

## **Doing Time-Travel: Performing Past and Present at the Prison Museum**

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### **Introduction**

The transformation of former prisons to sites of “dark tourism” reflects a recent trend in the use of decommissioned buildings for alternative purposes, such as museums and other heritage sites, which particularly emphasise “representations of death, disaster or atrocity for pedagogical and commercial purposes” (Walby and Piché, 2011: 452). Prisons are spaces that hold a morbid fascination for visitors who are unlikely to ever encounter such a space in their everyday lives (Strange and Kempa, 2003). Far from a traditional tourist site, the prison museum is built upon consumer desire to access the inaccessible; to glimpse a life on the ‘inside’ and all its assumed horrors from the comfort of being on the ‘outside’ (Turner, 2013) – with the choice and liberty, of course, to enter, to leave, to accept or to reject any given exhibition or display (see Hall, 1973). Prison museums cater, on the one hand, to a market of visitors seeking such tourist experiences for entertainment (Adams, 2001; Schrift, 2004). On the other hand, they function to educate visitors about penal pasts, shaping contemporary understandings through engagement with carceral histories (see, for example, Baker, 2014: 1).

In this chapter we attend to the ways in which a particular prison museum – the Galleries of Justice, in Nottingham, U.K. – informs and entertains while making the past usable in the present. The Galleries of Justice is a prison museum housed within a former courthouse and gaol. It not only tells a penal history specific to the county of Nottinghamshire, U.K.; but also conveys a national carceral history, holding the official *Her Majesty’s Prison Service* archive collection.

The museum also portrays the global connections of Britain's penal past through exhibitions charting the period of transportation to the Americas and Australia (Baker, 2014; Galleries of Justice, nd-d). During a two-year period of research investigating the manner in which prison museums allow those on the 'outside' to access life 'inside' (see Turner, 2013), we found performance to be a crucial technique in the making of the past usable and comprehensible to the visitor. By performance, we refer to the ways in which the past is not merely represented, but also embodied and brought to life in so-called 'non-representational' ways (Thrift, 1996) – through costumed interpreters, audio guides, and by encouraging visitors to participate themselves, as pretend convicts.

During one of the eight visits we made to the Galleries of Justice, we participated in a group tour of the former prison. As the tour progressed through the courtrooms to the prison cells below, we moved linearly through time while also experiencing overlapping time periods in the same space. In the exercise yard, for example, we experienced 1856 and 2013 simultaneously:

Before entering the women's prison, we were lined up and inspected in the exercise yard by Mrs Linton, the prison matron. We were shouted at in stern voice for our slack shoulders and ordered to open our hands out to scrutinise our nails and ensure we were not hiding anything. She then informed us how we must not 'cross her' (after all, her husband was the governor); we were to 'obey' orders at all times; speak 'only when spoken to' and 'co-operate' with her and her staff. We were told, in no uncertain terms that we would be 'reformed through hard labour and education'. Any inclination to titter at the performance was suppressed by our being chastised by the lady dressed as a 19<sup>th</sup> century matron. She was really quite serious. Had we smiled, we felt we might be

punished as described. We followed her direction, marching around the exercise yard when explicitly told to - just like the prisoners of the past (Turner and Peters, 2013).

Performances, we argue, are crucial to the ways in which carceral pasts are used in the present. Performance is often used to bridge a temporal gap between past and present at heritage sites (see Leighton, 2007). Yet, in the penal heritage site, such performance becomes doubly significant. It marks a spatial boundary crossing from the outside to life inside – creating a sense of life somewhere distinctly different – a space hitherto unknown to the visitor. Yet performance also works to facilitate a temporal boundary crossing as tourists engage various penal pasts; they embark on a process of time-travel to distant and not-so-distant pasts via the performed narratives constructed at the museum. We argue that this builds an affective experience of past carceral space that also shapes perceptions of prisons in present society.

In this chapter we explore the performative time-travel techniques of the Galleries of Justice in order to interrogate how this museum makes British penal history knowable and usable to the audience. To do so, we work through varying strategies of performance: the performance of museum staff through costumed interpretation and the performed audio tours and virtual tours; and the encouraged performance of visitors to co-produce these historical narratives through their participation. First, however, we introduce heritage, performance, and penal tourism in greater depth before turning to our specific case study of the Galleries of Justice and the performative encounters of past and present that are brought to life there.

### **Heritage, performance, and the prison museum**

Many of the buildings constructed during the nineteenth century prison-building boom have now been rendered obsolete and unfit for use, owing to architectural degradation and the cost of maintenance. In place of their former purpose, many have been repackaged within a framework of heritage preservation, creating the recreational leisure pursuit of “penal tourism” (Strange and Kempa, 2003). Strange and Kempa illustrate the prominent examples of Alcatraz in the United States and Robben Island in South Africa that now serve as museums and heritage sites (2003); whilst Welch and Macuare (2011) explore the Argentine Penitentiary Museum in Buenos Aires, which operated as a prison until 1947. Walby and Piché (2011) examine how multiple penal sites such as county and local prisons as well as a former warden’s house in Ontario, Canada, have been utilized for tourism purposes.

Such studies have investigated penal tourism through a variety of analytic lenses. Bruggeman’s (2012) examination of America’s archetypal “separate system” prison – the Eastern State Penitentiary, in Philadelphia – explores the politics that many creators of penal tourist sites grapple with, the obfuscation of race, power, and community that emerge via systems of preservation. Barton and Brown (2012) consider tourist travels to a functioning prison site in Dartmoor, U.K., during the inter-war period, where visitors arrived daily to watch inmates marching out for afternoon labour. Such work highlights the use of prison sites as ‘spectacles’ or displays of extraordinary, ‘other’ spaces, for a fascinated public. At the Angola State Prison in Louisiana, the public pays to watch prisoners competing in rodeo activities (Adams 2001; Schrift 2004).

Piché and Walby (2004) problematize penal tourism, suggesting that it rarely offers an accurate insight into prison life. Such a critique hinges on the spatial and temporal distancing and distinctions that arise at such heritage sites. Whilst such sites aim to bridge the gap between prison and society to foster greater understanding, often the reverse happens. Indeed, as the tourist engages in a boundary crossing from the ‘outside’ to see/watch/engage with elements of the ‘inside’; the ‘inside’ is set up as a profoundly different or ‘other’ space; expanding the chasm between society and prison, rather than bringing the two closer together. Simultaneously, such tourist sites aim to enhance present day understandings of carcerality. Yet, a temporal distancing also occurs. The presentation of particular penal histories are often at odds with the present shape of contemporary prisons, yet these narratives come to represent prison life itself – with common themes of punishment, servitude and rehabilitation – further extending the gap in understanding between those on the outside and inside.

In recent years, scholars of memory and heritage have explored the production and consumption of the past through processes of performance (Johnson, 1999a; 1999b) – the use of more-than-representational, embodied and ‘enlivened’ techniques – to bridge such gaps and bring visitors into closer ‘touch’ with specific times and spaces in the past. As Tilden notes, “[i]nterpretation is the means through which to shorten the distance between site/artefact and the visitor” (1957: 8). Live interpretation, where actors perform to interact with visitors, ranges from “historic re-enactment through to theatre, storytelling and role play” (Leighton, 2007: 120). In recent years, this method has been especially popular at the museum (see Jackson, 2000; Malcolm-Davies, 2004; Shafernich, 1993; Wallace, 1981). As Leighton describes,

The Galleries of Justice, the former Shire Hall and county gaol for Nottinghamshire, located in Nottingham's Lace Market, invites visitors to travel through three centuries of crime and punishment. Visitors experience a real trial in an authentic Victorian courtroom before being sentenced and 'sent down' to the original cells and caves deep within the site. During their stay in the cells visitors meet the warders, costumed live interpreters who 'welcome' them for their stay, along with the hangman; the ultimate experience is however the Haunted Lock-in (2007: 120)

Crang, in particular, explores the contested ground that such performances elicit in museum spaces, arguing that they "create a powerful effect of realism ... [that] lends authority" (2003: 8). As Schouten (1995: 21) echoes, "[v]isitors to historic sites are looking for an experience, a new reality based on the tangible remains of the past. For them, this is the very essence of the heritage experience." Indeed, performance ostensibly brings visitors closer to the histories represented, through presenting them in a non-representation manner (Thrift, 1996). Such 'real-life' depictions work to fold pasts and presents together by "recreating environments"; bringing disparate times into touch through the personal, embodied, interpretive nature of the performance. This often makes the past appear more 'authentic' to the visitor (who comes into closer, 'genuine' contact with the past) (Crang, 2003: 266). Prison museum curators have employed these approaches to representing history. Yet for the prison museum these techniques are doubly significant in view of the subject matter. The work of the penal tourist site is not simply to narrate the past, but to narrate an 'other' space. Indeed, penal tourist sites increasingly utilise performative affects to elicit empathy with incarcerated others. For the visitor engaging with penal tourist sites like the Galleries of Justice, techniques such as embodied performance –

of both staff (enacting gaolers) and visitors (enacting convicts) – relies on a boundary crossing, a spatial dislocation from the world outside to a performative re-creation of the inside, travelling back and forth, from past and present through narration and character performances (see Baker, 2014; Galleries of Justice, nd-a).

### **Accessing the prison museum**

In 1993, at the end of its long history in penal justice, the Lace Market Heritage Trust took ownership of the site of the Nottingham Shire Hall and County Gaol. The trust transformed the site into the Galleries of Justice museum, which opened two years later. Official records state that a gaol existed from 1449, although it is believed that criminals and other miscreants were detained here from a much earlier date. In 1878, the prison was closed due to appalling conditions but the courtroom remained in use until 1986. The Galleries of Justice makes use of a variety of different spaces on its premises. In addition to the courtroom, visitors are able to explore the Georgian and Victorian prison cells; ‘dark’ punishment cells and the oubliette (dungeon); the exercise yard; and the additional wing added in 1833. The museum itself is one which tells multiple histories, both of specific carceral pasts relating to the former court and prison on site, and to a national history of crime and punishment in the U.K.

Our fieldwork at the Galleries of Justice entailed eight site visits where we navigated the site and its exhibits independently, and engaged with a variety of the scheduled performance led-tours. We also participated in audio tours (available on days of the week when guided tours were unavailable) and virtual tours (designed for visitors with limited mobility, owing to the inaccessibility of the lower parts of the building). Visits were conducted over two years in order

to gain a sense of how performances differed with time of year; the weather; and with respect to performance led-tours, the costumed interpreter leading the tour, and the dynamic of differing tour groups. This method was a form of auto-ethnography (see Crang and Cook, 2007: 6) where we shuttled between multiple insider/outside roles as researcher/tourist; civilian/prisoner; in order to understand how the penal past was made usable by the museum and comprehensible to visitors. Through “assaying” the past in the present (following Garrett, 2011), we were able to reflexively and critically consider the role of performance in negotiating the complex temporalities and spatialities enfolded in the prison museum.

In addition to this, we also held conversations with museum staff, including costumed interpreters and those in a curating role; and analysed promotional materials and guidebooks (both in print and online). This was in conjunction with collating 486 online visitor reviews of the museum. We analysed user reviews posted during the time frame of the research (January 2012 to November 2014) in order to accumulate the most current opinions and triangulate with the auto-ethnographic observations made at the site (and therefore not referring to defunct exhibitions). These postings provided a rich and informative insight into tourist engagements with the penal museum (Langer and Beckman, 2005; Paechter, 2013).

### **Performing the carceral past in the present**

Advertised as one of its unique attractions, the “exciting and engaging” performance-led tours are one of the museum’s central methods of communicating the carceral past (Galleries of Justice, nd-d). During these tours costumed interpreters lead visitors around different parts of the building. For example, a tour around the County Courtroom is led by either an usher or the



Sheriff of Nottingham; the pre-reform cells exhibited by a turnkey, his wife, or an executioner; and the Victorian prison and exercise yard introduced by a prison warden or a matron. These interpreters are advertised as a substitute for the real thing, with the museum proclaiming that “costumed actors will make you feel right at home” (Galleries of Justice, nd-d). The choice of the word “home” is particularly poignant, given that the space of the prison is set up as spatially distinct from, and ‘other’ to, the space of the home. What is implied is that the experiences elicited on the tours are aimed to make visitors *genuinely* feel they are enfolded within the prison, at the various moments of the past that are represented and performed. As Crang notes, there is an often an “effective authority to ... interpretation” (2003: 266), which the Galleries of Justice embrace to engage visitors in their narration of the past. Indeed, the job advert for a costumed interpreter at the museum stresses the need for “authenticity” and “commitment” to educational work (Galleries of Justice, nd-c). As such, performances are intended to bridge the gap between prison and home, past and present, through the very embodied, haptic, and felt elements that performance encapsulates.

Yet the job description for staff working as costumed interpreters stresses the need to work “in line with prepared information and scripts” (Galleries of Justice, nd-c), to ensure performances are “genuine,” “authentic,” and hence hold authority as “accurate” narrations of the carceral past. This suggests that far from being a dynamic bridge between past and present, the tours simply become spoken representations of the past; rather than working as a lively and embodied means of dealing with the spatial and temporal distancing the past prison setting presents. The scripts are peppered with well-positioned points of exclamation: the number of people executed in the building; nods towards gruesome punishments “carried out below your very feet”; and point

towards supposedly genuine artefacts from prisons across the country – all interspersed between the obligatory timeline of key dates in the history of criminal justice in the U.K.

Whilst some points were common in narration and plotline, the tours we engaged with differed radically. This depended on the make-up of each group partaking in the tour, and the set of costumed interpreters who delivered the scripts. We further found from our conversations with museum curators and costumed interpreters that scripts are often adapted by staff themselves, contributing to a “forever changing” experience of tours (Galleries of Justice, nd-d). As such, the narration of the temporally- and spatially-distinct prison past is retold and reshaped with each performance. This forever changing performance of the past is further complicated by the organisation of the narrative, which is simultaneously linear but also temporally fractured. For example, a discrete, linear, historical story unfolds, related to the space in which the costumed interpreter performs his or her role. However, upon moving to another space within the museum time reverses, and the visitor is transported back again, as another linear history is told from the perspective of this new location. The narrative in the County Courtroom, for example, stretches from the late 1600s to the present day, before the tour returns back to the earlier Georgian period of history once more, when this performance ends, and the visitor is routed to the prison below, and to the turnkey, his wife, or the executioner (whoever happens to be on the staff rota for that day).

This complex shuttling of time, back and forth, through the performances of the interpreters, brings strands of temporally-disparate histories together, encouraging the visitor to time-travel across different eras of penal history through one interpreter whose performed character and

costume, is, however, situated in just one era. Thus whilst making the penal past comprehensible through direct performance, costumed interpretation also presents a palimpsest of fractured pasts that can be confusing to a visitor unable to *place* those pasts in context to penal reforms and the contemporary penal institution.

In spite of this, the majority of visitors who reviewed the museum agreed on the quality of the museum and the expertise of the costumed interpreters. Yet, adding to the complexity just mentioned, the specific content and delivery of the tours differed with the shifting position of the costumed interpreters as they oscillated between narrator and actor. Indeed, whilst interpreters took on specific roles couched in a particular moment in history (turnkey, executioner, matron, etc); in telling a broader historical story within the space of their performance, they shifted from this character-role to that of narrator. As one visitor recounted:

The tour was good, though as a museum professional myself I would have rather had a character either in role or just in costume as the Sheriff, not one that flitted between the two – but that's just my little bug bear and I know that everyone else in the group really enjoyed the banter (TripAdvisor, Amanda, 2013).

Staff at the museum take on a hybrid role when they act as a guide, in the *present*, leading visitors to/from the court room, prison cells, and exercise yard; yet once in these places, switch seamlessly to a character of the *past* (a sheriff, a turnkey, a matron). Tour guides then, embody a boundary crossing from past to present through the “emplotment of events” (to follow Crang, 1994); yet also move from outsider to insider spatially, as they shift position from an omniscient narrator who views history from ‘beyond’, to a character situated ‘within’ the story.

What is most striking, however, is the power implicit in the performed narratives of the costumed interpreters (see also Bruggeman, 2012). In performing either the role of narrator or character, the costumed interpreter takes a position of power in relaying penal narratives of life on the inside. As narrator they are ‘overseer’ of the history – placed to objectively and reliably re-tell a story of the past. As a character, they are positioned as judges, gaolers, executions, reformers – those who can dictate control over prisoners – administering penal justice, punishment, and reform. Indeed costumed interpreters rely on audience participation as prisoners and their previous knowledge about crime and punishment to instigate the anecdotes they tell.

Costumed interpreters themselves do not perform the role of prisoner. Indeed, the narratives told by interpreters are the stories of those whose voices have been recorded, archived, and noted as reliable sources on prison pasts. The informal histories of prisoners, those silenced through their very position, are unheard through such performances. In this sense, the history that is constantly retold by the Galleries of Justice constantly embeds the structures of dominance and subjugation that shape our understanding of the penal past. Yet, interestingly, the voices of prisoners emerge via other strategies of performance, such as through objects and mannequins that ‘give voice’ through innovative displays (see Hoskins, 2007). In the transportation exhibition, for example, carved wooden figures are each decorated with a plaque telling ‘their story’: giving a name, their occupation, and their role on the convict ship. More than this, quotes from ‘real’ criminals appear throughout the museum. Conversations with staff revealed how these narratives were carefully pieced together from known historical accounts of the individuals’ crimes, cross-referenced with prison journals and period-appropriate surgeons’ logs, for example. As Hoskins notes, narratives of the past emerge from the vibrant and affective potentiality of an object (in this case

mannequins and plaques). Rather than simply working as static items, they can speak (as well as being spoken for) and can therefore hold capacities to literally perform a past as they come into contact with visitors (Hoskins, 2007: 441). This helps to build an empathetic relation as elements of penal life emerge, bringing the visitor from the outside into touch with artefacts from the inside.

**[Figure 5.1 HERE: Wooden figures portraying individuals aboard the convict ship]**

Audio recordings also play in certain exhibition rooms. These recount narratives about different elements of punishment and prison life, such as carnivalesque public punishment or the experience of nights spent in a communal women's cell. On the one hand these recordings provide a personal narrative but they are also often disembodied, creating a chasm or distance between the prison inside and outside. Those in positions of authority – the turnkey, matron, and so on – are given names, faces, and *character* through interpretation – Mrs. Linton, Dr. Massey. The prisoner, through recordings, sometimes has no name, no character, but rather comes to represent all prisoners. This, in part, reflects a problem faced by penal museums generally, the few stories retained that have been told by prisoners. However, in spite of such simultaneous absence and presence (see Jones *et al.*, 2014), performances such as this facilitates an effective border crossing between two distinct spaces and times through the senses of sound and vision. One particularly gruesome audio performance appears in the 'Georgian' prison, at the gaol entrance. It consists of an unidentified woman, burning at the stake, accompanied by the sounds of her screams, the crackling of the flames engulfing her, and prolonged choking noises. At

intervals, the darkened cavern the mannequin is situated within lights up in deep reds and flickering yellows. The brief audio states that,

She was taken from the prison barefoot and she was drawn on a hurdle to the site [background noise of shouting and jeering]. They put her on a tar barrel against the stake. She was held in place by three iron bars and a rope around her neck [screams]. The rope was pulled tight, almost strangling her [screams of pain]. They rolled the barrel away and then lit the fire [crackling of flames. Screams. Crowd shouting. Choking screams] (Galleries of Justice, nd-a).

Furthermore, in many parts of the museum, a soundtrack of noises can be heard – objects given life through audio means. These ‘sounds of the prisons’ are often metallic, representing irons clinking together as prisoners shuffled around the prison. Such methods of ‘giving voice’ to the prisoner, and prisoner experience, are particularly effective methods of performing the past and eliciting an understanding of the horrific elements of penal regimes at particular moments of the past. Although less dynamic and changing (compared to costumed interpretation) they work to bring the past into the present in disturbing and evocative ways that move beyond mere representation.

However, audio is not simply layered on top of objects and mannequins. In addition to these audio snippets, audio tours are substituted for the absence of costumed interpreters on Mondays and Tuesdays. On these days visitors can “roam the courts, prison and dungeons with only the voices of the past for company” (Galleries of Justice, nd-b). Like the costumed interpreter-led tours, the audio guide shuttles back and forth from inside to outside the prison, through overarching narration and first person character stories. Similar to the tours, the narratives shift

back and forth through time, while using the sense of sound in conjunction with the architecture of the prison, objects on display, and mannequins to bring the prison to life. Where audio tours are particularly effective is in their ability to speak from a variety of first person character stories – both prison gaolers and prisoners. Whilst costumed interpretation provides the visitor with a taste of discipline, punishment, and prison reform, the audio more effectively gives prisoners an active voice (see Galleries of Justice nd-a). Voice is particularly effective in view of its immediacy in connecting the visitor to the past penal life. The timbres of the voice, the tone, speed, dialect, and gendering of voice provide an emotive link between the past and present, especially through the often shocking narratives relayed (see Kanngieser, 2012). For example, one audio snippet provides an insight to life in a Georgian cell. Compared to a written description, the audio, heard *in* context with the cell, enfolds past and present, inside and outside, in uncomfortable and provocative ways:

[Croaky male voice] ... gaol fever, dysentery, low fever and the dreaded diarrhoea. We get it all down here. You get sick, there's nowhere to put you because the infirmary is being used by the bloody debtors half the time. One man died .... They didn't have anywhere to put his body so they left it out over the weekend and it stank (the) infirmary out so badly, nobody could use it (Galleries of Justice, no date-a).

Through such audio the museum provides both the shocking, gruesome, uncomfortable narratives of prison life, yet also ones that were arguably banal, everyday, ordinary occurrences. The direct nature of performance (whether embodied, or disembodied via objects, audio, and so on), is particularly useful in attempting to bridge past and present; inside and outside. Yet, the manner of performance simultaneously provokes distance. On the audio tour, for example, voices are, on occasion, ill-fitting to the subject they portray. The actors are often well-spoken,

and their voices do not always seem to match the age of the character they portray. One female prisoner, 15 years of age, sounds far older (Galleries of Justice, nd-a), compromising the sense of realism on which the performance relies.

Visitors are also encouraged to act in ways that ostensibly mirror those of the convicted. When visiting the Galleries of Justice, entrance tickets feature randomly distributed convict numbers corresponding to a particular ‘real life’ criminal. Each convict number refers to boards behind closed doors that display information about the individual’s crime and the date it occurred. A mirror is placed on the panel, positioning the visitor’s reflection in place of the ‘mug shot’ – transferring the visitor’s visual identity to that of their convict counterpart (see Figure 5.2).

**[Figure 5.2 HERE: Discovering your ‘real life’ convict history]**

Visitors are encouraged to follow the story of ‘their’ crime, generating a particular spectacle around the sentence their character received. Although this is an obvious attempt to shorten the distance between past and present, inside and outside via the creation of individual empathy, we found on some occasions our convict numbers were the same as others in the group, thus removing the opportunity to truly claim them for ourselves. On various visits, ‘our crimes’ ranged from murder of a child to stealing a cow. On a more recent visit, one of us made the casual remark: “Oh, I’m sentenced to death again.” Indeed, during our participation on these tours, the guides themselves asked members of the group questions such as “Who’s due for a good whipping? Which of you is getting hanged then?” In the spirit of performing our prisoner roles appropriately, we were expected to respond to such questions, embroiling us within a



created atmosphere of discipline and incarceration. After inviting us past a barred gate into the oldest part of the former prison, a man in period costume introduced himself as a ‘turnkey’. We recorded the interchange that followed in one of our field diaries:

The turnkey asked who has been sentenced to public whipping. I raised my hand. He smiled at me and told me it was sure to be terrible, but reminded me of the silver lining: I would only have to spend two weeks in the prison. He asked me if I had any money. I played along, I said I had none. He asked me what I thought I might be able to sell. I knew something of pre-reform English prisons. I thought to reply, “my body” but then I realised there were children in the room, maybe we don’t talk about that. I shrugged my shoulders. “You’ve got a nice ponytail” he said, “and a full set of teeth. You can sell the hair to a wig-maker (or if it’s poor quality we can use it to stuff mattresses). And the dentist loves a good supply of teeth. The rich people would rather have human than horse teeth if theirs need replacing. You can bargain before they rip them out. That should make the two weeks pass by more easily.” I shuddered. Teeth. There’s always something about teeth that makes me cringe. The turnkey was nonchalant. He wished me good luck for my sentence, and reminded me that my punishment was for a set number of lashes, not just until I was senseless. He hoped that I didn’t pass out too soon and that I made it out alive (Turner and Peters, 2012)

We were also expected to participate in activities relating to various areas of the prison. In many cases, penal tourist sites become just one more photo opportunity, with people lining up to enact the mundane but laborious everyday chores prisoners were assigned; to pose locked up in the

pillory or stocks; or to create our own ‘mug shots’ (see Figure 5.3). We noted some of these occasions in our ethnographic diaries:

Today we took our own mug shots, dressing up in convict uniforms and chalked our prisoner numbers on a slate to hold up while being photographed. In this way, we were encouraged to feel some empathy with those being received to prison in the past, whilst also delighting in this experience of the extraordinary (Turner and Peters, 2013).

**[Figure 5.3 HERE: Writing our own convict numbers before having ‘mug shots’ taken]**

For visitors with limited mobility, alternative methods of performance are also harnessed. Students at Nottingham Trent University have developed a virtual tour of the museum in conjunction with the museum staff. Using gaming technologies, visitors can “navigate themselves through virtual space” to explore the parts of the building that otherwise only can be accessed via steps or uneven ground (Museums and Heritage, 2013). The developers of the virtual model were keen to ensure that this was an interactive experience comparable to the experience provided by the live tour:

In order to maintain a connection to the real site and engage the visitor it is imperative to also embed the site’s social history within the virtual tour. For this reason it now contains audio, video and effects that provide atmosphere and narrative to tell the story of the building and give a sense of place to the 3D environment (Museums and Heritage, 2013).

In this experience, individuals are offered a hybrid performance. Just like their counterparts in the live tours, they perform both the role of visitor and that of prisoner experiencing these spaces.

The virtual medium creates a relationship to the body via the ability of users to control their point of view in order to “move and look around the space.” Similar technology is found in the first person computer game. This ‘being there’ is therefore vital to “incorporating a sense of presence” but it requires more than simply a lifelike reproduction of the physical environment (Museums and Heritage, 2013). As the researchers involved in the development of the virtual tour explain,

A good storyteller can conjure up and animate the spirit of history. The power of these stories should not be underestimated – they are significant in enriching the visitor’s experience of historical memories and culture and are engaging and entertaining as well as educational (Patel and Tuck, 2008: 249-250).

In order to encapsulate these stories, the overall performance of the virtual tour includes audio, video, and other visual effects. The experience is designed to engender something close to real-time, a performance of the past in the present, with flickering torches, fire, steam, videos of prisoners, and sound effects present in each of the spaces, with the visitor’s movement around the 3D environment triggering the voice of the tour guide.

### **The politics of (co)creating understanding**

Regardless of whether one experiences the museum via live interpreter, audio tour, or virtual tour, it is clear that the museum aims to foster the dual experience of entertainment and education (Galleries of Justice, nd-d). Visitor reviews commented on the learning experience created through this kind of participation:

Good fun in the dock!” – Excellent museum with staff all in costume and acting as characters from the past. Visitors get roped in too and all the children in our tour party seemed to love it! (TripAdvisor, Wendy, 2013).

I took a group of year 10 students to the Galleries of Justice and we all really enjoyed the day. The staff are fantastic and make you feel like you are really experiencing what it would have been like. The mock trial that the class trip was very well organised and the students all took part, enjoyed it and most of all learnt a lot in the process. It is definitely a must see for young and old! (TripAdvisor, NAC24, 2013).

These kinds of engagements rely on the ability of visitors to interact during their experiences. However, there is a recognition that a simultaneous ‘distance’ must also occur, in order for these visits to be successful. As Huey explains, it is the fact that although the visitor knows that pain and suffering may be occurring at these sites, it is being enacted on others (and specifically, unknown others), and in this way, the sites can achieve a spectacle “both compelling and pleasurable” (2011: 386). As such, the visitor can watch (and learn) about these transgressive activities, but they are not expected to experience any of their negativities (Seltzer, 1998: 271; Stephens, 2007).

However, in many cases, these interactions may cross the line to affect the visitor in very physical ways. Although we, as visitors, may merely intend to look at activities happening at these sites, what we see can often make us tremble or shake, make us feel cold or sick (Pile, 2010). As one visitor to the Galleries of Justice described,

We then descended to the dungeon and pit areas where another female actor explained the life of prisoners in the past. It was fascinating to note that prisoners could pay for

better beds and blankets, otherwise they would get thrown into the pit, which was dark and scary – I didn't dare go inside. We were then left alone to explore the area, I would say that some of the younger kids were upset and uncomfortable in that environment, and I myself wasn't quite sure where to go. Then, a "guv'nor" showed us a replica of the gallows and how hangings were performed. One of the female tourists was visibly disturbed and had to have a breather (TripAdvisor, seantyy, 2013).

As participant tourists and pseudo-prisoners ourselves we found elements of the performance disturbing. Being locked in a nineteenth century cell on a cold November day, with the wind blowing through the open window bars, was chilling. So too was the sickening internal feeling evoked from the sound of a sharp crack and the chips of paint which were removed as the 'turnkey' whipped his cat o' nine tails at the wall. A horrifying realisation arose of the damage that would have done to human flesh. Nevertheless, as with any tourist experience, visitors to the Galleries of Justice have a choice. The room exhibiting the procedure of carrying out the sentence of death by hanging carries a warning sign, encouraging individuals of nervous disposition to bypass this particular element of the tour. The fact that visitors are 'buying into' these prison experiences highlights the difference between actual prisons and penal tourist sites, and further exposes the disconnect between them that persists in spite of attempts and technologies that seek to transport the visitor to other times and places.

## **Conclusion**

In this chapter we have drawn on research conducted at the Galleries of Justice to explore how visitors are encouraged to 'do time'; or rather 'do time-travel', through their engagements with carceral histories. By allowing visitors to touch, see, feel, and enact versions of penal life in the

museum, individuals are able to traverse the temporal divide between then and now and so too, the spatial division between inside and outside. Yet in exploring these boundary crossings, we have demonstrated how the penal museum is problematic as a heritage site – and more so, how the embodied performances of staff and visitors complicate matters further. For some visitors, enacting carceral pasts through a convict journey imprinted upon the entrance ticket – encouraging the visitor to empathise with the assigned prisoner – may promote a more attached, more manageable, more personal, understanding of the prison system and its complexity. In other ways, the performance of the turnkey's likeable persona, for example, provides a comic spectacle that creates a distancing effect from the harsher realities of penal history. The Galleries of Justice spectacularises prison life as horrific, with the creation of stereotypical prison characters in the form of the costumed interpreters who provide a narrative of prison as a miserable, brutal place. However, even this horror is sensationalised to make it more agreeable to most visitors. The hearty laugh of the turnkey's wife, combined with the (largely) child-friendly narration of prisoners sentenced to execution, contributes to an atmosphere of fun not anguish. As such, horror for entertainment prevails, and 'true' horrors are sanitised.

Having said all this, the ideas of temporal dislocation are crucial here. The prison museum presents particular segments of time in penal history, choosing particular convict journeys and performances to be the focal points for visitors. These performances, and the multiple affects they evoke, produce a disconnection for the visitor – who is not simply experiencing a spatial dislocation from the world outside - to a performative re-creation of life inside – but is also experiencing a temporal disconnection as they move back and forth to specific moments in carceral history. This 'time-travel' – or crossing of a temporal boundary – produces versions of

penal life that render the contemporary prison as something abstract and disjointed in time. In attempting to illuminate, and make proximate and known the prison environment; the performance of particular prison journeys simultaneously creates a distance, both spatial and temporal, between the heritage site and the contemporary prison, understanding of which they may be seeking to promote.

As such, penal tourist sites, we have proposed, have a distinctive role. This is constituted through their very nature as spaces that are not ordinarily accessible and which hold a morbid fascination. They promote a tourist experience that both seems to encapsulate 'life behind bars' in the past (and present) but one that is also a (co)creation based on assumptions of that life. For the majority of liberal society, these sites of heritage and leisure rest firmly upon a support of previous perceptions of the prison, built up in media constructions and in our imaginations. This places penal tourism in an awkward conundrum, altering perceptions of a world so central to the functioning of society, yet so relatively unknown to most people. Accordingly, these are spaces that scholars of the usable carceral past must continue to explore to better understand how prison is understood and engaged with in the present.

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