

# Turning nature into art:

## Marianne North in Natal

by Stephen Coan

The Victorian traveller and artist Marianne North has a standalone gallery devoted to her work at the Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew, in south-west London. The gallery, named after her, houses a collection of 848 paintings, including those created during her visit to the Cape Colony and Natal in the 1880s. The paintings, bearing witness to North's 'immense industry' are 'the result of nearly twenty years of travelling, in the course of Miss North's self-imposed task of recording the world's tropical flora.'<sup>1</sup>

### Early years

Marianne North was born on 24 October 1830 at Hastings, East Sussex on the south coast of England, the second child of Frederick and Janet North. Marianne had an older sister, Janet (born in 1817), from her mother's first marriage in 1816 to Robert Shuttleworth of Gawthorpe Hall in Lancashire.<sup>2</sup> Shuttleworth died in 1818 and she married Frederick North in 1825. Marianne was their second child. The first, Charles, was two years older than Marianne; and another daughter, Catherine, seven years her junior.

Relatives of Frederick North owned Rougham Hall and its surrounding estate in Norfolk, where Frederick spent his school and university holidays 'with an old farmer at Rougham' and came to love the area.<sup>3</sup> On his graduation Frederick went to Geneva in Switzerland to board with a French family in order to learn the language, returning to England to study law. A man with broad interests, he enjoyed 'wide acquaintance among the scientific, artistic and political personalities of the day' and so Marianne 'learnt young to be at ease in such company.'<sup>4</sup>

In Marianne North's posthumously published two-volume autobiography, she recalls that her 'first recollections relate to my father. He was from first to last the one idol and friend of my life, and apart from him I had little pleasure and no secrets.'<sup>5</sup> In 1831, a year after Marianne's birth, her father was elected the Liberal member of parliament for Hastings. He held the seat until 1835 and again from 1854 to 1865 and 1868 to

1869. He would later become deputy-lieutenant and justice of the peace for Norfolk.

Marianne had little formal education: 'Governesses hardly interfered with me in those days ... [she writes] ... Walter Scott or Shakespeare gave me their versions of history, and *Robinson Crusoe* and some other old books my ideas of geography.'<sup>6</sup> When someone

told my mother that I was very uneducated (which was perfectly true) ... I was sent to school at Norwich with Madame de Wahl, one of the three sisters of Lady Eastlake who had committed the folly of marrying Russian nobles while students at Heidelberg. She had lived to repent, and escaped after much trouble, bringing home to England a son and a daughter, whom she had to educate and bring up by her own earnings.<sup>7</sup>

This would be Marianne's 'only formal education'.<sup>8</sup>

The Norths divided their year between town and country: the summers between her half-sister Janet's 'old hall in Lancashire and a farmhouse at Rougham'.<sup>9</sup> Winters were spent at Hastings on the coast, moving on to London for the social season which began in the spring. In 1847 the family embarked on an extended tour of Europe returning to England in 1850. During their eight-month stay at Heidelberg in Germany Marianne was able to enjoy 'with her father the adventurous life she was so partial to.'<sup>10</sup>

'My father often took me on expeditions, starting by rail, and then plunging into the forests, over hills and valleys, where we met pretty roe-deer, hares, or foxes, and gathered great bunches of lilies of the valley; all was apparently so calm and peaceful, though at that moment great revolutions were hatching all over Europe.'<sup>11</sup> Their visit to Vienna 'coincided with a revolutionary uprising and the party were forced into a hair-raising escape from the murderous violence.'<sup>12</sup>

Marianne was already proficient in watercolours, a required accomplishment for young females of her class, but during her later teenage years her enthusiasm was not for art but music and particularly singing. For a while she trained under Charlotte Helen Sainton-Dolby, a well-known contralto and composer of the

time, but was held back by acute stage fright that left Marianne trembling with fear. She then turned to painting, taking lessons ‘in flower-painting from a Dutch lady, Miss [Magdalena] van Fowinkel, from whom I got the few ideas I possess of arrangement of colour and of grouping.’<sup>13</sup> The botanical artist Valentine Bartholomew ‘also gave me a few lessons in water-colour flower-painting.’<sup>14</sup>

Several artists lived in Hastings at the time, including the watercolourist William Henry Hunt; ‘the only master I longed for’ but he would not teach. She thought his work would ‘live for ever, as it is absolutely true to nature.’<sup>15</sup> Edward Lear, the artist and writer, famous for his limericks, lived for a while in the gardener’s cottage at the North’s Hastings home and ‘became a good friend and supporter of Marianne’s artistic endeavours.’<sup>16</sup>

In 1867 a ‘crucial event in Marianne’s artistic development occurred ... when she was introduced to oil painting by Robert Dowling, an Australian artist who stayed with the Norths over Christmas.’<sup>17</sup> Marianne described painting with oils as ‘a vice like dram-drinking, almost impossible to leave off once it gets possession of one.’<sup>18</sup> She would later find ‘the force of colour in tropical vegetation was best conveyed by heavier oils.’<sup>19</sup> According to Lady Harriet Thistelton-Dyer, a noted botanist and botanical artist, Marianne’s painting techniques ‘were unconstitutional and rather peculiar ... She simply made a rough sketch rapidly in pen and ink of the subject and then worked paint straight onto the canvas and merely squeezed colour out of the tubes and put it on as it was without any medium. This horrified all artists who knew of it.’<sup>20</sup>

Marianne was 24 when her mother died in January 1855. On her death bed she ‘made me promise never to leave my father.’<sup>21</sup> Marianne kept her promise, ‘remaining his constant companion until his dying day.’<sup>22</sup> Following his wife’s death Frederick North let the family home at Hastings and moved to a flat in Victoria Street, Westminster.

Marianne was a frequent visitor to Kew Gardens with her father who was a friend of its director Sir William Hooker.<sup>23</sup> During a visit in 1856 Hooker gave Marianne ‘a hanging bunch of of the *Amherstia nobilis*, one of the grandest flowers in existence. It was the first that had bloomed in England, and made me long more and more to see the tropics. We often talked of going, if ever my father had a holiday long enough.’<sup>24</sup> Though they did not venture as far as the tropics, an opportunity for travel came in 1865 when her father lost his seat in the parliamentary elections. Marianne’s sister Catherine



Marianne North

had previously been a fellow companion on travels with their father but a year earlier she had married the writer and critic John Addington Symonds who described Marianne as ‘blonde, tall, stout, good-humoured, and a little satirical’.<sup>25</sup> Henceforth Marianne and her father travelled alone together. On this trip they took in Switzerland, Austria, Italy, Corfu, Cyprus, Turkey, Lebanon, Syria, Egypt, Israel and Palestine.

Marianne’s father died in 1869: ‘For nearly forty years he had been my own friend and companion, and now I had to live without him, and fill up my life with other interests as best I might.’<sup>26</sup> ‘I could not bear to talk of him or of anything else, and resolved to keep out of the way of all friends and relations till I had schooled myself into that cheerfulness which makes life pleasant to those around us. I left the house at Hastings for ever.’<sup>27</sup>

### After her father’s death

Marianne went to Menton on the French Riviera ‘to devote myself to painting from nature, and try to learn from the lovely world which surrounded me there how to make that work henceforth the master of my life.’<sup>28</sup> She journeyed along the Riviera to Italy, finally ending up in Sicily where she spent the spring of 1870 before returning to London in the summer where she re-opened the London flat in Victoria Street that would become

her permanent residence in England. She embarked on a social life for a while but ‘had long had the dream of going to some tropical country to paint its peculiar vegetation in natural abundant luxuriance.’<sup>29</sup> Financially independent and with her father dead, she was now able to pursue her dream.

In 1871, armed with letters of introduction (including from Edward Lear and Charles Kingsley), she embarked on the first of her long journeys, taking in Canada, the United States, Jamaica and Brazil. Further journeys would find her in Japan, Singapore, Borneo, Java, Sri Lanka (Ceylon) and India. In Sarawak, Borneo, she was hosted by the Rajah and Ranee of Sarawak, Sir Charles and Lady Margaret Brooke, venturing forth from their home by canoe and on foot into the jungle. There she painted a pitcher plant, new to science, later named *Nepenthes northiana* in her honour. In Sri Lanka she stayed with the photographer Julia Margaret Cameron who posed Marianne for the camera wearing Sri Lankan traditional dress.<sup>30</sup>

Over time the pattern of her travels ‘becomes clear: the quick, warm friendship with the local settlers and officials, with or without the benefit of introductions from her influential circle at home; the kindly and considerate attitude to servants and natives, the attitude of a Victorian lady accustomed to good service and well knowing how to deserve it.’<sup>31</sup> Despite this her travels were often arduous: braving all weathers, severe cold to severe heat; and transport by canoe, carriage or on foot. As for accommodation she ‘preferred a tent or barn to a formal drawing room, solitude to the company of local bigwigs, unpretentious people to servants of any kind.’<sup>32</sup>

On Marianne’s return to England in the summer of 1879 she hired a fashionable London gallery in Conduit Street to exhibit her paintings. The *Pall Mall Gazette* suggested they should have a permanent home at Kew Gardens; and Marianne thinking this a good idea wrote to Sir Joseph Hooker, who had succeeded his father as director of Kew Gardens,<sup>33</sup> expressing her wish to build a gallery for her paintings on the grounds of Kew at her own expense. With a few caveats he agreed. Marianne

engaged her friend James Ferguson, an architectural writer and occasional architect, to design the gallery and supervise its construction.<sup>34</sup>

Plans for the gallery were well under way when Charles Darwin invited Marianne to visit him at his Kent home, Down House, in 1880. Marianne considered Darwin ‘the greatest man living’ and was ‘much flattered at his wishing to see me, and when he said he thought I ought not to attempt any representation of



*The restored Marianne North Gallery interior at the Royal Botanical Gardens, Kew (©RBG, Kew, Andrew McRobb)*

the vegetation of the world until I had seen and painted the Australian, which was so unlike that of any other country, I determined to take it as a royal command and to go at once.’<sup>35</sup> So she did.

The Marianne North Gallery opened at Kew in June 1882. On display for the opening were 627 paintings and 246 types of wood she had collected. The paintings were placed close together in tiers with no wall visible. Even today the ‘artistic effect is almost overpowering’<sup>36</sup> and at the time Wilfred Blunt described the collection as a ‘gigantic botanical postage-stamp album’.<sup>37</sup> The stamp album still had some empty pages: ‘All the continents of the world had some sort of representation in my gallery except Africa, and I resolved to begin painting there without loss of time.’<sup>38</sup>

### Marianne North in South Africa

In August 1882, armed with introductions to botanists and bishops, she sailed from Dartmouth in the *Gran-tully Castle*, which ‘took me to the Cape in rather more than eighteen days – one of the shortest voyages



ever made.<sup>39</sup> Marianne stayed outside Cape Town at Wynberg, then a village, in a ‘nice large Dutch House’ belonging to the railway engineer William George Bronger and his wife Sarah; also home to their son-in-law the hydrologist and irrigation engineer John Gamble who was married to their daughter Constance.<sup>40</sup> Marianne subsequently turned down an invitation to stay at Government House: ‘I knew when I was well off, and declined the honour. My quieter home suited my particular work best.’<sup>41</sup> But she did have lunch with Governor of the Cape Colony Sir Hercules Robinson as well as visiting the Botanic Gardens where she met botanist Peter MacOwan and entomologist Roland Trimen.<sup>42</sup>

Marianne was struck by the ‘extraordinary novelty and variety of the different species’ in the Cape Colony: ‘the proteas were the great wonder, and quite startled me at first’.<sup>43</sup> Both Marianne and her ‘many friends’ collected specimens of a variety of plants and ‘two baths stood in my painting-room full of wonders.’<sup>44</sup>

While at the Brongers, Marianne was invited to stay by Hildagonda Duckitt,<sup>45</sup> ‘who managed the great old Dutch farm of Groote Post’ where she spent several days. Throughout her time in southern Africa Marianne preferred accommodation in ‘modest farmhouses and inns’.<sup>46</sup> She had a knack of bumping into the right people. On one occasion, returning from Bain’s Kloof to Cape Town by train, she found herself sharing a compartment with David Gill, Her Majesty’s astronomer at the Royal Observatory in Cape Town.<sup>47</sup> ‘He was one of the most agreeable men in South Africa, so I was lucky.’<sup>48</sup> Marianne was often lucky and ‘maintained the only time her plans went wrong was when she travelled with a companion.’<sup>49</sup>

From Cape Town she made her way by rail, horse and carriage to Port Elizabeth, which she thought ‘far more like a capital than Cape Town: it is full of life and work, very clean and neat, with an excellent hotel called after my father’s old leader, Lord Palmerston.’<sup>50</sup> Botanist Russell Hallack called on Marianne at the Palmerston Hotel the evening after her arrival; a ‘most interesting man’ who brought ‘two exquisite ground-orchids in his hand, which gave me work for the two next days.’ Hallack seemed ‘to know every flower of South Africa, and all about them, though he passed his days in business.’<sup>51</sup> Hallack advised her to go and stay at the Cadle Hotel 25 miles inland from Port Elizabeth. She found it ‘perfect quarters: a sort of farmhouse rather than a hotel, with the kindest of hosts and hostesses ... One felt more like a friend than a boarder. I had an upstairs

room, opening on a veranda with a window at the other end, looking over the farm and offices across the kloof to the distant mountains.’<sup>52</sup>

While at Cadles, as everyone called the hotel, Hallack took her to Van Staden’s River gorge, she riding a Basuto pony, ‘which treated me as if I were no weight at all, and both walked and cantered to perfection.’ In ‘a marshy hollow, [I] saw the *Sparaxis pendula* for the first time ... making me scream with joy ... “I was sure you would do that,” said my guide contentedly.’<sup>53</sup>

Hallack gave Marianne an introduction to Mrs Galpin in Grahamstown, the wife of a watchmaker there who had built a curious house with a tall tower and had seven sons all fond of natural collections of different sorts.<sup>54</sup> ‘These young men brought me constant relays of beautiful flowers. I stayed in a quiet room at the railway-hotel, where I could work well with a good light, and seldom went out except for drives with Mrs. Atherstone, a wonderful old lady of over eighty.’ Her husband, Hugh Atherstone

was the one man of the place, and full of information. He also collected for me, sometimes riding thirty miles before breakfast to get a flower ... His garden, which he planted forty years before, was well worth coming across the world to see, and full of strange plants, mostly native. The biggest of all aloes had been called after his relative, Mrs. Barber.<sup>55</sup>

A naturalist and artist, Mary Barber, was ‘probably the most important female amateur scientist in nineteenth-century South Africa.’<sup>56</sup>

I had heard her name ever since I entered South Africa as the great authority on all sorts of natural history, and was delighted when she walked into my room one day and said she had come from the country on purpose to see me. She showed me some of her own paintings, stippled on white paper, with a line of neutral tint round the edges to raise them ... She had painted many of the stapelias, and brought me two to do — brown and yellow stars with a most evil smell.<sup>57</sup>

Marianne’s travels in the Cape Colony brought her eventually to King William’s Town where she was met by the horticulturalist James Leighton. He took her to the botanical gardens where ‘we saw the poor director, who looked ill and depressed; everyone seemed in the same condition thereabouts.’<sup>58</sup> It was arranged for Marianne to go to the Pirie forest and lodge with a family who ran a sawmill. Leighton rode and Marianne drove

a country cart over the most awful roads. We lost our way, and went short cuts. Once when it seemed too bad for wheels to pass, I got out and fell in the mud; after that I slipped on some steppingstones and got soaked

in the river from head to foot, in which state I arrived at the house. I had to change everything at once.<sup>59</sup>

Her visit to Cape Colony ended at Port St Johns where she stayed with the resident magistrate John Oxley-Oxland and his wife Jane, son-in-law and daughter of the missionary Bishop Henry Callaway who came to visit: 'He was very big and merry, had begun life as a London physician, and gave up a good practice to come out as a missionary with Colenso; but he was very High-Church, and so they separated ... He was a man of the world, interested in everything that was going on; and the banishment at St. John's he did not enjoy.'<sup>60</sup>

Marianne wanted to travel overland to Natal but she waited in vain as it became 'more and more improbable: 120 miles through a country where the tribes were actually fighting. So I painted more flowers.'<sup>61</sup> Finally, having decided the overland journey was 'impossible, and that I must go by sea, the steamer did not come!' It did a fortnight later on 8 April 1883 in the shape of the *Ladywood*: 'The ship was crowded with excursionists from Natal, and I thought myself lucky to get the captain's cabin, next the engine.'<sup>62</sup> The *Lady Wood* docked in Durban harbour at nine the next morning and

'a good-natured young man brought my things and myself by the tram to the Marine Hotel<sup>63</sup> where that evening Mr. A., Donald Currie's agent, drove me up the hill to dine and sleep at his house, as his wife was going away the next day.

They lived close to the Botanical Gardens. Their house was quite hidden by the bright blue ipomoea, generally called 'morning glory.' I never saw it more lovely. The hedges all over that hill were hung with other ipomoeas, bignonias, tecomas, thunbergias, and a lovely white creeper from Barbados. I saw also an exquisite hibiscus growing tall, like a hollyhock, with a deep blue eye. In the gardens I found splendid zamias of all sorts, and stangerias which came from St. John's. Their leaves are so like large fern-fronds that they have deceived botanists, as they did me at first.<sup>64</sup>

During her stay in Durban, she met Colonel B. [James Henry Bowker] who

was known everywhere as Colonel Butterfly. He had done good service in the war, commanding the volunteers, and had been photographed with his net in many groups of them: never without his net, an appendage

to which the poor Empress Eugenie objected not unnaturally, when it appeared conspicuously in front of a view he presented to her of her son's grave.<sup>65</sup>

Bowker gave her 'some curious insects, and the flowers they haunted: a yellow mantis on a yellow everlasting, and a pinkish one on a pink everlasting flower.'<sup>66</sup> Marianne also met Eliza Sanderson, widow of John Sanderson, who showed her 'the most minute pencil-drawings of orchids by her late husband, and a wonderful flower he had discovered, called the *Ceropegia Sandersonii*, a creeping asclepias, with white and green cornucopia flowers, covered by umbrellas.'<sup>67</sup>

From Durban Marianne took the train up the north coast to Verulam, from where she drove 7 miles farther through pretty country up to Tongaat to stay with James and

Katherine Saunders:<sup>68</sup>

Their house had never been finished, but was already rendered dangerous by white ants, which were eating all of it that the damp had left. It stood on the top of a hill with a lovely garden, and distant views all round. Cotton, with pink, white, and yellow flowers; sugar, coffee, and fruit trees were there in quantities, all in good order.<sup>69</sup>

According to Marianne the Mauritian-born James Renault Saunders (1818–1892), the father

was a gigantic old man in gold spectacles, and a stupendous hat like a target. He reminded me of a typical Tory squire at home, perfectly unreasonable in his dogmas, but quite ready to laugh at his own unreason. He used to walk about with his arm resting on the arm of his clever little wife, she in a straight waterproof cloak, looking like a figure out of a Noah's ark. She was always most earnest about everything she did, and spent hours trying to puzzle out the names of every little weed. She



*Morning Glory, Ipomoea rubro-coerulea, a Mexican species that Marianne North painted at the home of the Donald Currie agent in Durban* (© RBG, Kew)

sang also, with an old voice, but much taste, and tried to paint in oils, while I was there, but didn't like it. She had already made a valuable collection of water-colour studies of the flowers of Natal.<sup>70</sup>

While there

Two nice girls, the daughters of one of the oldest American missionaries, rode over some twenty miles to stay for a few nights.<sup>71</sup> One of their men had been building 'Catch-why-ho's' (way of pronouncing it) new kraal, and had long talks with the master himself, who declared our Queen to be the most beautiful woman in the whole world. He had brought back cart-loads of boots, and said that though he gave up all other clothes, he would stick to them and to the chimney-pot hat!<sup>72</sup>

Another visitor was a Mr H[ill]<sup>73</sup>

a most enthusiastic botanist [who said] I must go with him to see a group of aloe trees forty feet high, the only ones left in that country; so I went to Verulam to stay a couple of nights, and he drove me over. He was a butcher by profession, but had bought considerable property, and started a large sugar-mill. Near this we found the noble group of trees on the bank of the river. The trunks measured two feet through at a yard above the ground, and rose to perhaps twenty feet of stately gray stem, then split into forks, which re-split into numberless pairs of great leaf-bunches, bearing three to five spikes of scarlet flowers, like red-hot poker, in July, when they might be seen forty miles off. They were the sole remains of forests which had disappeared in that part of Africa, perhaps for centuries, and even those three trees have been cut down since I was there, so I have been told. [Hill sat and watched Marianne at work] much pleased to see his dear aloes at last done justice to. He said not even Mrs. Saunders. had been to see them, and when he wrote a description of them to Kew, they had coolly asked him to cut one down and send them a 'section' for the museum!<sup>74</sup>

Marianne travelled from Durban to Pietermaritzburg by train. She was to stay with Bishop John Colenso and his family and was met at the station by an archdeacon who

put me into the bishop's carriage, which took me to a house where I found his youngest daughter Frances at luncheon.<sup>75</sup> She had a hectic flush and a hard cough, and said it was the first visit she had paid since her return from England. An old gentleman who came in, she told me, was one of their worst enemies. He seemed perfectly civil, but the whole family had isolated themselves by their Zuluism.<sup>76</sup>

The Colensos had long been in contact with Kew. In 1862 the whole family went to England for a visit during which they made friends with Joseph Hooker. He sent 500 kinds of flower seeds to the Colenso residence at Bishopstowe and the Colenso's eldest daughter Har-

riette organised the planting. Friendship and botanical interests kept the links between Kew and Bishopstowe alive and Marianne would easily have obtained an introduction to the bishop.

Marianne's account of the visit there provides an interesting contemporary account:

We did not pass a tree after leaving Maritzburg, crossing a dreary waste of long yellow grass or ripe corn till we came in sight of Bishopstowe, with its many-gabled house and gum-trees, like an oasis in the desert. It stood on the top of a small hill, and every tree there was planted by Dr. Colenso. Under the verandah covered with creepers he stood to receive me, giving me his arm with as much courtesy as if I had been a princess. It seemed quite a dream of old days to meet such a thorough gentleman again, and difficult to understand how one so genial and gentle could have made himself so hated by the majority of the country. His conversation was delightful, but the strained atmosphere of Zuluism which pervaded the house was painful to me, and difficult to understand. Cetewayo's portrait was everywhere, and he was talked of as a hero and martyr.

Over the course of her stay at Bishopstowe, Marianne found 'poor Frances sadly in want of sympathy, and almost reduced to despair and hatred of Zuluism, though she was the authoress of the book about them, and hated the Government more.'<sup>77</sup> Marianne did her best 'to disentangle [Frances's] artistic difficulties, and give her courage to go on painting from nature. The companionship of sweet flowers would have done her more good than sickly sentimental phantoms of high art, such as she was attempting, under the influence and spirit of Burne Jones's school in England.'<sup>78</sup>

As far as Marianne was concerned the 'only natural thing in the house was the poor old mother, very delicate and feminine [Sarah Frances Colenso, the bishop's wife]. She seemed delighted to get a new listener from the outer world, and to tell me stories of her youth. She did not worry herself about Zuluism, and it was a relief for me also to escape the family mania.'<sup>79</sup> While at Bishopstowe Marianne was taken

to see the printing-press, which was continually contradicting every fact stated by the Government or officials, who in their turn contradicted every fact published by it. Messengers were continually arriving with fresh lies (I believe) from 'the king'. Cetewayo had sent them a dog to take care of; some Englishman had given it to his majesty, and it was said to be worth £60, but could not bear coloured people. It seemed in a consumption when it first came, and was not much better since. It looked entirely disgusted with South Africa.<sup>80</sup>

Bishop Colenso had several pets including





*View of Table Mountain [Mkhambathini] from Bishop Colenso's house: the eucalyptus and Indian bamboos were planted by the bishop and the bird is likely the blue crane mentioned by Marianne North (©RBG, Kew)*

a fat retriever which never left him. He used to talk with him during the meals, and the dog seemed to understand all he said. He had also a pet lemur from Madagascar, which generally lived with the cows, but spent the hot hours of the day in a guava-tree, eating and spoiling the fruit, till it was time to go and fetch its friends home to be milked, after which it cuddled itself up close to me for the night. It hated dogs, and bit his majesty's pet as soon as it arrived, which did not add to the poor creature's love of South Africa. It also hated Zulus. Cats, rabbits, and a crane wandered about the pretty garden all sociably together, and never strayed further, as they found (like myself) that there was no place to stray to when once they left the oasis. All round was a pathless desert of long burnt up grass, inhabited only by grass-ticks. There was a wind too, and it was cold, and the cold produced its usual effect on me, so I fled.<sup>81</sup>

### Last years

Marianne had intended to travel on to Zanzibar or Mauritius, but as no ship was available for six weeks and being both 'ill and homesick' she decided to go home and take a rest, so she left Durban on the *Melrose* 'on the 22d of May; had another talk with my botanical friend at Port Elizabeth, two days with the Gambles in

their new house among the silver-trees at Wynberg, and reached home on the 17th of June 1883.'<sup>82</sup> Marianne enjoyed a 'delightful' three months at home which 'gave me fresh strength and courage for the task I had still set myself to do.'<sup>83</sup> And off she went to the Seychelles and Chile.

An extension to the Marianne North Gallery was made in 1883 to accommodate her later work including the paintings made in southern Africa, of which sixteen were painted in Natal. Poor health put an end to Marianne's travels in 1886 and she retired to Mount House, Alderley in Gloucestershire where she began writing her memoirs: 'putting all my journals and odds and ends of letter together – it is most amusing work even if it never comes to anything more – it is curious how new and fresh some years of my life come back.'<sup>84</sup>

Joseph Hooker recommended Marianne send her memoirs to the publisher John Murray who remarked on their length and 'their very peculiar character'.<sup>85</sup> An editor was required. Marianne was not up to the task due to her poor health and the task fell to her sister Catherine Symonds.<sup>86</sup> Marianne died at Mount House

on 30 August 1890, though not before having designed and planted a garden ‘stocked with rare plants from all corners of the globe’.<sup>87</sup> And, it should be added, several plant species being named after her.

Peter Raby concludes that in both her painting and writing, Marianne North conveyed ‘a sense of awe in response to the richness and diversity of the plants she recorded. She was a non-intrusive traveller and a non-collecting collector ... Turning nature into art, she then enshrined her vision of the natural riches of the world in a special temple on the sacred botanical site of Kew.’<sup>88</sup>

- As well as books, letters and papers referenced in the notes, I also consulted M.J. de Haan, *Mission on the Margin: A Case Study on Reformed Mission Prospects in eNkumane, KwaZulu-Natal* (Pietermaritzburg: Cluster Publications, 2010); and the S2A3 biographical database of southern African science, <https://www.s2a3.org.za/bio/Main.php> and Wikipedia.

## NOTES

- 1 Dorothy Middleton, *Victorian Lady Travellers* (Chicago: Academy Publishers, 1993): 54.
- 2 Shuttleworth was killed in 1818 ‘having upset a coach and four he was driving’ and nearly causing ‘the death of his wife and of the delicate child Janet, who was born afterwards.’ (Marianne North, *Recollections of a Happy Life, Volume 1* (London: Macmillan, 1892): 4).
- 3 *ibid.*
- 4 Middleton, *Victorian Lady Travellers*: 55.
- 5 North, *Recollections of a Happy Life, Volume 1*: 5.
- 6 *ibid.*: 8.
- 7 *ibid.*: 13. Lady Elizabeth Eastlake (1809–1893), born Elizabeth Rigby, was an author, art critic and art historian. The Rigby family lived in Norwich and had a farm at nearby Framingham Earl. They lived in Heidelberg from 1827 to 1829 where three of the daughters Anne, Maria Justina and Gertrude married Baltic German barons. Anne de Wahl (1804–1869), Elizabeth’s sister, married Carl George de Wahl of Wattel, Estonia. She divorced him in 1837 and ‘returned to England to run a succession of girls’ schools in Norwich and London’; see *The Letters of Elizabeth Rigby, Lady Eastlake*, edited by Julie Sheldon (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2009): 42, n.3.
- 8 Michelle Payne, *Marianne North: A Very Intrepid Painter* (Kew: Royal Botanic Gardens, 2011): 5.
- 9 North, *Recollections of a Happy Life, Volume 1*: 5. The hall was Gawthorpe Hall which Marianne’s half-sister Janet inherited in 1818 following the death of her father. In 1842 she married Sir James Phillips Kay-Shuttleworth who assumed her name and title.
- 10 Payne, *Marianne North*: 5.
- 11 North, *Recollections of a Happy Life, Volume 1*: 14.
- 12 Payne, *Marianne North*: 6.
- 13 North, *Recollections of a Happy Life, Volume 1*: 26–27. Magdalena van Fowinkel (1785–1875) lived in England between 1826 and 1875 and exhibited at the Royal Academy.
- 14 North, *Recollections of a Happy Life, Volume 1*: 27. Valentine Bartholomew (1799–1879) was a botanical artist and flower painter in ordinary to the Queen from 1837.
- 15 ‘We used to see a good deal of him at Hastings, where he generally passed his winters, living in a small house almost on the beach under the East Cliff, where he made most delicious little pencil-sketches of boats and fishermen.’ (North, *Recollections of a Happy Life, Volume 1*: 27).
- 16 Payne, *Marianne North*: 13.
- 17 *ibid.*: 14. Robert Hawker Dowling (1827–1886), Australian colonial artist who exhibited at the Royal Academy, London.
- 18 Quoted in Payne, *Marianne North*: 14.
- 19 Dea Birkett, *Spinsters Abroad: Victorian Lady Explorers* (Phoenix Mill: Sutton Publishing, 2004): 107.
- 20 Quoted in Birkett, *Spinsters Abroad*: 107. Lady Harriet Ann Thiselton-Dyer (1854–1945), botanical artist and daughter of Joseph Hooker (see note 33). She married William Turner Thiselton-Dyer who became director of Kew in 1885.
- 21 North, *Recollections of a Happy Life, Volume 1*: 30.
- 22 Payne, *Marianne North*: 7.
- 23 William Jackson Hooker (1785–1865) botanist and botanical artist. Appointed first director of Kew Gardens in 1841 following the recommendation that the gardens come under state ownership.
- 24 North, *Recollections of a Happy Life, Volume 1*: 31.
- 25 John Addington Symonds, quoted in Birkett, *Spinsters Abroad*: 4.
- 26 Marianne North, *Some Further Recollections of a Happy Life* (London: Macmillan, 1893): 231.
- 27 North, *Recollections of a Happy Life, Volume 1*: 38.
- 28 North, *Some Further Recollections of a Happy Life*: 231.
- 29 North, *Recollections of a Happy Life, Volume 1*: 39.
- 30 Julia Margaret Cameron (1815–1879) and her husband, Charles Hay Cameron (1795–1880) moved to Sri Lanka in 1875 to be closer to their sons who were managing the coffee and rubber plantations owned by their father.
- 31 Middleton, *Victorian Lady Travellers*: 60.
- 32 Anthony Huxley, ‘Introduction’ in *A Vision of Eden: The Life and Work of Marianne North* (London: Stationery Office, 1999): 12.
- 33 Sir Joseph Dalton Hooker (1817–1911) botanist, explorer and close friend of Charles Darwin. In 1855 he was appointed assistant director of the Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew and, succeeding his father, William Jackson Hooker, became director in 1865, holding the post for twenty years.
- 34 James Ferguson (1808–1886), Scottish architectural historian known for his work in India on the rediscovery and dating of ancient sites.
- 35 Marianne North, *Recollections of a Happy Life, Volume 2* (London: MacMillan 1894): 87. Charles Darwin (1809–1882) wanted to visit North in London, but being frail knew he would not be able to manage the stairs to her flat.
- 36 Peter Raby, *Bright Paradise: Victorian Scientific Travellers* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1996): 205.
- 37 Quoted in *ibid.*
- 38 North, *Recollections of a Happy Life, Volume 2*: 217.
- 39 *ibid.*
- 40 William George Brounger (1820–1901), British railway engineer. In 1857 he was commissioned to build the Cape Colony’s first railway – from Cape Town to Wellington. Thereafter he extended the rail system in the Cape and was appointed colonial railway engineer in 1873. He was on the management committee of the Cape Town Botanical Gardens from 1873 to 1881. John Gamble (1847–1889), mathematician, engineer, hydrologist, meteorologist and keen botanist. From being a mathematics lecturer at Lincoln College, Oxford, Gamble changed careers to become an engineer. In 1875 he was appointed the Cape Colony’s hydraulic engineer. He married Constance Brounger in 1878.



- Responsible for the water supply systems for several towns and cities, including Port Elizabeth, King William's Town and Graaff Reinet, he was regarded as 'the father of irrigation and hydrology in South Africa' (Tony Murray, 'John Gamble: Maths prodigy who took up Engineering', <https://www.theheritageportal.co.za/article/john-gamble-maths-prodigy-who-preferred-engineering> accessed 1 July 2025).
- 41 North, *Recollections of a Happy Life, Volume 2*: 220.
  - 42 Peter MacOwan (1830–1909), Scottish chemist, came to South Africa to improve his health and settled in Grahamstown where he became principal of Shaw College. A respected botanist, he corresponded with William Hooker at Kew and was a director of the Cape Town Botanical Gardens. Roland Trimen (1840–1916), English entomologist, also came to South Africa for health reasons and subsequently became an authority on South African butterflies. He was private secretary to several Cape Colony governors, a curator at the South African Museum, a respected ornithologist and an expert on vine diseases.
  - 43 North, *Recollections of a Happy Life, Volume 1*: 218.
  - 44 *ibid*: 219.
  - 45 Hilda Duckitt (1839–1905) ran the farm Groote Post and was well known for her culinary skills, publishing two pioneering books of South African cuisine: *Hilda's 'Where is it?' of Recipes* (1891) and *Hilda's Diary of a Cape Housekeeping* (1902).
  - 46 Middleton, *Victorian Lady Travellers*: 69.
  - 47 Sir David Gill (1843–1914), Scottish astronomer and Her Majesty's astronomer at the Royal Observatory, Cape Town from 1879 to 1906.
  - 48 North, *Recollections of a Happy Life, Volume 2*: 235.
  - 49 Middleton, *Victorian Lady Travellers*: 10.
  - 50 North, *Recollections of a Happy Life, Volume 2*: 239. The Palmerston Hotel was demolished in 1936 and rebuilt in the Art Deco style. Its name was changed to the Campanile Hotel in 1960 and it is derelict at the time of writing.
  - 51 Russell Hallack (1824–1903), businessman and naturalist who came to South Africa in 1843, settled in Port Elizabeth and was a member of the Eastern Province Naturalists' Society; North, *Recollections of a Happy Life, Volume 2*: 239.
  - 52 *ibid*: 240. Cadle Hotel, run by the Cadle family from 1862 until its closure in 1916 is now Woodridge College and Preparatory School.
  - 53 North, *Recollections of a Happy Life, Volume 2*: 244.
  - 54 Henry Carter Galpin (1820–1886), horologist and civil engineer was another Briton who came to the Cape Colony for reasons of health. He married Georgina Luck and the couple settled in Grahamstown where Galpin bought a double-storey house as their home and his place of business (watchmaker and jeweller). They had seven sons one of whom was the botanist, Ernest Galpin. Galpin made several extensions to the house including a meridian room, a small observatory above it, a clock tower and a camera obscura. The house is now the Observatory Museum.
  - 55 William Atherstone (1814–1898) came to the Cape Colony aged five with his parents in a party of the 1820 Settlers. Trained as doctor under his father Dr John Atherstone as well as in Dublin, London and Heidelberg, he joined his father's practice, taking it over on his death in 1855. He served on the Grahamstown city council and in the Cape legislative assembly. Mary E. Barber (née Bowker, 1818–1899) came with her parents to Cape Colony in a party of 1820 settlers at the age of two and married Frederick Barber in 1842. She would have been known to Marianne North as she corresponded with Joseph Hooker. The aloe referred to by North is the tree aloe *Aloidendron barberae*.
  - 56 Cornelis Plug, 'South African science in the years, 1899–1900' *South African Journal of Science* 95 (January 1999): 3.
  - 57 North, *Recollections of a Happy Life, Volume 2*: 247.
  - 58 *ibid*: 257. North's friend was probably the horticulturalist James Leighton, who had trained at Kew and worked there from 1878 to 1880 during which time he would have met her. In 1880, he came to the Cape Colony and settled at King William's Town. In 1882 he was appointed curator of the King William's Town Botanic Garden, succeeding James Johnson (the 'ill and depressed' director) who had been in charge for only a year.
  - 59 North, *Recollections of a Happy Life, Volume 2*: 257–258.
  - 60 *ibid*: 269. Henry Callaway (1817–1890) was born in London. He studied medicine and after qualification in 1844 opened a practice in London. In 1845 he married Ann Chalk and in 1854 he offered his services as a missionary doctor to John Colenso, recently appointed the first Anglican bishop of Natal. Callaway was ordained a deacon by Colenso in 1854 and worked at Ekukhanyeni (place of light), the mission station adjacent to Bishopstowe, Colenso's residence outside Pietermaritzburg. Callaway was ordained a priest in 1855 and the following year licensed as a physician and surgeon in Natal. In 1858 he fell out with Colenso over theological matters and established the Springvale mission station on land near the Mkhomazi River and subsequently established mission stations at Highflats and in East Griqualand. In 1873, he was consecrated the first missionary bishop of St John's, Kaffraria, located at Port St Johns; later moving the seat of his diocese to eMthatha (Umtata). Callaway wrote *Nursery Tales, Traditions, and Histories of the Zulus* (1868) and *The Religious System of the Amazulu* (1870). He also translated the Book of Psalms and the Book of Common Prayer into Zulu. Reverend John Oxley-Oxland, who married the Callaway's adopted daughter Jane Button, took over the Pondoland mission at Port St Johns. In 1878, Oxland gave up missionary work to become British Resident in Pondoland, a post he still held at the time of Marianne North's visit in 1883. According to North though he had 'given up parsonic duties' he 'still dressed in that style, and looked particularly clerical on Sunday, when all the family went in state to church (under the trees), and the 100 soldiers were marched there with drums and fifes playing.' (North, *Recollections of a Happy Life, Volume 2*: 266).
  - 61 *ibid*: 267.
  - 62 *ibid*: 273.
  - 63 The Marine Hotel was demolished in 1972. Donald Currie (1825–1909) owned the Union Steamship Line with whom it was synonymous. I have been unable to identify Mr A.
  - 64 North, *Recollections of a Happy Life, Volume 2*: 273–274.
  - 65 *ibid*: 274. Colonel James Henry Bowker was a brother of Mary Barber and a keen naturalist. He was a member of the party sent to Zululand to create a memorial for Louis Napoleon, the Prince Imperial, on the spot where he was killed in 1879 to be ready in time for the visit by the late prince's mother, Empress Eugenie, in 1880. Bowker appears in a well-known photograph of the completed monument along with others involved in its construction but is not holding a butterfly net. I have been unable to locate the photograph described by Marianne North.
  - 66 North, *Recollections of a Happy Life, Volume 2*: 274.
  - 67 *ibid*. John Sanderson (1820–1881), businessman, politician, journalist, artist and botanist. The genus *Sandersonia* (fam. Liliaceae) was named after him as are several plant species. After his death Sanderson's botanical illustrations were offered to the Durban town council which turned them down. Kew purchased the collection for £8 in 1949 (see Donal P. McCracken and Patricia A. McCracken, *Natal the Garden Colony: Victorian Natal and the Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew* (Sandton: Frandsen, 1990): 47; and Jane Carruthers, 'Trouble in the garden: South African botanical politics ca.1870–1950' *South African Journal of Botany* 77 (2011): 258–267).

- 68 Katherine Saunders (1824–1901), eminent botanist and botanical artist who sent 426 specimens to Kew from 1881 to 1889 and met Joseph Hooker there during her 1881–1882 visit to England. Born in England, she married James Renault Saunders (1818–1892) in 1851. They came to Natal in 1854 and her husband became manager and then owner of a sugar estate in Tongaat and one of Natal's nineteenth-century sugar barons.
- 69 North, *Recollections of a Happy Life, Volume 2*: 275.
- 70 *ibid.*
- 71 The American missionary Aldin Grout (1803–1894), after whom Groutville was named, is the main candidate for the description of being 'one of the oldest American missionaries'. My thanks to Les Switzer for information on Grout.
- 72 North, *Recollections of a Happy Life, Volume 2*: 277. The Zulu king Cetshwayo kaMpande met Queen Victoria in 1882 during a visit to England during his exile to the Cape after the Anglo-Zulu War of 1879. He was returned to Zululand by the colonial authorities in January 1883 and permitted to occupy the central territory of a partitioned Zululand. To his north was his enemy Zibhebhu kaMaphitha, *inkosi* of the Mandlakazi, and to the south the Reserve Territory administered by Theophilus Shepstone's brother, John. Cetshwayo set about rebuilding his royal homestead oNdini which had been razed to the ground by the British. Both Zibhebhu of the Mandlakazi and Shepstone demanded the allegiance of all those living in their respective provinces, many of whom were uSuthu loyal to Cetshwayo. Zibhebhu began persecuting the uSuthu, who resolved to strike back. In the battle of Msebe in March 1883, thousands of uSuthu were killed at a cost of only ten Mandlakazi. With his people facing starvation, it became imperative to break the power of Zibhebhu and Hamu before the spring planting season. Cetshwayo began assembling an army at oNdini, but Zibhebhu struck first and decimated the Zulu leadership.
- 73 Marianne North frequently describes those people she met using only the first letter of their surname; hence Mr H. John Conyngham assisted in supplying a surname but I have been unable to discover a first name.
- 74 North, *Recollections of a Happy Life, Volume 2*: 277–278. A month after Marianne's visit, Bishop John Colenso died on 20 June 1883.
- 75 The youngest of the Colenso daughters was Agnes, not Frances. Bishop John Colenso (1814–1883) was the first Anglican bishop of Natal, appointed in 1853. Notable for his theological and political disputes and his championing of the Zulus; his challenge to the colonial authorities over the rigged trial of Langalibalele, *inkosi* of the Hlubi, in 1873 raised the ire of the white settler community.
- 76 North, *Recollections of a Happy Life, Volume 2*: 278. Several people would qualify for this description. Could it be the worst of Colenso's enemies, Theophilus Shepstone, or one of his relatives?
- 77 North, *Recollections of a Happy Life, Volume 2*: 279. The book in question is Frances Colenso, *History of the Zulu War and its Origin*; assisted by Lieutenant-Colonel Edward Durnford (London: Chapman and Hall, revised edition, 1881).
- 78 North, *Recollections of a Happy Life, Volume 2*: 279; a reference to artist Edward Burne-Jones and his fellow Pre-Raphaelites.
- 79 North, *Recollections of a Happy Life, Volume 2*: 279.
- 80 *ibid.*
- 81 *ibid.*: 280.
- 82 *ibid.*
- 83 *ibid.*
- 84 Marianne North to Arthur Burnell, 17 January 1880, quoted in Birkett, *Spinsters Abroad*: 271.
- 85 John Murray quoted in Raby, *Bright Paradise*: 213.
- 86 Marianne North, *Recollections of a Happy Life* was published in two volumes in 1892; and *Some Further Recollections of a Happy Life* appeared in 1893.
- 87 Raby, *Bright Paradise*: 331.
- 88 *ibid.*: 214.