

## The Model House

The Museum was a beautiful Victorian building in the old part of Lyme Regis, built in 1901 on the site of Mary Anning's former home.

The feet of visitors brought in sand, Blue Lias mud (from hopeful fossil hunting expeditions) and dirt from the streets and beaches. The building itself was more than capable of generating its own dust, without the coastal contributions that people trod in.

The cleaner swept the floor every morning, paying little attention to the exhibits, apart from the model of Mary Anning's house. That was always in her line of vision as she turned the corner of the floor with her brush and where she chose to pile up the debris swept up from the previous day.

It was a sweet little replica of the famous fossil hunter's house, but it lacked any real signs of being lived in, no peeling paint, leaking gutters or curtains, but there were, she noticed, a few muddy splodges on the steps to the front door. 'How clever of the model maker to put those there' she thought to herself. As she was a little obsessive about cleanliness, she did long to give those steps a bit of a scrub, but as the house was encased in glass, it was out of her reach. She bent to sweep up the pile of dried Blue Lias mud and sand from the museum floor into her pan and for a moment, she thought she saw something move behind the window of the house. The instant was quickly dismissed from her thoughts as she concentrated on the task in hand, after all, heavy rain always played tricks with the light coming in through the stained glass windows.

The following morning, once she'd whisked up the debris pile, she noticed what appeared to be a little trail of wet Blue Lias mud just beneath the little house. Little drying up drips, almost like footprints in minute form. With a damp cloth she wiped them up, following the trail to the little house and thought nothing more of it. Her job done, she focused on her day ahead, her shopping, getting something a bit special for lunch and hopefully catching up on some emails to family and friends.

In the evening, once the museum had closed for the day, she would return to wipe down the display cabinets as she did every Thursday, before locking up the building for the night. There was something so satisfying about polishing the wood back to its natural warm sheen and buffing the glass to the point of it becoming invisible.

On Friday, just after opening time, she popped in to the museum to pick up her pay. It was unusual for so many staff to be in there at that time on a Friday. She found the curator, along with other staff and volunteers, staring into one of the locked display cases, with baffled looks being shared between them. No one recalled that cluster of tiny ammonites being in that case before, they certainly weren't catalogued or labelled and they still had traces of sticky Lias mud on them.

Her eyes were drawn not to the ammonites, but to the smears of Blue Lias sticking to the wood and the lock of the display case, smears dulling the glass at the very edges. Later, she would make sure that she wiped that down again, even though she was absolutely certain that she had left the display case polished and pristine the evening before.

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