An anonymous account of Mary Anning (1799-1847), fossil collector of Lyme Regis, Dorset, England, published in All the year round in 1865, and its attribution to Henry Stuart Fagan (1827-1890), schoolmaster, parson and author.

Errata

p. 77, second column, line 26, for ‘Frederick’ read ‘Ferris’

p. 78, first column, line 3, add ‘of Woodchester’ after ‘recalled’

p. 80, second column, line 9, add ‘, the young girl in London,’ after ‘Miss Bell’

p. 80, lines 5-6 from bottom should read ‘further, implicit, timings of c. 1838 (Cadbury 2000, 231) and c. 1833 (Shone 2009, 19).’


http://repository.nms.ac.uk/1258

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AN ANONYMOUS ACCOUNT OF MARY ANNING (1799-1847), FOSSIL COLLECTOR OF LYME REGIS, DORSET, ENGLAND, PUBLISHED IN ALL THE YEAR ROUND IN 1865, AND ITS ATTRIBUTION TO HENRY STUART FAGAN (1827-1890), SCHOOLMASTER, PARSON AND AUTHOR

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An anonymous account of Mary Anning (1799-1847), fossil collector of Lyme Regis, Dorset, England, published in All the year round in 1865, and its attribution to Henry Stuart Fagan (1827-1890), schoolmaster, parson and author

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Abstract:

An article on the fossil collector Mary Anning (1799-1847), published in All the Year Round in 1865, and much used in Anning literature, is usually ascribed to Charles Dickens. In fact it was by the Reverend Henry Stuart Fagan (1827-1890), grammar school headmaster, Church of England parson, and literary man. It is neither original nor reliable, and introduced errors into the Anning literature which are still problematic. The methodology of attribution of anonymous articles is discussed.

Introduction

Mary Anning the younger (1799-1847), fossil collector of Lyme Regis in Dorset, has, rather remarkably, attracted more biographical attention than any other geologist in Britain and Ireland, with the exception of Charles Darwin, who had rather more reason for fame than his geological work (Oldroyd 2013). Some of those writings, in nineteenth-century periodicals, were anonymous. This was common in such journals. It helped protect authors in sensitive positions, while readers had to consider articles on their merits rather than the author’s reputation (Secord 2000). However, not knowing who the author was makes it hard today to judge the author’s competence and motivations in writing the piece. By contrast, the author of one account of Anning is known to be closely connected to her through his family, with considerable implications for our appreciation of his likely accuracy and of his approach (Brown [1859], Taylor and Torrens 2014b). Again by contrast, our identification of the probable authors of an anonymous 1857 piece on Anning as knowledgeable friends of hers, and prominent natural scientists and local historians, gives this piece much greater significance (Anon. 1857, Taylor and Torrens in press 2014a).

The subject of our paper is another nineteenth-century account of Anning, an anonymous piece published on 11 February 1865 in All the year round (Anon. 1865a), which has become popular, even fashionable, as a source for writers on Anning. Charles Dickens (1812-70) was the magazine’s editor and frequent contributor (Drew and Craig 2011), and was always considered an obvious potential author for the Anning piece (Torrens 1995, Zalasiewicz 2012). But there is no evidence that Dickens was in fact the author. Yet somehow this provisional suggestion has become a positive identification in much recent writing on Anning (for instance Cadbury 2000, 162; Goodhue 2004, 181 with provisos; Emling 2009, 198-9; Ridgway 2012; Morgan 2013).

In this paper, we reprint the 1865 piece, demonstrate that it was not written by Dickens, and identify the actual author, including the likely sources for his often misleading statements. We show that this literary hack was neither an original nor a reliable source for Anning, and conclude with a discussion of the disastrous effects for the Anning literature of relying so heavily and repeatedly on uncritical use of his piece.

Archival and repository information

Unless otherwise stated, all family history information, including jury lists, is from church and statutory sources accessed via www.ancestry.co.uk, www.familysearch.org and www.findmypast.co.uk. Somerset is in its contemporary sense, with the inclusion of Bath. Abbreviations: b., born; bap., baptised; c., circa; DJO, Dickens's Journals Online (URL: www.djo.org.uk, accessed in June-August 2012); OHC, Oxfordshire History Centre, Cultural Services, St Luke’s Church, Temple Road, Cowley, Oxford OX4 2HT; OXFUM, Arkell and Hope Libraries, Oxford University Museum of Natural History, Parks Road, Oxford OX1 3PW, England; TNA, The National Archives, Kew, Richmond, Surrey TW9 4DU, England; TNA, The National Archives, Kew, Richmond, Surrey TW9 4DU, England (URL: www.nationalarchives.gov.uk); WI, Wellesley Index, Houghton et al. (1966-1989) and website (URL: www.wellesley.chadwyck.co.uk).

The All the Year Round article

The text is given verbatim, except that original pagination has been inserted. All insertions and comments in the text are in bold in square parentheses. Comments made elsewhere in this paper are not repeated here. The original paragraphing is retained, but not line breaks.
MARY ANNING, THE FOSSIL FINDER

[Starts on p. 60] Every one must have seen at least an engraving of that strange old-world monster the Plesiosaurus, of which Cuvier said, when the skeleton was sent to him from Lyme Regis, “Verily, this is altogether the most monstrous animal that has yet been found amid the ruins of a former world. It had a lizard’s head, a crocodile’s teeth, a trunk and tail like an ordinary quadruped, a chameleon’s ribs, a whale’s paddles, whilst its neck was of enormous length, like a serpent tacked on to the body.” This “liassic, first cousin of all lizards,” was discovered by a self-taught geologist, the daughter of a Lyme carpenter. [Quotation untraced — perhaps made up by the author, vaguely recalling the etymology of Plesiosaurus as ‘nearer to reptiles’.

Things in this world pretty much repeat themselves. Women’s pursuits follow this law. In Lady Jane Grey’s time, hard study was fashionable. Mary Hutchinson and the Duchess of Newcastle are representatives of a race who were something far more than mere students. Then came a frivolous age, and then, by-and-by, science got to be popular; the ladies’ pocket-books and annuals of some forty or fifty years ago almost invariably contain a few algebraic equations, besides arithmetical problems like those which Longfellow’s Kavanagh sets his wife, and [p. 61 begins] some chemical experiments to boot. This age produced the class of whom Mrs Somerville is the type. We have now got round again to the frivolous epoch; it will be the men’s fault if it lasts long, for women have consciences, and feel that what their sons are to be depends mainly on them; besides, their minds are naturally more active than those of the “lords of creation,” and if they now and then taboo everything intellectual, it is because they find such conduct pleases. Geology does not seem a pursuit likely to attract women, yet we have known several who had picked up a very fair knowledge of its outlines — some of them literally like Horace’s slave who had mastered the Stoic philosophy while acting as pew-opener in Stertinius’s lecture-hall. There was a quaint old lady who used to go her “midland circuit,” calling on all parsons and other supposed encouragers of science, carrying about with her boxes of “specimens,” and begging to be allowed to enlighten the national school children at so much a head. Then there is Miss Wetherall, at Amesbury, quite worth a visit, her “museum” being a collection of flints of the oddest shapes, twisted like snakes, knotted like ropes, branching like coral, and her talk being about Stonehenge and the universal pre-diluvian serpent-worship, of which she believes it a remnant, and of noting the zealous affection with which she points out tracings of Karnac, and snake temples in India and America, drawn by her father, the ex-cicerone of the neighbourhood. [The Egyptian temple of Karnac rather than the megalithic site of Carnac in Brittany.]

But Mary Anning was something more than a mere village celebrity, interesting to those who like to study character, and are fond of seeing good stubborn English perseverance make way even where there is nothing in its favour. She acquired, if not an English, certainly an European, reputation. Professor Owen thought so highly of her usefulness, that he moved the authorities of the British Museum to grant her a pension of forty pounds a year, which she enjoyed for some little time before her early death.

Her father used to employ the church holidays in picking up along the beach pretty pebbles and shells, fossil and recent, and “verterberries,” and “John Dory’s bones,” and “ladies’ fingers,” and other “curies,” as they were called. Lyme and its neighbour, Charmouth, were then on the old coach-road, and the passengers mostly liked to take away a specimen or two, which they got either from Anning or from a Charmouth “fossiler,” called the Cury-man, or “Captain Cury,” from his trade in curiosities. [Plainly from Roberts (1834, 286-7) rather than (1856, 557-8).] In August, 1800, little Mary Anning was taken to see some horse-riding in the Rack field. A thunderstorm came on: those in charge of her hurried her under a tree; a flash of lightning struck the party, killing two women on the spot, and making the child insensible. A warm bath restored her to consciousness, and, strangely enough, she who had been a very dull girl before, now grew up lively and intelligent. She soon got to accompany her father in his rambles. “Fossiling,” however, does not appear to have paid so well as steady carpentry, for the family went down the hill. The father died of consumption, and Mary, at ten years of age, was left very badly off. Just then a lady gave her half-a-crown for a very choice ammonite. This encouraged her to take to collecting as a regular means of life. But she soon proved something more than a mere “fossiler.” Gradually that truth dawned on her mind which our Laureate has so beautifully expressed:

There rolls the deep where grew the tree;  
O earth, what changes thou hast seen!  
There, where the long street roars, hath been  
The silence of the central sea.  
[Tennyson, In Memoriam, part of stanza CXXII.]
In 1811, she saw some bones sticking out of a cliff; and, hammer in hand, she traced the position of the whole creature, and then hired men to dig out for her the lias block in which it was embedded. Thus was brought to light the first Ichthyosaurus (fish-lizard), a monster some thirty feet long, with jaws nearly a fathom in length, and huge saucer eyes, some of which have been found so perfect, that the petrified lenses (the sclerotica, of which it had thirteen coats) have been split off and used as magnifiers. People then called it a crocodile. Mr Henley, the lord of the manor, bought it of the enterprising young girl for twenty-three pounds. It is now in the British Museum. Sir Everard Home, writing in 1814, supported the crocodile theory; by-and-by, when more perfect paddles had been discovered, he said it must be a fish. Dr Buckland (father of our lively young salmon-hatcher) pronounced its breast-bone to be that of a lizard; Dr Ure hit upon the happy name ichthyosaurus; Conybeare, and De la Beche, and others, had a turn at it; and at last all their drawings, specimens, and a great many fresh details which Miss Anning had since brought to light, were sent over to Cuvier; and after a ten years' siege, the Protean monster surrendered, and took the form under which he is at present known. Then came the Plesiosaurus, which was the occasion of a sharper, though shorter, battle. Miss Anning's business, of course, was not to take sides, but to furnish the combatants with munitions of war – now a paddle, then a jaw, then a stomach full of half digested fish. She had in a high degree that sort of intuition without which it is hopeless for any one to think of becoming a good collector of fossils.

Here, as in everything else, field and chamber practice are widely different: you may be well up in the latest theories, and able to argue perfectly on the specimen when it is laid before you, and yet you may totally lack that instinct which will lead your brother-collector right to the place where the "specimen" is to be found, and will direct him in following up the track, till from finding a fragment of a claw he succeeds in ferreting out the whole skeleton. Our heroine would have been able, for instance, out of fifty "nODULES," all looking to you much of a muchness, to pick without hesitation the one which, being cleft with a dexterous blow, should [p. 62 begins] show a perfect fish imbedded in what was once soft clay. Scenting out valuable specimens in this way, she enabled the savans to fix four kinds of ichthyosauri, besides two plesiosauri, and the extraordinary pterodactyle (discovered in 1828) which made Cuvier retract what he had said of the lizard's cousin, and award the palm of strangeness to a monster half vampire, half woodcock, with crocodile's teeth along its tapering bill, and scale armour over its lizard-shaped body. If you have never seen the creature delineated, take Dr Buckland's wonderful plate, Duria antiquior, wherein "the dragons of the prime, which tare each other in the slime," are shown, swimming, flying, biting, fighting, "as 'twas their nature to;" [Tennyson, In Memoriam, LVI] and aloft in the corner of the picture, those things that look like Japanese kites, are nature's first attempts at anything in the bird line. Grewsome beasts they seem to be. Even if the pre-Adamite man is ever proved to have been existing at that epoch, we cannot imagine his wife making pets of them, or his children liking to have them hung about the house in cages, they have such a family likeness to the evil spirits who beset Æneas or Satan in an old illustrated Virgil or Paradise Lost.

One more discovery Miss Anning helped to bring about: the ladies' fingers were at last judged from their surroundings to be the bony processes of pre-chaotic cuttle-fish – belemnites they are now named, because they are long and dart-like, instead of flat like our present cuttle-fish's inside. Some of them are so perfect that the ink-bag has been found and "utilised." Dr Buckland, in his amusing Oxford lectures, used to show drawings in sepia the colouring matter used in making which was countless thousands of years old. Of this lias itself, in which all these creatures are discovered, we must say a word: it is largely exported, especially to Holland, for lias-lime has the property of hardening under water, and so is invaluable in forming the dykes, whereby, with facings of immense blocks of Finland granite, the Dutchmen try to keep the sea out of their polders, or low-level meadows. Everybody knows that our geological strata, of which we can show a greater variety in this little island than much larger countries possess, do not run parallel with any of the coasts, but transversely from north-east to south-west. The chalk goes from Norfolk across to the Isle of Wight, with the Wealden and London clay and other beds laid upon it; the oolite from the North Riding, down through Oxfordshire and westward to Bath, and so on of the rest. Then again the bands are not continuous and unbroken. Often one bed is washed away (denuded) along more than half its original course. This is especially the case with the lias. It is found at Lyme, it "crops out" again in a few other places, but is not largely represented anywhere else except in Leicestershire, where, at Barrow-on-Soar, fish and reptiles identical with those at Lyme might, till
lately, have been bought for a fifth of the price which
the Duke of Buckingham (who gave one hundred and
twenty pounds for a very indifferent ichthyosaurus)
and other amateurs have made fashionable at Lyme.
Alas! O intending speculator, the Barrow men have
now learnt how to charge.

But to return to Miss Anning. Dr Carus, who
went with the King of Saxony through England and
Scotland, in 1844, and wrote an account of his majesty's
journey, speaks of visiting her collection, and securing
six feet of reptile for fifteen pounds. The doctor says:
"Wishing to preserve the name of this devoted servant
of science, I made her write it in my pocket-book; she
said, with unaffected pride, as she gave me back the
book, 'My name is well known throughout Europe.'"
Better known indeed abroad than at home! In her
own neighbourhood, Miss Anning was far from being
a prophetess. Those who had derided her when she
began her researches, now turned and laughed at her
as an uneducated assuming person, who had made one
good chance hit. Dr. Buckland and Professor Owen and
others knew her worth, and valued her accordingly;
but she met with little sympathy in her own town, and
others knew her worth, and valued her accordingly;
the highest tribute which that magniloquent guide-
book, The Beauties of Lyme Regis, can offer her, is to
assure us that "her death was, in a pecuniary point,
a great loss to the place, as her presence attracted a
large number of distinguished visitors." Quick returns
are the thing at Lyme. We need not wonder that Miss
Anning was chiefly valued as a bait for tourists, when
we find that the museum is now entirely broken up,
and the specimens returned to those who had lent
them. No one had public spirit enough to take charge
of a non-paying concern, when the early geological
furore had calmed down, and people came to bathe
and not to chop rocks. You may now visit the old
abode of saurians without being able to see a single
tolerable specimen.

Miss Anning wrote sadly enough to a young girl
in London: "I beg your pardon for distrusting your
friendship. The world has used me so unkindly, I fear
it has made me suspicious of every one."

All this time she was dying of a malignant tumour
in the breast – Her flying to strong drinks and opium
to ease the pain of this, her detracting townspeople
do not fail to record to her discredit. She died in 1847,
and the Geological Society, in concert with the vicar of
the place, have lately put up a little memorial window
to her in the church – "a poor little thing, sir; one of
those kaleidoscope windows, you know," said one
of the "faint praisers," who, having neglected her
in life, seem to think it quite proper to decry all her
belongings now she is gone.

Grateful or ungrateful, the Lyme people live in a
pretty country. It is a fine bracing walk over the hills
from Bridport, itself a quaint place – a knot of houses
by the beach, and all the rest of the town a mile and
more inland – so inland, that you don’t see the sea from
any part of it. Near Bridport ends the Chesil Bank, that
strange pebble beach which runs along from Portland,
joining the “island” to the [p. 63 begins] mainland. The
pebbles grow gradually smaller as you move westward.
At Portland they are as big as respectable potatoes. West
of Bridport they are small peas; you think it is a sand-
bank till you put your hand down and feel. So regular is
this decrease, that they say smugglers, running ashore
on blind nights, tell their whereabouts by picking up a
handful of gravel.

The road to Lyme is very hilly. Even we, who live in
the hilliest part of Sommersetshire, groaned at the ups
and downs; but what drivers these people are: how
glad we were to be afoot, despite the fatigue. After
our Zomerzet fashion of locking the wheel at every
gentle slope, to see these Dorset men swing along
down the hills without either drag or skidpan, was a
"caution." Is it that the men are bolder or the horses
better trained? About the Peak, in Derbyshire, they
do the same thing; but in the Saxon’s Paradise, the
pleasant country, the “Somerset,” we always make as
much fuss about a hill as a London ‘bus does in going
down by St Sepulchre’s church. [The dangerously
steep Snow Hill, near the Saracen’s Head coaching
inn, which served the northern and western coaches
before the railways; it features in Charles Dickens’s
novel Nicholas Nickleby.]

Lyme has a history of its
own. It was great in Edward the Third’s reign, when
the Cobb, the artificial harbour, was first built; and
the Feast of Cobb Ale was founded. The “ale,” in the
good old times, was the equivalent of a public dinner
now-a-days – generally for some good object; and this
“Cobb ale” flourished till the Puritans “put it down,”
along with stage plays and other unseemly sports.
[Probably from Roberts (1856, 344-345).] Lyme fitted
out two good ships for the Armada. It was defended
by Blake against Prince Maurice. The defence of Lyme
and that of Taunton are enough to immortalise our
great republican admiral, even without his deeds of
prowess by sea. As is too often the case, the besieged
sullied their cause by sad cruelty in the day of
triumph. After the royalists had gone off, they sallied
out to pillage, and finding a poor old Irishwoman of
the enemy, drove her through the streets to the sea-
side, knocked her on the head, slashed and hewed her body with their swords, and, having robbed her, cast her carcase into the sea, where it lay till consumed. The admiral’s secretary says explicitly that the women of the town slew and pulled her in pieces. Whitelock writes much to the same effect. Some tell of a hogshad stuck with nails having been prepared, into which the old woman was put, and so rolled into the sea. Such is civil war. Another sad episode in the history of Lyme is the attempt of the Duke of Monmouth – the coward who skulked away from Sedgmoor while the poor Somersetshire rustics, whom he had deluded, charged and charged again, with scythes and billhooks, Kirke’s “lambs” and Feversham’s dragoons. Daniel Defoe was among Monmouth’s men. The brothers Hewling, of Lyme, were among the most pitied victims of the “Bloody Assize.”

But, amidst all the interest attaching to the quiet little “fashionable” watering place, not the least is that which centres round the name of Mary Anning. Her history shows what humble people may do, if they have just purpose and courage enough, towards promoting the cause of science. The inscription under her memorial window commemorates her “usefulness in furthering the science of geology” (it was not a science when she began to discover, and so helped to make it one), “and also her benevolence of heart and integrity of life.” The carpenter’s daughter has won a name for herself, and has deserved to win it.

Methodology and the problem of anonymity

We do not attempt a statistical analysis of word frequency to identify the author of the 1865 piece (e.g. Drew and Craig 2011), as the piece is, so to speak, contaminated by its evident reliance on other writers. Rather, we found it useful to consider several lines of evidence:

1. **Documentary evidence** such as publisher’s accounts: strong (e.g. Taylor and Torrens in press 2014a), but needing careful interpretation (for instance, when payment is made to a representative rather than the author, Smith et al. 2010). For this 1865 paper, however, no archival evidence is known (Oppenlander 1984; Drew and Craig 2011; DJO).

2. **Style**, by comparison with work of known authorship: useful if written for similar audiences at similar times, but only indicative at best unless the style is particularly distinctive.

3. **Content relevant to the topic**, especially its selection and handling, and level of specialist knowledge displayed; actual factual content is too easily copied to be very reliable.

4. **Content irrelevant to the topic**, especially personal interests and quirks.

5. **Personal allusions**, such as place of residence.

We found it useful to assess candidates using only some criteria, and then cross-check potential positives with the remaining evidence, ideally using information unknown to us when we picked the candidate. This is, of course, a Popperian formulation and testing of hypotheses. A partial identification predicts that the remaining information will be consistent: the more specific the hypothesis and information, the more likely the identification is correct (though it cannot, of course, be formally proven). For instance, internal evidence in The Lymiad, a poem written about Lyme in 1818, matches independently obtained personal data for a likely author, strengthening the case for her authorship (Taylor 2012; Torrens 2014). As with DNA evidence in law courts, it is necessary to show that the analysis is not biased by knowing some of the evidence in advance. This can be addressed by presenting the problem in a way which does not depend on prior knowledge. In this case, we rely on a high level of circumstantial evidence, but also consider, later, how likely it is that the match arose by chance.

**Authorship**

The ‘Miss Wetherall’ of the 1865 article (page 61) must be a slip, perhaps inspired by the all-weather, so to speak, endurance needed by any guide to Stonehenge out on Salisbury Plain (or it may be an otherwise unknown nickname, but see below). She is plainly Miss Caroline Champneys Browne (bap. 1796-1881). Her father was Henry Browne (d. 1839), Stonehenge’s first custodian, who mixed apocalyptic Christianity and Biblical literalist geology to portray Stonehenge as an antediluvian temple damaged in Noah’s Flood (Browne 1823, 1832; Anon. 1882; Taylor and Torrens in press 2014a). His son Joseph (c. 1797-1881) succeeded him, and with his sister Caroline carried on well into the 1870s (Anon. 1876a, 1882). The flints and Miss Browne, correctly named this time, reappeared the following year in a piece so similar, in allusions and in style, to the 1865 article as to suggest at once that they were by the same author, one H. S. Fagan:

It is no good asking what Stonehenge means. Some wild theorist has lately said that it is post-Roman. Quaint old Miss Brown, the greatest
curiosity in Amesbury, will tell you (much more sensibly) “It is antediluvian, sir” [...] she shows you [...] the flints of wonderful forms which are found lying about she believes to have been fruit, lizards, and fir cones – anything, in fact, except the sponges which we know they were. ([Fagan] 1866, 392; WI)

The Reverend Henry Stuart Fagan (1827-1890) attended the progressive City of London School from 1840, and matriculated at Pembroke College, University of Oxford, in 1845, graduating BA in 1850 and becoming a Fellow from 1850-52 (Ms Amanda Ingram, Archivist, Pembroke College, pers. comm. to MAT, 3 August 2012; Anon. 1847, 1850a, 1850b; Macleane 1897). Fagan was ordained priest in the Church of England in 1852, evidently with his career as a grammar school headmaster in mind (Anon. 1852, Curthoys 1997b). He was briefly an assistant master at King Edward’s School, Birmingham, in 1851 (Ms Alison Wheatley, Archivist, Schools of King Edward the Sixth in Birmingham, pers. comm. to MAT, 26 February 2013). Fagan then became Headmaster of the grammar schools at, successively, Burton-on-Trent, Derbyshire (1851-5), Market Bosworth, Leicestershire (1855-8), and Bath, Somerset (1858-70), this last linked to the parish living of Charlcombe. Fagan was not particularly successful as a headmaster, seemingly as much because of the intractable problems of the still unreformed grammar schools as of his own failings of temperament, and in 1870 he became vicar of the parish of St Just-in-Penwith in Cornwall, the most westerly town in England. In 1882 he became rector of Great Cressingham with Bodney, Norfolk, where he died in 1890. From the 1860s onwards, Fagan wrote many periodical and newspaper articles, especially on politics in which Fagan was a Liberal and, by the 1880s, a strong advocate of Irish Home Rule, even during the Irish Republican bombing campaign in Britain – Pembroke College’s historian slyly described him as ‘a very able man, of somewhat explosive Home Rule opinions’ (Macleane 1897, 481-2). In Church of England politics Fagan was neither High nor Low Church, disavowing the latter’s Biblical-literalist, anti-evolutionary tendency, and indeed he was once described as a ‘Christian Socialist’ in the Charles Kingsley sense (Fagan 1878, 764; Anon. 1888) (basic references for Fagan’s life are Boase and Courtney (1874-1882); Foster [1888]; Anon. 1890a, 1890b, 1890c, 1890d; Tynan 1913, Symons 1934; Boase 1965; Wroughton 1982; Taylor 2014; WI).

The internal evidence of the 1865 piece is that the author
1. was not a resident at Lyme;
2. wrote his piece in 1859-1865 (citing Brown [1859]);
3. wrote with confidence, rephrasing borrowings from other writers when others might copy more slavishly;
4. had been to Stonehenge and Amesbury in Wiltshire, and to Derbyshire and Leicestershire;
5. was likely to be politically Liberal, from the comments on self-help, the Civil Wars, and women’s education;
6. lived in Somerset, in a hilly part;
7. had some interest in geology, but made significant errors.

Fagan at once fits the first five criteria from the evidence already adduced. On the sixth criterion, the hills surrounding Bath such as Lansdown, and especially Kingsdown on the London turnpike, were notoriously difficult for coach travel, which posed real problems for the poorly-braked horse-drawn vehicles.
of the day. On the seventh criterion, Fagan’s geological expertise, such as it was, is discussed below. However, he would have had access to good libraries in Bath. Bath had many proprietary libraries (Kite 1966) as well as that of the Royal Literary and Scientific Institution, which (at least in 1879) had both volumes of Buckland’s *Bridgewater Treatise* (Russell 1879). Fagan also wrote a number of articles which mixed travel, topography and local history ([Fagan] 1874, 1876, 1879). The 1866 piece already cited is about walking in the Mendip Hills and on Salisbury Plain. Another, formally anonymous, piece about a Bathonian’s walking holidays in Somerset and Wiltshire is plainly by Fagan (1871); not used to argue for his authorship of the 1865 piece, to avoid circularity). He briskly mixed holiday narrative and observation with local history and geology robbed from guidebooks and local histories, both in advance (Fagan 1879, 217), and at his destination ([Fagan] 1866, 393-4). The 1865 piece is essentially about a ‘walk’ to Lyme with added Anning content. Lyme was a traditional seaside resort for Bathonians, convenient because the Exeter coaches had passed nearby. By 1865, however, Fagan would have taken the Great Western Railway to Maiden Newton, changing there for the branch line train to Bridport, the logical start of his hike (cf. Anon. 1862, Thomas 1981).

Other references in the 1865 article now make sense. As a Midlands schoolmaster Fagan would know the peripatetic old lady with her boxes of specimens (page 51), and his knowledge of Barrow upon Soar fossil prices likely came from buying some for his school at Bosworth in the same county (page 52). His ‘Miss Wetherall’ is almost certainly a slip for the fossil-collecting Mrs Ann (or Anne) Wetherell née Merewether (1779-1866), who lived near Bath at Calne (Anon. 1866, 1867). Her elder half-brother’s son was John Merewether (1797-1850), Dean of Hereford, who excavated Silbury in the Avebury megalithic complex, thought by many to be a snake temple (Seccombe and Clewlow 2004-6, Torrens 2013); her brother was Henry Merewether (1780/1-1864), lawyer, and from 1842 to 1859 Town Clerk of the Corporation of London, while Fagan was at its City of London School (Welch and Schofield 2004).

Henry Stuart Fagan as geologist

Fagan plainly knew some geology. He would, for instance, visit the Mendip bone caves when on holiday in Somerset, and commented, if only briefly, on local geology elsewhere ([Fagan] 1866, Fagan 1867a; 1867b; 1873; [Fagan] 1874) in ways consistent with the relatively superficial knowledge shown in the 1865 piece. To go further runs into the problems of dealing with such marginal figures, in which the smallest involvement with science may, or may not, be significant. In this case, scrutiny throws up some fascinating links, some of which sadly have to be put down to coincidence, but some of which provide conclusive evidence.

Fagan’s school, the City of London School, was famous for its mathematical emphasis as part of a modernised curriculum. It also gave rather more attention to the sciences than usual by the admittedly miserable standards of the day, including chemistry, ‘natural philosophy’ (i.e. physics), and ‘geography and natural history’, though it is not known whether this included geology (Douglas-Smith 1965, 83). We wondered if geology, as an improving recreation, was encouraged by the school’s notable headmaster, George Ferris Whidborne Mortimer (1805-71), whom Fagan revered, and for whom he evidently named his eldest son Henry Mortimer Fagan (bap. 1854-80) (Anon. 1879a; [Fagan] 1883; Douglas-Smith 1965; Lupton and Curthoys 2004). Mortimer’s given names immediately suggest a link with Revd George Frederick Whidborne (1845-1910), the famous researcher on Devonian fossils. Perhaps this led to a geological interest, as suggested for Joseph Lucas (1846-1926), the fine geologist and hydrologist (Mather et al. 2004). Unfortunately the same given names were common in the extended Whidborne family, and we have so far been unable to sort out the many Whidbornes of those (and other) given names conclusively. It is nevertheless clear that Mortimer was strongly linked to the Whidbornes by family or friendship, officiating at Whidborne marriages such as that of the palaeontologist’s father, also called Rev. G. F. Whidborne (c.1809/10-1869), and with Mortimer and this elder Whidborne being reciprocally involved in their families’ probate affairs (Anon. 1844; Foster [1888]; TNA Prob 11/2024, will of Mortimer’s father William). However, it seems unlikely that this connection is relevant here, as the palaeontological Whidborne was not even in his teens when Fagan showed his first demonstrable interest (see below).

Another curious link between Fagan and fossils is that the minister who baptised Fagan at Stroud in 1827 was Dr John Williams (c.1779-1857), who moved in 1833 to nearby Woodchester (baptismal certificate, Fagan’s diaconal ordination papers, Oxford diocesan
papers, OHC, Ms Joyce Brown, pers. comm. to MAT, 28 November 2012; Fisher 1871). The Rev. Henry Housman (1832-1912) recalled, in his fascinating book *The Story of our Museum*, how, in 1840, he and his brother Frank (or Francis, b. c. 1829) found that ‘a former Rector of the parish had been a geologist, and [...] when the rectory changed hands at his death his specimens were left behind’. This Rectory had both a ‘room [...] set apart for this collection, and [...] a “fossil house” in the garden, where the old gentleman cleaned and sorted his treasures before arranging them in his museum’ (Housman 1881, 154). Housman’s reference to the ‘former’ parson suggests that the fossil collector was not Williams but his predecessor Revd Peter Hawker (1772-1833), who is indeed known for having a fine ichthyosaur (Howe et al. 1981). If so then this link seems unlikely to be significant for Fagan, as Williams moved to Woodchester only after the Fagans had (presumably) moved to Chelsea where Fagan’s sister Lucilla was baptised in 1830.

There is no doubt, however, about the significance of Fagan’s attendance at Professor William Buckland’s ‘Geology’ lecture course (of unspecified title) beginning on 20 April 1847 at the University of Oxford (register, Misc. Mss. 13, Buckland Archive, OXFUM, reproduced here as Fig. 2). The author of the 1865 piece was also an attendee of Buckland’s lectures (p. 62). This is corroborated by his slip of ascribing Henry De la Beche’s lithograph *Duria antiquior* to Buckland, who had had his own small format version printed for use as a lecture handout (Buckland 1860, xi) — an error also, or rather again, made by Fagan (1878, 769) in a very similar passage:

I remember, *duria antiquior* (the hard old times), a lithograph that dear old Dean Buckland used to give to those who attended his Oxford geology class. What lectures those were, by the way — to see the old Dean tuck his arms behind him, lifting his gown up into a sort of cock’s tail, and walk across the lecture-room foot before foot as a fowl walks, explaining thereby the fact that the big foot prints on the Massachusetts sandstone flags are in single lines, and not in truth as are the tracks of men and apes, and bears, and that, therefore, the creature who made them was a bird [...].

In those dying years of the unreformed University, Fagan was reading for the standard Bachelor of Arts degree on the old syllabus comprising classics (with some history, philosophy, and so on), mathematics, and ‘Rudiments of Religion’, essentially a test of Anglican doctrine which included, amongst other things, ‘Evidences of Religion, natural and revealed’ (University of Oxford 1848, 117-18; Curthoys 1997a, 1997b; Walsh 2000). As well as being voluntary, therefore, the geology lectures were almost completely irrelevant to Fagan’s final examinations in the absence of any science final honours school, unless perhaps he could work some of Buckland’s providential geology into a Latin or Greek composition, or an answer on natural theology. Moreover, Fagan paid a course fee of 2 guineas — in real terms more like £400 today (Taylor and Torrens 1987). Nor was he following fashion in this scientific interest, or for that matter in
Fagan’s attendance is also highly significant quantitatively. During his undergraduate years, only about 2-2½% of undergraduates in the University took Buckland’s geology course (nine in Fagan’s class, and an average of about ten or eleven for the 1840s as shown by the slightly unclear register, versus a mean of 421 new undergraduates each year in 1845-9, using data in Leach 1994, 371; two coauthors (Fig. 2) were college Fellows, but were Oxford graduates and are counted here as undergraduates who had simply delayed their attendance; repeat auditors are ignored as minor; auditors of the smaller and fewer Mineralogy classes are ignored; Silliman 1854 and Rupke 1997 make similar points). As with Enrico Fermi’s famous problem, ‘how many piano tuners are there in Chicago?’, the issue of how many candidates there for writing the 1865 piece can be converted into inquiring how many Oxford graduates and Buckland course attendees lived in Somerset and wrote for magazines, and then breaking up the problem into successive factors, the errors in the estimates tending to cancel out. Such an analysis also helpfully shows the most specific factors in identification, and therefore which to focus on. We estimate:

1. Buckland had 1000 lecture attendees from 1819 to 1849 (say one class a year of fifty declining to ten by the 1840s, cf. Rupke 1983 and see above).

2. four per cent of graduates lived in Somerset, with 2.2% of the population of England and Wales, and 1.5% of the UK population (Coke 1864), but containing the élite city of Bath.

3. two per cent of graduates wrote for general magazines (around 2% in the late nineteenth century went into journalism, theatre, etc. (Curthoys 1997b), but not all would have written for general magazines; however, those in other careers did it as a sideline to their main profession, as did Fagan).

Multiplication gives about 0.8 possible authors, which suggests that we need not look too hard for alternative candidates, and does not take into account the very considerable circumstantial evidence presented for Fagan’s identification.

Fagan is not known to have had any very active further interest in geology. He seemingly wrote very little on science, even as popular articles, one notable exception being an open-minded piece on evolution (Fagan 1878). As a headmaster Fagan seems to have maintained and developed science teaching but it is not clear that he was particularly unusual or anything more than mildly progressive. Fagan is not known to have had a geological collection of his own. No geological specimens are mentioned in an account of Fagan late in life (Tynan 1913), or amongst the ethnographical and antiquarian objects he lent to a temporary exhibition at St Just which had geological items from other lenders (Anon. 1881b, 1881c). Fagan seems to have rarely joined scientific societies (Anon. 1890a). He did join the Royal Geological Society of Cornwall around 1880 (Anon. 1880a), but only for a year — perhaps he had been dragged along by his old Pembroke contemporary Prebendary Hedgeland, who, as well as being a noted bibliophile and supporter of public libraries, was an active Society member (Anon. 1869b, 1879b, 1880b, 1881a, 1893). Philip Hedgeland (1825-1911), erstwhile fellow Buckland course coauditor, was Vicar of Penzance and Prebendary of Exeter and probably helped Fagan fix the swap of his Bath position for the Cornish parish (Roberts 1894; Macleane 1897; Courtney 1911).

Fagan did support general educational activities, such as presiding over the occasional scientific talk and prize-giving at local institutions in St Just (e.g. Anon. 1873, 1876b). What is, however, highly significant in resolving the remaining anomalies in the 1865 piece is that, just before the article appeared, Fagan attended the September 1864 meeting of the British Association for the Advancement of Science, in Bath. He donated £1, while his Grammar School was the venue for Section G, ‘Mechanical Science’ (Anon. 1864a, 5, 8, 285), and he recalled hearing the ‘big-wigs’ on the Bath hot springs ([Fagan] 1871, 370). His reference to his Oxford contemporary Frank Buckland (1826-80, William’s son) as the ‘salmon hatcher’ recalls Buckland’s Bath meeting paper (Anon. 1864a, 230; Buckland 1865). His remarks on Anning and fossil nodules are unsupported by other accounts of her. Instead, they are suspiciously reminiscent of the ‘geological clairvoyance’ of the Bath collector Charles Moore (1815-81), who demonstrated his ability to predict the fossils inside Upper Liassic nodules from Ilminster, Somerset, at the 1856 meeting at Cheltenham, to much amusement, a feat which Moore repeated at
Bath (Anon. 1856, 1864c, 1864d; Moore 1864; Pengelly 1897, 59; Copp et al. 2000). Moore’s talk included a demonstration of how fossil cephalopod ink could be smeared on paper, which probably reminded Fagan of Buckland’s own demonstrations, and Moore’s remarks on the thinning of the Middle Lias in the Bath area are a likely source for Fagan’s mangled remarks on the Lias (page 62). In fact, the Lower Lias is well developed and was well worked in Somerset, Gloucestershire, and Warwickshire in particular (Anon. 1864a, 76-7, 135, errata; Moore 1864).

Fagan would have been in good time to write the Anning piece after the meeting, and might even have visited Lyme as a result of the meeting, for he took late October walking breaks ([Fagan] 1866). He may also have been encouraged by Moore’s fine collection of ichthyosaurs and other fossils in the Bath Royal Literary and Scientific Institution, and by reports of the discovery, at Charmouth near Lyme, of the plesiosaur cited as a ‘Monster Reptile’ in a garbled article (Anon. 1864b), as well as earlier magazine pieces on Lyme (Anon. 1862) and on Anning (Anon. 1857, Taylor and Torrens in press 2014a). This plesiosaur’s collector was in fact a native Bathonian, Edward Cecilius Hartsinck Day F. G. S. (1833-95), who also carried out the geological survey for the first Channel Tunnel project. Day had married the daughter of a Bath solicitor, and they were resident at various locations, including Charmouth around 1862-1865 where he would find another plesiosaur in 1865, but they evidently retained their ties to Bath as two of their children were born in that area (Anon., 1864e, 1865g; Day 1911, 483, folios 7 and 9). Although there is no specific evidence, it would not be surprising if Fagan met Day in Bath, whether at the British Association meeting (which Day attended, Anon. 1864e) or at some other time.

Discussion

Henry Fagan’s cheerful article was a piece of light reading, not historical scholarship. To judge it by the standards of the latter might seem like breaking a butterfly on the wheel, except that such rigorous assessment is forced on us by its increasingly frequent and uncritical usage in the Anning literature. In reality, Fagan’s piece was a careless hack job for the mass publishing industry, which drew heavily, and often erroneously, on other writers, notably George Roberts’s historical works (1834; 1856) and William Buckland’s Bridgewater Treatise (1836, or one of its copiers). Above all he lifted much content from the revised edition of Henry Brown’s local guidebook Beauties of Lyme Regis … (Brown [1859]), in blatant plagiarism which was denounced, probably by a friend of Brown’s, as ‘so flagrant and paltry an act of literary injustice’ (Anon. 1865c; Taylor and Torrens 2014b). Comparison with relevant extracts of Brown’s book (reprinted by Taylor and Torrens 2014b) shows why Fagan came to know about Miss Bell (despite this source being a devotional volume probably little known outside her family, Grant 1827), and about the King of Saxony. Certainly, his piece made those episodes better known. But this was at the price of bungling them and contaminating the Anning literature ever since.

Fagan’s account of the King’s visit is doubtless via Brown ([1859], 61-2), but so mangled that one cannot be sure. His supposed quotation of Carus is in fact his own paraphrase and adds, in particular, ‘unaffected pride’, which contributes to a rather different interpretation of what was in fact an impromptu and casual visit (Carus 1846). He also stated, or at least strongly implied, that the King bought the ichthyosaur, which is in neither Carus nor Brown (and which has seemingly directly or indirectly influenced, for instance, Goodhue 2004, 109, Emling 2009, 191-2, and Shone 2009, 21).

Another bungle is the presentation of Anning’s comment about the world using her ill in the highly misleading context of her final years in the 1840s when it was actually made in 1824 (reiterated for instance by Cummins 2010, 196, though Zalasiewicz 2012, 27, spotted the error). Fagan plainly used Brown ([1859], 63) as his source, as his text includes Brown’s minor changes to the original (Grant 1827, 131-2, and Taylor and Torrens 2014b). The temporal confusion seemingly arose because Brown inserted a section dealing with the King’s 1840s visit into a sequence dealing with the 1820s; this led to misleading phrasing in his book, but the ambiguity, and the true dating, are nonetheless clear from Brown’s text (Taylor and Torrens 2014b). Anning’s comment has since been given an implicit further conflation of timing with a later (1831) conversation with her friend Anna Maria Pinney (Lang 1956, 147), on scientific men picking her brains (Goodhue 2004, 69). It has also been given a further, implicit, timing of c. 1838 (Cadbury 2000, 231 and Shone 2009, 19).

Other factual errors of Fagan’s include a degree of confusion in the account of the finding of the first Anning ichthyosaur. His mention of Ure is probably from Roberts (1834, 288-9), who wrongly credits...
Andrew Ure rather than Charles Koenig with coining the name *Ichthyosaurus*; Roberts corrected this error in a later erratum slip (not found in most, and perhaps all, copies: HST, personal observation). The story of the ichthyosaur eye lenses being useable as magnifiers today is a garbled misunderstanding of the sclerotic ring of bony plates stiffening each eyeball, of which De la Beche and Conybeare (1821) originally reported thirteen segments, a fact often repeated elsewhere as in Roberts (1834, 323). Fagan’s nonsense made its way into the popular literature and even a school textbook, horrifying Groff (1894) and Crook (1894). Crook did wonder if calcite infilling of the sclerotic ring or orbit could in principle provide a plano-convex lens, but this would not correspond to the original lens, and in any case such a taphonomic phenomenon has not been reported for any fossil tetrapod. There are other errors, such as the garbled account of the 1838 annuity (Torrens 1995), which we do not explore further here.

That leaves little for the historian more concerned with useful content than the problems of historical writing about Anning:

1. Fagan commented on (some?) local perceptions of Anning and of her dependence on alcohol or laudanum during her final illness. But to whom did he speak, some eighteen years after she died? There is no known evidence that Fagan knew Anning in person, and nothing in his life story to suggest the possibility.

2. Fagan noted the lack of a local museum, though it is not entirely clear what he meant by referring to the closure of a ‘museum’. This cannot have been the stock in Anning’s shop, which had been sold on her death in 1847 (Brown [1857], 28). Lyme did not have a permanent museum in the modern sense, till the present Lyme Regis Philpot Museum was opened in 1921 (Taylor 1986). Perhaps the museum mentioned by Fagan was that in the Working Men’s Institute (Taylor 1986; closure date uncertain). Alternatively it could have been one of the presumably semi-commercial and fairly ephemeral displays such as that organised by Henry Marder, local chemist and fossil collector, and presumably also his brother James, in the Baths some time in the 1850s, as noted by Brown ([1857], 28, with advertisement in end matter, 28): ‘visitors, on application to Mr J. Marder, can be favored by an inspection of several valuable and highly interesting specimens of the Ichthyosaurus, Plesiosaurus, &c. See Advertisement.’ Another ‘museum’ was set up in the Assembly Rooms around 1859 and listed in the Post Office Directory for that year only (Anon. 2006).

However, there would be no very clear distinction between such displays and the normal stock in trade of a commercial fossil dealer.

Torrens (1995, 272) has commented that the 1865 piece is unusual amongst the Anning literature in treating Anning as an adult, but this must in part be due to Brown, who has to be given far more credit as a source for Anning, not least because of his family’s own links to the Annings, whether by blood or friendship (Taylor and Torrens 2014b). Fagan made Brown’s work, and the Anning story, more widely known, under the powerful imprimatur of Charles Dickens, to a general readership who would not normally read works of palaeontology or of Dorset history and topography. It is unfortunate that he did it carelessly, and has been cited uncritically.

On a methodological point, it is worth adding that we have exploited the new searchable internet databases for genealogical data and for newspapers, magazines and books. We found them somewhat unreliable, with transcription errors compounding gaps in coverage. So even more caution was needed than usual in taking the absence of evidence as evidence for actual absence. But these databases still proved enormously useful, especially when the original print or archival source could be checked, and especially when they threw up information in locations that would not otherwise have been checked for practical reasons, especially the crucial 1866 piece on Stonehenge which flagged Fagan as the possible author. The databases also proved valuable in tracing reuse of the piece. Even at the time, Fagan’s piece was almost at once extracted in the *Kentish Chronicle* and *Scotsman*, translated into French with additions in the *Revue Britannique* and rewritten for children in *Chatterbox* (Anon. 1865d, 1865e, 1865f, 1869a). It also seemingly prompted another author to write a piece on a visit to Lyme, though with only brief mention of Anning (Anon. 1865b).

Fagan’s errors act as the historiographic equivalent of tracer radioisotopes, tracking the descent of his work into some of the most recent popular accounts of Anning. The origin and survival of Fagan’s errors — and new errors such as Dickens as the author of the piece — remind us that much of the literature about Anning has been produced by writers with little or no specialist knowledge, and without checking the primary sources. Moreover, Fagan’s piece also reminds us that writing for the wider public is a most valuable role, perhaps best conveyed by the French expression *haute vulgarisation*, but that it carries commensurate
responsible for respect for historical accuracy.

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