

*****PRESS RELEASE*****

Rare Mary Anning Letter extract to be auctioned - Lyme Regis community rallies to bring it home.

An exceptionally rare partial handwritten letter and signature from pioneering fossil collector Mary Anning is due to go under the hammer (Bonham's Auctions 26th March) prompting an urgent community-lead fundraising campaign to secure its return to her home town of Lyme Regis.

The Friends of Lyme Regis Philpot Museum are spearheading this public appeal to raise funds to bid on this rare artefact. It gives an intimate glimpse into Mary's innermost thoughts, of which we know precious little.

<https://www.paypal.com/gb/fundraiser/charity/144460>

<https://www.bonhams.com/auction/32104/lot/52/anning-mary-autograph-fragment-signed-mary-anning-mentioning-fossils-np-nd/>



Letter from Dr Paul Davis, Geology Curator, Lyme Regis Museum

The Friends of Lyme Regis Museum are raising money to cover the purchase (including the auction fees) and display of a partial hand-written letter by pioneering palaeontologist Mary Anning. This letter has come up for auction (see [Bonhams : ANNING \(MARY\)](https://www.bonhams.com/auction/32104/lot/52/anning-mary-autograph-fragment-signed-mary-anning-mentioning-fossils-np-nd/)) and will be sold on 26th March 2026.

This letter is exceptionally important due to Mary Anning's pre-eminent place in British history, and we are desperate to preserve this item in the designated nationally important collection of Lyme Regis Museum, which is sited on her first home and fossil shop.

Mary Anning was a pioneering female at the birth of palaeontology and geology as a scientific discipline. Born in Lyme Regis in 1799 to a poor working-class family she overcame the societal pressures of class and sex to be a groundbreaking female palaeontologist. Her achievements were celebrated by scientists during her life and by generations of scientists after her death in 1847. Her life and achievements have recently been brought to the attention of a wider public audience as she has been recognised as a highly significant historical person appearing as a topic within the KS1 National Curriculum. Her pre-eminence as a pioneering female scientist is well recognised, in 2010 she was voted as one of the ten most influential women in British science history by the Royal Society. She has appeared on British Postage Stamps (2024), Royal Mint 50p coins (2021), and was shortlisted to appear on the new Bank of England £50 note (2019). In 2022, as a result of a crowdfunding campaign, a new public statue of Mary Anning was unveiled on the Lyme Regis seafront in 2022, providing a lasting tribute to her legacy and inspiring future generations to engage with science and discovery.

Even though Mary is now well (and quite rightly) celebrated we have extremely few contemporary documents to help understand her life. We only know of 48 part or complete letters written by her – all but 4 (including this one) are in public collections and this is only the second letter ever to come to market. Almost all these surviving letters detail her scientific transactions with contemporary scientists, and we have almost no evidence of Mary's personal life or feelings. Even though this letter is only partial it provides a tantalising glimpse of the 'real' Mary.

The letter states:

'But I was so worn out after you saw me that I almost wished I might never see a Lady again and the name fossils makes me sick with its concominants [sic- concomitants].'
Gratefully Yours Mary Anning.

Tom Sharpe former curator at National Museum of Wales the author, *The Fossil Woman A Life of Mary Anning* (2020) and *Mary Anning The Companion Guide* (autumn 2026) and world expert on Mary Anning writes:

'Mary Anning's fame draws visitors from all over the world to Lyme Regis Museum. Located on the site of the house where she lived until 1826, it is ideally placed to tell the story of this remarkable woman. There is no better or more appropriate home for this letter fragment, an exceptionally rare example of a personal, not business-related, letter of Anning's. Bringing this autographed letter fragment home to Lyme Regis allows it to be seen and interpreted in the context of the place where it was written and offers visitors a direct and tangible connection across two centuries with Mary Anning.'

If this letter is secured for Lyme Regis Museum, it will enable access for researchers to analyse these intriguing statements. It will also enable visitors to see this rare document

on display at the Museum, built on the site of her former home and overlooking the Jurassic Coast where she made her remarkable palaeontological discoveries.

If when contributing to this campaign you wish to continue to support the Friends of Lyme Regis Museum there are further projects for which the funds raised could make a significant difference.

For example, The Friends help Lyme Regis Museum acquire, display and research scientifically important fossil specimens which demonstrate the outstanding palaeontology of the Jurassic Coast World Heritage Site. They also help the museum to tell the story of Mary Anning, increasing access to her marvellous and inspirational story which helps to nurture an interest in science amongst young visitors. Remaining funds raised would be used to support such projects.

Please note, this campaign is led by the Friends of Lyme Regis Museum. All funds raised by this campaign will initially be transferred to the Paypal Giving Fund account of the Friends of Lyme Regis, Registered Charity #278774 and held there until after the auction. Any surplus funds will be used to support the charitable aims of the Friends of Lyme Regis Museum (including the projects detailed above). If you prefer to donate directly, this can be arranged. Please contact: FOLRMpub@gmail.com

<https://www.paypal.com/gb/fundraiser/charity/144460>

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