

**A Wander through Watchet Past – characters, industry and song – with David Milton**  
**Quantock u3a Local History Group meeting 19<sup>th</sup> June 2023**

It was a great day for a wander round the lovely harbour town of Watchet in the inimitable company of David Milton, the Bellman of Watchet, member of the Court Leet, Shanty singer and Song writer, Stone Carver, sometime print and paper mill employee, and man of the town! Thirteen of us attended and I feel we got excellent value for our £7. Here are some random jottings from the day and photos. I will pop some videos up on the facebook page.



- Watchet blue: <https://www.watchetmuseum.co.uk/social-history/>  
<https://www.facebook.com/GeneralColor/posts/obscurecolor-watchet-this-is-a-very-pale-blue-color-similar-to-sky-blue-accordin/1471840042940190/>
- Port 1000 yrs, Name is probably Celtic – Wood on the Hill.
- Van Heusen shirt making in building opposite Boat Museum
- Rope walk and hut – rope making long history in the town
- Best hanging rope Bridport dagger
- Methodist less strict in Watchet than Minehead, so Sunday docking in Watchet was preferred. Had 17 pubs plus many other drinking places



- Pagoda shed and first PO by station
- 4 original farms owned by Wyndhams
- 600 at Papermills, 180 printworks, now school is largest employer
- St Decumen's story: <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Decuman>
- War memorial made in Wells cathedral Stone masons
- Old levellest route to Williton Goviers Lane (gloves) and on to Glastonbury (Pilgrim Route)
- Docks closed 25-30 yrs quarantine area, pallet shipping, scrap metal, paper, Esparto grass for papermaking (papyrus) but needed ballast, eg bricks
- Watchet lime, good quality for underwater concrete setting, e.g. eddystone



- Manual handling too small for containers
- The Anchor now radio museum
- HMS Fox, Laurence of Arabia used it
- 5 dock wall collapses
- Death under paper bale...h&s issues
- East, middle, west town
- Esplanade used to be allotments
- Stoute family donated library, covenanted protected from sale by council
- Red cross hall had to be bought back by village when Red

Cross changed focus. Migrated to Phoenix centre charity

- 2 cinemas once upon a time, the Conquest. Closed in 50s
- Used to be band stand on Esplanade. Still an entertainment area
- John Short - shanty Jack. Cecil Sharp...recorded over 60 songs. Died 1933. Famous, only common seaman to have obituary in Times
- Ambulance, fire station, mortuary and police station all along the Esplanade
- Stones put up where smithy once was
- Sailhouse, now Esplanade club etc one storey originally sails hoisted out roof, brewery where coastguard is now
- Bank house: Hole in the wall, bank, customs house

- Watchet very poor and then wealthy. Lots of smuggling, custom house out of sight of harbour, and customs man plied with drink. Moved up to higher town so could look over town
- Fitzroy barometer set up by Acland-Hood
- 1607 flood, house with barometer built before flood. 2nd row of houses at time
- Market street, Watchet shambles
- Swain st - swine street Anglo saxon
- Watchet Sailor song
- 9 alcohol outlets in market st. Temperance society bought up several and turned to bnbs
- Wyndham office now The Corner House
- Cobbled throughout originally
- Market house was a church, prison and chandlers
- Court leet ale tasting, 6 inns
- 1607 got flattened, rebuilt 1610s
- Portree, bailiff at Court Leet.
- Tunnels from under Melbourne House across up to Swain street...flooding from high tides until blocked off
- Sammy Hakes Cottage, found old harbour wall, home of hobblers, tying up boats and get a shate of cargo
- Witch lived there too, cursed landlords donkey when he refused to extend her credit
- Mineral yard built on reclaimed land, shipping iron ore, closed 1910



- Alabaster line too
- 2 tidal pools, single sex
- 615, one of 10 Burgh towns, Watchet silver pennues, so Danes invaded, Danesfield burial mounds
- 2 boxing clubs 2 town bands
- 3 leats off Washford, mill had central mil wheel, so the leat came through centre of building.
- Sea lock, the Star regularly got flooded by sea, just prior to covid flash storm flood
- Kentsford original Wyndham seat before Orchard Wyndham
- Portholes from broken up boats seen in many houses, HMS Fox story rats leaving
- Last thatched cottages in Watchet, Waterloo due to thatching style not the battle
- High tides send weirs backwards
- Bakery - largest In Southwest, Bond bakery, doughnut boys
- Flood plain, but not for 120 yrs, mineral yard wall 5m tide but up there now
- Papermill had a huge finishing cylinder come in on a boat which rose 6ft when offloaded
- Stoates Mill: Big leat to feed gylks turbine
- Stoates was a paper bag mill til 1960s
- Variety of other industries, then residential
- Cobbler binding, Shackles nickname
- Anchor street car park found another mill site
- Tommy Webster, Mancunian escaped from Strangeways, jumping the wall, broke both legs, joined merchant navy...rather than prison, but nasty run. Got convoy medal. Websters Walk
- Milk bar and dairy on corner of Anchor st
- The Bank House swain street owned by wealthy ships captain colkd oversee entire harbour before methodist church etc built.
- Tunnel ran to tackle shop, to Stoates mill and a farm barn



- Lost village off Helliwell, lots of tales – David also runs a Ghost Story Walk in the Autumn which might be of interest...