the possibility and the necessity of reformation. The rebellious hooligans' readiness to fight for King and Country confirmed that the former could be directed, without too much difficulty, along more constructive lines. The spectacle of thousands of his former delinquents

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<sup>346</sup> Holmes' pride in his former wayward boys volunteering to fight for King and Country is evident in several of his novels (Holmes, 1915; 1916; 1918a; 1918b; 1919; 1921; 1923).

<sup>347</sup> As to the exact number of those who died during the war the records offer contradictory evidence. While Holmes states that 'above three thousand' were serving in the armed forces and mercantile marine, and that a 'third of the number did not return' (Holmes, 1923, p.78), the *Sheffield Red Book* noted that '1,672 were killed or drowned in the war' *Sheffield Red Book* 1923, p.230.

joining the colours showed that, '[g]iven a reasonable chance, even the most mischievous hobbledehoy will turn out a man to be proud of' (Holmes, 1923, p.77).

The sphere of youth provided a crucial arena within which the elite could display its commitment to progressive social change and its claim to political leadership. While the adolescent was prone to crime and other misdemeanours, his very impressionability made him susceptible to more positive influences. As Freeman had earlier noted, it was for precisely the same fundamental reasons, that adolescence, 'which is most liable to vice is most susceptible to virtue. The qualities which, perverted, produce crime, are the very ones which, cultivated, produce regeneration' (Freeman, 1914, p.107). The remedy advanced for juvenile crime was two-fold. First, it was necessary to devise appropriate means through which this misspent energy could be more constructively channelled. Secondly, there was a demand for a regular system of supervision for those youngsters new to the world of work but denied the guiding influence of parental discipline.

Alerted to the dangers of the wartime leap in rates of recorded juvenile crime, the Juvenile Organisations Committee had been formed in December 1916. Headed by Arthur Norris, its role was to 'stimulate the various children's organisations to increased activity, to widen their search for new helpers, to co-ordinate their work and reconsider their methods in order to deal with special difficulties'.<sup>348</sup> Branches of the Committee were set up in Sheffield and in other towns and cities across the country. Towards the end of the war the role of the JOCs expanded to include work with adults as well as juveniles, coordinating work that was geared to the promotion of 'the health and morale of the workers in all munitions areas'. The Welfare and Health Department of the Ministry of Munitions during the war encouraged initiatives that offered 'suitable recreation' for industrial workers. Acting in conjunction with industry, the Department helped to set up welfare and recreation schemes for both adults and juveniles.<sup>349</sup> In Sheffield a number of the largest steel firms were involved in the scheme.<sup>350</sup> These schemes were influenced to a great extent by the wartime emphasis upon the need for industrial cooperation between master and men at a time of national crisis. When, after

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<sup>348</sup> *Juvenile Organisations Committee Papers* PRO HO45/349554/53.

<sup>349</sup> The scheme was financed with contributions from employers. Of every £100 contributed, £80 was deemed by the Inland Revenue to be reclaimable by way of the excess profit tax. *Ibid.*

<sup>350</sup> For a comprehensive list of those employed as Boys' Welfare Superintendents at major firms in the city see *Sheffield Daily Independent*, 7 August 1923 and *Sheffield Yearbook and Record*, 1919, p.44.

the Armistice, the need for conciliation was deemed even greater, these wartime innovations proved particularly useful.<sup>351</sup> There was, remarked W.G. Evans, local magistrate and Welfare Superintendent at Vickers,

a new spirit in the land; especially in the big works of cities like Sheffield. No longer are lads, or men or women, regarded as mere wage earners who are of no other consequence. They are all of consequence to the nation. The nation has learnt that if happiness, contentment and prosperity are to prevail the conditions of life must be improved. So we have Welfare Departments.<sup>352</sup>

Concern about the impact upon the character of the young worker of blind-alley work, unemployment and modern industrial methods served to consolidate welfare efforts during the post war decade.<sup>353</sup> The 'problem of boy labour', as it was popularly known, was to remain an enduring focus of discussion throughout the 1920s. Concern was directed to the way in which boys were discharged from the disciplinary restraints of school at the very moment when the turmoil of adolescence and the 'consummate force of heredity' allowed detrimental social influences to have free rein upon a weak and impressionable character. The boy-worker, noted Freeman before the war, possessed a substantial income but was cheated of normal boyish activities. The result was that he became 'unnaturally sensational and melodramatic' and 'prone to seek satisfaction in undesirable ways' (Freeman, 1914, pp.105-6). In the midst of post-war recession, the Sheffield Daily Telegraph remarked how the

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<sup>351</sup> Probably having in mind the welfare work carried out by the large industrial concerns in Sheffield, Robert Holmes commended 'the splendid recreation rooms and instruction centres provided by some of our large manufacturing firms, also their well-situated and extensive playing fields. [They] are a tremendous asset to the community. It remains to devise means for linking up the work-people of smaller employers, and we shall have gone far towards eliminating the hooligan and the untaught of either sex, to our great gain' (Holmes, 1923, p.87).

<sup>352</sup> *Sheffield YearBook and Record* 1919, p.43. SCL.

<sup>353</sup> T.A. Richards, Welfare Superintendent to Edgar Allen and Co. Ltd, argued that, 'modern conditions robbed the worker of the pride of having made something, and made it impossible for him to obtain reflected development from his work. Something had to be done to nullify the stultifying effects of repetition work. The best way was to teach the worker how to utilise his leisure, and for that purpose it was necessary to "catch 'em young"'. Richards described how when boys left school the influence of schoolteachers was considerably removed and the control of parents lessened. The period between 14 and 21 was 'a very critical period through which boys and girls passed'. At his steel works where of the 1,750 hands 240 were boys between the ages of 14 and 21, there was 'an efficient organisation for developing the youthful outlook along the right lines...The monotony of work was so great that as soon as knocking off time came the thought of practically all of them was to seek distraction - and most of them looked to unsatisfying excitement rather than entertainment'. Sheffield Daily Telegraph, 24 November 1927.

youth or young man in a blind-alley occupation is one of the most pressing problems of the day, and at the same time, one of its most potential dangers. The unemployable is the menace in our midst, and too often forms the ready raw material out of which the loafer or the criminal is formed. Society, in the interests of self-protection, to put it at its lowest, cannot turn a deaf ear to the appeal to do something that will avert such a future for those derelicts<sup>354</sup>

Observers recognised that during normal conditions the majority of boys succeeded in graduating from boy labour to regular adult employment. Accordingly, blind-alley work was just one aspect of the much wider problem of insufficient training and character development, with the consequent threat to national efficiency.<sup>355</sup>

Intensifying these concerns was the high rate of unemployment amongst youths, and the inevitable association between idleness and mischief. The early years of the 1920s saw the highest incidence of unemployment during the inter-war years with almost 70,000 being out of work in the city during the summer of 1921.<sup>356</sup> From then until the late 1930s, there was no time at which there were less than 40,000 unemployed persons in the city. Indeed, throughout the 1920s Sheffield was afflicted by some of the highest unemployment rates within any of the urban areas. At the beginning of 1925, one of the better years, the city had a total unemployment rate that was twice the national average and a juvenile unemployment rate of 17 per cent - more than four times the national average (Owen, 1933; Stuart, 1922).

Speculation about the link between worklessness and crime provided an occasional subject of debate. However, during the immediate post-war years the attention of observers tended to be directed to what were perceived as more pressing concerns. The creation of a class of 'unemployables', habituated to life without work and outside the scope of the disciplinary rigours of work nourished fears that such a group would provide recruits for revolutionary doctrines. There was, noted one observer, a large class of boys who, after being made unemployed were very difficult to handle. 'They are convinced that no one thinks of their problem and that society has deliberately planned to exploit boy-labour...A lengthy period of unemployment tends to develop in them a

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<sup>354</sup> Sheffield Daily Telegraph 27 December 1922.

<sup>355</sup> 'What we need to consider is not the sacrifice of a certain number of youths through faulty industrial arrangements, but the lack of training and the manufacture of inefficiency in the majority of boys between school and manhood', (Freeman, Op. Cit., p2).

<sup>356</sup> The break in the post war boom and the Coal Strike pushed unemployment figures up to 69,300 (see Owen, Op. Cit.)

'Bolshevik' attitude, with many marked class prejudices' (Eagar & Secretan., 1925, p.75). 'Youths', commented the Independent's *Passer-By* column,

are roaming the streets at the time of their life when aimlessness is most dangerous to their character...Councillor Cecil Wilson [suggests] that if these boys and youths are not dealt with in a proper way now, they will become a menace and a danger in the future. He might have gone further, and said the extremists find in them a fertile ground for the reception of the gospel of revolt.<sup>357</sup>

Middle class unease about such high levels of unemployment could be expressed in other ways. The threat of 'demoralisation' of formerly respectable sections of the labouring population through enforced idleness provided material for national and local debate during the period.<sup>358</sup> Unemployment was held to have a pernicious effect on the character of young people, while the handing out of doles by the state compounded the evil. In a letter to the Telegraph, Mr W. E. Dixon of the Sheffield Council of Social Services, formerly the Guild of Help, demanded that

[s]omething must be done if these unemployed girls and boys are to be saved from the evil effects of "money without work" and "nothing to do". Unemployment is undoubtedly impairing their possible usefulness in industry, and we are creating an "unemployable" class which will undoubtedly cost the city a good deal more than immediate measures would do<sup>359</sup>

Crime was perceived as one of these possible costs.<sup>360</sup> When Robert Holmes, the Sheffield Police Court Missionary was asked by the Sheffield Daily Telegraph for his view on the effect of the dole on young men and whether it lead to more crime, Holmes responded by stating that,

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<sup>357</sup> Sheffield Daily Independent 22 March 1921

<sup>358</sup> On the question of the perceived demoralising consequences unemployment see (McKibbin, 1987). A Daily Mail article entitled, "The Viscous Dole" is typical of many devoted to the issue of demoralisation. After reporting the case of a man who was sent to prison by a Thames court magistrate for drawing the dole by false pretences the article continued: 'Every day brings proof of the increasing demoralisation caused by the dole and of the way in which it is undermining the character of the people. It is leading to laziness, to trickery and to a brazen determination to 'get something for nothing' and live on charity...The corruption caused by the dole is far more widespread than people realise...Many of the younger out of works are losing the will to work' (The Daily Mail 21 April 1925, p9)

<sup>359</sup> Sheffield Daily Telegraph 14 March 1923, p6.

<sup>360</sup> 'Full well are we aware of the numbers of men who, but for worklessness, would never have seen prison' Sheffield Discharged Prisoners Association, 1933 p4.

Unquestionably, there are a large number of youths who find it easy to exist on the dole, and they make no special effort to find regular employment...Having nothing to do they have the whole day on their hands, with manifold temptations to get into mischief, and mischief has a tendency to degenerate almost unconsciously into crime...It is fairly safe to assume that the average unemployed youth who appears in the Police Court has had a long standing acquaintance with the dole.<sup>361</sup>

Such crime, added Holmes, had little to do with poverty. These youths were in receipt of the dole and, accordingly, could not 'plead destitution as an excuse for falling into crime. Whether there would be an increase in crime were the dole withdrawn, as some people imagine, cannot safely be predicted. The fact remains that little crime committed in Sheffield at the present time, has the excuse of starvation on the part of the criminal.'<sup>362</sup> The problem was one of demoralisation rather than pauperisation.

During the 1920s, however, the term 'demoralisation' began to acquire a new meaning. Instead of indicating a threat to traditional respectable values, an alternative, psychosocial understanding began to emerge. The declining attraction of the traditional notions of respectability was a significant factor in this. Equally important perhaps was the changing political climate. As the post war-tide of revolutionary sentiment waned and the authorities became a little more relaxed, other notions began to displace the idea that the unemployed provided ready material for radical doctrines. As McKibbin notes, there was a shift from a conception of unemployment as fostering a disaffected and insurrectionary population to one marked by apathy and acquiescence (McKibbin, 1987, p.161). The emergent social psychology of unemployment suggested that the unemployed went through successive stages in their reaction to worklessness, from optimism to resignation and then despair. These stages, moreover, were accompanied by progressive deterioration in the social and intellectual capacities of the individual (Ibid.). Just as the civilising of the urban poor during the nineteenth century was accompanied by a shifting conception of them as feeble rather than dangerous, the pacification of workers during the 1920s encouraged a view of the latter as generally pathetic rather than predatory. A survey undertaken in Sheffield by F.D. Stuart in 1922 under the auspices of the J. J. Astor Committee stressed that youths, particularly those youths that had spent

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<sup>361</sup> Sheffield Daily Telegraph 3 June 1925 p.7.

<sup>362</sup> Ibid.

time in the army, posed a particular problem of 'progressive demoralisation'. Stuart discussed the effect of unemployment on the morale in the city. After consulting local employers and social workers he concluded that, 'in rapidly increasing numbers men are becoming more and more demoralised, and the number who will never again be content to settle down to steady work is increasing...People who have been closely watching the effects of unemployment on the people, are of the opinion that the young men deteriorate much more quickly than do those who are turned 45 years of age' (pp.274-5).<sup>363</sup>

Youth crime was one possible consequence of misspent time and misdirected or vitiated energy, and provided a spectre that was occasionally raised by those who demanded measures against the curse of unemployment. The solution that was advocated by members of Sheffield's professional elite was the implementation of effective training and guidance. In February 1918 a Juvenile Employment Committee was established with the aim of supervising the moral training of the city's youth.<sup>364</sup> The work of the Committee was directed to the coordination of the efforts of employers, teachers and parents to place children in employment that would privilege the strengthening of character over short-term financial gain. Guidelines were issued to head teachers concerning the necessity of informing parents of their obligations:

The teachers should, on all suitable occasions, in addition to giving general advice and assistance to parents, lay special stress upon the importance of placing the child in some employment which will train him to earn his living in after life and not in one which will merely offer him good wages for the moment without giving him the chance of such training.<sup>365</sup>

In the autumn of 1919, occupational centres for unemployed juveniles were established in Sheffield. Though subsequently closed due to financial restrictions, they were re-

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<sup>363</sup> In his survey of juvenile employment undertaken at the end of the decade, Owen remarked how, 'the effects of even a few months unemployment on growing minds at a vitally important stage in their development should not be underestimated...The experience of unemployment and the realization of the contingency of future unemployment plays havoc with the new-found sense of personal importance and freedom which boys and girls straight from school appear to enjoy, and breeds a spirit of hopelessness and irresponsibility the consequences of which may long outlast the occasion of its birth', A.D.K Owen *A Survey of Juvenile Employment and Welfare in Sheffield* 1933, p.34.

<sup>364</sup> The Committee comprised 18 members, the Sheffield Education Committee and the Ministry of Labour Local Advisory Committee each contributing six individuals. The final six members were chosen on the basis that they possessed 'a special knowledge of juvenile problems and experienced in social work. Three of the six additional members will be women'. *Sheffield Education Committee Minutes*, April 1917-Mar 1918, pp.508-9.

<sup>365</sup> *Ibid.*



established in 1923.<sup>366</sup> One of the arguments put forward for re-opening the centres was to avoid youths wandering the streets and prevent hooliganism. President of the Ecclesall Board of Guardians, Mr James Blossom remarked that 'the economy effected on these centres was false economy because the city would have to pay for it ten times over in years to come. Lads who now left school had no work and were wandering about the streets where they would rapidly develop into hooligans.'<sup>367</sup> Mrs Cavill, a representative of the Board of the Council of Social Services was equally convinced that, 'if the schools were reopened, they would do much even if they kept the youngsters off the streets'.<sup>368</sup>

However, one problem encountered was the poor level of attendance at such centres. While compulsory for those above the age of 16 and in receipt of unemployment benefit or, occasionally, public assistance, attendance was voluntary for those below that age. It was those aged 14-16 years and judged to be in need of particular guidance whose participation was generally poor.<sup>369</sup> When evening classes were established towards the end of the decade, the social services encountered the same problem of low take up, particularly amongst those coming from poorer homes.<sup>370</sup>

A similar difficulty arose for those who viewed youth organisations as the best way of steering juveniles away from crime. Those young people deemed most in need of supervision and guidance were least touched by the efforts of professionals. Of the 7,500 boys attached to youth organisations in the city, two thirds were under the age of 14. Owen estimated that 2,500, or nearly one-seventh of the 18,000 or so boys between the

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<sup>366</sup> In January of that year the Government had offered to pay 75% of the cost of running the centres on the basis that the local authority was prepared to pay the balance. Considerations of economy led the local Education Authority to refuse this offer. However, following a campaign by members of the voluntary and statutory services in the city and the initiative of the Sheffield Council of Social Service, a voluntary fund was organised which was sufficient to cover the balance for three months and two centres were opened in May. Though closed again in July they were reopened in September on a permanent footing when the Education Committee agreed to shoulder the local financial element.

<sup>367</sup> Sheffield Daily Telegraph 15 February 1923

<sup>368</sup> Ibid.

<sup>369</sup> In 1926, for example 253 boys and 128 girls attended the centres. *Sheffield Education Committee Minutes*, April 1924-Mar1925, p.93.

<sup>370</sup> Only a fifth of juveniles coming from "very poor" homes attended evening classes, and for many of these the attendance was of very short duration. '[A]ttendance at evening classes', remarked Owen, 'appears to be very much more usual in the case of boys and girls coming from comfortably-off working-class homes than from poor homes' (Owen, Op. Cit. p.38).

ages of 14 and 18 years in Sheffield, were attached to juvenile organisations.<sup>371</sup> Yet for the majority, association with juvenile organisations ‘in most cases...ended within a year of leaving school’.<sup>372</sup> More worrying was the small numbers of boys and girls from underprivileged backgrounds.

**Fig 7.3**  
**Percentage of boys and girls attached to juvenile organisations since leaving schools and family circumstances**<sup>373</sup>

<b>Family Circumstances</b>	<b>Boys %</b>	<b>Girls %</b>
Good	30.5	14.6
Moderate	25.2	18
Poor	13.5	6.1
Very Poor	12.3	7.4

Owen remarked that participation in juvenile organisations was more frequent in the case of adolescents coming from comfortably off working class homes than in the case of those coming from poor homes. ‘Juvenile organisations only touch a small proportion of the boys, and a very small proportion, indeed of the girls coming from poor working class homes.’<sup>374</sup>

In her Home Office study, Barbara Lewis had also revealed how only 4.4 per cent of Sheffield juvenile offenders belonged to a youth organisation. One reason offered was that ‘young offenders do not appreciate club life, they are repelled by discipline and prefer the liberty of the streets’. An additional factor was the ‘refusal of existing clubs to grant membership to the troublesome boy [and] an inadequate number of clubs in thickly

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<sup>371</sup> Even fewer girls were attached to juvenile organisations – 2,200 out of 19,000, or about one-ninth Owen Op. Cit. p.39.

<sup>372</sup> Ibid.

<sup>373</sup> Figures cited in Owen, Op. Cit. p.40.

<sup>374</sup> Ibid.

populated districts'.<sup>375</sup> Whatever the prejudices or limitations of the organisations examined by Lewis, throughout the 1920s a number of prominent workers made strenuous efforts to ensure the participation of delinquents in the various youth organisations in the city. One of the first initiatives was the Button Lane Boy's Club, also known as the 'Borstal Club' established at the turn of the century. Upon the suggestion of the Chaplain and the Governor of Wakefield Prison, Henry Michael Elliott, the local banker, formed a committee in 1896 for the purposes of looking after delinquent boys who would otherwise have been sent to prison.<sup>376</sup> The committee took a disused public house in Button Lane that handled over 500 juveniles during its five years in existence. According to his obituary in the Sheffield Daily Telegraph, Elliott's 'efforts were rewarded with such success that 80 per cent of the boys made good'.<sup>377</sup>

By the 1920s there were on average 7,500 boys and 6,500 girls involved in Sheffield's youth organisations (Owen, *Ibid.*). The Scouts, Boys' Brigades, Church Lad's Brigades and similar organisations were led by many of the local elite whose concern was to cultivate notions of citizenship and service in the critical period of adolescence and steer young men and women away from demoralising influences.<sup>378</sup> Albert Harland, prominent businessman and Commissioner for the Sheffield Local Association of Boy Scouts suggested that

the man who worked amongst boys was confronted with one of the most varied, one of the most changeable, and one of the most difficult problems in the world - that of boy nature...The needs of the boy were a vigorous physical life, especially for those living in our large cities, and leadership at an age when

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<sup>375</sup> PRO, HO45/349554/53.

<sup>376</sup> Originally from South Wales, Henry Michael Elliott (1861-1934) was manager of the High Street branch of the London Joint City and Midland Bank and a director of the Neepsend Steel and Tool Company. He was a zealous worker for the Anglican Church, being warden of St. Marks's Church. He was involved in a range of additional public service duties, such as Committee member of the Sheffield Boy's Working Home, work with the Guild of Help and later the Sheffield Council of Social Services. He also acted as Honorary Secretary of the Voluntary Society for the Care of the Mentally Defective. *Obituary*, Sheffield Daily Telegraph 5 March 1934, p.5

<sup>377</sup> After the passing of the 1901 Juvenile Offenders Act' the Club was found to be no longer necessary and closed. Sheffield Daily Telegraph, 5 March 1934, p.5.

<sup>378</sup> William Blackshaw at Croft House Settlement established the first Boy Scout troops in the early 1900s. The Boys Brigade was formed in 1888 in the old Norfolk street chapel. An extension of the Sunday School Union, the Boys brigade later merged with the Boys Life Brigade founded in 1902. By the 1920s there were 2,000 boys in 75 companies, Sheffield Daily Independent 17 January 1927.

both crime and religion gained their largest number of recruits. A leisure purposely filled with interest must lead to a nobler sense of citizenship.<sup>379</sup>

These bodies were organised and run along voluntary lines by conscientious members of the local middle classes who devoted much of their spare time to the plight of juveniles from the industrial quarters of the city. These individuals were usually active Christians, their endeavours receiving the direct or indirect sponsorship of the local churches. In their appeals for financial and material support, youth workers fixed upon the hopes and fears of the middle-classes regarding the impressionability of youth. When the leader of the local Boys' Club Movement, Edwin Barker, called for volunteers to form a University Boys' Club in Shalesmoor, he suggested that

[t]he working lad between 14 and 18 years is probably the most neglected member of the community. Yet surely this citizen-to-be is not the least important. At school age he had games organised for him, play centres and home control. Now, as a wage earner, with fuller "rights" over his leisure time, he enters a "gap period" just when his need of help and direction is greatest. Scouts, Brigades, Evening Classes attract some of his type and do splendid work, but still the mass remains scarcely touched. And the "man of tomorrow" spends his leisure time (to him the real time!) of his most malleable years in the doubtful environment of the street corner. The Boys Club Movement is an attempt to cope with this problem, and the remarkable growth of Club work is a witness to the success of the method.<sup>380</sup>

One problem with which youth organisations were confronted during the 1920s was the discrediting of militarism. During the pre-war years, this ethos had provided for these bodies a cohering ideology, a set of customs and rituals, and a steady flow of young recruits. After the slaughter in Flanders and Northern France, the regalia of Khaki uniforms, dummy rifles and regimental marching were the subject of embarrassment if not rebuke, as were the principles they conveyed. One consequence was the abolition of

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<sup>379</sup> Albert Harland, *Woodsmoke*, Sheffield Association Magazine of Sheffield Boy Scouts, Vol. 1 1924, p.5, SCL. A native of Scarborough and son of a clergyman, Albert Harland (1869-1957) was educated at Rugby and moved to Sheffield in 1891. Here he became managing director Wilson's snuff manufacturers. Commissioner of the Sheffield Association of Boy Scouts he was also involved in a broad range of welfare and philanthropic bodies in the city: Committee member of the Sheffield Boys' Working Home; Secretary of the Sheffield Guild of Help; Treasurer of the Sheffield YMCA, and member of the Sheffield Juvenile Employment Committee. He was also Conservative MP for the Ecclesall Constituency from 1923 to 1929, a former Alderman, Town Trustee, prominent Anglican and a leading opponent of drink and gambling. In 1929 he announced his intention to retire as MP, 'in order to devote his attention to local social work'. See *Sheffield Daily Telegraph* 28 November 1930, p.5.

<sup>380</sup> Edwin Barker, 27 June 1927, LTE, *Sheffield Daily Telegraph*.

the branch of the Officer Training Corps at King Edward VII Grammar School in Sheffield. The Church lad's Brigade came under similar attack from radical opponents. Such organisations were no doubt affected by the antimilitarist climate. On the other hand, their leaders made efforts to stress their role as an antidote to the problems of unemployment and its associated evils.<sup>381</sup> Rev. William Fanshaw, Curate of Heeley Parish Church and an organiser of the local church Lads Brigade, defended the latter on the grounds that it prevented youths from drifting into trouble:

Personally, I find it extremely objectionable to see lads of from 14 years upwards slouching through the streets or, hanging around street corners, simply going to the devil without anyone raising a finger to help, except perhaps a few voluntary workers in the various boys' organisations - who as a reward get the mud of militarism slung in their faces.<sup>382</sup>

The work of these recreational bodies provided one mechanism whereby juvenile delinquency could be engaged and defeated. However, it was recognised that the reach of such organisations was limited. They could only influence juveniles in their recreational hours – and then, only those few who were willing to participate. The boys' clubs were seen to be unable to reach into the sphere of the family that was deemed the breeding ground of juvenile crime. Only through early intervention into such homes, it was believed, could character be effectively moulded and notions of citizenship instilled. During the 1920s a network of voluntary and statutory bodies had either evolved or been created specifically to deal with this task. One of the key characteristics of these bodies is that they worked closely with both employers and educational agencies. The work of the Police Court Missionary, the Sheffield Boys' Working Home, the Continuation Classes, the School Attendance Visitors and many other bodies ensured that the impressionable juvenile was directed along a safe path.

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<sup>381</sup> Presiding at the Sheffield Regiment of CLB annual Festive Dinner, Lord Horne, Governor and Commandant stated that, '[t]he CLB did splendid work in keeping boys on the right path, and helping them to become Christian men and efficient citizens. If ever there was a necessity for such an organisation, that necessity exists at the present moment...In the old days there was always employment waiting for the boys on leaving school. Today, they had with them the curse of unemployment, which had a very marked effect upon the boy. It was a tragic position when there was nothing for the boy to look forward to. Evils waited upon idleness. But here the CLB did noble service'. Sheffield Daily Telegraph 12 May 1925.

<sup>382</sup> Sheffield Daily Telegraph 14 August 1923.

## Chapter Eight

### Moral Crusaders

In the decade following the Great War the bastions of moral order in the municipality found themselves to be in a peculiarly foreign environment. Church organisations discovered those issues around which they had traditionally campaigned, such as liquor and gambling, diminished foci of social stigma. Negative moralisation of the sort practised by their nineteenth century forebears had little resonance in an increasingly secular and politicised climate, tending to be greeted instead as an attack on the working man. A number of moral crusaders managed to adapt successfully to the new environment. Yet, for those who remained fixed to the course charted by their predecessors, isolation and declining influence was their inevitable fate. Another group of moral entrepreneurs, the police, encountered similar difficulties operating in what it found to be a hostile environment. The Sheffield police force was to prove itself able to cope with the political and economic tensions of the 1920s and to adapt to the shifting sands of cultural sensibility. Yet, as I shall examine towards the close of the chapter, this was not without considerable cost.

#### The Temperance Movement

In the analysis of editorial and letter content undertaken in Chapter 4, I described how in the decade after the Great War the various religious bodies tended to promote a condemnatory view of crime. Crime was portrayed by these groups in terms of impending moral danger – as the inevitable consequence of unbridled drink and gambling. The relatively alarmist rhetoric displayed by the various temperance and religious bodies during the 1920s was nothing new. Their concern with the moral conduct of the lower orders had been an enduring feature of elite discourse since the mid-nineteenth century. However, it was the scale of inebriety in the town that provided for middle class observers the most conspicuous evidence of chronic immorality. The introduction of the 1830 Beer Act had served to heighten the concern of reformers, already perturbed by the scale of drinking by local artisans both during their leisure hours and in the workshop. Whereas in 1821 there were 209 public houses in the town,

by 1833 there were 329 fully licensed houses and 235 of the new “free” beer houses (Reedman, 1931, p. 9). The Act entrenched the conviction that drunkenness was the provenance of much immorality. From this early period, alcohol, drunkenness and crime became intimately associated in the emerging middle class purview. As the Sheffield Mercury proclaimed ‘the increase of public houses and the impossibility of enforcing proper regulations, must be regarded as the most fruitful source of pauperism and crime’.<sup>383</sup> The Sheffield Independent provided an account of the immediate effect of the passing of the Beer Act

On Monday last the immediate effect of the operation of the new Beer Bill was exhibited in the streets of this town in a most striking manner. During the early part of the day groups of drunken men were to be found at every turn, and at night time it was inconvenient, if not dangerous, to walk through the streets... On Tuesday morning the prison list presented the names of 39 men, women, and children who were committed under the general charge of being disorderly. Several persons were in a state of intoxication when they were brought before the magistrates; and more than half the number exhibited broken heads, and clothes injured by the contents of the channels of the street.<sup>384</sup>

In 1853 a Select Committee was formed to investigate the level of drunkenness, its premise being that drunkenness in Sheffield was greatly in excess of that in other major towns in the country.<sup>385</sup> As Saunders, a local town councillor, remarked, ‘the fact appears plain and undeniable, that drunkenness is greatly in excess in Sheffield, as compared with other towns’.<sup>386</sup> For Saunders, as for others, a number of measures would be required in order to inculcate character, namely, a greater control of licensed premises combined with a regime of moral improvement.<sup>387</sup>

### The Ethos of Respectability

The perceived indifference of artisans to the emerging middle class norms provoked the consternation of local and visiting dignitaries alike, providing the stimulus for more

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<sup>383</sup> Sheffield Mercury 8 May 1830, Quoted in Reedman (Op. Cit., p.9).

<sup>384</sup> Sheffield Independent 16 October 1830, Quoted in Reedman (Op. Cit. pp.9-10).

<sup>385</sup> Saunders (1853).

<sup>386</sup> Ibid. (p.6).

<sup>387</sup> Ibid. (p.13). See also Mercer (1996).

concerted attempts to enforce middle class values.<sup>388</sup> The central ethic of this project was that of respectability. Reid has defined respectability as 'a system of values prescribed by the middle class for the working class...an ideology which united the middle class with [deferential] sections of the working class in a vertical relationship' (Reid, 1976, p. 281, emphasis in original; see also Reid, 1977). Thrift, sobriety, hard work and self-improvement formed the essential components of this ideology. The proscription of alcohol consumption provided a mechanism with which the middle class elite sought to enforce these values. As Reid observes, '[m]iddle class condemnation of working class drinking was essential to the ideology of respectability' (Reid, 1976, 286). Drunkenness was constructed as the antithesis of 'respectable' values, drink marking the symbolic boundary between respectable and disreputable behaviour.<sup>389</sup>

A non-indictable offence, drunkenness was throughout the second half of the nineteenth century viewed both as a moral failing and the cause of more serious crime. In addition, middle class reformers worked to ensure the symbolic association within the general consciousness of drunkenness and criminality. At the forefront of this crusade stood the churches and their associated temperance bodies. The first temperance society in the city was founded in 1832. In 1855 the Band of Hope was formed and by 1905 Sheffield had over two hundred societies with a combined membership of 20,000.<sup>390</sup> It was in the latter decades of the century that the temperance organisations began to exert a noticeable influence on local licensing policy. The strength of religious Non-Conformity in the city ensured that the Disestablished churches and their temperance societies led the way in disseminating the anti-liquor gospel. In 1893 the Wesleyan Methodist Church Council formed the Social Questions League. The body exercised a powerful sway over the licensing justices, an influence that continued into the 1920s. While the town's population increased by over forty per cent between 1891 and 1930,

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<sup>388</sup> Harriet Martineau suggested that the recklessness of the towns people was due to 'the excessive sickness and mortality of the place...the depraved state of bodily health' which, 'against all remonstrance and preventative efforts on the part of their employers' they inflict upon themselves' choosing instead 'a short life and a merry one' (quoted in Saunders, 1860, p.23).

<sup>389</sup> The American temperance movement derived its appeal not so much from the extent of drinking in that country but the symbolic association of intemperance with the catholic 'urban, immigrant lower classes' in contrast to 'rural, protestant, middle class America. Prohibition came as the culmination of the movement to reform the immigrant cultures and at the height of the immigrant influx into the United States' (Gusfield, 1967, pp.184-5). See also Gusfield (1963).

<sup>390</sup> Band of Hope Jubilee Handbook, 1905. SCL.



the licensing bench succeeded in reducing the number of licensed premises by 25 per cent.<sup>391</sup>

From the mid-nineteenth century, local dignitaries looked upon the statistics relating to convictions for drunkenness as an index of the moral condition of the populace.<sup>392</sup> Temperance advocates and their opponents wielded these figures in their regular skirmishes at public meetings and in the press. Teetotalers and anti-temperance activists were polarised along political lines in the Liberal and Tory camps respectively. At the same time the city's two daily newspapers functioned as the propagandistic organs of these camps. From the 1860s until late 1920s their pages, particularly the letters' columns, were the regular sites of bitter exchanges. While one paper was vilified as the opponent of freedom, the other was denounced as the stooge of brewery interests. Headed by the doggedly anti-drink Leader family, The Sheffield Daily Independent was firmly opposed to any relaxation in the licensing laws. From the 1860s the paper passed into the hands of the *Sheffield Independent Press Ltd*, many of whose shareholders remained equally staunch proponents of abstinence and who sought to ensure that the policy of the newspaper remained the same.<sup>393</sup> By the same token, those who controlled the rival newspaper, the Sheffield Daily Telegraph and its evening paper the Yorkshire Telegraph and Star were just as firm in their support of the Conservative Party and anti-temperance causes.

### Post-War Sobriety

Although the Great War appears to have provided for the protagonists a brief diversion from traditional enmities, the post-war years brought with them a renewal of hostilities. Yet, after the Armistice, two new factors pressed upon the conduct of campaigning by temperance crusaders and their opponents. The first was the striking improvement in the

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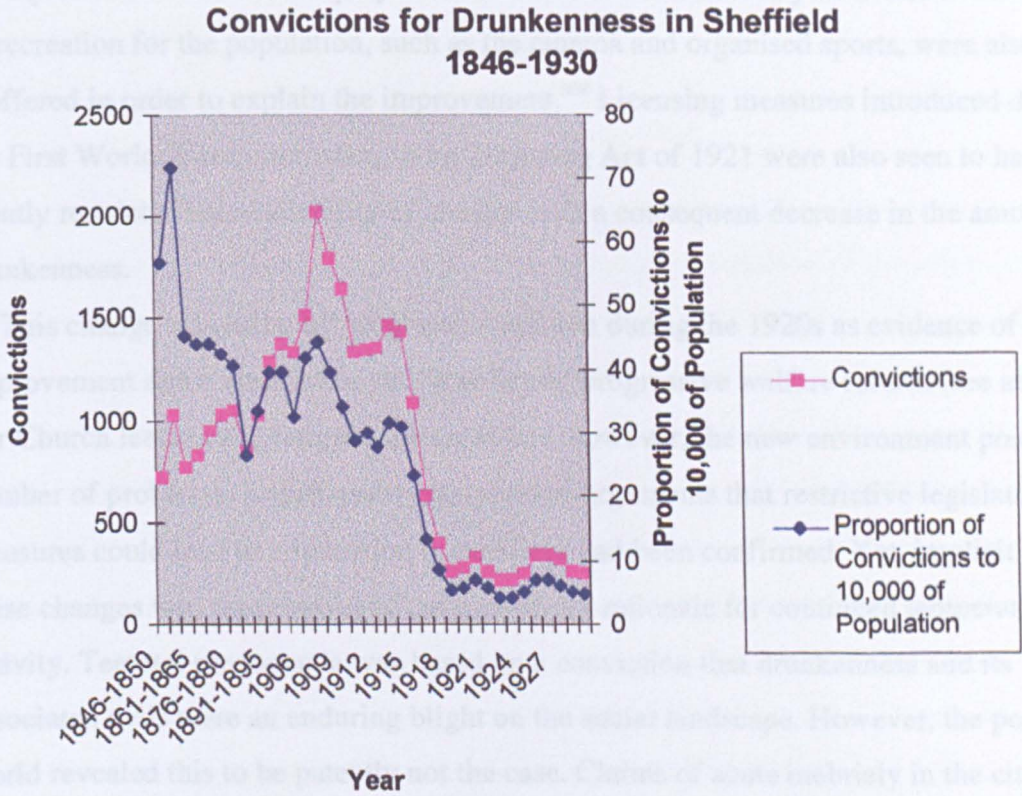
<sup>391</sup> In evidence before the Licensing Commission of 1897, W.E Clegg noted that, largely due to the activities of the Social Questions League, the Licensing Magistrates passed a resolution in 1894 suggesting that 'the number of licensed premises for the sale of intoxicating drinks in this city is far in excess of the number required to supply what are considered the legitimate wants of the inhabitants'. (Quoted in Reedman, *Op. Cit.*, p.16).

<sup>392</sup> See Saunders (1853). The recording of convictions for drunkenness by the Sheffield Borough Police commenced on an annual basis in 1860.

<sup>393</sup> Henry Joseph Wilson, a leading temperance campaigner, magistrate and local industrialist had a share in the Sheffield Independent Press. He died in 1914 and in his Will he demanded that his share should not be sold or transferred to any person who might utilise their possession to make a change in the political side of the paper. Obituary, *Biographical Notes relating to Sheffield*. SCL.

level of sobriety compared to any time before 1914. The second was the altered middle class sensibility and the associated modification of the ethic of respectability. In the years after the war, the Chief Constable's reports to the annual meeting of the Sheffield Licensing Justices revealed a dramatic fall in the number of convictions for drunkenness.

Fig. 8.1<sup>394</sup>



Whereas 1466 convictions were recorded in 1913, by 1916 the number had fallen to 632 and then again to 256 in 1918. In just five years the number of recorded convictions had fallen by a massive 80 per cent. Expressed as a proportion of the population the fall was just as staggering. Whereas in 1907 there were 44.3 convictions to every 10,000 of population, by 1918 this had fallen to 5.4.<sup>395</sup> Moreover, the fall in convictions in

<sup>394</sup> The convictions are for 'Simple' and Aggravated' drunkenness. *Licensing Statistics for England and Wales Annual Reports, 1906-1930*, Home Office Library. See also Reedman (Op. Cit., p.39).

<sup>395</sup> Reedman described the changes thus: 'Expressed as a proportion per 10,000 of the population there is no real fall in the convictions for drunkenness in Sheffield from 1860 until the war period. Up to the war the convictions fluctuated between about 24 per 10,000 and about 49 per 10,000 of population. Since the war the fluctuation has been between 4 and 6.5 convictions per 10,000 of population' (Ibid., pp.31-2).

Sheffield was much more pronounced than in any other large city.<sup>396</sup> It was a shift that was to remain largely unchanged in the decade following the Armistice.

A number of reasons were advanced for the decline in intemperance. The incidence of severe unemployment was perhaps one of the most frequent explanations tendered. Just as experts had argued that economic prosperity encouraged drunkenness,<sup>397</sup> so the decline in drunkenness was correspondingly attributed to the reduced income available for liquor as a result of unemployment. The increased availability of alternative sources of recreation for the population, such as the cinema and organised sports, were also proffered in order to explain the improvement.<sup>398</sup> Licensing measures introduced during the First World War culminating in the Licensing Act of 1921 were also seen to have greatly restricted the availability of alcohol with a consequent decrease in the amount of drunkenness.

This change was taken by progressive opinion during the 1920s as evidence of moral improvement and a vindication of the policy of progressive welfare reform (see above). For Church leaders and temperance crusaders, however, the new environment posed a number of problems. Superficially, temperance arguments that restrictive legislative measures could lead to a reduction in inebriety had been confirmed. Yet, implicit within these changes was the removal of the underlying rationale for continued temperance activity. Teetotal propaganda was based on a conviction that drunkenness and its associated evils were an enduring blight on the social landscape. However, the post-war world revealed this to be patently not the case. Claims of acute inebriety in the city now flew in the face of increasing evidence to the contrary. In effect, the fall in the number of convictions withdrew from the temperance bodies one of their central arguments for

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<sup>396</sup> In England and Wales as a whole [since the war], the proportion of convictions for drunkenness per 10,000 of population has markedly fallen, but the fall in Sheffield is very much greater than in any other case (Ibid. pp.31-2).

<sup>397</sup> 'Drunkenness is apt to be a concomitant of high wages and good trade' *Judicial Statistics for England and Wales*, 1900, p.25. Home Office Library.

<sup>398</sup> This explanation was also advanced in the Report by Reedman in 1931. '[I]n one important respect the circumstances of this generation are different from those of all previous times - namely, in the variety of the diversions which are within reach of every class in the community. These are competing, and competing successfully, with the public houses for the leisure hours of the people. Most important is the cinema, which has risen in meteoric fashion to an established position in the social economy... Cheap travelling facilities, due to the development of road transport, organised sports, such as cricket and football... all now compete with the public house to reduce its relative importance as a place of entertainment and social exchange' (Reedman, Op. Cit., pp.33-4).

increased efforts at proscription of drinking. Anti-liquor campaigners found themselves to be increasingly out of step with the outlook of the post-war period.

The tendency of campaigners to inflate the seriousness of the crime statistics and to rebuke the moral demeanour of the lower orders ran increasingly counter to the dominant intellectual outlook. This arose not simply as a result of the perceived dramatic fall in the level of drunkenness. Another factor intervened to expose the exhortations of temperance crusaders as conspicuously abrasive and out of touch with the dominant social climate. Specifically, over the preceding decades a fundamental reconfiguration in the ideological and social life of the nation had taken shape and been crystallised in the crucible of war.

One manifestation of the new climate was the increased marginality of the churches. Since the turn of the nineteenth century the sturdy religious habits of the middle class had had begun to fragment. 'It is the middle class which is losing its religion; which is slowly or suddenly discovering that it no longer believes in the existence of the God of its fathers, or a life beyond the grave' (Masterman, 1909; cited in Wickham, 1957, p.179). A drift towards more secular notions of thought was the inevitable expression of the growing mastery of science over nature and of the conviction in the necessity of human centred change. Before the Great War, the weight of convention tended to hold middle class scepticism towards spiritual matters largely in check. Though in decline, religious attendance continued during a period 'in which faith weakened long before habits were broken' (Ibid. p.179). The cataclysm of 1914-1918 changed all this. The effect upon the churches, noted Wickham, was 'catastrophic'. At home, an unprecedented fluidity of the nation encouraged a flouting of old conventions and a break with deference and formality. Abroad, fighting men 'discovered values which they had never associated with religion or morality...that comradeship and solidarity were the essence of life, that the damning sins were not 'wangling', drunkenness, impurity or profanity, but cowardice, selfishness, snobbishness and tyranny' (Ibid. p.208). Upon their return the high expectations of veterans were quickly dashed and disillusionment with organised religion set in. Lent by Church leaders to the British cause, the alliance of the Almighty only bred contempt amongst troops for the churches. Noting particularly the effect within the city of Sheffield, Wickham added, 'it was in the interwar years that the decay of the churches was the most rapidly advanced...Compared to the pre-war days, religion and the churches simply dropped out of the public interest' (p.221). The

churches had lost the bulk of the middle class generation that fought the war. The effect during the following decades was to detach their sons and daughters from organised religion. In his survey at the end of the 1920s, Owen confirmed that more than eighty per cent of the boys and girls in Sheffield in the city did not attend church, chapel or Sunday School 'except possibly on special occasions' (Op. Cit., p.41). Most of those who did attend such organisations were from that section of society Owen judged to be least in need of moral guidance.

The emphasis upon negative moralisation and a perceived insensitivity of organised religion to the social and economic concerns of the masses served to increase the gulf between the public and temperance campaigners. Their propaganda reduced the problem of drink to one of personal morality to the exclusion of broader social factors. Of course, as innovators in the realm of social intervention the Mission and settlement work of the Churches provided a welfare service, 'at a time when the welfare state was an untenable proposition' (Farr, 1991, p.11). They embodied the growing recognition that the gospel would be established amongst those most in need only by addressing social questions.<sup>399</sup> Yet the public often seemed suspicious of the prescriptive motivations behind such initiatives, while some church leaders viewed the estrangement of the urban poor as more of a threat than an opportunity. Rev. John Higgitt of the Sheffield Wesleyan Mission remarked:

There is a great gulf between the Church and organised democracy. Masses of the people have little regard for organised religion. Yet many of these are keenly alive to social and economic questions, and are keen on propaganda for promoting syndicalism. Karl Marx is their god. The basis is purely materialistic, and as such is a menace to future civilisation.<sup>400</sup>

In their attempt to address this spiritual vacuum the approach of temperance campaigners tended to be, 'negative, moralistic and unsympathetic' (Wickham, Op. Cit. p.198). Outside the confines of teetotal gatherings, however, the response of the local professional elite was much more sensitive. Both political expediency and liberal

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<sup>399</sup> For example the Sheffield Methodist Mission sought to combat unemployment by establishing a timber yard. The yard was established before the First World War by the Rev. Samuel Oliver of the Ebenezer Chapel at Shalesmoor: 'I could not offer permanent employment for any man. I wanted to save the men from starving, stealing and the workhouse, and therefore I had to make the wages as low as possible so that they should want to move on' (Quoted in Farr, *Ibid.* p.22)

<sup>400</sup> *Sheffield Wesleyan Mission, Annual Reports 1922*, p.16. SCL.

compassion ensured that sympathy rather than condemnation characterised the approach of the municipal leadership to social problems during the post war-years. This, in turn, mirrored a process by which the focus of middle class intervention had 'shifted from overt moral indoctrination to environmental improvement' (Reid, 1976, p. 289). In effect, what had taken place was a fundamental modification of the ethos of respectability. The moral condition of the lower orders remained a prominent aspect of middle class discourse. Yet, this concern was presented within the politically neutral and consensual idiom of progressive welfare reform and therapeutic intervention. Whereas Temperance philosophy rested on the explicit 'moral supremacy of abstinence', the therapeutic approach 'took a less moralistic and more sociological and functional view of... drinking' (Gusfield, 1967, p.86).

The response of Temperance advocates to the new conditions was two-fold. First, a number of organisations accepted the reality of increasing sobriety, though explanations for the improvement varied. For example, towards the end of the 1920s, the Church of England Temperance Society highlighted the part played by both unemployment and the knowledge imparted to the populace by good temperance work.<sup>401</sup> While more inclined to stress the providence of the Almighty than acknowledge any moral improvement, these individuals nevertheless accepted that the post-war period was one of increased sobriety.<sup>402</sup> There were others who believed the most suitable means of improving the habits of the lower orders to be through the pursuit of positive social welfare rather than negatively through exhortation. For example, just as moral depravation was believed to arise from insanitary living conditions, slum clearance was viewed by many as the best way of reducing intemperance amongst the poor.<sup>403</sup> Such programmes offered a chance

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<sup>401</sup> 'That there is less drunkenness in our midst today is admitted on every hand... [W]e earnestly pray that as a result of the knowledge imparted to children generally, and in our own branches in particular, there may in future be a larger percentage of people determined to keep their bodies in "temperance, soberness and chastity". There is no doubt whatever that the continued industrial depression which prevails throughout the greater part of this diocese in common with other districts where coal and iron are the staple industries is largely if not altogether responsible for the decrease'. Sheffield Diocesan Gazette Vol. XV, 4, April 1929, p.8.

<sup>402</sup> For example the Bishop of Sheffield, Dr Hedley Burrows, stated that he 'believed that there was good ground for hopefulness, and he gave several instances showing the marked decline in the amount of drunkenness in the past 25 years. On the whole, we were getting better' Sheffield Daily Independent 25 April 1922, p.5.

<sup>403</sup> For example, Moses Humberstone, Lord Mayor, prominent Labour councillor and temperance advocate expressed a commonly held sentiment when he declared that the back-to-back slum drove the men to the public house and that the eradication of slums would lead necessarily to a lessening of the vice. The artisan 'returning home from work on washing day to a home when there were three or four children to be

to reduce the number of licensed premises by sweeping away older establishments in the slum quarters while carefully restricting the number of new premises erected in the new estates.

The more evangelical temperance advocates, however, clung tenaciously to the conviction that drink remained an acute scourge and a wellspring of crime. For example, there were some that maintained that the alleged decrease in drunkenness was purely a statistical anomaly, its true extent being as great as ever. In a speech to the Sheffield United Temperance Council Arthur Neal, MP, said that, '[h]e was dubious about giving too much attention to the statistics showing the decline in drunkenness, which relied on the activity of the police and the definition of the term "drunk"'.<sup>404</sup> This argument was not particularly novel. In evidence before the Licensing Committee of 1897, William Clegg had made a similar point.<sup>405</sup> He remarked that convictions for drunkenness were less in Sheffield than other major cities, more as a result of police practice than a sober populace. Due to the inadequate number of police in the city the Chief Constable was forced to 'give orders not to arrest a mere drunken man' (Quoted in Reedman, 1931, p.16). Reedman also partly attributed the low number of convictions to the 'greater leniency on the part of the Sheffield police', compared to previous years and other towns.<sup>406</sup> Throughout the post-war years most commentators recognised the statistics as notoriously unreliable. Yet when deployed by committed temperance advocates to explain the decrease in drunkenness, the same argument fell on deaf ears.

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attended to. The fire was hidden by drying clothes. After a drink of tea he hurried to the nearest public house where the licensee, with an eye to business, had a bright cheerful fire. A good many homes had been broken up through that sort of thing'. Sheffield Daily Telegraph 3 October 1928.

<sup>404</sup> Sheffield Daily Independent, 25 April 1922, p.5. Arthur Neal was one of the city's leading temperance advocates. As a Liberal he occupied seats in both the Council and Parliament. He sat as Member of Parliament for the Hillsborough constituency in the city and became Junior Minister in the Coalition Government. He also undertook the position of Alderman, was Chairman of the Board of Guardians and held a seat on the Sheffield Juvenile Employment Committee. As a lawyer he was Vice President of the Sheffield District Incorporated Law Society.

<sup>405</sup> Sir William Edwin Clegg was, in the first three decades of the twentieth century, one of Sheffield's most influential citizens. Justice of the Peace, Alderman, Chairman of the Citizen's Association, President of the Liberal Federation and member of numerous Council Committees and Sub-Committees. During the 1920s he was Chairman of the Licensing Committee. The Clegg family were prominent Anglicans and leading members of the British Temperance League and its affiliate organisations.

<sup>406</sup> For convictions per 10,000 of population, his survey showed the position in 1928 to be as follows: Sheffield 5.06; Leeds 10.3; Birmingham 26.08; Liverpool 29.09; Manchester 32.5; Newcastle 33.06. Reedman added that 1928 was not an unexceptional year, 'very similar figures are revealed for the whole period from 1920 to 1930' (Reedman, *Ibid.* p.32).

In a period when the prevailing inclination was to put a positive gloss on every social statistic, such claims, it seems, were regarded as unnecessarily critical and unhelpful.

### Drink, crime and the Municipal Housing Schemes

Committed to the anti-drink cause, the more unreconstructed temperance advocates utilised other means to highlight the continued evil of drink.<sup>407</sup> These 'moralisers in retreat' clung tenaciously to the conviction that inebriety posed a continued blight and that abstinence was the only road to salvation.<sup>408</sup> Although Church leaders in the city tended to steer clear of explicit condemnation of the lower orders, the anxieties arising from the rapidly changing social landscape appeared initially to offer opportunities for continued campaign work. For example, the development of new corporation estates to the North and East of the city presented an opportunity for church leaders and their followers to broaden the appeal of temperance philosophy. The annual Brewster Sessions, where applications for the commencement or renewal of licenses were submitted, often proved the scene of heated debates between the contending factions. Temperance advocates appealed to the sympathies of a traditionally pro-temperance Licensing Bench. They also worked upon the anxieties of residents on both the newly built and adjacent estates. The rents of the corporation homes were a good deal greater than the average charged for privately rented accommodation and usually beyond the reach of all but the skilled working class (Owen, 1931). This differentiation in rents increasingly gave rise to a residential division between the skilled working class on estates such as Manor, Brushes and Wybourn estates and their former neighbours left behind in the slum districts. Promoters of abstinence appealed to the new tenants' aspirations for respectability and also exploited the anxieties of existing residents living in adjacent, privately-rented areas.<sup>409</sup> For their part, the brewers and their supporters

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<sup>407</sup> See Gusfield (1968, p.145).

<sup>408</sup> Gusfield describes how the core membership of the Women's Christian Temperance Union in the United States refused to soften their attitude to drinking, even though prevailing opinion in the United States had become increasingly anti-temperance. He describes those individuals who adhere blindly to an ethos and set of values that are rejected by the general population as "moralisers in retreat" (Gusfield, 1955, p.228).

<sup>409</sup> The decision of the Licensing Justices to grant a new license in the respectable working class suburb of Tinsley in March 1922 provoked a storm of apparently well-organised protest by the various temperance bodies. In his opposition to the decision, Henry Pritchard, Minister of the United Methodist Church and Chairman of the Tinsley Citizens' Committee, made the following appeal: 'We are told that the brewers are prepared to surrender three licenses. We understand that they are in the slum areas. We are told by



could often exploit similar anxieties when making their case to the Justices and to local residents. Defenders of liquor frequently manipulated the concerns of respectable working class opinion about the consumption of beer in the home and the purchase of alcohol by children. One case involved an unsuccessful application to build a licensed house in a new corporation estate on the fringes of the respectable neighbourhood of Firth Park.<sup>410</sup> Mr Wing, representing the brewery, submitted to the Licensing Bench that

The only licensed houses in the district were the Pheasant and the Horseshoe, and...they did not meet the requirements. People had to send their children for beer in bottles, and there had been an occasion on which a boy had been seen with a box on wheels carrying seven or eight lots of beer...there were many objections to working men keeping beer in their own houses...He pointed out that it was proposed to have a bowling green attached to the new house and also a tea-room which would be quite separate from the licensed premises.<sup>411</sup>

As in previous years, the licensing justices refused the application. For the promoters of abstinence and their supporters on the Licensing Committee, the new estates provided an opportunity to test the idea that sober homes made better citizens.<sup>412</sup> In their attempt to restrict the number of such outlets in the new housing developments the forces of abstinence often proved remarkably effective. As Reedman noted, the new

Manor Estate, entirely a working class post war municipal housing estate, with a population of nearly 20,000, has neither any licensed premises nor yet a registered club within its boundaries. Though several efforts have been made by the 'Trade' to obtain a license on the Manor, the magistrates have consistently refused the applications on the grounds that it is neither necessary nor desired by the majority of inhabitants, while the Corporation is unwilling to let any site for a public house or a registered club (Reedman, 1931, pp.24-5).

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legal, medical and labour authorities that "slums" follow the drink. What has Tinsley done to be thus penalised? It means poverty, degradation, and the retarding of industrial development. Working men have bought their own houses. The property will depreciate. Is this an incentive to thrift'? LTE Sheffield Daily Independent 3 March 1922, p.4.

<sup>410</sup> This suburb lies to the North of the city, adjacent to land given to the Corporation by the Firth family, wealthy industrialists and benefactors.

<sup>411</sup> Sheffield Daily Telegraph 6 February 1925.

<sup>412</sup> Opposing the Firth Park licence Mrs Schofield, a member of the Sheffield Board of Guardians and Rev. A Hearn used this argument successfully. '[T]he housing estates comprise a town planning scheme, in which it is possible to test the theory that good houses produce better citizens, and that the introduction of additional drinking facilities would endanger the experiment... Give the theory a chance. You have people coming who have never had a chance of living under decent conditions before. Give them a chance and don't put temptation in their way'. Sheffield Daily Telegraph 28 February 1924.

Despite such innovation, however, temperance campaigners found their propagandistic work to be of diminishing influence in an increasingly secular world. A fundamental social and cultural shift that entailed a modification of the ethic of respectability had taken place. Whereas the latter had presumed a sizeable disreputable section of society to be converted through exhortation, the ethos of citizenship rested on the belief in the essential integrity of citizens. The integration of the disaffected was to be achieved through voluntary participation in the civic life of the community. Such an outlook left little room for those who sought to chastise the conduct of the lower orders for their inebriety and criminality. The inability of the traditional moral campaigners successfully to stigmatise liquor during the 1920s was repeated in other areas of campaigning work.

### Churches and Gambling

The declining returns to be had from temperance work directed the attention of religious crusaders to other, hopefully, more fruitful areas of work. In gambling they believed they had found an alternative means by which to promote the Gospel in the midst of spiritual scepticism. Like drunkenness, gambling was a punishable offence, and was deemed both morally destructive and a potent source of more serious crime. While the incidence of drinking was viewed by all but the most dogmatic of temperance advocates to be less of a problem than formerly, during the post-war years gambling was held by all sections of the middle classes to have increased in scale and intensity. A common refrain was that gambling, especially the illegal ready-money variety in the form of 'street betting', was almost ubiquitous in working class districts of the city and was a potent source of demoralisation. In the years preceding the First World War and after, a variety of religious bodies directed considerable attention upon this vice and its perceived attendant social evils of poverty, crime and demoralisation. Yet, to an extent comparable to the anti-drinking campaigns, the ability of crusaders to mobilise opinion against gambling was extremely limited. As an evangelical campaign for moral and spiritual prudence, the anti-gambling activists found themselves isolated in a hostile social environment.

### Nineteenth century Origins

Although gambling had provided for centuries a popular source of recreation amongst all social classes, it was in the mid-nineteenth century that gambling by the lower classes became the focus of middle class unease and moral enterprise (Malcolmson, 1973).

Gambling, notes Clapson, was a pejorative term for wagering and gaming. While the latter referred to the activity of the respectable classes, gambling 'was associated with the lower classes, with cheating and with indulgence' (Clapson, 1992, p. 1). As with the temperance campaigns, the crusade against gambling was promoted by advocates of moral prudence and respectability. Their exhortations were directed at the cultural manifestations of indigence and demoralisation amongst the lower orders. For example, concern with the 'common gaming houses' springing up in English towns and cities resulted in the 1853 Betting houses Act. However, it was in the 1880s that the development of the electric telegraph system and a large popular sporting press enabled the masses to engage in betting on horses, an activity that had largely been the preserve of the gentrified classes. By the turn of the century gambling was said to be endemic amongst the working classes. In 1902 the House of Lords Select Committee on betting argued that 'betting is generally prevalent in the United Kingdom and that the practice of betting has increased considerably of late years especially amongst the working classes'.<sup>413</sup>

At the turn of the century, racial and eugenic concerns compounded fears about lost national production and of a disaffected and demoralised working class. Witnesses to the 1902 Select Committee frequently submitted evidence in the respectable social Darwinist vocabulary of the day. Robert Knight, a Newcastle magistrate, stated that 'betting among the young has become a form of insanity...Lads of bright intellect, who might have made the world better, are drawn into the vortex of madness and develop low cunning instead of character. They become moral and intellectual wrecks...If the betting craze goes unchecked, the sober youths of Germany will take the reins of the commercial world.'<sup>414</sup> In 1906 the Street Betting Act was passed as a remedy to the problem.<sup>415</sup> However, as Clapson informs us, the act was passed 'just as mass betting took off into self-sustained growth' (p.39). The major consequence of this was a widespread evasion of the law.

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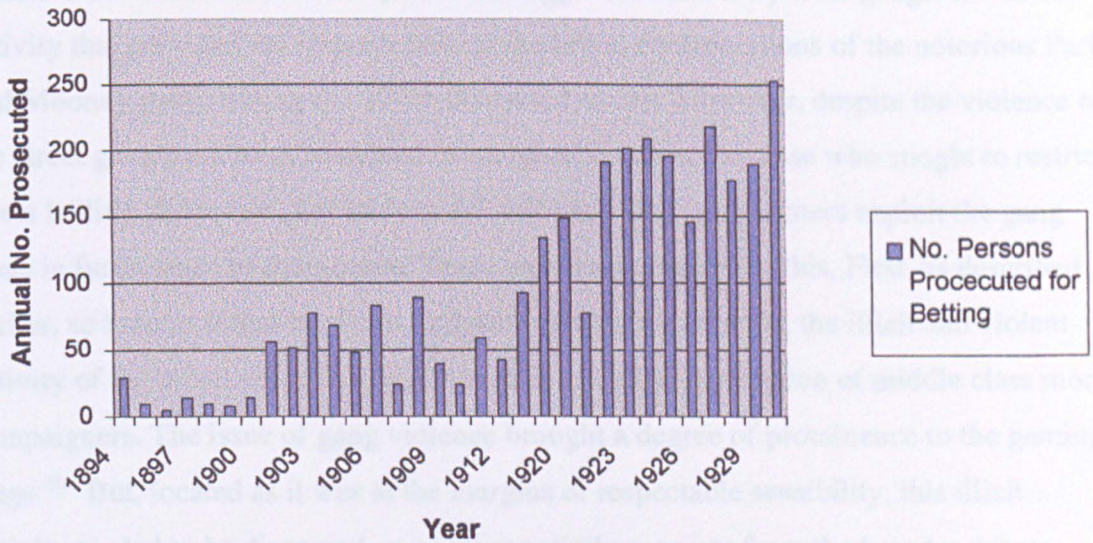
<sup>413</sup> *House of Lords Select Committee on Betting*, 1902; p xii HMSO.

<sup>414</sup> *Ibid.* p.176, No. 3638.

<sup>415</sup> This act complemented the earlier Betting Houses act of 1853 and a further restriction on street betting passed in 1874.

Fig. 8.2

No. Persons Procecuted for Betting in Sheffield  
1894-1930



Gambling in the 1920s

The statistics for gambling published annually during the 1920s appeared to confirm the popular perception of a rise in illegal street betting. Increasing disposable income, improved communications and the expansion of the sporting press were most commonly advanced in explaining the increase. As in the Edwardian period, however, the leap in the number of persons prosecuted may have been as much a symptom of the publicity generated around the issue.<sup>416</sup> During the 1920s, two developments operated to place gambling at the forefront of public attention: the shift on the part of the authorities to regulate of betting through the introduction of a betting tax and the evangelical campaign by the church organisations to maintain the legal proscription of the vice.

Street Betting

Street betting was the popular term for illegal gambling of which there were a number of forms. One type of illegal gambling was that centred upon ‘pitch and toss’ rings.<sup>417</sup>

Groups of up to four or five hundred men would gather at sites located at well-known

<sup>416</sup> The recorded increase in cases of street betting during 1907, noted the Home Office, ‘may possibly be due to the public attention directed to this matter which resulted in the... Street Betting Act of 1906’ *Judicial Statistics for England and Wales* (1907) p.23. Cd. 3929, 1908. Home Office Library.

<sup>417</sup> Bean informs us that the bets were placed on the proportion of heads to tails, or vice-versa, of three coins upon falling to the ground after they had been tossed in the air (Bean, 1981, p.7).

venues in the city.<sup>418</sup> Bean describes how each ring, or 'pitch', was run by a boss who collected a toll on each bet placed.<sup>419</sup> The popularity of the activity ensured that large profits accrued to the organisers.<sup>420</sup> For the same reason this illicit though highly lucrative business was often subject to a struggle for control by rival gangs. It was this activity that provided the impetus behind the brutal confrontations of the notorious Park and Mooney gangs during the 1920s discussed earlier. However, despite the violence of the street gangs, the rings remained of marginal concern for those who sought to restrict street betting. It appears that seldom did anti-gambling campaigners exploit the gang issue in furtherance of their cause. There were two reasons for this. First, as described earlier, so long as it was confined to their own neighbourhoods, the illicit and violent activity of the urban poor was judged to be outside the jurisdiction of middle class moral campaigners. The issue of gang violence brought a degree of prominence to the gaming rings.<sup>421</sup> But, located as it was at the margins of respectable sensibility, this illicit activity tended to be discussed as an issue entirely separate from the broader debate about street betting. For example, in the evidence offered by Sheffield Police Superintendent Frederick Denton during the 1923 *Select Committee on Betting*, no mention was made of the problem of the gaming rings and the associated menace of gang violence.<sup>422</sup> Secondly, as an essentially moral venture, campaigners sought to elevate the dangers that gambling posed to respectable citizens, especially with regard to the welfare of children and women. In this regard the gambling activities of the gangs were subsidiary to the most widespread form of street betting that was based upon

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<sup>418</sup> Although there were many rings, the principal tossing rings were at Sky Edge, Five Arches Wadsley and Tinsley (Ibid.). In an interview with the *Sheffield Mail* and reprinted in the *Sheffield Independent*, George Mooney revealed that at the Sky Edge ring 'often there were 200 to 300 men in the ring at once' and that 'men came as far as Barnsley, Penistone and Rotherham'. *Sheffield Daily Independent*, 28 June 1923, p.5.

<sup>419</sup> The boss, also known as the 'towler or 'toller', was accompanied by a number of scouts and henchmen whose role was to safeguard the business, or 'joint', against police raids. (Bean, Ibid).

<sup>420</sup> In the interview with the *Mail*, mentioned above, Mooney revealed that 'I have myself picked up £200 out of the ring at one time, and I know a man who has picked up £1000' *Sheffield Daily Independent*, Op. Cit.

<sup>421</sup> For example, the 'Mail' and 'Independent' repeatedly pointed out that the gaming rings formed the basis of gang activity. The *Independent's*, the *Passer By* column stated that, '[t]he gaming rings are a pivotal point because without them the members of the gangs would be robbed of much of their powers of mischief.' (Ibid.)

<sup>422</sup> The absence of any reference to the rings or gang activity is particularly conspicuous given that only a few weeks before Denton gave his evidence the issue had hit the local headlines in the city. A series of shootings and gang fights in mid June had forced the issue to the forefront of public debate.

organised sporting events, such as horse and greyhound racing, football and a host of other sporting activities.<sup>423</sup>

While 'on-course' betting through licensed bookmakers was a legal activity, the 'off-course' variety of ready-money betting was proscribed by law. This form of gambling provided the revenue for a host of illegal street bookmakers and their touts in the city. The latter operated both in the residential areas of the town, collecting stakes on a regular basis as they went from house to house. Street bookmakers and their agents also operated in factories, offices, shops and public houses. The extent of gambling was revealed in some detail to the 1923 *Select Committee on Betting*. Giving evidence to the Committee, Superintendent Frederick Denton suggested that betting on licensed premises had increased since the war due to the increase in unemployment and consequent lack of income for publicans. Responding to the chairman's enquiry as to why the number of license-holders going in for bookmaking or betting had increased, Denton stated that

The man to-day has not the money to spend; therefore the license-holder is very hard pressed...not that he makes much money out of the betting, I think, but as an encouragement for customers who go to the house...The system that has come up recently is this, that a bookmaker will probably use one [public] house and he has agents who will go round and collect from other houses. For instance, we have raided two houses recently; in one we found the bookmaker actually there; he made it his headquarters; and we found that he had a number of agents round other houses.<sup>424</sup>

It was stated that whereas public houses tended to cater to clerks and skilled artisans, other outlets served the lower classes. Denton admitted that there was a great deal of betting undertaken on 'private' premises, such as 'hairdressers, tobacconists, confectioners, greengrocers' and so on.<sup>425</sup> Much of the betting in the city was also undertaken by way of street bookmakers going from house to house or taking slips while standing at street corners in the poorer quarters of the city. The alleged threat that these forms of betting posed to women and children aroused the particular consternation of the

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<sup>423</sup> Giving evidence to the 1923 Select Committee Frederick Denton responded that betting took place on a whole range of sports in the city – cycle races, foot races, walking races and boxing. *Report of the Select Committee on Betting Duty, Minutes of Evidence*, p.508, 1923, House of Commons Papers Vol. 5.

<sup>424</sup> Ibid.

<sup>425</sup> It was suggested that not only had betting at these places very much increased during the past few years, but that in many cases the business acted purely as a cloak for betting (Ibid. P.505).

Select Committee and other middle class observers. Indeed, much of Denton's testimony was given over to outlining the extent to which women and children engaged in street betting.<sup>426</sup>

The attention directed to gambling provided a fillip to the campaign work of the town's moral guardians. In 1920, local church leaders formed the Sheffield Citizen's Committee. This cross-denominational body comprised leading figures from the Anglican and Free Churches. The President of the Committee was the Lord Bishop of Sheffield, Leonard Hedley Burrows, while Percy Medcraft took the role of Chairman. The declared aim of the Committee was to attain 'a clean life for every citizen'. To that end it took a leading role in the drive against drink and gambling in the city.<sup>427</sup> However, from the inception of the body, the campaign against gambling provided the mainstay of the Committee's work. Though modelled on the Temperance bodies and frequently manned by the same personnel, the role of the Committee was to provide an organisational arm that was publicly separate from the work of the traditional anti-drink movement. It was believed that the widespread public concern with the extent of illegal betting promised to provide fruitful material for campaign work and propaganda.

One of the first public initiatives undertaken by the Committee was to send a deputation to the City Justices, which was in turn directed to the monthly gathering of the Watch Committee in March 1920. The deputation included such influential figures as Robert Holmes and Rev. George McNeal.<sup>428</sup> The Watch Committee Minutes record that 'they urged the desirability of further steps being taken, if possible, by the Watch Committee and the Police to prevent the growth and reduce the amount of betting and gambling in the city'. This inaugural expedition by the Citizen's Committee was, it appears, a successful one. The Watch Committee resolved 'that the Chief Constable be requested to issue a General Order to the police urging them to greater efforts in the suppression and prevention of gambling and betting.' It also resolved to

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<sup>426</sup> For example, Denton responded in the affirmative when the Chairman of the Committee asked, 'Do women in Sheffield bet to any great extent... have they got the system that we have heard of in other parts of the country of the bookmaker or the bookmaker's agents calling at their private houses and getting the women to bet' (Ibid. p.506)

<sup>427</sup> In 1927 it was at the head of a campaign to keep the newly built Manor corporation estate alcohol free.

<sup>428</sup> The delegation also comprised Rev Rutland Spooner and George Smith, both energetic and veteran Temperance activists.

represent to the City Justices the fact that the enormous increase in betting and gambling which has taken place in the city recently and the great difficulty which the City Police experience in securing offenders, and respectfully urge upon the City Justices that they should take the subject into their consideration, believing that the offence can, probably, be checked and reduced by the activity of the City Justices in inflicting heavier fines, and in proper case, imprisonment, when offenders are convicted by the court.<sup>429</sup>

In their attempt to restrict street betting such groups cleverly exploited nuances within the broader political temperament. For example, campaigners sought to treat betting and its advocates as a manifestation of an unhealthy speculative habit that was both individually harmful and socially divisive. This tactic appealed to the traditional respectable belief in the pursuit of social advance through thrift and hard work. It also exploited the popular disdain for the wartime alliance of profiteers and militarists and the conspicuous and profligate consumption by the rich in the post-war years.<sup>430</sup> Unfortunately, as some seasoned observers recognised, speculation played an increasingly vital role in normal business, in addition to bazaars and other fund-raising activities by the churches.<sup>431</sup> Moreover, the disdain for anti-militarism was more than outweighed by the hatred of what was popularly regarded as a piece of class legislation. More important perhaps was the perception that the experience of war had put an end to traditional puritan values. As one commentator noted, 'Puritanism is out of favour, and all its assumptions. The principles for which it stands – the inherent depravity of human nature, the insistence on the moral view of life...are resented' (De Bunsen, 1919, pp.155-6). Inge similarly lamented the passing of what increasingly appeared to be the

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<sup>429</sup> Watch Committee Records – Minutes, March 18 1920, p.2 (SCL). Chairman of the Watch Committee was Aldermen George Cattell. The resolutions passed by the Committee were submitted to a meeting of the City Justices. They in turn adopted a recommendation that 'when offenders are convicted the City Justices should take such steps as they consider necessary to suppress a serious and prevalent evil' Sheffield Watch Committee Minutes 1 April 1920, p.3.

<sup>430</sup> Prominent reformer and Liberal MP, Charles Masterman, believed that the ostentatious expenditure by the wealthy was one of the chief obstacles to healing the rift between the classes: 'It would do well if those who are spending would realise that it is necessary to go softly and behind closed doors, and to recognise that they are being watched by thousands of eyes, awakened to criticism by the grim education of war. It cannot be significantly emphasised that revolutions and calamities are created, not by what happens, but by what men think has happened' (Masterman, 1922, p.96).

<sup>431</sup> Commercial rivalry ensured that main newspaper companies in the city were on the look out for new ways of attracting readers and maximising sales. For the owners of the Telegraph during the early 1920s football coupons seemed to provide one such avenue. Having fewer misgivings about the ethics of gambling than its rival, the Telegraph became the first newspaper in the country to attempt to maximize its revenue by this means. However, the experiment was a short-lived one. Leng and Co. was prosecuted under the 1920 Ready Money Betting Act and, in a landmark ruling in 1928 at the Kings Bench, the 'Telegraph' lost the case.



values of a previous age: 'In all strata of society there has been a reaction against the middle class ideals which inspired the once popular books of Samuel Smiles...there has been a revolt against Puritan ethics generally...Christian ethics have been branded as irrational taboo-morality' (Inge, 1926, p.287).

Despite such obstacles, many activists adopted the course taken by Peter Green.<sup>432</sup> A veteran anti-gambling campaigner, he pursued a policy of unequivocal condemnation choosing, in the traditional manner, to stigmatise the activity as a source of crime and demoralisation.<sup>433</sup> As was noted in the analysis of letters to the editor undertaken in Chapter 4, anti-gambling campaigners frequently utilised the spectre of crime in their attempts to highlight the dangers of unrestricted betting. Though street betting itself was proscribed, campaigners argued that the failure to enforce more rigorous restrictions against this activity would prove fertile terrain for more depraved conduct. The type of crime to which church leaders most commonly referred was a nebulous but symbolically loaded subject. Campaigners rarely defined the nature of the alleged menace. Yet, as with their earlier crusades, their pleas were directed to traditional notions of respectability and to what they believed were the fears and anxieties that animated their middle class and lower middle class constituency.<sup>434</sup> As with the temperance crusade, however, they found that dominant perceptions of crime and other social problems had changed. Crime was regarded not so much as a moral failing but as an environmental problem. When the subject of 'crime' was utilised by the prohibitionist wing of concerned opinion, the symbolic inference was that of unrestricted vice and, by implication, of the need for appropriate measures. For the majority of observers, however, gambling was perceived as a valid social activity, its very ubiquity serving to demonstrate the misguided outlook of its detractors. Even for those who were concerned

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<sup>432</sup> Peter Green was Canon of Manchester and Chaplain to the King.

<sup>433</sup> 'Betting is beyond all comparison the most fruitful source of crime'. He went on to note how betting is 'at once a source of violent crime and the means whereby the ranks of violent criminals are recruited... Today our race course ruffians need not fear comparison with the worst foreign criminals, as the violent outrages of the so-called "Clerkenwell" or "Italian" gang and its rival the "Birmingham" gang have proved. The threat to the young was just as great: 'ever since I first ran a Lads Club in Old Kent Road I have seen generations of boys sucked down in the whirlpool of crime through betting, and through selling those special editions of evening papers which exist to give racing news only' (Green, 1924a, pp.41-2).

<sup>434</sup> 'Gambling', noted Rev. E. Hamson of the Queen Street Congregational Church, 'was far more subtle and demoralising than drink... If you want to find the scum of humanity you find it on a racecourse' Sheffield Daily Telegraph 4 June 1923. The Rev. A. J. Talbot Easter suggested that gambling was 'the most fruitful source of crime' Sheffield Daily Telegraph 16 January 1928.

at the extent of gambling, the latter was not automatically associated with more serious forms of crime. This was particularly the case for those individuals closely involved in welfare work amongst the urban poor. In evidence to the 1902 Select Committee on Betting, Charles Russell stated that while betting among working class lads was increasing, 'it does not increase crime amongst the working classes'.<sup>435</sup> Closer to home Robert Holmes was equally unconvinced by the claims of an association between the two:

I know it is common to state a definite connection between gambling and crime, but I think the connection is greatly exaggerated. For one person who steals in order to cover losses in gambling, there are at least twenty who have no such excuse.<sup>436</sup>

That both Russell and Holmes were devoted and prominent Christians is significant. The goal of spiritual restitution was at the heart of their work with youthful hooligans. Yet their experience of welfare work served to distance such individuals from the sweeping claims of their more zealous colleagues in the Church. In stepping up their campaigns for an end to gambling the latter were responding to the diminishing social purchase of organised religion and to the perceived indifference of the public to traditional notions of puritan morality. Furthermore, through such campaigns religious activists in many ways drew attention to their own isolation and, inevitably, sped the advance of their own demise.

Concern about the morally destructive consequences of gambling existed well beyond the confines of the religious bodies in the city. Yet, for this latter section of public opinion crime tended to be a minor consequence of unregulated betting. The demoralisation of women and children and the threat of 'industrial wastage' were just two of the more routine justifications for reform of the betting laws. Moreover, their goal was the regulation of betting by legalisation rather than outright eradication. Whereas the churches were fervent in their opposition to the 'taxation of vice', it was the

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<sup>435</sup> Russell went on to qualify his statement when he explained that while the ordinary working class lad had no access to money that was not his own, 'amongst the better class it leads to crime'. In any event his evidence provides an example of the way in which the traditional association of gambling with working class crime was beginning to break down. *House of Lords Select Committee on Betting*, 1902, 8 December 1902, p.187, HMSO.

<sup>436</sup> Speech to the Social and Industrial Commission of the National Assembly of the Church of England, quoted in *Sheffield Daily Telegraph* 9 September 1927.

former approach that commanded both widespread popular support and won the backing of the professional elite. One of the most common arguments in favour of legalisation voiced by public spokesmen was the need to remove a potent threat to the institutional integrity of the police force. It is to examining the role of the Sheffield police force during the 1920s to which I now turn.

### The Sheffield Police as Moral Crusaders

A group rather more centrally involved in the debates regarding the extent and nature of crime in the city was the Sheffield Police Force. Becker has drawn attention to the specific set of interests and motivations of this particular group of moral entrepreneurs. As a rule enforcer the police officer is obligated to justify the existence of his position. Secondly, he must win the respect of those with whom he deals (Becker, 1973, p.156). During the 1920s, the leading members of the Sheffield Police Force emerge as central characters in many areas of discussion relating to the nature and extent of crime and its possible remedies. Men such as Chief Constable Hall Dalwood and his replacement Captain Percy Sillitoe commanded the attention of respectable opinion in the city and provided an authoritative expert voice on such issues. Yet, as an organisation dedicated towards the maintenance of public order and enforcement of laws, the Sheffield Police Force could not remain unaffected by the prevailing disposition towards crime and political and economic tensions that scarred these years. These operated at different yet closely connected levels and succeeded in stimulating changes that, in retrospect, can be seen in part as an adaptation to a shifting environment. Fundamentally, the 1920s emerge as a period of substantial adjustment for the police force in the city.

### Rumblings of Discontent

On 6<sup>th</sup> May 1923, the Chief Constable gave an interview to a reporter of the Sheffield Daily Telegraph. In the interview, published the following day, Colonel Hall-Dalwood expressed what was to be the first of a series of public statements concerning the inability of the Sheffield Police force to provide an adequate service. The Chief Constable stated that, given the extent of unemployment in the city, he could not hope to hold back crime in view of what he believed to be the inadequate number of police at his

disposal and a magistrates bench given to excessive leniency (See Fig. 8.3).<sup>437</sup> These were criticisms that, over the ensuing decade, Hall-Dalwood and subsequently other observers came increasingly to vent.

**Fig. 8.3**<sup>438</sup>

**Police Numbers Compared to Population of  
Several English cities, 1923.**

<b>Town</b>	<b>Population</b>	<b>No. of Police</b>
Liverpool	603,118	2,260
Birmingham	919,438	1,586
Manchester	735,551	1,420
Bristol	377,161	676
Leeds	485,500	725
<b>Sheffield</b>	<b>542,552</b>	<b>566</b>
Bradford	263,979	467
Hull	267,013	473

That the Sheffield Police Force possessed an inadequate number of police officers was by no means a new observation. The rapid expansion of the city during the second half of the nineteenth century outstripped its per capita provision of police. In 1862-3 the town forfeited its grant from central government on account of the 'failure of the Watch Committee and borough council to accept more money had to be spent on more police, simply to keep pace with the population' (Critchley, 1967, p.130). The situation did not improve with the arrival of the new century. In 1904 the Watch Committee received an urgent report from the Chief Constable R. N. Scott concerning the strength of the force. Again, the Watch Committee rejected his request for more officers, though eventually

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<sup>437</sup> Hall-Dalwood's statement was submitted without, it seems, any inducement from the public for an explanation. Perhaps the Chief Constable was perturbed by the recent scrutiny of the Home Office (See Chapter 2). On the other hand he may have felt a need to account for the reported rise in cases of larceny and house and shop breaking. Either way, it appears that he was under very little public pressure to do so at the time.

<sup>438</sup> Taken from figures provided by Colonel Hall-Dalwood to the Sheffield Daily Telegraph, 7 May 1923 p.5.

the demand was conceded (Keeble-Hawson, 1968, p.197). Although population growth in the town had levelled off by the First World War, the Chief Constable still found himself with a force considerably under strength. His recent arrival at the post and readiness to accept wartime sacrifices perhaps served to suppress any misgivings he may have held about the condition of his force. Nevertheless, such problems could only have been compounded when 290 men of the local constabulary were enrolled in the Second Police Reserve during the war.

During the immediate post-war years a number of factors served to add to the problems arising from the numerical weakness of the force. The increase in work arising from the burgeoning amount of traffic duties provided a continual source of frustration for the police authorities. Moreover, the resources required in the policing of the numerous industrial and political disputes placed an additional strain upon the organisation. The failure to bring the police force up to strength continued during the early 1920s when, in line with the demands of the government-appointed Geddes Committee, the City Council sought resolutely to adhere to measures of strict economy. In implementing these measures at the expense of the police force the City Council came into conflict with the Home Office. The response of the Home Office to the recommendations of the Desborough Committee had been to enhance the powers of the former at the expense of the local Watch Committees and Joint Standing Committees (Dixon, 1966). A number of measures were incorporated into the 1919 Police Act directed to this end.<sup>439</sup> One of these was to increase the power of the Home Office by giving it control over the regulation of pay and terms and conditions of service (Reiner, 1985; Weinberger, 1991). For the leaders of Sheffield Council and their supporters it was a clear case of municipal freedom versus government tyranny.<sup>440</sup> The subsequent refusal of the Watch Committee to abide by Home Office directives relating to the funding of the police force led to a good deal of friction between all parties concerned. During August 1919 the Council mounted a general review of the salaries of all higher officials. One outcome was the Watch Committee's opposition to the action of the Home Secretary in pressing Sheffield and other local authorities to grant a non-pensionable

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<sup>439</sup> Another was to increase the independent standing of Chief Constables and their links with the Home Office. For example, the 1919 Act stipulated that Home Office approval was needed for the appointment of Chief Constables (Dixon, Op. Cit.).

<sup>440</sup> These measures, exclaimed the 'Telegraph', were 'a vestige of war centralisation which was moving in the direction of a national police force' Sheffield Daily Telegraph, 19 February 1921, p.4.

bonus to members of the police force. Additionally, the Watch Committee chose to pay the salary increase for the Chief Constable in instalments rather than in line with the national pay scale. In response the Government withheld its payment of one-half maintenance of the force amounting to a sum of £76,000.

The council's struggle with the Home Office to curtail municipal expenditure found widespread support amongst the business community and their representatives in the city.<sup>441</sup> The Watch Committee's refusal to be 'bullied' met with the support of the Sheffield Daily Telegraph:

No sane man – at any rate in Sheffield – will believe that any government, to say nothing of this Government, at a moment when the economy is the most urgent need of the nation, can be insisting on extravagance. For that is what this means.<sup>442</sup>

Adherence to obligations of political neutrality forced the Chief Constable to maintain a honourable distance between the disputants.<sup>443</sup> Nevertheless, the feud between the Home Office and the Watch Committee undoubtedly left Hall-Dalwood in an invidious position.

It was not until June 1923 when the Sheffield gang troubles were brought to public attention by the press that Hall-Dalwood's concerns began to be accepted by other commentators. The Independent and Mail's determined campaign for something to be done about the gangs succeeded in directing public attention towards the shortage of police officers. Even then, however, criticism still continued to be heaped on the shoulders of the Chief Constable and his men. In his study of enforcement organisations such as the police, Becker has drawn attention to the dual problem with which they are

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<sup>441</sup> At a meeting of businessmen at the Cutlers hall Sir Albert Hobson remarked 'The pay of the police has been brought up to the London level. The police should be well paid, but the city could not afford to keep a privileged class, and the police should be obtainable at the market price. The market price for police might be higher in London than it is in Sheffield. What was even more wasteful was the fixing of police pensions at from £150 to £160. That scale would be out of all proportion to the cost of living when the cost of living came down' Sheffield Daily Independent 18 March 1922, p.6.

<sup>442</sup> Sheffield Daily Telegraph, 19 February 1921, p.4.

<sup>443</sup> The Chief Constable was placed in an unfortunate position when the Watch Committee attempted to draw him more directly into the dispute. In a meeting of the Committee they resolved 'That this Committee observe that the Home Secretary proposes to insist upon the scale of pay for the Chief Constable being retrospectively applied, this disturbing what they consider to be an equitable arrangement between the Committee and their Officer, *and which they understand is so regarded by that Officer*, and desire one again to protest against his proposal, and decline to concur therein'. *Watch Committee Minutes* 14 July 1920, Sheffield City Council Minutes, Vol. 1919-20, pp.603-4 (emphasis added).

confronted. First, the position of the police officer rests on the assumption that there is a social problem that needs to be tackled. Much of his effort therefore is spent alerting the public to the scale of the problem, 'particularly when they are seeking funds'. Secondly, his credibility also rests on the assumption that he is succeeding in dealing with the same problem. Therefore, the police, 'typically oscillate between two kinds of claims. First they say that by reason of their efforts the problem they deal with is approaching solution. But in the same breath, they say that the problem is worse than ever (through no fault of their own) and requires renewed and increased effort to keep it under control' (Becker, 1973, p.157). Despite the support of a section of the press, the period from 1923 until Hall-Dalwood's retirement in 1926 was marked by repeated criticism by the local newspapers of his performance. Having been convinced by the Chief Constable that he could not hope to hold back crime, the Press could not be so easily reassured that the situation was under control.

The difficulties encountered by the police force arose not simply from shortage of men and money. Nor was the personal weakness of the Chief Constable solely responsible for the problems. His declared inability to cope may well have provided a spur for broader questioning of his abilities. Cockerill has a point when he argues that much of the blame for the low morale of the force 'must be attributed to the lack of a vigorous leadership' (Cockerill, 1975, p.76). However, there were broader processes at work that operated to focus pressure upon the policing of the city. An important factor was the political climate during the 1920s. Despite the gross under-resourcing of the police, it seems that most sections of the community remained markedly unsympathetic to their plight. In the popular imagination the police force was held to be an instrument deployed by bosses against the industrial poor. The heavy-handed manner in which the police often intervened in political and industrial disputes left many radical activists markedly hostile.<sup>444</sup> The importation of large numbers of extra police into the city to help control unrest aroused equal rebuke from Labour representatives. The Chief Constable, they claimed, had taken the decision without consulting either the Watch Committee or the City Council, the former endorsing the initiative only after the event. What Labour representatives found most alarming was the incendiary effect of the

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<sup>444</sup> Following a number of well-publicised violent confrontations between the police and demonstrators the behaviour of the police was subjected to detailed scrutiny. One of the most notorious incidents was the 'Walkley Riot', in which many demonstrators were hurt, one subsequently dying from his injuries (See Chapter 6).

importation of outside police and the authoritarian manner of such decisions. 'The public,' protested Councillor Rowlinson,

had trusted the unemployed, in spite of great irritation, to maintain something like normality under abnormal conditions. Yet before any outbreak of any description had taken place, they found this mass of police imported into the city, they found charges up and down the city, and men on horseback. There was no antipathy to the police of the city, but there was always antipathy to imported police, because the people felt that that the importation of them was an insult. It was worse than Prussianism to put authority into the hands of one individual in the city.<sup>445</sup>

Liberal opinion was equally sensitive to such claims of political policing and financial excess. A particular source of anger was the apparently profligate expenditure on policing duties and police salaries while other areas of expenditure remained curtailed. Responding to the protection of the salary of police officers at the very moment when public funding of education had been subject to cutbacks, Joseph Batey, Principal of the Sheffield Pupil Teacher's Centre exclaimed

The crux of the whole educational question was the lack of teachers... There were policemen walking the streets of Sheffield who were getting more money than college-trained teachers.<sup>446</sup>

The political tensions of the period served to undermine the position of the Sheffield Police Force in other ways. The experience of war had bestowed upon the population contempt for all public displays of militarism. The leaders of the boy scouts movement encountered the rebuke of those who objected to the continued use of khaki uniforms,

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<sup>445</sup> Sheffield Daily Telegraph 15 June 1922

<sup>446</sup> Sheffield Daily Telegraph 7 July 1921. In 1924, the Independent's *Passer By* column referred to the Chief Constable's recent decision to award annuity grants to policemen only in cases of extreme gallantry or outstanding merit. It remarked: 'It may be that "a policeman's lot is not a happy one" on occasions, but it is often more pleasant than a good many occupations. He has what in these days is an excellent wage, a secure job and the certainty of a comfortable pension when he is still at an age to enjoy it' Sheffield Daily Independent, 16 June 1924. A similar sentiment was expressed in a letter published in the following edition: 'Those in authority seem to have money to throw away on well paid policemen. Why they want so many of them in this quiet city I don't know. There are many crippled soldiers knocking on the workhouse door. Not only that, but a policeman gets 1s for serving summonses on pauperised residents'. Letter by D. Holland, 17 June 1924, Sheffield Daily Independent.



wooden rifles and regimental marching.<sup>447</sup> The police force suffered similar protests. In October 1920 a number of Labour Councillors protested at the issuing of a new police drill book, which, they suggested, was moving the force in a direction of military drill.<sup>448</sup> Although the Watch Committee subsequently rejected the accusation, it is striking how, in the charged political atmosphere of the early 1920s, the authorities remained highly sensitive to such claims.<sup>449</sup>

The enforcement of legislation aimed at curbing street betting remained one of the most corrosive threats to public respect for the police force. These laws were viewed by many commentators as class-biased, serving, in the words of Clapson, to reinforce 'a sub-political "us and them" feeling' (Clapson, *Op. Cit.*, p.46). That the police were enforcing a manifestly prejudiced piece of legislation was a point of continued unease for many leading police officers and politicians. It was, moreover, one of the strongest arguments laid out in favour of taxation (and hence legalisation) of betting.<sup>450</sup> The ubiquity and popularity of this illegal activity provided a danger to the integrity of the police in other ways. A good deal of evidence was offered to the 1923 Select Committee on Betting Duty to show that police officers themselves were amongst the most

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<sup>447</sup> In July 1919, plans to establish a Cadet Corp in Schools provoked an outcry at a Sheffield Education Committee meeting. *Sheffield City Council Minutes* July 1919.

<sup>448</sup> 'In the opinion of this Council any system of drill for the city Police which is in the direction of military drill is undesirable, and that the Drill Book recently issued to the Police is of such a character, and further as it contains instructions which are such as to cause grave misgivings in the public mind, it is to be an instruction to the Watch Committee to call in the copies issued'. Motion moved by Councillor Mrs Wilkinson and Seconded by Councillor Marshall. *Watch Committee Minutes* 21 October 1920, Sheffield City Council Minutes, p.897.

<sup>449</sup> The Watch Committee responded thus: 'The suggestion made that there have been material changes in the drill performed by the City Police Force has no foundation in fact. The only drilling of the Force during the past year has consisted of seven ceremonial drills, and the only changes in this ceremonial drill have been that the men have marched in platoons instead of divisions, and the words of command have been altered' (*Ibid.*).

<sup>450</sup> In 1932 the Deputy Commissioner of the Metropolitan Police told Parliament that the bias of the law caused a 'general lowering of respect for the police, putting them in a position of antagonism to a very large part [of the public] which is quite law-abiding in all respects except those arising from the taste for gambling' (Quoted in Clapson, *Op. Cit.* p.65). The Member of Parliament, Sir Leo C. Money, spoke in a similar vein when he stated that '[t]he public is entirely with the bookie and against the cops. And, as we may suppose, the cops' duty of suppressing street betting under an unpopular law is exceedingly distasteful, and pursued without undue enthusiasm' (*The Spectator* 23 August 1924, p.249). Sir John Anderson, Permanent Under-Secretary of State during the 1920s, remarked how 'the absence of any public support for the enforcement of the Street Betting Act' inevitably resulted in a 'diminished respect for law and instruments of law' (Anderson, 1929).

inveterate gamblers.<sup>451</sup> Something that particularly perplexed members of the Committee was the allocation of only 12 men out of a force of 600 to combating betting in the city, and the ability of many bookmakers to operate largely unmolested by the police.<sup>452</sup> Though rarely expressed, it is probable that the danger of police corruption was at the forefront of the authorities' minds. In January 1930 these suspicions were confirmed when three police constables and nine bookmakers were charged with offences of bribery. During the court proceedings as many as twenty police officers from the Brightside Division in the East End of the city were implicated. All were found to have consistently taken cash from bookmakers between 1922 and 1929. While the three officers were found not guilty through lack of evidence, 11 of their colleagues appeared as prosecution witnesses against the bookmakers and openly admitted accepting money.<sup>453</sup> In his summing up the Judge, Mr. Justice Humphreys, castigated the Brightside Division as 'rotten to the core'. 15 officers were subsequently dismissed from the force and another seven fined for dereliction of duty (Bean, 1987, pp.93-95).

### Excessive Leniency

There were other factors operating on a more fundamental level that impacted upon the activity of the police force. Given the range of constraints encountered by the police, professional officers such as Hall-Dalwood were perturbed by the sympathetic hearing accorded to offenders by advocates of the new welfare approach. While his peers championed the belief that crime and other social problems arose from material deprivation and a failure to implement the new welfare ethos, for Hall-Dalwood it was moral depravity that was the cause of poverty. 'I am convinced', he stated in a submission to the 1923 Select Committee on Betting, 'that 25 per cent of the poverty

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<sup>451</sup> When asked by Sir Beddoe Rees 'are constables allowed to bet themselves? Is it contrary to police regulations?' Superintendent Frederick Denton replied 'I am afraid the police are only human' *Report of the Select Committee on Betting Duty* (Op. Cit., p.516).

<sup>452</sup> Responding to Denton's claim that 90 per cent of the adult population in the industrial quarters of the city engaged in betting, Mr William Graham on the Committee asked: 'Do you not think in that case... [we] find only 12 men out of a staff of 600, and those 12 having other police duties, that this is a rather ludicrous proportion of the police force to set aside for so vast an evil? Sir Beddoe Rees asked 'Is it not strange that in Sheffield you do not take greater action to suppress it?' (Ibid., pp.512, 514).

<sup>453</sup> One of the bookmakers, Frank Pacey, was fined fifty pounds with fifty pounds costs. He revealed to the court how, with the complicity of the police, he had operated in the same location for over 6 years without being convicted (Bean, 1987, p. 94).

amongst the working classes of today is attributable to a very large extent to [betting]'.<sup>454</sup> The Committee was markedly hostile to this statement, one that Denton, as the representative of the Sheffield City Police Force, tried his best to defend. For the Chief Constable, the extent of moral fecklessness was matched by a failure of those in authority to deal effectively with the threat. He was particularly convinced that the city magistrates were excessively lenient in their treatment of criminals. In his interview with the Telegraph noted above, Hall-Dalwood was scathing about the lavish manner in which magistrates dispensed bail and the tendency to treat many criminals as first time offenders. 'Bail' he said, 'is being so freely granted that what is happening now is that criminals are laughing in the face of the police, saying that when they are arrested the magistrate will give them bail, and in more cases than one they have immediately gone away and committed another offence the very same evening'.<sup>455</sup> The tendency to treat many criminals as first time offenders through the use of probation he deemed especially regressive.<sup>456</sup> Hall-Dalwood went on to note that, owing to the greater evidence required to produce a conviction and the light character of the sentence, 'criminals would rather be caught in Sheffield than in any other town in the country'. In the interview he affirmed that

[u]ndoubtedly there is far too much leniency... The only deterrent when crimes are committed in abnormal times like this and the only effective prevention is an adequate punishment by either the local magistrates or the Recorder at the Quarter Sessions which would teach these people that they cannot commit these crimes with impunity.<sup>457</sup>

Again, however, what is striking about Hall-Dalwood's opinions is the way in which they ran counter to those of his peers. This was as true of nominally conservative spokesmen as it was of the more liberal wing of middle class sentiment. Writing in his *Current Topics* column, John Oakley responded to Hall-Dalwood's effusion thus:

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<sup>454</sup> The statement formed part of an extract from the 1913 Annual report of the Chief Constable. Though ten years old, Hall Dalwood specifically requested that this be submitted to the Committee. *Report of the Select Committee on Betting Duty*, Minutes of Evidence p.595, Appendix V1, 1923, House of Commons Papers Vol. 5.

<sup>455</sup> Sheffield Daily Telegraph 7 May 1923.

<sup>456</sup> The Chief Constable noted how when a housebreaker is placed on probation the receiver deserts his former clients and makes new ones. 'In this way what is happening in Sheffield is that we are making thieves'. Ibid.

<sup>457</sup> Sheffield Daily Telegraph 7 May 1923

The Chief Constable complains that Sheffield magistrates require too much evidence before they will convict and that when they do convict the sentence is too light. Both accusations are in a way true, but it is not to the discredit of the Sheffield magistrates that it is so... It seems to us... that it would be better for half-a-dozen criminals to escape punishment rather than that one innocent man should be wrongfully convicted.<sup>458</sup>

Home Office officials had been equally critical of Hall-Dalwood's claims of over-leniency on the part of the Sheffield Magistrates. In his letter to the Home Office, Hall-Dalwood explained the increase in crimes of simple larceny in such terms:

Another contributory factor, in my opinion, is the leniency shown to offenders when they were brought before the court (I do not make this statement as criticising the policy of the Magistrates, but to give a possible reason for the increase in this class of crime).<sup>459</sup>

In a subsequent memo sent to Buckland by Farrant, the Chief Constable's claims were rejected, albeit on more objective grounds than those advanced by John Oakley:

In Sheffield the percentage of imprisonment is stationary, but the severity of the terms has increased. The percentage of fines is smaller, probation being substituted for fines. In England and Wales the percentage of sentences of imprisonment is smaller of recent years, fines being substituted for the shorter terms. Probation is stationary. On the whole I do not think the figures indicate greater leniency in Sheffield.<sup>460</sup>

The indifferent response to Hall-Dalwood's claims of over-leniency on the part of the Bench did not, however, continue. Although the Chief Constable continued to voice criticism of the policy of the magistrates and Watch Committee, as was discussed earlier, it was the action of the local press in turning the spotlight on the Sheffield gangs that served, more than anything, to direct public attention upon the conduct of the authorities.

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<sup>458</sup> Sheffield Daily Telegraph 7 May 1923 p.5.

<sup>459</sup> Letter from Hall-Dalwood to Buckland, 8 March 1923. PRO, HO45/17928/429843/2

<sup>460</sup> Memo from Buckland to Farrant, 27 March 1923. HO 45 17928/429843/2 PRO.

## Local Reactions

Perhaps the significance of the 'gang wars', however, lay not simply in the revelations of the violent deeds of dangerous hoodlums and their ultimate defeat. Just as relevant for the purposes of this study is the way in which the campaign against the activity of the gangs was symptomatic of broader changes in public sensibility. Despite the general acceptance by middle class observers of a sympathetic and reformative approach to criminal questions, there was a counter current that operated to modify this outlook. As discussed in chapter 6, this sympathy was extended as part of a contract, mutually agreed and entered into, on the part of the citizens and the state. On one level it rested on the assumption that individuals would be offered a range of welfare entitlements and that they in turn would abide by certain responsibilities and public duties. More abstractly this arrangement ultimately rested on a changing relationship between the state and civil society. In other words, the political incorporation of the masses to which the reforms of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century were directed rested upon an increasing acceptance of the rule of law and of the authority of the agencies of the state (Garland, 1985; Reiner, 1985, pp.60-61). Formerly the authorities and police had 'accepted the notion of a criminal class and to have concentrated their efforts on containing stigmatised areas and their groups who lived in them' (Emsley, 1994, p. 445). Violence was regarded as an inevitable aspect of slum life, both for residents and the police. However, in the modern period of consensual state reform of which the 1920s formed a key decade, this was increasingly less the case. Political and social reform rested on an increasing intolerance to public displays of violence. Whereas slum communities had previously been left to fend for themselves, now the cost of state reform and civic inclusion was a requirement that they abide by certain norms of behaviour. This change was mirrored in the evolving relationship between the public and the police. Where violence had been a grudgingly accepted part of the policeman's lot, the post-war decade witnessed a gradual change in both the official and public disposition to the police. A determined attempt to create a fully professional police force, incorporating protected rates and uniformity of pay, improved conditions and training, was accompanied by a growing expectation by the authorities that the public would respond in kind by respecting the constabulary. One manifestation of this was a growing tendency to dismiss charges of assault brought against the police, and a greater readiness to convict on police evidence (Reiner, 1985). The increasing intolerance on the part of officialdom

for violence against the police was of course intimately related to broader social changes. The long-term decline in general violence and assaults upon the police pointed to a more fundamental change in public attitudes (Gatrell, 1980). The evolving character of police duties no doubt helped this. As Reiner notes, whatever the reasons for the decline in violence towards police officers 'it is clear the police reflected and contributed to it' (Reiner, Op. Cit., p.56). The 1920s was a particularly important decade in the evolving 'service' role of the police. It was an image that was cultivated by the authorities in order to secure consent (Ibid. 1985).

These developments corresponded with a *relative* easing of political polarisation and more long-term alterations in the social landscape, changes which contributed to the gradual attenuation of long established loyalties and animosities. The demolition of slum neighbourhoods no doubt helped the police in their task of tackling the stigmatised areas. The re-settlement of the former residents in the outer council estates also helped to disperse the criminal gangs and made the task of policing the miscreants somewhat easier.<sup>461</sup> Perhaps an equally important factor was the 'social and physical...revolution [that had] taken place in the conditions of life of these people' (Owen, Op. Cit., p.39). The improvement in living conditions was just as striking as the reformulation of new social networks and the strengthening of the family unit. The impact of such changes was to reduce residential and social polarisation and create a model of urban living for the next few decades.

### Victims of Change

In light of the above, it can be seen that the reaction to the activity of the Sheffield gangs during the mid-1920s was symptomatic, at least in part, of this growing social intolerance to public displays of violence. The call for stronger measures against violence in the city represented not a challenge but an essential component to the ethos of reform.<sup>462</sup> The reformulation of attitudes to street violence together with the political and economic stresses of the period inevitably left victims in its wake. In his campaign

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<sup>461</sup> Between 1919 and 1930 five acres of congested built-up land, consisting of 366 dilapidated houses, were cleared mainly from the notorious Scotland Street/ Furniss Hill area. From here 1,777 residents were removed to the newly constructed Wybourn housing estate (Owen, 1931)

<sup>462</sup> In this regard it is worth noting that a division of labour appears to have existed in the pages of the Sheffield Daily Independent. While the *Passer By* column demanded harsher measures against the gangs, on the same page the editorial column could often continue its requests for renewed efforts at criminal reform.

against activities of the gangs and the inactivity of the magistrates, Hall-Dalwood found some support amongst the local elite. Despite this, however, he continued to come under intermittent fire from the press and other public figures. On 29<sup>th</sup> October 1925 a three month leave of absence was given to the Chief Constable because, stated the Watch Committee, 'he needed a complete rest and release from his official duties.'<sup>463</sup> In January 1926 the Chief Constable resigned through ill health.<sup>464</sup> Cockerill's view that his resignation was due to 'some form of mental illness in which he though everyone in authority was against him' may have some truth (Cockerill, Op. Cit. P.75). On the other hand, his early retirement is perhaps more properly explained by the difficult circumstances encountered by Hall-Dalwood during his tenure.

On 1<sup>st</sup> May 1926 Commander Percy Sillitoe was sworn in as Chief Constable. Bean has noted the way in which the policies he pursued were his by inheritance rather than invention (Sillitoe, 1955). Nevertheless, within one year the gangs had been broken. Moreover, the police force had been radically restructured, communications improved and the standing of the profession in the city much increased. In hindsight, the abrasions sustained by the Sheffield Police Force during the 1920s were the price paid for its adaptation to a new environment.

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<sup>463</sup> This was an extension a one-month leave of absence that was granted on 15 October. *Watch Committee Minutes* 29 October 1925, Sheffield City Council Minutes, p.880.

<sup>464</sup> The resignation of Hall-Dalwood, 'incapacitated for the performance of his duty by infirmity' took effect from 15 January 1926 with a pension for life at £750 per annum. *Watch Committee Minutes* 7 January 1926, Sheffield City Council Minutes, p.181.

## Conclusion

I have in this study been concerned to understand the place crime occupied in the purview of the Sheffield elite in the decade or so after the Great War. I commenced this task recognising that, in their various forays into the history of crime and its control, social historians and historical criminologists have left the period relatively undisturbed. Consequently, I have set out to explore fresh ground and test some assumed truths. In assessing elite perceptions of crime an important challenge has been to overcome the bipolar and often sterile debate into which the existing literature has tended to drift. An era of penal and criminal reform once characterised by contemporaries in terms of benevolent state intervention has been subsequently framed within the context of coercion and control. Both the range of policies and prevailing sensibilities concerning crime as they existed during the 'Progressive' era – and by implication the 1920s – has tended to be portrayed by the mainstream literature within a theoretical framework premised upon the essentially malign intentions of criminal policy. Conservatives have attacked the regulatory aspect of the state and its concern for the welfare of the offender rather than the victim of crime. For their part, radicals have emphasised the coercive character of welfare reform and the role of the governing class in fomenting crime panics as a diversion from structural inequalities.

My approach has been to reject these formulations as ahistorical and one-sided. I have instead stressed the necessity of a historically specific approach to understanding elite perceptions of crime during the 1920s. Rather than the flower of benign humanitarianism or the cover for a manipulative elite, a somewhat different picture is accordingly revealed. I have shown how elite perceptions of crime arose out of an intricate flux of contending social and ideological currents. Such views owed little to elite ideological imposition, malevolent or otherwise, and even less to the actual incidence of crime. Instead, I have suggested that attitudes to crime and the offender in the decade following the Great War emerged out of a complex interplay of broad social currents and more immediate elite concerns. By means of a detailed analysis of newspaper coverage and other literary sources I have revealed how such perceptions were shaped by the powerful discourses of class, progress, science and degeneration, separately displaying long historical threads, together giving rise to distinctive features during this important historical period. Accordingly, I have been able to trace how



perceptions of crime during this period were continuous with earlier decades and, in several ways, discontinuous in others.

The analysis has, moreover, confirmed the utility of local case study. It has offered a degree of focus and furnished a body of previously unexplored material not accessible by means of a purely national survey. My focus upon the Sheffield middle class elite during the 1920s has facilitated a detailed investigation into the interplay between the conceptualisation of crime and a range of contextual currents during a key historical period. For example, I have described how the Sheffield municipal leadership articulated their views about a range of social issues and sought to shape rather than be buffeted by events. The national, and sometimes, international prestige of several members of the Sheffield elite reflected the town's status as a key industrial centre, one that was subject, in particularly intense form, to all the social crises and political urgencies that weighed upon the minds of the British governing classes. The various exchanges between the Home Office and key municipal professionals perhaps reflected these concerns most explicitly. In tracing the interplay of national debates and more particular concerns, my aim has been to provide a more complete picture of the conceptualisation of crime of leading British professionals and intellectuals during the first post war decade. The local study has served not only to identify the key factors shaping views of crime on at the municipal level but also to provide a clearer identification of the common factors shaping perceptions more generally.

By way of a conclusion it is possible to summarise the main themes and findings developed in the preceding study:

#### The low-key approach to crime

An influential body of writers has portrayed crime panics as an inevitable concomitant of periods of economic and social tension. 'Crime panics', claims Stuart Hall, are 'most likely to occur at moments of social tension, when uncertainties about the future or fears about the polarising nature of social conflict' are at their height (Hall, 1975, p. 37). The evidence presented in my study contradicts this claim. A prominent finding of the study is that crime was a comparatively minor topic of interest during the turbulent 1920s. I revealed how relatively few LTEs and editorials discussed or made reference to crime, with less than one per cent of all contributions referring either incidentally or substantially to this issue. The absence of crime panics during the 1920s is particularly

striking. A number of well-publicised murders were the subject of local debate in the immediate post-war years. Yet, these were on the whole ephemeral in duration and provoked limited response by the professional elites. The rigours of falling circulation, political rivalry and a growing intolerance to public displays of violence, impelled the liberal press in the city to direct attention to the activities of the Sheffield gangs. However, even here the reaction of leading politicians and key professionals was markedly restrained, indicating a faith in remedial methods of crime control.

Paying particular attention to the outlook of the middle classes in Sheffield, I have detailed how there certainly existed a good deal of anxiety during this period. Readers' letters published by the two local newspapers and other writings of the local middle classes convey a sense of isolation and insecurity in a hostile world. These sentiments owed much to the abrupt ending of cosy, Edwardian certainties brought about by the Great War and the turbulence generated by the uneasy post-war conditions of political conflict, economic strife, and cultural flux. Furthermore, as in the previous century, the perceived cultural habits of the urban poor provided the focus for the insecurities of their more prosperous neighbours. Yet, despite the intensity of these emotions, crime was not a focus for broader middle class anxieties. Occasionally, certain notorious crimes and the subsequent trials and punishment of the accused provided the subject of local debate. And, as I examined in some detail, letters to local newspapers offered a forum for the articulation of rather less mediated, more reactionary sentiments. But even here I revealed crime to be a largely minor topic of public debate, one that tended to be discussed only as a subsidiary component to the more pervasive topics of class, progress and degeneration, the primary social themes within which the concerns of respectable opinion were framed. A regard for the historically conditioned character of elite sensibilities to crime serves to undermine the arguments of those who have argued that 'moral panics can be found at almost anytime [and] grow to their most extreme at times of social and economic crisis' (Kimber, 1996, p. 8).

Although crime featured seldomly in the opinion pages of newspapers, their editors were five times more likely to examine the topic than their letter-writing readership, and also tended to adopt a markedly relaxed and positive view of the nature of crime and offenders. Editorial views about crime were presented here not in the idiom of punitive sentiment nor as a means to channel people's fear about the present in a reactionary direction. The calm and hopeful outlook evident in the pages of the local press reflected

the ascendancy of the liberal elite, a group committed to the project of social reform, and testified to the corresponding marginalisation of reactionary opinion.

Contrary to the claims of a number of writers (Barlow et al., 1995a; Barlow et al., 1995b; Hall et al., 1978), one finds equally scant evidence that the authorities attempted to foment crime panics as a diversionary ploy - a 'tool' utilised by the powerful to distract attention from the structural roots of economic and associated social difficulties. On the contrary, I have shown how, during the 1920s, Home Office professionals, probation officers, magistrates, municipal officials and politicians all publicly acknowledged the link between factors like unemployment, poor housing, poverty and offending. Such 'economic' designations owed much to a flexible, positivist tradition of scientific investigation practised by medically trained professionals. The latter favoured empirical investigation over abstract theorising, and their efforts to understand the aetiology of crime rested upon a clinically grounded psychology concerned with the individual offender. It was an approach that recognised both the role of environmental factors in the causation of crime and its manifestation in psychological makeup of the individual criminal.

The balance of broader social and political factors also impelled the professional elite to recognise social conditions as important factors in the causation of crime. The acceptance amongst leading intellectuals of the need for broad based social reform served to focus attention on the structural origins of crime just as the latter served, in turn, to reinforce the dominant belief in the necessity of welfare measures implemented by the state as a solution to such problems. I have suggested, however, that it was the depoliticised character of criminal and penal policy that perhaps best explains the ease with which the elites were able to associate unemployment and poverty with crime. The insulation of criminological discourse from broader ideological contestation ensured, more than anything, that the authorities encountered little pressure to avoid structural explanations of crime.

In assessing the professional elites' relaxed attitude to crime the significance of residential and cultural factors were also explored. A city that was polarised residentially along class lines helped ensure that, outside of the factory, respectable citizens rarely crossed paths with their poorer neighbours. The refusal of the middle classes to pry too deeply into the realm of street or family life indicated both a cultural indifference to the raucous and often violent character of working class living and a respect for the integrity

of the domestic sphere. Nonetheless, I argued that these offer only a partial explanation for the restrained character of elite perceptions of crime and offenders. In the context of profound political conflict, cultural and residential polarisation served to nurture middle class fears about their neighbours. While recorded rates of crime in the city showed a tendency to increase during the 1920s the authorities displayed a growing reluctance to tolerate behaviour they would formerly have ignored. The low-key response to crime is all the more striking in view of such circumstances. Therefore an adequate explanation for the absence of crime panics during the 1920s, I argued, had to take account of a number of factors, such as the progressive view of crime, the sympathy for the criminal, the medicalised understanding of criminality and the salience of class-infused politics.

### The progressive conception of crime

A consistent theme to emerge from this study is the markedly positive approach to crime and criminals that predominated during the post war years. The analysis of the two Sheffield daily newspapers revealed one particularly important element of elite opinion – the editorial - to display a strikingly optimistic view concerning crime issues. Editors were five times more likely than their readership to discuss the topic and were less punitive in tone and more inclined to empathise with the unfortunate offender. The positive outlook of the editorial was mirrored in the opinions of prominent figures within the city. Leading politicians, industrialists, social reformers, and those more directly involved within the domain of criminal justice – such as magistrates and probation officers – disseminated a Panglossian view about the extent of crime and the ability to reclaim the offender. This outlook owed much to developments that predated the period. Among the most important were Victorian certainties about progressive change, the Christian ethos of humanitarian sympathy and the emergence of the new ‘Welfare’ approach to resolving social problems.

A belief in the ability to reform the offender was strongly associated with a conviction in the essential honesty of the ordinary citizen and the transformative potential of state intervention. In the years following the First World War the professional elite in Sheffield and beyond saw themselves as beneficiaries and custodians of a range of progressive policies implemented by their Victorian and Edwardian predecessors. Diminishing rates of recorded crime and a falling prison population testified to both the success and the continued centrality of earlier reforms.

Perceptions of a protracted decline in crime and of a reduction in the number of 'hardened criminals' served to confirm that society was morally on the upgrade. As Briggs observed, 'the Fagins and Bill Sykes' of Dickens' day have disappeared. Costume has changed, and violence has largely disappeared. The criminal has progressed like the honest man' (Briggs, 1924, p.xii).

As I examined in some detail in my survey of the Sheffield elite, shifting perceptions of the criminal were closely tied to initiatives by local voluntary and state agencies to pacify and remoralise the poor. Such efforts were part of a wider political objective to mould responsible political subjects from the dangerous mob. Accordingly, the rights of political citizenship and the wide network institutions of social welfare established during the late Victorian years served to complement the ideology and practice of criminal and penal policy in the 1920s. Yet, in tracing the precise character of this positive approach to crime I have stressed the significance of developments novel to the period under scrutiny. Despite the impression given by both Whig and Revisionist accounts on the subject, elite perceptions of crime during the 1920s were not simply the legacy of institutional and social changes enacted during previous decades. The Great War, in particular, had a significant impact on views about crime. I have noted how the markedly hopeful view about the trajectory of crime and the redemptive capacity of the offender reflected a broader certitude regarding the possibilities of constructive social reform enacted by the agencies of the state. In this regard, an important legacy of the war was its impact upon the perceived range of possible causes of crime, the extent of criminality and the treatment of the offender. The war was seen to give rise to new types of crimes, such as shop breaking, and to novel means by which they were carried out, such as the use of motorised transport. The conflict also enhanced the role of psychological explanations of offending with increased emphasis being placed upon the subjective motivations of the offender and the importance of immediate home surroundings. The experience within prison of liberal intellectuals operated to enhance the pace of institutional reform. More important, the war underscored the ameliorative capacity of the state, of which penal reform was just one component, and confirmed the need to extend state intervention into many areas of life.

Perceptions of falling crime during the 1920s owed more to the creed of improvement and elite sensitivity to the broader political situation than the reality of falling crime rates. Increased levels of reported crime, particularly involving offences

against property, were a regular feature of annual Home Office reports during the decade. Aware that recorded crime was not continuing its downward trajectory, commentators nevertheless almost always tended to articulate a positive response. Professionals explained such increases as the consequence of economic difficulties or the vestige of war, and in so doing implied these to be a temporary rather than permanent feature of the social landscape.

In my study I have explored the ways in which political and cultural turmoil formed an important legacy of the Great War. The discrediting of former beliefs and questioning of traditional absolutes, the intensity of political conflict, and the appearance of changed habits was felt by all sections of the Sheffield middle classes. Most prominent in the thoughts of the local Sheffield elite, and across society more generally during the 1920s, were, I suggested, the problems posed by adversarial political life and potentially unbridgeable social divisions. It is therefore all the more remarkable that, despite the anxiety generated by such tensions, the elite managed to display such a markedly positive approach to crime and offenders. This optimistic attitude was most clearly manifested in the response to youth crime. Aside from the occasional lamentations of an isolated band of conservatives, in Chapter 7 I revealed how the key issue relating to youth crime was perceived by most observers to be the wrongful criminalisation of ordinary child naughtiness. As Robert Holmes, Sheffield's first Probation Officer, declared,

I have few memories more humiliating than that of a visit to a prison wherein were incarcerated at one time forty two lads whose age ranged from sixteen to nineteen, all belonging to one city, and all there merely from the misfortune of having parents too poor or too negligent to pay fines imposed for playing football in the street or else gaming with coins in a public place (Holmes, 1923, p. 80).

The war served to confirm the possibility and necessity of reformation and that young men could be directed, without too much difficulty, along more constructive lines. The elite's response to youthful offending was exemplified in their approach to crime in particular and social problems in general: a conviction that the moral state of the nation was marked by continual improvement; a commitment to muscular intervention and social reform; and a confidence in the essential integrity of the industrial classes and the redemptive potential of those who happened to fall.

### The Scientific or medicalised conception of crime

I have discussed how this buoyant outlook owed much to the emergence of a scientific rather than a moral conception of crime. Traditional notions of wickedness gave way to a medicalised view of the causes of, and remedies for, offending. The habitual criminal was conceived of as weak rather than predatory, the youthful offender a product of misapplied energy and the failure of adjustment to home surroundings. Psychology rather than criminal anthropology provided the predominant discipline for the scientific understanding of the criminal and the aetiology of crime.

I have described how the declining purchase of former notions of respectability and negative moralisation were manifested most starkly in the difficulties experienced by important institutions in Sheffield. Though each differed significantly, the post-war experiences of agencies such as the temperance associations and the police force in Sheffield was one of attempting to survive in a rapidly changing world. Institutions and individuals more directly engaged in the realm of welfare work tended, by contrast, to be better placed to adapt to the changing social climate and consequently found the going much smoother. Voluntary and statutory welfare organisation provided a means by which the local elite could provide moral guidance and dispense material sustenance to the urban poor. Moreover, a key advantage of welfare work was that it allowed professionals to administer moral benefaction in a much more subtle and less obviously intrusive manner than formerly. The evidence I have presented suggests that, in the adversarial climate of the period, this was especially useful. If, during the 1920s, crime was perceived to be diminishing qualitatively and quantitatively, it took place in the context of widespread concern about political stability. In these circumstances the medicalised discourse was able to relocate social problems such as crime from the realm of moral and political contestation to the more placid domain of therapeutic consensus.

### The consensual character of criminal policy

An important theme to emerge from this study is the bipartisan character of criminal justice policy. I have described how the latter provided one of the few areas of consensus in a society characterised by conflict. It offered a neutral vocabulary through which to negotiate highly politicised debates and a clear illustration of the benefits to be accrued from the wider application of welfare reforms. That two Sheffield newspapers,

adversaries on almost every other issue, strove almost in equal measure to endorse the rehabilitative programme testifies to the ability of the latter to bridge traditional ideological fissures. This consensus owed much to the dominance of a medicalised rather than a moral conception of crime and the reconfiguration of the elite relationship with the state.

An influential body of writers has depicted the welfare mode of criminal justice as a wholly malign and coercive initiative. Garland regards 'penal welfare' as a repressive 'complex' of institutions and policies that was all the more sinister because it hid behind the cover of humanitarian sympathy (Garland, 1981; Garland, 1985). Lasch also views the consequence of these changes as an erosion of the rights of the ordinary citizen. 'Though presented as the height of ethical enlightenment [such reforms] extended the coercive powers of the state, now disguised as a "wish to befriend and help," into every corner of society' (Lasch, 1978, pp.157-8). Yet the evidence I have presented suggests these accounts, at least as they apply to Sheffield in the 1920s, to be markedly one-sided. Of course the greater reliance on initiatives such as probation entailed a widening of the reach of the state, as witnessed, for example, by the thousands of juveniles boys despatched to an uncertain fate in local steelworks, the Canadian prairie or the merchant marine. However, I have argued that neither were the agencies behind these policies distinguished by an unremitting authoritarianism, nor were their clients particularly resistant to its services.

In arriving at these findings I have laid emphasis upon understanding the particular social and political circumstances that predominated in the decade after the First World War, in addition to appreciating the contribution of more long-standing factors, such as the respect the governing class held for the legal rights of the citizen. The need to replace discord with harmony provided the paramount political objective for the Sheffield elite during the 1920s. In these circumstances leading members of the local middle class endeavoured to circumscribe some of the more coercive tendencies implicit within the correctionalist approach of penal welfarism. Accordingly, I have emphasised the sharply defined limits of state intervention. Attention has been drawn to the antipathy of leaders in Sheffield to deterministic philosophies such as eugenics and similar policies that seemed to threaten traditional notions of individual free will and the integrity of professional expertise. Indeed, I have suggested that the centrality of the welfare character of criminal policy owed much to its role as an alternative to the more



deterministic and coercive variants of elite thinking. The prevailing discourse of welfare was able, especially in matters relating to reform of the offender, to provide a much more mediated and politically acceptable resolution of middle class concerns during the 1920s. In sum, 'penal welfare' was to prove a less coercive, more consensual and professionally prudent method of dealing with crime and other social problems.

### The sympathetic regard for the offender

Prominent within elite commentary on crime was a sympathetic disposition towards the criminal. As with other aspects of elite discourse about crime, this sympathy was shaped by both currents that preceded the 1920s and a number of more immediate factors. I have described in some detail how the Sheffield elite's regard for the offender owed much to a tradition of Christian benevolence and a paternalistic disposition to the plight of the urban poor. It also rested, in part, upon the rather less benevolent attempt to pacify and discipline the most incorrigible of the industrial classes. Such sentiments provided the stimulus for middle class engagement in a range of voluntary and statutory agencies in the city. Having as their goal the reintegration of offenders, those involved in the work of the Police Court Missions, the Magistrates Bench, and the Discharged Prisoners Aid Society formed part of a wider network of voluntary and statutory involvement directed towards the moral, political and physical improvement of the poor. Such efforts owed more to Christian notions of forgiveness and a paternalistic concern for the poor than authoritarian motivations. Moreover, the discourse of citizenship obliged the elite to attempt to reintegrate the offender through the provision of employment.

However, I have also stressed the significance of a number of developments specific to the period under scrutiny. In particular, I have revealed how the decimation of youth during the Great War resulted in a defensive elite inclined to give the younger generation the benefit of the doubt. I have also described the way in which the volatility of relations between the classes in the immediate post-war years intensified this defensiveness and encouraged also a low-key response to crime. Hesitancy about pursuing coercive social policies was matched by a determination to win over alienated social groups, primarily through a promise to engage in a programme of constructive reform. This approach rested ultimately on the professional elite's recognition of the dangers of adversarial rhetoric and, as the feared insurrection failed to materialise, an

awareness of the temperate character of the industrial classes: 'Now whence comes this infinite patience, this deliberate preference for the existing order of things with its occasional hardships and perennial discomforts when apostles of revolution set out another way'? The credit, responded Holmes, was due to the precept set in the minds of children, 'of the duty and necessity of labour... the rule is for a lad to leave school bent on earning an honest living. The exception is that he shall entertain a preference for idle or dishonest ways' (Holmes, 1923, p.112). Despite the misery of urban squalor and the attractions of 'the gospel of revolt', professionals recognised that their best course of action was to appeal to the essential honesty and industriousness of the working classes.

The preference for affirmative endorsement over negative moralisation with regard to the moral integrity of the urban masses corresponded with the wider aims of gaining compliance with evolving social norms. The 1920s emerge as an important period in the transition from paternalistic to more impersonal and inflexible modes of intervention under the aegis of the state. Closely related to this was a growing intolerance for public displays of violence and an expectation on the part of the authorities that the newly acquired rights of citizenship would be reciprocated through the observance of social responsibilities.

### The salience of class

In accounting for the low-key disposition to crime I have placed particular emphasis upon the elite's experience of class conflict. An appreciation of the specificities of the post-war years reveals the primacy of broader collective struggles in the shaping of elite attitudes to crime, though not in the way conceived in traditional accounts of the period. These have focussed either on the social control policies of a capitalist state (Hay, 1975b; Platt, 1969; Sims, 1997), or the 'social crimes' of a rebellious working class (Humphries, 1981b; 1981c; White, 1986). I also suggested that sympathy for the criminal and a low-key response to crime during this period derived as much from contemporary political urgencies as any notions of decreased criminality, Christian sentiment, cultural indifference or residential separation. But I did so with reference to the specific social and political circumstances of the period rather than through mechanistic assertions concerning the working out of economic and class differences. In the years following the Armistice, the conflicts and compromises forged from the struggle between competing ideologies dominated domestic politics. It was not that

criminal justice policy was in any way forced into the shade by these more pressing social issues, but that the adversarial character of social life played a direct role in shaping elite perceptions of crime and wider social policy. Accordingly, I revealed criminal justice reform, like welfare reform more generally, to have been moulded by the collective character of social life during the period. Institutions and ideologies that anchored individuals within society and gave the latter solidity, in turn, complemented the adversarial character of social relations during the period. It was an arrangement that privileged the relationship between the state and offender and accorded a marginal role to the status of the victim.

Propelled by intense political and social conflict and recognising the necessity of closing the class divide, I described how the consensual approach to crime was utilised by the elite as a means of emphasising the necessity of broader welfare reform. Key individuals in the city repeatedly played down the extent of crime and praised the law-abiding character of its citizens, even in the face of evidence to the contrary. Throughout the turbulent post-war decade the issue of crime was utilised in order to illustrate that 'things were not so bad in the balance'. Set against the backdrop of industrial strife and political animosity, crime was drawn upon in order to praise the orderly character of the residents. It was for this reason, I have suggested, that during the politically sensitive post-war decade, the professional elites strove to distance themselves from those conservatives wedded to unconstrained denunciations of working class criminality and other types of anti-social behaviour.

The desire to avoid confrontational rhetoric and, through this, narrow political divisions encouraged a disposition on the part of both the local and national elites to adopt a positive view of the criminal and the trajectory of crime. I noted how such currents were reflected in Home Office interpretations of criminal statistics. In their pronouncements concerning the state of crime, administrators were as much affected by their belief in the necessity of adopting a positive view of demeanour of working class behaviour as anything implicit within the statistics themselves. The Sheffield municipal leadership greeted annual crime figures published by the Home Office as confirmation that the nation stood at the head of a new era of progress and that the problem of crime was well on the way to being overcome. In this way, elite statements about crime and the offender throughout the 1920s served to vindicate the present and stake a claim on the future.

### The exemplary role of criminal and penal policy

Sensitivity to the historically conditioned character of elite discourse concerning crime and its control has helped to reveal what is perhaps the most novel finding of the analysis. This relates to the exemplary role of criminal justice policy during the 1920s, specifically the way in which the latter was utilised by the elite to reinforce the need for broader welfare intervention. This relationship has hitherto been conceptualised predominantly in terms of the exchange of disciplinary practices and techniques. Or as Garland explained, 'the normalising function of the Welfare State owes its origin and possibility to the realm of penality' (1981, p.30). Yet, while it is true that the coercive components of welfare reform owed much to the precedents set within the sphere of penal and criminal justice reform, I have argued that the emphasis struck within Garland's formulation is misplaced. I have suggested that, during the 1920s, it was not so much the normative but the consensual and progressive character of criminal reform that proved crucial for the elite. Those policies directed to dealing with crime and offenders served as a model for broader welfare intervention and constructive political engagement between the classes that this project involved.

It is important to recognise that the emerging realm of welfare policy was not simply 'coloured' by the progressive status of criminal and penal reform, any more than the latter was the direct embodiment of progressive liberal welfare, as Whig interpretations have tended to maintain. Instead, I have placed particular emphasis upon the social context within which the liberal elite's operated, namely, the volatile political climate that prevailed in the decade after the Armistice and the requirement on the part of the authorities to avert a damaging social war. The importance of criminal and penal welfare was that it offered a positive endorsement of welfare intervention, the key strategic initiative employed by the governing elite to ensure class cooperation. Criminal justice policy not only enjoyed the warm glow of prestige conferred by the apparent success of earlier reforms, but was characterised by unprecedented consensus across all political parties and social groups. It is out of this combination of long-term historical changes and more specific social factors that helps to provide a clearer insight into elite perceptions of crime during the 1920s.

Why does history matter? Because it is as much about the present as the past. As E. H. Carr remarked, 'the past is intelligible to us only in the light of the present; and we can fully understand the present only in the light of the past' (Carr, 1961, p.55). One of the most interesting questions raised by this study relates to recent attitudes to crime. Discussed above is the way in which the consensual approach to criminal policy and the progressive view of crime arose on the basis of intense political contestation. It is worth considering the extent to which the politicisation of crime during the last third of the twentieth century has arisen from a corresponding demise of traditional solidarities. Many writers have taken a somewhat different view. For some these shifting responses to crime are more or less a response to increased rates of offending (Blom-Cooper, 1974; Morris, 1989; Stone, 1983; Windlesham, 1993; Young & Mathews, 1992). Yet, as Downes and Morgan have made us aware, the emergence of crime as a key political issue occurred significantly later than the rise in recorded rates of offending (Downes & Morgan, 1994). Others explain these changing attitudes in terms of intensified social conflict (Hall et al., 1978; Sheley & Ashkins, 1981). Punitive law and order policies were utilised to lay low defenders of the status quo and dismantle the old welfare order. However, rather than being a response to growing social polarisation one could just as easily make the opposite claim. In hindsight, what is striking is the way in which these conflicts were not the prelude but the conclusion to a period of class-based social conflict. In other words the politicisation of crime was a response to the attenuation of traditional affiliations and social bonds and not their cause. I have shown how traditional solidarities gave shape to social life and placed a premium on a positive vision of the future. It seems that the end of ideological contestation has just as readily freed the elite of its old moorings, but robbed it of direction and made it especially fearful about change. If 'no issue is more divisive than crime' (Edsall & Edsall, 1992, p.232), then this reflects the elite's inability to project an optimistic orientation to the future. In this way the emergence of a 'therapeutic state' (Nolan, 1998), or 'crime control state' (Garland, 2001) should be seen as the response of the political classes to a radically altered social environment. Yet, when compared to the outlook of their predecessors, it is a response characterised by particularly low expectations about the potential for positive social change.

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