

welcome

The nation's disgust at the prevalence of paedophilia is resulting in wrongful accusations and even calls to ban the internet. Maybe we should all stop and think

On page 81 of this issue we relate the shocking story of William Jones, falsely accused of being in possession of child pornography, and how the ensuing lengthy police investigation devastated his life.

As I write, yet another celebrity has hit the headlines accused of sex crimes against children, and newspaper columns, radio chatshows and live TV debates are awash with comment – most of it ill-informed.

In the last week I've heard people saying things like "the internet should be banned", which is almost as ignorant as "he looks like a paedophile, he must be guilty".



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It's beginning to resemble the witch hunts of the middle ages, with the role of the church inquisitors played by the tabloid press, their readers hanging around the village pond baying for the next drowning.

It's an appreciation of the dangers of that medieval no-smoke-without-fire attitude that gave birth to the principle that the accused is innocent until proved guilty which is, thankfully, now fundamental to English law, but not, sadly, fundamental to peasant thinking.

The logical conclusion is that no adult will be able to talk to a child ever again, let alone work with them, for fear of being denounced as a paedophile by a neighbour they accidentally slighted in the supermarket. Parents will fear showing genuine affection to their own offspring lest it be interpreted as sexual in nature.

Jerking the knee

Now before you start phoning, emailing and writing to ask what this has got to do with a computer magazine, let me explain.

When a situation arises where a technology, in this case the internet, is blamed for the spread of mankind's evil, it's beholden upon those who 'know' – who have experienced the good a technology can do – to calmly

enjoin debate and bring reason where once there was pig-ignorance.

When the ass of the Law would find guilty someone who stumbled over a child pornography site and reported it to the police, because it's an offence to even view it, those who know that fairly simple computer forensics can prove the difference between lengthy and repeated visits to a site and backing swiftly out of a home page, need to stand up and be heard.

Otherwise the rabid cries of the mob that thinks that banning this or that will solve the problem will be the only voices heard.

Because without informed debate there will be many more people like William Jones who suffer the consequences of false accusation. Next time it could be you or me. ■

Andrew Charlesworth

reader information

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