



Watchet Conservation Matters

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

Issue 53 July/August 2017

St. Beuno's Church Culbone



From the Chairman



Dr Tony Serjeant, Somerset Ecology Officer, will be the speaker at our Open Meeting on Tuesday July 18th when he will give a presentation on The Mineral Line of Watchet - please come along; this is an unmissable opportunity.

Nick Cotton and Jan Simpson-Scott are very close to completing the Turner Interpretation Board with Georgie Grant of Onion Collective. This will be unveiled at Splash Point/the Victorian Pleasure Ground at the location from where we believe the artist depicted Watchet on his visit in 1814. We plan a Bring-Your-Own food and drinks party to celebrate this and will let you know the date when this will take place.

We are delighted to have people interested enough to come along and observe our committee meetings with a view to becoming committee members. So it's all good news for WCS.

Councillor Whetlor is our new WTC Representative and we are pleased to welcome her.

Thank you all very much!



Jason Robinson

Dear All,
We are very encouraged by the response to our various FaceBook posts which members and non-members are responding to.

Nick Cotton's mystery objects on our WCS FB page have proved very popular with some inspired guesses as well as obvious expertise (last object 1,349 people reached). Bob Cramp's weekly photographic archive of Wansbrough Paper Mill is a significant record of an important piece of Watchet's history and industrial heritage which has drawn admiration and requests for copies (last set 1,013 people reached). Dave Simpson-Scott's photographic survey of the flora and fauna of the Mineral Line is another developing chronicle of the changing seasons along this fascinating trail. Eventually we hope this will form a booklet for sale. We thank you for all comments on these posts and please keep them coming.



A walk with Coleridge to St. Beuno's Church Culbone



A walk with Coleridge to St. Beuno's Church Culbone

Sometime ago Jane Sharp contributed a very interesting article about the Beulah Chapel and the Culbone Stone.

Curiosity led us one sunny afternoon in September to visit "the smallest complete parish church in this country", mentioned in both the Domesday Book and the Guinness Book of Records. It was not easy to find; it certainly isn't easy for parishioners to reach it for the regular fortnightly evensong.

In a quiet country lane we came upon two farms; Ash Farm which gave us a clue we were in the right area with its prominent sign "Xanadu", a reference to Coleridge's poem Kubla Khan, and almost next door was Parsonage Farm where our arrival

brought out several dogs who greeted us with loud but friendly barking causing their mistress to investigate. As well as pointing the way towards a steep rocky path which would bring us to Culbone Church this delightful Anglo-Finnish woman from London, married to the local farmer, told us that Ash Farm was the likely location for the writing of at least part of Kubla Khan. In fact Coleridge himself confirms that he wrote one hundred lines of it in an opium-induced haze at Ash Farm.

*"And there were gardens bright with sinuous rills
Where blossom'd many an incense-bearing tree;"*

This was Coleridge's interpretation of Xanadu, a vision in a dream. It is haunting and beautiful. If this is the setting then it is inspiring even without the opium! The landscape speaks to you as you walk down

through the trees catching glimpses of the sun, pretty flowers strewn the way, the distinctive laughing song of the Green Woodpecker ringing through the woods. A jay flew across our path. Spiral fields ran down to the sea.

*"And here were forests ancient as hills
Enfolding sunny spots"*

Entering through a wide gate which had once opened the way to the path down to the church we were on a bridleway, wide but uneven, falling away to a narrow trail which merged with Coleridge's coastal route amongst woodland and coppice.

"Friendship is a sheltering tree."

There is little life around here and the remaining few cottages are dark and not made for easy living. Culbone Church when you find it is breathtaking and its history is long. Evensong takes place here every other Sunday at 3pm and we were told there are five in the congregation; the farmer's wife we spoke to, the farmer, the vicar and two vergers. The building is a patchwork: a melange of Saxon, Norman, Medieval and Victorian architecture with myths attached to enhance the history.

The graveyard was fascinating and provided a very humorous moment. Clearly the most prominent family buried here had the surname of Red which itself is unusual and many of the tombs and graves are occupied by members of this family. One such tombstone was dedicated to Irving Red. Underneath his inscription was the

name of his wife, buried with him. Her name was Ethel! Poor woman; what a cross she must have had to bear. The parish records show that the family became Red Richards, then Richard Richards and in 2004 there is a reference to Richard Red Richards. This is for another study on another day.

It was a glorious afternoon. One could be carried away here with Coleridge's Pantisocracy, his utopian dream, a search for peace. But to be practical if you decide to make the visit along this path strong shoes are vital.

Jan Simpson-Scott

Include your family name in the subscriber list (see order form below)

Front cover, bottom: *The Cross in the 1850s.*

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A HISTORY OF WATCHET

By A L Wedlake, updated by Paul Upton



INCLUDING OVER 100 PHOTOGRAPHS PAST AND PRESENT



Open Meeting - How to Start Tracing your Family Tree



Open Meeting - How to Start Tracing your Family Tree by Jane Sharp

On 16th May we were given a highly interesting talk by Jane Sharp on how to trace our ancestors.

Starting with yourself note relevant details: date and place of birth, addresses lived in, schools and colleges, achievements, clubs/societies, jobs and one's spouse. This forms a sound basis on which to build as one moves back up the family tree.

Talk to relatives asking for the same information without delay. Time can make memories fade; sadly, take away their owners. Your relatives may also be able to help to provide details about other family members including those no longer living. A description of their appearance may help identify them from photographs. Family stories, rumours and hearsay are also valuable as some may later be corroborated as fact! The aim is to build up a picture of each ancestor as a whole

person, not just as a name on a long list.

Inevitably this line of investigation will reach a limit and gaps will emerge so seek other sources of information: censuses, parish records, certificates for births, marriages and deaths, newspapers, wills, family paperwork and photographs. Commercial family tree websites require a subscription but can speed up research. Ancestry.co.uk, is free of charge at public libraries for an hour. The Dorset and Somerset Family History Society, run by Jane, offers appointments for up to an hour once a month.

Jane has traced some of her ancestors back to the 1700s. Whilst some archives, such as censuses, have been transcribed and digitised Jane advised looking at originals where available, as transcribers can misinterpret the information, confusing baptism and birth dates.

Jane emphasised the importance of not becoming sidetracked. Store all information safely with the final version worked up into a document.

Jane suggested joining a local family history group. She then issued a health warning: this activity is highly addictive! Her closing words from Robert Baden Powell: "Look wide, and even when you think you are looking wide - look wider still". I will add one to that, the title of a novel by Primo Levi: "If not now, when?"!

Andrew Harrison

Three Watchet brothers, three headmasters



Three Watchet brothers... ...three headmasters

This is a remarkable story of a Watchet couple whose four children all went on to become school teachers, with three sons progressing to headmasterships. Mr. Wallace (Wally) West was a well-known local shopkeeper at "Ye Olde Shoppe" in Swain Street, which he ran for many years in collaboration with his wife Lily, who also ran an adjoining fancy goods shop. Today the premises are known as "The Old Bakery". Mr. West was a prominent townsman, being a member of the Urban District Council for many years during which time he served two terms as chairman.

Mr. and Mrs. West's eldest child was Joan, who died in 1999 at the age of 74. She married Ken Webber, the son of a well-known Watchet family, and they both qualified as

school teachers. Joan concluded her career as deputy head of Washford First School. They were both enthusiastic members of Watchet Tennis Club.

Tony, second eldest, graduated as a teacher, completing his career as headmaster at Priorswood Primary School, Taunton. He was a talented footballer, being a valued member of a very successful Watchet Town side. In addition, he was a member of Watchet Tennis Club and Watchet Dramatic Society.

Second son Pat followed in his elder siblings' footsteps and became a teacher, going on to become in 1974 headmaster of Priory Secondary Modern Boys' School, Taunton, and in 1977 became headmaster of Heathfield Comprehensive School, Taunton. He retired in 1992. Pat, too, was sport orientated, playing soccer and cricket for Watchet, and in his younger days was an enthusiastic member of the Social Club in Esplanade Lane, being particularly keen on table tennis and snooker. Like Tony, he married a teacher.

Youngest son Ron, who sadly passed away in 2000, also qualified as a teacher and became headmaster of Minehead Middle School, retiring in 1996. He carried on the family sporting tradition, also playing soccer for Watchet Town. Ron represented Somerset at soccer and captained the FA Southern Amateur XI. Indicative of his footballing prowess, he was offered terms by Sheffield Wednesday and Bristol City. A rare story of one family's academic and sporting achievements.

Maurice Chidgey



Wansbrough Mill Community Archive Project Days



Wansbrough Mill Community Archive Project Days

Friday September 1st

The Wansbrough Mill archive is becoming really exciting! The launch event to showcase the range of archive material has been set for Friday September 1st. There will be some invited guests and you are all invited too. If you cannot make the launch there will be plenty of time to catch up because the displays will be up for all of September.

There will be film, photographs, information boards, original live music and song written and performed by locals. There will be work by local visual artists. A Theatre Melange event is planned but not finalised yet. All of this inspired by the experience of

working with people who were a part of the Wansbrough Mill family and in celebration of the influence of paper-making in Watchet's history.

Saturday September 23rd

The Community Archive event will be launched. This is the result of the Community archive days which were held so people could share their stories and memories of life at the Mill. Expect some great yarns and very interesting photographs and papers. Permission has been given by all contributors so we can share their memories with you.

October...

A very exciting virtual reality tour of the Mill buildings is being prepared for October. It sounds amazing!!!! More information closer to the time...

Many thanks to the loyal hardworking volunteers who have given their time and energy to sorting through the documents etc inside the mill offices. Many a time I have had a headache wondering when will this be finished? I am glad to say that has now been done and Kalina and Chris are making final preparations to send it to the Somerset Heritage Centre for inclusion in their archive collection for posterity.

Ann Hill

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

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.

Mill photography of Sue Lowe and Toby Bryant by Bob Cramp.

Photography of Mineral Line flora and fauna by Dave Simpson-Scott.

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A walk along the Mineral Line on 26th June 2017

Here are a few more pictures illustrating the ever-changing world of nature, particularly at this time of year along the Mineral Line.

Four different species, all making their own contribution to life - and in the case of the first picture a future contribution perhaps to a human stomach! It is of course a blackberry in bloom, but well past its best and now the developing fruit is clearly visible.

No. 2 shows some balsam at the edge of the river just coming into its full summer plumage, beautifully intense pink.

The third shows what looks such a silky, cosy little cushion - but look more closely. It's actually a seed head on a thistle. The cushion itself (and only the cushion!) is so soft that it is hard even to feel the tips of individual threads on a finger. What a contrast with the rest of the plant

Then there is beautiful sorrel, only just coming into bloom but soon the hints of red will develop dramatically and the plant will become very distinct within its enveloping green surroundings. Not at all obvious yet, but just wait! The last over is a mallow, growing close to the ground - lovely colour.

The final picture is of the top of a well-weathered post, very close to Kentsford.

It is beautifully covered (enrobed?) by a deep bed of at least two mosses, and their intricacy and detail are absolutely enchanting. Looked at closely enough, truly the land of elves and fairies!

Dave Simpson-Scott



Blackberry in bloom



Balsam



Thistle seed head



Moss on an old post