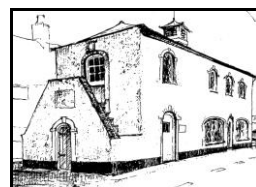


# Watchet Market House Museum

# Newsletter



SUMMER 2025

No. 31

## Curator's Choice – The Cork Life Jacket

The cork life jacket in the Museum was used by the coastguards and RNLI from the 19th century. The design of this type of jacket is generally credited to the Inspector of Lifeboats at the Royal National Lifeboat Institution in the UK, Captain John Ross Ward (later Vice Admiral of the Royal Navy). He created a brown cork vest in 1854 to be worn by lifeboat crews for both weather protection and buoyancy.



Simply made out of cut cork and sewn canvas, they were primitive by today's standards.

Our example was donated to the Museum by Jesse Norman in 1979, and is shown in the picture, worn by her husband the late John Norman, a Coast Guard Auxiliary in the 1950s.

## The Iguanodon Theatre Visit Sunday 31 August on the Esplanade



The Watchet Market House Museum and the Emerald Ant Theatre Company are proud to be staging a street theatre production on the Esplanade on Sunday 31 August. The 35 minute performances will start at 12.30am and 3.00pm – while all taking place within the body of an Iguanodon!

It is a free event with supporting activities taking place along the Esplanade and at the Geckoella workshop on the East Quay.

*Please bring your own chairs.*

## A Rare Grandfather Clock

We were delighted to receive a grandfather clock from Sheila Foster earlier this year, which was assembled in Watchet by John How(e) circa 1800. Research by John Fielding, has revealed that the parts were manufactured in Birmingham. The How family were established clockmakers in West Somerset from 1730 to 1820. They made and repaired church clocks and long-case clocks. John How, who was based in Watchet between 1791 and 1822, preceded Walter Foy, who had operated as a jeweller, watch and clock maker from what later became Rossiter's Jewellers, and then the Lynda Cotton Gallery, in Swain Street. We have a Walter Foy clock in the Museum. Grateful thanks go to Andrew Homer for his research about Watchet clock smiths.



The clock in question is a long case-clock with an automaton. The case is in a very poor state with wood worm and will probably be discarded. However, the clock itself is being renovated by John Fielding and his son, who were trained in clock repair.

It is hoped to be able to display this in 2026.

## Watchet Voices

The group will be looking for Watchet memories from childhood. We need to capture these memories before they are gone! If you know anybody with a memory of their childhood in Watchet we would love to speak to you. The group carried out recordings prior to COVID and, following the success of the Watchet War Memories CD, we want to continue.

Please contact any member of the committee with names of people you think might be interested.

We sell the War Memories CD in the Museum, which will be of interest to those who enjoy the 40's weekend celebrations.

## Stewards' Outing

This year, as a 'thank you' to our loyal stewards, we are taking an outing to Seaton, on the East Devon coast on Friday 17 October. As normal, stewards will go free and get priority. Members can put their names down on a waiting list on a first-come-first-served basis. Contact Jim Nicholas 01984 631660.



Seaton Town Centre

A cream tea is included in the price for non-stewards. The cost for non-stewards is £15 which includes a cream tea. The bus will leave Watchet at 9.15 am, and we would expect to return to Watchet by 5.30 pm. Take a £1 for that all-important quiz!

## Appeals for pictures .....

Have you got any photographs tucked away, which might be of interest to us and relate to Watchet? Please call Jim Nicholas (01984 631660) or Sara Long (07838 680518).

## VE Day street parties photographs request

We had a small display on the VE day (7 June 1945) celebrations but found that we are short of actual VE day celebration photographs from street parties all those years ago. We would be grateful for any photographs you can find, which we can copy for our collection and return.

## Watchet Lifeboat Station

The Lifeboat Station which now houses the Watchet Library is celebrating 150 years since it was established. The Museum has produced a collage of photographs with supporting narrative. Some very interesting information has been found.

Why not visit the Library to take a look.

## Our Re-Accreditation Process ....

### .... The Saga continues ....

Our submission has been accepted and has been sent to the Arts Council National Accreditation panel in early August. We should receive our award outcome letter via email around a fortnight later, possibly sometime around the 25th August 2025. Fingers crossed! It has been a long and arduous process.

## Visitors

It is always very encouraging when we get visitors from far and wide looking for connections with Watchet, and in the spring, we were pleased to welcome Nigel Gardiner and family from Australia, who were related to Captain Henry Press, one-time Bristol Channel pilot, yachtsman, Watchet lifeboat coxswain and notable marine artist. Henry had emigrated to Australia in the 1880s. The visitors were able to see copies of a lot of his work, which had been displayed in our exhibition, held in 2024. We were able to include a family tree, prepared by Jane Sharp, our

Family History researcher. Needless, to say the family were absolutely delighted.

## Winter Talks Programme 2025/2026

2025

8 October *Nigel Phillips* presents  
"Nature of the Quantocks"

12 November *Helena Jaeschke* presents  
"Museum Conservation in the South West"

10 December *Amal Khreisheh* presents  
"The Chew Valley Hoard"

2026

14 January *Rob Wilson-North* presents  
"Archaeology of Exmoor"

11 February *Jon England* presents  
"What's Next!"

11 March **ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING**

the presentation of accounts  
and following light refreshments,  
*Jeff Cox* will present "Ada Lovelace"

## Committee Members

**Chairman/Curator:** Jim Nicholas 01984 631660  
**Treasurer:** Peter Murphy 01984 636473  
**Secretary:** Sue Upstone 07974 093608  
**Membership:** Gill Williams 01984 634 001  
**Photograph Archivist:** Sara Long 07838 680518  
Dot Amery, Hugh Amery, Dr Jane Armstrong,  
Gay Chilcott and Molly Quint  
Jonathan Westcott - consultant  
The Museum Telephone number: 01984 632 266

## Membership and Stewards

We currently have 127 members of the society with approximately 42 on our steward base.

## New Stewards Wanted .... Please!

### Your Museum Needs You!

We are always looking to recruit new stewards.

Each steward will sit in the Museum for 2 hours and have the pleasure of welcoming visitors, talking to people and watching the world go by. If you feel that, as a member, you would like to help in the smooth function of the museum, please speak to Gill, Gay or Jim, who will be very pleased to discuss steward duties with you. A short induction will be given in the Museum. You would find the experience very rewarding.

## .... and finally ... our Market House Lease

We have been notified by Watchet Town Council, that the lease for the Market House ground floor has finally been signed by all parties. This means that we have security of tenure for at least 10 years. Phew .... and only four years overdue!!

*Photos: Watchet Market House Museum  
unless specified otherwise*