

Watchet Conservation Matters

Promoting, Conserving & Improving
Our Physical & Natural Environment

Issue 62 January/February 2019

From the Chairman



Vindolanda near Hadrian's Wall.



Dear Members,
Compliments of the Season.

I trust you have all had a very enjoyable Christmas and have been able to indulge and take advantage of some of the wonderful activities available in Watchet during the festive period.

As we welcome in the New Year, we are confronted by the most challenging months of the year, January and February, dark, wet, cold, windy and miserable. I always find February the most depressing of all, when will it ever end, and then quite suddenly it is spring. It's all over. It is safe to come out of hibernation.

What do we hope for in Watchet in 2019, let us hope our hard working Town Council is successful in their endeavours to secure the long term futures of both the bookshop and library for the town, let us also hope the the Onions secure the funding to realise the East Quay project and wouldn't it be wonderful if a way could be found to remove the silt from the harbour and prevent it from returning, in other words restoring to Watchet a viable Marina.

I hope your New Year resolutions include renewing your memberships to the WCS, it would be a good opportunity to do so at our first Open meeting on Tuesday the 15th January at 7.30pm at the Methodist Schoolrooms, Harbour Road.

The talk is "An Introduction to Fungi" by Peter Baker, an illustrated talk with a focus on local species found on the Quantocks. I hope to see you there.

I wish you a Happy and Healthy New Year.



Bob Cramp

Milestones

To see the countryside, whatever the weather, many of us drive for miles and miles to view, photograph or even video record what attracts us. Why should we bother with maps and signposts? We can use Sat Nav to show us the way and tell us how much further we have to go. Even without a sat.nav, sign after sign after sign on a motorway can show us directions and distances as we speed on our regulated way.

In Britain before 1939 there were many more milestones than today, when you may walk, cycle or drive a very long way before you see even one. Today around 9,000 remain, (some of cast iron) after many more were removed along with signposts, to baffle possible invaders, and many were lost and never replaced after the second World War.

Go back to pre-Roman times in our country and you would see no milestones at all. We can thank the Romans not only for building the muddy, rough and narrow tracks into straight and safe roads, but also for measuring many of them in 'mille'. The mille was measured as 1000 military double paces (it must have been an average!) and every 1000 paces was marked on a cylindrical stone with the number of mille, the word being Latin for 1,000. This also applied in other parts of the Roman Empire, where the mille counted the number of mille from Rome.

This Roman mille turns out to be 1618 present-day yards compared with today's Statute Mile of 1760 yards, which was introduced in 1593. Local variants on the statute mile existed until well into the 19th century, and in Yorkshire a 'long mile' could be as long as 2,600 yards!

One authentic Roman milestone is in the museum at Lincoln, and another can be seen in the Norman church at Wroxeter. The 'London Stone' in the wall of St. Swithin's Church in Cannon Street in London, is alleged to be Roman and to be the marker from which all distances were measured. The accuracy of such measurements is doubtful, as witness the Red Lion Hotel at Atherstone in Warwickshire, where the mileages to London, Lincoln and Liverpool are all marked on the milestone as 100, whereas the true mileages are 102, under 70 and over 100 respectively.

Incidentally in Georgian times there was a decree that the King must not travel more than 50 miles away from London without a Minister. This annoyed royalty so much that although the mileage from London to Brighton was actually 51 and 3/4, every milestone showed it as 'under 50 miles'.

Very few Roman milestones exist in situ: one, very plain, is at Vindolanda close to Hadrian's Wall and believed to be 2,000 years old. One Roman mile away to the west of it is a broken example, while another near Sedburgh is believed to be Roman. Apparently local attempts to



conserve it were carved in stone in 1836. A few such stones are now in museums and there may be others lying in the undergrowth as yet unrecognised.

The Romans are famous for road-building, but after they left Britain in the 5th century their roads were not repaired and declined into narrow, uneven and muddy tracks with milestones becoming meaningless as the roads were used less and less. Much later King Charles II became interested in the road network and supported cartographer

John Ogilby's proposal to map and measure the nation's roads. This began in the early 1670s. Ogilby's maps were the first to use the new Statute Mile, and were the result of his team using a wheel dimensurator. This original device, with its 'finely engineered design' could record 10 Statute Miles in just one revolution, and was pictured in a cartouche on pages in his first atlas, published in 1675. His maps reflect Roman roads, and were well-used in all aspects of travel. Also part of his work was the noting of existing milestones,



from 1840 a universal postal charge which depended on weight, not mileage.

The roads in Ogilby's time were still in poor condition, and travellers often complained about the neglected and often dangerous state of them. Acts of Parliament were eventually passed to create a management system to improve them. Important roads were gated and tolls charged for using them: the funds raised were managed by local trustees who used the funds for maintenance and improvement. These Trusts were established from 1663, when the first Turnpike Trust was set up in Lincolnshire. The gates had a spiked barrier along the top which was only opened when the toll fee was paid... Hence the terms 'turnpike' and 'toll road'.

Travel by road increased, mail-coaches ran to set times, and passengers enjoyed coach journeys to more destinations. Local communities and also individuals raised pillars inscribed with information for travellers. The need for guidance sometimes led to villagers being beset with enquiries: this annoyance caused Thomas Cockshott of Tadcaster, workman, to raise a stone at his door inscribed 'To Leeds, 14 mils'. There are three 'one mile' stones on roads out of Aberystwyth, nowadays known as the A487, the A44 and the A4120. These have information, also giving the distance to 6 or more other towns. Some newer milestones show fractions of miles as a decimal: others, much older, have Roman numerals.

although the funds available did not cover placing new ones. However with his work the Statute Mile became accepted and widely acknowledged by travellers. The accuracy of his measurements over the 100 major routes for which he was funded (though he actually surveyed many more) led to postal charges being accounted per mile. Eventually, in Britain there was



the early days of toll roads the vehicles travelled slowly, and milestones parallel to the road were easy to read, but as speeds increased the stones were angled for better visibility.

With the advent of metal castings, old weathered stones were replaced by metal plates. Some of these had a sloping triangular top where information could be shown, and some Yorkshire turnpikes had the road's name inscribed on it. There are various styles of milestone in areas where a particular road-builder used his own distinctive design: Thomas Telford for example used a classical flat design alongside the road he built to Holyhead.

If you want to find examples not too far from home, look along the B3170 road to Taunton, where there is a series marked with eighths of a mile. Some others are distinctive County plates, which you can see on the B3130 near Tickenham. In the U.K. some of the oldest (apart from Roman) were along the 16 mile long road from Cambridge to the village of Barkway. All 16 stones, erected in 1731, were paid for by local worthies; some replaced older stones considered 'insignificant' designs. One of these replacements bore the crest of Trinity Hall, Cambridge, in memory of that college's don who had funded it.

Shapes of the milestones varied from place to place, as did the materials they were made from: their frequency also varied. From 1740 onwards the Turnpike Trusts were encouraged to set up a milestone at every mile, and in 1766 this became compulsory. The early milestones were usually square or cylindrical, though tombstone shapes were also seen in

Later, more care was given officially to the maintenance of milestones, and it was not until the General Turnpike Act in 1766 that their provision and preservation was compulsory.



Milestones

They were valued more in Victorian times, and later, when bicycle races were popular and the milestones became used as start and finishing points. Beware, however, of thinking that the Statute Mile in the U.K. is the only measure of distance! Although the Statute Mile is still the English Ordinary Mile of 1,760 yards, the 'Wayfarer's Book', published in 1940, states that the English Geographical Mile is 2,096 yards, the Admiralty Mile is 2,027 yards and the Nautical Mile is 2026 yards.

Confusion reigns as I write this! Nautical Miles are fine, but the other two mentioned above sound like oddities...

Are they still used?

Valerie Ward



Report on the Watchet Conservation Society AGM



Report on the Watchet Conservation Society AGM held on Tuesday 20th November 2018

The Society held its Annual General meeting at the Phoenix Centre on Tuesday evening, November 20th. Chairman Bob Cramp welcomed members and friends, and declared that a quorum was present of members eligible to vote.

The minutes of the 2017 A.G.M. were circulated, and Mervyn Brown proposed they be accepted. Ian Barrass seconded this, the Minutes were accepted nem. con. as a true record and Bob Cramp signed them.

Bob Cramp then reported that the Stoates Mill and Turner interpretation board projects had been completed, and the

West Street wild flower project has the Society's ongoing support. After adverse weather the flowers are recovering and will look good in the seasons to come. The Mineral Line Flora and Fauna book was completed and printed and proving a great success.

Six open meetings were held during the year, with speakers on diverse subject of interest. In September "Memories of Watchet" drew a very large audience.

Bob, as Chairman, thanked Jason Robinson especially for his expertise and help in the 6 issues this year of "Conservation Matters". He also thanked the 'unsung heroes' who had worked very hard in planting and tending the flower border by the railway and elsewhere in the town.



Report on the Watchet Conservation Society AGM

Treasurer Ann Hill reported that income this year was a little less than in 2017, but a grant had been gratefully received from the Community Bookshop. The current bank balance stood at £3,573.00, but with some outstanding payments. Standing in for Andrew Harrison as Membership Secretary, Ann said that the Society had 73 subscribing members: it is hoped to enable payment of membership subscriptions electronically next year. Hard copies of "Conservation Matters", if ordered regularly, would cost £9.00 per year. At this point Paul Upton suggested keeping an archive collection of every copy of this beautifully produced magazine, which was welcomed by the meeting.

Andrew Harrison had been unable to attend this year's A.G.M. but he had said that since he had resigned as Membership Secretary at last year's A.G.M. he now had little contact with the Society's activities.

Bob Cramp thanked Case Officer Phil Gannon for his help in investigating particular special cases of planning infringements and requirements.

An election, en bloc, of the Society's Committee was then held, with Bob Cramp as Chairman, acting Secretary and Newsletter Editor, Ann Hill as Treasurer and acting Membership Secretary, Phil Gannon as Case Officer, Valerie Ward as Minutes Secretary and Press Contact: other Committee members were as follows: Molly Quint, Nick Cotton, Jason Robinson, Mervyn Brown, Lucy Shaw and Rob Hutchings.

The business of the A.G.M. completed, Dave Milton (Watchet's Town Crier) auctioned some full colour framed photographs taken by Bob Cramp, and David Simpson-Scott, a black and white framed photograph of H.M.S. Fox and a painting by Nick Cotton of Watchet Station. After this, when bidding was very competitive, a selection of donated prizes were raffled, and David entertained with a selection of songs from those recorded on his recently produced CD "Songs from the Bellman". In several of these he was accompanied on guitar by a new talent in Watchet, Kevin Bown.

David recalled the re-enactment three years ago, in Watchet, of a Viking funeral, when a 10 foot long boat carrying cremated ashes was set alight, on a memorably calm sea, to sail until fire and water took her out of sights. From that event came David's own composition "Saying Goodbye to the Longship". He closed in a thoughtful mood with "Row on Row on, Another Day" and "Crossing the Bar", after which refreshments were served to all. Thanks to the Committee and the Phoenix Centre for their hospitality.

Valerie Ward

My Grandfather's Legacy

My Grandfather's Legacy

Amongst my earliest and heartfelt memories is the time I spent walking the woods and hedgerows with my grandfather in rural Gloucestershire. He was a true countryman, a keen horseman, a fisherman and a student of nature. His knowledge was extensive and, in his gentle way, was anxious to impart as much knowledge as possible to the little mite toddling by his side. He could identify every bird song, locate a nest with ease, show me a badger's path, pick and chew on a leaf from the hedgerow, identify fungi and name wildflowers. I retain if somewhat hazy memories of our time together but one image stands out in its delightful simplicity as clearly as yesterday. In the warm sunshine, we sat idly on a grass bank amidst a generous collection of wild strawberries, the first I had seen. Grandfather encouraged me to pick as many as I could and place them on a large leaf he had prepared for the purpose and we sat in silence eating what, as I remember, was the sweetest fruit I had ever tasted.

To this very day, I have in my tiny garden an area set aside for these wonderful plants and when in season, the first strawberry transports me back to my early childhood and my grandfather in the most magical way. He would be dismayed I'm sure at how much of our countryside has disappeared from his earliest childhood and the once common sights and sounds that he would have taken for granted are now a rarity and we have to seek them out on

protected marshes and woodlands. The fields and meadows that were a mass of wildflowers buttercups, poppies and the beautiful rich cornflowers amongst many others are now a thing of the distant past, but there are some encouraging signs as some sympathetic farmers have recently given us the treat of revisiting and planting wildflower meadows, creating a this landscape of a previous age for new generations to enjoy. With the loss of 90% of our hedgerows since my grandfather's day, it is not difficult to realise the impact that will have had on our bird and animal population and it is well documented. We have lost many of our ponds thus reducing the once common sight of newts, toads and frogs that were so prevalent when I was a child. The conservation and preservation of natural habitat is constantly under threat with our insatiable need to build more housing estates as our population soars and our indigenous bird and animal population declines. It is easy to feel helpless when faced with this onslaught and think there is nothing one can do to stem the flow but we can make a difference if we have even the smallest garden.

My garden abuts the central car park and is very small. From there, you may have seen a grapevine cascading from the wall which has been with me for many years and, with perfect growing weather, produces a bumper crop and encourages my noisiest and naughtiest visitors, the insatiable starlings. Interestingly, for several weeks there was just a single starling and of course, the obvious name





My Grandfather's Legacy

for this beautiful bird was Joseph. It wasn't long however before he was joined by his rather coarse and loud family members..Despite its modest size, I have given my little garden over to creating a micro habitat, planting buddleia and other shrubs that attract butterflies and I have not been disappointed with a variety of different types - Peacock, Brimstone, Red Admiral, Meadow Brown, Tortoiseshell and of course the Cabbage White amongst others and also the Burnet Moth which seems to come every year, but the most exciting visitor which has given me such delight is the most curious of creatures, the Hummingbird Hawk-Moth. It is probably thirty years since I have seen this incredible animal and it is difficult to describe my childish joy to find it feeding on my buddleia.

My daughter, about five years ago, gave me a bug box for Christmas, a circular log filled with hollow bamboo shoots which hangs on the wall. The first year sheltered nothing but a spider, but in the second year, I was introduced to the leaf cutter bee, an ingenious insect which gave its presence away by the perfectly cuts semicircles in my iceberg rose leaves. Careful scrutiny of the bug box showed the bees busily stuffing the cut leaves into the bamboo holes and research told me that the bee would lay an egg along with lots of pollen.

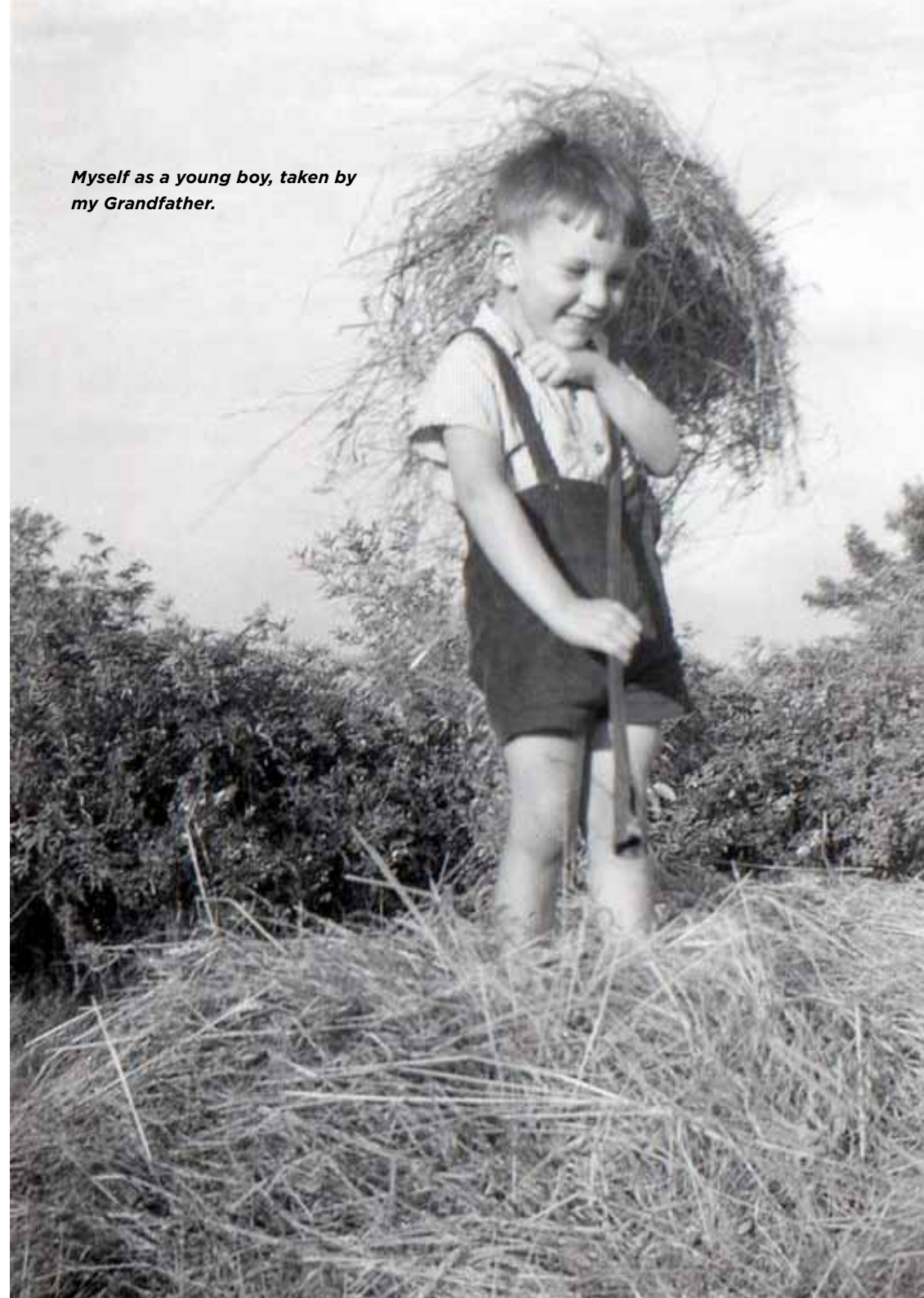
The emerging pupa would use this as sustenance and as far as I could see, each hole would contain four or more potential bees... And indeed the following summer a good number emerged. The honey bee

also visits as does the white-bottomed and orange-bottomed bee and I have allowed the growth of woundwort and the maligned ragwort to encourage them.

I have Bertie the blackbird to thank for reawakening my latent interest in our natural wildlife as, some years ago, he was ailing and had found his way to my garden. I decided to do my best for him without thinking there would be much chance of success, but astonishingly he made a complete recovery and soon attracted a mate. For four seasons he was with me and remarkably produced no less than thirty-four fledglings over that period, all of which (a few reluctantly), left the garden to take their chances. It was rather sad when I realised that Bertie had succumbed to what I assumed old age... The end of an era. Remarkably in just two weeks, Bertie II took his place and, as I write this, is feeding on his favourite food of mealworms. Bertie was responsible for the introduction of a feeding station and a rather grand bird table built by a friend and now I have daily visits from a noisy and enthusiastic flock of sparrows, collard doves, starlings, jackdaws and the occasional visit from a blue tit and a wren. Since the revamp of the Co-Op and the introduction of some rather bright lights that appear at 6 o'clock, I have been serenaded with his beautiful song by the garden Robin, some considerable time before sun-up.

While on the subject of robins, inspired by Dave Simpson-Scott's 'A year-long look at wildlife and plants along the Mineral line*', I have taken the opportunity to walk the line

Myself as a young boy, taken by my Grandfather.





My Grandfather's Legacy

daily and was surprised when sitting on a bench to see half a dozen robins within a few feet of me, most unusual as they are so territorial. The explanation revealed itself the following day when I encountered a gentleman with his border collie and a bag of bird seed. He comes every day to feed them at the same spot and, standing back, I watched the frantic coming and going of the robins enjoying their daily treat.

My little patch is well-managed chaos, with a proliferation of ivy which I carefully manage. This allows cover throughout the winter but also harbours a multitude of insects and spiders, providing a constant supply of food. The ivy flowers are late to produce fruit, another valuable source. The small pond, with constant running water and fitted with a bird Jacuzzi, gives a lot of entertainment for both the birds and myself and at the borders, the autumn leaves have been left to decay and will produce additional sustenance for the spring. It would be easy for me to ramble on about the joy my little garden brings, but there is a point to my writing this and it is that we all have the opportunity to support our birds and wildlife and relish the joy that they can give us by managing our gardens carefully and considering the wildlife as much as our prize blooms. Introducing a pond, perhaps not for goldfish but more for our endangered amphibians and considering plants that will encourage bees and butterflies, could make a real impact if enough people take this course.

I have a lot to thank my grandfather for introducing me to what the Somerset naturalist called 'Simple Delights'.

Nick Cotton

**'A year-long look at wildlife and plants along the Mineral Line' is written by Dave Simpson-Scott and is available for £5.00. Proceeds go to the WCS.*

Watchet Conservation Matters is published six times a year. If you would like to contribute news or an article, please contact our acting secretary Bob Cramp on: bob2cramp@gmail.com

Members of the Watchet Conservation Society receive this bi-monthly newsletter via email for free, or a printed copy for only £1.50 each. If you are not a member and have enjoyed reading this publication, come and join us to help us conserve our physical and natural environment. All of our committee members would be delighted to welcome you.

Membership (per annum):

£6.00 (single membership)

£10.00 (couple membership)

Printed copy of Newsletter:

£1.50 each (£9.00 per annum)

£2.00 each (ad hoc single purchases)

Both (per annum):

£15.00 (single membership, 1 x newsletter)

£19.00 (couple membership, 1 x newsletter)

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West Pier

Climb a few steps, scan around.

The incoming tide spreading over rocks, falling back time and again surging over pebbles and ammonites not yet found.

Fishing boats out on the high tide—expecting a good catch.

Scan around 1869 clearly inscribed in the West Pier wall. So, what happened then?

It was the year R. D. Blackmore published Lorna Doone—was it not!

Hilda Cornish