The Watford Blue Movie Trial: regulating rollers in 1970s Britain

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Abstract

This article uses the example of a forgotten obscenity case from 1974 to show the processes involved in the production and distribution of British hardcore pornographic 8-mm films, known in the trade as rollers. It also gives attention to the legal framework affecting pornography at this time, showing how the Director of Public Prosecutions, against a backdrop of increasing tabloid attention on the transnational pornography trade and corruption in the Metropolitan police, used the Obscene Publications Act 1959 in conjunction with other laws to increase the chances of a conviction. The article draws on the findings from a methodology that combines approaches from law with ethnohistory, using court records alongside media reportage. I suggest that such an approach can help further understanding of the legal frameworks for pornography, as well as revealing how the trade has been subject to regulation and control.

Introduction

Figure One: John Darby's garage, Rayner's Lane, Harrow. National Archives, DPP 2/5303-1.

On 22 November 1972, after a routine stop by local police officers in Harrow, Greater London, an entrepreneur named John Darby was arrested while loading his car with 'obscene material'. They discovered that the boot of Darby's car contained 608 pornographic magazines, 35 pornographic 8-mm 'rollers'[1] and the 16-mm negatives for 14 films. When searching Darby, several keys were found. One of the officers noted that the car was parked in close proximity to nearby garages and returned to the scene, wanting to see whether the keys would fit any of the locks. The hunch proved right. Later, the officers returned to the location of the arrest and found a wealth of pornographic

material, identifying the base for Darby's mail-order business (see figure one). The police seized the following materials:

- 4391 magazines (73 titles),
- 354 novels (21 titles),
- 44 typescripts (five titles),
- 28 records (one title),
- 16 packets of photographs,
- 601 packets of playing cards,
- 379 titled 8-mm rollers (51 titles),
- 346 untitled 8-mm rollers (subsequently not deemed to be obscene),
- 17,544 empty film cartons for 37 titles,
- eight unprocessed film titles, and
- a number of 16-mm films, including master negatives.

Alongside these were documents relating to his six mail-order operations. Of particular interest to the police was an invoice for 5000 film spools that linked Darby with an Anthony Collingbourne of Watford. At this time, it was not realized that Collingbourne produced many of the titles found in Darby's garage. Further investigation revealed the extent of Collingbourne's operation, ultimately resulting in what would become referred to as the Watford Blue Movie Trial by the popular press.

All of this information is taken from the records of the Director of Public Prosecutions (DPP) available at the National Archives in Kew, London, which relate to the Watford Blue Movie Trial. Although many records for offences committed under the Obscene Publications Act 1959 (OPA) have not been kept, there are many cases available that provide an insight into the regulation of the pornography business. Such materials have been used by Stoops (2018) to construct a history of Britain's pornography trade before the post-war period. However, given Britain's status as a large-scale producer of hardcore pornographic films from the mid-1960s onwards (Hebditch and Anning 1988; Carter 2018), there remains a lack of formal documents which help to document this business; an issue that regularly faces porn historians (Alilunas and Erdman 2018).

In this article, I make a case for the use of legal research techniques to aid both the historical and contemporary understandings of the pornography trade found in different countries, but also how it has been regulated. I begin by exploring how recent work on pornography has given attention to its contemporary legal context, suggesting the need for further engagement with other laws used to regulate pornography. I move on to discuss how one might research this, reflecting on how I combined methods from the field of law with cultural approaches to investigate the Watford Blue Movie Trial. I then use the example of this trial to illustrate how such an approach can give insight into the regulation of pornography and how it can uncover forgotten histories of cultural and economic production. I conclude by reflecting on some of the limitations of this approach for studying the history of pornography, as well as considering how it can help further understanding of the legal frameworks in which pornographers operate.

The legal context for pornography

In Britain, the introduction of the Criminal Justice and Immigration Act 2008 (CJAIA) led to a number of studies exploring the impact of this problematic law and debates relating to extreme pornography (Johnson 2010; Smith and Attwood 2010; Beresford 2014; Antoniou and Akrivos 2017; McGlynn and Bows 2019). Beresford (2014, 379), for example, focuses on the case of *R v Peacock* (2012) to demonstrate how the 'law itself is the creator and producer of extreme pornography', rather than the pornography business, indicating how it has been used to regulate and control sexuality. The author also draws on relevant obscenity trials to show the limitations of the concept of obscenity; I explore these later in this article. While much of this work acknowledges the significance of the OPA, identifying how the CJAIA emerged out of a concern for the OPA being able to 'deal with the specific threat posed by the availability' (Smith and Attwood 2010, 173) of pornography online, there remains a lack of in-depth analysis of specific OPA cases that are explicitly related to the pornography business.

In a British context, academic work tends to focus on the more high-profile obscenity cases, such as the Oz trial (Carlin 2007) or those relating to popular music (Cloonan 1995; Collins 2019). In relation to pornography, attention has been primarily given to erotic literature (Sutherland 1982; Becket 2007; Bradshaw and Potter 2014), as opposed to other forms of pornography that emerged in the 1950s and 1960s, such as photographs, type- scripts, magazines and films. One can find mentions of specific obscenity cases relating to such forms in the work of Robertson (1979), who offers a comprehensive overview of British obscenity law up until 1979, which I draw on throughout this article, and in Mares (2017), who gives a detailed breakdown of a historic obscenity trial *Shaw v DPP* (1962), using a similar approach to the one I describe here. I have been interested in how the documentation of such trials describe the organization and operations of pornography businesses at different points in time. For a trade with clandestine beginnings, this is especially useful in helping to understand previously hidden production and distribution practices. Additionally, they also show how pornography was subject to strict regulation in Britain, and the ways the law was administered, often entrepreneurially, to prosecute those who sought to benefit from distributing pornography.

Such a method is commonplace in the study of history, where historians use legal documents to construct microhistories of past events. As Magnússon and Szijártó (2013, 5) suggest, focusing 'on certain cases, persons and circumstances, microhistory allows an intensive historical study of the subject, giving a completely different picture of the past'. Yet, for them, microhistory goes beyond simply offering a case study from a particular moment in time; it instead uses smaller events to answer larger questions. An often-cited example of this is Ginzburg, Tedeschi and Tedeschi's (1992) study of an Italian peasant cheesemaker named Menocchio, which draws on court records to tell the story of his life and philosophy, revealing the repressive society in which he lived. Davis' (1985) work takes a similar approach to present the case of Martin Guerre and imposture. Both of these examples show how researchers use legal records to shed light on people 'below the level elite', adopting a Marxist position that results in 'history from below' (Kane 2019, 43). Darnton (2004, n.p.) refers to such work as 'incident analysis', noting that they have a common theme: 'the ambition to tell stories about events in such convincing detail that they will modify the

general understanding of the past'. He suggests that studies on controversies dominate, as historians can draw on the wealth of formal documents, such as legal records and media reportage. Therefore, there is a tendency to take an approach similar to that of a detective to construct a narrative.

These techniques are also used in historical work on pornography. For example, Gustafsson (2016) analyzes three historical Swedish court cases involving the distribution and exhibition of pornographic films. Through consulting Swedish trade papers, Gustafsson found mentions of cases relating to illegal screenings of pornographic films long before they legalized pornography in 1971. He then located documents specific to these cases in the Regional State Archives. These detailed how money was made from showing the films to proletarian audiences, highlighting a concern around the working class having access to pornography, a common debate in porn studies (Kendrick 1987; Schaefer 2007). Arnberg (2017, 6) also uses trade journals and prosecution documents to trace Swedish magazines from 1910 to 1950 that were considered obscene by regulators, identifying the prehistory of the Swedish pornographic magazine business before legalization. In an American context, there have been studies on the relationship between pornography and the First Amendment and significant historical obscenity trials. Strub's (2013) monograph on *Roth v United States* is one such example, offering a thorough analysis of the trial, placing it in context and considering its lasting legacy. Gertzman (1999) draws on historical documents to document the entrepreneurs involved in America's erotic book trade from 1920 to 1940, such as Samuel Roth. Gertzman constructs a narrative of a forgotten trade through his engagement with legal files, offering both a social and legal history.

Returning to the UK, Stoops (2018) draws heavily on the materials I talk about in this article to piece together the story of Britain's pornography trade between 1900 and 1945, a time that has been given little academic attention. Stoops uses records from the courts and government, alongside newspaper reports, uncovering a hidden transnational trade. Stoops errs away from microhistory, attending to a broader social history of the business. My approach focuses on specific legal cases, which tell untold histories of entrepreneurs, performers and regulators. However, as Stoops identifies, these records can be limited, offering scant details on the production processes of pornography, as well as its consumption. Archives containing such documents can also be frustratingly incomplete, with countries having differing commitments towards preserving their legal histories for future use. It is also common to find that certain documents specific to obscenity or pornography can be either closed or heavily redacted. Then there is the question of validity, as the files are usually from the perspective of prosecution, potentially providing a 'skewed picture' of events (Kane 2019, 44). To address this, I suggest an approach that incorporates methods from law with those commonly used in cultural studies.

A legal approach

To research Britain's illicit economy of hardcore pornography I opted to use ethnohistory, conducting primary interviews with those involved from the 1960s onwards alongside media reportage and collected ephemera.[2] The accidental discovery of the Watford Blue Movie Trial led to me engaging with legal methods, such as doctrinal research. According to Hutchinson (2013, 9),

this is 'a process used to identify, analyse and synthesise the content of the law'. It involves investigating past instances of case law and other applicable secondary sources to analyze and understand the legal context of what is being studied (Chynoweth 2008). This might include 'locating cases and statutes, the use of indexes and citators, and the use of computer information retrieval systems such as *Westlaw* and *LexisNexis*' (McConville and Chui 2007, 3). Such systems allow the researcher to easily search for cases linked to specific laws, although not all are made available on these services and may require the use of a dedicated legal reference library.[3] Doctrinal research is viewed as a traditional methodology used in the study of law, emerging out of the legal profession (Wheeler and Thomas 2000). More recently, the field has seen an increased move towards 'socio-legal research', or, as it is also known, 'law in context'. This approach draws heavily on sociological research methods to investigate legal issues, placing them in 'a context within which law exists, be that a sociological, historical, economic, geographical or other' (Wheeler and Thomas 2000, 271).

My approach can be seen as a combination of the two, using a doctrinal approach to locate legal instruments, such as statutes, court records and other relevant documents. I then triangulate them, where possible, alongside primary interviews and media reportage, placing the law in context. I have found that combining these approaches allows for a more holistic view, attempting to reveal and counter the inconsistencies of each source and avoid the 'skewed picture' that Kane (2019, 44) speaks of. These sources are then used to construct a narrative of the event. What follows is an example of this. First, I discuss the legal statute relevant to the Watford Blue Movie Trial – the OPA. I then place this law in context, focusing on how the regulation of the pornography business tightened in the early 1970s before exploring how the DPP made their case, which ultimately resulted in the trial.

Regulating pornography

According to McGlynn and Ward (2009, 329), the OPA was the 'primary statutory mechanism for regulating adult pornography' in Britain until the introduction of the CJAIA. However, as Smith (2005, 149) points out, prior to the introduction of the CJAIA, there were four other laws used to regulate pornography:

- the Customs Consolidation Act 1876 – covering the importation of indecent materials;
- the Post Office Act 1953 – prohibiting the distribution of pornography by post;
- the Protection of Children Act 1978 – prohibiting the production and possession of child pornography; and
- the Video Recordings Act 1984 – regulating the distribution of video recordings.[4]

As solicitor and Chair of the Campaign Against Censorship Edward Goodman explained, 'a mass of statutes and common law offences applicable to pornography exist'.[5] With this in mind, the following can also be added to the aforementioned:

- the Indecent Displays (Control) Act 1981 – preventing the public display of porno- graphic material;[6]
- the Public Order Act 1984 – preventing the display of insulting material;

- the Cinemas Act 1985 – consolidating the Cinematograph Acts 1909–1982 to regulate cinema clubs;[7] and
- the Criminal Justice and Public Order Act 1994 – outlawing indecent pseudo-photo- graphs of children.

Smith (2005, 149) acknowledges that the definitions of all of these laws are problematic and 'notoriously slippery'. Therefore, rather than providing a coherent legal framework for regulating pornography, they instead present a mess of overlapping laws that causes con- fusion and makes their application complex. For example, the Customs Consolidation Act 1876 prevents the importation of 'indecent materials', the Post Office Act 1953 prohibits the distribution of 'indecent or obscene' articles through the Royal Mail and the OPA focuses on obscenity. According to *R v Stanley* (1965), 'the words "indecent or obscene" convey one idea, namely, offending against the recognised standards of propriety, indecent being at the lower end of the scale and obscene at the upper end of the scale'. However, the vagueness in terms can be used by the defence to lessen the sentence, arguing that an article is indecent rather than obscene.[8] The Watford Blue Movie Trial illustrates how prosecutors could combine these laws to strengthen their case and pursue a conviction.

It is not my intention, nor is it the purpose of this article, to give a history of the OPA.[9] I instead want to focus on how it operates as a statute, identifying some of its limitations and shortcomings as a piece of legislation. According to the opening text of the OPA, its purpose is to 'provide for the protection of literature; and to strengthen the law concerning pornography'. It is targeted at those who distribute obscene material rather than those who produce or possess it.[10] For Robertson (1979, xvii), a barrister and critic of the OPA, it has 'suffered more criticism than any other contemporary piece of legislation'. Despite this, the 'test' for guilt, whether the offending article has the 'tendency to deprave or corrupt', has remained unchained since it emerged out of the infamous *R v Hicklin* (1868) case. This is problematic for two primary reasons. Firstly, the OPA originates from the Victorian period, where there were regular attempts to 'legislate morals' (Roberts 1985, 611). At the heart of this law was a concern about whether obscene material might 'stimulate criminal appetites, undermine working-class incentives to lead a life of self-discipline and moral regularity and, not least, provide opportunities to deflate the moral pretensions of the upper ranks in society' (1985, 613). Therefore, this outdated perception of obscenity is still applicable today, despite considerable changes in attitudes relating to sex and sexuality.

Secondly, the subjectivity of the term 'tendency to deprave or corrupt' is highly problematic. Woozley (1982, 218) sees the phrasing as unclear, and Robertson (1979, 1) argues that it is 'defined by reference to vague and elastic formulae'. The test of obscenity relies on the case made by the prosecution to convince the jury as to whether the offending articles meet this vague criterion and for the defence to persuade otherwise. This is set out in section 1 of the OPA:

> an article shall be deemed to be obscene if its effect or (where the article comprises two or more distinct items) the effect of any one of its items is, if taken as a whole, such as to tend to deprave and corrupt persons who are likely, having regard to all relevant circumstances, to read, see or hear the matter contained or embodied in it. (Obscene Publications Act 1959, section one)

Therefore, it becomes the jury's duty to determine whether the intended audience for the material is likely to be depraved or corrupted by it. But, as *R v Whyte* (1972) questioned, can pornographic articles sold in a bookshop deprave or corrupt their clientele when they might already be depraved and corrupted before purchasing the material? Then there is also the question of 'public good'. According to section 4 of the OPA, a person will not be convicted under sections 2 or 3 of the act if it can be justified that the article 'is in the interests of science, literature, art or learning, or of other objects of general concern'. The defence is permitted to draw on the 'opinion of experts' to demonstrate that the offending material has a public good.[11] This resulted in a number of high-profile pornography trials being reported by the media. For instance, *R v Lindsay* (1974) saw the acquittal of hardcore filmmaker John Lindsay, with experts for the defence arguing that his rollers could improve people's sex lives. Such cases also drew further public attention to the material it was attempting to prohibit. In response, obscenity law was tightened, with *DPP v Jordan* (1976) 'limiting the public good defence to material with intrinsic merit as literature or learning' instead of the 'therapeutic effect' argument (Robertson 1979, 4). Whether an article can deprave or corrupt its likely audience is a highly difficult assessment to make and is heavily based on one's own moral compass.

Furthermore, the subjectivity of the term has also affected how the law has been policed. For example, police forces across Britain had different perceptions on what would constitute an obscene publication, with Manchester confiscating relatively soft material, while police in Portsmouth 'tolerated the sale of anything short of child porn, bestiality or torture' (Robertson 1979, 5). The most extreme level of toleration could be found in London's West End, where the Obscene Publications Squad (OPS) used the law to their advantage. They operated an informal licensing system for pornographers, permitting the sale of hardcore pornography in Soho and profiting from it (Carter 2018). Under section 3 of the OPA, police are given the power of seizure, but did not need to provide receipts for stock that was confiscated. Therefore, an inventory seized by the OPS during raids on unlicensed pornographers could be sold on to those who paid for a licence (Tomkinson 1982).

Its ineffectiveness as a legal mechanism for controlling the pornography trade led to the introduction of other laws, as outlined at the beginning of this section, to regulate pornography. This is evident in the reduction of obscenity cases over the past 20 years and the challenges of getting a successful conviction.[12] A Freedom of Information request to the Ministry of Justice reveals a considerable drop in charges under the OPA, with 429 convictions in 1984 compared to just 10 in 2014.[13] In 2019, a number of sexual acts identified as 'obscene' in Crown Prosecution Service guidance were removed (Petley 2019). The Crown Prosecution Service now asks prosecutors to contemplate a list containing 14 other laws before considering the OPA.[14] This seems to indicate that the faults of the OPA have finally been recognized. Yet looking at how the law has been exercised historically has two main benefits. Firstly, it shows how sex and sexuality have been regulated at different points in time. Secondly, obscenity cases can provide a window into the operations of the pornography trade, particularly during times when it has been subject to strict control. Having explored the workings of the OPA, I now want to move on to look at one specific

obscenity case from 1974, which relates to the production and distribution of rollers. As I have shown in this section, the limitation of the OPA to secure prosecutions meant that prosecutors would often draw on other laws to strengthen the chances of a guilty verdict. As the Watford Blue Movie Trial shows, performers could be found guilty of appearing in rollers alongside those who shot and sold them.

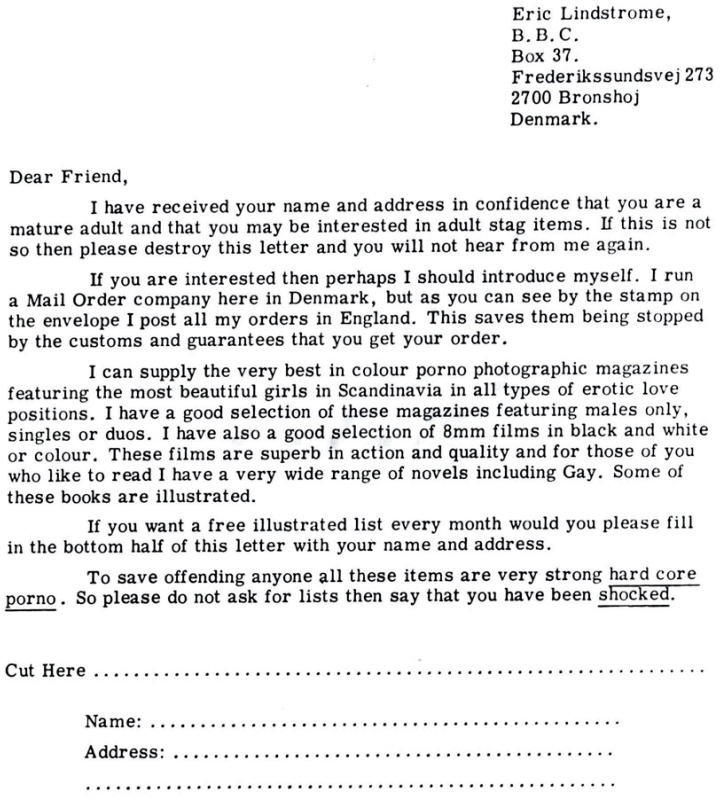
A transnational trade

On Sunday 8 November 1970, the top right of the front page of *The People* featured an article stating '"Blue Films" Boom Exposed', alongside the text 'GUILTY MEN NAMED'. Inside was a two-page spread, documenting their investigation into Original Climax Films, a British company that started trading in 1966, but moved to Copenhagen, Denmark, when they legalized pornography in 1969 (Kutchinsky and Snare 1999). In the late 1960s, Britain's trade in hardcore pornographic films was concentrated in Soho, London, the epicentre of Britain's sexual economy (Mort 2010), but could also be found in the backrooms of bookshops across Britain. These rollers were mostly made in Britain by labels such as Climax, Private Films, Dolly Films, Svensk Films, Delilah DeLuxe, Eros Films, Action Films, Venus Films and Malmö Films, with Climax dominating the market. The films were usually shot on 16-mm cameras, but printed on 8-mm film, selling at around £15 for a black and white film or £25 for colour, the latter being rarer and more sought after.

By the early 1970s, the production of rollers in Britain reduced, as it became cheaper for distributors to import films from Denmark. In a police interview on 26 November 1975, roller producer Ivor Cook remarks on how 'the bottom went out' of his business because 'supplies were being brought in from the continent'.[15] The production quality in Denmark was higher, with the films being processed and printed in laboratories rather than through amateur means, such as 'garage labs'[16] or semi-professional duplication machines.[17] Climax's move from London to Copenhagen enabled them to enhance their production process, using official film laboratories and industry-standard equipment, rather than having to make do with informal means. Distributors risked the threat of customs seizure due to lower prices of Danish-produced films and the potential for higher profits. The transnational trade in hardcore pornography began to grow, with more content now available from Europe and an increase in mail-order operations selling pornography. As profits increased, the OPS struggled to maintain control as they also sought to capitalize on this expansion.

A further tabloid report on the pornography trade by the *Sunday People* on 27 February 1972 finally revealed the activities of Evan 'Big Jeff' Philips, the man behind Climax, hyperbolically identifying him as 'THE FIRST BLUE FILM MILLIONAIRE'. They also reported on the corrupt practices of the OPS, drawing on the findings of Matthew Oliver, a private detective who was part of Labour politician Lord Longford's investigation into the pornography trade. Following these revelations, Robert Mark, then Commissioner of the Metropolitan Police investigation, introduced an anti-corruption unit to weed out 'bent coppers' (Cox, Shirley and Short 1977). Although the findings of the Longford Report (1972) did not lead to a reform of obscenity law, it did succeed in bringing further media attention to Britain's pornography trade and its

relationship with police corruption. Pornography now became a subject of national interest and pornographers who were once able to operate without the threat of arrest or prosecution because of their affiliation with the OPS now found themselves vulnerable. John Darby's arrest, as described in the opening of this article, was the initial event that ultimately led to the Watford Blue Movie Trial. In the 1960s, the OPS aimed to keep the pornography trade confined to Soho, making it easier to control and police. By the 1970s, mail-order businesses were increasing partly because of the rise in Scandinavian pornography being smuggled into Britain (Hebditch and Anning 1988). Therefore, the OPS were reluctant to permit mail order unless it was placed under tight constraints, fearing members of the public complaining to national police forces about receiving unsolicited mailshots. Such complaints could lead to their superiors questioning the effectiveness of the OPS, threatening their corrupt, but profitable, informal licensing system.



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Dear Friend,

I have received your name and address in confidence that you are a mature adult and that you may be interested in adult stag items. If this is not so then please destroy this letter and you will not hear from me again.

If you are interested then perhaps I should introduce myself. I run a Mail Order company here in Denmark, but as you can see by the stamp on the envelope I post all my orders in England. This saves them being stopped by the customs and guarantees that you get your order.

I can supply the very best in colour porno photographic magazines featuring the most beautiful girls in Scandinavia in all types of erotic love positions. I have a good selection of these magazines featuring males only, singles or duos. I have also a good selection of 8mm films in black and white or colour. These films are superb in action and quality and for those of you who like to read I have a very wide range of novels including Gay. Some of these books are illustrated.

If you want a free illustrated list every month would you please fill in the bottom half of this letter with your name and address.

To save offending anyone all these items are very strong hard core porno. So please do not ask for lists then say that you have been shocked.

Cut Here .....

Name: .....

Address: .....

.....

Figure Two: Mailshot from one of Darby's mail-order businesses. Author's personal collection.

Darby, who claims to have been involved in the pornography trade from 1969, was one of many mail-order operators seeking to benefit from legalization in Denmark. In 1970, he was charged with 'fraudulently evading the prohibition of the importation of indecent or obscene articles from Denmark'. Undeterred, Darby immediately resumed his enterprise after successfully appealing his conviction and avoiding a 12-month prison sentence due to his relationship with an OPS officer. He later purchased a mailing list containing 5000 potential customers from this officer and was permitted to run several mail-order operations, providing that he paid a £100 monthly licence fee.

Darby sourced product from the Danish firms Color Climax, Flesh Films and Lasse Braun, but also from British producers. Darby's mail-order catalogues show that he distributed rollers from International Films, Taboo and Phoenix and Taboo of Sweden, working alongside filmmaker John Lindsay (see figure two for an example of Darby's mailshots). Darby was again arrested in late 1971 after being stopped by uniformed police with no affiliation to the OPS, who discovered that he had hardcore pornography in his car. Now paying £200 to the OPS per month, Darby was not charged. The arrest described in the introduction to this article occurred one year later and was carried out by officers who were not aware of Darby's pre-arrangement with the OPS. He was charged with two counts of publication for gain, contrary to section 2 of the OPA, and two counts of sending an indecent or obscene article, namely a brochure advertising obscene material, contrary to section 11 (1) of the Post Office Act 1953. A rough estimate of Darby's seized stock, which is based on the prices found in the mail-order catalogue, suggests that it had a possible retail value between £250,000 and £400,000 (£3,373,395 and £5,397,432 today) – high- lighting how lucrative the trade could be, despite the risk of arrest.

The police investigation into Darby revealed that he was a major mail-order distributor of hardcore pornography in Britain with links to many roller labels. This was identified through his possession of 16-mm master negatives and having 1200 empty roller boxes for a company named Anglo Continental. Furthermore, the police discovered an invoice for 5000 8-mm film spools. This document revealed that half of this order had been collected from the supplier by a person named Anthony Collingbourne from Watford. With Darby charged, but managing to evade arrest and going into hiding, the police placed their attention on Collingbourne.

House of Mirrors

Figure Three: Anthony Collingbourne in Timber (1970-72). Courtesy of the Erotic Film Society.

Collingbourne had already been investigated by the police shortly after Darby's arrest in 1972. Following a search of Collingbourne's record shop and home, 779 magazines, one typescript and two rollers were found. Officers noticed that these items were also being sold by Darby's mail-order businesses. Collingbourne's previous address was then searched, where a diary containing a list of film titles and a sketched diagram of a film processing machine was discovered. When interviewed, Collingbourne admitted little, telling officers that all of the material was for his personal use, aside from the 779 magazines he stored for a friend. The police decided not to charge Collingbourne at this point, but continued their investigation. His face was eventually recognized in seized rollers. Officers also identified vehicles and locations used in the films. In a later police interview from 1975, Collingbourne recounted his career of working in pornography.[18] In 1962, Collingbourne was released from prison. Shortly after, he met a man named Ken Taylor who operated a studio in Edgware, London. 'Skinny' Taylor, as he was known, made hardcore films, and Collingbourne ended up being a paid performer in some of them. In the late 1960s, Collingbourne ran a car dealership in Watford until it mysteriously burnt down.

Following an unsuccessful insurance claim, an acquaintance suggested that he start a photography studio, noticing that none existed in Watford, but many could be found in nearby London. Collingbourne opened Studio Hire in 1969. In addition to taking 'straight' photographs for clients, he also let the studio out for 'club nights', where people could come and photograph a glamour model; he would develop and print the films, as well as selling photography accessories. Being aware of the studio, Taylor contacted Collingbourne to ask whether he could rent the studio to make rollers. Collingbourne agreed, providing that Taylor showed him and an associate how to make them. Collingbourne purchased equipment from Taylor, negotiating a deal where Taylor would buy any films Collingbourne made for a set price. Taylor also sold him an American processing machine so that the films could easily be developed. This relationship provides an insight into how the economy of hard- core film production in Britain operated, with filmmakers working together to share resources and increase profits.

Collingbourne also recollects Taylor advising him to pay the OPS for a licence; as Collingbourne was not operating in the West End, he believed he did not need one. On beginning to sell rollers to Soho bookshops, Collingbourne realized the need for a licence, following the advice of a bookshop worker. Unlike other licences discussed in this article, Collingbourne's differs. His was a 'pay as you go' licence, with payments ranging between £25 and £1000 depending on the information or protection that was required at any given time. Collingbourne's interview recalls a search of his house in late 1972 when there was no arrest or charge, despite police dis- covering 5500 porn magazines in one of the bedrooms. Collingbourne suggests that these were 'ignored' by the two officers, and they are not evidenced in any of the police reports from the search included in the case files. However, he soon discovered that the protection afforded by the licence was limited.

Collingbourne admits to releasing rollers on five labels: Academy, Anglo Continental, Apollo, Double X and Look (see figure four). He likely had some involvement in Fantasy and Viking Films, as rollers released by these labels often use the same performers and filming locations. It was common for roller producers to have a range of labels. It appears that this was a

technique used to confuse the police, with multiple labels implying different producers. I suggest that this was also a way for producers to meet the demand for new content, introducing new labels to give the impression that fresh material was avail- able. Some films appear on multiple labels, occasionally under alternate titles, maximizing the return on one film. It also shows how customers could be exploited in an unregulated market. As Gorfinkel (2019, 8) states, the adult business is often a 'fickle profit-driven industry', and unscrupulous tactics are common in the pursuit of profit.

Figure Four: Selected rollers from Collingbourne's labels. Author's personal collection (faces obscured to protect the identities of performers).

Between 1970 and 1972, Collingbourne was involved in the production of at least 64 rollers.[19] In addition to distributing these via mail order through Darby, Collingbourne also sold to bookshops across the UK through an associate named Kenneth Wyatt. In 1973, a bookshop in Llanelli, Wales, was searched by local police. When interviewed by police, the bookshop's owner stated that he paid Wyatt between £150–200 per month for stock, including Anglo Continental rollers. This shows how the bookshop trade was expanding beyond London's West End, with many towns and cities now having bookshops offering 'under the counter' material for sale. As mentioned

earlier, with regional police forces having different interpretations of obscenity law and approaches to how it was policed, some forces would openly permit the sale of hardcore pornography.

Figure Five: House of Mirrors (Anthony Collingbourne, 1972) roller. Author's personal collection (faces obscured to protect the identities of performers).

The police had now revealed the extent of Collingbourne's operation, linking him to the production and distribution of 42 rollers that the police considered obscene. They identified the performers in the majority of the films and conducted interviews with them. Through these, others implicated in the enterprise were named and tracked down. Many of the performers were in relationships with one another and lived in a house Collingbourne owned, which also served as a studio. A total of 11 people were arrested, and the court issued warrants for another four performers. The roller to receive the most attention in the police files and the eventual tabloid reportage of the case is *House of Mirrors*. The film was distributed in a purple box with the brand at the top and a colour photograph on the front cover, containing the title (see figure five). Made in 1972, it features four people engaged in group sex; a common trait of British hardcore pornography from the 1960s and 1970s.

On viewing the film, it is noticeable that the standard of production is not particularly high, offering little narrative or performance. It appears that the sole purpose of the film was to document the sexual act and commercially benefit from it. The film was shot on colour 16-mm film and printed on 8-mm film for distribution and was made available in both black and white and colour versions, the former being sold at a lower price point, the latter more expensive. The film's

notoriety is in part due to its setting; the suburban home of George Yallop, who also is a performer in the film. Yallop, a widowed porn collector from Watford and regular frequenter of Collingbourne's photography studio, had a bedroom with a mirrored ceiling and mirrors placed around the room, giving the roller its title and distinctive setting (see figure six). Another film that was central to the prosecution's case is *Traveller's Rest*, also filmed in Yallop's garden and using much of the same cast as *House of Mirrors*. Again, the film features group sex and, as with *House of Mirrors*, includes a sequence of anal sex. The DPP files name Collingbourne as the director of both of these films.

Figure Six: Screenshots from House of Mirrors (Anthony Collingbourne, 1972). Author's personal collection.

The trial

Having discussed the police investigation, I now focus on the subsequent trial to show how the OPA was used in combination with other laws to prosecute the majority of people involved in the production and distribution of Anglo Continental films. This not only reveals the convolutions of obscenity law, as discussed earlier, but I argue that this specific case was used as an attempt to deter pornography production in Britain. It began with a committal hearing that took place on 2 November 1973. The purpose of this was to establish whether there was a case to answer. By 5 December 1973, the 10 defendants were charged with 'conspiring together and with others to

publish obscene films'. The case files show that the DPP had consulted with experienced barristers on whether a conspiracy charge would be appropriate in this case, conspiracy being a common law offence that could be used in conjunction with the OPA. According to Robertson (1979, 231–232), common law charges such as conspiracy 'carry a number of tactical advantages unavailable to the prosecution in proceedings brought under the OPA' and that a conspiracy is 'merely an agreement', possibly even 'a nod or a wink'. Collectively, they faced a total of 30 offences. These included publishing an obscene article and having obscene articles for publication for gain (contrary to the OPA), sending a postal packet enclosing indecent or obscene articles (contrary to the Post Office Act 1952) and buggery (contrary to the Sexual Offences Act 1956). A total of 15 films are named in these counts. Although named in count one along with Collingbourne, in a hearing that took place on 26 November, Darby surprisingly escaped the conspiracy charge. Considering Darby's connections, one could assume that police corruption was involved. After this, he went into hiding, reappearing in the later *R v Lindsay* (1974) obscenity trial. It seems that the strict bail conditions were out of concern for others following Darby's lead.

The trial began on 22 April 1974 and ended on 6 June 1974. It lasted for six weeks and, at that time, was referred to as the 'one of the longest pornography trials in Britain' by *The Guardian* (6 June 1974). The defence selected an all-male jury, believing it to be more representative of the intended audience. This turned out to be a narrow-minded decision that did little in their favour. All of the defendants pleaded not guilty. The trial is not explicitly detailed in the case files, only containing a breakdown of each day's activity, but the summing up from the judge, Marcus Anwyl-Davies, gives an overview of the case, although littered with moralistic assumptions. Further summaries of the trial can be found in the daily reports offered by the tabloid press. These are equally moralistic, focusing on the more sensational and salacious aspects of the case. It is worth mentioning that the trial made all of the major national papers, including images of the defendants. Articles made regular mention of Yallop's mirrored bedroom where *House of Mirrors* was filmed, focusing heavily on the suburban location of films and pornography moving out of the confines of the city to the family space.

The prosecution took a moral position, arguing that the films produced by the defendants 'debase and defile [an] essential part of human life which ordinary decent standards demand shall remain private' and that the 'films defile and debase those who produce them, those who perform in them and similarly, those who view are also defiled and debased'. Davies summarizes the prosecution's overarching argument as 'filth for parties seeking for financial gain from the furtive seedy market'.[20] Two of the prosecution's witnesses were initially involved in the production of the films and had swayed their position, likely for a favourable deal. One was a female performer in Collingbourne's films, who reveals further details of his enterprise and how he sourced female performers from a model agency based in Streatham, south-west London. These models would initially be employed to be photographed by amateur photographers at Collingbourne's studio and then asked to perform in rollers, being paid anywhere between £25 and £50 per film; men would be paid around £10. Another witness was Yallop, who loaned the use of his house to Collingbourne for filming. A total of 10 films are named in the 30 offences; these were screened to the jury to support

the prosecution's case. The rollers that received the most attention in the case were those which stood the best chance of being considered obscene by the jury. Both *House of Mirrors* and *Traveller's Rest* were used as they contained instances of anal sex. At this time, heterosexual buggery was an offence in Britain under the Sexual Offences Act 1967, carrying a life sentence. It was not until 1994 that:

> the House of Lords accepted an amendment to the Criminal Justice and Public Order Bill which resulted in buggery of a female being partially decriminalised in England and Wales in largely the same way as the law then applied to buggery between males. (Johnson 2019, 336)

One male performer was charged with two acts of buggery, while the three makers of the two films were charged with aiding and abetting; the prosecution could not trace the female performer. This shows that those who appeared in rollers could also be prosecuted.

The approach from the defence was contradictory and chaotic, partly due to circumstances beyond their control. Firstly, Collingbourne was taken ill at the beginning of the trial and, like Darby, fled the country. He sought exile in the Netherlands, where he could not be extradited as his charges did not apply due to a loophole in their treaty with the UK. Secondly, a solicitor's clerk who belonged to a firm representing two of the defendants climbed the court's roof and protested against the protracted nature of the trial, threatening to set off a cylinder of laughing gas into the ventilation system. Finally, four of the defendants got married to each other. These incidents did nothing more than draw further media attention and made the defence's job more challenging. From the material I have collected, it appears that a public good defence was not mounted. However, there is reference in the DPP files to other trials where it was used, suggesting that the prosecution had prepared for such a tactic. Instead, they focused their attention on limitations of the terms 'deprave and corrupt' and the following key arguments:

1. Those who purchased the films were unlikely to be affected by them.
2. If the activities shown in the films are not depraved and corrupt, but deemed acceptable, how can they deprave and corrupt viewers?
3. While such films may offend some of the population, it does not necessarily mean that they deprave or corrupt.
4. The question of censorship and whether the prohibition of pornography serves a purpose in modern society where attitudes have changed.

The statements from the defendants show that they all sought to minimize their own involvement in order to lessen their guilt. For example, one male performer said that he took no payment from the films, only performing in them for the accommodation that Collingbourne provided. One of the assumed filmmakers stated that he also took no payment, acting as a technical advisor in exchange for watching them being made. Both of these accounts suggest that the defendants were attempting to show that they did not financially gain from the productions. However, the female performers gave more detailed explanations for their involvement. One recounted how she became involved in

rollers through meeting someone at the Playland amusement arcade in Piccadilly Circus, London, having run away from her family in the north of England. She recalled how her relationship with this person led to her appearing in many rollers, but is vague about who produced them. Another told of how they per- formed in rollers to help pay for an abortion. She also described how Collingbourne persuaded her to appear in a bestiality themed film titled *Dog Lovers* by offering more money, even though she did not want to be involved.[21] Collectively, all of the defendants and the witnesses for the prosecution who were part of the enterprise did not consider the films to be obscene and believed that hardcore pornography should be legalized.

Judge Anwyl-Davies' summing up of the case for the jury included a definition of the OPA, an overview of the offences, a reflection on the evidence used in the trial and, finally, a summary of the arguments put forward by the prosecution and the defence. One day later, on 5 June, the jury reached their decision. Out of the 10 defendants, seven men and two women were found guilty on a number of charges. A female performer was acquitted of all charges. Although not present, Collingbourne was given a five-year prison sentence and a £2223 fine, which he eventually served after being arrested when attempting to re- enter Britain. Wyatt was found guilty on four accounts and sentenced to two years in prison. The male performer charged with buggery was found guilty and, in line with the other defendants, received a fine and a suspended prison sentence. In his sentencing, Anwyl-Davies described Collingbourne as a 'lonesome lecher', a term repeated in tabloid newspapers, and told the female who performed in *Dog Lovers* that she was 'a disgrace to womanhood'. He stated that the defendants participated in the 'regular production of obscene films of the most horrid and vile nature, hideously crude totally devoid of artistry and deliberately designed for the furtive, filthy and highly lucrative market'. He saw the verdicts as 'a clarion call for reticence and privacy in the matters of personal sexual behaviour' and stated that they 'condemn the claim that a commercial enterprise of this large nature is acceptable to this Society and … the shrill petulant protest of licentious liber- tines has been resoundingly rejected'.[22]

Two appeals were launched. The first was by Collingbourne and Wyatt. This appeal argued that Anwyl-Davies had erred in law on four counts, focusing on whether he had mis- directed the jury to consider whether a significant proportion of those who were likely to come into contact with the films would be depraved and corrupted. The second appeal was on behalf of two performers, one of whom was found guilty of buggery. Again, it presented four counts, two per appellant, arguing that the performers were not aware that the films were being distributed as part of a commercial enterprise. They also argued that the two- year limit on prosecutions, found in section 2(3) of the OPA, was applicable, as the offending film was made in 1971. Therefore, the offence did not continue beyond this date, making it inadmissible by the time of the arrest in 1973. The court rejected both appeals, and the original verdicts were upheld. The appeal relating to section 2(3) was rejected due to common law charges for conspiracy and aiding and abetting. This made the offence a continuing one that would go beyond the two-year limit stated in the OPA.

Conclusion

The Watford Blue Movie Trial was a long, complex and, at times, chaotic obscenity trial that resulted in the convictions of nine people. At the appeal hearings, Prosecutor Richard Du Cann described it as the 'first of its kind'. Beyond this, it has significance for two reasons. Firstly, it provides a window into how a largely undocumented, clandestine trade operated. The DPP files reveal the practices of producers and experiences of performers, the latter being a voice that is absent in histories of the British pornography business (Bowring et al. 2018). They also show how pornography was distributed, particularly within the context of pornography becoming an increasingly transnational trade due to countries such as Denmark and Sweden legalizing pornography (Larsson 2016). Although the files pertain to only one case of hardcore pornography production and distribution in Britain, they demonstrate the scale of the enterprise, indicating how lucrative it could be despite the threat of arrest. The content of the files suggests that similar trials might be equally beneficial in helping scholars further understand the complex historical foundations of the pornography trade.

Secondly, the trial shows how pornography was regulated at a time when it became a subject of national interest. The Watford case began when the trade was regularly featured in the national press and the limitations of the OPA for controlling the trade were being called into question. From looking at the case files, it appears that the prosecution was conscious of this context, combining the OPA with common law offences, such as conspiracy and aiding and abetting, to strengthen their chances of a conviction, introducing more substantial penalties and fines than those that are possible under the OPA. Also significant is performers being prosecuted for their involvement in the production of pornography. As the OPA makes clear, making pornography in Britain was not an offence, but introducing a conspiracy to contravene section 2 of the OPA by publishing material enabled all of those involved in the production and distribution to be prosecutable; the buggery convictions, and the aiding of abetting the act, are further evidence of this. Following this trial, the British production of rollers slowed and, for the remainder of the 1970s, the trade was dominated by one filmmaker: John Lindsay (Kerekes 2000). It would appear that the profile of the trial, revelations about corruption within the OPS and the increase of imports from the continent contributed to this decline. I would argue that such cases can show how the law has been entrepreneurially used to control pornography, with the prosecution benefiting from the same inconsistencies in the OPA that enabled producers and distributors to do business.

In this article, I have suggested that the use of legal research methods can be of value when documenting hidden trade and further understanding the legal frameworks for pornography. However, such an approach is not without its limitations. While files such as the Watford case are a rich resource, their reliability is questionable. For instance, it is evident that many of the statements lack detail, are evasive, are intentionally vague and are economical with the truth. Also, they offer the perspective of the prosecution rather than the defence, presenting a one-sided view. Furthermore, the files are often incomplete and missing significant facts, notably lacking detail in the area of production processes, such as the processing and duplication of film. Therefore, it is necessary to triangulate using other sources wherever possible. I have attempted to locate people

mentioned in the files and conduct interviews with them. However, there is an ethical dimension to this research. Should people in cases such as the Watford Blue Movie Trial be contacted or even named in the research? Readers will note that I have chosen not to name many of the defendants even though they are identifiable in public records and newspapers. This is the position I have taken to protect those who are still alive. Those who I have named have either died or are already known for their participation in the pornography trade. For instance, Collingbourne died in 2007. Despite these limitations, this approach can be beneficial when attempting to document pornography's legal history. As I have shown, pornography laws are messy and complex, allowing them to be used entrepreneurially by the producers and distributors of pornography, as well as those who police such enterprises. Therefore, investigating these cases can help to shed further light on a trade that has a long and difficult legal history.

Notes

1. Rollers is the term used by the trade to describe hardcore British 8-mm films on 200-ft reels that were sold in sex shops or via mail order.
2. I describe my approach to ethnohistory in greater detail in Carter (2018).
3. For those who are not barristers or students studying for the bar, access is often granted at the discretion of the librarian.
4. This was repealed in 2010.
5. Edward Goodman was interviewed on 22 May 2000 via email.
6. See Manchester (1982).
7. See Manchester (1980) for more details on the regulation of obscene films in post-war Britain.
8. R v Waterfield (1975).
9. For a critical overview of the OPA see Robertson (1979).
10. It has always been legal to produce hardcore pornographic material in the UK, but not to sell it, until the re-evaluation of the R18 certificate in 2000 (Petley 2011; Perkins 2012). Possession has also been permitted, providing that it is not for gain (added to the OPA in 1964), and that is does not contravene other laws, such as the CJAIA or the Protection of Children Act 1978.
11. According to the Index on Censorship's guide on obscene publications: 'there is a slightly different "public good" defence for performances, films and soundtracks. Here it applies if publication of the film or soundtrack is justified as being for the public good because it is in the interests of drama, opera, ballet or any other form of art, literature or learning.' See: https:// www.indexoncensorship.org/2020/01/free-speech-and-the-law-obscene-publications/.
12. For an overview of contemporary obscenity trials, see the website of obscenity lawyer Myles Jackman: http:// mylesjackman.com
13. From the data given, it is interesting to note that the use of the OPA significantly reduced from 2001 onwards, following the re-evaluation of the R18 certificate, and fell even further after the introduction of the CJAIA.
14. See: https://www.cps.gov.uk/legal-guidance/obscene-publications
15. The National Archives, UK, Director of Public Prosecutions, DPP 2/5754.
16. According to Brian Pritchard, a retired film laboratory technician who I interviewed on 13 December 2019, a garage laboratory would be an amateur film processing operation, often using commercially available equipment such as Todd Tanks.
17. Such as the American-made Uhler 8-mm Cine Printer.
18. The National Archives, UK, Director of Public Prosecutions, DPP 2/5789.
19. This estimation is based on information provided in the files, but also through the 498 rollers I have uncovered during my research.
20. The National Archives, UK, Director of Public Prosecutions, DPP 2/5301-2.
21. The commercial production of bestiality pornography was common in Scandinavia, when competing labels such as Color Climax diversified their production to include performers having sex with animals. Bestiality is rarely shown

in rollers, but appears to slightly increase in the early 1970s as British labels such as Anglo, International Films and Universal competed with material that was commercially available in Europe.

22. The National Archives, UK, Director of Public Prosecutions, DPP 2/5301-2.

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