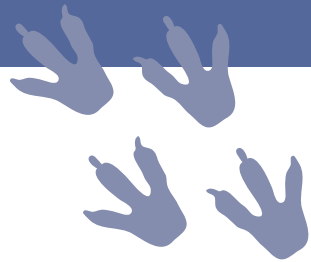




## The Story of Mary Anning



1

Mary was born on 21 May 1799 in Lyme Regis, Dorset. She had quite a scary start in life.

When she was just a baby, Mary and her nurse were sheltering under a tree when they were struck by lightning! The nurse did not survive, but Mary did. Her parents thought that the lightning made her into a bright, curious child.

Even though Mary was very interested in learning, she did not go to a proper school. This was because at the time everyone had to pay to go to school and Mary was from a very poor family.

2

Mary's family were always looking for ways to make money.

Whilst walking along the beach, Mary and her father often noticed strange-shaped rocks. Some of them looked like coiled snakes – she called them snakestones.

Mary wanted to find out more about them, so she took them home and cleaned them. She found that rich people wanted to buy her funny-shaped rocks, which they called curios or curiosities.

We now know that Mary's curios are fossils – the remains of animals and plants which lived millions of years ago. But when Mary was alive, no one was sure what they were.

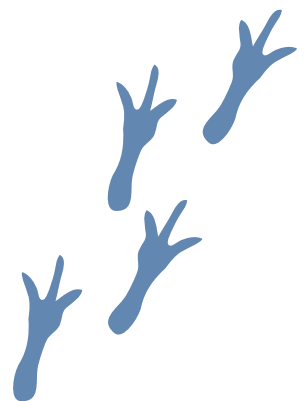


3

Mary's father died when she was still very young. Her family became even poorer, and Mary had to spend all her time hunting for fossils to sell.

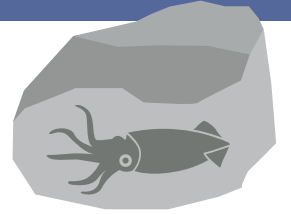
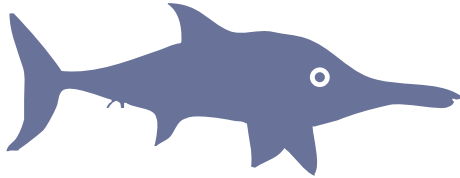
When Mary was 12, her brother John noticed the tip of a huge snout sticking out of the cliffs. He rushed home to tell Mary, who then spent months patiently chipping the rock away to reveal the fossil underneath.

The beast she uncovered was like nothing she had ever seen before – it looked like a great crocodile, but it had such enormous eyes! She drew pictures of her animal and sent them to London. Soon, all sorts of gentleman were coming down to her little house to look at it.





## The Story of Mary Anning



4

They called Mary's creature a fish lizard, or an Ichthyosaur, and announced that it was an extinct animal which swam in the ocean a long time ago.

This upset a lot of people, as at the time most Christians believed that all creatures were created perfect by God, that they had always looked the same and would never die out. Many people did not believe Mary and the other scientists, and thought the Ichthyosaur was just a strange looking crocodile.

Mary soon discovered more fossils which definitely weren't crocodiles, including a long-necked Plesiosaur and a flying Pterosaur. People started to listen.

5

Mary's other important discoveries were strange fossils, called Bezoar stones. She cut open hundreds of these spiral-shaped rocks and found they were full of fish scales and bones. She realised they were actually fossil pool!

This helped scientists understand the food chains of ancient animals, and paint a picture of who was eating who.

Mary kept detailed notes of everything she found. Ink was quite expensive but she found a cunning solution. Some of her squid-like fossils, called belemnites, had ink sacs. Mary found that when she mixed the fossil ink with water she could use it to write! You can still see her diary written in belemnite ink in the Lyme Regis Museum today.

6

Mary carried on fossil hunting for the rest of her life until her death in 1847, when she was just 47.

As a poor woman, she was never recognised as a brilliant scientist as she would be today. However, her work changed the way we view the world around us and she is now known as the greatest fossil hunter who ever lived.

People travel from all over the world to come to Lyme Regis and hunt for fossils, and even leave fossils at her grave instead of flowers!

She also might have inspired the popular tongue twister – she sells seashells on the sea shore.

