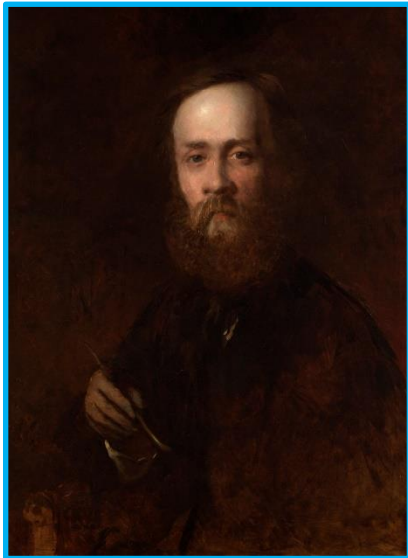




Weston's Museum

Weston-super-Mare has had a Museum since 1861. The founder was William Mable, a shoemaker by trade, who came to Weston from London in 1852.



A portrait of the museum's founder William Mable © Weston Museum

Fascinated by the excavations then taking place on Worlebury, Mable began to put together a collection of "specimens of natural history". His aim was "to secure a museum for the town of Weston, free to the public at all reasonable times".

Mable was clearly a believer in the power of education. Around 1859 he was one of the founders of a school in Carlton Street for disadvantaged young working boys. Education was still not compulsory at this time and many children did not learn to read or write. In 1861 he donated his collection to the school.

In 1863 the nearby Emmanuel Church raised the money to build a hall in memory of the late Prince Albert. Mable's Night School and collection moved in. In 1868 a large new room was added to the Albert Memorial Hall to house Mable's growing collection.



Curator W.H. Palmer among the museum's collection, 1906 © Weston Museum

William Mable died in 1887. His broader vision of a Public Museum finally came to pass in 1901 when a purpose-built Library and Museum was built on the Boulevard - the work of celebrated local architect Hans Price.



The Library and Museum building in 1911 © Weston Museum

The building played this dual role until 1975, following Local Government reorganisation. Separated from the Library, the Museum moved into its present premises in Burlington Street and was renamed “the Woodspring Museum”.

Formerly these had been the workshops and store for the Weston-super-Mare Gaslight Company, having been developed in that role from a jumble of earlier buildings.



The Gaslight Company building as it originally was © Weston Museum

The properties had been bought by Weston Borough Council in 1973 following the Gas Company’s move out to Drove Road.

The former joint Library and Museum still stands, awaiting a new role now that the Library has moved to the Town Hall.

In 1985 The Museum acquired a Victorian cottage standing at the eastern end of the building. It has been furnished in the style of 1901 and adapted to house the Museum’s wonderful collection of toys. It is known as Clara’s Cottage after Clara Payne who lived there for many years.

In 1996 North Somerset Council took over from Woodspring and the Museum was renamed “The Time Machine” until 2002, when its name changed yet again to “the North Somerset Museum”.

Weston Town Council acquired the Burlington Street building in 2012 and wasted no time in making a bid to the Heritage Lottery Fund to make major improvements. The bid was successful, the building has undergone a major redesign, and the collection is now presented in an entirely new way.

Now known as “Weston Museum” we are once again telling the story of Weston to a whole new generation of residents and visitors.



The grand re-opening of the Museum in 2017 © Weston Museum

William Mable would probably be surprised and not a little delighted that his vision of a Museum for the town of Weston-super-Mare is still very much alive. The new Gallery for Temporary Exhibitions is named in his memory.



Weston-super-Mare
Town Council