

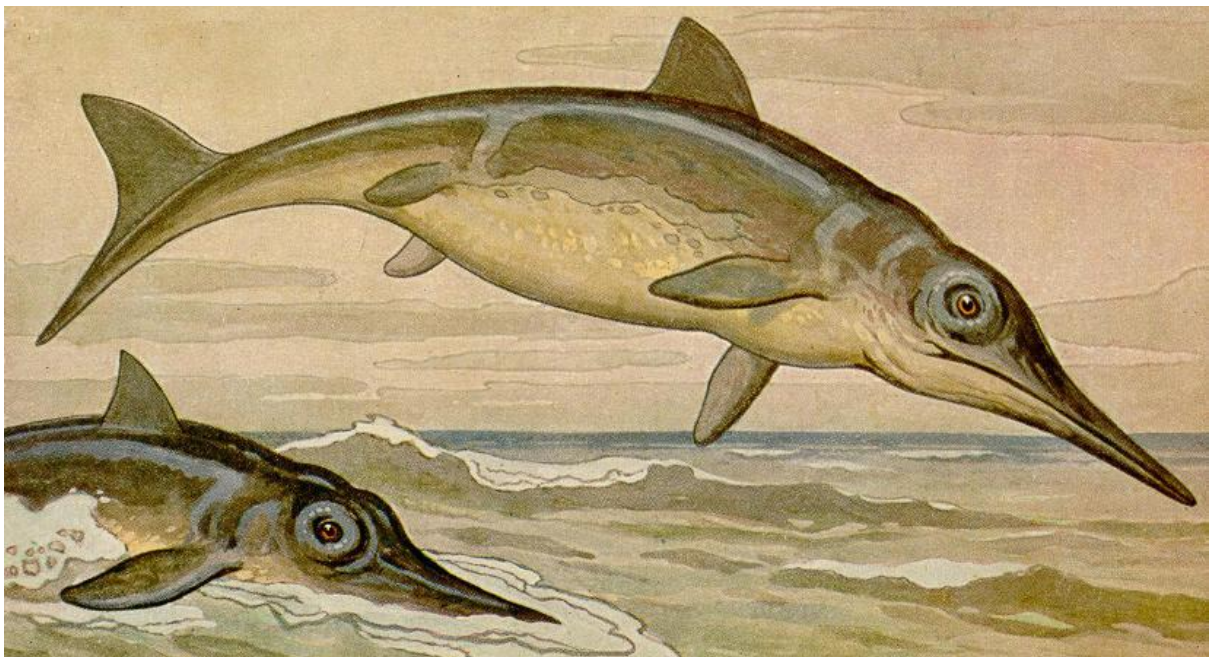
Jonah Rolph and the Ichthyosaur.

Ichthyosaur – an extinct marine reptile.

Fossilised back-bone of a pre-historic reptile found on Lakenheath Fen.

On 25th June 2020 the Heritage Group received confirmation from Julie Curl, osteologist, that two fossils which had come into our possession were part of the vertebra of an ****Ichthyosaur**; a large extinct marine reptile which lived in the Mesozoic era between 250 and 90 million years ago. *Then the climate was hot and steamy, with large swampy seas and river deltas where giant ferns grew. During the Mesozoic era life diversified and dinosaurs, reptiles, and insects predominated. Such mammals as existed were small and looked rather like shrews. During this time seas became larger and islands were formed. This is the environment which ichthyosaurs inhabited.

**livescience.com*



Google wikimedia public domain illustration of an ichthyosaur by Heinrich Harder.



Two sections of the vertebra of the Ichthyosaur. Donated by Prof. Ray Bonnett.

**The reptile ate fish and squid and could have eyes the size of a football (10" dia.) which aided sight in deep water. A complete fossil found in 1898 was 85 ft. long and clearly a fast swimmer capable of 24 mph. By comparison a professional swimmer can swim at 6 mph.

**The Natural History Museum.

Jonah Rolph. 1868-1940.

In 1924 Jonah, a well-known resident in the village, acted for the Commissioners of Lakenheath and Brandon Great and Little Fen as the Fen Rate collector in addition to being a farmer. One of his duties was the regular inspection of dykes, ditches, staunches and wind-powered pumps which controlled the water levels on the Fen. He was responsible for the bringing of legal action against non-payers of the Fen Rate.

As a young man he was apprenticed to a wheelwright but an accident prevented him from completing the apprenticeship. *In 1892 he seems to have been part of a vocal trio with Emma Rolph (later head of the Infants Dept at Lakenheath School), and HH (*His Highness*) Frederick Duleep Singh, son of HH Prince Duleep Singh of Elveden. *The Bury Free Press reported an occasion when the trio entertained the somewhat strangely named ***'Primrose League' at the 'Mildenhall and Icklingham Habitation of The Primrose League'.

***The League had been formed to attract potential new Conservative supporters through wide ranging social activities. (A forerunner of the Young Conservatives perhaps)?*

**Bury and Norwich Post August 16, 1892. ** Wikipedia.*

Jonah had an interest in natural history and paid farm labourers to bring him 'objects' such as Neolithic flint tools found in fields and on the Fen and this is how the fossils were discovered. We think that the fossilised backbone found on Lakenheath Fen came into Jonah's possession at some time in the 1920's-30's.

Between the mid 1920's and his death Jonah lived at Crescent House, a farm which was on the north west side of the High Street down a narrow track which now leads to a modern bungalow. It was here that the farmers came to pay the Fen Rate.

The announcement of his death in October 1940 in the ***Bury Free Post gave more interesting information: he had become famous in wild-fowling circles for the wooden duck decoys he made which were said to be highly realistic.

****Bury Press and Post 24 Oct. 1940*

Jonah was the husband of Emily Annie, née Pickworth, sister of Dr. Pickworth, who was the village doctor from 1884 to 1926. Doris Ditchburn, whose memories have been so useful to us, was Jonah and Emily Annie's daughter.

The fossilised vertebra came into the possession of Capt., later Major Popay, (there is a memorial window to him in St. Mary's), and later still into the possession of Doris Ditchburn who gave them to her nephew, Prof. Ray Bonnett, the grandson of Jonah and Emily Annie. Ray has donated the fossilised vertebra to the Heritage Group.