everyday criminal law and criminal justice in Quebec and Lower Canada from 1764 to 1837, or from a little after the British Conquest to just before the Rebellions. Its focus is on the everyday, not in the sense of daily – as today, direct personal contact with the criminal justice system was exceptional – but in the sense of routine or ordinary. Ordinary law and justice in the colony were played out mainly at the lower levels of the justice system, around the justices of the peace and their police … We still know relatively little about the structure and operation of the lower-level civil and criminal courts, and, as for the experiences of people who came before the justice system, these come to us mainly through the work of social historians examining specific phenomena such as wife-battering or infanticide. And yet, as historians of other jurisdictions have shown, it was the everyday structures and acts of routine criminal law and justice that affected the greatest number of people, with what are often termed ‘ petty’ cases and ‘low law’ making up the bulk of the work of the criminal justice system and constituting, in general, the concrete basis of the experience of justice.

From the Introduction