



Watchet Conservation Matters

Promoting, Conserving & Improving
Our Physical & Natural Environment

Issue 41 July/August 2015

Our Chair Molly Quint

More from Andrew Harrison's Holiday Memories...

Something I love about this area's scenery is how the view can change so rapidly as one moves from place to place. One minute I am looking up at skylines dotted with trees silhouetted against passing clouds and the next minute gazing down on familiar landmarks and beyond them to far horizons. Two of these three photographs, taken by my father during our holiday in the early 1960s, are in the latter category. One looks down from Rydon Hill over Doniford and the holiday bungalows in

which we were staying. The other is of Watchet from a vantage point somewhere just below Dawes Castle. I have tried to locate the exact spot from where this was taken but was driven back by thick spiny hedges!

The third photograph is of Helwell Bay, looking across to Watchet's lighthouse and Minehead beyond. Down on the beach are my mother, sister and me although I had to use a magnifier to be sure it was us!

Andrew Harrison



being part of the working group. The plans for The Boat Museum have been submitted to West Somerset Council, so this is all good for Watchet.

A smaller project which Watchet Town Council has asked WCS to take over is The Pound at the bottom of South Road. Watchet Town Council will pay for the plants and Malcolm and I will work on it. If anyone would like to help keep it tidy afterwards that would be great.

Our next meeting will be on Tuesday July 21st at 7.30pm at The Methodist Schoolroom. Do come along for it is about SS Great Britain by Brian Portch who gave the excellent talk on "Brunel the Engineer". Perhaps in the autumn we may be able to visit the ship in Bristol.

Dear Friends and Members,
Do hope you are all enjoying the wonderful weather and Watchet is a wonderful place to be. I am now proud to say I am a resident at long last and am thrilled to be able to look out over the Bristol Channel to Wales, and walk along the Esplanade to the shops.

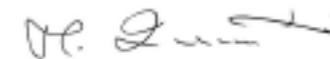
We had an excellent talk on Tidal Lagoon Power with a record attendance of 75 members and friends. Since the meeting the Company has had permission to go ahead with the first lagoon at Swansea so we wish them luck.

The Onion Collective is moving forward with the proposed re-development of The Pleasure Gardens at Splash Point with WCS

With very best wishes for an excellent summer here in a very special part of West Somerset.

Yours very sincerely,

Molly Quint





The Fitting Memorial

The Fitting Memorial

In Watchet Cemetery the ground rises in broad green terraces from the car park to a crest line before you encroach upon the boundary of the churchyard. The lower terrace is crowded with the great and the good of Watchet; several Bindings, Murphys and Joneses.

When you reach that upper level you immediately come upon a very simple upright ledger stone in grey-blue Welsh Slate which is striking both in its simplicity and in the restraint of the wording of the inscription:

“Sheila Frewin. 20.3.39 – 23.1.14
She loved and painted flowers”

The Sheila we knew in a nutshell! Years ago, 1988 actually, I met Vanessa Straker when she was seeking an appropriate gravestone for her stepdaughter and was disappointed at the choice offered by monumental masons, both in the designs, and in the stones in their working range. It was at a time when churchyards were obliged to refuse highly polished stones and some of the more outlandish designs – stencilled representations of “Behold I stand at the door”... Equally no teddy bears! These were decisions made by a ruling of the Diocesan Council and enforced nationwide. We joined together, Vanessa in seeking masons, and indeed sculptors, who would provide stones with some restraint and dignity, coupled with lettering which reached a City & Guilds standard.

My role was to list the stones available from our lands which were able to meet the required harmonies, in contrast to the imported granites generally favoured by commercial monumental masons. Vanessa’s initiative caught on from her base in Snape, Suffolk, to become “Memorials by Artists”, representing a growing collective of artists glad to have the commissions generated. To all appearances Sheila is commemorated here with a perfect example of the system for which Edward and his family are to be commended.

Situated at that crest line Sheila has a direct view of the full length of the Quantocks when the weather is kind. She also has the company of Quinty; what could be better for conversation?

Eric Robinson

The Magna Carta Embroidery



The Magna Carta Embroidery

We have all heard the silly joke question “Where was Magna Carta signed” with the answer “at the bottom!” But how many of us know what Magna Carta is?

A committee of 25 feudal barons were present at the sealing of the document, Magna Carta, which was an attempt to limit the powers of the King by law and to protect the rights of the barons. The 1215 charter required King John to proclaim certain liberties and accept that his will was not arbitrary, by explicitly accepting that no “freeman” (a non-serf) could be punished except through the law of the land, a right that still exists today. This sacred text is the foundation for Rule of Law and the principles of democracy throughout the UK and many countries throughout the World.

To celebrate the 800th anniversary of the signing of Magna Carta, Royal embroiderer



Rhoda Nevins (a member of the Royal School of Needlework, who helped to embroider the wedding dress of the Duchess of Cambridge) has designed 12 panels to commemorate one of the most important events in Britain. The touring exhibition of the embroideries will be displayed on June 15th at Runnymede, where Magna Carta was signed, at an event to be attended by Her Majesty The Queen.

I visited the exhibition in Taunton in April. The embroideries were exquisite! Each panel is hand embroidered and appliqued using different fabrics, threads and wool. There is a lot of gold thread in them and Rhoda has interpreted each aspect beautifully. Where there is a river or water, she has used crumpled Organza to give the effect of movement. Where there are buildings she has used fabric which looks like brickwork, and trees and hedges are emphasised with wool. The embroideries were an inspiration; I will try to do something similar to commemorate a special occasion in my life.

It was exhibited in Taunton because one of the 25 barons was William Malet, of Curry Mallet. The exhibition was opened by Primrose Mallet Hill, a direct descendant. The exhibition is only being displayed in the areas from where the original 25 barons originated. If you get a chance to see it elsewhere on its tour, I would thoroughly recommend it.

Jane Sharp



The Town of Watchet

And what sort of a place is this town of Watchet? Now I am not going to tell you that this is a handsome town: indeed it is quite the contrary. I rather fear the majority of people would say it is downright ugly, and I know that Murray calls it "a mean, dirty place." Its houses have no pretensions to architectural beauty, and its streets are very narrow; nevertheless, seen from a distance, it is picturesque, and above all, it looks primitive, and not stuck up. The residents perhaps will not like the word primitive applied to their town, but it is true; and as to the very idea of its being stuck up - how they will laugh at it. No, no there is no chance of Watchet being stuck up for another century, at least, I should think not, and that is why I like it. I dare say a great many visitors would call it a funny place. By funny I mean odd or curious, not droll. Oh dear no, it is too matter-of-fact to be called droll. Pleasure most assuredly does not seem to have much business there (paradoxical, perhaps, to think of such a thing), and most certainly business does not appear to find much pleasure here. Notwithstanding this, however, we shall see presently that pleasure does stalk abroad sometimes in this little port and those who take the trouble to look into the matter, will also see that a good deal of business (does not stalk, but) is carried on noiselessly, smoothly and regularly therein. In a word, Watchet is not a demonstrative town. It has no rows of gorgeous, dazzling, tempting shops like more pretentious watering places, to speak of a large trade and very high prices; neither has it crowds

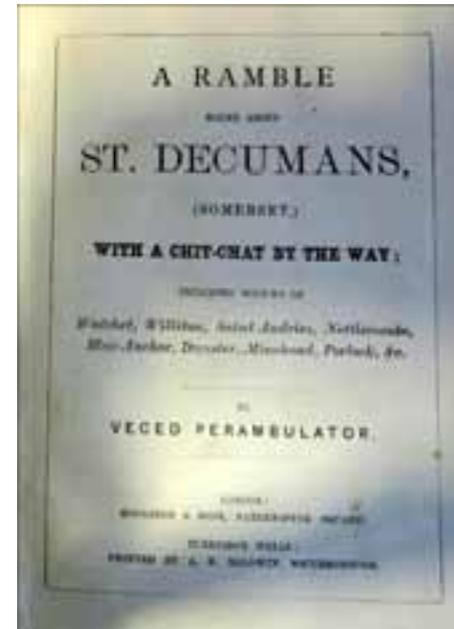
of visitors for ever pottering about its streets, picking up the waifs and strays of amusement that accident may drop in their way, or striving how they may put odd time to death with the least trouble to themselves.

Watchet is situated on the shores of the Bristol Channel, about 17 miles from Taunton, and a like distance from Bridgewater (sic), eight miles from Minehead, and six from Dunster. The Channel is here about 20 miles broad, the opposite coast of Wales being spread out before you for a vast distance, stretching away to the east and west.

The town possesses three streets, about 250 houses, sundry shops, a small market and a large harbour, one church, three or four chapels, two railway stations one hotel and several small inns, a pleasure ground, a news-room, a ladies (sic) bathing place, a post-office, a parade, and a police force.

The greater number of houses are in the streets, and the remainder are pitched down anyhow in the outlying roads or fields. Visitors would do well, if they do not put up at the hotel, to take up their quarters at some of the house on the parade, or in the outlying fields; that is if they are to be had. Of the shops, the hotel, the market, &c., what shall I say? I have already said the place is primitive in outward appearance, and to a great extent it is so in reality in its internal arrangements, and if visitors go down there in order to view the beauties of nature, and to live comfortably, they can do so very well; but

The Town of Watchet



if they go, with grand ideas of fashion and gaiety, and a desire to fare sumptuously, why then craving their pardon, they had better not go at all. At the hotel, which is a newly-built and commodious structure, you can live comfortably (I repeat the word as being a pleasant one, and very expressive), but I do not presume you could live luxuriously, though doubtless, being within 17 miles of Taunton, luxuries can be easily procured if necessary; and from all I saw, and all I heard of this establishment, and its proprietor (Mr. Mossman), I am very well assured that the traveller or tourist putting up at the West Somerset hotel, will be very kindly and liberally cared for by both host and hostess. The inns are of the class usually met with in the neighbourhood of harbours.

The shops are not numerous. There is an excellent chemist's, where the usual style of London business is not largely departed from; the cigar and tobacco, and a few other articles of trade being added thereto. There is, of course, a stationer's and a bookseller's shop, where all the necessary articles for the pursuit of the three R's (reading, 'riting, and 'rithmetic), are to be had; also a supply of toys and other fancy articles. Here is likewise a lending library, where you can procure food for the mind, if such is your need.

There are two butchers, where you can get good meat considerably cheaper than in London or its suburbs. Among other shops there is an ironmonger's, a draper's, a greengrocer's, a baker's, and a photographer's; also several lodging houses. At the shops you can get all things necessary for the sustenance of the body and the clothing thereof; you can also get whatever you require for the employment of your hands; and by the proprietors of the two last-named (photographer and lodging-houses) you can be taken in and done, or done for, to your hearts content. There is also a news-room belonging to the Mechanic's Institute, a capital institution, and a well-furnished room. The visitor is courteously invited to make use of this latter, and can contribute anything he pleases to its support.

But in a town like Watchet, the shop of all shops is the general shop. So I say commend me to the general shop if I want to eat, drink, or be clothed, or to set up house-keeping, or to do anything else





The Town of Watchet

within the range of mortal wishes. For what is it that you cannot procure a such an emporium?

Again and again I must repeat it, great, wonderfully great, are the marvels, and prodigiously wonderful are the mysteries, that lie in, around and about these multum-in-parvo emporiums. Oh for a ramble into the labyrinths behind the well-worn counter, for a dive into the mysterious regions below, for a rummage among these wonderful pigeon-holes above, or a cruise into the wilds of those (to be vulgar) unexplored regions, the outlying yards or storehouses. But such a voyage is not within my reach, so I pass on to notice another universal establishment, the Hall of Letters.

The Post Office of Watchet is not palatial, but though unlike St. Martins-le-grand in grandeur, it is all that is wanted, which is more than can be said of the London establishment.

In most cases the supply of every requisite appears to be quite equal to demand; the size of the buildings commensurate with their need. Lodging houses, perhaps, form an exception to this remark; it being a general opinion that there would be more visitors if there were more accommodation for them. The supply of lodgings is very limited indeed, and at present there does not seem much probability of an increase, building not being likely to go on here, owing to restrictions imposed upon the letting of the land by the trustees of the late Lord Egremont, to whom a great part

of the property in and around this town belongs.

The railway stations form no exception to the rule in their deficiency in structural beauty; but they answer the purpose for which they were designed.

The above extract is taken from A Ramble round about St Decumans (Somerset) with a chit-chat by the way by an unidentified author with the pseudonym Veced Perambulator. It was written in about 1885. I wonder if anyone knows who he or she was. Please let me know if you have any idea. How much has changed in the last 130 years - and how much hasn't! The Post Office referred to was in the building that now houses the kebab shop. The general store was probably that of W & L Copp & Co in the building that is now Albert's 'Ardware.

Paul Upton

Speaker Review

Tidal Lagoon Power a talk by Steve Mewes

Our Tuesday evening Open Meeting saw one of the highest attendances ever recorded, with 75 people crammed into the Methodist schoolrooms to hear Steve Mewes talk about Tidal Lagoon Power.

The evening started with a short video highlighting the background to the need for renewable energy sources and moved onto the proposed tidal lagoon scheme planned for Swansea (planning permission was due 10th June).

After the video Steve spoke about the requirements for tidal lagoon power; these being shallow water (because of building cost) and large tidal range. The Bristol Channel met these requirements very well but with the Welsh coast being the most suitable Swansea was chosen as their first project.

Tidal lagoon power is provided by a series of bidirectional turbines enabling generation on the ebb and flood tide. Steve pointed out that the lagoon would be flushed through at each tide change and that the lagoons would have many positive ecological and lifestyle benefits.

The Swansea scheme would comprise a 10km wall built 2.8 m above high tide level, take 3.5 years to build and have a design life of 120 years; turbine life was estimated at 60 years. It was estimated that the Swansea scheme would provide power to 155,000 homes and 90% of Swansea Bay's domestic use. The estimated cost of one

billion pounds seemed to shock everyone but we were told that this compared very favourably with the cost of Nuclear and off shore wind farms which both had much shorter working lives

Then followed a short talk on the possibility of a Bridgwater Bay lagoon, which would encompass Watchet within a 32km (24 mile) wall. Steve pointed out that there were several projects at the drawing board stage and that Bridgwater Bay would be 5th in line so that a lot of experience would be gained by the time they got round to our local scheme.

These newer schemes were all much bigger than Swansea with subsequent higher build cost but with the prospect of much higher generation capacity. Understandably there was a great deal of discussion on the local scheme particularly with regard to the silt affecting our side of the channel, others expressed their concern for marine life and fishing as well as access to the harbour. To all these points Steve admitted that at this stage he had no definitive answers, but that extensive computer modelling would, over the next few years, provide this information. At the end of the day if the problems could not be overcome then the scheme would not go ahead.

It was an enlightening talk and Steve stayed behind for a further hour to talk to individuals.

Alan Jones





Watchet's Industrial Past

Watchet Foundry (continued from issue 39)

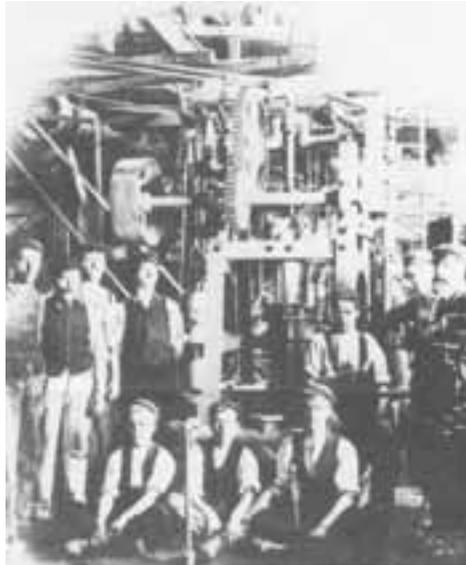
Swain Street Foundry, c. 1910. The firm established by John Gliddon in 1833 and still operating in West Somerset and North Devon ran this foundry from 1875 to 1946 and fulfilled orders both for home and away.

Here the staff are making a triple cylinder expansion engine for a paper mill in Cheddar. On the far left is Charlie Stevens who started work as a locomotive stoker on the West Somerset Mineral Line from 1886 to 1898, being made redundant when the line closed that year. Charlie Stevens was a noted cyclist who won all the August Bank Holiday races on the recreation ground.

Far right is Cornishman Samuel Blackwell (foreman) employed as blacksmith and engine fitter between 1869 and 1883 at the Brendon Hills Iron Mines, being made redundant on closure of the mines. He was employed by Gliddons at the Watchet Foundry. In emergency Sam Blackwell acted as dental surgeon with the aid of a pair of engineer's pliers.

The title FOUNDRY is still visible outside the building. Behind the foundry was another one reached by a passage from Market Street run by Charlie Hole.

Phil Gannon

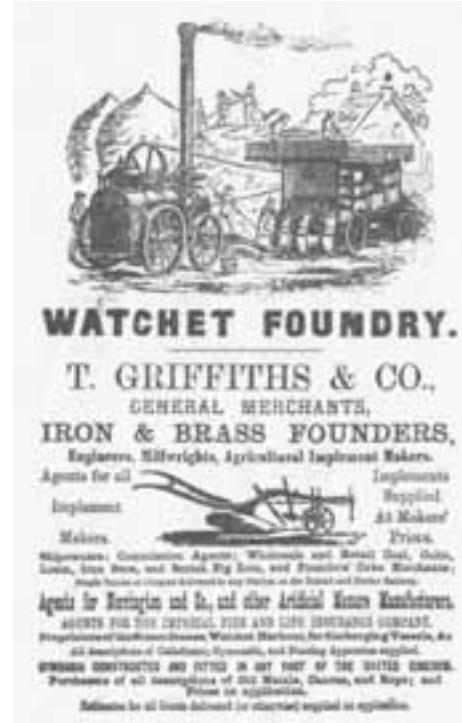


Inside the foundry c. 1910.

Far left is Charlie Stevens, started to work as a locomotive stoker on the West Somerset Mineral line 1886-1898, redundant when the line closed in 1898.

Far right is Cornishman, Samuel Blackwell (foreman) employed as blacksmith and engine fitter 1869-1883 Brendon Hills Iron Mines, redundant on closure. Employed by Gliddons at the foundry.

*Back inside cover:
T. Griffiths & Co. advertisement 1872*



Watchet Conservation Matters is published six times a year. If you would like to contribute news or an article, please contact our secretary Jan Simpson-Scott on: jan@topcreative.co.uk

Members of the Watchet Conservation Society receive this newsletter bi-monthly either via email for free or a printed copy for £1.00 per copy. If you are not a member and have enjoyed reading this publication, please consider joining us and help us to conserve our physical and natural environment. Membership is just £6.00 per year. All of our committee members would be delighted to welcome you.

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Sheila Mannes-Abbott 1939-2014

“She loved and painted flowers”

Sheila's painting of the Branton Pansy, officially known as *Viola Tricolour* L. subsp. *Curtisii*, was commissioned for Curtis's Botanical Magazine which was first published in 1787 and continues to the present day, published by Royal Botanical Gardens, Kew. It was William Curtis who discovered *Viola Tricolour* L. subsp. *Curtisii* and Martyn Rix was the author of a learned article about this dwarf perennial seaside or sandhill pansy in Curtis's Botanical Magazine in April 2014.

Sheila painted this from a sample she collected two years ago with Edward from Branton Burrows. Sadly these pansies are becoming a rare species. Their delicate appearance above ground gives no clue to their tenacious long tap roots. A dainty flower with soft colouring they are an important food source for fritillary caterpillars.

Branton Burrows is at the centre of The North Devon Biosphere Reserve which is used as a study area for conservation, a cultural landscape maintained by local people. Make a visit and share a place enjoyed so much by Sheila. Feel the harmony with nature she loved.

Jan Simpson-Scott

