

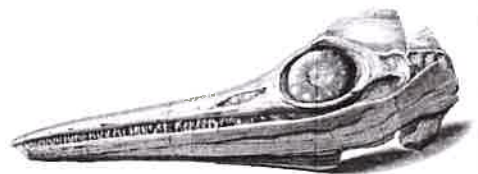
Mary Anning



- She was born in 1799 and died in 1847 aged 47.
- She lived her whole life in Lyme Regis in Dorset.
- Her father (Richard) was a carpenter, her mother was called Molly.
- There were 9 children but only Mary and Joseph survived to adulthood (this was not unusual in those days because there were no cures for many diseases). Joseph was 3 years older than Mary.
- Their house was so close to the sea it would flood when there was a storm at high tide.



- When Mary was a baby a strange event happened - she was out one day with a neighbour and 2 other women when it began to rain. They sheltered under a tree which was struck by a bolt of lightning. The 3 women were killed instantly and the lifeless baby was rushed back to her parents' house. They were heart broken and bathed her body in warm water. But a miraculous thing happened – Mary opened her eyes. Apparently returned from the dead. A doctor declared that it was a miracle.
- Baby Mary became famous in the town. People said that she was different after the lightning strike – brighter, stronger, more curious and confident – all the qualities that would help her become much more famous as an adult.
- Lyme Regis was a popular seaside town for visitors in Mary's time.
- Mary's family were poor. She did not go to school for long but learnt to read and write at a Sunday School.
- Mary's father would take her and Joseph to the beach to collect strange rocks that they called curiosities. They would sell these rocks to the tourists from a table outside their house.
- When Mary was 11 her father died after he had been injured in a rock fall on the beach.
- The family were now poorer than ever as there was no money coming in from her father's carpentry.
- Mary continued to hunt for the strange rocks on the beach that some people were now calling fossils. Scientists were excited by these mysterious rock creatures but no one was quite sure what they were.
- The rock on the cliffs was soft and unstable. After every storm there would be falls of rock, but these would often reveal new fossils. It could be dangerous at times. Mary was once trapped by a rock fall and on another occasion cut off by the incoming tide.
- Mary had a little black and white dog called Tray who was always at her side.
- When Mary was 12, she and her brother were out hunting when they found a huge fossil skull encased in rock. It seemed to be some sort of sea monster. With the help of some local quarrymen, they freed it from the surrounding rock using picks and hammers and carried it back to her house.
- Over the next weeks and months, Mary cleaned the fossil skull by skilfully chipping away the surrounding rock one small chip at a time. It was painstaking work as a mistake could ruin the find.



Everyone thought it was the skull of a strange sort of crocodile.

- A few months later, Mary found the rest of the skeleton and cleaned it in the same way. She laid it out in her father's old workshop and people flocked to see it. It was the most important fossil ever found.
- The family sold it to a collector for £23 which was a lot of money in those days. Later it would be sold to The British Museum and given the name Ichthyosaurus which means fish lizard.

- Mary continued to hunt for fossils and sell them to tourists. Her better finds she sold to scientists for higher prices. Lyme was famous by now as a fossil collecting site and many collectors and scientists would also hunt among the cliffs. But it was dirty and dangerous work and none of them had such a good eye for spotting fossils as Mary.



- Ammonites and belemnites (which were known as devil's fingers) gave some of her best trade.
- Despite her very limited schooling, Mary borrowed books and scientific papers on fossils and through her reading kept up to date with scientific ideas on these strange creatures from another time that were trapped in the stone.
- Her reputation as an expert as well as a fossil hunter spread and she was visited by many important scientists and collectors of the day.



- When she was 24 she found the first complete skeleton of a plesiosaur and a few years later the first British skeleton of the strange flying lizard called a Pterosaur. This skeleton was bought for the British Museum.
- By the age of 27 Mary had saved enough money to buy a house with a proper glass fronted shop window where she could display her fossils and attract more trade.



- Scientists and collectors continued to visit her, talk about fossils with her and even ask her to take them out hunting on the cliffs because she was so much better at finding fossils than anyone else.
- Sometimes these scientists took the credit for new ideas and fossil finds that were actually Mary's, which wasn't fair.
- Mary died of a disease at the age of 47 (unmarried and childless).
- She had lived in a time when no woman could vote or go to university and she had been a poor woman with very little education, yet she had made a huge contribution to science. Her fossils can still be seen in museums all around the world.
- Mary Anning is now recognised as one of the greatest fossil hunters the world has ever known.

