



WATCHET CONSERVATION MATTERS

For conserving our built and natural environment

Issue 26 January/February 2013

From our Chair, Molly Quint:

Dear Everyone, A very very Happy New Year to you all, may it be a busy one, a fun one and also one that we can say, as an organisation, that we will have achieved many things.

2011 ended with the great unveiling of "Seascape", then into 2012 with the Fitzroy Barometer refurbishing. The Year continued with many truly exciting happenings, including of course, the royal visit and the theatre project on East Quay. Will this year be so busy??

We had to say goodbye to Lin Hart; Town Council Representative on our Committee, thank you Lin so much for your contribution. We welcome back Hazel Bowden who used to be the WTC rep. before Lin. We must be quite well-behaved for Hazel to be prepared to return!! We now have a strong Committee of 11 members – we are pleased to welcome, Alan Jones, Tony McLoughlin and Jayne Hall, to join us, all elected at the A.G.M.

Thank you all for attending the AGM and special thanks to Mike Dan, Edward Frewin, Paul Reynolds and Paul Upton for showing interesting topics on their laptops. We must now move forward into the coming year with new ideas, energy to accompany them and time to accomplish them. Our first event of 2013 will be the Open Evening on the 15th January in the Methodist Schoolroom, please come along when Phil Gannon will give an illustrated talk on the Brendon Hills iron mines and the West Somerset Mineral railway.

The Phoenix Centre filling up fast at the AGM



On 11th February we have booked The Spice Merchant for the evening to raise money for the Conservation Society. The management of the restaurant are generously donating the evening's profits to our Society, so the more we eat the more money we raise. This event is open to all Members and Friends, so do come and have a relaxed time surrounded by good friends. If you would kindly let me know the time you would like to book a table and the number in your party, I can organise it.

In the next issue of our newsletter, John Irven will give us an account of how the splendid new railway crossing came to be. In the meantime, our local Council has asked the Conservation Society to plant and tend the small gardens at the crossing and Watchet Town Council have kindly donated £100 towards the planting, many hands make light work, so offers of help will be received with open arms. We are hoping to complete the task in good time for a grand opening in February.

In 2013 we aim to complete our other ongoing projects of creating a sculpture atop the Beacon on the Memorial Ground and the interpretation board commemorating the Chimney that enhanced our skyline until its demolition in 2011. This New Year is beginning to look lively, may it be a Special One for you all.

Yours very sincerely, Molly Q

Forthcoming Events:

The Brendon Hills Iron Mines & the Mineral Railway: A brief history

Tuesday 15th January 7.30 pm at the Methodist Schoolroom

Phil Gannon has kindly agreed to present this illustrated talk. The West Somerset Mineral Railway served the mines in the Brendon Hills and transported the ore down to Watchet Harbour. Phil will tell us of the conservation work that was initiated by the Exmoor National Park Authority and other partners, with the benefit of lottery money funding.



Goviers Lane Pedestrian Crossing. Prof Eric Robinson turns his professional eye to the splendid new granite steps:

The carefully re-graded slopes together with the chicane now provide much improved access for wheelchair users, whereas others can still use the original steps dating from when the railway was constructed in 1862. These have also been improved by adding four additional riser steps of granite with helpful side rails

The original steps were of a distinctive granite with a slightly buff-red fleck. Trowelsworthy



Granite, from the south side of Dartmoor is no longer a working quarry, so the idea of using it was out of the question. This much is true these days of the many quarries which worked granite in Cornwall. Fortunately, some have kept in business by recycling old buildings and in this situation, the contractors: Sully, were able to acquire recycled kerbstones and cut them to size for the steps. Slightly worn through use, they offer an almost slip-free surface to their broad width.

Best seen on or after rain, their surfaces show a flecked pattern with white crystals of feldspar interlocking. That pattern is close to that of De Lank Granite from Bodmin Moor, adding to the geological diversity of Watchet. It's well worth a pause en route.

Past Events:

Coffee Morning, Bring and Buy Stall at Watchet Station.



On Friday 14 December, a very wet day indeed, my ever-faithful team of helpers arrived at Watchet Station to find that the Station-Master had lit a very welcoming fire and Kathy Jones, acting chairman of FOWS, had the urn boiling in readiness for our first joint venture and WCS's last fund-raising event of the year.

The tables were laid with pretty tablecloths and Molly had made festive table decorations,

Kathy Jones had decorated the station shop with balloons and Holly. Watchet's new Town Crier, David Milton, was out calling the faithful to buy our cakes, Cranberry Conserve and other seasonal treats. Fearful of ruining his new uniform in the heavy downpour and incurring the displeasure of local residents who had funded his costly outfit David did not risk turning out in full fig. Instead, wearing an aged black bowler and armed with his bell he toured the wet streets of Watchet to tempt one and all to join us - thank you David.

It was a lovely occasion. We thoroughly enjoyed ourselves and swelled our coffers by £126.25p, no mean feat on our first foray into coffee morning entertainment – and a welcome change from our usual bric-a-brac events. It was very refreshing to see so many people who are now members of both organisations – WCS and FOWS.

Raffle prizes were won by Eleanor Crane, Rosalind Pick, David Milton, Rachel Fawcus, Kathy Jones, Sheila Frewin and John Irven. My grateful thanks go to those who supplied raffle prizes and items for sale, both WCS members and FOWS. As ever I am overwhelmed by your generosity and as I have said before without your help we would not be able to hold these fund-raising events. Special thanks to my trusty band of helpers especially Lin Marlor, banker of our profits and purveyor of cakes and preserves, and her co-worker Ellie Jones and their husbands, the two Alans; to Barbara Farmer and Kathy Jones on refreshments. I must add how very much we missed Tina Barry and her special brand of humour. Unfortunately she was at home nursing tooth-ache.

Everyone is keen to repeat this joint venture next year so I must ensure that I keep the Station Master onside. Without him none of this is possible!!

We shall be out on The Esplanade again, resuming our bric-a-brac sales at a date to be decided so watch this space. In the meantime start clearing out your cupboards and sending us unwanted Christmas gifts.

Finally thank you for your support throughout 2012 and I send you all good wishes for 2013.

Jan Simpson-Scott

Then and Now: Spot the differences



Parts of Watchet are very different now than a century ago. The slipway at West Street Beach shows major work on sea defences in the form of poured concrete. Quite a few yards of cliff have gone with the passage of time. Not sure whether the paddling pool is under water or not yet constructed.

Watchet's Historical Past: WATERLOO COTTAGES

Following the recent re-thatching, Nick Cotton reflects on their history

We are all familiar with Waterloo Cottages which are situated by the Washford River - they are the only thatched cottages remaining in Watchet.

Just a few miles outside the town in surrounding villages, there are many surviving examples of cottage thatch. Why is it that there are no other thatched buildings surviving in the town? Certainly there is clear evidence from James Date's wonderful photographs from the early 1860's that much of Swain Street was thatched. Watchet had a significant advantage over the outlying villages in that at the time of Date's images, Watchet was undergoing one of its busiest times. The Great Western Railway had arrived, bringing with it obvious trade advantages. The West Somerset Mineral Railway was also established; the harbour was very busy and with this vibrant commerce came a degree of prosperity.



It was probably during this period that many of the buildings were 'modernised', removing thatch and replacing it with tile. It was easy for Watchet to access slate as the maritime trade with Wales was virtually on a daily basis and building materials including slates were brought to the harbour at a comparatively modest cost. Coupled with this was the obvious advantage to the community of benefiting from the increased prosperity.

Waterloo Cottages however, remained thatched. There could be a number of reasons for this. At this period in Watchet's history, it would seem likely that, as today, there were three individual dwellings and perhaps the respective owners were unable to agree on replacing the thatch.

Some time ago, Paul Upton and I were kindly given access to one of the cottages and there was clear evidence of a fireplace complete with typical elm bressemer with rushlight burns.

Other visible interior construction made it relatively easy to date the interior to the late 17th. century. The exterior again suggests that at some time there had been a fourth cottage. The position of Waterloo Cottages relative to the river would certainly indicate that a building would have stood here since medieval times and, in all likelihood, much earlier.

Prior to the erection of the bridge, there was a ford which in all probability would have been used by packhorses bringing wool to the town for the cloth trade. We can assume that the cottages had access to the river via small boats at high tide. The Conservation Society was fortunate enough to identify clear evidence of a late medieval harbour in the basement of Sammy Hake's cottage.

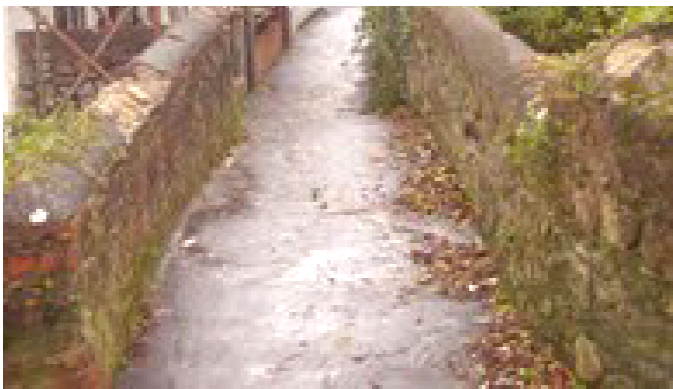
Almost certainly, prior to our existing harbour, the original port was located in the 'basin' adjacent to "The Star". It is possible that Waterloo Cottages were in some way connected with maritime trade.

Why are they called Waterloo Cottages? An interesting theory seems possible: the distinctive thatched 'eyebrows' on the upper windows, a very familiar feature on many similar dwellings, became popular in the late half of the 18th. Century and which have created such an appealing visual motif.

We could at this stage further speculate that originally the cottages were a single, unified dwelling, taking the form of a long house.

The windows are the best indication as to the name: the Battle of Waterloo, in 1815, may well provide the answer. Is it feasible that when the cottages acquired the addition of an upper storey, it coincided with this monumental event in Britain's history?

A conclusion of this article will appear in our next newsletter. Meanwhile the following note about the footbridge by Waterloo Cottages from our secretary Jan Simpson-Scott will interest members:



At the beginning of this year our very own Professor Eric Robinson brought to the attention of WCS Committee that the little pedestrian bridge – known to the Council as Watchet Footbridge 0460304 – was quite badly damaged and asked if it was in our remit to contact someone about it. After looking at it and seeing that the coping stones were loose and some mortar was

coming away I contacted the person in charge of bridges at Somerset County Council. Since that time the Bridge Maintenance Team Leader and I have been in regular correspondence. In the meantime the condition of the bridge has deteriorated and I emailed my contact at SCC on Monday 10th December. By reply I received an email informing me that the works order for this was being finalised and would then be issued to the contractors. The hope is that the work will be completed by 1st February 2013 (unless more urgent work crops up). Thank you Eric for raising this.

I must add that at all times the Bridge Maintenance Team Leader has been most helpful and probably as frustrated as I have been. Success is now in sight and hopefully our little bridge which runs over Washford River in Whitehall will soon be restored as another attractive feature of our pretty town.

Poet's Corner: Samuel and Sara Coleridge – an unwise marriage?

Thanks go to Jan Simpson-Scott for this latest article on our local poets

In Pennsylvania with his poet friend, Robert Southey, Coleridge launched an ambitious plan to establish a pantisocracy, a democratic utopia described by some as a form of communism. Around the same time Southey talked Coleridge into marrying the sister of Southey's fiancée,



Robert Southey

Edith, so that they would both have wives to help start this Utopia. There is debate as to whether Coleridge loved Sarah Fricker but he married her in 1795 and remained married to her after Southey abandoned the utopian plan.

Thus the basis for the Coleridge marriage was not laid on a sound foundation from its onset and the match proved disastrous. Coleridge's unhappy marriage was a source of grief to him throughout his life.

For Sarah it must have been the same torment. On their marriage, to please Coleridge she agreed to drop the H from her forename and from then on became Sara. (This adds to the difficulty in researching her as some sources refer to Sarah and others to Sara.) Their early married life was spent in Bristol where Sara came from but Coleridge was often away and failed to correspond with her. Alone, eleven months after their marriage she delivered Hartley their first son.

Thomas De Quincey the essayist wrote, "Coleridge assured me that his marriage was forced upon him by Southey". Yet on their marriage Coleridge himself wrote "on Sunday I was married – united to the woman whom I love best of all created Beings – Mrs Coleridge – I like to write the name."

Coleridge was erratic in his behaviour, struggling with addiction and high ideals of self-sufficiency and by the time they were living in Nether Stowey Sara was weighed down with the chores of everyday life – lifting heavy iron pots to suspend above the open hearth, chopping kindling, washing laundry, darning and mending clothes, sewing new ones, keeping oil lamps filled; and taking care of Hartley. The kitchen at Lime Street's Coleridge Cottage, adapted closely from records, is a testimony to how

difficult and solitary her life was. Coleridge was often bed-ridden from a combination of ill-health, rheumatism and his drug addiction. Sara then had to become his nursemaid in



Samuel Taylor Coleridge



Sara Coleridge

addition to her other daily chores. She suffered two miscarriages between the birth of Hartley and the birth of Berkeley who was to die in infancy whilst Coleridge was away in Germany with Dorothy and William Wordsworth. Facing such an agonising ordeal alone caused her to lose her hair. For the rest of her life she wore a wig.

Increasingly Coleridge went his own way though much of his work reveals a lofty view of the potential of marriage, “the long entrancement of a true-lover’s kiss”. Yet as early as 1796 he questioned marriage in general, “marriage – sole propriety in Paradise or thorn in the flesh, reason on this.” Coleridge was a mass of confused emotions. The domestic conflict that existed is evident in the despondent tone of his poem “Dejection: An Ode”, in 1802, published on October 4th, the seventh anniversary of their marriage. Coleridge’s implicit concern with the marriage emerges in the marriage metaphors of the lines “Ours is the wedding garment, ours her shroud”.

It is interesting how Coleridge sought refuge with his literary friends, searching for an antidote to his emotional conflict and in the process becoming an absentee husband and father, aggravating the relationship further.

In October 1801 Coleridge wrote to Robert Southey “the marriage, though indissoluble, is unendurable”. By December 1801 he wrote “for what is life gangrened, as it is with me, in its very vitals, domestic tranquility.” This is yet another mixed message, admittedly from a man who was rarely, if ever, at peace with himself but Sara must have been suffering too and she had no escape from the drudgery of her life as did Coleridge in his walks and travels.

For Sara tensions developed as she struggled to become her husband’s intellectual equal, his friend and not his servant, whilst at the same time trying to maintain a comfortable home for her family and resolve the financial debts as they descended further into poverty. Meals were frugal, rooms were cold. There would be periods of domestic harmony before Coleridge again regressed into his opium fog promising to get help for his “bad habit”. Sara has been belittled by both Dorothy and William Wordsworth who claimed that Sara had no creative ability. Tom Poole remained loyal to her and wrote “Sara possesses just the elements of practicality and common sense that her husband needed to function as a poet.”



Coleridge's final home
In Highgate

Coleridge’s life began to unravel at the turn of the nineteenth century and his health began to fail as he resorted more and more to laudanum. Poor health and emotional stress affected his writing. He became estranged from Sara and in 1799 fell in love with Sara Hutchinson whose sister married William Wordsworth three years later. Early in 1808 Coleridge arranged a separation from his wife though he continued to maintain her. Sara Hutchinson was to reject him in 1810 after which he moved to London where he stayed with an apothecary, Dr James Gillman.

Coleridge wanted an ideal wife, Sara sought to be this. That such a state cannot exist seems not to have entered their consciousness. This against a background of eighteenth century values of virtue, submission and obedience from a wife made the eventual collapse of their marriage inevitable.

***Wildflowers around Watchet* – by Botanical Artist - Sheila Mannes-Abbott**

Coltsfoot (*Tussilago farfara*)



Coltsfoot is a rather under-rated wildflower. We all know and love Primroses but the bright yellow Coltsfoot is frequently overlooked. Its sturdy stems hold the flower upright like little chimney sweep's brushes. The central disk is surrounded by a circle of fine petals.

The leaves appear after the flowers have died, these heart shaped leaves have been likened to a horse's hoof, hence the common name of Coltsfoot. The botanical name of *Tussilago farfara* means: dispeller of coughs and Coltsfoot was regularly used by apothecaries for respiratory problems.

The flowers I painted were from the bank on the side of the steps leading down to Hellwell Bay where they grow quite prolifically.



WATCHET CONSERVATION SOCIETY

Chair

Treasurer and Membership Secretary

Secretary

Case Officer

www.watchetconservationsociety.co.uk

Molly Quint - 01984 632592

John Irvén - 01984 631083

Jan Simpson-Scott - 01984 639615

Paul Upton – 01278 734630

Committee: Nick Cotton, Edward Frewin, Jayne Hall, Alan Jones, Tony McLoughlin, Peter Murphy, Paul Reynolds

Watchet Conservation Matters is published six times a year. If you would like to contribute news or an article, please contact the newsletter editor:

Edward Frewin – 01984 633422

E-mail: edward@frewin.co.uk