

Somerset

Watchet alabaster

Alabaster resembles marble and can be very finely carved. The white alabaster of the Midlands is well known but Watchet's pink stone, often mottled with white, black and dark salmon, was popular for monuments and fonts in the 17th century as it resembles expensive coloured marbles. It was seldom used locally but was an important west Somerset export until the mid 19th century when it was used for fireplaces and ground for gypsum plaster.

Lent by Mary Siraut.

Plesiosaur Vertebra

The Museum of Somerset has a remarkably complete 200 million year old Plesiosaur fossil (a type of marine reptile) but parts of these extinct creatures together with their relatives the ichthyosaurs have been found throughout the county especially during lias quarrying, a major Somerset industry in the 19th century. This vertebra was found on the site of the Bath and West showground.

Lent by the Portable Antiquities Scheme.

Devil's toenail

This is a coiled oyster (gryphea) fossil from the west Somerset coast which is rich in fossil remains. These creatures lived between 200 million and 66 million years ago. The Somerset coastline has undergone enormous changes over the millennia. Mesolithic finds and vestiges of sunken forest off the coast are evidence of the sea's advance retreat and advance as is the extent of modern coastal defence.

Lent by Mary Siraut.

Donyatt potsherds

The Donyatt potteries were a long-lived industry in south Somerset mostly concentrated at Crock Street and their products are found locally and in America. They produced everyday kitchen and table earthenware from the 14th to 19th centuries, Crock Street Pottery was probably the last, in production until the early 1900s, although an art pottery was based at Donyatt in the 1920s. These decorated sherds are from the rims of 18th-century dishes.

Lent by the Portable Antiquities Scheme.

Starkey, Knight and Ford beer bottle

Brewing is an ancient Somerset industry. One of the largest brewers was the company Starkey, Knight and Ford created when Taunton brewer Thomas Starkey joined up with fellow brewers George Knight of Bridgwater in 1888 and Thomas Ford of Tiverton in 1895. They had several malthouses and breweries including Bridgwater, source of this early 20th-century bottle. Their tied houses bore the sign of the flying black horse in relief on a gable.

Lent by Mary Siraut.