This book represents the second stage of John Beattie’s quest to understand the relationship between crime, policing, prosecution, and punishment in post-Restoration England. In his previous work, *Crime and the courts in England, 1660–1800* (1986), Beattie looked at the administration of justice in and around London, and concluded that public debates about reform in the reign of George III tended to conceal the fact that practical innovations—notably defence representation and punitive transportation—had already begun the process earlier in the eighteenth century. *Policing and punishment in London* focuses more tightly on the city of London, declining even to stray for long into the adjacent regions of Westminster, Southwark, and Middlesex. Although this feels more honed and purposeful than the earlier work, less dutifully compendious, the persuasive argument remains similar: the transformation of national policy was a long process of maturation rooted in problems on the streets and the *ad hoc* responses of authorities feeling their way towards the creation of a more orderly urban society. In some ways, this book resembles Ian Archer’s influential monograph on sixteenth-century London, impressing upon us, as it does, that the state was built from the bottom up as much as top down, and that London led the way.

The simplicity of the book’s two-part structure—policing and prosecution followed by prosecution and punishment—is deceptive. In fact, Beattie pulls off one of the hardest tricks of all by organizing his book along thematic and chronological lines, ensuring that by 1750 we feel the weight and significance of the developments he identifies. The author, and his subject, remind us that the early modern period exists in historians’ minds because it constituted a transitional phase between what we recognize to be medieval and what we recognize to be modern. It is this patient commitment to demonstrate shifts within otherwise unchanged contexts that makes this such a big book, shot through with implications for the evolution of urban Britain. The relationship between what we would see as amateurism and professionalism is a good example. In the eighteenth century, socially appropriate men were still expected to take their turn as constables, but were more and more likely to pay a deputy so that they could continue to devote all their time to their trades. Constables were still expected to carry medieval halberds as they patrolled the City, but it is easy to see why men required to chase shoplifters down narrow streets increasingly preferred short staffs, lanterns, and rattles.

Like its predecessor, this is a book with a solid statistical basis, but less concerned with positivist interpretation and more with how contemporaries understood fluctuating levels of indicted crime. It is, therefore, a book about perceptions and complex realities, less so grand narratives. And this is the means by which Beattie explains change in the practical application of the law: he keeps contexts of attitude and debate fluid and diverse in the pursuit of what he calls ‘a changing culture of prosecution’ (p. 103). For instance, it is clear that men of property became increasingly anxious about theft, but by no means all roads led to Tyburn...
as a consequence: magistrates appear to have incarcerated most petty thieves in Bridewell, and even to have discharged large numbers of accused felons if the evidence against them seemed insubstantial. Strictly speaking, this was a job for a grand jury, but the effect of such short-cuts was to prevent the system becoming clogged with cases which were going nowhere, and therefore to allow more efficient treatment of serious criminals.

Nor was this just self-interested pragmatism. Among traditional understandings of crime as a moral failing in the individual, Beattie detects new currents of awareness: crime as a collective problem linked to the poverty of defined social groups: apprentices, migrants, demobilized soldiers, and orphans. By 1750 law enforcement was still overshadowed by the gallows, but it had acquired many refinements, not least in its preventative and investigative functions. A chapter on thief-takers is testament to the latter. In the ‘blend of private energy and public authority’ (p. 228) which fuelled their work and determined the ambivalence of attitudes towards them, lies a key insight into the origins of modern policing. Similarly, although the Georgian courts resembled those of Elizabeth’s reign – theatres of liberty and power, where principles of common law and trial by jury were upheld, and severe punishments softened by customary discretion and mitigation – innovations in interpretation and procedure were deeply significant.

Transportation and forced labour became common alternatives to capital sentences, amidst growing misgivings about excessive use of the noose; and after 1689 these measures were formalized at law, thereby ‘strengthening policing, prosecution, and the consequences of conviction’ (p. 315). Meetings between the city’s recorder and government ministers to determine the level of capital punishment illustrate well the search for new solutions. In general, Beattie demonstrates the importance of increased political engagement at the centre, especially after 1714 when governments showed a new willingness to tackle criminals as the enemy within, much as they defended themselves from enemies without. Energies were directed not just into the vehemence of rhetoric but into the effectiveness of policy. The payment of huge rewards for the conviction of highwaymen and other heinous criminals is a case in point. More effective policing, and punishments which better fitted crimes, would in time supplant the older ideological messages of sin and death broadcast from the gallows; the limits of terror – to borrow from the subtitle of this fine, illuminating book – had been exposed by the thriving, threatening reality of the modern commercial metropolis.

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‘It is hard to overpraise this book’, writes one reviewer of James Secord’s Victorian sensation, using hyperbolic language typical of almost all the more than forty international reviews that the book has received in publications from History Today to the Financial Times. The book has been described variously, for instance, as ‘masterful and provocative’, ‘meticulous’, ‘monumental’, ‘magnificent’, and to evoke the book’s title, ‘sensational’. It was further nominated by the Sunday Times as one of the 100 most important books of the year, a testimony to the elegance and accessibility of Secord’s prose style.
In this 624-page book, fifteen years in the making, Secord has written a history of the writing, material production, and reading of one book published anonymously in 1844 as *Vestiges of the natural history of creation*. Until now most historians of science and cultural historians have tended to treat *Vestiges* as one of several failed forerunners of the *Origin of species*, a book that for all its popularity was a bit of a joke, for Robert Chambers, its author, was no Darwin and he made mistakes both in fact and in theory and was ridiculed by some and labelled a dangerous heretic by others. However, *Vestiges* was a sensational book which gripped the imaginations of a generation of readers, many newly literate, and was discussed in working men’s associations and clubs and drawing rooms across Britain for some considerable time. *Vestiges* continued to exert popular appeal even after Darwin’s *Origin* appeared, selling more copies than *Origin* until the 1880s.

Written with the techniques and conventions of the novel, *Vestiges* presented readers with an epic and breath-taking history of the earth in evolutionary terms, beginning with a nebulous fire-mist and tracing the gradual evolution of biological forms in a series of metamorphoses from primitive sea creatures to lizards and birds. *The Examiner* praised ‘the simplicity of the writer’s manner, and the beauty of his style’; Disraeli claimed that *Vestiges* was ‘convulsing the world’. It was the book of the age and left its mark on the writings of Thomas Carlyle, Charles Darwin, Elizabeth Barrett Browning, Alfred Tennyson, and Benjamin Disraeli.

Secord announces early in the book that this is an ‘experiment in a different kind of history’. What kind of experiment in history is this? Beginning with the premise that all reading is local, in that any reader reads within a social context, and that reading, understanding and interpretation are determined by particular temporal intellectual conditions, Secord maps the reading and assimilation of *Vestiges*’ visions and claims in several major cities in the later 1840s: Oxford, Cambridge, Liverpool, and Edinburgh. He presents the reading experiences of scores of different readers through the detailed exploration of diaries, letters, and reviews. He demonstrates the crucial role of journalism and new communication technologies in negotiating the role between readers, the market and ways of knowing.

This is all, in the words of reviewer Adrian Johns, ‘fine-grained micro-historical work’, which over chapter after chapter builds up to a significant grand narrative which shifts the historical arena for the study of the history of evolution and its debates considerably earlier to the 1840s away from the 1860s and the reception of Darwin’s *Origin*. This is important for three reasons. First, it challenges the single-impact narrative which has so dominated simplistic readings of nineteenth-century intellectual history (*Origin* as the book that changed the world overnight; Darwin as revolutionary genius; 1859 as the year the meteor-book fell). Secondly, because by doing so it complicates and deepens our understanding of the processes by which evolutionary ideas were assimilated, revealing in Secord’s words the ‘network of relations that make up the larger picture’. Thirdly, it does not present the writers and intellectuals who read *Vestiges* as the gatekeepers and mediators of evolutionary ideas but instead broadens the stage of assimilation to include reviews, conversations, debates in drawing rooms and working men’s clubs between ordinary men and women.

To succeed at this experiment in history writing, Secord moves between disciplines in the words of another reviewer, ‘with the elegance of an intellectual athlete’, drawing simultaneously on the techniques of literary theory and those of narrative social history. For the literary historian and for historians concerned with reading practices and the history of the book, Secord offers an important account of the effects of anonymity on reception as well as
an experiment in historiography itself. But the great achievement of *Victorian sensation* is to have refocused attention on the complex and diverse mechanisms of nineteenth-century intellectual debate and on evolutionary theorizing as a process influenced by many hypothesizers. This is ‘gradualist’ intellectual history – a welcome challenge to the catastrophist, single-impact historical narratives which so often portray Darwin standing alone at the centre of the meteor crater he has made. Instead *Victorian sensation* shows Darwin engaged like so many of his peers in a crowded conversation, which had begun many years before he entered it.


Richard Wetzell has written the first comprehensive history of German criminology. This in itself is a surprise given that good accounts exist for the development of criminology in France, England, Italy, and the United States, all of them written in the wake of Michel Foucault’s phenomenally influential thesis that scientific knowledge systems should be understood as systems of power used for social control, and that the science of criminals was one such knowledge system. Wetzell, too, duly roots his account in Foucault’s work, noting that a Foucauldian framework, *pace* Peukert, invites us to read Nazi eugenic policy as the logical conclusion of the exclusionary power embedded in criminological thought. He goes on, however, to argue that this glib conclusion fails to do justice both to German criminology’s increasing methodological sophistication, and to the deep tensions and conflicting narratives that characterized it virtually from its point of conception.

*Inventing the criminal* covers the period from the reception of Lombroso’s theory of the born criminal in Germany to the end of the Nazi era. It is clearly structured, accessibly written, and provides both a good index and an exhaustive bibliography. The individual sections are short, and key pieces of information are repeated throughout the book so as to allow the reader to read individual chapters in isolation. As such it will please all students of the period and makes an ideal textbook for university teaching. Of the seven chapters, five consider the development of criminological thought proper, while the remaining two explore how these theories interacted with the formulation of penal policy, including, in the later period, the legal provisions for sterilization and other eugenic measures. In these latter sections Wetzell provides an insightful view into the clash between medical and legal practitioners. The application of the resulting laws remains unexplored, however, a task left for the book’s forthcoming companion volume. The narrative of the establishment of criminological knowledge thus becomes divorced from the attendant narrative of its transformation into power – much of the book comes in the form of an intellectual history, providing a comprehensive string of names of criminological scholars and the theories they developed.

If Wetzell defers the application of the criminological knowledge he analyses for a later volume, there is equally little on the actual practice of how this knowledge was established, aside from a fascinating discussion of Bavaria’s Criminal-Biological Service in chapter five.
This omission stems in part from Wetzell’s decision – traditional in analyses of crimino-
logical thought – to exclude criminalistics, i.e. the science of detection, from his survey.
Given that criminalistic thought was developed alongside criminology, and often by the
same practitioners, this could be considered a significant oversight: surely the conceptual-
izations of criminals developed in the detective sciences would complement the picture
Wetzell unfolds.

Refreshingly, Wetzell’s narrative does away with a monolithic view of criminology as a
science dedicated to the creation of a criminal other. Rather, he stresses the conflicts and
contradictions inherent in its development, and sketches several rival traditions, including
those arguing against any clear marks of distinction, biological or other, between criminal
offenders and ordinary citizens. Nevertheless, he stresses the primacy of biological and
psychological research in criminology over sociological modes of explanation, rooted in
part in the pessimistic belief that the social causes of crime were more difficult to combat
than so-called endogenous ones. The picture that emerges is complex and multifaceted,
and Wetzell’s argument, that even scientists in favour of eugenic measures were aware
of the dearth and fragility of the scientific evidence for a hereditary basis of crime, is
convincing.

Inevitably, it is Wetzell’s evaluation of criminology during the Nazi era that will com-
mand the closest attention. He argues that criminology preserved a surprising amount of
integrity throughout the period, for the most part resisting a simplistic biological and racial
determinism. At times, this skirts dangerously close to an apologia of mainstream
criminology, shifting most of the blame for the Nazis’ aggressive eugenic measures, and
eventual exterminatory politics towards criminals, on to fringe scientists whose views were
over-represented because they pandered to the regime’s prejudices. Wetzell is aware,
though, that even conscientious scientists were implicated in the regime’s politics, and
supported its policies often against their better scientific knowledge: his account could thus
more charitably be read as a narrative of how methodological sophistication and good
science cannot necessarily prevent its abuse. Indeed, the book provides a fascinating per-
spective on the workings of the Nazi state, with the justice ministry sparring with Nazi
officials and scientists over the issue of the sterilization of criminals.

Any book of the scope of *Inventing the criminal* is inevitably going to have minor factual
glitches: Hans Kurella was not an unambiguous supporter of Lombroso’s theory of atav-
ism as Wetzell suggests; Paul Näcke’s contributions to Hans Gross’s *Archiv für Kriminal-
anthropologie und Kriminalistik* did not unilaterally argue for the importance of milieu over
hereditary influences – indeed Näcke was one of the few openly antisemitic criminologists
of his day, and would at times stress the importance of racial factors in determining
criminal characteristics. These errors are minor, however, and should not detract from the
book’s many achievements. It would be equally churlish to chastise the book for what it is
not: it is not a social or political history of criminology; nor does it provide a history of the
public knowledge about criminals and their scientists, despite a handful of allusions in that
direction. Like any pioneering work it thus reminds us of the many aspects of German
criminology that remain to be explored. As it stands, *Inventing the criminal* is indispensable
reading for any scholar in the field, and holds much that is of interest to the non-specialist.