



WATCHET CONSERVATION MATTERS

For conserving our built and natural environment

Issue 17 June/July 2011

From our Chair, Molly Quint:

Dear Friends and Members

Welcome to our latest newsletter. I do hope you enjoy it. We are thrilled that Pat Wolseley has agreed to be our speaker at the next meeting at the Methodist Hall, she is great fun but so knowledgeable on all plant life that I know we will have a wonderful evening, do please come.

It was so sad that we had to postpone the Pool Fun Day; you can see in the photo that we made great preparations. We are now holding it on Monday 25th July 5pm - 9pm. as part of the Watchet Summertime Event. Programme as before, so please bring a picnic, boats etc. to make it a lovely evening, we hope the sun will shine!!



Photo: Steve Guscott

Nick Cotton has been a wonderful help to the WCS and now he has agreed to join our committee, we are so pleased - welcome Nick.

If there is anything WCS can do to help any of its members, please do not hesitate to ask.

Yours very sincerely, Molly Q.

Forthcoming Events:

Tuesday July 19th 2011, 7.30 pm Watchet Methodist Schoolroom, Harbour Road

'Lichens and their use as environmental indicators'

An illustrated talk by Pat Wolseley MA Oxon

Pat, who lives locally, has kindly agreed to give the WCS an introduction to these fascinating organisms on which she has worked for many years both at home and abroad to develop lichens as indicators of air quality and of forest stability in the tropics. She continues to work at the Natural History Museum in London as a Scientific Associate; she is an ex-President of the British Lichen Society.

All are welcome and admission is free



September 20th Methodist School Room

Looking forward to our September meeting, Chris Saunders who wrote the interesting article in the last newsletter on Watchet's Sea Bathing Pools is to be our speaker. The talk: "Brunel's Broad Gauge Railway at Watchet – (1859-1900)".

Our Bric-a-brac stall during Watchet Summertime

Jan Simpson-Scott thanks all those who have donated items for the WCS Bric-a-brac stall aimed at raising funds for work on The Pebble Garden. Please come and support us on the Esplanade on Tuesday 26th July, 10am to 4pm. Buy someone else's bric-a-brac!! There will be lots to choose from and some wonderful bargains.

Past Events "Life in The Quantocks" a talk by Tim Russell.

Myra Barratt writes:

When I moved to this area I thought the Quantock range of hills possessed a spectacular beauty. From its northerly highest point the panorama takes in the Brecon Beacons in Wales and Glastonbury Tor to the east. The Brendon Hills and Minehead lie below to the south and west.

Tim Russell, senior Quantock ranger, came to our meeting to give a most interesting slide presentation and talk. We learned that the Quantocks were separated from the Exmoor National Park in 1956 and became the first Area of outstanding Natural Beauty (A.O.N.B.) in the country.

Responsibility for the Quantocks is divided between the County Council, The Forestry Commission, The National Trust and the AONB. Tim and a small team patrol the entire 38 sq. miles including the Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) area, into the Bristol Channel coastline from West Quantoxhead to Kilve .

His responsibilities are for the protection of the native ponies, ancient woodland, heathland and fertile farmland, flora and fauna, plus heritage way marking and leisure facilities.

Controlled heather burning (Swaling) is always completed in the winter months before the end of March. On Staple Plain I have watched as the gloriously colourful (but very invasive) Rhododendron valley has been uprooted and burned to restore our native plants. In the same area many larch trees have been felled before they succumb to the virulent "Sudden Oak Death" disease which is advancing from the West Country.

Tim is aware that he has an enjoyable and interesting job and we know that we are fortunate to have the service of a knowledgeable and sympathetic person to deal with the problems that humans bring to the hills, such as poisoning of birds, illegal driving, fire lighting, camping and littering. Members and guests enjoyed this very informative meeting.



Watchet Town Council

Our congratulations go to John Irven, the Conservation Society's Treasurer and Membership Secretary for his election to the Town Council. We are delighted also to welcome another new town councillor: Lin Harte as the official representative of the Town Council to sit on the Watchet Conservation Society committee. Two strong links between the Conservation Society and Watchet's elected representatives.

Progress Report: Esplanade Lane Pebble Garden

Our Society is pleased to report that we have now had formal approval from West Somerset Council that we are to be allowed to develop the proposed "Pebble Garden" behind the tourist office at the corner of Esplanade Lane. Sculptor David Milton has made the wonderful offer of donating some of his work to complement the area, so perhaps we should now be talking of the proposed "Sculpture Garden". Nick



Cotton's drawing here, gives us an idea of the finished project. We are delighted to learn that David is currently making great progress and so the ground works will begin as early as August in preparation for the installation of his sculptures.

Conservation in action - 41 Swain Street, Watchet



This is a spectacular example of Dry Rot which was found at No. 41.



Paul Upton continues "An Everyday Story of Restoration Folk" in his blog at: <http://watchetconservationsociety.blogspot.com/> The May episode deals with how he tackled the Dry Rot. As can be seen from the photograph above, it's not for the squeamish. Happily most of us will not encounter this monster in our own homes but it's an extremely interesting read nonetheless and to be forewarned is to be forearmed. On a happier note, the other photograph shows how Paul has rebuilt the chimneys as they were originally, for venting the recently discovered Inglenook fireplace.

Following last month's article on 41 Swain Street, Jackie Binding sent us a fascinating story complete with photographs of her experiences and intimate knowledge of this particular property. The whole article sadly is too long for our newsletter but she kindly agreed to abbreviate it, as you will find below. The fuller article is on Paul's blog, or you can call me (Edward Frewin) on 01984 633422 for a copy.

41 Swain Street - My Home until 1947

The owner of the house in Swain Street from around the early 1900s until 1947 was Gladis May Lewis. She was my grandmother. In 1921, she was widowed with a son and two



daughters aged 8, 6 and 4. A later photograph of the family with two smaller friends is shown taken outside the kitchen window. Nan was the GWR agent collecting parcels delivered by rail and distributing them throughout the locality by horse and cart. She also owned two shire horses used for pulling laden trucks along the East Quay. We had stables at the top of the yard and a gate from the garden on to Station Road. The horse and cart came down the yard into Swain Street.

Nan bought the property from the Wyndham Estate in the early 1920s.

As a small child I remember the internal layout of the house very well. There were several outhouses in the yard, used by locals for storage of paint and cinema seats from the old Cosy Cinema. The garden ran right up to Station Road (Harbour Road).

Around 1947 GWR stopped delivery of parcels via the goods shed with horse and cart. Nan sold the property, retaining the top part for the water trough and stables for the shires, and bought Esplanade House. A few years' later it was decided not to use horses on the East Quay and so she sold the Shires. In 1954 she had a house built for herself, my mother, sister and me on the remaining land. She called it Little Silver, after the fields where she sometimes kept the horses. The Council bought the rest of the original land and in due course converted this and the orchard behind the old town hall into a car park.

Jacilyn Binding - May 2011

Watchet's Historical Past

Ben and Tanya's Remarkable Discovery. *Nick Cotton writes:*

Well-known Watchet musicians Ben Allen and Tanya Phipps, who purchased the idiosyncratic harbour-side cottage 'Sammy Hake's Cottage', have become an important part of the local community.

Having lived on the harbour for two years, they discovered an anomaly within the house which had aroused their curiosity: what appeared to be an old cellar had been filled with beach rubble for no apparent reason. As they began the daunting task of removing this spoil, nothing could have prepared them for what they would find. As progress was made in excavating the material, it became clear that the existing 19th. Century cottage was constructed around a much earlier building from the 18th.Century. Intriguing bits of slipware pottery, a clay pipe and a skull were found. The skull however, I identified as being made of plastic and purchased in Roger's Furniture shop several days prior to my visit. It was some days later that I made a second visit where, quite remarkably, Ben had uncovered at the base of his enthusiastic excavations, a semi-petrified mooring post and, in what appeared to be in excellent preservation, a portion of a medieval quayside, as shown in my drawing below. I had the good fortune to have the Exmoor maritime historian John Gilman visiting me and he was able to confirm it as indeed medieval and dating from the 1500's.

This period was an important part of Watchet's history. The town was well-established as a cloth manufacturing centre and indeed there were a good number of dyers, weavers and fullers in residence. The origins of the much-lauded dye "Watchet Blue" are still in contention; its common usage and innumerable literary references date from at least the early 14th.century.

There was of course no bridge in Market Street at this period and the road was crossed by a ford. It was possible at high tide for ships and boats to move upstream along the river as far as Waterloo Cottages.

John Gilman explained that ships of 30 or 40 tons would navigate this stretch. There would have been jetties on both sides of the river and a good deal of trade would have been carried out at this time. Certainly there is mention of wine, salt, victuals, wood and coal being imported and in the 1560's a Watchet ship was involved in the wine trade between Bridgwater and La Rochelle. It would seem that Watchet may well have been exporting limestone, fish and seaweed. Some considerable time later, the town had a herring fleet. On completion of the English Heritage Survey in 2003, it stated that it was likely that in the



vicinity of Sammy Hake's Cottage there must have been some quayside building on either side of the river. This exciting and important discovery confirms this.

Ben and Tanya are conserving their piece of medieval Watchet history and incorporating it as a feature of the cottage.

The Watchet Conservation Society is indebted to them both for their enthusiasm and shared passion for preserving Watchet's early maritime heritage.

St Regis Paper Mill Chimney

Our secretary, Jan, recently met with Matthew Nixon of the Paper Mill, planning a joint project to commemorate St Regis chimney which is soon to be demolished. The plan is to preserve the base of the chimney on which will be erected an information board produced with the help of Paul Reynolds, Paul Upton and Nick Cotton. This should be a fitting memorial to an important Watchet landmark. The project is in its very early planning stages. We will give you updates in subsequent issues of the newsletter.



Poet's Corner - Coleridge, friends, happiness and Watchet

Coleridge's friendship with William Wordsworth is well-known. But Coleridge had another friend, George Cruikshank, with whom he roamed the Quantocks whose beauty without doubt both inspired him and brought him great happiness in what was a turbulent life.

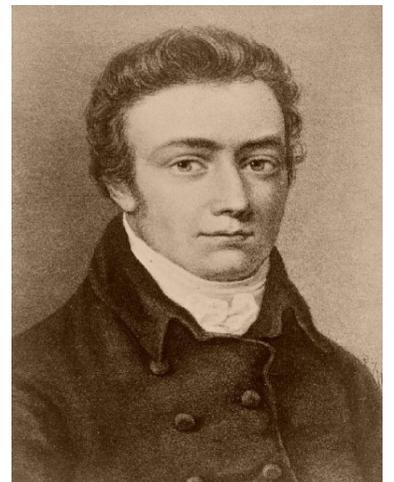
Coleridge admitted that Wordsworth had the greater "industry" of the two poets and Wordsworth's life was certainly calmer with more order than Coleridge's. However the three friends supported each other in their ideas.

In the autumn of 1797 the three set off from Wordsworth's home in Alfoxden to visit Linton and the Valley of the Rocks.

Having arrived there they decided to proceed along the Quantock Hills towards Watchet and it was during this walk that Cruikshank told Coleridge and Wordsworth about a dream he had had. Inspired, and on arrival in Watchet, Coleridge said, "And here (in Watchet) is where he (The Ancient Mariner) shall set out on his fateful voyage".

Coleridge's account of this period in his life gives an extraordinarily happy picture of these three friends roaming the Quantocks, poor, it is true, but possessing youth, freedom, joy in Nature, imagination, an ever-present sense of the beautiful and an ever-present eagerness to stir up the gift of God that was within them.

These were probably the happiest days that Coleridge was to know – and he spent them here in Watchet.



Wildflowers Around Watchet

Botanical artist – Sheila Mannes-Abbott says:

We are fortunate here in West Somerset to see wonderful displays of Foxgloves in the Spring. Two areas near Watchet in particular where there are great swathes are at Staple Plain, West Quantoxhead also along the A39 at St Audries. Elegant in shape and en masse a beautiful sight almost glowing along the banks and in the woodland areas. To create this intensity of colour in my painting, I had to apply layer upon layer of water colour paint to achieve the density but retain the translucency.

The name Foxglove is supposedly from the Old English: “Foxes Glofa”, coming from the myth that the fox must have used the flowers on their paws to help them steal very quietly during their nocturnal raids on the country folk’s poultry. As the Foxgloves grow on the wooded hillside slopes that the Fox also chooses for its den, then the association is clear.

The genus name digitalis refers to the Foxglove flowers. The Latin translates to: “measuring a finger’s breadth”. Traditionally, as with many poisonous plants, expert herbalists used the Foxglove for medicinal purposes. Digitalis is still used today in heart medications where Foxgloves are grown commercially for the extraction of digoxin and digitoxin.



Watchet From The Air

Paul Reynolds, a member of our committee has given us access to his wonderful library of photographs that he has taken, using his remote controlled helicopter. We are spoilt for choice as to what to print. This photograph shows the development at the top of West Street. One hopes that when the homes are eventually placed on the concrete slabs the occupiers will take great care stepping out of their back doors! More photos to follow in future newsletters.



Campaign to save Watchet's Library:



As well as the ongoing campaign to save the library service in Watchet, there is also a question of safeguarding the building itself. The society made a request to English Heritage to "list" the Library building on the Esplanade as it is one of Watchet's finest buildings. It started life in 1874 as a lifeboat station and remained in operation until 1945. It was given to the town as a library in 1951. Unfortunately English Heritage have declined our request as many of the most significant architectural features were removed when it was made into a library. There is a fuller account of the history of this building on our website: www.watchetconservationsociety.co.uk follow the link to: *Building Dating and Analysis – Library/ Lifeboat Station*

Stop Press: Watchet's East Wharf Development.

Molly Quint and John Irven represented the Conservation Society at The West Somerset Council cabinet meeting on July 6th. They report: West Somerset Council have approved a report and recommendations concerning The East Wharf, Watchet. The development agreement with Urban Splash is being extended until March 2014, with a break clause in March 2013. The aim is for them to submit plans for a more rational, reduced scope design that would still have a chance of receiving planning permission while delivering the necessary financial returns. At present they are suggesting a wharf type waterfront design, with ground floor commercial units and parking and boat storage behind, with a significantly reduced number of residential units. Very complimentary comments were included in the report about our assistance in helping them understand the limits imposed by ground conditions at the site, and as a result of which we have been invited to participate in ongoing consultation in the project alongside Watchet Town Council and the Marina. We believe this to be a positive step forward in engagement with us.

WATCHET CONSERVATION SOCIETY

Chair

Treasurer and Membership Secretary

Secretary

Case Officer

Committee: Theresa Harper, Tim Prior, Paul Reynolds, Eric Robinson.

Watchet Conservation Matters is published six times a year. If you would like to contribute news or an article, please contact the newsletter editor:

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