

Poole's early naturalists

Philip Henry Gosse – Father of the aquarium

Philip Henry Gosse (1810–1888), famed naturalist and inventor of the first seawater aquarium, lived in Poole between 1812 and 1827. Gosse wrote and illustrated a succession of books and articles on natural history, including marine life, birds and reptiles.

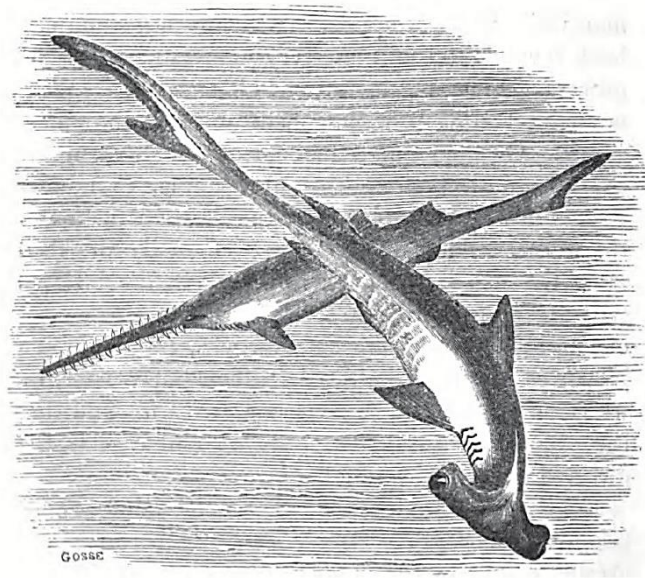
Gosse was born in Worcester on 6th April 1810. He spent his childhood living in Poole with his aunt Susan Bell, mother of Thomas Bell the famed surgeon, zoologist and writer, and later moved to Skinner Street, where he was a member of Poole Congregational Church.



Aged fifteen years Philip Henry Gosse began working for George Garland at his counting room in Poole before sailing to Newfoundland in 1827 to work as a clerk for Slade, Elson and Co. It was during his time working on Newfoundland that his passion for presenting natural history flourished and he caught, drew and wrote about the insects on the island.

Gosse described the sawfish's appearance in his 1849 publication 'The Ocean':

"Another singular deviation from the general structure is found in the Saw-fish (*Pristis antiquorum*) which is a shark with the head prolonged into a flat bony sword, each edge of which is armed with sharp bony spines, resembling teeth, pointing backwards: there are about twenty in each row. The body is also covered on the upper surface with hard tubercles, the points of which turn backwards. In this respect it resembles some of the Ray or Skate tribe, as does also its flattened form of its body, and in other respects."



In 1853 Gosse left his everlasting mark on the world and coined a term for something that you may have in your home. He created the first ever aquarium at London Zoo and began a craze in Victorian England that has lasted into the present day. His 1854 manual 'The Aquarium: An Unveiling of the Wonders of the Deep Sea' features the first ever use of the term aquarium.

Thomas Bell – Tortoise and turtle expert

Gosse's cousin, Thomas Bell (1792 – 1880), was born in Poole. He became a world leader in reptile zoology, even working to describe the reptile and crustacean specimens which Charles Darwin brought back to London after his expedition on the Beagle in the 1830s.



Bell was born in Poole on 11th October 1792 and lived with his mother Sally in Market Street (end house pictured). His publication [Monograph of Testudinata](#) was the world's leading publication on turtles and his book *British Stalk-eyed Crustacea* is still considered a masterpiece. When Charles Darwin returned to London from the *Beagle* expedition on 2 December 1836, Bell was tasked with examining and describing the reptile and crustacean specimens.

Thomas Bell helped pave the way for Darwin's theory of natural selection when he confirmed that the giant Galápagos tortoises were native to the islands, not brought in by buccaneers for food as Darwin had thought.

Bell was the President of the Linnean Society and chaired the meeting on 1st July 1858 when Darwin and Alfred Russel Wallace first published their theories on natural selection.