



# Mary Anning Rocks and its Outreach Impacts

Anya Pearson<sup>1</sup>

*1Mary Anning Rocks, Longbarn House, Spadger Lane, West Stafford, Dorchester; DT2 8UB, UK*

**Corresponding Author's E-mail:** [anypea@icloud.com](mailto:anypea@icloud.com)

---

## Review Article

Received:  
16-Aug-2024  
Revised:  
14-Oct-2024  
Accepted:  
05-Nov-2024  
Published:  
27-Nov-2024

## Abstract

The Mary Anning Rocks charity started as a campaign to raise a statue for the noted early paleontologist and fossil collector Mary Anning in her hometown, Lyme Regis. Now, after the statue was raised, the campaign is still a vibrant and engaging example of how to connect with communities, especially with school-age children. This inclusive and creative campaign ignited far-reaching engagement across a multitude of demographics, but in particular, young women who saw themselves represented in the field of geosciences for the first time. By leveraging Anning's legacy this way, Mary Anning Rocks has helped numerous museums and educators by drawing footfall and helping them open their doors to new audiences. Through the creative use of art, social media, and community engagement, they have harnessed Anning's story to encourage interest and learning in the geosciences, forging connections between scientific discovery, cultural heritage, and local communities.

© The Author(s) 2024

**Keywords:** Education; Geoconservation; Engagement; Jurassic; Marine reptiles

---

## Introduction

On May 21st, 2022, with the help of my daughter Evie Swire, I unveiled a bronze statue of the early 19<sup>th</sup>-century paleontologist Mary Anning in Lyme Regis. Over two thousand people crowded the sea defenses where the statue waited under a bright unveiling cloth. People had gathered all day (Fig. 1), and as the area began filling, some clambered up the grassy bank to get a better view. Hundreds wore our campaign T-shirts, 'Mary Anning Rocks' emblazoned across their chests and journalists pushed and shoved with cameras on booms, trying to get the best shot.

I'm a fashion design academic and lecturer at the Arts University Bournemouth, specializing in ethical and sustainable practices. I am not a geologist or paleontologist. When I started this campaign six

years ago, I had no clue about the Earth sciences. I liked fossils but wasn't a huge fan of dinosaurs, mud, cold beaches, or Jurassic Park. I was, however, a huge fan of this incredible, working-class woman who lived in Lyme Regis two hundred years ago. The ground-breaking Mary Anning was remarkable in many ways. Yet, she was undervalued in various ways from the moment she made her first discovery at the age of eleven, even in the town of her birth, Lyme Regis.

## A Pioneer of Paleontology

Mary Anning was born in 1799 and spent her life unearthing marine reptiles, including ichthyosaurs and plesiosaurs, as well as all the other fossils typical of the English Lower Jurassic, including fishes, ammonites, and belemnites (Lang 1939; Torrens 1995; Sharpe 2021; Taylor & Benton 2023).



**Figure 1.** The Mary Anning Rocks statue unveiling in Lyme Regis, Dorset, on the 21st of May 2022, with patron Professor Alice Roberts and founder Evie Swire. Photo © Mary Anning Rocks 2024.

These discoveries were novel and unexpected and significantly impacted the professional geologists and paleontologists of the day. Yet, later in life, Mary Anning became despondent as men built their reputations on her discoveries, while she received neither the financial rewards nor the scientific recognition she rightly deserved. Although some gentlemen scientists acknowledged Mary Anning in their papers, Conybeare avoided giving her any recognition. A letter from her friend Anna Maria Pinney provides insight into how Mary felt about this at the time. Pinney wrote, “She says the world has used her ill and she does not care for it, according to her account these men of learning have sucked her brains, and made a great deal by publishing works of which she furnished the contents, while she derived none of the advantages.” (McGowan 2001).

However, some of these gentlemen scientists, like Buckland, de La Beche, and Murchison, developed friendships with Mary Anning that were as close as the patriarchal restrictions and social etiquette of the time permitted between men and women. (Torrens 1995; Sharpe 2021). It is also well documented in the androcentric historical narrative that Buckland, along with others, provided financial support to Mary when needed through print sales and auctions and campaigned for her to receive a government pension in 1838 in recognition of her work.

### **An Impressive Surge of Literature**

After she died in 1847, Mary Anning fell into near obscurity. However, by the 1990s, her name had gained considerable recognition among professional paleontologists, and in the small town of Lyme Regis, she was celebrated as one of the

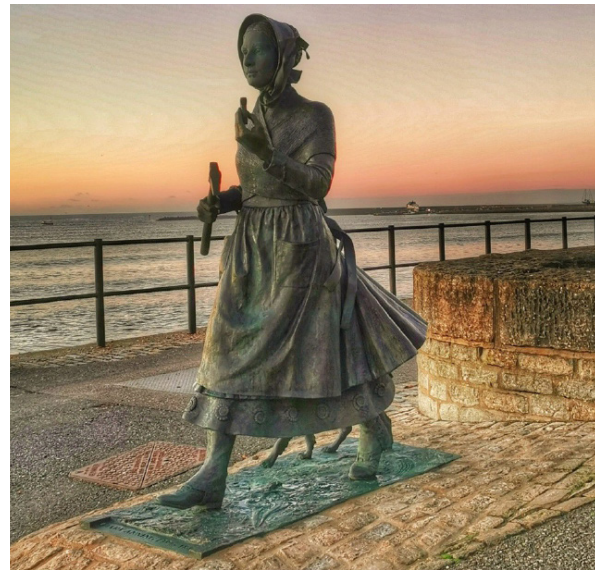
town's most prominent figures. The Philpot Museum (now known as The Lyme Regis Museum) has honored her legacy since its establishment in 1921, and an impressive surge of literature (e.g., Cadbury 2000; Pierce 2006; Davis 2009; Skeers 2020; Sharpe 2021) and a film ('Ammonite' in 2020) have also highlighted her story. She is featured in textbooks and, in 2013, was added to the UK national curriculum and discussed alongside prominent historical figures such as Elizabeth I, Rosa Parks, Emily Davison, Mary Seacole, and Florence Nightingale.

However, despite this growing recognition, it is essential to acknowledge that, from an external perspective, especially in academic circles, Anning is often viewed as a well-remembered figure internationally and in Lyme Regis. While she may have a road named after her and a presence in the local museum, her global impact and recognition do not compare to those of her contemporaries included in the national curriculum. Although there has been notable attention surrounding her life recently, significant work remains to be done to elevate her status to that of the globally known everyday names that join her on the roll call of historically important women.

What is truly remarkable about Anning is that she is an awe-inspiring role model for children today, as shown by numerous books (e.g. Anholt 1998; Walker 2000; Pierce 2006; Skeers 2020). Anning did what she did from a poor, working-class background with limited education. She was primarily self-taught and unflinching in her drive to understand and learn more about the fossils she dug from the cliffs. She dissected squid and fish she bought from the local fisherman so she could understand more about the biology of the long-dead animals she found. Nothing got in her way, and Mary never gave up.

### That's What Inspired Me

This article isn't about what she did but what she stands for. Even two hundred years after her death, she still inspires people, especially children, into the Geosciences. That's what inspired me to start this campaign. She is by far the worthiest of role models for others, particularly young girls and women, to look up to and to be, finally commemorated in Lyme Regis (Fig. 2).



**Figure 2.** Mary Anning's life and quarter bronze statue faces out towards Black Venn and is situated at the junction of the old cart road and Long Entry. Photo © Mary Anning Rocks 2024.

While experiencing menopause and after reading Caroline Criado Perez's book 'Invisible Women' (Criado Perez 2009), I conceived the idea of creating a statue of Mary Anning. The statistics and the glaring lack of female representation, particularly in visual culture, were deeply troubling. As a visual artist, I found this disparity particularly challenging to reconcile with my work and perspective. With no guidebook on how to raise statues, I turned to the local fossil community in Dorset. Once I had a team of modern-day fossil collectors and both amateur and professional geologists on board, things progressed quickly. We launched a crowdfunding campaign just as the government announced the second COVID-19 lockdown,

which gave people more time to reflect and engage in creative, hands-on projects. We also organized a local school's community art project, allowing local children to design how Mary should look. I dedicated a great deal of time and effort to branding and marketing the campaign and leveraging social media to spread the word.

I reached out to the celebrities of the earth sciences community, writing lots of emails and letters. Support quickly grew, with notable figures like novelist Tracy Chevalier, Sir David Attenborough, and Professor Alice Roberts backing the project. Though the campaign was delayed due to Covid-19, we eventually raised the £150,000 needed to commission our chosen artist, Denise Dutton. After eight months of work, Mary's clay rendering (Fig. 3), created at a 'life and a quarter' scale, was ready to be sent to the foundry in Wales for casting in bronze. This larger-than-life-size was necessary to counter the optical illusion that



**Figure 3.** Mary's Life and a Quarter clay rendering with artist Denise Dutton for scale. Photo © Mary Anning Rocks 2024.

often makes statues in open spaces appear smaller than they are. The 'life and a quarter' scale ensures the statue maintains its full presence and looks appropriately proportioned once installed outdoors.

Mary finally arrived in Lyme Regis four days before the unveiling on the back of a flatbed truck and was cemented permanently into her new home, marching out to the beach with basket and hammer in hand and Tray, her dog trotting by her side.

### The Right Place at the Right Time

Mary was in the right place at the right time for me to find her. If I still lived in Newcastle, I'd champion Mary Astell (Kinnaird 1979). If I were still living in the East End of London, I'd raise a monument to the Match Girls (The Match Girls Memorial n.d.). In Edinburgh, it would be Elsie Inglis (McLaren 2022; Elsie, Statue for Elsie Inglis n.d.); in Canterbury, Aphra Behn (Ferguson 1991; About Aphra Behn n.d.). The sad truth is that these women may be known to campaigners and scholars, but they are not more widely appreciated.

These forgotten women now have incredible campaigns championing them. Over the years, many have sought my advice because of the considerable publicity generated by the Mary Anning Rocks campaign. As a collective, we now have twelve campaigns and counting (Fig. 4). We are a mentoring and support group called VISIBLE WomenUK (Visible Women (n.d.); Invisible Women n.d.). These championed women are the lucky ones. There are so many more to discover and celebrate.

### The Importance of Representation

But why are civic monuments and statues important, especially in the digital age? Representation in statues and monuments within our landscapes is vital because public artworks show us how to visualize our shared history. They represent peo-



**Figure 4.** From top left to right: Virginia Woolf, Sylvia Pankhurst, Elizabeth Elmy, Mary Clarke, Henriette Lacks and Aphra Behn. Photo © Mary Anning Rocks 2024.

ple we all agree are significant and worthy and should be remembered. There are many statues in the UK of men (Fig. 5), and making women an equal part of that experience is essential. Whether it is a monument or a statue, the values and beliefs celebrated with a publicly displayed piece of art reflect what the people of that town, like Lyme Regis, are choosing to remember and honor.

The symbolic annihilation of women (Gerbner and Gross 1976) in public discourse has been an immense problem. Some female scientists from the past are being rediscovered, Mary Anning was always there, in the minds of geologists at least, whereas other female scientists of the time were

overlooked completely, such as Elizabeth Bennet and Mary Moreland (Buckland's wife). However, organizations like TrowelBlazers (TrowelBlazers 2019) are now championing their contributions in the 'digging' sciences: archaeology, geology, and paleontology. These efforts are helping to restore the recognition they long deserved.

A noted case of symbolic annihilation of women comes from a consideration of civic monuments in the UK. Only 4% of statues in the UK are of named women, most of which are of royal women. According to the Art Online database for the UK (Art UK n.d.), there are 4,912 publicly owned sculptures, of which 892 are named individuals. For these, each



**Figure 5.** Who are we putting on pedestals? 85% of statues in the UK commemorate the deeds of men. Photo © Mary Anning Rocks 2024.

artist and the named individual was assigned a gender, with all others classified as ‘unknown’. It turns out that there are more statues of men called John (82) than all named non-royal women – among these, John Lennon has eight statues.

#### **Charities Outreach Programme**

The Mary Anning Rocks campaign started with a statue but continues with a significant outreach program. First, with the help of the Geologists’ Association (GA), the artist’s maquette of the statue went on tour, visiting numerous museums and galleries throughout 2023 and 2024, with bookings right into 2025. We also receive requests to host her from museums and organizations in Europe and the United States, and following this strong interest, we have commissioned two copies of the maquette from Denise Dutton so we can start planning further ‘road trips’ with the GA very soon.

Mary has been hosted by some of the most impressive museums, large and small. The impact of this is she has now been seen by thousands of people who would never be able to make the trip to Lyme Regis and hundreds more who have been learning about her for the first time (Fig. 6).

#### **The Ripple Effect**

The outreach and impact of the campaign and the tour have been a joy to watch unfold. The ripple effect even inspired Dorset Hospital to name a new unit after Mary (Fig. 7).

For me, it’s been the little wins. Last summer, I attended the Girls in Geoscience (GiG) event at the University of Plymouth with Mary’s Maquette. GiG is an important initiative because women still only comprised 26.3% of the UK STEM workforce in September 2023 (Workforce Statistics 2023). I was approached by a first-year student studying geology who told me that when she was fourteen it was our social media campaign that allowed her to ‘see herself’ for the first time as a geologist. This was life-affirming proof of the importance of outreach initiatives and giving everyone the chance to have diverse role models to look up to.

#### **Pass the Baton on**

In 2025, we officially hand Mary Anning’s statue and the learning legacy to Lyme Regis Museum (LRM). We always intended to pass the baton on to a worthy custodian, and we couldn’t think of



**Figure 6.** Mary Anning on tour. From top right to left: GiG Girls into Geosciences, University of Plymouth, The “Road Trip” map so far, the Yorkshire Museum poster and Hastings Museum and Art gallery publicity photos. Photo © Mary Anning Rocks 2024 (3 girls looking at Mary photo: Photographer: Rod Morris (i:roadfactoryfilms))

a more deserving and wonderful organization to partner with than LRM. This summer, we funded an information board by the statue and signage around the town, and in the last few weeks, we have created free teaching materials that can be accessed and downloaded from our website (<https://www.maryanningrocks.co.uk/free-stuff>). Beautifully illustrated, ‘Mary’s Map’ lets you trace Mary’s footsteps around Lyme Regis, exploring where she lived and worked, and dis-

covering the key buildings and landmarks in her story. It also highlights the significant people who supported Mary throughout her life. We also have ‘Mary’s Timeline’, a fun and graphic artwork that is a visual timeline highlighting Mary’s remarkable milestones, including some of her most famous accomplishments and perhaps a few you might not know.

The most significant change for the charity is, however, a project we launched in Dorchester,



**Figure 7.** The opening of the Mary Anning Unit at Dorset Hospital with myself, Evie Swire and staff at the ribbon cutting ceremony. Photo copyright Mary Anning Rocks 2024



**Figure 8.** Initial sketches of Sylvia Townsend Warner by sculptor Denise Dutton

Dorset, at the beginning of the summer. We had an agreement from the Charities Commission to change our name and objectives, allowing us to focus on another marginalized, forgotten woman of history. This November 2024, we are excited to announce that our next statue project will honor Sylvia Townsend Warner (Fig. 8) —an extraordinarily witty writer and poet, one of the most remarkable authors of the last century, and an LGBTQ+ pioneer (Sylvia Townsend Warner Society). Townsend Warner will be Dorchester's first non-royal woman commemorated with a statue, joining six men, a horse, a dog and a Queen. While Thomas Hardy and William Barnes are traditionally celebrated as Dorset's literary icons, by raising a statue of Sylvia, we will permanently add her diverse and remarkable voice to the county's rich literary heritage.

#### Acknowledgments

I am grateful to two anonymous reviewers for many suggestions that improved this review.

#### Conflicts of Interests

I have no conflicts of interest to declare

#### Open Access

This article is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License, which permits use, sharing, adaptation, distribution and reproduction in any medium or format, as long as you give appropriate credit to the original author(s) and the source, provide a link to the Creative Commons license, and indicate if changes were made. The images or other third party material in this article are included in the article's Creative Commons license, unless indicated otherwise in a credit line to the material. If material is not included

in the article's Creative Commons license and your intended use is not permitted by statutory regulation or exceeds the permitted use, you will need to obtain permission directly from the OICCPress publisher. To view a copy of this license, visit <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0>

#### References

- About Aphra Behn (n.d.). <https://www.aisforaaphra.org/about-aphra> . Retrieved 12 Nov, 2024
- Anholt L (1998). *Stone Girl, Bone Girl: The Story of Mary Anning*. New York: Scholastic.
- Art UK (n.d.). <https://artuk.org/discover/art-works> \_Retrieved 12 Nov, 2024
- Cadbury D (2000). *The Dinosaur Hunters*. London: Fourth Estate.
- Criado Perez C (2019). *Invisible Women: Exposing Data Bias in a World Designed for Men*. London: Chatto & Windus
- Davis LE (2009). Mary Anning of Lyme Regis: 19th century pioneer in British palaeontology. *Headwaters*. 26: 96–126.
- Elsie, Statue for Elsie Inglis (n.d.) . <https://www.elsieinglis.org/>
- Ferguson MW (1991). Juggling the categories of race, class and gender: Aphra Behn's Oroonoko. *Women's Studies*. 19: 159–181.
- Gerbner G, Gross L (1976). Living with television: The violence profile. *Journal of Communication*. 26: 172–199.
- Invisible Women (n.d.). <https://invisiblewomen.org.uk/>
- Kinnaird JK (1979). Mary Astell and the conservative contribution to English feminism. *Journal of British Studies*. 19: 53–75.

Lang WD (1939). Mary Anning (1799-1847), and the pioneer geologists of Lyme. Proceedings of the Dorset Natural History and Archaeological Society. 60: 142–164).

McGowan C (2001). The Dragon Seekers. New York: Perseus.

McLaren ES (2022). Elsie Inglis: The woman with the torch. DigiCat.

Pierce P (2006). Jurassic Mary: Mary Anning and the Primeval Monsters. Stroud: The History Press.

Sharpe T (2021). The Fossil Woman: A Life of Mary Anning. Bridport: Dovecot Press.

Skeers L (2020). Dinosaur Lady: The Daring Discoveries of Mary Anning, the First Paleontologist. Chicago: Sourcebooks.

Sylvia Townsend Warner Society. <https://townsendwarner.com> Retrieved on 12/11/2014

Taylor MA, Benton MJ (2023). The life of Mary Anning, fossil collector of Lyme Regis: a contemporary biographical memoir by George Roberts. Journal of the Geological Society. 180: jgs2022-053.

The Match Girls Memorial (n.d.). <https://www.matchgirls1888.org/> . Retrieved 12 Nov, 2024

Torrens H (1995). Mary Anning (1799–1847) of Lyme; ‘the greatest fossilist the world ever knew’. The British Journal for the History of Science. 28: 257–284.

Trowelblazers (2019). <https://trowelblazers.com> Retrieved 12 Nov, 2024

Visible Women. <https://www.maryanningrocks.co.uk/visiblewomenuk>

Walker SM (2000). Mary Anning: Fossil Hunter. Minneapolis: Millbrook Press.

Workforce Statistics (2023). <https://www.wise-campaign.org.uk/updated-workforce-statistics-september-2023/>. Retrieved 12 Nov, 2024