



Watchet Conservation Matters

Promoting, Conserving & Improving
Our Physical & Natural Environment

Issue 47 July/August 2016



Our Chair Molly Quint



Dear Friends and Members.

It has been a busy time within the Watchet Conservation Society Committee during the last two months. As reported in the last Newsletter our Treasurer John Irven resigned but luckily Ann Hill has agreed to come onto our Committee and take over the vacancy. She has lived for many years in Somerset, loves the area, bought a house in Saxon Close and joined WCS. We welcome her and know she will be a great asset to our team.

We also welcome five new members and already have several speakers lined up for our Open Meetings in 2017.

A new project is in the planning stages. Discussions have begun with Rosalind Pick, Robert Blois, our Tree Specialist and consultant, and Jane Sharp, one of our members, looking at the flora and fauna along the Mineral Line. Hopefully they will

be helped by Paul Reynolds taking aerial photographs. We are also looking at the Old Lime Kilns in Doniford. These projects all take time but will be great when completed.

The Calendar Competition is now well underway and a very exciting project. If you have not already done so and wish to enter send your photographs to Jason Robinson at jason@bestbeforeend.net or look on our website for details. Closing date is September 30th.

Also I do hope you are enjoying the Mural on the Sea Wall in the old mineral yard car park. The project started off in WCS but then became a Stand-Alone group. Pat Dennis is an excellent artist with a lovely sense of humour which comes through in all his work. Thank you Pat.

The Tidal Pool on West Street Beach will be cleaned out as usual in July for the enjoyment of visitors and local children so as you can see there is plenty to keep WCS busy. If you feel you would like to help in any way please contact me.

We were very sad to hear of the death of Julie Foster who supported WCS at various bric-a-brac sales we held on The Esplanade. We offer our condolences to her family.

Yours very sincerely,

Molly Quint

So, just who do you think you are?



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The Hobby of Genealogy has become more and more popular. Finding out all about your ancestors and where they fit on your family tree is much easier now than it used to be. When I first started researching my family in the 1980s everything had to be done manually. There were no computers to speak of and the only way to find out information was to travel up to London, to St Catherine's House to look at Birth, Marriage and Death registers so you could order Certificates, or visit local record offices to look at parish records. It took a lot of time and money in those days!

However now it is much easier to get started as there are so many websites offering help and suggestions on how to get started. There are family history societies all over the world,

and a variety of publications with interesting articles to whet your whistle.

Unfortunately, most people seem to leave this hobby until they are retired and have "more time" but sadly it is often too late at that stage because the opportunity to talk to older members of the family has gone because they have passed away taking information, stories and rumours with them. Don't think you can walk into a County Record Office and be presented with a large brown envelope with all the information you need in it, just like they do on television.

There are several commercially run websites which, for a subscription, will give you the opportunity to search records in the comfort

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of your own home. The most popular ones are Ancestry and Find My Past. Both of which offer lots of records and transcriptions from a large variety of sources. Ancestry is free to use for an hour in Somerset Libraries.

But where do you start? With you of course! If you have children or grandchildren to whom you want to pass down your research then don't miss yourself out and go straight to the older generations. You are the best person to write about "your" history, when you were born, the names of your parents and grandparents (you would be surprised how many people do not know this information because they only knew their grandparents as "Granny" or Grandad"!) Record where you went to school, your achievements and qualifications, and where you worked and lived. Once you have this information it will

give you the skeleton (excuse the pun) for gathering information about your ancestors.

Different people research for different reasons, some just want to get back in history as far as they can, others just want to "collect" ancestors, but there are those like myself who want to "put meat on the bones", in other words make a rich history of my ancestors. Find out where they lived, how they lived, where they went to school, where they worked, how and where they died and where they are buried. By doing it this way you learn so much about social history, and to be quite honest it makes the hobby much more enjoyable.

One tip I would give you is to write down where and when you find each piece of information. This is critical if you have to prove





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where you found the information, or need to go back to it another day. The information you can expect to find on the commercial websites is Census details, transcriptions of parish registers, newspaper articles, indexes to Birth, Marriage and Death certificates, army records, passenger lists etc etc, so you see, there is a lot out there. But don't expect to find everything in one sitting. And remember, some information, particularly transcriptions, has been put onto the websites by human beings, and as we know human beings make mistakes. Linking into someone else's family tree may seem like a "eureka" moment, which you think will save you a lot of time, but how do you know the information they have gathered is correct? Many people have done this only to find that the information in someone else's family tree is not correct.

I would recommend joining your local family history society. Don't be put off by the fact it is a local society and you are researching your ancestors elsewhere in the country. Research methods, and the way we go about them, are the same whether your ancestors came from Cornwall or Norfolk. Members of local groups are always willing to share research methods and ideas and there are usually members who specialise in certain things, e.g. Army records, who are willing to help. Here in West Somerset your local group meets in Dunster on the last Wednesday of every month, at 7pm in the Memorial Hall. New members and visitors are always welcome. This group is part of the Somerset and Dorset Family History Society.

You will have successes, and you will hit brick walls and don't think that you are the first person to punch the air and shout "YES!" out



loud when you find something interesting or exciting. We have all been there, and done that at some point in our research. Don't just sit in front of a computer screen and gather all your information. Get out there and walk in the footsteps of your ancestors, visit the churches in which they were baptised, stand by the font and get the tingly feeling that comes when you think about one of your ancestors being baptised in that very place all those years ago. Visit their graves and lay flowers. I can guarantee that you will shed more than one tear during your research.

There is, of course, a health warning which comes with researching your ancestors - it is very, very addictive. If you like detective stories you will love genealogy, and once you start you probably won't be able to stop.

Good luck.

Jane Sharp
West Somerset Family History Group
01984 639428

The Mystery and Mystique of Watchet



The Mystery and Mystique of Watchet

Our town is variously described as quaint or quirky.

There is mystery and mystique here too in Watchet's heritage. You can gain entry to this magic within minutes or take a trip to a nearby island.

On most days Steepholme can be seen quite clearly, and beyond its sister island Flatholme. Often Steepholme is skirted with a veil of mist which gives the impression it's floating. A mystical isle, it is drenched in history and legend, with rousing stories of Vikings, smugglers and pirates. There will be more on smuggling and pirates in our September edition.

Just a walk away is Hellwell Bay designated a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI). In the 1720s when Daniel Defoe visited Watchet during his voyage around Britain, he wrote that he was both mystified and intrigued by the fossils he found on the shore.

Search for the mystique in the Limestone Pavement below.

A collaboration from Nick Cotton and Jan Simpson-Scott



Inspired by Nick Cotton's 1st Heritage Trail, history on our doorstep - and the need for conservation.

Music from the sighing of the sea
caressed the air as the tide receded,
soothed the landscape;
ammonites emerging, graced the rocks.
The fleeting hush of extinct times.
Comfort of the ocean's hints
through the haze of pre-historic memories.

Linnet on bladderwort
Kangaroo on armourstone
Walk this path along the limestone pavement.
Did Turner walk this way?
Time-capsuled Jurassic thoughts,
the dying echo of the devil's toenail.

Feel the life in the silence,
catch the mood of the sea.
Look to the distance; see the past and feel the present.
Raise your eyes to the vault of heaven over Watchet
and treasure the moment.

All this is ours - to be guarded.
Conserved for the long tomorrow.

Jan Simpson-Scott

WCS "Walks around Watchet, Trail 1 From Watchet Station along the coast to Doniford Lime Kiln" written and illustrated by Nick Cotton is available in Watchet Tourist Information Office.



**Somerset Women
A talk by Esther Hoyle - Speaker Review**

Our last talk was something different. We moved away from old buildings to a talk about people. Esther Hoyle from the Somerset Heritage Trust entertained us with stories and documents from the archives about some of the stranger records she has unearthed during her time as an archivist. Records go back to Saxon times but the more fascinating come from the 18th and 19th centuries. Perhaps it was no surprise that criminal records held the most interest with coroners' records and the wonderfully named "Calendar of Prisoners". There was the drunken bridegroom whose wedding the vicar

cancelled; the quack doctor dressed as a woman who entered into two bigamous marriages.

Many of the stories were distressing accounts of women and children left destitute either because of the husband's death, imprisonment or transportation. The only real source of charity was the Parish Poor Rate which was applied with little sympathy and relief was dependant on the parish in which the husband was born. If the wife had moved around, had more than one marriage and children from several husbands this created enormous complications and added to the distress of the wife and children.

The story of Emmeline Pethick of Weston-Super-Mare showed that Somerset produced at least one prominent female. She was a member of the Suffrage Society and after being introduced to Emmeline Pankhurst became treasurer of the Women's Social and Political Union and with her husband began the publication "Votes for Women" in 1907.

Esther Hoyle was very entertaining and there was a good deal of humour and the varied nature and number of questions which followed bore witness to the interest generated by her talk. A big thank you to Esther for an enlightening evening.

Alan Jones



The West Somerset Family History Group



The story behind this photo is:

The West Somerset Family History Group was contacted by a gentleman in Canada a couple of years ago who sent this photograph to us. He wanted confirmation of where this photograph was taken and it would then confirm to him who the family in the photo were. He thought it was somewhere in West Somerset, but didn't know where. I recognised it as being taken in St Decuman's churchyard, from the buildings behind the people by the grave. I enlarged the photograph so I could read the headstone behind the group and then I visited the churchyard. Using the photograph and the wording on the headstone I was able to pinpoint

the approximate position the photograph was taken from and confirm that it was St Decumans. I was also able to take a corresponding photograph showing roughly where the grave was (sadly there was no headstone). The family were "Langdons". We were able to reply to the Canadian gentleman confirming exactly where the photograph was taken. This illustrates quite well the assistance given to other researchers, even though they are on the other side of the world!

Jane Sharp

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”

Iris Pallida

Iris Pallida is a parent to all those exotic Bearded Irises that have been bred from it. Known as the garden goddess it stands majestically; elegant and tolerant. It has shape and structure and in 2007 was the inspiration for a fragrance by L'Artisan Parfumeur who paid tribute to Iris Pallida's depth and warmth. Her fragrance is sweet, her lavender-blue blooms, like ruffles, are translucent; her sword-shaped foliage is eye-catching.

Iris Pallida has been cultivated for at least

500 years, growing since ancient times. It was common in cloister gardens and is depicted in medieval sources. The Iris was named in antiquity for the Greek goddess of the rainbow and messenger of the gods. Iris the Goddess restored peace and balance after a storm, and the flower Iris is sacred to her. She was The Shape Shifter who adapted easily to different environments as the flower Iris is flexible in the garden border. Her history is rich in symbolism; a flower of Royalty, faith, wisdom, hope and valour.

Sheila loved painting Irises; her love is in the detail, the colour, the vibrancy, the movement of her Iris Pallida.

Jan Simpson-Scott