



# WATCHET CONSERVATION MATTERS

Promoting, conserving & improving our physical  
and natural environment

Issue 36 Sept/Oct 2014



**From our chair Molly Quint**

Dear Friends,

Everything is moving forward to Autumn but what a wonderful Summer we have had, plenty of Sun, Fun and Events. Now we are looking forward to our first talk of the Season, on Ice Houses, (very necessary to store meat etc in the days before fridges and freezers), given to us by Barbara Marchant, who has studied these curious buildings around many parts of England. Do come and find out how they were designed and used. Also we are beginning to think about the AGM on 18th November in the Phoenix

Centre, perhaps you would like to come onto the Committee, speak to us, we would love some more friends to join us with new ideas and interests.

Those of us who have been in Watchet for a number of years were saddened by the passing of Vernon Stone this month. When harbour master he was always seen in and around the harbour, as it was then, with the Cargo boats coming in and the noise of unloading and then loading of the waste paper, tractors, etc. He would go out to meet the large ships and bring them in, sometimes in awful weather, when they looked as though they would jump over the quay and miss the entrance because of the swell. He would set the Fitzroy Barometer each morning and shut and open the sluice gates on the river to flow through the harbour. He had a great sense of humour, always with a grin and a mumbled greeting, so a great character who will be missed, our sincere condolences to his family and friends.

Yours very sincerely, **Molly Q.**

**OPEN MEETING TALK**  
**ON TUESDAY SEPTEMBER 16TH**

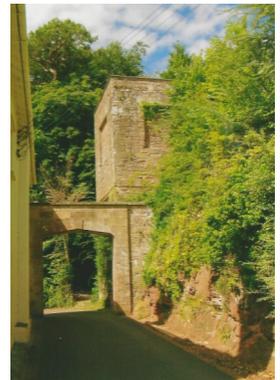
Our next open meeting speaker will be  
Barbara Marchant,

who will give an illustrated talk about Ice Houses.

A reminder of life before we had refrigerators.

Our picture shows the ice house at  
Orchard Wyndham.

The meeting will start at 7.30  
At the Methodist Schoolrooms.



## ISAMBARD KINGDOM BRUNEL A talk by Brian Portch on 15<sup>th</sup> July

It was always going to be a popular talk, but somehow we squeezed 55 people into the Methodist schoolrooms to hear Brian's talk about the lives and works of the famous father and son team of engineers, Isambard and his father Marc Brunel. Brian explained first how IKB came by his unusual names. His father was Marc Isambard Brunel and came from a long established French farming family and he married Sophia Kingdom, Isambard was keeping both family names alive.



Marc was fortunate to have escaped the French revolution, being employed by the navy he was able to obtain a passport for the United States where he made a good career as a surveyor and engineer. In 1799 he return to England landing in Falmouth and moved to Portsmouth where he made a name for himself by mass producing rigging blocks for the navy. The navy needed 100,000 blocks a year and previously these had each been carved by hand. In collaboration with the mechanic Henry Maundslay, they were able, with 10 men, to produce the work of 100 men. Their production line was revolutionary and the machine tool industry began.

Now back in England Isambard renewed his friendship with Sophia Kingdom whom he had met in France and they were married in 1836.

The 30s were a busy time for the workaholic Isambard, submitting designs for the Clifton Suspension Bridge, being appointed engineer to the Bristol Railway Co, (later renamed The Great Western Railway) preparing parliamentary plans for the Great Western Railway, as

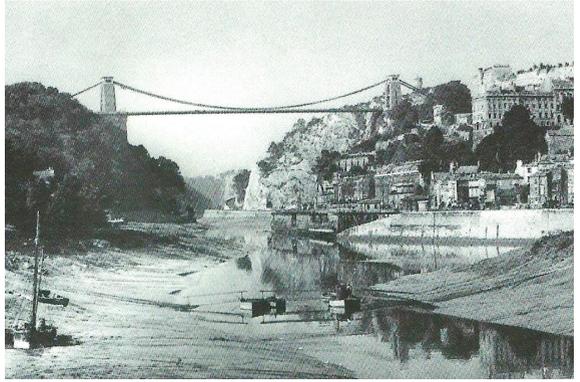


well being appointed engineer for continuing work on the Thames Tunnel, engineer to the Hungerford Foot Bridge in London, the Merthyr and Cardiff Railway, the Bristol and Exeter Railway, the foundation of the Great Western Steam Ship Company, culminating in the first voyage of S.S. Gt. Western in 1838.

Brian suggested that in this later respect Brunel was the first to consider integrated travel.

Today we can still see many of his great works which are his lasting legacy.

The Clifton Suspension Bridge, the many bridges, viaducts and tunnels along the Great Western Railway, the bridge over the Thames at Maidenhead and of course if you are looking for a



great day out visit the SS Great Britain in the floating harbour at Bristol.

Sadly we have no visible record in Watchet of his broad-gauge railway like they have at Crocombe Station, perhaps there is an opportunity here in Watchet to commemorate our greatest engineer.

We look forward to a return visit from Brian.

AJ.

### **Lime Cross and 14th century Watchet**

Watchet was rich in lime with the limestone ridge above Watchet being covered in trees. During the Medieval period the town was settled around the mouth of Washford River with shelter from the west provided by Cleve Hill and in the east by the headland of Culvercliffe. The large open space between was known as Chipping Street, later as Market Street. Culvercliffe Street ran eastwards from here along the shore and seems to have disappeared when storms in the 1450s swept away the burgages, (borough rented properties), and exposed Watchet to constant erosion. Further south a parallel street, Culver Street, was possibly part of what we know as Esplanade Lane. During the 14<sup>th</sup> century the town spread inland with the formation of South Street (1361 – 1385) and Swine Street, known now as Swain Street, which ran from the eastern end of the market place to Lime Cross, today the junction of Harbour Road and Swain Street, known locally as The Cross. Lime Cross led down to the market area and the sale of all available goods would have taken place there, with Lime Cross presumably the site for the sale of non-perishable goods especially the all-important lime.

Paul Upton, our Casework Consultant routinely refers to Lime Cross and recommends that we re-adopt this. Since Onion Collective is making this area a focal point for its plan to enhance Watchet it seems timely to retrieve an important piece of Watchet's rich heritage. In future I hope you'll join in calling this historic part of Watchet by its evocative name Lime Cross.

**Jan Simpson-Scott**

## CONSERVATION IN ACTION AT ST DECUMAN'S CHURCH

The St Decuman Church Organ sits in its impressive position in a purpose built west gallery. It replaced a much smaller instrument that was built by Snetzler in 1760 for Buckingham Palace and purchased by the Earl of Egremont sometime around 1820 and loaned to the church. The quality of Snetzler's work was outstanding, but the instrument lacked the power and versatility for the size of this church. The organ was removed to Eton College Chapel, Berkshire in 1926, where it still rests.

George Osmond (1868 - 1949) was an organ builder based in Priory Bridge Road Taunton. The business survived his death for several decades, eventually splitting into smaller firms such as Deane Organs. This too has now gone out of business.

In a recent survey the St Decuman's Osmond organ was described as a very good solid two manual and pedal instrument and it should be considered one of their best instruments from that period.

Apart from some minor work done by Osmonds themselves in the nineteen sixties, the organ had had no major work done since its installation in the 1920s. Before the restoration the organ was extremely dirty and was certainly ripe for a thorough cleaning and overhaul. The action was on the heavy side but it was agreed that thoroughly overhauled and adjusted it would last another lifetime.

The action was heavy, and it became almost unplayable. The pipes and, especially the main organ construction, were incredibly dirty. On removing the side panels piles of debris over four inches thick existed in parts of the instrument, clogging up the action and the pneumatic motors that controlled the pedal pipes. The pedals and many of the stops were either partially functioning or not functioning at all. The pedal board was cracked and the pedals splitting. The swell pedal stuck in either the open, or closed position, and 'cyphers' (notes that 'stuck' due to the action seizing up) were becoming more frequent.

In all, the organ was deteriorating and would only get worse rather than better, as more and more of it became unreliable.

So, in 2012 it was decided to overhaul the instrument to bring it up to a reliable playing condition. In addition, while work was being done, it was also decided that a few minor improvements in specification could be undertaken for a little extra





cost, resulting in a fine instrument that would last another generation or two before any major work would need to be done again.

The usual selection of contracts were required under the diocesan faculty scheme, and Lance Foy and Son of Truro were given the contract as their suggestions seemed in keeping with the organ, were sensitive to the church environment and needs and was within a sensible budget.

Lance and Christopher (“Chip”) began work immediately after Easter 2013, and completed the work in July 2014.

As it stands the instrument is very tightly packed into the gallery space and the bass notes of the Pedal Open, speak into the Tower and the old action for the pedals was unreliable and worn out. Therefore new chests were constructed from scratch with electrical solenoid valves and the whole pedal action electrified. In addition the Pedal Open diapason were made louder so that they can be heard in the main body of the church. Extra pedal ranks of Cello and Octave were created from the old Great Gamba to brighten the otherwise dull and limited pedal section.

The bellows and reservoir were all repaired for the numerous leaks and a new pedal board (to replace the non standard one, which was splitting and unreliable) complete with a proper balanced swell pedal (rather than a poor notched lever swell) was installed.

The console and mains electrics were completely renewed as these were in a rather dangerous condition, and the electric pump in the vestry was overhauled.

The whole mechanical keyboard and stop control action was overhauled and each of the 930 pipes were cleaned and tonally adjusted. The show pipes were painted silver and gilt.

Finally the organ was tuned and tested.

The total cost of conserving this fine organ was around £23,000 plus VAT. Considering the amount of work achieved, this was a reasonable amount and represented less than £240 a year since it was installed, which is far less maintenance cost than an average family car!

Alan Jones (from information supplied John Guttridge.)

***There will be a recital by John at St Decuman's church on Saturday 18th October at 7.30 tickets at £5.00 from Alan Jones .***

## Neil Hopkins hand-making artists' paper at Pitt Mill, Roadwater

I met Neil Hopkins some years ago at the home of a mutual friend, Margaret Adams, who worked with me on Sunday mornings at Harbour Community Bookshop on the Esplanade. Neil was the son she never had and apart from being a faithful and devoted friend to Margaret he was her trusted gofer!



At her magnificent bungalow, overlooking green fields and sea, at Blue Anchor, Margaret held Open House. Amongst others, we met Arlene and Peter Swift and it was with them that we went to see Neil at work at Two Rivers. This was shortly after he had talked to us at the Open Meeting in March and in his own energetic style demonstrated his handmade paper-making. This is the only time I recall we have had a hands-on practical session.

The location of Pitt Mill is breath-taking, idyllic. Set beside a stream where a water wheel once powered the mill is a house dating back over 400 years housing much of the ancient milling material. It stands in a pretty garden with Neil's workshop and studio at the rear.

We were treated to a work-in-progress demonstration of the whole process which you will remember from his talk and my photographs of Neil at work will help trigger your memory. It's a small workshop full of large vats where the fibres of cotton and linen, sometimes hemp, esparto, flax, seeds, are beaten in water for around 4 hours, before the sheets are formed individually using English hand moulds. Neil is a big guy who almost fills the workshop so movement must be adept. It is time- and labour-intensive making this high quality paper; physical strength, dexterity and stamina are vital requirements. Occasionally Neil's son helps but largely Neil works alone for long hours. It is not a process which can be left whilst he takes a break.

This is not a working museum as such; it resembles the pre- Industrial Revolution cottage industries employing as it does historic practices and skills honed to environmental perfection. It is not only a centre of industry but of artistry and education.

On the first floor is Neil's studio and a plethora of artistic mesmerism – tokens and tributes from artists who purchase their paper from here, portraits of Neil, water colours, oil paintings and a fascinating collection of anecdotal messages underneath sheets of paper suspended from the ceiling to dry. It is all wondrous, as is Neil whose energy and love of his work is obvious. It is one of very few surviving hand mills still operating in Europe. It is a niche. And it is on our doorstep. Yet another local treasure.

*"thou hast caused printing to be used; and, contrary to the king, his crown and dignity, thou has built a paper-mill."*

Shakespeare. Henry VI, Part 2.

**Jan Simpson-Scott July 2014**



Hans Schwarz Self Portrait : oil on board:58x53cm:  
Hans Schwarz Studio collection  
©Hans Schwarz Estate

### **HANS SCHWARZ - ARTIST**

**Do you remember *Watchet Faces* –  
the millennium exhibition at  
The Lynda Cotton Gallery?**

Hans Schwarz, the artist who painted many Watchet residents, died in 2003, but Watchet is to host a major exhibition of his work this autumn. He had a fascinating life during which he produced a phenomenal number of works of art.

Hans was born in Vienna in December 1922, the only child of Viktor and Emilie Schwarz. Viktor had fought in the Austro-Hungarian army in the First World War, but at the time of Hans' birth he was a bank

clerk. Hans' early days were comfortable and happy, but two events changed the course of his life. His mother died when he was only twelve years old, and then, in 1937, Nazi Germany annexed Austria and it became part of the Third Reich (the Anschluss). Hans had started training at the Viennese School of Arts and Crafts at fourteen, but he was forced to leave because of his Jewish blood. In 1938, after Kristallnacht (Night of the Broken Glass), the British government was petitioned by charitable organisations to allow temporary admission of Jewish children - a process that became known as Kindertransports. Viktor managed to secure a place for Hans on a train out of the country sponsored by the Society of Friends and the Cadbury family. He left his father, never to see him again. Hans was provided with accommodation and a job at the Bournville factory in Birmingham. He quickly showed industry and talent which was recognised and encouraged by his employers.

In 1940 the British government ordered the internment of all those termed enemy aliens between the ages of 16 and 70, and Hans was forced to go to a series of internment camps. On his release in 1941, he returned to Birmingham, and started training at the Birmingham School of Arts and Crafts. After graduation in 1943 he worked as a commercial illustrator and graphic designer and taught part-time at various art colleges whilst he built up his own artistic body of work. He married his wife Lena in 1944. They lived in Halesowen and they had two sons, Stephen and Julian. In 1953 they moved to Wimbledon and then Hampstead in London, living and working alongside a community of other artists, many of which, like Hans, were European émigrés. By 1964, he was able to give up his commercial work and concentrate on painting and sculpture full-time. They bought a house in Stogursey, right next to St Andrew's Well. They lived there full-time for a few years and then moved back to London, keeping the Stogursey house for frequent visits until Hans' death in 2003. During the 40 year period, Hans did a vast number of paintings of people and places in Somerset. He made close friends in the area, most notably Watchet's gallery owner and artist, Nick Cotton.

In 1999 Hans painted 24 portraits of Watchet people which were exhibited at Nick's gallery at the Millennium entitled *Watchet Faces*. Although some people didn't like their portraits, the exhibition was a great success and it attracted the attention of the national press. Amongst those that he painted were Vernon Stone, Ben Norman, David Milton, Richard Booz, John Richards, Alan Woollam, Molly & Quinty and Alec Danby.

Although Hans painted a wide variety of subjects he was most famous as a portraitist and there are paintings in many public galleries, most notably the National Portrait gallery. He was also a sculptor and author of several books on drawing and painting which were translated into several languages and sold around the world. Hans was amazingly prolific - he could not allow a day to pass without painting.

Watchet is fortunate in being able to host a major exhibition of his work at the Lynda Cotton Gallery from October 13 - 26.

**Paul Upton**



Town Crier  
(Alec Danby)1999  
watercolour  
56 x 76 cm:  
Private collection :  
©Hans Schwarz estate



Watchet Harbour Master (Vernon Stone) 1999 Hans Schwarz Studio collection:  
©Hans Schwarz estate

Paul Upton has written a biography of the artist which will be launched at the National Portrait Gallery just prior to the exhibition. He is also writing *Hans Schwarz in Somerset* which focuses on the people and places that he painted whilst at his Stogursey home.

## A Visit to Watchet's Paper Mill

On Thursday July 17<sup>th</sup>. Conservation Society members enjoyed a fascinating tour of our iconic paper mill. We were just one of the many groups that DS Smith entertained that day, hundreds of local folk were given the opportunity to see what happens at the site of Watchet's largest employer.



Our group was fortunate enough to be hosted by Mark Hughes, the mill production manager. He was not just able to show us around the facility but was able to answer our many questions on the technology and history of the Mill. After the tour, we were treated to tea and cakes!

On a walk up the Mineral Line, one sees the countless bales of waste paper. We were shown how the mill's 170 employees recycle our rubbish and turn it into a useful raw material for the packaging industry.

Mark showed us how the contents of our recycling boxes start a journey through millions of pounds worth of machinery ending up as high quality brown paper which will be shipped to factories converting it into corrugated card, postal tubes, paper bags, jigsaw puzzles, brown envelopes, food containers and many other useful items. In Watchet, we see the lorries arriving with waste paper and then the same lorry leaves with 28 one tonne rolls of finished product and that's all in a matter of hours.



The first process is to remove all manner of non-paper waste from the bale. Plastic, metal and glass for instance. Those of us who are inconsiderate enough to throw our junk mail, straight into the waste paper box without removing the polythene

wrapper or when at the recycling centre, treat the paper skip as a general refuse container, just spare a thought for the paper mill who have to remove that rubbish before they can use the paper pulp to manufacture a clean and useful end product.

The bale of waste is shown bubbling in a cauldron, sorting the good from the bad and then pulp is produced of the right consistency and quality to start its journey through the paper making machinery.

If you came to a recent Conservation Society talk by Neil Hopkins from the Roadwater Paper Mill, you will relate to the process. But instead of Neil scooping up the pulp on to a single mesh tray, Wansbrough's machinery picks it up on a continuous web and it's then dried and refined until it finally emerges as a massive roll of brown paper of just the right weight and consistency required for its eventual conversion into a toilet roll centre, brown paper envelope with your tax demand, or whatever.

If Neil were to stop for a coffee break his output would drop by a few sheets of paper, if this machine breaks down, the cost to DS Smith is £50 worth of lost production for every minute's down time. At the other end of this machine a great roll of paper emerges, which is then slit into smaller rolls of the width specified by the Mill's customer.



Watchet's Paper Mill has certainly come a long way since it was founded in the 1750s at Snailholt. In 1846 the Wansbrough family started installing machinery. Now it is part of the huge DS Smith organisation.



My over-riding impression from this visit was that we saw a very modern organisation, the employees of which were key to the well-being of the company, with health and safety being the company's paramount concern. It's good to know we have a very "green" organisation working on our doorstep, well done DS Smith.

**Edward Frewin**

## Fly Agaric fungus painted by Sheila Mannes-Abbot.



Fly agaric *Agaricus muscarius*, Its botanical name comes from the Latin 'musca', or 'fly', apparently referring to its use in parts of Europe as an insecticide, crushed in milk for attracting and killing flies. The genus agarica includes the popular field mushroom and the commercial mushroom. It is amongst the most iconic of the toadstools, commonly depicted in children's books and on Christmas cards around the world. It is highly distinctive and, at least when fresh and in good condition, can hardly be confused with any other species.

Its hallucinogenic properties have been well-known for centuries and the species has a long history of use in religious and shamanistic rituals,

especially in Siberia. It is a common and widespread fungus, native to much of the north-temperate world,

Although it is generally considered poisonous, reports of human deaths resulting from eating the mushroom are extremely rare. After parboiling—which removes the mushroom's psychoactive substances—it is eaten in parts of Europe, Asia, and North America. AJ

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

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