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PLYMOUTH'S
BOOK OF
WONDER
OVER 100 AMAZING FACTS

To find out more about Plymouth, Britain's Ocean City contact the Enterprise and Inward Investment team on:

E invest@plymouth.gov.uk

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in [InvestPlymouth](https://www.linkedin.com/company/investplymouth)

Other useful websites:

visitplymouth.co.uk

theboxplymouth.com



FOURTH EDITION

Welcome to the fourth edition of the Plymouth Book of Wonder, we've combined some of our favourite facts from the previous three editions, alongside some new quirky and fascinating facts about Britain's Ocean City. The book continues to give you a flavour of what makes Plymouth the vibrant, creative and exciting ocean city that it is today.

Plymouth is an ambitious city with huge growth potential and is undergoing exciting changes, with many more on the horizon. We have already seen the transformation of Millbay and the Royal William Yard, now a cultural hotspot for restaurants, art galleries and events. It's this creativity and vibrancy, along with our spectacular waterfront location and rich heritage that provides such a fantastic quality of life, making Plymouth, Britain's Ocean City the perfect location to live, work and invest.

A number of facts in this edition are from The Box, Plymouth's award-winning museum, gallery and archive.

To find out more about business opportunities in Plymouth, contact the Enterprise and Inward Investment team on:

E invest@plymouth.gov.uk

W investplymouth.co.uk

✕ [@investplymouth](https://twitter.com/investplymouth)

in [InvestPlymouth](https://www.linkedin.com/company/investplymouth)

Plymouth is home to the UK's first National Marine Park, where people, planet, and place come together to realise a new and sustainable relationship with the sea.



Plymouth was named as the best city in Britain for Growth in the PWC Report, Good Growth for Cities report 2024.



The British Firework Championships has been held in Plymouth since 1997. For over 25 years millions of visitors have enjoyed the displays over Plymouth Sound.



Barden ball bearings can be found in equipment used in every environment on Earth, and off it too!

Super precision bearings have been incorporated into the International Space Station, meteorological, observational and telecomms satellites, and have even travelled to Mars as part of the Phoenix Rover!

Barden has been based in Plymouth for over 75 years and celebrated its 75th diamond anniversary in 2023.



Jacka Bakery on Southside Street, on the Barbican, is Britain's oldest working bakery and is the site of the bakery which is rumoured to have made the ship's biscuits for the Mayflower.



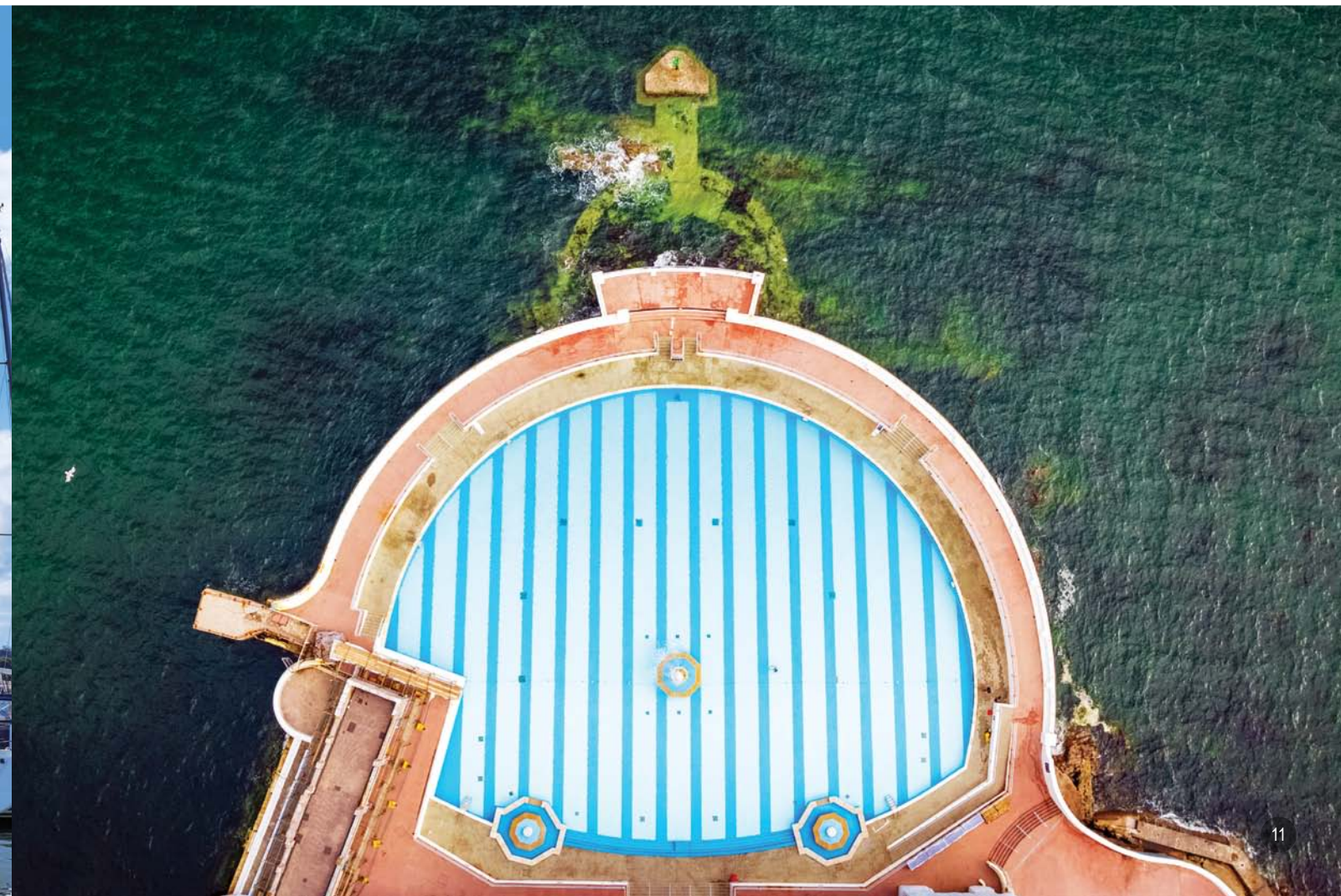
Plymouth born Tom Daley is Team GB's most decorated diver of all time, with 11 World, Commonwealth and European Championship gold medals and five Olympic medals. He earned his first gold medal at Tokyo 2020 in the 10m synchro alongside diving partner Matty Lee.

The Box, Plymouth's major award-winning museum, art gallery and archive, has 2,177,516 objects and works of art in its collections – highlights from which can be seen in its permanent galleries. The smallest is a feather winged beetle, the size of a full stop. The largest is the Royal William figurehead, on loan from the National Museums of the Royal Navy. He's as high as a giraffe and weighs 2.5 tonnes.



There are 52 Plymouths across the globe, but only one original.

Plymouth's Art Deco Lido opened in 1935 and is regularly featured in the national press as one of the finest places in the UK to swim.





In 1919, Plymouth's Nancy Astor became the first female MP to take a seat in the House of Commons. She was introduced to Parliament on 1 December 1919. A famous painting showing this historic moment is part of The Box's collections.



Scott of the Antarctic, who is still regarded as one of the top 100 Britons, was from Plymouth. You can see his skis and mittens on display at The Box.

Photo from The Box (Plymouth City Council)

Mine's a pint

Local legend has it that when the Tolpuddle Martyrs returned from Australia between 1837 to 1839, they stayed in the Dolphin Hotel on the Barbican.



Sir Arthur Conan Doyle assisted at a medical practice in Durnford Street. Sherlock Holmes was rumoured to have been based on his colleague there, Dr Budd.



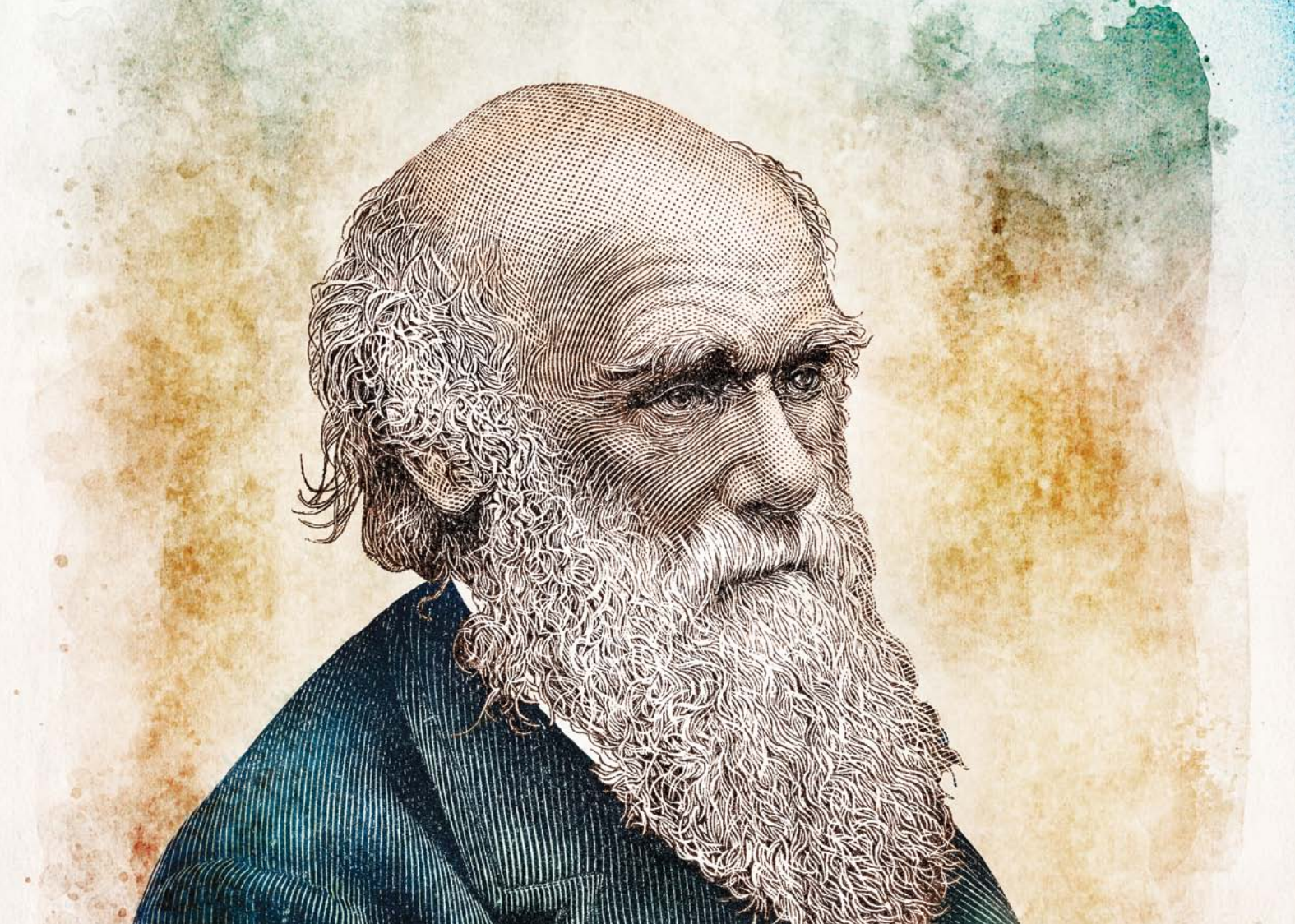
Plymouth has the oldest Ashkenazi Synagogue in continuous use in the English speaking world – it dates from 1762.



Sir Francis Chichester was the first person to sail single-handed around the world with only one stop – and the fastest person at the time! He started in Plymouth in August 1966 and arrived back 226 days later.

Photo from The Box (Plymouth City Council)



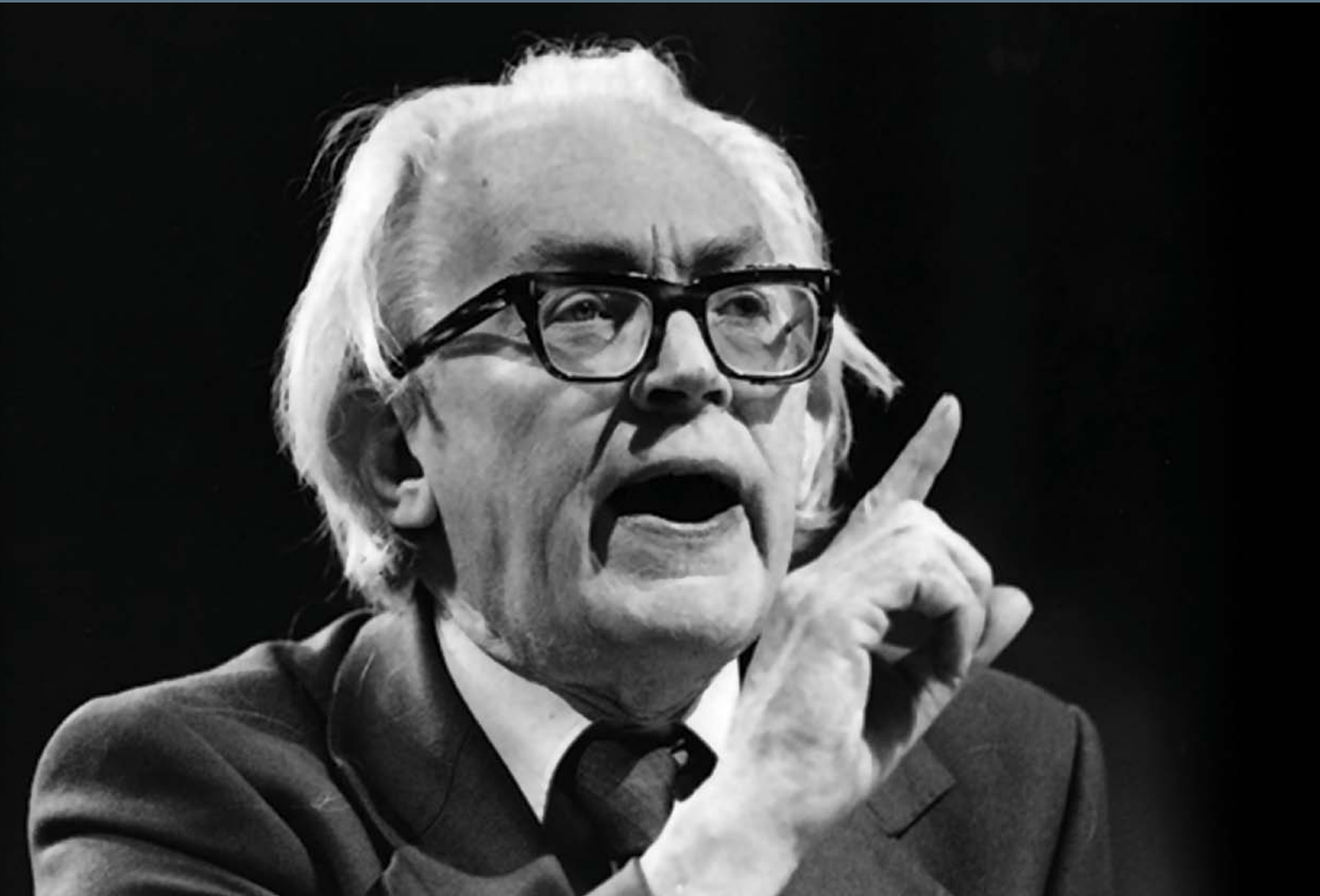


Naturalist Charles Darwin was one of the crew on board HMS Beagle when it set sail from Plymouth in December 1831. The five-year voyage, much of which was around South America, helped confirm his theory of evolution.



Stanley Gibbons founded his famous stamp collecting business in Plymouth in 1840, the same year that the Penny Black stamp was launched.

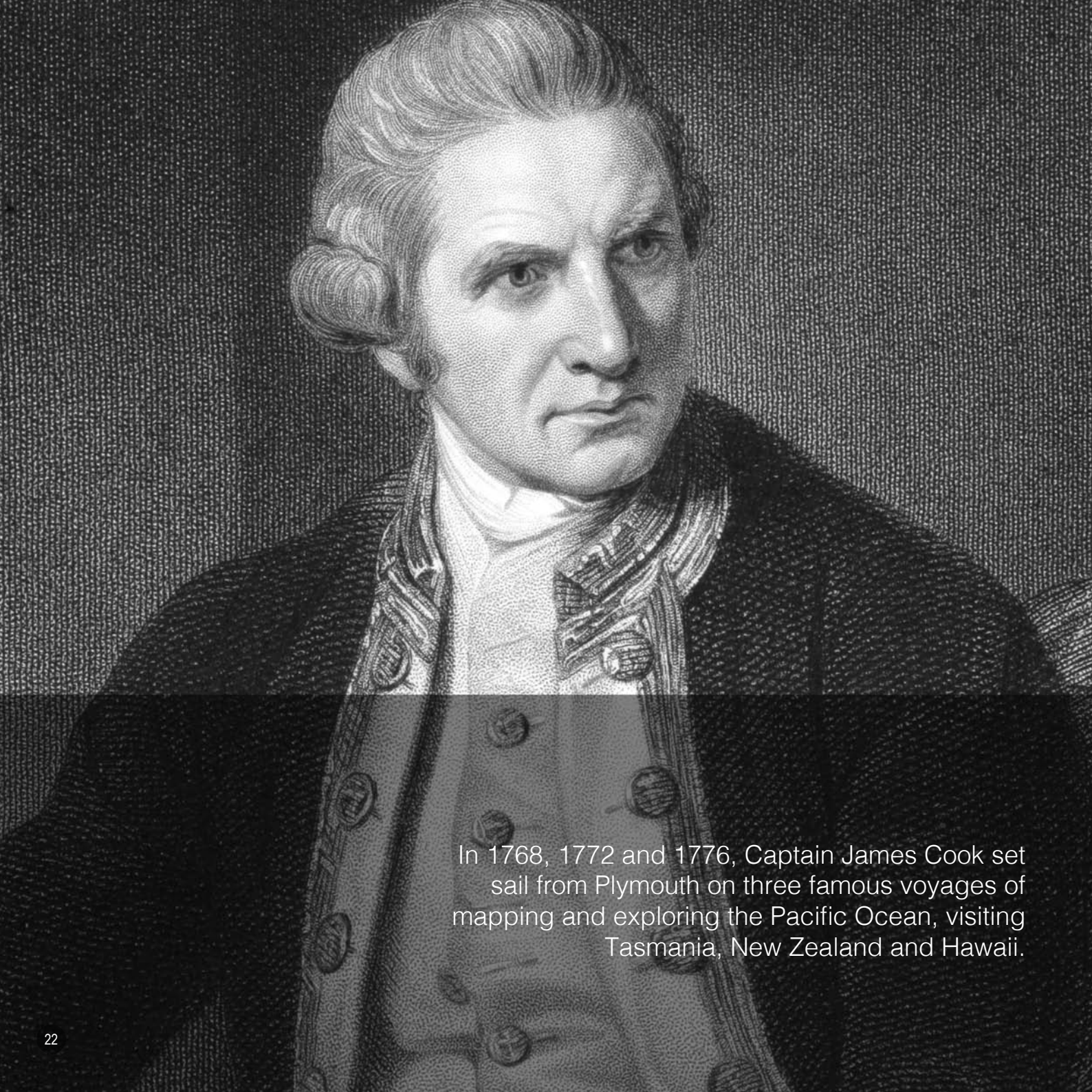
Plymouth-born Michael Foot was editor of the Evening Standard before he was 30, at the forefront of Health and Safety Legislation and leader of the Labour Party.



Passport

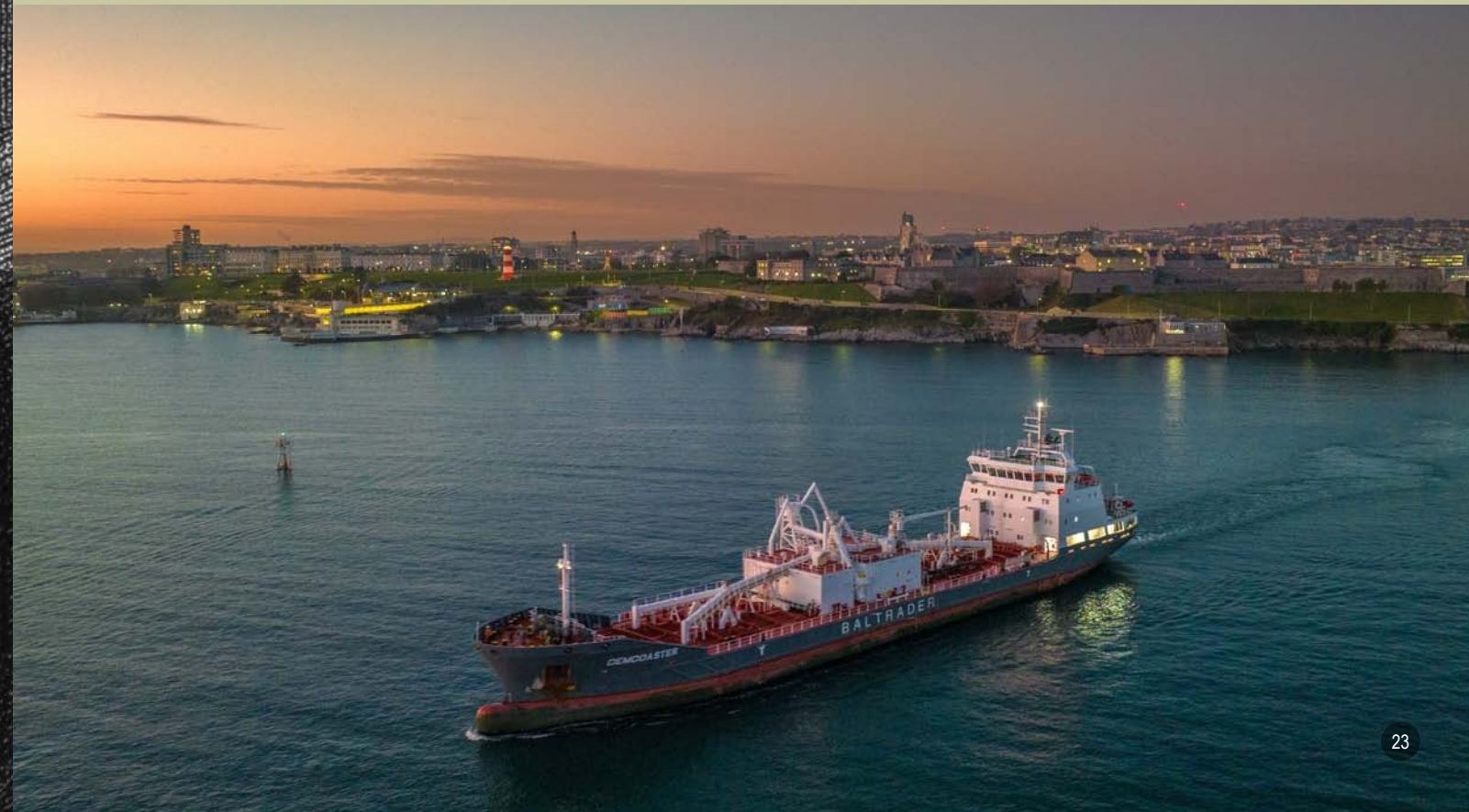
In 1390, Plymouth and Dover became the two licensed English ports for pilgrims to travel to Spain. This enabled pilgrims to leave without obtaining special permission from the King.





In 1768, 1772 and 1776, Captain James Cook set sail from Plymouth on three famous voyages of mapping and exploring the Pacific Ocean, visiting Tasmania, New Zealand and Hawaii.

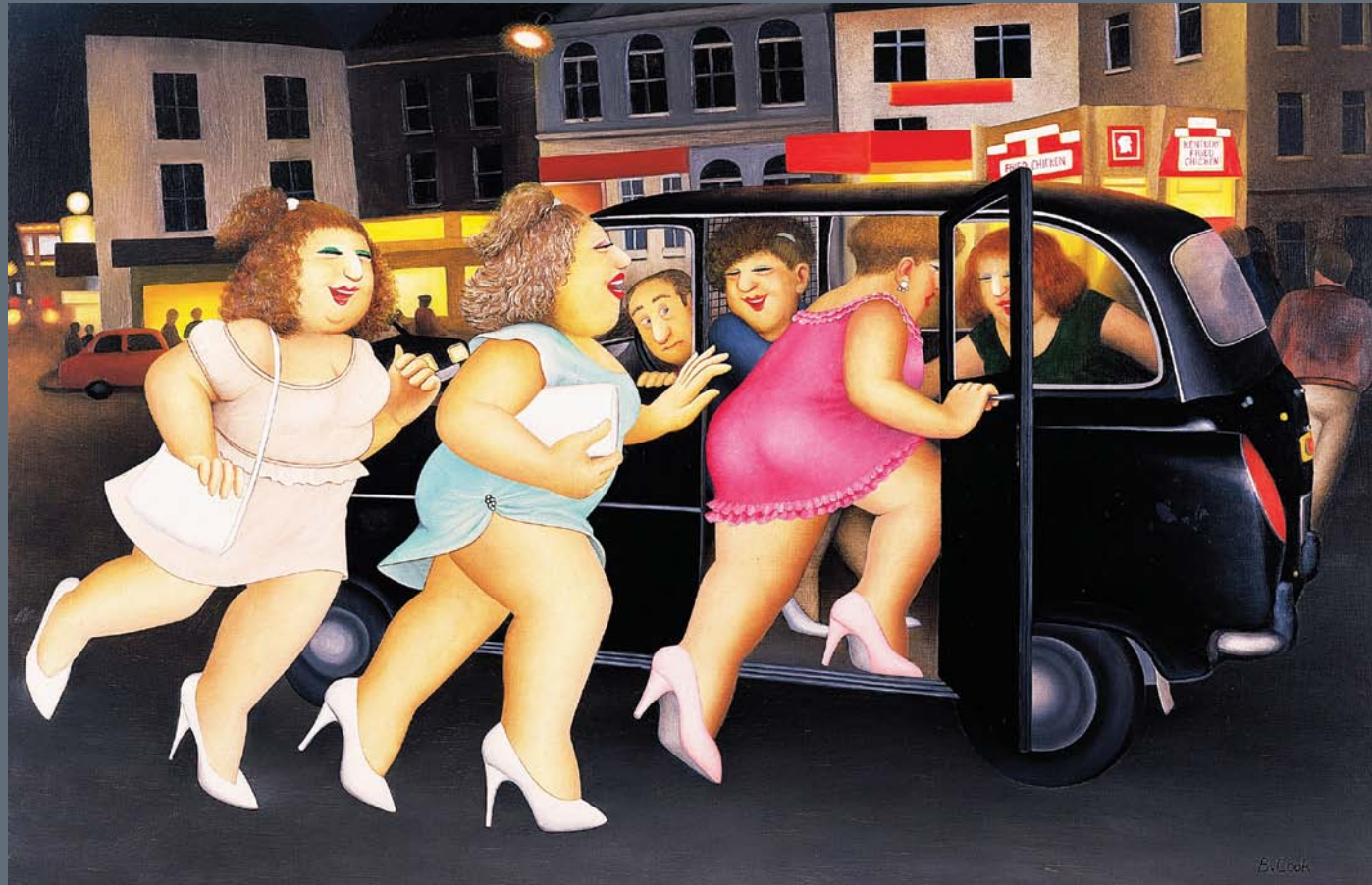
Cattewater Harbour Commissioners undertake over 1,000 shipping movements annually, facilitating the import/export of 2 million tonnes of wide-ranging cargoes to and from countries as far afield as Mexico.



HMNB Devonport

The Ministry of Defence and Babcock International work in partnership on this 330 acre site, the largest naval base in Western Europe with four miles of waterfront. Currently HMNB and Dockyard Devonport contributes over £700 million to the Plymouth economy and supports the employment of nearly 14,000 across the city.





The popular artist Beryl Cook made her home in Plymouth. Her recognisable paintings have featured on 1st class stamps.

Image courtesy of www.ourberylcook.com. © John Cook 2024

The Port of Plymouth Sailing Regatta is one of the oldest regattas in the world. It started in 1823.



Photograph from Freshwave Photography



Black Friars Distillery, the working home of Plymouth Gin since 1793, is the oldest working gin distillery in England.



Plymouth Gin's Black Friars Distillery on the Barbican is rumoured to be the place where the Pilgrims spent their last night before sailing on the Mayflower.

Fugro's Academy Training Centre deliver Remotely Operated Vehicle (ROV) introductory courses. They are the first in the world to receive International Marine Contractors Association approval. Ensuring only appropriately trained individuals enter the industry, maintaining high safety standards and quality services for the maritime sector.



Endurance swimmer and UN Patron of the Oceans, Lewis Pugh, was born in Plymouth. Lewis was the first person to swim the length of the English Channel. He started at Land's End on 12 July 2018 and finished at Dover on 29 August 2018. The swim was 328 miles (528 kilometres) in length, and took 49 days.



Credit: Heads Up Definition

Thales opened the first UK Maritime Autonomy Centre in Turnchapel for the development, assessment and certification of autonomous technologies and platforms.



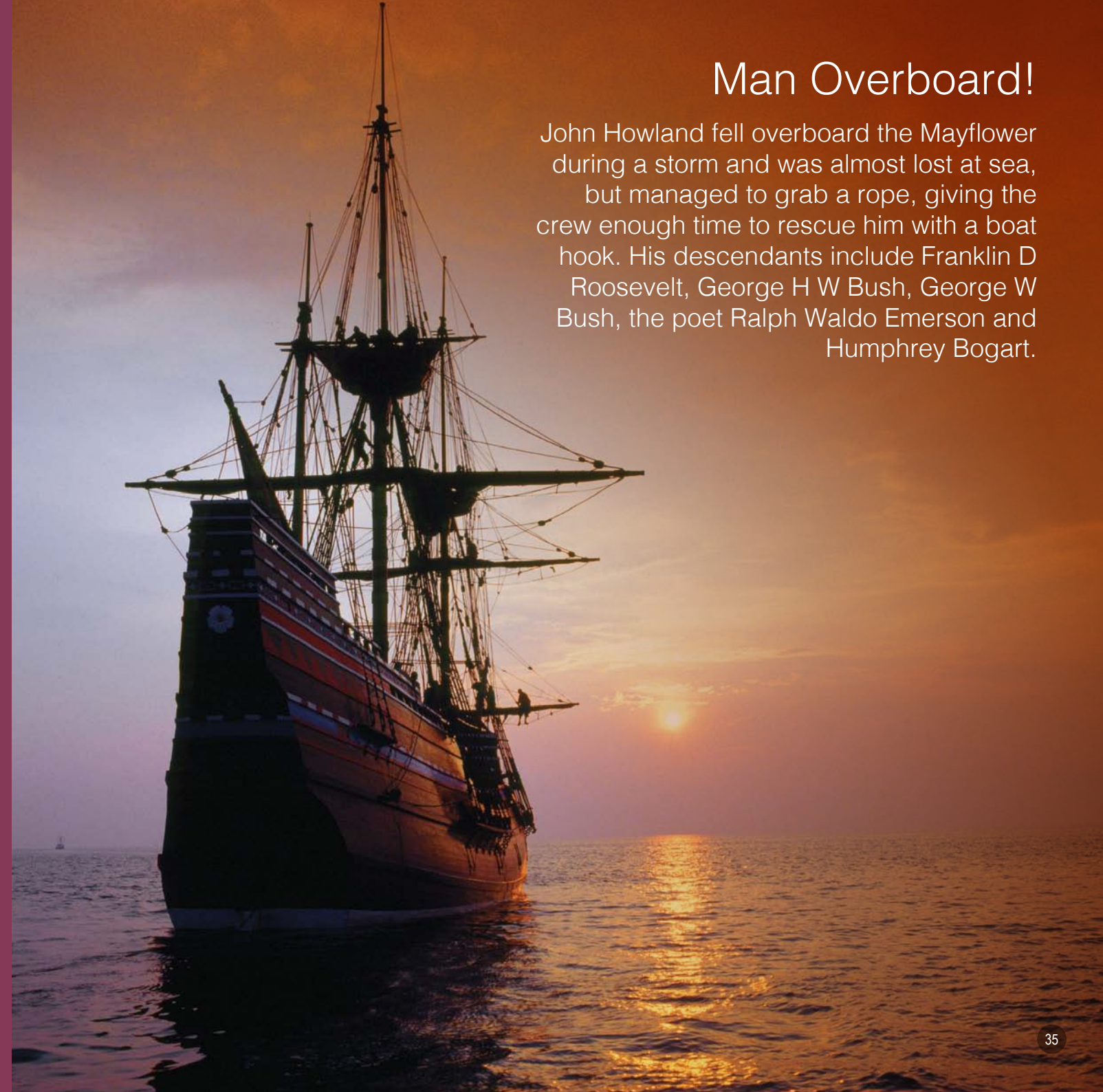
If you climb the 93 steps to the top of Smeaton's Tower, on a clear day you can still see the original base of the lighthouse standing on the notorious Eddystone Reef.



Many of the surviving crew of the Titanic landed at Plymouth's Millbay Docks on their return from America. They had to give witness statements to the Board of Trade before being allowed to leave for home.

Man Overboard!

John Howland fell overboard the Mayflower during a storm and was almost lost at sea, but managed to grab a rope, giving the crew enough time to rescue him with a boat hook. His descendants include Franklin D Roosevelt, George H W Bush, George W Bush, the poet Ralph Waldo Emerson and Humphrey Bogart.





Well-known comedian Dawn French was born in Plymouth.

Royal William Yard is home to the largest collection of Grade I listed former Royal Naval buildings in the UK.





To ensure exceptional levels of quality, 80 per cent of the components of every Princess Yacht are manufactured on-site in their Plymouth yards, allowing for complete control of the finest details.



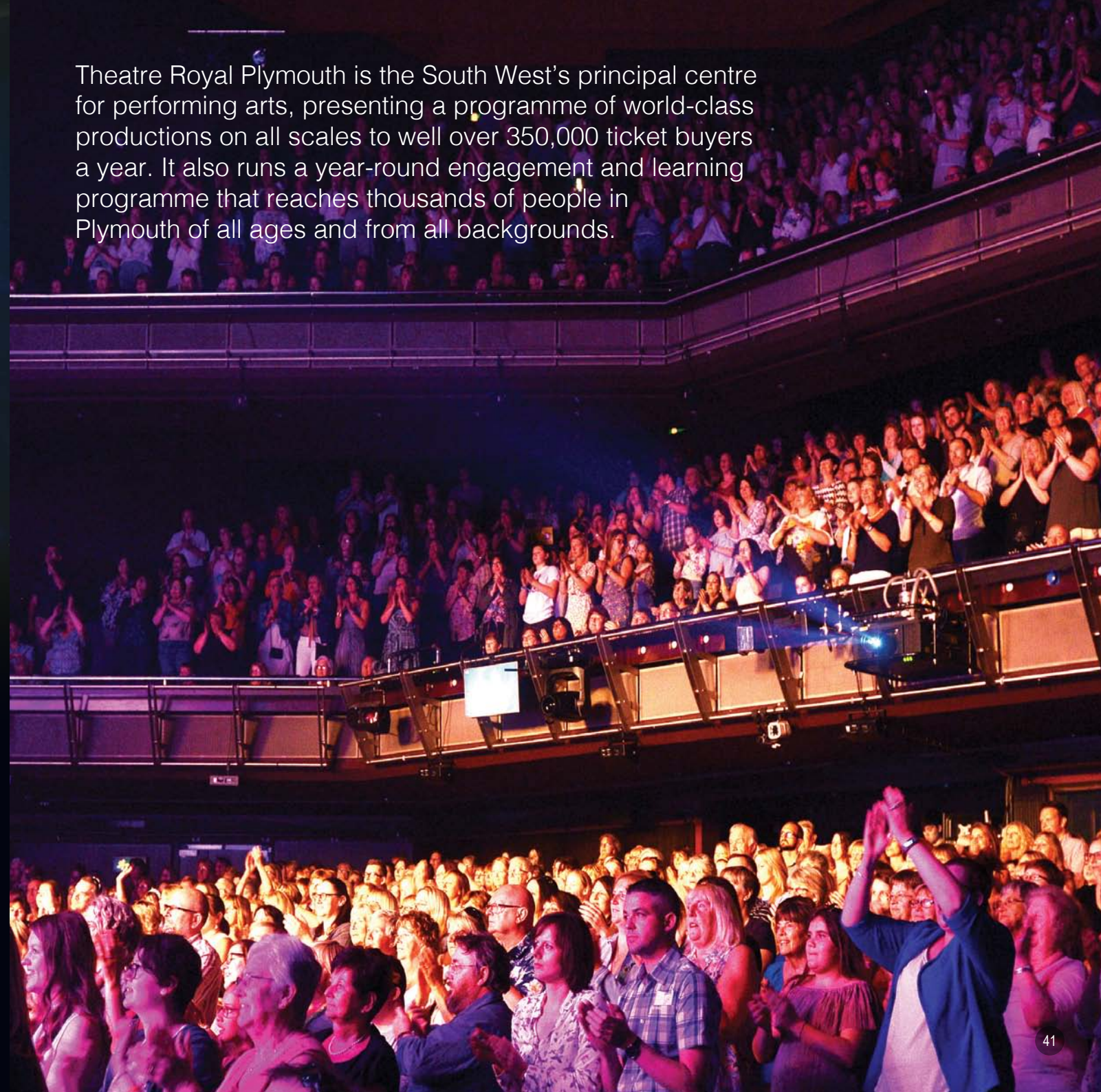
Fine Tubes manufactures precision metal tubing that plays a vital role in our world. From landing gear in passenger jets, to rocket engines in space missions as well as life-saving medical implants for millions of patients worldwide — Fine Tubes is all around us!

Specialist titanium tubing manufactured by Fine Tubes was used in the Solar Orbiter satellite, which captured the closest-ever images of the Sun.





The National Marine Aquarium has the deepest tank in the UK. Their Atlantic Ocean exhibit holds 2.5 million litres of water. The Aquarium pumps and cleans around 50,000 litres of Plymouth seawater daily for its world class exhibits.



Theatre Royal Plymouth is the South West's principal centre for performing arts, presenting a programme of world-class productions on all scales to well over 350,000 ticket buyers a year. It also runs a year-round engagement and learning programme that reaches thousands of people in Plymouth of all ages and from all backgrounds.



Opened in 1859, the Royal Albert Bridge over the river Tamar, designed by Isambard Kingdom Brunel, is regarded as an engineering marvel.

Plymouth was one of the first places in the UK to have a lifeboat, with the first stationed here in 1803. The RNLI was set up in 1824 and formally took over running the Plymouth lifeboat station the following year



Photo from Phil Monckton





French Emperor Napoleon Bonaparte was held captive on *HMS Bellerophon* in Plymouth Sound from 26 July to 4 August 1815. A much-loved painting depicting the event is in the collections at The Box.



In 2019, Plymouth became the first UK city to join the Fab City initiative.

Founded in 2014, Fab Lab Plymouth in Arts University Plymouth has become the largest Fab Lab in the South West. Giving designers and innovators the skills and technologies to make (almost) anything.

Fab Lab Plymouth serves as a regional hub for the Fab Lab movement, the global network which includes over 2,500 Labs across more than 30 countries.

The Box holds the largest regional film archive in the UK. It includes over 250,000 individual films plus other key items – like two of the actual Gus Honeybun puppets from Television SW.



Plymouth boasts 1,500 'Gold Anchor' marina berths – Sutton Harbour Marina, Mayflower Marina, Queen Anne's Battery and Plymouth Yacht Haven.





Plymouth has the highest concentration of manufacturing and engineering employment in the whole of the South of England.

The amount of stone used to create Plymouth's pioneering Breakwater in 1812 is equivalent to three-quarters of the amount of stone used to build the Great Pyramid.



Karen Friendship, Managing Director, Alderman Tooling Ltd

David McKee, the creator of Mr Benn and Elmer the Elephant, lived in Plymouth and was a student at Arts University Plymouth, where he was made an Honorary Fellow in 2011.



Mr Benn, Elmer © David McKee, published by Andersen Press



Plymouth Science Park houses the most Advanced Digital Manufacturing Innovation Centre in the South West Peninsula.

It provides vital support to our regional defence, health and advanced engineering interests. Medical implants, components for submersibles, dental moulds, robotic arms, spinal surgery guides are just a few examples of bespoke items that can be designed, produced and tested at the Plymouth Science Park.

University Hospitals Plymouth NHS Trust (UHP) is the largest acute healthcare provider in the South West peninsula and is also the Major Trauma Centre for the region.

Annually, UHP sees over 560,000 outpatients, cares for over 120,000 patients on its wards, has over 95,000 attendances at its Emergency Department, Royal Eye Infirmary Emergency Department, and Minor Injury Units, and serves almost 2 million people who can access the specialist services.

UHP is a specialist teaching hospital in partnership with the University of Plymouth and working with Plymouth Marjon University.



Flag Officer Sea Training (FOST) has been based in Plymouth since 1995. It delivers through-life operational maritime training across all disciplines for the Royal Navy and Royal Fleet Auxiliary as well as other navies that wish to make use of its world class services.



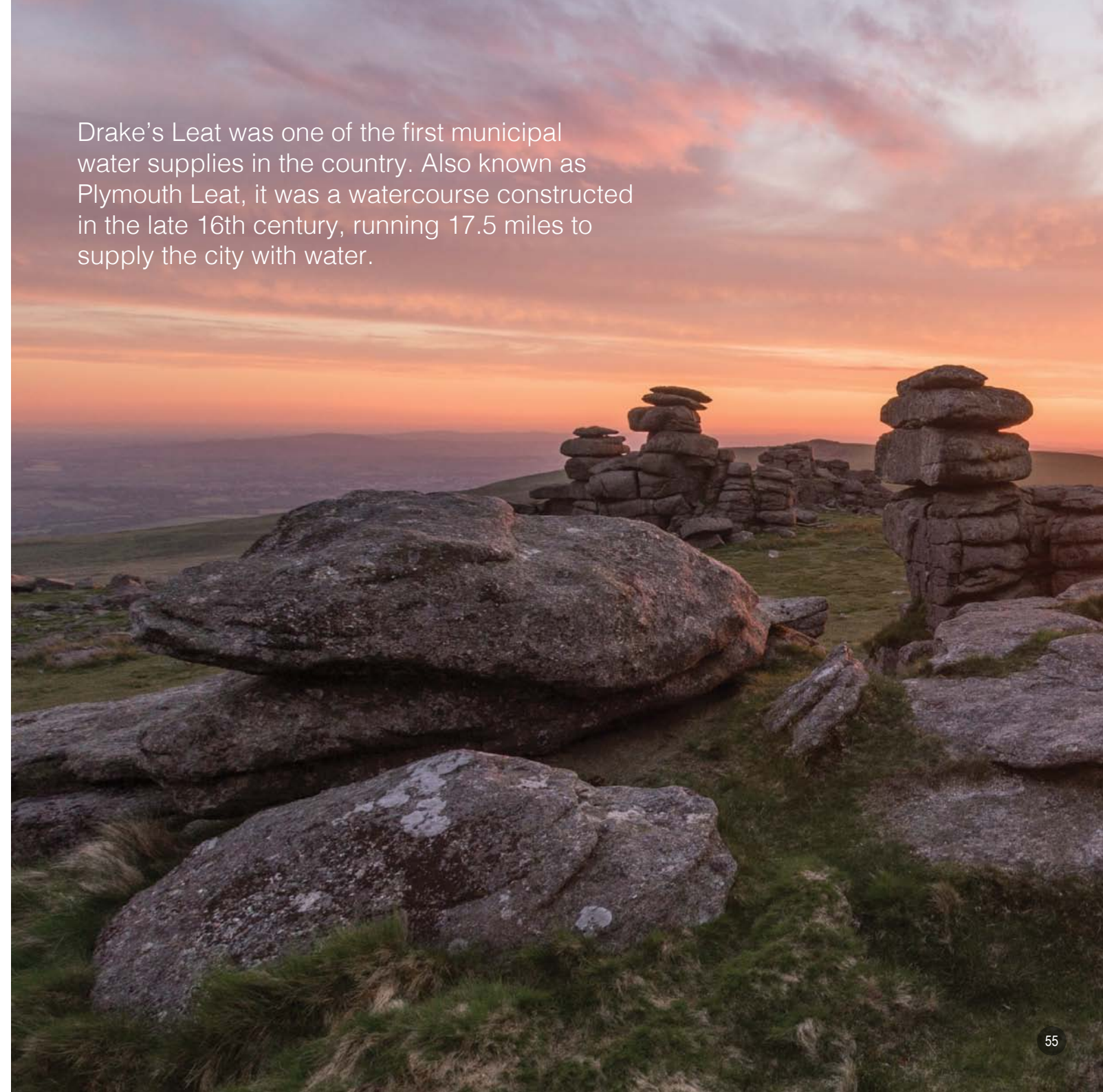
One in a million

The late Trevor Francis was Plymouth -born and the first player to command a £1 million transfer fee in English football.



Photo from ColorSport.co.uk

Drake's Leat was one of the first municipal water supplies in the country. Also known as Plymouth Leat, it was a watercourse constructed in the late 16th century, running 17.5 miles to supply the city with water.



In 1995, the National Trust's Saltram House, in Plymouth, was used as a location for the BBC adaptation of Sense and Sensibility starring Alan Rickman, Kate Winslet and Emma Thompson.



Smart Sound Plymouth is a globally unique concept providing world-class proving and demonstration facilities for cutting edge marine technologies.

The famous 20th-century artist John Piper designed post-war stained glass windows for Plymouth's Minster Church of St. Andrew, as well as the new Coventry Cathedral.



Plymouth-based Vispring is the bed of choice for celebrities and royals alike. Only this year Vispring's luxurious mattresses have found their way into the bedrooms of Diversity frontman Ashley Banjo, television presenter and radio host Claudia Winkleman, and hosts of the top podcast The Therapy Crouch, husband and wife team, former England footballer Peter Crouch and model Abbey Clancy.



The archives at The Box hold proof that Devon invented the Cornish pasty! The earliest-known recipe dates from 1510.

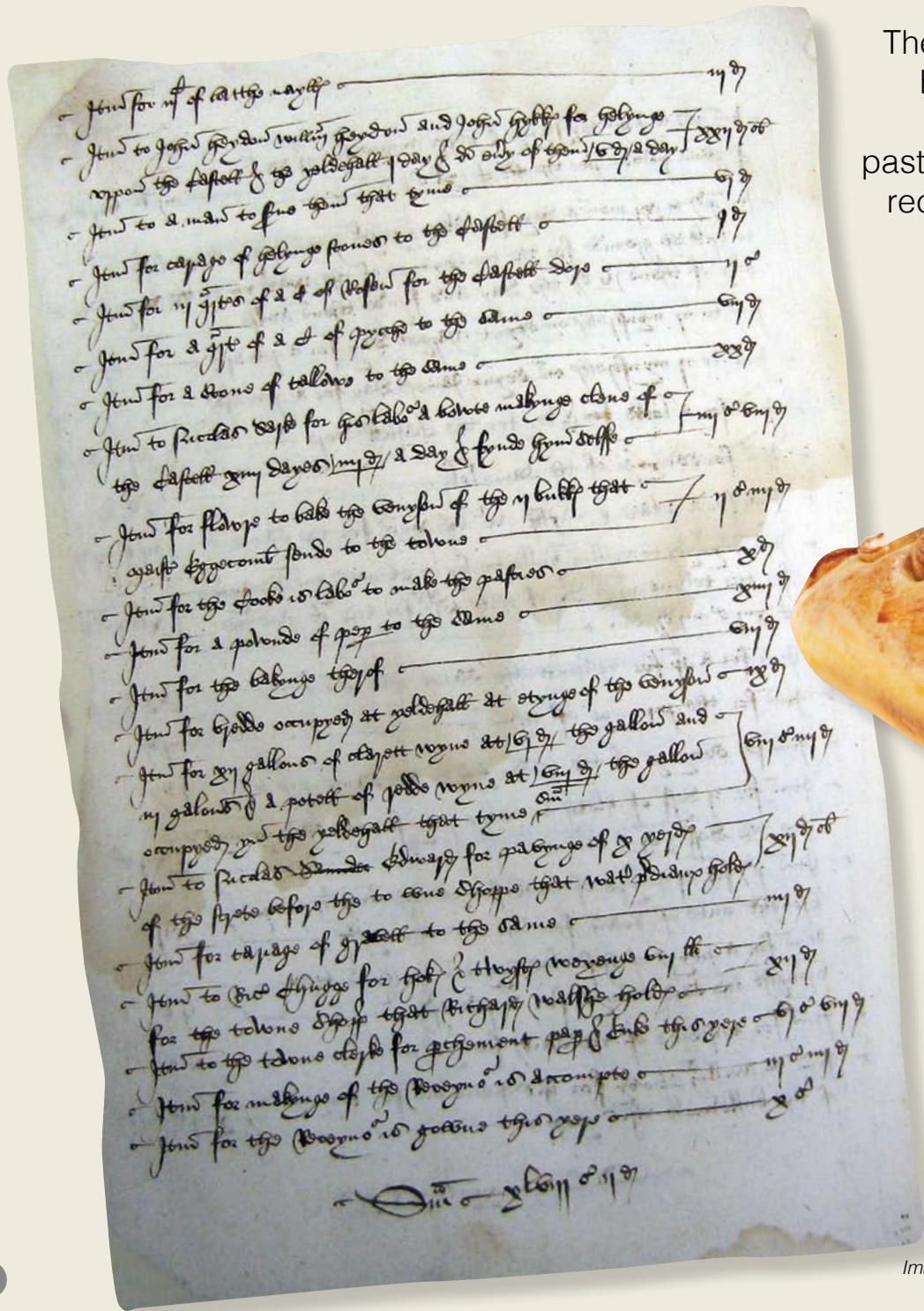


Image: The Box (Plymouth City Council)



Maintained by Plymouth Marine Laboratory in partnership with the Marine Biological Association, the Western Channel Observatory is globally recognised for being one of the most comprehensive and longest shelf sea observatories in the world.

Photo from Anna Silyakova

The Market Hall in Devonport is home to Europe's most advanced 360° immersive dome. With a 15m diameter, a screen that covers the whole surface, and a 19.1 spatial sound system, the dome is globally recognised as a state-of-the-art facility.

Market Hall is the only Immersive Technology Centre in the far South West and the UK's best immersive dome.



The music journalist, novelist and script writer David Quantick was born and brought up in Plymouth, he officially unveiled the Beatle Bums sculpture on the Hoe in 2016.

Two of Ernest Shackleton's voyages of Antarctic exploration left from Plymouth's Millbay Docks. The ill-fated *Endurance* in 1914 and the *Quest* in 1921.



George Passmore (b. 1942) – one half of famous artist duo Gilbert and George – was born in Plymouth. They have garnered worldwide acclaim for their work and won the highly prestigious Turner Prize in 1986.

“Kiss me Hardy” are Nelson’s famous last words. Hardy was captain of HMS Victory at the Battle of Trafalgar in 1805 and, like Nelson, was regularly based in Plymouth.



John Macarthur (1767-1834) was the world pioneer of the woollen industry in ‘Oz’ but he had his roots in Plymouth. As a soldier he and his family sailed to Australia with the ‘Second Fleet’. Choosing to settle on granted land, he introduced Spanish Merino sheep to Australia.

Plymouth has been the start and finish point for some incredible female sailing pursuits.

Record breaking yachtswoman Dee Caffari, who has sailed around the world six times, also has a link to Plymouth. She has competed in a number of races that have started or finished in Plymouth, including the Artemis Transat in 2008 and the Fastnet.



For over two decades, Burts has been known for its premium, hand-cooked British potato chips that are made with care in Devon. Committed to only using Red Tractor approved potatoes from local growers, its small-batch packs are full to the brim with tasty chips thanks to its long-standing South West ingredient partners who help to create authentic flavours that make Burts the award-winning snack maker it is today.

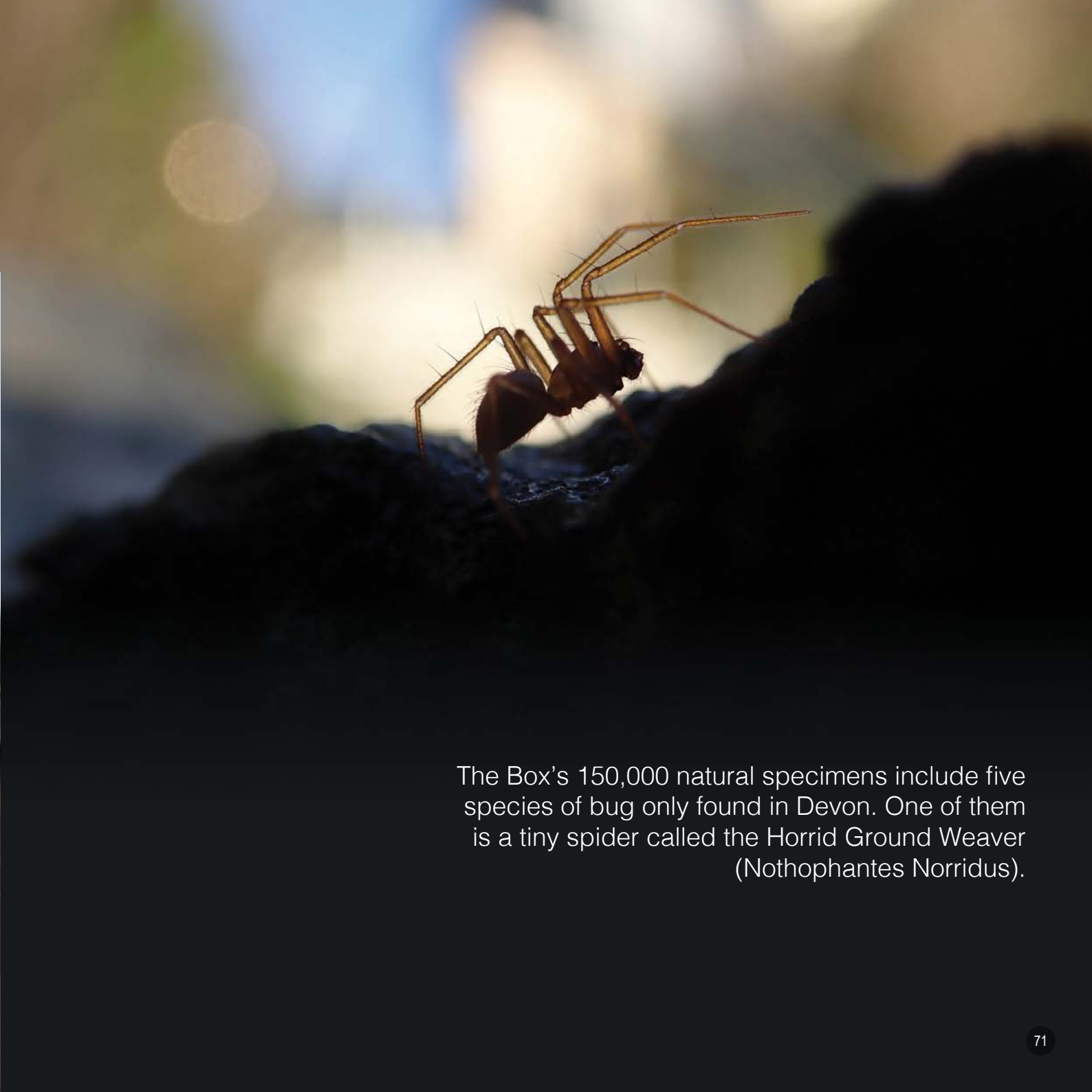
Burts' key mission is to make delicious and quality snacks, all whilst supporting independent suppliers, caring about its community and charities close to its heart, like the Royal National Lifeboat Institution (RNLI).

BURTS
—
Made with Care
IN DEVON



Photo from Burts Snacks

For her operational tour in Afghanistan, including during an ambush on 12 March 2009, Plymouth-born Kate Nesbitt (then aged 21) became the first female member of the Royal Navy, and the second woman in the British Armed Forces, to be awarded the Military Cross.

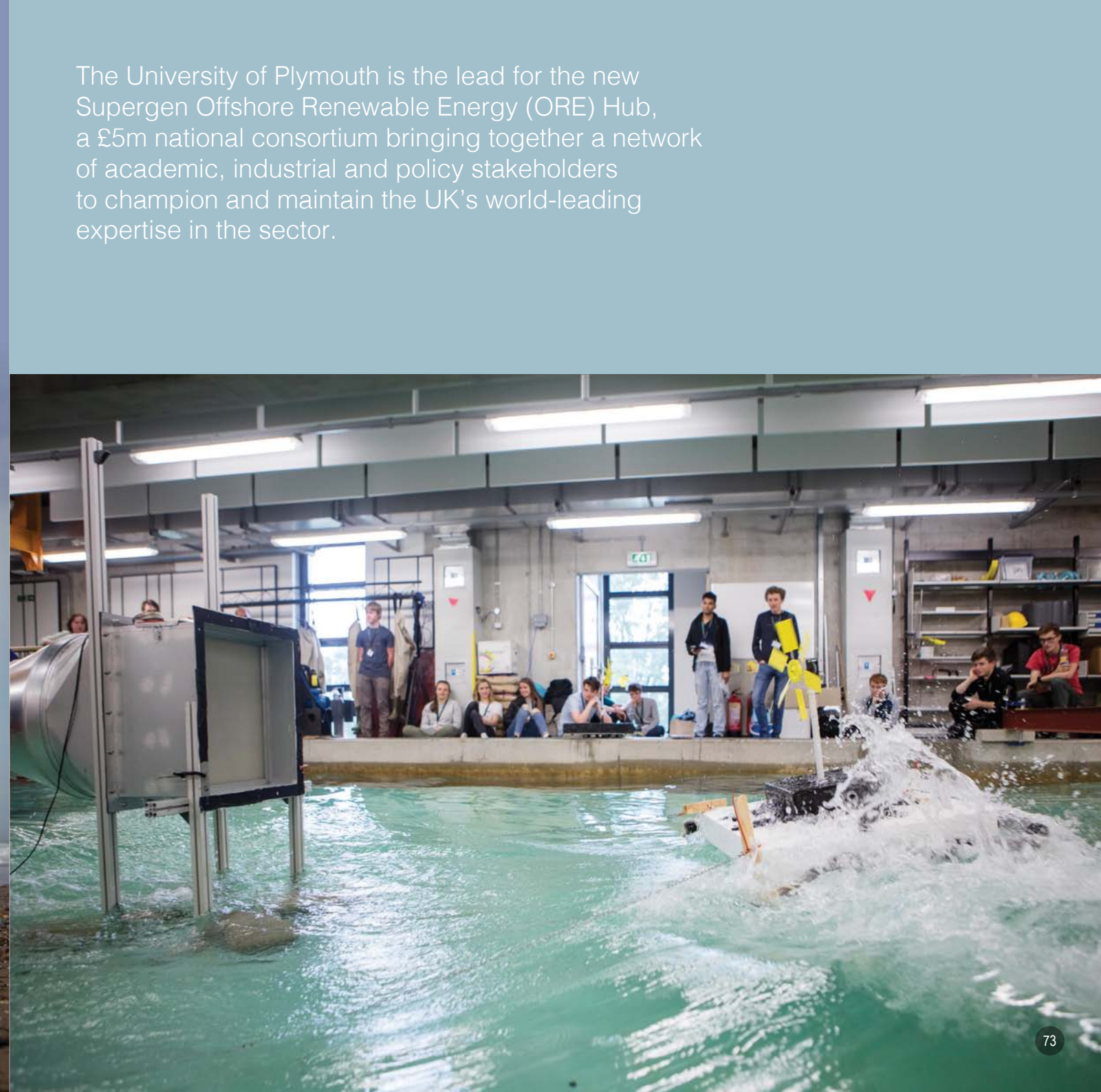


The Box's 150,000 natural specimens include five species of bug only found in Devon. One of them is a tiny spider called the Horrid Ground Weaver (*Nothophantes Norridus*).

The University of Plymouth's research into microplastics has directly influenced legislation in the UK, Canada and the European Union. Indeed, it was the only UK university to be cited by the government when it banned the use of microbeads in wash off cosmetics.



The University of Plymouth is the lead for the new Supergen Offshore Renewable Energy (ORE) Hub, a £5m national consortium bringing together a network of academic, industrial and policy stakeholders to champion and maintain the UK's world-leading expertise in the sector.



Brittany Ferries has been sailing from Plymouth to France for over 50 years.



Sir Joshua Reynolds, famous portrait artist and founding President of the Royal Academy, was born in Plympton, near Plymouth on 16 July 1723. Several of his portraits are in The Box's art collection.

In March 2019, the Theatre Royal Plymouth unveiled Messenger, the UK's largest bronze sculpture created by the artist Joseph Hillier. Messenger is 7 metres (23ft) tall, 9 metres wide (30ft) and weighs 10 tonnes.



Aggie Weston was a champion of sailors' welfare and set up the first Sailors Rest in Plymouth. She was the first woman to be given a full ceremonial Royal Navy funeral.



The Royal Citadel is home to 42 Commando and one of few star-shaped forts still working in the UK. It's one of only ten places in the UK that has permission to fire a 21 gun salute.

Opening the first store in 1989, Chris Dawson started the retail giant 'The Range'. With over 170 stores across the UK and Ireland, its global head office is in Plymouth at the flagship Derriford store.



The Barbican was one of the few quarters of the city to escape major damage during the Plymouth Blitz in the Second World War and has tight alleys flanked by Tudor, Jacobean and Georgian properties from 16th, 17th and 18th centuries.



There are more than 100 listed buildings on this labyrinth of cobblestone lanes!

The Times and Sunday Times Good University Guide 2025 rated Plymouth Marjon University as the No. 2 university in England for Teaching Quality. The WhatUni Student Choice Awards ranked Marjon as No. 4 in England for Career Prospects.

Marjon moved from Chelsea in London to Plymouth in 1973, so has been part of Plymouth's identity for over 50 years!



Photo from the University of St Mark & St John

Sir Francis Grant, 1803 – 1878
Sir Charles Eastlake, 1853
Pen, ink and wash on paper, 29.3 × 20.3 cm
Presented by Simon C Dickinson Ltd and
Hindlip Fine Art, 2012
© The National Gallery, London



Sir Charles Lock Eastlake, the first Director of the National Gallery and President of the Royal Academy, was born in Plymouth in 1793.

The Mayflower carried 102 passengers plus crew to America and took 66 days to cross the Atlantic. 2020 marked the 400th anniversary of the sailing of the Mayflower.



The University of Plymouth, Plymouth Marjon University, City College Plymouth have all been awarded Gold award by the a national Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF).



Catherine of Aragon, Henry VIII's first wife, and Pocahontas were among the historical figures whose first steps on British soil were made here on the Barbican in 1501 and 1616 respectively.



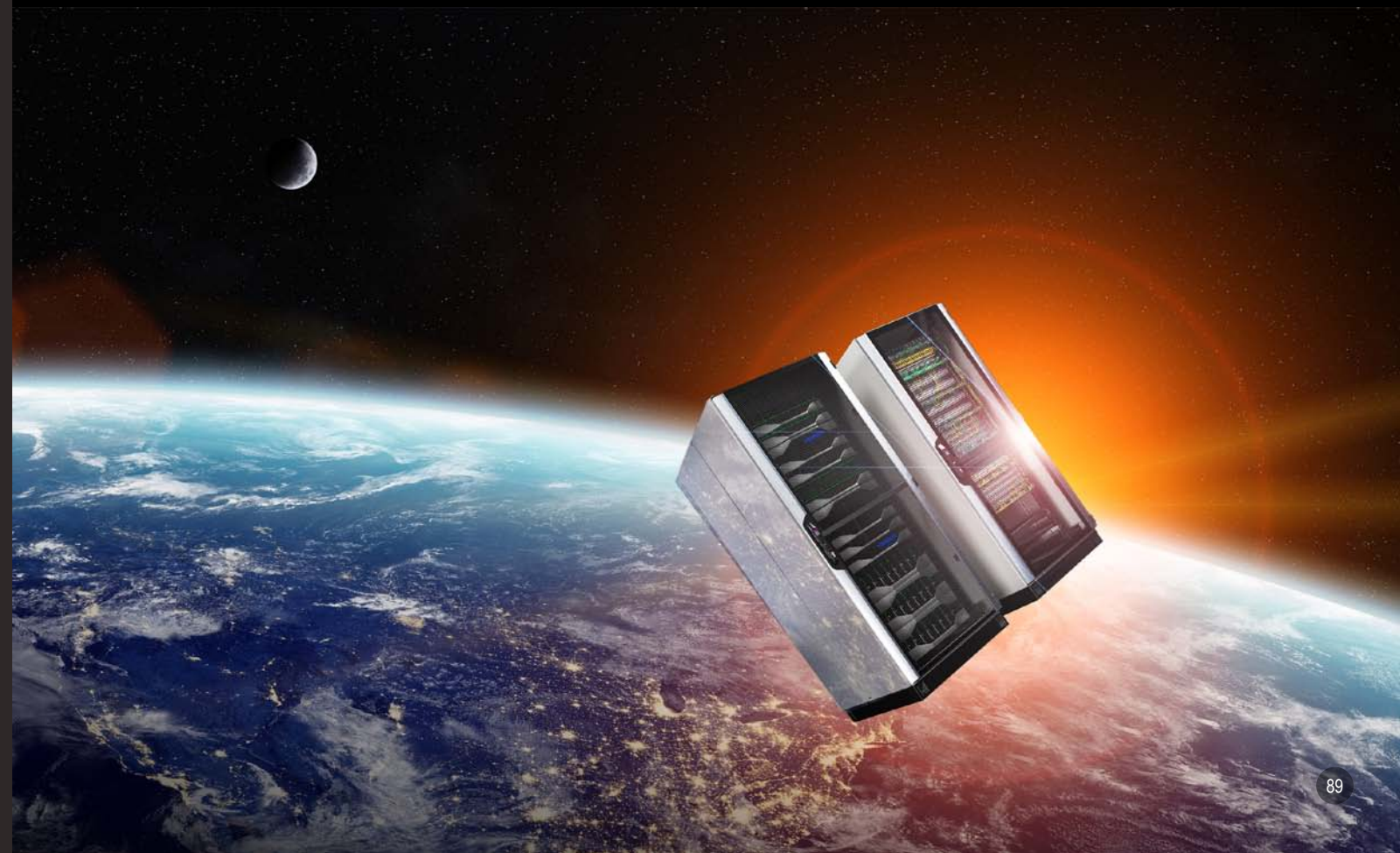
In April 1849, Devonport Column was used for one of the world's first experimental demonstrations of electric light. Organised by Plymouth scientist John Nash Hearder, the light burned for three hours and with the help of a reflector, the light was said to be shining brightly enough to read a book almost 3.5 miles (6 kilometres) away at Trematon Castle.

Devonport Column photo from RIO

St Luke's church, built in the 1820s, has been restored to become one of the largest contemporary art spaces in the South West. Now part of The Box, it hosts exhibitions by international contemporary artists and also features a beautiful, fused glass window inspired by world famous scientific illustrator, Maria Sybilla Merian.



Rittal-CSM is the Plymouth-based UK manufacturing and engineering facility for Rittal. They make an astonishing 120,000 IT racks per year. If you stood them on top of each other, Rittal would be able to launch the first IT rack into orbit.





The Box's historically important Cottonian Collection is protected by an Act of Parliament and includes works of art by some of the world's most famous artists, including a drawing believed to be by the one and only Leonardo da Vinci.

English footballer Jack Leslie was one of the first Black players in the English Football League. Jack played for Plymouth Argyle from 1921 to 1934, making over 400 appearances and scored more than 130 goals.



The Mayflower Autonomous Ship (MAS) recreated the 3,500 mile journey across the Atlantic in 40 days.



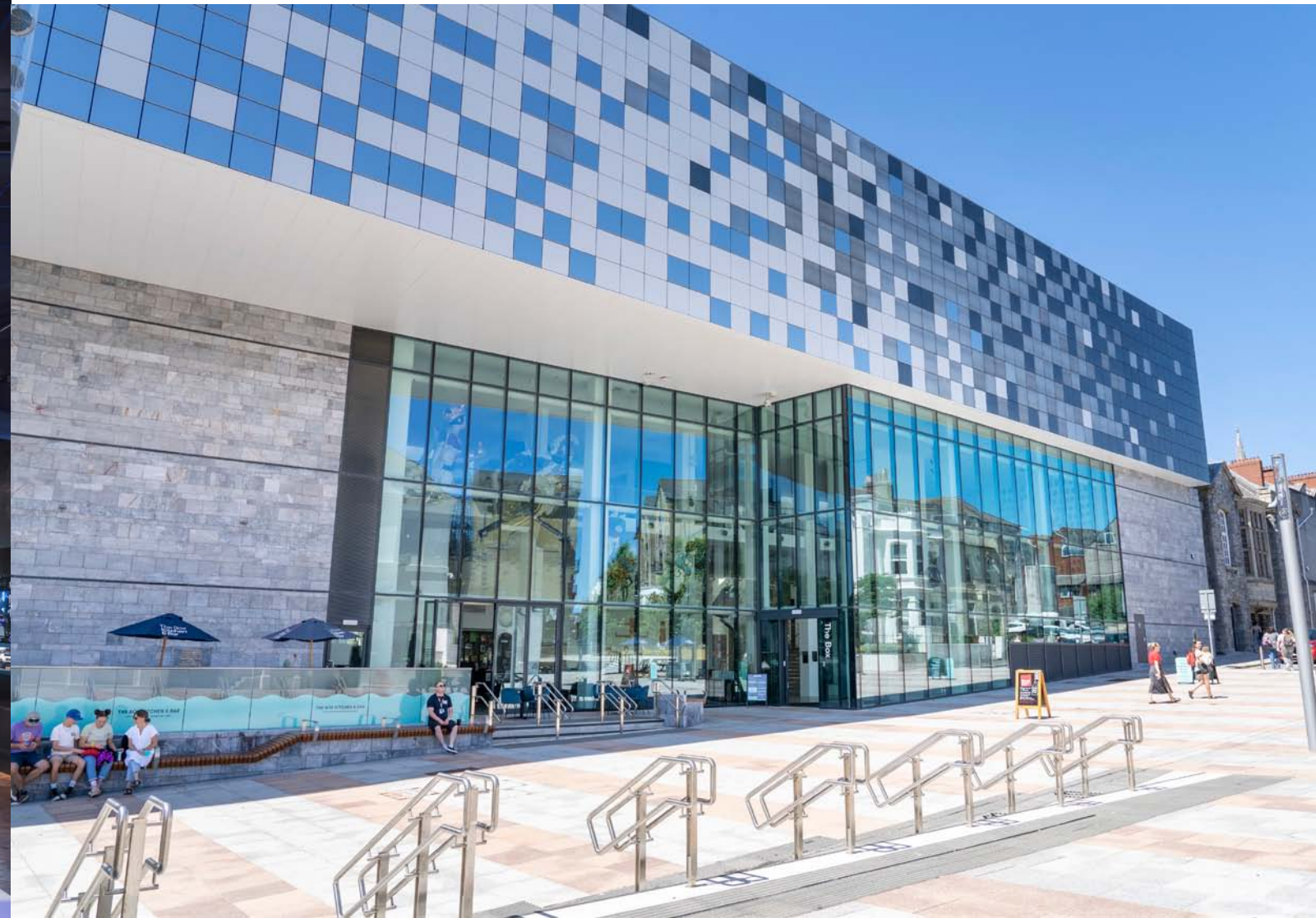
The South West Coast Path, a 630 mile journey which runs through Plymouth, has been named as the happiest walk in the whole world, by Ingams.



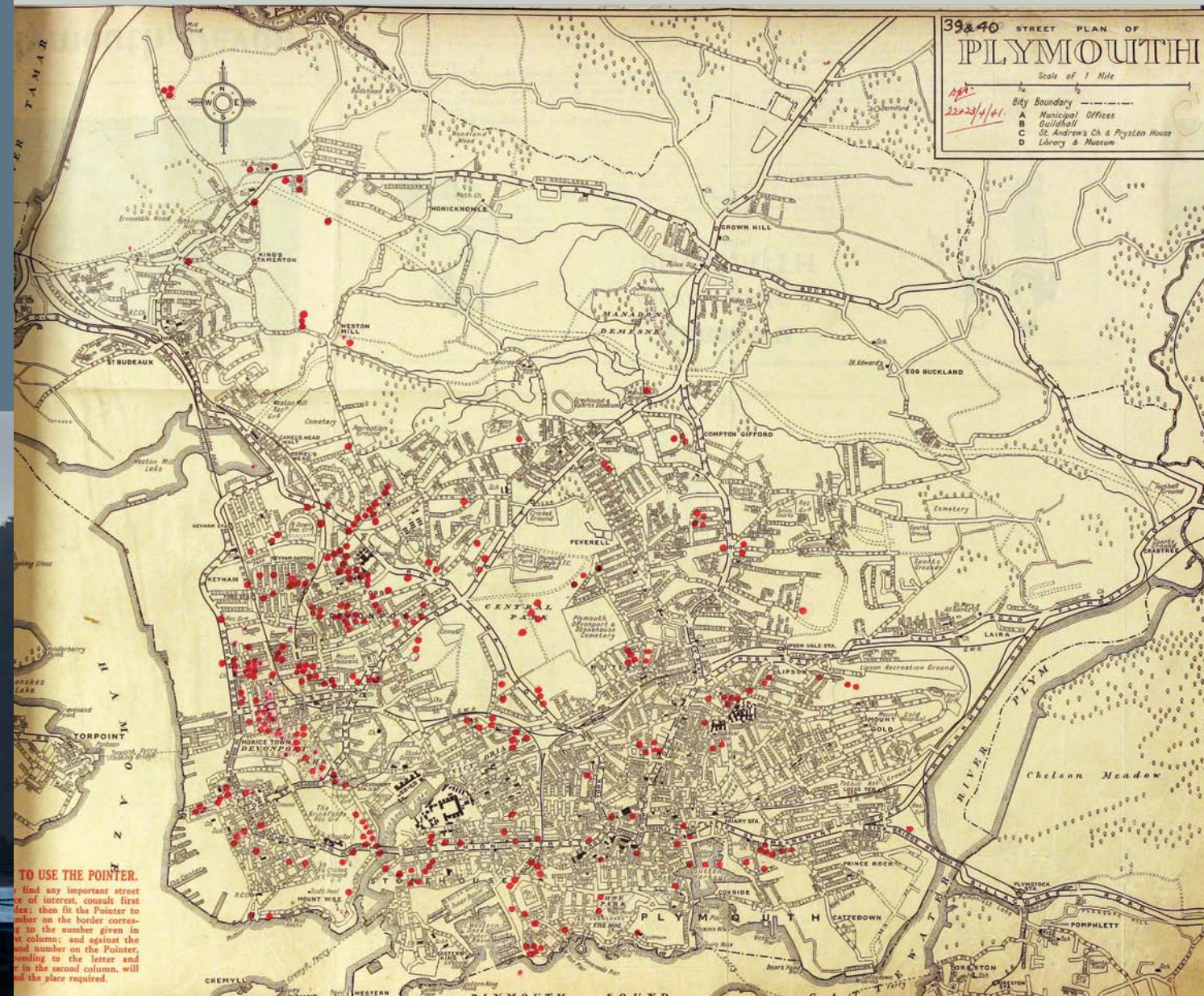
The Box's woolly mammoth welcomes visitors to its natural history gallery – a symbol of how fierce and fragile nature can be. Her name is Mildred – chosen after a public competition which received more than 1,300 entries!



Since it opened in September 2020, The Box – the city's museum, art gallery and archive – has won or been nominated for over 20 awards and welcomed more than 1 million visitors.



Anthony Gormley, one of the world's most celebrated artists working today, created Look II on Plymouth's West Hoe Pier. The sculpture was installed in 2020 to commemorate Mayflower 400 and the opening of The Box.



In The Box's 'Active Archives' gallery you can see the Plymouth Bomb Book which evidences the most destructive raids on the city during the Blitz.

Image: The Box (Plymouth City Council)

Plymouth employs more people in the marine sector than any other local authority area in the country, over 20,000 people — 18 per cent of the city's work force.



Plymouth is the only place in the UK, which can maintain the Continuous at Sea Nuclear Deterrent