

What did Charles Dickens do for us?

Charles Dickens is considered by many to be the greatest and most-popular novelist in England.

His literary success began with the publication of *Pickwick Papers* and continued until his death in 1870.

During his lifetime he published more than a dozen major novels, a large number of short stories, a handful of plays, and several non-fiction books.

In his novels he created a world of characters so distinctively cruel or suffering or comic and repugnant that is almost unrivalled by any other writer.

Dickens has been acknowledged as an influence on the modern Western observance of Christmas and inspired several aspects of it, such as family gatherings, seasonal food and drink, dancing, games and a festive generosity of spirit.

His famous novella *A Christmas Carol* was written at a time when the Victorians were examining and exploring many Christmas traditions.

These included traditions of the past such as carols as well as new customs such as Christmas trees, cards and crackers.

A Christmas Carol, published in 1843, tells the story of Ebenezer Scrooge, an old miser who is visited by the Ghosts of Christmas Past, Present and Yet to Come and is transformed into a kinder man. By addressing the

Barry Chandler, of Torquay Museum

exploitation and mistreatment of the poor, Dickens encouraged rich Victorians to redistribute their wealth and help those in need. Even the Queen of Norway sent gifts to London's disabled children signed 'With Tiny Tim's love'.

In this book Dickens also popularised the phrase 'Merry Christmas'.

Dickens wrote with great humour and reminded his readers that although life was often harsh, it could be tempered with kindness.

He believed that good heartedness would prevail over evil and created his own world of hilarious characters which lived out these ideals.

His work remains hugely popular today. Torquay Museum owns one original letter signed by the man who brought literature to the masses by publishing it serially in the periodicals of the day.

This year, our Charles Dickens letter and a selection of Victorian Christmas objects have been placed around the museum to form a trail for young visitors to discover. From jelly moulds



A letter by Charles Dickens is on display at Torquay Museum this Christmas

to the humble robin, the items epitomise the idea of a Victorian Christmas.

The museum will be open on December 20 to 22 and December 27 to 29 from 10am to 4pm. See Torquay Museum's website or follow on social media for details of tickets and opening times.



A Victorian Christmas card.

Credit: TORQUAY MUSEUM

Will Arthur Hyde Dendy finally be honoured by a blue plaque in 2023?

After trying for more than 20 years to establish a blue plaque to Arthur Hyde Dendy, it looks as though at long last this might change in 2023.

Having been promised sponsorship by a local philanthropist, it may be we shall be able to honour this famous man in the new year.

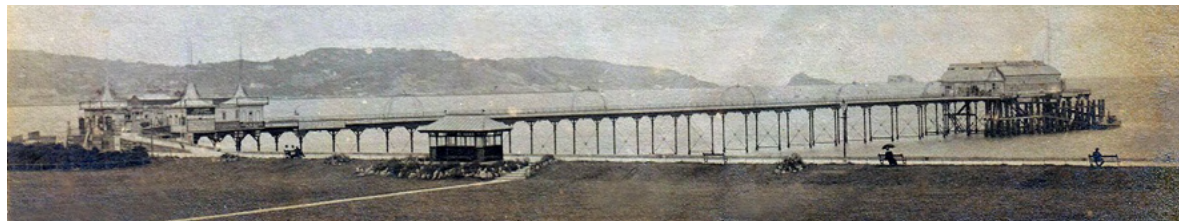
My recent feature concerning Arthur suggested that he was the greatest benefactor to Paignton ever seen and yet today other than a couple of road names and a public house honouring his name, he is largely un-recalled.

Locals and visitors seem to know little of his amazing legacy of built heritage and other businesses he founded when living in our town.

Arthur Hyde Dendy retired from Birmingham as a successful lawyer and being wealthy, then decided that retirement did not really suit him.

Why he had chosen Paignton and not Torquay, being one of the top resorts in England, was learned later in his life when having been asked the question: "Why did you choose Paignton?", he merely replied: "Torquay... was made for Paigntonians to look at."

One of his 1885 printed promotional guides left us his description of Paignton when stating: "Every watering place has its own special features and Paignton has its own too. Here, you



Arthur Hyde Dendy's Paignton Pier in around 1879

The stories behind Torbay's blue plaques by Ian Handford, chairman of Torbay Civic Society. This week: Arthur Hyde Dendy

will find no rollicking horseplay and boisterous fun such as you may have been accustomed to on Ramsgate or Margate Sands - Paignton prefers to be select, dignified and discreet; yet there are not wanting abundant means of enjoyment."

Having realised retirement did not suit, his first venture into the new world of buildings and construction came when creating the Gerston Hotel, later the Woolworths store, on Hyde Road.

Having built this in 1870, he must have realised Brunel's new railway would benefit from having a hotel adjacent to the station.

Meanwhile, he was building the Esplanade Hotel, later the Inn on the Green, and then many more

hotels including the Terra Nova and Park Hotels.

At the rear of the Esplanade he even constructed the first ever cycling track in Devon, which later doubled up as a general sports arena when archers and rugby players made use of the facility.

His many buildings were just part of his vast business empire established mainly for the tourist and sporting sector.

Mr Dendy started our first omnibus company which regularly ran from Torquay to Paignton, and then a bathing machine company operated from his Esplanade Hotel and, finally, a boat service from the pier.

He even established a newspaper and publishing company which, in

time, allowed him to produce his personal tourist guides.

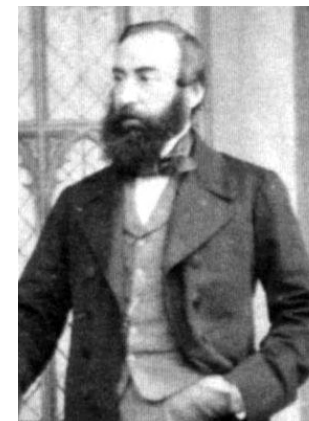
Yet his most lasting legacy was to be the iconic Paignton Pier which although the original buildings were later lost in a fire, structurally it still survives today.

As a hyperactive entrepreneur, he took amazing risks in order to provide visitors and residents with every type of facility imaginable, yet ultimately he would not make a second fortune in retirement.

In less than 20 years Mr Dendy built a portfolio of hotels, two theatres, numerous villas and associated businesses plus, of course, the pier.

He did marry and left us a daughter and yet, for some unknown reason, neither the family or history seems to have remembered how important this Victorian man and entrepreneur was to Paignton.

After his death, the trustees to his estate refused to allow the council to buy the marshy land he owned between Hyde Road and Victoria Road and it took five long years



Arthur Hyde Dendy

before the land was compulsory purchased in 1894 to construct Victoria Park and its ponds. They emerged just in time for the agricultural show of 1900.

Should a blue plaque finally be established to this amazing man, perhaps then his amazing legacy will be realised.