

Salcombe Maritime Museum Update - Society Showcase 2024

The sun shone again for this year's Society Showcase in partnership with Salcombe Maritime Museum. People came from all corners of Devon to enjoy a day out in this fascinating coastal town.



This year is a very special one for the museum as not only has it secured funding from The National Lottery Heritage Fund's Dynamic Collections Project to make the collection available to a wider range of people, but it is also celebrating its 50th anniversary.

Abigail Gray (the museum's Engagement Project Officer) explained more about the project and the successes they are having engaging local audiences with the collections by reconnecting objects with their stories, visiting schools and running outreach events such as the Curious Club. Roger Barrett (maritime historian, and chair of the Museum) gave the group an illustrated introduction to the history of the town.



We discovered how shipping fuelled the growth of the town in the C19th, with the fast Salcombe schooners dominating the fruit trade. The number of merchant sailing vessels owned in Salcombe peaked in 1878 at 126 vessels! A combination of steamships starting to dominate trade in the later C19th and the Great Depression led to rapid decline and a flight of capital out of shipping. The shipping trade and the tradespeople associated with it in Salcombe moved elsewhere and the population declined. It wasn't until the arrival of the railway at Kingsbridge that the town reinvented itself as a fashionable yachting and tourist centre. Several well-known brands were initially founded in Salcombe including brands such as Jack Wills, Crew Clothing and Quba Sails.

After lunch we learned about and saw up close some of the museum's collections and went on a guided tour of the town. Historic photographs helped to illustrate the differences between Salcombe today and in the past.



A huge thanks to Roger and Abi from the Salcombe Maritime Museum for their support with this event. It was great to find out about the shipping origins of the town before it's reinvention as a tourism destination.



The idea behind the 'Society Showcase' is to share the achievements of some of Devon's heritage organisations, projects and local groups. If you know a group or organisation who would like to be involved in future please email events@devonhistorysociety.org.uk.