

# Talking about prisons: making sense of difficult heritage at Peterhead Prison Museum

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## Slide 1

- Rachael
- Context – PPM, link to Judith presentation – site of difficult heritage.
- Funded project via the British Academy – 18 months.
- (1 minute)

## Slide 2

- Rachael
- Growing public interest in prisons as a form of tourism – PPM is an interesting case study because of its peripheral location. Attracts up to 200,000 visitors per year, many of who only visit Peterhead for the museum. Interpretation includes stories of incarceration, punishment and the prisons history via an audio guide, 'Scotland's Gulag' – point of local and national intrigue.
- Former studies have illustrated how curated objects related to a prison produce meaning for visitors – and so interested how people explore curated museum spaces.
- While other studies have considered the visitor experience and how heritage is constructed in these spaces – we do not know much about how people actually interact, respond and negotiate penal heritage in-the-moment. Therefore, aim is too...
- (2 minutes)

## Slide 3

- Rachael
- Conceptual background is derived from dark tourism and penal tourism studies that acknowledge the growing popularity of prison tourism, and the importance of interpretation in the construction of authentic versions of the past through exhibit design and experience.
- Combining this with museum and social interaction studies (studies such as – galleries and museums...) to acknowledge that the way people interact in museum spaces can reveal important insight into how people come to see and understand exhibits in particular ways.
- This combined methodological and conceptual approach underpins the unique contribution to knowledge.
- (2 minutes)

## Slide 4

- Alona
- The data we collected was in form of video, filmed at a number of exhibits at PPM. We used small GoPro cameras, to have a less intrusive set up.
- We decided to use an opt-out consent approach, whereby visitors would have to indicate that they do not want to be filmed, or withdraw their footage afterwards, with approval of our ethics committee. We placed notes near the exhibits to inform visitors of the filming being in progress, and provided them with leaflets, explaining about the project, with help of the museum staff. We were also on site throughout the filming days and could control the cameras via our mobile phones.
- The raw videos were then edited, to trim out all the 'empty' footage and log the interactions. In this process we also indicated which interactions included minors or vulnerable adults, since we could not include their footage in our analysis.
- The resulting interactions were reviewed and transcribed using Conversation Analysis method (we will show examples shortly). Here it's important to emphasise that CA is about the orderliness of

interaction – so we are not interested in ‘why’ people do something but ‘what’ they do – and what happens next.

- We have conducted one Data Analysis Workshop, where we reviewed and discussed the transcripts to identify important elements of the interactions. Another workshop is planned for November and will bring together wider stakeholders from prison museums and academia. Some of the findings will be presented today that have emerged so far from the analysis.
- (1 ½ minutes)

## Slide 5

- Alona
- The two exhibits that we want to talk about today are The Murder Cell on the left, and the Cat O Nine Tails on the right.
- The Murder Cell exhibit is a reconstruction of a scene of a murder aftermath, that took place in this cell.
- While this is a reconstruction, the photos on the wall here picture the real murder room at the time of the event.
- The Cat o Nine tails exhibit includes a construction, known as ‘tripod’, to which the prisoners were strapped before receiving their punishment using the Cat o Nine Tails device by the guards.
- Next to the exhibit there is a photo of a guard holding the cat o nine tails, and the device itself is displayed outside the room.
- (1 minute)

## Slide 6

- Alona
- Before we talk about the key findings from these two exhibits, we thought it would be useful to mention some general observations.
- (1 minute)

## Slide 7

- Alona
- Talk through the photos:
- Bringing things to each other's attention
- Looking in the same direction
- Giving way or otherwise interrupting the interaction due to the presence of others.
- Important, what people do, where they look and how they respond, can inform the engagement of others. This aligns with previous studies that have observed social interaction in museum and gallery spaces.
- (1 ½ minutes)

## Slide 8

- Rachael
- It has been noticeable in our findings to date, that the Cat o Nine Tails exhibit attracts significantly longer and deeper engagement with the exhibit – visitors tend to listen to the whole story on the audio guide, spend time exploring the exhibit and interact with each other through some discussion, pointing, gestures and facial expressions (usually shock or horror). In contrast, engagement with the murder cell tends to be brief and with only a few exceptions people tend to not stay for the duration of the story and do not interact meaningfully with each other.

- An initial observation, is that visitors spend longer making sense of the Cat o Nine Tails exhibits and draw upon each other and the environment as resources to achieve this. In particular, the photo of the guard holding the Cat o Nine Tails engenders interaction between the photo, whipping frame and each other. In this particular transcript P2 (the man to the left) produces whipping gestures and points to the photo, while P1 responds to his actions with a gasp and shocked facial expression.
- The photo, in this context, engenders multiple interactions between participants acting as an anchor for sense making to occur as people look, point and discuss the photo in the context of the exhibit.
- Interestingly, although the Murder Cell does also contain photos of the actual murder we observed very little interaction or discussion with these. However, the murder cell itself is a reproduction of these photos and, therefore, does not add any further value to sense-making beyond what can be seen in the reproduction.
- (2 minute)

## Slide 9

- Rachael
- The third point is an interesting observation about how and when people use humour.
- In this example, we see a couple at the Cat o Nine Tails where P2 (left) jokes about the idea that it 'didn't do them any harm' which triggers laughter and further sarcasm/ joking about the topic between them. She corroborates his opinion and humour.
- We've noticed humour being used on several occasions – sexual or punishment connotation, and (like this example) reference to the other (diminishing severity)
- Think about the orderliness of interaction. Humour is often used before people have fully engaged with the exhibit either in terms of the audio narrative or the exhibit artefacts (like the anchor). Humour often diminishes if and when engagement takes place.
- (1 ½ minutes)

## Slide 10

- Rachael
- (1 minute)

## Slide 11

[No notes.]