



Watchet Conservation Matters

**Promoting, Conserving & Improving
Our Physical & Natural Environment**

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Our Chair Molly Quint



most weeks about their progress which help us all keep up to date.

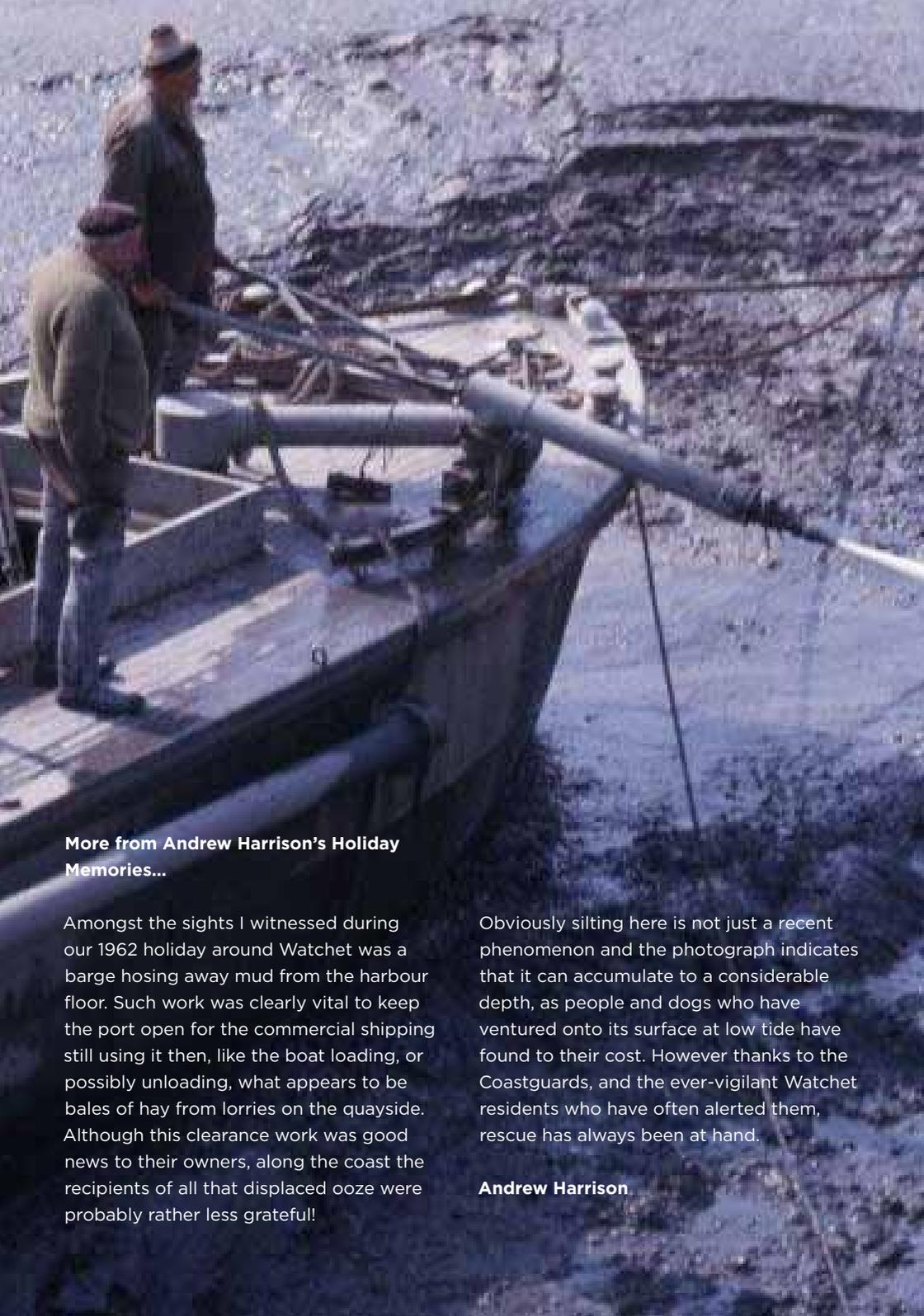
Our next Open Meeting is on Tuesday 19th May 7.30pm in the Methodist School Room. "Tidal Lagoon Power." It will be presented by the firm who are already starting on the Tidal Lagoon at Swansea and I am sure it will be a very interesting evening, with many questions asked regarding the wild life, both in and out of the water, how it will affect the beaches etc, so do please come along and help to make it a most illuminating talk.

With Very Best Wishes from your Chair.

Molly Quint

Dear Friends and Members,
Do hope you are all looking forward to a wonderful and busy Summer. Watchet always seems to have things happening and events taking place which we can all enjoy and perhaps even help with an event or two!

As you know we are Stake Holders with the Onion Collective and are thrilled with the progress they are making with plans for the Boat Museum and new offices there. We have sent in a letter of support to WSC so sincerely hope planning application is granted for them to move ahead with this exciting project. The East Quay is proving a little more complicated but am sure they will succeed with, again ,exciting new plans. The West Somerset Free Press has articles



More from Andrew Harrison's Holiday Memories...

Amongst the sights I witnessed during our 1962 holiday around Watchet was a barge hosing away mud from the harbour floor. Such work was clearly vital to keep the port open for the commercial shipping still using it then, like the boat loading, or possibly unloading, what appears to be bales of hay from lorries on the quayside. Although this clearance work was good news to their owners, along the coast the recipients of all that displaced ooze were probably rather less grateful!

Obviously silting here is not just a recent phenomenon and the photograph indicates that it can accumulate to a considerable depth, as people and dogs who have ventured onto its surface at low tide have found to their cost. However thanks to the Coastguards, and the ever-vigilant Watchet residents who have often alerted them, rescue has always been at hand.

Andrew Harrison



Charity Indian Meal



Charity Indian Meal 23rd February 2015

February again - thus it must be time for Molly and all Conservation types to gather again in The Spice Merchant for our curry evening - and so it proved with Molly's efforts well received and a good turn-out on the night.

Lest there are any newcomers who aren't aware of this growing habit in our town - The Spice Merchant encourage the Conservation Society - and all other charitable organisations in the area to come along on a pre-booked Monday evening. Everyone orders their meal (full choice from the menu) and pays in the usual way. Now for the really good part, afterwards the restaurant calculates its

profit from the evening, and donates this sum back to the society! Very generous of them and a second benefit to the idea is the whole restaurant tends to be full of people who all know one another, so a friendly (noisy?) evening tends to result. As a final comment on this -those of us who've been before also know just how good the food is, with a wide variety, especially of the milder kind, so it is easy to find something really nice without getting fingers (or mouths!?) burned.

It was indeed a lovely (Molly's word) evening with lots of chatter from all around and lots of empty plates to clear away as well. Empty tables were of course rare! The generous donation from The Spice Merchant was £180.20 and the raffle raised £77.00 so the total of £257.20 reflects a very successful evening's fundraising.

To end, thank you to all who came along and for those who weren't able to, watch for this space, or Molly's invitation, next year and come along and join the fun.

Dave Simpson-Scott

Speaker Review

The Alfred Jewel

David Milton gave us an amusing and much needed history lesson which put the story of King Alfred and the Alfred Jewel into context.

The jewel, made around 874 was found in North Petherton in 1693. It passed from the finder to the farmer and to the Lord of the Manor, who was the landowner, in rather quick succession. It then passed down through the family until one of his descendants donated it to the Ashmolean museum which has vigorously defended its ownership until today. The Museum of Somerset in Taunton was given permission to display it for the month of February, where record numbers of people queued to see it.

The origin of the jewel is uncertain. Its association with Alfred is based on the words surrounding the jewel "Aelfraed Mec Hecht Gewyrca" which translates to "Alfred Ordered Me Made".

The jewel is believed to have been the handle of an aestel or pointer that Alfred is known to have had made and presented to each of the bishoprics in his domain, together with his translation of the Latin bible into Anglo Saxon. The period was very unsettled as Viking raids and settlements engulfed much of England. Our own county was involved as witnessed by the Danesfield mounds. The history brought to our attention the connection of our area to many important issues from the middle ages, such as the fortification of our

county against Viking attack (Watchet was a fort in the defence line) to our status as a major producer of silver coinage.

David then gave us an amusing history of the two inch, tear drop shaped jewel, as far as it can be ascertained. It depicts a male with long hair, holding two plants and colourfully dressed. The gold is believed to have come from France or Spain and the Crystal from Rome. The enamelling and workmanship also indicates continental origins. The back is intricately tooled. Altogether it is an amazing piece of workmanship for its time.

Local silversmith, Geraldine Holweig, closed the evening with a fascinating insight into the production of her enamelled jewellery, from art work to silversmithing, soldering and many layers of enamelling. We were so much more appreciative of the technical challenges that the makers of the jewel had to overcome.

Geraldine displayed a selection of her beautiful brooches, rings and spoons.

Myra Barrett





Splash Point Path



The new path up to Splash Point

Two years ago I attempted to walk up the old and awkward path to Splash Point but had to turn back midway as the dip in the path was waterlogged and caked in mud. It was completely impassable.

This is me in late February this year testing out the wonderful new path which has resulted from a collaboration between Natural England and SCC. Now it is a delightful short walk, easily negotiated on the regenerated sturdy path which has been widened and covered with a good layer of crushed stone.

Natural England aims to develop the English Coast Path, a new long-distance walk which

will eventually allow people to walk around the entire English coast. How fortunate for us that the Somerset coast has been chosen as the location for one of the first stretches of the English Coast Path from Minehead to Brean Down. The steps down to the fossil beach have also been reinforced.

Try it for yourselves. Enjoy the sea breeze, feast your eyes on the rock strata, listen to the birdsong and let nature inspire you.

Jan Simpson-Scott
April 2015



Why did we choose to retire in Watchet?

Why did we choose to retire in Watchet?

John and I met in 1956 at Chelsea Polytechnic College moving to Watchet from Sussex.

John's sister was in the Land Army, trained at Cannington, then spending the rest of her life near Taunton. Holidays were centred on an annual visit to her. Each year we spent a day in Watchet, and grew to love the town. We bought a drop-dial clock in Nick Cotton's father's antique shop, old postcards and pieces of glass from his mother's shop. Swain Street's big attraction was the smell of bread from Bon Bakery and its fast-acting loaf slicer.

It is part of Watchet's quirkiness that roads don't always follow a logical sequence with house numbering; a result of infill. A,B,C,D often follow houses built much earlier. Our postmen are wonderful delivering post accurately, but delivery drivers are often puzzled when the sat nav directs them down Goviers Lane, or they try to find Old Wristland or its absent name-plate, the unmade section of Wristland Road connecting with Culvercliffe Road and leading to the Bowling Club.

In our 20 years here we have seen the struggle to retain use of The Phoenix Centre, the building of the Marina, opening of the Boat Museum, a War Memorial, a safe crossing from Goviers Lane over the railway line, the saving of our Library, a new footbridge at Watchet Station... all achieved by pressure, hard work and co-operation; Watchet's two statues on the Esplanade,

the weather vane on the Memorial Ground, David Milton's Seascape sculptures and Coronation Jubilee Memorial.

Other intriguing mementoes of Watchet's past we might walk by and not notice or even tread on. My attention was drawn to the cream brickwork and decorative capstones on local walls and doorways... the easiest one to find at the bottom of Goviers Lane, on the wall adjoining the steps to the Memorial ground. It has "Ebbw Vale" on one edge and EV appears on other stones and bricks: a reminder of a century-old cargo handled in Watchet's port. Ballast from ships long gone can still be found on Watchet's beaches as well as water-rounded pieces of more modern red bricks. In our early years here we collected driftwood for our wood-burning stove and found enough rusting car parts to keep our teenage grandchildren keen on beach-walking.

Other intriguing things I wish I knew more about are the attractive mosaics at some of Swain Street's shop doorways. Were all the shops like this at first with the proprietor's name on the design as it has been preserved at the pharmacy? Window frames of many shops are in a curved design: all made by the same person at the same time? The Museum Society's oral history project may provide some answers! Were the remains of a water pump close to a boundary fence at Watchet Station related to the water tower or signal box removed in the 1930s?

Valerie Ward



West Somerset's Idyllic Artists

West Somerset's Idyllic Artists

During the 1860s, around the time the West Somerset Railway opened, a handful of proficient artists began to visit (and inhabit) Watchet's rural hinterland. While none of the group is as famous as their contemporaries in the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood, their art is of sufficient importance to merit recognition as belonging to a specific movement - the Idyllic School. Examples of their pictures, some of which depict recognisable local scenes, can be found in galleries, books and online.

The artists - John William North, Frederick Walker and George Pinwell - were accomplished at capturing rural scenes, and West Somerset provided perfect subject matter. They needed to earn a living, and initially specialised in the production of book and magazine illustrations, for nationally recognised engravers, including the Dalziel Brothers. Several of the books were fine Victorian coffee table affairs, including the poetry anthologies "A Round of Days" and "Wayside Posies", published by Routledge in 1865 and 1866, respectively.

Many of the Idyllists' illustrations depict harmonious rural life, with people apparently leading simple, noble existences, in true "chocolate box" style. But they were also social realists, capturing how parts of rural England were arguably still feudal, with mechanisation and the Game Laws bringing hardship for farm labourers. North (1842-1924) stayed the longest,

remaining resident in West Somerset from the mid-1860s, until his death. He lived in various places, including Halsway, Woolston, Beggearn Huish and Leighland, and achieved considerable success, his paintings being held in many galleries, including the Tate. He is buried in Nettlecombe churchyard.



Frederick Walker and John William North, c1868 (National Portrait Gallery)

West Somerset's Idyllic Artists



John William North - Gypsy Encampment (Victoria & Albert Museum)

Interestingly, North was a friend of the writer Richard Jefferies (1848-1887), who stayed with him in 1883 while visiting Somerset, before writing "Red Deer" and "Summer in Somerset". Jefferies is considered to be one of the best English nature writers of his time, on account of his depiction of English rural life in essays, books of natural history, and novels. Will Self and Monty Don are said to be fans.

Frederick Walker (1840-1875), an early colleague and friend of North, who was once described by Sir John Everett Millais as the "greatest artist of the century", first

visited West Somerset in August 1868, during which time he attempted a spot of fishing. He wrote to his mother:

"The place is full of beautiful bits, and seems to agree with me perfectly. We are going this evening to see something very jolly. There is a wonderful little church, and a strange old cross in the churchyard (which might do for the background of that picture, if I lose no time). The fishing is a perfect failure; I have given up the idea."



West Somerset's Idyllic Artists



*Frederick Walker - The Plough
(Engraved by MacBeth)*

Despite Walker's lack of success at fishing, he spent a significant amount of time with North at Halsway and Woolston, in 1868-1869, producing some of his best-known oil paintings there (including *The Plough* and *The Old Gate*, both of which are now in the Tate).



*George Pinwell - The Old Cross
(National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne)*

The third of the trio, George Pinwell (1842-1875), was a master of the art of wood-block illustration, as well as a skilled painter in oils. He too was a friend of North, and also stayed

with him at Halsway in the late 1860s. Pinwell's particular talent was in the depiction of people, who would often appear introverted, perhaps with hidden faces. He is credited with adding figures to some of North's works.

Two other notable artists connected with the Idyllists were Robert Walker MacBeth (1848-1910), who lived in Bilbrook from 1887, and Sir Hubert von Herkomer (1849-1914), who lived near Washford, in the 1890s. MacBeth was a distinguished painter and engraver, producing notable etchings of some of Frederick Walker's greatest works. Herkomer came to West Somerset at the invitation of North, whom he greatly admired, and was perhaps the most successful of them all, working as a painter and portrait artist, as well as a print-maker, composer, educator and film-maker. A German by birth, he spent most of his life in England, becoming a Royal Academician and Slade Professor of Art at Oxford University, as well as being honoured by the Kaiser in 1899, and knighted by the King in 1907.

While none of these artists is as famous as Millais, Constable or Turner, the Idyllists were nevertheless successful and their work remains important today. Indeed, Herkomer and North are credited with having influenced Post-Impressionist European artists, including Van Gogh (North via his early use of pointillism - a technique of painting with small dots). That West Somerset could inspire nationally recognised artists, a century and half ago, is a fitting complement to its inspiration of Coleridge and Wordsworth, some 70 years earlier.

Mike Quint

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 daughter Kim used one of Sheila's paintings of Iris Sha Jehan, named after the builder of The Taj Mahal, for the incised leaves carved in the slate on the front of Sheila's headstone.

The design in the centre of the circle is Kim's graphical interpretation of one of Sheila's favourite flowers - The Hellebore.

Helleborus Orientalis is an elegant flower; its pretty, nodding cup-shaped blooms beckon spring and sustain early bees. Like Sheila it is spectacular in its simplicity, beautiful and intriguing.

Sheila lies in a tranquil spot and yesterday a posy of hellebore had been placed for her by Edward from Hattie, her faithful dog.

Jan Simpson-Scott