Friends of
Argyll Estates Archives

Online Seminar: *From Political Wife to Woman Politician: Lady Frances Balfour decides to reform Marriage and Politics*

Join us online via Zoom, following the Friends AGM, at 15:00 UK-time on **Friday 20 Nov** to hear Susan Pedersen, author of *Burn This Letter: Love and Trouble in a Marriage of Four* (John Murray, 2026), talk about the brave, unusual and consequential life of Lady Frances Balfour.



Image: Lady Frances Campbell, from the Library of Congress collection

Lady Frances Balfour, tenth child and fifth daughter of the 8th Duke of Argyll, was a force in politics in the 1880s and 1890s – although now she is virtually forgotten. Having listened to her father argue with Cabinet colleagues from girlhood, even slipping into the side gallery of the House of Lords to hear him speak, young Lady Frances Campbell knew she wanted a political life too. When she married Eustace Balfour in 1879, she thought such a life within reach, for Eustace was the nephew of Lord Salisbury and brother of A.J. Balfour, who would dominate politics for the next few decades. But when Eustace was offered a parliamentary seat, he refused to stand. He would stick to his chosen field of architecture.

What was Frances to do? First, she remade her marriage. She would act as the "political wife" for her brother-in-law, later Chief Secretary for Ireland Gerald Balfour (with whom she fell deeply in love); even after Gerald married Lady Betty Lytton, daughter of Disraeli's Viceroy to India, Frances contrived

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to have the two couples live in neighbouring Kensington houses, sharing political campaigns and family life. But she soon went further, founding women's philanthropic and cross-party organizations and becoming the women's suffrage movement's most effective parliamentary lobbyist. After 1906, suffrage would become a vibrant, popular and out-of-doors movement, but in the 1890s it relied more on the personal connections and sharp strategic mind of Frances Balfour, who spent more time in the Ladies Gallery of the Commons than most MPs spent in the Commons chamber. This talk recovers her brave, unusual, and consequential life.

Speaker Biography

Susan Pedersen, raised in Japan to missionary parents, has taught at Harvard and Columbia University, where she is now Morris Professor of British History. She is the author of several books, including *The Guardians: The League of Nations and the Crisis of Empire* (2015), which won the 2015 Cundill Prize for Historical Literature. Her book about the remarkable personal and political partnership between Lady Frances Balfour and Lady Betty Balfour, *Burn This Letter: Love and Trouble in a Marriage of Four* is just out from John Murray. She writes regularly for the *London Review of Books*.

Booking information

This event is FREE* for members of the Friends.

***Please note: Friends must be logged in to their web account to receive their discount!**

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