



WATCHET CONSERVATION MATTERS

Promoting, conserving & improving our physical and natural environment

Issue 30 Sep/Oct 2013

From our Chair, Molly Quint:



Molly preparing for the unveiling of the chimney information board.

Dear Friends and Members
What wonderful summer weather we have had this year and long may it last, Indian Summer would be lovely, just to take us into Autumn and then perhaps a kind winter. As usual the summer has been busy, with many activities and happenings. Great Pool Cleaning and Pool Fun Day,

this is so good for Watchet visitors and local children to have somewhere to play safely and we are very grateful to all who helped. Then the unveiling of the Chimney Information Board, wonderful co-operation from the Wansbrough Mill, then a little more knowledge gained by a lovely tour of St. Decuman's Church, with again many thanks to those who helped to make it a very interesting occasion. The Church Tower was opened for those brave enough to see the amazing view of Watchet and the really beautiful countryside of Somerset, bad for the knees but great for the eyes! Now we move forward to our first talk of the autumn on Water and its Power, and the way we can use it, by Alex and Phil Gannon. It will be lovely to catch up with you all again in the freshly decorated Methodist School Room. ***Yours very sincerely Molly Q***

Forthcoming Event:

**Tuesday September 17th 2013 7.30 pm
at the Methodist School Room**

Waterpower - Past and Present

Alec Gannon, assisted by brother Phil will give an illustrated talk on the basic fundamentals of principles governing hydropower, its history and the changes through the years. He will detail the different types of waterwheel/turbine. Alec says a series of slides will be used to illustrate the talk including photos and diagrams of installations he has worked on and of local installations.



Past Events: Unveiling of the chimney information board followed by a tour of St Decuman's Church led by Alan Jones and Eric Robinson.



WCS members gather for the unveiling



On the right, Robin Trigg who did such a great job installing the information board, chats with our town crier and Dave Simpson-Scott prior to the unveiling.

Jan Simpson-Scott and Alan Jones are preparing a leaflet for the tourist office, detailing the history of the paper mill; this is the text:

The paper mill was founded in 1750 by William Wood. Paper was hand-made in the mill using the vat method and was known as St. Decuman's paper. Production was limited, probably one cart per week. By 1810 Wood's business was expanding and apprentices were being brought in from Cheddar.

In 1824 the mill was taken over by James Date, William Peach and John Wansbrough who gave his name to the mill. Wansbrough introduced the first machines for paper-making and had 120 employees with a wage bill of £100 per week. Mainly widows were employed – their wages were lower, they didn't argue or join early unions and reduced the poor relief on parish rates. Wansbrough, a devout Methodist, built a chapel in the mill grounds, insisting his employees worshipped there. The local area was important to Wansbrough's success giving him all the basic requirements: an adequate labour force, a plentiful water supply and accessibility to raw materials – paper waste in the form of beer labels, pawn tickets and old posters, rags of every description and colour, emitting an indescribable stench and dust. Communications with marketing areas were good, initially by sea and horse-drawn wagons, rail later. There was considerable inward traffic by ships to Watchet Harbour with coal from South Wales, wood fibre and esparto grass for pulp.

Most of the mill was destroyed by fire in 1889. Ten years later five paper machines were operating and Wansbrough mill was the largest manufacturer of paper bags in the country. David S Smith purchased the mill in 1986 and today there is a large transport fleet. Constant investment and reshaping has turned it into the UK's leading paper maker.

The chimney, an unusual square shape, accessed directly opposite the lych gate of St. Decuman's Church, was installed c. 1865 to overcome draught problems with the coal-fired boilers. Built of local red bricks from Wellington Brickworks bound with iron bands there

were six stages marked with double courses of buff brick from Ebbw Vale, topped with a corbelled-out section and two courses of dog-tooth brickwork. Originally its height was about 75ft. which presumably was not high enough to create the required up-draught as another 15ft section was added.

Wansbrough chimney was demolished in 2011 on safety grounds. WCS decided that the site should be commemorated with an Interpretation Board. Molly Quint, Chairman of WCS , introduced a short ceremony in July 2013 and the Interpretation Board showing artwork by Nick Cotton, aerial photography by Paul Reynolds and script by Jan Simpson-Scott was unveiled by Matthew Nixon of D S Smith Paper and Jan Simpson-Scott , secretary of WCS. The Interpretation Board was sponsored by D S Smith Paper.

The Saint Decuman's Church Tour

After the excitement down at the "stump" of the chimney for the unveiling, we then went back up the hill to the church where Alan Jones talked on the background and history of St Decuman's whilst Eric Robinson detailed the Wyndham family influence on the church. Inevitably, some fascinating geological facts surfaced when Eric explained the subtle differences between slate and marble, as you will read below.



Eric Robinson, Alan Jones and a Wyndham Monument

Alan told us how Saint Decuman arrived from Wales on a hurdle with a cow, how a pagan chopped off his scalp which was then reunited with the rest of his head after washing in the restorative waters of the Holy Well.

We learned that there was a Saxon church at Daws Castle (that's just outside Watchet at the top of West Street) but as is common with our coastline, it ended up on the West Beach

when the cliff eroded. There is a field called Old Minster where once the earthwork stood. Our present church was dedicated in 1189 but nothing remains of this today. The earliest part of our current church is the chancel which possibly housed the saint's bones after they were moved from the Saxon church.

The original central Norman Tower is replaced by the current western tower which was built by the middle of the fifteenth century.

Most of the stained glass is of Victorian or Edwardian origin, one exception being a lancet window on the north side of the chancel featuring the Royal Arms of King Edward 1st.

There is much else that Alan told us, including the history of the internal features and the church's connection with the slaying of Thomas à Becket. Space prohibits a full account of his talk. However, there is a very informative leaflet available in the church, well worth the trip to obtain a copy.

Eric Robinson then took the floor to tell us about the Wyndham Family's connection with St Decuman's Church he writes: Not to put too fine a point on it, the Wyndham family

survived and prospered through Elizabethan and Jacobean years where others failed, by being politically and religiously adept.

Their wealth came from lands in Sussex and Norfolk in addition to our own parts of Somerset, but in particular from coal and iron mines in West Cumberland, the area from which they took their title as Earls of Egremont. The 4th earl was grand enough to be the sponsor of W M Turner no less.

All of this success is expressed in the prominent wall monuments in the north aisle of St Decuman's for which they could afford the skill of as important a sculptor and mason as Nicholas Stone, sometime associate of Wren at St Paul's. All of this excited Professor Pevsner when he wrote his original volume on Somerset in his series "**Buildings of England**" which everyone quotes. On one point, however, he got it wrong, in his notes he identified as "slate" the 9' tall slabs with monumental brasses which are wall-mounted and almost cut out the light of the east window to the Chapel.

In the course of the revision of the Somerset volume by my colleague, Julian Orbach, we came upon a record in the account of Nicholas Stone junior, of work carried out for the Wyndham family in 1634 for a "black marbell stone" and later, "for the carriage of a black marbell stone of 9 foot ½ long from Scotland Yard to Longacre". In 1634, Scotland Yard was a Thameside Wharf, and Longacre was the workshop of the Stone family masons.

This is where geologists earn their keep. The "black marbell" is actually black limestone from Tournai in Belgium, the stone of many classical fonts in Medieval and later churches. As a stone it contains small fossils which serve to identify it as limestone but not a true marble. The Stones worked at times in Amsterdam and the Low Countries, the source of the best monumental brasses. Stone junior was involved in shipping Portland Stone to the Continent, so a return cargo of a 9 foot slab makes no problem. How it got to our end is not documented, but Orchard Wyndham paid up in 1637.

Marble as opposed to slate is always cool to the touch. Try it when you next visit St Decuman's.

West Street Beach Pool Fun Day on Saturday July 13th.

Having undertaken the annual spring clean of the West Street Beach tidal pool in June, the



Pete Stevenson starting a Paper Boat Race

Conservation Society held our annual pool fun day. The weather could not have been better, with a grand attendance from residents and visitors alike. Having shown children how to make paper boats, they were allowed to race them on the pool, with heat winners racing in a final to determine the champion paper boat maker. Subsequent races with wooden 'nail boats' and sailboats each determined a category winner,

who were all presented with prizes, before running against each other in a grand sail boat final. Chloe Chambers as winner of the overall title was presented with the 'Jim Barry Prize 2013' by Tina, widow of local man Jim Barry in whose memory the prize is awarded. Many other attractions included traditional apple bobbing, magnetic fishing and model boating for the youngest children using fresh water inflatable pools. A highlight was also a series of egg and spoon races for children, ladies and gentlemen, with the ladies challenging the Local Watchet Coastguards who had turned out in force to support the event. The challenge was won by Sue Wills! Molly Quint said, 'it's always great to see the children and their families enjoying themselves, and we are glad that we can continue to promote such traditional beach activities in Watchet with the help of our members and volunteers'



Chloe and Tina

Goviers Lane Crossing Commendation

We are thrilled and pleased to report from Somerset County Council, David Peake's news that at the Institute of Civil Engineers Awards ceremony in June, the Goviers Lane Crossing Project won the 'bronze medal' and was commended in the Community Project of the year category. This is a great achievement for the partnership working between West Somerset Railway plc, Somerset County Council, West Somerset Council, Watchet Town Council and Watchet Conservation Society together with community campaigners. As active Conservation Society committee members, John Irven was responsible as Community Stakeholder for facilitating the whole project, with Jayne Hall responsible for the design of the crossing in her "day job" at West Somerset Council. When asked how they felt about

the award, Jayne said: "That's fabulous news! It makes us feel all that perseverance was worth it in the end!! The project was a resounding success in our eyes as it has reconnected the town and brought local people together! Proof that with the right attitude things CAN get done and we CAN make a difference!"



David receives the certificate from the President of the Institution on behalf of the partners.

Humphrey Davies, Chairman of the West Somerset Railway PLC, said 'I have to congratulate all the partners involved in the development of Goviers Lane Crossing for achieving the Bronze Medal place at the Institute of Civil Engineers

award ceremony. Goviers lane has been an example of the Railway working with the Community to provide and appreciate the social needs of Watchet, one of the busiest towns along the railway....catering for the local residents and providing a facility for visitors to safely access the town. This has to be a bench mark for future developments where the railway and towns along the line can work together to improve the needs of all parties.

Poet's Corner: Samuel Taylor Coleridge, father of Hartley David Coleridge
The concluding part of Jan Simpson-Scott's essay considering Coleridge as a father



Whilst Coleridge the father was able for the most part to sit upon his demons, drink and drugs, and thus achieve the greatness he merits, Hartley's strength of character was more limiting, leaving him unable to rise above the paralysis which continually aggravated him. Despite the support of his father



and Wordsworth his time at Oxford was not successful, nor was his foray into teaching. Some critics have claimed that Hartley most definitely possessed poetical and critical genius. Hartley himself wrote, "I am one of the small poets." Was he incapacitated by the genius of his father, the charismatic, revolutionary Romantic with his coterie of Wordsworth, Southey and Poole, a father he could never hope to equal, let alone surpass? There is no evidence that Coleridge tried to suppress Hartley's genius, quite the reverse. But Coleridge was never going to be a steady guiding influence providing structure and nurture, leading the way to his son's literary fulfilment. He was too chaotic himself. Yet he dreamed of seeing Hartley blossom and nowhere is this clearer than in one of his finest poems, "Frost at Midnight" with its imagery of "silent icicles/ Quietly shining to the quiet Moon" –

"Like those, my babe! which ere tomorrow's warmth
Hath capp'd their sharp keen points with pendulous drops,
Will catch thine eye, and with their novelty
Suspend thy little soul: then make thee shout,
And stretch and flutter from thy mother's arms
As thou wouldst fly for very eagerness."

Rarely was there any adult calm within Coleridge, always childish joyful energy.

Coleridge never boxed himself in with boundaries or limitations, forever testing any framework. Hartley however knew his limits, though the beautiful and touching piece *Poietes a poietes* -

"No hope have I to live a deathless name" – almost contradicts its own assertion.

At Coleridge Cottage in Nether Stowey there is the front parlour where Coleridge sat and wrote his legendary work. At his feet is the wicker cradle which he rocked. In some ways he was a modern father, hands-on we would say today. But the very freedom Coleridge sought with nature and which moved his pen to such fine lines disabled him as a father. Did

his desire to release the genius he believed Hartley to be put too much pressure on the boy?

In his poem “The Anemone” Hartley Coleridge explores the frailty and smallness of this flower. This linking of weakness and size with fear and shame is a recurring theme in his work. Like his father and other Romantics Hartley Coleridge was charmed by the novelty of everyday things. This is not unusual with late eighteenth/early nineteenth century writers, Jane Austen being perhaps a prime example. Everyday things personified their world. But for Hartley Coleridge nature served as a symbol of the moral and spiritual world. He could also be humorous and reflective.

“Harmless warriors, clad in mail
Of silver breastplate, golden scale –“
“And yet, since on this hapless earth
There’s small sincerity of mirth
And laughter oft is but the art
To drown the outcry of my heart”

Hartley Coleridge was spontaneous and personal, dealing with the joys, sorrows, hopes and disappointments of life. Samuel Coleridge expected his son to become a superlative poet. The emotional responses upon him were immense. Hartley Coleridge was born at the peak of the Romantic Movement, the zenith of his father’s success. He began writing as the Victorian era was emerging; a new social order was evolving. Sentimentalism was the theme of the embryonic industrialisation. Hartley Coleridge recognised the change in the national rhythm –

“I am a petty man of rhyme
Nursed in the softness of a female time”.

We have two geniuses, father and son. Genius is no guarantee of success. The world acknowledges the success of Samuel Taylor Coleridge as a poet. Hartley followed in his shadow, wrote some moving verse, but was never able to lift that shadow.

A New Use for Marina Mud: suggests Eric Robinson

We were all very pleased to see the damaged copings to our ancient packhorse bridge over the Washford River repaired last year with good sand and lime mortar. The workmen certainly knew what they were doing with exactly the right materials.

Having said that, the repair stood out in starkly white contrast to the brown lichenate crust of the original weathered coping. To counter this, several traditional ‘natural’ treatments have been tried in recent months, hoping to ‘distress’ the new mortar (superficially of course). A brown acrylic paint, boot polish, out of date yoghurt to name but three mentionable reagents. Results have been disappointing. Now, however, a copious smearing of mud fresh from the Marina has been applied in the hope that the mud pigment together with the salt and mineral ingredients of the mud might soak into the fresh semi-porous mortar and leave a natural stain.

(I hate to disappoint Eric but I passed that way the other day and so far cannot see the desired result. Perhaps one of our readers can come up with an alternative solution – Ed.)

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

The Cuckoo Pint (*Arum maculatum* L.)



A common sight in our hedgerows and on our wayside verges at this time of the year are the bright red berries of the Cuckoo Pint. My water-colour painting shows the root and fresh growth that is so common in the spring and then bright red berries as we see them at this time of the year. It must be remembered that all parts of this plant are toxic; the red berries would be particularly harmful to children. The Cuckoo Pint grows to about 25cm in height and are commonly found in most European countries, especially Britain, Holland, Ireland and Southern Germany. Towards the top of the stem is the spadix, which has an unpleasant smell, resembling manure and therefore attracts small flies. The flies are trapped under hairs that line the stem. Once pollinated the sheath withers, the flies are released, coated in pollen to start the process all over again. Other common names for the Cuckoo Pint are: Lords and Ladies, Adam and Eve, Parson in the Pulpit or Bulls and Cows. The

Elizabethans used the root to manufacture a white starch.

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.



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