



Marianne Harriet Mason 1845-1932

First Inspector of Boarded out children

Folk song pioneer, Plant illustrator & collector,

Psychic Investigator

Marianne was born in London, the daughter of George William and Marianne Mason and the family moved when she was 4 to Carmarthenshire before returning to their native Nottinghamshire by 1861 census, and building their family home at Morton Hall in Babworth, Ranby in Nottinghamshire.

In 1877 she was the **first** woman to collect, record and publish traditional folk songs in "*Nursery Rhymes and Country Songs*" starting a folk song revival. She volunteered for many years before she was offered paid work as a test case which led to her becoming the **first** woman Inspector of Children Boarded Out (fostering) Beyond the Union in 1885. She was known for thoroughness and went on to be appointed a Government Inspector, a role she performed for 25 years, retiring in 1910. Her unpublished autobiography *A Pioneer Life* in the Nottinghamshire Archives gives an account of her 25 years of service and of the many instances of inequality and discrimination she overcame. By 1910 there were 72 women working in various civil service departments and on her retirement, they presented her with a gold bracelet as their pioneer.

Marianne was also one of the original members of the Society for Psychological Research alongside various Professors and others meeting in a dingy room in an unfashionable part of London. Her memoir gives a fascinating account of early

experiments in telepathy including her work with two Foley brothers which she wrote up in an article '*Thought Reading*' in 1882. She details some of her own personal experiences of possible paranormal events but is also not totally convinced by all things supernatural. She does however accept the reality of telepathy and was open minded about hauntings – but rejected ghosts and poltergeists and had no time for mediums. She was sceptical about Madame Helena Blavatsky the co-founder of the Theosophical Society and a celebrated mystic. Marianne did not believe that Blavatsky had by psychic processes in India created a cup and saucer found missing from a picnic set and discovered buried in the ground at a spot indicated by Blavatsky. Marianne felt she was a fraud and the society sent investigators out to India and the frauds were discovered and exposed.

After she retired she went to see her brother, Canon Edward Mason, in South Africa where she travelled widely visiting Southern Rhodesia and Uganda and painted and collected flowers. In 1913 she published '*Some flowers of eastern and central Africa*' and was elected to the Royal Geographical Society. She died at her home in Rondebosch in 1932 and left 400+ plant studies to Kew Gardens. She had three plants named after her.

Marianne was a remarkable pioneering woman and is often overlooked.