

GREETINGS TO DUNSTER, BRITISH COLUMBIA, FROM DUNSTER, WEST SOMERSET, ENGLAND

We found some information about your community from the joys of the world - wide web and at this time of goodwill thought that some of your local inhabitants might be interested in some information about "the original" Dunster here in Great Britain. History shows that you were named, if not founded, by a railroad official who originated from here.

We too have an historic railway station, which still sees steam trains. Dating from 1874 Dunster station was closed by British Rail in 1971 but came back to life in 1976 as part of the West Somerset Railway which at 20 miles in length is England's longest "heritage" line. It runs between the seaside town of Minehead and the village of Bishops Lydeard which is four miles from Taunton, county town of Somerset. Trains run on selected dates throughout the year and daily from the end of May until the start of October. Between September 4th and 12th (except on the 8th) the world famous steam locomotive "Flying Scotsman" will be working trains on the WSR in a one-off visit that is unlikely to be repeated for a number of years. Booking of tickets for the public will go live on February 16th but more details can be obtained by e-mailing info@west-somerset-railway.co.uk (or read on a little further).

However by Dunster standards a building dating from 1874 is modern. The main street is overlooked by Dunster Castle and there have been fortifications on the site for over a 1000 years. The history of the castle is not particularly martial or gory and from 1066 to the late 20th century it was the property of only two families in succession, the de Mohuns and the Luttrells. And the Luttrells purchased it from the de Mohuns. However in the 17th century it withstood a long siege in the English Civil War, after which the fortifications were "reduced" by the victors to lessen the chances of it being of any further use as a source of trouble. Today it is one of many buildings in the care of the National Trust.

Other historic buildings include the working water mill, the packhorse bridge, the tithe barn which was once part of the priory, a large church with a dovecot in the grounds, the former Nunnery and the old Yarn Market building. As if this wasn't enough in the 18th century one local also constructed a folly, in the form of a hill top tower, which at least offered a landmark for seafarers in the Bristol Channel. With that body of water having the second largest tidal range in the world, back in the days of sail the mariners needed all the help they could get. Dunster did once have a harbour but it went out of use in the 16th century and all that remains is a shallow declivity near the Dunster Beach holiday chalets. There have been a number of archaeological digs which show that the history of the village dates back to at least Roman times.

Dunster was once very important in the wool and cloth trades of England but as these moved elsewhere what has survived is architecturally a medieval village adapted to 21st century living. The main sources of income today are derived from the tourism and leisure markets as apart from its own attractions the village is also a very good base for visiting the Exmoor National Park. The climate is one of the mildest in Britain and would certainly seem so compared with British Columbia at this time of year.

There are various events held locally each year. The biggest three are the Dunster Country Fair in July, the Dunster Show in August and Dunster by Candlelight which takes place on the first Friday and Saturday in December. The first two are a mixture of livestock shows and competitions with fun fairs, trade stalls, arena displays plus refreshment tents and stands, very much the sort of setting where in classic British crime stories something nasty happens and the detective arrives to solve the case. Candlelight is the two days when the lighting is softened, entertainment can be found in venues and

on the streets and of course every business has its doors open. From small beginnings this event has grown to be one of the major ones in the South West during the lead-up to Christmas.

Possibly oddly, there has been no major literary figure associated directly with Dunster. However at nearby Nether Stowey there is another property in the care of the National Trust, the cottage where Samuel Taylor Coleridge lived during the period when amongst other works he composed the "Rime of the Ancient Mariner". This hapless sailor's voyage began at another nearby location, Watchet harbour, where a statue of him stands on the quayside. R.D. Blackmore's novel "Lorna Doone" is "A Romance of Exmoor" in its full title and many of the locations can be visited included the tiny church at Oare where Carver Doone attempts to shoot Lorna during her marriage to John Ridd.

This message is originating from the Yarn Market Hotel in the village which stands right next to that historic structure. We have 28 en-suite rooms, a licensed bar and a restaurant and we are open all year round. During each year we host a number of themed breaks including singing, painting, visits to historical churches in the area, Dunster by Candlelight and an English Christmas. Also for this year we are hosting two special breaks in conjunction with the visit of "Flying Scotsman" to the West Somerset Railway. These will include a ride behind the famous engine and behind another steam loco at work on the WSR and visits to a pair of contrasting railways. The Lynton and Lynmouth Cliff Railway is from the Victorian age, is water powered and links the twin Exmoor villages. The Lynton and Barnstaple is a revived section of a narrow gauge line which closed in 1935 and is now being brought to life by dedicated enthusiasts. You can see much more about us at www.yarnmarkethotel.co.uk

Which just leaves us to wish everyone in Dunster BC a happy and comfortable 2017.