

14th December - John of the Cross-Narwhal



John was a priest, friar and poet in sixteenth century Spain. His beautiful spiritual writing has inspired many countless people down the centuries and is still popular today. He was resourceful and brave as well as talented. At one stage in his life he was imprisoned in a monastery as a result of an on-going religious dispute, confined to a tiny cell and fed on bread, water and scraps of dried fish. Despite the horrible conditions he wrote one of his most famous poems during his confinement 'Spiritual Canticle'. After nine months he managed to pry his cell door off its hinges and escape through a small window in an adjoining room. He went on to play an important role leading and teaching in his order.

The narwhal is a whale with teeth, and in the case of males (and some females) an impressive looking twisted tusk or horn. This tusk is really canine tooth which grows to an epic size, reaching up to 3.1metres and growing throughout the animal's life. The narwhal looks very much like a cross between a whale and a unicorn. In the Middle Ages dodgy traders sometimes sold spiral narwhal tusks, claiming them to be genuine unicorn horns. Because people believed that the horn of the mythical unicorn had magical properties, narwhal tusks were very valuable. Sadly, narwhals are still hunted by humans and are also threatened by climate change.