



Watchet Conservation Matters

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

Issue 50 January/February 2017



Our Chair Molly Quint

*Wildfowl and Wetland Trust,
Steart Marshes*



will continue to support them as you have supported me. Thank you all so much.

Yours very sincerely,

Molly Quint

A handwritten signature in dark ink, which appears to read "M. Quint".

Dear Friends and Members.

A very Happy New Year to you all. 2016 was a busy year for WCS with new people joining, new projects started, calendars printed and excellent talks at our Open Meetings. In the Town, changes taking place, some we like, some we are getting used to, but certainly Watchet never stays still, which is so good.

As a Society we have lost Paul Upton as our Case Officer but he will still be representing us on various projects, which we are so grateful for, as his knowledge and understanding is so necessary in times of change, thank you Paul.

Following on from the AGM in November, you will know that I am stepping down as Chair on 1st March. I have so enjoyed my term, have learnt a huge amount about Conservation, and met many lovely people. The Committee is very strong and active so am sure you



A visit to the Wildfowl and Wetland Trust, Steart Marshes



A visit to the Wildfowl and Wetland Trust, Steart Marshes

Following an interesting Museum Talk on Tuesday 11th October, Ellie and I decided to take a look at this latest site on our doorstep. The marshes are just beyond Hinkley and beside the River Parrett. The WWT promotional literature describes the site as “a new habitat for wildlife, and providing improved flood management for local people and an amazing place to visit”. Well we can certainly agree with their final statement. It really is a must-visit site. They actively encourage walkers, wheelchairs, cyclists and horse riders (we didn't see any horses but there was sufficient evidence to show they had been there!). There is a good car park (with toilets) situated close to the 3 comfortable hides.

We had been told that the best time to visit was at a high tide above 3m-4m, because the rising tide would draw the

birds nearer to the lagoons where the hides are situated. Well the day we wanted to go high tide was 8.00am and 6.30pm. Neither was convenient, the first too early the second too dark. Did it matter? Not a bit. The early morning rain cleared up and the sun broke through, the easterly wind took a holiday and we set off (me without even a coat). At the first hide overlooking the newly excavated tidal gullies, which were of course without any water, we saw 2 greenshanks, shelduck, herons and egrets.

At the second hide overlooking the man-made lagoons, where some of the tidal water is trapped, we saw more greenshanks, redshanks, cormorants, more herons and 12 great egrets (the most I've ever seen at one time), more shelducks and possibly shoveler ducks (they were a long way off and the light was fading - like my eyesight). Their silhouette and method of feeding made me fairly confident. A circular walk back

A visit to the Wildfowl and Wetland Trust, Steart Marshes



to the car park as the sun was setting was brightened by a 'charm' of goldfinches. About 20 birds flew up from the hedges as we passed, whilst up above small flocks of starlings were circling, making their familiar chattering noises.

What a wonderful way to spend an afternoon. For those of you much fitter there are pleasant walks around the reserve following the path of the River Parrett or alternatively following the coast to Steart point.

The site is open from 9.30am-4.30pm and it's FREE. We shall definitely be going back (hopefully at high tide) and I'll let you know how we get on.

Alan Jones



The Sea Wall Murals Project



The Sea Wall Murals Project

The journey from a grim, grey barrier to the pageant of interest and colour that now graces the sea wall has been long and hard fought, but has so clearly been worth the effort. Tim Prior lit the spark, forming a subcommittee within the Conservation Society to transform a drab and unvisited part of the Mineral Yard into a real asset for the community. As plans for the project evolved, and the scale of work required became clearer, the self-contained Watchet Arts Group was formed to take it forward.

After many twists and turns; the sad loss of Tim and the failure of two successive bids for funding from the Hinkley Point CIM fund, the murals were finally accomplished thanks to the imagination and skill of Pat

Dennis, a hard core of dedicated volunteers and some very generous donors. Funds were also raised from a number of sources including the sale of tiles for the adjacent mosaic, a phenomenon in its own right, and the CIM fund which finally came through with a grant of £1000. Whilst we all continue to admire what has been achieved, this is not the end of the story. It was always part of Tim's vision to create a garden area at the west end of the yard and WAG fully intend to bring this plan to fruition too. Watch that space!

Andrew Harrison

A famous son of Watchet



A famous son of Watchet

In 1892 a prestigious dinner was held at the Memorial Hall, Farringdon Street, London, to honour a famous son of Watchet. Mr. Thomas Allen Reed, a pioneer of shorthand systems who could write at the phenomenal speed of 200 words per minute, was presented with a memorial scroll and 200 guineas for his achievements in the art of shorthand writing by Mr. Isaac Pitman, the inventor of the world's first shorthand system.

Mr. Pitman also presented Mr. Reed with an engraved address from the townspeople of Watchet, describing him as "the premier shorthand writer in the world" and expressing pride that "Watchet and Watchet alone is able to regard you as her son".

In his acceptance speech, Mr. Reed recalled his schooldays in the town, where he spent many delightful hours among the low, slippery, weed-covered rocks catching crabs and gathering limpets.

Mr. Reed was born in Market Street, Watchet, in 1826. His parents moved to Bristol, but Thomas stayed on with friends in Watchet, enduring delicate health until the age of six. He learned French from visiting lugger captains, then went to school in Bristol, later learning shorthand, first the Lewis system, then Pitman's. He then headed a firm of shorthand writers, helped popularise Pitman's and adapted it into French. He also studied phonography in Bristol and became the greatest exponent of the craft.

Among many other things, Mr. Reed worked as a reporter on the Norfolk News, and founded the Building Society Gazette in 1870, which still lives on today as the Mortgage Finance Gazette. He also worked in India for a government commission into the opium trade.

Thomas Reed died in 1899 in Surbiton, Surrey, after a lifetime of remarkable achievements.

Maurice Chidgey





From the editor



From the editor

WCS calendar was a runaway success; some people were disappointed that they had sold out so quickly but as it was an experiment and costs were quite high we made the decision to limit the numbers to 250. Having gained in confidence, should we repeat this venture, we shall work from an earlier date which will give a longer period for sales and marketing.

We are all indebted to Nick Cotton whose brain-child this was; to Jason Robinson who designed it; to all those photographers who entered the competition and from which the final twelve were chosen and the three winners to whom Jason presented the prizes at our AGM in November last year.

To Harbour Community Bookshop, our sponsor, we shall always be indebted.

Our first Open Meeting of 2017 is on Tuesday 17th January at Harbour Schoolrooms at 7.30pm. Our guest speaker is David Bunny; his subject "Clay Tobacco Pipes". Please do come along and support if you can.

We welcome Bob Cramp to our committee; Bob will be helping with photography in various areas and supporting our drive for conservation. If you would like to join us or come as a guest to see how we work you would be most welcome. Contact a committee member for details or email me on jan.d.scott@icloud.com or telephone 07817 057882.

Our initial plan for the period after Molly's retirement is to have a "rolling chairman" until the vacancy is filled. I will give updates on this.

Jan Simpson-Scott

AGM report Tuesday 15th November 2016



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The Phoenix Centre was almost packed to capacity for the AGM which started with a talk by The Onion Collective about their plans for redeveloping the East Quay site.

Following the success of the Boat Museum renovation and the new Visitor Centre they were now ready to continue the work they had started on the East Quay. Naomi explained that they had secured money for the initial surveys, consultations and architects drawings to get them up to planning stage. Some of the original ideas had been changed following public discussions resulting in the road within the site being moved, moving the building away from the bank and a major rethink on the observation tower.

Georgie then enlarged on the plan and talked about potential new tenants, the anticipated new jobs that would be created as well as the importance of highlighting the coastal heritage and local geology. More open forums were planned throughout November for the public to look at the new designs.

Molly then went on to talk about the past year and how many excellent open meeting speakers we had. She also spoke about the Splash Point construction, the Mineral Yard Mural, the Calendar Project, the Boat Museum/Visitor Centre and also the Malcolm Davey memorial stone carved by our own David Milton.

In the pipeline for next year there is a flora and fauna survey of the Mineral Line.

Following the election of committee and officers Molly explained that she would be giving up as chairman but would stay on the committee.

Under other business the success of the two new trail leaflets written and illustrated by Nick Cotton and printed by Alan Jones was mentioned; these new leaflets are available from the Visitor Centre and after Easter from the Tourist Office.

After the official business Jason Robinson presented the prizes to the winners of the Calendar competition.

The winners were: 1st Prize to Gillian Gibbons; 2nd prize to Alison Grove and 3rd prize to Chris Deane.

The AGM concluded with a fine finger buffet washed down with wine and soft drinks. As always an excellent evening.

Alan Jones



Maurice Chidgey

Maurice Chidgey

It's a great pleasure to welcome Maurice Chidgey as a contributor to this edition and I hope it will be the first of many articles in our newsletter by such an authoritative writer.

It was serendipity that I found myself picking up an old copy of Exmoor Magazine whilst I was waiting for an appointment in Taunton. There on the front cover was a name I knew from Watchet Market House Museum; inside were two articles by Maurice. More happenstance next day when I met Maurice in the local opticians. Feeling brave I asked him if he had time perhaps he would like to write something for us, drawing from his collection. The very next day I received two articles, one of which, Thomas Reed, A Man of Watchet, appears this month.

My grateful thanks to Maurice, another Man of Watchet.

Our Mineral Line Flora and Fauna Project continues; despite cold and misty weather, typical of this time of year, once again there are some delightful photographs of this berry season. Keats' Ode to Autumn, a poem of conflict, addresses the rich powers of the season as well as the sadness of the passing of the year. Walking along the Mineral Line will give you a local sense of the romance and drama captured here when the clouds hang low, and yet there is a riot of fruitfulness.

Jan Simpson-Scott

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.d.scott@icloud.com

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.

Photography of Steart Marsh and Mineral Line by Dave Simpson-Scott

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A walk along The Mineral Line on 5th December 2016

A grey and misty morning - not the most conducive time for a walk along the Mineral Line.

However, there are still many colourful berries contrasting with the dark, wet, bare hedges. Most striking are the spindle berries which have turned from pale pink and are now open to reveal the bright orange seeds. The trees covered with the pink and orange berries lighten up the hedgerows.

Amongst the wild rose bushes are the mossy tufts of the robin's pincushion or bedeguar galls. "Bedeguar" comes from a Persian word meaning "brought by the wind". Inside the galls live the larvae of the small gall wasp which will emerge in the spring as adults.

An egret flies up through the bushes. A squirrel is busily feeding in the branches of a tree. Trout can be seen, although well-camouflaged by the murky brown water.

A surprising number of jewels on a dank and chilly morning.

Rosalind Pick



Squirrel



Misty view of Mineral Line



Iris Foetidissima (Stinking Iris)



Robin



Robin's pincushion