

The background of the cover is a high-contrast, black and white photograph. It shows the silhouettes of five people walking across a rough, textured surface, possibly a wall or a large piece of stone. The figures are dark against the lighter, grainy background. The lighting creates long, dark shadows that stretch across the surface, suggesting a low sun position. The overall mood is somber and mysterious.

**THE  
CONTEMPORARY  
HISTORY OF  
DRUG-BASED  
ORGANISED CRIME  
IN SCOTLAND**

Robert McLean  
Chris Holligan  
Michael Pugh

THE CONTEMPORARY HISTORY  
OF DRUG-BASED ORGANISED  
CRIME IN SCOTLAND

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# THE CONTEMPORARY HISTORY OF DRUG-BASED ORGANISED CRIME IN SCOTLAND

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INVESTOR IN PEOPLE

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*Michael Pugh*

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## PROLOGUE: THE APPLEROW ATROCITY

On a chilly Wednesday afternoon, shortly before 2:12 p.m. on 6 December 2006, a blue Mazda car, registration S733ESF, was captured on CCTV parked outside the Applerow Motors MOT garage in Glasgow's Lambhill Estate. The garage is a family run business, owned by David Lyons, brother of Eddie Lyons senior, known figurehead of the Lyons crime family, based in Milton, Glasgow. Stepping out from the Mazda, two men disguised with 'old man' masks and trench coats, later identified as Raymond 'Rainbow' Anderson, then 45, and James Scott McDonald, then 33, proceeded to enter the garage forecourt, armed with military grade firearms, as the workers inside went about their business of testing and repairing motor vehicles (Scottish Courts & Tribunals, 2022, p. 6). It is believed that Raymond's son, Junior, was also present during the time of the incident, as the driver of the Mazda, though charges against him were dropped at the subsequent court trail. Among those working inside the garage were David Lyons, his son Mark and his nephew Michael Lyons Junior. David's nephew, Steven Lyons, accompanied by his friend, Robert 'Piggy' Pickett, the gunmen's intended targets, were also present. Steven's vehicle, a Ford Focus, was booked in to be serviced that day.

David Lyons was first to spot the masked pair. He called out a warning to the others inside. His nephew, Michael Junior, took heed and attempted to flee; however, one of the gunmen would fatally wound him with a single shot through the chest (Scottish Courts & Tribunals, 2022). Steven Lyons, at the time of his uncle's warning call, was seated in his vehicle. Steven instinctively slammed on the accelerator as a bullet shattered the Focus's rear window. Having nowhere to go, the vehicle struck the metal perimeter fence, bringing it to a halt. A second bullet was then fired, superficially striking Steven on the back. A third, and final shot in his direction, would result in a bullet passing through his leg, breaking it in two in the process, as he attempted to flee from the smashed vehicle for more adequate cover (Findlay, 2012a). Pickett was less lucky than Steven and received considerably worse injuries. As the masked pair entered the garage, Pickett had been standing outside the vehicle. Trapped inside the small unit, he was an easy target. Soon, Pickett was shot twice in the back, before one of the gunmen pumped a third bullet into his abdomen from

close range, only two feet away (Findlay, 2012a, p. 88). The gunmen then proceeded to run back to the Mazda car, get in and drive off. The car was found two days later on Friday, 8th December 2006, abandoned in Vaila Street, Cadder, a short distance from the *locus*, having been set alight and burned out. The attack took all of three minutes. By 2:15 p.m., two men lay critically ill, while a third, Michael Junior, was dead (Scottish Courts & Tribunals, 2011).

## INTRODUCTION

Although it reads as a storyline straight from a Hollywood movie script, the Applerow incident hammered home to the Scottish Government, Police Scotland and other stakeholders involved in the country's criminal justice apparatus, the stark reality of, and serious threat posed by, drug-based organised crime in Scotland. For a variety of reasons, extending to multiple facets of society, prior to the 'Applerow massacre', Scotland's illicit drugs trade had grown exponentially in just over 10 years. Any strategic response from those in positions of power tended to be laissez faire, ad hoc and operationalised in a desultory fashion. As a result, the illicit drug market grew almost unchecked (Deuchar et al., 2021). While drug harms had skyrocketed since the heroin boom, in the late 80s, as did ensuing violence, since the mid-90s, the government had been all too aware that the US federal 'war on drugs', initiated under the Nixon administration in 1971, had proven a costly and highly criticised disaster in the States. Halting the drugs trade in Scotland, given it was driven by socio-economic supply-demand processes, characterised by a multiplicity of persistent and intersecting factors, would prove extremely difficult.

Attempting to tackle gun violence directly related to drug-based organised crime at its root could prove a beartrap for any political party willing to accept the challenge. The Applerow shootings, however, signalled an escalation in violence associated with drug-based organised crime in the city. The incident drew considerable attention from newspapers, printing numerous back-to-back stories, uncovering the true extent, and fearful grip that drug-based organised crime had on Scotland's west coast. This movement to report on drug-based organised crime was spearheaded by then investigative journalist, turned Conservative MSP (2021–), Russell Findlay. Findlay's centre spread '*would you let this man look after your children?*', for the Daily Record, shed

light on the growing feud between criminal fraternities in Northern Glasgow, namely the Lyons and Daniels crime families (2012a). The piece named key actors, and listing a series of tit-for-tat assaults, stabbings and shootings that had occurred with increasing frequency on the streets of Glasgow, prior to Applerow, highlighting a marked increase in danger to the wider public [Eddie Lyons Senior, who ran a criminogenic youth club, discussed in chapter 6].

Related campaigns from community groups and partnerships had long recognised, and now sought to expose, the ever-increasing threats an illicit drugs market posed to wider public safety, while contributing to the sustained erosion of community life. The Glasgow public, as voiced by SNP councillor (Canal Ward) Billy McAllister, who had been elected in 2006 on the pledge of bringing drug-based organised crime to the attention of the Scottish Parliament at Holyrood and the UK Parliament at Westminster, had had enough. He demanded an effective government response to a worsening crisis (UK Parliament, 2006). McAllister was subsequently given bodyguards for his own protection, after a £50,000 contract was put on his head for speaking out publicly. In less than 6 months, in May 2007, the Scottish National Party (SNP) replaced Scottish Labour at the helm of Scotland's devolved government. Alex Salmond would replace Labour's Jack McConnell as Scotland's First Minister. Eager to make an impact, perhaps an overzealous SNP, publicly acknowledged the problem and within a year published *'The Road to Recovery: A New Approach to Tackling Scotland's Drug Problem'*, indicating a desire to create a 'drug free Scotland' within 10 years (Scottish government, 2008). While overblown, this statement of intent had been supported by earlier action. In October 2007, the country's first dedicated Serious Organised Crime Taskforce (SOCT) came into being. Its purpose: to eradicate the illegal drugs trade flourishing in the country. In an era of continued adherence to new public management principles, focusing on performance measurement, the SOCT was a bold, yet potentially risky, declaration. Yet, supported by an intelligible strategic overview, as indicated in subsequent government publications in 2009, 2015 and 2016, and the creation of an Anglo-Welsh counterpart in 2013, in the form of the National Crime Agency (NCA), it was a welcomed addition, as a tool at Police Scotland's disposal to address the growing menace that is drug-based organised crime (NCA, 2013; Scottish government, 2009, 2015, 2016).

Before the year 2000 and a United Nations conference – The Palermo Convention (2000), which followed that same year – the term 'organised crime' was rarely, if ever, used by politicians or law enforcement in the European context. When the term was used, it was typically without any degree of agreed consensus, consistency or background. The same proved even

truer in the UK context where law enforcement had not even considered the possibility of organised crime as a plausible phenomenon on British shores. Organised crime was a US concept, particular to the States and affiliated with Mafia organisations with international ties, with preindustrial origins rooted the Sicilian Cosa Nostra, thus ultimately alien to Britain. In the United Kingdom, criminals operated, somewhat strictly, in illicit markets, and utilised specialist skill sets, for typically acquiring financial rewards, and as such were simply deemed ‘professional criminals’ (Von Lampe, 2016). The term professional was used as an adjective indicating a skill set honed by experienced criminals. The term was also applied at the individual level, neglecting differences when situated within the group context. Before the late 1980s, professional criminals were almost exclusively involved in predatory-based crimes: characterised as loosely coordinated, yet planned, attacks which occurred in short, intense, durations (McLean, 2019a, 2019b, 2019c). This included activities like armed robbery, kidnap/ransom, bank robberies, safe cracking and jewellery heists. The Great Train robbery, involving the now infamous professional criminal Ronnie Briggs, embodies the point eloquently (Hobbs & Antonopoulos, 2013).

The Palermo Convention, launched by US think tanks, resulted in the extrapolation of not only the term organised crime but also to its adoption as an analytical lens and policy preoccupation globally. The United States would prompt nations who signed the Convention to accept organised crime as a very real concept, permeating their national borders. Since the 1980s and 1990s, the end of the Cold War, coinciding with strategic free market policies, had helped accelerate the capitalisation of the global economy. Subsequently, as the legitimate international market expanded across the globe, with trade increasing, and profits surging, the illegal market mirrored this success. Consequently, market-based crime largely replaced predatory-based criminality; more so given post-war advances in technology, the implementation of methodical transportation systems, the professionalisation of security and the digitalisation of money, which simultaneously impacted upon the success rates of predatory-based criminality. The drug trade was one such market. Following the ebb and flow of the cannabis and cocaine trade, the heroin boom in the late 1980s had a particularly devastating effect on communities, especially traditionally working-class ones, UK-wide, as detailed by Wagstaff and Maynard’s (1988) report on drug consumption and policy. The west coast of Scotland, with its disproportionately working-class population, would be significantly affected by this.

By 2010, professional criminals in Scotland had almost entirely halted predatory criminal activity and switched to drug-based organised crime. This

transition reflected converging variables operating at transnational, national and regional levels. In collaboration with Police Scotland (Scotland's merged national force founded in 2013), the devolved Scottish Government published its plan for addressing the problem: *Scotland's Serious Organised Crime Strategy*. The report indicated that by 2015 drug supply accounted for over 70% of the countries professional crime directly and around 20% indirectly (Scottish government, 2015, p. 6). Drug supply had come to dominate the landscape of Scotland's criminal underworld. Since then, annual updates continue to indicate the most sophisticated and dangerous criminal groups to be involved, almost exclusively, in drug supply and, as a consequence, the procurement, and use, of firearms as a source of conflict resolution. This book's purpose therefore is to provide an overview and insight into the contemporary historical shift in which professional criminals in Scotland moved towards operating disproportionately in drug-based organised crime. The book identifies the break with traditional forms of professional crime and signifies those points of change in behaviour towards the unified professionalisation of organised criminal gangs dealing exclusively in drug-based crime.

In Scotland, like much of the United Kingdom, organised crime has come to predominantly express itself through the supply and distribution of drugs. Therefore, the book concentrates mainly on drug markets. While Edinburgh is Scotland's capital, Glasgow is in many ways its heart. As late as the 1980s, the city's metropolis homed over half of the country's population; as such, it is the ideal location for historical criminology research. It is here that Scotland's sectarian division frequently spilled over, that the infamous razor gangs emerged and that the nation's higher echelons of organised criminality tend to operate from. Thus, this contemporary history of drug-related organised crime in Scotland begins in Glasgow. While drug supply has gone on in various forms and guises since the late 19th century, it was only since the heroin boom in the 1980s that supply and consumption became widespread and consequently spilled over into a highly publicised 'war'. This war centred on the control and monopolisation of a blossoming drugs market. For this reason, the book focuses on the contemporary history only, but please note this term 'contemporary' is used loosely but relates to a time frame covering the past half century or so. This is why the book opened with an infamous incident which brought considerable public attention and demand for police and political intervention to tackle the growing issue of organised criminality involved in drug supply.

## METHODOLOGY

In seeking to trace the shift in criminal enterprise in Scotland moving from traditional types of professional crime, such as racketeering and robbery, to criminality rooted in market processes, i.e. the illegal drugs trade, the book utilised both primary and secondary sources of data. The data for this research are largely derived from multiple sources. The bulk of the dataset used for this book originates from four independent research projects which were carried out by Robert McLean between 2012 and 2023. Thus, it is important to shed some light on the background of such research given it spans over a decade and has resulted in over 50 book, report and journal publications on the topic.

The first research project comprised data gathered from ethnographic fieldwork conducted between 2012 and 2017 as part of the Robert's PhD researching group organisation and criminal trajectories (McLean, 2018, 2019a, 2019b, 2019c). The second dataset derives from collaborative research conducted between 2017 and 2019 (McLean et al., 2019). Both studies were approved by the authors' home institution: University of the West of Scotland. The third dataset was carried out as part of group research looking at the changing landscape of youth offending in Scotland (Deuchar et al., 2021). This was conducted between 2020 and 2022. Much of the fieldwork was conducted on Glasgow's Southside and in neighbouring towns, villages and suburbs, including but by no means limited to, Barrhead, Busby, Clarkston, Giffnock, Johnstone, Linwood, Paisley, Renfrew and Thornliebank. These areas form a continuous urban expanse with the city of Glasgow. However, the second study also sought to widen the geographical scope and included fieldwork in Inverclyde, and West and South Ayrshire, as well as some limited, yet fruitful interviews from participants across the Central Belt, in the city of Edinburgh, the Highlands, and Stornoway on the Isle of Lewis. Such participants tended to be accessed through gatekeepers from the original sample in the West Coast.

Participant criteria for the first project was set as: (a) having participated in group offending, (b) having engaged in criminal behaviour defined by Police Scotland as organised crime (Scottish Government, 2015) and (c) being over 16 years of age. Participants were initially accessed via faith-based organisations, whereby outreach workers and community volunteers acted as gatekeepers. A combined purposive and snowball sampling strategy yielded 40 interviewees, primarily indigenous Caucasian males, aged from 14 to their mid-40s. Qualitative interviews typically lasted anywhere from 30 minutes to 1 hour and were one-on-one (except for two group interviews). All interviews were audio recorded, selectively transcribed and analysed thematically. The second dataset comes from a follow-up study carried out between 2017 and 2019.

A number of promising leads remained from the first study as potential interviewees had been excluded from participating owing to time constraints or the original research inclusion criteria. Therefore, this prompted a second study to be initiated free from the pressure of PhD deadlines and with more inclusive entry criteria. Participants had to (a) be, or have experience of being, involved in what Police Scotland identify as serious and organised criminal activity or (b) be involved in agencies seeking to reduce organised crime harms or (c) have been significantly affected by organised crime. In addition to outstanding leads, several charitable organisations working with (ex) offenders seeking to disengage from gangs and desist from crime were also contacted. A similar combined approach of purposive and snowball sampling yielded a second sample of 43 interviewees aged 14–60 years. 30 interviewees were offenders, eight of whom were female. All but three male participants identified as Scottish, although not all were White or Caucasian. Participants were typically interviewed in small groups of between two and five. Five practitioners with intimate knowledge of the local drugs scene and eight local residents (seven males and one female) with histories of being shaped by the voices of actors ‘situated’ within Scotland’s illegal drugs market, not those who seek to influence the market externally, such as law enforcement (McLean, 2019a, 2019b, 2019c).

The third dataset which contributes to data within this thesis was from independent research conducted from 2020 to 2022. Approval was granted by the University West of Scotland. The research sought to explore the changing landscape of youth and gang violence in Scotland. Both group and individual interviews were conducted in face-to-face settings and then later in an online context in accordance with the COVID-19 pandemic regulations. This produced an overall sample size of 75 participants. Interviews were conducted with 36 practitioners, including police officers, No Knives Better Lives voluntary workers, social workers and youth workers with ‘Youth Point Arbourlour’ and Scotland’s Violence Reduction Team. In addition, 39 (ex) offenders were interviewed. The term offender here applies to any individual who has had formal systems contact due to antisocial, delinquent and/or criminal behaviour. A workable definition was applied in this respect, to account for the fact that this sample group also included children and young people ranging from 13 to 20 years of age.

In addition, as part of the current book, ethical approval was also granted by Strathclyde University to conduct further interviews, this time exclusively within an online setting, with individuals who had prior direct and/or indirect experience with consequences resulting from drug-based organised crime. This included a total of six interviews shaped by an oral historical framework.

Lynn Abrams (2010), in her book *Oral History Theory*, describes oral interviews as a methodological approach ‘recording [the] speech of people with something interesting to say and then analysing their memories of the past’. While oral historians argue the recording of verbal history to be of significant importance, in that it not only capture physical ‘facts’ about events which took place, but more often than not, captures psychological facts, in that while discrepancies may emerge about the physicality of events, nonetheless such discussions are factual to the source discussing them, thus rendering them ‘facts’ (Peniston-Bird, 2008, p. 104).

Three of the six oral interviews carried out had been notable individuals involved in the criminal underworld during the 1990s. As such, they were well positioned to offer invaluable insights into sensitive topics and issues related to various events in Paisley between 1986 and 1999. These actors had previously been interviewed by the researcher as part of the prior research sample for the study conducted between 2017 and 2019. The other three interviewees had informal involvement or knowledge of criminal activity across Paisley and Glasgow. One in particular shared loose kinship with the Daniels crime family, and loose friendship with the Lyons crime family, in northern Glasgow. Interviews were recorded verbatim, before being paraphrased. This was carried out in accordance with the wishes of the interviewees due to the fear of persecution by law enforcement or retaliation by underworld figures. As such, all names, along with some details of notable dates and incidents, have been changed in order to retain participant anonymity. Additional sources of data were used to contextualise and clarify much of the oral testimony.

In accordance with practices outlined by Strathclyde University, a range of archival sources were used to provide wider background to the research topic. This included accessing several corresponding prison letters and an affidavit from key actors operating at the higher echelons of drug-based organised crime in Scotland. Letters were obtained via third-party agents. These contained insightful information written first-hand by those involved in the distribution of drugs into South Glasgow and Renfrewshire communities during the 1990s. In addition, a single partially completed diary (in several volumes) was also obtained and accessed, again via a third-party agent. The diaries contained insightful information on several events centring on the illegal supply of drugs in the Glasgow conurbation in the early 2000s. The diaries belonged to an indirect actor involved in an ongoing drug-related dispute between two notable crime families. Other sources of data were accessed via media content analysis, and the searching of key databases for public records, such as National Records Scotland, and Scottish Courts and Tribunals, as well as published reports and statistical information from HM (UK) Government,

the Scottish Government, NGO reports, the UK Home Office and Police websites/webpages. Other information was obtained via a review of academic and scholarly journals, including the *Scottish Law Journal*, in an effort to gather coverage of key cases.

Researching organised crime is difficult, and direct observations can of course be risky, while infiltration of willing participants involved in such activities can also be complicated – practically as well as ethically (Windle, 2013). Autobiographies use an insider's voice and can prove an important tool for gathering what would otherwise be inaccessible information. This is particularly true when autobiographies are patchworked with other data sources in order to plug gaps in knowledge. Despite being utilised in a number of studies on organised crime (Hobbs, 2013) and terrorism (Shapiro & Siegel, 2012), Morselli (2003) argues autobiographies are nonetheless all too often overlooked and thus remain an underused source. Indeed, Ken Plummer (2001) argues that autobiographies should not be seen strictly as objective accounts, but when used as sources of supplementary information, they can prove invaluable. Using such a methodology to recount the events of 'the Essex Boys' murders, Criminologist James Windle (2013) stresses the need to 'investigate' and 'validate' accounts utilising alternative sources.

Autobiographies were used here both to fill knowledge gaps and validate participant accounts. This method proved useful when coupled with insider knowledge of recorded events. This included autobiographies of gangland enforcer, turned publisher, Paul Ferris, often co-authored by the late Reg McKay. The author(s) compiled four books in total: *Ferris Conspiracies* (Ferris & McKay, 2001), *Vendetta* (Ferris, 2005), *Villains* (Ferris & McKay, 2010) and *Deadly Divisions* (Ferris & McKay, 2002). Additional McKay autobiographies which were also used, although to a lesser extent, included *The Last Godfather* (McKay, 2007), *McGrew* (McKay, 2010), *Murder Capital* (McKay, 2006) and *Armed Candy* (McKay, 2002). *Armed Candy* in particular was written using a series of pseudonyms and thus could only be deciphered with insider accounts to compare and check against. It was useful as it discussed the activities of the now-deceased Stuart Boyd, who played a pivotal role in the criminal underworld in the late 1980s and 1990s. In addition to McKay's publications, former investigative journalist and organised crime fighter, Russell Findlay MSP's publications *The Iceman*, *Caught in the Crossfire* and *Acid Attack* are also used (Findlay, 2008, 2012, 2018, respectively). The latter book was written and published as a result of a coordinated acid attack on Findlay by those involved in organised crime for published investigative pieces on their activities. While there remain a number of questions regarding validity surrounding the use of autobiographical information,