
Reflections on attending the BSC HNet and AusNZ Historical Criminology Network Joint Event

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It would be difficult to begin any kind of reflection without observing that it has been, at best, a strange eighteenth months for everyone and the academic world is no different. There have been some significant shifts in practice, and for me, one of the good things that has come out of the pandemic has been a shift in approaches to learning, including a leap to online events. And as a part-time student who is to all intents and purposes a distance learning student, and one who works full time, conferences can often be difficult to access. Of course, conferences in person can be great – but a two day internationally lead event normally requires a considerable amount of time and expense across the board. From accommodation to travel to childcare to time off work, costs add up. Being able to access a conference online, through a platform which is free at point of use, and which can be accessed anywhere has been an absolute game changer for many.

The networking event run by HCNNet in July 2021 was definitely one of the highlights of this period of time. From the comms in advance, to the timekeeping, to the contents in terms of both speakers and topics, it was excellent, and combined a plethora of interesting and useful discussion. Collaboration with colleagues in Australia and New Zealand ensured a diverse and dynamic series of discussions, and from my perspective, seeing research allied with my own in other times and places was really valuable. The sessions I attended had clearly been thoughtfully prepared, and although the time allowed for was stuck to precisely, it felt (like the best of conferences) as though the conversations were only just beginning.

I was particularly inspired by the 'Researching More Recent Histories' session, which began to unpick some of the nuances of researching within living memory. A number of central themes emerged, not least balancing access with a right to privacy, the significance of oral history and the counter-balance of contemporary statistical studies and the politics of it all. My own research focuses on the mid-twentieth century but a number of the issues discussed in the context of much more recent studies are nonetheless applicable. There is great scope for exploring the time period where living memory overlaps with historical study, and how that is interwoven

with criminological theory, and I look forward to further discussion around this.

The 'Criminalisation and Policing of Women' session was also of great use, drawing together a diverse crowd of people with a variety of research interests. Events such as these, when as well chaired as this session was, are brilliant networking opportunities. I genuinely think this format delivers better online – the threat of being muted by the chair is very real and achievable in comparison to in-person events. It is often valuable to learn about overlapping and co-existing pieces of work, and this event was no exception. Already, the rewards of this session have begun to be reaped, and I hope further conversations will ensue once the term begins in the early autumn.

Finally, as an archivist as well as a historian, I was intrigued to hear more in the 'Digital Data Methods' session, particularly in terms of perspectives on digital resources for historical criminology. A number of sources discussed are of considerable longstanding, such as the Old Bailey Online, but it was useful to discuss newer and less frequented sources, and gain further understanding of how other academics are identifying and examining archival documents. There is great potential for further collaboration between archives and historians and criminologists, and in my view, there is an opportunity here to develop conversations between the professions.

I'd like to thank the organisers for drawing together such a varied set of sessions, and chairing them with such clarity and good humour. This was an excellent event, and I hope that, as academic life begins to return with in-person activities, events such as this will continue to happen. Many thanks in particular to David Churchill and Vicky Nagy for all their hard work in making this happen; your endeavours are very much appreciated