

Ironclads in the Bay

These late Victorian images were kindly sent to Torquay Museum by Stephen Hobbs, honorary archivist at Hartland Abbey and originator of the Hartland Digital Archive.

A couple of them show the ironclads in the Bay returning from Queen Victoria's diamond jubilee celebrations at the Spithead.

Ironclads are steam-propelled warships protected by iron or steel armour plates, which were predominantly constructed from 1859 to the early 1890s.

They were developed as a result of the vulnerability of wooden warships to explosive or incendiary shells.

The Royal Navy was the second to adopt this type of warship.

Towards the end of the 19th century, the descriptions 'battleship' and 'armoured cruiser' came to replace the term 'ironclad'.

The diamond jubilee review, which took place on June 26, 1897, at Spithead was reported as one of the great historical naval spectacles.

It involved around 170 vessels, including 50 battleships drawn up in several seven-mile-long lines between Portsmouth and the Isle of Wight.

The Queen was represented by her son Bertie, Prince of Wales, the future Edward VII and the lead ship was HMS Renown.

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Your chance to see Bay's last grey whale

Normally locked away in Torquay Museum's stores, The Secret Museum exhibition gives visitors a chance to see an extremely rare and scientifically important whale vertebra that was discovered on Babbacombe beach.

The find reminds us of the fragile nature of even the largest sea creatures, that can be tipped into extinction by human activity.

The Atlantic grey whale vertebrae pictured here were acquired by William Pengelly in 1861. They were found locally at Pettitor and Babbacombe beaches and Pengelly bought them for the museum and subsequently wrote a paper on them published in 1865.

He said: "A few years ago, but the exact date has escaped me, there was brought to my house a large bone which had been washed ashore on Babbacombe beach [the old spelling], near Torquay. It was not difficult to see that it was part of the vertebral column of a cetacean, and that it had undergone considerable abrasion."

These specimens and others from the coasts of Sweden were used by John Edward Gray to make the first scientific description of the species.

Edward Gray placed the whale, scientific name *Eschrichtius robustus* in its own genus in 1865, naming it in honour of physician

Barry Chandler, from Torquay Museum, reveals The Secret Exhibiton

and zoologist Daniel Frederik Eschricht.

The common name of the whale comes from its coloration. It now only survives in Pacific waters.

The museum's specimens were radio-carbon dated in the 1990s to around 340 years old making them the last-surviving remains of grey whale from the eastern Atlantic.

The remains are of international importance and are still studied by whale experts.

So what happened to the northern Atlantic grey whale?

It appears to have become extinct in the 18th century.

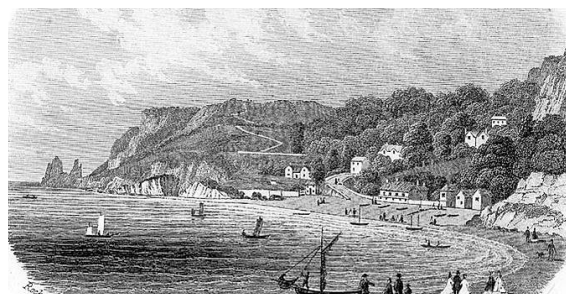
Little is currently known about the historical distribution of the whales, where they calved and where they lived but they seem to have been seasonal migrants to both sides of the Atlantic and it is believed that whaling is the possible cause of their extinction.

Radiocarbon dating of American east coastal remains confirm that grey whales existed there at least through the 17th century.

This population ranged from Southampton, New York to Jupiter



Grey whale vertebrae on display in The Secret Museum exhibition



Babbacombe beach in 1864

Pictures: TORQUAY MUSEUM



The Atlantic grey whale

time after death making them easy to harvest. But this is not quite the end of the story. In 2011, a grey whale was spotted in the Mediterranean, off the coast of Israel, and in 2015 another was seen near the coast of Namibia. Scientists now believe that in the distant past grey whales moved from the Pacific to the Atlantic when climate conditions permitted them to do so.

With the Arctic currently receding, it appears they are finding their way through again.

Use this opportunity to see the grey whale vertebra that was discovered on Babbacombe beach and visit The Secret Museum exhibition.

Island, Florida, the latest from 1675.

In his 1835 history of Nantucket Island, Obed Macy wrote that in the early pre-1672 colony, a whale of the kind called 'scrag' entered the harbour and was pursued and

killed by the settlers. The 'scrag whale' hunted by the early New England whalers, was almost certainly the grey whale.

Grey whales were popular prey because they could be found close to shore and they floated a long