

# Exploring Torquay's 'Secret Museum'



Community curator Julie Sweet, owner of the Bon Bon shop on Victoria Parade, choosing an object  
Picture: TORQUAY MUSEUM

**"There is more hidden away than there is on display."**

The words of Molly Oldfield inspired the creation of an exhibition that explores the items Torquay Museum keeps in store and the reasons why many are rarely, if ever, displayed.

With more than 330,000 items in the building, Torquay Museum only has about one per cent of its collection on display at any one time.

Space is probably the greatest factor that limits the ability to display the collections but there are many others and they are often far from obvious.

The forthcoming exhibition *The Secret Museum*, which will hopefully open in the late spring or early summer, is the most challenging museum staff have ever tried to create.

Firstly, they have opened up the stores to the public and invited guests to become curators for a few hours and choose what they would like to see on display.

To this end, they have asked them to follow a few simple guidelines about the themes of the exhibition.

The chosen items should not replicate those already on display and should be things rarely seen.

Secondly, the museum is deliberately trying to place things on display that are problematic for many reasons, items they would often avoid displaying.

This means tackling

**BARRY CHANDLER**  
Torquay Museum

many issues such as the ethics of collecting, the conservation of objects, value and rarity, research and identification, physical size and weight, and why some objects and even whole collections just get lost and forgotten.

The whole process has made staff look again at what the museum holds in storage and why.

The visiting community curators looked at the collections with fresh eyes.

Many were surprised at the size of the collections in storage and daunted by the task of choosing just one object. But individual interests would usually guide the curator to an object with sometimes surprising results.

Items the museum had never previously looked at or even identified were chosen alongside some spectacular and well-known objects that the

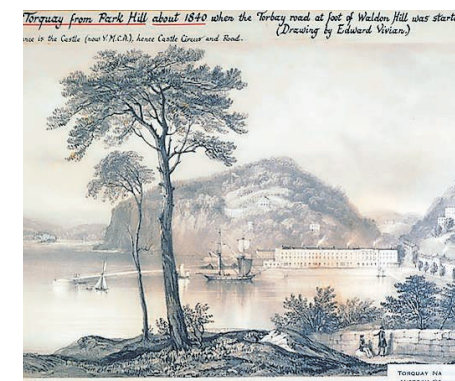
museum simply rarely has any reason to display.

Everything in storage is valued in its own right and conserved for the future and this community curation process has highlighted how long-forgotten objects can speak to us in so many different ways and the value of continuing to store them.

Torquay Museum's collections are an incredible resource for our local community and later this year with the help from the National Heritage Lottery Fund, visitors will get a chance to see what the public have chosen and why.

Over the next few weeks in the Torbay Weekly, Torquay Museum staff will explore the reasons why the museum doesn't display some of its items but values keeping them safe for future generations.

They will also look at a few of the chosen objects and how they will go about putting them on display sometimes for the first time.

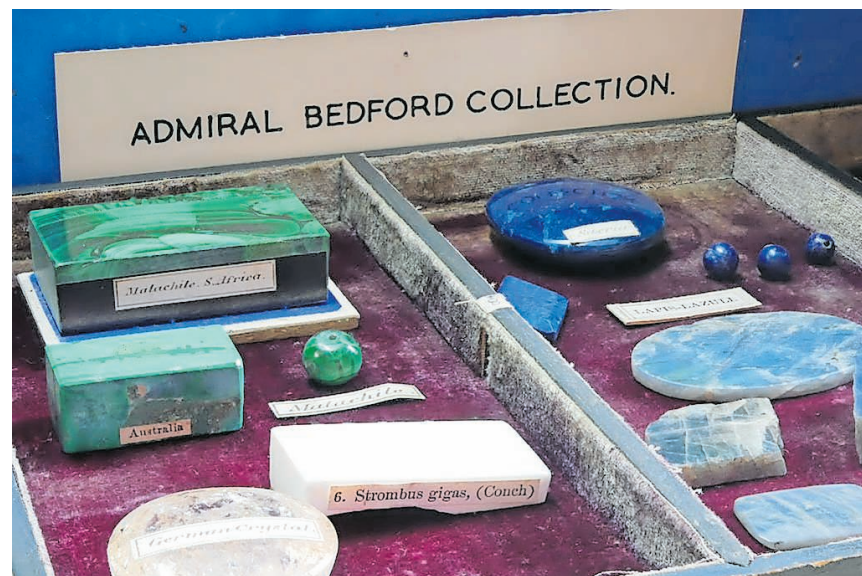


Julie Sweet's choice... a lithograph of Torquay from Park Hill about 1840 from a drawing by Edward Vivian

Picture: TORQUAY MUSEUM



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Admiral Bedford's collection of gems and small curios

Picture: TORQUAY MUSEUM