This symposium centred around a reflexive engagement with the shapes and roles of the European past in Australasia and consequently, the academic frameworks within which engagement with this past has been undertaken and understood. As a postgraduate student more loosely affiliated with the field of medieval and early modern studies than many of the other participants – my interest is in contemporary medievalisms, from a cultural studies perspective – I found the examination of the development of this field within Australasian academia fascinating. The tension between an elegiac memorialising of past strengths now weakened by university cutbacks and shifting academic fashions, and the opportunities for interdisciplinary exchange and a sense of co-ordinated effort enabled by the Network for Early European Research was a major theme, as was the recognition of the broader influence/importance of the study of Medieval and Early Modern Studies for understanding colonial and contemporary Australasia.

The format of the symposium, with 30-minute papers and 20-minute replies by the respondents, was new to me, and I think it worked extremely well. The in-depth engagement offered by the respondents enhanced the original arguments, and offered different perspectives on the material presented. The respondents modelled potential readings and applications of the papers, which encouraged me to think more broadly about how the material was applicable to my own research. The sense of dialogue built up by this format extended beyond the pairings of presenter and respondent, as many respondents drew together ideas and themes from earlier sessions. This continued engagement highlighted the strengths of the NEER heading for such events: these were dialogues that could continue beyond this symposium to other conferences, events and individual research directions. I should also mention the appropriate choice of venue, which also highlighted the connections between academia and the community through the guided tours of the two exhibitions dealing with the history of Victoria and the history of the book.

Papers of particular interest for me were those dealing with concepts of natural law and native title, religion and secularism, and colonial medievalisms. These thematic concerns drew across several disciplines, exemplifying the diverse approaches possible under the MEMS banner. They shared a vibrant relevance to contemporary Australasia, and the different speakers all clearly communicated their own interest and enthusiasm for their subject matter. While not all this material was directly relevant to my own research interests, the presentations were intellectually sophisticated and stimulating and therefore of interest to me in terms of their methodology as well as subject material. It was also interesting to see research projects at various stages of development through the lens of the papers.

I would like to thank NEER for the travel funding that allowed me to attend the symposium. Enabling postgraduates to participate in such forums is invaluable – and very much appreciated – as it allows us to gain a better sense of the place of our own work within broader academic fields and to be inspired by cutting-edge research currently being carried out in Australia and New Zealand.