



Watchet Conservation Matters

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

Issue 55 November/December 2017



Wansbrough Paper Mill

From the Chairman



competition to own an original illustration featured in it!

In addition, following the meeting, we shall be welcoming the Watchet Community Choir who will entertain us.



Our 2018 Open Meeting Programme has been finalised and starts on Tuesday January 16th with 'The history of Clay Tobacco Pipes'. We've all dug up bits of these in our gardens, if so bring some along and David Bunney, a local expert, will provide an insight into their manufacture, design and use in archaeological dating.

Finally a plea for support, with such an active Society your committee needs you! Please consider making a personal contribution to your society by joining us. Just speak to a committee member, attend one of our monthly meetings and see whether you can help us in some way!

Your Society and Committee are nearing the end of another active year and shortly, on Tuesday November 21st, we'd like to welcome you all to the Phoenix Centre at 7.30pm where we'll be holding our 'streamlined' AGM.

See you all on November 21st.

The WCS has achieved much this year and our membership has responded by attending our open meetings, the last two of which have stretched the capacity of our venue. So thank you all for your support.

Mervyn Brown

Please make every effort to attend our AGM where we have two additional attractions planned, an auction of original illustrations by Nick Cotton which were created for inclusion in the new, revised edition of A.L. Wedlake's 'A History of Watchet'. I know many of you will be purchasing a copy of this book, updated by Paul Upton, and I anticipate stiff

“Requiem for Wansbrough”



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On Sunday October 15th, Watchet photographer Bob Cramp launched an exhibition and photo-book of photographs taken by him during 16 visits to Wansbrough Paper Mill since its closure in December 2015.

The interest shown in his pictures on FaceBook of what had been a major employer in Watchet has motivated him to produce the book of photographs called “Requiem for Wansbrough”

The exhibition of Bob’s photographs, in various sizes, lined the walls of the old Tourist Information Office, providing often spectacular views of the now disused site

as never before seen by the workforce when in production. One particularly intriguing picture, of the inside of a massive metal container, was taken by photographing through a very small ground-level inspection hatch.

Many people came to the launch and were able to see Chris Northam, chief engineering officer at the Mill when it closed, receiving from Bob a hard-cover copy of the pictorial book, in recognition of his help in showing Bob round the site at the beginning of the project.

As Bob himself said, it was only after a number of visits that he could find his way round the Mill. Chris Northam, who had spent 36 years at the mill, had been an enormous help.

“Requiem for Wansbrough”



The exhibition was open for one week, and visitors were able to view and order copies of “Requiem for Wansbrough” and enlarged copies of Bob’s photographs.

Bob had said earlier that his life as a photographer had never fulfilled his desire to focus on industry and machinery, and in the Wansbrough project he became “overawed by large, noisy machines... and I found my own Metropolis”.

Valerie Ward



Here's something slightly different (perhaps?)

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Watchet Conservation Society has been in existence for a good while and it is fair to say that it has worked hard to earn both an enviable reputation and respect, and definitively made a mark in the town with a wide range of interests and involvements. This seems to be especially true over recent months, with new and worthwhile projects coming to fruition, and demonstrated by the increased audiences at the public meetings. Lovely to see and rewarding to be a part of. Long may it last.

But how about something a little different? I was fortunate enough to join a group who went on an "owl prow!" a few days ago. Off we went, 7pm start, into the wilds of the Somerset countryside woodlands. Darkness (almost complete) came upon us – torches essential to move around – and with an excellent guide, Chris Sperring, from the "Owl and Hawk Trust", we set out in search of owls.

Chris is a very special guide, and calls to the owls, who believe it or not, reply to him. The spot, where we were, was known to him as a site for tawny owls, and so there he was, transformed into a "human tawny owl". And didn't he do a good job! He can tell the difference between male and female birds from the tone of their call. He even identified one that he said was bad-tempered! Also one that was either a young bird or had a slightly poor voice/call (shall I say, in poor owl/human vocabulary!). It was getting cool by the time our evening

finished, close to 10pm, but a charming, enlightening and enthralling experience. Just to be completely clear, we didn't see any owls (couldn't see a hand in front of the face!), but heard lots. Had one flown overhead, we would have seen it against the night sky. Must try again!

I've been on other trips with Chris a year or two back and he was equally gripping on a wide variety of wildlife on walks through the Levels. If you get the chance and have even the slightest interest in wildlife, don't miss the opportunity to spend some time with him!

What is the object of this note? I had a charming evening, and, yes, I'd like to share it. But there is a greater aim. Owls, sadly in common with much wildlife, are in decline and our enjoyment of wildlife is at risk as their numbers fall. This is a simple and straightforward conservation issue, admittedly in a different area to the existing interests of WCS, but conceptually identical. I'm not proposing a dramatic change of direction, but maybe there are people here in Watchet who would be interested in taking part in a small increase in the Society's breadth of involvement and influence – even if it be merely by close association with existing organisations. There is a lot of wildlife hereabouts and the more we do to help it (without changing their lifestyle) the more enjoyment we can get from their presence.

What do you think? All comments welcome.

Dave Simpson-Scott





Mineral Line Life – A review!

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The year is now complete. I have lost count of the number of times I've "walked the line", so to speak, but every visit has uncovered something that I've not noticed before. I sometimes think that I know every yard (metre?) of the path, but not a bit of it. The plant-life changes almost with each tick of the clock - certainly every week shows changes - except perhaps in the depths of winter when, of course, change happens more slowly.



I've loved this project and learned a great deal from the visits. I've always been interested in wild-life (won a prize, long long ago, at school, for collecting more wild flower species than anyone else in the class!), but this experience has been really enlightening. If you, my readers, get as much from this exercise as has the author, then it will have been a thoroughly worthwhile piece of work.



So, the data is now collected – and in practice the words also are in the final stages. With more attention to detail and publication, before long we (The Conservation Society) should be able to get the work to a printer. Then the original aim can be realised - giving people more information about just how interesting the Mineral Line is.



Following this note there will be a time of preparative (but not forgetful) silence, whilst the final stages are addressed. The aim is for publication by the spring.

Mineral Line Life – A review!



In the meantime, here are five pics from different seasons, and to finish off, and do something slightly different, a sixth pic, this one being a pastel representation of a photo I took during the autumn.

Thank you all for your time and attention. It has been a pleasure to write these articles – and hopefully you'll feel it has been worthwhile.

Dave Simpson-Scott

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





Open Meeting - Memories of Old Watchet by Jenny Hill



Open Meeting - Memories of Old Watchet by Jenny Hill

In a crowded schoolroom 55 people came to hear Jenny Hill give a really fascinating talk about her photos of 'Old Watchet', both people and places.

Paul Upton introduced the evening and gave helpful prompts to get Jenny talking about the many stories associated with the people in the photos. These included photos of her family going back four generations. Jenny explained her family could be traced in Watchet back to around 1776.

There were photos of St Decuman's Private Boys School when it was a private school operating from within the vicarage. The headmaster was vicar Burgess and the teacher Spencer Ayres. Jenny explained how wealthy pupils subsidised the 'bright but poor' children of Watchet. In the back row is Bert Stephenson (Tony Knight explained that Bert was still alive aged 101, also in the picture were his "uncles" Reg and Alfie.) Then followed a photo of St Decuman's Sunday School which showed

a young Ivy Stephenson (third row with large hat behind the vicar) as a young girl in the front row, taken, I judged, to be c.1920. Ivy was known to many at the meeting, even to a relative newcomer like myself, as she was still playing the church organ well into her 90s and died aged 100.

The pictures that followed were chosen by Paul and included photos of Swain Street, which generated lots of comment and discussion as to who and what the shops were. We moved onto Market Street which involved so many conversations that we were in danger of not hearing Jenny's comments but Paul soon restored order and the photo journey continued onto the Esplanade showing the bandstand where the shelter now stands, and Lloyds Bank which prompted yet more memories. We finished up at 'Nortons Corner' and Liddymore Road, which despite the shops looked like an unmade road.

Clearly for many this was a trip down memory lane and one could not be anything but amazed at Jenny's remarkable memory.

Alan Jones

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.

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Come and Join Us

As you all know we have been without a Casework Officer for 2 years since Paul Upton retired and without a Chairman for 1 year since Molly Quint retired. We have continued regardless with Phil Gannon and Bob Cramp covering the role of Casework Officer and members of the committee chairing meetings on a rolling chairman basis.

At the AGM on Tuesday 21st November 2018 the following will be standing for re-election as Officers and Trustees:

- **Bob Cramp - Chairman**
- **Ann Hill - Treasurer**
- **Jan Simpson-Scott - Secretary**
- **Nick Cotton**
- **Jason Robinson**
- **Mervyn Brown**

- **Gina Nicholls - Minutes Secretary**
- **Andrew Harrison - ex officio Membership Secretary**
- **Valerie Ward - ex officio Press Officer**

All the above have been proposed and seconded by members.

There is still time for YOU to join us. There is plenty to do especially help with our many projects. Contact one of the committee if you're interested in supporting us and working to preserve the heritage of our splendid little town which has so much valuable history.

Jan Simpson-Scott