



Parted Friends



Babbacombe Cliff Railway and crowded Oddicombe beach (PR4244)

Remembering Torbay's lost terracotta industry

In 2004, Torquay Museum acquired a statuette of a mournful boy with the help of the Art Fund and the V&A Purchase Grant Fund.

It was the top of the rage of terracotta wares produced in the town and a symbol to represent the industry in the museum.

The mournful boy, a statuette of a boy and his dead dog, more correctly known as 'Parted Friends' is part of a range of statuettes of figures and animals produced in the last quarter of the 19th century by the Torquay Terracotta Company.

The statuette is by George Halse who exhibited in various sculptural mediums at the Royal Academy between 1860-1885, the prototype was likely to have been a plaster model 'Parted Friends' which was exhibited in 1874.

In 1865, the discovery of fine terracotta clay during building work in the grounds of Watcombe House on the outskirts of Torquay, led to the formation of the Watcombe Terracotta Clay Company in 1869.

In 1875, the Torquay Terracotta Company Limited was established at Hele Cross as a rival to Watcombe.

BARRY CHANDLER

Torbay Museum

At this time the two companies competed in the same market of high-quality terracotta busts, statuettes, classical urns and vases, often enamelled and gilded, although the Torquay Terracotta Company probably produced wares to a higher standard.

A hand-written account of stock from January 1, 1878, held in the museum details the extent of the range of figures made by the company at this time, and includes at the top of the list 'Parted Friends' as the top of the range statuette.

A further pencil document from the same period outlines the production cost of the figure. As a top of the range item this piece would have only been manufactured in very small numbers with even fewer surviving to the present day, possibly five or less may still exist.

The figures produced in this period satisfied a demand that had been fuelled by the Great Exhibition of 1851.

It was the fashion for prosperity to be displayed through the

products of the manufacturing industry.

The middle classes liked their furniture, ornaments and everyday objects to be highly decorated and in the 1870s the vogue was for Neo-Classicism and Renaissance Revival.

The early Torquay pottery industries tapped into this and produced ornaments for the new middle classes and the elite of society.

This fashion was so strong that the Torquay Museum building itself displays Neo-Classical tympana of the 'arts' and 'nature' designed by John Philip (the architect famous for creating the Albert Memorial in London) probably made at the Watcombe Pottery Company.

The statuette joins a small range of figures made by the Torquay Terra-Cotta Company, held by the Museum, including figures of Raphael and Michelangelo. Its acquisition adds more depth to the Torquay Museum collection that aims to reflect the importance to the town of its local industries during its greatest period of growth in the late 19th century.

Parted Friends can be seen on permanent display in the museum entrance hall.



Southwest view of Oldway Mansion and visitors in the gardens in 1964 (PR24517)

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