

OUR CRIMINAL PAST: EDUCATING HISTORIANS OF CRIME: CLASSROOM, ARCHIVES,
COMMUNITY

Second AHRC Network Event

6th September 2013, Leeds Metropolitan University

Jo Turner¹

This enlightening and well-attended day was the second of three research networking events, each organised by Dr Heather Shore (Leeds Metropolitan University) and Dr Helen Johnston (University of Hull), and supported by the Arts and Humanities Research Council. As such, it was the second opportunity for scholars, archivists and those engaged in an educational and heritage capacity in museums and prisons who are interested professionally and academically in *Our Criminal Past* and its future, to meet, discuss, hear excellent papers, and discuss further. Held at Broadcasting Place, Leeds Metropolitan University, the event was attended by over fifty established and newer members of the network all interested and involved, in particular for this event, in educating crime historians - academically in schools, and in further and higher educational establishments, as well as in local history heritage sites. The day was split into four sessions: session one was concerned with digital and media resources for teaching the history of crime; session two was concerned with student participation in crime history; after lunch, session three was concerned with archives, heritage and educating historians of crime; and the fourth and last session was concerned with teaching future historians of crime.

After preliminary welcome statements by Dr Heather Shore, who reminded the audience that this was a network event where audience participation was welcome and expected, the first morning session on digital and media resources for the history of crime was opened by Dr Louise Jackson (University of Edinburgh) with her paper entitled *Crime on Film: using visual sources in the classroom*, and followed closely by Dr

¹ turnerj@chester.ac.uk. Lecturer in Criminology, University of Chester.

Andrew Davies (University of Liverpool) with his paper entitled *Digital histories of crime and research-led teaching*. Both papers outlined innovative specialist modules on offer to third year undergraduates reading history at the respective universities.

Dr Jackson talked about the module she leads in which students examine debates about youth and delinquency in post war Britain through film. In the paper Dr Jackson said that, through the work of the British Film Institute and the Scottish Screen Archive, there is now a substantial and rich seam of visual material available for use in teaching. This includes documentary film, fictional feature films (although often in a social realist frame) and those that straddle genres. Working as historians with this seam of material raises a number of questions that the paper set out to address. Dr Jackson posed the questions of how might these representations and interventions be interpreted? To what extent did writers and film-makers reinforce dominant social scripts about 'juvenile delinquency' and to what extent did they challenge them? What kind of a lens does film offer regarding cultural perceptions and attitudes? How should historians work 'with' film, particularly in the classroom? Using two examples, *The Weak and The Wicked* (1954) and *Good Time Girl* (1948), Dr Jackson addressed the questions posed and talked about how she uses such films in the classroom. Discussion following the paper revealed (minor) problems such as some students being unfamiliar with black and white film, and recognition of other cultural forms such as literature being a good substitute for film if the module covered earlier time periods.

Similarly, Dr Davies spoke about a pioneering module he leads entitled *Digital histories of crime and punishment in C19 England*, in which the teaching is research-led rather than research-informed. Dr Davies outlined the difference by explaining that special subjects (in history) generally require students to work on primary sources traditionally selected by members of staff, so that students are guided through packs of gobbets and trained in source criticism. However, Dr Davies explained, histories of crime and punishment benefit from a vast array of sources from digital newspapers, parliamentary

papers and the Old Bailey Online to the collections held by on-line genealogy web resources such as *Ancestry* and *Findmypast*. Using these sources, Dr Davies takes a cohort of no more than fifteen students through the whole research process from formulating their research proposal to producing a 5,000 word project. With the emphasis being on the students doing their own research, they are required to devise their own research topics, collect their own primary sources, and relate their findings to relevant secondary literatures. Although challenging, Dr Davies reported that the first two cohorts of students relished the challenges that the module presented - not only did they produce work of a high standard, but just as importantly, they reported that they came to see themselves as historians in their own right, and as skilled researchers. Discussion following the paper mainly centered on whether students would benefit from mini contextualising lectures as there was no prior orthodox teaching on the history of crime and punishment delivered to undergraduates reading history at the University of Liverpool.

The second session of the morning, opened by Dr Johnston, was concerned with student participation in crime history, and saw Dr Drew Gray (University of Northampton) present his paper entitled *Putting Undergraduates on Trial: Using the Old Bailey Online in teaching and assessment* and Zoe Alker (Liverpool John Moores University) present her paper *Blogging Beyond the Classroom*. Both papers illustrated how undergraduate students in the respective universities (and disciplines) were taught and assessed in their use of crime history sources in non-orthodox ways. Following a description of the *Old Bailey On-Line*, Dr Gray explained how for several years he has been using it, along with *London Lives 1690-1800* and *Locating London's Past*, as part of a teaching and assessment exercise for second year undergraduate history students with the broad aim of reconstructing a criminal trial from the Old Bailey proceedings. The assessment has two parts - a group 'presentation' lasting approximately fifteen to twenty minutes, in the form of a re-enactment of a criminal trial in a moot room, and a 1,500 word individual written piece containing a deeper analysis; the two halves weighted equally

for assessment purposes so that he can test students' abilities to present orally and on paper. The assessment takes place at the start of the second (spring) term to enable a number of the themes of the module to be introduced earlier in the (year-long) module which it is expected will emerge during the assessment exercise. Dr Gray explained that the assessment has developed over the time he has been teaching the module, and has proved to be a popular and challenging one for students. In his paper Dr Gray discussed the assessment and how it has evolved, looked at some of its strengths and weaknesses and suggested ways in which he considered it might be developed in the future.

In her paper, Zoe Alker explored the implications of student blogging in a third year undergraduate English degree module, *Prison Voices: Crime, Conviction and Confession 1700-1900*. For this module students have to produce six 1,000 word critical reflection pieces as blogs for both dissemination of their work and assessment. Zoe convincingly argued that using public blogging as an assessment tool trains students to become creators as well as users of digital content, consumers not simply users, and encourages a more active engagement in research participation and knowledge exchange. However, during the paper, Zoe also argued that while this model of learning is highly rewarding for students, and can be itemised on a *curriculum vitae* as having created a web resource, it highlights pedagogical challenges relating to digital literacy, comparability with traditional assessment forms, and quality-control of published student work.

Following an excellent buffet lunch, Dr Shore introduced the third session of the day which contained three papers and was concerned with archives, heritage and educating historians of crime. This session saw Pollie Shorthouse (Galleries of Justice, Nottingham) present her paper entitled *Learn from the past to act in the present and change the future*, Sue Mackay (Ripon Museums Trust) present her paper entitled *Engaging Audiences* and Andrew Payne (The National Archives) present his paper entitled *Educating Child Criminals at The National Archives*. Pollie Shorthouse gave an introduction into how the National Centre for Citizenship and the Law (a charitable

organisation that is rolling its work out over the country) works with young people, from key stage one up to sixth form students, across the United Kingdom in historical and contemporary courtrooms to bring criminal history to life and showing how it affects young people today and can make an impact on their future. They do this by getting young people into the courtroom to act out criminal trials. This works to not only inform them of the processes that may take place if they break the law but also raises their aspirations by showing the criminal justice careers beyond the traditional.

Sue Mackay's paper similarly outlined how the Ripon Museum Trust uses primary evidence in the form of archive records, oral history, original artefacts and its buildings and sites to educate, engage and inspire a range of formal and informal learners but mainly concentrated in this paper on how the trust works with young people in schools and colleges. Sue gave examples of how the Trust uses these sources to interpret the history of their three unique sites to suit diverse audiences. Following Sue, Andrew Payne spoke about how the National Archives Education Service has made extensive use of criminal records both online and in education workshops for primary and secondary school students. In particular, Andrew demonstrated using examples how the prison commission records which relate directly to children have a particular appeal for young people and have generated some of the most creative responses. To illustrate this, Andrew played the inspiring drama produced by blind and partially sighted young people using the records of William Towers aged twelve in 1870 (known on the output as *Prisoner 4099*).

After tea and coffee, Dr Johnston opened the fourth and last session of the day which was concerned with teaching future historians of crime. The session saw two papers, the first from Peter D'Sena (Higher Education Academy) entitled *The future of teaching our criminal past in higher education* and the second by Ben Walsh (Historical Association) entitled *History of crime in the classroom*. Peter D'Sena argued that although schoolteachers tend to publish most about strategies for teaching the criminal

past, the history of crime has been subject to a scholarly boom in both research and teaching in higher education institutions in the past three decades and there are few signs that its popularity is waning - evidenced by the numbers of higher education teachers and doctoral candidates in the event's audience. Therefore, Peter argued, university historians need now to reflect on the future of teaching our criminal past (the overarching theme of the day), taking into account not only matters of pedagogy and opportunity, but also issues about its place and purpose in the broader curriculum.

To 'future proof' the existing, well-established position of the crime historian, Peter proposed four broad areas and solutions: Partnership - Peter suggested that university historians and teachers need to tap into public histories and community education such as local history studies. Secondly, interdisciplinarity - Peter suggested that crime historians should consciously work across disciplines (as art historians have done for a while). Thirdly, the use of technology - Peter argued that 'traditional' forms of engagement, such as field, archive and museum visits and local case studies may still have a vital role to play, but so too might the MOOC (Massive On-Line Open Course). However, he warned against allowing the need to keep abreast of technology to take over the history that needs to be told. Finally, Peter advised crime historians to continue with what they know works with research and teaching, not to abandon orthodox methods especially if they have delivered results in the past, but to keep them and bring into play the new technologies and methods as they fitted in and enhanced the teaching. Returning to the school classroom, Ben Walsh ended the day by echoing Peter's opening comments and arguing that the history of crime and punishment is often a marginal topic in history teaching in schools and colleges, and that the current curriculum review will have a negligible impact on this position. In his paper, Ben argued that more important, for the inclusion of the history of crime and punishment in the classroom and for the future of higher education crime history students, are the strategies and resources which convince teachers the value of studying crime history and support them in teaching it.

In conclusion, this networking day was as successful as the first for all who attended in providing a stimulating mix of papers by motivating speakers in genial surroundings. Despite the breadth, or maybe because of it, the papers and subsequent discussions brought together a range of topics in order to continue the discussions surrounding *Our Criminal Past*, by discussing today the education of crime historians - academically in schools, and in further and higher educational establishments, as well as in local history heritage sites – and demonstrating how these overlap and complement each other. The third and last of these three research networking events will be held on January 31st 2014 at the Galleries of Justice in Nottingham under the theme of representing penal histories and will be specifically concerned with displaying and narrating the criminal past.