



Activity Four

Activity Name	4. Town and pier
Learning Aims	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Learn something about the historic, social and natural heritage of the WSMR area ○ Learn how the WSMR affected Watchet.
Links to National Curriculum	<p>History</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Local history study ● Knowledge and understanding of events, people and changes in the past ● Historical enquiry
Resources required	4a Map of Watchet; 4b 5f Unloading the ore in Watchet; 4c The Mineral Yard; 4d Station plan; 4e WSMR at Watchet
Activities	1. Mineral Line trail in Watchet



This walk is on the flat and is wheelchair accessible. It should take approximately one hour.

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Activities	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Start on the Esplanade in Watchet, from where there is an excellent view of the harbour, and the site of the former West Pier, from which ore was offloaded into waiting ships bound for Wales.2. Where the Esplanade meets Market Street you can find Watchet Market House Museum, which has an interesting display of Mineral Line artefacts and photographs in the window, as well as inside.3. Continue along Market Street past the London Inn, and Yankee Jack's cottage. Turn right into the car park, formerly known as the Old Mineral Yard which used to be a bustling place. At the beginning of the century workers cast large concrete blocks on the WSMR sidings to re-build the West Pier, which had been damaged in the Great Storm of 1900.  The Mineral Yard c.1904 (4c)4. Walk through the car park to the West Pier. This is the route horses would have took when pulling wagons of ore from the train to the quay. Look at the exposed section of rail on the West Pier which marks where the iron ore used to be discharged into waiting boats.  Unloading the ore from Watchet Pier (4b)

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5. Retrace your steps back along the pier. As you pass the slipway turn back so that you are standing at the top of it. On the left hand wall, an old piece of rail has been pinned to the wall. This is likely to have come from the WSMR, although nobody knows how it got there.



A piece of rail pinned to the entrance to the harbour.

6. Retrace your steps through the car park, and standing on the pavement by the entrance of the car park, look at the Old Station House (now private property).



The old Station House



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Teacher information

Watchet prior to the WSMR

There is evidence of a semi-urban settlement at Watchet in Saxon times.

Watchet was one of King Alfred's ten burghs; it had a mint from c. 980, which remained in production into medieval times. Watchet suffered repeated Viking raids in the tenth century.

At Domesday, a mill and an agricultural estate are recorded. The area was part of the estates of the William de Mohun who built Dunster castle.

Watchet's cloth industry grew in the medieval period. It also traded in limestone, seaweed and had fisheries.

Catastrophic storms in the 1450s virtually destroyed Watchet's harbour and swept part of the town away. The harbour was cleaned out and a new pier built in Queen Elizabeth I's time at the expense of the lords of the manor, Luttrells and Wyndhams. Trade, mainly with Bristol and Wales, grew in salt, coal, wine and livestock; smuggling was also important in the seventeenth century.

However, despite further repairs to the harbour in the early eighteenth century, silting became a problem and Watchet declined as Minehead grew.

Watchet and the West Somerset Mineral Railway

In the mid nineteenth century the two railways (West Somerset Mineral Railway, and West Somerset Railway) had an impact on the town's infrastructure and economy.

The West Somerset Mineral Railway was an 11 mile long railway constructed from 1857 - 1864 to transport iron ore from the Brendon Hills to the harbour at Watchet.

Mineral Railway trains carried iron ore mined in the Brendon Hills to Watchet station. From there a horse pulled the wagon over Market Street and onto the quay, to be loaded into the 40 ton vessels that carried the ore to Newport in South Wales. From Newport it was taken to Ebbw Vale, or one of the other ironworks owned by the company, to be smelted. The cast iron produced in the furnaces at Ebbw Vale was converted into wrought iron and rolled into rails. After 1865, steel rails were also made at Ebbw Vale.

Until 1875 the iron ore was shovelled by hand into waiting boats. This was made easier by the installation of hydraulic tippers in the 1870s which dispatched the minerals into the boats. In 1883 the Brendon Hill iron mines were closed due to the availability of cheap iron ore from Spain.

Iron ore was loaded by hand into 40 ton vessels for conveyance to Newport, and return cargoes of coal and mine timbers gave the shipowners constant employment. From 1859 to 1883, 25 Watchet vessels and 26 crew members were lost.

The great storm

On 29 December 1900 a severe storm destroyed most of the west pier and about half of the eastern pier of Watchet harbour, and wrecked several vessels in the harbour. In 1902 Watchet Urban District Council was formed to enable its rebuilding.

The new work was constructed of precast mass concrete blocks; the former lighthouse was re-erected at the end of the west pier. The arm of the west pier from which ore had been loaded into ships was not reinstated. Work was completed in January 1905, but because of storm damage during the re-construction, the cost had increased from £18,000 to nearly £24,000. The new harbour was finished in 1907. In 1908 the Somerset Mineral Syndicate built a timber jetty at the site of the former Mineral Pier.

From 1907-10 the line from Watchet to Brendon Hill was re-opened by the Somerset Mineral Syndicate, and the Watchet Briquetting Syndicate, to produce iron ore briquettes from the

crumbly ore stockpiled at Colton Pits mine. The briquetting plant was sited in a small field at Washford, and they were then taken to Watchet for shipment. In March 1910 the directors of the Somerset Mineral Syndicate and the Watchet Briquetting Syndicate wound up both companies, and in July the effects of the Watchet Briquetting Syndicate were sold. In 1918 the west quay was leased to a Cardiff ship breaking firm.