



# TROLLOPE THE LAW & TRANSGRESSION



**Magdalene College, Cambridge**  
**27-28 March 2026**

## FRIDAY 27<sup>th</sup> MARCH

2.00pm

### Arrival of delegates and registration

From the College Lodge you will be directed to the Cripps Court Conference Centre for registration. There is a room to store your luggage in the foyer.

2.15pm

### Welcome and housekeeping

The Cripps Court Auditorium

Dominic Edwardes, Trollope Society Chair

Susan Cooper, Trollope Society Honorary Secretary

2.25pm

### Conference introduction

The Cripps Court Auditorium

Professor Linda McClain

Professor Linda C. McClain opens the conference with a short introduction reflecting on law, morality and transgression in Anthony Trollope's fiction. A professor of law and former practising lawyer, she sets the scene for two days of discussion exploring how Trollope's novels engage with justice, judgement, and the boundaries between legal rules and moral responsibility.

2.45pm

### Mr Dove's Opinion: Custom and Conscience in the World of the Pallisers

The Cripps Court Auditorium

Gerard Clarke

Trollope's *The Eustace Diamonds* introduces two of the most realistic lawyers in Victorian fiction, the indefatigable solicitor Mr Camperdown, and the learned barrister Mr Dove, to whom Mr Camperdown turns for advice about the diamonds purloined by Lizzie Eustace.

Mr Dove's Opinion, written for Trollope by a friend at the Chancery Bar, upsets Mr Camperdown's ideas about custom. Mr Dove indicates a kinder disposition towards Lizzie than might be expected. Enforcer though he be of the property rights of the monied classes, Mr Dove has some unexpected views on the "simple dirty matter of money".

This paper considers Mr Dove's Opinion about the diamonds, and his views about Lizzie Eustace and property. Is he right about the law of heirlooms? More importantly, how does Trollope use Mr Dove as a critical commentator on the doings of the rich?

3.25pm

### How Bad is John Caldigate?

The Cripps Court Auditorium

Dr Tom Crewe

How bad is John Caldigate? This is the question underlying Trollope's novel, named for its eminently questionable hero. It is asked of John's conduct as a student, which costs him his patrimony and estranges him from his father; of his behaviour towards his cousin Julia and his friend Dick's sister; of his actions on his voyage to Australia; and of his decision to live with Euphemia Smith out of wedlock. It of course becomes the central question of a legal trial: has he been so very bad as to have committed bigamy? And it hovers over his actions during the trial itself. The question is one his wife, Hester, must confront as she decides whether to stand by him regardless of the verdict. It drives her mother, certain of the answer, to extremes of intolerance and manipulation.

In its depiction of these entwined moral, social, and legal pressures, *John Caldigate* emerges as one of Trollope's most searching studies of human behaviour, and his most sustained exploration of belief: why people believe, whom they trust, and how prejudice and misapprehension shape judgement. It takes us to the heart of his great and distinctive achievement as a novelist.

4.05pm

### Break for tea

The Denis Murphy Gallery

4.35pm

### Unexpected Interventions: The Deus ex Machina in Court

The Cripps Court Auditorium

Gilly Wilford

This paper explores the ways in which Trollope uses unexpected interventions to resolve difficult legal situations, often through figures who operate quietly behind the scenes before emerging at the last possible moment.

From the unlikely hero, Mr Bagwax, in *John Caldigate*, whose dogged persistence uncovers the truth in a case of bigamy, via Mr Toogood, in *The Last Chronicle of Barset*, whose investigations go way beyond his legal remit to save Mr Crawley from a charge of theft, we reach Madame Marie Goesler. Marie, in *Phineas Redux*, has the hardest task and carries it out quietly, determinedly and with success, saving our hero from the gallows.

Mr Dockwraith, in *Orley Farm*, is, by contrast a malevolent figure who leaves no stone unturned to discredit Lady Mason.

Together these cases show Trollope's skill in creating suspense through legal narratives that are less 'whodunnits' than 'how-done-it's' and invite reflection on justice, chance and character.

5.15pm

### Law, Transgression, and Gender Prejudice in Anthony Trollope's *Cousin Henry*

The Cripps Court Auditorium (Zoom)

Professor Deborah Denenholz Morse

Anthony Trollope's short novel *Cousin Henry* centres on a transgression of the spirit rather than the strict letter of the law. From the outset, the offence is clear: Henry knows where his uncle Indefer has hidden a later will that would disinherit the rightful heir, but he conceals this knowledge. Trollope's interest lies less in legal procedure than in Henry's inner life and in the responses of those around him, from the morally upright Isabel Brodrick to the resolute family solicitor, Mr Apjohn.

The novel's deeper mystery, however, lies in the visceral revulsion Henry inspires. Nearly everyone who encounters him expresses intense loathing, often in strikingly hyperbolic terms. This language is accompanied by repeated suggestions that Henry is deficient in conventional manliness, accused of weakness, emotional excess, and an inability to "face it like a man".

Trollope appears to interrogate the prejudice generated by Henry's presentation of gender difference. The extremity of Henry's own perceptions gradually shifts the reader's sympathy towards him. Although legally and socially absolved in the end, Henry remains marked by the ordeal. This paper argues that *Cousin Henry* offers not only a critique of primogeniture, but a broader and more searching examination of gender prejudice.

5.55 - 6.00pm

### Close of the afternoon and housekeeping

The Cripps Court Auditorium

Dominic Edwardes, Trollope Society Chair

7.00pm

### Conference dinner reception

Benson Hall

Reception for residential delegates and those attending the conference dinner.

7.30pm

### Conference dinner

The Hall

The Hall is a beautiful sixteenth-century dining room, originally the monastic refectory. The dinner will be informal and the dress code is smart casual. Delegates who have registered to give a three-minute reading from the works of Anthony Trollope will be invited to speak.

# SATURDAY 28<sup>th</sup> MARCH

## 7.30 - 8.30am Residential delegates breakfast

### Ramsey Room

Breakfast will be served between 7.30 - 8.30am for residential delegates.

## 9.00am Welcome and housekeeping

### The Cripps Court Auditorium

Chris Skilton, Trollope Society Trustee

## 9.10am Justifying Septimus Harding: Ecclesiology and Law in *The Warden*

### The Cripps Court Auditorium

Dr Mark Rigg

Trollope's Barchester novels draw on a range of ecclesiastical commitments with deep roots in Anglicanism. This paper argues that Septimus Harding and Archdeacon Grantly are best understood as representatives of fundamentally contrasting approaches to church and church law.

The warrant for this approach lies in the novel's central dispute: a medieval Roman Catholic bequest subjected to the legal and moral scrutiny of Victorian Anglican England. This controversy is not simply about the temptations of wealth but enables a wider ecclesial struggle between competing visions of church authority and church law.

Anglicanism differs from traditional Protestantism. Two theological frameworks illuminate the complexity of Harding and Grantly. Avery Dulles's *Models of the Church* reveals Grantly as an advocate of the Church as Sacrament, while Harding comes to embody the Church as Servant. Luther's *Heidelberg Disputation*, with its contrast between ecclesiologies of glory and of the cross, further sharpens this distinction. Together, these perspectives deepen our understanding of the novel's dispute, characters, and narrative resolution.

## 9.50am Comfort break

## 10.00am 'Some gross insufficiency in the laws of extradition': Anthony Trollope's *Phineas Redux* and International Law

### The Cripps Court Auditorium

Dr Frederik Van Dam

In his travel book *North America* (1862), Trollope claims to have little interest in international law, remarking that he refused to read authorities such as Wheaton or Phillimore, relying instead on his own common sense. Taken at face value, this assertion is difficult to sustain. Trollope refers to international law in a number of his writings, and the professional and intellectual circles in which he moved would inevitably have exposed him to contemporary debates on the subject.

Moreover, Trollope's work for the Post Office, including his role in negotiating postal treaties in Central America and Egypt, would scarcely have been entrusted to someone without at least a working knowledge of international legal principles. This paper suggests that Trollope's fiction, and his political thinking more broadly, can be better understood when placed within the context of Victorian international law.

To explore this claim, the paper offers a close reading of *Phineas Redux*, arguing that changing Victorian conceptions of extradition and the right of asylum play a significant, if often understated, role in shaping the novel's plot and its moral and political concerns.

## 10.40am Presence and Absence: Transgressive Trustees and Anthony Trollope

### The Cripps Court Auditorium

Dr Hazel Vosper

Transgressive trustees were a frequent subject in Victorian newspapers, parliamentary debates, and popular novels. Yet, although legal trusts—whether created through wills or marriage settlements—feature in many of Anthony Trollope's works, the figure of the trustee rarely takes centre stage. The principal exception is Alaric Tudor's

fraudulent behaviour in *The Three Clerks*. This absence is striking, given the narrative potential of trustee misconduct: family disappointments, courtroom disputes, questions of financial morality, and the gendered dynamics of power—all themes that recur elsewhere in Trollope's fiction.

The purpose of this paper is to explore that absence. First, it will examine how trustee misconduct was perceived and represented in Victorian life from a historical perspective. Second, it will analyse Alaric Tudor's failure to fulfil his trustee duties and assess how this storyline was received by Trollope's contemporary critics. Finally, the paper will adopt a more speculative approach, considering whether the very absence of trustees in Trollope's novels may occasionally have served a narrative function, shaping the plots in ways their presence might not have allowed.

## 11.20am Break for tea

### The Denis Murphy Gallery

## 11.40am Trollope and the Equitable Judgment of Human Failings

### The Cripps Court Auditorium

Professor Gary Watt

In *Where the Shoe Pinches* (Pólemos, 2016), Professor Watt examined *The Warden* and Septimus Harding's pursuit of what Harding calls "true equity". This presentation extends that enquiry across the chronicles of Barchester and into a contemporary church land dispute with echoes of *The Vicar of Bullhampton*. It argues that Trollope's fiction promotes the Aristotelian virtue of equity (*epieikeia*) in the judgment of others. Aristotle writes in his *Rhetoric* that: "It is equity to pardon human failings, and to look to the lawgiver and not to the law; to the spirit and not to the letter...to the character of the actor in the long run and not in the present moment; to remember the good rather than evil" (i.13.1374a). This Aristotelian equity, which was adapted into English law by Chancery judges motivated by a clerical concern for mercy, leads us amongst other things "into the temptation of loving the leading ecclesiastical characters for their weaknesses as much as for their strengths" (Durey, 2002).

## 12.20pm A Taxonomy of Transgression in Anthony Trollope's Novels: A Conversation

### The Cripps Court Auditorium

Professor Linda McClain and Claire Laporte

Trollope felt obliged to "make virtue alluring and vice ugly." He criticized novels that confer good outcomes on bad characters. Using character outcomes as a yardstick of ethical judgments in Trollope's world, this conversation explores a taxonomy of transgression in Trollope's novels. In the legal realm, the novels address transgressions from outright crime (murder, embezzlement, forgery, theft, bigamy) to shady and unethical manipulations that affect the legal rights of others (suborning, lying, concealment). Trollope's novels sketch out nonlegal norms, such as rules around gender and class. For example, Trollope explores the propriety of cross-class marriages, but often in contexts in which class boundaries are contested. Women guilty of power-grabbing or overweening ambition—for example, mercenary marriages—often come to bad ends, as do men who transgress social norms of gentlemanly conduct. Yet, sometimes norms cross-cut each other, such as when social abhorrence toward bigamy is pitted against the power of feminine love. Outcomes in these situations reveal a hierarchy of moral principles.

## 1.00pm Question and answer

### The Cripps Court Auditorium

Claire Laporte

The conference speakers will join a panel session led by Claire Laporte.

## 1.25pm Closing remarks

### The Cripps Court Auditorium

Dominic Edwardes, Trollope Society Chair

## 1.30pm Lunch

### The Denis Murphy Gallery

## SPEAKERS



### Gerard Clarke

Gerard Clarke is a London barrister. His practice includes what Trollope's Mr Dove, a traditional Chancery barrister might be surprised to learn is called Modern or Commercial Chancery. Gerard has practised commercial, public, and media law since the 1980s. He has appeared in Courts at every level in England and Wales, in the European Court of Justice, the European Court of Human Rights, the British Virgin Islands and the Cayman Islands. Gerard has also worked in international legal teams on cases in the USA, Switzerland, Hong Kong, Singapore, Bermuda, Gibraltar, the Channel Islands, the Isle of Man, the UAE, Malaysia, and Botswana. Gerard has advised the UK and several other governments. Gerard holds a degree in Modern History from the University of Oxford. His interests include legal history, old cars, and Victorian novels, and he regards Mr Dove as the best lawyer in fiction.



### Dr Tom Crewe

Tom Crewe's first novel, *The New Life*, was the *Sunday Times's* novel of the year for 2023, and won the Orwell Prize for Fiction, the Sunday Times Young Writer of the Year Award, the Betty Trask Prize, the South Bank Sky Arts Award for Literature, and the Prix du Premier Roman Étranger. He was chosen as one of Granta's Best of Young British Novelists. Since 2015, he has been an editor at the *London Review of Books*, to which he has contributed more than forty essays. He recently appeared on an LRB Close Readings podcast, with Professor Dinah Birch, to discuss Trollope's *The Last Chronicle of Barset*.



### Professor Deborah Deneholz Morse

Deborah Deneholz Morse is the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH) Professor at William & Mary. Deborah is the author of *Women in Trollope's Palliser Novels, Reforming Trollope*, and wide-ranging articles on Trollope. She is lead editor of *The Routledge Research Companion to Anthony Trollope*, and co-editor of *The Politics of Gender in the Novels of Anthony Trollope*. She also writes and edits frequently on the Brontës, on Elizabeth Gaskell, and in Animal Studies.



### Claire Laporte

Claire Laporte is the President of the Trollope Society USA, a nonprofit literary society devoted to the works of Anthony Trollope. She writes essays on literature that are available at <https://clairelaporte.substack.com//> and leads community and Trollope Society reading groups as part of an effort to popularize literature and create connections between community and academic readers. Claire is a former intellectual property trial lawyer. She practiced law for almost 30 years at a private law firm and finished her legal career as the Head of Intellectual Property for Ginkgo Bioworks, a publicly traded biotechnology company. Claire also provided pro bono legal services to advance marriage equality and transgender rights. Claire is also Vice-Chair of the only public hospital system in Massachusetts.



### Professor Linda McClain

Linda C. McClain is Robert Kent Professor of Law at Boston University School of Law and Co-director of the BU Program on Reproductive Justice. She writes about family law, gender and law, feminism, civil rights, and constitutional law. She has written several articles and book chapters on the novels of Anthony Trollope (two with Professor Allison Tait). She is active in the Trollope Society (UK) and Trollope Society USA.



### Dr Mark Rigg

Dr. Mark Rigg is an English literature teacher at the Storm King School, a private boarding school in Cornwall-on-Hudson, NY. He attended Amherst College and Yale University; later, he earned his doctorate from Luther Seminary. He is the author of *Preaching in Place: Wendell Berry and the Agrarian Sermon*. He holds degrees in English literature and Christian theology.



### Dr Frederik Van Dam

Frederik Van Dam is Assistant Professor of European Literature at Radboud University, Nijmegen, The Netherlands. He is the author of *Anthony Trollope's Late Style: Victorian Liberalism and Literary Form* (2016) and the co-editor of *The Edinburgh Companion to Anthony Trollope* (2019). He is currently finishing a project that deals with British poetry and international cooperation, and his most recent work focuses on Central-European modernism and infrastructure. He chairs the European Consortium for Humanities Institutes and Centres and is one of the editors of the *European Journal of English Studies*. In 2015, he created *The Pleasure of that Obscurity*, a documentary about the place of Trollope in the scholarship of J.Hillis Miller.



### Dr Hazel Vosper

Dr Hazel Vosper holds an MA in Historical Research, and her PhD thesis examined the social, cultural, and legal influences on female investors in England from the mid-nineteenth to the early twentieth century. She is an independent scholar whose research focuses on women's financial agency, the historical experiences of female investors, and their representation in print culture.



### Professor Gary Watt

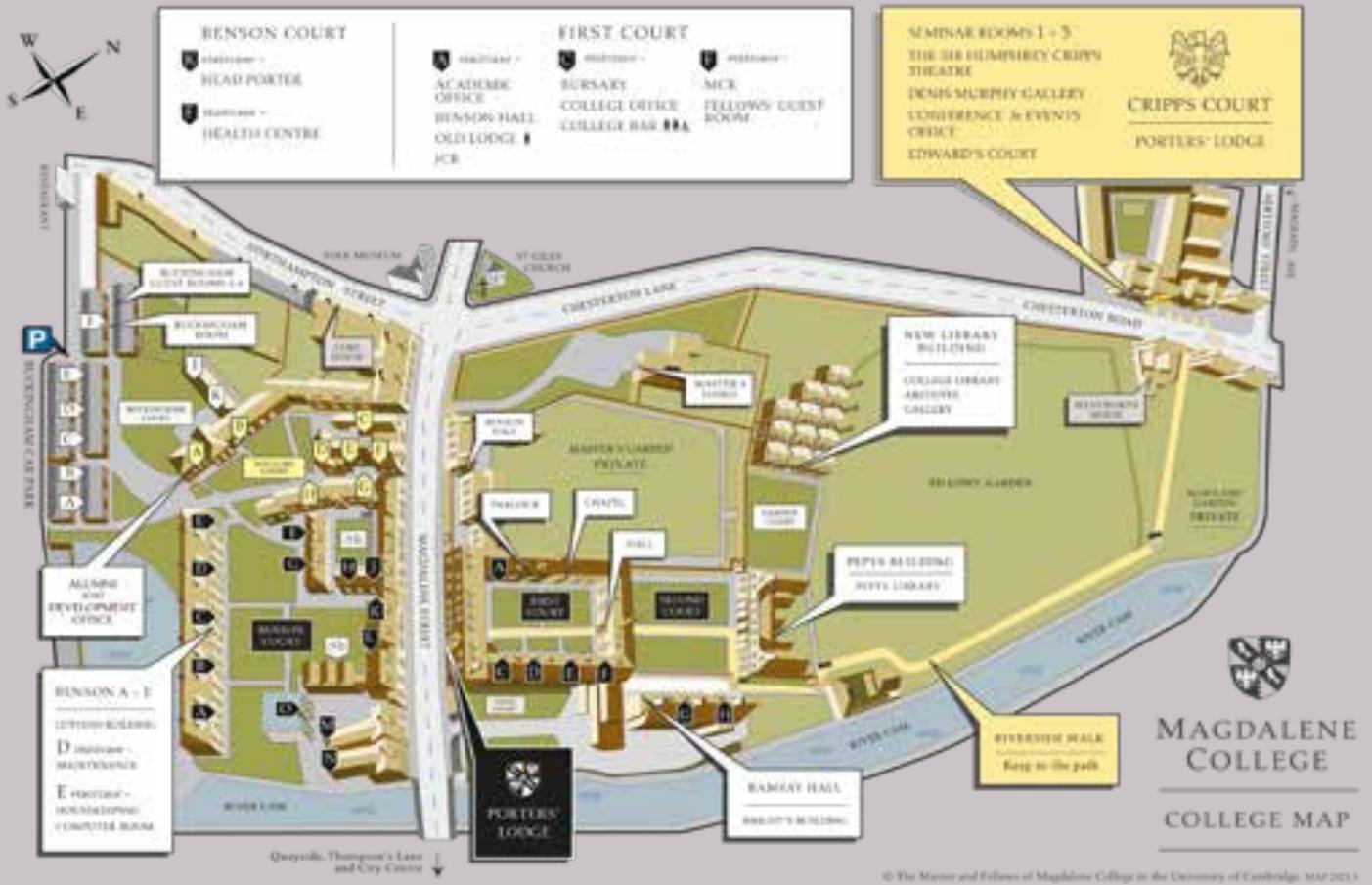
Professor of Law, University of Warwick. Founding co-editor of the journal *Law and Humanities*; General Editor of the book series *A Cultural History of Law* (Bloomsbury); Monographs include *Trusts and Equity* (OUP), *Dress, Law and Naked Truth* (Bloomsbury, 2013), *Equity Stirring* (Hart, 2009), *Shakespeare's Acts of Will* (Bloomsbury Arden Shakespeare, 2016), *Shakespeare and the Law* (OUP, 2024). Publications on Victorian literature and the law include articles and chapters on Dickens, Eliot, and Trollope.



### Gilly Wilford

Gilly has read and enjoyed Trollope since reading *The Small House at Allington* in her teens. She then read the Barchester novels in the right order and used the Palliser novels as an antidote to accountancy exams. She has spent many hours in Trollope's company ever since.

# MAGDALENE COLLEGE MAP



## TROLLOPE SOCIETY

### The Trollope Society's 2026 Conference

*Trollope: The Law & Transgression* explores the theme of law and transgression across Anthony Trollope's fiction. Bringing together academics, lawyers, novelists and readers, the conference examines how Trollope represents legal systems, moral failure, social rule-breaking, ecclesiastical authority, gender prejudice, inheritance, equity and international law. Across two days at Magdalene College, Cambridge, we will consider how Trollope dramatises both the letter of the law and the pressures of conscience, custom and social judgement.

### Organising Committee

Members of the organising committee are Susan Cooper, Dominic Edwardes, Mark Green and Chris Skilton. The Trollope Society is a voluntary organisation with no paid staff. The conference has been organised by members of the Society's Executive Committee who have kindly given their time to make the weekend possible. We hope you enjoy the conference and the opportunity to explore Trollope's work together.

### Contact

If you need any assistance over the weekend please speak to a member of the Organising Committee or call Susan Cooper on 07748 666509.