



# WATCHET CONSERVATION MATTERS

For conserving our built and natural environment

Issue 20

January/February 2012

## ***From our Chair, Molly Quint:***

Dear Members and Friends, thank you all so much for coming to the AGM and helping to make it such a good evening. We now have our Committee for the coming year, some new names but I am happy to say, many of last year's members continue to stand. I would like to say a huge "Thank You" to them for all the hard work and many things achieved during the past year, ending of course with the wonderful "Seascape", the



Standing room only at the AGM

triumph of David Milton, to whom Watchet and the WCS are enormously grateful. We thank you David. The New Year will bring many challenges, especially the Mineral Yard Project, so we ask you all to continue to give us the support and encouragement that we have grown used to and we promise in return to work hard for WCS and Watchet. May I wish you an exciting and enjoyable New Year and am sure it will be a memorable one.

*Yours very sincerely, Molly Q.*

## ***Forthcoming Events:***

### ***Member's Meeting: January 17<sup>th</sup> at the Methodist Schoolroom 7.30pm***

We will be looking forward to our future plans, particularly the exciting Sea Wall Project. Looking back, the highlight of the evening will be a showing of Mike Dan's lovely video of the Sculpture Garden unveiling. Paul Reynolds has some more aerial photographs of Watchet. Do please come along, to what will be an informal and fun evening.

### ***PastEvents: The Opening of The Sculpture Garden December 27<sup>th</sup>.***

#### ***"Seascape - Four Standing Stones" by David Milton***

As newsletter editor it's my job to report on the unveiling ceremony. I must say that I am struggling to find words that adequately describe what an exciting event it turned out to be. I found the whole occasion very moving; the speeches were just right, the ceremony so appropriate and what a turnout – just look at the numbers in the photograph below. To achieve this remarkable addition to Watchet's many charms, involved so many people giving so freely of their time and money. After the unveiling, the grand finale to the event was the crowning of our "Sculptor Laureate", it was fitting that Paul Upton: the project manager, performed this task.

Nick Cotton was asked if he would kindly write an account of how the concept developed and then a little about David Milton the sculptor; which follows:-



Eric Robinson describes the geology of the stones

One of Watchet Conservation Society's most ambitious projects to date reached a conclusion on 27<sup>th</sup> December 2011. The idea was conceived in 2010 when the Society's committee was discussing a plot of redundant land in Esplanade Lane, immediately behind the community bookshop and which had long since been left dormant. It was originally the site of a blacksmith, the grandfather of local resident Mervyn Parsons but it has been many years since the Lane echoed to the sound of the anvil.

With Watchet's long maritime history, it seemed a good idea to somehow celebrate our unique coastal location. It was decided that local sculptor David Milton should be approached to consider the potential of the site and he eagerly embraced the proposal to create a sculpture garden. Paul Upton took on the role of project manager, ably assisted throughout by his capable and enthusiastic cohort Ben Allen. Our redoubtable chair, Molly Quint, together with John Irven, sought permission from the local authority to make use of this derelict plot. This was granted by the West Somerset Council, along with permission from the Wyndham Estate for removal of pebbles from the beach.



David laying first stone in the rain

Funding was the next thing that required serious consideration, and Secretary Jan Simpson-Scott and other society members were particularly successful in this regard by running a bric-a-brac stall during Watchet Summertime week. Every attempt was made to keep costs to a minimum, with numerous people giving their time and expertise freely. The Community Bookshop gave a generous donation and supported the Society from the outset.

When it came time to erect the sculptures, an anxious David was assisted particularly by Chris Groves, who had the task of bringing the pieces to the site. Paul Upton and Ben Allen, once again in the thick of it, helped also by Martin Boyce, another Society member. Special mention must be made of the Sea Scouts who helped to collect stones and pebbles from the beach.

This has truly been a community project, with a multitude of individuals involved in bringing it to fruition; it's not possible to mention everyone by name, so typical of Watchet's townsfolk - generous and enthusiastic. The Society owes these people a great debt of thanks.

## David Milton - Sculptoris Laureatus – 'Standing Stones'



I remember bumping into David on West Street beach on New Year's Day, a distant figure silhouetted against an ashen grey sky, head bent, intently studying the stones beneath his feet. It was early in the morning, with both of us attempting to clear our heads of over-indulgence.

With reasonable coherence, all things considered, we discussed the make-up of the beach and his fascination with the geology and character of the ever changing beach landscape that changed with each tide. He sees a certain magic in the stones and I was enthralled by the way he held and caressed them. This was well over a decade ago. Thus began a friendship that remains to this day.

As soon as his first modest pieces arrived in the gallery, they found an immediate and appreciative audience. Since those early days, David's work has found its way into private collections throughout the British Isles and abroad. He has accepted both private and public commissions over the years and has had numerous accolades from critics and collectors alike.

David is that rare talent who works instinctively; when I first met him, he was completely unaware of any specific artistic influence and had no formal art training. Things have moved on a little since then, but his approach remains as it always was.

The ambitious group of four individual standing stones says much about Watchet and the artist. We are all familiar with the standing stones that are found throughout Britain; we can easily claim them as our earliest sculpture.

David draws his inspiration heavily from the beach, where the land meets the sea in much the same way as Barbara Hepworth was inspired by the ancient stones of Dartmoor. He includes a degree of symbolism in his work; the waxing and waning of the moon, the rising and setting sun, the ebb and flow of the tides and the ever-changing behaviour of the winds and clouds. All these elements and more can be found in his work and will fascinate and intrigue the countless thousands of those who find themselves compelled to stop and look. All four standing stones are inter-related and each complements and reacts with the other. He calls it, simply, "Seascape".

The Conservation Society and the people of Watchet are indebted to David for producing this work for the town.

*Nick Cotton January 2012*

## ***Good Design in practice***

### ***Our Restored Railway Footbridge:-***



As it was for an election address by Dudley Ward in 1906



105 years later

Watchet's thanks go to Councillor Tony Knight for all his hard work on this project; here he tells us how our smart "replacement" bridge came into being:

Saturday November 26<sup>th</sup> 2011 saw the railway footbridge dedicated, opened and brought back to unite the two sides of our wonderful town. It was over 18 months since it was deemed unsafe and closed to the public. The dangerous structure was removed early in 2011 and there were many critics in the town who told me that the bridge would never return. However, after a great deal of debating the West Somerset Council agreed to fund the basic replacement. I was keen to see the return of some reproduction Victorian lamps to enhance the structure and undertook to raise the required extra cash. I remembered the vertical bar guards from my younger days and they too were added to my shopping list. The total cost was nearly £7,000 but as you now know, the necessary funds were raised and both have been included in a splendid new footbridge decorated in GWR colours. My grandfather and father (who both worked at the station) would be so pleased with the outcome.

Ron Smith was a tremendous help with his financial support and encouragement that I thought it fitting that as another local lad he should 'cut the tape'. Why invite a dignitary? It's a bridge for Watchet! Our town band played, a steam engine arrived, Alec Danby our town crier was in strong voice and then the Revd. Clive Gilbert: St Decuman's new vicar; dedicated the bridge in front of a large crowd. I then invited individuals and groups who had donated to my appeal to follow Ron and myself over the bridge.

Mention must be made of the fine workmanship of the contractors: Steelway. Thanks also go to the West Somerset Railway for their cooperation. All in all it was a great job done and another great day for Watchet.

## ***Watchet's Historical Past***

Once again we are indebted to Jack Binding for a further chapter detailing Watchet's military connections.

### **Queen Bee arrives at Doniford Camp**

In the 1930s Watchet had been earmarked by the military authorities as a base for carrying out experiments to develop pilot-less radio controlled planes known as "Queen Bees" (a derivative of the Tiger Moth) and in due course orders were made for the establishment of land based catapults. In the meantime it had been agreed to experiment with the catapulting of Queen Bees from the newly built HMS Neptune and in July 1935 she dropped anchor some distance off Watchet harbour. The first flight to be catapulted was successful and the plane, which was on floats, landed in the sea undamaged and was brought back to Watchet harbour by the salvage tug "Adastral" which had been equipped with a special crane for lifting planes out of the water.

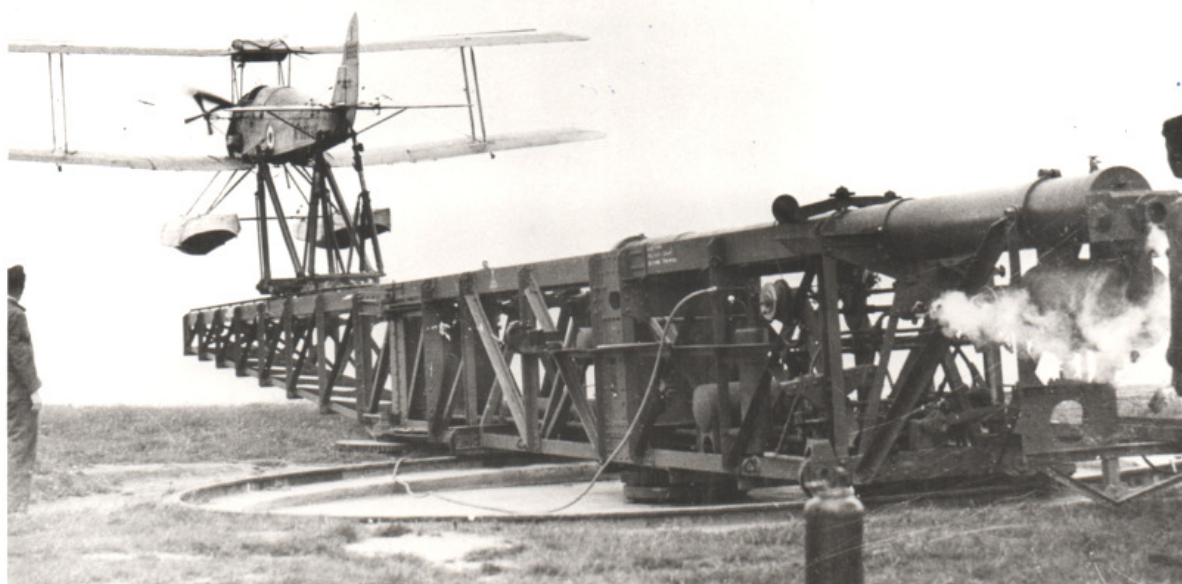


[\*\*The Adastral alongside Watchet Dock\*\*](#)

However, the second flight to be launched was not quite so successful. Refusing to respond to commands, it glided inland towards Blue Anchor for about half a mile and eventually crashed into a tree.

Further meetings were held between Air Command and the Military and in 1936 a decision was made to form three Flights of which the third Flight would be based at Biggin Hill for use at Watchet. It was agreed that the siting of the catapult would be at Doniford opposite the firing range which was known as the Gun Park. A long strip field called Kingsland was commandeered for use as an airfield and from time to time Tiger Moths would land and take off from this area known locally as "Pitching Field".

In July 1937 an operational detachment, No 1 AACU, arrived at Watchet with the first flight of Queen Bees. On 3<sup>rd</sup> August the anti-aircraft co-operation unit made the first successful catapult launch of the aircraft but, unfortunately, the machine was damaged when landing on the sea.



CATAPULTING A QUEEN BEE - DONIFORD CAMP

The firing exercises were only carried out during the summer months and the various techniques put into use improved not only the flights but the gunner's ability to score near misses rather than hitting the planes direct. A decision was then made to take the experiments a stage further by carrying out a series of night exercises. *(To be continued)*

## Watchet's Prehistorical past:



Watchet Conservation Society and the town itself are very fortunate to be able to call on the expertise of our local Geological expert: Professor Eric Robinson. Eric kindly contributed the following article explaining the background to what you may have seen recently in the shop window of the chemist shop on Swain Street. It was a limestone slab with over a dozen ammonites.

Take my word for it; says Eric, it's rather special. Watchet is famous as a place where beginners in Geology can come, scan the beaches and go home with fossils which will always be 'special' for them but every now and again specimens turn up which are out of the ordinary. This example was listed by Sothebys for one of their sales in the autumn and caught the attention of a partner of the Quantock Pharmacy as he looked for items of history relating to chemists. Provenance given was Helwell Bay; our richest outcrops of Lias shales and limestone can be found there. With commendable local spirit, he bought it for an undisclosed sum and now it can be seen from time to time in the shop window.

The ammonite species is Caloceras johnstoni Sowerby 1824, its delicate thin shell being coated with a fine film of pyrites which gives it the golden lustre which makes the specimens so striking.

## Poet's Corner – "The Lime Tree Bower – my prison"

*The last issue of our newsletter featured a photograph of Molly Quint and John Irven sitting splendidly in the Lime Tree Bower at Coleridge Cottage on the occasion of the official opening. Jan Simpson-Scott tells us here the background to "The Lime Tree Bower".*

Coleridge wrote this poem in 1797 under the lime tree in the garden of Tom Poole, his neighbour and friend. It was a message for, almost a conversation with, Charles Lamb, the essayist, who had come to stay with the Coleridge family in Nether Stowey.

The word prison was used metaphysically – something within Coleridge himself. Certainly he was captured and contained after Sarah, his wife, had accidentally scalded his foot with boiling milk and he was confined to Tom Poole's garden. For a man who liked to roam freely this was indeed prison-like. Yet he found a release which enabled him to explore a deeper meaning of his universe, a more intense appreciation of society and nature around him.

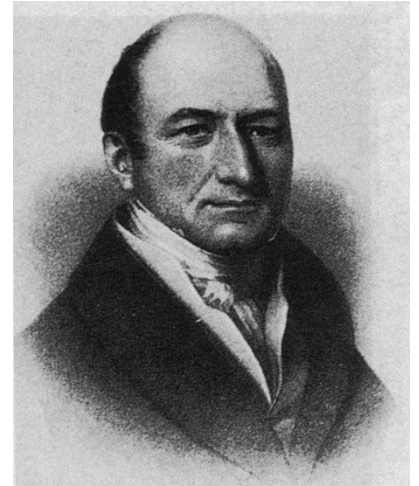
Nevertheless, as a man, deeply egocentric and selfish, he placed himself at the core of this new universe and there is no evidence to suggest that his prison benefitted anyone more than it did Coleridge himself. His own view of the universe, both in terms of society in Nether Stowey and the wider world in which he travelled with the Wordsworths, found its greatest influence in his own connection with it rather than through any view of the others. Whilst this may seem a harsh judgement he was a free spirit and a deep thinker who came to his own unshakeable conclusions.

One problem when analysing Coleridge's thoughts in the flow of a poem is the extent to which his emotions were driven by the opium he had been fed since his rheumatic childhood. Yet he establishes a dialogue with the reader so there must have been a greater rationality than is evident say in *Kubla Khan* (see next Newsletter).

The Lime Tree Bower is an insight into extremes – deprivation and salvation. It is a poem of many moods, many contradictions, solitude, loneliness, jealousy of his friends roaming without him. Yet it is also the acknowledgement of the wonders of nature and friendship. His prison, mentally self-imposed, allowed him to explore theories he had flirted with previously – conservation, self-sufficiency, transcendentalism, and most of all the impact of nature which is ever-present in this poem. Interestingly he leaves most of these under-developed theories behind as he moves to a conclusion in this work that nature and friends are all-empowering, all dominating, all important.

Whilst there is an under-current of self-pity as there usually is in Coleridge's writing he is able to overcome the restriction which this imposes as he comes to the realisation that nature, far from being confining, is infinite and as a consequence, its joys immense. He tries desperately on a mental level to join his friends on their journey. His physical situation limits him but his mind reaches out and his imagination soars. Nature and friendship run parallel in his thoughts, which, translated into words, slide on to the page, and he is transcendent.

As a poet Coleridge will always be dramatic, he is not stable at the best of times, indeed it is now considered that he suffered bi-polar syndrome, yet his extremes hold an amazing quality for the reader. From the darkness of his "prison" he moves along the spectrum of



Tom Poole 1888

moods towards a life-enhancing joy and an acknowledgment of the worth and power of true friendship.

Reader – a question for you. Would he have achieved this had not Sarah scalded his foot?

*It would be lovely to reproduce the entire poem here but clearly we do not have the space. However, here are a few of the opening lines as a flavour:*

Well, they are gone, and here must I remain,  
This lime-tree bower my prison! I have lost  
Beauties and feelings, such as would have been  
Most sweet to my remembrance even when age  
Had dimm'd mine eyes to blindness! They, meanwhile,  
Friends, whom I never more may meet again,  
On springy heath, along the hill-top edge,  
Wander in gladness, and wind down, perchance,  
To that still roaring dell, of which I told.

## **Wildflowers Around Watchet**

**Botanical artist – Sheila Mannes-Abbott**

*Describes and illustrates Galanthus nivalis - Snowdrops*

Although a native plant of Sicily and Greece, where it flowers October to December, it is among the best-loved and well-known flowers of the British Isles, both wild and cultivated. Their grey-green leaves, enclosing the white buds, push up through the soil (and even snow) during January and February. The flowers have three white spreading petals which are twice as long as the three green tipped inner petals. Snowdrops rarely set viable seeds. I find that planting in groups of 3 to 5 whilst still in leaf; they spread vegetatively and form large clumps as can be seen in the famous Snowdrop Valley near Wheddon Cross, (part of the Avill Valley). On Watchet's own doorstep there are great swathes of Snowdrops along roadside verges with a particularly spectacular display on the way up to Nettlecombe.



### **WATCHET CONSERVATION SOCIETY**

[www.watchetconservationsociety.co.uk](http://www.watchetconservationsociety.co.uk)

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