Institution: University of Liverpool

Unit of Assessment: (28) History

Title of case study: Facilitating citizen research, democratising data, and changing public attitudes towards criminality in the UK, Australia and the US.

Period when the underpinning research was undertaken: 2013-2017

Details of staff conducting the underpinning research from the submitting unit:

Name:	Role:	Period employed by submitting HEI:
Professor Barry Godfrey	Professor of Social Justice	2012-2020

Period when the claimed impact occurred: 2014-2020

Is this case study continued from a case study submitted in 2014? N

1. Summary of the impact

The **Digital Panopticon** created new opportunities for family historians and students in schools and Higher Education to pursue their own research using the free searchable website's unique capability to link together over 50 digitised data record sets relating to the offending histories and biographies of 90,000 people tried at the Old Bailey (1670 and 1925) - the most complete record of convict lives ever created. The website, together with the physical exhibitions, public talks/lectures which were formed using the data and the findings, as well as printed/television media which reported or drew upon the research, have demonstrably changed public understandings of criminality in the UK, Australia and the US.

2. Underpinning research

The aim of the **Digital Panopticon** project (3.1) was to explore modern issues around the use of imprisonment and re-offending, using data on people either transported to Australia (1803-68) or imprisoned in the UK (1853-1914). Until the **Digital Panopticon** was launched in 2013 it had been impossible to answer a question originally posed in the 18th century by Jeremy Bentham – which was the most effective system of punishment, 'imprisonment' or transportation? (3.2) Led by the University of Liverpool, professors, researchers, and PGRs from five universities in the UK and Australia joined forces to share methods and ideas. The result was the **Digital Panopticon** website, which combines over 50 datasets about convicts collected together for the first time. Collating this enormous body of data (50 million data fields) made it possible to explore and analyse the lives and criminal careers of over 90,000 individuals who were sentenced at the Old Bailey between 1690 and 1925. The main theme (Penal Outcomes), also led by Liverpool, explored the factors – type of punishment, gender, offending record, family relationships, age, re-offending, and occupation – which either prolonged or shortened criminal careers. Being able to compare in detail large numbers of convicts' offending histories and biographies has allowed us to demonstrate that there were significant factors which supported desistence from offending (relationship formation, employment, maturation, and the level of reintegration back into the economic and social base of the country they lived in). At the conclusion we had definitively answered Bentham's and many other questions, finding that:

- Non-custodial sentences (transportation to Australia) damaged people's lives, but not as much as did custodial sentences (British convict prisons) (3.2).
- A significant proportion of convicts re-offended, but transported convicts committed more minor offences than those imprisoned in the UK (3.2).
- Transported women fared better than imprisoned women over the longer term (3.3).
- The children and grandchildren of transported convicts were taller/healthier and had better lives than the children of convicts imprisoned in the UK (3.4, 3.5).

- Non-custodial sentences for children reduced re-offending (3.6).

3. References to the research

3.1 The Digital Panopticon website: www.digitalpanopticon.org

3.2 Godfrey, B. (2019) 'Prison versus Western Australia: Which worked best, the Australian penal colony or the English convict prison system?', *British Journal of Criminology*, 59, 5, 1139-1160 https://doi.org/10.1093/bjc/azz012

3.3 Williams, L. and Godfrey, B. (2018) *Criminal Women 1850-1920: Researching the Lives of Female Convicts in Britain & Australia*, Pen & Sword: Barnsley (ISBN 978-1-52671-861-7, available on request).

3.4 Watkins, E. and Godfrey, B. (2018) *Criminal Children: Researching Juvenile Offenders 1820-1920*, Pen and Sword: Barnsley (ISBN 978-1-52673-808-0, available on request).

3.5 https://theconversation.com/children-of-convicts-transported-to-australia-grew-up-taller-than-their-peers-in-the-uk-84006

3.6 Godfrey, B., Cox, P, Shore, H. and Alker, Z. (2017) *Young Criminal Lives*, Clarendon Series, Oxford University Press (ISBN 978-0-19-878849-2, available on request).

4. Details of the impact

The **Digital Panopticon** is a freely accessible website with over 300,000 users since 2017 (5.1). Described as a vital website for research (5.4)*,* user-beneficiaries ranged from family historians ("*To Australians, your project is of national significance. An eye-opening and jaw dropping project* [about the] *foundation of our nation*", 5.2); to government ministers ("*The project is nationally and internationally significant as it highlights the unique nature of the convict experience in Western Australia and provides a better understanding of our archives and history*", 5.3).

User-beneficiaries: pump-priming family history research

By freely sharing our research with the public on the successes and failures of the systems of transportation to Australia and imprisonment in the UK (something the Australian media described as the "Convict Ashes", 5.4), we brought a huge body of data from beyond paywalls to family historians/genealogists. People used data in **Digital Panopticon** together with the online explanatory essays to support large numbers of personal and family research journeys (5.2). The results were transformative: "*Truly heart-breaking. This is no understatement. Thank you. Thank you. Your project will no doubt reach into many households in Australia and England*" (5.2). Many had their family-stories challenged, confirmed, or explained, and were determined to carry on with their research. "*I am descended from ten NSW convicts. From the material it appears that after arrival in Australia the women were able to become, or to marry, moderately prosperous and, generally, respectable men … I am now considering how I can use the material I and others have gathered for historical projects.*" "*I have been a Civil Servant of some 40 years and worked in Prison Administration for six years I was also an Administrative Researcher to the Inquiry into the Efficacy of the NSW Police Administration. I have used Digital Panopticon to conclude that most transported convicts were far better off after their arrival in Australia.*" (5.2).

Using Exhibitions from Liverpool to the wider world to change opinion

Whilst there was clearly considerable appetite for the website, interest in physical and online exhibitions which used the data was also significant. Partners at the University of Sheffield led on an exhibition (*Criminal Lives,* December 2018 - May 2019) at the London Metropolitan Archives using data from **Digital Panopticon** sourced by **Godfrey** and **Williams** (Liverpool-based PDRA) (praised by *The Lancet* for its contemporary resonance to debates about contemporary penal reform). **Godfrey** and **Price** (Liverpool-based PDRA) then organised an exhibition showcasing the impact of punishment on people's lives at Liverpool Metropolitan Cathedral (5-12 March 2018)

focusing on Liverpool-born prisoners to embed stories locally (3.2, 3.3, 3.4). Forty of the 3,000+ visitors from Merseyside (and wider afield in the UK and across Europe) who saw the exhibition left comments stating that their views of criminals were changed ("*relevant and accessible to a wider audience; Brings dead people alive. What a fantastically informative exhibition – I shall never look at criminals in the same way!*" 5.5). We were subsequently invited to take the exhibition to Liverpool Legal Aid Offices to give a talk to staff as part of in-house training. The Diversity Champion in the Criminal Applications Section stated that after staff had witnessed the similarities in the lives of the Victorian and the modern poor, they had a greater appreciation of the difficulties faced by legal aid applicants today: "*I know we do the unconscious bias training in work, but I think in our role sometimes you can get certain perceptions of criminals. This exhibition reminds you that you can't do that…it assists us in our day-to-day thinking as caseworkers*" (5.6).

As a result of the success of this exhibition **Godfrey** was asked by National Trust Australia to construct a temporary exhibition at UNESCO world-heritage-site, Hobart Penitentiary Chapel, Tasmania*.* The co-produced exhibition and accompanying public lectures focused on the improvement of social policy towards offenders ("*a stunning success…one of the most popular historic experiences in Hobart*"*,* becoming a top-10 tourist site in Hobart on TripAdvisor, 5.7). Following the 45% increase in footfall, the exhibition was made permanent. Using some of the existing images with new images of US convicts, an online exhibition was held at the Willson Center (part of the Uni. of Georgia which hosts exhibitions for students and general public), launched by an online public lecture on unconscious bias. As a result of this exhibition, in March 2020 **Godfrey** collaborated on a grant application with Alabama Department of Archives & History to digitize records of African American prisoners using the **Digital Panopticon** model. The project therefore continues to impact on the democratization of data in the UK, Australia and the US.

Impacting on public debates

Since 2014, there has been considerable engagement with international public audiences. In 2015, **Godfrey** gave the Australia Day Address in London, attended by the Australian High Commissioner and Lord Mayor of the City of London (5.8) which led to **Godfrey** giving a private lecture to the Judges at the Central Criminal Court, who then used **Digital Panopticon** data for a theatre production, *Trial and Error*, at the Old Bailey (**Godfrey** provided data from **Digital Panopticon** and co-authored the script; performances raised £30,000 for The Sheriffs' & Recorder's Fund which provides grants to aid the reform of ex-prisoners, 5.9). In May 2017 **Godfrey** organised a week of public lectures and *Findmypast*-supported family-history sessions in a Scottish bookshop (over 100 attendees). **Godfrey and Williams** introduced the website to the Australian public at the *The Big Convict Debate* at Fremantle Prison (5/2/2018, 300 attendees) which was held to mark the 150th anniversary of the end of convict transportation to Australia. Published at the same time and authored by **Godfrey and Williams**, the [*Conversation* piece](#) on the last Western Australian convict was read by over 100,000 people (77% of readers were Australian). There followed a series of public lectures across Australia. A talk at the Institute of Advanced Studies in Perth attracted over 250 adult learners, community historians, local politicians and academics ("*We've never had so many people staying behind to ask questions",* 5.2)*.* State politicians and local people debated prison reform following a public lecture in Tasmania, and media interviews on national TV and radio helped to stimulate debates about the use of imprisonment ("*Professor Godfrey has convinced us that the debate over crime and punishment, reform and rehabilitation is as relevant today as it was two centuries ago*", *Late Night Live*, Australian Broadcasting Corporation, 5.4). The ABC radio interview/public lectures were made available online; and in 2020, the ABC included **Godfrey'**s programme as one of nine prestigious "Big Ideas" in their series of "*the best of talks, forums, debates, and festivals held in Australia and around the world, casting light on major social, cultural, scientific and political issues*", 5.4).

Digital Panopticon also indirectly impacted on public attitudes, through providing data and inspiration for the cultural industries. Matthew Crampton, co-author of the play *The Transports*, performed across UK, stated that he came across the **Digital Panopticon** "*when already deeply engaged in writing and telling stories about transportation* [and that he] *was able to make good*

use of this wonderful resource to find and trace individual cases from the Old Bailey to Australia. Particularly useful are the explanatory guides to different records The **Digital Panopticon** has helped me beyond being a useful resource. It has reinforced my belief that, so long as you make the information personal and relevant, you can lead casual observers willingly into highly detailed records. It is a fine place to start one's research, plus, of course, an excellent resource for conducting that research (5.2)." In addition to Crampton's use of the data, TV Companies have used **Godfrey**'s research findings to mould their programmes. **Godfrey** provided guidance on life-course offending to various film production companies (*Wall to Wall, IKON, Lion Films*), later becoming consultant (providing research, advising on and writing scripts) for Series 13 of *Who Do You Think You Are?* **Godfrey** also providing on-screen interviews for four episodes (a weekly audience of over 6,000,000 saw the findings of **Digital Panopticon** used to explain the causes of criminality). **Godfrey** then worked with a Channel 5 production company, explaining how Digital Panopticon biographical data-linking can be used for non-Old Bailey cases, transforming academic research into accessible material which would appeal to a wide audience and providing source material/interviews broadcast in 2019 (5.2).

Creating active learners

By creating a website where students can engage directly with data, the **Digital Panopticon** has created active school- and undergraduate student researchers who are now able to design their own projects. It has become a central part of annually run research-led undergraduate modules in the UK, Australia and the US (5.10). This has helped to transform pedagogic practices using digital humanities to inform, challenge, and stimulate students; to provide an excellent teaching experience for tutors and learners; and to extend the boundaries of the possible with regard to the use of historical data in school and undergraduate settings. Undergraduates have seized the opportunity to manipulate and investigate data on their own, and to construct their own research: In HAA007 Convict Ancestors (300 students), University of Tasmania Diploma of Family history students (many non-traditional entry and adult-learners) are introduced to the Digital Panopticon and trained to search its collections to enrich the study of a single life course. Students on HAA105 Convicts in Context (210 students) are provided with a detailed online tour of the Digital Panopticon and shown how to use its features to do more complex searches. They then explore the lives of prisoners who share a particular characteristic (i.e. convicted of a particular crime, transported to Australia, or imprisoned in the UK), to use data to, really, make their own research. The freedom was enthusing and invigorating for students ("*HAA105 scored 98% approval*", 5.10).

At the University of Georgia, HIST 3775 students use **Digital Panopticon** to construct a research question and write up either a formal research proposal or a research paper: "*My students find it challenging to shift from the standard assignment of reading and discussing written sources to conducting data analysis and charting their own course to a research topic and thesis. Nevertheless, it is precisely this kind of novel, hands-on research project that encourages students to practice self-activated learning. Some students resist and struggle more than others but, by the end of the process, all of them have expressed their satisfaction with work which they can really call their own…the experience is transformative*" (5.10).

Using **Digital Panopticon** in this way has not only transformed their undergraduate learning experiences and achievements, but has also provided a route to enrichment of their employment and post-education experiences: "*…at least a dozen of the students who got their first taste of digital humanities research with Digital Panopticon have gone on to work in the Digital Humanities Center as participants in summer workshops, interns, or as teaching assistants…For the past three years students who prepared the strongest research essay using the Digital Panopticon won the History Department's Award for Best Digital Humanities Project*" (5.10).

5. Sources to corroborate the impact

   5.1 Evidence of the use of website provided by Google analytics (until 31st July 2020).

5.2 Comments from users of Digital Panopticon website from the UK and Australia, and events feedback.

5.3 Letter from WA Minister for Local Government, Heritage, Culture and the Arts commenting on the importance of the Digital Panopticon to the cultural heritage of Western Australia.

5.4 Australian media reporting on the Digital Panopticon

5.5 Comments from visitors to Liverpool Metropolitan Cathedral March 2018, primarily from Liverpool and the UK, but also from visitors from Ireland, Europe, and the wider world.

5.6 Comments made by staff of the Liverpool Legal Aid Office concerning the exhibition and talk which constituted part of their in-house training programme.

5.7 Email from Head of National Trust Tasmania (Hobart Penitentiary Church) commending the increase in footfall caused by the Digital Panopticon exhibition, and how the exhibition increased the profile of the site.

5.8 Letter from Sir Michael Savoury, Lord Mayor of London; details of Australia Day Address (attended by the Australian High Commissioner; representatives of the Royal Navy and the City of London Guilds); and email from Deputy Chair of the Britain-Australia Society.

5.9 Email from Judge Peter Rook, Central Criminal Court (Old Bailey) and organizer of 'Trial and Error"; together with details of the money raised for the Judges and Recorders Fund (and how they distribute that money to ex- prisoners to encourage rehabilitation).

5.10 Email from module leaders about the use of Digital Panopticon in encouraging and facilitating students to become independent researchers.