# Middlesex and Westminster Calendars of Prisoners tried at Sessions of the Peace, 1836-1889

## Description

The dataset has been created from printed lists of prisoners tried at Middlesex or Westminster Sessions of the Peace. The information given includes the name of the prisoner, age, occupation, level of literacy, previous convictions, offence charged with, date tried, verdict and sentence.

There are two tables in the dataset:

* cpm\_prisoners - data for individual prisoners (82686 rows of data)
* cpm\_sessions - brief metadata for sessions, derived from calendar title pages

## Background

This dataset was created as part of the Digital Panopticon (DP) project (www.digitalpanopticon.org). The DP project uses record linkage technologies to bring together existing and new genealogical, biometric and criminal justice datasets held by a range of organisations, in order to explore the impact of different types of punishments on the lives of c.100,000 people sentenced at the Old Bailey between 1780 and 1875.

The Calendars represent a source for offences and punishments at a lower level in the justice system than the Old Bailey, in order to trace previous offending and recidivism. The prisoners in the Calendars can be linked to Old Bailey offenders directly using information about previous offending, and more probabilistically by linkage on personal information (names, ages, occupations, etc).

This dataset is one of a number to be released as open data by the DP 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.

DP dataset code: CPM

## Original records

The dataset is derived from three series of records, held at the London Metropolitan Archives:

* MJ/CP/A - Middlesex Sessions (including Westminster) 1836-1853 (6033 rows of data)
* MJ/CP/B - Middlesex Sessions (including Westminster) 1855-1889 (73093)
* WJ/CP/A - Westminster Sessions 1838-1847 (3560)

From 1844, Westminster Sessions were held as part of Middlesex Sessions (as 'adjourned' sessions).

The early calendars (MJ/CP/A and WJ/CP/A) are small unbound pamphlets. (The pamphlets for 1850 [MJ/CP/A/31] are collated into one file.) From 1855 (MJ/CP/B) they are larger pamphlets which have been bound into yearly volumes. The amount of information they contained gradually expanded over time: information about literacy appears from 1848, occupations and outcomes from 1855, partial information about previous convictions from 1855 and fuller details from 1861.

The calendars are arranged on the page in a tabular format. The layout can be deceptively complex; for example, the use of brackets to group information for prisoners who were tried together. The text is often quite cramped, lacking clear whitespace or boundaries between table cells (especially horizontally).

An individual might appear on multiple occasions within the dataset; a prisoner's trial could be postponed to a subsequent session; their post-trial sentencing could similarly be postponed (the calendars contain lists of these later 'judgments' in separate sections); and some prisoners offended on multiple occasions, at least some of which were recorded in information about previous convictions (though it is unclear how comprehensive this information was).

There are alphabetical indexes at the beginning of each calendar which have *not* been included in the dataset. A small number of fragmentary files have also been excluded from the data.

## Data creation and limitations

Digitised images were supplied by the London Metropolitan Archives and transcribed for the DP project. The transcriptions were produced using Optical Character Recognition to average at least 99 per cent character accuracy, but the quality of the text can vary considerably depending on the condition of the originals.

Further problems could arise from the complexity of the tabular layout of the Calendars, particularly the frequent lack of horizontal white space/borders between entries.

Given the size of the dataset, manual checking for errors has been minimal. Some particularly unlikely ages (0-8 or >99) were checked and corrected.

The originals made extensive use of 'ditto' to indicate repeated information. In a few columns (offence tried, verdict, sentence) where the information was of particular interest to the DP project, the information has been filled down, but in most columns has been left as originally transcribed. There has been no attempt to normalise dates or categorise offences/outcomes. Nor has there been any attempt to do internal record linkage.

## Data

### cpm\_prisoners.tsv

**dp\_id**

the prisoner's unique ID in the DP database.

**prisoners\_group\_id**

ID linking prisoners who were grouped together for trial in the calendar, as indicated by brackets (not guaranteed to have caught every instance of this)

**reference**

LMA catalogue reference

**session\_date**

opening date of session according to title page metadata (yyyy-mm-dd)

**prisoner\_calendar\_number**

prisoner's number in the calendar

**given\_name**

prisoner first name(s)

**surname**

prisoner last name

**age**

age of prisoner

**trade\_status**

trade/occupation/marital status; text as transcribed

**literacy**

text as transcribed; often heavily abbreviated

**name\_additions**

mainly additions such as 'junior' or 'senior'

**aliases\_alternative\_names**

aliases and alternative names

**prisoner\_additional\_status**

records various types of additional information, including nationalities (it should not be assumed this was consistently given), or prisoners who refused to give a name

**prisoner\_additional\_info**

bailed, prison, etc; indicted with another prisoner listed separately in the calendar (no attempt to link these)

**prisoner\_previous\_convictions**

prisoner's previous convictions, text as transcribed; each conviction separated with ||

**committing\_magistrate**

text as transcribed. Not cleaned at all. May contain name of police court/sessions

**warrant\_date**

text as transcribed. Not cleaned or standardised in any way.

**custody\_date**

date - text as transcribed. Not cleaned or standardised in any way.

**offence\_tried**

text as transcribed, except for filling in 'dittos' where possible.

**tried\_date**

date - text as transcribed; have not done anything to clean or normalise this because we have the session date

**before\_whom**

judge. text as transcribed - not cleaned at all

**verdict**

text as transcribed; except that dittos have been filled

**previous\_convictions\_in\_indictment**

previous convictions referred to in indictment (not the same as the previous convictions column)

**sentence\_order\_outcome**

sentence, order or other outcome; filled 'dittos' but not done anything to clean up text.

**calendar\_entry\_type**

type of entry in calendar: t = trial; jud = judgment at a session subsequent to the original trial

### cpm\_sessions.tsv

**reference**

LMA catalogue reference

**prison**

where the prisoners tried were being held

**session\_location**

where the sessions were held (not always stated)

**session\_type**

if an 'adjourned' session

**session\_date**

opening date of the session (yyyy-mm-dd)

## Further information

DP description of the dataset: https://www.digitalpanopticon.org/Middlesex\_House\_of\_Detention\_Calendars\_1836-1889

London Metropolitan Archives online catalogue: https://search.lma.gov.uk/

## Acknowledgments

The Arts and Humanities Research Council funded the DP project (2013-2017).

The London Metropolitan Archives hold the records and supplied the high-quality digitised images.

eAthena Solutions carried out the OCR transcription.

Sharon Howard, project manager for the DP project, cleaned up and converted the raw OCR data for project use, and produced this version and associated documentation for public release.

## 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 DP 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

## Suggested Citation

Digital Panopticon, 'Middlesex and Westminster Calendars of Prisoners tried at Sessions of the Peace, 1836-1889' [dataset], version 1.0 (January 2018), www.digitalpanopticon.org.