

The badger spends most of its time, except when searching for food at night, in complex underground setts. The sett consists of a number of galleries and passages all kept scrupulously clean. There are also special chambers lined with moss and grass in which the young are born. Another, blocked off to prevent intruders from entering, is used by the badger during winter when it is asleep.

Regarding the recent badger cull; I know that there are always two sides to an argument but I personally am in disagreement with current measures.

WATCHET CONSERVATION SOCIETY www.watchetconservationsociety.co.uk

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Promoting, conserving & improving our physical and natural environment

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From our Chair, Molly Quint

Lovely to be in contact with you all again and do hope you have had a good Autumn but now with the clocks changing it really seems as though Winter will soon be here.

A smiling woman with short, curly white hair, wearing a black turtleneck and a tan suede vest, holding a clipboard and pen outdoors.

At the AGM , after the business has been completed we are having a fun quiz based on the Newsletters of the past year, organised by Jan & Alan. The winners will receive a bottle of 'fizz'. This will then be followed by Dave Milton as auctioneer, offering the five lovely paintings by Nick Cotton which were used on the Mill Chimney Interpretation board. Nick has kindly given these to swell our

funds so we do hope the bidding will be brisk. All this will be followed by our usual wine & nibbles so please come along for a happy evening.

The newsletter this time has been very kindly produced by Alan Jones ,thank you so much Alan. We send our love and very best wishes to Shelia & Edward and thank them both for the wonderful work they have put into the newsletters and all the support they still continue to give to WCS.

We do hope you will come to the AGM, for a glass of wine, a chat and catch up with all that is happening to your society.

See you there,

Molly Q

The Watchet Court Leet.

By Chris Saunders.

For those new to Watchet, there is, in the town, an ancient form of government that has been in existence for over 750 years.

The Watchet Court Leet is one of the very few surviving courts that were formed back in the mid 1200s to administer local government and generally run the towns and boroughs.

Now existing only as a ceremonial body, it does however, still operate as it has done all these years.

It consists of 15 prominent native citizens of the town together with the President and the Bellman.

The Officers hold the following positions:-

President

Baliff, and Deputy Portreeve

Inspectors of weights and measurers (2)

Deputy Baliff Ale Tasters (2)

Stockdriver Pigdriver

Recorder Scavengers (2)

Foreman of the Jury Bellman Jurors (3)

The President is the Lord of the Manor or his appointed representative, and the bellman is the current town crier. The Portreeve is an official of authority that has existed since the 1100s, responsible for collecting taxes and port duties, this position has traditionally been held by the Lord of the Manor or his



From the temporary editor:

I was pleased to step in to help with the newsletter when asked by Molly, but soon got to thinking what a hard act it was to follow. We have become so used to the high standard of presentation from Edward that anything short of that standard just wouldn't do.

I was so pleased when Edward said that Sheila could supply paintings and text for the back page from file to keep us going for the next few issues. Thank you so much Sheila. You will see that from flowers we have moved on to animals and this issue sees the beautiful picture of a badger surrounded by ivy, cuckoo pint berries and some small fungi that I can't identify! Watch this space!

Jan has written an article about 'how they came to Watchet' I would love to receive any article on this subject or any other topical subject that might be of interest to our members, I can't guarantee it will go in the next newsletter because we can't fill more than 8 pages, but it will go in when space allows. Photographs are also welcome, I can take them in almost any format or even hard copies can be delivered and I will scan them and return them, (please do put your name and address on the back and identify where it is—but use a felt tip not a ball point pen).

Some of you will know that Ellie and I live at Hithe in Doniford Road. This house was built some 90 years ago and before we came here it was a residential home run by Jenny and Les Bird, prior to that it was the doctor's surgery. Do any of our long standing residents know any more about this house or have any memories they would care to share about its time as a doctor's surgery.

Please get in touch with me by post, by telephone, or e-mail with items for the newsletter. The next issue will be for Jan/Feb and I will need copy by 1st week in January, I know you'll all be too busy before Christmas!

I look forward to seeing you all at the AGM on at 7.30

Alan Jones 59b Doniford Road, 01984 639004 (alanjones64@btinternet.com)

Watchet and District Choral Society

Invite you to a traditional concert of Christmas Carols and readings followed by coffee and mince pies at Watchet Methodist Church Thursday 12th December at 7.30pm tickets on the door at £5. proceeds to League of friends at Williton hospital.

Get your Christmas festivities off to a flying start.

Water Power Past and Present

Alec Gannon gave the Society a fascinating talk on water power, ably assisted by his brother Phil. He started with the earliest form of water wheel used in ancient times which were usually set horizontally, and took us quickly through the development of the vertical wheel used in this country up to the eighteenth century, some of which have survived to the present day. He described overshot, breast-shot, undershot and backshot wheels and their relative merits. He used many local and more distant examples such as Cricklepits near Exeter, Dunster Mill, Orchard Wyndham (at the Bakelite Museum), Piles Mill at Allerford and the large wheel at Combe House Hotel in Holford. Further afield, he mentioned the "Lady Isabella" on the Isle of Man (72ft diameter) and Heasley Mill near North Molton.

Alec moved on to describe the development of the water turbine, using as examples a "Pelton" wheel in North Wales of 1840, and the "Gilkes" turbine of 1903 that can still be seen outside Stoates Mill in Watchet. He showed pictures of the extensive work that he has done repairing old turbines. One could hardly believe that some could be brought back into use, considering the conditions in which they were found. We saw pictures of Alec's own workshop where turbines were being repaired demonstrating his own skill and patience.

Alec talked about the use of water-wheels and turbines to generate electricity and concluded with a picture of a pair of Archimedean Screws made for this purpose in South Wales.

What came across in the talk was Alec's enthusiasm for the technology and engineering involved in water power, and his own skills and experience in working in the field.

The talk ended with an extra treat – the demonstration of the workings of a water powered sawmill. Alec had made a perfect model of the sawmill at Simonsbath. We watched as water poured in the top flowed past the wheel, driving the circular saw and out into a bucket below.

Paul Upton 22 September 2013



representative; in the case of Watchet for hundreds of years this has been the head of the Wyndham family. One of the duties has been to administer the running of the town through the court. In this way the day to day running of the town is done by the locals on behalf of the Lord, and in turn, the Crown.

Most of the other positions and appointments are cycled through the members of the court and can change from year to year. In the past there were other posts such as constable and bread weigher. The bellman's position came into existence in 1700s.

The scavengers are the official street cleaners; however the district council actually do the job with a large mechanised street sweeper.

The court sits annually in the Bell Inn in the last week of October, at noon sharp, to conduct its traditional business. In the past the court has sat in the "court room" at Kentsford farmhouse and at the Downfield Hotel, however the Bell has been its home for over 300 years.

Some days before the court is due to sit the bailiff issues written summons for all those expected to attend. On the day the bellman announces the sitting of the court to the local population and acts as a reminder to those who might be late!

On opening the proceedings the jury answer their names and those who fail to answer after having their name called three times will be fined; the payment to be made at the next court sitting.

Following the swearing in of the foreman, the jury is in turn sworn in.

The business consists of a number of "presentments" or items that need to be discussed or decisions that need to be made.

There follow the reports from the officers and the recorder, in particular, reports on major items of news for the preceding year.

Some of the "Jobs" handed out are more serious than one might expect, for instance there are two ale tasters appointed. This on the face of it looks a pretty good job, and might be in modern times; however the importance of testing the quality of ale and beer on sale in the town did have its dangers. If a bad batch of brew was tested, the health risks could be considerable, hence there are two tasters appointed! It is known that John Shakespeare, father of William, was an ale taster in Stratford on Avon.

The inspector of weights and measurers held an important position being in office to protect the town's folk from unscrupulous traders; he would not have too many friends in the traders and would be liable to be corrupted by them. If he was, then he would be out of favour with the rest of the population.

At the end of business the court retires to enjoy a traditional feast of roast goose and all the trimmings, followed by traditional apple pie. The meal is completed with a portion of walnuts and the Royal and Loyal toasts. The toasts are made using a punch made to a secret recipe handed down through the generations. Ru-

mour has it that it can be quite strong, but excellent in quality! In recent years it has been tradition that following the toasts, a guest speaker is invited to address the court on subjects of interest to it.

The court has a number of assets or relics, consisting of the bailiff's staff, a pair of handcuffs and some standard weights. The ceremonial punchbowl and ladle get an annual outing and are most appreciated by the gathered assembly. The handcuffs, however, are not so appreciated as they are used to bring offenders before the court

Similar courts exist elsewhere in England, all with different methods of operation. For example Southampton seldom meets but when it does a great deal of pomp and ceremony occurs. On the other end of the scale Laxton in Nottingham is a working court administering the common land and field system that still exists there. Two local courts meet from time to time in Milverton and in Taunton, neither however adhere to the citizenship qualification as Watchet does.

For those interested in finding out more about this archaic but important slice of English history, there are a number of volumes of interest in the library on the esplanade. Alternatively a search on the internet will bring up some interesting facts.

Why we came to Watchet

By Jan Simpson-Scott

David and I had lived and worked in the SE for many years, mostly in St. Albans. We had known that whilst it's a very pleasant area of the country and we had both enjoyed our careers there it was far too busy for what we envisaged for our retirement.

Reading for as long as I remember has been a favourite pastime for me, usually following a pattern of a serious read – Anne Tyler, Kazuo Ishiguro, John Irving and so on, and then what I call a comfort read whilst my mind relaxes. These easy reads might be Agatha Christie, Joanna Trollope, usually crime fiction or aga saga. One of my favourites is Marcia Willett who was born in Somerset on the day the atom bomb was dropped on Hiroshima. She lived on Exmoor for many years but now lives in Devon. Her books centre on Dunster, Porlock, Washford and Watchet. They are magical reads and the location is vital to the plot. Her insight into human nature runs deep.

After reading one of these – I think it was “Summer Bird-Cage” – Dave and I were planning our property search. Having discounted Cornwall – too far, Devon – we had recently lost a potential purchase in Teignmouth I said to Dave “Let's go and look at Marcia Willett country – Watchet sounds intriguing”. So June 19th 2006 found us here on our first visit. We parked in Harbour Road and wandered around this charming little town. I was hooked. On June 27th at 10.30 am we turned up to view the house we were to purchase. No doubts for either of us. If there had been they would have been quickly dispelled by our overnight stays with Rachel and Derek Fawcus who at that time were living at Esplanade House, running a

B&B. We had three stays there, each time in The Garden Room. Entrancing. Rachel and Derek would serve us a magnificent breakfast before we set off to clean, have carpets laid and generally prepare our new home. Our addiction grew.

We did everything wrong. We did not visit Watchet through the seasons as the guide-books on retirement tell you to. We did not rent a place to get the feel of the locality and its people before purchasing. We moved here on September 27th 2006. We've never looked back. And all because of Marcia Willett and her alluring pen!!

We both love Watchet and we are having such a wonderful time, Dave as Stationmaster at Watchet Station, and for me working in Harbour Community Bookshop is a dream-come-true. We have travelled widely since we moved here yet the magnet of Watchet draws us back each time. It's home.

Over the snowy week-end of January 20/21 I read “The Summer House” by Marcia Willett. Set in Allerford, Bossington and Simonsbath, it's a family drama, a poignant story of family life, friendship and the testing of bonds. Her depiction of our Somerset countryside is excellent. It is not classic literature, nor is it chick-lit. It's a cosy read, satisfying, undemanding.

“The Prodigal Wife” by Marcia Willett was the novel I took with me when I had a stay in hospital when I knew my concentration would not be up to serious fiction. The opening lines had me gripped – the main character was checking his boat in Watchet harbour whilst his girl-friend shopped in Bicknoller – perfect, it ticked all the boxes when I wasn't feeling too comfortable. It was balm, soothing, effortless enjoyment but demanding enough to keep the mind engaged.

Marcia Willett is not in the same literary class as our hero STC. No-one would call his lines cosy – they are demanding, disquieting at times. But sometimes our lives, brains, minds demand something softer, more entertaining. There is usually a copy of one of Marcia Willett's novels in Watchet Library or in Harbour Community Bookshop. You can find her on www.devonwriters.co.uk.

Well that's OUR reason for being here. Why did YOU come to Watchet? Perhaps you'd like to share your story with us. We'd love to hear from you.

