# Tattoos in the Digital Panopticon Database, 1793-1925

## Description

This dataset contains information about tattoos on 58,002 criminal convicts from records created between 1793 and 1925. These datasets were created by extracting data from datasets in the Digital Panopticon (www.digitalpanopticon.org), a compilation of 50 datasets containing records pertaining to men and women convicted of crimes at the Old Bailey court in London in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The eight datasets from which tattoos data have been extracted include substantial physical descriptions of the convicts’ bodies, including evidence of tattoos. Other information about the convicts was extracted from the ‘life archives’ of these convicts, which contain evidence from all the records pertaining to that convict in the Digital Panopticon. For more information about this data, see: https://www.digitalpanopticon.org/Tattoos,\_1793-1925.

The information given includes details of the names and demographic details (age, gender, occupation, religion) of the convicts, their tattoos (descriptions, subjects, body location), and other physical marks on their bodies (such as scars and boils). For further details, see below.

There are two tables in the dataset:

* convict\_descriptions: each row consists of the physical description of one convict (241,207 rows). Many convicts have separate entries from records created at different times.
* convict\_description\_segments: each row consists of a ‘segment’ of a physical description, which describes the marks on a specific part of a body, for example the right arm (565,280 rows).

## Background

This dataset was created as part of a British Academy funded project, ‘Analysing Criminal Tattoos through Data Mining and Visualisation’. Using data from the AHRC funded ‘Digital Panopticon’ project, the project developed new methods of data extraction and visualisation in order to better understand the meanings embedded within this and other rich bodies of textual evidence.

This dataset is one of a number to be released as open data by the Digital Panopticon project. It can be used for standalone research but additionally, the project will release record linkage data (known as 'life archives' data) which will enable researchers to reconstruct information about individuals from multiple datasets in ways that go beyond what is possible using the search facilities at www.digitalpanopticon.org.

The data comes from two Digital Panopticon datasets, with separate codes:

convict\_descriptions (TTD)

convict\_description\_segments (TTC)

## Original records

The tattoos dataset is extracted from datasets included in the Digital Panopticon project. For more information, see https://www.digitalpanopticon.org/Tattoos,\_1793-1925. Links on that page link to information about each of these constituent datasets.

## Data creation and limitations

The source datasets contain physical descriptions of convicts' bodies. Extracting and analysing information about tattoos from these descriptions is not straightforward, because they contain a wide range of other information: physical characteristics (eye colour, shape of face, etc), bodily infirmities (lame leg, broken nose), and personal details (such as occupation or religion), in a variety of formats. The challenge in this project was to extract the information about tattoos from all the other information in these descriptions. The methodology adopted, using a combination of segmentation, pattern matching, dictionaries, iterative manual checking, and historical interpretation, is described under ‘Methodology’ on the webpage https://www.digitalpanopticon.org/Tattoos,\_1793-1925.

As far as we are aware, this data deposit contains the largest amount of information about tattoos available for the nineteenth century. The information about convict tattoos provides otherwise unavailable access to the sentiments of men and women who left few if any other records in their own voice. Nonetheless, there are some significant limitations to this data:

* First, these are only written descriptions, and often they provide very limited evidence of what the tattoos actually looked like. The clerks who recorded this information used their own words, and sometimes censored obscene language. They may also have failed to record all tattoos. Accounts vary as to whether convicts were stripped to the waist or totally naked while the tattoos were recorded, and it is likely that the relatively small number of tattoos on the lower half of the body is due to the fact such tattoos were often not visible.
* Second, the computational methodologies used to extract this information (described above), are not infallible, and it is likely that some tattoos have been omitted or misidentified.
* Finally, the historical judgement involved in identifying designs, subjects, and words written on bodies is subjective and fallible; it is likely that other historians would have made somewhat different decisions.

## The data

The dataset contains two tables: convict\_descriptions and convict\_description\_segments.

### convict\_descriptions

#### columns

* subrecordid = The unique ID of the Digital Panopticon subrecord from which this description is taken.
* recordid = The unique ID of the Digital Panopticon record from which this description is taken.
* life\_id = The unique ID of the Digital Panopticon life archive from which this description is taken.
* dataset = dataset from the Digital Panopticon from which this evidence is taken (see list below)
* hastattoo (n/y/u) = does this record indicate the convict has a tattoo: no, yes, unknown (the physical description of the convict is blank)
* haspunishmentmark (n/y/u) = does convict have a mark from physical punishment: no, yes, unknown (the physical description of the convict is blank)
* designs = segmented description of each separate tattoo design on convict's body, divided by pipe characters ( | )
* writtenwords = words written on the convict’s body
* writtenyears = years written on the convict’s body
* punishmentmarks = language used to describe any punishment marks on the convict’s body
* body = words used to describe the body, such as ‘right forearm’, with body parts separated by pipe character ( | )
* digest = location on convict's body of each tattoo together with description of tattoo, each tattoo separated by pipe character ( | )
* subjects = subjects of any tattoos, determined manually by project staff by selecting from a defined list (provided below)
* url = link to the convict’s life archive in the Digital Panopticon
* fulldescription = full transcription of the description of marks on the convict’s body in the original data
* given = name of convict
* surname = name of convict
* gender (f/m/u) = female, male, unknown
* transported (no/yes) = was the convicted transported to Australia.
* ticket\_of\_leave (no/yes) = if transported, was the convict eventually awarded a ‘ticket of leave’, a form of probation.
* penalservitude (no/yes) = if imprisoned in Britain, was the convict sentenced to penal servitude, a sentence which replaced transportation in 1857.
* granted\_prison\_license (no/yes) = a prison licence was a form of probation.
* married (unknown/yes) = indicates whether there is evidence in the Digital Panopticon that the convict was married. This is of limited use since the Digital Panopticon records have very limited evidence about marriages.
* insane (no/yes) = indicates whether there is any evidence in the Digital Panopticon records that the judicial authorities deemed the convict to be insane.
* in\_hulks (unknown/yes) = indicates whether there is evidence in the Digital Panopticon that the convict served time in the hulks.
* religion
* religion\_category = the descriptions of convicts’ religions have been consolidated into a small number of categories to enable statistical analysis; see list below.
* occupation
* occupation\_top\_50 = standardised name of the occupation if it is in the top fifty occupations in the database (list below)
* hisco = a number indicating the social class category of the occupation, as indicated by HISCO, a a historical international classification of occupations (list below)
* place\_of\_birth
* ship = name of the ship if the convict was transported to Australia
* earliest\_trial\_offence\_category = the category of offence the convict was first charged with in the records of the Digital Panopticon (explanation below)
* earliest\_trial\_sentence\_category = the category of punishment sentence for the convict’s first conviction in the records of the Digital Panopticon(explanation below)
* latest\_trial\_offence\_category = the category of offence the convict was last charged with in the records of the Digital Panopticon(explanation below)
* latest\_trial\_sentence\_category = the category of punishment sentence for the convict’s last conviction in the records of the Digital Panopticon(explanation below)
* descyear = the year in which the description was written
* desc\_count = The number of descriptions of this person in the database.
* born = year of the convict’s birth. This is often calculated from their age as recorded in a later record, so may be imprecise.
* trials = number of trials of this convict recorded in the Digital Panopticon
* earliest\_trial
* latest\_trial

### convict\_description\_segments

#### columns

Many of these are the same as in the convict\_descriptions database, and are explained above. The following columns, however, are only used in this database, which divides the full description of a convict’s marks into separate ‘segments’. A ‘segment’ is a part of the description which refers to a specific body part, for example their right arm. The additional columns are:

• life\_id = The Digital Panopticon life ID of the person for whose description the segment is derived.

• tattoo\_in\_segment (n/y) = is there a tattoo in this specific segment, no or yes

• pm\_in\_segment (n/y) = is there a punishment mark in this specific segment, no or yes

• tattoo\_in\_description (n/y) = is there a tattoo in the full description of the convict’s marks, no or yes

• pm\_in\_description (n/y) = is there a punishment mark in the full description of the convict’s marks, no or yes

• segment\_type = The tattoo identification process characterised each segment with respect to the features it thought it contained, e.g. if it contained a body part and a tattoo, it was assigned the segment\_type ‘body tattoo’.

• segment\_parts = text of the segment, divided into parts with each mark and body part separated by a pipe character ( | )

• segment\_part\_classifications = How each part of the segment has been classified. For example, as a part of the body, or as a mark.

• other\_descriptive\_terms = Descriptive terms which could not be assigned to a specific body part, such as ‘pockpitted’.

• adjectives = any adjectives used in the description, including colours, numbers, and sizes

• marks = words used to describe any non-tattoo marks on the convict’s bodies, such as scars or boils.

• injuries = words used to describe any injuries recorded on the convict’s body.

• unknown = any words in the description which our methods failed to categorise.

• segment\_year = year in which the specific segment was recorded.

### Explanations of entries in specific columns

#### datasets

For information about these source datasets, see https://www.digitalpanopticon.org/Tattoos,\_1793-1925

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| dataset | description |
| cin | Western Australia Convict Indents |
| fas | Founders and Survivors |
| fas\_pgo | Founders and Survivors data from the Police Gazette |
| hcr | Criminal Registers |
| mpr | Millbank Prison Registers |
| pld | Female Prison Licences |
| rhc | Metropolitan Police Register of Historical Criminals |
| tlm | Male Prison Licences |

#### subjects

america = Phrases or symbols relating to America or American history, culture, identity.

astronomy = Phrases or symbols relating to astronomy. For example, sun and moon, stars.

australia = Phrases or symbols relating to Australia or Australian history, culture, identity.

britain = Phrases or symbols relating to Britain or British history, culture, identity.

death = Phrases or symbols relating to death. For example, skull, cross-bones.

invention = Phrases or symbols relating to nineteenth and twentieth-century inventions e.g. camera.

ireland = Phrases or symbols relating to Ireland or Irish history, culture, identity.

jewellery = Tattoos that represent jewellery. For example, ring, bracelet.

justicepunishment = Phrases or symbols relating to justice and punishment. For example, scales, whip.

love = Phrases or symbols relating to love. For example, heart, 'I love you'

military = Phrases or symbols relating to the military or warfare. For example, sword, Lord Kitchener, pistol, soldier.

namesinitials = Any names or sequences of letters that can be interpreted as initials.

nationalidentity = Term refers to tattoos that represent an aspect of national identity. For example, flag, cross flags. Most have also been given subject categories for specific countries.

nature = Phrases and symbols related to animals, flowers and plants. For example, elephant, flower pot

naval = Phrases or symbols relating to the Navy or maritime and seafaring cultures. For example, anchor, mermaid, sailor.

pleasure = Phrases or symbols relating to leisure practices including drinking, gambling, recreation. For example, cards, tobacco, glass, dancing.

religion = Phrases or symbols relating to the Christian religion. For example, seven candlesticks, cross, crucifix, clasped hands

sex = Phrases or symbols relating to sex or obscenity. For example, naked, obscene.

year = A tattoo with the four digit number of a year.

#### religion\_category

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| religion\_category | description |
| catholic |  |
| church\_of\_england |  |
| jewish |  |
| miscellaneous | Includes Greek Church. |
| mixed | This category is used when multiple records in a convict’s life archive indicate religions in more than one category. |
| muslim |  |
| other\_protestant | Includes baptist, calvinist, lutheran, methodist, presbyterian |
| unspecified\_protestant | Religion is given as ‘protestant’ only. |

#### occupation\_top\_50

List of the top fifty occupations in the whole Digital Panopticon dataset, for which the names have been standardized:

agent

baker

barman

blacksmith

bootmaker

boy

bricklayer

butcher

cabinet

carman

carpenter

charwoman

clerk

cook

costermonger

dealer

dressmaker

engineer

errand

farm

french

gardener

groom

hawker

jeweller

labourer

laundress

maker

married

merchant

other

painter

plasterer

polisher

porter

postman

printer

sailor

salesman

seaman

servant

shoemaker

shopman

smith

soldier

solicitor

spinster

stoker

tailor

traveller

waiter

weaver

wife

#### hisco

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| hisco\_code | description |
| 0.5 | aristocracy |
| 1 | higher managers |
| 2 | higher professionals |
| 3 | lower managers |
| 4 | lower professionals, higher clerical and sales personnel |
| 5 | lower clerical and sales personnel |
| 6 | foremen |
| 6.5 | small manufacturers |
| 7 | medium-skilled workers |
| 8 | farmers and fishermen |
| 9 | lower-skilled workers |
| 10 | lower-skilled farm workers |
| 11 | unskilled workers |
| 12 | unskilled farm workers |
| 13 | workers (no further information) |
| 14 | children |

#### earliest/latest \_trial\_offence\_category

Offence categories are those used for the Old Bailey Online. For further information, see: https://www.oldbaileyonline.org/static/Crimes.jsp

Each offence is categorized both as a specific offence, and within a general category, with each entry providing the specific offence first, followed by a space and then the general offence category. So in the first entry below, the specific offence is ‘animal theft’ and the general category is ‘theft’. The possibilities are listed below:

animal\_theft theft

assault breaking\_peace

breaking\_peace libel

breaking\_peace riot

breaking\_peace vitriolage

breaking\_peace wounding

burglary theft

concealing\_a\_birth miscellaneous

damage\_to\_property

damage\_to\_property arson

damage\_to\_property\_other damage\_to\_property

deception

deception bankruptcy

deception deception\_other

deception fraud

deception perjury

embezzlement theft

forgery deception

game\_law\_offences theft

grand\_larceny theft

housebreaking theft

infanticide killing

keeping\_a\_brothel sexual\_offences

kidnapping miscellaneous

killing

killing manslaughter

mail\_theft theft

miscellaneous

miscellaneous conspiracy

miscellaneous disorderly

miscellaneous drunkenness

miscellaneous felony

miscellaneous habitual\_criminal

miscellaneous illegal\_abortion

miscellaneous miscellaneous\_other

miscellaneous perverting\_justice

miscellaneous piracy

miscellaneous prostitution

miscellaneous returning\_from\_transportation

murder killing

petty\_larceny theft

pocketpicking theft

rape sexual\_offences

receiving theft

royal\_offences coining

royal\_offences uttering

sexual\_offences

sexual\_offences bigamy

sexual\_offences sodomy

sexual\_offences\_other sexual\_offences

shopbreaking theft

shoplifting theft

simple\_larceny theft

stealing\_from\_master theft

theft

theft extortion

theft\_from\_a\_specified\_place theft

threatening\_behaviour breaking\_peace

treason royal\_offences

vagabonding breaking\_peace

violent\_theft highway\_robbery

violent\_theft robbery

#### earliest/latest \_trial\_sentence\_category

Sentence categories are those used for the Old Bailey Online. For further information, see: https://www.oldbaileyonline.org/static/Punishment.jsp

Please note that these were the sentences meted out by the judges; they do not indicate that the convict actually received that punishment. For a variety of reasons, often owing to pardons, the actual punishment received was less harsh than that sentenced.

Each sentence is categorized both as a specific sentence, and within a general sentence category, with each entry providing the specific sentence first followed by a space and then the general category. So in the third entry below, the specific sentence is to be drawn and quartered, and the general category is ‘death’. Where no specific subcategory was indicated, only the general category is provided, as in the first entry below. The possibilities are listed below:

death

death\_respited death

drawn\_and\_quartered death

imprisonment

imprisonment hard\_labour

imprisonment house\_of\_correction

imprisonment imprisonment\_insanity

imprisonment imprisonment\_newgate

imprisonment\_other\_institution imprisonment

miscellaneous fine

miscellaneous military\_naval\_duty

miscellaneous sureties

no\_punishment

penal\_servitude imprisonment

transportation

whipping corporal

## Further information

Digital Panopticon descriptions of the source datasets: https://www.digitalpanopticon.org/Tattoos,\_1793-1925

Digital Panopticon research page outlining some of the project’s findings concerning the practice of tattooing: https://www.digitalpanopticon.org/Convict\_tattoos

Article in *The Conversation* about the research findings: https://theconversation.com/how-tattoos-became-fashionable-in-victorian-england-122487

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Jamie McLaughlin, Research Software Engineer at the Digital Humanities Institute of the University of Sheffield, performed the data extraction and categorisation, and created the databases.

Sharon Howard, early modernist and digital historian, audited and analysed the data, and created visualisations which allowed us to better understand the data and its limitations. She and Jamie McLaughlin were primarily responsible for the creation of this data deposit.

## Licence

The dataset is released under a Creative Commons Attribution Non-Commercial 4.0 (CC BY-NC) licence: https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0

Please contact the Digital Panopticon project if you wish to use the data for purposes that fall outside the terms of the licence, or if you're interested in future research collaborations: https://www.digitalpanopticon.org/Contact\_Us

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