

= Somerton =

Somerton / ˈsʊmɔːrtən / is a small town and civil parish in the English county of Somerset . It gave its name to the county , and was briefly , around the start of the 14th century , the county town , and around 900 AD was possibly the capital of Wessex . It has held a weekly market since the Middle Ages , and the main square with its market cross is today an attractive location for visitors . Situated on the River Cary , approximately 8 @. @ 8 miles (14 @. @ 2 km) north @-@ west of Yeovil , Somerton has its own town council serving a population of 4 @, @ 697 as of 2011 . Residents are often referred to locally as Somertonians . The civil parish includes the hamlets of Etsome , Hurcot , Catsgore , and Catcombe .

The history of Somerton dates back to the Anglo @-@ Saxon era , when it was an important political and commercial centre . After the Norman conquest of England the importance of the town declined , despite being the county town of Somerset in the late thirteenth century and early fourteenth century . Having lost county town status , Somerton then became a market town in the Middle Ages , whose economy was supported by transport systems using the River Parrett , and later rail transport via the Great Western Railway , and by light industries including glove making and gypsum mining .

In the centre of Somerton the wide market square , with its octagonal roofed market cross , is surrounded by old houses , while close by is the 13th century Church of St Michael and All Angels . Somerton also had links with Muchelney Abbey in the Middle Ages . The BBC drama The Monocled Mutineer was filmed in Somerton from 1985 to 1986 .

= = History = =

The earliest reference to the town is in the Anglo @-@ Saxon Chronicle , which records that in 733 the King of Wessex , Æthelheard lost control of Somerton to Æthelbald , King of Mercia . Somerton was the site of the 949 meeting of the witan , a form of Anglo @-@ Saxon parliament . The town returned to West Saxon royal control in the ninth century , and it was listed in the Domesday Book of 1086 as " Sumertone " . The name may come from Old English for " sea @-@ lake enclosure " , " summer town " or " summer farmstead " . The Somerton name was extended to the people in the area it controlled , and this area became known as Somerset , although Somerton soon ceased to be the most important settlement and never grew into a large town . The parish was the largest in the Hundred of Somerton . It was , briefly , the county town of Somerset from the late thirteenth century into the early fourteenth century . A building referred to as " Somerset castle " is believed to have been built around 1280 as a county gaol , with a visitor in 1579 describing the remaining portion as " an old tower embattled about castle @-@ like " . It was owned by Sir Ralph Cromwell between 1423 and 1433 . Details are vague and visible remains have vanished , so its status as a castle and its very existence is in doubt , with one writer , D.J.C. King , feeling that people were confusing it with Somerton Castle in Lincolnshire .

The Abbots of Muchelney Abbey held the Rectorship of the parish church of Somerton during the Middle Ages . They built a tithe barn , to house the tithes of crops and produce paid by the parish to the town 's Rector . The Abbey was dissolved in 1539 during the English Reformation , and the tithes and the tithe barn passed into the ownership of Bristol Cathedral . In the 20th century the barn was converted into private housing .

Glove making was a major industry in the town in the early nineteenth century , along with the production of rope and twine . The Somerton Brewery , owned by a local landowner named Thomas Templeman , was first recorded under the Tithe Apportionment Act of 1841 . The brewery became a large producer in Somerset until its final closure around 1935 . Before the National Insurance and the Health Service was introduced , Somerton Men 's Club acted as a local provident society within the area . Gypsum was extracted by hand at the Hurcott open @-@ cast mine from the Victorian era up until it closed down in 1953 . In 1906 , a railway station opened on the Castle Cary Cut @-@ Off which was built by the Great Western Railway . Whilst the line still remains in use , the station was closed in 1962 . When the Marconi Company built the radio stations known as the Imperial Wireless

Chain for the Post Office during 1925 ? 26 , they also established their own transmitting station at Dorchester with a receiving station 30 miles (48 km) away at Somerton .

Somerton was hit by four Luftwaffe bombs on the morning of 29 September 1942 during the Second World War . The bombs were aimed at the Cow and Gate milk factory and it was largely destroyed . Ten nearby houses were badly damaged . Nine people were killed and thirty seven injured . A memorial at the dairy site commemorates those killed . The factory later became a district council depot , and was recently bought by the town council for possible use as the site of a new town hall .

= = Governance = =

The town council has responsibility for local issues , including setting an annual precept (local rate) to cover the council 's operating costs and producing annual accounts for public scrutiny . The town council evaluates local planning applications and works with the local police , district council officers , and neighbourhood watch groups on matters of crime , security , and traffic . The town council 's role also includes initiating projects for the maintenance and repair of parish facilities , as well as consulting with the district council on the maintenance , repair , and improvement of highways , drainage , footpaths , public transport , and street cleaning . Conservation matters (including trees and listed buildings) and environmental issues are also the responsibility of the council .

In October 2009 , eleven of the local councillors resigned en masse , citing excessive criticism from local residents and in particular criticism from a hostile local weblog . In February 2012 the External Auditor appointed by the Audit Commission published a critical Report in the Public Interest regarding the activities of Somerton Town Council in the fiscal year 2008 to 2009 .

The town falls within the non @-@ metropolitan district of South Somerset , which was formed on 1 April 1974 under the Local Government Act 1972 , having previously been part of Langport Rural District . The district council is responsible for planning permission and building control , local roads , council housing , environmental health , markets and fairs , refuse collection and recycling , cemeteries and crematoria , leisure services , parks , and tourism . Somerset County Council is responsible for major services such as the Local Education Authority , social services , libraries , main roads , public transport , policing and fire services , trading standards , waste disposal and strategic planning .

Somerton is in the electoral ward of Wessex and whilst it is by far the most populous area , the ward stretches north to Compton Dundon . The total population of the ward taken from the 2011 census was 5 @, @ 402 .

Somerton elects one Member of Parliament (MP) for Somerton and Frome county constituency , represented in the House of Commons of the Parliament of the United Kingdom , and is part of the South West England constituency of the European Parliament which elects six MEPs using the d 'Hondt method of party @-@ list proportional representation .

= = Geography = =

Somerton is situated on a plateau , above and to the south of the deep valley of the River Cary . The river flows west and then north through the Somerton Moor and then into King 's Sedgemoor Drain on the Somerset Levels eventually joining the River Parrett near Bridgwater . The town is 116 miles (187 km) from London , 28 miles (45 km) south from Bristol and 9 miles (14 km) north @-@ west from Yeovil , just off the Dorset border . Somerton 's hamlets include Etsome , Hurcot , Lower Somerton , Littleton and Midney . Great Breach Wood is a biological Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) and is situated just 1 @.@ 4 miles (2 @.@ 3 km) north @-@ east from Somerton , near the hamlet of Littleton .

Somerton 's climate is typical of the climate of south @-@ west England which is usually cool winters with warmer summers and precipitation all year round , with more rain experienced in winter .

= = Demography = =

The Somerton parish had a population of 4 @, @ 706 as of 2002 . In the 1801 census the population of the town was 1 @, @ 145 and the first half of the 19th century saw strong growth (reflecting that seen elsewhere in England during this period) , with the population rising to 2 @, @ 140 in 1851 . It however then began to drop , starting with a significant drop to 1 @, @ 917 by the 1861 census . The population steadily fell until 1921 , before steadily rising thereafter . It was not until 1961 that the population of Somerton had risen above its former population of 1851 . The population has since continued to steadily increase .

= = Economy = =

A weekly market has been held in Somerton for much of its history . The cloth industry dominated the town 's market from the 17th century until the 20th century , when agriculture took over as the leading industry . Some light industries and services , such as garage repair , physiotherapy , water treatment , and builders and decorators , are located in the business park on Bancombe Road .

= = Landmarks = =

The main square , Market Place , with its market cross is today an attractive location for visitors . Market crosses have stood in the square since before 1390 ; the present Butter Cross , a roofed market cross , was rebuilt in 1673 , and is Somerton 's most noted feature . The structure was the property of the Earls of Ilchester who sold it to the town in 1916 . It is a Scheduled Ancient Monument . Next to the Butter Cross stands the " Market Hall " , previously known as the " Town Hall " , although the building has never fulfilled either of these functions . Bordering the square are the church , and the Lady Smith Memorial Hall , also known as the " Parish Rooms " , which was built in 1902 , and the 17th century Market House , now a restaurant . The Red Lion was opened by the Earl of Ilchester in 1768 as a model coaching inn . It closed in 1995 ; after a period of neglect it has been redeveloped as town houses .

From the early 1980s onwards projects aiming to improve Somerton for film industry purposes have been undertaken . The market square was heavily revamped , creating a central parking area with easy access to the local amenities . The BBC drama The Monocled Mutineer was filmed in Somerton from 1985 to 1986 .

= = Somerton Court = =

Somerton Court , originally known as " Somerton Erleigh " . The house has had various owners including Edward IV 's brother , the Duke of Clarence , and Henry Percy , 6th Earl of Northumberland , who sold the estate in 1530 . It passed through a number of hands until 1597 when it was purchased by James Fisher , whose son later rebuilt it in 1641 . The court remained in the Fisher family 's possession until 1808 when it was sold . Its new owner renamed the house " Somerton Court " , and replaced the gabled dormers with Gothic battlements and turrets . The house was later enlarged by the Hall @-@ Stephenson family . During World War II it was occupied by Royal Navy WRENS . In the 1970s it was purchased by a local businessman Stuart Pattemore . In 1987 Somerton Court and the estate of 55 acres and 4 cottages including The Dower House was purchased by Roger Byron @-@ Collins when it subject to extensive upgrading and extensions . It was resold in 2005 . The Dower House was built in the early 19th century . Somerton Court is now used for Wedding Receptions . The house now stands in 55 acres grounds .

= = Transport = =

The town 's former , and only , railway station was on the Castle Cary Cut @-@ Off , once part of

the Great Western Railway . Although the line still remains in use the station closed to passengers in 1962 , and goods in 1964 . The nearest station is now at Castle Cary . On the outskirts of the town stands the impressive Somerton Viaduct .

Despite Somerton being situated in a rural area , the closest main road from Somerton is the A303 road that runs near the town and stretches all the way into northern Hampshire and finally ends at Basingstoke . The minor B3165 road runs through the town although the road is less commonly used and does not join to the A303 for another 4 miles (6 km) . Two B roads , the B3153 and B3165 , run through Somerton ; the B3165 , mentioned earlier , starts in the town and runs southwards to the A372 Langport road . The A372 itself runs south @-@ east to the junction of the A303 and A37 roads at Podimore services .

= = Religious sites = =

The Anglican Church , St Michael 's and All Angels , has origins which date from the 13th century , with a major reshaping in the mid 15th century , and further restoration in 1889 . It is built of local lias stone cut and squared , with Hamstone dressing . It has been designated by English Heritage as a grade I listed building .

It is notable for a carved roof , with lions and a small cider barrel purportedly carved by the monks of Muchelney Abbey . Sir John Betjeman was also inspired by an inscription on the candelabra . The church is quite plain on the outside but inside is one of the finest wooden carved roofs in the county . It is shallow pitched with massive , richly decorated tie beams and short king posts . The whole area of the roof is divided into square carved panels set in the framework of the structural timbers which are decorated with carved bosses where they intersect . There are 640 panels each carved with the same quatrefoil design . In the triangular spaces above each beam are dragon @-@ like beasts . It is said there are bullet holes in the timbers , caused by soldiers who camped in the church in 1646 before the Battle of Langport . The 17th century pulpit and altar table are Jacobean woodwork . There are five other churches in the town , including Catholic and Methodist groups .

= = Education = =

Somerton has two primary schools in the town , but no secondary schools . Children aged between 4 and 7 attend the County Infants ' school at Etsome Terrace . It has around 120 students in five classes that are named after flowers . Older children (between 7 and 11 years) attend the Monteclefe CEVA Junior School on Kirkham Street , which provides the second part of primary education in the area .

= = Twin towns = =

Licciana Nardi , Tuscany , Italy

Sillé @-@ le @-@ Guillaume , Pays @-@ de @-@ la @-@ Loire , France