

The dark side of the rural idyll: Stories of illegal/illicit economic activity in the UK countryside

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Highlights

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We question the presentation of rural life as idyllic.

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We present five stories of illegal rural enterprise.

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We argue that roguery is endemic in rural culture.

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We theorise that rural culture is criminologically distinct from urban culture.

Abstract

In rural sociology and rural studies, rurality in many countries is commonly constructed as an idyllic space in which crime is perceived as an urban problem. In other countries, however, rurality is constructed as a place where the individual is vulnerable and the population is socially beyond the urban. This article questions the construction of rurality as idyllic by reporting on research in rural areas which demonstrates that crime, in particular illicit and illegal enterprise based crime, is becoming more prevalent in the UK countryside. In urban areas, illicit and illegal forms of entrepreneurship are distinctive in terms of how they are construed and enacted – so why would it not be similar in rural areas? The paper presents a theoretical framework based on the work of Ferdinand Tönnies which demonstrates that contemporary examples of roguery exist in the UK countryside. We make more visible what previously was invisible, or ignored in the literature. Five stories of illegal rural enterprise are presented which provide a counterargument to Mingay's rural idyll. Since illicit and/or illegal rural enterprise is under-researched this constitutes an original attempt to frame an emerging phenomenon of interest.

Keywords

Ferdinand Tönnies;

Roguary;

Illegal rural enterprise;

Illicit Rural enterprise;

Criminal-entrepreneurship

1. Introduction

According to annual figures published by NFU Mutual, rural crime is increasing on a year by year basis. The main contribution of this paper is to highlight what we believe (based on our research) to be a contemporary trend in rural crime and to discuss how illegal enterprise crime is subtly changing perceptions of traditional criminality in rural contexts as older criminal practices merge with new entrepreneurial criminal behaviours (Smith, 2009). This work challenges existing perceptions relating to the moral status of rurality and particularly the pervasive notion of the rural idyll (Williams, 1973, Mingay, 1989, Bunce, 1994 and Yarwood, 2005) through an examination of the social relations and dynamics of contemporary illegal and/or illicit entrepreneurial practices in the UK countryside. These practices include food fraud and adulteration, theft, counterfeiting, drug dealing and tax avoidance, which exist at the boundaries of enterprise and organised crime. In particular, we challenge perceptions of the moral superiority of rurality. We argue that the perception of an entrepreneurial criminal act as illicit or illegal depends upon the context in which the act occurs and in particular upon its relationship to idealised (and idyllised) notions of rurality. We do, however, recognize that the rural idyll is only one of many concepts that could be relevant here. We define illicit entrepreneurship as a process whereby entrepreneurs supply customers with legal, illicit and/or illegal services or products often without being aware of the illicit nature of the transaction, service or product, or the illicit means used to channel the legal products or services provided. It is illicit in so far as it contravenes accepted rules of morality. The effect of the rural idyll on members of the public is to make them believe that such practices would not occur within the rural domain, especially if committed by those who live or work in the countryside.

The study and the bulk of the literature interrogated are set in a British context, albeit some of the findings could be transferable to other ruralities (indeed, the context, examples, results and conclusions would seem to be applicable to rural settings in countries with similar political cultures and modes of farming such as Eire, the US, Canada, Australia and New Zealand). Although the subject matter and context of this paper is rurality per se the stories used to examine and illustrate the illegal and/or illicit rural practices we encountered during our research employ the conceptual rubric of entrepreneurship to address a gap in the established field of rural sociology and the developing fields of rural criminology and entrepreneurship. The extant literatures of crime, entrepreneurship and rurality play an important role in framing this research. Despite these literatures occupying conceptually and theoretically separate domains, we see areas of crossover in terms of subject matter (when each literature uses the other as context). We take the rural idyll as

our starting point in interpreting rurality because we argue that the bucolic aesthetics of rurality are at variance with the urban based aesthetics of crime (Millie, 2008) and because of this many people find it difficult to envisage the rural as a potentially criminogenic environment. This paper adds to earlier attempts to question the rural idyll and comment on the 'dark side' of the rural (see Eriksson, 2010 and Scott and Biron, 2010; for a discussion of the differential stereotypicality of media representations of rural masculinities amongst other issues).

Of interest is an expanding literature on rural entrepreneurship and rural enterprise independent of the rural studies literature (see Bryant, 1989, Wortman, 1990, Stathopoulou et al., 2004 and McElwee, 2006). Indeed, Bryant argued that not only the entrepreneur but also the entrepreneurial activity of other people in the rural environment is crucial in sustaining the vitality of rural areas. This argument is important because criminal entrepreneurs in rural areas may not have the appearance either of legitimate entrepreneurs or of traditional criminals. Indeed, Bryant critically asked: 'what benefit can be derived from entrepreneurial activity'? Clearly, for criminals there is a financial benefit. Moreover, entrepreneurship is an enabling framework open to all in the rural population and should not be restricted to examples derived from legal, moral, or conventional enterprise. To date, a major omission in the rural crime debate within rural studies is the notion of criminal entrepreneurship per se (Hobbs, 1988 and Smith, 2009). The topics of rural criminal-entrepreneurship and illegal and/or illicit rural entrepreneurialism (Davis and Potter, 1991 and Smith and McElwee, 2013) add another missing dimension to the literature. This work answers the call for studies (Yarwood and Edwards, 1995) that focus on this notion but adds to a growing debate on urban–rural relationships and crime and criminal entrepreneurship in rural areas, which is a theme in this special issue.

We use the term 'enterprise' broadly to cover actions and activities performed in the pursuance of financial or material gain and not in the traditional sense of an enterprise as a business entity.

In the management ethics literature, people who break the law are regarded simply as criminals, not entrepreneurs (Machan, 1999) However, if an act is merely illicit or immoral then the person who commits that act may still be regarded as an entrepreneur. There are two problems with this approach: it takes no cognizance of acts that are legal yet harmful (Machan, 1999: Ackoff, 1987), and it assumes that criminal acts should not be of concern to scholars of entrepreneurship. Our research, however, aims to examine how licit/legal and illicit/illegal entrepreneurship are combined and intertwined within the practice of rural criminal entrepreneurs and businessmen. This necessitates considering the differences between licit/legal and illicit/illegal entrepreneurial activity in a rural setting. To do this we critique the concept of the rural idyll, which casts a long shadow over the literatures of rurality, rural crime and rural enterprise via the work of scholars such as Tönnies (1887/1957) and Mingay (1989). Indeed, Tönnies' concept of 'roguery' is our main theoretical interrogation tool.

In the next section, we position rurality within the inter-disciplinary literatures by discussing theory, concepts and earlier research. Thereafter, we consider the nature of rural crime before briefly conceptualising the concept of illicit/illegal rural enterprise. We follow this with a discussion of methodology. The empirics are based on interviews and presented in the form of "stories" which are interpreted. We then present our findings and conclusions.

2. Positioning rurality within the literature

Rurality is a concept, a category, a discourse, an organizing architecture, a location and a material space dependent upon the unit of analysis used (Halfacree, 2006). In rural studies, crime and entrepreneurship feature in research articles primarily as research variables but seldom appear together, even though many variables commonly identified with enterprise and ‘rural development’ are also associated with crime (Rephann, 1999). Indeed, issues of location and space are central to understanding other ruralities (Halfacree, 2003).

2.1. Interpretations of rurality

The writings of Tönnies (1887/1957) on the topic of *Gemeinschaft* (community) and *Gesellschaft* (society), whereby he ascribed special qualities to rural life such as the cohesiveness of familial relationships, are our starting point. This theme is continued within the literature on rurality, in the evocative notion of the ‘rural idyll’ (Williams, 1973, Mingay, 1989, Short, 1991, Bunce, 1994, Bunce, 2003 and Short, 2006), alluding to an idealized, utopian countryside. Although the rural idyll is portrayed in a variety of ways (e.g. pastoral – Bell, 1997), its core meaning is that the rural is morally and aesthetically superior to the urban. One implication of this is that levels of crime and criminality are seen as being lower in rural areas (see Pennings, 1999, Carcach, 2000, Jobes et al., 2004, Hogg and Carrington, 2006, Donnermeyer, 2006, DeKeseredy et al., 2006 and Francisco and Chenier, 2007 for the full debate). In spite of numerous critiques of the notion of rural idyll (Little and Austin, 1996, Cloke and Little, 1997, Swaffield and Fairweather, 1998, Cloke, 2003, Bell, 1997 and Bell, 2006), it continues to dominate some discussions of rural social difference (Browne, 2011). However, we are concerned only with the core meaning and we question the alleged moral superiority of the rural. We begin by considering alternative constructions of rurality – see Table 1 for a critical discussion of these.

Table 1.

A critical comparison of alternative constructions of rurality.

Approaches/Turns	Description	Comment
Physical geography approach (Mingay, 1989).	The rural as simply the countryside – the land or space or territory or locality or ‘natural’ environment that exists outside the urban or mainly ‘built’ environment	The terminology of ‘natural’, as contrasted with ‘built’ supports notions of a rural idyll. Natural’ is typically (though wrongly) assumed to be morally superior and crime is not seen to be part of this idyll
Perceptions of negativity (Weisheit et al., 1996)	Rurality viewed as relatively backward, parochial, reactionary, intolerant of change and diversity, and suspicious of outsiders. This casts rural dwellers as ‘other’. But urban dwellers and in-migrants are also cast as ‘others’ by rural	Who is cast as an outsider is flexible, depending on context and situation. Criminals, for example, are often viewed by rural dwellers as urban invaders

Approaches/Turns	Description	Comment
	<p>dwellers</p> <p>Locates countryside, not as a 'natural' environment to be respected and cherished but one to be manipulated and re-engineered to maximise profits for landowners and 'agri-business'. Halfacree interpreted productivism as a historically specific formation of rurality, dominated by an increasingly industrialised agriculture (rural locality), supported by government literature and policy (social representations), and lived by rural populations</p>	<p>From the mid-20th century onwards, the productivist hegemony was questioned by environmentalists and gentrifying consumers, who, in different ways, wanted to protect and preserve what was left of the 'natural' environment (e.g. as a tradition or heritage), and in some cases to restore what had been lost</p>
The productivist turn (Halfacree, 1993 and Halfacree, 2006)		
	<p>Locates rurality as culturally (as opposed to 'naturally' or economically) constructed. Halfacree identified four species of post-productivism: super-productivism (a ruthless exploitation of natural resources), consuming idylls (rurality as a resource for leisure and pleasure), effaced rurality (an annihilation of rurality altogether), and radical rurality (an active production of environmentally friendly locales, land-based activities and ecocentric beliefs)</p>	<p>The rural becomes viewed as a disembodied cognitive structure which we use as rules and resources to make sense of our everyday world. The rural is a subversion of the productivist, idyllised and effaced rurals. The only one of these species that does not clearly involve a claim to the moral superiority of the rural is 'effaced rurality'. Yet it is far from clear what this would look like. Although the 'radical rural' rejects the other three rurals, it still holds to its own visions of the rural idyll</p>
Post-productivist turn (Halfacree, 1993 and Halfacree, 2007)		
	<p>The rural as produced through physical human and non-human activity</p>	<p>This approach has been said to redress the idealist, immaterial definition of post-productivism but crime is not specifically considered within this approach</p>
The material turn (Halfacree, 1995, Wylie, 2005 and Massey, 2006)		
	<p>Rurality is not merely a geographical space or a social representation (or idyll). Rather, it is a hybrid: 'a complex</p>	<p>Halfacree drew upon Lefebvre's theory of space, applying his conceptual triad of spatial practices, representations of space</p>
As embodied practice (Cloeke, 2006 and Halfacree, 2006/Halfacree, 2007)		

Approaches/Turns	Description	Comment
and Lefebvre, 1991/1974)	interweaving of power relations, social conventions, discursive practices and institutional forces which are constantly combining and recombining' (Cloke, 2006)	and spaces of representation to make sense of the three-fold nature of rurality. Spatial practices were identified with rural localities, representations of space with social representations of rurality, and spaces of representation with embodied rural practices
A multiplicity of ruralities and differentiated countryside (Pratt, 1996 and Murdoch et al., 2003).	This is context based rurality depending upon the (changing) character of various combinations but what is specifically rural about each of the constituents of the combination, as well as about the whole, remains open to interpretation. Murdoch et al. viewed rurality as defined by context, time and place	This is a promising approach in relation to this study because it does not exclude crime and serves to challenge the monolithic hegemony of other representations such as that of the rural idyll

The defence of the rural idyll is well-worn in rural studies. Woodward (1996) identified a number of discourses of rurality that reject the counter-idyllic label of deprivation, re-presenting it variously as inconvenience, an unavoidable part of rural life, a natural outcome of specific ways of living, a lifestyle choice, an individual failing, or simply as non-existent (an urban problem only). Alternatively, Neal and Walters (2007) envisage the rural as narrated not only as a space of safety but as a space of freedom. The 'regulated' character of 'a settled landscape mapping out a social order across a picturesque terrain' (Bell, 1997, 95) is contrasted with 'non-regulated' or 'unregulated' usage, which may involve transgressions of the rules of the non-rural world. These two narratives are but two sides of the same idyllic coin: the mutuality of surveillance that promotes and produces public safety (as described by Jacobs, 1961; in urban areas) is precisely what makes it possible for people to move and express themselves freely, without fear of harm. The rural idyll is not to be identified with either 'regulation' or 'non-regulation' but rather with Hayek's 'spontaneous order' – self-organisation or self-regulation. This notion of freedom involves autonomy to transgress the usual social and legal conventions such as underage driving, underage drinking, driving on private land/back roads, and ownership of guns. Natural environments (e.g. woods – Bryson, 1997) and open spaces are viewed as idyllic but can become loci for fear and anxiety. Such transgression is contained because it is restricted to certain kinds of activities in certain areas (Neal and Walters, 2007, 259). These transgressions and their containment are generally accepted by those who live in rural areas. This aspect of rural culture is associated with a wider dislike or occasional outright rejection of governmental regulation seen to be overly bureaucratic and lacking in understanding of rural concerns and needs (Neal and Walters, 2007, 260–1). The rural idyll is thus suffused with transgression – both illicit and criminal behaviour making its claims to the moral high ground unstable. The same close-knit communities that are seen as comforting and supportive can also be

experienced as suffocating, damaging and even criminogenic. Having discussed the nature of rurality we turn to consider the nature of rural crime.

2.2. The nature of rural crime and the existence of the rural rogue

The foregoing discussion of rurality helped us understand the nature of rural crime. It is not just that the various versions of the rural idyll conspire to distort people's perceptions of rural crime; it is also that the different interpretations of rurality imply different understandings of rural crime. In particular, the concept of a 'differentiated countryside' (Murdoch et al., 2003) suggests that the types of crime committed may vary, and may be viewed differently, from one rural area to another. It also suggests that rural crime, like rurality, is to be understood in terms of the localities in which it occurs, how it is socially represented, and the everyday circumstances in which it is committed, experienced and interpreted. According to Mahar (1991), rural identities are negotiated via the use of gender-based strategies and distributions of capital. This system is organised according to a specific logic of moral differences specific to rural communities in that rurality is predominantly patriarchal and masculine.

The contemporary literature on rural crime generally falls short of recognising its distinctiveness from urban crime. Mostly, as Donnermeyer et al. (2006) have pointed out, it has been dominated by urban-based criminological approaches. Increasingly, it is becoming accepted that the nature of rural areas is extremely varied and subsequently this variety is likely to be reflected in the complex and distinctive nature of rural crime (Williams, 1999 and Donnermeyer, 2006). As scholars we are not yet clear about how to make sense of this variety. Marshall and Johnson (2005, 47) concluded that basic research needs to be conducted to examine variations in crime in a variety of areas. One cannot make generalisations about crime and safety in rural areas, even though views on rural crime remain polarised between the urban and rural. From a theoretical perspective, there is a dichotomy which mirrors the idyll in the form of the urban marauder thesis.

In addition, there are other complex social issues in play, such as the withdrawal of police from the countryside (Smith and Somerville, 2013); the increasing levels of rural crime as the countryside becomes more of a target for organized criminal gangs; and the rise in rural entrepreneurial crime committed by insiders (Smith et al., 2013).

2.2.1. Urban marauder thesis

There is a commonly held perception that in rural areas most crime is committed by urban invaders (Jay, 1992, Hogg and Carrington, 1998, Dhalech, 1999, Yarwood, 2001, Little et al., 2005 and Smith, 2010). This idyllic view ignores the insider perspective. Thus the rural idyll induces people to perceive rural areas as places of safety, even when they are not. Whether rural areas that are frequently visited by outsiders are particularly at risk from travelling criminals remains unanswered in the literature but it is easier (and safer) for residents of small rural communities to erroneously attribute crime to outsiders than accuse neighbours within the confines of small groups. Thus both crime and the fear of crime are less prevalent in rural areas than in urban areas, lending credibility to and supporting the idyll and the assumption that any threat to safety must come from outsiders who do not understand or share rural values. Evidence is lacking, however, concerning whether outsiders present more risk to country-dwellers (Marshall and Johnson, 2005). Conversely, 'visible' outsiders face risks visiting some rural areas. In the study on women's fear of crime in rural areas (Little et al.,

2005), the only (perceived) threats to safety mentioned by respondents came from other residents not from strangers, necessitating consideration of rural rogues.

2.2.2. Rural rogues

Until recently, the notion of the 'rural criminal' had not advanced much since the works of Tönnies and Sorokin and his associates and other early theorists such as Clinard (Tönnies, 1887/1957; Sorokin and Zimmerman, 1929, Sorokin et al., 1931 and Clinard, 1944). Tönnies distinguished two types of criminal: 'offenders' and 'rogues'. He considered offenders to be driven by the underside of the capitalist ethic whereby they were its brutalized victims driven to crime via poverty, despair and circumstance. In contrast, rogues consciously engaged in criminal activity as a business, motivated by financial gain and profit. Thus an offender may commit a 'one-off' crime out of passion or through circumstance – whereas the criminality of a rogue is more rational and organised. For Cahnman (1973: 173) roguery is an act that "... originates in a conscious and sustained will ... and that is not an occasional but usual means of making a living". Although there are problems with Tönnies' typology, in that it can be difficult in practice to distinguish a rogue from an offender, we find the term 'rogue' useful because to us it involves the idea of cunning, or chicanery, associated with an ability to conceal one's criminal behaviour, to the extent that it is invisible, or does not appear to be criminal and may even be condoned within one's community. Thus, on the surface, rogues might appear to others to be 'respectable' but underneath they are criminals. They differ from other criminals with respect to the nature of their cunning (which is, in itself, a particular kind of acumen – see later discussion), their success in hiding their criminal activities from the authorities, and their status within a certain environment. Chicanery involves misdirection, which in turn involves an element of dishonesty or deceit, which is not necessarily criminal but could be.

Although the majority of rogues operated out of urban enclaves, Tönnies acknowledged rural rogues too. What has been missing to date, however, is an examination of the local processes and contexts working to allow or hinder the actions of rural rogues. On this point, Barclay et al. (2004) show that high cohesiveness can facilitate and support offending behaviour through 'blind-eye turning' (Bartel, 2003, Ellickson, 1991 and Neal and Walters, 2007, 260) and 'techniques of neutralisation' (Enticott, 2011). Similar processes and contexts may exist in urban areas – for example, a respected entrepreneur in an urban restaurant doing illicit side deals which would damage his status if known within his legitimate peers.

There are confusions and paradoxes in current thinking and practice around rural crime (Marshall and Johnson, 2005, 47; and Mirrlees-Black, 1998 and Freudenburg, 1986). Classifications of rural areas for crime recording purposes are arbitrary and inconsistent with one another, and insufficiently sensitive to small area variation. Crime 'hotspots' may exist in rural areas that are measured by police statistics/surveys to be relatively crime-free when the opposite is true. The literature of 'Green Criminology' (Hogg and Carrington, 2006, Barclay et al., 2004, Donnermeyer, 2006, Beirne, 2002 and Nurse, 2008/Nurse, 2011 and Enticott, 2011) offers a more sophisticated approach to understanding rural crime, in which each characteristic of a rural area e.g. sparsity of population, density of acquaintanceship, and distance from government, can function as a source of both safety and danger. Currently, however, social representations of rurality are dominated by the (idyllic) view that rural environments are safe places. Green criminology regards rural crime as distinctively rural rather than as just an extension of urban crime in line with changing theories of

rurality (see Table 1) i.e as a composite of locality, social representation and lived experience. This challenges the hegemonic social representation of rurality and crime as dominated by the idyllic.

Having considered how these interpretations of rurality and dichotomous theoretical viewpoints help our widening appreciation of the rural context in relation to crime it is perhaps appropriate at this stage to synthesise these with the emerging concept of illegal/illegal rural enterprise.

2.3. Conceptualizing illicit and/or illegal rural enterprise

We briefly introduce relevant entrepreneurship theory to orientate readers unfamiliar with the theoretical context and to illustrate how entrepreneurship occupies a distinctive moral space (Anderson and Smith, 2007 and Pompe, 2013). Although there is a great deal of literature on entrepreneurship, and also on rural enterprise and illicit business (McElwee, 2006), there is very little written that addresses the phenomenon of illicit or illegal enterprise in the rural. Nevertheless, notions of the entrepreneur as a “lovable rogue” abound (Anderson and Smith, 2007).

Entrepreneurship is a diverse social phenomenon and although we have chosen Anderson's (1995) definition of entrepreneurship many other definitions emphasize a broad range of activities including innovation and the acceptance of risk and failure (Knight, 1921/Schumpeter, 1942), albeit it is usually legal risk that is discussed. Entrepreneurial activity helps improve market efficiency and overall economic welfare (Kirzner, 1973), and Etzioni (1987, 175) suggests that the activities of entrepreneurs help change obsolescent and ossified societal patterns (including idylls), positioning entrepreneurs at the forefront of social change. Entrepreneurship is viewed as both a private and a public good (Buckley and Casson, 2001), although it is a morally ambiguous pursuit because it always entails a degree of exploitation. Yet we argue that the description of entrepreneurship as a life theme by Bolton and Thompson (2000) demonstrates that entrepreneurship pervades all social milieux irrespective of whether they are urban or rural.

Theoretically, there should be little difference between a rural and an urban enterprise, other than the extent to which the start up, development of and support for it is constrained by exogenous factors such as geographical location, access to labour markets, infrastructure and value chains (Vik and McElwee, 2011). Yet these factors are significant (Smith and McElwee, 2013). Where entrepreneurship is explored in a rural context, studies focus on the dynamics and behaviours of a small number of individuals, often farmers (e.g. Kalantaridis and Bika, 2006 and McElwee, 2006) and not illicit or illegal entrepreneurs. Exceptions include Smith (2004) and Smith and McElwee (2013) on rogue farmers, and Basran et al. (1995) on exploitative farmers.

Baumol (1990) argued that entrepreneurship can be unproductive and destructive as well as productive and that entrepreneurs and criminals emerge from the same social milieux. Moreover, much, but not all, illicit entrepreneurship can be located within the informal economy (Williams, 2006) because there is a blur between what is considered to be licit by the entrepreneurs themselves and the apparent willingness of individuals to break the law when the opportunity presents itself and when there is little likelihood of being caught.

There is a growing appreciation (Smith, 2004, Wempe, 2005 and Fadahunsi and Rosa, 2002) of the characteristics of illicit economic activity. The commission of illicit rural enterprise crime necessitates the possession of appropriate forms of social capitals (Ellickson, 1991 and Pretty and Ward, 2001) because as an activity it differs from other criminal activities in that it is not dependent upon the

possession of entrepreneurial and/or criminal social capitals. It may be committed by otherwise apparently law abiding individuals, networking with others who possess entrepreneurial or criminal acumen. Entrepreneurs and criminals have characteristically different acumen and social capital based on their different kinds of experience and the different kinds of environment in which they operate. Many have social capital which spans both kinds of environment. The focus is upon a discrete, and almost invisible, entrepreneurial milieu in which legitimate and criminal fraternities (Smith, 2013) use their entrepreneurial ability to create and extract additional value from the environment and surrounding landscape (Anderson, 1995). In a rural context there are numerous intertwined criminal fraternities (see Smith, 2013; for a fuller discussion). Although these fraternities are ostensibly separate entities they can and do collude with one another to commit profit-driven crime and as such can be classed as rogues using Tönnies definition (1887/1957).

Research into illicit and illegal entrepreneurship has sought to explore why certain groups and individuals, despite not fitting the conventional description of the entrepreneur, engage in enterprise and entrepreneurship. They work at and beyond the boundaries of what is known and, occasionally, of what is accepted in the pursuit of profits. The majority of research exploring illicit entrepreneurship, however, has tended to focus on criminality rather than on the illicit (Rehn and Taalas, 2004a, Rehn and Taalas, 2004b, Smith, 2004, Smith, 2007, Smith, 2009 and Williams, 2008; Frith and McElwee, 2008 and Frith and McElwee, 2009b). Moreover, individuals involved in these enterprises are commonly portrayed as deviant and often as social outcasts who operate at the margins of society. However, illicit enterprises and other marginal activities are not necessarily criminal, and illicit rural entrepreneurs exhibit characteristics, such as strategic awareness, opportunity spotting and networking, shared by licit entrepreneurs (McElwee, 2008). Drawing on earlier work with drug dealers (Frith and McElwee, 2008), we suggest that illicit rural entrepreneurs may well have multiple business interests that generate employment and develop the rural economy. Frith and McElwee, 2009a and Frith and McElwee, 2009b) challenge the prevailing assumption that entrepreneurship is always a good thing. Moreover, Baumol (1995) acknowledged the often parasitical nature of entrepreneurship, describing the deplorable and debilitating effects that such actors (or illicit entrepreneurs) can have on the 'natural' workings of the economy. This is a key issue because standard definitions of entrepreneurs ignore the multiple interests and the social entrepreneurialism of the illicit enterprise. The stereotype of the illicit entrepreneur is framed as a 'dodgy' or 'unscrupulous' character (Galloway, 2007, 271). Consequently, Smith (2007, 245) and Williams (2006) argue that research on illicit entrepreneurship should move away from mainstream or typical cases of entrepreneurship to focus on cases of entrepreneurship that are at the 'edge of the known and accepted'. This study takes up this challenge.

3. Methodological underpinnings

One of the problems with researching illicit or illegal entrepreneurship in rural environments is that rural enterprise covers such a wide gamut of activities (Smith, 2004). Gaining access to respondents can be problematic. To develop a robust framework for defining types of illicit enterprise activity in the rural, we employed a mixture of methodologies. Individually and collectively we have been engaged in this research since 2007 and have now interviewed over thirty respondents located in Aberdeenshire, Cumbria, Yorkshire, Lincolnshire and Cornwall. Our respondents included 2 retired rural police officers; a serving police officer; a PCSO; an animal cruelty officer; 4 farmers; 4 members of staff from The Food Standards Agency; 6 council employees ranging from animal health officers,

environmental health officers to trading standards officers and several rural entrepreneurs. Many of these interviews were recorded using audio technology and a typical interview lasted for 60–90 min. However, some respondents preferred not to be recorded and spoke more freely in a free flowing conversation. Our approach was a broadly 'reflective' phenomenological approach (Cope, 2005) drawing upon data gathered from a variety of 'narrative based' sources such as interviews with respondents coupled with 'insider knowledge' (Costley et al., 2010).

The stories we gathered from our respondents were of cases they had dealt with, or were stories they had been told by others. Thus, although we gathered storied data on illegal and illicit criminal activity committed by rogue farmers and entrepreneurs, we were unable to collect direct quotes from criminal respondents. Also our respondents had insider knowledge of illicit rural enterprise and, being industry insiders, were able to engage in 'backyard ethnography' (Heley, 2011) via the privileged position of their occupations. From these respondents we elicited nearly 100 examples of illegal and illicit activities including cattle and sheep rustling, tax evasion, EU subsidy fraud, collusion with organized criminals and even prostitution. Some of the stories related to the same individuals but the majority were different crimes committed by different farmers and industry insiders. From these we present stories to feature as worked examples. The criminal acts discussed in each example relate to the individual's story.

Following Weber (1978), our aim was to attempt to understand the experience of entrepreneurs by listening to the ways in which they make sense of the world and ascribe and attribute value to their experiences (Bogdan and Taylor, 1975, 14). Surprisingly, it is only relatively recently that such interpretative approaches have been used in entrepreneurship research (Smith, 2004, Cope, 2005 and Devins and Gold, 2002).

The broad range of the material collected allowed us to categorize the data thematically whilst integrating human interpretation (Schutz, 1953) with entrepreneurial practice. Thus we identified the nature of the phenomenon and developed patterns of behaviour to be visualized and understood, as well as identifying relationships between these themes or aspects which we then analysed using accepted constant comparison techniques (Miles and Huberman, 1984). We developed the themes by using a system of positioning 'post-it-notes' thematically on a wall until the arrangement and emergent themes made sense to us. The themes resonated with the literature and were idyllic versus non-idyllic, insider versus outsider, urban versus rural, licit versus illicit and legal versus illegal (criminal). We interpreted these intuitively using our instinct and knowledge of both rural and urban crime and enterprise. We acknowledge that our research is tentative and needs to be repeated with larger sample sizes and in a wider variety of contexts.

4. Results

We now present five of our stories of rural criminal enterprise narrated to us by our respondents, which challenge the rural idyll, and thereafter present an analysis of how their stories advance our understanding of the ruralities discussed above.

The Story of Bert

Bert is a 'well-to-do', successful 'entrepreneurial farmer'. He engages in pluriactive behaviours and has numerous outside business interests and investments. He is a hard working and industrious

individual with an active mind open for entrepreneurial opportunities but is well known locally as a confirmed bachelor, womaniser and a 'bit-of-a-lad'. He likes a drink and is a very sociable person. He was not originally from farming stock but associated with young farmers in his youth. He used a family inheritance to rent his first farm in the 1970s and borrowed heavily from the banks to finance his venture. In the 1980s a financial depression resulted in high interest rates. To stave off bankruptcy he entered into a 'no-questions-asked' relationship with a local gangster whom he allowed to use rented properties. This arrangement lasted several years before it came to light in a police case. Bert being regarded as a reputable businessman gave evidence that he was unaware of the gangsters' reputation. He openly admits that he would have 'gone under' financially had it not been for the regular illicit income and knows that other farmers in similar circumstances have been sent to jail.

Charles's Story

Charles is a 'gentleman farmer' and serial-entrepreneur, from an established farming family who married into gentry. However, Charles a canny farmer with the 'Midas touch' was always 'on the make'. On one occasion he bought a piece of agricultural plant at a 'knock-down' price on a 'no-questions-asked' basis only to be visited by several 'heavies' sent to recover the bargain. The matter was never reported to the police. His reputation for sharp practices in the farming community was legendary. When he built a new building he always added several feet to the dimensions to increase productivity. One story relates to him selling the outer perimeter of his fields to his son so that in the event of a bank foreclosing on a loan the property would be of no value as the bank/new owner would have to negotiate access to the fields through the son. He has fallen foul of the law, being convicted of the commission of environmental crimes such as polluting the environment with slurry spillages to ease the pressures of factory farming. He is not averse to taking risks and cutting corners or running tractors without road tax.

Jackie's Story

Jackie, a serial entrepreneur brought up in a small village, has owned and run a variety of businesses in urban and rural settings. Jackie bought into a rural garage and car sales business and owned and ran this along with a portfolio of other businesses. When the second-hand-car sales industry hit a period of recession he rented the business to a local gangster with no business experience who used the business as a cover for money laundering purposes. The gangster installed a 'front' man who ran the business at an apparent loss for several years before it closed down. It will never be established whether Jackie had knowledge of criminal intent or not but reputations are easily checked in rural business communities.

Ivan's Story

Ivan is a rural businessman originally from Lithuania. He is an opportunistic entrepreneur who runs a weekly bus service between Lithuania and the UK and supplies a local Polish shop with a wide range of items. The bus carries parcels both ways. His current top seller is homemade vodka which retails for £5 a litre and sells in Lithuania for 70p per litre. Ivan operates on the fringes of crime and his business has upset an illegal still owner.

Andrei and Aleksander's Story

Andrei and Aleksander are brothers and business partners, originally from Bulgaria, who now live in a rural village in England. The two brothers initially established a rural gangmasters business ten years ago providing migrant labourers but now conduct an illicit business activity focused around VAT fraud. They use headed paper of another legitimate 'Gangmaster' business but include their own address. They put an invoice in the envelope with a note asking for cheques to be made payable to another named party. The farmers on being invoiced usually pay without considering there is anything abnormal. Cheques can be up to £10,000 per day with VAT on top for around 8–10 weeks peak season. They also engage in selling red diesel and ships diesel (for which no tax is paid). Profits are reinvested in property and building work in Bulgaria. They also trade pound coins at £60 per £100 and notes at £40 per £100.

See Table 2 below for an individual analysis of these stories in relation to rural crime using Tönnies' concept of roguery to help us better understand their entrepreneurial activities and how they are counter idyllic.

Table 2.

An analysis of the stories from the perspectives of Tönnien roguery and Baumolian theory.

Subject	Analysis of the stories
Bert	<p>Bert was fortunate to be treated as a witness because he knowingly formed the alliance with an urban based criminal. This is a legal grey area in that it all depends on whether Bert knew of the criminal's previous convictions and intentions, or not. Although his farming and business activities are now strictly legal and productive in a Baumolian sense he is nevertheless ashamed of his past behaviour. Ironically, Bert's actions could be regarded as productive (for him) in a Baumolian sense despite being destructive to society. Bert's reputation within the farming and business communities is intact but the stories of roguery add to his personal legend locally. This example of income generation activity is at least morally wrong but demonstrates how illicit entrepreneurial pluriactivity can both simultaneously create and extract value. Bert acknowledges that he is or has been a 'bit-of-a-rogue' but as an entrepreneur he is pragmatic and justifies his former shady dealings to himself as being committed out of necessity. He is an example of the archetypal 'loveable rogue' beloved of entrepreneurial mythology. Bert is a member of the rural elite and is a definite 'insider'. He falls into Halfacree's typology of productivism as a ruthless exploiter of opportunities with a materialist outlook. Yet he maintains his idyllic farming persona.</p>
Charles	<p>Charles is a more complex character. His stories are classic examples of entrepreneurial sharp practice and of Tönnien roguery. As a farmer, he sometimes operates in a moral grey area, which he justifies as being business pragmatism not real crime - many of his activities are amoral, immoral and illicit rather than criminal. He is driven by the profit motive and by the need to leave a legacy to his sons who are now also farmers. Charles is a doyen of the rural elite and unquestionably an 'insider'. He is ruthless to the point of being</p>

Subject Analysis of the stories

almost sociopathic as an exploiter of opportunities and adopts a materialist outlook but revels in his idyllic farming persona. From a Baumolian perspective Charles practices productive, unproductive and destructive entrepreneurship and is a productivist by Halfacree's definition.

Jackie is known locally as a rogue but also as a clever serial entrepreneur. Outwardly his garage business retained the appearances of legality although it was being used for illegal and unproductive purposes. He created and extracted additional value by drawing rent and income from an otherwise ailing business. The gangster who rented the property also gained value in terms of seizing a money laundering opportunity. Jackie has a reputation for sharp business practices, hedonism and partying and is very much a 'lovable rogue'. As a village based entrepreneur he too is part of an entrepreneurial business elite and thus is an insider. From a Baumolian perspective Jackie practises both productive and destructive entrepreneurship and is a productivist by Halfacree's definition.

Ivan was raised in rural Lithuania and prefers to live in the countryside. It is his intention to remain in the UK and gain citizenship. Although he is an outsider and in-migrant he is not a visible member of the business community. He will deal with urban and rural rogues alike. Eventually he and his family will assimilate into the locality and become a part of the rural elite 'living his idyll'. He is a profit-driven rogue under Tönnies' definition and a materialist post-productivist under Halfacree's typology. From a Baumolian perspective Ivan practises unproductive and destructive entrepreneurship.

The brothers are serial criminal entrepreneurs who were brought up in rural Bulgaria. They see nothing unusual in their activities but can still be classified as Tönnien rogues and criminal entrepreneurs as most of their activities are criminal (albeit they may also be illicit). They are classic outsiders who adopt an urban gangster persona. Their business is rural-based merely for convenience but there is nothing particularly rural or idyllic about it. Halfacree's typology is not relevant here. From a Baumolian perspective Andrei and Aleksander practise destructive entrepreneurship.

Collectively, all the rogues use illegal or illicit practices to create and extract additional value from their businesses either when the opportunity presents itself or routinely. We consider if there is any difference between their illegal activities (as farmers and rural entrepreneurs) and those of the conventional acquisitive criminal.

On reading across the stories and using the analytical technique of constant comparison several themes emerged from the data. Firstly, character flaws feature in the stories. Bert and Jackie are hedonists who like to socialise, drink and party, which brought them into contact with a wide range of individuals across the social strata, exposing them to illicit entrepreneurial opportunities. Charles

was driven by his ambition to expand his empire to pass onto his sons, and showed little regard for authority. Ivan, Andrei and Aleksander engaged in entrepreneurial pluriactivity using legal businesses to piggyback their criminal activities. Commercial and financial pragmatism connected to sharp business practises is an obvious driving force in all the cases as the rogues seized opportunities either of necessity or from choice. There is evidence, in the cases of Bert, Charles and Jackie, of the more established rural elite 'turning a blind eye' to the criminal nature of their actions (thereby engaging in neutralization techniques) whilst running parallel legal and illegal ventures simultaneously. It is also of note that some of the crimes committed are close to being organised, for example tax fraud and selling illicit labour. Many impinge upon but cannot be fully subsumed within the category of ordinary "white-collar-crime".

Using Tönnies' concept of roguery as an interrogative tool to examine the stories in relation to the literature on rurality, we can report the following. All the rogues were male, lending credence to Little's (1987) notion of rural crime as a masculine gendered domain. (To confirm this, a further study is needed with a larger number of respondents.) Also, all the examples discussed challenge or contradict the social construction of rural crime as an activity conducted by urban invaders, since the crimes were all committed by farmers, local businessmen and people living in rural communities. This suggests that rural crime may be mainly committed by local people but again a larger study would be needed to establish this. Also, from the analysis it is evident that most of the individuals conformed to Tönnies' category of rural dwellers infused with the spirit of rural community. The examples of illegal and illicit entrepreneurial activity did not occur in isolation but required ongoing participation by an individual from within the local business and/or farming communities. Our rogues were embedded in either or both of these communities. By identifying and documenting the existence of such rogues we have made a contribution to the literatures on crime, entrepreneurship and rurality and provided a new framework for reading rural social constructions of crime. In accordance with Baumol's definition of criminal entrepreneurship our respondents were imaginative in their pursuit of financial gain. To some extent they hid their illicit and illegal activities behind the cloak of the rural idyll. Far from being Tönnies' brutalised victims some are members of the rural elite (Mahar, 1991). They were not deviants or outcasts but rogue farmers and entrepreneurs operating in a hidden, deniable rural criminal space where they engaged in illicit productivist practices to maximise their profit. They are examples of Halfacree's rural productive materialists. Our research therefore confirms the complexity of rural crime and challenges the dominance of the rural idyll.

Rogues have always existed in the countryside and it is in their interest to maintain this idyll. In such stories, there is a clear rupture between individual and social perspectives such that the moral viewpoints of the entrepreneurial individual are exposed as being misaligned with prevalent ethical parameters. Some of these rural rogues are very much a part of their communities, for example Bert, Charles and Jackie, but nevertheless they engage in illegal or illicit practices which could threaten the idyllic status of those communities if the true extent of their criminal entrepreneurship were to become known. Bert and Charles as successful farmers add value to the community by providing jobs and a secure income to locals but their illegal and illicit activities also help them extract additional value from the countryside. The practice of all these individuals therefore epitomizes a fundamental tension between roguery and respectability. We argue that at least some of the crimes committed by these entrepreneurs (for example, the cooperation with gangsters) would not be condoned by the local community if they knew of them.

It is ironic that our sample of six illegal entrepreneurs is split between the idyllic representations of white middle class farmers or rural entrepreneurs and non-idyllic ethnic in-migrants (who were rural entrepreneurs in their homelands and are continuing their practices here). The former are able to operate unhindered not only because their illicit or illegal activities are hidden by the cloak of the rural idyll itself, but also because the rural space gives them freedom to do so, as argued by Neal and Walters (2007). They are protected from close scrutiny because they belong to an 'established elite' of land and/or property owners, the legitimacy of whose activities is rarely questioned in rural areas. The latter, however, do not enjoy this protection. Thus, as with the common misapprehension that most rural crime is committed by urban invaders, it is often believed that it is the work of 'foreigners' more generally.

5. Conclusions

In this paper, we consider that research into illicit entrepreneurship should be concerned with all types of entrepreneurial activities in which current laws, norms and rules of behaviour are challenged, reconsidered, redefined, and, in certain circumstances, rewritten. We have highlighted one contemporary change that is occurring in the nature of rural crime and enterprise, which is tied up with complex social issues mentioned previously (Smith and Somerville, 2013/Smith et al., 2013). The illegal pluriactivity of the rogue farmers we highlight provides an alternative example of the discourse on farmers as rational decision-makers, who can be as exploitative and dishonest as any other business entrepreneur (Mooney, 1988). This serves to remove the mask of respectability worn by these 'rural rogues' and expose the murky underbelly of rural life that is obscured by the rural idyll.

Our research challenges the claimed moral superiority of the rural idyll by setting up and testing Tönnies' concept of roguery to facilitate our understanding and theorising about illicit entrepreneurship, using the rural as a context. Not only do illicit and illegal entrepreneurial activities in rural areas represent a fascinating phenomenon in themselves, but also their investigation promises fruitful insights into entrepreneurship in general. It is apparent that the narratives blur the boundaries between the licit and illicit. The distinction between criminal and non-criminal is clear enough but the distinction between licit and illicit is not. The problem is that whether an activity is licit or illicit depends to some extent on the context in which it occurs, and narratives do not always specify this context sufficiently. Furthermore, an illegal or criminal activity may also be illicit, in the sense that it would not be condoned by members of the same community, but the rogue could still get away with it because the activity is kept secret. Such a rogue has then to lead a double life, which must be difficult in a small rural community. Again, an activity could be illegal or criminal but licit (i.e. condoned by the community), and that could be very interesting, e.g. when it comes to law enforcement. In such cases, it seems unlikely that the whole community would be supportive, so there will be tensions and conflicts between different sections of the community. It is our intention to study this aspect of the illicit in future work. Yet again, there may be activities that are perfectly legal but illicit, in that they are disapproved of by the community. Broadly speaking, this could include forms of so-called anti-social behaviour (which could include allegedly anti-social enterprises such as scrap-metal dealing), and this is another interesting focus for study. The above scenario has important implications for society and for the authorities (such as police, animal health practitioners and professionals) charged with interdicting such crime, not to mention politicians and policy makers as well as the Crime Commissioners in England and Wales. This is significant in relation to policy

implications. We argue that there is a greater need for politicians and policy makers to take cognisance of the changing nature of rural crime in the UK. There is a need to have a UK wide policy on rural crime and for this to include enterprise orientated crimes committed by industry insiders. There is a need to have a unified inter-agency strategy and action plans on measures required to better interdict such criminals. There is a pressing need to reappraise how we police the countryside and consideration of new policing models to fill the gap in the landscape caused by the closure of so many rural police stations and the reduction in the number of rural police officers and Police Community Support Officers in our rural communities. The current ad-hoc arrangements are not robust enough to deal with the problem. Investigating such crimes is costly enough without having to start from 'scratch' and assemble a new team of experts to tackle the case every time a new criminal enterprise is uncovered.

An original feature of the study is that it discusses illegal/illicit activities in relation to entrepreneurship in the countryside and connects this discussion to (mainly) sociological theory and previous research. The study reviews and draws on a wide range of literatures to bring together what have been the rather discrete spheres of theorising and research relating to entrepreneurialism, criminality and rurality and rural spaces. This is significant in that the social and political issues which influence everyday activities in rural settings require inter disciplinary academic collaboration/research to provide practical answers and solutions. This study demonstrates the potential for cross-fertilisation between research on rurality, social change, crime, community safety and entrepreneurship. It deals with a topic that is of considerable interest to scholars of both rural studies and entrepreneurship, namely multiple manifestations of the entrepreneur and the variety of activities in which they engage. We have established that there are negative as well as positive aspects to rural entrepreneurial behaviour, thus adding to Rephann's argument that 'rural development' is similarly associated with both enterprise and crime (Rephann, 1999). We add to the debate on social change, crime and community safety, focussing on emerging issues in rural areas.

It is less clear how issues of morality and ethics influence the dynamic. For example, the study suggests that the distinction between licit and illicit remains fuzzy and unclear, which is in itself a contribution. Another contribution lies in illustrating that some crime in rural areas is being committed by farmers, rural entrepreneurs and businessmen acting as opportunists, predators and rogues (Mood, 2005), and not by urban criminal invaders. However, we cannot dismiss completely the crimes of the latter because to do so would be to ignore the social and technological changes occurring in the world which allow organised crime to easily infiltrate rural environments, e.g. cannabis production, and environmental and wildlife crime, which utilise local residents to further their operations (see Enticott, 2011 and Nurse, 2013). Moreover, these examples of illicit rural enterprise are not crimes that the police normally deal with, nor examples of white-collar criminality, but entrepreneurial crime committed for financial gain (one of the characteristics ascribed to rogues by Tönnies).

Our stories reveal the power of the rural idyll to conceal the nefarious activities of our rogues who operate unseen in closed networks, using their specific rural and criminal social capitals to their advantage. This is important because entrepreneurship and criminality are strongly connected to social context, necessitating further investigation. There is an assumption in the literature that entrepreneurs are engaged primarily in moral forms of enterprise (Rehn and Taalas, 2004a and Rehn and Taalas, 2004b), in which they do not cause harm to others. Whilst questioning this assumption,

we acknowledge that illicit entrepreneurship in rural settings is difficult to interpret. Our stories assist in such interpretation by challenging the continuing hegemony of the rural idyll and questioning the extent of urban criminal 'invasion'. The work of Tönnies on rural crime and rural sociology remains under-appreciated and we make an additional contribution by using his concept of roguery as an interrogative tool to analyse our storied data, thus reopening the debate.

We acknowledge the incremental nature of our contributions and that a deeper level of analysis of the data and an expansion of the dataset may reveal further nuances and understandings. More in-depth research into the concept of IRE is necessary in order to exploit this area of research and to understand the phenomenon. We have not sufficiently established the nature of the difference (if any) between urban and rural entrepreneurship. There is a need to encourage similar studies to be tested in other regions/countries and for studies into the perceptions of rural business owners and ordinary rural dwellers. We need studies into differences and similarities in rural-urban illicit/illegal entrepreneurship and further empirical research into the nature and condition of rural crime in established entrepreneurial elites to facilitate the development of new theories of rural crime and rural criminal entrepreneurship. We need to move beyond stories to engage in theorising to address questions such as: how did our rural entrepreneurs come to engage in illicit activities? How do such activities shape rural countrysides? How do illicit and licit entrepreneurial activities interact to create patterns of entrepreneurship? And finally, we call for a further round of inter-disciplinary examination, by quantitative and large scale qualitative studies and perhaps even by more "backyard ethnographies" like those conducted by Heley, 2008, Heley, 2010 and Heley, 2011).

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