



# **Watchet Conservation Matters**

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

**Issue 52 May/June 2017**

Wansbrough Mill



## From the Chairman



completed by June.

Work seems to be advancing towards the reprint of Wedlake's 'History of Watchet' and as you read this, no doubt WCS member Paul Upton who has undertaken this important project is beavering away. This venture is a combined effort with Market House Museum and the first time we have worked together.

Dear All,

It is very exciting and encouraging now that spring is upon us to see our apple trees becoming established at Splash Point and blossoming as I write this. This modest little orchard has the potential of expanding thanks to the continuation of donations for additional trees from in particular Pebbles Bar who have been generous in helping with this WCS project.

On the flora and fauna topic, Rosalind continues her survey of the mineral line at what is the most fecund time of the year. She is ably assisted by Dave Simpson Scott with his photographic images which he will continue to post on our Facebook page throughout the seasons. The response to this project has been very encouraging but of course it will be some time before it reaches a conclusion. Well done Rosalind ! The continuing Mystery Object feature also appears on our page and has generated great interest with some very inventive guesses, often more amusing than the answers.

We are in the final stages of completing the Turner Interpretation Board to be sited at Splash Point and all being well, it should be

The Fitzroy Barometer on the Esplanade has undergone its annual refurbishment and will be gleaming in the sunshine. The Society maintains this significant piece of Watchet's maritime heritage since we undertook its restoration some years ago. Another cleaning project is the paddling pool at West Street beach which will also be completed in the near future. The redoubtable Molly continues to not just oversee the various planting and maintenance of flowers and shrubs for the society, but gets physical with her boundless and infectious enthusiasm.

It is important to mention that there are numerous people who have given their time and expertise to our many projects that we have completed since the Society was founded ten years ago. They are far too many to name here, but without these often unsung heroes working so hard for us, it would have been impossible to have achieved so much.

Thank you all very much !

A stylized, handwritten signature of Nick Cotton in black ink.

**Nick Cotton**





## Old Photographers Never Die, they just lose Focus

### Old Photographers Never Die, they just lose Focus

I first became aware of Watchet's paper mill soon after my arrival in 2011, when the factory chimney was demolished. The sight of pantehnicons heavily laden with huge rolls of paper struggling up the Brendon Road became familiar. I learnt that there had been paper manufacturing on the site since the 17th century and that it was the major employer in the area; I rather took it for granted until production abruptly ceased in December 2015.

It was the Contains Art installation about the closure of the mill and Bill Inge's short film that fired my interest and imagination; I felt that it was important to produce an accurate photographic archive of the machinery before it deteriorated, and saw great potential for interesting photography.

In late October I was shown round the plant by Chris Northam, the chief engineer. After being given a safety briefing, a radio, a hi-vis jacket, was let loose. I headed for machine PM No.5, the jewel in the crown, capable of producing 350 tons of cardboard every 24 hours. I descended to the basement and instantly found myself in a world of Fritz Lange's Metropolis, huge gears used to drive the enormous rollers (40) at great speed. Proceeding to the back of the plant I was engulfed in a maelstrom of pipes of varying sizes; taps, fans, motors, all the bits to make it work. Knowing how much

power, water, heat, steam and humidity was involved I wondered how it was possible to work and survive in such an environment. The industrial revolution and Blake's "dark satanic mills" sprang to mind.

Obviously the workforce did survive, as most of them loyally worked there for thirty five or forty years, in a sprit of pride and comradeship. Photographically I have had a ball, losing myself (literally) for four days documenting the machines and machinery as well as the more eclectic and abstract images.

In the new Year I was approached and joined forces with SIAS, the Somerset Industrial Archeology Society, helping to produce an accurate photographic record of the plant. Utilising most of my earlier work I have spent a further seven days of photography as required. We hope to complete the work soon, before the mill is sold.

I would like to thank Chris Northam and his staff who have always been most helpful and accommodating.

**Bob Cramp**







### If only...

...a certain gentleman was still alive today in Watchet he would almost certainly have solved one of the town's biggest and longest problems – mud and silt! I refer to the ever-increasing flow of mud and silt into the outer harbour and the marina. Sadly though, only his mortal remains and memorial stone are in Watchet.

Early in the last century Watchet was the home of one of the most distinguished scientists of his time. Professor Osborne Reynolds was formerly professor of engineering at Manchester University and spent his retirement years with his wife and daughter Margaret at St. Decuman's Vicarage, where he died at the age of 69 in 1912. He is buried in St. Decuman's churchyard. His widow and daughter remained at Watchet for many years after his death.

Although born in Belfast, his boyhood was spent in Suffolk. In the interval between leaving Dedham Grammar School and entering Queen's College, Cambridge, he spent some time at an engineering works at Stony Stratford. He graduated at Cambridge in 1867, being Fifth Wrangler, and in the same year was elected a Fellow of College. In 1868 he was appointed to the Chair of Engineering at Owens College, Manchester – the first of its kind ever founded in the United Kingdom. Honours fell thick upon him; in 1878 he was elected Honorary Fellow of his old College and Member of the Institute of Civil Engineers. The previous year he had become a Fellow of the Royal Society, and in 1884 was appointed a member of the Council of the Royal Society and held one of the two Royal Medals annually granted by it.

Professor Reynolds was the author of numerous scientific papers, which were published in collected form by the Cambridge University Press in three volumes. In the field of experimental and applied mathematical hydraulics he was probably the foremost worker of his time. His greatest and final contribution to science was his paper on "The Sub-Mechanics of the Universe", accepted by the Royal Society of 1902 – this paper was the outcome of 25 years of study.

In an editorial tribute, the Manchester Guardian of the time declared that Professor Reynolds was "not only one

of the most distinguished men who ever taught in the University of Manchester, but one of the most brilliant and acute original thinkers of our time in his own domain of physics and its application to engineering .....He solved some of the mysteries of the action of tides and currents on estuaries and beaches which had baffled all the hydraulic engineers before him, and so laid down the principles on which coast erosion and silting should be checked." If only...!

A couple of years ago a small group of academics from Manchester University visited Watchet Market House Museum and inquired if anyone could direct them to the grave and memorial to Osborne Reynolds at St. Decuman's churchyard. They had been there, but their search had been unsuccessful. Fortunately I was able to satisfactorily answer their inquiry, but unfortunately had to decline their kind offer of a free lunch! Professor Reynolds is still held in very high esteem at Manchester University and many of his theories and ideas are still in practice today.

### Maurice Chidgey





## Open Meeting - Talk on The Fall and Rise of the Otter



### Open Meeting - Talk on The Fall and Rise of the Otter

A good turnout came to hear Ian Anderson's talk on The Fall and Rise of the Otter

Before the talk Jan Simpson-Scott as acting chair explained how in the absence of a full time chair (replacing Molly who had stood down after many years), the committee would take turns to chair the meetings.

We were given a bonus by Ian including an additional film about ancient megalithic monuments from the era of 2,500/3,000 BC.

Ian covered Bronze Age stones on Dartmoor, Tarr Steps and also Celtic crosses and Scottish grave markers.

Ian's main 'event' was his talk about otters. Following the catastrophic decline in the 1950s due to hunting and chemical

contamination of watercourses, the small residual population in the West Country was able to spread from about 1990 when as a country we tackled the pollution problem and changed attitudes to sharing fish stocks with otters, (still contentious in some places).

Ian, who had a cottage on the island of Skye, has a remarkable affinity with these shy and secretive animals and some of his photography was breathtakingly beautiful not just the endearing otters, but the scenery as well. He explained how otters had evolved to a life in water by special adaptations whereby they can close their nose and ears when submerged and their eye lenses can change shape to focus underwater.

It was an amazing conservation story and we are fortunate to have people like Ian who are so dedicated to their survival.

**Alan Jones**

## An occasional letter from the editor



### An occasional letter from the editor

Bob Cramp, one of our 2 in-house photographers (Dave Simpson-Scott being the other one), went to Kingston Seymour where he took this photograph of the plaque in the church there commemorating the great flood of 1607.

The Bridgwater Bay tsunami or tidal surge of 1607 brought the cobbles to the beach in Watchet and Nick Cotton wrote about the lost village of Easentown, a result of this tsunami, in our last edition. The many cracks in the layers of rock in the cliff face are evidence both of coastal erosion and of what Hugh Prudden, of the Somerset Environmental Records Centre, claimed in 2005 is a growing body of documentation of faults to be found in West Somerset. Our own member, Dr Eric Robinson, a prominent geologist, has long drawn our attention to the Watchet Fault on which the east end of the harbour is built. If you walk along the cliff footpath from Watchet to Doniford and take the steps

down to the foreshore of the fossil beach you can see the cracks in the layers of rock in the cliff face referred to in geological studies as the Doniford Bay Fault. The Atlantic Ocean is responsible for some of the wear and tear along this shoreline. Geologists refer to it as an earthcache. The different colours in the rock formation are quite spectacular but hold their own dangers.

Bob's photograph illustrates the impact of this tsunami in the parish of Kingston Seymour. Bob also met Bob Ford who has vintage Watchet in his blood and Bob and I hope to interview him for a piece for a future newsletter. He is something of a conservationist, having surveyed 23 orchards in Kingston Seymour in 2010 on behalf of the People's Trust for Endangered species, working in collaboration with Natural England.

Much more to come and I do hope you enjoy these newsletters.

**Jan Simpson-Scott**



## Wansbrough Mill Community Archive Project Days



### Wansbrough Mill Community Archive Project Days

In last month's newsletter I wrote about two Community archive days which had been set up to invite members of the public, former employees and their families and friends, to come along with their contributions. I am very pleased to say that a good number of people did attend on the two days with documentary evidence which has resulted in some real gems of information. We were able to copy and record documents, letters, photographs and stories with the owner's permission and they will become a section of the Wansbrough Mill Community Archive. They are invaluable and provide personal anecdotes and evidence showing how the mill affected the lives of workers and their families. They are personal stories,

sometimes humorous, sometimes emotional but always honest and informative. They provide a verified human dimension for the archive which is important to include because history is about remembering how people lived their lives after all.

### APPEAL FOR ADDITIONAL INFORMATION PLEASE!

During the two world wars when men were away, women took on the running of the mill. We have no records relating to it. If anyone can help us we would be very grateful. Also there are records of fires at the mill, but we understand that there was also flooding. We have no records of that either, so again if you can help we would be very glad.

There will be an additional Community Archive Day at the Phoenix Centre on Saturday May 20th from 11am to about 4pm.

Thank you to everyone who has contributed already and if you have anything to share please come along on 20th May. There will be tea and cake!

**Ann Hill**

**WCS Treasurer and WCS Representative on The Wansbrough Mill Archive Steering Group.**

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](mailto: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 Mineral Line flora and fauna by Dave Simpson-Scott.*

**Watchet Conservation Society**  
[www.watchetconservationsociety.co.uk](http://www.watchetconservationsociety.co.uk)

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June - Jason Robinson  
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## **A walk along the Mineral Line on 8th April 2017**

Following an exceptionally warm weekend this morning is overcast with a definite chill in the air. On both sides of the Mineral Line are numerous Alexanders: a large, olive-green plant with vivid lime-green umbrella-like flowers. It was known as *Petroselinum Alexandrium* (parsley of Alexandria) in medieval Latin and one of many plants introduced into Britain by the Romans. The stems were used in cooking; the strange aniseed smell disappears during cooking leaving a mild subtle flavour.

At ground level there are flashes of blue; the purple-blue flowers of ground ivy, a few clusters of violets, a patch of bluebells, the bright blue of the lesser periwinkle. A bumble bee is flitting from stalk to stalk of the common vetch and a couple of bee-flies are feeding on the nectar of celandines.

Robins, blackbirds, wrens and blue tits are singing overhead and a willow warbler is attracting attention to itself with its loud enthusiastic song.

**Rosalind Pick**



*Bummbie Bee*



*Ground Ivy*



*Willow Warbler*



*Periwinkle*