



# Watchet Conservation Matters

Promoting, Conserving & Improving  
Our Physical & Natural Environment

Issue 73 September/October 2021

## From the Chairman



To All Members,  
Definitely, definitely, my last appearance  
as JMW Turner.

Watchet has been slowly recovering  
after a difficult period. The Sunday and  
Wednesday markets have been running  
since April and businesses have thankfully  
been returning to normal, with the proviso  
of the wearing of face masks.

There have been some promising  
developments since I last wrestled with  
writing the Chairman's message in March.  
Chief amongst those have been the arrival  
of Cardiff Marine and the departure of Tim  
Taylor as operators of the Marina. From  
the moment of their arrival on April 1st,  
there was a hive of activity: upgrading the

harbour furniture before the water injection  
dredger CMS 'Innovation' arrived in the third  
week and set to work to clear out the silt  
which has increasingly plagued the Marina,  
preventing its full use. The results are there  
for all to see: less mud, more water, and  
the restoration of the gate. They plan to  
finish by the middle of August, giving us a  
marina with 180 berths. This has coincided  
with the 20th Anniversary of the opening  
of the Marina which was celebrated on the  
weekend of the 24th-25th July.

What a tremendous boost to the economy and  
life of Watchet! There is a BCYA Coast Rally  
being held on the Bank Holiday weekend.

Watchet Summertime is taking place, albeit  
in a reduced format. The Music Festival is  
going ahead, and the Community Cinema  
is reopening; let us hope there are no more  
Covid setbacks. On September 3rd the East  
Quay building will be officially opened.

We (WCS) are planning to hold an open  
meeting on September 21st, the speaker is  
Julian Orbach, the well-known architectural  
historian, his subject is "Nikolaus Pevsner, his  
work, his legacy and his travels in Somerset".

I realise this newsletter is again late, but I  
hope you will consider it worth waiting for.  
The main article is another fine piece by  
Mike Quint entitled "Here Were Dragons".

"The Wild Flower Garden" recalls my first  
crisis when I became WCS chairman in 2017.  
We had to negotiate a licence from the  
WTC to allow a Wild Flower Garden to be  
created in the West Street Car Park. It gives

ad huc ppa regione Reverendissimū: ad sua ipse iuncta cu cetera mu-  
rit. 7 ibi multas uirtutes fecit q̄s enūmare aliq̄s n̄ potest. Et dedit  
illi x̄p̄e altare honorificabile de excelso. cui nemo intelligebat co-  
lorē. Et p̄ea ad labrīna annē uenit ut nauigaret. 7 misit altare in  
mare: q̄d 7 p̄cedebat i d̄s uolebat illū uenire. Inuitus r̄p̄onb;: Caro.  
7 Arthur. regnabant multa p̄c̄a habitantes in Dinuathoy. Et  
uenit Arthur circūiens ut inueniret serpentē ualidissimū ingentē  
tribile. q̄ uastabat x̄m. partes agri. Carrū. Et uenit Carantoc 7 salu-  
tauit Arthurū q̄ gaudens accep̄ b̄ndictionē ab illo. Et interrogauit  
Carantoc Arthurū utrū audiss; ubi applicuiss; altare suū. Et  
Arthur respondit. Si habueris p̄ciū. nunciabo t̄. Et ille dix̄. Qd̄  
p̄ciū postulas; Ille respond̄. Ut deducas serpentē q̄ in p̄p̄e d̄. t̄.  
si seruis d̄i es: ut uideam; Tunc beat̄ Carantoc p̄uixit 7 orauit  
addm̄. Et ilico uenit serpens cū sonitu magno: q̄si uiculus ad  
matrē current. Indinamq; caput suū an̄ seruū d̄i. q̄si seruus  
obediens d̄no suo: humil̄ corde. 7 lenis oculis. Et dedit stolā suā leḡ  
collū ei: 7 dedux̄ illū q̄si agnū. nec exaltauit pen̄as neq; ungias.  
Et erat collū ipsi q̄si collū tauri septē annor; qd̄ uix potat stola  
circūire. Deū pr̄erit una adarec; 7 salutauerit Catonē: 7 bene  
suscepta s̄ ab eo. Et dix̄ illū serpentē in media aula: 7 cibauit illū  
corā poplō. 7 conati s̄ occidē illū. Non reliq̄t cū occidi. q̄a dix̄ qd̄  
exūbo dei uaniss;. ut d̄cleret peccatores q̄ in caritū erāt. Et ut osten-  
deret uirtutē d̄i p̄illū: 7 p̄ea p̄r̄t̄ ex̄t̄ potat̄ d̄i. 7 Carantoc dissol-  
uit illū. 7 impauit illi ut discedens ueniret nocte. nec reuēret̄  
amplē. Et exiuit: hesitq; an̄ sic d̄i ordinatio d̄i. Et accep̄ algues:  
qd̄ cogitauerat Arthur in mensam fac̄. s; qd̄ apponebat sup̄  
illā. iactabat in longinq;. Et postulauit Rex ab illo ut reciper̄

Carrū infempituo Graphyo. 7 p̄ea edificauit eccliam ibi. P̄ea uenit  
uox illi dec̄do ut mitter̄ altare in mare. Deū misit Catonē Arthur.  
ut interrogaret de altari. 7 nunciatū ē. illis. qd̄ in ostiū Guellit  
appul̄at. Et dix̄ Rex. s̄m̄ date illi. p̄c̄a aḡ ubi altare inuen-  
tū ē. P̄ea uenit Carantoc 7 edificauit ibi eccliam. 7 uocata ē. ciuitas  
Carroc. Venit autē uox illi dec̄do 7 dix̄. ut in griliū p̄geret: 7 relin-



## From the Chairman



**Covid Sunset**

me no little pleasure to see it still thriving, so please read "The Wild Flower Garden". Early in March the WCS was able to provide funds for some school computers, read "Knights Templar" to find out more. "Cleeve Hill" gives an account of the continuing efforts WCS to prevent the development.

"East Quay" is a personal view by Nick Cotton and there is an update from "Watchet Hedgehogs" who are going from strength to strength. The "Pleasure Ground" is an update on all the new developments up there, and "Millmaster Clock" recounts how a clock from the paper mill has found a home in the Boat Museum. "The Saga of the Footpath" details WCS efforts to ensure footpath safety on the Coastal Path. Lastly another wonderful poem from Deanna Payne, "Ave Mudrina"

Many of you will be aware that the Wild Flower Project suffered some damage perpetrated, almost certainly, by a single individual. This mindless act of vandalism has caused universal condemnation. The volunteers Liz and Ione have made the most of this experimental project and it has proved to be a joy and inspiration to so many as it has developed. Liz and Ione have decided to call it a day and the WCS are very grateful to have been part of their efforts and it is with some sadness that we say goodbye to them. The Society is anxious that this project continues, but will need new volunteers to take it on. I hope that someone comes forward to carry it on and they will receive the support of the WCS and the WTC. Liz will be on hand to offer advice on the procedure. It would be a shame if this little area of Watchet didn't continue to bring pleasure for everyone in the future.

## From the Chairman

A bumper edition, I hope you enjoy it. This will probably be the last newsletter for some time, and it is unlikely to appear again in its present form. Jason Robinson devised this format and has been responsible for the layout, design and publishing of every issue since No.39 March/April 2015, (this present one is No.73). Jason is planning to return to Lancashire shortly, we will be unlikely to be able to replace him. We are very grateful for his contribution; he will be sorely missed; we wish him well.

I became WCS Chairman at the AGM in November 2017, the Secretary and newsletter editor Jan Simpson Scott resigned, early in 2018. I foolishly agreed to cover both posts temporally until the AGM in 2018; expecting members to come forward to fill the posts. My second mistake was not putting my foot down then. As secretary I had to deal with a lot of correspondence including letters to planning officers, support for grant applications, as well as organising committee meetings, circulating agendas, minutes, preparing publicity for open meetings etc. That is without the additional tyranny of producing the newsletter to be circulated before the open meetings.

For someone who types with two fingers, these were very time consuming and unenjoyable duties. I have at every opportunity appealed for some help, and for members to join the committee with a view to taking office - all to no avail. I have to say being the Chairman of the Conservation Society has been a privilege, and some of the things we have achieved make me proud.

There appears to be a great reluctance for recent retirees and people moving to Watchet to want to get involved. The Conservation Society is not the only group or society finding difficulty in replacing long-standing officers.

There is no point in carrying on kicking the can down the road, I originally resigned (for health reasons) as WCS Chairman giving six months' notice at the AGM in 2019. Unfortunately, the Treasurer resigned at the same time and the accounts were unresolved and unaudited. I had to take on that role as well. No one on the committee really took my resignation seriously.

Covid and lockdown happened, and I have just had to carry on, but no more... no more newsletters and my resignation as Chairman will take effect very shortly. I need open heart surgery and I am on an eight-month waiting list. I have no energy. The good news is that I have had help sorting out the accounts, and Lucy Corlett Shaw is now the Treasurer. Her sister Sarah is taking on the role of Secretary.

So, we need a changing of the guard: a Designer, someone with literary leanings to take over the Newsletter, and a new WCS Chairman. Not a lot to ask. Come on Watchet, Your Conservation Society Needs You!

Please contact me, or any committee member.

**Bob Cramp**







**Kwinty—Hobby Horse**

### Here Were Dragons (and a Young King Arthur)!

Watchet and its vicinity have a rich association with historical dragons, both mythical and real. The former abounds within local religious myths, folk tales and churches, while the latter take the form of the fossilised remains of ichthyosaurs and plesiosaurs, which continue to be discovered in the Jurassic rocks of the beaches and cliffs of the West Somerset Coast.

The most interesting local religious dragon myth is that of the Welsh Christian missionary St Carantoc (also known as Carannog), who visited the area in the 6th century. According to his two medieval hagiographies, or vitae, written in the 12th century, he followed his floating stone altar

up the Bristol Channel from Llangrannog in Ceredigion (west Wales), by boat, only to lose it before he came ashore. Upon landing near Doniford (the mouth of the River Willett - Guellit), Carantoc asked the young future king, Arthur (who lived at nearby Dunster - Dindrarthou - with Cato, the Duke of Cornwall), if he'd seen the altar. He replied that he had, and that Carantoc could have it back if he got rid of a dragon that had been terrorising the neighbourhood. Carantoc dealt with the dragon by taming it, rather than killing it, whereupon Arthur returned the altar, and donated land at Carhampton - Carrum/ Carron, where Carantoc built a monastery, before leaving for Ireland.

The relevant part of the original manuscript of Carantoc's Vita A, dating from the 12th century,

describes this period of his life as follows (BM MS Cotton Vespasian A XIV - the relevant part lies between the two red arrows):

For those readers not familiar with 900 year old Latin(!), the above excerpt was translated by W J Rees, in 1853, in his "Lives of the Cambro British Saints", as follows:

*"And afterwards he came again to his own country, Ceredigion, to his cave, with many clergymen, and there performed many miracles, which no one can enumerate. And Christ gave him an honourable altar from on high, the colour of which no person could comprehend; and after wards when he came to the Severn to sail over it, he cast the altar into the sea, and it went before him where God wished him to go. In those times, Cato and Arthur lived in that country, dwelling in Dindrarthou; and Arthur went about that he might find out a very powerful, large, and terrible serpent, which laid waste twelve parts of the land Carrum; and Carannog came, and saluted Arthur, who rejoicing, received his blessing from him. And Carannog asked Arthur whether he had heard where his altar had landed; and Arthur answered, "If I shall be paid for it, I will tell thee," and he said, "What dost thou require to be done?" He answered, "That thou shouldst lead the serpent that is near thee, and we shall see whether thou art a servant of God." Then the blessed Carannog went and prayed to the Lord, and immediately the serpent came with a great noise, running as a calf to its dam. And it bowed its head to the servant of God, as an obedient servant to its master, with an humble heart, and downcast eyes. And he put his robe about*

*its neck, and led it as a lamb, and it did not raise its wings or claws; and its neck was as that of a bull seven years old, so that the robe could scarcely go round it. Then they went together to the castle, that they might salute Cato; and they were well received by him. And he brought the serpent to the middle of the hall, that he might feed it before the people; and they endeavoured to kill it, but he would not let them, because he said that it came by the word of God to destroy the sinners, who were in Carrum; and for him to show the power of God by it. And afterwards he went without the gate of the castle, and loosed it, and in its departing, he commanded that it should hurt no one, nor return any more; and it injured none as God had commanded.*

*And the altar being received, Arthur intended to make it a table, but whatever was put thereon, was thrown off to some distance. And the king requested that he would receive Carrum for ever by a written deed, and afterwards he built there a church. Subsequently a voice came to him from heaven, directing him to place his altar in the sea, and he sent Cato and Arthur that they might make enquiry respecting the altar; and it was told to them that it had landed in the port of Guellit; and the king said, "I will again give twelve parts of land, where the altar may be found." Afterwards Carannog came and built there a church, and the city was called Carron. And a voice came to him from heaven, and said that he should go into exile, and leave his family. Innumerable persons were buried in that city, and their names are not mentioned and he alone went to Ireland..."*

Although the existing church at Carhampton is dedicated to St John the Baptist, an earlier chapel, believed to have been demolished in the late 1500s, was dedicated to St Carantoc. It was observed by Leland (Henry VIII's antiquary), during his tour of England in the 1540s, who described the village as follows:

*"Carentun Parocha a Mile from Dunster Castella. Carntown is shortly spoken for Carantokes sumtyme was the Paroch Chirche."*

According to Savage's 1830 "History of the Hundred of Carhampton", the site of the demolished St Carantoc's church was in the vicinity of Eastbury Farm. In 1828 it yielded historic building remains, as well as human bones and skeletons. More recently (1993/4), an archaeological investigation of the site uncovered evidence of human occupation from the Dark Ages (sixth to tenth century A.D.), including sherds of imported Mediterranean and Gaulish pottery, as well as human remains from the same period (Hollinrake Archaeology Co-Op, date unknown).

Dragon myths associated with other saints, who have had churches dedicated to them locally, include:

- St Petroc (Timberscombe) – said to have restored life to a man who had been killed by a dragon and banished the dragon. On another occasion he cured a dragon with an eye injury.
- St Dubricious (Porlock) – apparently used a bell to scare dragons away from passing travellers.
- St Michael (Minehead) – described in

the Bible as having battled Satan, in the form of a dragon.

- St George (Bicknoller and Dunster) – famous dragon killer and patron saint of England.

Meanwhile, further afield, at Keynsham, near Bath, the land was supposedly uninhabitable due to serpents, until the arrival of St Keyne, a holy woman and hermit, in the 5th century. St Keyne turned the serpents into stone, through prayer, forming the "snakestones" which occur in the vicinity. Snakestone is a medieval term for fossilised ammonites, which remain abundant in the Keynsham area today.

Physical evidence of West Somerset's associations with mythical dragons, and particularly of their slaying comes in the form of numerous carvings, bench ends and gargoyles. These can be seen in or on local churches and other ecclesiastical buildings:

- St Decumans Church, Watchet – stone carving (showing St George and the dragon?) and exterior stone carvings of dragons
- Crowcombe Church – several bench ends showing dragons, including one with two heads
- Dunster Church – bench ends showing St Michael and St George
- Carhampton Church – three exterior stone gargoyle dragons
- Bicknoller Church – bench end and exterior niche stone carving showing St George
- Cleeve Abbey – wall painting showing St Margaret of Antioch with two dragons



**St Decuman's Church—Medieval Stone Carving**



**Crowcombe Church—16th Century Bench End**



**Cleeve Abbey—15th Century Wall Painting**





## Here Were Dragons (and a Young King Arthur)!



### ***Duria Antiquior***

Mentions of dragons can also be found in local non-Christian legends and folk tales. One example is the Great Worm (Gurt Vurm) of Shervage Wood, near Holford, which was apparently cut in half by a woodcutter. Both halves ran away, with one half ending up in at the Dragon's Cross, Bilbrook, and the other in Kingston St Mary. Another is the Minehead "Sailors Horse" - an effigy of a dragon-like creature which parades around Minehead and Dunster during the first three days of May. The origin of the tradition is unknown, although it could be linked to an anecdotal tale involving a boat disguised as a dragon to scare off Viking raiders, or the St Carantoc dragon myth described above. Kwinty's depiction of Minehead's Sailors Horse is at the start of the article

A more modern story, probably from the last century, features a large fire-breathing dragon which supposedly lived beneath Putsham Hill, near Kilve. Known as Blue Ben, he would apparently need to cool off in the sea and, on one such occasion, got stuck in the mud, and drowned. A large dragon-like skull, discovered at Street during the 19th century, was said to have been Blue Ben's. It was, in fact, that of a fossilised ichthyosaur. Further information about much of the above can be found in Brian Wright's excellent 2002 book, "Somerset Dragons". Turning now to Watchet's fossils, Henry de la Beche's famous lithograph, depicting Ancient Dorsetshire (*Duria Antiquior*), 200 million years ago, could just as easily be an illustration of the seas around Watchet, at that time. Ichthyosaurs, plesiosaurs

## Here Were Dragons (and a Young King Arthur)!



and ammonites, to name just three of the extinct organisms included in the picture, all feature within the local fossil record. Their remains, including whole specimens, continue to be found in the Liassic (Lower Jurassic) rocks exposed on the local beaches. Examples can be seen in Watchet's Market House Museum.

The earliest known fossil ichthyosaur from Watchet was discovered in 1818, during the so-called "heroic age" of British geology. This was not long after Mary Anning, just 12 years old, had caused such a sensation with her first major finds of ichthyosaur fossils in Lyme Regis around 1811/12.

Popularly referred to as "sea dragons" (along with plesiosaurs), ichthyosaurs were at first thought to have been the remains of crocodiles, lizards or fish. They are, in fact, the fossilised remains of extinct, air-breathing, dolphin-like marine reptiles. Ichthyosaurs lived from the early Triassic to the late Cretaceous (between 250 to 90 million years ago).

Ichthyosaurs are well-represented in the rocks deposited under the seas which existed at Watchet and the Somerset coast during the late Triassic and early Jurassic (204 to 194 million years ago). The specimen discovered at Watchet in 1818 was considered, at the time, to be the most perfect ever found. The finder, a Mr Morgan of Bristol, sold it to the Royal College of Surgeons, where it presumably remained until it was unfortunately lost to an air raid during World War 2. The Geological Society owns a sketch of the fossil by George

Cumberland (a Bristol-based artist, fossil collector and friend of William Blake) which is reproduced below by permission of the Geological Society of London.

The handwriting below the image reads:

*"A sketch of a Fossil Fish's skeleton in schistous stone found in 1818 at Watchet in Somersetshire near low water mark - it is about 4 foot 10 inches long, in tolerable good preservation, and appears to have had four paddles or fins of great strength and magnitude, like others of the same tribe, found formerly on the coast of Yorkshire, and of late years at Lyme in Dorsetshire - also in the blue lias near Bath. The Geological Society possesses another about the same size, but differing in the form of the teeth. Another equally small but much more perfect in point of preservation, from Lyme, is possessed by Col Birch, and Mr De La Beche of Lyme has a fourth very perfect of the same genus. This belongs to Mr Morgan of Bristol. Excepting the posterior fin it seems much to resemble the porpoise."*  
GC, 1819.



**Reproduced by permission of the Royal Geological Society**



**Ichthyosaur—Watchet Museum**

As well as providing anatomical information about the fossil, Cumberland's handwritten text constitutes a roll call of well-known fossil hunters of the time, including the Reverend Peter Hawker (owner of the famous "Hawker's Crocodile"), Henry De La Beche (who established the British Geological Survey), Colonel Birch (who auctioned off his fossil collection to provide financial support to the Annings), and the Reverend William Buckland (Oxford academic, clergyman and all-round scientific celebrity).

Buckland was known for his zoophagy (his desire to eat his way through the animal kingdom), amongst other things, his publications on coprolites (fossilised "Ichthyosaur poo" - which can also be found at Watchet), and for being the author of one of the Bridgewater Treatises, which attempted to reconcile geological discoveries with the teachings in the Bible. More locally, Buckland was the Oxford

tutor, and lifelong friend, of temperance campaigner Sir Water Calverley Trevelyan, whose country seat was at Nettlecombe, 3 miles inland from Watchet. And intriguingly, Buckland's Treatise suggests that Mary Anning visited Watchet, and found a "fossil ink bag", from a Loligo (squid), here.

Several fossilised ichthyosaurs have been discovered at Watchet, since 1818. A specimen in the Watchet Museum was apparently found at Helwell Bay in 1890, and given to the County Museum at Taunton, as part of the Blake Collection. It was presented to the Watchet Museum in July 1979, on the occasion of its first opening. A photograph is shown below.

A very complete ichthyosaur skeleton 3.3 m long and containing an embryo was collected from Doniford Bay during the 1990s. The individual, a female, was pregnant at the time of her death. This

now resides in the Lower Saxony Museum, Germany. A specimen of Ichthyosaurus conybeari found at Watchet and held in the collections of the National Museum of Wales is notable for being the only specimen of the species found in Somerset.

Turning now to the other kind of "sea dragon", the plesiosaurs, these have also been found at Watchet, but less frequently than ichthyosaurs.

The first recorded plesiosaur specimen from Watchet appears to have been part of a fossil collection belonging to Henry Ball, a local surgeon. His collection was described in the Dorset County Chronicle, in June 1840, in an apparent advertorial for Watchet, which included a mention of a "large and perfect plesiosaurus", as follows:

*"WATCHET - The little town of Watchet is so shut in from any public road, and so sheltered from view on all sides, that perhaps there is no village in Somersetshire so little known or visited, except by the sailor or the coal carrier. And yet this little place possesses an interest that must soon make it the resort of the philosopher and the man of science, and perhaps, ere long, it may become a place of attraction to the idler and the amusement seeker. It may be asserted with truth that there is no place on the British coast that abounds with more interest to the geologist than Watchet. The discoveries of Mr Ball, and his free and candid explanations of them, every one who visits him must greatly appreciate -*

*his large and perfect plesiosaurus, and his collection of fossils, are well worthy the inspection and deep attention of every inquiring mind. The "organic remains of a former world" which he has collected, most amply display his acuteness in discovering, and his perseverance in bringing to light the monsters of a world departed, and no one will see his collection without being reminded that in the world destroyed there was the same Almighty design in the creation as there is visible to every eye in the beautiful world which we now inhabit. All along the coast the geological formations are peculiarly attractive, and clearly exhibit the marked distinction between the primitive and more recently formed rocks. In the former the appearance of anything that had life is searched for in vain, whilst the latter so abounds with fossils, that the fragments of them are visible almost at every step. The property in and about Watchet has been possessed by the Wyndham family for centuries, and it was the policy of the late Earl of Egremont not to suffer a stone to be moved or a house to be built, otherwise this little spot could not have remained wanting in attraction. Now, it is understood, that the present Earl is much interested in the discoveries going on, and is desirous of furthering improvements; if so, Watchet will become in a short time a place of considerable resort during the summer months."*

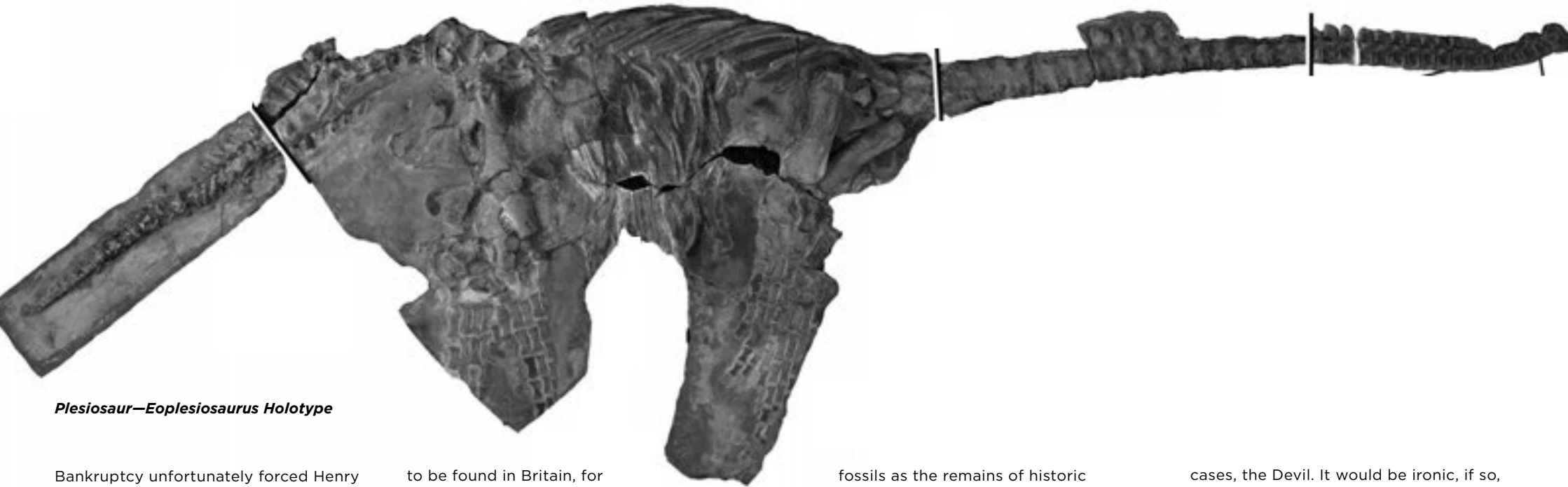
Whether Watchet has become "the resort of the philosopher and the man of science" and a "place of attraction to the idler and the amusement seeker" is a moot point!





*Plesiosaur—in situ Kilve*





***Plesiosaur—Eoplesiosaurus Holotype***

Bankruptcy unfortunately forced Henry Ball to sell his collection in 1841 and, it is thought, the plesiosaur ended up in the ownership of the Reverend David Williams, who sold it, in 1852, to the Somersetshire Archaeological and Natural History Society (SANHS). It is now held in the Museum of Somerset, on behalf of SANHS, and is of considerable importance to science, being the holotype of a separate and only recently described new genus/species - *Eoplesiosaurus antiquior* - one of the earliest plesiosaurs. A photograph adapted from the relevant scientific paper is provided below.

Back to the present, the first complete and fully articulated plesiosaur skeleton

to be found in Britain, for over 100 years, was found a few miles along the coast from Watchet, near Kilve, in 2003. Named the “Collard plesiosaur”, after the person who found it (Nick Collard), this remarkable 1.5m long specimen is now centre stage in the main hall of the Museum of Somerset, following its meticulous preparation and preservation. The photo below shows it before excavation, exposed and lying “belly-up”, with its head to the right of the picture.

Looking at the above picture, it’s not hard to imagine the early inhabitants of West Somerset, prior to any knowledge of geology and evolution, viewing exposed plesiosaur and ichthyosaur

fossils as the remains of historic dragons. Could this therefore explain the abundance of dragon myths and legends in the vicinity of Watchet? The story of Blue Ben speaks to this possibility, while that of St Keyna provides a direct link between fossils (albeit ammonites) and a Christian saint.

And did the early Christians use the existence of dragon-like fossils to provide credibility to their stories of the dragon-killing (or dragon-taming) saints, via legends such as those of St Carantoc, in order to help recruit people to their cause? This would fit with a widely held view that dragons were often used by medieval hagiographers as a metaphor for the evils of paganism and, in some

cases, the Devil. It would be ironic, if so, since these same fossils, many years later, helped to provide important scientific support to the theory of evolution, which replaced, in many people’s minds, the Biblical story of creation.

**Mike Quint**



## Wild Flower Garden



All wildflower patches look best at certain times of year and at the West St. Car Park, The Wildflower Project is at its best from the beginning of May when the Meadow Clary and Moon daisies start to flower. These are in full flood by the end of May and happy to continue flowering well into June when they are joined by many different flowers at different times: Fumitory, groundsel, and poppies to name some annuals; biennials (some self-seeding): Foxgloves, teasels and mullein; and other perennials; cowslips, scabious and selfheal. Shrubby specimens include Rose and Restharrow.

Last year we took on extra space. So now we have the whole of the right-hand side verge of the carpark (looking towards it). Thankfully we were joined by David Wood, another volunteer, who helped with

some sympathetic strimming. Lock down meant that Liz couldn't come to the patch for a few months, but at the crucial time Linda and Tickle Daley, Jill Newton and lone stepped in to do some vital watering, saving the lives of plants that were not fully established. These efforts led to a very floriferous Summer.

More sympathetic tidying ensued, and before the November Lockdown, Liz, lone and David, using their shears and strimmer left the plot in a state of 'Sweet disarray' rather than abandoned or bleak. The teasels and Evening primrose seed heads formed a lovely silhouette, and the notice performed the task of announcing great things to come.

This year, after a long hibernation, in early Spring, Liz did a drive by in order that

## Wild Flower Garden

she could see what was going on and write this report: PLENTY! There is a good clump of violets forming, a primrose and daisy flowering, along with celandine and fumitories and many other plants in bud. lone pointed out that a piece of land that looked like a suburban border two years ago now looks like it has been there forever.

Flowering in March: Violet. Primrose, Cowslip, Oxlip, Fumitory, Groundsel leaving it showing all promise for the summer.

We had a slow start during an exceptionally dry and cold April and then the rain did us proud in May. Since then, we have felt able to do a largely optional amount of work; some removal of plants that are too invasive and the occasional cutting back of seeded plants. The plot it seems again at its best, but with a larger variety of plants becoming established. There are some great new arrivals, and the more established plants are spreading seed about. The two areas taken on at different times are blending nicely and we are continuing to learn what will or won't work in some quite tricky weather conditions. We continue to add seed and new plantings whenever possible. We now have a variety of plants seeding about the bank naturally so things can only get better

Our intention, if we are able, is to carry on, to let things grow, to see what does well, to nurture other local natives that 'should' do well, but if they don't, probably not worry too much. This Spring and Summer we will make a list of plants as they flower and

detail the plants that were already here and the ones that we have planted. Hopefully we won't need to water but we would be glad of help if we need to water.

It's worth stopping by, not only to have a look at the flowers and admire the amazing view to the Mendips and beyond but also to stop and listen to the sparrows chattering in the Blackthorn Hedge. We hope we have gone some way to improve the local food supply for the sparrows, as they eat seed of every description.

Since the writing of this report, lone and Liz, the main volunteers of the Wild Flower Project have sadly decided that they need to give it up. lone is not well (and hasn't been all the time she has been working on it) and Liz has an increasing workload at home.

We deem it a successful pilot project, it shows with a little bit of land and thought and not much money, beauty and diversity can be easily be increased. We hope that some one will carry on with our work and other projects will follow. We are happy to advise if needed.

Thanks to WCS and WTC for enabling the project, it has been a fun journey.

### Liz and lone

### Addendum

*We are delighted that Terry Leese has agreed to take over running the Wild Flower Project, supported by WCS and WTC.*





## Knights Templar

Good Afternoon Lucy and Bob,

Thank you so very much for the kind donation of £600 which we used to secure three further chrome books which supported learning for children during the most recent lockdown and are now being used back in school.

As a school, we have been overwhelmed by the support of the local community in making donations of old laptops/devices and funding new ones which helped ensure all of our children could access the remote learning on Google Classrooms.

We are now pleased to be fully reopened again and the children are all settling back in well to the routines and enjoying being able to see their friends and teachers again in the flesh!

The devices we purchased with your donation will continue to support the children's learning here in school.

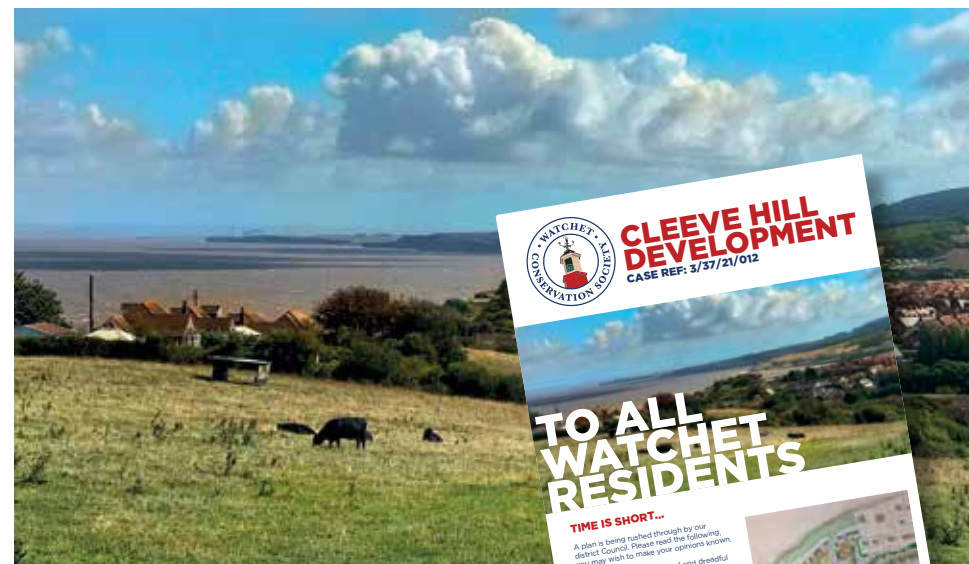
Best wishes

**Laura Weaver**

Deputy Head Teacher and SENDCo  
Knights Templar Community Church School



## Cleeve Hill



I would like to thank everyone who submitted an objection to the proposed housing development on Cleeve hill. The Conservation Society with the help of Watchet Connects volunteers, were able to distribute over 2000 explanatory leaflets, one to every household in Watchet.

Thank you to all those individuals who gave of their time. Supporters of the development were 56, suspiciously many not living in Watchet.

However the number of objections lodged by individuals and members of local organisations and societies amounted to a massive 475, hopefully sending a very clear and strong message to the planners in Taunton. Thank you once again.

**Bob Cramp**







## East Quay



I have become deeply saddened in recent times to see our community so divided. Watchet has a long tradition of working together for the benefit of the town. It never ceases to amaze me how many organisations work independently in our small community for the benefit of everyone, and often below the radar, neither requiring nor expecting any particular praise or acknowledgement, just the simple gratification that they may have 'made a difference'.

This year marks a significant milestone since the marina was built in 2001 and I'm reminded of how at the time, the majority of townsfolk opposed it. The strength of feeling was such that a group was formed to oppose it. SWAMP (Stop Watchet's Appalling Marina Project) was supported both vocally and financially by the residents of the town in an attempt to save the harbour. I remember this period very well but what is most memorable

was that there was never any real unpleasantness nor attacks on individuals. Residents accepted each other's points of view, maybe with a reluctance, but nevertheless with a patient tolerance, as was the Watchet way. The prediction that the marina would, within several years, fill with mud and silt up, sadly proved to be the case and the White Elephant predicted by so many people became a depressing reality. However, after years of neglect, the recent acquisition of the Marina by the Welsh company Cardiff Marine is proving to be a salvation. I have taken great delight in watching, from the elevated position of the Pleasure Ground, the water retained become greater, little by little, on every tide and for the first time, boats afloat when the tide is out. This development in the Marina's future has gained universal approval and everyone is in agreement... the outlook appears rosy.

## East Quay

The future of Watchet now lies with not just the Marina but perhaps principally with the Onion Collective as they attempt to mould a new identity for our town with an iconic building on the historic East Quay. This may prove to be a wonderful vision and indeed a complete reinvention of the town, turning its back on the industrial and maritime heritage and instead reinventing Watchet as a destination for the arts. It is certainly a bold experiment for a town with little artistic heritage. Much will depend on the originality of the future calendar of this enterprise, how effectively the project can engage with the public and, importantly, the Watchet residents. Having had a lifetime involved with the visual arts, working with artists, museums, public and private galleries, I know from experience that it is no easy task to capture the imagination of the public. The reality is sadly that for the vast majority, they feel that 'art' has little to offer or interest them. Interest in music and theatre and of course film generally find a larger and more appreciative audience and so there is always the fear that the people of Watchet may well choose to ignore this development and at worse, resent it, as a large number undoubtedly do at the moment.

It must be remembered that there are artists who are not on the Onion Collective payroll who are going to be investing their own money rather than accepting funding or grants in the hope that they will be part of a commercial success within this development. I think it is important that we wish them well. A print studio I find

particularly interesting and traditional papermaking from the long-established Two Rivers Company will, I'm sure, create interest, along with the Geckoella Geological themed workshop.

It might be worth considering why there have been a number of failed community projects in Watchet led by the Onion Collective. Perhaps the Pleasure Ground (Splash Point) and the 'Makers Club' might be good examples. The former, despite the initial enthusiasm, floundered and this historically important piece of land reverted to its original, neglected state, much to the dismay of many local residents. The building of the temporary Pavilion (and landscaping) was intended to engage and unite the community in a shared project. Sadly, although I personally found it interesting, it proved to be almost universally disliked and a waste of money. It did seem to have been quite successful at the beginning but once the funding ran out, so it seems did the enthusiasm. Much the same happened unfortunately with the Makers Club. These projects, based purely on outside funding, have a distinctive flaw. In the past, proposed schemes, before they could start, would require some money to be raised, perhaps with a jumble sale, a sponsored run or a whole wealth of other possible means. This meant that even if your contribution was very modest it gave you a stake in the finished project. Raising funds in this way would often mean that many people had played a part in bringing an aspiration to a conclusion. This I think is probably how Watchet has evolved into





## East Quay

a caring community, always ready to get involved in anything and anyone that they see as a benefit to the town. The East Quay building has certainly been the cause of much debate, and for many residents, it is not seen in a favourable light, with the design receiving a great deal of derision. It is certainly going to dominate not just the East Quay but the whole of the old town. The question most frequently asked is 'how does it relate to old Watchet?' Certainly concrete, that most damaging of environmental materials, seems to be much in evidence throughout the build and perhaps at odds with many of the other buildings in the town. The architectural statement this building makes may struggle to relate to the evolved building of Watchet over the centuries, or perhaps in time it may complement it? Time will tell. It will I hope be identified as a product of the 21st century and, when completed, hopefully enhance this ancient port. As I write this, we won't have long to wait to make that judgement. I remain optimistic which I fear places me in the minority. There have been many proposals for building on the East Quay, including blocks of flats that would have done nothing other than provide an income for the council. This is at least innovative. And so, Watchet looks to the future with the prospect of a revitalised marina and an art gallery built by the Onion Collective. Is this a genuine vision for the people of Watchet and its future or is Watchet nothing more than a vehicle for the dreams and personal aspirations of the Onion Collective? Regardless, my sincere wish is that the deep division

that has increasingly manifested itself in recent times can heal and that once again, Watchet might return to the community that I have cherished for most of my adult life.

**Nick Cotton**

## Watchet Hedgehogs Group



We held our first stall at the Watchet Street Fair in May, coinciding with the start of Hedgehog Awareness week. And what a success it was! Louise Dunn from Hoglets Hedgehog Rescue was there to answer any questions and to offer advice to visitors to the stall. John Thwaites brought lots of items made by men in Sheds Taunton. These included hedgehog houses, feeding stations, as well as bat, bird and bug boxes. A wide selection of the British Hedgehog Preservation Society leaflets, covering a variety of hedgehog-based subjects were available for people to take home with them. Children were able to collect a pack containing a letter from 'Spike' and pictures of hedgehogs to colour in. A big thank you to Sue Gannon and Mike and Mandy Church for helping on the stall during the day. Hoglets Hedgehog Rescue benefitted from the sale of items made and donated by supporters of the group.

Later in the week a few members of the group organised and took part in litter picks around Watchet. They retrieved discarded litter which could otherwise be a danger to wildlife, and in particular Hedgehogs. Several bags were filled with litter and disposed of. Litter picking sticks and bags were borrowed from the Information Centre.

I was interviewed by Charlie Taylor on BBC Somerset. Charlie is a hedgehog lover and was keen to have me on his show. He was particularly engaging during the interview, and made me feel quite at ease. I was able to tell listeners about Watchet Hedgehogs and give some advice. In particular, I was able to advise on how to make gardens more wildlife friendly and attractive to hedgehogs, as well as how to make hedgehog highways, allowing them to move freely from garden to garden.





## Watchet Hedgehogs Group



The group's numbers are increasing almost daily, many people join after we held the stall on the Esplanade, and after my BBC interview. We do however, seem to be attracting people who think the group is for the pet hedgehog, the African Pygmy, and so I have to tactfully tell them that we are only interested in our own native hedgehog, *Erinaceus europaeus*, and the conservation of the species.

Thanks to Geckoella Ltd, we will soon have a website with links to other societies and groups, ideas about how to make hedgehog boxes and feeding stations, and lots of other help and advice.

It is now a year since I had the idea to start this group and we are building an able team of members with different skills and abilities. We have lots of enquiries from local people and plenty of others who are willing to offer help. It has become apparent that although hedgehogs in our area are benefitting

from the group, people are also benefitting through learning, sense of purpose, making new friends, using their skills, and from the satisfaction of knowing that there is 'someone' out there who can help.

As always, if you see a hedgehog which needs help in some way, either because it is poorly, injured or out in the daytime, please contact any of the people below.

**Jane Sharp**

**Louise Dunn**

07712 673563 (Hoglets Hedgehog Rescue)

**Simon Dunn**

07552 078364 (Hoglets Hedgehog Rescue)







## Pleasure Ground



The Conservation Society is working closely with the Pleasure Ground Group. We are delighted with the enormous progress that has been achieved in in just 12 months. An area that was a considerable safety concern, the old gun emplacement, has been secured by railings protecting what had been a sheer drop to the quayside below. These railings were constructed by Watchet artist-blacksmith Ben Horrobin. As a personal gift to the town, Ben made no charge for his considerable time and expertise. The steps to the railings were installed by Ryan Nunn of Viking Construction, again at no charge. Great excitement greeted the arrival of the wonderful donation of a GWR bench. Its installation was overseen by Mark Mossman and his helpers. It was lovely to bring together a number of those involved for a 'photo opportunity'; in particular, Myra and Ian Barrett, who were kind enough to fund an Information Board to replace the one that had been

vandalised. In just a short time, the Pleasure Ground has become a regular destination for a good many people who now sit in comfort, enjoying the most spectacular view in Watchet.

This project has captured the imagination of those able to visit. it has been most gratifying how many people have been generous with their time and financial help. There have been a good number of butterflies visiting, including Meadow Browns, Ringlets, Speckled Woods, Tortoiseshell, Peacocks, Painted Ladies, Skippers, Gatekeepers, Marbled Whites, and of course, the most familiar Whites. Cinnabar moths have laid eggs on the ragwort, and their striped caterpillars are now feeding on the plants. A donation of teasel plants last year may attract visiting goldfinches, one of the most beautiful of our birds. The teasels are growing amongst the trees in the heritage orchard, and the

## Pleasure Ground



latter, since their pruning, are developing some healthy-looking apples.

The human sundial project is well underway, and it is hoped that this may be completed by the autumn, after which attention will be focused on the planting of the bower and other possible developments.

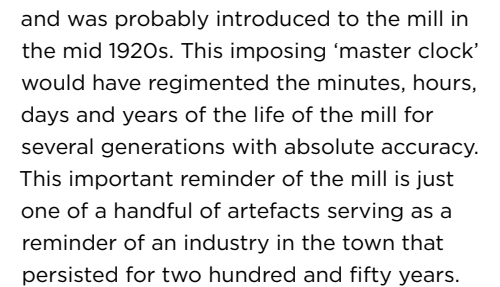
**Nick Cotton**





This Electric Clock is a poignant reminder of the Wansborough Paper Mill which was the principal employer in West Somerset for countless generations. After humble beginnings in the mid 18th century and 250 years of paper production, the Paper Mill switched off its machines for the final time in 2015.

The Paper Mill electric clock was made by a rival company that had its roots in America



**Nick Cotton**





## The Saga of the Safety of The Footpath



Our concerns about the safety of the public using the West Somerset coastal path between the Goviers Lane crossing to the steps to the Pleasure Ground started in September 2020 after Midas removed the mature trees and the earth bank which formed a natural barrier between the edge of the path and the East Quay. A very muddy path, it was nevertheless used daily by dog walkers and those using the Coastal path, an accident waiting to happen. A woman fell over and nearly slipped off the edge and almost had a very nasty accident. It seemed that neither Midas nor the Onion Collective were in any way interested or concerned about the safety of those using the footpath, nor were they prepared to accept responsibility for any potential accidents.

It seemed the OC were not holding Midas to account for the situation they created. Rather disturbingly, this laissez-faire attitude became their mantra over

the coming months. To add insult to injury, Midas erected a quite ineffective temporary fence made of electrical fittings and plastic tape.

The path was closed to the public from January 11th for "Building work relating to the East Quay development and for path improvements. It is expected to take 3 months." On 1st March, I wrote a letter to the OC seeking reassurance 'that the Coastal Path be restored to being safe for use by the general public after the damage caused by the indiscriminate removal of a number of trees by Midas which compromised the integrity of ground of the path.' Her reply contained the following phrases: "The Whips will take some time to be established on the bank.", "We are keen to not fence the path given it was historically not fenced in." and "As you will be aware the National Trust have made a move towards not fencing banks and cliffs and advising Public







## The Saga of the Safety of The Footpath



caution rather than damaging said area with posts.”

When the path was eventually opened six weeks later, my worst fears were realized; I was horrified to see large areas of the path unprotected and, with no fencing in place, it was again, an accident or accidents, waiting to happen for any toddler or dog, with a potential fall of 15-20 feet.

I contacted the OC and John Irven of WTC requesting him to do a risk assessment.

The OC replied that the bushes, trees, etc. would soon grow and that the SCC had already passed the path as safe. The WTC replied that it was outside their remit. I was staggered. Anybody could see it was lethal and I found it surprising that the safety of Watchet's citizens was not the concern of the Town Council. As a very last resort, I posted on Facebook. It had immediate effect and the path was again closed to the public.

Bearing in mind that the path had only just reopened after being closed for four months, this was not exactly what I had in mind, and I again resorted to Facebook with, admittedly, a very critical and controversial post, something I have very rarely done. However, it did the trick, the path was again reopened the same day with warning signs. Not ideal but an improvement, and a situation which I was able to monitor on my trips up to the Pleasure Ground.

Several weeks ago, on 20th July, I was walking up the path and I suddenly noticed a brand new, wonderful fence. Sanity prevails. I am grateful to whichever powers that be that have suddenly seen the light.

I have to wonder why it took three months.

**Bob Cramp**

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.

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Jason Robinson

Mervyn Brown

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Rob Hutchings

Dave Evans



### **Ave Mudrina**

For all the time I've lived here,  
We've had a muddy marina,  
Bold and brown, squelchy and thick,  
You really should have seen her.

An ancient mistress to tame the waves  
As an industrial beauty she was built  
But as time rolls on and tides come in,  
Her stomach is filled with silt

Often I have wondered,  
What secrets she is holding,  
Is she filled with long rusted bikes?  
Or something far more foreboding?

Her walls are guilded with Algae  
A cathedral to the murky waters  
Her waves a hymn of sand and grit  
Sung woefully to her daughters

Her arms reach out to embrace the ocean  
Who shows her nothing but disdain,  
And so she hides her vessels safe  
Inside and knows them each by name

For a long time the marina and  
the ocean have been unlikely foes  
But now they've begun to connect again  
Thanks to a few blokes and a hose.

They sent a jet of sea water slicing through  
her sludgy core  
And thus began the arduous task of making  
her like before

As the marine soup rose upwards  
The ocean did their chore  
The tide slid in and swept away  
What had been so stubborn before

The ocean knocked the harbour wall  
And the marina welcomed them gladly  
When all was said they both decided  
They had missed each other quite badly

So now they hold hands against the mud  
as once they did before  
Both waiting the day they can embrace  
when the mudrina is no more.

### **Deanna 'Twitch' Payne**