

PLYMOUTH PAST: SUSTAINABLE FUTURE

Report on Plymouth Law School's ESRC Festival 2015 Exhibition

David J Cox¹

(with additional text and images from Kim Stevenson)



On Saturday 14 November 2015 Plymouth City Museum and Art Gallery hosted an event which formed part of the Economic & Social Research Council's (ESRC) annual Festival of Social Science. The interdisciplinary public engagement event (organised by Professor Kim Stevenson) was entitled *Plymouth Past: Sustainable Future* and involved interactive displays and exhibitions of the work of several members of the Plymouth University School of Law on this year's ESRC theme of sustainability. The exhibition focused on 3 main aspects: social, cultural and environmental sustainability as illustrated in this poster by Jason Lowther.

An informational poster for the exhibition. At the top, it repeats the title 'PLYMOUTH PAST: SUSTAINABLE FUTURE' and subtitle. Below is a photograph of the same sailing ship. The main body of the poster is divided into three columns of text, each with a corresponding colored circle in a central Venn diagram: 'Society and Culture' (green), 'Economic' (orange), and 'Environmental' (blue). The 'Society and Culture' text discusses Plymouth's history and its relationship with the sea. The 'Economic' text talks about rebalancing the local economy. The 'Environmental' text highlights the city's natural heritage and the need for sustainable development. At the bottom, there are logos for the ESRC Festival of Social Science, Plymouth University, and the Law with Plymouth University.

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10 members of the Law School Staff were involved in the exhibition working in partnership with Jan Freedman at the Museum and a number of local organisations who provided images, artefacts, and other presentational materials: Policing Past Community Present (represented by Carmen Talbot), the Friends of the Historic Collections of Devon and Cornwall Police (represented by Brian Edmunds and colleagues), Plymouth City Council (Graham Naylor) Plymouth Arts centre (Anna Navas), Hidden Heritage (Paul Diamond) and with input from myself; Dr David J. Cox, (Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Wolverhampton) and member of PUNCS – Plymouth University Nineteenth-Century Studies network. Considerable assistance was also provided from Plymouth University Events Team (Lucy Davies)



Some of the many participants involved in the day's events

The event proved very popular with members of the public, with well over 100 people attending the exhibition during the day. A real highlight proved to be a [short film](#) produced by Professor Kim Stevenson, directed by Rob Giles (Fobit, Faculty of Business) and screenplay by Dr Judith Rowbotham (together with input from many others), which highlighted the ways in which past events within the city resonated with today's concerns for a sustainable future.



There was also considerable interest shown in the Policing Past Community Present and Friends of the Historic Collections of Devon and Cornwall Police displays, as this included an opportunity for children (and several adults!) to dress up in full historical police uniform, complete with helmet, handcuffs and truncheon.



A potential police recruit enjoying his visit to the exhibition

Social Sustainability

The exhibition of crime and policing in Plymouth profiling the Plymouth Crime History Project based in the Law School proved a big hit with posters designed by Dr Iain Channing, Dr Judith Rowbotham, Professor Kim Stevenson and the project's work based learning second year law student Dale Teobald. Several members of the public were intrigued by the exploits of Chief Constable Joseph D. Sowerby, one of the youngest men ever to be appointed as Chief Constable at the age of just 29. His attempts to subdue both drunkenness and prostitution within Plymouth elicited quite a few comments, as did his clever arrest of Mrs Pankhurst before the ship on which she was returned from a tour of America (the White Star liner *Majestic*) docked in Plymouth Harbour. A large crowd of some 5,000 Suffragettes had assembled in Plymouth intent on preventing the police from arresting Mrs Pankhurst when she landed, but Chief Constable Sowerby forestalled their protests by removing her from the ocean liner and spiriting her away with the help of motor cars provided by Scotland Yard. Another case that generated interest was the 'Ghastly Discovery' of the remains of a female child found in a house in Notte Street in January 1880, this was before modern forensics could be used to ascertain the cause of death prompting Judith Rowbotham to ask visitors

what did a Victorian community do in a case strongly suggesting a mother had murdered her child?

A related exhibit included an interesting discussion about how the poor and the less fortunate in society were treated in the nineteenth and early twentieth century workhouses manned by Associate Professor Phil Bates with quizzes provided by Professor Stevenson and Dr Rowbotham, (Are you smarter than a Victorian and Why did workhouses exist?) and how such efforts relate to today's welfare society. The final contribution to this section was an interesting poster by undergraduate work based learning student Dale Teobald concerning a Court Martial that took place following an altercation between two Royal Marine officers in 1889, and how the decision of the court affected the subsequent lives of both participants.

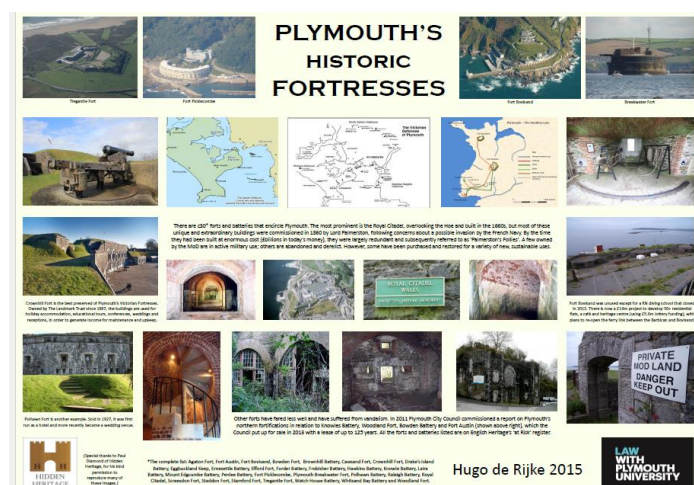
Environmental Sustainability.

An exhibition by Associate Professor Jason Lowther and Dr Victoria Hamlyn concerning the pros and cons of alternative forms of energy such as offshore and onshore wind farms supported a stand about the future sustainability of Plymouth's rich marine diversity. This stand generated discussion about the detrimental effects and gains from marine activities past and present including shipping, fishing, leisure, renewables etc., and the legal response or lack of. Some interesting marine 'specimens' were kindly provided by Jan Freedman (Acting Keeper of Natural History, Plymouth Museum) and there was an opportunity to visualise what Plymouth Sound could look like in the future with the development of green energy.



Cultural Sustainability

A display by Associate Professor Hugo de Rijke and Hidden Heritage photographer Paul Diamond highlighted the fascinating survival and potential future uses of the numerous coastal fortresses and batteries around Plymouth built to defend the coast from the threat of invasion. Commissioned in 1860 at enormous cost by Lord Palmerston, some 28 installations were built but many became redundant 'Follies', case studies like Grenville Fort and Maker Barracks (Rame peninsula) are undergoing significant transformation into sustainable properties designed to benefit the local and wider community. The provision of Lego bricks for children to recreate such fortresses also proved extremely popular on a very wet day.



Finally, a thought-provoking display by Craig Newbery-Jones on how computer games such as Call of Duty can influence discussions about the role of law and order in present and future society. Video games are a pervasive cultural medium, but their depiction of law and justice is often questionable. Screen examples encouraged visitors to consider themes of justice in a more contemporary accessible way.

Members of the public who visited the event were asked to fill in a short feedback questionnaire and over 50 completed forms were handed in. The public's view of the event was overwhelmingly and almost unanimously positive, with many saying how much they had enjoyed the event and had found it thought-provoking and interesting, and that they especially appreciated the thought that had gone into the planning of the event to ensure that children were included in the activities of the day. Many of the respondents asked for the event to be repeated next year, but over a longer period.