

# Torquay Museum's trail of tigers for half-term

**Barry Chandler** looks at Torquay Museum's half-term's trail of tigers

**In 2022, the Chinese New Year fell on Tuesday, February 1, and celebrations culminated with the Lantern Festival on Tuesday.**

With the world's eyes on Beijing again for the Winter Olympics, Torquay Museum has created a trail to celebrate the transition between Chinese zodiac signs from the Ox to the Tiger.

Like their zodiac animal, people born in years of the tiger are considered vigorous and ambitious, daring and courageous, enthusiastic and generous, self-confident with a sense of justice and a commitment to help others for the greater good.

To create our trail of tigers, the museum has searched its collections, mostly natural history, to find other creatures with tiger in their name.

These animals - and a mineral - tend to share a general colouring and patterning which has linked



New Tiger Trail in the museum

them in name to the king of big cats.

Our trail starts with one of the museum's most iconic exhibits, the trophy head of a Bengal tiger which has been displayed in our entrance hall, on and off for over 40 years.

The Bengal tiger ranks among the biggest wild cats alive today, but is threatened by poaching and loss and fragmentation of habitat, and is estimated at comprising fewer than 1,500 wild individuals.

The rarity of this incredible animal makes the museum's example collected in 1860 all the more special.

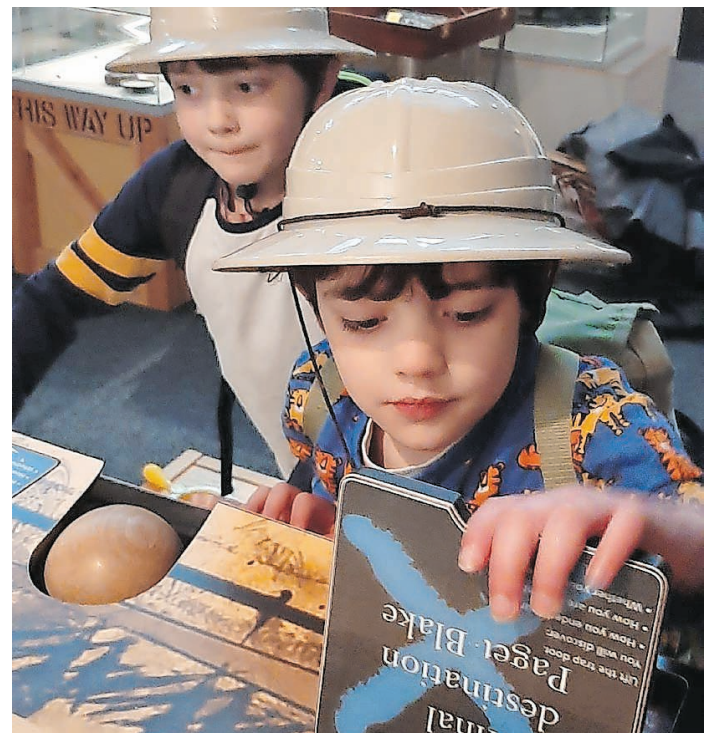
The Tiger Trail is new for this half-term but there are plenty of other activities around the

museum to occupy young and old alike.

There is a safe cracking game in our Explorers' Gallery along with The Curse of the Mummy's Hand, an interactive experience based on our ancient Egyptian collections.

There are interactives around the museum and toys and Explorer backpacks for the youngest visitors. We also have a temporary exhibition Far Side of the World: Torquay's Fijian Connection showcasing the museum's internationally important Fijian artefacts from clubs to boat models and pottery to fish hooks.

Linking to this we will be showing a free film - with a valid entry ticket - on our big screen, on Thursday, February 24, with two



Children's activities in the Explorers Gallery

Pictures: TORQUAY MUSEUM

showings at 11am and 1.30pm.

This is an Oscar-nominated, animated musical adventure based in the Polynesian islands and featuring a very large fish hook.

We are sure you know the one!

The museum will be open Monday to Saturday during half-term week.

We recommend booking online through art tickets on the museum's website but you can also just turn up.

Remember you can also take



A Fijian fish hook which has inspired the choice of a free film for this half term

advantage of the 30 per cent off ticket prices for local people.

## Torquay villa was home of Prince Peter Georgievich of Oldenburg and his family

**The stories behind Torbay's blue plaques by Ian Handford, chairman of Torbay Civic Society. This week: Villa Borghese**

The placement of a blue plaque on Villa Borgehese in Ridgeway Road, the Lincombes, Torquay, was an interesting scenario in that it started soon after I became chairman of Torbay Civic Society.

It was the only time that differing owners at the property had contacted me about the possibility of establishing a plaque on the listed property.

When the initial request failed because of cost, it was 10 years later before a second owner - having found the sponsorship - agreed the plaque erected in 2014.

Villa Borghese was one of hundreds of Italianate homes built by the Palk family through its land agent William Kitson, a man with the desire and then power to develop Torquay into what he envisaged would be a Victorian town 'enclave for the rich'.

He made sure wide roads, gentle gradients and steps to

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give access to servants were installed across the many hills of Warberry, Lincombe and Vane Hill Road areas.

During a quarter of a century, Mr Kitson used his energy to develop a town suitable for residents and visitors although largely ignored the wishes of Robert Palk of Palk Estates, his sponsor, who wanted for industrialisation and commercial properties.

Because Kitson was a committed churchman, he did build many churches including St Mary Magdalene, St Marks and St Matthias in Wellswood, plus many local government buildings.

Villa Borghese, constructed in the 1830s for the Capel-Cure family, became a setting for their sculptures and paintings

brought back from their 'Grand Tour of Italy' while waiting for a new home in Shropshire to be completed - ultimately named Badger Hall.

Their house mirrored the Borghese's properties in the City of Rome where gardens, parks and sculptures also carried this name.

Rev Edward Capel-Cure had at one time served as chaplain to Queen Victoria although was now retired.

By the late 1840s, this first family had moved out and we can only assume the villa was like many of that era, often leased out by owners.

Yet by July 1850, Prince Peter of Oldenburg and his wife Princess Therese and their eight children stayed with us for many months in the secluded terraced villa hidden

in the Lincombes. Eventually, other Russian families came to Torquay including the Romanoffs, who on spending holidays here, chose to lease and stay at the mansion Villa Syracrusa on Daddyhole Plain Road.

This property, sitting 200ft above sea level, enjoyed magnificent views of Torbay and many members of the Russian aristocracy including HIH the Grand Duchess Marie of Russia and stayed here in the years to 1867.

Syracrusa eventually became the Torquay Hydro and later the Overmead Hotel, before today having been extended many times, it is called the Headland Hotel on Daddyhole Road.

Villa Borghese, meanwhile of the 20th century, is converted into large apartments with its additional wing added. It was during early 2014 that a second owner - a civic society member - arranged for the necessary blue plaque sponsorship to honour the villa and its most famous resident, Prince Peter Georgievich of Oldenburg. That saw me contact the Oldenburg

public house on Winner Street, Paignton, to ask if they would like to have use of the advert space on our official pamphlet - knowing that the inn had changed its name from The Globe to The Oldenburg, in recognition of the prince's visit to Torquay having been nominated to the throne of Denmark in September 1854 - exactly 160 years previous.

The plaque was finally unveiled on July 31, 2014, by the chairman of Torbay Council Mrs Jane Barnby, together with the owners and members of Torbay Civic Society and the public present.

Following the formal unveiling, we then viewed the ground floor and inner floor areas and garden before being served refreshments and hearing a little of the historical background of Borghese.

**Torbay Civic Society's full-colour leaflet Villa Borghese and his Imperial Highness may be obtained by sending two second class stamps and a stamped addressed envelope to Torbay Civic Society, 4 Palace Avenue, Paignton TQ3 3HA**