



Watchet Conservation Matters

Promoting, Conserving & Improving
Our Physical & Natural Environment

Issue 39 March/April 2015



Our Chair Molly Quint

These photographs (on the cover) were taken by my father around 1962 when we came from Essex to Watchet on our summer holidays. Then aged around 10 little did I realise that 52 years on I would be living close to Watchet or that I would become involved in its community life. Unfortunately I do not remember the boat trip itself but I do remember staying at Doniford Bay holiday bungalows in Watery Lane and playing in the stream behind. Last year we were thrilled to find that bungalows are still there, even if the Ford Popular in which we arrived has long since dissolved into the mists of time.

Andrew Harrison



East Quay we were proud to be able to give them our active support by attending the February Cabinet and Full Council Meetings at West Somerset Council and speaking in favour of their plans. It is a large and brave undertaking but with their professional approach and dedication WCS is confident that Watchet will progress to become a more vibrant town with much to offer to both residents and visitors.

Our next Open Meeting is on Tuesday 17th March with a talk on the wonderful "Alfred Jewel" which I am sure you all know is in the Taunton Museum until the end of February, on loan from the Ashmolean Museum in Oxford. Do please come along and help to make it an enjoyable evening.

With Very Best Wishes from your Chair.

Molly Quint

Dear Friends and Members,
I am delighted to announce that we now have two people who will be producing our new-style newsletter. Jan, who is our WCS secretary, will collect the copy, proof-read it and liaise with Jason, our new committee member since the AGM in November, who will design and publish it. Welcome to you both and I am sure you will continue to carry on the great work begun by Edward and maintained by Alan. The Newsletter is such a very important part of WCS. Our many thanks to everyone who has produced it and to those who have contributed with articles and ideas. Please continue to do so.

With Onion Collective moving forward with their plans for the Boat Museum and the



Watchet Foundry

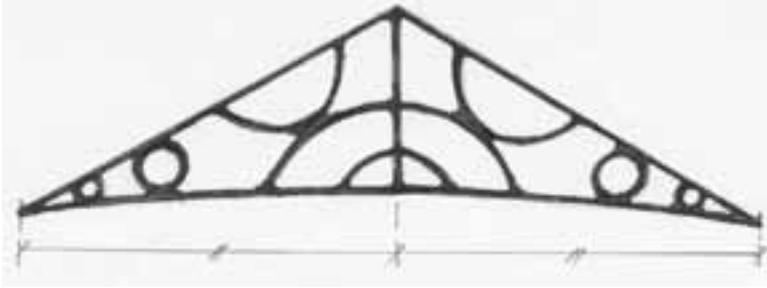
Many will have seen the word "Foundry" on the front of premises in Swain Street. What was not obvious to public view lay behind the premises accessed via Market Street. The last remains of the former foundry behind have only recently been demolished for redevelopment. What was of interest you may well ask? But a brief history first...

Nothing is known about the first owners of the Watchet foundry in Swain Street or what they made. It is known that Lacey & Co were iron and brass founders there in 1852 but had closed in 1856. W. H. Hole then took over the firm, followed by his son Charles.

An extract from Kelly's Directory of 1872 advertises the Watchet Foundry when it was owned by Thomas Griffiths. The business was advertised for sale in 1875. (It is not clear whether this was the front foundry building or that at the rear). Around 1890, possibly earlier, it was acquired by the Williton agricultural engineering firm of J. Gliddon & Sons who worked it until the late 1940s making a wide range of domestic and agricultural iron work including kitchen ranges, hot water systems, water pumps, etc.

They also undertook heavy castings for the West Somerset branch of the GWR and for





Cast in two halves and bolted together on centre line.
Plate thickness 3/4" x 3 1/2" width.
Trusses @ 8'
Centres approx

the Lynton and Lynmouth cliff railway. The works employed between 18 and 30 men depending on the work and it had an 18 foot furnace. The fan blast was powered by a gas engine which also powered lathes and machine tools.

For a great many years afterwards the premises were used as Cecil Stone's builders' yard which is currently used by his son John. Much of the building has been extended to the rear and converted into residential accommodation.

The recent demolition removed the last remains of the foundry workshop including the disposal of the cast iron roof trusses and remnants of the former handling equipment (radial arm jib and transverse beam). The cast iron trusses were of particular interest as they predate the commercial production of steel. The choice of material is not ideal for the application, cast iron being poor in tensile strength but excellent in compression.

As can be seen from the photographs the design of the trusses was quite ornate, especially in profile, for an industrial

application. However they were thin in section without any strengthening in the webs and cast in two halves. On examination the trusses were quite crude in their casting, exhibiting both slag inclusions and numerous blow holes (flaws) on the flat faces. It is perhaps reasonable to suggest that they may well have been cast on site and deemed acceptable for their own use and not of "saleable" quality. For all the shortcomings in design, choice of material, and quality of casting, the roof was supported for over 150 years! I understand that the salvaged trusses have been sold to a developer for a "barn conversion" on the outskirts of Bridgwater.

Phil Gannon

References have been taken from Exmoor's Industrial Archaeology (published 1997); The Archive Photographs series "Minehead to Watchet" compiled by Glyn Court (1996); Neither Here Nor There? by M. H. Jones & J. R. Hamilton (2010).

This will be continued with more photographs in the May edition.

Pevsner and Orbach: The Buildings of England : Somerset: South and West

Between 1951 and 1974, Sir Nikolaus Pevsner set out to describe and comment on every building of architectural importance in every county in England. His work was published in a series of books entitled, "The Buildings of England" and Somerset was divided into two volumes, Somerset: North and Bristol and Somerset: South and West which covered our area.

The latter was first published in 1958 and, whilst other areas have been revised and updated since then, we had to wait until 2014 for our new edition. It was worth the wait. Julian Orbach, a well known architectural historian has done a very thorough job and included considerably more buildings than Pevsner had originally chosen to include. The new volume is twice as long as the original. Not only has Orbach added modern buildings of note, which had not been built in Pevsner's day, but he has also included many more from times past.

Pevsner, in the original works, not only described buildings, but also included some critical commentaries, some of which were just quirky and others which showed personal prejudice. Orbach has adopted a similar style, with informed commentary, but avoiding the prejudice.

The section on Watchet was meagre in the original, focussing mainly on the church of St Decuman with brief reference to the Market House, the then Westminster Bank (Bank House) and the Baptist chapel.



The new volume also include descriptions of the Methodist Chapel, the Harbour, the Lighthouse, the Library, the statues on the Esplanade, the Georgian House, the Town Council Chambers, the Station, the Goods Shed (Boat Museum), Waterloo Cottages and

Town Mills (Stoates Mill). The book covers all the towns and villages of south and west Somerset in alphabetical order and is an invaluable source of information for those interested in the built environment when out and about.

One interesting addition to the new volume is the mention of contemporary architects. The important work of Louise Crossman Architects from Withycombe is mentioned several times. Another local celebrity, Eric Robinson, assisted with the geology section. Unfortunately, although the book is only twice as long, it is over seventy times the price of the original! I see that my old copy cost eight shillings and sixpence. However, I think it is well worth the price of £30 and recommend it highly.

Pevsner N (1958) and Orbach N (2014); The Buildings of England: Somerset: South and West; Yale University Press, New Haven and London; ISBN 978 0 300 20740 8, Price £30

Paul Upton
January 2015



Speaker Review

Somerset Coast - A Living Landscape a talk by Nigel Phillips

A packed audience in The Methodist Schoolroom welcomed Nigel to talk about the Somerset Coastline which was copiously illustrated by his slides.

Nigel worked as an ecologist and a Natural Reserve Manager, for the RSPB and the National Trust and retired to live in Nether Stowey four years ago. In his retirement he decided to work to raise the profile of Somerset's coastline, and published a book in 2011 on this subject.

He told us that although our coastline may not boast the shimmering seas of the Med, we do have brilliant wildlife and a huge range of plants, birds and marine life living on or near our 50 miles of coastline (from Brean Down in the east to Glenthorne in the west).

Many species of bird overwinter in the east of our county particularly, coming from Scandinavia and Canada for the relative warmth of our estuaries and abundant food available. Nigel showed some stunning pictures of Dunlin flying in formations much like those more famously created by the starlings of the Levels. Red Shank, Skylarks, Golden Plover, Avocets, Peregrines, Rooks, Snow Bunting were all shown in their habitats.

Of the 700 species of seaweeds in the UK, we have 122 here locally, all of which can be eaten as they are not poisonous (though may not be to our taste!). Bladder Wrack

(the only one I knew!), Toothed Wrack, Egg Wrack, Saw Wrack, Green Gutweed (apparently good at Blue Anchor), and Dulse - poetic names they may not be but all go towards making our marine habitat so distinctive.

Did you know that we have good access to Pacific Oysters on Watchet Beach? Or that Minehead has loads of Hermit Crabs and Cuttle Fish Eggs and Sunstar Starfish?

Nigel was also very informative about the plants we can see in our different habitats, dunes, cliffs, salt marshes, and downlands. Many plants, like the Yellow Horned Poppy and Sea Lavender, are no longer found in counties such as Cornwall, because of the numbers of people visiting their seaside, but are still very much in evidence here. Nigel showed some lovely slides of the White Rock Rose, less common than the Yellow Rock Rose, but in abundance on Brean Down in May.

Following Nigel's presentation many more of us will be inspired to go out and explore our fabulous coastline. Let's not just sit here and think about it - let's get out there and open our eyes to the beautiful and interesting wildlife we have literally on our doorsteps!

Rachel Irven

Belmont



Belmont - 51 Brendon Road, Watchet

Members have probably noticed the estate agent's for sale signs outside Belmont at the top of Brendon Road. The sale is because the firm that was converting it into flats has gone into receivership. Unfortunately the house and the site are in a very sorry state, with work only half done and many original features removed. The ground floor flat is not included in the sale as it is the subject of a long-term leasehold.

The house was probably built by the Wansborough family around the middle of the nineteenth century. They then owned the paper mill below. Like Downfield, built by the Stoate family, the house represents an important part of Watchet's social and industrial history.

The receivers have produced plans to build up to nine houses on the site although these have not yet been submitted for planning permission. The house itself is possibly beyond restoration to its former glory and may even be threatened with demolition.

Paul Upton, our Case Officer is keen to collect any information, memories or pictures which members may have so that he can make a record of this important building for posterity.

Please contact him on 01278 7346230, by email: pupton@talk21.com if you can help.





Postcards from the Somerset Coast

Postcards from the Somerset Coast – an ECHO voyage of discovery

Take a virtual voyage along our distinctive coastline and into the lives of the people who live and work here. These colourful, living “postcards” have been created by Theatre Mélange who produced ECHO Watchet - Portrait of a Harbour Town in the shipping containers especially imported to the East Quay for the event in 2012 that now provide a home for Contains Art.

Each one features real-life stories interwoven with the distinctive sights and sounds of the landscape accompanied by a compelling soundtrack of original music from some of the region’s best musicians including Ben & Tanya of our own Pebbles Bar.

Available via the YouTube button on the company’s website:
www.theatremelange.com
or directly at:
<http://youtu.be/kPGYB04JDWo>

You can enjoy them as an armchair sailor in the comfort of your own home or on the go via tablet or smartphone.

These first ECHO Postcards from the Somerset Coast have been made possible with investment from Somerset County Council’s Creative Industries Development Fund and Arts Council England. The plan now is to continue the journey and add more of our special Somerset coastal locations including a more detailed portrayal of Watchet.

Sandy, Theatre Mélange’s Artistic Director says:

“We are pleased to be working again with Watchet Conservation Society to develop a version of our new ECHO postcards especially for Watchet. The idea is that we would create a “digital trail” that would lead you around the town to discover more about the landscape and heritage of the place through the stories of the people who live and work here. So for example, you are led out to the beach, through a series of QR codes for your phone, where you are introduced to Eric Robinson who points out the geological treats to be discovered there. Then back to Esplanade Lane where the QR code activates a film of Dave Milton showing how his sculptures were made and so on... a look behind the scenes as it were. This is something that could also be tied in to the heritage trail map that the Market House Museum produces. Lots of ways we could add to what’s happening to encourage visitors here and to stay longer”.

I hope to keep you updated on our joint venture in future newsletters.

Sandy Maberley



Watchet Conservation Matters is published six times a year. If you would like to contribute news or an article, please contact our secretary Jan Simpson-Scott on: jan@topcreative.co.uk

Members of the Watchet Conservation Society receive this newsletter bi-monthly either via email for free or a printed copy for £1.00 per copy. If you are not a member and have enjoyed reading this publication, please consider joining us and help us to conserve our physical and natural environment. Membership is just £6.00 per year. All of our committee members would be delighted to welcome you.

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Sheila Mannes-Abbott 1939-2014

“She loved and painted flowers”

Sheila's headstone was installed at her grave in St Decuman's churchyard on the first anniversary of her death, January 23rd, by Edward, their three children, Guy, Kim and Jonathan, with Ieuan Rees, the stonemason who had carved the memorial into Welsh slate in his workshop at Ammanford, West Wales.

Kim, at Sheila's request, created the headstone. It is startling and striking in its simplicity. It captures Sheila's beauty, her charm and style, the enigma of her being. I went to see it a few days after its installation, early in the morning as the snowdrops along the path were just waking and lifting their heads.

Iris tuberosa - Widow Iris - carved into the back of the headstone, was chosen by Sheila's family from a variety of her paintings, because of its graphic style and abstract look. In the evening the diagonal rays of the sun pick out the detail.

Visit and see it for yourself; spend a while looking at Widow Iris, remembering Sheila. She lies next to Derek Quint, dear funny Kwinty, Molly's husband, like Sheila such a support to WCS, each of them enhancing the lives of everyone fortunate enough to come into their world.

Jan Simpson-Scott

