

History Department Seminar 28 March 2012

Heather Wolfram

(Canterbury History)

‘God save us from psychologists as expert witnesses’: The Battle for Forensic Psychology in Weimar Germany

In 1927, the Berlin-based psychiatrist Paul Plaut wrote an article in which he claimed that the International Congress for Sexual Research, which had been held in Berlin in October 1926, had provided a forum for the first public discussion of the position of psychology within the legal process. Citing the papers given by the psychologist William Stern, the psychiatrist Albert Moll and the jurist Albert Hellwig, he pointed to a consensus among psychologists, psychiatrists and jurists about the importance of psychological knowledge in the courtroom, but noted their strong disagreement about which of these professions was best equipped to provide expert opinions in this context. Following up the tensions observed by Plaut at the International Congress for Sexual Research, this paper will highlight the contested nature of forensic psychology in early twentieth-century Germany. It will also demonstrate what was at stake professionally for psychologists, psychiatrists and jurists in debates over forensic psychological expertise.

HEATHER WOLFFRAM is a lecturer in Modern European History at Canterbury. She received her PhD from the University of Queensland in 2005 before taking up postdoctoral fellowships at the National University of Singapore and the Centre for the History of European Discourses (University of Queensland). Heather's work has been concerned with discipline formation and scientific authority, particularly in the realm of the border sciences and psychology as demonstrated by her research on psychical research and parapsychology in Germany and the history of forensic psychology. Her publications include *The Stepchildren of Science: Psychical Research and Parapsychology in Germany, c. 1870-1939* (2009) and 'Crime, Clairvoyance and the Weimar Police', *Journal of Contemporary History* (2009).

Wednesday 28 March 2012 at 1.00 p.m.

Room 311, History Building