

Impact case study (REF3)

Institution: The Open University		
Unit of Assessment: D28 History		
Title of case study: Using criminal justice history to benefit policy makers, the public, and prisoners and prison staff		
Period when the underpinning research was undertaken: 2004-2020		
Details of staff conducting the underpinning research from the submitting unit:		
Name(s):	Role(s) (e.g. job title):	Period(s) employed by submitting HEI:
Dr Rosalind Crone Dr Chris A Williams	Senior Lecturer in History Senior Lecturer in History	2006 to present 1999 to present
Period when the claimed impact occurred: 2013 - December 2020		
Is this case study continued from a case study submitted in 2014? No		
1. Summary of the impact		
<p>Members of the Centre for the History of Crime, Policing and Justice have conducted research into historical criminal justice systems and practices which have had impact on policy makers, on public understanding and on prisoners and prison staff.</p> <p>Research into police history has shaped a series of policy-relevant seminars for civil servants in the UK government, enhancing Home Office civil servants' appreciation of lessons from the past. AHRC-funded research into the history of prisons [G1] resulted in an open access database of previously unknown records, now widely used by the media and public. AHRC-funded research into prison education [G2] led to the production of a pioneering open educational resource for UK prisoners and prison staff.</p>		
2. Underpinning research		
<p>The underpinning research was conducted within the Centre for the History of Crime, Policing and Justice, a long-standing research group at The Open University (OU) whose members research criminal justice history with a view to contemporary lessons and applications.</p> <p>Williams's research on the development of UK policing has implications for present-day challenges. His research shows how operational control of the police shifted from local to national responsibility, which arguably lessened democratic accountability. A key rupture occurred in the 1950s when the position of urban police was undermined by several corruption scandals which the Home Office used to limit local independence [O4].</p> <p>Williams provided the first comprehensive study of the mechanisms for directing and regulating police officers' conduct. This showed how new technologies (radios, telephones, centralised computer systems) transformed the typical police constable from the relatively independent artisan of the eighteenth century to today's disciplined and closely monitored officer, with associated implications for democratic control of the police [O5]. He has highlighted the need to preserve police records and archives in order to offer practical advice to policy makers and information to members of the public concerned by police accountability [O6].</p> <p>Crone is the first historian to research prisoner education in nineteenth-century England. Prior to her AHRC-funded work [G1], literacy in prisons had been largely ignored by historians of education and of penal policy. Crone initially examined the intensive reading programme implemented at Reading Gaol by the evangelical chaplain John Field [O1]. Beginning around 1844, Field taught illiterate prisoners to read and write so they could study the Bible, which he believed would transform immoral offenders into law-abiding productive members of society. Field kept detailed records of prisoners' previous educational attainments and their progress in prison. Crone located and analysed these neglected records to discover how, for example, Field negotiated early release for favoured prisoners who made the most progress.</p>		

Impact case study (REF3)

Penal history has tended to focus on case studies of individual prisons because archival records of prisons are dispersed and hard to access. To address this, **Crone** moved beyond a case study approach to develop a deeper understanding of penal practices and education in nineteenth-century prisons. She extracted the educational profiles of 18,182 prisoners from chaplains' reports, prison registers, and lists of pre-trial prisoners (Quarter Sessions calendars) in Berkshire, Lancashire and Suffolk between 1840 -1870. **Crone's** findings challenged a series of long-held assumptions about literacy, including David Vincent's contention that older generations were more illiterate than their younger counterparts [O2]. Prisoner literacy rates highlight the importance of adult literacy schemes, including prison schools, which had been marginalised or absent in existing studies of education and literacy.

Finally, as the culmination of her AHRC Early Career Fellowship [G1], **Crone** created an exhaustive list of nineteenth-century prisons and their archives to track the extent and features of prison education. This resulted in the first comprehensive guide to nineteenth-century prisons and their archives, published in two volumes and in a searchable, open-access database, '19th Century Prisons', on the website www.prisonhistory.org [O3]. The database contains details on 847 English local and convict prisons. Prior to this research, historians did not know how many local prisons existed. Almost nothing was known about the education they provided. In 2019, **Crone** added a second database, 'Local Lock-ups', to the Prison History website, providing details of 926 structures used for the temporary confinement of accused criminals and enabling the public to engage with the site by contributing additional information [C2].

3. References to the research

These outputs have been peer reviewed and published by academic publishers or journals.

- O1. **Crone, R.** (2012) 'The great "Reading" experiment: an examination of the role of education in the nineteenth century goal', *Crime, History & Societies* 16 (1), 47-74.
<https://doi.org/10.4000/chs.1322>
- O2. **Crone, R.** (2010) 'Reappraising Victorian literacy through prison records', *Journal of Victorian Culture* 15 (1), 3-37. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13555501003607644>
- O3. **Crone, R.** (with L. Hoskins and R. Preston) (2018) *Guide to the Criminal Prisons of Nineteenth-Century England*, 2 volumes (London Publishing Partnership)
- O4. **Williams, C.** (2007) 'Rotten boroughs: the crisis of urban policing and the decline of municipal independence 1914–64', in J. Moore J.B. Smith (eds) *Corruption in Urban Politics and Society, Britain (1780-1950)* (Ashgate: Aldershot), 155-175.
<https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315259192>
- O5. **Williams, C.** (2014) *Police control systems in Britain, 1775-1975: From parish constable to national computer* (Manchester University Press).
<https://doi.org/10.7228/manchester/9780719084294.001.0001>
- O6. **Williams, C.** ed. (2004) *Giving the Past a Future. Preserving the Heritage of the UK's Criminal Justice System* (Francis Bootle: London).

Funding

- G1. AHRC Early Career Fellowship: **R. Crone** (2015-18) *Educating Criminals in Nineteenth-Century England*, AH/L009692/1, GBP 184,260.00.
- G2. AHRC Follow on Funding: **R. Crone** (2019-2020), *Prison History for new learners inside and outside the Prison*, AH/ AH/S012834/1, GBP 72,370.00.
- G3. AHRC Fellowship: **C. Williams & C. Emsley** (2008-2009), *Policing and Citizenship: Resourcing a Better Understanding*, AH/F008791/1, GBP 114,148.00.

4. Details of the impact

Impact on policy makers

The 2014 Home Office (HO) Improvement Plan identified ‘learning from experience’ as one of eight actions to transform the HO [C7]. In 2015, the HO invited **Williams** to join its Learning from Experience Reference Group, in which he advised (based on [O5, O6]) on how to incorporate historical knowledge into contemporary policy formation. Work with the HO and Cabinet Office was augmented by the OU History Department’s long-standing collaboration with, and financial support of, the think tank History & Policy (H&P). This organisation connects historians with policy makers and has been part-funded by the OU since 2016. In 2015, H&P invited **Williams** to convene a seminar series at the HO, designed to provide historical perspectives on contemporary concerns for policy makers. Simon Szreter, co-founder of H&P, comments: *“[Williams’s] major research project on the history of police command and control systems, published in 2014, demonstrated that he had an understanding of the ways that the Home Office had made major policy decisions in the past, and of a broad spread of issues related to criminal justice in the UK which made him an ideal convenor for the ongoing seminar”* [C6].

Williams ensured that the series would provide continued professional development for HO staff. He identified and invited speakers on topics such as counter-terrorism and the police national computer system. **Williams** arranged 31 seminars, including contributions from OU historians and four based on his own research, such as a document exercise on the HO’s historical response to threatened cuts. Each talk was attended by an audience of approximately 20 to 40, including a significant number with responsibility for policymaking.

The majority of 227 attendees attending seven seminars in 2016-17 answered affirmatively when asked: *“Did you learn anything that might be useful in your work?”* Attendees’ feedback was positive about the link between historical knowledge and policy making, for example: *“Overall, I really love that these seminars take place - it’s so important to learn from the past to inform the future and we should do more with experts/academics!”* [C8].

In March 2020, during lockdown, the HO asked **Williams** to continue the series remotely as a monthly blog. **Williams** has commissioned five blogs to date; readers included the incoming Permanent Secretary. During the Windrush inquiry the HO was challenged to *“implement a learning plan on UK history”*. In response the HO referred to in-house *“talks with groups of staff explaining the history of the department and its place within the wider history of the UK”* and, building on this, that they would start *“a departmental UK history training programme for all Home Office staff”* from June 2021 [C9].

The success and impact of the seminar series with the Home Office has led to further involvements with, and impacts on, Whitehall officials:

- 1) In June 2018 **Williams** was the only historian invited to participate in a Cabinet Office workshop in which academics and policy makers discussed the organisational and ethical issues of police adopting new technologies such as ‘big data’ and other advanced IT techniques (a topic discussed in [O4]);
- 2) **Williams** participated in a workshop with the Foreign and Commonwealth Office exploring opportunities for historical perspectives in its work, including reviving the FCO official history series (stopped in 2010 because of austerity cuts) and recruiting official historians into Departments. One outcome was the HO’s appointment of an official historian in July 2020;
- 3) In April 2020, the Cabinet Office Innovation Unit invited **Williams** to advise on historians with specialism relevant to the COVID-19 recovery period, and on ways to apply relevant

Impact case study (REF3)

historical perspectives within Whitehall. In response, **Williams** compiled a government database of relevant academic expertise.

Andrew Blick, Director of H&P, confirms that **Williams** “*advised History and Policy on setting up similar series elsewhere in Whitehall, including making a presentation about this with the Dept for Business Enterprise Industry and Science (BEIS) in September 2016, advising on the selection of a convenor for a series at the Department of Transport, and making initial contact with a representative of the Department for Education*”. He also “*worked on behalf of History and Policy in the spring of 2020 to collect names of historians with relevant experience on advising on pandemic response, which were passed on to the Cabinet Office Innovation Unit*” [C6].

Crone's research on prison education also impacted on policy makers via her work with the Prisoners' Education Trust (PET) (<https://www.prisonerseducation.org.uk/>), the UK's leading prison education charity, supporting over 40,000 people in prison since 1989. The Ministry of Justice found that prisoners funded by PET are, a year after release, 25% less likely to reoffend and 26% more likely to be in employment. **Crone** began working with PET after Nina Champion, then PET Head of Policy, read her research [O1] and realised its potential for the promotion of education within contemporary prisons [C1].

PET CEO Rod Clark regularly refers to **Crone's** research when promoting the value of prison education to policy makers and practitioners. If nineteenth-century legislators recognised the benefits of prison education this strengthens the case for its continued importance today, argues Clark, based on **Crone's** research. He also points to the public impact of her research: “*It is important that the public have awareness of the importance and value of prison education and Dr Crone's work has helped engage people through a historical lens. I have found myself drawing on her material in presenting to other general audiences*” [C1].

Impact on education for prisoners, former prisoners and practitioners

In collaboration with PET and funded by AHRC Follow-on Funding [G2], **Crone** worked closely with former prisoners and prison staff to translate her research findings [O1, O2, O3] into an Open Educational Resource (OER) on the history of prison education in the UK.

Explorations in the History of Prison Education is a free course which uses **Crone's** research to inform learners in secure environments about the history of prison education. It can generate credits towards an OU degree and serve as a first step towards formal education. Uniquely, **Crone** employed former prisoners as consultants for the design and production of the course. While OU modules are often studied by students in secure environments, this is the first time that an OU module draws on funded research and the experience of former prisoners to create course materials which will teach prisoners for years to come.

The production process itself has impacted on the former prisoners involved as consultants. One comments that “*the work with the OU [...] persuaded me to consider how my lived experience could be used to good effect*” and he is now seeking employment “*avenues in the field of prison education*”. Another comments: “*I have learned a great deal from the materials that I was asked to review. Doctor Crone has encouraged my further research into the history of local Lock-Ups and prison history as a whole. [...] I have been able to enhance some of the material that we use in our videos [for] prison viewers, and as such further engaged prisoners with ongoing learning and development. For me, this is the most important aspect of imprisonment*” [C5].

The OER was to be piloted in April 2020. The pandemic forced a postponement as prisoners were confined to their cells and unable to access education. The OER will be piloted as soon as circumstances allow and will then be freely available in prisons and to the public via the OU's free learning platform OpenLearn. The long-term impacts on learners in secure environments will not come into effect until the end of the lockdown (see Covid statement).

Impact case study (REF3)

Impact on public understanding of history and genealogy

Crone's database '19th Century Prisons' includes lists of surviving archives for 847 prisons, including prison registers and records for prisoners and prison staff. Unlike other historical records such as censuses, these sources contain an exceptional level of detail about individuals, e.g. birthplace, residences, religion, education, occupation and physical appearance (height, eye colour and distinguishing marks), making the database a powerful and attractive tool for genealogists and members of the public interested in family history.

'Prison History' received approximately 18,000 visits between July and December 2019. In 2020, of 55,661 visits approximately 20% were from outside the UK [C2]. Visitors identified as professional historians (28%), local historians (18%) and family historians (32%), in addition to students, ex-prisoners and journalists. Visitors said they would use what they had learnt in articles, museum tours, training sessions, academic teaching and research. 40% intended to contribute to the site; members of the public have so far added more than 300 local lock-ups to the database and updated information on hundreds more. Since April 2019, 25 local historians, museum curators and a prison officer have contributed 27 articles on local prisons [C2]. This has brought local history alive and created an online community. It has had profound impacts on individuals, including a former prisoner who contributed to the site: "*Reflection, especially self-reflection helps you to grow. I felt that by reflecting on my environment I would speed up that growth, I was right. It worked.*" He added that he was "*extremely proud*" of his article on the history of Bridewell prison [C2].

The significance of 'Prison History' is also evident in the extent of its public participation. Hundreds of users have contacted **Crone** to explain the personal impact of the information it contains. For example: "*Thanks to your database [...] I can now introduce information about Lincolnshire gaols and houses of correction, when working as a volunteer at the castle prison. Before I found your website all I could say to visitors was that Lincolnshire had 2 or more other gaols and houses of correction but could not answer any questions about them!*" (Volunteer Guide at Lincoln Castle Prison, February 2020) [C2].

The producers of BBC1's *Who Do You Think You Are?* (each programme attracts 6 million viewers) used 'Prison History' to reveal that actor Kate Winslet's great-great-great grandfather was one of the first prison wardens at Dartmoor Prison. **Crone** appeared as an expert on the show (August 2019). [Text removed for publication] researcher for the programme, confirms that the resource "*was incredibly useful for me in tracking down [...] additional prison records [...] and cross-referencing where I had drawn a blank*" [C3].

Crone was invited to write two articles, including a 'Document Masterclass' on prison registers for *Who Do You Think You Are?* magazine (readership: 17,500 in print, 33,000 online). 'Prison History' also featured in two further articles in the magazine which introduced the resource to family historians [C4].

5. Sources to corroborate the impact

- C1.** Email testimonials: Nina Champion (PET), November 2020; Rod Clark (PET), July 2020.
- C2.** Screenshots relating to <https://www.prisonhistory.org/>: impact report March 2020; Google Analytics report February 2021; correspondence from website users.
- C3.** Email from [text removed for publication], Wall to Wall Television, May 2019.
- C4.** Four magazine articles, *Who Do You Think You Are?* Magazine (Summer 2018, Summer 2019, September 2019, January 2020).
- C5.** Email testimonials from former prisoners, December 2020.
- C6.** Testimonials: Simon Szreter on **Williams's** involvement with H&P (email, January 2021); Andrew Blick on **Williams's** successful running of H&P seminar (letter, January 2020).
- C7.** Home Office Improvement Plan document, February 2014.
- C8.** Feedback questionnaires from Home Office seminar series, 2016-2017.
- C9.** The Response to the 'Windrush Lessons Learned' Review: A Comprehensive Improvement Plan, September 2020.