



BESSIE MARCHANT INVENTORY

June 2023

ABSTRACT

Bessie Marchant (12 December 1862 – 10 November 1941) was an English writer of adventure novels for children. She wrote about one hundred and fifty novels from 1892 to 1941. The girls' boarding-school-story became her most popular genre between 1920s to 1930s.

Canterbury Christ Church University

This inventory has been authored by Yosselin Claudio Montano whilst volunteering at Augustine House Library.

Biographical history

Bessie Marchant (1862-1941) who also wrote under the pseudonym of John Comfort was a novelist of adventure novels for children. She published about one hundred and fifty books from 1892 to 1941. Her earliest novels were influenced by her evangelical Christian background. In the 1920s to 1930s, her girl's boarding-school stories became very popular.

Even though she had never visited other countries, she researched about them at the Bodleian Library in Oxford, and through the pages of the National Geographic magazine. She also received letter from girls around the world.

Custodial History

The Bessie Marchant Archive was donated to the International Centre for Victorian Women Writers, Faculty of Arts, Humanities and Education, Canterbury Christ Church University by Alan Major. Further accruals are not expected.

Extent

1 box

Xx books

Access

Access to the collection is during core library hours, between 9.00-5.00 Monday to Friday. Please email library.canterbury@canterbury.ac.uk to order material in advance of your visit.

All images ©ICVWW

Language of material

English.

Preferred citation

Bessie Marchant MSS, International Centre for Victorian Women Writers, Canterbury Christ Church University, CC/U/BM/001 (etc).

Scope and Content

The collection contains correspondence, photographs, and magazine articles.

System of arrangement

The archive has been arranged into the following series:

CC/U/BM/001 -37

- CC/U/BM/001 A photograph of Bessie Marchant in her adult age given to Alan Major by Miss Thelma Cranmer.
- CC/U/BM/ 002 A photograph of Bessie Marchant taken in 1941 before she died at her desk in Gothic House given to Alan Major by Andrew Lawson. In front of her is a photograph of her husband Jabez.
- CC/U/BM/003 Birth certificate of Bessie Marchant born on 12th December 1862 in Petham, daughter of William and Jane Marchant.
- CC/U/BM/004 'Bessie Marchant: The Maid of Kent whose exciting stories thrilled thousands of English children', a magazine article about Bessie Marchant, published in 1991 by Alan Major in the magazine *This England*. This article has 4 pages, pp. 30-33, and there are 8 photos which were taken in colour and black and white.
- CC/U/BM/005 In Memoriam Rev. J. A. Comfort, November 7th, 1915, Hymn entitled "Friend of the Friendless" by William Cowper. The hymn was sung at Bessie's husband's funeral.
- CC/U/BM/006 The Magazine of Lewisham School, Weston-Super-Mare, August, 1904, It is a booklet published by The Mendip Press, LTD. 17 pages. Inside the booklet, at the back, there are 2 letters and 1 note.
- CC/ U/ BM/ 007 Photograph of the house at Debden Court Farm in Petham where Bessie lived with her father, William Marchant. Given to Alan Major.
- CC/U/BM/008 Cowley's Charlbury Almanack, Guide and Local Directory, 1906, It is an almanack which was published in 1906 by Dyson and Sons. The almanack contains photographs and event dates which happened in Charlbury.
- CC/U/BM/009 Photograph of Gothic House in Charlbury where Bessie Marchant lived. Given to Alan Major. Photograph by courtesy of Andrew Lawson in 1982.
- CC/U/BM/010 A photograph of Bessie Marchant's grave in Charlbury churchyard. Photograph by courtesy of Andrew Lawson.
- CC/U/BM/011 A photograph of Bessie Marchant taken in Gothic House, Charlbury in 1928., Photograph, Mrs Crunlet family?
- CC/U/BM/012 Photographs of Elmsted Baptist Mission given to Alan Major. The 1st photo shows the field side view of the Elmsted Baptist Mission Hall. The 2nd photo shows the front of the building. On the back of the photograph, on the 2nd photo, there is a description of the noticeboard that reads "Elmsted Baptist Mission. Sunday School 11 a.m. Afternoon Service 2.45 p.m. All are welcome".
- CC/U/BM/013 Two photographs that show the front and the back of the "Debden Court Farm" house in Petham where Bessie Marchant lived in her childhood.
- CC/U/BM/014 Photograph of the Elmsted Baptist Mission Hall taken in 1920.
- CC/U/BM/015 *Bygone Kent, A Monthly Journal on all Aspects of Local History*, Volume Nine, Number Eleven, published by Hamish and Barbara Mackay Miller by Meresborough Books in

1988. It includes articles about the Canterbury Dean, a Marine Artist, Flying Circuses, the Great Fire of Wye, a farmer's fight against Church Rates, an airliner's forced landing, Arthur Mee, the other Woolwich Ferry and a Sevenoaks Rail Disaster. Furthermore, in the journal appears photographs and different events, and an article in which William Marchant, who is Bessie's father, appears "William Marchant, Farmer, and 'A Church Rate Song' by Alan Major" on page 661.

- CC/U/BM/016 *Bygone Kent, A Monthly Journal on all Aspects of Local History*, Volume Six, Number Two, published by Meresborough Books and edited by Hamish Mackay Miller in 1985. It includes articles on Staplehurst, and the Explosion at Erith, a Tonbridge School, a Canterbury Rebel, Shipwreck at Kingsgate, Bessie Marchant, Smugglers at Goudhurst, Bromley's Windmill and the Mote, and Maidstone. Furthermore, in the journal, there are photos of different events or personalities from that date. And Bessie Marchant's article appeared as 'Kent's Pioneer Children's Novelist, Bessie Marchant' by Alan Major on page 95.
- CC/U/BM/017 Rachel Marchant's letters, a photo of Rachel Marchant, niece of Bessie Marchant, for an unknown newspaper that was written in the 1980s. Rachel sent Alan Major four letters related to her aunt Bessie Marchant between 1983 and 1985. It is believed that the newspaper was published in the 1980s.
- CC/U/BM/018 Thelma Cranmer's letters, 11 letters were sent to Alan Major from Thelma Cranmer between 1983 and 1987 with the purpose of telling the life and work of Bessie Marchant.
- CC/U/BM/019 Letter from Blackie Publishing Group signed by Maureen McGowan and given to Alan Major on 22 July 1983. In the letter is stated that Bessie was given a contract that was dated 1913. At the bottom of the paper handwritten in pen, there is information about the contract and commission for her books.
- CC/U/BM/020 Type written copies of letters sent between Bessie Marchant and the publisher "Blackie and Son" signed by Walter W. Blackie. In the letter, both of them discuss Bessie's book between January and February 1920. In all the letters they discuss the delay of one of Bessie's books and the new agreement about the number of books published by her per year and new ideas about one of Bessie's books. Furthermore, the 6th letter which was sent by Mr. Brackenridge to Bessie Marchant contains information about one of the letters that was sent by Blackie and Son to Bessie about the book agreement.
- CC/U/BM/021 Two typewritten letters by the Company "Blackie and Son" to Bessie Marchant and Bessie Marchant's daughter between 1936 and 1941. The 1st letter was typewritten by Blackie and Son to Bessie Marchant about her new book and the rejection of one of her books. The 2nd letter is addressed by Blackie and Son to Bessie Marchant's daughter because the company wanted to show some respect for the deceased Bessie Marchant. Next to the 2nd letter, "Blackie and Son" typewritten on November 1941 there is an article dedicated to Bessie Marchant.

- CC/U/BM/022 Three typewritten letters addressed by "Christy and Moore" to Mrs J. A. Comfort. The first letter typewritten by Bessie's agent on May 1930 was addressing the matter of the contract. The second and third letters are from the Executors of the late Mrs J. A. Comfort and show the royalty and commission cheque herewith addressed by the company "Christy and Moore between 1944 and 1947.
- CC/U/BM/023 Copy of typewritten letter given to Alan Major by Thelma Cranmer from the daughter of Ambrose Comfort, who was the stepson of Bessie Marchant, and wife Eleanor. The letter contains some information about Ambrose Comfort that Alan Major was interested in writing an article about and a little bit of information about Bessie Marchant's life. The photographs mentioned in this letter are not part of this archive.
- CC/U/BM/024 Three letters were sent to Alan Major from different relatives of Bessie Marchant from Australia between 1985 to 1986. The first letter was typewritten by Jean Chandler a relative of Bessie Marchant who mentioned stories about her aunt Bessie while she was living in England. The second letter was written by Mrs. F. R. Chandler who was a niece of Bessie Marchant and there was personal information about Bessie Marchant on it. Moreover, she mentioned an article about Bessie Marchant published by Bygone Kent. The third letter was written by Jean Chandler with some personal information about Bessie Marchant.
- CC/U/BM/025 Four letters were written by Andrew Lawson to Alan Major. The letters were written from April 1983 to September 1984. At the top of the first letter, Andrew Lawson appears to be a descendant of the Marchant family. The four letters contain little personal information about Bessie Marchant and her daughter. But it does have information about her house and the time she stayed there. Even though it was mentioned photographs of Bessie Marchant were enclosed in one of the letters, it seems the photographs do not appear in the library archive.
- CC/U/BM/026 Letters from Kent County Council Education Committee. Three letters were sent to Alan Major. One was from a Head Teacher of Petham School and another person called Richard Love. The first letter was an answer from the Head Teacher of Petham School to Alan Major about the record of Bessie Marchant attending Petham School. The two papers attached from November 1984 contain some information about whether Bessie Marchant was admitted to Petham School. Unfortunately, there is no information in the letter about whether Bessie Marchant was admitted or not to Petham School. Furthermore, the record of Petham School was taken from "Kent County Council Education Committee". And the third letter was written by Richard Love in December 1984 and mentions someone called Frederick Sidebotham. It seems the second letter which was typewritten on November 1984 was sent by John Russ or Ross?
- CC/U/BM/027 Three typewritten letters and one article given to Alan Major by Mary Martin Bacon, a friend of the Marchant family, from August 1986 to February 1987. the three letters contain information about Bessie Marchant. Furthermore, there is an article about Dr Mary Martin-Bacon, who was a lecturer at the Experimental College connected to the University of Washington, minister, writer and medium., Letter,

- CC/U/BM/028 Formal letter from District of Woodspring. This is a document written on 15 August 1983 by Miss Jane Evans, who worked in Woodspring Museum, given to Alan Major. The document contains information about Bessie's husband's family, Mr and Mrs F. G. Comfort. Furthermore, there is information about portraits of Mr and Mrs F. G. Comfort donated to Woodspring Museum by their daughter Mrs R. Stewart Smylie in 1953. And Mr F. G. Comfort was a Headmaster at a boys' school in Weston-super-mare in 1869 and for 50 years.
- CC/U/BM/029 Letter written by Ruby Benice, who lived in the US, sent to Mr Alan Major. The letter contains information about Mr and Mrs Alex Comfort, who lived in Lewisham and were the owners of a boys' school. There is not any information about Bessie Marchant but it is believed that Mr and Mrs Comfort were relatives of Javez Ambrose Comfort. Even though they did not have children, they used to be visited by their nephew and niece. Furthermore, Ruby stated that Dr Alex Comfort could be the nephew mentioned in the letter. Furthermore, there are some stories Ruby told about the boys' school. There is no information about the date the letter was written. And Dr Alex Comfort could be a relative of Javez family?
- CC/U/BM/030 Letter written by John Howard, who was a reader of *The Lady* article on Bessie Marchant, given to Alan Major on 26 September 1986. In the letter, John Howard mentions an article on Bessie Marchant from *The Lady* magazine and a book named *No Ordinary Girl* written by Bessie Marchant that John Howard received in 1933 when he was 11 years old.
- CC/U/BM/031 Letter written by A. T. Marsh on 03 October 1986 and given to Alan Major. The letter contains information about one of Bessie's Marchant books *Yuppie*. Furthermore, Arthur is delighted that Mr Major will be writing about Bessie Marchant and he commented on her popularity but also refers to a dispute over the "Chapel". Arthur wrote about borrowing a book of Bessie Marchant's book *Yuppie* from Maidstone library and points out a particular place name spelt differently in the book. And Arthur offered to help Mr Major with his research into Hastingleigh and Bessie Marchant information.
- CC/U/BM/032 Letter from John Comfort written on 23 May 1983 and sent to Alan Major. In the letter, there are details of Bessie Marchant's family, Marchant Comfort (Bessie's daughter) and Thelma Comfort. John Comfort wrote that he did not know about Bessie Marchant's early life but he mentioned that the first edition of her books was given to Thelma Cranmer, the cousin of Marchant Comfort, and the other books stayed at Gothic House in Charlbury. Also, John mentioned that Thelma Cranmer could help Alan Major with his search as she was a close friend of theirs.
- CC/ U/ BM/ 033 Three Letters written from Bessie Marchant to different people from January 1900s to January 1932 given to Alan Major. Bessie Marchant wrote the first letter (a) to her stepson and wife, Ambrose and Eleanor asking for money because his father's income was low and her literary income dropped and she considered selling her furniture. The second letter (b) was written to Dorian, a regular correspondent. Bessie was grateful for the letter Dorian sent to her about her daily life and Bessie pointed out another girl who Dorian would like to write to. Furthermore, she wrote about the day she took a break

from writing and doing housework, and she mentioned Lady Margaret who she had tea with. Finally, Bessie wrote a third letter (c) to Dorian from South Africa. In the letter she was sorry for not replying to her letter because she was busy, she mentioned her experience in a bookshop in Oxford. Moreover, Bessie mentioned her dislike for some games such as Cricket and how fortunate Dorian was to live in another country and her interest in how girls are in fact. Undated, but it is stated that it was in the 1900s.

- CC/U/BM/034 'Alan Major looks at the busy life of Bessie Marchant - The Victorian Pioneer Children's Novelist', *The Lady*, 14 August 1986, This is an article of two pages (pp. 272-73) from *The Lady*, written by Alan Major on 14 August 1986. The article points out the story of Bessie Marchant from her early years to her death and there is some other information from people who contacted Mr Major about her private life. And four black-and-white pictures appear in the article.
- CC/U/BM/035 Marriage Certificate of Jabez Ambrose Comfort and Elizabeth Marchant. Furthermore, the Marriage Certificate contains information about the place they had married, the date, age, conditions or the name of the people who were present at that time.
- CC/U/BM/036 An obituary of Bessie Marchant's father and 3 letters written by Alan Major to Professor Gavin and Dr Oulton from May to September 2014. The obituary contains information about Mr William Marchant and next to it, there is a fragment of Comfort-Marchant's marriage and mentions the name of Bessie Marchant's father. The first letter was written in May 2014 to Professor Gavin and Dr Oulton about whether they were interested in having Bessie Marchant's items that Mr Major had as part of his work for his article about her. Also, Mr Major mentions in the letter some people and publishers and a dissertation written by Suzette Starmer about Bessie Marchant. The second letter was written on July 2014, it is a reply from Alan Major to Dr Oulton about Bessie Marchant's items that were sent to the Campus. He mentioned Andrew Lawson, one of Bessie Marchant's relatives, and some articles such as *Bygone Kent* July-August about Bessie Marchant's father. And he mentions that some of his writings were published by different publishers. The third letter was written to Dr Carolyn Oulton on September 2014 and mentions one of Bessie's books *Ripe Corn*. But there is more information about Alan Major's books, such as *A New Dictionary of Kent Dialect* published by Meresborough Books and *Kentish As She Wus Spoken* published by S. B. Publications.
- CC/U/BM/037 Typewritten letter by Suzette Starmer sent to Alan Major on 27 September 1999. Suzette wrote to Alan Major about her dissertation and her offer to the Royal Holloway College at the University of London to research for a doctorate. Furthermore, she sent him a copy of her dissertation on some of the works of Bessie Marchant and a few details of her biography. The dissertation of Suzette Starmer consists of 47 pages, including the contents and abstract.

Books in the Historical Children's Fiction Collection

Marchant, Bessie. *Yuppie*. Robert Culley. 1898.

Marchant, Bessie. *Tell-tale-tit*. Robert Culley. 1899.

Marchant, Bessie. *Yew Tree Farm*. S.P.C.K. 1904.

Marchant, Bessie. *Molly Angel's Adventures*. Blackie and Son Ltd., London, 1915.

Marchant, Bessie. *By Honour Bound*. Thomas Nelson. 1925.