

Book Reviews

Post-1800

PETER ADEY, D. J. COX, and BARRY GODFREY. *Crime, Regulation and Control during the Blitz: Protecting the Population of Bombed Cities*. History of Crime, Deviance and Punishment Series. London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2016. Pp. 253. \$114 (cloth).
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As we approach eightieth anniversaries associated with the Second World War, scholars of the home front will be grateful for this fully researched and mostly well-written monograph. Focusing upon Liverpool, the great port city in northwest England, and nearby Birkenhead, Peter Adey, D. J. Cox, and Barry Godfrey draw a detailed picture of preparations for air raids following the airship and biplane attacks on Britain during the First World War. These cities initiated an interdependent Air Raids Precautions apparatus to manage the simple fact that life in a large provincial city was itself interdependent and complex: an attack on one facet of the infrastructure could have massive consequences for the wider functioning of a densely populated coastal city. During the Blitz of 1940–41, the Liverpool docks would become a key target for the Nazis, and the warren of poor housing surrounding them was home to a traditional working-class community whose values and lifestyles were often indifferent to official notions of law and order. This situation gave rise to some significant questions. How would a sizeable, relatively homogenous community behave and cope during the heaviest attacks? How would the black-out and rationing regulations be policed? How extensive would be petty crime or more serious infractions of the law? In what ways would the trauma of air raids and the experience of evacuation affect the population, particularly children? What would be the overall impact on mobility, and morale? And how would these problems be managed?

Drawing particularly upon Mass Observation materials, Home Office weekly intelligence reports, national and local newspapers, local authority committee minutes, criminal and police records, and some autobiographical, literary, and film sources, the book offers both scope and detail. It begins with the First World War, ranges through the interwar period and the specter of air warfare, and culminates with the actual air raids on Liverpool and their consequences. These include the longer-term impact on the built environment. Liverpudlians later referred to the urban renewal of Liverpool during the 1950s and 1960s in terms of

being “blitzed” by modern redevelopment schemes. Renovations disrupted the built environment and social life of the city as the bombs had done.

Adey, Cox, and Godfrey’s analysis of interwar preparations and their operation under fire includes some fascinating material on the citizen cyclists, the metaphor of the city as a nerve system, literary and fiction film depictions of the potential chaos, tensions between local authorities and central government, the concerns of politicians over morale, and gendered notions of voluntary firefighting and fire watching.

Asking whether the Blitz spirit engendered a more law-abiding mentality, the authors explain why Liverpool, despite extensive poverty, saw less increase in crime than the national average. Most crimes were against property rather than people and usually involved those who knew each other. The authors also offer some new and fascinating research on the blackout. Many people defied the blackout regulations, causing resentment and hostility among those fearful for their homes. Police also concentrated much of their effort on the docks and working-class districts as opposed to wealthier outlying districts, skewing the offenses records. The blackout posed significant pressures for the police, however. Bombed-out houses and shops were ripe for looting and were used for various nefarious activities, for example, as surveillance was rendered more difficult.

Crime, Regulation and Control is particularly convincing when challenging orthodox views of petty crime and the extent of the black and grey markets as atypical diversions from the Blitz spirit. So extensive and ingrained was the moral economy of poorer people, they felt it completely natural to negotiate the rationing regulations, to get little extras and treats when they could. Yet they remained loyal to the war effort.

This study shines new light onto the complex question of juvenile delinquency in wartime Liverpool. Contemporary psychologists, sociologists, and politicians, not to mention the police and magistracy, were convinced that deviance was rising as a consequence of wartime conditions. Their explanations included arguments about maternal deprivation caused by the evacuation of young children, particularly boys, and the disruption to the developing bond between mother and son. More realistically, the blackout provided opportunities for petty theft and misbehavior. Bomb sites and air raid shelters were sometimes sites of drunkenness and sexual assault, and even their bricks and mortar might be stolen for domestic use.

The problem of monitoring and managing the mobility of the population is the subject of another fascinating chapter. Motorization had led to an increasingly mobile population by 1939, and it aided the phenomenon of “trekking” to escape from imminent air raids into the outer suburbs or nearby countryside. Trekking was viewed by officials largely as symptomatic of panic and declining morale, but as the authors show, it was a rational response to danger from the air. Despite problems in the Air Raid Precautions apparatus, evacuation, and the hardworking but cross-pressured emergency services, morale mostly held up.

A number of minor criticisms should be noted. For example, the infamous and tragic story of the so-called “Blackout Ripper” in wartime London contains no reference to the existing historiography, and its inclusion evidences a tendency for the authors to bolster certain points from the experience of other cities when the primary material is lacking in Liverpool. The Labour MP Ellen Wilkinson is first introduced only by her surname, and her importance is explained only in later pages. And the name of Sonya O. Rose, a revisionist historian of the home front, is spelled as “O’Rose.”

Such quibbles aside, the book will make a very useful addition to undergraduate reading lists on the history of the Second World War in Britain. It will also interest postgraduate researchers, historians, and criminologists studying the home front, and practitioners in the growing fields of historical trauma studies.

Mark Clapson
 University of Westminster
M.Clapson@westminster.ac.uk