



Watchet Conservation Matters

Promoting, Conserving & Improving
Our Physical & Natural Environment

Issue 56 January/February 2018

**The Rope Walk
Watchet Strata Sculpture**



From the Chairman



Greetings,
Those of you who attended our AGM on the 21st November will agree it was an enjoyable and successful evening with our Town Crier proving to be a talented and entertaining auctioneer with a brilliant contribution at the end by our community choir.

We had already decided to support Ione Harris's ambition to create a wild flower plot on the West St car park. We assisted her to submit her application to the Town Council and in December Mervyn Brown negotiated and completed the risk assessment for final approval to enable planting to start.

The Mineral Line Project, a year long study of its Wildlife, Flora and Fauna will shortly be going to press. Initially this was started by Rosalind Pick with David Simpson-Scott

illustrating her copy with Photographs. Sadly Rosalind resigned early last year and David has taken responsibility for the whole project. Sumptuous photographs with well informed, interesting text it's a serious piece of work and I congratulate him. I am sure it will be popular.

I feel confident that in the spring we will be celebrating the unveiling of the Turner Interpretation Board at Splash point, more news later.

We have been keeping a watchful eye on the Stoates mill development to ensure that the iron works are preserved and this is also benefiting from a Nicholas Cotton interpretation board.

Since my appeal at the AGM I have had several offers of help ,from Alison Mills and Sharon Garcia Vince, to improve our communications and accessibility as a society. I am most grateful.

I am sorry but due to illness this newsletter has been much delayed. I hope we are in better health by March 20th when David Ayling talks about "The Butterflies of Watchet"

All good wishes,

Bob Cramp





The Rope Walk – Watchet Strata Sculpture



The Rope Walk – Watchet Strata Sculpture

In 2016, as part of the regeneration of the Boat Museum and Visitor Centre, Onion Collective commissioned me to create a representation of Watchet's unique geological coastal landscape. It was to be situated along the new dividing fence between the WSR and Rope Walk pathway with the aim of highlighting the importance of Watchet's geology through a public Artwork.

The piece comprises three metals, mild steel, stainless steel and copper, to suggest the range of colours and types of rock strata such as blue lias; black shale; limestones; red, green and grey mudstones. Interspersed are also various fossil forms in

copper, forged steel and sandblasted glass. The glass pieces were beautifully created by stained glass Artist, Frankie Pollak.

The sheer size of the work presented me with several challenges in terms of managing its construction. Without doubt I would not have managed to meet these without the kind and generous support of Chris Northam and the remaining staff at Wansbrough Paper Mill after its closure. Many thanks to him for donating all the stainless steel for this project and allowing me to cut the pieces in their workshops and then continue to work and lay out all 50 metres of it!

Then came the demanding job of installing the piece, so I am very grateful to all those

The Rope Walk – Watchet Strata Sculpture



involved; Watchet Community Bookshop for their grant to enable the funding of installation costs and to WSR and the staff at Watchet Station who gave their time to enable my safe access to install the work on the track side of the fence. Though most importantly, I have to thank all the amazing volunteers who over several months came to help me with the installation come blazing sunshine, wind or freezing cold. I really couldn't have completed it without them!

I hope visitors and residents alike will enjoy the sculpture as part of Watchet's emerging new landscape.

Dot Kuzniar



Ada Lovelace: 19th-century computer programmer?

Who'd have thought that one of the original computer whizzes was a woman? And a woman who lived in the first half of the nineteenth century at that! And had a close local connection.

Even as a teenager Ada Byron (later Countess of Lovelace) was interested in maths and technology. And, yes, she was the only daughter of THAT Lord Byron! Born in January 1815, Ada received an usual education for a girl of her time, as her mother encouraged her strongly in her studies of maths and science while discouraging her interest in literature, art and poetry. Lady Byron's motives were apparently to deflect the attention of her highly intelligent daughter away from the arts. She feared that any interest Ada showed in that direction might encourage similarity

in other ways to her mentally unstable poet father, who was so famously described by Lady Caroline Lamb as 'mad, bad and dangerous to know'...

Despite prolonged periods of ill health in her childhood and early adolescence (or perhaps partly because of that), Ada's academic education was intensive. Naturally for a girl of her class there was no question of attending school: her mother employed a series of private tutors and exerted considerable pressure to keep her mind as fully occupied as possible with thoughts of science and maths. Despite her mother's best efforts, though, Ada loved the arts and there is some evidence that she was musical too, for she learned to play the piano, violin and harp. Her mother couldn't afford to neglect the skills that society then demanded of a young lady destined for a suitable marriage, after all! However, by the age of 12 Ada was working on a project to develop human flight, systematically recording in her book entitled *Flyology* all the possible wing materials she would need to research, based on her own studies of bird anatomy. Once she had mastered how to get airborne, she planned to power her flight by steam (a pretty weighty means of propulsion that was unlikely to be sufficiently aerodynamic for her needs, one can't help thinking). So, not your average pre-teen girly aristocrat!

Her fascination with mechanical things led to a long and close friendship with the notable mathematician Charles Babbage. Their collaboration began after they first met at a society party when she was 17 and Babbage a Cambridge professor in his 40s and well established in his field. He was already

working on his 'Difference Engine' – a kind of calculating machine. Later on Babbage was to abandon that project and move on to the more technically advanced 'Analytical Engine', and it is for her work with him on this that Ada is best known and which has earned her somewhat belatedly (and not very accurately!) the reputation of being the first computer programmer. She appreciated rather better than Babbage the computing potential of the Analytical Engine and wrote copiously about it, although as a woman she had to publish her work with just her initials rather than her full name. By that time, we must bear in mind, she was married with three young children and the busy social life appropriate to her social status and wealth, but her research work and writing continued to dominate much of her life. And of course she had plenty of staff at home so was free to devote most of her time to her passion for maths and science – as well as apparently conducting a fairly colourful private life...

Even if you're already familiar with the technological career of Lady Lovelace, you may perhaps be wondering why she features in this newsletter. There is a local connection, although not with Watchet itself, yet with the fringes of Exmoor just a few miles down the Bristol Channel. It is on the edge of Porlock Weir that, after her marriage to Lord William King (later created Earl of Lovelace), Ada spent quite some time. In addition to his other property in West Somerset, Lord King owned Ashley Combe, an estate where the family used to holiday, travelling to Porlock Weir from their homes in Surrey and London. If you walk the paths today behind the village port up towards Culbone Church, you'll be treading the same paths as Ada – though in her day

the grounds through which you pass would have been in far better condition. Sadly the house itself has gone, too, so you'll not glimpse anything of it during your ramble. After its heyday as the holiday home of the Lovelace family, the house at Ashley Combe changed use a number of times and was adapted for various purposes – including as a WW2 evacuation home, a Barnardo's children's home and finally a country club of dubious repute. In 1974, after about 20 years left derelict, the building was demolished because of safety concerns.

Ada Lovelace died of cancer in 1852 at the age of only 36. She had experienced much pain and sadness in her short life, with its difficult early years and ending with long months of distressing illness at the same time as her marriage was breaking down. There is a further local connection here: it seems that she had become romantically involved with John Crosse of Fyne Court, just a few miles away but deep in the Quantock Hills. John was the eldest son of Edward Crosse, whose pioneering work on electricity was once said to have been the inspiration for Mary Shelley's book *Frankenstein*, although the book was first published in 1818, long before Crosse started his experiments... Whatever the situation – which no one but those involved will ever know for sure – following a private conversation with Ada a few months before her death, the Earl of Lovelace cut off all contact with Ada and their children. This despite the fact that by then she was dying: a sad end to a life of unrecognised brilliance.

Margaret Shaw



The Wild Flower Project Pilot Scheme

The Wild Flower Project Pilot Scheme in West Street Car Park

We would very much like to obtain permission from Watchet Town Council to plant the designated area (see plan) with wildflowers to beautify, to encourage wildlife and to showcase what could be done anywhere with a bit of thought. We are hoping there will be no need to call on the Highways Agency as we can work from the car park, the verge and the pavement. With regard to the soil condition we will carry out soil tests on the proposed area. We believe the banks were thrown up at the time of levelling the car park and that the soil is poor and therefore ideal for a wild flower habitat. The soil on the bank is entirely stable with a variety of established grasses and Ribwort Plantain which is a key component when designing a naturally balanced flower rich sward. The soil around the base of the Tamarisk has not been so intensively strimmed over the years and is looser earth where Alexanders have set seed. The ground will require limited preparation. The waste plant material around the Tamarisk will be cleared and new planting carried out straight away. The rest of the area will be lightly strimmed and initially sown with yellow rattle seed which helps keep the grass under control and is another key component for successful wild flower growth. Grass will be removed as required and plantlets put in its place. Some patches will be sown with poppy seed which needs some soil disturbance for germination. The site will be maintained by us and all maintenance and work undertaken will be timed and logged in a fortnightly report/journal together with a record of plants added and their progress. Photographs will

be taken as work progresses and as results show. As this is a pilot scheme we will put together a report of our findings at the end of the year (season) recording successes, failures and what we should, could and would have done differently. At this stage we will be able to collate a long-term maintenance strategy which will be a similar plan to the one in place already, with strimming carried out a few times throughout the year, though in a more discerning manner and with the advantage of a beautiful, interesting wild flower garden teeming with wild life. We will shoulder any small costs ourselves e.g. seeds and compost. We both have access to and ability to grow plants and indeed have started collecting them already with our enthusiastic anticipation. We would like to put a beautiful Orientation notice/sign up... 'Wild flowers to look out for'. Help towards expense of the sign would be appreciated.

Throughout the first year we will be at the site fortnightly, if not weekly to check on progress (and I pass it a few times a day and will be checking on things with anticipation and excitement) and we will write up a log in our journal / report and do anything needed at that time. We will work gently by hand at the start to encourage the plants we want and planting will be steadily ongoing as we will of course be aiming to have things flowering throughout the entire season

At each visit we will clear anything away that looks messy or has 'gone over' or gone to seed. The banks are at present maintained by the Council by strimming a few times a year and once the more careful work of the first year is done this will remain the maintenance needed.

The Wild Flower Project Pilot Scheme



We will need agreement that the Council will not strim the site at all during the first year. We have a volunteer to strim as necessary who is extremely careful and sympathetic. A gentle strimmer.

Liz and I will undertake almost all of the work for the first year and yes there are others who are willing to help (though I would say its important that it's Liz and me to start off. We have made our plan and want to be the ones to carry it out). Yes we could pull in other help if needed as there is much local support.

We are also drawing up a good list of locals who are willing to volunteer some time hand-weeding our road edges to present to the Council on our anti-pesticide drive... great response!

We would see long-term maintenance as being a continuation of the same few strims that the Council does now.

I haven't estimated the cost of a sign. We'd like to do something a bit artistic and have it include a list of plants to look out for but we won't want to spend a fortune. I shall look into this when I have a bit more time if thats ok. Hopefully come up with an easily affordable way to get something nice done. Liz and I would also like to be the ones to design the sign!

Also we could do a bit of 'crowd-funding' on our anti-pesticide page for the cost of the sign.

Ione Harris and Liz Passmore



AGM report Tuesday 21st November 2017



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.

AGM photography Alan Jones

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The Fish Weir project

This year 2018 will be the year of The Fish Weir project, something we have had on the backburner for a while awaiting the necessary permissions.

Bob Cramp