

MARGARET MARY PLUES (1828-1901)

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This is one in a series of articles about prominent British and Irish field-bryologists of the past. The author would be very pleased to learn of any information which supplements its content.

A Social and Biographical History of British and Irish Field-bryologists is also available on-line at <http://britishbryologicalsociety.org.uk/>

Botanical career

Margaret Plues wrote several popular books on natural history, including *Rambles in Search of Mosses* (1861), *Geology for the Million* (1863), *Rambles in Search of Wild Flowers* (1863, 4th edition 1892), *Rambles in Search of Flowerless Plants* (1864), *British Ferns* (1866), *A Selection of Eatable Funguses of Great Britain* (1866), and *British Grasses* (1867).

Family background and biography

Margaret Mary Plues was born in Ripon, Yorkshire, a daughter of the Reverend William Plues (1791-1851) of Skelfield, Ripon, and Hannah (*née* Swire, 1791-1851). William and Hannah had a large family of at least eight children. One of Margaret's elder brothers, Mark (1815-1863) also married a Swire – his first cousin Mary Anne (1829-1910); they emigrated to Australia. Another elder brother, Samuel Swire Plues (c.1816-1898) became a solicitor (of which there were several in the family) and later Attorney-General for the colony of British Honduras at Belize.

Margaret never married, and in 1851 (the year in which her parents died), she was a “landed proprietor” living in Ripon with her elder sister Emily. In 1861 Margaret was a “fund-holder” (i.e. with private means), living with another sister Elizabeth and her solicitor husband Edmund John Jennings at Hawkhurst in Kent. At the time of the 1871 Census, Margaret was living with a third sister, Mary Ann, and her solicitor husband James Robinson Tomlin in Richmond, Yorkshire. Margaret worked as a governess in Richmond, and also became a good friend of the sisters at the Assumption Convent there. She was a Franciscan Tertiary at that time, having converted to Roman Catholicism in 1866.

Margaret moved to London some time in the 1870s, and with assistance from nuns nearby was placed in charge of Monsignor Thomas John Capel's newly founded Converts Home and Workroom near the Assumption Convent in Kensington Square. The Monsignor was not proficient with finances, and constantly borrowed and was in

debt. Margaret was one of those he borrowed from, and when he was bankrupted she too was ruined financially.

Margaret moved the Workroom, and in 1881 she was head of a household at 30 Fulham Road, where she lived with 16 other females, of whom 13 were dressmakers. Her occupation then was given as “Artist in Painting and Embroidery”. Interestingly, at the time of the 1881 Census, Fanny Tripp (another clergyman’s daughter and author of a popular book about mosses) was a visitor at 3 Ovington Square, London – not far from Margaret’s residence in Fulham Road. I wonder if they knew each other.

By 1885 she was lately in charge of a Ladies Home in Kensington Square.

By 1891 Margaret was living at Springfield Meadow, Church Street, Weybridge, Surrey with her widowed and retired brother Samuel, where she was “living on her own means”. She entered a convent at Weybridge towards the end of her life, perhaps after Samuel died.

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