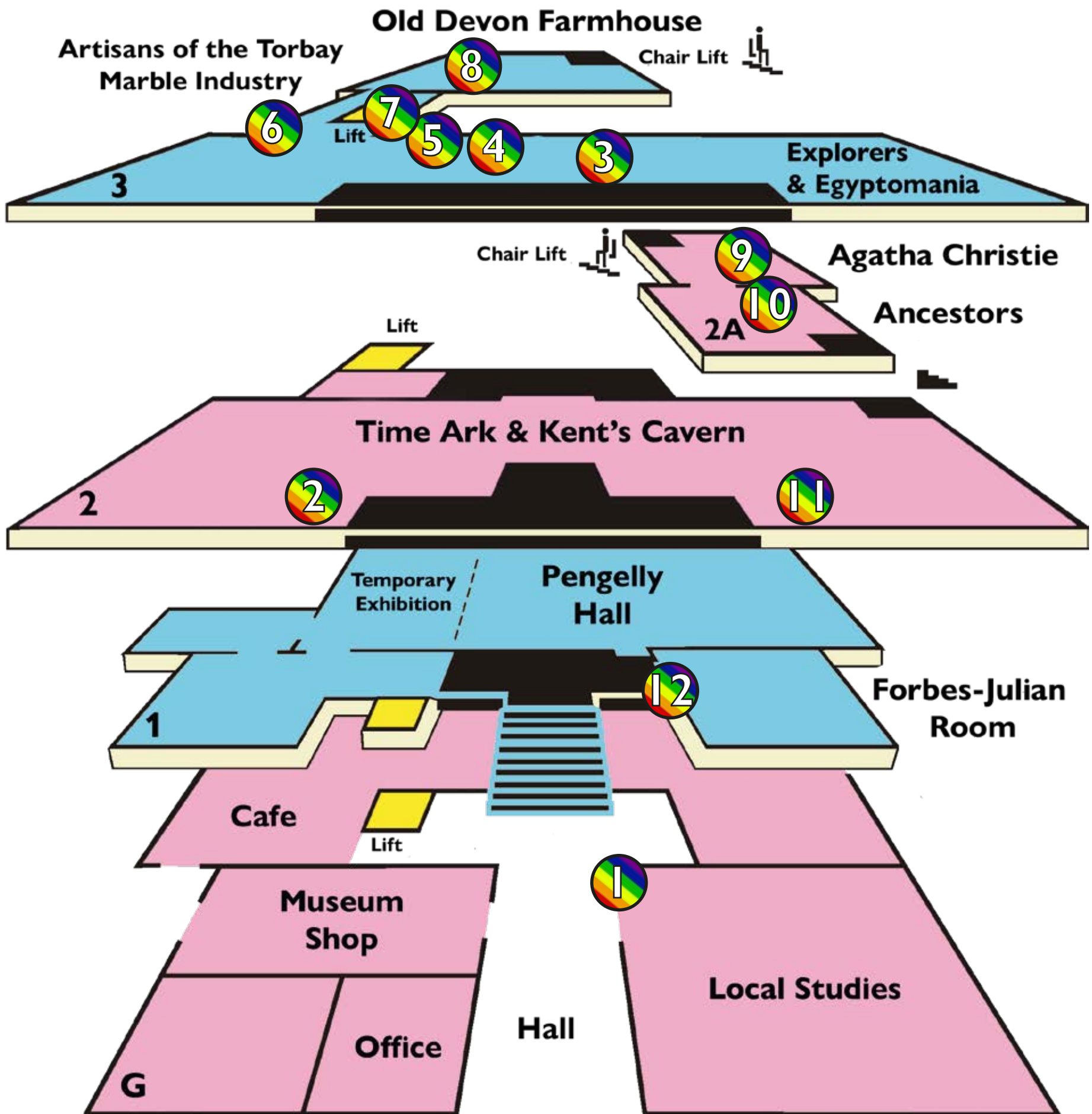


The Michelangelo Trail

A DELVE INTO LGBTQ+ HISTORIES



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Explore hidden LGBTQ+ histories from Torquay Museum's Collections by following The Michelangelo Trail around the galleries. You'll find more information about the objects by scanning the QR codes in display cases or by visiting our website.

Use #TheMichelangeloTrail to share your thoughts with us on social media.

Research for the trail was done by Will Emery (He/Him) and Iona Tytler (She/They).



1

Roman Coin of Hadrian

Even though Emperor Hadrian married a woman, he was also publicly known to have engaged in multiple same-sex relationships. This was not uncommon in ancient Rome, men were free to choose sexual partners of any gender on the condition they were the 'active partner' in the encounter. In more modern terms Hadrian was likely bisexual, yet had a preference for same sex relationships. The most famous was his relationship with Antinous which lasted for 8 years until the untimely demise of Antinous who drowned in the river Nile in AD 130.



2

Shark Jaws

Sharks are some of the oldest known lineages of species to still exist today. Although their hardness is often attributed to their wide genetic, habitual and prey diversity, it's not impossible that their ability to reproduce asexually without access to a mate may have played a part in their survivability. Asexuality in humans refers to those who do not experience sexual attraction but doesn't always negate the desire to have children. Everyone is different and no one person experiences their sexual identity the same way as another, like sharks, people and their identities are unique.



3

Amulet including the Egyptian Goddess Isis

Among the many roles and powers of the Goddess Isis was her role as the maternal goddess and protector of children, and as such was also seen as the carer for the members of society who were unique or downtrodden. This reason may explain why Isis was so commonly worshiped by the Egyptian priests who experienced same-sex attraction. In addition to her popularity as a protector, she was also known for her strong magics and gender affirmation powers.



4

Sir Richard Burton

Burton was a British explorer born in Torquay known by rumour and fact as being something of a 'sexual deviant', mainly due to how frank his writings about sex and sexuality were by Victorian standards. He was fascinated with the sexual practices of the inhabitants of the places he travelled to and his descriptions of techniques hinted that he had participated, breaking both sexual and racial taboos of his day. He was also responsible for the English translation of the Karma Sutra leading some to recognise him as the Godfather of the Victorian sexual revolution.



5

Samurai Sword

Despite popular misconception or assumption, pre-1868 Japan was exceptionally accepting, even encouraging, of same-sex relationships between men and bisexuality, especially within the confines of the Samurai warrior classes. This is in part due to the consensus between the religious and military institutions on the matter, the two most powerful factions in shogunate controlled Japan. It has also been hypothesised by some Japanese historians that the man to woman ratio in cities had a part to play in the commonality of same-sex relationships between men.



6

Angela Burdett-Coutts

Burdett-Coutts was a British philanthropist who worked with William Pengelly promoting local geology and the Torquay marble industry. Even though she married William Bartlett in 1881, prior to this she lived with her partner Hannah Brown. Upon Hannah's death, Angela wrote to a friend that she was "utterly crushed by the loss of my poor darling, the companion and sunshine of my life for 52 years", which is not only devastatingly romantic, but also indicative of their "more than friends" relationship.



7

Terracotta Statuette of Michelangelo

Renaissance Italy was a very homosocial culture, one where the beauty of the human body was worshiped in the form of art, which provided the perfect cover for the self-expression of more 'deviant' activities. It was public knowledge that the male apprentices often participated in intimate and sexual relationships with their mentors and the artist Michelangelo was clearly an open participant in this culture. Alongside the popularity of his works, he has made his way as a Queer Icon in modern Gay Culture.



8

Witch Ball

Witch balls were first hung in the windows of 17th century homes and were thought to keep evil spirits and witches at bay. Histories of queerness and witchcraft are commonly thought of as interconnected. The witch ball can be seen as a symbol of the commonality of 'outsider status' and discrimination in the everyday lives of both of these groups, with this discrimination frequently placed into law. The persecution of queer individuals throughout history for their sexuality can be related to the persecution of those who practised witchcraft, with the line between these often blurred in the past.



9

'A Murder Is Announced' Novel by Agatha Christie

Murgatroyd and Miss Hinchliffe, two women featured in this novel very much suggest a certain type of lesbian relationship of 'Partners'. This term didn't exclusively refer to women as a couple in the 20th century, however, women who were publicly recognised as living together as partners or friends often suggested a lesbian relationship. Additionally, lesbians often conformed to either the masculine and feminine or 'butch/fem' stereotypes at this time, with one preferring men's clothes and the other more female attire.



10

Jaw Fragment of Cave Lion

It would be impossible to tell if this specific lion engaged in homosexual activities, however, when looking at the similarities between the habits of lions then vs now, it is within the realms of possibility. Currently, both male and female lions have been seen to interact homosexually, in nature and in captivity. The act of male and male bonding is not that dissimilar than between that of male and female lions. Male lions' pair-bond for a number of days and initiate homosexual activity with affectionate nuzzling and caressing, leading to mounting and thrusting.



11

Cave Hyaena Skull

Like most mammals, hyaenas are no strangers to homosexual acts, in fact, historically the hyaena was recognised as being "quite obsessed with sexual intercourse". They had also been miscategorised as Hermaphroditic by nature due to their unique reproductive system. One medieval bestiary noted that since hyenas are "neither male nor female, they are neither faithful nor pagan", making them an unknown factor and are therefore obviously not to be trusted. Because of their one-of-a-kind sex, they were used in such bestiaries to illustrate "the evils of homosexuality".



12

Waddeton Court Figures

These figures are thought to date to the Elizabethan era. Within these, there are several representations of characters from the past that have their own place in queer history. Roman Emperor Julius Caesar, was rumoured to have had an affair with Nicomedes, the king of Bithynia. It was recorded by Roman historian Suetonius that Caesar often faced political harassment due to this suspected relationship. His fellow politicians often referred to this rumour negatively to score political points.