

# Volunteers tackling museum's backlog

**Veronika Valigurská,** digital and collections officer at Torquay Museum

**Most new additions to Torquay Museum's collections have to wait for months, years or even decades to be looked at and processed.**

One such example is a donation by Mike Thompson from Torbay Council printing department of more than 550 post-war photographs.

These were gifted to the museum in the summer of 2011 and immediately joined a growing backlog of unprocessed donations in the museum's pictorial archive store.

Their turn finally came, 11 years later, in the autumn 2022 after the lantern slide project had finished and more work was needed for our keen collections volunteers.

While cataloguing Mike Thompson's photographs, we came across some incredible images from all parts of



The former Tudor cinema at St Marychurch, which became a bingo hall in the 1970s and now operates as Bygones. (PR42406)

Torbay. A selection of these made an appearance on the museum's social media during the last four months.

There were previously unseen images of the interior of Oldway Mansion, snaps of the opening of the sports hall, fitness suite and catering facilities at the Torbay Leisure Centre in 1984, a photograph of the former Tudor cinema - now Bygones - at St Marychurch, beautiful views of Brixham harbour and many more.

Some people might think that it shouldn't take very long to document a box of photographs but to follow modern procedures, every single one needed to be numbered, recorded,

scanned and located within the stores.

In the end, the whole process took three volunteers four months to complete. It has taken 30 years to document more than 53,000 items in the museum's pictorial archive and it is estimated that there are approximately 25,000 more to process.

The museum gets offered more donations almost every week, sometimes it's one item, other times hundreds and with the reduced number of collections staff, it's no wonder every donation needs to patiently wait its turn.

Staff are currently so busy that they have had to suspend any further



A view of the Quay in Brixham (PR42505)

donations until June. Very often they are asked if there is an online database of Torquay Museum's images. Sadly, the answer is no. Staff have looked into the process, even drafted a project and applied for a National Lottery grant to make it happen but it wasn't successful.

The fees for hosting images are so high that the museum simply can't afford to create an online database without external funding.

This is why staff regularly post newly digitised images on the museum's social media, where they can be seen by thousands of people.

You can view them by searching for #DigitalArchives on Facebook, Twitter and Instagram.



Oldway Mansion's ballroom set up for chess tournaments (PR42595)

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