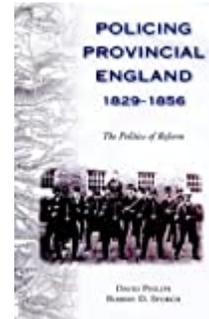


David Philips, Robert D. Storch. *Policing Provincial England, 1829-1856: The Politics of Reform.* London and New York: Leicester University Press, 1999. x + 342 pp. \$75.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-7185-0112-9.



Reviewed by Elaine Reynolds (Department of History, William Jewell College, Liberty, MO)

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“Bobbies on bicycles...”

The popular image of British policing has included a rather bucolic aspect – the country policeman who knew everyone in his village, did his rounds on a bike, and was always being shoved aside on the really important cases by the man “from the Yard,” that is Scotland Yard. In the historiography of policing, the rural policeman was seen as the younger brother of the ground-breaking men of the Metropolitan Police. County police forces were measured by the urban yardstick, found wanting, and reformed in the mold of the Met in the mid-nineteenth century, bringing order to the countryside. Like most popular twentieth-century images of policing, however, and the more serious historiography that helped create it, our understanding of rural policing has changed considerably in recent years, largely due to the work of fine scholars like David Philips and Robert Storch. *Policing Provincial England* is their latest contribution to the re-examination of the roots of modern, bureaucratic police forces in Great Britain. The book fills an important gap in our appreciation of the origins and process of rural police reform. Philips and Storch describe the state of policing in the 1820’s and 30’s, taking readers through the types of changes made in rural areas by virtue of permissive national legislation, local government acts, and private initiative. The book ends with the County and Borough Po-

lice Act of 1856, which mandated that all counties adopt the same model of professional police.

In their examination of the early nineteenth-century state of rural policing, the authors tackle the question of the extent to which rural parish constables lived up (or down) to the stereotype created by Shakespeare and nineteenth-century critics– who “stigmatized the constables as lazy, recalcitrant, illiterate, officious, aged, bumbling, mercenary and corrupt, often perfect ‘Dogberries’” (12). While it was clear that the status of the office of constable had declined since the seventeenth century, it is not clear that nineteenth-century constables did their duty any better or worse than their ancestors. What has changed, Philips and Storch clearly show, was the “expectations of the criminal justice system among the landed classes....”(23).

The authors present persuasively the various sources of these changed expectations. Their account reinforces other recent work done on urban (especially London) police reform.[1] First, the origins of reform were not monolithically metropolitan and Benthamite. Philips and Storch provide a clear account of the kinds of discussion and experimentation that went on in rural counties. Clearly the foundation of the Metropolitan Police in 1829 provided grist to the reformers’ mill. However, two things in particular generated discussion in the counties–

the 'Swing' riots of the early 1830's and the New Poor Law of 1834. Later, the threat of Chartism and the seemingly inexorable rise of crime rates also factored into the equation.

In terms of actual police practice, the magistrates in Cheshire created a paid constabulary by virtue of a private Act of Parliament in 1829, anticipating later public acts. Philips and Storch break newer ground, though, in their discussion of other types of locally initiated experiments pursued under the auspices of Lighting and Watching Acts, volunteer subscriptions, or the Poor Law. This all supports an important point: "...the wide establishment of small local paid policing agencies during the 1830's suggests that many country gentlemen no longer objected to the *principle* of a paid police..."(109-110).

If the argument was not about amateur vs. professional policing, there was still room for debate about other issues, such as cost and control. The latter issue was of particular importance to Edwin Chadwick, who was the main force behind the Constabulary Force Commission, set up by Whig Home Secretary, Lord John Russell. A staunch Benthamite, Chadwick made sure the final report of the Commission recommended centralized control and inspection of a national rural police force. Philips and Storch convincingly show how Chadwick not only influenced what evidence was gathered, he even re-wrote some of the answers given by witnesses. Additionally, the authors argue, "...there is not evidence that the Commission fully analyzed all of the vast amount of material contained in the returns to the questionnaires from JP's and Boards of [Poor Law] Guardians" (123). Still, Chadwick had to deal with his fellow Commissioners, Col. Charles Rowan, Commissioner of the Metropolitan Police, and Charles Shaw Lefevre, Whig MP, and Russell. The final recommendations of Commission's Report, published in 1839, clearly show that Shaw Lefevre and Russell were aware, if Chadwick was not, that a due respect to the authority of magistrates and a concern for ratepayers reactions was important if any scheme of reform was to have a chance of success. This point contributes significantly to the on-going re-evaluation of Benthamite influence on the process of reform in nineteenth-century Britain.

So, instead of a national, centralized police, the outcome of the Constabulary Commission Report was the County Police Act of 1839, amended in 1840. What Philips and Storch show us, though, is that a short, paragraph-length resolution from the magistrates of Shropshire in December 1838 was as influential (or more)

than Chadwick's Commission. The 'Salop Resolution' called for the establishment of a paid police force under the authority of the local bench of justices, "...disposable at any point of the Shire where their services might be required....for the prevention as well as detection of offenses, for the security of persons and property, and for the constant preservation of the Public Peace." (137). Russell and the magistrates of several other county endorsed it. The provisions of the subsequent Police Acts were closer to the Salop Resolution than Chadwick's report. They were permissive, that is they allowed those counties that so desired to set up paid police forces but did not require it.

Philips and Storch do an interesting analysis of the split between those counties that chose to adopt the new form of policing and those that rejected or ignored the Police Acts, with about half opting for the former and half for the latter. The authors' major conclusions are that counties with significant industrial or mining regions, or were close to London were often more likely to go for reformed policing but as crucial was the local political landscape within Quarter Sessions. The influence of reform supporters among magistrates was crucial but did not always prove to be enough to tip the scales. This was an issue that could cut across Tory-Whig lines at the local level. The authors take us through the variety of issues that surfaced in local debates, including crime, the cost of improved police forces, the constitutionality of such forces, and, perhaps most importantly, the implications for the power and authority of magistrates and local parish officials. It was the problem of cost, however, that proved to be the largest deterrent to adoption of the Police Act. Ultimately, Philips and Storch insist "that the County Police Acts of 1839-40 constitute the foundation of English provincial policing. Their passage and adoption were major consequences of the landed class' rethinking of provincial order keeping" (164).

To further enhance this interpretation, the authors then take us through the details of how the debate about policing worked out in some specific counties. I did wonder if the broader analysis of why various counties did or did not adopt the Police Acts would have been better placed after these individual examples, rather than before. While I appreciate the research effort that went into providing this range of examples, presented as they are, they seem somewhat repetitive. And except for their geographical location, it was not entirely clear to me why these particular counties were chosen, except the last, Cheshire. But this was the only weak section for me in what is otherwise a book that goes from strength to

strength.

To conclude, Philips and Storch trace out the events between 1840 and 1856 that culminated in the passage of the County and Borough Police Act of 1856. This latter legislation made it mandatory for counties to adopt the reformed police mode, but with the central government paying up to twenty-five percent of the cost. Here again, the authors convincingly show the tangled nature of the reform process, including local initiatives as well as the debates at the national level. And here, as all through the previous accounts, the theme of expense is played out. For so many people at all levels, the key question was not whether they should or should not reform the police but how much would it cost and who would bear the brunt of that. By 1856, it was clear that reform from the center would not be acceptable unless payment from the center accompanied it.

Throughout this book the research shows an impressive depth. The authors are up-front about the limits they chose (for example, staying within England, excluding the other segments of the British Isles) and the challenge inherent in tracing out this account from widely scattered sources. The end result is all the more impressive, given that neither author lives in England. Another impressive aspect of the book that is evident all through the text is the linkage of police reform and Poor Law reform. I found this part of the argument fascinating. Philips and Storch show the clear connections between the issues at several levels, including administration, funding, and attitudes. For example, one reason the older system of parish constables was in trouble after 1836 stemmed from an administrative ruling from the Poor Law Commissioners that made it impossible for parish officials to pay costs for a constable out of poor rates, a common practice up until then. I almost wish the authors had done more with

this connection. It makes me wonder if the older, broader notion of 'police,' encompassing more than crime prevention and detection, lasted longer than we thought. I also found the way in which Philips and Storch traced out the complexity of the issue of police reform at both the local and national levels well done. In particular, the authors make a powerful argument about the way in which the Provincial Ruling Class (to use their phrase) had to take account of both their superiors in Westminster and their ratepaying neighbors in the parishes. There is no way we can go back to the nice, neat categories of 'police-for or against' after this book. And while some may miss that tidiness, the more tangled story that these authors tell gives us a much better understanding of how the process actually occurred and the stakes in the outcome.

Note

1. I am thinking here of Stanley H. Palmer's groundbreaking, *Police and Protest in England and Ireland, 1780-1850* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1988), which forced historians to acknowledge the importance of Ireland as a testing ground for police reform, and my own, *Before the Bobbies: the Night Watch and Police Reform in Metropolitan London, 1720-1830* (London and Palo Alto, Calif.: Macmillan and Stanford University Press, 1998). It appears my work and this one crossed in the publishing process. I found a similar type of reform process at work in eighteenth-century London as Philips and Storch found in rural counties in the 1820s and 30s. I would be interested to know if my work would have been any help to them.

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