

the OXTON SOCIETY



Great to be back!

THE Secret Gardens of Oxton is back for 2022! Having had to stage the event online for the past two years due to the pandemic, organisers are thrilled that this year's event will be held in public again on Sunday, May 8 between 10am and 5pm.

Up to 20 private gardens are due to open their doors to visitors and the Mayor and Mayoress of Birkenhead, Cllr George Davies and his wife, Cath, will be special guests.

There will be a host of craft stalls, musical entertainment by local artists, the Friends of the Arno plant sale, children's activities, food and drink and a gala raffle with fabulous prizes donated by local businesses.

Organiser Kirsty Cotton said: "While our 'virtual' gardens event on Facebook was a success in terms of keeping people entertained during a difficult couple of years and still raising money for charity, there's

nothing like holding the event in public. We're looking forward to welcoming people back into Oxton so that they can enjoy the fabulous gardens we have in the village and enjoy a much-needed day of family entertainment.

"This is the 20th secret gardens and people will be able to see some of their favourite gardens of the past as well as some new ones for 2022."

Advance tickets priced £8 (£10 on

the day) including a programme, will be on sale from April 1 at several shops and restaurants in Oxton Village as well as Homebird, Heswall. Online tickets can be purchased at theoxtonsociety.co.uk

Proceeds will be divided between the Oxton Society and three local charities assisting on the day – Birkenhead Woodcraft Folk, Stick 'n' Step and Shaftsbury Youth Club. Free car parking is available on Oxton Fields, Storeton Road.



Our big green blanket



OXTON has a distinctive tree scape. If you look from the upper floor of St Catherine's hospital you will observe a sea of hard landscape and terraced housing. But as you raise your eyes you are confronted with the Oxton Forest.

It's like a big green blanket covering the horizon. You wonder what's underneath but quickly realise it's all those streets you are familiar with- Fairview Road, Village Road, Rose Mount and Shrewsbury Road. This is not accidental. It is due to planning, the control of casual felling and mismanagement, and the care and attention given to their trees by owners.

A great variety of species

A very large number of the trees are mature, dating back to the 19th century, when the Village experienced its major period of growth.

The treescape is characterised by a great variety of different species, the various colour and shapes of which add immeasurably to the quality of the area while providing a shelter and haven for wildlife.

What we see today is a product of private owners who sustain this valuable heritage. Only three trees in the whole Conservation Area are actually owned by Wirral Borough Council.

The Society promotes the protection and sensitive management of the local treescape, while encouraging the planting of new trees of appropriate species to provide continuity for future generations.

The Society has supported members who wish to plant new trees, including contributions to funding. The Society is currently reviewing the operation of this fund and will report back shortly on any changes.

Regulations protecting trees

Regulations protect all trees in the Conservation Area.

The Society has a Tree Group which is responsible for commenting to Wirral Borough Council on all proposals for work on trees in the Conservation Area.

The law provides protection for all trees in the Conservation Area with a trunk diameter of 7.5cm in diameter (about 3ins) or more, at chest height. The protection extends to the roots too.

Protection does not mean that no tree work can be done but it does mean that all proposals for work on trees and their roots must be notified to the Tree Preservation Officer of Wirral Borough Council at least six weeks before the work is commenced.

Forms to notify the council of your intention to do work may be downloaded from the Oxton Society website. Go to conservation/trees/

tree works The council's consent is not required for any tree that is dead or dangerous. However, anybody proposing to cut down such a tree is advised to give five day's written notice, unless it's an emergency. The removal of deadwood/broken branches is also exempt.

You could be prosecuted if the council considers you have carried out unauthorised work.

It's in your best interest to always check with the Wirral Council's Tree Preservation Officer by email at planningenforcement@wirral.gov.uk or phone 0151 606 2004.

The Society's approach to tree work proposals

When Wirral Borough Council receives a proposal to undertake work on trees in the Conservation Area it asks the Society for its comments. The Tree Group prepares the comments.

The Society is an advisory body in this regard and any comments it makes are taken into account, but do not have to be endorsed. Ultimately, decisions on proposals are the responsibility of Wirral Council's Planning Committee.

The Society always tries to make its judgments in an impartial and informed manner. It comments from the perspective of a Conservation Society and always emphasises the impact of the proposed work on the treescape as viewed from the public domain - although owners must notify Wirral Borough Council of all proposed work.

The Tree Group works within its code of practice - please visit www.theoxtonsociety.co.uk/trees/tree-comments/

We need you!

THERE is a vacancy on the Tree Group with a view to the successful applicant taking on the role of coordinator. This is an interesting opportunity which will enable an

amateur tree lover to play a leading role in the protection of Oxton's famous treescape. Please contact Alan Chape at chape@me.com for more information.

Social supermarket offers food for thought in Oxton Village

A SOCIAL supermarket in the heart of Oxton Village is proving a life-line for hundreds of residents who are struggling to make ends meet.

Around 200 people a week are buying discounted food and household essentials at the Green Shop Mini Mart in Christchurch Road which opened in December.

The initiative is the brainchild of 27-year-old Kris Leigh from Egremont who set up Break The Mould, a not-for-profit organisation, in 2019. He initially wanted to create opportunities for young people in Wirral through sport and education – but has since diversified into Sustainable Living Projects (SLP) to help the wider community.

Kris, who opened his first mini mart in Noctorum, said: “I was inspired to set them up for two reasons - food poverty and food waste. As a country we waste tonnes of food which is crazy as we have so much food poverty in the UK, plus the amount we waste is bad for our planet as it creates CO₂ pollution in landfill.

“There are 900 households in Oxton that are affected by universal credit cuts, and with the rising cost of living and wages not inflating at the same rate, working families and individuals are equally struggling. No one should ever have to make a decision whether they should have a meal or stay warm. ng at the same rate, working families and

“Thanks to the support of Jo Stakes, the manager at The Green Shop, we opened our second mini mart there and it’s helping to stretch everyone’s budgets further. Our support numbers are constantly growing, from footfall to home deliveries. The mini mart is also a great way to educate people about food waste. Lots of people have changed their



Sue Mahoney at the mini market and below, Kris Leigh coaching children

mindset over ‘best before dates’ and testing before they throw food out.

“It’s important to address any pre-judgments about who can use our mini marts—we are open to everyone and are here for all people.”

Volunteer Sue Mahoney, who is the Labour candidate for Oxton ward, said: “I grew up in Liverpool in an era when everyone helped each other. The Green Shop and the mini mart support the community like that. People come here not just for food but for a chat too. We have a lot of regulars and pensioners. I can tell from talking to people that a lot of them are struggling so hopefully we offer social support too.

“We also offer work placements for students from Foxfield Special School to gain valuable experience of working in a shop.”

Sue is one of around 75 volunteers who support the array of BTM projects including sports and holiday clubs and education and crime prevention programmes in schools.

Kris said: “We are very proud of the incredible culture BTM has built. We have volunteers from Wirral, the UK and different parts of the world too who work remotely. Our ethos is to give everyone opportunities. Some of our volunteers are university students who gain valuable experience managing teams and projects



before going into their chosen careers, and some are making a complete career pivot and want to learn from more experienced people.

“The most amazing thing is that the aspirations of BTM resonate with every single one of us. We are all volunteers. We might get funding to run certain projects like sports/ youth engagement, but in terms of the mini marts, no-one is paid and any money we make is used to buy more stock.

“Our ambitions are endless. We want to continue to help as many people as possible and keep doing it well. We want to eventually have a building that we can run all of our projects from and my ultimate goal is to be a nationally recognised organisation in many different fields.”



How Carbon Literate are you?

WHILE world leaders at the COP26 conference debated ways to reduce carbon emissions, the Oxtan Society was debating, and then committed to its own carbon reduction action plan, *writes Oxtan Society Secretary John Heathman.*

In August, several members of the committee took part in a Carbon Literacy Project training course and those who attended are now certified as Carbon Literate under the Carbon Literacy Standard.

This does not mean we are all carbon neutral – far from it – but we now understand the impact our daily lives have on the environment and how we can reduce our own carbon footprints.

We personally committed to make changes, and reduce our CO₂ output; simple things like more use of rail travel instead of cars, cut down on eating beef, turn down the thermostat by one degree, and (this was a big one) reduce air travel.

For myself, one of the things I committed to was to cut out short car journeys of less than three miles, and in the last six months, I've been surprised at how often I have cycled to the local supermarket. It does make you realise how easy it is to make a small difference.

As well as individual actions, the Society has made its own Climate Change objective statement; this was presented at the last AGM, and has been signed off by the executive committee. Here it is in full:



What significant carbon reduction action are you committing to undertake with a group?

Declare the Society as an organisation driving towards carbon emission reduction in all its activities. Work towards an EcoOxtan strategy with partners

Show leadership by taking actions personally, and as a Society to reduce carbon emissions and publicise these to our membership.

Seek out best practice from within our membership, both residential and business and adopt and share these actions.

Identify specific local issues that need addressing (E.g. gas heating); seek out, adopt and publicise actions to address these.

Outline how your action is significant to this group, and how it reduces the group's carbon footprint.

This will be an initiative that places the Society in an influencing capacity for a long-term global issue.

Using our communication channels with local government and our 800 strong membership we can have a voice to lobby organisations and governments to change. As a community, we can realistically achieve CO₂ reductions in the region of thousands of tonnes annually.

So, having made this grand statement, how do we take this forward? One easy way is to share ideas and information. We will be publishing more on this in future communications, but we obviously are looking for engagement with all our members both residential and business, as we are sure that there will be many actions we can all undertake. Please let us know what you are doing or what you think the society should consider in order to effectively contribute to carbon reduction and climate change.

You can measure your own household carbon footprint at www.carbonindependent.org

It is frightening to see the results of where we contribute to the CO₂ problem, but that then gives us all the challenge to think how we can make small changes to help to reduce our contribution to the environmental crisis. It is a commitment for life!

Another Gold crown for Oxtan in Bloom

JOHN Booth celebrated his retirement from looking after Oxtan's hanging baskets with another 'Gold' in the 2021 North West in Bloom Awards (*pictured*).

The judges said the standard of maintenance and upkeep throughout the village was 'of a high standard' and they were impressed with the commitment shown despite the constraints of the pandemic.

They said the plants were appropriate to the village and gave a very good floral

impact and a high level of entertainment. Horticulture was at the very core of all the village's activities and was being used to improve the area for visitors.

They said environmental responsibility was taken very seriously by the team and community engagement was clear, with year-round activities.

They added that the Oxtan Secret Gardens event is 'testament to horticulture being used in a positive way'.



Spring is in the air for The Friends of the Arno

BULBS peeping through the earth, daffodils in bloom and everything in the garden is looking rosy—so it's time to visit the Arno!

Stroll through the gates on Storeton Road and as you approach the first tree on the left, look underneath and you will find a wonderful display of snowdrops.

This little plant could have possibly of been brought here by the Romans centuries ago, but it has become a firm favourite mainly found growing in woodland around trees, a folklore symbol of hope that spring is on its way.

Once you reach the top of the steps leading into the quarry you will see the results of our autumn planting of various bulbs peeping through. This is when we realise it was all worthwhile, even in the bad weather.

For those with green fingers

As in previous years the Friends of the Arno will be running the plants stall at the Secret Gardens.

This has always been a great success, thanks to the many green-fingered people who have grown, split and potted on plants to be sold.

We hope you are already taking cuttings, collecting plants and growing seedlings for this year's stall.

If you are splitting herbaceous plants, digging up seedlings or otherwise have anything to spare, please put them into pots and let us have them to sell.

The plants can be delivered a few days before Sunday, May 8 to 1 Ingestre Road (if no-one is at home leave them by the porch).

Please label them if you know what they are. If you would like them to be collected or have any queries, please phone Peter on 652 1027. Alternatively, they can be delivered to the stall from 8.30am on the Sunday.

The stall will be in front of The Willows in the village centre. All sales cash only.



Also, any unwanted terracotta pots, gardening tools or gardening books would be welcome for selling on the stall.

Contribution to Climate Change

In the Arno and Oxtan Fields we are working with the council and Mersey Forest Initiative to plant trees that will capture carbon. We are growing plants and shrubs to combat biodiversity loss and provide habitats for wildlife.

We have installed nesting boxes for owls, smaller birds and bats, and are building up large stocks of compost and leafmould to enrich the soil and prevent degradation.

We're encouraged that groups like ours around the world are doing similar things, which collectively will play a part in reducing the negative effects of greenhouse gasses, waste products and pollution.

Britain in Bloom Award 2021

In the 'Britain in Bloom Awards' we achieved a Level 5 Outstanding for the Arno Rose Garden. This inspires us to carry on what we are doing to keep the local community looking its best.

New members

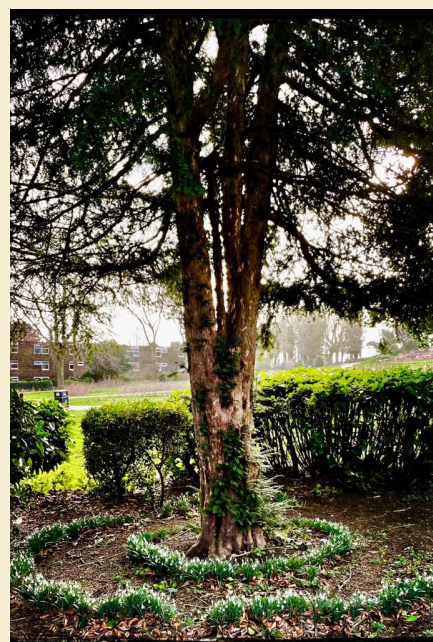
We are looking for new committee members. Formed in 2007, we work closely with Wirral Borough to

agree planting and re-wilding schemes and maintenance of benches and equipment.

We are also involved in fundraising for projects, such as rescuing The Little Arno, and hold plant sales and other events during the year.

You do not have to be an avid gardener, but if you feel you could contribute please email our Peter at peter@defigueiredo.co.uk or call 0151 652 1027. One thing we can guarantee is you will make new friends!

Finally, our notice boards are refreshed frequently so please take some time to read all our up to date activities and events.



Oxton People—Rhiannon Evans

RHIANNON Evans, chair of the Oxton Society since 2010, has announced she is retiring this year, so we took the opportunity to feature her in this edition of *Oxton People*.

Brought up in Cardiff, Rhiannon went to Sussex University to read English and did a Masters on William Blake before working in an art school in Worthing.

She moved to Wirral in 1979 and was instrumental in setting up pioneering courses for adults, particularly women, at Wirral College of Art & Design, which later merged into Wirral Met.

She then became Pro Vice Chancellor at Edge Hill University where, under Tony Blair's government, she led a national team to widen access to universities for young people from first generation backgrounds. She received an MBE from Prince Charles in 2008 for her work in widening access to universities.

She retired in 2009 and later received an honorary doctorate from Edge Hill University.

Rhiannon lives in Oxton with her husband, Graham. She has two daughters, two grandchildren and a great grandchild.

When did you move to Oxton and why?

I came here in 1979 with my daughters who were 12 and 8. A friend from Brighton knew someone who lived here and she said it was Hampstead of the North and the only place I should live. I thought it was an extraordinary place with a friendly atmosphere, although unemployment was at 38% and that was shocking from someone moving here from the South. People welcomed everyone who moved here. The famous park and museum also interested me and I wanted to be near Liverpool.

What inspired you get involved in the Oxton Society?

I went to one or two meetings when Patrick Toosey was chair and then he needed someone to take over



while he was unwell. I had my arm twisted. I had very little knowledge of the area because I had commuted into Lancashire every day and only went into Oxton on a Saturday. My retirement project was publishing my mother's war journals, which can be a lonely pursuit, so I thought it would be a good to balance that with something more people-centred.

What are your highlights during your time as chair?

I don't take any credit for this at all but I'm proud that the Society has developed into a very professional organisation; from the website, to the history group, to the charities and partners we work with. We've won awards—Civic Voice, RHS—and the Secret Gardens won Wirral Event of the Year. We don't concentrate on awards but it's important to highlight the Society's success, I will really miss being involved.

To anyone interested in taking over, what advice would you give?

My advice would be to let the experts do their jobs. We have a variety of expertise on the committee - planners, tree specialists, legal expertise—specialists who know what they're talking about – so I'd say just look at where you can add value.

What will you do with the extra time you'll now have?

I'm looking to write a book about a house in North Wales that I'm interested in and I also plan to do more walking. I've completed nine long

distance routes in the last 10 years since I retired and I'm hoping to do some more.

What's your proudest achievement?

My daughters' achievements. One is a libel barrister, and now a QC, and watching her 'taking silk' in the Royal Courts of Justice was a very proud moment. Then my other daughter received an Honorary Doctorate for her work with charities and the health service from Manchester University.

Who are you inspired by?

The fictional character Dorothea Brooke in George Eliott's *Middlemarch* as she really knew that women needed to have meaningful work to be properly human and William Blake because he's lasted as a radical and visionary for 250 years as every generation rediscovers him. A contemporary figure is Barack Obama, because he's an extraordinary eloquent orator with the ability to communicate and empathise with people.

People would be surprised to know this about me...

In 1967, while I was a student in Paddington, I rented a flat for free for working on site, and I was Gary Brooker's landlady (lead singer of Procol Harum) when he made *A Whiter Shade of Pale*.

What do you like most about living in the village?

The architecture; the harmony of Georgian and Victorian streets; the great pleasure I get from going up hill and then down hill; the atmosphere; the people; the community and the trees.

What changes would you like to see?

The main issue is parking and I don't know how it is going to be resolved. It's a perennial issue but these streets are clearly not designed for so many cars. It will take real imagination and funding to find a solution.

The Oxton Society: Reviewing the future

IN 2019 the Society undertook a major review of our objectives:

1. Promote and secure high standards of planning, landscape and architecture to preserve, improve and develop the area
2. Engage and communicate with members and residents to raise awareness of Oxton's history, architecture and unique environment
3. Foster community and business involvement
4. Maintain the Society on a sustainable financial footing, including working with partners

Since 2019 the business of the Society has been disrupted by covid. In addition, the council is about to publish a Draft Local Plan which will contain important new policies on conservation and heritage. We have revisited our objectives and drawn up a revised agenda for action, to re-emphasise the Society's core business and to prepare our response to the Local Plan.

Our primary objective is to protect the character of the conservation area and raise awareness of its heritage, but this needs to be bolstered by the support of the community and businesses. This is in line with the Society's constitutional status as a Conservation Area Advisory Committee.

This status is a way for the public to help the council in managing and protecting the environment. This was operationalised through an Executive Committee that has the important role of commenting on applications for planning permission and tree work.

The primary objective (No 1 above) requires us to develop strong links with residents and businesses. We need to raise awareness by a process of informing, educating and communicating. This will help to ensure that everyone is clear about what is permissible and is then in a position to do the 'right thing' in relation to matters that do not require planning permission.



In this context the Society will:

- Update and refresh our advice notes on our website
- Use the newsletter to emphasise the importance of conservation matters
- Review our social media strategy
- Leaflet the Conservation Area with advice on how to look after the conservation area
- Review our relationship with businesses in terms of how we secure their views

We will sustain and increase emphasis on conservation matters by:

- Interpreting and applying the emerging design guides and codes of the new local plan
- Examining the new net zero policies in the local plan
- Protecting the character of the 400+ properties that are defined as making a positive contribution to the character of the area
- Informing and educating everyone about the new legal framework that applies to changes to walls in the Conservation Area
- Reinforcing the need to follow the rules in relation to work on trees (see page opposite)

We also have to address how we respond to the new Draft Local Plan which, if approved, will pro-

vide the framework for the next 10-15 years. The main part of the plan will be about defining land for new housing and any potential impact on Wirral's Green Belt. However, it will also [contain important new policies on conservation and heritage](#).

The Society has worked with Conservation Areas Wirral and has submitted a draft policy statement for the Conservation Area. This emphasises the need to protect and enhance the area's character, notably its character properties, its sandstone and other walls, its trees and associated greenery and the vibrancy of the village centre.

A new element of the Local Plan will be the need to address the Government's agenda to promote higher quality design through the medium of design guides and codes. This means we will almost certainly have to review how we respond to the range of new development and enforcement issues that we may be confronted with.

The Plan will be published in the next few months and the Government will appoint an inspector to conduct an Examination in Public to assess it. The full detail of the Society's new strategic framework will be published on our website and we welcome comments.

We hope that now we are emerging from the pandemic we can improve the quality of our conversation with all of you. So let us know your views.

Trees and planning

Shrewsbury Court—Application: T1. Sycamore-Prune back branches; T2. Sycamore -Prune back branches and remove Ivy from base; T3.Sweet Chestnut -Raise canopy to 4 metres; T4. Laurel- Remove; G4 various bushes (Holly, Laurel, Bay Laurel) - trim back branches; T6. Laurel - Prune back branches overhanging drive. *Oxton Society comments:* The Society would not oppose the application

6 Storeton Road—Application: 2 x Sycamore trees—Fell. *Oxton Society comments:* The removal of the trees would have a significant impact on the tree vista. The Society would not object to professional attention to

the trees in order to reduce the crown and raise the canopy

12 South Bank—Application—T1. Birch—Remove branches; T2 2X Birch (close proximity) - Remove limbs 10%; T3 Maple-Remove limbs; T4 Magnolia -Remove limbs; T5 Hornbeam Crown thinning by 15%. *Oxton Society comments:* The Society would not oppose the application

19 Alton Road—Application: 1. Leylandii tree -fell; 2. Little tree (not identified) dead; 3. Holly tree - prune. *Oxton Society comments:* The Society would not object to the application

Beechwod 21 Poplar Road- Application—Birch tree -crown reduction by 33%. *Oxton Society comments* - The Society does not oppose the application.

16 Rose Mount—Application—1. Atlas Cedar—Fell; 2. Incense Cedar - Fell. *Oxton Society comments:* 1. The Society would not object to the application

2. This is a large tree and its removal would have an impact on the tree vista. However, the Society would recommend that a professional opinion should be consulted as to a means of dealing with the perceived problem

Village news

IT is with great sadness that we have to report that Carolyn Weber passed away peacefully at home on March 5th.

Carolyn made a huge contribution to the Oxton Society over the last ten years and more.

With her Midas-touch she took on the newsletter, the website, the archive and the history of Oxton's houses, for which she had a particular passion, and through these interests transformed our communication with members.

Carolyn was also a superb minute secretary over that entire period who brought clarity and order to our sometimes convoluted discussions. More than anything we will miss Carolyn's friendship, kindness and her great example of courage and fortitude in the face of ill health. Our deepest condolences go to Steve and all the family.

AFTER 12 years at the helm, our Chair, Rhiannon Evans has decided to step down. This will formally take place at the next AGM in September, when a new Chair shall be appointed.

Rhiannon has led the Society through a period of strong consolidation and her leaving will be a loss to the Society and to Oxton.

The position of Chair is open to any member who wishes to be considered for the role.

Any interest should in the first instance be addressed to John Heathman, Secretary The Oxton Society, either by email, johnheathman@live.com or in writing to 7 Kylemore Road, Oxton, Prenton, CH43 2HA

THROUGH the gate in the old sandstone wall, you will find a quiet tranquil space being slowly and lovingly restored by our many volunteers.

We would love to show you around the garden, as well as introduce you to our plans for a Garden Pavilion, for which we are currently fundraising. Our next Open Day is on Saturday, April 2 from 10am – 3pm and will be attended by the Mayor of Wirral, Cllr George Davies.

Join us for activities and refreshments at 34a Slatey Road, Oxton, CH43 4UG - just look for the Callister gate!



Contact us

If you have any comments you can contact the Newsletter team via email at info@theoxtonsociety.co.uk or post to the Secretary, 7 Kylemore Road CH43 2HA. You can also contact the Society about any other matter using the above addresses or via the website

www.theoxtonsociety.co.uk. If you're not receiving emails from us with news updates, your email address is not in the database, so please let us have it. Details are confidential and will never be passed on to third parties.