

Devon's *Victorian* surprises

In this second part* of our look at group friendly attractions in Devon, Stuart Render discovers more surprises, and finds out just what the Victorians did for us



Buckfastleigh, home of the South Devon Railway



Rural charm at Buckfastleigh station. Most journeys will start here



A full-size Victorian Street is the centrepiece of Bygones, a privately-owned museum packed with hundreds of thousands of items painstakingly collected by Richard Cuming and his family



Bygones has surprises around every corner of the three-floor attraction, including this particularly grisly tableau depicting a 19th-century dentist. It's not for the faint hearted



Older visitors will revel in Bygones' extensive collection of items



Bygones is housed in an old cinema in the St Marychurch area of Torquay



It's not a sign you're going to see anywhere else, but it exemplifies the eclectic mix of things to see at Bygones. The present location was acquired to house a 27-ton steam locomotive

Devon is well known for its country lanes, its picturesque villages and its sandy beaches. A visit to Canonteign Falls brings a new surprise: 'England's Highest Waterfall', the sign says. It's quite a claim. "We're actually home to England's highest man-made waterfall," explains Canonteign's Lianne Bell. "This is a magnificent example of a Victorian folly," she says. "There are two sets of waterfalls here: the natural falls that have existed in this valley since time immemorial and the Lady Exmouth Falls, named after the third Lady Exmouth and built by local miners under her direction in 1890."

Canonteign Falls (pronounced canonteen) lies south west of Exeter in the heart of the Teign Valley on the southern edges of Dartmoor National Park.

For touring groups, a visit to Canonteign is likely to comprise three parts: the walk to the waterfalls, an exploration of the beautiful lakes, and a cuppa, or more, in the modern restaurant.

From the visitor centre the path to the waterfalls gently climbs alongside the river. First into view is the glorious spectacle of Clappitt Falls, part of the natural waterfall course that originates high up on Dartmoor. A few yards further on and the majestic Lady Exmouth Falls comes into view, dropping some 70 metres. For the less able on their feet, this is as far as they will go because from here the path climbs up 90 steps, passing through the Secret Garden (well signposted!) and the Victorian Fern Garden. However, as is so often the case, the exertion is rewarded as you reach the top of the falls and Buzzard's View, with spectacular views across south Devon and Dartmoor.

The circular route winds its way back to the visitor centre through ancient woodland.

Lianne explains that visitors are often surprised when they discover

there's more to a visit than just the opportunity to see the waterfalls and the woodland.

"We have a total of seven lakes that provide a fascinating walk in themselves," she says. "Each one is different, with level pathways and accessible bridges. We have Swan Lake, so named because it's home to our pair of Black Swans, Dame Margot and Rudolph. All the lakes give visitors the opportunity to see wildlife in its natural habitat including kingfishers, bats, butterflies, wildfowl and otter."

Lianne says that the lakes were built by the current Lord Exmouth as recently as 1990.

"We always urge tour planners to allow time in the itinerary for groups to visit the waterfalls and then have a walk around the lakes, possibly sitting on one of our benches and taking in what we believe are some of the most beautiful views Devon has to offer."

Back at the visitor centre, Home Farm Cafe offers a range of meals and refreshments, wherever possible using locally-sourced ingredients. Groups can pre-book lunches or a Devon cream tea.

"While we've tried to make a visit as accessible as possible, especially the lakes, this is a natural environment and some of the walks are steep and have naturally exposed tree roots," says Lianne.

"We recommend sensible footwear. However, for me, although the waterfalls are rather special in their own way, it is the beauty and peacefulness of the lakes, even when we're busy, that I know will appeal to older groups. How would I sum up what we have here? I'd say we are a magnificent example of a Victorian folly set in a magical natural paradise. I think we're one of the most breathtaking attractions in Devon and can offer a wonderful group visit. Give me a call and I can explain the options."

Groups of 12 or more pay £6.50 for adults and £5.50 for seniors. A typical dwell time, including refreshments is around two hours.

Access is along the B3193 near Christow, three miles from the A38 Teign Valley turn-off at Chudleigh.

A 'lost' Victorian village

Four miles south west of Tavistock is a destination that will be familiar to viewers of the BBC programme *Edwardian Farm*.

Morwellham Quay is an award-winning attraction that forms part of a UNESCO World Heritage site. A 'lost' Victorian village, an historic port and a copper mine, complete with mine railway, Morwellham gives groups the opportunity to step back in time and enjoy the charm of a bygone age as costumed guides reveal what life was like in Victorian times. Set in 200 acres of yet more spectacular landscape, this time on the banks of the River Tamar, the boundary between Devon and Cornwall, Morwellham became the greatest copper ore port in Queen Victoria's empire. She visited the site in 1856.

After the mine closed the site became a mining museum. In 2010, following a period of declining visitor numbers, and with new owners, the attraction has reinvented itself. Today, it is a living, working museum, the unique backdrop offering a home to a number of festivals and events.

A highlight of a visit is the unique narrow-gauge mine railway that travels along the banks of the Tamar before disappearing underground into the George & Charlotte copper mine buried deep into the hillside. During your time in the mine – and you stay on the train as it makes regular stops on its circular journey – groups learn about the harsh working conditions of Victorian miners. The tour takes around 45 minutes and the trains – there are two – can carry groups of 30 at a time. Back in the village and there are demonstrations and talks that give a fascinating insight about the people who lived and worked there. Visitors can see local craftsmen at work, wielding

hammers in the blacksmith's forge and turning clay in the pottery. There's an opportunity to visit the historic wooden sailing ketch *Garlandstone* and, should the mood take you, to try on costumes and look like a Victorian lady or gent.

The BBC programme *Edwardian Farm*, presented by Ruth Goodman, focused on a year in the life of Edwardian farmers.

The Ship Inn serves a variety of snacks, hot and cold lunches, cakes and the ubiquitous Devon cream tea. There's a shop that offers a wide range of gifts including iron work and pottery made on site.

Morwellham Quay is also a great educational platform for learning with a variety of workshops for schools and resources to make learning fun. Coach operators looking to attract new private hire business will also be interested to learn that Morwellham provides a learning platform for teachers or adults looking to broaden their knowledge about Victorian history and see it first-hand.

There's free, dedicated coach parking and coach drivers receive free entry. One word of caution – as you reach Morwellham along a typical Devon lane, you find yourself driving into what, at first glance, appears to be the actual Victorian village with visitors and costumed characters milling all around you. It is indeed the village. It's a quirk of the layout that you have to drive through it – with extreme caution – to reach the parking area and visitor centre on the far side.

This is a good half-day stop to allow time for the ride into the mine, the many demonstrations, and a cuppa.

The group rate, for 16 or more, is £7.50 for adults and £6.50 for children. This includes the ride on the mine railway.

Steam along the Dart

Buckfastleigh, on the A38 half way between Exeter and Plymouth, is the starting point for the South Devon Railway.

This seven-mile-long standard gauge heritage railway has a history going back 140 years.

The route from Buckfastleigh takes you along the banks of the River Dart to Totnes, through some more of Devon's most beautiful and hidden countryside.

Most groups start their visit at Buckfastleigh where there's free coach parking, a restaurant and toilets. There's also a fascinating museum and an engineering workshop where heritage locomotives from around the country are repaired and restored.

A well-stocked shop and refreshment rooms also make this an ideal place for lunch or afternoon tea either before or after a journey.

The steam-hauled journey takes 30 minutes to travel to Totnes. Next to the station at Totnes, which sits on the northern edges of the town, is Totnes Rare Breeds Farm.

Coach access at Totnes is at the main line station, a 500-yard walk away. Depending on the group, the opportunity to visit Totnes' medieval town centre and castle may be best achieved on a separate journey by coach. However, there's another reason why returning to

the Station Cafe, with yet more railwayana, and the Jubilee Gift Shop selling a range of memorabilia.

This really is one of those attractions where there really is something for everyone. To call it simply a museum really doesn't do it justice.

Richard explains how the collection has evolved.

"My whole family were avid collectors," he says. "We still are. My parents established the business and Amanda and I now run it. Looking back I guess we started collecting in the 1960s. In 1986 my father bought a 27-ton steam locomotive from Falmouth Docks. Our garden just wasn't big enough and he didn't want to run the engine on a heritage line.

"We looked around and found an old cinema near to our post office business in St Marychurch. We took the plunge, sold the shop, but now had enormous premises. We decided to combine our interests in railways and antiques and invite the public to come and see the collections.

"Over the next year or so, with the help of an excellent mason, a skilful carpenter and many patient friends, we recreated our Victorian

park. The attraction offers a variety of tour and food options including morning coffee, light lunches, afternoon tea and, yes, the Devon Cream Tea, all taken in the restaurant with views out to the attraction's relaxing gardens.

Rates for groups of 20 or more are £8. The tour of the caverns takes an hour with a typical dwell time of between one and half and two hours.

"We're one of a number of attractions in Torquay and the surrounding area that are within just a short drive of one another," says General Manager James Hull. "We can cater for pre-booked groups with our various catering options. Give me a call and I can offer some suggestions for linking us with other attractions as part of a day's itinerary."

Family home and castle

Powderham Castle is the family home of the 18th Earl and Countess of Devon.

Located on the A379 between Exeter and Dawlish, it was originally

built by Sir Philip Courtenay in 1391 and has remained in the same family since.

Entertaining guided tours bring the fascinating history of the castle to life.

Secret doors, a window that sometimes isn't a window, and a haunted landing are just three of the treasures in store.

Outside, the acres of gardens and grounds are framed with far reaching views across the deer park to the Exe estuary.

Each season offers a reason to visit, from the bright yellow daffodils along the drive and the peaceful haven of the Woodland Garden in the spring, to the roses and wisteria in the Rose Garden over the summer.

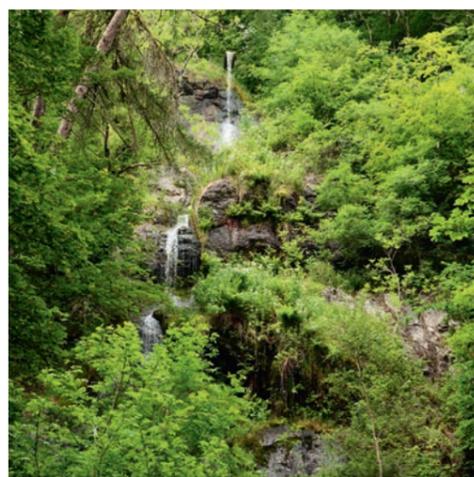
A tractor and trailer combination provides the Deer Park Safari, a 35-minute journey that takes in more of the grounds.

Coaches drop off at the end of the drive in from the main road, and then park for free in a dedicated coach parking area. Groups walk the short distance up to the imposing main entrance of the castle.

Catering packages include morning or afternoon tea, and lunch



Not sure what to do? Canonteign Falls offers suggestions



It's a Victorian folly, the man-made Lady Exmouth Falls at Canonteign



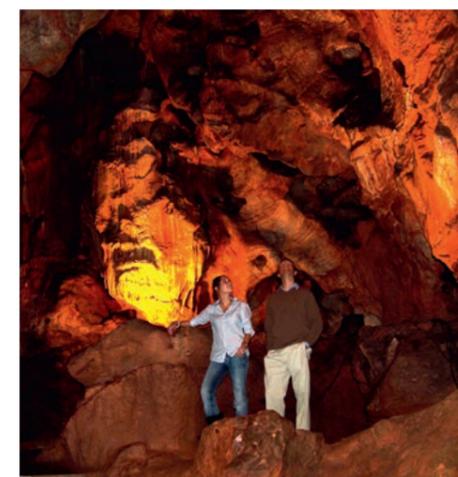
Canonteign's seven lakes are surprising and truly enchanting, and well worth exploring



Powderham Castle has been in the same family since 1391



Morwellham Quay's narrow gauge railway takes groups into the George & Charlotte copper mine



Kents Cavern – one of the most important Stone Age caves in Europe

Buckfastleigh should be considered.

Adjoining the station car park is Dartmoor Otters and Buckfast Butterflies, an otter sanctuary and butterfly farm.

The South Devon Railway offers a number of group packages that include a train ride and visits to both of the wildlife attractions. There's also a special package that combines train travel with a voyage along the River Exe from Exmouth with Stuart Line Cruises.

An itinerary could start with a morning trip on the railway, lunch at Buckfastleigh, and then travelling the 45 minutes to Exmouth for an afternoon cruise – or vice versa.

Train tickets for groups are £8.40 single or £11.90 return. The combined rail and cruise package start at £15 for adults and £14 for senior citizens.

Pure nostalgia at Bygones

Bygones is a privately-owned museum located in the St Marychurch area of Torquay.

Run by Richard Cuming and his sister Amanda, the museum covers three floors and is packed with hundreds of thousands of items stretching back to the reign of Queen Victoria.

The 'wow' factor hits you from the moment you walk in off the main road, with a full-size Victorian Street complete with shops, a forge and a post office. As you make your way around the museum you come to a bedroom, a nursery, and a bathroom, each full of items collected, donated or bought by Richard, Amanda and their parents Ken and Pat.

Around one corner you come across a particularly grisly tableau depicting a 19th-century dentist. It's not for the faint hearted!

Your journey brings you into the 20th-century with an excellent collection of railway memorabilia, a magical fantasyland and a 28-foot model railway. There's a WWI trench in France and a display of items from the Far East in 1944. Around another corner and you find yourself in shopping streets from the 1940s and 1950s. On one of the floors is

street scene using authentic building materials. We opened in May 1987."

Although a guide can be pre-booked, Richard suggest that visitors just follow their noses.

"Everything is signed," he says. "We find people come to us at the end and say that they liked all the little surprises, and the shocks!"

There's a comprehensive 42-page guidebook (£2.50) that tells you all you need to know, and is a first class souvenir of your visit.

Coaches can drop-off outside the main entrance. Group rates for 15 or more are £6 per person.

"We welcome coach groups and are happy to accommodate any specific requirements," says Richard. "Our aim is to try and treat all our customers as we would like to be treated if we were on holiday and visiting an attraction ourselves."

The typical dwell time at Bygones is around an hour and a half, but allow two hours if you want to include refreshments.

Stone Age cave

A 10-minute drive from Bygones is Kents Cavern, one of the most important Stone Age cave sites in Europe.

Since the early 19th century the prehistoric cave, which has been privately owned by the Powe family since 1903, has been excavated and researched. That activity has provided a unique record of ancient human occupation going back around 500,000 years. Those excavations continue to this day.

The extensive labyrinth of caverns, which have a constant year-round temperature of 14°C, include spectacular stalactite and stalagmite formations. Accessibility is good with nine shallow steps, concrete paths throughout, and plenty of headroom.

Access for coaches is from the A379 Babbacombe Road onto the west end of Ilsham Road. The turn into the attraction is rather cosy and caution is required. Coaches drop-off and park in the dedicated car

One-stop tour planning

The Devon Association of Tourist Attractions (DATA), which operates under the brand 'Devon's Top Attractions', operates a 'one stop' information shop for tour planners, offering local knowledge, an image bank and useful contacts. It can also put together familiarisation visits for coach or tour operators who wish to try before they buy. DATA also publishes and distributes 1.2 million copies of 'The Complete Guide to Devon', a useful road map showing all its member attractions, beach guide and tide tables.

Accommodation options

On this visit to Devon, organised by the Devon Association of Tourist Attractions, the accommodation was kindly provided by Brend Hotels at The Park Hotel in Barnstaple, and the privately owned Langstone Cliff Hotel in Dawlish Warren.

The Park Hotel

The Park Hotel, one of the family-run Brend Hotel Group portfolio of hotels across Devon and Cornwall, is located in one of the quieter corners of Barnstaple. The three-star property has 40 bedrooms, most of which have been recently refurbished with stylish contemporary soft furnishings.

Many of the rooms have views across to Rock Park and the River Taw beyond. There's a short, level walk to the town centre.

Brend Hotels prides itself on treating groups arriving by coach exactly the same as other guests staying at the hotel.

Nigel Maun, Tours Director with Brend Hotel Group, says: "A member of the management team will meet and greet the coach. We provide tea and coffee to guests while we take luggage to the rooms. As much as possible our menus are the

same as private residents' Table d'hote menus. Meal times are the same as other residents and we offer tables of twos, fours and sixes. We work closely with tour planners to ensure we understand what type of group it is – for example a touring group or a social club.

"At certain times of the year we offer extra value items, including a cream tea on one day of the tour. At the end of the holiday we always provide a wave away, getting on the coach to say thank you and farewell.

"There's free coach parking on site, or at our nearby sister hotel. With our wealth of local knowledge I'm always happy to help tour planners put together excursions."

Langstone Cliff Hotel

Set in 19 acres of woodland on the south Devon coast at Dawlish Warren, the Langstone Cliff Hotel is ideally suited as a base from which to explore the county.

Originally built in 1750, and adapted and extended many times over the years, the three-star hotel has 64 bedrooms, most of which are located across just two floors. 17 of the rooms have private balconies.

The hotel boasts expansive lawns and gardens, and both outdoor and indoor swimming pools.

General Manager Mark Rogers, says: "We welcome coach groups, offering a meet and greet and a swift check-in. Our guests can choose from the main menu and we offer individual or group seating depending on what the tour manager wants. Because we're a family-run hotel we pride ourselves on providing our guests with a friendly and hospitable atmosphere, combined with good food and surroundings. I would be delighted to talk with any coach and tour operator considering a visit to Devon."



Morwellham Quay's Tessa Wannell, helping to bring Devon's history to life



The 64-bedroom, group friendly Langstone Cliff Hotel at Dawlish Warren has both indoor and outdoor swimming pools

options including soup and a roll, sandwiches, ploughman's or quiche. Is there an option of an afternoon Devon Cream Tea? Of course there is!

Groups of 15 or more pay £9 for adults and £8 for seniors. The group organiser receives free entry; the driver also gets free entry and a refreshment voucher. The Deer Park Safari costs an additional £2.50 per person.

The attraction says that the best time to visit, when the gardens are at their best, is April to June, and then in September.

So, as we bring this second part of our look at some of the best group-friendly visitor attractions in Devon to a close, let's leave the last words to the Earl and Countess of Devon.

Writing in Powderham Castle's Groups' Guide, their words sum

up a county that's clearly committed to working more closely with coach tour operators. They say: "Thank you for bringing a group to Powderham Castle.

"We are delighted to share our family home with you and hope you enjoy everything Powderham has to offer."

➤* Part one appeared in the September 2015 issue. In that feature we said that the picturesque north Devon village of Clovelly offers spectacular views through the trees to the Atlantic. We were close. The views are actually of the Bristol Channel and Bideford Bay. We also said that Jana Edwards, who runs Clovelly Village Tours, charges a group rate of £3 per person for her excellent one-hour walking tours. She doesn't; it's only £2.50.

Contact information

Bygones

Richard Cuming
01803 326108
richard.bygones@gmail.com
www.bygones.co.uk

Canonteign Falls

Lianne Bell
01647 252434
info@canonteignfalls.com

Devon's Top Attractions

Devon Association of Tourist Attractions (DATA)
Anne Blackham
07905 291567
marketing@lotstodo.co.uk
www.lotstodo.co.uk

Kents Cavern

James Hull, General Manager
01803 215136
caves@kents-cavern.co.uk
www.kents-cavern.co.uk

Langstone Cliff Hotel, Dawlish Warren

Mark Rogers, General Manager
01626 868000
mrogers@langstone-hotel.co.uk
www.langstone-hotel.co.uk

Morwellham Quay

Tessa Wannell
01822 832766
admin@morwellhamquay.org
www.morwellhamquay.co.uk

Powderham Castle

Groups Department
01626 890243
groups@powderham.co.uk

South Devon Railway

01364 644370
trains@southdevonrailway.org
www.southdevonrailway.co.uk

The Park Hotel, Barnstaple

Nigel Maun, Tours Director, Brend Hotels
01271 344496
www.brendtours.com