

Are You More Likely to be Murdered in Your Beds than in Medieval Times?

By ROBERT BARTLETT

The Home Office publish the annual homicide figures to which they add a summary encapsulating, in a few short paragraphs, all the horror and distress caused by the loss of so many lives. We live in violent times; maybe but was the threat of murder far worse for our ancestors?

Main Points Homicide in the Year ending March 2015 in England and Wales

The Homicide Index showed there were 518 homicides (murder, manslaughter and infanticide) representing a decrease of 5 offences (1%) from the 523 recorded for the previous year.

- Over recent years, the number of currently recorded homicides has shown a general downward trend and the number at 518 the lowest since 1983 (482).
- There were 9.0 offences of homicide per million of the population (0.9 per 100,000). As in previous years, children under 1 year old had the highest rate of homicide (35.8 offences per million population) compared with other age groups, the highest since year ending March 2004 (42.8).
- With the exception of those aged under 1-year, adults generally had higher incidence rates of being a victim of homicide than children.

For children aged 1 or over, homicide rates were higher for 1 to 4 year olds (4 per million or 0.4 per 100,000) than for 5 to 15 year olds (2 per million 0.2 per 100,000).

- Just less than two-thirds of homicide victims (64%) were male, the lowest since 1996 (64%).
- There were differences between males and females in the pattern of relationships between victims and suspects. **Women were far more likely than men to be killed by partners/ex-partners** (44% of female victims compared with 6% of male victims), and **men** were more likely than women to be **killed by friends/ acquaintances** (32% of male victims compared with 8% of female victims).
- There were **54 homicide victims aged under 16 years**. Three-fifths of these victims were killed by a parent or step-parent (60%, or 31 offences).
- The most **common method of killing continued to be by knife** or other sharp instrument with 186 victims killed in this way, accounting for over 1 in 3 (36%) homicides.
- **Killed by shooting** were 21 homicide victims (4% of the total) 8 fewer than the previous year and the lowest number since 1980 (19 homicides).

When comparing statistical evidence in this case one thing is obvious and certain. The population is now far greater than it was and whereas the measure for crimes within the community was based on numbers per 100,000 they are now measured against crimes per million. Yet the murder rate 1780-1800 is the same at 0.9 cases per 100,000 of the population as 2015.

Collecting and interpreting crime figures is and never has been an exact science given the way they are collected and changes made to practices and procedures over the generations. Crime figures from long ago probably like statistics need to be treated guardedly and in this case seen as indicators of trends.

The Population of England up to the Middle Ages¹

At the time of the Domesday Book (1086) England probably had a population of about 2 million with about 10% living in towns. (Much less than in Roman times). However the population grew rapidly. It may have reached about 5 or 6 million by the end of the 13th century.

At the time of the Domesday Book London had a population of about 18,000. By the 14th century it had

¹ www.localhistories.org/population.html

risen to about 45,000. Other towns were much smaller. York may have had a population of about 13,000 by 1400 but it then fell to about 10,000 by 1500. Most towns had between 2,000 and 5,000 inhabitants.

Between 1348-49 the Black Death reached England and is thought to have killed about a third of the population. The plague returned again and again and the population of England was severely reduced. In 1400 the population of England was probably about 2.5 million.

The Population of England 1500-1800

By 1530 the population of England and Wales had risen to around 3 million and by 1600 it was about 4 million. London grew from a population of about 60,000 or 70,000 at the end of the 15th century growing by 1600 to about 250,000. The next largest town was probably Bristol with a population of only around 20,000 in 1600.

At the end of the 17th century it was estimated the population of England and Wales was about 5.5 million and Scotland about 1 million. London had a population of about 600,000.

In the mid 18th century the population of Britain was about 6.5 million. In the late 18th century it grew rapidly and by 1801 it was over 9 million. The population of London was by then almost 1 million.

During the 18th century towns in Britain grew larger though most still had populations of less than 10,000. However in the late 18th century new industrial towns in the Midland and the North of England mushroomed. The population of Liverpool was about 77,000 in 1800. Birmingham had about 73,000 people and Manchester had about 70,000. Bristol had a population of about 68,000. Sheffield was smaller with 31,000 people and Leeds had about 30,000

people. Leicester had a population of about 17,000 in 1800. In the south Portsmouth had a population of about 32,000 in 1800 while Exeter had about 20,000 people.

The Population of Britain After the Industrial Revolution

In the 19th century Britain became the world's first industrial society. It also became the first urban society.

1801	8,893,000 ²
1811	10,164,000
1815	The population of Britain not just England had reached 13 million ³
1821	12,000,000
1831	13,897,000
1901	41,000,000

By 1851 more than half the population lived in towns.

About 15 million people left Britain between 1815 and 1914 averaging 150,000 a year about 5 times the population of Portsmouth!

There were many immigrants to balance out the lost population. In the 1840s people came from Ireland, fleeing the famine.

Remarkably, between 1857-1901 reported indictable offences declined by almost 50% whilst the population grew from 19 million to 33 million. The number of serious crimes fell from 92,000 to 81,000.⁴

During the 20th century the population of Britain grew more slowly however the population of Britain is now 64.6 million.

By 1991, recorded crime was ten times that of 1955 forty times that of 1901.⁵

The 1881 population of the county of Surrey was 188,830.⁶ See table on opposite page for population of the county's larger towns.

The Godalming Division was formed in 1893 with a population of

21,109 and there were 21 constables. The Guildford or Headquarters Division had a population of 35,018 and thirty-nine constables including eleven stationed at HQ where there were no civilian clerks. Farnham with a population of 24,767 had twenty-six constables.⁷

When recording the population of the county of Surrey and relating that to policing is difficult. There was no formalised policing in Surrey before the Metropolitan Police were formed in 1829 encompassing the north of the county, including after 1839 as far out as Epsom. When the Surrey Constabulary was formed in 1851 it did not police the northern more urban parts of the county, this pleasure was delayed until 2000.

Population for the whole of Surrey up to the Thames⁸

Census Year	The whole of Surrey
1801	269,043
1821	398,658
1841	582,678
1861	831,093
1881	1,436,899
	Surrey County Council area
1881	266,200
1891	319,600
1991	1,000,900

It is essential to understand the part population growth plays in the development of policing. For Guildford, it may account for the growth and level of violence associated with the Guy riots as there were always large groups of young, many moving into or close to the towns seeking work and a better way of life than was offered within isolated villages. The young are known to be hot headed and prone to violence and crime – the more mature person

UK Census starting with 1801^{9/10}

Census	Population	Number of commitments for trial	Proportion per 100,000
1841	15,914,148	27,760	174.6
1851	17,927,609	27,960	156.2
1860		15,999	
1861	20,066,224	18,326	91.3
1862		20,001	
1863		20,818	
1871	22,712,266	16,269	71.6
1881	25,974,239	14,704	56.6
1891	29,002,525	11,605	40.0
1901	32,528,000		
1911	36,070,000		

*Population of the larger towns of rural Surrey*¹¹

Location	1841	1851	1861
Farnham	6,651	7,264	9,278
Frensham	1,583	1,559	1,750
Seale	428	508	669
Dorking	5,638	5,996	6,997
Chertsey	5,347	6,025	6,589
Egham	4,448	4,482	4,864
Godalming	4,328	4,657	5,778
Guildford	4,506	5,171	5,425
Merrow, Guildford	252	278	363
Stoke next Guildford	2,054	2,507	3,797
Reigate	4,584	4,927	9,975

adapts his way of life to take account of increased responsibilities of family and work.

As towns grew and law enforcement became more frequent, complex and difficult. The one-year only untrained, amateur constable fulfilling a civic duty, often at great financial loss, encouraged the search for alternative methods. The formation of the Metropolitan Police in 1829 gave another model but the rural parts of the country were not yet ready for such dramatic and potentially costly change. Government were to legislate,

cautiously and with great care as there was opposition to police, particularly when not under the direct control of the magistrates and hence the county gentry. They feared a loss of control.

Additional pressures upon policing came from the growth in population density, the coming of the railways from 1830 leading directly to the growth of new towns at Woking and Redhill. For Farnham the development of the Camp at Aldershot was from the evidence contained in this paper, to have an effect on the levels of violence. Added

to these problems were a number of agricultural depressions in a county where the number of agricultural labourers formed a high proportion of the population. Amongst other policing issues were the criminal gangs, many itinerant, many living on the heaths and woodlands of the county, including Farnham. More will be set out later of a criminal gang operating from West Surrey that burgled and murdered in the 1840s and the start of the 1850s.

The 2011 census showed that Surrey has a population of approximately 1.1 million people. Its largest town is Guildford, with a population of 66,773; Woking comes a close second with 62,796 followed by Epsom and Ewell with 39,994 people and Camberley with 30,155. Towns of between 25,000 and 30,000 inhabitants are Ashford, Epsom, Farnham, Staines and Redhill.

Due to its proximity to London there are many commuter towns and villages in Surrey, the population density is high and the area is one of the richest parts of the UK. Surrey is Britain's most densely populated county, excluding Greater London, the metropolitan counties and Bristol. Much of the north east of the county is an urban area contiguous to Greater London. In the west, there is a conurbation straddling the Hampshire/Surrey border, including

2 www.teacherlink.org/content/social/instructional/pop/popstud.html

3 www.uk.filo.pl/uk_history_9.htm

4 Letter in the *Spectator*, 3 May 2014 by Will Orr-Ewing Gertrude Himmelfarb: The Demoralisation of Society

5 Ibid

6 Durrant page 21

7 Ibid

8 www.ons.gov.uk 200 years of census in Surrey

9 *The Story of Scotland Yard* by Sir Basil Thompson, 1935. Reprint Kessinger Publishing Rare Reprints, page 100

10 *A History of Police in England* by WL Melville-Lee, 1901. Reprint Kessinger Rare Reprints 2012 page 339

11 www.wsfhs.org

in Surrey Camberley and Farnham¹²

Population estimates for District and Borough Councils in Surrey 2016

Surrey	1,168,809¹³
Elmbridge	132,670
Epsom and Ewell	78,950
Guildford	146,080
Mole Valley	86,104
Reigate and Banstead	144,100
Runnymede	85,594
Spelthorne	98,469
Surrey Heath	88,067
Tandridge	86,025
Waverley	123,315
Woking	99,435

The Growth in Crime¹⁴

During the first two decades of the 20th century the police in England and Wales recorded an average of 90,000 indictable offences each year, a figure, which increased to over 500,000 during the 1950s.

The crime rate consequently quadrupled from 250 crimes per 100,000 people in 1901 to 1,000 by 1950.

But the history of crime in the 20th century is dominated by the even sharper rise in offences recorded by the police since the late 1950s. During the 1960s there was acceleration in recorded crime: it was the only decade in the century where crime doubled. Crime continued to rise according to this measure for much of the remainder of the 20th century, with an average of over one million crimes recorded each year in the 1960s, increasing to two million during the 1970s, and 3.5m in the 1980s.

There is no simple answer as to why crime rates increased so markedly in the second half of the century. Over the period, there were significant changes to the types of offences

recorded as crime, and how they are counted, making it difficult to accurately assess underlying trends in 'real' crime. Recorded crime levels have also been affected by the behaviour of the public in reporting crimes to the police. An increase in the number of burglaries reported, for example, may partly be due to the relatively recent need to inform the police in order to make an insurance claim, rather than an indication of any real increase in the level of burglary.

New inventions, creating new opportunities for misdemeanour, a growth in the value of ordinary people's personal property, and the criminalisation of drug use have had real effects on crime levels during the 20th century. The most obvious example of an invention that has spurred crime is the motorcar: by 1991, a car was being reported stolen on average once every minute across England and Wales. Aeroplanes made international transport and smuggling easier, while the growing use of computers has created new kinds of offences.

The puzzle for today's criminologists is to explain falling crime.

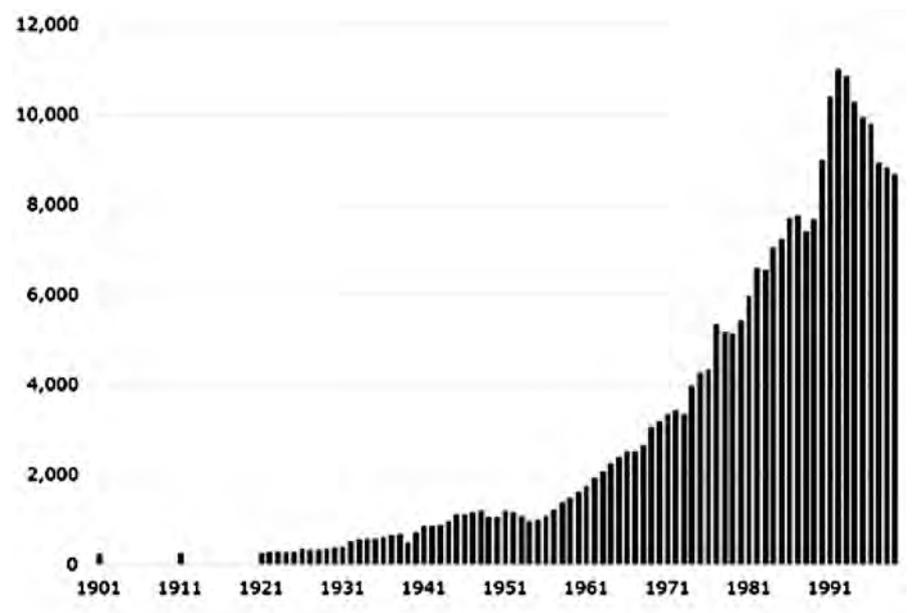
Recorded offences reached 6m in 2003, and a steady decline has since been seen in most kinds of recorded crime, with particularly steep falls in some offences such as burglary. Some argue that improvements in security, particularly modern systems to prevent vehicle intrusion, have significantly reduced the opportunities for committing crime. Others contend that imprisonment, policing or demographic factors play the most important role.

Getting Offensive

The chart below shows recorded offences per 100,000 people in England and Wales during the 20th century.

"A Fiery & Furious People"

So how was it for our ancestors long ago? Did they sleep soundly and safely in their beds? James Sharp a recently retired history professor at York University and an early supporter of the PHS, a man who has studied crime and violence throughout our history in a recently published book *A Fiery & Furious People* has lots of



Recorded offences per 100,000 people in England and Wales during the 20th century

examples that are strangely redolent of modern times.

1201-1276¹⁵

In 1977 James Buchanan Given undertook research covering 1201-1276 across Bedfordshire, Kent, Norfolk, Oxfordshire, Warwickshire, London and Bristol. He traced 2434 victims of homicide with a total of 3492 perpetrators. That is about 32 potential homicides a year across a significant part of the South and Midlands. However there was a wide variation in numbers:

Rural Norfolk

9 homicides per 100,000 of the population

Warwickshire

47 homicides per 100,000 of the population

Bedfordshire

22 homicides per 100,000 of the population

Kent

23 homicides per 100,000 of the population

Oxfordshire

18 homicides per 100,000 of the population

Given deduces that a working average for rural homicide in the 13th century was 20 per 100,000 of the population, which he considers to be a high number.

1244-1276

Given traced 199 victims in London or 12 homicides per 100,000 of the population

1227-1248

In Bristol there were 16 murders or 4 homicides per 100,000 of the population

1278

6 homicides in London with a population of 40,000 or 15 homicides per 100,000 of the population.

The Crime of Homicide

1300-1420

In the book the work of Barbara Hanawalt is explored. She reviewed the surviving coroner's records for Northamptonshire between 1300-1420 recording a total of 575 homicides. Men were responsible for 99% of the offences and were victims in 94% of the recorded inquests. (i.e. women 1% and 6%)

In London during the same period women were the perpetrators in 7% of the cases and were victims in 10%.

Victims outside the family dominate the recorded cases with 255 killed during fights or burglaries. People were more likely to kill on a Sunday 21% in Northants and 38% in London. Monday was also a dangerous day with 15.4% in Northants and 23% in London. Northants was more dangerous in the spring and summer. Was this the consequences of too much drink on a Sunday; too many pints in the public house?

In Northants 33% killed indoors and 50% in the fields or street with evening or night-time 86% in Northants and 90% in London.

In Northants the weapon of choice was a knife, 42%, 25% staves which many workingmen carried, fists or feet 0.6%. 50% of the deaths followed a sudden altercation.

There was of course no formalised police and the justice system relied on the parish constable and magistrate. In Northants 50% of those suspected of homicide did not turn up for court and were therefore outlawed, 5.9% of 529 or 31 who went to court were executed.¹⁶

1485- 1688 Sussex¹⁷

Records of Coroner's inquest for Sussex have survived.

1485-1558

244 surviving inquest records covering homicide:

65 murders
7 cases of manslaughter
14 verdict of self-defence

1558-1603

582 Sussex inquests:
53 murders
53 cases of manslaughter
12 verdicts of self-defence

1603-1688

521 inquests:
96 murders
69 cases of manslaughter
4 verdicts of self-defence

1560-1619 Sussex¹⁸

1560-1619 153 homicides (excluding infanticide) traced with 169 suspects. 150 of the victims and 169 of the suspects were male. Female victims were 26, 10 killed by other women. Few cases were within the family.

Homicide was spread across all classes:

- 50 of the Sussex accused were labourers
- 36 craftsmen or tradesmen
- 26 husbandmen - small to middling farmers
- 26 Yeomen

Of the 169 accused:

- 45 of the accused, 33 men and 12 women were acquitted
- 1 man and 1 woman are discharged by the Grand Jury (committal)
- 15 men were at large
- 13 there is no information
- 21 cases pardons, reprieve or self defence

¹² en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Surrey

¹³ www.surreyi.gov.uk/Viewdata.aspx?P=Data&referer=%2fViewPage.aspx%3fC%3dbasket%26basketid%3d288

¹⁴ www.parliament.uk/business/publications/research/olympic-britain/crime-and-defence/crimes-of-the-century/

¹⁵ *A Fiery & Furious People* page 46

¹⁶ *A Fiery & Furious People* page 50

¹⁷ *A Fiery & Furious People* page 116

¹⁸ *A Fiery & Furious People* page 108

- 36 men and 4 women hanged
- 33 claimed benefit of clergy i.e. could read the bible and were a part of the church establishment so dealt with by ecclesiastical courts
- 1 women pleaded she was pregnant and could not be hung
- Over 25% acquitted

Sussex Homicide Rate for a Population of about 90,000

1560,1570,1580s

3-4 homicides per 100,000 of the population of Sussex

1590s

5-6 homicides per 100,000 of the population of Sussex

1560s early decades

4 homicides per 100,000 of the population of Sussex

Manslaughter became the accepted verdict when death was an unintended consequence.

By 1800 this figure was 1 homicide per 100,000 of the population by 1873 250 annually in England and Wales.

By 2015 this figure was 1.5 homicides per 100,000 of the population.

According to official statistics, there were 55,453 trials and 45,039 convictions for serious ('indictable') offences in 1901, figures, which showed no significant rise in the numbers of such types of crime. There had been, however, a steady increase since 1886 in the number of lesser ('non-indictable') offences, which were tried without a jury before summary courts, roughly equivalent

to today's magistrates' courts. Such lesser offences included petty larceny and drunkenness, which 210,342 people were charged in 1901.

Violent crime was not as much of a concern in 1901 as it is today and was seen as falling. A report by the Criminal Registrar, published in 1901, noted that the period had 'witnessed a great change in manners: the substitution of words...for blows... an approximation in the manners of different classes; a decline in the spirit of lawlessness'. This was partly due to policing: the historian V.A.C. Gatrell has argued, in his article in *The Cambridge Social History of Britain*, that the Edwardian working classes were heavily regulated and that the falling indictable crime rate between 1860 and 1914 reflected a period when policing was able to obtain 'a peculiar and transient advantage...over ancient forms of popular lawlessness visible on the street'²⁰

Homicide (includes murder, manslaughter and infanticide)

1898	328
1908	321
1918	204
1928	284
1938	305
1948	341
1958	261
1968	425
1978	532
1988	624
1997/8	748
1998/9 (old rules)	750

The Home Office hasn't actually recorded a 'murder rate' for several decades, as since 1972 the crimes of murder, manslaughter and infanticide have been compiled to make a homicide rate.

Using the Home Office's recorded crime statistics and population estimates from the Office for National Statistics, we can see that the homicide rate (recorded per million of the population but transcribed per 100,000):

2006

1.4 per 100,000

2009/2010

1.12 per 100,000 compared to 0.63 per 100,000 in 1964

2015/2016

1 per 100,000

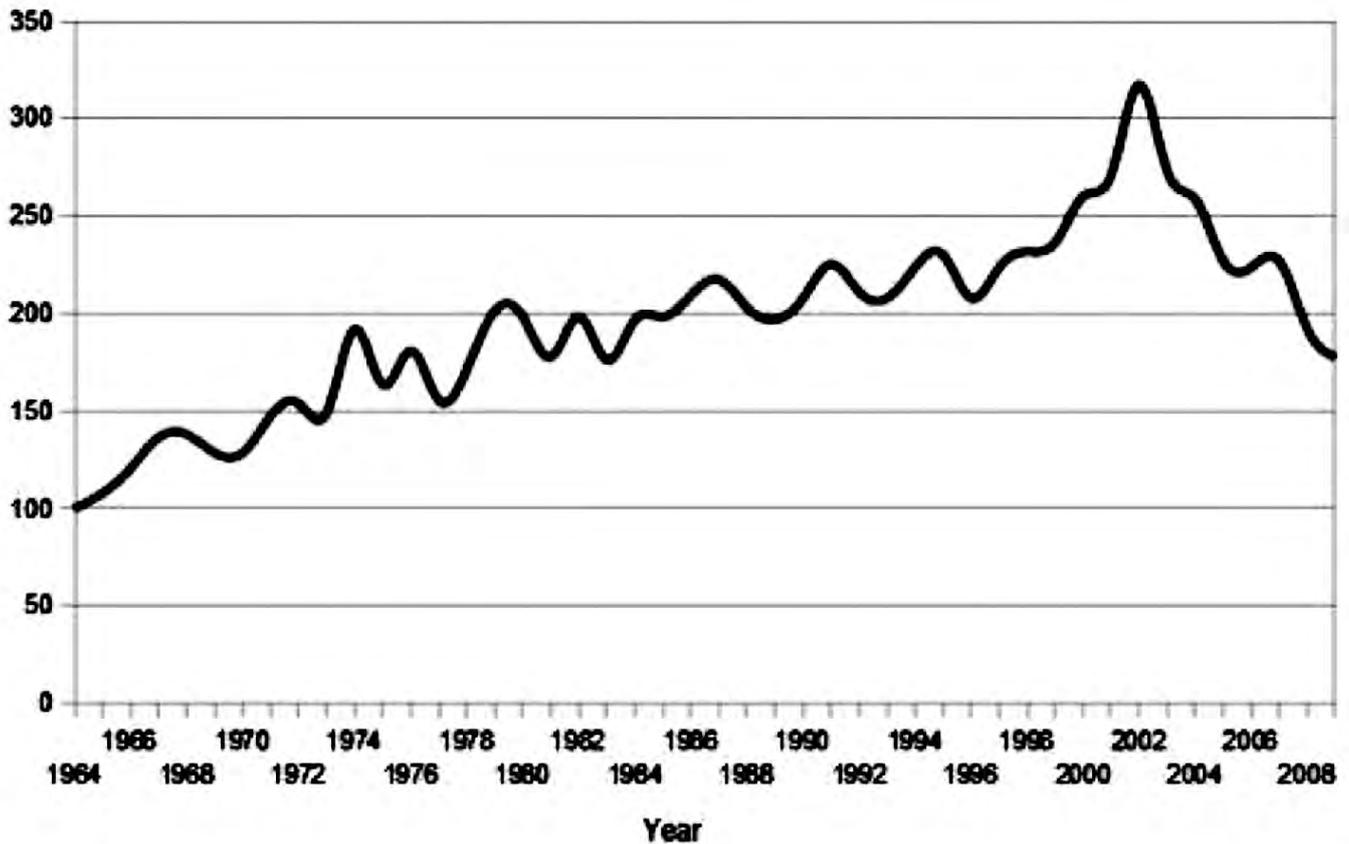
March 2016 there were 571 homicides recorded by the police in the latest year (2015/16), which represents a rate of 10 per million of the population or 1 per 100,000. The latest number was up 34 on the previous year and among the highest recorded in the last 5 years. However, the homicide rate has fallen from 14 per million of the population a decade ago (year ending March 2006).²¹

In 1998 the Home Office made a change to the way police recorded homicide, which had a significant impact upon the results produced. Whereas before 1998 multiple murders were considered as a single incident, afterwards each death was considered separately. In 2002, the figures included the 173 murders committed by Harold Shipman, whereas if these had been committed in 1964, they would have only counted as one incident for the purposes of the Home Office statistics. 2017 terrorist attacks will disrupt the downward trend.

Of course this could also mean that the difference between the most

Homicide Rate Surrey and Sussex

	Homicide Rate Sussex¹⁹	Homicide Rate Rural Surrey	Homicide Rate Urban Surrey
1660-1679	2.6 per 100,000	4.3 per 100,000	8.1 per 100,000
1700-1719	1.2 per 100,000	3.5 per 100,000	3.9 per 100,000
1780-1800	0.6 per 100,000	0.9 per 100,000	0.9 per 100,000



Indexed changes to the homicide rate, 1964-2009

recent year from which there is data and 1964 might also be exaggerated. To do a true like-for-like comparison there would be a need to limit the analysis to the years 1964-1997.

However even within this timeframe it would appear that the homicide rate did indeed double. In 1997 the homicide rate stood at 0.14 per 100,000 still more than twice the 1964 level.

But there are some factors that need to be considered. In particular, it is worth noting that the homicide rate itself is not a static figure, and is frequently revised in response to developments in cases. The reported homicide rate totals the number of incidents initially treated as murder,

manslaughter or infanticide by police when they begin investigations. However this can fall in subsequent months and years in response to new information (for example, as cases initially considered murder are revised to suicide).

If we look specifically at cases still considered homicide at the end of the period then the change in the murder rate between 1967 (the earliest year for which data is available) and 1997 is more modest. In 1967 this rate stood at 0.73 per 100,000 and reached a peak of 1.28 per 100,000 in 1995, falling slightly to 1.24 per 100,000 in 1997. In this analysis therefore, the homicide rate did not quite double.

¹² en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Surrey

¹³ www.surreyi.gov.uk/Viewdata.aspx?P=Data&referer=%2fViewPage.aspx%3fc%3dbasket%26basketid%3d288

¹⁴ www.parliament.uk/business/publications/research/olympic-britain/crime-and-defence/crimes-of-the-century/

¹⁵ *A Fiery & Furious People* page 46

¹⁶ *A Fiery & Furious People* page 50

¹⁷ *A Fiery & Furious People* page 116

¹⁸ *A Fiery & Furious People* page 108

¹⁹ *A Fiery & Furious People* page 125

²⁰ www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/pathways/census/living/crime/c1901.htm

²¹ Crime in England and Wales: year ending March 2016



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