

# Mary Anning

Mary Anning was born in England on 21st May 1799. She lived in the seaside town of Lyme Regis, in Dorset, and became a well-known fossil hunter. She died in 1847, aged 47.

## What do we know of Mary Anning's childhood?

Anning was one of two surviving children born to Richard and Mary (Molly) Anning. Anning's father would often take Mary and her brother, Joseph, to the beach to pick up shells and stones to sell to visitors. Anning did not go to school regularly because the family was poor. She taught herself about geology and anatomy from books and observation.

## Who was Mary Anning and what do we know about her?

Throughout her life, Mary Anning was an enthusiastic fossil collector who found many important fossils of prehistoric animals. Although she was not trained as a scientist or geologist, her fossil finds changed scientific thinking. When Anning was a child, people were unaware of fossils and knew nothing about long-dead animals of the past. In 1811, she discovered a skeleton that she believed belonged to a crocodile. However, she had actually found a complete dinosaur fossil that we know today as the *Ichthyosaurus* or the 'fish lizard'. Anning went on to discover the first *Plesiosaurus* skeleton in 1823 and the first British specimen of the *Pterodactylus* in 1828.

When they heard about her finds, many eminent geologists came to visit Anning in Lyme Regis. She shared her discoveries and knowledge with them and led them on expeditions to find new fossils. To earn a living, Anning opened a small shop selling rocks and fossils and often chatted to visitors about her finds.

## Why was Mary Anning famous?

Mary Anning's fossil finds were some of the most significant geological discoveries in history. They shook the world and made many people question their scientific and religious beliefs. Her discoveries led scientists to develop new ideas about the history of the Earth.

Anning is famous throughout the world, and her work encouraged many enthusiastic fossil hunters. Her story also inspired the well-known tongue twister, *She Sells Seashells by the Seashore*.

Anning died in 1847, aged 47. The president of the Geological Society wrote a moving eulogy about her life, even though she hadn't been allowed to join the society during her lifetime because she was a woman. Members of the society also funded a commemorative stained glass window in St Michael's Parish Church, in Lyme Regis.

In 2010, the Royal Society included Mary Anning in their list of the top 10 British women who have influenced the history of science. Today, information about Anning and some of her discoveries can be seen at the National History Museum, in London, and at the Lyme Regis Museum, in Dorset.