

International Partner Investigator

Thomas Dixon



The ARC Centre of Excellence for the History of Emotions is committed to creating and enhancing international collaboration. Partner Investigators are researchers whose work focuses on emotions in Europe in the time period 1100–1800, and who are based at institutions outside Australia.

Professor Thomas Dixon is a founding member and former director of the Centre for the History of the Emotions at Queen Mary University of London (QMUL). He currently leads a major interdisciplinary research project funded by the Wellcome Trust: ‘Living With Feeling: Emotional Health in History, Philosophy, and Experience’.

Thomas Dixon’s books include *From Passions to Emotions: The Creation of a Secular Psychological Category* (Cambridge University Press, 2003), *The Invention of Altruism: Making Moral Meanings in Victorian Britain* (Oxford University Press, 2008) and *Weeping Britannia: Portrait of a Nation in Tears* (Oxford University Press, 2015). He is currently researching the histories of anger and rage. His broadcast projects have included a television program about science and religion and the ‘Five Hundred Years of Friendship’ BBC Radio series.

Professor Dixon has been a Partner Investigator of the Australian Research Council Centre of Excellence for the History of Emotions since 2013, and visited the Perth, Adelaide and Melbourne nodes of the Centre during November 2016. He reflects on his time with the Centre below.

Over the years it has been cheering and encouraging to see the amazing work being done at the different nodes of the Australian ARC Centre of Excellence for the History of Emotions, including not only research but also education, public engagement, and innovative online

research tools and resources. When I visited Perth, Adelaide and Melbourne in November 2016 I was able to see all of this activity at first hand, as well as receive helpful feedback on my new research project on the history and meanings of anger from a world-class array of researchers.

On my arrival in Perth I gave a research seminar to the history of emotions group at The University of Western Australia (UWA) entitled “‘Like a Libyan Lion’: Getting to Grips with Rage in Eighteenth-Century England’. The talk took its title from an account in Daniel Defoe’s *The Complete English Tradesman* (1726) that describes a shopkeeper of a fragile temper who was often enraged by the impertinence of his customers. Although the man maintained a polite and civilised exterior with his annoying customers, when the provocation became too much he would go upstairs, beat his wife and kick his children in a violent rage like ‘a man in Bedlam’, before sitting down to weep profusely. A couple of minutes later, he would return to his shop, ‘as humble, as courteous, and as calm as any man whatever’. With his customers the man was a lamb, but with his family a madman, ‘outrageous like a Libyan lion’. I discussed a range of sources in this paper, including sermons, works of moral philosophy and treatises about physiognomy and expression. The discussion and questions afterwards provided valuable new directions for this part of my project.

While at UWA I also met with Kirk Essary and Paul Megna and began a conversation about the history of words for anger-like emotions in the early modern period. That conversation continued in Adelaide and also online, after my return to the UK.

In Adelaide, I had the pleasure of giving a keynote talk at CHE’s Biennial Research Meeting (9–10 November 2016), attended by all members of the Centre. I spoke on the wide-ranging topic, ‘What is anger?’, drawing on perspectives from philosophy, linguistics, anthropology and history. I explained why I think of the history of emotions as a kind of anatomy, and how I intend to use this project to make the case against the psychological theory of ‘basic emotions’. My talk was followed by responses from Kirk Essary and Paul Megna, and an extremely useful discussion.

At this conference I also attended sessions to do with education and engagement, which were hugely impressive. I was especially struck by the pilot version of an online game ‘The Vault’ that showcases history of emotions research in an extremely imaginative way. In meetings with Carly Osborn and Andrew Lynch, I explored the possibility of the QMUL Centre for the History of the Emotions and our ‘Living With Feeling’ project getting involved in the next stage of development. I am pleased to say that this is now happening and hopefully will result in the production of a successful commercial game.

While in Adelaide I also attended and spoke at a conference on the Public Humanities organised by the Australasian Consortium of Humanities.

The final leg of my visit took me to Melbourne where I attended and spoke at 'Art, Objects and Emotions, 1400–1800', a conference connected with the 'Love: Art and Emotion' exhibition curated by Angela Hesson at the National Gallery of Victoria. As with all parts of my trip, this forum proved hugely stimulating and informative.

In Melbourne I also delivered a public lecture about my most recently published book, *Weeping Britannia: Portrait of a Nation in Tears*, and was interviewed by Jon Faine on the 'Mornings with Jon Faine' show on 774 ABC Melbourne radio.

Since returning from my trip, the connections and collaborations started in Australia have continued to bear fruit in several ways. The first joint publication on the Queen Mary and CHE blogs was a series of three posts about the history of anger, arising from the [talk I gave](#) in Adelaide, and the two responses given by [Paul Megna](#) and [Kirk Essary](#). In June 2017 the two Centres held an extremely successful interdisciplinary joint conference in London, with the title 'Fears and Angers: Historical and Contemporary Perspectives' (QMUL, 19–20 June 2017), which provided another forum where our conversations could continue. Finally, as noted above, we remain actively engaged in collaborative research and development work on the online game 'The Vault'.