



Yeovil Town Council



Supporting Documents

South Somerset Heritage Collections Project

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1. Background:

Yeovil Town Council

Yeovil Town Council (YTC) is a local government body with the best interests of the town at heart. The Council is made up of 24 locally elected Councillors, some of whom also serve on the unitary authority, Somerset Council. Regular meetings are held to make decisions and respond to local need. Work is often carried out in collaboration with Somerset Council, particularly for larger projects and services.

In 2024 YTC took over ownership and management of Westlands Entertainment Venue, Yeovil Country Park, Yeovil Recreation Centre, green spaces and play parks and management of South Somerset Heritage Collection. The Council is ambitious and leading on a strategic approach to cultural and green infrastructure for Yeovil and surrounding parishes. The Council recognises the ability of the heritage, arts and nature to transform lives, raise aspirations, improve education and enrich the quality of life for local residents.

South West Heritage Trust

South West Heritage Trust was founded in 2014 as an independent charity for Somerset, Devon and the South West. We want to celebrate and protect our rich heritage, helping everyone to enjoy it now and in the future. We bring together services previously provided by Somerset Council and Devon County Council, who remain our main funders.

Operating across six main sites, we deliver a wide range of heritage experiences for people of all ages. We work with many local and strategic partners, including Arts Council England and the Heritage Lottery Fund.

Museums - We run the widely-praised Museum of Somerset in Taunton, Somerset Rural Life Museum in Glastonbury, Avalon Archaeology in Shapwick, and the Brick and Tile Museum in Bridgwater. Together they tell the remarkable story of Somerset and the South West. We care for over 3 million museum objects ranging from outstanding geology and archaeology to textiles and fine art.

Archives and Local Studies - We hold the major written evidence for the history of Somerset and Devon. Our Archive and Local Studies Services have centres in Taunton, Exeter and Barnstaple where we care for 10 million archives dating from the 8th century to the present day. More than 350,000 printed reference works about Somerset and Devon are also held in the Local Studies collections. Together they are essential resources for anyone wanting to begin a journey through the history of the South West.

Historic Environment and Estates - Our Historic Environment and Estates Service supports local authorities, partners and the public by offering planning-related advice and information on Somerset's archaeology and built heritage. The service is also responsible for over 400 acres of historic landscapes including Cothelstone Hill in the Quantock Hills and Deer Leap and Blackmoor Reserve in the Mendip Hills.

Learning - We provide learning opportunities for people of all ages, as well as formal workshops for Key Stages 1 and 2. A Loans for Learning Service makes authentic heritage objects available for use in the classroom. We also work in partnership with secondary schools and further and higher education institutions.

2.Public Statement – 31st March 2026

South Somerset Heritage Collection

Following a recent Health & Safety review of the property where Yeovil Town Council's South Somerset Heritage Collection is housed, it has been decided that the building will be closed to general public access. As a result, access to the collection will be limited to staff and volunteers only.

The South Somerset Heritage Collection is currently located at Lufton Depot on Artillery Road, a site owned by Somerset Council. The review identified that the building is not suited to public access, particularly for visitors unfamiliar with the site. For clarity, the collection remains fully accessible to staff and volunteers, and its care and management continue as normal.

Yeovil Town Council recognises that this change naturally prompts questions about future public access to the South Somerset Heritage Collection. The Council would like to reassure residents and stakeholders that it remains fully committed to the collection's long-term future and to making it accessible to the public. To support this, a working party has been established that will commission a study exploring suitable alternative premises for the collection. The group's initial focus will be to agree the scope of this study that will include an options appraisal for the development of a Museum or Heritage Centre for Yeovil. Yeovil Town Council recognise there is a huge amount of passion, knowledge and expertise in this area and will seek to appoint an experienced, independent and expert body to consult, examine and report their findings for members to consider through our established democratic processes. Further updates will be shared as progress is made and we will publicise opportunities for residents, businesses and organisations to have their say and contribute to this development.

3.South Somerset Heritage Collections development

The museum's statement of purpose is:

Collections that represent the stories of local communities. South Somerset Heritage Collections will offer engaging and quality experiences, maximising opportunities to reach visitors and communities year round.

1. History of the collections

The original inspiration of the museum came from Alderman W.R.E. Mitchelmore, Mayor of Yeovil 1918-1921, who was interested in local antiquities and in particular the Roman site at Westland, discovered in 1923.

Dr C.A. Raleigh Radford's excavations there in 1927 produced valuable Romano-British archaeological material. An important collection of fire arms was presented by Alderman Henry Stiby, another Mayor (1904-05) and an Honorary Freeman of the Borough of Yeovil. The photographic collection includes Henry Stiby's original glass plate negatives; a 1961 aerial survey of Yeovil and a recent addition of Estate Agent Peall & Co's A-Z drawers detailing properties sold across the south west of England.

Other gifts included the Pinney collection of glassware, Bailward Costume Collection and Roman finds from Lufton and Ilchester, excavated under the direction of Mr L.C. Hayward, together with many other gifts, loans and purchases of interest to the local area.

The Museum collections were housed in the former coach house to Hendford Manor as the Museum of South Somerset. In 2004, Heritage Lottery Fund and South Somerset District Council grants created the Community Heritage Access Centre, (CHAC) an off-site environmentally controlled store on Lufton Depot, near Yeovil. This was to care for the collections in store at the Museum of South Somerset and kept in industrial sites around Yeovil.

The Museum of South Somerset closed in March 2011. CHAC achieved Accreditation Status in 2014 and is now the main contact for physical artefacts and photographs related to Yeovil and South Somerset.

The Community Heritage Access Centre (CHAC) was renamed and rebranded as the South Somerset Heritage Collection (SSHC) from July 2021 to August 2022.

2. An overview of current collections

a. Archaeology:

Material ranges from the Palaeolithic up to the twentieth century. The collection comprises groupings of small finds (i.e. artefacts of metal, bone, glass, stone etc.) along with an amount of

pottery and animal and human bone both worked and un-worked. The major strengths of the collection lie in the following excavation archives:

- Ilchester Mead Roman
- Lufton Villa Roman
- Westland Roman Villa

b. Costume & Textiles:

The costume and textile collection consists mainly of:

- Women's garments, most of which date from the 18th and 19th centuries (especially wedding dresses)
- Gloves
- 19th century infant wear
- Men's waistcoats, most of which date from the 18th and 19th centuries

There are a number of earlier items and a growing collection of 20th century material. A small portion of the collection is made up of male daywear and children's clothing i.e. waistcoats and christening robes. There is also a large collection of fashion accessories, i.e. fans, scent bottles, jewellery and items used in the production of textiles, i.e. lace bobbins. There is a collection of military uniforms from WWII and some items of ceremonial regalia. There are also two personal costume archives: the *Bailward* collection of 18th-19th century costume and the *Tacchi-Morris* collection of 20th century costume.

The strength of SSHCs costume collection is the Bailward costume collection. This collection includes men's and woman's costumes covering periods between 18th century - 19th century, it is especially valuable as a snapshot of body adornment of one particular family and class, over many generations. In 1997 this collection, which had been on loan to the South Somerset Heritage Collection since c1955, was generously donated by the descendants of the Bailward family and original lenders.

c. Decorative Arts:

British ceramics

The reference collection of ceramics is small, consisting of:

- Pottery made in South Somerset, particularly Donyatt ware
- Roman pottery from excavations at Lufton, Ilchester Mead, and Westland sites
- Post-medieval decorative ceramics in the Pinney Glass collection
- Some examples of rare Tintagel - B class sherds from excavations at South Cadbury
- Robertson collection of Yeoviliana.
- Five riot jugs, unique to Yeovil's history

Glass

- Pinney collection of glassware dating to 18th century.

Metalwork – Silver

- The strengths of the existing collection lie in a few commemorative plaques, ewer and a commemorative tray.

Furniture

There are only a few pieces of furniture in the collection; most of these pieces have a South Somerset association based on use (i.e. the former mayor's chair, the bureau designed for the original Borough Museum). There is a significant 18th century table in the collection.

Other:

- Pinney collection of gemstones
- Marble statue created by Westmacott.
- Angel Inn panel dating from 1603.
- Cromwellian clock, one of only six known to exist.

d. Fine Arts, Painting, drawing and prints:

With the exception of a few very fine oil and watercolour paintings, SSHC's collection is almost exclusively confined to two-dimensional graphic art (i.e. drawings and prints). These mainly comprise illustrations of Somerset scenes and portraits of people associated with South Somerset, together with works by artists connected with the district by birth or residence. Its main strength is as a visual reference collection of places and architecture in South Somerset.

Of particular note are a group of portraits depicting the members of prominent glover's families. These include Thomas Dampier and his wife Elizabeth Dampier who was also the daughter of William Bide, another local glover. Portraits of Thomas William Dampier-Bide and Elizabeth Dampier-Bide continue the tradition.

e. Documents & Printed Ephemera:

A small collection of printed ephemera has been acquired since 1928 and has been expanded since 1991 to complement the social history and Education and Outreach collections:

- Legal documents concerning Yeovil dating back to 14th century
- Poor Law Rate Books dating back to 1664.
- Social history flatwork, such as bills, proclamations and public apologies
- Maps, archaeological illustrations and certificates
- Photographs in frames

Batten collection of maps and documents dating back to 16th Century.

f. Geology:

- Local Fossils
- Local Sedimentology

g. Photographic:

The photographic collection - consisting of c.5000 negatives, original prints, lantern slides and glass plates - is an important visual record much used by researchers. Strengths include:

- Yeovil and district
- Gloving industry
- Glass slides, - Victorian & Edwardian (including Stiby collection dating from 1880's.)
- 1993 survey of Yeovil
- Social History

Few of these photographs are of intrinsic significance as artefacts, for example, to the technological development of photography, but are important because of the images they record. To ensure that every care can be taken to prolong the life of the original medium for as long as possible and to ensure the preservation and use of the image, many of the images are copied using modern photographic techniques which produce a negative and paper print and increasingly digital form.

h. Social History:

The main material is connected with the history of the people, work and leisure of South Somerset, including material related to trades and crafts, in particular Petter's and Westland's. The collections derive from early efforts to record the ethnography of the district and tend to form typological groups of artefacts such as Friendly Society Brasses, the gloving industry and the development of Petter / Westland as a manufacturing base in the District.

Whilst recognising the physical limitations of storage, the need to actively collect selected material reflecting the development of the landscape, industry and human life of South Somerset and thereby to maintain the relevance of SSHC's collections is understood.

Gloving was one of Yeovil and South Somerset's main industries up until the early twentieth century. Together with the portraits of prominent glovers, the gloving collections include hand tools, machinery, patterns, archives, photographs and the gloves themselves, which record the heritage of the gloving industry or 'Great Trade' as it has been described locally.

i. Numismatics:

The coins and medals date from ancient Greek and China to the 20th century. The particular strengths in the collection are Roman Imperial coins, and Somerset trade tokens, notably the 18th century tokens. The collection also includes bank notes, some local and general medallions and English regal coinage from Saxon times to the present.

An important collection of medals is the Pearson collection belonging to Charles Pearson, naval commander present at the battle of Trafalgar and his son Sir Charles Knight Pearson veteran of the Crimean and Boer wars, mentioned in despatches eleven times. A sword, painting and naval dirk also make up part of this collection.

The coin collection has grown up through donations of single coins and collections. There has always been a marked concentration on acquiring specimens with a Somerset provenance; specimens made in, or for specific use in, the district. This includes chance finds, material from excavations and hoards.

j. Toys, Dolls & Games:

The collection contains a small number of dolls, and assorted toys and games from the 18th - 20th centuries.

k. Firearms and Weapons:

One of SSHC's strengths is its firearms collection, consisting of c.85 weapons collected privately by former mayor and businessman Henry Stiby of Yeovil. The collection was presented in 1926 to the town of Yeovil for inclusion in the Yeovil Borough Museum. This collection is noted for its well-chosen examples illustrating the development of the firing mechanism, and includes journals kept by Henry Stiby describing these mechanisms.

l. Medicine Collection

The medicine collection derives mainly from Newtons Chemist which was in Hendford, Yeovil. A collection from a chemist in South Petherton is also held and one or two medical items have been donated individually. Newtons Chemist collection dates from the 19th century to the early 20th century. The South Petherton collection dates from the mid-20th century.

In all disciplines, the collecting area will be confined to the area of post-1974 South Somerset unless otherwise stated.

The majority of the collections derive from the area of the post-April 1974 boundaries of the district, but inevitably there are parts of the collections, which derive from other areas.

3. Themes and priorities for future collecting

The South Somerset Heritage Collection (SSHC) recognises its responsibility, in acquiring additions to its collections, to ensure that care of collections, documentation arrangements and use of collections will meet the requirements of the Accreditation Standard. It will take into account limitations on collecting imposed by such factors as inadequate staffing, storage and care of collection arrangements.

The themes that SSHC is interested in collecting in the future are:

- Material which adds to the areas outlined in the existing collection outlined in section 2.
- Historic items from the area of South Somerset, in particular gloving from 14th century onwards.

SSHC will not collect:

- In areas where local museums exist, unless in partnership or with the agreement of the local museum
- Categories of objects which are the responsibility of another Somerset museum as defined within the joint collecting policies
- Unprovenanced items
- Items with no local link, either by location or through a link to a local individual
- The archives of archaeological excavations, unless in exceptional circumstances
- Natural History
- Geology
- Sound Archive (Oral History) but will pursue the development of a joint approach with other Somerset museums and will include oral history where appropriate in particular projects
- Items which are illegal or pose a danger to health, for example gas masks and medical items.