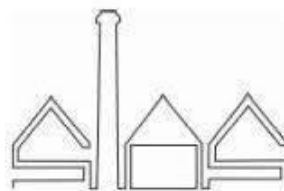


# LOCAL HERITAGE LIST FOR SOMERSET & EXMOOR OVERARCHING STATEMENT



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## 1. Introduction

- 1.1 This statement supports the Local Heritage List for Somerset and Exmoor and should be read in conjunction with the Technical Guide. It sets out some of the main elements that contribute to the special character of the region, recognising its inherent diversities.
- 1.2 The statement was prepared from an account by Mary Siraut of the Victoria County History.<sup>1</sup>

## 2. Overarching Statement

- 2.1 Somerset is a county of rich agricultural land, much of it historically enclosed. This explains the large number of parishes and villages, and also the very large number of small- to medium-sized market towns compared with other English counties, often quite close together such as Langport and Somerton, or Street and Glastonbury. Exmoor straddles Somerset and Devon and is a rural upland surrounding the Royal Forest of Exmoor.
- 2.2 The region is divided by hills, usually in long ranges like the Brendons, Quantocks, and Mendips, as well as by areas of former wetland, with island villages and many squatter cottages. There were also a number of medieval royal forests that gave rise to particular landscapes and agricultural development when they were disafforested, notably Exmoor.
- 2.3 Throughout the region there are a wide variety of building materials and styles. Many parts of Somerset and Exmoor have good and varied building stone, notably Ham Stone, Red Sandstone and various types of Lias, with numerous old quarries still visible and some remaining in active use. Those areas without ready access to good stone used cob and thatch or, later, brick and clay tile, which greatly influenced the urban expansion in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Oddities also arose, like the Lias slab garden fencing around Keinton Mandeville and Street, or the slab houses constructed with waste Lias and brambles. The great variety of local building materials contributes today to the diverse character of the region's towns, villages and hamlets.
- 2.3 Somerset and Exmoor boasts a long coastline with former major Bristol Channel ports at Minehead, Watchet and Bridgwater. Later seaside resorts, mainly of Victorian date, are found at Minehead, Blue Anchor, Burnham and Brean. With the introduction of the railway and improved road access, tourism blossomed in Cheddar and Exmoor where destinations such as Porlock, Lynton and Lynmouth expanded.
- 2.4 Because of its size and predominantly rural landscape, transport throughout Somerset and Exmoor was slow until the introduction in the nineteenth century of canals and railways. These transport routes left their mark but also eased migration and brought in building materials like London brick, Welsh slate and Westleigh limestone. Sadly, most of the regions' railways were closed in the later twentieth

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<sup>1</sup> Siraut, M. (2022). Personal correspondence.

century, leaving a legacy of traffic problems in spite of the M5. A classic example is Dulverton, which is difficult to get to by road but was once an easy train ride from Taunton.

- 2.5 In terms of landownership, important resident families tended to be concentrated in the west and northeast of the county, and they had a major influence for both good and ill. Examples of good estate housing can be found at the Trevelyans' at Woodford, the Acland-Hoods' at Sampford Brett and Sir Thomas Acland's estates at Dulverton and Holnicote, now in the care of the National Trust. The Crown, which owned several estates including the former Luttrell and Portman estates in the twentieth century, were instrumental in building roads, bridges, schools, housing estates, county farms and public buildings. Local councils, in conjunction with the wealthy landowners, have historically exhibited a careful approach in their attitudes to planning and conservation, which has been beneficial to the local heritage. Additionally, absentee or corporate landowners, like the bishops of Winchester in Taunton Deane, had more of an indirect effect in that it was left largely to local tenants how or what they built or improved. More recently the creation of Exmoor National Park and four Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty and the designation of internationally and nationally protected areas for wildlife have affected development in building and agriculture.
- 2.6 Industry in Somerset and Exmoor is varied – even the cloth industry was divided between the coloured cloths of Taunton and West Somerset and the raw white cloths produced in the rest of the county. Silk was woven where there was water and labour, and haircloth was produced in Castle Cary. Major industries tended to develop *ad hoc* in different places such as shoemaking in Street, art casting at Frome, glove-making in Yeovil, pottery at Donyatt, and shirt and collar manufacture in Taunton, whereas tanneries, breweries, foundries, and later engineering and food processing were established in many towns. The presence of raw materials, skills, markets, and roads were important but after the railways and, later, motorway arrived, any industry could be established almost anywhere with easy access for communications and workers.

### 3. Further Information

- 3.1 Further background information is available from the introductions to the two *Buildings of England* editions for Somerset and Devon, with comprehensive accounts of the geology, building materials, early history, settlement patterns, and architectural history of the counties.<sup>2</sup> *Aspects of Somerset History* by T. J. Hunt also provides a good overview of key historical developments in Somerset.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Foyle and Pevsner (2011); Orbach and Pevsner (2014).

<sup>3</sup> Hunt (1973).

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