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Coprolite Mining

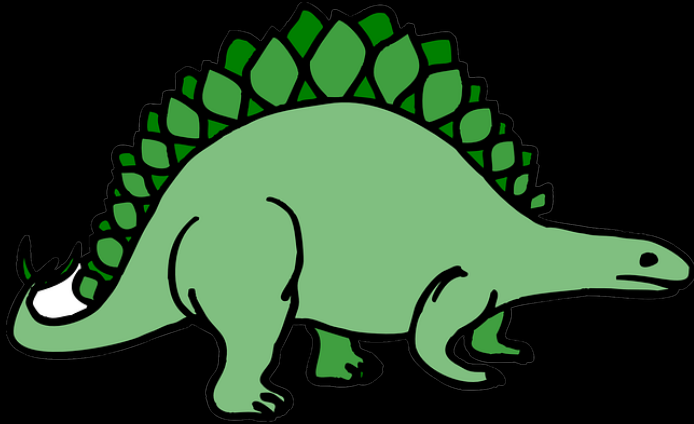
A woman in a floral shirt is on the left, and a man is on the right, looking through a microscope. A microphone is positioned between them. The background is a light blue gradient.

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Coprolite Mining on Coldham's Common



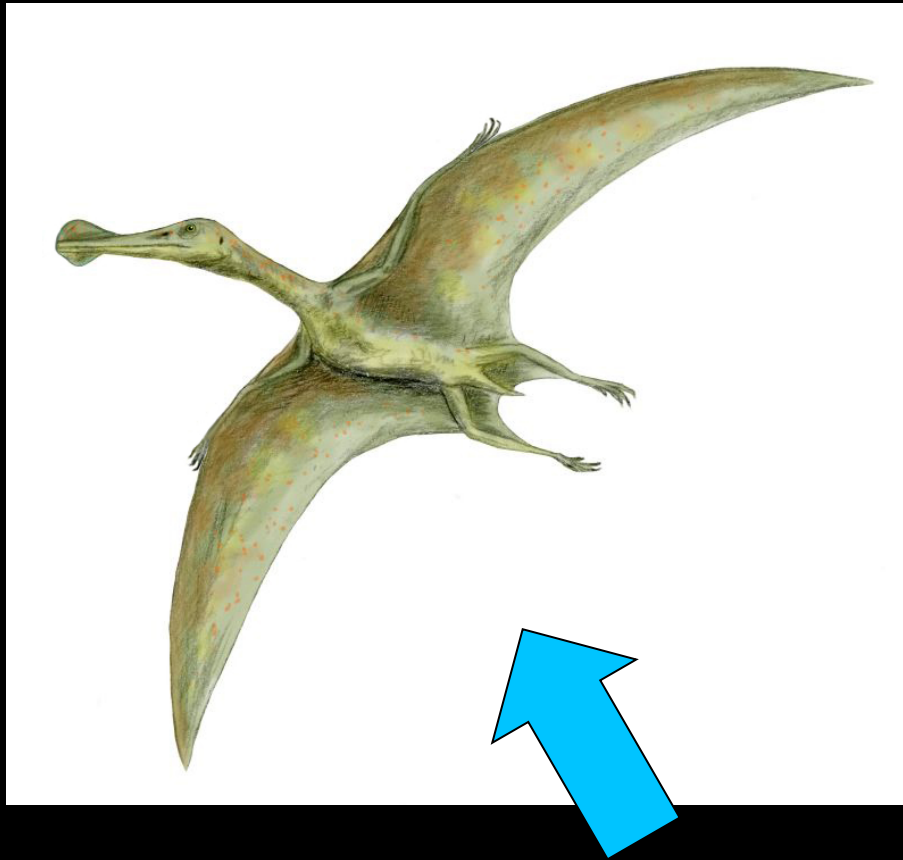
Little did the dinos and pterosaurs know that their poo would come in handy for us humans millions of years later!

110 million years ago, when dinosaurs roamed the earth, South East England became a communal toilet on which tons of dinosaur and pterosaur (flying reptile) dung was dumped!

It wasn't until the 19th century that we discovered the little presents the dinos and pterosaurs (flying reptiles) had left us buried just underneath the earth in and around Cambridge, including Coldham's Common!

Their poo was one of the most in-demand poos around, meaning that the dinosaurs and pterosaurs were able to power an entire industry and fertilise thousands of crops with their fossilised poo- called coprolite!

Poo of Pterosaurs Found in Cambridge Greensand



The fossilised poo of an Ornithocheirus (a type of Pterosaur) were found in the Cambridge Greensand in the late 19th Century.

This animal would have lived and flown around Cambridge!

Isn't it amazing to imagine that if we went back in at time machine to millions of years ago a flying reptile would have been soaring above our heads!

So who discovered this fossilised poo in Cambridge?!



FACTOID!

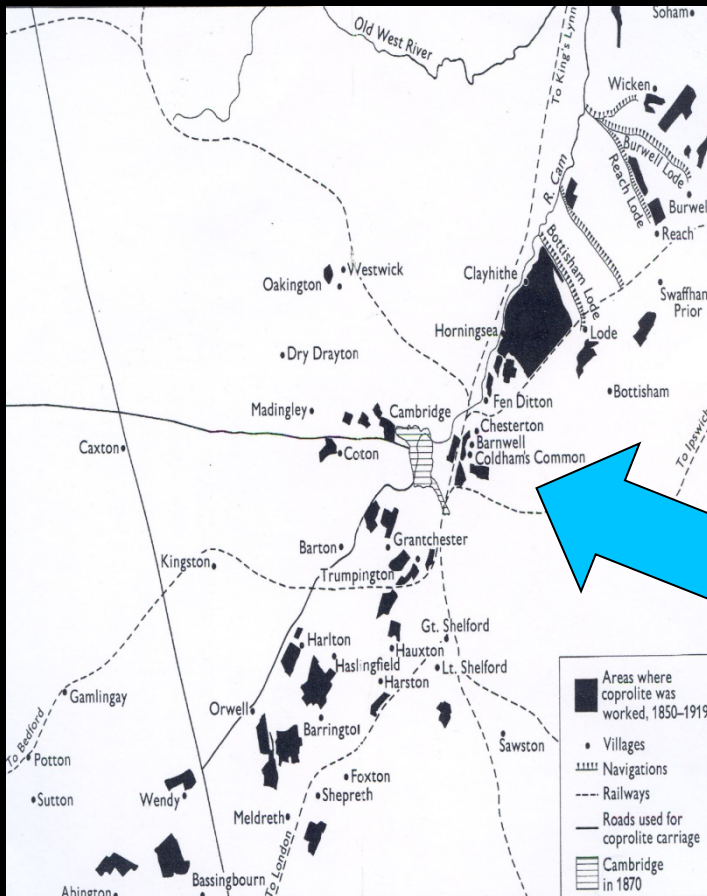
It was actually the workers in the brick fields between Chesterton Road and Victoria Road who first discovered coprolite in Cambridge.

They often complained about the inconvenience caused when bricks containing coprolite would explode in the furnaces during the heating process!

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Where Were the Coprolite Mines in the Cambridge area?



There were many coprolite mines in and around Cambridge in the late 19th Century.

Can you see all the black areas on the map? That's where all the coprolite was found- there was quite a lot of it!

Can you spot the Coldham's Common Mines on the map?

Coldham's Common Coprolite Mines



Then



Now

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The Cambridgeshire Coprolite Mining Rush!



It was discovered that this fossilised dinosaur/flying reptile poo (coprolite) could actually be quite useful, as it's properties meant it was an extremely rich fertiliser for growing crops.

One of the first places where coprolite was discovered was on Coldham's Common and soon after its discovery, the "Cambridgeshire Coprolite Mining Rush" began.

But between the 1850s and the 1890s they used up all the coprolite supplies on Coldham's Common so the industry stopped there.

Coprolite Pit in Orwell, near Cambridge

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We Need More Fertiliser!



Figure 8. Coprolite diggings at Trumpington, Cambridge, during World War I, with an early dragline in the background (photo: Cambridgeshire Collections).

Coprolite mining also started again in WW1 at other mines around Cambridge due to a shortage of other fertilisers.

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As the population grew in the early 19th Century farmers needed fertilisers to help them grow more crops, to meet the needs of the country.

Supplies of bone and other fertilisers became couldn't keep up with England's demand, so farmers began turning to the newly discovered fossilised dinosaur/ flying reptile poo to help their crops grow!

FACTOID!

Bones were imported to England from all around the world to be used as fertiliser, such was the demand for it that people even turned to digging up bones from the battlefields!

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Steam Locomotive Pulling Coprolite. Station near to Coldham's Common was Barnwell Junction



As steam was the technology of the time, steam trains would transport the coprolite away from the mines, which was then sold to farmers not only from all over Britain but also overseas to countries in Queen Victoria's Empire like Australia!

Totally Devoted to Poo!



FACTOID!

An entrepreneur John Bennet Lawes was so excited by his new company 'Lawes Chemical Manure Company' that he took his wife to the Thames to look for potential factory sites instead of taking her to Europe for their honeymoon!

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Coldham's Common by Michael Rosen

To watch the film of Michael performing the poem on Coldham's Common visit:
<https://vimeo.com/167581593>

The years pass
and the grass grows,
the grass grows over
the years disappear...

Underground
clues are found.
Listen! And we can hear
across a hundred million years...

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The sound of the sea
where now there's a tree;
giant lizards in the sky
wide wings take them high
swooping on fish in the waves
gliding over rocks and caves
flapping and stopping
leaving their droppings
for millions of years
right here, just here.



The years pass
and the grass grows,
the grass grows over
the years disappear.

What were droppings and bone
turn to stone
deep down, day and night
silent, slow, out of sight
vast beyond measure
a secret treasure
deep in the ground
waiting to be found.

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Up above people come and go
their pigs and cows moving slow
free to graze upon the ground
until a Lord puts fences round:
nowhere for the pigs and cows,
and with the people starving now
one Jack o' the Style leads a revolt
with a hundred others they call a halt
break the fences and burst back through
with pigs and cows, their hens and ewes.



The years pass
and the grass grows,
the grass grows over
the years disappear.

One John Ball from Burnell way
beneath the grass, said there lay
some sort o' magical stuff
the which - if ye had enough,
mixed it right, made it just so,
it'd make any plant grow
and in a matter of just a few years
thousands came and dug right here.



Very few knew that all the while
they were free to do so, 'cos of Jack o' the Style
very few knew that the reason why
was down to lizards in the sky
for millions of years, leaving behind
what many years later, others would find.

The years pass
and the grass grows,
the grass grows over
the years disappear
and here we are:
we stand right here.

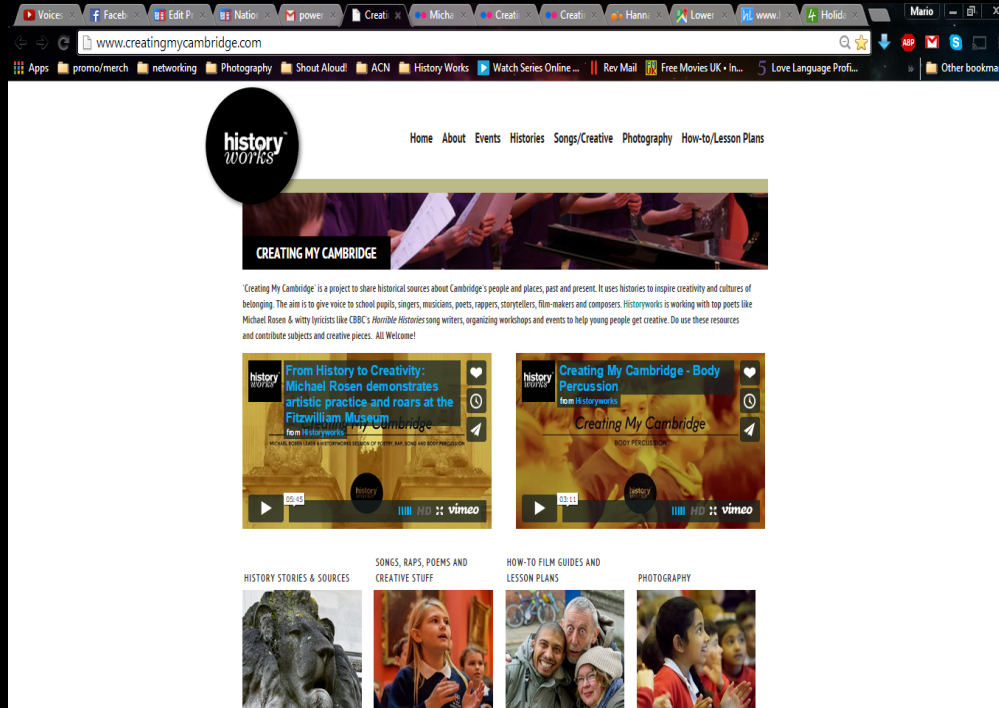
The background of the top section shows two people from the chest up. On the left, a person is wearing a green and red floral patterned shirt. On the right, a person with dark hair is leaning forward, looking at a screen. A black microphone is positioned between them, pointing towards the center. The entire scene is dimly lit, with the primary light source coming from the screen they are looking at.

Pterosaur Poo by Michael Rosen

Pterosaur poo, Pterosaur poo.
Thousands found it. Didn't know what to do!
Pterosaur poo, Pterosaur poo,
Made of stone. Too hard to chew.
Ptesosaur poo, Pterosaur poo.
Near to where, the cows go moo.
Pterosaur poo. Pterosaur poo.
Now it's ancient. Once it was new.
Pterosaur poo. Pterosaur poo.
Thousands came. Did they queue?
Pterosaur poo. Pterosaur poo.
In a poem by you know who!

Web Resources available at:

<http://www.creatingmycambridge.com/history-stories/>



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