

Mesmerised by sirens of the sea singing



Follow the Torbay-based 'The Seal Project' on Facebook

Obviously, we are blessed to live so close to a beautiful coastline and it's no great surprise to discover that some of the best local wildlife experiences involves sea creatures.

Recently, I wrote about dolphin watching and this week I would like to talk about seals - grey seals to be precise.

I've spotted seals on numerous occasions around the area. Down at Preston beach was a particularly memorable occasion; on an autumnal high tide, with people hurrying along the front desperately trying to avoid getting drenched by the pounding waves, I suddenly spotted a head pop up, unbelievably close to the protective sea wall.

He bobbed up and down, spy-hopping, curiously watching the coming and goings of the humans onshore.

Another time I spotted an equally curious seal was close to Paignton's Harbour Light restaurant. Once again, this animal seemed fascinated by the humans passing obliviously by.

And, of course, there's Brixham's famous 'Sammy the Seal' who could often be spotted lounging near the Brixham Marina office.

It has to be said that most of my sightings have come about in the autumn and spring, however recently we visited Brownstone Battery not far from Coleton

Nature Notes

With Lee Connor



Fishacre and this was where I heard, for the very first time, grey seals 'singing'!

This is something I had often read about but never actually experienced.

As we approached the World War Two defences, over and over again wafted a low mournful sound that sounded quite eerie.

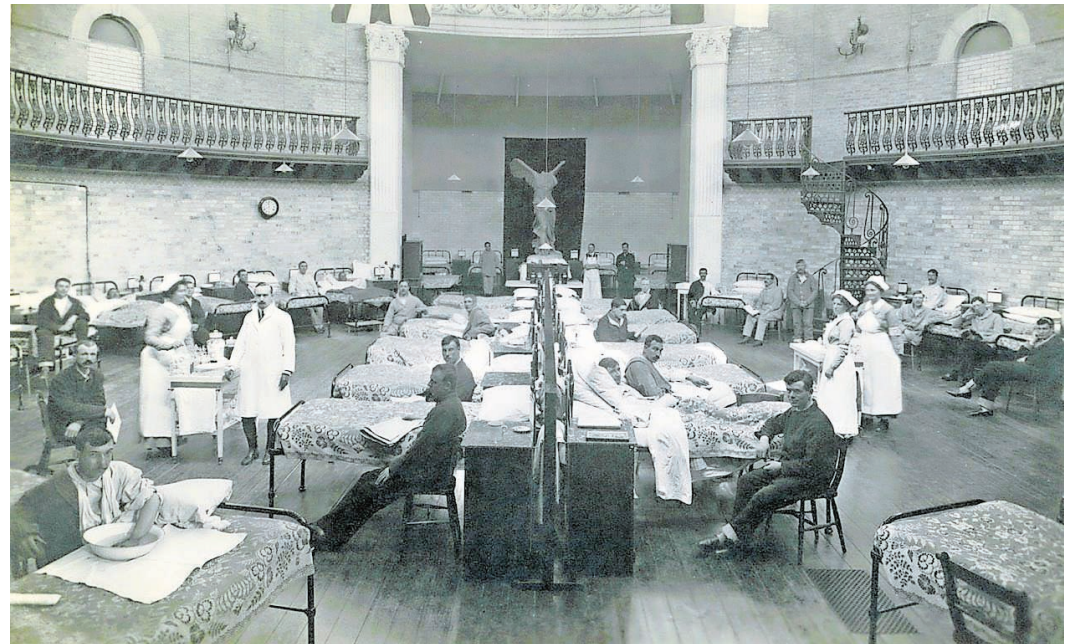
However, the serenading 'sirens' weren't the mythical creatures that lured sailors to their death with the sweetness of the song; no, these somewhat porky Pavarottis were grey seals lazing in the warm sunshine at the rocky base of the Mew Stone.

Sadly, it seems, not everyone is mesmerised by our beautiful seals. A few weeks ago, a video taken in Torquay of a man throwing a bottle at a seal went around social media.

The Seal Project said this wasn't an isolated case and that it had received 'numerous reports of this aggressive behaviour recently'.

What a sad indictment of our times.

To learn more please follow the Torbay-based 'The Seal Project' on Facebook.



A ward at the American Women's War Hospital at Oldway Mansion, Paignton, where they treated US servicemen who had flu

When Torquay Museum predicted pandemic

2018 marked 100 years since the outbreak of Spanish Flu, the last major pandemic which the world faced.

CLARE HOWE
Torquay Museum

Torquay Museum held an exhibition to mark this centenary and part of this detailed the inevitability of another pandemic on a similar scale.

Thankfully, in 2020 the world is better placed to deal with a pandemic and thanks to the National Health Service the population of the UK is much better looked after.

Sometimes known as Purple Death, the 1918 flu outbreak had similar symptoms to seasonal flu but could be much more severe. Healthy young people could complain of sore throats and fevers and within hours suffocate, their skin taking on a terrible purple hue.

The flu did not act so quickly in all cases, the first stages often

brought a high temperature, chills, shivering, and an almost unbearable headache. Pain in muscles and joints made it hard to stand. A red bloated face, a chesty cough and congestion from catarrh added to the discomfort.

Some people appeared to recover after a few days but then relapsed and died. In others, the flu brought on pneumonia or sepsis and since neither of these could be treated at the time, victims usually died. The many people who survived Spanish flu were often left with ill health long after the virus had passed.

Like almost the entire world, Torbay felt the impact of Spanish flu. In a council meeting on October 31, 1918, the disease was described as prevalent. Schools

were closed, public gatherings postponed and school aged children excluded from cinemas.

Even so, in Torquay, 96 people had died of influenza by the end of the year.

The deaths continued into 1919. In February, the Torquay Directory covered the story of nine-year-old Harold J. Hannaford, of 39 Mallock Road.

On the Tuesday, he got a headache and a cold and on the Thursday night he suffered a convulsive fit and died.

"The suddenness of death," the newspaper stated, "is characteristic of the type of influenza prevalent just now."

Most people who died were aged between 20 and 40 and many of the casualties in the Torbay area were servicemen.

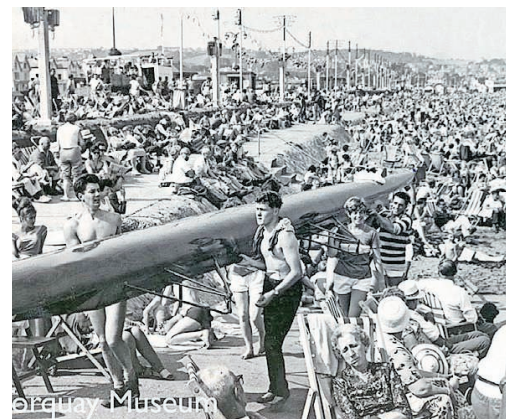
At Oldway Mansion in Paignton, which at that time was being used as a hospital for US troops, there were more than 100 deaths.

New Zealand troops stationed in Torquay were also affected and there is a monument to their dead in Torquay Cemetery.

In Brixham, airmen sent from Torquay to the base on Berry Head took the flu with them and while in the cottage hospital, they infected almost the entire staff.

It has long been universally believed among scientists and health professionals that one day there would be another pandemic on the scale of 1918.

At national and international level, there have been plans in place to combat such an occurrence, little did anyone know that it would occur so soon after commemorating 100 years since the last pandemic.



A crowded Paignton Sands and promenade in August 1964 (PR24538) Picture: WESTERN MORNING NEWS

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