

Busy week as Secret Museum exhibition opens with a flourish

Torquay Museum's long-awaited Secret Museum exhibition opened last Saturday to a sell-out audience.

Local people flocked to the museum for a special Celebration Day to mark both its 175th anniversary and the opening of its summer exhibition.

In a fun-filled day of celebration, families took part in craft workshops where they made beautiful willow and tissue paper bee lanterns with willow artist Vik Westaway.

Visitors were also able to create their very own treasure chests to take home with them, with the help of the museum's education team, taking inspiration from the fantastic new Secret Museum exhibition.

There was also a visit from spellbinding local storyteller Isabella the Bicycling Botanist, who regaled visitors with stories from her incredible journeys around the world, and the people she met along the way.

There was a display of beautiful natural history-themed banners and silk flags made especially for the Day of Celebration by local artist, Shelley Castle, and her group of volunteers.

Visitors were also able to follow a trail made up of animal sculptures created by children from Cockington Primary School using natural paints and materials. But the star of the day

CARL SMITH
Torquay Museum

was the Secret Museum exhibition itself, which is the culmination of two years' planning by the museum's curatorial team, who have worked closely with members of the public to choose 175 unusual, wonderful and sometimes bizarre objects - one for each year that Torquay Museum has been in existence - many of which have never been displayed before.

There's a bewildering array of treasures on display in the exhibition, drawn from the museum's vast and enormously varied collections, both from Torbay and the four corners of the world, donated to the museum over the past 175 years by everyone from local Devonians to globe-trotting explorers.

"If you've ever wanted to see a collection of objects that are beautiful, wonderful, awe-inspiring, or just very unusual, then you really shouldn't miss this exhibition," said Clare Howe, project curator.

"We have a Napoleonic era flintlock pocket pistol; a Victorian Tipple Stick which on the outside appears to be a normal walking cane but hidden within is a glass bottle to secretly transport alcohol; a beautiful Edwardian mourning bodice; a selection of

some of the 6,500 stunning lantern slides in our collections; a beautiful Persian helmet; and a clock owned by Pope Pius IX, to name but a few."

The Secret Museum exhibition is the most complicated that the museum has ever staged and includes more than 150 objects on display, with a further 30 represented on screen. Many of these objects were chosen by members of the community and are displayed alongside labels written by their selectors.

The exhibition provides a fascinating insight into why 99 per cent of the museum's 330,000 objects are kept in store.

It has also been an excuse for museum staff to get out all the things they love but don't usually fit in to exhibition themes, giving visitors an insight into the treasure trove that is the museum's stores.

The Secret Museum exhibition, part of a project to celebrate Torquay Museum's 175th anniversary, is included in the price of admission, and is open until September 5.

It's strongly recommended that visitors book their tickets online in advance by visiting the museum's website.

Local people who live within a TQ postcode will get a 50 per cent discount on the admission price. All tickets allow repeat entry to the museum for 12 months from the date of purchase.



Visitor Sam Cooper in the Secret Museum exhibition
Above, 19th century Cantonese vases

Pictures: TORQUAY MUSEUM



Children in the museum's Secret Garden Trail



The Secret Museum exhibition



George and Rosie with mummy at the Day of Celebration