

Amelia Griffiths, Bay's forgotten female scientist

Known during her lifetime as the Queen of Seaweed and well respected among the scientific community, Amelia Griffiths has been largely forgotten in the town she called home for many years.

Born Amelia Warren Rogers in 1768 in Pilton, near Barnstaple, North Devon, Amelia was the eldest daughter of a wealthy Devon family.

In 1794 at the age of 26, she married Rev William Griffiths, they eventually settled in St Issey in Cornwall where he was the vicar.

In 1802, Amelia was widowed when William drowned leaving her with five young children to care for.

She moved the family to Ottery St Mary - where her mother was from - and it was here that she first learnt about marine botany from the Rev Samuel Goodenough, a founder of the Linnaean Society.

He said she was 'a most

CLARE HOWE
Torquay Museum

intelligent investigator'.

Her interest in algae and seaweeds grew and she made detailed observations of them through all the stages of their development, hunting the shorelines of Devon, Dorset and Cornwall for specimens.

In 1829, Mrs Griffiths decided to move to Torquay where she could best pursue her interest in seaweed.

She and her two daughters moved to a house on Cary Parade and took on a servant called Mary Wyatt.

All four collected seaweeds and Mary eventually went on to run a shop selling pressed seaweeds, shells and other items.

When Torquay Natural History Society was founded in 1844 she was invited to become an associate member - women were barred from



Amelia Griffiths seaweed collected in Torbay.

Pictures: TORQUAY MUSEUM

full membership - she declined saying it was 'an honour devoid of privilege'.

She later became a full member of the society and specially created two volumes of bound seaweeds for Torquay Museum,

which she donated in 1848.

Volumes of her seaweeds were purchased by the British Museum when she auctioned them for charity and after her death, William Pengelly - founder of Torquay Natural History Society -

encouraged Baroness Burdett-Coutts to buy all Mrs Griffiths' specimens.

These were then given to Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew.

Although Amelia Griffiths wrote very little that was published she greatly influenced many male botanists freely sharing her knowledge and specimens with them.

Many of them thanked her in the books they produced and some named seaweeds after her.

The levels of respect she demanded are evident from Charles Kingsley's assertion that due to her 'extraordinary powers of research English marine botany almost owes its existence'.

Torquay Museum is now trying to bring Amelia Griffiths to greater prominence and she will feature on a banner being made by the community for the 175th anniversary pageant to be held on June 12.



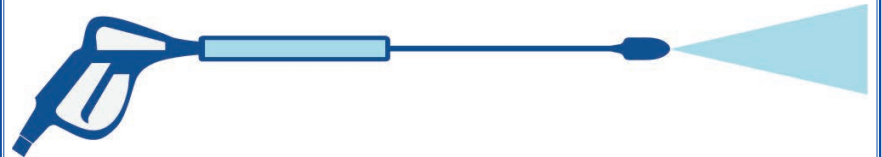
An early photograph of Cary Parade where Amelia Griffiths lived. (PR4819)

riviera fm 107.9
www.riviera.fm

LISTEN TO
riviera fm live
24 hours a day
on **107.9 fm**
email us: info@riviera.fm

Your voice in the community

Torbay Jet Washing Specialists



- Driveways
- Patios
- Decking
- Windows
- Gutters
- Bins
- Walls
- Fences
- Shopfronts

10% off voucher - Quote TWI

enquiries@torbayjetwashingspecialists.co.uk

24hr Call out Blocked Drains

07494 500067

Top Quarry, Galampton, Brixham, Devon TQ5 0EH