

World of piracy comes to Torquay Museum

This week sees the opening of the first of this summer's maritime themed exhibitions, **Pirates! Fact & Fiction.**

We have decided on exhibitions that emphasise our seafaring connections, beginning with those gentlemen of fortune... pirates!

Their very mention conjures images of Spanish galleons under attack from one-eyed swashbuckling rogues and remote desert islands with buried treasure.

But how much of our view of pirates has been created by the fictional world of Treasure Island or is the product of Hollywood invention?

Separating fact from fiction in the world of piracy is no easy task; even the most famous historical source, A General History of the Robberies and Murders of the Most Notorious Pirates, was written by a mysterious Captain Johnson, whose identity remains a mystery.

The reality is that piracy has a history far longer than the golden age of the Caribbean Sea robbers.

The deeds of these men and sometimes women were far darker than the exploits of literary and screen heroes, as they almost always involved slavery, robbery, torture, and death.

This exhibition will take you

Barry Chandler, engagement and collections manager at Torquay Museum

from the earliest pirates of the Mediterranean to some of the greatest pirate fleets of the South China Seas and will look at why these outlaws on the edge of society have been figures of both horror and fascination for centuries.

The Mediterranean and Aegean Seas were home to some of the world's earliest and greatest civilisations.

The rise of great city-states of Ancient Greece and later the Roman Republic, provided the ideal hunting ground for the first sea robbers.

It was the ancient Greeks that first used the term 'peirates' meaning 'one who assaults.'

The Aegean Sea was ideal for these early pirates; they could hide among the many tiny islands and prey upon the passing trade ships.

The Devon region had a

particular connection to another group of pirates.

From the 16th to the 19th century, Barbary Corsairs captured thousands of ships and took more than a million captives to work as galley slaves or labourers for the North African ports.

They raided as far north as Iceland and in 1625, they took the island of Lundy, off the North Devon coast.

From there, they raided the northern coast of Devon and Cornwall, taking more than 1,000 captives from the region in that year alone.

The 'The Golden Age of Piracy' will form the focus of the exhibition.

This term was first used in the 1920s. It describes the period from the 1690s to the 1720s that saw a great upsurge in piracy around the Caribbean Seas.

Its end is marked in 1724 by the publication of Captain Charles Johnson's A General History of the Robberies and Murders of the Most Notorious Pyrates, which gave sensational accounts of the lives of the most famous pirates of the previous decade, including Blackbeard, Bartholomew Roberts, Anne Bonny and Mary Read.

Johnson's book was an immediate success, largely creating the modern conception of



Original costumes from a pirate TV series Black Sails.

Picture: TORQUAY MUSEUM

pirates and inspiring generations of writers and filmmakers.

Swashbucklers and rogues are taking over Torquay Museum from

April 30, the first day of the Brixham Pirate Festival and will stay until September 3.

See you there, me hearties!

The blue plaque at Cockington Court

One of the society's earliest plaques was unveiled by my predecessor, Mrs Ena Hocking, after she became chairman of TCS following the departure of our founder from Torquay, Mrs Sheila Hardaway.

This plaque was unveiled on the external wall of Cockington Court – the manor house – overlooking its huge grounds and the driveway from the historic village up to Cockington Church.

Being an early plaque, little survives of the original files on who, why and when the application was made.

What we do know is that Viscount Falkland Lucius Henry Charles Plantagenet Cary, a member of this arm of the Cary family, sponsored it and our original pamphlet, now out of print, was in those days provided by Torbay Council's printing department in conjunction with Torquay Museum and Library.

The photographs used were provided by a Peter Hunt and the museum, then known as Torquays Natural History Society, while the text came

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

courtesy of local writer Derek Seymour.

The unveiling on the building already used by the Devon Rural Skills Trust set up by TDA was on behalf of Torbay Council.

In originally being known as simply the Manor House Cockington, Mr Seymour confirms this in his biography when stating: "The story of this attractive old house is as simple as it is undramatic, for it has always been just the manor house of a small village."

Years before this, in the 1930s, local historian A.C. Ellis confirmed in his publication 'An Historical Survey of Torquay' that 'for the earliest documentary reference to (Cochintone), we must go back to the Domesday Book where we can read in the Exchequer copy – William himself – holds

Cochintone although Alric held it in the time of King Edward and it paid gold for three hides, and there is also land for 13 ploughs'.

Today, the estate still comprises 450 acres and is still one of most photographed areas in Torquay.

Cockington Court (Manor) and Cockington Church are at the centre of the estate or country park, giving easy access to visitors who can still today view many of the skilled businesses situated at the rear of the Court building itself.

Although these will change according to consumer demand, the businesses still include a furniture maker, glass blowers, blacksmithing, silversmithing leatherworking and inside the Manor an art gallery, shop and a large café.

The original operators of the



Cockington Court, home to the Cary family from 1375 to 1654

Picture: KEITH PERRY

building were the Coast and Countryside Trust, who then moved aside after contracts were signed during 2010/11 for a £2.85 million 'revamp' of Cockington Court via the TDA.

This ensured the newly-built Cockington Court Craft Centre and car park area was funded by the Commission of Architecture and Built Environment Regional Development Fund, in partnership with Torbay Council.

Today, visitors can experience 15 shops and the craft centres at the rear of the Cockington estate behind the old orchard

and Cockington Church itself. In adding further interest, the Devon Guild of Craftsmen also opened new business units, including inviting the famous Dartington Hall Trust to establish a base in Torbay.

The village, meanwhile, continued to expand its many curio shops as well as retaining the original attractions, including the Drum Inn.

The horse and carriage business has also been resurrected which makes the whole of Cockington a very worthwhile visitor experience.

Still owned by Torbay Council, via TDA, it has changed many of the internal areas within the Court to provide a large cafeteria, numerous shops and exhibition room plus art centre and committee rooms.

Our plaque, erected in 1988, was viewed when we later arranged walks and tours of the estate on November 30, 2011, finally supporting the opening of the Craft Centre when before being addressed by Melissa Wakefield, manager, who arranged for refreshments to be served.