



# Watchet Conservation Matters

Promoting, Conserving & Improving  
Our Physical & Natural Environment

Issue 67 November/December 2019



## From the Chairman



reminiscing about the Watchet's brilliant Music Festival and the fireworks of Watchet Summertime.

Did you enjoy the Wind Chime installation on the Esplanade? It has got dark, it has got cold, the clocks have gone back but we have managed somehow to create and produce "Watchet, Then & Now" our 2020 Calendar.

As it is the lead article by Nick Cotton, I will not say more other than to urge you to attend our AGM on the 19th November, when you will hopefully, not only renew your WCS membership but will be able to procure your calendar, before they sell out.

See you there, oh and by the way, Have a Great Christmas and give a Big Welcome to 2020: yet another New Year.

Dear Members,

It is remarkable how quickly time passes, it is something to do with the ageing process apparently, never good news, but better than the alternative. Each new day is a decreasingly smaller piece or fraction of one's life so far and therefore appearing to go faster and faster, well, something like that.

Well I know that must be right, 2019 has almost disappeared and these bi-monthly News Letters/Chairman's messages arrive with irritating frequency, demanding, as they do, my attention.

At least five things have happened since the September/October issue when I was

**Bob Cramp**



## Watchet, Then & Now



### Watchet, Then & Now

Following the incredible success of our first calendar which sold out by December 2nd two Christmases ago the Society decided to have another go with a very different approach. Our town has some incredible photographers and we decided to call on their expertise and considerable talent in producing a 'Then & Now' format. The Society has an extensive archive of old Watchet photographs which are regularly posted on our facebook page and create a good deal of interest and comment.

Our chairman Bob Cramp approached a number of photographers asking if

they would be prepared to stand in the footsteps of the earlier photographers and try to replicate a similar viewpoint. The fascinating outcome was interesting in that, in many cases, little has changed. Watchet has not suffered as so many other towns have in losing the individual and quirky architectural facets that give our streets and town a very special and unique charm. Of course a number of buildings have suffered some unsympathetic 'renovation' in the past and that is a shame, but in recent years many buildings have been restored with skill and special attention to their heritage, in some cases



## Watchet, Then & Now



revealing architectural history that has been hidden for centuries.

There were a number of problems in proceeding with this project... which of the numerous old sepia photographs to choose, and the real dilemma, which photographers to approach. Can there be another town of our size that boasts such a wealth of talented photographers? It fell to Bob to complete this unenviable task which he completed with fortitude and, although he may not have shown it, some trepidation.

The calendar, now complete, will with each month have two photographs, as it is now and, superimposed, the vintage image (many of which are over a hundred years old). This will certainly be a unique Watchet calendar and the Society is extremely grateful to the photographers who made it possible.

### Nick Cotton

## The Beginning of Bells



### The Beginning of Bells

Bells are among the loudest of musical instruments and among the oldest in origin. In Europe bells (if you can describe them as such) were formed by bending sheets of metal and were more like a gong than the bell shape we know today. In fact they looked quite like a crudely made cowbell, and casting from molten metal did not begin until the 4th century A.D. or thereabouts. However, in China casting bells had begun around 2000 B.C, and the Chinese were the first to use this method of making the various bells used in ceremonial and decorative situations.

The method which in principle is still used today, was to pour bronze at about 870 degrees Celsius into a mould - a different size for each bell. An inner and an outer mould, called respectively the core and the cope, were required. The core in earliest years was made of wax and the cope of a special loam mix built within a metal frame. The wax was melted out after the bronze bell shape had cooled. In the 19th century this 'lost wax' process was further developed by replacing the wax core by a brick base covered in loam mixed and moulded to achieve the correct inner shape of the bell.





## The Beginning of Bells

Before the complete mould is ready to be used for the first (and only) time, the shape is repeatedly checked and measured inside and out. It is then dried in an oven, given a coating of graphite to add a fine finish, and any inscriptions are impressed on the inner surface of the cope with individual moulded letters. After this there is a final drying to be done, the cope and core are aligned and clamped together, and the molten bronze (77% copper, 23% tin ) is poured in. The biggest bells can take several days to cool completely, and to enable even cooling they can be buried in a pit until the mould can be taken apart and the bell is released. Air and gases are released as the fibres in the loam mix gradually burn away during the casting process, and the tiny holes left in the cope assist in this.

When the bell is released and cleared of the loam fragments, then tuning it can begin... a very skilled and painstaking task achieved by the gradual removal of metal from the inner surface.

Bells generally are long-lasting, and a few are still in regular use after as long as 700 years. In fact one of the two bells at the Culbone church of St. Beuno is known to date from the 14th century and is the oldest on Exmoor. Bells which have been damaged can be melted down and re-cast, as happened a number of times to bells at St. George's church in Dunster. Apparently there, although in the 17th century the church itself was not well looked after, but the bells were rung at each and every opportunity, so much so

that ropes and clappers were regularly replaced and some bells had to be re-cast several times. Bells were shipped via Watchet or Minehead to Bristol for repair or re-casting, and on one early occasion a bell was re-cast in Dunster itself, probably at the site of Bell House (marked on a 1643 tithe map).

To be continued...

**Valerie Ward**



## Open Meeting - Watchet's Past



### **Open Meeting - Watchet's Past - Tuesday 17th September by Tony Knight and Jenny Hill**

It has become a bit of a tradition that the last open meeting before the AGM is an informal discussion (a talk is not an adequate description) about 'Watchet's past'. An evening spent looking at old pictures of places and people, sometimes in living memory but often well outside it.

This last meeting was introduced by Tony Knight and Jenny Hill, photos displayed professionally by Paul Upton. Just over 40 members and friends turned up to join in a lively discussion as to who was

who in the photos or how old or where a particular photo might be.

Being a relative newcomer to Watchet along with many other 'incomers' present, it's fascinating to see familiar places as they were 50/100 years ago, but even more interesting to hear the stories from 'locals' whose families have lived here for generations recalling their memories. During the evening we had photos of Watchet Town football team, taken just before the war and featuring Tony Knight's father. Many



## Open Meeting - Watchet's Past

other team members were recognized by the enthusiastic audience. A photo of a coronation party in the council school canteen featuring a young master Knight, there was discussion from 'incomers' as to where this hall was and what happened to it! The item that drew the most discussion was a series of photos of St Decuman's school, 1986, which was situated where Woolhams Place now stands. Because Tony Knight was chairman of the Town Council at the time and a school governor he was very much involved in the replacing of the two schools, County school and St Decuman's school. It was hoped that the new school would be ecumenical but only the Methodist Church and St Decuman's chose to take part, names for the new school were proposed and Templars school was chosen, later changed to Knights Templar by the then head, Alan Woolham.

During the evening we saw photos of St Audries Army and RAF camp, the 'Pleasure Ground' complete with fair, the Esplanade with life boat station (now the library), Lloyds bank and a roller skating rink circa. 1910, all these prompted lively comments.

An interesting side track was during a discussion about the town cemetery, when the discussion got round to the whereabouts of Yankee Jack's (Captain John Short) grave, Tony, with family connections to the old sailor, believed there was sufficient evidence to suggest that he may have been cremated in Bristol, hence no local tomb. This

somehow led Jenny onto the fictitious mother of Lorna Doone being buried at St Decuman's. This then led onto the Florence Wyndham story, each story led to another and that's what makes these evenings such fun.

### Alan Jones

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 bi-monthly newsletter via email for free, or a printed copy for only £1.50 each. If you are not a member and have enjoyed reading this publication, come and join us to help us conserve our physical and natural environment. All of our committee members would be delighted to welcome you.

### Membership (per annum):

**£6.00** (single membership)

**£10.00** (couple membership)

### Printed copy of Newsletter:

**£1.50 each** (£9.00 per annum)

**£2.00 each** (ad hoc single purchases)

### Both (per annum):

**£15.00** (single membership, 1 x newsletter)

**£19.00** (couple membership, 1 x newsletter)

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## Moon

Moon, what are you doing?  
Coming out from behind a cloud:  
lighting up the landscape.

Looking from my window.  
Fields, hedgerows, muddled  
patterns, across the landscape.

The church clock,  
striking midnight, strikes  
the urge to walk.  
While the moon lights my  
way across the landscape.

Hilda Cornish



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