



The Good Old Days: Crime, Murder and Mayhem in Victorian London

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From Reader Review The Good Old Days: Crime, Murder and Mayhem in Victorian London for online ebook

Ren says

Author and historian Gilda O'Neill, well-known for her social history books exploring the changing face of London's East End, examines the problems that plagued the "good old days" of the Victorian era, using the thesis that problems of the present day really aren't all that different from the past, and the past is far less rosy than memory and glorified history would have us believe.

Despite a perception of the Victorian age as a kind of golden era of prosperity and safety from a societal sense, bolstered by its developments in technology and advancements towards modernity, O'Neill argues that it was actually a time of extremes, leading many sections of the population to turn to crime in order to survive. She's remarkably effective in drawing parallels with the world of Victorian vice and modern society, and meticulous about providing examples to illustrate her points. I particularly liked her debunking of blaming video games for violence in modern youth, a tired old argument we've been hearing my entire lifetime and probably longer. But learn enough about history and it turns out that nothing is really new, the details and circumstances change but the core of human nature, especially in conditions of social shifts and poverty, doesn't change too much.

Chapters are divided by vice, and look at problems like drug and alcohol dependency, crimes involving children and child abuse, murder, prostitution, common street crime like petty theft, and perhaps most intriguingly the section on cons, fraud and psychic crime. O'Neill presents cases that sparked public interest and exemplified social issues of the day. And of course, no book on Victorian criminal history in London, especially with its heavy focus on the East End, would be complete without a chapter devoted to Jack the Ripper. Historical episodes and explanations of specific crimes and cases are interspersed with the author's own familial background and their experiences in various colorful London jobs.

As interesting as the subject material is, I didn't enjoy the structure - the author presents a fairly good argument then inserts a big chunk of source to back it up, making it read more like an academic dissertation than a well-told history or work of narrative nonfiction. Long sections of the text are direct quotes from other sources that seem like they'd be more effective if woven into the narrative instead of extracted and used verbatim.

And sometimes the individual episodes didn't go into enough detail, they seemed to be over before I'd found out all I wanted to know. But that can be a positive: it's a quick read so serves as a solid introduction to the history of crime in the era and a jumping off point for additional topics of interest.

I absolutely loved her somewhat cynical assessment that, just like in the present day, if you were healthy, wealthy, and male, things would probably work out just fine; but if you were any combination of the opposites of those three things, you face a much tougher time. Some things never change.

I received an advance copy of the new ebook edition in exchange for review.

Bettye McKee says

A portrait of life in Victorian London

The author has made a comparison of the "good old days" of the Victorian era with the present day.

The book provides a comprehensive look at life in Victorian London. Many subjects are covered including crime and punishment, the crushing poverty of the lowest classes, education, employment, disease, sanitation, inequality and others.

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Senator says

Great info, very edifying. little dry.

Kareemah says

A handy book to chuck at anyone moaning about how good it was in some previous time period.

Kris says

A decent read

This book makes the case that our "back in the good old days" dreams are misguided and misinformed. We cover crimes and punishment, vices and living conditions during the Victorian era. Quite eye opening and shocking. The only critique I have to offer is that the author sprinkles this fairly extended essay piece with "my mother" or "my aunt" or "people like me". I feel this is out of place and takes away from the rather clinical tone of the rest of the piece.

MR B P HUGHES says

Enjoyed this book

Its a decent read about the difficulties of life for the majority in the Victorian times. Life and existence was hard and serious divisions existed

Marsha says

An actual view of the horrible Victorian time! You thought we had it bad now; it doesn't begin to compare!

J says

A great read

A very well thought out and put together book which draws back the curtain on the so called Victorian values so beloved by certain elements of society today. The author sets out to parallel shock headlines of recent years with those same headlines in the good old days. The same features of drugs, gangs and "foreigners" so beloved of elements of today's press also excited the Victorian press. A very good, well researched book which should appeal to anyone with half an interest in London of the Victorian age.

Mrs Olga A Danes-Volkov says

One of the best books I have read this year

For people interested in social history, this is an unforgettable read. Beautifully written, it covers many aspects of Victorian life exposing the fallacy that except for the fortunate middle echelons of society, it was very far from the good old days. Whatever the shortcomings of the present day, we have so very much to be grateful for.

Doghouse Gav says

Well written

A very well written book. I have read many of this kind and although it was much the same as the rest it is still worth a go.

Susan says

Was the Victorian period really so good, was it so much better than the present day Britain. If you think so read about the East End of London in Victoria's day - the problems, the crime, the poverty.

I probably would have preferred that the information that was obtained from that era was actually incorporated into her text rather than as separate sections in the chapters.

But still an interesting read especially if you are interested in social history.

A NetGalley Book.

Les Wilson says

For myself and most of my generation, the good old days doesn't refer to the Victorian period; we refer to the

post war years. This was a time when neighbours were neighbourly, children were grateful for what they were given, and we're not bored a few days into the school holidays. The words Please and Thank you were in use, bank tillers could do maths without the need of a calculator. Also for me, food tasted better even if there wasn't much of it.

Eileen Hall says

This fascinating book tells you all you didn't know about life on the streets of Victorian London. Great read and highly recommended.

I was given a digital copy of this book by the publisher Endeavour via Netgalley in return for an honest unbiased review.

Diana Apperley says

Just goes to show things have never really been that great. Is all a facade!

Kristine says

The Good Old Days: Crime, Murder and Mayhem in Victorian London by Gilda O'Neill is a free NetGalley ebook that I read in mid-December.

Where other Victorian retrospectives glaze over grime, disease, gang violence, fraud, unusual punishment, and an income/achievement gap in favor of fond memories of social advances and prosperity, O'Neill embraces all of these topics with gusto and an bubbly storytelling narrative style.
