The Oxton Society

Annual Report for year 1st March 2025 to 28th February 2026



25 Years of support to local charities

Total donated £375,449



Introduction from Chris Jarrey, Chairman

As the year 2025-2026 draws to a close for the Oxton Society I believe we can all look back with a great deal of pride in both how we have gone about our business as a conservation society and also how we have once again contributed to the Oxton area in general both as an events organiser and charity fundraiser.

Fundamentally we are a conservation charity with the remit to try and educate and gently steer the residents of the Oxton conservation area, under the auspices of Wirral Council planning officers and within their own legal working frameworks, to maintain the beautiful village in which most of us reside. All in all it's a very happy and effective team in its various guises and responsibilities, I hope that you would agree. Our newsletters and pamphlets are an important part of this process and they form a very high quality publication which is often used as a template for other conservation areas and which are also published as a bound periodical every few years. If anyone would like to purchase one of these excellent documents please do get in touch.

Another bumper year for our Secret Gardens event bought record crowds and record income, thanks to Lisa and Kirsty for their enormous efforts and to the many many other volunteers and garden owners who make this special event such an important annual occurrence. It's the lifeblood of all we do, along with the hanging baskets and Christmas lights in the village, and one would be very difficult to achieve without the other.

As always we are desperately in need of new blood for the organisation and running of these events. There is a definite older demographic to much of our organisers, apologies if that's offended anyone but on the whole it's true. This year we are losing the irreplaceable skills and charms of both Don Firth-Williamson and Steve Weber, business liaison and planning committee stalwarts as well as general committee members, and we still haven't found someone to take on the hanging baskets organisers role. It would be a great shame to have to stop any of our activities but the hanging baskets are probably the most long-lasting visible evidence of our activities in the village. We'd all miss them I am sure, it's a roll we desperately need to fill so please do come and have a chat if you think you can help.

As always our history group continues their excellent work in producing publications, blue plaque and wonderful guided walks around the village. A big thank you to all of them for everything you do.

One new venture we have made this year is funding a redesign of what was an untidy piece of land by Jarrow Close in the village centre, the organisation of which we have our committee member John Field to thank. I hope you agree the work has made a tremendous difference to the look of the area. We also purchased a couple of planters for the village centre, arranged by Helen Gammon. We have ideas to brighten up a couple of other open areas in the village that, overall, are intended to encourage the residents and visitors to adopt a more engaged attitude to conservation.

Going forward you may notice a few changes to our events as we react to the increasing demands of legislation, and to the engagement of the local businesses. Initially, we will

endeavour to make the Christmas Lights event a little more family oriented, with the introduction of some diverse entertainment and a change in location. If this proves successful it could pave the way for a review of the format for Secret Gardens.

But back to conservation; we are currently in the process of producing a new Conservation Area Management Plan. We will keep members in the loop as to any ideas and changes coming from this which might be of interest. Keep your eye on the newsletters and our website for updates over the next 6 months.

Conservation and Planning

Earlier in the year, the society approached Wirral Borough Council to discuss the renewal of The Oxton Village Conservation Area Appraisal and Management Plan (CAAMP). This document, last produced over 15 years ago, is essential as it provides a professional assessment of the key characteristics of the conservation area, the risks it faces and the opportunities for its improvement. The Management Plan will also outline key conservation policies which guide the way the council determines local planning applications as well as setting out practical actions for the improvement of the conservation area.

In order to secure an early review of the CAAMP, the society agreed to fund half of the cost, and leading conservation experts Donald Insall Associates have been appointed to carry out the review which is now at an advanced stage. The council will publish a draft of the CAAMP for consultation over the next few months.

The society has also been heavily involved in nominating some of Oxton's best buildings for inclusion in Wirral's Local List. Once approved, this new initiative will recognise the best and most valued of our local architecture providing some additional protection, adding to those 30 plus buildings already included on the National Heritage List for England which already enjoy the highest level of heritage protection. Before the Local List is finally approved, there will be full consultation setting out the full implications for building owners.

Tree Group

The tree group, consisting of Dave Coombs and Ron Jones continue to handle the important job of dealing with tree cutting applications and providing advice and help to residents. We have seen a small increase in applications over recent months, but are pleased to note that most applications still carry a "No objection" response. Keeping residents informed of the rules and regulations in managing their trees is still a main priority of the committee.

Finance

Treasurer, Griff Round

2025/6 was a year where the Oxton Society built up its reserves for future strategic expenditure. The year saw a successful Secret Gardens event with funds spent on a new Blue Plaque and the production of History Group periodicals. The Christmas Lights event also generated a net income for the first time in many years.

At year end, reserves were almost £35,000. A very successful 2026 Secret Gardens with higher attendance and revised pricing saw nearly £31,000 raised for local charities.

Membership

Membership Secretary, Hugh Owen

As a voluntary membership organisation, The Oxton Society relies on a strong membership to run the organisation and deliver our activities. We have no paid staff.

At the end of the financial year, our residential membership stood at 414, a small increase on the previous year. We also have 64 community and business partners, many of whom contribute generously with financial support for our events.

Membership numbers fluctuate month to month as new members are recruited and others move on, and we were pleased to welcome 20 new members during the year. We continue to attract new support through recommendations from existing members, working with local estate agents to inform newcomers to the village of our work, and posters in prominent places in the Village. Whilst the cost of living has rocketed, we are proud to have held our annual subscription fee for many years (£10 for a household and £8 for an individual) and feel we offer real value for money at a time when pockets are being squeezed. We have tried to make payment and membership renewal as easy as possible through the use of standing orders, and the vast majority of members (93%) now take advantage of this convenient method of payment. In addition, 85% of you generously ‘gift aid’ your membership subscriptions, meaning we can generate additional income through reclaiming tax.

We are extremely grateful to all members for your loyal support, especially those who are able to volunteer to run the Society, organise our events and deliver our communications. Thanks also to those who responded to the member survey we conducted during the year. As we had expected, the response rate was excellent and the results - which we have already shared with you - have helped shape our priorities for the years to come.

Community Activity

Hanging Baskets

This project continues to ensure the village looks its best throughout the summer. Thanks once more to John Booth for organising the installations, aided by his son Phil who maintains the watering system. Keeping the baskets looking their best has again been due to the commitment of Ian Garland. We are very grateful for their help.

Secret Gardens

This year was the 25th Secret Gardens event. It was another hugely successful day, masterminded again by Kirsty Cotton and Lisa Stafford with help from a great team and charity volunteers. We expanded our outlook a little by creating a new mini-hub at Eastcourt, fully engaging with the Calister Garden and by seeking out more local volunteers to assist with running the event. Great weather on the day helped produce our largest profit for the event which has now been shared out to the charities assisting us. The last 25 years of the event has seen £374,699 being distributed to local charities, plus providing vital funding to the Society. This is a huge achievement which everyone anyone associated with Secret Gardens over the years can be proud of.

Christmas Lights

For the first time in running this event, a small profit was made. This was partly because of investment in the lights installation in previous years, but also principally due to the sponsor donations from a few local supporting businesses. The organising team led by our events leaders Kirsty and Lisa have proved instrumental in improving the marketing of this event.

It is with regret to note that the society has had to re-assess the format of its two flagship annual events following difficulties in making arrangements with some of the businesses in the village centre. In order to safely run events, the Society needs the support of all the businesses in order to be able to plan how it manages the village centre areas during the road closures. Several businesses adopt a non-communicative and in one or two cases even an aggressive negative stance to the Society and refuse to engage with us. For this reason, future Christmas and Secret Gardens events in the village centre are being re-assessed as to their format and viability.

Oxton History Research Group

Secretary, Rowena Beighton-Dykes

Over the past year the Oxton History Research Group (OHRG) has continued to collaborate on a range of projects related to the local area, bringing new information to light, responding to queries about local history and disseminating research for others to enjoy. The main areas of the group's work are in producing material for the Oxton Society's historical supplement The Periodical, delivered with the Newsletter, and leading various walks describing key characters and stories from Oxton's history. In March the group hosted a very busy stand at the Wirral History and Heritage Fair, and since the last AGM has expanded its work to include events at the Callister Garden.

The Periodical
Since the last AGM the group has produced articles for 3 editions of the Periodical, now in its 55th edition. The research group draws on primary and secondary sources for their material: census returns, business directories, maps and photographs as well as published books, pamphlets and brochures, some of which are long out of print. Topics are discussed at regular meetings, where information is shared on individual specialist knowledge and future subjects agreed.

Walks
During the year the group has hosted more than 20 advertised walks, including during the Wirral Walking Festival in May, and the Heritage Open Days season in September. As well as the advertised tours, bespoke walks for different groups have been facilitated, adding to the number of walks led by the team. Due to the popularity of the walks the OHRG would be interested to hear from anyone who would like to join the team to help with this rewarding activity.

Callister Garden events
In the spring the OHRG piloted holding monthly events in the Callister Garden's pavilion. These events have enabled access to the resources held by the OHRG archive as well as offering a venue where talks can be held on local history. Maps showing the development of the Oxton area, and photographs of people and properties has proved, unsurprisingly, popular. A talk on Edith Smith, the first certificated policewoman, who grew up in Oxton, was well attended and is now the subject of a play, much of the original research having been undertaken by the OHRG.

Future plans
The OHRG continues to be an active group, with new material constantly being researched for sharing with the wider community. We are sometimes asked if it is possible to join the group, and we stress that our concentration is on the planning and delivery of all our various activities. We find the history of Oxton is fascinating and rewarding and would be interested to talk to anyone who might like to join us as part of the team on this basis.

Summary of the annual accounts for 2025-2026

Year ended 28 Feb 2025			Year ended 28 Feb 2026	
Income	Expenditure		Income	Expenditure
		Administration		
£4,009		Memberships & donations	£5,024	
	£596	Accountancy		£600
	£176	AGM		£315
	£159	Website/Software		£199
	£1,762	Newsletters		£1,575
£197	£594	Other	£135	£1,179
£4,206	£3,287		£5,159	£3,868
		Strategic aims		
£11,172		OxSoc Secret Gardens	£10,168	
	£0	Blue plaque		£992
	£3,347	Hanging baskets		£2,424
£127	£658	History group & periodical	£1,030	£3,137
£5,524	£9,209	Xmas lights	£5,767	£4,687
	£8,350	Community		£1,496
	£2,508	Conservation		£310
£16,823	£24,072		£16,965	£13,046
£21,029	**£27,359**	**Totals for the year**	**£22,124**	**£16,914**
£29,739		**Carried forward**	**£34,949**	

Secret Gardens

Secret Gardens 2025			Secret Gardens 2026	
£21,596		Programmes (pre- sales)	£25,969	
£10,275		Programmes (on the day)	£16,073	
£10,080		Other income	£11,711	
	£8,451	Expenses		£9,686
	£23,450	Payments to charities		£30,847
	£10,050	Balance to Oxsoc		£13,220
£41,951	£41,951		£53,753	£53,753
		Programme numbers		
2700		Programmes (pre- sales)	2597	
1027		Programmes (on the day)	1339	
3727		Total programmes sold	3936	