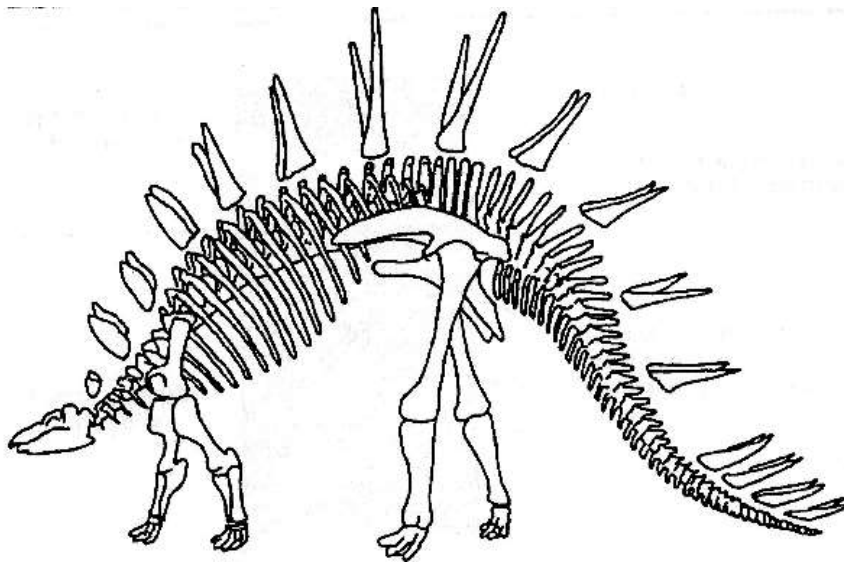


Hooky's Dinosaur

Millions of years ago dinosaurs trod the earth of Hook Norton. This part of central England was then a coastal area. Large numbers of small seas and lakes were depositing the Jurassic sediments of 150-200 million years ago which have now become the layers of ironstone, limestone and clay on top of which we live. Of the many fossilised remains they reveal, perhaps the most interesting is a ferocious-looking dinosaur unearthed in a quarry in Hook Norton parish nearly thirty years ago.



Preliminary Reconstruction of the Stegosaur

From Terra Nova, vol. 4 (1992), page 628

The geologist E.A. Wolford made the first recorded discovery near Traitor's Ford in the late nineteenth century, a bone which was identified as an anterior dorsal vertebra, which is part of the spine. In the twentieth century, various finds were made; one, of the cervical centrum (the chunky body of a neck vertebra), by David Oliver of Headington was donated to the Oxford University Museum of Natural History. Hook Norton's own polymath, Percy Hackling, also discovered bones there and encouraged fuller scientific exploration. In 1987 Brian Boneham, a mature student from the University of Northampton, made a chance discovery of another dorsal vertebra; two years later he organised a team to use heavy equipment to dig down to the bones.

They found, jumbled up all together, vertebrae, ribs and tail spines, but no head. George Forsey, a lecturer in earth sciences at Northampton, identified the dinosaur as probably *Lexovisaurus? Vestutus*, which died out about the middle of the dinosaur period. It was an ancestor of the better-known and much larger *Stegosaurus Armatus* (Armoured Spine back or Plated Lizard) that existed later in North America, China and other parts of the world.

Lexovisaurus had a paired row of tall and narrow bony plates on its back with a tail bearing two pairs of bony spikes. Some experts think this subspecies also had two great spines or plates, up to a metre long, jutting out to the side from its shoulders, making formidable-looking weapons. This feature was not evident on the Hook Norton specimen, which was still formidable enough: it was probably about 7.5 metres long by 2.7 wide (25 feet by nine feet), or about the size of a standard single-decker bus. Almost certainly a vegetarian, the subspecies probably died out because of a period of prolonged drought.

Brian Boneham also organised deep drilling near Stonesfield, two miles west of Woodstock, in order to establish the historical order of the various strata in north Oxfordshire. From this it was established that the strata in which the dinosaur was found were laid down earlier than other strata which now, thanks to the folding of the earth over the millennia, lie deeper below sea level. From this Boneham was able to establish that the Hook Norton dinosaur lived (and died) about 175 million years ago. This date is much earlier than that of any other *Lexovisaurus* discovered so far, and has led to the suggestion that the stegosaurus species had its origins in the northern Cotswolds and later spread to China and the United States, where specimens of its descendants have been found in great numbers.

The bones are now housed in the Oxford University Museum of Natural History in Parks Road, but are not currently available for viewing. However, you can see in that museum the first fossil bones ever to be described as a dinosaur, and the resulting reconstruction; this *Megalosaurus* was found in 1824 twenty miles away near Stonesfield.

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To learn more about the background and context of this article, go to the Introduction to *Overviews* at the beginning of this section, or the Table of Contents in the *Gateway* which opens this website.