

# Newton Abbot Museum Audio Guide Transcript

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## **Track One: A warm welcome to Newton Abbot Museum!**

When you entered the building you might have noticed a large ceiling to floor watercolour of the town, it was painted by George Sheperd in 1820. It includes images of Old St Marys Chapel, Highweek Street. The original image is owned by the Ashmolean Museum and it is very small, we are delighted that it has been successfully enlarged to fill the wall.

Adjacent to the watercolour image, is an eclectic display of objects in gilded frames. The items range from children's toys, to WWI bugles, and swordfish snouts!

Beyond this little display is a selection of late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century oil paintings of the area, and you will find the toilet facilities here.



## **Track Two: Introduction and Early History**

You are now standing in what was the former St Leonard's Church. It was completed in 1835 and replaced the ancient Chapel of St Leonards in the centre of the town, which was falling into disrepair.

The museum has the open feeling of the original church with its tall windows flanking either side of the building. One can still see an uninterrupted view of the Chancel where the Altar once stood.

The museum is light and airy and colourful, there are ten main themed areas which cover the history of the town. The objects displayed are changed regularly so there will always be reason for a return visit.

**On your right are the green cases which explore the early history of the area.**

The first case contains exciting finds that have been discovered in Newton Abbot and the surrounding area. This case is designed to display objects that were found near Newton Abbot and are on loan to the museum.

As you move along the displays you will be able to see finds from the Iron age settlement found on a hill located above Bradley Manor. This little collection of items

includes pottery fragments, two whet stones for sharpening tools, a quern stone for grinding grain, a spindle whorl, for spinning wool, and some tiny blue glass beads. All these were discovered by the resident of Bradley Manor, Diana Woolner and they date from the 1<sup>st</sup> century BC.

Nearby a case displays two remarkable ancient axe heads, one is black and has knapped edges, this object is not only a useful tool but is aesthetically pleasing. The second axe head is boat shaped, each end curves upwards with a central hole for the shaft, with one end crafted as an axe, both these implements would have been status symbols and highly prized.

It is an exciting time for archaeologists in Devon as the old theory of the Romans not venturing west of Exeter is being turned on its head. A vast Romano-British site has been revealed at Ipplepen, and excitingly, new Roman discoveries continue to be found in our local area.

We have a small selection of recently excavated Roman pottery fragments unearthed from the construction of the South Devon Link road on the Torquay Road. Archaeologists were able to tell us that the fragment of black and white pottery was made in the largest workshop in Gaul (modern France) made by Paternus V from Lezoux,

You might now be hearing giggles as in the next area visitors can try on an assortment of hats and see themselves in the mirror.

Next to the 'hat trying on area' is our colourful, medieval market automaton. Visitors can pop a pound coin into the slot to watch the scene come to life. As the automaton begins, a dog wags its tail whilst grabbing sausages from a market stall, a cheese seller is cutting cheese, a man is demonstrating a 'cup and ball, 'now you see it now you don't!' and in a tent, when the curtain draws back, you can see a monk from Torre Abbey having his tooth 'pulled' by the Barber Surgeon! The curtains then close, and when they re-open, the monk not only has a set of shiny false teeth, but has a lovely monkish hair cut as well!

The displays continue to explain how the two towns and their markets were established either side of the river Lemon. By the 13th century the wealthy Abbots of Torre were developing the south bank (New town of the Abbot). At the same time

Theobald de Englishville, a Norman knight, was busy developing the north bank (Newton Bushel). The two towns finally amalgamated to become the market town of Newton Abbot in 1901.

A slightly faded, 400 -year -old document, is displayed with the seal of Gilbert Yarde of Bradley, it confirms Gilbert's ownership of both the weekly markets. The two markets were held on different days of the week, either side of the River Lemon. The wealthy Abbots of Torre established their market adjacent to St Leonard's Chapel. On the north side of the river, Theobald's market was held on 'treacle hill' near 'old St Mary's', which has now been altered into living accommodation.

Near this area is a magnifying glass which can be moved up and down to get a closer view of a selection of coins. The earliest coin has a very recognizable image of Henry VIII, and the small coin beneath it shows the sharp side profile of Elizabeth I. Some of the coins were found in local gardens, and others came from a discovery of a mini-coin hoard found by a local metal detectorist.

Next to this is a touch screen which allows you to search through 4 digital maps with 8 'hot-spots'. The earliest map dates from 1790. The latest map shows the town in 1932. Each hot spot has an image with some more information to discover about the building or person associated with the area at that time.

The last object on display in the early section was found by a metal detectorist in the fields around the outskirts of the town. It is a beautiful Tudor dress hook, it is tear-drop shaped with very small metal circles covering its surface. It really doesn't look big, or strong enough to hold up the heavy skirts of a Tudor lady's dress. This might explain how it came to be lost all those years ago.

Throughout the building there are information boards which serve as a conservation trail. Each board explains how the professional conservators have restored the stained- glass windows, chancel ceiling, font, pulpit, the exterior and interior. This Grade II listed- building, has now been preserved for future generations to come.



### Track Three: People & Places

**In the centre aisles, opposite the front desk, are lavender coloured showcases which tell the story of just some of the people that have moulded the town over the years.**

The showcase nearest to the early 'green' displays tells the story of the Newton Workhouse, it was viewed by all as a place of last resort and greatly feared. Before government benefit payments if you were unable to work and had no means to get by; the future was starvation or the workhouse, where you were given accommodation in return for (often hard) work.

In 1893 Newton Abbot Workhouse served 39 Parishes and it finally closed in the 1940s. There are stories of a cruel Matron, who was finally sacked by Dr Lee, much to the relief of all the inmates.

A colourful teapot with a chipped spout and a painting of a country cottage on it is a relic from the annual Hospital Saturday event, as is the little silver cup near-by. Events to raise money to run the hospital were organised every year. This continued from 1898 until the National Health Service came into being in 1948.

At the end of the case, you will discover another story concerning a young girl known as Kitty Jay. Kitty was an orphan found on the streets of Newton Abbot and taken in by the Workhouse. When she was old enough, she was sent to work on a farm on Dartmoor. She became pregnant, and rather than return to the Workhouse, sadly took her own life. She was buried at the crossroads near Manton and her grave can still be seen today. It always seems to have fresh flowers placed on it. There are many folklore stories associated with the spot.

On this side of the showcase there might be some busy activity as it is where the 'dolls house' is. The image of a house is divided down the middle: one side is Victorian, and on the other half it is modern. There are a range of magnetic images of objects to be put into their correct positions in the correct period rooms.

Two windows at the top of the house show two little brightly coloured clockwork birds. They used to delight a little boy when he visited his grandfather every Sunday. In the next window is a tiny porcelain doll sitting on a rocking chair.

In the same area there are domestic objects which range from a brass kettle and nit comb to a Bakelite radio.

As you move slightly to your right, there is a display of three elaborately decorated Victorian greetings cards, as well as a delicate hand -made love token which was made in 1792.

The love token opens -up to reveal 12 heart-shaped sections, each one has a romantic verse in it. It is remarkable that this fragile object has managed to survive the test of time.

As you round the end of that showcase there is a silhouette of a Constable who looks as though he is holding a real truncheon. This object was used to quell a bread riot in the town in 1866.

Turn the corner to your left to find out about 'The dying behaviour of Thomas Campion' in 1795. A Kingsteignton blacksmith, aged 30, the Broadsheet (a newspaper) says that he was the 'unfortunate victim of public injustice'. He was singled out, despite pleas to his good character, as the leader of a riot. As the French Revolution was still fresh in the Court's mind, perhaps it is not surprising that they chose to make an example of him. They hanged him on the 23<sup>rd</sup> July 1795 near Belle-Marsh Mill, the scene of the riot.

Lift the prison bars beneath, to find another plea for justice, this time to save John Burge from hard labour for taking two twigs valued at 2d. We don't know if the petition worked or not.



## Track Four: Trade & Industry

Across the room on the far wall adjacent to the reception desk explains the history of local trades and industries.

Pass by the small shop area, which has the 'Object of the month' showcase at one end of it. Do ask someone for more information about the object on display this month.

The first case in the trade area has three, large heavy clay tools which helped the Clay workers extract the valuable clay from the ground. The tools have unusual names; the thwarting iron, the lumper and the pogue. They were used to cut, and undercut the squares of clay, with the spike on the pogue being used to spear the clay square and hurl it onto the waiting cart.

There are two large ledgers from the Watts, Blake & Bearne Clay Co. Each order book is full of details of where the clay was being exported to, such as Russia, Sweden, Germany just to name a few, as well as the more local Staffordshire potteries. This area of Devon is renowned for the best quality ball clay in the world, and it is still being exported far and wide.

The display of the local Arts and Crafts Aller Vale pottery shows some very fine examples of the potters decorating skills. John Philips set up the pottery in 1881 encouraging the potters to find inspiration from the designs from ancient potters. The museum's main collection of Aller Vale pottery was donated by Frank Findlay who was the Aller Vale pottery's London agent. The designs appealed to the Royal family, with Queen Victoria and Princess Alexandra acquiring some pieces.

To the right of the pottery is probably the most unusual object in the whole collection, a rope swing made of hair! Maud Albrighton lived next door to the Rope Walk in East Street. She had extremely long, strong hair. The rope makers used to joke with her that if she ever cut her hair off, they would be able to make a rope swing from it. She did cut her hair into a fashionable 'bob', and the ropemakers, good as their word, made this rope swing out of her clipped tresses! There is a large photograph of her sitting on her rope swing looking very pleased with herself !

To your right there is information concerning the history of the Stover Canal and the Granite Tramway created by the entrepreneurial Templer family. James Templer built the Stover Canal from 1790-1792 which enabled him to transport clay onto the clay barges on the River Teign. The clay was then loaded onto ships which delivered clay to ports all over the world. His son, George Templer built the Granite tramway on Dartmoor which was officially opened in 1820. The granite from Haytor was used in the construction of The British Museum, London Bridge and Covent Garden Market amongst others.

As you turn to the right, in the centre of the room is a colourful hands-on interactive to illustrate how to make a rope. Next to this is a framed Victorian patent and wax seal for Ephriam Yeo who designed a windlass to assist in the rope making process.

Before the coming of the railways in 1846, the chief employers in the town were the clay industry together with the Vicary family's wool and leather industries. Lift the flap to smell what it might have been like to work in the leatherwork!.

John Vicary's office clock is on display, one can almost imagine its' slow 'tick tock' as another day of industry passed by.



### **Track Five: The Railways**

You might hear a whirring noise above your head, as a model of the Antelope, (one of Isambard Kingdom Brunel's Broad Gauge locomotives), passes by on the overhead track. The Antelope was the very first train to arrive at Newton Abbot Station on December 30th 1846.

In this railway themed area, is a sepia image of a driver and fireman photographed in Newton in 1892, leaning out of their engine. Projecting out of this image is a 3D model of one of the enormous central drive wheels that were fitted onto Broad Gauge locomotives, giving a sense of scale.

As you move along to your right you will come across a large cast iron pipe section with a curious slot on top. This was part of Brunel's extraordinary atmospheric



railway, built in 1847 between Exeter and Newton Abbot, he had planned it to go as far as Plymouth.

The atmospheric pipe was fitted between the rails. It had a slit in the top, and a piston inside the pipe was connected to the train by a connecting 'arm'. The air in front of the piston was pumped out which caused a vacuum. The atmospheric pressure, let in by lifting the leather valves on top of the pipe, forced the piston along.

With no locomotive to haul the carriages, it was silent, swift and smokeless. The system, however had many problems; it operated for less than a year.

At the end of the case next to a bust of Brunel is a hands-on model to demonstrate how the atmospheric railway was propelled. The visitor is asked to pump the button to move the piston along the pipe.

Near-by you can try out your skills as a signalman, or woman, by pulling the signal levers forward. You will then hear quite the clunking of the two signal arms as they move down one after the other. The position of the arms informed the driver if they could move forward, or not. They make quite a lot of noise when they are returned to their original position!

The other sounds you will hear in this section are the signal bells. The Great Western Railway (GWR) signalmen used these bells to 'speak' to each other to inform each other what type of train was coming into their section. There were different codes for passenger trains, freight trains and even a code for a Royal train!

All around you in this area the displays are full of railway memorabilia such as whistles, warning horns, ticket punches, carriage keys, cap badges, metal signs, header boards from locomotives, arm bands, 1940s GWR holiday guides and much more.

A fine, very large green model of a GWR locomotive fills a whole case. It was made by Mr Chalk who was the winner of the London model engineering exhibition in 1988. He donated it to the museum quite recently, and it takes pride of place.

Newton Abbot was a key railway town and in its hey-day was known as the 'Swindon of the West'.

You can try out the audio -visual screen in the Station Masters desk area, to explore railway images and films, as well as turning the virtual pages of William Dawson's watercolours of the South Devon Railway and atmospheric railway, painted in 1847. Last, but certainly not least, is a book of wonderful pencil sketches of locomotives and railway life drawn by Mr Chase from 1947 onwards.

As you move away from the railway section you will pass the Pulpit. It was created by Herbert Reed in 1924. It is made from Beer stone, it has five statues, one in each niche and all have historic connections with St Leonards. They include St Joan of Arc, St Martin of Tours, King Clovis and Bishop Remigius, and St Leonard himself. The statues were detached from the pulpit when the building was an antiques centre, they have now been fully restored.



### **Track Six: John Lethbridge 18th century inventor and diver**

A strange large wooden barrel is suspended from the ceiling, it has leather arm holes, and a small circular window to look through. The lid of the barrel is screwed on.

What is it, what was it for, who invented it, and when?

The answer is a diving-engine invented by the eighteenth -century diver and salvage man, John Lethbridge. Lethbridge, who was from Newton Abbot, was not the first person to invent a diving machine, but he modified the barrel to build his own 'diving engine'. He became a highly successful, and renowned salvage man diving on shipwrecks all over the world. John retrieved bullion and precious cargos for the mighty Dutch East India company, among others.

He said he could dive up to 12 fathoms using only the air in the barrel, which he said lasted for half an hour. He relied on his crew to winch him up to safety with the items he had salvaged, before being lowered to the 'deep' once again. Lethbridge was extremely successful and became a millionaire; he was still offering his services as a salvage man, at the grand old age of 81! He died aged 83 and is buried at Wolborough Church where he was the Churchwarden.

Below the full- sized replica is a colourful automaton of John Lethbridge's diving-engine, turn the handle clockwise to lower the engine into the watery depths.

Adjacent to the Lethbridge model is a restored 15th century font from Salcombe Church. It was provided by the 10th Earl of Devon in 1877, after he commissioned a new font for Salcombe. It was conserved in 2020.



### **Track Seven: Costume**

Make your way up the ramp and turn right through the gap in the wall to discover our costume area.

The large centre display case is a fantastic addition to the museum as it allows us to exhibit items from our costume collection. We have a small, but wonderful collection of very fine Victorian clothes, as well as a beautifully embroidered 18th century waistcoat, and many other interesting items.

One of our most recent donations is a turn of the century, men's Household Cavalry uniform.

The displays in this case change at least once a year to help preserve the collection from light and dust damage, whilst still enabling the costume to be displayed for visitors to enjoy.

All the costumes have been donated to the museum by local people.

To the right of the big showcase is a dressing table with open drawers which display button hooks, kid gloves, a chatelaine worn on the waist to secure items such as keys, and a christening robe.

On the wall are three little Victorian baby bonnets, which perhaps have a sad story to tell as they were never completed. In this area is a dressing up box where you can try on different items of costume including a corset – imagine wearing that every day!. Below your feet you will also come across a surprise display in the floor itself.

In an area next to the large costume case visitors can have a go at working out if statements were true or false. Lift the flaps to reveal the answers. They reveal some

fascinating facts about such things as whether the Victorians had photographs taken with the dead, or whether they had bells on their coffins in order to ring them if they had been accidentally buried alive!

Alongside this interactive display and, over the wall as you go towards the War section at the top of the ramp, there are an array of life sized cut out figures of Victorian Ladies. The images have been enlarged from a Ladies magazine in the museum collection and they date from the 1840s (the equivalent of a fashion magazine these days)

At the top of the ramp you find yourself in the area that focusses on WWI & WWII.



### **Track Eight: War**

This area is all about the lives and experiences of the people of Newton Abbot as they lived through the First and Second World Wars.

The WWI displays include a VAD nurse's autograph album. VAD stands for the Voluntary Aid Detachment which provided nursing care for military personnel. The album is full of funny little sketches and sayings written by soldiers, thanking the 19 year- old Ella Kenshole for her kindness during their recovery in Newton Abbot's VAD hospital. Other objects include a Bully Beef tin opener, a medical officer's little trench lamp, and two 'trench art' shell cases. These remarkable objects have been skilfully adapted from shell cases into vases and are decorated with stippling, and the names of the battles of Cambrai and Ypres.

War medals and information on the construction of the War Memorial brings home the impact that the War had on the town. The town raised £1,745 to erect a memorial of the 'Figure of freedom'. It was unveiled on the 23rd July 1922.

Within the displays is a short film that shows the effects of shell shock on the young men returning from the trenches after the Battle of the Somme. Seale-Hayne Agricultural College, on the outskirts of the town, became a shell shock hospital run by the pioneering Dr Arthur Hurst. His films have survived, and they show the men

before and after their treatment. He used humane therapies to cure 90% of his patients, saving the lives of many shattered men.

As you advance past the WWI showcase, round the corner, you are now entering the WWII themed area. The vibrant Polish costume ahead of you illustrates the town's connection with the Polish community. After the War Churchill promised to create homes for all Polish soldiers and their families who had fought alongside the Allies. Ilford Park, Stover was the former American Military hospital which was adapted to house 1,000 'displaced persons' It was known as 'Little Poland'. It is now a residential home for Polish people.

Large images of the bombing of Newton Abbot station, are interspersed with objects from the period such as, HMS Beagle's name board and ship's bell. HMS Beagle was adopted by Newton Abbot residents during Warship Week in 1941. Other items on display include a Gas Mask, defused incendiary bombs and a Women's Land Army great coat. The coat was worn by Pamela King. Her father, Dr King, had served in WWI and her brother was sadly killed in the Second World War.



### **Track Nine: Conservation and Community**

Retracing your steps back to the WWI area, move forward into the Community and conservation area. The floor has Victorian encaustic tiles and a ramp leads up to where the Altar once stood.

One of the first cases you will come across is called 'Your Space'. This case is for the community to display either objects from their own collections, or, items and art-work that have been created during museum workshops. It is a space that is continually adapted and renewed. You may even wish to display your very own collection or creation here in the future.

A square, low showcase nearby gives the museum a chance to display the new donations that have recently arrived. Anything from pottery to costumes to boat models. There is often something new to discover.

Next to the ramp on a plinth is a very large oak chest, known as the Feoffee Chest. It was used as a safe to store important documents in. The chest has eight different locks, so each Feoffee had to be present to open the chest together. Rents gathered by the Feoffees were used to support the poor and needy of the Parish. In 1612, the names of new trustees, John Reynell and Nicholas Parr, were engraved between the locks.

### **Chapel of St Leonard- Patron Saint of prisoners.**

Next to the chest is a mosaic model of St Leonard's Tower which was made in the mid-1920s by Harry Hodges of Teigngrace. Harry was a 'keeper' at Stover House (now Stover School). He probably saved the pieces of broken pottery from the kitchen of the grand house.

St Leonard's Tower is an important landmark of the town and has always been a place for meeting and celebration.

The original chapel was built in the 13th century by the wealthy Abbots of Torre and was beside the bustling medieval market.

Later falling into disrepair, most of the chapel was eventually demolished in 1836. However, local people voted overwhelmingly to keep the tower - known fondly as 'The Clock Tower'.

Many important announcements have been made in front of the chapel and tower over the centuries. The most significant took place in 1688 when Prince William of Orange first proclaimed his intention to become King.

### **Chancel ceiling**

Above you is the highly decorative and beautifully painted chancel ceiling. It was painted by a local artist, Vernon Benbow in 1881. We know this because during the restoration of the ceiling in 2020 the names of Vernon Benbow and other workman were discovered on the panels. The ceiling has been divided up into 20 panels with dark blue backgrounds. Each panel contains paintings of religious symbols. These include beautifully painted Pre-Raphaelite -styled Angels playing musical instruments, as well as plants and stars which echo medieval paintings.

## **The Sandford Orleigh Overmantel**

Head up the ramp towards the magnificent carved oak overmantel, or fire-surround.

It was created by George Templer of Haytor granite tramway fame, he was a wood turner himself, and collected various old wood carvings salvaged from old buildings and churches. The overmantel includes 16 very early renaissance panels.

These panels were made from Baltic oak, which would have been slower growing than English oak, and therefore easier to carve. They are dated, by dendrochronology, to 1522-25. The style is known as All'antica carvings, an Italian term meaning 'in the manner of the ancients'.

The museum received funding from the Heritage Lottery Fund to restore the badly damaged structure which was donated to the museum in 2008. It had been removed from George Templer's house at Sandford Orleigh during alterations to turn the house into apartments.

## **Church & Chapel**

Opposite the overmantle is an area describing the influence of church life on Newton Abbot and the surrounding villages. The silverware on display was used in Abbotskerswell Church for over 400 years. The chalice (or cup) is the oldest piece hallmarked 1692, and is inscribed 'The Parish Cup of AB Carswell' - 'AB Carswell' meaning 'Abbotskerswell' .

The museum has a collection of Bibles and Prayer books that will be displayed alternately over the years, from a rare early Elizabethan 'Breeches' Bible, to a 17th century Bible which belonged to Newton Abbot's first dissenting priest, Samuel Yeo. He served the town for 53 years and died in 1699.

There is also an unusual stone seat with feet carved into the stone sitting below the showcases. The feet might be just graffiti from the past or the urge for people to

leave something of themselves behind in a spiritual place. The stone seat came from All Saints Church, Highweek.

Make your way back to the ramp, or, walk down the steps to return to the 'Your Space' case area. You can either walk down the steps next to the signal arm, or retrace your steps past the WWI area, and down the ramp back to the main body of the museum.



### **Track Ten- Notable Newtonians**

Near the reception area are some glass double doors, make your way through these into the lobby and you will find yourself in what was once the main entrance of the Church. Although the area is quite small it enables us to celebrate some of the town's most remarkable and fascinating characters.

This display includes information on film stars to pharmacists, African explorers, the first lady barrister called to the Bar, to a rock star, and war heroes. They have all made a lasting contribution to history on a local, National or global scale.

The display will change regularly as there are so many remarkable stories we have yet to share with you.

Hanging from the ceiling are an array of glass time capsules. The local community were asked what objects might not still exist in 100 year's time, or, what items represent 2020, the year the Museum opened. As well as objects that reflect the pandemic, false teeth, glasses, mobile phones and money are some of the items that were chosen.

You have now come to the end of the tour, please make your way back to the Front Desk where you can return the audio guide. You will also find a small gift shop next to the desk, do ask a volunteer or member of staff if you would like any assistance.



At the end of your visit please exit the museum from the same door you entered on your way in. We do hope you have enjoyed your visit, and we look forward to seeing you again very soon!