

Museum reopens and looks to the future

I have great pleasure in announcing that Torquay Museum will be re-opening its doors on Tuesday, February 1.

As noted in my last piece, we are adopting a new opening pattern to enable us to better manage our limited finances.

Each week our standard pattern will be to open on Tuesdays, Wednesdays, Thursdays and Saturdays.

These days have long proven to be the best days on which to maximise our footfall but in order to make this work we need your support to spread the good word about the museum and encourage friends and family to visit.

Currently we have a temporary exhibition on Fiji which adds to the six permanent galleries.

Please come and visit and discover why we have this unexpected connection with the far side of the world.

Learn about the fascinating history, traditions and crafts of Fiji through the museum's rich collection of objects and the stories of the collectors who brought them to Torquay.

During the closed period in January we have been working hard to craft a new and exciting programme of temporary exhibitions and events to take place over the next year.

Basil Greenwood,
manager of
Torquay
Museum



We have yet to finalise this programme but will bring more news on it over the coming weeks and months.

We are still working alongside our business consultant brought in to assist in reshaping our operations here at the museum and how we might best serve our local community.

This work on devising a new strategy and business plan has brought to the forefront of my mind what incredible items we have in our collections at Torquay Museum.

The difficulty is with more than 330,000 items to choose from, what are the stories we should share with our audience?

We have asked this question of the public before and we get equally impassioned views on diametrically opposite themes!

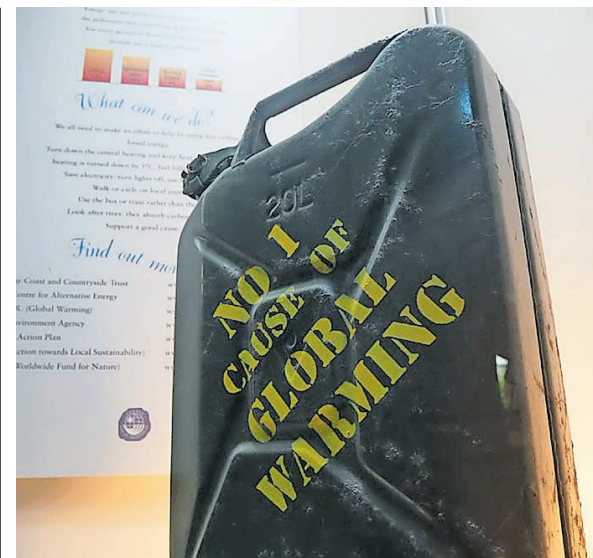
From local history to world

cultures, from Agatha Christie to Ice Age Torbay, from the local marble industry, to rural life and natural history.

There has to be a balance as to what we focus on and where possible we try to bring items out of the stores and get them on display using our temporary exhibition programme.

The other area we are considering carefully at the moment is the possibility of connecting 'themes' to tell the story of our collections in a more coherent way.

Two such themes occupying our minds at the moment are climate change and environmental issues - this would link very well with many aspects of our collections including natural history, the 'human evolution story' through



Torquay Museum's global warming display which was created over 20 years ago

the Ice Age collection and the social history collection through the Old Devon Farmhouse.

It would be really valuable to hear from readers of Torbay Weekly what aspects of the museum's collections you would

like to hear more about. I look forward to hearing from you with what I am sure will be wide ranging views on how we should focus our efforts at Torquay Museum. Please e-mail basil.greenwood@torquaymuseum.org



A current temporary exhibition 'Far Side of the World: Torquay's Fijian Connection'

Pictures:
TORQUAY
MUSEUM

Honouring 12th century Spanish Barn at Torre Abbey

Ian Handford, chairman of Torbay Civic Society, tells the story behind each of Torbay's blue plaques. This week: Spanish Barn

What should have been one of our earliest blue plaques was eventually erected in Torbay in 1988 by our first president Mrs Shelia Hardaway.

It honoured the Spanish Barn in the grounds of Torre Abbey, a building at the time described by the curator of Torre Abbey, Leslie Retallick, as being 'one of the largest, oldest and stoutly constructed buildings of its kind in Britain'.

Constructed in the late 12th and 13th centuries by the monks of Torre Abbey, the building was used by the Premonstratensians of Welbeck Abbey France after their departure from their homeland.

Their name came from their home town of Premontre, 60 miles outside of Paris, and we are informed by Mr A C Ellis, in his book An Historical Survey of Torquay 1930, that in the 19th century the Premonstratensian Order was not then present in Torquay

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although the order had three houses in Britain based at Spalding Lincolnshire, the Canons of Storrington Sussex and at Bedworth in Warwickshire.

During the Spanish Armada of 1588, the Barn was used to house 397 prisoners of war who had been captured by our navy and thereafter the structure was always to be called The Spanish Barn.

It was Lord Cary, when writing to the Privy Council, that reported 'Prisoners number 397, whereof we sent to the Lord Lieutenant five of the chiefest (sic) of them, whom his Lordship has committed to the town prison of Exeter in Devon etc..'

Eventually, Cary descendants of the Cary family purchased the Barn near Torre Abbey before many decades later in

1930, they sold the Abbey and the Barn to Torquay Council.

It was the local authority who modernised the medieval barn works that included installing electric lights and a new flagged stone floor.

During the Second World War, the barn was used as an RAF gymnasium, as it was adjacent to the officer training centre that had been established at Torre Abbey.

During the next era of its remarkable history at the end of the war the local authority converted the Spanish Barn into a multi-purpose premises so that it might be used or leased for exhibitions and other entertainments.

In time musical concerts and

the occasional theatre plays would be performed, while at other times art exhibitions and other single entertainers leased the building.

Eventually in 1987 after Torbay Civic Society committee man Denis Walton founded the concept of the blue plaque scheme, it seemed likely the Spanish Barn would be one of the first likely to be unveiled.

But with sponsorship and literature taking time, eventually both were funded by Torbay Council before Denis Walton with Frank Cawson, local historian, undertook to produce a text and with the help of curator Leslie Retallick and the historical background gleaned from Arthur Ellis's book, the official council pamphlet even included pictures from the Natural History Society at Torquay Museum.

Today, that pamphlet is long out of print although a special proof copy of its text with pictures overleaf is obtainable by sending a small donation as outlined below.

By the time the society had agreed the wording of the plaque, it read 'The Spanish Barn built circa 1196 by the Monks of Torre Abbey - 397 prisoners of war from the Spanish Armada were held here in July 1588' before finally this and the text of the pamphlet were again proofed before all the artwork was then approved.

By this time, its position in our list of plaques had slipped to number 11.

The official unveiling finally took place in January, 1988, which at least coincided with the 400th anniversary of the Spanish Armada.

The plaque was formally unveiled by our, now late, president Sheila Hardaway and the mayor, Cllr Eloise Armes, with the curator Leslie Retallick also in attendance.

The Spanish Barn proofing sheet of the text with some pictures copied overleaf can be obtained by sending two second class stamps plus a stamped addressed envelope to Torbay Civic Society, 4 Palace Avenue, Paignton TQ3 3HA

