

‘This Mysterious Little Book’, *The Marriage Almanack* (1835): Family Planning and the Long Eighteenth-Century Pocketbook

Abstract: In 1835 a ‘mysterious little book’ was reviewed in both medical journals and women’s magazines: Dr Anton F.A. Desberger’s *The Marriage Almanack; or Ladies’ Perpetual Calendar* (1835). The *Marriage Almanack* featured advice and monthly charts for pregnant women, helping each user to work out the expected date of a baby’s delivery from conception and quickening. Drawing from eighteenth-century medical literature that recommended that women record their menstrual cycles to identify dates of conception, measure gestation, and predict delivery, this article looks to women’s pocketbooks of the long eighteenth century as important precursors to the *Marriage Almanack*, being potential repositories for the data essential to this exercise of recording. This article argues that throughout the eighteenth century, women’s printed pocketbooks were self-conscious of, and further developed, their potential to assist the safe delivery of children. With the *Marriage Almanack*, the first mass-produced print tool for predicting baby due dates, Dr Schloss and his editor drew upon the existing capacity of women’s pocketbooks to assist family planning.

Keywords: family planning, menstruation, pregnancy, pocketbooks, almanacs, ephemerides, medicine, diaries, reproduction

I ‘This Mysterious Little Book’

In 1835 *The Marriage Almanack* was published by Schloss, a German medical bookseller in London. *The Lady’s Magazine* called it a ‘mysterious little book’.<sup>1</sup> The volume was marketed at female purchasers of pocketbooks or almanacs, but this one was different from the usual annually-printed miscellanies of recipes, songs and poetry. This perpetual calendar for married women was a tool for family planning, directed at those who were either already pregnant or planning to conceive. It provided practical advice, urging its readers to stay away from strong alcohol, to emanate complacency so as to avoid strong emotional outbursts, and to make sure the bosom is neither too bare nor too muffled, or too tightly laced (14-15). The twelve charts that follow the guidance, one for each month of the year, dedicate a column each to conception,

quickenings (i.e. the first sensation of the baby's movements), and labour, and organise the dates of the month underneath so that by reading across the columns the reader may predict a baby's due date (see fig. 1).<sup>2</sup> The charts remind readers of the saints days for each date, to inspire Christian readers in choosing a name for the baby. The volume's main purpose was to assist with family planning in order to better prepare for the involvement of the medical profession: 'With respect to the confinement itself, we have only to say, that the calling in of the accoucheur or midwife is above all things indispensable'.<sup>3</sup>

JANUARY.

| BEGINNING. |              |                    | MIDDLE    |            |                    | END.     |                |                  |
|------------|--------------|--------------------|-----------|------------|--------------------|----------|----------------|------------------|
| JANUARY.   |              |                    | MAY.      |            |                    | OCTOBER. |                |                  |
| 1          | CIRCUMCISION |                    | 20        | Frances    | <i>Bernardine</i>  | 8        | Ephraim        | <i>John</i>      |
| 2          | Abel         | <i>Basil</i>       | 21        | Pradens    | <i>Constantine</i> | 9        | Denys          |                  |
| 3          | Enoch        | <i>Genevieve</i>   | 22        | Helena     | <i>Julia</i>       | 10       | Amelia         |                  |
| 4          | Titus        |                    | 23        | Desiderius |                    | 11       | Burkard        |                  |
| 5          | Simeon       |                    | 24        | Esther     | <i>Johanna</i>     | 12       | Erenfried      |                  |
| 6          | EPIPHANY     | <i>Three Kings</i> | 25        | Urban      |                    | 13       | Edward Conf.   |                  |
| 7          | Melchior     |                    | 26        | Augustine  | <i>Camilla</i>     | 14       | William        |                  |
| 8          | Lucian       |                    | 27        | Bede       | <i>Hildebert</i>   | 15       | Helwig         | <i>Theresa</i>   |
| 9          | Caspas       |                    | 28        | William    |                    | 16       | Gallus         |                  |
| 10         | Paul Hermit  |                    | 29        | Maximilia  |                    | 17       | Etheldreda     |                  |
| 11         | Erhard       | <i>Hyginus</i>     | 30        | Wigan      | <i>Ferdinand</i>   | 18       | LUKE           |                  |
| 12         | Reynold      | <i>Ernest</i>      | 31        | Petronella |                    | 19       | Ptolemy        | <i>Peter</i>     |
|            |              |                    | JUNE.     |            |                    |          |                |                  |
| 13         | Hilarius     |                    | 1         | Nicomede   | <i>Fortunatus</i>  | 20       | Wendelia       |                  |
| 14         | Felix        |                    | 2         | Macarius   |                    | 21       | Ursula         |                  |
| 15         | Habakkuk     |                    | 3         | Erasmus    |                    | 22       | Corduca        | <i>Salome</i>    |
| 16         | Marcellus    | <i>William</i>     | 4         | Ulrica     |                    | 23       | Severus        |                  |
| 17         | Anthony      |                    | 5         | Boniface   |                    | 24       | Solomon        | <i>Raphael</i>   |
| 18         | Prisca       |                    | 6         | Benignus   |                    | 25       | Crispin        |                  |
| 19         | Ferdinand    | <i>Sulpicius</i>   | 7         | Lucretia   | <i>Robert</i>      | 26       | Amandus        |                  |
| 20         | Fabian       |                    | 8         | Medard     |                    | 27       | Sabina         |                  |
| 21         | Agnes        |                    | 9         | Barnimus   |                    | 28       | Simon and Jude |                  |
| 22         | Vincent      |                    | 10        | Ouuphris   |                    | 29       | Engelard       |                  |
| 23         | Emerantia    | <i>Ildefonsa</i>   | 11        | BARNABAS   |                    | 30       | Hartman        |                  |
| 24         | Timothy      |                    | 12        | Blandina   |                    | 31       | Wolfgang       |                  |
|            |              |                    | NOVEMBER. |            |                    |          |                |                  |
| 25         | PAUL         |                    | 13        | Tobias     | <i>Anthony</i>     | 1        | ALL SAINTS     | <i>Toussaint</i> |
| 26         | Polycarp     | <i>Paula</i>       | 14        | Modestus   | <i>Basil</i>       | 2        | All Souls      |                  |
| 27         | Chrysostom   | <i>Julian</i>      | 15        | Vitus      |                    | 3        | Gotlieb        | <i>Hubert</i>    |
| 28         | Charles      | <i>Charlemagne</i> | 16        | Justina    |                    | 4        | Charlotte      |                  |
| 29         | Samuel       | <i>Francis</i>     | 17        | Alban      | <i>Adolphus</i>    | 5        | Eric           |                  |
| 30         | Adelgunda    |                    | 18        | Paulina    | <i>Arnold</i>      | 6        | Leonard        |                  |
| 31         | Valerius     | <i>Peter Nol.</i>  | 19        | Gervase    |                    | 7        | Erdman         |                  |

Figure 1. Anton F. A. Desberger, *The Marriage Almanack; or Ladies' Perpetual Calendar* (1835). © British Library Board, Shelf mark P.P.2464.d.(1.).

This article seeks to unravel the mystery of this book, presenting the *Marriage Almanack* as a pocketbook and calendar which sought to reveal upon reading the secrets of

gestation to a wide audience of lay-readers. Drawing from eighteenth-century medical literature that recommended that women record their menstrual cycles in order to measure gestation and predict delivery, it looks to women's pocketbooks as important precursors to the *Marriage Almanack*, being potential repositories for the data essential to the exercise of recording menstruation for elite and middling women. I argue that throughout the eighteenth century, women's printed pocketbooks were self-conscious of, and began to exploit, their potential to assist the safe delivery of children. With the *Marriage Almanack* (1835), the first mass-produced print tool for predicting baby due dates, Dr Schloss and his editor drew upon the existing capacity of women's pocketbooks to assist family planning.

## II Predicting Due Dates

According to the medical literature of the period, determining a pregnancy in the early modern period involved observing bodily symptoms such as an absent period, swollen breasts, a closed cervix, swollen veins in the neck, and nausea, as well as taking heed of strange cravings.<sup>4</sup> The only empirical diagnosis was through urology, accessible only to a small sector of the population.<sup>5</sup> The difficulty of confirming pregnancy produced in women what Cathy McClive has called a 'corporeal uncertainty'.<sup>6</sup> Conception could only be identified retrospectively, once the mother experienced quickening, around five months later. As Caitlin Scott points out, 'This understanding of pregnancy placed the onus to identify a quick child firmly upon the mother leaving considerable room for flexibility in interpreting her own symptoms and seeking a remedy'.<sup>7</sup> A whole new field on eighteenth-century abortifacients has sprung up in recent years, shedding light on women's access to birth control and their networks of information. In parallel to this, Sara Reid and Patricia Crawford have pioneered the study of early modern menstruation.<sup>8</sup> But little consideration has been paid to family planning in the sense of predicting delivery.<sup>9</sup> For the pregnant woman, an accurate prediction of due date was important for ensuring that she had the correct support at the crucial moment. It could be used for booking

a midwife, and in the latter half of the eighteenth century, perhaps a surgeon or physician, too.<sup>10</sup> Linda Pollock has shown that seventeenth-century women were able to identify each stage of conception, gestation and predict birth accordingly, sometimes at variance with the medical literature of the period, through cessation of menses, abdominal size, quickening and increased pain.<sup>11</sup> All four of these elements—menstruation, abdominal growth, the movements of the baby, and pain—required mapping over time in order to be fully understood. The first of these signs, then, the missing period, was the most important one to record.

Throughout the eighteenth century, there was a common belief that periods should be regular, settling into a monthly routine. Stephen Freeman's *The Ladies Friend; or, Complete Physical Library* (1785), described their regulation for a female readership:

After their first coming down in maids, it is seldom that the courses flow above once in two months or two weeks; or if they do, it is but in small quantity: but as the fair sex grow more ripe, when they begin to think warmly of love, when the blood and its natural vigour increases, the terms then come down oftener, or in larger quantity, till the settled term of once a month is fixed: and under that regulation they continue, till about the age before-mentioned, unless illness, pregnancy, or giving of suck interrupts them.<sup>12</sup>

Freeman, whose partner (in both senses of the word), Rachael Lane, ran a successful midwifery practice,<sup>13</sup> was drawing upon long-held views about periods, including a recognition since the seventeenth century that the earliest indicator of pregnancy was most likely to be a missing period.<sup>14</sup> This had been widely popularised by the hugely influential *Aristotle's Compleat and Experienc'd Midwife* (1711), where William Salmon wrote that 'the Suppression of the Terms is generally a sure sign of Conception to such Persons as have had 'em orderly before', a phrase which was repeated verbatim in further editions and other works throughout the century.<sup>15</sup> Regulation and regularity are key themes of *Aristotle's Midwife*, in which Salmon also provided month by month guidance on the treatment of maternal health: do not bleed child-bearing women in the fourth month, for instance, and abate her diet and increase exercise

during the eighth.<sup>16</sup> The style of Salmon's advice differs from that of the *Marriage Almanack* in addressing the pregnant woman's attendants, rather than the woman herself.

While recording menstruation helped women to identify late or missing periods, it was not always a clear indicator of pregnancy, as Freeman reminds us: younger and older women may not as readily expect regular periods, and breastfeeding and illness, as well as pregnancy, could explain their absence. Salmon himself warned that even when pregnant, a woman could still experience menstruation: 'yet is not the having them always a sign there is no Conception: For as much as many that have been with Child have had their Terms, and some even till the fifth or sixth Month; which happens according to the Woman's being more or less Sanguine'.<sup>17</sup> As John Leake also warned, a girl's 'monthly discharge, is generally, at first, irregular'.<sup>18</sup> Recording periods was therefore one important—but not the only—way for medical practitioners to predict pregnancy and gestation.

Warnings about trusting too much to the menstrual cycle to indicate gestation also arose from the fact that theories about menstruation were shaped by the emergence of charity hospitals and clinical training.<sup>19</sup> Alexandra Lord has shown that practitioners from these backgrounds had a disproportionate impact upon midwifery, publishing extensively and training Britain and its colonies' midwives.<sup>20</sup> They supported their authority by emphasising how far their understanding of menstruation was derived from observation. However, as has been often noted, such understanding was skewed by the fact that the women observed in charity hospitals were of a class more prone to suffer from amenorrhea arising from undernourishment, but nevertheless such theories were applied to women of all backgrounds.<sup>21</sup> Even so, while the medical profession considered a wide range of symptoms to indicate pregnancy, lay people continued to focus primarily on lack of menstruation.<sup>22</sup>

Regular menstruation was important for all women, not just those planning a family, but also because regular periods were considered essential to a woman's health.<sup>23</sup> This

had implications for the treatment of women with irregular periods, whose cycles were sometimes the focus of medical attention in a bid to regularise and therefore heal the ‘sufferer’.<sup>24</sup> The many surviving recipes for nostrums designed to bring on a delayed period testify to this anxiety, which also brought with it a new one, that they could be used surreptitiously as abortifacients. As the anonymous author of *The Ladies Dispensatory: or Every Woman her own Physician* (1739) warned, ‘Married Women ought, however, to be careful, that they do not mistake the Stoppage of their Courses caused by Conception, for this Disease, lest by taking Medicines to cure their fancied Illness, they procure a Miscarriage’.<sup>25</sup> The centrality of the regular period to both family planning and women’s health in general, as exemplified by the popularity of John Freind’s *Emmenologia* (1703) in this period, translated from Latin to English by Thomas Dale in 1729, meant that recording menstrual cycles was at least implicitly encouraged, and perhaps even expected.<sup>26</sup> Certainly, some man-midwives recommended their patients to record menstruation, as their correspondence-consultations indicate.<sup>27</sup> But this was also a period in which menstruation could not be openly discussed, or even written about, by respectable women.<sup>28</sup> Where rare examples documenting menstruation survive, it is often discussed in ‘heavily encoded, oblique ways’, as Sara Read has demonstrated.<sup>29</sup>

Evidence about the Early Modern experience of menstruation uncovered so far comes from men and medics rather than women, as women tended to obscure that information even in private diaries.<sup>30</sup> One of the most oft-quoted examples is that of Samuel Pepys who, though he destroyed his wife’s diary, kept a meticulous record of her periods in his own, expressing his ‘hopes’ in the winter of 1659-60 when her ‘terms’ were late that she might be pregnant, a comment which he later strikes through when they finally arrive.<sup>31</sup> Patricia Crawford discovered in Sarah Savage’s diary from 1687-88 a rare example of a woman recording her own menstrual cycle in her bid to fall pregnant.<sup>32</sup> But Pepys and Savage are relatively early

examples and epitomise a concentration in the scholarship on the seventeenth century and earlier. Meanwhile, diaries from the eighteenth century remain understudied.<sup>33</sup> In the nineteenth century, Ann Lister records her menstruation in euphemistic terms, as her ‘cousin coming’. On 19 May 1828 she notes, ‘My cousin had come an hour or two before reaching Edinburgh’, and the following month, on 17<sup>th</sup> June, she ‘Awoke finding my cousin coming gently so got up’, noting two days later her determination not to let her napkins and her flow interfere with sex. Lister wrote all of her diaries in a form of short-hand which was only deciphered by her descendent John Lister much later that century, doubly obscuring her cycle from prying eyes. The diaries of Sarah Welch Hill seem to record without naming her menstrual cycles for the years 1833, 1840, and 1847. Explicitly, she begins to record that of her daughter in 1856: ‘Wed 9<sup>th</sup> The coldest day yet. Margaret for the first time poorly. She is not 13 years old till March. She is very little so but think it is a beginning’.<sup>34</sup> Given the widespread encouragement to record or at least remember menstrual cycles, and the growing evidence of manuscript markings recording women’s periods, it is perhaps unsurprising that women’s printed diaries of the eighteenth century began to recognise that their printed affordances could be mobilised for predicting and supporting delivery. Women’s diaries were self-conscious of, and began to exploit, their potential to be repositories for data which would assist the safe delivery of children.

### III Planning through Print

As annual publications providing a basic printed calendar aimed at a female readership, women’s pocketbooks and almanacs left unsaid the basic premise that they might be used to record menstruation. Almanacs and their pocketbook descendants had multiple functions as calendars, literary miscellanies, guides to weather and husbandry and repositories of advertising media.<sup>35</sup> The earliest almanacs, with their ephemeris, or astrological content, had granted the form a prophetic capacity, forecasting weather, predicting world affairs and

political developments, and identifying common seasonal health complaints. They therefore determined the best seasons for key events in husbandry as well as the most beneficial times for dispensing medical treatments. Early Modern almanacs have been mined for what they tell us about seventeenth-century women's engagement with popular culture and medicine, as well as astrology and prophecy, due to their status as the cheapest form of printed matter then available and the fact that some of the earliest almanacs composed for female readers were edited by women health practitioners, Sarah Jinner of London and Mary Holden of Sudbury, midwife, both self-defined scholars of physick. Jinner's *Almanack and Prognostication* began around 1658 and Holden's *The Womans Almanack or Ephemerides* began around 1688. As Alan S. Weber has argued of these works, despite long being dismissed as popular culture, 'women's almanacs did not offer an alternative female "folk", "herbal", or "kitchen physick" medicine in contrast to university and classically-male medical knowledge', but rather aimed to create and (re)target medical knowledge specific to female bodies to a female readership. The emergence of the almanac dedicated to female readers in the second half of the seventeenth century, such as those edited by Jinner and Holden, was a product of increasing women's literacy, and their distinctive medical content drew from a medieval heritage ranging from authors such as Trotula of Salerno and Hildegard of Bingen, and a more recent tradition furthered by Elizabeth Grey, Jane Sharp, Queen Henrietta Maria and Hannah Wolley.<sup>36</sup> Jinner's works included abortifacients, recipes to help conceive and carry children, as well as those for easing what we would now call mastitis, as well as for encouraging milk flow in nursing women.

Eighteenth-century printed women's pocketbooks, on the other hand, have been predominantly studied in relation to their development of an educational or social space for women to commune over fashion, literature, music, and art. But even when pocketbooks' supplementary content did not have a prominent focus on healthcare or family planning, their



calendars and lunar cycles continued to supply women with opportunities for managing menstruation and sexual health. Almanacs provided astronomical charts printed in tables for predicting the phases of the moon and the movement of celestial bodies which were far from easy to navigate. *The Ladies' Diary: or, Woman's Almanack* (1704-1841) featured all of the usual calendars and lunar charts. But it departed from the norm by experimenting with and initiating an association of women with calculation. The diary has been studied for its contribution to mathematics, providing problems as complex as Newtonian calculus to a readership marketed as female.<sup>37</sup> As its arithmetical and calculating content usurped its medical material, the *Ladies' Diary* carved out an important space for women in mathematics in the eighteenth century. Women readers of almanacs were thereby accorded a capacity for deduction which would make them ideal navigators of the charts printed in Schloss's *Marriage Almanack*.

From 1691, William Salmon, 'Professor of Physick', and author of *Aristotle's Midwife* cited above, had used his *London Almanack* as just one tool of many in popularising medical information and recipes.<sup>38</sup> And he was not the only one. Many made the relationship between astrology and health, such as Roger Kendal, 'Student of Physick and Astrology', who in his *Ephemeris Absoluta* (1701) entreated his female readers to be especially wary 'of the Winter Quarter', 'which threatens Females in general with Diseases, especially such as proceed from a Defluxion of Rheum and other Maladies, occasion'd by Cold; and an eminent one with much sorrow, if not Death'.<sup>39</sup> The title-page of *An Ephemeris of the Coelestial Motions* (1701) identified its compiler, William Cookson, as a 'Student in Astrology and Physick'. Alongside adverts for treatments by others and a book, on the back page Cookson advertised his own medical practice, as was common of almanacs compiled by medical practitioners,<sup>40</sup> where he noted that 'He also Calculates Nativities most exactly and Teacheth the whole Art of Astrology, at his House, at the Bee-hive and Globe in Gun-Yard in Houndsditch London'.<sup>41</sup> To combine

the teaching of ‘the whole Art of Astrology’ with the calculation of nativities implies that the two require a similar set of skills. Lunar theories had provided one school of thought for explaining menstruation, arising from the fact that many women menstruated once every lunar month (28 days). This theory was widely debunked, as it did not explain the cause of menstruation in woman as opposed to men, and did not account for different women experiencing periods at different times in the same climate. An alternative and more accepted belief was that menstruation purified the blood or released a potentially dangerous excess.<sup>42</sup> Nevertheless, an ongoing association between the cycles of the moon and of menstruation remained in the popular imagination.

*The Lady’s and Gentleman’s Diary, or, Royal Almanack* (1776), by Reuben Burrow underlined the importance of the supporting printed materials to every ephemeris:

As Almanacks are become necessary to people in every station of life, and consequently have a more extensive sale than almost any other publication, it is evident, that when founded upon proper plans, and well conducted, they must be of general utility, and that there can hardly be a greater public nuisance than one conducted in a contrary manner. For it is not the immediate use of a Calendar or Ephemeris only, that the author should have in view, (for if that only was required, a single sheet would fully answer the purpose) he ought also to give proper instructions, to add new improvements, and to present such subjects of useful knowledge, and laudable curiosity, to his reader, as may not only be serviceable in affairs of life, but also excite in him a desire after science and rational improvement.<sup>43</sup>

The poetry, enigmas and puzzles constituted the very kinds of material that Burrows claimed made an almanac worth reading, or ‘improving’. From 1771, Ann Fisher, the longstanding and popular female compiler of pocketbooks for women, would innovate in this way through her initiation in *The Ladies’ Own Memorandum-Book* of ‘a Plan of female Education; i.e. That every succeeding year should hand down some anecdote, fable, character, &c, tending to the edification and entertainment of the sex’. Fisher’s plan was also one inherently concerned with planning the management of a woman’s family. The first instalment of the ‘Plan’, which took

the form of an introductory paratext, was an essay on wet-nursing composed by an ‘unknown correspondent’, written in the form of a letter from ‘A Mother’. While other women’s pocketbooks had dealt with the character of the ‘nurse’ in their poetic materials, such as the *Women’s Diary*, which in 1763 and 1764 and featured a pair of poems by ‘Stella’ on baby loss written from the perspective of the infant and the nurse, Fisher’s essay was overtly didactic.<sup>44</sup>

The ‘Mother’ congratulates Fisher on ‘reviving a Plan of female Education’, justifying her own contribution of ‘hints on nursing children’ by arguing that the ‘good temper, the health, vigour, and fertility of the mind depend a good deal on the bodily constitution’. The author, a mother of ‘a very large family’ notes that she ‘may have had more experience’ than Fisher in nursing children, though it is unlikely, as Fisher herself had 6 children, and the letter writer in her editorial is almost certainly another authorial persona that she adopts for the sake of her educational project. The advice is partly anecdotal, and almost prescriptive, though it is made palatable by being spoken in the voice of someone who has experienced nursing herself:

Children should suck the breasts of their mothers, for the health and welfare of both; and should be put to the breast within twenty-four hours, by which the milk is brought kindly and gradually, preventing a milk fever, or sore breasts—And when the mother has not milk sufficient for the sustenance of the child, I have found new milk and water, (or thin milk) boiled with well-baked, light bread, agree better with children than water-pap, which was always subject to gripe mine.

Speaking woman to woman, the ‘Mother’ takes care to promote the health of the woman as well as that of the child, urging regular but moderate exercise in the open air, to take care to drink only good table beer or fresh, clean ale rather than wine or punch (which ‘hurt both me and the child’), and to eat well but avoid ‘some sorts of fish, strong meats, and gravies’. Regarding raising healthy children, she recommends keeping them cool, giving them lots of water, dressing them loosely rather than in tight-fitting stays, and daily washing in cold water.

The editorial on nursing was supplemented by a verse upon the same theme. But during the year in which this diary was being prepared, Fisher complained about the decline of

her own poetic abilities: ‘Dame Care has defray’d my Fancy with all the Poetical Talents I was ever Mistress of’.<sup>45</sup> She therefore turned to her printing-house manager, Robert Carr, also a poet using the pseudonym ‘Primrose’, who provided the following song:

The Nurse. An Air.  
Come, little cooing, innocent thing,  
Listen, ah! listen, while I sing  
Thy pleasing flight;  
Around me cling,  
My smiling fond delight.  
Yes, yes, yes,  
Sweet Billy, shall nursy kiss:  
Where, or whither, as with me,  
Shou’d my sweetling happy be.  
Newcastle. Primrose. 1771

A further poem appeared in the 1776 *Memorandum-Book*, ‘On Seeing a Lady Nursing her Own Child’, by J—C—of Durham, supporting Fisher’s belief that mothers should feed their children themselves: ‘Maternal transports fill her lovely breast, | And each fond smile proclaims her truly blest’. Eighteenth-century women’s pocketbooks are much more frequently claimed as sites of literary and cultural contributions than of medical advice and information on beginning families. But the material in Fisher’s pocketbook achieved both ends.

In 1775, ‘G. Lacey, of Bridport’ contributed to Fisher’s *Ladies’ Own Memorandum-Book* an enigma poem which he considered easy to solve because it was on a subject well-known to all of the sex: midwives.

1775 Enigma VIII, A Midwife ‘By G. Lacey, of Bridport.’

Those ty’d fast by Hymen I own my best friends,  
For chiefly on them my employment depends;  
And should solely—but many fond vot’ries of love,  
Who leap o’er the bound’ries of virtue and rove  
Unrestrain’d and unbridled by business promote,  
And know that they must, too; tho’ they care not to show’t:  
The first seem quite proud they can find me employ;  
They swell and look big on’t—for I oft bring ‘em joy.  
My being’s quite ancient—am known to all climes,

Was always a female 'till these latter times;  
 I am both sexes now; for a custom most base,  
 Which has rought on the moderns no little disgrace.  
 My sex has confused; but (to her praise be it told)  
 A most amiable Queen with this custom won't hold:  
 But the sex does distinguish, as the folks did of old.  
     Ancient hist'ry sets forth, how, in fam'd Egypt's land,  
 I receiv'd from its monarch a special command;  
 But because his command and a greater's did vary,  
 I the same disobey'd and did quite the contrary.  
     Now I'll venture to say 'tis no difficult task  
 For the lovely, fair ladies to take off my mask.

Lacey's comments on the hermaphroditic qualities of the midwife figure ('I am both sexes now') reveal how far the pocketbook served to meet readers' present preoccupations. Through the contributions of Fisher's 'Mother' character, John Carr, and her corresponding contributors such as Lacey, Fisher's pocketbook commented upon the contemporary realities of pregnancy and child-bearing for her readers.

Fisher's 'Plan of Education' continued serially each year. The essay on nursing was supplemented the following year by a second letter recommending a milk diet for children up to twelve years old:

Madam,  
 Your polite invitation should not have drawn me into public again, had not my bounds been too circumscribed in your last, for so particular a recommendation of Milk-diet for Children as I could have wished; and therefore beg leave further to observe, That children should have milk for breakfasts and suppers, at least, till they are ten or twelve years of age, as being the best anti-scorbutic, the best cooler and sweetner of the blood and juices; and, if I may judge by effects from the use or neglect of it in my own family, more constitutional than any thing else that can be substituted in its stead.<sup>46</sup>

The Mother is represented here as medically knowledgeable through her understanding of milk as an 'anti-scorbutic', or, in other words, having the effect of preventing or curing scurvy. Her vocabulary as well her experience marks her out as informed, and by judging the effects of milk drinking 'in my own family', she puts theory into practice. She goes on to bemoan that the introduction of tea into 'almost every family' has coincided with the emergence of 'many species of nervous disorders' in children, attributing these disorders not to the tea itself but to

the lack of milk which it has replaced. These conjectures had been anticipated in her earlier letter, where she included other home remedies, such as ‘sea water, wrought off with cold fresh water’ for ‘worm cases, or in scorbutic ones’, which, when arising from overeating manifest as ‘startings out at nights, rushes, and eruptions of the skin every now and then’. She had also gestured toward participation in emerging national schemes of public health, in recommending inoculation against the small-pox, lamenting her loss of a son through her own remissness to organise his vaccination, ‘though, as all my other children are still living, hale, and strong, after my neglecting so great a good, I ought to be thankful rather than repine’.

Finally, the correspondent closes her second epistle with a quotation from James Thomson’s *The Seasons*, ‘Spring’ (Line 1149 onwards), leaving Fisher, the editor,

To rear the tender thought,  
To teach the young idea how to shoot,  
To pour the fresh instruction o’er the mind,  
To breath th’ enliv’ning spirit, and to fix  
The gen’rous purpose in the glowing breast.

By implication, the lines that in Thomson immediately precede these, ‘Then infant reason grows apace, and calls | For the kind hand of an assiduous care’ could be taken to symbolise Fisher’s role as didact and pocketbook compiler. The Thomson verse was also used in much of the advertising copy for *The Pleasing Instructor* (itself appearing in the advert in the following issue of the *Memorandum* for 1773) and appeared in the main body of the ‘Thoughts on Education’ which prefaced the *Pleasing Instructor*, which had from 1770 been signed by ‘A. Fisher’, herself. Moreover, the quotation seems more suited for Fisher’s educational textbooks than for her *Ladies Own Memorandum* pocketbook, which, fronted by fashion plates and filled with literary puzzles, might not at first appear to hold such a didactic purpose. As Helen Williams has argued, the slow elision of the author-editors of the *Pleasing Instructor* and the *Ladies’ Own Memorandum-Book* was also beginning to be helpful in supporting the educational credentials of Fisher’s pocketbook.<sup>47</sup> Nevertheless, the plan of female education

continued in further volumes of the pocketbook, with advice on raising children, keeping them healthy through home and medical remedies, and on their education. Fisher's editorial was a striking intervention in the form of the ladies' diary.

If Fisher's pocketbook did not explicitly invite its readers to record their own menstrual cycles within its pages, it implicitly urged them to consider family planning. *The Ladies' Own Memorandum-Book* provided a list of feasts, and in 1781 warned that: 'Marriage is forbidden from the first Sunday in Advent, till after the Twelfth Day; and from the Beginning of Lent till Low Sunday'. Each copy also encouraged its readership to consider family planning from a charitable perspective, recommending that they help ameliorate pregnancy and delivery for women less fortunate themselves, for whom preparation for delivery might be most important and potentially life-saving. Each year, from the earliest surviving copy of the pocketbook in 1766, the example table of 'Accounts Balanced' in the prefatory materials upon which Fisher's readers were meant to model their own financial records listed a subscription to the Lying in Hospital (see fig. 2).

ACCOUNTS balanced in 1765. [Received.

|      |  |         |       |    |            |
|------|--|---------|-------|----|------------|
| Dec. | Cash in hand at last week's end  | -       | 16    | 12 | 6          |
| 23   | Paid for 3 doz. candles  | - - - - | -     | -  | -          |
| 24   | Ditto 6 pounds butter  | - - - - | -     | -  | -          |
| 30   | The baker's note   | - - - - | -     | -  | -          |
|      | The milk-woman's ditto   | - - - - | -     | -  | -          |
| 31   | Received of my Husband   | - - - - | 15    | 15 | -          |
|      | Marketing, beef 7s. 6d. mutton }<br>6s. 9d. veal 9s. chickens 5s. 6d. }  | - - - - | -     | -  | -          |
|      | My last subf. to the Lying in Hospital                                   | - - - - | -     | -  | -          |
|      | My mercer's note   | - - - - | -     | -  | -          |
|      | Two of the Ladies own Memorand. }<br>Book, for self and daughter - - - } | - - - - | -     | -  | -          |
|      | Balance, or cash in hand   | - - - - | -     | -  | -          |
|      |  |         | Total | £  | 32   7   6 |

LUNATIONS, or ASTRONOMICAL New and Full MOONS, in the YEAR 1766.

| New       | D. | Hour.     | Full      | D. | Hour.     |
|-----------|----|-----------|-----------|----|-----------|
| January   | 11 | 1 Morn.   | January   | 1  | 1 Morn.   |
| February  | 9  | Noon.     | February  | 24 | 7 After.  |
| March     | 10 | 10 After. | March     | 26 | 11 Morn.  |
| April     | 9  | 10 Morn.  | April     | 24 | Midnight. |
| May       | 8  | 11 After. | May       | 24 | 10 Morn.  |
| June      | 7  | Noon.     | June      | 22 | 5 After.  |
| July      | 7  | 2 Morn.   | July      | 22 | 1 Morn.   |
| August    | 5  | 6 After.  | August    | 20 | 7 Morn.   |
| September | 4  | 9 Morn.   | September | 8  | 3 After.  |
| October   | 4  | 1 Morn.   | October   | 18 | 2 Morn.   |
| November  | 2  | 4 After.  | November  | 16 | 3 After.  |
| December  | 2  | 5 Morn.   | December  | 16 | 6 Morn.   |
| Ditto     | 31 | 5 After.  |           |    |           |

ECLIPSES in the YEAR 1766.

- February 9, of the Sun, invisible.
- February 24, of the Moon, visible, 4 Digits.
- August 5, of the Sun, visible, 11 Digits.
- August 20, of the Moon, invisible.

Figure 2: Ann Fisher, *The Ladies' Own Memorandum-Book; or, Daily Pocket Journal, For the Year 1766* (London: Robinson and Roberts, [1765]), n.p.. Montgomery Manuscript 156, Rare Book & Manuscript Library, Columbia University in the City of New York.



Newcastle-Upon-Tyne's Lying-In Hospital was one of several such charitable institutions established in the eighteenth century, and the first outside of London. The premises, owned and managed by Sarah Hudson, widow, were open by December 1760 on Rosemary Lane.<sup>48</sup> Ladies were encouraged to subscribe a penny a week, or to provide an annual subscription. Fisher's inclusion of the charity in her account serves both to align the charitable provision of safe delivery with the provision of other such essentials as candles and food, and, of course, a pocketbook. But it also sends a message about the requirement of women to account for their own periods in order to prepare for the eventuality of their own pregnancies.

Over the course of the eighteenth century, women's pocketbooks more and more began to include printed information which engaged with the prospect that their pages might be used for family planning. Even if their users did not take up the unsaid invitation to record menstruation within their pages explicitly, the books nevertheless constructed a printed world which aligned women's wellbeing and good husbandry with regular record-keeping. They provided helpful charts of lunar cycles, which correlated with what was considered to be the 'regular' menstrual cycle, and increasingly included printed material directly supporting and directing women's record-keeping along the lines of family planning, by providing information about lying-in hospitals, breastfeeding support, and recipes for emmenagogues. The printed affordances of annual pocketbooks assisted women planning families by providing potential—if only used at the level of the imaginative—repositories for the data which they could later use to measure gestation and accurately predict and prepare for childbirth.

#### IV Pocketbooks and Perpetuity

Analysing the annotations of the earliest surviving copy of the *Ladies' Own Memorandum-Book* from 1766 reveals some key facts about its provenance and the way in which this particular copy was used. The diary belonged either to John Brumwell (1721-1792) or to his wife Isabella Brumwell (1726-1803). Revealing a strict account of income and expenditure,

the ruled pages of the diary record rental income from property and expenses including bushels of oats, mint, rabbits, rum, brandy, leather and linen, and money spent socially, including ‘At the Club,’ as well as on ‘Jackey’s schooling’ (their son John Francis, b. 1755), and his dancing. The first ruled page in the book is filled with memoranda carried over from the previous year, mostly concerning payments. But one date of note is the ‘B. Cow Consated ye 11. Of Oct: 1765’. In fact, the cow’s sex life is a central theme of the book, with ‘Cow Bull’d’ being recorded on 15 September 1766 and again, ‘Cow Bull’d’, on 27 October 1766. The cow and the bull seem to have trouble conceiving, however, though the human side of the Brumwell family had more luck. On 27<sup>th</sup> June, the diary is inscribed ‘Isabella Brumwell Delivered of Two Daughters & Christened Ann & Isabella’. That same day, 0-10-6 is paid ‘To ye Midwife’.<sup>49</sup> Printed pocketbooks, with their lunar cycles, lent themselves to recording monthly menses. But even though the main themes of the Brumwell diary annotations are accounts, reproduction, and reproductive accounts, women’s periods are notably absent.

The copy of the *Ladies’ Own Memorandum-Book* from 1778 surviving in the Bodleian Library Oxford probably belonged to John Lievesley (1775-1886) or his wife, Sarah Freeman Lievesley (1775-1836), of Bottesford, Leicestershire. Like the Brumwell diary, the Lievesley text deals also with husbandry, being particularly concerned to record information about sheep, lambs, and wool. On 20 October we learn that they ‘put the Ram to the Ewes’.

The endpapers also capture sermons which appear on a monthly basis:

31 December 1782, Mr Shoon Text 1 John 4 & 16  
 [3 January]  
 14 January 1783 Mr Smith text Luke the 17 & 5 [14 days]  
 11 February, Mr Hoyer text, John 5 and 40 [28 days]  
 11 March, Mr Guy text, Isaiah 27 & 13; Peter 4 and 16 [28 days]  
 8 April Mr Johans text Ephesians the 3 verce 20 [28 days]  
 6 May Mr Hoyer Hebrews the 7 & 25v [28 days]  
 1 Aug Mr Jones and Mr Shol from the psalms [12 weeks and 3 days]  
 23 September Mr Hoyer text Philippians the 1 2 .... [29 days]<sup>50</sup>

The Lievesleys may have been to church more regularly than this account suggests, but these specific dates clearly held importance to the author. This could be because of Sarah's monthly cycle, since all of these dates fall upon Tuesdays exactly 4 weeks apart. Rather than the sermons being recorded within the text box dedicated to that day, their formatting as a list rebuts the printed affordances of the diary. This list format is clearly for ease of use, with the writer thinking ahead to re-reading, and taking care to present the texts and the dates upon which they were discussed in such a way as to present a visual overview or calendar at a glance. As with the dates of a menstrual cycle, the individual meanings of the dates seem to be less important than their meaning in relation to each other. This was a list which invited re-reading. As the author of the extensive guide for how to use *The Ladies Complete Pocket-Book, for the year of our Lord 1761* suggested:

it may not be improper to recommend the careful preserving of these Books, as they may be of Use even Years after, to have recourse to on many Occasions, and will always enable any Lady to tell what Monies she has Receiv'd and Paid; what Appointments, or Visits, she has made and had return'd, during any Period of her Life.<sup>51</sup>

Clearly, many of the books that have survived to posterity reflect the fact that they have been used either as perpetual calendars or as manuscript repositories more akin to commonplace books than to disposable diaries. Whether printed or blank, Dr Thomas Beddoes scathingly wrote in 1802 of 'pocket-books as full crammed as the cloth hall at Leeds, during our dispute with the Northern Powers' with 'verbal and written recipes for every current name of disease'. The pocket book format was the perfect receptacle for collecting and disseminating medical recipes. Beddoes went on: 'Some treasure up these stores for family use. Others are public-minded, and know no greater pleasure than in drawing from their magazine for the benefit of every acquaintance within reach of a call or note'.<sup>52</sup>

The Lievesley diary was used for several years beyond 1778, recording the birth of their daughter Caroline Sarah Lievesley on 25 August 1806. The pocketbook has been used like a

commonplace or family book in that it records momentous occasions as well as poetry, a joke ('Why is the house of Commons like an account Book? Because there are many cyphers in it', 17 May 1778), and a recipe 'for A gentle Puke' ('two penneth of Ipeccocany' [ipecac, an emetic], 16 November 1778). The Lievsleys used their 1778 copy of *The Ladies' Own Memorandum-Book* as many would have done a family Bible:

29 November memorandums paid:

1801 Janry 18 Mary Ann Lievesley born  $\frac{1}{4}$  before 8 sunday morning  
1802 Nov 22 William Lievesley born  $\frac{1}{2}$  after 8 monday morn  
1804 Nov 10<sup>th</sup> Elizabeth Lewesley born near one oclock saturday morning  
1806 Caroline Sarah Lievesley born august 25  $\frac{1}{2}$  past 8 monday evening  
1809 Janry 1<sup>st</sup> Emma Lievesley born  $\frac{1}{2}$  past 7 Sunday evening  
1811 Feb 13 Thos Lievesley born  $\frac{1}{2}$  past 6 oclock wednesday evening

30 Nov cash:

1813 April 3<sup>rd</sup> Hannah Lievesley born  $\frac{1}{4}$  before 12 oclock Saturday night  
1819 April 23 Friday between 3 and 4 in the afternoon departed this life Mary Ann Lievesley aged 18 years  
Nov 30 1820 departed this life Elizabeth Lievesley about  $\frac{1}{2}$  past 3 in the morning on a Friday both of consumptions she would have been 16 had she lived another week

Many copies of women's pocketbooks that survive with markings reveal a value beyond the year of their intended use. This may also be a reason for their preservation, as receptacles for writing when the tax on paper remained high and while the literary content of women's pocketbooks aimed to attract investors, repeat purchasers, and the images to encourage collection.

An exploratory reading of eighteenth-century pocketbooks in the holdings of the British Library reveals that those that have survived were far from being used as ephemera. *The Ladies Complete Pocket-Book, For the Year of our Lord 1761* includes printed instructions and directions for preparing and administering medical treatments, notes on international affairs and an account of spa waters, but was used by its anonymous reader as a receptacle for recording and preserving manuscript recipes for meals.<sup>53</sup> Ann Heading's copy of *Harris's Ladies Memorandum Book* for 1792 records both items of momentary significance, such as the

cost of her under-petticoat ‘a yard & Quarter Long’ in the week beginning 1<sup>st</sup> October 1792, and what ‘Farther ows’ for the week of 5<sup>th</sup> March. But it also serves as a commonplace book and longstanding record of her life and interests to which she regularly returns and records events.<sup>54</sup> An important event in her life seems to be her coming to Oxford, perhaps relocating there, an event which she records twice in contradictory ways. She selects the somewhat random blank space by Monday 12<sup>th</sup> March to note that she ‘Came to Oxford Aug 27 1797’, whereas in the space allocated for 26<sup>th</sup> August 1792, she records that she ‘Came to Oxford on this day 1796’, four years after the diary was originally issued. While the proximity of the dates might be due to the caprices of memory, or perhaps capture two distinct and important trips to the city, what is clear is that Heading uses the printed affordances of the diary for her own unique purposes over a number of years. She notes down the lyrics to the song ‘The Forsaken Nymph’ (c. 1800), an extract from a love-letter anthologised in the *Complete Letter Writer* (1762), and a recipe to make a suture for a wound.<sup>55</sup> The birth of William Heading is recorded on 30<sup>th</sup> August 1794, and the death of Thomas Heading on 27<sup>th</sup> September 1800. The final date recorded in the diary is 1806, beside which she notes down an illegible name, marking this pocketbook’s sustained use over a period of 14 years. As was common, Heading reappropriates the prescriptive rules for using the pocketbooks and adapts the grids to her own purposes.<sup>56</sup>

That such volumes were passed down through families is suggested by a run of ladies’ diaries belonging to the Pye family of Norwich. Mary Pye of St. Gregory’s, Norwich, seems to have been the original owner of twenty-two diaries bound in two volumes, from 1782-1793 (vol. 1) and 1794-1803 (vol. 2),<sup>57</sup> having signed and dated the 1795 book and signed the book for 1801. Presumably after their binding as two volumes, Sarah Pye, probably a relation, signed the preliminary pages of first, adding the date 4 June 1819, suggesting a retrospective preservation of individual diaries as composite bound volumes, and an interest in the diaries 37 years after they were first produced. On the endpapers of his family’s copy of *The Ladies*

*Miscellany, or, New, Useful and Entertaining Companion* for the year 1787, one John Leyland wrote that ‘These books belonged either to my mother or my aunt’.<sup>58</sup> The volume has been carefully bound, the book decorated with his book plate, and his marginalia records his act of archiving female voices. In his nostalgia for the female archive, Leyland anticipates the words of Leigh Hunt in his essay on keepsakes:

we remember a series of pocket-books in a great drawer, that, in addition to their natural size, seemed all to have grown corpulent in consequence of being fed with receipts, and copies of verses, and cuttings out of newspapers. The hook of the clasp had got from eyelet to eyelet, till it could unbuckle no further. These books, in the printed part, contained acrostics and rebuses, household recipes for various purposes, and a list of public events. There was love, politics, and eating.

By comparison, he suggests, ‘modern’ pocketbooks are brief, slim, and pride themselves on their portability.<sup>59</sup> His grandmother’s drawer suggests a much more permanent feature.

Women’s pocketbooks were used both in the moment and as tools for retrospective reflection: as printed repositories of life and death. They had the potential to be preserved, as Newbery’s *Ladies Complete Pocket-Book* recommended, for the purpose of re-reading and analysing such ‘Appointments, or Visits, she has made and had return’d, during any Period of her Life’.<sup>60</sup> That appointments or visits might include those pertaining to family planning was supported by their printed content, which was often tailored to that theme. Pocketbooks outlasted their years of publication, serving as prompts for remembering dates of birth and death, making us question their frequent categorisation as ephemera, and revealing that the term ‘ephemera’ is dependent as much upon the way in which an artefact is used as for what it is intended.

V *The Marriage Almanack*

Perhaps with pocketbook in hand, women planning families had to navigate, potentially through the assistance of a midwife or other health professional, a range of medical

information—much of it available in print—to help them to predict their due dates. Having recorded their menstrual cycles and other signs such as quickening according to medical advice, expectant women then needed to process that information. In 1835, German obstetrician Anton F.A. Desberger of Erfurt designed and published a perpetual calendar especially for this purpose, translated into English as *The Marriage Almanack; or Ladies' Perpetual Calendar, in which Every Day of the Year is Marked with Reference to Three Important Epochs* (1835). Desberger had first appeared in print with his *Archaeologia Medica Alcorani, Medicinae Historiae Symbola* (1831), a Latin version of medical excerpts of the Koran, on the title page of which he describes himself as ‘doctore et medico in exercitu regis borussici’ (physician in the army of the Prussian king).<sup>61</sup> He later moved into obstetrics.

Anticipating the printed wheels still essential for calculating due dates in booking appointments in twenty-first century GP surgeries across the UK, the *Marriage Almanack* is a technology – a printed perpetual calendar—of use to women ‘in the family way’, providing a chart enabling them to predict delivery date based on ‘three epochs’: conception, quickening (the first sensation of the baby’s movements) and birth. Knowing just one of those dates, women could read across the column to predict their baby’s arrival. In the meantime, they could prepare for the event by consulting the calendar’s prefatory materials, comprising several pages of guidance on pregnancy and childbirth, written from the perspective of a male medical practitioner, and supplemented by ‘additions by an English Physician’.<sup>62</sup> These pages were intended to tender ‘the service of a faithful and confidential friend, especially to the young and newly married, in matters of urgent interest—where the inexperienced might hesitate, or not even know how to go about to ask advice’.<sup>63</sup>

The *Marriage Almanack* was introduced in its English iteration as a work already successful on the continent (‘In Germany its popularity is very considerable’), and it came with the authority of a dedication by the publisher, with permission, to Sir Charles Mansfield Clarke,

Physician in Ordinary to Queen Victoria, ‘with the highest respect for his professional skill’.<sup>64</sup> It was clear to the makers of the volume that the term ‘almanack’ was one which would most clearly describe its purpose, in the historic sense of an almanac used for predicting celestial events or even for superstitious prognostication: ‘We have adopted the present title as the most simple we could think of—although the work has a much larger scope than that of affording a mere calendar’.<sup>65</sup> But the term was also suggestive of an expectation that women’s pocketbooks, also known or referred to as almanacs, would be the most obvious tool by which women could manage their pregnancies.

However, the term brought with it legal implications. The volume was conscious of its own belatedness and blamed the delay in being introduced to England on account of the Stationers’ Company’s monopoly on almanacs: ‘In Germany its popularity is very considerable; and probably the only reason why it has not been already naturalized in this country is, that until just now, Almanacks of every sort, on account of the heavy tax imposed upon them, were in a great measure proscribed.’<sup>66</sup> The implication is that had the guild foregone its monopoly, an important public health benefit may have been achieved, one democratising medical knowledge for the health of ‘females of every rank and condition in life’.<sup>67</sup> The volume also played upon the almanac’s popularity to stress its purpose in democratising medical knowledge, particularly for the benefit of younger women and those of limited financial means, who cannot buy out the services of medical professionals for periods longer than absolutely necessary:

The manner of reckoning with reference to the time of expected confinement, is a subject which the sex—particularly the junior members of it—ought clearly to understand. Much time is saved, and often great anxiety avoided, by being able confidently to approximate to the hour of solicitude and hope. In point of economy too, it is submitted, that the advantage of bespeaking the assistance of the medical and other attendants at the proper time, is not to be overlooked: while to the latter parties neither is it of little consequence that they are not kept in suspense—perhaps suffering serious disappointment—owing to the miscalculations of their patient.<sup>68</sup>



Being carefully worded in an accessible and polite manner, so as not ‘to offend even the most fastidious delicacy’,<sup>69</sup> the *Marriage Almanack* was positively received, both at home and abroad. The reviewer writing for the *American Family Magazine* considered that it ‘contains much that is interesting to the young married female, directing readers to purchase it from its New York importer, William Colman.’<sup>70</sup> The *Sunday Times*’ reviewer approved it as both polite and useful: ‘This little manual, which many ladies will gladly possess, contains the materials for certain calculation, which must save an immensity of trouble and annoyance both to themselves and their medical attendants. There is nothing in it to offend, and some mite of the sort was long wanting’.<sup>71</sup> The *Lady’s Magazine* sent the book to a mother of ten children to review:

This mysterious little book is entirely devoted to married ladies, whose peculiar state may require that they should pay particular attention to their health. The great fame of the author in Germany, and the sanction of Sir. C.M. Clarke, gives full assurance of its worth; we can likewise add the opinion of a lady, the mother of a large family, to whom we submitted the work, who declares that the maxims are excellent, and that the arrangement of the calendar, although it requires some little study, will be of high utility. In fact, no young married women ought to be without it.<sup>72</sup>

The more conservative *Literary Gazette*, however, considered it ‘at once indelicate and uncalled for’, but mainly took issue with its perceived German-ness, suggesting that ‘No where but in Germany we think could such an almanack even suggest itself for publication’.<sup>73</sup> Overall, however, the scientific community saw it as a long overdue innovation.

The work was sufficiently successful to demand a second ‘enlarged and improved’ edition in 1838. This edition carefully obscured the text’s German origins and blended the material composed by the German doctor and his English editor, who now presented a united front as ‘we’.<sup>74</sup> It was remarketed in such a way as to demystify its purpose. The new title, *The Marriage Almanack; and Mother’s Manual: with an Appendix Containing a Perpetual Calendar for Calculating the Duration of Pregnancy*, reflected the editor’s decision to be much

more explicit about the book being a tool for predicting birth. The material inside, too, was more fulsome and directive. The introduction reminded its readers that ‘The signs by which a female can judge as to whether she is about to become a mother are, for a considerable period, extremely uncertain and deceptive’.<sup>75</sup> All the signs that indicate pregnancy were ‘liable to several exceptions, and are separately of little value; it is only by their coincidence and accordance that a correct judgment can be formed. Indisputable proof of pregnancy can only be furnished about the fifth month, when it is possible for the experienced medical practitioner to feel the child, by means of a slight pressure on the abdomen, and with the aid of the stethoscope to hear the pulsations of the heart’.<sup>76</sup>

Such amendments also went down well. Of the second edition, the *London Medical Gazette* argued that

This little lady’s-book is quite within our province: it treats of matters, medical and hygienic, principally relating to the pregnant state. Its chief object seems to be to facilitate the calculation of the time of pregnancy; and, used for this purpose, we imagine it may prove serviceable to many females who make sad blunders in their reckoning, to the great vexation both of themselves and their obstetrical attendants. Accoucheurs could not do better than recommend it to ladies on their lists. It is very beautifully got up; the tables are clear and intelligible, and the short remarks are sufficiently practical.<sup>77</sup>

As a ‘Calendar for Calculating the Detection, Progress, and Duration of Pregnancy’, the *Marriage Almanack* was excerpted in the 1841, posthumous, edition of Michael Ryan’s *Manual of Midwifery: or, Compendium of Gynaecology and Paidonosology*, which the title-page boasted was ‘re-written, greatly enlarged, and adapted to the present state of science’.<sup>78</sup>

As a ‘perpetual calendar’ it was also appended in 1842 to the first American edition of Thomas Bull’s *Hints to Mothers, for the Management of Health During the Period of Pregnancy, and in the Lying-In-Room* (1833).<sup>79</sup>

*The Marriage Almanack* harnessed the women's pocketbook's ability to record menstruation and therefore predict delivery dates, producing the first printed tool for family planning. Women's diaries had always served in such ways, but had never been so overtly packaged. *The Marriage Almanack* was a tool with a rich heritage in pocketbooks, drawing from their capacity for astrological prognostication and husbandry advice, and also their potential for perpetual use. Through its medical information and printed charts intended for women as lay readers, it assumed the kind of skillset that female readers of almanacs would have deployed more broadly across lunar charts and mathematical puzzles. The *Almanack* borrowed the well-recognised format of the pocketbook and relied on an unsaid but widely held belief that women should—or did—record their menstrual cycles. With its innovative publication of the predicting charts, the *Almanack* paradoxically brought into public view the mysteries of gestation while also aiding women's capacity to independently—and privately—predict their babies' arrivals.

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<sup>1</sup> *Lady's Magazine and Museum of Belles-Lettres*, 6 (1835), p.356.

<sup>2</sup> Anton F.A. Desberger, Mode of reckoning the time, *The Marriage Almanack; or Ladies' Perpetual Calendar, in which Every Day of the Year is Marked with Reference to Three Important Epochs* (London: Schloss, 1835), p.31.

<sup>3</sup> Approaching Confinement, *Marriage Almanack*, p.25.

<sup>4</sup> Linda A. Pollock, 'Embarking on a Rough Passage: The Experience of Pregnancy in Early-Modern Society', in *Women as Mothers in Pre-Industrial England*, ed. by Valerie Fildes (London: Routledge, 1990), p.44-67: p.43.

<sup>5</sup> Michael Stolberg, *Uroscopy in Early Modern Europe* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2015); Rebecca Whiteley, 'Figuring Pictures and Picturing Figures: Images of the Pregnant Body and the Unborn Child in England, 1540-c.1680', *Social History of Medicine* 32.2 (2019), p.241-266; Pollock, p.43.

<sup>6</sup> Cathy McClive, 'The Hidden Truths of the Belly: The Uncertainties of Pregnancy in Early Modern Europe', *Social History of Medicine* 15.2, (2002), p.209-227: p.210.

<sup>7</sup> Caitlin Scott, 'Birth Control and Conceptions of Pregnancy in Seventeenth-Century England', *Retrospectives* 2 (2013), p.73-85: p.80-82; p.83; p.85.

<sup>8</sup> See for example, Sara Reid, *Menstruation and the Female Body in Early Modern England*, *Genders and Sexualities in History* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2013); Patricia Crawford, *Blood, Bodies, and Families in Early Modern England* (London: Longman, 2004).

<sup>9</sup> No almanacs are considered in the 12-volume study *Eighteenth-Century British Midwifery*, ed. by Pam Lieske (London: Pickering & Chatto, 2007). Mary Fissell includes very brief references to almanacs in her work, though they rarely feature as objects of interest in their own right. Fissell (1991), *Patients, Power and the Poor*

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in *Eighteenth-Century Bristol* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2002), p.22-23; p.37-38; Fissell, *Vernacular Bodies: The Politics of Reproduction in Early Modern England* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2006), p.198 n.4; p.136; p.142.

<sup>10</sup> Sarah Blank Dine, 'Diaries and Doctors: Elizabeth Drinker and Philadelphia Medical Practice, 1760-1810', *Pennsylvania History* 68.4 (2001), p.413-34.

<sup>11</sup> Pollock, p.44-45.

<sup>12</sup> Stephen Freeman, *The Ladies Friend; or, Complete Physical Library* (London: printed for the author, 1785?).

<sup>13</sup> Susan Mitchell Sommers, 'Stephen Freeman of Antigua and London: A Respectable Rosicrucian', *Journal for Research into Freemasonry & Fraternalism*, 6.1 (2015), 21-48: 40. For more information on Freeman, see Sommers, *The Sibyls of London: A Family on the Esoteric Fringes of Georgian England* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2018), esp. p.82-99.

<sup>14</sup> Patricia Crawford, *Blood, Bodies and Families*, p.39. Cathy McClive has undertaken an extensive study of the ways in which this theory was promoted and questioned throughout the eighteenth century, finding that in the Early Modern period (as now), menstrual calculations were unreliable. Cathy McClive, *Menstruation and Procreation in Early Modern France* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2015), p.11, p.177.

<sup>15</sup> William Salmon, *Aristotle's Compleat and Experience'd Midwife*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition (London: printed, and sold by the booksellers, 1711), p.27.

<sup>16</sup> Salmon, p.33; p.35

<sup>17</sup> Salmon, p.27.

<sup>18</sup> John Leake, *Medical Instructions towards the Prevention, and Cure of Chronic or Slow Diseases Peculiar to Women* (London: Baldwin, 1777), p.69.

<sup>19</sup> See XX's essay in this special issue, evidencing the challenge of the Edinburgh dispensary's dealings with gynaecological complications given their frequency and the relative lack of knowledge of their causes.

<sup>20</sup> Alexandra Lord, "'The Great Arcana of the Deity': Menstruation and Menstrual Disorders in Eighteenth-Century British Medical Thought', *Bulletin of the History of Medicine*, 73.1 (1999), p.38-63: p.42.

<sup>21</sup> Lord, p.42-43.

<sup>22</sup> Reid, p.83; Lord, p.61.

<sup>23</sup> Caitlin Scott, 'Birth Control and Conceptions of Pregnancy in Seventeenth-Century England', *Retrospectives*, 2 (2013), p.73-85: p.80-82; p.83; p.85; Lord, p.48; 57; Reid, p.4.

<sup>24</sup> Women were less likely to see an issue with delayed periods. Lord, p.61.

<sup>25</sup> *The Ladies Dispensary: or Every Woman her own Physician* (London: Hodges, 1739), p.23. For methods other than nostrums used in 1840s' Dundee, see Morag Allan Campbell, "'This Distressing Malady': Childbirth and Mental Illness in Scotland 1820-1930', PhD thesis, University of St Andrews (2020).

<sup>26</sup> John Freind (1703), *Emmenologia*, tr. by Thomas Dale (London: Cox, 1729), p.2.

<sup>27</sup> Lord, p.63.

<sup>28</sup> Lord, p.49.

<sup>29</sup> Reid, p.2.

<sup>30</sup> Reid, p.82, p.96; Lord, p.63; Alfred Leslie Rowse, *Sex and Society in Shakespeare's Age: Simon Forman the Astrologer* (New York: Scribner, 1974), p.226-27; Crawford, p.43-45.

<sup>31</sup> Samuel Pepys, *The Diary of Samuel Pepys: 1660*, ed. by Robert Latham and William G. Mathews (Oakland, CA: U of California P, 2000), vol.1, p.1. See also Reid, p.82-83.

<sup>32</sup> Savage's diary survives in Chester City Record Office at shelf mark DB8. See Crawford, p.43-45.

<sup>33</sup> An exception is Dine, who has read Elizabeth Drinker's diary (1760-1810) alongside the journal of physician William Shippen to reveal the growing practice in America, inspired by the recent English trend, of booking physicians as well as midwives in advance of delivery.

<sup>34</sup> E.g., for 1738: January 13<sup>th</sup> Sunday; February 8<sup>th</sup> Friday; March 10<sup>th</sup> Sunday; April 5<sup>th</sup> Sunday; May Sunday [sic]; June 10<sup>th</sup> Tuesday; July 9<sup>th</sup> Tuesday; August 8<sup>th</sup> Thursday; September 11<sup>th</sup> Wednesday; October 13<sup>th</sup> Sunday; Nov 10<sup>th</sup> Sunday; Dec 8<sup>th</sup> Sunday. Sarah Welch Hill papers, Durham County, Hope Township, Ontario, 1821-1881, Finding Aid F634, Province of Ontario Archives, Toronto, Ontario. See transcription of selected fragments by Robynne Rogers Healey on the *Rural Diary Archive*, available at <https://ruraldiaries.lib.uoguelph.ca/home>, last accessed 11 November 2021.

<sup>35</sup> Alan S. Weber, ed., *Almanacs, The Early Modern Englishwoman: A Facsimile Library of Essential Works, Series II, Printed Writings, 1641-1700: Part I, Vol.6* (Aldershot: Ashgate: 2002), p.ix.

<sup>36</sup> Weber, p.ix-x.

<sup>37</sup> Henry Beighton, editor of the *Ladies Diary*, unsuccessfully petitioned for a female editor in 1720. When he died in 1743, his widow Caelia edited it until Robert Heath took over in 1745. Costa, p.69; Teri Perl, 'The Ladies' Diary or Woman's Almanack, 1704-1841', *Historia Mathematica* 6 (1979), p.36-53, p.44. Joe Albree and Scott H. Brown, "'A valuable monument of mathematical genius': *The Ladies' Diary* (1704-1840)", *Historia Mathematica* 36.1 (2009), p.10-47; Shelley Costa, 'The *Ladies' Diary*: Gender, Mathematics, and Civil Society in Early-Eighteenth-Century England', *Osiris*, 2nd Series, Vol. 17, Science and Civil Society (2002), p.49-73.

- <sup>38</sup> Louise Hill Curth, 'The Medical Content of English Almanacs 1640–1700', *Journal of the History of Medicine and Allied Sciences* 60.3 (2005), p.255-282: p.263.
- <sup>39</sup> Roger Kendal, *Ephemeris Absoluta: or a Compleat Diary of the Caelestial Motions Exactly Calculated from Astronomia Carolina, For the Year of our Redemption 1701* (London: Company of Stationers, 1701), p.4-5.
- <sup>40</sup> William Andrews's *News from the Stars* (London: Company of Stationers, 1701) advertised spectacles, Merlinus Anglicus Junior's *Or the Starry Messenger* (London: Company of Stationers, 1701) advertised the wares of 'Dr. Russel's Widow', including 'Spirits, Pills, Powders, Lozenges, &c.'.
- <sup>41</sup> *An Ephemeris of the Caelestial Motions of the Year of our Lord 1701, by William Cookson, Student in Astrology and Physick* (London: Company of Stationers, 1701).
- <sup>42</sup> Crawford, p.48; Lord, p.44.
- <sup>43</sup> *The Lady's and Gentleman's Diary, or, Royal Almanack; For the Year of our Lord, 1776*, by Reuben Burrow, Late Assistant Astronomer at the Royal Observatory, and Teacher of the Mathematics (London: Carnan, 1776), Preface, n.p.
- <sup>44</sup> 'All the Aenigmas &c. answered by Stella; In an Epistle, supposed to be the little Child's Answer to the Nurse's from the Elysian Fields', in *The Ladies' Diary: or Woman's Almanack For the YEAR of our LORD 1763* (London: Wilde, for the Company of Stationers, [1762]); 'All the Aenigmas &c. answered by Stella; In an Epistle, supposed to be the little Child's Answer to the Nurse's from the Elysian Fields', in *The Ladies' Diary: or Woman's Almanack For the YEAR of our LORD 1764* (London: Wilde, for the Company of Stationers, [1763]).
- <sup>45</sup> Ann Fisher, 4 September 1771, British Library, Hodgson Papers vol. 5 Add. MS. 50244.4.
- <sup>46</sup> Ann Fisher, ed., *Ladies' Own Memorandum-Book; or, Daily Pocket Journal for the Year 1772* (London: Robinson and Roberts, [1771]), n.p..
- <sup>47</sup> Helen Williams, 'Printing, Publishing and Pocket Book Compiling: Ann Fisher's Hidden Labour in the Newcastle Book Trade', in *Print Culture, Agency and Regional Identity in the Hand Press Era*, ed. by Rachel Stenner, Adam James Smith and Kaley Kramer (London: Palgrave, 2022).
- <sup>48</sup> John Brand, *The History and Antiquities of the Town and Country of the Town of Newcastle upon Tyne* (London: White, 1789), p.135; p.601; Eneas Mackenzie, 'Medical Establishments: The Lying-In Hospital and Charities', in *Historical Account of Newcastle-Upon-Tyne including the Borough of Gateshead* (Newcastle-upon-Tyne: Mackenzie and Dent, 1827), p.517-522.
- <sup>49</sup> Ann Fisher, *The Ladies' Own Memorandum-Book; or, Daily Pocket Journal, For the Year 1766* (London: Robinson and Roberts, [1765]), n.p.. Montgomery Manuscript 156, Rare Book & Manuscript Library, Columbia University in the City of New York. Ann would die aged 2 whilst Isabella would live to 79.
- <sup>50</sup> Similar entries appear on the page for 9 November: '10 November Mr Smith Text Proverbs the 28 13;11 Grantham John the 6 37; 8 December Mr Gay text Lucke the 1 22; 5 January Mr Shaw's texts Hebrews 6 chap 18; Genesis 40 D<sup>o</sup> 16; 2 February Mr Hopper text Malachi chap 3 16.
- <sup>51</sup> *The Ladies Complete Pocket-Book, for the year of our Lord 1761* (London: Newbery, 1761), n.p.
- <sup>52</sup> Thomas Beddoes, 'Essay on Personal Imprudence, Active and Passive', *Hygëia; or, Essays Moral and Medical on the Causes Affecting the Personal State of our Middling and Affluent Classes* (Bristol: Phillips, 1802), p.16; Fissell, *Patients, Power, and the Poor*, p.37-38.
- <sup>53</sup> *The Ladies Complete Pocket-Book, for the year of our Lord 1761* (London: Newbery, 1761), n.p., British Library General Reference Collection shelfmark RB.23.a.38154.
- <sup>54</sup> *Harris's British Ladies Complete Pocket Memorandum Book for the year 1792* (London: Goldney, 1791), British Library General Reference Collection shelf mark P.P.2472.0a.
- <sup>55</sup> 'Love-Letter II: From Mrs Behn [sic], to a Gentleman she was passionately fond of' [not in fact by Behn], *The Complete Letter Writer: Or, Polite English Secretary*, 8<sup>th</sup> edn. Improved (London: Crowder, 1762), p.125.
- <sup>56</sup> On the (mis)use of the printed affordances of women's pocketbooks, see Lindsey Eckert, 'Priscilla Wordsworth's Pocketbook Diaries and Interfaces of Subjectivity', *The Review of English Studies*, 71.300 (2020), p.508–527.
- <sup>57</sup> 'Mary Pye St. Gregory's Norwich', in *The Ladies' Own Memorandum-book, or Daily Pocket Journal, for the Year 1801* (London: Robinson, 1800), British Library General Reference Collection, RB.8.a.215, item number 8 of 9.
- <sup>58</sup> *The Ladies Miscellany, or, New, Useful and Entertaining Companion for the year 1789* (London: Brown, 1788), [end-paper], British Library General Reference Collection RB.23.a.6925.(1.).
- <sup>59</sup> Leigh Hunt, 'Pocket-Books and Keepsakes', in *Essays*, ed. by Arthur Symons (London: Scott, 1887), p. 8-19: p.11-12. Holly Day does excellent work on this passage in her forthcoming history of the pocketbook, as it moves toward the gift book.
- <sup>60</sup> *The Ladies Complete Pocket-Book, for the year of our Lord 1761* (London: Newbery, 1761), n.p.
- <sup>61</sup> Anton J. A. Desberger, *Archaeologia Medica Alcorani, Medicinae Historiae Symbola* (Gothae et Erfordiae: Hennings, 1831).

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- <sup>62</sup> Anton F.A. Desberger, *The Marriage Almanack; or Ladies' Perpetual Calendar, in which Every Day of the Year is Marked with Reference to Three Important Epochs* (London: Schloss, 1835). The English Physician has not been identified.
- <sup>63</sup> Editor's Preface, *Marriage Almanack*, p.7.
- <sup>64</sup> Editor's Preface, *Marriage Almanack*, p.7; Dedication.
- <sup>65</sup> Editor's Preface, *Marriage Almanack*, p.7.
- <sup>66</sup> Editor's Preface, *Marriage Almanack*, p.7.
- <sup>67</sup> Desberger, Author's Preface, *Marriage Almanack*, p.11.
- <sup>68</sup> Editor's Preface, *Marriage Almanack*, p.8.
- <sup>69</sup> Editor's Preface, *Marriage Almanack*, p.8-9.
- <sup>70</sup> *Family Magazine*, 2 (1835?), p.200
- <sup>71</sup> Advertisement in the *Court Journal* 312 (18 April 1835), p.256.
- <sup>72</sup> *Lady's Magazine and Museum of Belles-Lettres*, 6 (1835), p.356.
- <sup>73</sup> *Literary Gazette*, reprinted in *Albion: A Weekly Chronicle of Literature, Science and the Fine Arts* 1 (1835) p.126.
- <sup>74</sup> Compare to the first edition, which reflected upon the role of the editor: 'In the additions which we have made to the work, we have chiefly had it in view to render the statements and suggestions of the author as precise as possible, wherever we thought we could do so with effect: and in the professional hints which we have here and there interspersed, we have, we think, given some information, which Dr. Desberger himself with all his prudential caution, would not object to.' Editor's Preface, *Marriage Almanack*, p.8-9.
- <sup>75</sup> Anton F.A. Desberger, *The Marriage Almanack; and Mother's Manual: with an Appendix Containing a Perpetual Calendar for Calculating the Duration of Pregnancy*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn. (London: Scloss, 1838), p.11.
- <sup>76</sup> Introductory Remarks, *Marriage Almanack*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn. (1838), p.14.
- <sup>77</sup> *London Medical Gazette: Or, Journal of Practical Medicine* 15 (28 March 1835), p.920.
- <sup>78</sup> Michael Ryan, *Manual of Midwifery: or, Compendium of Gynaecology and Paidonosology* (London: Published by the Author, 1841), p.527-529. Ryan had been the editor of the *London Medical and Surgical Journal* and was an underappreciated contributor to the field of medical ethics and jurisprudence, with his midwifery manual being one of the texts in which he developed his ethical practice. Howard Brody, Sahra Meghani, and Kimberley Greenwald, eds., 'Introductory Essay: Michael Ryan and Medical Ethics', in *Michael Ryan's Writings on Medical Ethics, Philosophy and Medicine* 105 (London: Springer, 2009), p.1-76: p.23; p.44.
- <sup>79</sup> Thomas Bull (1833), *Hints to Mothers, for the Management of Health During the Period of Pregnancy, and in the Lying-In-Room [...] From the Third London Edition, with Additions by an American Physician. To Which ibis Added, The Ladies' Perpetual Calendar* (New York: Wiley, 1842).