

# Volunteer Will wins top award for his work at Torquay Museum

**Torquay Museum volunteer Will Emery has won a prestigious award for his work for the Michelangelo Trail: A Delve into LGBTQ+ Histories.**

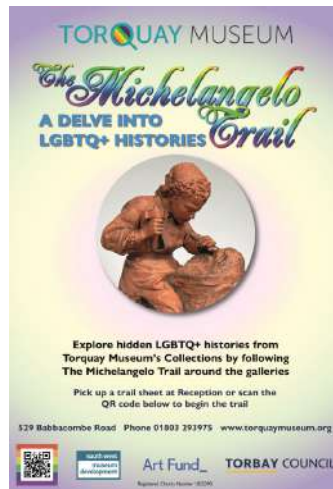
Will was presented with the Marsh Volunteering Award for the South West, won jointly with a museum on Jersey, at a ceremony at the British Museum.

The British Museum and the Marsh Charitable Trust have been working in partnership for the 14th year of the Volunteers for Museum Learning award which recognises the hugely important contribution that volunteers make to help museums engage with their visitors.

Celebrating the time volunteers have given in the previous year is particularly pertinent as teams and individuals helped their museums and heritage sites recover from the pandemic.

The Volunteers for Museum Learning award forms part of a programme of awards presented by the Marsh Charitable Trust in the fields of science, ecology, conservation, heritage, literature and volunteering. Each one of these awards recognises individuals and organisations who devote their lives to improving the world today and in the future.

The Marsh Awards programme is



Will Emery worked on the museum's Michaelangelo Trail

managed in association with key partners including the Zoological Society of London, English Heritage, Barnardo's, the Refugee Council and the British Museum.

The aim of the Volunteers for Museum Learning award is to recognise those volunteers who engage directly with museum visitors in any capacity.

Will was the primary volunteer

involved with the project The Michelangelo Trail: A Delve into LGBTQ+ Histories funded by the South West Museum Development Recovery Fund to discover LGBTQ+ histories throughout Torquay Museum's collections and galleries.

This digital and physical trail is a permanent addition to the museum's galleries hosted through the museum's website.

Will volunteered for the project after seeing a call for volunteers on Facebook to interpret LGBTQ+ hidden histories.

He joined the team, initially for three months, to search the collections and research content on a variety of items.

He was given the difficult task of searching for at least one object with a hidden story in each of the museum's galleries.

There were 90 applications from across the UK, some from groups of volunteers and some from individuals. The judges consisted of staff from the Marsh Trust, staff and volunteers from the British Museum and a representative from the Royal Horticultural Society.

The 2021 Marsh Volunteer Awards were announced by Muriel Gray, deputy chair of trustees at the British Museum.

She said: "Museums across the UK



Will Emery with his Marsh Award.

Credit: BENEDICT JOHNSON

are grateful for the contribution of volunteers to ensure they reach and inspire as many people as possible.

"Volunteers are also an important part of the British museum community. The efforts of volunteers up and down the country in 2021 are an inspiration as they gave their time throughout a challenging period, helping museums and heritage sites with their recovery from the impacts of the pandemic.

"These awards recognise the commitment and enthusiasm of volunteers in museums and we are very grateful to the Marsh Charitable Trust for acknowledging this work."

The winners each received £500, donated by the Marsh Charitable Trust. The one overall national winner, The Cambrian Heritage Railway Museum in Shropshire, received an additional £2,000.

## Torquay vicar was on religious collision course with Bishop

**Although part of this man's story was told in the Church of St John The Evangelist, Higher Terrace article, it featured mainly the blue plaque at the church and its designer George Edmund Street and later his son, also another George.**

Today, I concentrate on vicar William George Parks-Smith born in 1804 and ordained a priest at Exeter in 1834 who locals today still call 'Flowerpot Smith'.

Churchman Parks-Smith was licensed to be an assistant to Rev Domett and a year later married his daughter Elizabeth.

With the death of Rev Domett, his successor did not require an assistant and so Parks-Smith left. Fortunately, the Very Rev William Mallock, patron of St John, then nominated Parks-Smith for the 'office of curate of the perpetual curacy of the endowed Chapel of Torquay in the parish of Tormohun'.

Now the powerful Lord Bishop of Exeter controlling a diocese of four counties confirmed Williams appointment in July, 1837, making him curate of Torquay's small Chapel of Ease which decades later

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

was to become Church of St John the Evangelist.

The original chapel was established in 1822 when it played only a minor role in Torquay, holding two Sunday services weekly and having no parochial responsibility, no font and no licence for formalising marriages.

Sitting on St Johns Hill, the small chapel was used to teach mainly doctrine and the principles of the established Church of England to children.

Yet unknown to Bishop Phillpotts, its curate had leanings towards Rome and followed the practices of Keble and Pusey with their commitment to Catholicism.

It was soon very clear that Rev Parks-Smith and Bishop Phillpotts were on a religious collision course.

Rev Parks-Smith never actually celebrated Holy Communion but his many 'innovations' were already

transgressing tradition.

One topic even went national when a Times reporter in February, 1845, wrote of the ceremonials at Torquay as being 'obnoxious changes being introduced - when at the parish church no such alterations to services have taken place'.

The Times reported later that worshippers at the Chapel of Ease had even been witness to their Bishop sweeping flowerpots and flowers from the altar and the Chapel Cross. as he saw these transgressions as serious which started a legal battle which ended in the first ever 'national ritual prosecution'.

Admonishing Parks-Smith for his 'innovations', the Lordship then warned him 'to not again offend in the like manner, and I further order that you pay for the cost of these proceedings'.



The church of St John The Evangelist in Torquay.

Credit: DAVE PICKSGILL/GEOGRAPH.ORG.UK

welcomed by the Bishop, who re-instated him as parish vicar.

But now Rev Parks-Smith commissioned George Street, a known Catholic, to demolish and rebuild his church in the Georgian style. It was all a step too far for Phillpotts who, in November 1864, finally refused permission for the new church to even open.

It was some years before St Johns was opened in 1871, by which time both George Street and his Lordship were dead. It would be George's son George that built the new tower with its illuminated cross.

Rev Parks-Smith will always be remembered as 'Flower Pot Smith', due to religiously sticking to his principles.

Yet having served his Torquay congregation for 30 years, he finally retired immediately after the formal opening of his new church and eventually died at Brighton in 1886.

This more than extra-ordinary life should to my mind be worthy of remembrance, perhaps by commemorating the churchman Rev William George Parks-Smith by the unveiling of a blue plaque at his church at Higher Terrace, Torquay.

But three years later Parks-Smith was at it again, this time leading to an Order of the Church Council. But he had had enough and now fled Torquay to enlist as a chaplain in the Crimean War. A year later he was back and strangely was