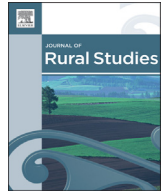


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Exploring the relationship between crime and place in the countryside[☆]

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ABSTRACT

Despite the plethora of research on crime and rurality, relatively little has been written about location in terms of the offender or the victim. This is all the more surprising, given that wider criminological theories, such as routine activity theory, address how and why perpetrators and their victims are drawn to the crime locale, and perceptions of an endangered countryside often assign responsibility to outsider offenders. This contribution draws on the writer's work, between 2002 and 2005, in carrying out the Cornwall Crime Surveys (CCSs) in one rural county of England, to develop an exploratory model of crime and place in the countryside. In terms of both offender and victim, it is argued that location can be viewed in two ways: firstly, the status of offenders and victims in the area; secondly, their reasons for being at the crime scene. Thus victims' status in the area can be described according to whether they are: long term residents; recent arrivals; second home owners; temporary residents, e.g. seasonal workers; or visitors, e.g. holidaymakers or there on business. While their reasons for being at the crime scene may be because it is their home, workplace or a leisure facility. Similarly, offenders' status in the area can be described according to whether they are: long term residents; recent arrivals; temporary residents, e.g. seasonal workers; visitors, e.g. holidaymakers; travelling criminals; or commuter criminals. And their reasons for being at the crime scene may be because it is their home, workplace, or leisure facility, or a location specifically targeted.

This model adds to our understanding of where and why offences are committed in rural areas, fear of crime, and what crime reduction measures might be most effective.

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1. Introduction

Crime is overwhelmingly an urban phenomenon. Rural residents of the U.K. appear to enjoy a higher quality of life than their urban counterparts and crime is also less common there, according to both recorded crime statistics and victim surveys (Aust and Simmons, 2002; Chaplin et al., 2011; Countryside Agency, 2002). These findings of less crime and disorder in the countryside echo those from the U.S. (Duhart, 2000; Truman et al., 2013; Weisheit and Donnermeyer, 2000). Almost exceptionally, Australia provides an example of a country where rural crime rates, particularly for violence and public disorder, are often above average (Hogg and Carrington, 2006), while Canada, with a similar constituency of indigenous poor in remote parts of the country, reports a similar pattern (Lithopoulos and Ruddell, 2011; Ruddell, 2014). The Crime

Survey England and Wales (CSEW) (formerly the British Crime Survey (BCS)) also reveals lower levels of 'fear' of crime in rural areas. Not surprisingly, then, geographers describing the rural idyll incorporate notions of safety and security, a stark contrast to the nemesis of an 'urban nightmare' (J. Jones, 2012; Yarwood, 2005). The relationship between crime and rurality is, nevertheless, a topic of particular interest in England and Wales. The trial and subsequent imprisonment in 2000 of Tony Martin, a farmer who shot two young burglars, generated widespread criticism of crime and policing services in the countryside (Mawby, 2004), one argument being that more isolated locations were particularly vulnerable to crimes like burglary yet were inadequately policed.

It is, moreover, notable that crime patterns vary within rural areas, just as rural areas themselves vary from one another (Marsden et al., 2012). As in cities, offenders are disproportionately drawn from amongst the poor and unemployed, and areas of deprivation are the setting for high levels of crime, as well as being home to large numbers of offenders and victims (Dingwall and

[☆] I am grateful for the suggestions made on an earlier draft by Kreseda Smith.
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Moody, 1999). Equally, within rural areas, towns appear to experience higher levels of crime than villages and smaller settlements, and the CCS demonstrated that rural residents also see their local towns as more dangerous than where they live (Mawby, 2007a, 2012). Other crime generators may include tourism and leisure facilities (Brantingham and Brantingham, 1995; Mawby, 2007b).

However, little emphasis has been placed upon considering whether crimes in rural areas are committed by locals and against local residents. Indeed, there is a common perception among those committed to the rural idyll, that crime in the countryside is committed by outsiders who travel there to offend, thereby threatening the peace and tranquillity of the countryside (Gilling, 2011; Halfacree, 2011). Such an image is presented by Gilling as one of 'an endangered countryside'. But this image is not supported by research evidence. Thus, McElwee, and Smith (2012) claim that:

'Research into rural crime tends to concentrate on the crimes committed and not upon the profile of those committing the crimes. There is a general belief amongst farmers and country people that farm crime is carried out by marauding criminals and vandals from urban areas. Indeed, it is claimed that predatory urban-based criminals frequently plan and perpetuate crimes in rural areas, including those on farms. Likewise, rural communities blame the migration of urban criminals into the countryside for the increase in crime.'

However, McElwee and Smith go on to argue, again with little supporting evidence, that crime is largely committed by local people.

This lack of research interest is surprising. On one level, it can inform theories. Generic criminological theories such as routine activity theory (Felton and Cohen, 1980), that consider how and why perpetrators and their victims are drawn to, or attracted to the crime locale by focussing on the characteristics of offenders, potential victims, and security measures. And theories that explain the relationship between crime and rurality. Thus if understanding rural crime requires understanding factors that make rural life distinct from urban life, and correspondingly understanding changing rural crime patterns requires understanding factors that make rural life today distinct from rural life in the past (Weisheit and Donnermeyer, 2000), a clearer picture of 'travel to offend' patterns is a vital part of this process.

On a different level, more detailed information can inform good practice. For example, criminal justice practitioners can use evidence on whether offenders are local or not to design appropriate crime reduction policies. And local government officials can use evidence of whether newcomers, visitors or other groups experience greater crime risks, and conversely whether locals or outsiders are responsible for crime and disorder, to design policies that address the concerns of both local residents and those who may be deterred from visiting or settling in the countryside.

This paper uses the author's work on the local crime and disorder audits conducted in Cornwall between 2002 and 2005 to speculate on the relationships between offenders, victims and location. However, while the emphasis in McElwee and Smith's (2012) short discussion is on developing a typology of local offenders, the emphasis here is on typologies of offenders and victims, especially those from outwith the rural. Before that, the following two sections describe Cornwall as a rural county and detail the data available from the audits.

2. Cornwall: personifying rural Britain

While there are a multitude of definitions of rurality (see for example: Halfacree, 1993; Yarwood, 2005), three components are regularly cited:

Table 1
Towns in Cornwall with populations in excess of 10,000 and population density.

Main towns		Pop. per 1000 ha	
Caradon	Saltash	0.12	
Carrick	Truro	Falmouth	0.19
Kerrier	Camborne	Redruth	0.19
North Cornwall	Bodmin		0.07
Penwith	Penzance		0.20
Restormel	Newquay	St.Austell	0.21

- Rural areas have been associated with a particular way of life, traditionally typified by Tonnie's concept *gemeinschaft*.
- The industries in such areas were typically rural in nature, primarily centring on agriculture, forestry and fishing.
- There was a low population density, and rural areas were relatively distanced and outside the influence of cities and larger towns.

Clearly, social, economic and technological changes have undermined such distinctions. In a UK context, the size of the country and the spread of communications technologies mean that few areas are truly isolated or remote, physically or culturally, making it markedly different from the situation in, say, Australia (Barclay et al., 2007; Mawby, 2011a) or Canada (Lithopoulos and Ruddell, 2011; Ruddell, 2014). Equally, traditional rural industries have been superseded by, for example, tourism and the service sector, and by the popularity of living in the countryside while commuting to work in nearby towns and cities. As in most industrialised societies, rural areas are defined by government predominantly in terms of density and proximity to urban centres (Bibby and Brindley, 2013; Webster et al., 2006). Bearing these caveats in mind, Cornwall is one of the most rural counties in England, with a low population density and no towns of over 20,000 people. The county is comprised of six districts: Caradon, Carrick, Kerrier, North Cornwall, Penwith and Restormel. It has an overall population of about half a million. It is known to most people as a tourist base, but also suffers high levels of poverty and deprivation. Nevertheless, as the Cornwall County Council website¹ acknowledged:

'Cornwall remains essentially rural in character ... The County contains a wide scatter of small towns and villages, reflecting an economy hitherto largely dependent on farming, fishing and widespread metalliferous mining, and difficulties of terrain and communications which did not favour the growth of urban centres. Only 31%, or just under one third of the population live in towns of over 10,000 inhabitants, compared with four-fifths in England and Wales ... Distance and the cost of travel mean that the larger cities of Exeter and Plymouth have less influence than might otherwise be the case.'

'At the other end of the scale, a little over a fifth of the population live in rural areas and smaller settlements of less than 1000. A further fifth live in villages of between 1000 and 2000 and just over a quarter live in the larger villages and smaller towns with populations between 2000 and 10,000.'

This latter point is reiterated in replies to the 2004 Cornwall Crime Survey (CCS). Asked to say what best described the area where they lived, only 16.8% of respondents said they lived in a large town. In contrast, 35.7% said they lived in a small town, 37.1% a village, and 10.4% in a relatively isolated area.

As Table 1 indicates, only nine towns in Cornwall have populations in excess of 10,000 and three districts have only one such town. The only sizeable city in the vicinity is Plymouth (with a

¹ This and other quotes taken from www.cornwall.gov.uk/business/economy/corn1.htm.

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