

Punishing The Dead?

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What can we learn from suicide, that most personal and often inscrutable of acts? This strikingly original work shows how, from treatment of suicides in historic Britain, unique insights can be gained into the development of both social and political relationships and cultural attitudes in a period of profound change. Drawing ideas from a range of disciplines including law, philosophy, the social sciences, and literary studies as well as history, the book comprehensively analyses how successful and attempted suicide was viewed by the living and how they dealt with its aftermath, using a wide variety of legal, fiscal, and literary sources. By investigating the distinctive institutional environments and mental worlds of early modern England and Scotland, it explains why suicide was treated as a crime subject to financial and corporal punishments, and it questions modern assumptions about the apparent 'enlightenment' of attitudes in the eighteenth century. The book is divided into two parts. Part one examines the role of lordship in managing social and economic relationships following suicide and illuminates the importance of distinctive punishments inflicted on suicides' bodies for understanding historic communities. The second part of the book places suicide in its cultural context, analysing the attitudes of early modern people to those who killed themselves. It explores religious beliefs and the place of the devil as well as secular and medical understandings of suicide's causes in sources that include provincial newspapers. Informed by continental as well as British research, *Punishing the Dead?* explicitly compares England and Scotland, making this a completely British history. It also offers intriguing evidence for the importance of cultural regions and local vernaculars. EAN/ISBN : 9780191585128 Publisher(s): Oxford University Press Format: ePub/PDF Author(s): Houston, R. A.

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