

# FLINDERS HISTORY RESEARCH SEMINAR

**Dr Claire Walker (University of Adelaide)**

**Grace Howe (University of Adelaide)**

**'Like Christ on a Cross: Seventeenth-Century Catholic Narratives of Suffering'**

**Friday, 10th June**

**11.15am - 12.30pm**

**Room SSS149 or online**

## **Abstract:**

In 1659 a Benedictine nun was dying from breast cancer in Ghent. She interpreted her pain as a form of atonement for her sins, but she also likened the ulcerating tumours to the five wounds of Christ on the cross. In a world without effective pain killers, early modern people developed narratives of suffering which enabled them to make sense of pain and manage physical trauma. Understanding bodily agony with a religious matrix (for example) did not stop them from seeking various medical remedies. There are countless examples of early modern medical texts that affirm the demand for professional medical treatment. However, religious belief did shape the way that individuals experienced, interpreted and coped with painful symptoms. This paper considers how specific narratives and images functioned to assist Catholic women to manage and cope with pain. Grounded in case studies from monastic and secular environments, it argues that women drew from a wide template of biblical, saint and martyr stories to express physical and emotional agony, grief and fear. However, these women experienced and managed pain in distinctly personal ways. While the matrix for suffering was principally Christ-centred, individuals interpreted their own distress through the textual and material prism of these holy characters typologies of torment and endurance.



## **Bio:**

CLAIRE WALKER is Senior Lecturer in History at the University of Adelaide. She researches post-reformation English religious houses for women, exploring the nuns' intellectual, political and spiritual practices. Her recent publications consider the emotions of religious exile, with a focus on suffering and how this was characterised in monastic writing and material culture.

GRACE HOWE is a graduate of the University of Adelaide and is currently enrolled in a PhD programme. Her project examines how the Protestant martyrologist, John Foxe, created templates of suffering in The Acts and Monuments that were tailored towards specific demographics across his readership.