



Langport

A HISTORIC TOWN AT THE HEART OF THE LEVELS



Langport

Langport is an ancient market town, occupying a strategic position at a crossing of the River Parrett, with evidence of Celtic, Roman and Saxon occupation. It was the site of a significant Civil War battle in 1645.

It boasts a fine mix of historic buildings and modern facilities. Its small independent shops and wide range of amenities make it a vibrant hub for the surrounding area. There are lively community activities, original arts and crafts on sale and interesting places to eat and drink. You can enjoy many pleasant walks around the town, with attractive picnic areas beside the river and in the Town Garden, overlooking the moors.

Langport lies at the heart of the Somerset Levels, with its fantastic flora and fauna and stunning scenery. With its proximity to must-see places like Wells, Glastonbury and Taunton and a wealth of nearby historic houses and gardens, Langport makes an ideal and welcoming centre for exploring – whether on foot, cycling or by car – the historic and natural attractions of south Somerset.

Janet Seaton



The Tour of Britain cycle race coming through Langport



The Battle of Langport

The Battle of Langport, which took place on farmland to the east of the town on 10th July 1645, was an important battle late in the English Civil War, in the aftermath of the decisive Royalist defeat at Naseby. The Parliamentary Army, under the command of Sir Thomas Fairfax, defeated the Royalists, led by General Goring, and chased them through the town and out towards Bridgwater. As they fled through Bow Street many of the houses were set alight, but the fires were soon put out by the residents. Oliver Cromwell himself was present, and wrote a detailed account of this “happy victory” near “a very strong place of the enemy’s called Langport”, describing at the end how “the enemy quitted Langport, when they ran out at one end of the town, we entered from the other.”



Portcullis

Langport adopted the symbol of the portcullis with flying chains in the 15th century. It was the badge of Lady Margaret Beaufort, a generous benefactor who had inherited the manors of Curry Rivel, Langport Eastover and Langport Westover from her father John, Duke of Somerset. It can be seen in the arches under the Town Hall and on the tower of All Saints’ Church, a reminder of the town’s historical importance.

Hall of Fame

Many notable people are associated with Langport. As well as the Bagehots and Stuckeys, we also celebrate:

The Kelways

James Kelway (1815-1899) was a successful plant breeder and nurseryman, who founded Kelways of Langport. Long known worldwide as the Royal Nurseries, and later run by his son William and grandson James, it still flourishes today. The family memorial is in St Mary’s churchyard, Huish Episcopi.

The Queketts

William Quekett (1767-1842) was Headmaster of Langport Grammar School for over 50 years. His sons Edwin and John were famous microscopists, the former co-founding the Royal Microscopical Society. Another son, Edward, kept a museum in the Hanging Chapel. The family grave is in All Saints’ churchyard.

C H Sisson

Charles Sisson (1914-2003), who retired to Langport after a civil service career, was a well-known poet and translator. He is buried in St Mary’s churchyard.

Digby Denham

Digby Denham (1859-1944) was born in Bow Street, the son of a baker. He emigrated to Australia where he became a successful businessman and politician, serving as Premier of Queensland 1911-1915.

Langport, a well frequented market-town, on the river Parr, which is navigable for barges to Bristol, and occasions a good trade here. Eels are exceeding cheap and plentiful here.

Daniel Defoe: 1727

Walter Bagehot

Walter Bagehot (1826-1877) was a famous Victorian banker and writer on economic and constitutional matters, who remains influential to this day. Born on 3 February 1826 in Bank House, Cheapside, he was the son of Thomas, a senior director of Stuckey’s Bank, and Edith, a member of the Stuckey family. The two families dominated Langport commerce for over a century. Bagehot was educated in Langport, Bristol and University College London. He helped run Stuckey’s Bank, and also wrote on a wide variety of subjects. His two most important works remain classics: *The English Constitution* (1867) and *Lombard Street* (1873). He edited *The Economist* from 1861 until his death, and was consulted by leading figures like Gladstone. US President Woodrow Wilson made a pilgrimage to Bagehot’s grave in 1896 and 1899. In 1858, Bagehot married Eliza, eldest daughter of James Wilson MP, founder of *The Economist*. They had no children. Bagehot died in 1877 at Herd’s Hill (now Hurds Hill), his Langport home, and was buried in All Saints’ Churchyard.



How to get here



Further information

- Langport Information Centre, Bow Street, Langport TA10 9PR, 01458 253527 langportinfo@btconnect.com
- Langport Town Council (details below)
- Langport Area Business Group: labginfo@gmail.com

See also

- www.visitsouthsomerset.com
- www.visitsomerset.co.uk

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Langport Town Council

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Walk Langport project is supported by



Bow Bridge

The River Parrett was crossed here in Roman times, and a bridge was first mentioned in 1220. It was rebuilt by the Parrett Navigation Company, and opened in 1841. Just upriver is the modern footbridge, installed in 2006.

Great Bow Wharf

River-based trade was vital to Langport's commercial prosperity for centuries. This restored warehouse, next to Bow Bridge, was once operated by the trading company, Stuckey & Bagehot. Railway transport brought the decline of river commerce, and the warehouse is now a multi-purpose community facility, including a 'Bagehot Room' and a 'Stuckey Room'.

Ensor House

Ensor House is named after Thomas Ensor, a Milborne Port glove manufacturer who operated here in the 1930s. The factory mainly made up ladies' dress gloves from pre-cut leather supplied from Tintinhull, employing 30-40 people, mostly women, with many more 'outworkers'. It closed in 1971.

Town Hall

The Town Council still meets in the Town Hall, which was built in 1733. At various times the building has housed the town's horse-drawn fire engine, the cells and the county court.

Town Clock

An octagonal town clock was installed in 1802. In the 19th century Langport had several clockmakers. William Preddy, who worked here in the 1820s-1830s, has over 20 signed clocks still in existence. Despite this, the present clock was made in London.



Town Garden

Tesco funded the development of the Town Garden for community use, when they opened their North Street supermarket in April 2002. Renamed the Walter Bagehot Town Garden in 2013, it contains two finely illustrated

interpretation boards, one about Bagehot and the other about the pump that saved Langport from serious flooding in October 1960.

Bank Chambers

In 1770 this became the HQ of Stuckey's Bank, later one of the most influential regional banks, with a banknote circulation second only to the Bank of England itself. Walter Bagehot was born here in 1826 when his family lived above the bank. In 1875 the Bank expanded to their new premises next door.



Langport Arms

The Langport Arms Hotel is one of the earliest secular buildings, recorded in 1596 as 'the inn'. By the 1700s there were many others, like the Dolphin and the Angel, which can still be seen in Bow Street. It was a coaching inn, acting as the post office until that moved into separate premises.

Herald House

Langport's own newspaper, the *Langport Herald*, first appeared in 1855 and was published until 1937. The building is still known as Herald House, and the Herald offices beside it are now residential.

Photograph of Hurds Hill: Clifford Lee / David Holmes

KEY

- 1 Bow Bridge
- 2 Great Bow Wharf
- 3 Ensor House
- 4 Town Hall
- 5 Town Clock
- 6 Town Garden
- 7 Bank Chambers
- 8 Langport Arms
- 9 Herald House
- 10 Moors
- 11 Viaduct
- 12 St Gildas Convent
- 13 All Saints' Church
- 14 Hanging Chapel
- 15 Hurds Hill
- 16 Kelways

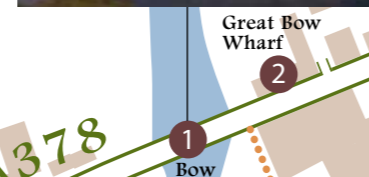
..... Footpaths

Moors

Langport's moors, once important as pasture and grazing, now have community amenity uses. Cocklemoor forms part of the popular riverside walks, hosting many local events. Northmoor and Langport Common Moor lie to the north. To this day, a limited number of Langport residents – 'commoners' – retain traditional grazing rights on Northmoor.

Viaduct

At one time Langport had two rail stations, Langport West, and Langport East, but both closed in the 1960s. Now the trains speed past on the 14-span viaduct without stopping.



St Gildas Convent

Hill House was the home of the noted banker, Vincent Stuckey. In 1903, the French Sisters of Christian Instruction bought it, renamed it St Gildas Convent, and ran a school here until the early 1990s. The adjacent Church of St Joseph was added in 1929.



All Saints' Church

All Saints' Church has dominated the skyline since the 15th century. There are many impressive 'hunky punks', exterior grotesque stone carvings unique to Somerset. The Church was declared redundant in 1994, but is regularly used for community purposes. The east window has a fine collection of medieval stained glass, and the west window was installed in memory of Walter Bagehot.



Hanging Chapel

The Grade 1 listed Hanging Chapel is the jewel in Langport's crown. It is a 15th century structure with 12th century origins. Over time it has been the town hall, a Sunday School, an armoury, museum, grammar school and, since 1891, a masonic lodge.



Hurds Hill

Formerly known as Herd's Hill, and located just off the Curry Rivel road, this fine mansion and grounds was the Langport home of the Bagehot family until the early 1930s. Since then it has had a number of owners and uses, including, until recently, a residential nursing home. It is not open to the public.

Kelways

The former warehouses and offices of Kelways Nurseries are preserved as the Old Kelways buildings on the Somerton Road. Now at their new nursery down the road, Kelways are still famous for their peonies and irises, regularly winning medals at the Chelsea Flower Show for their displays.

