



Recording crime:

the preservation of policing history

## Project Information Sheet: Surveys

### What is the Recording Crime project?

*Recording Crime* is the public name for an *Arts and Humanities Research Council* funded PhD project. The project is being carried out between October 2016 and September 2018 by Angela Sutton-Vane, a research student in the history department at the Open University. The main aim of the project is to examine the laying down of regional policing history by establishing patterns and practices around the preservation of police records.

### Why is the project important?

Unlike the Metropolitan Police regional police forces have never been covered by *The Public Record Act* and management of records, particularly around their selection for retention and destruction, has been left to individual forces. Although most now comply with guidance there is little to assist forces in identifying or preserving records of potential future importance to historians, families (of both police staff and victims), criminologists or sociologists (to name just a few).

This research is ground-breaking. Much has been written about the history of the UK police but little about how this history has been selected and preserved, or about the relationship between information management, legislation, history, organisational pride and the perceived “lack of transparency” in the way the police manage their information (highlighted by recent enquiries). Research will aim to provide a balanced reflection of the police’s relationship with their own history and the necessarily complex area of managing sensitive information alongside the public’s growing expectations for rights of access. It is hoped this process will support future policy work around the preservation of police records.

### How will the project be carried out?

The project will involve three interlinking stages:

- examining legislation, regional policing history and culture to identify key events such as force amalgamations and other organisational, political, technological or legal changes that may have affected patterns of records retention or disposal;
- undertaking surveys of local record offices to identify how, why and when regional police forces were, or still are, depositing material, as well as the types of records present – for example whether they record corporate narratives, administrative processes or detection of crime;
- gathering oral histories: *The Oral History Society* describes oral history as “the recording of people’s memories, experiences and opinions” and this will form a vital part of the research process in that it will collect the stories of retired police officers and staff who created or managed records. This will throw light on the effects of force amalgamations, organisational pride, changes in working practices and personal views and knowledge of policing history.

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## Working with local record offices, museum curators and police forces

Angela will be surveying selected local record offices in order to ascertain quantities and dates of records assigned from their regional police force. She also hopes to find answers to questions around access, interpretation and the presence of original case files relating to serious crime which rarely find their way into the public domain. In addition, research will involve working with curators of police museums as they play a recognised and significant role in the preservation of police archives.

## Respecting the confidentiality of all contributors

The project has been guided by the Open University's *Human Research Ethics Committee* and will meet strict criteria around consent, confidentiality, protection of information and participants. In short, no interviewee will be identifiable in any subsequent published work (unless specifically requested), all personal information will be stored securely and no personal details will be shared with any third parties.

## Thank you

Angela would like to gratefully thank the project funders: *The Open University*, *The Consortium for the Humanities & Arts in the South East* and *The Police History Society*.

## Find out more ....

Research findings will be shared during the project through talks and papers, with the final report published as a PhD thesis in late 2018 or early 2019. The recorded oral history interviews and transcripts will be deposited at the *British Library's Sound Archive*. There is a project page to keep contributors up-to-date on Angela's website (see the green W icon below) and she would welcome contact either about the project or about participating.

### About Angela Sutton-Vane



Angela has worked for museums and archives for over 20 years – most recently as the curator of a police museum. She also trained as a police researcher and during her earlier student days supported her studies as a tape transcriber for the Metropolitan Police. She has a first class degree in the preservation of artefacts and was later awarded an Arts & Humanities Research Council grant to complete a Masters by Research in Material Culture, graduating with a distinction. Angela is a member of the *Oral History Society* and has attended extensive training with them in preparation for the project. She has successfully applied for funding and managed several police heritage projects including *Driving Heritage*, *Policing Past Community Present* and *Rethinking CaP*. She is a passionate supporter and committee member of *The Crime and Punishment Collections Network (CaP)* which is an Arts Council England subject specialist network devoted to supporting all collections relating to crime and punishment.



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