

VICTORIAN MODERNITIES

25-27 June 2015, University of Kent, Canterbury

Co-sponsored by the Centre for Victorian Literature and Culture (University of Kent) and the Dickens Project (University of California, Santa Cruz)



Image: "Train passes signals in moonlight": hand-painted magic lantern slide, c. 1850, courtesy Kent Museum of the Moving Image

Keynote speakers

Professor Jonathan Grossman (UCLA) and Dr Ruth Livesey (Royal Holloway) and featuring a magic lantern show performed by Joss Marsh and David Francis from the Kent Museum of the Moving Image.

On 9 June 1865 at 3.30pm, Charles Dickens came close to losing his life when the South Eastern train in which he was travelling from Folkestone to London derailed while crossing a viaduct near Staplehurst in Kent. While Dickens and his travelling companions – Ellen Ternan and her mother – survived, ten passengers were killed and forty were injured. The accident affected him greatly, and he continued to suffer 'sudden rushes of terror, even when riding in a hansom cab', as he confessed a year after the event. The grim ghost story that emerged from this traumatic experience to be published in *All the Year Round* – 'No 1 Branch Line. The Signalman' – contrasts markedly with the ebullient celebration of railway speed in 'A Flight' – his earlier account of travelling from London to Paris for *Household Words*. While Dickens's early responsiveness to the symbolism of the railway and embrace of the connections enabled by new technological and industrial processes may have made him a 'leader of the

steam-whistle party *par excellence*' as Ruskin claimed, his writing also resonates with many of the anxieties and instabilities we associate with modernity.

The 150th anniversary of the Staplehurst railway accident in June 2015 provides us with an occasion to reflect upon the ambivalence that distinguished the Victorians' multifaceted engagement with the complex concept we now refer to as modernity. We welcome proposals that address any aspect of Victorian modernities and especially encourage interdisciplinary approaches.

Topics may include but are not limited to:

- Modern mobilities: transport, travel and tourism
- Victorian New Media: print, audio and visual technologies
- Cosmopolitanism and the Victorian global imagination
- Industrial fatigue, shock and trauma
- Victorian advances in science and medicine
- Neo-Victorianism
- Commodity culture and consumerism
- Modern spaces and temporalities, including the city
- Victorian avant-garde movements and/or new genres
- New Victorian social types: new women, decadents, dandies etc
- Narratives of belatedness, decay, apocalypse or nostalgia: challenges or resistances to modernity in the Victorian period

Deadline for proposals:
31 January 2015

Please submit 300 word abstracts to: victorianmodernities2015@gmail.com

Enquiries can be sent to Cathy Waters (c.waters@kent.ac.uk) or Wendy Parkins (w.j.parkins@kent.ac.uk)

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