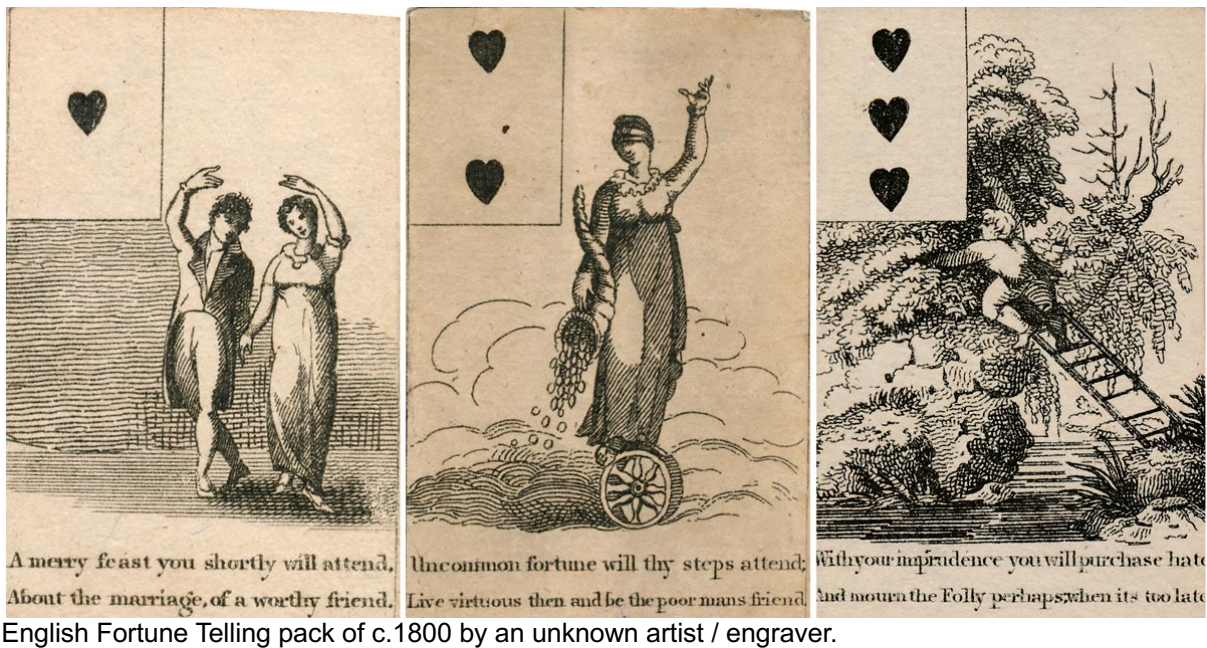


Feelings of Safety and Security in the Early Modern World

Friday 27 November 2026
Macquarie University, Sydney

Call for Papers



What did it mean to feel safe or secure for early modern populations? How did people persist and build futures for themselves and their families in challenging conditions? This workshop aims to fill a key gap in our knowledge of how people created conditions to feel safe during times of existential danger or crisis in early modern Europe.

Safety and security can be defined in multiple ways: economic, social, political, physical, psychological, cultural and emotional. In the context of modern history, especially as it pertains to twentieth-century constructions of 'risk', there is now an established literature on the development of health and safety in workplaces, insurance and risk, 'risk society', including nuclear anxieties and environmental concerns, and in relation to child-rearing and childhood opportunities, where children's 'worlds' are reduced by safety concerns. Within colonial contexts, there is a literature on 'cultural safety' and its absence, as a dimension of security for marginalised groups. There is some work on early modern security, particularly in relation to political and national security, physical safety, and individual freedoms, and growing work on economic insecurity and its impacts. Religion is an important part of this story, but people not only lived for the next life but the one on earth.

Parents imagined futures for their children; children hoped for themselves; families aspired to long lineages and survival over generations.

This workshop hopes to build on and expand this foundational research to consider how early modern people acquired the social and emotional resources to persist 'at the end of the world'. We welcome papers for the period 1400-1800 and for any geographical context.

We now call for papers that elucidate this topic. Papers might consider but are not limited to:

- Definitions and practices of safety and security
- Safety and security for individuals, groups, nations and other collectives
- Positive emotions as a counterpoint to fear and anxiety
- Consolations and comfort during challenging times
- The emotions of resilience and persistence
- Hope for the future as a dimension of safety
- Imagination as a place for safe feeling or future building

Papers should typically be twenty minutes long; proposals for panels and roundtables are also welcome. If you would like to propose something less conventional, please do get in touch. Hybrid options are a possibility; please indicate on your proposal if that is desired.

Please send a title, 200 word abstract and two-sentence bio for each speaker to katie.barclay@mq.edu.au by 30 May 2026.

Conference organisers: Katie Barclay, Dianne Hall, Dolly MacKinnon, Una McIlvenna, Charlotte-Rose Millar

This event is part of a series by the organisers that press us to consider the intersections of future, feeling, children, temporality, crisis and our imagined responses. Please look out for further information.

