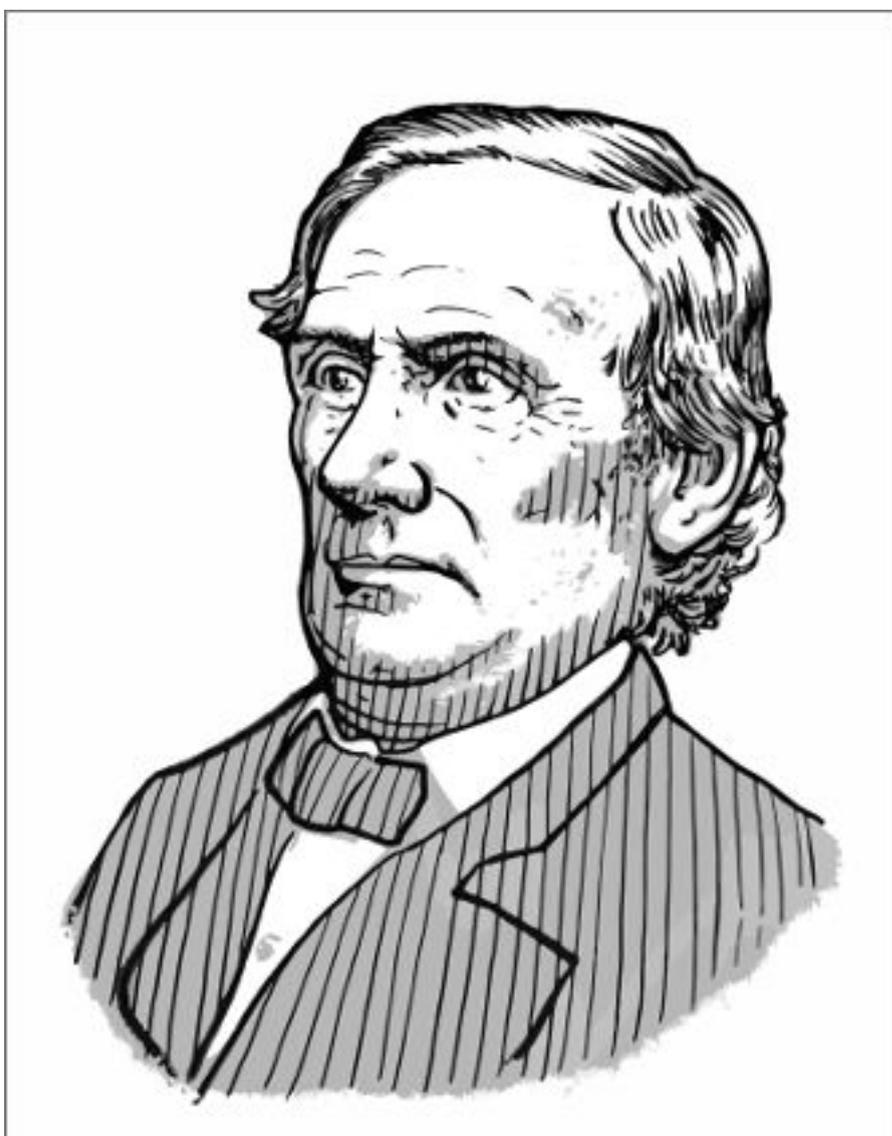


— ISLE OF WIGHT —  
**HIDDEN  
HEROES**

**Primary School Education Resource**

**Rev William D Fox (1813-1881) - The Dragon Hunter from Brightstone**



## Who was Fox?

The Reverend William D Fox was an influential amateur fossil hunter and collector, who worked as a curate at Brightstone, Isle of Wight, in the late 19th Century. He is credited with being the Englishman who has the most dinosaurs named after him, and discovered more species than any other person in England.

## What did Fox do?

Fox arrived on the Isle of Wight in 1862 aged 43 to assist the local vicar of St Mary the Virgin church in Brightstone (known as Brixton at the time).

During his life on the Island he cultivated a passion for collecting dinosaur fossils while out on regular walks and rides on a donkey, along the beaches of West Wight, including Brightstone Bay. He collected many important fossils, some that were new species.

Fox died on the Island and is buried in the graveyard at St Mary's Church, Brightstone. There was no doubt about Fox's passion for palaeontology during the first golden age of fossil collecting. The vicar's wife said of him, 'It was always the bones first and the parish next'

Fox wasn't a professional scientist with no formal training, but he was a passionate and knowledgeable amateur fossil hunter.

His daily excursions along the cliff paths and beaches of West Wight, including Brightstone and Brook bays, Barnes Chine and Cowleaze Chine, yielded many significant new fossil finds, and many of his discoveries were named after him including:

- Polacanthus foxii (a spiky-backed, armoured herbivore)
- Aristosuchus (meaning 'superior crocodile', a small bipedal carnivore)
- Hypsilophodon foxii (a fast, bipedal herbivore with a sharp beak).
- Eucamerotus foxii.
- Calamosaurus foxii.



Iguanodon bones © Isle of Wight Council

### **Be careful - there's another Fox!**

Rev William D Fox is often confused with another man who lived and worked on the Isle of Wight at the same time called William Darwin Fox, who was also a clergyman. He was the second cousin of Charles Darwin, but was not, it seemed, interested in dinosaur fossils.

### **An Example of Foxes Contribution to Science**

An example of the contribution Fox made to the science of palaeontology can be seen in the discovery of a small plant eating dinosaur on the south coast of the Island. *Hypsilophodon* was found initially by workmen at Cowleaze Chine, and was presumed to be a juvenile *Iguanodon*. When Fox found another specimen he realized it must be an adult. He wrote to Professor Richard Owen, at the British Museum in London, raising the concern that there were significant differences in the skeletons, and speculated that they might be a new species of small *Iguanodon*. However, Thomas Huxley recognised it to belong to a new genus, which he called *Hypsilophodon* in 1869 and named it *H. foxii* in 1870. Fox's collection was acquired by the British Museum (Natural History) in 1882, after his death in 1882.

### **Why is Fox a Hidden Hero?**

- Rev William D Fox's amateur contribution to palaeontology is very special. He discovered more species of dinosaur than anybody else in the UK and has more dinosaurs named after him than any other Englishman.
- In his day he corresponded and helped inform many great scientists of the day, including John Hulke (geologist and fossil collector who described and studied many of Fox's finds)

and Richard Owen (who first coined the name Dinosauria, meaning 'Terrible Reptile' or 'Fearfully Great Reptile', which led to the use of the word dinosaur).

- His legacy of fossil collecting, over 1000 fossils, were sold to the British Museum, now called the Natural History Museum and are still used today for study and reference.
- The Isle of Wight has always been recognised as one of the best places in Europe to find dinosaur bones because of its diverse geology and abundance of fossils. Fox was the first to discover several new species of dinosaur fossils (around 120 million years old) and some are unique to the Isle of Wight
- Fox showed the importance of amateur fossil hunting and collecting which is still important now and accessible to all — amazing new fossil discoveries are being found every day on the Isle of Wight.

## **Fox Timeline**

**1813** - Reverend William D Fox was born in Cumberland.

**1829** - William Buckland, cleric, geologist and palaeontologist, is the first person to describe a fossil named Megalosaurus meaning 'Great Lizard' - the word dinosaur wasn't invented yet.

**1842** - The term dinosaur (dinosauria from the Greek meaning 'terrible lizard') was first invented by the palaeontologist Richard Owen.

**1862** - Fox moved to the Isle of Wight aged 43 to help the vicar at Brightstone, Isle of Wight. He lived at Myrtle Cottage, North Street in Brightstone.

**1867** - Fox resigned his post as curate at Brightstone, but continued to look for fossils in the area.

**1875** - Fox moved to become curate of Kingstone, near Shorwell, Isle of Wight.

**1881** - Fox died.

**1882** - Fox's collection of over 1000 fossil specimens is acquired by what would later become The Natural History Museum.

## **Educational Resources**

### **School Trips**

### **Visit Dinosaur Isle**

Visit Dinosaur Isle and discover more about Fox, palaeontology and fossils and dinosaurs discovered on the Isle of Wight.

### **Visit the place Fox lived**

The Church of St Mary the Virgin, Myrtle Cottage and Brightstone Museum (in North Street) are all in Brightstone village centre. Parking is available in Warnes Lane Car-Park.

Walk around the Fox Trail in Brightstone: [Link to map](http://www.dinosaurisle.com/documents/RevFoxTrail-map.pdf)  
(<http://www.dinosaurisle.com/documents/RevFoxTrail-map.pdf>)

### **Fossil Hunting**

Book a school fossil hunting trip with local experts from Dinosaur Isle. Visit Isle of Wight beaches including Yaverland, Compton Bay, Brightstone Bay (accessed via Shepherds Chine).

Dinosaur Isle  
Culver Parade  
Sandown  
Isle of Wight  
PO36 8QA

01983 404344

### **Ideas for Incorporating Fox into the Classroom**

Fox and other Hidden Heroes can link into many areas of the [National Curriculum](#), including history, geography, design and technology, computing and art and design.

Below is a breakdown of subject areas and content quoted from the National Curriculum where it might be appropriate for Fox, plus some ideas for study:

#### **History**

Although Fox is not internationally well-known, he played a significant part in the development of palaeontology, and his collection of fossils is still studied today. Fox came to the Island only 3 years after Charles Darwin's *Origin of the Species* was first published and his detailed notes and articles to scientific magazines helped influence many people during the true golden age of fossil hunting during the late 19th century.

Link to [National Curriculum for history](#).

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/national-curriculum-in-england-history-programmes-of-study/national-curriculum-in-england-history-programmes-of-study>

## Ideas:

- Research Fox and create a magazine article imagining how you would describe one of the fossils he found.
- Study Fox to show how his work influenced other palaeontologists and scientists of the time such as Richard Owen and Charles Darwin. What other scientists knew him and came to the Isle of Wight to study fossils?

## Geography

The Isle of Wight has always been recognised as one of the best places in Europe to find dinosaur bones because of its geology and abundance of fossils, plus the constant erosion of the cliffs revealing new dinosaur bones every year. Fox was the first to discover several new species of dinosaur fossils and some are unique to the Isle of Wight.

Link to [National Curriculum for geography](#).

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/national-curriculum-in-england-geography-programmes-of-study/national-curriculum-in-england-geography-programmes-of-study>

## Ideas:

- Create a map of Fox's regular circular walk from Brightstone village along the beach and back to the church, creating a key, compass directions, and adding dinosaurs along the trail.
- Visit a West Wight beach for fossil hunting. How have the cliffs changed over time? Why are the West Wight beaches particularly good for dinosaur fossil hunting?

## Art

Nobody really knows what the dinosaurs looked like, but we can ascertain much from their bones and in making comparisons with animals alive today such as birds. Many illustrators have imagined what dinosaurs look like. On the Isle of Wight we have our own: John Sibbick a professional illustrator who has illustrated many dinosaur books in his time, including Iguanodon and Neovenator. He was even commissioned by the Royal Mail to make dinosaur-themed stamps. His illustrations are detailed and colourful and some of his work is on show at Dinosaur Isle in Sandown.

Link to [National Curriculum for Art and Design](#)

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/national-curriculum-in-england-art-and-design-programmes-of-study/national-curriculum-in-england-art-and-design-programmes-of-study>

## Ideas:

- Visit the dinosaur footprints at Hanover Point, near Compton Bay (which is managed by the National Trust) to see the amazing Iguanodon footprints on the beach, the forest of fossilised trees at low tide and various fossils in the rocks. Make your own dinosaur footprints on the sand and take photos, or back in the classroom make your own dinosaur footprints out of clay.
- Visit Dinosaur Isle Museum and see John Sibbick's work. Use Google and the library to find dinosaur books he has illustrated. Look at some fossil skeletons and then imagine what the skin of the dinosaur looked like, horns, eyes, teeth, feathers, colours? Make some dinosaur art from all your research.

## Website Links

- IW Hidden Heroes: <https://iwhiddenheroes.org.uk/rev-william-fox/>
- Wikipedia on Fox: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/William\\_Fox\\_\(palaeontologist\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/William_Fox_(palaeontologist))
- Dinosaur Island (Sandown): <http://www.dinosaurisle.com>
- Dinosaurs of the Isle of Wight Wikipedia: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dinosaurs\\_of\\_the\\_Isle\\_of\\_Wight](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dinosaurs_of_the_Isle_of_Wight)
- National Trust website for Compton Bay/Hanover Point: <https://www.nationaltrust.org.uk/compton-bay-and-downs/features/searching-for-fossils-around-compton-bay>
- Great fossil website with details of many Island beaches - UK Fossils Network: <https://ukfossils.co.uk/category/isle-of-wight/>

## Books/Research

- Blows, W.T. 1983. William Fox (1813-1881), a neglected dinosaur collector of the Isle of Wight. Archives of Natural History. 11, 299-313.
- Daisy and the Isle of Wight Dragon by Martin Simpson (ISBN: 978-0952211822).
- Dinosaurs of the Isle of Wight by David M. Martill and Darren Naish (ISBN: 9780901702722).
- Jack and Boo's Dinosaur Island by Philip and Eleanor Bell (ISBN: 9780956298034).
- Remarkable Islanders - Ripping Yarns by Ian Williams (ISBN: 9781899392476).

- Diamond Coast - The Story of the Isle of Wight Coast by Ian Williams (ISBN: 9781904349150).
- The Complete Dinosaur by James Orville Farlow, M. K. Brett-Surman (ISBN: 978-0253357014).
- My Favourite Dinosaurs by John Sibbick (ISBN: 9781596875173).