

Impact case study (REF3b)

Institution: University of Sheffield
Unit of Assessment: 30 - History
Title of case study: The Old Bailey Online, 1674-1913: Enriching Understanding of Personal and Social History
<p>1. Summary of the impact (indicative maximum 100 words)</p> <p>The online, fully searchable edition of the <i>Old Bailey Proceedings</i> has been consulted during the assessment period by over 3.5 million unique users, including genealogists, non-academic historians, and students across dozens of countries, reaching millions more through the TV and radio programmes it inspired. It has enriched the cultural lives of individuals and enhanced the educational experience of university students across the world. Users have deepened their understandings of their personal ancestors and of the societies in which they lived, and have been stimulated to conduct their own research and write their own histories. Those interested in the law have developed an appreciation of the historical evolution of the criminal trial and the importance of the public dissemination of accounts of legal proceedings. The innovative and interactive method of presenting history online has been replicated in subsequent publically available online resources, including <i>London Lives, 1690-1800</i>, created by the same project team.</p>
<p>2. Underpinning research (indicative maximum 500 words)</p> <p>The Old Bailey Proceedings Online [R1] was a product of a collaboration, initially between the University of Sheffield and the University of Hertfordshire, in which historical research conducted by Professors Robert Shoemaker (Sheffield) and Tim Hitchcock (Hertfordshire) was conjoined with advances in humanities computing developed by Sheffield's Humanities Research Institute (HRI) and Hertfordshire's Higher Education Digitisation Service (HEDS).</p> <p>Between 1998 and 2004 Shoemaker carried out research into several aspects of street life in eighteenth-century London [R2,R3]. In doing so he discovered the value of the printed <i>Old Bailey Proceedings</i>, periodically published accounts of trials held at the Old Bailey, not just for qualitative evidence from trial narratives but also for identifying important long-term trends in patterns of violence, policing, and punishment. While historians had long been aware of the value of this source for studying the social history of London, it had never before been used for studies of crime or criminal justice which combined textual evidence with analysis of serial trends. This research was joined with Professor Hitchcock's research into plebeian life in eighteenth-century London, when, in 1999, Hitchcock and Shoemaker concluded that the creation of a digital edition of the <i>Proceedings</i> would facilitate not only the dissemination of their research findings, but also enable a wide audience to conduct research into an almost unlimited range of topics.</p> <p>The creation of an online edition of the <i>Proceedings</i> was facilitated by technical innovations developed at the HRI and HEDS. Between 1994 and 2003, HRI researchers, particularly Michael Pidd and Jamie McLaughlin, developed a methodology for combining automated and manual XML (extensible markup language) to mark up or 'tag' digitised historical texts, and they developed a search engine based on a combination of Lucene and MySQL which conducts keyword and statistical searches of large bodies of text, capturing the complexity and variability of trial evidence.</p> <p>The research contributions of the two universities were equal but distinctive, with Shoemaker's crime and criminal justice research [R2,R3] complementing Hitchcock's expertise on London plebeian life, and HEDS' innovative procedures for digitising large volumes of text complemented by the HRI's new mark up and search techniques. Both directors developed the detailed XML mark-up schema which forms the essential foundation of the entire project. Following the success of the first phase of the project, which covered 1674-1834, funding was obtained from the AHRC for a second phase, covering 1834-1913. This was informed by the research and direction of a third director, Professor Clive Emsley of the Open University, an expert on nineteenth and twentieth-century criminal justice. In both phases the text was processed and the website was constructed at the HRI in Sheffield, under the direction of Drs Louise Henson (Senior Data Developer, first phase), Sharon Howard (Project Manager, second phase) and Philippa Hardman (Senior Data Developer, second phase), and with the technical expertise of McLaughlin.</p> <p>The project created a fully searchable electronic edition of all surviving published editions of this periodical [R1]. The first phase was completed in 2005 and the second phase in 2008. The website provides direct and searchable access to 127 million words of trial records, and still represents the</p>

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largest body of accurately transcribed and thoroughly tagged historical text currently available.

The site also contains substantial contextual information to assist users in understanding the texts in the form of 50,000 words of historical background and search advice on 40 webpages, directly informed by research carried out by the project directors. On the basis of research Shoemaker carried out between 2003 and 2008 comparing the content of the *Proceedings* with alternative accounts of the same trials, identifying the ideological messages and social impact of the *Proceedings* [R4,R5] he was the principal author of four of the five webpages 'About the Proceedings', including 'The Value of the Proceedings as a Historical Source', which identifies significant limitations in trial reporting. His previous research also informed his authorship of all six pages on 'Crime Justice and Punishment', and 'Gender in the Proceedings'.

Since completion of the project, the directors have developed three further interactive public websites, each of which incorporates the Old Bailey Online, most notably *London Lives* [R6].

Shoemaker's research on 'the reform of public conflict in London, 1660-1800' was funded by grants from the British Academy and Arts and Humanities Research Board (AHRB) in 1998 (£9,943). Both organisations also funded his research on representations of crime in London in 2003 (£16,653). Initial funding of the Old Bailey project came from the AHRB in 2000 (£281,820) and the New Opportunities Fund in 2001 (£397,218). The second phase of the project was funded by the AHRC (£317,114) in 2005. *London Lives* was funded by a grant of £803,937 from the ESRC in 2005. Total project funding = £1.83 million.

3. References to the research

- R1. Old Bailey Proceedings Online, 1674-1913 (www.oldbaileyonline.org). ISBN 978-0-9557876-0-7. Academic review in *Reviews in History* (May 2010). The 1674-1834 edition was reviewed on H-Net (June 2003) and in the *Journal of Legal History* 26:1 (April 2005), pp. 91-93.[RAE 2008]
- R2. R. Shoemaker, 'Male Honour and the Decline of Public Violence in Eighteenth-Century London', *Social History* 26 (May 2001), pp. 190-208 [peer reviewed journal; DOI 10.1080/03071020110041352]
- R3. R. Shoemaker, *The London Mob: Violence and Disorder in Eighteenth-Century England* (Hambledon and London, 2004), pp. xv + 393 ISBN 1852853735 [monograph] [RAE2008]
- R4. R. Shoemaker, 'The Old Bailey Proceedings and the Representation of Crime and Criminal Justice in Eighteenth-Century London', *Journal of British Studies* 47 (2008), pp. 559-580 [peer reviewed journal] [REF2]
- R5. R. Shoemaker, 'Print Culture and the Creation of Public Knowledge about Crime in Eighteenth-Century London', in *Crime Prevention, Surveillance and Restorative Justice: Effects of Social Technologies*, edited by Paul Knepper, Jonathan Doak and Joanna Shapland (Taylor and Francis, 2009), pp. 1-21 [REF2]
- R6. *London Lives, 1690-1800: Crime, Poverty and Social Policy in the Metropolis* (www.londonlives.org). ISBN 978-0-9557876-3-8. Winner of the 2011 British Society for Eighteenth-Century Studies Prize for Digital Resources. Academic review in *Reviews in History*.

4. Details of the impact

Shoemaker and Hitchcock actively promoted public engagement with the Old Bailey Online through their work with the media, participation in TV and radio programmes, and frequent public lectures. In addition, in 2006 they published a mass-market compilation of stories from the *Proceedings*, *Tales from the Hanging Court* (Arnold, 2006).

The site has had substantial reach. To date, it has received over five million visits, 3 million of which occurred during the REF census period. According to Google Analytics from 20 Oct 2010 to 31 July 2013 the site had 1.4 million unique visitors. In that period visitors came from 218 countries, with the top ten being the UK, US, Australia, Canada, New Zealand, Germany, Ireland, France, India and Spain. Visits average four minutes and 41 seconds and users consulted an average of 6.68 pages, which suggest that once single page visits are discounted (58%), a substantial minority of users spend a considerable amount of time on the site; 33.5% of users are returning visitors.

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In addition to academic researchers, the primary beneficiaries of the site are family and local historians, university students, and those interested in the law. A JISC funded 'Impact Analysis' survey carried out in the autumn of 2010 revealed that the most frequent uses of the site were, in addition to academic research (39%), family history (36%), university teaching (28%), and reading for personal learning/leisure (28%) (users could tick more than one box) [S6]. The 7,156 registered users of the *Old Bailey/London Lives* websites include members of 67 family history societies and a broad range of public bodies, public history societies, schools, the media and government departments [S7].

Family historians have used the website to obtain a better understanding of their ancestors' lives and living conditions. As the magazine *Discover My Past England* reported in October 2011, the site, in combination with *London Lives*, 'offers exciting and unprecedented opportunities for family historians to really enrich their ancestors' histories'. This is confirmed by anecdotal evidence. One user reported that the Old Bailey account of the trial of her husband's great great grandmother 'gave us a greater picture of who she was. Life for her must have been hard...'. Another Australian reported that research on the website prompted a research trip to the UK to find out more. While some descendants have had to come to terms with evidence of their ancestors' criminality, the story was happier for 'Simon, from London'. In May 2008 he told the BBC that 'using the Old Bailey site on Monday was life-changing for my mother-in-law. She asked me to look up her grandfather who her grandmother had evicted for bigamy.... The records show he was found not guilty. It is a story I've heard for many years and it is great to have a confirmed ending.'

Having discovered something about their ancestors, many users of the website have been prompted to develop their historical curiosity and contextualise their ancestors' lives by conducting further research into the history of criminal justice and other topics, taking advantage of the site's historical background pages and its structured search facilities. One reported that he found the site 'absolutely fascinating, not only for the information I found about our forebears... but also for the patterns one can see using the search facility', particularly patterns of punishment for pickpockets. In compiling a family history for his children and grandchildren he decided to broaden the story of his six convict ancestors by writing a chapter on the phenomenon of transportation to Australia [S1]. Another, whose great-great-grandfather participated in John Otley's 1817-18 convict-based expeditions into the Australian outback, used the website for his published book on the expedition and effusively acknowledged it as one of his most important sources [S8]. In a letter to the HRI, one user reported that she 'found that the excellent search engine offered the ability to use the material in many different ways which have nothing to do with the justice system... they have made a significant contribution to a study I am making of wheelwrights and coachbuilders in London from around 1780 to 1820' [S2].

The website has inspired highly successful TV and radio programmes, thereby reaching an even wider number and range of beneficiaries and enriching audiences' understandings of the evolution of the criminal trial and social practices. According to its creator (Tony Marchant), the site 'inspired' the Royal Television Society Award-winning BBC1 TV series 'Garrow's Law', which ran three series between 2009 and 2011. Marchant has acknowledged that the programmes 'could not have been written' without the Old Bailey website [S3]. The major theme of the series, the impact of the advent of lawyers on the development of the criminal trial, is covered in Shoemaker's historical background page on 'Trial Procedures'. Historical notes for each episode posted on the BBC website heavily referenced the Old Bailey Online. The first two seasons of Garrow's Law attracted over 20 million viewers, with a satisfaction level for the first series of 80/100. Positive reviews the programme received suggest that the programme prompted viewer reflection on its themes; as John Crace wrote in the *Guardian* on 14/11/11, 'it made me think'.

The website featured even more prominently in the BBC Radio 4 show 'Voices from the Old Bailey', which ran two series of four episodes each in 2010 and 2011. Shoemaker participated in planning the programme and the selection of trials included and was one of the speakers in two programmes, where he discussed, on the basis of his research, highway robbery and the case of the murderess Sarah Malcolm. Each programme reached almost two million listeners. It was the fourth most popular programme on Radio 4 in 2010; in 2011 during the time it was live it was the third most popular series on the iPlayer. It was positively reviewed and achieved high levels of appreciation (88/100 for one episode) [S4]. Its impact on listeners can also be seen in the fact that each programme caused a spike in website usage as listeners followed up the cases discussed.

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The site is widely used in university teaching. Educational domains account for 17.7% of the first 1000 most accessed internet links to the site. As of August 2013, registered users (registration is voluntary) come from 284 universities from twenty-three countries. Students have deepened their knowledge of British social history and have refined their skills in primary source analysis and the practice of historical research. The 'Impact Analysis Report' noted that students had benefitted from the opportunity not only to learn about historical content, but also to develop core skills, and many use it as the principal primary source for their dissertations. Students in focus groups reported that the site *'had been their first real opportunity to engage with a substantial set of primary sources that had not been pre-selected by a teacher. This was something they found exciting and stimulating because it allowed them to find and interpret material for themselves'* [S6]. An Associate Professor of Theatre and Costume Studies at Dalhousie University reports that she set her group of 19 students a material culture project using the website and the *'things they came up with and the links they made are fantastic... every student became completely engaged in the project, and totally involved in the research'* [S5].

The site has also had an impact on the public attitudes towards contemporary legal practice. The original purpose of the *Proceedings*, as highlighted in Shoemaker's research, of making judicial proceedings publicly available in order to enhance public confidence in the law, has been noted by some commentators. On 29 April 2008 the *Guardian* ran an editorial 'In praise of... the Old Bailey', noted that *'at oldbaileyonline.org the [court's] records are accessible, free and fully searchable... in stark contrast'* to the proceedings of the modern criminal courts, where access is severely restricted. In September 2008 Jack Straw, then Home Secretary, acknowledging the importance of 'lifting the veil which sometimes keeps justice from view', announced the abolition of the fees which newspapers had to pay for court lists, and said he would *'open up the justice system through the power of the internet, with online court records'*; a BBC reporter suggested the decision to abolish fees was inspired by the Old Bailey Online [S10]. In 2010, an Old Bailey judge invited Shoemaker to speak to barristers, clerks and judges about the online *Proceedings*, to further his goal of improving the modern Old Bailey's presence online and increasing public understanding of the court's activities.

Hitchcock and Shoemaker were awarded the 2010 Longman/History Today Trustees Award for a 'person, persons or organisation that has made a major contribution to history over the past year or years' for the 'ground breaking' 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' [<http://www.historytoday.com/paul-lay/longman-history-today-awards-2010>]. The website featured in the report, 'The Impact of AHRC Research 2011/12', which quoted David Willetts, Minister for Universities and Science as saying it 'provide[s] a valuable resource', not only to academics and researchers, but also as 'source material for creative industries' [S9].

5. Sources to corroborate the impact

- S1. Family historian (use of website by a family historian);
- S2. A historian (impact on non-academic historians);
- S3. Writer of 'Garrow's Law' (website as inspiration for the programme);
- S4. Producer, Loftus Audio, producer of 'Voices from the Old Bailey' (Shoemaker's role in programme and its impact);
- S5. Associate Prof. of Theatre and Costume Studies, Dalhousie University (use of website in university teaching)
- S6. *Crime in the Community Impact Analysis Report* (JISC, Dec. 2010):
http://www.jisc.ac.uk/media/documents/programmes/digitisation/analysis_cic.pdf
- S7. ESRC Impact Report, *Plebeian Lives and the Making of Modern London*,
<http://www.esrc.ac.uk/my-esrc/grants/RES-000-23-1217/outputs/read/f61a7764-80e7-4388-ab9b-d5d79a864201>
- S8. E. V. (Tim) Crampton, +20... *Remembering the Forgotten. Rewriting Australian History*. (2008) [<http://tinyurl.com/lpn8m8p>]
- S9. 'The Impact of AHRC Research 2011/12': <http://tinyurl.com/lftfbk>
- S10. 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