

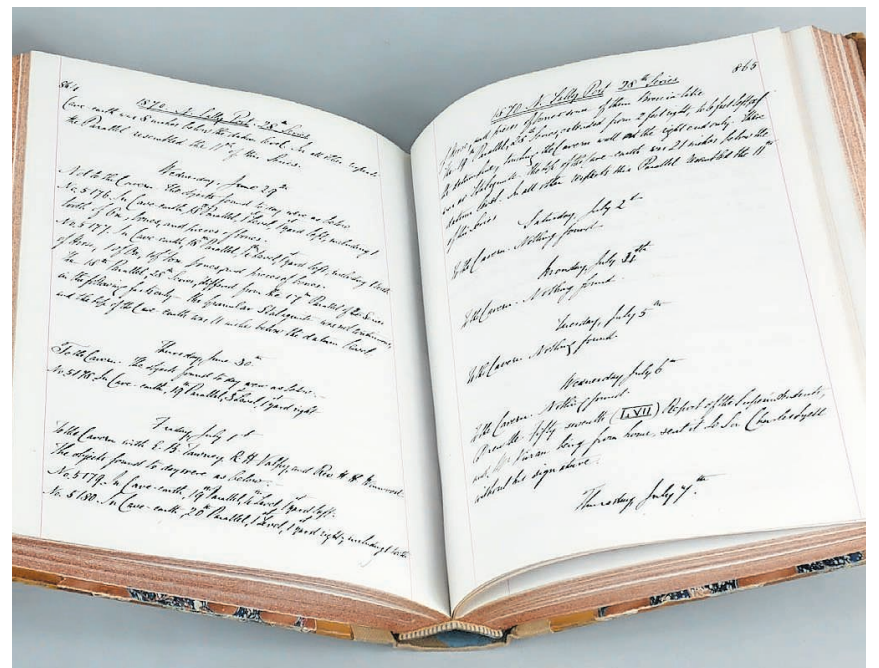
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Pengelly's excavation diaries for Kents Cavern are of international importance. Picture: TORQUAY MUSEUM

## Items of importance regardless of their financial value

**Popular television programs like the Antiques Roadshow, Flog It! and Bargain Hunt play on our curiosity to find out the financial value of items and the thrill of discovering treasure in our possession.**

This results in one of the most common questions we are asked by people bringing objects in for identification: "What's it worth?"

This question, which Torquay Museum staff cannot answer, along with another - "If the museum needs money, why don't you sell something?" - serve to highlight how the museum thinks differently about value.

Unlike the antiques experts on TV's Roadshow, Torquay Museum staff only ever value items for insurance purposes.

The staff at the museum are not in touch with the commercial markets and cannot be sure of valuations which change all the time.

We need the help of antiques experts to value our collections so that we can be correctly insured, this is particularly true of loan items entering and leaving the museum where they are at greater risk.

While the absolute value

**BARRY CHANDLER**  
Torquay Museum

of objects is important to us for insurance reasons, it means very little in terms of how an object is valued by the museum.

This can be hugely effected by both time and provenance. In the museum, we have a duty to treat all objects with equal respect as we hold them in trust for the public.

Time, provenance and rarity inevitably elevate certain objects to regional and even national and international importance regardless of their financial value.

Probably the best example of this are William Pengelly's excavation diaries for Kents Cavern.

Arguably of low financial value, time has shown them to be unique in their scope as a record of a 19th century excavation.

The provenance they provide to thousands of artefacts held in our museum and other museums in Britain and abroad makes them of international importance.

So why can't the museum just sell things especially if they are never used or

looked at?

Museums are governed by strict codes of conduct and to be an accredited museum we must follow the guidelines created by the Museums' Association and Arts Council England.

Put simply, these state that once an object has entered the public trust of a museum it should remain there and only be sold in exceptional circumstances.

Part of the process of any disposal of an object involves offering it free of charge to any other museum that wants to look after it and maintain it for the public.

The consequence of this is that only items that are collectively deemed of very little public worth are ever disposed of.

On the very rare occasions when valuable objects are sold by museums to raise funds, the money must be used only to support the care of the remaining collections, effectively maintaining public benefit.

If you are interested in what happens behind the scenes in the museum, our major summer exhibition The Secret Museum will open later in the year.

We will be displaying 175 objects, many chosen by the public and most rarely ever seen.