

Museum exhibition reveals when Soviet spies mapped Torbay

In 2019, Torquay Museum was approached by Nathan Allen, an employee of a touring exhibitions company called Bespoke Scientific. He produced a copy of a map of Torbay in their company's possession unlike anything we had ever seen.

The map had been produced in Russia in 1976, in the middle of the Cold War and showed Torbay in greater detail than any Ordnance Survey or commercial map that was available.

The existence of this map posed so many questions: How did they make it? Who was employed to do this work? Why did they make it, and what was it for?

Our immediate thought was that we wanted to exhibit these maps in the museum and tell the story of how they came into existence.

During the Cold War, the Soviet Union embarked on the greatest secret intelligence-gathering operation the world has ever (not) seen, with spy satellites, reconnaissance aircraft and

Barry Chandler from Torquay Museum reveals the 'secrets' behind an upcoming new exhibition

undercover agents gathering information from across the globe.

It drew up detailed maps of the great cities of the world: New York, Paris, London... and Torbay!

The astonishing detail shown on the maps was useful for spies and policy makers, diplomats and invading armies and potentially occupiers.

These maps provided tactical information about Torbay and chilling insights about the best routes for tanks and harbours with deep water for destroyers.

The maps were part of a huge undertaking to record vast areas of the planet at various levels of detail long before Google Earth.

After the collapse of the Soviet Union, these top-secret documents, some of which are still classified by the Russian Government, were

held in military depots throughout the USSR.

Those that were held outside Russian-controlled territories were gradually traded with the West in exchange for much-needed currency.

Even today no-one who made them will talk with the West about their manufacture and many have not been publicly displayed.

The Torbay maps will be displayed in the museum for the first time.

The maps give fascinating detail of how the Soviets viewed Torbay and the UK at the height of the Cold War.

Placed in the context of local civil defence, the protect and survive information campaign and life under the threat of nuclear attack, they bring back a world we have so quickly forgotten and remind us how rapidly things can change.

They also raise the question, what else do we not know is happening?

The exhibition 'The Russians Are Coming! Soviet Spies and the Secret Mapping of Torbay' starts in mid-August. Log on to www.torquaymuseum.com for details and to book your visit.



The exhibition 'The Russians Are Coming! Soviet Spies and the Secret Mapping of Torbay' starts soon



The Pavilion (PR26142)



View of the promenade leading to Palm Court Hotel (PR16854)



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