



WATCHET CONSERVATION MATTERS

For conserving our built and natural environment

Issue 23 July/August 2012

From our Chair, Molly Quint:

Many things have happened since our last Newsletter and one to really remember was our celebration of the Olympic Torch Relay in the Paddock of Crossways. The sun shone and members & friends came complete with chairs and pic-nics to cheer on our runner Paula Cannings. We then had a wonderful surprise visit from James Winter, complete with his torch, who had run in Minehead.

For the Queen's Jubilee Celebrations we had another great bric-a-brac stall run by Jan, then a lovely evening at the Indian Restaurant as a very successful money raiser, which we hope to repeat in the New Year, all are welcome.

One project we are rather struggling with is the St. Decuman's Holy Well. We have been up each fine Wednesday afternoon to tame the weeds but they do grow rather fast!! Shrubs and ground cover plants would be very welcome, if you have any spare in your garden, or maybe a donation to buy some, would be lovely, please phone me, also if you could give an hour or two to lend a hand.

Next items in the diary are: 'A Post-Card from Watchet' 17th July, then the bric-a-brac stall 16th Aug during Watchet Summertime Week and Pool Fun Day on Sunday 19th August.

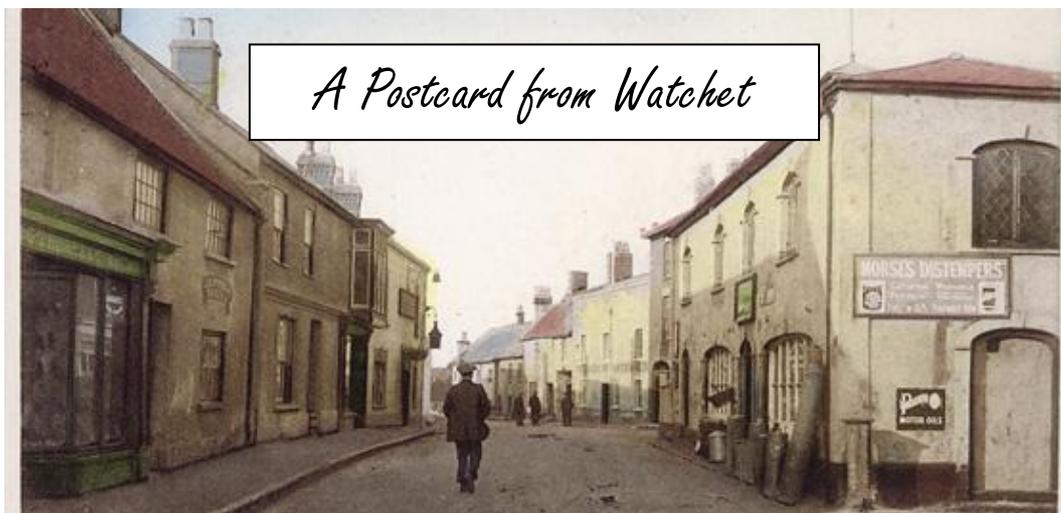
Looking forward to seeing you all soon.

Yours very sincerely, Molly Q



Careful Molly, that's hot!

Forthcoming Events: Tues July 17th. 7.30pm Methodist Schoolroom



A Postcard from Watchet

Lin Hart has a wonderful collection of postcards of old Watchet and is treating us to a slide show of a selection of them. She has a wealth of knowledge about the subjects featured on the cards and we look forward to a very entertaining evening. All are welcome.

Past Events: David Ireson's talk: "Becoming Human"

Eric Robinson reports on the evening and adds a personal insight on David's talk

"THUS IT WAS IN ANCIENT TIMES"

As a geologist, I always enjoyed working on sites where we were trying to reconstruct the past – back beyond the limits of written history. Back beyond 10,000 before the present, we were dealing with the end of the Ice Age(s).

Our principles in approach were based upon the saying: "The Present is the Key to the Past", claiming that if a beetle now lives and breeds north of the Arctic Circle, if it is then found in clays in the Mendips, it signifies an arctic climate in Cheddar. All of this, rightly or wrongly, assumes that what we know of ecology has remained a near-constant over the years; or changes but slowly.

For his lecture "*Becoming Human; living with deer and other animals since the Ice Age*", David Ireson was able to call up recent uses of new techniques from forensic sciences and chemical analysis to add colour to our interpretations to good effect. He was able to paint a picture of Neanderthal Man as a robust and thinking carnivore (his teeth tell this), using fire and employing necessary skills as hunter –gatherers. Bog burials allow us access to stomach contents which reveal a diet improved by herbs and forest plants to add to meats won from the chase. Animals as large and formidable as Mammoth or Woolly Rhinoceros were trapped and slaughtered at water holes by what must have been coordinated teamwork.

Local discoveries, as recent as 2011, from the gravel cliffs of Doniford bring Neanderthals hunting in the Doniford River. If only we had caves or rock shelters we might have been able to share the mysteries of cave art so richly preserved in the Dordogne of France. Such a record, however, would have posed us with the challenge of interpretation: wish-fulfillment for the chase by hunters, simple admiration of animal life? The choice is yours. If there was any form of religious ritual involved, we have to leave that to David Ireson. Orderly burial of skeletons speaks of respect for the dead, but not necessarily a belief in the hereafter, but again we can leave that to David. Myself, I must remain a mere scientist (and carnivore) in company with my friend Chris Stringer whose book "The Origin of Our Species" (2011), David recommends.



The illustration is a reconstruction of the landscape at Swanscombe in the Thames Valley of Kent, our best hominid site in Britain. The now extinct Swanscombe Deer and Long Tusked Elephant are prominent, but on the skyline, men with spears are running from a grass fire. For this period the climate must have been Mediterranean, a warm interglacial ca 300,000 bp.

Our 3rd Bric-a-Brac Stall.

Once again we owe our thanks to Jan Simpson-Scott for another brilliant effort, this time on Diamond Jubilee Day. Here's her report.

On Monday June 4th with my regular team of helpers, Tina Barry, Lin Marlor and Barbara Farmer, we set up our stall at 9am on a blustery Esplanade and began trading as soon as the first train came in. The wind dropped, the skies turned blue and the Esplanade came alive. We were busy most of the day with only rare opportunities to sit and savour the tea and coffee very kindly supplied by the Harbour Community Bookshop. This was our third venture in the bric-a-brac business and Lin has emerged as our honorary treasurer, Tina supplies the fun and laughter, Barbara keeps things under control and I guess I organise. Whatever our system, it works and we make a very good team and work splendidly together and thoroughly enjoy ourselves. The hardest part is packing up at the end of a tiring day and disposing of rubbish, cardboard boxes and wrappings. However this year we scored a great success as, good husbands that they are, Alan Marlor and Dave Simpson-Scott, apart from delivering everything onto the Esplanade, turned up to pack away unsold goods, dismantle tables, remove rubbish and take it all away. So; three cheers for these two gentlemen.

Finally, our Honorary Treasurer, Lin, declared that we had raised £227.93p. So I would like to thank again my superb team and all those who provided bric-a-brac and those who came along to buy it and swelled the Conservation Society's coffers a little more.

Our final sale this year will be on Thursday 16 August so watch this space for details and requests for unwanted items. Without all of you helpful people this would not be possible. My thanks go to all of you. Watchet Conservation Society is truly grateful.

An Unusual Fund Raising Event

There's nothing like mixing business with pleasure and that is exactly what we did on Monday evening 18th June. The Spice Merchant Restaurant in Watchet, generously offered to donate the evening's profits to the Conservation Society, which of course encouraged many of us to enjoy a sociable evening with wonderful tasty food. In knowing that our self-indulgence would swell the Society's coffers added to our enjoyment. And what a financial success it turned out to be: a cheque for £270 was presented to the Society. Of course no WCS event is ever complete without the customary draw which added a further £37 to our funds.



The cheque was presented to Molly Quint, Chair WCS by the Proprietor, Iqbal Hussain, also present were, Afsar Uddin the manager of The Spice Merchant and Jan Simpson - Scott, Secretary of WCS.

Watchet's Historical Past: Jack Binding, in the following article, tells us that the Watchet lighthouse was erected in 1862 and so for 150 years now, mariners have cause to thank this beacon of safety for indicating safe haven.

It was the year 1860 and the inhabitants of Watchet were beginning to feel the benefits derived from the industrial revolution. Trade through the harbour was increasing, boosted in great measure through the exporting of iron ore from the Brendon Hill mines to Newport. The import of mixed goods was also increasing.

Quite recently, whilst researching some old Watchet documents, I came across a tender by a Mr. Wm. Tredwell of Westminster, dated 24th September 1860 for £15,058-10s-2d for, inter alia, extending the length of the West Pier, the construction of a pier on the eastern side of the harbour, the altering and re-construction of the town slipway and diversion into the harbour of the Washford River. This was formally submitted to the Harbour Commissioners who were the overseers of the harbour.

My attention was then drawn to W. H. (Ben) Norman's book entitled: "Tales of Watchet Harbour", wherein he confirms that the contract had been awarded to Mr. Tredwell and he comments that the tender figure appeared to be very low in view of the massive construction and excavation work involved. Included in the contract was the provision for a cast iron lighthouse at the end of the new West Pier. Ben described the new lighthouse as a hexagonal cast iron tower which was supplied by Hennem, Spink & Else of Bridgwater in 1862 and cost £75-0-0. Although I am unable to find evidence of an actual day and month when the lighthouse was completed, it is fairly safe to state that it was erected in 1862.

Plans to enlarge the harbour were submitted by three engineers, Rice Hopkins, Isambard Kingdom Brunel and James Abernethy, and the cheapest plan submitted by Abernethy was adopted. Copies are on view in the Market House Museum.



WATCHET HARBOUR FROM THE EAST. C 1875

Poet's Corner (Jan's essay marks a welcome return of this section to our newsletter)

Kubla Khan, a vision in a dream, A Fragment

Many years ago I was led to believe that Coleridge wrote Kubla Khan in an opium-induced haze at The Ship Inn at Porlock. A visit there was most disappointing, no evidence whatsoever that he had ever been there yet we know that around the time he wrote this Fragment poem Coleridge spent some time in Porlock and complained that his poetic inspiration was interrupted by a visit from "a person from Porlock". Rumour has it that this could have been someone from The Ship Inn requesting that he settle his drinks bill!

Coleridge claims that this work came to him in a dream whilst he was under medication and evidence from Coleridge's own manuscripts show that this was opium. This is quite likely to be true as we know that Coleridge was well-known as a recreational user of laudanum, a drink made from opium and alcohol, as well as being an addict through long term medical use.

In order to gain some understanding of this surreal, dreamy unfinished work it is necessary to include a few lines to give the flavour of its phantasmagoric nature:

In Xanadu did Kubla Khan
A stately pleasure-dome decree:
Where Alph, the sacred river, ran
Through caverns measureless to man
Down to a sunless sea.

A damsel with a dulcimer
In a vision once I saw:
It was an Abyssinian maid,
And on her dulcimer she play'd
Singing of Mount Abora



.....
So here is a glimpse of the fantastical images of the place where Kubla Khan, grandson of Ghengis Khan, had ordered his pleasure dome to be built with Coleridge yearning to return to his dream. This caused some critics to focus on Coleridge's relationship with drugs and his desire to withdraw into the hallucinatory world which became increasingly common and possibly more familiar to him. In an earlier piece I referred to his search for self-sufficiency and his dream of Pantisocracy, a Utopian world he believed to be achievable. There does seem to be a connection here in Coleridge's thought processes.

The poem is one of timeless beauty, surreal qualities, and it is regarded as one of the great works of English Literature. Prince Charles described the poem as "poetic fruit".

Coleridge as one of our great Romantic poets creates an imagery in Kubla Khan of serene beauty juxtaposed with a quite terrifying violence of nature tamed by human thought. There is angst, there is drama, there is idealism, but possibly the need for escapism overrides all. At times Coleridge was able to escape through walking, at others the only way he seemed to contact his own soul was through fantastical imagery, so often drug-induced, but the constant return to this reinforces his belief that a perfect world was possible.

Could I revive within me,
Her symphony and song,
To such a deep delight 'twould win me,
That with music loud and long,
I would build that dome in air,
That sunny dome! Those caves of ice!
And all who heard should see them there,
And all should cry, Beware! Beware!
His flashing eyes, his floating hair!
Weave a circle round him thrice,
And close your eyes with holy dread,
For he on honey-dew hath fed,
And drunk the milk of Paradise.



Coleridge kept this poem for private readings and it remained unpublished until 1816. It has received great accolades and derisory criticism. Some claim that indeed Coleridge is not the author of this fragment poem though I think this is now largely disputed. A wealth of opinions have been recorded. I have deliberately included extracts which I feel are significant so that you too may make up your own mind. It was written whilst Coleridge lived amongst the people of Somerset. He is our poet. No matter whether you love it or hate it you will have been inspired to some opinion. Coleridge remains a jewel of Somerset, a vital part of our literary heritage. At times he may be beyond our comprehension yet he and the nature around us, so very far from Xanadu, are forever interwoven.

Jan Simpson-Scott 10th. January 2012.

The Watchet Wall Project – art on the edge

Remembering back to our AGM in January, members will recall the presentation from Tim Prior about the idea of using the sea defenses by the west pier for public art. Tim enthused us all with his vision of using the blank wall as a canvas to tell the story of Watchet. The Mineral Yard, part of which is a car park and part derelict could be turned into a garden with a water feature. What has been happening to this project?

The land in question is owned by West Somerset Council, part of the land is used by Wessex Water to maintain the sewage pumping station and the marina have rights to park boats in the area. There have been some exploratory discussions with the council and support has been gathered from Watchet Town Council too.

The project could have long lasting effects for the regeneration of Watchet through the encouragement of public art. The idea includes setting up a local arts organisation to stage art events in the future which will involve local people and encourage visitors to the town. This is a really exciting project.

At the centre of the scheme, part of the wall could be made up of small glazed tiles that people pay £1 to design, fire and install. This would involve anyone, residents and visitors alike and would raise money for the project. To carry out this ambitious work will require a number of fund raising applications to such as the Big Lottery or the Coastal Communities Fund and the seeking of commercial sponsors for some of the features.

The Conservation Society has decided that the scale of the project is too great for it to manage alone. Tim took a presentation to the Town Council's Environment & Planning Committee who gave its enthusiastic support. It was agreed to ask the Watchet 2025 organisation to sponsor a public meeting in Watchet. From this meeting, it is hoped that a new organisation would emerge that was dedicated to achieving the project and managing it in the future with Tim as a consultant.

The date of this meeting is to be Monday 23rd July at the Phoenix Centre starting at 7.30pm. Dave Westcott, Watchet 2025 Committee and Chair of WTC E & P Committee as well as a district councillor for Watchet has agreed to chair the meeting. Conservation Society members and anyone in the town who is interested in the project are encouraged to attend. Watch out for posters nearer the time confirming the details.

Our thanks go to Peter Murphy for providing this update on The Watchet Wall Project.

Watchet Conservation Society Committee

Following on from the last issue of the newsletter, where we profiled John Irven our Treasurer and Membership Secretary, it's now Jan Simpson-Scott's turn. Jan is the Society's Hon. Secretary and it has to be said that we are very fortunate that she gives up so much of her time to deal with WCS business. General correspondence is just a small part of what she contributes. I personally am in awe of her minute-taking expertise, shortly after each meeting the committee members receive an E-mail from her with succinct and precise details of the previous meeting, in my experience



there has never been any discussion as to the accuracy of these minutes. She has however made a rod for her own back: on any rare occasion that Jan can't take the minutes, finding a volunteer replacement is extremely difficult as any likely candidates rush for the door! We are also indebted to her for the interesting contributions she makes to our newsletter, under "Poet's Corner". Running the bric-a-brac stalls for us has been a fruitful money raising activity, one day she may be able to get a car back in her garage – not too soon I hope, because there's another event on 16th August needing more stock. As well as the work she does for the Conservation Society Jan also fits in stewarding at Coleridge Cottage in Nether Stowey, can be found volunteering for The Harbour Bookshop, and stewarding at Watchet Market House Museum. Jan was one of the original group who set up WLF (Watchet Library Friends) to campaign to keep Watchet library open – thanks Jan.

Help Needed Please!

We are planning to undertake the annual clean of the tidal pool on Saturday 4th August in time for holding the Fun Day on the afternoon of Sunday 19th August. Any assistance with either event will be greatly appreciated -please let John Irven know if you can help. John can be contacted on: 01984 631083 or john.irven@btinternet.com

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

Iris foetidissima is maligned for having rather small dull flowers, but which on closer inspection are really rather beautiful, also despite one of its common names: Stinking Iris, it does not stink, it has a curious smell if the leaves are crushed but is far from unpleasant. A native perennial of damp woodlands, hedgerows and sea cliffs; it often goes unnoticed until the autumn when it really comes into its own with its glowing scarlet 'berries' which last until the spring. In the garden they make shady corners shine with colour through wintry days. I have found this a good garden plant as it is quite slow growing and not overwhelming to its neighbours, both Iris forms are in my garden and grow easily from seed. The specimen I have painted here is a yellow form (If anyone would like seeds of this please ring me), with larger flowers, the 'berries' are also slightly larger but still breed true. The sword like, shiny leaves are a backdrop for later plants and are attractive in themselves. As I am sure many of you will know the less showy native grows in great numbers along the Mineral Line.



Just one more thing the foxgloves are absolutely staggering at the moment they are flowering in their tens of thousands (no exaggeration) on Staple Plain, West Quantoxhead a sight not to be missed if you can make it.



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