



the
Oxton Society

Annual Report 2021-2022



As the headline of our March newsletter announced:

GREAT TO BE BACK! And in full swing.

The end of February marked the long awaited end of Covid restrictions and we were able to look forward to planning our flagship and main fundraising event, Secret Gardens, for the first time in two years. The previous two events had been held virtually. We were delighted that all Village businesses, including most of the newly opened ones, had survived the pandemic but we were very sorry to hear of the untimely death of the owner of Delaineys. Our Committee meetings resumed in person and we are looking forward to seeing members over the next year at various events. Some key members of the Committee — Carolyn Weber, Patrick Toosey and Steve Ferguson — retired and we were very sad that Carolyn Weber passed away after a long illness in March. Martin Decker, a founding member of the History Group, died in tragic circumstances.

Officers and the Committee took the opportunity to reassess the Society's direction and strategy in the light of Wirral Borough Council's new Local Plan. Two important areas emerged which will help shape our work in the coming years: climate change and conservation and, as a consequence, we renamed the Planning Group, as the Conservation Group.

A number of Committee members undertook Carbon Literacy training, provided by an accredited Liverpool company. We individually committed to reducing our carbon footprints and also signed the Society up to make significant commitments over the next few years. These included showing leadership by publicising our actions, seeking out best practice from Village businesses and from individual members and identifying specific issues on which we can work together. One common issue identified was the energy efficiency of Oxtan houses.

Conservation

We renewed our commitment to conservation, planning and the new Local Plan and committed to sustaining and increasing our 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 designed to address climate change;
- protecting the character of the 400-plus properties that have been defined as making a positive contribution to the character of the Conservation Area;
- informing and educating members 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.

Planning

As a designated Advisory Body we were invited to comment on 15 applications for planning permission in 2021/22. The Council takes our comments into account when making the final decision. The vast majority of applications were for minor developments and we supported most



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of them. For example, applications for extensions were acceptable provided the materials were in keeping with the parent house. Some applications were (almost) invisible from the public domain and therefore fell outside of our agreed remit. So we made no comment, even though that might involve neighbour disputes or affect the setting of listed buildings, or both. In a few cases we made minor suggestions as to how the development might be improved.

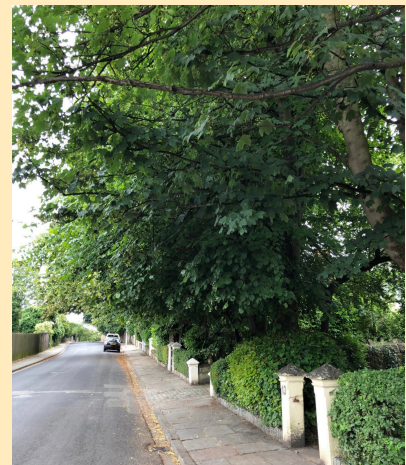
Two applications are worth mentioning in more detail. The listed building at 14 Arno Rd was in danger of being lost. The owners saved it with a new roof and we supported their application for replacement sash windows in timber. By far the largest potential scheme in Oxtton is the proposed development of the Ashton House site in Village Rd. In anticipation of this significant application, we drew up a list of criteria in advance which we used to evaluate it. We judged that the application met most of our criteria. 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 at handover, or optimised the use of passive energy by design. The Council are still to decide on the application.

We publish all our comments on our website – you can view at: theoxtonsociety.co.uk/planning/planning-comments/.

Trees

The Committee has made a special effort to be more accessible to residents of the Conservation Area this past year despite the challenges of the pandemic. The unique treescape of the Village is cared for and nurtured only by local residents and a few professional tree surgeons. The Committee is anxious to recognise all this hard work by giving as much support and guidance as is possible through the Tree Group.

The scheme which considers the purchase and planting of replacement trees was made available in 2021 and details about support are available on our website. Sixteen applications to carry out tree work were made to the Local Authority, all within the prescribed time limits, and this reflects great credit on the convener who has run the scheme almost single handed. Of those applications, the Society made no objections in 11 cases and offered advice on a further six.



Community



Secret Gardens

We were compelled by Covid regulations to hold a virtual event in May 2021 with 25 residents submitting video tours and photos of their gardens. A number of local entertainers provided music and artists exhibited their work. Over 3,000 people visited the site and a live raffle was accomplished with prizes donated by local businesses. A total of £3,242 was raised for the Oxtton Society and Friends of the Arno, our partner charity. And £200 worth of food items were collected in the Village and donated to Wirral Food Bank.

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Christmas Lights

Replacement lights had been purchased the year before and a JustGiving page was set up with a target of £3,000, which was achieved. The event was planned and went ahead successfully after a two year absence. We were very grateful to Ewer Roberts for sponsoring a beautiful tree.



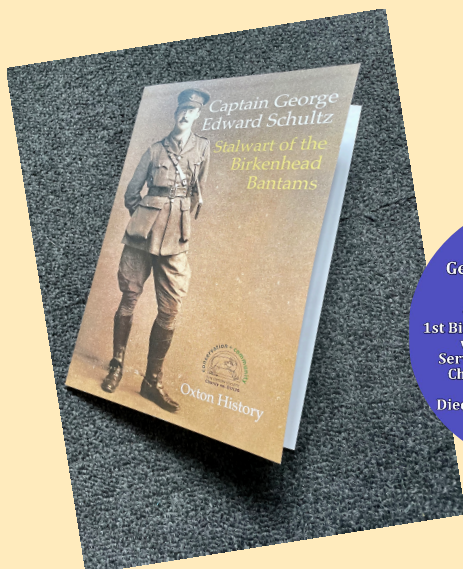
Hanging Baskets



A generous donation from an anonymous donor in memory of two family members, Barbara Taylor and Earl Lyden, meant that 50 hanging baskets were purchased and prepared by Dovecote nursery. The irreplaceable John Booth, who has introduced and masterminded the complex watering system for a decade, notified us that he would be stepping down and a replacement would be needed.

History

During the pandemic the History Research Group continued to produce original research for the History Periodical, which was posted online and later followed by the normal printed copies. Throughout we also responded to individual requests for research into people's houses and relatives. Covid curtailed the annual History Walks programme of four different walks but we resumed in May 2021. After a slow start numbers built up, particularly for the walks we held as part of the National Heritage Open Days programme in September. In 2022 we have a full programme and have introduced a new walk, "Women of Oxtan", the first of which was held on 8th March 2022 to celebrate International Women's Day. Please see the website and noticeboard for future Walks dates.



The Oxtan Society
Captain
George Edward Schultz
(1887-1917)
Company Commander
1st Birkenhead Bantam Battalion
was born in this house.
Served in the Cheshire Greys,
Cheshire Territorial Force,
and the Bantams.
Died of his wounds in Picardy
19th August 1917

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A Blue Plaque, our sixth, in memory of George Schultz, an officer in the Birkenhead Bantams, was unveiled in Silverdale Road. The commanding officer from Chetwynd did the unveiling, and it was stressed that Captain Schultz's commemorative plaque made him a representative for the many Bantam Regiment soldiers who lost their lives in the 1st World War.

Communications

We have adopted a familiar communications strategy which ranges from social media, all-members emails, to the traditional quarterly newsletter and History Supplement.

We maintain a comprehensive website which has posts for latest news as well as providing reference material on our policies, records of our minutes, details of major events/activities and online facilities to join or renew membership of the Society.

We send out periodic emails on hot topics to over 600 subscribed members. During 2021/22 we sent out 38 emails on topics such as the Xmas Lights Switch-on, Virtual Secret Gardens, History Walks and occasionally and regrettably, sad news.

The Society members' Facebook site has become an important means of keeping members informed about coming events and the existing and new regulations and policies which govern our approach to protecting the character of the Conservation Area. It has also become the showpiece, alongside the Only in Oxton site, for photos depicting the history and current character of the Village.

We have a Twitter account which has over 1000 followers and it is useful for reaching further afield than our members' base.

Membership

Another difficult year due to Covid and the paying membership of the Society increased overall by only one new membership: 33 paying memberships were started but we lost 32 memberships mostly due to people moving. At the end of the membership year we had 472 paying memberships. Our membership comprised 162 Individual memberships and 310 Household; we also had 51 Business members. Almost 70% of our membership were living within the Conservation Area.

Of the members who joined or renewed in 2020-21 48% paid by cheque and 52% by the newly introduced standing order system, which is being strongly encouraged. We benefit greatly from the 85% of members who agree to make their payments eligible for Gift Aid. Twelve members added donations. Although the pandemic affected recruitment we have achieved successes: several new members signed up online on the Membership section of our website, having been impressed by the quality of www.theoxtonsociety.co.uk 'advertisements' placed on Facebook.

Financial

A further year disrupted by the pandemic saw the Oxton Society incur an overall deficit of £504. This was a much better performance than the previous year, due to funds being raised through a Virtual Secret Gardens event and the lack of any large one-off items of expenditure. Membership income was impacted positively in the short term by the introduction of the standing order system. The Oxton Society ended the year with healthy reserves of £20,033.

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Looking Ahead

Our revised agenda and strategy is to re-emphasise the core business of the Society and to prepare our response to the Council's Local Plan. We believe that our primary objective is to protect the character of the conservation area and raise awareness of its heritage. This objective will be bolstered by the support of the community and businesses and underpinned by sound financial management. This is in line with the Society's constitutional status as a Conservation Area Advisory Committee, which has remained largely unchanged since 1979.



In addition, the Society will continue to develop its role and activity in initiating and organising events including Secret Gardens, Xmas lights, hanging baskets and research into the history of Oxton. We see these as fundamental aspects of community cohesion and vital adjuncts to underpinning the viability and attractiveness of the Village centre.

Our grateful thanks go to garden owners who let us view their gardens online and the businesses who have supported us over the past year and helped make Secret Gardens 2022 the best ever. We have come through 2021 with a renewed sense of community and a particular thanks for this must go to Councillor Allan Brame for galvanising and supporting so many volunteers during the pandemic over the past two years.

Finally, I have served eleven years as Chair and it is time to step down and let the opportunity go to someone else. As I do this, I reflect on the knowledge and expertise within the Committee that has helped to make Oxton a better place. I would also like to pay tribute to the loyal membership, the hard working Committee and the first rate team of Officers who unstintingly and, often invisibly, work on our behalf.

Rhiannon Evans

Chair, The Oxton Society

June 2022

Summary of the annual accounts for 2021-2022				
Year ended 28 Feb 2021		Year ended 28 Feb 2022		
Income	Expenditure		Income	Expenditure
		Administration		
£4,628		Memberships & donations	£3,155	
	£400	Accountancy		£458
	£229	AGM		£80
	£510	Subscriptions (CV,CAW etc)		£500
	£643	Website/Software		£163
	£887	Newsletters		£990
£15	£163	Other	£1	£152
£4,643	£2,832		£3,156	£2,343
		Strategic aims		
-£1,051		OxSoc Secret Gardens	£1,560	
	£410	Blue plaque		£29
	£866	Hanging baskets/Bunting		£250
£832	£3,742	History group & periodical	£165	£703
	£447	Tree planting		£1,030
£3,334	£3,553	Xmas lights	£6,538	£7,410
	£2,000	Other		£158
£3,115	£11,018		£8,263	£9,580
£7,758	£13,850	Totals for the year	£11,419	£11,923
£20,537		Carried forward	£20,033	
Secret Gardens				
Virtual Secret Gardens 2021		Secret Gardens 2022		
£0		£8 Programmes (pre-sales)	£20,257	
£0		£10 Programmes (on the day)	£16,158	
£3,303		Other income	£7,717	
	£60	Expenses		£5,602
	£973	Payments to charities		£23,118
	£2,270	Balance to Oxsoc		£15,412
£3,303	£3,303		£44,132	£44,132
Programme numbers				
0		£8 Programmes (pre- sales)	2532	
0		£10 Programmes (on the day)	1615	
0		Total programmes sold	4147	
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Oxton Society Annual General Meeting

Wednesday 28th September at St. Saviour's Parish Centre, 30 Bidston Road, CH43 2JZ

19.00 - 20.30

Agenda

1. Chair's Welcome
2. Minutes of last AGM held September 29th 2021 (emailed previously)
3. Matters arising
4. Presentation and approval of Chair's Annual Report
5. Accounts and approval of Treasurer's report (see page 7 of Annual Report)
6. Nomination and election of Executive Committee members and Officers
7. Presentation of Design Awards
8. Presentation of Outstanding Contribution to Oxton Awards
9. Strategy and the future for The Oxton Society
10. Close of Meeting

There will be a stall displaying and selling the Society's publications