

the OXTON SOCIETY



OXTON VILLAGE WELCOMES THE WILLOWS

THE long-awaited redevelopment of the old HSBC bank site in Village Road is set to be completed by Christmas.

The finishing touches are being made to nine flats – five two-bedroom and four one-bedroom including a penthouse – by Eraklis Developments Ltd.

The Hideout Café is opening in one of the four retail units on the ground floor and, so far, interest has been expressed in the remaining units by a pet shop, vegan food shop and china/flower retailer.

Michael Hercules who owns Eraklis Developments Ltd, said: “There has been a fantastic response from residents who are really pleased with the work we’ve done.

“We have gone out of our way to accommodate all of the requests we’ve had from neighbours, planning regulators and the Oxton Society and we’re really pleased with how it looks. We think it’s in keeping with the village.”

All of the flats have modern fitted kitchens and bathrooms and will be fully carpeted and have uniform blinds at the sash windows.



There is private parking at the rear of the building and electronic gates will be installed at the side.

The rent for the penthouse is £750 a month, £700 for a two-bedroom flat and £650 for a one-bedroom. One flat has already been taken.

Eraklis Developments has overseen several property developments in the borough including the award-winning Roklis Manor development on Cloughton Firs.

“We have always been fond of Oxton,” said Mr Hercules. “It’s taken a long time to get The Willows to where it is now because of other projects that were happening, but we’re pleased it’s nearly finished and all of the flats should be ready in the next few weeks.”

The former HSBC bank closed in 2006. Since planning permission was granted for the development in 2010, detailed discussions have taken place between the developer, the council and the Oxton Society regarding the materials to be used, the category and colour of the brickwork and make-up of the windows.



CHRISTMAS IS CANCELLED?



Tree decorations by Janine Suggett, Lynda Roberts, Mary Bryning, Pam Pauling & Sian Bailey

CHRISTMAS may be in jeopardy across the country but at least we can promise you a light show in the village to warm your hearts.

Sadly the virus means that we have abandoned our popular Xmas Lights Switch-on, but we are lighting up the village again from the end of November, dreaming of a White Christmas.

The special highlight this year will be the addition of a giant illuminated Xmas Tree, generously donated by Greens and decorated by our friends from The Oxtan Artists. The Artists cannot hold their annual Art Fair this year, but you will be able to see examples of their work on the tree. Some examples of the beautiful decorations being made are shown above.

We are also extending the lights to include some missing sections and the total cost of the lights will be about £3,500. We budget for £1,000 from Society funds and normally the balance comes from donations, refreshments, stall-holders and the raffle., this year there will be no crowds - so no income to help pay for the lights. We are getting £500 from the Council's Community Fund and we hope that the businesses will help out. But that still leaves some fundraising to do to close the gap.

There will be a "Buy a Bulb" collection box in Greens and we are opening a "Just Giving" page so that you can make a small donation.

Please just go to <https://www.justgiving.com/campaign/OxtanXmasLights> or go to Justgiving and search for oxtanxmaslights, and help us to cheer up the village for Christmas.

OUR LOCAL CENTENARIAN

HUGE congratulations to war hero and Society member Mike Carr who celebrated his 100th birthday on 29th October. Mike was an original member the the SAS and has featured in several history books. He retrained as an art and design teacher after the war.

Mike and his wife Barbara moved to Oxtan in 1960 and last year celebrated their diamond wedding anniversary.

Last year Mike was invited to perform the official Christmas Lights switch-on in the village.



This wonderful photo of Mike in his younger days was taken by the famous photographer Cecil Beaton



RUTH Davies has always had a passion for music. Her earliest childhood memory is playing the piano at her great aunt's house.

But the 52-year-old Birch Road resident took up the oboe in high school and landed her dream job in the Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra when she left the Royal Northern College of Music in 1994.

Here Ruth talks about her love of music and Oxton...

Where does your passion for music come from?

I was surrounded by music growing up. My Dad sang in a choir and was a fan of Bach and The Three Degrees and mum liked Buddy Holly, so there were always cassettes on in the car.

In primary school I joined a recorder club and in junior school I had violin lessons but I didn't get on with the violin at all, I hated it.

At senior school I took up the oboe and stuck with it. Different people take to different instruments. I didn't suit playing a stringed instrument because I couldn't bear the feel of the strings under my fingers. Even today if I see someone play a guitar I get a bit twitchy.

Do musicians have a natural gift?

I genuinely believe that anyone can play instruments. In the old days no-one asked that question because everyone played something but sadly music is becoming marginalised in the curriculum.

Once a week I work with 0-3 year-olds at Child Led Music Making in Anfield and the natural musicianship and creativity the children have is amazing. Those given the opportunity to carry on playing music do. However, like any other discipline, you have to practice if you want to develop your skill and advance.

What was a typical week like at the Phil before COVID? ... and after?

We used to do two concerts a week and some out-of-town concerts.

Covid's had a huge effect. The laws mean we can't go back to work properly. The Phil has been amazing and we're doing our best to do proper concerts with a socially-distanced audience.

It's been hard not being able to play with people. It's not like being a pianist where you can play on your own, you need other people.

How have you managed during lockdown?

My partner, Nigel Dufty, plays double bass in the Phil so at the start of lockdown we recorded popular classics like Somewhere Over The Rainbow and Fields of Gold and uploaded them to You Tube. We've had thousands of views. I'm not a high-brow person. Music is music for me and it's a shame to put it into categories. Doing a song like Over The Rainbow is just as amazing to me as doing a Mahler symphony.

How often do you have to rehearse?

When we're in rehearsals it's for six hours a day most days. The oboe is one of the hardest instruments to play as you need to be physically stronger than if you're playing a less arduous instrument.

It physically takes its toll on your body sitting in a stress position for hours. You need to practise but your body needs to relax too.

With the oboe you need to make your own reeds so we spend an inordinate amount of time hunched over gauging machines rather than practising!

What is your favourite music?

I love playing Brahms' symphonies and I'm a huge fan of Ella Fitzgerald. I like Abba and French pop music too. There's something really 'pop' about it. It's in the tradition of Edith Piaf, who I love, and the story-telling through the songs is great.

People would be surprised to know about me...

I'm a big fan of anything French and love the films too. I did French A Level and my mum was a French teacher so we used to go camping in France. I also love baking and am a massive Bake-Off fan.

What is your proudest achievement?

Doing a solo oboe and violin Bach Concerto with Nigel Kennedy at the Phil and watching my daughter, Ella, play the oboe on stage at the Phil when she was in the youth orchestra. It was a really nice circle of life and I was glowing with pride.

What do you love about Oxton?

I love the fact that you bump into people in the village and everyone is friendly and will stop to chat. It's a creative place and there is a lot going on. It feels intimate but not in an ivory tower type of way. It's well-connected and everyone keeps an eye out for each other. During lockdown shops like Edwards and Greens were fantastic the way they were delivering food to residents.

FRIENDS OF THE ARNO



OUR volunteers have been extremely busy over the past few months, while social distancing of course.

The gardening group have tackled some bigger clearing jobs such as removing ivy from the hedges along the edge of the entrance path from Ingestre Road and pruning the overgrown hedges around the bug hotel. The biggest job has been constructing a raised bed by the shed, which will be used as a plant nursery.

All this year we have been looking after pots of plants beside the shed originally intended for a spring plant stall. An autumn tidy may result in more cuttings etc, so we may be able to offer plants on an informal basis on our 'First Saturday' mornings, for a small donation to our funds.

Working alongside the council, one of the sandstone walls in the quarry has been stripped of ivy. The wall needs some attention but looks so much better. We have also approached the council with regards to trialing some picnic benches in the Arno and on Oxtan fields, which we feel would be a great addition to our open spaces.

The smaller shrubbery by the sandstone steps is now lending itself to some imaginative manifestations to intrigue our youngest visitors: why not take a look!



Friends of the Arno at the unveiling of the Bee Hotel

On the first Saturday in September we got together with members of the Oxtan Society to unveil a plaque underneath one of our new Bee hotels which are positioned on trees in our long border. The plaque is to honour Bill Blackledge M.B.E a dedicated member of the RHS North West in Bloom.



Our first Saturday in October was called off due to the very wet weather. We would have been planting 700 spring bulbs which we have purchased with the many generous donations we have received over the past few months. We would like to thank everyone who has donated during these challenging times and of course our many members who are supporting us. We couldn't do it without you. It is really rewarding to see so many people using this valuable space.

We all hope it won't be too long before you can join us at one of our events, until then keep well and keep gardening.

This month addition in to the Newsletter, the current History Periodical and the Anniversary Booklet (see page 7), members will be receiving the AGM Report, as we are unable to hold the AGM this year.

You will also receive copies of the previous two History Periodicals which were originally produced on-line only, as a number of members have requested hard copies.

TREES FOR ALL SEASONS

OUR Oxton trees have been displaying wonderful colours this autumn. After the summer shades of green our trees introduced a wider range of contrasting colours into the streetscape. Highlights included the electric yellows of the native field Maples and Maidenhairs while the leaves of other varieties of maples showed their crimson best. Dotted about were the light maroons of the Sweet Gums. Nature was cheering us up!

These are just some of the varieties included in the more than 60 trees planted by the Society over the past 14 years in the Oxton Conservation Area. All have been planted at the request of owners, businesses and churches and have been totally financed by the Society's Tree Planting Fund. Amazingly, there is so little public space in Oxton suitable for tree planting that only five trees are 'owned' by Wirral Council! The area's characteristic tree cover exists only because individual owners look after them.



Maple (Acer x Freemanii) planted 7 years ago, Kylemore Road



Three trees planted in the Shrewsbury Arms car park 10 years ago. From the closest:

Field Maple (Acer campestre "Elsrijk"), London Plane (Platanus x hispanica), Maidenhair tree (Ginkgo biloba)

It is widely known that trees make a very important contribution to the urban landscape, to birds and wildlife, to the urban environment and in offsetting climate change. Yet there are complaints ... usually arising from the wrong trees having been planted decades before in the wrong place. All new trees funded by the Society are recommended on the basis of their individual suitability for their location so they will not attract the disapproval of current and future generations. Each tree species has a shape that needs to be matched to its future location: tall and short, wide and thin, round or oval, dense or dappled.

The Society's Tree Group has produced an annotated list of trees suitable for planting in the Conservation Area (see the Society's website at conservation/trees) and an outline of the Tree Planting Fund is also there.

But what about those pesky autumn leaves piling up on the ground? Why not get rid of them by converting them to a wonderful garden resource: It's simple. Wet them generously and pack them extremely tightly into an old or recycled black bin-bag. Pierce the bottom of the bag in a few places to allow surplus water to drain away, put in a shaded out-of-the-way place and ... a year later you have lovely peat-like soil conditioner – free!



Sweet Gum (Liquidambar styraciflua "Warplesdon") planted 5 years ago at Christ Church.

OUR FOURTH BLUE PLAQUE

THE Oxton Society has unveiled its fourth Blue Plaque in tribute to two sisters who were among the first female newspaper editors in the country in the early 1900s.

Laura and Jeannie Willmer were editors of the *Wallasey News* and *Birkenhead News*, respectively, and influential in the Suffrage movement, campaigning alongside the non-militant National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies (NUWSS).

The plaque was officially unveiled outside the sisters' former home in Wellington Road by Liverpool Echo editor Maria Breslin,

The unveiling ceremony, on Saturday, September 19, was kept low key so as to observe social distancing measures.



Maria Breslin, Liverpool Echo editor; Shabbah Jaffar, current owner of the former Willmer sisters' home; Rhiannon Evans, Chair of the Oxton Society and Jo Hipps, Oxton Society History Group
Picture courtesy of Liverpool Echo

Rhiannon Evans, chair of the Oxton Society, said: "The Blue Plaque Scheme celebrates the links between notable local figures of the past and the building in which they lived."

"This is our fourth Blue Plaque and we had planned a bigger event with more people, but because of COVID we were restricted to just six. The sisters would have lived through the Spanish flu so I'm sure they would have sympathised with us."

Maria Breslin, who was appointed the Echo's first female editor earlier this year, said: "It was a privilege to be invited to join the Oxton Society in honouring two such inspirational and pioneering women."

"Laura and Jeannie led fascinating lives and were free spirits and strong women. They were women of their time and women of their class. Both helped shape what it is to be a woman today."

Jo Hipps, a member of the Oxton Society History Group, was inspired to find out more about the sisters after coming across a defaced 1911 census form. She has produced a booklet about their lives which is available via www.theoxtonsociety.co.uk.

The Oxton Society has previously commissioned Blue Plaques to honour Brigadier Sir Philip Toosey, the war hero played by Sir Alec Guinness in *Bridge on the River Kwai*, Edith Smith, who was the first woman to become a warranted police officer and composer Cyril Scott.

You can watch a video of the unveiling and read the speech given by Maria Breslin at www.theoxtonsociety.co.uk

“I’m really privileged to live in the house where these amazing women lived. What they did with their newspapers and protests was great. Their contribution has helped us have some of the rights and freedoms we have today.”

Those are the words of 10-year-old Maya Jaffar, who lives in the Willmer sisters’ former home in Wellington Road with her brothers Shrey and Aman and her parents Shabbar and Anupam Garrib. The Prenton Prep pupil is fascinated with strong, pioneering women and was thrilled when the Oxtan Society History Group discovered who had lived in her home in the 1900s.

Maya said: “I think it’s really motivating to stand up to the government and tell them that something is not right and should change. If I had lived in the Victorian era I would basically belong to my father, brother or husband and I would not be able to buy this house because women weren’t able to buy property.

“On my seventh birthday I got Goodnight Stories for Rebel Girls about women who are role models around the world and I was really interested. Women like Hypatia and Ada Lovelace and lots of girls who protested and were suffragists.”

Her eight-year-old brother Shrey, who also attends Prenton Prep, said: “I think equality between men and women is a cool thing and I’m never going to move from this house.”

The youngsters’ sentiments about the Willmer sisters were echoed by their father, Shabbar, when he spoke at the unveiling of the Blue Plaque.

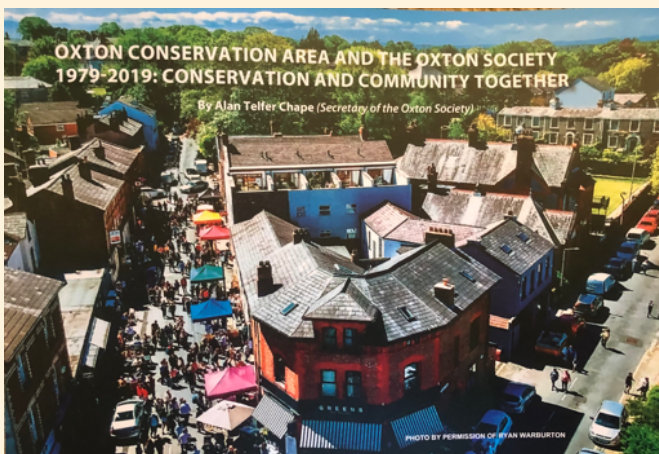


Shabbar Jaffar and Anupam Garrib with their children Maya, Shrey and Aman

“We are very honoured to be living in this house with a history connected to human rights and women’s rights,” he said.

“Every time we go past the plaque we will think of the difficulties and inequalities that women have suffered over the years, particularly at that the time when the Willmer sisters were living. Even today, there is inequality and gender inequality on a number of fronts. Humans rights and equality are incredibly important in our family. This plaque will remind us of how it was in the past, how it is now and how it can be made better.”

ANNIVERSARY BOOKLET



ALL members will be receiving a copy of a booklet commissioned by the Society to celebrate the Oxtan Society’s first 40 years. This has been written by Alan Chape, Secretary to the Society.

We hope you will enjoy reading “**Oxtan Conservation Area and the Oxtan Society 1979-2019: Conservation and Community together**”.

Volunteers delivering the booklet will attempt to put it through your letterbox but, if this fails, they will ring the door bell. If there is no response they will leave the booklet, in an envelope, in the safest and driest place nearby.

If you would like further copies they can be purchased from the Society.

TREES AND PLANNING

Trees

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

6 Glenmore Road CA/20/0103

Somerville, Talbot Road. CA/20/0123

2 Victoria Mount. CA/20/0145

6 Templemore Road. CA/20/0150

24 Dudley Close. CA/20/0164

13 Victoria Mount. CA/20/0168

6 Templemore Road. CA/20/0187

16 Kylemore Road. T/20/0162

39 Rose Mount. T/20/0181

35 Fairview Road. T/20/0189

The Society made comments in relation to:

Car Park, Prices Lane T/20/0115

Proposal: To reduce the height of five willow trees to wall level, fell one sycamore, fell dead birch and lime trees and reduce height of cherry and birch trees.

Comments: Accepted that willow trees are currently overpowering but they do provide significant greenery.

Alternatives might be to remove willow trees and replant with less dense canopy, reduce height by 50% or remove alternate trees. Suggest replacement of sycamore with tree with less dense canopy. One lime tree appears in good health and should be retained. Suggest applicants consider applying to the Oxtan Society Tree Fund if replanting is approved.

Planning

The Society has been consulted on one new application since the last report:

The Hollies, 14 Mount Pleasant. APP/20/01038.

The property is identified in the Character Appraisal as “making a positive contribution”. Proposal to replace a single storey glazed conservatory at the rear with a single storey extension on a slightly enlarged footprint, not visible from the highway. The proposed replacement wall and timber double doors on the frontage would be an improvement on the existing. Agreed no comment necessary.

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

PAYING SUBSCRIPTIONS

AS from next March 2021 we are changing to a new method of renewing your membership. In future, when your renewal is due, the preferred method will be to pay by Standing Order or to set up a Regular Payment if you do internet banking. We hope this will be more convenient for our members and it will certainly reduce the admin efforts of our hard-pressed officers.

New payments for multiple years will be discontinued unless you are in the middle of a multi-year plan which will run its course. Payments by Bank Transfer (BACS) will also be discontinued.

When you are due for renewal the invitation with the February Newsletter will contain full details of how to set up your payments. There will be the option to continue to pay annually by cash or cheque for any members who really want to - but we hope that Standing Orders will become the new normal. We will also be introducing Standing Orders for new members. Gift Aid and donations will continue as before.



YOU may or may not be a frequent user of Amazon but many people don’t know that they have recently set up a scheme where for every purchase you make they will give a donation to a charity of your choice at no extra cost to yourself!

We have recently successfully added the Oxtan Society to the list of available charities to choose from.

All you need to do is go to smile.amazon.uk to make your Amazon purchases (instead of the usual amazon.co.uk) and select the Oxtan Society as your chosen charity and we will benefit from everything that you buy.

OXTON SOCIETY DESIGN AWARD

THE purpose of the Society's Design Award scheme is to encourage and celebrate development projects, large and small, which contribute to our primary objective of ensuring that the special character of the Conservation Area is maintained and enhanced. The Awards have been an important part of the Society's annual programme for many years and, despite the very unusual circumstances, this year is no exception. A full description of the eligibility criteria and assessment process can be found on the Society's website: follow the link 'Conservation' - 'Design Award'.

There are two categories of award. The most outstanding projects(s) which meet all the criteria in full, will win the Society's Design Award and be presented with a plaque. Other projects of merit may be awarded a Certificate of Commendation. This year we are making an award in each category.

The Design Award goes to Rob and Sally Warnock for a beautifully executed two storey side extension to Beechwood, 21 Poplar Road.

The property is a large and imposing mid-19th Century villa of great character and the extension is in a visually prominent position on Poplar Road. The panel were unanimous in their praise for the quality of design and skilful use of materials which resulted in a "seamless" addition which "will settle down to being a natural part of Oxton".



Beechwood before the extension



Beechwood after the two-storey side extension

A Commendation is awarded to Henry and Jo Hipps for the careful conversion of an existing garage to a garden room and the construction of a new garage at West Ridge Lodge, Ingestre Road. The panel were impressed by the quality of the new build work which is sympathetic to the character of the property which dates back to 1864. The work used reclaimed sandstone, lintels and stable cobbles.

The awards are normally presented at the Society's AGM, which this year has been postponed because of the pandemic. We hope that this can be rescheduled for early 2021. Fuller details of each of the awards can be found on our website



West Ridge Lodge garden room before & after



West Ridge Lodge new garage

THE ORIGINS OF SECRET GARDENS

THIS year would have marked the 20th anniversary of the award-winning Secret Gardens of Oxton. We talk to the Oxton couple who helped organise the very first event.

When the first seeds were sown for the Secret Gardens of Oxton back in 2001, eight residents opened their gardens to the public and 800 people visited the village.

The idea was first planted by Oxton Society member Ian Wray following a holiday in the Cotswolds where he'd visited a similar scheme.

So social secretary Patrick Toosey and his wife Monica rose to the challenge

"We decided to give it a go," said Patrick, 86.

"Our fundraising efforts at that time were hard work. We held barn dances and firework displays but they never made much money.

"Monica and I lived at 20 Rose Mount then so we opened our garden and, with a bit of arm-twisting, encouraged friends and neighbours to do the same.

"The committee decided to call it The Secret Gardens of Oxton because people couldn't actually see the gardens behind the stone walls. We thought if we got 200 visitors then it would be a success but four times as many people came."

The couple had spent nine years living in Staten Island, New York, through Patrick's job in the shipping industry and took inspiration from school fairs they'd been involved in.



Patrick & Monica Toosey with the poster for the first Secret Gardens event

Not everything went to plan though as Patrick recalled.

"We didn't make allowances for car parking and it was chaos on the day," he said. "Holding the event on a Saturday did not help either.

"Also we naively advertised our own telephone number for enquiries and we were never off the phone!

"The first map we printed was a photocopy of the A to Z which visitors couldn't follow and there were no road closures or risk assessments. However, we learned valuable lessons to take forward.

"It was an immensely rewarding day and raised £3,000 – more than any of the other events we'd organised. Our first charity was Sam the Scanner at Arrowse Park Hospital.

"We knew we had to hold the event again because people were obviously interested."

The event was switched from a Saturday to a Sunday, clearer maps were produced and £1,500 was spent paying for the roads to be closed.



Today, three youth groups – The Viking, Birkenhead and Shaftsbury – take it in turns to organise the car parking on Oxtan Fields.

“The parking works like clockwork now, Martin Hesketh, an architect and Viking youth leader, devised a fool-proof system,” said Patrick.

Before this year’s coronavirus crisis, the biggest threat to the event was the great British weather.

“We switched from May to June one year to try to guarantee sunshine but it made no difference because our weather is so unpredictable,” said Patrick. “We switched back because the gardens are at their best in May.”

As its popularity grew, a separate committee was formed to run the event and more activities for children were introduced along with musical entertainment.

Today, around 25 gardens open each year and more than 3,000 people visit. Local businesses get involved and 350 volunteers help out. The event raises money for the society, a youth group and two other chosen charities.

Monica, 70, said: “We set the ball rolling 20 years ago but there’s now an enormous amount of work put in by a lot of people who are all assigned various jobs and that has made the event into what it is today.

“We’ve also had guest pianists providing a musical backdrop and several choirs and performers as well as the introduction of craft and art stalls.

“The event has grown beyond our expectations.”

Patrick added: “It’s fantastic that it’s still popular 20 years on. We don’t say the gardens are perfect – they’re just ‘secret’.”



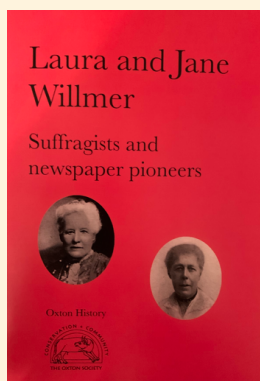
SECRET GARDENS 2021?

THE Secret Gardens coordinators have met to consider holding the event in 2021 and will be making the following proposal to the next committee meeting:

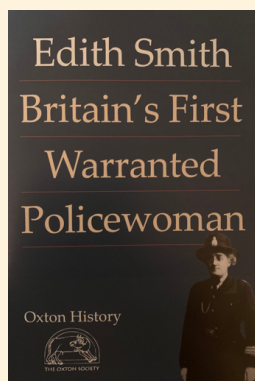
In the light of the Wirral’s Covid risk status, Tier 3 / Very High, it is not possible to plan at this time with any certainty for a live SG event in May 2021. The SG coordinators have secured a provisional date of May 9th but no further planning will take place until January. If positive changes in the COVID situation enables such an event on this scale there will be time then to undertake the appropriate planning. The alternative would hopefully be a virtual event.

MAKE 2020 A HISTORIC CHRISTMAS

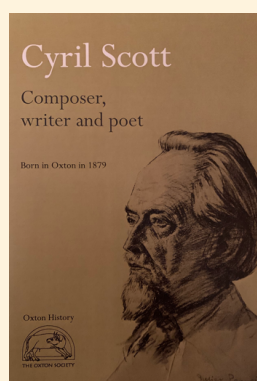
OXTON History Publications, produced by the Oxton History Group, are now available to purchase online. Our publications tell the stories of prominent and interesting Oxton people from the past. Much of what we write is based on our original research. The following booklets are available.



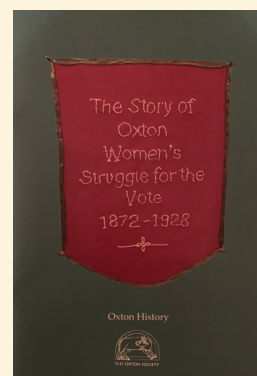
Laura and Jane Willmer, Suffragists and Newspaper Pioneers, £3.00 (8 pages)



Edith Smith, Britain's First Warranted Policewoman, £3.00 (8 pages)



Cyril Scott, Composer, Writer and Poet, £3.00 (8 pages)



The Story of Oxton Women's Struggle for the Vote, £4.50, 16 pages)

All four booklets can be purchased together at a special price of £10.00

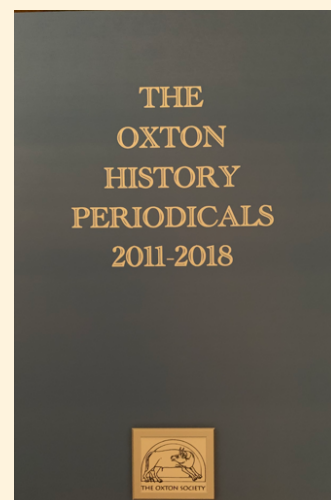
Also available is the bound hardback collection of the first 25 History Periodicals £15

As a package all four booklets together with the Periodicals Book can be purchased for just £23

These publications would be of interest to anyone who wants to know about Oxton's rich history and would also make an ideal gift or stocking filler for Christmas.

To order copies please send an email to history@theoxtonsociety.co.uk telling us which publications you wish to order, your name and address and confirming payment by bank transfer to The Oxton Society, account number 51059475, sort code 40 10 26, with the Reference "History" plus your surname

Your order would be delivered to your doorstep in line with with Covid safety regulations, by a member of the History Group.



Contacting us

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 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 Oxton Society website at www.theoxtonsociety.co.uk

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