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ESRC Festival of Social Science: Challenging Perceptions of Law and Criminal Justice

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ESRC FESTIVAL OF SOCIAL SCIENCE:
CHALLENGING PERCEPTIONS OF LAW AND CRIMINAL JUSTICE
5 November 2014 - in partnership with Plymouth Central Library
Patricia Gray and Kim Stevenson

This event was one of over two dozen held in the South West and Wales region as part of the annual week long series of free events organized and sponsored by the Economic and Social Science Research Council to celebrate and promote social science research. This year’s theme was ‘Talking Social Science’ and the Law School’s proposal, Challenging Perceptions of Law and Criminal Justice was approved through the competitive process. The event was run by Law and Criminal Justice lecturers and students from Plymouth Law School and was opened by Dr. Dan Gilling, Head of Plymouth University Law School. In partnership with Plymouth Central Library, the event provided the opportunity for the public, particularly young people, to learn about how academic research can improve community life and contribute to promoting fairness and justice. Twenty posters (all listed in the Appendix) were on display in the exhibition which illustrated current criminological and legal issues of core concern to the community, particularly challenging public misconceptions of crime and punishment, difficulties in accessing the law and legal advice for disadvantaged and vulnerable groups, homelessness, the rights and interests of victims, challenging hate crime, rehabilitating offenders, restorative justice and immigration.
The exhibition was designed to facilitate active public engagement, with all the researchers and student groups present and available to answer questions and talk in more detail about their posters and the research and issues which underlay them. Participants were encouraged to read and engage with the posters by entering a quiz competition with answers embedded in the posters and prizes distributed at the end of the afternoon’s activities. Some of the posters also had embedded Virtual Reality links which viewers could scan to find out more information about the subject, access associated web pages or watch short video clips.

Five of the posters are included here by way of illustration beginning with this generic poster advertising the event which was specially created by Criminology and Criminal Justice graduate Mike Ives for the event to link together all the various law and criminal justice themes from the exhibition.

[Editor’s Note: Mike’s final year dissertation is also published as an article in this issue].
The next two posters were created by the event organisers Professor Kim Stevenson and Dr. Patricia Gray, entitled respectively ‘Using Digitised Newspapers to Recover Crimes from the Past’ and ‘Restorative Youth Justice in Action’.

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**Using Digitised Newspapers to Discover Crimes from the Past - The ‘Remarkable and Unique’ case of the Mignonette**

**The Tragedy**

19 May 1884: Capt. Dudley recruited first mate Stephens, deckhand Brooks, and inexperienced sailor 17-year-old Richard Parker, to sell the Mignonette from Southampton to Australia, 5,000 miles off the east coast of Africa, a huge wave struck. All 4 abandoned ship into a small wooden dinghy with no water and 2 lbs of tinned fish. They caught a small turtle but no fish. After 13 days, Parker, an orphan, became very ill from drinking seawater, apparently near death.

**The Trial**

10 September at Falmouth Magistrates Court, and despite local sympathy, they were committed to Exeter Assizes to be tried on a technical charge of wilful murder.

**The Legal Outcome**

10 December: Queens Bench Court in London declared Dudley and Stephens had committed ‘nothing less than murder’ and sentenced them to death. Two important legal principles were established:

1. There was no defence in criminal law for the men’s conduct.
2. English courts have no jurisdiction over international waters but can hear cases involving incidents on British registered ships.

Dudley and Stephens were pardoned by Queen Victoria and ordered to serve 6 months in prison.

**The Name Richard Parker was used in which 2012 Oscar winning film?**

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**Restorative Youth Justice in Action**

Re-discovering its roots in progressive and socially just practices through the lived experiences of key stakeholders.
Two posters which reflect the work of student volunteer groups and societies within the Law School demonstrate how both law and criminology and criminal justice students engage with the real life problems and experiences of individuals who become subjects within the criminal justice process. One from the Plymouth University Howard League Student Society entitled “‘Banged Up’: Young Offenders’ Experiences of Imprisonment’ and the other by law students from the Innocence Project entitled ‘Miscarriages of Justice’. 
In addition three mixed-media interactive activities were also programmed during the afternoon to further stimulate interest in the issues raised by the posters and awareness of library resources and facilities. At 2.30 pm the Plymouth University Howard League Student Society showed a film which they had designed and which explored young offenders’ experiences in prison via cartoons and video clips and linked to their “Banged Up” poster.

Detective Chief Inspector Brookshaw of Devon and Cornwall Police gave a fascinating presentation at 3pm on the use of forensic evidence entitled ‘Every Contact Leaves a Trace’, followed at 3.30 pm by a talk about the issue of police corruption with the controversial title ‘Bent Cops’. Throughout the afternoon a ‘dead body’ lay outside the main exhibition room to create a ‘murder scene’ and provide the start point for a ‘Whodunnit’ murder mystery game. This game, which was designed by the staff from Plymouth Central Library, involved teams of three following up clues and forensic evidence spread throughout the library on shelves and in books in order to try to discover and identify ‘the murderer’.
The event was hailed a great success by all participants and the convivial atmosphere (despite the 'murder') was enhanced by laying on refreshments and snacks thought the afternoon.

Appendix

List of Posters

Gareth Addidle: The “New Location” of Community Safety. Policing, Community Planning and Community Safety: a local case study

Jill Annison, Dan Gilling, Giselle Hanley-Santos and Tim Auburn: Problem-solving in Plymouth Community Justice Court

Philip Bates: Children’s Medical Treatment: Who Decides?

Sharon Beckett: Women’s Experiences of Workplace Violence

Iain Channing: Legal Responses to the British Far-Right'

Hugo de Rijke: Bailiff Law

Lisa Deblasio: Adoption and Justice for Families – finding a balance through research

Patricia Gray and Professor Roger Smith: Restorative Youth Justice in Action: Rediscovering its roots in progressive and socially just practice through the lived experiences of key stakeholders

Jason Lowther: Regulating the Marine Environment

Craig Newbery-Jones: Is the Doctor a Lawyer?

Chris Pac-Soo and Oliver Smith: Foreign National Workers in the Night Time Economy: An examination of vulnerability, violence and identity

Alex Passman and Law Clinic students: South West Employment Rights Centre

Plymouth University Howard League Student Society: “Banged Up”: Young Offenders’ Experiences of Imprisonment’

Peter Shears: Enforcing the consumer’s right to be stupid

Lesley Simmonds: What will be the Effects of Local Commissioning for Victims’ Services in the UK?

Kim Stevenson: Using digitised newspapers to recover crimes from the past

Pippa Trimble and Innocence Project students: Miscarriages of Justice

Dean Wilson: In-County Immigration Policing in the UK: Enforcement, Networks and the Practice of “Crimmigration”

Dean Wilson and Oliver Smith: Eviction: Policy, Experience and Change