

RNA Conference 2022 – Sessions and Speakers

Please see the timetable for details of times and choices

Friday 15th July

Emma Darwin

(morning session only for those who have booked)

Psychic Distance is the concept which integrates decisions about narrative voice, characters' voices, pace, viewpoint and showing and telling. Emma explains how it can strengthen your writing.

Emma Darwin's debut THE MATHEMATICS OF LOVE is possibly the only novel ever nominated for both the Commonwealth Writers Best First Book and the RNA's Novel of the Year. Her second novel A SECRET ALCHEMY, was a Sunday Times bestseller as well as forming the major part of her PhD in Creative Writing from Goldsmiths. Her blog "This Itch of Writing" gave rise to GET STARTED IN WRITING HISTORICAL FICTION. Her memoir, THIS IS NOT A BOOK ABOUT CHARLES DARWIN, was published in February 2019.

RNA Committee Q&A

The past couple of years have given the RNA a chance to take a healthy look at itself in the mirror and now we're embarking on some changes. If you'd like to speak with the committee, come along and ask your questions!

Emily Ruston & Jenny Hutton:

Bring on the Rewrite!

Jenny and Emily look at your book from the point of view of an editor, from the moment your manuscript hits their inbox. They'll cover the most common writing pitfalls they've seen, debunk revision letter jargon, explain what stands out in the slush pile, and make a case for the most soul-destroying words of all - THE REWRITE! Between them **Jenny Hutton** and **Emily Ruston** have over thirty years' experience in the publishing industry. They cut their teeth at Harlequin, editing over seventy manuscripts a year each, and gained a sharp understanding of what readers want. In a freelance capacity they have worked for some of the biggest global publishers. They have seen their private clients go on to achieve best-selling independent success and secure dreams of a traditional publishing contract. They know what works commercially and just what it will take to make a story shine.

Julie Cohen chairs:

Who is the Contemporary Protagonist?

with Emily Bedford, Hattie Grunewald, Maisie Lawrence

Julie Cohen chairs a talk with agent Hattie Grunewald, Canelo's Emily Bedford and Dialogue Books editor Maisie Lawrence on today's most likely - or unlikely - protagonists heading into our books and flying off the shelves.

Lizzie Lamb & Adrienne Vaughan: Publishing But Were Afraid to Ask

Everything You Wanted to Know About Indie

Lizzie Lamb and Adrienne Vaughan are super excited to share the secrets, tips and knowledge they have accumulated over ten years as successful indie authors. Indie publishing has been a game changer and they know how it works. They will take you from finishing your novel to publishing on Amazon, (hopefully) achieving best-seller status. The guide will include: finding an editor/using a critique service, employing a proof reader and cover designer, how to format your novel for Amazon, purchasing ISBN numbers, going 'wide' versus Amazon KDP Select, book distribution services and the importance of establishing a media presence.

Adrienne Vaughan has been a writer since the age of seven, from the moment she first sat at the kitchen table thumping out stories about ponies, witches, and unicorns on her turquoise Petite typewriter. Today she writes award-winning, page-turning romantic suspense. Brought up in Dublin, Adrienne lives in rural Leicestershire with her husband, two cocker spaniels and a rescue cat called Agatha Christie – 'So-named because we never know who she's going to kill next!' Her latest novels, GIFT TO A MERMAID and THE SHELL SISTERS - cur-

rently waiting in the wings to be published - are both spell-binding family sagas with a touch of Celtic magic based on Ireland's Ancient East Coast.

With Scottish, Irish, and Brazilian blood in her veins, it's hardly surprising that **Lizzie Lamb** chose to become a writer. As a child, she wrote extra scenes for the films she watched at Saturday cinema and handed the hand-written scripts out to her friends. After thirty four years as a primary school teacher, she decided to find out if she had it what it took to become a published author and joined the RNA and hone her craft. It was at an RNA Conference that another writer encouraged her to write from her heart and not focus too overtly on what she 'believed' agents and publishers were looking for. She formed the New Romantics Press with three other members of the RNA and went down the self-publishing route. It was the best decision she's ever made.

Jean Fullerton:

WELCOME! with conference notices from Alison and Sheila

Jean Fullerton is currently Acting Chair of the RNA.

Alison May (chair)

Practice Makes Pitch Perfect

with Hannah Schofield, Donna Hillyer, Belinda Toor (HQ)

We've done it online, now it's the time to stand up and give your elevator pitch a go in public! Our panel of experts are ready and waiting to hear your one minute elevator pitch and to offer constructive feedback. If you'd like to put your name in the hat, please email sheilacrighton@me.com by July 1st. Names will be drawn July 3rd so you will have plenty of time to buff and polish your pitch to perfection!

Sarah Rees Brennan:

Creating Realistic Characters in a Fantasy World

Lauded YA Fantasy author Sarah Rees Brennan talks about real people living out-of-our-world lives.

Sarah Rees Brennan is the author of the Demon's Lexicon trilogy, and the Lynburn Legacy series which begins with UNSPOKEN, a romantic Gothic mystery about a girl named Kami Glass, who discovers her imaginary friend is a real boy. Sarah's latest fantasy standalone IN OTHER LANDS, the story of the crankiest nerd who ever fell into a magical land, was a Lodestar and Mythopoeic award finalist.

Saturday 16th July

Romantic Novelists' Association AGM

Alex Hutchinson:

The History of Chocolate and Romance

Ever wondered how flowers and chocolates became the clichéd first-date gift? Or feared your historical romance might contain a factually erroneous confection? Ever suspected that the entire Western attitude to sweets may have been shaped by a cynical Scotsman who was trying to irritate his uncle-in-law? Let Alex Hutchinson take you on a fascinating journey into the history of chocolate in Europe to discover precisely when and how your characters would eat theirs. (Hint: 1933 - the year a box of chocolates got romantic.)

Alex Hutchinson is an historian, archivist, broadcaster, and author. After spending more than a decade at the world famous Rowntree's sweet factory in York running their vast in-house archive, she is now an internationally recognised expert in the history of chocolate. Alex is best known for her regular appearances on the hit Channel 5 series The Wonderful World of Chocolate. Alex combines a peerless knowledge of her subject with a passion for making history accessible to all audiences.

Tamsin Collison:

Let Me Tell You A Story (DIY Audio Books)

Voice coach Tamsin Collison coaches author Rhoda Baxter through the key elements of making your own audio book.

Janet Gover:

New Writers' Scheme Get-Together

In this session for members of the New Writers' Scheme, Janet will give an overview of the year so far and talk

about how to get the most benefit from your report. Come along with your questions!

Janet Gover is the New Writers' Scheme Organiser. She is a graduate of the scheme and is now working on what will be her 16th published novel. Her NWS spreadsheet is a thing of great beauty. When she's not writing or being a slave to her exceedingly fluffy cat, she spends far too much time playing silly computer games and cooking – sometimes succeeding in both.

Sarah Waights:

Slay the Synopsis!

Published or unpublished, no-one escapes that dreaded request for a killer one-page synopsis – it is THE critical tool in securing the attention of agent, publisher or even the next book with an existing editor. Come away newly confident, understanding just what makes a synopsis irresistible; how to ensure it ‘sells’ and ‘tells’ your book; what to put in (and what to leave out); pick up practical tools to ensure your synopsis shines bright in a crowded marketplace.

Poppy Alexander (*Sarah’s writing alias*) wrote her first book when she was five, but it failed to find a publisher. There was a long gap in her writing career while she grew up, and after studying classical music at university, she decided the world of music was better off without her and went back to writing instead. She takes an anthropological interest in family, friends and life in her West Sussex village (think, *The Archers* crossed with *Twin Peaks*) where she lives with her husband, children and various other pets. Poppy’s first book - *25 DAYS 'TIL CHRISTMAS* - has been translated into several languages. Her most recent book, *THE LITTLEST LIBRARY* has just been published by Avon/Harper Collins in the US. Poppy also writes as Rosie Howard, is generally lurking on social media and you can find her via her website: [poppy-alexander.com](http://poppyalexander.com)

Stuart Bache:

Indie Cover Design Lab

Designer to some of the biggest indie authors in the world (and a few trad authors, too), Stuart Bache is going to look at a selection of your book covers and give detailed feedback, ideas, tips and changes to your current designs. Stuart will also answer any question you have on the design process, whether it’s on the best way to work with your designer or where to find the best images. Please email your covers to sheilacrighton@me.com if you’d like your cover to receive a ‘Bache’-Inspection.

Stuart Bache has over 15 years of experience in book cover design, both for traditional publishing and indie authors. Stuart has been in senior positions at Hodder & Stoughton, Penguin Random House and Harper-Collins and freelanced for almost every publisher in the UK and USA. Seven years ago he set up Books Covered, a design agency for indie authors, and designs covers for Mark Dawson, LJ Ross, Simon McCleave, Karen Inglis and many more.

Fiona Loakes:

TikTok for Authors

Think TikTok is for kids? Think again. When a social media platform has the power to send books into the bestseller lists, publishers and authors sit up and pay attention. But what is TikTok? Does “Booktok” really sell books? The romance-reading community is active on TikTok, so are there opportunities to engage with readers who might love our books? This session will cover an introduction to the app, facts and figures about book sales generated by Booktok, and tips for creating a successful author account on TikTok (and no you don’t have to dance or lip-sync – unless you really want to!).

Fiona Loakes is an award-winning author of romance and women’s fiction, and has written more than 25 novels under the pen names of Fiona Lucas and Fiona Harper. She joined TikTok in the midst of lockdown in 2020 and since then has gained more than 25,000 followers on the app, talking about her books, life as an author and writing and publishing tips – you can find her at @fionalucasauthor. Fiona also runs a Facebook Group for authors wanting to get started on TikTok: (www.facebook.com/groups/tiktok4authors)..

Lizzy Dent:

An Author’s Journey from page to screen

Hear how Lizzy’s book ‘THE SUMMER JOB’ hit tinseltown with her agent, Hattie Grunewald and Mark Stay of The Bestseller Experiment.

Lizzy Dent (mis)spent her early twenties working in Scotland in hospitality, in a hotel not unlike the one in her first novel, *THE SUMMER JOB*. She somehow ended up in a glamorous job travelling the world creating content for various TV companies, including MTV, Channel 4, Cartoon Network, the BBC and ITV. But she always knew that writing was the thing she wanted to do, if only she could find the confidence. *THE SUMMER JOB* has been translated into a dozen languages and optioned for TV by Universal Content Production (NBC Universal). *THE SETUP* is her second novel.

Rhoda Baxter:

Top Ten Contract Questions

Are you an author who doesn't have an agent? How do you know if the contract you're offered is a good one or a scam? Come and find out about ten things you should consider before you sign a publishing contract. Ideal for new authors and those who are unagented.

Rhoda Baxter / aka Jeevani Charika is a British-Sri Lankan author who writes multicultural women's fiction and romantic comedies. Her books have been shortlisted for various awards. She loves all things science geeky. She also loves cake, crochet, and playing with Lego. You can find out more about her (and get a free book by signing up to her newsletter) on her website www.jeevanicharika.com

Katie Fforde & Rowan Coleman:

My First Bookclub

Have you ever wondered how an established and successful author feels about the first book they ever published? Well, now you'll be able to find out. Please join Alison May as she interviews bestselling authors Katie Fforde (*LIVING DANGEROUSLY*) and Rowan Coleman (*GROWING UP TWICE*) about their meteoric journey (or were they rollercoaster rides?) to getting that first novel published and find out what they think about it now. Rowan Coleman is the internationally bestselling and award winning author of fifteen novels including *THE MEMORY BOOK*, *THE SUMMER OF IMPOSSIBLE THINGS* and *THE GIRL AT THE WINDOW*. A life long Bronte fan, under the Bronte-inspired pen name Bella Ellis, Rowan also writes the Bronte Mysteries - a carefully researched series of novels that imagine the Bronte Sisters were amateur detectives before they were famous. *THE RED MONARCH* is out now!

Katie Fforde is President of the RNA and is a best-seller many times over. Her latest book is *A WEDDING IN PROVENCE*

Anita Chapman:

Get to Grips With Instagram

Anita explains how to get the most out of Instagram as an author. How can you make photos look better? What should you post and how often? Who should you follow? Why use hashtags and how? What are Instagram Stories and what on earth is a Reel? Bring your phones for a bit of fun creating Instagram content together! (If you don't have an Instagram account, try to set one up beforehand so you can take part)

Anita Chapman (of neetsmarketing.com) advises authors on how to use social media effectively via Zoom, and by writing up social media plans. She's been running courses and working one-to-one with authors since 2015.

Janet Gover chairs...

Slush Pile Slam!

with Victoria Pepe (Amazon), Rhea Kurien (Dash), Jennie Rothwell (One More Chapter)

Are your first words captivating? Will your opening paragraphs excite a reader? Get an instant response to your submission from our panel of industry experts. Submit the opening page of your book, anonymously, to be read aloud to our panel. See how long it takes for them to give it a thumbs up – or a thumbs down. Discover the real importance of your opening and how industry professionals make their choices. Open to anyone attending the conference. Email janetgover@romanticnovelistsassociation.org with your opening 500 words (to the nearest end of sentence). The e-mail should be titled Slush Pile Slam Submission. The submission should be in an attached, anonymous, word document, in standard MS layout (12 point, Time News Roman, double spaced with indented paragraphs). Learn from everyone's submission – not just your own. Submissions will be read in the order in which they are received. Submissions open at 12.00 noon

Monday 27th June and close at 12.00 noon on Friday 8th July. Submissions that fall outside the guidelines will not be read.

Pia Fenton & Anna Belfrage

How Good is your Dual Time Management?

How to dress for success, ensure you avoid distorting history and in general survive minor inconveniences such as smallpox, childbirth, the plague, starvation and war. In other words, a light-hearted look at time travel! *Had Anna Belfrage been allowed to choose, she'd have been a time-traveller. As this was impossible, she became a financial professional with two absorbing interests: history and writing. Anna has written acclaimed time travelling series *The Graham Saga*, set in 17th century Scotland and Maryland, and the equally acclaimed medieval series *The King's Greatest Enemy*, set in 14th century England. She has recently released *A FLAME THROUGH ETERNITY* (the 3rd in a new series), *THE WANDERER*, a fast-paced contemporary romantic suspense with paranormal and time-slip ingredients, as well as *THE CASTILIAN POMEGRANATE*, the second book in her Castilian Saga. At present, Anna is working on a medieval series featuring Edward I, as well as a book set in 1715 where magic lockets and Jacobite rebels add quite the twist.* www.annabelfrage.com <http://Author.to/ABG> <https://www.facebook.com/annabelfrageauthor/> Twitter: <https://twitter.com/abelfrageauthor>

As **Christina Courtenay**, Pia Fenton writes historical romance, time slip and time travel stories, and lives in Herefordshire (near the Welsh border) in the UK. Although born in England, she has a Swedish mother and was brought up in Sweden – hence her abiding interest in the Vikings. Christina is a former chairman of the RNA and has won several awards, including the RoNA for Best Historical Romantic Novel twice with *Highland Storms* (2012) and *The Gilded Fan* (2014) and the RNA Fantasy Romantic Novel of the year 2021 with *Echoes of the Runes*. *Tempted by the Runes* (time travel published by Headline 9th December 2021) is her latest novel, with a new standalone timeslip novel, *Hidden in the Mists*, coming in August 2022. Christina is a keen amateur genealogist and loves history and archaeology (the armchair variety). <http://www.christinacourtenay.com> <https://www.facebook.com/christinacourtenayaauthor?ref=ts> <https://twitter.com/PiaCCourtenay> <https://www.instagram.com/ChristinaCourtenayAuthor>

Sunday 17th July

Laurie Johnson and Bobbi-Lee Wright:

Ever Wanted to Write for Mills & Boon?

Want to write a Mills & Boon romance but not sure where to start? Editors Laurie Johnson and Bobbi-Lee Wright talk through each UK-acquired M&B series and the opportunities available. With a focus on the Historical series, we'll cover key-selling tropes, creating characters with emotional conflicts and how to avoid submission pitfalls. Join us in this workshop and we'll give you the tools needed to take your story from romance concept to M&B contract!

Laurie Johnson's love of Mills & Boon romances began at the age of twelve when she pilfered one from her nan's extensive collection! She's always been an avid reader and loves stories so much she completed a degree in Imaginative Writing. As an Editor at Mills & Boon, she gets to read wonderful romances every day and acquires for some of her favourite lines including Modern, Medical, True Love and Historical. She loves acquiring exciting new voices and looks for those fresh spins on classic themes. At home, Laurie is a mum of twins—it's chaos, but she loves it and is so grateful to have her very own hero to rescue her when she's outnumbered! Twitter: @lauriec_johnson

Bobbi-Lee Wright is an Editorial Assistant for the Mills and Boon Modern series, joining the team in 2020.

Bobbi-Lee has a lifelong love of romance that started when she would buy second-hand books with her leftover train ticket money as she walked home from school. With a love of writing and getting wrapped up in the art of storytelling, Bobbi-Lee went on to study Journalism at Goldsmiths College, University of London. While writing dramatic news stories she'd secretly get lost in romance! As a true stroke of luck on her last day of university she landed her dream job at Mills & Boon and pinches herself every day that she gets to be surrounded in the romantic world she'd spent years escaping to! Twitter: @bobbi_leewht

Sonia Duggan:

Taking 10 Seconds to Fall In Love With Your Writing

Would you like more ease and flow in your writing process? As creative writers, all we want is to be able to sit and write, but how to do that when our minds keep being seduced by distractions? That's where mental fitness

comes in. In this workshop, Sonia will show how you can learn to take command of your mind, silence the Saboteur voices of doom, distraction and despair, and strengthen your Sage brain so that you can choose thoughts and emotions that support you in your work and life and bring you joy. You'll have the opportunity to take a free assessment before the conference to help personalize your learning during our time together. We'll do some quick, easy exercises that you can practice at home every day to start building your mental muscle, and learning a new perspective that can help you each time life delivers a disappointment. You will leave this workshop with a basic understanding of tools that can help you boost your performance, improve wellbeing and strengthen relationships hello@unlimitedcreativitycourse.com www.unlimitedcreativitycourse.com.

Sonia Duggan combines her skills as a life and mental fitness coach with her love of creative writing to help writers achieve their best work through living their best life. She started her training as a mental fitness coach with Positive Intelligence in March 2020 at the start of the pandemic. As the world was rocked by panic and fear, she was struck by the high level of calm and positivity among the coaches on her course. She went on to become one of the first coaches in the world to be certified by Positive Intelligence in mental fitness coaching and has seen great shifts in her clients. Sonia has been a writer most of her life and a professional coach for over 13 years. She particularly enjoys helping writers access their full creativity, increase confidence and resilience, tackle writer's block, and balance priorities. She is certified CPCC by the Coaches Training Institute (CTI), credentialed PCC by the International Coach Federation (ICF) and certified CPQC by Positive Intelligence (PI). She coaches clients individually, leads workshops for writers and runs courses on creativity and happiness. Sonia is also a pranic healer, treating physical, emotional and psychological ailments.

Pernille Hughes & Elizabeth Drummond with Mark Stay of the Bestseller Experiment

Join Pernille Hughes, Elizabeth Drummond and chair Mark Stay, host of the Bestseller Experiment, talking about our favourite romance tropes. From enemies-to-lovers, fake dating and second-chance love, discover what these authors love to read and write, and what they think is next for the RomCom genre.

Before writing full-time, **Pernille Hughes** (pronounced Pernilla) studied Film & Literature at university. After graduating she went into advertising and later on to market natural history films before working in children's television, which meant living in actual Teletubbyland for a while! From 2011–2015, she was a regular contributor for the Sunday Times column 'Confessions of a Tourist'. She has two novels published to date *PROBABLY THE BEST KISS IN THE WORLD* and *PUNCH-DRUNK*. Her new book *TEN YEARS* will be out August 2022.

Elizabeth Drummond grew up and studied in Yorkshire, attaining a degree in English Literature from Sheffield University before moving to New York for a year post-graduation. It was in New York she learned she was nothing like Carrie Bradshaw so upon her return to England she moved to London where she forged a successful career as a film distribution executive. Although her experiences on film sets and corporate boardrooms could fill multiple books with scandal alone, Elizabeth's first novel *THE REUNION* is mostly filled with light-hearted humour and romance. Elizabeth lives in Essex with her husband and two daughters.

Mark Stay got a part-time Christmas job at Waterstone's in the nineties (back when it still had an apostrophe) and, despite being working class and quite lippy, somehow ended up working in publishing for over 25 years. He would write in his spare time and sometimes those writings would get turned into books and films, including the Witches of Woodville series from Simon & Schuster, and the forthcoming Warner Bros. horror movie *Unwelcome*. Mark is also co-presenter of the Bestseller Experiment podcast, which has inspired writers all over the world to finish and publish their books. Born in London, he lives in Kent with YouTube gardener and writer Claire Burgess and a declining assortment of retired chickens..

Charlotte Ledger: How Your Voice Fits Into the Commercial Romance Market

A very common response from agents and publishers is the 'We love your voice but the story isn't right for us' rejection but what does this actually mean and how can you avoid this? An in-depth look at why publishers buy the books they do with a focus on audience, pitch and trends.

Charlotte Ledger is Publishing Director of One More Chapter. She started at Mills & Boon in 2011 before mov-

What Readers Want

ing across to HarperCollins in 2013. Since then, she has covered commercial fiction from million-copy-best-seller Debbie Johnson to USA Today and Kindle #1 bestseller Sue Fortin. She was shortlisted for The Bookseller and SYP's Trailblazer of the Year award and has won the RNA's Publisher of the Year award twice.

Brigid Coady chairs...

Writing the Rainbow: LGBTQ+ Fiction

with Rebecca Slorach, Melissa Lenhardt, Charlie Lyndhurst

As Senior Editor at Mills & Boon **Rebecca Slorach** works on the dedicated longer length romance list. Recent publishing highlights have included the LGBTQI+ romance *THE SECRET OF YOU AND ME* by Melissa Lenhardt. Next year she is proud to publish *ONE NIGHT IN HARTSWOOD*, Emma Denny's winning novel from the LGBTQI+ competition 'Romance Includes Everyone' Mills & Boon ran with the RNA, as well as Amber Rose Gill's debut novel *UNTIL I MET YOU*.

Melissa Lenhardt is a multi-genre author from Texas. Her debut mystery, *STILLWATER*, was awarded the 2014 Whidby Writers' MFA Alumni Emerging Writers contest and *SAWBONES*, her historical fiction debut, was hailed as a "thoroughly original, smart and satisfying hybrid, perhaps a new sub-genre: the feminist Western" by Lone Star Literary Life. The New York Times called her sixth novel, *HERESY*, "An all-out, women-driven, queer, transgender, multiracial takeover of the Old West." When Melissa isn't travelling, she lives in Dallas with her family.

Charlie Lyndhurst (aka Liam Livings) is an award-shortlisted novelist who lives with his boyfriend and cats. He bakes to indulge his dangerously sweet tooth, admires unaffordable classic cars, and drinks pink wine with friends. His favourite sport – gold medal standard – is reading a romantic novel in a long hot bath.

Clare Mitchell:

Paying The Man - the tax talk

The session that deals with all the stuff you don't want to do, but is essential you know about, an overview of the main financial issues for an author empowering you to take control of your business. Clare's mantra is: BE LEGAL: BE SMART: BE BRAVE! Learn how to stay on the right side of the tax authorities, maximise the money you make from your career, and know when and how to seek professional help and advice. The tone is constructive and informative and also (hopefully) entertaining. There will be a handout, links to useful information, and the opportunity to ask questions. Only UK tax matters will be covered, and no individual's personal tax situation will be discussed publicly.

Clare Mitchell ACA is a fully qualified Chartered Accountant with over 35 years of experience in a wide variety of industries, and currently running a private portfolio of clients, both author and non-author. As **Clare London**, she's also a romance author in both the male/female and male/male genres, publishing through independent publishers since 2007 and also now self-publishing.

Living the History with Elizabeth Chadwick: an interview with Nicola Cornick

Find out how best-selling historical author Elizabeth Chadwick went from stacking shelves to storming castles. **Elizabeth Chadwick** is a multi-award winning, million-selling historical novelist with 27 novels in print translated into 18 languages. Her novels have been New York Times bestsellers and have been optioned for film and TV. *THE SCARLET LION* was included in Historical Novel Society founder Richard Lee's top ten historical novels of the decade. She occasionally lectures on the academic circuit and is a member of the Royal Historical Society. A longstanding member of the RNA, she is a winner of the historical RoNA and has been shortlisted for the award six times. The medieval period is her speciality but she loves all forms of historical fiction. She lives in a cottage in the Vale of Belvoir with her husband and four mad terriers. When not time travelling at her desk, she enjoys photography, taking long walks, and lots of reading!

Nicola Cornick is an international bestselling, award-winning writer who has written over thirty romantic historical novels in a career spanning twenty years. She studied History at University of London and Ruskin College Oxford and worked in academia before becoming a full-time author. She volunteers as a guide and researcher for the National Trust at the 17th century Ashdown House and is a trustee of the Friends of Lydiard Park and the Wantage Literary Festival. A former chair of the RNA, Nicola enjoys giving talks on a number of historical and writing topics. In her spare time, Nicola trains guide dog puppies.

Julie Cohen:**But Why??? Crafting Conflict for your Characters**

The trickiest part of writing any romantic novel isn't getting your characters together—it's keeping them apart. Julie, a twice-Richard and Judy Book Club bestseller, will talk through how to create rich and believable inner conflicts for your characters, and how to craft external conflicts that will add to the emotional punch.

Julie Cohen is an award-winning, bestselling author of over 25 novels. She is a Vice President of the Romantic Novelists' Association. In 2020 she won the RNA Inclusion Award for her work founding the RNA Rainbow Chapter for LGBTQ+ writers, and in 2018 her novel *TOGETHER* won the RoNA for Contemporary Romantic Fiction. She is an Associate Lecturer in Creative Writing at the University of Reading and runs an online creative writing school, Novel Gazing. Her latest novel is *SUMMER PEOPLE* (August 2022, Orion).

Liz Fenwick & Brigid Coady:**Who Am I?**

As the online world becomes evermore noisy and busy, it becomes confusing to know what your writer's brand is and where and how you should be online. Liz Fenwick and Brigid Coady will lead you through how you should develop your brand (or even brands) and how to navigate the online world. By the end you should have the tools to answer; 'Who Am I?' and 'Where Should I Be?'

Novelist, wife, mother of three, slave to two cats and dreamer-turned-doer, Liz Fenwick is an award-winning author of eight novels that have been published in fourteen languages, and has been dubbed 'The Queen of the Contemporary Cornish Novel,' by the Guardian. She was born in Massachusetts but is now based in Cornwall, where she spends her days writing, looking at the view from her study and plot walking - if not found procrastinating on Twitter.

Brigid Coady is the author of a number of romantic comedies, including *Emma Ever After*, *Persuading Austen*, and the Joan Hessayon award winning, *No ONE WANTS TO BE Miss HAVISHAM*. Brigid is a managing director for an integrated marketing and communications agency, which mostly means she spends a lot of time with spreadsheets. She has been a voiceover artist and radio presenter. She will happily discuss fan fiction and all things One Direction, but, be warned once started she won't stop.

Allana Vincent:**The Pinched Waist: A History of the Corset**

Dive into the past with Allana Vincent to explore the world of period corsetry. Over the last 300 years we look at why women wore corsets, what damage did they do and were they really comfortable? She will bring along historical replicas to try on, compare and discuss how they feel and bring historical fashion to life.

After completing a Foundation Degree in Costume Construction at the University of Glamorgan, Allana Vincent furthered her studies at the Northern College of Costume. After taking on some of the projects there, she fell in love with costume making and decided to make it her full-time job - a daunting but exciting prospect! Since then she has worked in theatres, on films and TV, as well as making unique bridal dresses for clients and other bespoke garments for performers, art galleries and historical re-enactment. Her theatre credits include working on the UK tour of 'The Phantom of the Opera', West Yorkshire Playhouse's 'Chitty Chitty Bang Bang' and 'Strictly Ballroom'. Her TV and film credits include 'Bill', 'Royal Night Out', 'The Go-Between' and 'Dad's Army'. Creating costumes has always been a passion, the pursuance of which allows her to take on a variety of challenging projects by creating clothes that people will love and treasure! <https://www.allanacos-tume.co.uk>

Liz Berwick:**Cupcake Decorating**

Ever read a cosy café book and wished you had a beautifully decorated cupcake to hand? Join us for this hands-on cupcake decorating workshop with Liz Berwick from Simply Scrumptious Cupcakes and all of your wishes will come true! (Please contact sheilacrighton@me.com if you have special dietary requirements as gluten-free and/or vegan cupcakes can be made available if requested in advance)

Nicola Verdon:**Land Girls and the Countryside**

Join Professor Nicola Verdon as she discusses the working woman in the early twentieth century.

Nicola Verdon is a Professor of Modern History at Sheffield Hallam University where she researches and teaches British history in the 19th and 20th centuries with a focus on gender and labour, rural society, poverty and standards of living. She is the author of two books, *RURAL WOMEN WORKERS IN 19TH CENTURY ENGLAND* and *WORKING THE LAND: A HISTORY OF THE FARMWORKER IN ENGLAND FROM 1850 TO THE PRESENT DAY*. Her postgraduate students are studying projects as diverse as the relationship between femininity and dress in Victorian mining districts and the Aid Spain movement in interwar Britain.

Ruth Long:

Snog, Marry, Murder

We know them, we love them (some of them) but when it comes down to it who would you pick? And why? A fun and entirely frivolous audience participation event to pick our favourites, the ones we love, the ones we love to hate and the ones we simply can't stand. Get ready to shout, cheer and boo for the characters we know and would snog, marry or kill. Bring wine. You must still have some left, yes?

Ruth Frances Long / Jessica Thorne writes romance and fantasy from the heart which often strays into weird and wonderful liminal places. She works in a specialised library of rare & occasionally crazy books.

The 2022 conference programme was dreamt up, chased up and pulled together by the utterly wonderful Sheila Crighton, aka Annie O'Neil, aka Daisy Tate, aka Sheila McClure. www.annieoneillbooks.com @DaisyTat-etastic @mcBookieMonster