

# Moral Panics, The Media and The Law

## An International Symposium



28-29 September 2005  
University House, Newcastle



The UNIVERSITY  
of NEWCASTLE  
AUSTRALIA

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Most adults living in Australia and other western societies today who consume the popular press and mass electronic media will have experienced a moral panic, where an outbreak of public anxiety, focussed by the press and by government reaction, serves to ‘amplify deviance’ and promote fresh measures to solve ‘social problems’. More broadly conceived, moral panics have a long history, but it is arguable that the quintessentially modern ‘law and order’ species originated in eighteenth-century England, with the hitherto unknown conjunction of a mass-circulation press, the middle-class public, and regular parliamentary sessions. After 1700 English society experienced uniquely rapid growth in the consumption of printed materials, especially newspapers, magazines and satirical prints. The new audience for the press was the rising middle class, ‘respectable’ people of property who were defining their identities in the burgeoning ‘public sphere’ of reading, writing and association. They were both alarmed and fascinated by new social conditions in the rapidly-growing cities, especially in the metropolis of London. At the same time, there were significant changes to parliament: permanent sessions were established from 1689, and parliamentarians proved highly responsive to public opinion and pressure, producing an unprecedented body of regulatory legislation. Here, according to sociological theory, were the necessary ingredients for media-driven anxieties about order and deviance and their legislative solutions that regularly animate modern democratic societies.

The principal rationale for this two-day symposium on ‘Moral Panics, the Media and the Law’, is to test the foregoing hypothesis and to place the issue of eighteenth-century moral panics and their connections with law in a broader context. The meeting brings together a group of early modern scholars who will consider the generation of moral panics in early modern England generally (i.e. 1500-1800). It will be especially important to discuss the constitution of public anxieties before 1689, when access to legislative redress was restricted and the press was much less developed, meaning that other media (e.g. oral and visual theological media) must have constituted popular alarm. The symposium will also attempt to stimulate reflections on issues of governance and opinion in modern societies generally by including contributions from sociologists and legal scholars about other more contemporary panics and ‘law’ reactions. Indeed, the meeting should provide a critical perspective on modern politics, especially the perception that governments legitimize their authority by helping to constitute popular anxiety about threats to moral and personal security.

**CONFERENCE ORGANISERS**

David Lemmings  
(Liberal Arts)

Nancy E Wright  
(Language and Media)

Katherine Lindsay  
(Law)

## DRAFT PROGRAMME DAY ONE

### Wednesday 28 September

9.15                    **Welcome**

Professor Nick Saunders, Vice-Chancellor, The University of Newcastle

9.30-11                **Histories, Theories and Hypotheses**

David Rowe            ‘The Concept of the Moral Panic: An Historico-Sociological Positioning’

David Lemmings      ‘Law and Order, Moral panics, and Eighteenth-century England’

11-11.30              **Tea**

11.30-12.30          **17<sup>th</sup>-century panics: Witchcraft and the Law**

Malcolm Gaskill      ‘Fear Made Flesh: the English Witch-Hunt of 1645-47’

12.30-2.00            **Lunch**

2.00-3.30             **17<sup>th</sup>-century Panics: the Currency of Fear**

Claire Walker        ‘“A New Narrative of the Old Plot”: Catholics and Moral Panics in 1678’

Greg Warburton      ‘The Public and Private Faces of 17<sup>th</sup>-century Fear and Panic: East Anglian Witchcraft 1645-47’

Nancy Wright        ‘Transvestism Denounced: the Moral Panic about “Roaring Girls” in Early Stuart London’

3.30-4.00              **Tea**

7.00-10.00            **Dinner** (venue TBA)

## DRAFT PROGRAMME DAY TWO

### Thursday 29 September

- 9.30-11            **18<sup>th</sup>-century Panics: Forgery and the Law**
- Randall McGowen ‘The Paradoxical Character of the Panic over Forgery in Eighteenth-Century England’
- 11-11.30           **Tea**
- 11.30-1.00        **18<sup>th</sup>-century Panics: the Media and the Law**
- David Lemmings ‘London Crime and the Press in the 1720s and 1780s’
- Cindy McCreery ‘A Moral Panic in London, c.1790?: “The Monster” and the Press’
- Michael Davis    ‘A Reign of Terror? The British Jacobin Panic and the Rule of Law during the 1790s’
- 1.00-2.00        **Lunch**
- 2.00-3.30        **Moral Panics and the Law in Modern Australia and the Pacific**
- Colin James      ‘The Masculine Panic in Response to the Family Law Act of 1975’
- Deidre Howard   ‘The Moral Panic about Tort Law Reform in Modern Australia’
- Michael Goddard ‘Criminal Evictions: Moral Panics about “squatter” Settlements in Papua New Guinea’
- 3.30-4.00        **Tea**
- 4.00-5.00        **‘Something must be done about it’: Panics and Regulation in Britain**
- Ben Sheehy      ‘“The Trouble with Stockjobbers”: the South Sea Bubble, the Press and Legislative Regulation of Money Markets’
- Frank Bates and  
Ron McGinty     ‘“Arrest him, he’s indecent, he’s obscene what’s more!” The Poems and Paintings of D.H. Lawrence as Part of Cultural History and Moral Outrage’

**The Symposium is sponsored by**

**The University of Newcastle Centre for  
Interdisciplinary Study of Property Rights**

**and**

**The ARC Network for Early European Research  
(NEER)**

The *Centre for the Interdisciplinary Study of Property Rights* is dedicated to interdisciplinary research (including political, historical, cultural and legal research) and publications about property rights, property law and land distribution in developed and developing countries. The Centre involves research teams from across Schools and Faculties at the University of Newcastle who work together with researchers from a consortium of Australian and international universities. The Centre provides opportunities for post-graduate students to undertake innovative, interdisciplinary research projects. Specific areas of research in which the Centre can provide post-graduate supervision and consultancy include: comparative studies of native title and land rights, Aboriginal law and jurisprudence on the Pacific Rim, cultural property rights, intellectual property rights, and the development of real and personal property law. The Centre has a program of annual conferences and research seminars. For more information visit the website at:  
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The *ARC Research Network for Early European Research* (NEER) is funded under the Australian Research Council's Research Networks Program. The Network aims to implement a formal framework for supporting and enhancing current Australian research into the culture and history of Europe between the fifth and eighteenth centuries. It also aims to foster new research and new connections between researchers, and to develop and nurture the next generation of researchers in the field. NEER's research agenda focuses on the relationship between the European past and the Australian present. The Network will build on Australia's existing international reputation for innovative, interdisciplinary research in this field and will significantly enhance its capacity and international impact. For more information visit the website at: [www.arts.uwa.edu.au/earlyeurope/index.html](http://www.arts.uwa.edu.au/earlyeurope/index.html)



## Accommodation in Newcastle

### *Hotels*

#### **Best Western Capri Plaza Hotel**

Corner King & Steel Street Newcastle NSW 2302

Tel: +61 2 4926 3777 Toll Free: 1800 246 835

Fax: +61 2 4926 4379

[www.capriplaza.bestwestern.com.au](http://www.capriplaza.bestwestern.com.au)

#### **Quality Hotel Noah's on the Beach**

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#### **Novocastrian Motor Inn**

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#### **Crowne Plaza Hotel**

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Fax: +61 2 4907 5055

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### *Apartments*

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### *Bed and Breakfast*

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#### **Maggie's at the Beach**

<http://newcastle.stays.com.au/8617>

#### **Buchanan B & B**

20 Church Street Newcastle NSW 2300

Tel: +61 24926 5828

**For further information on the symposium please contact Associate Professor David Lemmings:**

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