

The Anglophile

July 2026



The Jurassic Coast
Fossils, Rugged Sea Cliffs & More



EDITOR'S LETTER

Dear all,

Welcome to the July 2026 issue of The Anglophile.

This month's issue takes us to the Jurassic Coast, from East Devon into Dorset, along one of Britain's most distinctive stretches of shoreline.

It's famous for its fossils and geology, but also includes places such as Lyme Regis, with its harbour wall, literary connections and long association with fossil collecting; Charmouth, where the cliffs still draw people in search of ammonites; and Portland, with its stone, lighthouse and strong maritime character.

We also look at Mary Anning, one of the most remarkable figures connected with this coast. Born in Lyme Regis, she became an expert fossil collector at a time when science was still trying to understand extinction, deep time and the prehistoric world. Her discoveries helped change the way people thought about the history of life on Earth, even though she worked outside the formal scientific circles of her day.

Elsewhere in the issue, we explore Portland, whose famous limestone has been used in some of Britain's best-known buildings, while Portland Bill and Chesil Beach give the area a rugged identity quite different from the softer seaside towns nearby.

We hope this issue gives you a sense of that richness, and of a coastline where the past is not hidden away, but written clearly into the cliffs.

Anyway, I hope you enjoy the issue.

Chris



THE BEST PLACES TO VISIT ON THE JURASSIC COAST

LYME REGIS, PORTLAND & MORE

The Jurassic Coast is one of the most distinctive stretches of coastline in England. Running for about 95 miles through Dorset and East Devon, it is famous for its cliffs, fossils, sea arches, beaches and handsome old towns. It is also a UNESCO World Heritage Site, recognised for rocks and landforms that tell a story stretching back around 185 million years.

For visitors, though, the appeal is not only geological. This is a coast of gentle seaside towns, dramatic walks, harbour views, old pubs, fossil shops and places where the landscape seems to change every few miles. Here are some of the best places to include on a trip.

LYME REGIS

Lyme Regis is one of the classic towns of the Jurassic Coast, and a good place to begin.

It has an attractive seafront, a small harbour, independent shops and a long association with fossil hunting.

The town is closely linked with Mary Anning, the pioneering fossil collector who made several important discoveries here in the early 19th century.

The beach and cliffs around Lyme Regis are still known for fossils, though sensible caution is needed near unstable cliffs. The town itself is very pleasant for a slower visit.

The Cobb, the curving harbour wall, is its best-known landmark and appears in both Jane Austen's 'Persuasion' and John Fowles' 'The French Lieutenant's Woman'.

It is a fine place for a stroll, especially in good weather.



Lyme Regis

CHARMOUTH

Just along the coast from Lyme Regis, Charmouth is one of the best places for anyone interested in fossils. The beach is backed by cliffs that regularly reveal ammonites and other remains from the ancient seas that once covered the area.

The Charmouth Heritage Coast Centre is a useful first stop, particularly for visitors who want to understand what they are looking at before walking on the beach. Guided fossil walks are often available, and they are a good idea if this is your first time fossil hunting.

Charmouth has a quieter feel than Lyme Regis, making it a good choice for those who prefer a more relaxed village base.

WEST BAY AND BRIDPORT

West Bay is the small harbour settlement just south of Bridport, and its towering golden cliffs are among the most recognisable sights on this part of the coast. They were also used as a filming location for the television series 'Broadchurch', which brought the area to a wider audience.

The harbour has a working, practical character, with fishing boats, seafood stalls and views along the beach. Bridport, a short distance inland, is a lively market town with a strong arts and food scene. Together, West Bay and Bridport make a good pairing: coast and town, cliffs and cafés, sea air and a little local browsing.

CHESIL BEACH AND ABBOTSBURY

Chesil Beach is quite unlike most English beaches. It is a long shingle barrier beach, stretching for many miles, with the Fleet Lagoon behind it. It is impressive rather than conventionally pretty, and its scale is part of the attraction.

One of the best places to appreciate it is from Abbotsbury, a historic village with stone cottages, a famous swannery and subtropical gardens nearby. The beach itself can be hard going underfoot, so it is often better admired than walked for long distances. Even so, the view is memorable, especially on a clear day when the line of shingle seems to run on almost without end.





Lulworth Cove and Durdle Door

LULWORTH COVE AND DURDLE DOOR

Lulworth Cove and Durdle Door are among the best-known places on the Jurassic Coast, and for good reason. Lulworth Cove is a near-circular bay formed by the sea breaking through layers of rock, while Durdle Door is a natural limestone arch standing just along the coast.

The walk between them is popular, though it includes hills and uneven paths. Good shoes are recommended, and it is worth checking local access before setting out, as cliff paths and beach steps can be affected by weather and erosion. Even if you only view Durdle Door from above, the scene is one of the coast's great sights.

Lulworth village also has places for refreshments, making this a practical stop as well as a scenic one.

OLD HARRY ROCKS AND STUDLAND

At the eastern end of the Jurassic Coast, Old Harry Rocks offers a very different sort of view. These white chalk stacks stand off the coast near Studland and mark the point where the Jurassic Coast meets the wider sweep of Dorset's chalk landscape.

The walk to the viewpoint from Studland is one of the most rewarding short walks in the area, with open sea on one side and countryside on the other. Studland itself has sandy beaches and a gentler feel than some of the more dramatic cliff sections further west. It's a fine place to end a Jurassic Coast journey, looking back across a coastline shaped by deep time, weather and the sea.

WEYMOUTH AND PORTLAND

Weymouth offers a more traditional seaside experience, with a broad sandy beach, Georgian seafront and busy harbour. It is a good choice for visitors who want easy facilities, level walking and plenty of places to eat. It also works well as a base for exploring the surrounding coast.

Nearby Portland has a very different character. The Isle of Portland is tied to the mainland by Chesil Beach and is known for its limestone, rugged coastal views and Portland Bill lighthouse. The area feels more exposed and dramatic than Weymouth, with wide sea views and a strong sense of maritime history.





THE JURASSIC COAST QUIZ

How well do you know the Jurassic Coast? Take our quiz and find out. Answers on p22.

1. The Jurassic Coast stretches through which two English counties?
2. Approximately how long is the Jurassic Coast?
3. What international status was awarded to the Jurassic Coast in 2001?
4. Which Dorset town is closely associated with the fossil collector Mary Anning?
5. What type of prehistoric marine reptile was one of Mary Anning's most famous early discoveries?
6. Which famous natural limestone arch is found near Lulworth Cove?
7. What is the name of the long shingle beach that connects Portland to the mainland?
8. Which seaside town is known for the Cobb, a curving harbour wall associated with Jane Austen's **Persuasion**?
9. The cliffs at West Bay became especially well known through which British television drama?
10. What is the name of the white chalk sea stacks at the eastern end of the Jurassic Coast, near Studland?
11. Which lighthouse stands at the southern tip of the Isle of Portland?
12. Portland stone was famously used in which major London cathedral designed by Sir Christopher Wren?
13. What is the name of the circular bay formed by the sea breaking through layers of rock near West Lulworth?
14. Which village near Lyme Regis is especially known for fossil hunting and its heritage coast centre?
15. The Jurassic Coast's rocks record roughly how many million years of Earth's history?
16. Which novelist visited Lyme Regis and used the town in one of her novels?
17. What type of beach is Chesil Beach: sandy, shingle or mudflat?
18. Which Tudor king ordered the building of Portland Castle as part of England's coastal defences?
19. Which East Devon town marks the western end of the Jurassic Coast World Heritage Site?
20. Why is the Jurassic Coast so important to geologists and fossil hunters?

GALLERY: JURASSIC COAST





Path Down to Lulworth Cove



Portland Bill Lighthouse



Old Harry Rocks, Dorset



Guildhall Cottage, Lyme Regis



PORTLAND

STONE, SEA AND STORY ON ENGLAND'S SOUTHERN COAST

Portland is one of the most distinctive places on the southern English coast. Joined to the mainland by Chesil Beach, it is often called the Isle of Portland, though it is technically a tied island rather than a true island. It sits just off Weymouth in Dorset and forms the southernmost point of the Jurassic Coast, the World Heritage coastline known for its cliffs, fossils and long geological story.

Yet Portland has a character all of its own. It is not a polished resort in the way that some English seaside towns are. Its appeal is more rugged and practical: stone quarries, working harbours, lighthouses, windswept paths, old cottages and wide views over the English Channel.

A PLACE SHAPED BY STONE

Portland is best known for Portland stone, a pale limestone that has been quarried here for centuries. It has been used in some of Britain's most famous buildings, including St Paul's Cathedral in London and parts of Buckingham Palace. The stone gives many of Portland's own houses and walls their distinctive colour, tying the place visually to its geology.

Quarrying has shaped both the landscape and the community. The old quarries, cuttings and stone tracks are part of Portland's identity. Some have been turned into nature reserves or sculpture areas, while others still remind visitors that this was never simply a place for scenery. It was a working landscape.

The island's geology also links it firmly to the Jurassic Coast. Portland's rocks belong to the later part of the Jurassic period, and its cliffs and stone beds are part of the same great sequence that makes this coastline so important.

PORTLAND BILL AND THE LIGHTHOUSE

At the southern tip of Portland is Portland Bill, one of the best-known landmarks on this stretch of coast.

This is where the land runs out into the sea, and where the waters can be treacherous.

The meeting of tides around the Bill has long made this a hazardous place for ships.



The red-and-white Portland Bill Lighthouse is the most recognisable sight here. The present lighthouse first shone in 1906 and still stands as a symbol of Portland's maritime life.

It looks out across a powerful stretch of sea, and even on a calm day there is a sense that the coast here is not to be taken lightly. Nearby is Pulpit Rock, a striking formation left by quarrying, which has become another familiar Portland landmark.

The area around the Bill is open, exposed and memorable, with the sort of sea views that make it easy to understand why lighthouses mattered so much.

PORTLAND HARBOUR AND NAVAL HISTORY

Portland's position gave it strategic importance. Its harbour became one of the great naval anchorages on the south coast, protected by breakwaters and watched over by fortifications. For many years, Portland had a strong connection with the Royal Navy, and that military and maritime history is still part of the area's atmosphere.

Portland Castle, built for Henry VIII in the 16th century, is a reminder of an earlier period of coastal defence. It was one of a chain of artillery forts created to protect England from possible invasion. Unlike a romantic medieval castle with towers and battlements, Portland Castle is low, solid and practical, designed for gunpowder warfare and harbour defence.

The harbour has also adapted over time. It is now used for commercial, leisure and cruise activity, but its scale still hints at its former naval importance.

VILLAGES AND LOCAL CHARACTER

Portland is not a single town but a collection of settlements. Fortuneswell, Chiswell, Castletown, Easton, Weston, Southwell, Wakeham and the Grove each have their own feel. Some sit low near the harbour and Chesil Beach, while others are higher up on the plateau.

The local stone gives many older buildings a strong sense of place. Narrow lanes, cottages, walls and chapels all help create an atmosphere different from nearby Weymouth. Portland can feel more self-contained, more weathered and more independent.

Its landscape also reflects older ways of life. Farming, fishing, quarrying and seafaring all played a part in Portland's history. The result is a place where the coast is not just a backdrop but the basis of local identity.



Pulpit Rock

CHESIL BEACH AND THE WIDER COAST

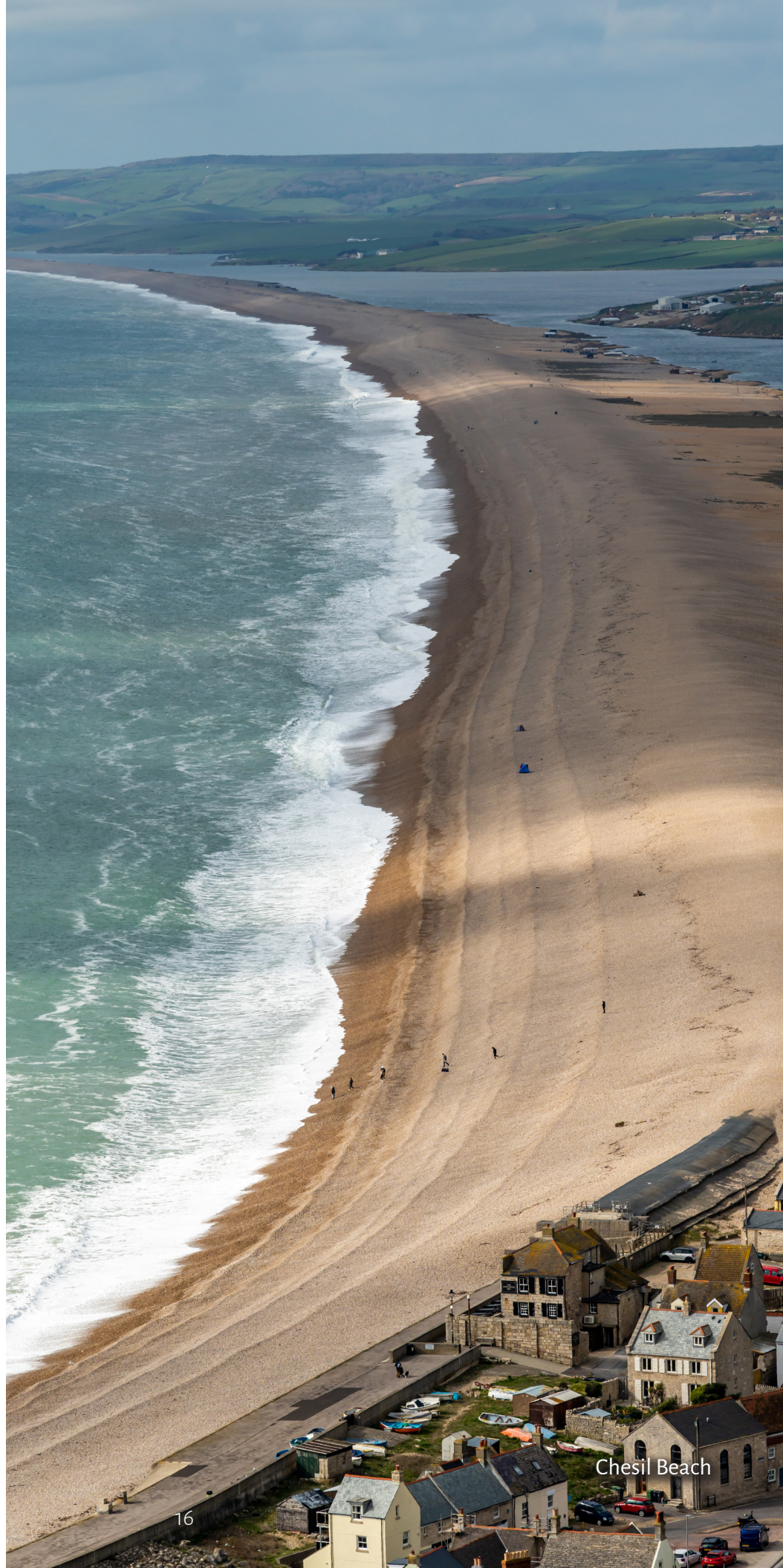
Chesil Beach is one of the Jurassic Coast's most remarkable natural features.

This long shingle beach stretches for around 18 miles, forming a great barrier between the sea and the Fleet Lagoon behind it. It is not a soft sandy beach in the usual seaside sense, but something more austere and dramatic: a vast bank of pebbles, shaped by waves, tides and weather over thousands of years.

Perhaps its most important role, however, is that it physically links Portland to the Dorset mainland. Without Chesil Beach, Portland would be a true island, separated from the coast by open water.

Instead, the great shingle ridge creates a natural land bridge, making access possible by road while still giving Portland the distinctive character of an island. Crossing Chesil Beach, the landscape changes noticeably, and there is a real sense of leaving the mainland behind before arriving on Portland.

Chesil also has a modern literary association through Ian McEwan's novella 'On Chesil Beach', published in 2007, which uses the beach and its sense of openness, distance and emotional tension as an important setting.



Chesil Beach



Portland Castle

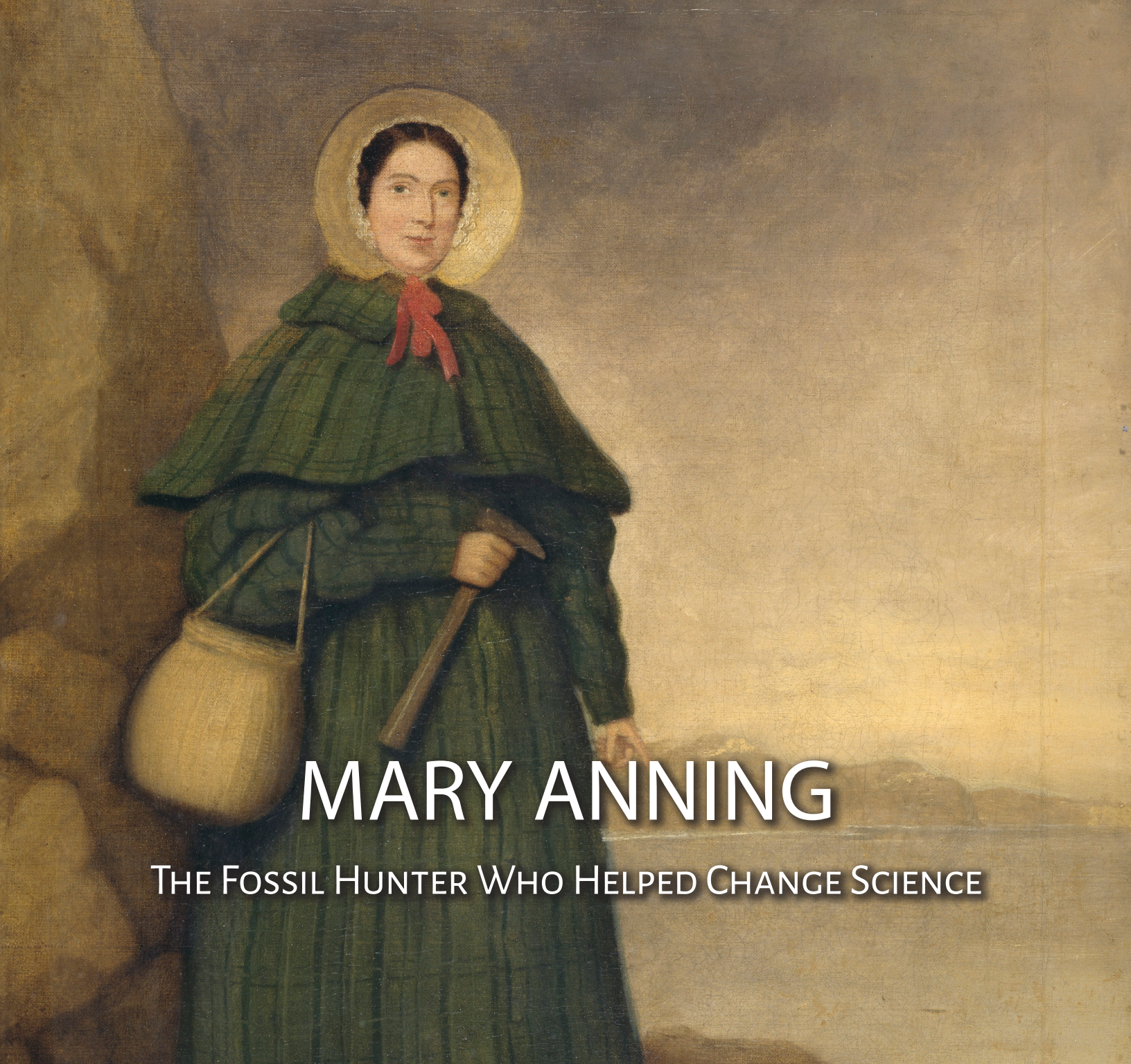
VISITING PORTLAND

Today, Portland attracts walkers, history enthusiasts, sailors, climbers, birdwatchers and anyone drawn to dramatic coastal scenery. The South West Coast Path runs around the island, giving views of cliffs, sea, quarries and the distant Dorset coastline. It is one of the best ways to understand Portland's shape and character, though even shorter walks can give a strong sense of the place.

Portland Bill is the obvious highlight, with its red-and-white lighthouse, wide sea views and exposed coastal setting. Nearby Pulpit Rock adds another distinctive landmark, while the surrounding cliffs show the island's long relationship with quarrying and the sea. Portland Castle, built for Henry VIII, offers a reminder of the island's defensive importance, particularly its role in protecting Portland Harbour.

The old quarry landscapes are also part of Portland's appeal. Some are now used for walking, nature and sculpture, showing how a once-industrial landscape has been partly reimaged. The island's villages, including Fortuneswell, Easton, Weston and Southwell, give a quieter view of local life, with Portland stone cottages, narrow lanes and a strong sense of independence from nearby Weymouth.

It is not a place that needs to be rushed. Portland rewards slower looking: at stone walls, harbour views, lighthouse beams, old lanes, abandoned quarries and the changing colour of the sea.



MARY ANNING

THE FOSSIL HUNTER WHO HELPED CHANGE SCIENCE

Mary Anning's life began in modest circumstances, but her work helped shape one of the great scientific stories of the 19th century. Born in Lyme Regis, Dorset, in 1799, she grew up on what is now the Jurassic Coast, a stretch of cliffs and beaches famous for fossils. At the time, however, geology and palaeontology were still young sciences. Many people had not yet accepted that the Earth was millions of years old, or that entire species had once lived and then disappeared.

Anning helped change that. Through patience, skill and a remarkable knowledge of the local cliffs, she found fossils that forced scientists to think differently about the history of life on Earth.

A CHILDHOOD AMONG FOSSILS

Mary Anning was the daughter of Richard Anning, a cabinetmaker who also collected fossils to sell to visitors. Lyme Regis had already become known for its unusual stones and shells, and tourists often bought them as curiosities. For the Anning family, fossil collecting was not simply a hobby. It was a way to earn money.

Mary learned from her father, but her childhood was difficult. The family was poor, and after Richard died in 1810, Mary, her mother and brother had to rely even more heavily on fossil collecting. This meant long hours on the shore, often in cold and dangerous conditions. The cliffs around Lyme Regis are unstable, especially after storms and landslips. Yet those same landslips also exposed new fossils.

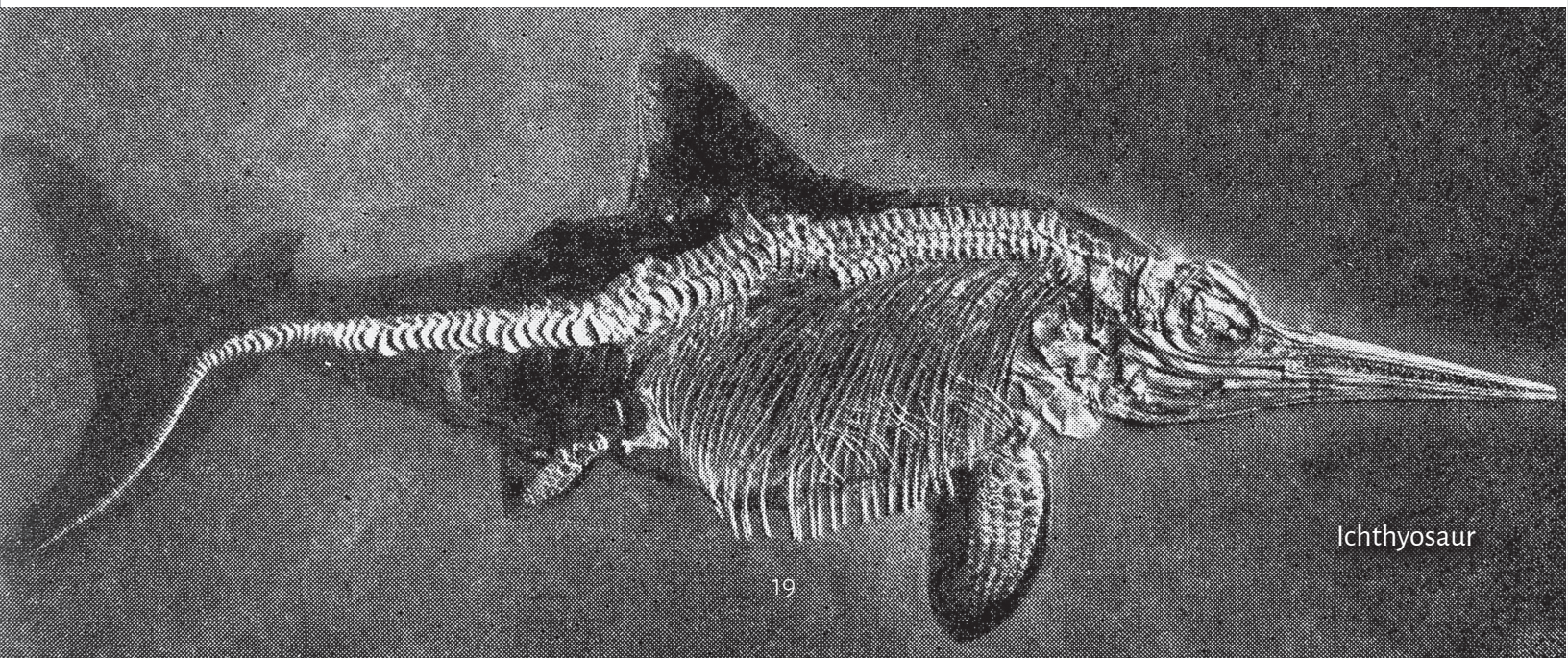
Anning became exceptionally good at reading the cliffs. She knew where to look, how to remove delicate specimens, and how to prepare them for sale or study. Her education was limited, but her practical understanding of fossils and anatomy became highly respected.

THE ICHTHYOSAUR DISCOVERY

One of Anning's earliest major finds came when she was still very young. Around 1811, her brother Joseph found part of a large skull, and Mary later uncovered much of the skeleton. The creature became known as an ichthyosaur, a marine reptile that lived in prehistoric seas.

This was an important moment. The skeleton was unlike ordinary animals known at the time. It resembled a fish in some ways, but also had reptilian features. For scientists, it raised difficult questions. What was this creature? When had it lived? Why was it no longer alive?

The ichthyosaur was not the first fossil of its kind ever found, but it was one of the first to be studied seriously. It helped bring attention to the idea that strange and extinct animals had once inhabited the Earth.



Ichthyosaur



Plesiosaur Skeleton

PLESIOSAURS, PTEROSAURS AND OTHER FINDS

Anning's later discoveries were just as important. In the 1820s she found a near-complete plesiosaur, another marine reptile with a small head, long neck and broad body.

The specimen was so unusual that some experts initially doubted whether it could be genuine. It was.

She also found a pterosaur, a flying reptile. This was the first pterosaur skeleton discovered outside Germany.

Along with these major finds, Anning collected fossil fish, ammonites, belemnites and other specimens from the Lyme Regis cliffs.

Her work extended beyond simply finding fossils. She understood how bones fitted together and could identify details that others missed.

She also recognised the importance of coprolites, now understood as fossilised faeces. This may sound unglamorous, but it helped scientists learn more about the diets and habits of prehistoric animals.

A WORKING WOMAN IN A MALE SCIENTIFIC WORLD

Despite her achievements, Anning faced major barriers. She was a woman, working class and not university educated.

In early 19th-century Britain, scientific societies were dominated by men. Women were largely excluded from formal membership and from the public recognition that came with it.

Many educated geologists and collectors bought specimens from Anning, corresponded with her or visited her in Lyme Regis. Her fossils informed the work of men who became better known than she did. Some acknowledged her expertise; others benefited from it without giving her full credit.

Anning sold fossils to survive, not to build a comfortable fortune. Her income was uncertain, depending on finds, buyers and weather. A dangerous winter could be both a threat and an opportunity, as storms loosened the cliffs and exposed new material.



Mary's Statue In Lyme Regis

RECOGNITION AND LEGACY

Mary Anning died in 1847, aged only 47. By then she was respected by many who knew her work, but she had not received the full recognition her discoveries deserved.

That has changed considerably over time.

Today, Anning is regarded as one of the most important figures in the early history of palaeontology. Her discoveries helped demonstrate that the Earth had a deep past populated by creatures very different from those alive today.

They also contributed to changing ideas about extinction, geology and the long history of life.

Lyme Regis remains closely associated with her. The town's museum stands on the site of her former home and fossil shop, and the cliffs where she worked are still visited by fossil hunters.



Plaque At Mary's Birthplace

Her story is especially powerful because it combines scientific achievement with personal determination. She had no formal position, little money and few of the privileges enjoyed by the gentlemen scientists of her time. Yet her eye, knowledge and persistence helped alter how people understood the natural world.

Mary Anning's life is a reminder that science is not only made in universities and grand institutions. Sometimes it begins on a beach, in bad weather, with someone who knows exactly where to look.

Quiz Answers: 1. Dorset and Devon; 2. About 95 miles; 3. UNESCO World Heritage Site status; 4. Lyme Regis; 5. An ichthyosaur; 6. Durdle Door; 7. Chesil Beach; 8. Lyme Regis; 9. Broadchurch; 10. Old Harry Rocks; 11. Portland Bill Lighthouse; 12. St Paul's Cathedral; 13. Lulworth Cove; 14. Charmouth; 15. Around 185 million years; 16. Jane Austen; 17. Shingle; 18. Henry VIII; 19. Exmouth; 20. Because its cliffs and rocks reveal a long sequence of geological history, including fossils from the Triassic, Jurassic and Cretaceous periods.



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