

# The hippogriff's tusk



Anthony Buckeridge was a teacher at a boys' boarding school. At the end of the day he would sometimes make up bedtime stories for the boys and this was how he came to invent the character Jennings and his friend Darbshire. Jennings may have been based on a boy that the author remembered from his own schooldays.

For a fortnight, Jennings wrote his diary in a spare exercise book. He kept the entries short, as he planned to copy them all into his diary when at last it was returned to him. Even so, he soon began to despair of the task which lay ahead, because so much happened during the next fortnight that very soon he had filled up a dozen pages reporting the events of the day.

For it was during this time that the Form 3\* museum was founded. The enterprise started off in an atmosphere of unbounded optimism, as a result of an astonishing discovery made by Darbshire.

He was digging his patch of garden during break one morning, when he unearthed an object which he felt sure was the fang of a prehistoric monster. He called to Jennings who was weeding in an adjoining plot.

"Wow! I say, look what I've found ... A genuine hippogriff's tusk."

"A genuine *what?*" queried Jennings, looking with interest at the mouldering piece of bone that his friend was waving in the air.

"Well, it's either the tusk of a hippogriff, or some animal jolly like it."

"But there *is* no animal like it," Jennings pointed out.

"Not now, of course – that's what makes it so rare. Funny to think it's been lying in my vegetable patch since the Bronze Age."

They examined the 'find' carefully. When the mud had been wiped off with Darbshire's handkerchief, they found that the relic consisted of a four-inch length of discoloured ivory. At one end was a hole, which suggested that the original owner had been in the habit of sharpening his teeth on the Bronze Age rocks.

Jennings' recent visit to the Natural History Museum entitled him to speak as an expert on prehistoric animals and, after a few moments of frowning thought, he gave his opinion. The tusk had clearly belonged to some extinct monster, he decided: probably not a genuine hippogriff, as that species had never existed, except in legend. On the other hand, it might well have belonged to a *bogus* hippogriff. There was no doubt, he maintained, that the fang was well fossilised, slightly ossified and possibly a little petrified as well.

\*Form 3 at the time when this book was written (1955) is the same as today's Year 7

1 Jennings had to write his diary in an exercise book for (ring one):  
four days    seven days    10 days    14 days    30 days.

1 mark

2 What did the boys grow in their patches of garden?

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1 mark

3 What event qualified Jennings to take on the role of 'expert' on prehistoric animals?

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1 mark

4 Is a 'hippogriff' a real prehistoric animal or a mythical creature? Support your answer by quoting from the text.

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1 mark

5 What is the meaning of the word 'bogus'?

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1 mark

6 What did the boys use to clean their find?

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1 mark

7 Match each verb below to its correct definition by drawing a line to join them.

|              |  |
|--------------|--|
| to fossilise | to convert to bone   |
| to ossify    | to turn to stone   |
| to petrify   | to preserve in rock something that was once a living creature or plant |

3 marks

8 What explanation is offered for the fact that there is a hole in the artefact?

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1 mark

Review

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