



WATCHET CONSERVATION MATTERS

For conserving our built and natural environment

Issue 25

November/December 2012

From our Chair, Molly Quint:

Dear Friends,

Well autumn is here in such a beautiful array of colours, made brighter when wet from a shower of rain and then lit up by the sun. Do hope you were all able to see HRH the Princess Royal. Eric and I were so proud to represent WCS at the Fitzroy Barometer, thank you for that wonderful opportunity to talk with her and Lady Gass who is also a member of WCS. Lady Gass explained to



Princess Anne that Admiral Hood was her ancestor and it was he who donated the Barometer to Watchet as well as other ports around the English coast.

Watchet rose to the occasion so well, with the Sea Scouts performing their duties so expertly. A letter has arrived from the Palace thanking us for a happy and memorable day. Please all come to our AGM on the 20th November in the Phoenix Centre, three members have put their names forward to join our Committee: Jayne Hall, Alan Jones and Tony McLoughlin. We thank them for accepting the nomination and look forward to welcoming them and all our other members at the AGM.

Yours very sincerely, Molly Q

Forthcoming Events: Watchet Conservation Society A.G.M.

Tuesday 20th November 7.30 pm at the Phoenix Centre

It's time once again for our annual business meeting. It will be held at the Phoenix Centre on 20th November. There will be the usual annual reports, discussion of our finances and election of the committee members. This year there are some vacancies on our committee, nomination papers are available from our secretary Jan Simpson-Scott (01984 639615), so if you feel you have the enthusiasm to help protect and conserve Watchet's built and natural environment then we'd love to hear from you.

After conducting the formal, statutory business, the evening will have a fun element as well. Enjoy a glass of wine, a nibble and a natter, whilst there is a slide projection reliving a wonderful year in Watchet.

It's good to report that it was almost standing room only in the Phoenix Centre last year, such is the enthusiasm amongst our members for what The Watchet Conservation Society attempts to achieve – thank you for your support.

Past Events: Echo Watchet: Portrait of a Harbour Town

Jan Simpson-Scott reviews here, the September member's meeting.

On Tuesday 18th September Sandy Maberley and Christopher Ferris came to talk to us about Theatre Melange, The Echo Project and "A Portrait of Watchet a Harbour Town". Sandy quickly had a very eager audience.

She is such a vibrant speaker, full of enthusiasm, treading a difficult line as she wanted to encourage everyone to turn up to see the project on East Quay but obviously didn't want to give the game away!! She told us enough to whet our appetites and no more. Very clever of her. The idea was that we all buy tickets and go along to have our own bespoke journey.

"Echo" is essentially about community - people and place. It seeks to discover what connects the hidden web which makes people feel that they belong. To this end Sandy and Christopher have filmed people talking about community in their own words, filming good times and bad times. Each filming is a mini-performance, done in peoples' own homes.

Images of Watchet have been gathered: the landscape and the sounds, seagulls, dredgers, Fred Bacon on the quay, stones from the beach and much more. Watchet's essence cannot be bottled in a single package. It has so many facets and associations, many contradictory, and Echo seeks to bring all these together. Its focus is on the period of time which is in living memory, hence it revolves around post-war memories, garnering what people value about the past, the present and their aspirations for the future, making a connection between them all, searching for a balance between tradition and modernity, exploring the life of the commercial port as a contrast with Watchet's harbour today.

It was a completely engaging talk from Sandy, a fascinating evening with plenty of questions afterwards and a very amusing vote of thanks from Alan Jones. In the event, Echo Watchet was a very successful venture as we made our journey watching a community in conversation with itself.

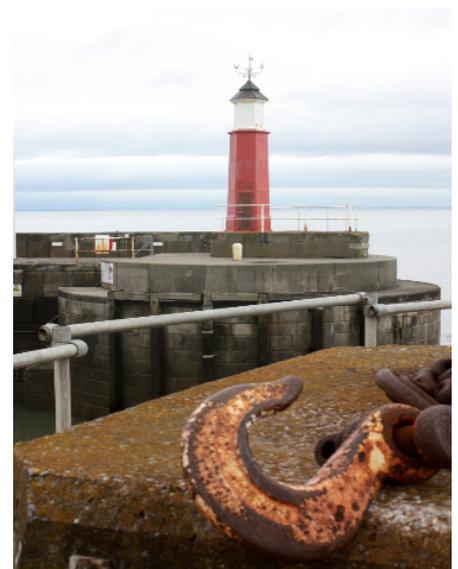
The actual performances, despite the less than clement weather, were a thrilling experience. It's fair to say that all who experienced the atmosphere in those sea containers came away excited and proud to be part of this wonderful little town.

Sandy recently wrote to our local newspaper: "THE JOURNEY IS NOT YET OVER":

Sir, I would like to send a big thank you to all the people of Watchet - individuals, clubs, associations and the Town Council – who have supported and participated in ECHO Watchet over the past eighteen months.

Thank you for inviting us into your homes and for sharing your stories with us..... ...The journey is not finished yet though, and in the future we will be looking at ways of using and adding to the material that has been generated.

Firstly we intend to create a DVD, hopefully for Christmas, but meanwhile do follow the news on the ECHO Watchet Facebook page..... ...The good ship ECHO Watchet has far to go.



Then and Now: Spot the differences



Parts of Watchet are very different now than a century ago but here's an example of how little West Street has changed since Victorian times. (except ugly yellow lines and cables).

The Watchet Wall Project: an update.

Readers will recall how The Conservation Society gave birth to the Watchet Wall Project in the town's Mineral Yard but quickly realised that a stand-alone group could best fulfill the aims and ambitions of this complex project. Dave Simpson-Scott, Publicity Officer for the new group. "Brings us up to speed":

Yes we've renamed the "Watchet Wall project" – it is now, "The Seaspray Gallery" and another thing to change, is the name of our group - we're now the "Watchet Arts Group". Born from the Conservation Society, we are a group of 14, with differing backgrounds and skills but united by a determination to "produce the goods" (as they say!) and create something that is - at the very least - popular with the townsfolk of Watchet and just as importantly, brings people from far and wide to enjoy our town.

What else have we done? Well we've meetings and in summary: we have officers of our new group, led by Chairman Tim Prior, and we've got on and done most of the inaugural activities. In a very short style we plan monthly meetings, have agreed a constitution, plan to issue a short broadsheet soon, are sorting out the rudiments of a web site and have already formed four sub groups to address (1) a fund-raising mosaic project (2) site clearance and survey (3) art and design and finally (4) fundraising overall. In a nut shell we're feeling rather proud of this progress and we hope to maintain a sensibly rapid pace in the future.

To finish, and arguably more important than anything else I've said –we have clear declared support for the project from West Somerset Council. There's no stopping us now!!

As well as the art project in the Mineral Yard, the new group has great plans to convert the overgrown, fly-tipping area, into a public garden. You probably saw in a recent copy of our local newspaper, Darren Scott's artist's Impression of the finished area. Volunteers from W.A.G. have now cleared the site, carried out a survey and are formulating ideas as to how the garden will be developed. Here's a photograph of the "Blank Canvas".



Watchet's Historical Past:

At this point in the newsletter, we are fortunate always to have Jack Binding write on Watchet's rich heritage. On this occasion we are printing a copy of the text that Jack prepared for the recent royal visit. - Thank you Jack; we know that The Princess Royal was very appreciative.

In the 1850's elements of the industrial revolution had reached Watchet and, in particular, trade through the harbour had increased enormously, mainly through the exporting of iron ore from the Brendon Hill mines. The West Somerset Mineral Railway ran from the iron ore mines down the valley to the port at Watchet where the ore was loaded on to ships and sent to the Ebbw Vale smelting works in South Wales.

The Harbour Commissioners, who controlled the harbour, came to the conclusion that it was of the utmost urgency to enlarge the size of the harbour and to increase the length of the western breakwater by some 400 feet which was to be a wooden construction.

They immediately instructed three eminent engineers, viz Rice Hopkins, James Abernethy and the famous Isambard Brunel, to submit plans for the proposed extension, which was to include the erection of a harbour lighthouse and signaling mast at the head of the breakwater. The plans were put out to tender and the successful one was that of James Abernethy in the sum of £20,058.00, the company being William Tredwell of 18 Parliament Street, Westminster.

The lighthouse was erected in 1862 and was supplied by Messrs Hennetts of Bridgwater costing £75 and is of a cast iron construction. It is approximately 22 feet in height. The lantern at the top, complete with oil lamp, cost £90 and was supplied by Stevens and Sons presumably of London. The cost of transporting it from London by the newly formed Watchet Trading Company was two Pounds, eighteen Shillings and five Pence and 12 Shillings was paid to one Alfred Wedlake for assisting to erect the lantern.

On the night of 27 December 1900 the town and harbour suffered the most severe storms in living memory. The western breakwater was breached and practically washed away leaving the harbour open to the ravages of the sea. Ships in the harbour broke away from their moorings and only three survived – the rest were completely destroyed. Overnight Watchet had lost its livelihood.

The Harbour Commissioners sought estimates for rebuilding amounting to £15,000 plus but were unable to secure the necessary capital. After a series of public meetings it was agreed that the town should form its own local authority, which would allow them to raise the necessary capital on the rates. 1902 saw the formation of the Watchet Urban District and the capital sum of £16,000 was raised to rebuild the western breakwater. The new breakwater was built of masonry and large concrete blocks and in 1904 the lighthouse, which had survived the storm, was re-erected and still stands firm today. When built the Lighthouse was painted red and would have exhibited a red light as pre IALA-A (Introduced in 1970/80s) starboard lights and buoys were red and port lights were green when entering a port.

It now has an occulting green light with a 3 second interval from three green windows and has a range of approximately 9 miles. It is a harbour navigational starboard marker however Trinity House requested the light was modified from fixed to occulting when the Marina was built to distinguish it from the Marina entrance lights.

The sequence is two and a half seconds green and half a second extinguished. Now, 150 years on, we are proud that the lighthouse continues to stand as a beacon offering a safe haven to all mariners who sail the Bristol Channel – and long may it continue.

<p>WATCHET LIGHTHOUSE by Sara Summers</p> <p>Watchet Lighthouse, Stands old and tall. A guiding light to us all.</p> <p>Come what may she's Straight and strong. She stands alone All day long.</p>	<p>She guides strangers in, With her welcome light And winks at us all, All through the night.</p> <p>In sun and snow. Solid and true. Like us Watchet folk, Dependable through and through!</p>
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HRH Princess Anne admires a freshly painted lighthouse

There is some mobile phone video footage of fixing the Commemorative plaque to the lighthouse on Youtube

Visit: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yTroMt-wGTk>

Instead of Nick Cotton's regular item on Watchet's historical past, he deals here with more contemporary issues:

POSITIVE PROGRESS

Since the formation of the Conservation Society, Watchet has undergone a great many changes, particularly regarding the sympathetic restoration of our valued historic buildings and, importantly, with new developments - one such example: Malthouse Court adjacent to our Post Office. The developer has sourced local materials and completed the re-build to a very high standard.

Numerous regular visitors are constantly commenting on how much Swain Street in particular has improved. Many have been surprised and delighted with David Milton's sculpture in Esplanade Lane which has rendered a once redundant area a real "must see" for anyone visiting Watchet.

The site of the old newsagents, next to the beautifully restored 17th. Century hall house, now Gallery 41, is in the process of total renovation and is making excellent progress. It is going to make a significant impact on the Street.

MEMBERS ACTIVITIES

Two of our members deserve a special mention. Firstly, Robin Trigg who lives at number 1, West Street. Robin has been an active supporter of the Society in lending his expertise to various projects, particularly the restoration of the Fitzroy Barometer. He has successfully reversed a trend that has so often spoilt the aesthetic appearance of a number of our period buildings; Robin has lived in West Street for a good number of years in a cottage that

he has lovingly restored. It had always been his intention to replace the UPVC windows and return them to hardwood; additionally, to return the guttering and downpipes to cast iron. These are expensive renovations and it has taken Robin a long time to find himself in a position to complete these final enhancements. Well done, Robin! (*"Then and Now"* on page 3 of this newsletter, shows his splendid wooden windows on the East elevation – Ed.)

SWAIN HOUSE

Anyone visiting Swain Street in the last twelve months could not fail to notice the extensive renovation of Swain House, at number 48. The new owners, Jason and Annie Robinson, and young son Archy have decided to make Watchet their home.

The distinctive Victorian facade still retains the original shop front and has been painstakingly restored it's a testament to their determination in maintaining the authentic period feel of the street.

There was little of the interior worthy of saving and as a result, was completely gutted. There was however some excitement when an eighteen



foot hole appeared in the floor which fortunately was not too sinister, but a well containing crystal clear water. This well pre-dating the building appears probably to have been a shared with the property next door. It is interesting that a number of similar wells have been discovered in recent times in the street. Enormous care and attention has been given to creating a spectacular modern look, which, although contemporary, very successfully manages to maintain the integrity of the building.

Jason has an exceptional eye for detail and a visit to the website or Facebook will give an opportunity

to see how he has achieved this transformation.

The Conservation Society has, since its formation had an interest in maintaining and, where possible, restoring the many cobbled areas that are fortunately in abundance in our seaside town. Jason deserves great credit for successfully re-instating the cobbled path that gives access to his and other properties from Swain Street, and is so much a part of our heritage and history. I can testify to the personal effort of Jason who undertook this task himself. I retain a clear image of Jason wheeling barrows, full of cobbles re-claimed from the rear of Gallery 41. An exhausted figure slumped over the gate, having laid another load of pebbles. This experience was so poignant that returning home I felt the need of a cup of tea and a lie down myself in sympathy.

The Conservation Society wish Jason and his family the very best in this new venture and extend our heartfelt appreciation that he has embraced the society's desire to celebrate our past whilst importantly becoming relevant to the 21st. century.

Swain House Boutique B & B, 48 Swain St., Watchet 01984 631 038 stay@swain-house.com

ROYAL VISIT

The visit of Princess Anne had a number of positive effects, with the enthusiastic painting of bollards and railings, and general tidying up. The lighthouse, probably our most iconic landmark, was re-painted, with the Town Council supplying the scaffolding and paint. A special mention must be made of Ian and Tom Wedlake who undertook the task at no cost to the town. Thank you, Tom and Ian.

Another Society member, Tony McLoughlin, brought his not inconsiderable skills to fruition with the completion of a carved stone plaque this is now fixed to the wall at the site of the "Seascape Sculpture". We are very fortunate as a society that we have so many members who have very specific skills and give their time freely for their affection of Watchet.

Finally, the Society would like to pay a special tribute to our local road-sweeper, Nigel Bridger, who has the important task of keeping our streets and pavements clean. Thanks, Nigel for doing that important bit extra, we're proud of what you do for Watchet.

Talking of the Royal visit, the photograph on page one of this newsletter, shows Eric Robinson talking to HRH the Princess Royal, we can eavesdrop on what he said:

Your Royal Highness, Watchet is justly proud of our barometer, a pride which I can best explain by addressing you as a yachtsman prepared to risk the challenge of Scottish waters relying upon good weather-forecasting. Forecasting as we know it stems back to just these barometers, the outcome of campaigning by Captain Robert Fitzroy. Best known as captain of RRS Beagle and taking Charles Darwin as his naturalist on his South American voyage, he had several years' experience charting the coast of Patagonia and the passage of Cape Horn, creating charts still used today.

In that work, several other naval brigs of between two and three hundred tonnes were dismantled or even wrecked by the sudden storms. The survival of The Beagle with less damage depended upon Fitzroy foreseeing bad weather by closely watching changes of barometric pressures and taking shelter, sometimes for days. When he returned to England in 1835 he was put in charge of Chatham Dockyard from where, in his four-volume report on the South American voyages, one of which was written by Darwin, he urged the installation of effective barometers at all British ports. Design he explored, and settled for one patented by the instrument-makers, Negretti and Zambias of the city, our Watchet instrument being an example.

Being supported by Admiral Hood and Beaufort, and being himself a determined man, Fitzroy won his case, and after a disastrous storm in 1859, barometers were installed in United Kingdom ports the following year. At that time the telegraph system was being introduced and in 1860 Fitzroy organised the publication of a simple weather forecast in the pages of The Times, a signal success to his campaigning and a sound basis for our fishing fleets if they chose to use it. At least ten instruments were on the quaysides of Scottish ports (something to check Ma'am!).

Two years ago when our instrument suffered damage to the casing, it was seen as a fitting matter for our Conservation Society to attend to. That work was authorised by my companion today, Mrs Molly Quint, who is our active Chairman.

Post scriptum: It is interesting to read the weather predictions on the barometer card. They can be quite poetic, a point noticed by The Princess Royal who certainly knows her Shakespeare....."short showers are sharp, but quick themselves consume". Richard 11. Look at the bottom left on the card.

Poet's Corner

Pressure on space this time around, sadly means holding over Jan Simpson-Scott's latest essay until January: "Samuel and Sara Coleridge – an unwise marriage?"

A date for your diary-

Donning another hat, Jan says: The Stationmaster and the Committee of FOWS – Friends of Watchet Station - have very kindly offered the station as a venue for WCS to hold a Christmas Coffee Morning/Bring and Buy Sale on Friday 14th December from 10.00 am. All the coffee you can drink and biscuits for £1. Please come along and bring friends and neighbours to support WCS.

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

Fungus Foray

I discovered two of my favourite toadstools within feet of each other up on Staple plain. Wood Blewitts are a bluish lilac colour at first but as the cap expands it grows paler and takes on that "flying" characteristic. The smaller toadstool: *Laccaria laccata*



amethystea always amazes me with the sheer brilliance of colour. It is always a joy to wander through the woods during autumn in search of these beautiful flowerless plants. Such a thrill if one happens to stumble on the amazing red toadstool so often illustrated in children's story books: the Fly Agaric (*Amanita muscaria*), as beautiful as it is poisonous.



WATCHET CONSERVATION SOCIETY

Chair

Treasurer and Membership Secretary

Secretary

Case Officer

Committee: Tina Barry, Nick Cotton, Peter Murphy, Paul Reynolds, Edward Frewin

www.watchetconservationsociety.co.uk

Molly Quint - 01984 632592

John Irven - 01984 631083

Jan Simpson-Scott - 01984 639615

Paul Upton – 01278 734630

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