

14-Marianne's Legacy, and the plants named after her

Marianne North traveled the world to paint plants in their native countries, her work was very distinctive. Most Victorian botanical artists worked in water colours, portraying a single stem with a bloom, and perhaps a fruit or berry against a plain background. Marianne worked in oils. Importantly these were much more durable when working outdoors and traveling. They showed the plants complete and included natural locations together with the surrounding vegetation. Her legacy? She was a remarkable Victorian artist with a great eye for botanical detail, and has the largest permanent one woman exhibition in the country. All housed in a purpose built gallery she commissioned and funded, with the displays exactly to her specification.



Nepenthes northiana

"Mr E. went up a mountain near and brought me down some grand trailing specimens of the largest of all pitcher-plants, which I festooned round the balcony by its yards of trailing stems. I painted a portrait of the largest, and my picture afterwards induced Mr Veitch to send a traveler to seek the seeds, from which he raised plants and Sir Joseph Hooker named the species Nepenthes northiana. These pitchers are often over a foot long, and richly covered with crimson blotches." Mr E was Herbert Everett of the Borneo Company, who said he "traversed pathless forests amid snakes and leeches to find and bring it down to the artist." *"Only those,"* wrote Marianne, *"who have been in such places can understand the difficulties of progress there. The specimens grew on the branches of a tree about 1000 feet above the sea on the limestone mountains of Sarawak. When I received them I tied them in festoons all round the verandah, and grumbled at having only one small half-sheet of paper left to paint them on."*



Kniphofia northiae

A Giant Kniphofia near Grahamstown. This is a near relation of the familiar "red-hot poker" grown in our gardens. Now named after Marianne as *Kniphofia northiae*.



Northea seychellana

*From that flat-topped, isolated hill, one saw a long stretch of wild mountain coast, and many islands, some 2000 feet below, across which long-tailed boatswain-birds were always flying; behind it, the highest peak of Mahé frowned down on us, often inky-black under the storm-clouds. They were gathering round it when I came up on the 7th of January, and for a whole fortnight the rains came down day and night, showing me wonderful cloud-effects, dark as slate, with the dead white capucin trees sticking through like pins in a pincushion. There were few living specimens of any age, but those were noble ones, the young leaves a foot in length, looking like green satin lined with brown velvet, and growing in terminal bunches at the ends of the woody branches. They seemed to me much like the gutta-percha trees of Borneo, but I could make out nothing certain of the flowers, and was told "it had no flower," or a "red flower," or a "white one," each statement most positive, from those who lived actually under the trees! The nuts every one knew, and collected them as curiosities. Flowers were sent afterwards to England, and Sir J. Hooker declared it a new genus, and named it *Northea seychellana*, after me.*



The entrance to the North Gallery in Kew gardens

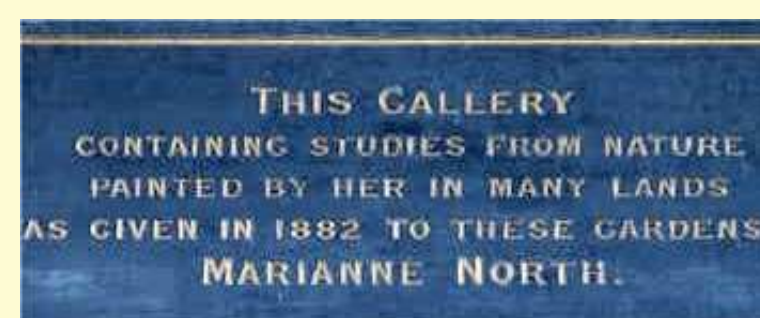
Her friend J.D.Hooker, Director of the Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew, commented on the importance of the paintings when the gallery opened in June, 1882;

"On the beauty of the collection it is unnecessary to dwell, and it is not possible to overrate its interest and instructiveness in connection with the contents of the gardens, plant houses, and museums of Kew; visitors may, however, be glad to be reminded that very many of the views here brought together represent vividly and truthfully scenes of astonishing interest and singularity, and objects that are amongst the wonders of the vegetable kingdom; and that these, though now accessible to travelers and familiar to readers of travels, are already disappearing, or are doomed shortly to disappear, before the axe and the forest fires, the plough and the flock, of the ever advancing settler or colonist. Such scenes can never be renewed by nature, nor when once effaced can they be pictured to the mind's eye, except by means of such records as this lady has presented to us, and to posterity, which will thus have even more reason than we have to be grateful for her fortitude as a traveler, her talent and industry as an artist, and her liberality and public spirit."



Crinum northianum

Another crinum has since been called Northiana, [from her original text] after myself. It has a magnificent flower, growing almost in the water, each plant becoming an island at high tide, with beautiful reflections under it, and its perfect white petals enriched by the bright pink stamens which hang over them.



This is the plaque over the door of the North Gallery



Marianne retired to Alderley in poor health after years of arduous traveling. At the end of Recollections Volume 2 her sister and editor, Mrs. John Addington Symonds, added her own tribute:-

"But she was full of kind thoughts for her own people, and kept more men employed upon her pretty garden than were really needful for its work, even after it had ceased to be an active pleasure to herself; because, as she said, giving them work was the best way in which she could help those poor people whose own

lives were so hard. And that principle of unostentatious kindness to those immediately belonging to her had been her rule through life, making her often seem indifferent to other people's wider schemes and charities.

I think she was intolerant of "Rules" in all things (except, perhaps, in music), exceedingly and scornfully sceptical as to rules in art: for instance, the limitations and laws of composition in painting. She painted as a clever child would, every thing she thought beautiful in nature"

