

THE UNIVERSITY OF HULL

**Reactions to crime, criminality and class in Hull and East
Yorkshire during the interwar period**

being a Thesis submitted for the Degree of

PhD in the University of Hull

by

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September 2018

Abstract

The interwar years have often been depicted as a period characterised by the consolidation and expansion of more progressive attitudes to crime. Reform and rehabilitation challenged retaliation and retribution for primacy in both criminal justice discourses and practice, while modern, scientific methodologies continued to shape perceptions of, and offer solutions to, a whole range of criminal behaviours. Moreover, crime was rarely politicised and never the issue it would become in the second half of the twentieth century.

However, these are generalisations and offer only a partial account of crime in the interwar years – one that masks potentially divergent responses in towns and cities across the country. The localised characteristics and discretionary nature of criminal justice, and the asymmetrical impact that a range of social, political and economic issues had on attitudes to crime, make it difficult to present an overarching ‘national’ narrative of the period. Instead, more focused studies, which draw out the specificities and complexities of responses at a local level, may be needed. To that end, this study looks at the region of Hull and East Yorkshire, examining and evaluating a range of sources including police files, court records and parliamentary papers, and with a focus on a quantitative and qualitative content analysis of the local press.

Here a more nuanced account is presented, where sustained levels of anxiety about crime drove diverse and at times seemingly incongruous reactions to offending. In this often incoherent collision of ideals, regional exigencies could precipitate calls for more punitive responses to crime and perpetuate certain pejorative conceptualisations of criminality, while at the same time eliciting sympathetic views, supporting notions of reform and the belief in the reclamation of the individual. It is an account that perhaps more aptly reflects the intricacies of what was a diverse period of British history.

Acknowledgements

Firstly, I would like to express my sincerest thanks to Dr Alan Simmonds for all his help, advice and guidance during the production of this thesis. As well as offering unwavering support throughout the process, we developed a friendship that made the whole endeavour more enjoyable. I would also like to extend my gratitude to Dr Richard Gorski for his help in guiding me through the PhD process, and for his excellent comments and suggestions during the drafting of the final versions of this thesis. And thanks go to my good friend and former University of Hull colleague, James Oldfield, whose proofreading knowledge and advice proved invaluable.

I am grateful for all the assistance given to me by the archivists and librarians at the various institutions I visited during the course of my research, notably the Hull History Centre and the Treasure House in Beverley. The staff at the British Newspaper Archive also made my life much easier by offering useful advice and responding swiftly to my questions and comments.

Finally, I would like to say thank you to my partner, Tracy. Without her patience, understanding and steadfast support during my years as a postgraduate student I don't think I would have made it to the end. The same goes for my parents, Ron and Elaine, whose encouragement during this and all the other academic projects I have undertaken over the years is appreciated beyond words.

Contents

Abstract	i
Acknowledgements	ii
List of figures and tables	iv
Introduction, themes and perspectives	1
Sources and methodology	48
Chapter 1: Contextualising Hull and East Yorkshire: crime and society, 1919 to 1939	75
Chapter 2: Mixed messages: contrasting responses to contemporary offending	116
Chapter 3: Panic stations: the threat of juvenile delinquency and the rise of transport-related crime	160
Chapter 4: Reform versus retribution: the complexities of dealing with local lawbreaking	200
Chapter 5: Continuity and change: enduring class perceptions and the terminological shift	249
Conclusion	294
Bibliography	308

List of figures and tables

Figures

Figure 1. Indictable offences known to the police in Hull, 1919 to 1938. Calculated from the criminal statistics for England and Wales.	94
Figure 2. Indictable offences known to the police in England and Wales, 1919 to 1938. Calculated from the criminal statistics for England and Wales.	95
Figure 3. Persons proceeded against for non-indictable offences in Hull, 1919 to 1938. Calculated from the criminal statistics for England and Wales.	101
Figure 4. Indictable offences known to the police in East Yorkshire, 1919 to 1938. Calculated from the criminal statistics for England and Wales.	104
Figure 5. Persons proceeded against for non-indictable offences in East Yorkshire, 1919 to 1938. Calculated from the criminal statistics for England and Wales.	106
Figure 6. Crime references in the <i>Hull Daily Mail</i> for the decades of the 1920s and 1930s.	112

Tables

Table 1. Mean totals for crime-related references in editions of the <i>Hull Daily Mail</i> for January 1924, January 1928, January 1932 and January 1936.	66
Table 2. Mean totals for crime-related references in 6-day, 12-day and 18-day constructed weeks.	67
Table 3. Standard error calculations for 6-day, 12-day and 18-day constructed weeks.	68
Table 4. Top ten specified offences in the 378-sample <i>Hull Daily Mail</i> crime counts.	109

Introduction, themes and perspectives

It could be argued that the years between the two World Wars in Britain have gained a ‘coherent identity’ that is unmatched by any other period of similar length in the country’s history.¹ However, the reality is much more complex. In fact, there is no single, satisfactory picture of Britain in the interwar period. Historians may find the end of the First World War and the commencement of the Second convenient bookends, but the intricacies and idiosyncrasies of the various social, political and economic aspects of the period make it impossible to present a comprehensive and inclusive account of the interwar years beyond broad generalisations. While many suffered during the economic crises of the early 1920s and during the years of the depression in the 1930s, with high unemployment, increasing poverty and slum housing as marked features, others benefited from rising wages, better accommodation and the increasing availability of new consumer goods, along with opportunities to participate in a whole host of leisure activities such as trips to the cinema and dance halls, watching or participating in sporting events, and travelling around the country utilising new forms of mechanised transport.² There were also stark regional variations in how these various elements, both positive and negative, affected local populations, compounding the issues of generalisation. It may not even be possible to provide a comprehensive account of each of the two decades of the interwar years. The so-called ‘Roaring Twenties’ did at times become a playground for those wanting to throw off the shackles

¹ M. Pugh, *We danced all night* (London: Vintage, 2009), vii.

² Pugh, *We danced all night*, viii. Pugh’s book reveals the complexities of interwar Britain and challenges the myths of a single, ‘gloomy’ picture, revealing instead both the positive and negative elements of the social history of the period. For other examples of leisure opportunities in the interwar period, see P. J. Beck, ‘Leisure and sport in Britain, 1900–1939’, in C. Wrigley (ed.), *A companion to early twentieth-century Britain* (Chichester: Blackwell Publishing, 2009), 453–469.

of wartime privations.³ However, the twenties were far from roaring for the many people affected by economic and political crises, while the 1930s have been often depicted as a decade of doom and a drift towards war, despite the growth of 'home ownership, new light industries, a consumer society', and major improvements to the infrastructure of Britain.⁴ Gardiner believes the decade of the 1930s is best viewed as one with many stories and many histories.⁵ In fact, this is arguably the best way to observe the whole period between 1919 to 1939. After all, the reality of social history is that it 'does not divide itself into self-contained packages'.⁶

Interestingly, one aspect of social history that has often been depicted as generally positive in traditional accounts of the period is crime. The interwar years have sometimes been viewed as a period of transformation, where earlier nineteenth-century attitudes to criminality and the treatment of offenders, which placed retaliation and retribution at the heart of criminal justice, were being replaced by more enlightened and humanitarian ideals. Rose claims it was an era that displayed a 'new belief in the value of human life', where the 'conception of the state as the guardian of the poor, the oppressed, the sick, the very young and the very old had begun to take root'.⁷ It was a period where criminals were seen as 'individuals to be pitied, cared for and, if possible, reclaimed'.⁸ This was part of the shift from 'the criminal act to the delinquent man, from repression to prevention, from retribution to rehabilitation'.⁹ A continuation and extension of the changes in attitudes that had been taking place in the final decades of

³ Pugh, *We danced all night*, vii.

⁴ J. Gardiner, *The thirties: an intimate history* (London: HarperPress, 2010), xiii.

⁵ *Ibid.*, xiv.

⁶ J. Stevenson, *British society 1914–1945* (Middlesex: Penguin Books Ltd, 1986), 17.

⁷ G. Rose, *The struggle for penal reform* (London: Stevens and Sons Limited, 1961), 93.

⁸ D. Garland, *Punishment and welfare: a history of penal strategies* (Aldershot: Gower Publishing Company Limited, 1985), 27.

⁹ M. Pifferi, *Reinventing punishment: a comparative history of criminology and penology in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 17.

the nineteenth century and in the years running up to the First World War, much of which had been influenced by emerging criminological thought.¹⁰

These shifts took place across the criminal justice system but were arguably most notable in the punishment arena. Following the Gladstone Committee Report of 1895, which was the result of an investigation into prison conditions in England and Wales, there was a move, albeit gradual, towards the ideological centralisation of seemingly more progressive notions of punishment such as reformation of the prisoner.¹¹ There was a growing belief in the ‘efficacy of correctional rather than punitive penal policies and rehabilitation of the offender’.¹² The welfare of those imprisoned for substantial lengths of time now came under scrutiny as the latest scientific developments made it ‘easier to calculate the damage done by incarceration to long-term prisoners and more difficult to detect its benefits’.¹³ The number of floggings inflicted on convict prisoners fell dramatically, broad arrows on uniforms were removed, along with heavy leg chains and the ‘convict crop’; separation of inmates was suspended and then abolished; and there were some improvements, albeit limited in their application in many institutions, to the physical conditions in which prisoners were being kept.¹⁴

The centrality of reform in this emerging ideology was exemplified by the introduction of a range of measures and programmes aimed at ‘saving’ rather than

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 17–18.

¹¹ T. Newburn, *Crime and criminal justice policy* (London: Longman Group Limited, 1995), 7–8; L. Williams, ‘The Gladstone Report’, in J. Turner, P. Taylor, K. Corteen, & S. Morley (eds.), *A companion to the history of crime and criminal justice* (Bristol: Policy Press, 2017), 97–98; 97–98.

¹² C. O’Malley, *Crime and consensus: elite perceptions of crime in Sheffield, 1919–1929*. PhD thesis (University of Sheffield, July 2002), 17.

¹³ J. Briggs et al., *Crime and punishment in England: an introductory history* (London: UCL Press Limited, 1996), 237–238.

¹⁴ W. J. Forsythe, *Penal discipline, reformatory projects and the English Prison Commission 1895–1939* (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 1990), 175–176; A. Brown, *Inter-war penal policy and crime in England: the Dartmoor Convict Prison riot, 1932* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 7.

simply punishing criminals.¹⁵ Prison was no longer seen as the only, or even most desirable, option for dealing with offenders. This was particularly the case for those committing more minor offences. In addition, the implementation of the Criminal Justice Administration Act in 1914, which provided magistrates with the option of giving fine defaulters more time to pay what they owed, resulted in far fewer offenders being sent to prison.¹⁶ This was a ‘truly extraordinary period’, says Wilson, a period of sustained and ‘remarkable decarceration’ that saw the overall prison population halved by 1939.¹⁷ It was also during the interwar years that there was a concerted effort to professionalise social work and the probation service to ensure that courts in all regions of the country could recommend probation as a means of punishment to suitable offenders.¹⁸ For Radzinowicz and Hood, this shift away from the reliance on locking up offenders ‘set the pattern for the very optimistic approach towards crime and its control which flourished’ during the interwar period.¹⁹ These shifts applied to both adult and juvenile offenders, although attitudes to the latter were still rife with contradictions. However, many still believed that, through positive intervention, vulnerable youngsters who were, for a variety of reasons, more susceptible to carrying out criminal acts, could be saved and ushered away from a life of crime. This approach appeared to be building on the work of the new and more liberal youth justice system that had developed during the nineteenth century.²⁰

¹⁵ Newburn, *Crime and criminal justice policy*, 11–12.

¹⁶ V. Bailey, ‘English prisons, penal culture, and the abatement of imprisonment, 1895–1922’. *Journal of British Studies*, 36, 3 (1997), 285–324:319.

¹⁷ D. Wilson, *Pain and retribution: a short history of British prisons, 1066 to present* (London: Reaktion Books, 2014), 89.

¹⁸ Rose, *The struggle for penal reform*, 148.

¹⁹ L. Radzinowicz & R. Hood, *A history of English criminal law and its administration from 1750*, vol.5: *the emergence of penal policy* (London: Stevens & Sons Limited, 1986), 778.

²⁰ B. Godfrey et al., *Young criminal lives: life courses and life chances from 1850* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 41.

These progressive ideals have often been posited as generally representative of the prevailing attitudes to crime and punishment during substantial periods of the interwar years. Moreover, it has been claimed that, despite the many social dislocations occurring during this period, there were no widespread and sustained crime panics. This is despite the fact that there were increases in the annual recorded crime figures across the 21 years, particularly during the 1930s, although admittedly not at the alarming rate that would characterise the post-Second World War era. At times, there may have been calls for tougher penalties to deal with perceived increases in crime, but, overall, these lost out to views that were more enlightened and a 'reformatory emphasis' in new punishment methodologies.²¹ Moreover, the police continued to be viewed positively during this period and were often celebrated by politicians and social commentators as the best force in the world.²² Despite a number of accusations of corruption and policing biases during the interwar years, they 'largely escaped the critical attention being given to other domains of the criminal justice system' by either politicians or criminologists.²³ With a focus on more effective punishment methodologies and the reclamation of those offenders deemed conducive to state intervention, the police, claims Davie, were given little more than a 'walk-on part'.²⁴ Some have gone further, claiming that politically crime was not a major issue at all during the first decades of the twentieth century. It did not cause concern among politicians, was rarely a part of electioneering and was never the political football it

²¹ V. Bailey, 'Crime in the twentieth century'. *History Today*, 38, 5 (1988), 42–48:43.

²² C. Emsley, *Crime and society in twentieth-century England* (Harlow: Pearson Education Limited, 2011), 153.

²³ N. Davie, 'Law enforcement: policies and perspectives', in D. Nash & A. Kilday (eds.), *Murder and mayhem: crime in twentieth-century Britain* (Palgrave: London, 2018), 271–302:275.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 278.

would become in the later part of the century.²⁵ In fact, as a political issue, crime may have actually been played down in some areas of the country during the interwar years, and this has certainly been the case in much of the historiography of the period.²⁶ As Emsley has concluded, crime was ‘not an issue that unduly worried the people of Edwardian and interwar England, and the progressive penal policy, which resulted in the closure of virtually half of the local prisons, continued with little hindrance into the aftermath of the Second World War’.²⁷

Not all are in agreement with these analyses of interwar crime. Taylor claims that crime was politicised to the extent that criminal justice policy was a reflection of the actions of politicians, bureaucrats, the police and the courts, aligned more to contemporary budgetary constraints than to actual levels of criminal behaviour. However, he does claim that ‘social progress’ became more important than the police in defending society during this period.²⁸ The notion of progress and reform in the penal system and the punishment of offenders has been subject to a number of attacks from historians, sociologists and criminologists. A range of factors, including the primacy of capitalist economic structures and the exigencies of political ideology, are sometimes centralised in arguments about the driving forces behind what have been viewed as progressive and reformatory transformations in the punishment of offenders.²⁹ These approaches have often questioned the motives of the agencies

²⁵ C. Emsley, ‘Crime, police and penal policy’, in C. Wrigley (ed.), *A companion to early twentieth-century Britain* (Chichester: Blackwell Publishing, 2009), 438–452:449; Emsley, *Crime and society in twentieth-century England*, 8; C. O’Malley, ‘The rise in crime’. *Spiked*, (19 May 2005). Available online: <http://www.spiked-online.com/newsite/article/1047> [Accessed 6/1/2014].

²⁶ See O’Malley, *Crime and consensus*; J. Carter Wood, ‘Press, politics and the ‘police and public’ debates in late 1920s Britain’. *Crime, History and Societies*, 16, 1 (2012), 75–98:79.

²⁷ Emsley, ‘Crime, police and penal policy’, 449–450.

²⁸ H. Taylor, *The politics of crime in interwar England and Wales with particular reference to some discontinuities with nineteenth century criminal justice policy*. PhD thesis (University of Nottingham, August 1997), 1–3; H. Taylor, ‘The politics of rising crime statistics of England and Wales, 1914–1960’. *Crime, History and Societies*, 2, 1 (1998), 5–28:6.

²⁹ B. Godfrey & P. Lawrence, *Crime and justice since 1750*, 2nd edition (Oxon: Routledge, 2015), 78–82.

behind the introduction of seemingly more progressive policies. Aside from pragmatism in dealing with the criminal elements in society, it has been argued that the ruling classes sometimes initiate programmes of reform as a means of consolidating power and control through, for example, implementing more effective forms of punishment behind the facade of ‘progress’.³⁰ Transformations in society brought about by industrialisation and urbanisation required innovative methodologies of control, such as new prison institutions, a professionalised police force and the bureaucratisation of justice, to retain order.³¹ Here the relationship is one of domination and control rather than benevolence and reform. So at the heart of any new penal law remains the notion of ‘social authority and the governing claims of those in power’.³²

However, this theoretical positioning is far from straightforward. Ignatieff, who is a proponent of the control thesis, acknowledges that these explanations are vulnerable to accusations of social reductionism, ascribing homogeneity to a ruling class of individuals ‘acting or thinking as a collective historical subject’, when it is not actually possible to do so.³³ In these approaches, the humanitarian goals of the reformers are discounted as ‘surface rhetoric’, propagated by the political and economic elite.³⁴ Perhaps more significantly, in these reductionist accounts, the complexities of ‘historical reality’ are downplayed or ignored.³⁵ Historical reality is important here. A government is never omnipotent and is rarely the only organisation

³⁰ M. Foucault, *Discipline and punish: the birth of the prison* (London: Penguin Books Ltd, 1991), 82. See also Godfrey & Lawrence, *Crime and justice*, 79–80.

³¹ D. Philips, ‘“A just measure of crime, authority, hunters and blue locusts”: the ‘Revisionist’ social history of crime and the law in Britain, 1780–1850’, in S. Cohen & A. Scull (eds.), *Social control and the state* (Oxford: Martin Robertson, 1983), 50–74:66–67.

³² D. Garland, *Punishment and modern society* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991), 123.

³³ M. Ignatieff, ‘State, civil society and total institutions: a critique of recent social histories of punishment’, in S. Cohen & A. Scull (eds.), *Social control and the state* (Oxford: Martin Robertson, 1983), 75–105:94–95.

³⁴ Bailey, ‘English prisons’, 305.

³⁵ Ignatieff, 77.

directly responsible for retaining social order or dealing with criminal behaviour.³⁶

Criminal justice legislation may originate with the state, but local agencies, decentralised both ideologically and practically when responding to contemporary local issues and concerns, play a significant role in crime control and prevention. As Morris has noted, historically criminal justice was always ‘locally organised, locally financed and locally run’.³⁷ This has been the case for both adult and young offenders. The ‘nascent youth justice system’ of the nineteenth and early twentieth century, created by a range of interested parties including politicians, businessmen, philanthropists and reformers, ‘epitomized local liberalism in that it was developed by local interests to suit local needs’, without excessive state intervention or control.³⁸ The discretionary power of the courts, which may or may not be utilised in response to local exigencies, serves to localise the picture further. The ‘room for discretion at the sharp end of policing’ also means that there is ‘no simple relationship between the elaboration of policies or objectives of Parliament, the Home Office or elsewhere, and their application on the ground’.³⁹

Irrespective of the motivations of the authorities, there still appears to have been a perceptible move away from the punitive ideologies of the Victorian period to new methodologies of ‘welfare’ and ‘reform’ in the early twentieth century.⁴⁰ The local focus of criminal justice does mean, however, that the true extent of any ‘progress in practice’ during the interwar period will remain debatable. Reform (or even the cloak of reform) may have been partially or completely absent in some places, particularly in times of crisis, supplanted by the harsh ideals of earlier retributive justice. As Godfrey

³⁶ *Ibid.*

³⁷ R. M. Morris, ‘Lies, damned lies and criminal statistics: reinterpreting the criminal statistics in England and Wales’. *Crime, History and Societies*, 5, 1 (2001), 11–127:112.

³⁸ Godfrey et al., *Young criminal lives*, 41.

³⁹ Davie, ‘Law enforcement: policies and perspectives’, 273.

⁴⁰ Godfrey & Lawrence, *Crime and justice*, 83–84.

and Lawrence have noted, ‘there are always interesting variations in sentencing practices in different areas of the country’.⁴¹ Brown’s research into the Dartmoor Prison riot of 1932 and its impact on contemporary perceptions of incarceration as punishment has tested ‘the reformatory rhetoric of the period’, questioning its practical application in penal institutions during the interwar years.⁴² Bailey has also challenged the idea that progressive attitudes permeated the whole ‘penal complex’ during this period, claiming instead that positive structural transformations in the prison system have often been ‘exaggerated’.⁴³ In fact, the ‘pace of progress in humanizing prisons was glacial’.⁴⁴ Perhaps more importantly, incarceration remained a ‘mainstay of the criminal justice system’ in the early decades of the twentieth century, even though there was a decline in the overall prison population.⁴⁵ Pearson has also warned against retrospectively viewing the interwar period as a ‘golden age’ for law and order, citing continuities of pre- and post-Second World War attitudes and concerns, particularly in relation to moral decline and the rise of juvenile delinquency.⁴⁶ That said, he does recognise that there existed in society a ‘surprising permissiveness’ with regards to crime and criminality and an ‘unusual degree of sympathy towards offenders’.⁴⁷ This is exemplified by the absence of any high-profile law-and-order campaigns on the key crime-related issues of the day, such as the significant increases in the number of breaking-in offences and incidents of street robbery.⁴⁸

This thesis argues that a number of external factors, which exerted pressures on local authorities, the police and the courts, would have no doubt created disparities of

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 91.

⁴² Brown, *Inter-war penal policy*, 144.

⁴³ Bailey, ‘English prisons’, 293.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 322.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 318.

⁴⁶ G. Pearson, *Hooligan: a history of respectable fears* (Basingstoke: The Macmillan Press Ltd, 1983), 25–48.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 34–35.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 35.

responses across the country, both ideological and practical. There was a whole range of turbulent events and profound problems that had the potential to impact on attitudes to crime in the interwar period. The historical reality here is that these events and crises would have had varying degrees of influence across different towns and cities. Consequently, this makes it difficult to present an overarching narrative of the development of crime in the period, and questions the accuracy of some of the existing accounts of crime between the wars, where the primacy of penal policy and the belief in the development of more enlightened attitudes to offenders and criminal justice have often shaped our understanding of contemporary reactions to crime. Just as is the case for the interwar period as a whole, it may be preferable to view crime and reactions/responses to offending as a set of diverse, local histories, each with its own distinct characteristics and intricacies. This is borne out by this current study, which centres on Hull and East Yorkshire and charts responses at a city and regional level, evaluating the impact of a whole range of social, political and economic factors on purportedly new directions and attitudes to crime and criminal justice. The aim is to offer a more nuanced interpretation of reactions to crime and criminality, beyond generalisations that are often fashioned from national surveys or ideologically and policy-centred examinations. It goes further by arguing that it may in fact be necessary to develop a set of histories within histories in order to chart an accurate account of the incredibly diverse reactions to crime during the interwar years.

In Hull and East Yorkshire, it appears to have been a complex period marked by continuity and change, one that witnessed both reaction and reform. It supports those authors who have questioned the extent to which reforming ideals permeated society during the interwar years, highlighting continuities of ideology and practice in dealing with offenders at a local level. Here it appears that regional exigencies and what Bailey

has called a ‘civic consciousness’ often influenced and guided responses from local officials, including magistrates, prison chiefs and the police.⁴⁹ In these circumstances, classical notions of punishment and justice remained part of the local crime discourse, viewed positively as an effective means of dealing with the growing problems of criminality; an antidote, perhaps, to the prevailing liberal and progressive attitudes that were seen by many to be failing society. Long established perceptions of offenders, which reflected earlier nineteenth century attitudes rather than purportedly more modern, scientific methodologies and approaches, also remained a key component in discussions and debates around crime and criminality, although, as in their original incarnations, the terminology remained far from clear and unambiguous. However, this thesis also recognises that a shift in attitudes did take place during this period, where reform and rehabilitation challenged retaliation and retribution for primacy in both criminal justice discourses and practice, and this became a prominent feature of debates in Hull and East Yorkshire. Again, these responses were often influenced by local issues and concerns, as well as the ideological transformations that were taking place across wider society, which placed welfare at the heart of criminal justice, even if it appears that, locally at least, these transformations had limited impact on actual perceptions of offenders.

Consequently, the result is rather a mixed bag, where local responses appear to both endorse and challenge many of the existing accounts of the interwar period, to varying degrees and under a range of circumstances. Moreover, and perhaps most significantly, there appears to have been a distinct lack of coherency to local reactions throughout the period, with very little agreement on how best to deal with the pertinent crime issues of the day. The only certainty is that crime remained an issue for the

⁴⁹ Bailey, ‘English prisons’, 323.

authorities throughout the period, amplified by the social, political and economic specificities of the region. This is the ‘historical reality’ that is often masked by metanarratives or generalised accounts that promote one set of responses, be it in a positivist tradition or one that highlights continuities of practice or ideology, significantly above the other. While this absence of clarity may be an inconvenient truth for historians wanting to present tidy generalisations about the interwar years, these complex, contradictory, inconsistent and at times seemingly incongruous responses to crime and criminality nevertheless remained key constituents of the local narrative in Hull and East Yorkshire.

In reviewing the literature for this study, six common crime or crime-related issues/themes were identified as being present in Britain between the years 1919 and 1939. Stevenson may be correct when he states that the main social, political and economic crises of the interwar years appear to have had a modest impact on actual crime levels.⁵⁰ However, this thesis argues that they were, to varying degrees, crisis narratives during the period, which had the potential to increase fears and anxieties about criminality, and in turn affect perceptions of, and reactions to, crime. The six themes are:

1. Anxieties about the brutalization of returning soldiers from the First World War and their alleged new-found propensity for criminal behaviour.
2. The deteriorating economic situation in the 1920s, culminating in the years of depression, alongside rising poverty and increasing unemployment, leading to postulations about their cumulative impact on levels of criminality.

⁵⁰ Stevenson, *British society 1914–1945*, 372.

3. Escalating fears over the perceived degenerative qualities and characteristics of society's 'undesirables', compounded by contemporary concerns over unequal levels of fecundity between the respectable and the 'rough'.
4. The politicisation of the working classes during the 1920s and 1930s and associated threats to public order.
5. Deteriorating behavioural issues among the country's youth and rising fears of a growth in juvenile delinquency.
6. Concerns over the increased mobility of the criminal and the growing number of traffic offences on the country's roads.

Utilising a range of sources (full details of which can be found in the next chapter), local reactions to these themes were tested and evaluated in a bid to develop a more detailed, grass roots history of crime and criminality in this period. Fundamentally, all of the themes provoked genuine concern among the press, the public, the police, the courts, and the local authorities in Hull and East Yorkshire, which precipitated a wide range of responses, both positive and negative. Further evaluations of local reactions to crime in general, including responses to everyday offending and more serious transgressions, have helped to complete the picture, as have evaluations of reactions from further afield and within a national context.

Reactions to crime and the criminal

The above list is, of course, not exhaustive but is instead a set of circumstances and issues that have been frequently identified by researchers working in this field as having the potential to impact on the incidence of, and reactions to, crime during the interwar period. More importantly, this thesis argues that these elements had the

capability, due to their seriousness, to heighten anxieties about criminality and may even have the potential to become what have been called ‘moral panics’ among the local population. This notion of a moral panic is one that has been well used and well researched by historians, sociologists and criminologists alike. In his seminal work on the subject, *Folk Devils and Moral Panic*, Cohen outlined the basic principles and the fundamental idea of a moral panic, stating that:

Societies appear to be subject, every now and then, to periods of moral panic. A condition, episode, person or group of persons emerges to become defined as a threat to societal values and interests; its nature is presented in a stylized and stereotypical fashion by the mass media; the moral barricades are manned by editors, bishops, politicians and other right-thinking people; socially accredited experts pronounce their diagnoses and solutions; ways of coping are evolved or (more often) resorted to; the condition then disappears, submerges or deteriorates and becomes more visible.⁵¹

Crucially, these panics often shape perceptions of crime and the criminal and may precipitate punitive action against those individuals or groups that have been identified as ‘folk devils’ by the members of society most threatened by perceived deviant behaviour. According to Young, these mostly occur when the ruling elite’s hegemony is endangered or in crisis.⁵² A society that is experiencing a period of fundamental and distressing transformation is also much more conducive to the appearance of moral panics.⁵³ The industrialising nineteenth century was, of course, subject to such transformative societal changes. It could be argued that so too was the tumultuous interwar period in Britain, with its damaging social, political and economic upheavals, which affected most parts of the country, including Hull and East Yorkshire (more will be said on this in Chapter 1).

⁵¹ S. Cohen, *Folk devils and moral panics*, 3rd edition (Abingdon: Routledge, 2011), 1.

⁵² J. Young, ‘Moral panic: its origins in resistance, resentment and the translation of fantasy into reality’, *British Journal of Criminology*, 49, 1 (2009), 4–16:13.

⁵³ K. Thompson, *Moral panics* (London: Routledge, 1998), 8.

The moral panic concept is not without its problems. Why some societies in certain eras are more susceptible to panics remains, as Jewkes states, ‘debatable’.⁵⁴ There is also the issue about how long a moral panic should last to be worthy of the title.⁵⁵ What is deemed ‘moral’ to one group of people and not to another introduces further subjectivity into the terminology.⁵⁶ Moreover, it could be argued that, once again, there appears to be an element of social reductionism in this approach, with the interests of the ruling classes homogenised and set against a defined deviant group, ignoring the complexities and specificities of potential influencers such as local politics, local demographics, the nature of the local press, and the characteristics and administration of local criminal justice. A further controversy in moral panic theory is the idea of disproportionality – that is, a general view that there are many more individuals involved in the deviant behaviour than actually is the case, and that the reactions and responses to the perceived crisis appears to be ‘out of all proportion to the actual threat’.⁵⁷ This presents a key problem for moral panic theorists: how is it possible to establish what a disproportionate response to a perceived threat is if the actual size of the threat is not known. For both Davis and Sindall, the reactions to the London garrotting panics in the mid-nineteenth century exhibited all the key elements of a classic moral panic.⁵⁸ Davis’ work has, however, come under attack for attempting to attribute such a panic to these events in the capital. Stevenson has claimed that statistical trends reveal an ‘upsurge in violent crime up to one year before the onset of

⁵⁴ Y. Jewkes, *Media and crime* (London: Sage Publications, 2004), 73.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 76.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 77–78.

⁵⁷ E. Goode & N. Ben-Yehuda, *Moral panics: the social construction of deviance* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers Ltd, 2002), 82; J. Springhall, *Youth, popular culture and moral panics* (London: Macmillan Press, 1998), 4–5.

⁵⁸ J. Davis, ‘The London garrotting panic of 1862: a moral panic and the creation of a criminal class in mid-Victorian England’, in V. A. C. Gatrell, B. Lenman, & G. Parker (eds.), *Crime and the law: the social history of crime in Western Europe since 1500* (London: Europa Publications, 1980), 190–213; R. Sindall, ‘The London garrotting panics of 1856 and 1862’. *Social History*, 12, 3 (1987), 351–359; 351.

the ‘moral panic’ of 1862’.⁵⁹ So in this sense, some of the responses that followed, however seemingly draconian or punitive, may have been allied to growing fears around increases in violent crime during this period.

Criticisms of moral panic theory on the basis that it deals primarily in exaggeration rather than empirical reality need not be detrimental, as it is not the purpose of this study to determine whether a particular threat was amplified beyond reality in a specific region of Britain during the interwar period.⁶⁰ Moreover, although the multimedia characteristics of the modern world has facilitated a reciprocity of messages and influence between so-called folk devils and the ruling authorities, which in turn may have diminished the significance of the concept, it does remain relevant for the period under examination in this study, when the print media, both local and national, had a huge amount of control over the information about crime.⁶¹ Objections based on the imprecise definitional boundaries of the term are also not injurious to this study. Some of the key indicators of moral panics do however provide a useful theoretical framework for contextualising local reactions to crime in this period. As noted earlier, it has been claimed that these forms of panics can result in calls for the introduction of punitive measures against perceived offenders. Cohen’s folk devils were the ‘dangerous’ youths involved in the clashes between mods and rockers in the 1960s. In the aftermath of the panics, Cohen claims that the police displayed a range of extreme responses including ‘a suspension of principles such as neutral enforcement of justice and the respect for individual liberty’.⁶² In reaction to the London garrotting

⁵⁹ S. J. Stevenson, ‘The ‘habitual criminal’ in nineteenth-century England: some observations on the figures’. *Urban History Yearbook*, 13 (1986), 37–49:38.

⁶⁰ T. Newburn, *Criminology* (Abingdon: Willan Publishing, 2007), 99–100.

⁶¹ C. Williamson, ‘‘Hope I die before I get old’: social rebellion and social diseases’, in D. Nash & A. Kilday (eds.), *Murder and mayhem: crime in twentieth-century Britain* (Palgrave: London, 2018), 177–211:179.

⁶² Cohen, *Folk devils*, 100.

panics 100 years earlier, the police initiated new observation practices, targeting certain groups in society and arresting many more ‘suspicious characters and reputed thieves’.⁶³ In an attempt to deal with the garrotting panic, the judiciary reacted with castigatory sentences, often facilitated by a redefining of minor crimes to more serious offences.⁶⁴ Political and legislative responses proved to be more far-reaching. Davis claims that the passing of the Habitual Criminals Act of 1869, which introduced a seven-year period of police supervision for felons receiving a second conviction, was in part a result of the panic.⁶⁵ King adds the 1865 Prisons Act and the reintroduction of flogging to the list of legislative responses.⁶⁶ Sindall goes further, claiming that, in addition to the Prisons Act, the Penal Servitude Act 1864 and the Security from Violence Act 1863 were also introduced as part of the response to the panics.⁶⁷

While there may not have been comparable legislative reactions to crime in the interwar period, this study will show that, locally at least, anxieties could still precipitate calls for more punitive measures to deal with what were deemed to be dangerous acts of criminality from certain groups. This meant that nineteenth-century notions of retaliation and retribution remained part of local discourses on crime and criminality, alongside, but often at odds with, the more enlightened and progressive ideals. Emsley has recognised the existence of this duality of ideals during periods of purported ‘welfarism’, such as the interwar years. While discussing Rutherford’s concept of the three ‘credos’, which define the values and beliefs of criminal justice practitioners – punitive, pragmatic or liberal/humanitarian – Emsley acknowledges that

⁶³ P. King, ‘Moral panics and violent street crime 1750–2000: a comparative perspective’, in B. Godfrey, C. Emsley, & G. Dunstall (eds.), *Comparative histories of crime* (Devon: Willan Publishing, 2003), 53–71:56.

⁶⁴ Cohen, *Folk devils*, 112; Sindall, ‘The London garrotting panics of 1856 and 1862’, 352–357; King, ‘Moral panics and violent street crime’, 56.

⁶⁵ Davis, ‘The London garrotting panic of 1862’, 209–210.

⁶⁶ King, ‘Moral panics and violent street crime’, 57.

⁶⁷ Sindall, ‘The London garrotting panics of 1856 and 1862’, 357.

the retributive element of criminal justice can survive, but in a more ‘muted’ fashion.⁶⁸ However, as the subsequent chapters will reveal, in times of crisis in Hull and East Yorkshire, and, interestingly, even during more tranquil periods, this retributive element was far from ‘muted’, regularly challenging the purportedly new orthodoxy of reform.

Targeting the criminal class

Arguably, the folk devils during the garotting panics, and for much of the nineteenth century, were members of what was perceived to be a ‘criminal class’ – a group or section of society, residing at the bottom of the social strata and living off the proceeds of criminality. Most crime historians agree that the idea of a criminal class became centralised in narratives of criminality back in the nineteenth century, with increases in crime in the rapidly industrialising and urbanising towns of England attributed to the criminal activities of a morally distinct class of people who posed a threat to the economic and social infrastructure of civilised society. While some historians, such as McGowan, have claimed that the origins of a criminal class actually dates as far back as the sixteenth century, the nineteenth century, and particularly the mid-nineteenth century, appears to be the high point of what Godfrey et al have termed the ‘othering’ process – where a group of perceived criminals were defined as a class apart from respectable society.⁶⁹ It is a period that has been characterised as one where elite anxieties about this perceived class of criminals ‘dominated discussions of crime and

⁶⁸ Emsley, *Crime and society in twentieth-century England*, 9–10; A. Rutherford, *Criminal justice and the pursuit of decency* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), 3.

⁶⁹ R. McGowan, ‘Getting to know the criminal class in nineteenth-century England’. *Nineteenth Century Contexts*, 14, 1 (1990), 33–54:34; B. S. Godfrey et al., *History and crime* (London: Sage Publications, 2008), 12.

criminality and reshaped the criminal justice policies' of governments across Western Europe.⁷⁰

Who were these alleged recidivists? Credible definitions based on empirical evidence and beyond inflammatory generalisations and negative depictions often found in contemporary publications are difficult to come by. Although crime statistics had become entrenched within the political discourse and law enforcement agenda of the nineteenth century (statistics which may have precipitated such negative stereotyping and classification), there was a dearth of evidence to defend the proposition that a criminal class actually existed. What appears certain is that, as Stanford states, most social commentators and law enforcement agencies of the period agreed that the 'vast majority of its members originated from the working class'.⁷¹ That is not to say that *all* members of the working class were routinely attributed with criminal characteristics and an associated deficiency of morals. The criminal classes were regularly seen as inhabiting a sub-stratum of this class, where members could be differentiated by their perceived levels of respectability or criminality.⁷² As Stedman Jones and Gatrell have both suggested, there was also a fluidity and at times an ethereal quality to these definitions and boundaries, which could be further blurred during periods of crises within society, leaving the working class as a whole vulnerable to intensified periods of vilification from all those groups sitting above them in the social strata.⁷³

⁷⁰ H. Boritch, 'The criminal class revisited: recidivism and punishment in Ontario, 1871–1920'. *Social Science History*, 29, 1 (2005), 137–170:137.

⁷¹ T. G Stanford, *The Metropolitan Police 1850–1914: targeting, harassment and the creation of a criminal class*. PhD thesis (University of Huddersfield, September 2007), 28.

⁷² C. Emsley, *Crime and society in England 1750–1900*, 2nd edition (Harlow: Longman Group Limited, 1996), 65.

⁷³ G. S. Jones, 'The threat of outcast London', in M. Fitzgerald, G. McLennan, & J. Pawson (eds.), *Crime and society: readings in history and theory* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1994), 173–188:177; V. A. C. Gatrell, 'Crime, authority and the policeman-state', in F. M. L. Thompson (ed.), *The Cambridge social history of Britain 1750–1950, volume 3: social agencies and institutions* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 243–310:303.

By the 1880s, it is claimed that the concept of the criminal class began to make way for seemingly more modern forms of classification. This was part of a new discourse that posited biological explanations, including heredity, for criminality and focused on notions of the degenerative characteristics of industrialisation and urbanisation using the work of Lombroso and other studies within nascent criminology.⁷⁴ The use of psychiatry and examinations into human behaviour also began to inform policy makers and criminal justice practitioners as the focus shifted away from the activities of the group or class to the constituents of the individual.⁷⁵ By the 1920s, a ‘medicalised’ approach to crime and criminality became the dominant discourse, one in which both morality and politics had been removed and replaced with the ‘politically neutral vocabulary of medical science and pathology’.⁷⁶ These new approaches not only precipitated shifts in the way offenders were dealt with but also in how they were perceived and identified. New terminology, such as the ‘residuum’, became part of the language describing the group or class deemed responsible for undesirable or criminal behaviour.⁷⁷ As Marwick has noted, social welfare was one element that helped shift this focus away from the concept of a ‘submerged class’, and the notion almost vanished from ‘academic’ discussions of this period of British history.⁷⁸ Nevertheless, the primary target appears to have remained ostensibly static, although an extension of the classificatory boundary could now comfortably incorporate not only recidivists and hardened criminals but also the ‘economically

⁷⁴ H. Johnston, *Crime in England 1815–1880: experiencing the criminal justice system* (Oxon: Routledge, 2015), 39; Godfrey et al., *History and crime*, 87; Rose, *The struggle for penal reform*, 93.

⁷⁵ Brown, *Inter-war penal policy*, 68; Rose, *The struggle for penal reform*, 94; Emsley, *Crime and society in England 1750–1900*, 77.

⁷⁶ O’Malley, *Crime and consensus*, 44–46.

⁷⁷ Godfrey & Lawrence, *Crime and justice*, 119.

⁷⁸ A. Marwick, *Class: image and reality in Britain, France and the USA since 1930* (Glasgow: William Collins, 1981), 55.

unproductive residuum of social outcasts'.⁷⁹ These were the individuals who by 'the virtue of their inability to adapt to the realities of mature industrial capitalism were confined to poor housing, poor education, the workhouse and ultimately the prison'.⁸⁰ Members of this sub-group of the working classes also became 'unemployables' and the main constituents of the 'social problem group', the latter becoming primarily associated with the eugenics movement.⁸¹ These debates served to shift the focus even further away from the notion of the existence of a criminal class.⁸²

These were not the only terms used to identify persistent offenders or potential criminals in the final decades of the nineteenth and early parts of the twentieth century. 'Roughs' and 'hooligans' can be added to the mix, although locally, each term's definitional boundaries were far from static, as will be discussed in Chapter 5. However, crime remained the common denominator. Many crime historians and criminologists agree that the notion of a dangerous and criminal class apart has resonance.⁸³ Shortly after riots in the summer of 2011, the then Justice Secretary, Kenneth Clarke, declared that events should be seen as an 'outburst of outrageous behaviour by the criminal classes – individuals and families familiar with the justice system who haven't been changed by their past punishments'.⁸⁴ It could be argued that the panic that ensued facilitated an ideological strengthening of what was an already punitive law enforcement agenda, with a sanctioning of the use of increased force to

⁷⁹ J. MacNicol, 'In pursuit of the underclass'. *Journal of Social Policy*, 16, 3 (1987), 293–318:296.

⁸⁰ B. S. Godfrey et al., *Criminal lives: family life, employment, and offending* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 4.

⁸¹ H. Croall, *Crime and society in Britain*, 2nd edition (Essex: Pearson Education Limited, 2011), 149; MacNicol, 'In pursuit of the underclass', 297.

⁸² B. Godfrey, *Crime in England 1880–1945: the rough and the criminal, the policed and the incarcerated* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2013), 149.

⁸³ See J. A. Sharpe, *Crime in early modern England 1550–1750*, 2nd edition (London: Longman, 1999), 173; D. Melossi, 'Changing representations of the criminal'. *British Journal of Criminology*, 40, 2 (2000), 296–320:310; Emsley, *Crime and society in England 1750–1900*, 173.

⁸⁴ P. Lewis et al., 'Kenneth Clarke blames English riots on a 'broken penal system'. *The Guardian*, Internet edition. 5 September 2011. Available online: <https://www.theguardian.com/uk/2011/sep/05/kenneth-clarke-riots-penal-system> [Accessed 27/1/2014].

deal with the perpetrators in the form of baton rounds and water cannons and draconian sentences handed out to those appearing before the courts.⁸⁵ The criminal classes were once again part of the narrative.

A simple search through recent Hansard archives reveals that the concept has actually appeared many times in recent years in relation to other crime-related issues.⁸⁶ It seems that the terminology has remained a convenient shorthand for pitting the respectable middle classes against the dangerous and criminal working classes in the years after its heyday of the mid-nineteenth century. As Godfrey et al found in their research into persistent offenders in Crewe, which covered the interwar years, the ‘idea of a hard core group of criminals plaguing society then, as now, is a hard one to shake off’.⁸⁷ It may then be better to conclude, as Gatrell and Tobias appear to do, that, irrespective of the development of an arguably more sophisticated terminology, we are in fact still dealing with the same entity – a perceived class or sub-group from within the working class that have always, through their criminal behaviour and alleged moral deficiencies, posed a threat to ‘respectable’ society.⁸⁸

Irrespective of any actual terminological shift, the notion of a dangerous class apart can still be used to vindicate the nature of the response to the threat posed by such groups in society – responses that are at times punitive but viewed contemporaneously as necessary to address this perceived threat. For instance, the belief in the existence of a criminal class of repeat offenders precipitated the implementation of restrictive legislation in the form of the Habitual Criminals Act 1869 and the Prevention of Crime

⁸⁵ S. Reicher & C. Stott, *Mad mobs and Englishmen? Myths and realities of the 2011 riots*, Kindle version. (London: Constable & Robinson Ltd, 2011), chapter 1, section ‘A parliamentary consensus’, para. 5. [Downloaded 27/1/14].

⁸⁶ For examples, see HC Deb 4 July 2003, vol 408, col 651; HC Deb 20 November 2000, vol 357, col 7; HC Deb 28 July 2000, vol 354, col 1445.

⁸⁷ Godfrey et al., *Criminal lives*, 73.

⁸⁸ Gatrell, ‘Crime, authority and the policeman-state’, 254, J. J. Tobias, *Nineteenth-century crime: prevention and punishment* (Newton Abbot: David & Charles, 1972), 29.

Act 1871.⁸⁹ At street level, these perceptions were also likely to influence police policy when targeting potential offenders.⁹⁰ They would have had an effect on the magistrates and judges, who were exposed to the frequent and negative representations from politicians and the media alike.⁹¹ Moreover, did it really matter whether these representations – be it the criminal class, unemployables, residuum or social problem group – were factual or simply political or media constructs? Or was it instead the ‘popular belief in its existence that fuelled so much of the debate and the resultant actions in the field of crime and punishment’?⁹² It appears on the face of it that these perceptions, while based in myth, were no doubt real in themselves, apparently sanctioning the ‘extreme measures’ taken to deal with this perceived problem group in society.⁹³ Terminology aside, it would be safe to assume that ‘underlying assumptions and misconceptions about crime and criminals’ are ever present and ‘colour both political and public discourses’.⁹⁴

Due to its historical origins, much of the detailed research into the perceived criminal class has focused on nineteenth-century incarnations. Less has been said about the use of the concept or that of a class apart in definitions and reactions to crime and criminality in the first half of the twentieth century. This study has examined these class-based perceptions within the aforementioned themes and as part of the overall analysis of local reactions to crime and criminality. One of the key aims has been to try to identify whether the concept of the criminal class and associated criminalisation of the working classes (or subsections) persisted within political and social narratives, at a

⁸⁹ Godfrey & Lawrence, *Crime and justice*, 116.

⁹⁰ Taylor, *The politics of crime in interwar England and Wales*, 122 & 125.

⁹¹ C. Emsley, *Crime, police, and penal policy: European experiences 1750–1940* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 200.

⁹² Godfrey et al., *Criminal lives*, 73.

⁹³ McGowan, ‘Getting to know the criminal class’, 47.

⁹⁴ D. J. Cox et al., ‘Persistent offenders in the north west of England, 1880–1940: some critical research questions’. *Crimes and Misdemeanours*, 1, 1 (2007), 69–89:86–87. Available online: <http://www.lawcrimehistory.org/journalVol1Issue1.htm> [Accessed 26/10/2013].

local level, during the particularly challenging interwar period. It has tried to locate this within the purportedly new ideological framework of this period. So if there was a shift in terminology, was this an apt reflection of the new progressive agenda of the interwar years, where the influence of Social Darwinism and the medicalisation of criminality became central to understanding deviant behaviours? Or was there a continuation of broadly held perceptions of class-based criminality, heightened during periods of social and economic crises and used to demonstrate that most crime is ‘something committed on law-abiding citizens by an alien group’?⁹⁵

Crime-related crisis narratives of the interwar years

It may be that the reasons why there has been limited research into the evolution of the concept of the criminal class are similar to the reasons why there has been much less research into reactions to crime and criminality in the early decades of the twentieth century. Developments in the criminal justice system have naturally become a focus for researchers, but just how far social, political and economic factors influenced responses to crime and criminality, especially at a local level, has received much less attention. As already noted, the review of literature for this study has uncovered a significant amount of research into the many social, political and economic aspects of interwar history that were directly or indirectly related to crime. As Wiener has contested, discourses around these kinds of elements should be positioned and evaluated as integral parts of the development of the criminal policy framework, influencing and shaping each other rather than existing in isolation as separate, self-contained entities.⁹⁶ It also goes beyond simple policymaking. These elements are key influencers in how

⁹⁵ Emsley, *Crime and society in England 1750–1900*, 173.

⁹⁶ M. J. Wiener, ‘The march of penal progress?’. *Journal of British Studies*, 26, 1 (1987), 83–96.

crime is perceived and in the subsequent practical application of criminal justice policy. As stated earlier, these aspects influenced the development of the thematic approach of this thesis, the ideas and theories of which (detailed below) were tested as part of the core evaluations.

1. The aftermath of war

The devastating and destructive effects of an international conflict on the scale of the First World War left the belligerents with scars that took many years to heal. By 1921, 1,187,450 British men were receiving pensions for disabilities, both mental and physical, sustained during the First World War.⁹⁷ When combined with the physical and psychological impact of the loss of around 745,000 men, it is not surprising then that a conflict of this magnitude would transform the social, economic and political characteristics of a whole nation.⁹⁸ It can also change the key characteristics of those individuals who fought in the bloody battles or were subjected to the dehumanising and brutalizing effects of the war. According to Lawrence, 'Britain after the First World War was a nation haunted by the fear that violence had slipped its chains.'⁹⁹ There was a view that the war had damaged some ex-servicemen irreparably, leaving them brutalized and devoid of the morals and ethics that had once set them apart as honest Englishmen. These were, the theory goes, men who had faced unimaginable acts of violence during the war years and were now desensitised to this violence. Trained in the use of firearms and with no jobs or little else to occupy their time, they would, it was believed, inevitably turn to crime, both violent and petty, to make ends meet and

⁹⁷ C. Wrigley, 'The impact of the First World War', in C. Wrigley (ed.), *A companion to early twentieth-century Britain* (Chichester: Blackwell Publishing, 2009), 502–516:512.

⁹⁸ A. Marwick, *The deluge*, 2nd edition (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), 330.

⁹⁹ J. Lawrence, 'Forging a peaceable kingdom: war, violence, and fear of brutalization in post-First World War Britain'. *The Journal of Modern History*, 75, 3 (2003), 557–589:557.

stimulate their bodies and minds.¹⁰⁰ The introductions to the annual crime statistics discussed these kinds of causal relationships between conflict and criminality, and so did some magistrates presiding over cases involving former soldiers.¹⁰¹ Moreover, many soldiers believed that, in return for the incredible sacrifices they had made during the war, the nation had a duty to meet their social and economic needs in its aftermath. If this did not happen then ‘they would take for themselves’.¹⁰²

These fears were widespread and continued well into the 1920s.¹⁰³ They also went beyond the criminal, raising fears about whether the brutalizing effects of war also threatened the nation’s peace and existing social order.¹⁰⁴ The shocking nature of this issue resulted in the press running stories on the criminal actions and behaviour of ex-servicemen. While there is evidence to show that in 1919 ‘bloody riots’ involving former soldiers gripped many towns and cities across the country, and that by 1921, 9,580 former soldiers were committed to prison, the focus on the new, criminalised ex-serviceman was more likely to have been part of the sensationalism inherent in newspaper reporting.¹⁰⁵ The reports often ‘focused on the part played by servicemen not because they predominated within the crowd but because it was genuinely shocking that they should be there at all’.¹⁰⁶ In the end, the notion that the First World War had

¹⁰⁰ C. Emsley, *The Great British bobby* (London: Quercus, 2010), 15; C. Emsley, ‘Violent crime in England in 1919: post-war anxieties and press narratives’. *Continuity and Change*, 23, 1 (2008), 173–195:173.

¹⁰¹ C. Emsley, *Soldier, sailor, beggarman, thief: crime and the British armed services since 1914* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 167 & 163.

¹⁰² H. Mannheim, *Social aspects of crime in England between the wars* (London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd, 1940), 113.

¹⁰³ H. Shore, ‘Criminality and Englishness in the aftermath: the Racecourse Wars of the 1920s’. *Twentieth Century British History*, 22, 4 (2011), 474–497:489.

¹⁰⁴ Lawrence, ‘Forging a peaceable kingdom’, 557.

¹⁰⁵ Lawrence, ‘Forging a peaceable kingdom’, 557; Mannheim, *Social aspects of crime in England*, 110;

C. Emsley, *Soldier, sailor, beggarman, thief*, 160.

¹⁰⁶ Lawrence, ‘Forging a peaceable kingdom’, 567.

criminalised former soldiers does not appear to be supported by the evidence to hand.¹⁰⁷

Truth and hard facts are not a prerequisite for generating panics. However, although the brutalized ex-servicemen, with an alleged proclivity for criminality, did provide the middle classes with another ‘folk devil’ and the potential for a full-blown moral panic, no nationwide panic occurred.¹⁰⁸ In fact, ‘the anticipated crime wave of returning soldiers desperate for material goods, brutalized by warfare, and prepared to use guns smuggled home from the front, was a damp squib’.¹⁰⁹ Moral panic or no moral panic, and whether fuelled by press reports or actual incidents, the authorities appeared to initiate responses to the perceived crisis by targeting ex-servicemen in police campaigns and introducing legislation, such as The Firearms Act of 1920, which were ostensibly aimed at quelling fears (which were very real) about the criminalised armed and dangerous ex-soldier roaming the nation’s towns and cities.¹¹⁰ With regards to the alleged criminal activities of former soldiers, the primary perpetrators were more likely to have been ordinary ‘tommies’ rather than elite soldiers or the officer class.¹¹¹ Lawrence goes as far as claiming that one of the striking features of the debates surrounding the brutalization of the First World War soldier was its ‘class overtones’.¹¹²

¹⁰⁷ Shore, ‘Criminality and Englishness’, 492; Emsley, *Soldier, sailor, beggarman, thief*, 160 & 173.

¹⁰⁸ Shore, ‘Criminality and Englishness’, 478; Emsley ‘Violent crime in England’, 174.

¹⁰⁹ Godfrey, *Crime in England 1880–1945*, 130.

¹¹⁰ Emsley, *Soldier, sailor, beggarman, thief*, 162–164; Shore, ‘Criminality and Englishness’, 478 & 493; Lawrence, ‘Forging a peaceable kingdom’, 562.

¹¹¹ Shore, ‘Criminality and Englishness’, 489.

¹¹² Lawrence, ‘Forging a peaceable kingdom’, 559.

2. The society and economy of interwar Britain

The 21-year period between the two World Wars has sometimes been characterised as one of capitalism in crisis. The decline of the staple industries of shipbuilding, coal, cotton, engineering, transport, iron and steel, alongside increases in unemployment, breakdowns in industrial relations, the crash of 1929, and the years of depression, all serve to present a bleak picture of interwar Britain.¹¹³ Unemployment levels remained relatively high throughout the period, with an average of just over 14% of the insured workforce without a job.¹¹⁴ A more balanced portrait of the period may pitch severe economic slumps and burgeoning unemployment against periods of recovery (however limited) and increases in incomes, living standards and leisure opportunities.¹¹⁵ However, contemporary perceptions of this period would have been shaped by local circumstances and relative experiences of hardship and deprivation. Constantine and Aldcroft have noted that the severity of the crisis, and the impact on unemployment levels, varied widely across the regions.¹¹⁶ So while employment actually increased in London, the southeast and the midlands, the rest of the country, and particularly northern towns and cities, were home to much higher levels of the jobless.¹¹⁷ The situation appeared dependent on the specific industrial characteristics of the region, particularly relating to export trade.¹¹⁸ Consequently, the prevailing economic conditions and high levels of unemployment remained a major concern for both

¹¹³ A. Mason, *The General Strike in the north east* (Hull: The University of Hull Publications, 1970), 2; S. Constantine, *Unemployment in Britain between the wars* (Essex: Longman Group Ltd, 1980), 2.

¹¹⁴ K. D. Brown, 'Industry and services: employment and unemployment', in C. Wrigley (ed.), *A companion to early twentieth-century Britain* (Chichester: Blackwell Publishing, 2009), 302–318:311.

¹¹⁵ D. H. Aldcroft, *The inter-war economy: Britain, 1919–1939* (London: B. T. Batsford Ltd, 1973), 375; E. Hopkins, *A social history of the English working classes 1815–1945* (London: Edward Arnold Ltd, 1979), 253–256.

¹¹⁶ Constantine, *Unemployment in Britain*, 18; Aldcroft, *The inter-war economy*, 79.

¹¹⁷ Aldcroft, *The inter-war economy*, 79.

¹¹⁸ J. Stevenson & C. Cook, *The slump* (London: Quartet Books Limited, 1979), 56.

successive governments and local authorities in the hardest-hit towns and cities during this period.

Of relevance to this study is the claim that ‘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’.¹¹⁹ These anxieties were likely to have been heightened in those regions most affected by industrial decline and economic depression. In the research carried out for his study of elite perceptions of crime in Sheffield during the 1920s, O’Malley found that reports from the local Quarter Sessions and police courts suggest that there was a general acceptance of a link between unemployment and crime.¹²⁰ Similar observations were detectable in north-eastern towns severely affected by the depression.¹²¹ Writing in 1940, Mannheim had come to the same conclusions, claiming that ‘economic factors in the causation of crime’ had become ‘generally accepted’, although the relationship fluctuated in intensity from district to district.¹²² This was believed to be the case even though there had been little in the way of a ‘systematic or statistically valid analysis of the relationship between unemployment’ and the backgrounds of those who found themselves without work during this period.¹²³ An examination of the crime statistics for the period between 1929 and 1932, which saw unemployment levels reach their peak, also reveals that rates of serious property crime doubled between these years.¹²⁴

The economic crises and cyclical slumps would have adversely affected the lower stratum of society, whose livelihood relied upon employment in those industries

¹¹⁹ O’Malley, *Crime and consensus*, 62.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*, 190.

¹²¹ K. Nicholas, *The social effects of unemployment in Teesside* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1986), 104.

¹²² Mannheim, *Social aspects of crime in England*, 123 & 147.

¹²³ Brown, ‘Industry and services’, 306.

¹²⁴ L. Williams & B. Godfrey, ‘Serious property offending in the twentieth century’, in D. Nash & A. Kilday (eds.), *Murder and mayhem: crime in twentieth-century Britain* (Palgrave: London, 2018), 65–89:69.

most damaged by years of decline. In towns and cities across the country, 15% to 20% of the working-class population were living below subsistence level.¹²⁵ Even as early as the 1920s, a class of ‘unemployables’ were believed to have existed in society.¹²⁶ As more and more of these individuals came into contact with the police and passed through the courts, the focus on this group or class is likely to have intensified. Muncie argues that rising crime in this period was ‘laid firmly at the door of the working-class families’.¹²⁷ Moreover, concerns over recidivism were back on the agenda, sometimes reflecting contemporary views about the relationship between crime and poverty, at other times revisiting stereotypical nineteenth-century perceptions of the alluring and influential nature of criminal networks and associations.¹²⁸ Mannheim believed that for the man with previous criminal convictions, episodes of high unemployment proved particularly painful, as he was ‘not only the first to lose his job in periods of depression but also the first to turn to crime during a spell of unemployment’.¹²⁹

Just as Ager found in his study into links between crime and poverty in several urban and rural districts of nineteenth-century England, the picture is ‘extremely complex’ and was coloured by the social, economic, political and geographical specificities of each region, which in turn precipitated the adoption of a ‘wide range of strategies’, including crime, to supplement the earnings of the local population during periods of extreme hardship.¹³⁰ However, research into the links between unemployment and crime during the interwar period has cast doubt on the validity of the claims about causal relationships. Crime did increase during the interwar period,

¹²⁵ Aldcroft, *The inter-war economy*, 377.

¹²⁶ Croall, *Crime and society in Britain*, 149.

¹²⁷ J. Muncie, *Youth and crime* (London: Sage Publications, 1999), 78.

¹²⁸ B. Godfrey & D. J. Cox, *Policing the factory: theft, private policing and the law in modern England* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2013), 28–29.

¹²⁹ Mannheim, *Social aspects of crime in England*, 151.

¹³⁰ A. W. Ager, *Crime and poverty in 19th century England: the economy of makeshifts* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2015), 131–139.

particularly in areas such as robbery, motor offences and simple thefts, but by a relatively small amount, leading Stevenson to conclude that there was ‘no clear-cut parallel between unemployment and crime’, even during the worst years of interwar depression.¹³¹ While it is accepted that a fall in living standards caused by a period of unemployment could precipitate certain levels of criminal behaviour, there appears to have been no clear correlation between crime levels and unemployment in individual towns and cities during this period.¹³² However, it could be argued that any notion of a link between unemployment and crime was likely to have been experiential rather than based on scientific methodologies or statistical analyses.¹³³ The views of those in authority would have been shaped by contemporary local and national exigencies and events, whether based on fact, fabrication or simple misconception. More importantly, their reactions and responses (punitive/retaliatory or reforming/rehabilitative) would have, to varying degrees, been influenced by these perceptions.

3. Dealing with the ‘undesirables’

Concerns over the degeneration of the British stock, compounded by a perceived proliferation of the ‘less desirable’ elements in society, can be traced back to the nineteenth century.¹³⁴ These fears continued and were heightened during the first couple of decades of the twentieth century, as reflected in the formation of the Eugenics Education Society in 1907, which was established as a means of disseminating research and information relating to heredity and, more importantly, how these could be utilised as a means of improving racial characteristics.¹³⁵ By 1914, the organisation could boast

¹³¹ Stevenson, *British society 1914–1945*, 373.

¹³² Constantine, *Unemployment in Britain*, 41.

¹³³ Godfrey & Cox, *Policing the factory*, 28.

¹³⁴ H. Prins, *Criminal behaviour* (London: Tavistock Publications, 1982), 55–56.

¹³⁵ Gardiner, *The thirties*, 212–213; The term ‘eugenics’ was first used in 1883 by Francis Galton.

a membership of 1,047 and had obtained support from many influential political groups such as the socialist organisation, the Fabian Society.¹³⁶ However, it was, once again, the huge dislocating effects of the First World War and the idea of a ‘civilization in crisis’, compounded by the recession and mass unemployment, that helped to forge a more resolute ideology based around the principles of heredity and the exploitation of key elements of Lombrosian anthropological criminology.¹³⁷ By the 1920s, a newly emergent eugenics movement, bolstered by patronage from a raft of well-respected figures including George Bernard Shaw, John Maynard Keynes and Julian Huxley, was presenting explanations as to how ‘society could be threatened by degeneracy if mentally unfit people were allowed to outbreed, normal decent citizens’.¹³⁸

Science began to play a much bigger part in analyses and explanations for criminal behaviour, with theories about the hereditary characteristics of deviancy and degeneracy now becoming part of the discourse about crime and criminality. The battle between the ‘respectable’ and ‘undesirable’ could now be fought within the scientific. As Garland notes, it was now the case that the explanation for the existence of this ‘criminalised’ class rested in the ‘natural, constitutional propensities’ of the individual members, rather than as a product of their relationship to the law or within societal group constructs.¹³⁹ That said, ‘class eugenics’ did become ‘a central motif’ within the ideological framework of eugenicist thought, in that the aim was to secure the ‘predominance of a specific social group’.¹⁴⁰ In this sense, it was the perfect vehicle for

¹³⁶ Garland, *Punishment and welfare*, 150.

¹³⁷ R. Overy, *The morbid age* (London: Penguin Books Ltd, 2009), 3 & 105; MacNicol, ‘In pursuit of the underclass’, 300; A. Raine, *The anatomy of violence: the biological roots of crime* (London: Penguin Books, 2014), 11–12.

¹³⁸ Godfrey, *Crime in England 1880–1945*, 144. For a detailed account of eugenics policies, see also G. Jones, ‘Eugenics and social policy between the wars’. *The Historical Journal*, 25, 3 (1982), 717–728.

¹³⁹ D. Garland, ‘The criminal and his science’. *The British Journal of Criminology*, 25, 2 (1985), 109–137:131.

¹⁴⁰ M. Freedon, ‘Eugenics and progressive thought: a study in ideological affinity’. *The Historical Journal*, 22, 3 (1979), 645–671:649.

the advancement of a 'distinctive aspect of 'middle-class' ideology'.¹⁴¹ The target for eugenicists were what they identified as the 'social problem group', whom they claimed made up a tenth of the country's overall population and were primarily comprised of the 'feeble-minded'.¹⁴² It was alleged that the constituent individuals had a propensity for a whole range of unsociable and undesirable acts, including crime and anti-social behaviour.

Alongside what were seemingly rational ideas, such as an encouragement to the middle classes to increase their birth rates to offset alleged discrepancies in the relative fecundity between the social groups, ran the more radical policies of birth control and sterilisation for the lower orders.¹⁴³ Overy claims that there were even calls for the state murder of undesirables, via lethal injection or gas chamber.¹⁴⁴ While government legislation of this nature was never forthcoming, a sterilisation bill was presented to the House of Commons in 1931 (subsequently rejected by the Labour Party on class prejudice grounds), and a committee was convened by the Minister of Health in 1932, which identified a quarter of a million suitable candidates for voluntary sterilisation.¹⁴⁵ It appears that, while these ideas and purported solutions to the contemporary issues of differential birth rates now appear unsavoury and extreme in the aftermath of the events of the Second World War, there was widespread support for such solutions. Freedon has stated that the findings of the health committee in 1934, which proposed voluntary sterilisation as an appropriate means of dealing with the 'unfit', received positive reactions from many MPs and the liberal press, including newspapers such as the

¹⁴¹ L. T. Ray, 'Eugenics, mental deficiency and Fabian socialism between the wars'. *Oxford Review of Education*, 9, 3 (1983), 213–222:213.

¹⁴² B. Mallet, 'The social problem group: the president's account of the society's next task'. *Eugenics Review*, 23, 3 (1931), 203–206:204–205.

¹⁴³ Jones, 'Eugenics and social policy between the wars', 719; Ray, 'Eugenics, mental deficiency and Fabian socialism', 215; Overy, *The morbid age*, 96–98 & 114.

¹⁴⁴ Overy, *The morbid age*, 115–117.

¹⁴⁵ Overy, *The morbid age*, 124–125; Gardiner, *The thirties*, 215.

Manchester Guardian and the *News Chronicle*.¹⁴⁶ These ideas were taken seriously at the time, even though the proposed solutions never received legislative approval. Could it be argued that the rather extreme nature of the proposed solutions to the problem could only have been developed within the milieu of a societal panic? Jones believes so, claiming that there was a belief at this time that a 'small minority of the hereditary inferior' who, if uncontrolled, would 'swamp' respectable society.¹⁴⁷ Moreover, the solutions, like so many of the policies aimed at dealing with certain sections in society – whether defined as the criminal classes, residuum, unemployables or social problem group – appeared 'restrictive and punitive in intent'.¹⁴⁸

4. The politicisation of the working classes

While there is little doubt that the perceived brutalization of First World War soldiers and the desperate economic situation in Britain heightened fears among the country's elite, it has been claimed that it was the increased threat posed by political and industrial unrest that 'formed the principal factor stirring middle class unease' during the interwar period.¹⁴⁹ A mounting politicisation of class antagonisms, played out in acrimonious wage disputes, strike action and high-profile hunger marches by the unemployed, all served to shake the foundations of the prevailing political and social order. Compounding these anxieties was the ever-present fear that communist agitation among the working classes could foment a revolution on the scale of Russia in 1917, invariably leading politicians, the police and the middle class to sanction and implement responses, both operational and legislative, that would quash the threat at

¹⁴⁶ Freedon, 'Eugenics and progressive thought', 667.

¹⁴⁷ Jones, 'Eugenics and social policy between the wars', 726.

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 728.

¹⁴⁹ O'Malley, *Crime and consensus*, 161.

source. It was a period characterised by the criminalisation of political dissent and all those individuals involved in such activities.¹⁵⁰

The 1920s and 1930s became the battleground for a series of ideological and physical clashes between the working classes and the authorities. According to Weinberger, the first major post-war clash took place in Whitehall in October 1920, when the police carried out a baton charge against a procession of the unemployed.¹⁵¹ A similar incident occurred at a demonstration in Liverpool in 1921 and these continued into the following decade with clashes across the country in Bristol, Manchester, Birmingham, Cardiff, Nottingham, Stoke, Wigan and London.¹⁵² Gardiner claims that by the end of 1931 more than 30 towns and cities had witnessed ‘clashes between the police and unemployed demonstrators’.¹⁵³ The violent characteristics of these confrontations caused consternation in both government circles and among political demonstrators. Accusations of class bias were also levelled at those tasked with retaining public order. This was a period of the polarisation of the political/ideological, right across Europe, purportedly delineated on class lines (the reality, of course, was markedly more complex). In their book on policing in England and Wales during this period, Laybourn and Taylor have noted this ‘obvious class bias’ in operations.¹⁵⁴ Emsley supports this claim of bias, arguing that ‘when it came to violent clashes’ ordinary Bobbies ‘found themselves fighting the political left as opposed to the political right’.¹⁵⁵ This is perhaps exemplified by events in Birkenhead

¹⁵⁰ Taylor, *The politics of crime in interwar England and Wales*, 353.

¹⁵¹ B. Weinberger, ‘Police perceptions of labour in the inter-war period: the case of the unemployed and of the miners on strike’, in F. Snyder & D. Hay (eds.), *Labour, law, and crime: an historical perspective* (London: Tavistock Publications Ltd, 1987), 150–179:152.

¹⁵² J. Morgan, *Conflict and order: the police and labour disputes in England and Wales, 1900–1939* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987), 246.

¹⁵³ Gardiner, *The thirties*, 150.

¹⁵⁴ K. Laybourn & D. Taylor, *Policing in England and Wales, 1918–1939* (Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 79.

¹⁵⁵ Emsley, *The Great British bobby*, 219.

in 1932, when police arrested hundreds of unemployed protestors and then conducted a 'reign of terror' where 'working-class areas were raided, homes broken into without warrant and their occupants, men, women and children, indiscriminately arrested'.¹⁵⁶ Added to this was the charge that fascists were dealt with more leniently than the communists during the pitched political battles of the 1930s, and that the fundamental focus for the law enforcement agencies was the suppression of left-wing and working-class political agitation, thus dissipating the threat to social order.

This alleged ideological predisposition to the right of politics and a concomitant hostility to an increasingly politicised working class appear to have been galvanised by legislation aimed at those individuals and groups protesting at the prevailing economic and political situation. The Emergency Powers Act of 1920 facilitated effective responses to strike actions and disturbances in the decade that followed, and was utilised in 1921, 1924 and during the 1926 General Strike.¹⁵⁷ According to Morgan, between May and November 1926, of the 7,960 people prosecuted in the courts, 3,304 were dealt with for breaches of the emergency regulations.¹⁵⁸ These powers were enacted across the country, essentially criminalising key aspects of the political and industrial protest. The deteriorating political situation, at home and abroad, and the apparent escalation of extremism on both sides of the political spectrum, precipitated further punitive action from the government. The Public Order Act 1936, which curtailed the political demonstration and march, was finally executed in response to the infamous events at Cable Street on 4 October 1936, when the police and anti-fascists clashed during a planned celebratory march by Mosley's British Union of Fascists through East London. This piece of legislation 'represented the culmination of a long

¹⁵⁶ T. Bowden, *Beyond the limits of the law* (Middlesex: Penguin Books Ltd, 1978), 227.

¹⁵⁷ Laybourn & Taylor, *Policing in England and Wales*, 57.

¹⁵⁸ Morgan, *Conflict and order*, 211.

debate within government about how increased civil disorder should be controlled'.¹⁵⁹ While the act was presented and viewed ostensibly as a piece of legislation aimed at stemming violent political confrontation, which was most closely associated with fascism, it had 'more profound implications for labour and its right to meet, march and protest'.¹⁶⁰ These claims appear to be partly borne out by the fact that the first arrests under the act occurred during an industrial dispute at Harworth Colliery in Nottinghamshire in 1937.¹⁶¹ Criminalising what were deemed to be the increasingly dangerous activities of political groups on the left in such a manner may further blur the line between respectable and criminal. Now 'men and women who had thought themselves law-abiding and respectable' found themselves criminalised during the protests as war was waged on the 'working-class as a whole'.¹⁶² That may have been the case even though only a tiny section of this class participated in this kind of political militancy.¹⁶³ Within the realm of public order, distinctions between criminal and non-criminal often became indistinguishable.¹⁶⁴

5. The challenges of youth

The idea that there was a growing problem of deviance among the nation's youth became part of the narrative of crime in the interwar period. Middle-class fears of a rising adolescent criminality, with the potential to dislocate the long-held morals and sensibilities of this class, prompted a series of debates and discussions on the causes,

¹⁵⁹ R. Thurlow, *Fascism in Britain: from Oswald Mosley's Blackshirts to the National Front* (London: I. B. Tauris & Co Ltd, 1998), 82.

¹⁶⁰ Morgan, *Conflict and order*, 229.

¹⁶¹ J. Clark, *Striving to preserve the peace! The National Council for Civil Liberties, the Metropolitan Police and the dynamics of disorder in inter-war Britain*. PhD thesis (Open University, August 2007), 210.

¹⁶² S. Todd, *The people: the rise and fall of the working class, 1910–2010* (London: John Murray, 2014), 56–57.

¹⁶³ A. August, *The British working class, 1832–1940* (Harlow: Pearson Education Limited, 2007), 235–236.

¹⁶⁴ Briggs et al., *Crime and punishment in England*, 223.

consequences and solutions to the problem. Of course, juvenile delinquency was not an interwar invention. The concept itself appears to have had its origins in the nineteenth century, identified following a series of surveys, studies and investigations into what was perceived to be a growing and dangerous issue for society.¹⁶⁵ The First World War did, however, increase fears around delinquency. It was believed that for the youth, the forced dislocation of the family, with fathers at war and mothers working in the factories, would have a naturally adverse effect on behaviour.¹⁶⁶ Godfrey has claimed that by the 1920s, a moral panic about the problem of juvenile delinquency had already developed in Britain.¹⁶⁷ The end of the war brought little respite as both the popular and provincial press continued to propagate stories of the dangers of youth delinquency, fanning the flames of fear among the middle classes.¹⁶⁸ Many reasons were advanced for the perceived increases in juvenile criminality, ranging from the economic and environmental to the cultural and hereditary. Alleged leniency in the courts was also cited as an explanation for the increases in delinquency.¹⁶⁹

Were these fears justified? The number of juveniles proceeded against for indictable offences did increase during this period, from 12,200 in 1910 to 29,400 in 1938.¹⁷⁰ The greatest proportion of this increase appears to have occurred in the 1930s (with a concomitant escalation of anxiety), borne out by chief constables' annual

¹⁶⁵ H. Shore, 'Inventing' the juvenile delinquent in nineteenth-century Europe', in B. Godfrey, C. Emsley, & G. Dunstall (eds.), *Comparative histories of crime* (Devon: Willan Publishing, 2003), 110–124; Muncie, *Youth and crime*, 53; M. May, 'Innocence and experience: the evolution of the concept of juvenile delinquency in the mid-nineteenth century', *Victorian Studies*, 17, 1 (1973), 7–29:16.

¹⁶⁶ Godfrey & Lawrence, *Crime and justice*, 141.

¹⁶⁷ Godfrey, *Crime in England 1880–1945*, 127–128.

¹⁶⁸ S. Humphries, *Hooligans or rebels? An oral history of working-class childhood and youth 1889–1939* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell Publisher Limited, 1981), 176; V. Bailey, *Delinquency and citizenship: reclaiming the young offender 1914–1948* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987), 123.

¹⁶⁹ Bailey, 'Crime in the twentieth century', 43.

¹⁷⁰ Stevenson, *British society 1914–1945*, 373–374.

reports highlighting the problem of juvenile delinquency.¹⁷¹ It is less clear from the literature covering this period whether these fears were a consequence of hard statistical evidence, from the police or the authorities, or the result of a sustained media sensationalisation of the key issues, as per moral panic theory. It does appear, however, that the delinquent ostensibly remained a member of one particular group in society, the working class, and was predominantly male.¹⁷² Moreover, the dysfunctionalities that were perceived to be inherent within the familial relationships of these classes were also regarded as facilitators to acts of criminality among its younger members. However, despite increasing fears about delinquency and calls for harsher punishments in some quarters, it has been claimed that the authorities still regularly adopted a 'more sympathetic attitude to young offenders', initiating programmes and legislation that focused on welfare and treatment, rather than on punishment and chastisement.¹⁷³

Many reasons have been posited for the adoption of such an approach. For example, Horn claims that the motivation was born out of a desire to 'compensate society for the great loss of young men' during the war.¹⁷⁴ The alleged failure of retaliatory forms of punishment, exemplified by rising juvenile crime figures, may have also precipitated a move to more enlightened (and hopefully more successful) methods of treatment. The Children and Young Persons Act 1933 could be viewed as a legislative manifestation of a more progressive attitude and approach. That said, its introduction was not without controversy. Moreover, its implementation may have served only to amplify fears of juvenile delinquency, as youth crime rates increased

¹⁷¹ P. Horn, *Young offenders: juvenile delinquency 1700–2000* (Stroud: Amberley Publishing Ltd, 2010), 192; Bailey, *Delinquency and citizenship*, 119.

¹⁷² J. Clarke, 'Managing the delinquent: the children's branch of the Home Office, 1913–30', in M. Langan & B. Schwarz (eds.), *Crises in the British state 1880–1930* (London: Hutchinson and Co. Ltd, 1985), 240–255:252.

¹⁷³ Horn, *Young offenders*, 179.

¹⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 180.

significantly following the passing of the act.¹⁷⁵ Of course, as with all crime-related statistics, these increases may have been a consequence of the way data was collated and may have been a result of the age revisions contained within the new Act, which raised the age limit of offenders to 17.¹⁷⁶ It could also have been, paradoxically, a result of a growing confidence in the primacy of welfarism within the courts, which in turn persuaded the police to send more children to court to be treated rather than simply punished.¹⁷⁷ Nevertheless, the problem continued to dominate the crime agenda in the 1930s, precipitating the initiation of a major Home Office-led investigation in 1938. Six cities were chosen to take part survey on the basis that a sizeable number of youth offences would take place in each area during the lifespan of the investigation.¹⁷⁸ Conveniently for this study, Hull was identified as one of the cities in the investigation, perhaps demonstrating its perceived propensity for cultivating criminality among younger members of the local population. Just how widespread and coherent were the new approaches to delinquent behaviour? Did these attitudes pervade local responses to crime, or was there a more complex set of reactions at work in cities like Hull and the surrounding region? It is perhaps here that the ‘progress’ and ‘reform’ thesis can best be tested. After all, it has also been claimed that it was ‘in the city that juvenile crime assumed its most dangerous proportions’.¹⁷⁹

¹⁷⁵ Bailey, *Delinquency and citizenship*, 165.

¹⁷⁶ K. Bradley, ‘Juvenile delinquency and the public sphere: exploring local and national discourse in England, c. 1940–69’. *Social History*, 17, 1 (February 2012), 19–35:21–22.

¹⁷⁷ R. Gard, *Rehabilitation and probation in England and Wales, 1876–1962* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2016), 157.

¹⁷⁸ A. M. Carr-Saunders et al., *Young offenders: an enquiry into juvenile delinquency* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1942), 56.

¹⁷⁹ Humphries, *Hooligans or rebels*, 165.

6. *Crime on the move*

Perhaps one of the strongest crime stories to come out of the press during the interwar period was the idea of the motor bandit and gangster.¹⁸⁰ Sensationalised articles about these new and dangerous smash-and-grab raiders became part of local and national crime narratives, glamourised and feared in equal measure. The motor bandit was often described as a ‘new class of professional criminal’, utilising modern technology to remove the barriers and boundaries of what had for a long time been crime within localised limits.¹⁸¹ As one contemporary observer noted perceptively, this new-found mobility meant that the criminal could now ‘take the whole country as his province’, leaving a disparate and decentralised police force literally playing catch up with the speedy offender.¹⁸² This, of course, served to spread fear into most regions across the country, particularly those areas, such as the rural countryside, relatively untouched by the (professional) criminal. However, it was not just the motor bandit that caused consternation among the authorities, the police, the general public and the moralising elites during the interwar years. The 1930s was the decade that saw the advent of the joyriding menace, incidence and fears around which have continued to hit the headlines to the present day. Beaven claims that: ‘Just as the bicycle in the nineteenth century had provoked a moral panic about its misuse by youths, social observers began to comment on the menace of the motor car.’¹⁸³ Major towns and cities such as London, Birmingham, Manchester and Glasgow, with their rising populations and increased car

¹⁸⁰ Brown, *Inter-war penal policy*, 94.

¹⁸¹ J. Chipperfield, ‘“Can they bear the name Englishmen?” The celebrity of motor-bandits as a ‘new breed of villain’ in the 1920s’, *Villains and Villainy 1st Global Conference*. Oxford, 19–21 September, 2009, 1–17:2.

¹⁸² S. K. Ruck, ‘The increase of crime in England: an analysis and criticism’. *Political Quarterly*, 3, 2 (1932), 206–225:213.

¹⁸³ B. Beaven, *Leisure, citizenship and working-class men in Britain, 1850–1945* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2005), 174.

use, appeared to be more susceptible to joyriding incidents.¹⁸⁴ In concert with the idea of the agile motor bandit, there were increased fears that criminally inclined youths from the less respectable areas of the major cities were infiltrating (and potentially corrupting) the more affluent suburbs and districts of Britain.¹⁸⁵ Of course, as with other panics perpetuated by the press, these anxieties were likely to have been ‘disproportionate to the threat actually posed’.¹⁸⁶ Nevertheless, these fears are likely to have fuelled subsequent reactions by the police, politicians, the press and the public at both a local and national level.

As Laybourn and Taylor explain, as soon as motor vehicles appeared on the streets of Britain, they caused serious problems for the authorities.¹⁸⁷ While high-profile incidents involving smash-and-grab raids and young joyriders may have created the headlines, a whole range of offences, which increased as the period progressed, were now under the jurisdiction of the police. These offences could be anything from speeding and driving while under the influence of alcohol, to obstructing the highway and creating excessive noise on the roads. The latter was one of many ‘mechanical offences’ that swelled the local and national crime statistics and raised anxieties about road usage, the others being crimes such as licence infringements, lighting problems and vehicle emissions.¹⁸⁸ Arguably of greater concern was the large and rising number of deaths and injuries on the roads due to the increases in vehicle ownership during the interwar period. By the 1930s, a ‘road holocaust’ led to calls for more effective policing, which alongside the need to deal with growing issues such as the motor

¹⁸⁴ S. O’Connell, *The car in British society: class, gender and motoring, 1896–1939* (Manchester, Manchester University Press, 1988), 103–104.

¹⁸⁵ Beaven, *Leisure, citizenship and working-class men in Britain*, 175.

¹⁸⁶ A. Brown, ‘Crime, criminal mobility and serial offenders in early twentieth-century Britain’. *Contemporary British History*, 25, 4 (2011), 551–568:564.

¹⁸⁷ K. Laybourn & D. Taylor, *Battle for the roads of Britain: police, motorists and the law, c.1890s to 1970s* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), 1.

¹⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 84.

bandit, albeit inflated for public consumption, resulted in more police motor patrols (although not everywhere in the country), new legislation for dealing with speeding, and the introduction of road safety educational programmes.¹⁸⁹

While the youthful joyrider and sensationalised motor bandit appeared to be another overt manifestation of the criminal propensity of the repeat offender and subsections of the British working class, it has been argued that the criminalisation of the other aspects of the motor transport boom in the 1920s and 1930s took a different turn by finding a new scapegoat – the middle-class motorist. The rising number of motoring offences, both serious and trivial, brought the middle classes, who, due to the costs of motoring, were the primary owners of private motor vehicles for most of this period, ‘into conflict with the police for the first time’.¹⁹⁰ This group now became the target for sustained campaigns by the government and the police. The road user and abuser was often vilified in the press and targeted not just by the authorities but by the public, who were also the pedestrians on the receiving end of the dangerous antics of many of these new and inexperienced motor vehicle drivers. For instance, Emsley says that the idea of the ‘road hog’ became a comparable construct to the concept of the criminal class, in that it was perceived as ‘a recognizable, external group making war on society’.¹⁹¹

As with many of the responses to crime and criminality in this period, and in line with the overall conclusions of this current study, reactions to motor vehicle crime, by the authorities, the police, the law courts and the public, appear to have been far from consistent and evade simplistic summarisations. Godfrey claims that it was in fact

¹⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 8–11, 65 & 150.

¹⁹⁰ O’Connell, *The car in British society*, 132.

¹⁹¹ C. Emsley, ‘Mother, what did policemen do when there weren’t any motors?’ The law, the police and the regulation of motor traffic in England, 1900–1939’. *The Historical Journal*, 36, 2 (1993), 357–381:380.

the working-class road user who was disproportionately more likely to be prosecuted by the police than the middle-class motorist.¹⁹² A substantial number of traffic offences that were dealt with by the police and the courts were perpetrated by the cyclist, motorbike rider or goods vehicle driver, many of which would have come from the traditional working class.¹⁹³ Moreover, an expanding second-hand car market, which developed from the middle of the 1930s, allowed many more members of the working class to buy a motor vehicle and hit the roads of Britain.¹⁹⁴ As will also be revealed, O'Connell appears to be correct when he states that the 'potential for opposition to the car was more apparent at the local level'.¹⁹⁵

A local focus

Despite all the research into specific crime-related aspects of interwar Britain, there have been far fewer investigations into perceptions of, and reactions to, crime and criminality during this period. In this sense, the interwar years remain an underresearched period for historians of crime. Localised studies into reactions to crime in this period are even scarcer. However, as O'Malley states in his own Sheffield-based examination of elite perceptions of crime in the 1920s, such studies are invaluable as they can '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'.¹⁹⁶ As stated earlier, and as will be revealed in subsequent chapters of this thesis, all of the main elements of criminal justice, including the police, the courts and the prison system, had a local focus and

¹⁹² Godfrey, *Crime in England 1880–1945*, 42.

¹⁹³ *Ibid.*, 40.

¹⁹⁴ C. Divall, 'Transport, 1900–1939', in C. Wrigley (ed.), *A companion to early twentieth-century Britain* (Chichester: Blackwell Publishing, 2009), 287–301:290.

¹⁹⁵ O'Connell, *The car in British society*, 137.

¹⁹⁶ O'Malley, *Crime and consensus*, 39.

were administered locally, often in line with local or regional exigencies, even if primary policies were determined nationally. So any historical account of the development of criminal justice, both theoretical and practical, must take this into consideration. This is not just relevant for examinations of attitudes to crime but may also be important when looking at statistical representations, where ‘national averages conceal substantial local variations in practice’, as Donovan and Lawrence discovered in their investigation into the administration of road traffic offences at a central London magistrates’ court in the first half of the twentieth century.¹⁹⁷ It is highly likely that there would have been divergent experiences across the different towns and cities in this period, particularly in those regions most affected by the issues and circumstances identified earlier as conducive to societal panics. These are likely to have affected both perceptions of crime and the administration of criminal justice. This means that an overarching ‘national’ narrative of the interwar years may be beyond the reach of the historian. Instead, a set of focused, localised studies may be needed to develop a more comprehensive and, ultimately, more accurate picture.

Comparing this local study to O’Malley’s findings may partly prove the point. O’Malley claims that in Sheffield there was a low-key response to crime in the 1920s, with the local elite championing, through consensus, more progressive approaches to offending and the offender – findings very much in line with the historiography of interwar crime and criminality presented earlier.¹⁹⁸ As this thesis will reveal, the situation in Hull and East Yorkshire defies such a definitive and unambiguous conclusion, instead both supporting and challenging, at various times and in diverse circumstances, existing narratives and assumptions about the 21-year interwar period.

¹⁹⁷ P. Donovan & P. Lawrence, ‘Road traffic offending and an inner-London magistrates’ court (1913–1963)’. *Crime, History and Societies*, 12, 2 (2008), 119–140:138.

¹⁹⁸ O’Malley, *Crime and consensus*, 252–261.

Of course, by ending his detailed investigation in 1929, O'Malley omits a turbulent decade of the interwar years that appeared conducive to a serious of societal panics in line with many of the themes identified here, such as the escalation of threats to public order and the growth of extremist politics; the deteriorating economic situation and the onset of the depression; growing fears around degeneracy caused by the alleged proliferation of the social problem group; further rises in juvenile delinquency; and the ever-increasing problem of motor transport crime. His findings may not have been different if this period had been included. However, as the following chapters of the thesis will reveal, these issues did provide a backdrop for rising local anxieties about crime, with responses often as disparate as the social, political and economic history of the entire period.

Chapter 1 will provide the initial context for this local study, beginning with a brief social and economic history of Hull and East Yorkshire during the interwar period and then detailing the basic elements of local law enforcement in the region. It will also offer an analysis of official crime statistics in the region before outlining the quantitative aspect of this study, providing an overview of the kinds of crimes that regularly featured in the local press between 1919 and 1939. Chapter 2 presents an analysis of four of the six key themes identified in this study – fears over the brutalization of ex-servicemen; the economic crises of the early 1920s and the years of depression in the 1930s; the politicisation of the working classes, the rise of extremist groups and the perceived threats to social order; and the development of eugenics and escalating fears of degeneration – all of which were present in the region during this period albeit with varying levels of anxiety, but falling short of what could be deemed a societal panic, hence their collection together in this chapter. The two issues that did appear to provoke panic-level responses locally – the increasing threat of juvenile

delinquency and the rise of motor transport-related crime – are covered in Chapter 3. Here the perceived key constituents and causes of these types of crime are examined and assessed, alongside the reactions from the local police forces, the courts, the press and the public. Chapter 4 outlines the specific configurations of local responses to the six themes and other aspects of crime and criminality, further highlighting the contradictions and inconsistencies in the punishments proposed and implemented as part of a concerted bid to deal with what were perceived to be the key crime issues of the day. Here the complexities of local reactions are writ large, exposing the difficulties of positing generalised accounts of prevailing attitudes to crime and punishment in the interwar years. These complexities are also present in the content of Chapter 5, which evaluates the role and development of the working-class folk devil in local debates around crime and criminality. Although all the previous chapters individually assess the role of class in local crime perceptions and cite examples of the use of class-based language in the crime narratives, Chapter 5 will deal with this explicitly while also charting the development of lower-class offender classifications during the interwar years in a bid to evaluate the existence of the purported terminological shift. A Conclusion will draw together all the major findings of this study and offer suggestions for further research. However, before commencing with these chapters, it is important to detail and justify the key methodologies employed in this study of crime and criminality in Hull and East Yorkshire during the interwar period.

Sources and methodology

This chapter will provide an overview of the various sources used in this examination of crime and criminality in Hull and East Yorkshire during the interwar years, which has attempted to present a detailed account of local reactions in this period. These sources include a range of local items, alongside relevant national records and reports. Of central importance to this analysis is the daily local newspaper, so the chapter will begin with details of the main publications examined for this study. It will then look at how the content of these publications was analysed and evaluated before offering an in-depth account of the techniques used to identify a representative sample of editions, crucial for this investigation. The chapter will conclude with an overview of the other key resources used in this study.

It is true to say that the media offers viewers and readers an appreciation of crime and its perpetrators that few will ever experience, while also helping to shape ‘official definitions’ of the crime problem facing a given society.¹ For some time, newspapers have been the key vehicle in this media landscape. Therefore, it is not surprising that, for the historian, they have become a primary source of information relating to crime and criminality, even though other fields of academic research, such as sociology, criminology and media studies, have often been at the forefront of ‘conceptualising, theorising and chronicling crime in the media’.² The process of producing and delivering crime news is a complex one, shaped by a range of local, political and, crucially, financial influences. Newspapers are primarily commercial enterprises and have to attract as many readers as possible if they are to be profitable.

¹ B. Roshier, ‘The selection of crime news by the press’, in S. Cohen & J. Young (eds.), *The manufacture of news: social problems, deviance and the mass media* (London: Constable and Co Ltd, 1973), 28–39:28.

² Williamson, ‘Hope I die before I get old’, 180.

The consequence of this can be a ‘tendency, when dealing with crime, to report a disproportionate number of more serious incidents’.³ Exaggeration, distortion and even falsification can become major elements of crime reporting in order to create what is deemed to be a newsworthy item.⁴ They are also, of course, a feature of all forms of reporting. Due to its newsworthiness and its potential of attracting additional readers, crime is always likely to feature prominently in the media, with more extreme crimes ‘over-represented in comparison to the official crime figures’.⁵ The importance of crime stories as both a mechanism for grabbing additional readers and as a page filler for daily newsholes is impossible to overstate. This includes the whole range of stories, from the mundane to the sensational. Their prevalence is a key reason why newspapers remain a key resource for historians wanting to ‘build a more complete picture of the main forces that shaped attitudes to crime and justice’.⁶ In fact, newspapers are perhaps ‘unrivalled’ in their ability to present a picture of what was important, or believed to be important, to the respective communities they represented.⁷

Their key role in developing local and national crime narratives naturally leads newspapers, and the media as a whole, to be seen as orchestrators of anxieties and, at the more extreme level, ‘prime movers’ of moral panics.⁸ The press as prime movers has a long history and is not something that was confined to the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. In his study of ‘crime waves’ in Colchester in the 1760s, King shows that local newspaper reports had a provoking effect on the population of Essex after reporting increases in offences such as robbery and burglary, resulting in the local

³ Emsley, ‘Violent crime in England’, 182.

⁴ Jewkes, *Media and crime*, 68.

⁵ Croall, *Crime and society in Britain*, 18.

⁶ P. King, ‘Newspaper reporting and attitudes to crime and justice in late-eighteenth- and early-nineteenth-century London’. *Continuity and Change*, 22, 1 (2007), 73–112:76.

⁷ D. Bates, *Historical research using British newspapers* (Barnsley: Pen & Sword History, 2016), 39.

⁸ D. Garland, ‘On the concept of moral panic’. *Crime, Media, Culture*, 4, 1 (2008), 9–30:15.

authorities offering up (or seeming to offer up) solutions to tackle the perceived crime wave.⁹ Although there is a paucity of research for the years 1919 to 1939, both in terms of newspaper content analyses and the detailed examination of media representations of crime (something that this study aims to address), it does appear that, as in other periods, newspapers in the interwar years both reflected and raised concerns, even perhaps precipitating changes in the law enforcement agenda. For example, Shore's investigation into the so-called 'Racecourse Wars' of the 1920s found that the press 'dramatically sensationalized both the protagonists and events' during the wars, with police actions being delivered in response to press coverage of the dangers posed by the perpetrators.¹⁰

Crime remained a 'staple' element in press reporting throughout the interwar period, even though these years have been perceived to be relatively crime-light (as a political issue).¹¹ It was a time when newspaper circulations doubled, with two-thirds of the population reading a daily newspaper by 1939.¹² It was a 'formative and vital period in the making of the modern press', one which better connected the political lives of the various classes in society (even though the advent of the cinema was undoubtedly challenging its primacy of news dissemination).¹³ Of course, these comments relate primarily to growth in readerships of the national newspapers rather than the provincial press, which faced stiff competition from the London-based nationals during this period.¹⁴ However, provincial newspapers remained a viable economic proposition during the interwar years, helped in no small part by the

⁹ P. King, 'Newspaper reporting, prosecution practice and perceptions of urban crime: the Colchester crime wave of 1765'. *Continuity and Change*, 2, 3 (1987), 423–454:433–434.

¹⁰ Shore, 'Criminality and Englishness', 475 & 479.

¹¹ J. Carter Wood, "'The Third Degree': press reporting, crime fiction and police powers in 1920s Britain'. *Twentieth Century British History*, 21, 4 (2010), 464–485:471.

¹² A. Bingham, "'An organ of uplift?'". *Journalism Studies*, 14, 5 (2013), 651–662:651.

¹³ S. Newman & M. Houlbrook, 'Introduction'. *Journalism Studies*, 14, 5 (2013), 640–650:643.

¹⁴ P. Clarke, *Hope and glory: Britain 1900–2000*, 2nd edition (London: Penguin Books Ltd, 2004), 114.

commercialisation of the industry and the ‘corporate coupling’ between the local evening papers and the big nationals.¹⁵ More importantly, just like the nationals, they can offer ‘evidence on a scale, and of a diversity, that other sources simply cannot match’, affording ‘more detailed coverage of their societies than almost any other source’, thus providing historians with a ‘treasure trove of information about all aspects of public and private life’.¹⁶ Moreover, provincial newspapers generally have a larger audience locally and are perhaps more trusted than their national rivals.¹⁷ In the interwar period in regions like Hull and East Yorkshire, they were the only media vehicle for local crime stories and, consequently, the only place where local residents could get their daily diet of information about criminal activity.

The main newspaper examined in this study is the *Hull Daily Mail*, which increased its audience throughout the interwar years. In 1921, the circulation figures for the newspaper had reached 60,578. By 1938, the figure had increased by more than 20,000 to 83,000 copies a day.¹⁸ Crucially, the *Hull Daily Mail* and *Hull Times*, which was the daily’s sister publication produced weekly on a Saturday, were the only local newspaper titles that survived the whole 21-year period under investigation. The large circulation figures and the consistency of production make them viable sources for a study of this nature. They also provided the aforementioned ‘treasure trove’ of articles, many of which focused on local crime and criminality and regularly included comments from the key players in local criminal justice, as well as factual court

¹⁵ M. Bromley & N. Hayes, ‘Campaigner, watchdog or municipal lackey? Reflections on the inter-war provincial press, local identity and civic welfarism’. *Media History*, 8, 2 (2002), 197–212:197.

¹⁶ A. Bingham, ‘Media products as historical artefacts’, in M. Conboy & J. Steel (eds.), *The Routledge companion to British media history* (Oxon: Routledge, 2015), 19–28:22.

¹⁷ R. Matthews, *The history of the provincial press in England* (London: Bloomsbury, 2017), 21.

¹⁸ B. Robinson & J. Markham, *Hull Daily Mail: a part of the community* (Beverley: Highgate Publications Limited, 2009), 53.

reporting with verbatim statements from featured cases.¹⁹ In fact, it has been noted that the provincial titles offer the most consistent coverage of local court reporting, and this was the case with the *Hull Daily Mail* and *Hull Times*.²⁰

The origins of the *Hull Daily Mail* can be traced back to 1885 when a collection of local businessmen joined forces and took over an ‘old-fashioned Conservative weekly newspaper and transformed it into a bright new daily’.²¹ The original aim of the newspaper may have been to help one of the businessmen, Frederick Brent Grotrian, be elected to parliament as a Conservative MP.²² Grotrian, who did become an MP for Hull in 1886, took control of the newspaper until his death in 1905, after which time a private company was formed to run the *Hull Daily Mail*, whose board members included Grotrian’s four sons.²³ One of the sons, Herbert Brent Grotrian, who was chairman of the board, would also become a Conservative MP for Hull in the 1920s. Edgar Lewis, an experienced journalist, remained as editor following the death of Frederick Grotrian, and when Lewis died in 1922, the editorship went to his son Edgar Wills Lewis.²⁴ By the second half of the interwar period, the *Hull Daily Mail* had seen off its liberal daily rivals the *Eastern Morning News* and the *Hull Evening News*. Both publications, which were part of the same newspaper group, had been experiencing financial difficulties for some time, and the *Eastern Morning News* finally ceased publication in 1929 after merging with the *Hull Evening News*. The *Evening News* itself collapsed a year later, amalgamating with the *Hull Daily Mail*, which took on some of the newspaper group’s editorial staff.²⁵ The *Hull Daily Mail* was now the only daily operating in the city and remained so for the

¹⁹ I. Jackson, *The provincial press and the community* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1971), 89.

²⁰ J. Rowbotham et al., *Crime news in modern Britain: press reporting and responsibility, 1820–2010* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 140.

²¹ Robinson & Markham, *Hull Daily Mail*, 10.

²² *Ibid.*

²³ *Ibid.*, 18.

²⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 39

rest of the period. Its continued success at the heart of the local community was helped in no small part by its association with Lord Rothermere's Northcliffe Newspapers Group, which in 1930 purchased a substantial stake in Provincial Newspapers, a company that had bought a half-interest in the Grotrian brothers' Hull and Grimsby Newspaper Group, which then owned both the *Hull Daily Mail* and *Grimsby Evening Telegraph*.²⁶ The importance of the *Hull Daily Mail* to the lives of the inhabitants of Hull and the surrounding areas had been recognised for some time, summed up by a quote from its Managing Director, Edgar Grotrian (who remained in post until his retirement in 1937), which he made when the newspaper moved to a new block of offices in the city's Jameson Street in 1926. Grotrian declared that a provincial newspaper such as the *Hull Daily Mail* is a

public institution, and part of the commercial and social structure. It embraces every popular interest and enters into the daily life of the people more than any other institution. It must accurately and impartially deal with all sides of life, in due proportion. It takes many years to build up and obtain the confidence so necessary for its success, but, once attained, there is between it and its readers a most intimate relationship, which would be difficult to efface.²⁷

The *Hull Daily Mail* consistently claimed to provide readers with an 'impartial record' of the activities and views of all the local political parties, offering itself up as an independent 'organ of opinion'.²⁸ Following the downfall of its daily rivals, the newspaper once again reiterated its point about impartiality, recognising that it now had an even greater responsibility for reporting local affairs objectively to its readers.²⁹ The reality in the coverage of certain issues, particularly politics, may have been different. A bias may also have been present in the coverage and opinions relating to some of the other themes covered in this thesis. This may not be surprising given the origins of the

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 38–43.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 24.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 40.

²⁹ Hull Daily Mail, 'Announcement to readers', *Hull Daily Mail*, 17 April 1930, 14.

newspaper and apparent political characteristics of the ownership. This bias may have been present, to varying degrees, in the selection and presentation of articles that filled the daily newspaper, including crime-related pieces, reflecting the attitudes of owners, editors and even journalists. It may have appeared most explicitly in the newspaper's opinion pieces, such as editorials and articles written by local columnists.

It is worth noting, however, that these attitudes are rarely cultivated in a vacuum. As Wiener notes, the opinions of the elite 'permeate society as a whole', adopting and reflecting prevailing 'national values', even if they do have a disproportionate influence on the 'conduct of affairs'.³⁰ Of course, the extent of this influence is always open to question.³¹ Moreover, irrespective of any bias, a newspaper must still somehow mirror the social, cultural and political landscape of its local communities if it is to flourish.³² To become a functional and integral part of community life, it needs to address the 'material and cultural concerns' of that community, serving the public interest with a diet of social (including crime) and political information, alongside more entertaining elements such as sports, theatre and cinema.³³ It could even be argued that a special relationship with the local community, (as described in the above quote from Edgar Grotrian), which places the reader above politics and other major influencing factors, needs to become the 'raison d'être' for a successful provincial press.³⁴ Barbara Robinson, a former writer on the *Hull Daily Mail*, argues that the newspaper cultivated such a relationship throughout its history, leading her to declare at the publication's centenary in 1985 that 'the history of the *Hull*

³⁰ M. J. Wiener, *English culture and the decline of the industrial spirit 1850–1980* (London: Penguin Books, 1992), 5.

³¹ J. W. Kingdon, *Agendas, alternatives, and public policies* (New York: Harpercollins College Publishers, 1995), 57–58.

³² Robinson & Markham, *Hull Daily Mail*, 1.

³³ Bromley & Hayes, 'Campaigner, watchdog or municipal lackey?', 198–199.

³⁴ Matthews, *The history of the provincial press*, 109.

Daily Mail is the history of Hull and its environs over the past century'.³⁵ This particularly local history is writ large across the *Hull Daily Mail*, from its front pages, editorials and opinion pieces, to the news articles (including police and court reports), features and letters to the editor – all of which have been examined in this study.

Content analysis

To achieve this study's key objectives – that is, to examine and evaluate local reactions and responses to crime and criminality in the interwar period – a detailed content analysis was conducted via a sample of newspapers covering the 21 years between 1919 and 1939 (more will be said on the sample in the next section). Content analysis has become a well-used and 'accepted method of textual investigation, particularly in the field of mass communication'.³⁶ It is, as Krippendorff explains, an 'unobtrusive technique', which allows researchers to examine large amounts of data for its 'meanings, symbolic qualities, and expressive contents'.³⁷ It is in this sense a 'scientific tool'.³⁸ However, it does have its limitations for use in mass communication analyses. Holsti has noted that it is impossible to provide definitive accounts of the intentions of a particular passage or text via this form of methodology; inferences around causal relationships are the only feasible conclusions.³⁹ The effects and outcomes of messages are important (for instance, newspaper reporting influences on the local law enforcement agenda), but these will be presented and assessed primarily via the

³⁵ Robinson & Markham, *Hull Daily Mail*, 1.

³⁶ D. Silverman, *Interpreting qualitative data*, 3rd edition (London: Sage Publications Ltd, 2006), 159.

³⁷ K. Krippendorff, *Content analysis: an introduction to its methodology*, 2nd edition (Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, 2004), 44.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 18.

³⁹ O. R. Holsti, *Content analysis for the social sciences and humanities* (Massachusetts: Addison-Wesley Publishing Company, 1969), 27; W. L. Neuman makes the same point in *Social research methods: qualitative and quantitative approaches*, 7th edition (Boston: Pearson, 2011), 368.

statements and reflections written as part of articles, editorials, opinion pieces, readers' letters and other items within the newspapers examined in this study.

Any limitations of content analysis are outweighed by its ability to provide detailed textual analyses of a specific source. It is particularly conducive to mixed-method document analyses, providing an invaluable framework for a complementary quantitative and qualitative approach.⁴⁰ To ensure reliability, which is central to the success of any content analysis, it is necessary to construct usable coding categories and develop robust sampling techniques that can be replicated effectively (as stated, full details of the newspaper sampling techniques are included in the next section).

Holsti's definition of coding is both succinct and accurate when he states that 'coding is the process whereby raw data are systematically transformed and aggregated into units which permit precise description of relevant content characteristics'.⁴¹ These units can be anything, ranging from one or two words to a phrase or larger theme.⁴² However, investigators should be aware, says Holsti, that there is no perfect method of coding; it is instead crucial that the researcher uses his or her specific research questions as a guide.⁴³

For the quantitative element of this analysis, the unit categories were all small and related to actual or perceived criminal behaviour such as murder, manslaughter, burglary, theft, assault, drunkenness, fraud, embezzlement, gaming offences and vagrancy (all of which were primarily defined by contemporary legal terminology or the vernacular of the newspaper reports). An individual category for 'motoring offences' was also created to capture the plethora of traffic violations that occurred

⁴⁰ S. N. Hesse-Biber & P. Leavy, *The practice of qualitative research* (Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, 2006), 279–286.

⁴¹ Holsti, *Content analysis*, 94.

⁴² Holsti, *Content analysis*, 116; Neuman, *Social research methods*, 363; J. Saldana, *The coding manual for qualitative researchers*, 2nd edition (London: Sage Publications Ltd, 2013), 3.

⁴³ Holsti, *Content analysis*, 94–95.

during this period. More general items relating to police activities and court reports were also quantified. However, as there was a multitude of indictable and non-indictable offences during this period (as the convoluted judicial statistics reveal), it was deemed necessary to unitize and code a selection of what appeared to be the most prevalent and relevant. This was an iterative process, conducted during the early stages of the analysis and as part of the initial sample testing. All the offences (actual or perceived) that failed to make the cut were quantified collectively in an ‘other offences’ coded unit. Finally, to assess how often local crime featured in the newspapers (as compared to national incidents), and to aid the more focused qualitative analysis as detailed below, each offence or crime-related article was categorised as ‘local’, which was defined as taking place or related to offending in Hull and the East Yorkshire region, ‘national’ or ‘international’.

As O’Malley states in his own survey of newspaper crime reporting, closed categories of quantification can prove ‘insensitive to the contextual dimension of the documentary material’, in that they fail to take account of how ‘newspaper representations of crime may be influenced by attitudes towards issues unrelated to crime’.⁴⁴ He addresses this by devising complementary contextual categorisations such as education, religion, politics, the criminal justice system and unemployment, and aligns the results accordingly as ‘main’ and ‘subsidiary’ items.⁴⁵ For this study, it was deemed appropriate to categorise collectively items that appeared to be crime-related but had no explicit mention of a particular crime as ‘no crime specified’, but still scored in the analysis. O’Malley’s quantitative complementary categorisations, and his warnings against contextual insularity, are perhaps better addressed by this study’s

⁴⁴ O’Malley, *Crime and consensus*, 92.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 107–108.

qualitative analysis, as some of his categories actually constitute key themes of this research. Moreover, many of the objectives (and findings) of the research differ significantly.

The quantitative analysis has provided a useful and interesting backdrop to this study, highlighting the specifics of crime coverage in the local press and the geographical context of overall newspaper coverage. An in-depth qualitative analysis of newspaper content is needed to address more explicitly the key research questions and objectives. The aforementioned coding categories were used as a starting point for this examination, but a more detailed textual analysis was conducted to scrutinise prevalent narratives and discourses of crime and criminality, facilitating a depiction and evaluation of the ‘specific version of realities’ as presented in the pages of the newspapers.⁴⁶ As Altheide notes, coding designed for quantitative analyses has the specific objective of generating data that can be counted, while the ‘main emphasis of qualitative content analysis is on capturing definitions, meanings, process, and types’.⁴⁷ This requires a more flexible and iterative approach to be adopted, where meanings within the text are revealed, and categorisations constructed and reconstructed to accommodate the various research themes and objectives. To take one example: the coded category of ‘theft’ can be scored for statistical purposes when identified within a newspaper article, but to try to understand the full meaning of this item, and, more importantly, to address the key research questions, it needs to be evaluated within the wider narrative of the article. Consequently, if relevant (i.e. it is not just a basic, descriptive account of an incident) this coded item could be appraised within the wider themes of say, juvenile delinquency (if the act was committed by a child or youth),

⁴⁶ U. Flick, *An introduction to qualitative research*, 5th edition (London: Sage Publications Ltd, 2014), 357.

⁴⁷ D. L. Altheide, *Qualitative media analysis* (London: Sage Publications Ltd, 1996), 26–27.

socio-economics (if financial reasons were presented as justifications for the criminal behaviour, by the accused or accusers), or class-based perceptions (for example, if the language used was one of pejorative social classification). Of course, many of the items examined within the samples were not as complex as this, fitting more neatly into one or two of the themes of this research. It did, however, provide an essential protocol for the qualitative analysis, alongside the more rudimentary elements such as the date, page number, geographical location, source etc.⁴⁸ It also goes some way to addressing the problems of coding acting as an analytical straightjacket for this type of research, facilitating instead a more expansive and adaptable categorisation that goes beyond mere legal definitions of crime to incorporate broader perceptions of criminality.⁴⁹

To ensure consistency across the 21-year interwar period, the items coded and counted for the quantitative element of the research were scored identically – i.e. no extra weighting or importance was attributed to crime-related pieces that featured as front-page pieces, opinion columns or features, as opposed to smaller articles or news in briefs. Any additional value, which would have been determined subjectively, would have affected the replicability and, consequently, the reliability of the findings. As the crime article count was conducted as a complementary element in the research, this approach was deemed appropriate. The more detailed analysis and assessment of the respective items were reserved for the qualitative examination, in line with the key objectives of the research. Of course, no judgements were made regarding the motivation of the editor and proprietors on the positioning of articles. This is a complex process, one that is dependent on many internal and external factors, and which can be different across daily editions. For example, newspapers are reliant on scheduling

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 28.

⁴⁹ Silverman, *Interpreting qualitative data*, 163; R. Reiner, 'Media-made criminality: the representation of crime in the mass media', in M. Maguire, R. Morgan, & R. Reiner (eds.), *The Oxford handbook of criminology*, 4th edition (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 302–337:306.

harmonies between crime, the courts and the coverage, in addition to the constant dependency on the police to provide the crucial information necessary for a more detailed and accurate report.⁵⁰ All these are likely to have an impact on the final article, determining its quality, accuracy and newsworthiness and, consequently, its positioning in the newspaper. While front-page pieces are now seen as important in newspaper production, both from a newsworthy point of view and as a means of attracting readers (and perhaps as a reflection of the agenda and motivations of the editor/owner), during the interwar period the provincial newspaper was more likely to carry advertisements on its front page rather than eye-catching headlines and salacious copy, reflecting instead the commercial necessities of local newspaper production at that time. In terms of consistency, the picture would be complicated further for an examination of the *Hull Daily Mail* during this period as by 1930 a decision had been made to replace front-page advertisements with news coverage.⁵¹ The local newspaper was one of the first exponents of such an approach.

While it is difficult to assess the motivations behind the positioning of articles in each edition of the newspaper (and similarly the content of such articles), there is one section that has been seen consistently as serving as ‘the voice of the newspaper’ – the editorial column.⁵² This is the part of the newspaper that can offer personal and often controversial views on particular issues of the day. Hall et al claim that the editorial column can at times act as the voice of public opinion, both as a means of reflection of societal concerns or as a method of pressurising or influencing the authorities to implement tougher policies or take stronger actions to deal with perceived

⁵⁰ Reiner, ‘Media-made criminality’, 325.

⁵¹ Robinson & Markham, *Hull Daily Mail*, 42.

⁵² O’Malley, *Crime and consensus*, 89.

crises.⁵³ They can help to create unity behind a particular issue of concern, reflecting the values of both the newspaper and its readers.⁵⁴ The press can also, via the editorial, act as a key legitimiser to ‘reinforce the actions of the controllers by bringing their own independent arguments to bear on the public in support of the actions proposed’.⁵⁵ The *Hull Daily Mail* made no secret of the fact that its editorials would present the newspaper’s views, ‘frankly and fearlessly’, to the reading public.⁵⁶

A similar argument, although perhaps to a lesser extent, can be made for the role of other opinion pieces in a newspaper. Throughout the interwar period, the *Hull Daily Mail* ran regular features that tackled key and sometimes controversial issues (including crime and criminality), either in a national or international context within the ‘London Letter’ pieces, or more locally focused as part of the ‘Humberside Echoes’ column, written by the pseudonymic John Humber. The *Hull Daily Mail* also featured snippets of news and information (local, national and international) in the acerbic ‘“Mail” Mustard and Cress’ sections. These titbits were mainly standalone items, but were on occasion commentary pieces on stories that featured in the current or a recent edition of the newspaper. These commentary pieces retain an air of subjectivity akin to the editorial or opinion piece but regularly featured crime- and police-related themes, so were worthy of further investigation.

Hall et al are less convinced about the role that another key part of the newspaper, the letters pages, plays in reflecting local public opinion surrounding a particular issue.⁵⁷ Again, motivations around why a member of the public writes to the editor of the local newspaper and whether his or her opinion is a fair reflection of the

⁵³ S. C. Hall et al., *Policing the crisis: mugging, the state, and law and order* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 1980), 65–66.

⁵⁴ Bates, *Historical research*, 25.

⁵⁵ Hall et al., *Policing the crisis*, 66.

⁵⁶ Robinson & Markham, *Hull Daily Mail*, 40.

⁵⁷ Hall et al., *Policing the crisis*, 121.

public at large are difficult to measure. It may instead be more useful to view these items as influencers of internal (i.e. editorial) debates about newspaper content and priorities.⁵⁸ The letters pages then may be better assessed as a valuable mechanism ‘by which journalists can learn what is on the minds of audience members’ and react accordingly with material (particularly front page news and editorials) that is both relevant and interesting.⁵⁹ So in this sense, crime-related content of a given newspaper is, in part, a reflection of wider concerns among the public, although at times perhaps still ancillary to the attitudes and objectives of the editor and proprietor. Bradley believes that they can still ‘capture something of the lay voice’ on issues of crime and criminality, even after being subjected to the respective editorial processes.⁶⁰ As long as any limitations are noted, letters to the editor can continue to be utilised as a valid resource for an analysis of general concerns and attitudes to crime and criminality in a particular region, counted and evaluated as per the other items in each newspaper. Moreover, from the early days of publication, the readers’ letters in the *Hull Daily Mail* have been a popular part of the newspaper, with regular contributors in each daily edition.⁶¹

As stated, the crime-related content of regular news pieces is worthy of examination, whether its inclusion is a result of social, political (reflecting elite or public concerns) or simple commercial exigencies. This includes news items covering everything from basic, everyday offending to more sensationalised items of local or even national importance. It is, after all, the language and content of the article that is crucial for a deeper understanding of the predominant perceptions and narratives of

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

⁵⁹ D. Pritchard & D. Berkowitz, ‘How readers’ letters may influence editors and news emphasis: a content analysis of 10 newspapers, 1948–1978’. *Journalism Quarterly*, 68, 3 (1991), 388–395:389–394.

⁶⁰ Bradley, ‘Juvenile delinquency and the public sphere’, 30.

⁶¹ Robinson & Markham, *Hull Daily Mail*, 7.

criminality. At times, even in the most matter-of-fact descriptions of crime that featured in the *Hull Daily Mail* and *Hull Times* included pronouncements that exposed the prevailing attitudes to offending and offenders. For example, court reports would often include comments by the sitting magistrates and judges made during the respective cases, some of which were benign while others presented insights into the thoughts of the judiciary, revealing everything from opinions on social class to responses to repeat or youth offending. Police reports also sometimes included comments by the local chief constable on crime issues of the day, while minutes of the meetings of local organisations such as the probation service were often accompanied by observations from the chair. Simple crime stories could also include comments by the police, the courts, the probation service and even the newspaper itself. As such, all these were examined and evaluated in the selected sample as part of the evaluation of attitudes to crime and criminality.

Sampling techniques

When undertaking studies of the media covering a significant period of time it is almost inevitable that some form of sampling of the primary source material is required. This is particularly true of newspaper analyses, where hundreds of editions of each publication may be published each year. For example, for the 21 years of the interwar period, more than 6,500 editions of the *Hull Daily Mail* were produced, each featuring dozens of articles, features, letters and opinion pieces. In an ideal world, all articles in every edition would be examined in order to provide the most comprehensive analysis available. However, this simply may not be feasible in a study of this nature (or probably in any other study for that matter). Sampling is a crucial method in content analysis as it 'allows the researcher to economise on research efforts by limiting

observations to a manageable set of units'.⁶² To ensure findings are deemed valid and reliable it is crucial that the set of units you identify are 'statistically or conceptually representative of the set of all possible units'.⁶³

How is this possible? If a simple random sample of the whole population is large enough then it may be deemed to be representative of this population.⁶⁴ However, this would probably only be the case if all units within the said population were alike and the chances of selecting each individual unit equal. As already stated, with a population of tens or hundreds of thousands to examine, a huge amount of resources would be required to conduct an effective content analysis of enough newspapers to meet random sample reliability criteria. Furthermore, in the case of media analyses, the cyclical nature of newspaper production, where newsholes vary depending on the day of the week (particularly relevant in the more commercially sensitive local/regional media arena), create potential biases that need to be overcome if a more 'representative' sample is to be identified.⁶⁵ To avoid oversampling, say, too many Saturdays, when advertisements and sports often dominated the pages (and in the case of the *Hull Daily Mail* were often the smallest newspapers of the week), a more effective and viable alternative is to adopt a method of stratified sampling where the data is organised into subgroups in an attempt to reflect the whole population more accurately. One solution that is being used more frequently in newspaper content analyses is constructed week sampling. Here all Mondays in the population are identified and then one is selected randomly, followed by all Tuesdays in the

⁶² Krippendorff, *Content analysis*, 84.

⁶³ *Ibid.*

⁶⁴ D. Riffe et al., 'The effectiveness of random, consecutive day and constructed week sampling in newspaper content analysis'. *Journalism Quarterly*, 70, 1 (Spring 1993), 133–139:139.

⁶⁵ D. A. Luke & C. A. Caburnay, 'How much is enough? New recommendations for using constructed week sampling in newspaper content analysis of health stories. *Communication Methods and Measures*, 5, 1 (2011), 76–91:78.

population, Wednesdays, Thursdays etc. until a full week has been ‘constructed’, ensuring that every day of the week (Monday to Saturday in the case of the *Hull Daily Mail* as no Sunday edition was produced) has been selected equally and no bias has been attributed to a specific day.⁶⁶

Building on earlier investigations into similar sampling techniques, such as those by Davis and Turner (1951), Stempel (1952), and Jones and Carter (1959), Riffe et al carried out further research into the efficacy of this type of stratified sampling – both in terms of optimum sample size for reliability, and efficiencies for time and resource limitations – tested against simple random sampling methodologies.⁶⁷ They discovered that constructed week sampling was more efficient than either random sampling or consecutive day sampling (which starts at a given point and includes each day of the week but may fail to sample across the whole period under investigation).⁶⁸ Riffe et al concluded that using constructed week sampling in newspaper content analyses can provide reliable estimates of the population mean – i.e. the sample would be reflective of the whole, and significantly more reflective than simple random sampling.⁶⁹ Furthermore, their study found that ‘one constructed week was as efficient as four’ in an examination of six months of editions of a daily newspaper (exceeding basic probability theory expectations), the significance of which is immeasurable to the researcher with limited time and resources.⁷⁰ Subsequent studies by members of this

⁶⁶ S. Lacy et al., ‘Sample size for newspaper content analysis in multi-year studies’. *Journalism and Mass Communication Quarterly*, 78, 4 (Winter 2011), 836–845:837.

⁶⁷ Riffe et al., ‘The effectiveness of random, consecutive day and constructed week sampling’; F. J. Davis & L. W. Turner, ‘Sample efficiency in quantitative newspaper content analysis’. *Public Opinion Quarterly*, 15, 4 (Winter 1951), 762–763; G. H. Stempel, ‘Sample size for classifying subject matter in dailies’. *Journalism Quarterly*, 29, 3 (Summer 1952), 333–334; R. L. Jones & R. E. Carter, ‘Some procedures for estimating “news hole” in content analysis’. *The Public Opinion Quarterly*, 23, 3 (Autumn 1959), 399–403.

⁶⁸ Riffe et al., ‘The effectiveness of random, consecutive day and constructed week sampling’, 139.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

research group and others, which evaluated sample sizes for newspaper content analysis across several years of editions, appear to corroborate these initial findings.⁷¹ These results were tested to see if they were viable for an examination of the *Hull Daily Mail*. Following the key principles set out by Riffe et al, four separate months were selected and articles coded for crime-related content.⁷² For the purposes of consistency, January was chosen for the month, and the years, which were at regular intervals throughout the whole period, were selected to reflect and capture changes in newspaper size across the years, including the aforementioned shift to front-page news items. The number of occasions a crime appeared was then counted and the mean calculated for each of the four months, and then for the population as a whole.

Table 1. Mean totals for crime-related references in editions of the *Hull Daily Mail* for January 1924, January 1928, January 1932 and January 1936.

Newspaper month and year	Mean number of crime-related references
January 1924	15
January 1928	15.4
January 1932	13.7
January 1936	12.4
Mean population total	14.1

In total, 106 newspapers were analysed for the sample, and the results are detailed in Table 1. There was a diverse range in the number of crime-related references in the sample editions – from four at the lowest end to 35 at the peak. As these divergences actually appeared within each sample month, as well as across the

⁷¹ See Lacy et al., ‘Sample size for newspaper content analysis’, 836–845; Luke & Caburnay, ‘How much is enough?’, 76–91.

⁷² Riffe et al., ‘The effectiveness of random, consecutive day and constructed week sampling’, 135–136.

four years, when calculated as a mean of the population there appears to be a remarkable consistency in the total figure. Furthermore, the number of pages in the newspaper sample, although ranging from between four and 12 in the early years, to up to 16 or 20 in the 1930s, made little difference to the mean totals when constructed week sampling was applied. In fact, as Table 1 reveals, some of the later editions contained fewer crime-related references than those eight or ten years earlier, even in editions that boasted 20 pages of news coverage, which consequently affected the overall mean figure. That said, it is worth noting that later editions did feature larger front-page pieces, but for the quantitative purposes of both the test sampling and the subsequent study would still only count as one, as already outlined.

To test both the effectiveness and efficiency of the constructed week sampling technique, 20 samples of a 6-day (one week), 12-day (two weeks), and 18-day (three weeks) were selected. The days were chosen by assigning each a number and then using an online random number generator to select each corresponding day. The mean for each sample was then calculated. The results are presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Mean totals for crime-related references in 6-day, 12-day and 18-day constructed weeks.

Constructed week	Mean number of crime-related references across the 20 samples
6-day (one week)	14.4
12-day (two weeks)	13.8
18-day (three weeks)	13.7

As the Riffe et al study used a 95% confidence interval to calculate the efficiency of constructed week sampling – i.e. results within two standard errors of the mean population – this test did the same. Where the population mean was 14.1, the

population standard deviation stood at 4.88, and calculations were made for the standard error ranges (Table 3).⁷³

Table 3. Standard error calculations for 6-day, 12-day and 18-day constructed weeks.

Constructed week	% within two SE	% within one SE
6-day (one week)	100	90
12-day (two weeks)	100	85
18-day (three weeks)	95	85

The findings from the test sample echo those by Riffe et al, with all three constructed week samples (6-day, 12-day, and 18-day) meeting the 95% confidence interval, thus making them a suitable sampling technique for a content analysis of the *Hull Daily Mail*. Moreover, the results for the three constructed week samples falling within one standard error of the mean are well above the 68% predicated by the Central Limits Theorem for random samples.⁷⁴ Again, following the examples of Riffe et al, it is safe to conclude that as little as a 6-day constructed week would provide a reliable representative sample for four months of the *Hull Daily Mail*. Extrapolating these findings means that three constructed weeks would cover each of the 21 years under investigation. In total, 378 editions of the *Hull Daily Mail* were analysed for crime-related content, which proved to be a challenging but ultimately achievable figure. This figure also meant that there was a correlation between the percentage (approximately 6%) of the total newspaper population for the 21 years and the sample size used to test the efficacy of constructed week sampling.

⁷³ For example, the standard error calculation for the 6-day constructed week was $4.88 \div (\sqrt{6})2.45 = 1.99$. So for two standard errors the figure would be 3.98.

⁷⁴ Riffe et al., 'The effectiveness of random, consecutive day and constructed week sampling', 138.

Although the constructed week sample technique has been primarily utilised in quantitative analyses of newspaper content, as was the case here, it also provided the basis for the qualitative examination of content, carried out in line with the key objectives and research questions. The recommendations of Riffe et al to use two constructed weeks for a year's worth of newspapers, and the Lacy et al findings that a nine constructed week sample yielded reliable results for a five-year period, could no doubt be applied to this current study.⁷⁵ However, it was important to make sure that the initial preparatory examinations of the *Hull Daily Mail*, alongside the sample test approach and findings as described above, guided both the quantitative and qualitative content analysis of the newspapers in a bid to become a more iterative and effective research approach. For example, during the testing of the constructed week sampling technique, crime-related incidents were identified and counted using the aforementioned categories, but some sections, such as the 'court gossip' columns that featured in the earlier editions of the newspaper, were counted as single units. As these often included commentary on various forms of criminal activity, it was decided to count these separately and analyse them as individual elements in the contemporaneous crime narrative in order to evaluate their relevancy to the themes of the research. While this would no doubt increase the crime counts in some instances, a consistent approach across the years ensured that this would not affect the overall averages or negate the efficacy of constructed week methodologies. In order to observe trends and developments of narratives across what has already been described as a diverse 21-year period, it was important to ensure that all the years were covered in the 378-edition sample. Consequently, each 6-day sample was constructed from within a four-month

⁷⁵ Riffe et al., 'The effectiveness of random, consecutive day and constructed week sampling', 139; Lacy et al., 'Sample size for newspaper content analysis', 843.

period of each year (i.e. January to April, May to August, September to December), again assigning numbers to each edition and using an online number generator for the selection, all with the aim of adhering to the sample test approach and the Riffe et al findings.

Of course, the 378-newspaper sample was representative only in the sense that it would yield a sufficient number of crime-related articles to carry out a more in-depth textual content analysis. Until the qualitative analysis was carried out, the specific content was unknown, apart from it being crime related. As will be shown in subsequent chapters, the sample did yield a sufficient number of relevant articles for an effective qualitative content analysis to be conducted. To bolster this examination, a series of formulated keyword searches of the newspaper archive database were also carried out.⁷⁶ Online databases can provide ‘the capability to retrieve a large quantity of relevant items with a single search term’, and are becoming an increasingly useful tool for the newspaper researcher.⁷⁷ However, as with other sampling methods, the dangers of reliability and validity and the representative characteristics of the results mean that caution should be applied during the search process.⁷⁸ The results are also influenced by the quality of the database technology and efficacy of its search engines, so it is impossible to conclude that a specific search term yields all instances within the archive.⁷⁹ Consequently, this approach was not used for the crime counts but was only utilised to support more detailed textual analyses of the newspaper sample. A range of search terms relating to the key themes was generated. These included relatively open

⁷⁶ The British Newspaper Archive, *Hull Daily Mail*. Available online: www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk [Accessed from 25/11/2014]. Copyright: Image © Trinity Mirror, courtesy of The British Library Board.

⁷⁷ J. E. Stryker et al., ‘Validation of database search terms for content analysis: the case of cancer news coverage’. *Journalism and Mass Communication Quarterly*, 83, 2 (Summer 2006), 413–430:414.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 423.

terms and phrases such as ‘criminal class’, ‘residuum’, ‘motor bandits’, ‘juvenile delinquency’, ‘eugenics’, ‘crime reform’, ‘soldiers’, ‘police’ and ‘unemployment’.

The whole 21-year period was covered during the searches and as with the 378-edition sample, trends and developments in the local crime narratives were examined and evaluated. To support these newspaper content analyses, and to help evaluate the existence of perceptible crime panics or raised anxieties within the local community (which are often characterised by a prolonged moralising commentary over a period of days, weeks or even months in the newspapers), sequential newspaper editions were analysed when sampled or database-searched articles were found to contain relevant thematic elements. For example, where an editorial column in a specific newspaper discussed the issue of juvenile delinquency or the problems of increasing motor crime (and the proposed solutions), several editions of the newspapers that were printed both before and after the said article were examined in a bid to identify observations on a particular aspect of criminality that was perceived to be a threat to society, both locally and nationally.

While the aforementioned online database could be exploited for interwar editions of the *Hull Daily Mail*, there was no corresponding database for the *Hull Times*. These newspapers were instead examined on microfilm, where crime-related articles were identified using the John Meadley Index, accessed via the Hull History Centre.⁸⁰ This is an index of articles covering everything from agriculture and art to the weather and whaling, and, crucially, highlighted local articles on crime, police, prisons, punishment and the courts. The index did not cover every incident of local crime, and the original compilers were no doubt selective in their assessments of what would be of

⁸⁰ R. Barnard, *The Meadley Index to the Hull Times, volume VII (1917–1927)* and R. Barnard, *The Meadley Index to the Hull Times, volume VIII (1928–1945)*. Hull History Centre, Hull.

interest to future historians and researchers (no criteria was included for how the articles were chosen for the index). In addition, a proportion of the articles identified in the weekly *Hull Times* index were straightforward reprints of the original pieces that had featured in its sister paper, the *Hull Daily Mail*. The index still yielded interesting and relevant articles, thus contributing to the overall examination, albeit in an auxiliary and complementary fashion.

Other key sources

While the local newspapers were the primary source for the reconstruction of an interwar crime narrative, other key voices were also examined and evaluated in a bid to present a more comprehensive picture of reactions to crime and criminality in this period. As Hall et al note, the role of the media in shaping and defining the primary narratives of crime should not be assessed in isolation (the authors were primarily dealing with elite and public responses to mugging in the 1970s).⁸¹ Instead, the exploits of other key constituents in the crime drama, such as the police and the courts, which are inextricably linked to media analyses and responses, should also be examined.⁸² As noted previously, newspaper reports from the local police forces and the magistrates' courts and assizes regularly featured comments from the respective chief constables and judges/magistrates, in addition to details about local crime levels, specific crime issues and particular cases appearing before the courts. While these reports may have been subject to the editorial processes of the newspaper, they remain crucial to our understanding of the local crime narrative and perceptions of criminality.

These reports have been supplemented by information gathered from contemporaneous documentation produced by the local police forces and the courts.

⁸¹ Hall et al., *Policing the crisis*, 30.

⁸² *Ibid.*

For example, ‘general orders’ from the chief constables of both the Hull Police and East Riding Constabulary, which include details of local policing priorities and issues, have provided a wealth of detail about local campaigns. So have the quarterly reports of Hull City Council Watch and Licensing Committee, which oversaw local policing activity, and the minutes from the East Riding Standing Joint Committee, which met four times a year and often included comments from the local chief constables. A series of local beat reports, produced in 1928, have also been examined. For contextual purposes, and to provide an overview of official crime levels in Hull and East Yorkshire, the annual judicial statistics for England and Wales have been utilised, with all the usual caveats applied to such crime returns. The East Riding Constabulary Chief Constable’s annual returns, which included additional details and comments about the figures, augmented these nationally produced statistics. The annual judicial statistics also provide information on court appearances, and the reports from the commissioners of prisons, detailing prison populations across the country including Hull, are available for most of the interwar period. Locally compiled registers of imprisonments for Hull complemented these statistics, as did details extracted from the Hull juvenile court registers, which were compiled from 1933. The annual reports from the Hull, East Riding and Lincolnshire Discharged Prisoners’ Aid Society provided further information about local attitudes to crime and criminality.

To understand the social, political and economic context in relation to crime and criminality in the interwar period, a number of other sources were exploited, including Hansard reports from debates held in the House of Commons and House of Lords, and Cabinet papers covering issues such as public order, corporal punishment and criminal justice bills. From a local perspective, records of the committee meetings and proceedings of Hull City Council and East Riding of Yorkshire Council were

examined, along with trade directories and yearbooks detailing both the local demographics and the political constituency of the region. Utilised alongside the aforementioned judicial statistics and the local police returns, these sources have afforded invaluable detail for the contextualisation of the region in interwar Britain, which is presented in the next chapter.

Chapter 1

Contextualising Hull and East Yorkshire: crime and society, 1919 to 1939

Progress and poverty still marched together if not hand in hand [...]. The analysis of inter-war living conditions illustrates only too clearly the paradox.¹

As noted in the Introduction, it is difficult to present a single, comprehensive social history of Britain during the interwar period. Most regions experienced both the negative and positives of the two decades between the wars. It would be fair to say, however, that some areas, such as the industrial north and parts of Wales, faced the former more frequently than the latter. As Overy notes, ‘dismay’ and a sense of ‘morbid decline’ became a ‘mainstream concern’ for people in many towns and cities across the country.² One of the primary concerns of the period was burgeoning unemployment, particularly in the aftermath of the First World War and in the early years of the 1930s. Until 1935, the national unemployed figure stood at more than 2 million – a consequence of the partial disintegration of many of the country’s staple industries, such as coalmining, iron and steel, and shipbuilding.³ Even within this single, negative element there were divergences of experience, illustrating just how difficult it is to present a ‘national’ picture of the interwar period. For example, the ‘rate of unemployment growth varied markedly between regions’, with areas such as London, the South-East and the Midlands experiencing job growth while many northern towns and cities faced economic stagnation.⁴

¹ Aldcroft, *The inter-war economy*, 375 & 384.

² Overy, *The morbid age*, 3 & 7.

³ Stevenson & Cook, *The slump*, 54.

⁴ Aldcroft, *The inter-war economy*, 79.

Hull and East Yorkshire was one such region that experienced many of the negative and destructive aspects of the interwar years in Britain. In their history of Hull, Gillett and MacMahon claim that for most of this period unemployment remained above the national average, hitting more than 20% of the eligible workforce at its peak in 1933.⁵ The reality may have been even worse. A 1937 enquiry by the Pilgrim Trust on the effects and causes of unemployment revealed that in the East Riding of Yorkshire as a whole, the figure was actually nearer 24%, remaining above 20% for the five years between 1931 and 1935.⁶ Some industries suffered more than others did. In 1924, about 28% of the more than 10,000 dockers in Hull were unemployed, rising to half of the workforce by 1931.⁷ Work in the shipyards was also damaged irreparably during the interwar years. By the 1930s, almost 40% of workers in this once booming industry were unemployed.⁸ Other major centres in the region outside of Hull were also affected. For instance, despite the relative strength and industrial continuities of the administrative centre of the East Riding of Yorkshire, Beverley still experienced what were perceived to be ‘critical levels’ of unemployment for the town, particularly in the first three years of the 1930s.⁹ Of course, alongside unemployment came deprivation and hardship for many local families in cities like Hull, compounded by bad housing in certain districts. According to Avery, overcrowding affected one third of the population of Hull in 1931.¹⁰ Larger towns like Beverley also suffered from housing shortages after the First World War.¹¹ Population increases intensified the problem. However, the

⁵ E. Gillett & K. A. MacMahon, *A history of Hull*, 2nd edition (Hull: Hull University Press, 1989), 431.

⁶ National Archives, AST 7/256. The Pilgrim Trust, *Enquiry into the causes and effects of long-term unemployment*, 1937. Available online: <http://discovery.nationalarchives.gov.uk/details/r/C1834014> [Accessed 20/8/2013].

⁷ R. Gurnham, *The story of Hull* (Andover: Phillimore & Co. Ltd, 2011), 170.

⁸ Gillett & MacMahon, *A history of Hull*, 432.

⁹ C. R. Elrington, (ed.), *The Victoria history of the counties of England, volume VI: Beverley* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), 154.

¹⁰ A. Avery, *The story of Hull* (Pickering: Blackthorn Press, 2008), 49.

¹¹ Elrington, *The Victoria history*, 152.

bare statistics for rises in Hull may be misleading as the increase from approximately 285,000 in 1920 to just under 320,000 by the late 1930s can partly be attributed to boundary extensions that took place on 1 April 1930.¹² Migration away from the city in 1920s no doubt tempered the problem. That said, the problem was real; overcrowding persisted and slums remained a feature of many districts across the city.¹³

Again, it would be erroneous to present a simple one-sided, primarily negative picture of the region in this period. During the particularly difficult time in the immediate aftermath of the 1929 crash, Hull avoided the economic extremes endured by some of the other major cities in the country, mainly because of the absence of heavy industry in the region.¹⁴ Housing conditions began to improve in the 1930s, helped in no small part by local house-building programmes that created 19,000 new houses in the years after the First World War.¹⁵ Some of these were part of the new sprawling council estates in the north and east of the city, which improved (materially) the lives of those fortunate enough to be rehoused as part of the local slum clearances.¹⁶ Many people in Hull experienced health improvements during this period, alongside rising living standards for those who had kept their jobs or who were able to find employment outside those industries most affected by the economic slump.¹⁷ The quality of education also improved, as more money was invested in the city's schools.¹⁸ Those with a little spare cash could indulge themselves in the increasing number of leisure opportunities available in the city. By 1938, 36 picture houses were operating in

¹² Hull City Council, *Council year book* (1920). Town and City Council Printed Material, C TMY/4/44, Hull City Archives, Hull History Centre, Hull; Hull City Council, *Council year book* (1939). Town and City Council Printed Material, C TMY/4/63, Hull City Archives, Hull History Centre, Hull.

¹³ J. Markham, *The book of Hull* (Buckingham: Barracuda Books Ltd, 1989), 111.

¹⁴ K. J. Allison (ed.), *A history of the county of York, East Riding: the city of Kingston Upon Hull*, vol. 1 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1969), 275.

¹⁵ Gillett & MacMahon, *A history of Hull*, 435.

¹⁶ Markham, *The book of Hull*, 111.

¹⁷ Gurnham, *The story of Hull*, 170–171.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 174.

Hull, and the period has been described as a ‘golden age’ for local theatre.¹⁹ However, Hull, like many places across the country, remained a city of contrasts, where it was ‘possible to live in one part of the city under a cloud of poverty and unemployment and to see the period as a time of deprivation. Equally, one could reside in an affluent area’.²⁰ The lives of the people of Hull and district were indeed marked by the paradoxical ‘progress and poverty’ during this period.

Just as it is problematic to generalise about the socio-economics of the country – or even a single region for that matter – in the interwar years, this thesis argues that it is also dangerous to generalise about attitudes and reactions to crime and criminality. As regions across the country suffered or flourished (relatively) socially and economically during the demanding interwar period, it is also likely that responses to criminality (often perceived to be linked to social and economic factors) were marked by local specificities and exigencies. So in order to gain a more accurate picture of the fundamental attitudes and reactions to crime and criminality in the period, it is crucial to examine responses at a local level, within a national framework. This may reveal divergences across the country and even within regions (urban Hull versus rural East Riding, for example) that, on the face of it, experienced many similar challenges and issues during the interwar years.

Very little is actually known about crime in Hull and East Yorkshire during the interwar period, or for most of the twentieth century for that matter. While most of the general histories of Hull have covered the basic social, economic and cultural aspects of the region between 1919 and 1939, crime and criminality are neglected areas. There is also an absence of academic studies into either incidents or attitudes to crime in this

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 176–178.

²⁰ Markham, *The book of Hull*, 111.

region. Before examining the findings of both the newspaper crime counts and the qualitative analysis of the archival material and *Hull Daily Mail* and *Hull Times*, it may be beneficial to commence with a brief overview of the nature of the law enforcement agencies operating in the region. The structure and relative efficiency of each police force impacted significantly on their ability to deal effectively with crime in their respective district, so this will provide the context for the summary of local crime statistics, compiled by each of the local police forces and sent to the Home Office for collation and publication. It will also highlight some of the main problems faced by each respective police force during the period, facilitating a contextualisation of the more detailed quantitative and qualitative analyses of the reactions to crime and criminality that follow in this and the next four chapters.

Local law enforcement

Today, only one force, Humberside Police, has responsibility for law and order in Hull and the East Riding of Yorkshire. In the nineteenth and the first half of the twentieth century the two regions had geographically specific and distinct police forces – Hull City Police and East Riding Constabulary (and the Beverley Borough Police Force until its merger with the East Riding Constabulary in 1928) – even though the idiosyncrasies of the region’s physical boundaries necessitated close cooperation and a sharing of resources and information between the two organisations. Below is a brief history of the development of both forces up to the Second World War and some of the issues that they faced during the interwar years.

Hull City Police

Until 1836, Hull ‘did not have a paid and professionally organized police force’.²¹

Instead, the city had a system that had remained in force for hundreds of years and featured parish constables and watchmen acting as the main methods of law

enforcement.²² A growing urbanised population in the nineteenth century was often

accompanied by increasing anxieties about crime and criminality, precipitating the formation of a more modern police force.²³ Of course, this was nothing new during this

period, as police forces were created across the country. According to Welsh, who has researched the development of the Hull Police, this new borough force was

‘considerably superior’ to many other police forces, being a more efficient and

effective law enforcement organisation.²⁴ As the population of Hull increased, so did

the strength of its police force. At its inception in 1836, the total number of officers was

87, but by the time of its centenary in 1936, the numbers of the force had swelled to

485, although this does include members of the police fire brigade.²⁵ During the same

period, the gross expenditure on the Hull force had increased to just under £180,000.²⁶

By the start of the Second World War, the strength of the Hull Police force had reached

493 officers.²⁷ As is the case today, increases in both crime and the fear of crime

precipitated calls for additional police officers to ensure the safety of the city’s growing

population. Welsh claims that in the first few decades after the formation of the new

Hull Police force, the public/police number ratio remained at a relatively stable and

²¹ D. R. Welsh, *The reform of urban policing in Victorian England: a study of Kingston upon Hull from 1836 to 1866*. (PhD thesis. University of Hull, January 1997), 73.

²² A. A. Clarke, *The policemen of Hull: the story of Hull Police force 1836 to 1974* (Beverley: Hutton Press Ltd, 1992), 7.

²³ *Ibid.*, 34.

²⁴ Welsh, *The reform of urban policing*, 82.

²⁵ *An authentic history of the Hull Police force – in commemoration of its centenary, 1836–1936* (Hull: Hull Watch Committee, 1936), YH 363/2, East Riding of Yorkshire Archives, Treasure House, Beverley, 13.

²⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁷ Hull City Council, *Council year book* (1939), 127.

effective level.²⁸ However, the First World War would have ‘left holes in the police ranks’ due to officers serving in the conflict.²⁹ The inevitable loss of life and the numbers of officers who sustained injuries in the conflict would continue to affect the local force in the years immediately following the war. The issue of police numbers led the Hull Watch Committee, which until the mid-1930s was responsible for the maintenance and management of the city police, to call for additional officers to help bolster current numbers.³⁰

Such calls were common throughout the 21-year interwar period, and many of them appeared in the pages of the local press. For example, on 19 December 1934, an article discussing the current strength of police acknowledged the efficiency of the force (confirming Welsh’s claims noted earlier) while at the same time requesting more police officers on the beat.³¹ A few months later, the Chief Constable, Mr T. E. Howden, made a recommendation to the Watch Committee for an additional 24 men to deal with increasing crime in the city, as he felt that the ‘position had become very acute and the public were not getting the protection to which they were entitled’.³² The calls continued, increasing in line with the growth of the new housing estates that were springing up on the outskirts the city. Boasting an ever-growing population, the new developments in north Hull were, it was claimed, without adequate protection, leading to increasing fears among the local population. ‘Hull’s shortage of police is causing an increasingly serious position’, declared an article in a June 1936 edition of the *Hull*

²⁸ Welsh, *The reform of urban policing*, 383–384.

²⁹ Emsley, *Crime, police, and penal policy*, 247.

³⁰ Hull City Council, *Watch Committee minute book* (1918–19). Humberside Police Authority Records, POL 4/1/1/31, East Riding of Yorkshire Archives, Treasure House, Beverley; Clarke does claim that older men or recently retired officers were recruited to deal with the shortage caused by the First World War, in Clarke, *Policemen of Hull*, 93.

³¹ Hull Daily Mail, ‘Hull Police strength: new chief inspector proposed’, *Hull Daily Mail*. 19 December 1934, 8.

³² Yorkshire Post, ‘More police for Hull’ (27 March 1935). *News cutting book 1934–1935*, Humberside Police Authority Records, POL/4/11/1/1, East Riding of Yorkshire Archives, Treasure House, Beverley, 12.

Daily Mail.³³ The piece went on to claim that, due to the lack of police protection on the estates, ‘pilferers and other undesirables are watching their opportunity’.³⁴ Many of the calls for additional officers, however, either went unheeded or were refused by Hull City Council’s Finance Committee on account of a lack of resources.³⁵ While the local public may have wanted more bobbies on the beat, particularly in times of perceived crises, they were less keen in swelling the ranks themselves. The results of a city-wide appeal to men over military age to become special constables of at least 2,500 strong, ended with a figure that was described by regular *Hull Daily Mail* columnist John Humber as ‘extremely disappointing’.³⁶

There is little doubt that the perceived nature of crime and criminality during the interwar period was one of the key reasons behind the calls for more police officers in Hull. While the offences that most concerned the authorities remained incredibly static during the hundred or so years from the beginning of the modern police force to the start of the Second World War – such as theft, robbery and drunkenness – the specific socio-economic and political milieu of the interwar years produced at times a fervency of approach to local law enforcement that may have been neglected or ignored by more generalised ‘national’ accounts of crime and criminality in this period. As will be shown in the subsequent chapters, a host of events and issues often provoked vehement responses and decisive action. For example, while the constituency and objectives of the police on the beat remained the same for many years, the motor age precipitated a direct response by the Hull Police with the purchase of additional motor vehicles and finally in the formation of the Mechanical Transport Department, even

³³ Hull Daily Mail, ‘Hull must have more policemen: unprotected homes on housing estates’, *Hull Daily Mail*, 5 June 1936, 9.

³⁴ *Ibid.*

³⁵ Hull Daily Mail, ‘No money for increased police force at Hull’, *Hull Daily Mail*, 28 March 1935, 9.

³⁶ J. Humber, ‘Disappointing reply to Hull call for “special” constables’, *Humberside Echoes*, *Hull Daily Mail*, 13 June 1938, 4.

though the latter was only instituted following the Road Traffic Act of 1933.³⁷ The department contained 30 constables operating a range of vehicles including four cars, two vans, three motorcycles and two ambulances. Pedal cycles were added to beats on the outskirts of the city.³⁸ This also affected ordinary beat policing. In 1930, Chief Constable Howden proposed major changes to the local police organisation, redistributing resources in line with a new ‘police box system’.³⁹ This system allowed officers, in times of emergency, to contact more speedily either headquarters or local branches via telephones in the police boxes, which were located on every beat in the city, replacing the previous time-consuming method of using messengers or attending in person to raise the alarm. The aim was to tackle what was perceived to be the increased mobility of the offender who, due to the advent of the motor car, could ‘work more quickly than they did in the past’.⁴⁰ The new scheme would also facilitate better communications between police headquarters and beat officers during their day-to-day duties.⁴¹

What does appear to have remained constant in the century following its inception in 1836 is the esteem in which the public and local dignitaries held the Hull Police and its officers. In his account of the local force in the first half of the nineteenth century, Welsh notes how the perceptions of the police were overwhelmingly positive; the force’s actions as a whole rarely elicited criticism in the pages of the local press.⁴² In general, the same can be said about the public response to local policing in the interwar years. This is perhaps exemplified by the large crowds that ‘lined the street to

³⁷ Clarke, *Policemen of Hull*, 101.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 110.

³⁹ Hull Watch Committee, *Minutes of the proceedings of the Watch and Licensing Committee* (25 February 1930). Minutes of Proceedings of Committees, City and County of Kingston Upon Hull Municipal Corporation and Urban Sanitary Authority, TCM 2/43/3, Hull History Centre, Hull, 38.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 39–40.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 39.

⁴² Welsh, *The reform of urban policing*, 384.

watch the police march behind their band' as part in the centenary celebrations of the Hull Police in 1936. The parade featured four superintendents, 17 inspectors, 30 sergeants and 264 constables, headed by four mounted police.⁴³ During the service held at Hull's Holy Trinity Church, the Archdeacon of York, Ven. Canon A. C. England, declared that for a hundred years the 'citizens of this great city have enjoyed the protection and care of their lives and property by a gallant body of men trained and equipped for their duties', adding that Hull had 'much cause for pride and for the greatest possible satisfaction in the men who have served their day and generation in such a conspicuous manner'.⁴⁴

Of course, there were occasions when the press featured articles that were less than complimentary about local police and policing methods. In a piece written by E. V. Knox, entitled 'Annoying the public', the author asked whether the police were there to 'protect the public, or to protect themselves from the charge of inactivity', although this was directed at all police and not just members of the local force.⁴⁵ There were also complaints and accusations made against certain officers in the Hull Police who, it was claimed, could display 'rudeness and incivility' when dealing with members of the public.⁴⁶ Newspaper editorials sometimes attacked the police for their failure to deal with serious crime, complaining that a disproportionate amount of time was being spent on the growing number of minor offences. However, these were often about police numbers and part of campaigns to increase the amount of local officers, or an attempt to reverse the hundreds of new offences and bye-laws that had emerged

⁴³ Hull Daily Mail, 'Robert pleads guilty to causing a crowd – a large crowd – to collect! Hull Police centenary', *Hull Daily Mail*. 4 May 1936, 7.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

⁴⁵ E. V. Knox, 'Annoying the public', *Hull Daily Mail*. 16 July 1928, 8.

⁴⁶ Chief Constable, Hull City Police, *Incivility* (21 July 1937). Chief Constables' Memoranda 1926–1937, Humberside Police Authority Records, POL/4/2/4/3, East Riding of Yorkshire Archives, Treasure House, Beverley.

because of the latest motoring acts initiated by the government.⁴⁷ Overall, the Hull Police remained a much-respected organisation, seemingly doing its best in extremely challenging times. They never became a scapegoat for the press – it already had its stooges; and they were ones that appear to have endured, and would endure, for many years.

East Riding Constabulary

Then, as now, rural policing presents a whole host of unique issues and challenges. Unlike its urban counterparts in large cities like Hull, where the population although large is often concentrated in geographically distinct and spatially compressed districts, the rural region can be more expansive and feature a number of heterogeneous towns and villages located within sometimes imprecise boundaries. Conversely, rural districts such as the East Riding of Yorkshire also experienced significantly fewer incidents of crime when compared to conurbations such as Hull. This makes them an interesting counterpoint in crime and criminality studies, which often focus on the industrialised and urbanised towns and cities that were perceived to be the ideal breeding grounds for criminal behaviour. That is not to claim that crime was not an issue. However, by March 1938, after what was a tumultuous 20-year period of British history following the events of the First World War, a member of East Riding Constabulary, commenting at a superintendents' conference in Beverley, noted that no police division in the force's jurisdiction was running at more than two or three crimes a day.⁴⁸ While it is always difficult to assess the actual levels of crime, be it in a city or a rural district, it is correct to conclude that more serious crimes, such as assault, robberies, gang-related

⁴⁷ For an example, see Editorial, 'The police and their duties', *Hull Daily Mail*. 12 March 1931, 6.

⁴⁸ Chief Constable, East Riding Constabulary, *Chief constable's conference with superintendents minutes* (1 March 1938). Humberside Police Authority Records, POL/3/2/6/1, East Riding of Yorkshire Archives, Treasure House, Beverley, 37.

incidents, and murder, were in fact ‘comparatively rare’ in places like the East Riding of Yorkshire, although they still did occur on occasion.⁴⁹

The geographical specificities of the region did make policing difficult, requiring chief constables to be creative and resourceful with the officers they had at their disposal. The total acreage covered by the East Riding Constabulary stood at 741,073 in 1929, significantly higher than some other rural areas in the country, such as Northamptonshire (581,679), East Suffolk (549,241) or West Sussex (401,916).⁵⁰ The sheer size of the district made effective policing extremely difficult. One of the key reasons for this was due to the fact that ‘away from the towns and divisional stations policemen were often quite isolated in their villages with no means of speedily summoning assistance if required’.⁵¹ It may have also been the case that many of the officers in the constabulary were relatively untrained in rural policing. To counter these problems, chief constables often felt the need to bombard their officers with detailed orders about how to carry out their duties more effectively, given the specificities of policing the countryside.⁵² So in addition to instructions about working hours and the length of their respective beats, officers were issued with detailed orders on how to complete their note books and beat reports.⁵³

Some of the issues around police numbers in the East Riding may have been tempered in 1935 when boundary extensions to Hull absorbed parts of the parishes of

⁴⁹ A. A. Clarke, *Country coppers: the story of the East Riding police* (Hornsea: Arton Books, 1993), 66.

⁵⁰ East Riding Constabulary, *Files relating to the financial management of the force* (1931–1932). Humberside Police Authority Records, POL/3/4/2/2, East Riding of Yorkshire Archives, Treasure House, Beverley.

⁵¹ Clarke, *Country coppers*, 77.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 25.

⁵³ Clarke, *Country coppers*, 25; a detailed breakdown of how East Riding Constabulary officers were directed in compiling their beat reports is available in: Chief Constable, East Riding Constabulary, *General orders 15/1927, 22/1927* (14 September 1927). General Orders 1927, Humberside Police Authority Records, POL/3/2/2/2, East Riding of Yorkshire Archives, Treasure House, Beverley.

Cottingham, Anlaby, Willerby and Kirk Ella.⁵⁴ These were on top of the substantial extensions that had taken place several years earlier, which saw the addition of more than 4,000 acres to the Hull borough.⁵⁵ This all helped because, as Clarke notes, the areas of the East Riding that sat adjacent to Hull and which probably experienced (or were perceived to experience) levels and types of crime more associated with the larger cities, kept the members of the East Riding Constabulary busy.⁵⁶ The merging of the Beverley Borough Police force with the East Riding Constabulary in April 1928 may also have helped by bolstering the number of officers in the Constabulary with new members (although Beverley was a relatively small unit in itself).⁵⁷ As in Hull, there were regular calls for increases in the strength of the East Riding Constabulary following its formation in 1856. These persisted throughout the rest of the nineteenth century and during the interwar years, and like Hull, policing in the East Riding had changed very little over the years. The rapid social and economic changes precipitated a rethinking of law enforcement in rural areas as well as the big towns and cities. It was no longer deemed suitable for parish constables and watchmen to police the towns and villages. So on 14 October 1856, a Quarter Sessions meeting approved a recommendation for a police force of 48 constables and 12 mounted or superintendent constables – at a cost of approximately £4,200 per year.⁵⁸

While the strength of the East Riding Constabulary may have increased over the next 50 to 60 years, often as a result of ‘cajoling’ by inspectors and chief constables who offered unfavourable comparisons of officer numbers with county police forces in

⁵⁴ Chief Constable, East Riding Constabulary, *General orders* (1935). General Orders 1935, Humberside Police Authority Records, POL/3/2/2/10, East Riding of Yorkshire Archives, Treasure House, Beverley.

⁵⁵ Allison, *A history of the county of York, East Riding*, 1–10.

⁵⁶ Clarke, *Country coppers*, 63.

⁵⁷ Chief Constable, East Riding Constabulary, *General order 11/1928* (7 April 1928). General Orders 1928, Humberside Police Authority Records, POL/3/2/2/3, East Riding of Yorkshire Archives, Treasure House, Beverley.

⁵⁸ Clarke, *Country coppers*, 15–16.

different parts of the country, the criminal landscape of the interwar years presented a new set of issues and challenges to the rural copper.⁵⁹ Growing problems on the roads caused consternation in the boroughs, and so did increases in local crime and rowdyism among younger members of the community, prompting calls for more police officers in what were previously relatively quiet market and coastal towns such as Drifffield, Flamborough and Bridlington.⁶⁰ As in neighbouring Hull, these calls were made during periods of local and national economic crises, when, unfortunately, government spending on such organisations was constantly under review.⁶¹ For example, in 1932/33 the strength of the East Riding Constabulary was actually reduced by three constables because of a ‘major reduction in police expenditure’.⁶² The size and distribution of the police force in the East Riding meant that, at times, it was necessary to ask for assistance from its neighbour in Hull. This was particularly the case at the regular horse racing meetings held in the town of Beverley. The Chief Constable of East Riding Constabulary made requests to Hull to help police these events, which included everything from the monitoring of course-side activities to traffic control and parking.⁶³ Even when the East Riding Constabulary had deployed approximately 30 constables and a number of plain-clothes officers who travelled from meeting to meeting, it was still deemed necessary to have in excess of 70 policemen from Hull.⁶⁴ The collaboration, facilitated by the proximity of the two forces, worked both ways. As the fears of public order escalated in the year of the General Strike, Hull Police had issued a request to the East Riding Constabulary for assistance. The force duly deployed a

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 45.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 52.

⁶¹ Taylor, ‘The politics of rising crime statistics’, 10.

⁶² Clarke, *Country coppers*, 80–81.

⁶³ Chief Constable, East Riding Constabulary, *General order 20/1928* (13/14 June 1928). General Orders 1928, Humberside Police Authority Records, POL/3/2/2/3, East Riding of Yorkshire Archives, Treasure House, Beverley.

⁶⁴ Hull Daily Mail, ‘All the colours of other days – but not the same animation at Beverley races’, *Hull Daily Mail*. 25 May 1938, 1.

detachment of one sergeant and 10 constables, bolstering the existing police numbers and the 75 constables of the 1st Police Reserve unit.⁶⁵ Collaboration of this nature remained a feature of policing in Hull and East Yorkshire throughout the interwar years.

Without conducting detailed histories of other police forces in the country, it is impossible to state whether Hull City Police or East Riding Constabulary differed in their respective approaches to law enforcement. It is highly likely that, as populations increased, calls for more officers on the beat (as is the case now) became a general refrain across the country. The shift to a more centralised police force and the drive towards efficiency probably both helped and hindered some local forces. The social and economic characteristics of the region and transformations in the nature of offences impacted severely on both forces in Hull and East Yorkshire, precipitating the calls for additional officers. Just how effective either force was in detecting and solving crime, however, is difficult to determine. On the face of it, the annual Home Office crime figures should provide a valuable guide. However, due to their inherent flaws, they may only be useful as part of an assessment of perceived rather than actual crime.

Crime statistics for Hull and East Yorkshire

Official statistics of crime in any region and during any given period are notoriously unreliable. As Gatrell and Hadden state, there is always

the problem common to all statistics of criminal behaviour: the fact that even under the most effective systems of law enforcement some offences must

⁶⁵ East Riding County Council, *Minutes of the proceedings of the Standing Joint Committee of the County Council and Court of Quarter Sessions for the East Riding of Yorkshire* (28 June 1926). Minute Book 1925–1928, East Riding County Council Records, CCER/1/4/4/12, East Riding of Yorkshire Archives, Treasure House, Beverley, 136.

always escape detection. As a result a certain discrepancy between the ‘actual’ and the recorded incidence of crime is inevitable.⁶⁶

This is the much debated and impossible to ascertain ‘dark figure’ of crime. No doubt police numbers, as already discussed, would have impacted on each force’s ability to detect, solve and, importantly, record crime, thus contributing further to the ‘dark figure’. However, the causal relationship between falling crime figures and police numbers is far from straightforward and could even be deemed a paradoxical one. A ‘weakening’ of a police force and its crime detection activities could lead to an increase in *actual* crime.⁶⁷ A corresponding decrease in the said force’s efficiency due to insufficient police numbers could also mean that these increases are not recorded, resulting in figures that do not accurately reflect the structural changes taking place to local law enforcement.

On a normal, day-to-day basis, the actual processes and systems adopted by each police force and the efficiency of the methods used to record criminal activity would be reflected in the official statistics. The relative intensity of each force’s law enforcement activities, provoked by specific societal anxieties (as will be shown in later chapters), could also affect the crime figures.⁶⁸ As could the redistribution of resources from core pursuits, including serious crime detection and prevention, to what are deemed to be less critical activities such as the regulation of traffic and dealing with motoring offences.⁶⁹ In a bid to address this issue of force distribution, the Hull Watch Committee passed a recommendation in July 1935 to allow all Hull Police officers doing clerical work or acting as fitters in the police force’s mechanical transport

⁶⁶ V. A. C. Gatrell & T. B. Hadden, ‘Criminal statistics and their interpretation’, in E. A. Wrigley (ed.), *Nineteenth century society: essays in the use of quantitative methods for the study of social data* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1972), 336–396:350.

⁶⁷ Mannheim, *Social aspects of crime in England*, 69.

⁶⁸ T. Sellin, ‘The significance of records of crime’. *Law Quarterly Review*, 67 (1951), 489–504:496.

⁶⁹ Mannheim, *Social aspects of crime in England*, 71.

division to be freed up to carry out more beat work on the streets. Civilians would replace the officers in these roles.⁷⁰ Indiscipline, coupled with insufficient training, may also have been a major issue for some police forces, as it was at times for the East Riding Constabulary.⁷¹ Compounding the problem further was the fact that different towns and cities may have used distinct categories for what appeared to be same offence – for example disorderly conduct and breach of the peace – making this kind of method of ‘data collection [...] particularly sensitive to consistency problems’.⁷²

The increasing federalisation of the police force during the interwar period should, on the face of it, help facilitate short-term comparisons during this 21-year period.⁷³ However, the ever-changing definitions and categorisations of crime, legislated centrally, implemented locally (perhaps discriminately) and presented in the annual judicial statistics, make comparisons problematic, even for relatively short periods. There is also the subject of the motivations of chief constables when presenting their crime figures to the Home Office. Taylor has claimed that during the interwar period the police created a ‘supply-led demand’ for their unique services by artificially raising crime statistics and other incidents of local and national interest and concern.⁷⁴ Conversely, police chiefs may be keener to present lower crime figures in a bid to reassure the public that they are operating effective preventative mechanisms. They could also try to boost ‘clear-up’ rates by failing to record crimes or recording

⁷⁰ Hull Watch Committee, *Minutes of the proceedings of the Watch and Licensing Committee* (5 July 1935). Minutes of Proceedings of Committees, City and County of Kingston Upon Hull Municipal Corporation and Urban Sanitary Authority, TCM 2/48/3, Hull History Centre, Hull, 65.

⁷¹ Clarke, *Country coppers*, 24

⁷² E. Monkkonen, ‘The quantitative historical study of crime and criminal justice’, in J. A. Inciardi & C. E. Faupel (eds.), *History and crime: implications for criminal justice policy* (London: Sage Publications, 1980), 53–73:61.

⁷³ Gatrell, ‘Crime, authority and the policeman-state’, 263.

⁷⁴ H. Taylor, ‘Forging the job: a crisis of ‘modernization’ or redundancy for the police in England and Wales, 1900–39’. *British Journal of Criminology*, 39, 1 (1999), 113–135:124–127.

them inaccurately – for example, marking them as a single offence if not solved or as multiple offences if somebody had been arrested and charged.⁷⁵

All these issues (the above list is not exhaustive) can make it difficult to assess accurately the true level of crime in society. That does not mean that crime statistics have no inherent value to the crime historian. Caveats in place and warnings heeded, they can still be used to map historical trends across time or gain better understanding of the developments in criminal justice policy.⁷⁶ They can provide that crucial ‘starting point, a hypothesis, for patterns of both criminal activity and responses to perceptions of that activity’.⁷⁷ As noted in the previous chapter, crime reporting has been a staple part of the media for many years, and details about levels of crime using the judicial statistics are a mainstay of these reports.⁷⁸ The *Hull Daily Mail* and *Hull Times* regularly ran articles using the official statistics for crime in both the Hull Police and East Riding Constabulary districts. The newspapers also included reports detailing the crime returns from the chief constables, taken from the annual reports from Hull or the quarterly meetings of the Standing Joint Committee for the East Riding of Yorkshire. These were primarily crime figures as presented in the annual judicial statistics for England and Wales under the categories ‘indictable offences known to the police’, respective to each police force. As with many of the other sets of figures in the annual returns, these were far from satisfactory and unlikely to present a comprehensive and accurate account of crime in each borough. According to Mannheim, these offences were purely discretionary in that each individual crime would only be recorded if an officer in charge believed that a reported incident had actually both occurred and

⁷⁵ Godfrey et al., *History and crime*, 32.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 35–36.

⁷⁷ Emsley, *Crime and society in England 1750–1900*, 30.

⁷⁸ Bradley, ‘Juvenile delinquency and the public sphere’, 19.

constituted a crime.⁷⁹ That said, in the interwar period, the compilers of the annual statistics, while recognising the issues, regarded these figures to be the ‘best index to the volume of crime’.⁸⁰ No comments regarding the validity of these statistics or acknowledgment of their problems were included in the newspaper reports; instead, they were presented as a true and accurate representation of crime in the region. When interpretations did appear, such as those from the respective chief constables, local magistrates, prison representatives or probation officers, they relate to the actual levels of crime (increases and decreases) as presented in the statistics and not to the efficacy of the figures themselves. As Sindall notes pertinently, perceptions that the public and institutions have around crime are actually based ‘on the criminal statistics, not the actual state of crime’, making them a ‘measure, not necessarily of what was happening, but of what people believed was happening’.⁸¹ It is these perceptions that are important here.

Official crime levels in Hull

Recorded crime in the UK increased for most of the twentieth century. In 1900, the number of indictable offences known to the police stood at 2.4 per thousand of the population; by 1997 this had risen to 89.1 (1992 experienced the highest recorded figure of 109.4 indictable offences per thousand population).⁸² The largest increases in recorded crime took place after the Second World War. Crime levels did rise during the interwar period, but these were at a much more modest rate. According to Stevenson,

⁷⁹ Mannheim, *Social aspects of crime in England*, 37.

⁸⁰ Home Office, *Criminal statistics England and Wales 1930*, Cm 4036 (London: Her Majesty’s Stationery Office). Available online: <https://parlipapers.proquest.com/parlipapers/docview/t70.d75.1931-031667?accountid=11528> [Accessed 3/11/2016], vi.

⁸¹ R. Sindall, *Street violence in the nineteenth century: media panic or real danger?* (Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1990), 26.

⁸² J. Hicks & G. Allen, *A century of change: trends in UK statistics since 1900* (London: House of Commons Library Research Paper 99/111, 1999). Available online: <http://researchbriefings.parliament.uk/ResearchBriefing/Summary/RP99-111> [Accessed 3/11/2016], 14.

these increases were between 5% and 7% per year.⁸³ There was, however, a ‘slightly sharper’ increase in crime during the 1930s, the perceived causes of which will be discussed in subsequent chapters.⁸⁴ As already noted, Hull didn’t buck other national social and economic trends during the interwar years (even if, as with other towns and cities, they experienced a number of locally-specific issues), and it was the same with regards to recorded levels of crime, as Figures 1 and 2 illustrate.⁸⁵

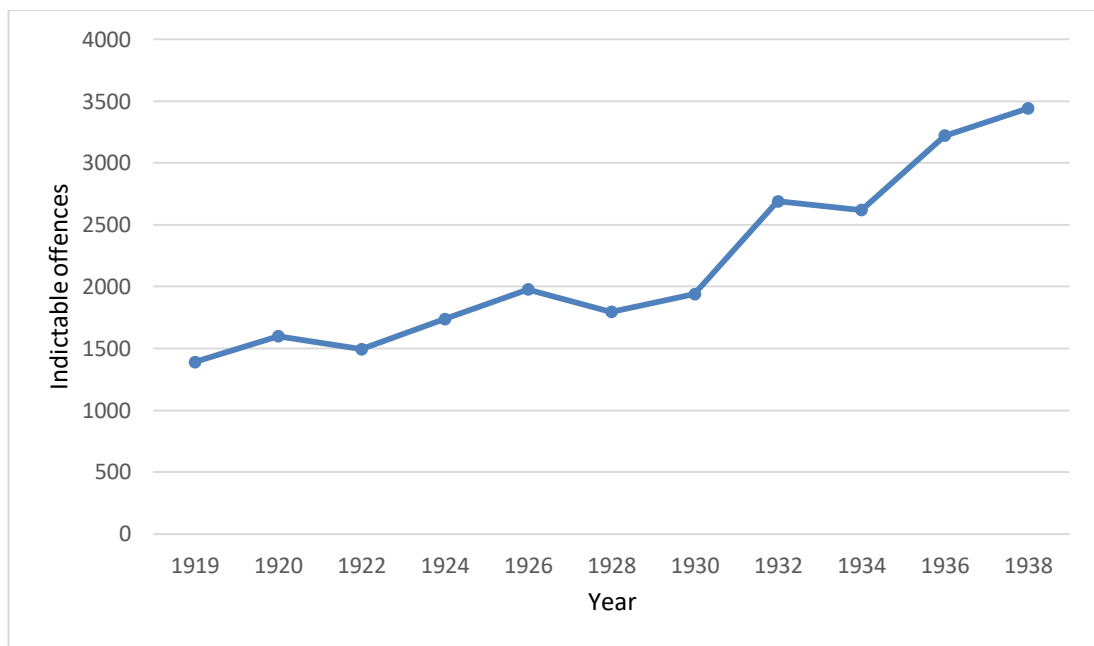


Figure 1. Indictable offences known to the police in Hull, 1919 to 1938.

⁸³ Stevenson, *British society 1914–1945*, 372.

⁸⁴ Emsley, *Crime and society in twentieth-century England*, 22.

⁸⁵ The dates and intervals in Figure 1 and 2 were determined by the availability of crime data for Hull and for England and Wales. These were utilised in both charts in order to make accurate and useful comparisons.

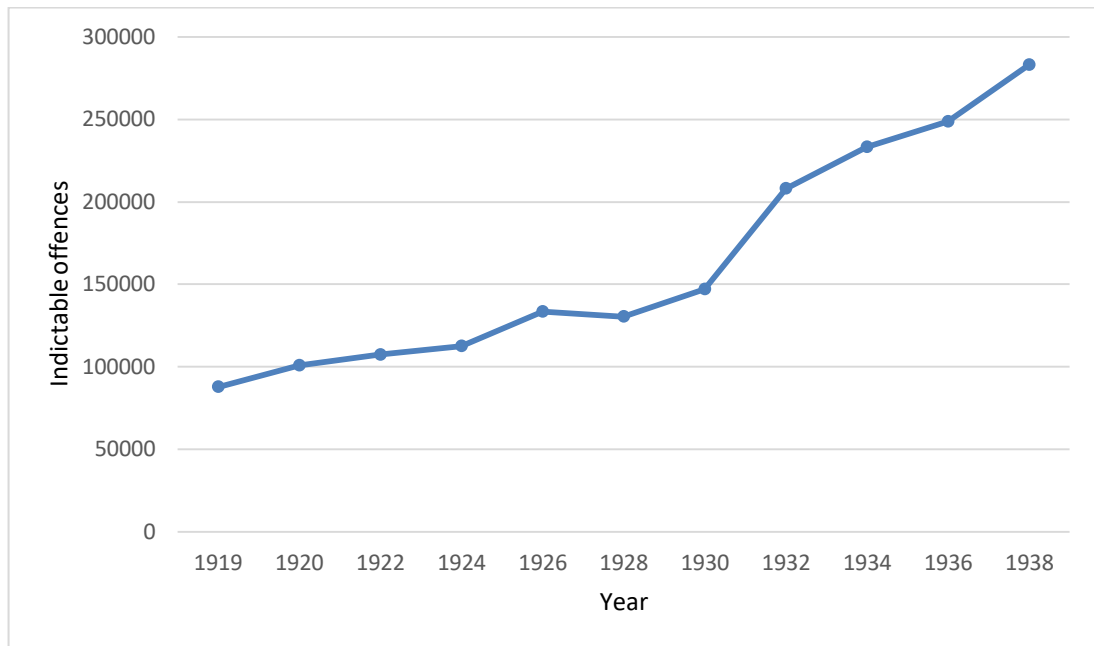


Figure 2. Indictable offences known to the police in England and Wales, 1919 to 1938.

With the exception of one obvious blip for the years 1932 to 1934, which may be an accurate reflection of crime in Hull or could be an anomaly caused by one or more of the plethora of reasons already stated for discrepancies and inconsistencies in recorded crime data, there is a striking correlation between the trajectories of the two sets of figures. The differences between the two periods, where the 1930s saw a marked increase in recorded crime when compared to the previous decade, is also highlighted by the two charts. Hull appears to have seen the same level of increases in indictable offences in the decade before the Second World War, rising from 1,939 in 1930 to a total of 3,442 in 1938.⁸⁶ This is compared to an increase in the 10 years from 1919 to 1929, when the number of indictable offences known to the police rose from 1,339 to

⁸⁶ Home Office, *Criminal statistics 1930*, 115; Home Office, *Criminal statistics England and Wales 1938*. Cm 6167 (London: Her Majesty's Stationery Office). Available online: <https://parlipapers.proquest.com/parlipapers/docview/t70.d75.1939-036675?accountid=11528> [Accessed 3/11/2016], 155.

1,740.⁸⁷ The apparent spike in the figures for 1926, which appears in both charts, was, according to the introductory notes of the judicial statistics for 1927, a consequence of the ‘exceptional conditions arising out of the General Strike’.⁸⁸

Local reactions to, and assessments of, such increases in the crime figures, as presented in the daily newspapers, could often be inconsistent and contradictory and were dependant on the type of crimes highlighted by the statistics. In June 1936, the *Hull Times* reported that the Hull Corporation had little enthusiasm for the creation of an assizes in the city, believing that the number of cases that came before the courts and the potential cost to local taxpayers did not justify a specific court for Hull alone.⁸⁹ Reinforcing this view, an article in the New Year’s Eve edition of the *Hull Daily Mail* in 1936 announced that Hull was a law-abiding city and one that was ‘remarkably free from serious crime’.⁹⁰ However, only a month later, the newspaper was reporting a 27% increase in crime in Hull compared to the same period in the previous year. The newspaper article included comments by the Recorder at the Hull Quarter Sessions declaring the need for tougher sentences for what were viewed as serious offences such as housebreaking.⁹¹

⁸⁷ Home Office, *Judicial statistics England and Wales, criminal statistics 1919*. Cm 1424 (London: Her Majesty’s Stationery Office). Available online: <https://parlipapers.proquest.com/parlipapers/docview/t70.d75.1921-024827?accountid=11528> [Accessed 3/11/2016], 66; Home Office, *Criminal statistics England and Wales 1929*. Cm 3853 (London: Her Majesty’s Stationery Office). Available online: <https://parlipapers.proquest.com/parlipapers/docview/t70.d75.1930-031205?accountid=11528> [Accessed 3/11/2016], 115.

⁸⁸ Home Office, *Judicial statistics England and Wales, criminal statistics 1927*. Cm 3301 (London: Her Majesty’s Stationery Office). Available online: <https://parlipapers.proquest.com/parlipapers/docview/t70.d75.1928-029767?accountid=11528> [Accessed 3/11/2016], v.

⁸⁹ *Hull Times*, ‘Hull gives up effort to get assizes: not enough enthusiasm or interest in the city’, *Hull Times*. 27 June 1936, 2.

⁹⁰ *Hull Daily Mail*, ‘Hull law-abiding city: stipendiary’s comments in “Review”’, *Hull Daily Mail*. 31 December 1936, 10.

⁹¹ *Hull Daily Mail*, ‘Increasing crime in Hull: recorder’s stern warning, comments on extra 27 per cent’, *Hull Daily Mail*. 28 January 1937, 12.

An assizes may have been deemed unnecessary for Hull, but there remained a widespread view that a professional system, with a stipendiary magistrate, legally trained and well versed in the laws of the land, dispensing unprejudiced justice in the local courts, was vital for a city of its size. This view was voiced most vehemently during the early part of the interwar period when Hull was without a stipendiary, following the resignation of the incumbent in 1919 and before the appointment of a new magistrate in 1925. During this time, there were claims that the city had witnessed a series of glaring injustices in cases overseen by lay magistrates operating in the Hull courts.⁹² ‘The law of England is so complex that even Judges of the High Court find a difficulty in interpreting it’, declared the *Hull Daily Mail* in March 1920. This made the appointment of someone with legal training ‘essential’ if effective local justice was to be administered.⁹³ ‘His legal acumen, his knowledge of human nature, and his strict impartiality – for he has no private or vested interests to serve – make him an ideal personage to dispense the King’s justice’.⁹⁴ So why did it take so long to appoint a new stipendiary in Hull? It appears that resistance originated primarily within the local council, who voted down the appointment on a number of occasions. There were accusations that this was simply down to local finances, but the council also made much of the issue of not being able to choose the new stipendiary itself.⁹⁵

Hull City Council finally agreed to appoint a stipendiary magistrate in 1925. The man who took up the role was John Robert Macdonald, from Brondesbury in London.⁹⁶ Macdonald, who served as the stipendiary for Hull until his retirement 1952,

⁹² Hull Daily Mail, ‘Important local topic’, *Hull Daily Mail*. 9 April 1920, 10.

⁹³ Editorial ‘A pressing necessity’, *Hull Daily Mail*. 6 March 1920, 2.

⁹⁴ Editorial ‘Fiat justitia’, *Hull Daily Mail*. 15 February 1923, 4.

⁹⁵ Lex, ‘Stipendiary for Hull: urgent need to re-open the question’, Letter to the editor, *Hull Daily Mail*. 2 February 1923, 7; Editorial ‘A pressing necessity’, 2; Editorial, ‘Stipendiary magistrate for Hull’, *Hull Daily Mail*. 9 January 1925, 4.

⁹⁶ Hull Daily Mail, ‘Our new stipendiary’, *Hull Daily Mail*. 19 March 1925, 3.

worked in the City before being called to the Bar, practicing in both London and on the North-Eastern Circuit.⁹⁷ He also fought in the First World War, spending time in France, Macedonia, Egypt and Palestine, receiving the Officer of the British Empire (military) and the Order of the Nile medals for his service during the conflict.⁹⁸ Despite this appointment and the misgivings about the adequacy of local justices of the peace, lay magistrates continued to play a key role in Hull courts throughout the period. They were often prominent members of the local community and included MPs, councillors, civil servants, doctors, surgeons, managing directors, company chairmen, business owners and even key figures in the trade unions, such as the Transport and General Workers Union and the National Union of General and Municipal Workers. There was even a secretary for the United Ancient Order of Druids.⁹⁹ Many of these JPs also served on the boards of a range of influential local organisations, such as the Hull Education Committee, which in 1919 included 12 sitting magistrates.¹⁰⁰ More than a third of the 68 magistrates listed in the 1939 Hull trade directory had been involved in the local courts throughout the interwar period, with a handful commencing as justices of the peace well before 1919.¹⁰¹ The main change that occurred during this period was the increasing number of female magistrates operating in the city. By 1939, 13 women were dispensing summary justice, although their social backgrounds still generally

⁹⁷ Hull Daily Mail, 'Our new stipendiary', 3; *Stipending magistrates* (1925–1952). Miscellaneous Functions of the Hull City Council's Town Clerk Department, C TMK/1/4/15, Hull City Archives, Hull History Centre, Hull.

⁹⁸ Hull Daily Mail, 'Our new stipendiary', 3.

⁹⁹ *Kelly's directory of Hull and neighbourhood* (1919). Hull Local Studies Library, Hull History Centre, Hull, 210–435; *Kelly's directory of Hull and neighbourhood* (1930). Hull Local Studies Library, Hull History Centre, Hull, 285–566; *Kelly's directory of Hull and neighbourhood* (1939). Hull Local Studies Library, Hull History Centre, Hull, 379–715.

¹⁰⁰ *Kelly's directory of Hull and neighbourhood* (1919), xx.

¹⁰¹ *Kelly's directory of Hull and neighbourhood* (1939), xliii–xliv.

mirrored those of their male counterparts and included wives of managing directors and local business owners, and a former Lady Mayoress of Hull.¹⁰²

Aside from the aforementioned housebreaking, what other kinds of crimes were taking place in Hull during the interwar period? The most serious offences, such as murder and manslaughter, were not common, although the available annual judicial statistics do record a handful of incidents. It appears that 1924 and 1936 were the most violent with five murders taking place in the city in each respective year.¹⁰³ This figure does appear to be relatively high when the national average for homicides (murder, manslaughter, infanticide) between the two wars was about eight per million of the population in England and Wales.¹⁰⁴ The local press responded accordingly. A front-page article in the *Hull Daily Mail* revealed, in suitably dramatic fashion, the moment a local police officer forced his way into a shop in George Street and discovered the ‘body of the aged proprietor – murdered’.¹⁰⁵ He was bludgeoned to death by an unknown assailant, and the nature of his murder provoked an immediate response from the police who said they would investigate the crime with ‘every resource at their command’.¹⁰⁶

The crime statistics for all the other years, however, do reveal a significantly smaller number of such crimes. As perhaps would be expected given the specific economic circumstances of the period, the most common indictable offences were

¹⁰² Kelly’s *directory of Hull and neighbourhood* (1939), 379–715; Hull Daily Mail, ‘Hull’s 10 new magistrates’, *Hull Daily Mail*, 14 July 1939, 1.

¹⁰³ Home Office, *Judicial statistics England and Wales, criminal statistics 1924*. Cm 2602 (London: Her Majesty’s Stationery Office). Available online: <https://parlipapers.proquest.com/parlipapers/docview/t70.d75.1926-028114?accountid=11528> [Accessed 10/11/2016], 127; Home Office, *Criminal statistics England and Wales 1936*. Cm 5690 (London: Her Majesty’s Stationery Office). Available online: <https://parlipapers.proquest.com/parlipapers/docview/t70.d75.1937-035442?accountid=11528> [Accessed 15/11/2016], 115.

¹⁰⁴ Hicks & Allen, *A century of change*, 14.

¹⁰⁵ Hull Daily Mail, ‘Aged shopkeeper found murdered: police seek unknown assailant’, *Hull Daily Mail*, 14 March 1936, 1.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*

larceny, including ‘simple or minor larcenies’, which regularly hit four figures in the 1920s and 1930s (more will be said on the perceived causal relationship between poverty and crime in Chapter 2). Burglary/housebreaking appears to have been most prevalent in 1931 and 1932, while obtaining by false pretences, receiving stolen goods and bigamy also featured regularly in the statistics.¹⁰⁷ One other offence is worth noting at this stage: attempted suicide. The recorded figures for this crime, which was an indictable offence throughout the period, appear to remain remarkably high, akin to larger industrial cities in the north, such as Leeds and Sheffield. For example, the 1929 crime statistics include 53 offences of attempted suicide for Hull, the same as for Sheffield and only three fewer than Leeds.¹⁰⁸ The numbers never dropped to single figures and were at their highest in 1931, when the recorded figure hit 56.¹⁰⁹ The *Hull Daily Mail* regularly featured cases covering attempted suicide at the local courts but would often place these within the national context. For example, a newspaper article exclaimed that, although there had been fewer murders in 1927, there had been a ‘swift rise’ in the number of suicides – the total figure now standing at 4,500 per year in England and Wales.¹¹⁰

Although serious offences always feature more prominently in discussions around crime and criminality in the media or in official documents such as the annual crime statistics, most offences that are committed in any given period and in any particular location are of a less serious nature (in the eyes of the law that is). Hull was

¹⁰⁷ Home Office, *Criminal statistics England and Wales 1931*. Cm 4360 (London: Her Majesty’s Stationery Office). Available online: <https://parlipapers.proquest.com/parlipapers/docview/t70.d75.1932-032347?accountid=11528> [Accessed 10/11/2016], 115; Home Office, *Criminal statistics England and Wales 1932*. Cm 4608 (London: Her Majesty’s Stationery Office). Available online: <https://parlipapers.proquest.com/parlipapers/docview/t70.d75.1933-032933?accountid=11528> [Accessed 10/11/2016], 121.

¹⁰⁸ Home Office, *Criminal statistics 1929*, 115–116.

¹⁰⁹ Home Office, *Criminal statistics 1931*, 115.

¹¹⁰ Hull Daily Mail, ‘Fewer murders: suicide rate nearly doubled in England’, *Hull Daily Mail*. 5 April 1929, 9.

no different. As Figure 3 below reveals, the number of persons proceeded against for non-indictable offences recorded by the local police remained relatively static for most of the period, hitting approximately 20,000 in 1922 and remaining several thousand above this figure until 1936.

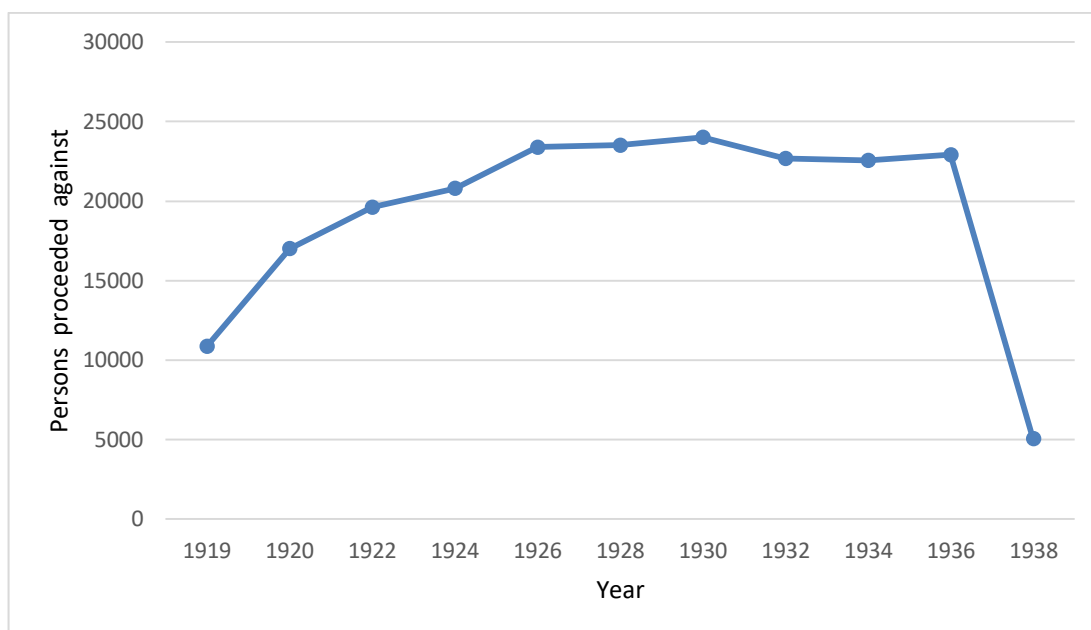


Figure 3. Persons proceeded against for non-indictable offences in Hull, 1919 to 1938.

The totals were, however, extremely high when compared to other towns and cities – often two or three times as many as Leeds and Sheffield; more in line, and even sometimes exceeding, much bigger cities like Birmingham, and only trumped by some of the larger county statistics or the huge conurbations of places like Manchester, Liverpool and, of course, London. These crime statistics are far from satisfactory, however. As the numbers recorded are for ‘persons proceeded against’ and not for the actual crimes themselves, it is impossible to gauge the true extent of crime, as one offender may have been charged and found guilty of several offences. The introductory notes in the annual statistics recognised these issues, acknowledging that you could not state with ‘any approach to accuracy’ the total number of non-indictable crimes

committed, and this was for both the overall national figures and those of the police districts featured in the reports.¹¹¹ As discussed earlier, while this fact may render them useless as an actual guide to the number of non-indictable offences committed in Hull during the interwar years, these figures were presented as the true state of local crime in the local newspapers; celebrated when the figures decreased and provoking local concern when they appeared to rise substantially. Moreover, specific crimes and their apparent frequency (as detailed in the annual statistics) were always of local interest. Assault, drunkenness, malicious damage and gaming offences were regularly the main crimes recorded in the annual statistics. So too were motoring and road traffic offences, particularly in the 1930s. There were also consistently high figures for offences against Police Regulations and the Education Acts, although no detail is presented in the annual statistics as to which specific regulations were transgressed in Hull.

So why were the total figures for Hull so high? Was the city riddled with petty offenders during this period? Due to its geographical location and the nature of some of its key industries, there were a higher number of persons prosecuted for maritime-related offences against, for example, the Merchant Shipping Acts. However, that was the case for other major port towns and cities like Liverpool.¹¹² What actually set Hull apart, and was responsible for the high figure, was the local Hull Corporation's vehement adherence to a 1677 Act that restricted trading in the city on Sundays.¹¹³ It was claimed that, via this outdated Act, the corporation could bring in revenues of £100

¹¹¹ Home Office, *Judicial statistics England and Wales, criminal statistics 1925*. Cm 2811 (London: Her Majesty's Stationery Office). Available online: <https://parlipapers.proquest.com/parlipapers/docview/t70.d75.1927-028699?accountid=11528> [Accessed 10/11/2016], 7.

¹¹² See Home Office, *Criminal statistics 1930*, 107.

¹¹³ Hull Daily Mail, '£100 a week: what the Corporation makes in Sunday trading penalties', *Hull Daily Mail*. 21 March 1927, 10.

a week from vendors prosecuted for trading on a Sunday.¹¹⁴ The prosecutions constituted a high percentage of the total non-indictable offence numbers for Hull. By 1931, an article in the *Hull Daily Mail* was even claiming that the number of Sunday trading offences in the city made up two-thirds of the total for the whole country.¹¹⁵ This proportion was noted in the introduction for the 1930 annual criminal statistics, stating that there appeared to be a ‘greater disposition to prosecute’ in places like Hull. It declared that prosecutions for the ports of Hull and Grimsby together accounted for 24,281 out of the total 31,090. Hull’s figure alone was 19,835.¹¹⁶ The editors of the annual statistics had already felt it necessary to include a footnote in the 1925 report, qualifying the total non-indictable figure for Hull of 21,639 by stating that 17,985 of this total was for ‘persons proceeded against for Sunday Trading’.¹¹⁷ While this addition was welcomed by the local press as a means of explaining why the city’s figure for 1925 exceeded both Manchester and Birmingham, it was also hoped that those who perused the annual statistics would not overlook the footnote.¹¹⁸ The number of prosecutions for Sunday trading did fall dramatically, however, as the totals in Figure 3 show – a consequence of the introduction of the Shops (Sunday Trading Restriction) Act 1936, viewed as a more ‘modern’ approach to the regulation of shop opening hours.¹¹⁹ By 1937, the number of persons prosecuted had dropped to 6,272.¹²⁰

¹¹⁴ Editorial, ‘A cuckoo’s egg’, *Hull Daily Mail*. 22 March 1927, 4.

¹¹⁵ *Hull Daily Mail*, ‘Sunday trade offences: Hull has two-thirds of country’s total’, *Hull Daily Mail*. 12 May 1931, 7.

¹¹⁶ Home Office, *Criminal statistics 1930*, xv-xvi.

¹¹⁷ Home Office, *Criminal statistics 1925*, 127.

¹¹⁸ Our London Correspondent, ‘War and crime’, London Letter, *Hull Daily Mail*. 21 March 1927, 7.

¹¹⁹ Home Office, *Criminal statistics 1938*, ix.

¹²⁰ Home Office, *Criminal statistics England and Wales 1937*. Cm 5878 (London: Her Majesty’s Stationery Office). Available online: <https://parlipapers.proquest.com/parlipapers/docview/t70.d75.1938-036119?accountid=11528> [Accessed 10/11/2016], 115.

The figure plummeted to just five in 1938, with a concomitant drop in the overall total for persons prosecuted for non-indictable offences in Hull.¹²¹

Crime levels in East Yorkshire

On the whole, crime trends in East Yorkshire during the interwar years mirrored those at both a national level and in neighbouring Hull, with the 1930s seeing a higher incidence of serious offending than the decade following the First World War. As a predominantly rural district, the actual number of recorded crimes was much lower than in other towns and cities across the country. As Figure 4 shows, the number of indictable offences in 1919 stood at 212 and remained between 200 and 300 for the rest of the decade.¹²² By 1938, the number had more than doubled to 561.¹²³

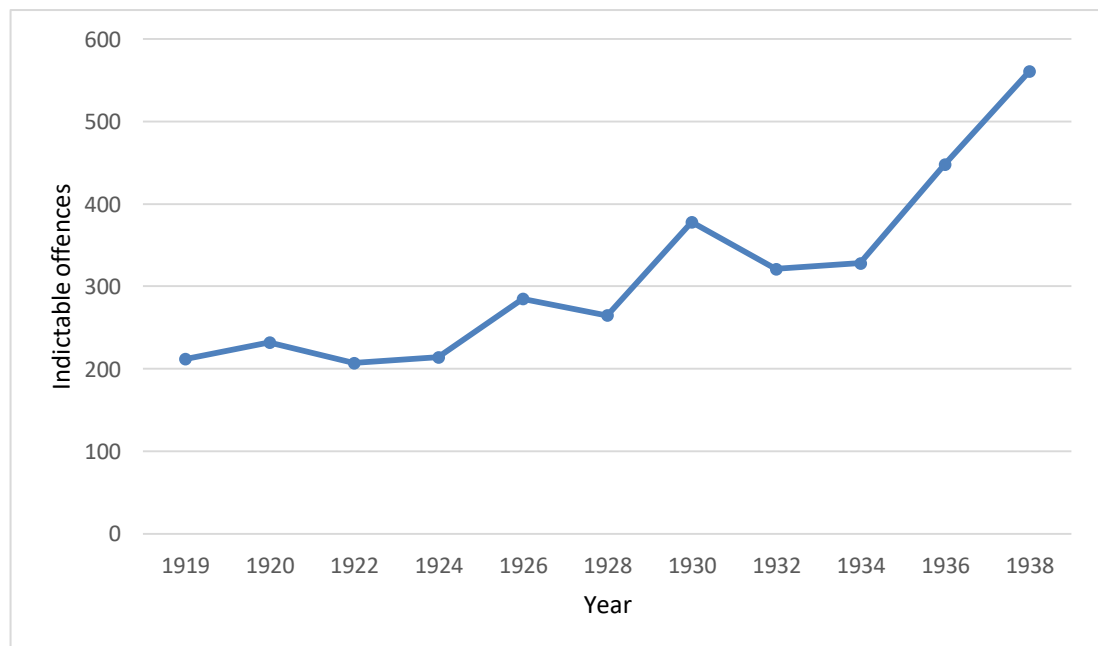


Figure 4. Indictable offences known to the police in East Yorkshire, 1919 to 1938.

¹²¹ Home Office, *Criminal statistics 1938*, 155.

¹²² Home Office, *Criminal statistics 1919*, 66. The total includes the figures for both East Yorkshire and Beverley Borough districts, which were compiled separately until the two forces merged in 1928.

¹²³ Home Office, *Criminal statistics 1938*, 155.

As with neighbouring Hull, the increases in indictable offences in East Yorkshire received mixed responses from the local authorities and the press. On the one hand there were concerns raised at the quarterly East Riding Standing Joint Committee meetings when the chief constable's reports often revealed the 'disturbing fact' that there was 'an increase in all classes of crime', when compared to the same period of the previous year.¹²⁴ However, although the available official statistics showed that crime had increased significantly from 1936 onwards, the Mayor of Beverley appeared unperturbed, claiming that 'serious criminal offences' in his own town were 'practically absent'.¹²⁵ While it is difficult to corroborate these assertions due to the lack of specific crime figures for Beverley, the number of indictable offences for the East Riding of Yorkshire for 1936 totalled 448 – this was more than a third higher than two years earlier.¹²⁶ It seems highly unlikely that a town the size of Beverley would have escaped some of the more serious offences, such as manslaughter, indecent assault, housebreaking and receiving stolen goods, reported to have taken place during the last few months of 1936.¹²⁷ Other offences to note in East Yorkshire during the interwar years were very similar to those in Hull, including crimes such as larceny and obtaining by false pretences.

While serious offences were relatively uncommon in the East Riding of Yorkshire, the number of persons proceeded against for non-indictable offences was consistently in the low thousands throughout the period, as Figure 5 shows.

¹²⁴ Hull Daily Mail, 'More crime in East Riding: disturbing fact in Chief Constable's report', *Hull Daily Mail*, 24 June 1935, 7; Hull Daily Mail, 'Crime in East Riding: increase in number of indictable offences', *Hull Daily Mail*, 11 October 1932, 5.

¹²⁵ Hull Daily Mail, 'Beverley mayor's tribute to police', *Hull Daily Mail*, 5 January 1937, 10.

¹²⁶ Home Office, *Criminal statistics 1930*; Home Office, *Criminal statistics 1936*, 115.

¹²⁷ East Riding County Council, *Minutes of the proceedings of the Standing Joint Committee of the County Council and Court of Quarter Sessions for the East Riding of Yorkshire* (4 January 1937). Minute Book 1936–1938, East Riding County Council Records, CCER/1/4/4/15, East Riding of Yorkshire Archives, Treasure House, Beverley, 50.

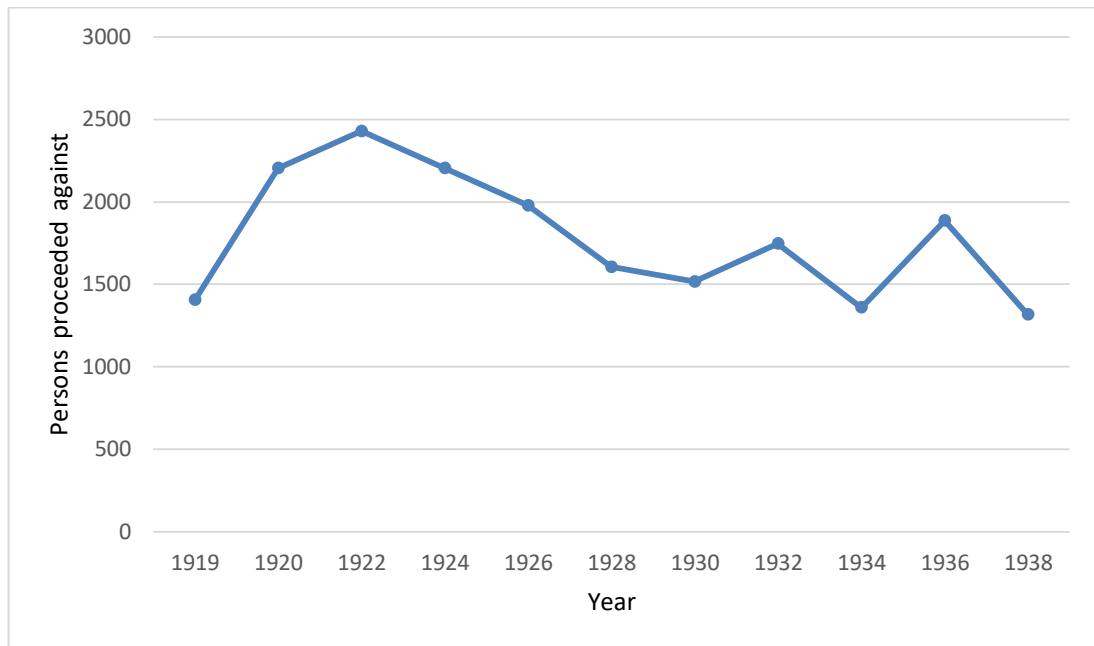


Figure 5. Persons proceeded against for non-indictable offences in East Yorkshire, 1919 to 1938.

Interestingly, the peak years for these types of offences were not during the 1930s but were actually at the start of the period, although, as already noted, these statistics are not a reliable reflection of the actual amount of crime being committed. There is no specific indication as to why the trend for non-indictable offences in East Yorkshire differed so much from Hull, with the exception of the final couple of years of the 1930s. As these figures relate to prosecutions rather than offences, it could be a consequence of one or more of the many factors affecting the local police constabulary, as discussed earlier. It is perhaps just a reflection of the discretionary nature of local enforcement (such as the comparatively and persistently high number of Sunday trading offences prosecuted in Hull) and the subjectivity and divergences of recording practices adopted by the different police forces, even those in close proximity to one another. It may just be the difference between urban and primarily rural. That said, the overall figures were still the subject of discussions at the regular Standing Joint

Committee meetings, and local newspapers presented them as an official and accurate account of the levels of crime in the district.

While the number of persons proceeded against for crimes such as assault and malicious damage featured regularly in the annual statistics (the same as Hull), more often, the *Hull Daily Mail* would dedicate articles, opinion pieces and sometimes feature letters relating to specific aspects of criminality that were causing concern, such as a rise in juvenile delinquency or motor crime. As per Hull, the latter featured predominantly in the annual judicial statistics in the district, particularly in the 1930s. Out of the 1,317 persons proceeded against for non-indictable offences in 1938, 853 of these cases related to motor traffic incidents or offences against the Highway Acts.¹²⁸ However, it would be erroneous to conclude that the indictable and non-indictable offences already listed were the only ones that featured in the pages of the local press. The whole myriad of criminality taking place in Hull and East Yorkshire during the interwar period found its way onto the pages of the *Hull Daily Mail*. Just how accurately this coverage reflected the official statistics or was instead a manifestation of the general concerns of the local authorities (or even a consequence of the simple commercial exigencies of the provincial press) will be discussed in the next section and subsequent chapters.

Crime counts in the *Hull Daily Mail*

As already stated, crime stories have, and continue to be, a fundamental ingredient of the daily newspaper, offering editors a means of both attracting readers and an invaluable device for filling pages. The quantitative analysis of the *Hull Daily Mail*, which counted the number of crime-related reports in the articles, features, letters and

¹²⁸ Home Office, *Criminal statistics 1938*, 155.

editorials in a sample set, reveals that this local newspaper was indeed no different to any other daily newspaper. Every single edition of the 378-newspaper sample featured articles that mentioned some aspect of crime or policing, ranging from single sentence entries to full-page features. In total, the sample yielded 7,113 crime-related references, with many editions of the newspaper featuring 20 or more references to crime or policing, in one form or another. The large number of references to the more serious incidents of murder and manslaughter perhaps exemplifies the value of the crime piece to the daily newspaper. Almost three quarters of all the newspapers examined in the sample included at least one item relating to murder or manslaughter. Many featured several articles covering what were relatively infrequent crimes during the interwar period, especially in Hull and the East Riding of Yorkshire. Although Hull was never a hotspot for crimes of this magnitude, the *Hull Daily Mail* compensated by featuring murders and manslaughters from around the country and across the water. Out of the 513 references in the sample, 419 of these related to homicides in towns and cities outside the region – only 37 focused on these crimes occurring locally. This would probably have been the case for most provincial newspapers operating in the regions. That is not to say that local crime, including serious indictable incidents, did not feature prominently in the pages of the *Hull Daily Mail*. Just over 44% of the overall total were local, while half were of a national context and the rest were international. Moreover, the 50% may be a misleading total as a significant proportion of this amount (998 out of the total 3,579) was counted as ‘no crime specified’. These were often smaller ‘titbits’ style pieces relating to crime and criminality in other towns and cities, replete with facetious or humorous (or attempted humorous) overtones. Table 4 below lists the top ten most featured ‘specified’ offences (rather than general crime or policing references).

Table 4. Top ten specified offences in the 378-sample *Hull Daily Mail* crime counts.

Offence	No. of references	% locally based
Theft	915	69.5
Transport/motor offences	695	74
Murder/manslaughter	513	5
Assault	277	63
Drunkenness	254	55.5
Burglary	236	48
Betting and gaming	127	70
False pretences	122	67
Robbery	114	14
Fraud	87	29

With the obvious exception of murder/manslaughter offences, the main crimes counted in the *Hull Daily Mail* sample on the whole reflect those crimes featured in the local police returns published in the Home Office's official annual statistics. In addition, there was a local focus to the reporting of these crimes, as highlighted by the high percentages in Table 4. Indictable offences such as burglary and theft figured prominently in both the newspapers and the annual statistics. Theft (or larceny) actually featured in 89% of all the newspapers examined, with some of the editions discussing the offence on many separate occasions (in both a local and national context). As Table 4 shows, crimes including assault, drunkenness, obtaining by false pretences and gaming offences were also a feature of crime reporting in the newspapers. So too were traffic and motoring offences, the second most prevalent crime identified in the *Hull*

Daily Mail crime counts. These were present in the newspapers throughout the 21-year period but increased significantly in line with the increasing number of offences that both local police forces dealt with at the end of the 1920s and throughout the subsequent decade. On several occasions, the number of times the *Hull Daily Mail* mentioned traffic offences or motoring crime in a single edition reached double figures.¹²⁹

There are a few notable absences in the newspaper crime counts. Sunday Trading issues were only mentioned on seven occasions, at odds with the prevalence of this offence in the annual statistics (as outlined earlier). That is not to say that the issue was not of local concern. Keyword database searches of every edition of the *Hull Daily Mail* from 1919 to 1939 did yield a number of articles, editorials, opinion pieces and letters devoted to this issue. The sample crime counts also failed to reflect the number of attempted suicides in the annual statistics. The issue was mentioned on 35 occasions, although only 19 of these related to local incidents. Although a regular feature in the annual statistics, what were specifically described as regulatory offences or offences against Education Acts barely got a mention in the sample newspapers. These could include offences against private charitable agencies such as the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB) and the National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children (NSPCC), which had been established by the end of the nineteenth century, or parents prosecuted for not sending their children to school.¹³⁰ When appearing in the newspapers, these kinds of crimes were counted as ‘other’ offences as they did not fit comfortably in the main specified offences of this analysis.

¹²⁹ For examples, see *Hull Daily Mail*, 7 February 1933, 9 October 1934, 7 January 1936.

¹³⁰ Godfrey, *Crime in England 1880–1945*, 43–44.

Unsurprisingly, the ‘other’ crimes category in the quantitative analysis of the *Hull Daily Mail*, which collected the myriad of offences not included in the list of named offences, yielded the highest counts. Just over 26% of the total number of crime-related incidents featured in this category (around half of which were locally based), but no specific crime or crime trends emerged as noteworthy enough to be promoted to named offences, which had been constructed during the sample testing process and following an initial examination of local police returns in the Home Office annual crime statistics. Due to their prevalence in the test samples, some offences had already been identified and added to the actual crime count list, including offences against Licensing Acts (58 reports), robbery (see Table 4), embezzlement (37 reports) and poaching (27 reports). There were also a number of articles, features, opinion pieces and letters that included discussions and comments about crime and criminality in general (250 references, 92 of which were about local crime) and about the nature of policing (244 references, 136 of which discussed local police forces). While there appears to be a correlation between the types of crime taking place in Hull and East Yorkshire (according to the annual statistics) and the local newspaper coverage of crime during the interwar period, the relationship between the total number of offences and references to criminality as presented in the *Hull Daily Mail* is less apparent. References to crime actually decreased between the 1920s and 1930s, even though recorded crime (particularly indictable) was on the rise.

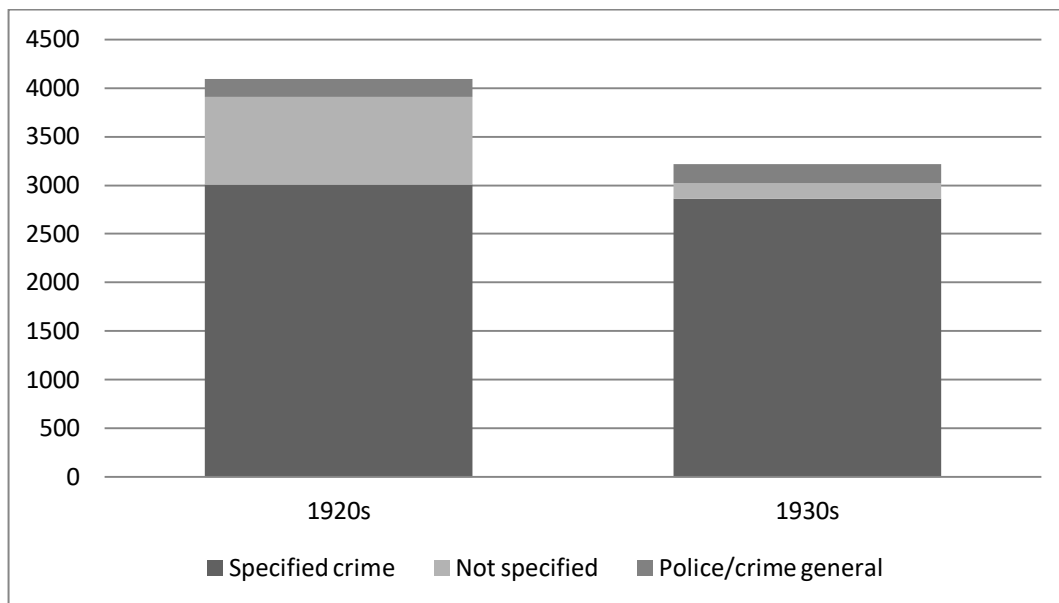


Figure 6. Crime references in the *Hull Daily Mail* for the decades of the 1920s and 1930s.

Changes to newspaper layouts and the way in which some articles were handled after the *Hull Daily Mail* replaced advertising with news stories on the front pages is probably responsible for most of the discrepancies between the two decades. Figure 6 shows that a significant proportion is made up by the ‘not specified’ category, which included smaller ‘titbits’ and crime references (usually in places outside of the region and with no mention of the actual crime being perpetrated) in regular columns such as the ‘court gossip’ pieces and the “‘Mail” Mustard and Cress’ sections, the latter featuring on the front pages for most of the 1920s. Of course, these references, however small, are still relevant in an analysis of prevailing attitudes and responses to crime, so were analysed as part of the detailed qualitative examination of the newspapers. Removing these from the totals above reveals a relatively consistent picture of crime coverage over the two decades. For the 1920s, the study recorded 3006 references to the identified specific or named crimes, as opposed to 2,863 for the following decade. Of these, just over 44% related to local crime in the 1920s and 47% in the 1930s. Nevertheless, this still means that, while the annual statistics were presenting a

gloomier picture of crime both nationally and locally, the *Hull Daily Mail* wasn't necessarily rushing to fill its pages with crime-related pieces in any greater quantity, although changes in the overall nature of crime in the country, such as the surges in motoring offences (there was an 18% increase in these references between the two decades) and a reduction in persons convicted of drunkenness (dropped by two-thirds over the period), were reflected in the newspapers

It is, however, unwise to draw any specific conclusions about crime coverage in the *Hull Daily Mail* simply based on numbers alone. While it is possible, quantitatively, to extrapolate from findings in the *Hull Daily Mail* set held in the British Newspaper Archive and used in this analysis, the potential discrepancies in the number of crime articles that may have been present in the various editions produced each day make it difficult to reach a comprehensive assessment beyond broad generalisations. It is probably the case that the frequency and themes of the crime content in any edition of the *Hull Daily Mail* was, to a certain degree at least, a reflection of the concerns and anxieties of the local authorities, heightened during the crises that gripped the region at different periods and with varying intensity during the interwar years. The consistent levels of crime coverage, particularly locally-based crime, do appear to show that the newspaper editors never shied away from tackling the serious subject of crime. On the other hand, the amount of space dedicated to crime-related articles in the newspapers may have been part of a more pragmatic approach in that, due to the proliferation of crime in this era, these types of news stories were excellent daily newshole fillers.

As already noted, crime is a key feature of the daily newspaper; the more sensational the story the better. Consequently, serious crimes such as murder received a disproportionate amount of news coverage, distorting the overall picture of crime at

both a national and local level.¹³¹ This no doubt accounts for the high figure of murder references in the *Hull Daily Mail* sample. However, the incidence of crime in the newspaper sample may also be a ‘reflection of the information that is disseminated by official agencies, particularly the police’, so it is unrealistic to view them as a true indicator of actual crime levels.¹³² This also relates back to the effectiveness and efficiencies of local police forces in detecting and recording criminal offences, which impacts directly on the amount of crime local courts will deal with and, subsequently, the number of articles local newspapers devote to these events.

What is much more important than simple statistics is what the newspapers were actually *saying* about crime and criminality during this period. As discussed in the previous chapter, since its inception and until the modern digital era, the newspaper has been the principal means of disseminating information about crime, justice and policing to the general public.¹³³ The consistent levels of crime coverage in the *Hull Daily Mail* appear to prove this point. Consciously (through an editorial agenda) or as a result of a perceived perpetuity (due to the number of times a theme or subject is covered), newspapers can define the importance of an event, such as a crime or series of crimes, while offering readers ‘powerful interpretations’ of how these events should be comprehended.¹³⁴ This is part of their significance to historians as both the ‘vital repository’ of the views and opinions of the day and as ‘prime mover’ of societal reactions to crime.¹³⁵ Through a detailed textual analysis of these events and

¹³¹ J. Carter Wood & P. Knepper, ‘Crime stories’. *Media History*, 20, 4 (2014), 345–351:345; Roshier, ‘The selection of crime news by the press’, 33; R. M. Bohm, ‘Crime, criminal and crime control policy myths’. *Justice Quarterly*, 3, 2 (1986), 193–214:204.

¹³² P. Williams & J. Dickinson, ‘Fear of crime: read all about it? The relationship between newspaper crime reporting and fear of crime’. *British Journal of Criminology*, 33, 1 (1993), 33–56:49.

¹³³ R. M. Ward, *Print culture and responses to crime in mid-eighteenth-century London*. PhD thesis (University of Sheffield, 2010), 45.

¹³⁴ Hall et al., *Policing the crisis*, 57.

¹³⁵ King, ‘Newspaper reporting and attitudes to crime and justice’, 76; Garland, ‘On the concept of moral panic’, 15.

interpretations, as presented in the newspapers, it may be possible to ascertain the primary concerns of people in Hull and East Yorkshire with regards to crime and criminality during this period. This analysis is complemented by an in-depth examination of other available crime-related sources to give the fullest picture possible (see Sources and Methodology chapter for full details). Through a subsequent examination of the reactions of the local authorities and law enforcement agencies to these events – in the form of both the punishments meted out to offenders and the prejudices levelled at perceived lawbreakers – it will also be possible to show just how important crime was in the social, economic and political narratives of Hull and East Yorkshire during the interwar years. It is to this detailed analysis that this study now turns.

Chapter 2

Mixed messages: contrasting responses to contemporary offending

Rising crime levels, be it overall or for specific offences, will often raise fears and anxieties among those in authority and the public at large. They will provoke a range of responses, sometimes seemingly disproportionate and often media-fuelled, regularly targeting groups deemed most responsible for the increases in crime. This was the case during certain periods between the wars at both a national and local level, as in Hull and East Yorkshire. However, statistics themselves only tell part of the story. Fears around crime and criminality are regularly triggered or amplified by specific events or incidents, which become societal flashpoints for concerns about potential criminal acts or breakdowns of public order. Anxieties are also raised by both short- and long-term changes and crises in the social, political and economic constituents of a particular society at a given period. These may be within a national context, so serious that the effects reverberate across individual towns and cities across the country, or are more geographically specific, contained for the most part within a particular region. Either way, these fears and anxieties may relate, not to actual increases in crime, but to circumstances conducive to a proliferation of criminality. Again, specific groups may become the targets for these fears and concerns.

The years between the two World Wars provided such a conducive set of circumstances, with both flashpoints and substantial periods of social, political and economic upheaval. However, irrespective of rising crime figures (although admittedly relatively modest when compared to the years after 1945) and a prolonged period of societal change, the interwar years have on the whole been viewed positively in regards to crime, with responses more muted than earlier periods, and solutions seemingly

more enlightened and progressive. How accurate are these representations about contemporary reactions to crime and criminality in this period? Are generalisations in danger of masking the complexities and intricacies of the interwar years (as is the case for historical depictions of the period as a whole)? One way of attempting to answer these questions is to provide a more detailed picture of reactions to crime by analysing local responses to the societal configurations of the day.

This chapter attempts the first stages of such a task by examining the reactions of key groups, individuals and organisations in Hull and East Yorkshire to four of the six themes that have been identified in this study as potentially conducive to triggering concerns and fears about crime and criminality during the interwar period. These themes – the alleged brutalization of returning soldiers from the First World War; rising poverty and rising unemployment; the growth of eugenics theory; and the politicisation of the working classes – offer a contextual approach to the examination of local responses, facilitating an evaluation of accepted accounts of crime and criminality between 1919 and 1939. Perhaps not surprisingly given the comparative demographics of the urban district of Hull and the predominantly rural East Riding of Yorkshire, these themes impacted more significantly on the former, hence the focus of this chapter is weighted in favour of the city of Hull. All four themes do have one element in common, which is why they are collected together in this chapter. While raising concerns among the local population and playing a prominent role in local discourses about crime during this period, they failed to elicit responses that could be characterised as a panic. However, that is where the obvious similarities end.

Dealing with the casualties of war

The notion of the brutalizing effects of major conflicts on combatants is a potent and enduring one. The events and consequences of a conflict of the magnitude of the First World War were always going to leave indelible scars on the nations, and individuals, that participated directly and indirectly. So alongside the narrative of providing a 'land fit for heroes' for former combatants of the conflict, anxieties grew over how to deal with those battle-weary, damaged and embittered soldiers returning to the social, economic and political spheres of everyday life. It is perhaps also no surprise therefore that, following the cessation of fighting in 1918, there was an 'upsurge of fears about a fresh crime wave unleashed by the four-year conflict'.¹ These fears centred on the returning soldiers who were believed by many to have been 'de-civilised' by their traumatic experiences in the conflict, and, as they had been trained in mortal combat, posed a very real and violent threat to society at large.

This was part of a long pattern of adverse reactions following major conflicts at home and abroad. Rawlings claims that a crime panic followed the end of the War of Austrian Succession in 1748 as demobilisation and crime became inextricably linked in people's perceptions of the consequences of war.² According to Sharpe, parliamentary fears around the crime wave that followed the War of Spanish Succession thirty years earlier resulted in the passing of an Act that recommended transportation of offenders to the American colonies.³ These fears materialised once again in the nineteenth century following the cessation of the Napoleonic and Crimean Wars.⁴ As noted in the Introduction, although the anxieties around returning First World War soldiers were

¹ Pugh, *We danced all night*, 103.

² P. Rawlings, *Crime and power: a history of criminal justice 1688–1998* (Harlow: Addison Wesley Longman Limited, 1999), 25.

³ J. A. Sharpe, *A fiery and furious people: a history of violence in England* (London: Random House Books, 2016), 396.

⁴ Emsley, *Violent crime in England*, 173.

very real, no violent crime wave materialised in the years following the end of the war.⁵ Even though stories of the violent or criminal former soldier found their way into the national dailies, the main local newspapers in Hull and East Yorkshire on the whole refrained from sensationalising these sorts of activities.

The reason why the *Hull Daily Mail* and *Hull Times* (and at times the local police and courts) opted for a more subdued approach to the criminal behaviours of former soldiers was not through a lack of potential targets. Between 1914 and 1918, approximately 70,000 local men and women had participated in the war, and many of those who were lucky enough to return home no doubt still bore the physical and mental scars of such a devastating conflict.⁶ That is not to say that stories of violence perpetrated by ex-soldiers did not feature in the local newspapers. Most of these, however, were incidents that occurred outside Hull and East Yorkshire. For example, a year after the war ended, the story of William Wright found its way into the *Hull Daily Mail* on several occasions. Wright, an ex-soldier, when charged with the wilful murder of his sweetheart, Annie Coulbeck, in Caistor, admitted to the police that he had ‘strangled her with his hands’.⁷ Earlier the same year, discharged soldier, James William Ryan, appeared at Chertsey Magistrates’ Court charged with the attempted murder of a one-legged Anzac at a local hospital.⁸ While the most serious of crimes such as murder were always good copy for the newspapers, most of the stories about violent offenders were related to robberies and assaults, both in the home and on the streets. In Maidenhead, three assailants, who were identified as soldiers, gagged and

⁵ Emsley, *Soldier, sailor, beggarman, thief*, 160.

⁶ Gurnham, *The story of Hull*, 169.

⁷ Hull Daily Mail, ‘Callous Caistor crime’, *Hull Daily Mail*. 15 November 1919, 3; Hull Daily Mail, ‘Caistor tragedy, domestic servant found strangled: demobilised soldier charged with murder’, *Hull Daily Mail*. 30 October 1919, 5.

⁸ Hull Daily Mail, ‘Where is my wife? Drama in hospital ward’, *Hull Daily Mail*. 17 June 1919, 4.

threatened a young domestic servant with a jack knife, demanding money from her before ransacking the house.⁹

These types of offences did occur closer to home, and although they featured much less frequently as the years passed after the First World War, they could still be found right up until the end of the 1930s. In 1938, Frank Markham, who had worked on Hull docks after being diagnosed as medically unfit and discharged from the Royal Artillery, was sent to prison for three months after being charged with robbery with violence for stealing five or six shillings from a man with an artificial leg.¹⁰ Although the article declared that Markham had 14 previous convictions for similar offences, no specific comments from the court case or from the newspaper itself were included in the article. This was the general pattern of coverage, with most accounts of violent behaviour from ex-soldiers merely descriptive and non-judgemental. On occasion, and especially when discussing less violent and less serious crimes, the newspaper's opinion pieces, editorials and in particular descriptive accounts of contemporary court cases could at times appear to serve as apologists for the veterans, blaming their behaviour on other factors, such as a deterioration of physical and mental wellbeing as a consequence of the war. In May 1922, John Joseph May, a former army soldier, was charged with attempting to steal six shillings from the licensee of his local pub. During the court case, it was claimed that he was 'not always responsible for his actions' due to a head wound, shell shock and frost-bitten feet he had suffered from during the war.¹¹ Sir Gerard Arthur Maxwell Wilshire blamed a 'virulent type of trench fever' for an

⁹ Hull Daily Mail, 'A servant bound and robbed', *Hull Daily Mail*. 19 April 1919, 2.

¹⁰ Hull Daily Mail, 'Stole from man with artificial leg: hard labour for former soldier in Hull', *Hull Daily Mail*. 12 August 1938, 1.

¹¹ Hull Daily Mail, 'Before Hull bench to-day', *Hull Daily Mail*. 11 May 1922, 5.

alleged assault on a 23-year-old woman, which took place in woods near Maidstone.¹² The defendant had tied the woman's hands behind her back, ordered her to undress and then blackened her face with polish during the attack.¹³

This sympathetic and at times apologist approach went further, even to the point of refuting the idea that ex-servicemen who had fought bravely for King and Country had a new-found propensity for criminal behaviour. In a curt response to a letter from a *Hull Daily Mail* reader claiming that it was lack of work for ex-servicemen that was the cause of increases in crime in the region, the editor stated categorically that the newspaper 'cannot admit that men who have worn His Majesty's uniform are readily tempted to crime, however hard their plight'.¹⁴ A similar rebuttal appeared in the 'London Letter' column of 16 January 1920, which discussed the 'present epidemic of robberies with violence'. The correspondent claimed to have found 'no evidence to support the ingenious theory that it is due to ex-servicemen, who have acquired the knack of rapid personal property audit from the overhauling of German prisoners in France'.¹⁵ However, the writer added that they believed 'some allowance must be made for the world's sudden and arbitrary change back to civilised habits from such an orgy of violence'.¹⁶ The contradictions in the initial denial of involvement of ex-soldiers followed by the need to excuse such behaviour seem to have evaded the writer of this passage. These latter comments appear to be very much in line with the 'official' explanation of an increase in societal criminality in the aftermath of the war. There was recognition that the conflict had somehow dislocated combatants' inherent morality, leading returning soldiers down the path of crime. In the introduction to the Report of

¹² Hull Daily Mail, 'Blackened girl: Baronet pleads "guilty" to assault in wood', *Hull Daily Mail*. 28 June 1927, 10.

¹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴ Want Work, 'Recent crimes', Letter to the editor, *Hull Daily Mail*. 2 March 1920, 4.

¹⁵ Our London Correspondent, 'Cat propaganda', London Letter, *Hull Daily Mail*. 16 January 1920, 4.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

the Commissioners of Prisons for 1920, it was stated that inquiries into the 6,461 former soldiers sent to prison in that year found that the men had committed crime from ‘sheer lawlessness’, which was ‘generated by the conditions of active service in different parts of the world, where the normal constraints of conduct had been banished by the stress of war’.¹⁷ This was brutalization theory in action.

As part of this response, the prison commissioners’ reports claimed that crimes committed by ex-soldiers had nothing to do with the socio-economic circumstances that many former servicemen found themselves in after the war.¹⁸ However, although the editors of the *Hull Daily Mail* could be both deniers and apologists of veteran criminality, they also challenged this notion by featuring a raft of articles relating to the social and economic characteristics behind the crimes committed by former soldiers. As the forthright response to the letter quoted above illustrates, this also appears to contradict the newspaper’s own editorial positioning with regards to the circumstances of ex-serviceman. Rather than blaming directly any acts of criminality on medical conditions associated with the conflict, the majority of the articles examined in this study revealed that both the mental and physical injuries that ex-servicemen were suffering from had made it extremely difficult for them to find employment following demobilisation. The economic slump that gripped the nation in the first few years after the war compounded these problems.¹⁹ In 1921, well over a million men across the country were claiming pensions for injuries and disabilities they had received during

¹⁷ Prison Commission, Home Office, *Report of the commissioners of prisons and the directors of convict prisons 1920*. Cm 972 (London: Her Majesty’s Stationery Office). Available online: <https://parlipapers.proquest.com/parlipapers/docview/t70.d75.1920-023855?accountid=11528> [Accessed 10/1/2017], 6.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁹ R. H. Burke, ‘Policing bad behaviour – interrogating the dilemmas’, in J. Rowbotham & K. Stevenson (eds.), *Behaving badly: social panic and moral outrage – Victorian and modern parallels* (Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2003), 63–76:71–72.

the conflict, such as loss of limbs, damaged eyesight and mental illness.²⁰ As a result, many former soldiers faced destitution and found themselves before the courts on charges of stealing, vagrancy and other offences related to their economic circumstances. Former resident of Hull, Walter Gould, stood in the dock at Kirkham in 1924, charged with obtaining by false pretences 18 dozen eggs and a set of scales, pleading for another chance after having got into debt through illness and lack of work and being 'tempted to commit the offence in order to obtain money for food'.²¹

Ex-servicemen appear to have struggled for many years after the war ended. In 1936, a former soldier who served in both the wars in South Africa and in Europe appeared at Hull Magistrates' Court accused of stealing two ornamental cannons. The man, Arthur Willis, justified his actions by claiming it was 'temptation' as he had 'no food in the house'.²² In some cases, long-term unemployment through illness associated with serving in the war could result in more extreme forms of criminal behaviour, as was the case with 25-year-old Hull man James Robinson, who was charged with attempting to murder his children by turning the gas on in the room in which they were sleeping.²³ In mitigation, Robinson, who had served in the Durham Light Infantry in 1917, blamed his action on 'depression through being out of work, and lack of good food'.²⁴ For the Hull Police surgeon who examined Robinson, this was another case where the 'moral state' of a former soldier had been lowered to the point where criminality was a natural course of action.²⁵ In this instance, it appears the brutalizing

²⁰ Wrigley, 'The impact of the First World War', 512.

²¹ Hull Daily Mail, 'Hard labour for Hull man: obtained eggs and scales by false pretences in Lancashire', *Hull Daily Mail*, 14 March 1924, 5.

²² Hull Daily Mail, 'Theft of two cannons: Hull's ex-soldier's temptation', *Hull Daily Mail*, 24 February 1936, 5.

²³ Hull Daily Mail, 'Gassed his children: story of Hull father's fight against adversity', *Hull Daily Mail*, 11 March 1927, 7.

²⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁵ *Ibid.*

effects of war had lay dormant for almost a decade, awoken by the desperate social and economic circumstances of the defendant.

The local newspapers regularly documented the problems facing soldiers following demobilisation from the forces. As well as featuring numerous articles on the plight of former servicemen, the newspapers ran campaigns to help ex-soldiers find work. Shortly after the end of the war, they printed articles featuring lists of ex-servicemen who were looking for employment, along with details of their backgrounds and experiences.²⁶ The disabled soldier was not the only one that caught the newspapers' attention. They championed those tradesmen and professionals who had to give up their businesses, or leave them in the 'hands of incapable understudies', when they went to serve in the armed forces, often returning to financial ruin.²⁷ The newspapers also printed letters from former soldiers who were often angry about their plight and that of fellow ex-servicemen. 'I think it is a disgrace to see so many discharged and demobilised soldiers walking about the streets, out of work', declared the correspondent who called himself 'one who has done his bit'.²⁸ Another letter writer, who had been wounded during the war, challenged readers to 'come and see the conditions we live under' in the city of Hull, claiming that the terrible residential conditions that he was forced to live in were full of 'women bawling', 'dogs barking' and 'gangs of young hooligans screeching and shouting till after 10 o'clock at night'.²⁹

Overall, the local newspapers refrained from vilifying former First World War soldiers or their illegal actions once out of the army, exemplified directly via editorials

²⁶ For example, see Hull Daily Mail, "'Mail" ex-service propaganda: last two days of campaign, employment for ex-service men is still wanted', *Hull Daily Mail*. 12 February 1920, 5.

²⁷ Hull Daily Mail, 'At the sign of the tin hat', *Hull Daily Mail*. 12 January 1920, 3.

²⁸ One who has done his bit, 'Unemployed ex-service men', Letter to the editor, *Hull Daily Mail*. 20 August 1920, 6.

²⁹ Live and let live, 'Invalid soldier and his troubles', Letter to the editor, *Hull Daily Mail*. 17 August 1920, 5.

or indirectly through the printing of supportive and sympathetic articles and letters, and the publishing of mitigating court commentary from judges, magistrates and defendants themselves. This appears to have been a reflection of a genuine concern about the plight of the ex-soldier, accentuated perhaps by an inherent patriotism in the conservatism of the local newspapers, although patriotism itself was not necessarily the preserve of the political right. There also appears to have been a consensus that ex-servicemen were not always responsible for their actions, through either physical or mental deficiencies caused by the war or the miserable social and economic circumstances they found themselves in after retiring home from the conflict, exacerbated by prevailing medical conditions. As noted during a case at Marylebone Police Court in 1924, when the sitting magistrate claimed the defendant, who had been demobilised suffering from chronic deafness and malaria and could only find part-time employment that was insufficient to pay for both his rent and his child's education, had been 'driven to stealing' by his current economic circumstances.³⁰

Interestingly, in all the articles, letters, editorials and opinion pieces examined in the local newspapers, there was, contrary to the claims by Lawrence outlined in the Introduction, no overt class element within the ex-servicemen narrative, even though the majority of those appearing before the courts would have been regular tommies. The former soldier was never perceived to be part of the criminal class, even when his persistent illegal activities had placed him within the category of repeat offender, living among the lower classes and associating with known thieves and vagrants whose circumstances were no doubt similar to his own. His army background and his sacrifices for King and Country appeared, in part, to absolve his behaviour in the eyes of the authorities. That is not to say that all former soldiers appearing before the courts

³⁰ Hull Daily Mail, 'Driven to stealing', *Hull Daily Mail*. 6 February 1924, 7.

were acquitted or always dealt with more leniently. As already shown, defendants could and did use the army and wartime injuries as mitigation for their actions in a bid to elicit leniency from the courts, or to avoid further compounding their wretched economic circumstances. Magistrates and judges sometimes responded positively, as was the case with Charles Sugden who was charged with stealing a collection box from Leeds Infirmary at Pontefract Court in 1923. The chairman of the court imposed a fine of £3 on Sugden instead of a custodial sentence as sending him to prison would have resulted in his army pension being stopped.³¹

Of course, the ex-soldier was not the only victim of the harsh economic circumstances that enveloped the country in the aftermath of the First World War and at different periods throughout the interwar years. So did this apparently sympathetic and supportive approach apply to all those who found themselves in hard times during these years?

Unemployment and crime

Unemployment devastated millions of individuals and families during the interwar years. Politicians of all persuasions recognised the problem, but despite proposing and implementing a range of measures aimed at alleviating the key issues associated with the lack of work, unemployment remained a spectre that haunted large swathes of British society between 1919 and 1939. As noted in Chapter 1, Hull and East Yorkshire escaped the worst effects of the economic slumps that ravaged many of the country's towns and cities, particularly in the north of England, but it still suffered from high levels of unemployment for most of the period. Local authorities, the police, the courts and residents witnessed the problems first hand. In his New Year greeting in 1928, the

³¹ Hull Daily Mail, 'Paltry thefts', *Hull Daily Mail*. 27 July 1923, 6.

Lord Mayor of Hull, Alderman H. Dean J.P., commented on the ‘great amount of distress that prevails in the city’ due to high levels of unemployment, urging local business to do that little bit extra to find work for the thousands of residents in need.³² The Hull Watch Committee echoed these sentiments several weeks later when the council instructed all committees of the corporation to ‘expedite all contemplated work with a view of mitigating the prevailing distress’ that existed in the city due to the ‘abnormal amount of unemployment’.³³ Residents were also urging local police forces to investigate any cases of child poverty and neglect that were blighting major cities like Hull.³⁴

Hull Police had begun helping those suffering distress due to unemployment early in the period. In December 1921, the force had started a relief fund for the unemployed, where the money collected would be given to those in need in the form of tickets for food but not for alcohol, tobacco or sweets.³⁵ If anyone were in doubt of the extent of the problem then numerous articles in the *Hull Daily Mail* and *Hull Times* would have set them straight. For example, around the same time as the Lord Mayor of Hull was pleading for help dealing with the issue, an article in a local newspaper declared that if ‘any proof were needed of the intense poverty and distress existing in the city it is furnished on debtors’ day at Hull County Court’.³⁶ An editorial in the *Hull Times* despaired at the increasing number of unemployed men and boys, calling for action to deal with the growing problem, in much the same way as the Lord Mayor of

³² Hull Daily Mail, ‘1928 New Year greetings’, *Hull Daily Mail*. 2 January 1928, 8.

³³ Hull Watch Committee, *Minutes of the proceedings of the Watch and Licensing Committee* (24 January 1928). Minutes of Proceedings of Committees, City and County of Kingston upon Hull Municipal Corporation and Urban Sanitary Authority, TCM 2/41/3, Hull History Centre, Hull, 19.

³⁴ East Hull Ratepayers Association, *Letter to the Chief Constable of Hull Police* (29 November 1919). Humberside Police Authority Records, POL/4/2/3/11, East Riding of Yorkshire Archives, Treasure House, Beverley.

³⁵ Chief Constable, Hull City Police, *Memorandum to the force* (5 December 1921), Chief Constables’ Orders 1921, Humberside Police Authority Records, POL/4/2/3/14, East Riding of Yorkshire Archives, Treasure House, Beverley.

³⁶ Hull Daily Mail, ‘Debtors’ day: poverty in Hull’, *Hull Daily Mail*. 10 January 1928, 10.

Hull.³⁷ Visitors to the city also witnessed the blight of unemployment. In a letter to the editor of the *Hull Daily Mail* shortly after the end of the war, a correspondent from Manchester was appalled by the number of ‘barefooted children’ roaming the streets of Hull, believing that this was a result of there being ‘practically nothing here for the poor’, unlike in Lancashire where the cotton mills provided regular employment for the working classes.³⁸

Unemployment, particularly long-term unemployment, brought with it poverty and a concurrent deterioration in the physical health of sufferers. As Hopkins notes, there were also many psychological consequences from the lack of work, such as apathy, a loss of dignity, the disintegration of self-respect, and the feeling of resentment that their predicament was a consequence of the decisions and actions of others rather than their own.³⁹ Combined with all the physical, social and economic issues of unemployment, it is no wonder that there was during the interwar period a widespread view that such desperate circumstances could lead the unemployed, who appeared to have very little to lose, into a life of crime – a viewpoint which, to a certain degree, still persists today. This notion of a link between unemployment, poverty and crime appears to have pervaded all levels of society in the interwar period. In a House of Commons debate in 1932, Labour MP David Grenfell stated that he felt ‘most reformers have been convinced for a long time that there was a connection between poverty and unemployment and crime’.⁴⁰ Secretary of State for the Home Department, Sir Herbert Samuel, echoed this during the same debate when he attributed increases in crime to the ‘extreme’ economic conditions that the country and its population were facing now, exemplified by the increasing number of thefts in the more depressed areas, particularly

³⁷ Editorial, “‘What is wrong?’”, *Hull Times*. 19 September 1925, 6.

³⁸ A lover of Hull, ‘Barefooted children in Hull’, Letter to the editor, *Hull Daily Mail*. 5 March 1919, 4.

³⁹ Hopkins, *A social history of the English working classes*, 236.

⁴⁰ HC Deb 15 April 1932, vol 264, col 1191.

by young offenders.⁴¹ For the Home Secretary there was a very clear correlation between the statistics for unemployment and those for crime.⁴² It appears that some members of the second chamber took a similar view. Again citing experts in such matters, the Lord Bishop of Southwark declared that ‘those who are most competent to know the facts of the case assure us that there is a very close connection between unemployment and crime’.⁴³ Those working in the justice system also referenced the link. In the introduction to the 1923 Report of the Commissioners of Prisons, it was accepted that unemployment was ‘one of the chief contributory factors to the prison population of to-day’, believing that longer-term unemployment further increased the chances of being committed to prison.⁴⁴ The following year’s prison report reiterated this view.⁴⁵ It also found its way into the introductions to the official annual crime statistics, although in the report for 1929 the issue appeared to have been localised with overall increases in crime much higher in the industrial areas of the north of England, specifically attributed to the depression that was having a detrimental effect in these districts.⁴⁶

If there was a link between unemployment, poverty and crime then it was clear that it would be in the towns and cities suffering the most from the prevailing economic conditions that the problem would be most apparent. In her study of the social effects of unemployment in the depression-hit districts of Teesside, Nicholas found that the

⁴¹ HC Deb 15 April 1932, vol 264, col 1140.

⁴² Hull Daily Mail, ‘Increase in crime as legacy of the war’, *Hull Daily Mail*. 15 April 1932, 16.

⁴³ HL Deb 18 March 1924, vol 60, col 575.

⁴⁴ Prison Commission, Home Office, *Report of the commissioners of prisons and the directors of convict prisons 1923*. Cm 2000 (London: Her Majesty’s Stationery Office). Available online: <https://parlipapers.proquest.com/parlipapers/docview/t70.d75.1923-026188?accountid=11528> [Accessed 24/1/2017], 6.

⁴⁵ Prison Commission, Home Office, *Report of the commissioners of prisons and the directors of convict prisons 1923–1924*. Cm 2307 (London: Her Majesty’s Stationery Office). Available online: <https://parlipapers.proquest.com/parlipapers/docview/t70.d75.1924-027428?accountid=11528> [Accessed 24/1/2017], 6.

⁴⁶ Home Office, *Criminal statistics 1929*, xv–xvi.

adverse impact of a disintegrating economy on regional crime levels was a serious concern for local officials.⁴⁷ It was a theme that featured in the local press, and even though she found ‘no direct correlation’ between increases in crime and unemployment, possible links were taken seriously, particularly by those charged with dealing with crime, such as the Chief Constable of Middlesbrough police.⁴⁸ Many other police forces may have taken a similar view. In the annual report of H. M. Constabularies in February 1933, Lieutenant-Colonel W. D. Allen, an Inspector of Constabulary for Scotland, believed that it was ‘unemployment and its consequent results’ that was largely responsible for increases in crimes, particularly those against property.⁴⁹

The idea was expounded by the upper echelons of the police forces of Hull and East Yorkshire, particularly during the 1930s. In an article in the *Hull Daily Mail* in 1932, the Chief Constable of Hull Police, Mr T. E. Howden, revealed his belief in the causal relationship between the lack of work and criminal activity, even though the piece was primarily written as a reassurance to the population of Hull, refuting recent claims by the Home Secretary that crime was on the increase across the country.⁵⁰ Interestingly, here it was not poverty or destitution due to lack of work that was at fault but rather temptation through idleness and inactivity. A few years later, the Chief Constable of East Riding Constabulary, Mr J. E. Ryall, appeared to come to a similar conclusion when he declared at a police court meeting that temptation and crime ‘came to those who had too much time on their hands’.⁵¹ It appeared to be a view of some other contemporaries of the period. In a 1932 analysis of the increases in crime in

⁴⁷ Nicholas, *The social effects of unemployment*, 104.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 114.

⁴⁹ Hull Daily Mail, ‘New problems for police: treatment of modern crime’, *Hull Daily Mail*. 24 February 1933, 13.

⁵⁰ Hull Daily Mail, ‘Increase in crime: Hull not seriously affected’, *Hull Daily Mail*. 18 April 1932, 5.

⁵¹ Hull Daily Mail, ‘Prevention of crime’, *Hull Daily Mail*. 13 March 1937, 10.

England, Ruck found that while unemployment may 'readily' suggest itself as a reason for rising crime levels, it was not necessarily depravation and poverty that drove offenders to criminal acts; it could simply be a case of 'mischief for idle hands'.⁵²

It was, however, the poverty thesis that appeared to be the most prevalent with local officials and the newspapers in Hull and East Yorkshire. At the annual meeting of the Hull, East Riding and North Lincolnshire Discharged Prisoners' Aid Society, an organisation created to help former prisoners integrate back into society (more will be said about the work of this society in Chapter 4), the Lady Mayoress of Hull appeared keen to point out that 'great poverty' was responsible for a large proportion of the crime currently being committed, adding that it was due to the 'slippery slope of poverty that men and women came to the sad end they did'.⁵³ In response to the comments from the aunt of one of four young dockers who were charged with stealing scrap metal from a local business in Hull, who claimed it was the lack of employment that had driven them to commit the crime, the sitting magistrate said that he wished he could find work for them to help their situation.⁵⁴ The police officer giving evidence during the case of 60-year-old Hull resident Frederick Langley, who was charged with stealing four iron axle boxes from the yard of LNER, knew that Langley had been unemployed for a number of years and had previous convictions. He was in 'no doubt that his downfall was due entirely to unemployment'.⁵⁵ This was also the opinion of Detective Sergeant Lynas who stood as a witness when engineer John Chas Roberts appeared at the Hull Quarter Sessions in October 1930 charged with breaking and

⁵² Ruck, 'The increase of crime in England,' 206–207.

⁵³ Hull Daily Mail, 'Help in need: magnificent work for Hull's discharged prisoners', *Hull Daily Mail*. 18 March 1925, 5.

⁵⁴ Hull Daily Mail, 'Lack of work the problem', *Hull Daily Mail*. 25 May 1938, 10.

⁵⁵ Hull Daily Mail, "'Downfall due to unemployment": Hull man fined for theft', *Hull Daily Mail*. 30 May 1939, 5.

entering a shop and stealing a bottle of wine, two bottles of ale and a pair of boots. Roberts was bound over for two years.⁵⁶

There was no shortage of newspaper editorials covering the subject either, although most of the comments were incidental to the primary issue of the pieces, which was still ostensibly about crime and criminality. For example, in an editorial about leniency in the court system, the *Hull Daily Mail* stated emphatically that in areas with high unemployment you would find parallel levels of crime.⁵⁷ Associated poverty was also believed to be one of the key drivers of crimes such as theft, precipitated by ‘utter need’ rather than simply ‘for the sake of doing so’.⁵⁸ A riposte perhaps to the views of the local chief constables and their comments about ‘idle hands’? A handful of letters to the newspaper pressed the point of the damaging relationship between poverty and crime. ‘The total elimination of poverty and want is, to my mind, the only effective remedy for crime’, declared one such letter writer.⁵⁹ Another common refrain was the insufficient amount of dole money that an unemployed man received and on which he was expected to keep his family – crime being the only solution to his plight.

This form of justification, where prevailing circumstances had allegedly driven a person to crime, was common in court reports in the local newspapers. When 27-year-old Thomas Henry Hitchen was caught breaking and entering a shop and house in Hull, he told the arresting officer that he was doing this because he was unemployed and ‘down and out’.⁶⁰ Samuel Charles Edwards presented the same defence of being ‘hard up’ when charged with stealing stones of ham from the Albert Dock in March

⁵⁶ Hull Daily Mail, ‘Given a chance: engineer’s statement to the recorder’, *Hull Daily Mail*. 21 October 1930, 1.

⁵⁷ Editorial, ‘Crime and leniency’, *Hull Daily Mail*. 1 April 1932, 8.

⁵⁸ Editorial, ‘East Riding crime: people who are hard-hit by thefts’, *Hull Daily Mail*. 22 June 1937, 4.

⁵⁹ S. A., ‘Crime and poverty’, Letter to the editor, *Hull Daily Mail*. 15 April 1932, 7.

⁶⁰ Hull Daily Mail, ‘Remanded in custody: man’s alleged house-breaking in Hull’, *Hull Daily Mail*. 11 January 1932, 1.

1926. Edwards was placed on probation for two years.⁶¹ It was ‘hunger’ that drove George William Graham, a 55-year-old dock labourer, to try to break into a wooden box on Humber Dock. So he claimed at Hull Magistrates’ Court in April 1925.⁶² Desperation through an inability to live on 23 shillings a week was the justification for why George Coultas was charged with loitering with intent after a plain clothes police officer had caught him and two associates attempting to break into motor cars in the city. In pleading his case during the court session, Coultas declared that he simply ‘had to do something’ in order to get by.⁶³ Abject poverty also appeared as a justification in some of the extreme cases heard at the local courts. Fred Clark, who was 50 years old and lived in a ‘poor part of Hull’, was found in the cellar of his house with his throat cut in June 1923, near to his wife who had a badly injured head.⁶⁴ ‘It seems that unemployment and poverty had preyed on Clark’s mind. That morning there was no food in the house, and the poor fellow was thoroughly depressed.’ The coroner gave a verdict of suicide while of unsound mind.⁶⁵

As the evidence suggests, the causal relationship between unemployment/poverty and crime appears firmly embedded in the narrative of criminality in Hull and East Yorkshire throughout the interwar years. Why does this matter? If this relationship was indeed a part of the crime discourse of this period then an examination of themes such as unemployment and poverty allows the historian to offer new interpretations of prevailing attitudes and reactions. For example, it is no doubt the case that between 1919 and 1939 crime was never the political issue it would

⁶¹ Hull Daily Mail, ‘On probation for two years’: Hull fitter’s theft from Albert Dock’, *Hull Daily Mail*. 29 March 1926, 8.

⁶² Hull Daily Mail, ‘Before Hull bench to-day’, *Hull Daily Mail*. 14 April 1925, 5.

⁶³ Hull Daily Mail, ‘Three men followed alleged suspicious acts in Hull’, *Hull Daily Mail*. 22 November 1932, 10.

⁶⁴ Hull Times, ‘Spectre of poverty: how tragedy reached Hull homes’, *Hull Times*. 23 June 1923, 4.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

become during the second half of the twentieth century and the first decades of the 2000s.⁶⁶ If crime was a part of interwar debates about unemployment and poverty, and this seems to be the case in Hull and East Yorkshire, then claims that it failed to register as a major issue among politicians in this period may need to be reassessed. It is true that explicit references to crime rarely featured in the manifestos and campaigns of the major political parties during the interwar years.⁶⁷ It is also the case that local politicians in Hull and East Yorkshire failed to put forward policies that would directly tackle the issue of rising crime rates. However, for these same local politicians, unemployment and its associated social ills remained a major concern throughout the period. During an election address in 1924, the Conservative candidate in Hull, Herbert Brent Grotrian, believed that unemployment was the ‘first and most serious problem’ facing the country at the time.⁶⁸ At the same election, John Arnott, who was standing for the South West Hull parliamentary seat (which he would win at the 1929 general election), declared unemployment to be ‘an evil’ that must be abolished through the coordination of industrial resources in the public interest.⁶⁹ A decade later, the issue remained pertinent. In a leaflet distributed by George Muff, the Labour candidate for the East Hull parliamentary election in 1935, he stated that the decimation of local industry, which had left the area ‘almost derelict’, had ‘compelled many more of our fellow citizens to seek the cold comfort of the Relieving Officer’.⁷⁰ Not surprisingly, national manifestos of the main political parties also regularly featured policies and promises designed at relieving the problems of unemployment. The Conservative

⁶⁶ Emsley, ‘Crime, police and penal policy’, 449.

⁶⁷ O’Malley, ‘The rise in crime’.

⁶⁸ Editorial, ‘The first of our problems’, *Hull Daily Mail*, 24 October 1924, 4.

⁶⁹ J. Arnott, *Election address of John Arnott to the electors of South West Hull* (29 October 1924). Papers of Frederick Brent Grotrian and Sir Herbert Brent Grotrian, U DX82/16, Hull University Archives, Hull History Centre, Hull, 3.

⁷⁰ G. Muff, *Labour candidate for the East Hull parliamentary election* (14 November 1935). Papers of Lt Commander Edgar Philip Young RN (retired) and Amica More Young, U DYO/2/19, Hull University Archives, Hull History Centre, Hull, 2.

manifesto of 1923 called for ‘drastic measures’ and an ‘urgent solution’ to deal with the problem of unemployment and underemployment.⁷¹ A year later and the unemployment situation was, believed the Conservatives, ‘as grave, if not graver’.⁷² The other parties agreed. The Liberal manifesto of 1929 believed that unemployment remained the ‘central domestic issue which confronts us’.⁷³ At the 1935 election, Labour’s manifesto proclaimed that the country faced the ‘grim spectacle of two million workless with an army of well over a million and a half people on the Poor Law’, with the ‘deepened tragedy of the distressed areas’.⁷⁴

Of course, the difficulty here is gauging just how entrenched the themes of unemployment, poverty and crime were in the political discourse of the day. Not all politicians accepted the causal relationship between unemployment and crime levels, as demonstrated by the comments of Lieutenant-Colonel Sir Vivian Henderson during the aforementioned parliamentary debate on the issue in 1932, when he stated that it was ‘quite untrue’ and also ‘grossly unfair to the unemployed themselves to suggest that, because there is more unemployment, there is necessarily bound to be more crime’.⁷⁵ Briggs et al appear to question this relationship when stating that the unemployed were generally ‘too embedded in structures of respectable behaviour to respond to their difficulties by turning to crime on a large scale’.⁷⁶ It could also be contested during periods when there was no clear, observable correlation between falling or increasing crime rates and corresponding levels of unemployment. Furthermore, any discernible correlations that did appear to exist between the statistics for crime and unemployment

⁷¹ F. W. S. Craig, *British general election manifestos 1918–1966* (Sussex: Political Reference Publications, 1970), 11.

⁷² *Ibid.*, 29.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 61.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 81.

⁷⁵ HC Deb 15 April 1932, vol 264, col 1165.

⁷⁶ Briggs et al., *Crime and punishment in England*, 189.

are problematic in themselves. In their study of private policing in the factory system, Godfrey and Cox conclude, albeit tentatively, that during periods of economic downturn and concurrent increasing levels of unemployment, factory workers generally refrained from stealing in the workplace. Any increase in levels of crime instead reflected a more zealous approach adopted by employers to the prosecution of such offences.⁷⁷

There would also be divergences across towns and cities. While inferences may be drawn about the relationship between crime and unemployment in places like Hull, other towns and cities may not present obvious correlations.⁷⁸ In fact, while the evidence suggests that the prevailing view in Hull and East Yorkshire was one of a causal relationship between the two, locally there were still some who regarded this relationship as incidental. For example, the governor of Hull Prison, Captain E. D. Roberts, stated at the 1934 annual meeting of the Hull, East Riding and North Lincolnshire Discharged Prisoners' Aid Society that the prison population actually got smaller during periods when unemployment was at its highest.⁷⁹ His claim, of course, would have been more noteworthy if he had been able to provide statistical evidence to support this assertion. Mr J. R. Macdonald was quick to challenge a newspaper report that had misquoted a comment he made about the unemployed and crime. The *Hull Daily Mail* had reported him as saying that, with regards to crime, the unemployed were 'driven to it', when what he actually claimed to have said was that they were 'hard driven' and not necessarily more inclined to criminal behaviour. 'In spite of the hardness under which the men of the country are being driven, they are keeping honest, admirably honest, and it is something to be proud of. They are hard driven, but they

⁷⁷ Godfrey & Cox, *Policing the factory*, 37.

⁷⁸ Constantine, *Unemployment in Britain*, 41.

⁷⁹ Hull Daily Mail, 'Unemployment means fewer prisoners', *Hull Daily Mail*. 13 March 1934, 4.

resist going into crime.’⁸⁰ The evidence suggests that this was a view at odds with many others at the time. Nevertheless, it was the opinion of one of the primary law enforcers in the region and one who served in the Hull courts for many years.

This is a further example of the many contradictions in the reactions to crime in Hull and East Yorkshire during the interwar years. These detailed and localised analyses can provide insights into how certain crimes (those relating to unemployment, poverty etc.) were perceived by the authorities, irrespective of whether subsequent research has challenged the existence of any actual causal relationship. Crucially, they can help to gain a better understanding of how the authorities viewed and dealt with the perpetrators of these crimes. The economic slumps of the 1920s and 1930s had a devastating impact on many predominantly working-class industrial towns and cities in Britain, often resulting in high levels of unemployment. While the class of the defendants who stood before the courts was rarely stated (except for example in mitigation or in passing judgements on respectability or its absence), crime as a consequence of poverty or lack of employment was committed overwhelmingly by the working classes. Locally it seems attitudes and reactions to both the crimes and the offenders were rife with inconsistencies.

Much more will be said about these contradictions and the complexities of local responses to crime and criminality. It is, however, worth providing a few incidents by way of example. In an editorial for a Saturday edition of the *Hull Daily Mail* in July 1926, the newspaper concluded that those appearing before the courts were not ‘altogether responsible for the crime’ with which they were charged but instead may be a ‘victim of circumstances’. This could be a lack of education, but also tellingly,

⁸⁰ Hull Daily Mail, ‘What Hull stipendiary said: unemployed men hard driven, but keeping honest’, *Hull Daily Mail*. 18 September 1925, 10.

poverty and unemployment.⁸¹ This was another example of the belief in the causal relationship between crime and poverty. Local police and the courts could also offer a sympathetic attitude to desperate offenders. In the same year as the above editorial, a destitute middle-aged man from Manchester was charged with ‘sleeping out’ in Hull, as he could not find work. Rather than facing charges and possible incarceration, the local magistrates instead gave him food and the train fare back to Manchester.⁸² Conversely, an editorial in April 1932, which was referenced earlier when revealing the prevailing attitudes to the causality between unemployment and crime, also stated that, in response to the latest statistics, the only ‘safe method’ to deal with ‘the menace’ of increasing criminality was to ‘make the punishment fit the crime’.⁸³ It appears that mitigating circumstances or leniency were no longer applicable.

It is not altogether surprising that those who were apprehended on more than one occasion regularly faced the wrath of the courts, even if unemployed, destitute or homeless. In the eyes of the authorities, previous convictions could negate mitigating circumstances, marking prisoners out as repeat offenders, even if poverty and unemployment remained the main cause of their actions, which was no doubt exacerbated by gaol time (although as Chapters 4 and 5 will reveal, local reactions to persistent offenders were complex and often contradictory). Described by police as a ‘bad hat’ due to his previous convictions, unemployed James Watson was sentenced to 12 months’ hard labour for stealing boots, clothing and money from a house in Grimsby.⁸⁴ The same fate befell alleged career criminal Arthur Goddard, who was convicted of breaking into three Hull shops – the result, he claimed during an appeal

⁸¹ Editorial, ‘Crime and probation’, *Hull Daily Mail*, 24 July 1926, 2.

⁸² Hull Daily Mail, ‘Magistrates collect fare: man who slept out helped from Hull’, *Hull Daily Mail*, 6 January 1926, 5.

⁸³ Editorial, ‘Crime and leniency’, 8.

⁸⁴ Hull Daily Mail, ‘Householders afraid: twelve months’ hard labour for a Hull man’, *Hull Daily Mail*, 16 July 1928, 10.

for ‘clemency’, of losing his job on the railways during the economic slump in the 1920s.⁸⁵ While recognising the unfortunate situation of 64-year-old defendant Anne Elizabeth Clark, who had claimed that poverty had driven her to steal six pieces of wood as she had not been able to light a fire in her home since her husband had died, the chairman at Hull Police court only discharged the case because of Clark’s age and not her current social circumstances, stating that ‘had she been a younger woman’ she might have been punished.⁸⁶ This was no doubt because Clark had appeared before the courts on several previous occasions.

Adding to the complexity of reactions to crime and criminality is the fact that, for some commentators, the drift into poverty and a proclivity to commit crime was not primarily a consequence of social or economic factors. Instead, some believed that biology was playing a greater role in the downfall of the working classes and, more alarmingly for the proponents of such views, the nation as a whole.

‘Scientific’ approaches to criminality

The horrific events that took place across Europe in the years before and during the Second World War, which saw millions of lives destroyed as part of an ideological and indomitable programme of ethnic cleansing, has for the most part consigned eugenics to the dustbin of history – a pseudo-science championed by cranks and political extremists. However, this was not the case during the interwar period. At different times and with varying degrees of success, eugenicist thought penetrated social and political debates, as theories and fears of racial degeneration continued to pervade British society in the aftermath of the First World War. At the heart of eugenics

⁸⁵ Hull Daily Mail, ‘Ten years’ penal at 17: Hull sessions case reveals career of crime’, *Hull Daily Mail*, 2 August 1922, 8.

⁸⁶ Hull Daily Mail, ‘A woman without fire: Hull magistrates’ leniency to an aged woman’, *Hull Daily Mail*, 4 May 1921, 6.

thinking during this period lay the notion that heredity played a key role in defining the social strata of society. Those groups who found themselves at the bottom of the pile were there because of ‘natural inequalities’ – inherent weaknesses and inferiorities, both mental and physical, passed down from generation to generation to the detriment of society as a whole.⁸⁷ Eugenacists believed that these ‘sub-normal people’ were part of what they termed the ‘social problem group’, and if allowed to continue ‘inbreeding’ then they would persist in swelling the ranks of the ‘high grade defectives’, thus posing a threat to respectable members of society.⁸⁸ The eugenics’ solutions to the problem were, as noted in the Introduction, birth control and the sterilisation of those deemed unfit and undesirable.

This theme found its way into the pages of the local press. While the general theory and ideological underpinnings of eugenics was discussed in the sampled newspapers, this occurred on only a handful of occasions. The primary focus was the alleged inequitable levels of fecundity between the middle classes and the lower stratum and the mechanisms by which these levels could be recalibrated in favour of the former. During a lecture to the Eugenics Education Society in 1926, the Bishop of Birmingham, Dr Barnes, proclaimed that the ‘feeble-minded were disastrously prolific, and their fecundity was a concern’ in a country where the most religious and intellectual members of society were ‘curiously and distressingly infertile’.⁸⁹ The differential birth-rate theme and the danger posed by the dwindling stocks among the superior middle classes was one that was also propagated by another member of the clergy William Ralph Inge, eugenicist and one-time Dean of St Paul’s Cathedral, his

⁸⁷ Jones, ‘Eugenics and social policy between the wars’, 722.

⁸⁸ E. J. Lidbetter, ‘The social problem group: as illustrated by a series of East London pedigrees’. *Eugenics Review*, 24, 1 (1932), 7–12:9–10; Mallet, ‘The social problem group’, 204.

⁸⁹ Hull Daily Mail, ‘Unfit increase fastest’, *Hull Daily Mail*. 17 February 1926, 3.

comments being a regular feature in the local newspapers.⁹⁰ In a speech at the inaugural meeting of the Oxford Eugenics Society in 1928, he declared the upper middle classes to be the ‘cream of the community’, urging younger members of this class not to waste time and money on motor cars but to breed in greater numbers in a bid to match the rapidly increasing numbers of ‘inferior’ stock.⁹¹ The theme appeared to hit a nerve closer to home. A letter to the *Hull Daily Mail* from a concerned citizen spelled out the problem, for present and future generations, when declaring that ‘England in 1960 will have no more use for weaklings – either physical or mental – than in 1932’.⁹²

Encouraging the middle classes to breed the next generation of fit and healthy (mentally and physically) individuals in greater numbers was one strand of eugenicist thinking that made the local newspapers. The more extreme solution to the perceived problem of the swelling of the ranks of ‘undesirables’ was voluntary or compulsory sterilisation – and this policy did receive some support in the region. Commenting on a case heard at Leeds Assizes in 1931, when a Hull woman had allegedly given birth to nine ‘mentally defective’ children, seven of whom were girls who then gave birth to four more ‘defective’ offspring, an editorial in the *Hull Daily Mail* asked why on earth ‘this horrible curse’, which relies on the taxpayer to cover the care costs, has to be permitted.⁹³ The solution was to compel, via the necessary legislation, all such people to ‘undergo the operation of sterilisation’ for the good of the nation.⁹⁴ A former medical officer from Hull, Dr W. M. Frazer, was of a similar opinion, using the example of a soldier in the American Civil War who married what he described as a ‘feeble-minded

⁹⁰ See Hull Daily Mail, ‘Over population’, *Hull Daily Mail*. 18 February 1924, 7; Hull Daily Mail, ‘Slums and citizens: breeding faster from bad stock’, *Hull Daily Mail*. 3 December 1927, 4.

⁹¹ Hull Daily Mail, ‘Children or cars? Dean Inge on the upper middle classes’, *Hull Daily Mail*. 8 May 1928, 3.

⁹² R. M. S., ‘Nursery schools’, Letter to the editor, *Hull Daily Mail*. 22 January 1932, 13.

⁹³ Editorial, ‘The mentally defective’, *Hull Daily Mail*. 4 December 1931, 8.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*

girl' and whose many descendants were either feeble-minded or of 'questionable mentality'. His solution was the ruthless application of a programme of sterilisation.⁹⁵ Some local organisations agreed. The Beverley (Yorkshire) Board of Guardians passed a resolution urging the sterilisation of the mentally unfit in 1929, and six years later, the Hull Insurance Committee approved a similar resolution asking the government to legalise voluntary sterilisation.⁹⁶ A talk about heredity at the Hull Rotary Club a year later also appeared to show support for the policy.⁹⁷ Of course, it was not just a case of reducing the numbers of those who were deemed unfit, simply to even up the respectable/undesirable ratios. Rooted in eugenicist thinking was the belief that these individuals possessed an inherent propensity to commit crime, and a large proportion of the criminal activity currently taking place across the country could be attributed to these groups. Arthur Molson, the Conservative MP for Doncaster, summed up this position during a debate on mental deficiency in the House of Commons in February 1934 when he declared that this group was not only filling our mental homes, asylums, hospitals, and infirmaries but could also be found in 'our gaols and our workhouses' and 'contributing a large proportion of the criminal element of the population'.⁹⁸

In Hull, mental deficiency was blamed for many of the attacks on women and children that had allegedly taken place over the years (no details of the extent or nature of these attacks were published). The solution, claimed a *Hull Daily Mail* editorial in November 1927, was sterilisation, deemed to be the most 'humane way' and a policy that the newspaper hoped the government would now adopt.⁹⁹ More than ten years later

⁹⁵ Hull Daily Mail, 'Defective people: former Hull M.O.'s solution', *Hull Daily Mail*. 6 January 1932, 8.

⁹⁶ Hull Daily Mail, "'Mail' Mustard and Cress', *Hull Daily Mail*. 9 April 1929, 1; Hull Daily Mail, 'Putting a check on the unfit: Hull Committee favours sterilisation', *Hull Daily Mail*. 3 January 1935, 8.

⁹⁷ Hull Daily Mail, 'Our fate shaped by ancestors: Hull Rotary Club talk on heredity', *Hull Daily Mail*. 22 February 1936, 3.

⁹⁸ HC Deb 28 February 1934, vol 286, col 1183.

⁹⁹ Editorial, 'To combat mental deficiency', *Hull Daily Mail*. 1 November 1927, 4.

and public fears around street attacks remained a part of the local crime narrative, and so did the idea that sterilisation would be the ‘lasting cure, and the cure from which the future generation would benefit’.¹⁰⁰ The local newspapers also printed articles covering court cases at which local judges and magistrates commented on the issues of eugenics and sterilisation. One case that generated a great deal of publicity was that of Frank Quantrill, who was convicted of an offence against a 13-year-old girl and found insane. Due to the defendant’s mental state, the ruling was that he should be detained at His Majesty’s pleasure. However, the judge presiding over the case, Mr Justice McCardie, questioned whether such a judgment was the correct one, asking the Board of Control whether sterilisation would be a better option to confinement.¹⁰¹ Justice McCardie was to make further comments about sterilisation and the ‘terrible evil of mental defectives’ at the Leeds Assizes the following year, which were vehemently supported by a *Hull Daily Mail* editorial and, not surprisingly, by the president of the Eugenics Society, Bernard Mallet, who, in a letter to the newspaper, directed interested readers to a copy of the proposed Bill to legalise voluntary sterilisation, which had been presented to the House of Commons in July 1931.¹⁰²

Not everyone agreed with such draconian policies; alternative views were presented as part of the local crime debates. Senior Hull Probation Officer, Mr C. Rankin, believed that the majority of those individuals that were dealt with by the police and that came before the courts were undoubtedly weak-minded and underfed, but were far from hardened criminals. In fact, they could be found ‘in all ranks of life’

¹⁰⁰ G. W., ‘Street pests’, Letter to the editor, *Hull Daily Mail*. 8 September 1937, 4.

¹⁰¹ Hull Daily Mail, ‘Feeble minded problem: judge and question of sterilisation’, *Hull Daily Mail*. 5 February 1930, 4.

¹⁰² Editorial, ‘The mentally defective’, 8; B. Mallet, ‘Eugenic sterilisation’, Letter to the editor, *Hull Daily Mail*. 28 December 1931, 7.

rather than belonging to a hereditarily-determined criminal class.¹⁰³ Mr F. A. Chapman, a local inquiry officer, endorsed this view during a meeting of the Hull Corporation Committee for the care of mentally defectives. Chapman believed that the best way to deal with the individuals was through segregation and institutional care, claiming that sterilisation of ‘weak-minded women’ would actually exacerbate the problem by facilitating acts of ‘promiscuous immorality’, in turn leading to the spread of venereal disease.¹⁰⁴ Chapman’s thesis appears to have found favour with the female writer who penned Portia’s Weekly Topics column in the *Hull Daily Mail* and who believed it would be wiser to wait before rushing ahead with a policy of sterilisation that could ‘open a wide door to immorality’.¹⁰⁵ Others refrained from the hard-line approach of compulsory or voluntary sterilisation, offering gentler methods of re-establishing the equilibrium of asymmetrical birth rates. For example, East Riding County Council decided it could not support a voluntary sterilisation policy but was prepared to make it illegal for defective persons to marry.¹⁰⁶

This idea of restricting marriages between those deemed ‘undesirable’ did receive some publicity in the 1920s and 1930s, and many of these comments were made by female officials and representatives.¹⁰⁷ During an address to the Hull and District Branch of the National Council of Women in December 1937, Mrs C. Neville-Rolfe OBE, Secretary General of the British Social Hygiene Council, stated that a ‘happy and successful marriage could only be attained by two normal people’, and if

¹⁰³ Hull Daily Mail, ‘Self the criminal: Hull probation officer and the value of the mind’, *Hull Daily Mail*. 10 March 1926, 6.

¹⁰⁴ Hull Daily Mail, ‘Mental defectives: interesting comments by Hull official’, *Hull Daily Mail*. 23 November 1927, 6.

¹⁰⁵ Portia, ‘Sterilisation of the unfit’, Weekly Topics, *Hull Daily Mail*. 25 January 1934, 5.

¹⁰⁶ Hull Daily Mail, ‘Voluntary sterilisation: East Riding County Council not prepared to support’, *Hull Daily Mail*. 4 November 1927, 5.

¹⁰⁷ It is difficult to assess whether there was any correlation between what appears to be the softer morality/marriage thesis and the gender of its supporters. As is often the case with all news stories, editorial exigencies may have been the determining factor in the inclusion of the articles, so it may just be a coincidence, albeit an interesting and intriguing one.

mentally defectives continued to marry then there would always be ‘unstable homes’, which created ‘moral instability’ particularly for the younger members of the household.¹⁰⁸ This view had been voiced in the *Hull Daily Mail*’s regular House and Home column when the writer urged ‘unhealthy people’ not to marry so as to avoid ‘unhappy consequences’, while recognising, somewhat contradictorily, that marriages between such people can sometimes produce offspring of genius.¹⁰⁹ Comments on marriage by members of the Eugenics Society also made the news. When Mrs C. B. S. Hodson addressed the weekly meeting of the Bridlington ILP in February 1928, she stated that current circumstances had made the prevention of marriages between mentally defectives a necessary requirement.¹¹⁰

Although many of the key strands of eugenics theory did feature in the pages of the local newspaper in Hull and East Yorkshire, they did so infrequently (the references in this section represent the lion’s share of those evaluated in the newspaper sample). Of all the themes analysed in this study, eugenics appears to have had the least impact locally. There was no real panic around the issues of racial degeneration and associated criminality, although concerns around the negative consequences of differential birth rates was a common theme, as highlighted in the above examples. What is interesting is the apparent contrast between responses to the perceived causal relationships of socio-economics and crime and the theories that represented a form of ‘biological reductionism’.¹¹¹ On the whole, a more sympathetic attitude manifested itself with the former (as in the case of ex-soldiers and the first-time offending unemployed), while the latter appears to have elicited unequivocally negative reactions, even though what

¹⁰⁸ Hull Daily Mail, ‘Social problems of to-day: address to Hull Council of Women’, *Hull Daily Mail*, 7 December 1937, 3.

¹⁰⁹ Hull Daily Mail, ‘House and Home’, *Hull Daily Mail*, 29 May 1924, 6.

¹¹⁰ Our Own Reporter, ‘Bridlington “Mail” Mems’, *Hull Daily Mail*, 27 February 1928, 9.

¹¹¹ J. Welshman, *Underclass: a history of the excluded since 1880*, 2nd edition (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2013), 64.

appear to be calls for the more punitive responses (sterilisation) were at times tempered by less draconian measures (segregation, objection to marriage). Responses to the Frank Quantrill case and the comments from Justice McCardie expound the key ideas of eugenics but may also reveal more far-reaching and sinister objectives. It was never explained how sterilisation rather than incarceration would stop someone like Quantrill (or any other of the offenders featured in this context) committing further offences, unless sterilisation itself was viewed as a punishment and not solely as an effective mechanism to stop the propagation of potential criminals. Sterilisation may have been seen as a physical punishment designed to both deter and humiliate those who were deemed to be mentally defective. These punishments were, however, also aimed at the class to which they belonged – a class that was perceived to be both criminal and undesirable.¹¹² The policy of sterilisation may have been a concerted attempt to reduce the number of these undesirables, and those proposing such a policy made no secret of this fact. The aim was to redress the social balance but perhaps more importantly, ensure the predominance in society of members of another social group, i.e. those who believed themselves to be part of the respectable class.¹¹³

These kinds of negative reactions were not limited to biological theories or concepts of hereditary criminality. Akin to the responses proffered within the framework of eugenics, and in stark contrast to the sometimes sympathetic approach adopted in relation to the socio-economics of lower-class offending, the arena that has provided a substantial proportion of the historical context of the interwar period may also offer a deeper understanding of the prevailing reactions to perceived working-class criminality in British society.

¹¹² J. MacNicol, 'Eugenics and the campaign for voluntary sterilization in Britain between the wars'. *Social History of Medicine*, 2, 2 (1989), 147–169:160–161.

¹¹³ Freedon, 'Eugenics and progressive thought', 649.

The political threat from the masses

‘Public order is a major concern of politicians at all levels of government.’¹¹⁴ This statement is as pertinent now as it has been for centuries. Spontaneous and violent events such as riots or confrontational and rowdy street demonstrations exacerbate fears and anxieties around public order. These fears are also heightened during periods of social, economic and political disharmony. The years between the two World Wars was one such period (or periods to be more precise) of disunity, fostering concerns about the breakdown of law and order and a collapse of societal norms. Following the events in Russia in 1917, the possibility of similar revolutionary forces overthrowing the ruling classes was never far from the minds of those in government.¹¹⁵ These anxieties were compounded by cycles of industrial unrest that became a feature of much of the period. The advent of extremism, perceptibly from forces on the political left but also from those on the fascist right, added to the problems for those maintaining social order during this tumultuous 21-year period of British history.¹¹⁶

Laybourn and Taylor claim that during the interwar years, a coordinated approach to dealing with these issues was conducted by the state with the help of chief constables from police forces across the country.¹¹⁷ A consequence of these heightened fears and this new approach was an increase of force and hostility directed at those deemed to be responsible for revolutionary acts or disorderly behaviour during strikes and industrial agitations. It became part of the prevailing system of social control across the country, often played out in ideological and physical confrontations with those believed to be the enemy of the state. Even the provincial police officer now felt

¹¹⁴ P. Waddington, ‘The politics of public order policing: a ‘typographical analysis’’, in C. Critcher & D. Waddington (eds.), *Policing public order: theoretical and practical issues* (Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing Company, 1996), 129–144:136.

¹¹⁵ Morgan, *Conflict and order*, 75.

¹¹⁶ E. Hobsbawm, *Age of extremes: the short twentieth century 1914–1991* (London: Abacus, 2001), 122.

¹¹⁷ Laybourn & Taylor, *Policing in England and Wales*, 51–53.

that it was part of his remit to protect local citizens from what were deemed to be ‘alien creeds’ pervading society.¹¹⁸ In Hull and East Yorkshire, the local press had by January 1919 already declared war on what it believed to be the most dangerous ‘alien creed’ – Bolshevism:

The disease, like the influenza, [...] is spreading fast, and it is the duty of all men and women who hold liberty and every decent thing in life dear to pay serious heed to the menace, and be prepared to combat its attempts to infect our existence in Britain. [...] Bolshevism means the tyranny of the hooligans and murderers of a town over every orderly element. [...] The antidote to Bolshevism is Common-sense.¹¹⁹

Although the terminology changed over the next few years, with labels such as Bolshevism and communism (and even to a certain degree socialism) becoming interchangeable during discussions about this new menace to society, the target ostensibly remained the same – those parties and organisations on the left that expounded policies and ideologies attacking the existing economic and social order and demanding a regime that was less hierarchical and more favourable to the oppressed and exploited working classes. The demonstrable association between Bolshevism/communism/socialism and criminality, as illustrated by the above quote, remained a common theme for most of the 1920s. It was a political creed that relied on the ‘support of the criminal classes’, which meant that every ‘respectable person went in danger of his life’.¹²⁰

Acts of violence and other forms of serious criminal behaviour, such as looting during street-based disturbances, made headline news and associated negative commentaries in newspaper editorials. For instance, a series of violent incidents that took place in Liverpool during August 1919, which resulted in damage to commercial

¹¹⁸ C. Emsley, *The English police: a political and social history*, 2nd edition (Essex: Addison Wesley Longman Limited, 1996), 136–137.

¹¹⁹ Editorial, ‘Ware Bolshevism!’, *Hull Daily Mail*. 8 January 1919, 4.

¹²⁰ Our London Correspondent, ‘Top hat peril’, London Letter, *Hull Daily Mail*. 14 February 1919, 4.

properties and looting, was described as a ‘thieves’ orgy’, likening events to a ‘terror’ in a Bolshevik town conducted by a ‘mob of the lowest scum of the city’.¹²¹

Heightening fears of a dissolution of law and order and a drift into barbarity, the editorial went on to claim that the entire city of Liverpool was ‘on the point of falling into the hands of its roughest and most criminal elements’.¹²² Increases in crime were also attributed to the actions and behaviours of extremists on the political left. Quoting comments from Mr Justice McCardie, the *Hull Daily Mail* exclaimed that crime levels were rising as a consequence of the inculcation of ‘false moral values’ on those succumbing to the poisonous doctrines of left-wing extremists, resulting in a dangerous and detrimental effect on the ‘national character’ of the country as a whole.¹²³ Be it socialists, communists, Bolsheviks or Marxists, all were seen as enemies of the people and a very real threat to law and order.

Evidence of the alleged inherent criminality of this political creed was regularly presented in the pages of the newspapers, although rioting or mob violence appear to have been rare occurrences in Hull and East Yorkshire, if the number of occasions they featured in the press is an accurate reflection of the actual level of local incidents. One aspect of purportedly left-wing criminality did, however, regularly make it onto the pages of the *Hull Daily Mail* – that is, dissension at political gatherings. The threat to public order from the left was of much greater concern locally than any increase in general criminal activity. Local debates around political dissent and political agitation no doubt reflected national concerns of the police and the government. This is not a surprise. It was, after all, a period when such activities were being characterised as

¹²¹ Editorial, ‘A thieves’ orgy’, *Hull Daily Mail*. 4 August 1919, 2.

¹²² *Ibid.*

¹²³ Editorial, ‘A judge’s lament’, *Hull Daily Mail*. 29 November 1926, 4.

criminal and political proponents targeted as potential lawbreakers.¹²⁴ A series of events, such as the general election campaigns in 1922, 1923, 1924, 1929, 1931 and 1935 and periods of social and industrial unrest including the General Strike of 1926 (and the Hull dock strikes locally), made political and ideological conflict inevitable. With the events in revolutionary Russia still ‘fresh in the mind’, the activities of the political left were, locally, perceived to be a threat to what Young describes as the ‘previously untouchable power base’ in the region.¹²⁵ Local police officers were charged with monitoring the activities of political agitators, communists and potential revolutionaries and reporting on their movements in the region, alongside those characters who were the bread and butter of community beat policing such as the prostitute, persistent offender and habitual drunkard.¹²⁶ It appears that a similar approach was being adopted by police forces across the country. According to the ‘Talk of London’ column in the 3 October 1931 edition of the *Hull Daily Mail*, police officers in various parts of the country were keeping a ‘close watch’ on the speeches made by political agitators from the extremist left.¹²⁷ The author of the column believed that police forces yet to adopt such an approach were now more likely to do so during the general election campaigns.

Hull was home to many political meetings, marches and demonstrations during the interwar period, and many of these were organised and attended by members of the political left.¹²⁸ These no doubt caused consternation for the local authorities and the two local police forces. Although the Chief Constable of Hull Police, Captain W. A .

¹²⁴ Taylor, *The politics of crime in interwar England and Wales*, 353–354.

¹²⁵ A. Young, *Scandals! Rogues, rascals and infamy in Hull and East Yorkshire* (Beverley: Highgate Publications Limited, 2011), 29.

¹²⁶ East Riding Constabulary, *Driffild beat report* (1928). Humberside Police Authority Records, POL/3/8/1/4/2, East Riding of Yorkshire Archives, Treasure House, Beverley; Chief Constable, East Riding Constabulary, *General orders* 15/1927, 22/1927.

¹²⁷ Hull Daily Mail, ‘And others police will watch’, The Talk of London, *Hull Daily Mail*. 3 October 1931, 4.

¹²⁸ Gillett & MacMahon, *A history of Hull*, 448.

Woods, declared that there was no need for anxiety when he announced in 1925 that its First Reserve was to be increased to 100 men and a Special Constabulary of up to 500 members was to be recruited, claiming that the auxiliary force would not be used for political purposes such as strike-breaking, it came during a period of heightened tensions between those in power and agitators on the left.¹²⁹ The *Hull Daily Mail*, however, was keen to point out that other local police forces were increasing their numbers during this period in response to the growing threat of communism.¹³⁰ The real fears about threats from socialist, communist or Bolshevik agitation do not appear to have been primarily related to potential public order offences at events hosted by the left themselves but were instead precipitated by those occasions when ideologically opposed factions converged, accidentally or via coordinated campaigns, at meetings organised by Conservatives and Liberals, and later in the 1930s, the British Union of Fascists.

The tone of news articles and commentary pieces during election campaigns and political addresses was at times unashamedly pro-right wing, again perhaps a reflection of the conservatism of the *Hull Daily Mail*. For example, an editorial covering a local by-election in 1923 claimed that it had been impossible for Conservative candidate, Alderman Sir Charles Wilson, to present his views to the audience due to the howlings of certain hooligan members of the audience who had organised such disruption in advance.¹³¹ Its sister paper, the *Hull Times*, appeared to be no less subjective in its coverage of political matters, exemplified by an article in its Saturday 13 November 1926 edition in which it decried the subversive elements of the

¹²⁹ Hull Daily Mail, 'Hull Police: subsidiary force to be enlisted, no need for anxiety', *Hull Daily Mail*. 20 October 1925, 5.

¹³⁰ Hull Daily Mail, 'Hot-bed of communism: meeting force by force', *Hull Daily Mail*. 13 January 1926, 9.

¹³¹ Editorial, 'To-morrow's by election', *Hull Daily Mail*. 25 July 1923, 4.

socialist ‘gone mad’ whose aim it was to disrupt the meetings of the Conservative candidate for the Central Hull election, Commander Gaunt, and suppress his ‘freedom of speech’ through mob tactics and persistent interruptions to proceedings.¹³² The newspapers also regularly featured letters from the public supporting this editorial positioning. Incidents such as these were not necessarily criminal in conduct or intent. It is difficult to ascertain exactly how many transgressed the accepted (and legal) norms of behaviour at political hustings, marches and demonstrations. It was not common for the local newspapers to include details of court cases featuring acts of criminality at political gatherings, be it proponents of the left or the right of British politics. As the coverage of political meetings in the *Hull Daily Mail* and *Hull Times* often appeared to be biased in favour of those on the ideological right, it would be safe to assume that, had there been numerous incidents of violence and disorder at local gatherings, perpetrated by the forces of Bolshevism, communism or socialism, then these would have made regular and no doubt prominent appearances in the newspapers.

It could be argued that anxieties around public disorder at political meetings were, partly at least, a media creation; a means of demonising the left and promoting politicians with an ideological viewpoint closer to that of the conservative owners of the local newspapers. While the police recognised that it was often difficult to deal with disturbances of a ‘political nature’, for a large part of the interwar period no major concerns were raised regarding the increasing politicisation of various groups on the left or right.¹³³ Although certain political propaganda methods were discouraged or prohibited, such as chalking on pavements and using loudspeakers and gramophones in

¹³² Hull Times, ‘Organised rowdies: interrupting Commander Gaunt’, *Hull Times*. 13 November 1926, 11.

¹³³ Hull Daily Mail, ‘You need not be an amateur detective, but it is your duty to help the police’ (7 July 1938). *News cutting book 1934–1938*, Humberside Police Authority Records, POL/4/11/1/2, East Riding of Yorkshire Archives, Treasure House, Beverley, 78.

public places, and the police remained vigilant before, during and after political gatherings, expressions of concern about undesirable political activities came mainly from the writers in the local press.¹³⁴ Dunning et al are probably correct when they claim that authorities have showed a general ‘lack of concern’ towards disorders at political gatherings.¹³⁵ However, locally this statement appears to have been more accurate for the 1920s and early 1930s. By the middle of the 1930s, as in many parts of Britain, Hull and East Yorkshire would be feeling the reverberations caused by the rise of fascism.

In June 1934, the Chief Constable of East Riding Constabulary had declared at the superintendents’ conference that ‘no difficulty was being experienced in regard to meetings of the British Union of Fascists’ (BUF).¹³⁶ As the fascists’ campaigns intensified, violent clashes between diametrically opposed political groups from the right and left became much more prevalent. By 1936, the BUF was holding regular meetings in Hull, and these often attracted increased publicity and opposition from anti-fascist organisations.¹³⁷ Some meetings were stopped following disruption by members from opposition groups, such as one that took place at the city’s Metropole Hall in January 1936 when a small section of the audience allegedly picked up chairs and used them as weapons against the fascist supporters.¹³⁸ The most notable of these regional meetings occurred in July 1936 when the leader of the BUF, Oswald Mosley, addressed

¹³⁴ Deputy Chief Constable, Hull City Police, *Chalking on pavement* (16 March 1927). Chief Constables’ Memoranda 1903–1928, Humberside Police Authority Records, POL/4/2/4/1, Treasure House, Beverley; Hull City Police, *Hull City Council byelaws* (1870–1950). Humberside Police Authority Records, POL/4/1/3/3, East Riding of Yorkshire Archives, Treasure House, Beverley, 205.

¹³⁵ E. Dunning et al., ‘Violent disorders in twentieth-century Britain’, in G. Gaskell & R. Benewick (eds.), *The crowd in contemporary Britain* (London: Sage Publications Ltd, 1987), 19–75:39.

¹³⁶ Chief Constable, East Riding Constabulary, *Chief constable’s conference with superintendents minutes* (15 June 1934). Humberside Police Authority Records, POL/3/2/6/1, East Riding of Yorkshire Archives, Treasure House, Beverley, 1.

¹³⁷ J. Charnley, *Blackshirts and roses: an autobiography by John Charnley* (London: Brockingday Publications, 1990), 69.

¹³⁸ Hull Daily Mail, ‘Wild scene at Hull fascist meeting’, *Hull Daily Mail*. 21 January 1936, 4.

thousands of people at the Hull Corporation Field. Stones and missiles were thrown during the meeting, and a reporter at the *Hull Daily Mail* claimed that he had been informed that around a dozen Blackshirts had been injured, some of them seriously, after being attacked with iron bars and pieces of metal.¹³⁹ The events at Hull Corporation Field prompted an outpouring of vehemence directed against left-wing opponents of fascism, who were perceived to have been responsible for the disruption that occurred, just as they had been at local hustings in the 1920s. In the week following the meeting, several editions of the *Hull Daily Mail* featured letters from readers supporting the fascists and decrying the violent and undemocratic activities of the 'Red' opposition. One contributor, who attended the meeting, claimed that he had seen a man with an 'iron bar up his sleeve', while many others were 'well supplied with bricks, stones and other "silencers"'.¹⁴⁰ A day after the event, the columnist John Humber was in no doubt who was to blame for the violence and disorder at the event – those who were singing the 'Red Flag' during the meeting.¹⁴¹

The police were also certain that they knew the identity of the perpetrators of the violence. It was, claimed Hull Police's Chief Constable, Mr T. E. Howden, the opposition parties who had been 'determined to smash up the Fascist meeting' through acts of 'hooliganism' and without 'any regard for public safety or free speech'.¹⁴² He claimed that any violence committed by the fascists was in self-defence and as a last resort.¹⁴³ Reports from local police officers who attended the meeting and that were sent to the Home Office as evidence appear to corroborate the claims of the Chief

¹³⁹ Hull Daily Mail, 'Brickbats end Hull meeting', *Hull Daily Mail*. 13 July 1936, 6.

¹⁴⁰ Disgusted Onlooker, "'Reds" and free speech', Letter to the editor, *Hull Daily Mail*. 14 July 1936, 4.

¹⁴¹ J. Humber, 'Fascism in Hull', *Humberside Echoes*, *Hull Daily Mail*. 13 July 1936, 4.

¹⁴² Hull Daily Mail, 'Fascist meeting: revelation by Hull's police chief' (30 March 1937). *News cutting book 1934–1938*, Humberside Police Authority Records, POL/4/11/1/2, East Riding of Yorkshire Archives, Treasure House, Beverley, 66.

¹⁴³ *Ibid.*

Constable, were laying the blame firmly at the door of the opposition groups who were present at the event.¹⁴⁴ Interestingly, Howden's comments were delivered during a defence of the police methods used to restore order at the event. This appears to be part of a national narrative that had developed during that 1930s that questioned police neutrality at fascist and anti-fascist organisations at political gatherings.¹⁴⁵ The police were often accused of siding with the fascists at these events and dealing more aggressively with organisations and groups on the political left, criminalising what were deemed the democratic activities of those who objected to the views propagated at such meetings. Sometimes this alleged bias would be demonstrated by a police indifference to violence perpetrated by fascist members dealing with rowdy behaviour at their meetings. Only two months before the events at Corporation Field, the Hull Labour Party had claimed that members of the audience at a fascist rally at the city's Fulford Rooms were manhandled and treated in a 'rough manner'.¹⁴⁶ Chief Constable Howden defended the decision not to intervene in the matter, as he claimed the police had no jurisdiction to enter the venue unless a 'miniature riot' broke out.¹⁴⁷

However, fascist meetings were not the only political gatherings that prompted allegations of disproportional, biased or non-interventional approaches by the police. As part of a nationwide protest against the Unemployment Act, the Communist and Unemployed Workers' Union attempted to address a meeting in Hull's City Square on Sunday 24 February 1935, but the police refused them access, stating that it would cause a traffic obstruction.¹⁴⁸ According to local newspaper reports, the amassed crowds refused to move on and missiles were thrown. Mounted police attended the

¹⁴⁴ National Archives, HO 144/21060/141–16. Home Office, *Disturbance: British Union of Fascists, activities*, 1936.

¹⁴⁵ Godfrey & Lawrence, *Crime and justice*, 25–26.

¹⁴⁶ Hull Daily Mail, 'Manhandling at fascist rally alleged', *Hull Daily Mail*. 29 April 1936, 5.

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁸ Hull Daily Mail, 'Hull Police disperse communists', *Hull Daily Mail*. 25 February 1935, 5.

event and, alongside police on foot, they moved the crowds to Corporation Field and a meeting was held there.¹⁴⁹ The incident made the national newspapers but some accounts of the event, which stated that mounted police charged the crowds and trampled on a number of people at the event, were heavily criticised by Hull Police's Chief Constable Howden, who claimed that these incidents had been 'grossly exaggerated'.¹⁵⁰

It is difficult to ascertain, with the available evidence, whether any actual bias in policing political meetings existed in Hull and East Yorkshire during this period. Local police chiefs did, however, regularly attribute blame to those on the political left for disorder behaviour, rowdiness and violence, and this fits with the prevailing attitudes of the media. Police actions may have simply been a response to the growing fears of a potential dissolution of public order, or they may have been influenced by a cultural or ideological standpoint that aligned the political left with criminality – a narrative that emerged after the events in Russia in 1917. The local newspapers, however, went much further by not only demonising and criminalising the left as a political ideology but also the adherents of such an ideology, as the quotes at the beginning of this section show. It was the 'criminal classes', the 'crooks' and the 'roughs' who were the primary supporters of what was perceived to be an evil doctrine.¹⁵¹ The culprits were also the gullible and desperate working classes who had been fooled into believing their plight could be improved by a shift towards Bolshevism/communism/socialism. As one editorial declared:

It is a government for a certain class which they seek, and that means they rely on duping the lower classes to enable them to seize power [...] Poor men,

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁵¹ Hull Daily Mail, 'Children's "Cheka"', *Hull Daily Mail*, 3 April 1923, 4; Editorial, 'To-morrow's by election', 4; Editorial, 'Ware Bolshevism!', 4; The Magpie, 'Bird's eye view of the Hull hustings', *Hull Daily Mail*, 20 October 1924, 5.

hungry and workless, discontented with their lot, living in mean streets, and with a black future stretching out before them, are naturally susceptible to this particular kind of mental poison.¹⁵²

These ‘ill-balanced’ members of the lower orders, who had limited educations, were much more predisposed to the promises offered by utopian left-wing doctrines.¹⁵³

Lumping together the left, the criminal and members of the lower/working class in this manner was no doubt a mechanism of the local media, but, to a certain extent, was also a reflection of police attitudes in Hull and East Yorkshire. What was essentially a heterogeneous group had become conflated into a dangerous entity, one to be feared but also dismantled by the police and the courts. In this sense, the politicisation of the working classes during the interwar period precipitated a further criminalisation of that very same group.

Conclusion

All the themes examined in this chapter regularly appeared, to varying degrees, in the pages of the *Hull Daily Mail* and *Hull Times*. Not surprisingly, the timing of their appearances related to both local and national exigencies and played out more readily in the city of Hull rather than the rural East Riding. However, the picture presented in the press and the actions of the local police and courts in response to crime and criminality is complex and beyond generalisation. While a sympathetic attitude to the plight of the former soldier (most of whom were more than likely ordinary working-class tommies) was commonplace, and could materialise in the absolution of criminal behaviour, a more hard-line approach was exhibited to those groups on the ideological left of politics through the criminalisation of their activities and the labelling of

¹⁵² Editorial, ‘The menace’, *Hull Daily Mail*. 14 March 1925, 2.

¹⁵³ Editorial, ‘A judge’s lament’, 4.

individual members as troublemakers or violent revolutionaries, some of which may have been a reflection of the political conservatism of the local press. While the extremes of eugenics theory were on occasion supported by the local newspapers in a bid to stem the perceived criminality of the lower orders, not everyone agreed with the draconian policies of voluntary or forced sterilisation, favouring instead softer methodologies designed to reduce the alleged reproductive proclivities of those on the bottom rung of society. Contradictions also appear in the responses to acts of criminal behaviour committed through sheer desperation due to unemployment and associated poverty. The prevailing view locally appears to be one that accepted the causal relationship between the lack of work and criminality, although simple idleness rather than destitution was also presented as an explanation. Either way, the police, the courts and newspaper editors could be sympathetic to the potentially criminal predicaments of those without work. However, reoffenders, while still destitute, were not always dealt with so compassionately, even though a criminal record would no doubt have made it even harder for the defendants to find paid work in the future, thus perpetuating the problem for the unemployed.

Consequently, it is not possible to find a single, overarching narrative to local responses to crime and criminality relating the four themes analysed in this chapter. While they all relate primarily to working-class criminality, there were inconsistencies and, at times, contradictions in the reactions by the authorities in Hull and East Yorkshire. Of course, this may have been the case in other major towns and cities during the interwar years. Hull and the wider region had its own local peculiarities and specificities, however, further illustrating the need to escape metanarratives or generalised historical accounts of the interwar years, particularly about crime. It would be prudent to supplement these accounts with local contexts that may present a

multiplicity of responses, which are often contradictory and perhaps historically inconvenient, but, crucially, offer a better insight into specific reactions to crime and criminality during these years. As stated in the introduction to this chapter, reactions to the four themes were similar in that they failed to generate widespread and sustained panic locally among the ruling authorities and the public at large. The same cannot be said about the other two major themes analysed in this study. As Chapter 3 will reveal, fears and anxieties around perceived rises in juvenile delinquency and the huge increases in motor transport-related crime during the interwar years appear to have been perpetuated and compounded by the dominance of these types of criminal behaviour appearing in the courts, as part of police campaigns and in the pages of the local newspapers.

Chapter 3

Panic stations: the threat of juvenile delinquency and the rise of transport-related crime

There was a divergence of responses to criminal activity relating to the themes covered in the last chapter. All were present, to varying degrees and at different times during the period, in the discussions around crime and criminality in Hull and East Yorkshire.

However, what sets apart the two themes covered in this chapter is the intensity of the responses by the press, the police, the courts and the public. The themes, juvenile delinquency and the rise of transport-related crime, appear to reflect that juxtaposition of old and new in the years between the wars. The first can trace its origins back to the nineteenth century, while the second was very much a product of its times and the technological advancements taking place during this period. Fears around a purported rise in youth crime followed the cessation of the First World War and continued throughout the period.¹ The 1930s in particular, witnessed increasing anxieties in response to what was seen as a rise in criminal activity among the country's young people. The huge rise in transport-related offences, which was primarily the result of the growth in motorised vehicle use, also raised major concerns for the police and the public, and these anxieties were reflected in the level of press coverage assigned to this modern type of crime that was now afflicting society. Legislation passed by the government during this period in both spheres probably heightened fears as the number of offences mushroomed following its implementation.

How did these anxieties play out in the press in Hull and East Yorkshire? What were the responses from the local police forces, the courts and the public? This chapter will examine these reactions and provide a localised and detailed account in a bid to

¹ Godfrey & Lawrence, *Crime and justice*, 142.

transcend once again generalisations about crime and criminality during the interwar years. Moreover, just as the four themes in the previous chapter had one thing in common (that they failed to elicit panic-level responses) reactions to the two themes covered in this chapter were similar in that they appear to have provoked more sustained levels of alarm during this period. This is in part exemplified by the number of references to these offences in the newspapers, police records and court reports. More significantly, it is from the detailed examination of the actual content of the local debates that it is possible to provide an accurate account of the prevailing crime narratives and an assessment of the levels of anxiety present in Hull and East Yorkshire during these years. From the same exercise, it is also possible to identify the alleged and actual perpetrators of these types of offences.

Responding to youth crime

In his book *Coming of Age*, Springhall notes that the threat of juvenile delinquency has posed a ‘perennial historical problem’ for society.² It was an issue that caused consternation and raised anxieties throughout the period between 1919 and 1939, no doubt compounded by a whole series of social, political and economic circumstances that materialised during these years. Alleged increases in the number of offences committed by individuals or gangs of young people raised the threat of youth-perpetrated crime waves spreading across the country. There was little doubt that statistically youth crime appeared to be a major issue, although this was much more marked in the second half of the period. A 1925 Home Office report on the work of the Children’s Branch noted that in the region of 30,000 people under 16 had appeared

² J. Springhall, *Coming of age: adolescence in Britain 1860–1960* (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1986), 157.

before the juvenile courts every year since the end of the First World War.³ After an initial increase in juvenile offenders appearing before the courts in the aftermath of the First World War (the reasons posited for this will be discussed later in the chapter), the figures appear to have steadied out in the 1920s, settling at around 24,000 by 1929.⁴

It was a different story in the 1930s. The number of persons proceeded against in the juvenile courts rose significantly, reaching around 53,000 in 1938, although as with all such figures they are a far from satisfactory indicator of the true level of criminal behaviour.⁵ The Home Office enquiry into juvenile delinquency, which began in 1938 (as discussed in the Introduction), commented on the increases, noting the significance of the implementation of the 1933 Children and Young Persons Act.⁶ The introductory notes in the annual crime statistics highlighted the issue of juvenile offending. The 1931 report stated that a ‘large proportion’ of those found guilty of burglary offences were ‘young people’, while a year earlier the report had talked about the ‘prevalence’ of less serious forms of property offences perpetrated by the young.⁷ The 1930 report went as far as claiming that for many of those aged under 30, there existed a ‘continued addiction to crime’ of a ‘lawless and adventurous’ nature.⁸ Of course, this stretches to breaking point what could be deemed a ‘young person’. However, the report appears to be making the point that even though some of the offenders were no longer young persons, they were youthful offenders when they started their careers in crime. The notion of an ever-expanding criminal population,

³ Home Office, *Third report on the work of the Children’s Branch 1925* (London: His Majesty’s Stationery Office). Record of Hull Magistrates Court, C DPM/36/92, Hull City Archives, Hull History Centre, Hull, 5.

⁴ Home Office, *Criminal statistics 1919*, 49; Home Office, *Criminal statistics 1929*, 79.

⁵ Home Office, *Criminal statistics 1930*, 79; Home Office, *Criminal statistics 1938*, 75. The 1933 Children and Young Persons Act raised the age limit of offenders to 17, so this would have had an impact on the numbers.

⁶ Carr-Saunders, et al., *Young offenders*, 46.

⁷ Home Office, *Criminal statistics 1931*, xiii; Home Office, *Criminal statistics 1930*, v.

⁸ Home Office, *Criminal statistics 1930*, v.

augmented continuously by the juvenile delinquent, may not have been a new concept, but the apparent increases in youth crime during this period made the need for a solution ever more pressing.

Crime levels in Hull and East Yorkshire

Of course, as with all crime statistics, those for juvenile offenders provide only a partial account of the true nature of offending and are flawed in much the same way, with legislative changes relating to the reform or punishment of the offenders (and their implementation in the courts) skewing the overall figures, making comparative analyses problematic. As detailed in Chapter 1, the accuracy of such statistics was rarely called into question in the newspapers produced in Hull and East Yorkshire during the interwar period. Their ostensible validity appeared to derive from their official, authoritative origins. As was the case in the nineteenth century when the concept of the juvenile delinquent gained currency, newspapers like the *Hull Daily Mail* and *Hull Times* regularly featured stories of offences perpetrated by young people, creating a perception that juvenile criminality was a ‘frequent and real threat to society’.⁹ In the 378 editions of the *Hull Daily Mail* analysed in this study, 55% featured at least one reference to juvenile crime. Of this 55%, more than two thirds related to criminal activity in Hull and East Yorkshire. Whether or not this was a true reflection of actual crime levels in the region, or a consequence of other factors such as police efficiencies or the availability of juvenile crime reports to the local editors, the regional press covered the issue frequently throughout the 1920s and 1930s.

⁹ J. Abbot, ‘The press and the public visibility of nineteenth-century criminal children’, in J. Rowbotham & K. Stevenson (eds.), *Criminal conversations: Victorian crimes, social panic, and moral outrage* (Columbus: The Ohio State University Press, 2005), 23–39:29.

However, it was more than just consistent coverage. From the early years after the end of the First World War to the statistically evidenced growth in criminality among the young in the 1930s, concerns were vehemently voiced locally about the problems of juvenile delinquency, often from the local press and those in authority, such as the courts and police chief constables. ‘Unprovoked attacks by hooligans are becoming common in Hull’, stated the *Hull Daily Mail* in August 1919 following an attack by ‘young hooligans’ on three foreign visitors to the city, which resulted in the three men being treated for their injuries in the local infirmary.¹⁰ ‘Hooliganism’ by the young people of Hull was ‘too frequent and must be stopped’, declared Mr G. L. Shackles, magistrates’ clerk at the Hull Police Court, after two youths were charged with assaulting the proprietor of the Pavilion Dancing Hall in April 1920.¹¹ The court heard that the youths were ‘worse for drink and very riotous’ after they were refused entry, hitting the cashier and breaking two windows. Both youths received a £5 fine for their actions.¹² Fears around the growth of violence among the city’s youth continued. The local and national crime statistics provided fuel for the fire, even though the majority of crimes for which young people were summoned at the local courts were for less serious offences such as housebreaking and simple larceny. This was the case in both Hull and the surrounding East Riding district.¹³ Many of the other offences that young people were committing would now be deemed anti-social or nuisance behaviour rather than criminal. This included anything from rowdy youths congregating in city squares and making excessive noise to groups of children playing

¹⁰ Hull Daily Mail, ‘Hooliganism in Hull: pedestrians attacked in Old Town’, *Hull Daily Mail*. 4 August 1919, 3.

¹¹ Hull Daily Mail, ‘Hull hooligans: scene in a dancing hall’, *Hull Daily Mail*. 29 April 1920, 6.

¹² *Ibid.*

¹³ For examples of the juvenile crime statistics, see Chief Constable, East Riding Constabulary, *Bundle of annual returns* (1926–1936). Humberside Police Authority Records, POL/3/3/3/2–POL/3/3/3/14, East Riding of Yorkshire Archives, Treasure House, Beverley.

football in the streets. A letter writer to the *Hull Daily Mail* described the former as young people ‘behaving in the most objectionable way’, while an example of the latter saw 23 boys summoned and charged at the local juvenile court.¹⁴ Juvenile smoking was also an issue that was raised by the local police.¹⁵ While this hardly represented a serious crime, it was deemed to part of the moral downfall of contemporary youth and one that required checking.

Overt differentiations between the seriousness of the crime rarely appeared in relation to reports of an increase in crime among the region’s young people. Stern warnings were issued on the basis that youth criminality was getting out of hand and was posing a serious threat to society. Delinquency had become a ‘grave problem’ for Hull according to Councillor D. C. Lister, Chairman of the Hull Education Committee, which if continued at the present rate would mean the city would need ‘special courts and paid people to devote their time to the question’.¹⁶ The number of young people crowded in the corridors of the juvenile courts had become a ‘disgrace to the city’ and one which was no longer acceptable to the citizens of Hull.¹⁷ The increasingly concerning national picture was also discussed in the newspapers. An editorial in the *Hull Daily Mail* in April 1934 declared the issue to be one requiring ‘serious consideration’ in light of the fact that there had been a 40.9% increase in the number of youths sent to prison, according to the latest annual report of prison commissioners.¹⁸ By 1939, the *Hull Times* was claiming that juvenile crime accounted for almost 40% of

¹⁴ Seeker of peace and quiet, ‘Hull hooliganism’, Letter to the editor, *Hull Daily Mail*. 21 February 1936, 8; Hull Daily Mail, “‘Mail’ Mustard and Cress”, *Hull Daily Mail*. 8 May 1919, 1.

¹⁵ Deputy Chief Constable, Hull City Police, *Juvenile smoking* (4 January 1927). Chief Constables’ Memoranda 1903–1928, Humberside Police Authority Records, POL/4/2/4/1, East Riding of Yorkshire Archives, Treasure House, Beverley.

¹⁶ Hull Daily Mail, ‘Grave problem of child delinquency’, *Hull Daily Mail*. 5 May 1937, 7.

¹⁷ Hull Times, “‘Hull juvenile court queue a disgrace to the city’”, *Hull Times*. 29 April 1939, 13.

¹⁸ Hull Daily Mail, ‘Increase in crime: juvenile offenders and debt imprisonments’, *Hull Daily Mail*. 27 April 1934, 10.

the total offences recorded in Hull. This was a worrying development that required an immediate and effective solution.¹⁹

The emergence of 'gang' crime

The number of crimes committed by juveniles was only part of the issue. As was the case with many other industrialised towns and cities across the country, it was the alleged increase in gang-related crime and associated violence that was of growing concern for the police and the local authorities. These made good copy for the editors of the local newspapers. In November 1937, the *Hull Daily Mail* presented its 'revelations of gangster terrorism' to readers, detailing the recent spate of assaults at a number of city dance halls, committed by a 'gang of young hooligans'.²⁰ The newspapers alleged that these gangs had been causing problems across the region for many years. For example, five youths were purported to have assaulted a man in a Hull street in September 1919, landing him in hospital.²¹ Across the Humber in Barton, two gangs of youths appeared before Barton Police Court after throwing stones at each other and at the local police station.²² In nearby Scunthorpe, the *Hull Times* declared gleefully that a local gang, whose members were all under 14 years' old and who had been causing trouble in the town for some time, had been 'broken up' by local police. The leader of the gang, who was aged 10 at the time of the court case, and his associates were involved in 27 different cases – a charge sheet that was described by the local superintendent as 'one of the most appalling lists he had ever seen'.²³

¹⁹ Hull Times, 'Warning to juvenile offenders', *Hull Times*. 5 August 1939, 2.

²⁰ Hull Daily Mail, 'Revelations of gangster terrorism in Hull: hooligans of the dance halls', *Hull Daily Mail*. 1 November 1937, 10.

²¹ Hull Daily Mail, 'Hull hooligans' assault', *Hull Daily Mail*. 15 September 1919, 8.

²² Hull Times, 'Stones at police station: Barton youths who are perfect pests', *Hull Times*. 29 May 1937, 7.

²³ Hull Times, 'Astounding juvenile crimes: Scunthorpe gang broken up', *Hull Times*. 10 December 1932, 11.

While these incidents did make the news, they appear to have been dealt with promptly by the local authorities, if the newspaper reports are to be believed.²⁴ It would also be false to conclude that actual gang-related offences appeared with any regularity in the local newspapers. Of the 378 editions of the *Hull Daily Mail* examined in the sample, these types of seemingly organised criminal activities featured on only 13 occasions, and most of these were of a national or international context, rather than local. The issue appeared on only a handful of occasions in the copies of the *Hull Times* analysed in the study. This is probably an accurate reflection of the level of gang-related activity taking place in Hull and East Yorkshire during the interwar years, exemplified by the absence of any major campaigns or obvious concerns in the police records for the period. Unlike many other major cities during the interwar period, such as Glasgow, Sheffield and Birmingham, Hull and its district appears to have escaped such conflict.²⁵ As an editorial in the *Hull Daily Mail* declared reassuringly: ‘Citizens do not need to be reminded that they are not running the risk of being held up at every street corner. Their lives and property are not in danger of attack from an organised criminality which cannot be controlled.’ The issue was serious but ‘it must not be made worse than it really is’.²⁶ The newspaper went on to claim that residents in Hull actually found it hard to comprehend the gang warfare issue as they were living in a city that was ‘remarkably free’ from crime, even though the same newspaper had been making

²⁴ Hull Daily Mail, ‘No gangs in Hull: stipendiary adopts a firm attitude’, *Hull Daily Mail*. 30 July 1925, 5; Hull Daily Mail, ‘Firm hand with hooligans: straight-forward statements at Hull court’, *Hull Daily Mail*. 10 May 1926, 4; Hull Daily Mail, ‘To ban gangs: Hull stipendiary gives a plain warning’, *Hull Daily Mail*. 1 June 1927, 10; Editorial, ‘Hull “gang” warned’, *Hull Daily Mail*. 14 September 1928, 4.

²⁵ For example, see A. Davies, ‘Street gangs, crime and policing in Glasgow during the 1930s: the case of the Beehive Boys’. *Social History*, 23, 3 (1998) 251–267.

²⁶ Editorial, ‘The gang problem’, *Hull Daily Mail*. 25 April 1930, 6.

regular assertions about the need to clamp down on what it termed gang-related, juvenile crime.²⁷

However, in the eyes of the editors of the local newspapers, just as in the number of crimes committed by young people locally, differentiations between the seriousness of the offences may have been spurious. For most of the period, cases appear to have been lumped together into what was termed ‘gang’ crime irrespective of whether they were violent street gangs of the Glasgow or Sheffield ilk or merely groups of young people committing simple larcenies or anti-social behaviour. This was also the case for letter writers to the newspapers. Complaining about the ‘crowds of young hooligans armed with big sticks’ out on the streets of Hull during the school holidays, one contributor described it as one of the most ‘disgusting sights’ they had ever witnessed in the city.²⁸ A year later and the same complaint, from a different resident, was making the letters pages. This time it was described as a ‘growing evil’ that needed ‘drastic treatment’.²⁹ The issue stretched across the region. Complaints were made in seaside resorts as well as inland towns and villages. In the coastal town of Withernsea, gangs of youths who gathered on the promenade were condemned for frightening female passers-by with what were described by a local correspondent as ‘opprobrious and distasteful remarks’.³⁰ It is easy to mock these seemingly hysterical responses. It is important, however, not to denigrate such fears due to their seemingly trivial or less menacing characteristics. This type of so-called gang crime became a key component in the local juvenile crime narrative during this period. The conflation of the various degrees of gang activity, from the groups of youths playing games or congregating in

²⁷ Editorial, ‘Glasgow’s gangs: conditions that are hard to realise’, *Hull Daily Mail*. 18 December 1936, 8.

²⁸ Disgusted, ‘School holiday brutality’, Letter to the editor, *Hull Daily Mail*. 4 January 1932, 8.

²⁹ Paterfamilias, ‘School holidays’, Letter to the editor, *Hull Daily Mail*. 27 June 1933, 8.

³⁰ Our Own Correspondent, ‘Withernsea gossip’, *Hull Daily Mail*. 8 May 1924, 6.

the street to the more nefarious activities of the professional gang members conducting coordinated robberies or participating in skirmishes with rival groups, was not confined to the local newspapers in Hull and East Yorkshire and was not a product of the interwar years. Its origins appear to date back to the nineteenth century, where press narratives in other regions of the country and in the capital offered up rather specious definitions of what could be described as youth gang crime.³¹ Nonetheless, this was the language of the local press in Hull and East Yorkshire, and these were the perceptions of many people living in the region. Of course, it is difficult to ascertain how much was the result of newspaper sensationalism or an authentic reflection of levels of crime or of local opinion on the issue. However, there does appear to have been some substance behind these views of gang-related activities. According to the Home Office-initiated investigation into juvenile offending in 1938, just over 80% of the crimes committed by the examined group of 181 delinquents in Hull were carried out by a ‘gang’ of young people. This led the report to conclude that it was ‘obvious that the majority of offences are committed when boys are in company’.³²

Without recording and evaluating every crime committed by juveniles in the 21-year interwar period, it is impossible to extrapolate these findings beyond the initial investigation. However, it does appear that a significant proportion of the crimes committed by youths in the city, which resulted in proceedings at the juvenile court, involved two or more individuals. These were for the whole gamut of offences, from the lower-level nuisance crimes to theft and criminal damage. For example, in June 1937, eight children aged between 12 and 16 appeared before the juvenile court after

³¹ H. Shore, *London's criminal underworlds, c.1720–c.1930* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), 144.

³² Carr-Saunders et al., *Young offenders*, 110–111.

being caught playing cricket in the street.³³ In 1934, six boys and one girl, aged between nine and 12 years old, were charged with stealing cigarettes, chocolate biscuits, several bottles of mineral water and a half-crown.³⁴ A year later, 10 members of a ‘gang’, the youngest being just eight years old, were caught breaking and entering the Blundell Street School and stealing two tins of Jubilee Toffee.³⁵ In August 1937, 20 juveniles appeared before the courts accused of wilful damage to three properties in the city. All of the accused were aged between nine and 12 years old.³⁶ The local Watch Committee would also use ‘gang’ shorthand to describe these types of offences, as was the case when a number of local youths, intent on celebrating the end of the First World War and the signing of the peace settlement, stole oil barrels from a Hull yard to help light a series of fires.³⁷

Once again, responses to juvenile delinquency were far from straightforward or consistent throughout the period. Gang crime (that is, crime committed by groups of youths) did become part of the narrative, and so did a belief in a growing criminality among the region’s young people. These were reflected in the pages of the newspapers, illustrated by their frequency in the sample set and searches. Even though residents had been reassured that organised street gang problems were not a major issue in the city of Hull, the other recurring themes of youth crime would have no doubt fuelled local fears and anxieties. So too did the posited reasons for why juvenile criminality was on the increase during the interwar years. Many of these were, in part, a rerun of the

³³ *Juvenile court register* (1936–1938). Records of Hull Magistrates Court, C DPM/7/2, Hull City Archives, Hull History Centre, Hull, 183.

³⁴ *Juvenile court register* (1933–1936). Records of Hull Magistrates Court, C DPM/7/1, Hull City Archives, Hull History Centre, Hull, 24.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 173.

³⁶ *Juvenile court register* (1936–1938), 211.

³⁷ Hull Watch Committee, *Minutes of the proceedings of the Watch and Licensing Committee* (9 July 1919). Minutes of Proceedings of Committees, City and County of Kingston Upon Hull Municipal Corporation and Urban Sanitary Authority, POL4/1/1/31, East Riding of Yorkshire Archives, Treasure House, Beverley, 154–155.

arguments and debates detailed in Chapter 2. It was here, in the search to find out *why* the region's young people were turning to crime, that many of the complexities and contradictions of local responses were once again exposed.

Our children are out of control

Not surprisingly, the unique circumstances of the First World War and its aftermath were the first issues to fuel fears and anxieties around increases in juvenile criminality in this period, just as they had done in relation to those returning soldiers debilitated and brutalized by the horrifying events of the conflict. As Godfrey and Lawrence have stated, these fears centred on the absence of parental control and guidance, where fathers were caught up in the conflict and mothers were out at work in the munitions factories.³⁸ Juvenile crime figures for the war years appeared to substantiate perceptions of the negative consequences of the absence of parental control. In the annual statistics report for 1919, the increases in the number of young people proceeded against in the juvenile courts between 1914 and 1918 were laid bare – there was a 36% increase with the figure growing from 36,929 in 1914 to 49,915 in 1918 (after hitting a peak of 51,323 in 1917).³⁹ While mothers would return to the family home at the end of the war, the appalling death toll during the conflict and the huge number of returning soldiers who had been wounded in the war, mentally and physically, continued to raise concerns. This was in spite of the fact that many households had actually returned to familial normality and juvenile crime figures for 1919, perhaps reflecting this, saw a drop to something akin to pre-war levels.⁴⁰

³⁸ Godfrey & Lawrence, *Crime and justice*, 141.

³⁹ Home Office, *Criminal statistics 1919*, 8. As always, caution is needed when interpreting these figures as they were for 'persons proceeded against' rather than number of offences. However, the report believed these probably offered the best available information on the matter.

⁴⁰ Home Office, *Criminal statistics 1919*, 8.

The local press in Hull and East Yorkshire picked up this issue but dealt with it in a generally sympathetic manner, with the perpetrators of crime often perceived as victims, similar to the approach adopted during discussions about criminality among ex-servicemen. For example, while acknowledging that the dislocation of the family through the removal of fathers and elder brothers may have precipitated an ‘outburst of crime’ among Hull’s juvenile population, they were simply ‘caught in the wave’ of criminality, which had ceased now discipline had returned to the home following the cessation of the fighting.⁴¹ It was part of the explanations for increases in youth crime a decade later, when the generation who were under 16 during the war had prolonged their criminal tendencies.⁴² It would also be used in mitigation for some boys that appeared before the courts, as in the case of a defendant accused of stealing chocolates from a warehouse and damaging the roof in the process, whose father had been invalided home during the war and now resided in an asylum.⁴³

The negative impact of war, however, was not a prerequisite for the absence of parental control thesis. Echoing the concerns of reformers in the nineteenth century, inadequate parenting per se was advanced as a key reason for wayward behaviour among the young.⁴⁴ The *Hull Daily Mail* claimed that this issue was responsible for the ‘ruin of hosts of children’ – a view supported by several readers who, through the letters pages, cited causal relationships between the ‘laxity of parental control’ and increased ‘juvenile depravity’, feeling it was the responsibility of parents to ensure

⁴¹ Special for the “Daily Mail”, ‘Decrease in juvenile crime in Hull’, *Hull Daily Mail*. 1 February 1921, 6.

⁴² Hull Daily Mail, ‘How crime has increased: war’s effect on the young’, *Hull Daily Mail*. 31 March 1932, 8.

⁴³ Hull Daily Mail, ‘Boys’ theft of chocolates’, *Hull Daily Mail*. 7 April 1921, 5.

⁴⁴ May, ‘Innocence and experience’, 21.

children behaved themselves when out on the city's streets.⁴⁵ The Chief Constable of Hull Police, Captain W. A. Woods, appears to have been of a similar opinion, believing 'looser' parenting controls to be one of the main causes of the increases in criminal behaviour.⁴⁶ The Hull Probation Committee came to the same conclusions in its annual report for 1934, responding to the growing number of juveniles placed on probation during that year.⁴⁷ Locally, it was a theme that spanned the two decades. As war broke out in Europe once again, the Hull Juvenile Court was pleading with parents to pay more attention to what their children were getting up to on the city's streets when unsupervised.⁴⁸

However, the issue went beyond one of parental control. General conditions in the home were also seen to play a crucial role in shaping the child's future. Again, this was nothing new. As Shore points out, alongside parental and child relationships within the family, 'home environments' were 'central to discourses of juvenile delinquency' in the nineteenth century and have remained so ever since.⁴⁹ In Hull, these conditions could include environmental factors, reflecting the desperate economic circumstances of the family, or psychological/physical issues, which may have been a consequence of neglect or cruelty. A special correspondent writing in the *Hull Daily Mail* in January 1923 appeared mortified after discovering that youths were sleeping on the local docks and stealing food to survive due to the appalling conditions at home.⁵⁰ Addressing the mother of a 16-year-old boy who had been charged with stealing a £1 treasury note, the

⁴⁵ Editorial, "'Dangerous" youth', *Hull Daily Mail*. 22 December 1926, 4; W. S., 'For thoughtful people', Letter to the editor, *Hull Daily Mail*. 3 April 1923, 6; Peace, Sweet Peace, 'Hull's noisy streets', Letter to the editor, *Hull Daily Mail*. 25 November 1922, 3.

⁴⁶ *Hull Daily Mail*, 'More child crime: chief constable advises more scout spirit', *Hull Daily Mail*. 13 May 1925, 9.

⁴⁷ J. Humber, 'Reported increases in juvenile crime in Hull', *Humberside Echoes*, *Hull Daily Mail*. 18 May 1935, 4.

⁴⁸ J. Humber, 'Lads who run wild', *Humberside Echoes*, *Hull Daily Mail*. 12 October 1939, 4.

⁴⁹ Shore, 'Inventing the juvenile delinquent', 118.

⁵⁰ Special to the "Mail", 'Lives of crime: Hull boys who steal and sleep on docks', *Hull Daily Mail*. 23 January 1923, 6.

stipendiary magistrate, Mr J. R. Macdonald, declared that the boy's future was her responsibility, after a probation officer had stated that he had no chance at home. 'If his home life was made comfortable he would be saved, but if it was made a misery to him he would turn out to be criminal. You can save him or send him to hell.'⁵¹

Idle, mischievous or criminal?

Hull Probation Committee's annual report for 1934 cited another reason for increases in juvenile offences and provided further explanations as to why more young people were now being placed on probation. As was revealed in Chapter 2, this was an issue that caused consternation for the police, courts and the local authorities – that is, unemployment.⁵² During periods of economic downturn when employment in the core industries became scarcer, it was feared that youths leaving school without work would fall into crime. The economically challenging years immediately after the end of the First World War, when cities like Hull suffered from a contraction of international markets, forced the issue to be raised on a number of occasions.⁵³ Speaking at a meeting at Hull's Guildhall in January 1920, the secretary of the Hull Advisory Committee for Juvenile Employment, expressed concern over the lack of apprenticeship opportunities in the engineering industries for local boys. There was no such issue for Hull girls, where the demand for domestic servants in the city was greater than the supply.⁵⁴ As a handful of cases at Hull courts testify, where lack of work was presented as mitigating circumstances for offences such as theft and robbery,

⁵¹ Hull Daily Mail, 'Boy's sad life: unhappy Hull court story', *Hull Daily Mail*. 14 April 1925, 5.

⁵² Humber, 'Reported increases in juvenile crime', 4.

⁵³ This appears to have been the case for other dock cities such as Liverpool, where the chief probation officer claimed in 1924 that 85% of juvenile offences were committed by the unemployed, HL Deb 18 March 1924, vol 60, col 575.

⁵⁴ Hull Times, 'Juvenile employment: opportunities for apprenticeship lacking', *Hull Times*. 20 January 1920, 5.

the obvious worry was that youths would turn to crime to survive.⁵⁵ Moreover, it was feared that these youths, with similar circumstances and a desperation that left them with little to lose, would gang together to commit crime on the city's streets. The *Hull Daily Mail* was of the opinion that gang trouble in the city was 'allied to the big social problems' of the day, such as unemployment, environment and 'economic circumstances'. It was only when these matters were resolved that the criminal activities of these youths could be quashed effectively.⁵⁶

The belief in a causal relationship between unemployment, deprivation and criminality does appear to have been much less pronounced for youth offending than for adult crime. The reasons for this are not altogether clear. There may have been a notion that juvenile crime was an act of mischief rather than something carried out through necessity. In this theory, boredom, which was still likely to have been another consequence of a lack of work, played a much bigger role than desperation. Bailey identifies the prevalence of this view at the beginning of the interwar period, where delinquency was 'bound up with the temporary strains of adolescence' and the young person's need to find excitement in pursuits outside the accepted and legally defined norms.⁵⁷ The belief was that the young person needed an outlet for their pent-up energy, and this often materialised as mischievous or criminal behaviour. It was the task of the police, the magistrates or the local probation officers to determine whether the actions were the former or the latter.⁵⁸ It was also clearly the view of several leading professionals responsible for dealing with youth crime in the region. During an address to local teachers, Hull's Probation Officer, Mr C. Rankin, claimed that 90% of criminals began their 'careers' before they were 18 years old, and the first offence was

⁵⁵ Hull Daily Mail, 'Houses ransacked by Hull youths', *Hull Daily Mail*. 11 March 1931, 7.

⁵⁶ Editorial, 'The gang problem', 6.

⁵⁷ Bailey, *Delinquency and citizenship*, 12.

⁵⁸ Editorial, 'Juvenile delinquency', *Hull Daily Mail*. 18 September 1923, 4.

very often ‘due to some impulsive act of mischief’.⁵⁹ The governor of Hull Prison also propagated the belief in the link between idleness, through lack of work, and criminal mischief. In the Commissioners of Prisons Annual Report for 1924–25, he declared that youths were ‘accumulating habits of idleness and all kinds of mischief, at just the time that they should be accumulating habits of industry and good citizenship’. The consequences were serious: here was ‘a nucleus of our future prison population’.⁶⁰

According to Bailey, the idea that juvenile delinquency was primarily a quest for excitement and adventure was replaced in the 1920s, first with a shift to socio-economic factors, then to the primacy of environmental conditions in the family home. By the 1930s, conditions at home became the ‘most accepted explanation of delinquency’, even though there was resurgence in the view of a causal relationship between unemployment and crime later in the same decade.⁶¹ In Hull and East Yorkshire, the notion of the mischief-making delinquent appears to have had much more longevity. Echoing his own views on the propensity of the idle and inactive man or woman to criminality (as detailed in Chapter 2), Chief Constable of East Riding Constabulary, Mr J. E. Ryall, declared during a gathering of the local branch of the National Police Court Mission in May 1937 that increases in juvenile criminality were due to ‘boredom’ and a lack of knowledge about how to employ their leisure time.⁶² He expanded on these views a few months later, defining the cause of juvenile crime as a ‘spirit of adventure’. However, he also partly contradicted his previous assertions that boredom was one of the root causes of crime among the young by claiming that the

⁵⁹ Hull Daily Mail, ‘Juvenile crime: Hull probation officer addresses teachers’, *Hull Daily Mail*. 20 December 1926, 7.

⁶⁰ Prison Commission, Home Office, *Report of the commissioners of prisons and the directors of convict prisons 1924–1925*. Cm 2597 (London: Her Majesty’s Stationery Office). Available online: <https://parlipapers.proquest.com/parlipapers/docview/t70.d75.1926-028109?accountid=11528> [Accessed 24/4/2017], 47.

⁶¹ Bailey, *Delinquency and citizenship*, 12 & 124–128.

⁶² Hull Times, ‘Cause of juvenile crime: views of E. Riding Chief Constable’, *Hull Times*. 29 May 1937, 7.

desire for 'ready cash' was also an 'inducement to crime', exemplified by the high number of larcenies committed by juveniles in the East Riding.⁶³ It is true that a high percentage of the crimes committed by the young in the region were defined as simple or minor larcenies, but no detailed qualitative analysis of the figures was presented as evidence to justify these assertions and generalisations. They were more than likely anecdotal; a result of the experiences of the crime detection carried out by local police officers. That said, the adventure thesis did have its supporters, well into the 1930s. An editorial piece in the *Hull Daily Mail* in December 1938 featured a quote from Hull stipendiary magistrate, Mr J. R. Macdonald, delivered during a court appearance of a gang of youths charged with breaking electric meters and stealing the contents stating: 'You thought you were dashing young heroes when you are, in fact, silly young kids.'⁶⁴ The editorial goes on to claim that children did not go astray because of a lack of pocket money – it was an absence of morals that was at fault, and the parents were also once again the target for blame.⁶⁵

Recurring themes, be it parental control, home environments or the lack of employment appear to have been a feature of the ideological positioning of the reasons and reactions to juvenile crime in Hull and East Yorkshire in this period. However, no single dominant theme in attitudes towards youth offending emerged from the analysis of police records or in the newspaper sample and searches. All existed concurrently, to varying degrees. That is not to state that they were complementary. On the contrary, as we have seen they could be contradictory, both within the themes themselves and as part of the thoughts and opinions of key individuals in the region. The editorial quoted at the end of the last paragraph also advanced a view that once again makes it difficult

⁶³ Hull Daily Mail, 'Why boys commit crimes: East Riding police chief's view', *Hull Daily Mail*. 22 September 1937, 9.

⁶⁴ Editorial, 'This gang business: teach delinquents theft is silly', *Hull Daily Mail*. 13 December 1938, 6.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

to formulate generalisations about attitudes to crime and criminality during this period. It was not children from poor homes that went astray, claimed the editorial, but those who do not appreciate the true ‘value of money’ and have ‘indulgent parents’.⁶⁶ The blame for this form of delinquency was laid at the door of the more affluent families in the region. Of course, a look at the crime statistics for Hull and East Yorkshire and an examination of local court cases could dispel such a notion. Therefore, it is not a surprise that locally this was not the only view. In a more overt attack on the inherent criminality of the lower classes, and in what also appears to be one of the few local examples of publicly-voiced eugenicist thinking in the press, the head mistress at Hull High School for Girls, Miss Elliott, stated during a pupil prize-giving event that intelligence was ‘inborn, innate and cannot be taught’. This meant that at the bottom of the social scale, where the mental capacity (but not physical development) of adolescents had stopped, the result was ‘outbreaks of hooliganism’.⁶⁷

Incidents of alleged middle-class delinquency did make the local press, however. A spate of ‘gross hooliganism’ on Hornsea promenade, where benches and windows were smashed, was allegedly carried out by youths ‘whose schooling and education should have placed them above such despicable “rags”’, so claimed a letter writer to the *Hull Daily Mail* in November 1928.⁶⁸ Of course, the implication here is that these sorts of acts are committed more regularly by the less-educated, lower-class youth.⁶⁹ The preponderance of the belief in working- or lower-class criminality appears to have been one that was hard to shift, no doubt backed up by the regularity in which youths from these social groups appeared before the courts. Just as eugenics had failed

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

⁶⁷ Hull Daily Mail, ‘Problems for teachers: four types of pupils they meet’, *Hull Daily Mail*. 24 October 1930, 11.

⁶⁸ A lover of justice, ‘Hornsea hooliganism’, Letter to the editor, *Hull Daily Mail*. 23 November 1928, 3.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

to gain traction in the local discussion about crime, complex theories about biological inferiority and the inherent criminality of lower-class youths never became a major feature of the crime discourse in Hull and East Yorkshire. Furthermore, during the interwar period, a new form of criminal behaviour materialised in the region, utilising the technology of the age, and this began to dominate the local crime narrative. On the surface at least, it appeared to challenge assumptions about class-specific criminality. It also sent shockwaves across the region.

The increase in transport-related crime

Perhaps the most striking development during the period between the two World Wars was the rise of motor vehicle. This was, say Donovan and Lawrence, ‘one of the most important social changes of the twentieth century’.⁷⁰ The burgeoning motor industry opened up a new range of leisure activities for those wealthy enough to afford the new motor car, while commercial transportation was transformed by new vehicle technologies. The impact was felt early in the period. In 1920, around 187,000 cars were registered in Britain; a year and a half later, this figure had risen dramatically to 242,500.⁷¹ By 1939, the number of private cars had exceeded the two million mark.⁷² The number of commercial vehicles also increased markedly during this period. Virtually half a million vehicles were utilising the growing network of roads in Britain by 1938.⁷³

Alongside the positive aspects of the rise of road transport, which afforded increased leisure opportunities to those fortunate enough to own a motor vehicle and

⁷⁰ Donovan & Lawrence, ‘Road traffic offending’, 120.

⁷¹ W. Plowden, *The motor car and politics 1896–1970* (London: The Bodley Head Ltd, 1971), 164.

⁷² Donovan & Lawrence, ‘Road traffic offending’, 122.

⁷³ T. Barker & D. Gerhold, *The rise and rise of road transport, 1700–1990* (Basingstoke: The Macmillan Press Ltd, 1993), 86.

new commercial opportunities to businesses transporting goods around the country, there was, of course, a darker side. The number of accidents on the country's roads, a substantial proportion of which resulted in fatalities, caused consternation for governments, the police and local authorities. Legislation aimed at the road user, some of it focused on curbing the dangerous activities of the private car and commercial vehicle driver, also had a serious impact on the work of the police and the courts. Furthermore, what were perceived to be the increasing use of motor vehicles for criminal activities such as robbery and burglary had a major impact on the criminal justice system.⁷⁴ Early in the period, police operations were becoming more and more directed towards traffic offences and the illegal activities of the motor vehicle user.⁷⁵ This increasing police focus on the roads, and subsequent prosecutions in the courts, is laid bare in the annual crime statistics. According to the report for 1938, those found guilty of the myriad of traffic offences constituted 60% of the overall total of offenders for that year.⁷⁶ By the end of the interwar period then, this type of criminal, in his or her many guises, appears to have become the country's most prevalent offender.

Crime levels in Hull and East Yorkshire

The city and region of Hull and East Yorkshire contributed to this trend in the national crime statistics for traffic offences. The 1938 annual statistics revealed that there had been 2,851 offences against the Highways Acts alone in Hull, while in the East Riding of Yorkshire there had been 853.⁷⁷ These were 56% and 65% of the total number of non-indictable offences in each area respectively. The huge increases in the number of traffic offences on local roads caused serious problems for both the Hull Police and

⁷⁴ Donovan & Lawrence, 'Road traffic offending', 120.

⁷⁵ Godfrey et al., *History and crime*, 68.

⁷⁶ Home Office, *Criminal statistics 1938*, vi.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 154–155.

East Riding Constabulary. The chief constables of both forces frequently acknowledged the issue and were vocal in their calls for assistance in dealing with the growing problem. As early as 1925, the Chief Constable of Hull Police, Captain W. A. Woods, asked the local Watch Committee for funds to purchase a new motor car to help deal with the range of offences being committed on the city's roads under his jurisdiction – everything from basic traffic supervision and the enforcement of licensing law to 'criminal investigation work' and in areas where 'speedy police action is necessary'.⁷⁸ A few years later in 1930, the new Chief Constable, Mr T. E. Howden, went much further by asking for permission to form a 'Motor Patrol Branch' with four new vehicles to deal with new Road Traffic Act regulations.⁷⁹

As stated previously, it was not until 1933 that the force created its own Mechanical Transport Department, which included four vans, two cars and three motorcycles.⁸⁰ In the same year that Howden made his request, the Chief Constable of East Riding Constabulary, Captain A. F. Hordern, was stating that the eight patrols the constabulary had on hand to deal with the growing issues on the county's roads were simply a 'drop in the ocean'.⁸¹ More patrols were needed if the force was going to deal with the issue efficiently and effectively on what was a huge network of rural roads. The calls continued as the number of incidents and accidents rose. In March 1936, the Chief Constable of East Riding Constabulary, Mr J. E. Ryall, called for additional numbers to strengthen the force 'in order to stem the increase in accidents' and motor

⁷⁸ Hull Watch Committee, *Minutes of the proceedings of the Watch and Licensing Committee* (28 July 1925). Minutes of Proceedings of Committees, City and County of Kingston Upon Hull Municipal Corporation and Urban Sanitary Authority, TCM 2/38/3, Hull History Centre, Hull, 87.

⁷⁹ Hull Watch Committee, *Minutes of the proceedings of the Watch and Licensing Committee* (23 December 1930). Minutes of Proceedings of Committees, City and County of Kingston Upon Hull Municipal Corporation and Urban Sanitary Authority, TCM 2/44/3, Hull History Centre, Hull, 15.

⁸⁰ Clarke, *Policemen of Hull*, 101.

⁸¹ *History of the East Riding of Yorkshire Police, 1857–1957*. Miscellaneous Local History Collection, UDDX/16/30, Hull University Archives, Hull History Centre, Hull, 27.

related crime.⁸² Police officers were finding themselves tied up with traffic-related duties rather than dealing with other common crimes in the region such as burglary, theft and assault. With increasing frequency, the local newspapers became a platform for escalating fears and anxieties around the use of motor vehicles and what appeared to be an almost unstoppable growth in the number of traffic offences on the region's roads.

The number of transport-related crime incidents counted in the *Hull Daily Mail* sample, as detailed in Chapter 1, highlights the level of concern in the local region (the numbers and availability of these types of crime stories to the journalist and editors would, of course, also be a factor in the coverage). It was the second most discussed theme, next to thefts, in the newspapers examined in the study, with the overwhelming majority relating to local incidents. Furthermore, more than two-thirds of the newspaper sample featured at least one transport-related crime incident. Totals in some of the sampled newspapers actually hit double figures. There was around an 18% increase in the number of occasions these crimes featured in the newspapers between the two decades of the 1920s and 1930s. While this is significant in itself, it also highlights the fact that the issue featured prominently from the beginning of the period under investigation. In addition, the keyword searches of the *Hull Daily Mail* online database yielded a plethora of articles relating to traffic offences, and in line with the findings from the sample, they covered a whole raft of offences – everything from faulty lights, licence infringements and driving without insurance to dangerous/reckless driving, being drunk in charge of a vehicle and deaths caused by motor vehicle users. In their study of road traffic offences cases at a central London magistrates' court,

⁸² Hull Daily Mail, 'More police needed in East Riding: increase in crime and road accidents', *Hull Daily Mail*. 23 March 1936, 10.

Donovan and Lawrence found that the courts did not regard these types of traffic offences as ‘intrinsically serious’ but were instead rather mundane and routine.⁸³ The same could be said about a substantial number of road traffic offences occurring in Hull and East Yorkshire. Matter-of-fact newspaper reporting was a feature of how certain transport-related offences were dealt with in the local press, although as stated previously, this was no different to the way that local newspapers of the period handled other types of petty offences. It is certainly true that individual cases of what were seen to be low-level or regulatory offences, such as the failure to install the correct lighting on motor vehicles or pedal cycles and obstructions to pedestrian walkways by badly parked cars and lorries, were reported as a straight account of both the incident and the outcome. They were a common feature in the newspapers, as the crime counts reveal. Moreover, newspaper articles would regularly feature full lists of offences that had appeared at court at a particular session, and these list could run into the dozens. The cumulative impact of this number of reported offences no doubt amplified the issue and may have, in part, contributed to further responses by the press and the targeted campaigns initiated by the local police forces during this period. Campaigns included crack downs on vehicle users who were driving without the requisite licences, summoning owners of vehicles that didn’t have efficient ‘silencers’ or were making excessive noise due to faults or defects in design, and police were stopping drivers who were exceeding the speed limit and endangering the public.⁸⁴

⁸³ Donovan & Lawrence, ‘Road traffic offending’, 130–137.

⁸⁴ Hull Daily Mail, “‘Mail’ Mustard and Cress”, *Hull Daily Mail*. 9 August 1923, 1; Chief Constable, East Riding Constabulary, *General order no.24/1925* (18 April 1925). General Order Book 1921–1925, Quarter Sessions Papers Relating to Police, East Riding Constabulary Records, QAP/10/2, East Riding of Yorkshire Archives, Treasure House, Beverley, 221; Chief Constable, East Riding Constabulary, *General order no.19/1929* (12 July 1929). General Orders 1929, Humberside Police Authority Records, POL/3/2/2/4, East Riding of Yorkshire Archives, Treasure House, Beverley; Chief Constable, Hull City Police, *Motor vehicles: manner of driving* (9 March 1923). Chief Constables’ Orders 1920–1940, Humberside Police Authority Records, POL/4/2/3/13, East Riding of Yorkshire Archives, Treasure House, Beverley, 59.

Condemning the careless road user

This last campaign, against excessive speeding, was often part of a wider battle to reduce the number of accidents that were becoming an all too common feature on Britain's roads. Plowden claims that the 'most striking feature of motoring in the early 1930s was the rise in road casualties', with the number of deaths and injuries on the roads reaching the worryingly large figure of 239,000 by 1934.⁸⁵ Locally, this had been the case from the early 1920s. In October 1924, the Chief Constable of Hull Police, Captain W. A. Woods, highlighted the number of fatal accidents in the city, warning of the dangers of increasing traffic on the roads, which was causing concern for both the police and the public.⁸⁶ A few months earlier in the same year, a newspaper article had warned readers of the dangers of motor traffic after what was described as an 'extraordinary number of motor accidents' on the region's roads.⁸⁷

The figures that were presented to the public were indeed shocking for the time. As early as 1923, in the East Riding area alone, there were 10 deaths and 94 injuries involving motor vehicles.⁸⁸ Just over five years later, the number of deaths had more than doubled and the injuries had quadrupled. Even though Hull was not the worst city of its size in the country, 22 people had still died on the roads and 755 had been injured in 1927, the majority of these incidents involving motor vehicles.⁸⁹ Although the local press and the police signed up to and promoted the principles of the Safety First Association's campaigns during the 1920s and 1930s, which were aimed at reducing the number of accidents across Britain, the figures continued to increase locally, as

⁸⁵ Plowden, *The motor car and politics*, 266.

⁸⁶ Hull Daily Mail, 'Traffic dangers: Hull Chief Constable's view on the big subject', *Hull Daily Mail*. 14 October 1924, 5.

⁸⁷ Hull Daily Mail, 'Road dangers: great number of recent accidents in Hull and District', *Hull Daily Mail*. 14 March 1924, 5.

⁸⁸ Hull Times, 'Increase in crime: 28 cases of burglary in E.R.', *Hull Times*. 6 January 1923, 11.

⁸⁹ Our London Correspondent, 'Local street accidents', London Letter, *Hull Daily Mail*. 18 April 1928, 4.

more and more vehicles used the region's roads.⁹⁰ In the first nine months of 1936, there had been 2,169 accidents in Hull, with 23 deaths (more than half of which were children) and 964 injured.⁹¹ By November 1936, an editorial in the *Hull Daily Mail* was claiming that there had been 'little improvement' in the number of accidents on the roads in Hull and East Riding, after figures revealed that in October of that year, 253 accidents had been reported to the police, which was a rate of just over eight a day. The number of injuries stood at 117 for the month and three people had died.⁹²

Of course, not all road accidents were the result of criminality, be it by the motorist, cyclist or pedestrian. Many of the accidents were just that, and no blame could be attributed to any of the parties involved. However, the causal link between illegal acts, such as reckless driving, speeding and being drunk in charge of a vehicle, appeared incontestable, and road accidents became firmly embedded within the local crime narrative. It featured regularly in articles and editorials, and also in letters to the editor. For example, a Mr Thomas E. Hill wrote to the newspaper in July 1930 to complain about 'road hogs' in Hull, claiming that the high number of 'terrible accidents' in the city was down to the 'excessive speed' of drivers. Reducing their speed, through corrugated bumps in the road, was the only way to safeguard the public.⁹³ Ardent cyclist W. Sowerby was of the firm opinion that if the 'slaughter' on the roads does not stop 'the public will take the matter into their own hands. They are in the majority, and have a right to more protection.'⁹⁴ An editorial in July 1935 repeated the call for harsher penalties for the drink driver, which it viewed as the most

⁹⁰ Hull Daily Mail, 'Road accidents: Hull decides on "Safety First" campaign', *Hull Daily Mail*. 3 December 1928, 6.

⁹¹ Editorial, 'Hull street accidents', *Hull Daily Mail*. 24 October 1936, 6.

⁹² Editorial, 'Death on the road: accidents maintain their high level', *Hull Daily Mail*. 5 November 1936, 8.

⁹³ T. E. Hill, 'Plan to check road hogs', Letter to the editor, *Hull Daily Mail*, 3 July 1930, 10.

⁹⁴ W. Sowerby, 'Cyclists & motorists', Letter to the editor, *Hull Daily Mail*. 2 January 1935, 9.

‘serious crime’ to be ‘found on the statute books’. It claimed that the ‘one sure way to deal with drunken drivers’ was to send them to gaol and ban them from driving. This was the only way to achieve a reduction in the number of serious offences being committed in the region.⁹⁵ Letter writer G. A. Oliver was of a similar opinion, believing that the sale of beer was linked to accidents on the road, claiming that there had been a 17% increase in convictions for drunkenness since the reduction in beer duty.⁹⁶ The courts, however, were not always in agreement with this hard-line approach. At times, cases that were heard by local magistrates appear to support the notion that driving under the influence was not viewed as a particularly serious crime during the interwar period. At the local court in January 1938, Hull stipendiary magistrate, Mr J. R. Macdonald, declared that 32-year-old Wilfred Evelyn Chapman’s offence of driving while under the influence of alcohol on New Year’s Day was far from being a ‘bad case’ and, accordingly, imposed a lenient fine of £1. The magistrate did not suspend Chapman’s licence either as he felt that this would have been a ‘tremendous punishment’ for the defendant, who drove a taxi for a living.⁹⁷

In addition to the belief in causality, the notion that accidents were inextricably linked to criminal activity on the roads was also helped by the fact that police chief constables would present accident figures alongside local crime statistics, and these would then be reported in much the same way in the local newspapers. This may have been deliberate. According to Taylor, senior police officers used these accident figures, the accuracy of which was questionable anyway, to add ‘public urgency’ to the motor transport issue in a bid to recruit the officers needed to deal effectively with the

⁹⁵ Editorial, ‘Drunk-in-charge motorists’, *Hull Daily Mail*. 11 July 1935, 6.

⁹⁶ G. A. Oliver, ‘Motorists and intoxicants’, Letter to the editor, *Hull Daily Mail*. 30 May 1934, 9.

⁹⁷ Hull Daily Mail, “Wicked to treat taxi-drivers” – Hull stipendiary’, *Hull Daily Mail*. 7 January 1938, 1.

increasing number of vehicles on the roads.⁹⁸ The position of the *Hull Daily Mail* could be, unsurprisingly, contradictory when discussing problems on the roads. While many editorials wrestled with the problems caused by increasing numbers of road users, they also recognised the benefits of the proliferation of new motor vehicle technology. ‘The part that motor traffic plays in the commercial life of the city entitles it to every respect and consideration by the authorities’, declared an editorial in March 1931. Despite regular calls for a clamp-down on the increasing criminality of road users and measures to halt the rising number of fatalities on the roads, it believed it was ‘necessary to revise our outlook on road traffic and meet its difficulties with new methods and broader and more sympathetic treatment’.⁹⁹

Local vitriol against the road user was also inconsistent and at times unhelpfully expansive. Several editorials in the 1930s summed up the *Hull Daily Mail*’s position. It stated that in order to reduce the number of injuries and fatalities on the region’s roads it was ‘up to the driver, the cyclist and the pedestrian to exercise more care’.¹⁰⁰ It believed that all were responsible for the problems on local roads. It was a view shared by the local police forces and many chief constables across the country. For example, the Chief Constables of Manchester, Bradford and Exeter police forces were all convinced that the cyclist and the pedestrian were responsible for a substantial proportion of the accidents happening on the roads.¹⁰¹ The motor-cyclist was also often presented as a lawbreaker, either through noise pollution or as a reckless and dangerous

⁹⁸ Taylor, ‘Forging the job’, 127–129.

⁹⁹ Editorial, ‘Safety first’, *Hull Daily Mail*. 26 March 1931, 6.

¹⁰⁰ Editorial, ‘Hull street accidents’, *Hull Daily Mail*. 14 October 1936, 6.

¹⁰¹ Laybourn & Taylor, *Battle for the roads*, 17.

rider.¹⁰² Finally, there was the lorry driver, who was depicted as a noise polluter as well as a pavement obstructor.

While these views were neither radical nor necessarily unjustified (then or now), it does, at first glance, appear to challenge perceptions of class-specific transport crime in the interwar period. It is correct to state that it was the elite that were the primary users of motor vehicles in the period's early years, and it was members of this group that initially found themselves in contravention of new motoring legislation.¹⁰³ The increases in vehicle ownership were also driven by an 'aspirational and largely middle-class consumer culture', and this group became the greatest advocate of motoring in the period.¹⁰⁴ However, as Divall notes, there was also a growing second-hand car market that opened up opportunities for car ownership to a 'small but significant number of working class families'.¹⁰⁵ Irrespective of whether they could afford a car or not, the working classes were already using motorised vehicles to travel on the roads. According to Koerner, the motorcycle industry was claiming that it was the working-class male who was the primary customer during this period, even though users were likely to have been drawn from a much wider social spectrum.¹⁰⁶

By targeting all road users, the editors of the *Hull Daily Mail* exemplified this absence of class bias or acknowledgement of a class specificity to transport-related offences. Moreover, at times this absence was stated explicitly. In the editorial discussed earlier, which proffered a more sympathetic approach to increases in road traffic, the newspaper claimed that no single class was to blame for careless driving that

¹⁰² Hull Daily Mail, "'Mail' Mems', *Hull Daily Mail*. 12 October 1927, 4; Hull Daily Mail, 'Hedon motorist fined: Sproatley justices and dangerous riding', *Hull Daily Mail*. 5 October 1923, 3; Hull Daily Mail, 'Ban on Hull motor cyclist: drover dangerously at "treacherous" corner', *Hull Daily Mail*. 10 May 1938, 1.

¹⁰³ Emsley, 'Mother, what did policemen do', 358.

¹⁰⁴ Divall, 'Transport, 1900–1939', 290.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁶ S. Koerner, 'The British motor-cycle industry during the 1930s'. *The Journal of Transport History*, 16, 1 (March 1995), 55–76:62–64.

was putting other users at risk, and called on ‘all classes’ to cooperate to help solve the problem.¹⁰⁷ While this may have been a genuine call for unity to deal with the growing issue of transport-related crime, it could be argued that it may also have been a way of deflecting some of the attention away from the middle-class motorist by a conservative local press, whose natural affiliation may have been with this group of road users. There is little evidence, however, to suggest that the middle-class motorist had the explicit backing or sympathy of the local newspapers, whose scattergun approach to identifying key perpetrators at times facilitated attacks on this very same group. In a *Hull Daily Mail* editorial written while the government’s Road Improvement Bill was getting its third reading in July 1925, the seriousness of the offence of drink driving was highlighted by the newspaper, implying that offenders were usually drawn from the middle classes when stating that a simple fine for the offence was not really a punishment for a ‘wealthy man’.¹⁰⁸ That said, the newspapers did also appear happy to feature articles and publish letters from readers offering different points of view. To some, the wealthier motorist was not the main villain on the roads, but rather the ‘criminal classes’, who now ‘have no need for pistols [...] they can freely accomplish their crimes with the aid of motors’.¹⁰⁹

The rise of the motor bandit

This notion of using motor vehicles for criminal ends was a prevalent one during the interwar years, and it was one that gained traction in Hull and East Yorkshire. It manifested itself most explicitly in the concept of the motor bandit, which, from a newspaper point of view, became one of the most high-profile acts of criminality in this

¹⁰⁷ Editorial, ‘Safety first’, 6.

¹⁰⁸ Editorial, ‘Safety first’, *Hull Daily Mail*. 7 July 1925, 4.

¹⁰⁹ Thaxbeer, ‘Safety first’, Letter to the editor, *Hull Daily Mail*. 5 March 1932, 4.

period. This was probably down to its potentially dramatic characteristics, such as the daring smash-and-grab raid, the audacious pavement bag snatch and the high-speed police chase. The term also covered crimes such as the theft and selling on of motor vehicles for an attractive profit.¹¹⁰ The *Hull Daily Mail* began covering these kinds of stories early in the period, reflecting growing concerns about the increases in these types of offences across the country. In an article about a raid on a Bond Street jewellers in May 1924, the newspaper's special correspondent declared that this type of crime was likely to become a 'permanent feature of London life', adding that the motor gangs involved were 'at war with society'.¹¹¹ These 'daring raids' and the police attempts to catch these mobile criminals became a regular feature of the local press. 'The activities of the modern highwayman are becoming too pronounced to be comforting', declared a *Hull Daily Mail* editorial in 1932. More police motor patrols and better cooperation between forces was needed to meet this new peril.¹¹² Other measures included new police operations specifically targeting offenders, often rehearsed beforehand in a bid to 'strike terror into the hearts of these motor bandits'.¹¹³

Criminals in Hull and East Yorkshire appear to have been slower to take advantage of new motor vehicle technology after the end of the First World War, evidenced by the absence of local incidents in the press in the early part of the period.¹¹⁴ By the mid-1920s, however, articles about the exploits of the local motor bandit began to appear in the *Hull Daily Mail* and *Hull Times*, although it would be fair to say that the intensity of press anxieties throughout the period appear to have

¹¹⁰ Chipperfield, 'Can they bear the name Englishmen', 2.

¹¹¹ Special correspondent, 'Motor bandits: sinister organisations with cosmopolitan crook as leader', *Hull Daily Mail*. 8 May 1924, 5.

¹¹² Editorial, 'The motor bandit', *Hull Daily Mail*. 18 August 1932, 8.

¹¹³ Our London Correspondent, 'Frustrating motor bandits', London Letter, *Hull Daily Mail*. 9 April 1929, 4; Hull Daily Mail, 'Great police offensive: early morning trap for car thieves' *Hull Daily Mail*. 31 August 1932, 5; Editorial, 'Beating the motor bandit', *Hull Daily Mail*. 2 September 1932, 6.

¹¹⁴ Clarke, *Policemen of Hull*, 98.

exceeded the actual number of incidents taking place in the region. The first smash-and-grab incident identified in the *Hull Daily Mail* sample appeared on 12 March 1926. Here three men in a car pulled up outside local jewellers, Messrs Gleason and Co, jumped from the vehicle and tried to steal gold Albert chains from the premises, before returning to the vehicle and driving off. A police chase ensued but the robbers escaped.¹¹⁵ Similar incidents were reported in the press, such as the robbery that took place at another local jeweller, Messrs P. S. Phillips and Co, a few years later. Again, the motor bandits evaded capture, although the newspaper claimed that the ‘whole detective department’ was ‘engaged in an active search for the thieves’.¹¹⁶ Car thefts also made the news, but the bigger stories were often reserved for the more extreme incidents, such as the case of the three motorcar thieves who appeared at Hull Police Court following a tour of the country in a number of stolen vehicles, taken from a variety of locations including Hampstead, Harrogate and Northamptonshire.¹¹⁷

Geography played a key part in shaping local anxieties. The rural characteristics of much of the region, with its scattered towns and villages, had long acted as a barrier to thieves, who, without any means of transportation, would have found it difficult to reach many local properties and steal their belongings. This all changed with the onset of vehicle mechanisation. The rural towns and villages of the East Riding, like many other places across the country, could, of course, benefit from an expanding motor industry through an increase in tourism and visitors, revitalising many aspects of rural life such as increased revenues for the stately home, the transformation of the country

¹¹⁵ Hull Daily Mail, ‘Smash and grab raid: exciting chase of motor bandits’, *Hull Daily Mail*. 12 March 1926, 5.

¹¹⁶ Hull Daily Mail, ‘Daring “smash and grab” raid in Hull’, *Hull Daily Mail*. 12 March 1930, 5.

¹¹⁷ Hull Times, ‘Amazing exploits: motor car thieves brought to book near Hull’, *Hull Times*. 10 October 1925, 6.

inn and the expansion of a 'new garage trade'.¹¹⁸ The downside to the technological advancements within the motor industry was the fear that criminals could steal cars, vans or lorries and visit these once remote towns and villages, commit burglaries and then return hastily back to their home town or city. It was unlikely that they would be stopped by local police forces, as their limited resources and outdated transport facilities would make it difficult for them to track down and catch the perpetrators.

It was of particular concern for those rural areas that were in close proximity to the larger cities, where crime was perceived to be a real problem for the police. It was an issue that had been recognised by East Riding Constabulary soon after the end of the First World War. A general order from the constabulary's Chief Constable dated 17 December 1920 highlighted the problem of the motor bandit travelling unimpeded from town to town. He asked all officers on duty in rural districts between dusk and dawn to make a note of vehicle registrations and identification marks, along with the number of passengers in each vehicle. It was, claimed the general order, a method being adopted by all other police forces in the north of England, helping to trace vehicles suspected of being involved in serious crime.¹¹⁹ Another proposed solution by the constabulary was to develop a collaborative working relationship with the neighbouring Hull Police in a bid to curtail the movements of the motor criminal from big city to smaller towns and villages. It was an initiative supported by the Chief Constable of Hull Police at the time, Mr T. E. Howden, who recognised the importance of cooperation in what was a growing problem for the rural East Riding, but one that at that time had not affected Hull to the same extent.¹²⁰ This collaborative approach did yield some positive results.

¹¹⁸ D. Jeremiah, 'Motoring and the British countryside'. *Rural History*, 21, 2 (2010), 233–250:233–234.

¹¹⁹ Chief Constable, East Riding Constabulary, *General order no.45/1920* (17 December 1920). General Orders 1920–1925, Humberside Police Authority Records, POL/3/2/1/4, East Riding of Yorkshire Archives, Treasure House, Beverley.

¹²⁰ Hull Daily Mail, 'Increase in crime: Hull not seriously affected', *Hull Daily Mail*. 18 April 1932, 5.

In 1932, a criminal gang from Hull had been travelling via motorcar into the East Riding during the night and committing burglaries from warehouses. Improved communications between the local forces had thwarted their activities and forced them further afield. On their way back from a warehouse break-in in Mansfield, the gang was chased and apprehended by police officers from the East Riding Motor Patrol unit. In court, the criminals were sentenced to between five and seven years' penal servitude.¹²¹

The nature of the crime coupled with the limited resources of the police meant that they often appeared resigned to the fact that the motor bandit could evade capture and continue to be a menace to the local population.¹²² Fears remained heightened throughout the period, no doubt compounded by the thrilling stories of the evasive bandit, be it local or further afield, which often featured in the local press. Who were these motor bandits? As already stated, the majority of motor car users during this period emanated from the more respectable sections of society, even those who found themselves in front of the judge for what may have been their very first time. In the case of the motor bandit, for some this was perceived to be a new form of criminality, committed by a modern and dangerous type of criminal.¹²³ However, many still believed that it was the same criminal elements of society that were the primary perpetrators of this kind of crime. 'The motor car enables the criminally-minded in the great towns to travel faster and farther afield into regions where they are not known and the chances of interference with their criminal activities [...] are less', declared the

¹²¹ East Riding County Council, *Minutes of the proceedings of the Standing Joint Committee of the County Council and Court of Quarter Sessions for the East Riding of Yorkshire* (27 June 1932). Minute Book 1932–1935, East Riding County Council Records, CCER/1/4/4/14, East Riding of Yorkshire Archives, Treasure House, Beverley, 20.

¹²² Hull Daily Mail, 'Criminals helped by public', *Hull Daily Mail*, 22 April 1932, 1.

¹²³ Brown, *Inter-war penal policy*, 94; Brown, 'Crime, criminal mobility and serial offenders', 563; Chipperfield, 'Can they bear the name Englishmen', 7.

introduction to the annual criminal statistics for 1928.¹²⁴ The implication here seems clear: the motor car was opening up a world of new opportunities for those that were ‘criminally-minded’ and who were already committing locally-based crime. It was a view that was also repeated in parliament. During a parliamentary debate on the Banditry Bill, which was introduced in 1933 to give new powers to the police and courts to reduce the number of motor bandit-related offences, Conservative MP, Gordon Hall-Caine, warned people not to allow the ‘criminal class to take advantage of such a wonderful [...] new invention as the motor car’ and called for an increase in the penalties imposed on those using it for criminal activity, which the new legislation eventually introduced.¹²⁵

Not surprisingly, this notion of the age-old criminal now utilising new technology for their nefarious activities became firmly embedded in the local motor bandit narrative in the interwar period. In the aforementioned article about the raid on a Bond Street jewellers, the *Hull Daily Mail*’s special correspondent described the perpetrators as a ‘band of criminals’ who had an ‘advantage over his comrades of a few years ago in that he is able to use a motor vehicle without exciting suspicion’.¹²⁶ These were essentially the same kinds of offenders that had plagued the city for years but who were now using modern methods to commit their crimes. It was a view that was to be repeated in the local newspapers. In an editorial in April 1932, the *Hull Daily Mail* appeared keen to make sure the police were specially trained and given new motor vehicles to ‘meet this menace of the criminal classes’.¹²⁷ It was conceded that these criminals were experts in their field, with ‘some of the best brains in the world of crime

¹²⁴ Home Office, *Criminal statistics England and Wales 1928*. Cm 3581 (London: Her Majesty’s Stationery Office). Available online: <https://parlipapers.proquest.com/parlipapers/docview/t70.d75.1929-030503?accountid=11528> [Accessed 30/5/2017], xiv.

¹²⁵ HC Deb 24 March 1933, vol 276, col 653.

¹²⁶ Special correspondent, ‘Motor bandits’, 5.

¹²⁷ Editorial, ‘Motor bandits and the police’, *Hull Daily Mail*. 27 April 1932, 4.

engaged in the planning of these robberies'.¹²⁸ A professionalisation of this form of criminal activity was required if it was to achieve its aims. The press believed that the criminal class, whose constituents it never overtly defined in this motor bandit narrative but whose key characteristics were those assigned to this group many years ago (as outlined in the Introduction), was doing just that, adapting to this new and modern type of crime. Just as the burglar, fraudster or pickpocket had developed the necessary skills and expertise in his or her respective field, so had the motor bandit. In this narrative, the motor bandit was not necessarily a new type of criminal.¹²⁹ This was simply a new type of crime.

There was another offence that became part of the local narrative on transport-related crime, one that appears related to motor banditry (although appeared much less frequently in the local newspapers) and further blurs any categorisation of motor vehicle crime as class specific. This was a crime that has now become a familiar part of modern Britain but in the 1920s and 1930s was in its infancy – joyriding. This offence was defined as taking a motor vehicle for ‘temporary use without the consent of the owner’, and was predominantly committed by youths.¹³⁰ Significantly, the threat appeared to come from the ‘undesirable’ elements of society who emerged from the city slums and were ‘spreading into the suburbs’ in stolen vehicles.¹³¹ A front-page article in the *Hull Daily Mail* declared that the problem locally had reached epidemic levels, citing the cases of three youths, aged 17, 15 and 11, who had taken 13 cars in a month, bringing the city’s total to 25 in March 1937 alone.¹³² Earlier incidents included

¹²⁸ Special correspondent, ‘Motor bandits’, 5; Editorial, ‘Motor bandits and the police’, 4.

¹²⁹ Chipperfield, ‘Can they bear the name Englishmen’, 2; Brown, ‘Crime, criminal mobility and serial offenders’, 563.

¹³⁰ Beaven, *Leisure, citizenship and working-class men in Britain*, 174.

¹³¹ *Ibid.*, 175.

¹³² Hull Daily Mail, ‘Epidemic of “joy-riding” in Hull: 25 motor cars go in a month’, *Hull Daily Mail*. 7 April 1937, 1.

that of a 15-year-old Grimsby lad whose remarkable escapades in stolen cars, taken from private garages in nearby Cleethorpes, made the news.¹³³ The problem appeared to be one that was affecting major cities across the country. In Birmingham, the police dealt with 259 cases in 1934 and 317 a year later, while in Manchester in 1936, joyriders appropriated 471 cars, which was a 35% increase on the previous year.¹³⁴ Legislation to make the act of taking a vehicle without the owner's consent a criminal offence had come into force in 1930, and locally this was welcomed as a means of dealing with the problem of more and more joyriders appearing before local magistrates.¹³⁵ The increasing number of offences, locally and nationally, which were no doubt made more visible by the new legislation, failed to ease press anxieties. In fact, as the 1937 example above reveals, it may have intensified local fears about the rampaging joyrider who, like his motor bandit counterpart, could now access parts of the region that he had previously been out of reach. For many, this was a 'perfect storm' of criminal activity – offences committed by unruly youths (primarily working class) combined with the curse of new motor vehicle technology.

The dramatic and sensational offences of motor banditry and joyriding were always more likely to feature in the local press. This is the nature of newspaper reporting. Motor banditry in particular appeared as one of the most visible and identifiable themes in the transport-related crime narrative in the Hull newspapers. As shown, it was also one that raised anxieties among the local police forces, especially officers in the East Riding Constabulary who now had to deal with increases in the number of criminals on the move. That said, this was still only one element in the overall motor crime narrative, albeit arguably the most exciting. The majority of the

¹³³ Hull Daily Mail, 'Grimsby boy's joy rides: remarkable story of escapades in stolen cars', *Hull Daily Mail*. 15 October 1927, 6.

¹³⁴ O'Connell, *The car in British society*, 103–104.

¹³⁵ Editorial, 'New "pleasures" of "joy riding"', *Hull Daily Mail*. 14 November 1929, 4.

transport-related incidents that featured in the *Hull Daily Mail* and *Hull Times* were of a much more mundane character. It was the sheer scale of the offences – alongside what was seen as an interconnected problem that is the increasing number of road accidents – which would cause panic in the region. While many of these incidents not surprisingly featured motorised vehicles, the cyclist and pedestrian were also perceived to be part of the problem. However, for most of the period no road user was singled out or scapegoated for their activities, whether these were illegal or just dangerous. All were guilty, to varying degrees and at various times, of causing problems on the region's roads. All became targets of local police campaigns (and the local press) at one time or another during the interwar years. Transport-related crime was indeed the most prominent theme examined in this study.

Conclusion

The perceived increases in levels of juvenile delinquency and the rise of transport-related crime were major sources of concern for people living in Hull and East Yorkshire. The volume and nature of the newspaper coverage and the number of references found in the local police records for this period demonstrate that these were issues that caused genuine concern during the interwar period. Fears about the growing threat of youth gangs, out-of-control children and mischievous young people made juvenile delinquency a key topic of discussion and debate, while the number of traffic offences (however trivial), the increasing number of road accidents, and the arrival of the modern-day highwayman made transport offences a regular feature of the press for most of the period. Presenting raw statistics for the number of crimes committed by young people and the totals for traffic offences without explanation or a delineation of the nature of the crime may have served to accentuate the significance of the problem.

The press no doubt compounded the issue by the way it dealt with the reporting and commentary for these types of crimes. This was particularly the case with juvenile offending, when at times crimes committed by groups of youths were labelled (maybe intentionally) as gang crime, which had more serious connotations. Conflating a wide range of traffic offences, perpetrated by everyone from the dangerous driver to the careless pedestrian, and incorporating these into the 'accident' narrative also made the issue appear more serious (the ballooning number of accidents on the roads was a serious enough issue on its own). The heralding of a new arch-villain, in the guise of the motor bandit, added spice to the debates while also raising concerns over the increasing mobility of the career criminal. While the frequency of juvenile and road traffic offending in the local newspapers was not just a reflection of the level of concern – it must also have been a result of production and commercial necessities – the number of police campaigns conducted during the period and the references to these types of offences in the police archives reveal that they were of significant concern to local law enforcement.

Local anxieties were very real, but whether the reactions to all these new (and old) forms of offending could be accurately described as moral panics is difficult to ascertain. The juvenile delinquent (primarily working class) was seen as a folk devil to many people and a very real threat to respectable society. Newspapers no doubt amplified the problem through their coverage and commentaries, even if the analyses of juvenile crime were often contradictory and rarely consistent. It was a different story with traffic offences, however, as the target of local vitriol rarely remained static and could encompass everyone from the car and lorry driver to the cyclist and pedestrian, which in the case of local press coverage may have been deliberate, as already noted. This wide spectrum of offending meant that no specific class could be demonised and

consequently no individual folk devil emerged. That said, the press still magnified the issues with its consistent coverage and its crisis narratives and may have influenced local reactions. However, a detailed examination of the actual configurations of the responses to juvenile delinquency, transport crime and the many other offences committed in the region during this period may offer a clearer picture of how locals reacted to crime in the interwar years. The results of this examination are presented in Chapter 4. It will show how crime and criminals were perceived and dealt with by the press, the police, magistrates, probation officers and local authorities. The aim is to continue to offer new interpretations of what were often complex, contradictory and at times incoherent responses to offending – interpretations that go beyond simple generalisations about the reformatory and rehabilitative characteristics of crime responses during the interwar years.

Chapter 4

Reform versus retribution: the complexities of dealing with local lawbreaking

The punishment of offenders against the laws was a problem of our social existence which [...] should be faced resolutely and boldly, as all such problems should be faced – in a spirit of charity most certainly, but also of common sense.

[...] there are offenders whose criminal tendencies will yield to a policy of reclamation – where such a policy may turn some youngster from crime and make a decent citizen of him.

There are crimes of brutality and violence, which can only be justly met with stringent correction – crimes for which the punishment, if it is to be adequate, must involve retaliation.¹

The above comments made by Judge H. L. Beazley during an event at the University College of Hull in 1934, attended by the Earl of Feversham, president of the National Association of Probation Officers, provide a useful summary of the two sides of the local debate surrounding crime and criminality during the interwar period (although as will be revealed, ‘crimes of brutality and violence’ were not the only ones to precipitate punitive responses locally). The years between the two World Wars have often been characterised as a period that witnessed the development of a ‘new penal discourse’, which placed reform rather than retribution at the centre of the debates around criminality.² A range of modern and seemingly more progressive methodologies were adopted for dealing with offenders. Social work was maturing during the interwar years, and there was a transformation in the treatment of offenders with the shift towards psychological analyses and the development of a more professionalised and

¹ Hull Daily Mail, ‘Crime to-day and crime of bygone years: retaliation or reclamation’, *Hull Daily Mail*, 28 April 1934, 6.

² Garland, *Punishment and welfare*, 27.

centralised probation system.³ Of course, these shifts in both the ideological and practical approaches to offending would have had an impact, to varying degrees, across all the regions of Britain, and Hull and East Yorkshire was no exception.

As will be outlined in the first part of this chapter, those charged with law enforcement in the region, and those responsible for publicising criminal activity, did propagate these views at various times during the interwar years. This modern notion of reform for the offender became a key part of the crime and criminality discourse in Hull and East Yorkshire. However, it was never propagated in isolation. It was a key part of the crime debates but rarely distinct. Instead it sat (at times uncomfortably) alongside attitudes and responses that could be perceived to be a hangover from the previous century – that is, the belief in retaliation and retribution. The second part of this chapter will explore this punitive approach to dealing with offending, which dominated the crime narrative for substantial periods of the interwar years. The objective is to present, as far as is possible, an accurate account of local responses to crime during this period, even if these were at times both complex and contradictory.

Rehabilitation and reform

The local police forces, the courts and the press in Hull and East Yorkshire all recognised the power of reform and rehabilitation in the fight against crime in the region. The notion of straightforward punitive treatment for criminality, which could include anything from corporal punishment to long periods of incarceration, found a rival in the local crime discourse of the interwar years. At times, what was seen as the archaic policy of retribution was condemned as barbaric and deemed an ineffective and incongruous method of dealing with issues around criminal behaviour, for both young

³ See Gard, *Rehabilitation and probation*, 79–165.

and old. ‘Nowadays magistrates and judges are not so concerned with the severity of the punishment as they are with the desire to help the offender to go “straight”, and to save him from falling permanently into a life of degradation and crime’, declared the *Hull Daily Mail* in 1926.⁴ ‘When there was no decency, when the penalties were atrocious, when we hanged or transported our thieves, when we tortured our prisoners, when we left them to die in foul dungeons, crime was rife [...] You cannot remove crime nor even lessen it by just increasing penalties. This has been tried – and has failed.’⁵

Many offences dealt with by the local police and courts began to be viewed as more trivial, warranting a verbal caution rather than punitive treatment. This included low-level motoring offences that were on the increase and did cause consternation locally but were still deemed too minor to warrant the time needed to process the case through the court system.⁶ Those appearing at local courts for more common offences such as vagrancy and drunkenness were often treated with pity and seen as a nuisance rather than criminal, at times receiving leniency and even help from the magistrates rather than chastisement or punishment. During a case at Hull Police court in December 1931, the judge respited the sentence against 78-year-old Joseph Wright, who was charged with begging, in order to give him the opportunity to apply to the Public Assistance Committee for help, as he had no means of supporting himself.⁷ Even repeat offenders could often receive lenient sentences. Hull defendant Peter Graham received

⁴ Editorial, ‘Crime and probation’, 2.

⁵ Special to the “Mail”, ‘To stop crime – train youth right’, *Hull Daily Mail*. 25 June 1926, 7.

⁶ Chief Constable, East Riding Constabulary, *Chief constable’s conference with superintendents minutes* (14 October 1939). Humberside Police Authority Records, POL 3/2/6/1, East Riding of Yorkshire Archives, Treasure House, Beverley, 53; Chief Constable, East Riding Constabulary, *Chief constable’s conference with superintendents minutes* (3 November 1936). Humberside Police Authority Records, POL 3/2/6/1, East Riding of Yorkshire Archives, Treasure House, Beverley, 19.

⁷ *Hull Daily Mail*, ‘Begging at 78’, *Hull Daily Mail*. 18 December 1931, 9.

a fine for being drunk and disorderly even though it was his 75th appearance in court.⁸ 31-year-old Maud Gilby, of no fixed abode, only received a five-shilling fine at her 63rd appearance in court for being drunk and incapable, even though she had been described as an ‘annoyance to decent people’ by the stipendiary magistrate.⁹ The governor of Hull Prison viewed these types of crimes as a result of a ‘terrible affliction’ rather than the result of inherent criminality.¹⁰ These types of offenders needed to be saved from these conditions rather than punished for their actions.

Prison was seen as a last resort and far from the most effective means of reclaiming the drunkard. That said, the local prison population often included individuals charged with drink-related offences, some of whom were regulars and incarcerated on a persistent basis.¹¹ It will come as no surprise to hear that while there was a shift in attitude to this form of low-level offending, there was very little agreement about the actual levels of crime in Hull and East Yorkshire. While magistrates were protesting about the volume of these types of offences in Hull, the local press was declaring England a ‘sober country’ and congratulating Hull on its temperance during New Year celebrations and bank holidays.¹² Local police in Hull appeared to support this latter view, particularly in those districts that were sometimes perceived to be a hotbed of intoxication. In a report to the Hull Watch Committee in 1926, a Hull police inspector claimed that he had not seen a single person in the area of Stoneferry Road in the city, which had been singled out as a place where drunkenness was rife, who could have been arrested for being drunk, and, furthermore, it was ‘very

⁸ Hull Daily Mail, ‘Before the Hull bench to-day’, *Hull Daily Mail*. 24 March 1924, 5.

⁹ Hull Daily Mail, ‘Woman’s terrible record: 63 times in court and only 31’, *Hull Daily Mail*. 19 January 1933, 5.

¹⁰ Hull Daily Mail, ‘A terrible affliction’, *Hull Daily Mail*. 4 June 1931, 11.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹² Hull Daily Mail, ‘Gaol “not so bad”: stipendiary’s discussion with old Hull offender’, *Hull Daily Mail*. 4 November 1938, 7; Editorial, ‘England a sober country’, *Hull Daily Mail*. 5 October 1932, 4; Hull Daily Mail, ‘Few “celebrations”’, *Hull Daily Mail*. 2 January 1928, 5; Hull Daily Mail, ‘Not one holiday “drunk” in Hull’, *Hull Daily Mail*. 7 August 1934, 5.

rare that the police have to arrest any person for drunkenness' in this area of Hull.¹³ A decade later, the Chief Constable, Mr T. E. Howden, appeared to be contradicting these claims of a reduction in the number of cases of drunkenness brought before the courts when he noted that Hull was placed sixth in the ten largest cities and boroughs in the country for these types of offences.¹⁴ As with most crimes, the practicalities of local policing and the pressures of resources may have created these fluctuations in arrest and prosecution rates.¹⁵ If there were fewer drunks in Hull, and that remains debatable, then the reasons were not that obvious either. The *Hull Daily Mail* suggested several factors may be responsible for aiding the decrease in drunkenness during this period – everything from the growth of the allotment movement and the increase in countryside pursuits, to the development of leisure facilities, such as the cinema, and the increasing number of travel opportunities afforded by the burgeoning motor vehicle industry. The rising cost of alcohol was believed to be another major reason why consumption declined during this period.¹⁶

Reactions to another centuries-old offence, prostitution, appear less prosaic. This is not surprising in a port city, where the issue had caused anxiety for Hull residents for many years.¹⁷ That said, responses in the local newspapers appear to have rarely reached the moralising heights that may have been expected. This could be partly due to the fact that, although the number of prostitution-related offences appearing in the annual police returns for Hull were higher than some inland towns and cities, they were still quite small when compared to other offences being committed locally, only

¹³ Hull Watch Committee, *Minutes of the proceedings of the Watch and Licensing Committee* (23 March 1926). Minutes of Proceedings of Committees, City and County of Kingston upon Hull Municipal Corporation and Urban Sanitary Authority, TCM 2/39/3, Hull History Centre, Hull, 46–47.

¹⁴ Hull Daily Mail, 'Police chief's advice to Hull clubs', *Hull Daily Mail*, 4 February 1935, 7.

¹⁵ P. Jennings, 'Policing drunkenness in England and Wales from the late eighteenth century to the First World War'. *Social History of Alcohol and Drugs*, 26, 1 (Winter 2012), 69–92:76–77.

¹⁶ Editorial, 'England a sober country', 4.

¹⁷ Welsh, *The reform of urban policing*, 248.

reaching the teens, 20s or 30s in most years.¹⁸ Perhaps not surprisingly, the figures for Hull's rural neighbour were significantly lower, with the East Riding Constabulary regularly recording no offences whatsoever.¹⁹ Prosecution rates, as revealed in the annual statistics, are probably not the best indicator of the problem at hand as the act of prostitution itself was not a criminal offence, rather it was the related activities of, for instance, solicitation or keeping a brothel that could result in prosecution. Moreover, the figures would have been influenced by a range of factors, such as policing levels and the focus of local law enforcement, as discussed in Chapter 1. Hull was not the only dock city to see lower rates of prosecution during the interwar period. In Liverpool, there was a 98% drop in proceedings for street solicitation between 1919 and 1936, with just 10 arrests in 1934.²⁰

The actual act of prostitution did, of course, have its detractors during this period, and there were concerns over its prevalence in Hull, particularly in relation to dockside activities.²¹ However, at the same time as the owners and managers at Hull docks were coming under fire for permitting what were seen as these less than desirable activities (and a new bye-law was introduced to deal with the problem), nearby Immingham was being lauded for an absence of immorality at its docks.²² Concerns

¹⁸ For examples, see Home Office, *Criminal statistics 1919*, 77; Home Office, *Criminal statistics 1924*, 127; Home Office, *Criminal statistics 1929*, 115; Home Office, *Criminal statistics 1932*, 121.

¹⁹ For examples, see Home Office, *Criminal statistics 1929*, 115; Home Office, *Criminal statistics 1932*, 121.

²⁰ K. Chamberlain, *'Hardened offenders', 'respectable prostitutes' and 'good-time girls': the regulation, representation and experience of prostitution in interwar Liverpool*. PhD thesis (Keele University, 2013), 3.

²¹ Hull Watch Committee, *Minutes of the proceedings of the Watch and Licensing Committee* (19 November 1919). Minutes of Proceedings of Committees, City and County of Kingston upon Hull Municipal Corporation and Urban Sanitary Authority, TCM 2/33/3, Hull History Centre, Hull, 20; Hull Watch Committee, *Minutes of the proceedings of the Watch and Licensing Committee* (22 February 1927). Minutes of Proceedings of Committees, City and County of Kingston upon Hull Municipal Corporation and Urban Sanitary Authority, TCM 2/40/3, Hull History Centre, Hull, 36.

²² Hull Watch Committee, *Minutes of the proceedings of the Watch and Licensing Committee* (26 October 1926). Minutes of Proceedings of Committees, City and County of Kingston upon Hull Municipal Corporation and Urban Sanitary Authority, TCM 2/39/3, Hull History Centre, Hull, 100; Hull Daily Mail, 'Immingham dock: amazing development', *Hull Daily Mail*. 2 June 1923, 2.

were often voiced around secondary issues relating to prostitution, such as venereal disease. Here the Hull branch of the National Council for Combating Venereal Diseases was advocating education rather than retribution as a means of eliminating the disease, which, along with prostitution was often seen as an inevitable consequence of life in a seaport.²³ Illegitimacy was also seen as a problem in Hull, often as a result of immorality. Again, the solution, according to Dr Allen Daley, Medical Officer of Health for Hull, was not punishment but reclamation, believing religion and education to be the pathways to redemption.²⁴ Those living off immoral earnings, which was a criminal offence, did feel the wrath of the courts. For example, 24-year-old John Culliney, who was described as a ‘reptile’ by the sitting magistrate during a case in November 1922, was given six months’ hard labour for receiving money from Hull prostitute, Kate Leggitt (alias Lassa).²⁵ Interestingly, no judgement was made about Leggitt’s practices. Instead, she was described simply as a ‘good-looking girl residing in Norfolk-street’.²⁶

Of course, the absence of any high-profile, targeted campaigns against prostitution does not necessarily mean that a liberal attitude existed towards these practices. Perhaps there was a general level of acceptance in cities like Hull, where these kinds of activities were commonplace. Dealing with the ‘sleazy problems of vice’ and the ‘ever-present prostitutes and brothels’ was, as Clarke notes, simply part of the Hull policeman’s lot, especially during the evening beats.²⁷ Instead of responding with indignation and calls for retribution, the routineness of the offence may have generated

²³ Hull Daily Mail, ‘Housing and morals: Hull’s crusade against hidden scourge’, *Hull Daily Mail*. 1 April 1922, 4.

²⁴ Hull Daily Mail, ‘To help fallen girls: what is done at a Hull maternity home’, *Hull Daily Mail*. 26 May 1927, 7

²⁵ Hull Daily Mail, “‘Reptiles like you’: magistrate on Hull man living on woman’s earnings’, *Hull Daily Mail*. 27 November 1922, 5.

²⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁷ Clarke, *Policemen of Hull*, 103.

a degree of tolerance. Or maybe it was just a simple case of turning a blind eye to the problem. More research is needed to form definitive conclusions about local attitudes to prostitution. While the above examples appear to reveal the development of more liberal and progressive responses to activities such as prostitution, the offence itself was not investigated as a primary theme of this study but instead constituted only a supplementary element within the overall investigation of the local reform/retribution response dichotomy. Just as with many of the themes investigated here, further research may reveal a multifaceted set of attitudes and responses, challenging any conceptualisation of interwar prostitution purely ‘in terms of decline and improvement’, which may ‘overlook a whole catalogue of complexities which transpired’ during the interwar years, as Chamberlain’s research into Liverpool prostitution has revealed.²⁸

It appears that the nature and characteristics of the offender could be just as important as the actual crime when sentencing was taking place. As revealed in Chapter 2, the police, the courts and the local press often adopted a more lenient approach to returning soldiers and the economically deprived. These victims of circumstances could be given an opportunity to mend their ways. As was the case with John Williams, an ex-servicemen who appeared before Bridlington Police Court charged with stealing a grey velour hat. His military career, during which he had been badly wounded twice, was part of the appeal for clemency and, consequently, he was given a second chance with no conviction recorded against him.²⁹ Fred Waterson, a police officer and former member of the Artillery Brigade during the First World War, also left Hull Police Court

²⁸ Chamberlain, *‘Hardened offenders’*, 338.

²⁹ Hull Daily Mail, ‘Bridlington Police Court – hardly a fair exchange’, *Hull Daily Mail*. 23 January 1923, 7.

a free man, even though he had been charged with theft. At that time, he was the first member of the police force to have been charged with such an offence.³⁰

Leniency could even stretch to those offences that were deemed an increasing menace to society. As already demonstrated, in Hull and East Yorkshire drink-driving was not always viewed as the serious offence it is now, and softer sentences were issued accordingly. Of course, these attitudes may have prevailed in other towns and cities across the country.³¹ The many individuals caught joyriding in stolen vehicles in this period could also count themselves lucky to have received rather forgiving sentences. The 15-year-old Grimsby lad who had developed a 'habit' of taking cars from garages in Cleethorpes and returning them after a joyride, as noted in Chapter 3, was only fined 10 shillings for his actions.³² A 14-year-old errand boy from Hull, who 'treated himself to a joy-ride' in his employer's car, causing a considerable amount of damage to the vehicle in the process, was lucky to escape with a probation order.³³ So too were the three young lads who made the front page of the *Hull Daily Mail* in April 1937 after admitting to taking 13 cars in one month in Hull, probation again being their only punishment.³⁴ Age may have played a significant role in these sentences, as will be shown later in this chapter. Even so, this notion of giving offenders a second chance appears to have gained some traction in the region during the interwar years.

³⁰ Hull Daily Mail, 'Blasted his career: Hull policeman's theft of 4/11', *Hull Daily Mail*. 15 May 1923, 10.

³¹ C. T. Potter, *An exploration of social and cultural aspects of motorcycling during the interwar period*. PhD thesis (University of Northumbria, 2007), 185.

³² Hull Daily Mail, 'Grimsby boy's joy rides', 6.

³³ Hull Daily Mail, 'Went for a joy ride: Hull medicine boy appropriates doctor's car', *Hull Daily Mail*. 13 March 1929, 12.

³⁴ Hull Daily Mail, 'Epidemic of "joy-riding" in Hull', 1.

Probation as punishment

According to Garland, the number of sanctions designed to deal with offenders almost doubled during the years running up to the First World War and included measures such as probation orders, training in borstal institutions, preventative detention and licensed supervision.³⁵ These began to reshape attitudes towards the criminal, with reform becoming the ‘central and predominant signifier’ in the debates around crime and punishment.³⁶ At the heart of this shift was legislation such as the 1907 Probation of Offenders Act, which gave courts the power to offer non-custodial sentences to offenders, deemed suitable for this kind of progressive treatment. These approaches continued and developed after the cessation of the war, bolstered further by new legislation including the 1925 Criminal Justice Act. Gard claims that the act was introduced to overhaul the current system, which had seen an ‘uneven use of probation around the country’.³⁷ The Home Office was naturally concerned and used the legislation to develop and improve the current system, increasing the number of probation officers by appointing one in every probation area. The Act also proposed changes to the way probation officers were paid and supervised.³⁸ The rise in personnel helped to increase the number of orders issued by the courts, but it was not until the second half of the period that a ‘modern system of probation’ featuring a ‘state funded, national and secular system of probation officers’ was created.³⁹

Like any developing system of criminal justice, the probation service would have its fair share of problems. There were both supporters and detractors who voiced their opinions about the service (many using the pages of the press to do so). It is not

³⁵ Garland, *Punishment and welfare*, 19.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 19 & 27.

³⁷ Gard, *Rehabilitation and probation*, 111.

³⁸ National Archives, CAB/24/171/84, W. Joynson-Hicks, *Criminal Justice Bill 1925*, 13 February 1925. Available online: <http://discovery.nationalarchives.gov.uk/details/r/D7726430> [Accessed 26/4/2016].

³⁹ Gard, *Rehabilitation and probation*, 123.

the purpose of this current study to detail the intricacies of the ideological development of probation during this period. It is important to note that the notions of welfare, reform and rehabilitation, which were central to the probationary movement, became embedded in the crime discourse of the period. In many cases, the courts would choose probation rather than incarceration as the preferred method of punishment for dealing with the offender at hand. Hull's courts adopted probation with varying levels of intensity and different degrees of enthusiasm throughout the 21-year period between the two World Wars. In a piece in the *Hull Times* in 1930, Rev J. G. Patton, who was the minister at Swanland Congregational Church and a regular contributor to the local newspapers in Hull, noted that the 'probation idea' had been practised in Hull for a long time, even before the creation of a professionalised system of welfare. This, he claimed, placed Hull 'ahead of any city in the Kingdom in the equipment and administration of its Probationary work'.⁴⁰ Articles on the subject began to appear in the local newspapers. In a special piece by correspondent 'Nic Narc' in 1929, extolling the virtues of the local probation officer, the modern concept of probation was described as a 'creative force to guide and rehabilitate', which if 'wisely applied by the Courts and carefully administered by probation officers working in close relationship with the public [...] experience has proved that it becomes more effective than the use of force, coercion or punishment for anti-social personalities'.⁴¹

Some of the articles detailed visits to Hull and East Yorkshire from leading exponents of the probation system and supporters of welfarism more generally. Mr W. Clarke Hall, metropolitan magistrate and chairman of the Magistrates' Association and the National Association of Probation Officers, summed up this positive ideological

⁴⁰ Rev. J. G. Patton, 'Judges, lawyers and police: men who have administered justice in Hull', *Hull Times*. 5 April 1930, 11.

⁴¹ Nic Narc, 'Relationship of probation officer to community', *Hull Daily Mail*. 4 October 1929, 6.

positioning of probation during an address arranged by the Hull Probation Committee at the city's Guildhall in December 1930. While recognising that the notion of justice as something other than simple revenge on the lawbreaker was a relatively new concept, he believed that this idea of reformation rather than retribution should remain at the heart of the criminal justice system.⁴² Prison was not a 'panacea' and failed to reform the criminal, a truth apparently supported by recent statistics revealing that 55% of all crimes were committed by offenders who had already spent time in prison, 25% of who had been convicted of five or more offences.⁴³ While the newspaper itself provided no commentary to the piece, the fact that it appeared prominently on the front page may give some indication of its importance to the local narrative around criminal justice during this period.

The *Hull Daily Mail* began to feature probation-related cases during the early development of the system in the 1920s. For example, three men found guilty at Hull Police Court on serious charges of theft were all placed on probation 'because of their hitherto good characters'.⁴⁴ It appears that one of the key aims of this system was to spare those of good or respectable character from the indignity and degradations of prison, which could turn the relatively minor offender into a perpetual criminal as a consequence of mixing with hardened criminals. Repeat offenders were also offered probation as punishment. A man who stole £125 from his cashier sister received a two-year probation sentence even though he had been placed on probation eight years earlier for the theft of two watches.⁴⁵ Further examples could be found during the 1920s and 1930s. A married mother, Mrs Ethel Coultas, was spared prison and told to 'behave

⁴² Hull Daily Mail, 'Helping hand of probation: justice not the revenge of the society', *Hull Daily Mail*. 6 December 1930, 1.

⁴³ *Ibid.*

⁴⁴ Hull Daily Mail, "'Mail" Mem's', *Hull Daily Mail*. 3 October 1924, 4.

⁴⁵ Hull Daily Mail, 'Money in dustheap: Hull man's theft from sister cashier', *Hull Daily Mail*. 9 October 1925, 5.

herself' by the local magistrate after she pleaded guilty to stealing a woollen cot cover and shawl. Coultas was already on probation after receiving a previous conviction a year earlier, and it was claimed during the case that she had stolen the items to obtain food as she had not eaten for two days.⁴⁶ The governor of Hull Prison, Captain J. Brown, appeared to sum up the progressive position in 1938 when he declared that 'prison can never solve the crime problem. Sending people to prison does not tend to improve them for the fight when they come out'.⁴⁷ Senior probation officer for Hull, Mr C. Rankin, agreed. He believed that it was better to have fewer prisons and those that we did have should be as empty as possible. Probation was seen to be one of the key ways of achieving this, and the figures backed up his claims by proving that the districts that made the most of their probation services, such as Hull, returned fewer prisoners.⁴⁸

The ideological shift towards reform in this period appears to have gone beyond straightforward notions of probation and the avoidance of incarceration. Even those who found themselves serving time in the local prison were not necessarily viewed as beyond hope or undeserving of compassion. In 1926, it was noted that there was some 'interesting work going on in the Hull Prison', where education and entertainment were being offered to prisoners in the form of books donated from the Hull Public Libraries Committee.⁴⁹ Around 300 books would be loaned to the prisoners, and it was deemed important that the prison service should renew these books periodically.⁵⁰ This appeared to be an attempt, however small, to mitigate some of the damaging and

⁴⁶ Hull Daily Mail, 'No food for two days: Hull husband's plea for wife', *Hull Daily Mail*. 19 February 1937, 6.

⁴⁷ Hull Daily Mail, 'Prison cannot solve crime problem: Hull governor advocates alternatives', *Hull Daily Mail*. 8 March 1938, 7.

⁴⁸ Special for the "Daily Mail", 'Emptying the prisons: how Hull is helping to reform the man', *Hull Daily Mail*. 6 June 1923, 4.

⁴⁹ Hull Daily Mail, 'Hull library matters: books to be loaned to prisoners', *Hull Daily Mail*. 21 September 1926, 6.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

brutalizing effects of incarceration on the offender. Rather than existing simply as a place of punishment, prisons should be ‘places of training, progress and hope’, according to Hull Prison Governor, Mr W. Young, speaking in 1925.⁵¹ The harsh regimes were to be replaced by rehabilitative methodologies aimed at the ‘reformation of the prisoner, through the development of his mind, character and soul’, reducing the high rates of recidivism, as highlighted by Clarke Hall’s crime statistics.⁵²

This approach was bolstered by the work of the Hull, East Riding and Lincolnshire Discharged Prisoners’ Aid Society, which was established in 1857 with the aim of helping former prisoners reintegrate into society and make a useful and lasting contribution via employment, education and voluntary work. The driving force behind the organisation was an ethos of ‘optimism’ and ‘opportunity’, helping former prisoners to ‘face the world afresh’.⁵³ After all, leaving prison was, claimed *Hull Daily Mail* columnist John Humber, a ‘time when such people are in need of a friend more than at any other period of life’.⁵⁴ ‘A man or woman who has served sentence is not necessarily a bad lot’, he added. ‘The majority are capable of reacting to the kind of treatment shown on leaving prison; and if society can get the money it can do more and better work. At present it is helping 1,500 ex-prisoners a year.’⁵⁵ A substantial proportion of the funding for these types of aid societies, whose members included magistrates and the governor and chaplain of the local prison, came from a treasury grant, which was only remunerated following Home Office certification of each

⁵¹ Hull, East Riding and Lincolnshire Prisoners’ Aid Society, *Annual report* (1925). Hull and East Riding Prisoners’ Aid Society Records, C DSPA/2/2, Hull City Archives, Hull History Centre, Hull. 23.

⁵² Hull Daily Mail, ‘Prisoners’ debates’, *Hull Daily Mail*. 1 December 1925, 5

⁵³ Hull, East Riding and Lincolnshire Prisoners’ Aid Society, *Annual report* (1919). Hull and East Riding Prisoners’ Aid Society Records, C DSPA/2/1, Hull City Archives, Hull History Centre, Hull. 19–20.

⁵⁴ J. Humber, ‘Prisoners’ Aid Society’, *Humber Echoes*, *Hull Daily Mail*. 28 June 1935, 10.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 10.

organisation.⁵⁶ While some of these organisations were viewed with scepticism, many were there to ensure that prisoners were ‘not alone in the world, but that each was cared for by a benevolent, paternal society and that assistance would be given to ameliorate the pressure of environment’.⁵⁷

The local prisoners’ aid society appeared to have been held in high esteem. In fact, Hull was deemed ‘unique’ in the way local police officers and prison officials supported both incarcerated prisoners and those leaving prison.⁵⁸ In what appeared to be a bid to prove the point, the *Hull Daily Mail* featured articles and letters from some of the former inmates the society had helped to make better lives for themselves after leaving prison. A feature written by ex-prisoner, Michael Stebbings, who had served 12 months in Hull gaol, paid tribute to the work of the society, believing it to be one of the most ‘potent’ and ‘active’ charity organisations operating in the city, bestowing dozens of former inmates with a ‘renewal of self-respect’ through its endeavours to stop offenders returning to a life of crime.⁵⁹ The organisation was thanked for providing money, groceries and coal to the families of those that have served time, as well as new clothing for former inmates, in what he described as a ‘spirit of real, true Christianity’.⁶⁰ Writing to the newspaper in December 1930, another former Hull prisoner, whose record included 13 convictions for theft, with prison sentences ranging from two months to 10 years, espoused a similar view. The letter writer, who was now holding down a good job, thanked the society for giving him the ‘chance of earning an honest living’, wishing them ‘health and prosperity’ in their future endeavours.⁶¹ This advocacy of what was perceived to be the crucial, rehabilitative work of the society

⁵⁶ Forsythe, *Penal discipline*, 218 & 226.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 218.

⁵⁸ Hull Daily Mail, ‘Unemployment means fewer prisoners’, 4.

⁵⁹ M. Stebbings, ‘A striking tribute to the Hull Prisoners’ Aid Society’, *Hull Daily Mail*. 13 June 1932, 4.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

⁶¹ Grateful, ‘Value of probation’, Letter to the editor, *Hull Daily Mail*. 11 December 1930, 3.

became a refrain in the newspapers during the 1930s. Anecdotes of amelioration were also a regular feature of the annual reports from the Hull, East Riding and Lincolnshire Discharged Prisoners' Aid Society. In the 1933 report, a discharged prisoner, whom the society had helped to secure a job as cashier at a Salvation Army home, thanked them for 'timely help and counsel', promising to 'never go back to the old life'.⁶² A local man with several previous convictions to his name was equally thankful, once again promising that prison life was a thing of the past now that he had been able to find work and finally offered a 'chance in life' that he was determined not to spurn.⁶³

Reclaiming the young offender

This whole notion of giving offenders a second chance, be it before going to prison or on release, remained at the heart of this new approach to criminal justice. As Gard notes: 'In the aftermath of the Great War the Home Office was under pressure from a number of sources to instigate change in the treatment of juvenile offenders.'⁶⁴ Punitive or retaliative responses to offending were now seen merely to stigmatise those appearing before the courts as purely criminal, thus affecting his or her life chances after sentencing. Moves towards methodologies that were more progressive, such as probation, was seen as an antidote to this form of stigmatisation. As the opening quote to this chapter reveals, this is perhaps best illustrated by the new approaches to youth offending that were adopted during the interwar years, which attempted to reclaim the youngster from a potential life of crime and make them an honest and decent citizen once again. A report from the Children's Branch of the Home Office, written in the

⁶² Hull, East Riding and Lincolnshire Prisoners' Aid Society, *Annual report* (1933). Hull and East Riding Prisoners' Aid Society Records, C DSPA/2/2, Hull City Archives, Hull History Centre, Hull. 8.

⁶³ Hull, East Riding and Lincolnshire Prisoners' Aid Society, *Annual report* (1939). Hull and East Riding Prisoners' Aid Society Records, C DSPA/2/2, Hull City Archives, Hull History Centre, Hull. 18.

⁶⁴ Gard, *Rehabilitation and probation*, 91.

same year as the introduction of the new Criminal Justice Bill, summed up the new ideology underpinning criminal justice for juvenile offenders: 'The idea of treating the young offender as a criminal is far from the mind of the average Magistrate, and while he seeks to give him a fair trial he looks not so much to the task of punishing as to that of befriending and of helping him regain his footing.'⁶⁵ According to Horn, this new approach resulted in fewer cases of child offending coming before the courts, in the 1920s at least.⁶⁶

Just as police had proffered leniency by issuing cautions for a number of what were perceived to be less serious crimes committed by adult offenders, they also appear to have done the same for the younger criminal. In addition, probation was preferred to incarceration in dealing with youth crime.⁶⁷ Figures for Hull show that probation was used in around 44% of cases involving children under the age of 16, compared to around 6% in Coventry and 1.5% in Southampton.⁶⁸ The Hull Prison chaplain believed that the young offender should not be sent to prison at all, advocating probation as a more suitable form of treatment, as long as it was administered kindly and firmly.⁶⁹ These approaches built on the changes that had been part of the reformation of criminal justice for young offenders as laid out in the 1908 Children's Act, which, claims Melanie Tebbutt, formed the 'basis of the 'modern' juvenile justice system' in England and Wales.⁷⁰ Juvenile courts were established as part of the Act, dealing with cases of offenders up to the age of 16.⁷¹ The age was increased to 17 as part of the 1933 Children and Young Persons Act, along with a shift in the age of criminal

⁶⁵ Home Office, *Third report on the work of the Children's Branch*, 6.

⁶⁶ Horn, *Young offenders*, 185.

⁶⁷ M. Tebbutt, *Making youth: a history of youth in modern Britain* (London: Palgrave, 2016), 61.

⁶⁸ Rose, *The struggle for penal reform*, 143–144

⁶⁹ Prison Commission, *Report of the commissioners of prisons 1923*, 60.

⁷⁰ Tebbutt, *Making youth*, 60–61.

⁷¹ Bradley, 'Juvenile delinquency and the public sphere', 21.

responsibility from seven to eight, all of which appeared to be a further attempt to move away from old notions of retribution to more progressive, rehabilitative approaches that placed the welfare of the young offender at the centre of the justice system and utilised new and scientific approaches in the treatment of offenders, while also considering personal and external factors to be key causes in the creation of the criminal youth.⁷²

Were these ideological shifts in the treatment of the young offender part of the discussions and debates about youth crime in Hull and East Yorkshire? The *Hull Daily Mail* did acknowledge that a shift had taken place in an editorial in its 8 January 1938 edition, which referred to a speech made by the Home Secretary, Sir Samuel Hoare, delivered during a visit to Hull in October 1937 when he opened a new remand home in the city. The newspaper stated that it was now recognised across the board that ‘the savage methods of punishment in vogue years ago must not be resorted to, and that children must not live in a constant state of terror that they may unwittingly break some regulation which will land them in the hands of the law’.⁷³ Even though the problem of youth crime needed addressing, the welfare of the young in this view remained paramount when deciding on future forms of punishment. The local press had offered similar views previously. In the first of a new series of educational articles looking at a range of issues surrounding children and young people in Britain, the *Hull Daily Mail* noted that the first few decades of the twentieth century had witnessed a change in approach to child welfare with a ‘growing apprehension of the duties and responsibilities’ of all the nation’s citizens have towards their children.⁷⁴ The article, which was written by Leah Manning, assistant secretary to the Education Committees

⁷² Bradley, ‘Juvenile delinquency and the public sphere’, 21; Tebbutt, *Making youth*, 61–62; Bailey, *Delinquency and citizenship*, 132.

⁷³ Editorial, ‘Juvenile delinquents’, *Hull Daily Mail*, 8 January 1938, 4.

⁷⁴ L. Manning, ‘The Children and Young Persons Act’, *Hull Daily Mail*, 29 November 1933, 4.

of the N.U.T., acknowledged that punitive treatments for children and adolescents were outdated; the aim now was to discover the most effective methods for preventing the young offender from drifting into a life of crime. This could only be done through the cooperation of the various agencies charged with dealing with young criminals, including the new juvenile courts, which could recognise the role played by individual circumstances and offer care and protection rather than retribution as a deterrent to criminal behaviour.⁷⁵ ‘Reform, not punishment’ was the most effective method of dealing with juvenile crime, according to Lady Lawson-Tancred, a justice of the peace who also sat on the West Riding Country Advisory Committee. The comment was made during a speech at the Hull and District Branch of the National Council of Women in October 1936, where she claimed that the majority of those offenders placed on probation or fined rather than incarcerated rarely reoffended in a 12-month period after the initial sentencing.⁷⁶

In addition to cautions, fines or probation, courts were also sending young offenders to borstals rather than to prison in a bid to inculcate them with a ‘moral education’ and the importance of hard work.⁷⁷ These state-run institutions were championed locally in the 1920s and seen as an effective mechanism for discouraging youngsters away from a life of crime. As early as 1906, the borstal had ‘proved encouraging’ when introduced to the justice system in Hull and East Yorkshire, with many of the recipients finding employment with one of the local ship owners on release.⁷⁸ The governor of Hull Prison in 1925, Mr W. Young, believed that borstal had regularly met its primary objective of transforming potential recidivists into law-

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

⁷⁶ Hull Daily Mail, ‘Reform not punishment: modern methods with juvenile crime’, *Hull Daily Mail*. 31 October 1936, 3.

⁷⁷ Tebbutt, *Making youth*, 60.

⁷⁸ W. C. Irvine, *A brief history of Hull gaol* (Well Thought Out Publication and Fair Maiden Reprographics, 2013), 38.

abiding citizens.⁷⁹ Sending young offenders to these types of institutions meant avoiding the hardened criminals that were perceived to be filling the nation's prisons. Instead of manufacturing new criminals, these institutions could provide vocational training for the young offender, giving them an 'entirely new view of life' and a 'determination to get back into the ranks of useful citizens', so wherever possible should be used as the preferential treatment for the child criminal.⁸⁰

This use of progressive and arguably more enlightened methods of treatment could regularly be found in the local courts. At times, judges and magistrates seemed more than happy to subscribe to and apply this modern and more lenient approach to sentencing, much more so than they did for adult offenders. This is not surprising if the primary aim was to reduce the number of potential future criminals among early offenders, rather than dealing with persistent criminals, many of whom were no doubt seen to be beyond saving. As was detailed earlier in the cases of joyriding, local magistrates could impose moderate sentences that appeared symbolic rather than punitive, even when the offence was part of a perceived 'crime wave' requiring immediate action by the police and local authorities. As the newspaper sample counts revealed, theft was the most common local crime discussed in the *Hull Daily Mail* during the interwar period, and almost 70% of the references related to local incidents. However, magistrates could express leniency to some youths charged with these types of offences, just as they did with certain individuals (ex-soldiers, the unemployed etc.) whose social and economic circumstances were seen to warrant such an approach.

When Eric Stanley Cockburn from Bridlington appeared before Hull court in January 1922 charged with stealing £7 in treasury notes and £5 6s in cash from his

⁷⁹ Hull Daily Mail, 'Prisoners' debates', 5.

⁸⁰ Editorial, 'The borstal system', *Hull Daily Mail*, 23 August 1927. 4; Editorial, 'Prison or borstal?', *Hull Daily Mail*. 15 March 1928, 4.

employer, the chairman of the bench acknowledged that the defendant had ‘been brought up under unfortunate circumstances’ and consequently ‘would deal with him leniently’.⁸¹ Although Cockburn did receive a one-month prison sentence, which perhaps would be viewed as harsh in today’s terms, the chairman assured him that he would receive ‘every possible assistance by the missionary’ when he was released from prison.⁸² The police court bench also decided to take a ‘lenient view’ in the case of three youths charged with attempting to enter and steal from a house in Hull. Two years’ probation was the sentence after the youths pleaded guilty to the offences.⁸³ The number of offences committed by the young criminal did not appear to be a barrier to leniency in certain cases. Probation was once again the sentence for two youths who were charged with stealing four metal rings from a shop in Beverley Road, even though the magistrates’ clerk claimed that the boys had already ‘committed thefts from almost every shop’ in the area.⁸⁴ Even when the crime itself was viewed to be an unforgivable act, some magistrates appeared reluctant to sentence offenders to a period of incarceration. Commenting on Thomas Dixon’s theft of an unemployed man’s bicycle in July 1933, the Hull magistrate declared it to be the ‘meanest theft there is’ in this city. It was ‘meaner than stealing the money out of a blind man’s can’.⁸⁵ Recognising that sending the youngster to prison would have marked him out as a ‘gaolbird’ and affected his future life chances, the magistrate said he did not want to do that, so instead sentenced him to probation in a bid to ‘save’ rather than punish him.⁸⁶

⁸¹ Hull Daily Mail, ‘Causes of youth’s downfall: sad story in Hull court’, *Hull Daily Mail*. 3 January 1922, 7.

⁸² *Ibid.*

⁸³ Hull Daily Mail, ‘Constable’s capture: Hull youths attempt to enter house’, *Hull Daily Mail*. 23 September 1930, 10.

⁸⁴ Hull Daily Mail, ‘Hull boys charged: alleged to have stolen goods from many shops’, *Hull Daily Mail*. 14 May 1930, 12.

⁸⁵ Hull Daily Mail, ‘Cycle stolen: Hull magistrate and “a mean theft”’, *Hull Daily Mail*. 13 July 1933, 1.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

One aspect that was central to the ideological debates around progressive forms of punishment for young offenders was the increasing notion of the barbarity and ineffectuality of physical chastisement. For some time, the use of the birch as both retribution and deterrent had been a key component in the discussions around child criminality. However, this form of physical punishment appeared incongruous in the new penal landscape of the interwar years. The report on the work of the Children's Branch of the Home Office declared in 1925 that there was little evidence to support that view that birching acted as a deterrent to youth offenders and had been discredited as a solution to preventing the criminal activities of the young.⁸⁷ Abolition was called for in some quarters, and by the end of the interwar period this position was being presented to government following recommendations laid out in a report by the Departmental Committee on Corporal Punishment, which had been set up to investigate the use of corporal punishment in the penal systems of England, Wales and Scotland.⁸⁸ Just as the Children's Branch had highlighted the lack of evidence to support the deterrent claim, the committee's report noted the absence of 'statistical proof', which led it to conclude that it was not an 'effective penalty for juvenile delinquents'.⁸⁹ It recommended that the practice in England and Wales of whipping boys under 14 for indictable offences, and in Scotland of using the birch to punish boys under 16 for a whole range of offences at common law, should cease.⁹⁰ As part of the Home Secretary's memorandum detailing the report's findings, an appendix was included demonstrating the 'remarkably favourable reception' that the recommendations

⁸⁷ Home Office, *Third report on the work of the Children's Branch*, 11.

⁸⁸ National Archives, CAB/24/277/23, S. Hoare & J. Colville, *Corporal Punishment*, 16 June 1938. Available online: <http://discovery.nationalarchives.gov.uk/details/r/D7731132> [Accessed 26/4/2016].

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 2.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 1–2.

received from a whole host of newspapers including *The Times*, *Manchester Guardian*, *Herald* and the *Scotsman*.⁹¹

It would be fair to say, however, that at times the abolition of corporal punishment and the use of the birch received a lukewarm response locally. That is not to say that abolition did not have its supporters. There were adherents of the recommendations who voiced their concerns about the use and effectiveness of physical chastisement for juvenile delinquency. Quoting from an official report by the Board of Education, which stated that 25% of boys punished with the birch committed new offences within a month, letter writer Conrad Gill claimed that this proved that birching did not have the desired effect. Encouragement rather than intimidation was a better solution.⁹² A few months earlier, another letter writer, J.D., summed up the abolitionist position when declaring that the birch rod as administered by the law of the land should ‘not be for children but for the backs of fools’.⁹³ As will be outlined in the second part of this chapter, the removal of corporal punishment as a method of dealing with young offenders, which appeared to be a natural expression of the move to more progressive forms of punishment in this new era, was perhaps a step too far for many in Hull and East Yorkshire, especially during periods where delinquency appeared to be mushrooming, according to crime statistics and police reports. At times, the reactions to the perceived threat posed by these increases was far from restrained, as was shown in Chapter 3. This was a conflict of ideology, summed up in Portia’s Weekly Topics column of April 1932 when she declared (echoing the quote at the start of the chapter): ‘The question of the wisest way to treat young offenders is full of difficulties. We have to see on the one hand that no young life is wrecked by harsh judgement, and on the

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 9–15.

⁹² C. Gill, ‘Birch for young offenders’, Letter to the editor, *Hull Daily Mail*. 6 April 1934, 5.

⁹³ J.D., ‘Revival of the birch’, Letter to the editor, *Hull Daily Mail*. 20 February 1934, 6.

other hand that the community is safeguarded'.⁹⁴ This could mean that harsher punishments, including physical chastisement, may still be required to halt the criminality of youth. However, it was not just young offenders who became (or remained) the target of a punitive approach to dealing with crime. In an era where the primacies of justice had, allegedly, become reform and reclamation, antithetical notions of retribution and retaliation remained awkward bedfellows. And for significant periods of the interwar years, in Hull and East Yorkshire at least, they had also stolen most of the bedclothes.

Retaliation and retribution

The move to more progressive (and supporters would claim more effective) methods of punishment for offenders of all ages faced major hurdles during the interwar years. The challenging social, political and economic characteristics of the age, exemplified by the six themes identified in this study (which are, as stated, not exhaustive) tested, to varying degrees, the resolve of those charged with dealing with local law enforcement in this period. So it is no surprise that rising crime levels and heightened concerns around criminality – when, for example, it was believed that deprivation inevitably led to offending, the politicised working classes were precipitating societal breakdown, the region's roads were playgrounds for criminals, and youths were on the rampage – ensured that harsher punishments for offenders remained a central part of the local crime discourse. Irrespective of whether these fears materialised in full-blown moral panics, the view remained that, in the face of this perceived onslaught of criminal behaviour, drastic solutions, in the form of sterner penalties, were required to stem the tide of criminality. While leniency in the criminal justice system was an admirable

⁹⁴ Portia, 'The prevention of juvenile crime', Weekly Topics, *Hull Daily Mail*. 21 April 1932, 5.

notion, many felt that it had proved itself to be a poor deterrent by failing to reclaim the citizen, young or old, from a life of crime.

This could be seen in attitudes to a whole range of criminal offences, much of which could be deemed petty. As detailed in Chapter 1, shopkeepers and stall holders who chose to trade on a Sunday in Hull received fines for their trouble, swelling the overall crime figures for local non-indictable offences in such a way that the city appeared to be hotbed of low-level offending. The reasons for the tough approach to these trading offences is unclear. Accusations around the financial benefits of policing the offence, in the form of fines, came from many quarters, including the local press. However, the position of the *Hull Daily Mail* was not always clear or consistent; its editorials appeared at times to support both change and the status quo. In March 1927, the present position with regards to the imposition of 5s fines for the trading offence was declared ‘ridiculous’, especially in light of the fact that there was demand from customers for shopping on a Sunday.⁹⁵ Several years later and the newspaper was recognising the necessity and rigour of such an act and that there was ‘no reason why we should depart from existing conditions’, while also acknowledging that locally it was ‘highly lucrative’ for local organisations and the police.⁹⁶ Shortly before the implementation of the new Shops (Sunday Trading Restriction) Act in 1936, Hull’s city treasurer reported to the Hull Finance Committee that Hull Corporation would lose £4,800 a year in income from fines when the Act was implemented.⁹⁷

Irrespective of the motives, the local authority and the police believed the contravention of laws around trading hours was a serious matter. A Hull Police memorandum from the Chief Constable, Mr T. E. Howden, in December 1928,

⁹⁵ Editorial, ‘A cuckoo’s egg’, 4.

⁹⁶ Editorial, ‘Sunday trading: Hull and the act of 1677’, *Hull Daily Mail*. 20 August 1935, 4.

⁹⁷ Hull Daily Mail, ‘Hull to lose £4,800 a year: by ending Sunday trading fines’, *Hull Daily Mail*. 27 November 1936, 5.

exemplified this standpoint when reminding officers of all ranks that regulations under the shop hours acts should receive regular and ‘stringent observation’, with any breaches reported directly to him.⁹⁸ However, Hull was not the only location in the region to adopt such a draconian approach to Sunday trading. The local council in the east-coast town of Withernsea was waging war on the stallholders who were selling goods on the promenade in a bid to prevent this persistent contravention of Sunday trading laws.⁹⁹ Competing positions could, however, be found in the letters pages and newspaper articles. Some local traders railed against the incongruity of an act that dated back hundreds of years, while others condemned the ‘greed’ of those who flouted the law and opened on Sundays in a bid to steal the Saturday and Monday trade from ‘decent and law-abiding traders’ in the city.¹⁰⁰ There may even have been a moral and religious edge to the debates around the ‘evil’ of trading on the Lord’s Day.¹⁰¹ Some local religious groups were even calling for increases in fines to stop the ‘avarice’ of city shopkeepers.¹⁰²

This was not the only ‘moral crusade’ taking place during this period. In the 1930s, the city of Hull witnessed a backlash against the increasing number of clubs gaining licences and punitive reactions to establishments breaching local licensing and gambling laws. A *Hull Daily Mail* editorial in 1933 laid bare local concerns over the growing ‘club menace’. The piece claimed that 148 clubs were registered in Hull, with a total membership of 33,221. This was compared to Bristol, a city of similar size

⁹⁸ Chief Constable, Hull City Police, *Shop hours act* (26 December 1928). Chief Constables’ Memoranda 1926–1937, Humberside Police Authority Records, POL/4/2/4/3, East Riding of Yorkshire Archives, Treasure House, Beverley.

⁹⁹ *Hull Daily Mail*, ‘War on Sunday trading: Withernsea Council’s drastic measures’, *Hull Daily Mail*. 8 August 1921, 2.

¹⁰⁰ A 40 years’ trader, ‘Sunday trading’, Letter to the editor, *Hull Daily Mail*. 27 September 1929, 14.

¹⁰¹ Parliamentary Correspondent, ‘Sunday trading’, *Hull Daily Mail*. 2 May 1928, 5.

¹⁰² *Hull Daily Mail*, ‘Increase the fines! President of Hull Free Church Council and Sunday trading’, *Hull Daily Mail*. 22 March 1927, 12.

whose total number of clubs stood at only 50.¹⁰³ ‘Every new club opened up adds to the work of the police’, claimed the article. This ‘cannot be allowed to continue indefinitely. The numbers must be regulated’.¹⁰⁴ One of the key concerns was the lack of stringent control in clubs when compared to pubs. Action was needed to ensure adequate supervision and regulation of these premises. The police agreed. Hull’s Chief Constable, Mr T. E. Howden, claimed that without regulation the supply and consumption of alcohol in clubs could get ‘hopelessly out of control’.¹⁰⁵ Compounding the issue was the number of clubs operating outside the spirit of club law. Numerous cases of licence infringements came before the local courts, many following police raids on clubs believed to be flouting licensing and gaming laws or operating illegally as ‘bogus’ members’ organisations. Club owners and managers often received considerable fines and the clubs lost their operating licences.¹⁰⁶ There appeared little sympathy for club officials or owners and satisfaction when these illicit activities had been closed down. ‘If a club is conducted on straightforward lines, in accordance with the letter of the law, then there need not be any cause for worry’, declared the *Hull Daily Mail*. ‘The issue is simple enough. Every club official knows the rules.’¹⁰⁷

The problem associated with city clubs went much deeper. Accusations around links between the Hull Watch Committee and club officials and alleged bias in the administration of justice became a defining feature of local debates, with many of the incidents making front-page news. Councillors claimed that clubs run by or including watch committee members were avoiding prosecution. During a case in the county

¹⁰³ Editorial, ‘Clubs v pubs’, *Hull Daily Mail*. 7 February 1933, 4.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁵ Hull Times, ‘Drink in clubs: Hull Chief Constable’s fears through lack of control’, *Hull Times*. 11 February 1933, 14.

¹⁰⁶ Hull Daily Mail, ‘Court story of raid on East Hull club: betting and illicit drinking charges’, *Hull Daily Mail*. 2 April 1936, 9; Hull Daily Mail, ‘Hull club “drink den” struck off’, *Hull Daily Mail*. 17 April 1936, 11.

¹⁰⁷ Editorial, ‘Club raid’, *Hull Daily Mail*, 4 May 1931, 6.

court, former Mayor of Hull, Alderman Benno Pearlman, asked a police constable if he thought it was ‘fair that members of the Watch Committee should be conducting clubs of this kind while people who aren’t members are prosecuted?’¹⁰⁸ The case followed a police raid at the Premier Recreation Club, where the investigation had discovered that a betting book for 1933 showed 138,668 bets at the premises.¹⁰⁹ It was alleged that many clubs were singled out for prosecution while others, which were conducting similar illegal activities, were ignored by the police and the courts. Pearlman claimed that this made the administration of justice in the city a ‘joke’.¹¹⁰ There was also a class element to the debates, with some local councillors calling for an independent review into police practices. One councillor claimed that there were ‘thousands of people in this city [...] who are saying there is class legislation from the police with regard to the action that has been taken against clubs’.¹¹¹ However, while prosecutions against clubs and club officials continued, there appears little evidence that the corruption or class angle was investigated fully. In fact, it would be the Hull Watch Committee, rather than an independent review panel, that actually scrutinised the activities the police and local clubs in the city.

There appeared to be a class element to some other crimes that were seen to be a problem or a nuisance for the authorities in Hull. The fervour with which the perpetrators were prosecuted ran counter to notions of leniency that were also part of the crime debates in Hull and East Yorkshire. Many of these offences were low-level crimes and several were against local bye-laws. Some of these bye-laws were no doubt introduced before the period under examination, but there is no evidence to suggest that

¹⁰⁸ Hull Daily Mail, ‘Ald. Pearlman’s allegations: clubs run by members of Hull Watch Committee’, *Hull Daily Mail*. 26 March 1934, 1.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁰ Hull Daily Mail, ‘Hull club struck off – over £100 in penalties’, *Hull Daily Mail*. 7 May 1934, 1.

¹¹¹ Hull Daily Mail, ‘Echo of club prosecution: a Hull inquiry’, *Hull Daily Mail*. 4 May 1934, 14.

they were revised or revoked during the interwar years. For example, it was against the law to beat or shake a carpet before 8 o'clock in the morning, fly a kite at any time, or make and use a slide on ice or snow. Any person using profane or obscene language, or singing an obscene song or a ballad, could be prosecuted under the law.¹¹² Just after the end of the First World War, and following complaints from a number of residents, the Chief Constable of Hull Police was reminding officers that, under the Defence of the Realm Regulations, it was illegal for people to sell oranges outside theatres and music halls after 8pm on weekdays.¹¹³ Later, officers were told to give 'serious attention' to the matter of dropping orange peel in the streets as this posed a real danger in slippery weather.¹¹⁴ Noisy street traders and hawkers, particularly ice-cream vendors, also came under fire for contravening local bye-laws.¹¹⁵ In neighbouring Goole in 1937, five women appeared before their local magistrate charged with hanging their washing in the street, which contravened another local bye-law. Justifying the prosecution, the police officer who dealt with the case claimed that clothes lines 'constituted a danger to pedestrians' and was brought to court as a warning to other householders after a local townsman had allegedly been nearly killed in an accident caused by hanging washing.¹¹⁶ Other minor offences for which members of the public were summoned to court included leisure activities such as playing football in the streets. Unsurprisingly, this was primarily an offence committed by youngsters, although on occasion older

¹¹² Hull City Police, *Hull City Council byelaws* (1889–1924). Humberside Police Authority Records, POL/4/1/3/2, East Riding of Yorkshire Archives, Treasure House, Beverley, 7.

¹¹³ Chief Constable, Hull City Police, *Selling oranges in street after 8pm* (21 February 1919). Chief Constables' Memoranda 1916–1926, Humberside Police Authority Records, POL/4/2/4/2, East Riding of Yorkshire Archives, Treasure House, Beverley.

¹¹⁴ Chief Constable, Hull City Police, *Orange peel deposited in streets* (7 August 1924). Chief Constables' Memoranda 1903–1928, Humberside Police Authority Records, POL/4/2/4/1, East Riding of Yorkshire Archives, Treasure House, Beverley.

¹¹⁵ Chief Constable, Hull City Police, *Noisy street traders* (20 July 1928). Chief Constables' Memoranda 1926–1937, Humberside Police Authority Records, POL/4/2/4/3, East Riding of Yorkshire Archives, Treasure House, Beverley.

¹¹⁶ Hull Daily Mail, 'They hung their washing in the street: five Goole women summoned', *Hull Daily Mail*. 24 June 1937, 7.

defendants found themselves appearing before the courts and receiving fines for their nuisance behaviour.

Just as the nature and characteristics of the offence and offender could at times elicit more sympathetic attitudes from the police, courts and local press, even if these were deemed to pose serious threats to law and order, they could also provoke tougher responses. When Stanley Lucas, a married man with three children, appeared before Hull magistrates in 1929 on charges of theft of cigarettes, his solicitor explained that the defendant had never been in trouble before and only committed the crime due to poverty. Seemingly unmoved by the plea, and contrary to progressive notions of second chances (and in direct opposition to the general views outlined in Chapter 2), the stipendiary magistrate declared that it was ‘not the law that because a man committed a crime once, he would get off’.¹¹⁷ Fears around the growing threat to social order, precipitated by the apparent politicisation of the working classes, could also trigger reactive and more punitive approaches to crime prevention and punishment. In the politically charged 1920s and 1930s, the whole question of the appropriateness and effectiveness of lenient sentencing with dealing with these types of crimes came under fire.¹¹⁸ This is not surprising. These local attitudes simply reflected government approaches to dealing with the politicisation of the masses. As Morgan notes, the Home Office was pressing local police officers to deal more ruthlessly with the organised unemployed in a bid to reduce the perceived threat to law and order.¹¹⁹ The higher number of arrests of anti-fascist agitators during the 1930s may also have been a

¹¹⁷ Hull Daily Mail, ‘Due to poverty: Hull man pleads guilty to theft of cigarettes’, *Hull Daily Mail*. 28 October 1929, 10.

¹¹⁸ Editorial, ‘A judge’s lament’, 4.

¹¹⁹ Morgan, *Conflict and order*, 240.

reflection of these prevailing attitudes, while also vindicating those who claimed that a bias existed in the policing of fascist and communist political gatherings.¹²⁰

That said, it would be inaccurate to conclude that these attitudes regularly translated into harsher sentencing in the local courts. While the menace of Bolshevism and communism became a common refrain, the *Hull Daily Mail* newspaper sample featured few local examples of politically-motivated or politically-related crimes appearing before the courts in Hull and East Yorkshire during the interwar period. As noted in Chapter 2, there were articles covering the violence at local BUF rallies and high-profile court cases featuring leading members of the left, such as the trial of 12 communist leaders at the Old Bailey who were facing three counts of sedition.¹²¹ However, much less was made of the consequences of the alleged illegal activities of key political perpetrators locally. This makes it difficult to assess how any prevailing ideology was applied in Hull and East Yorkshire. At times, the organised unemployed were actually congratulated by the press for their law-abiding ‘conduct and attitude’ during demonstrations and meetings, comparing Hull favourably with other more violent towns and cities.¹²² There appears to have also been a notable absence of the practical application (in terms of police actions and local court cases) of another extreme ideological viewpoint, eugenics. The eugenics rhetoric – albeit simplified and reduced to notions around sterilisation of the fecund but unfit lower classes – made its way into the local newspapers but was rarely supported via local examples of the ideology in action.

¹²⁰ National Archives, HO 45/25388/6, Home Office, *Disturbances: fascist and anti-fascist meetings, 1937–1938*.

¹²¹ Hull Daily Mail, ‘Communists’ trial at Old Bailey’, *Hull Daily Mail*. 16 November 1925, 10.

¹²² Hull Daily Mail, ‘Despite the agitators: creditable behaviour of Hull’s workless’, *Hull Daily Mail*. 13 September 1921, 6.

The same cannot be said about responses to what was one of the primary concerns of the era – motor transport crime. Given the number of offences being committed during this period, it is no surprise that the local newspapers were sometimes awash with articles covering police campaigns and court cases relating to this new and worrying type of crime, and most of these were based locally. As ever though, there was an inconsistency of approach, with the seriousness of the offence not always precipitating a similarly resolute response. While some drunk drivers and younger joyriders could find themselves in front of a sympathetic and lenient judge, other offenders, who were committing much less serious crimes, were feeling the full wrath of the police, the courts and the local press. Cyclists also became a target for much of the period.¹²³ Riding a bike without the requisite lights was an offence regularly dealt with in the local courts. An article in the *Hull Daily Mail* in August 1925 claimed that the number of offenders appearing before Hull Police Court in a two to three-week period had reached ‘the half century’.¹²⁴ More than six years later the newspapers were still reporting the problem. At a session at Hull Magistrates’ Court in December 1931, 74 cyclists were charged with lighting infringements, receiving fines of between five and 10 shillings.¹²⁵ By 1939, courts across the region were warning cyclists that if they continued to ignore lighting regulations they would face much heavier fines.¹²⁶ The local police forces also targeted cyclists for the ‘reckless manner’

¹²³ Chief Constable, East Riding Constabulary, *General order no16/1925* (20 March 1925). General Order Book 1924–1927, Quarter Sessions Papers Relating to Police, QAP/10/3, East Riding of Yorkshire Archives, Treasure House, Beverley, 66.

¹²⁴ *Hull Daily Mail*, “‘Mail’ Mems’, *Hull Daily Mail*. 13 August 1925, 4.

¹²⁵ *Hull Daily Mail*, ‘Cyclists’ lamps: many offenders up at Hull’, *Hull Daily Mail*. 15 December 1931, 5.

¹²⁶ *Hull Daily Mail*, ‘E. R. court warning to cyclists’, *Hull Daily Mail*. 13 December 1939, 1.

in which they rode through the city. The Chief Constable of Hull Police, Captain W. A. Woods, instructed his local officers to 'give this matter their strict attention'.¹²⁷

Reckless driving/riding by car and motorcycle owners, which was believed to be the cause of many accidents in the region, was also the focus of police action.¹²⁸ The number and nature of the convictions reflected local policing in this matter. For example, 29-year-old George Leslie Grayson was disqualified for six months after driving his vehicle at 35mph around a sharp bend and colliding with an oncoming vehicle. He was also fined £3 and ordered to pay 17s 6d costs, along with solicitors' fees totalling one-and-a-half guineas.¹²⁹ The stipendiary magistrate appeared unapologetic for the tough sentence, describing it as a 'typical case of the sort of thing we have to try and stop'.¹³⁰ This sentiment was echoed a few months later by a judge hearing the case of a lorry driver who was banned for 18 months and sentenced to four months in prison for causing death by dangerous driving. Dangerous driving was a serious offence, stated Mr Justice Godard. 'The cases must be few in which a man found guilty of this offence was not punished, and punished by being sent to prison.'¹³¹ However, this view may not have been consistent across the country. According to Laybourn and Taylor, many magistrates were often reluctant to punish motorists for these kinds of serious offences both 'out of respect for the social position of the middle-

¹²⁷ Chief Constable, Hull City Police, *Reckless riding by cyclists* (14 February 1923). Chief Constables' Orders 1920–1940, Humberside Police Authority Records, POL/4/2/3/13, East Riding of Yorkshire Archives, Treasure House, Beverley, 56.

¹²⁸ Chief Constable, Hull City Police, *Motor vehicles: manner of driving* (9 March 1923). Chief Constables' Orders 1920–1940, Humberside Police Authority Records, POL/4/2/3/13, East Riding of Yorkshire Archives, Treasure House, Beverley, 59.

¹²⁹ Hull Daily Mail, 'Ban on Hull motor cyclist', 1.

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*

¹³¹ Hull Daily Mail, 'Four months for N. Lincs. lorry driver: sequel to Hull-Howden road tragedy', *Hull Daily Mail*. 1 July 1938, 12.

class driver and concern regarding the possible loss of employment of the working-class driver.¹³²

Probation as punishment – an alternative view

At times, far from being a permissive age or one primarily characterised by welfarism, leniency, and the formation of new approaches to criminal justice, it was instead a period marked by the past, with unmistakable links to, and continuities with, the retributive responses of the earlier nineteenth century. What is more, even one of the central elements in the rehabilitative and reform agenda, probation, received mixed responses locally, often coming under attack for its perceived lack of effectiveness in stemming the tide of a burgeoning criminality. Of course, a professionalised probation system was, relatively, still in its infancy, so it was understandable that there would be teething troubles for what was a major shift in the treatment of the offender. As Gard notes, by 1936, the system had already undergone three separate reviews and was now facing another Home Office appraisal.¹³³ The review once again raised the issue of the inconsistent use of probation by courts across the country, along with problems concerning the system's effectiveness, leniency and a purported inherent sentimentalism.¹³⁴ It was these kinds of accusations that would become part of the local narrative in Hull and East Yorkshire.

Unsurprisingly, rising crime, or to be more precise, rising crime figures, could precipitate reactionary responses by the police, courts and local press. Often the blame was placed firmly on the lenient approaches now being adopted by the courts, and probation, which offered offenders a second chance, could be the target for such vitriol.

¹³² Laybourn & Taylor, *Battle for the roads*, 79.

¹³³ Gard, *Rehabilitation and probation*, 158.

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*, 160.

‘Increases in crime’, declared Mr Justice McCardie, were ‘due in no small measure to the inadequate sentences which have been imposed for prior convictions’. His comments came as early as 1925 during a case in which he sentenced a local motor mechanic to 18 months’ hard labour for forgery.¹³⁵ McCardie reiterated this position a year later during a session featuring a large number of offences. ‘Sentences of too light a character to those who are determined to repeat the commission of crime,’ he stated, meant that judges should face the fact that without tougher approaches to criminal behaviour and a heavier hand in the courts, we should not ‘regard the future with optimism’.¹³⁶ The message was clear: rather than being perceived by offenders as a place of redemption, courts needed to be seen as the worst place possible; a place where tough justice was administered and examples made.¹³⁷ Local magistrates appeared to run out of patience with the probation system and began to sentence accordingly. Henry Jewitt, a Hull window cleaner, may have considered himself lucky in 1934 to have received a six months’ prison sentence with hard labour for stealing 1s 8d from a gas meter when it was revealed in court that he had already been placed on probation and had also served three years in borstal prior to the case. During the case, the stipendiary magistrate, Mr J. R. Macdonald, declared that six months was the toughest sentence he was sanctioned to give, even though he felt Jewitt deserved closer to 18 months’ imprisonment for his persistent lawbreaking.¹³⁸

Despite regular pronouncements by advocates of the reform/rehabilitation agenda and the practical application in some quarters of lenient sentencing aimed at

¹³⁵ Hull Daily Mail, ‘Too many warnings? Judges’ comments in Hull offender’s case’, *Hull Daily Mail*. 12 May 1925, 5.

¹³⁶ Hull Daily Mail, ‘Crime in England’, *Hull Daily Mail*. 24 November 1926, 12.

¹³⁷ Hull Daily Mail, ‘Increase in crime in Hull: recorder utters a warning’, *Hull Daily Mail*. 30 July 1935, 1.

¹³⁸ Hull Daily Mail, ‘Found a man in the house: Hull woman deceived by talk’, *Hull Daily Mail*. 13 March 1934, 1.

removing the stigmatisation and criminalisation of offending, prison continued to be viewed as an easy and effective method of punishment for the criminal and appeared to be the preferred option for many. In 1919, the daily average number of inmates at Hull Prison stood at 101.¹³⁹ By 1923, the figure had more than doubled to 270.¹⁴⁰ Despite fluctuations over the remainder of the decade and into the 1930s, when official figures included increases and decreases in the daily average totals, the overall number of daily prisoners remained significantly higher than for the early part of the period. This was during a period when the prison system as a whole was contracting, with the national daily average prison population decreasing by almost a third between 1900 and 1936.¹⁴¹ The local prison population included all age ranges – from as young as 16 (in the early years of the 1920s) and 17, to as old as 77.¹⁴² Many of those incarcerated at Hull Prison were, of course, recidivists. Some of these prisoners had dozens of previous convictions for various offences, including theft and drunk and disorderly. One 54-year-old inmate had racked up 144 convictions for the latter offence, although it is not clear how many times he had served a prison sentence for his crimes.¹⁴³

Of course, prison population figures in themselves may not prove that reformatory principles had been abandoned in the region. Prison may have been the only option, or a last resort, for many of these repeat offenders. The attitudes and opinions of those involved in criminal justice in the region are much more telling. Even those judges who were once viewed to be more liberal, advocating leniency rather than

¹³⁹ Prison Commission, *Report of the commissioners of prisons and the directors of convict prisons 1919*. Cm 374 (London: Her Majesty's Stationery Office). Available online: <https://parlipapers.proquest.com/parlipapers/docview/t70.d75.1919-022234?accountid=11528> [Accessed 31/7/2017], 47.

¹⁴⁰ Prison Commission, *Report of the commissioners of prisons 1923*, 75.

¹⁴¹ Forsythe, *Penal discipline*, 240.

¹⁴² *Register of imprisonments by Hull courts* (1920–23). Hull and East Riding Prisoners' Aid Society Records, C DSPA/5, Hull City Archives, Hull History Centre, Hull.

¹⁴³ *Register of imprisonments by Hull courts* (1936–40). Hull and East Riding Prisoners' Aid Society Records, C DSPA/8, Hull City Archives, Hull History Centre, Hull.

severity in the punishment of offenders, increasingly viewed incarceration as the only effective method of stopping persistent criminality. In a tribute piece to Mr C. F. Lowenthal, who had served as the recorder at Hull Quarter Sessions for a number of years and had been seen as a 'lenient judge' whose sentences 'never erred on the side of severity', the columnist John Humber claimed that Lowenthal had lost patience with those criminals who were habitually in trouble with the law, handing out 'penal servitude' without 'tremor' or a 'feeling of reluctance, for he realised that these dangers to society are always best under lock and key'.¹⁴⁴ In the face of protestations over the rehabilitative inadequacies of the current prison regime, judges and magistrates remained more than willing to commit certain offenders to prison time, regularly discounting the often desperate personal circumstances of the offender, as expectant mother Catherine McCaffer discovered during a case at Hull Quarter Sessions in 1932. McCaffer had been known to the police for some time and faced charges of obtaining clothing and money by false pretences. During the case, the recorder stated that he did not like passing a sentence that would mean a baby being born in prison but felt that in the circumstances it was the only option. The court sentenced McCaffer to three years' penal servitude.¹⁴⁵ The ideological underpinnings of this approach may appear retributive, but they also acted as cautionary examples to potential offenders. Labourer Tom Williams, who pleaded guilty to being drunk and disorderly in Drifffield market place, received a 14-day prison sentence for the offence at the local petty sessions in August 1921. During the case, the Bench stated that the sentence should act as a 'warning to others'.¹⁴⁶ It was a tactic that would be used throughout the period.

¹⁴⁴ J. Humber, 'The late Mr C. F. Lowenthal,' *Humberside Echoes*, *Hull Daily Mail*. 13 February 1933, 4.

¹⁴⁵ *Hull Daily Mail*, 'Woman's fraud in Hull: penal servitude sentence as sequel', *Hull Daily Mail*. 5 October 1932, 5.

¹⁴⁶ *Hull Daily Mail*, 'A warning', *Hull Daily Mail*. 13 August 1921, 2.

Prison continued to be presented as a suitable form of punishment and an effective method of crime deterrence but was not the only option discussed locally. However, in comparison to overtly redemptive methods, these still appeared retaliatory in intent. For example, instead of incarceration, the Hull Prison chaplain suggested ‘enforced labour’ on land or in quarries for recidivists who no longer viewed prison as a deterrent.¹⁴⁷ The long-serving Hull stipendiary magistrate, Mr J. R. Macdonald, mooted the idea of ‘labour camps’ for offenders, which he saw as an ‘intermediate method’ of punishment, somewhere between probation and prison. His proposal was in response to rising crime rates and a perceived failure of the current system of probationary sentencing. ‘Mr Macdonald has long been a firm advocate of probation in all its forms,’ claimed a *Hull Daily Mail* editorial in September 1935, ‘but a man of his experience and humanity does not make declarations like this without there being good cause’.¹⁴⁸ Something had to be done as there was ‘an increasing number of people who think that the breaking of the law will bring nothing more than an admonition from the Bench, and a piece of advice to go away and be good for a spell ranging from three months to three years’.¹⁴⁹ It was claimed that offenders in the camps would have to work hard, not through forced labour, but through the knowledge that if they didn’t they would ‘starve’.¹⁵⁰

It is difficult to view this as a punishment that sits comfortably between probation and prison. It appears akin to a retaliative methodology analogous with incarceration and hard labour. Admittedly, inculcating discipline into campmates was a

¹⁴⁷ Prison Commission, Home Office, *Report of the commissioners of prisons and the directors of convict prisons 1925–1926*. Cm 2826 (London: Her Majesty’s Stationery Office). Available online: <https://parlipapers.proquest.com/parlipapers/docview/t70.d75.1927-028713?accountid=11528> [Accessed 1/11/2017], 43.

¹⁴⁸ Editorial, ‘New way with lawbreakers’, *Hull Daily Mail*. 23 September 1935, 4.

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁰ Hull Daily Mail, ‘Labour camp for offenders’, *Hull Daily Mail*. 23 September 1935, 5.

key component of the proposal – something that was felt to be lacking in many of the offenders appearing before the local courts. It is worth noting here that this idea emanated from a man who, as well as supporting the notion of probation was also a keen advocate of the work of the local discharged prisoners' aid society, serving as its vice-president from 1925. Moreover, the threat of starvation through idleness or insubordination had menacing connotations, particularly in light of the events unfolding across Europe at that time. Recognising its reactionary and potentially unpalatable characteristics, the editorial in the *Hull Daily Mail* noted that some 'soft-hearted folk' will no doubt protest at such an institution, claiming that (in the contemporary vernacular) it was a akin to 'Hitlerism', while others will find 'all manner of objections on all sort of grounds'.¹⁵¹ Nevertheless, the newspaper felt that it was an idea worth considering by those charged with law enforcement at both a local and national level. Crucially, it was deemed a method that could deal effectively with the ever-growing menace of juvenile offending, contrary to those who believed that reclamation was the solution to the delinquent crisis.

Retaliating against the young offender

The labour camp solution may appear to be an extreme example of the approach adopted by the elite in Hull and East Yorkshire, but it aptly reflected much of the local debates around youth criminality and became the kind of solution proffered in response to an ineffective and overly sentimental development in criminal justice during the interwar years. In the face of the growing menace of delinquency, as illustrated by official crime statistics, notions of leniency and the ideals of probation found themselves under constant attack. The 1933 Children and Young Persons Act, which

¹⁵¹ Editorial, 'New way with lawbreakers', *Hull Daily Mail*. 23 September 1935, 4.

many claim may have precipitated statistical increases in the number of crimes, also came under attack from those who believed that sentimentality had no place in the administration of criminal justice for the young offender.¹⁵² These attacks came early in the period in Hull and East Yorkshire, as highlighted by an editorial that claimed that officials dealing with the criminality of youngsters had ‘too much “humanity” about them’, although the piece did come out in support of paid probation workers.¹⁵³ A challenge to the sentimentality of the new justice ethos was again highlighted by an editorial in the *Hull Daily Mail* that felt that there was now a need to address the issue of rising criminality with more severe punishments, although without resorting to the barbarity of the Victorian era, and this was an issue that should be of ‘grave concern’ for both social workers and the public at large.¹⁵⁴

However, this last piece was published in 1937, and it was in the 1930s that the most vehement reactions to the new approaches to youth crime could be found. These came in direct opposition to the more liberal attitudes that many officials in Hull and East Yorkshire continued to adopt in this period. Leniency was often seen as a method that should be abandoned in favour of tougher sentences in youth crime cases. ‘We have had far too much sympathy with juvenile bag-snatchers, car stealers, and so forth’, declared the *Hull Daily Mail* in April 1932.¹⁵⁵ It was now time to make sure that punishments became a deterrent for youthful criminal activity. This kind of ‘sloppy sentimentality’ was doing ‘great harm’ to society by failing to deal effectively with the

¹⁵² G. Pearson, ‘Youth, crime, and society’, in M. Maguire, R. Morgan, & R. Reiner (eds.), *The Oxford handbook of criminology*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), 1161–1206:1165.

¹⁵³ Editorial, ‘Juvenile delinquency’, 4.

¹⁵⁴ Editorial, ‘Our juvenile delinquents: a growth which must be arrested’, *Hull Daily Mail*. 25 October 1937, 4.

¹⁵⁵ Editorial, ‘Crime and leniency’, 8.

youth crime problem.¹⁵⁶ An editorial in the newspaper in February 1936 claimed that young criminals felt safe in the knowledge that if caught they would be dealt with leniently and compassionately, as part of the prevailing ideological standpoint of the criminal justice system. This encouraged the delinquent to ‘take a chance’ and commit further offences, leaving the magistrates ‘at their wits end’ to deal with the problem, as juvenile crime statistics continued to rise.¹⁵⁷ The editorial appears to have been written in response to a news article published three days earlier entitled ‘Juvenile crime menace’, which detailed some of the 45 cases and 100 offences that were heard during a single session at the local juvenile court.¹⁵⁸

Just as with adult offenders during this period, there existed an intolerance to many forms of criminal activity that defied the ideological underpinnings of the progressive agenda. Prison remained a ‘popular’ form of punishment for some young offenders, even while many were extolling the virtues of the developing probation system and the notion of second chances. As early as 1920, in what appeared to be a congratulatory and even triumphalist announcement in his general order of 12 September, the Chief Constable of East Riding Constabulary notified his officers that the three youths who had been apprehended while in possession of stolen goods taken from local lock-up shops had all received nine months in prison following their appearance at Hull Police Court.¹⁵⁹ In a similar case, 15 years later, seven juveniles were sentenced to three months’ incarceration for stealing 36 bars of chocolate.¹⁶⁰ It appears that at the same time as the more progressive commentators were calling for a

¹⁵⁶ Hull Daily Mail, ‘Juvenile court sentiment: great harm done by mistaken leniency’, *Hull Daily Mail*, 16 June 1932, 5.

¹⁵⁷ Editorial, ‘Juvenile crime’, *Hull Daily Mail*, 29 February 1936, 4.

¹⁵⁸ Hull Daily Mail, ‘Juvenile crime menace’, *Hull Daily Mail*, 26 February 1936, 7.

¹⁵⁹ Chief Constable, East Riding Constabulary, *General order no.33/1920* (20 September 1920). General Orders 1920–1925, Humberside Police Authority Records, POL/3/2/1/4, East Riding of Yorkshire Archives, Treasure House, Beverley.

¹⁶⁰ *Juvenile court register* (1933–1936), 142.

reduction in the number of young offenders incarcerated for their crimes, the local police and magistrates continued to support harsher penalties in the belief they remained the most effective way of dealing with the youth crime issue. Those committing what were relatively minor, but deemed to be persistently nuisance forms of offending, such as playing cricket or football in the streets, also found themselves in front of the local magistrate and fined for their actions, often with threats to punish more severely the next time they appeared before the courts.¹⁶¹

All forms of juvenile criminal activity appeared to be a problem, but of greatest concern was the increase in violent crime. As highlighted in the previous chapter, the problem of youth gang crime, however conflated or inaccurately defined, was perceived to be a major issue locally, and the purported violence that became associated with certain gang activities led the local authorities to suggest tougher sentencing for offenders. The *Hull Daily Mail* dealt with the problem head on in an editorial in October 1930. It declared that ‘instances of robbery with violence and cases of unprovoked attacks are becoming almost daily features. They lead one to wonder if, indeed, our present policy of tempering justice with an overdose of leniency is wise’.¹⁶² The newspaper claimed that very few cases that came before the courts were worthy of a lenient approach to punishment. On the contrary, ‘if a youth chooses to be violent, the only remedy must perforce be of a violent nature’.¹⁶³ For many, this meant physical chastisement and the use of the birch. Hull stipendiary magistrate, Mr J. R. Macdonald, was not averse to proposing a simple, good old-fashioned ‘whacking’ to some of the youths that appeared in his courts for violent offences.¹⁶⁴

¹⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 47 & 222.

¹⁶² Editorial, ‘Young criminals’, *Hull Daily Mail*, 27 October 1930, 6.

¹⁶³ *Ibid.*

¹⁶⁴ *Hull Daily Mail*, ‘Revelations of gangster terrorism’, 10.

As already noted, debates about the withdrawal of this form of barbaric and archaic punishment regularly played out in the pages of the local newspapers, with the *Hull Daily Mail* sometimes supporting calls for its abolition. However, support was often fleeting and invariably inconsistent. This could be the case within the content of a single article or editorial. For example, while celebrating the decline of physical chastisement as a method to deal with the young offender, the newspaper also claimed that the ‘fear of physical punishment lurks in the minds of youthful offenders, and there is no doubt in some cases it acts as a deterrent and induces a young prisoner to follow the “straight and narrow path”’.¹⁶⁵ Birching was seen as a ‘welcome alternative punishment’ when other forms of treatment, no doubt the more progressive types, had failed in their objectives.¹⁶⁶ What is interesting about these comments is that they appeared in 1927, well before the more substantial increases in juvenile crime were noted. Of course, rising juvenile crime statistics did have a negative impact locally, precipitating calls for the cessation or reduction of the forms of punishment that were now firmly embedded in the new progressive agenda. The experiences of the police, the magistrates and all those charged with dealing with youthful offending, who witnessed many of the problems on a regular basis, also contributed to these calls. Those young offenders who failed to see the errors of their ways, appearing in court time after time for similar offences, needed to be taught a lesson – and that lesson came in the shape of the birch. Fines were simply ineffectual, claimed the *Hull Times*. Youths who failed to determine what was ‘right and wrong’ needed an ‘appropriate dose of punishment’, which would serve as much more ‘impressive lesson’.¹⁶⁷ ‘It is all very well pleading that physical punishment will sour the boys for life’, declared the *Hull Daily Mail* in

¹⁶⁵ Editorial, ‘Crime and the birch’, *Hull Daily Mail*. 2 April 1927, 2.

¹⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁶⁷ Editorial, ‘Right and wrong’, *Hull Times*. 1 June 1935, 6.

August 1939. 'There must be some consideration paid to decent law-abiding people desirous of getting on with their business [...] If appeals or threats cannot cure them of their deliberate law-breaking then stronger steps should be put into force.'¹⁶⁸ The governor of Hull Prison agreed. At the annual meeting of the Hull, East Riding and North Lincolnshire Discharged Prisoners' Aid Society in 1934, Captain E. D. Roberts called for local Hull justices to revive the use of the birch for errant boys.¹⁶⁹

There may have been irony in the fact that his comments were made during the annual meeting of a local organisation that had been commended for its progressive approaches to offending and its essential work helping released prisoners reintegrate into society. Interestingly, his opinions met with support from other speakers at the event including Hull stipendiary magistrate, Mr J. R. Macdonald, and the local port chaplain, Reverend Frederic Matthews, who believed that the birch, if administered properly in the presence of both the parents and magistrate, was the 'best means of creating respect for law and order in the minds of young people'.¹⁷⁰ Backing came from another member of the clergy, Canon E. Arthur Berry, who felt that probation was failing young people and the local communities in Hull, leaving the police powerless and unable to deal with the problems of youth crime. Those individuals who acted unlawfully must be taught discipline and punished accordingly.¹⁷¹ The use of the birch remained available to judges and magistrates following the successful removal in the House of Lords of a clause in the 1933 Children and Young Persons Act that would have outlawed 'whipping' as a punishment for the juvenile offender.¹⁷²

¹⁶⁸ Editorial, 'Juvenile crime', *Hull Daily Mail*, 3 August 1939, 4.

¹⁶⁹ Hull Daily Mail, 'Use of the birch: Hull view on prison governor's suggestion', *Hull Daily Mail*, 16 March 1934, 14.

¹⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁷¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁷² Emsley, 'Crime, police and penal policy', 449.

With these opinions regularly finding support from the police and among those administering justice locally, it is no surprise that Hull revived the birch in 1935 following a 12 years' absence. The unlucky recipient was a 13-year-old boy who had been caught stealing three cartons of cheese from a local shop.¹⁷³ The case was offered up as an example to other offenders in a bid to stem the tide of juvenile criminality, purportedly caused by prevailing notions of leniency. More birching cases followed. In July 1938, a 12-year old boy received six strokes after he was caught stealing a shilling from another boy. If that wasn't enough, the chairman of the bench at the petty sessions in Sproatley stated that if he had been older than they would have been charged with the more serious offence of robbery with violence.¹⁷⁴ The birch continued to be seen as an effective method of punishment right up until the end of the interwar period, although the threat was used more frequently than the actual punishment. However, in August 1939, another local boy found himself on the receiving end of the birch after wrecking a caravan and damaging a gun and wireless. The seriousness of the incidents perpetrated by the 11-year-old left the magistrates in no doubt that it was a 'proper case for the birch'.¹⁷⁵ Again, the incident was used as a warning to other offenders, as local magistrates adopted 'sterner measures' following what was seen to be a consistent failure of 'more merciful treatment'.¹⁷⁶ Although it had been several years since the bench had ordered a birching, they believed that this previous case had helped reduce juvenile crime locally – a rather contradictory claim given that the use of the birch was justified in the current case as an effective solution to growing levels of crime among

¹⁷³ Hull Daily Mail, 'Hull boy receives the birch: example to check juvenile crime', *Hull Daily Mail*. 5 September 1935, 8.

¹⁷⁴ Hull Times, 'Bench orders E.R. boy to be birched', *Hull Times*. 30 July 1938, 8.

¹⁷⁵ Hull Times, 'Warning to juvenile offenders: Hull magistrates threaten birch if crime continues', *Hull Times*. 5 August 1939, 2.

¹⁷⁶ *Ibid.*

the Hull's youth population, which now accounted for almost 40% of recorded crime in the city.¹⁷⁷

Of course, Hull and East Yorkshire were not the only places in England that were calling for and using the birch as punishment and deterrent. Other publicised cases included sentences handed out in Gainsborough, Doncaster, Colwyn Bay, Birkenhead and in the capital.¹⁷⁸ According to Muncie, in 1939 alone, 50 birchings against boys under the age of 14 took place in the country.¹⁷⁹ It is difficult to provide an assessment of these events without further investigation into the specific circumstances and the prevailing ideological standpoint of those who were charged with dealing with law enforcement in these regions. In Hull and East Yorkshire, however, it is possible to chart the development of attitudes and practices of punishment for young offenders. Emsley may be correct when he states that mounting anxieties about rising levels of juvenile delinquency in the interwar period did not actually result in the implementation of harsher penalties and more draconian laws.¹⁸⁰ The laws and punishments that already existed and were available to the police and courts, and which were called for and used in Hull and East Yorkshire, already appear harsh by modern standards, even harking back to the punishment methodologies and practices of the pre-First World War era. However, Emsley appears to be only partially accurate, in the case of Hull and East Yorkshire at least, when he claims that these anxieties manifested themselves in calls for the introduction and extension of progressive ideals such as

¹⁷⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁷⁸ Hull Daily Mail, 'Birch for shop thief', *Hull Daily Mail*, 24 October 1930, 9; Hull Daily Mail, 'Juvenile crime in Thorne', *Hull Daily Mail*, 21 June 1932, 5; Hull Daily Mail, 'Birch for boy offenders', *Hull Daily Mail*, 11 April 1936, 4; Hull Daily Mail, "'Mail" Mustard and Cress', *Hull Daily Mail*, 3 September 1929, 1.

¹⁷⁹ Muncie, *Youth and crime*, 80.

¹⁸⁰ Emsley, 'Crime, police and penal policy', 444.

probation.¹⁸¹ To be sure, these calls were made in Hull and East Yorkshire during the period and appeared to have been supported by large sections of the local elite, but they were regularly drowned out by antithetical, retaliatory and seemingly reactionary ideas of tougher punishments for young offenders in response to rising levels of delinquency, challenging the adherents of reclamation and rehabilitation for much of the interwar period. As Clarke states, ideological shifts in the treatment of juvenile offenders ‘should not distract us from the powerful continuities of practice’.¹⁸²

Conclusion

As is the case with many other elements of the local crime debate, it is impossible to posit generalisations about attitudes to punishment in Hull and East Yorkshire during the interwar years. What can be deemed more enlightened notions of dealing with offenders did pervade local society, to varying degrees, at times shifting the criminal debates away from reactionary ideas of retaliation and retribution to more progressive responses in the form of rehabilitation and reclamation. Probation and the concept of giving offenders a second chance rather than stigmatising them as criminals genuinely became part of the crime debates in the region. For adherents of the progressive agenda, incarceration was a last resort when other methodologies had failed. This philosophy became most pronounced in the treatment of young offenders, who could be saved from a life of criminality. Physical chastisement and the savagery of the birch also became incongruous in this developing discourse of welfarism and had long been deemed an ineffective treatment of young offenders by abolitionists. There also appears to have been a general permissiveness by law enforcement agencies in Hull and East

¹⁸¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁸² Clarke, ‘Managing the delinquent’, 252.

Yorkshire to certain acts of criminality, many of which were viewed as simply low-level offences that posed little threat to the local communities.

However, this was only part of the local crime narrative. Ideological shifts towards more progressive policies and attitudes to the punishment of offenders were regularly met with stiff opposition. Challenges to notions of leniency and what many viewed as the failings of welfarism came thick and fast, often precipitated by fears and anxieties around rising crime levels and widespread criminality among certain sections of the community. Probation as punishment and sentencing that was perceived to be too compassionate regularly came under attack early for failing to deal effectively with the crime problem, pushing the concept of incarceration and hard prison time back into the spotlight. Just as those of the more progressive persuasion found their most apposite target in the young offender, so too did those who believed tougher measures were the only solution to the current and future crime dilemmas. Consequently, physical chastisement as an effective method of punishment, primarily in the form of the birch, found a growing band of supporters from many sections of the community and became once again embedded in the local crime discourse. While some offences met with indifference or tolerance in Hull and East Yorkshire during this period, there were equally as many that received little sympathy from the police, the courts or the local press.

Local idiosyncrasies may have been contributory factors in the propagation of the various responses, either progressive or reactionary, to contemporary offending. What makes it even more difficult to generalise about the period is the fact that local attitudes to punishment failed to follow any linear development. They never shifted progressively from one ideological standpoint to the other. Instead, both viewpoints remained key components in the debates about crime and criminality in Hull and East

Yorkshire, challenging each other at different times and influenced by both local and national exigencies. Moreover, the attitudes of key players in the criminal justice system could often appear inconsistent and seemingly contradictory, such as those by Hull stipendiary magistrate Mr J. R. Macdonald, and of the local police chief constables, as featured in this and the previous chapters. Attitudes did harden as the era progressed as crime figures, particularly those relating to juvenile offending, raised anxiety levels and fomented strongly held opinions about the dangers and inadequacies of reform. However, these were nothing new. It appears that, alongside new legislation, ideological shifts and changing practices in the criminal justice system, local opinions about how to deal with offenders in Hull and East Yorkshire at times returned to what could be perceived as archaic and anachronistic methods of punishment in the modern, interwar era. If this return to, or prolongation of age-old (and far from permissive or enlightened) attitudes to crime manifested itself in the punishment debates during the interwar period, then did these attitudes also remain part of the discussions about the primary perpetrators of crime? Or was there indeed a terminological shift away from class-based, crime-laden categorisations of offenders to forms of labelling that fitted congruously within the new landscapes of science and progress? Chapter 5 will examine these issues in more detail.

Chapter 5

Continuity and change: enduring class perceptions and the terminological shift

As the previous chapters have shown, there is no single or simple narrative of local reactions to crime and criminality during the interwar period. The various social, political and economic issues of the period and their perceived relationships to criminality impacted unevenly on the region, eliciting a range of responses from the sympathetic to the punitive. At times, attitudes in Hull and East Yorkshire reflected some of the more progressive and liberal ideas of the age, in line with those depicted in more generalised accounts or national surveys of the early parts of the twentieth century. Responses could also appear reactionary in nature, exhibiting more aptly the key characteristics of the retributive justice applied during periods before the First World War. It appears that this apparent continuity of attitudes may also have been reflected in the way criminals and potential offenders were targeted and conceptualised. It would be fair to say that during the interwar years the focus remained on those perpetrators who belonged to the lower or working classes. Of course, this is not a surprise. As has probably been the case since the establishment of a functioning criminal justice system in this country, the majority of offenders who were arrested and charged by the police and who appeared before the various courts of the land derived from the lower strata of the social class structure. That is not to claim that the middle and upper classes are not perpetrators of crime or are exempt from the various forms of criminal justice. As Emsley notes, there is no shortage of evidence to prove that offenders in the twentieth century could come from any particular social class.¹ However, the reality may be that any hope, then or now, of an ultimately fair and

¹ Emsley, *Crime and society in twentieth century England*, 53.

objective criminal justice system is perhaps a utopian or ‘impossible dream’.² Instead, we are left with institutions and mechanisms of criminal justice that, overall, reflect the inequalities of society, including class differentiations.³

This chapter will further consider just how far members of the working classes were targeted by the police forces of Hull and East Yorkshire during this period, while also continuing to examine responses (retributive or reformatory) by the courts to perceived working/lower-class criminality. More importantly, it will detail the development of the conceptualisation of this criminality, assessing the key configurations of the language used to describe these offenders. As stated in the Introduction, the target may have been a sub-group of the working classes, whose immoral behaviour and criminal associations set them apart from, and in direct opposition to, respectable society. Crime historians have often cited the early decades of the twentieth century as a period in which the class-based terminology of the nineteenth century had made way for categorisations that more aptly reflected the new scientific and criminological approaches to crime and criminality. However, as this chapter will also reveal, there appears to have been no linear development of the class apart concept in Hull and East Yorkshire during this period, where one ideological construct supplanted another. Instead, and in line with the other findings of this study, a much more complex picture is presented, where the notion of the criminal class remained part of crime debates but was also just one element in the conceptualisation of criminality in Hull and East Yorkshire, albeit still an important and visible one.

² R. Reiner, *Crime: the mystery of the common-sense concept* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2016), 10.

³ *Ibid.*

Targeting the lower classes

According to Godfrey and Lawrence, the ‘perceptions of many influential individuals that the poor were responsible for the bulk of crime undoubtedly helped to shape the course of much police activity’.⁴ This is certainly true for the police forces of Hull and East Yorkshire during the interwar period. At times, the chief constables of both forces asked their officers to target certain districts believing them to be hotbeds of criminal activity, or of potential criminal behaviour. Many inhabitants of these districts, who were no doubt from the working and lower classes, came under surveillance and were subject to police scrutiny even if they had yet to commit an offence. As was revealed in Chapter 2, local beat officers were charged with monitoring the activities of political agitators and the habitual drunkard. The officers were also asked to keep a watchful eye on people deemed to be mentally unstable (no definition of what this actually meant was provided) and those perceived to be of ‘bad’ or ‘doubtful’ character, irrespective of whether they had committed a criminal offence.⁵ Entries in the beat books of a number of officers in the East Riding Constabulary are evidence of this type of criminal stereotyping, with many featuring the names of locals they believed should be observed due to their alleged predisposition to criminality.⁶ How this predilection was identified or defined is difficult to assess but at times it appeared to be both biologically and culturally predetermined. During a case at the Hull Quarter Sessions October 1932, during which Frederick Kay was sentenced to prison for his part in a smash-and-grab raid in the city centre, the court was told that the police had picked out Kay from a crowd of people and ‘pounced’ on him at the scene because he was a ‘rough-looking’

⁴ Godfrey & Lawrence, *Crime and justice*, 131–132.

⁵ Chief Constable, East Riding Constabulary, *General orders 15/1927, 22/1927*.

⁶ East Riding Constabulary, *Cottingham beat report* (1928). Humberside Police Authority Records, POL/3/8/1/3/8, East Riding of Yorkshire Archives, Treasure House, Beverley, 63; East Riding Constabulary, *Driffield beat report*, 70.

person.⁷ In an article by a jury woman at a case featuring a man charged with theft, bigamy and the assault of an 85-year-old woman, the convicted man was described as having the ‘face and figure of a typical criminal’.⁸ Moreover, these attitudes were reflected among local residents as well. A letter writer to the *Hull Daily Mail* complained about having to live among ‘such an uncivilised set of people’, pleading with the police to do something about the noise, vile language and brawling of lower-class men and women.⁹ Several years later, an editorial in the newspaper reiterated these concerns about the use of bad language among the lower classes claiming that plain clothes police officers should start patrolling the streets in ‘certain districts’ to combat this evil that ‘threatens to be a serious menace to public peace’.¹⁰ According to Churchill, these types of morally offensive acts had become the staple of urban beat policing by the late nineteenth century.¹¹

Guilt by association was commonplace during this period and became a key element in the ideological stereotyping of the potential offender. Many individuals were placed under surveillance due to their criminal connections and were deemed to be worth watching even though they had yet to commit a crime. As part of the ongoing justification for this approach, examples were cited of cases where the speedy detection of an offender, with known criminal associates, had been facilitated by prior observation before the offence took place.¹² Those who were being observed and were innocent had nothing to fear from such a practice. The problem here was that the ranks of those ‘known to the police’ may have been artificially swelled by the names of

⁷ Hull Daily Mail, ‘Man asks Hull recorder to put extra year on sentence’, *Hull Daily Mail*. 4 October 1932, 1.

⁸ J. W. W., ‘Impressions of a jurywoman’, *Hull Daily Mail*. 15 August 1921, 4.

⁹ Mother of Six, ‘Invalid soldier and his troubles’, Letter to the editor, *Hull Daily Mail*. 20 August 1920, 6.

¹⁰ Editorial, ‘Demeaning language’, *Hull Daily Mail*. 3 February 1927, 4.

¹¹ D. Churchill, ‘“I am just the man for upsetting you bloody bobbies”: popular animosity towards the police in late nineteenth-century Leeds’. *Social History*, 39, 2 (2014), 248–266:252–253.

¹² Hull Daily Mail, “Known to the police”, *Hull Daily Mail*. 31 March 1922, 3.

individuals who had been taken to the local police station on suspicion of committing an offence but who were later released without charge, as a directive from the Chief Constable of East Riding Constabulary had asked all local stations to compile a register of such individuals.¹³ Not surprisingly, those individuals that had committed an offence previously were regularly placed under observation in a bid to restrict further criminal activities, even if this appears to fly in the face of the notion of second chances, as highlighted in the previous chapter. Orders from the local chief constables made this an explicit part of the duties of the police officers on the beat. Moreover, categories in the local beat reports included ‘persons of criminal habits’, known ‘thieves’ and their hangouts, and persons who were likely to assault the police or commit a sexual offence due to their known proclivities or previous convictions.¹⁴

In a further bid to develop a more coordinated and efficient approach to dealing with the region’s ‘resident criminals’, chief constables asked for a ‘dossier’ to be compiled containing photographs, descriptions, finger prints and the *modus operandi* of each individual.¹⁵ In line with police practices of the day, they also made a request to gather information about all those connected with the individual, including relatives and their known locations.¹⁶ This approach could result in accusations that the police were harassing individuals who had committed crimes previously, making it more likely that they would be identified as offenders in the future. Frustration with being labelled a habitual offender could then boil over into violence against the police. This is allegedly what happened to 24-year-old Arthur Gawthorpe from Hull, who was

¹³ Chief Constable, East Riding Constabulary, *General order no. 5/1928* (2 February 1928). General Orders 1928, Humberside Police Authority Records, POL 3/2/2/3, East Riding of Yorkshire Archives, Treasure House, Beverley.

¹⁴ East Riding Constabulary, *Cottingham beat report*, 64; East Riding Constabulary, *Driffild beat report*, 71; East Riding Constabulary, *Skipsea beat report* (1928). Humberside Police Authority Records, POL/3/8/1/1/1, East Riding of Yorkshire Archives, Treasure House, Beverley, 38.

¹⁵ Chief Constable, East Riding Constabulary, *Chief constable’s conference with superintendents minutes* (15 June 1934), 2–3.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

sentenced to six months' hard labour for assaulting a police detective while the officer was on duty. His brother claimed that he had secured a job for Gawthorpe, but the police would not leave him alone. 'If they had done so he would have been "all right"', the brother claimed in court.¹⁷

Recidivism was a problem for the police and the courts throughout this period. As examples in the previous chapters have shown, many individuals apprehended by the police and then charged in the courts had several offences against their names. The problem was there for all to see in the annual reports of the prison commissioners. In the 1923–24 report, 62% of male prison receptions had been previously convicted of an offence. During the next few years, the figure for male receptions continued to rise, reaching 66%, while the female reception figure for recidivism hit 86%.¹⁸ These shocking figures no doubt caused consternation among contemporaries charged with dealing with crime at this time. As Mannheim declared in his 1940 study of crime between the wars, which examined the characteristics of recidivism as recorded in the post-trial calendars of the London Criminal Court and Quarter Sessions: 'The rapidity with which one conviction follows another cannot fail to make a deep impression upon anybody examining these records.'¹⁹

Hull had its own problem with recidivists, as highlighted by the 55% reoffending figure quoted in Chapter 4. The local prison registers for the interwar period also evidences the problem. Examine the names and convictions of prisoners for any month in any year and the number of those who had committed offences previously makes stark reading. For example, in January 1920, 50% of those listed in the register

¹⁷ Hull Daily Mail, 'Hull man sentenced: found "guilty" of assaulting a detective', *Hull Daily Mail*. 5 June 1928, 5.

¹⁸ Prison Commission, *Report of the commissioners of prisons 1923–1924*, 9; Prison Commission, *Report of the commissioners of prisons 1925–1926*, 8.

¹⁹ Mannheim, *Social aspects of crime in England*, 374.

for that month had previous convictions, ranging from one offence to 41.²⁰ The figure for the number of previous convictions could be much higher. In August 1927, one individual had 113 convictions to their name, and 83 out of the total of 126 of those committed had been convicted previously.²¹ It was an issue that regularly made the local press. Aside from the individual cases of recidivists that appeared in court coverage in the newspaper, articles also adopted a more holistic approach, noting how many of the total number of offenders appearing before the court in a particular session had been there before, as in October 1924, when only three of the 19 cases on the night charge book at Hull Police Court were first-time offenders.²² The problem of recidivism was also recognised by the chaplain of Hull Prison, and his comments describing these persistent offenders as of the ‘lower and baser sort’ appear to reaffirm perceptions of the prevalence of lower-class criminality in the city.²³

Class in the courts

As this study has already shown, recidivism in itself was not always a prerequisite for a period of incarceration for an offender. There appeared to be no threshold for how many offences were too many and no obvious consensus on which crimes merited the harshest punishments. Instead, a whole range of circumstances could determine the sentencing for those appearing before the courts. Of course, the attitudes of the presiding judge or magistrate must have played a significant role. There does appear to have been much less sympathy for the persistent offender who was also a known associate of criminals from the lower classes who were seen to be blighting the city of

²⁰ *Register of imprisonments by Hull courts* (1920–1923).

²¹ *Register of imprisonments by Hull courts* (1926–1932). Hull and East Riding Prisoners’ Aid Society Records, C DSPA/6, Hull City Archives, Hull History Centre, Hull.

²² Hull Daily Mail, “‘Mail’ Mems’, *Hull Daily Mail*. 14 October 1924, 4.

²³ Prison Commission, *Report of the commissioners of prison 1925–1926*, 43.

Hull and the wider region. When repeat offender Robert Noble appeared before Hull Police Court in July 1927 he was given four months' imprisonment with hard labour for an assault on a police officer. Noble was described as 'an associate of the worst thieves in Hull' and was known to local police officers as a 'very violent man who did very little work.' In fact, he was seen to be a 'perfect nuisance to the district'.²⁴ A man named White received a much tougher sentence than his two criminal associates after appearing before local magistrates on the charge of stealing two steel axles, three cast iron wheels and an iron stanchion from a property in Hull's Queens Dock in 1929. As a 'well-known thief and an associate of thieves', White received six months with hard labour, while one of his co-accused was placed on probation for three years after the magistrate saw 'some good' in him.²⁵ Prison was also the sentence for 50-year-old Joseph Nevins after being charged with loitering with intent to commit a felony, a consequence of the local detective inspector's alleged familiarity with his criminal activities and Nevin's association with other known thieves.²⁶ The same fate befell four men arrested on the first day of the annual Hull Fair in October 1920 for loitering with intent to commit a felony. All were seen to be 'associates of thieves, convicted thieves, and suspected persons'.²⁷ Interestingly, in the latter two cases, the fact that the men claimed they had served in the army during the First World War failed to persuade the bench that a sympathetic sentence would be more appropriate.

Previous convictions, known criminal associations and the character of the defendant played an important part in narrative of the court proceedings and the punishments meted out by the sitting judge or magistrate. However, contrary to the

²⁴ Hull Daily Mail, 'Caravan scene: Hull constable knocked down steps', *Hull Daily Mail*. 7 July 1927, 5.

²⁵ Hull Daily Mail, 'Alleged Hull dock theft: three men charged', *Hull Daily Mail*. 8 March 1929, 9.

²⁶ Hull Daily Mail, 'Hull court reports', *Hull Daily Mail*. 10 May 1920, 6.

²⁷ Hull Daily Mail, 'Hull Fair prowlers: four caught first day', *Hull Daily Mail*. 12 October 1920, 5.

directives of the chief constables, which stated unambiguously that known criminals and persons of dubious character should be kept under surveillance due to their propensity for criminal behaviour, police officers acting as witnesses during actual criminal proceedings were reminded that such information should not be disclosed to the court. 'The fact that he has a bad character is generally immaterial on the question of his guilt or innocence', declared an instructional memorandum from the Chief Constable of East Riding Constabulary in 1926. 'Police should therefore in giving evidence strictly avoid making reference to the prisoner's previous history except by the direction of the Court.'²⁸ It is interesting to juxtapose this view, which was part of the police code and appears to respect the purported non-discriminatory nature of the criminal justice system, with the general policing methodologies of local officers at this time, where the 'bad character' of an individual, be it a convicted criminal or as an associate of known offenders, acted as a justification for an intensification of police activity. Conversely, the memorandum reminded officers that the court should be notified when a prisoner has consistently displayed a 'good character' as this was important to show that it was unlikely that they had committed the offence.²⁹

In the courts of Hull and the East Riding, this good versus bad dichotomy materialised more readily in the form of 'respectable' versus 'rough'. Rather than simply predetermining guilt or innocence, it was often used to justify lenient sentencing for those deemed worthy of compassion, and harsher sentencing for the rest, as the above examples of cases involving known criminals suggest. When barman John Stanley Burton appeared before the Hull Police Court in 1923, he received only a one-month prison sentence for living off immoral earnings, even though he could have been

²⁸ Chief Constable, East Riding Constabulary, *Instructional memoranda* (26 October 1926). General Orders 1926, Humberside Police Authority Records, POL/3/2/2/1, East Riding of Yorkshire Archives, Treasure House, Beverley, 1.

²⁹ *Ibid.*

sentenced him to six months' hard labour.³⁰ The leniency shown to Burton was a result of the court being notified of his 'respectable family associations', even though it was stated by Mr Slack, who was presiding over the case, that his background did not alter that fact of his guilt. The one-month sentence without hard labour also meant that his 'pension would not be interfered with'.³¹ A former superintendent of East Riding Constabulary, Fred Cooper, was also granted his pension in respect of services to the force, even though he was serving time for embezzlement.³² Probation was often the sentence for the more respectable defendant. Annie Spark, described as a 'well dressed woman', was given one year's probation at Hull Police Court in July 1920 after pleading guilty to stealing a pound of sausage and half a pound of margarine during a case. The court heard that she had 'plenty of money' so there was no actual reason for stealing the items.³³ A three-year probation sentence was handed out to 23-year-old Emma Prest, after she pleaded guilty to the theft of a fitch fur coat in 1929. Prest, who was married with a child, 'came from a respectable family' and the constable giving evidence during the case said he was surprised to see her in trouble. Prest's poor health was blamed for her having 'given way to a sudden impulse' to steal the item in question.³⁴

Even serious offences could result in relatively light sentences for the more respectable defendant. Although the Hull doctor Douglas Gordon Robinson was summoned to court for driving his motor car to the danger of the public in September 1926, he had no conviction recorded against him. A police officer had witnessed Dr

³⁰ Hull Daily Mail, 'A woman his downfall: painful story in Hull court', *Hull Daily Mail*. 1 January 1923, 5.

³¹ *Ibid.*

³² Hull Daily Mail, 'Supt. Cooper's pension: recent conviction not to be a handicap', *Hull Daily Mail*. 30 May 1925, 2.

³³ Hull Daily Mail, 'Robbing Hull tradesmen: young woman's lapse', *Hull Daily Mail*. 10 July 1920, 2.

³⁴ Hull Daily Mail, 'Sudden temptation: Hull woman placed on probation for stealing fur', *Hull Daily Mail*. 28 November 1929, 12.

Robinson drive out in front of a horse and cart, nearly causing a ‘serious mishap’.³⁵ In mitigation, the doctor, who admitted the offence, claimed he was rushing to a ‘most urgent case’ and did not see the officer who was controlling the traffic.³⁶ The *Hull Daily Mail* featured a similar, albeit more overt case of what appears to be class-influenced leniency that took place several years later in the north east of England. Here a Dr William Graham received a £100 fine when found guilty of the manslaughter of a man he drove into after falling asleep at the wheel.³⁷ Justifying the lenient sentence, and contrary to the opinions expressed by Justice Godard in the lorry driver case highlighted in Chapter 4, the judge stated to Graham that as a medical man ‘you have received very high character, both as a man and a doctor, and I am anxious not to take any course which might have the effect of intimating, to those whose duty it will be to inquire into the matter, that you are, in my opinion, unfit to practice your profession’.³⁸ Although the British Medical Council investigated the case, they did not remove Graham from the medical register.³⁹ Due to the fact that Graham needed his car to practice his profession, the judge decided against ordering a disqualification of his licence.⁴⁰ Only 18 months later, the *Hull Daily Mail* featured an article about a lorry driver who was sentenced to nearly two years in prison for the manslaughter of a Birmingham shop assistant, and in this case, he was suspended from driving for 10 years.⁴¹

³⁵ Hull Daily Mail, ‘Called to urgent case: Hull doctor who “took a chance” with his car’, *Hull Daily Mail*. 21 September 1926, 10.

³⁶ *Ibid.*

³⁷ Hull Daily Mail, ‘Doctor who drowsed: £100 fine on manslaughter charge’, *Hull Daily Mail*. 6 November 1933, 10.

³⁸ *Ibid.*

³⁹ Hull Daily Mail, ‘Doctor who was fined: to remain on medical register’, *Hull Daily Mail*. 1 June 1934, 7.

⁴⁰ Hull Daily Mail, ‘Doctor who drowsed’, 10.

⁴¹ Hull Daily Mail, ‘Lorry driver sent to gaol’, *Hull Daily Mail*. 8 July 1935, 10.

These provide a mere snapshot of what appear to be the absurdities in the sentencing of respectable members of society during this period. Of course, not all of those individuals appearing before the courts received lenient punishments. A Withernsea man Stanley Marshall, who was described as belonging ‘to respectable people’, was sent to prison for four months for embezzling more than £14 from his employers, Nestlé and Anglo-Swiss Condensed Milk Company.⁴² Harry Hartford Whitton, the English representative for Cleary Mines Ltd in Toronto, was sentenced to four months’ imprisonment at Hull Police Court in September 1922 for attempted fraud, after he was caught taking money for shares and returning bogus share certificates to those that had invested in the company.⁴³ The language of respectability still played a significant role in these cases (even though the idea of respectability cannot be clearly delineated) and remained a constant in the local discourse about crime and criminality in Hull and East Yorkshire. So while Whitton was punished for his crimes, the magistrate felt it was a ‘sad pity’ to see a man of his ‘intelligence and ability’ not divert his energies into more useful practices.⁴⁴ In another ‘sad case’ of someone coming from a respectable home who had found themselves in court on two charges of assault, the stipendiary magistrate said he was ‘simply astounded by some of the people who came through the court. Usually they were poor people and without much education.’⁴⁵ In this language of social status, the working classes could be rebuked for attempting to act like respectable members of society and participate fully in the legal process, as was the case in June 1935 when 38-year-old labourer Cyril

⁴² Hull Daily Mail, ‘Debt and trouble: cause of Withernsea traveller’s downfall’, *Hull Daily Mail*. 10 November 1926, 10.

⁴³ Hull Daily Mail, “‘A regular rogue’: flagrant swindle attempted in Hull”, *Hull Daily Mail*. 1 September 1922, 8.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

⁴⁵ Hull Daily Mail, ‘Girl who left home: story behind two Hull assault summonses’, *Hull Daily Mail*. 29 June 1925, 5.

Bradford read out portions of the criminal law in court as a defence to accusations that he assaulted a Hull Police officer, who had arrived at his house to collect a fine for a previous offence.⁴⁶ It was stated during the case in the Hull Police Court that it ‘seemed idiotic for a working-class man to try and understand the law of England and it was no use trying’. Rubbing salt into the wounds, Mr J. R. Macdonald, stipendiary magistrate, added: ‘And if you have a collection of Acts of Parliament, burn them.’⁴⁷

Utilising the ‘respectable’ terminology in this way may have been an effective method of positioning the defendant within the ‘social and cultural contexts that produced the case’, serving to ‘label and categorise their identities and to explain their motivations’.⁴⁸ It provided readers with some basic information about the defendant, which served as convenient shorthand for how he or she should be perceived within the criminal justice system.⁴⁹ This could be augmented by a number of descriptors covering items such as the context and location of offence, marital status, and the way a defendant was dressed.⁵⁰ The idea that a person’s clothing provided an accurate guide to their social status and, consequently, their potential for criminality, was a visible element in the court coverage featured in the local press in Hull and East Yorkshire. It may have been used to both repudiate and validate accusations of criminality, although the authorship of such commentary was not always clear, but more often than not appears to have rested with the journalist, so at times may have reflected personal as well as organisational biases and prejudices.

⁴⁶ Hull Daily Mail, “‘Amateur lawyer loses’: sent to gaol for assault on Hull P.C.’, *Hull Daily Mail*. 28 June 1935, 1.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

⁴⁸ B. Godfrey et al., “‘The most troublesome woman in Crewe’: crime, gender and sentencing, 1880–1940’, in S. D’Cruze, E. Avdela, & J. Rowbotham (eds.), *Crime, violence and the nation state* (Lewiston: Edwin Mellen, 2009), 249–292.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

In the court reports column of the *Hull Daily Mail* in June 1921, a person described as a ‘respectably dressed married woman’ was charged with stealing items from a Hull shop, who when asked said that she had no idea why she had committed the theft.⁵¹ This seemingly straightforward statement contained several distinct signifiers (dress, marital status and social background), codifying where she should be ‘positioned’ in the criminal justice process, and whether she was a person that was likely to have committed such a crime.⁵² In a story about betting offences in the same year, a *Hull Daily Mail* article began by stating that ‘her smart attire’ suggested that ‘she belonged to what is commonly called the better class’, again providing readers with distinct class descriptors, although this was tempered by the subsequent line stating that ‘her sporting slang certainly lessened her status’.⁵³ Nevertheless, both statements serve to position the person in question, even predicating her guilt or innocence. Criminal justice practitioners claimed that the criminals themselves recognised such signifiers of status. ‘So present are they in the minds of members of the criminal classes that prisoners frequently borrow better clothes than they possess to make a good figure before the court’, declared the *Justice of the Peace* journal in 1921.⁵⁴ Although basic personal descriptions did appear in local newspaper reports, additional background information about the defendant was uncommon. As Godfrey et al found in their analysis of newspaper court reporting in Crewe during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, there appears to have been a ‘comparative lack of interest’ in this element in the local press.⁵⁵ In Hull and East Yorkshire, more overtly pejorative and distinctly class-laden terms remained part of the local crime discourse.

⁵¹ Hull Daily Mail, ‘Married woman’s alleged theft’, *Hull Daily Mail*. 28 June 1921, 5.

⁵² Godfrey et al., ‘The most troublesome woman in Crewe’, 249–292.

⁵³ Hull Daily Mail, ‘Today’s story’, *Hull Daily Mail*. 5 September 1921, 4.

⁵⁴ ‘The presumption of innocence’, *Justice of the Peace*, 85, 53 (December 1921), 606.

⁵⁵ Godfrey et al., ‘The most troublesome woman in Crewe’, 249–292.

Conceptualising criminality

The above attitudes to the working-class offender are, of course, far from new or unique. The majority of local crime would have been committed by members of the working classes, so it is no surprise that this group's activities were regularly vilified and criminalised by the police, the courts and the local press. As the previous chapters have indicated, the policing and punishment of crime and criminals in Hull and East Yorkshire, whoever they were and whatever their status, was often complex and contradictory, defying simple generalisations. However, is it still possible, within this maelstrom of reactions to offending during this period, to position these attitudes and responses more distinctly within an ideological construct that once had resonance in nineteenth-century discourses about criminality, and which could be used to identify the primary perpetrators of crime and justify punitive approaches to the punishment of said offenders? Even though it has been claimed that, by the early part of the twentieth century, notions such as the criminal class had been displaced by new and less overtly felonious conceptual classifications of the habitual lower-class offender, reflecting the various attitudes of the period such as the progressive standpoints of those charged with dealing with criminality, the purportedly restrained attitudes to the problem of increasing crime, and the medicalisation of criminal classification.

The criminal class revisited

The notion that there exists in society a distinct group of professional or repeat offenders living off the proceeds of their illegal activities, conceptualised as the 'criminal class' in the nineteenth century, is a potent one, remaining part of national

debates about crime.⁵⁶ It is an enduring stereotype, claims Sharpe, one that has influenced and informed approaches to criminality over many years.⁵⁷ Of course, its modern-day application in no way compares to the prevalence of the concept during its formative years, when it played a key role in debates about the perpetrators of crime and the formation of criminal justice policy aimed at dealing with the persistent offender and quelling the fears of respectable society.⁵⁸ What of the interwar years? Could such a pejorative concept, which identified and demonised specific sub-groups of the working classes based on their perceived propensity for criminal activity, exist during a period that was, allegedly, more enlightened, more liberal, and characterised by transformations in the way offenders were viewed and dealt with by the criminal justice system?

As this study has revealed, many of the pre-First World War attitudes to crime and punishment persisted well into the interwar years, so it is no surprise to see such concepts continue to resonate at both a national and local level. Contemporary observers, including those involved in the criminal justice system, often perpetuated such views about the existence of a criminal class of persistent offenders. In an article written for the *Justice of the Peace* journal, the author claimed that the ‘bulk of offenders’ who commit illegal acts ‘come from one class, which we may call the criminal class’, although they did acknowledge that even ‘millionaires in their motor cars are liable to come before the justice of the peace’.⁵⁹ A simple search of Hansard records for this period confirms that the concept also existed in upper echelons of political life. During debates on a range of subjects, from health and voting rights to

⁵⁶ Emsley, *Crime and society in England 1750–1900*, 168 & 173.

⁵⁷ Sharpe, *Crime in early modern England*, 135.

⁵⁸ Johnston, *Crime in England*, 35.

⁵⁹ ‘The diversity of the law’s operations: the justice of the peace’, *Justice of the Peace*, 83, 47 (November 1919), 518.

policing and the death penalty, politicians from all parties were heard repeating the term. For example, in November 1922, the future leader of the Labour Party, George Lansbury, used the concept when discussing how many members of the unemployed were also members of the criminal class, and whether it was accurate to suggest that those who are leading the organised unemployed could be described as emanating from this group.⁶⁰ The following year, former prime minister David Lloyd George baulked at the suggestion that the ‘majority of the criminal classes in Wales are members of the Church of England’ during a debate in the House of Commons.⁶¹ It is interesting to note here that he never actually questions the existence of the criminal class itself. A decade later and Aneurin Bevan, who became health minister in the Atlee government after the Second World War, repeated such notions during a debate on amendments to the constitution of the Police Federation when he declared that we needed a police force that was ‘just as individualistic and as adaptable as the criminal classes themselves’.⁶²

The term was used in other debates and discussions about policing in England. During a Royal Commission inquiry into police powers and procedures in 1928, the chairman, Lord Lee of Fareham, explained the purpose of the inquiry, which was to examine the relationship between the police and the public, but stated that the law-abiding citizen did not ‘wish to see the police discredited, although the criminal classes no doubt would like nothing better’.⁶³ It would also feature in debates about punishment and criminal justice, as in the case in 1932 when a standing committee was considering the recommendations in the Children and Young Persons Bill to raise the

⁶⁰ HC Deb 23 November 1922, vol 159, col 75.

⁶¹ HC Deb 12 July 1923, vol 166, col 1672.

⁶² HC Deb 26 June 1933, vol 279, col 1215.

⁶³ Hull Daily Mail, ‘Police and public: commission of inquiry into powers and procedure’, *Hull Daily Mail*, 10 October 1928, 10.

age limit of the death penalty to 18, with an amendment to make it 21. Justifying his opposition to the amendment, the Hon. J.J. Stourton believed capital punishment to be 'one of the safeguards of civilisation' and if abolished, through sentimentality, then crime would no doubt increase. 'It is by means of capital punishment that the criminal classes are kept in bounds and the house-breaker is discouraged from carrying lethal weapons.'⁶⁴ During further discussions about the death penalty in 1938, Conservative MP Cyril Culverwell claimed that the large manufacturing centres of Britain and America were home to 'organised criminal classes'.⁶⁵

Not all politicians agreed that a criminal class existed in Britain. While some were warning of the dangers of such a class of criminals, others were espousing sentiments that revealed a more humanitarian approach to dealing with offenders, questioning the relevance and accuracy of the criminal class concept in this purportedly modern era. For example, as part of the discussions on the 1938 Criminal Justice Bill, Mavis Tate, Conservative Member of Parliament for Frome, said of the Bill that it 'really does something to make us realise that there is no such thing as a criminal class. It is a step forward to the realisation that we are all fallible human beings, and that many of us might easily have been in exactly the position of some of these unfortunate people.'⁶⁶ Harold Nicholson, the National Labour member for Leicester West, agreed, adding that he felt the legislation successfully 'abolished' the idea of the criminal class along with the notion that 'once a gaol bird always a gaol bird'.⁶⁷ During an earlier reading of the Bill in November 1938, Frederick Pethick-Lawrence, who had been elected Labour Member of Parliament for Edinburgh East in 1935, had delivered the same sentiments when declaring that he was 'happy to think we are getting away from

⁶⁴ Hull Daily Mail, 'Death penalty: age limit fixed at 18 years', *Hull Daily Mail*. 8 March 1932, 10.

⁶⁵ HC Deb 16 November 1938, vol 341, col 985.

⁶⁶ HC Deb 1 December 1938, vol 342, col 709.

⁶⁷ HC Deb 1 December 1938, vol 342, col 704.

the idea of what used to be called the “criminal classes””.⁶⁸ While more people may have been questioning the reality of this class during this period, and were less likely than some of the social commentators of the nineteenth century to accept that a large proportion of crime could be attributed to such a group, it continued to be part of ongoing crime discussions and debates. This shows that, once again, narratives of the period, whether national or local, must incorporate and reflect the many contradictions and complexities of reactions to crime in this period if they are to provide accurate accounts of these responses.

Locally, the nineteenth-century concept remained part of the crime narrative in the early part of the twentieth century, often used in discussions around increasing crime levels in Hull and East Yorkshire. However, as the original incarnation of the criminal class was principally associated with the negative aspects of nineteenth-century industrialisation and urbanisation, it is not surprising that it was chiefly in Hull that the concept found its voice. Its equivalent in the rural East Riding was, claims Foster, the vagrant, gypsy or the casual labourer.⁶⁹ While this may have been the case in the nineteenth century, which is the focus of Foster’s examination of the East Riding Constabulary, the growth of the motor car in the interwar period, as already outlined, increased the scope for the nefarious activities of this perceived class of criminals, carrying them into new and uncharted territories. Back in Hull, and in the regular House and Home column in the *Hull Daily Mail*, the author, Mother Humber, blamed the ‘heavy calendar’ at the Hull Quarter Sessions on the expanding criminal classes who were ‘growing bolder and stronger’ day by day.⁷⁰ The close proximity of these groups to the lower classes in the overcrowded districts of Hull was also swelling the

⁶⁸ HC Deb 29 November 1938, vol 342, col 297.

⁶⁹ D. Foster, ‘The East Riding Constabulary in the nineteenth century’. *Northern History*, 21 (1985), 193–211:208.

⁷⁰ Mother Humber, ‘House and Home’, *Hull Daily Mail*. 29 April 1909, 3.

prison ranks according to the committee representing the local Progressive Association, the Trades Council and the Hull Co-operators.⁷¹ In the early part of the twentieth century it was believed that all offenders of the criminal class should be ‘shut up for life, so that their kind might be eventually stamped out’, so claimed Dr Pride during a sermon in Bridlington in 1909.⁷² In line with eugenicist thinking of the period, Dr Pride went further by calling for the barring of all marriages between the infirm and physically unfit, while the career criminals, the vagrants and the lunatics should be ‘permanently cut off from propagating their species’.⁷³ Locally, this biological/environmental-determinist view of the creation of the so-called criminal classes may have been most prevalent during this pre-First World War period, as exemplified by another instance in Hull when it was claimed, during a meeting of the Hull and District Teachers’ Association, that underfed children could simply not be taught – and ‘from these ranks came the vicious and criminal classes’.⁷⁴

The concept of the criminal class continued to be part of the crime narrative in Hull and East Yorkshire after the end of the First World War. This study has already demonstrated that fears around the rise of political activism among the working classes and the threat of revolutionary communism precipitated such usage. So did the growth of the motor vehicle, which was viewed increasingly as another weapon in the armoury of the persistent and professional offender. The term would also feature in court cases during this period and as part of local debates about crime and policing. During a perjury case in 1920, the Hull man Louis Shultz was sentenced to six months’ imprisonment, but was told he would serve his term in the ‘second division’, which was

⁷¹ Hull Daily Mail, ‘The housing of Hull’, *Hull Daily Mail*. 7 September 1900, 4.

⁷² Hull Daily Mail, ‘Social perils: are we on the road to ruin?’, *Hull Daily Mail*. 20 January 1909, 4.

⁷³ *Ibid.*

⁷⁴ Hull Daily Mail, “‘Diseases of school life’: craze for high attendance’, *Hull Daily Mail*. 29 April 1907, 3.

‘devised for the detention of people not of the criminal classes’.⁷⁵ At a conference of police superintendents at the Hull Guildhall in 1930, the Lord Mayor of Hull acknowledged how difficult the role of the police had become, adding that it was important to ensure that the force kept pace with the ‘greater cunning of the criminal classes’ and that a transformation from brawn to brain was needed when dealing with today’s ‘criminal community’.⁷⁶ Following a resolution by Hull City Council not to sanction an increase in the city’s police force, an editorial in the *Hull Daily Mail* decried the decision stating that most people would regret this turn of events, except the ‘criminal classes’ in the city.⁷⁷ Those responsible for the welfare of younger members of society could also use the term liberally. In April 1932, the Hull Advisory Committee for Juvenile Employment presented a ‘gloomy’ picture in its quarterly report, which detailed the alarming rise of casual labour in the city.⁷⁸ Echoing the fears and opinions of many of his colleagues at the meeting, Councillor Copeland J.P. felt that action was needed to ensure that youngsters had better employment opportunities locally as ‘boys at a loose end at about the age of 16 often drifted into the criminal classes’.⁷⁹ The Vicar of Filey also expressed his concerns about the youngster’s potential criminal path in one of his regular pieces written for the *Hull Daily Mail*. In the article, he criticised those who excused the transgressions of the young, blaming them for creating the habitual lawbreakers of the future, even though he was not

⁷⁵ Hull Daily Mail, ‘Hull Perjury case: appeal against sentence fails’, *Hull Daily Mail*. 20 December 1920, 5.

⁷⁶ Hull Daily Mail, ‘Old time police: Hull sheriff’s experience’, *Hull Daily Mail*. 25 October 1930, 3.

⁷⁷ Editorial, ‘Hull Police needs’, *Hull Daily Mail*. 2 August 1935, 6.

⁷⁸ Hull Daily Mail, ‘Girls who work 72 hours: Hull M.P.’s to be notified’, *Hull Daily Mail*. 29 April 1932, 13.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*

personally ‘familiar with the criminal classes’ of which he felt these youngsters may become associated.⁸⁰

It was in these types of personal accounts, experiences and opinions that the use of the criminal class concept could most often be found during this period, used as shorthand to describe a group that would be instantly recognisable to the relative audience. In the daily ‘London Letter’ column, the regular correspondent utilised this type of terminology when covering illegal activities within a local, national and international context. For instance, when detailing disturbances in the agrarian regions of India in the early 1920s, it was reported that the local extremists and the criminal classes were exploiting the prevailing circumstances for both economic and political gain.⁸¹ In the same day’s column, but this time closer to home, the correspondent scoffed at the introduction of women jurors in the courts and, quoting a lawyer who had been at the first session with a mixed jury who claimed that it wouldn’t be long before they became ‘distinctly popular as jurors with the habitual criminal class’ due to their ‘sentimental outlook’.⁸² Several years later, when discussing the increasingly fashionable automatic photograph studio, the correspondent described the contraption as something that ‘should be popular with all except the criminal classes’, who would no doubt want to remain incognito.⁸³ There is a tangible flippancy with which the concept of the criminal class is used in the latter example, and this glibness could be found in the regular features in the *Hull Daily Mail* aimed at women readers. The primary culprit here was the author K. R. G. Browne, who in two notable examples, both of which were examining women’s fashion and accessories, lamented the lack of pockets in a woman’s garment, which resulted in the need to carry one’s possessions,

⁸⁰ Vicar of Filey, ‘Need of personal religion’, *Hull Daily Mail*. 2 August 1922, 3.

⁸¹ Our London Correspondent, ‘Trouble in India’, London Letter, *Hull Daily Mail*. 3 January 1921, 4.

⁸² Our London Correspondent, ‘Legal criticism’, London Letter, *Hull Daily Mail*. 3 January 1921, 4.

⁸³ Our London Correspondent, ‘Getting “took”’, London Letter, *Hull Daily Mail*. 28 February 1928, 2.

and warning women not to wear a tiara – both instances providing a ‘standing invitation to the criminal classes’.⁸⁴

Further examples demonstrate that the concept of the criminal class remained part of the debates on crime and criminality in many other towns and cities during the interwar period. Once again, it would figure in court cases as pronouncements from local judges and magistrates and would feature in statements from senior members of the police force. During a case at Tower Bridge Police Court in 1923, the magistrate highlighted the fact that a number of illegal incidents had been taking place at coffee stalls in the area, recommending that the local constabulary pays more attention to these ‘nightly resorts of the criminal classes’.⁸⁵ A high-profile case at the Old Bailey in November 1931, during which two men were tried and found guilty of the attempted murder of a police officer, raised concerns over the potential use of firearms by the police and their reciprocal use by the criminal elements of society. ‘We know that when we arm our police we should be inviting the criminal classes to adopt the same course themselves’, declared Mr Justice Humphreys during the trial.⁸⁶ The relationship between the police and the different classes in society was the subject of a talk given by the Chief Constable of Manchester police in January 1924. For the criminal classes the ‘so-called arm of the law’ appeared to be ‘long, strong and terrible’, he claimed.⁸⁷ In addition, there was a warning that the police should not underestimate the cunning of the criminal classes and their knowledge of the law by simply issuing cautions for offences that could result in arrests. While giving evidence before the Police

⁸⁴ K. R. G. Browne, ‘Pockets for women: mere men are burdened with too many’, *Hull Daily Mail*. 12 December 1931, 6; K. R. G. Browne, ‘Got you on “a little bit of string”’, *Hull Daily Mail*. 6 May 1933, 4. See also K. R. G. Browne, ‘Yes, your policemen are wonderful’, *Hull Daily Mail*. 11 May 1935, 4.

⁸⁵ *Hull Daily Mail*, ‘Coffee-stall pots’, *Hull Daily Mail*. 25 May 1923, 3.

⁸⁶ *Hull Daily Mail*, ‘Fifteen years’ imprisonment for English gunman’, *Hull Daily Mail*. 25 November 1931, 10.

⁸⁷ *Hull Daily Mail*, ‘The arm of the law’, *Hull Daily Mail*. 21 January 1924, 3.

Commission in 1928, which was examining the role of women police officers, Sir Charles Haughton Rafter, the Chief Constable of Birmingham police, stated that it was simply not the case that the 'poorer classes knew less about the law than the more educated. The criminal classes and their associates know the criminal law extremely well,' he exclaimed.⁸⁸

It is interesting to note that in the last example there appears to be a clear conflation of the criminal and poorer classes in the viewpoint of the Birmingham Chief Constable, exemplifying the long-held belief in the close relationship between the lower classes and crime. Of further interest is that it also appears to contradict the comments noted earlier in the case of Hull labourer Cyril Bradford, who was mocked for trying to understand and use the law of the land. While the term appears to have remained part of national and local crime debates in the interwar years, it is not possible to establish a clear conceptual definition from its contemporary usage. The idea of the criminal class may have meant different things to different people, depending on relative circumstances, and simple proclamations by the key protagonists in law and order debates do not necessarily make it easier to identify the primary target of their attacks. Consequently, there is a danger of over-interpretation of the documentary evidence. However, there may never have been clear definitional boundaries of just who constituted the criminal class. While it has been widely accepted that this was ostensibly a sub-group of the working classes, it was also a 'rather nebulous group of individuals'.⁸⁹ At times, the distinction between members of the law-abiding but poorer members and the criminal elements of this class could be

⁸⁸ Hull Daily Mail, 'Women police: chief constable against any independent body', *Hull Daily Mail*. 15 November 1928, 12.

⁸⁹ Godfrey et al., *History and crime*, 83.

blurred, as the above comments from Sir Charles Haughton Rafter demonstrate.⁹⁰ What appears more apparent in the interwar examples is that the principal notion of ‘a class apart’, a group that is distinct from the rest of the law-abiding and respectable members of society, remained a constant, even when the term was used flippantly by newspaper columnists, the police or local magistrates. Arguably, what was missing here when compared to its Victorian incarnation was the sense of the impending doom this class posed. That said, the belief in an ever-present threat to respectable society did remain identifiable. The alleged perceptible relationship between proponents on the political left and the activities of the criminal classes remained a constant, particularly with regards to fear around public order during this period. Moreover, political disorder per se was not a prerequisite for these fears, as revealed in an opinion piece in a 1932 edition of the *Saturday Review of Politics, Literature, Science and Art*, which was discussing the recent Dartmoor Prison mutiny. The outbreak of violence at the prison was described as ‘disquieting’ and proof that ‘convicts were desperate men’ and ‘must be treated as such’.⁹¹ Attacking the misplaced sentimentality of some of the contemporary approaches to dealing with offenders, the article went on to claim that ‘whatever heights of civilisation the general body of the population may attain there will always exist a criminal class, and that class must be treated as a danger to the rest of the population’.⁹²

These depictions and the notion of a criminal class apart were also apparent during instances of pejorative differentiations between the ‘respectable’ and ‘criminal’, even when the so-called respectable members of society had become criminals

⁹⁰ D. Taylor, ‘Beyond the bounds of respectable society: the “dangerous classes”’, in Victorian and Edwardian England’, in J. Rowbotham & K. Stevenson (eds.), *Criminal conversations: Victorian crimes, social panic, and moral outrage* (Columbus: The Ohio State University Press, 2005), 9.

⁹¹ ‘Dartmoor mutiny’. *Saturday Review of Politics, Literature, Science and Art*, 153, 3979 (January 1932), 116:116.

⁹² *Ibid.*

themselves, as in the aforementioned Louis Shultz case. When three manufacturers from Bradford were sentenced to 12 months' imprisonment and fined £1,000 for defrauding the government of £18,630, the prosecuting solicitor, Mr Lowenthal, described the prisoners as 'clearly not men of the criminal class'.⁹³ Returning to the story of Sir Gerard Arthur Maxwell Wilshire from Chapter 2, who was found guilty of assaulting a 23-year-old woman, the judge presiding over the case, Mr Justice Rowlatt, summed up by stating to Wilshire that it was of course 'a dreadful thing to find a man in your position where you are. Needless to say it is a very much greater humiliation to you than to a member of the criminal classes.'⁹⁴ The governor of Durham prison made similar distinctions when he offered his own view on why the number of prisoners convicted of serious crimes was increasing. It was, he claimed, due to the arrival of a 'new stamp of offender', one that has regular employment and was from a respectable background – and one that in no way was 'associated with the criminal class'.⁹⁵ It could also be used to justify a parity of harsher sentencing between the 'respectable' and 'rough', as highlighted by a case at Leeds Assizes in December 1930 when 73-year-old Colonel Stafford Edward Somerville T.D., who was purported to be one of the best known solicitors in the West Riding of Yorkshire, pleaded guilty to the fraudulent conversion of money belonging to a trust fund. Mr Justice Talbot found the case to be a 'depressing one' considering the background of the prisoner. 'A great deal of the work of Criminal Courts is concerned with men who have little or no chance in the world', he declared. 'It is impossible for me to punish men of the criminal classes and leave

⁹³ Hull Daily Mail, '£18,630 income tax frauds: manufacturers sent to prison', *Hull Daily Mail*. 26 July 1920, 3.

⁹⁴ Hull Daily Mail, 'Blackened girl', 10.

⁹⁵ Prison Commission, Home Office, *Report of the commissioners of prisons and the directors of convict prisons 1921*. Cm 1523 (London: Her Majesty's Stationery Office). Available online: <https://parlipapers.proquest.com/parlipapers/docview/t70.d75.1921-024911?accountid=11528> [Accessed 17/11/2017], 9.

men like you to err with your eyes open and go free.’⁹⁶ Somerville was sentenced to five years’ penal servitude.

While there is little doubt that the concept of the criminal class remained a part of the general discussions about crime during the interwar period, it would be fair to say that its appearance locally was sporadic. A search of the electronic database of copies of the *Hull Daily Mail* produced 37 instances of the terms ‘criminal class’ or ‘criminal classes’ for the interwar period (the efficacy of electronic search engines and associated technology is discussed in the Sources and Methodology chapter). It would also be disingenuous to conclude that it played an atomistic role in local responses to criminality in Hull and East Yorkshire. As already demonstrated, the idea of the lower-class repeat offender, be they a member of the purported criminal class or straightforward recidivist (although the two were not mutually exclusive), found adherents in the police, the courts, the local press and among the public. Many other ideological classifications found their way into local debates and discussions around crime and criminality, in line with those identified by crime historians and criminologists working on histories of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries (and outlined in the Introduction). Once again, the picture is a complex one, where no linear development of concepts could be identified and no substantive terminological shift took place – a shift, it has been claimed, which was more aligned with the changing attitudes in the criminal justice system and society more broadly.

‘The residuum of the unemployable’

Godfrey and Lawrence have claimed that at the end of the Victorian period there was a shift in the way that the class apart was now being identified and described. Members

⁹⁶ Hull Daily Mail, ‘Failed his trust: five years for aged Yorkshire solicitor’, *Hull Daily Mail*. 2 December 1930, 1.

of this group residing at the bottom of the social class structure were now deemed part of the 'residuum' of society.⁹⁷ Rather than dealing with the 'criminal community' as a whole, 'legislation and social policy' now focused on the individual 'poor souls at the bottom of the class system'.⁹⁸ This was part of the new 'knowledge landscape' of the final decades of the nineteenth century, which witnessed the advent of scientific criminology and the medicalisation of criminality.⁹⁹ This residuum included unproductive and degenerate individuals, whose social, cultural and economic inadequacies had confined them to a life of poverty and misery; the antithesis of the hard-working and more respectable members of society. The residuum's alleged biological and psychological inferiorities could be seen to be 'dragging down the race as a whole' and were deemed surplus to requirements.¹⁰⁰ Its members' 'brutish' and 'immoral' behaviour left respectable society in no doubt that they posed a threat, even perhaps a revolutionary one.¹⁰¹ As Weinberger suggests, the term 'residuum' also became 'interchangeable' with 'criminal'.¹⁰² Consequently, this group was now the target for both social commentators and law enforcement agencies during the late nineteenth century, who believed in the innate link between vagrancy, idleness and criminality.¹⁰³

There is little evidence to suggest, however, that this new term had the same longevity in Hull and East Yorkshire as its conceptual counterpart, the criminal class.

⁹⁷ Godfrey & Lawrence, *Crime and justice*, 119.

⁹⁸ Godfrey, *Crime in England 1880–1945*, 149.

⁹⁹ B. S. Godfrey et al., *Serious offenders: a historical study of habitual criminals*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 19–20.

¹⁰⁰ J. Harris, 'Between civic virtue and Social Darwinism: the concept of the residuum', in D. Englander & R. O'Day (eds.), *Retrieved riches: social investigation in Britain 1840–1914* (Aldershot: Scolar Press, 1995), 67; P. M. H. Mazumdar, 'The eugenicists and the residuum: the problem of the urban poor'. *Bulletin of the History of Medicine*, 54, 2 (1980), 204–215:215.

¹⁰¹ G. Stedman Jones, *Outcast London: a study in the relationship between classes in Victorian society*. (Oxford: Clarendon Press 1971), 283–290.

¹⁰² B. Weinberger, 'The criminal class and the ecology of crime'. *Historical Social Research*, 15, 4 (1990), 121–139:122.

¹⁰³ Taylor, *The politics of crime in interwar England and Wales*, 125; Emsley, *The English police*, 51.

There was only one incidence of the term being used in this context between 1919 and 1939 in the *Hull Daily Mail*, according to the results of the electronic database searches for this period. A number of editorials in the newspapers did highlight the problem of the residuum in the first decade of the twentieth century.¹⁰⁴ Some of these discussions adopted a moral tone, referring to the degenerative characteristics of the residuum who were seen to be contaminating certain districts in Hull. As a piece in a 1905 edition of the newspaper declared: 'Slums are continually forming, wherever the residuum of a great city collects, and the slum has a life, and a standard, physical and moral, of its own.'¹⁰⁵ Any idea of raising these standards through education or employment appeared hopeless. At times, the implication was also that these districts were 'nests of vice and crime' and had to be destroyed, comparable to many of the theories of how to deal with the criminal class in parts of the city.¹⁰⁶ The residuum's purported propensity for criminality made them a dangerous element in society, and certain districts in Hull were identified and targeted as harbouring these threats to local life.¹⁰⁷ However, by the end of the First World War, the evidence suggests that this concept no longer played a key role in the crime debates in Hull and East Yorkshire. When it did feature in the local press, it was within debates about morality and the need to help rather than punish constituent members by, for instance, abolishing the terrible slums in which they resided.¹⁰⁸ The demise of the term may not have been restricted to Hull and East Yorkshire but may have been felt more widely, as Godfrey et al have suggested.¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁴ The *Hull Daily Mail* online database searches revealed that the term actually appeared 17 times between 1900 and 1909.

¹⁰⁵ Editorial, 'Slum stomachs', *Hull Daily Mail*. 20 November 1905, 4.

¹⁰⁶ Editorial, 'A prerogative', *Hull Daily Mail*. 16 May 1902, 2.

¹⁰⁷ Editorial, 'A distressing legacy', *Hull Daily Mail*. 19 January 1905, 2.

¹⁰⁸ Editorial, 'Abolishing the slums', *Hull Daily Mail*. 14 February 1933, 4.

¹⁰⁹ Godfrey et al., *History and crime*, 90.

By the beginning of the twentieth century, the focus now was on one of the key components of those sub-groups rooted at the bottom of the class structure – an aversion or inability to work for a living. This group of ‘unemployables’ was differentiated from those who were simply without work by their lack of desire or suitability for regular employment, becoming instead a ‘substratum of the unemployed’.¹¹⁰ The spotlight here was on those members of society who were idle, morally deficient and criminal, but the term also incorporated the sick, disabled and lunatic.¹¹¹ According to Welshman, it was used by a number of writers during this period, including the Fabians Sidney and Beatrice Webb, and by focusing on unemployment moved the terminology away from the purely biological to the industrial/structural.¹¹² Although it may have been a feature of crime discourses at the end of the nineteenth and turn of the twentieth century, there is little evidence to support the claims that the idea persisted into the 1920s, at least not in Hull and East Yorkshire.¹¹³ As Chapter 2 revealed, unemployment and poverty were major issues for the local authorities, even if the responses and attitudes were at times inconsistent and muddled. The causal relationship between unemployment/poverty and crime was also well established. However, there is nothing to suggest that there was a view locally that there existed in the region a group of unemployables who actively resisted the idea of work and who may have possessed a proclivity for criminality. Moreover, those groups who were deemed unfit to work, either through physical or mental disabilities, were rarely categorised as unemployables. That is not to claim that the term was completely

¹¹⁰ Welshman, *Underclass*, 42.

¹¹¹ Godfrey et al., *History and crime*, 90.

¹¹² Welshman, *Underclass*, 35 & 55.

¹¹³ J. Welshman, ‘The concept of the unemployable’. *Economic History Review*, 59, 3 (2006), 578–606; Welshman, *Underclass*, 56; Croall, *Crime and Society in Britain*, 149.

absent from debates during the interwar years.¹¹⁴ Fears around the ‘ever-flowing tide of unemployables’ were propagated occasionally in the pages of the local press, for example, with comments about how best to deal with what were seen to be the ‘waste products of civilisation’.¹¹⁵ It also appears that the term was neither the progeny of, or substitute for, the criminal class (or even the class apart) or that the ‘concept [...] was simply the social residuum reborn’.¹¹⁶ Instead it appeared to be a separate categorisation, as exemplified during the sermon by Dr Pride in Bridlington who, when listing the great social perils of our age, included the ‘casual and vagrant class, the unemployed and unemployable, the lunatic and pauper class, [and] the habitual and criminal class’.¹¹⁷ In a further example of the absence of conceptual clarity, an editorial in the *Hull Daily Mail* conflated two notions when reporting on a £2,000 gift from the Queen to help those without work during the winter months, stating that there ‘remains the residuum of the unemployable, and how to deal with these will tax the wisdom of the strongest’.¹¹⁸

The social problem group

Perhaps a reason for the relative absence of the residuum and unemployables in the 1920s and 1930s was that by this time these concepts had been subsumed into a new ideological model, one that drew on the hereditarian principles promulgated by the eugenics movement and that flourished for a brief time both before and during this

¹¹⁴ The term ‘unemployable(s)’ appeared on four occasions in the *Hull Daily Mail* online database searches for the 1920s, and nine times in the 1930s, although four of these were in the same article.

¹¹⁵ Editorial, ‘Two problems’, *Hull Daily Mail*. 26 January 1926, 4; Dean Inge, ‘Prison and prisoners: on starving and other deterrents’, *Hull Daily Mail*. 14 July 1922, 6.

¹¹⁶ Welshman, *Underclass*, 56.

¹¹⁷ *Hull Daily Mail*, ‘Social perils: are we on the road to ruin?’, 4.

¹¹⁸ Editorial, ‘The Queen intervenes’, *Hull Daily Mail*. 13 November 1905, 4.

period.¹¹⁹ This group contained many of the same individuals and families that had inhabited the criminal classes, the residuum and the unemployables, but now the biological perspective played a much more significant role in both the reasons why these groups existed (and multiplied) and how they could be eliminated. Here the medicalisation of criminality was once again at the forefront of both identification and resolution.¹²⁰ In an article in the journal *Eugenics Review* in 1931, president of the Eugenics Society, Bernard Mallett, detailed the primary constituents of what was called the ‘social problem group’, which included ‘the bulk of unemployables, incorrigible slum makers, prostitutes, inebriates, habitual criminals, chronic paupers, and *high grade defectives* that existed in the community’.¹²¹ The idea of the social problem group emerged from a study based in East London that examined the causal relationship between ‘heredity’ and ‘social inadequacy’.¹²² Mallett concluded that this group had a membership of around 4 million people, which he claimed was one tenth of the whole population.¹²³ Action was needed to deal effectively with this group in order to halt the degeneracy of the nation at large. ‘Authoritarian solutions’, which included the idea of compulsory or voluntary sterilisation for individual members of this group, were documented in Chapter 2.¹²⁴ In the end, policies such as voluntary sterilisation, which were supported by some politicians and notable social commentators, failed to pass through parliament and the adherents of this racial and biological reductionism are now often seen as dangerous eccentrics, in this country at least, following the genocidal events of the Second World War.

¹¹⁹ MacNicol, ‘In pursuit of the underclass’, 296; Welshman, ‘The concept of the unemployable’, 598; Godfrey et al., *History and crime*, 91.

¹²⁰ Welshman, *Underclass*, 58–64.

¹²¹ Mallett, ‘The social problem group’, 204. *Italic emphasis in original.*

¹²² *Ibid.*, 203.

¹²³ *Ibid.*, 204–205.

¹²⁴ Welshman, *Underclass*, 64.

Although the actual existence of the social problem group was very difficult to prove (as for that matter were the other theoretical constructs), the concept did appear to gain some traction during the interwar period. The term was used during health debates in the House of Commons, which looked at the proposals around sterilisation and its potential to stem the tide of degeneracy. For example, Wing Commander Archibald James, a Conservative MP in the 1930s, repeated the claims of the Eugenics Society when he stated that a ‘submerged tenth of the population’ comprised what was now ‘known as the social problem group’.¹²⁵ The members of this group were deemed unable to look after themselves, and their abhorrent activities and inherent criminality was a ‘drag on the standards of the race’.¹²⁶ However, just as the allegedly scientific principles of eugenics failed to penetrate the debates about the causes and solutions to crime and criminality in Hull and East Yorkshire, beyond what appeared to be transient support for the notion of voluntary sterilisation in some quarters, the biologically-infused concept of the social problem group was conspicuous by its absence in local crime discussions during the interwar period. Not a single reference to this alleged group was found via the local newspaper database searches, at any time during the first four decades of the twentieth century. As has been shown, concerns about the degenerative characteristics of certain groups in local society did at times manifest themselves in calls for punitive forms of punishment and what now appear to be drastic solutions. Although inherent criminality was one of the key components of eugenic theory and the social problem group construct, and the primary target of these notions remained ostensibly the same, local responses were rarely articulated within this

¹²⁵ HC Deb 3 July 1934, vol 291, col 1827.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*

framework. Instead, it appears that in Hull and East Yorkshire, the purportedly anachronistic notion of the criminal class persisted to a much greater degree.

The rough and the hooligan

It is worth noting at this point that the idea of the ‘criminal class’, the ‘residuum’, ‘unemployables’ and the ‘social problem group’ were not the only descriptors used to identify (criminal or undesirable) members at the bottom of the social structure in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. There are two others that featured much more prominently in the crime and criminal justice debates in Hull and East Yorkshire during the interwar period, although they were still loosely defined and far from robust. The first of these was the ‘rough’, which according to Shore was a term that had already become a feature of newspaper journalism by the second half of the nineteenth century.¹²⁷ The core constituents of this group were no doubt the same as for the others already discussed – that is, the lower-class members of society whose relationship with crime instilled fear into the more respectable middle classes. That is not to claim, however, that the notion of the rough was a straightforward synonym for the recidivist or frequent offender. As Godfrey notes, the rough was often positioned somewhere between the ‘criminal class’ and the ‘respectable poor’, which included ‘the unruly, the disreputable, the disrespectful, the stand-up drunk, and the fighting working-class dwellers of many towns and cities’, but who were not necessarily ‘notorious’ or persistent offenders.¹²⁸ The term would be used locally as pejorative shorthand to describe many of these groups, whether discussing crime or other social and cultural

¹²⁷ Shore, *London’s criminal underworlds*, 143–144.

¹²⁸ Godfrey, *Crime in England 1880–1945*, 8–9.

aspects.¹²⁹ When the local Hull harbour master Mr H. Richardson retired from the job in 1924 after ten years of service, he detailed some of the main activities he undertook while working in the role, which included regular tours of the Hull docks, where he was ‘always liable to meet roughs and undesirable characters’ on his travels.¹³⁰ It was also used during court cases as a descriptor to differentiate between the undesirable and respectable. When a woman appeared before the court charged with being drunk and disorderly, she defended her recalcitrant actions when confronted by local police officers by stating that she was not aware that they were the police. ‘They were dressed like roughs and not detectives’ she declared, much to the amusement of the court.¹³¹

Although social status and criminality remained essential components of the rough, it was a specific type of criminal behaviour that came to define their activities. The rough’s alleged propensity for violence and apparent desire to commit acts of criminal damage became principal characteristics, and not surprisingly this made them regular fodder for the local press, whether based locally or further afield. In March 1936, the *Hull Daily Mail* described the case of an assault on Thomas Edwards, who was a night attendant at Automobile Purchases Ltd in Hull. The assailant Arthur Noel Bullock was bound over for the offence and the chairman at the Hull Police Court appeared dismayed by the fact only one or two attendants staffed garages that remained open all night, which was an open invitation for ‘gangs of roughs’ to enter and cause damage to property.¹³² Across the Humber in Grimsby, two seamen were assaulted by ‘street assailants’ in 1924, who made off before being caught or identified. The

¹²⁹ An accurate count of the use of the term, as revealed in the *Hull Daily Mail* online database, was made more difficult by the commonalities of ‘rough’ and its derivations in general English usage. However, phrase searches for the term ‘roughs’ alone yielded 76 examples during the interwar years.

¹³⁰ Hull Daily Mail, ‘Hull harbour master retires’, *Hull Daily Mail*. 25 September 1924, 3.

¹³¹ Hull Daily Mail, ‘Court gossip’, *Hull Daily Mail*. 6 November 1928, 3.

¹³² Hull Daily Mail, ‘Assault at Hull garage: man bound over for striking attendant’, *Hull Daily Mail*. 4 March 1936, 16.

newspaper headline at the time described these assailants simply as the ‘Roughs at Grimsby’.¹³³ It was the ‘cat’ for two ‘Hull roughs’ who assaulted Walter Harrison from behind during an attack at his shop on Hessle Road in the city. Both men also received 18 months’ prison sentences for the offence.¹³⁴ These kinds of violent activities could also be found in the cultural and political spheres. Although in modern parlance they are more generally labelled as ‘hooligans’, the perpetrators of violence at football matches were sometimes described as ‘roughs’ in this period, as was the case after an incident at the Bradford City and Oldham Athletic game in 1921, when five men attacked an attendant working in the turnstile boxes at the Valley Parade ground, stealing £5.¹³⁵ While this was ostensibly a robbery, it also appears to be another example of the increasingly violent nature of the sport during this period, which deteriorated further in the 1930s to include events such as pitch invasions by supporters and attacks on referees and players.¹³⁶

That said, there is little evidence to suggest that violence at football matches in Hull was a major problem during this period. What appeared to be more of an issue were disturbances at political meetings. Those members of the working classes intent on disrupting the meetings of their political opponents were regularly described as roughs. In a bid to prevent a Conservative candidate from presenting his views and policies at the local hustings, an editorial in the *Hull Daily Mail* claimed that ‘gangs of roughs, toughs, and crooks have followed him from meeting to meeting’ to disrupt the events.¹³⁷ Another candidate was receiving the same treatment during elections a year

¹³³ Hull Daily Mail, ‘Roughs at Grimsby: seamen severely injured by street assailants’, *Hull Daily Mail*. 13 September 1924, 4.

¹³⁴ Hull Daily Mail, ‘Cat for Hull roughs: two men in Hessle-Rd assault case’, *Hull Daily Mail*. 3 May 1922, 6.

¹³⁵ Hull Daily Mail, ‘Gateman attacked at Valley Parade’, *Hull Daily Mail*. 5 September 1921, 3.

¹³⁶ Pearson, *Hooligan*, 30.

¹³⁷ Editorial, ‘To-morrow’s by election’, 4.

later, while the ‘roughs leave undisturbed those whose views are more in sympathy with their own’.¹³⁸ This alleged adversarial positioning by political opponents on the left was referenced on numerous occasions in the local press. During a meeting at Hull’s Alexandra Dock in July 1923, when a vote was taking place on a possible return to work following a strike by dockers, those who disagreed with the result, which saw the dockers vote to end the strike, reacted angrily. According to one attendee at the event, after a subsequent meeting had been called to discuss the result, those in charge were ‘howled down, punched, and kicked by 20 or 30 roughs’.¹³⁹ Political events further afield often contained the same descriptive elements. There were riotous scenes in August 1920 during the hunger strike of the Lord Mayor of Cork, who was being detained in Brixton Prison.¹⁴⁰ Reports claimed that the thousands of people that had gathered outside the prison, who were waving the red flag, included ‘a large proportion of the rough element’ and consequently, there was ‘an ugly rush, and the police, who were attacked by roughs armed with sticks, were compelled to draw their batons’.¹⁴¹

While this notion of the political ‘rough’ did play a role in the local crime narrative during this period, at times it become interchangeable with a second descriptor that was primarily associated with youth and gang crime – hooliganism.¹⁴² As a number of quotes in Chapter 2 have already highlighted, the ‘hooligan’ terminology was used regularly to describe oppositional groups on the left during what was undoubtedly an anxious time for the political elite. Meetings and election campaigns across Hull and East Yorkshire were allegedly disrupted by left-wing

¹³⁸ The Magpie, ‘Bird’s eye view of the Hull hustings’, 5.

¹³⁹ Only One, ‘Considerations for Hull dockers’, Letter to the editor, *Hull Daily Mail*. 25 July 1923, 4.

¹⁴⁰ Hull Daily Mail, “‘Up Sinn Fein!’” Riotous scenes outside Brixton prison’, *Hull Daily Mail*. 25 August 1920, 6.

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁴² Searches of the *Hull Daily Mail* electronic database revealed that the terms ‘hooligan(s)’ and ‘hooliganism’ were used on 541 occasions in the newspapers between 1919 and 1939.

hooligans who objected to the messages propagated by speakers and politicians and who were intent on limiting the propaganda value of such events. During a Hull meeting of the Economic League in 1927, who it was claimed were conducting an ‘assiduous campaign’ against socialism in the region, the platform was rushed three times and stones were thrown by hooligans in a bid to ‘dislodge the speakers’.¹⁴³ It was often claimed that this was part of a political campaign by Bolsheviks to initiate a revolution in the country, using hooligan elements to meet its objectives. ‘Capable, intelligent, well-educated and vindictive men join hands with the scum of the world’s underworlds in carrying on a campaign for the destruction of Britain [...] Hooliganism at public meetings is part of the work of these unofficial committees’, declared a special correspondent for the *Hull Daily Mail*.¹⁴⁴ Communist hooliganism was perceived to be a problem in Hull and there were calls for the issue to be dealt with from many quarters.¹⁴⁵

As with the rough, violence was a key signifier of the hooligan in Hull and East Yorkshire. As early as 1920, attacks on the public and the police by the local hooligan elements were ‘becoming all too common’ in the region and required tougher action by local law enforcement agencies.¹⁴⁶ A number of Hull residents wrote to the local newspaper to vent their anger about the rise of local hooliganism. In what was alleged to be a series of racial attacks in the city, one letter writer, who hailed from Sweden, claimed that his ‘race’ was ‘getting seriously molested’ by the hooligans in Hull, and

¹⁴³ Hull Daily Mail, ‘Platform rushed in Hull: stones thrown at meeting of Economic League’, *Hull Daily Mail*. 2 May 1927, 5.

¹⁴⁴ Special Correspondent, ‘The two pitfalls: instability and inconsistency’, *Hull Daily Mail*. 22 November 1926, 9.

¹⁴⁵ For examples, see R. B. Mortell, ‘Fascists v. Communists’, Letter to the editor, *Hull Daily Mail*. 8 October 1936, 9; H. Townend, ‘Fascism and Hull City Hall’, Letter to the editor, *Hull Daily Mail*. 14 May 1936, 9.

¹⁴⁶ Hull Daily Mail, ‘Hooliganism in Hull: exemplary sentences for assault’, *Hull Daily Mail*. 25 June 1920, 8.

that he had never experienced this problem in other ports around the country.¹⁴⁷ The issue had no doubt been brought to the attention of the public and the press by the number of cases appearing in the local courts, where the accused were described as hooligans or where their actions were deemed acts of hooliganism. A spate of violence on Sundays in Hull's Market Place in early 1926, which led to a number of arrests, was described as straightforward 'hooliganism' at Hull Police Court. Here local labourer Harry Troupe was charged with using obscene language and with assaulting a police officer during one such incident, which featured around 20 'hooligans, many the worse for drink'.¹⁴⁸

Attacks on local police officers by the hooligan element raised concerns, particularly during the 1920s. 'There seems to be no decrease in hooliganism in this city', declared the *Hull Daily Mail* in an article about a case at Hull Police Court in July 1920 in which six to eight men allegedly attacked P.C. Harvatt while he was attempting to arrest local man Frederick Harrison.¹⁴⁹ The chairman said that it was time to put a stop to this hooliganism in Hull and was disappointed that he was unable to make an example of Harrison by sending him to prison without the option of a fine.¹⁵⁰ At times, the fight against this type of violent behaviour appeared to be failing. According to the *Hull Daily Mail*, hooliganism had returned to the Drypool district of Hull in 1924, citing the case of 30-year-old Thomas Richardson, who was charged with an unprovoked attack on American seaman, Alderman Scott, leaving him with a black eye and burst upper lip.¹⁵¹ During the case, a local police officer, Sergeant Dawson,

¹⁴⁷ Henriksen, 'A Swede's complaint of Hull', Letter to the editor, *Hull Daily Mail*. 31 October 1919, 8.

¹⁴⁸ Hull Daily Mail, 'Sunday hooligans: violence in Hull Market-Place', *Hull Daily Mail*. 25 January 1926, 5.

¹⁴⁹ Hull Daily Mail, 'More Hull hooliganism: policeman attacked', *Hull Daily Mail*. 12 July 1920, 5.

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁵¹ Hull Daily Mail, 'Hull hooliganism: attack on American seaman at Drypool', *Hull Daily Mail*. 9 September 1924, 8.

described Richardson as a ‘hooligan’, who did not care if it was a man, woman or child that he assaulted. Richardson received a two months’ prison sentence with hard labour for the offence.¹⁵²

Although the term hooligan was used in these contexts throughout the interwar period in Hull and East Yorkshire, it could also be found in its earlier, late-nineteenth century incarnation. This was, according to Pearson, a concept that entered the English lexicon in 1898 following the events of a raucous August Bank Holiday in London when a disconcertingly large number of youths found themselves in court for a range of offences including disorderly behaviour, assault and drunkenness.¹⁵³ It found its way into local discussions around youth criminality at this time and in the years to come – a succinct signifier to describe the rowdy and at times criminal antics of groups of ‘troublesome youths’.¹⁵⁴ This brand of hooliganism became a major concern to the police and the courts in Hull and East Yorkshire, and these anxieties were played out within the local crime debates about the dangers of a growing juvenile criminality. Initial concerns appeared shortly after the end of the First World War (as a consequence of the prevailing social circumstances discussed in Chapter 3), and in the aftermath of a spate of hooligan-defined incidents in the region. Unprovoked attacks by these wayward youths elicited stern responses from the local press and the public whose lives were being blighted by their actions. Writing to the *Hull Daily Mail* in October 1919, one Hull resident was disgusted at the behaviour of a ‘gang of ruffians demanding money’ from two young ladies, who were accosted on their way home. Refusing to hand over their money, the letter writer claimed that the two ladies were ‘struck unmercifully by these hooligans, and one of the young ladies was even kicked

¹⁵² *Ibid.*

¹⁵³ Pearson, *Hooligan*, 74.

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 75.

in the ribs'.¹⁵⁵ In an attack that had very similar racial overtones to the one that was alleged to have been perpetrated by hooligans on the Swedish community living in Hull, five youths hospitalised a Mr Julius Dibb after kicking him and knocking him to the floor. Before the incident, the youths, who were described as hooligans by the *Hull Daily Mail*, had allegedly identified Dibb by shouting, 'there's a Jew'.¹⁵⁶

Akin to the other key concepts of the age, the hooligan model could be heterogeneous, incorporating a wide range of activities, from the criminal to the simply bothersome. In fact, the main actions of the rowdy and uncontrollable hooligan could be much less violent than the above examples. That is not to say that these activities were not seen as a threat to law-abiding citizens. On the contrary, what could be considered lower-level incidents of crime were still part of the overall issue of working-class youth criminality that was gripping Hull and East Yorkshire and the country as a whole. Rowdy youths came under attack for their alleged hooligan behaviour at several sites across the region, such as the museum quarter in Hull. Here it was claimed that 'youths without manners' were congregating in the area and turning the precincts into a 'bear-garden'.¹⁵⁷ Action was called for to deal with the issue, which included the local Property and Bridges Committee considering closing the museums on a Sunday, when the majority of the bad behaviour took place.¹⁵⁸ Local parks and playgrounds also became the scenes of what was described as hooligan behaviour. This time the Hull Parks and Burial Committee stated that drastic action must be taken to stop the 'wilful damage' caused to parks and playgrounds, which had cost the city more than £1,000 in

¹⁵⁵ Disgusted, 'Alleged Brook-Street hooliganism', Letter to the editor, *Hull Daily Mail*. 23 October 1919, 2.

¹⁵⁶ Hull Daily Mail, 'Hull hooligan's assault', *Hull Daily Mail*. 15 September 1919, 8.

¹⁵⁷ Editorial, 'A Sunday privilege', *Hull Daily Mail*. 2 April 1938, 4.

¹⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

1929.¹⁵⁹ In one incident, five boys in Canon Street playgrounds were caught throwing stones at the parks attendant and used obscene language when confronted.¹⁶⁰

Once again, the issue of youths causing a nuisance while playing games in streets caused consternation among residents and the local authorities. In an appeal to Hull Police, one resident claimed that crowds of hooligans came down the streets every night to play football and often started ‘brawling and shouting’ and throwing anything they could get their hands on. The resident wanted the police to catch these rowdy youngsters and make an example of them.¹⁶¹ The magistrate at an East Riding sessions in June 1923 was of the same opinion after hearing the case of four youths summoned to court on charges of causing wilful damage. These hooligans were accused of throwing a ‘fusillade of grass sods and stones’ at a local workshop after the owner of the premises had refused to return their ball when it was kicked for the third time into his backyard.¹⁶² In a riposte to the four youths, who all received a substantial fine for their troubles, the magistrate declared that he was not going to stand for this ‘sort of Bolshevism’ any longer.¹⁶³ In what appears to be a rather incongruous application of the concept in this statement, it is still possible to observe the conflation and inconsistencies of the usage of the term hooligan, compounding its own definitional complexities and adding to the terminological convolutions of the early decades of the twentieth century.

¹⁵⁹ Hull Daily Mail, ‘Hooliganism in Hull: park superintendent’s complaint to committee’, *Hull Daily Mail*. 12 June 1930, 9.

¹⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁶¹ Resident, ‘Complaint of “hooligans”: appeal to the police’, Letter to the editor, *Hull Daily Mail*. 6 August 1919, 3.

¹⁶² Hull Daily Mail, ‘Hooliganism at Cottingham: four youths fined for doing wilful damage’, *Hull Daily Mail*. 13 June 1923, 5.

¹⁶³ *Ibid.*

Conclusion

While there may have been some shifts in attitudes to crime and criminality in Hull and East Yorkshire during the interwar years, members of the working classes remained the target for local police officers. Whether they were known offenders, associates of thieves or simply deemed to be potential criminals, they continued to be identified as worthy of intense scrutiny by law enforcement agencies as part of a concerted effort to rid the city and region of them. The courts also played their part, albeit rather inconsistently, imparting punitive sentences on said offenders while at times exhibiting a class bias in favour of the more respectable defendant. As well as this practical application of the criminalisation of the lower classes, which at times mirrored earlier nineteenth-century attitudes to criminal justice, the targeting was conceptualised as part of a continued ideological attack on these classes. Far from disappearing or transforming into new ideological constructs, as has been claimed, there was something extremely familiar about the form of many of these attacks. Seemingly in conflict with prevailing societal shifts in the perceptions of crime, which were increasingly drawing on new and often scientific models of criminal behaviour and arguably more progressive punishment methodologies, the concept of the criminal class appeared to display a dogged resistance to change in Hull and East Yorkshire during this period, remaining a perceptible part of the local crime narrative. Even though it was far from conceptually robust and was never explicitly defined, it remained a usable and recognisable shorthand to identify a purported class of offenders committing crime in the city.

The concept was used to differentiate between the respectable and criminal, and may have been flexible enough to include large swathes of the working and lower classes within its soft definitional boundaries. It was utilised within some of the themes

examined in this study, and can be located in crime discourses during periods of both crisis and of relative calm. It never really found any competition from the emerging concepts of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, such as the 'residuum', 'unemployables' or the eugenics' conceived 'social problem group'. Some did make an impact locally in the years running up to the First World War but were largely absent in the aftermath of the conflict. The fact that they failed to penetrate at a local level and were essentially omitted from debates and discussions around crime and criminality may have simply been because they were too abstract or theoretical. What was deemed to be a more pragmatic way of dealing with crime and punishment during this period, which at times, as already highlighted, rejected or contradicted many of the more enlightened and progressive approaches of the age and resorted to the more 'tried and tested' methodologies, appears to have also ensured, in no small part, the longevity of seemingly dependable concepts such as the criminal class.

That is not to claim that its usage was widespread and to the exception of all other pejorative concepts. As has been shown, the terms 'rough' and 'hooligan' were considerably more common in representations of crime and criminality during the interwar period. However, it is argued here that there were key definitional differences between these concepts and others such as the criminal class, and, consequently, they are not synonyms for each other. While the core constituents ostensibly remained the same, i.e. the criminal working classes, locally, the rough and hooligan would be used to identify specific groups or individuals and their purported violent or criminal activities, which also relate back to some of the themes analysed in this study such as fears around political activism and the rise of juvenile delinquency. Of course, simply identifying and crudely quantifying the usage of such terms may overlook the true extent to which the working or lower classes were more subtly labelled and positioned

within the justice system, particularly with regards to the respectable/criminal dichotomy in the courts. More importantly, these definitional discrepancies serve only to compound the issues of complexity that mark local (and often national) reactions to crime and criminality during the interwar years, once again challenging assumptions about the key characteristics of the period and making the prospect of an overarching narrative or neat and tidy generalisations virtually impossible.

Conclusion

Historical analyses of crime and criminality, whatever the era, are complicated affairs. National surveys of crime and accounts focusing on the development of criminal justice policy or the ideological dispositions of the state and key lawmakers, which are perceived to have influenced new directions and approaches, provide important and valuable narratives of crime in a particular period. However accurate these studies are, their scope and the obvious need to present clear, coherent and usable accounts may lead to generalisations about crime and criminality and the homogenisation of what are likely to have been disparate reactions in towns and cities across the country, compounded by the social, political and economic issues of the day. These diverse responses could be either ideological or practical (or both), reflecting or rejecting the theoretical and applied elements of the criminal justice system, often in response to local and regional exigencies or as a consequence of the specific characteristics and constituents of the agencies charged with dealing with crime and criminality. As Emsley states perceptively, it is ‘one thing to pass legislation and to create systems, and another to have them implemented as the legislators would have wished’.¹

In order to reflect more accurately this diversity of responses and supplement the more generalised accounts, it may be necessary to conduct focused and localised surveys of reactions to crime and criminality in a given period. This thesis is the result of such a study, one that centres on Hull and East Yorkshire during a period of history that has received much less attention from crime historians. The aim has been to show how the police, the courts, the press and the public responded to the crime-related issues affecting the daily lives of those living in the region during the 21-year period

¹ Emsley, ‘Crime, police and penal policy’, 448.

between the two World Wars. Utilising a range of local and national sources, including newspapers, police files, court records, crime statistics and parliamentary papers, it has attempted to chart the 'historical reality' of these reactions in a bid to test assumptions about the prevailing attitudes to crime and the criminal in this period and the practical application of associated punishment methodologies. The hope is that such an account can contribute to the debates about the reactions to crime and the development of criminal justice during the latter half of the nineteenth and early part of the twentieth century, while adding to the literature examining crime during the interwar period.

In doing so, a rather complex picture of crime responses has emerged, one that makes generalisations particularly problematic. There appears to have been an absence of clarity in local attempts to deal with crime, compounded by an inconsistency in responses and attitudes to both offenders and the various forms of punishment. Sustained levels of anxiety around crime induced seemingly incongruous and at times contradictory reactions to offending, where punitive responses and the perpetuation of certain pejorative conceptualisations of criminality collided with arguably more sympathetic and progressive views, which championed notions of reform and the belief in the reclamation of the individual. In this sense, the thesis both supports and challenges many of the prevailing accounts of crime during the interwar period. Just as with the nation as a whole, Hull and East Yorkshire witnessed a gradual change in attitudes to crime and criminal justice, influenced by more humanitarian goals and a move to rehabilitative ideals for both young and adult offenders. This played out in the local press and the courts, supported by police chiefs, magistrates, probation officials, newspaper editors and the public. However, these views were rarely propagated in isolation and were regularly challenged by those who adopted a tougher stance and saw reformatory principles as an ineffective means of dealing with what was perceived to be

a growing crisis of criminality, often aligned with the social, political and economic issues affecting the region during the interwar years.

Hull and East Yorkshire experienced both the positive and negative elements of the period between the two World Wars. Poverty and progress were key features, although it would be fair to say that the region never experienced the extremities of either aspect. Official crime statistics, which were well used and their accuracy rarely contested, revealed that the overall trends for crime in the region matched those at a national level, charting steady rises during the 1920s and greater increases in the 1930s. Locally, crime remained an issue throughout the period. Police forces in Hull and the East Riding regularly called for more resources to deal with what was perceived to be a growing problem, often in response to published crime statistics, even if the figures revealed that the majority of offences were of a less serious nature. The quantitative analysis of the sample newspapers showed that these types of offences, such as theft and transport-related crimes, became a key feature of local crime coverage. In fact, crime remained a staple element in the local press throughout the period, which, as with most newspapers, was probably a consequence of a number of influences, such as the frequency of offences, the persistent requirement to fill the daily newsholes, and the commercial pressures of selling more copies, exemplified by the disproportionate number of sensational offences such as murder and manslaughter.

However, the constancy of newspaper coverage as revealed by the quantitative analysis is not matched by a consistency in findings from the detailed qualitative investigation. Moreover, the information garnered from an examination of the supplementary sources, both local and national, serve only to compound issues of local coherency. The four themes gathered together in Chapter 2 found common currency as a simple reflection of the level of anxiety they triggered (i.e. not at panic levels) rather

than as a constancy in the qualitative approach adopted locally in dealing with offence and offender, both across the four themes and within each defined element. Although nationally there may have been serious concerns that soldiers returning from the First World War, brutalized by their experiences during the conflict, would possess a new-found propensity for criminal behaviour, a more muted response materialised in Hull and East Yorkshire in the aftermath of the war. The tone was regularly sympathetic, rather than castigatory, and at times the local press became apologists for acts of criminality, believing ex-servicemen to be victims of circumstance, not responsible for their actions and definitely not part of a class of repeat offenders, even though some had no doubt become local recidivists. These circumstances were often deemed economic, with a lack of employment being cited as key reason for crime, leading the *Hull Daily Mail* to initiate campaigns to help find former soldiers local work, again demonstrating the sympathetic attitude to this type of criminality.

Interestingly, this sympathetic attitude could also extend to civilians who found themselves destitute through lack of work. Locally, there was a strong belief in the causal relationship between poverty and crime, and this was often reflected in a leniency in sentencing, although punishments meted out in the courts could at times also expose what appears to have been an underlying retaliatory approach to these types of offenders, despite poverty being propounded as a mitigating defence. However, this idea of a causal relationship was not without its critics. Local police chiefs often claimed that it was inactivity or idleness that was the motivating factor in criminal behaviour, just as they would do in explanations of the increases in juvenile delinquency. The relationship between poverty and crime remained a talking point throughout the period. Incumbent local politicians, and candidates in local elections, were keen to offer solutions to the unemployment problem blighting the region, and

although the issue of crime was rarely stated explicitly during electioneering, the generally accepted causal relationship between the two makes it difficult not to conclude that remedies for one must also have incorporated and embraced mitigations for the other.

There was much less sympathy for those offenders who found themselves on the wrong side of the law due to what were perceived to be inescapable and undesirable hereditary factors. This was often reflected in the punitive solutions and punishments advanced by advocates of scientific methodologies and approaches to crime and criminality, linked to eugenicist thought and theories. Sterilisation of the so-called ‘mentally deficient’ was posited as a potential solution to the purportedly unequal levels of fecundity between the middle classes and the less respectable members of society, thus halting an apparently increasing sub-stratum of the inherently criminally-minded and limiting the impact of its degenerative characteristics on society. However, extreme solutions (extreme in terms of current post-Second World War sensibilities but not to many leading figures in the first half of the twentieth century) such as compulsory or voluntary sterilisation failed to make a major impact in Hull and East Yorkshire. Instead, ideas such as dissuading marriage between ‘undesirables’ and promoting union for the middle classes were vocalised more readily. It appears that criminal justice officials in the region adopted what Bailey describes as an ‘extremely circumspect approach to the new scientific knowledges’, holding them at ‘arm’s length’ for much of the period.² Moreover, locally no panic emerged around the racial degeneration and the alleged criminal propensities of the mentally deficient lower classes, although the members of these classes were consistently perceived pejoratively

² Bailey, ‘English prisons’, 304–305, 323.

and the alleged hereditary characteristics of those who deemed unfit did at times precipitate more radical biological and social solutions.

Just as there was a belief in the inherent criminality of the so-called undesirables, there was also a conviction that members of the political left possessed a natural desire to commit crime and were a threat to public order. Here was a belief in a strong alignment between the forces of Bolshevism and the criminal classes, compounded by the febrile atmosphere of the post-Russian Revolution. Local newspapers in Hull and East Yorkshire regularly featured articles about breakdowns in social order, precipitated by left-wing thuggery and violence. While such violence was not commonplace in the region during the interwar period, regular disturbances at political meetings, allegedly orchestrated by groups on the left, were presented as evidence of their intended criminality, even if the definition of what constitutes a crime here was sometimes stretched to breaking point. The growth of fascism in the 1930s and its adherents' alleged propensity for violent confrontation did little to alleviate the fears around left-wing criminality. Like so many other forces in the country, the local police continued to point the finger at the communists and socialists when violence erupted at political gatherings on the city's streets. However, the threat was never really that close to home. Anxieties around the disintegration of public order were no doubt heightened by local press coverage of political meetings and compounded by articles about more serious public order infringements in other towns and cities, alongside reiteration about the dangerous outcomes of revolution in the east. Very few local cases of individuals committing politically motivated or politically related crimes exist in the newspaper sample or the searches for the interwar period. The absence of concrete examples did little to alleviate the continued demonization of members of those parties

on the political left and their alleged association with the roughs, toughs and criminal classes.

While there may have been few local instances of political crime to justify the levels of fear and recrimination, this was certainly not the case with the two other themes tested in this study. As Chapter 3 revealed, the number of crimes committed by juveniles in this period and the huge increases in transport-related offences often created panic in the press and raised anxieties among those charged with dealing with local lawbreaking. Again, there appeared to be very little coherency when dealing with either issue, compounded by a lack of consensus on the causes of criminality and some conflation between them. For example, youth gang crime was seen as a problem, and the local juvenile court registers and surveys into the problem did reveal that offences featuring groups of youths were contributing to increases in delinquency, as revealed by local and national crime statistics. However, this was not gang crime comparable to cities like Glasgow, Sheffield or Birmingham. This was often more akin to anti-social behaviour, although at times reactions and subsequent punishments were calibrated to more serious crimes, even during this purportedly progressive era. Dealing with the issue of delinquency was no doubt made harder by a lack of consensus about the causes of youth criminality. An absence of parental control, compounded by the loss of fathers during the Great War, was posited as a reason for increases in juvenile delinquency. Environmental and economic factors were often cited as explanations. There was also a view locally that children committed crime through a lack of leisure opportunities and the need for excitement. This view serves to blur the obvious class specificity of youth criminality in this period. Idleness was not the preserve of the lower classes, and examples of middle-class misbehaviour, even what was described as hooliganism, made it into the local press. That said, the working classes were more often the primary

target of the parental control, environmental and economic theses, and the punishments and programmes developed to deal with associated issues of theft and violence always appeared to have this group in mind.

The issue of class was much less clear-cut with regard to transport-related crime, which like delinquency raised major concerns locally during the interwar years. This was no doubt a consequence of how the issue was defined and dealt with during this period. All road users, to varying degrees, became the target for local vitriol and were blamed for the ballooning crime statistics. This also included the conflation of simple accidents with actual offences, as regularly presented in the local press alongside the wide range of offences that constituted transport-related crime. The cumulative effect of this approach further raised anxieties about the dangerousness of the city's streets. It is fair to say that there was a perceptible absence of permissiveness when it came to the road user. The introduction of the high-profile and sensationalised motor bandit into the narrative of transport crime added to the growing tensions. Even though he was a rare beast in Hull and East Yorkshire, the motor bandit precipitated a range of measures by the local police forces, aimed at catching and dealing with this newly-mobile but still ostensibly criminal element. A dual threat came in the form of joyrider, the numbers of which, it was claimed, had reached epidemic proportions in Hull and East Yorkshire. Here was both a transport criminal and a juvenile delinquent – the two most feared components in the local crime narrative of the interwar years. However, as was the case with all the previous elements tested in this study, the ideological and practical manifestation of these fears and anxieties in the form of punishment methodologies was complex, contradictory and frequently incoherent.

Many of these complexities and contradictions were detailed in Chapter 4. It appears that the police, prison officials, the courts and many other individuals and

organisations involved in dealing with local offending recognised the value of reform and rehabilitation during the interwar years. The local press also regularly advocated the use of what can be described as progressive forms of punishment to deal with contemporary crime issues. For many, prison was no longer viewed as the most suitable method of punishment, especially in the attempts to reclaim offenders and lead them away from a life of degradation and crime. Probation became the preferred option, and Hull claimed to be an early proponent and extensive user of this developing form of punishment. At times, the notion of second chances coloured much of the crime debates in the region, for both first-time offenders and for those who had spent time incarcerated for their crimes, the latter receiving invaluable assistance from the respected local prisoners' aid society. This belief in giving offenders another chance became particularly pertinent in local debates around the treatment of young offenders. Here, reclamation rather than retribution underpinned the methodologies advocated and used by those dealing with local delinquency. Again, probation became a preferred option, with many local voices opposed to what were now seen to be anachronistic and barbaric forms of punishment for juveniles such as the birch. Moreover, an arguably more liberal and permissive attitude sometimes pervaded local society, where certain crimes were perceived to be more trivial and not subject to punitive policing and punishment.

This was only part of the story, and locally at least, perhaps not even the most substantial part. Alongside this apparent permissiveness, a punitive approach to crime and criminality remained a constant throughout the period, and proponents were often vocal in their support of such approaches. In the often febrile atmosphere of the interwar years, where a raft of social, political and economic issues and developments accentuated problems of crime and criminality, it is perhaps no surprise that the more

progressive ideals came under attack. Rising crime rates, as revealed by official statistics, precipitated calls for a return to harsher punishments, even though there was little evidence that such an approach had been effective in the past. Leniency and the allegedly lighter sentences handed out in the courts were blamed for increases in criminal behaviour. Probation was viewed as a main culprit, leading many to call for increases in the use of longer periods of incarceration for criminality – prison still being seen by some as an effective and practical deterrent to crime and a suitable punishment for a range of offences, as revealed in by the local court records and prison statistics. It was claimed that, due to an unhealthy level of sentimentality, these humanitarian approaches had failed to deal with some of the key issues of the day, including the growing menace of juvenile delinquency. Much tougher measures were needed in dealing with youth crime, and those advocates of the use of the birch succeeded in initiating its restoration in the local criminal justice system from 1935, after a 12-year absence.

So while there was, at times, ‘progress in practice’ and an advocacy of more enlightened approaches to both crime and the criminal, there was also no perceptible break with the punitive attitudes of the nineteenth century. Locally, this continuity appears to have been most apparent in the way offenders and potential offenders were both perceived and targeted. The focus remained on working- and lower-class criminality, and recidivism, especially those members of criminal groups known to the police, was often dealt with punitively in the courts (although first-time offenders could also feel the wrath of the courts). Conversely, the more respectable classes could sometimes find a more sympathetic ear. It is perhaps no surprise then that notions such as the criminal class, which differentiated between the respectable and criminal, remained part of the local (and national) narrative for all of the period. Although

perceptions based on modern scientific methodologies and criminological theorising did at times penetrate the discourse at a local level, they failed to do so with any real impact. Consequently, terms such as the ‘residuum’, ‘unemployables’ or ‘social problem group’ were conspicuous by their absence when identifying local criminals. The default position appeared to be the well-used and easily recognisable (conceptually that is) criminal class, which, through custom and usage, needed no specific definition. Other terms, such as roughs and hooligans, supplemented rather than supplanted the idea of a criminal class, with definitions focused primarily on violence or specific attributes of criminality, although the working classes remained the primary constituents.

The complexities of local responses to crime may, in part, have been an apt reflection of the many ‘competing interests and programmes at work’ during the interwar period, in towns and cities across the country.³ There was, however, a distinct lack of coherency in Hull and East Yorkshire, with conflicting and contradictory attitudes about how best to deal with crime and no consensus regarding the causes and nature of criminality. Progressive and ostensibly more enlightened responses regularly collided with retaliative and punitive approaches to punishment. It must be acknowledged that these apparent complexities and contradictions may have been compounded by the nature of crime reporting in the newspapers, which were a key source for this study. In his own study of newspaper crime reporting in late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century London, King found that newspapers of the period rarely presented a ‘single coherent discourse’ about crime and criminal justice due to the ‘multi-vocal’ nature of much of the coverage.⁴ However, local newspapers had changed

³ Godfrey & Lawrence, *Crime and justice*, 86.

⁴ King, ‘Newspaper reporting and attitudes to crime and justice’, 103.

significantly in the 100 years between the focus of King's study and the early years of the twentieth century, where the professionalisation of newspaper reporting in the provincial press had removed much of the erraticism and incongruity of content, leading to the production of a more cohesive, community-focused product.⁵ Moreover, the voices used in this study were often the key players in local criminal justice, including local magistrates, senior probation officers and police chief constables, and their occupational longevity provides a consistency in motivation, if not necessarily in ideological positioning (perceptible personal contradictions and inconsistencies have already been highlighted in previous chapters).

Of course, the limitations of any newspaper content analysis must be acknowledged, including the issue of sample size. In an ideal world, where time and resources are not an issue, all newspapers produced for the entire interwar period would have been examined as part of the evaluation of local responses. As detailed in the Sources and Methodology chapter, every attempt has been made to provide a representative sample of the more than 6,500 editions of the *Hull Daily Mail* produced during the 21-year-period between the wars. Extensive keyword searches of the complete set of newspapers have provided additional detail in support of the central hypothesis, and, of course, local newspapers were not the only sources examined for this study. Police records, reports from key local organisations and a range of other archival materials, both local and national, have been used to support the evaluation of attitudes to crime during the interwar period.

This is, of course, primarily a local study, so it can only provide an overview of attitudes and reactions to crime within the Hull and East Yorkshire region (although

⁵ For an overview of the development of the provincial press in this period, see Matthews, *The history of the provincial press*, 86–137.

many themes have been contextualised nationally). So even though the region may have displayed many similarities to other parts of the country during this period – particularly those industrial towns and cities of the north of England – it would be dangerous to extrapolate these findings en masse and transpose local attitudes and responses onto what are, on the surface, seemingly comparable areas. However, one of the central arguments of this thesis is that it may not be wise or possible to generalise about the nature and characteristics of crime and criminality during the interwar years due to the likelihood of significant regional disparities, shaped by local exigencies and compounded by the social, political and economic constituents of a particular milieu. So while a local study is, by definition, limited in its scope, it can also, due to its very nature, offer a more focused and granular account of reactions at a grass roots level, where ideological and legislative developments in criminal justice, including those deemed to be more progressive and humanitarian, can be evaluated as policies/ideology in practice. Further local studies of this nature, which focus on a particular city or region, may help to provide a more accurate representation of overall attitudes to crime, even if these studies create a patchwork quilt of regionalised responses, or offer an intricate and idiosyncratic account within one particular area, as found in this examination.

This study has also highlighted a number of interesting themes worthy of further investigation. As Chapter 2 revealed, the causal relationship between poverty and crime became central to the debates around criminality in Hull and East Yorkshire during the interwar period. Due to the parameters of this current study, more detailed analyses were not possible, even though research into links between unemployment and criminality in interwar Britain remains a relatively ‘neglected area that awaits a

historian of crime'.⁶ Whether real or perceived, these links may shed further light onto how crime was perceived and dealt with during the economically volatile years between 1919 and 1939. As Chapter 3 revealed, reactions and attitudes to prostitution in Hull appear to have at times displayed the liberal and humanitarian ideals of the progressive agenda, which may appear surprising given the primary economic and geographical characteristics of the town. This could be tested with additional research. The response to criminality on Britain's roads during the burgeoning motor age also offers potential areas of research for crime historians, particularly if, as in Hull and East Yorkshire, the cumulative effect of the scale of offences, the local police forces' conflation of accidents with criminality, and perceptions about the newly-acquired mobility of the criminal classes, generated widespread panic. Again, localised studies may offer more nuanced accounts of the relative reactions, aligned with ideological and practical developments in the criminal justice system. These will once again help to address some of the limitations of generalised histories or national surveys of this period and those focusing on specific elements within the themes highlighted here. As this study has demonstrated, these kinds of local narratives are likely to provide some of the most compelling accounts of reactions to crime and criminality during the interwar years, drawing out the complexities and contradictions of what was a short but tumultuous period of British history.

⁶ C. Emsley, 'Historical perspectives on crime', in M. Maguire, R. Morgan, & R. Reiner (eds.), *The Oxford handbook of criminology*, 4th edition (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 122–138:135.

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