

the OXTON SOCIETY



Newsletter February 2019



Oxton's White Christmas



Over 500 local people were treated to mulled wine, mince pies, hot dogs and carols at our 'White Christmas' switch-on on Saturday 1 December. We had children's entertainments, organised by the Woodcraft Folk, choirs from Woodchurch Road and St Joseph's Primary Schools, Santa's Grotto, a Christmas raffle and Elsa from 'Frozen' to switch on the lights. With mild weather a good time was had by one and all, echoed by lovely comments on our Facebook site after the event.

The replacement of the old coloured bulbs with white lights, and the addition of lights on the heritage lampposts, was the first phase of work to enhance the lights. It was made possible this year by a wonderful fund-raising effort, co-ordinated by Kate Wyness from Greens. Oxton locals gave generously to 'Buy a Bulb' collecting boxes placed in local businesses.

Local businesses also supported the lights with cash donations and raffle prizes. The stand-out sponsors were the Courtyard, Edwards News for Santa Claus and his children's presents, and a generous donation from Bogan's Carpets, the Oxton-family-owned company. The Society would like to acknowledge the support of all the businesses who helped to make this year's Christmas Lights a great success. We are aiming for further enhancements next year, including lights in the village centre trees.

"Massive effort from the Oxton Society to organise a splendid event yesterday. The white lights looked much better and Elsa was a real hit with the children. Well done, thank you!"

"The switch on was fab! So glad we went, a big thank you to everyone who organised it"

Thanks to all the local businesses who contributed to the Lights - Noubalm, Gossip, The Green Community Shop & Centre, The Drawing Room, Anne Roberts Hair & Beauty, Speedwell Motor Co, Simply Drinks, Homebrew, The Mayflower, Impressions, Oceans Fish Bar, J Cooke Limited, Oxton Conservative Club, Oxton Bar and Kitchen, Greens, Bisque-It, Christine Lesley Hair and Beauty, Oxton's Angels, and The Oxton Labour Party

Hanging Baskets - Past and future



Our lovely hanging baskets won another RHS Britain in Bloom award in 2018! Oxton received a Gold Award in the Village category, which we collected at an awards ceremony at the Southport Convention Centre in November. Congratulations go to John Booth and the other volunteers who worked to erect, maintain and take down the baskets over the season.

And now we have good news for the future. The Society has received a welcome offer of support from a major local business. Clearground, a Birkenhead-based firm which provides a wide range of facility support services to clients throughout the Northwest, has offered manpower support for the major tasks of putting up and taking down the baskets, and maintaining the automatic watering system and brackets.

The generous offer of up to 4 man-days of time – free of charge – has been made by the company's Managing Director Phil Piercy, an Oxton resident and member of the Society. Phil made the offer at a meeting with Society officers as a practical way to demonstrate his support for our work. This goes a long way to relieving our concerns about continuing our award-winning hanging baskets programme after 2019 when John Booth, the current co-ordinator and driving force behind the programme, takes a step back.

So, many thanks to Phil for helping to keep Oxton in bloom for years to come!

Secret Gardens of Oxton, 19th year

Save the date - Sunday, 12 May 2019 for this year's event

Once again the organisers need your help to make this event a success, raising funds for Birkenhead Youth Club, The Terral Morgan Memorial Fund, Wirral Women and Children's Aid and The Oxton Society.

Volunteers

Could you give a few hours of your time to help out with a wide variety of tasks on the day? Please help if you can.

Plants, plant pots, tools and gardening books

The plant stall is usually one of the biggest fund-raisers, and we need contributions of garden plants, gardening tools in good condition and books about gardening. So when you are working in your garden this spring please consider potting-up some plants so that they can become established and a good size to sell on the day. Also, any plant pots you may find at the back of the potting shed will be very useful to the people running the stall so that they can also be getting plants ready.

Raffle Prizes

The Grand Charity Raffle can help you to 'recycle' any unwanted Christmas gifts or items that no longer fit in your home. *More information will be in the April news-letter but if you have any questions before then please contact Lesley McGarrity alsr.mcgarrity@tiscali.co.uk*

Commemorating Edith Smith



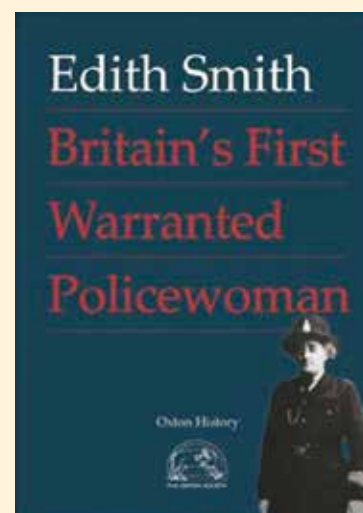
In June last year we recognised pioneering policewoman Edith Smith, who was born and raised in Oxtan, with a Blue Plaque in Palm Hill. After learning that Edith, who died in 1923, was buried in an unmarked grave in Halton, Runcorn, a project to raise funds for a headstone to commemorate her was initiated by officers and staff from Merseyside Police. In conjunction with police forces from Grantham and Cheshire and Historical Groups from Oxtan, Grantham and Runcorn, £2,500 was raised.

On 7 December Edith Smith's headstone was unveiled at St Mary's Church, Halton, following a church service and a procession, attended by local mayors and a large contingent of police from Merseyside, Cheshire and Grantham, around 30 officers in their ceremonial uniforms. There were also representatives of the History Societies and children from local primary schools, who displayed their tributes to Edith. Edith's granddaughter Margaret Smith, who unveiled the Oxtan plaque, again travelled up from Folkestone to attend the event.



The event was reported on BBC North-West News, including an interview with Bob Knowles from the Oxtan Society. Following the extensive interest in Edith's life, not only is there a booklet produced by the Society available in the Oxtan Bookshop in the Williamson Art Gallery, but it can now also be read on-line via the Oxtan Society website.

The Society's next Blue Plaque will be for composer Cyril Scott, who was born in Oxtan and lived in Village Road. The plaque will be unveiled in June this year - details to follow in the next Newsletter



Mighty Oaks from Little Acorns Grow



As part of National Tree Week 2018, the Friends met on the Oxtan Fields on Saturday 1st December to plant a young oak tree. Heather and David Alcock, together with their daughters Georgia and Rose, contacted our Friends group to donate their small tree.



Georgia Alcock, who is just 8 years old, had picked up an acorn she found under a large oak tree on Wimbledon Common 4 years ago. Her parents helped her plant the acorn which has now grown into a tree that is almost as tall as she is.

We gathered on the Oxtan Fields to ceremoniously plant her cherished oak tree, which we hope will thrive and grow into a beautiful large specimen for future generations to enjoy. Georgia, along with her little sister Rose, got stuck in and helped with the planting.



Finally the young tree was in the ground and we all stood proudly for a group photograph. We hope that Georgia and her sister will always remember this small oak they helped to grow and will return, perhaps with children of their own, to sit beneath the branches of a mighty oak, which they grew from one tiny acorn!

The Alcock family, who were already Oxtan Society members, have since joined the Friends.

If you are also interested in supporting our work, please contact the Membership Secretary: Linda Atkinson, 1 Salem View, Oxtan, CH43 5UH tel: 0151 652 9016 You can also find a membership form on our blog: <http://friendsofthearno.blogspot.com> Annual membership costs £5.00 or £7.50 for households

Wirral Festival of Firsts Poetry Festival- Entries for Poetry Competition



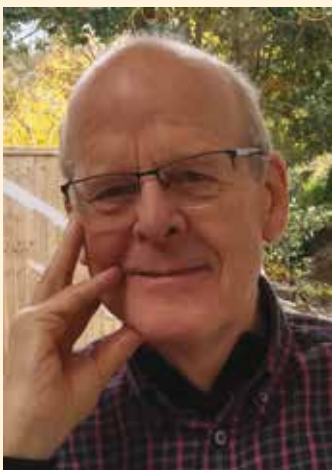
Wirral Festival of Firsts is holding a poetry festival the weekend of 10 – 12 May, to be launched by Roger McGough and Little Machine with a show of poems set to music. In the run up to the festival, a poetry competition is now open which will be adjudicated by Anna Saunders, Director of the Cheltenham Poetry Festival. Four prizes will be awarded: 1st prize £200, two runners up prizes of £50 each and a Wirral prize of £50 for a poet living or working on the Wirral. Entry is £4 per poem or £10 for 3 poems. The closing date for entries is 22 March

2019, winners will be notified by 19 April and invited to attend a prize giving event during the festival weekend.

You can enter the competition online at www.wirralpoetryfestival.org.uk or by post at Wirral Poetry Festival, c/o Judy Ugonna, 71 Alderley Rd, Hoylake CH47 2AU

Subscriptions Renewal

Your continued membership ensures that our Oxtan Society has both a voice and a base income for events in our community. If there is a renewal reminder letter included with this newsletter could you please renew as soon as possible. Thank you!



Steve Ferguson

During his 27 years on the Oxton Society Committee Steve has taken a particular interest in Oxton’s treescape and was pleased that the Society became known for its proactive approach to tree protection, maintenance and planting. Oxton Village is widely known for its fine trees as well as its secret gardens!

He was born in Winnipeg on the Canadian Prairies to a mother who was active in the promotion of women’s social action and services and a father who was a political journalist and commentator. At seven, his family moved to Montreal and he was fortunate to spend many summers and winters in a forested rural area. His mother was a keen gardener who even had a radio programme “How does my Garden Grow?” (her name was Mary!) and through her Steve inherited a deep interest in gardening and arboriculture.

He graduated from university in 1962 as a biologist/ecologist and set off for Britain for a twelve month “tour” of Europe, but on planning his return, he decided to linger and became an immigrant. He worked as a secondary school teacher in London, Totnes and Bristol and met his partner Sue when they were both doing postgraduate studies in sociology at Bristol University. They moved to Liverpool in 1971 where he taught Sociology and Politics of Education to teachers at the University of Liverpool and became a British citizen.

Steve found much to enjoy and admire when he settled in Britain. He reflects that a Canadian has to travel hundreds of miles to find a change in culture, architecture, vegetation and landscape. In Britain and Europe all of these were on his doorstep.

There was also the excitement of the “Swinging Sixties” even though a colleague and friend perceptively noted that he seemed to “have passed through the 60s without touching the sides”!

Steve and Sue moved to Oxton in 1989 and have now been in the same house for nearly 30 years. Now that they are retired from paid employment, they have time to enjoy their own garden.

What is your earliest memory?

Seeing a map, with Winnipeg right in the centre. All the trains and roads (and a few air routes) radiated from there. “Wow”, I lived at the centre of the world! Later I learned that the map had been produced by the City.

What are you most proud of doing?

Of being part of a Society which has seen membership rise from less than 100 members in 1991 to over 500 now; raised over £300,000 for small local charities from almost 59,000 visitors to the Secret Gardens; planted over 60 trees; been given 3 Royal Horticultural Society Awards and a national Civic Society Award ...and still going strong. All of it done by volunteers.

Who would play you in the film of your life?

Gromit, Wallace’s best friend.

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

In the 1950’s I spent three summers with two colleagues in the Canadian Arctic undertaking the first survey of marine plants and animals in that area.

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

Absolutely none. Sue and I feel privileged to have had stimulating and rewarding work, good friends and opportunities to travel.

Which famous person do you most admire?

William Beveridge who defined and, with Clement Attlee’s legislation, brought to Britain the Welfare State and the concept of the “safety net” for citizens.

What do you like about Oxton?

Undoubtedly the sense of community which Sue and I have so enjoyed and benefited from.

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

While welcoming sympathetic development and change it is important to ensure that existing details such as windows, signage, walls and pavements are not lost.

Planning

We have been consulted on five applications since the last Newsletter. None raise any significant heritage issues and no comments were submitted:

13 Templemore Road - APP/18/01142

Single storey rear extension. The property has little heritage interest and the extension would not be visible from the highway.

38 Rose Mount Close - APP/18/00849

Wrap-around side and rear extension. Although a significant extension, the property is within a modern development and would have no impact on the character of the conservation area.

5 Roslin Road - APP/18/01165

Apply render to rear elevation. Victorian mid-terrace property which the Conservation Area Appraisal shows as making a positive contribution to the character of the conservation area. However, the change is minor and will not be visible from the highway.

17 Rose Mount – APP/18/00915

Two relatively minor amendments to the approved design for conversion of premises to 'Thyme' restaurant. Proposal to slightly increase the footprint and roof pitch of the rear extension onto the rear service yard. Also very small changes to detail of the frontage design.

44 Village Road – APP/18/01575

Proposal for a well-designed single storey rear extension which is not visible from any public area.



Update on 2 Rose Mount (old Brimark building) – APP/17/01265

Work is commencing in January on the conversion of the building to a residential apartment with artist's studio and workshop. This is welcome news on an important development in the village centre which attracted much support from Oxtown Society members

Trees

The Society submitted comments on tree applications as follows:

12a Rose Mount CA/18/0259

Proposal: Pollard eucalyptus to improve light into owner's and neighbour's gardens

Comment: A tall and imposing tree clearly visible from the adjacent roads and further afield

within the conservation area. We appreciate that it is now a large tree for its position between two rows of house but feel that formal pollarding would make the tree no longer the imposing feature it is in the urban landscape. Suggest more measured crown reduction and/or thinning of up to 30% as compromise to improve light whilst retaining overall impact of tree.

25 Newburns Lane CA/18/0221

Proposal: Crown lift 15% total foliage on holly to allow more light to property. Heavily reduce mature laurel leaning against property. Heavily reduce line of laurels to previous form as a hedge. Fell mature willow to allow more light into garden.

Comment: No objections to proposals. Holly and willow not visible from public space.

2 Mount Pleasant CA/18/0226

Proposal: Reduce crown of copper beech by 2 metres and thin by 20%.

Comment: This is a mature tree in a dominant position. Work is obviously needed as branches overhang the road and interfere with telephone cables, but will need to be done sympathetically and professionally. No comment can be made until we are made aware of the exact nature of the intended work, which is not clear from the application.

32 Birch Road CA/18/0227

Proposal: Fell willow (?) close to house as branches knock against wall

Comment: This is a tree of uncertain type, possibly a type of privet which is a remnant of a former hedge. No objection to removal.

10 Victoria Mount CA/18/0253

Proposal: Remove three older unmanaged apple trees and replace with three new varieties.

Comment: Trees do not appear visible from the road. Well accepted that fruit trees have relatively short life span, no objection to removal and replacement.

1 Spring Villas CA/18/0255

Proposal: Fell poorly pruned unattractive cherry tree and replace with Sorbus (mountain ash)

Comment: Relatively small tree with some branches with little leaf cover. No objection to proposal.

16 Poplar Road CA/18/0256

Proposal: Fell fir tree blocking light to adjacent property

Comment: The tree appears to have overgrown the relatively small area of garden. No objection to removal.

Local What's on

Oxton History walks

- **27 April** Arno walk
- **11 May** West walk (Wirral Walking Festival)
- **15 May** East walk (Wirral Walking Festival)
- **19 May** Williamson walk (Wirral Walking Festival)
- **25 May** Arno walk (Wirral Walking Festival)

Walks start at 11a.m. and last an hour and a half.

To book please ring Oxton Village Books, 652 0202

We can also offer tailor-made walks for small groups or organisations on any day of the week, please contact us.

Wirral History & Heritage Fair

9 March, 10.00 to 4.00 at Birkenhead Town Hall. Dozens of exhibitors: historical societies, family history, books and displays. Meet costumed characters from Wirral's past!

Williamson Art Gallery and Museum

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

- **21 February** Souvenirs from the Far East. Illustrated talk by Dr Brigitte Jurack
- **To 1 September** Animal Encounters. Animals across six centuries of art
- **To 17 March** "How we look" – Wirral Met Art School Fellowship Exhibition
- **To 17 March** The Spider Project: Beyond the Label
- **27 Feb to 24 March** Drawn from life experience by Jonathon Kennedy

Chess Club

Local member Daniel Hewitt is looking to set up a local chess club – just for fun, no fees, prizes etc. If you are interested, please contact him at danhewitt86@yahoo.co.uk

"Cycling Solo to Sulawesi"



21 March, 7.00 pm at the Williamson Art Gallery. Society member Dave Barden will talk about his 9,000 mile bike ride through 17 countries. Cost is £7.50 on the door. All proceeds will go to the Indonesia Earthquake and Tsunami Appeal.



40 years....and still going strong

2019 marks the 40th anniversary of the founding of the Oxton Society and we have been looking through our archives to find out about the early days of the Society.

In 1979, David Ainsley, one of the founders of the Society, put a notice in the local newsagents to see if anyone was interested in forming a society which, if the area was designated as a Conservation Area, would have the right to be consulted by the local authority on every planning application in Oxton. He says:

“Oxton's character is largely determined by its sandstone walls, its overhanging trees, details such as sash windows and doorways, and a simple palette of materials, as well as, of course the local shops and pubs and the local people. Having lived in the area for a short while, I realised that every time I walked around more sections of wall were being demolished, trees were being cut down, and fine, elegant sash windows were being replaced by undistinguished casement windows. The very character I loved was facing not a sudden death, but death by a thousand small cuts. As an architect, I knew that if an area were declared a Conservation Area, then citizens had the right to hold a public meeting, to form a society with publicly elected committee members, and this society had the right to be informed of and to comment on every application made to the Council for Planning Approval, and I saw this as a way of halting a slow deterioration.”

A small number of local residents got together to form an interim committee with a view to establishing an Oxton Conservation Society and approached the Local Authority to see if there was a possibility that Oxton might be declared a Conservation Area. They found that the planning department was already in the process of considering which parts of Wirral should have Conservation status. Members of the committee had suitable skills and were able to work with the Authority on the process of designating Oxton as a Conservation Area.

The committee wanted to generate wider interest so that they could hold a public meeting and formally constitute a Society. At that point a planning application was made to demolish two large houses at the corner of Balls Road and Slatey Road and to build a large public house. There is nothing like a threat from outside to bring a community together and when a public meeting was called at the Williamson Art Gallery, over 200 people attended, and it was then that the Society was really born.

During this year we will have more articles in the Newsletter on the history of the Society and the Annual General Meeting in September will give us a chance to celebrate the 40th anniversary. *If any members have memories or photos from the early days please let us know at info@oxtonsociety.org.uk. We would love to hear from you!*



THE OXTON SOCIETY

Where did our logo come from? When the committee decided that the Society should have a simple logo, research showed that there was a basis for the name Oxton being related to oxen. David Ainsley recalls going to Birkenhead Library and finding the ox in a book on old illustrated manuscripts. He added the shape around it and the Society's logo was created!



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.