

the

OXTON SOCIETY



WELCOME to our second virtual newsletter and, although we may miss the buff- coloured real thing popping through our doors, and a small number of members cannot access it online, the current situation does allow us to expand the content, as you will see from this current edition.

The editors have worked very hard to include some of the suggestions that were made in the survey that was completed in February 2020 by 180 members. So in this edition, as well as the regular items, you will see the first of 'Who's been living in YOUR house', a member's 'Personal view' by Peter Gommon, a new feature on wildlife and a second article on the architecture of Oxton.

Since we last went to press, we have all lived through three months of surreal and unsettling times and now we emerge cautiously from total lockdown to a recognition that we must continue to be vigilant and cautious for the foreseeable future. We have a huge debt of thanks to many businesses and organisations in Oxton village for sustaining us through those challenging months and I make no apology for listing some of these again. Huge thanks to: Kate & Paul at **Greens of Oxton** and their colleagues Esme, Priya, Jo, Mealla and Sandra; Paul and Kirsten at **Edwards** and colleagues Maureen, Mike, Su, Pat, Ellie, Ellie, Dave, Jack, Andy, Henry & Kelly; Mr Jethi, his daughter and colleagues from **Stirling Wines** and all at Homebrew, Sabrosa, Thyme & Ocean's Fish Bar.



We also extend our thanks to all the doctors, nurses, health professionals, and key workers in all settings including the volunteers in the WhatsApp Coronavirus Support Group, led by Allan Brame. The recently festooned bunting is a way of saying thank you and welcome back to newly opened businesses, and the floral theme was chosen to add some summer colour in the absence of the hanging baskets this year.

The pandemic continues to impact on all our plans and the next date in the Oxton Society's calendar would be the Annual General Meeting (AGM) in late September. We intend to publish and circulate an Annual Report in September but we will not be able to hold the meeting this Autumn because of uncertainties arising from the pandemic. Our current plan is to hold an Annual Members Meeting in February/March which will include AGM business. It will raise questions about what elements of the Conservation Area and the Society's work are essential for protecting the character of the village and the way conservation and community values mutually support each other. We are very much looking forward to hearing and discussing the views of members at this meeting.

Rhiannon Evans, Chair

Society volunteers erecting the bunting

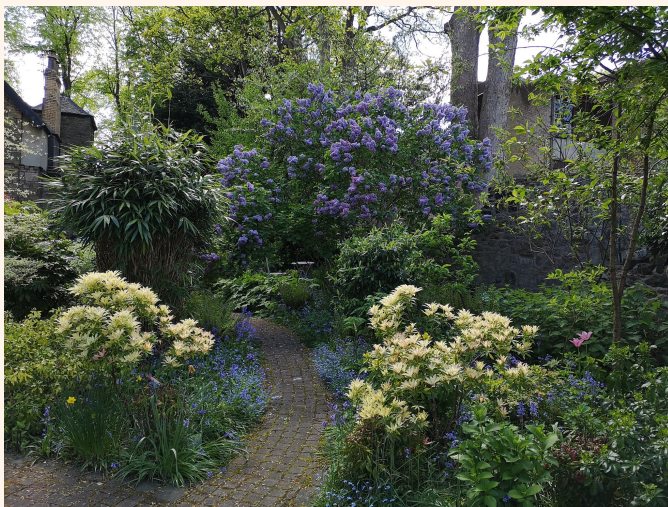


A VIRTUAL SUCCESS!

THE annual Secret Gardens of Oxton was cancelled this year due to the Covid-19 pandemic - but that didn't stop a team of local residents joining forces to create a 'virtual' event instead.

The volunteers set up a Facebook page, called Oxton's Virtual Gardens, to feature videos and pictures of the gardens that would have opened on May 10, along with performances from the musicians and singers who were due to take part.

Thousands of visitors to the site – some from as far afield as China and America – were asked to make a donation to Wirral Foodbank and local residents were encouraged to contribute to a food box in the village.



More than £3,000 was raised and the food box proved so popular it is still in the village today – having amassed more than half a tonne's worth of food so far.

Kevin Donovan, who came up with the idea for the event, said: "Not only did visitors thoroughly enjoy the 'virtual' gardens experience, but they raised a phenomenal amount for such a worthy cause.

"The garden owners spent a lot of time and effort preparing for the Secret Gardens of Oxton so by moving the event online, people still got to see the result of all their hard work.

"It was a great interactive day and we had some lovely comments. I think people really appreciated the fact that they could still see the beautiful gardens of Oxton, but from the safety of their own home."

Richard Roberts, manager of Wirral Foodbank, said: "I'd like to thank Oxton's Virtual Gardens for choosing us as their charity and to everyone for their generous support."



Rachel Buxton, who organised the food box, said: "Residents have been so generous. The box is in the village from Thursday to Saturday and I'd like to thank Kate and the team at Greens who have been keeping an eye on it for us."

Rhiannon Evans, chair of the Oxton Society, said: "This would have been the 20th anniversary of the Secret Gardens of Oxton but Kevin and the team did a tremendous job in setting up a 'virtual' event at such short notice.

"I would like to congratulate them for a thoroughly enjoyable day as well as the garden owners for their tremendous work."

People can still see the garden videos and pictures by searching <https://www.facebook.com/groups/oxtonvirtualgardens/>

Thanks go to volunteers Kevin Donovan, Kirsty Cotton, Lesley McGarrity, Becky Atherton, Lisa Stafford, Rachel Buxton, Laura Penn, Carla Walker and Cllr Allan Brame for officially opening the event.



WHO'S BEEN LIVING IN MY HOUSE? -

STOURTON LODGE, ARNO ROAD

THIS column is in direct response to members' requests to tell the story of people who lived in some of the houses in Oxton. All houses have a story to tell but for some there is more information available than others. Houses tell of individual lives, the changes in professions and the social history of our common lives.



The stone cottage that became our house was built around 1797 but the first recorded resident is listed in the 1851 census. The census records indicate a wide range of professions, many of which illustrate Oxton as a place where middle class families settled during the 19th century. These included a customs and shipping clerk; salt and tobacco merchant; Unitarian minister; chartered accountant; ship broker; portrait painter; journalist and secretary of Anfield cycling club; systems analyst; botanical artist. Generally, women who were recorded in the census in their own right were women of independent means. In total there have been 13 children living here, many of whom were born in the house. Most families appear to have had one live-in servant until the First World War. People generally lived in Stourton Lodge for a long time, 15 years being the average and 43 years the longest time.

I want to highlight one couple, William and Frances (Fanny) Binns who moved into our house when they were in their mid to late 30's and lived here from 1874 to 1888 with one servant Sarah Hetherick, who was 45 in 1881. There were no children.

Rev. William Binns, from Lancashire, was a Unitarian minister at Charing Cross church for almost 30 years. Frances' family was local and she was brought up in a substantial house, Talbot Lodge, in Oxton. They started married life in Oak Bank, Oxton Road and moved to Stourton Lodge, South Bank, where they lived for 13 years.



Rev Binns was part of a group of independent minded, liberal thinkers who contributed substantially to Birkenhead's development in the last quarter of the 19th century. When well wishers across the Borough, and of all denominations, gathered in Charing Cross, to recognise Rev Binns' substantial contribution to the town, the chairman acknowledged Rev Binns '*Has had a powerful influence on the intellectual and religious life of Birkenhead for more than twenty five years*'. He was president of the Birkenhead Shakespeare Literary Society, to which he contributed lectures, and which was one of the earliest Shakespeare societies in the country. He was also an early member and, later, president of the Birkenhead Scientific & Literary Society. His interests and concerns were wide and he lectured and preached in favour of the disestablishment of the Church of England and, following the 1870 Education Act, he agitated for a School Board for elementary education in Birkenhead, free of Anglican doctrine.

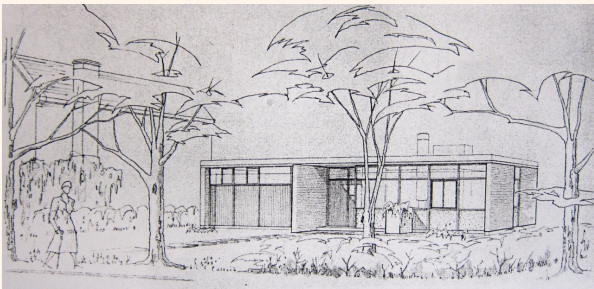
I imagine him reading, thinking and writing in his study overlooking the garden with its serpentine path identical in shape today to the one on the 1847 map. He embraced the radical ideas of his day: Charles Darwin and the theory of evolution; abhorrence of cruelty to animals and social welfare reform. Despite his anti-establishment views he was invited to attend the ceremony by the Prime Minister, William Gladstone, of the cutting of the sod for the railway tunnel under the Mersey in 1884.

Fanny Binns was a powerful influence in her own right. As an early advocate of Women's Rights, she became president of the Birkenhead committee for Women's Suffrage in 1872, speaking in favour of women's suffrage a number of times in Birkenhead and Liverpool. Frances, without tertiary education herself, was determined that women should have the same opportunity as men and in 1873 she collected subscriptions '*In aid of the expenses of ladies training to be women doctors in Liverpool*'. It gives me great pleasure to think that in our sitting room more than 130 years ago, Fanny Binns and other Oxton women who supported the suffragist cause, met over a cup of tea and planned the means by which votes for women and a more equal society could be achieved. Maybe, Sarah was invited to attend too and William even made the tea. *Rhiannon Evans June 2020*

THE MODERNIST HOUSES OF OXTON & NOCTORUM

IN my first article I looked at some of the earliest houses in Oxtun, for this one we come more up to date with the second half of the twentieth century.

After the damage and stagnation of the Second World War, changes in the building stock of Oxtun took time to emerge. The late 1940's and early 1950's were slow years, architectural speaking, with limitations on construction materials and a ravaged economy. This was the environment that a new generation of architectural graduates entered, fired up with enthusiasm to create a brave new world. By the late 1950's opportunities for small house projects, always the staple of young architects wanting to make a name for themselves, started to appear. Oxtun offered suitable sites, with villa gardens capable of sub-division and the steady demolition of larger properties. A new wave of smaller middle-class family houses were constructed, most were architecturally



House on Boundary Rd, 1955, Jo Parker

One of the first projects to make it out of the ground was a bungalow at the junction of Boundary Road and Upton Road, designed Roy Jo Parker this diminutive building was initially refused planning permission in 1955 due to its uncharacteristic Modernist appearance. Granted on appeal it still stands today although much altered.



4 Stokesay, 1966, Ivan Johnson & Partners

The wooded slopes of Noctorum hide a few other notable houses from the late 1950's including Ha'pennyfield, 1959, a rare built project from the prominent Liverpool architectural historian Quentin Hughes. This building has been so unsympathetically extended that only demolition would put it out of its misery.



Entwood, 1959, Dewi-Prys Thomas

Fortunately, not all Modernist houses have suffered this fate and an exceptional survivor in mint condition is Entwood, 1959, by a fellow graduate of Liverpool University School of Architecture, Dewi-Prys Thomas. A cluster of three cubic forms, rendered, under mono-pitched roofs which vary in direction and level, making the most of its sloping site, it has been carefully restored by its current owners.

Other examples in the area include: Birkenland, 1957, also by Dewi Prys Thomas, Charleville, 1959, Jo Parker, and No. 4 Stokesay, 1966. The latter feels as if it belongs on the Californian coast, a timber clad single storey horizontal box with a mono-pitch roof, raised above its sloping site on stilts with expansive windows facing west.



Ingestre Rd, 1957, Jo Parker

The village centre of Oxton offered fewer opportunities for new commissions but the few that did get built are particularly good examples. Jo Parker's own house on Ingestre Road from 1957 being the most complete. Again, a small single storey building, with later two storey extension also by Parker, built on a tight site and even tighter budget, with the architect doing much of the building work himself.

Another opportunity for a site was created by the former quarry between Newburns Lane and Mount Pleasant where the steep slopes had previously prevented construction. Here two houses were designed each cascading down the stone faces in multiple levels. The house at the Newburns Lane end, by Jim O'Donahue (extending a Victorian cottage), has a triple height open plan living room under a sloping glazed roof, the staircase wrapping around the central brick fireplace. Parts of this staircase are carved into the rock face and the whole ensemble has the air of Blofeld's lair from a James Bond film, you only need the white cat and swivel chair to complete the picture.

At the northern end, Robin Clayton designed what appears from the road to be a single storey brick house but which reveals itself as a multi-storey series

of cantilevered concrete beams infilled in glass and brick panels dropping sharply into the depths of the former quarry.



Mt Pleasant house, Jim O'Donahue

All of these buildings share a language of modern architecture which owes a great deal to the Californian Case Study houses from the late 1940's and early 1950's. As with these precedents they were generally built on difficult sites with limited budgets and simple economical materials. Cheap construction has sometimes created technical problems which is, in part, why so many houses of this period have been altered, often unsympathetically. Having stylistically fallen out of favour during the 1980's and 1990's this period of modern architecture is now once again valued and we are lucky in Oxton to have a few dedicated custodians who continue to care for these important parts of our heritage.

Dominic Wilkinson

A VILLAGE FOR ALL SEASONS

THE Oxton Society and Friends of the Arno have joined forces to produce a calendar for 2021.

Local photographers have captured the changing seasons in this picturesque part of the world – from the award-winning hanging baskets and Secret Gardens in Oxton to the first spring daffodils and the roses in full bloom in the Arno.

The calendar will be a great keepsake for residents and relatives alike and will be available to buy in late autumn. More details to be published soon. Money from calendar sales will be divided between the two organisations.

A MUCH LOVED SPIKEY FRIEND

THE hedgehog is a much-loved garden favourite which roams our neighbourhoods at night in search of juicy worms and insects. You may even be lucky enough to have a pair nesting under your decking or garden shed! The British hedgehog is very well established in our urban environments and can surprisingly do very well in cities, making good use of what's on offer.

Did you know? There are approximately 5,000-7,000 spines on an adult hedgehog and they also have a very small tail, which many people are unaware of. Their little legs can travel up to two miles each night to look for food, which is why it's so important our gardens allow them to roam safely – but more on that later.

Their varied diet consists of mainly beetles, earthworms and caterpillars, making them a gardener's best friend. On occasions, they'll munch on meat-based pet food if people have left a supplementary dish out for them. A clean bowl of fresh water is always welcomed by hedgehogs and other mammals, especially during dry, warm spells to prevent dehydration.

From April – October, hedgehogs are busy bringing up their young and if they've had their first brood early enough, they'll usually have a late one from August onwards. These youngsters however will need to eat as much as they can to build up enough fat reserves to see them through hibernation, which can be quite tricky when they require a weight of 600gms!

Unfortunately our beautiful, spikey friends are on a decline in the UK due to significant habitat loss through developments and intense agricultural practices – but we can help bring them back with small adjustments in our gardens. A small hole in your garden fence either side can create a great little connection into next door's garden and vice versa. Shrubberies and borders in gardens are good habitats for them to go searching for food and make great nesting spots from the fallen dry leaves. Hedgehogs usually hibernate between November and mid-March the following year, so leaving a small wild area in your garden full of leaves and branches in the autumn will encourage them in to your garden to hibernate through the winter months.

For more information on how you can help hedgehogs, Cheshire Wildlife Trust has a great actions page full of ideas and things you can do to encourage them into your garden. Visit: www.cheshirewildlifetrust.org.uk/how-help-hedgehogs.

Cheshire Wildlife Trust also have a 'Give a Hog a Home' adoption pack which is full of information and a perfect gift to give a loved one for a birthday, Christmas present or other celebrations. Look out for packs being available to buy again soon. www.cheshirewildlifetrust.org.uk/naturegifts

Article kindly provided by Rachel Bradshaw, Cheshire Wildlife Trust





Conor Mallucci is the paediatric neuro surgeon at Alder Hey who featured in last year's BBC2 *Hospital* series where he performed life-saving brain surgery on three-year-old Charlie Robinson.

Born in London, the 54-year-old father-of-three has lived in Oxton with his wife, Alison, for 22 years and talks to the Oxton Society Newsletter about his life as an adopted Scouser...

Tell us about your route into medicine:

Medicine is the 'family business' as my parents and sister were doctors. I studied medicine at University College London and was a semi-professional rugby player at the time so the idea was to specialise in orthopaedics. However, I spent a couple of years training in different departments and when I did neuro surgery it was the first time I was inspired. I realised it was what I wanted to do for the rest of my life. I did my specialist training in Birmingham, Nottingham and Paris, as back then, France and Canada were the leaders in this field.

Why did you choose to work in Liverpool?

There were very few jobs in neuro surgery in the 90s so you had to follow the work and a job at Alder Hey and the Walton Centre came up. Liverpool was part of my upbringing. My mum, who is Irish, used to take me for tea at the Adelphi before getting the ferry to Ireland to visit relatives so I knew what a lovely city it was. My family are Liverpool fans and I think it was my destiny to live here. Now I'm a season ticket holder and take my kids to the match.

Tell us about your work at Alder Hey?

Paediatric neuro surgery was done at Walton when I first joined but over the years it moved to Alder Hey. It has grown from a small department into a world-class one and is one of the top two in the country along with Great Ormond Street Hospital. Alder Hey is wonderful. I was a consultant at 31 and I became a professor two years ago and now do a lot of research.

Is your job upsetting at times?

It can be upsetting but it's a privilege to do what I do. Generally my role is very positive. Families come to us when their lives are falling apart and we perform surgery and remove a child's tumour and most of the time they do well. We help prolong life, if not cure cancer completely.

What advice would you give people?

Love your family and love your job.

Are your children following you into the 'family business'?

Benedict is a medical student in Leeds and Anna, who is currently on a gap year in Rome, is going to study medicine at UCL. Sebastian, who is 15, fancies doing economics in London.

What have you learned about yourself over the year?

I am always learning and trying to change and improve. I can put in a hard shift, but you have to have a laugh while in work. We spend most of our time in work so you may as well love it.

Who do you admire most?

Jürgen Klopp is my hero at the moment. Klopp is a remarkable, modern statesman and I love to watch him being interviewed.

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

In an ideal world I would have been a professional sportsman.

Why did you choose to live in Oxton?

When I got a job here I was advised to buy a house in Formby or Wirral. The first house we looked at was advertised as an Italian-style villa with views overlooking Liverpool which was perfect. I walked in and said: 'this is where we're living'. It was spring and Oxton was in full bloom and the house was actually cheaper than the one-bedroom flat we were renting in Nottingham. We didn't know anyone but our neighbour came over with a bottle of wine and we became close friends. Virtually all of our best friends are within walking distance in Oxton.

What do you like most about living in Oxton?

It's seven minutes to Liverpool and seven minutes to the coast.

In terms of housing it's beautiful. I love the village and the people. It's a professional community and people have moved here from different parts of the world. It's very cosmopolitan in that sense. I love the buzz of the village.

What would you change about the village?

I'd like a really good wine bar not just beer shops. I'd like Fraiche to open for general bookings! It's a good food place and I'd like to see another high-end restaurant. Greens is the best thing to happen to Oxton in five years. I'd like the building site sorted and I'd like to see a butchers back.

TREES AND PLANNING

Trees

THE Society has been consulted on seven applications for tree work since the last report. At the following addresses there were no objections to the proposals:

34 Poplar Road CA/20/0046
Land north of Croft Edge CA/20/0052
13 Shrewsbury Road CA/20/0078
20 Rathmore Road CA/20/0084
18 Village Road T/20/0075

The Society made comments in relation to:

26 Shrewsbury Road CA/20/0038: Large trees prevent sunlight, cause debris and are apparently affecting structure/stability of party wall. Smaller trees affecting mobility in and around the garden. Proposal to remove smaller trees and remove branches of large trees. The Tree Group visited the premises to meet the owner and neighbour and advised them to contact a reputable tree surgeon and put in a specific application which could then be commented on.

37A Rose Mount T/20/0068: Proposal to remove epicormic growth from oak to rear of 37a and 37b and remove two or three lower larger limbs as previous pruning has left them over-extended, unbalanced and at risk of falling in strong winds. Tree Group had no objection to removal of epicormic growth but was concerned that removal of lower limbs might give an unbalanced appearance when viewed from Victoria Lane where the tree is most visible. Group asked that Tree Officer view and assess the potential risks mentioned in the application. And if risks are high then no objection would be made to the proposal.

Planning

The Society has been consulted on four new applications since the last report. No comments were made on three applications:

1 Kylemore Road APP/20/00279: Rear garage conversion

Denehurst, 6 Talbot Road APP/20/00605: Alteration to front ground floor windows and creation of raised patio at rear

3 Lorne Road APP/20/00611: Three storey side extension

The Society made comments in relation to:

23 Fairview Road APP/20/00395: Raise height of existing front extension and construct rear extension. Objection made to the changes to the front extension as it would exacerbate the harm already done to the character of the property, which the Appraisal identified as a property which “makes a significant contribution”. The application was subsequently approved by Wirral Borough Council.

7 Parrs Road APP/20/00434: Side and rear extension. Representations made to Council case officer on the wholly inadequate Heritage Statement.

Full details of all applications and comments are available on ‘Planning’ & ‘Conservation’ sections of the Society’s website.

VILLAGE DEFIBRILLATOR UPDATE

WE are delighted that most of the funding has now been raised for the purchase of a defibrillator in the centre of Oxton Village. Huge thanks to individual donors and local councillors who supported an application under the Community Fund. The maintenance costs will be supported by the Oxton Society.

Progress has been affected by Covid 19 but negotiations with regard to exact location and installation have begun again and permission has been given by the bank for the defibrillator to be attached to the wall of the cash machine structure.



OUR HIGH SHERIFF MEMBER

RETIRED judge and Oxton Society member John Roberts became the new High Sheriff of Merseyside in April. However, with no immediate public engagements because of lockdown, the 72-year-old, who now lives in Bidston with his wife, Mary, has had to 'reinvent' the way in which he carries out his role, as the Oxton Society newsletter found out...

"I was delighted when the Lord Lieutenant of Merseyside, Mr Mark Blundell, asked me to agree to my name being put forward as the possible High Sheriff of Merseyside for 2020.

"High Sheriffs of Merseyside are appointed by the Queen in her right as Duke of Lancaster and they have all played a role in public life. I have been a Deputy Lieutenant of Merseyside since 2016 and am the president of Wirral Hospice St. John's.

"It's a big commitment in terms of time and you have to pay for everything yourself as no public funds are involved but it is a great honour to be selected.

"The names of the new High Sheriffs for the three counties within the County Palatine of Lancaster, namely Lancashire, Merseyside and Greater Manchester, are only announced a month before they each take office after a private ceremony at which Her Majesty the Queen 'pricks the Lites' by using a bodkin to put a hole in the vellum against each of those the names.

"My Installation was supposed to be at Liverpool Hope University but because of lockdown I had to make my declaration via Zoom. I hadn't even heard of Zoom until a week before!

"Being High Sheriff is a wonderful opportunity to go to places and meet people so it is rather disappointing that things haven't turned out as we envisaged but that is as nothing compared to the loss, bereavement and hardship some people have gone through during this pandemic.

"As I have not been able to attend public engagements, I thought that if I couldn't see people, I would ring them or write to them instead.

"High Sheriffs have many responsibilities and one is to support the voluntary sector so I contacted Wirral Community Action and have been phoning many of the voluntary groups that they have helped.



"It's been fascinating for me. I've been talking to a lot of people who are doing very special things about which I knew nothing.

"I've written to many people including the civic mayors, the Chief Constable and the heads of the NHS Trusts and the emergency services.

"I have recorded a video clip for a hospital trust praising the NHS and its staff and in due course will take part in the 'virtual' Annual Service marking the start of the legal year which is normally held in Liverpool Cathedral.

"I will be contacting the armed forces, faith groups and young people's organisations next.

"In some ways I've got more done working from home and I'm delighted I've been able to speak to so many people."

John used to live in Bellfield Drive and Arno Road in the past and is a long-standing member of the Oxton Society. He and Mary have five children and nine grandchildren between them.

He said: "Oxton is a special place with its own identity and rich heritage. We love the village, its shops and its many interesting highways and byways. We joined the Oxton Society because its aim to support the village is admirable."

OXTON VILLAGE AND THE CONCISE TOWNSCAPE: WAYS OF SEEING AND A HOMAGE TO GORDON CULLEN

A personal view from Society member Peter Gommon

‘AS soon as the (environment) game or dialogue is understood the whole place begins to shake hands with you. It bursts all through the dull business of who did what and when and who did it first. We know who did it, it was a chap with a twinkle in his eye’

This was Gordon Cullen writing in the introduction to the second edition of his influential book, *The Concise Townscape*. The environment game he was writing about was the design and appreciation of places and place making. Cullen was a witty and erudite writer, and a master draughtsman who could work from clear analytical cartoons, through plans and sketches to beautifully crafted drawings. The purpose of much of his work was to explore how we see and experience places, and to understand how and why they have their particular characters.

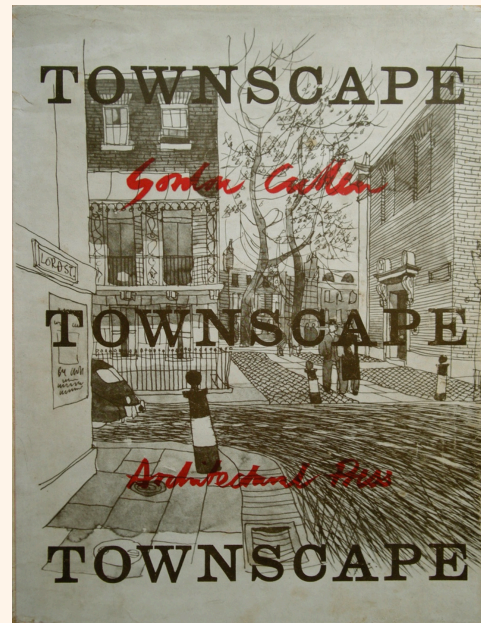
‘*Townscape*’ is the art of giving visual coherence and organisation to the jumble of buildings, streets and spaces that make up the urban environment, which he first developed in the magazine *The Architectural Review*, and later embodied in the book *Townscape*.

In his time, he was highly influential, and most architecture students and town planners of the 1960s-70s would have their own prized copy. Like most of his generation he was a modernist, but a modernist who could see that you don’t chuck away everything old to remake it new. You keep and enhance what is good and interesting and enhance it by the way you add to it.

In his time Britain was gripped by motor frenzy, which led to the trashing of more of our visual heritage than all the wartime bombing. Witness the disappearance of Georgian Chester to make space for the inner ring road.

The village of Oxton is crammed full of details and visual pleasures that are straight out Cullen’s systematic, intuitive casebooks.

Contemporary architecture and planning students no longer use *Townscape*, which is a shame. It was a book that taught people how to read places and how to capture their identity by drawing. Drawing was the essence of everything that Cullen did, because he knew that to draw was to observe closely, and it was the observation that was important. No wall-to-wall spread of phone photos can have the eloquence of Cullen’s *serial-vision* sketches.



*The Concise
TOWNSCAPE
1961/7, The
Architectural
Press; Gordon
Cullen*

I once took a group of Liverpool School of Architecture students on a tour of Oxton Village, to make a *serial-vision* survey of the village, by drawing it, so that they could learn from the process. They would later do a joint presentation to explore what they had seen. At lunchtime in the Shrew some of them continued their sketching, they were in the groove. The result was that we were all thrown out of the pub for subversive behaviour. Yes, we should have asked for permission, but there is something unsettling about the act of close observation.

Perhaps the Oxton Society could initiate a collective project of drawing and sketching the village again, to explore its visual quirks and character, and to see what is still good about it?. The contemporary language of townscape tends to read like an estate agents publicity flier rather than an attempt to understand what the person with a twinkle in their eye is seeing. This, in turn, could allow a discourse on parking and traffic which is not generated by the needs of car owners. Close observation might reveal that vehicles make much of the village centre invisible, cluttered and hard to enjoy because they obscure the townscape, the essence of the place.

We would welcome articles for the Newsletter from any members of the Society. If you have a topic you would like to write about please do contact the editors via info@theoxtonsociety.co.uk

A SAD VE DAY STORY

ON May 8, many Oxton residents marked the 75th anniversary of VE Day with 'socially distanced' tea parties. One such resident was Oxton Society committee member Don Firth-Williamson who lives in South Bank with his wife, Julie. Don invited a few neighbours round to raise a glass to Queen and country and they were intrigued by two moth-eaten knitted dolls which took pride of place in his garden. So he revealed the story behind them...

"My maternal grandfather William was very Victorian and owned three farms. He wanted his children - my mum, Elsie, my Auntie Hilda and my Uncle Bill, to help him run the farms. During the war Bill became a pilot, Hilda joined the WAAF and my mum stayed on the farm. At 30 she fell pregnant with me to one of the farm managers but my grandfather made her give me up for adoption.

"Meanwhile, Hilda met the love of her life, Joe, in the RAF. They wanted to get married but my grandfather refused and made her leave him. She was heartbroken and knitted the dolls - her and Joe in their uniforms - which she treasured. She never married.

"When I was 16 my grandfather died and my mum tracked me down and I was reunited with her and Auntie Hilda.

"In 1977, shortly after my graduation, I took Auntie Hilda on a drive around Lincolnshire to the airfields where she

had been based. She loved the trip down lane and we went to the house where Joe's parents had lived. We drove into this little cul de sac and saw a man digging in the front garden - it was Joe!

"Auntie Hilda was so shocked and I pleaded with her to get out of the car and say hello but she wouldn't. She said it was 'too late' and made me drive away. It was never mentioned again. My mum died when she was 71 and Auntie Hilda died six months later, aged 70. I always thought it was such a shame that she never said hello to Joe that day.



"The dolls are 80 years old but they take pride of place on our dresser. It seemed so apt to bring them into the garden on VE Day and our Oxton visitors were moved by the story behind them."

THE CURTAIN FALLS ON THE MURAL SAGA

THE controversial mural in the village centre has been altered as required by the Council. Before the coronavirus lockdown the Council planning officer had advised the owner that the inclusion of the TRFC logo at the centre of the mural brought it within the requirements of the Advertisement Regulations and that permission should have been sought. It was agreed by the Council that if the owner removed any reference to Tranmere Rovers Football Club the mural would not contravene the Regulations, and he was given a fixed period to make the changes or face prosecution. The time period was subsequently extended due to the lockdown.

In fact, the changes to the mural have gone beyond the removal of the TRFC logo to include additional heraldic features so that it now depicts the Birkenhead coat of arms. The Council has now advised that the changes meet the legal requirements and that they have closed the file.



Local residents and Society members will have mixed views on this outcome, as has been the case throughout the saga. The Oxton Society has not changed its view that the mural is inappropriate in this location in the heart of the Conservation Area, and considers that the outcome reveals a weakness in the legal powers to protect the character of the Conservation Area. The Society is disappointed that there was no consultation at any stage. But the Council's decision is final.

One unfortunate aspect of the affair was the way in which conflicting views, particularly expressed through social media, began to take the form of a 'culture war' and sometimes generated more heat than light! The Society very much hopes that any further comment can avoid this.



WELL what a glorious spring we have had, it has been absolutely wonderful to see so many people using the Arno and Oxtun fields.

Families with children on bicycles, owners with their dogs, teenagers, people picnicking - it's never been used and appreciated so much for years. As volunteers we are so pleased to be able to offer these spaces as a place of refuge and have received numerous positive comments from people realising how important our open spaces really are.



During the hot weather some of our volunteers have been out watering with the Oxtun Society's old Bowser, some roses and various other plants in the long border have suffered. One plant that is looking fantastic is the tall Echium next to the rose arch which loves Mediterranean conditions - mild winters, hot springs and summers – and normally grows in places like Madeira.

HEATHER ALCOCK

WE are delighted to welcome Heather Alcock as a new member to the Oxtun Society Committee. Heather moved with her family to Oxtun Village from Kingston upon Thames seven years ago. She fell in love with the lively village centre, leafy streets, mix of period houses and friendly neighbours. Along with husband David, who is a Wirral lad, daughters Georgia and Rose and far too many fish, she has happily settled into village life.

Heather is a built heritage practitioner with 20 years' experience. In the USA, she worked in private practice based in New York City and after immigrating to the UK in 2009, she first worked for the Environment Trust for Richmond upon Thames. Shortly after moving to Oxtun, she became Heritage Conservation Officer for Port Sunlight Village Trust and has enjoyed working for them to deliver a range of built heritage projects.

Heather is keen to support the Oxtun Society with policy, funding and research around built heritage.



Jobs have been continuing on the shed with another well needed water butt installed and gutter brushes to stop leaves getting into them. A very generous gentleman donated an owl box, which has been positioned in the quarry garden.

As a group we continue to strive to keep our open spaces looking good now and for the future. We hope you are all keeping well and look forward to seeing you at one of our events in the future.

We are always looking for new members, to support us either financially for as little as 10p a week or to do a spot of gardening. Why not join us the first Saturday of each month in the rose garden. Contact Linda 652 9016 or visit friendsofthearno.blogspot.com



Contacting us

Contributions to the Newsletter are welcome and should be sent to the Editors by email to info@theoxtonsociety.co.uk or by post to the Secretary, 4 Willan Street, CH43 5ST.

You can also contact the Society about any other matter using the above addresses, or via the Oxtun Society website at www.theoxtonsociety.co.uk

Do you have an email address? If you are not receiving emails from us with news updates, your current email address is not in the database, so please let us have it. Your details are confidential and will never be passed to third parties.

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