

the

OXTON SOCIETY



Let there be light



WE'RE delighted to announce that the Oxton Christmas Lights Switch-on is back after a two-year absence.

The event gets under way at 3.30pm on Saturday, November 27 and will run to 6.30pm, with the Mayor and Mayoress of Birkenhead, Cllr George Davies and his wife Catherine, performing the switch-on.

Father Christmas will also be making an appearance at his grotto and this year's attractions include artisan food and gift stalls, mulled wine & mince pies, children's entertainment by Woodcraft Folk, carousel and Christmas novelties, street food from local businesses, Salvation Army Christmas carols, children's choirs from St Joseph's, Woodchurch Road and The Luminelles and The Famous Rock Choir. A Grand Christmas Raffle has a top prize of a £300 Bogan's Carpet voucher.

Please note that this is a cash-only event.

Dave Pennington, from the Christmas Lights Planning Committee, said: "Now lockdown restrictions have been lifted, we are looking for-

ward to the Village coming together again. We will continue the theme of an Oxton White Christmas and plan to extend the lights to include The Willows and Claughton Firs, towards the Shrew. This year's Christmas tree is sponsored by Ewer Roberts Flowers. We are also looking for **volunteers to help out** so if you can spare any time to help set up and clear away afterwards, please contact mariejpennington@sky.com."

A JustGiving appeal has also been set up to raise £3,000.

Jeff Willis, vice chair of the Oxton Society, said: "Income from all our

activities does not cover the costs of putting on the event. The road closure alone costs £850, and we are seeing increases in our electrical contractor's fees and carousel hire.

"The shortfall is usually met with profit from The Secret Gardens, but it was a virtual event again this year and income was drastically reduced. We are asking if residents would please consider making a donation. Nearly £1,000 has already been raised, so thank you to everyone who has contributed so far."

Visit [Justgiving.com](https://www.justgiving.com/oxtonxmaslights) and search for oxtonxmaslights



Can you help out at next year's Secret Gardens of Oxton?

PLANS for the 2022 Secret Gardens of Oxton are well under way.

The event has been held online for the past two years because of the Pandemic but, fingers crossed, the public will once again be able to see the village's beautiful gardens in person on May 8.

Every year the event relies on the support of hundreds of volunteers and because several key members have retired, there are three key positions that need filling—two in **health and safety** and one for a **ticket manager**.

The **health and safety** roles start around February and involve carrying out risk assessments on each garden that will open to the public. Assessments also need to be made in other areas that will have visitors such as the cafe at Prenton Prep School.

The roles include writing a Covid risk assessment and event plan to submit to the council, checking steps, entrances and exits, looking for trip hazards etc, arranging signs such as entry, exit and steep steps and completing a standard form. They also include speaking with garden owners about the number of stewards that will be needed. Signposts at the event will need collecting afterwards and put back into storage.

If you have previous health and safety experience or would like to be considered, email secretgardens@theoxtonsociety.co.uk.

The **ticket manager** role commences around the end of March and involves liaising with a number of local shops and businesses to deliver tickets (which will be used as proof of purchase on the day). The ticket manager will also collect the takings, which will need to be banked or passed to the Treasurer of the Secret Gar-



dens Committee.

Posters will also need to be put up locally in garden centres, shops, libraries and various other venues.

Ticket sales start early April and follow-up visits will be needed to replenish ticket stocks leading up to the event. Some participating gardens also need tickets providing for the day itself.

Records will need to be kept reconciling tickets and sales. This role is for six weeks and is an important part of the build up.

Organiser Lisa Stafford said: "The Secret Gardens of Oxton is the highlight of the local calendar and raises much-needed funds for the Society and local charities. The event wouldn't be possible without the support of local people volunteering their time and we would love to hear from anybody who hasn't been involved

before but would like to help out in May 2022."

If you would like to help in any capacity, please email secretgardens@theoxtonsociety.co.uk.



Green-fingered volunteer needed

JOHN Booth has been organising our much-admired hanging basket displays for a number of years but as he reaches the grand age of 80, a new volunteer is needed.

As well as bringing some wonderful colour to the village street scene we have had three Gold Awards from the RHS's North West in Bloom.

However, the time has come to pass the mantle on to a younger person who would be able to carry on the

good work into the future. If we can find a new coordinator, John would be willing to assist in the background with help when needed.

We have an automatic watering system and an agreement with a local firm, Clearground, which take care of the heavy-lifting in putting up/taking down the baskets and we have a team of volunteers who help with all the jobs. Email info@theoxtonsociety.co.uk if you are interested in helping.

Park life

THE Oxton Society was invited to help Birkenhead Park celebrate its 175th anniversary and so we asked members for their advice and we had three responses.

These included a vintage car show, celebrating the shared history of the Park and Oxton residents and linking the event in 2022 to our own Secret Garden event. We have asked the team to explore the latter.

Oxton in the spotlight as solider is honoured with Blue Plaque

AN Oxton soldier who helped lead a unique battalion in the First World War was honoured by the Oxton Society in August.

George Schultz was a Company Commander of the Bigland's 1st Battalion Birkenhead Bantams, a revolutionary body for men under 5ft 3ins.

A Blue Plaque was unveiled outside his former home in Silverdale Road by Major Paul Hands from Chetwynd Barracks.

Jeff Willis, vice 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 a fitting tribute to George Schultz and the important role all of the other soldiers of the Birkenhead Bantams played in the First World War."

George, who was born in 1887, was a Lieutenant in the 1st Volunteer Battalion of the Cheshire Regiment before emigrating to Canada in 1911.

On the onset of war, he responded to Kitchener's call for volunteers and returned to Wirral immediately.



George Schultz in 2015



Captain Rob Barr MBE from 234 (Wirral) Squadron RLC Chetwynd Barracks, Sarah Richmond and her son Seb who live in the property now, Oxton Society vice-chair Jeff Willis, George Schultz's grandson John, Major Paul Hands who did the official unveiling, Bob Knowles of the Oxton Society History Group and Dominic Richmond. Picture by James O'Hanlon

Alfred Bigland, another Oxton resident and MP for Birkenhead, had persuaded the War Office to permit the raising of a battalion made up of men under the Army's regulation height, although the officers were all taller. This is the only time when the name of Birkenhead was used in the official title of a battalion.

In August 1917 while leading his company to capture a strategic hill known as The Knoll in Picardy, France, George, age 30, was fatally wounded.

He was awarded the British War Medal and the Inter-Allied Victory Medal and his name is etched on the Birkenhead Cenotaph.

Speaking at the unveiling ceremony his grandson, John Schultz, said the Blue Plaque was not only a fitting tribute to his grandfather, but to the other 920 soldiers from the Birkenhead Bantams who lost their lives during the conflict.

Dominic Richmond, who owns the house, attended the event along with his wife, Sarah and son, Seb.

He said: "I've lived in this house for 20 years. I received a book written on Captain Schultz by his grandsons and thought that it might be of interest to the Society.

"We were very proud when we realised such a prominent solider lived in our house. We knew of the family from having done some of our own research but not that one of the children had been so giving and special in the First World War.

"There has been loads of reaction from people walking past our home. Everyone stops and reads the Blue Plaque.

"The Schultz grandsons will be so pleased that their grandad is being recognised for what he did.

"The unveiling ceremony was very special and featured on TV and in the press and we were very proud to be involved in the occasion.

"The most pleasing thing about the ceremony was seeing how proud the family were to see their relative be recognised for his efforts, their hard work and research has meant that George and his fellow colleagues will always be remembered.

"I think it was also a great showcase for the Society as it does so much to promote Oxton in so many ways."

A booklet about George Schultz's life has been produced by the Oxton Society History Group and is available via www.theoxtonsociety.co.uk

'Patrick has been relentless in promoting the Society to all comers'

THREE prominent members of the Oxton Society retired this autumn after years of sterling work for the community.

Citations were read out during October's AGM to Patrick Toosey, Steve Ferguson and Carolyn Weber, excerpts of which are printed here...

Of Patrick Toosey, Oxton Society secretary Alan Chape said:

I HAVE a particular connection because we joined the Society at roughly the same time. The Society was then focused on responding to planning and tree applications but not much else. Patrick quickly recognised the need to revive and broaden the Society's role. This primarily involved its relationship and connection to the local community.

Patrick followed this up with the idea of having the Oxton Secret Gardens. Ian With Steve Ferguson he began to contact garden owners and the first Secret Gardens took place in 2001 with eight gardens 800 visitors, causing traffic chaos. The rest is history!

Patrick's next proposal was to have Xmas lights in the village in 2002. He maintained it would appeal to residents and businesses. The lights would be installed and then taken down for the next Xmas. In addition, the idea of an event emerged involving a switch on with stalls and music.



Patrick Toosey receives his citation from Society chair Rhiannon Evans and former Secretary Alan Chape

The then Secretary was appalled at the idea and thought it would put the Society at financial risk! He moved that it should only take place if Patrick was prepared to personally reimburse any financial loss. The lights went ahead, and the Secretary resigned!

Patrick then became Chair of the Society and worked tirelessly to promote its aims. He became a fixture around the village and earned the soubriquet of Lord Oxton and a range of other titles!

No one can deny Patrick's enthusiasm

and fondness for the village. I certainly saw it first-hand in 2005/6 when we were faced with the closure of the HSBC bank. I remember discussing with him what could we do to ameliorate the impact of the closure?

After much wringing of hands, he declared "I'll speak to the Chairman of the Bank". He duly did and to everyone's amazement the Chairman agreed to dedicate the freehold of the site to the Society. Mouths dropped at the sheer effrontery and brass necked nerve.

What followed was a 14-year hard slog of getting the developer to produce a scheme worthy of the site. Patrick and I took a special interest in getting the scheme built.

Patrick is a great supporter of the village and its ongoing conservation. He has been an enduring enthusiast during his time on the committee. He has boosted membership.

He has used that easy manner to play the role of the man in the street to great effect. He has been adept at contacting and utilising the skills of many different committee members and his other contacts.

He has been relentless in promoting the Society. His father has a blue plaque to his achievements. Patrick would also be a worthy recipient but not yet. He is a trooper and a nice and gracious man.

'Steve's efforts for the Oxton Society have been legion'

Steve Ferguson's citation was delivered by vice-chair Jeff Willis:

STEVE has been a cornerstone of the Oxton Society from the beginning. As he finally hands over the last of his responsibilities we can reflect on the Steve-sized gap left behind. His prodigious energy and unquenchable enthusiasm were deployed in so many roles that it is difficult to imagine how the Society could have developed so far without him.

My first insight came when I was asked to take over just part of the job of putting on Secret Gardens. I realised that almost single handed he had been responsible for coordinating the

whole operation – which is now devolved to a vast team of contributors.

Trees and walls were his forte. He ran the Tree Group and his expert knowledge won the confidence of council specialists. He launched the Tree Fund which encouraged new planting and developed a valuable partnership with Port Sunlight Trust tree contractors. He became an expert on walls and promoted good stewardship on correct ways of rebuilding and use of lime mortar.

He laboured away in the administrative engine room as Membership Secretary and, with his wife, Sue, as Newsletter Distribution Organiser.

He was also known for his tenacious role as 'Keeper of the Constitution'. His impeccable eye for detail produced a membership database well before its time. The newsletter distribution operation was always a joy.

His efforts for the Society are legion and he was always the epitome of good humour, modesty and decency.

He led by example with wry smile and others followed his lead and pitched in to help the project.

The good health of the Society which he leaves behind is a testament to all his hard work over the years. Will we ever find his like again?

'Newsletter, minutes and archive improved under Carolyn's watch'

Oxton Society chair Rhiannon Evans paid tribute to Carolyn Weber

GETTING to know Carolyn over the past nine or ten years I can see that she has always had that *Midas* touch. For us on the committee, it has meant an added professionalism to each of the roles that she undertook. The newsletter, minutes and archive were all improved under her watch.

As our minute secretary she kept the chair under control and raised the minutes of the Executive Committee to the highest standard (Carolyn was the preferred minute taker of the Vice- Chancellor of the University of Liverpool on select committees).

And, of course, with her exacting eye, Carolyn always offered to proof-read documents and she always found something; sometimes to our embarrassment but always reported with gentle good humour.

Carolyn also helped with the redesign of the website from 2017. With her keen eye for detail she worked with Jeff Willis and helped shape the architecture of our new site and posted much new material in a much more user friendly way.

In recent years she was lead editor of the newsletter, bringing new chal-

lenges including a new software programme that she had to learn. She has told me how much she enjoyed this role, working with Carla Walker, who will now lead on the newsletter. Likewise, Carla has said how



Carolyn Weber

privileged she felt working with Carolyn and how much she has learned that will guide her in future editions Carolyn conducted a survey in 2019 (she is a geographer, after all) and invited members to suggest new articles for inclusion in the newsletter and some of these ideas have recently been included: local flora and fauna, Who lived in Our House together with snippets of wider news.

And something else she took charge of, invisible to most of you and us, the archive.

The Society has an extensive archive going back to its inauguration in 1979 and it was Carolyn who inherited these untidy folders, loose papers, photographs and newspaper clippings and has neatly organised them into boxes and files. They are all now dated and alphabetically ordered. Carolyn is not only a geographer but also a historian and there are many houses in Oxton which have been thoroughly researched by her. Following the unearthing of digital photographs or portraits, we have come face to face with men and women who trailed in their crinolines up our own staircases and slept in our bedrooms.

Carolyn has brought her wide-ranging personal skills and knowledge to the committee; she has lent those skills to us, and, as a result, she has raised our standards. She has also brought her creativity.

Carolyn is a superb maker of intricate quilts and I sometimes think that the three layers of the quilt are like the three areas of the Oxton Society that she tackled with the same care for detail, thoughtfulness and sparkle.

We will do our best to uphold your standards, Carolyn. Thank you for all you have contributed over the last ten years. We will miss you.



Steve Ferguson receives his citation from vice chair Jeff Willis

2021 AGM

THE Oxton Society's AGM was held at St Saviour's Church on Wednesday, October X with 37 members in attendance.

Reports for 2019-20 and 2020-21 were approved together with the financial reports.

The design and other awards did not take place because of the need to maintain social distance.

Topics for future speakers were identified on topics including climate change and the implications for Oxton, lessons for Oxton from the pandemic and the implications for Oxton of a new local development plan.

Oxton People—Actress Pauline Fleming

OXTON resident Pauline Fleming has had an illustrious acting career.

Born in Liverpool, the 61-year-old has appeared in TV programmes such as Brookside, where she played Sinbad's girlfriend Val Walker and Coronation Street, as Mike Baldwin's girlfriend Penny King, as well as Emmerdale and Years & Years. She has also tread the board in many productions including The Full Monty, Cilla The Musical and The Vagina Monologues.

With Art Council funding, Pauline staged her own production of Harold Pinter's Ashes to Ashes at The Birkenhead Priory and Beckett in Birkenhead, which was performed at Christ Church, Oxton last month.

When did you move to Oxton?

I always wanted to live in Wirral and found a lovely flat in Wexford Road seven years ago after my daughter Cornelia went to university. I had two Cavalier King Charles, Aubrey and Doris, and everyone knew them. They've both sadly died but during lockdown I got a rescue Russian tortoise which I've called Putin.

How did you get into acting?

I went to Sheila Elliot Clarke drama school on Hanover Street when I was 19 and secured my first job when I gate-crashed an audition at Pineapple Studios! The audition I had gone for involved dancing and I couldn't dance so I walked out, but then I realised Theatre Clwyd were upstairs auditioning for a singing role so I popped my head round the door and told them I could sing Secret Love by Doris Day and got the job!

What's been your favourite role?

I love Shakespeare and my most challenging role was Paulina in The Winter's Tale for an outdoor production in Birkenhead Park. I was a mature student doing a degree in English Literature at University of Liverpool at the time and my tutor's wife worked at the Liverpool Reader Office and got funding for it. She wanted me as a professional actress and playing Paulina was my most enjoyable experience.



Do you prefer stage or TV?

Both. With live theatre if you let up, you can't hide, but on set they say 'cut' and you go again. It's a very different technique but both are good fun if you're in a role you enjoy.

Which actors do you admire most?

Doris Day was my first idol but she also ruined my life! She was so romantic I thought that's what real life was like but obviously it isn't. I'm also a huge Bette Davis fan.

Tell us about your work in the medical profession

I run my own company and have a pool of actors who help medical students by acting out various scenarios - such as a grieving mother or a widow - as this is part of their degree. I'm passionate about this side of my work as it's important and makes a difference. I'm currently working with medics in Liverpool producing a training video for GPs.

How did lockdown affect your work?

Before lockdown I was very busy on tour with the Full Monty and then Cilla The Musical. I took a break from touring and I started working with Special Educational Needs pupils but then the schools closed, so I took advantage of some time off and Cornelia came to live with me. She'd

bought a house in Slatey Road, so while her husband did it up she became my bubble. She also found out she was pregnant and I now have my first granddaughter, Adora.

How did Beckett in Birkenhead come about?

The Arts Council funding meant I had to find a venue in the Birkenhead catchment area and I love churches and came across Christ Church. Gerry, the vicar, and Jackie, the administrator, were absolutely fabulous. They couldn't have been more helpful and were absolute stars in making it happen.

Do you have any hobbies?

I have an allotment in Bidston and you wouldn't believe the amount of hours I put in. I've been a vegan for four years and a vegetarian for 45 years for animal welfare reasons so I grow a lot of vegetables.

What's your proudest achievement?

Gaining my degree while I was a single parent and working full time on Brookside. My marriage had just broken up and I'd lost both my parents but despite the odds I got a 2:1.

People would be surprised to know...

My great grandfather was called Dang Chang and he sailed to Liverpool from China to escape the Boxer Rebellion in the late 1800s. He met Mary, who was 17 years younger, and came from Ireland to escape the remnants of the Potato Famine. They got married and opened one of the first Chinese laundries in Liverpool.

What do you love about Oxton?

I love the trees and the greenery.

What changes would you like to see in the village?

The village is lovely but I would like to see some more wine bars and a bit of variety. I think what Host do is lovely. It would be great to have places to sit outside with a glass of wine.

Friends of the Arno usher in a new season...

*'Every leaf speaks bliss to me
Fluttering from the Autumn tree'*

By Emily Bronte

WELCOME to Autumn—the time of year to appreciate our open spaces for long walks amongst the falling leaves and cosy nights in front of the fire.

We have achieved yet another Green Flag award for 2021, which we are very proud of.

The flag was raised on June 21 on a rather wintry day with social distancing still in place.

Nevertheless, we continue to strive forward in our quest to keep our open spaces looking as good as we possibly can.

We have received even more generous donations for our cause recently from people who really appreciate our efforts, so a big 'thank you'.

We welcomed the three judges from the RHS Britain in Bloom awards in the Arno and are keeping our fingers crossed for a Gold award this year.

Our gardening group has been busy over the past few months.

They meet every Monday in the rose garden between 10am-12pm and anyone is welcome to come along to help or just pop in for some advice and a chat.

The long border is looking a little wild, normal for the time of year.

The Michaelmas daisies, or asters, are putting on a wonderful show of a delicate blue-mauve shade.



Volunteers from The Friends of the Arno

They are part of the original planting which we have inherited from our Edwardian benefactors.

There are also autumn sedums, in shades of deep pink.

Our two council gardeners have been hard at work keeping the rose beds weed free and sharp edged. Dead-heading has continued when they have had the time and they are doing a really great job.

On our first Saturday in October we planted our spring bulbs. Our gardening group had cleared and prepared the ground ready for planting in the two borders.

As you enter the quarry we had 650 bulbs of five different varieties to plant - Tulipa Little Beauty, Tulipa Turestania, Anemone Blanda, Scilla

Bifolia Dwarf narcissi. Although the day was damp it didn't dampen our spirits.

We arranged them in groups before planting tall at the back and smallest near the front.

It didn't take us long as quite a few volunteers had turned up, then it was back to the shed for a well-deserved hot drink and a good chat.

All we need to do now is look forward to seeing them in spring 2022 for a colourful display.

Just along the path from Ingestre Road you will find Snow Berries growing amongst the hedgerow. They are ever so easy to find – just look for their little round white, snow like, berries just starting to appear just now!



The Friends of the Arno achieve the Green Flag award for 2021 and volunteers enjoy a well earned cuppa after their hard work

Trees and planning

Planning Report, October, 2021

We have commented on two important applications since the last newsletter

Re: APP/21/01158 - Ashton House, Ashton House Hospital Complex

See opposite

LBC/21/01688 - 14 ARNO ROAD, OXTON,

We recognised that this listed building was in great danger of being lost and we applauded the tremendous work of the new owners to rescue it from a derelict condition and support their continued efforts to complete the exterior restoration work. Our comments were as follows:

We are surprised that the application was validated without photographs. We recognise that windows are more than 50% damaged and beyond repair because of a combination of rot, warping and lead-based paint. We support the replacement with single-glazed puttied windows with lamb's tongue glazing bars, to the standard of the new window already completed. We hope that the interior shutters will also be re-

tained. We suggest that the Council encourages slim-line double glazing in replacement timber windows to improve thermal efficiency - although we recognise that this would be at the applicant's discretion.

Tree Report

56 Poplar Road

Application—

Lime tree crown reduction 3 metres and crown thinning 25%

Sycamore trees x3 crown reduction 3 metres crown thinning 25%

Oxton Society comments: The Society would not object to the work being carried out.

45 Rosemount

Application: Laburnum tree-fell.

Oxton Society Comments: The Society would not object to this application

7A Shrewsbury Road

Application: Beech tree-fell. Oxton Society's comments: In view of the apparent poor health status of the tree, the Society would not object to the application

Ashton House

When the Health Authority withdrew most of their activities on the Ashton House site they created one of the few remaining development opportunities in the conservation area. The large site is bounded by a substantial sandstone wall facing Village Rd, Alton Rd, Columbia Rd and Kent St. We have now submitted our comments to the council.

The proposal is to retain Ashton House and convert it into 10 apartments and a cottage, with a mix of private and shared amenity space. The more recent extensions to the building are to be demolished and a new extension added. Adcote House and Kent House are to be demolished and replaced with 5 new houses with private parking and amenity space. At the time of writing the application is still under consideration.

In anticipation of the application the Society drew up a number of criteria against which we would judge the proposals. We supported the approach adopted in terms of site layout, landscaping and access and welcomed the retention of Ashton House, most of the mature trees and the boundary wall. We were disappointed that the proposals were not designed to be carbon neutral or optimise the use of passive energy by design.

We thought that the layout provided a good balance between residences, car-parking and landscaping and did not over-develop the site. Access was in keeping with a conservation area and included an open (ungated) road and pedestrian access

The landscaping strategy is good with a reasonable attempt to include wild parts to the landscape and the mature trees. It provides variety and avoids a car dominated scheme although some mitigation/screening should be considered for the Ashton House car park. We said that the design of the houses is not imaginative and does not include energy efficient terraces, although they are consistent with the local character. We said that there is a missed opportunity to achieve a carbon-neutral solution including energy saving house types and car charging points. We are also discussing with our local councilors how the construction process can be well-managed in order to minimise disruption to local residents.

New payment system a great success

THE Society has welcomed 26 new memberships recently – including six new businesses.

At the start of 2021 we made Standing Orders the preferred method for paying your subscription. Automated annual payments remove the need for subscription reminders and make administration simpler for both members and the society.

Also our bank has just introduced charges for paying in cheques – so

Standing Orders save us money. Members have clearly liked the new system as 75% of about 150 memberships which were due to renew have switched to the new payment method. Payment by cash or cheque remains an option.

As a charity we benefit from Gift Aid. The majority of members agree to 'Gift Aid' their payments (increasing their value by 25%) and a small number also make additional donations to support our work.

Contact us

Email the Newsletter team 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.