



# WATCHET CONSERVATION MATTERS

Promoting, conserving & improving our physical and natural environment

Issue 29 July/August 2013

## ***From our Chair, Molly Quint:***



**Dear Friends Old & New,** Welcome to our latest Newsletter, Edward does such a wonderful job keeping us all in touch with everything that is going on and for finding so many interesting items for our members to read.

Summer is here and everything in the garden is growing at an alarming rate. Members are keeping St. Decumens Well looking beautiful, many thanks indeed to Rachel Fawcus and her helpers, the Goviers Lane Crossing gardens have had another make-over, many thanks to Green Fingers, and now our latest Project, "The Chimney Information Board", is almost complete. The site is being cleared, the art work for the display board is at the printers and the Mill is being a great partner in this project. Again very many thanks go to all who have given so much time and effort to bring this to fruition. The grand unveiling will be performed by Matthew, from the Mill and our project manager Jan. This will take place at the site

of the old chimney on 16th July at 7pm, followed by Coffee in St. Decuman's Church, and a tour of the beautiful building. Do please all come and make it another lovely evening.

Just a little personal note, thank you all for your kind enquiries regarding Derek, he is now making excellent progress and hopes to see you all soon, perhaps at the Pool Fun Day on Saturday 13th July at West Street Beach.

***Yours very sincerely Molly Q***

## ***Forthcoming Event: July 16th 2013 7.00 pm***

### **St Regis Chimney Interpretation Board unveiling**

#### **The programme for the evening:**

7pm Introduction by Molly Quint followed by a background explanation from Matthew Nixon of D S Smith Paper Ltd.

The unveiling by Matthew Nixon and Jan Simpson-Scott

7.20 pm Walk to St. Decuman's Church

7.30 pm Refreshments in the church

7.45 Alan Jones and Tony McLoughlin will lead a tour of the church.

*Nick Cotton has kindly produced several water colour paintings to illustrate the display board, one is shown here, the others feature later in this newsletter.*



## **Past Events: AN EVENING WITH JOHN GILMAN**

*Thanks go to Alan Jones for writing this review (from his hospital bed!)*

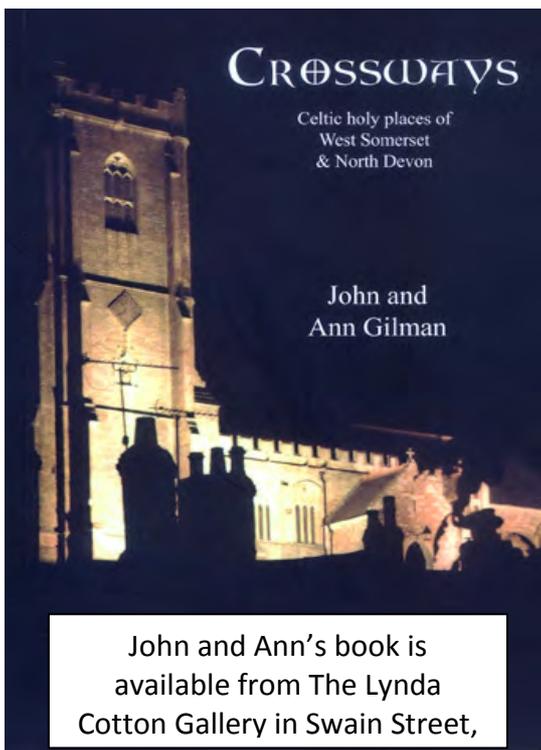
On Tuesday 21<sup>st</sup> May we were treated to an evening of wit and wisdom. John regaled us with the early history of Celtic Christians who lived between 490 -690 AD (or CE if we are to be politically correct – which I'm not). We heard how with the departure of the Romans c.450AD, the Celtic people returned to their agricultural traditions.

As the Saxons moved westwards from south east Britain they changed the names of the Celtic churches but never got further than the Parrett estuary leaving the Celtic tribes to flourish in West Somerset, Devon and Cornwall and keeping many of the ancient dedications (e.g.) St Decuman's here in Watchet, St Carantoc, St Petroc, St Dubricious and St Piro.

John talked of the 'age of saints' and the dedication of many of the monks from Welsh monasteries, of the marvelous knowledge of seamanship (it is known that they travelled all along the west coast of Britain as far north as Scotland and south to Brittany, there is now evidence that they crossed the Atlantic Ocean in their 'currachs' and settled in Labrador in north America).

These early Christians did not come here as 'missionaries' to convert the 'locals,' but to set up a chapel where they could live a solitary, righteous and spartan life. Inevitably they soon attracted a small following and over the years monasteries were formed. Some like St Petroc moved on setting up new cells even as far away as Brittany. (Probably he only wanted a peaceful life away from the crowds).

John then went on to talk about dowsing and its use in ancient times (the ancient Greeks and Romans all 'dowsed'). Today John uses 'dowsing' to locate the original foundation of ancient building both present and derelict, in his book 'Crossways' –Celtic holy places of West Somerset & North Devon – He and his wife Ann, describe the flow lines used to position our Celtic churches and describes in some detail our local church of St. Decuman as well as many others in West Somerset. It was an interesting evening even for the 'sceptics'.

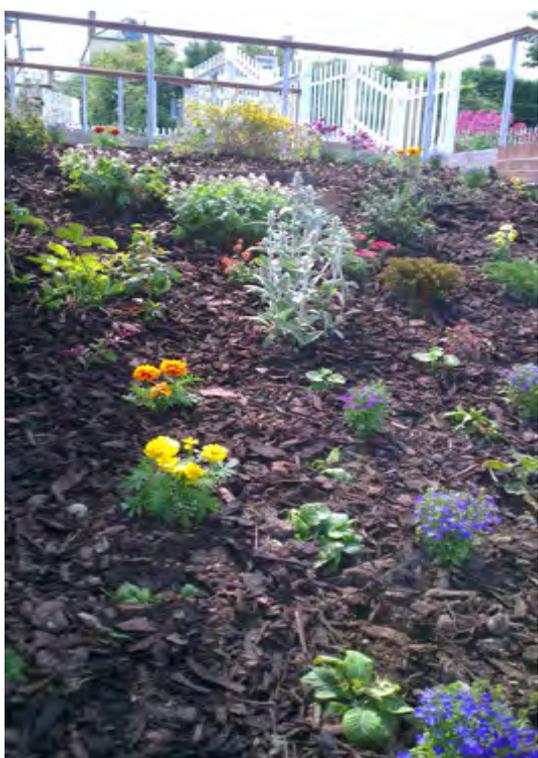


John and Ann's book is available from The Lynda Cotton Gallery in Swain Street,

## ***“A Car less Car Boot Sale ”***

The Conservation Society took responsibility for the planting and upkeep of the gardens at the Goviers Lane railway crossing. This of course does cost money. Jayne Hall had the inspiration of raising some cash by running a boot sale on The Esplanade during the recent fund-raising event for the Air Ambulance.





After a contribution to the Air Ambulance, £149.70 remained, to spend on the gardens – well done Jayne and of course husband Chris who manned the stall. Sixty Geraniums were purchased and planted, as well as lots of bags of bark mulch to suppress the weeds as can be seen in the photographs. The remaining cash will finance future plantings.



Once the Geraniums come into flower, there will be a riot of colour to be enjoyed by those arriving at the station as well of course Watchet residents just popping into town. Our thanks go to Malcolm Davy, Jayne and Chris Hall, Molly Quint, Sheila and Edward Frewin for neglecting their own gardens to tend the Conservation Society's.

### ***Talking of stalls on The Esplanade, another successful Jan Simpson-Scott Bric a Brac sale at the Wednesday market June 26<sup>th</sup>. Jan says:***

Under a lovely summer sky Tina Barry, Alan Marlor, Dave SS and I set up our stall and Ellie Jones and Pam Lawes filled the tables to groaning point with pretty china cups and saucers and a few odd things like a budgerigar cage and a cat bed. The bird cage was sold to someone who asked why we didn't have two love-birds to go in it! Barbara Farmer was brilliant at getting people, especially men, to part with their money. Rosalind Pick had an amazing sales patter about the exclusivity of our wares. A customer told her she was wasted on our stall.

It was such fun, hilarious at times and we made good friends with the stall-holders either side who asked if we would be back the following Wednesday. We assured them that we could not do this every week – too exhausting and we get too dirty.

After paying Julie, the Town Warden, £15 for our pitch, we raised a neat £155, much of this from customers arriving on the first two trains coming in to the station. Our thanks to all of our WCS members who once again cleared cupboards to donate sale items, to HCB who gave us much needed liquid refreshment and to St. Margaret's Hospice Shop who took our unsold items at the end of the day. It's a dream team all working together and thoroughly enjoying ourselves as we do it.

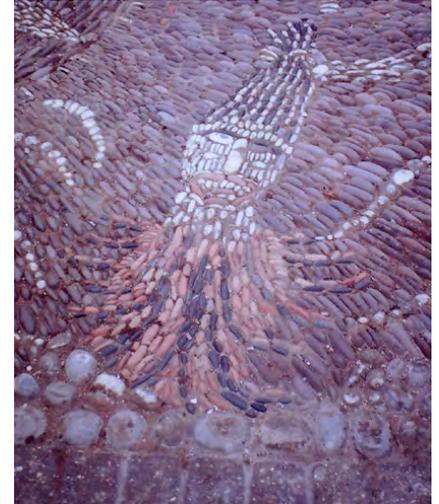
We missed Banker Lin Marlor who has been very poorly and we wish her well in her convalescence and hope she'll be back with us soon.

## ***A Watchet Treasure:***

***Eric Robinson has been out and about with his camera in order to illustrate his tale of St Decuman and Watchet's tribute to the famous saint.***

At the far end of Harbour Road, alongside the library, is an oft forgotten piece of Watchet history which deserves our attention when we address visitors. It is in fact a summary of an event, part legend; part Dark Age history: the story of St Decuman, a Welsh Saxon saint, just a little below Dyfed, who brought the gospels to our town in the 7<sup>th</sup> century.

An accomplished navigator of skin boats - currachs (super coracles), Decuman at other times journeyed to Iona and the Western Isles. On the time that concerns Watchet, he came across the Channel, accompanied by a favourite cow to look after his wellbeing, and sought to convert the local Saxons. All went well, but came a time when matters changed and his head was cut off summarily. Being already a saint with special powers, he reputedly replaced his head, perhaps with the help of the sacred waters of what we now call St Decuman's well and carried on his good works away from Watchet. He is buried in the north aisle of Llandaff Cathedral in Cardiff. All of this is told graphically in pebble mosaic in a work completed in 1996 by a nationally famous craftsman in mosaic, Maggy Howarth of Cobblestone Designs. Apart from that skin boat and cow, a rather grisly detail is the severed head, the blood streaming down as blood red pebbles, filling the upper corner of the



total design close to Harbour Road, a special interest for children! It seems fitting to draw attention to this vital bit of Watchet history at this juncture, because in June, the railings bounding the mosaic and creating a frame for the whole have just been restored by local craftsman and blacksmith, Ben Horrabin, aided by his uncle, Gordon Lee, as welder able to tighten up the protective railings against skateboarders.

Final touches to the whole came with work on the lime mortars bedding the railings into the local Williton Red Sandstone bases. This was carried out by another specialist craftsman, Jeremy Lile of Roadwater.

All we need now is a reinstatement of the explanatory notice which was once fixed to the library wall. Why this is important has to be the fact that this is work by local craftsmen of which we can rightly boast to our visitors.



## **West Street Beach Pool Fun Day Saturday July 13<sup>th</sup>. 1-00 till 6-00 pm**

On Saturday 22<sup>nd</sup> June Watchet's tidal pool was given a much needed wash and brush-up, when volunteers undertook a spring clean that has now become an annual event. Conservation Society members, including Charles Birch, John Elling, Andrew Harrison, John and Rachel Irvén, Judy Prior, Paul Reynolds, Molly Quint and Cynthia Webb wielded buckets and brooms, with heavy lifting kindly performed by local contractor Nick Sherrin and his mechanical digger. The Conservation Society first took on the challenge of



emptying out and cleaning the West Street beach pool in 2010 when a lack of care over many years had left it full of boulders and silt. The first clean-up was a major task but now a smaller spring clean each year means the facility can be used as a children's boating pool during the summer months. John Irvén and Paul Reynolds were responsible for the project management; Paul as can be seen was

rewarded for his efforts with "the catch of the day".

The pool cleaning is always an enjoyable time and achieves a great end result and of course the facility will be put to good use when the Conservation Society stages the annual Pool Fun Day on July 13<sup>th</sup>. The event is from 1pm to 6pm with boat races starting at 2.00 pm. There will also be paper boat making sessions, races for wooden model and sail boats, as well as a host of traditional entertainment from apple bobbing to magnetic fishing. The Conservation Society hopes that many families will participate in the races and bring along their own picnics and refreshments to help keep this Watchet beach tradition alive. And of course it is totally free entertainment!



## **Poet's Corner: Samuel Taylor Coleridge, father of Hartley David Coleridge**

***In this essay, part one of two, Jan Simpson-Scott throws light on Coleridge as a father***

We've explored STC as a poet, a man and a husband. I'm now looking at him as a father, this time as father to Hartley, next time, possibly, as a father to Sara, his only daughter.

Coleridge and his wife Sara had four children. The couple arrived in Nether Stowey with Hartley whom critics claim was Coleridge's favourite child; Berkeley was born at the cottage in Lime Street and died of consumption when he was eight months old whilst Coleridge was with the Wordsworths in Germany. Derwent was born in the Lake District. Sara, their only daughter, became the custodian of her father's work.

As we know Coleridge's sojourn in the West Country produced some of his finest work. On our doorstep is the statue of The Ancient Mariner believed by some to be his opus magnum, remembered by many of us from our days in junior school. Several of his biographers believe that his West Country period was also his period of domestic

happiness, though it is not without its contradictions which as we know are a feature of his entire life.

David Hartley Coleridge, known as Hartley, was his first child and born in Bristol in September 1797. At the time Coleridge was away in the Midlands but his lines:

“Well! –

It is a father’s tale: but if that Heaven  
Should give me life, his childhood shall grow up  
Familiar with these songs, that with the night  
He may associate joy – “

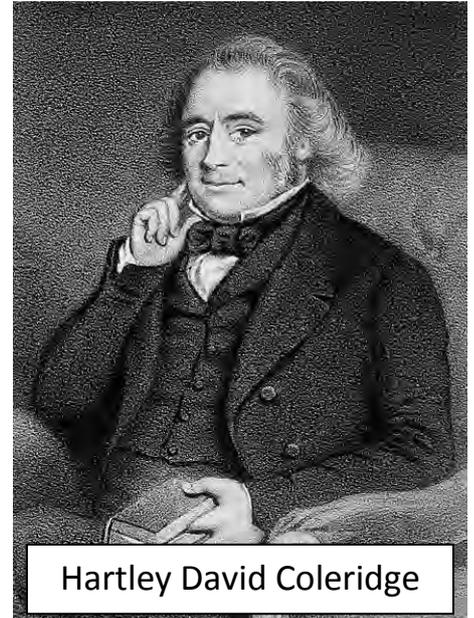
Here we have the usual quest for the Utopian dream, his one-dimensional view of life which he dreamed of for his first born. But this was followed by a sequence of rather weary sonnets which reveal his confused feelings as he embarked on fatherhood. His general interest in childhood had always been purely romantic, yet his own experience of child-rearing was often troubled, especially with his first born.

Hartley’s relationship with his father was difficult, maybe as a result of his father’s absences from home and Hartley’s own inclination towards self-examination which caused him to continually have doubts about himself. Coleridge celebrated Hartley’s infancy –

“So for the mother’s sake the child was dear,  
And dearer was the mother for the child”.

In these lines there is a confident domestic happiness which Coleridge was able to sustain for the early years of Hartley’s life but after that his poems indicate the difficulties he had in establishing a consistent rapport with the boy. When Hartley was eighteen months old Coleridge wrote “The Nightingale”. In one of his notebooks at Coleridge Cottage there is an extract which inspired the final lines of this poem. “Hartley fell down and hurt himself – I caught him up crying and screaming – and ran out of doors with him – The Moon caught his eye – he ceased crying immediately – and his eyes and tears in them, how they glittered in the Moonlight”. His delicate observation of the boy’s raised finger and brimming eyes and his hope that the boy will live happily in nature capture the intimacy of his desire to be the perfect parent but the simplicity of his belief in the easiness of parenting shows clearly his hopeless naivety.

Coleridge’s early obsession with Pantisocracy, his Utopian dream, is mirrored in Hartley’s creation of Ejujria, an ideal world into which the boy escaped. This is a matter of some debate with the Coleridge biographers. Is there a Utopian gene passed from father to son? Unlikely. Did Coleridge’s obsession with the idealism of nature transmit itself to Hartley and did it have its genesis in the moonlight? For me this does have some romantic credence? The Wordsworths were a significant part of Hartley’s early years, Romanticism was the backdrop of his early life and he was a child with a vivid imagination. Coleridge and indeed Sara his mother identified his imagination and strong intellect as evidence of genius. Coleridge’s beliefs ensured that Hartley’s early education was irregular and the boy was allowed to wonder and dream and ponder over Coleridge’s books and poems. By eight he was roaming the countryside in “uncontrolled fits of poetic fancy”. Here seeds of confusion



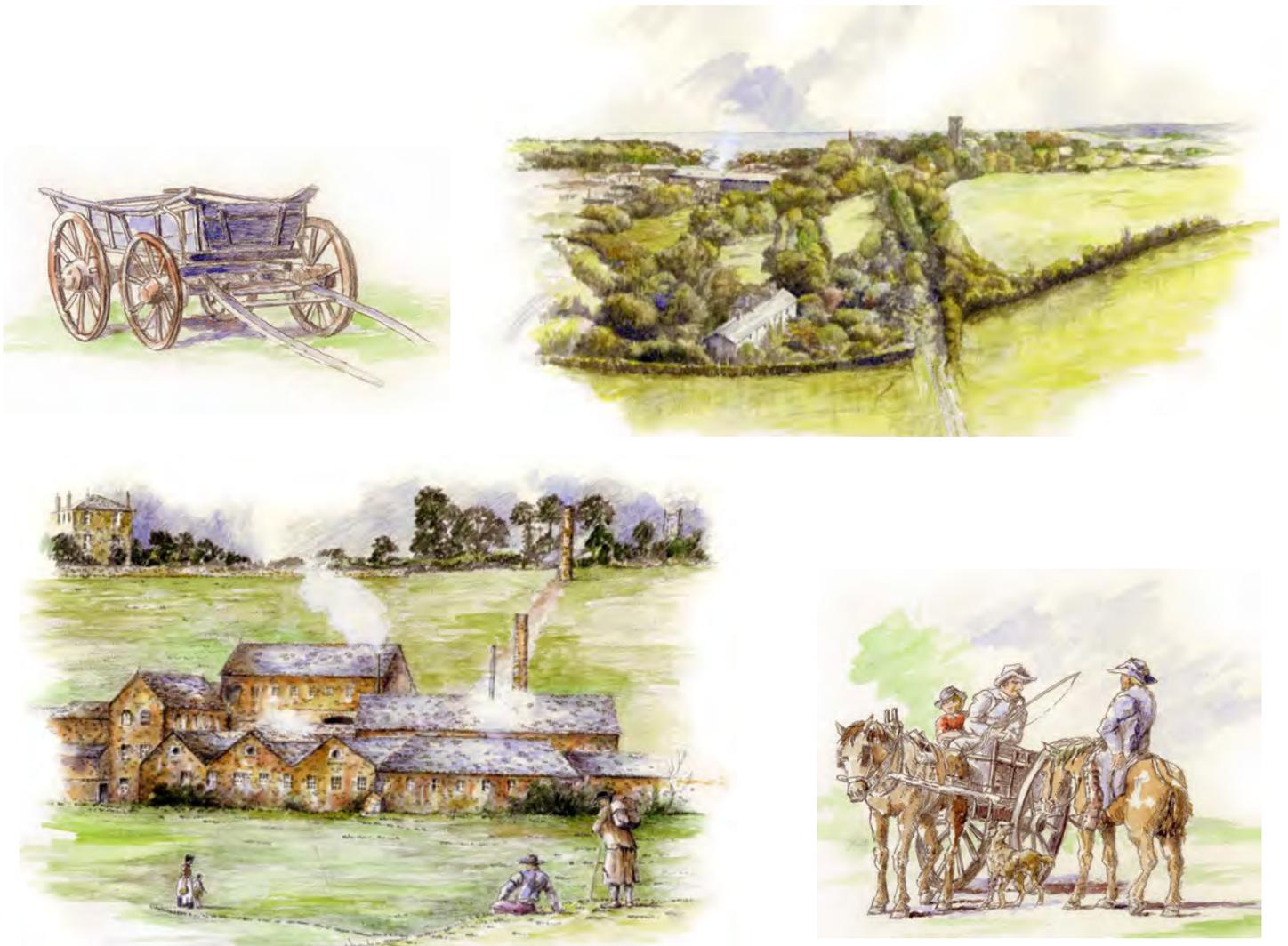
Hartley David Coleridge

appear to have been sown causing such conflict during his Oxford years. Coleridge and Wordsworth and to a lesser extent Sara nurtured him with notions of poetic greatness which he was unable to fulfil. Yes he had the mind of a romantic but he was plagued by the shadow of his father who with Robert Southey, the architect of Pantisocracy, helped to gain him a place at Merton College, Oxford. Either the pressures of academic life or the predicament of being the son of a renowned poet, possibly a mix of both, led to his alcoholism which dominated the rest of his life. Failure to win the prestigious Newdigate prize for English verse compounded his feelings of inadequacy.

Hartley's early poems, including *The Horses of Lysippus*, were lauded by critics for their technique, detail and observation. Yet they reveal the inner child which remained within him throughout life, causing his wayward impulses. He was forever trapped in the wilderness of nature and the lack of boundaries which defined him. .... ***To be continued***

## St Regis Chimney 1865 to 2011

Just over a year ago, one of Watchet's significant landmarks: the paper mill chimney, had to be demolished owing to the cost of maintaining it in a safe condition. The Conservation Society thought it was right and proper that there should be some form of "memorial" to its passing and Nick Cotton was asked to paint some water-colours that could be reproduced on a display board to be placed where the chimney once stood. We are thrilled with the lovely paintings that Nick has kindly donated to the Society, which are reproduced here:



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

### **The Pyramid Orchid (*Anacamptis pyramidalis*)**



This Orchid gained its name because the flower spike is in the form of a pyramid as it begins to open; later, as it matures the flower spike becomes more cylindrical. A Pyramid Orchid can have as many as 60 – 100 tightly packed flowers.

Although generally mid-pink in colour, plants by the sea can have much darker flowers. I have seen both types in our local area but further inland they are indeed a lighter shade. Its liking for quick draining calcareous soils means it can be found on cliff-tops, chalk downs, seaside golf links and as with several other species it can be found happily colonising on roadside verges. Driving from Watchet to Porlock there are several places with welcome splashes of pink where this particular orchid happily survives .

The flowers have a faint sweet scent, described by some as unpleasant; I do not find it so.

As with all of our precious and threatened wildflowers; before it became illegal to pick them, our terrestrial orchids became a rarity, where once they grew prolifically. Now the threat to them is mainly from over-zealous mowing before the plants have an opportunity to set their seeds.

***Members of the Watchet Conservation Society receive this newsletter bi-monthly either the printed copy or by e-mail. If you have enjoyed reading this publication and are not a member, please will you consider joining the Society, you would be helping to conserve our physical and natural environment. It costs just £6 a year, any of the committee members below, would be delighted to welcome you.***



**WATCHET CONSERVATION SOCIETY**

**Chair**

**Treasurer and Membership Secretary**

**Secretary**

**Case Officer**

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