

The Mineral Line

In 1852 a Welsh company started mining for iron-ore on the Brendon Hills. They constructed a railway to bring the ore to Watchet for shipment to South Wales. The mines closed in the 1880's but a passenger service continued until 1898. Two mines reopened in 1907, but the venture collapsed in 1910. The old line is now a pleasant walk to Washford or through Kentsford Farm to the church and back to Watchet.

West Somerset Railway

A broad gauge railway from Taunton reached Watchet in 1862 and this was the branch terminus for twelve years until it was extended to Minehead. Although built to handle the increased harbour trade, thousands of visitors arrived by train for a cruise along the coast or across to South Wales. Dr Beeching's axe fell on the line in 1970 but a few years later it reopened. With the enthusiasm of many volunteers the railway offers an exciting journey by steam power.



Market House Museum

Near harbour
Open daily : End of March to early November
10:30am - 4:30pm
Tel : 01984 632266

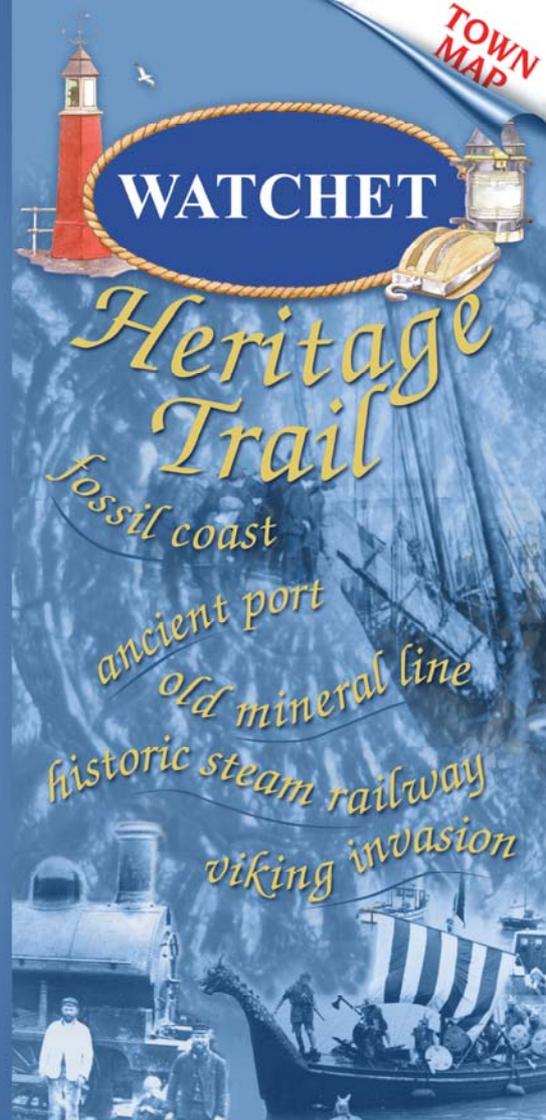


Boat Museum

In Harbour Road near railway station
Open Easter to 30th September 2-4pm on
Tues, Wed, Thurs, Sat & Sun
Tel: 01984 634242

Tourist Information Centre

6 The Esplanade
Open daily : Easter to 30th September
10:30 am - 4:30pm



Welcome to Watchet, a seaport with over 1000 years of history. From its Celtic origin its Saxon Mint and attacks by the Danes it grew into a medieval town with a cloth industry and market. The harbour developed into a thriving port, busy with sailing ships and mariners.

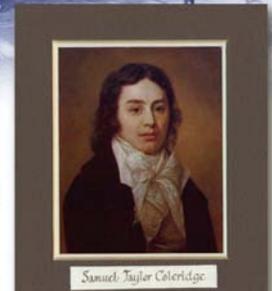
Now we invite you explore Watchet's narrow streets and discover more of its history and charm.



Ancient Port

The harbour has for centuries been the centre of trade. In the 1860s it was enlarged to handle increased trade. In December 1900 a fierce gale destroyed part of the harbour and wrecked many ships. The harbour was rebuilt and trade resumed.

In July 2001 Sir Robin Knox - Johnston opened the new marina.



Samuel Taylor Coleridge

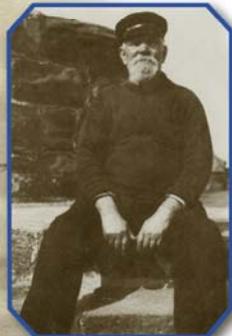
Watchet Old Town

The narrow streets of the oldest part of the town cluster around the harbour. In the Middle Ages this area was the hub of cloth manufacturing, milling of grain, sale of fish and a market place. By the 19th century there were foundries, sawmills, shipbuilding yard, a paper mill and a host of other trades and shops.

Rhyme & Verse

The poet Coleridge visited Watchet in 1797 and it is generally thought that the harbour is the port from which "The Ancient Mariner" set sail on his fateful voyage.

The town's most famous sailor was John Short, nicknamed "Yankee Jack". He sailed the world and with his powerful voice led the sailors in the singing of sea shanties as they worked. In his retirement he became Town Crier. In 1914 he was interviewed by Cecil Sharp, a collector of folk songs, who recorded the words and tunes of many of the shanties. John died in 1933 aged 94 at his cottage in Market Street.



The Lighthouse

The lighthouse on the west pier was erected in 1862 at the time when the harbour was enlarged.

The cast iron tower was supplied by Hennet Spink & Elsa of Bridgwater and cost £75. The light was first illuminated by an oil lamp, then by gas and later by electricity. In 2012 HRH The Princess Royal visited Watchet and unveiled a plaque commemorating the 150th year of the lighthouse.

Lifeboats

The town's library once housed the lifeboat. It was built in 1875 for the first boat, the Joseph Soames. The last lifeboat until 1944, was a rowing and sailing boat named the Sarah Pilkington.

Fossil Coast

When Daniel Defoe (author of *Robinson Crusoe*) walked along the beach at Watchet he was amazed at the curious shapes of fossils he found. Look carefully and you too may discover some interesting fossils.



Start your walk from the Esplanade 1. At the junction of Esplanade Lane with the Esplanade is Watchet's Seascape Sculpture Garden. Here you can view the harbour and marina and, in your mind, go back 100 years to imagine a port busy with sailing ships and sailors. Ships traded along the coast to Ireland and the continent, and the harbour was vital to the prosperity of the town. Samuel Taylor Coleridge wrote his epic poem "The Ancient Mariner" after visiting Watchet in 1797. The harbour is generally

thought of as the port from which the Mariner set forth on his fateful voyage during which he shot the albatross. A fine bronze statue of the Ancient Mariner, sculpted by Alan Herriot, stands on the Esplanade. It was commissioned by the Watchet Market House Museum Society and erected in 2003 as a tribute to Samuel Taylor Coleridge. A statue of John Short (Yankee Jack) can also be seen on The Esplanade.

Walk along the Esplanade towards the railway. At the end is the old lifeboat house, now the library: 2 adjacent is the St. Decuman's Mosaic and the War Memorial. Turn right into Harbour Road. The West Somerset Railway 3 is the longest preserved railway in the country with 20 miles of track used by steam and diesel trains. The old goods shed is now the Boat Museum 4.

At the junction of Harbour Road with Swain Street is a large building with a doctors surgery 5. This has been used variously as a cinema, café, garage, shop, Van Heusen shirt factory and night club.

Cross the road towards Anchor Street, stopping to look at the Coronation Clock 6 over the house on the right. Instead of figures the face has the inscription Elizabeth II. In front of the Council Chamber stands a stone commemorating the Queen's Diamond Jubilee. You are now at the top of Swain Street with its many shops and houses. You can explore this street later and see the Old Foundry 15 where molten metal was poured to produce machinery parts for the Paper Mill and the iron-ore mines.

WATCHET Heritage Trail

Continue along Anchor Street to the packhorse bridge and 17th Century thatched cottages. If you wish to take a longer walk, cross the main road bridge, to reach the start of the footpath which follows the route of the old Mineral Railway. Along this line trucks carried iron-ore from the Brendon Hill mines to be shipped from the harbour to the smelting works in South Wales. You can walk as far as Kentsford Farm and return on a waymarked path via St. Decuman's Church or continue on the Line to Washford.



To continue the Town Trail, cross the small stone bridge and turn right beside the Washford River to reach the site of the Manor Mill 8 and Mill Pond. To your left is Station House 9. This was the station for the Mineral Railway when it was also used by passenger trains. You can still see the platform and the Engine House 10. At this point the railway crossed the road onto the West Pier where the ore was loaded into sailing vessels for transport across the Bristol Channel.

Turn right into Market Street. One of the small houses is Yankee Jack's Cottage 11 named after a Watchet sailor who ran the blockade during the American Civil War of the 1860s. John Short (his real name) was a shanty man on board ship and many of his songs were taken down by Cecil Sharp, a collector of English folk songs and shanties.



Under a nearby archway is the entrance to the West Pier 12 and Lighthouse 13.

From the pier you can view the harbour and, on a clear day, see the Welsh mountains across the Bristol Channel. On the nearby West Street Beach you may be lucky enough to find fossils and veins of alabaster in the cliffs.



Return to Market Street and the Old Market House 14 built about 1820 which includes the Court Leet Lock-up. On the top floor is the Holy Cross Chapel and Celtic Heritage Centre, while the ground floor houses the town's museum. Here is an excellent exhibition of the town's history, including fossils, the Saxon Mint, sailing ships, mines, railways and industrial and social history. There are also some fine maritime paintings and a collection of fascinating photographs. The museum is the best place to end your walk and discover more about Watchet's Heritage. Entrance is free.

Key

- Tourist Information
- Toilets
- Carpark
- Viewpoint
- Heritage Trail
- Ancient Mariner Statue

