

# History Talks from David Clarke

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## Explore and Discover Winchelsea

Winchelsea is an opportunity to imagine a life in a town whose Grand Design has little changed in over 700 years. There are three medieval gates that guard the approaches, the old Court Hall that once acted as the gaol and the seat of the Mayor's power, and a great church that promised so much, its grandeur and wealth reflects the affluence and influence of the town in the 14<sup>th</sup> century.

The stunning Georgian houses that have their ancient founding roots in their medieval vaults trace a history back to the town's wine trade and despite its difficult past, it has survived to capture a unique vision of King Edward I's dream of a hilltop town. It is a walk into history.

Winchelsea's stagnation was arrested towards the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century with the new Town Well, the restoration of the Church of St Thomas and, when its decayed grandeur was discovered by artists and writers and Pre-Raphaelite Victorians.

Turner and Millais painted, Thackeray, Ford Maddox Ford and Joseph Conrad wrote, actress Ellen Terry came for the quiet life, Beatrix Potter, rented Haskards, Elgar stayed to play golf and HG Wells wrote a short story called *Miss Winchelsea's Heart*. All attracted by the town's grace.

In 1866, Dante Gabriel Rossetti said of the Mayor and Corporation's procession it was "*observed by a mob of one female child in the street and by us from the inn window*".

It is little different today.

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