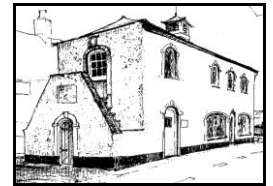


Watchet Market House Museum

Newsletter



WINTER 2025/2026

No. 32

Curator's Choice - The Ancient Mariner Statue

Commissioned by Watchet Market House Museum in 2002, the iconic Ancient Mariner statue stands proudly on the Esplanade, drawing admiration from the hundreds of tourist who visit throughout the year.

Sculpted in bronze by Alan Beattie Herriot of Pencuik, the statue stands on a plinth of red sandstone, albatross and crossbow to hand. He looks majestic but sad, reflecting no doubt on his actions in slaying the bird in Samuel Taylor Coleridge's famous poem 'The Rime of the Ancient Mariner,'. His action condemned the ship to sail around the world forever. The poem was believed to have been started over a lunch in the Bell Inn, Watchet's oldest pub, in 1797.



The cost of the statue, commissioned by the Museum with a large public subscription, was in excess of £24,000, details of which are available in the Museum's records. It was unveiled in 2003 by the late Katherine Wyndham in 2003, a good friend of our Museum.

Watchet Paper Mill

Believe it or not the Paper Mill closed 10 years ago! Paper has been made in Watchet for over 250 years and the Wansbrough site has had many different owners. At its peak it employed over 600 folk from around West Somerset and it was a very sad day when the machines stopped running. The closure in December 2015, put over 170 people out of work and Watchet suffered for some time.



The oil painting shown, is the oldest in the Museum collection and believed to be from the mid-19th century. Described as 'British School', it shows St. Decuman's Church and the paper mill.

A series of events is being coordinated by the Onion Collective, to remember the mill's long association with the town, beginning with a low key social event on 6 December at the Esplanade Club from 2.00-5.00pm showing films and sharing memories. Thereafter events will be arranged through until April 2026 with provisional dates as follows:

- Paul Upton/Chris Northam talk 13 February 2026
- Art Exhibition 14/15 February 2026
- Jim Patterson (Two Rivers) talk 17 March 2026
- Community History Day 7 or 9 April 2026
- Wansbrough walk - week beginning 13 April 2026

So yet again Watchet has had to re-invent itself and tourism is now the main focus. With three Museums, an art centre, the Marina and Heritage Railway, a good music scene, a variety of shops plus the glorious walks, the town is well-equipped to face the next phase of its development. The loss of the coast road, B3191, has not helped with many businesses suffering due to the lack of through traffic.

Our Success!

Our new Accreditation certificate, valid for five years is now proudly displayed in the Museum. All that hard work has paid off, and we can continue to receive assistance and advice, apply for grants and receive relevant training. It is a very proud moment for us all.

Plans for the winter

Maintenance-wise it is necessary to replace the Court Leet lock-up door, which is beginning to suffer from facing the full force of the prevailing weather. Our drunken sailor, incarcerated within, is beginning to complain!

Internally, we will be refreshing a lot of the art collection, producing a feature about the tides, particularly those of the Bristol Channel. Our souvenir collection will also be on display.

We are hoping to display an 18th century Watchet clock, donated by Sheila Foster, which is being repaired by John Fielding's son.

The South-facing external window will be revamped and this will feature the Neighbourhood Plan information and vision

Watchet Voices

It is important that the memories of Watchet folk are recorded for posterity and we will be resuming this capture of oral history from willing participants, starting in the New Year. You may know a Watchet resident who would be happy to share their memories of life in Watchet? Please speak to Dot Amery, Sarah Long or Sue Upstone with names.

Our visitor numbers for 2025

Sadly the final total of 22,157 was nearly 2,000 lower than last year. It was believed to be the result of the heat wave we enjoyed over the holiday season, but it could also be due to the loss of passing traffic since the closure of the B3191 to Blue Anchor.

Visitors to the Museum this year

They came from: London, Sydney Australia, Devon, New Zealand, Wales, Scotland, India, California, New York USA, Poland, Canada, Florida USA, Netherlands, Santa Fe, Germany, Malaysia, St Helena, South Africa, Denmark, Spain and from nearly every corner of the British Isles including the Isle of Wight!

And they loved it as shown in our Visitors' Book

Ammonites!! Fossils!! what a history this place has; so much information packed in such a small space; a great collection; what an amazing treasure; beautifully presented; lovely, friendly staff; 1st class; brill, fantastic, awesome; so glad I decided to get off the train - loved my visit; .. small in stature ...big in content; a credit to the town; could spend hours here; I hope more come and see the fossils; who knew there could be so much history just in Watchet, have to come again;"

There are many more of these pages of these comments, which give enormous encouragement to the Museum Committee who continue to ensure that Watchet retains its rich history for today and for future generations.

Why not visit the Museum and see what we have been up to? The Museum is always there so it is easy to say "I can visit another day – maybe tomorrow". Local visitors rarely pass through the door and they miss a wealth of local heritage and history. An ex-Watchetonian was so thrilled to find his photo in one of the wonderful swing-frames, that he rushed over to tell the steward.

Visitor Attractions in Somerset

The Committee were very encouraged to discover that the Watchet Market House Museum is ranked No 5 in the small, free-to -enter museums in the South West category.

Well done to all.

The Stewards' Outing

Despite a malfunctioning coach the stewards outing to Seaton was much enjoyed. Many took the opportunity to ride the tram beside the River Axe to view the wildlife, while others explored the town including the Museum. A bracing walk along the seafront to the river-entrance harbour (below) was well worth the effort. A sumptuous cream tea rounded off the day.



Photo: Peter Mather

Membership and Subscriptions

A reminder to those yet to pay their subscriptions of £5 per annum, these are now due (1.11.25 – 31.10.26).

You can pay in one of the following ways:-

By cash: to any committee member

Direct: into the Museum bank account: Sort code: 30 19 57 WATCHET MARKET HOUSE MUSEUM, A/c No: 00002231.

Please include reference **SUB followed by your surname.**

Standing Order: using the Museum bank details as noted above.

We thank all those members who have already paid.

All your money goes toward the upkeep of the Museum in order to retain its vibrancy, interest and importance in this town.

Call for new stewards for the 2026 season

We are always looking to recruit new stewards, without whom we could not operate.

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 the steward duties with you. A short induction will be given in the Museum. You would find the experience very rewarding and learn more about our lovely town and its rich heritage.

Winter Talks Programme 2025/2026

2025

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

Reports and the presentation of the accounts
and following light refreshments,

Jeff Cox presents our final talk on *"Ada Lovelace"*

The Committee

Chairman/Curator: Jim Nicholas 01984 631660

Treasurer: Peter Murphy 01984 636473

Secretary: Sue Upstone 07974 093608

Membership: Gill Williams 01984 634001

Photograph Archivist: Sara Long 07838 680518

Dot Amery, Hugh Amery, Dr Jane Armstrong,

Gay Chilcott and Phil Gannon

Jonathan Westcott – consultant

Plus two members of Watchet Town Council sit as trustees.

The Museum Telephone number: 01984 632266

With seasons greeting and a very happy New year to all our readers from the Market House Museum Committee.

*Photos: Watchet Market House Museum
unless specified otherwise*