

'Made to be Played' project gets Arts Council funding

In August, Torquay Museum received grant funding from Arts Council England to create a project focusing on musical instruments.

'Made to be Played' will include a new interactive exhibition of instruments from various eras and cultures from both our own collections and those of exhibition curator Ian Summers.

Through it, the museum hopes to engage a diverse audience in making, playing and appreciating musical instruments.

The project idea came from Ian Summers, a retired academic previously head of medical imaging at the University of Exeter, who has collected and made musical instruments for the past 50 years.

I asked Ian where his passion for musical instruments came from?

"I'm not sure exactly how it started - I can remember, as a five year old, asking for a Christmas present of a toy accordion I'd seen in a shop window.

"When I was nine I was lucky enough to be offered free violin

Barry Chandler on how Torquay Museum's exhibition showcases musical instruments

lessons at school, with a free instrument.

"As a 14 year old in the 1960s, I built a simple guitar so I could play pop songs - in those days there was more of a 'make do and mend' attitude, and it seemed an obvious idea to make an instrument rather than buy one."

Ian first made contact with Torquay Museum a few years ago to come and study some of the remarkable instruments the museum has in storage.

"In 1990 I bought a book 'Musical Instruments Collections in the British Isles', which mentioned some instruments in Torquay Museum. However, it wasn't until 2017 that I was able to visit Torquay Museum to see its



Left, Ian Summers with part of his musical instrument collection. Below, musical instruments on display in the Explorers Gallery include this Key Cittern by Longman and Broderick of London which is over 200 years old.

Pictures: TORQUAY MUSEUM

instruments - many of them not on display but in store.

"The collection includes some beautiful wind instruments from the 18th and 19th centuries - flutes, oboes, a clarinet and a trumpet with keys, not valves like a modern trumpet.

"However, my personal favourite is an autoharp, a type of zither, fitted with a special device to help with tuning its many strings, before the days of electronic tuners."

Ian and the museum hope to generate interest in the world of music through the display and engagement with our combined collections.

Ian said: "I hope to share my interest in the enormous variety of musical instruments that exists

beyond the 'regular' instruments that are usually encountered.

"I also hope to show that anyone can have a go - the enjoyment of making/playing an instrument is not just for the specialist."

The project, co-curated with Sophie Yarde-Buller from Exeter, will include an exhibition planned for spring 2022.

There will also be online articles and stories on Torquay Museum's social media channels and here in the Torbay Weekly.

People will be able to come and listen to a range of musical styles during a series of events and performances or have a go at making their own instrument.

There will even be a newly commissioned piece of music inspired by the collections.



Lord Edward Bulwer-Lytton made his home in Torquay

This blue plaque was requested by an owner of one of the apartments in Marine Palms during December 2019.

Marine Palms was originally Argyll Hall during the Victorian era, a time when his Lordship Edward Bulwer-Lytton - novelist, poet, dramatist, orator and Statesman - lived here between 1867 until his death in 1873.

While researching the history, we discovered a second owner living at the Marine Palms on Warren Road, Torquay, was, in fact, a director of the McCarthy Contracting and Development Company, the contractor who had carried out the conversion and rebuild of Hotel Roseland (previous name) into the prestigious apartments we see today.

The apartment's management agency would normally be approached for sponsorship of a plaque and literature, although on this occasion both were underwritten by the contractor.

By January 2020, the plaque was on order and historian

The stories behind Torbay's blue plaques by Ian Handford, chairman of Torbay Civic Society. This week: Lord Edward Bulward Lytton

Mike Holgate was researching the biography, to eventually produce the formal pamphlet.

Although we normally try and unveil plaques on a significant anniversary with Covid-19 having been announced in February, we knew his lordship's birthdate on May 25 would be out of the question.

Fortunately, the first lockdown allowed a small number of people to associate for significant events and so in complying with what were still Government guidelines, we chose March 5, 2020, for the formal unveiling.

Last year was also the 200th anniversary year since the publication of Edward's first book, 'Ismael an Oriental Tale'. Edward George Earle Bulwer

was born in London on May 25, 1803, being the third and youngest son of Colonel William Earle Bulwer and his wife, the heiress Elizabeth Barbara Warburton-Lytton.

Following the death of their father in 1807, the two elder brothers were sent to public school but Edward stayed with his mother and was educated by private tutors.

After her death in 1843 he formally changed his surname to Bulwer-Lytton so as to inherit the Lytton title.

A child prodigy, Edward was writing poetry as early as seven, with his first work - 'Ismael: An Oriental Tale' - and many other poems, being produced between the ages of 13 and 15. All were published in 1820, exactly 200 years previous.

Subsequently his literary career left over 50 major works including a 12-volume poem - King Arthur, plus novels like Pelham, Godolphin, Eugene Aram, The Caxtons, The Pilgrim of the Rhine, The Last Days of Pompeii and Rienzi and Last of the Roman Tribunes which formed the basis of Wagner's opera Rienzi.

His works also include famous phrases like 'the great unwashed', 'the pursuit of the almighty dollar', and his most-quoted line from the play Richelieu 'The pen is mightier than the sword' - which being so significant was included on the blue plaque.

Edward served Huntingdon constituents from 1831 until 1841, in a distinguished political career as MP.

In spite of impressive speeches made in support of the anti-slavery legislation and Electoral Reform Bill, he still lost the seat.

In February 1844, and in accordance with his mother's wishes, he changed his name to Bulwer-Lytton and assumed the Lytton Arms by Royal Licence.

Now elevated to the peerage as Baron Lytton of Knebworth, in 1866 he started to spend the winter months in Torquay at Argyll Hall on Warren Road.

Out of the public eye, a private letter reveals: 'I like Torquay very much in a lazy way' and would often stroll along Torbay Road until one day after viewing the burning wreck of the ship Wallace - it had drifted onto Abbey Sands - he caught a chill stimulating a neuralgic attack and died later aged 69, in the arms of his son at Argyll Hall on January 18, 1873.

The official plaque unveiling was led by Torbay Civic Mayor Maggi Douglas-Dunbar and myself before our small group moved into the apartment of Mr/Mrs Easton, where superb refreshments were served and various presentations given.

Torbay Civic Society's pamphlet 'Lord Edward Bulwer-Lytton at Argyll Hall' may be obtained by sending two second class stamps plus a stamped addressed envelope to Torbay Civic Society, 4 Palace Avenue, Paignton TQ3 3HA.