

Museum researchers go on the trail of life stories from a fresh perspective

For the last 10 weeks the staff and volunteers at Torquay Museum have been researching LGBTQ+ histories for a new trail through the museum's galleries and website. The museum has never researched objects and people from this perspective before and our volunteer researchers have scoured the collections looking for interesting stories and hidden histories to engage and inspire our audience.

William started at the museum in September after seeing our Facebook post shared by South Devon College. He has been searching all aspects of the museum's collections, from natural history specimens to Roman coins looking for hidden content and stories less often told.

He said: "The opportunity to be a part of helping to put together the LGBTQ+ Trail has without a doubt been a truly phenomenal and incredible experience for me. To have an outlet for my skills and

Barry Chandler from Torquay Museum tells how the heritage venue's volunteers are helping the LGBTQ+ community to reveal its history

to shine a light on the histories that have often been erased or neglected because they were considered to be unimportant has brought, as a descendant of their community, a unique kind of pride. I am delighted that the museum is taking this step, and I am proud to be taking it alongside them.

"Being able to physically volunteer in the museum, working around and with artefacts of great historical significance, to simply 'be' where the stories of those who

came before us are recorded and celebrated has re-ignited my passions for the study of history. The support and kindness of my mentors and the other volunteers who helped to stoke those fires has forged relationships that I will never forget.

"My favourite object to have researched in the trail would have to be the Emperor Hadrian era Roman Coin, and the subsequent story of Hadrian and his lover Antinous, which was devastatingly romantic."

Iona has engaged with the project remotely. Based in Scotland she also responded to the Museum's social media call for volunteers and has been using her research skills in social history to contribute to the project.

She said: "My experience of working on the LGBTQ+ histories trail is one that I have greatly enjoyed. I think that the creation of the trail by Torquay Museum is such a great step, and will be a wonderful example to other



A Witch Ball on display in Torquay Museum

Picture: TORQUAY MUSEUM

museums and heritage spaces too. "As a remote volunteer, I have appreciated the opportunity to research items from the museum collection and to write text on them for the trail.

"This has involved researching many different areas of the past, such as the figures of the 'Nine Worthies' and the history of witchcraft.

"Something which I found interesting in the museum collection was the witch ball. I did not know the purpose of this object before researching it, and

found that these were hung in order to keep evil spirits and witches away in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

"With the individuals at this time often being linked with witchcraft, the witch ball symbolises to me the commonality of 'outsider status' and discrimination in the everyday lives of both these groups."

The trail begins on Saturday, December 18 and will be permanently accessible in the galleries and on the museum's website www.torquaymuseum.org

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