
International Dialogues in Historical Criminology

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There is nothing new about historical research in criminology. Historical studies of crime and criminal justice have contributed materially to the field throughout its history. Yet, in recent times, a growing community of scholars has emerged across various parts of the world, which has breathed new life into historical approaches to crime and control. This community has found institutional expression in a set of networks in historical criminology, organised under the auspices of the leading scholarly societies in criminology, which have served to bring scholars together and to foster new collaborations within their respective locales.

One challenge, though, has been how to connect these various networks together across considerable distances to support international exchange of ideas and approaches in historical criminology. The increased familiarity with virtual communications during the COVID-19 pandemic certainly presents an opportunity, but after more than a year of Zoom meetings and conferences, few of us are hungry for another lengthy Zoom conference stretching the window between different time zones to breaking point. What many were missing was the chance to meet people with similar interests in an informal setting and to rebuild personal support networks fractured or fragmented by the effects of the pandemic.

For these reasons, we decided to organise the first joint event between the British Society of Criminology Historical Criminology Network (established in 2018) and the Australian and New Zealand Historical Criminology Network (founded the following year). Taking place over two days on 14-15 July 2021, the purpose of this event was to open up discussions concerning broad topics of mutual interest between the networks, rather than for the usual format of paper presentations and respectful silence. The event was structured around short, themed sessions, which aimed to enable participants to meet others with similar research interests from across multiple time-zones.

Each session was convened jointly by members of both networks, helping to combine perspectives from distinct research cultures and contexts. As such, the event would not have been possible without the commitment of an excellent group of scholars who variously designed and led these sessions: Zoe Alker (University of Liverpool); Paul Bleakley (Middlesex University); Barry Godfrey (University of Liverpool); Michael Guerzoni (Indigenous Fellow, University of Tasmania); Thomas Guiney (Oxford Brookes University); Helen Johnston (University of Hull); Natalie Maystorovich Chulio (University of Sydney); Esmorie Miller (London South Bank University); Alana Piper (University of Technology Sydney); and Rob White (University of Tasmania). We are enormously grateful to each of these scholars for their support and participation.

In the following pages, you will read from some of the convenors about the issues raised in their respective sessions. Participants covered a very wide range of topics and questions over the course of the two days. The first session centred on support for PhD students and early career academics, touching on expectations of senior colleagues and mentors, the importance of building effective support networks for academic or non-academic careers, and the challenges of navigating these issues in the midst of a pandemic. The second session covered digital data methods, highlighting the growing wealth of digital archival documents available to scholars from Australia and the UK. The third session explored the challenges and opportunities of researching more recent histories, touching recurrently upon questions of the ethics of historical research involving living subjects or their immediate descendants and upon complex interactions between the archival record and social memory. The fourth session focused on decolonising and indigenising historical criminology research, including means of pursuing this in historic research contexts. The fifth session, on the criminalisation and policing of women, involved lively discussions of the intersections between gender and historical criminology research, including the competing analytic priorities of longitudinal analysis and critical junctures of change. The final session examined how historical research in criminology (and criminological research more generally) has approached victims and victimisation, including questions of the ethics of working on victims' histories and related histories of troubled pasts.

These discussions confirmed that there is a real appetite for international collaboration in historical criminology, separated though scholars may be by some 15,000km. Follow-on discussions arising out of the event are underway, not just about shared research interests, but also about supporting one another during an extremely testing time for health, wellbeing and for sustainable scholarship. We hope that these discussions will contribute, in due course, further to internationalising historical criminology as a flourishing area of criminological enquiry.
