

HEX Handbook Distinguished Lecture, 5 November, Tampere University

**Dr Tiffany Watt Smith – Friends among the dead: how to write about experience in historical research**

Friends are such an ephemeral part of life, leaving few traces behind. So, what does it mean to write a history of twentieth-century women's friendships, not only as they were thought about and legislated against, but as they were experienced?

This talk explores the boundary points between the historian and her subject in her attempt reconstruct friendship's pasts. As historians, we are nervous of inserting our own experiences into the lives of those we write about, recognising the risks of anachronism and projection, both particular temptations for those of us writing about the intimate worlds of feeling. And yet without the back and forth of empathy, there is no entry point to these sometimes fragile legacies, no way to begin to imagine what these worlds of friendship meant.

Taking the medievalist Carolyn Dinshaw's phrase 'a touch across time' as a starting point, this talk will make a case for attending to our own experiences in writing histories of feeling, and imagines the places where these experiences might land – from shaping questions to generating speculative histories. It argues that ultimately, thinking about experience helps us advance an ethics of historical research in an age where the question 'who owns this story?' is becoming particularly urgent.