



# Watchet Conservation Matters

Promoting, Conserving & Improving  
Our Physical & Natural Environment

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## From the Chairman



***Launch at high tide from the town slipway...***



Hello Friends,  
As this is the first and hopefully one of the last Newsletters that I will be editing, I thought we would have a break with tradition and save you from having to look at yet another mug shot. It gives me the chance of talking about us, the WCS, and what we do.

Obviously we look to protect our way of life in Watchet and the environment particularly the Conservation area and to keep an eye on planning decisions.

Did you realise that we or rather our volunteers manage and look after the plants and gardens at the bottom of Goviers Lane, parts of the Esplanade, the boat of flowers at the West Street slipway and that we undertake the annual cleaning of the West Beach Tidal Pool.

We design, produce and install interpretation boards at places of interest most recently at Stoates Mill. We clean and maintain the Admiral Fitzroy Barometer (on the

Esplanade) and write and produce a large number of free pamphlets on local walks and points of interest. Shortly to be printed is a sixty page book on a "A year of walks along the Mineral Line" filled with text and wonderful photographs.

We do "Stuff" like the Standing Stones behind the bookshop, and at the moment we are in discussion with the WTC to install a human sundial at the children's playground on the memorial ground.

The Society has helped in negotiations with the WTC including a risk assessment to help facilitate the planting of a Wild Flower area on the West St Car Park including the prevention of the use of insecticides.

There is a large loyal following on our WCS Facebook site.

On top of this we have managed a full programme of Talks at our well attended Open Meetings, the next of which is on



the 17th July and it's a real beauty "The Archives of Punch Magazine" given by Helen Walasek the former curator of the magazine who is donating "The Best Of Punch 2000 Humour Classics" as a raffle prize on the night.

So why have I decided to mention this now and I realise I have used a lot of "We", but that is really the point, there is actually very little "We" and too much "I".

Our committee meetings rarely have more than half a dozen people attending and that includes a consultant and our WTC rep and we really cannot carry on without some more assistance. The treasurer also our acting membership secretary has just announced that she will not be standing again after the November AGM and I, as well as chairman, also act as secretary and newsletter editor, two roles for which I am completely unsuited.

Clearly we are at a crisis point, do you still want a Conservation Society?

So come on Watchet, surely there must be members who can afford one evening and several hours a month, retired with the necessary skills who could join us, we are quite a sociable bunch, and now we meet at Molly's house it is really quite pleasant. We would also appreciate some more members, so if anyone would like to check us out, attend a meeting with no obligation, you would be most welcome, contact me or Molly.

Enough of me, enjoy your summer,



**Bob Cramp**



### My Neighbours

I am sure most people in Watchet will be familiar with Eric and Sheila Clavey, who I first met six years ago when I moved into Doniford Road.

Eric was born in Flowerdale Road, one of five boys, his father Percy worked all his life in the Paper Mill on machine No.5. Sheila, his long suffering wife came from Minehead and has lived here since they married 55 years ago. "Woman, there is no such thing as a five minute job" is a familiar refrain heard over the garden fence. She has been a Watchet stalwart over the years, supporting most local organisations, including St Decumans, and has been an Akela (Cubs). They moved into Doniford Road 45 years ago and have raised two boys. They are a lovely couple in every sense of the word, and I am very lucky to be living next door to them. Eric has been a painter and decorator since he was 15 years old and although now 79 and retired, keeps his hand in and has just varnished the wooden railings at Goviers lane for the WCS.

However it is the picture, taken in 1905 of Harry Clavey, Eric's grandfather, driving the

mail cart outside Nether Stowey Post Office that caught my eye. His Father and Uncle held the post before him.

The mail cart which plied daily between Watchet and Bridgewater arrived around 5-6am and letters were delivered in Williton and Watchet by 7am. The Royal Mail was a source of great National Pride and no effort was spared to ensure that the post was delivered safely and punctually.



This was a post he held for fifteen years, until the WSFP of July 17th 1915 reported: "A motor mail service was inaugurated between Watchet and Bridgewater. While this new departure is thoroughly in keeping with the times and will accelerate dispatch, there will doubtless be many who will miss the familiar figure of H. Clavey and his pair of steeds."

Harry then worked at the paper mill, sadly dying as a result of a work related injury, aged 50.

**Bob Cramp**



### Lifeboats in Watchet

Lifeboats in Watchet? No, they're in Minehead. How many times have I heard this? More than I care to count. Yes, Lifeboats are in Minehead NOW. But, Watchet had a Lifeboat Station BEFORE Minehead.

Watchet Lifeboat Station was opened on 25th July 1875 and closed on 8th June 1944. So, it was operational for nearly 70 years. Minehead's first Lifeboat arrived in 1901, 26 years after Watchet's. Some people believe that Minehead only got a Lifeboat because of the famous overland haul of Lynmouth's Lifeboat to Porlock Weir in January 1899. The arrival of a motor Lifeboat in Minehead in 1939 heralded the end of Watchet's Station. Enough of Minehead.

Pictures 1 and 2 show the Lifeboat Station as it was then and as it is now. You will all recognise the building as our Library. It was obviously necessary to change the size of

the door but why was the shape of the roof changed, I ask myself. The original roof was so typical of Lifeboat Station design at the time. I find it sad that there is NO plaque on the building that says it was the former Lifeboat Station.

As far as I can tell from RNLI records, there were 6 different Lifeboats stationed in Watchet. All were wooden rowing boats, some could also have sails. They had 10 or 12 oars, were between 33ft and 37ft long and were supposed to be self-righting.

The site for the Boathouse was provided by the Dowager Countess of Egremont. In 1875, nearly £800 (a lot of money at the time) was donated by Mrs Somes to pay for Watchet's first Boathouse, Lifeboat and Carriage. On 25th July 1875, there was a traditional Service of Dedication and Naming Ceremony when the Lifeboat was named "Joseph Somes". In 1883 this Lifeboat was renamed "W. H. G. Kingston",



the first of three Lifeboats with the same name! The second, which again was a brand new Lifeboat, arrived on 5th December 1887 with the third, a second hand boat, arriving in June 1900. Another second hand Lifeboat, this time called Quiver No. 1, arrived in September 1902. She was replaced on 4th July 1903 by a brand new Lifeboat which was christened "John Lingard Ross" by Lady Acland Hood on 3rd August 1903. She stayed in Watchet until 12th September 1919. The final Lifeboat was again second hand and was called Reserve No. 6J until 1921 when she reverted to her original name of "Sarah Pilkington".

Launching a Lifeboat wasn't as quick and easy as it is today. The Lifeboat on its carriage needed about 20 people to haul it from the Boathouse along the Esplanade to the Town Slip. It was lowered down the Slip using rope and tackle with the rope hitched around the post shown in Picture

3. The hitching post is still there, beside the Market House Museum, with a small plaque above it. At High Tide, launching the Lifeboat from the bottom of the Slip into the sea was easy, as seen in Picture 4 with the launch of "John Lingard Ross". At Low Tide, however, the Lifeboat had to be hauled across the mud in the Harbour into the sea using horses. Picture 5 shows a Lifeboat being hauled through the harbour mouth. The same process, in reverse, was needed to recover the Lifeboat. Just think of the effort that must have taken. It was slow, hard work but there was never a lack of volunteers.

A number of well-known local families were involved with the Lifeboats in Watchet. Relatives of some of Watchet's Lifeboat men are still active at Minehead Lifeboat Station.

Operational launches of the Lifeboat were few and far between with most of them



## Lifeboats in Watchet

being to aid sailing vessels, either carrying cargo or fishing. One rescue, on the evening of 10th November 1899, was particularly noteworthy. The fishing boat "Rosalie" of Minehead was in difficulty off Watchet Harbour in heavy seas and a north-westerly gale. Luckily, the crew's cries for help were heard. The Lifeboat "W. H. G. Kingston" was launched with great difficulty at dead low water. The Lifeboat men were unable to make progress against the strong tide and wind and were carried further and further away from the fishing boat. Five Watchet fishermen launched a small boat with Mr William Escott in charge. He was 2nd Coxswain of the Lifeboat at the time. They succeeded in reaching the fishing boat and the 2 fishermen were rescued and landed safely. For his gallantry and leadership, Mr William Escott was awarded an inscribed pair of binoculars by the RNLI. The binoculars are still proudly kept by his family. The RNLI awarded each of the other 4 men, Mr Alfred Wedlake, Mr Alfred Nicholas, Mr Simon Nicholas and Mr James Davies, inscribed barometers. As far as I can tell, these were the only awards given to Watchet Lifeboat men by the RNLI.

Helwell Point with a heavy swell running. Ten soldiers were found trapped on rocky ledges under the high cliffs. All were landed safely.

Then as now, locals raised money for Lifeboats. The book "Watchet 1000 - A Celebration of a Saxon Port's History" gives Howard Strong's account of Lifeboat Day. He recounts how the Lifeboat was hauled by horses from Watchet to Williton then back to Watchet via Washford, Old Cleeve and Blue Anchor. Money was collected for the Lifeboat along the way.

The personal opinions are my own. The RNLI's Lifeboat Enthusiasts' Society paper "Watchet (Somerset) 1875-1944" was the source of the factual information I have used. I thank them for it. I am aware that their information does not always agree with information published in books about Watchet.

### Catherine Knight

There are two launches that remind me of present day Lifeboat launches and I thought "Nothing changes"! At 6.50 am on 23rd March 1935, "Sarah Pilkington" was launched. Three boys had left Watchet Harbour in a small boat and were unable to get back against a very strong tide and stiff WSW wind. The Lifeboat took the boys in their small boat in tow and landed them safely in the Harbour at 9.50 am. At 10.40 am on 29th August 1942, bathers were reported to be in difficulty near



## The flora and fauna of the Holnicot Estate by Nigel Hester



### Open Meeting - The flora and fauna of the Holnicot Estate by Nigel Hester

On a beautiful May evening 33 members and friends of the Conservation Society met at the Methodist schoolrooms to listen to a fascinating talk by Nigel Hester about the flora and fauna of the Holnicot Estate.

As it turned out Nigel's talk embraced the geography, geology and history, both ancient and modern of the picturesque estate.

The estate encompasses high moorland, woodland, a fertile vale and of course four and a half miles of dramatic coastline. Even into the sea, where at low tide the remains of an 8000 year old forest can be seen.

The coastal ridge at Porlock was breached in the storm of 1996 and the flooded land has now become a valuable salt marsh habitat with many important plants associated with it, including the Yellow Horned Poppy.

Many birds are attracted to the varied coastline including peregrine falcon, little egret, redshank, shelduck and occasionally oystercatchers, in the winter it's home to hundreds of turnstones.

Nigel showed us photos of Holnicot House in its various reincarnations and also many of its cottages. Restoration work on the cottages at Selworthy have revealed these to be originally medieval farmhouses. The oldest cottage on the estate is a 14th century gatehouse which contains many original features.

Away from the coast the estate consist of farmland, mainly livestock, woodland, including the important 1000 acre Horner wood, home to ancient (700 years) sessile oaks - more of this wood later. Finally the moorland uplands, including Dunkery Beacon, which is half of the estate's acreage.

Horner Wood has around 330 species of lichen, some quite rare and one only recently



## The flora and fauna of the Holnicot Estate by Nigel Hester

discovered. The habitat supports pied flycatchers, which are encouraged by the provision of nest boxes, also the tiny wood warbler and the beautiful silver washed fritillary butterfly. At the other end of the scale you will find buzzards and ravens.

Nigel explained how the moorland required active management to prevent it reverting to scrubland, this was originally achieved by 'burning off' the heather, today grazing is considered more environmentally sustainable. One moorland bird, the Dartford warbler, is making a comeback, after numbers declined drastically following severe winters, these birds overwinter, unlike the other warblers who spend their winter in Africa. Sadly merlins, Europe's smallest raptor, are down to just one breeding pair. It's a hard life on Exmoor.

Nigel's work on the estate, now under the control of the National Trust, involves him liaising with wildlife trusts and conservation bodies, not to mention one million visitors each year and an army of volunteers - with lots of events planned for young people, the emphasis is always on the next generation.

It was an enthralling talk, Nigel is clearly a man in his element.

Conservation Society meetings are open to everyone - visitors £2 members free. The next meeting will be on Tuesday 17th July when Helen Walaseck will be talking about Punch Magazine during the 1930s and 1940s. Do come along.

**Alan Jones**



*Porlock Bay from near Hurlstone Point*

Watchet Conservation Matters is published six times a year. If you would like to contribute news or an article, please contact our acting secretary Bob Cramp on: bob2cramp@gmail.com

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.

**Watchet Conservation Society**  
www.watchetconservationsociety.co.uk

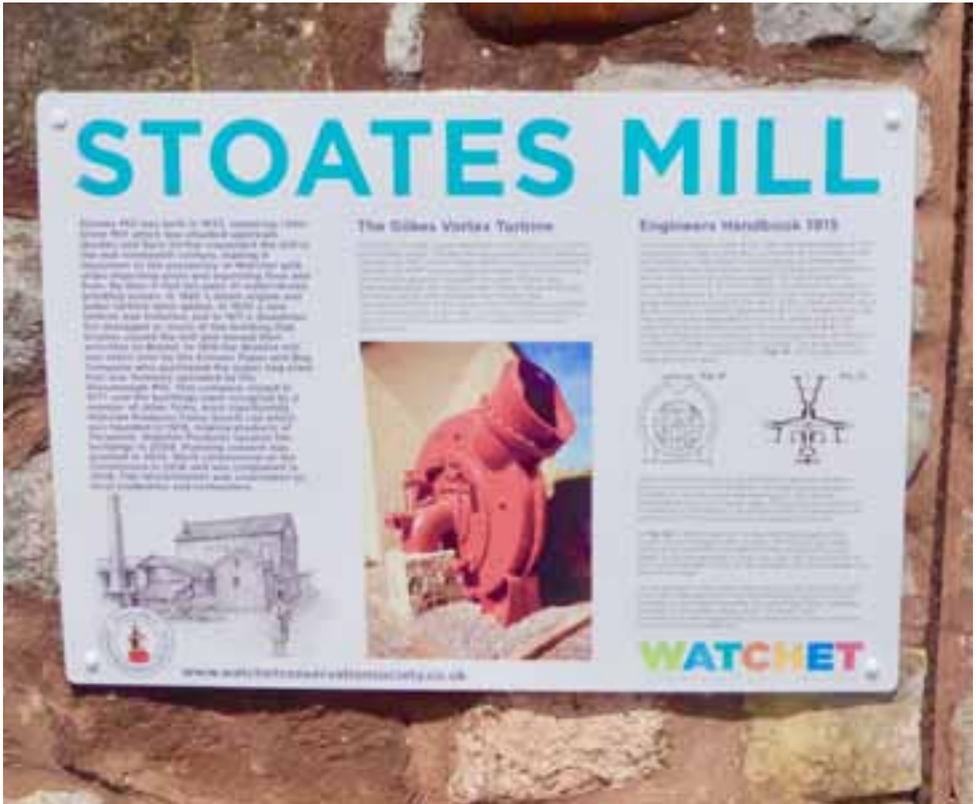
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### Stoates Mill Interpretation Board

The Conversation Society were commissioned by the developers of Stoates Mill to design and complete an interpretation Board to recognise its significance in the town's history. It is situated on the wall next to the Turbine which has been returned to its original site and now resplendent in its coat of red paint.

**Nick Cotton**