

<b>Institution: University of the West of England, Bristol</b>		
<b>Unit of Assessment: 28</b>		
<b>Title of case study: Reshaping museum practice and the interpretation of criminal justice</b>		
<b>Period when the underpinning research was undertaken: 2010-2020</b>		
<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>
Dr Rose Wallis	Senior Lecturer	2015 – present
<b>Period when the claimed impact occurred: 2016 – 2020</b>		
<b>Is this case study continued from a case study submitted in 2014? No</b>		
<b>1. Summary of the impact</b>		
<p>The award-winning Courthouse Museum, opened at Shire Hall, Dorchester, in 2018, was curated by Dr Rose Wallis and based on her original research into regional courts of law as sites of social contest and reflections of social change. Shire Hall has national and international resonance as the site of the trial of the Tolpuddle Martyrs in 1834. The setting up of the museum, drawing on Wallis' research and collaboration with local trustees and museum professionals, has established a new centre for public engagement with the social function of criminal justice in the past and present. In its first year of opening, the museum attracted over 17,000 visitors. The dissemination and development of Wallis' interpretative approach employed at Shire Hall has provided a framework for professional practice, forging new partnerships for collaborative working between academics and heritage practitioners, and has been used to inform the redevelopment plan for Bristol's Victorian magistrates' courts.</p>		
<b>2. Underpinning research</b>		
<p>Historical research by Dr Rose Wallis has focused on criminal justice, local government, and the lived experience of these features of society amongst communities in the late-eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. It has addressed calls for more concerted studies of the actions and attitudes of the authorities to social protest. In focusing on the courts as structures of government it has provided important new insights into the social relationships shaped by them. Wallis' historical expertise underpinned and enabled her involvement with Shire Hall Courthouse Museum, which generated new historical research and practice-led research; interrogating the interpretation of criminal justice histories in heritage contexts.</p>		
<b>Research in practice</b>		
<p>Wallis' research has concentrated on regional courts of law and their function as both judicial and local governmental centres. Rather than seeing them as purely regulatory or controlling, her work has emphasised them as sites of social contest; places where people from all walks of life interacted and sought redress. Her published work on the prosecution of social protest has complicated representations of law as merely repressive, highlighting the importance of local and regional contexts in shaping popular action and responses to it (R1). Locally-focused studies expose more clearly the social relationships that underpin local government and popular protest (R2, R3), nuancing our understanding of national events</p>		

## Impact case study (REF3)

(R1, R2) and changes in the form and function of the criminal justice system (R3). The courts, from this perspective, shape and reflect social relationships, making their study vital to understanding societal change.

In March 2016, Wallis was invited to join the interpretation team at Dorset's Shire Hall, to use her research to develop a new interpretation strategy for a courthouse museum. The Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) had awarded Shire Hall GBP1,500,000 in 2015, match-funded by West Dorset District Council, to renovate and redevelop the site as a centre for public engagement with criminal justice, social justice and human rights.

Initial interpretation plans for the new museum had been rejected by both Shire Hall's trustees and the Lottery Fund. Focused on 'rough justice', the original strategy had emphasised narratives of repression and unproblematic progress in the development of our criminal justice system. Building on Wallis' research, a new interpretation strategy was developed by Wallis with Anna Bright (Managing Director), Iona Keen (Heritage Consultant), and Jill Cook (Trustee). This was framed instead by the conception of the courts as a dynamic, social space and focused on researching the individual cases that came before the court at Shire Hall in order to inform and engage visitors with the history and social function of criminal justice.

New archival research conducted by Wallis and local volunteers was used to create the fixed interpretation and multi-media guides, including a bespoke interactive family guide, at Shire Hall (R5). Cases concerning the treatment of young offenders, popular political activism, and social welfare, are presented to visitors; resonating with their own experiences, stimulating reflection and debate (R4, R5).

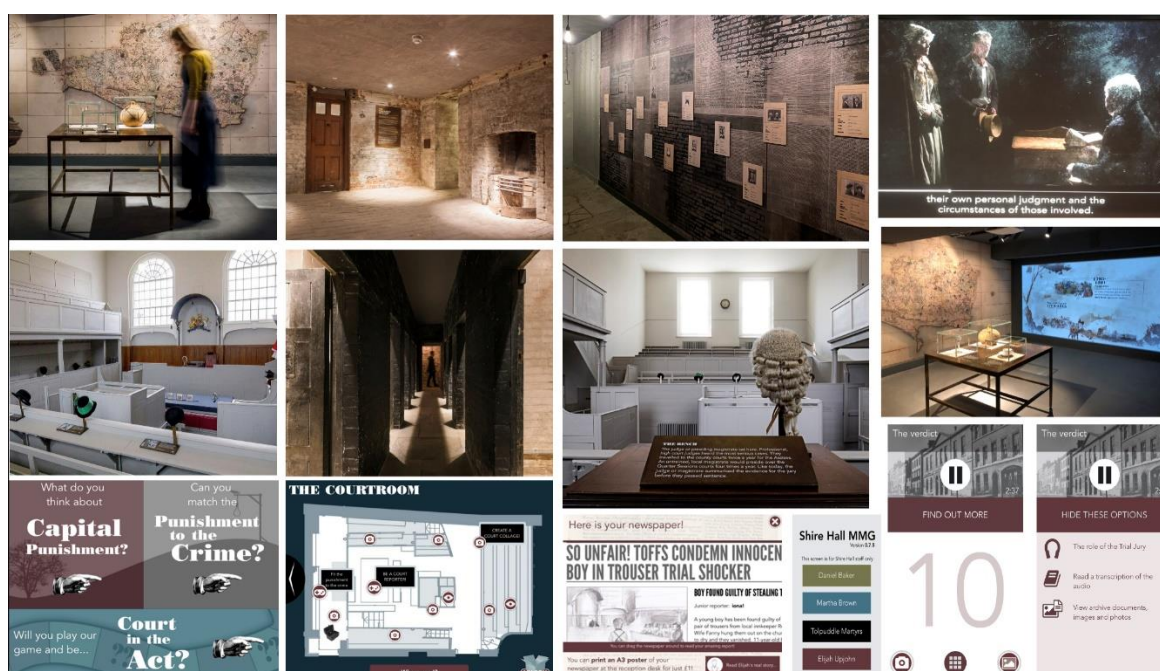


Figure 1: Shire Hall Historic Courthouse Museum

### Practice-led research

This new interpretative approach for Shire Hall drew on key elements of Wallis' research and historiographical positioning, which had important implications for public engagement and the museum's aims. Most people have little direct experience of the criminal justice system. A populist focus on the repressive function of the courts, or a generalized narrative of change, limits visitors' critical engagement by distancing them from the complex lived experience of historical actors. These narratives negate discussion of why particular judicial

and penal decisions were made, and limit critical reflection on the functions of criminal justice in the past and present (R4). Locally-focused, archivally-driven, interpretation has the scope to provide a more accurate and nuanced picture of the operation of the law (R1, R2, R3). It is also a means to engage visitors more effectively: by connecting them with the physical space in which these events occurred; by presenting accurate and un-sensationalised evidence; and by choosing cases that were representative of ordinary peoples' lived experience that are both relatable and relevant to contemporary society (R4). Collaborative work at Shire Hall, and additional comparative fieldwork at other sites of criminal justice undertaken by Wallis, underpinned her critical evaluation of the approach to interpretation adopted at Shire Hall (R4).

### 3. References to the research

- R1** Wallis, R. 2010. 'We do not come here...to inquire into grievances: we come here to decide law': Prosecuting Swing in Norfolk and Somerset 1829-1832.' *Southern History*, 32, pp. 159-175. <https://uwe-repository.worktribe.com/output/1494755>
- R2** Wallis, R. 2018. 'Prosecution, Precedence and Official Memory: judicial responses and perceptions of Swing in Norfolk', in C. J. Griffin and B. McDonagh (eds), *Remembering Protest in Britain since 1500: Memory, Materiality and the Landscape* (Palgrave Macmillan) <https://uwe-repository.worktribe.com/output/1494146>
- R3** Wallis, R. 2020. 'Rulers of the County: The magistracy and the challenge of local government c. 1790-1834', *The Local Historian* 50:2 pp.92-107. <https://uwe-repository.worktribe.com/output/6829300>
- R4** Wallis, R. 2019. 'More than horrible histories': engaging the public with criminal justice past and present' *Twelfth International Conference on the Inclusive Museum*, Paper delivered at Muntref, Museum of Immigration, 7-9 November. Buenos Aires: Argentina <https://uwe-repository.worktribe.com/output/6845434>
- R5** Shire Hall Historic Courthouse Museum, 2020. Exhibition portfolio: <https://uwe-repository.worktribe.com/output/6958867>

### 4. Details of the impact

#### Professional impact at Shire Hall

Shire Hall, Dorset's courthouse between 1797 and 1955, was the site of the trial of the Tolpuddle Martyrs in 1834, in recognition of which the Trades Union Congress purchased the courtroom through a charitable trust in 1956. It became a site of pilgrimage, particularly for trade unionists, but lacked a curatorial or interpretative framework for the public at large. Wallis, as academic practitioner within the interpretation team, was instrumental in providing this framework for the courthouse museum at the heart of Shire Hall's new public era. This framework directly shaped the exhibitions and the on-going public engagement activities. According to its Managing Director, it was '*thanks to Rose [Wallis] and her research that there is a Shire Hall historic courthouse museum*' (S1).

The proposed museum's interpretation strategy was presented to the Shire Hall board of trustees and adopted in September 2016 (S2). UWE-directed archival research, led by Wallis and volunteers at Dorset History Centre, provided all the content for the museum. Wallis collaborated with digital media providers, writers and film makers to incorporate the research into the fixed and multi-media interpretative displays and activities (R5). The same focus on archival evidence has been central to underpinning the museum's learning programme (S1).

Professional impact has been key to the project. Wallis has been actively involved in the training of volunteers, leading a series of workshops in March 2018 for approximately 80 volunteers prior to the museum's opening, complemented by a written guide, as an

introduction to the history of Shire Hall and criminal justice, and to the interpretative ethos and aims of the museum (S1, S3). In August 2018, Wallis facilitated another workshop to support volunteers engaged in archival research to refresh and support the historical content at Shire Hall and, in September 2020, a workshop to support the induction of new volunteers.

### **Public impact at Shire Hall**

Public impact has been notable. In its first year of opening Shire Hall welcomed over 17,000 visitors. The research methodology was 'instrumental' in developing a 'multi-dimensional approach' to the new interpretation strategy and the museum's overarching theme: 'Justice in the balance'. Throughout the project,

*'[Wallis] was instrumental in ensuring not only historical accuracy but also that the narrative linked back to our key messages, project aims and vision for Shire Hall' (S4).*

Combining archival research with a dialogic understanding of visitor engagement has been at the heart of this strategy, seeking to encourage critical reflection on the operation and social function of criminal justice past and present (S2). The archival research has proved a vital part of the visitor experience; 97% of survey respondents confirmed real lived experiences had enriched their visit, making it 'more lifelike' and 'authentic', it '[b]rings the building to life. It puts history into a personal perspective.' 70% of respondents stated that it had made them think differently about the role of law in their lives, offering critical reflections on the apparent improvements in criminal justice. It also demonstrated 'how important it is that the reasons behind what caused people to commit crime are looked into', that 'mistakes are still made' and the need 'even in the future to respect all people in society' (S5). The museum is 'changing people's perceptions of the criminal justice system' (S1).

In its first year of opening, Shire Hall was awarded Silver for Access and Inclusivity, and Gold for Tourism Innovation at the Dorset Tourism Awards (2018). At the Tourism Excellence Awards for the South West region, the museum was highly commended again for Access and Inclusivity and received a Silver award for Tourism Innovation. In 2019, Shire Hall was a national finalist in the Association for Heritage Interpretation Discover Heritage Awards, where the judges noted that:

*'The interpretation offers a clear story about the Shire Hall and 'justice in the balance', allowing visitors to compare and reflect upon similar issues raised today. The chosen media engage visitors with particular physical, sensory and intellectual needs' (S6).*

The museum won Bronze at the Visit England Awards for Excellence 2020. *The Guardian* praised Shire Hall's 'clever curation and excellent interactive guides' that 'will entertain visitors of all ages' (S7).

### **Supporting the museum through the Covid-19 pandemic**

Since Spring 2020, Wallis has worked with Shire Hall's learning manager to redevelop elements of the museum's interpretation to make it 'Covid-secure' and facilitate reopening (S1). The Managing Director recognised how integral Wallis has become to the museum, 'helping out with a second 'new' interpretation and restructure once Covid struck', and she since been made a trustee. Moreover, it was felt that:

*'the interpretation work that [Wallis] has done could form the blueprint for similar such collaborations with museums of all sizes across the country' (S1).*

**Extending the interpretative approach beyond Shire Hall**

Extending the interpretation model employed at Shire Hall has been centred on supporting redevelopment of Bristol's old magistrates' courts. The National Lottery Heritage Fund (NLHF) reviewers of a successful GBP4,250,000 bid to redevelop the courts (collaboratively with the Bristol-based charity, Creative Youth Network (CYN)) commended Wallis' vital '*robust heritage interpretation strategy*' which was central to the proposal and which NLHF had identified as missing from CYN's initial proposals (**S8**).

This strategy not only offers public access to the history of the courts, but helps facilitate new use of the building as a creative enterprise centre specifically for young people from disadvantaged or marginalised backgrounds. Emphasising past and present connections, the interpretation strategy supports public engagement with the work of CYN by considering the social function of public buildings and spaces and the treatment of young people:

*'[Wallis] continues to play an important role in overseeing how our heritage interpretation strategy works in practice, something which will be key in our work with young people and their understanding of history'* (**S8**).

Wallis' critical evaluation of the approach employed at Shire Hall has been used to inform interpretative practice more broadly. In February 2020, Wallis facilitated an interdisciplinary collaborative workshop. This brought together heritage professionals from Ripon Museum Trust, the Museum of London, and the National Justice Museum, as well as academic colleagues in Law, Criminology, Social and Public History, and Heritage Tourism, to share and evaluate approaches to interpretation and audience engagement. The discussions were used by Wallis to produce a manifesto for effective and ethical interpretation of criminal justice histories (**S9**).

The Senior Curator and Archivist at the National Justice Museum explained the value of the workshop and manifesto:

*'It helped us to re-examine our Display Policy and to be more explicit in how we interpret different groups and their lived experiences of the criminal justice system in a more empathic way.'* The manifesto provides '*the starting point of laying down the basis of best practice for museums and heritage sites.*' Most crucially, it will be used to '*forge new partnerships for collaborative working between academics and heritage practitioners on projects*' (**S10**).

**5. Sources to corroborate the impact**

- S1** Testimonial from the Managing Director of Shire Hall historic courthouse museum
- S2** Shire Hall interpretation strategy, September 2016
- S3** Shire Hall Historical Briefing for volunteers, March 2018
- S4** Testimonial from the Interpretation Consultant, Shire Hall
- S5** Visitor evaluation from Shire Hall
- S6** Shire Hall Historic Courthouse Museum, Runner up in *Association for Heritage Interpretation Discover Heritage Awards 2019*
- S7** [The Guardian, review of Shire Hall](#), 7<sup>th</sup> August 2018
- S8** Testimonial from the Creative Director, Creative Youth Network
- S9** [More than horrible histories: a manifesto for effective and ethical interpretation of criminal justice histories](#) (2020) (manifesto can be downloaded via link)
- S10** Testimonial from the Senior Curator and Archivist, National Justice Museum