



Oxton Society Annual Review
2022-2023



**David Barden
(1951-2023)
Oxton Society Committee Member and friend**

INTRODUCTION

As my first year as Chair draws to a close we can look back on a fabulously successful year for the village as a community and the Oxton Society as an organisation. The brilliant team of individuals who combine to help make our village such an enticing environment should all give themselves a pat on the back for the incredible work they have done, some for many years, and for what they have committed to do in the year ahead.

On a terribly sad note the Oxton Society ends the year with the tragic news that our dear friend and colleague Dave Barden fell victim to the dreadful earthquake in Morocco which claimed the lives of so many and which has taken him from his family and many friends too soon. Our thoughts are with Frances, his wife, and family to whom we extend our deepest thoughts and condolences.

Turning to the Society we have had a bumper year both in our conservation work and in the all important fundraising which enables us to carry out our role within the Oxton community. Jeff Willis has been instrumental in designing and creating an impressive and informative leaflet with everyday conservation advice in an accessible format which was successfully delivered to every household in the conservation area and we extend our thanks to Jeff, and all others who helped in the project, for what should be a very useful reference for the people who live within our beautiful environment for years to come.

The Christmas Lights and Secret Gardens events are the social highlight of the year in Oxton and this year's Secret Gardens equalled our most successful year ever in terms of revenue raised and for this special thanks should go to Kirsty Cotton and Lisa Stafford who have taken the event on as organisers for a second year after Covid and managed to grow and update it in many positive ways. Our secretary John Heathman also plays an important part in the organisation of both events in his own quiet way (as well as so many other aspects of the society's administration and organisation) and we extend our appreciation to him too, and to all executive officers, committee members, members and the legions of helpers and organisers without whom the events would simply not be able to function.

This year's Secret Gardens raised £27,000 for our local charities, something for which we can all be proud of as a society and a village community.

New plans for next year include a review of the Oxton Management Plan, particularly in light of changes in legislation and pressures caused by loosened development criteria and climate change. The annual events will also move with the times and there is a hope that the businesses in the village could take some of the organisational responsibilities currently being run by the society members, some of whom are reaching an age where they feel more and more unable to cope with the physical and time demands made upon them. On that note, John Booth will be retiring from the committee and from organising the magnificent hanging baskets which add so much to the village centre every summer and for which he has rightly won many gold awards over the years that he has been planning, hanging, dead-heading and maintaining the irrigation systems that water them. We extend our warmest thanks to John for his long and selfless service and are seeking someone urgently to take on this important and attractive role in the future.

Our thanks also go to Ron Jones who is resigning his role as tree co-ordinator and the search for his successor is well underway, Ron has been a well regarded member of the tree group for a number of years and he will be missed.

The society took the decision to extend the areas we can assist with funding and advice to include those in the immediate vicinity of our conservation area which had a positive impact on our own environment. In order to achieve this we have tweaked our constitution slightly and a vote will take place at the AGM to confirm these changes. The first beneficiary of this new arrangement will be The Friends of The Arno gardens who we are happy to financially assist in the building of a new facility in the gardens and to whom we have this year also handed over the entire proceeds of the plant stall that they run at Secret Gardens to benefit them in its entirety. It is hoped these gestures can provide them with additional income in subsequent years with which to carry on the wonderful works in their rose gardens which reside on the very edge of our conservation area.

I would lastly like to pay tribute to my predecessor as chair of the society Rhiannon Evans who carried out the role seemingly effortlessly for 11 years and for whom I am indebted for leaving such a smooth running and effective organisation and a great team of dedicated conservationists who make such a difference in maintaining the wonderful environment we know as the village of Oxton.

CONSERVATION

Planning

The Society's main aims are to benefit our community and to preserve and enhance the conservation area. We believe that we need to intensify our conservation efforts to strike a better balance between community and conservation. The production and delivery to every address of the leaflet on "how to look after the conservation area" was our first step in that direction. We continue to comment on all planning applications and publish our comments in the newsletter and website. However, 2022/23 saw very little activity in new development apart from the on-going saga of the major Ashton House site. Our views were that the proposed scheme was generally acceptable, particularly in respect of landscaping and tree preservation. We had reservations about arrangements for the management of the boundary wall and some "green" aspects (insulation, EV charging points). We understand that the developers are still in negotiation with the planners about the design of the 6 family houses. All this underlines the fact that the future character of Oxton depends more on the myriad of minor decisions that residents take in looking after their own properties - particularly in the 500 or so heritage houses and the walls and trees that give Oxton its special character.

Of particular importance in recent times has been the developments in regulations regarding walls, another important feature of the village and one on which the society has placed greater emphasis of late.

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

Trees

The tree group continues their essential work advising and guiding both the public and council officers in the conservation of the precious trees in the village which help to form the important character we all recognize. The virtual forest we live within is almost unique in this part of the Wirral, viewed from above it forms a near continuous canopy over the Oxton conservation area. The council are currently conducting a review of the trees in the area and of the TPOs in place which we hope will further strengthen the long-term health of this valuable ecosystem.

COMMUNITY

Secret Gardens & Christmas Lights

As already mentioned, both events were a great success, the lights were lit on a Sunday for the first time this year as a one off arrangement and this saw even larger crowds of locals in attendance than usual. As a family event it is enormously popular and even though the society runs it as a financial loss we see it as a way of giving back to the many young families who live in the village and its surrounds.

The Secret Gardens event goes from strength to strength and forms the main fundraising source for the society along with membership fees. Local charities are both major contributors in terms of marshals and helpers on the day for which they are able to share in the profits to help them do the great work many people rely on.

History

The history group have had a terrific year, publishing four highly informative history supplements about the village and its environs in our newsletters as well as organizing highly popular History Walks packed with information about the life and times of the village. They even offer special tours for private groups so if you have an organization or interested group please do get in touch with them, they offer a really good experience for the inquisitive amongst us.

They also organize our blue plaque program and other historical publications as well as representing and promoting us at various history fairs on the Wirral and beyond.

Communications

Our website continues to grow and develop and is a source of information about the society's activities as well as a historical recourse for our publications and newsletters whilst also providing a fascinating selection of historical photographs of the village. Details can also be found of the society committee members plus useful advice and information about the society's work and the conservation area.

We deliver newsletters each year to about 400 addresses including about 60 businesses. We also send regular topical emails to over 600 members that we have email addresses for and post on our Oxton Members Facebook site.

Thanks to everyone who helps maintain the website and Facebook pages, it's a huge undertaking and often unfairly undervalued.

Membership

Our membership remains steady with perhaps a turnover of 40 losses and gains every year. At the end of 2022/23 we had about 300 household members and 160 individuals suggesting a total membership of about 750 people - making us one of the largest conservation societies in the country.

More than 85% of our members now gift aid their subs and this brought in over £500 for 2022/3.

Administering new subscriptions and renewals has been a big job and this has been considerably helped by moving over to renewing subscriptions by standing order as the norm. Over 80% of our members now help us by renewing by standing order. We are considering introducing standing orders as the only way of subscribing in order to reduce the workload of our next Membership Secretary.

Financial

The finances of the society remain strong with an increase in reserves for the last financial year due to being able to run a full Secret Gardens event following the two years of covid lockdowns. The table below lists our main income and expenditure.

Finally, many thanks once again to members, officers, the executive committee, garden owners who so kindly let the public in to their secret gardens and the businesses who have supported us over the past year and helped to make Oxton a special place to live.

Chris Jarrey

Chair, The Oxton Society

October 2023

Summary of the annual accounts for 2022-2023

Year ended 28 Feb 2022			Year ended 28 Feb 2023	
Income	Expenditure		Income	Expenditure
£3,155		Administration		
	£458	Memberships & donations	£3,374	
	£80	Accountancy		£472
	£500	AGM		£199
	£163	Subscriptions (CV,CAW etc)		£0
	£990	Website/Software		£129
£1	£152	Newsletters		£1,137
		Other	£99	£431
£3,156	£2,343		£3,473	£2,368
		Strategic aims		
£1,560	£29	OxSoc Secret Gardens	£15,228	£0
	£250	Blue plaque		£2,760
£165	£703	Hanging baskets/Bunting		£807
	£1,030	History group & periodical	£220	£0
	£7,410	Tree planting		£5,921
£6,538	£158	Xmas lights	£3,114	£459
		Other		
£8,263	£9,580		£18,562	£9,947
£11,419	£11,923	Totals for the year	£22,035	£12,315
£20,033		Carried forward	£29,753	

		Secret Gardens		
Secret Gardens 2022			Secret Gardens 2023	
£20,257		£8 Programmes (pre- sales)	£21,688	
£16,158		£10 Programmes (on the day)	£13,760	
£7,717		Other income	£12,919	
	£5,786	Expenses		£12,097
	£23,118	Payments to charities		£25,389
	£15,228	Balance to Oxsoc		£10,881
£44,132	£44,132		£48,367	£48,367
		Programme numbers		
2532		£8 Programmes (pre- sales)	2711	
1615		£10 Programmes (on the day)	1376	
4147		Total programmes sold	4087	