

Crime in the Nineteen Hundreds

Professor David Jones was an eminent historian at Swansea University. He died so early at the age of 54. David was an expert on the history of crime and policing.. Here are some extracts from his book “*Crime and Policing in the Twentieth Century—The South Wales Experience*” .

In the early twentieth century, methods of preventing and detecting crime had hardly changed since the 1850s. Beat patrolling by foot was the main policing activity. It had the advantage that, whatever its efficiency, it gave people the security of a regular police presence. The beats varied in size, the largest being in the area of least population....Reynoldston on the Gower peninsula was then by far the largest beat in the county, being eight miles long and five miles broad, with only one constable for 3,000 people. This was ideal territory for the watchful ex - farm labourers in the force. The impression gained from early notebooks is that sergeants and constables on these large rural beats performed the full range of police duties, including the inspection of dog licences and farmers' stock books, but soon learnt which matters were “important” and kept others away from their superiors and the courts. Many days passed before a crime was entered in their brief daily reports.....

In Reynoldston the rural population posed few problems for the local police, who filled in part of every week rounding up stray animals, looking for dog owners, and catching farm labourers and domestic servants cycling home without lights. The classic daily summary in the rural station journals which survived since the 1920s is the entry “all quiet and peaceful”, and in their letters to the

*newspapers the residents of these places boasted,
incorrectly, that the majority of the offences were
committed by gypsies, tramps, visitors and the outsiders.*