The Watford Blue Movie Trial:
Regulating Rollers in 1970s Britain

Oliver Carter, Birmingham Centre for Media and Cultural Research, Birmingham City University.

oliver.carter@bcu.ac.uk

www.olivercarter.co.uk

Biography

Dr. Oliver Carter is a Reader in Creative Economies at the Birmingham Centre for Media and Cultural Research, Birmingham City University. His research focuses on alternative economies of cultural production; informal forms of industry that are often removed from a formal cultural industries discourse. He is the author of the monograph *Making European Cult Cinema: Fan Enterprise in an Alternative Economy,* published by Amsterdam University Press in 2018, and is currently writing his second monograph, which explores the cultural and economic development of the British adult film business. This research has informed the award-winning documentary series *Sexposed* and the feature *Hardcore Guaranteed*, both of which are distributed by Amazon Video. In 2018 he was awarded a British Academy Small Grant to explore the transnational trade in hardcore pornography between Britain, Scandinavia and the Netherlands, holding public research events in Copenhagen and Amsterdam that brought together those with knowledge and experience of the trade.

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Abstract

This article uses the example of a forgotten obscenity case from 1974 to provide further understanding of the processes involved in the production and distribution of British hardcore pornographic 8mm 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 to the transnational pornography trade and corruption in the Metropolitan police, used the Obscene Publications Act (1959) in conjunction with other laws to enhance the possibilities of a conviction. It draws on the findings from a methodology that combines approaches from law with other methods, using court records alongside media reportage. I suggest that such an approach can help to further understand the legal frameworks for the pornography business, as well as showing how the trade has been subject to regulation and control.

Key words: Law, obscenity, British pornography, political economy, regulation.

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Introduction

<INSERT FIGURE ONE HERE>
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. At the local police station, it was discovered that the boot of Darby's car was holding 608 pornographic magazines, 35 8mm 'rollers'[1] and the 16mm negatives for 14 films. When searching Darby, they found he had a number of keys on his person. Noting that the car was parked in close proximity to a number of nearby garages, one of the officers went to see if the keys might fit any of the locks. The hunch proved right. Later, the officers returned to the scene of the arrest and found a wealth of pornographic material, identifying

the base for Darby's mail order business (see figure one). In total, the following pornographic materials were seized by the police:

- 4391 magazines (73 titles)
- 354 novels (21 titles)
- 44 typescripts (5 titles)
- 28 records (1 title)
- 16 packets of photographs
- 601 packets of playing cards
- 379 titled 8mm rollers (51 titles)
- 346 untitled 8mm rollers (subsequently not deemed to be obscene)
- 17,544 empty film cartons for 37 titles
- 8 unprocessed film titles
- A number of 16mm films, including master negatives

Alongside these materials 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 was involved in producing many of the titles that were found in Darby's garage. Further investigation into revealed the extent of Collingbourne's operation, and brought to public attention their activities, resulting in what would become referred to as the Watford Blue Movie Trial by the popular press.

All of this above 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. Though many records for offences committed under the Obscene Publications Act (1959) (OPA) have not been kept, there are many cases available, which provide an insight into the regulation of the pornography business. Such materials have been used in work by Jaime Stoops (2018) to provide a history of Britain's pornography trade prior to the post-war period. However, given the Britain's status as a large-scale producer of hardcore pornographic films from the mid-1960s onwards (Hebdtich and Anning 1988; Carter 2018) there remains a lack of formal documents which help to document this business (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 the ways in which 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 that have been 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 an insight into how the law can be used to regulate pornography, but also how it can uncover forgotten histories of cultural and economic production. I conclude by reflecting on some of the limitations of this approach might have for studying the history of pornography, as well as considering how it can help to further understand the policy frameworks in which pornographers operate.

The Legal Context for Pornography

Since 2010, the legal context for pornography has received greater attention from scholars. This can perhaps be explained by the emergence of recent laws that have sought to control access to, and the possession of, pornography. In the United Kingdom, the introduction of the Criminal Justice and Immigration Act (2008), or as I refer to it hereon in, the 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' of pornography online, there remains a lack of in-depth analysis of specific OPA cases that are explicitly related to the pornography business (Smith and Attwood 2010, 173).

In a British context, much of the academic work on obscenity trials has a tendency to focus on the more high profile 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, typescripts, 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 *R v Shaw* (1961), using a similar approach to the one I describe here. My own interest has been in how such trials, and their relating legal documents, can give an understanding of how the business of pornography has functioned at different points in time, revealing details about a trade that has clandestine roots and therefore been subject to strict regulation and control. Additionally, they also show how pornography has been regulated through the enactment of laws that have been used to prosecute those who have sought to benefit from distributing pornography.

Such a method is commonplace in study of history, where legal documents have been used to construct microhistories of past events. As Magnússon and Szijártó (2013, 5) suggest, by 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 oft cited example of this is Ginzburg's (1992) study of a peasant Italian cheesemaker named Menocchio, which draws on historic 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 are instances show how legal records can be used to shed light on people 'below the level elite', adopting a Marxist position that results in 'history from below' (Kane 2019, 43). Darnton (2004, 62) refers to such work as 'incident analysis', and 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 are able to draw on the wealth of formal documents, such as legal records and media reportage. Therefore, there is a tendency to take an approach that is similar to that of a detective to piece together the narrative.

These techniques can be found in historical work on pornography. For example, Gustafsson (2016) analyses 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, giving details on an informal trade in pornographic films and how

money was made from showing them to proletarian audiences, highlighting a concern around the working class having access to pornography, a debate common in porn studies (Kendrick 1987; Schaefer 2007). In another study on the history of Swedish pornography, Arnberg (2017, 6) also uses trade journals and prosecution documents to trace Swedish magazines from 1910-1950 that were considered obscene by regulators, identifying the prehistory of the Swedish pornographic magazine business prior to legalisation. In an American context, there have been studies on the relationship between pornography and First Amendment in the United States of America and significant historical obscenity trials. Strub's (2013) monograph on *Roth vs. The United States* is one such example of this, offering a thorough analysis of the trial, placing it in context, as well as considering its lasting legacy. Gertzman (1999) too draws on historical documents, giving attention to the entrepreneurs who were involved in America's erotic book trade from 1920 to 1940, such as Samuel Roth. Through engagement with legal documents, Gertzman is able to construct a narrative of a forgotten trade, offering both a social and legal history.

Returning back to the United Kingdom, Stoops' (2018) draws heavily on the materials that 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, as well as using newspaper reports, uncovering a hidden trade that operated on a transnational scale. Stoops errs away from microhistory, attending to a broader social history of the trade, rather than closely focusing on the people who participated within the trade. My own approach has been to focus on specific cases, which can help to assemble untold histories of entrepreneurs, performers and regulators. However, as Stoops identifies, such records can be limiting, 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, and 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 which incorporates methods from law with those commonly used in cultural studies.

A Legal Approach

My research has taken an ethnohistorical approach, relying on primary interviews with those involved in pornography trade from the 1960s onwards alongside media reportage and collected ephemera.[2] It was not until I discovered the Watford Blue Movie Trial that I engaged with legal research methods, such as doctrinal research. According to Hutchinson, this is 'a process used to identify, analyse and synthesize the content of the law' (Hutchinson 2013, 9). It involves investigating past instances of case law, as well as other applicable secondary sources, to conduct an analysis and to 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 for the researcher to easily search for cases linked to specific laws, though not all are made available on these services and may therefore require the use of a dedicated legal reference library.[3] Doctrinal research is viewed 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, or, as Wheeler and Thomas (2000, 271) suggest, 'interface with a context within which law exists, be that a sociological, historical, economic, geographical or other context'.

My own approach can be seen as a combination of two, using a doctrinal approach to locate the instruments of law, such as statutes, court records and other relevant legal documents. I then triangulate them, where possible, alongside primary interviews conducted with people who are named in such documents, as well as media reportage, placing the law in context. I argue 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 that is placed within the context it took place. What follows is an example of this. I firstly discuss the legal statute relevant to the Watford Blue Movie Trial, the Obscene Publications Act, to show the regulations relevant to the pornographers mentioned in the trial. I then place this law in context, focusing on how the period of the early 1970s moved towards increased regulation of the pornography business, before moving on to explore the case constructed by the DPP, which ultimately resulted in the trial.

Regulating Pornography

According to Maglynn and Ward (2009, 329), the OPA was the 'primary statutory mechanism for regulating adult pornography' in the United Kingdom until the introduction of the CJAIA. However, as Smith (2005, 149) points out, prior to the introduction of the CJAIA, there were four additional 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;
- The Video Recordings Act (1984) – regulates the distribution of video recordings.[4]

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

- The Indecent Displays (Control) Act (1981) - prevent the public display of pornographic material;[6]
- Public Order Act (1984) - prevents the display of insulting material;
- The Cinemas Act (1985) – consolidates the Cinematograph Acts 1909 to 1982, to regulate cinema clubs;[7]
- Criminal Justice and Public Order Act (1994) - outlawing indecent pseudo photographs 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, it instead presents a mess of overlapping laws that causes confusion and makes their application complex. For example, the Customs Consolidation Act 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* (1962), 'the words 'indecent or obscene' convey one idea, namely, offending against the recognized 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,

for example[8]. The Watford Blue Movie Trial demonstrates how these laws would be often combined by the prosecution 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 vagaries and shortcomings as a piece of legislation. According to the opening text of the law, its purpose is to 'provide for the protection of literature; and to strengthen the law concerning pornography'. The law was targeted at those who distribute obscene material, rather than those who produce or possess it.[10] For Robertson (1979, xviii), a barrister and critic of the OPA, it has not achieved this, and has therefore '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 comes from a particular period of history, namely the Victorian era, 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'(Roberts 1985, 613). Therefore, this perception of obscenity, which is from a particular moment in time, is still applicable today, despite there being considerable changes towards 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. As described in section one of the OPA, it also requires the article to 'be taken as whole', rather than focus on individual sections, and the judgement of it depraving and corrupting those 'who are *likely*, in all the circumstances, to read, see or hear the matter contained or embodied in it' (my emphasis). Therefore, the court has to make a judgement on whether the intended audience for the material are likely to be depraved or corrupted by it. This is highlighted in *R v Whyte* (1973), which raised a question about whether the pornographic articles sold in a bookshop would likely deprave or corrupt their clientele, when they might already be depraved and corrupted prior to purchasing the material. Then there is also the question of 'public good'. According to section four of the OPA, a person will not be convicted under sections two or

three 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 are permitted to draw on the 'opinion of experts' to demonstrate that the offending material has a public good, and is a common feature of many obscenity cases (Robertson 1979, 4).[11] This resulted in a number of high-profile pornography trials being reported by the media, such as *R v Lindsay* (1974), drawing further public attention to the material it was attempting to prohibit. As a response, obscenity law was tightened, with *DPP v Jordan* (1976) 'limiting the public good defence to material with intrinsic merit as literature or learning' (Robertson 1979, 4). Whether an article can deprave or corrupt its likely audience is therefore a highly difficult assessment to make and is based on one's own personal moral position.

Furthermore, the subjectivity of the term has also affected how the law has been policed. For example, Robertson (1979, 5) notes how police forces across the UK 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'. The most extreme level of toleration could be found in London's West End, where the Dirty Squad, used the law to their advantage by operating an informal licensing system to permit the sale of hardcore pornography in Soho and economically benefit from it (Carter 2018). Under section three of the OPA, police are given power of seizure, but they did not need to provide receipts for stock that was seized. For those who were operating without a licence and had their stock seized by The Dirty Squad, it would often be sold on for profit to those who were paying a licence (Tomkinson 1982).

Its ineffectiveness as a legal mechanism for controlling the pornography has led to the introduction of further laws, as outlined at the beginning of this section, to regulate pornography. This is evident in the reduction of obscenity cases over the past twenty 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 that were stated as 'obscene' in Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) guidance were removed (Petley 2019). The CPS guidance now suggests that prosecutors contemplate a list containing 14 other laws before considering using the OPA.[14] This seems to indicate that the shortcomings of the OPA have finally been acknowledged, having little relevance in the current zeitgeist. Yet looking at how the law has been exercised historically has two main benefits. Firstly, it shows how sex and sexuality has been regulated at different points in time, and, 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 manufacture 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. The Watford Blue Movie Trial not only convicted those who were involved in the production of hardcore pornography, but also those who performed in such films.

A Transnational Trade

On Sunday, 8 November, 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 company, which started trading in 1966 in Britain, but had 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 mainly contained to Soho, London; the epicentre of Britain’s sexual economy (Mort 2010), but could also be found in backrooms of bookshops across the United Kingdom. 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 Playboy Films, with Climax dominating the market. They would be usually shot on 16mm cameras, but printed on 8mm, 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 number of British producers of rollers were reduced, as it was cheaper for bookshop owners to import films from Denmark. In a police interview that took place on the 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 quality of production in Denmark would also be higher, the films being processed and printed in laboratories, rather than through amateur means, such as the use of ‘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 informal means. Bookshop owners would be willing to risk the threat of customs seizure due to cheaper prices of films available in Denmark 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. With profits increasing, the trade began to get out of control, and the corruption within the Dirty Squad became more widespread, seeking to benefit from the growth in profit.

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 Dirty Squad, drawing on the findings of Matthew Oliver, the private detective hired by the Lord Longford's committee investigating the pornography trade. A Metropolitan Police investigation into corruption was subsequently undertaken. Though the findings of the Longford Report (1972) did not inform any policy relating to pornography or obscenity, it did bring further media attention to Britain's pornography trade and its relationship with police corruption. With pornography now being a subject of national interest, pornographers who were once able to operate without threat of arrest or prosecution because of their affiliation with the Dirty Squad, now found themselves vulnerable, as John Darby's arrest, described in the introduction to this article, suggests.

<INSERT FIGURE TWO>
Figure Two: Mailshot from one of Darby's mail order businesses. Author's personal collection.

The Darby investigation is identified as the initial event that ultimately led to the Watford Blue Movie Trial. In the 1960s, The Dirty Squad aimed to keep the pornography trade confined to Soho, making it easier to control and police, but by the 1970s mail order businesses were increasing partly because of an increase in pornography imports from Scandinavia being smuggled into the UK (Hebdtich and Anning 1988). Therefore, the Dirty Squad were reluctant to allow mail order, unless it was placed under tight constraints, fearful of complaints from the public for receiving unsolicited mailshots. Darby was one of many mail order operators, seeking to benefit from the legalisation of pornography in Denmark. He claims to have been involved in the pornography trade from 1969 and, in 1970, was charged with the offences of fraudulently evading the prohibition of the importation of indecent or obscene articles from Denmark. Undeterred by this, Darby immediately resumed his enterprise after successfully appealing his conviction and avoiding a twelve-month prison sentence, due to his relationship with a Dirty Squad officer. He later purchased a mailing list containing 5,000 potential customers from this officer and was permitted to run a number of

mail order operations, providing that he paid a £100 licence per month. He sourced product from Scandinavia, such as content from Danish firm Color Climax, Flesh Films, Lasse Braun, but also from Britain. As one of Darby's mail order catalogue shows (see figure two), he was distributing rollers from British labels such as International Films, Universal Films, Taboo and Phoenix and Taboo of Sweden. Darby was again arrested in late 1971, being stopped by uniformed police with no affiliation to the Dirty Squad who discovered that he had hardcore pornography in his car. Now paying £200 to the Dirty Squad per month, Darby escaped charge. However, as outlined in the introduction to this article, one year later, Darby was again stopped, but this time it was by Harrow police officers who were not aware his pre-arrangement with the Dirty Squad. He was charged with two counts of publication for gain, contrary to section two 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 - £400,000, highlighting 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 the United Kingdom, but that he was also linked to a number of film labels who were actively producing rollers. This was identified through his possession of 16mm master negatives and him having 1200 empty roller boxes for a company named Anglo Continental. Furthermore, the police found an invoice for 5000 film spools, and that an Anthony Collingbourne of Watford had collected half of this order from the supplier. With Darby charged, but now in hiding, attention was placed on Collingbourne.

House of Mirrors

<INSERT FIGURE THREE HERE>
Figure Three: Anthony Collingbourne in *Timber* (1970-72). Courtesy of the Erotic Film Society.

Collingbourne had already been investigated by the police shortly after the Darby arrest. Following a search of his record shop and home, 779 magazines, one typescript and two rollers were found that were identical to those being sold by Darby. They then searched Collingbourne's previous address, discovering a diary containing a list of film titles and a sketched diagram of a film processing machine. At interview, Collingbourne admitted little,

telling officers that all the material was for his own personal use, aside from the 779 magazines that he was holding for a friend. Collingbourne was not charged at the point, but the investigation continued. With Collingbourne now known to the police, his face was eventually recognized in seized rollers. Vehicles and locations used in the films were also identified by the police. In a later police interview from 1975, Collingbourne recounted his career of working in pornography[18]. It began in 1962 when Collingbourne was released from prison. He met a man named Ken Taylor who operated a studio in Edgware, London. 'Skinny' Taylor, as he was known, was involved in the production of hardcore films, and Collingbourne ended up being a paid performer in some of them. By the late 1960s, Collingbourne was running a car dealership in Watford until it mysteriously burnt down. Following an unsuccessful insurance claim, an acquaintance suggested that he start a photography studio, identifying that none existed in Watford, but a wealth could be found in nearby London. In early 1969, Collingbourne opened Studio Hire. In addition to taking 'straight' photographs for clients, he would 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 if he could rent the studio to make rollers. He agreed, providing that Taylor would show him and an associate how to make them. Collingbourne purchased equipment from Taylor, negotiating a deal where Taylor would buy any films made by Collingbourne back for a set price. Taylor also sold him an American processing machine, so that he would easily be able to develop his films. This relationship provides an insight into how the economy of hardcore film production in the United Kingdom would operate, with filmmakers working together to share resources and increase profits. Collingbourne also recollects how Taylor also advised him to pay for a licence from the Dirty Squad; 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 I have discussed in this article, Collingbourne's differed in that his was a 'pay as you go' licence, with payments ranging between £25 to £1000 depending on the information or protection that was required at any given time. He recalls the search of his house in late 1972 when there was no arrest or charge, despite police discovering 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 statements from the search

included in the case files. He discovered that protection the licence offered turned out to be temporary.

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

Collingbourne admits to releasing rollers on five labels: Academy, Anglo Continental, Apollo, Double X, and Look (see figure four), but it is likely that he was also involved in Fantasy and Viking Films, as some use the same performers and filming locations. It was common for roller producers to have a number of different labels. It appears that this was a technique used to confuse police, with multiple labels implying different producers. I also 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 available. You will see some films appear on multiple label's 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 for profit. I estimate that 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 a partner named Kenneth Wyatt. In 1973, a bookshop in Llanelli, Wales was searched by local police. When interviewed by police, the owner of the bookshop states that Wyatt was paid between £150 to £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 previously mentioned, 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.

<INSERT FIGURE FIVE HERE>
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 to be obscene, in part because they featured scenes of anal sex and also instances of bestiality. They had identified the performers in the majority of the films and, from interviews with them, those who were involved in their filming. Many of these performers were in relationships with one another and lived at a house Collingbourne owned, which also served as a studio. This resulted in a total of 11 arrests and warrants granted for another four performers. The roller to receive the most attention in the police files and in the eventual tabloid reportage of the case is *House of Mirrors*. As the picture of the packaging demonstrates, it was presented in a purple box with the brand at the top and a colour photograph on the front cover, containing the title of film (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 in the way of narrative or performance (see figure six). It appears that the sole purpose of the film is to document the sexual act and commercially benefit from it. The film was shot on 16mm and printed on 8mm for distribution; a standard process for rollers. It 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, as well as having mirrors placed around the room, giving the roller its title and distinctive setting. 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 in the final scenes of the film. Collingbourne is identified by the police as the director of both of these films from interviews conducted with the performers.

<INSERT FIGURE SIX HERE>

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

The Trial

Having discussed the police investigation, I now want to focus on the subsequent trial that took place to show how the OPA was used in combination with other laws to prosecute the majority of people who were involved in the production and distribution of Anglo Continental films. This not only reveals the complexities of obscenity law, as discussed earlier, but I argue that this specific case was used as an attempt to deter pornography production in the United Kingdom. The committal hearing began on Friday 2 November, 1973, establishing whether there was a case to answer. By the 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 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, 231-32), 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, which included publishing an obscene article and having obscene articles for publication for gain (contrary to the OPA 1959), 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. Though named in count one along with Collingbourne, Darby surprisingly escaped the conspiracy charge in a hearing that took place on 26 November; considering Darby's connections, one could assume that police corruption was involved. After this, he went into hiding, reappearing in a later blue movie case that took place in Birmingham.[20] It seems that the strict bail conditions were out of concern for others following Darby's lead.

The trial began on the 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 audience for the films that were being prosecuted, which turned out to be a narrow-minded decision that did little in their favour. All of the defendants plead not guilty to the charges. The trial is not explicitly detailed in the case files, only containing a breakdown of each day's activity, including witness schedule and film screenings, but the summing up from the judge, Marcus Anwyl-Davies, provides an overview of the case, though littered with moralistic assumptions. Further summaries of 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 case made all of

the major national papers, including images of the defendants. The newspapers 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 hyperbolically summarizes the prosecution's overarching argument as 'filth for parties seeking for financial gain from the furtive seedy market'.[21] Two of the prosecution's witnesses were originally involved in the production of the films and had swayed their position, likely for a favourable deal. One was a female performer from a number of 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 photography studio and then asked to perform in rollers, being paid anywhere between £25 to £50 per film; men would be paid around £10. Another witness was Yallop, who had loaned the use of his house to Collingbourne, serving as the location for *House of Mirrors* and *Traveller's Rest*. A total of 10 films are named in the 30 offences; these were screened to the jury as a way to support the claims of the prosecution. The films which 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.[22] 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 decriminalized 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 female performer could not be traced by the prosecution. This shows that performers could be prosecuted for making pornography, not just those who distributed it and stood to gain the most profit.

The approach from the defence was contradictory and chaotic, in part due to circumstances that were beyond their control. Firstly, Collingbourne was taken ill at the beginning of the trial and then, following Darby's lead, 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, during the trial a solicitor's clerk who belonged to a firm representing two of the defendants, climbed the roof of the court, protesting against the protracted nature of the trial and wanting to set off a cylinder of laughing gas into the ventilation system. Finally, four of the defendants got married to each other during the course of the trial. These incidents did nothing more than draw further attention from the media and made the job for the defence more challenging. From the material I have collected, it appears that a public good defence was not mounted, though there is reference in the DPP files to other trials where it was used, suggesting that the prosecution had prepared for such an approach. Instead, they focused their attention on limitations of the terms 'deprave and corrupt' as well as 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 necessarily mean that they are depraving and corrupting;
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 lodgings 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 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, having run away from her family in the North to London. She recalls how her relationship with this person led to her making a number of rollers over the course of several years, but is vague about who was involved in their production. Another disclosed that she came to be involved in rollers to help pay for an abortion, and that Collingbourne persuaded her to appear in a film titled *Dog Lovers* that featured scenes of bestiality by offering her more money, even though she did not want to be

involved.[23] 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 that that hardcore pornography should be made legally available.

Judge Anwyl-Davies' summing up of the case for the jury included a definition of the OPA and the meaning of the word 'obscenity', an overview of the offences in the indictment, 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 the 5 June, the jury had 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 she faced. Though not present, Collingbourne was given a five-year prison sentence and a £2223 fine. Wyatt was found guilty on four accounts and given a two-year prison sentence. 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 that was repeated in tabloid newspapers, and told the female who performed in *Dog Lovers* that she was 'a disgrace to womanhood'. He stated the defendants were involved 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 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 libertines has been resoundingly rejected'.[24]

Two appeals were launched. The first was by Collingbourne and Wyatt. It argued that Anwyl-Davies had erred in law on four counts, focusing on whether he had misdirected 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 and that the two-year limit on prosecution, found in section 2(3) of the OPA, was applicable here, as the offence did not continue beyond the production of a film in 1971. Both appeals were rejected, and the original verdicts were upheld. The appeal relating to section 2(3) was rejected due to the use of the common law charges for conspiracy and aiding and abetting, therefore making 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 for practices that are not considered legally problematic today. 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 a 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 legalising pornography (Larsson 2016). Though the files pertain to only one case of hardcore pornography production and distribution in the United Kingdom, it demonstrates the scale of the enterprise, indicating how lucrative it could be despite the threat of arrest. The content of the file indicates that similar trials might be equally beneficial in helping scholars to further understand the historical foundations of the pornography trade.

Secondly, it shows how pornography was regulated at a time when it was becoming a subject of national interest. The Watford case begins 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 stronger 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 the United Kingdom was not an offence, but introducing a conspiracy to contravene section two 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, is 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 film maker: John Jesner Lindsay (Kerekes 2000). It would appear that the profile of the trial, revelations about corruption within the Dirty Squad 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 used to attempt to control pornography.

In this article, I have suggested that the use of legal research can have value for documenting hidden trade and further understanding the policy frameworks for pornography. However, such an approach is not without its limitations. While files such as the Watford case are a rich resource, one must question the reliability of them. For instance, it is evident that many of the statements lack detail, are evasive, intentionally vague and 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, particularly lacking detail in the area of production processes, such as processing and duplication of film. Therefore, it is necessary to triangulate using other sources wherever possible. My own approach has been to attempt 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 not included the names of many of the defendants named in the case, even though they are identifiable in public records and newspapers, and have obscured their faces in the included images. 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. Despite these limitations, this approach allows for an exploration of the legal histories of other cases relating to pornography in other countries. 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 prosecute and control them. Therefore, investigating these cases can help to shed further light on the political and economic practices relating to a trade that has had a long and difficult legal history.

Acknowledgments

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Figure Four: Sample of rollers produced by Collingbourne.

Figure Five: *House of Mirrors* (1972) roller box.

Figure Six: Screenshots from a high-definition scan of *House of Mirrors* (1972).

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[1] Rollers is the term used to by the trade to describe hardcore British 8mm films on 200ft 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 the 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 (Robertson 1979)
[10] It has always been legal to produce hardcore pornographic material in the United Kingdom, but not to sell it, until the reevaluation of the R18 certificate in 2000 (Perkins 2012; Petley 2011). 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 Criminal Justice and Immigration Act (2008), 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 films and soundtracks. Here there is a defence if publication of the film or soundtrack is for the public good because it is in the interests of drama, opera, ballet or any other form of art, literature or learning'.
[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 2001 onwards, following the reevaluation of the R18, and fell even further after the introduction of the CJAIA.
[14] https://www.cps.gov.uk/legal-guidance/obscene-publications
[15] The National Archives, UK, Director of Public Prosecutions, DPP2/5754, Virgo, Wallace Harold and others: corruption offences between 1 January 1964 and 24 October 1972.
[16] According to Brian Pritchard a retired film lab technician, who I interviewed on the 13 December 2019, a garage lab would be an amateur film processing operation, often using commercially available equipment such as Tod Tanks.
[17] Such as the American made Uhler 8mm Cine Printer.
[18] The National Archives, UK, Director of Public Prosecutions, DPP2/5789, Virgo, Wallace Harold and others: corruption offences between 1 January 1964 and 24 October 1972.
[19] This estimation is based on information provided in the files, but also through the 498 rollers I have uncovered during my research.

[20] See R v Lindsay (1974)
[21] The National Archives, UK, Director of Public Prosecutions, DPP 2/5301-2, Collingbourne, Anthony and others: offences committed under the Obscene Publications Act 1959 on dates between 1 June 1971 and 14 May 1973.
[22] The Sexual Offences Act (1967) only partially decriminalised buggery, making anal sex between two men over 21 no longer an offence, providing that it took place in private and was consensual. Anal sex between a male and female remained an offence until it was partially decriminalised in 1994 (Johnson 2019).
[23] The commercial production of bestiality pornography was common in Scandinavia, when competing lables 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.
[24] The National Archives, UK, Director of Public Prosecutions, DPP 2/5301-2, Collingbourne, Anthony and others: offences committed under the Obscene Publications Act 1959 on dates between 1 June 1971 and 14 May 1973.