

Watchet Conservation Matters

Promoting, Conserving & Improving
Our Physical & Natural Environment

Issue 68 January/February 2020

From the Chairman



consuming particularly when combining the secretary and the role of newsletter editor. Well the good news is that this is my last ,the next newsletter will be edited by Dave Evans.

The story of December is the incredible success of sales for our Watchet "Then and Now" 2020 Calendar, due to the promising start against all advice I ordered another 100 copies on top of the initial order of 300 and with the amazing help from our wonderful local retailers we have nearly sold all 400 copies.

So it's a big thank you to Neil and Tracy at Alberts, Sandy at New Horizons, Janet at Cotton Street, Fiona in the Visitor Centre, Kim in the library, Howard at the Spar, Liddymore Road and Reg at the Breeze gallery in Willerton.

Dear Members,
Compliments of the Season.

Much seems to have happened since the November Newsletter, we held a successful and enjoyable AGM on the 17th November perhaps noteworthy was the fact that the treasurer resigned before the meeting, and at the end of the meeting I announced that I would be stepping down as your Chairman in six months time in June. This has been a difficult decision, but there are a number of personal projects that I have been trying to undertake, my Photo Archive for a start and I realise need the time and space to pursue them. Being your Chairman has been a privilege and a pleasure, but it can also be very time-

Due to a ferocious Facebook campaign masterminded by Nick Cotton, they have been posted all over the world. I would like to reproduce this e-mail I received (as Chairman) from New Zealand:

"Hi a friend of mine Pat Wilkes from Watchet sent me the 2020 calendar and to my delight the February photo showed the roof of the house I was brought up in called 'The Cottage' when we first moved in in 1947 later become 50 Brendon Road. It was so exciting to see it again. I was able to show my grandchildren where I lived. Lots of trees now in front of it that were not there when we were: we could easily see South Wales on a clear day.



From the Chairman

In the old photo the mill chimney with outhouses in which our hens spent their nights. The oak tree was where our swing hung and the path down to the mill was often warm underfoot from the heat from the boilers that drove the turbines.

My father Arthur Farrier was chief engineer at the Wansbrough paper mill after Mr Salmon. In 1960 when we emigrated to New Zealand, Dad had been appointed as Chief Engineer at the Whakatane Board Mills.

The whole Calendar brought back so many happy memories of my childhood.

So this is really a thank you to the Watchet Conservation Society for producing such a delightful calendar.

Kind regards
Inga Nu'u QSM JP."

How wonderful and amazing is that!

Hope to see you at our first open meeting, January 21st when the talk by Francis Farr Cox is on the River Parrett Navigation at 7.30pm.

I wish you Health, Wealth and Happiness in 2020.

Bob Cramp



Henri Salmét, aviator (1878-1929?)



Henri Salmét, aviator (1878-1929?)

The excited crowds that thronged the Esplanade to witness this summer's aerobatics of planes issuing smoke trails across the sky above the harbour prompted my memory of an account in Ben Norman's "Tales of Watchet Harbour" and events that happened a century before. He devotes just a couple of lines to this unique event in the port's history and I thought it might be interesting to do a little further research into French pioneer aviator, Henri Salmét.

West Somerset had, in 1911, experienced its first encounter with the wonders of a flying

machine when Minehead was visited by the celebrated airman 'Benny' Hucks. The Daily Mail did much to sponsor the early years of flight and indeed had put up the not inconsiderable sum of ten thousand pounds for the winner of the 'Round Britain Air Race' at the time of Benny's visit. It is not these events that we are particularly interested in however as the residents of our town would only have had a brief glimpse of the plane as it made its way up the Severn Sea, although had you been travelling on the railway from Minehead, the pilot had playfully followed and overtaken the train, attracting no doubt an enthusiastic response from the passengers as they leaned out of the carriage windows.

Henri Salmet, aviator (1878-1929?)



We must however move forward to the spring of 1914 when once again Minehead received another visit from an intrepid airman, a Frenchman, one Henri Salmet, a true 'magnificent man in his flying machine', as part of a visit to the West Country, a tour again sponsored by the Daily Mail.

This next aeronautic experience some three years later was an altogether more dramatic event, although certainly not planned as such. Henri Salmet was a well known airman of the day, based at the Bleriot Flying School at Hendon where he was a flying instructor. He was making a tour of England when he had an unfortunate and embarrassing

incident near Penzance in Cornwall when his plane, with floats attached, had tried, unsuccessfully, to land on the water.

These early pioneers of flight however were unlikely to be put off by such trifling inconveniences and Henri continued his uneventful progress from Cornwall through Devon until he became the first airman to fly over Exmoor and the Devon/Somerset border to his latest destination, the seaside town of Minehead. And so he arrived at this popular watering hole without incident and in dramatic and spectacular style, having circled the town several times before coming in to land on the sandy beach serving as the landing strip, no doubt to the astonishment and

awe of the onlookers whose incredulity at this great spectacle is not difficult to imagine.

Salmét's 90 hp Bleriot monoplane was a little more powerful than Benny Hucks' earlier plane and had the capacity to carry a passenger. It was with some trepidation that Mr. Murray Hill, a resident of the town who had provided a hangar and security for the monoplane, was, as part of a number of exhibition flights, given the thrill of a personal flight.

The excited passenger was reported as saying 'his flight to have been glorious, but the wind at times was so terrific, he could scarcely hold his head against it'. All was going well and then it came time for the pilot to leave Minehead for his next destination, Weston-Super-Mare. He had an uncomplicated and easy take off from the beach into a South West breeze accompanied by his passenger, a Mr. H. van Trump of Taunton. They followed the coastline to Watchet, where an eager and expectant crowd had gathered on the Esplanade and the pier to watch the fly past. As Salmét approached the town, the spectators were horrified to see the plane first lose height and then nose dive into the waters below. A contemporary report in the West Somerset Free Press stated: 'It sent up a huge column of sea and steam, obliterating all traces of the machine and its occupants for a few seconds, it seemed as if both had completely disappeared.

A feeling of terror gripped many of those who had witnessed what seemed to be

a dive to the death...' The incident had happened about a mile out to sea and with the utmost alacrity, the crew of the Watchet lifeboat was launched to see if anything could be done to aid the hapless victims along with their plane which was drifting rapidly away on the ebb tide. With fevered rowing, the crew quickly reached the unlucky pair and remarkably, the two were rescued which was fortunate as neither of them could swim!

Ben Norman includes in his brief account of this event a photograph of the crew of the lifeboat and it seems fitting to list them here:- Walter Norman, James Baker, Thomas Allen, Alfred Binding, Charles Escott, Alfred Langdon and John Binding. These are all well known Watchet names and there will be many descendants still living in the old port. Well-known photographer, H. H. Hole, was fortunately on hand to record the events and some photographs accompany this article.

It is barely over a hundred years since this fascinating event in Watchet's history and yet, in such a brief period, the advance of flight has taken us to the moon and sent probes to the furthest reaches of our solar system. Looking at the photographs of these early planes, they seem to be constructed with nothing more than a bit of string and the most basic materials and driven by what seems now the most elementary of engines. Salmét 'the airman', as reported by the Free Press on his arrival at Minehead, stood on the seat of his aeroplane, apologized to the crowd for his late arrival, and, buffeting his arms



vigorously, remarked that he was "cold, very cold". Less than a hundred years later came the iconic utterance "one small step for a man, one giant leap for mankind". Astonishing, isn't it?

Nick Cotton

References: West Somerset Free Press, Ben Norman & Geoff Cox.



Bell Ringing

Ways of ringing bells have changed over the centuries and are also different in other parts of the world. The English style of change-ringing, with bells hung in a tower, was for example hardly known outside these islands, but when in 1964 a new ring of 10 bells was dedicated in the cathedral of Washington, U.S.A., the Method, as it is known, began to spread. Despite this increased interest, 98% of the world's ringing towers are still in the U.K.

There are three very different ways of using tuned bells: hitting the bell on the outside used to be the only method in the East, and in Europe now many countries

use a glockenspiel. This has a frame with the bells hung in order of musically tuned notes and struck on the outside to play tunes. A carillon, though also striking the bells on the outer surface would produce the notes mechanically via a keyboard, and sometimes could be sited in a tower, as in Bruges. The third way of bell-ringing is to have the bell struck from the inside, by a clapper suspended on a flexible wire, rope or chain. This way is used extensively here since it was introduced in the Western world, but Oriental bells and the gongs from which they developed are still far more often struck on the outside with a stick or a mallet.

In Europe, bells seem to have been used very little until Christianity began to spread,

and ringing them became part of church services and the religious life. This way of using bells to mark important parts of worship is still used today: the bells called people to worship, to give information and warn of danger, and this is still done today.

However, when the English style of change-ringing developed, the bells were hung on a frame which supported the wheels and ropes as well as the bells they controlled. This meant that to have a ring of bells a church needed a tower to contain the bells safely when being rung. Most churches had three or more bells, and in towns a church might have 6, 8, 10 or even 12. This usually meant that a belltower had to be specially built or added to a church, and the local Lord of the Manor would provide funds for it. As a result, more and more occasions were marked by ringing the bells, ordered by the Lord of the Manor...military victories, fairs, royal visits, as well as the nightly curfew and the Angelus or morning bell which marked the end or beginning of the working day.

On the topic of belltowers, there is a remarkable example of a very ornate, privately built, tower near Birchington, Kent, which held a ring of 12 bells. John Powell, Squire of Quex Park, had it built in 1819 A.D. and named it the Waterloo Tower: he rang the bells himself, but surely he must have had some assistance if he rang all 12!

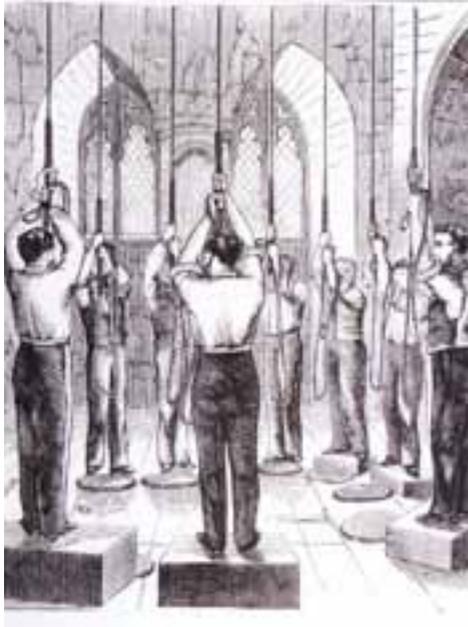
This tower remained for 150 years the only privately-owned ringing tower in Britain, but in 1951, near Banbury, a farmer called Charlie Jarvis built a tower and provided a ring of 6 bells. This was later increased

in stages by him to 16 bells. The lightest weighed 14lbs. and the heaviest 1-and three-quarter cwts.

Other unusual belltowers include not only some which have been re-built in a different position in the church. This happened at High Wycombe where in the 16th. century a central tower was demolished and rebuilt at the west end. Other oddities include Southwell Minster and Merton College chapel, where there were no proper places with space for the ringers. The situation was rectified in Southwell when in 1963 a new floor was built for the ringers to stand on, but in Merton College chapel the ringers had to make do with only a three-foot wide gallery which went round the tower walls, above a 60 foot drop to the belfry floor below.

Learning to be a tower bellringer is much harder than people realise: mistakes cannot be concealed from the rest of the team, and instruction while ringing is in progress has to be shouted. New terms must be learned such as : a ring is a set of bells, while a peal is the succession of notes they ring. Change-ringing is a system of ringing that causes the bells to change their order of sounding in an orderly, prescribed way.

Getting it right sounds like a nightmare when you are told that there can be no less than 5040 changes using 7 bells, no less than 6000 changes on 8 bells, and so on, when a peal is rung correctly. Understandably there have to be rules of



decorum and behaviour, and there exist in some belfries a Notice giving Rules.

One of the oldest set of Rules is in the belfry at Drewsteignton on Dartmoor ends:

"Who will not to these rules agree Shall not belong to this belfrie".

Some were rules about reimbursement for ringers... nowadays only at a wedding, but in the past there seems to have been payment (as well as fines) paid in beer or cider for other occasions. As for funerals, there were strict procedures, and in the 1702 Rules of the London Scholars we read:

"Toll the tenor bell (the heaviest and lowest in tone) 9 times for a man, 6 for a woman and 3 for a child. During the Service the clapper may be half-muffled by covering one side of the clapper with leather, and afterwards during the burial, tolled the number of years the deceased had lived."

On a happier note, a highlight of bellringing is the belfry outing—traditionally an annual event when a day is set aside for groups of bellringers, when they arrange to visit each others' belfries for ringing and other jollity.

Valerie Ward



Report on the Watchet Conservation Society AGM, held at the Phoenix Centre on Tuesday November 17th at 7.30pm.

The Society held its Annual General meeting at the Phoenix Centre on Tuesday evening 17th November, the Chairman Bob Cramp welcomed Members and visitors and declared the meeting quorate.

Copies of the 2018 AGM were circulated and Mervyn Brown proposed they be accepted. The meeting agreed nem.con. The chairman Bob Cramp presented his report .He started by saying that the major year's achievement was to still be in existence, running the Society with such a small active committee, and had had more than its normal share of challenges.

The Wildflower Garden, West St. continues to be supported by the Society and after protracted negotiations with the Town Council had secured another year's licence.

The Chairman thanked the dedicated team of gardeners who continue to look after Goviers Lane crossing, the flower displays outside the the Phoenix Centre and the Harbour Cafe and the Boat at West Street, and also the couple who look after St Decuman's Well.

Rob Hutchings and Bob Cramp met considerable success when meeting the Director of Somerset Museum in Taunton to complain that Watchet's Yankee Jack had been overlooked and not given his proper dues in the Shanty display, they are renewing the section and are according him his rightful place early in 2020.

The Chairman talked with pleasure about the recent successful Launch of Watchet "Then and Now" the Society's 2020 Calendar which had taken place on November 4th and members were invited to purchase their copies to avoid disappointment.

The Society had completed a varied talks program for the six open meetings, Spiders, Fungi, Watchet Radio Museum, Coastal erosion around Watchet which was attended by 90 people and lastly an evening of old Watchet and memories and photos.

Mervyn Brown spoke of the Talks planned for next year's Open Meetings , the first of



AGM - Tuesday November 17th at 7.30pm

which in January 20th will be on "The River Parrett Navigation Company". This will be followed in March by "Know your Place", a digital mapping project, In May "The Henge of Avebury and Silbury Hill" and in July a talk about Steart Saltmarsh. In September is planned another evening of Watchet reminiscence.

The Treasurers Report

Ann Hill, the treasurer has resigned and it was left to Bob Cramp to deliver her report. The current Balance stood £3,658.08 with some outstanding payments, the accounts have not been finalised or audited. Clearly not a satisfactory situation, for which the Chairman apologised and promised to redress as soon as possible and report back.

Lucy Corlett Shaw in her membership report said that the membership to date was 100.

Bob Cramp thanked Casework Consultant, Phil Gannon, for his help and advice regarding planning issues and decisions during the year.

Election of officers. There being no persons offering to stand, it was agreed to re-elect the current officers en bloc.

Before declaring the meeting closed, the Chairman thanked the committee members for their efforts but also announced that he felt that he could no longer carry on as Chairman, acting newsletter editor and secretary and wished to stand down from these roles and would depart by June 1st.

The meeting then welcomed performance poet Deanna Payne who entertained with her witty perceptive and humorous poems, one entitled Watchet Conservation. These were much appreciated by the audience as were the generous and delicious refreshments which followed.

Bob Cramp

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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Watchety!

Watchet Conservation Society,
can be summed up in very few words to me!
For Watchet Conservation Society,
are the people who keep Watchet watchety!

When I was first asked what they do,
I responded with 'i don't know' and stared at
my shoe!
But, after a chat and a quick Google too
I thought I'd like to share my findings with you.

'Promoting, preserving and improving
the physical and natural wonders of Watchet'
Each time they complete a project
I think ' man, they can't top it' and yet they do!
Conserving, promoting and improving too.

Superheroes of stone work,
Champions of Watchet quirks,
They are the people who balance
Old and new and make sure Watchet works!

They see Watchet for all its oddities,
The things that make it home
They see bits of History
Where others just see stone!
From the landmarks that they treasure
To the landmarks they create
So many people, passions and pride
They take it in their stride keeping Watchet
watchetified!

So,
Here's to Watchet Conservation Society
The people who keep Watchet watchety!

Deanna Payne