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in the Humanities & Social Sciences



Gwenda Morgan, Peter Rushton. *Eighteenth-Century Criminal Transportation: The Formation of the Criminal Atlantic*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004. 238 pp. \$69.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-333-79338-1.

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Published on H-Albion (March, 2007)

The North Atlantic and its periphery in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries have long attracted scholarly attention. The quarter century since Kenneth Davies published his seminal study, *The North Atlantic World in the Seventeenth Century* (1974), has seen a rich mix of general and more particular studies, amid which I. K. Steele's *The English Atlantic, 1675-1740: An Exploration of Communication and Community* (1986) is still outstanding. The processes of colonization as chapters in social, economic, maritime, and entrepreneurial history have attracted an array of scholars. The aspect of the transportation of convicted criminals from England and Ireland to North America (usually as an alternative to execution) has attracted less attention. It perhaps tends to fall between the history of crime and criminal justice in early modern England and colonial history during the same period. The former has attracted some notable scholarship during the past decades, as was signalled by an excellent survey of it in 1993.[1] There has been a strong focus on the severity of the judicial system and particularly on capital punishment, but less so on the more humane alternative: exile.[2] Gwenda Morgan and Peter Rushton have served us well by offering a short but informative study of what they call "the Criminal Atlantic" (paralleling "the Black Atlantic," the slave diaspora). Their research over the past eight years, from their base at the University of Sunderland, has given them a thorough knowledge of crime and punishment, including transportation in England's North East counties, which, in turn, has given them an appreciation of regional differences. They have published a monograph based on this research, and an edition of the notebook of a clergyman-magistrate that is a model of its kind. They have also, even prior to this volume, examined the wider English

scene in at least two articles.[3]

Here their purpose is to explore how the transportation system worked and its impact on relations between colonies and mother country. One of the topics examined (so far as sketchily surviving records will permit) concerns the varying responses of local justices to the opportunities provided by the Act of 1718, which firmly established transportation as an alternative to execution, with the degree of flexibility that varying sentences could provide: seven or fourteen years. In some counties magistrates embraced the opportunity with enthusiasm, in others they showed little interest. Devon's magistrates were numbered among the former, regularly transporting some convicted of grand larceny, and occasionally sending off "vagrants" and "rogues." However, in the North East, although Northumberland and Newcastle were enthusiastic, Durham's justices did not apply the Act before 1750, preferring corporal punishment to either imprisonment or the death penalty. Again in Cumbria, despite the close connection of the county with the Chesapeake through Whitehaven's tobacco trade, justices did not apply the Act until the 1740s and Westmorland only applied the act once before the American Revolution. Readers will seek an explanation for this diversity in vain, for the authors find it defies classification or interpretation. A second theme describes how the merchant communities of London, and such outports as Bristol and even remote Carlisle, provided the shipping. Merchant houses like Sedgeley and Jackson in Bristol regarded convicts as just another profitable cargo tucked in with household and manufactured goods that the captains would trade for tobacco. In the West Country as in London transporting convicts became a substantial and profitable business by the 1770s. In Whitehaven also, to-

bacco merchants, already experienced in the slave trade, were happy to exploit this source of profit. The authors also examine the vexed question of how effective the system was in permanently exiling miscreants. Here the authors are in a difficulty from which I am not sure they successfully escape. A wealth of popular ballads, "autobiographies," and pamphlets emerged from Grub Street describing with relish the escape of convicts from America and the crimes they committed either singly or in wandering gangs once they reached their old haunts. Explored at length by the authors, they are wonderfully entertaining, but what significance must we attach to them? Such stories were hardly typical of convict experience. The anonymous crowd surely remained and died in the colonies, and it would be interesting to know how many found through transportation various careers open to talent as so many did in New South Wales during the next century.

Having studied the popular literature so closely, Morgan and Rushton find a theme which some of us might have missed: how the movement of transportees and the reaction of the colonists to their arrival had a cultural dimension. While some contemporary doubters (Dr. Samuel Johnson looming among them) insisted that transportation was not a true deterrent since, unlike hanging, it was an "invisible" punishment, Morgan and Rushton insist that "far from being invisible ... transportation stimulated cultural and political exchanges between Britain and its colonies" (p. 4). For example, colonial newspapers devoted an extraordinary amount of space to accounts of trials of criminals in London, and repeated at length accounts in English newspapers of the crimes of transportees who had clandestinely returned to England. Grub Street's songs and stories (and notably John Gay's *The Beggar's Opera*, 1728) were as popular in the colonies as in England. Indeed the authors conclude that one thing that bound the convict cultures on both sides of the Atlantic were the stories they told about their experiences in the system and which were enshrined in

the print culture.

This is a sustainably interesting study of an aspect of the North Atlantic world during the eighteenth century. Trans-Atlantic transportation was slain by the achievement of American Independence (although, as the authors show, not quite as abruptly as we are usually told). The attachment of the British Government to exiling undesirables was undimmed by this set back. It is perhaps worth pointing out that of the estimated 210,000 convicts exiled from Britain between 1650 and 1868, only 50,000 were sent to America. The other 160,000 found themselves in a far stranger, less hospitable, and certainly more distant environment: Australia.

Notes

[1]. J. Innes and J. Styles, "The Crime Wave: Recent Writing on Crime and Criminal Justice in Eighteenth-Century England," in *Rethinking Social History*, ed. A. Wilson (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1993).

[2]. D. Hay, P. Linebaugh, J. Rule, E. P. Thompson, and C. Winslow, *Albion's Fatal Tree: Crime and Society in Eighteenth-Century England* (Harmondsworth and Middlesex: Allen Lane, 1975); V. Gatrell, *The Hanging Tree: Execution and the English People 1770-1868* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994); and more generally, J. Beattie's excellent survey, *Crime and the Courts in England 1660-1800* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986).

[3]. Rogues, *Thieves and the Rule of Law: The Problem of Law Enforcement in North East England 1718-1800* (London: UCL Press, 1998); *The Justicing Notebook (1750-64) of Edmund Tew, Rector of Boldon*, Surtees Society 205 (Woodbridge and Suffolk: Boydell and Brewer, 2000); "Running Away and Returning Home: The Fate of English Convicts in the American Colonies," *Crime, Histoire et Sociétés* 7, no. 2 (2003): 61-80; and "The Magistrate, the Community and the Maintenance of an Orderly Society in Eighteenth-Century England," *Historical Research* 76 (2003): 54-77.

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Citation: Roger Hainsworth. Review of Morgan, Gwenda; Rushton, Peter, *Eighteenth-Century Criminal Transportation: The Formation of the Criminal Atlantic*. H-Net Reviews. March, 2007.

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