



Top secret D-Day documents from LCT 2074 which was loaded at Torquay.

Pictures: TORQUAY MUSEUM

Museum collections reveal secret, concealed and mysterious objects

Throughout Torquay Museum's collections there are rare items that by nature or design were never meant to be seen.

Their purpose was to remain hidden from view, sometimes in plain sight, sometimes by the act of concealment or camouflage.

Some items however, despite our best efforts, refuse to give up their secrets, they remain mysterious and unidentified.

For the Secret Museum exhibition, we have been searching the collections for these objects.

The most obvious place to look was in the social history and archives collections.

There are some documents that held extraordinary secrets, our Normandy landings maps held perhaps the most important secret of the 20th century, the location of the allied invasion of Europe on June 6, 1944.

Then there are Col Fawcett's diaries. Not only was he a spy in his early career but the coordinates, he believed were the location of the Lost City of Z, were also hidden in his journals. These have fascinated explorers for almost 100 years.

When we dug deeper we found more unusual objects.

Concealed weapons such as a

BARRY CHANDLER

Torquay Museum

discreet pocket pistol with a Torquay dealers mark and a custom officer's rummage stick with a hidden blade for searching and self-protection.

We also looked again at an object known as the 'smugglers stick'.

Within this walking cane is a long glass bottle for the storage of liquids.

Research showed that this object was actually a 'tipple stick'. A novelty item found in Victorian penny bazaars, and used for the covert transport of alcoholic drinks.

It also revealed that there was secret compartment in the handle that we had never noticed, inside was a tiny glass that had remained hidden for over a century.

The natural history collections are also mine for secret creatures.

A simple Torquay beach pebble can conceal a wonderful fossil coral over 400 million years old, all it takes to reveal it, is to polish the surface and the specimen appears.

This discovery started an

industry using the local stones for decorative objects and architectural features.

We also found creatures that evolution has masterfully disguised. Moths that look like tree bark, butterflies that



Nightjar from Torquay Museum's natural history collection.

perfectly mimic dead leaves and the nightjar an almost invisible bird that conceals itself by choosing the best environment for its camouflaged plumage.

Many of us may never see a nightjar in the wild, their secretive lives are not yet fully understood but nightjars from southern England are known to overwinter in the south of the Democratic Republic of Congo, a remarkable migration for a small bird.

There are also a few items that will not give up their secrets. We are currently researching some Fijian seeds chosen by a member of the public.

An internet search and the experts from the Royal Botanic Gardens at Kew have turned up nothing so far, the seeds are stubbornly refusing to be identified or classified until the right person comes along with the knowledge to unlock their secrets.



Flintlock pocket pistol dating to the early 19th century marked Torquay