

Rare finds from Kents Cavern join Torquay Museum's collection

Kents Cavern is Torbay's prehistoric treasure chest.

It is one of the most important Palaeolithic sites in Britain, and has yielded an extraordinary number of finds that span over half a million years of time.

The staff at Kents Cavern have been sorting out their stored material and have been able to deposit around 1,000 items with the museum's most important Designated Quaternary Cave Collection and Archive.

Excavations have been taking place in the cave from as early as 1826, when Father John MacEnery recorded finding flint tools alongside the bones from extinct animals.

His excavations inspired one of the founders of Torbay Natural History Society, William Pengelly, to lead the great excavation of the cave from 1865-1880.

Pengelly may have unearthed as many as 80,000 bones and artefacts from the cave and sent them to museums and collectors all over the world.

Most of the bones that were kept locally are housed at Torquay Museum, which has been displaying them as long as it has been open to the public.

Arthur Ogilvie, curator of the museum, led further excavations in 1920s and 1930s.

In 1927, he uncovered the oldest modern human remains in Britain.

The KC4 jawbone places the first

Barry Chandler, of Torquay Museum and Elliot Ling, from Kents Cavern



Roman copper alloy nail cleaner discovered at Kents Cavern in 2003.

Credit: TORQUAY MUSEUM

Homo sapiens in our country in Torquay around 42,000 years ago.

KC4, along with other remains from Kents Cavern and other local cave sites such as Joint Mitnor and Cow Cave in Chudleigh, are all included in the museum's Quaternary Cave Collection, which consists of around 32,000 items.

The documentation of these has taken over 16 years creating a resource used by researchers from all over Britain and abroad.

In 2016, the Quaternary Cave Collection was deemed of such importance that it was awarded Designated status, recognising its national importance and capacity to deepen our understanding of the world.

Small numbers of items have also been slowly accumulating at Kents Cavern over the last century. Items left by excavators in the 1920s and 1930s and some picked up by tour guides.

There are also finds from more

recent excavations carried out by Exeter Archaeology in the 2000s among the 1,000 or so items of re-discovered bones and archaeology found whilst clearing up.

These include the bones and teeth of prehistoric animals such as horse and rhino, but also Palaeolithic and Roman tools, including a copper alloy nail cleaner, left at the cave around 1800 years ago.

The items transferred from Kents Cavern now form a valuable part of the museum's Designated Collection.

Over time, they will be documented and recorded on a database so that future researchers can access and learn from them.

Discover more about the Ice Age mega fauna and the first humans in Britain in Torquay Museum's



Elliot Ling with boxes of material from Kents Cavern landscape.

Credit: TORQUAY MUSEUM



Palaeolithic flint blades and a flake found outside Kents cavern in 2003.

Credit: TORQUAY MUSEUM

Ancestors Gallery, and if you travel to the museum by public transport or

bike, you can get a free yearly pass, but hurry this offer is running out.

Mystery surrounds why prominent citizen suddenly left Paignton

One of Torbay Civic Society's earliest plaques was unveiled in 1987 courtesy of Torbay Council and unveiled by my predecessor Mrs Ena Hocking, chairman of the society, would have attended Primley House on Totnes Road presumably with the chairman or mayor of council.

The plaque reads: "Here resided the Belfield family and later Herbert Whitley - biologist and founder of Paignton Zoological and Botanical Gardens" and carrying the number 38 when, in fact, at the time it would have been about number four put up by the society.

Having previously featured this plaque when highlighting the life and times of Herbert Whitley a year ago, I thought it only right that the Belfield family should similarly be featured in my series.

They, in fact, took precedence on the plaque being the original owners of the Primley estate.

The Whitleys purchased the estate in 1870 after John Finney

The stories behind Torbay's blue plaques by **Ian Handford**, chairman of Torbay Civic Society. This week: The Belfield family

Belfield suddenly decided to leave one morning - quite out of character - when announcing he wanted to sell up and leave the town in spite of, at the time being a prominent citizen of Paignton.

This virtually instant decision saw him depart his property, which was then taken over by the wealthy Whitley family, as he moved to Exeter.

To locals, it was a most strange end and one that still today no-one knows why he chose to leave other than wishing to get away from Paignton as he never returned.

Little was written about Primley prior to the 18th century except that in 1709 a John Furneaux had paid rates on Primley Garden while another man John Elliott paid rates for a 'house at Primley' which was said to have a cobbled area at the

back. The Belfields, however, are known to have come to Paignton from Lancashire during 1567 but it was not until the 18th century their name turns up linked to Primley through marriage.

The head of the family at that time was John Belfield, the sitting MP for Exeter and its official recorder.

After his death, many generations from his children were linked, although somewhat historically complicated, so suffice it to say this even included ghosts said to be 'unable to rest in peace'.

It was not until a great-great grandson of John, the prominent famous man of Devon the Rev Sabine Baring Gould gave us the song Widescombe Fair, being an antiquary hymn writer, churchman and a novelist. It was his son who



became a vicar in Paignton who served the town for 48 years and oddly officiated at his daughter's wedding which to say the least was strange as it makes you wonder who gave the bride away on her wedding day. The Belfield regime abruptly ended in 1870 when the wealthy Whitley family - who had made their money as part owners of the Greenall Whitley and Co Brewery in Warrington - moved to the South West and bought the estate and its mansion house.

In 1987 - 127 years later - Torbay Civic Society erected the

blue plaque to commemorate them and today's Belfield family, who are also quoted on the restored plaque displayed at the boundary entrance wall on Totnes Road in Paignton.

In 2005, the society arranged a formal 'heritage weekend' at Primley to celebrate English Heritage's annual event that year.

Having been given this first opportunity to view the house, then a care home, society members and the public attended and were given free refreshment courtesy of the trust. Later, with numerous members of the public contacting us complaining about the deteriorating plaque, in partnership with the Herbert Whitley Trust, during 2017 it was restored and finally repainted.

The text of 'The Belfield Family and Herbert Whitley' pamphlet may be obtained by sending two second class stamps and a stamped addressed envelope to Torbay Civic Society, Office No 1, 4 Palace Avenue Business Centre, Paignton TQ3 3HA