

An engraving of Napoleon Bonaparte from Hester's collection

The discovery of a lost autograph collection

In 1986, work experience placement Joanne Porter, who was working on Torquay Museum's archives, made a chance discovery in a cupboard.

She alerted the curator's attention to 12 albums packed with letters. What she had discovered was Hester Forbes-Julian's autograph and letter collection which has been left to the museum in her will in 1934.

Will in 1934.

The society had almost certainly been overwhelmed with the task of documenting around 4,000 letters and put it safely away.

Unfortunately, they forgot it was there. Hester Pengelly was the youngest daughter of one of the museum founders, William Pengelly.

Her education at private schools in Torquay and at Cheltenham Ladies' College was followed by home studying with her father. VERONIKA VALIGURSKÁ

Toruay Museum

She was a member of the Geologists' Association, the Anthropological Institute, the Dante Society and other institutions. By the turn of the 20th century, Hester inherited a significant autograph collection of the rich and famous. Originally bound in 12 albums and numbering 1,500 items, the collection of signatures and letters also featured documents and portrait engravings.

and portrait engravings.

Through Hester's father's scientific connections, her own links with Torquay Natural History Society and her marriage to prominent metallurgist Henry Forbes Julian, a considerable number of items were subsequently added.

Hester would also take

advantage of Torquay being a popular holiday resort for the famous and frequently invited important members of society to accompany her for afternoon tea. Their replies, favourable or

Their replies, favourable or otherwise, became part of the collection.

Hester was to lose her husband Henry on the Titanic in 1912. Letters of condolence some from European royalty were discovered in the collection.

This discovery started what became a 13-year volunteer project to document, transcribe and scan the collection.

It includes letters from Jane Austen, John Keats, Charlotte Brontë, Abraham Lincoln, Nelson, Napoleon, Wellington, Gustavus Adolphus, Stanley, Livingstone, Scott and Shackleton, to name but a few.

Many of the letters have now been published, often in biographies.



Hester Pengelly

My dear Capendra

You must send your letters over five towns in

Justice before you and there, & them perhaps you may find therm

Jam now and wering as I do. I laughed at several parts of the one which
as interlaining as I do. I laughed at several parts of the one which
they memory, or he shall severe know what I will do to hom. The
Ball at Thompshift is this severe know what I will not be horn. The
they caves are different between home to get him a severement to
the caves are different between home to get him, a fearment to
the strong way, to onay herefore we expect to gething a practice of a
world. I believe to the total some fraction. William, a fraction of
benefit, for which to for all other series ends which I among were have
led your. I now humbly ask your parton. Migabout is weary
will about my writing thereon to as a presufferent for her. I
would insent upon always writing out all himse in future, if I
would insent upon always writing out all himse in future, if I
would be hear that ledwines is prome to me. I am at the solding
Joan at any broke from of his provent to a one. I am at the level
we while satten cap to ingle to have to a one. I am at the speca,
which was to the all the parties all; I som to mean a Manna.
I cover cap visited to have of his provent to a one. I am at the speca,
which satten cap to a all the parties all; I som to mean a Manna.
I he loady one of his able the parties who the dissending such
the loady one of his present of salls. Shate dissending such
the land, the fine able the parties of the to grape what it is like.
I have glower the seedful chooks of Manthamaking much
there was which you always to the one said way wall, the her appearance of the ware want of the fine of the may
there was a which you always to the some said way would, the may

A piece from Hester's Collection