

International Agatha Christie Festival comes to Torquay Museum

Every September, thousands of fans flock to Torquay to enjoy the International Agatha Christie Festival, which celebrates the life and work of Torquay's most famous daughter, and the universally acknowledge Queen of Crime.

Torquay Museum is home to Britain's only permanent Christie Gallery, and each year hosts a series of events during the festival.

This year, the museum has a crop of criminally good events.

The museum is kicking off the festival with the world premiere of Agatha Christie in the Middle East, a documentary that tells the little known story of Christie's life in the Middle East with her second husband, the archaeologist Max Mallowan.

The film will be screened free of charge in the museum's tiered auditorium, with cinema-quality projector, at 5.30pm on Sunday, September 12.

To reserve your seats, contact the museum directly on 01803 293975, seven days per week, 10am to 4pm.

For those Christie fans with a love of trains, there is an Agatha Christie-inspired model railway event, where guests can meet the

Torquay Museum's cop of criminally good events celebrating the Queen of Crime. **Carl Smith** reports

builders of a stunning set designed originally for Channel 5's Great Model Railway Challenge series.

The builders will present their clever, animated masterpiece in the flesh, sharing details of the challenges they faced building it, the Christie novels that inspired them, as well as showing excerpts from the TV episode where it was presented to the public to such acclaim.

There are two events - at 1.15pm on September 14 and 17, and

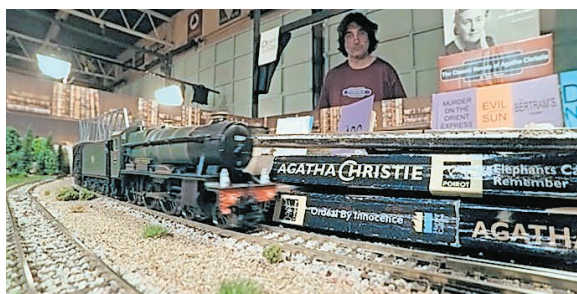
tickets cost £8 each. Book online via the International Agatha Christie Festival website, or contact Torquay Museum on 01803 293975, 10am to 4pm.

For the sleuths among you, the Curse of Amenhotep murder mystery will provide some exercise for your little grey cells.

A seemingly supernatural murder has taken place among Torquay Museum's exhibits, and you and your team have been drafted in to get to the bottom of it.

The Curse of Amenhotep is a

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Photo: THE CHRISTIE ARCHIVE TRUST

two-hour interactive mystery experience which will use your skills of investigation, observation and deduction to scour the eerie corners of the museum after hours and solve the crime.

To book your tickets for this

event, which takes place on Friday, September 17, at 7pm to 9pm, or for more information, visit the International Agatha Christie Festival website, or contact Torquay Museum on 01803 293975, seven days per week, 10am to 4pm.

Palace Hotel was once home to incredible benefactor to Paignton

The stories behind Torbay's blue plaques by **Ian Handford**, chairman of Torbay Civic Society. This week: **Washington Singer at the Palace Hotel**

A blue plaque to honour Washington Singer came courtesy of owner of the Palace Hotel, Steve Furness.

Having been requisitioned during the Second World War for the Canadian Armed Forces, the hotel was eventually purchased by Trust House Forte Group in 1950 until they sold the Regal Hotel Group, who later sold it to Mr Furness and his company, the Duchy Group, in May 1966.

Torbay Civic Society then realised that since placing a plaque at Oldway Mansion to honour the Singer family in 1988, two of their six children - Washington and Paris Singer (his picture still adorns the lounge wall in the Palace Hotel) - had never been honoured in Torbay in spite of the fact the brothers had been incredible benefactors to Paignton and both had owned major property

Torbay's blue plaques by **Ian Handford**, chairman of Torbay Civic Society. This week: **Washington Singer at the Palace Hotel, Paignton**

on the Paignton Esplanade.

Washington Merritt Singer (pictured) was born in Yonkers, New York, in June 1866 and named in honour of the city, while a third Christian name was to honour the famous General Grant - later President Grant - a friend of his father Isaac.

With his middle name being ancestral, this went back to Alice Eastwood Merritt (1851-1890) and any plaque would become an important part of this extensive family history.

Today, there are no honours that remind us of Isaac Singer's six children except the few names on roads like Paris Road,

Mortimer Avenue, Washington Close, Rhodanthe Road and places like the Merritt Flats or their home Oldway Mansion on Oldway Road.



Washington was the first president of the swimming club in Paignton and president of its rowing club, plus a steward at the Newton Abbot Racecourse and Master of the South Devon Hounds.

Later, his main pre-occupation became horses as he would ride and hunt well and eventually established a racehorse stud at Newbury.

He became an early member of its Jockey Club and adopted as his turf colours myrtle, green and white always popular

with local punters, although not lucky at winning until his horse Challacombe won the St Leger in 1905.

At Newbury, he established an event named The Washington Singer Stakes, which still survives today.

In Paignton, he left us stables near the junction of Manor Road and Old Torquay Road and in Steartfield Road - today the Coach House - while as a major benefactor he built the town's first cottage hospital while also funding the organ at St John's Church.

Finally, in 1906, he funded the construction of the Merritt Flats in Totnes Road - built for the poor who were desperately in need of new accommodation.

However, his most prestigious venture was the laying out of Preston Green before establishing one of the UK's first private aircraft hangers, built near what is now Redcliffe Hotel.

Today, the only break anywhere in George Bridgman's wonderful long seawall can be seen near The Boathouse, which gave access

to the beach for Mr Singer's private aircraft, which eventually offered some of our country's earliest public flights in an aeroplane.

With our request to honour Mr Singer with a plaque, this was finally unveiled on the entrance wall of what had been his home, Steartfield House - today the Palace Hotel - on Thursday, August 1, 2002.

The formal event was led by the Worshipful Mayor of Torbay Mrs Heather Buckpitt and her escort David Buckpitt.

Mr Furness also took the opportunity to formally open his new swimming pool at the hotel, which was then toured by all attending the plaque unveiling, before returning to the hotel ballroom where a buffet luncheon was provided and finally further presentations made.

Torbay Civic Society's pamphlet, written by John Wilson, a long-term friend of the Singers, was given out freely. Over following years the society held many functions at the Palace until eventually it was sold by Duchy Hotels.