



Innocence
Project
London



2025/26

This publication is a collection of autobiographical reflections by students working for the Innocence Project London (IPL), based at the University of Greenwich, London.

The IPL was established in 2010 and became a registered charity in 2020. Law and criminology students work in small groups to deconstruct cases of convicted individuals who are maintaining their innocence and have exhausted the criminal appeals process. Students learn through the Innocence project model of clinical legal education, which was developed in the United States of America, where the first Innocence Project was founded in 1992. They analyse the evidence that led to the conviction, develop legal theories that could reopen the case, and search for factual evidence of innocence.

The majority of clients who apply to the IPL will already have appealed their conviction, so the aim of our work is to submit an application to the Criminal Cases Review Commission (CCRC). The CCRC is an independent body that reviews possible miscarriages of justice in England and Wales. It determines whether a conviction or sentence should be referred back to the Court of Appeal. The CCRC will only refer a case back to the Court of Appeal if it finds new evidence or a new legal argument that was not put forward at the time of the trial or on appeal and that would render the conviction unsafe by showing that the jury would have reached a different decision had they been aware of it.

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Foreword

Dr Louise Hewitt | Director IPL | Associate Professor in Law

This collection of short auto/biographies is based on students' experiences of working on the Innocence Project London (IPL), either voluntarily or as part of a credit-bearing module (in Criminology only). Students deconstruct claims of innocence, reviewing all available evidence and documentation to identify new evidence or a new legal argument not put forward at the initial trial or on appeal. These students are advocates for innocence work. They speak at conferences nationally and internationally and share their casework with both University of Greenwich students and academics, as well as on a global platform. Without them, the work of the IPL would not be possible, and it is their drive and passion that keeps me going. Every year I am inspired by their determination to improve the criminal justice system, and I hope that, when you read this collection, you will be inspired too.

This book offers an innovative way for students to tell their stories about their experience working for the IPL and to engage them in a new way of reflecting on their learning. The process of writing these auto/biographies gives each student a voice, and reading their stories helps us understand who they are through their personal experiences.

I am honoured to run the IPL and to provide a student experience that not only improves student outcomes but also provides access to justice for convicted individuals who maintain their innocence. The students have been brave and bold in sharing their personal stories. I am immensely proud of them for their effort, hard work, and dedication to what we do.

Find out more about the IPL at www.IPLondon.org

On X and Facebook @innocencelondon

On Instagram @innocenceprojectlondon

Nishita Arora

3rd Year BSc Hons Forensic Science with Criminology

I remember that when I was applying to universities and writing my personal statement, the one thing I mentioned was my belief that forensic science brings together science and law, serving both. From a very young age, I have always been interested in science as well as aspects of law, but when it came time to choose my career, I chose forensic science as the best option.

I was told about the Innocence Project London (IPL) in my first and second years, but I barely remembered to sign up. I recall the day we first got the email about joining at the end of my first year, and I thought to myself: Can I even do it? Is it possible for me to apply for something that would impact a person's life? As a forensic student, I am used to asking questions about what happened at a crime scene. After several conversations with another student who had already worked for the IPL, I finally decided to apply at the end of my second year.

As a forensic science student, I trained myself to look at evidence neutrally. I learnt how to collect, preserve, and interpret it. But what I had never quite grasped was what happens if that evidence is misinterpreted. What happens if an innocent person is still convicted? I didn't fully understand the weight of that question until I joined the IPL.

I remember attending my first training session and being told that some people are wrongly convicted and spend

their lives in jail because it can be easier to convict than to acquit. For a forensic student, that was unsettling. We are taught that evidence leads to truth, yet I was learning that evidence can also lead to error – and that someone's life depends on us finding those errors.

I started working on our case, and it took me a long time to get my head around it. The case was vast, with many concepts and people involved. I spent my entire Christmas break trying to understand it. Once I had, my forensic training kicked in. I knew how to read a case file differently from my law colleagues. I looked for gaps in the physical evidence. I asked questions about how blood got there, whether a mark was transfer or impact, and whether a shoe impression told the full story. My forensic knowledge and criminology degree 100% helped me work through the case, not as a lawyer but as a scientist.

What made the experience even more meaningful was that my final-year thesis became directly linked to the case. My research focused on how blood is deposited on shoe treads – whether through kicking, walking, or capillary action. In our client's case, footwear impressions were central to the prosecution's case, and one defendant maintains he never entered the property. The mechanism of blood deposition could be the difference between conviction and exoneration. My thesis gave me the tools to analyse that. It was an incredible feeling to realise that my degree was not just an academic exercise – it could make a difference to a real person maintaining their innocence.

As a forensic student, I am trained to be neutral. But working on the IPL taught me that neutrality does not mean indifference. I can remain objective in my analysis while caring deeply about the outcome. I can still follow the evidence while hoping it leads to justice. That is not a contradiction. That is responsibility.

Even with all the documents, the time pressure, and the disheartening moments when you feel stuck, there is also the rewarding feeling that you are helping someone. I remember the annual symposium. I remember a speaker telling us that in that prison, you might be the only ray of hope for that person. So do not think of yourself as doing something small. Think of yourself as the person who might just save someone's life and give them hope.

I remember Louise asking me in the interview whether I knew the work can be disheartening at times. I told her about a quote I have lived by all my life, something my mum used to tell me: It takes tiny, tiny, tiny droplets to fill an ocean. When the ocean is full, it looks beautiful. It feels amazing. So even if I contributed just a tiny drop, whether through my forensic training, my thesis, or my work on the case, I have done my part. And I hope more forensic students join this cause. We are needed here. The evidence does not speak for itself. Someone has to listen to it – and someone has to be brave enough to say when it might be wrong.

Calum Stanley Menzies

2nd Year BA Hons Criminology and Criminal Justice

I am a BA Hons Criminology and Criminal Justice student. I had always thought I had a set plan for my life, but being a university student and being part of the Innocence Project London (IPL) were not part of that plan until I went to college. During my Public Services course at college, university was just a blip on the radar, but my lecturer at the time told me he believed I could do fantastic things at university. At school, I studied history, geography, and media studies along with the core subjects of mathematics, English, science, and religious studies, none of which had anything to do with criminology or convictions. Then I watched *Just Mercy*, a film about a man on death row who maintained his innocence. This was when I was deciding which career I wanted to pursue. After watching the film, I started looking into jobs that helped people convicted of crimes they claimed they were innocent of, and the first one that came up was a lawyer. I had never wanted to be a lawyer; however, when I saw an opportunity to join the IPL as a student, I jumped at it. I applied to the University of Greenwich and attended a placeholder event where we were told about the IPL. From then on, I instantly knew I wanted to apply and be part of the organisation. During the first year of my degree, in my Criminal Justice classes, we learnt about conviction rates and the percentage of people in prison who claimed innocence, which sparked my interest. I was already waiting for the IPL application process to open, but when I was

successfully hired as a caseworker for the IPL, it became apparent that I had underestimated the number of people who claimed innocence. It was during the training for the IPL that I realised the severity of what is happening within the criminal justice process.

Having now worked for the IPL, it seems I was extremely naive about what would happen and what I would be taking part in. I knew there would be many hours spent reading a wide range of documents. However, what I did not know was how long the process would take to help a client get out of prison.

From a young age, I have always wanted to help people who couldn't help themselves. Before my great-grandad passed, he told me to always stay true to myself, even if it meant others disagreed with me. I am in charge of who I am and what I do (this might be why I continuously change my mind). Like most people, I look up to members of my family not because they are related to me but for the sacrifices they have made and the time they have put in to achieve what they have now. My mother and nan, both of whom I live with, have been a constant source of support. As a single parent, my mum worked long hours while also taking me to work with her. She showed me so many life lessons I did not know were life lessons at the time, and they have shaped me into the person I am today. Being a single parent also comes with people's perceptions of you, challenges, and doubt, but she didn't care. It never stopped her from being there for me at every play, assembly, or doctor's appointment I had growing up. It was that love and support that has shaped

me into who I am. My nan has lived with us ever since I was brought back home from the hospital. In school, we always used to sit and do my homework together while my mum was working, and often she would play a game to get me to complete it so it could be submitted on time. Looking back, however, I am glad I have those memories, but I do wish I had just got it done. When I told my nan I was applying to the University of Greenwich, she asked me all sorts of questions which I did not know the answer to, but then 10 minutes later she proceeded to tell me the answer. My nan always knew me best and still does. Over almost 22 years, my nan has been one of my biggest supporters, helping shape me into who I am. The work for the IPL can be tough, but it is hugely rewarding beyond belief because you get to help people who cannot help themselves. If you can help just one person, you will feel something that can't even be explained.

The IPL is a life-altering experience, and being part of it, to me, will forever be a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity I will forever be grateful for. I am especially grateful for the experiences and knowledge I have gained from Innocence work, which I will carry with me and hopefully be able to pass on to others.

Abigail Fogarty

2nd year LLB Law

I have always been a stickler for rules. I never liked any sort of confrontation that would end with me getting in trouble, so I tried my hardest to be 'perfect'. However, there is no such thing as 'perfect'.

I was once told that you should be more scared when you are innocent because anything you did in your past will be manipulated to make you seem guilty. When I was younger, I thought this was a very pessimistic view of the justice system, since it didn't seem possible that an innocent person could ever be convicted. Thinking back on this now, I realise that I have lived, and in some ways still live, a very sheltered life, and that my family wanted to protect me from some harsh realities. Because of this, I thought the law would protect all the other innocent people in the world and me. I was wrong.

I realised just how wrong I was while viewing universities. The University of Greenwich was the last on my list to tour. I liked the area, the campus, and the people, but the real selling point hit me during an introductory law talk when the Innocence Project London (IPL) was mentioned. I had heard of the Innocence Project before through the TV show *Suits*. However, you learn from a young age not to believe everything you see on TV and to do your own research on a topic. In 2025, I attended the annual IPL symposium to see what the IPL was really about. In contrast to what was presented in *Suits*, you

don't get to see your client regularly, you don't get leads to a case immediately, and you don't prove your client's innocence in a matter of months. Working on the IPL seemed like a lot of hard work, and I wasn't sure I was up for it. However, there was a speaker that year who asked you to look to your left, then your right, and imagine that person going to prison for something they didn't do. I didn't know the people beside me, so I selfishly thought to myself, what would I do if I went to prison for something I didn't do? Would I know what to do? Would I be alone? After the COVID-19 pandemic, I hated being alone and couldn't stand the thought of being trapped inside for any longer. Then I stopped thinking about myself and thought about the people who need the IPL's help. They are truly trapped. At that point, it was like I had an out-of-body experience when I realised that I had the possibility to 'untrap' someone, even if I'm just giving them some sort of hope. For this reason, I applied to be a student caseworker for the IPL, and I now work on the project.

My client's case has proven tricky, as we can't find answers to the questions we have due to a lack of crucial information and unreleased evidence. In addition, we can't reuse any evidence from the trial to make an application to the Criminal Cases Review Commission (CCRC).

In all honesty, because of this uncertainty stemming from a lack of information and evidence, and from my client's past, which has caused unconscious biases, I have recently been struggling to fully dedicate myself to the case. I worry I am losing hope. That being said, we

recently received a letter from my client thanking us for the work we are doing to support his case, which reminded me that what I am doing matters. Additionally, I spoke at the annual IPL symposium this year (2026) to share my case, and a guest speaker, Tom Hayes, also told his story of wrongful conviction and imprisonment, which reminded me even more of why I chose to be part of the IPL. I wanted to help and listen to people and remind them that they are not alone, as I would want people to help me if I were in this situation.

I initially chose to write this piece to share my story, but in doing so, the process has helped me reinforce why I am working for the IPL. I am extremely grateful for this opportunity and would like to take a moment to thank Dr Louise Hewitt for giving me the chance to work with such an amazing organisation and group of people.

And to those out there who would like to volunteer for the IPL, I would always recommend doing so. Even if you think you are losing hope of exonerating your client, you must remember that what you are doing is helping a real human being, and they are extremely grateful for you simply listening to their story, as most people don't have the privilege of being heard.

Innocence Project clients collectively spent more than 3,700 years wrongfully incarcerated.

'Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere.' – Martin Luther King Jr.

Aimee Stickells

2nd Year BSc Criminology and Criminal Psychology

My first introduction to the Innocence Project came during a university tour, when a student showed my father and me around the Queen Anne building. Curious about the course, I asked whether there were opportunities for practical experience, and she told me about the Innocence Project London (IPL), where she was working on a real case. From that moment, I was completely enthralled: something I had been fascinated by since early childhood was suddenly real, and I realised that this university was where I wanted to be and where I would belong. This was how I was going to achieve my dream of working in the criminal justice system – a system that I would later come to learn does not deliver justice. That evening, I spent hours researching the IPL; after discovering it was based at the University of Greenwich, I confirmed it as my first-choice university.

Growing up, I had a difficult and complex childhood shaped by anxiety, often marked by panic attacks and an overwhelming sense of uncertainty. This led me to rely heavily on others and, at times, to place my trust in the wrong people, leaving me feeling vulnerable and exposed. These experiences shaped my understanding of how frightening and unpredictable the world can feel. In many ways, they have given me a small insight into the vulnerability experienced by individuals with lived experience of the criminal justice system, particularly

those who are wrongfully convicted and unable to advocate for themselves.

Before entering my second year and applying to the IPL, I was encouraged to watch the BBC documentary *Andrew Malkinson; The Wrong Man: 17 Years Behind Bars*. I watched it on my commute to university, which was a mistake: I found myself unexpectedly moved by the profound injustice he had suffered and the ways it had affected his life. I was sobbing, tears streaming down my face. This was the moment I realised the true importance of the work undertaken by charities such as Appeal and the IPL, which strengthened my determination to contribute to this work myself.

Working with my casework group has been both the most challenging and the most rewarding aspect of my university experience. When we finally received the case, my group and I quickly realised that we were not only starting much later than other groups but also taking on a brand-new case, which meant starting from the ground up. As I began reading the documents, the sheer volume of evidence and the complexity of the case became clear. It involved multiple co-defendants, and the situation centred on the tragic death of the victim. There was a lot of sensitive material that my group and I had to navigate, and we supported one another as we each poured in hours to read around 1,000 pages of documents. We needed to create evidence lists, character lists, and timelines of our client's life and the events of the case. Additionally, as a criminology student and a non-law student, I had to develop an understanding of complex

legal principles and jargon, including joint enterprise, which is central to our client's case. Engaging with a case such as this has highlighted to me how widely misunderstood the legal doctrine is, particularly among those outside of law. Conversations with family and friends have revealed common misconceptions about guilt and responsibility, and I received many questions as to whether I thought my client was truly innocent. This has reinforced how easily injustices can be overlooked or misunderstood and has strengthened my commitment to advocating for greater awareness of the limitations and failures within the criminal justice system.

Just as I initially struggled to make sense of my own thoughts and circumstances, many individuals must navigate a criminal justice system they do not fully understand, often without support from others or the ability to advocate for themselves. However, although I am still overcoming my personal challenges, I have come to recognise that knowledge is power. This realisation strongly aligns with the work of the IPL. While working with my casework group, we have been able to be a voice for our client, which could have life-changing consequences. Moreover, my experiences have strengthened my ability to empathise deeply with others, allowing me to engage sensitively and without judgement with people's stories, a quality that I believe is essential when working on cases involving miscarriages of justice.

Bee Nicholls

3rd Year LLB Law

My interest in criminal law cannot be traced to a single moment. It was a gradual realisation that began before I had the vocabulary to articulate it. I remember watching the Oscar Pistorius trial as a child and being struck by its complexity. Even then, I found myself questioning the outcome, trying to understand how decisions were made and why they carried such weight. That curiosity stayed with me, evolving into a deeper need to understand how a system designed to deliver justice can, at times, fail.

That is what drew me to the Innocence Project London (IPL). When I applied to the University of Greenwich, I already knew I wanted to get involved as soon as applications opened. In my first week, I met a second-year student involved with the IPL whose enthusiasm was immediate and genuine. The way he spoke about Louise and the work he was doing only reinforced what I already felt: that this was something I needed to be part of.

By the time I joined the IPL, I had a strong academic interest in criminal law, particularly in evidence and legal reasoning. But innocence work felt different. It was not about analysing a closed case or critiquing a judgement from a distance. It was about engaging with something unresolved and ongoing and, most importantly, something that directly affects a real person's life.

Working on my case has fundamentally changed how I understand the law. Initially, I approached it with a

structured analytical mindset, focused on identifying issues and working towards solutions. But it quickly became clear that this work does not follow a predictable path. There is no clear progression or guaranteed outcome. The process is slow, fragmented, and often frustrating, with progress dependent on factors entirely outside my control.

That loss of control has been one of the most challenging aspects of the experience. I thrive on structure, deadlines, organisation, and completing work well in advance. Although I consider myself patient, the IPL has a way of testing that patience like nothing else.

This was only heightened by the realities of working within a team under pressure. We lost two valuable members over the course of the project, adding strain to an already demanding case. The case itself has been exceptionally difficult. There is no physical evidence, and many of our leads have led to dead ends. Progress has often depended on external responses, so we have spent months waiting for information, only to find it takes us no further. That kind of stagnation is deeply frustrating.

But that frustration is nothing compared with the reality our client faces.

One of the most unexpected aspects of the IPL has been the emotional connection that develops. It is not intentional. It happens gradually. You write to your client, and they write back. There is a level of trust in those letters that is difficult to articulate. To be entrusted, in

some way, with a person's life and story is an immense privilege, but it also carries weight.

There have been moments when that weight has stayed with me longer than I expected. Over the past couple of Christmases, I have found myself thinking about my client, wondering how they are and hoping they are okay. When it gets cold, I think about whether they are warm enough. Those thoughts are small but persistent, and they are a constant reminder of the reality they live in.

This has also reshaped how I understand frustration. There have been times when I have felt stuck, waiting, unable to move the case forward, but it feels almost tone-deaf to dwell on that when our client is experiencing the same waiting in a far more profound way. While we can step away from the work, they cannot step away from their situation.

During my first year working on the case, I often found myself thinking about it long after I had finished for the day. Sleep has never come easily to me, but the IPL gave that restlessness somewhere to go. I would return to the court bundle late at night, re-reading sections I had read countless times, convinced I had missed something. I revisited emails, retraced timelines, and searched for names that appeared briefly in statements, trying to understand where the gaps lay. At times, that persistence paid off. I found details that had previously been overlooked, small inconsistencies or threads worth pursuing. But even then, the outcome was never guaranteed. Some leads went nowhere. Others raised

more questions than answers. It became a cycle of hope and uncertainty that was difficult to step away from.

This experience has taught me that progress in this kind of work is rarely linear and that effort does not always lead to resolution. But it has also shown me the importance of looking closely, questioning what is presented, and being willing to sit with complexity.

Working with the IPL has left a lasting impression on me, not only because of the case but also because of the people involved. Louise, in particular, is one of the most impressive individuals I have had the privilege of working with. Her dedication, knowledge, and ability to navigate complex and emotionally demanding cases are qualities I deeply admire. She is among the many women who have inspired me to pursue academia, and I hope to lecture in criminal law one day.

The IPL is not something I will ever see as temporary. It has changed the way I think, how I approach the law, and how I understand justice. If I could, I would continue working on my case indefinitely because it does not feel finished and the work feels too important to walk away from.

More than anything, the IPL has reinforced why I chose this path. Not because the work is easy but because it matters. And because there is always value in continuing to ask questions, to look deeper, and to advocate, however slowly, for those whose voices are too often unheard. It is an experience that will stay with me.

Sofia dos Santos Bernardino

3rd Year BSc Criminology and Criminal Psychology

My experience over the past seven to eight months working with the Innocence Project London has been both interesting and challenging. It has helped me understand the criminal justice system in a more realistic way, beyond what I had learnt before.

I have worked on analysing case materials, including witness statements and legal documents. This involved carefully reviewing evidence and identifying any inconsistencies or gaps. One thing that stood out to me was how small issues in the evidence can have a significant impact on the outcome of a case. It made me realise that miscarriages of justice are not always caused by a single major mistake but can arise from a combination of smaller errors.

The case involved serious and sensitive allegations within a family context. Due to confidentiality, I am unable to go into detail, but the experience had a strong impact on me. It showed me how complex and emotionally challenging such cases can be, especially when they involve vulnerable individuals. At times, I found it difficult to balance empathy with the need to remain objective when analysing the evidence. This made me realise how important it is to remain fair and not let emotions influence judgement.

A key lesson I have learnt from this experience is the importance of critical thinking. Before working on this

project, I assumed the criminal justice system was largely fair. However, analysing a real case has made me question that assumption. I now understand that the system can be affected by human error, bias, and procedural limitations. This has helped me develop a more critical perspective.

This experience has also made me more empathetic towards people who have been convicted. Rather than seeing them only as offenders, I see them as individuals with their own circumstances. It has made me more aware of how serious the consequences of wrongful convictions can be, not only for the individual but also for their families.

I also became more aware of unfairness within the system. I noticed that factors such as a lack of resources, poor legal representation, and unreliable evidence can disadvantage certain individuals. This made me realise that injustice is not always obvious and can exist within the legal process itself.

Another important idea I explored was whether focusing solely on 'innocence' is always the best approach. I learnt that the concept of an 'unsafe conviction' can sometimes be more useful, as it focuses on whether the trial was fair rather than on proving complete innocence. This helped me understand some of the justice system's limitations.

This experience has also made me reflect on individuals in prison and their place in society. I now believe they remain part of society and should be treated fairly. The

stigma surrounding imprisonment can make reintegration harder, something I had not fully considered before.

Overall, this experience has had a positive impact on me. It has helped me develop key skills, including critical thinking, attention to detail, and teamwork. It has also made me more reflective and more aware of real-world issues.

Looking ahead, this experience has influenced my future goals. It has deepened my interest in working in the legal or criminal justice field, particularly in areas related to fairness and justice. I feel that this experience will continue to shape my thinking and future decisions.

Thank you for reading.

The Innocence Project London is a member of the global Innocence Network, based in the United States of America, which is an affiliation of innocence organisations from around the world, all of which offer pro bono legal and investigative services to convicted individuals who have maintained their innocence.

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Find out more at www.IPLondon.org.

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