



# Watchet Conservation Matters

Promoting, Conserving & Improving  
Our Physical & Natural Environment

Issue 71 September/October 2020

## From the Chairman



Anchor Inn



Our Dear Members,

When, after 23rd March everything in Watchet collapsed and went into meltdown, I consoled myself with the thought that my WCS duties would be very light and I would have lots of free time to finish my archive. How very wrong I was.

For me Conservation is about preserving our town and our way of life in Watchet and I decided at the end of March that the WCS should commit itself to fight tooth and nail to prevent the proposed housing development at Cleeve Hill.

It is so very wrong on every level, and yet the planners at Somerset West & Taunton Deane seemed determined, lemming-like

that it should go ahead, encouraged by the prospect of the developer re-routing the B3191 away from the cliff edge.

So in April, May and much of June, my time was spent hosting socially distanced strategy meetings in my cold back garden. I was extremely fortunate with the amount of specialist help at my disposal. Attending these meetings were Phil Gannon, Dave Evans and Nick Cotton, other occasional guests included Andy King of Geckoella and Paul Burrell, a concerned resident of Lorna Doone.

Our first letter of a very technical nature was sent to the Planning department on June 13th. On the 6th July, the WCS wrote personal letters to all the residents of Saxon Ridge and Saxon Close to persuade them to write to the planning committee. You can read this letter. Our final submission, which was also signed by nine other important Watchet organisations was delivered on the 13th July for the planning meeting on the 16th.

The planning committee meeting was extremely long and the decision to refuse outline planning permission went down to the wire, but was eventually, narrowly carried.

This was no doubt due in part to the tenacity of our District Councilors, Loretta Whetlor and Ian Aldrich, but I like to think we (WCS) played no little part in this, and I feel we are entitled to feel very relieved, very satisfied and yes, a little proud. Hopefully there will not be an appeal, but if there is, we will be ready.



## From the Chairman

During lockdown Nick Cotton set out to educate and entertain us through our WCS facebook page and put on over a hundred and fifty new followers in the process. Celebrating the natural history of the Mineral line and following through with more of his preciously unseen archive of pictures of old Watchet by James Date and Bert Hole, all accompanied by facts and data, his daily output was amazing.

Nick put on an Online History of Watchet Quiz hosted by David Milton, following this with an online free draw giving away bird-tables, bird feeders and hedgehog boxes. Following on from this he was contacted by Jane Sharp and asked to co-operate in setting up a WCS facebook page dedicated to the preservation of Hedgehogs. These wonderful little creatures are becoming an endangered species, although not apparently in Watchet. Our facebook group already has over two hundred members and we have supplied Jane with a large-scale map of Watchet to mark and record all the sightings. Read about Watchet's Hedgehogs.

In the middle of July we received the sad news of the death of Sally de Renzy-Martin, our Town Council representative and indefatigable champion of Watchet over many years. We launched an appeal, to raise funds to install a memorial bench in her memory and I am pleased to say that thanks to the generosity of the WCS members we have achieved our target and a bench will be situated in a position chosen by John, Sally's husband, underneath the pine trees, not far from the Community Centre which she helped

to instigate and was associated with for many years.

Nick Cotton, a friend and long time associate of Sally has written an affectionate tribute.

Thanks to the generosity of one of our members we are in the process of replacing the damaged Turner interpretation Board. To that end, Nick Cotton was in discussion with a member of the Onion Collective regarding the area known as Splash Point or The Pleasure Ground. It is apparent it is in a very sad state; very overgrown. The Onion Collective has offered to transfer the management of the area to the WCS. This has allowed Nick to fulfill a long held dream to make the space available for family use and to re-wild the land. Regrettably it was a committee decision that it was too big a task for the Society, bearing in mind its existing commitments, but Nick has pressed on with the project on his own, with an army of dedicated volunteers. It seems to have been the right decision: he is making substantial headway.

Managing the Society in lockdown has been challenging. But we did manage to organise a socially distanced Committee meeting at the end of July in Rob Hutchings' large garden in Williton (see picture) to discuss how we can manage the next few months, and on into the winter.

The summer seems to have passed very quickly, like many of you I have been confined to quarters until recently. There are worse places to be stuck than Watchet, but

## From the Chairman



I was looking forward to a relaxing of the restrictions—before the Rule of Six. Frankly, I have become a little depressed of late and it has taken me rather longer than it should to write the Chairman's message and assemble all the articles for this publication.

I fully realise how important it is to keep these newsletters going as a means of communication in these difficult times. It does appear to have become a three monthly event, but now it is more like a magazine.

Your lead article is a wonderful Watchet Story by Neil Wilson of the Radio Museum. We have a small piece from our old friend Michael Statham of the Welsh Slate Forum, about a Watchet Alabaster Font delivered to the Wesleyan Chapel in 1931, and if that is not enough, we have another wonderful poem from Deanna Payne titled "Reasons to be Happy". What's not to like?

Finally I have just had my heart pacemaker replaced I am good to go for another ten years—that has to be good news.

**Bob Cramp**

**Chairman**





## Cleeve Hill



### **Letter posted to all residents of Saxon Ridge & Saxon Close—6th July 2020**

Dear Resident,

There are several reasons why the Conservation Society is opposed to this development and we have submitted a number of objections that have been lodged by various individual members.

The fact that this is sited close to what is known as the Watchet Geological Fault should be reason enough to have dismissed this location in the first place. Anyone who has lived here for any amount of time, will be perfectly aware of the fragility of the cliffs on Cleeve Hill, in both their unstable nature and also continued erosion.

Importantly, from a historical and archaeological aspect, this site is generally recognised as almost certainly where

the very origins of our town began, even before the harbour. It is the site of Daws Castle (the old lime kilns) and the Minster, which pre-dates St Decumans. The field directly opposite the Lime Kilns has been known as Minster Field for at least 250 years. It is generally accepted that the Watchet Mint and the site of the Saxon village, were both within this area. Some archaeological work has been carried out at Daws Castle, with confirmation and clear evidence of this stronghold being in existence since the time of the Vikings.

Proper excavation of this site may even reveal it to be earlier and possibly Iron Age. Our town is under siege from potential developments at Cleeve Hill, Parsonage Farm and Liddymore, completion of which would effectively destroy the very nature of our town. It would also, in effect, go some considerable way to doubling the

## Cleeve Hill

population. At this present time, it could be easy for plans for such developments to slip through planning consent without much attention to the concerns of the residents of Watchet. The Society is determined that this won't happen and will, if necessary hold a physical public demonstration.

It is unfortunate that some of those who make the decisions on our behalf, may not have even visited the site and it is important that as residents of Watchet, we make our concerns known as loudly and as vociferously as possible.

Unfortunately the historical importance is unlikely to hold much sway with the planners but the inadequacy of the geological reports is extremely worrying are woefully inadequate.

There are obvious concerns regarding the access from Swain Street and importantly West Street which cannot be improved. The re-routing of the road will have a serious impact on residents of both Saxon Ridge and Saxon Close particularly. That this site is even being considered is unfathomable unless the council see it as way to avoid the expense of either protecting the crumbling cliffs or the re-routing of the road.

Importantly other reasons why this should not be considered. This plan was submitted prior to the mill closure releasing an extensive brown field site for development. Secondly Watchet has already reached the government target of house building

and exceeded it. If all the proposed developments take place it might be worth considering the impact on our local services, particularly the Doctor's surgery.

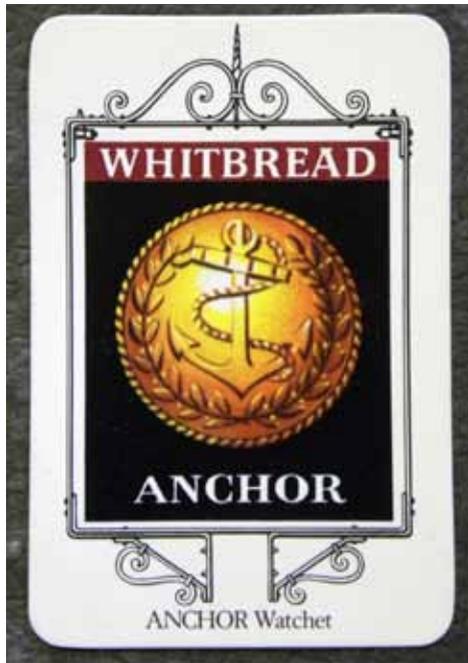
You may wish to make a personal objection to the following address:

*Planning Department,  
Somerset West and Taunton Council,  
PO Box 866,  
Taunton,  
TA1 9GS  
Application no: 3/37/18/015  
Outline application for 136 houses,  
Cleeve Hill, Watchet, Somerset.*

Yours sincerely,

**Bob Cramp  
Chairman, WCS**





**Fig 1**

Back in 2015, when considering purchasing the Anchor Inn as a museum for my collection of vintage radio equipment, I made an interesting discovery during an unofficial viewing of the property. In a shed behind the skittle alley was the former Whitbread pub sign which had once hung outside the Anchor.

When the purchase was completed in May 2015, I looked forward to displaying the old sign in a corner of the Radio Museum which I intended to devote to the history of the building. However, when I went in search of the sign I had seen only a few weeks before, I was disappointed to find it had disappeared.

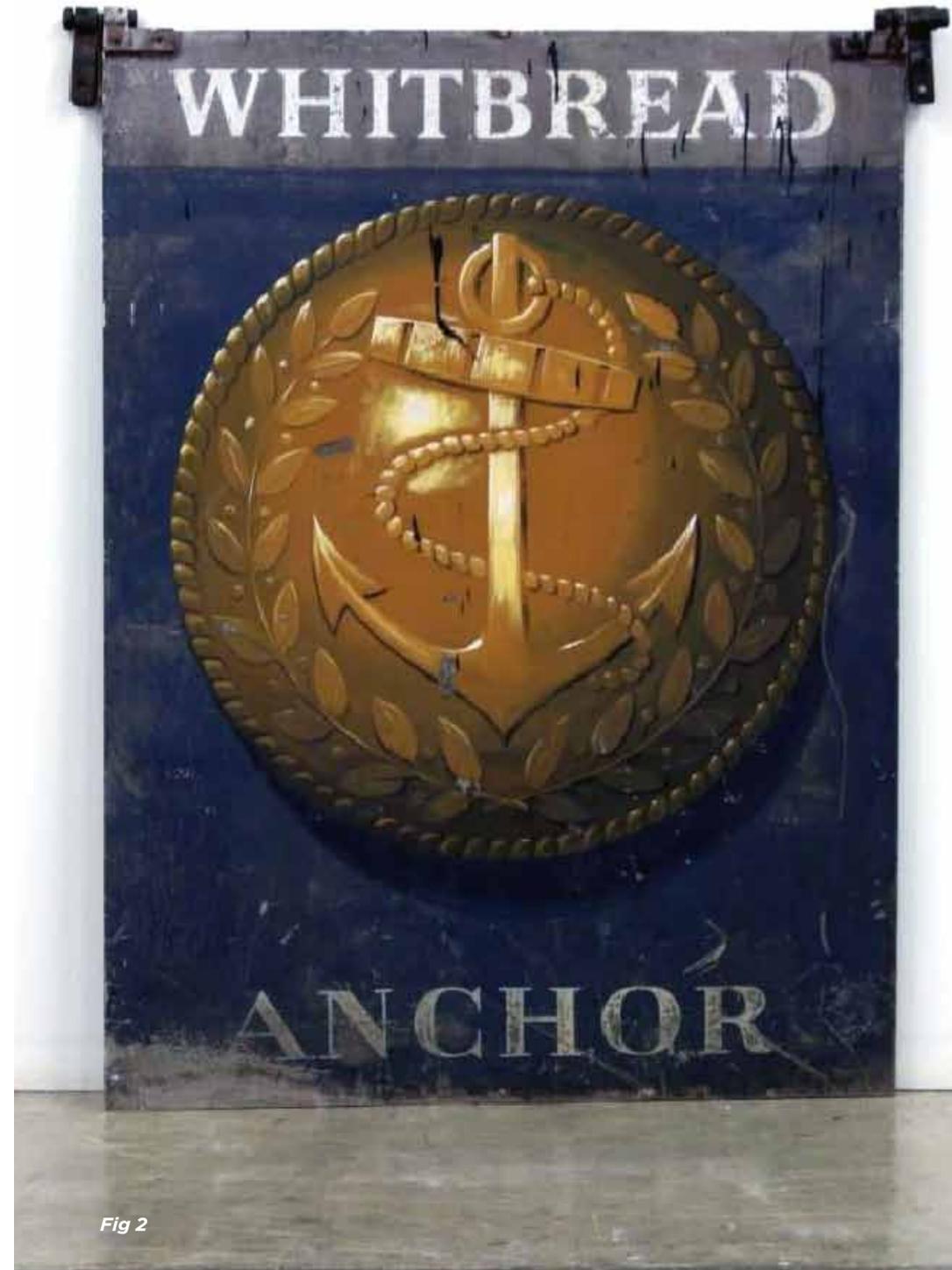
I had no idea where it had gone. Was it taken by Enterprise Inns when they removed all the pub signage (including the later hanging sign) and fittings shortly before the sale? Had somebody discovered its location and 'liberated' it? Or had it been hidden there by a local person who had returned to collect it?

For a while afterwards, I searched Ebay in case it came up for sale but succeeded only in finding an example of a picture card depicting the Anchor sign (Fig 1). The reverse of this card reads:

*'The History of Whitbread Inn Signs. 21. ANCHOR Watchet. The anchor is universally used as a symbol of the sea and there are many inns of this name. On this sign there is a 'foul anchor' i.e. one with a rope round it. The artist has chosen to illustrate a naval button of the 18th century on this sign. After Nelson's time a crown was added to Admiralty buttons. This is a most appropriate emblem for an inn situated near the coast of the Severn Estuary. A series of 25 Maritime inn signs. WHITBREAD & COMPANY LIMITED. Established 1742.'*

For a few years I forgot about the sign, presuming it to be permanently lost, until about six months ago when again I decided to search the internet. This time, to my amazement, an image of the actual sign that I remembered seeing in the shed appeared on the screen (Fig 2).

Despite there being many pubs with similar names, I believe that every pub sign bears an image unique to that establishment, so I was in no doubt that this picture was of the sign that once hung outside the Anchor in Watchet.



**Fig 2**



**Fig 3**

The sign can be dated to within a period of about forty years. I have a photograph from 1957 which shows no hanging sign except a small one inscribed simply 'The Anchor Hotel'. In 1959, Whitbread started buying shares in the former owners of the Anchor, brewers Starkey, Knight & Ford, eventually taking over the company completely in December 1962 with 400 tied houses. At this time, Starkey's had breweries in Tiverton and Bridgwater—although the Northgate Brewery in Bridgwater was closed by Whitbreads shortly after the takeover. After 1962, bottled beers such as 'Tivvy Pale' and 'Tivvy Brown' continued to be brewed at Tiverton and sold under the Starkey, Knight and Ford name. Then the brand disappeared completely, when in 1970 the West Country division was

renamed Whitbread Devon Ltd. An aerial photograph from 1966 shows some sort of hanging sign, but the fascia still bears the inscription "Starkey's Prize Medal Ales". Fig 3 shows the sign as it must have been in the later 1960s or 1970s.

In 2001, Whitbread sold their breweries and brewing interests to Belgium-based Interbrew, then in the following year, all their pubs, including the Anchor, were sold to Enterprise Inns. It was presumably at around this time that the Whitbread sign was removed and replaced.

Unfortunately, the image of the sign which I had found was on the website of an auctioneer situated in California, USA. The auction date was nearly two years ago in October 2018 but, after signing up to the website, I was able to discover that the sign had not sold. This gave me renewed hope that it may still be for sale somewhere, but having emailed the auction house twice in the hope of getting further information, I have not received a reply. It seems that for now, at least, the trail has gone cold.

Recently when recounting this story to a friend, she commented that it was unusual that the sign has made it all the way across the Atlantic when, most things that came out of the Anchor had difficulty making it across the street!

I would be very pleased to hear from anyone with pictures or information relating to the Anchor's history.

**Neil Wilson**



Recent research has revealed that one James John Moon (1853-1955), who had a long association with Barry Docks and was a Captain of the local Boys Brigade, also had a hobby which was sculpting baptismal fonts from Penarth alabaster. He apparently donated these to a variety of chapels. The only example of his work so far traced is in the Wesleyan Chapel in Watchet, also now used by the local Catholic community. It could well be that this font is actually carved from Watchet alabaster rather than Penarth. It was donated to the chapel in 1931.

A search for south Wales examples of Mr Moon's work continues.

**Mike Statham**

### Notes:

*Thanks to Robin Adeney webmaster of West Somerset Catholics for the photograph.*

*Western Mail, 2 Nov 1953.*

*He can recall the young days of Queen Victoria.*

*Western Mail, 15 March 1955.*

*Man who saw port grow dies at 101*

[www.westsomersetcatholics.org.uk/watchet](http://www.westsomersetcatholics.org.uk/watchet)



## Watchet Hedgehogs



I am delighted to say that the project is now up and running with the help of WCS, to help local people who love hedgehogs. These iconic British mammals need our help before it is too late and so 'Watchet Hedgehogs' has been set up (and sponsored by WCS) to monitor, and record, the numbers of hedgehogs in and around the town. You can get involved by reporting sightings, sharing photographs and stories, helping others who want to know how to encourage them into their gardens, what to, and what not, to feed them, advice on what to look for when they need our help and any other helpful hints. If you are new to hedgehogs and want to know more, then the group will be able to answer any questions you may have.

to garden and achieve a sufficiently large territory to sustain them. Equally, data captured by recording and monitoring can also supply evidence that helps to support a response to a planning application. This could be an objection to a development, or in support, depending on the circumstances; or it might be a request that specific conditions are applied when granting Permission. The evidence generated from recording adds substantial weight to such responses, as it is more difficult to dispute facts than assertions.

With the help of Environmental Consultants Geckoella Ltd, it is planned to encourage local people to provide suitable environments for hedgehogs in their gardens, and record sightings. Recording is a vital tool, as it is the only way of setting the base line and evaluating the success, or otherwise, of interventions intended to improve the health and distribution of the hedgehog population.

A Facebook page has been set up, called 'Watchet Hedgehogs', and I invite you to join. At the time of writing this the page has been running for just two weeks and we already have over 165 members! This is so encouraging. It shows how many of you are interested in and care about the welfare of these lovely little creatures.

Not on Facebook? No problem...  
Email us: [hedgehogswcs@gmail.com](mailto:hedgehogswcs@gmail.com).

Not got a computer? Again no problem...  
Call Jane on: 01984 639428.

If you know of someone who might be interested in contributing to the project but does not have a computer please tell them about us and ask them to call Jane.

**Jane Sharp & Dave Evans  
(in conjunction with WCS)**

It also provides an evidence base with which to influence the policies of Local and Strategic Plans as developed by District Councils, County Councils and Unitary Authorities. An example of this might be a policy that encourages connectivity in new builds, so that boundary fences and walls are designed in order that they always contain sufficient gaps to allow the passage of hedgehogs from garden





## Sally de Renzy-Martin, a Tribute

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The enormous contribution Sally made to the town is well recorded and remembered by her numerous friends and those involved in Watchet affairs over the decades. Her determination, innovation and ability to engage and convince people to support her current passion will be remembered for years to come.

Rupert, Chloe and Lisa were contemporaries of my own children, Olly and Jennie and they all grew up together, spending a good deal of time together in each other's houses, with inevitable mishaps and misdeeds of course. I can recall a good number of often amusing events and situations that would fill several chapters. I particularly enjoyed one occasion when they were teenagers, visiting Sally and seeing an interesting plant growing in the garden. I questioned Sally about it. She was a keen gardener, but had failed to identify it. I was aware of some barely concealed sniggering coming from the kitchen but, unfortunately, I cannot remember from which of the three miscreants. Anyway, some days later, the 'pot plant' had been removed and I was accused of being party to the deception—outrageous! Being naive is not a trait normally assigned to Sally, but there you go.

My own personal memories of Sally are extensive. Much time was spent around her kitchen table; glass in hand (we both liked a drink), holding forth on various subjects, almost exclusively on the small town topics of Watchet. We certainly didn't always agree which often led to heated exchanges, becoming even more heated as more wine was consumed and we

travelled boisterously into the early hours. Our differences never became anything more than that. It was easy to shrug our shoulders and agree to disagree, although sometimes I know I exasperated her. Sally had sound judgement and an analytical approach to resolving problems and situations that I have always envied. Her advice was always worth listening to.

Her commitment to Watchet was unquestionable and she worked tirelessly for the benefit of the town with little desire for recognition. Her reward was to see a job well done. I have fond memories of Sally far too numerous to mention, but looking through my mountains of literature, I came across a copy of the West Somerset Reviewer from the summer of 2003. I have reason to remember this all those years ago. How uncannily vivid the memory is. Sally was writing about Watchet and phoned me to ask if I could provide a little drawing to accompany the article. 'Make it romantic' she suggested and it would be great if she could 'collect it in the morning'. 'I haven't got time' I protested as she put the phone down. Of course she did collect it in the morning and I said 'Here you are Sally, you and me romantically hand in hand on Longsands'. She playfully punched me on the arm, engaging me with that smile of hers which will remain in my memory always.

**Nick Cotton**

The article is reproduced by kind permission of John Garland, then editor of The Reviewer.

# Sally de Renzy-Martin The healthy, happy, West Somerset holiday haunt

In *The Official Guide of the Watchet Urban District Council* possibly published in the early 50's, Watchet is described as 'The Healthy Happy West Somerset Holiday haunt' - so, nothing has changed!



Long Beach Sands, Watchet

The town nestles around its ancient harbour which has a history dating back to Viking invasions in the 9th century and was, reputedly, the inspiration for Samuel Taylor Coleridge's poem *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*. Today, the harbour is home to a bustling, modern marina, one of several on the Bristol Channel.

There are many things for a visitor to see and do in and around Watchet. The town has two fascinating museums—The Market House Museum and The Boat Museum. The Market House Museum displays Flatner boats, both original and reproduction, that were used on the Bristol Channel and, particularly, on the Somerset Levels. The Boat Museum mother of Lorna Doone is buried in Watchet's history, back to the Viking incursions, and on high ground to the West of the town and occasionally worth the effort for the wonderful views over the surrounding countryside and over the town and Bristol Channel to the Welsh coast. A popular attraction two miles from Watchet is the Washford transmitting station, the listed 1930's building is now home to a collection of tropical animals and birds, an aquarium, a puppet theatre, a radio museum and a café. There are more animals in the surrounding gardens where adults can sit at the picnic tables waiting for their children to tire of the large adventure play area. Tropicaria is easily identified by the neighbouring village is Washford Mill. Once a mill for the local wool trade, the buildings have been recently converted to provide outlets for local crafts, food and a café whilst continuing its long time trade in feed, fertilizers etc for local farmers. Just beyond Washford Mill is Cleeve Abbey, a Cistercian Abbey founded in 1188, where at times during the summer *English Heritage* arrange a *living history* performance.

In the town car parks there are maps of Watchet's *Heritage Trail* which, with an accompanying leaflet from the Watchet Market House Museum or the Tourist Office, will lead the visitor to Watchet on a gentle walk through the town's history. Watchet's beaches at West Street and Helwell Bay may not be noted for golden sands and blue seas but Watchet's beaches are famous for their richness of geographical features. People using our beaches must remember that the Bristol Channel has the second highest tidal range in the world and the umvay can easily find themselves trapped against the cliffs by a rising tide. Tide tables are available from several shops in Swain Street. Keen anglers can enjoy their sport from certain areas on the west pier or from one of the two charter boats working out of the Marina. Beach fishing is very popular at nearby Blue Anchor. On the eastern side of Watchet is the Memorial Ground, home to the town's many football and cricket teams and bordered by two tennis courts and a multi-sports court which are open to the public. Watchet once had its own 9 hole golf course on the edge of the cliff but unfortunately, several decades ago the course fell into the sea and the nearest facility is 8 miles away at Minehead Golf Club.

Watchet is an ideal place from which to discover the beauties of the nearby Quantock and Brendon Hills, both of which are walks and hidden hamlets, many with historic churches and interesting pubs providing sustenance for the thirsty and hungry.

There are many more attractions in our area most of which are accessible by public transport and some by steam train on the famous West Somerset Railway.



*Covid-sunset*

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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### **Reasons to be happy:**

Sometimes when I am down and life is  
feeling crappy  
I write a little list of things that make me  
happy

Such a list I now gift to you,  
In hopes, it makes you happy too!

Bubble baths, on a frosty day  
Micro-pigs wearing pink beret

Glossy white tiles and golden beaches of sand  
Imagining tiny birds in the hair of Russel Brand

Counting puzzled looks at poetry recitals...  
Fantasy lords with ridiculous titles!

Chocolates and Vodka, Staring at stars,  
Shouting 'WE ALL KNOW IT'S TINY!' at  
men with loud cars.

Shoals of fishes and Raincoats, Tales of  
mermaids at sea  
Sometimes I wonder what these lists say  
about me?

But there you go, you have it, I am done,  
I've told you my list, now go write your  
own one!

**Deanna 'Twitch' Payne**