# Metropolitan Police Register of Habitual Criminals, 1881-1925

## Description

The dataset has been created from registers of "habitual" criminals recorded by the Metropolitan Police on release from prisons in England and Wales between 1881 and 1925. The information given includes the name of the prisoner, year and place of birth, height, physical appearance, occupation, conviction and sentence details, previous convictions, prison and intended destination on liberation.

## Background

This dataset was created as part of the Digital Panopticon project (www.digitalpanopticon.org). This 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 Habitual Criminal Registers were created expressly for the purpose of enabling future detection of repeat offenders. As such, they contain valuable information for the project's research exploring long-term recidivism, especially after the Old Bailey Proceedings ceased publication in 1913. Information about previous offending facilitates direct linkage to Old Bailey offenders, and detailed personal information aids more probabilistic linkage methods.

This dataset is one of a number to be released as open data by the 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: RHC

## Original records

The dataset is derived from a series of records held at The National Archives, London:

* MEPO 6/1-37 - Metropolitan Police: Criminal Record Office: Habitual Criminals Registers and Miscellaneous Papers, 1881-1925 (135996 rows of data)

The registers were established following the 1871 Prevention of Crimes Act which gave the police powers to supervise and apprehend repeat offenders and those designated "habitual criminals". Information on individuals who had been convicted of more than two offences was collected by the police to help with both surveillance and future identification of known offenders.

From the 1880s, the registers kept a record of every habitual offender discharged from prison in England and Wales. Prison governors were responsible for notifying the police of the particulars and personal descriptions of released prisoners.

The calendars are arranged on the page in a tabular format. The text in early Registers is often quite cramped, lacking clear horizontal whitespace or boundaries between table rows. Abbreviations were used very extensively to cram as much information as possible into limited space, which can sometimes make interpretation of information difficult.

There are two distinct register formats, with some differences in the information recorded as well as layouts. The first format (MEPO6/1-7, to 1895) are in alphabetical order, and do not have trial or offence information except for the place of the offence. The second format (MEPO 6/8-37, from 1896) are in chronological order with name indexes. The indexes have *not* been included in the dataset.

## Data creation and limitations

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

Some problems could arise from the lack of horizontal white space/borders between entries in early Registers, but this does not seem to be a significant issue.

Given the size of the dataset, manual checking for errors has been minimal. The Digital Panopticon is unable to provide images of the records to enable checking of the accuracy of the information in the dataset. However, this series of records, with images, is available through FindMyPast.

## Data

### dp\_rhc\_20171213.csv

**dp\_id**

the prisoner's unique ID in the DP database.

**TNA\_reference**

The National Archives MEPO6 reference

**officeNo**

usually provided from 1896

**given**

first name(s) of prisoner

**surname**

family name(s) of prisoner

**nameAdditional**

a small number of prisoners have additional information about ethnicity

**aliases**

any aliases given, uncleaned, as originally recorded

**gender**

gender has been derived automatically from first names, where possible

**yearBirth**

year of birth

**placeBirth**

place of birth

**marital**

marital status is recorded only until 1895; heavily abbreviated

**height\_inches**

height, normalised to inches

**complexion**

heavily abbreviated

**hair**

hair colour, heavily abbreviated

**eyes**

eye colour, heavily abbreviated

**build**

physical build, heavily abbreviated; recorded until 1895 only

**face**

shape of face, heavily abbreviated; recorded until 1895 only

**marks**

scars, tattoos and other distinguishing physical marks; sometimes information about health

**offence**

recorded from 1896; heavily abbreviated

**placeLastOffence**

place of last offence is recorded until 1895 only

**placeConviction**

place of conviction is recorded from 1896

**dateConviction**

date of conviction, as recorded; date format varies (usually dd-mm-yy or dd/mm/yy)

**sentence**

length of sentence; abbreviated

**policeSupervision**

length of police supervision; abbreviated

**datePSexpiry**

date police supervision expires (date format varies; usually dd-mm-yy)

**prison**

prison from which released

**liberation**

date of liberation (date format may vary; usually dd-mm-yy)

**destination**

intended destination after liberation, until 1895 only

**trade**

trade or occupation, until 1895 only

**addressOccupation**

from 1896, intended destination address and occupation were recorded in a single table cell; splitting the two pieces of information has not been attempted

**Remarks**

includes abbreviated notes of previous convictions and other comments

## Further information

Digital Panopticon description of the dataset: https://www.digitalpanopticon.org/Metropolitan\_Police\_Register\_of\_Habitual\_Criminals\_1881-1925

The National Archives online catalogue: http://discovery.nationalarchives.gov.uk/details/r/C10815

## Acknowledgments

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

The UK National Archives (London) hold the records and supplied high-quality digitised images.

eAthena Solutions carried out the OCR transcription.

Sharon Howard, project manager for the Digital Panopticon project, cleaned up and converted the raw OCR transcriptions for project use, and produced this version of the data 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

## Citation

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