



Crime, Histoire & Sociétés / Crime, History & Societies

Vol. 6, n°2 | 2002
Varia

Patrick Carroll-Burke, *Colonial Discipline: the Making of the Irish Convict System*

Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2000, pp. 256, ISBN 1-85182-458-8, hb

Mark Finnane



Electronic version

URL: <http://journals.openedition.org/chs/428>
ISSN: 1663-4837

Publisher

Librairie Droz

Printed version

Date of publication: 1 December 2002
Number of pages: 130-131
ISBN: 2-600-00812-8
ISSN: 1422-0857

Electronic reference

Mark Finnane, « Patrick Carroll-Burke, *Colonial Discipline: the Making of the Irish Convict System* », *Crime, Histoire & Sociétés / Crime, History & Societies* [Online], Vol. 6, n°2 | 2002, Online since 19 February 2009, connection on 19 April 2019. URL : <http://journals.openedition.org/chs/428>

This text was automatically generated on 19 April 2019.

© Droz

Patrick Carroll-Burke, *Colonial Discipline: the Making of the Irish Convict System*

Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2000, pp. 256, ISBN 1-85182-458-8, hb

Mark Finnane

REFERENCES

Patrick Carroll-Burke, *Colonial Discipline: the Making of the Irish Convict System*, Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2000, pp. 256, ISBN 1-85182-458-8, hb.

- 1 This challenging book argues that half a century ahead of the date postulated by David Garland (in *Punishment and welfare*, 1985) as the point of emergence of the modern English penal system with its emphasis on individualisation, Ireland already had such a system in place. The reasons, suggests the author, have to do with the colonial character of the government of Ireland. The political context of managing Irish dissent and rebellion demanded at the same time innovation – and the privilege of government in a colonial state was an enabling factor, allowing experiments that were impossible across the Irish Sea.
- 2 Elements of this interpretation are familiar to readers of modern Irish history. The historian Oliver MacDonagh developed an interpretation of nineteenth century Ireland as a ‘social laboratory’, a place where Westminster could experiment with institutions and modes of administration that were impossible in Britain. Carroll-Burke does not adopt MacDonagh’s model explicitly but it lurks in the background of this detailed study of the evolution of the mid-Victorian Irish prison system. He does however draw on MacDonagh’s insightful study of a neglected figure in penal history, Sir Jeremiah Fitzpatrick. Not only was Fitzpatrick appointed an ‘inspector-general of prisons’ in the 1780s – he also developed the art of penal administration as a mode of identifying the individual character of the inmate through the collection of statistics. With this figure

standing at one end of the story and the better known Walter Crofton at the other, Carroll-Burke develops an account of the Irish convict system as a mode ahead of its time, carving out the possibilities of modern penology. The author identifies his subject area as an area that has received little attention elsewhere.

- 3 Is this a persuasive revision? It might be more so if the book developed its themes against a more thorough investigation of the existing literature. Strangely for a book published in 2000 there is no mention of some standard and influential work of the last two decades on English penal history – Radzinowicz and Hood (1986), Weiner (1990), Zedner (1991) Morris and Rothman (1995), McConville (1981 and 1994). The first of these in particular gives a detailed account of the debate between Jebb and Crofton that rightly occupies a good deal of Carroll-Burke's attention (pp. 198-210). Perhaps this indifference to other scholarship has its own unconscious point – after all there is a tendency in the literature of both English and United States social history a tendency to ignore altogether the significance of countervailing example close at home – Ireland finds no entry in the Morris and Rothman collection, nor does Crofton, a striking absence when one takes note of the contemporary salience of the 1860s debate between the latter and Sir Joshua Jebb.
- 4 In spite of the absence of an address to most other recent penal historiography, the book does however establish its ground in now familiar territory, Foucault on one side, Garland another. The demonstration that 50 years before the English language publication of Saleilles' *The individualization of punishment*, there was already in place a significant such mode in Ireland is worthy of note. But this reader at least is left wondering at the end whether there is any more significance to the case than this. Were the Irish innovations influential in other penal systems? Very likely if we read others (eg Waite's 1991 article on Maconochie, Crofton and Brockway in *Criminal Justice History*). But this is a question not pursued by the book. Other linkages are surprisingly overlooked – notably the significance of police surveillance in the management of released on license prisoners (see eg pp. 126-127) as a model for the management of habitual criminals in England. Indeed Carroll-Burke appears altogether to exaggerate the differences between Ireland and England in this respect Ireland being less unique than he claims (see pp. 126, 231).
- 5 A different theme is more persuasively developed in the author's focus on the now familiar Foucauldian theme of the replication of disciplinary modes of governance and self-formation in a great variety of institutions. Chapter 4 especially details this history – looking at its applications not only in schools but in the Irish Catholic training school for priests at Maynooth. With respect to the history of the prison itself the author devotes a good deal of attention to the development in Crofton's Irish system of programs of education aimed at reforming and rehabilitating the prisoner. These are valuable accounts, mining the rich lodes of the blue books with their frequent inquiries into the penal systems, as well as the mid-Victorian periodical literature, and the proceedings of the National Association for the Promotion of Social Science. However those looking for an account of the realities of the Irish prisons and prisoner experience of this system will have to look elsewhere – this is an account based almost wholly on the mid-Victorian official reports and discourses about penalty and discipline, with little attention to the archival record.
- 6 The evidently lengthy gestation of the book probably accounts for some of the unevenness of scholarship and analysis suggested above. This is nevertheless a valuable addition to the growing literature on nineteenth century penalty and its links to the history of other disciplines and institutions. In its focus on the achievements of Walter

Crofton, a figure who loomed larger in his own day than he has in later histories of the Victorian prison system, Carroll-Burke has thrown out a challenge to historians of the English and US prison systems to broaden their own horizons.

AUTHORS

MARK FINNANE

Griffith University, m.finnane@hum.gu.au