

the OXTON SOCIETY



Newsletter August 2018



Sunny Secret Gardens of Oxton 2018

Oxton Village showed itself at its best on Sunday, 13th May for the 18th Secret Gardens of Oxton. This year the sun shone and people turned out in their thousands to support the event, run by the Oxton Society with the help of a small number of local charities. Many months of planning and much hard work had gone into making the day a success, and over 3,000 tickets were sold.

Way back in November 2017 garden owners were approached to see if they would open their gardens, knowing that a decision to say 'yes' would result in a great deal of hard work. The result was superb and for this year's event a record 27 gardens were open, a serious challenge for visitors who wanted to visit all of them.



It was also a serious challenge for the army of volunteers and organisers who give up their time to make the event possible, and thanks go to all, including volunteers from the Oxton Society and Friends of the Arno. This year's partner charities, who also supplied volunteers, were Birkenhead Woodcraft Folk, Sundowns and The Vikes Youth Club.

The day is all about the gardens but there was much more going on, at 'The Hub' in the gardens of Prenton Prep School, in the village centre, at our local churches and elsewhere around the village. We had a grand charity raffle and Oxton Society refreshments at The Hub. There were arts and craft stalls to browse, Morris Men, a samba band, choirs and musicians, wandering minstrels and poets in the gardens, ponies, donkeys and a carousel for young visitors and for the first time there was a Maypole in one of the gardens.



The event is a chance to raise awareness about the Oxton Conservation Area by encouraging visitors and showing the village at its best, but is also a community activity which brings together several hundred people who help out in order to raise money for the Oxton Society and our partner charities. These small charities will receive a little over £4000 each, a significant sum which will help them to continue with their work.



The hanging baskets waiting to be put up

Village in Bloom again

The hanging baskets went up in the village at the beginning of June and are looking lovely again, thanks to Dovecote Nurseries who fill the baskets for us and to the team of volunteers who turned out on the day to hang them around the village. The 52 baskets cost the Society over £2,500 each year and transform the street scene over the summer months.

After this season the Society's hanging basket 'supremo' John Booth, who has looked after the provision and maintenance of the baskets and the automatic watering system for some years, is retiring from his role. In order to carry on with the spectacular basket display we need someone to take over from John. If you feel you could help and would like to discuss the role, please do contact Steve Weber at weber1@btinternet.com or John Booth at john.booth653@gmail.com

Our 50th Tree



Vicky Nowak (garden owner), Mayor of Wirral, Lord Lieutenant of Merseyside, Rhiannon Evans (Oxton Society), Maggie Sparks (PSVT). (Photo: James O'Hanlon)

An innovative tree planting collaboration, thought to be unique in the country, celebrated a milestone this year. During the Secret Gardens event the Lord Lieutenant of Merseyside and the Mayor of Wirral cut ribbons to mark the planting in Oxton of the project's 50th tree, a native Silver Birch (*Betula pendula*).

Over the last 10 years the Oxton Society has invested some £7,500 in its tree planting collaboration with Port Sunlight Village Trust (PSVT) to restore and enhance the Oxton Conservation Area. All the trees planted are chosen to improve Oxton's treescape for future generations, but their impact is already significant.

Details of the scheme and the current list of trees suitable for planting are shown on the Society's website (see conservation/trees).

Data Protection Legislation

A major change to UK Data Privacy Law, the General Data Protection Regulation, came into force on 25 May, 2018. Following this change, the Oxton Society now has a Privacy and Data Protection Policy which tells you how we collect and look after your personal data, how it is used and your rights as an individual under the new law. The Privacy Policy is enclosed with this Newsletter and is also available on our website.



Celebrating Oxton's pioneer policewoman

The Society's second Blue Plaque, for pioneer policewoman Edith Smith, was unveiled on 16th June at 18 Palm Hill. The event was attended by Edith's granddaughter, Margaret Smith, and other members of her family. There were also guests from the history societies of Grantham and Runcorn, where Edith had lived and worked, and from the Merseyside Police.

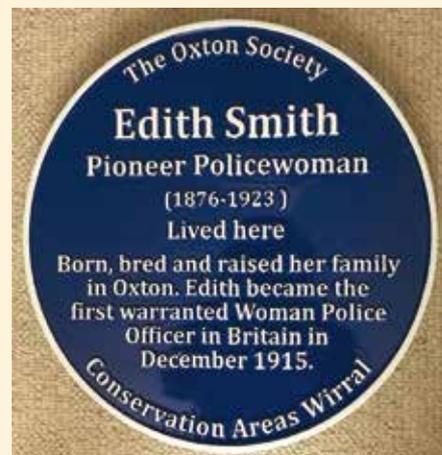
Edith Smith's story is about an ordinary woman born in Oxton in 1876 and brought up around here who earned a unique place in British social history by becoming in 1915 the first official woman police officer to be given the power of arrest.

At the unveiling Rhiannon Evans, Chair of the Oxton Society, noted that it was appropriate that the plaque was erected in the centenary year of the Representation of the People Act, which first gave women the vote, as Edith's story was closely linked to women's emancipation. Bob Knowles from the History Group gave a summary of Edith's life and Courtney Finn from the Civic Society of Grantham, where there is a street named after Edith as well as a plaque, said that she had been a great inspiration. Superintendent Louise Harrison from Merseyside Police described Edith as a very strong and empowered woman, especially given the times in which she was living.

Margaret Smith unveiled the plaque and looked forward to walking around Oxton with her family to see the places where her grandmother had lived. Edith lived in Rose Mount and Poplar Road as well as at 18 Palm Hill, where she spent most of her young years, and later in Wellington Road, where she was sub-postmistress of the Post Office.



To learn more about Edith there is a booklet on her life and achievements, written by Bob Knowles, on sale at Oxton Books in the Williamson Art Gallery, priced at £3. The material in the booklet is being used for an article by the International Association of Women Police, based in Los Angeles, so there is world-wide interest in our pioneering policewoman.



Friends of the Arno & Oxton Fields

Discovering the Arno Quarry Garden

The Arno is celebrated for its Rose Garden, but not so many people know about the Quarry Garden. This was the earliest section of Oxton's park to be established, and the Friends are about to install an Interpretation Board at the entrance to the Quarry Garden that explains its fascinating history and its varied wildlife.

The story begins in 1900 when three wealthy Oxton residents, Catherine

King, Edmund Taylor and George Wilson applied to the Earl of Shrewsbury for a 15 year lease on what was then a disused stone quarry on Arno Hill. The Earl agreed, and at their own expense our local benefactors set about creating a Recreation Ground for all to enjoy. It was a huge success, and in 1910 the Earl donated the land to Birkenhead Corporation in perpetuity, on condition that the beauties of the area were preserved in their natural state. Two years later the Rose Garden was added and The Arno became a public park.

Arno stone had been valued for centuries as a building material until the quarry closed in the 1890s. In the Victorian period the stone was used to build many of the fine new houses in the village, and the quarry face is still visible amongst the vegetation.

Old photographs show some of the lost features of the area – including the quarry steps, the sundial, the drinking fountain and the see-saw. The quarry steps still survive beneath the undergrowth, and one day they may be restored. The granite base of the sundial can also be seen. But it is the flora and fauna – the mature trees, the birds and insects – that now make the Quarry Garden such a rewarding place to explore.

A quoits match in the Quarry Garden c.1905



Fergus Anckorn

We regret to announce the death of Fergus Anckorn, aged 99. Fergus came up to Oxton in July 2017 to help the

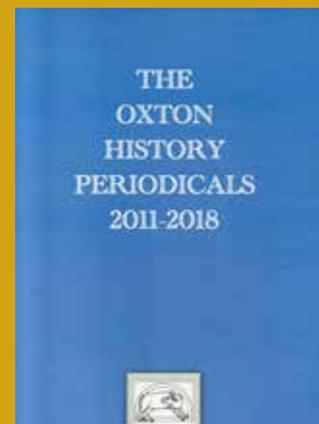
Oxton Society unveil our first Blue Plaque to Sir Philip Toosey, his former camp commander in Tamarkan Camp on the Thai Burma Railway. Fergus came from Hastings by train on his own, staying in a local hotel, and made a memorable lasting impression on all

those he met while he was here. He was the longest serving member of the Magic Circle and during his time in Oxton he entertained all and sundry with his array of magic tricks.



HISTORY PERIODICALS BOOK

The book of collected History Periodicals, with an introduction on the history of the development of Oxton, is now on sale in the Oxton bookshop in the Williamson Art Gallery, at a cost of £15. Those people who ordered the book can now collect their copies from the bookshop.





John Booth

John and his brother and sister were born in the Wirral. His parents lived in Rake House Farm later moving to China Farm, Newton, near West Kirby. They ran an arable dairy farm with cattle, pigs and shire horses. John's childhood was spent helping his Dad on the farm and going with him to Chester market to sell their farm produce.

He left school to take up an apprenticeship with North West Gas for ten years before becoming a plumber. John married Rosemary when he was 23 and they have a son and daughter. They eventually divorced but remain on good terms. Describing himself as a 'family man' John enjoys time spent with his five grandchildren.

Now retired, John puts his energies into fundraising for Marie Curie Cancer Charity, prompted by his father's death at 57 from cancer. He has many tales of derring-do while raising money: the ice bucket challenge, abseiling down Leasowe lighthouse, trekking to Machu Picchu and other challenges which took him to Nepal and the Amazon rainforest. He takes an active interest in Oxton Village, most notably in organising and maintaining the summer display of hanging baskets and the automatic watering system. The hanging baskets have won top awards in the RHS 'North West in Bloom Competition', including Best Neighbourhood in 2016 and a gold medal for Best Urban Community in 2017. John also helps out at the Arno and with all his charity work it has meant that he's barely had the opportunity to enjoy the Secret Gardens event. He is hoping that now, at 77 he can pass on his volunteering role to someone else so that he can, in his own words, "see a bit more of the hidden gems of Oxton behind high walls"

Oxton
people

1. What is your earliest memory?

Living on the farm and seeing cats, dogs, cows, calves, hens, mice, rats, rabbits and barn owls.

2. What are you most proud of doing?

Grandparent duties.

Volunteering with Marie Curie Charity. Helping Oxton Village to win awards for the hanging baskets and the Secret Gardens

3. Who would play you in the film of your life?

Sir Ranulph Fiennes

4. I think people would be surprised to know this about me?

I once sleepwalked out of the house and woke up on a cold concrete road.

If anyone had seen me they would have thought it was a ghost!

5. Looking back, do you regret any lost or missed opportunities in your life?

Yes I would have liked to join the RAF.

6. Which famous person do you most admire?

Madame Marie Curie

7. What do you like about Oxton?

It is a conservation area so its history can be protected.

8. What changes or improvements would you like to see in Oxton Village

I would like to see the conservation area extended to cover the original village centre of Oxton. I think a traffic management scheme would improve the centre of the village

The Green Gallery flourishes at the Williamson



Lawrence Holden and Jane Horton, Williamson and Priory Friends at the official opening

From a shoot of an idea four years ago, the Williamson and Priory Friends have now transformed a disused open space at the heart of the Williamson Art Gallery into a landscaped courtyard, the 'Green Gallery', completed in the year that the building turns 90 years old.

The Green Gallery had an official opening at the end of June with the High Sheriff and Mayor of Wirral in attendance, with music from the Liverpool Guitar Society, canapés and drinks provided by the Friends with many of the major contributors in attendance.

The new garden, beautifully designed by Peter Gommon and David Ainsley, has become a versatile space which extends the use of the café and provides outside space for small classes.

The £50,000+ cost of the garden has been met by generous donations from nine charitable trusts and an enthusiastic response from Friends and members of the public.

Planning

We have been consulted on two applications since the last Newsletter.

LBC/18/00183 - 13 Alton Road:

'Tanking' the basement and associated interior damp-proofing work with minimal external changes. No issues arising and no comment required.

LBC/18/00718 - 14 Arno Road:

Internal and external alterations to Listed Building. The works proposed are a further phase in the restoration of this Listed property. The Society wrote in support of the overall project last November. No further comment required.

Trees

The Society submitted comments on tree applications as follows:

7 Alton Road T/18/0047

Proposal: 2m reduction in height and thinning of sycamores to allow more sunlight in garden but retain privacy *Comment:* No objections to the work which should retain the overall appearance and shape of the trees.

11 Alton Road T/18/0048

Proposal: 2m reduction in height and thinning sycamores to allow more sunlight in garden and surrounding shrubs *Comment:* No objections to the work which should retain the overall appearance and shape of the trees.

7 Kylemore Road CA/18/0087

Proposal: crown and branch reduction of plum trees, cherry trees and false cypress tree and hedge *Comment:* No objection to any of these tree maintenance procedures.

12 Kylemore Road CA/18/0088

Proposal: Fell fir tree in back garden close to house. *Comment:* No objection to loss of this tree. Will open up view from road of more distant poplar tree

41 Rose Mount CA/18/0116

Proposal: Fell beech in front garden, concerns re advancing maturity, heavy dense crown, close proximity to house, excessive shading, leaf litter. Propose to replant with *Pyrus calleryana* "Chanticleer" *Comment:* Concerns might be addressed by crown thinning of the current tree. If the tree is felled we are pleased to see a proposal to replant with a new tree that will eventually grow to give a significant presence in the locality.

67 Arno Road T/18/0113

Proposal: Fell 2 elms dying and leaning towards house. Poplar: remove lowest central limb over road, reduce limb over road/drive by 25%, remove lowest limb over garden, crown raise 6-8m, remove deadwood.

Comment: No objection to first elm as tree appears to be dying. Second elm does not appear to be diseased, suggest tree is retained as will mitigate against loss of lower branches of Poplar. No objections to work on poplar, a significant tree in the local environment.

Society website transformed

You may have noticed that the Society's website has undergone a transformation! In conjunction with Nemysys, our internet service provider, we have completely revamped the site to give it a different look and feel and to improve navigation. We have also taken the opportunity to update the information on many of the pages.

The website works in conjunction with our newsletters, our Facebook page, our Twitter account and all-members' emails to keep you up to date with our work and what's going on in Oxtun. Although the website contains a "Latest News" blog its main purposes are to provide:

- Online facilities for joining the Society and renewing membership
- Advance tickets for Secret Gardens and publicity about the event
- Reports of Committee business, tree and planning comments.
- An archive of newsletters.
- Reference material about the Conservation Area and the Society.
- Advice notes (under Planning), e.g. how to look after your walls and windows.
- A huge gallery of historic photos of Old Oxtun



We are still working on the site and hope to add some new sections, including ones on local businesses. If you have any comments on the website or there is anything that you would like to see on the site that is not there currently, please do let us know at info@oxtonsociety.org.uk

Local Whats On

Oxtun History walks

- 11 August & 12 September East Walks (Fairview Rd, South Bank, Arno Rd)
 - 25 August & 15 September West Walks (Village Rd, St Saviour's, Wellington Rd)
 - 8 September & 6 October Arno Walks (Ingestre Rd, Birch Rd, Woodchurch Rd)
- Walks start at 11a.m. and last an hour and a half. To book please ring Oxtun Village Books, 652 0202

Williamson Art Gallery and Museum

Open Wednesday to Sunday, 10am – 5pm. Fully accessible, café available

- To 2 September Window on the World. Artwork by pupils from Wirral schools
- To 14 October Cammell Laird Shipyard 1993-1996, photographs by Tom Wood
- To 26 August Detours & Dislocations, photographs by Cian Quayle
- To 11 November Animal Encounters. Art from the collections featuring animals
- 12, 19 & 26 August Sunday Serenades. Free concerts, see Williamson website for details

Wirral Archives Service History Workshops

The Service provides free local history workshops in the Lower Ground Floor Conference Room, adjacent to the Search Room in Wirral Archives, Canning Street, Birkenhead

- 6 September The History of a Street: Stanton Rd, Bebington
- 1 November Wirral and the First World War: 1918.

The Wilfred Owen Commemoration, Birkenhead, 1918-2018



THE WILFRED OWEN COMMEMORATION BIRKENHEAD 1918-2018



Wilfred Owen is regarded by many as the greatest poet of the First World War, known for his verse about the horrors of trench and gas warfare. He lived with his family in Birkenhead between 1897 and 1907, at 7 Elm Grove, Higher Tranmere and later in nearby Wilmer Road and Milton Road. Wilfred was a pupil at Birkenhead Institute and attended the Sunday School and sang in the choir at Christ Church, Oxtan, where his father was a churchwarden.

When the First World War broke out, Wilfred was working as a tutor in France, where he saw soldiers wounded in the conflict. He returned to the UK and joined The Artists Rifles Officers' Training Corps and was commissioned into The Manchester Regiment in June 1916. Wilfred was killed in France in the early hours of 4 November 1918 on the Oise-Sambre-canal bank and is buried in the churchyard at Ors.

100 years after his death, the community of Birkenhead will be honouring Wilfred Owen, as well as all of those who fought in World War One, with a series of events throughout November 2018. These include:

- A creative Writing Workshop with Gladys Mary Coles, using World War One letters. 3 November at the Williamson Art Gallery
- Bullets and Daffodils: a Wilfred Owen Musical. 3 November at West Kirby Arts Centre
- Concert of Remembrance. 4 November at Christ Church, Higher Bebington
- An evening with the War Poets' Violins. 8 November at St Saviour's Church, Oxtan
- The Wilfred Owen Concert. 9 November at Christ Church, Oxtan

Full details of these and other events are available at

<https://wilfredowencommemoration.com/>



Contacting the Oxtan Society and the Newsletter

Contributions to the Newsletter are welcome and should be sent to the Editor by email to info@oxtonsociety.org.uk

or by post to the Secretary, 4 Willan Street, CH43 5ST.

You can also contact the society by any of the telephone numbers or email addresses given in this Newsletter and via the Oxtan Society website www.oxtonsociety.org.uk Many smart phone apps will get you straight to the Oxtan Society website by means of the code printed here.

Do you have an email address? If you are not receiving e-mails with news updates, your current email address is not in the database. *Please send it.*

Details are confidential and never passed to 3rd parties.