

Suspicion, stereotypes and proactive
policing in historical perspective: the
identification of repeat offenders by
policing agents in London, 1780-1850

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George Wright: 'a very old offender
[who] has been tried almost as often
as he [is] years old'

Home Office, Criminal Registers – Series 1, Newgate, etc., 1796-97, *London Lives, 1690-1800*, NAHOCR700020164 (www.londonlives.org, version 2.0, 27 March 2018), The National Archives, Ms. HO26/5, entry 1 March 1797, Edward Wright.

Legislation

1853 Penal Servitude Act

1869 Habitual Criminals Act

1871 Prevention of Crimes Act

- Judges to order up to 7 years of police supervision as part of sentencing.
- Offenders under supervision to report to the police every month.

Metropolitan Police Commissioner Mayne: 'it has lately been made a regulation that they [certain officers] should visit the gaols so as to become acquainted with the persons of all that are committed, and know them when they are set at liberty; they visit them weekly'

BPP, HC, 1834, XVI; Report from the Select Committee on the Police of the Metropolis, 1834, p. 20.



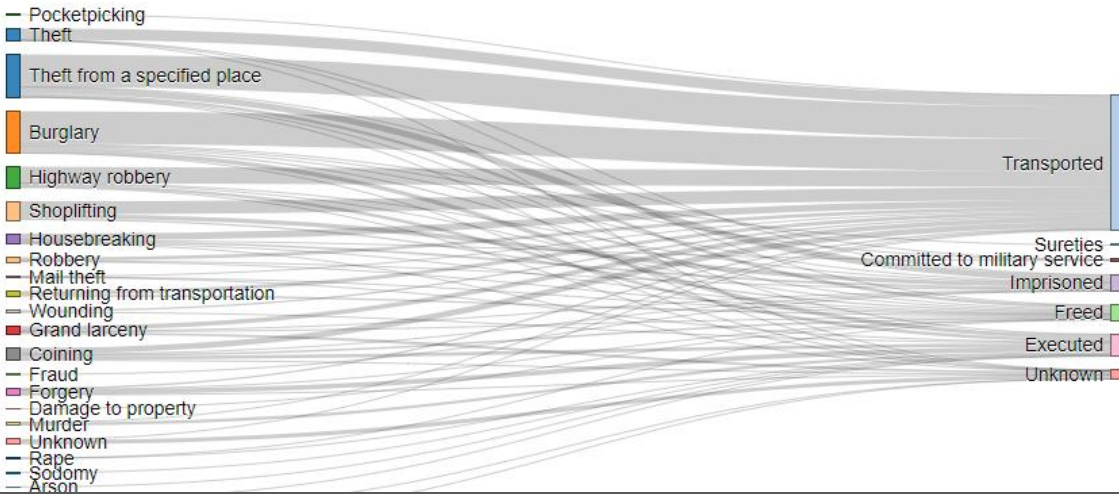
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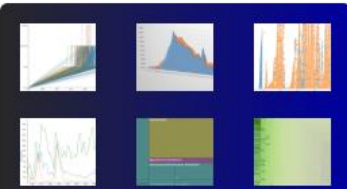
Life of the week

Mina Jury b. c.1828-1890

Mina jury was a habitual thief whose criminal career spanned more than four decades. Mina experienced both transportation to Australia and penal servitude in England during her lifetime. [Find out more](#)



Data visualisations



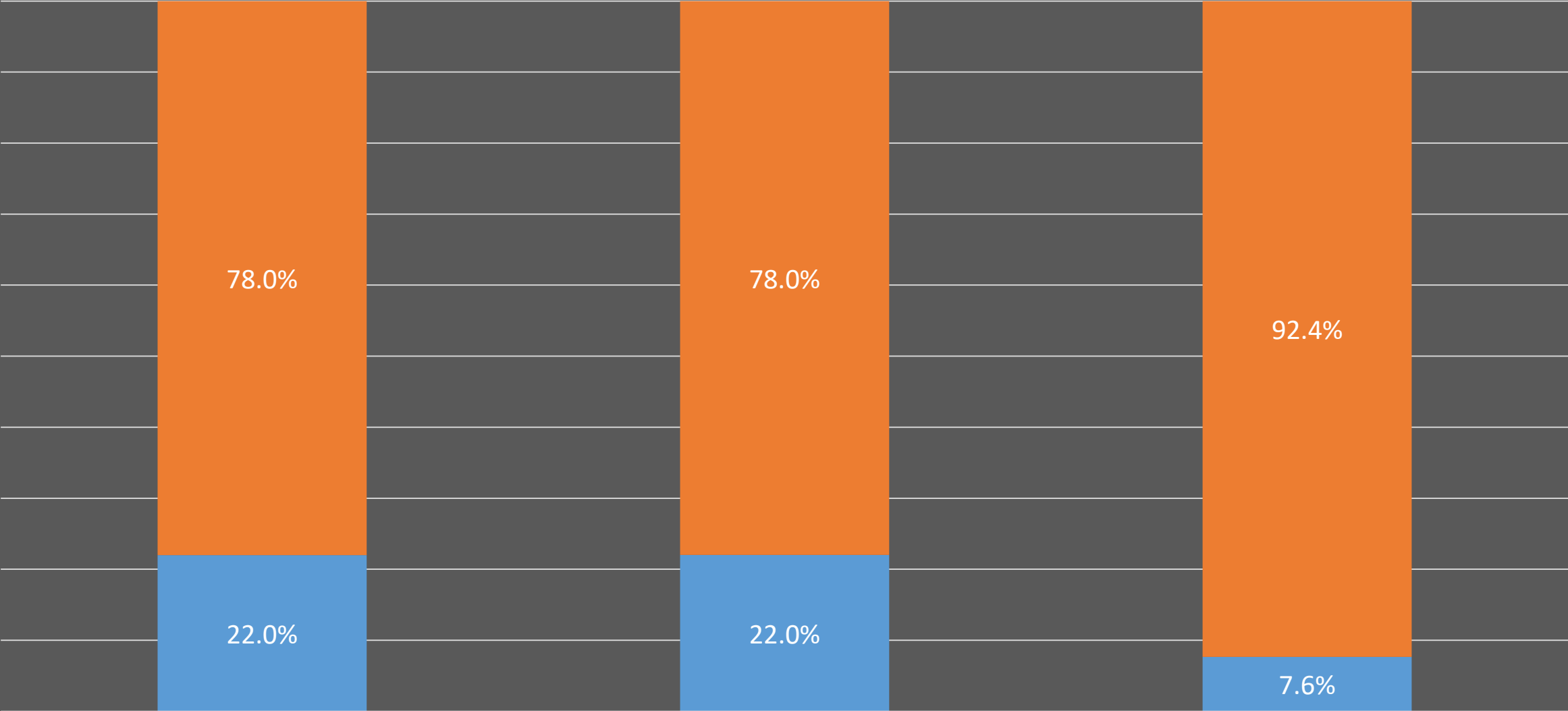
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Repeat offenders

- 3940 cases
- 1828 individual offenders
 - 1598 tried twice; 230 tried three or more times
- Charlotte Walker: tried 12 times
- 2182 cases with policing agents

Gender

Female Male

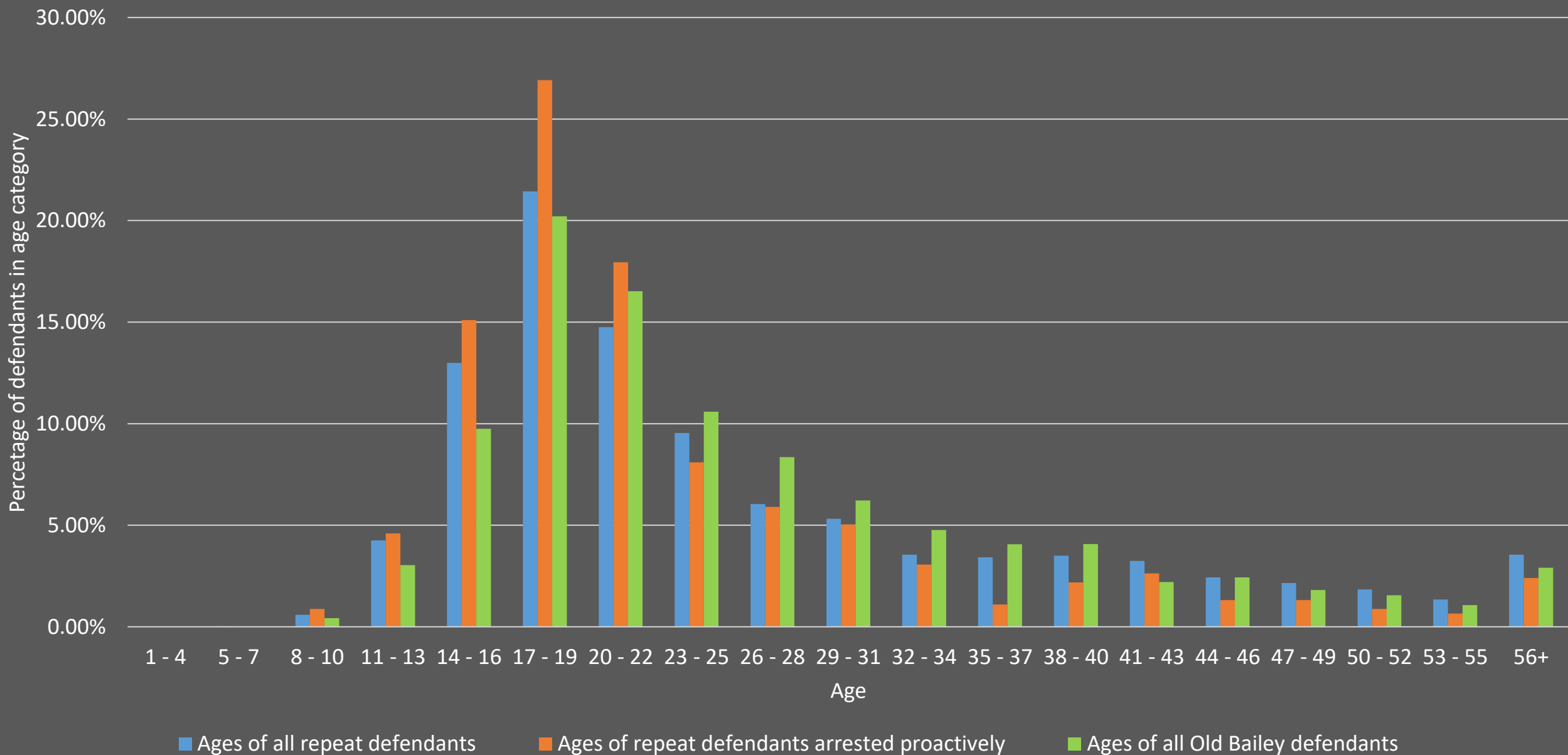


All repeat offenders

All offenders tried at Old Bailey

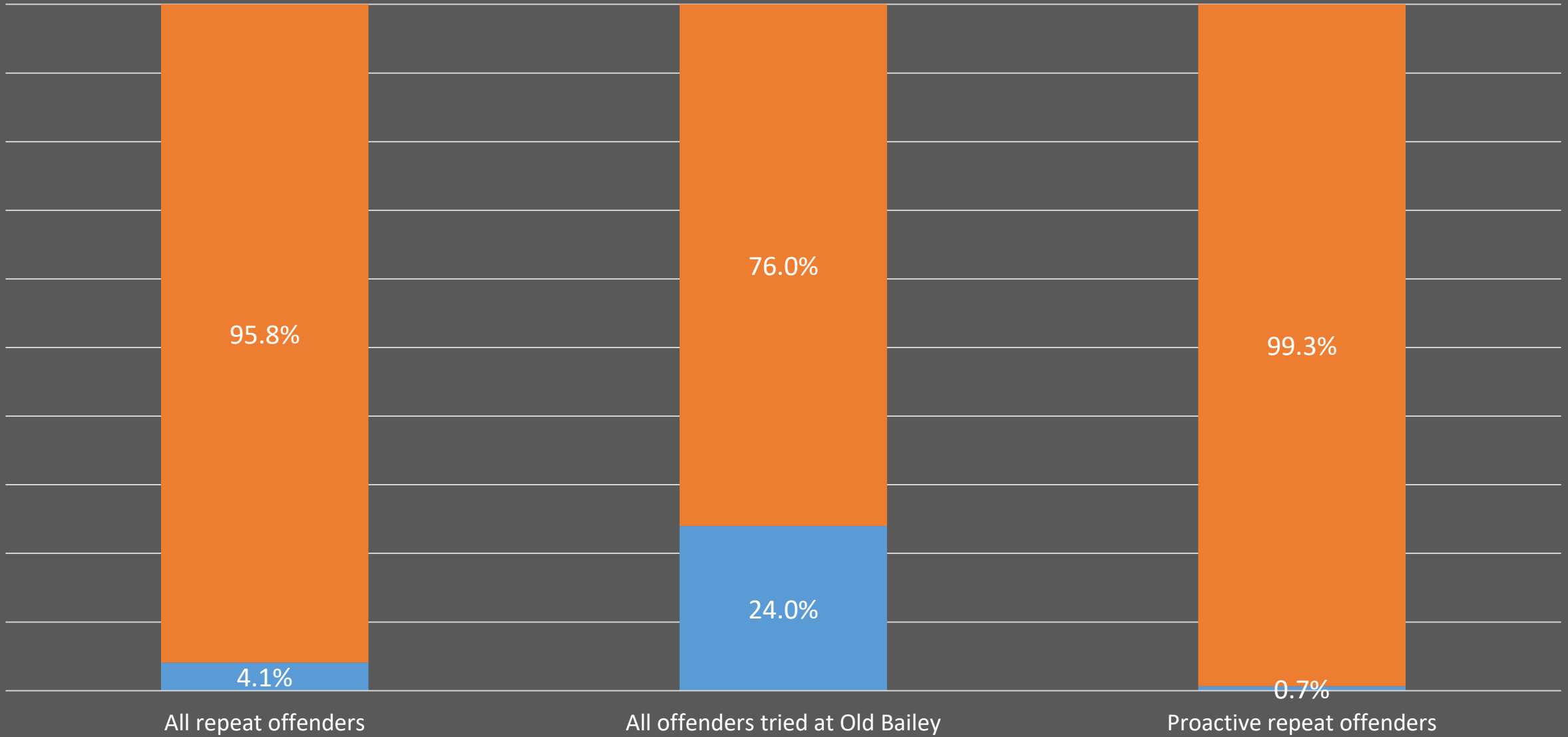
Proactive repeat offenders

Comparing the ages of all repeat offender, repeat offenders in proactive cases, and all Old Bailey defendants grouped at three-year intervals as percentages of the total number of defendants in each dataset



Verdict

■ not guilty ■ guilty



Repeat offender policing agents

1916 individual policing agents identified

31 arrested the same offender more than once

- 4 arrested same offender 3 times
- Median: 0.5 years between trials

Michael Casey, Police Constable: 'I saw the prisoner at Forest-hill gate with another man—the prisoner had a sack with four saws and a jack-plane—the other man had a shovel and spoke-shave—when they got near enough to see me, they ran across the forest—they were a quarter of a mile from the prosecutor—I traced foot-marks over two or three gardens, towards where I found them—I called the prisoner by name several times, but he went on—I followed him above a mile, and saw him throw the sack down—the other man threw the shovel and spoke-shave down; I took them up, and followed with them in my hand'

OBPO, July 1846, trial of Walter Jennings (t18460706-1471)

Philip Webster, officer: 'I am an officer, and apprehended her on the 6th of July. I knew her before, but could not find her'.

OBPO, July 1827, trial of Emma Armstrong (t18270712-149)

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