

find bits of the broken tentacles of Sea Lily Crinoids. And you can find all sorts of shells and bits of shell, some very like modern species, and some belonging to the now-near-extinct order of brachiopods, which look like bivalve molluscs, but are actually more closely related to worms.

One winter recently we found a total of 22 Ammonite and four Nautiloid species on and just under the Downs between Wilmington and Washington. Very often you just find fragments, but those small bits can still be enough to identify them. Sitting amongst the Bluebells in a tiny edge-of-Downland shaw this spring I casually picked up a frost-cracked lump of Grey Chalk. It was jam-packed with fossil Ammonite bits.

The more you look the more you find.

What is flint?

FLINT is formed of silica, a substance similar to glass, which is very common in nature. Indeed, perhaps 50% of the earth's crust is made up of it. Chalk deposits on the sea floor contained the remains of many silica-rich simple animals, such as Glass Sponges. Over time, this silica was redistributed after dissolving in the sea water, solidifying in places often associated with decaying animals, especially old burrows and shells.

There are regular bands of flint all through the White Chalk. In fact, in the old days, the White Chalk used to be called 'Chalk with Flints', to separate it from the Grey Chalk, which is largely free of these bands. Experts reckon that the regularity of the banding of flint and marl in the chalk is somehow related to long climatic cycles⁵ — called 'Milankovitch cycles' — caused by variations in the shape of the earth's orbit altering the amount of solar radiation reaching us. Very eerie and sci-fi!

The flint in our Downs is mostly black with a white skin, or cortex. Up in Yorkshire their flint is grey and more tabular. Sometimes the flint comes in different colours, such as dark red, like jasper. You

My Fossil Chalk Pit Lobster

Lorries and cars, trains and vans
Roar past, or chunder, halted for a jiffy.

Lights at night. Noise always.

Funny place to find a Lobster.

Six miles southwards the real sea lies,
With clanking dredgers and the
Haul of fishing's meagre pickings
— A haul to scarcely fill a few
Cold marble market slabs
Nowadays.

My Lobster's a survivor.

She's survived
NINETY FIVE MILLION YEARS
She has!

I see her in the cracked grey rock,
Her near-eternal hidey-hole.
I peer with eyeglass. Squint up close.

I see her spines and pincers black
Glossy and black as plain to see
As though she'd died but yesterday,

Not long before whole mountains reared -

Whole mountain chains from plain and
undersea
That reared and groaned and raised their
bulk

In time infinite s i m a l l y long,
While she lay still within her chalky tomb.

And now she lies within her broken home
Cupped in my hand.

I'm like a god, I think, to span such
God-like numbing tracts of time
In my mind-speeding wonder.

NINETY FIVE MILLION YEARS!!

Some gods we are!

Who make our own sea empty
And empty all the land
Of life except our own.

My Lobster's owned more of eternity
Than we will ever know.