



# WATCHET CONSERVATION MATTERS

Promoting, conserving & improving our physical  
and natural environment

Issue 37 Nov/Dec 2014



## From our chair - Molly Quint

Dear All, Wonderful late Autumn weather to help us through the Winter months. We are again at the AGM which is on Tuesday 18th November, 7.30pm.in the Phoenix Centre, we do hope you will come along and help us make it a mixture of business and entertainment , with a little refreshment to help the evening go with a swing.

You will see from the enclosed memo that the Newsletters are getting a little expensive to produce so we are asking anyone who still needs or likes them as a Hard Copy to donate a little towards their cost. We do hope you all enjoy reading them and we are so grateful to Alan Jones and Ellie for doing such a grand job in producing them six times a year. If you have a special story or comment please do send it in.

At the beginning of this year we had a wonderful evening at the Spice Merchant which raised a great deal for our funds because of their kind generosity, so I have again booked an evening on the 23rd of February. Please put it on your 2015 Calendar and book your place with me as soon as you can for a fun and profitable evening for WCS

So many people have mentioned how really lovely the flowers are at the Govier's Lane Crossing and I would like to take this opportunity of thanking Malcolm Davey for all his wonderful help with the planting, the weeding and especially the watering, without him the display would not have been so colourful and continuous.

We also have two new ladies helping us on the replacement boat on West Street slipway, Doreen and Jackie, painted & planted and again looking bright and pretty , many thanks to you both. Thanks also to Caroline for cheering up Market Street Car park with tubs and small rock garden, we were so sorry for her loss of Ian, a great character who will be greatly missed by so many. The last flower planting is the tubs on the brick seating on the Esplanade, this is a joint effort with WCS and the Marina, so we do hope they will fill out and compliment the other flower displays on the Esplanade.

Looking forward to seeing you at the AGM, yours very sincerely, Molly Q.

**On the 16th September we had a talk about Ice Houses from local resident Barbara Marchant.**



Barbara originally came from Kent and being born east of the Medway was thus a 'Maid of Kent'. It was whilst in Kent Barbara became interested in 'ice houses' and in particular the ice house at the Commissioner's House in Chatham dockyard, which was built in 1704.

In the 'Great Storm' of 1987 (which I remember well as we were living just across the Medway at the time) some large trees in the garden of the Commissioner's House came down and during the clear up and subse-

quent weeding, a large mound in the ground was discovered, further investigation found hidden steps leading down to a doorway. There were no records of a war time shelter or other building shown on the old plans and so the local history group got to work to explore. To their surprise and delight they found the original ice house. This triggered a lifelong interest for Barbara and during her talk we learnt about their origins from 2000BC and widespread use in those pre-refrigerator days. Many large country homes would have their own pond for extracting ice in the winter, but it seems that a huge market for ice and imports from as far as Canada were commonplace.

The design of most ice house followed a similar pattern with an opening on the top to allow ice to be packed in and a pair of lower doors below ground level insulated with goat hair. The whole construction was usually below ground level for added insulation or as at Orchard Wyndham built into the adjacent quarry face.

It was a shame that so many missed this interesting talk.

AJ

## **OUR NEXT OPEN MEETING WILL BE THE AGM ON TUESDAY 18TH NOVEMBER**

Following our business and election of officers and committee  
we shall be entertained by the

### **Acorn Shanty Crew**

The Acorn shanty crew are based in West Somerset and have been together for nearly a year performing at Watchet Summertime, Minehead Harbour festival and Musicians festival and the Carhampton Folk festival. The crew specialises in songs collected by the composer Cecil Sharpe from captains Phil Vickery of Minehead and John Short (our own Yankee Jack). This will be just a short taster of the repertoire so that you can get onto the fine food and drink that follows. However should this type of music appeal to you they are performing again in Minehead at the Beach Hotel the following night Wednesday 19th from 7.30 – 9.00 in aid of Minehead Museum.



## Samuel Taylor Coleridge - Porlock and The Coleridge Way

STC immortalised Porlock simply by reference to his “person from Porlock” whom he claimed interrupted the dream from which he awoke with his famous poem Kubla Khan quite clear in his mind. Since then many literary scholars have transformed this sleepy, pretty town into its own legend. Coleridge Way from Nether Stowey ends in Porlock and The Visitors’ Centre there testifies to the pleasure and challenge this walk has given to so many. Artwork there based on Kubla Khan is worthy of a visit in itself. It was a beautiful morning in early March when we set out from the shingle beach at Porlock Weir towards Horner. The views across Porlock Bay into the Bristol Channel were stunning with the water glistening and twinkling under a welcome sun. The South West Coastal Path makes for a spectacular walk with its expansive views and it is extremely well-signposted. The coastline here is dramatic and the scenery constantly changing. Salt has damaged some of the trees which stand eerily bare, telling their own story. In fact there is a wealth of tales in the Exmoor trees along this route which was part of our reason for walking this section.

Webber’s Post via Horner Wood was our destination and whilst quite short, afforded much pleasure through peaceful countryside, ancient woodland, valleys and meadows with an abundance of flora and red deer. As the breeze rustled the air words came back to me of Coleridge’s tussle with the movement of life and the dilemma he faced at the cottage in Nether Stowey where his life with Sara Fricker was falling apart. His poetic imagination provided Coleridge with a universal sympathy. At Webber’s Post, the ancient meeting place with its amazing wood sculptures, gorse ready to burst open, his lines from “To Nature” sprang to mind. They speak for themselves.

*“They may indeed be fantasy when I  
Essay to draw from all created things  
Deep, heartfelt, inward joy that closely clings;  
And trace in leaves and flowers that round me lie  
Lessons of love and earnest piety”*

Carpets of primroses and snowdrops adorned the ground; there was celandine and echoes of birdsong; lichen dressed the trees. Nature was awakening in sleepy splendour after its winter rest. Jays flew overhead. Walking was a delight, and easy across the open plain of Exmoor, across heath land into the ancient trees’ walk of Horner Wood with East Water’s rushing

stream below. There is scree, there is bare rock, there are ants' mounds lining the trail, and adders but we saw none of these. The views from here are panoramic and there is a small wooden bench on which to sit awhile immersing oneself in wonder at nature and its possibilities that so entranced and worried Coleridge in equal measure. Sara Coleridge, his fourth child and only daughter, also found inspiration in trees and wrote her own poem, unlike her father's in style, in fact polarised in its simplicity:

*"The Oak is called the king of trees  
The Aspen quivers in the breeze  
The Poplar grows up straight and tall  
The Peach tree spreads along the wall  
The Sycamore gives pleasant shade  
The Willow droops in watery glade  
The Fir tree useful in timber gives  
The Beech amid the forest lives"*

This has none of the metaphysical in which Coleridge dwelt but it dances in a way in which Coleridge's poems do not. It has a practicality which Coleridge and The Romantics were untouched by. Their ideas of Pantisocracy might have been borne of a practicality but they were unable to execute this concept by their very impractical nature.



East Water's rushing stream comes into view as we walked through the ancient oak pollards, past The General, now depleted in stature, yet its girth speaks of its origins and is enormous, its branches gnarled. In his Water Ballad STC wrote:

*"Come hither, gently rowing,  
Come, bear me gently o'er  
This stream so brightly flowing  
To yonder woodland shore.  
But vain were my endeavour  
To pay the, courteous guide;  
Row on, row on, for ever  
I'd have thee by my side."*

Exmoor's stunning landscape gave inspiration to Coleridge with its wild, unkempt beauty. The Coleridge Way from Nether Stowey is 36 miles long across a richly varied terrain, largely quiet and unspoilt. Dip in and out of it. Make your own diversions from it. For walkers and poets\* alike it feeds the mind.

Jan Simpson-Scott 2014

*\*(and artist! Ed)*

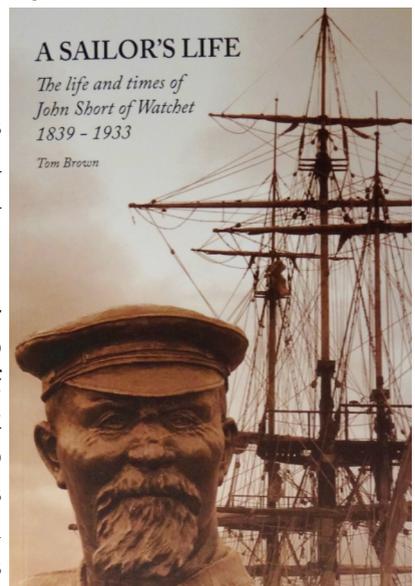
## TWO NEW BOOKS FOR WATCHET LOVERS:

### 1. A SAILOR'S LIFE - By Tom Brown

#### The life and times of John Short of Watchet 1839 – 1940

"A hundred years is a very long time"  
This line from one of Yankee Jack's songs is particularly appropriate as it was in 1914 that Cecil Sharp collected the wealth of sea shanties from Captain John Short .

Tom Brown and his wife Barbara entertained the Conservation Society not so long ago with their earthy interpretation of many of John Short's songs and this book will be enjoyed by all who would like to know more of his life, his songs, travels and details of each of the ships he sailed in, from coastal traders to deep sea ships



bound for Peru, Australia and Japan.

Included in the book are the words and music of many of the best known songs and is 'a must have' for any shanty singer.

This book also offers a fascinating glimpse into the merchant navy of the great days of sail.

The book is available from Watchet Market House Museum £10.50.

Or on-line [www.umbermusic.co.uk](http://www.umbermusic.co.uk) £13.99 incl p&p.

**ISBN 978-0-9930468-0-3**

## 2. THE QUANTOCKS

BY PETER HAGGETT

### Biography of an English Region

Peter Haggett gave a fascinating talk to the Market House Museum members in October during which he spoke of his passion for the Quantocks. He explained their geology and history from pre-historic times through the medieval period, Georgian and Victorian eras to modern day industry and tourism.

The book is beautifully illustrated with photographs taken by his daughter Jackie.

There is a topical chapter on 'Deaths in the Great War in the Quantock Parishes' which shows that Watchet and Bishops Lydeard each with 38 deaths suffered most in the region. On a

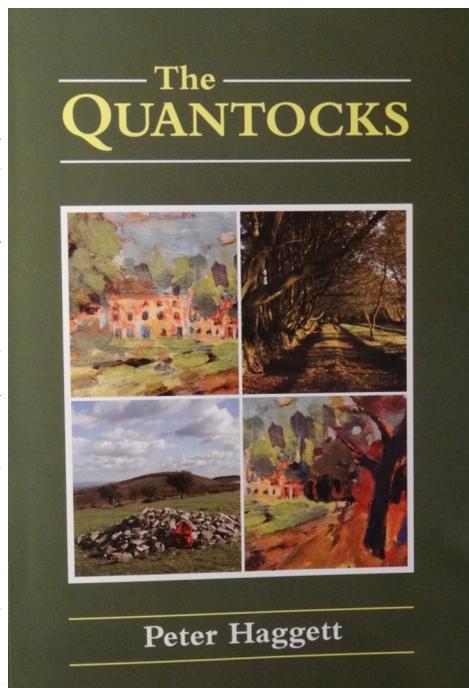
happier note his section dealing with long established families like the Luttrells and Ackland-Hoods reveals a family tree going back 31 generations at Fairfield House from the Goslands in 1167 to the present day owner Lady Gass.

Whatever your interest this book is a marvellous reference book to our local area.

Again this book is available from the Market House Museum, priced £14.99—and worth every penny, with some of the profit going to the museum.

**ISBN 978-0-9573352-0-2**

AJ.



## The Robin

Formerly known as The Redbreast and more recently as The Robin Redbreast.

I have in my possession a bird book given to me over 60 years ago, which I shall always treasure. The book was first published in 1910 and written by the Reverend C. A. Johns. It comes with 64 beautifully coloured plates by William Foster, but best of all is the beautiful prose.

I quote for the Robin."The Redbreast is everywhere invested with a kind of sanctity beyond all other birds. Its wonted habit of making its appearance to greet the resting traveller, its evident predilection for the society of the out-of-door labourer, whatever his occupation - the constancy with which it effects human habitations-and the readiness with which , without coaxing or training, it throws itself on human hospitality - engender an idea that there must be some mysterious connection between the two."

AJ

(watercolour by  
Sheila Mannes-Abbott)



*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

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

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