



The Otford Society Newsletter

Registered with the Civic Trust

Affiliated to the Council for the Protection of Rural England and the Kent Federation of Amenity Societies

MAY 2003

NOTICE OF THE ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING OF THE OTFORD SOCIETY

Thursday 15th May 2003 – 8 pm – in the Memorial Hall

All members are invited to attend the Annual General Meeting. This is your opportunity to voice your opinion on village matters and to influence the policies of the Otford Society.

The present Executive Committee is:

Ken Gunderson:	Chairman
Secretary:	vacancy
Alf Cook:	Treasurer and Vice Chairman
Vincent Tilley:	Membership Secretary
Andrew Barber:	Walks leaflets & NEWSLETTER distribution
Tony Wiltshire	
Derek Buck	

New members to the Committee would be welcome. Nominations can be made in advance or on the night, provided they have a seconder and the permission of the nominee.

The Annual Report of the Society is contained in this edition of the Newsletter. Please bring it with you as it is not intended to read it out again, in order to keep business down to a minimum. The detailed financial accounts will be distributed at the meeting.

An Open Forum will follow the refreshments when members can question the Committee and discuss local matters.



Palace Field in Winter

Photo: Doreen Wright

THE ANNUAL REPORT OF THE OTFORD SOCIETY 2001–2002

**Minutes of the Otford Society Annual General Meeting
held at 8pm on the 25th April 2002 in the Otford Village Memorial Hall**

Chairman's Welcome

The Chairman welcomed the over 70 members present and thanked them for the large attendance. Apologies for absence were received from Alf Cook, Society Treasurer, Elizabeth and Cliff Ward and Barbara Darby, Parish Clerk. The Chairman also thanked all those members who had attended the Society's recent St George's Day event and helped to make the occasion a memorable and happy one.

Minutes of the last AGM

The Minutes of the last AGM were confirmed as a correct record of the proceedings. Proposed for adoption by George Batson and seconded by Brian Wright and all agreed.

Matters Resulting

The completion of the Mosaic Project in the High Street had been welcomed as a valued addition to the village centre and was widely considered to be a good representation of the history of the area. The Chairman thanked all those people who had helped bring the Project to fruition. The Project hadn't been successful in the Rouse Kent Award.

Traffic Calming in the village continued to be a problem. John Masson asked how successful the recent Parish Council's request for opinions on restrictive measures had been. The Chairman responded that 37 people had sent in responses in favour of restrictions. Mr Masson questioned whether in a village of this size, this small number of people responding indicated a lack of local decisiveness. The Chairman confirmed that the Parish Council would issue a report. To implement measures such as road humps or a speed restriction to 20mph would necessitate street lighting as a statutory obligation and this remained an area of great division in the village. The Chairman asked for a show of hands to indicate those in favour of lighting and of those present five were in favour and approximately 45 against.

Treasurer's Report

Copy of the Report was circulated at the meeting and is as attached to the Minutes. Funds stood at £14,191.73. There was a surplus of £612.34 of income over expenditure for the year. The Chairman mentioned the high cost of printing the Newsletters. Members suggested asking other printers for competitive quotations. The Annual Subscriptions had been raised.

Membership – Vincent Tilley

Vincent Tilley confirmed that membership remained healthy.

Walks Leaflets – Andrew Barber

Andrew Barber said these continued to sell well especially the last booklet 'Ten Circular Walks from Otford' but stocks were diminishing. It was considered that the demand would be less this year than last as the local market might be saturated and a further reprint should be delayed at this time.

Planning

This hadn't been a very active year. The Society had objected to floodlit columns at Beadles Showrooms and this application had been withdrawn. Queries were raised by members about the mobile 'phone cabinet application on Parish Council land on the recreation ground. The Chairman

said he understood that part of the Parish Council's reason for considering the application favourably was that on land owned by the Council they could have a controlling influence on what was erected.

Members expressed concerns about health hazards. The Chairman agreed to write to the Parish Council informing them of members' concerns.

Proposals to have a new Rubbish Tip on land adjoining the Vestry Estate were mentioned and concerns expressed.

Election of Officers

Chairman – Proposed by George Batson, seconded by Mary Bell.

Treasurer – Proposed by Fay Plant, seconded by Betty Batson.

All other members of the Committee proposed en bloc: Vincent Tilley, Andrew Barber, Tony Wiltshire and Derek Buck. Proposed by Mrs Hammersley and seconded by Sid Shaw.

Newsletter

The Chairman asked for items of interest and local concern.

Other Activities

At the Bank Holiday Fete on 3rd June the Society would be manning a Treasure Hunt board game and asked for help in organising and prizes.

The Society had planned to have a small garden to commemorate the Jubilee on land by the telephone kiosk on The Green. However, after a verbal confirmation that it would be in order the Parish Council had made a late decision against the project.

The Garden Party will be held this year at Broughton Manor on 6th July with kind permission of Mr and Mrs Brown. Children were encouraged and the Chairman asked that help with refreshments could be given.

St George's Day/Shakespeare's Birthday Lunch, in the Club Room, was a happy village occasion. Guest speakers were Jim Leicester of the Royal Society of St George and Ray Russell of the Sevenoaks Shakespeare Society.

The Village Sign had been designed by Barbara Darby and was now erected on site, funded by the W.I.

Open Forum

Rev. D. Cassio asked for support with the new Parish Rooms. These would be in stone and matching the church as unobtrusively as possible. George Batson mentioned the proliferation of advertising signs displayed by the local public house around The Green and if they could be reduced and Rod Shelton commented on the increasing and disturbing problem of 'live music' from the public houses.

The Chairman mentioned a future project for the Society of a video 'Our Living Heritage'. This would give a visual history of all the listed buildings in Otford and Barbara Darby, who maintained a high standard in production of videos had agreed to take the project on. Much research would be needed, and consultation with the Historical Society.

The Chairman thanked the members for a lively and interesting evening and the meeting closed at 10pm.

CHAIRMAN'S REPORT

2001-2002 was another quiet year for the Society. The main concern is with the Executive Committee, where new members, including a Chairman and a Secretary, are urgently needed to keep our organisation going. Is there still a role in the village for an amenity society? This is a question that must be resolved, and I will be suggesting that our Autumn meeting (date to be announced) should tackle this problem.

The Garden Party held in the splendid garden of Broughton Manor, courtesy of Mr and Mrs Brown, was fortunate once again to enjoy fine weather. (We have not yet had an offer of a venue for this year.)

The St George's Day/Shakespeare's Birthday celebration lunch in the village hall proved so successful that we have been encouraged to make this an annual community event.

The NEWSLETTER manages to find sufficient recollections of Otford past, and news of Otford present, but ideally would like more comment and contributions from members and residents.

The Autumn meeting was very well attended and a good discussion of the traffic calming proposals was held. In the event, as we know, a residents' poll rejected the scheme for the High Street. It will be interesting to see how the closure of Mill Bridge in June will affect High Street traffic and parking.

Apart from traffic increase, there have been no new major planning problems. The trend towards in-filling continues, particularly in the Shoreham Road area. The new Village Design Statement group has started its work. Its report, which could take a year or two, is intended to guide planners on what sort of development is appropriate to Otford, particularly in the Conservation Area. As it happens, the Methodist and Anglican Churches have proposals in the planning stage for new buildings in the Conservation Area, both with the intention of providing improved facilities for the community.

Ken Gunderson, Chairman

TREASURER'S REPORT

The Accounts for the year ended 31st December 2002 show a surplus of £982.35. This is an increase of £370 compared with the previous year.

Increasing the Subscription rate, and with the financial success of various activities, contributed to the larger surplus.

The main increase in expenditure was the insurance premium in respect of the Mosaic. This has been doubled.

The total Accumulated Funds of the Society now stand at £15,174.08, of which £5,553.54 is held on behalf of the Pond Appeal.

A.J.A. Cook, Hon. Treasurer

MEMBERSHIP SECRETARY'S REPORT – 2002/2003

I am pleased to report that, due to the hard work of our Liaison Officers, the collection of membership subscriptions for 2002 were all complete before the end of the year. There was also an increase in the sum raised by subscriptions over and above 2001, which the Treasurer was very happy to receive before the year-end.

According to the records for 2002, the membership for the year stands at 1,102, which is very close to the figure for the previous year. The records also show that there are members present in 658 dwellings, again almost identical to 2001.

At the 2001 AGM I reported on the year 2000 membership, and commented that numbers had been falling gradually since 1996. Fortunately the figures for 2001 and 2002 have shown a slight increase, so it would appear that we are at present maintaining our high level of membership for a village amenity society.

However, I do not believe that we should rest on our laurels and would urge all of you to encourage your neighbours to join the Society, especially new residents moving into the area. As the committee has often pointed out, it is important to maintain the high level of support we have in the village which adds weight to any arguments we wish to put to local authorities on developments affecting our amenities or environment. Let us all still try to increase that support.

Unfortunately we have recently had several Liaison Officers resigning through ill health or advancing years. Therefore I would ask that any of our members who feel that they could assist the society in this very important task get in touch with me. It is not a very arduous responsibility, delivering just three Newsletters per year to a fairly small number of households and collecting annual subscriptions.

Once again, I would like to thank all our Liaison Officers past and present for their valuable efforts during the year and being the communication link with existing and prospective members.

Vincent Tilley, Membership Secretary, Tel: 01959 522491

Palace Field

The Parish Council maintains this SDC owned area as an Ancient Monument and Flower Field. Timing of grass cutting is crucial to a flower field and it was this point that was raised at our last AGM. Doreen Wright, who lives nearby, agreed to keep a watchful eye, take photographs, and report back in a year so that members would have some factual information. Here is her Report.

We are so lucky to have the Palace Field. How many villages have such a large and pleasant green area right in the centre of their village? Throughout the year it gives so much pleasure to so many people, both residents and visitors.

In Spring the grass becomes a verdant carpet and the trees burst into leaf. The stream winds through flanked by daffodils. It delighted me just a few weeks ago to see a young mother taking a photograph of her child smelling the daffodils massed in bloom and almost higher than her. The wild flowers drift into carpets of colour and the profusion of them is a source of amazement. It is always a sad day when the field is cut and the flowers temporarily disappear. It seems sad to lose their beauty, although mostly briefly as the next sprinkling of wild flowers appears.

The distinction between wild and natural or unkempt is a fine line. Wild and natural must be carefully nurtured and maintained otherwise the area becomes unkempt and neglected. This normally requires expertise regarding the timing of mowing to ensure that wild flowers are maintained and 'unwanted and ugly weeds' and overgrowth are restricted.

Throughout the seasons there is the never ending cycle of leaf, bud and myriad flowers. In the autumn, the horse chestnut, which has already been superb

with its vibrant flowers, becomes the mecca with the local children for 'conkers'. The tree known to me as the Gardner's tree, planted by ex-Otford residents Pat and Ian Gardner many years ago now still looks elegant and healthy.

We do have vandalism. The mindless destruction of the seats there for rest or quiet enjoyment still annoys and the litter, left without thought. But it is nice to see how many people pick up as they walk through, just because the sight of it offends them. Dog owners who let their pets foul both the path and field without picking up can spoil the area for others, especially the very young children, who run to play in the safe area on their way to the shops with their mothers.

The backdrop of the Tower and the hills of The Mount set the scene year round. I once was told that under Palace Field runs a mass of tunnels. Large enough for a man to walk through them. They were put in, I was told, originally by the Romans and used as conduits subsequently for the Palace. Other people, namely the historians amongst us, can probably give the full story on this. It is a place of beauty, serenity and history, and it is ours to use and enjoy.

*Doreen Wright
Chantry Cottage*

NANCY BRIAN

Nancy Brian died in February aged 94, while staying with her daughter in South Africa. Her home had been in Otford since 1938. She was a woman of many accomplishments and interests, but she will be remembered particularly for her skills as a professional photographer. Many of her pictures are of Otford and the surrounding countryside, and readers may recall her lovely photograph of Otford pond which we reproduced on our front page a few years ago. Her children, Robert and Mavis, are arranging for some of her collection to be passed to the Otford Society and the Heritage Centre, where they will be admired for many years to come. A Memorial Service will be held at the Parish Church later this year.

JANET WHITELOW

We were saddened to hear that Janet Whitelaw, who did so much fund-raising for village projects, had died. She, and her late husband Robert, served and helped many village causes, despite health problems. Janet's cheery and resilient presence will be particularly remembered by those involved in running the annual fete.

In June 2002 BETTY JENKINS completed recollections of her war-time life in Otford. The last instalment is printed here. Sadly, she died not many weeks later. She had lived in our village for 63 years, loving Otford, and loved by those who knew her. She belonged to many local societies including the Sevenoaks Philharmonic, who dedicated their performance of Brahms Requiem in April to her memory.

Thanks to Dad's Army and their fun and games on our TV screens, it may be difficult to think seriously of wartime Home Guard. Way back in 1935 'Air Raid Precautions for Britain' had been envisaged; later 'Civil Defence' plans were drawn up and by May 1940 these bodies and the Local Defence Volunteers (A People's Army) had developed into the Home Guard, ARP wardens and the WVS Services that were vital elements in the defence of the country.

Those who gave their services in the Home Guard had no idea when, if, and to what extent their commitment would lead them. They nevertheless took the need for service seriously, and followed the training, the exercises, the nightly manning of look-out posts (there was one on Otford Mount facing south across the valley) and all other duties asked of them. There were frequent (well advertised) 'emergency' night time call-outs; there were exercises in silently crossing fields on their stomachs – always hoping Mr Browning's cows had not preceded them; there were duty sessions on how to deal with gas attacks at the gas clearing hut by the Memorial Hall. Of course, we all had to carry our gas masks with us everywhere. They also attended lectures in the Hall on how to be good soldiers. At one of these a visiting VIP was instructing them on the do's and don'ts of Army life. 'Don't be like Private Snooks and do this ...' and 'Don't be like Private Snooks and do that ...', and all the time a real and embarrassed Private Snooks was there in the front row. Was the VIP ever told I wonder?

My husband's school had 17 out of staff of 21 called up, but he was reserved. He cycled to school at Sidcup and life there was hard with so many replacement teachers, but by joining the Home Guard he felt, like so many others, that he was doing 'his bit' in his spare time and preparing for whatever we might have to face.



As it was, the danger came from the skies. Locally a plane came down in the field that is now Tudor Crescent; Leonard Avenue was hit and houses destroyed, but without loss of life. I believe; and the Browning Settlement hut on The Mount was destroyed. Nearness to Biggin Hill meant we witnessed the Battle of Britain and we could see London lit up during the Blitz. Of this horror we had first-hand accounts from Londoners who had piled their lorries with families and any goods they could salvage and fled to the hopfields near Shoreham, which they knew from their hop-picking days. The Food Office had to go out to provide them with

emergency coupons and points for food they could cook on the open fires beside their huts. Their tales of life in London were pitiable and their shelters very rough and basic, but at least it was safer than London.

Planes engaged in the heavy bombing, by both sides, were heard and seen day and night. It seemed endless, but we were too busy to worry about ourselves. The evacuation from Dunkirk in 1940 with the rescue of many of our troops was something to rejoice in despite the devastation in France.

Finally there were the pilotless V1s with their droning noise and fiery tails; the danger was when the noise cut out and they fell to earth.

Barrage balloons in the lower field (now Tudor Crescent) and an anti-aircraft gun in the Chalk Pit were welcome means to deflect or disable these flying bombs before the destruction they carried could reach more densely populated areas. In all, 2,400 V1s fell in Kent in 1944. Then came the unpredictable V2s. They just descended, unheard, unheralded, and though fewer in number, caused terrible damage. The last of the V-bombs fell in March 1945 and Civil Defence was finally disbanded in May 1945.

In June 1944 we learned of the D-Day landings and the invasion of France. Victory was finally won in May 1945, closely followed by the Japanese surrender. The war was over.

All these years the Government had been planning ahead and looking to peacetime needs. One idea I was concerned with was the 'Milk Rationalisation Scheme'. It was to be my last job at the Food Office. Milkmen were asked to give details of their total business so that arrangements could be made to limit only one milkman's deliveries to each road. It would save fuel and labour. Their rounds, however, were not neatly confined to each local government's (i.e. Food Office) area, and there was much over-lapping. It soon became apparent that the separate area details they gave each Food Office added up to much more than the whole. Their areas did not match ours. However, agreements were eventually made and then came another difficulty – to allocate each milkman's round. Here Government foresight was evident. After the war, when some people would be able to afford to buy quantities of milk, butter and eggs from their milkman some might be disadvantaged unless they had been allocated mixed areas. It took some juggling to get rounds acceptable to each milkman. It was gratifying to be told, years later, by a milkman, that the scheme had been very successful.

I left the Food Office late in 1943 to spend seven unhappy weeks in Sevenoaks Hospital, followed by a lengthy convalescence. It did, however, give me a chance, unwelcome though it was, to experience the times, flights and frequency of the V1s from my own garden.

These recollections are just of my own wartime experiences in Otford and Sevenoaks. There have been many changes and much expansion as well as loss since 1939. The glowworms and nightingales have long gone, and my trusty bicycle has gone too. But the Otford I fell in love with 63 years ago is still to be found, and I am extremely grateful to have found it all those years ago.



Home Guard, 20th Kent Battalion, 1940s.

Property Otford Society, courtesy Betty Jenkins

Dates for your Diary

- Members' Garden Party:** No date or venue. Any offer would be welcome. Ring Chairman: 522709
- Autumn Meeting:** To be announced
- Annual Civic Service:** 11th May 10.00am, St Bartholomew's Parish Church.
- Village Fete:** Monday 26th May, pm.
Otford Society has a stall. Offers of help to Jean Gunderson 522709

1st November, evening, Memorial Hall. **Village Party Pieces.** Last year's successful community party to celebrate Otford's Best Village award is to be repeated, complete with Fish & Chip supper. Have you a 'Party Piece' with which you could entertain your friends and neighbours? The Organiser (Ken Gunderson 522709) is looking for help. Do you belong to a singing or dancing group, any age, any style, or is there some budding talent in your family, an instrumentalist perhaps? Please call KG if you are interested – the sooner the better PLEASE!
(Note: The Otford Players sponsored last year's event, donating £200 to Kent Air Ambulance.)

Otford Society

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