

Mary Anning

Mary Anning was a fossil collector who made many amazing discoveries.

Born	1799
Location	Lyme Regis, Dorset, UK
Occupation	palaeontologist
Died	1847



Childhood

Mary did not go to school regularly because her family was poor. She taught herself about geology and anatomy from books and observation. Mary's father often took Mary and her brother, Joseph, to the beach to pick up shells and stones to sell in his shop.



Work

Throughout her life, Mary was an enthusiastic fossil collector, who found many important fossils of prehistoric animals. Although she was not trained as a scientist or geologist, her specimens changed scientific thinking. When Mary was a child, people were unaware of fossils and knew nothing about long-dead animals of the past.



Significant discoveries

First discovery

In 1811, Joseph discovered a fossilised skull that he and Mary believed belonged to a crocodile. However, it belonged to a complete dinosaur fossil that is known today as *Ichthyosaurus*. Mary later uncovered the rest of the fossilised remains.

Later discoveries

Mary discovered the first *Plesiosaurus* fossil in 1823 and the first British *Pterodactylus* fossil in 1828.

Dinosaur fossils



Fossilised *Ichthyosaurus* skull



Fossilised *Pterodactylus* remains



Fossilised *Plesiosaurus*

Fame

When well-known geologists and palaeontologists heard about her finds, they came to visit Mary in Lyme Regis. She shared her discoveries and knowledge with them and led them on expeditions to find new fossils.



Lyme Regis beach

Problems

Mary Anning made some of the most important geological discoveries in history. However, the scientific community were reluctant to recognise her work because she was uneducated, poor and a woman.

At that time, poor people did not have many rights and women were not considered to be equal to men. Mary was unable to join the important scientific organisations of the time.



Inspiration

Mary Anning is famous throughout the world and her work has encouraged many fossil hunters. The geologist Thomas Hawkins wrote a book based on Mary’s ideas. A painter and geologist called Henry De la Beche painted what Dorset might have been like in prehistoric times, based on Mary’s fossil evidence. People think the tongue twister, *She Sells Seashells by the Seashore*, is about Mary.



Duria Antiquior – A More Ancient Dorset by Henry De la Beche, 1830

Death

Mary died in 1847, aged 47. The president of the Geological Society of London wrote a moving eulogy about her life. Members of the society also paid for a stained-glass window in St Michael’s Parish Church, in Lyme Regis, to remember Mary.

Legacy

Mary’s discoveries led scientists to develop new ideas about the history of Earth. In 2010, Mary was recognised as one of the top 10 British women who have influenced the history of science by the Royal Society, an important scientific organisation.

Today, information about Mary and some of her discoveries can be seen at the National History Museum, in London, and at the Lyme Regis Museum, in Dorset.

Mary Anning timeline

- 1799** Mary Anning is born.
- 1811** Mary’s brother finds an *Ichthyosaurus* skull. Mary discovers a complete *Ichthyosaurus* fossil.
- 1819** Mary’s *Ichthyosaurus* is displayed at the British Museum in London.
- 1821** Mary finds more *Ichthyosaurus* fossils.
- 1823** Mary discovers the first *Plesiosaurus* fossil.
- 1824** Mary finds fossilised animal faeces.
- 1828** Mary discovers the ink sacs of *Belemnidea* fossils and the first British specimen of the *Pterodactylus*.
- 1829** Mary finds a second *Plesiosaurus* and a *Squaloraja*.
- 1830** Mary’s friend and famous geologist, Henry De la Beche, paints *Duria Antiquior – A More Ancient Dorset*, based on Mary’s discoveries.
- 1847** Mary dies aged 47.

Glossary

anatomy	The study of the bodies of living things.
eulogy	A speech that is written about someone after they’ve died.
expedition	A journey that is organised for a purpose.
fossil	The remains of a once-living animal or plant, preserved as rock.
geology	The study of the formation and history of Earth.
inspire	To give an idea to someone.
legacy	The passing on of something that happened in the past.
palaeontologist	A scientist who studies fossils.
prehistoric	The time before history was written down.
specimen	Something that can be tested or examined.
uneducated	To have little or no schooling.

