

DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH HAS THE PLEASURE OF INVITING YOU TO  
THE GUEST LECTURE ON 29 MAY 2023

AT 14:30 IN F-139

Guest Lecturer:

**Professor Christine Ferguson (University of Stirling, Scotland, UK)**



### Unhandling Cottingley: Arthur Conan Doyle's *The Coming of the Fairies* 100 Years On

In December 1920, *The Strand Magazine* published a series of sensational photographs taken by two young girls from Cottingley that allegedly showed real-life fairies dancing at the bottom of their garden. Their authenticity was vouched by no less a person than world-famous Sherlock Holmes creator and spiritualist Sir Arthur Conan Doyle. The images immediately triggered a fierce public debate: were they evidence of the existence of otherworldly nature spirits, of the technical craft and duplicity of their creators, or of the suspect nature of photography itself? In this talk, Professor Christine Ferguson of the *Media of Mediumship* project examines the legacy of Doyle's defence of the fairies both for his own reputation as a rationalist and for his vexed relationship towards the scientific investigation of spiritualist phenomenon. How, we will consider, did Doyle's attempt to handle the Cottingley case work for and against the spiritualist cause, and to obscure the handiwork of photograph creators Elsie Wright and Frances Griffith? The talk will be illustrated with images of the original Cottingley fairy cameras and Elsie Wright's famous 1913 "Confession Letter", now held in the collections of the National Science and Media Museum in Bradford.

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