

Half a Century of Challenging Crime: The Cambridge Institute of Criminology Celebrates its 50th Anniversary

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On 24 September 2009 an 800 years old mother celebrated the 50th birthday of one of her children. Surprisingly, this exceptional event was not mentioned in the headlines of the newspapers. The reason was that it did not happen in a real family but in quiet academia. In 2009 Cambridge University celebrated its 800th Anniversary and by coincidence it also commemorated the 50th birthday of the Institute of Criminology in the same year.

Founded by Sir Leon Radzinowicz in 1959, the Institute of Criminology at Cambridge University was the first criminological institute in Britain. Over the last five decades the Institute has gained a worldwide reputation for excellence in criminological research and teaching. Its foundation marked the starting point of the successful academic and professional development of criminology in Britain that is shown by numerous institutions, people and – of course – the BSC. The Cambridge Institute is also home to the Radzinowicz Library, which is one of the world's most comprehensive research libraries in criminology. In 2004 the Institute moved to its current, purpose-built, modern building next to the Law Faculty.

These and many other positive developments over time were reviewed when the Institute celebrated its 50th Anniversary in autumn 2009. Just in time, a richly illustrated book 'Challenging Crime - A Portrait of the Cambridge Institute of Criminology' was published by Third Millennium Publishers (London). The book was launched at the 50th Anniversary Conference of the Institute which took place on 24 September 2009. The conference was hosted at the Faculty of Law and welcomed around 300 friends, alumni, former staff, colleagues and associates of the Institute.

The Vice Chancellor of the University, Professor Alison Richard, opened the event, followed by words of welcome from the Institute Director, Professor Friedrich Lösel and the Chair of the Law Faculty Board, Professor David Ibbetson. The three speakers illustrated the Institute's successful development over the last 50 years and some of its characteristics such as interdisciplinarity, internationality in staff and students and balance between basic and applied/policy-oriented research.

Professor Roger Hood, formerly Director of the Centre for Criminological Research and now Emeritus Professor of Criminology at Oxford University, and distinguished alumnus of the Institute, gave the opening address on the history of the Institute, and reflected on the achievements and life of its founder, Sir Leon Radinowicz.



Then academic staff of the Institute spoke on research that is currently being undertaken. This was presented in three main topic areas:

The first session 'Policing, Imprisonment and Legitimacy' began with a talk on 'Evidence-based policing around the world' from the Wolfson Professor of Criminology and Director of the Institute's Jerry Lee Centre of Experimental Criminology, Lawrence Sherman. This was followed by Professor Alison Lieblich, Director of the Prisons Research Centre, speaking on 'How legitimacy works in prison'. Then Dr. Adrian Grounds, Senior Lecturer in Forensic Psychiatry analyzed 'The effects of wrongful conviction and imprisonment'. Professor Andrew von Hirsch, Director of the Institute's Centre for Penal Theory and Penal Ethics, discussed the presentations from his perspective as a penal theorist and lawyer.

The session 'Early Prevention and Offender Treatment' commenced with a lecture on the 'Effectiveness of early prevention of delinquency' by Professor David Farrington OBE, Director of the world-famous Cambridge Study in Delinquent Development. This was followed by a presentation from Professor Friedrich Lösel on 'What works in offender treatment and programme accreditation'. Professor Manuel Eisner, Deputy Director of the Institute, closed the session with a talk on 'Bias due to conflict of interest: a cause for concern in criminological evaluation research'. Professor Roy King, Director of the Applied Criminology, Penology and Management Programme discussed the presentations as an expert in prison research and practice.

The final session 'Crime and the Community' opened with a lecture on 'Why young people commit crime' by Professor Per-Olof Wikström, Director of the PADS+ Research Centre in the Institute. Professor Sir Anthony Bottoms, Emeritus Wolfson Professor and former Director of the Institute spoke on 'Desistance and diachronic self-control', and Dr Loraine Gelsthorpe, Reader in Criminology and Criminal Justice, brought the presentation of current research to a close with a talk on 'The promise and pitfalls of some recent developments regarding women offenders and community provision'. Professor Susanne Karstedt, Professor of Criminology and Criminal Justice at the University of Leeds and external examiner at the Institute commented on the presentations from the perspective of a researcher with an European background.

Chief Government Social Researcher, Chief Scientific Advisor to the Home Office and distinguished alumnus of the Institute, Professor Paul Wiles, was the final speaker at the conference. He talked on the often uneasy relationship between 'Criminology and Crime Policy'.

The presentations drew not only a colourful picture of the Institute's past and current research, but on wider topics of Criminology. This was also reflected in the general discussions which - to no surprise - should have deserved more time. However, by the evening of this great day time was running out and most conference participants moved across Sidwick Avenue to attend the 50th Anniversary Dinner at Newnham College.

Numerous conversations during the day and at the dinner indicated that British criminologists - who may sometimes be the Institute's competitors for grants or excellent students - agreed upon the pioneering role of its 'older brother' at Cambridge. This role was also acknowledged by BSC representatives Dr. Kate Williams and Dr. Anne Brunton who attended the event at Cambridge. In sum, the Anniversary indicated that British criminology has achieved a strong international standing. This unifying experience is more important than a few differences in theory or methodology within the criminological family. For a small discipline it is essential to stay together in difficult times of higher education when there is no large umbrella in heavy rain.