

the

OXTON SOCIETY

free to members



WOW Oxtown!

What a year our lovely village has had...

We celebrated 125 years of The Arno fields and 100 years of Callister Gardens – beautiful open spaces to improve people's physical and mental wellbeing.

Another five-figure sum was raised for local charities through this year's Secret Gardens which, incidentally, marks its 25th birthday next year.

The newest edition to the village - the monthly Artisan Market – has just celebrated its first birthday at the RAFA Club with the promise of more to come.

And thanks to the History Group, the village has unveiled its sixth Blue Plaque in honour of another remarkable former resident, Sir Peter Shephard.

Chris Jarrey, Chair of the Oxtown Society, said: "When it comes to community spirit, cohesion and engagement, we have so much to be proud of in Oxtown.

"By working together – volunteers, visionaries and local businesses – we can continue to create a thriving environment that benefits everyone.

"We are inclusive in our approach and open to new ideas – so please get in touch if you'd like to be involved in future plans.

"In the meantime, I hope you enjoy this celebratory edition of our Newsletter."



Celebrating 125 years of The Arno



This year the Arno celebrated its 125th anniversary and was awarded yet another prestigious Green Flag award.

Thanks to the hard work of the Friends of the Arno - 220 members and 25 volunteers - this beautiful open space can be enjoyed by residents all year round.

It was thanks to two publicly spirited residents, Edmund Taylor and Catherine King, who came up with the idea of converting the abandoned quarry at Arno Hill into a healthy place of escape from the rigours of daily life in 1900.

They leased the site from the Earl of Shrewsbury for 15 years and set out, at their own expense, to convert the quarry into an informal public park which they named The Arno Recreation Ground.

An article in a local newspaper in 1907 proclaimed 'Nature is bountiful here. Gorse, heather, bramble and wildflowers grow in riotous luxuriance... a haven of rest and contemplation for the adults, and for the children a bit of fairyland, the home of romance and mystery'.

125 years later it still lives up to the benefactors' intentions as we celebrate their generosity.

Bringing nature into the school curriculum

The Friends of the Arno (FOA) have struck up an excellent friendship with Woodchurch Road Academy's headteacher, Alex Borrill, and are working to create wildlife projects for children in the classroom and in the park.

The first project earlier this year was an I-spy exercise with 25 youngsters, using work sheets to learn about the history of the Arno, and how nature thrives there. The children recorded their findings in a series of colourful drawings of flora and fauna which were displayed on the park noticeboards.

On the day of the Secret Gardens of Oxton, the school opened to visitors for the first time and a group of children visited the FOA plant stall in the village to tell members about the interesting butterfly project they had been doing.

There is also a sunflower project involving three FOA volunteers who went into the school to talk about growing plants from seed. Each child was given a plant pot, soil and a sunflower seed, and shown how to plant and water it. Afterwards the children took their pot home to watch the sunflower they planted grow to a great height.

The wildlife is very different in the summer season and the children returned in June for a second exploration. Working in three groups they identified flowers in bloom and the leaves on the trees, while also listening for bird calls. It is surprising what a variety of wildlife there is in the Arno, and the children loved seeking it out.

Reviving the Rose Garden

FOA have been replacing the diseased roses in some of the beds and introducing underplanting to create a more varied and all-year interest. During the winter and spring, volunteers made good progress with the planting and have received many compliments from visitors. This has given volunteers lots of encouragement as they continue the process over the next year.

If you would like to get involved with Friends of the Arno, email: peter@defigueiredo.co.uk



Callister Trust celebrates its centenary



The Callister Trust, a local charity which works from the Callister Garden in Slatey Road, has marked its 100th birthday by opening a new garden pavilion.

It was designed by local architect and lecturer Dominic Wilkinson, who is a committee member of the Oxtan Society, in collaboration with some of his students from Liverpool John Moores University.

The Pavilion was formally opened by Deputy Lieutenant of Merseyside and Oxtan resident, Angela Samata, during a special ceremony with Wirral's Mayor and Mayoress, Cllr Brian Kenny and his wife Helen, and trustee Cllr Allan Brame. *(Pictured above).*

The ceremony was attended by representatives of funders The Veolia Environmental Trust, The Price Parry Trust, the Oxtan Society, Wirral Green grants, Abbott Builders and some of the many other local people who helped make the pavilion possible.

Callister Trust Trustee Laura Penn *(pictured right)* said: "This new sustainable pavilion complements the surroundings and offers modern facilities. It is available for community groups and charities to use and will enable the garden to open up more for everyone to enjoy."

The Callister Trust was originally created by businessman Edward Fletcher Callister after his wife and daughter died on the same day at the end of the Spanish flu epidemic.

The charity was established in 1925 to promote the welfare of girls and young women in Birkenhead.

It has owned the half acre plot in Slatey Road since 1931 but by 2018 the garden had been boarded up and derelict for nearly 15 years.

Five local residents became trustees and along with a dedicated group of volunteers, have slowly breathed new life into the site, restoring the space and transforming it into a beautiful walled garden.

It features flower beds, grassed areas, a pond, paths and borders, a vegetable plot, nursery orchard and forest school area all surrounded by a range of trees.

Enclosed by a high Victorian Wall, the space is used for a range of community activities including forest schools, well-being sessions, reading groups and socials.

The garden is open for volunteers and visitors every Wednesday and Saturday morning and will be holding its annual Heritage Open Day on Saturday, September 20.

For more information, visit www.callistertrust.org, follow Callistertrust on Facebook or email callistertrust@gmail.com



Artisan market celebrates its first birthday

‘The love and support we’ve had from the Oxton community has meant the world to us’.

Those are the words of Ash Ahmed, the brains behind Oxton’s monthly artisan market which celebrated its first birthday in July.

Wirral’s mayor and mayoress, Cllr Brian Kenny and his wife, Helen, cut a birthday cake to mark the occasion and stallholders generously donated prizes for a special tombola.

Ash, who first thought of the idea of a monthly market after attending a Secret Gardens event, said: “It’s been a brilliant 12 months. It’s been amazing to see the market become a part of village life; full of character, colour and community spirit.

“Visitors have described it as one of the best artisan markets in the north west. All our traders are overwhelmed by the support from the local community, and it has become their favourite market to trade at.

“It has also benefited local businesses too as they see an increase in footfall in the village.

“Thank you to the Oxton Society and to Kate Pomfret whose help and belief in the idea were key to making this whole thing come to life.

“Here’s to bigger, better and many more brilliant Sundays together.”

The market, held on the last Sunday of the month, attracts visitors from all over Wirral. There are 30 stalls selling everything from home-made cuisines, breads and pastries; hand-made gifts and crafts to fresh, locally-sourced meat and vegetables.

The next market will be on Sunday, August 31 between 9am and 1pm at the RAFA Club, 17 Shrewsbury Road.



Secret Gardens raises another five-figure sum for charity

Over 4,000 people flocked to this year's annual Secret Gardens of Oxton on May 11 and helped raise an amazing £36,800 for charity.

Nineteen residents opened their gardens to the public and the village came alive with entertainment, craft stalls and a children's treasure hunt.

Local shops and restaurants were open for business and generously donated prizes to the popular grand raffle.

The charities benefitting this year were the Oxton Society, Open Door, Birkenhead Woodcraft Folk and Stick n Step and the Friends of the Arno raised £1,422 for their organisation through plant sales.



The annual event – which next year marks its 25th anniversary – is organised by local residents Kirsty Cotton and Lisa Stafford (*pictured right*) on behalf of the Oxton Society and is supported by over 400 volunteers.



Kirsty said: "It was another amazing day and thankfully the weather was good to us again. Secret Gardens is the highlight of the year in Oxton and really showcases what the village has to offer."

Lisa, who opened her Rose Mount garden again this year, said: "I'm really proud of my garden and I love sharing it with people and letting them look around. Visitors are so enthusiastic and complimentary and it makes all the hard work worthwhile."

A film crew from BBC North West Tonight covered this year's event and featured it on the regional news.

John Heathman, Secretary of the Oxton Society, said: "A massive thank you to everyone who played their part in making this year's Secret Gardens another resounding success. Particular thanks to Kirsty and Lisa who work tirelessly for months leading up to the day to ensure everything runs like clockwork."

The main sponsor of this year's event was Bogans Carpets.

If you would like to get involved in the 25th anniversary next year – whether that's opening your garden or volunteering to support - please email kirstycotton@googlemail.com

History in the making - Oxton's History Research Group scoops top award

The Oxton Society's History Research Group has received the prestigious Wirral Horn award in recognition of its contribution towards preserving aspects of Wirral's heritage.

Each year the Wirral History and Heritage Association awards an individual or group and this year Oxton History Research Group was chosen for its informative history walks and archive collection.

Proud Oxtonian John Green started Oxton's archive collection in the 1990s and passed it to Bob Knowles in 2010.

Bob set up the history group with like-minded residents who were interested in capturing the area's heritage.

The group researches various topics and produces a four-page History Periodical which is delivered alongside the Society's newsletter.

They also organise a series of free guided History Walks which around 200 people attend every year.

Bob said: "We're honoured to receive this award.

"Group members have changed over the years but we keep going because it's rewarding and interesting for us and we believe it contributes to a feeling of community involvement amongst our readers and walkers.

"Our History Periodical includes short stories based on original research and if people wish to make a collection we print them in hardback form for sale.

"We are also involved in the placing of Blue Plaques in Oxton, accompanied by interesting booklets about the people commemorated.

"As well as our popular village walks, members also give talks on notable Oxton folk such as Edith Smith, Britain's first woman police officer; Jessie Gavin, a celebrated artist and illustrator and the 'History of Oxton Pubs' is a particular favourite.

"A comment was made over a decade ago that we might run out of interesting people and events to write about but that's not true! We're still going strong and finding new extraordinary stories to tell. There seems to be a virtually endless number of tales round every corner."



Wirral Horn Award

Oxton History Group members:

Helen, Dave, Moira, Jo, Rowena, Bob, Gillian and Paul



Oxton unveils its sixth Blue Plaque

Oxton village has unveiled its latest Blue Plaque – in tribute to renowned architect Sir Peter Shephard.

Sir Peter was born at 13 South Bank in 1913 and lived in the cottage with his family until he graduated from Liverpool School of Architecture in 1936.

Sir Peter died in 2002 and the unveiling was carried out by his niece, Carole Vaughan, and Annabel Downs, editor of *Peter Shephard – Landscape Design Trust* publication.

Jane Patterson, the present owner of the cottage, welcomed guests at the ceremony into her beautiful garden to see the environment that had proved a lifelong inspiration to Peter Shephard.

The research for the Blue Plaque was carried out by members of the Oxton History Group, Moira Young, Rowena Beighton-Dykes, Jo Hipps and Helen Danson, along with Peter de Figueiredo and David Ainsley.

The son of an architect, Sir Peter was educated at Birkenhead School and Liverpool University. After obtaining his first-class degree he won the graduate scholarship and from 1940 to 1943, he worked for the Ministry of Supply working on the design and construction of arms factories.

He went on to work on the Greater London Plan for the postwar development of London and became a partner in Shephard, Epstein and Hunter. He designed schools for local authorities and buildings for the universities including in Liverpool, Keele and Oxford.

He became best known for many landscape projects such as London Zoo and various gardens in America such as Central Green at the University of Pennsylvania.

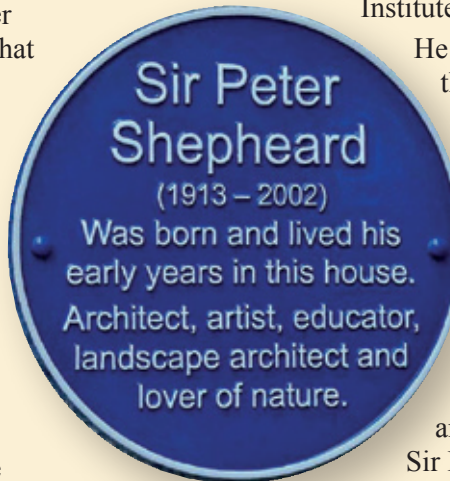
He produced all the line drawings for his own books, *Modern Gardens* and *Gardens*. His painting of Liverpool Docks after it was bombed is in the Walker Art Gallery.

He was president of a number of prestigious organisations during his career including the Architectural Association, the Royal Institute of British Architects, the Landscape Institute and the Royal Fine Art Commission.

He joined the National Parks Commission, the Countryside Commission, the Civic Trust and was an honorary artistic adviser to the Commonwealth War Graves Commission.

Other Blue Plaques in Oxton include Brigadier Sir Philip Toosey who Sir Alec Guinness played in the film *Bridge on the River Kwai*; Britain's first female police officer Edith Smith; sisters Laura and Jeannie Willmer who were among the first female newspaper editors; Sir Patrick Abercrombie, an esteemed prophet and practitioner of town and country planning, Cyril Scott, composer, poet and writer and Captain George Shultz, Company Commander, 1st Birkenhead Bantam Battalion.

The History Group has published a booklet about Peter Shephard priced £4. Please email: history@theoxtonsociety.co.uk for more information.



Our trees group has been busy assessing the impact of proposed tree cutting works. Thanks to Dave Coombs who co-ordinates the tree group for providing this report. Dave's team also visit residents to offer advice, before an application to cut trees is submitted.

7 Kent Street CA/25/00745

Proposal: Prune an oak tree, a willow and a fir tree.

Having met with the applicant he has explained in more detail the proposals - Crown raise Oak where overhanging neighbour's garden; Reduce in height by approx. 30-50% Willow which has been previously pollarded. Reduce in height small conifer tree.

Oxton Society Comment: Apart from the Oak these trees are not visible from a public place. We are happy with the proposals.

Council response: No objections

10 Rose Mount CA/25/00709

Proposal: Beech hedge line reduced by 50%

Oxton Society Comment: This is a line of tall closely planted Beech trees that were obviously originally a hedge. They have been allowed to grow tall and spindly along the boundary with the next property. We agree that reduction in height is a sensible move. There are several other mature trees at the property and there will be no effect on the overall treescape with this work being undertaken.

Council response: No objections

5 Parrs Road CA/25/00785

Proposal: Holly reduction 3m, Hawthorn reduction 1.5m, Holly removal, Cherry reduction 1.5m, Bay removal, Conifer reduction 3m, Conifer removal, Hedge conifer removal, Apple reduction 1.5m

Oxton Society Comment: We are happy with the proposed management of these trees. None of them have any great amenity value and those in the rear garden are only partially visible from Parrs Road or Arno Road. No objection to removal of the Holly and Conifers.

Council response: No objections

35 Fairview Road CA/25/00805

Proposal: Apple and Pear crown reductions, Magnolia crown reduction, Holly crown reduction and shaping, remove sycamore.

Oxton Society Comment: We are happy with the proposed management of these trees which are only partially visible from the road. The Sycamore is self-seeded and of little amenity value. We are happy with its removal which will allow the adjacent Holly and Hawthorn to flourish.

Council response: No objections

30 Fairview Road CA/25/00855

Proposal: Sycamore front garden; fell

Oxton Society Comment: This is a large Sycamore adjacent to the front wall. It is clearly diseased with a large fungal growth on the main trunk. The bark is in poor condition and there are several dead branches and

branches with very poor leaf cover higher up. We agree with removal of this tree and would encourage the property owner to plant a specimen tree as a replacement, slightly further from the wall, that in due course will maintain the greenery along Fairview Road.

Council response: No objections

10 Victoria Mount CA/25/00900

Proposal: Crown reduce by 1m approximately 7 trees in rear garden

Oxton Society Comment: None of these trees are visible from the street so we have no objection to the proposed works.

Council response: No objections

47 Rose Mount T/25/00872

Proposal: Remove lower overhanging branches of Holm Oak and 2x Lime all covered by a TPO. Cut back and shape a neglected Holly not covered by the TPO. All these trees are in the garden of 6 Mount Pleasant but overhang 47 Rose Mount.

Oxton Society Comment: The lower branches of these trees are not visible from the street so we have no objection to these works.

Council response: No objection.

27 Storeton Road CA/25/00943

Proposal: Remove 2 trees rear garden

Oxton Society Comment: There is an upright conifer in the rear garden not visible from the road. No objection to its removal. A multi-stemmed large shrub/small tree sits close to the sandstone boundary wall of the adjacent property. Although visible from the road it is of little amenity value, and we have no objection to its removal. We have suggested the applicant consider planting a replacement specimen tree elsewhere in the garden, but further away from the walls.

Council response: No objection

41 Christchurch Road CA/25/00675

Proposal: Remove large Sycamore as roots destabilising wall to adjacent property and concerns if tree fell would fall onto higher wall and properties nearby in The Firs.

Oxton Society Comment: This is a mature, healthy looking, Sycamore in the rear garden which is not clearly visible from a public space. It is sited close to and above a sandstone wall with a drop into the garden of the next-door property. This wall has had repairs in recent times. The applicant has advised us that she is now considering crown reduction of the tree by about 50% rather than removal of the tree as she feels this may reduce any stresses on the wall. We would be happy with this proposal but if further, more extensive damage to the adjacent wall were to occur then felling may be necessary.

Council response: None received at time of going to print

Oxton's very own Banksy

Eagle-eyed residents could be forgiven for thinking Banksy had visited Oxton Village in May when not one, but two new murals appeared overnight!

First a painting of Edith Smith – Britain's first female police officer - near Low, Slow and Dough, followed by a portrait of the BBC drama, 'Adolescence' near to Oxton Village Stores.

However, they were both the work of street artist Paul Don Smith from Surbiton who was inspired to 'leave his mark' having spent a few weeks in Oxton.

He said: "As well as doing street art I'm also a painter and decorator and I was decorating a house in Oxton for a friend of a friend.

"When I visit somewhere new I like to see what's going on. I saw Edith Smith's Blue Plaque outside her house in Palm Hill and was fascinated so I decided to do some research.

"I tapped into her history and was endeared by it. I wondered if everyone knew what she looked like and because I specialise in portraits, I decided to paint her."

Paul found a suitable wall, sought permission from the owner, and then enlisted the help of local artists to help source the materials he needed.

After receiving a positive response from the public, Paul then decided to create a second mural - a lasting reminder of the psychological crime drama 'Adolescence'.

Paul said: "It was a powerful programme about how our kids can be compromised online. I've worked in the film industry and have met Liverpool actor Stephen Graham and his wife, Hannah, before.

"You don't see posters for the programme now it's been aired so I thought I'd put it on the street."

It isn't just Oxton that's inspired Paul to reach for his paintbrush. As well as leaving lasting impressions in Casablanca, Las Vegas and the south of France, he also produced a well-known mural in Richmond in tribute to David Attenborough, called Attenborough's Arc.

Paul said: "Next time I visit Oxton I'd love to do a mural for another Blue Plaque recipient - Brigadier Phillip Toosey. His story inspired 'Bridge Over the River Kwai' played by Alec Guinness."



To learn more about Paul and his work, visit: pauldontsmith.co.uk

Design Award 2025

Nominations are invited for the Oxton Society Design Award 2025. The purpose of our Design Award scheme is to encourage and celebrate projects which preserve or enhance the conservation area.

Projects must be **located within the Conservation Area or its environs** and have been **completed within the two years prior to the AGM in November**. They can be:

- A new building or an addition to an existing building
- A renovation, upgrade or repair of an existing building
- The renovation, repair or improvement of outside features

The main criteria are:

- Making a positive contribution to the character of the Conservation Area
- The quality of the design
- The skilful use of materials
- Visible example of good practice which can inspire future projects

Outstanding projects(s) will win the Oxton Society's Design Award and be presented with a plaque at the AGM.

Other worthy projects of merit may be awarded a Certificate of Commendation.

Send nominations by email or post (see 'contact us' on back page). Ideally nominations should be accompanied by a few photos showing 'before' and 'after' and a summary of the work undertaken.

CLOSING DATE FOR THE 2025 AWARD IS 30 September 2025. NOTE THAT ANY PROJECT COMPLETED AFTER NOVEMBER 2023 CAN BE NOMINATED.

Full details of the Design Award Scheme, including examples of past winners are on our website at www.theoxtonsociety.co.uk/design-award/

Here are two recent examples of Commendations below: Christchurch Road and Edwards News in Rose Mount



Ann Fordham 1937 - 2025

The Oxton Society was saddened to hear of the death of one of our founding members, Ann Fordham.

Ann, who died last month aged 88, was a Forensic Clinical Psychologist and appeared as an expert witness in many famous criminal cases. Her career was long and colourful.

She looked after our publicity and regularly opened her Secret Garden in Rich View to the public.

She was well-loved and will be sadly missed by all who knew her.

The stage is set for the story of Oxton's first Gentleman Jack

A powerful new play set in Oxton in the Victorian era will hit the stage next month thanks to local actress Pauline Fleming.

Pauline, who has appeared on TV in *Brookside*, *Coronation Street*, *Emmerdale* and *Years & Years*, has long been fascinated about the story of Jessie Gavin – Oxton's first Gentleman Jack.

She is now bringing that story to life in a play she's written called *The Story of Jessie Gavin* thanks to Heritage Lottery funding.

And keeping it a family affair, her daughter Cornelia Cannell will be co-producing the production.



Cornelia is an employability lecturer at the University of Liverpool and an experienced creative who has collaborated with her mum across numerous community-based arts projects.

Jessie, a local Wirral artist, was a bold Victorian woman who dared to love and live freely. She left behind the constraints of her upbringing and found passion with the revolutionary architect Eileen Gray.

The 45-minute play follows their relationship and their vibrant lives among the creatives of London and Paris. Audiences will be welcomed with a short pre-show performance that sets the scene and mood of the era - a celebration of defiance, artistry, and love.

Pauline, who lives in Wexford Road, said: "When I heard about Jessie Gavin I felt compelled to write her story.

"Living in Oxton and knowing how special the village is, and discovering an interesting heritage story – one of many in the area – made writing this piece feel natural.

"It has been an absolute joy not only to bring Jessie back to life for 45 minutes, but to share a portion of her life with the beautiful community she was part of.

"In doing so we help keep our heritage alive, something that is deeply important to me."

Pauline has tread the boards in many productions including *The Full Monty*, *Cilla The Musical* and *The Vagina Monologues*.

In 2021, with Art Council funding, Pauline staged her own production of Harold Pinter's *Ashes to Ashes* at The Birkenhead Priory and Beckett in Birkenhead and Christ Church in Oxton.

The Story of Jessie Gavin is being shown at Callister Gardens, Slatey Road at midday and 3pm on September 14; at Unity Theatre Liverpool at 7.30pm on September 17; and Flaybrick Memorial Gardens, Birkenhead on September 20 at 3pm. Jessie is buried at Flaybrick and Pauline and Cornelia hope to take people to her gravestone after the production.

The Callister Gardens and Flaybrick performances are free of charge through the Eventbrite website: Discover Jessie Gavin Events & Activities in Liverpool, United Kingdom | Eventbrite

Tickets for Unity Theatre Liverpool are available from the venue priced £13.50 from: Unity - The Story of Jessie Gavin Oxton's First Gentleman Jack - Unity Theatre



Update on Ashton House development

In our last newsletter we were pleased to report that planning approval had at last been granted to the Ashton House complex on Village Road.

Regrettably, the latest news is that having secured the planning permission, the owner decided to put the property up for sale.

This will only mean further delays in any works taking place.

The planning permission as granted, will continue to be in force unless any new developer wishes to make any changes.

A spokesperson for the Oxton Society said: "If that's the case we would be back to square one, awaiting a fresh plan for the site and with the property becoming more and more dilapidated. We will continue to monitor progress."



Village centre in full bloom with hanging baskets

Our usual team of volunteers turned out on the last Sunday in June to erect 50 glorious hanging baskets in the village centre. This year the baskets came from our new supplier, Folleyfield Nursery. Delivery was provided by Alan of Oxton House Clearances.

The automatic watering system was installed by ex-committee member, John Booth and is now maintained by his son, Philip.

The display will delight residents and visitors alike throughout the summer season and will last well into October thanks in no small way to volunteer, Ian Garland, on duty for feeding and dead-heading. The hanging baskets cost about £3,000 and are just one of the activities that the Oxton Society fund from profits from the Secret Gardens of Oxton.



Guided tours of Oxton Village

At the beginning of the 19th century, the village of Oxton comprised a small number of poor cottages surrounded by fields and heathland.

Due to its proximity to the River Mersey and expanding city of Liverpool, it became a growing and prosperous community of farmers, merchants and tradespeople.

Oxton Village developed its own distinctive features and culture which continues today.

Much of what Oxton has to offer is clearly viable but the stories of the events and people who helped to make it what it is today can best be told by an entertaining Oxton Society History Group guide!

Free Guided History Walks run through the summer months.

Walks are scheduled for August 23, September 13, 14, 17, 20 & 21 and October 4, 11. They start at 11am and last approximately two hours.

You must book a place in advance. Please email oxtonbooks@yahoo.co.uk or text 07734 558411.

Contact us



If you have any comments or suggestions for the Society or the Newsletter team please email 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 address or via the website www.theoxtonsociety.co.uk

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