

BY A WOMAN'S HAND

Esther Inglis, Artisan



Esther Inglis, 1595. Artist unattributed, to date. National Galleries of Scotland.

RARE BOOK HUB

Rare Book Hub, San Francisco,
Honors 400th Anniversary Events
On The Death Of

Esther Inglis

(Dieppe, France, c1570 – Leith, Edinburgh, 1624)

Guest Article, With A Gallery Of Selected Images,

By **MAUREEN E. MULVIHILL**

November 1st, 2024





ESTHER INGLIS is finally having her moment in 2024. Sadly, she has had to wait awhile: a few centuries, in point of fact.

Though never an obscure, undocumented figure, praise and full respect came dropping slow (as Yeats might say). Only recently is Inglis beginning to receive due credit for her many accomplishments. As a multimedia artisan, Inglis produced an impressive body of work, as a writer, translator, calligrapher, painter, book illustrator, and book embroiderer.

Esther Inglis is often celebrated today as a producer of miniature books. These were typically gift-books which she herself prepared in one of her many calligraphic scripts (Gallery, Fig. 1). The best of these were constructed with elaborate binding materials, created by Inglis herself (Figs. 3, 4).

Her patrons included royals, nobles, friends of her inner circle, and an expanding network of sponsors and patrons. As a wife and mother of several children (eight recorded births), life in the artisan class -- then and now -- had its challenges.

By 2024, Inglis devotees have achieved several milestones for their heroine:

- ◆ The essential facts of Inglis's biography and career -- parentage, training, settings, marriage & maternity, patronage -- have been collected, and are now available in respected reference sources (*Oxford DNB*; *Routledge Encyclopedia of the Early Modern World*), as well as recent digital offerings (<https://libraryblogs.is.ed.ac.uk/estheringlis/>; < <https://estheringlis.com> >);
- ◆ A first-ever corpus of Inglis's extant work -- original writings, translations, crafts and visual arts -- is now established, catalogued, and ongoing;
- ◆ Scholarly work on Inglis has been lively, productive, and wonderfully creative (Fig. 6);
- ◆ Inglis has recently been the subject of first-ever scholarly events in the United Kingdom and stateside.



Special Events Commemorating the 400th Anniversary Of Inglis's Death

University of Edinburgh

October 19-20, 2024

Conference & Concert: *Esther Inglis in Context and Culture*

Keynotes: *Jamie Reid-Baxter (Glasgow); Georgianna Ziegler (Folger Library, U.S.)*

<https://llc.ed.ac.uk/english-literature/events/esther-inglis-contexts-culture>

Hats off to Anna-Nadine Pike, Project Curator: Esther Inglis 2024, for coordinating this first-ever, transnational conference. Its two keynote speakers and session panelists examined a broad range of subjects: portraits and other likenesses of Inglis; her religious and political intersections as a Huguenot woman; her interface with scribal culture and manuscript production; etc.

Distinguished Inglis scholar, Jamie-Reid Baxter (“Esther Inglis: ...,” *Studies in Scottish Literature*, 2024), had high praise: “A perfectly glorious event, especially the concluding concert in St Cecilia’s Hall, Niddry Street, Edinburgh. This was a real-time, live event with musicians and nearly 100 attendees. And it was free and open to an appreciative public. We were all singing the old 1564 Scottish Psalter version of Psalm 23, a text which Esther herself would have known and often sang. Moreover, the concert setting at St Cecilia’s Hall was only two blocks down the street from the very site of Esther’s first home in Edinburgh, where her parents ran their ‘Franche scole’.” Memorable and moving, all of this.”

Folger Shakespeare Library, Washington, DC.

October 25, 2024 - January 19, 2025

Manuscripts & Miniature Books Exhibition:

Little Books, Big Gifts: The Artistry of Esther Inglis

**Selections from Folger Shakespeare Library, Washington, DC,
and Houghton Library, Harvard University, Cambridge, MA.**

This is a small exhibition (375 sq. ft.) with big content. It displays twelve Inglis items: Six from the Folger Library, six from Harvard’s Houghton Library. Curators: Heather Wolfe, Curator of Manuscripts, Folger Library; Georgianna Ziegler, Thalheimer Associate Librarian & Head of Reference, Emerita, Folger Library; and Ashley Buchanan, Associate Director for Fellowships, Folger Library.

“This is the most beautiful little exhibition I’ve ever worked on,” said Heather Wolfe. “Georgianna, Ashley, and I decided early on that we wanted the twelve exhibited items to collectively reveal Esther as a book artist and a strategic gift-giver. But now that the books are in the cases, all I can think about is how tiny and perfect and magical they are!” (See Gallery, below, Figures 3, 4, 5.)



GALLERY



(Fig. 1). Esther Inglis. Calligraphic Script

Specialists have identified in Inglis's manuscripts some 40 different handwriting styles. See "Rare Esther Inglis Manuscript Unveiled," illustrated webpage, University of St Andrews, Scotland.

< <https://phys.org/news/2023-07-rare-esther-inglis-manuscript-unveiled.html> >



(Fig. 2). Houghton Library MS Typ 212, 1606

Inglis took special delight in drawing flowers and insects, suggesting perhaps fresh comparative work on Inglis and botanical illustrator, Maria Sibylla Merian (1647-1717).



(Figs. 3, 4). Esther Inglis. Miniature Gift-Book for an English Prince (1608)
Embroidered Binding, with Manuscript: *Argumenta psalorum Davidis*.
Folger Library, V.a.94. Gift of Lessing J. Rosenwald.

A prized binding (oblong, 4.6 x 7.7. cm). Small red velvet volume, decorated with raised silver thread and seed pearls forming a floral arrangement. Second image: The book's content: a 1608 manuscript in calligraphic script. Manuscript and embroidered binding by Esther Inglis. A special holiday gift to Henry, Prince of Wales, son of James I of England. Tim Tiebout, Photographer.

< <https://www.folger.edu/explore/collection-highlights/an-embroidered-binding/> >



(Fig. 5). Manuscripts Exhibition: Installation Overview
Little Books, Big Gifts: The Artistry of Esther Inglis

Inglis Manuscripts Exhibition, Folger Library and Houghton Library, Harvard.
 Stuart and Mimi Rose Rare Book and Manuscript Exhibition Hall, Folger Library.

October 25, 2024 – January 19, 2025.

Curators: Heather Wolfe, Georgianna Ziegler, Ashley Buchanan.
 Tim Tiebout, Photographer.



(Fig. 6). Digital Exhibition
Rewriting the Script: Works and Words of Esther Inglis

University of Edinburgh Exhibitions.

Curated by Anna-Nadine Pike.

With Linocut Prints by Ruth Nichols-Pike, Edinburgh.

< <https://exhibitions.ed.ac.uk/exhibitions/rewriting-the-script> >

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Note on Author Maureen E. Mulvihill, a rare book collector and scholar with the Princeton Research Forum, NJ, and Senior Editor, *Scriblerian*, is an Early Modernist with specialties in women writers, textual studies, and the visual arts. She studied at Monteith College, Wayne State University, Detroit; the University of Detroit, where she studied with Sir Tyrone Guthrie, Visiting Artist; Wisconsin (PhD '82); and at the post-doctoral level, Columbia University Rare Book School, Yale Center for British Art, and, as NEH Fellow, Johns Hopkins University. Her book credits include first editions of "Ephelia" and Mary Shackleton Leadbeater, and, as Advisory Editor, *Ireland And The Americas*, 3 vols. Her many illustrated essays for Rare Book Hub and scholarly journals are listed at Google Scholar (to be updated). She served as Vice President, Florida Bibliophile Society, 2012-2015, designing its new logo and website. The Mulvihill Collection of Rare & Special Books (early women writers) is featured in *Fine Books & Collections* (2016).

This article is dedicated to the memory of
Mary E. Burns (Edinburgh, Scotland),
 the author's paternal grandmother;
 and

Mary Somerville (Jedburgh, Scotland),
 celebrated 'Queen of Science'

< <https://www.rarebookhub.com/articles/2670> >

