



CrowdsourceHerBook

Women's book history & participatory science – an experiment

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Method. The CrowdsourceHerBook project collected images of women-owned books printed before 1900 from members of the public. It invited participants to photograph books with women’s ownership inscriptions in their possession, for example family heirlooms, and submit them via a simple form. They could share anything they knew about the books and their former owners and thus contribute to the study of women’s historical engagement with books and literature. Each submission was published on the project blog, often with an accompanying essay.

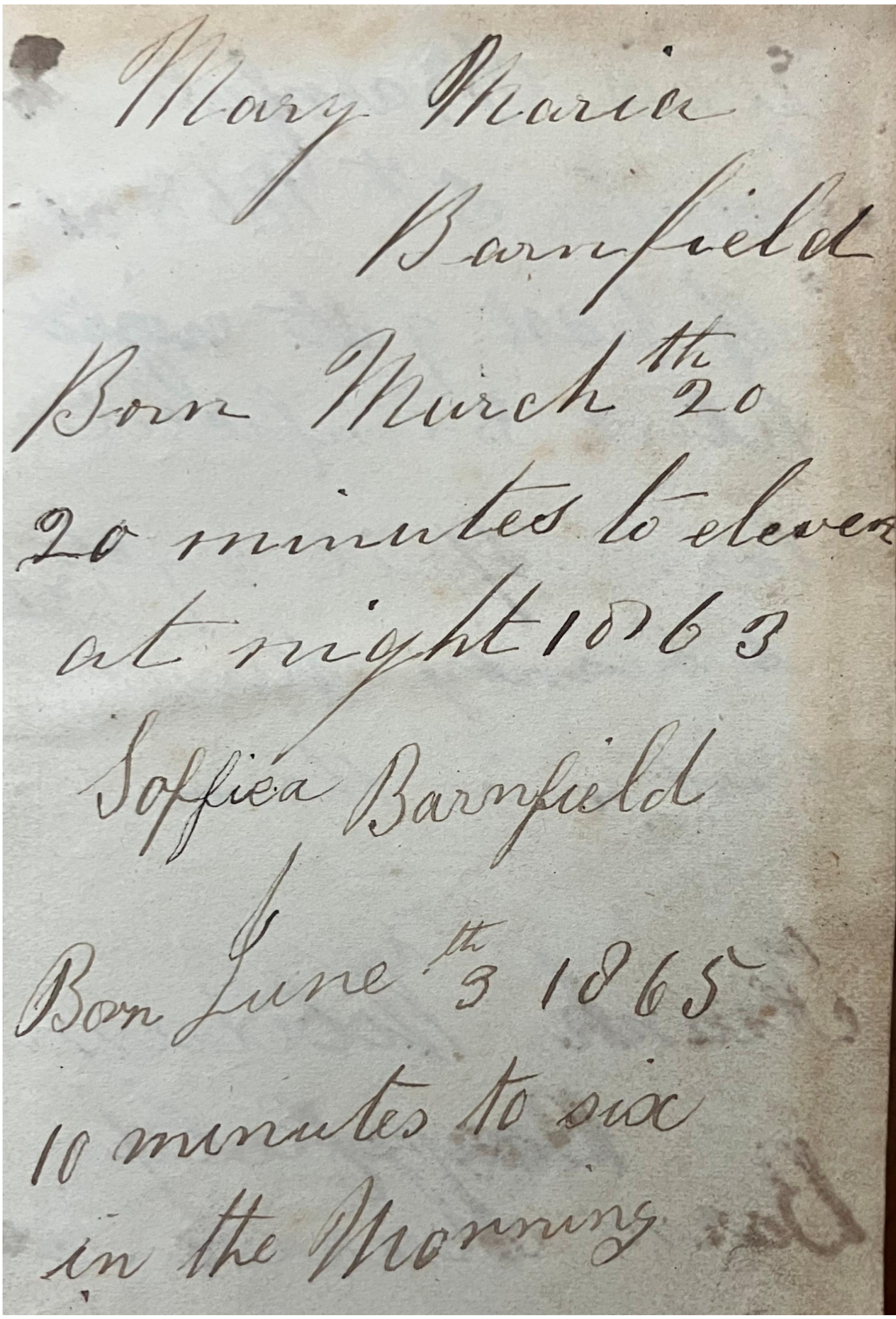
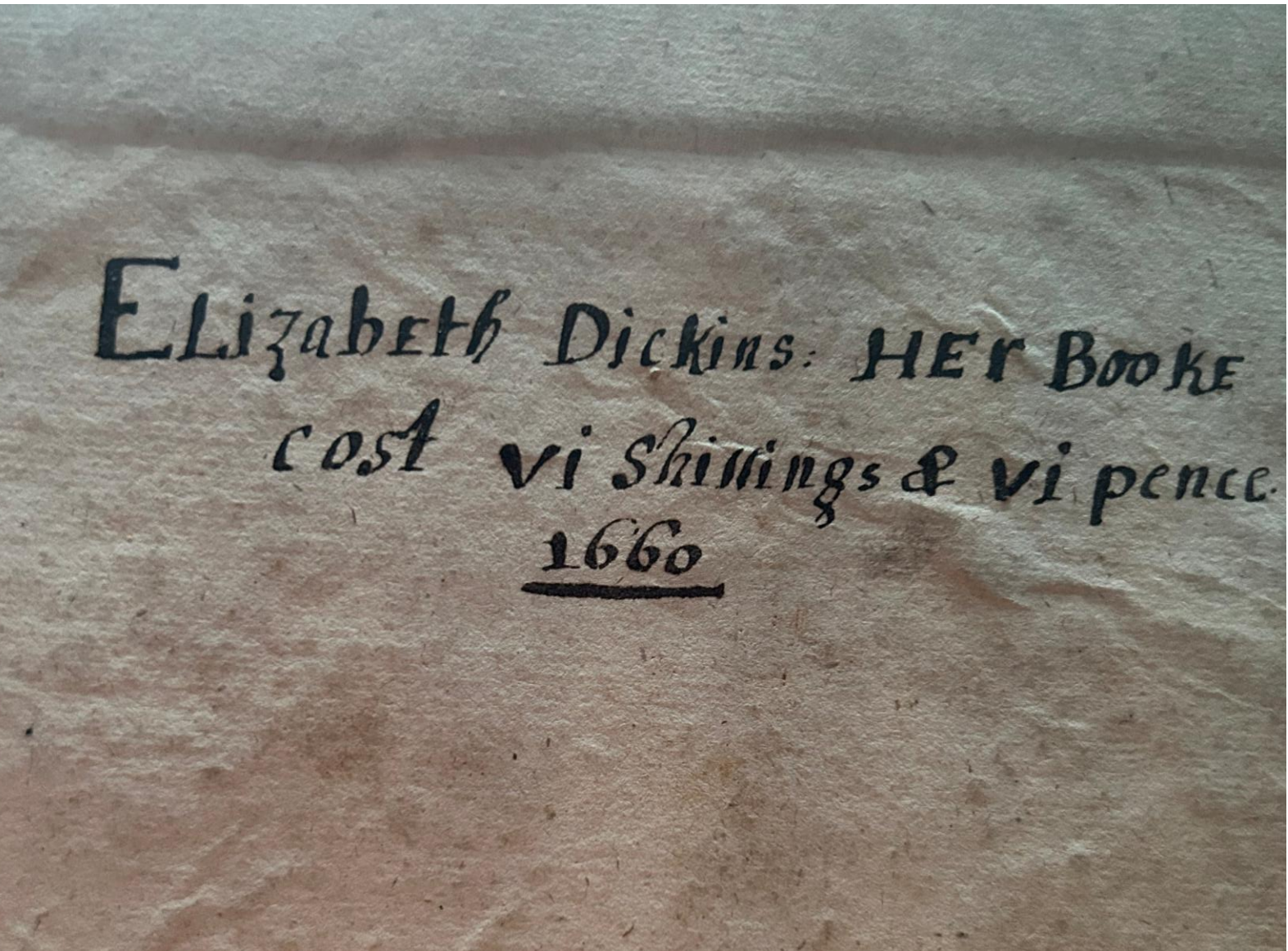
Background. Women’s participation in literary culture is often hard to trace or deliberately forgotten. Looking at women’s ownership inscriptions, bindings, annotations and scribbles can reveal their engagement with books and reading in the past. The project taps into a source of data that has received little scholarly attention: Books in private ownership, so books anyone might have lying around at home, especially books that got passed down in families over a long time.

- Results**
- Data from 50+ books (1638-1900) with evidence of female ownership.
 - Evidence of reading religious literature, but also novels and poetry, texts on botany, astronomy, history...
 - Most books only contained inscriptions, but serial stamps and book labels hint at entire personal libraries.
 - Some books contained further annotations, such as drawings, poems, or birth records.

Conclusion. Annotated 18th and 19th century books still circulate in considerable numbers. They can be used to study historical reading habits, family history, and book collecting. Inviting the public to share their books and their stories creates personal, informal counterweight to the bookhistory preserved in libraries and archives.



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2. Ownership inscription of Elizabeth Dickins in *General Directions for a Comfortable Walking with God* by Robert Bolton (1638), submitted by anonymous.

3. Notes in an 1854 bible owned by Mary Lewis, recording the births of her children, submitted by anonymous.

4. A pressed *Edelweiss* flower, found in a book of hymns from 1780 that once belonged to Rosine Morlock. Submitted by Eva Epple.

Look at the featured examples on csherbook.hypotheses.org/

References



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