

## Freya Stark (31 January 1893— 9 May 1993)

### Chagford and Dartmoor



Dame Freya Madeline Stark Mrs Perowne was born in Paris, where her parents were studying art. Her mother, Flora, was an Italian of Polish/German descent; her father, Robert, an English painter from Devon. She was a British explorer and travel writer.

For her 9th birthday she received a copy of the *One Thousand and One Nights*, and became fascinated with the Orient. She was often ill while young and confined to the house, so she found an outlet in reading. She delighted in reading French, in particular Dumas, and taught herself Latin.

Early family life was nomadic, split between grandparents' residences in Italy and Dartmoor. Her parents' marriage - they were first cousins and both strong-minded and independent - did not last. Her father revelled in the open and wild spaces of Dartmoor where he had built a house near Chagford, her mother preferred a bohemian existence in Italy and they separated. Freya Stark acknowledged in her first volume of autobiography *Traveller's Prelude* (1950) her life-long attachment to Dartmoor, writing that her Chagford home:

“left a permanent love behind it, so that I never move into Devonshire lanes or towards the Dartmoor tors without the knowledge that my roots are there.”

Stark wrote of her early acquaintance with the moor:

“I must have been very small – perhaps six years old. Our land ran into Dartmoor and held in its heathery edges stone circles where people brought flocks and lived through forgotten summers before the Romans came. I would play in and out of the boulders they had propped up to make their houses.”

She wrote more than two dozen books about her travels, which were mainly in Arabia, Iran and Afghanistan. She was a mountaineer and expert in Arabic and Arab culture. Although she was to settle in Asolo, Italy, she returned many times to Devon, valuing her Dartmoor roots.

