



# WATCHET CONSERVATION MATTERS

For conserving our built and natural environment

Issue 15

February/March 2011

## Introduction from our Chair, Molly Quint:

At the AGM I reported that the last year has been a huge learning curve for me personally and that I have made many new friends. It has been a busy year with excellent Newsletters and projects, thanks largely to John Irven, and a wide range of talks including topics such as The Effect of Global Warming on the flora and fauna of the West Somerset coastline by Nigel Hester, Stephen Hayes on Dunster Castle and Coleridge Cottage, and The Real Ancient Mariner by Robert Fowke. The WCS stand was used at The Festival of the Sea at Easter, The Fun Day Run by WTC, the Carnival fete and the Music festival. There were also projects, the main one being the cleaning of the Tidal Pool on West Street beach which culminated in Pool Fun Day, where Caprice won the Jim Barry prize.

Eric Robinson has been busy with Guerrilla gardening and has also been responsible for replacing many of the pebble pavements. Darren Scott has painted a period sign for West Street beach. The Signage Project, begun in 2009, was brought to fruition during the summer. The Pebble Garden project in Esplanade Lane is underway and WCS has agreed to help maintain St. Decuman's Well and is also trying to find a piece of land for an Apple Orchard. I do really want to thank all those who have helped in any of these ventures and pay tribute to the Committee as we look forward to an even more successful 2011.

Yours very sincerely

*Molly*



**Tuesday 15<sup>th</sup> March, 2011, 7.30 pm**

**Watchet Methodist Schoolroom, Harbour Road,**

**Watchet**

**'Not in my Backyard'**

**A talk by Paul Upton, Case Officer, Watchet  
Conservation Society**



Wooliams Place & 'Downfield' in St Decuman's Road

The subtitle could be, "A layman's view of Planning Control, Building Regulations, Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas with particular reference to Watchet". It will be an input of about 50 mins followed by a question & answer session with Paul Upton & Phil Gannon explaining about how designs and applications have made an impact on Watchet – with reference to both very modern and much older properties.

Do come along !

## Report on Annual General Meeting



**18/1/11 at the Phoenix Centre, Watchet**

40 people attended the meeting, of whom 32 members were eligible and were provided with voting slips. Voting took place individually for each officer position and the following were elected: Molly Quint – Chairman, John Irven – Treasurer & Membership Secretary, Jan Simpson-Scott – Secretary, Paul Upton – Case Officer. Eric Robinson, Mike Whetlor, Tim Prior, Edward Frewin, Teresa Harper and Paul Reynolds were elected in a block vote as members of committee.

At the close of the meeting we enjoyed a buffet, kindly prepared by members of the Phoenix Centre, with great musical entertainment and songs by Val Knight and Jonathan Pearman on banjo.

*Jan Simpson-Scott & John Irven*

## 'Guerrilla Gardening'

If you walk through the Anchor Street Car Park, look up to the long wall on the west side (towards Mill Street). We have fixed three wire baskets at a height above parked cars to add a touch of colour to what is rather a bleak place.



At the far end, on the right, we have cleared some of the soil and the bricks in readiness for the return of a seat. It is about five years since a very welcome seat was in the space before it was vandalised. Town Council have given the good news about a replacement – so watch this space.



In the Market Street Car Park we have placed three wooden boxes rescued from Quay West and abandoned. Painted blue and topped up with soil and compost, together with planted single pots, we hope that they are too heavy for casual theft and will cheer up that waste area.



Two pots have also been placed on the steps up to the Holy Cross Chapel to catch the eye of visitors and customers at the Bell and Hellikers.



Donations of 4 cordylinus plants by John & Rachel Irven now adorn the Anchor Street entrance from Anchor Street, and provide some protection to the gap in the hedging which has been used as an inappropriate short cut across the tended area.



Finally, Pearl, a welcome volunteer, has offered to keep an eye on the space outside the Boat Museum – another space to add to Watchet in Bloom. Anyone can join!

St. Decuman's Well



PS - We have been approached by Councillor Tony Knight as Warden of St. Decuman's Church asking if we would consider extending our work on gardening and tidying in Watchet to help maintain St. Decuman's Well. We have agreed and are seeking more volunteers to help with this and similar projects –so please let us know!

*Eric Robinson, John Irven & many others – more on this next time!*

**Market Street Washford River Cottages**  
A little conservation history *Paul Upton*



8 / 9 / 10 Market Street form a terrace of 3 cottages on the east bank of the Washford river alongside a small basin at right angles to Market Street itself. The river flows under the road bridge into the sea through a tunnel under the Mineral yard and the sea wall. The river is tidal here and waves can reach upstream to beyond Waterloo cottages at the packhorse bridge. The basin can be filled when the tide is above the 10 metre mark.

This view from Mill Lane shows nos 9 (on the left, known as "Riverside") & 10 Market Street following restoration works completed in 2001. After heavy rains, the stony beach can get covered in red sand washed down from upstream.

Before the Market Street road bridge was built, the river was crossed upstream at the packhorse bridge, & the basin could be used by vessels sheltering from the prevailing winds. It seems likely that the town's early trading port developed here.

These properties were in the ownership of the Wyndham estate until 1920 when they were sold together with three other cottages (since demolished to build the access road to Market Street car park) and the Bell Inn for £1330 to Arthur John Balmer, who was then landlord of the Bell Inn. Wyndham estate records of 1801 indicate that the properties were then called "Cooches" and the leaseholder was Elizabeth Flea. According to the records from St Decumans church she had eleven children. A grandson, John Flea (Mariner age 67) was still living there by the time of the census of 1851.

"Riverside", No 9, dates from the early seventeenth century, although buildings may have been on the site before, and was probably built as a wing to the property which is now No. 8. No. 10 is a slightly later extension but was not a dwelling until the nineteenth century. We do not know what it was originally used for. If you know, please tell us!

**Poemscape – a literary link with Watchet and Coleridge Country** *Jan Simpson-Scott*



Coleridge in 1797

**A personal description of Coleridge by Dorothy Wordsworth, June 1797**

A few months before Coleridge came to Watchet and laid his plans for the ballad which was to become *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner* Wordsworth's sister, Dorothy, wrote to her friend, Mary Hutchinson, who was to become the wife of William Wordsworth:

"You had a great loss in not seeing Coleridge. He is a wonderful man. His conversation teems with soul, mind and spirit. He is so benevolent, so good-tempered and cheerful. At first I thought him very plain. He is pale and thin, has a wide mouth, thick lips, and not very good teeth, longish loose-growing half-curling rough black hair. But if you hear him speak you think no more of them. His eye is large and full, not dark but grey. He has fine dark eyebrows, and an overhanging forehead".

Study the portrait and it is easy to see the accuracy in Dorothy Wordsworth's description, though his unruly hair is tied back. But contrast this quite plain and stern facade with the soul and spirit which would write of every emotion which came from his animated mind. His poetic genius was in full flower at the time of his visit to Watchet and it is generally accepted that every one of his greatest poems was written in Somerset.

From this time poets like William Hazlitt, Tom Poole, and Robert Southey became aware of a new spirit in poetry and each is said to have felt spellbound by Coleridge's voice as they listened to him on his wanderings around Somerset.

Readers - such genius has its roots in Watchet.

## We learned it first

For Watchet and our feelings about our 'icon', the Ancient Mariner, to hear from Bob Fowke the results of his researches which clearly established 'The Real Ancient Mariner' talk as a highlight for the year for the Conservation Society last November.

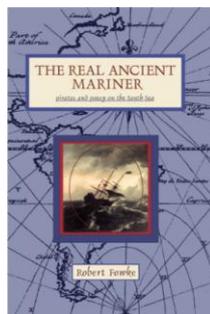


Currently until February 27<sup>th</sup>, at the British Library, London on Euston Road, there is an exhibition of the documents which they hold which are the background to Coleridge's thoughts and musings on the subject as he prepared and crafted the poem.



In the circumstances it seemed apt to let them know about the book, so it duly fell to Neville Gosling who started it all to write to Bob Fowke prompting him to offer copies of his book for sale in the excellent library bookshop, an offer we hope they will accept.

'The Real Ancient Mariner'  
By  
Robert Fowke  
(ISBN 9780954835149,  
Travelbrief Publications



Lateral thinking means that Watchet receives a plug.  
Thanks to Neville!

## Something to look forward to in 2011

Do you remember the fun we had clearing out the West Beach Pool of stones last summer ? Lots of people with different skills and muscle power set to and cleared stones, silt and detritus from the pool to make it ready for sailing boats and a mild amount of paddling and splashing.

We knew full well that the sea would quickly reverse the process, particularly when there were winter onshore storms, but our answer to the Watchet pessimism was the promise that when the tides and weather promised to be favourable, we would do it all over again. Plans are in hand to choose that tide and that date in spring or early summer, when you will hear in good time to join in.

At the time, there was some speculation about the date of the building of the pool. Some thought that they had learned to swim in the pool around 70 years ago. We ask for your recollections along with other Watchet history, before it all slips from memory and record .....



Broadstairs, Kent Seawater Pool

Interestingly in all of this, a recent article came to hand which dates tidal pools similar to ours as being a feature of the British seashore between 1920-1930. Seawater pools around 50 to 60 feet in length were built with concrete walls to contain water of about 3 feet depth, something close to our West Beach pool. Behind the plan was an aspect of health restoration for town and city dwellers taking a seaside holiday – a counter to ailments stemming from lives of the times. As the sea renewed the water every tide, regeneration was the message. Perhaps we should advertise Watchet for such benefits?

## Railway Footbridge & Goviers Lane Crossing



John Irven and Molly Quint attended the recent WSDC council cabinet meeting which covered these issues. In February the old bridge was dismantled by the contractors Steelway, who are designing and fabricating the 'like for like' replacement due to be erected by November 23<sup>rd</sup> 2011. The Society has been invited to help advise alongside other interested groups such as Friends of Watchet Station, & Museum, and we have gladly accepted.

## The Admiral Fitzroy Barometer



*obins*

may be found set into the wall of the cottages on the corner of Swain Street and the Esplanade. It used to be set daily, but today the protective grille and wooden door, hinges and locks are in a rather sorry state of repair, and the brass plaque commemorating its gift by Sir A.A. Hood is in poor condition. We are working to restore the item and with the Museum and Marina to see how daily readings could be resumed to become of benefit even to modern day local sailors!

### Membership Secretary & Treasurer's Report

*John Irven*

We currently have 50 paid up memberships for 2011, and are almost double the 28 we had at the same time last year. However, I would encourage all members who still need to renew their subscriptions for 2011 to do so as soon as possible. The website link has a downloadable renewal form.

<http://www.watchetconservationsociety.co.uk/about.html>

As a reminder, individual membership at £5.00 & family membership @ £7.50 gives one vote at AGM. A couple paying £10.00 each have a vote. Cheques can be returned to John Irven, 3 St. Decuman's Heights, St. Decuman's Road, Watchet TA230FL, or in person at the open meeting on March 15<sup>th</sup>.

### **Calendar of Events**

<b>Tuesday 15 March, 7.30 pm,</b>	<b>Methodist Hall - Paul Upton talk on 'Not in my Backyard'</b>
<b>Saturday 23 April,</b>	<b>Esplanade – Stand at WTC St George's Day 'fun day'</b>
<b>Tuesday 17 May, 7.30 pm</b>	<b>Methodist Hall - Tim Russell, Senior Ranger talk on 'Life in the Quantocks'</b>
<b>To be arranged</b>	<b>Pool clearing (dependent on tides/weather)</b>
<b>Saturday 18<sup>th</sup> June, 1.00pm</b>	<b>West Street Beach Pool – Fun day</b>
<b>Tuesday 19 July, 7.30 pm</b>	<b>Methodist Hall – Pat Wolseley talk on 'Lichens in the environment'</b>
<b>Tuesday 26 July, pm</b>	<b>Pool event as part of 'Watchet Summertime'</b>
<b>Tuesday 20 Sept, 7.30 pm</b>	<b>Methodist Hall – Talk by speaker TBA</b>
<b>Tuesday 15 November</b>	<b>AGM – venue TBA</b>

We would love to see you participating in upcoming activities of the society, as members, volunteers to help on projects, or just coming along to interesting talks!

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

### **Chair**

**Treasurer and Membership Secretary  
Secretary**

**Molly Quint - 01984 632592**

**John Irven - 01984 631083**

**Jan Simpson-Scott - 01984 639615**



**Case Officer**

**Paul Upton – 01278 734630**

**Committee: Edward Frewin, Theresa Harper, Tim Prior, Paul Reynolds, Eric Robinson, Mike Whetlor**

*Edited & Produced by John Irvén 23/2/11*