

## Friends of the Argyll Papers seminar series 2022/23

Dr Fraser Riddell

### *Victorian Theatre and the Cult of Beauty: Lady Archibald Campbell and Shakespeare's 'As You Like It'*

Fri 26 May @ 13:00 UK time on Zoom



This presentation will explore the life of the late-Victorian actor, aesthete and theatre producer Lady Archibald Campbell (née Janey Sevilla Callander, 1846–1923). Janey (or 'Lady Archie', as she was known to her friends) was the daughter of James Henry Callander of Arkinglas. She was orphaned at a young age and adopted by George Campbell, 8th Duke of Argyll, and raised at Inveraray Castle. In 1868 she married Lord Archibald Campbell, and was mother to Niall Campbell, 10th Duke of Argyll.

She is best remembered today for her innovative open-air productions of works by Shakespeare and other early dramatists. Lady Archie's 'Pastoral Players' were the first to revive the outdoor performances of Shakespeare that are now a familiar feature of the British summer. They made creative theatrical use of the natural landscapes near her home in Richmond upon Thames, including rustic shepherds herding flocks of real sheep and a soundscape of live birdsong. Her production of *As You Like It* in June 1885, with the noted designer and producer E.W. Godwin, was the theatrical event of the season. It was attended by noted writers and artists such as Oscar Wilde, James McNeill Whistler, and Max Beerbohm, as well as a host of European aristocracy.

This seminar will draw upon archival research in the Argyll Papers at Inveraray Castle to discuss the reception of Lady Archie's productions in the Victorian press and their broader significance within the so-called 'Aesthetic Movement'. It will also explore Lady Archie's own influence on writers in late-Victorian England, in particular the cosmopolitan art writer

Vernon Lee (1856–1935). Lee wrote a number of essayistic reflections on Lady Archie's plays, one of which I have recently translated for the first time from Italian. She also drew upon Lady Archie's eccentric personality as the inspiration for a fascinating short story 'Oke of Okehurst' (or 'A Phantom Lover', 1886), about a young woman who becomes fixated with a ghostly portrait of a long-dead ancestor.

Image: Lady Archibald Campbell and Eleanor Calhoun in *As You Like It*, from Eleanor Calhoun, *Pleasures and Palaces: The Memoirs of Princess Lazarovich-Hrebelianovich* (New York: Century, 1915)

**Dr Fraser Riddell** is Assistant Professor in English in the Department of English Studies at Durham University. He has written extensively about literature, performing arts and music in the nineteenth century, with a particular focus on Aestheticism and Decadence in the 1880s and 1890s. His recent publications include a translation of an essay by Vernon Lee about Lady Archibald Campbell's production of John Fletcher's *The Faithfull Shepherdess* (in *Studies in Walter Pater and Aestheticism*, 2022) and a chapter about the use of sound and music in Victorian pastoral literature (*The Victorian Idyll*, forthcoming with Routledge). Other work includes the monograph *Music and the Queer Body in English Literature at the Fin de Siècle* (Cambridge University Press, 2022).



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