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## INCARCERATING THE POOR: INTERPRETING POVERTY AND PUNISHMENT IN BRITISH PRISON MUSEUMS

*Dan Johnson*<sup>1</sup>

### **Abstract**

This article will seek to understand how and why many prisoners interpreted in prison museums come from lower class backgrounds, and pose questions about how these interpretations contribute to or counter stereotypes about crime and poverty in Victorian England. The article will analyse the Victorian Prison at Lincoln Castle and the York Castle Museum because both sites present the history of punishment without any substantial collections on display, thus utilising creative techniques to present their histories to their visitors. The York Castle Museum presents the history of punishment at the site from 1706 to 1829, while the Victorian Prison at Lincoln Castle showcases its history as a separate system prison from 1848 to 1878. Through primary source material the museums create prison narratives that present the historic prisoners as victims of British society before social welfare.

**Keywords:** museum studies, Lincoln Castle, York Castle, heritage studies, Victorian prison.

### **Introduction**

Former Director of the Prison Reform Trust, Juliet Lyon asserted in 2016 that, ‘for far too long, prisons have been our most neglected, least visible public service.’<sup>2</sup> Due to the invisible nature of the penal system, society relies on cultural representations to shape their views. These representations include literature, film, television, and the news. As people consume these media representations they begin to form their own views and opinions about crime and punishment. Juliet Lyon’s comment on the invisible nature of the current prison service is also true for the history of punishment in the UK. Prison museums have a unique potential to influence public understandings of the past in that they are institutions that are trusted to provide historically accurate information for the people to consume. This paper will analyse the York Castle Prison Exhibition at the York Castle Museum and the Victorian Prison at Lincoln Castle to demonstrate how their interpretations of prisoners and staff not only persuade visitors to feel empathy for the prisoners, but also use archival material to tell a larger story about crime and poverty before the welfare state.

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<sup>2</sup> ‘Queen’s Speech: Prison Bill’, *Prison Reform Trust*, online edn. <http://www.prisonreformtrust.org.uk> (Accessed 12 May 2017).

The study of prison tourism and prison museums in particular is still in its infancy in the United Kingdom but has been built on the seminal work, *Dark Tourism: The Attraction of Death and Disaster* by John Lennon and Malcolm Foley in 2000.<sup>3</sup> In 2015, Alana Brown and Alyson Barton presented the first in depth article on British prison museums in 'Show me the Prison! The Development of Prison Tourism in the UK'.<sup>4</sup> Also in 2015, Michael Welch compared ten prison museums around the world, including The Clink in London in *Escape to Prison: Penal Tourism and the Pull of Punishment*.<sup>5</sup> In a recent chapter by Hodgkinson and Urquhart, they assert that 'more research is needed to further explore what meanings we can impart from often sanitised and dehumanised presentations of prisons, and also how more complex, contested and nuanced presentations of sites can be encouraged.'<sup>6</sup> Although there are only a few publications analysing prison museums in the UK, they are generally written from a dark tourism perspective, with little attention paid to the nuance of the historical content on display. Although the field of dark tourism encompasses the study of the tourism and commodification of sites related to death and disaster, it is important to acknowledge that there is scope for a more nuanced examination of the interpretation of the history on display.<sup>7</sup> Indeed, Jessica Moody questions the focus of dark tourism on supply and consumption, rather than production and interpretation.<sup>8</sup> She argues that there is a need for public historians to contribute to the contextualisation, complication, and politicisation of the interpretation of dark tourism.<sup>9</sup>

One of the strongest examples of the growing emergence of dark tourism, particularly in prison museums, is the 2017 publication of *The Palgrave Handbook of Prison Tourism*. This edited volume is the largest collection of prison tourism research to date, however, only a few of the 40 chapters examine prison tourism in the UK, with chapter titles such as, 'Punishment as Sublime Edutainment: "Horrid Spectacles" at the Prison Museum' and 'Ghost Hunting in Prison: Contemplating Death Through Sights of Incarceration and the

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<sup>3</sup> John Lennon and Malcolm Foley, *Dark Tourism: The Attraction of Death and Disaster* (London: Continuum, 2000).

<sup>4</sup> Alana Barton and Alyson Brown, 'Show me the Prison! The Development of Prison Tourism in the UK', *Crime, Media, Culture: An International Journal*, 11:3 (2015), 237-258.

<sup>5</sup> Michael Welch, *Escape to Prison: Penal Tourism and the Pull of Punishment* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2015).

<sup>6</sup> Sarah Hodgkinson and Diane Urquhart, 'Prison Tourism: Exploring the Spectacle of Punishment in the UK', in Glenn Hooper and John J. Lennon eds, *Dark Tourism: Practice and Interpretation*, (London: Routledge, 2016), pp. 40-54 (p. 51).

<sup>7</sup> Richard Sharpley, 'Shedding Light on Dark Tourism: An Introduction', in Richard Sharpley and Philip R. Stone, eds. *The Darker Side of Travel: The Theory and Practice of Dark Tourism*, (Bristol: Channel View Publications, 2009), pp. 3-22, 5.

<sup>8</sup> Jessica Moody, 'Where is "Dark Public History?" A Scholarly Turn to the Dark Side and What It Means for Public Historians', *The Public Historian*, 38:3 (2016), 110-14, (p. 110).

<sup>9</sup> Moody, 'Where is "Dark Public History?"', p. 114

Commodification of the Penal Past'.<sup>10</sup> Although there remains a clear gap in the historiography of prison museums in the UK compared to the USA, Australia, Canada and South Africa, *The Palgrave Handbook* contributes a valuable collection of analysis to the field. This article aims to address this gap in British prison museum analysis by examining the interpretations of prisoners at Lincoln Castle and the York Castle Prison Exhibition at the York Castle Museum.

It is debateable whether these museums should be considered dark tourist attractions. On the surface, they are physically dark tourism sites because the museums are located inside historic Georgian and Victorian prison buildings where injustice and inhumane punishment were prevalent. Although these museums are housed in authentic prison buildings, the macabre spectacle of death and suffering is not necessarily the reason that tourists choose to visit these sites. The most popular reference to prison museums in the United Kingdom is the Dungeon attraction chain. These 'dark fun factories' sit on the lighter side of Philip Stone's dark tourism spectrum as they are primarily entertainment driven, with a sensationalism of dark local history.<sup>11</sup> In contrast, the darkest sites on the spectrum are reserved for sites of genocide such as the Auschwitz-Birkenau Memorial and Museum.<sup>12</sup> The former are not generally housed in sites of death and destruction but visitors attend for the spectacle and performance of the dark history on display. The London Dungeon features Jack the Ripper, while York presents Dick Turpin (1705–39), and Blackpool interprets the Pendle Witches.<sup>13</sup> These sites can be basically described as 'haunted houses' with a vaguely historical focus. The interpretations at the York Castle Museum and the Victorian Prison at Lincoln Castle do sensationalise the prison experience at times but the missions of these sites are primarily education based, rather than the entertainment focus of the dungeons.

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<sup>10</sup> Laura Huey and Ryan Broll, 'Punishment as Sublime Edutainment: "Horrid Spectacles" at the Prison Museum', in Jacqueline Wilson, Sarah Hodgkinson, Justin Piché, and Kevin Walby, eds. *The Palgrave Handbook of Prison Tourism* (London: Palgrave MacMillan, 2017), pp. 517-40; Sarah Hodgkinson and Diane Urquhart, 'Ghost Hunting in Prison: Contemplating Death Through Sights of Incarceration and the Commodification of the Penal Past', in Jacqueline Wilson, Sarah Hodgkinson, Justin Piché, and Kevin Walby, eds. *The Palgrave Handbook of Prison Tourism*, (London: Palgrave MacMillan, 2017), pp. 559-82.

<sup>11</sup> Philip Stone, 'A Dark Tourism Spectrum: Towards a Typology of Death and Macabre Related Tourist Sites, Attractions, and Exhibitions', *Tourism: An International Interdisciplinary Journal*, 54:2, (2006), 145-60, (p. 152).

<sup>12</sup> Stone, 'A Dark Tourism Spectrum', p. 157.

<sup>13</sup> See Merlin Entertainment Group, 'The London Dungeon' <https://www.thedungeons.com/london/en/>; 'The York Dungeon' <https://www.thedungeons.com/york/en/>; 'The Blackpool Tower Dungeon' <https://www.thedungeons.com/blackpool/en/> (date accessed: 13 July 2017).

Both sites witnessed death and suffering, however, the modern representations of the museums are as larger social history attractions where many visitors may not attend with a specific urge to explore their morbid curiosities. The Victorian Prison at Lincoln Castle is part of the wider Lincoln Castle visitor attraction that includes a medieval wall walk and an original copy of Magna Carta and the Charter of the Forest. The York Castle Prison Exhibition is part of the York Castle Museum, a social history museum that contains a range of exhibitions on topics from fashion, the First World War, and a recreated Victorian street for visitors to explore. Because of the social history backgrounds of the museums, the prison aspects of both sites focus on social aspects of the lives of the prisoners, most apparently the role of poverty as a motive for their criminal actions. Although not all the visitors may intend to treat their visits to these sites as dark tourism attractions, it is important to acknowledge the role that both dark tourism and the wider social history of the sites play in their interpretations of the prisoners.

## **1 Primary Source Material on Display**

The Victorian Prison at Lincoln Castle and the York Castle Museum interpret the lives of specific people who were incarcerated in those prisons to convey the types of crimes people committed and their experiences within the prison walls. Neither site contains substantial collections of artefacts to interpret for their visitors, resulting in a strong reliance on primary source material to apply through audio-visual technology to help facilitate public understandings of the penal history. This technology takes the form of videos of actors dressed up as prisoners that are then projected on the walls of some of the cells. This method of interpretation creates an immersive experience for the visitors to connect with the prisoners and their narratives. Indeed, it provides visitors with an immersive experience while also accessing and engaging with archival material that would otherwise be unavailable to the public.<sup>14</sup>

The idea of creating exhibitions without collections is not a novel one. Over the course of the last half-century, museums have shifted from focussing on collections as a source of 'high culture', to providing narratives that tell stories about aspects of the human condition that may not be physically represented. The new narrative style of interpretation provides historically disenfranchised groups a voice in these institutions. This new museum theory, or new museology, shifts museums from places of passive appreciation for collections, to sites that interpret new and sometimes difficult concepts that may challenge preconceptions and

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<sup>14</sup> Michelle Henning, 'New Media', in Sharon MacDonald, ed., *A Companion to Museum Studies* (Chichester: Blackwell Publishing, 2011), 302-18, p. 309.

spark dialogue and debate.<sup>15</sup> Both the Victorian Prison at Lincoln Castle, and the York Castle Museum embrace this new museology to present hidden narratives of the lives of early modern and Victorian prisoners that spent time incarcerated at the sites.

Although interpreting archival material through video seems immersive and entertaining, research on the data provides an important lens into how visitors access and use them in the exhibitions. Beverly Serrell explores the power of videos in exhibitions in her study of 45 museum videos: she found that they averaged an attraction power of 32 percent and a holding power of 39.<sup>16</sup> This means that the average museum video engages with 32 percent of the total visitor population and an average of 39 percent of those viewers watched the video to completion.<sup>17</sup> Although it is reasonable to expect that the statistics will be higher at both Lincoln Castle Prison and the York Castle Prison exhibitions due to the majority of interpretation presented through video, these statistics are important to understand when considering how much material the museums could reasonably fit into each video and the amount of time each visitor might spend watching each one. Although there are no studies on the viewing power of the videos in these two museums, the statistics provided by Serrell illustrate that the majority of visitors will not view the entirety of every video on display. This information makes the style, content, and historical material provided by each video vital to the interpretation of poverty and punishment in the museums. The video projections need to be able to grab visitor attention, present the information, and emphasise the importance of the history in a very short running time.

Both museums utilise archival material to inform their prison history narratives in the videos but some of the material is followed more closely than others. In some instances, such as the interpretation of the convicted thief, Simon Hargreaves at the York Castle Museum, details of the historical evidence are excluded to maintain a coherent narrative throughout the exhibit. In other circumstances, some projections such as Lucy Buxton, who was convicted of concealment of birth at the Victorian Prison at Lincoln Castle seem to be copied straight from the newspaper reports. There are many reasons for such differences in the interpretation of the archival material that will be discussed in this paper.

At York, the lines between entertainment and education become blurred in the videos of the prisoners and their keepers. The projections are displayed as ghostlike figures that present

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<sup>15</sup> Janet Marstine (ed.), *New Museum Theory and Practice: An Introduction* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2006), p. 5.

<sup>16</sup> Beverly Serrell, 'Are They Watching? Visitors and Videos in Exhibitions', *Curator* 45:1 (2002), 50-64 at p. 61.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*.

their experiences in first-person narratives for visitors to engage with. In other words, the archival material has been adapted from the original source to a playful script that is presented to the public through the projections. There is sometimes a perceived dichotomy between education and entertainment in museums, however, many argue that learning and enjoyment work together to provide a strong educational experience.<sup>18</sup> In an interview, the project manager of the exhibition asserted that there was no particular narrative that the museum intended to convey in the exhibition.<sup>19</sup> Although the project manager did not recall a specific message or tone to the exhibition other than the terrible conditions of prison life and a display of various offences that could have resulted in the incarceration of individuals in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, a reference document used to support museum staff in the exhibition clearly illustrates poverty as an underlying factor for each of the prisoners on display.<sup>20</sup> One example of this includes the context for Mary Burgan, who was convicted of murdering her illegitimate baby in 1705. Katherine Prior, the researcher for the exhibition, notes in the reference document, 'If Mary did kill her baby, the most pressing reason is likely to have been an economic one.'<sup>21</sup> The reference document makes similar claims for almost every prisoner on display, regardless of the conviction. Through these prison narratives, the prevalence of poverty as an underlying factor for each crime becomes a clear unifying message that the museum sends to its visitors.

The museum does not use any text panels when interpreting the lives and conditions of the individuals who inhabited the prison; rather, the history is presented in eight videos, each lasting between one and two minutes. Much of the inspiration for the prison lives on display in the York Castle Prison exhibition originate from a research document compiled by an external historian tasked to highlight individuals for interpretation. Through this document, the differences between the archival material and their manifestations as projections become apparent. With a wide range of historical sources creating the persona of everyone on display, and only a few minutes of running time, visitors only encounter a fraction of each potential story. To provide a stronger overview of each person on display and their experiences, each video is followed by a projection of a short paragraph that explains the individual's fate in the prison. This provides a more complete narrative and highlights the

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<sup>18</sup> Eilean Hooper-Greenhill, *Museums and Education: Purpose, Pedagogy, Performance*, (London: Routledge, 2007), pp. 33-34.

<sup>19</sup> York Museums Trust COO, unpublished interview with Dan Johnson and Rhiannon Pickin, York Museums Trust, (Interview Date: 14 November 2016).

<sup>20</sup> Katherine Prior, York Castle Gaol Reference Document, unpublished, York Castle Museum. This reference document, compiled by Katherine Prior for the York Castle Museum, contains the primary source research on each of the people interpreted through the projections in the exhibition. It contains a summary of each individual as well as a selection of transcribed archival material as primary support.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*

message that the museum attempts to send to the visitors. Although the final paragraph explicitly explains the outcomes of the prisoners, from visitor observation in the museum, it is apparent from both visitor observation and Serell's research on video statistics that many of the visitors do not watch each projection from start to finish, missing this key aspect of the interpretation.

The Victorian Prison at Lincoln Castle takes a different approach with its interpretation of its prisoners as victims of British society before social welfare. Although both museums use videos to interpret their penal history, Lincoln uses an omniscient third-person narrator to tell the stories of the inmates, rather than having them speak for themselves like at York. The Victorian Prison at Lincoln Castle is also more transparent about the history on display, clearly demonstrating that all the information comes from archival material including crown calendars, staff journals, and newspaper archives to implicitly demonstrate the role that poverty played in their criminal acts. Technology is utilised in the Victorian Prison at Lincoln Castle with interpretation through videos as well as touch screen tables. Comparably to York, the videos at Lincoln focus on the lives of the prisoners and the details of their trials and outcomes. Instead of presenting the prisoners as if they were speaking directly to the visitor, a third-person narrator uses newspaper archives, as well as the journals of the prison staff to share the stories of the prisoners on display. The projections often reference specific newspaper articles and prison official journals so that enthusiastic visitors may find them to seek more information. In addition to the projections, another form of technology used in the Victorian Prison at Lincoln Castle is touch screen tables. These allow visitors to read through prison journal excerpts, newspaper clippings, and watch videos that contextualise the history on display elsewhere in the museum. The common factor in both methods of technology is the transparency of the use of primary source material. One Tripadvisor reviewer notes, 'Excellent new interactive features to the castle prison make it more easier to relate to the people who were imprisoned there.'<sup>22</sup> This review clearly illustrates how the interactive material helps visitors to connect to the authentic history on display.

In addition to the use of video as the main form of interpretation in Lincoln, text panels provide general information about various topics and an excerpt of primary source material for support. An example of this is in the head warder's living quarters. In this room, a text panel describes the role of the head warder and that they were not allowed to leave the prison without permission. This statement is supported by a second panel containing an excerpt from a job advertisement *Stamford Mercury* on 5 December 1851, stating that 'he

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<sup>22</sup> Bethan K, Tripadvisor Review of Lincoln Castle, 'Unique and Interesting', April 2017, online <https://www.tripadvisor.co.uk> [Accessed 7 August 2017].



will have to reside in the Prison, and must be of unimpeachable character, and fully competent to discharge the duties of the appointment efficiently and well.<sup>23</sup> The transparency of the archival material reassures visitors that what they are engaging with at this site is authentic and educational for a wide-ranging audience.

In both museums, the use of primary source material is imperative to the interpretations of poverty and punishment on display. The primary sources provide visitors with personal experiences in the prison to engage with and to learn about the history of each site. Although both utilise video projections as the main form of interpretation, the primary sources transformed from the raw material to narratives that visitors can easily relate to in a short amount of time. Lincoln is more transparent with the use of primary source material; whereas York's prison exhibition tells a wider range of stories and a more explicit message about the harsh realities of prison life.

## **2 Interpreting Poverty and Punishment through Narrative**

The York Castle Prison Exhibition and the Victorian Prison at Lincoln Castle both have storytelling objectives. The lack of collections to present to visitors means that the museums need to present their history through a series of narratives that allow visitors to connect with the history of poverty and punishment at these sites. In both the narratives provide a humanising connection between the history and the visitors. Jenny Kidd argues that audiences often have positive reactions to performances that suspend belief, allow them to empathise with others, engage with the history, and make the experience feel authentic.<sup>24</sup> From the beginning of the York Castle Prison exhibition, the narratives of prison officials encourage visitors to sympathise with prisoners. The first prison official introduced is Turnkey, Thomas Ward. On the website accompanying the exhibition, the first line of Ward's description is 'Not all the crooks were behind bars!'<sup>25</sup> In the museum, Ward introduces himself in a caricature type fashion, describing how he is harsh on the prisoners and that he often takes payment for better accommodation. Following his introduction is a projection of text that reads 'In 1709 Thomas Ward was accused of "Inhumane and unchristian" behaviour. This did not prevent him from winning the job as Keeper of York Castle.'<sup>26</sup> There are two other prison officials interpreted or referenced in the exhibition. Richard Woodhouse was the Keeper in 1732 when 21 prisoners escaped. He incurred such large debt attempting

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<sup>23</sup> Victorian Prison at Lincoln Castle, 'Head Warder's Living Quarters' (date visited: 25 March 2017).

<sup>24</sup> Jenny Kidd, 'Performing the Knowing Archive: Heritage Performance and Authenticity,' *The International Journal of Heritage Studies*, 17:1 (2011) 22-35, 31.

<sup>25</sup> York Castle Prison, 'Keepers and Prisoners, Thomas Ward' <http://www.yorkcastleprison.org.uk/keepers-prisoners.html> [Accessed 21 March 2017].

<sup>26</sup> York Castle Museum, 'Thomas Ward Projection' (date visited, 29 June 2017).

to recapture them again that he eventually fell into debt himself and wrote a petition to the magistrates for reimbursement. A third prison official, Gaoler Thomas Griffith is referenced in the projection of debtor, William Petyt. Petyt was murdered in York Castle Prison in 1741 and Griffith was tried but acquitted of the murder.<sup>27</sup> Perhaps one of the most poignant projections that cause visitors to empathise with the prisoners is a dark, empty cell that only projects text on the wall with audio of coughing and heavy breathing. The text on this cell, projected via black light in a handwritten scribble reads '27 October 1737, on this night nine men awaiting trial died of suffocation in a cell of this size.'<sup>28</sup> This cell is harrowing as it alludes to the poor management and care by the prison staff. Interpreting the multiple miscarriages of justice through the Prison's history reinforces the idea that often the prisoners were also victims.

The negative interpretation of the prison staff cause many visitors to feel sympathetic towards the prisoners and their experiences in the cells. One reviewer asserted that 'The prison section really brings home the awful conditions and what the poor people locked up in the 18th and 19th centuries had to endure.'<sup>29</sup> Prisoners interpreted by the museum represent a range of crimes including a Luddite machine breaker and the famous highwayman, Dick Turpin. There are two interesting aspects here. The first is that, other than Dick Turpin, all the prisoners on display are interpreted as having committed crimes with poverty playing a common underlying factor. The second is that the only murderers selected are the two women on display. Mary Burgan was convicted of infanticide in 1706 and Elizabeth Boardingham was convicted of arranging the murder of her husband in 1776. These crimes are sensational because they defy the traditional stereotypical view as women as mothers and wives. Although these women were convicted violent criminals, the interpretation nonetheless provides visitors with reasoning to be sympathetic towards them.

Although the interpretations of the prison narratives at the York Castle Prison exhibition are highly gendered, with the men generally committing crimes against property and the women generally committing crimes against the person, the museum seems to manipulate the histories of some of the prisoners to fit the theme of poverty as a driving factor for crime. The most blatant manipulation of historical evidence is in the case of eighteen-year-old Simon Hargreaves, who is interpreted as being sentenced to transportation for breaking and entering a house and stealing a boiled egg. On the York Castle Prison exhibition website, the interpretation follows a common trend noted by Alana Barton and Alyson Brown,

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<sup>27</sup> York Castle Museum, 'William Petyt Projection' (date visited, 29 June 2017).

<sup>28</sup> York Castle Museum, 'Death Cell Projection' (date visited, 29 June 2017).

<sup>29</sup> Ohdear\_8, 'Plenty to See', Tripadvisor Review, 22 January 2016 [Accessed 21 March 2017].

sensationalising the criminal trials of each prisoner.<sup>30</sup> For Hargreaves, an introduction on the website describes him as a troublemaker and a beer lout who was convicted of burglary for stealing a boiled egg.<sup>31</sup> Although the interpretation on the website takes a less than positive view of Hargreaves, the exhibition proves more sympathetic.

The ghostly projection of Hargreaves interprets the young offender interacting with another prisoner, William Hartley. Hartley was a luddite convicted and later hanged for stealing guns from a farmhouse and plotting to break machines at a nearby factory. He is interpreted as remorseful of his crime and is attempting to convince Hargreaves to change his ways while he is still young. The interpretation of Hargreaves in the museum is that of a child who made a mistake was transported for life for a petty crime where he later turned his life around and had become a productive member of society in Van Diemen's land.

Hargreaves is also the focal point of one of the main activities in the prison exhibition for school groups. One activity for Key Stage 2 students focusses on his time in prison, but also after his transportation to Van Diemen's Land where he eventually married and became a carriage manufacturer. The education team uses this information to demonstrate that 'actually, it wasn't all doom and gloom. You could turn your life around.'<sup>32</sup> The Assistant Curator of Social History, and Head of Formal Learning at the York Castle Museum, states that,

it's great discussions to have with children, the ethics and the citizenship and that part of the curriculum. Not just the history as in, well you're stealing food. Probably because you can't afford to buy it. You're not stealing it to sell on. It's not like nicking someone's jewellery. And is that ok?<sup>33</sup>

This brings students face-to-face with issues around poverty and social welfare, as conversations frequently turn to modern comparisons where topics including benefits and foodbanks often arise.<sup>34</sup> Using the prison interpretation as a lens to view ideas about ethics and citizenship for students allows for a wider scope of analysis to discuss the culpability of some of the prisoners within the context of life in poverty in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

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<sup>30</sup> Alana Barton and Alyson Brown, 'Show Me the Prison: The Development of Prison Tourism in the UK', *Crime, Media, Culture: An International Journal*, 11:3 (2015), 237-258 (p. 251).

<sup>31</sup> York Castle Prison, 'Keepers and Prisoners, Simon Hargreaves', <http://www.yorkcastleprison.org.uk> [Accessed 21 March 2017].

<sup>32</sup> Assistant Curator of Social History (Formal Learning), unpublished interview with Dan Johnson, York Castle Museum, (date recorded: 24 November 2016).

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*

Interpreting Hargreaves' case in this way supports the wider theme of poverty as a key factor in his crimes, but actually, his case is much more complicated. A summary of the 1829 summer assizes in the *Hull Packet* report that Hargreaves, along with two other people

were seen lurking around the prosecutor's house on 18<sup>th</sup> of May last; on the following morning, the house was found to have been broken into and robbed of six loaves of bread, one pound of butter, nine eggs, a pint of dripping, and some elderberry syrup.<sup>35</sup>

The police were notified and the three men ran but were eventually caught. Hargreaves was found with an egg in one pocket and the elderberry syrup in the other.<sup>36</sup> He was reprimanded at York Castle a number of times while awaiting trial and transportation for bad behaviour and attempting to escape. He carried on his bad behaviour while in Hobart until he was conditionally pardoned in 1842, 12 years after his transportation.

It is clear from the archival material that the story of Simon Hargreaves is much more complicated and nuanced than the museum interpretation presents it. The history is clearly manipulated to fit the museum's agenda of presenting the history of the prisoners in a way that explores issues around civics and citizenship, as well as poverty before the welfare state. From comparing the historical evidence to the interpretation of Simon Hargreaves, the question arises: Was he really a victim of the class system, driven by poverty to commit his crime out of necessity, or was he simply a thief who committed a clearly premeditated crime of opportunity?

Where York displays the prison as a dungeon with corrupt and even criminal gaolers, Lincoln reflects the nineteenth century attitudes of the prison as a place for moral reformation. In this sense, the prison staff, especially the surgeon and the chaplain, attempt to help the prisoners who are interpreted as regular people who made mistakes in their lives and needed to reform. At York, the caricature-like projections are presented in a first-person narrative. Fieldwork observations confirm that the projections stir a range of emotions from fear to laughter amongst visitors as the characters tell their stories. The scripts were created as adaptations from the archival material available. The project manager of the exhibition conceded that there were minor disputes that occurred between the scriptwriter and the researcher over issues of accuracy.<sup>37</sup> When comparing the narratives of some of the prisoners at York it is evident that the projections do not quite match the archival evidence.

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<sup>35</sup> *Hull Packet*, "Yorkshire Summer Assizes", 4 August 1829, online edn., British Newspaper Archive <http://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk> [Accessed 19 May 2017].

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>37</sup> York Museums Trust COO, unpublished interview with Dan Johnson and Rhiannon Pickin, York Museums Trust, (Interview Date: 14 November 2016).

The museum narratives at Lincoln also interpret the crime history within the context of poverty. Introductory talks conducted by museum staff contextualise 1840s Lincoln as a part of the country suffering a major economic depression, driving people to commit crimes to feed their families. The introduction states, 'These people were probably in here because they were nicking a rabbit to feed their families. It's not major crimes.'<sup>38</sup> Context is rooted in historical analysis that argues that 'The Lincolnshire countryside, far from being a place of peace and social harmony, witnessed a marked deterioration in class relations and the waging of a bitter struggle... until at least the 1840s.'<sup>39</sup> This introduction to the economic distress and how this related to a rise in the commission of crimes of necessity amongst the lower classes provides a specific context for which visitors make meanings from their experience.

There are many similarities between the interpretations of York and Lincoln. At Lincoln, prisoners are also interpreted as victims of society, rather than perpetrators of the law. Another similarity is that the interpretations of prisoners at the Victorian Prison at Lincoln castle are also very gendered. The introductory panel to the women's side of the prison reads,

Many female prisoners were young, unmarried servants. A common crime was "concealment of birth"- the secret disposal of a new-born baby's body. Some stood accused of infanticide, suspected of murdering the new-born. Other crimes included theft, robbery, and arson.<sup>40</sup>

The only projection of a female prisoner at the Victorian Prison at Lincoln Castle is that of 22-year-old, Lucy Buxton. The narrator of the projection for Buxton states that she was convicted of murdering her five-month-old illegitimate child, John Edward in May 1868. The projection states that Lucy had a troubled life up to that point, including a stint as a prostitute and a prior conviction for theft from her master while she was a servant. Despite her troublesome past and the sentence of death passed against her, the judge received a petition from the jury to grant her leniency. The projection also states that a cleric from her parish wrote into the *Lincolnshire Chronicle* asking Christians to pray for her. Largely due to the many appeals for clemency, her sentence was commuted to penal servitude to life.

Although the case represents a gendered perspective of crime and punishment, the projection makes clear that the clemency did not come from Buxton's specific case, but rather she was an example of a growing movement against capital punishment. It should be noted that although not mentioned in the projection, this trial occurred just months after the

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<sup>38</sup> Ibid.

<sup>39</sup> T. L. Richardson, 'The Agricultural Labourers' Standard of Living in Lincolnshire, 1790-1840: Social Protest and Public Order,' *The Agricultural History Review*, 41:1 (1993) 1-18 (p.18).

<sup>40</sup> Victorian Prison at Lincoln Castle, 'Female Prison' text panel, (date visited: 26 March 2016).

passing of the 1868 Act to Provide for the Carrying out of Capital Punishment in Prisons, which ended public executions. The projection states,

People were beginning to suspect that there was something terribly wrong, not with young women like Lucy, but with a society that would drive them to commit such terrible a crime, hence the ink, the paper, the prayers, and the reduction of Lucy Buxton's sentence in September of 1868, to penal servitude for life.<sup>41</sup>

What is interesting about this interpretation is how true it is to the historical evidence.

There is a very detailed article about her trial in the *Lincolnshire Chronicle* from 1868 that highlights several witnesses, as well as the defence, before describing that 'The Prisoner, on hearing the sentence, fainted, and on recovering screamed and moaned bitterly, and was carried out of court.'<sup>42</sup> This, along with the other rich archival material, allow the museum to fit the narrative into the wider narrative of the prisoners as victims of a society before the welfare state.

## **Conclusion**

The York Castle Museum and the Victorian Prison at Lincoln Castle utilise primary sources and specific prison narratives to interpret their prisoners not as perpetrators of offences against the law, but victims of a society before social welfare. These social and ethical discussions are significant in the interpretation of British punishment because they may cause some visitors to question how much or how little these issues are still persistent in criminal justice today. Both museums demonstrate a unique interpretative style, focussing on prison narratives through audio-visual projections to share the history of the prisons and the punishment without using collections of artefacts. This style of interpretation forces the museums to rely more heavily on primary source material, giving archival material a more visible role in the public gaze. The use of primary source material to create the personas of the individuals and their stories allows the visitors to engage with the history from a seemingly first person perspective, allowing for a more immersive experience overall. Although both sites are not traditional display case and text panel museums, they send messages about poverty and punishment to visitors from the primary source material through the projections of the prison narratives, so that they may add context and nuance to public understandings of poverty and punishment within the framework of eighteenth and nineteenth-century penal history.

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<sup>41</sup> Victorian Prison at Lincoln Castle, 'Lucy Buxton Projection', (date visited: 26 March 2016).

<sup>42</sup> *The Lincolnshire Chronicle*, 1 August 1868, p. 6.