



The INTERNATIONAL CENTRE FOR
**Victorian
Women Writers**
Newsletter

Director's Cut

CAROLYN OULTON

Dear university somewhere in England, I'm sorry if I wasn't meant to appropriate your lovely hardback copy of the top 100 graduate employers at the Open Day. It wasn't my son's fault. He said, 'You're not meant to take it'. To which I replied, I admit inexcusably, 'Quick – leg it!'

But I was chuffed to see tech companies even I had heard of explicitly stating that they are looking for humanities graduates...

Which was odd, because I'd been told so often that we had to prepare for a world full of numbers (not great news for someone with suspected dyscalculia).

In this issue we're aiming to break down some of those boundaries. Retired toxicologist Spencer Needs shares his research on the Victorian poet and fiction writer Eliza Craven Green, who was part of the mid-century Leeds and Manchester literary scene after her husband left her and took their son to London. Realising her work as a seamstress was precarious, she managed to supplement her income through writing for periodicals.

PhD student Hannah Palmer tells us about her interdisciplinary projects on Victorian abortion and childhood trauma, and explains why these issues are still topical.

INSIDE THIS ISSUE

OUT OF THE ARCHIVES:
FINDING ELIZA
PP. 3 - 7

INTERVIEW WITH A GUEST:
HANNAH PALMER
PP. 8 - 10

ON WOMEN WRITERS:
VISITING THE HOME OF
VERNON LEE
PP. 11 - 13

Siobhan Smith has just finished her MA dissertation at CCCU, using digital methodologies and distant reading to recover a substantial corpus of Victorian novels featuring cross-dressing. We won't tell you how many hours it took, but we agree she was due a break. And where better to chill out than Vernon Lee's house in the Italian countryside?

We're also belatedly celebrating Ceylan Kosker's monograph on late-Victorian author Violet Fane, after it went missing in a letterbox (another Victorian invention) three years ago and she was too polite to chase us.

It's been intriguing learning more about how technology and humanities can work together - turns out we have much in common in this #worldfullofwords...

Recent Releases

Violet Fane: The Literary Identities of the 19th Century Poet and Novelist (2020) by Ceylan Kosker

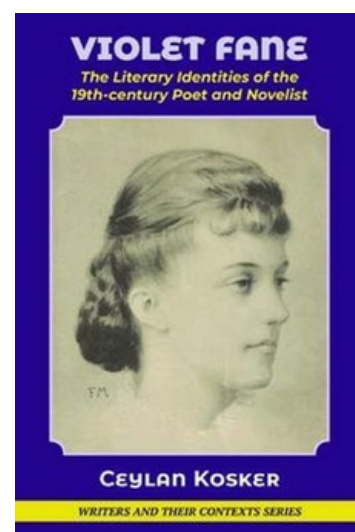
This is the first book-length study of the important poet and political writer Violet Fane (Lady Mary Montgomerie Currie, née Lamb, 1843-1905). It recovers Fane's work to a central position in the literary canon.

Fane is shown as a relevant figure in the literary history of the nineteenth century: as a poet, a celebrity writer, and an ambassadress. The study also illustrates the tensions within her self-representations that stem from the limitations gender roles imposed on women, which arguably caused her serious political works to be trivialised.

In recovering Fane as a writer of many genres who engaged with political, artistic, and historical issues of her day, Dr. Kosker examines her literary identities in parallel with her life, which was itself an important source of inspiration for her writings.

Find out more using the following link:

<https://blackwells.co.uk/bookshop/product/Violet-Fane-by-Dr-Kosker/9781913087029>



We want to hear from you! Get in touch with us:



Out of the Archives

Finding Eliza

Eliza S. Craven Green (1803-1866)

Seamstress, Actor, Poet and Author

SPENCER NEEDS

Eliza was born in Leeds at the dawn of the 19th century and was popular in literary circles. But by the early 21st century she was unknown, except as a footnote in history. I first learnt of her when I was researching my great grandfather, Henry Hawes Craven, who was the scenic artist and set designer for Sir Henry Irving. I discovered that his mother, Eliza Craven Green—of whom my family was unaware—had been an actor and a published poet. She was noted as the author of ‘Ellan Vannin’, a song much loved in the Isle of Man. I listened to the Bee Gees’ recording of this song (the Gibb brothers were born in the Isle of Man) and Robin Gibb’s deeply emotional rendering of ‘Ellan Vannin’ inspired my research into Eliza.

Eliza’s educated lower-middle-class parents fell on hard times and the family were in the Leeds workhouse when she was five years old. Nothing more is known of her childhood, but by her early twenties she and her younger sister had become actors. They were engaged in 1824 to perform in the Isle of Man. During their brief stay there, Eliza wrote poems which were printed in an island newspaper and also published a poetry book under her own name.



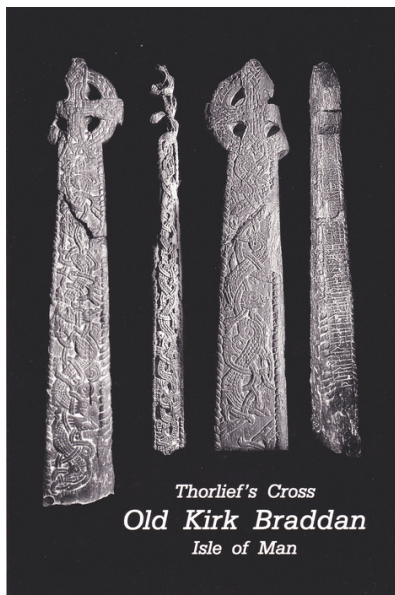
Image courtesy of Peter Killey

Left: Braddan Church on the Isle of Man, where Eliza worshipped. Contained in the church are several Celtic/Viking era crosses inscribed with runes. Eliza wrote a poem about them and speculated on the meaning of these runes:

*‘I lingered o’er the silent characters
Of a forgotten language darkly gone’*

On her return to England, she lived in Manchester and became involved in the vibrant Manchester literary scene. She met her future husband, James Green, through the theatre. After their marriage in 1828, the couple lived in Leeds at addresses in 'courts' and 'yards', which indicated an existence that was close to poverty. As a wife and mother, her acting diminished, but she maintained her poetic output. These poems, for which she would not have been paid, were mainly published in newspapers and journals.

These facts emerged as I started researching her life using the few clues provided in her entry in the Dictionary of National Biography. This was supplemented by census returns and the British Newspaper Archive. I made exhaustive internet searches for her name and for journals to which she may have submitted work. I visited the Isle of Man, Manchester and Leeds, and scoured many libraries and archives, including the British Library, and the Victoria and Albert Museum.



Left: Thorleif's Cross, inscribed with runes that Eliza speculated on in her above-mentioned poem.

Right: Eliza's son, Henry Hawes Craven Green.

Images courtesy of John Hall and S G Needs.



By 1842, Eliza had given birth to six children—the child mortality rate in those days was extremely high and three of her own did not reach adulthood. Her intense grief found expression in several poems. Her first born, William Henry, had died in 1831 at eleven months. The opening verse of her poem 'He Died!' is given below:

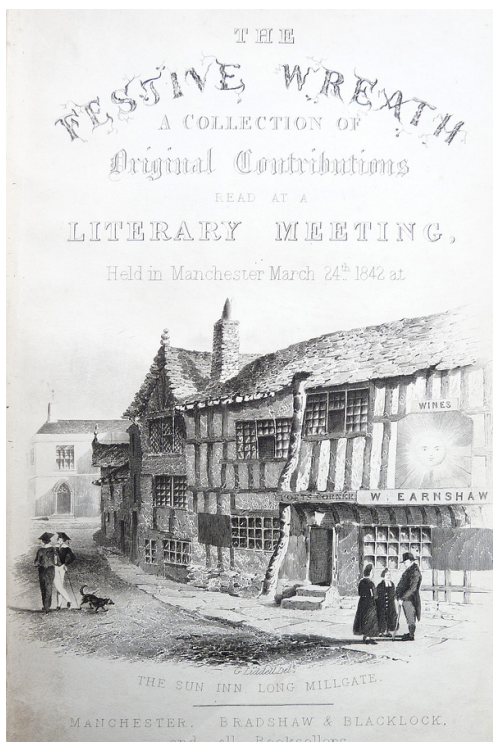
*He died!—they are but simple words
But oh! the withering pain
Th'unchanging grief those words have raised;
Grief, wild, and deep, and vain.*

In 1842 she had a poem entitled 'Children Sleeping' read out at a significant literary meeting in Manchester. Poems from this meeting were published in a book called *The Festive Wreath*. This poem reflected her deep love for her children. The first verse reads:

*Flowers of my life! how sweetly are ye folded
In the calm stillness of your happy rest;
The fond reliance that an angel watches
Your tranquil slumber, fills each infant breast:
And the young lips, whose last sweet breath was prayer.
Smile, as if seraph music lull'd ye there!*

Poems in other anthologies by Manchester publishers soon followed.

In 1851, the census records Eliza as living with her two daughters. Her husband had previously deserted her, and had taken their remaining son, Henry Hawes Craven, with him to London. The census records her occupation as 'seamstress'. Without the support of her husband's earnings Eliza faced a stark choice: starvation or prostitution. A seamstress' earnings were expected only to supplement a husband's income and were always below subsistence levels.



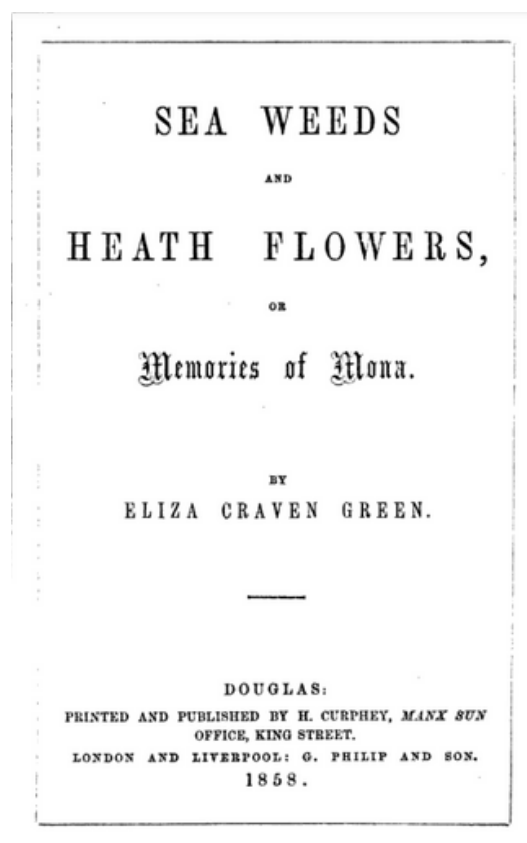
Left: Title page of The Festive Wreath

Right: Eliza's daughter, Frances Ann Elizabeth Green

Images courtesy of S G Needs

Eliza's response was decisive; she harnessed her innate poetic skills to writing short stories, for which she was paid. The stories she had written earlier had been published, probably for little reward, mainly in journals which were male oriented such as *The Odd Fellows Magazine*. In 1846, a French fashion journal began issuing an English edition. It was *Le Follet, Journal du Grande Monde*, subtitled 'Fashion, Polite Literature, Beaux Arts, etc, etc.' Eliza (using the pen name, Sutherland Craven) had a story called 'The Dream Bride of Rosenheim' in the first English copy.

It is subtitled 'A Legend of the Rhine' and is a tale about the last heir of Baron Rosenheim who was not inclined to marry and continue the line. The heir was entranced (by mind-altering herbal mixtures) into believing he had fallen in love with a beautiful but fated ancestor. The ploy had been devised by his mother and the vision was later revealed to be a cousin whose charms he had previously overlooked. True love ensued in real life. For this and subsequent stories Eliza would have been paid a significant sum. Over the next 20 years she wrote 149 more stories for the journal. It was the ideal platform for her work; the readership was predominantly female and well off. She rarely used her own name but had a variety of pen names, often suffixed with 'Esq'.



In 1858 Eliza published her book of poems *Sea Weeds and Heath Flowers or Memories of Mona* (Mona being the Isle of Man). It was popular and required a second edition and was also issued as a paperback. This book has stood the test of time and is readily available online.

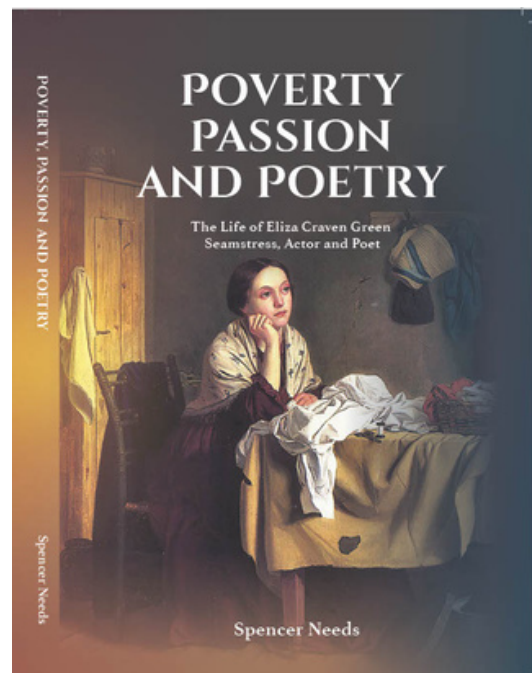
Eliza had often suffered from ill health (both mentally and physically), and she died in 1866 at the home of her married daughter, Clara, after a prolonged and painful illness. There were fulsome obituaries praising her personality and literary achievements, notably from *Le Follet*, *The Leeds Intelligencer* and *The Manx Sun*.

*Title page of Sea Weeds
(Google Books)*

With her demise, so the memory of her faded. She left a legacy of more than 180 short stories and 500 poems, but is remembered today only for 'Ellan Vannin'. Technically her poetry was good, and was often praised for its rhyme and composition. Much of her poetry is dated now, not least because her writing was often about royal or other notable persons or about topical events. But poems on other subjects, such as her concern for the poor, children, the peasantry, the impact of war, and the advent of steam railways, still bear relevance today.

With the exception of those poems in her book, her other writings were recorded only in ephemera (yesterday's newspaper is the next day's rubbish), and what has been recovered is from archived copies. Her short stories were only ever designed to entertain briefly and then be discarded—the reader knowing that another instalment or a new story would soon come along. The stories are of historical interest because they are a true reflection of the society and time in which they were written; their popularity over 20 years validates the veracity of their content. I think she had the ability to write a novel, but she never had the financial stability to write and publish an extended series as did Charles Dickens.

Eliza Craven Green was a remarkable lady who, in the face of extreme adversity, drew on all her reserves, especially her literary talent, to earn the income to house and feed her family, and to maintain their respectability.



Left: Eliza's gravestone. Image courtesy of S G Needs.

Right (for further reading!): Cover of Poverty, Passion and Poetry: The Life of Eliza Craven Green, Seamstress, Actor and Poet by Spencer Needs (2021).



Interview with a Guest

*THIS ISSUE WE SPOKE TO HANNAH PALMER,
A POSTGRADUATE RESEARCHER
AT LOUGHBOROUGH UNIVERSITY*

What is your PhD research project all about?

My PhD thesis, 'Abortion in Victorian Literature', is an interdisciplinary project spanning literary studies, history, and the medical/health humanities. It is a literary and cultural exploration into abortion and women's reproductive health in Victorian Britain. Although the project's focus is abortion and the intentional termination of pregnancy, it considers a wide range of Victorian reproductive terminologies – specifically, the fluidity and slippage between 'abortion' and 'miscarriage' in the nineteenth century. I argue that abortion was concealed through literary, linguistic, and historical codes which allowed Victorian writers to subtly include such a topical theme between the lines.

The thesis is primarily centred around an analysis of fiction. Some of the Victorian women writers discussed in my project include Elizabeth Gaskell, George Eliot, Mélie Muriel Dowie, and Edith Ellis. A large portion of the thesis is specific to Gaskell and her personal correspondence. It explores the discussion of abortion and women's health in her letters, and more generally comments on Gaskell's role within her community. However, to give an overview of the socio-cultural context of abortion in the Victorian era, the project also explores the depiction of abortion in newspapers, medical literature and records, legal documents and court cases, and life-writing. These various literatures draw on social, cultural, political, medical, legal, religious, and moral approaches to abortion, birth control and family planning, and female reproductive autonomy in the nineteenth century.

What first drew you to this topic?

I first became interested in motherhood and maternity while studying for my Master's degree in Victorian Studies. This was largely inspired after reading *The Autobiography of Margaret Oliphant* (2002) as part of a course on Victorian life-writing. I loved analysing Oliphant's delicate allusions to the closeness of mother and child during various stages: pregnancy, life, and death. At the time, I had established research interests in medicine, trauma, and the body but I found that aspects of motherhood and maternity encompassed all these interests. I continued exploring pregnancy and motherhood during the rest of my MA, and felt confident that I wanted to take this further into my MA dissertation or even a PhD. I initially considered producing a literary and cultural analysis of abortion for my 15,000-word MA dissertation; however, I soon noticed this idea was too large for such a small project, and it instead turned into a PhD proposal.

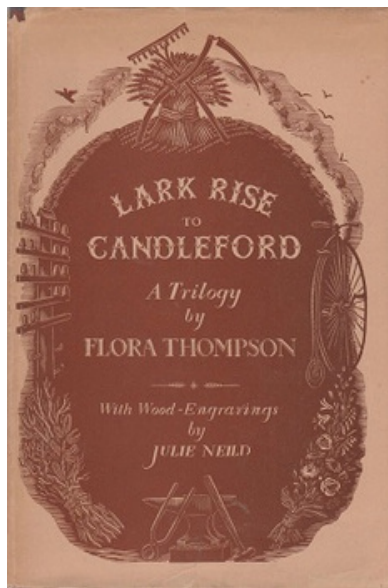
Is there anything that you've come across while working on the PhD project that has particularly surprised you?

Yes, plenty of things! I knew that tackling abortion in Victorian fiction would not be an easy task, but I was surprised at how difficult it is to source and find relevant materials. I have found that I am often looking for one or two very subtle (and often cleverly hidden!) references to abortion in lengthy Victorian novels. It sometimes feels like I'm looking for a needle in a haystack. However, this makes my research extremely exciting when I do find these little hints at abortion. It is out there, but - as this was a topic writers had to tiptoe around - it is well hidden.

When I first began researching this project, I was also surprised to learn that the Offences Against the Person Act 1861 remains an active piece of legislation in England and Wales today. This law criminalises the use of drugs and instruments to procure an abortion and carries a maximum sentence of life imprisonment. When I learnt about this law, it dawned on me just how timely and relevant the project is. As seen in the case of the tragic imprisonment of a mother-of-three earlier this year, the Offences Against the Person Act 1861 is not a distant memory of the past, but rather its use in modern law demonstrates a seemingly concrete tie to the Victorian era.

Can you tell us a little about any of the other projects you're currently working on?

Recently, I have been editing a project that I started a while ago, one which focuses on the depiction of childhood trauma and the effect of trauma on adult life. The project compares a neo-Victorian novel by Caleb Carr, titled *The Alienist* (1994), alongside its popular ten-part screen adaptation of the same name. I have also been exploring the abortion narrative in Sarah Waters's neo-forties novel *The Night Watch* (2006), which I am also hoping to turn into an article in the future.



Left to right: Elizabeth Gaskell, 1851 portrait by George Richmond; cover of Flora Thompson's *Lark Rise to Candleford*; and Dr Margaret Todd.

Images courtesy of Wikicommons

If you could meet three women writers, who would you pick and why?

Elizabeth Gaskell would have to be my first choice. It would be extremely beneficial to my PhD if I could interview her – I have some questions which desperately need answers! I would also choose to meet Margaret Todd. It would be wonderful to hear about her experiences as both a novelist and a doctor. Lastly, I would love to meet Flora Thompson. Despite not publishing in the Victorian period, I like to view her as a Victorian woman writer. *Lark Rise to Candleford* (1945) is one of my favourite books, and I can imagine enjoying a hot cup of tea while she tells me tales of life in English countryside during the 1880s.

On Women Writers

Visiting the Home of Vernon Lee: ‘Residenza del Palmerino’

SIOBHAN SMITH

Vernon Lee (1856-1935) is the professional and personal pseudonym used by Violet Paget; it was partly inspired by her (half) brother, Eugene Lee-Hamilton, who was a fervent supporter of her “intellectual development” (Mannocchi 2004). Featured on the [ICVWW's website](#), Lee is celebrated as a prolific and multi-faceted writer whose work has been placed in the context of New Womanism, Decadence, Children’s Literature, the Gothic, Queer Studies, Art Criticism, Italian History and Aestheticism.



I was first introduced to Lee by my undergraduate dissertation supervisor at Teesside University, Dr Jane Ford, who recommended Lee’s play, *Ariadne in Mantua* (1903), as a pertinent text for my focus on cross-dressing in fin-de-siècle literature. It is a unique example of cross-dressing as it features a woman who disguises herself as a man and then performs on stage as a woman whilst still in her ‘male’ role. It sparked a life-long interest in Lee’s work and inspired a trip to the place where she spent most of her life: ‘Residenza del Palmerino’ in Firenze, Florence.

The residence is managed by the Il Palmerino Cultural Association and run by Federica Parretti and Stefano Vincieri. Parretti and Vincieri are not only both extremely gracious hosts, but also incredibly knowledgeable about Lee and generous with sharing that knowledge.



Top right: Portrait of Vernon Lee by John Singer Sargent. Courtesy of Wikicommons.

Bottom right: Lee’s villa.

All images of the residence taken by the author.

The residence consists of three buildings, the oldest of which is the main villa, where Lee moved to with her family in 1889. This is a wonderfully preserved building which houses the impressive art studio where Lee held her weekly salons - it still has the original window looking out over the gardens and towards the Tuscan hills.

Whilst living in the main villa, Lee extended and renovated the building next door for her friend, Irene Forbes Mosse. Sadly, Mosse was forced to return to Germany with the onset of WW1 and never returned. Lee moved into the building herself and lived there from 1922 until she died in 1935 (Il Pamerino). It is on this building – known as ‘Little Villa’ – where her commemorative plaque is situated.



Left: Lee's commemorative plaque. The inscription reads:

*VERNON LEE VIOLET PAGET BORN 1856 DIED
1935*

*LIVED IN THIS HOUSE 1889-1935.
FROM HER YOUTH SHE LOVED ITALY
AND SPENT HER LONG LIFE & RARE INTELLECT
IN THE PERFECTING AND UNDERSTANDING THAT
& IN THE PASSIONATE SEARCH FOR BEAUTY,
HER MANY BOOKS LIVED TO PROVE IT.*

Today, ‘Little Villa’ is privately owned but the main villa and the old servant’s quarters provide accommodation for scholars, artists, and students looking for tranquillity and inspiration to work on their own projects. You do not need to be working on a Vernon Lee project to be able to stay at the residence; Parretti tells me that many people who visit have not heard of Lee and so have the pleasure of being introduced to her work whilst there.

The whole place is green and luscious and feels slightly wild. There is a palpable energy that resonates with Lee’s essays on the ‘Genius of Places’ where she talks about the “slow, poetic prose” (95) of a place. You can feel that, here, the poeticness of the buildings and gardens inviting you to ‘do’ – write, draw, paint, dance. Whatever you ‘do’, do it with the feeling of this place.



The bedrooms are brimming with original artwork and an eclectic mix of literature, and each one has a spectacular view over the various gardens. To walk through the gardens and smell the flowers that Lee enjoyed, to be inside the same four walls and under the same roof is quite the experience. This is 'Genius Loci' encapsulated, where places become "objects of intense and most intimate feeling" (3).



Inside the old servant's quarters, housed in this seemingly innocuous glass-doored bookcase, is Vernon Lee's archive. It holds a copy (mostly first editions) of almost every text that Lee has written, as well as scholarship that discusses her work. Here more than anywhere, the past is present. For anyone interested in Lee's work – this is the jewel that you need to visit. For anyone who is not (yet) an admirer of Lee's, I still whole heartedly recommend Residenza del Palmerino as the most beautiful and inspiring writing retreat.

For further information on Vernon Lee, visit: [The Sibyl Blog](#) and the [ICVWW Author Profile](#).

For more information on the Residence itself: <https://www.palmerino.org/>.



- Colby, Vineta. *Vernon Lee: A Literary Biography*. University of Virginia Press, 2003.
- Lee, Vernon. *The Enchanted Woods, and Other Essays on the Genius of Places*. London, 1905.
- Lee, Vernon. *Genius Loci*. London, 1899.
- Mannocchi, Phyllis F. "Paget, Violet [pseud. Vernon Lee] (1856–1935), art historian and writer." *ONDB*. Oxford University Press, 23 September 2004.
- "Vernon Lee," *Associazione Culturale Il Palmerino*, 2022. <https://www.palmerino.org/vernon-lee>.

Call for Papers and Upcoming Opportunities

- CfP - Online VPFA Study Day: 'Ouida: High Priestess of the Impossible'. Taking place 3-4 November 2023. This event aims to bring together scholars contributing to any project of Ouida scholarship, whether through recent and ongoing projects or at any point in the past. The organisers invite 20 minute papers and 10 minute flash presentations. Deadline: 6 October 2023. Find out more: <https://victorianpopularfiction.org/studyday/forthcoming-study-days/?fbclid=IwAR2Lo7HchS9m71HPVix--FWZOqDnlRZDtXiSdhxJT0uaXT-1yAdGVqjKNc0>.
- CfP - 'Victorian Events' at the University of Stirling, taking place 4-5 September 2024. The theme can be interpreted broadly. The organisers welcome 20-minute paper and panel proposals that speak to any aspect of the general CFP. Proposals should be submitted via the conference website by 1 December 2023. Please contact Professor Christine Ferguson christine.ferguson@stir.ac.uk or Dr Michael Shaw michael.shaw@stir.ac.uk if you have any questions. For more, see: <https://www.event2024.org/call-for-papers/>.
- CfP - 'Place and the Periodical: An international conference on the regional magazine', University of Chester, 25-26 June 2024. This conference aims to expand the area of scholarship surrounding the regional magazine and invites contributions on neglected magazine genre, from any era or nation. Please send 200 word proposals and a 100 word bio to placeandtheperiodical@gmail.com by 31 January 2024. Visit [@PlacePeriodical](#) for more.
- CfP - 'Commemorating Corelli: A Centenary Conference', taking place 4 May 2024. The organisers invite proposals for 20-minute presentations that explore various aspects of Marie Corelli's life, works, and cultural significance. Please submit abstracts of no more than 300 words for consideration, along with a brief biography of up to 100 words, via email to CommemoratingCorelli@gmail.com by 1 February 2024.

If you have a CfP or an event that you'd like us to advertise, please get in touch!