**Contributor: Hollie Price**

**Grierson [*married name* Taylor], Marion Anthony (1907–1998)**

Grierson [*married name* Taylor], Marion Anthony (1907–1998), film director, journalist, and youth worker, was born at Cambusbarron, Stirling, on 7 July 1907, the youngest of eight children of Robert Morrison Grierson (1860–1928), a schoolteacher, and his wife, Jane, *née* Anthony (1865–1936), who had been a lecturer at a teacher training college in Glasgow. Her siblings included John Grierson, often referred to as the ‘father of the documentary movement’, and Ruby Grierson, who also became a film-maker. Her parents were actively involved in their part-mining community. Her mother, Jane Grierson, a suffragette, socialist, and active member of the Independent Labour Party, administered a soup kitchen, taught at her husband’s school, and tutored children in the evenings. Marion credited her mother with encouraging her education, quoting Jane as saying ‘there were better things for women than the kitchen sink’ (Adams).

Marion Grierson attended her father’s school in Cambusbarron and initially studied at the University of Glasgow, later moving with the family to Edinburgh, where she completed her master’s degree in English and philosophy at the University of Edinburgh in 1926. She began her career as a freelance writer in London and, in 1928, won a travelling scholarship to Canada, sponsored by Allied Newspapers, where she took up a reporter post at the *Regina Daily Star* in Saskatchewan, latterly editing the women’s page. After two years in Canada, she moved back to London and was introduced to film-making by her brother John. She first encountered the film-making process in his basement flat in Hampstead, which had been transformed into a cutting room—with film strips ‘suspended from the mantelpiece’ (quoted in Beveridge, 11)—for the production of *Drifters* (1929). She began working as a film editor for the Empire Marketing Board, where she was responsible for editing the *Empire Journal*, a monthly short film shown to the public at the Imperial Institute.

Marion Grierson ran the film unit for the Travel and Industrial Development Association (TIDA) until 1939, when it was taken over by the British Council. Working as a film director and producer, her films were made with the aim of attracting tourists to Britain. They include *Edinburgh* (1934, silent) and a later sound version, *The Key to Scotland* (1935); *St James’s Park* (1934), *Beside the Seaside* (1935), *For All Eternity* (1935) and sound version *Cathedrals of England* (1937), *London on Parade* (1937), and *Around the Village Green* (co-directed with Evelyn Spice, 1937). Marion’s TIDA films have been classed by one film historian as a ‘largely undistinguished bunch’ (Low, 76–7) and dismissed as merely ‘competent’ in comparison with her sister Ruby’s ‘distinctive’ films (Ellis, 5). More recently, there has been recognition of Marion’s journalistic approach, the ways that her films give voice to their subjects, their innovative use of different visual and sound techniques, and their powerful, poetic, and witty records of everyday life in 1930s Britain.

Marion Grierson later described TIDA as an environment where everyone pitched in on different jobs, including camera work, editing, writing scripts, technical work, and manual labour—‘carrying reels of film backwards and forwards to Wardour Street’ (BEHP, 1989). She worked closely with staff across the Empire Marketing Board and the General Post Office (GPO) film units, where there was much discussion of each other’s films and loaning of material across the units. For instance, Marion later noted that *Night Mail* (Basil Wright and Harry Watt, 1936)—one of the movement’s most acclaimed works—‘has pieces from everybody’s films’, including two shots from her earlier Edinburgh film (ibid.).

Outside her involvement in film production, Marion played an influential role in promoting documentary film culture. She was a member of Associated Realist Film Producers, which was formed in December 1935 as a guild, intended to formalize the movement and aiming to put sponsoring, official or commercial, bodies in touch with film-makers. In 1936, she took up a lead editing role on *World Film News* (which replaced *Cinema Quarterly* as the documentary movement’s journal). Fellow documentarist Paul Rotha later described it as a dynamic paper (Rotha, 162), and Marion emphasized that she made it as colourful and attractive as possible, using her training in journalism and layout design. She left the role to give birth to her first child and the journal later ran into financial difficulties, ceasing publication in 1938.

In January 1934 Marion married fellow director Donald Fraser Taylor (1911–1968), who had also been at the GPO film unit. She and Donald had three children altogether—David (*b*. 1938), Jane (*b.* 1940), and Helen (*b.* 1946). Writing to fellow film-maker Evelyn Spice in 1938, Marion expressed her frustration with family ‘trying to persuade me that my place is in the home, and indeed I do want to be with David and have another baby. But I feel it would be wicked to give up what independence I have won’ (Fox, 592). While working full-time became increasingly untenable with a young family at home, earlier in 1938 Marion had resumed her position at TIDA, while also editing *Documentary News Letter* and, in 1939, advised the Éire government on tourist films. During the war she temporarily moved to Scotland to escape bombing raids in London, but continued to work as a freelance journalist and documentary writer, producer, and director. She was involved in several Ministry of Information films, which included shooting in Dorland Hall during bombing raids—likely to have been *Night Watch* (Donald Taylor, 1941)—and producing *Bringing up Babies* (Strand Film Company, 1942), about early infant care and well-being.

Grierson actively supported other women working in documentary, favouring using ‘a little influence [probably with her brother] to swing things’ their way (Fox, 592). She and Evelyn Spice had a lifelong ‘sisterly comradeship’ (ibid.): they met working in Canada and Marion encouraged Evelyn to move to London, where she became the documentary movement’s most prolific woman film-maker, before returning to Canada on the outbreak of war. After the war Grierson’s last credited film was the officially sponsored documentary *Post War Work: Civil Engineering*. A year later she was commissioned by documentarist Edgar Anstey to write a film treatment for the *This Modern Age* magazine film series, which was to focus on *Psychiatry and the Community*, in collaboration with the Tavistock Clinic. The film appears not to have been made but Marion was clearly interested in this field as she completed a postgraduate course in psychology at University College, London, during the period 1948–50. In the 1950s she moved into educational and youth welfare work: teaching for the London county council (1954) and later, based in Farnham, volunteering for the National Association of Mixed Clubs and Girls' Clubs (1956–8). Her interests in film-making endured in this period, and she made a film about the Duke of Edinburgh award scheme for girls in Buckinghamshire.

In the late 1950s, following the breakup of her marriage, Grierson moved to Glasgow, where she volunteered as the organizing secretary for the Glasgow Association of Mixed Clubs and Girls' Clubs. She later worked as area youth work co-ordinator for Ballantrae council. In the late 1970s she was researching living conditions in Glasgow amid high levels of unemployment on Clydeside. During her retirement she was working on a biography of her friend and fellow Scottish film-maker, Jenny Gilbertson. Latterly she lived with her sister Dorothy in Edinburgh, where she died at the Royal Victoria Hospital on 1 October 1998.

Marion Grierson’s career in the film industry was a remarkable one—not only in her capacity as a film-maker but in her determined, manifold contributions to documentary film culture. By comparison with the film career of her sister Ruby, which was cut short by her sudden death in 1940, Marion’s work has been far less celebrated in British film histories—perhaps due to the more ephemeralnature of her TIDA films and their distribution outside the UK, and the demands of her family life at the height of the documentary movement. Noting the commemoration of Ruby’s work after her death, film scholar Sarah Neely has highlighted the difficulties that Marion experienced in maintaining her film work alongside the demands of becoming a mother, which seem ‘to have relegated her to even greater obscurity’ (Neely, 30). Although their brother John Grierson has long dominated accounts of Britain’s documentary film movement, the Grierson sisters’ significant contributions have been increasingly recognized and Marion Grierson’s place in the history of the documentary film tradition better understood. There is still much left to uncover, though; a more vibrant, diverse picture of the tradition would emerge with exploration of the production, distribution, and innovative style of Marion’s films, the different kinds of skill and labour involved in her many roles in film culture, and the enduring social conscience of her career outside the film industry.

**Acknowledgements**

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