

Themes in British Social History

CRIME IN EARLY MODERN ENGLAND 1550~1750



J.A. SHARPE

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PREFACE AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

What might be termed the 'intellectual origins' of this book date back some fourteen years, to the period when I was beginning detailed work on my doctoral thesis on crime in seventeenth-century Essex. I was, and remain, convinced of the value of the detailed local study to the history of early modern crime. Similarly, I was, and remain, convinced of the excellence of the facilities of the Essex Record Office. Even at that early stage of my studies around the subject, however, it became obvious to me that it involved issues which stretched far beyond Essex, that much studied corner of Elizabethan and Stuart England, and far beyond the sixty-year period covered by my doctorate. This book is the product of my desire to come to grips with some of those wider issues. Even so, the initial debt I must acknowledge is to two men whose influence on me while I was involved in the earlier exercise still affects my work: Mr Keith Thomas, under whose supervision I learnt how to conduct historical research; and Mr Arthur Searle, from whom I learnt a great deal about how to approach local archives.

In the process of researching this present book my intellectual indebtedness has increased enormously. I have consulted printed primary materials and secondary works in the Bodleian Library, the British Library, the Brotherton Library, Leeds, the Guildhall Library, the Institute of Historical Research, and the J. B. Morrell Library, York. I am grateful to the staff of all these institutions for their assistance. I am also grateful for permission to consult and cite manuscript materials in the Borthwick Institute of Historical Research, York, the Corporation of London Record Office, the Doncaster Metropolitan Borough Archive Service, the Durham University Department of Palaeography and Diplomatic, the Essex Record Office, the Greater London Record Office, the North Humberside Record Office, Sheffield City Libraries, and, above all, the Public Record Office in London. The Crown-copyright records in the Public Record Office and the Greater London Record Office are cited by kind permission of Her Majesty's Stationery Office.

The services of these institutions have been supplemented by assistance from a number of individuals. I should like to thank all those who have given me permission to cite their dissertations or other unpublished materials. More specifically, Dr Tim Curtis, Dr M. J. Ingram, Dr John Stevenson, and Dr Keith Wrightson were all kind enough to read earlier drafts of sections of this book, and the final version has been considerably strengthened by their comments and criticisms. I have also been aided by conversations and correspondence with Ms Joanna Innes, Dr J. B. Post, and Mr John Styles, while my awareness of the wider geographical and chronological issues involved in my chosen subject has been sharpened by debate with continental and transatlantic scholars at the colloquia organised in Paris by the International Association for the History of Crime and Criminal Justice. I am grateful to John Stevenson in his editorial capacity and to Mrs Julie Eastwood for preparing the final typescript with her accustomed speed and accuracy.

I also owe much to having worked for nearly a decade in what is probably one of the best and certainly one of the liveliest history departments in the country, during which time I have learnt much through having to refine my ideas in argument with my colleagues and students. Of the former, Dr Jonathan Powis and Dr Dwyryd Jones have perhaps done most to deepen my understanding of the early modern period. Of the latter, my special subject group of the autumn of 1980 were especially noteworthy for taking nothing that I said on trust, and for voicing their criticism in forthright terms: I hope to see their like again.

Bishophill, York
August 1983

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DEFINITIONS, METHODS AND OBJECTIVES

It is currently becoming a commonplace among professional historians that the history of crime is a major growth area of historical research. It is generally regarded as one of a number of subjects to which serious attention has only recently been turned by historians, and which are frequently described by those working on more familiar themes as fashionable: the family, leisure, childhood and death, for example. Certainly, even though the existence of a number of important earlier studies should not be overlooked, it has been the last decade or so that has witnessed a rapid expansion of scholarly investigation of the history of crime, law and order, and related topics. Nevertheless, much remains to be done, and those working in the field are acutely conscious that if the history of crime is a growth area, it is one which still has considerable growing to do. So far as early modern England is concerned, serious writing on the subject is hardly overwhelming in volume: a handful of monographs; a similar number of collections of essays; less than ten unpublished doctoral theses; and little over twenty isolated articles and essays.¹ The historian of crime, reminded by his colleagues working in more established fields that his subject is fashionable and expanding, is forced to reflect on one of the basic truisms of crime studies: the reaction to deviants is usually far greater than their activities would justify.

That the history of crime is a growing subject is largely the outcome of the neglect with which it has hitherto been treated. The last generation of textbooks, for the most part, makes only passing reference to it. J. B. Black's account of the reign of Elizabeth I in the Oxford History of England series makes a few generalized remarks on lawlessness, mentions highwaymen briefly, and devotes the obligatory few paragraphs to vagabonds. Sir George Clark's account of the later Stuarts, in the same series, restricts itself to a brief and not entirely accurate commentary on witchcraft and duelling. One of the best known general histories of the eighteenth century, by J. H. Plumb, mentions crime and the criminal law as one element in the supposed

brutality of the age. A familiar picture is conjured up of gin-drinking, ineffective parish constables, the London slums, and Tyburn, while 'the brutality and ferocity of life . . . prevalence of dirt, disease and poverty' is commented upon. In such a world, it is little wonder that 'angry mobs, burning and looting' were as 'prevalent as disease'. Even books claiming to deal with economic and social history have had little to say about crime. Apart from some problems in London, the 'apprenticeship' which England experienced, according to Charles Wilson, included little schooling in illegality.² Indeed, economic historians in general have been content to supply us with accounts of the laudable achievements of the industrious apprentices: the less edifying exploits of the idle ones, it would seem, are best left to William Hogarth.

In large measure, this neglect of crime as an historical phenomenon is just one aspect of a much wider tendency, still with us, to treat social history as the Cinderella of the historical sciences. Since the late nineteenth century, the main thrust of English historical writing has been towards the study of past politics. Social history, when studied on a level above the purely anecdotal, has been approached largely in terms of the history of social policy. Even labour history, potentially an exciting subject, is only just beginning to emerge from its preoccupation with the early prefigurations of the modern labour party and trade union movement. Only recently has much serious attention been paid to those aspects of life which are outside the ken of such political institutions. This past neglect has led to two problems. The first, to use the words of Keith Thomas, is that social history has usually been treated as an 'undemanding subsidiary', something that at best deserves only brief mention before the historian passes on to his central concerns, politics and the constitution. Secondly, as Edward Thompson has put it, to the mainstream historian 'the people of this island (see under Poor Law, Sanitary Reform, Wages Policy) appear as one of the problems which the government has to handle'. Thomas's argument that 'the social history of the future will . . . not be a residual subject, but a central one, around which all other branches of history are likely to be organized',³ has not been fulfilled in Britain, least of all in the undergraduate syllabus. Nevertheless, important advances have been made.

These advances are the outcome of a number of factors. One of them is the influence of foreign historians, not least French proponents of the *Annales* school. Another is the contribution made to the study of history by the social sciences, of which social anthropology is probably of the most use to the early modernist.⁴ Both of these influences have done much to encourage historians of Tudor and Stuart England to approach their subject in new ways. But what is arguably the most important contribution to this rewriting of the history of early modern England has come from the massive growth in what might be best

described as archive-consciousness: documentary sources are more widely available than ever before, and historians are becoming increasingly imaginative in their ideas of how to use them.⁵ Many sources which were undiscovered, unavailable, or whose usefulness was unappreciated twenty years ago, are now readily on hand at the Public Record Office in London, or in local or specialist record offices. Research on these documentary riches is made easier by the way in which many of them have been repaired, cleaned, catalogued and indexed in such a fashion as to facilitate their use. In 1848 Macaulay, at the beginning of the famous third chapter of his *History of England*, lamented the fact that he was forced to base his account upon 'scanty and dispersed materials'. Most later political historians, in their brief accounts of English society in the past, have used a similarly anecdotal approach, although few have matched Macaulay's vividness of writing. Now, thanks to the labours of the archivist, those embarking on the writing of English social history frequently find an embarrassment of primary materials upon which to base their researches.

In particular, this extensive documentation makes it possible to treat crime as something more than an aspect of an undemanding and subsidiary area of history, capable of and deserving only anecdotal treatment. Recent work in the field has confirmed the suspicion that arises from reading a few of the older studies of the subject⁶: abundant materials await the historian willing to go out and find them, and important results await those willing to show diligence in reading these materials and ingenuity in using them. Court archives, although nowhere near complete, survive in large numbers, and reveal the business of tribunals as disparate as the Star Chamber and King's Bench at Westminster, and the local manorial court in the darkest corner of the realm. Such archives form the basis of the most important research on crime, the actuality of the prosecution of offences and their punishment. Other sources, many of them as yet relatively unexploited, provide insights into other important if ancillary facets of crime in the past. Popular literature, almost since its inception, has been full of accounts of spectacular crimes, accounts which provide some factual evidence as well as information on attitudes towards illegal behaviour. By the early eighteenth century, newspapers were regularly reporting crime, while additional information on the phenomenon is provided by advertisements concerning stolen goods. The statute book and parliamentary diaries can be used to give evidence on official attitudes and preoccupations, while there are also frequent if scattered references to crime in a wide variety of private documents, among them diaries, letters, and estate papers. There is certainly no shortage of material and, as we shall see, this is already reflected in a diversity of approaches to the subject.

This variety of materials relating to the history of crime, and mention of the diversity of ways in which the subject can be approached,

serve to introduce a fundamental problem: how ‘crime’ is to be defined. Our starting-point must be that the word crime is a general blanket term rather than a precise analytical or descriptive category. The term can be used to describe an accident; an incidental and unpremeditated explosion of passion or despair; a behaviour pattern expressive of emotional or mental instability or frustration; something akin to business activity; or even a chosen way of life. Defining behaviour as ‘criminal’ varies according to different circumstances or social conventions, and there is a constantly moving frontier of what is, and what is not, acceptable conduct in any given society. Crime thus includes not only those acts which most human beings would regard as intrinsically wicked but whose motivation can vary enormously (theft and murder, for example); it also comprehends behaviour which can be newly classified as criminal by a specific society and can therefore be created by legislators or law-enforcement agencies. As criminologists have recently reminded us, there is a need to distinguish between crime waves and ‘enforcement waves’ when analysing criminal statistics.⁷

Moreover, definition of behaviour as ‘criminal’ can vary according to social status or class, and is also prone to change over time: what a workforce might regard simply as taking traditional perquisites might be regarded as pilfering by employers, while types of violence which are acceptable in some periods might be less so in others. ‘Crime’, therefore, covers a wide range of activities, and is likely to be defined differently by different people at different times.⁸ For most of our purposes, however, since the early modern historian’s concern must be mainly with *recorded* crimes, an effective (if by no means exclusive) working definition of the word must be that crime is behaviour which is regarded as illegal and which, if detected, would lead to prosecution in a court of law or summarily before an accredited agent of law enforcement. Above all, such a definition, allied to good court records, allows us to understand how crime was defined by the relevant institutions of the society experiencing it. Overcoming modern preconceptions on this point is a major obstacle.

The sort of problem which historians encounter when they fail to interpret crime in the past in the terms in which it was understood at the time is clearly demonstrated in G. R. Elton’s introductory essay, ‘Crime and the historian’, in the collection of essays edited by J. S. Cockburn under the title *Crime in England 1550–1800*. Elton, for example, has difficulties with the notion that the historian of crime should concern himself with church courts and thus ‘throw theft and adultery into one bag’, since ‘contemporaries did not regard them as of one kind at all’.⁹ This is largely true, although we must bear in mind a number of Puritan writers who did put the two activities on a roughly equal moral plane.¹⁰ Neither, one suspects, did contemporaries regard theft and treason as the same thing: but Elton, a little later, puts these

two offences into one bag when he speaks of 'the real crimes as it were . . . treasons and felonies'.¹¹ The use of the phrase 'the real crimes' betrays the writer's line of thought. His definition of crime, despite his willingness to accuse another contributor to the volume of 'mildly anachronistic confusion',¹² is evidently based on what is perhaps the modern layman's definition of 'serious crime': burglary, robbery, rape and murder. To restrict a study of crime in early modern England to these offences simply will not do.

The first objection to equating 'real crime' with the serious offences, treason and felony, must be that in early modern England, as in modern British society (and, one suspects, all others), petty crime was more common, more typical, and in many ways more entitled to be described as 'real' crime than was the serious offence.¹³ In the crisis years of 1629–31, for example, 93 thefts were prosecuted at the Essex quarter sessions. The same years saw the prosecution of 698 individuals for defaulting on their statutory obligation to work on the highways, and of 652 persons for various offences connected with the drink trade.¹⁴ Ignoring petty crime not only obscures the reality of the pattern of prosecutions but also loses sight of one or two important points about the objectives of central and local government. One of the distinctive features of law enforcement in the first half of the period covered by this book was the prosecution of regulative offences, of which infractions of the drink laws perhaps loom largest in the archives of the criminal courts. To ignore this phenomenon is to ignore much of what the authorities of the period would have regarded as the essence of crime control, but to understand its full dimensions the historian must extend his researches into the records of local and minor tribunals, not least the ecclesiastical and manorial courts. The parish constable sending the unlicensed alehouse-keeper to the quarter sessions and the churchwarden sending the adulterer to the church courts would have regarded themselves as participants in the same struggle: disorder and ungodliness were not readily separable entities.

Mention of parish constable and churchwarden introduces another difficulty touched on by Professor Elton, namely that of distinguishing between crime and sin. The inhabitants of Tudor, Stuart, and Hanoverian England were, to say the least, a little unclear on this matter. Even at the end of the eighteenth century, contemporary opinion held crime to be little different from immorality. At earlier moments in time this was probably even more true. Adultery, indeed, is a case in point: in 1650 this sin, hitherto a church court offence, was turned into a crime when it was made felony without benefit of clergy by Act of Parliament. Puritan and other writers, citing both Mosaic law and the example of contemporary societies where such matters were better ordered than England, had been advocating this step for some time. Examination of the intellectual background to the Act provides a neat demonstration not so much of a willingness to criminalize sin as of a

widespread inability to comprehend a distinction between the two.¹⁵ Other documentation provides further evidence on this point. When, for example, the Court of Great Sessions at Chester issued an order against unlicensed alehouses in 1654, it justified its action by claiming that alehouses and the disorders found in them were 'to the great dishonour of Almighty God, scandall of all good government, hardening and encouragem[en]t of wicked and licentious p[er]sons in their vicious courses and endangeringe the publique peace'.¹⁶ This criminal court, therefore, obviously held that certain forms of wrongdoing offended God's laws as much as man's: contemporary perceptions, we might therefore suspect, were unused to the idea of any clear-cut division between sin and crime.

This suspicion is strengthened by the way in which contemporary commentators were addicted to the idea that minor sins and vices, if uncorrected, might lead all too easily to major crimes. The highly conventionalized biographies of convicted criminals, as presented in popular literature, abound with illustrations of this notion. Thus we find Edmund Kirk, executed in London in 1684 for murdering his wife, reportedly emphasizing to the crowd how his downfall was in large measure attributable to a youthful indifference to God's commands. He told how

Time was when I had as great a delight in vanity, as the most debauched among you. The day was lost in my apprehension, in which I met no jovial companion to drink or carouse away my hours; the night misspent, that was not improved in the embraces and dalliances of some Dahlila. The sentence came dully and insipidly from my lips that was not graced with an oath . . .¹⁷

When dealing with a society which regarded such conduct as the usual first step towards a career of serious crime, historians are obviously obliged to attempt to fit contemporary ideas on sin and its correction into their terms of reference.

If sin and crime were often conflated in the early modern period, a similar if less marked lack of clarity underlay the distinction between crime and what would be regarded currently as tort. A number of offences might be dealt with either by criminal prosecution or a civil action. Hence defamation, although most often remedied through launching a suit at the common law or ecclesiastical courts, might also be prosecuted as a crime, since defamatory language was thought to be conducive to a breach of the peace.¹⁸ Similarly assault, itself a very widely defined offence in this period, could lead to either indictment at a criminal court or the launching of a suit at the court of Common Pleas.¹⁹ Behind such examples, which could be multiplied, there lies a more general problem. The age was a deeply litigious one, and people were apparently very willing to resolve conflicts and settle disputes by going to law. This willingness to use the law imposes a different

perspective on prosecuted crime from that familiar to the modern observer. In the absence of a modern police force, most prosecutions of crime, and the overwhelming majority of prosecutions of felony in particular, were brought either by the victim or by local officers or individuals offended at what they regarded as deviant behaviour. Crime control, at this level, was therefore very dependent upon private initiative, and prosecution throughout the court system was essentially the outcome of a series of personal decisions. The prosecution of even serious crime, therefore, derived something of the flavour of a civil action from the social interactions which so often preceded it. With many petty offences, for example if a tenant confronted by a neighbour who damaged his fence sought remedy by presentment at the manorial court, the practical differences between the criminal and civil aspects of a case could be almost non-existent.

Our aim when studying crime in the past, therefore, must be to take as wide a view of the phenomenon as possible. Serious crime is, of course, a subject which demands serious attention, and much of our argument over developments in the period 1550–1750 will revolve around an analysis of recorded changes in the level of serious crime, combined with changes in its punishment and in attitudes towards it. Statistically, however, most crime is petty crime, and it would thus be idle to ignore the less serious offence. From the viewpoint of the authorities, the essential objective of law enforcement was the control, or at least curbing, of all forms of criminal and delinquent behaviour. If the state saw fit to attempt to regulate certain forms of behaviour through courts operated by the state church, it would be illogical to disregard cases tried before such courts. Similarly, if attempts were made to curb delinquencies through the manorial courts, these too should be numbered among our concerns. An exception must be made for such religious offences as heresy, recusancy, and failure to attend church. These are best studied within the context of religious history, and will receive attention in W. J. Sheils' forthcoming volume in this series on religion and society in early modern England. These offences apart, our intention in this book is to come to grips with past definitions and to leave the modern layman's definition of 'real' crime as far away as possible.

Having discussed definitions, we must now turn to examine the various methodologies which might be adopted in studying our subject. Traditionally, the greatest contribution has been made by legal historians.²⁰ Legal history is still a lively branch of both legal and historical studies,²¹ and to study the history of crimes without some prior acquaintance with the basics of legal history is akin to making bricks without straw. Nevertheless, studying crime purely through legal history is an activity which is vulnerable to a number of objections. The first of these is that the practise of both courts and law enforcement officers was often at variance with legal theory. Accord-

ing to this, if we may take the most striking example, the indictment should have been a document so accurate as to constitute an impeccable source upon which the historian might construct a number of conclusions, most of them statistical. Examination of Elizabethan and Jacobean indictments, on the other hand, has shown that they were frequently inaccurate, and that such matters as the occupation or status of offenders, their parish of origin, and even the date of the offence, cannot be derived from them with any reliability.²² Secondly, one of the hallmarks of the law enforcement system in this period was its flexibility, an attribute which included the correction of a wide variety of conduct which might have defied the precise definitions of the statute book. This flexibility was perhaps most marked in the manorial courts, which were local, decentralized, and to a large extent bound by local custom.²³ It is also evident, however, in the practices of tribunals dealing with serious crime. In particular, the power to bind persons over to be of good behaviour or to keep the peace, and the custom of sending petty offenders to the house of correction, gave the authorities almost unlimited discretion in what was, and what was not, illegal or dangerous behaviour.²⁴ Such cases as the Cheshire man indicted at the Court of Great Sessions in 1617 for drinking healths in his own blood²⁵ obviously take us a little beyond the legal historian's ken. Moreover, legal theory can tell us little about another major characteristic of early modern crime, the essentially personal or parochial circumstances which so often formed its context. Prosecution, it must be reiterated, was usually the outcome of choices made by the person offended against, or by village officers or village opinion, and often followed a lengthy period of interaction between them and the offender. This process, almost invisible to the legal historian, is crucial to the understanding of law enforcement in the early modern era.

A second approach, and one which has enjoyed much favour, is to write the history of crime from literary sources. This approach has appealed above all to the writers of textbooks on political history when constructing their brief descriptions of English society. Any social theme, after all, can be illustrated by a brief quote from Chaucer, Shakespeare, or the Paston Letters. Once more we are confronted with a refusal to take social history seriously, and the limitations of what might be termed the *Belles-Lettres* approach to the study of the subject are all too apparent. It is indicative of the priorities of English historical writing that historians who would otherwise have prided themselves on their scholarship, intellectual rigour, and talent for source-criticism should become slack, lazy, and uncritical when using literary sources to discuss social historical topics, crime included. J. B. Black, for example, concludes his brief discussion of highwaymen in Elizabethan England by commenting that 'Falstaff's disgraceful exploit at Gadshill was probably a not uncommon occurrence'.²⁶ This

exploit, of course, never took place outside the playhouse, and cannot be used as evidence of reality. Imaginative literature is imaginative literature: it can be used to illustrate past attitudes or preoccupations, but it should not be confused with historical fact. Unfortunately, the familiarity, vividness, and accessibility of literary sources makes them very attractive, and a number of writers, professional English scholars among them, have thrown these sources together to form easily palatable if hopelessly inadequate books. The reviewer of one such, commenting that its author had simply assembled 'the detritus of some Eng. Lit. lectures and shovelled it lazily behind a catchpenny title', has provided us with an epitaph for a whole approach to the history of crime.²⁷

As long as a century ago, however, scholars were already beginning to suggest an alternative body of source material and, by extension, a more systematic approach to the subject. As has been suggested, the historian owes a great deal to the modern archives profession, who have done so much to help him come into contact with primary materials. He also owes a substantial debt of gratitude to those scholars who, from the middle years of Victoria's reign onwards, took an active role in setting up societies for the publication of local history records. By the end of the nineteenth century, most English counties possessed both a local history journal and a series of publications of local records. The rise of this enthusiasm for local history is an interesting phenomenon, which awaits fuller investigation. Its immediate relevance to our argument is that a number of early publications in these records series consisted of editions of court, and especially quarter sessions, records. The standards of editing of these records varies, although some are excellent, and most of the editors were simply content with a brief and relatively uncritical introduction. Already, however, the enthusiasts editing their county's quarter sessions records were beginning to explore what is the most useful initial approach to the history of crime, the systematic study of court archives, usually with some notion of statistical analysis in mind. In particular, the work of J. C. Jeaffreson on the Middlesex sessions records provided a number of pointers as to how much sources might be used.²⁸

It is only in recent years, despite an excellent and neglected early study by C. L. Ewen of witch trials,²⁹ that such an approach has gained much currency. The 1970s, however, were to see the appearance of a number of studies which adopted it. The methodology seemed simple enough: find a good court archive, master the contemporary law relating to the court and the offences tried before it, work through the archive systematically, and produce a statistically-based study. These statistics could then be related to other socio-economic factors, notably grain prices and other economic variables, and important conclusions derived from such correlations as emerged about the

nature of crime and punishment in the past. Such a methodology formed the basis of a monograph by Joel Samaha, important essays by J. S. Cockburn and J. M. Beattie, constituted a starting point for Alan Macfarlane's book on witchcraft, and was a major feature of the first two doctoral theses to be completed on seventeenth-century crime, the first by T. C. Curtis, the second by the present writer.³⁰ Statistically-based studies have also appeared on crime in periods outside the early modern, and it is now possible to gain insights into patterns of and fluctuations in prosecuted crime for periods as far apart as the thirteenth and early twentieth centuries.³¹

The pitfalls involved in attempting to understand any set of criminal statistics are obvious enough, and, since the problems of a statistical approach to the history of crime are discussed in chapter 3, there is little point in rehearsing them here. Whatever their limitations, these statistically-based studies have made a number of important contributions to our understanding of the history of crime and punishment. Not least, such studies have indicated that it is possible to go far beyond that uncritical and anecdotal approach which has so impeded the serious study of the history of crime. Quantification must be limited in its ambitions, extremely cautious in its methods, and its results must be presented and explained with painstaking care. This is not to say that, where appropriate and possible, it is not an essential exercise, and that it cannot yield some important conclusions.

It rapidly became apparent, however, that counting was not the only thing that could be done with court archives. With some archives, of course, it was possible to do little else: the records of the Home circuit of the assizes, for example, although the only assize material which survives in any bulk between the starting point of our study and 1650, are limited mainly to indictments, whose value consists largely in the quantitative insights they provide into law enforcement in the past. Other records provide us with evidence of a qualitative type, and the intrinsically fascinating nature of much of this evidence soon distracted all but the most dedicated or unimaginative quantifier away from the calculator and the computer. Many court archives contain occasional letters, petitions, and other informal documents on a haphazard basis, and these often provide invaluable insights into the enforcement of the law at a grass-roots level. Moreover, and perhaps more importantly, historians began to appreciate the riches of those depositions, examinations, informations, and confessions which survive for some courts, and which contain the evidence of witnesses and the statement of the accused. Unfortunately for the historian, although fortunately for everyone else, England has never been a police state, and has never possessed an inquisitorial system of criminal justice. For this reason, the historian of crime in England will only rarely have access to records comparable to those which Richard Cobb, for example, has turned to such good use in his studies of crime and related topics in late