



ORGANIZED BY

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PROJECT

The Last Taboo of Motherhood?  
Postnatal Mental Disorders in Twentieth-Century Britain  
(2021 - 2024)

PROJECT WEBSITE

<https://www.ltomhistory.org/>

LOCATION

Room 2.43, Faculty Arts Building (FAB), University of Warwick

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SUPPORTED BY

The Wellcome Trust & Centre for the History of Medicine, University of Warwick



## WOMEN ON THE EDGE: MOTHERHOOD & THE FAMILY IN TURMOIL IN THE TWENTIETH CENTURY

On the night of 17 November 1938, Mary Desson, a Scottish mother of three and wife of a naval officer, threw her youngest child out of carriage window while on board an LNER train service from Inverkeithing to North Queensferry. Incredibly, the toddler Katherine - aged only one year and ten months old at the time - survived the incident. In accounting for her actions, Desson explained to Dunfermline police surgeon, Dr Robert Weir, that she had been feeling particularly desperate that night. Indeed, medical experts testified at trial that a lethal cocktail of psychological and personal issues culminated in Desson's extreme attempt to destroy her young daughter. At the High Court trial of the case in January 1939, the Lord Justice-Clerk concurred, remarking: 'from the evidence which I have heard... at the time you acted under great mental distress, and were not fully responsible for what you did.'

Although the Desson case occurred over eighty years ago, incidents in which mothers attempt to neglect or harm themselves or their children while allegedly under great emotional, personal, and psychological distress continue to make headlines. In July 2022, twenty-five-year-old Lauren Saint George was tried for the murder of her ten-week-old daughter, who was 'shaken to death' at the hands of her mother. At trial, it was revealed Saint George and her partner were homeless and struggling to cope with their new daughter, who had been born two-months premature. Saint George was also found to be struggling with postnatal depression. Despite being found guilty of infanticide before a jury at the Old Bailey, the presiding judge - Mr Justice Spencer - ruled that Saint George would be spared prison, as in his view the young mother: 'suffered and continues to suffer'.

Both the Desson and Saint George cases remind us of the challenges in untangling the motivations and conditions by which women act violently or transgressively, especially against their own family members or themselves. Yet these case studies also raise the important question of what role mental and emotional states play in spurring on some mothers to the most radical of actions. Although Desson and Saint George may depict extreme examples of women "on the edge", not only of sanity, but also of socially acceptable female and maternal behaviour, historical and contemporary accounts demonstrate that many mothers struggle with suicidal feelings and homicidal urges. Such struggles frequently take place while adjusting biologically, psychologically, and socially to motherhood and the pressures of child rearing. While medicine has, and continues to offer, formal psychiatric frameworks by which to make sense of often taboo, deviant, or destructive forms of maternal thinking and behaviour, psychiatric explanations cannot be isolated from broader contextual factors and pressures. Instead, a complex array of personal, social, economic, and psychological dynamics, combine to drive mothers to "the edge", while compelling some to act out violently or destructively.

This two-day workshop, co-organized by Dr Kelly-Ann Couzens and Professor Hilary Marland, and generously funded by the Wellcome Trust, draws upon contributions from scholars working in the fields of history, criminology, and legal studies to explore these core themes and questions. This event aims to grapple with the interplay between motherhood, mental or emotional states and broader themes of criminality, neglect, abandonment, and violence within the family in the long twentieth century. We are particularly interested in the role psychiatric, legal, "expert", and popular thinking have had in understanding "deviant" female behaviour and its impact upon women themselves, their families and society at large. We are also keen to explore and reflect upon theories, methods, and sources for recovering these pasts, or challenges in researching these themes.

# WORKSHOP PROGRAMME

WORKSHOP LOCATION:

Room 2.43, Level II, Faculty Arts Building (FAB)

DAY 1 THURSDAY, 7 SEPTEMBER 2023	
14:00	Arrival & Coffee
14:30	Welcome & Opening Remarks
14:40	SESSION I - PERSPECTIVES, SOURCES & ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS
	Claudia Soares, "A great indifference to her child's health': Motherhood, Childhood, and Social Care, 1960-1930'
	Lydia Plath, 'What To Do With A Plank of Wood? Some Reflections on Writing About Sexual Violence and Its Aftermath in Victorian England'
	Questions & Discussion
15:40	Short Break
16:00	SESSION II - MEDICINE, DIAGNOSIS & TREATMENT IN THE PAST
	Alison Pedley, "We are still far from possessing an adequate comprehension of the psychology of pregnancy': Criminal Lunacy and Puerperal Mania in Broadmoor Criminal Lunatic Asylum, 1895 to 1920'
	Morag Allan Campbell, "She will be watched carefully': The Conditional Release of Women Prisoners from Perth Prison's Criminal Lunatic Department'
	Hilary Marland, "A sophisticated blackmailer': Mothers, Maternal Mental Illness and Bonding in Post-War Britain'
	Questions & Discussion
17:30	Evening Drinks
19:00	Workshop Dinner
DAY 2 FRIDAY, 8 SEPTEMBER 2023	
9:00	Arrival & Coffee
9:30	SESSION III - FRAMING THE OFFENCE OF INFANTICIDE IN ENGLAND & WALES
	Rachel Dixon & Tony Ward, 'On the Edge - Mothers Killing Infants Aged 1 - 18 Months, 1870 - 1938'
	Kelly-Ann Couzens, '...one 'of those little wayside domestic tragedies of life': The Infanticide Act 1938 and the Inter-War British Family'
	Questions & Discussion
10:30	Short Break
10:45	SESSION IV - MOTHERHOOD & THE CRIMINAL JUSTICE SYSTEM
	Lynsey Black, 'Murder and Motherhood in Ireland, 1922 to 1964'
	Lizzie Seal, 'Themes of Motherhood in Cases of Racialised Women Accused of Murder and Attempted Murder in Britain, 1950 - 1970'
	Questions & Discussion
11:45	Short Break
12:00	ROUNDTABLE & WORKSHOP SUMMARY
13:00	Lunch
14:00	Close

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### **Murder and Motherhood in Ireland, 1922 to 1964**

From independence in 1922, until the Criminal Justice Act of 1964, the overwhelming majority of women prosecuted for murder in Ireland were prosecuted for the murder of a child. Of 292 women, 258 were charged with the murder of a child. In the great majority of instances their own child. That most of the women who stood accused were the mother of the victim raises questions about the meanings of motherhood and strongly implicates the wider context of Irish society in these decades, particularly in cases of 'illegitimate motherhood' in which children were born to unmarried women. This profile encompasses the majority of women prosecuted, reflecting the deeply 'criminogenic' shame unmarried motherhood carried with it in these decades. This paper explores the cases of prosecuted women, looking at the profile of the killings as well as the state responses to these instances of lethal violence perpetrated by mothers, including the use of religious sites of detention for convicted women. I explore both the cases of women who were ultimately convicted of murder and capitally sentenced, as well as those prosecuted for murder but convicted of lesser offences such as concealment of birth or manslaughter. These women were understood by reference to tropes of weak-mindedness, sin and morality. The paper also explores the ambiguities in attempting to define murder in the context of child-killing, both legally and socially, and discusses some of the questions which arose in relation to the enactment of a new offence of infanticide in 1949.

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**Lynsey Black** is Assistant Professor of Criminology in the School of Law and Criminology, Maynooth University. She researches in the areas of gender and punishment, historical criminology, and borders. She is a co-editor of *Law and Gender in Modern Ireland: Critique and Reform* (Hart 2019, with Peter Dunne) and *Histories of Punishment and Social Control in Ireland: Perspectives from a Periphery* (Emerald 2022, with Louise Brangan and Deirdre Healy). In 2022, she published her first monograph, *Gender and Punishment in Ireland: Women, Murder and the Death Penalty, 1922-64* (Manchester University Press). Her current research examines penal nationalism and the Northern Ireland border and is funded by an Irish Research Council Starting Laureate grant.

DR MORAG ALLAN CAMPBELL

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**'She will be watched carefully':  
The Conditional Release of Women Prisoners From Perth Prison's Criminal Lunatic  
Department**

One morning in March 1910, in the town of Kirkcaldy on the east coast of Scotland, a young woman left her house with her three-month-old baby in her arms and her other small child trotting along beside her. She made her way to a quiet pond in a local park and threw herself in, taking her children with her. The young woman would emerge from the water unscathed. Her two children did not.

Although charged with murder, the young woman, Jane, did not face trial. The decision of the Lord Advocate, Scotland's most senior law officer, was that a trial would 'in all possibility result ... in a verdict of insane at the time the crime was committed.' Less than two years after this tragic event, preparations were underway for Jane's release from the Criminal Lunatic Department at Perth Prison. She was released into the guardianship of her husband in June 1912.

But what did this mean for Jane and her family? In this paper, I will explore the course of Jane's contact with the custodial system until her unconditional release in 1929, a period during which she spent only two years within the prison itself. I will examine the discussions among legal and medical experts as they negotiated their plans for Jane's continuing custody beyond the prison walls, the arrangements in place following her conditional release, the roles and responsibilities of her family members, and the consequences for Jane and her family.

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**Morag Allan Campbell** gained her PhD in Modern History from the University of St Andrews in 2020. Her thesis explores women's experiences of a diagnosis of mental disorder related to pregnancy and childbirth in the northeast of Scotland between 1820 and 1930. A significant part of her thesis examines the care and custody of women who committed child murder in the early twentieth century. Now an independent researcher, Morag maintains a keen interest in ongoing research into women's experiences of mental healthcare and the history of psychiatry more generally. She also has an interest in the lives and career trajectories of women who worked in Scottish asylums and mental hospitals during the latter half of the nineteenth century and into the twentieth.

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**'...one 'of those little wayside domestic tragedies of life':  
The Infanticide Act 1938 and the Inter-War British Family**

In October 1939, the Liverpool Evening Express reported on the outcome of the murder trial of forty-two-year-old housewife, Annie Slater. Slater stood accused of the murder of her four-month-old infant son, James, whom she had taken to the Leeds and Liverpool Canal on the night of 13 August 1939, and drowned. Unlike her child, Slater survived the incident, and while recovering in hospital the morning after, confessed to police that: 'I was feeling ill at the time... I wanted to finish myself and the baby.' Slater's husband, Matthew, testified in court that his wife had been struggling as a mother, especially since the birth of James. The stress of caring for their further eight children had only increased, when Matthew lost his job as a dock labourer. Defence counsel, Mr G.B. Currie, asserted that the case 'was one "of those little wayside domestic tragedies of life", which took place from time to time.' Slater was found not guilty of murder, but guilty of infanticide, and sentenced to two months imprisonment in the second division.

Annie Slater is reflective of a new group of female offenders, who benefited from the provisions of the Infanticide Act 1938. Cases like that of Slater, have a long history of representation as domestic tragedies within British medical, legal and media discourses. However, the inter-war years saw an increased focus upon the destabilising impact child murder could have upon the integrity, and future, of the nuclear family. In this paper, I argue that these anxieties - largely shared across the political spectrum and voiced by medical professionals, legal practitioners, and other commentators - played a central role in justifying the implementation, and scope, of the 1938 Act in England and Wales. Against broader debates over racial fitness and population decline, infanticide law reform was positioned by its champions within ideals of domesticity and inter-war family life, helping to frame the legislation as beneficial not just to the individual, but to the nation as a whole.

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**Kelly-Ann Couzens** is an Australian historian of criminal and forensic history. Since June 2021, she has been based in the History Department at the University of Warwick and is currently working as a Postdoctoral Research Fellow on the Wellcome-funded project 'The Last Taboo of Motherhood? Postnatal Mental Disorders in 20th Century Britain' (2021-2024), led by Professor Hilary Marland. Kelly's work can be seen in the journal *History* and in Alison Adam's 2020 edited collection *Crime and the Construction of Forensic Objectivity from 1850*. She is also an Honorary Research Fellow at the University of Western Australia and is currently working on a book to be published by Palgrave, entitled *The Victorian Police Surgeon: A History of Crime and Forensic Medicine*.

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PROFESSOR TONY WARD  
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### **On the Edge of Infanticide - Mothers Killing Infants aged 1-18 Months, 1870-1938**

Clara Stathers, a married mother of four children from Hull, was tried in 1923 for the murder of her youngest child, ten months old Ernest Stathers, by drowning him in a bath. In the committal proceedings Clara was described as “mentally worn out”, “stressed”, “neurasthenic”, and suffering from “a form of mental depression,” phrases which depict vaguely defined mental disorders associated with the stresses of motherhood insanity.’ Clara was committed for trial at York Assizes, where the judge stated that “there were too many people alleged to be insane who were not insane” however in this instance, “it was a genuine and deplorable case of insanity.” She was found guilty but insane and was ordered to be detained during His Majesty’s Pleasure.

This paper seeks to explore the treatment of cases such as those of Clara Stathers, who killed infants who could not be considered “newly born” and who were described as suffering from what were often vaguely defined mental disorders associated with the stresses of motherhood. These conditions included the “lactational insanity” enshrined in the Infanticide Act 1938. We consider how medicine and the law responded to “respectable married women” and unmarried mothers, and the extent to which poverty and the stresses of family life were medicalised in discussions of child murder.

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**Rachel Dixon** is a Lecturer in Law at the University of Hull, where she lectures in Criminal Law and Criminal Justice. Her research interests lie in medico-legal history and in particular, infanticide and expert evidence. She obtained a PhD in Law from the University of Hull in 2018, which focused on Infanticide and Medical Expert Evidence 1688 -1955: a major element of this research examined the certainty (or lack of certainty) created by medical evidence and whether medical certainty increased throughout the passage of time with the advances of scientific experiment and medical discourse. Her PhD was published as a monograph in 2022: *Infanticide: Expert Evidence and Testimony in Child Murder Cases, 1688-1955*, (Routledge, 2022) and her recent research includes the publication of two book chapters in edited collections with Professor Tony Ward, Northumbria University: ‘Manslaughter, Concealment of Birth and Infanticide, 1900-37’ in Karen Brennan and Emma Milne (eds.) *100 years of the Infanticide Act: Legacy, Impact and Future Directions* (Hart Publishing 2023) and ‘Expert Evidence and Uncertainty in English Infanticide Trials, c.1725-1945’ in Lara Bergers, Pauline Dirven, Willemeijn Ruberg and Sara Serrano Martinez (eds.) *Forensic Cultures in Modern Europe: Expertise and Knowledge Practices* (Manchester University Press 2023).

**Tony Ward** is a Professor in Law at Northumbria University. His first period of research on maternal mental disorders and infanticide formed part of his PhD thesis completed in 1996. Subsequently he branched out into state crime (on which he co-authored two books with Penny Green), the law of evidence, and human trafficking. In recent years he has resumed historical research on infanticide in collaboration with his former PhD student Rachel Dixon, and they have contributed chapters to *Forensic Cultures in Modern Europe* (ed. Wilhemijn Ruberg et al, Manchester University Press 2023) and *100 years of the Infanticide Act: Legacy, Impact and Future*

PROFESSOR HILARY MARLAND

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**'A sophisticated blackmailer':  
Mothers, Maternal Mental Illness and Bonding in Post-War Britain**

In 1971 Dr Desmond Bardon, psychiatric advisor to the National Childbirth Trust, cited a new mother's description of her infant as 'a sophisticated blackmailer', an astonishing and troubling turn of phrase. Bardon was active alongside his work for the NCT in highlighting the serious nature and extent of postnatal mental illness and urged awareness and effective treatment of postpartum psychosis and depression, particularly amongst GPs, nurses and midwives. He worked closely with the NCT to oppose the increasing use of what he saw as invasive childbirth technology in hospital deliveries that, in his view, prompted mental distress and trauma. He was also a devoted follower of John Bowlby. In his advocacy of special units to treat mothers experiencing severe psychiatric disturbance following childbirth, Bardon placed great emphasis on Bowlby's attachment theory and the intergenerational traumas resulting from maternal mental illness. Thus, the new mother referred to above, was said to carry with her feelings of abandonment and neglect from her own childhood experiences which prompted a deep resentment of her own child, leading to a failure to bond.

While the risk of infanticide amongst mothers experiencing puerperal insanity had been consistently emphasised from the nineteenth century onwards, after the 1950s a broader range of anxieties were highlighted, focusing on less extreme but nonetheless pressing fears about maternal attachment, child development and neglect, with the mother's mental illness depicted as an impediment to bonding and her infant's future development and wellbeing. This paper aims to open up the complexities surrounding postnatal mental illness, in terms of the weight placed on the mother's distress and the risk to the infant. It also examines practical responses, particularly the setting up of Mother and Baby Units after the 1950s, specialised facilities where mother and baby would be kept together which emphasised the importance of bonding and the therapeutic benefits this would bring to mothers. Finally, it considers the impact of concerns about the failures of bonding on mothers already experiencing deep mental distress.

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**Hilary Marland** is Professor of History at the University of Warwick, and Principal Investigator on the Wellcome Trust funded project, 'The Last Taboo of Motherhood: Postnatal Mental Disorders in Twentieth-Century Britain'. She has published widely on puerperal insanity, childbirth and maternity, girls' health, migration and mental illness, and mental disorder in prisons. Her books include *Dangerous Motherhood: Insanity and Childbirth in Victorian Britain* (2004), *Health and Girlhood in Britain, 1874-1920* (2013) and her most recent book, with Catherine Cox, *Disorder Contained: Mental Breakdown and the Modern Prison in England and Ireland, 1840-1900*, which appeared with Cambridge University Press in 2022.



DR ALISON PEDLEY

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**'We are still far from possessing an adequate comprehension of the psychology of pregnancy': Criminal Lunacy and Puerperal Mania in Broadmoor Criminal Lunatic Asylum, 1895 to 1920**

Between 1863 and 1896, the medical regime at Broadmoor Criminal Lunatic Asylum had exercised a treatment policy based on moral therapy and management. In 1896 Dr Richard Brayn was appointed as Medical Superintendent. Unlike his predecessors, he had not been a deputy superintendent at the Asylum; most recently as Governor and Medical Officer at HMP Woking. During Brayn's regime, the population of the Asylum increased and there were changes in treatment and care. His tenure has been described as draconian, however not all patients experienced drastic changes in their asylum life. Brayn resigned in 1910 and Dr John Baker, his deputy, was appointed in his stead, remaining at Broadmoor until 1920.

In 1902 while he was Deputy Medical Superintendent, John Baker published an in-depth survey of the criminally insane women in the institution, 'Female Criminal Lunatics - A Sketch'. The focus of the paper was the cases of maternal infanticide and child murder in Broadmoor, particularly those female patients whose insanity and mental states were attributed to ante- and post-natal causes. In the treatise, Baker described the Broadmoor women patients who were suffering puerperal mania, melancholia and insanity, outlining the defining aspects of such diagnoses. Within his analysis, he also reflected on external social features as causal factors and whether it would be possible to limit future such crimes by anticipation.

Taking John Baker's retrospective as a starting text, this paper will review the attitudes towards and treatment of homicidal and infanticidal mothers during the two men's period of office, 1895 to 1920. Broadmoor's approach to such cases in this period, the first twenty years of the twentieth century, will be compared and contrasted with those of earlier years. The emphasis will be on how Broadmoor's medical regime reacted when faced with cases of maternal infanticide and child murder with the diagnosis of puerperal mania and insanity.

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**Alison Pedley** is Honorary Research Fellow in the Department of Humanities and Social Sciences at University of Roehampton, from where she received her PhD in 2020. Her thesis research centred on mothers who had murdered their own children and were adjudged as insane between 1835 and 1895. The women were committed to the English specialist, 'criminal lunatic' facilities of Bethlem Royal Hospital, Fisherton House Asylum and Broadmoor Criminal Lunatic Asylum to be held 'until her Majesty's pleasure be known'. Her subsequent 2023 monograph, *Mothers, Criminal Insanity and the Asylum in Victorian England: Cure, Redemption and Rehabilitation*, extended the period researched to 1900 to encompass the whole of Queen Victoria's reign. The research for both the thesis and the monograph, was undertaken in the archives of the three facilities and used case books, admission registers and nineteenth-century professional medical articles. Her present research is focused on Broadmoor State Criminal Asylum (as it became known) in the first two decades of the twentieth century. Between 1900 and 1917, the majority of female admissions was still of mothers who had committed child homicide and who had had their insanity attributed to female physiology and reproduction. Alison's research is a continuation of her earlier work and analyses the treatment received in Broadmoor by homicidal mothers up to the watershed years of World War One.

DR LYDIA PLATH

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### **What To Do With A Plank of Wood?**

#### **Some Reflections on Writing About Sexual Violence and Its Aftermath in Victorian England**

This project seeks to tell the story of an allegation of sexual assault written on a plank of wood that my father recovered from the staircase of my childhood home, a pair of Victorian cottages in rural Worcestershire:

Arthur [P--] committed  
a rape on Mary Ann [S--] Aug 7<sup>th</sup> 1886  
he made her cry she was then living  
with her Aunt [N--] who she said  
she would tell about [P--'s]  
Behaviour  
  
[P--] is afraid she is  
in the family way

This project raises a number of historical, methodological, and ethical questions, which this paper will reflect upon. Historically, my questions include: Who had written this on the stair? Why? Did Arthur indeed rape Mary? Was Mary pregnant, and if so, what happened to the child? (miscarriage? concealment? infanticide?) And who were Mary and Arthur anyway? I know that Arthur was a carpenter from a working-class family who relatively often found themselves in front of the magistrates; Mary did not have a recorded occupation but many of the women in her family were "gloveresses" (which may have been a euphemism for sex work). But what were their lives like, living on the edge of poverty in a small town in rural Worcestershire in the 1880s?

Methodologically and ethically, I draw on Saidiya Hartman, Marisa Fuentes, and Julia Laite work to reflect on how I can - and whether I should - trace Mary and Arthur in the historical record. This story is not in a letter or a diary in an archive; as far as I can tell the allegation is not recorded in a newspaper or court record for any historian to come across. It's on a plank of wood, which sits on a shelf in my study. Neither Mary nor Arthur are my ancestors; while their lives intersected with my childhood home, is this my story to tell? And would Mary (or Arthur) want it told? In other words, this paper will reflect upon: what should a historian do with an allegation of rape written on a plank of wood?

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**Lydia Plath** is an Associate Professor of US History at the University of Warwick and is Chair of the British Association for American Studies. Her research background is in the history of racism and racial violence in the United States, considered from an interdisciplinary perspective, and she has written widely on slavery and enslaved experiences as well as representations of slavery and racial violence in US cinema. She is also developing research into American Studies pedagogies through a number of collaborative publications and through her leadership of the Teaching American Studies Network. Her current project is a speculative history of an incident of sexual violence in rural Victorian England, for which she draws on methodologies from the history of slavery as well as her experience working with sexual misconduct policy in UK HE, to tell the story of an alleged rape and its repercussions.

PROFESSOR LIZZIE SEAL

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### **Themes of Motherhood in Cases of Racialised Women Accused of Murder and Attempted Murder in Britain, 1950-70**

This paper will identify meanings of motherhood as they were articulated in news reports of cases of racialised women accused of murder and attempted murder in Britain, 1950-70. 'Meanings of motherhood' will be broadly conceptualised to include cases where women were mothers, but also cases where they were perceived to occupy a mothering role. The paper will examine how constructions of racialised femininity and motherhood were shaped by understandings of emotional states. It will extend Seal and Neale's (2020: 811) argument, made in relation to capital cases of intimate murder by men of colour, that 'criminal cases communicate the emotional norms of the society in which they are situated' and as such have implications for citizenship and governance.

Hegemonic meanings of motherhood in mid twentieth-century Britain were intertwined with whiteness. Webster (1998) argues Black women were not associated with motherhood in the 1950s. By paying attention to portrayals and experiences of racialised women, the paper will analyse motherhood as a racialised identity. It will assess the role of discourses of emotionality and instability in cases of racialised women accused of murder and attempted murder, examine whether these were deployed to mitigate their actions, and how they related to understandings of gendered racial difference. It will place the press reports on these cases within the wider context of gender, race and family in postwar and postcolonial Britain.

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**Lizzie Seal** is Professor of Criminology at the University of Sussex. She is principal investigator for the British Academy funded project *Race, Crime and Justice in Britain, 1870-1955*. She is the author of five books: *Women, Murder and Femininity: Gender Representations of Women who Kill* (2010, Palgrave) *Transgressive Imaginations: Crime, Deviance and Culture* (with Maggie O'Neill, 2012, Palgrave) *Capital Punishment in Twentieth-Century Britain: Audience, Justice, Memory* (2014, Routledge) *Imaginative Criminology: Of Spaces, Past, Present and Future* (with Maggie O'Neill, 2019, Bristol University Press) *Gender, Crime and Justice* (2021, Palgrave). Lizzie has published a range of peer reviewed articles in the areas of historical and cultural criminology.

DR CLAUDIA SOARES

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**'A great indifference to her child's health':  
Motherhood, Childhood, and Social Care, 1860-1930**

Children's social work sources from the 19th and early 20th century document in detail the turmoil that many working-class families faced in struggling to stave off destitution. These sources also tell of the affective, psychological, and social contexts that many families faced, including the desperation, anguish, and depression that many parents felt (particularly mothers) in trying to make ends meet for their children. In several cases, these prolonged emotional states resulted in a range of violent behaviours, including self-harm, child abandonment and neglect, suicide/suicide attempts, and infanticide attempts. Moreover, social work records offer a glimpse of the impact of such turmoil in the lives of young children, many of whom were, in turn, labelled 'problematic' or 'deviant' by welfare workers.

This paper draws on my wider British Academy funded research which brings a history of emotions approach to the study of welfare agencies committed to supporting children and their families across Britain, Australia, and Canada in the long 19th century. The paper draws on a range of social care sources to get at the experiences of everyday life for pauper and 'problematic' families, and focuses, where possible, on sources that allow for the excavation of the voices, views, and feelings of parents and children to examine how they made sense of their diverse experiences. Finally, the paper will also consider institutional responses and attitudes towards 'deviant' maternal behaviour, its perceived impact on the children in care, and how this shaped subsequent treatment of both these children and their families.

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**Claudia Soares** is a British Academy Postdoctoral Fellow and Newcastle University Academic Career Track (NuACT) Fellow at Newcastle University. Her first monograph - a bottom-up study of children's social care in Britain across the nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries - was published in 2023 with Oxford University Press and entitled *A Home from Home? Children and Social Care in Victorian and Edwardian Britain, 1870-1920*. She has recent publications in *The History of Education*, *The History of the Family*, *History Workshop Journal* and *The Journal of Victorian Culture*. Her current research focuses on family welfare in Britain, Australia, and Canada between 1800-1930, and migrants' experience and wellbeing in the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

Website: <https://www.ncl.ac.uk/hca/people/profile/claudiasoares.html>