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**Barrie David G., *Police in the Age of Improvement : Police development and the civic tradition in Scotland, 1775-1865***

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- 1 Scotland has long exercised a brooding off-stage presence in the evolution of the police institutions of the British Isles. England and Wales, as a coherent and relatively uniform administrative unit, have received the majority of the attention devoted to describing the history of the new police. In recent years, though, enough research has been done on Scotland for it to be possible to write this important book. Much of this has been done by David Barrie, and he had made an excellent job of expanding his doctoral theses into an analysis which deals with the whole of urban Scotland – with some limited coverage of its rural areas. The institutional site for this book is the existence in Scotland, between the mid-eighteenth century and the later nineteenth, of ‘police commissions’ for urban governance, which were not replaced by all-purpose local councils until much later than elsewhere in Britain.
- 2 The term ‘police’ itself retained its broader Continental meaning for longer, and Barrie manages, largely, to make clear that some of the perceived difference between Scotland and England has been derived from the use of different words to describe similar

actions. Police – as in England – found themselves faced with a variety of tasks; he shows how the most significant of these in the nineteenth century was the control and containment of the poor, through the close supervision of vagrants and of the streets. Police also had a role in preventing major outbreaks of disorder, attempting to enforce evangelical moral norms, keeping the streets clear for traffic and commerce, and preventing and detecting crime. Some of the reasons for these preoccupations can be found in the fact that Scotland was poorer than England – although high levels of policing were funded – while others are linked to the relatively late decline in the community authority of Scotland’s established church in the eighteenth century. In Glasgow, major incidents of disorder in 1787 and 1820 accelerated and affected, but did not cause, subsequent police reforms. There was a degree of consensus about what the various police officers ought to be doing in the streets, even through the ways that they should be administered were the focus of debate.

- 3 Scotland’s many local police acts were not solely locally defined: the Lord Advocate in Edinburgh as well as the Parliament in Westminster could and did wield a veto power over them. But they were the product of local concerns, about both the problems of crime and disorder, and the best institutions to repress them. Barry shows that it was the police commissions rather than the councils which were the focus of local debates about the best balance between democracy and oligarchy, as well the focus of increasing central government interference during the nineteenth century, which culminated in the virtual homogenisation of Scottish police governance with its English counterpart by 1900.
- 4 Scotland was also different in the role played by civic humanism in providing an ‘intellectual climate’ for reform. Barrie here argues that the work of Lord Kames, Adam Ferguson, David Hume and John Millar – as well as the better-known Adam Smith – had an impact on Scottish police institutions, such that Glasgow’s Police Commission was: ‘designed to provide men of property with access to local office and establish a forum for public debate and self-direction ... [and] to form an important bridge between the local state and the civil sector, which was designed to ensure the rule of law, the defence of property, and urban improvement.’ [p. 81] He is unable to find the kind of direct evidence which would unequivocally prove this to be the case, but offers convincing circumstantial evidence that this was so.
- 5 One of the main ways that Scottish police history has hitherto been approached is through claims about the primacy of various innovations, notably in the arrival of the new police. Barrie avoids joining in the circular argument in which certain innovations in a particular area are first defined as the essence of police ‘newness’ and then identified as having taken place. Instead, he criticises this type of analysis, concluding convincingly that: ‘debates over whether modern policing emerged first in Scotland, England or Ireland are futile and pointless given the level of continuity between the old and the new police, and the inherent difficulties in defining and assessing which policing model should be used as a yardstick’ [p. 163].
- 6 *Police in the Age of Improvement* shows how a variety of local studies can be used in concert to trace common themes and set them in a broader context over a significant historical period. Thus, as well as the content of its conclusions, it also offers a model for ongoing research into the connection between police reform and local and national governance in this period. Rather than bring the history of Scottish policing into the ‘mainstream’ of police history, Barrie has performed a more useful task by including

Scotland in a reconstituted historical analysis of the mainstream of urban governance. His conclusions about the nature and extent of the specifically Scottish elements in this development – notably the role of local initiative, the impact of an influential advocacy of the power of civil society, and the extreme variation in local institutions – thus add to our general picture of how policing evolved in Europe as a whole.

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