



# Watchet Conservation Matters

Promoting, Conserving & Improving  
Our Physical & Natural Environment

Issue 48 September/October 2016



## Our Chair Molly Quint



members who have memorabilia from World War 1 to bring it along please.

Please also think about entering our Calendar Competition with your photos of Watchet. The closing date is 30th September, with judging on the 7th October. This is the first time WCS has produced a Calendar and we are all looking forward to purchasing one, or two, for presents. It will be on sale at our AGM in November at a price of £5 each.

With very Best Wishes to you all for a Happy and Sunny Autumn, from Molly.

Yours very sincerely,

Dear Friends and Members.

**Molly Quint**

Do hope you have all had a wonderful Summer. Watchet has certainly been a very busy and vibrant place with so much going on in and around the town, and I think the most spectacular was that of the two visits of the Balmoral, so lovely to see her back here again after missing last year.

School is back so parents and grandparents can now relax a little and enjoy the late sunshine.

We do hope you will come to our next Open Meeting on 20th September when Jane Sharp will be talking about visiting the Somme. I'm sure this will be a very interesting evening, especially those of you who have connections to this memorable time. Jane would like any



**Sheila Mannes-Abbott 1939 - 2014**  
**“She loved and painted flowers”**

Edward and I have agreed that this will be the final piece on Sheila and her paintings. And so this edition is dedicated to both Sheila and Edward; a reminder that they were founder members of our society and that both had a long history as conservationists well before our society was established.

Thank you Edward for your generosity and time in providing us with so many of Sheila’s beautiful illustrations for so long. They have given us so much pleasure.

On the following page is an article published in The Sunday Times on January 15th 1978 along with the illustration which accompanies this feature. The photograph is of Sheila in the 1970s in front of Warren Copse with her painting.

**Jan Simpson-Scott**

**The Barren Future Of Warren Copse**

This painting is what its artist terms “a letter of protest”. It records a copse near her home in East Berkshire, which is threatened with devastation as the site of a motorway service station. Warren Copse is a 40-acre primeval patch of bracken and briar near the village of Sherlock Row. There are 54 known species of wild flowers, including rare orchids and fungi, white admiral butterflies, nightingales, and badger setts. It was once a part of old Windsor Forest, and there are preservation orders on the oak trees. It is already spliced in two by the M4 motorway. Now the Department of the Environment (sic) intends to build a £4m service station there in the Green Belt as a staging post between the present Membury and Heston service areas, which are 56 miles apart.

The painter is Sheila Mannes-Abbott. From her home it is, for most people, a pleasant 15-minute walk across the fields to the copse. But two years after she left Ealing Art School, Sheila suffered her first attack of multiple sclerosis. For a time she was in a wheelchair. She married, brought up her first two children, Guy, now 14, Kim, 12, and today as she plays with her baby Jonathan she appears the picture of health - rosy cheeks, honey blond hair and wearing a demure Victorian printed dress. Five years ago she had another bad attack, and for a time lost the use of her right arm. It took her six weeks to paint a single flower head, with a fine sable brush fastened to her finger with rubber bands. Now, she says, cheerfully, her condition varies from day to day. Most of her inspiration these days comes from visits to the copse. If she is well enough



she drives; if not, her husband Edward Frewin, a director of Reading Fine Art Gallery, or one of the neighbours take her. One volunteer is Clive Scott-Hopkins, president of the local preservation society, and it was he who suggested that Sheila should make a record of the copse’s plants and wildlife as it might not be there much longer. “When I first told Sheila about the government’s plans for a motorway services area in place of the copse, she was in a frightful state,” he says. The result is a painting which took five months to complete. “I find it difficult to believe”, says Sheila, “that motorists, even with young families, need to stop, eat, drink and refuel and go to the loo every 20 minutes”.

**Carolyn Chapman**





**WELL - would you believe it?**

There I was enjoying myself, welcoming and talking to the visitors, with a fair bit of laughter as well - great for all concerned.

Then it all changed. Fred Bacon, our trusty piper, came in - and changed my shift completely. He sat down beside me, very serious, and in a trice as he started to explain, I was rapt (and frankly the visitors didn't get much attention for a good while - but I did click the clicker for each arrival! I think).

It seems Fred had been looking at old OS maps (6 and 25 inch series) of this

area and found something interesting. A particular map has something marked on it that doesn't seem to be mentioned elsewhere, including other similarly dated maps. A section of the appropriate map is attached above. (Fred first found it on a map marked "Somerset XXXV1 ordnance survey 25inch E", but my map is from the 6 inch series). Look closely at the box I've drawn, outlined in red. The map shows what it calls a "tramway", running from the site of Daw's Castle down on to the beach. Presumably - but ultimately only a guess - something to do with feeding the lime kilns or shipping out the finished product?



The map concerned is marked "surveyed in 1887", yet another map, this one marked "surveyed in 1886 and revised in 1902" shows no sign of the tramway. All of my limited research to date has been on line via OS maps from their Scottish base, but Fred says he's never heard of such a thing being there, which is good enough for me!

I wonder if anyone here in Watchet knows anything about this? As I've said, I've started - but only started - to look at this and am intrigued. Can anyone help? Do you know anything about this tramway, or was it just someone's mistake all those years ago!

Prepared with Fred Bacon's help and agreement.

**Dave Simpson-Scott**  
**d.s\_scott@icloud.com or 07817 057902**

*Or just tell any WCS committee member and give them your contact details, and I will come back to you.*



### A short sea story

Some of my father's holiday photographs taken around Watchet in the early 1960s have already appeared in this newsletter. One of those was a view from Splash Point of a small cargo ship tied up to the east quay, taking on or unloading its cargo. This one appeared on the cover page of the May/June 2015 edition. Here is another picture of the same vessel which he took from the esplanade. This shows its name to be the MV Maarsbergen.

Delving on the internet revealed some facts and figures about this vessel. It was Dutch, built in the shipyard at Waterhuizen, owned by the Zuid-Hollandsche Scheepvaart Maatschappij NV and launched in 1958. It was 69 metres long, had a capacity of 524 gross registered tons, a single diesel engine rated at 860 bhp and a maximum speed of 12 knots. In 1968 it was bought by the Saguaro Shipping Co. and its name

changed to the MV Yaga and re-registered in Liberia.

On December 23rd 1974, it was carrying china clay from Teignmouth in Devon to the Algerian port of Skikda, and was then off the Galician coast on the northwestern tip of Spain. This area, which includes Cape Finisterre, is known as the Costa da Morte owing to the large number of shipwrecks that have occurred along its treacherous rocky shore. It now claimed another victim as the Yaga's cargo shifted in heavy seas and she foundered. There were six men lost which, given the ship's size, may have been its entire crew.

**Andrew Harrison**



### A talk by Stephen Hayes - Speaker Review

We have had some very good speakers this year and July's speaker didn't disappoint. Stephen Hayes brought along a support team who call themselves 'The Anoraks'. This group of retired men from Crewkerne U3A are self-taught film makers and after a few jokes at their own expense in the form of a short film about themselves and their background we were given the 'main feature' which was an excellent film about the restoration of the Dunster water mill. The film entitled 'One Good Turn', took us through the recent history of the mill which had been let by the National Trust to private millers for the last 40 years. Sadly the mill needed major restoration, one wheel had already decayed beyond use, and the remaining wheel was on its last legs. Fortunately the Trust accepted the challenge and the film showed us the complex problems

in getting medieval machines restored. How wonderful to see that we still have expert restoration companies who can do this work. Today the mill is producing 10 tons of wholemeal flour every year. An excellent example of conservation and tourism working hand in hand, not unlike our own more modest example of The Onion Collective and local volunteers working together to restore the Watchet Boat Museum.

The Anoraks are currently working on a film about the West Somerset Railway which we hope will be the subject of a future 'Open Meeting', a real treat to look forward to.

**Alan Jones**



## A Bath Brick attributed to Watchet

### A Bath Brick attributed to Watchet

At a recent committee meeting of WCS Nick Cotton mentioned that he had come across a Bath Brick marked 'W Johnson Watchet Bridgwater'. At present the information on the origin of this item and the company that produced and sold it is scant and further research continues. However, since my time of living on The Somerset Levels back in the 1970s I have had an interest in these obsolete items and thought our members would like to read a little of their origin and use. So this is an introduction which I hope our readers find helpful.

Bath Bricks were manufactured in Bridgwater for around 100 years following a patent registered in 1827. They were produced by a number of brickworks adjacent to the River Parrett by firing silt or 'river slime' carried by the river which was settled into constructed 'slime batches', removed to a mill to prepare the material for moulding in a wooden rectangular mould, and then air-dried prior to low temperature baking in a bottle kiln.

One of several theories regarding the origin of their name is that Bath bricks are yellow and very similar in colour to Bath stone. They are smaller than conventional building bricks and although exist in a range of sizes they are generally approximately 6x3x2 inches.

Their use was for scouring and the following information is from a wrapper from a Bath brick manufactured by John Board & Co. Bridgwater.

'For POLISHING, SCOURING CLEANSING Rusty Metals, Knives, Forks, Fire Irons, Brass, Steel and Tin-work - MOST EFFECTIVE, AT LESS COST, LESS LABOUR - OBTAINABLE ALSO IN POWDER'

'Unequalled for cleaning dirty and greasy woodwork, floors, tables and removing vegetation and weather stains from brick and stonework'

The bricks were really a source of scouring powder so I have found many misshapen examples where they have been scraped to provide this material.

Bath Brick manufacture was very significant to the economy of Bridgwater with annual export figures of over 17 million bricks by the start of the 20th Century. Yet by the end of the 1920s, with the advent of modern cleaning agents which were more convenient to use, the industry declined and was soon confined to history and the bricks themselves to local landfills, museums and collections like my own!

Reference - I am indebted to the research of Brian J. Murless whose article in the first journal of the Somerset Industrial Archaeological Society back in 1975 created my personal interest in the subject.

**Mervyn P Brown**



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.d.scott@icloud.com](mailto:jan.d.scott@icloud.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.

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**Calendar Competition - do join in and send us your photographs!**

During this year there has been a magnificent collection of photographs of Watchet on Facebook. This inspired Nick Cotton's idea of running a calendar competition to show the incredible range of photographic talent displayed by residents of the town. It is not too late to enter!

The closing date for entry is September 30th; judging by an independent judge will take place on October 7th. The prize for the winning entry will be £100; 2nd prize £50, and 3rd prize £25. Full details of the competition and entry rules are on our website: [www.watchetconservationsociety.co.uk](http://www.watchetconservationsociety.co.uk) or from Jason Robinson: [jason@bestbeforeend.net](mailto:jason@bestbeforeend.net).

The calendar will be on sale for £5, including an envelope for posting, at various outlets in the town and at our AGM on Tuesday 15th November. These could be useful Christmas gifts especially for those posting overseas. We hope to publish some of the entries in future editions of our newsletter.

We have been generously sponsored in this project by Harbour Community Bookshop.

**WCS Calendar Competition Sub-Committee**  
**Nick Cotton**  
**Jason Robinson**  
**Molly Quint**  
**Jan Simpson-Scott**