

Torquay's first gas lamp - The Fiery Dragon

This week, as the price of gas is rising and we wonder what the winter will bring, we remember when it first brought light to Torquay in the shape of one of Torquay Museum's most-loved objects, The Fiery Dragon.

The Fiery Dragon is Torquay's oldest surviving gas lamp.

It was first used on October 8, 1834, and was constantly working until 1895 in the gas showroom in Union Street.

It is remembered fondly in a poem composed by Torquay magistrate Joseph Garrow which lists many of the shops around the harbour and sings the praises of the gas that lit the strand...

*And here's a fiery dragon, too,
Just tamed by Mr Burt,
Sitting, he breathes six fiery
flames,*

Flames which can do no hurt.

The dragon or more accurately a wyvern was created by cabinet maker Mr W.C. Burt, it is carved from mahogany with a bats wing

Barry Chandler, from Torquay Museum

burner projecting from its mouth.

Before being given to the museum in 2008, the dragon was kept at the office of the gas company Wales and West Utilities.

In most languages, cultures and contexts no distinction is made between wyverns and dragons.

However, since the 16th century, in English, Scottish, and Irish heraldry, the key difference has been that a wyvern has two legs, whereas a dragon has four.

This distinction is not commonly observed in the heraldry of other European countries, where two-legged dragon-like creatures are called dragons.

The wyvern is also a fairly popular commercial logo or



The building of Torquay & Paignton Gas Company floodlit by gas

Pictures: TORQUAY MUSEUM

mascot, especially in Wales and what was once the West Country Kingdom of Wessex.

The Fiery Dragon is currently in storage as Torquay Museum doesn't have enough space to have it on display all the time.

Some regular visitors may have seen it before as it's been on display in a few temporary exhibitions but what we haven't published before are the other associated pictures.

Last year, we were given a box of ephemera relating to Torquay and Paignton Gas Company and among photographs, documents, certificates and a gas leak detector there was an image of the dragon on display!



The Fiery Dragon, Torquay's oldest-surviving gas lamp, inset and above on the upper staircase of Torquay & Paignton Gas Company

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