

How children can enjoy the magic of the museum

Something rather magical happens on a school day trip to Torquay Museum. It's not just the children's anticipation and bubbling excitement of a day out of school that makes it special; there's a sense of the unexpected.

Stepping in through black wrought-iron gates, under the sandstone archway, the looks of solemnity give way to wonder and animated chatter.

For many children, it's their first visit to a museum. Welcomed by our knowledgeable and experienced Education Team, the children are introduced to our exciting learning environment, where we encourage exploration, creativity, discovery, and fun.

Allowing the children a hands-on approach to learning, with support from the team, your class can access many of our Museum collection-inspired workshops, each created to embrace STEAM activities, alongside many aspects of EYFS, KS1, and KS2 curriculums. Our incredibly popular Ancient Egypt workshop hosts one of the Museum's star attractions; Psamtek, an extremely rare child mummy. One of only four child mummies in the UK, and the only human mummy in Devon; Psamtek inspires curiosity in most, while occasionally unnerving others.

Understandable, considering the

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lore, superstition, and mystique surrounding mummies, the pyramids, and this ancient civilisation. The Education Team dispel the myths behind the mummy and replace the fiction with fact. Situated directly opposite the Museum, Torwood Gardens is ideally located for picnic lunches and a run around on the grass, weather permitting. It's also often the setting for training our Roman troops.

Our full-day Romans in Devon workshop includes Roman army training, where the children learn what it means to be an essential part of a well-trained fighting machine, without the 20-mile march in full armour!

Illuminated by a glass lantern roof, the Explorers Gallery showcases fascinating artefacts collected by Torquay-based explorers and scholars during their travels across the globe. Our education workshops focus on two of those intrepid adventurers and what it would take to survive in the hostile environments of their

expeditions. The Amazon Adventures workshop follows the life, and mysterious disappearance, of Percy Harrison Fawcett during his quest for the Lost City of Z, whereas the Polar Explorers workshop looks at the extraordinary story of Antarctic explorer Frank Browning, who accompanied Captain Robert Falcon Scott on the Terra Nova Expedition of 1910. Both workshops make a fantastic starting point for literacy units on adventure stories – in fact, many of our workshops do, and there's always the Agatha Christie Gallery, the Japanese Kite Warrior, a Narwhal Tusk, or a 62ft Anaconda for further inspiration – the list is endless, and the Museum is just full of adventure.

Every artefact has a story to tell. Other workshops include Meet the Ancestors Stone Age, Rocks and Fossils Discovery, Life in Victorian Devon, Mini Museum, and Toys through the Ages. These half-day workshops allow your class the amazing opportunity, after lunch, to have some self-led exploration time if you would like to make a full day of your visit. Children are welcome to eat their packed lunches here at the Museum, if preferred, just let the team know when booking. To book your next school workshop, make a pre-visit, or to discuss any extra queries you may have please contact education@torquaymuseum.org, and we'll be happy to help.



Exploring the past



Torquay Museum for children



Educational workshops

The small chapel that was to shine bright over Torquay

We celebrate the blue plaque for George Edmund Street at St John the Evangelist Church.

The early 19th century map saw Torquay as an insignificant fishing port called Tor Key. Yet, the internationally-famed architect George Edmund Street would eventually be commissioned to rebuild a small Chapel here on the Terrace, which he turned into the "Church of St John the Evangelist" that we still see today.

With Torquay's population having doubled by 1810 and with sufferers of glandular fever moving from the North to live near the sea, the new population soon doubled again, and this time many of the incumbents chose to live in or near Torquay town centre, where they then questioned where they might worship.

It is difficult today for us to imagine the importance the Church played in the lives of Victorians but it does perhaps explain why, on May 1, 1822, the foundation stone of the small Torquay Chapel was first laid. The new Chapel of Ease (as it was known) would eventually be turned by Mr Street into the significant Church of St John the Evangelist, although not yet sporting its tower with an illuminated Cross we all view today.

Mr G. E. Street was born in Woodford, Essex and eventually

The stories behind Torbay's blue plaques by Ian Handford, chairman of Torbay Civic Society.

he became a leading practitioner of building Victorian Gothic architecture.

His work took him around the world, becoming famous for his designs, which generally involved ecclesiastical architecture. In London, however, George found time to design and create the Royal Courts of Justice on the Strand, while being involved in literally hundreds of church projects.

It was after his father died that, together with his mother and sister, he lived in Exeter until, in 1841, George went to work as a pupil at the offices of Owen Browne Carter in Winchester. On his return to London, he became an improver at the George Gilbert Scott business in the City.

His first commission was the Biscovy Church in Cornwall and then, within five years, he had started his own practice to specialise in Church restoration. Quite how he was picked for the commission at Torquay is unknown, although we do know he had already designed more than a dozen Churches in the City of Oxford

before his return to London in 1855.

Meanwhile in Torquay, a local battle was raging between the Curate at the Chapel of Ease, the Rev William G Parks-Smith, and the Anglican Bishop of Exeter, Bishop Phillpotts, who for decades was seen as the most powerful man in the Westcountry, overseeing a Diocese stretching from Dorset to the Isles of Scilly.

In Torquay, Rev Parks-Smith as first Curate was, from the outset, a controversial figure. He was seen as an innovative Churchman (almost High Church). Though the Bishop had appointed him, he soon found him intolerable.

Phillpotts was an absolute traditionalist and now endless dispute arose, which eventually ensured Parks-Smith fled Torquay to enlist in the Crimea War as Curate. He fortunately survived and then returned to Torquay and, amazingly, Phillpotts (quite out of character) re-appointed him, while also giving him permission to reconstruct the now popular Chapel into a new Georgian Church, which



George Edmund Street by Samuel A. Walker

was to be renamed St. John the Evangelist.

Parks-Smith commissioned George Edmund Street to be his architect, a man known to have High Church sympathies. Now, Street's sculptured and decorative finishes all became too much for the Bishop and he eventually refused to allow his permission for the Church to open formally in 1864.

It took two more years before consecration came, though by then

Parks-Smith had moved on and George was dead. It was George's son – Arthur Edmund Street (also an architect) who finally completed the distinctive tower of today.

Our Blue Plaque honouring George Edmund Street and ST JOHN THE EVANGELIST CHURCH was unveiled by us in partnership with Torbay Council in 1989, one hundred years after Arthur had published his father's biography.