

Howard League for Penal Reform

Early Career Academics Network Bulletin

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ECAN Facebook Group



The Howard League for Penal Reform is active on [Facebook](#) and [Twitter](#). There is a special page dedicated to the Early Careers Academic Network that you can reach either by searching for us on Facebook or by clicking on the button above. We hope to use the Facebook site to generate discussions about current issues in the criminal justice system. If there are any topics that you would like to discuss, please start a discussion.

Madeleine Symons: social and penal reformer
By Martin Ferguson Smith

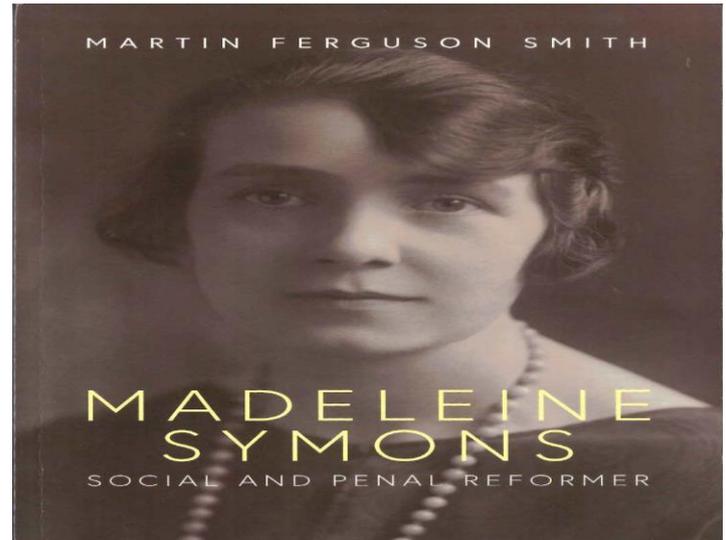
Silverwood, 2017, ISBN 978-1-78132-719-7

This fascinating and detailed biography of Madeleine Symons provides the reader with a clear insight into the life and work of a penal reformer, champion of the Howard League for Penal Reform and lifelong campaigner for the rights of women and children.

It highlights Symons' early life as a student of economics at Newnham College, Cambridge. It discusses the important contribution she made to the women's trade union movement during and after the First World War.

Madeleine became a magistrate in the juvenile court in the 1930s, a role she held for 25 years. She was a member of the Howard League's executive committee dedicating time and energy to supporting the charity until her death in 1957. She campaigned for reform, wrote articles for the Howard Journal and represented the Howard League internationally, attending a Paris UN meeting for NGOs along with Margery Fry in 1948.

This biography coincided with the 60th year of Madeleine Symon's death and the centenary (2018) of the celebration of women's suffrage for women aged 30 and over. The limitations placed on women's suffrage in 1918 impacted on Madeleine, who despite being a JP and a member of a Royal Commission, was not able to vote until she turned 30 in 1925.



The book seamlessly weaves her professional and personal life, providing a detailed portrait of a hardworking and committed campaigner for penal reform. It describes how she became a mother to Theresa in 1926 yet kept her birth a secret to all but a few close friends. As she was unmarried Madeleine adopted Theresa in 1927; 18 months later she adopted a boy and the author tells us she adored both her children.

This biography recognises and champions the work of just one of the many women who fought for social justice yet still largely remain hidden from history. Martin Ferguson Smith deserves praise for shining a light on the important contribution made by Madeleine Symons who was 'a tireless advocate of women's and children's rights. Many of the issues Madeleine Symons campaigned for, like court reform, the treatment of children in the criminal justice system and the inequalities faces by women are still relevant today and the Howard League continues to be outspoken about injustice.

*Lorraine Atkinson, Senior policy officer,
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