



Book Review by Dr Eamonn G Hall

Sources for the studies of crime in Ireland 1801-1921

Brian Griffin. Maynooth Research Guides for Irish Local History; Four Courts Press; (2005), 7 Malpas Street, Dublin 8; (tel 00-353-1-4534-668); ISBN 1 85182-950-4, hardback €45 and 1-85182-821-4, paperback €14.95.

Frequently as a person gets older, he or she becomes more interested in the past, in one's ancestors, 'the family-tree syndrome', and those especially 'interesting' member of one's family. I certainly admit to a fascination for the past and my ancestors.

This book is one of the Maynooth Research Guides for Irish Local History Series. Although the book relates to the sources for the study of crime in Ireland 1801-1921, it has a wider significance. This book will prove useful to lawyers and others who have an interest in sources of history – be it aspects of crime, general law or other aspects of legal history or family history.

Readers may be familiar with sources in the National Archives – a rich treasure trove. Lawyers have played a crucial role in the regulation of the National Archives including the late Mr. Justice Mr.

Niall McCarthy, Mr. Justice Hugh O’Flaherty and Mr Justice Byran McMahon.

The registered papers of the Chief Secretary’s Office between 1918 to 1924 fill 3,770 cartons in the National Archives : they document virtually all aspects of British administration of Ireland in the period of the Union. There are also the *State of the Country Papers* and the *Outrage Papers*. The registered papers of the Chief Secretary’s Office contain not only, *inter alia*, details of major crimes but also lesser offences such as illicit distillation, common assault, drunkenness, vagrancy, poaching, allowing cattle to stray onto the public road and from the early 1890s onwards illegally cycling on footpaths. Few of us can admit to not cycling on a footpath – at least once! There are of course indices and registers to the Chief Secretary’s papers.

The National Archives also hold papers of the Chief Crown Solicitor. In 1801 there were six Crown Solicitors, one for each assize. Starting in 1846 Crown Solicitors were distributed on a county basis instead of being confined to circuits.

Among sources of local history, newspapers are important. The author, Brian Griffin, who wrote *The Bulkies, Police and Crime in Belfast* (Dublin, 1999) and who lectures in history and Irish studies at the Bath Spa University, England, points out that many nineteenth and early twentieth century newspapers were often politically partisan and editorial bias may colour reporting. Newspapers of notes for the period include the *Freeman’s Journal*. Interestingly, the Chief Secretary’s Office collected newspapers cuttings, and these are available in the National Library.

It was Patrick Kavanagh who said ‘the parish was the Universe’. Here, he said were all the weakness and strengths of a community. Indeed it may be said that from the parish or local history, the story of a nation becomes a reality. The author Brian Griffin, deserves our gratitude.

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Hall – Sources for the Study of Crime in Ireland 1801-1921

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