

At 125, Agatha Christie's staying power is no mystery



The Agatha Christie monument in London's Leicester Square. (Rich Warren / Chicago Tribune)

By **Rich Warren**

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Agatha Christie, the grande dame of mystery, would have turned 125 Sept. 15, and her hometown of Torquay in Devon, on the shores of the sunny British Riviera, will be the epicenter of her party. The International Agatha Christie Literary Festival takes place there from Sept. 11-20, with lectures, film screenings and theatrical performances on the bill as well as a simulated murder mystery on the beach and even a literary dinner party in Christie's very own dining room.

Any other time of year, you can walk the Agatha Christie Mile, a self-guided tour flanked by two hotels of importance — the Grand, where she honeymooned, and the Imperial, where several of her mysteries are set. In between are such highlights as the place where her husband proposed, a cove where she nearly drowned and even a pier where she roller skated as a child. Don't miss a stop at the Torquay Museum to see sets and costumes from ITV's "Poirot" television series. Other exhibits reveal such fun facts as Agatha's intense dislike

for the Belgian detective she created, finding him "insufferable" and "a complete egoist."

But the pinnacle experience for Christie fans any day of the year is a stop at Greenway, her nearby country home high above the River Dart and reachable by an authentic stream train. There you'll see her Steinway piano (she trained to be a concert pianist, but stage fright prevented her from playing even for friends) as well as hear a recording of Agatha explaining her writing process. The home is furnished almost exactly as she left it.

Only have time to visit London? Pay respects to Christie by taking in "The Mousetrap," the murder mystery play she penned that's been running continuously since 1952. Or pay homage to her at the monument in Leicester Square, a bronze sculpture featuring a bust of Christie in profile.

Rich Warren is a freelance reporter.

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