

MARGARET REBECCA DICKINSON: A BOTANICAL ARTIST OF THE BORDER COUNTIES.

This beautifully presented book is published with full colour illustrations on silk finished paper by the

Berwickshire Naturalists' Club

A word from the author Dr. Elizabeth Towner

Miss Dickinson's paintings date from the 1840s to the 1890s. This 2021 is the bicentenary of her birth, a fitting time to commemorate her impressive life-work. This book brings together her Wildflower Collection and Album of Narcissus and describes her involvement in the Berwickshire Naturalists Club, within the context of her life and times. It is beautifully illustrated by her visual legacy of a wide selection of her paintings across the Border Counties.



My introduction to Margaret Rebecca Dickinson's botanical paintings was in a small exhibition a few years ago in Norham. The paintings were of plants, collected from the hedgerows and denes around the village and included specimens of wild angelica and blue anemone. The pictures reminded me of those in the Frampton Flora, produced by a family group of women botanists in Gloucestershire. I wondered whether Dickinson was well known locally as an artist, did she live in Norham and were there other examples of her work?

Notes from the exhibition, combined with further research revealed that Dickinson was a very prolific artist, although not widely known during her lifetime. The Archives of the Natural History Society of Northumbria housed the originals of her 458 watercolours of wild flowers, which had been annotated and digitized a number of years before and were available to view in an on-line gallery.

There was also a smaller collection of daffodil drawings in the prestigious Lindley Collections of the Royal Horticultural Society in London. There were copious numbers of illustrations but what about the artist herself?

Miss Dickinson proved to be an enigmatic person, leaving no diaries or letters. I could not trace a photograph or painting of her and there appeared to be no obituary.

But she was a member of the **Berwickshire Naturalists' Club** from 1873 to her death in 1918 and this provided a useful starting point.

Dickinson and her life and work became a Covid lockdown project for me. A frequent walk took me down the lane past her house, with views of the river Tweed and the bridge to Ladykirk. I was also familiar with many of the places where she gathered her specimens, throughout Northumberland, the Scottish Borders and County Durham.

Why was I particularly struck with the illustrations and the plants she collected? I think that it is interesting that Dickinson did not just concentrate on showy or beautiful or very rare specimens. Some depict very modest plants and some are very widespread specimens. Other plants depicted are now extinct or very rare. The rare Teesdale flora were painted by her a century before the upper Tees was flooded to construct the Cow Green reservoir. She also included some examples of 'ballast flora', a relic of the Region's industrial past. Her paintings of specimens collected in a botanising trip to Holy Island have been the inspiration for a contemporary poem about the artist and her work. In addition to wild flowers, she painted some cultivated plants, including those in the Album of Narcissus Drawings, some of which she had also grown in her garden.



Book Launch

A free lecture will be given by the author **Dr. Elizabeth Towner** at **Berwick Parish Church Hall** on **Thursday October 14th 2021** at **3.00p.m.**

You can purchase the book in person at the launch above for **£7.50**.

You may also order by phone or through the 'contact page' on the website (details below) These purchases will incur a small charge to cover postage.

Payment can be made by bank transfer or cheque.

Further details www.bnc1831.co.uk or by phone 01361 883070.

Club members can apply for a reduced rate.