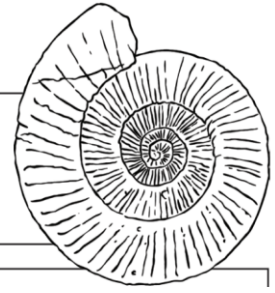




# Mary Anning



**Date of birth:** May 21, 1799

**Date of death:** March 9, 1847

Mary Anning was born in the seaside town of **Lyme Regis, Dorset, UK**, in **1799**. Although her parents had ten children, only Mary and her brother **Joseph** lived to adulthood. It's said Mary had a lucky escape when she was a baby. The lady holding her was struck by **lightning**. Miraculously, little Mary survived.

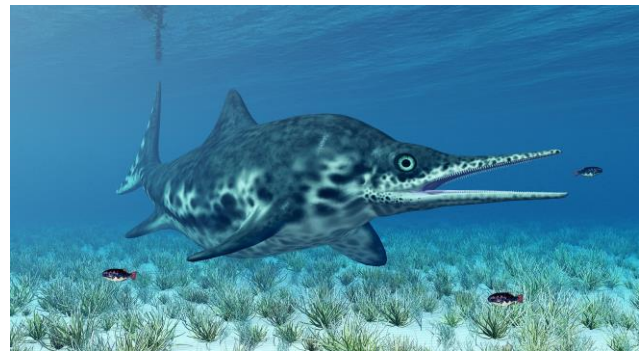
Mary's father didn't earn much in his job as a **cabinet maker**, so he boosted the family's earnings by looking for **fossils** (known as '**curiosities**') at the beach and selling them to holidaymakers. Young Mary and Joseph would join him, and they developed a deep love of **fossil-hunting**.



After their **father's death** in **1810**, Mary and Joseph carried on fossil hunting, to support the family. In **1811**, when Mary was **12**, they uncovered a strange **5.2-metre-long skeleton!** At the time, people believed that any unrecognisable creatures must have travelled from far-off lands, so scientists simply thought it belonged to a **crocodile**. Eventually, though, they realised it was an **ancient species**, and it was named **Ichthyosaurus** – meaning '**fish lizard**'.



The Ichthyosaurus fossil discovered by Mary Anning on display at the Oxford University Museum of Natural History.



Palaeontologists and artists use scientific evidence to show what Ichthyosaurs would have looked like.

Mary continued to scour the beach and crumbling cliffs of Lyme Regis with her dog **Trey**, and in **1823** she made another important discovery – the first ever **Plesiosaur skeleton!** This long-necked sea creature looked so odd that many people thought it was **fake** at first!



Mary Anning's Plesiosaur fossil can be seen on display at the Natural History Museum in London.

Mary made many other exciting discoveries, such as a flying reptile, later named the **Pterodactyl**, and **coprolites** – fossilised poo – which helped her work out what dinosaurs ate! Having taught herself **geology, anatomy** and **scientific illustration**, Mary was so highly skilled that she took **important scientists** fossil hunting and discussed ideas and **theories** with them.

Mary died in **1847**. Although she was well-known for her discoveries, Mary wasn't taken seriously as a scientist in her lifetime because of her **gender** and **poor background**. Some of the male scientists she worked with claimed her findings as their own! But today, Mary is recognised as a **pioneer** in the field of **palaeontology** and is celebrated as the greatest fossil hunter of all time!



## What is Palaeontology?

Palaeontology is the study of prehistoric and extinct animals and plants and their fossilised remains. A palaeontologist is someone who learns about life on Earth by studying fossils. Mary Anning was one of the first palaeontologists. She made many incredible discoveries and is thought of as one of the greatest fossil hunters to have ever lived.



If you would like to become a palaeontologist, you will need to do well in school before going to university to earn a degree. As a palaeontologist you will conduct fieldwork, searching and collecting fossils which you would ship back to your laboratory to study and analyse. You would then share your discoveries by writing about your research and presenting it to other scientists.