

Mary Anning

Famous fossil hunter Mary Anning was born on the 21st of May, 1799 in Lyme Regis, Dorset, England. She had one brother, named Joseph. When Mary was fifteen months old she was caught under a tree in a storm. Lightning struck the tree and three people were killed, but Mary survived.

Lyme Regis is famous for the fossils found in the cliffs and on the beaches.

Mary's father was a carpenter and a fossil hunter. Sadly, he did not make much money at either job. When he died in 1810, the family were very poor. The children began to hunt for fossils which their mother sold on a stall. They were also helped by a charity.

In late 1811, Joseph found what he thought was a crocodile skull. Mary dug out the rest of the 5.2 metre-long skeleton. In fact, it was not a crocodile at all, but an ichthyosaur. Ichthyosaurs (meaning fish lizards) were giant reptiles that lived in the sea and were like huge dolphins

In 1816 Joseph went to work as an upholsterer, while Mary continued to hunt for fossils. Even though Mary's ichthyosaur skeleton was on display at the British Museum in 1819, by 1820 the family were so poor that they had to sell their furniture. They were helped by a family friend, Thomas Birch, who sold some fossils in London and gave them the money.

In December 1823 Anning discovered the first complete plesiosaurus skeleton. Plesiosaurs were prehistoric marine reptiles with long necks and small heads.

During her career, Anning found many important fossils, including a pterosaur in 1828. She was also one of the first people to recognise how much could be learnt about what prehistoric creatures ate from coprolites (fossilised poo!).

The work of a fossil hunter was extremely dangerous. Mary's dog Tray was killed in 1833 by a rock fall. She wore a top hat while collecting fossils, to protect herself from falling rocks.

Mary Anning died in Lyme Regis in 1847 and is buried in the church yard there. The Geological Society later paid for a stained glass window to her in the church. The tongue twister "She sells sea shells on the sea-shore" was originally part of a song written about her in 1908.



Mary Anning

Questions

1. What happened to Anning when she was fifteen months old?

- Her father died.
- The tree she was under was struck by lightning.
- She first went fossil hunting.
- She moved house.

2. In which two places can you find fossils at Lyme Regis?

- The cliffs and beaches.
- The cliffs and hills.
- The beaches and rivers.
- The hills and beaches.

3. Anning's father was a carpenter. He also had another job, what was it?

- Upholsterer
- Fisherman
- Fossil hunter
- Police officer

4. Using information from the text, which phrase best completes this sentence;
After their father died, the Anning family...

- were extremely rich.
- had very little money.
- moved house.
- were struck by lightning.

5. Where did Mrs Anning sell their fossils?

- Their house
- A shop in the high street
- A stall
- A market

6. Tick the word or phrase that means the same as "continued":

- went
- carried on
- stopped
- hated

7. What does "on display" mean?

- On show
- Outside
- Out of sight
- Upstairs

8. Complete this sentence;

Plesiosaurs had...

- long bodies and small heads.
- short necks and large heads.
- long necks and huge heads.
- long necks and small heads.

9. Why did Anning wear a top hat when fossil hunting?

- It had belonged to her father.
- It was fashionable.
- To protect her head from rock falls.
- To keep warm.

10. In which year did Anning find a pterosaur skeleton?

- 1823
- 1847
- 1811
- 1819

11. Where is Anning buried?

- The British Museum
- Lyme Regis Churchyard
- On the beach
- London

12. What is there in Lyme Regis Church to remember Anning?

- A statue
- A memorial stone
- A pew
- A stained glass window

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4. Using information from the text, which phrase best completes this sentence;

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6. Tick the word or phrase that means the same as 'continued'.

- went
- carried on
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- hated

7. Find and copy the phrase that means 'on show'.

8. Complete this sentence: Plesiosaurs had long _____ and small _____.

9. Why did Anning wear a top hat when fossil hunting?

10. In which year did Anning find a pterosaur skeleton?

11. Where is Anning buried?

12. Connect the person to the fact about them in the text:

Joseph Anning

Born 21st May 1799

Thomas Birch

Worked as an upholsterer.

Mary Anning

Gave money to the Anning family.