

Agatha Christie and a trail of LGBT history

William Emery, Torquay Museum volunteer:

February is LGBT History Month 2022 - a month that celebrates and pays homage to the queer histories that are not frequently reviewed and taught and oftentimes buried in the past.

With the reopening of the museum falling on February 1, it is our pleasure to announce the newest addition to Torquay Museum: The Michelangelo Trail: A Delve into LGBTQ+ Histories.

This LGBT History Trail is a three-month long project that has focused on shining a light on the queer histories of objects in the museum's collections and permanent displays.

For example, within the Agatha Christie exhibit, the novel 'A Murder is Announced' has been included because of the two of the featured characters, as well as some previously undiscovered links to a members-only club for lesbian women in the 1950s.

'Partners' didn't exclusively refer to women as a couple in the 20th century, however, women who were publicly recognised as living together as partners or friends often suggested a lesbian relationship.

Additionally, lesbian couples often conformed to either the masculine and feminine or 'butch/fem' stereotypes at this time, with one preferring men's clothes and the other more female attire.

Regarding the basis of these characters, in the late 1940s, Agatha Christie lived in her London residence in Swan Court just off Kings Road.

A few minutes' walk from her flat was the Gateway Club, 239 King's Road, a lesbian members-

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only club where in passing, Christie may have observed the stereotypical depictions of the 'partners'.

The women in 'A Murder Is Announced' very much connote one of these types of lesbian relationship.

Murgatroyd is the feminine, 'fat and amiable'. She wears the housedress, does the laundry, and defers to her partner.

Miss Hinchcliffe is the butch tall woman, has a 'short man-like crop' of hair, and a 'weather-beaten countenance'. She wears the boots, slops the pigs, drives the

car, and brags about drinking.

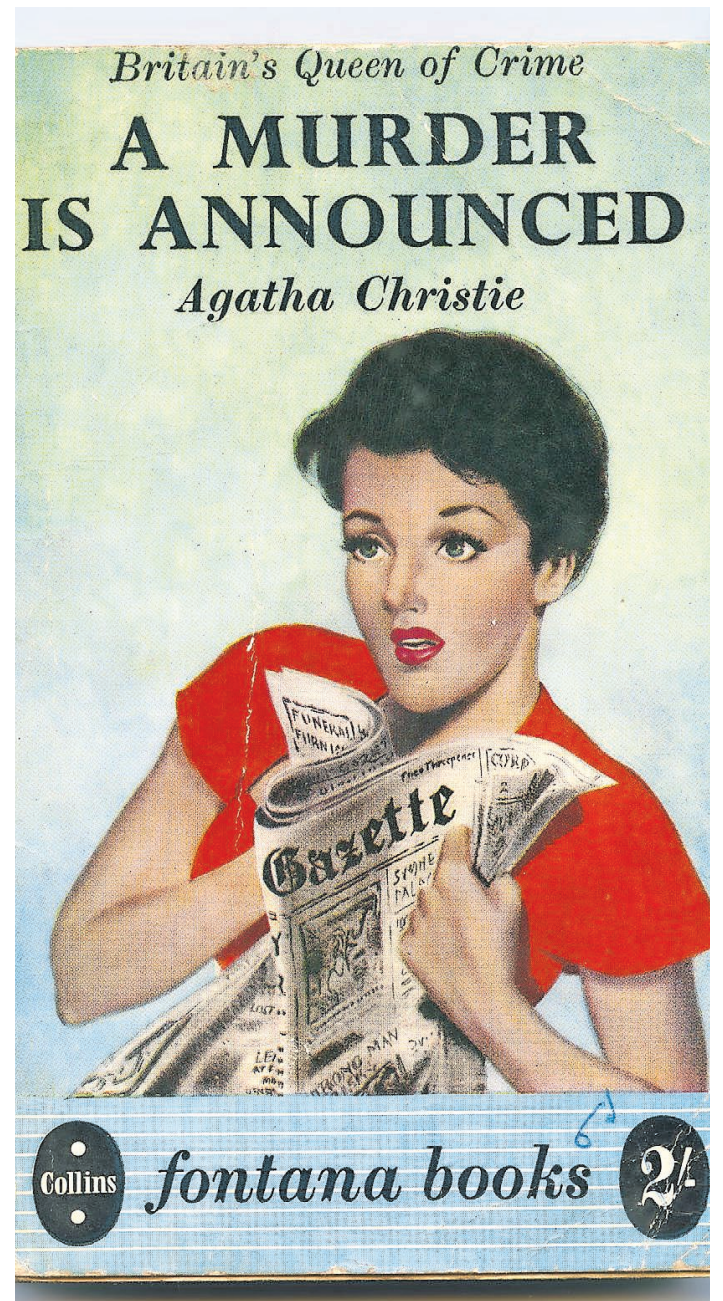
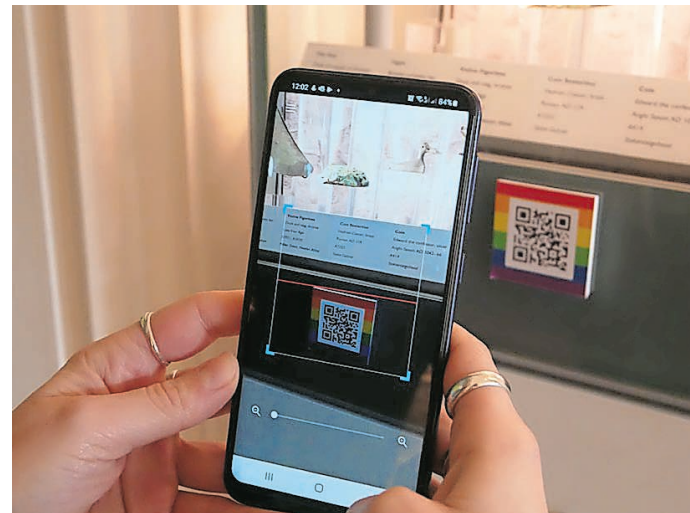
Upon the murder of Murgatroyd, Hinchcliffe vows that the killer will pay and is as fiercely defensible as any spouse.

Accessibility is paramount when it comes to Torquay Museum and the collections as everyone should have access to the past.

With this in mind, The Michelangelo Trail can be viewed on your mobile by scanning the QR Codes placed around the museum or if you prefer, you can pick up a paper copy of the trail at reception.

Here at Torquay Museum, we are very proud of the trail, but without the support and funding of Art Fund and South West Museum Development the trail would not have been possible.

We look forward to future events and collaborations with local LGBTQIA+ networks and communities.



Fotana paperback book cover for 'A Murder is Announced' and, left, scanning QR codes for the Michelangelo Trail in the entrance hall

Pictures: TORQUAY MUSEUM

Lift off for Operation Tree Trunk

When a helicopter hovers over the moorland village of Manaton one day later this month, the residents needn't worry that the air ambulance is attending an emergency or the police tracking a criminal.

In fact, it will be doing a routine job in a most unusual way.

The National Trust, which bought Manaton Rocks in 2017, wants to remove a group of trees which is spoiling the beauty spot's panoramic views towards Haytor, Bowerman's Nose and over the eastern edge of Dartmoor.

And it's going to use a helicopter to do it.

The trust says pulling the trees out from above is not only the best way to do the job, because of problems over access for tractors or horses,

but it will be the most cost-effective. The trees coming out are Sitka Spruce, plus some Douglas Fir and Western Hemlock, and the trust says that its work is 'to improve the view from the top of Manaton Rocks for local walkers and visitors, and as part of our policy of conifer removal from these high value woodlands'.

In a statement to residents, the trust said: "The site is inaccessible to any other wheeled or tracked machines to remove the trees.

"Lifting the material straight up, rather than attempting to winch it along the ground, will reduce damage to the soils in the area.

"The site is too steep and rocky to allow extraction by horses."

Insisting that the helicopter option is cost-effective, the trust said: "We have a local firm who can do the work. The job will take only a couple

of hours and will be cheaper than all other means of extraction and will cause negligible damage to the site."

It added: "Although helicopters do use fossil fuels, because they can get jobs like this done very quickly, the fuel used is less than might be used by other forms of mechanical extraction.

"Helicopters aren't the quietest machines, but the speed with which we can do this operation will make up for this.

"We expect to undertake the whole operation within two hours."

The date for the work has yet to be confirmed, although it will be on a weekday in late February.

The public will be allowed to watch, not from the site itself, but from the footpath from St Winifred's Church nearby.



Haytor and an old working granite mine

Picture: STEPHEN COOMBES