

<b>Institution:</b> University of Sussex		
<b>Unit of Assessment:</b> 28 – History		
<b>Title of case study:</b> The Digital Panopticon: changing the way the history of criminal justice is understood, researched and taught		
<b>Period when the underpinning research was undertaken:</b> 1 Nov 2013 – 31 Dec 2020		
<b>Details of staff conducting the underpinning research from the submitting unit:</b>		
<b>Name(s):</b>	<b>Role(s) (e.g. job title):</b>	<b>Period(s) employed by submitting HEI:</b>
Tim Hitchcock	Professor of Digital History; Director of the Sussex Humanities Lab	Nov 2013 – present
<b>Period when the claimed impact occurred:</b> 17 Sep 2017 – 31 Dec 2020		
<b>Is this case study continued from a case study submitted in 2014?</b> N		
<b>1. Summary of the impact</b>		
<p>Reframing and democratising the history of criminal justice, the Digital Panopticon project (under Hitchcock's co-leadership) created a comprehensive database and resource reflecting fifty separate record series, containing four million records evidencing the lives of 250,000 individuals accused of crimes in Britain between 1780 and 1925. Launched in September 2017, <i>The Digital Panopticon</i> website attracted 359,000 users from 210 countries in its first 36 months of operation, resulting in 1,775,000 page views. It has been extensively re-used by academic historians and by family and local historians to research the crime-disrupted lives of working people and has changed the way that the history of criminal justice is researched and taught. Wider communities have also gained new knowledge and understanding of law and punishment through exhibitions and public events, as well as through cultural and media work and collaborations.</p>		
<b>2. Underpinning research</b>		
<p>Funded through a £1.4 million AHRC grant (2013-18), the <i>Digital Panopticon</i> project has its roots in Hitchcock's career-long commitment to building open access digital resources that enable historians to develop more detailed understandings of criminal and pauper experience. The <i>Old Bailey Proceedings Online</i> was launched by Hitchcock and his long-term collaborator Robert Shoemaker in 2005; a further digitization project, <i>London Lives 1690-1800</i>, went live in 2010 and allowed users to link together records pertaining to individual Londoners, including criminals and paupers. Drawing on this web resource, Hitchcock and Shoemaker published their co-authored monograph <i>London Lives: Poverty, Crime and the Making of a Modern City, 1690-1800</i>, in 2015 [R1]. A second open access e-edition was published in 2020, in an experimental format that allows readers to directly follow links to the archival material cited. By carefully constructing individual lives from across sometimes intractable bureaucratic sources, <i>London Lives</i> revealed how the actions of criminals and the poor fundamentally shaped the development of systems of criminal justice and poor relief in 18th-century London. Its prosopographical / biographical approach was the foundation upon which <i>The Digital Panopticon</i> site was built.</p> <p><i>The Digital Panopticon</i> links together archival records at scale to explore the effect of punishment on the life chances of individual working people. Did transportation to Australia or imprisonment in Britain lead to better or worse life outcomes? The principal research findings to date include the identification of a significant difference between the punishment sentences passed at the Old Bailey courtroom and the punishments convicts actually received. The project has established that less than half of those sentenced to death were actually executed, that only two-thirds of those sentenced to transportation were actually sent to Australia, and that periods of imprisonment were often much shorter than prescribed by the court [R2]. The project has also established the varied impacts of different punishments on convict lives. Detailed study of</p>		

individual life archives (written up in 109 convict biographies on the website), combined with visualisations of the life events experienced by large cohorts of convicts, shows that those sentenced to imprisonment were more likely to reoffend when compared to those sentenced to transportation [R3].

The website – [www.digitalpanopticon.org](http://www.digitalpanopticon.org) – was launched in September 2017 at a major three-day international conference in Liverpool [R2]. The resource made it possible, for the first time, to systematically link some fifty separate record series into archives of individual lives. The four million records that it draws together include Old Bailey trial reports, criminal registers, transportation registers and convict indents, colony records, prison and hulks registers, and civil records such as the census and records of births, marriages and deaths.

Hitchcock brought three foundational elements to this project: an underlying digital architecture (use of an API with its separation of data and front end); expertise in creating ‘lives’ from disparate sources; and a commitment to history from below. He also led a key research theme – ‘Voices of Authority’ – which sought to explain how defendants experienced the trial process by recreating the sonic and spatial dynamics of the courtroom [R4 & R5]. To do this he worked with computer graphics researcher, Ben Jackson (also at Sussex), to change ‘text as data’ into ‘text as spoken word’ via a text-to-speech engine. Then, by developing 3D courtroom models, they were able to consider how speech was transformed by the shape of the space in which it was spoken and the physical characteristics of the person speaking (<https://oldbaileyvoices.org/>). Hitchcock hosted a workshop on ‘The History of Crime and the Courts in Three Dimensions’ in 2015 which addressed the ways in which historians might use 3D modelling to better understand and communicate the experience of standing trial in the past. The ‘Voices of Authority’ component of the project was presented to a large number of public audiences, including judges at the Old Bailey. It underpinned an exhibition curated by Hitchcock and Shoemaker – ‘Criminal Lives, 1780-1925: Punishing Old Bailey Convicts’ – which ran at the London Metropolitan Archive (LMA) from December 2017 to May 2018 and used the LMA’s collections alongside the project’s findings to explain the impact of different forms of punishment on convict lives [R6].

The project was a collaboration between Hitchcock, Shoemaker, and three non-digital scholars: Hamish Maxwell-Stewart (Tasmania); Deborah Oxley (Oxford); and Barry Godfrey (Liverpool). Sharon Howard (Sheffield) was project manager and technical work was undertaken by Jamie McLaughlin (Sheffield).

### 3. References to the research

**R1:** Hitchcock, T. and Shoemaker R., *London Lives: Poverty, Crime and the Meaning of a Modern City, 1690-1800*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015, pp. 461. Second edition, 2020: [www.londonlives.org/book](http://www.londonlives.org/book) [Submitted to REF2]

**R2:** Website: *The Digital Panopticon: Tracing London Convicts in Britain and Australia, 1780-1925*. [www.digitalpanopticon.org](http://www.digitalpanopticon.org) Includes a vast body of linked primary sources, search and visualisation facilities, background information.

**R3:** Hitchcock, T. and Shoemaker, R., ‘Making History Online’, *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society* 6<sup>th</sup> ser., 25, 2015: 75-93. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0080440115000031>

**R4:** Hitchcock T. and Turkel, W. J., ‘The *Old Bailey Proceedings, 1674-1913*: Text Mining for Evidence of Court Behaviour’, *Law and History Review*, 34(4), 2016: 929-955. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0738248016000304> Runner up ‘honourable mention’ for the Donald W. Sutherland Prize for the best article in legal history published in 2016.

**R5:** Klingenstein, S., Hitchcock, T., DeDeo, S., ‘The Civilising Process in London’s Old Bailey’, *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences (PNAS)*, 2014, <https://doi.org/doi:10.1073/pnas.1405984111>

**R6:** Exhibition: With Shoemaker, R., ‘Criminal Lives, 1780-1925: Punishing Old Bailey Convicts’, London Metropolitan Archives, 11 December 2017 to 16 May 2018.

**G1:** Godfrey (PI), Hitchcock, Oxley, Shoemaker (all Co-I), 'The Digital Panopticon: The Global Impact of London Punishments, 1780-1925', AHRC, AH/L006863/1, October 2013-March 2018, total £1,396,847.

#### 4. Details of the impact

The impact of Hitchcock's research is demonstrated through the use and reach of *The Digital Panopticon* website and the significance and effect of the 'Criminal Lives' exhibition curated by Hitchcock and Shoemaker. These have changed understandings of social history, produced and framed through new evidence for the purposes of education, cultural and media production and research.

The impact is multifaceted, with beneficiaries including school and university students, museums and curators, public broadcasters, partner organisations such as *Findmypast* and diverse publics. The project has allowed those researching family history to gain access to materials normally behind a paywall, expanding the scale of audience for these materials and increasing functionality by making the material cross-searchable [S1]. As Aoife O'Connor – the Head of Data Development at *FindMyPast* – explains, family historians can now access an 'interface that allows them to say "this person is the same as that person."' [S2]. But the underlying agenda – to expand understandings of the experiences of non-elite people and specifically the experience of imprisonment and transportation – has seeped into all the forms of impact. It underpins the project's commitment to open access and use of technical innovation to make a new and empathetic understanding of past lives possible, and it drives a determination to focus the attention of a wider cultural sector on the experience of non-elites.

The website was launched in September 2017 and has been operational for just over 36 months (as of 31 October 2020), with substantive upgrades implemented in March 2018. In its first 36 months, the site attracted over 369,000 users, via 524,000 sessions, delivering 1,775,000 page views. According to Google Analytics the site currently receives over 600 visits a day on average, with visitors coming from 210 countries; the top ten are the UK, Australia, United States, Canada, Philippines, New Zealand, Germany, Ireland, India and South Korea. User analysis suggests that the two largest groups are academic researchers and family historians. 15% of all sessions involve a 'page depth' of over ten levels, reflecting deep engagement with the material; sessions involving hours of research into hundreds of pages of material are common [S1]. Extensive media coverage in regional newspapers (e.g. *Yorkshire Post*, *The Liverpool Echo*), in online blogs (e.g. The GENES Blog and the State Library Victoria Blog) as well as genealogy magazines such as *Family Tree Magazine* extended the reach of the website and widened audiences [S3a]. For example, it was the subject of an article in Britain's bestselling family history magazine *Who Do You Think You Are?* (2017) under the title "Staggeringly huge' number of convict records available on new free history website'; was described as a 'website to watch' in 2018; and was an 'experts choice' website in 2020 [S3a]. The website was also reported on by *The Scout Report* as 'a resource of great quality and merit, and one that will be useful to our [tens of thousands of] subscribers.' [S3b]. Hitchcock has also widened audiences through public lectures and presentations aimed at specific groups such as family and local historians (e.g. Gresham College) and programmers and developers (e.g. CogApp in Brighton). A further audience was the judiciary: in May 2018, Hitchcock was invited to present on 18th- and 19th-century criminal justice and punishments to judges at the Old Bailey. User feedback, including 195 messages sent to the project's email address, indicates extensive use of the website by people with criminal ancestors, who combine material found on the site with their previous researches to enhance their understanding of the impact of punishment on their ancestors' lives. [S4]

Hitchcock's research has also provided content and inspiration for media and cultural productions. For example his research was used in the US public television station NOVA's 2-hour documentary [The Violence Paradox](#) to explain historical shifts in the extent and scale of societal violence (2019) [R5]. In Autumn 2018, and having first consulted *The Digital Panopticon* site, the producers of the prime-time BBC television programme, *Poldark*, contacted Hitchcock to draw on his specialist knowledge of the Old Bailey and the legal system. They were particularly

keen to use his research on what the court looked like. The 3D models of the Old Bailey courtroom that Hitchcock has developed with Ben Jackson were used by the programme makers to create an Old Bailey set in series 5 broadcast in 2019. As Andrew Lavin, the Set Design and Art Director confirmed, the research was 'invaluable' in allowing them to 'try to base everything in historical accuracy.' [S5].

Some of *The Digital Panopticon's* deepest impact lies in its promotion of a specific kind of educational practice in multi-disciplinary university teaching. Its search and visualisation features, as well as the secondary materials provided (notably on convict lives), are substantially used in teaching in universities across the English-speaking world, for example for modules in History (University of Exeter: levels 4-6 and PGT), Sociology and Criminology (University of Liverpool), Archaeology (University of New England, Australia) and Digital Humanities (University of Georgia, USA). Academics use the website specifically to teach students about the impact of punishment and more generally to encourage engaged learning and reflection on the affordances of digital resources. Henry Yeomans (University of Leeds, Law) asks his undergraduate students to use the site to consider 'whether the sentence given was carried out' and 'what happened to the offender post-trial', thereby focusing directly on the research questions and findings of the project [S6a]. Joanne Turner (Staffordshire University) comments that the site 'raises students' love of the topic' and encourages them 'to undertake empirical research in crime history.' [S6b]. Yeomans states that the site is 'a 'game-changer. It opens up new avenues for both teaching and learning as well as research.' [S6a]. Students agree; referring specifically to the project's research findings, second year students at Liverpool John Moores University report that 'being able to see how a person's life developed over a period of time from conviction is fascinating' and 'I was able to broaden my horizons and actually write about real convicts who would have lost their voice otherwise.' [S6c]. What the site adds is the facility for undergraduates to do primary research in a major archive, and cement real learning, through direct research experience.

The project's 'free in exchange for data back' model created by Hitchcock and Shoemaker for the *London Lives* site, and integral to the design of *The Digital Panopticon*, has demonstrated the benefits of commercial partnerships with academics and encouraged commercial partners to think about how their material might be used in the future by more varied audiences. Many of the digital resources on the site were drawn from *FindMyPast* and other commercial companies including *Ancestry.co.uk*, and followed a model of data exchange designed to overcome the issue of data siloing across the academic-commercial boundary. This approach allows commercial data providers to unlock pay-walled materials for a wider audience and make public and pay-walled material cross-searchable. The *Digital Panopticon* matched records from the *Old Bailey Online* with existing data that *Findmypast* and *Ancestry* had already digitised through their agreements with the National Archives in Britain and Australia. In the words of O'Connor (*Findmypast*), the project has had an impact in 'commercially [allowing them]... to reflect on how the material can be used differently by different audiences.' [S2].

Hitchcock's partnership with cultural organisations has extended the reach and significance of the impact. The exhibition that Hitchcock and Shoemaker curated – 'Criminal Lives, 1780-1925: Punishing Old Bailey Convicts' – told the story of the transition of punishment, from hanging, whipping and branding, and transportation to Australia, to imprisonment. It did so through: focusing on the life stories of individuals caught up in the criminal justice system; highlighting the contributions of the LMA's collections to the Digital Panopticon website; and using documents, prints and Victorian photographs from other collections in the UK and Australia. Graham Packham, Chairman of the City of London Corporation's Culture, Heritage and Libraries Committee described it as 'Thought-provoking and unsettling in equal measure... the range of visual materials and original items on display will certainly engage visitors.' [S7a]. The partnership with Hitchcock and Shoemaker enriched the professional practice of LMA staff, enhanced its educational offering and extended its capacity for public engagement [S7f]. The exhibition ran between December 2017 and May 2018 and attracted 5,500 visitors [S7b]. A series of evening events, including public lectures on historical trial procedure, the evolution of punishments, punishment in art, and using criminal records for family history research were so

popular that they were all oversubscribed [S7]. A programme of school visits reached 740 students and a 'schools' pack' was commended by teachers for its utility, particularly the extent to which it correlated with key curriculum content [S7c & d]. Comments in the exhibition visitors' book exemplify its impact on students: 'very helpful for my GCSE History studies in Crime and Punishment'. [S7e].

The exhibition also influenced future curatorial practice, encouraging LMA staff to use a broader range of materials and partners in exhibitions and expand their use of digital methods. For Archivist Sharon Tuff the exhibition opened up 'the possibilities of external loans and the procedures that surround that'; for Development Officer Tom Furber, 'I think it comes down to giving me reliable and authoritative research that I can use in my programme... I have a reliable source of school's information. I can use that and I can add depth to it.' [S7f]. According to Laurence Ward, Head of Digital Services, 'the most important thing is that the exhibition has opened up the scope of the records to our visitors... and what has been particularly illuminating in the exhibition for me is how that content can be opened up with the type of interpretation that the team [of Digital Panopticon academics] brought here.' He further noted that the critical reception of the exhibition 'brought the LMA to the attention of new users' as well as attracting media outlets – like *The Lancet* – 'that maybe wouldn't always pick-up something that we were doing.' [S7f].

A key aim of the exhibition's portrayal of convict life histories was to explain and scrutinise the contemporary judicial system. Press coverage recognised its success in changing views of the Criminal Justice System. In its review, *The Lancet* suggested the exhibition served as a timely warning – to 'sober us up from our grand guignol fantasies... that allow us to evade contemplation of the greater horrors in the prisons and detention centres of our own era.' [S8]. One visitor wrote 'Fascinating exhibition – thought provoking. Is locking people up the way to continue?' [S7e].

## 5. Sources to corroborate the impact

**S1:** Evidence of the website's reach and impact from Google analytics reports for the period to 31 October 2020.

**S2:** Interview with Aoife O'Connor, Head of Data Development, *Findmypast*, 31 July 2018.

**S3:** Media reporting on the website:

a. Selected media coverage of the website.

b. *The Scout Report*, 24:36, 7 September 2018. <https://scout.wisc.edu/report/2018/0907> and email.

**S4:** Website user feedback.

**S5:** Correspondence about *Poldark*.

**S6:** Educational impact in Higher Education:

a. Testimonial from Henry Yeomans, Associate Professor in Criminology and Criminal Justice, University of Leeds.

b. Testimonial from Jo Turner, Associate Professor in Criminology, University of Staffordshire.

c. Student evaluations, Liverpool John Moores University.

**S7:** 'Criminal Lives, 1780-1925' exhibition:

a. AHRC report on the exhibition.

b. Exhibition visitor numbers.

c. School visit numbers; comments by teachers.

d. Exhibition support materials for teachers.

e. Exhibition visitor book comments.

f. Interviews with LMA staff: Sharon Tuff, Archivist; Tom Furber, Development Officer; Laurence Ward, Head of Digital Services, May 2018.

**S8:** Wise, Sarah. 'Life Behind Bars' (17 February 2018), *The Lancet*, 391(10211), p649. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736\(18\)30210-1](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736(18)30210-1)