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| Institution: University of Hertfordshire |
| Unit of Assessment: Panel D (30): History |
| Title of case study: The Old Bailey Online: Democratising access to social history |
| <p>1. Summary of the impact (indicative maximum 100 words)</p> <p>The Old Bailey Online gives access to 197,745 trial reports (1674–1913), and constitutes the largest body of accurately transcribed and tagged historical text currently available. It contributes to the infrastructure of a ‘history from below’ and, according to the AHRC, ‘highlights the direct relationship that arts and humanities research can have with the public’. Used by over 3 million people since 2008, it has formed the inspiration for radio and television series, stimulated debate, enriched genealogical research and formed a rich resource for lexicographers. Most importantly, it has made the stuff of social history freely available to everyone.</p> |
| <p>2. Underpinning research (indicative maximum 500 words)</p> <p>An equal collaboration between Tim Hitchcock at the University of Hertfordshire and Robert Shoemaker at the University of Sheffield, with Clive Emsley of the Open University co-directing the second stage, the Old Bailey Online grew out of the directors’ respective research on the histories of poverty and crime in London. For Hitchcock, a concern to develop a distinctive form of ‘history from below’, encompassing the experience of poverty and poor relief, began in the early 1990s with the construction of a database of the parish archive of St Luke Chelsea. Hitchcock used this to write a prosopographical history of illegitimacy and poor relief in eighteenth-century London, published as a chapter in the edited volume <i>Chronicling Poverty</i> (1997), for which Hitchcock also served as one of three scholarly editors. Running concurrently, in collaboration with Robert Shoemaker, Hitchcock helped prepare and design a hypertext edition of primary sources reflecting the history of eighteenth-century urban England, which was published on CD-Rom in 1998. These projects, and Hitchcock’s ten years’ experience of teaching humanities computing, laid the intellectual and technical foundations for his contribution to the creation of the Old Bailey Online project, beginning in 1999.</p> <p>Hitchcock, working with the Higher Education Digitisation Service at the University of Hertfordshire, managed the process of digitally scanning the published <i>Proceedings of the Old Bailey</i> and using ‘double entry rekeying’ to transcribe the 127 million words of trial text. From 2005 to 2008, ten part-time University of Hertfordshire researchers tagged the nineteenth-century text using a unique XML mark-up schema, in which Hitchcock and Shoemaker defined each tag based on their knowledge of the eighteenth-century legal system and the <i>Proceedings</i>, thereby creating and imposing a new system for categorising all crimes and punishments of the period. Hitchcock co-managed all other aspects of the site’s production in collaboration with Shoemaker (and Emsley for 2005–8); and, with Shoemaker and staff of the Humanities Research Institute at Sheffield, defined the relevant XML schemas and naming conventions: 90 of these are, by their nature, unique to the Old Bailey. Hitchcock and Shoemaker also co-authored the 50,000 words of historical background materials on the basis of detailed archival research.</p> <p>By combining a double-entry rekeying methodology with XML mark-up and applying them to the <i>Proceedings</i>, the project created a 99.9 per cent accurate transcription of 197,745 pre-1834 trial records, including witness testimonies. This ensured that users could carry out keyword and phrase searches of the transcripts and images of the pages; undertake structured searching on crimes, verdicts and punishments; and generate robust statistics on crimes, prosecutions and changes in both criminal justice and the language associated with it. The hypertextual layout and character of the background materials, underlying data architecture, and methodology for capturing images and text was each created specifically for this project, and was informed by the project directors’ specific historiographical agendas and core aspiration of creating an infrastructure for ‘history from below’. The site was consciously designed to lead a mass public audience into direct</p> |

and empathetic engagement with the social history of working people.

These projects led to successor schemes that built on the Old Bailey site, creating a suite of linked social historical online databases, including 'London Lives' (www.londonlives.org) and 'Locating London's Past' (www.locatinglondon.org). Collectively, these provide the means of exploring the role of plebeian agency in the histories of poverty and crime, applying new methodologies to the research process, and publishing the resulting history for a new academic and popular audience.

3. References to the research (indicative maximum of six references)

Publications

Tim Hitchcock and Robert Shoemaker (project directors) *Old Bailey Proceedings Online, 1674–1913* (www.oldbaileyonline.org) [electronic resource], 2003–. ISBN 9780955787607

Tim Hitchcock and Robert Shoemaker, *Tales from the Hanging Court*. (Hodder, 2006; paperback edn, 2007) ISBN 9780340913741 (Hardback); 9780340913758 (Paperback)

Tim Hitchcock, *Down and Out in Eighteenth-Century London* (Continuum, 2004; paperback edn, 2007). ISBN 9781852852818 (Hardback); 9781852855529 (Paperback)

Tim Hitchcock, 'Begging on the Streets of Eighteenth-Century London', *Journal of British Studies*, 44: 3 (July 2005), 478–498. DOI: 10.1086/429704

Tim Hitchcock, 'Digital Searching and the Re-formulation of Historical Knowledge', in Mark Greengrass and Lorna Hughes (eds), *The Virtual Representation of the Past* (Ashgate, 2008), 81–90. ISBN 978-0-7546-7288-3

Funding

Development of the Old Bailey Online resource was underpinned by the following project funding:

2001–4: AHRB, Resource Enhancement Programme, **£281,820** awarded to Tim Hitchcock (Principal Investigator) and Robert Shoemaker for 'The Electronic Old Bailey Proceedings, c.1670–1788'.

2001–4: New Opportunities Fund, **£372,000**, awarded to Robert Shoemaker (Principal Investigator) and Tim Hitchcock for 'Old Bailey Proceedings up to 1834'.

2005–8: AHRC, Resource Enhancement Programme, **£317,114**, awarded to Tim Hitchcock (Principal Investigator), Robert Shoemaker and Clive Emsley for 'The Central Criminal Court, 1834–1913'.

2010–11: JISC, **£29,082**, awarded to Robert Shoemaker (Principal Investigator) and Tim Hitchcock for 'Crime in the Community: Enhancing User Engagement for Teaching and Research with the Old Bailey Online'.

4. Details of the impact (indicative maximum 750 words)

Old Bailey Online's impact is multifaceted, ranging from extensive public engagement with the site to media reuse of the trials in fiction, non-fiction, and 'factional' form. It is used by educationalists and, importantly, has democratised access to sources of working people's history.

Reach

Since initially launching in 2003, the site has received over 5 million visits, 3 million occurring since 2008. Google Analytics reporting shows that since October 2010, visitors have come from 213 countries, the top ten most frequent users being from the UK, US, Australia, Canada, New Zealand and Germany, Ireland, France, India and Spain. Visitor numbers to end July 2013 maintained a steady average of approximately 2,000 daily, and 32% were returning visitors. The average visit

lasts between 4 and 5 minutes, with the typical user viewing around 7 pages. A user survey conducted in 2010 revealed the most common uses of the site as: academic research (39%), family history (36%), university teaching (28%), and reading for personal learning/leisure (28%). Users could tick more than one box. [Section 5, Ref. 1]

Site promotion occurred through press releases coordinated with each launch stage, and public lectures given by Tim Hitchcock and Robert Shoemaker. More recently, the researchers' 'Crime in the Community' blog and regular tweets continue publicising the resource, and maintain a lively online community.

Significance and Secondary Reach

Site Users

In May 2008, the *Economist* declared Old Bailey Online 'a goldmine for family-tree growers' [Ref. 2], with user comments on the Family Tree Forum, BBC website, blogs and other online sources suggesting that family trees are greatly enriched by the discovery of convict ancestors. Australian Jan Richards' 2009 comment, when the Old Bailey user wiki was launched, is typical: 'How I remember waiting patiently (!) for them to reach 1828 so that the records of "my" convict could be loaded.' She added that the wiki was 'a great way of adding value to this fabulous site and demonstrating the "sharing" family historians are so renowned for.' [Ref. 3]

A British lecturer described in 2010 how his undergraduate students used it 'to recreate trials . . . and discuss the themes and issues that relate to the history of crime'. He praised the site's flexible search functions and illustrative results, with 'statistical searches [that] can be displayed as a simple table, or as bar or pie charts'. His students also found the site 'easy to use, rich in detail and fascinating'. [Ref. 4] A public library's blog in April 2013 concurred: 'Researchers at Guildhall Library have reported that they find the indexes and the ability to search under any keyword to be particularly useful'. A Canadian researcher simply said that searching Old Bailey Online 'changed my way of thinking about digital history'. [Ref. 5]

Contribution to the Creative Economy

In 2012 David Willetts, then minister for Universities and Science, said the website 'provided a valuable resource' to academics and researchers, and was also 'source material for creative industries'. [Ref. 6] Old Bailey Online material formed the basis of BBC1's hugely successful *Garrow's Law*, which ran for three series between 2009 and 2011, winning the Royal Television Society Award for best drama. Series creator Tony Marchant said in 2009 that his interest arose 'after the Old Bailey had published online transcripts of cases going back 200 years. These transcripts were a fantastic oral and written account of the period . . . the words of the accused and the prosecutors gave me an insight into the history.' [Ref. 7] *Garrow's Law* attracted almost 60 million viewers, and was released on DVD and as an iTunes download. In March 2013, the BBC also released *Tales from the Old Bailey*, a five-part factual drama series for schools.

Hitchcock and Shoemaker were involved in choosing individual cases, planning and acting as expert participants in BBC Radio 4's *Voices from the Old Bailey*, which ran for two series in 2010 and 2011, reaching 7 million listeners. The first series was ranked the fourth most popular programme on Radio 4, and the second the third most popular series on the iPlayer. In August 2011 the *New York Times* described the site as offering 'a unique window into the criminal justice system and, by extension, British culture'. [Ref. 8]

Stimulating Debate

In April 2008 a *Guardian* leader commented that, 'in stark and paradoxical contrast with the court's contemporary proceedings', the Old Bailey's eighteenth-century records were 'accessible, free and fully searchable'. [Ref. 9] The next month, the *Economist* also noted 'the transcript of a modern Old Bailey trial requires the permission of a senior judge and then payment to the record-keeping company' [Ref. 2], and a BBC reporter pondered whether the archive's openness was a welcome feature for people with criminal forebears. This inspired a reader in Kampala to comment: 'I curse why we don't have such details . . . we don't have records and if they exist they are poorly kept',

adding that a woman who had found a murderous ancestor via the website was 'lucky to have the information online'. [Ref. 10] In September 2008 another BBC reporter speculated on the *ipm* blog that home secretary Jack Straw's recent decision to abolish newspaper fees to access court lists might have been inspired by the Old Bailey Online; [Ref. 11] the fees were indeed removed later that year.

Entering the Lexicon

John Simpson, outgoing Chief Editor of the *Oxford English Dictionary*, reported on Radio 4's *Word of Mouth* that, when sourcing the origins of crime-related terminology, 'we cite from [Old Bailey Online] wherever we can. If we're dealing with a term from the criminal underworld of London in 1850, we're as likely to have a quotation from that as we are from one of Dickens' novels.' [Ref. 12]

Recognition

Hitchcock and Shoemaker were awarded the 2010 Longman–*History Today* Trustees Award (given for making 'a major contribution to history') for their 'groundbreaking' Old Bailey and London Lives projects and their 'unparalleled impact on the way that history can be researched, taught in universities and enjoyed by the general public'.

5. Sources to corroborate the impact (indicative maximum of 10 references)

1. Sharon Howard, Tim Hitchcock and Robert Shoemaker, *Crime in the Community Impact Analysis Report*, survey report (survey funded by JISC), (December 2010, p.6 for site user/usage statistics. A copy of the report is available.
2. 'In the dock and on the web', *Economist*, 1 May 2008. <www.economist.com/node/11294471>
3. Jan Richards, Orange Family History Group blog, 2 March 2009.
<www.ofhg.com.au/resources-registers-records-websites/convicts/old-bailey-online/>
4. Drew D. Gray, review of *The Old Bailey Proceedings Online* (review no. 897).
<www.history.ac.uk/reviews/review/897>
5. Lisa Smith, 'The Old Bailey Online: A Digital Inspiration', Sloane Letters blog, 14 April 2013,
<www.sloaneletters.com/old-bailey-online-digital-inspiration/>
6. 'Impact of AHRC Research 2011/12', AHRC report. (David Willetts quote: p. 20)
7. 'Garrow's Law – Tony Marchant Interview', BBC Press Office (2009)
<www.bbc.co.uk/pressoffice/proginfo/tv/2009/wk44/feature_tony_marchant.shtml>
8. Patricia Cohen, 'As the Gavels Fell: 240 Years at Old Bailey', *New York Times* (online), 17 August 2011. (Hard or PDF copy is available.)
9. 'In Praise of . . . the Old Bailey', leader, *Guardian*, 29 April 2008.
<www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2008/apr/29/law.oldbailey>
10. Rob Liddle, 'Great-granddad was a killer', *BBC Magazine* (online), 6 May 2008.
<<http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/magazine/7380747.stm>>
11. Chris Vallance, 'Online court records and prejudice', Radio 4, *ipm* blog, 23 September 2008.
<www.bbc.co.uk/blogs/ipm/2008/09/online_court_records_and_preju.shtml>
12. *Word of Mouth*, BBC Radio 4, 30 July 2013. (A copy of the podcast is available.)