



Poverty and Prostitution ; A Study of Victorian Prostitutes in York

Frances Finnegan

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Poverty and Prostitution is a study of 1,400 prostitutes and brothel-keepers operating in a Victorian cathedral city over a half century. It is based on the unique and systematic use of detailed evidence from such sources as the weekly newspaper reports of magistrates' court proceedings, workhouse records, Quarter Sessions Lists and material relating to the local refuge for 'Fallen Women'. The book also draws on the city's wealth of slum clearance records and on the evidence from the census enumerators' notebooks. Dr Finnegan examines the social and geographical origins of the prostitutes and their associates. The conclusions reached challenge existing interpretations of the subject and show that far from being a healthy and comparatively harmless activity which could be abandoned with ease, the Victorian street-walker's career was generally tragic and brief, overshadowed by poverty and characterized throughout by desperation, drunkenness, frequent prison sentences and disease. In addition to considering York's recorded prostitute community as a whole, the book is illustrated throughout with the histories of individual women, and contains fascinating photographic material.

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