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OXTON CONSERVATION AREA AND THE OXTON SOCIETY 1979-2019: CONSERVATION AND COMMUNITY TOGETHER

By Alan Chape (Secretary of the Oxton Society)



Biography of the author

I was born in Sunderland in 1943. I graduated with a degree in Geography at Leicester University in 1966. This was followed by a post graduate degree in Urban and Regional Planning at Nottingham University between 1966 and 1968. In 1968 I was employed by Liverpool City Council as a planning officer. I then worked for the City Council until 2000, spending the period from 1989 to 2000 as Assistant Chief Executive and Head of the Central Policy Unit. I retired in March 2000. I also served on the boards of the Liverpool Housing Action Trust and the Merseyside Training and Enterprise Council and acted as a consultant to the Audit Commission on the Housing Renewal Pathfinder Programme 2001-2005. I was also a founder member of the Oxton Artists group. I am a Fellow of the Royal Society of Arts, a Fellow of the Heseltine Institute University of Liverpool. I was awarded the OBE in 1998 for services to urban regeneration in Liverpool.

I have lived in Oxton village since 1968. I joined the Oxton Society in 2000 and I have been the Secretary of the Oxton Conservation Society since 2004. I have supported Liverpool football club since 1968 and I am the lead singer of the Orange Zebra band. I currently chair the Conservation Areas Wirral group that oversees the areas 26 conservation areas.

My hobbies are long distance walking, music (especially Bob Dylan), photography, graphic art, Liverpool City watching, Liverpool football watching, cricket watching, grandchildren watching, and local history. I run Facebook sites concerned with Oxton's Conservation Area, Liverpool's Pier Head and Waterfront and Wirral's Conservation Areas.

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Foreword

What makes a village an appealing place to live or work? The location, buildings, green spaces and its sense of place can be factors. But above all it is the people, and in this respect Oxton has been particularly fortunate. The story that this fascinating booklet tells is how a group of local people came together 40 years ago with the aim of protecting the character of the village and establishing a sense of community; and what they have collectively achieved. The influence that the Oxton Society has had in shaping public opinion, raising standards of conservation in the area and fostering civic pride is immense, and all of us who value the village have much to be grateful for.

In 1979 Oxton was under threat from demolition and unsympathetic alteration of buildings, inappropriate development and felling of trees. Not only did the embryo Society persuade Wirral Council to make the village a conservation area, but they took an immediate and active role in monitoring changes to buildings, advising on the proper care of trees and challenging intrusive housing schemes. As the worst threats gradually receded, the emphasis of the Society shifted to more hands-on, community-based activities including the annual Christmas lights, hanging baskets and

trademark Secret Gardens of Oxton. These have all been aimed at strengthening the commercial sustainability of the village centre, and the booklet describes the benefits they have brought. Another initiative has been the local history group, which has discovered many interesting stories about Oxton's past, giving rise to publications and blue plaques celebrating notable people who lived in the area, as well as guided walks.

A vital strength of the Society has been the active participation of its members, whose willingness to roll their sleeves up and act as volunteers has enabled these ambitious projects to prosper. For all who love and care about the village this booklet will make an engaging read. But more than that, we can all learn from the past, and there is much of interest that would also help other places and their communities to meet the challenges of the future.

Peter de Figueiredo

Architect, heritage professional and resident of Oxton

Preface

This commemorative booklet is designed to celebrate 40 years of the Oxton Conservation Area and the Oxton Society. Much of the information it contains can be found on the Society's web site and Facebook pages. However, the booklet contains more commentary on the nature of change in the area and the Society over the past 40 years, especially in relation to the designation of the area and the establishment of the Society. In addition, the final section identifies some of the factors that we think will influence the future of both. We hope it is a good read and the Society would be very interested in any feedback.

The booklet should be read in the knowledge that the aims of the Oxton Society are:

- **Aim 1 Promote and secure high standards of planning, landscape and architecture to preserve, improve and develop the area and its environs**
- **Aim 2 Enhance public awareness of Oxton's history, architecture and environment**
- **Aim 3 Foster community and business involvement to encourage civic pride**
- **Aim 4 Maintain the Society on a sound basis and sustainable financial footing, including working in partnership with others**

Introduction: The early development of Oxton

In 1801, the census returns showed 137 people living in 26 dwellings in Oxton (in both respects more than in Birkenhead) and there were not many more 20 years later, when the Cheshire historian Ormerod wrote that it was still "*small and mean, being composed of wretched straggling huts, among roads all but impassable*". However, he was complimentary towards the fine views from the top of Oxton Hill. At the same time the new steam ferry boats were bringing changes to Birkenhead, Ormerod felt compelled to say that "*no degree of civilisation or improvement*" had yet reached this corner of Wirral. A high sandstone ridge covered with bracken and "more suitable for game than the plough" would not have been an unkind description of Oxton Hill at that time.

In 1841 the population had risen to 546, and by 1847 the number of people living there had grown to over 1400. At that time Oxton was said "*very different.... and it is studded with detached residences, to which every week witnesses the addition of others*". In fact it was said that "*few places indeed possess greater advantages of situation in Oxton; its elevated position, its ready access to the ferries; its proximity to the (Birkenhead) park and the total absence of all manufacture, will ever command of preference with those who wish for a near country retreat*".

There were reasons for these quite sudden changes. There was a demand to satisfy, which was beginning to grow, amongst those Liverpool

merchants, who had earlier moved across the Mersey into the young town in Birkenhead. Now they wanted to move out of this fast-growing town to more pastoral surroundings and there were many more from Liverpool who would gladly join them. In any case, Birkenhead was now attracting its own merchants and industrialists. Of the 546 residence of Oxton in 1841, 228 were born outside of the County of Cheshire. Fortunately, at the same time the demand was increasing, the Earl of Shrewsbury granted fixed term building leases over large sections of Oxton. This provided any would-be resident with the opportunity of securing land at a very low cost and applying their capital to the grandeur of the house rather than the purchase of the land. The die was cast and Oxton was about to change forever. In 1851 the nature of some of the incomers is illustrated in an article (*"The landscape of Oxton Township 1795-1877 by Douglas Varley, Cheshire History No. 34, Autumn 1994"*). In *"..... two neighbouring houses in Village Road the following are recorded as residents; Samuel McGill (59), merchant ship owner, born in Scotland ; his wife and three young daughters, all born in Canada; a housemaid, general servant and cook, the two former born in Scotland; and only the cook being Cheshire born. Next door was Joseph Godden (28), member of the Royal College of Surgeons, born in London; his wife, British, but born in St. Petersburg, a young son and daughter, born in Oxton, Welsh house servant, a Dublin nurse, and one house servant ,the only other member who was Oxton born"*

There were also two distinct centres of village life by 1850 (see Fig. 1a) and at some distance apart. Around the Carnarvon Castle was mainly a collection of farm cottages and buildings, though now with the addition of some newer, finer residences. Strung along Bidston Road and at the top of Village Road this area was the Oxton Village of old. Here Oxton's oldest building Oxton Old Hall, as it has later become known, which stands at the corner of Village Road and Bidston Road, built in the 17th. Century. It is said that it was once used by the Earls of Shrewsbury as a hunting lodge.

Oxton's other centre, at this time, was generally contained within the area bordered by Storeton Road, Rose Mount, Claughton Firs and Fairview Road. This area, and especially Rose Mount and Claughton Firs, has become the Oxton Village of today. But it has a Victorian origin. It was an

obvious area for development, given that it was a corner of the township that was immediately accessible via the Oxton Road out of Birkenhead.

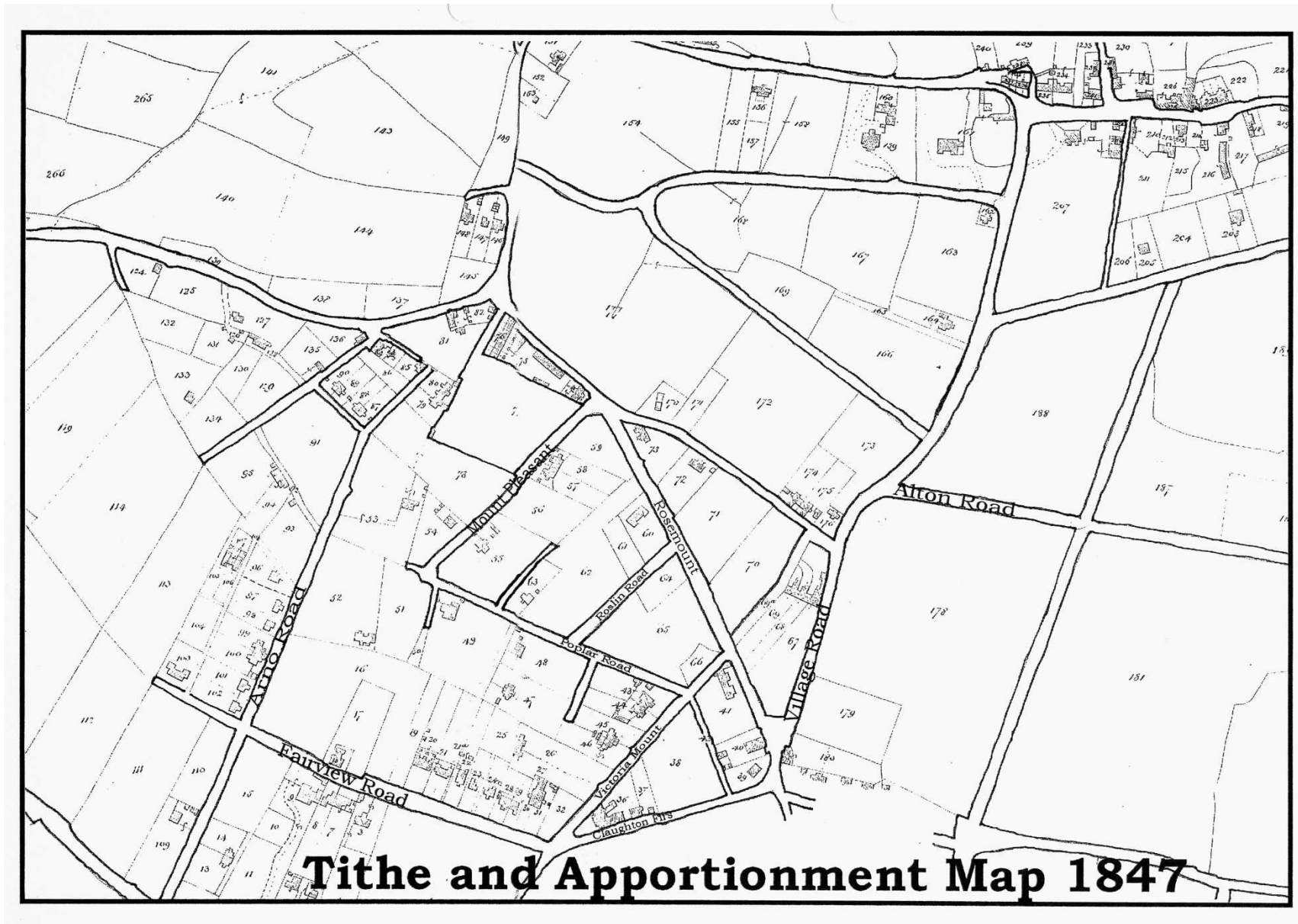


Fig 1a Tithe Map of Oxtou showing the two centres of village life in 1847 and the concentrations of development on Fairview Road and Arno Road

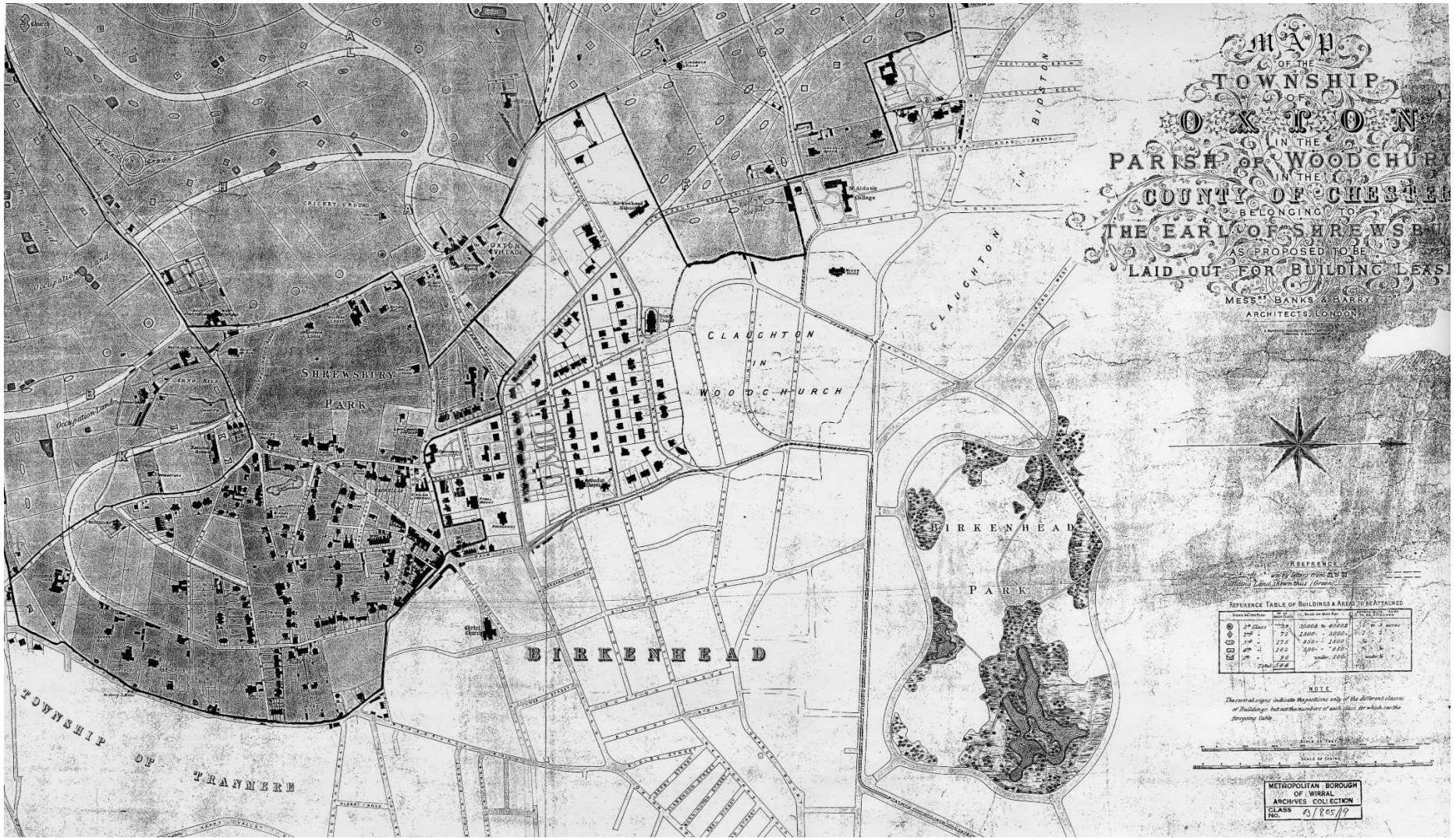


Fig 1b The Shrewsbury Estate Map indicating the new plots to be leased (1870)

As Oxton approached the 20th century it had come a long way from being a bleak and barren hill and was now established as the finest residential suburb of Birkenhead. However, not all of its open land had been developed. It was not until the 1960s that houses were built where Oxton Hill swept down to the Fender Valley and the township of Woodchurch. As Ray Johnson notes (Short History of Oxton 1800-1900 on the Oxton Society web site) “..... *Here where once there were to be found those ancient fields with such mysterious names as Crook Loon, Fotherings and Spath, there is today a modern housing estate. Much the same fate had fallen to Sand Heys, Bottom Heys and Kiln Hey of the close of the 19th Century. In the northern and eastern quarters of Oxton, where these fields lay, the progress of the builder was rapid. The area that lay generally between Shrewsbury Road and Bidston Road will soon be covered with fine houses, as Beresford Road, Wellington Road and others in the area were completed..... Here again we find some references to the Earls of Shrewsbury in the names of some of these new roads – Alton and Chetwynd are both family names of the Earls*”. The Earls of Shrewsbury were then to play a key part in the development of Oxton in the 20th century as they initially granted leases, and then freeholds, to successive waves of developers, builders and incomers. In fact the “.....*the noble Lord contributed in no small way to the area’s rapid development by leasing plots at a modest annual rental rather than selling them outright. This allowed the newcomers to be more extravagant in the construction of their houses. Untrammelled by any*

planning regulations they built what they liked, more or less where they liked. Styles of architecture and embellishments followed their owners’ whims.....” (The Rise of Oxton Hill: Alan Brack, Cheshire Life November 1989). The legacy, of course, is the present unusual street pattern and unadopted lanes of the village likened to the tracks “....*of scampering rabbits.”*

What is not generally known is that the first attempt to plan the Oxton area was in the aftermath of World War II. This was consequence of the severe bombing of Birkenhead. An outline plan was commissioned by the County Borough for the redevelopment of the village centre as a shopping and community centre for Noctorum, Prenton and Oxton. This would have involved the demolition of sixty existing houses and shops; fortunately, this was never implemented!!! This is referred to in the article above by Douglas Varley. This article also refers to the still earlier development plans (see Fig.1b) drawn up for the Earl of Shrewsbury in 1870. These show very clearly the architects’ conception of “*garden city*” planning on the western slopes of Oxton, providing for 544 plots designated in five different categories from half acre plots valued at £500 to 2-3acre plots valued at £3000-£4000. Proposed new roads, recreational grounds and churches “.....*give a foretaste of the developments that have taken place in that area in more recent times. The plans of 1870 do, however, provide useful evidence, supplementing the Ordnance Survey maps, and indicating an early understanding of the virtues of controlled peri-urban development”.*

1 Designating the Conservation Area and the establishment of the Oxton Society

In 1977 several individual houses and many of the trees in Oxton Village were already subject to listed building status or tree preservation orders. At this time a series of poor quality and inappropriate developments prompted the Wirral Society, together, with the Merseyside Civic Society and the Victorian Society, to approach the Wirral Council. The initial approach was in July 1977 to seek the formal designation of Oxton Village as a conservation area. The initial approach stalled, however, as there was insufficient Council staff available to undertake the necessary work. Eventually the conservation area designation and its initial boundary were approved in March 1979.

David Ainsley, who became the leading local resident in establishing the Oxton Society said “*I was originally attracted to Oxton because it was affordable (now there's a big change), and because of its obvious physical charms. Having lived here for a while, it was soon apparent that these charms were in danger of being eroded and the area could suffer death by myriad small cuts. As an architect, I knew that if an area were declared a conservation area, and if a group of people formed an annually elected committee, then they could require the local authority to show them planning and tree applications for comment. I approached Wirral BC planners and discovered that there was an idea to declare it a conservation area, but boundaries were not clear. I also put up a notice in the newsagents window to see if there were others who fancied joining me.*” So, the primary driver was the need to see applications for changes to buildings and trees.

The impetus for establishing the Oxton Society came initially from a notice in the newsagent's posted by David. This invited people to an informal meeting to discuss his concerns. Only seven or eight people attended the first meeting but subsequently several hundred came to the first public meeting, held at the Williamson Art Gallery. This was prompted by the outrage at a proposed planning application for a public house opposite the Gallery. Following that meeting the Oxton Society was formed, its constitution drafted, and the first committee elected in 1979.

In the report (4th. September 1978) considering the merits of designating the area the Wirral Council noted that “*...the slow development of the area over a period of time and in a spatially haphazard manner has given it its present variety of residential form and also its variety in quality of design. Not all the area has the charm and design quality that the better parts has, and groups of extremely attractive buildings are interspersed with examples of late Victorian and 20th.C. development which are only mundane. However the boundary of the proposed Conservation Area has been drawn to include the best and the ordinary so that practically the whole of hilltop settlement has been included to differentiate it from the housing of a later period which surrounds it.... Without doubt one of the strongest and most insistent qualities of the area is the role of boundary walling and extensive tree cover which provides a background to the street scene and unifies the whole area.*”

The report also set out the significant contributions to the environmental quality of the area made by the buildings, sandstone walls and luxuriant tree cover. In particular, the variety of the buildings, ranging in size from terraced cottages to substantial mansions and incorporating a wide variety of building styles. While “*.... few of these are listed buildings..... many of them exhibit a character and charm and a visual interest almost impossible to find in a typical modern estate.....A substantial number of houses stand on their own in spacious gardens, but others stand in groups where the loss of even one would seriously mar the group effect created by them all. Some of the larger houses surrounded by large grounds are under pressure for redevelopment as they are less suited to modern lifestyles. In a number of cases redevelopment has already taken place, sometimes with disastrous results*”. The report also referred to “*....The trees and walls often act inconcert, with overhanging branches sweeping over the top of walls and projecting high over the pavement and road below. The walls themselves are mostly made of rough-hewn sandstone*”.



Fig 2. Sandstone walls on Hughes Lane



Fig. 3 Luxuriant tree cover on Rose Mount at corner with Fairclough Lane



Fig. 4 Neo Georgian Willan Terrace on Willan Street

Some of this intrinsic character and charm of the area was captured in an article in Cheshire Life in July 1969 which referred to “.....*the little things that catch the eye: a pair of stone lions in a garden, the ace of clubs carved on a balcony, a front door painted a splendid imperial purple,. And the variety of the houses– walk less than a quarter of a mile and you can pass neo-Georgian, English Baroque, Victorian maritime gothic, mock Cheshire black and white, and Ruabon redbrick terrace. And, of course, the trees, hundreds of them, oak and ash, sycamore and beech and maple, cherry and lilac and juniper*”. Conversely the report also referred to several negative factors which were detracting from the character of the area. Many of these are still matters of concern to the present day. The report acknowledged that unfortunately Oxton “.....*had suffered during the course of years and its unique character had been steadily eroded and chipped away at the edges*”.

That phrase in the report resonates, even today. The Society has expressed its concern that this process is still evident today in parts of the Conservation Area. It has become clear that the current planning system cannot prevent this gradual erosion of the “unique character” of the area. This was emphasised in the 1978 report “.....*the fact that much of the changes which have taken place to doors, windows, roofs, rendering, stonework, walls and gate posts, has not been subject to planning controls. Most of the changes made have not required planning permission and this could only be addressed by defining such work as needing planning approval. The main mechanism for achieving this would be the introduction of Article 4.2 Directions in relation to specific residential character properties (fronting a public highway) in the Conservation Area*”. More of this anon!!

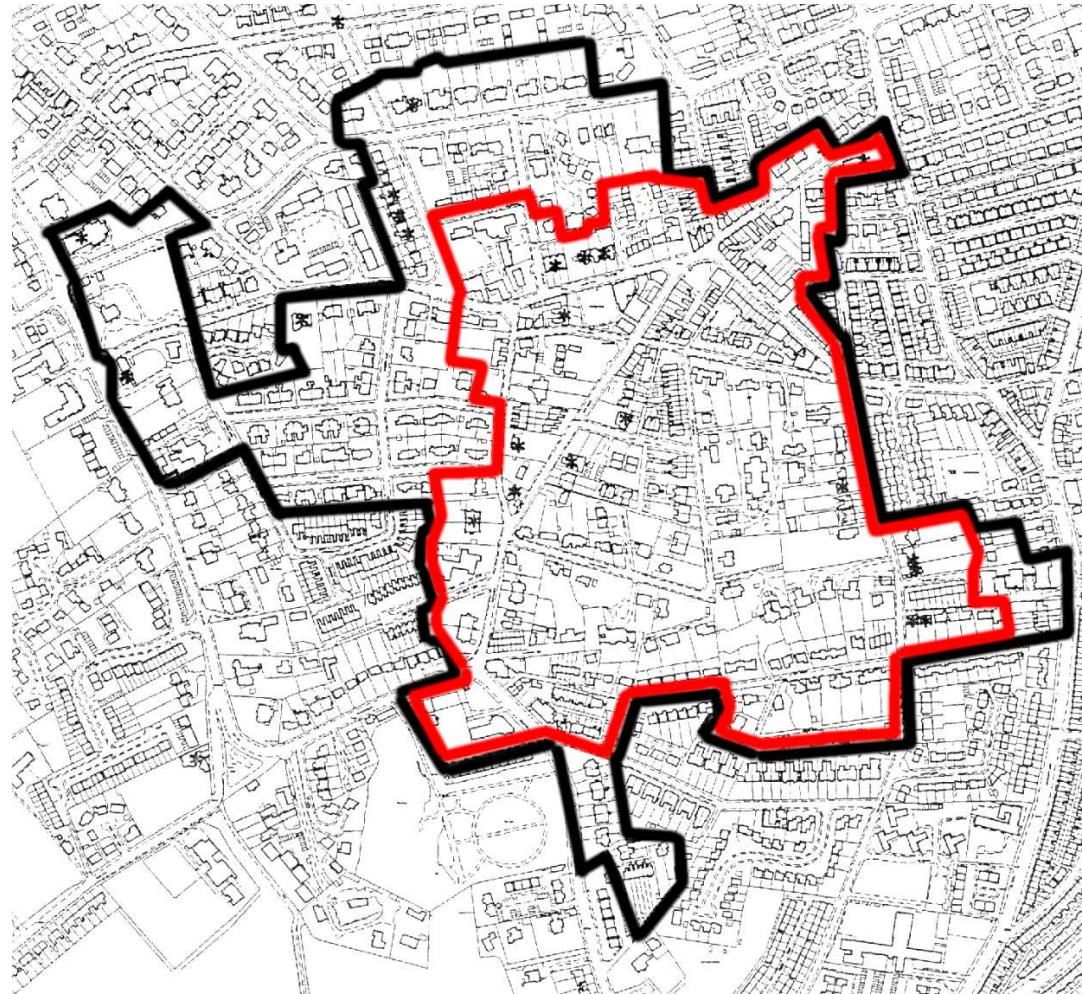


Fig. 5 Oxtown Conservation Area 1979 boundary (red) ,1981 extension (black) and 2010 extension (green)

The boundary in the 1978 report was significantly smaller than the current boundary (see Fig. 5). Essentially it covered the heart of the Conservation Area centred on the original Victorian settlement and the village centre. The

boundary was first amended in 1981 to embrace essentially the Edwardian streets of Templemore, Glenmore and Kylemore and parts of Bidston Road, Shrewsbury Road and Storeton Road. A further extension was agreed in

2010 to add parts of Talbot Road, Birch Road, Village Road and the Normanston area of distinctive terraced housing.

As noted above the primary drive to establishing the Oxton Society came from the need to have some oversight and influence on planning and tree applications. However, once the Oxton Society was fully established in 1979, and Conservation Area status had been granted, one of the first initiatives of the Society was to set about reviving, what was then, the only public space in the village. This was Prices Lane, which was owned by the Local Authority: it was used as a car park for residents and shoppers but had become a derelict eyesore. The Wirral Council in 1980 then approved a scheme for tidying up the site and landscaping it, to provide residents parking and a site for village functions. They also granted a 20-year lease of the land to the Society for a peppercorn rent.

At that time there were job creation programmes which provided labour for free if money could be raised for materials, which would cost £5,000. The Society realised that there was little chance of raising funds for a car park, but there might be funding for a sport related activity. After considerable discussion, the proposal put forward was a Petanque court! Petanque, or Boules, is a French game, similar to bowls, but played with steel boules on

a hard gravel surface, common in villages throughout France. An area would be developed for regular games just off the main part of Prices Lane

Not everyone was happy about the proposal – the June 1981 Society Newsletter noted:

“Some residents are concerned that the playing of Boules on this site will cause a disturbance. We would like to remind members that the Society’s main aim is to tidy up this area and provide a pleasant car park. The use of the site for boules will only be occasional...”

To the Society’s pleasure and surprise, with a letter of support from the British Petanque Society, the scheme was approved, and the area was surfaced and landscaped. There was an opening ceremony in September 1982, when a fete was held on the area in aid of the landscaping fund. Unfortunately, the Petanque pitch did not last and the site reverted to private ownership and is now used as a car park for the houses in Claughton Firs.

What this episode did reveal was that the fledgling Society could do “community” as well as “conservation” and prefigured a substantial increase in the former post 2000 onwards.

2 Oxton Conservation Area new building: The 1970s to 2000s

The 1978 Council report pulled no punches in criticising the impact of a number of new housing developments and this was instrumental in justifying the need for the conservation area designation “....The pressure for redevelopment, arising out of the unsuitability of many of the large houses for modern day living and the development opportunities presented by their large and spacious grounds, had led in a number of cases to some very poor examples, of modern development. Notable examples were 18-24

Fairclough Lane, 12-24 Rose Mount, Oxton Court, new housing along Arno Road and a new large house on Poplar Road..... This modern development had not fitted into the existing townscape and landscape for a number of reasons including the removal of stone walls to allow drive-ins for cars for individual houses and had thus destroyed the visual continuity of a street imposed by the stone wall. This was extremely well exhibited by 18-24 Fairclough Lane.”



Fig.6 Houses on Fairclough Lane (below) and Rose Mount (above) referred to in 1978 report

Conversely the report referred to” A number of good modern infill developments fitting into the existing townscape and landscape and contributing further to the distinctive variety of house types present in Oxton. For example, 25 Newburns Lane, the Midland Bank on Village Road

and a development of 15 new houses at Heathfields on Village Road and new flats at Yewdale Park on Poplar Road.”



Fig.7 Yewdale Park Flats

Some of these views were prefigured in the 1969 Cheshire Life article where the author expressed concern that the village "..... has changed though, now I come to look more closely. That pub car park right in the village centre, contriving to be pokily small yet nastily obtrusive, that wasn't there before. I don't remember those little Noddy houses with their pointed

roofs and staring picture windows, nor those military-looking blocks of flats, drawn up like the married quarters of the modern legions. Somebody has been selling land in Oxton while I've been away, and not making too good a job of it either." ("Birkenhead's Hampstead" Article July 1969 Cheshire Life: the author John Pratt revisiting his old stamping ground)



Fig.8 “That car park in the village centre” 1969 (Cheshire Life July 1969)

Since the Conservation Area was designated there has been a considerable amount of housing development in Oxton. This has been of varying quality and has ranged from a succession of flatted developments and detached, semi-detached and terraced housing. At the better end of the scale has been the Rose Mount Close, Yewdale Park, Storeton Road/Close, and Prices Lane schemes (see below).

The one piece of imaginative modern architecture was built in 1956 at 1 Ingestre Road. It is a flat/brick/timber frame bungalow with a two-storey extension built in 1976. The local architect was J Roy Parker (see Fig.10).

This process of integrating the “old” with the “new” has been challenging, and in many cases unsuccessful, especially where it has involved the

development of high-rise flats of some considerable scale (as in Talbot Court just outside the boundary and built prior to the designation) and low-rise flatted developments, for example, at Roslin Court, Shrewsbury Court and the junction of Village Road and Alton Road.

Clearly there was some tension between protecting the character of the conservation area and accommodating new developments, especially different forms of housing. To date, however, the scale of new housing development has not fundamentally changed the character of the area. The price of preventing this from happening, nevertheless, is eternal vigilance, as undoubtedly some of the developments to date have not been characterised by the words “quality design” and “in sympathy with their surroundings”.



Fig.9 Rosemount Close, Yewdale Park, Storeton Road/Close and Prices Lane



Fig.10 Ingestre Road



Fig11. The flatted developments



Fig.12 The town house developments

3 The Planning Policy of Wirral Council in relation to the Oxton Conservation Area (approved February 2000).

The planning policy for the area was first established with the designation of the Conservation Area in 1979. This was then codified in the CH7 Oxton Village Conservation Area Policy (included in Wirral Council's Unitary Development Plan adopted in February 2000). This stated that:

In relation to Oxton Village Conservation Area the principal planning objectives for the area will be to:

- (i) retain the character of the early Victorian commuter settlement;*
- (ii) preserve the sense of contrast between houses in spacious grounds and cottage scale groups of dwellings;*
- (iii) retain unifying features throughout the Area, such as narrow roads and paths, mature trees, and stone walls; and*
- (iv) retain visual coherence within the retail area, in terms of elevational treatment and the design of shop fronts.*

Outside the retail area, only primarily residential uses will be permitted.

Reasoned justification:

The objective of Policy CH7 is, therefore, to ensure that these distinctive features are preserved and enhanced. These considerations will also apply within the Oxton Village retail area.

Applications for development, including new shop fronts, will, therefore, be specifically required to respect and "mirror" the historic context of the Area. Outside this area, Policy CH7 restricts non-residential uses in order to retain the principally domestic character of the Area and of its historic buildings.

- v) Due to the sensitive nature of the Conservation Area, **outline planning applications** will not normally be accepted."*

Supplementary Planning Guidance Note 21

This is specifically about the Oxton Village Conservation Area. It set out a range of

planning policies as follows:

*(i) **new development** must respect Oxton's historic context in volume, scale, form, materials, and quality, as should proposals for development adjacent to or affecting the setting of the Conservation Area. In considering applications for development within garden areas, particular regard will be given to the setting of the parent building and adjacent dwellings, and to the density of surrounding dwellings;*

*(ii) Proposals for new **development for commercial, office or industrial use** will not normally be acceptable outside the area of existing shops along Rose Mount, Christchurch Road or Claughton Firs. Development will not be permitted if it would generate levels of traffic, parking, noise, or environmental problems which would be detrimental to the character or appearance of the Area;*

*(iii) **New shop fronts** should conform to the Local Planning Authority's Shop Front Design Guide. In particular, advertisements on fascia boards should be painted, and should not consist of individual acrylic lettering. Internally illuminated signs, and externally mounted, solid roller shutters will not normally be permitted;*

*(iv) **The demolition of period buildings** within the Conservation Area will not normally be permitted. This includes buildings such as coach houses, lodges or conservatories, which help to give a historic context to some older properties. Similarly, the demolition, or partial demolition of stone walls, will be resisted. In order to promote their long-term preservation, the conservation Officer has produced a repointing guide, which also relates to the maintenance of other stone buildings; and*

This planning framework was then added to and amended, in part, by the approval of the Oxton Character Appraisal and Conservation Area Management Plan in January 2010.

Applications are referred to the Society for comments by the Wirral Council. The Society is an Advisory Body in this regard and any comments we make are taken account of, but do not have to be endorsed. Ultimately decisions on planning applications are the responsibility of the Wirral Council's Planning Committee. In commenting on planning applications, the Society must interpret how any application relates to the planning framework outlined above and set out in the consequential Management Plan. Above all the Society is concerned with the external appearance of the development.

The degree of judgment the Society exercises clearly varies with the nature and scale of the development proposed. The great majority of the applications seen by the Society are endorsed as acceptable and do not require any substantial comment. Where applications do give rise to concern the Society tries to apply a basic set of principles when responding. These principles can be summarised by the following questions:

1. would the application preserve or enhance the distinctive characteristics of the Conservation Area, especially in relation to its scale, form, design details and use of materials? ;
2. would the application, if approved, create a precedent which could prejudice the ability of the Society to resist similar applications in the future?
3. has the application been submitted in a form which the Society feels accurately represents the location and setting of the development proposal?
4. does the application provide enough information on other aspects of the proposal to allow an informed judgment to be made about its desirability?
5. would the application despite being acceptable, create undesirable effects beyond the site in question, in relation to the construction process, generation of traffic, noise and environmental problems etc;
6. have similar applications been submitted previously and is the Society's response consistent?



Fig13. “retain the character of the early Victorian commuter settlement”



Fig.14 “retain visual coherence within the retail area, in terms of elevational treatment and the design of shop fronts”

At all times the Society tries to make its judgments in an impartial and informed manner in line with the above planning framework and principles. Inevitably, however, when judgments are being made there will be differences of opinion between the Society and local applicants, and with the planning officers responsible for advising the Wirral Council's Planning Committee. Indeed, the Society has been concerned about the degree to which the latter's interpretation of their planning framework is diverging from that of the Society.

As indicated above, the Society does not attempt to act as an arbitrator between individual applicants and the Council. Neither does it wish to enter negotiations on behalf of either party – although it can offer views from the perspective of a Conservation Society. It may be necessary for the Society's Planning Group to undertake a 'site visit' so that it can make informed comments. In doing this the Society will conduct the visit with decorum and in small numbers; thus, acting on behalf of its members and in the role agreed with the Council. These are not 'personal' matters but matters of "impersonal" judgment by the Society acting, at all times, to try to ensure the Conservation Area is preserved and enhanced.

Throughout this period there was a continuing problem of the limited ability of the Wirral Council to deal with a range of problems associated with unauthorised developments and changes to the character of the Conservation Area. This was notably the case in the village centre where there was widespread use of roller shutters and inappropriate shop fascias which contravened the planning framework of the Council. Eventually many of these changes were effectively immune from any enforcement because the time limit on Council action had passed. A similar situation existed in relation to modifications to a number of the sandstone walls and the creation of run-ins for cars. This was when the Wirral Council's Conservation Section had three full time officers; it now has one (see below).

4 The Changing Context post 2000-2010: embracing the community

Xmas Lights

From 2000 onwards the Oxton Society began to spread its wings to embrace conservation and community as inextricably intertwined. The committee attracted some new blood and a conversation emerged about how it could engage in some new activities. The first suggestion was the brainchild of Patrick Toosey. He suggested we should light up the village centre over the Xmas period. As part of this we should have a switch-on the lights event. Initially it caused some considerable dissension centred on the financial risk of depleting the society funds. In fact, it did lead to the resignation of the then secretary. Nevertheless, the risk was taken, and the Xmas lights have been a feature of village life since then.

Secret Gardens

This was quickly followed by a suggestion from another member of the committee of why not have an annual Secret Gardens Event. Ian Wray remembered that *".....The story goes like this. About 25 years ago we are on holiday in North Cornwall in a charming Landmark Trust property at Coombe (where they have preserved an entire hamlet). For some reason we take ourselves to a nearby village - Kilkhampton I think - where, in an extremely amateur way, three or four fairly ordinary gardens in terraced cottages have been opened. Nothing to do with the National Gardens Scheme or any hifalutin horticulture. So, we have our cups of tea and cake and when we come back the Oxton Soc renewal subscription is waiting. I attach my cheque to the little form and send it back scribbling on the back - 'what about opening some of the gardens in Oxton every year? We could charge for entry and call it the Secret Gardens of Oxton'. This little note finds its way to John Hinchcliffe, who was chair at the time, and the rest is*

- The event has raised the profile of Oxton as a place to live, work and visit and there is anecdotal evidence that it has increased community engagement and cohesion This year's Secret gardens was a major success, helped by a beautiful day of sunshine which brought out the

history". As with the Xmas lights the Secret Garden event has been an annual feature of village life for the last 19 years. The first event was a total of 8 gardens in aid of the Sam Scanner Appeal and as Patrick Toosey (the lead organiser) has noted "we anticipated 200 people would turn up but 800 came causing considerable traffic chaos".

Between 2001 to 2019:

- 93 different gardens have opened
- Profits of £352,347 have been made with 60% going to local charities and 40% to Conservation Area improvements including hanging baskets, tree planting, Xmas Lights, street furniture
- 58,321 over 18 adults have visited the event alongside many younger people and children
- The event won the Wirral Tourism award for Wirral Event of the Year-2013
- Civic Voice, Marsh Civic Award, highly commended for Secret Gardens; one of five civic societies to receive the award for its "Outstanding contribution to the Civic Movement"
- The event won a Britain in Bloom (RHS) Award 2017.
- Some 400 volunteers are involved in planning, promoting and the delivery of the event on the day.

crowds in their thousands. Ticket sales were up by 10% on 218 and over 3,000 visitors saw about 20 gardens. The refreshments, Raffle and Plant Stall (Friends of the Arno) also made record returns, along with the children's entertainments run by the Woodcraft Folk. A major departure was the Makers' Market in the village centre, organised by

Kate of Green's with about 18 street food stalls and craft offerings – which proved to be very popular. This all added up to a very healthy

profit-share for the Society and our partner charities.



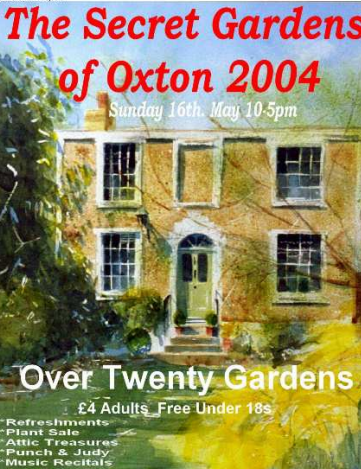
Fig.15 Xmas Lights

Proceeds to West Kirby Residential School
Winnal Holistic Care Services
Tubers Oxtou Projects

Picture by Chris Millichamp
653 0116

The Secret Gardens of Oxtou 2004

Sunday 16th. May 10-5pm



Over Twenty Gardens
£4 Adults. Free Under 18s

Refreshments
Plant Sale
Attic Treasures
Punch & Judy
Music Recitals
Arts & Crafts

Advance tickets contact:
Patrick Toosey 20 Rose Mount
Drawing Room 50 Christchurch Road

Tickets on the day:
20 Rose Mount 3 Mount Olive,
39 Village Road (Holly Lodge)
Drawing Room

the secret gardens of Oxtou



9th May 2010 10am - 5pm in Oxtou Village

30 gardens to visit and free park and river (CH3 5TW)
Purveyors music, arts and crafts for sale, refreshments and plant sale,
gardening advice, pony rides, shops, restaurants and pubs,
Punch & Judy and much more. A fun day out for all the family.

Tickets £7 on the day (under -18s free)
or buy in advance and save £2.00 from:


- The Drawing Room (50 Christchurch Rd)
- The Quandary Dress Agency (21 Rose Mount)
- Oxtou Village Books (44 Christchurch Rd)

or by post before April 28

For more information
ring 07963 248 268
or see www.oxtousociety.org.uk



Buy in advance
save £2




the (2nd) secret gardens of oxtou

Sunday May 12th 2002 / 10.00 am till 5.00 pm
Adults £4 (including map)
Children under 18 free
Refreshment station / plant sale /
photo and painting exhibition / chinese raffle

advance ticket / map sales contact:
Patrick Toosey 20 Rosemount Oxtou 652 1653

Buy in advance and start your visit at any garden
tickets are available on the day at 8 Victoria Mount




the secret gardens of oxtou 2005

Sunday 8th. May 10am-5pm

over twenty four gardens
adults £4 (if purchased before April 30th)
£5 thereafter/ children under 18 free
teas/plant sale/pony rides/barrel organ
chinese raffle/arts and crafts sale
punch and judy/music/golf competition
tickets available from shops in Oxtou village
centre & 20 Rose Mount
telephone information line 07963248268

charities supported will be the Iron Society,
Tam O' Shanter Urban Farm, Mental Society for the
West and Paralympic Sports Centre
and Youth Club Rock, Fairy
Nave Oxtou projects

Illustration by
Chris Millichamp
653 0116

Proceeds to:
St John's Hospice
Shaftesbury Dogs Club
Tubers Oxtou Projects

THE SECRET GARDENS OF OXTOU

Twenty Gardens

SUNDAY 11th May 10-5

Refreshments/ Plant Sale/ Bookstall
Arts and Crafts
Chinese Raffle
Organ Recitals/ Brass Band / Folk Music

Tickets £4 Adults. Free for Children (under 18).
Contact Patrick Topsey 20 Rose Mount 652 1653
Sara Ewing The Drawing Room 652 8452

Sunday 11th May
10.00 to 5.00

Secret Gardens of Oxtou

29 gardens and much more

Free car parking Woodstock Oxtou Road (between CH3 5TW)
Tickets £2.00 in advance, Oxtou 1900
Information: 07963 248 268 www.oxtousociety.org.uk

Plant sale, Chinese raffle,
arts and crafts, second hand books
music

Photographic Exhibition
and sale

THE SECRET GARDENS OF OXTOU

Sunday May 11th. 2003
10am to 5pm

Adults £4.00 including map
Children Free

In aid of St. John's Hospice
and Shaftesbury Club



Fig16. Publicising the event and the first Secret Garden Ticket (2001)



Fig. 17 A selection of garden owners



Fig. 18 Secret Gardens: the village centre

The Village Centre Hanging Baskets project

An unusual feature of the Conservation Area is that while it is principally a residential area it also has a vibrant well-defined business centre with a unique character. The Society is committed to support and promote this important asset. In 2001 it was decided that the Xmas Lights should be accompanied in the summer by a display of hanging baskets. This meant working with individual businesses and was consistent with the treescape of the village. It also was a means of raising the profile of the village centre and improving its attractiveness.

The project has expanded and improved over the following years so by 2015 the number of baskets had increased from 14 in 2001 to 52. Given the scale of this increase the Society installed an automatic watering system at a cost of about £4,000. The cost of the initial investment in the automatic watering system was very considerably reduced thanks to its design and installation was (and still is) provided by a member of the committee who is a professional plumber.

Since 2015 a small family-run local nursery in south Wirral [Dovecote Nurseries, Burton] has been the exclusive supplier of baskets for the

Project. This has enabled the baskets to achieve uniform and high-quality displays. At the end of the season all the contents of the baskets are recycled by local gardeners or by the Friends of the Arno and Arno Fields, our adjacent public park.

The success of the hanging baskets was rewarded in 2016 when the Society won the cup for Best Neighbourhood in the North West in the 'North West in Bloom' competition run by Britain in Bloom. This was followed in 2017 when the Britain in Bloom judges awarded a Gold Medal in the Best Urban Community class. Oxton got a Gold Award in the village category for 2018 and another Gold Award in 2019. Wirral's projects generally showcased a huge amount of volunteer hours, going all out to improve local areas, including Oxton and the Arno Fields. One of the best outcomes is how the projects have brought everyone together to improve areas for residents to live and work in.

The baskets display will continue but the Society is looking at options for making the project more cost effective and involving directly more of the local businesses.



Fig. 19 Hanging baskets and 2016 award

5 The Changing Context post 2000-2010: focusing on the character of the conservation area

Another feature of the post 2000 period was the increasing focus of the Society on the potential and actual threats to the character of the Conservation Area. There was a feeling that an incremental process was taking place of small-scale changes to buildings and walls which were not effectively part of the planning control system. While small in scale these were beginning to have an undesirable impact on the character of the area. In addition, the Society was of the view that added protection could be given to three areas, currently adjacent but outside the Conservation Area boundary (see below). As part of the appraisal we asked if these areas could be considered for inclusion within the boundary.

A range of discussions took place with the Wirral Council as the ultimate custodian of the Conservation Area. This led to an agreement in 2008/9 to jointly fund a new character appraisal of the area. A firm of consultants, Insalls based in Chester, were appointed to undertake the appraisal. They had experience doing the appraisals of many of the Wirral's other conservation areas and were nationally acknowledged as having expertise and insight. The appraisal was published in 2010 and was the product of an intensive partnership between the Society, Wirral Council and Insalls.

What emerged in the appraisal was a fascinating classification of the merits of both the buildings and the proposed extensions. The contribution of all the buildings in the Conservation Area, listed and unlisted, to the character of the conservation area were considered. This illustrated in Fig. Nearly every building dating from before the Second World War was considered to make either a **crucial or positive contribution** to the Conservation Area.

Those considered to make a **crucial** contribution were the listed buildings and those unlisted buildings that are important local landmarks, or that have a particular townscape function. This includes those good quality buildings that enclose the street scene or terminate a view.

Those designated as making a **positive** contribution (coloured yellow in Fig. 21) included the historic buildings that retain all or most of their original

character and appearance and/or which contribute to the street scene. These range from those that are virtually unaltered to others may have been subject to changes such as replacement doors and windows of different design, new roof materials, extensions and altered boundaries. Despite these changes, which are individually and cumulatively detrimental to their architectural and historic interest, they are buildings which currently retain sufficient of their original design and fabric to add to the special interest of the conservation area. There are over 400 of these dwellings in the Conservation Area. In many ways these are the buildings most at risk in terms of degradation to their character. They do not have the protection afforded by a statutory listing and much of their potential changes to, for example, windows, doors and roofs, is permitted development under the current planning control regime. This was the principal reason the consultants in the Character Appraisal recommended an Article 4 Direction to bring these elements within the planning control regime. Wirral Council were concerned about the resource implications of this proposal for their Planning Service and only agreed to the inclusion of this in the subsequent Management Plan with the addition of the words "...when resources permit". Fig 23 illustrates the properties that come into this category. What can be said, however, is that generally the owners of these buildings have bought into the conservation agenda and respected the positive character of their dwellings.

The advent of a national austerity agenda in 2010 clearly had a major effect on local councils across the country. Wirral was among the councils most badly affected and faced with declining budgets it was agreed to make savings by reducing the Conservation Team from three officers to one in 2014. Not only did this rule out any possibility of implementing an Article 4 Direction, as explained above, it also put even greater pressure on the ability of the Council to enforce its planning framework; as the resource for that function was also reduced significantly and only the most urgent cases could be pursued.



OXTON CONSERVATION AREA APPRAISAL

Prepared for Wirral Council and The Oxton Society
by Donald Insall Associates Ltd

January 2010

DONALD INSALL ASSOCIATES LTD, Bridgegate House, 5 Bridge Place, Chester, CH1 1SA
01244 350063 chester@insall-architects.co.uk www.insall-architects.co.uk



Oxton Conservation Area Management
Plan

January 2010

Prepared by the Oxton Society



Fig. 20 The Character Appraisal and Management Plan 2010

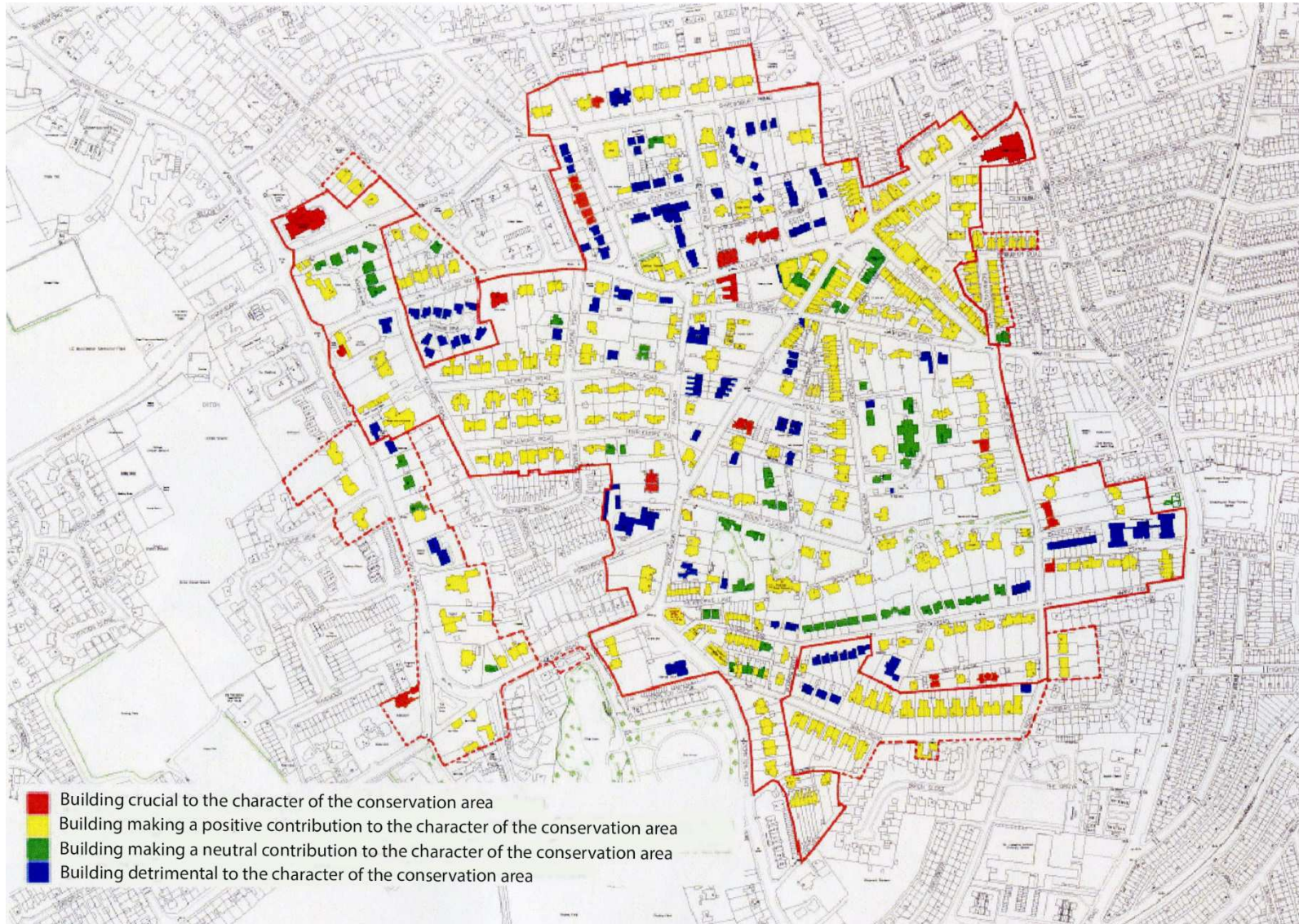


Fig. 21 The classification of buildings in the Conservation Area



Fig. 22 Examples of character dwellings (not listed) but making a positive contribution to the Conservation Area

The Oxton Conservation Area is also characterised by a number of listed buildings. There are 35 listed buildings and structures within the current conservation area boundary. The majority are listed at Grade II, with the Church of St Saviour listed at Grade II*. The listings occurred in two main periods-prior to 1981 and post 1981 (see fig 24). These buildings have

Prior to 1981 listed buildings in Oxton CA: 15

Christ Church

Walls and battlements of 32 Christchurch Road

Village Road 14,16,18,20,22,24

3 Village Road 2 & 4 Willan Street

30 Shrewsbury Road Holly Lodge Village Road

St Saviours Church Oxton old hall Talbot Road

Post 1981 listed buildings in Oxton CA:20

Alton Road 5,7,9,11,13,15 14 Arno Road

Fairview Road 14,16,17,20 Rose Mount 16,18,39,41

South Bank 3,5,7,11,13

All the listed buildings contribute positively to the character and appearance of the area, either through their landmark status or as prime examples of typical buildings in the area.

special protection and a planning application is required for most changes and any demolition. The buildings form an important part of the character of the area. Most of them reflect the neo Georgian and Victorian and Edwardian origins of the area. However, the oldest listed building is Oxton Old Hall dated early 17th C (see Fig 25).



Fig. 23 Listed Buildings in the Oxtou Conservation Area



Fig. 24 The oldest listed building: Oxton old hall probably early 17th Century

Walls

As was noted at the beginning of this bulletin it is not just buildings but other man-made features, principally boundary walls and hard surfaces, which make a positive contribution to the area. Cumulatively the sandstone and brick boundary walls found throughout the area are crucial to the character and appearance of Oxton. In recent years a number of these structures have been degraded or at risk. This has been due to two main factors- the

creation of hard standing runs for cars and tree growth. In other cases, it has been down to sheer neglect, notably in relation to the sandstone wall surrounding the site of Ashton House and other NHS facilities adjacent to Alton Road and Kent Street.

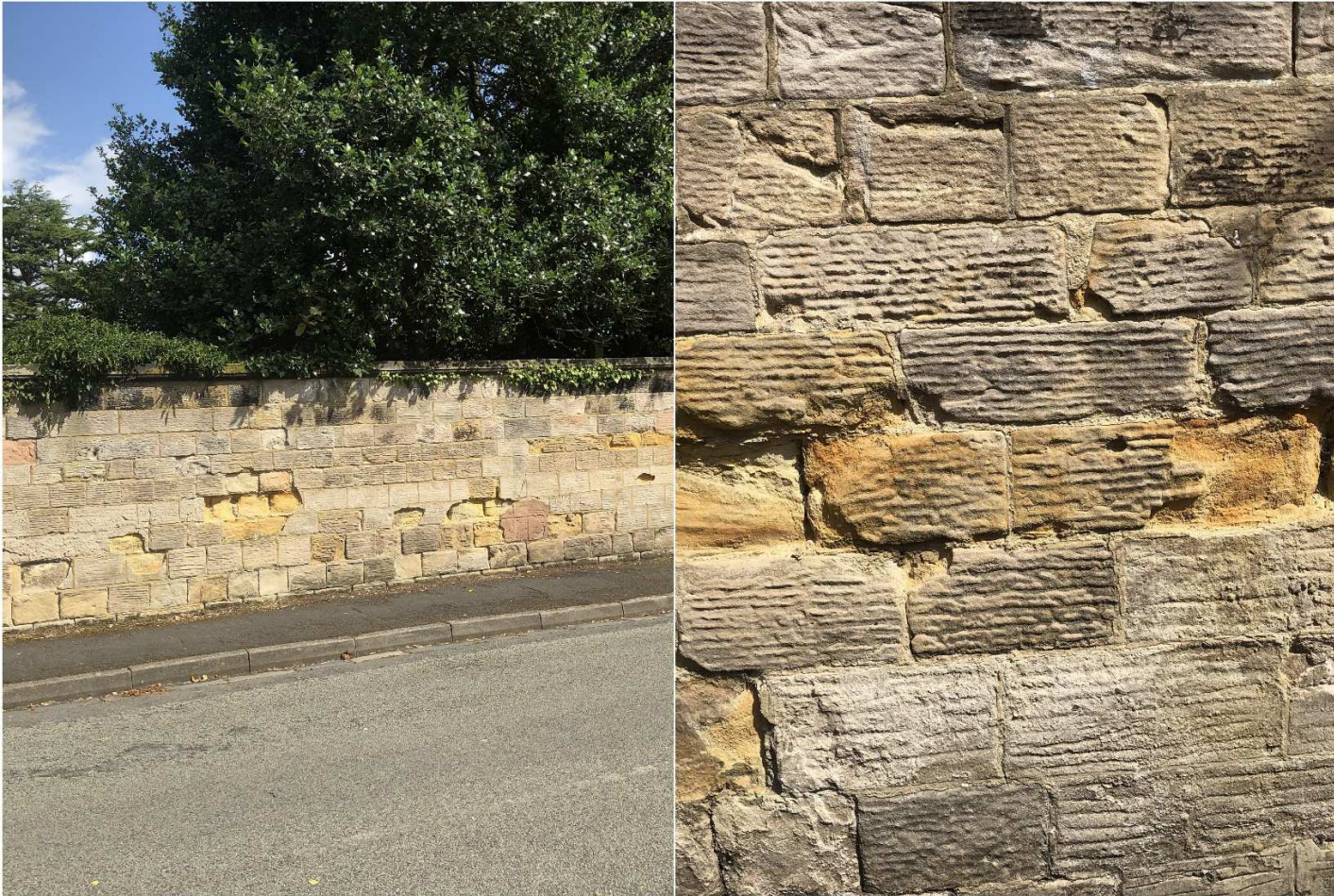


Fig. 25 Sandstone wall in very poor condition on Alton Road surrounding NHS facility

The Society has posted a note on its web site (<https://theoxtonsociety.co.uk>) advising residents and others how to properly undertake any work on walls. There are also a number of wall

contractors who have the necessary expertise to undertake such works. Details of these contractors are available in the advice note referred to above.



Fig. 26 Sandstone wall restoration on Rose Mount: example of good practice

Before a wall can be demolished in the Conservation Area you **have to apply for permission** and the legal position on this changed as a result of a High Court judgement in 2017. **Any** partial demolition of a wall now

requires planning permission, and the previous 50% threshold has been removed. This information came to light following the enforcement complaint that the Society made regarding a house in Palm Hill. The

Society regards this as a crucial addition to protect the walls of Oxton which are a defining part of the area's character.

Treescape Trees are the other feature that make a significant contribution to many street scenes and to the skyline of the area. They animate the street scene and give a distinctiveness to the area which is starkly illustrated in Fig 28.

The responses to applications for tree works have been a fundamental part of the Society's work to protect and enhance the character of the Conservation Area. The Wirral Council have acknowledged that the Society is an important partner in this process and have respected the validity of the Society's comments. The decision as to whether proposed work on trees is acceptable is taken by Wirral Borough Council, not by the Society. However, as the Society is an Advisory Body to the Council, we are asked for our opinion on the proposed work, although any comments we make do not have to be endorsed by the Council.

The Society has a Tree Group responsible for drafting the responses to the Council. The Group comprises interested members and although some have significant experience of working with trees their perspective is not technical. The group's comments are reported in the Society's Newsletter and published on the website.

The Group try to make their judgements in an impartial and informed manner and focus on the impact the proposed work will have on the appearance of the tree and its relationship to other trees, buildings and roads. The Group is particularly concerned about those trees that are visible from a public place although owners must notify Wirral Borough Council of *all* proposed work – whether or not it can be seen from a public

place. When making visits the Tree Group works within a clear Code of Practice.

The Society also encourages the planting of trees and has established a Tree Planting Fund to pay for the sourcing and planting of trees on members' properties in the Conservation Area. The trees chosen for Tree Fund support will be those that will attain a significant stature to contribute to the treescape for future generations. An extensive **list of trees** suitable for planting in Oxton has been prepared and it provides comments about the trees' characteristics. However, we are always willing to consider other suggestions and the selection of a particular tree for planting is always discussed and agreed with the property owner. The fund has planted over 50 trees since the scheme was launched in 2006/07. Of those only 4 have died and two, planted in public places, have been vandalised. It is now the Society's policy to protect with heavy duty screens those trees which are planted in places exposed to vandalism.

As the trees planted under the scheme are intended to contribute to the future treescape of the Conservation Area approval is limited to their planting in a place which is visible to members of the public. This usually means near the frontage of the property. The scheme is open to any member whose property is within the Conservation Area and includes individual, household or corporate membership. More than one tree on a single property can be funded. The terms for planting under the scheme usually include a requirement that the owners undertake to generously water the newly planted tree(s) on a regular and frequent basis throughout the first growing season.



Fig. 27 The glorious treescape of Oxtown from the St Catherine's Hospital site:



Fig. 28 The magnificent treescape of Fairview Road from both directions

Extensions to the Conservation Area

The 1981 boundary encompassed many of the older buildings in the village and its historic origins. It was also fairly clearly defined by roads and ownership boundaries. However, it excluded four key areas which are defined on Fig 30 below. The Character Appraisal in 2010 was tasked with analysing these areas and assessing whether they should be incorporated in the Conservation Area. Each of these areas, and its contribution to the character of the conservation area, was considered in detail and it was recommended they should be included. There was also a recognition that

the impact of these direction orders would be an increased workload for the development control administration of Wirral Council, but on balance it was felt that this was desirable in the interests of protecting the special qualities of the area. These designations then completed the boundary of the Conservation Area as it stands today. Effectively for the Society this represented the area of maximum importance in terms of the conservation of Oxton and its associated heritage.



Fig. 29 Birch Road and Normanston Road extensions

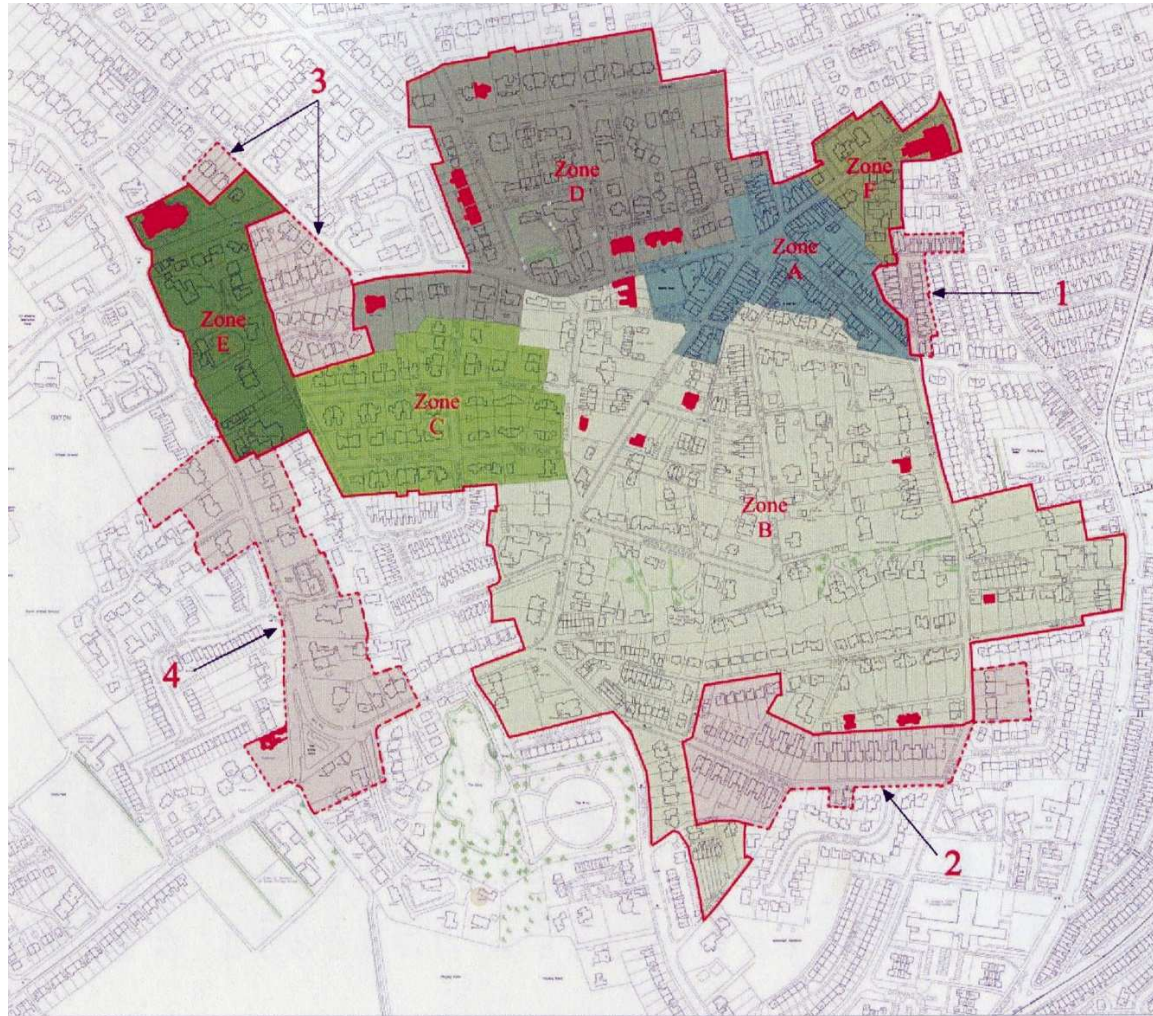


Fig.30 Area 1: Normanston Road/Derwent Road Area 2: Birch Road Area 3: Village Road and Wellington Road Area 4: Talbot Road, Mill Hill and Ingestre Road

6 The Village Centre

When you look at photos of the village centre in the early part of the 20th century two things stand out:

1 the junction of Village Road, Christchurch Road and Rose Mount is the central space properly framed by the surroundings, especially the old Talbot Hotel fronting the street; and

2 the harmony and fearful symmetry of the buildings, roofscape and chimney scape on Rose Mount and Cloughton Firs.

The village centre has lost some of that sense of enclosure at the crossroads and the buildings are a greater hotchpotch of changes to their facades, signage and general appearance viability and sustainability (see Fig 31 and 32). Well the jury is still out, but there are now signs that it is emerging with a new role and *raison d'être*



Fig. 31 The Village Centre early 20th C



Fig. 32 Cloughton Firs: after and before

The Society has been concerned that the walk-in retail function of the centre was gradually being eroded and replaced with a more service, bars and restaurant functions. Indeed, when the Council introduced for the first time, the concept of Oxton's night-time economy the Society was taken aback by this concept and expressed concern that it was alien and unsuited to the ambience of a Conservation Area. Nevertheless, the Council embodied this concept in its planning policy and the momentum towards this end state was reinforced by the demise of a number of the traditional retail outlets and the appearance of a number of bars, restaurants and service functions.

The concern about this trend was symbolised by the Society inserting a clause in the lease to the developer of the former Midland bank site in 2007 that prohibited the sale of alcohol from any part of the development. This restrictive covenant is still in place.

The development of the bank site became a cause celebre which has eventually been resolved with the near completion of the scheme in 2019; nearly 12 years after the initial planning permission was granted. The Society is now content with the scheme's design and its integration with its surroundings. The final element is the completion of the landscaping of the site's frontage which is the subject of a legal agreement between the Society and the developer.

Another aspect of the village centre has been the gradual improvement in the design and appearance of the facades of the businesses. The village was characterised by some very poor facades and ugly metal grills. This has now been ameliorated by a number of striking facades a number of which have been the recipients of the Society's design awards e.g. Edwards, Drawing Room, Christine Lesley's hairdressing salon and Greens. Awards were also made to the former businesses of Elegant Steps and Hudson's Design.



Fig. 33 “The Willows” is nearly completed but just needs the fence removed and the front of the development landscaped



Fig. 34 There has been a gradual improvement of the facades of many of the businesses



Fig. 35 Village Centre businesses 2015 and 2019: businesses come and go but some appear to be forever

Fig.35 does, however, highlight the relatively high turnover of businesses in the village; even between 2015 and 2019. The village lost 14 of its businesses and gained 12 new businesses over this 5-year period. The losses included Tea for two, Halligans, Simply Drinks, Adams, Rowlands and Brimark. The gains included Bon Bakery, Sabrosa, Thyme, The Stag Barbers, Home Brew and Oxton Boutique.

There are continuing problems which need to be addressed related to maintaining the viability and amenity of the village centre. Not least of these is the shortage of suitable parking places and the irresponsible parking and speeding of a minority of car users. There are no simple solutions to these problems, but the Society is collaborating with the local councillors to look at options for tackling them.

7 The History Group and Blue Plaques

John Green, a local resident, had amassed a considerable archive about Oxton's history and had been conducting guided walks to the east and west of the area for some years. He was the inspiration for the History Group. Sadly, John passed away in 2012.

Early in 2009 he decided to retire and passed on his invaluable work to Bob Knowles. In January 2010 the inaugural meeting of the History Group convened and made plans. Following in John's footsteps that same year,

those two updated walks were advertised and have been running ever since. A few historical items were written for the Newsletter, but it was clear that people were interested and that Oxton was dripping with history. The first full Periodical was therefore published in June 2011, featuring articles on two important Oxton institutions, its pubs and churches. To date 32 Periodicals have been published, packed with original research and fascinating stories. The first 25 have been published in a hardback book.



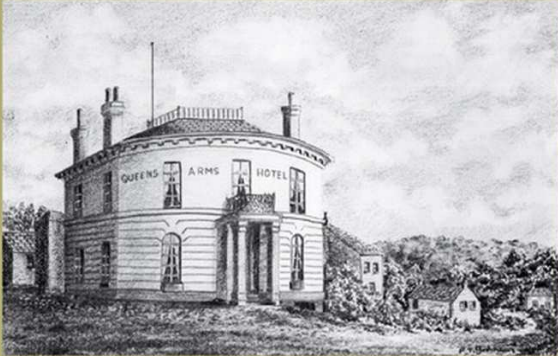
Fig. 36 In 2009 John Green was presented with a lifetime achievement award by Steve Maddox (former Chief Executive of Wirral Council)

The History Research Group now meets on a monthly basis, to plan and organise the work of its members, which has included over the years responding to personal queries, History Open Days, stalls at the Wirral History and Heritage Fair and at the Secret Gardens, presentations all over the Wirral, and in schools. There are now four guided Walks, East, West, the Arno and from the Williamson. Now around 200 people a year attend

these walks – that’s around 2,000 people over the years. The guides aim to entertain as well as inform the walkers.

Special topics have been published as Booklets; Edith Smith our first woman police officer, the Oxton Suffragettes and Cyril Scott the composer and poet. These are available from the Oxton Bookshop in the Williamson as are the ever-growing paper archive, articles, photos and postcards.

Oxton History Walks 2019



In the process of changing from an agricultural village to a growing and prosperous community of merchants, farmers and tradespeople, Oxton Village developed its own distinctive features and culture that is still alive today. Much of what Oxton has to offer is clearly visible but the stories of events and people from history are best told entertainingly by an Oxton Society Guide.

EAST WALKS:
Fairview Road, South Bank, Arno Road
15 May, 22 June, 17 August, 21 September

WEST WALKS:
Village Road, St. Saviours, Wellington Road
11 May, 8 June, 20 July, 18 September

ARNO WALKS:
Ingestre Road, Birch Road, Woodchurch Road
27 April, 25 May, 6 July, 14 September

NEW FOR 2019
Williamson Walks
Starting at the Williamson Art Gallery CH43 4UE
Slatery Road, Devonshire Place, Beresford Road
19 May, 22 September

The East and The West Walks begin in the village centre by the post box CH43 5SF
The Arno Walk starts by the play area near Sainsburys car park CH42 8PQ

All walks start at 11am and last about 1hour 30minutes.


To book please ring Oxton Village Books on 0151 652 0202

If no-one is available please leave a message with your telephone number.
We can also offer tailor-made walks for small groups or organisations on any day of the week.

Periodical No 30 February 2019 compiled by the History Group of the Oxton Society free to members

OXTON HISTORY


Eastcourt



Standing at the junction of Talbot Road and Holm Lane, **Eastcourt** (which is a **Grade II listed building**) is a supreme example of the grand style of residences that began to appear in Oxton during the 1840's and 1850's. When W.W. Mortimer (writing in 1847) said of Oxton that although just 20 years earlier the township had been described as a *scene of extreme misery*, he then felt required to say of Oxton that now it contains "... many elegant villas, and houses of every description and every style of architecture adorn the place". Mortimer might easily have been referring to **Eastcourt** – although its exact date of building is yet to be confirmed (but most probably very early 1850's). But it was not just the building itself, as obviously grand as it is, that gives to us today an impression of the residential development of Oxton in those times. What was built here then were quite simply *merchants' palaces* and of course *palaces* have *grounds*. **Eastcourt's** extensive formal and professionally landscaped grounds ran off from the house then down into Holm Lane and, of course, there was a grass tennis court and an extensive *orangery* there! In the later years of the 19th century, and as the scramble for building plots in Oxton intensified, many other *grand* residences were built here of course, but most of them were never quite as grand as those built during Oxton's earliest development – those like **Eastcourt**. This (watercolour) painting of **Eastcourt** is the work of the acclaimed Scottish artist, and publisher of many books on painting, **Maira Huntly**, and it is dated 1977. She was a family friend and a regular house guest of the Foster family who lived at **Eastcourt** between 1949 and 1997 - and the last family to do so before the building was converted into apartments. The original painting is still within the ownership of one of the Foster family, although that particular member of their family now lives in Nassau. It is reproduced here with the Foster family's approval.

Mill Hill

In an attempt to discover the actual date of building of **Eastcourt**, a scan through the 1851 Census return for Oxton was not particularly helpful but it gave, at least, a suggestion – but only that – of when it might have been built. It was the case at that time that certain parts of Oxton were described generally – as examples, *Arno Hill* and *South Bank* (literally, the south part of Oxton, and not just that little lane that today runs between Fairview Road and Arno Road) – so quite what *Mill Hill* was then given to describe we cannot be entirely sure, but perhaps it would have meant the general area of today's Mill Hill roadway. And, when you think of it, that's where **Eastcourt** sits of course! Only three residences were recorded in that Census as being on *Mill Hill*, but of most interest however is a simple (but annoyingly vague) entry between two of those residences – **Four Houses Building!** Was **Eastcourt** one of those 'four houses' then building? Perhaps in time, and after further research, we will know the answer.



17

Fig. 37 History periodicals

The Blue Plaque Scheme

On 18 March 2002 at 18 Village Road, Oxton, a blue plaque was installed by English Heritage as part of their English Heritage outside London series. It was inscribed “*Sir Patrick Abercrombie 1879-1957 Town and Country Planning Pioneer lived here 1915 -1935*”

It was envisaged that this might be the forerunner of many more plaques outside London. However, the scheme was abandoned and only the London element retained. Surprise, Surprise!!

In 2016 Conservation Areas Wirral (CAW) launched their Blue Plaque scheme. This stimulated the Society to introduce a scheme for Oxton in

partnership with CAW. This was launched in July 2017 with the unveiling of a plaque to honour Brigadier Sir Philip Toosey at his former home in Rose Mount, Oxton. Sir Philip was the war hero played by Sir Alec Guinness in big screen epic, Bridge on the River Kwai. The ceremony was led by two former prisoners of war commemorating their commanding officer – Gunners Maurice Naylor, 96, from Leicester and Fergus Anckorn, 98, from Sussex and was attended by family, friends and members of the Oxton Society.

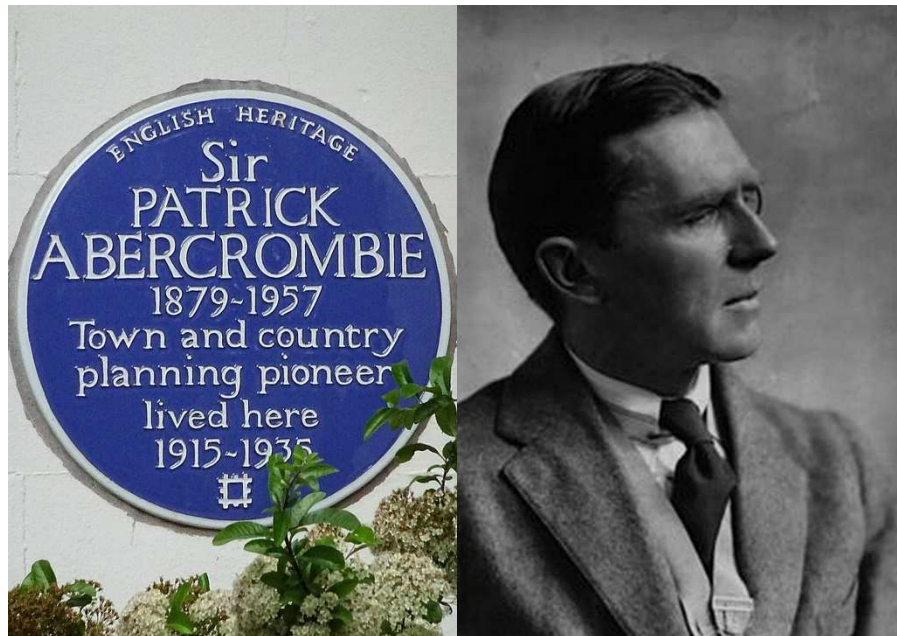


Fig. 38 The Blue Plaque for Sir Patrick Abercrombie at 18 Village Road



Fig. 39 The new Oxton Blue Plaques

Edith Smith, who was the first woman to become a warranted police officer, was born and bred in Oxton. She lived in 18 Palm Hill where members of the Oxton Society and their guests assembled on June 16th to unveil our second Blue Plaque. Edith made her mark in Grantham where she looked after the welfare of the town's young women given the proximity of army barracks at Catterick. The ceremony was attended by Courtney Finn from the Grantham Civic Society, who helped with Edith's biography, and members of her family, including her granddaughter, Margaret Smith who unveiled the plaque.

In June 2019 the first of two Cyril Scott plaques was unveiled by Vasily Petrenko, Chief Conductor of the (RLPO) Royal Liverpool Philharmonic

Orchestra at a small ceremony at the Laurels on the corner of Kylemore and Village Rd. Cyril Meir Scott (27 September 1879 – 31 December 1970) was a composer, poet and writer. He spent his childhood in Oxton, living in the house. His style of music was essentially late romantic. Sir Eugene Goossens, referred to Scott as the "Father of British Music". The second plaque was unveiled on the next day by the Georgian pianist, Nino Gvetadze- who is currently making recordings of the composer's work for Challenge Records – who gave a wonderful talk about the music of Cyril Scott. The plaque is on the house in Rich View where the composer was born on September 27th, 1897.



Fig. 40 Unveiling of Cyril Scott blue plaque by Vasily Petrenko accompanied by the Deputy Mayor and Mayoress of Wirral

8 The Design Awards

The Society's Design Award scheme, established in 2006, is designed to encourage and celebrate projects which contribute to maintaining and enhancing the special character of the Conservation Area. Awards are made at the Society's AGM. Eligible projects must be located within the Conservation Area and have been completed within the two years prior to the AGM. A wide range and scale of projects, both residential and commercial, are eligible for consideration including:

*A new building

*An addition to an existing building

*A renovation, upgrade or repair of an existing building

*The renovation, repair or improvement of outside features within the curtilage of the property, such as boundary walls, hard and soft landscaping, including tree planting



Fig. 41 Design Award plaque 2009

In assessing projects for an award, the Society has regard to the following criteria:

- *Making a positive contribution to the character of the Conservation Area
- *The quality of the design and its sensitivity to the context in which the project is located
- *The skillful use of appropriate materials
- *Creating a visible example of good practice which can inspire future projects of its type
- *Compliance with the approved planning framework for the Conservation Area

Houses and Walls

2 Mount Pleasant extension
22 Rose Mount Conservatory
10 Victoria Mount house extension
Well cottage Well Lane cottage refurbishment
20 Fairview Road artist studio
Wirral Lodge cottage Newburns Lane
5 Roslin Road wall restoration
13 Mount Pleasant restoration

Commendation

16 Cloughton Firs refurbishment
53 Rose Mount wall restoration

Projects are assessed by the Society's Executive Committee against the above criteria, taking into account advice from a panel of independent experts.

The most outstanding projects(s) are presented with a plaque. Other projects of merit may be awarded a

Certificate of Commendation. Nominations are made by members of the Society at any time during the year.

To date 18 design awards and 3 commendations have been made to a variety of projects ranging from shop facades to sandstone wall restoration to artist's studio to extension/conservatory to parish centre to church restoration to village car park. This symbolises the extent to which residents and businesses are willing to produce quality designs and go the extra mile to implement them. The projects include:

Shop Fronts

Christine Lesley's hairdressing salon
Drawing Room
Edwards Store
Hudson's Design Shop
Home Coffee
Elegant steps wedding shoes
Chutney Restaurant

Commendation

Greens of Oxtan

Others

Prices Lane car Park
Wirral Christian Centre
St. Saviours Parish Centre



Fig. 42 Design awards to 20 Fairview Road (above) and St Saviours Parish Centre (below)

9 Communicating to members, residents and businesses and forming partnerships

The Society now operates the full range of social media communications (Web site, Facebook and Twitter) and a hard copy newsletter. The latter was first produced in late 1979 and the web site in 2006 with the Facebook site in February 2015. Fig highlights the newsletter produced as part of the Society's 30-year celebrations and the latest 2019 edition. It has developed over time in terms of quality of production and content. It has allowed the Society to highlight the achievements and the people of the Conservation Area. It is the vehicle for information on planning applications and tree works. It provides "What's On" information about local events and is the vehicle for distributing all of this to the whole membership and the business community.

The Society's social media outlets include a recently revamped web site (<https://theoxtonsociety.co.uk>), a Facebook site (with 1,353 members) and a Twitter feed.

Communicating with local businesses

This has been a challenge for the Society and for the businesses. It has been possible to enlist the support of businesses for events, as per the Secret Gardens and Xmas Lights, plus the hanging baskets. They have contributed in money, and in kind, to all of these and played a major part on the day of Secret Gardens, as well as during the Xmas Lights and Hanging Baskets periods. What has been more challenging has been the absence of any kind of formal association and leadership from the business community. The Society initiated a series of business breakfasts during the 2012-2014 period which promised better things but were not sustainable. In many ways this is understandable given the demands that running a business entail.

However, in 2019 Kate Wyness (from Greens) showed commendable leadership in raising money for the Xmas Lights and organising a Makers Market to coincide with the 2019 Secret Gardens event. Hopefully this might stimulate other businesses to contribute in the same or similar ways.

Forming Partnerships.

A feature of the post 2010 period has been the development of partnerships with other bodies. The most developed partnership is with the Friends of the Arno and Oxton Fields. The latter have a co-opted place on the Society's committee and there is a significant overlap in membership between the two bodies. The Friends group has gone from strength to strength in maintaining the Arno rose garden and related areas and achieving Blue Flag status for the area generally.

In June 2019 it was announced that his Lordship the Earl of Shrewsbury had kindly accepted to be the Patron of the Friends of the Arno and Oxton Fields.

Partnerships have also been developed with

- * Civic Voice, the national voluntary body, which oversees England's conservation areas

- * Conservation Areas Wirral, formed in 2014, which acts the voice for the Wirral's 26 Conservation areas.

The Society has also maintained links with the Oxton Artists group and the Oxton Cricket Club.

The OXTON Society

Newsletter

September 2009

Free to Members



30TH ANNIVERSARY

Come and share the celebration

Free tickets are now available for the celebration of 30 years since the establishment of the Oxton Conservation Area and The Oxton Society. The event will be held at the Williamson Art Gallery from 6.30 to 8.45 pm on Saturday November 7th.

The focus of the evening will be Oxton Village — not just its history, but also its future as a thriving residential and business community. There will be an illustrated talk by David Ainsley, the first Chair of the Oxton Society, a panel discussion of Oxton life, with local people reflecting different perspectives and a presentation of awards for outstanding contributions to the Village.

A free glass of wine and complimentary light refreshments will be served and your ticket will

also enable you to view the annual Oxton Artists exhibition and sale, which will be open over that weekend.

Entry to the event will be FREE but only by ticket. You can obtain tickets (a maximum of two per household membership and one for individual and corporate members) by ringing 0151 653 0116 (or info@oxtonsociety.org.uk) before **October 10**. Include your name, address and contact details and the number of tickets you require. **Get your tickets early to ensure a place** as space is limited. The venue has disabled access but if you require any other assistance please let us know at the time you book your ticket(s).

We very much look forward to seeing you at the 30th celebration on November 7th.

THE 2008/09 AGM

The AGM took place on July 8 2009. Draft minutes are available on our website and on the notice board. Members may also obtain hard copies from the Secretary (see page 8 for contact details).

Your Executive Committee for 2009/10

Officers: Chair – Patrick Toosey; Hon. Secretary – Alan Chape; Hon. Treasurer – Jane Horton.
Other Members: Dave Dillon, Gill Dillon, Kevin Donovan, Rhiannon Evans, Steve Ferguson, Olga Lennon, Graham McLean, Kate Stansfield, Carolyn Weber, Steve Weber, Jeff Willis and Ian Wray. Cllrs. Pat Williams and Paula Southwood will continue as co-opted members.

Improving communication with members

Key features of the Executive Committee's work is reported in the Newsletter, and all members are regularly reminded that they can attend meetings. At the AGM, however, members asked for an improved flow of information about the work of the Executive Committee.

The Committee agrees. In future the approved minutes of the monthly meetings of the Executive Committee will be posted on our website and on the Village notice board during the month following the meeting.

the OXTON SOCIETY

free to members



Newsletter April 2019



Probably less than the Romans but it has had a big impact on anyone who lives, works in, or visits Oxton. If you want to judge for yourself the Wirral Archives Service is running a workshop on 2nd May on 'the Legacy of the Romans in the North West' (wirral.gov.uk workshops). The Society adopted an overall strategy in March 2011 with four aims :

- support improvements in the quality of buildings and the townscape
- increase awareness of Oxton's history, architecture, and environment
- build community and business involvement
- develop the organisational and financial basis for it's activities.

The Society's role in maintaining and improving the quality of the village's environment is a core function. The sections on trees and planning are examples. The History Group continues to tell the story of Oxton, and their supplement and the details of their walks show how they do it.

The Contribution of Secret Gardens.

This is the major event of the Society's year. It has grown to include many activities in the village, and become a large logistical exercise. The day has been central to the strategic aims of community involvement and financial sustainability.

Community Involvement.

One aspect of community involvement has been the willingness of garden owners to share the secret of what is behind the sandstone walls. Since 2001 over ninety have done so, and in the two years 2009 and 2010 thirty gardens were open on the day. In those years over 4,000 adult tickets were sold and in recent years it has been around 3,000. In the most recent survey 37% of visitors were from the Oxton postcode area, 48% were from the rest of the Wirral, and 15% from further afield. The event has significantly raised Oxton's profile.

Volunteers are vital to running the event, and we rely on local people and the participating charities. Calls for volunteers for this year's events are on page 3. Support for community activities which is year round comes from the funds which the day provides for the year's nominated charities. Since the event started in 2001 it has raised £225,000 for local charities.

Fig. 43 Oxton Society newsletters 2009 and 2019

10 Membership and Money

In examining the minutes book of the Society up to 1989 there was never an item on the committee agendas or minutes about membership numbers. However, there are three sets of accounts which give the sum for 'Subscriptions and donations', £61 in year ending 1979, £135 year ending 1983 and £198 year ending 1984. Subscriptions then were £1 for individual and £5 for corporate/businesses' The Society was not particularly adept at asking for membership renewals and Steve Ferguson in 1991/92 offered to design a new membership data base and found himself as the new Membership Secretary!! He asked for the records to transfer onto the data base and was given two handwritten and much edited foolscap sheets of names and addresses. There were only 50 names at that time.

Since then membership has risen significantly along with the membership fee. The latter now stands at £8 a year (still good value) for an individual membership and £10 for a household membership. By the end of 2019 there were 529 memberships of these 173 (32%) were individual; 298 (56%) were household and 57 (11%) were corporate. Membership is available to anyone. Members are kept informed about the ways in which the Society is protecting the Conservation Area and promoting its sensitive development. They are also kept up to date with planning issues and events which affect the area with a quarterly newsletter, members' emails, Facebook and Twitter.

It is interesting to look at the membership income between 2010 and 2019. Income grew from £3,000 to £4,000 although the primary income of the

Society still comes a from the Secret Gardens event. The Secret Gardens income/profit increased from £5,753 to £9,013 in the 2010/2019 period. This partly reflects the changes to the Secret Gardens profits distribution which changed from 25% to the Society and 75% to charities to 40% to the Society and 60% to charities. This reflected the Committees view three factors were relevant:

- * The greater volunteer input by the society
- * Charities were not fulfilling their pledges to sell tickets and provide support
- * Funding was required for a more ambitious Xmas lights event and other strategic spending.

Another important feature of the Society's finances is that its reserves are now much higher at £21,664 as opposed to £8,696 in 2010. This is partly a result of the higher % profit retained from the Secret Gardens event and also the increase in membership fees in the 9-year period. However, it also reflects good financial management by the two treasurers over this period: Jane Horton and Griff Round.

The Society is now in good financial order with a substantial membership, but the Committee is not complacent and is conscious of the need to examine new sources of finance/fund raising and to continue its membership recruitment campaigns.

11 Summarising the present and charting the future

The phases of the 40-year period reviewed in this booklet provide a template for considering where we go from here:

1979- 2000

The period of a fledging society, with growing confidence, adjusting to the demands of responding to a range of development and other changes to the physical fabric of the Conservation Area. Also oversaw an extension to the area in 1981 to embrace “Edwardian Oxton”.

The emphasis was on “Conservation” but with small forays into addressing community issues and consultations with businesses. The committee had a relatively high turnover of members and culminated in having to respond to the Wirral’s major Unitary Development Plan published in 1999-2000. This embodied a new planning framework for the Conservation Area as outlined in Section of this booklet. Early concerns expressed about the lack of enforcement by the Wirral Council.

2000-2009

The period of an influx of new committee members and while the emphasis remained on “Conservation” there was an increasing involvement in “Community “matters and a deeper engagement with the business community. It saw the advent of Secret Gardens on a small, and then increasingly bigger scale, allied to Xmas lights, and a more formal relationship with local businesses to assist with supporting these events and benefitting from them.

The committee was becoming increasingly concerned about the lack of enforcement by the Council in dealing with unauthorised changes to buildings, especially in the village centre. The latter was becoming characterised by roller shutters and facades/ fascias which contravened the approved planning framework agreed in 2000 Unitary Development Plan. In addition, there was an increasing awareness of a number of areas outside, but adjacent to the boundary of the Conservation Area, that needed the

protection of being inside. These were eventually incorporated within the boundary in 2010.

2009-2019

The last ten years were characterised initially by the decision of the committee to commission the Character Appraisal of the Conservation Area and to undertake a searching review of the Society’s strategy re its role in guiding the agendas of Conservation, Community and Business Liaison. There was even an attempt to formalise the relationship with local businesses by the means of a business breakfast forum. Unfortunately, this was not sustained, and this element of the Society’s agenda still needs further discussion and innovation.

It has also seen the advent of successive governments “austerity” agendas which eventually resulted in the diminution of the Wirral Council’s Conservation Section from three officers to one officer.

In this period the Society developed even further the Secret Gardens event, the Xmas lights and added the Hanging Baskets to decorate the village centre. The committee also negotiated a Conservation Area Management Plan with the Wirral Council to act as the overarching planning framework for the area. As noted previously this now needs to be reviewed and updated to better reflect the pressures for development and change.

The period also witnessed the establishment of the Society’s History Group which has led to a much better understanding of the people and places that underpin the Oxton of today. A design Award was also introduced in 2006 and has led to 18 awards and three commendations since. Another feature of this period has been the remarkable level of continuity of committee members (see Fig. 46. nine of the committee members in 2009 were still on the committee in 2019!!! New partnerships were established with the Friends of the Arno and Oxton Fields, the national Civic Voice, and in 2014 with the newly established Conservation Areas Wirral

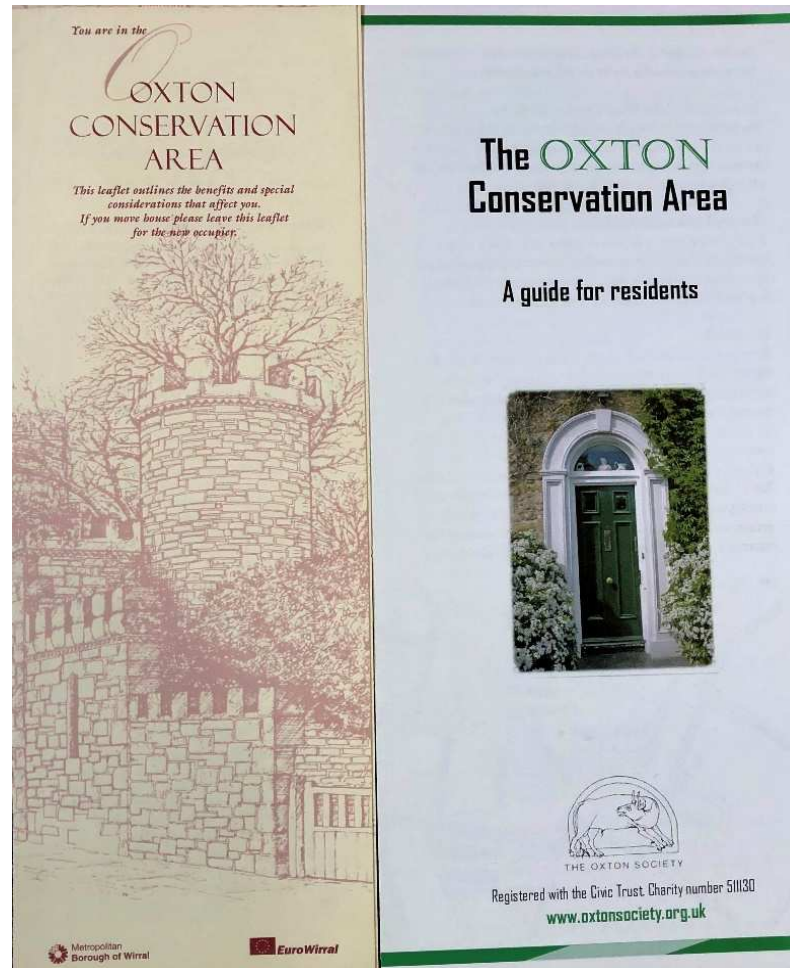


Fig. 44 Leaflets 1996 and 2007 outlining the nature of the Conservation Area and the obligations of residents

The Society has developed into a multi-faceted voluntary organisation with one of the largest memberships of any civic society in the country at more than eight times that of the early days. Today there are nine working Groups seeking to deliver the objectives of the same constitution agreed in 1979 although with updated aims (see below): History; Planning; Trees; Secret Gardens Task Group; Xmas lights; Hanging Baskets; Membership and Recruitments; Newsletter; Officers.

Charting the Future

The Society's last strategy review, as noted, took place in 2011. It was able to take on board the findings of the Character Appraisal and the production of a Management Plan for the Conservation Area. The review put protecting the character of the Conservation Area at the heart of the strategy and envisaged the eventual creation of an Article 4 Direction to give greater protection to many of the character houses in the area. This has not transpired and therefore the current strategy review is considering again how this might be achieved. There has been an agreement in principle with Council officers, and Conservation Areas Wirral, that Oxton Conservation Areas should be a pilot for a possible more widespread application of such Directions across the Wirral's Conservation Areas. This has been the recommendations of independent consultants in practically all the Character Appraisals to date. The question of Oxton's pilot area status is being pursued with the Council and will need a consultation with residents before any final decisions are taken.

The current review will take a rounded view of all the aims of the Society:

- **Aim 1 Promote and secure high standards of planning, landscape and architecture to preserve, improve and develop the area and its environs**
- **Aim 2 Enhance public awareness of Oxton's history, architecture and environment**
- **Aim 3 Foster community and business involvement to encourage civic pride**
- **Aim 4 Maintain the Society on a sound basis and sustainable financial footing, including working in partnership with others**

It is envisaged that this will be completed and published for consultation in early 2020, in a special edition of the newsletter and on the website.

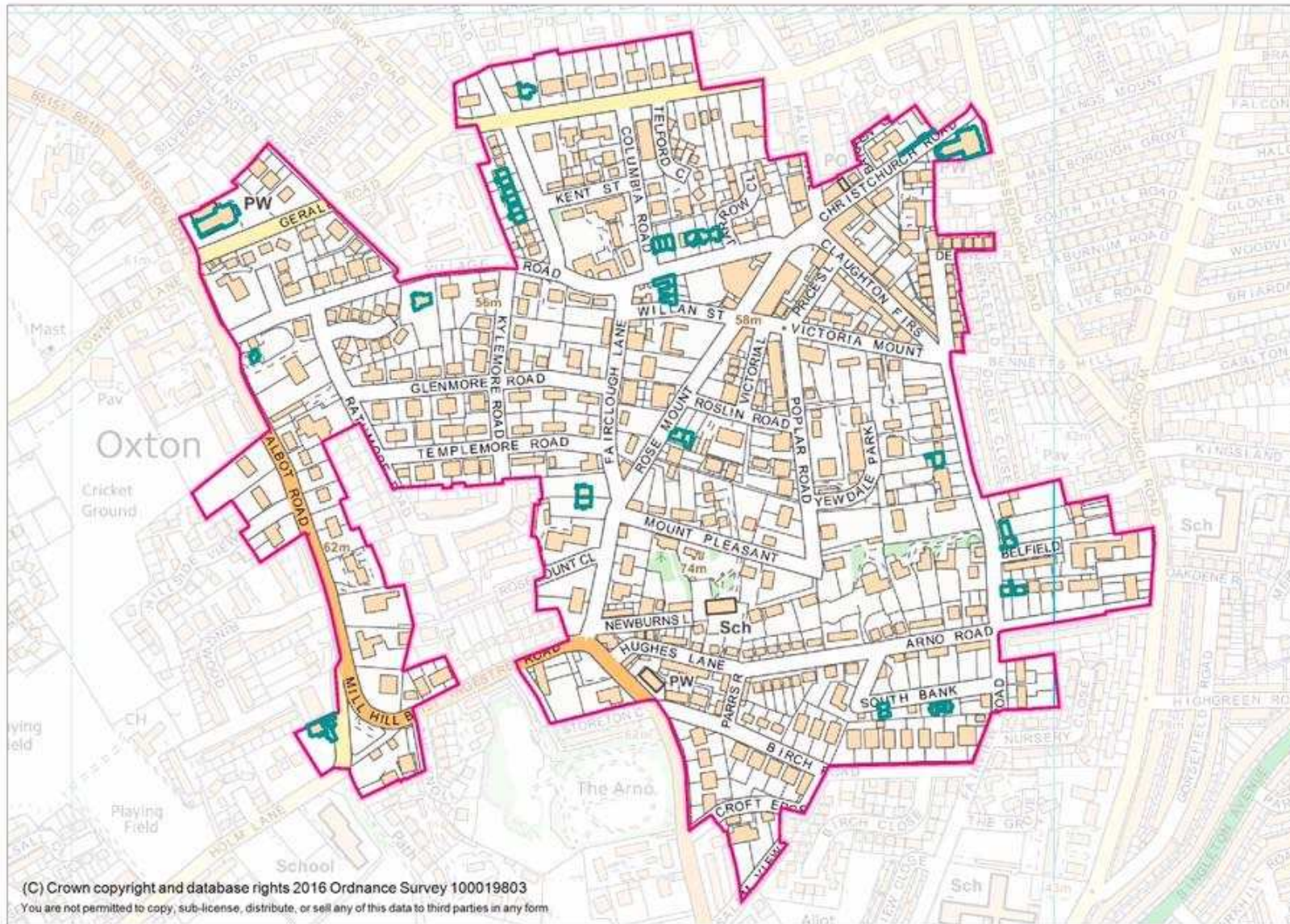


Fig. 45 The Oxton of today: listed buildings are shown in green.

Epilogue

In the Cheshire Life article quoted in the early part of this booklet the author's conclusion in 1969 was that:

“Oxton has no corporate life, as a community, at least none I could detect, now or when I lived there. That makes it very vulnerable and the place

needs the kind of articulate, sensitive support which might have stopped that atrocious car park, which might have slowed down the building of traffic-generating blocks of flats sited in narrow roads, which might make sure that Oxton is developed at least sympathetically . Otherwise they might all look out of their windows one day, peering between the mobiles and the trendy pottery, and discover the Oxton they paid to live in has gone”



Fig. 46 Conservation (signs at the entrance denote the Conservation Area), Community (residents of Prices Lane and Claughton Firs receive their Design Award) and the Local Economy (Greens of Oxton and other retail and service outlets contribute to the development of the local economy)

Well the Oxton he feared for has not happened, in part, if not primarily, because the Conservation Area was designated in 1979. The Oxton Society then played its part in providing the kind of *“articulate and sensitive support”* that prevented too much unsympathetic development. Nevertheless, to ensure Oxton remains a place of beauty, vibrancy and community, requires eternal vigilance. It means protecting and promoting its character,

community and local economy. It means the Society working in conjunction with the Council, residents and businesses to achieve this. It means generating a sense of civic pride in the place and the people. It means attracting the next generation of active local people to carry on, and develop further, the achievements of the current, but ageing, activists on the Society's committee

Postscript

In writing this booklet and consulting with colleagues there was clearly a fascination with the question “Why were people attracted to live here in the 1960’s and 1970’s?”. Over that period many of the people who became stalwarts of the Society moved to the village and are still here. So, we conducted a straw poll to canvass their views and see if there were any common factors. Here goes:

Rhiannon Evans (Current Chair of the Oxton Society) “I came in September 1979 to a lecturing post at The Laird School of Art, which became Wirral Metropolitan College. A Brighton colleague of mine whose oldest friend lived in Oxton recommended Oxton as the place to live and houses were very reasonable compared to the South East. I knew I wanted to live near Liverpool, not on the Dee side, so the combination of schools for my daughters, being near to work, family already here, like-minded people and the Cheshire Life ‘Hampstead of the North’ article made the decision fairly easy. I have to say it was nowhere near as attractive as it is now. I found the village dark, old fashioned, lacking, although at least most shops weren’t shuttered like Birkenhead. And there was a variety of specialist businesses: ironmongers, clockmaker etc”. On my retirement I was asked to join the Oxton Society Committee and, fairly quickly, to be its chair. I hesitated at first but agreed because the previous eighteen years my working life had revolved around Edge Hill University in Lancashire. Being part of the Society’s committee was a way of getting to know Oxton, which had been my home for the last thirty years. And it has been great working with such committed and enthusiastic people”.

Jeff Willis (Current Vice Chair of the Oxton Society) “We downsized to Poplar Rd in 2004 from a large house in Kingsmead Rd South where we had brought up our 3 children, now long gone. We had always envied the human scale of Oxton’s streets, the closeness of the shops and the history that presented at every turn. I knew a couple of people on the committee of the Oxton Society and had been to a few Oxton events. I had recently retired, and it only seemed right to offer myself for election almost

immediately to try and do a bit for the area and the community that I was joining.

I soon realised that the Committee was more than a discussion group and that everybody had at least one proper Oxton job. I was amazed at how much they were all doing and almost shamed into offering myself in 2005 as convenor of the Planning Group – to pull together our comments to the Council on planning applications. One thing led to another and my efforts were extended from being a humble spear-carrier to an “officer role” in Secret Gardens, Xmas Lights and the website”.

Alan Chape (Current Secretary of the Oxton Society) “We moved here in 1973 from Liverpool. My recollection is we were attracted by the relative cheapness compared to Liverpool of accommodating three families. Plus, the availability of improvement grants to lighten the cost burden further of dealing with a large Victorian property. What was not in our minds was the concept of Oxton as a fashionable watering hole full of like-minded left-wing oriented folk who we could integrate and socialise with as was the case in Liverpool. My recollection is of a slightly shabby village with a significant number of character properties in need of substantial renovation of the kind Christine Wray describes above. From 1973 had a busy working life in Liverpool and no real contact with the Society. Joined the Society in 2000 and the committee in 2001 on my retirement from Liverpool City Council. I became Secretary in 2003 and remain in that position today. In 2014 I established, with other conservationists from across the Wirral, Conservation Areas Wirral. I have been chair of that body, since its inception, encouraging action to protect the character of all Wirral’s 26 conservation areas.”

Patrick Toosey (former Chair of the Society and currently member of the committee) “In the 1970s my first wife, myself and four children were living in Heswall. Working in Liverpool and delivering three girls to Birkenhead High School was not easy. So, we started to, look around and put in a bid for a house overlooking the Wirral Ladies Golf Club. I was in Nigeria when a telex arrived from my wife. “I know we have put in a bid for a house already, but one has just come on the market which I think is just perfect- 20 Rose Mount”. She had no idea my Grandfather had owned it

and my father lived there till his marriage. I telexed back buy it!! That was in 1977. We enjoyed four blissful years therefore my wife's suicide in 1981.1982 saw me made redundant and in 1983 I married Monica. However, for the next fourteen years work took me to Saudi Arabia and then USA only returning full time to the UK in !988. Almost immediately joined the Oxton Society and soon after the committee -served as Social Secretary to establish fund raising events and then Secret Gardens with 800 visitors in Year 1. The rest is history. Thank you Oxton".

Carolyn and Steve Weber (Members of Oxton Society Committee. Carolyn is Archivist, Minutes Secretary and Member of the Newsletter Editorial Board. Steve is Leader of the Planning Group and member of Hanging Baskets Group) We moved to our Victorian house in Beresford Road – just outside the Conservation Area – in 1983. We had uprooted ourselves from our London home five years earlier, where we lived in a rented garden flat on the ground floor of a large Victorian house close to Highgate village. We loved the character of the house and the local community, but home ownership here was clearly unaffordable and this was part of the reason for our move “up North”. It took a while before we landed in Beresford Road, having first searched unsuccessfully in the Sefton Park area of Liverpool. We made our first home and started our family in a 1930's semi in Forest Road, and over the next three years got to know and appreciate the special character of Oxton. We found out through the local grapevine that the Beresford Road house was coming on the market and we knew our search had ended. Although our social life was very much Oxton-based, the Oxton Society didn't really figure on our radar for the next twenty years – with both of us in full-time jobs and three children to raise! By the time the kids had left home, and retirement was on the horizon our circle of friends included a number of Oxton Society committee members and we didn't take much persuading to join the ranks of the “perennial nine”. Carolyn is the minutes secretary, keeper of the archive and Newsletter editor, and Steve is the Planning Group lead and heavily involved in the hanging baskets programme.

Christine Wray (former Leader of the Oxton Society Tree Group) ‘We came to Oxton because Ken Martin the architect found us a house. We had never dreamt of going ‘over the water’. The house was a ruin when we bought it. Nothing was complete. Everything needed doing – the roof, the floor, the inside walls, the outside walls. We bought the house in November 1977 and moved in the following August – but only into two rooms!’

Peter Flynn (Current member of the Oxton Society Newsletter Editorial Group) “In terms of the reasons for moving if there had been suitable affordable houses round Sefton Park we would happily have stayed there and continued to socialise in Lark Lane. If a house in Rock Park had had a couple more rooms, we could have ended up there. Shrewsbury Road met our requirements, apart from the tenant in the basement! When I met my wife Anne, in the downstairs flat in Alexandra Drive, Liverpool, Pete Gommon was living there as well. The fact they ended up a few doors away on Shrewsbury Road without any communication between us suggests a similar process”.

