

## White Christmas Switch-on



All the planning and preparation and all the new lights can come to nothing if the weather is unkind. We can cope with a bit of rain, snow would be OK, but wind spoils everything. This year's switch-on was once again blessed with benign weather and so the crowds turned up for what was a novel departure – we launched an Xmas Market with food and craft stalls open from 1.00pm. Entertainments, kids' stuff, the raffle and mulled wine started early and everything was in full swing long before Santa arrived at 3.30pm.

The fabulous Luminelles and Erin Moxham kicked off the singing followed in short order by the impressive Rock Choir and the always popular school choirs from St Joseph's and Woodchurch Rd. As the light faded the Salvation Army Band struck up with carols and our oldest member, Mike Carr, arrived to press the big button and we all knew that Xmas in Oxton had started.



**Christmas Greetings from Oxton**



Oxton's Xmas Lights are a gift to the community from the Society, our local businesses, the Council, and all the locals who donated to our fund-raising. This year we all but finished our re-modelling of the display with the illumination of the three big trees. This was helped by £500 from the Council's Community Fund, a donation from the OBK and fund-raising. Nevertheless the Society still had to find about £1800 to finish the job. Next year we are thinking about a giant Xmas Tree, then that will be all for further significant expenditure.

We took in about £2,400 mainly from the raffle, the wine, and the hotdogs, and about £1400 from donations and fund-raising. The event cost about £5600 – made up mainly of the road closure (£1,275) and the lights themselves (installation, removal and new lights). The Woodcraft Folk organised kids' entertainments and made about £400 for their own funds.

We owe many thanks to everybody who made the event a success. Marie and Dave Pennington led the Planning Team and mobilised a host of volunteers and contributors who made it happen on the day, including Santa and all the entertainers. Kate Wyness of Greens organised fund-raising from locals and the market stalls. And thanks to those businesses who donated cash towards the lights or prizes for the raffle.

**The main sponsors were Bogan's Carpets, Oxton Bar and Kitchen, The Courtyard, Edwards News/Bon Bakery, Impressions, Thyme, The Conservative Club, Oxton Labour Party and The Mayflower. Raffle gifts were received from Home/Hombrew, Noubalm, Gossip, The Drawing Room, Anne Roberts, Speedwell Motors, The Riverhill Hotel, Sabaroso, Oceans, J Cooke, OBK, Greens, Bisque-it, Christine Lesley and Oxton Boutique.**



*Our own Mike Carr presses the switch*



*Mulled wine sales going strong*

## Spring is coming and so is Secret Gardens Sunday 10th May 10am to 5pm

### Volunteering

Last year's Event was the best yet! It was sunny, busy, and a brilliant day out! We are getting very excited for our 20<sup>th</sup> Year Anniversary in 2020 and this could be your opportunity to be part of a hugely popular event that attracts thousands of people into our beautiful Village and raises thousands of pounds for local charities.

It would be just 3 hours of your time and then you can enjoy the rest of the day in the Village! Jobs include stewarding, selling tickets, help on the raffle and in the gardens. No experience needed.

We need lots of helpers to keep this event safe, organised and successful so would love to hear from you. Please get in touch with Lesley on

[alsr.mcgarritty@tiscali.co.uk](mailto:alsr.mcgarritty@tiscali.co.uk)

### Cakes

The Oxton Society Cafe at The Hub is always hugely popular and is a brilliant fundraiser for our Partner Charities on the day. We need plenty of cakes to keep it going all day so if you are able we would love to receive your baked goods! No cream cakes please. Please wrap in foil and clearly label any plates so we can return afterwards, thank you

Drop off the day before please (venue tbc in April newsletter)

### Grand Raffle Prizes

The Grand Raffle is another unique feature and highlight of our event. It is different because ticket buyers choose which prize they would like to enter for so we need plenty of ideas to tempt them. This would be a great place to re-home any unwanted Christmas gifts! Toiletry sets, cookbooks, toys & kitchen items all gratefully received. Our raffle team will need prizes by 30<sup>th</sup> April please so they can box or wrap them. The team are happy to accept donations of money so they can buy things to put in the raffle or to add to other items. Please contact Lesley McGarritty on [alsr.mcgarritty@tiscali.co.uk](mailto:alsr.mcgarritty@tiscali.co.uk)

### Plants

- The plant sale is always a huge attraction with people queuing up early to grab the best bargains! We are grateful to The Friends of the Arno for running the plant stall and are hopeful with help with the following:
- Any plants that have outgrown your garden
- Plants that have been grown, split & potted to sell (please label name & colour of flower, potential size and sun/shade advice). Plants in flower & well established sell best
- Any unwanted pots, tools, gardening gifts & books

*No spider plants or bluebells please. Delivery point to be confirmed in April newsletter. If you have any queries please contact Peter, his email is [peter@defigueiredo.co.uk](mailto:peter@defigueiredo.co.uk)*

### Arts & Crafts

Pitches for Arts & Crafts are available at the event. They are located in Mount Pleasant by The Hub, where refreshments, the raffle & music attract visitors all day. On average 4000 people visit the gardens. As we are supporting our partner charities no charity (or refreshment stands) sorry.

Please get in touch with Lynda Roberts for more information on [lrobertslynda@gmail.com](mailto:lrobertslynda@gmail.com)

### Sad news

It is with regret that we have to report the death of Julia Dorman. Julia, a local resident, had been a member of the Secret Gardens of Oxton team from early 2017; she stepped up as a temporary member of the co-ordinating group then took on the organising of the entertainment for the event. She was also happy to offer help to other parts of the event, always there early on the day to help with the 'putting up' and to stay late to help with the 'taking down' or to stand in for missing volunteers if needed.

Her enthusiastic support for the event will be sadly missed.



## Nisha Katona



Nisha Katona was a child protection barrister for 20 years and is now the CEO, executive and development chef of Mowgli Street Food restaurants. Nisha had always been evangelical about Indian food and wanted to share that with people, teaching Indian home cooking alongside her full-time job. Five years ago, she took a 12-month sabbatical from her career as a barrister to open a restaurant serving Indian family recipes. Since opening her first Mowgli on Bold Street Liverpool in 2014, the popular Indian Street Food restaurant has grown to eleven restaurants nationally with around 400 staff and Nisha has never returned to her 'day job'! Mowgli is about how Indians eat in their homes and continues to pursue its dream to serve good, home style, fresh, clean Indian food.

As well as being 'mother' to Mowgli, Nisha has two teenage girls and is the author of three cookbooks. She has also worked extensively as a business and food expert, on several projects across the BBC, ITV and Radio 4. Nisha was recognised with an MBE in the 2019 New Year Honours List for services to the Food Industry.

The Mowgli Trust is the charitable limb of the restaurant and supports local charities in each of the cities where restaurants are located, donating over £300k to charities each year. Locally Mowgli donates to the Clatterbridge Cancer Charity and Claire House.

### What is your earliest memory?

Sitting in my pram in the afternoon sunlight of a Skelmersdale living room with my brother in his school uniform, shorts and bright cap on, standing beside me. He has been that supportive ever since but wears longer trousers.

### What are you most proud of doing?

Raising two daughters who adore each other.

I was never raised with a big family in this country as my relatives were all in India so it means the world to me that they are close and there for each other.

### What is your favourite holiday destination?

Italy Amalfi Coast without a doubt. Staring out at the bay of Naples eating Spaghetti con Vongole and then heading for a black sand beach. History, food, art, sun, sand, heaven.

### Who would play you in the film of your life?

We are limited to the handful of short brown middle aged women I suppose so Meera Syal or .....oh, Meera Syal

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

I speak 5 languages- Indian, Hungarian, English, French, and German.

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

I have a strong faith and so believe that every door closes because a better or the right one will open. There are therefore no such things as lost opportunities or regrets as long as I live compassionately.

### What have you learnt about yourself from setting up your restaurant business?

I do love humans more than anything. My life as a child protection barrister was all about meeting people at the lowest ebb of their lives and giving them hope. Business is the same. Give your employees hope and an enriched life.

### What famous person do you most admire?

CS Lewis - I regret so much that I will never meet him. His writing changed my life forever.

### What do you like about living in Oxton?

I love that the living rooms you walk past in the golden evenings are lined with book shelves and not 70 inch plasma screen TVs. I love that Greens exists and speaks to the tastes of everyone here.

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

We need a butcher and a fishmonger and we as a village need to actually shop in these local places and keep the village alive.

## Edith Smith and the Wild Women of Widnes

What is the extraordinary link between Britain's first woman police officer, Oxton's Edith Smith, The Wild Women of Widnes' Ice Hockey Team and poetry?

The answer is Lucy London. Lucy is the 'poet in residence' at the Planet Ice Rink in Widnes and each year dedicates awards for the Most Valued Player of the team in commemoration of largely unsung 'heroes and heroines of the First World War'. Last year she commemorated Sarah Macnaughtan (worth a look on Wikipedia) and this year it is Edith Smith's turn. Her team is named The Wild Women of Widnes of course. And on 22 September 2019 Bob Knowles of the Society's History Group was invited to attend a match against the Solway Sharks Ladies, to mount a display about Edith and, as shown in the photo, to give out the medals. If you fancy an unusual and entertaining evening out, search for the fixtures on the links below, power up your satnav (you'll need it in around Runcorn) and don't forget to wrap up well... it's very cold!

Follow these links for further information....[www.widneswild.co.uk](http://www.widneswild.co.uk) > [wild-women-8-solway-ladies-8](http://www.widneswild.co.uk/wild-women-8-solway-ladies-8)

[http://inspirationalwomenofww1.blogspot.com/2019/10/edith-smith-memorial-award-for-widnes\\_4.html](http://inspirationalwomenofww1.blogspot.com/2019/10/edith-smith-memorial-award-for-widnes_4.html)

<https://www.facebook.com/Lucy-Poet-In-Residence-760712734138364/>



## Oxton's Centenarian.

In the November newsletter we congratulated Mike Carr on celebrating his 99<sup>th</sup> birthday in October. In this one we celebrate the 100<sup>th</sup> birthday of Jean Gillespie last December.

Jean was born in Kensington Liverpool and when she married Ronald Gillespie they moved to Woodcote Bank in Rock Ferry. In 1971 they moved to 20 Wellington Road. She worked for many years at Rock Ferry Branch Library. When their three daughters left home they moved to Devonshire Place.

She had her birthday party at the RAFA club and relatives travelled from all over England. She now has six grandchildren and six great grandchildren.





## Oxton's Reputation Continues to Grow



It isn't just Oxton's gardens and hanging baskets which continue to grow. So does wider recognition that the village is an attractive and community minded place.

### North West in Bloom Awards 2019.

Oxton received a gold medal in the North West in Bloom Awards for the third year running. The village made a successful debut in the competition in 2017 when it won gold in the Best Urban Community category as well as the Best Newcomer Trophy for the Secret Gardens.

North West in Bloom is run in association with the Royal Horticultural Society and attracts hundreds of entries from across the region. Oxton's was based on the 49 hanging baskets around the village centre and resulted in it being crowned 'Best Village in the Region'.

The judges overall impression was that the Oxton Society was well motivated, with clear objectives, and that the hanging baskets were part of a wider environmental awareness aimed at improving the area. The judges



feedback stressed that as well as the horticultural and environmental quality of work, there was strong community and business involvement. They noted that the Secret Gardens initiative was a fundamental part of wider environmental efforts.

John Booth the Society Committee member who manages the initiative said at the awards ceremony at Wallasey Town Hall in December, 'over the past three years Oxton has been a front runner in the competition winning eight awards including three golds, which is fantastic'.



### Cool and Interesting?

The Liverpool Echo on 15<sup>th</sup> December 2019 named Oxton Village in a list of the 14 coolest and most interesting streets in Merseyside. It said that because it offers an array of boutiques and cafes to suit all manner of tastes in such a compact area that it hadn't singled out just one street. It stated that 'the centre of this Birkenhead suburb is a haven of characterful buildings, flourishing independent shops, and plenty of restaurants. It offers locals and visitors a true sense of community. If you're after a place that truly offers a village feel then this is the spot'

Oxton is in a list which includes Bold Street, Hope Street, and Lark Lane in Liverpool, Victoria Road in New Brighton, and Port Sunlight Village.

### Fresh Award for Fraiche.

Marc Wilkinson's village restaurant Fraiche has been named number 1 in the U.K. by the recently published 2019 Harden's, 'the Gastronomer's bible and long established restaurant guide based on customer reviews. To put the achievement in perspective well known and established gastronomic destinations are down the list. Simon Rogan's L'Enclume is 12, Alain Roux's Waterside Inn is 14, and Raymond Blanc's Le Manoir aux Quat'Saisons is at 15. The next highest ranked on Merseyside, and the only other one in the top 100 is Roski in Liverpool at 53.

This is just the latest of many current awards: the only restaurant on Merseyside with a Michelin star and awarded 4 rosettes by the AA; 20<sup>th</sup> in the Good Food Guide's best restaurant list; inclusion in 'La Liste' of the top 100 restaurants in the world.



## Trees and Planning

*Wirral Borough Council decides all planning applications and applications for tree work. It invites the Society to comment on their impact, for the protection and enhancement of the Conservation Area.*

### Planning Reports. November 2019.

**APP/19/01069. Land to the rear of 38-40 Arno Road.** There were no new planning application consultations but there was an update on the existing one to build a bungalow with access from Arno Road.

There had been no response from the WBC case officer to the Society's previous comment that the Heritage Statement accompanying the application was not fit for purpose, and that the application should not be considered further until information was provided.

It was agreed therefore that the Society should object to the application on two main grounds.

#### *Firstly*

The Character Appraisal and Management Plan jointly commissioned by the Society and WBC in stated that 'bungalows are almost always incongruous features within Oxton'. The application proposed to reduce the visual impact by protecting existing hedges with a 20 year covenant. Given hedges are not covered by the same protection as trees within Conservation Areas there are doubts over this as an enforcement mechanism.

#### *Secondly*

A length of sandstone wall would have to be demolished to create vehicle access from Arno Road Along with the construction of new retaining walls. Apart from the visual impact, the Tree Group expressed serious concern about the risk of damage to the root system of protected boundary trees near to the new access road.

No decision has yet been made and with 17 neighbour objections it may be referred to the Planning Committee.

### January 2020

#### **APP/19/01563. 6 Palm Hill.**

This was a retrospective application for the partial demolition of a sandstone wall to create an off road parking area. It was decided that an objection by the Society wasn't justified but it was important to note that a recent High Court judgement had strengthened control over the demolition of walls in Conservation Areas. The general rule had been that partial demolition not exceeding 50% of a wall's length could be classed as permitted development. The new ruling means that any demolition of a wall over 1 metre in height requires planning permission.

#### **Tree Group Comments on Applications : September to December 2019.**

The Society has been consulted on six applications. At the following 5 addresses there was no objection to the work, and in one case it was supported.

56 Poplar Road *CA/19/0207*

46 Poplar Road *CA/19/0220*

6 Mount Pleasant *T/19/0227*

Prenton Preparatory School *T/19/0257*

**3 East Bank** *CA/19/0295*. The Group supported work to reduce the height of a large fir tree by 20 feet.

Comments were made in relation to :

#### **10 Victoria Mount** *CA/19/0235*

Agree to felling of Elder; felling of two Leylandii and replacing with two Hornbeams; felling of Silver Birch and replacing with identical tree; careful removal of lowest branches of an Oak in the front garden by a qualified tree surgeon to raise the crown and avoid inconvenience to pedestrians.

*Full details of all applications are on the Society's website.*

## Preserving Our Tree Heritage : Thinking About Risk.

The trees in Oxton are one of the key contributors to the unique urban environment we have. Their varied appearance throughout the year enhances the feel of the area. They provide habitat for wildlife and they help to absorb and store our carbon dioxide emissions. The Oxton Tree Group is keen to help preserve and enhance the local treescape.

There are risks however particularly with large and ageing trees. In September last year a large Poplar fell down across Willan Street in Oxton Village. There were no injuries but in 2016 there was a tragic death of a baby when a large branch fell from a tree in Arrowe Park.

### Tree Owners and Risk.

There is a National Tree Safety Group (NTSG) which has published guidance on the risks and what owners can do to reduce the likelihood of incidents and liability. The guidance stresses that although the risk to safety is extremely small owners have a legal duty of care, and need to take a proportionate approach to managing trees and safety. It uses an example of a private garden with several trees, two of which overhang the road, to describe the features of reasonable, balanced tree safety management.

Owners should check their trees as part of their general care for the house and garden. They should be competent to recognise obvious visual defects,

and decide whether specialist advice is required. They do not need to record observations, but keep records of advice or work carried out. They should maintain a reasonable balance between expenditure on trees and maintaining them in good health and meeting their duty of care to others.

The Royal Horticultural Society (RHS) also offers advice about trees and safety.

The Society's Tree Group is keen to maintain and expand the current tree population. The full text of their revised Code of Practice is available on the website and the Group offers to meet any applicants for tree work. The Local Planning Authority's consent is not required for any protected tree that is dead or dangerous, but anyone proposing to cut down a tree is advised to give five days written notice unless it is an emergency. Hedges are not covered by the regulations concerning trees in conservation areas but residents are encouraged to maintain and trim hedges, especially when facing onto public rights of way.

The full text of this report by the Tree Group is available on the Society's website, as is information on the Tree Planting Fund to replace trees. Links to NTSG and RHS guidance, and Wirral Council's tree strategy are also provided.

## Friends of the Arno.



During National Tree Planting Week back in November 2019, the Friends decided to plant a tree in memory of 'Jim' who sadly passed away earlier in the year, and was one of the founder members of their group. They choose a spot on Oxton Fields where his wife Val can see it from her kitchen window. Family and friends were invited to the occasion and helped to plant the Mountain Ash.

It was a lovely occasion which contributed to the improvement of the environment the Friends are committed to. On Saturday 1<sup>st</sup> February they planted 300 new trees on Oxton Fields near Duck Pond Lane. Volunteers were invited to come along and help and refreshments were served in the shed in the Arno afterwards.



## Welcome to New businesses

### Bon Bakery

A warm welcome to Bon Bakery- Bakes and Shakes, a new venture by Paul Edwards of the newsagent/post office. With its bright, modern interior, Bon offers a wide range of fresh bread, baguettes and pastries baked daily. More than a bakery, it also does pizzas, pies and pasties, cakes and drinks. Meals to eat in or take-out include breakfasts, soups, baked potatoes, salads, sandwiches, paninis, pasta and hot dogs.



### Sabrosa

A warm welcome to Oxton's latest new restaurant, the Sabrosa Tapas Bar. Owner and Manager, Eduardo Ibanez, says "my aim is to bring an authentic taste and atmosphere of Spain to Oxton. My staff are all Spanish (they speak perfect English, of course) and we get all specialised ingredients from Spain as well as our wines, cheeses and hams. We serve Tapas every evening and have simple breakfasts and a lunch-time menu.



## Long Service Medals

Congratulations to Maureen Robinson and Sue Heywood on reaching 25 years of serving and caring in Edwards News and Post Office. Maureen told us, "Its not just a shop, more of a social service at the heart of the community". Sue said, "We try and look out for our customers and we notice if they go missing for a few days". Both said they had been to funerals of long standing customers. Pressed for the downside all they could muster was a bit of aggravation over the dual post office queue - but that was said with a smile..



## The Oxton Mural.



At the time of writing the controversy arising from the mural recently created on the wall of Home Café is very active and has, unfortunately, sometimes been bad tempered and divisive. To date the Society has deliberately avoided taking a formal stance. In the absence of any advance consultation our first priority was to establish, with the support of local Councillors, the legal position regarding planning permission. As we go to press Wirral Council is actively considering this and it could take some time. However when you read this in February things may have moved on. The Society will continue to update members via the website and email, including the Society's response if and when this results in a formal planning consultation.



## Local What's on

### St Saviour's Church, Bidston Road.

BCS Concert. Messa Gloria – Puccini and the Mozart Requiem.

28<sup>th</sup> March at 7.30pm in the church.

### Williamson Art Gallery and Museum.

Open Wednesday to Sunday 10am-5pm, fully accessible.

Williamson Open 2020. The annual exhibition returns in March. Full dates and entry details coming soon on the Williamson website.

The Things That Live Under the Stairs. The series of talks inspired by objects from the gallery's collections. 23<sup>rd</sup> February & 19<sup>th</sup> March 7pm £3.

The Sketcher's Arms. Sketching and experiments with drawing, suitable for all abilities. 23<sup>rd</sup> February & 19<sup>th</sup> March 6.30 – 8.30pm £5.

Drop-In Family Workshops. Our series of Saturday morning workshops suitable for all the family. Dress to get messy! 11am-3.30pm (drop-in), 1<sup>st</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> Saturday of the month, free (donations warmly welcomed).

*Happily the popular café has reopened for refreshments and with a limited menu.*

### Friends of the Arno and Oxton Fields.

Saturday 7<sup>th</sup> March, History and Heritage Fair, Birkenhead Town Hall, 10-4pm, and Potting for our Plant Stall, 10-12pm.

Saturday 21<sup>st</sup> March Spring Plant Sale, Duck Pond Lane, 10-12pm.

*Information on our website, [friendsoftheearnoblogspot](#)*

## Membership Renewal

The Oxton Society is a thriving charity organisation. At the start of 2020 the society has almost eight hundred paying members perhaps the largest group of its type on the Wirral. During 2019 we welcomed more than ninety new members. We are keen to involve local businesses and organisations, currently we have more than forty who receive our newsletters and other communications. People within our Conservation Area and from further afield clearly enjoy the varied benefits of membership and the opportunities to engage with a strong community.

The 'Membership Year' runs from the beginning of March until the end of the following February. There are 176 memberships due to renew at the start of this coming March. It helps our administration if subscriptions are paid promptly – and of course it cuts down on administration work if members pay for more than one year.

Almost nine out of ten members agree to have their payments made under the Gift Aid Scheme. This ensures that as a charity organisation the value of subscriptions and donations increases by 25%.

Our Society communicates with our large membership and interested parties through various means. We are fully compliant with all of the latest privacy legislation and knowing that they are secure 'on-line' more than five hundred memberships, businesses and other organisations receive information from us via e-mails. If you have not yet supplied us with your email address perhaps you may consider informing [membership@theoxtonsociety.co.uk](mailto:membership@theoxtonsociety.co.uk).

If you have any friends, family or neighbours who you think might enjoy joining us please encourage them to look at our excellent website; <https://theoxtonsociety.co.uk>, where they can join online using PayPal. If they would prefer to apply to join by post the Membership Secretary can deliver an application form – contact; Membership Secretary, The Oxton Society, 5 Mount Pleasant, Oxton CH43 5SY.



## Contacting us

Contributions to the Newsletter are welcome and should be sent to the Editor by email to [info@theoxtonsociety.co.uk](mailto:info@theoxtonsociety.co.uk) or by post to the Secretary, 4 Willan Street, CH43 5ST.

You can also contact the Society using the above addresses, or via the Oxton Society website at [www.theoxtonsociety.co.uk](http://www.theoxtonsociety.co.uk)

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