

the OXTON SOCIETY



Newsletter October 2018

Xmas Lights 2018

Saturday Dec 1st - a surprise in store

Festivities will start at 4.00pm.
switch on by **Elsa of Frozen** at 4.30pm.
The event closes at 6.00pm.
All the traditional attractions, including:

- Mulled wine and mince pies
- Salvation Army Band
- Choirs
- Kids' entertainment stalls, children's rides and slides
- Xmas Stall and Xmas Raffle
- Photo Opportunities
- Father Xmas Grotto



This 2018 Switch On will unveil the first phase of our programme to enhance the lights, while still maintaining that air of under-stated sophistication in keeping with the character of the Conservation Area. We have now developed a phased programme of improvements that, depending on fund-raising, can be implemented over the next couple of years.

The Christmas Lights and 'switch on' event costs about £3,000 to run. This pays for the road closure, the installation, maintenance and removal of the lights and some of the entertainment. The village businesses contribute nearly £1,000 in cash and raffle prizes. Edwards News usually sponsors Father Xmas. We make about £1,500 from mulled wine and mince pies, donations and the raffle. So, the Society meets the short-fall of about £500.

As things stand, we need an additional £2,000 to implement phase 2 of the development programme and another £2,000 for phase 3. We are looking at fund-raising possibilities and we'll be sharing these with members in the New Year.

Can You Help ?

There are hundreds of jobs to do in advance and on the day. The existing group is stretched to its limit. Please, if you can spare a couple of hours, get in touch with Marie Pennington on 652 2068 or text 07960133301, or email mariejpennington@sky.com

We need volunteers for the following:

Hot Dog Stand – a team leader and 3 friends to run the hot dog stand.

Santa Claus Grotto – a team leader plus 3 friends All decoration materials and equipment will be supplied.

***You can contact Elsa on Facebook - search for partywithaprincesswirral**

SAD NEWS - GERARD O'SULLIVAN



We are sorry to announce the passing of one of our most-valued members and a pillar of the Oxtton Community. Gerard O'Sullivan died last week after a long battle with illness. Gerard was known to us as a wonderful baker who, with his wife Jenny, ran the pop-up bakery every Saturday and graced Oxtton with his own brand of home-made bread. He ran a street food stall at Secret Gardens and contributed all the takings to our charities. And he still found time to do the donkey work in getting ready for the big day. Only last June he was out with the gang putting up the Hanging Baskets but his remission sadly proved to be a false dawn. We will all miss him very much.

But Gerard was a national as well as a local figure. He was Culinary Director for Aramark and was their lead in providing catering for the 2012 Olympics.

Aramark's Chief said: 'For over 10 years, Gerard has been one of the brightest stars within our Aramark family. He will be remembered not only for his incredible culinary talents, but more importantly for his generous heart and devotion to developing young and talented chefs around the world. He selflessly shared his knowledge and talents with anyone who expressed an interest in food, nutrition or cooking. His passion for food and people is legendary and he transformed the culinary profile of Aramark UK, winning the hearts and minds of colleagues and clients alike'.

Wirral's Local Plan Makes Green Waves

There is much controversy surrounding the preparation of the local plan for the whole of the Wirral. It has to cover the period between now and 2035 and has been in preparation for over 10 years! Because of this prolonged time period the Government threatened the Council with the removal of their plan making powers. As a result the Council agreed to a new timetable and have now embarked on a wide ranging consultation process.

The controversy is around how much land is needed to satisfy the Government's house building target for this area. Their initial target of 800 dwellings per annum meant the Council having to put forward extensive areas of the green belt for housing.

The provoked huge opposition from many areas of the Wirral and the formation of an alliance to oppose any release of green belt land. Much of the debate has been around the validity of the 800 dwellings target and the latest Government announcement has reinforced this scepticism. The latest forecast from the Government now has a target of 500 dwellings per annum compared to the previous 800. This significant reduction could mean a much reduced need for green belt release or no need for any.

The Council are now in discussion with the Government about whether the new target is confirmed. If it is the Council will have to resubmit revised proposals for how much land is required between now and 2035. Hopefully this could alleviate or remove the contentious release of green belt land. But who knows...

Another Great Year: The Annual General Meeting

The Society's Annual General Meeting was held on 13th September 2018 at the Williamson Art Gallery and Museum. Chair of the Society, Rhiannon Evans, highlighted the Society's great achievements since the AGM in 2017:

- Royal Horticultural Society Gold Medal for the village hanging baskets and the Special Recognition Certificate and Best Newcomer Trophy for Secret Gardens
- Financial success of Secret Gardens in 2017, with £22,000 shared between three charities
- Start of building work on the Bank Site in the Village Centre, thanks to the persistent effort of the Society
- Launch of the redesigned website, thanks to the work of Jeff Willis and Carolyn Weber.
- Success of the History Group, with new Blue Plaques to Sir Philip Denton Toosey and, in 2018, to Edith Smith.

The Chair highlighted planned activities for the coming year, including new Christmas lights, contributions to landscaping in the Village Centre, further Blue Plaques and publications. Society Secretary, Alan Chape, also Chair of the Conservation Areas Wirral, outlined the work of this group and the national concerns about the viability of conservation areas.

Society Treasurer, Griff Round, presented his financial report. The Society's financial reserves had improved compared with the previous year. Questions from the audience covered the reasons for retaining a printed, rather than electronic newsletter and the way in which charities are chosen to collaborate with the Society in Secret Gardens.

The following were elected:

- Chair: Rhiannon Evans
- Vice-Chair: Jeff Willis
- Secretary: Alan Chape
- Treasurer: Griff Round
- Committee members: Jane Horton, Steve Weber, Carolyn Weber, Steve Ferguson, Patrick Toosey, Bob Knowles, Dave Barden, John Booth, Chris

Jarrey, George Harrison. Eileen Lang was elected as a new member of the Committee. This leaves two vacancies for ordinary Committee members.

An Oxton Design Award was presented by David Ainsley, architect and member of the Design Award Group to Joanne Piercy for the improvement of the exterior of Chutney Street Food. Three commendations were also presented to: Francis and Danielle Johnson for exterior refurbishment at 16 Claughton Firs; Phil Stafford for the sandstone wall at 53 Rose Mount; Paul and Kate Wyness for the exterior of Greens in Village Road.

Two Awards were made for Outstanding Contributions to Oxton. Alan Chape presented the first to Alan Brighthouse, who has had a lifelong association with the Village, as a Liberal Party Councillor from 2010 to 2014 and a regular supporter of the Society.

Jeff Willis, Vice-Chair, presented the second award to Steve Ferguson, who has been a member of the Society Committee for 27 years. Jeff explained that Steve helped to start Secret Gardens in 2001 and has had a primary role ever since in co-ordinating the event; initiated and ran the Tree Group; developed the Society's membership database; edited the newsletter and continues to undertake its distribution.

The Chair thanked all members present for their contributions, the Committee, all volunteers and garden owners for their work during the year, businesses for their support, and Sue Chape and her team for refreshments.

The event was followed by a presentation by architectural historian Peter de Figueiredo on '*Conservation Areas: Sustainable Places?*' (see insert)

from top:
Francis and Danielle Johnson
Phill Stafford
Paul and Kate Wyness



15th Oxtan Art Fair, 2018



In terms of numerology, the number 15 is the number for 'harmony, innovation and family'. Oxtan Art Fair can offer all three, as it returns to the Williamson Art Gallery on November 24th for its 15th year.

Harmony: This year, there are 19 professional and semi-professional artists and friends who will come together to showcase their work across three gallery rooms.

Innovation : Members and annual guests will present a diverse mix of interesting and innovative art in the form of; photography, printmaking and painting. Plus, beautifully hand-crafted pieces including; ceramics, jewellery, wood-craft and textiles. Viewed as Wirral's must-visit pre-Christmas event, it gives both gift buyers and browsers a chance to chat to the artists about their work and if they choose, purchase a truly individual piece for their friends, family or home.

Family: There will be children's art activities on throughout the weekend and refreshments for sale in the fabulous Williamson Café to help make this a truly all-round family event.

This year, the fair will be opened by Angela Samata, Winston Churchill Fellow for research into Outsider Art and former co-ordinator of the John Moores Painting Prize. Angela said: "I'm delighted to be asked to open Oxtan Art Fair to the public. Having lived and worked in and around Oxtan for many years, I'm constantly impressed by the creativity that finds its home here. I deeply believe that supporting living artists in their endeavours is one of the greatest

things we can do and I see the Oxtan Art Fair as an excellent opportunity to do just that."

The Oxtan Art Fair started in 2004 by a group of friends who were aware that there was a core of artists residing in the area. With artists formerly of the area returning from overseas and newcomers attracted to the community atmosphere and picturesque village, the Oxtan Art Fair was born. All of the member-artists and craftspeople live in Oxtan. All our artists exhibit regularly in the North West, some nationally and a few internationally.

Oxtan Art Fair 2018 Williamson Art Gallery & Museum

Slatey Road, Birkenhead
CH43 4UE.

Sat November 24,
(10am- 5pm) and
Sun November 25
(10am-4 pm)



Can you help with our award-winning Hanging Baskets?



John Booth, our coordinator, is retiring after the 2019 season.

We need a replacement coordinator to work with John next year and take over in 2020. The role involves:

- Jan/Feb - place order with our local supplier, Dovecote Nurseries
- June – call-up team of regular helpers, order cherry-picker, to put up baskets
- June- Oct – feed and deadhead baskets and monitor brackets and watering system
- Oct – arrange take-down, compost to Arno Rose Garden, empty baskets to supplier.

Lots of help from our team of volunteers, including transport and back-up/advice from John. You will find the job very rewarding for quite a small amount of time, with constant praise from village users who really appreciate the contribution the baskets make to the village.

If you are interested OR if you want to discuss possibilities, please contact John Booth 07702 408 390 or john.booth653@gmail.com



More RHS Awards for Oxton's Hanging Baskets!

Following our four separate RHS awards last year the Society has been nominated for two or more further awards this year. We have been invited to the North West in Bloom Awards Ceremony in Southport's Convention Centre on November 2nd when we expect to receive awards for Hanging Baskets and Secret Gardens in the North West in Bloom "Urban Village" category.

Secret Gardens Coordination - Could YOU Do It?

Currently the Secret Gardens Co-ordinators are Jay Little and Lesley McGarrity. They will be retiring from the roles in 2020 so the Oxton Society is seeking new volunteers to take over from Jay and Lesley in 2021. It is very enjoyable to be a part of the event and to see how it all comes together.

The next couple of years will allow for a handover of responsibilities.

Secret Gardens has now been running for 20 years! It is run by an Organising Group of about 15-20 volunteers, each responsible for an aspect of the event, such as catering, entertainment, publicity, programme, volunteers. They are an experienced team who just get on with their own responsibilities. The coordinator's role is set out below:

Pre-event Planning (October-April)

- a) Planning, convening and running the Organising Group's two meetings in January and April with necessary emails, pre meetings and discussions and administration (familiarity with Word and email needed).
- b) Responding to queries from the public and potential participants.
- c) Troubleshooting and keeping an open eye on planning progress.
- d) Budget awareness (with the Oxton Society Treasurer)
- e) Keeping the Oxton Society Chair aware of any issues, with occasional attendance at an Oxton Society Executive Committee to update them.

On the day (May)

Being around to see what is going on, usually taking a role as a morning or afternoon duty manager. Assisting in the set up the day before and helping to dismantle infrastructure (such as gazebos, tables) at the end of the event (with help from lots of other volunteers!)

Post event (May-July)

Arrange and distribute thank you letters to sponsors, garden owners and other helpers, and seek and analyse feedback from the Organising Group ready to feed into the following year's event.



Secret Gardens: Raffle Prizes Wanted

We are seeking prizes of any kind, new or nearly new, for the Secret Gardens raffle in 2019. If you have anything that you might consider donating as a raffle prize please contact Patrick or Monica Toosey (652 1653 or pmttoosey@sky.com) to arrange delivery or collection

Trees

The Society submitted comments on tree applications as follows:

16 Fairview Road - CA/18/0135

Proposal: Fell ash in rear garden as diseased and possibly dangerous

Comment: Mature ash tree which has had lower branches removed in the past, not clearly visible from Fairview Road and surrounded by several other large mature trees. If felled there will be little overall impact on the tree-scape in the conservation area. We cannot comment if the tree is diseased or dangerous but if so we have no objections to it being felled.

43 Rose Mount - CA/18/0146

Proposal: Fell plum causing excessive shade and affecting stone wall. Replace with Acer or similar

Comment: Tree of low amenity value and only partially visible from Rose Mount and Roslin Road. No objections to work proposed, pleased a further tree will be planted as replacement

3 Oxton Lawn Mews - CA/18/0159

Proposal: Fell 6 hollies near boundary with Rathmore Road. Replant with a suitable tree

Comment: These trees are of low amenity value and we would support their removal and replacement with a single tree that could, in time, provide more impact to the surroundings

Planning

We have been consulted on five applications since the report to the last meeting, only one of which merited any comment:

28B Cloughton Firs - COMX/18/00972

Proposal: Conversion from commercial/ office use to residential. This application will be determined under the recently revised regulations which classes most proposals for the conversion of offices to residential use as “permitted development”, subject to a “prior approval” procedure to allow the Council to consider whether the proposal raises any issues, including conservation area considerations, which would require a full planning application.

Comment: 28/28B Cloughton Firs are vacant commercial / office premises which appear on the OS map as “garage”. The application says the internal conversion will create a 4-bedroom residential property with no change proposed to the external features. If this is

the case then there would be no cause for concern. However, the present entrance and window configuration is unusual, and it may be difficult to fit a conversion around these without making any external alterations. Presumably this is one of the matters the officers will be looking at to determine whether a full planning application is required.

None of the following applications raised significant issues for the character of the Conservation Area and no comments were submitted:

24 Cloughton Firs - APP/18/0076

Proposal: Single storey addition to an existing rear extension which is not visible from the highway.

13 Mount Pleasant - APP/18/0081713

Proposal: Two storey rear extension, terrace and detached garage. This property (Grassguards) was subject of a Design Award for sensitive refurbishment in 2015. Although substantial, this proposal will only be visible from the unadopted access to Well Cottages, off Roslin Road. It is understood that neighbour consultations have elicited some support.

11 Templemore Road - APP/18/00940

Proposal: Front porch. This is minor frontage development and the parent property has no heritage features that would be harmed.

2 Arno Road - APP/18/00983

Proposal: Outbuilding/shed adjacent to front boundary wall. This is minor development which despite its frontage location would not cause harm to the character of the property or street scene. The frontage of the property, including the boundary wall has been the subject of sensitive and high quality repair and improvement work, and the design and materials proposed for this small garden storage unit (including a ‘living roof’, cedar cladding and screen planting) have been carefully considered to mitigate any visual impact.

What's Happening on the Old Bank Site?



The bank site development is continuing. There was a hold up because of a dispute over the front facing windows. The developer had put forward the idea of plastic windows but with a profile comparable to a wood window frame. The Society acted as a go between the two parties and the developer's proposal was agreed.

In addition there appears to have been a mistaken measurement of the first floor concrete slab. This has now been replaced with a new floor. Both these matters have caused a significant delay. As far as we are aware the intention is to have the roof on the development by Xmas.

The Society is in close contact with the developer and the Council. We have a vested interest in assisting with the process of completing a development worthy of the village. We also have a

joint legal agreement with the developer in securing a quality scheme for the landscaping of the front of the site.

So watch this space. It's been a bumpy ride but we are getting there.

spot the difference

Alan Chape's latest posting on Facebook of the Bank site



Contacting the Oxton 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 Oxton Society website www.oxtonsociety.org.uk Many smart phone apps will get you straight to the Oxton 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.

This is an abridged version of the talk given by Peter de Figueiredo at the Annual General Meeting of the Oxton Society, 2018

Conservation Areas: Sustainable Places ?

The 'S' word in the title of my talk is one of those woolly terms that means different things to different people.

When the concept of sustainability first came into vogue in the 1980s and 90s, it suggested a global concern for the use of resources, making sure that actions we take in the present do not compromise the ability of future generations to meet their needs. More recently it has become a by-word for good planning. In fact the government's planning bible, the National Planning Policy Framework, states that the purpose of the planning system is to



achieve sustainable development. But what does that mean? The government document runs to 74 pages of densely worded policies that collectively, we are told, define the meaning of sustainability. Not very useful if you want to understand what makes a place sustainable. So, to get to the heart of the matter, I thought I would work backwards. I have a hunch that conservation areas are, on the whole, models of sustainability, and to test my hypothesis I have looked at their principal characteristics and how these might contribute to sustainability. If I am right, there is a lot to learn from such places, for they can teach us how we can live more sustainably.

Firstly I looked at what goes on in conservation areas – how are they are used, and what is their economic profile. Generally they developed over time, gaining a mix of uses and activities, including houses and flats, people living over shops, small businesses, restaurants,

pubs and churches. Oxton's conservation area is a good example. In such areas, we find vitality and diversity which helps to make the local community more self-sufficient. Linked to this is the fact that historic areas are more densely developed. House are often terraced or semi-detached rather than single as on modern housing estates. Often they have frontages directly onto the street. This represents a more efficient use of land, with little wasted space.

Next we can consider movement, how we get around in historic areas. Having a mix of uses means that there isn't the same need for car journeys, and because they were designed for pedestrians, cars can often be an encumbrance. Roads are mostly short, with connecting footpaths, so the layout encourages walking or cycling. So in Oxton you always see people moving around on foot – you rarely do in the suburban estates around. This is good for the environment and also for health and wellbeing. But there is a social factor too. For when you walk from your home to the shops or the pub, you are much more likely to meet your friends and neighbours. This is what sustains communities and can be vital for people living alone or for the elderly, who often find entertainment watching street activity from their window. Nobody enjoys looking out of the window at an empty street.

Research has shown that conservation areas support more shops and independent businesses. These can be greengrocers, florists, bakers, printers, small builders, craftsmen and professionals. These are businesses that would not exist in newer shopping or office areas, where the rents are much higher. Oxton again scores well with many independents, and the fact that they are patronised by local people helps to make them viable. That too is a good example of a sustainable community. I believe that we will see more creative and knowledge-based businesses, social enterprises and minority retailers in historic areas as people tire of out-of-town retail parks and supermarkets.

Still on a community theme, historic places can also be a powerful focus of local action. There are many examples

of communities coming together to save threatened buildings in their area, or more significantly to take back control (to use that abused term in a more appropriate way). For example, when St John's Church, Hoxton, East London was threatened, local people got together to run it as a nursery school, community café, employment centre and gym, as well as a church. Likewise the Oxton Society plays an active role in promoting and strengthening the local economy through community projects such as the Christmas lights, hanging baskets and 'Secret Gardens'. Volunteer work by the Friends of The Arno and Oxton Fields means that the local park is cherished and not neglected. All these things help to make our conservation area a more special and sustainable place.



Finally, it should not be forgotten that an attractive environment can have a very positive impact on the local economy. There are many conservation areas that demonstrate this point, and I will mention two. When the 18th century Chatham Dockyard closed in 1984 there was doom and gloom. But in 2014, 30 years on, a BBC report found that following its transformation to a mixed use business, leisure and residential area, the overall benefit to the local economy stood at £20 million a year. With all the historic buildings retained and converted, and sympathetic new development introduced within the dockyard environment, 100 new businesses had been attracted to the area as well as millions of visitors, producing a higher level of employment than when it was used by the navy. Equally dramatic is the transformation of Liverpool's waterfront. Challenging

the Thatcher government's view that the only answer to Liverpool's economic collapse was managed decline, Michael Heseltine, the environment minister, initiated a process of regeneration, the fruits of which can be seen today. In a poll recently organised by the Royal Town Planning Institute, the Liverpool waterfront was voted the greatest place in England.

So it is clear to see that there are many historic settlements where communities have lived successfully and sustainably for many generations. These areas are of mixed use, have been built to higher densities, are human scaled, people move around on foot, and have been built up over time. They have seen continual, small-scale levels of change rather than wholesale replacement. These areas are almost always popular with their local communities, as well as with visitors, who enjoy the variety, unexpected juxtapositions of buildings and landscape, fine detail and a general sense of vitality that comes with such diversity. When we feel a connection with our shared heritage in a village, town or city, we are almost certain to be in a conservation area.

Yet sadly, historic places – made by human beings for people on foot – offer us types of environments that we find almost impossible to create today. So it would be crazy not to treasure them and learn from them how to plan and build for today. But equally, we must remember that places have to be adapted in order to respond to external factors and changing lifestyles. That is often part of their appeal. So my message is don't just value your conservation area for its character and appearance, but also for its sustainability, and make sure that those factors that make it sustainable are nurtured as much as its beauty.



Liverpool waterfront – 'the greatest place in England'



THE OXTON SOCIETY