



# Watchet Conservation Matters

Promoting, Conserving & Improving  
Our Physical & Natural Environment

Issue 42 September/October 2015



**The New Edition of The Rime of The Ancient Mariner by Contains Art**

Cover pictures by; Alison Jacobs, Sue Lowe, Mike Bradshaw & Jason Robinson.

## Our Chair Molly Quint



Dear Friends and Members.

Do hope you have all enjoyed a good Summer – wind, rain, sun, visitors, grandchildren, festivals, events, to name a few distractions from our normal routine. Now it is Autumn; how quickly the time has flown by. Let's hope we have those lovely, warm, balmy days of an Indian Summer to take us through to perhaps Christmas!

We do hope you like the look of the newly planted Pound. Please pull up a weed or two as you pass. We have put down bark but weeds still pop through!

Goviers Lane crossing has received many lovely comments through the Summer and the brick flower stands on the Esplanade have been well worth doing. Robin, Jill and

John have worked hard on the Well Garden, thank you so very much.

The Pleasure Gardens are looking so good; Onion Collective has achieved so much in such a short time. We wish them success in all their ventures for the town.

Our next Open Meeting is on 15th September with a talk by Phil Gannon, one of WCS's own consultants, so do come along. Phil has such a great knowledge and understanding of Watchet and the surrounding area. 7.30pm in the Methodist Schoolroom.

Looking forward to the start of a lovely Autumn.

Yours very sincerely,

**Molly Quint**

## The Rime of the Ancient Mariner - Contains Art



### **The New Edition of The Rime of The Ancient Mariner**

Contains Art applied to Harbour Community Bookshop (HCB) for a grant to fund the purchase of ISBN numbers and additional copies of this splendid new and timely edition of Samuel Taylor Coleridge's epic work. This poem has become an important part of local legend and heritage and it is fitting that we celebrate this new issue in our newsletter.

STC is said to have found inspiration from his visit to our town in 1797. The sea impacted on his imagination and his genius grew as he walked the Quantock hills.

The Ancient Mariner Private View and Exhibition for the launch of this took place on a sunny June evening at the Contains Art venue on the quayside, where friends and followers gathered to celebrate with drinks and nibbles, and to queue for copies

of this fine publication which juxtaposes imagery and text in a modern, original form. It was the culmination of an immensely successful venture for Jessica Prendergrast, Naomi Griffith and Jason Robinson who with others brought this ambitious project to fruition. Jessica made a short address, thanking all those who had given their support, before introducing Tom Mayberry of Somerset Heritage Centre who read Part 1 and the final lines in a moving presentation. One heard the words amid the sound of silence.

Contains Art has made this a fascinating, quirky corner of Watchet, full of creativity, where for an evening in June art and poetry met.

You can purchase your own copy of this new edition from the Contains Art website or call into HCB to look at our bookshop copy.

**Jan Simpson-Scott**

## Speaker Review



### **Review of open meeting talk by Brian Portch**

On Tuesday 21st July Brian Portch paid us a second visit to talk about Brunel's S.S. Gt. Britain and we were treated to a marvellous account of Brunel's inspiring life and his venture into ship building.

The first motivation to go into shipbuilding was the desire to extend the range of the Gt. Western Railway beyond Bristol. The West Country geography made extending the railway line very expensive and the idea arose to go from Bristol to New York. Despite no previous knowledge of shipbuilding Brunel went straight in with revolutionary plans to build an iron hulled ship.

Whilst under construction in the Bristol dockyard, being built to have paddles either side, a small naval ship came into the dock with a revolutionary screw propeller.

Brunel seized on this new invention and could see its importance and immediately changed his plans to give his new ship a screw propeller. That Brunel was able to sell two new engineering concepts to the hardnosed money men is a testament to his charisma, force of personality, energy and drive.

The S.S. Gt. Britain was to have a chequered career from its launch in 1843 and Brian Portch indulged us with a detailed, illustrated history.

If you haven't made the trip to Bristol's floating dock to see S.S. Gt. Britain then put it on your wish list. There is now a new museum alongside to complete your day out.

**Alan Jones**



## Watchet Arts Group - Tim Prior



**Tim Prior, member of WCS, died on 26th July after a long illness.**

We shall remember him for being the inspiration behind the Watchet Wall Project which Tim launched at the Watchet Conservation Society AGM in 2011 where it was received with huge enthusiasm by members.

When it became obvious that Tim's ambitions were too extensive for our small society to achieve it was agreed that we should give Tim our backing to set up a standalone group and WAG was born in 2012. Its aim was to regenerate the old Mineral Railway Marshalling Yard and to improve the appearance of the sea wall to enhance Watchet using the Arts as a medium to help this rejuvenation.

Those of you who have recently been to this area of the town will see that the wall is being prepared for the mosaic which will soon be mounted.

It is very sad that Tim will not see his idea brought to fruition but it is a tribute to him that a group is working very hard to ensure that this becomes a fitting tribute to a man with such vision.

**Jan Simpson-Scott**

## Watchet Arts Group - Darren Scott



**Artist - Darren Scott**

I live in Watchet where I work as a Postman. I have a small home studio and enjoy using a variety of mediums (oil, watercolour, ink, pastels and acrylic) in my art. Fascinated by the vibrancy of colour and light I try to capture this in landscapes, townscapes and seascapes.

I have an interest in finding out about the history of my art subjects, such as the origins of buildings and the changing scenery which I paint.

**Darren Scott**



## Cowbridge Sawmill



### WCS outing to Cowbridge Sawmill - 2nd July 2015

There are only two working water mills remaining in Somerset. One of these is to be found at Cowbridge on the outskirts of Timberscombe. This being virtually on our own doorstep, it was a perfect destination for a WCS outing!

Looking around us, at first it was difficult to tell that this was indeed a mill. A new-looking but traditional-style stone building faced us whilst on either side were sheds stuffed to the rafters with all manner of things: piles of wood, an old tractor, metal posts, various wheels, what appeared to be an engine, other strange pieces of machinery and, in front of those, heaps of building materials and a massive crane peeking out from under a tarpaulin. The new building housed a forge and workshop at ground level and on the upper floor a museum which is reached by an outside staircase.

A water mill had been on this site since the 14th century and was used for many years for grinding flour. In 1567 it was recorded as being part of the Knowles estate. At the beginning of the 20th century, then worked by the Phillips family, it was converted for use as a saw mill. In 1911 Sam Grabham began working here and later his son Kevin. In 1933 a forge was built where the new one now stands and in 1937 ownership passed to Eva Huxtable. The Grabhams ran a successful sawmill and fencing business here until Kevin's retirement in 1993. It was from Eva's son Dudley's estate that Owen and his wife Angela bought the mill at auction in 1995.

Although Owen and Angela did not retire here from High Wycombe until 2002, restoration work began well before then. The scale of this task was truly enormous. In the mill itself, the floors were collapsing and the wheel was utterly derelict. The forge was also extremely dilapidated and eventually demolished, its replacement and the museum above being completed in 2011.

## Cowbridge Sawmill

In the forge local blacksmith Jim Horrobin showed some of his work in progress: parts for a beautiful weather vane he has been commissioned to make. Among the major works he has undertaken is the spectacular Winston Churchill Memorial screen that spans the crypt of St Paul's Cathedral.

Passing through to the back of the mill we saw a magnificent farm wagon, straight out of something painted by John Constable, and yet another restoration project waiting for time and effort to be spent on it!

As we stepped out into the rear courtyard the impressive water wheel came into view. It is of the "overshot" design (water runs from a flume onto its top surface) and is 14 feet in diameter. As found, it needed not only new buckets but also a new spindle that has been fashioned from the trunk of an oak tree taken from woodland near Owen's old home. Looking around us, it was clear that great improvements have recently been made outside the buildings

including the construction of a well, paths and steps, walls, an elevated deck on the side of the mill and also the creation of a landscaped garden below, like everything else here, all done to an incredibly high standard.

Before work could start on the mill itself, at least 30 cubic metres of accumulated sawdust had to be dug out from the ground floor, buried amongst which was discovered many of the treasures now exhibited in the museum. With a small band of dedicated volunteers, Owen has now almost completely restored the mill and installed a huge range of power tools which can be driven from the wheel including, on the ground floor, a very impressive circular saw with a blade 4ft 6in diameter. Via a bewildering sequence of wheels, clutches, belts and shafts, other machines, mostly located on the first floor, can also be driven, including a bandsaw, a now rare cylinder mower sharpening machine, planer/thicknesser





## Watchet's Industrial Past

from the opposite end of the drive train and so we were able to see the wheel and machinery all turning away despite the complete absence of water. The noise was tremendous and when the circular saw was powered up and its wicked teeth became an instant blur, despite the safety fence we still fell back another pace! When the wheel is not driving machinery the aim is for it to produce hydro-electric power.

Despite the vast number and scale of the tasks undertaken by Owen and his team, everything has clearly been executed to an extremely high standard and with a great deal of forethought. Should anyone reading this article be interested in becoming involved in the project, in any capacity, I am sure that the Friends of Renovating Cowbridge Mill Entirely (or FORCE for short!) would be delighted to hear from you. To learn more please contact Owen on: 01643 841744.

We received a very warm welcome from the team at Cowbridge Sawmill and Forge Museum. A truly memorable and inspirational day; thank you one and all!

**Andrew Harrison**

and tenon and morticing machines. Further mysterious-looking pieces of equipment stood in corners awaiting renovation and connection to the shafts that ran along the walls behind them. Much of this machinery came from the collection of Christopher Wallis a timber engineer and son of the famous inventor Barnes Wallis.

Sadly one vital ingredient lacking this day was the water needed to drive all this equipment! The leat upstream of the mill is being dammed, robbing it of its energy source. Efforts are ongoing to rectify this situation but in the mean time Owen has installed a diesel engine which can drive the whole system "backwards"

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](mailto: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"**

**Iris Foetidissima**

This is a wild iris which can be found locally along the Mineral Line. It has many common names, gladden, gladwyn, adder's meat, roast beef plant; perhaps the most usual is Stinking Iris. It is highly valued as a medicinal herb, particularly for making poultices for drawing out splinters.

So very delicate in looks, stems so strong, petals pale in colour, the large orange seed pods bursting open, ripe and vibrant; the leaves at the base almost dancing on the page. Roots, firm and tenacious, leaves like swords; Sheila captures not only Iris Foetidissima but her very mood. There is an understated charm about the dull purple-grey flowers. It is wholly autumnal in mood and palette.

Enjoy Iris Foetidissima and think of Sheila who loved Irises and left these for us to delight in as we indulge our senses in their movement, their shape, their spectacular display of themselves captured by Sheila with such intensity, just as she retains their fragility.



**Jan Simpson-Scott**