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1850–1970

Avril Maddrell

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Complex Locations

Women's Geographical Work in the UK 1850–1970

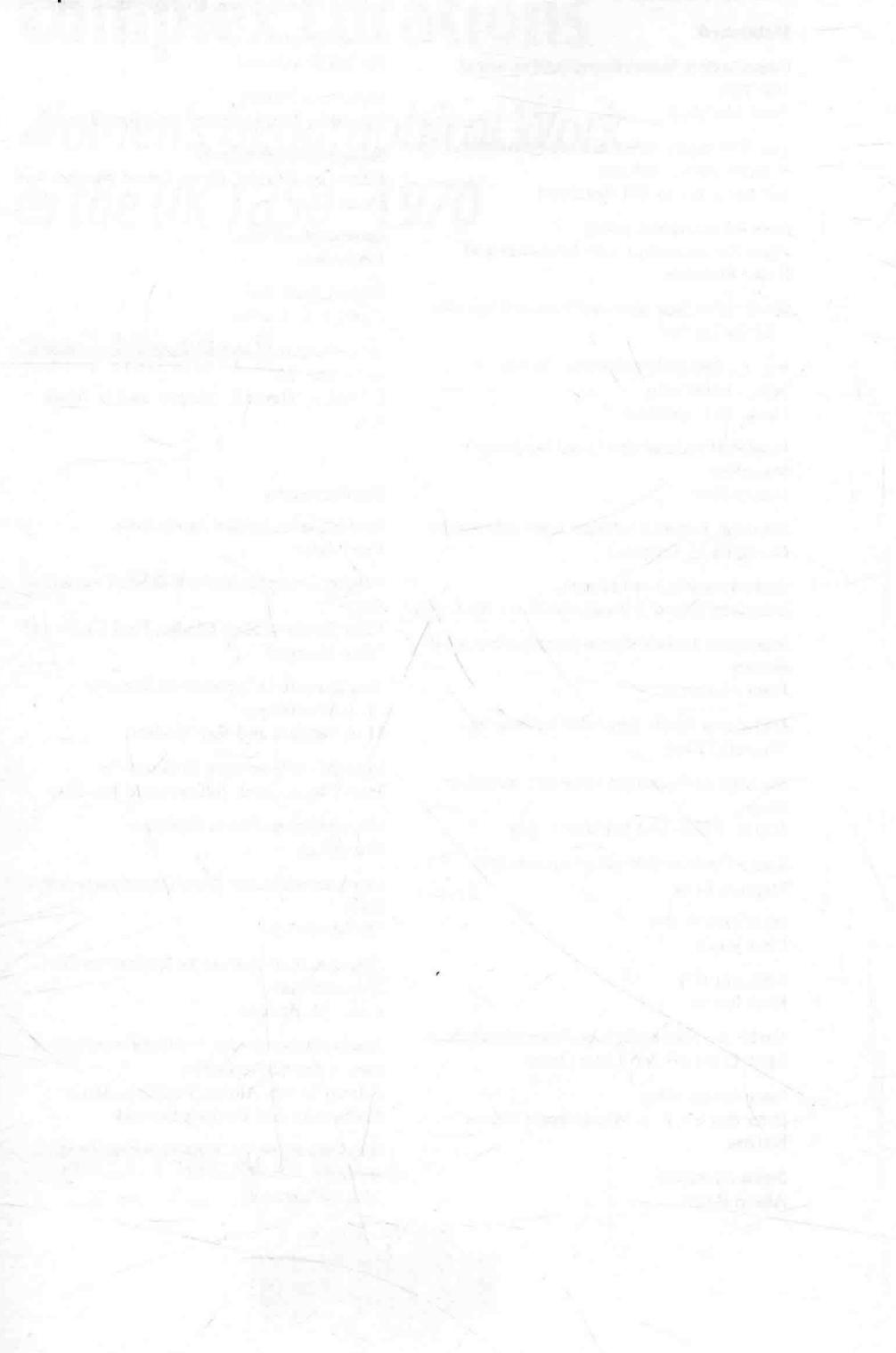
Avril Maddrell



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For Bill, Sam and Breesha

Contents

Preface

During my DPhil research I started to study women geographers working before 1918, including writers such as Mary Somerville, Isabella Bird and Marion Newbigin, and educationalists such as Nora MacMunn and Joan Reynolds, and their relationship to geographical societies, including the 1892–3 RGS women's membership debate. This convinced me that there was a bigger 'story' to tell about women's geographical work before second-wave feminism, not least because the popular perception of my own generation, based on the most widely read histories of the discipline, was that women had contributed little to the discipline before the 1970s and 1980s. For me it became a political project to repopulate the historiography of geography with women's work and I was delighted when my long-standing proposal finally found a home in the relaunched RGS-IBG/Blackwell series.

My confidence about a quick completion of the manuscript proved false, as the primary and secondary materials were much richer than I had anticipated. This was to the ultimate benefit of the book, but not the publication schedule! I have found it engrossing and fascinating as the lives and work of individual women geographers took shape, and connections emerged in relation to each other, the wider discipline and the socioeconomic and political milieu. While some women were well known in their day and their work easily traceable, others were serendipitous 'discoveries' (as with most 'discoveries', there all the time and usually known to others). 'Unearthing' perhaps gives an appropriate sense of the archaeological nature of some of the historiographical work (see Foucault 1972) and the thrill of finding even shards which tell us something new and enlightening.

Complex Locations lived up to its name as I organised the structure of the book. The chapters focus on geographical societies, travellers, educationalists and academics and are organised in broad chronological order. By following this format the early chapters address topics such as women's entry

to geographical societies and travel writing, which have been discussed in detail elsewhere but are nonetheless important for a rounded discussion of women's geographical work. The bulk of new research is found from Chapter Five onwards. For the most part the women studied were relatively easy to place, but there were numerous anomalies, where their chronology and/or multi-faceted careers challenged neat divisions. Having initially organised the academics under the headings of three successive 'generations', late in the day I realised that while a human reproductive generation might amount to my neat categories of about 20 years, academic reproduction, from new undergraduate to employable PhD holder can occur in as little as six years and some early academics were employed without higher degrees, making for much quicker production of successive academic generations. Thus the academic chapters have been divided into four broad periods reflecting wider socioeconomic and political periods in the UK: the 'first generation'; the interwar years; the war and immediate post-war years; and 1950 to 1970. Marion Newbiggin proved difficult to place, geographical societies perhaps the most obvious location, but that chapter didn't allow enough space to discuss her influential writing; her dominance of a single chapter reflects the limitations of organisational structures (notably chapter length) rather than her pre-eminence within the discipline.

I started the book knowing I would have to be selective of women travellers and teachers of geography, but expected to be able to include all of the women academics working in geography 1900–70. In the event, this has not been possible, given (a) the number of women and (b) my decision to analyse the production and reception of individuals' work in relation to personal biographical, disciplinary and wider contexts. I have been able to include most women academic geographers working before 1950, but have not been able to include/analyse in detail the work of all those working 1950–70. Some notable geographers beginning their careers at the very end of the 1960s are flagged briefly in Chapter Nine, but require a fuller treatment elsewhere. The selection made is intended to be representative of a geographical spread across the country and a range of research and teaching interests within the discipline, as well as departmental roles. While some chapters may be too long to read at one sitting I hope the reader will be tolerant of this, in the knowledge that this reflects the desire to be as inclusive as possible and to give the women 'voice' through the use of publications, archive sources and interview material. My hope is that the book will be read in a variety of ways, from those who wish to read it cover to cover, to those who read selective chapters or biographies; either (any) way I hope it will lead to further critical engagement with the complex locations of women's geographical work in the historiography of geography.

Series Editors' Preface

The RGS-IBG Book Series only publishes work of the highest international standing. Its emphasis is on distinctive new developments in human and physical geography, although it is also open to contributions from cognate disciplines whose interests overlap with those of geographers. The Series places strong emphasis on theoretically-informed and empirically-strong texts. Reflecting the vibrant and diverse theoretical and empirical agendas that characterize the contemporary discipline, contributions are expected to inform, challenge and stimulate the reader. Overall, the RGS-IBG Book Series seeks to promote scholarly publications that leave an intellectual mark and change the way readers think about particular issues, methods or theories.

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Kevin Ward
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RGS-IBG Book Series Editors

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Picture Acknowledgements

I am grateful to the following for granting permission to reproduce pictures: the RSGS for pictures of Marion Newbigin and Isobel Wylie Hutchison; the SGM for Figure 7.2; the RGS-IBG for pictures of Eva Taylor, Isabella Bird, Freya Stark, Gertrude Bell, Kate Marsden; *Gf* for Figures 4.5 and 6.4; *TIBG* for the pictures of Marjorie Sweeting and Monica Cole; the National Library of Scotland for a picture of Isobel Wylie Hutchison; the National Library of Wales for the picture of the Le Play Society field group in Guernsey; the School of Geography and Environment University of Oxford for Figure 5.1; the Principal and Fellows of Somerville College, Oxford for the portrait of Mary Somerville; the University of Sheffield Geography Department for the picture of Alice Garnett; Royal Holloway University of London for the photographs of Blanche Hosgood and Monica Cole; the London School of Economics for the photograph of Hilda Ormsby; Manchester High School for Girls for Figures 5.2 and 5.3; the Libertarian Alliance for the photograph of Alice Coleman; Cuchlaine King, Anne Buttimer, Dick Grove and Richard Hickman for photographs from their own collections.

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Chapter One

Putting Women in their Place: Women in the Historiography of Geography

The kind of knowledge that emerges from a discipline depends very much on who produces that knowledge, what methods are used to procure knowledge, and what purposes knowledge is acquired for

Monk & Hanson 1982: 12

Introduction

This book is intended to offer a new perspective on the history of British geography by focusing on the geographical work of women from 1850 to 1970. In broad terms, historical studies allow us to trace the development of geographical ideas and can shed light on the nature and practice of geography today. As Holloway has argued, 'The study of history is important if we are to understand why society is organized the way it is and *how we can use our understanding of the past to become agents of change in the present*' (2005: 2, my emphasis). Understanding the social construction of a discipline's history also allows us to engage with that history epistemologically, to examine what is and is not accepted as 'knowledge' and how this defines membership of and practice within the academy. Women have been omitted largely from histories of geography (Domosh 1991a); and histories of geography that fail to consider what has been 'left out' – 'what has been constructed as not-geography' – tell only a partial story (Rose 1995).

Recent histories of British geography have stressed the role of enlightenment thought (Livingstone 1992; Livingstone & Withers 1999; Mayhew 2000) and the role of imperialism (Bell *et al.* 1995; Driver 2001). Others have traced shifts in theoretical and methodological schools of thought principally in the twentieth century (Cloke, Philo & Sadler 1991; Johnston & Sidaway 2004) or 'key thinkers' (Hubbard *et al.* 2004). Most of these have