



# The Otford Society Newsletter

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**MAY 2004**

## NOTICE OF THE ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING OF THE OTFORD SOCIETY

Thursday 6th May 2004 – 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.

## THE ANNUAL REPORT OF THE OTFORD SOCIETY 2003–2004

**Minutes of the Otford Society Annual General Meeting  
held at 8pm on the 15th May 2003 in the Otford Village Memorial Hall**

### **Chairman's Welcome**

The Chairman welcomed the 70 members present, and thanked them for the large attendance, especially as the Newsletter with the Notice of the Meeting had arrived late, due to printing problems. Apologies for absence were received from Doug Dickerson.

### **Minutes of the last AGM**

The Minutes of the last AGM were confirmed as a correct record of the proceedings. Proposed for adoption by Andrew Barber and seconded by George Batson.

## **Matters Resulting**

The Chairman had followed up the concerns expressed at the last AGM concerning the installation of the Mobile Phone Mast, with the Parish Council. The Council had fully investigated all possible concerns for health and safety and were satisfied that there were none to cause alarm.

## **Treasurer's Report – Alf Cook**

Copy of the Financial Report was circulated at the meeting, copy attached. Funds stood at £15,174.08. This included £5,553.54 reserved for Pond renovation, still awaiting decision. The Society's funds remained in good order. The report was proposed for adoption by John Bolton, seconded by Gwynneth Miller.

## **Membership – Vincent Tilley**

Vincent Tilley confirmed that membership remained healthy and was slightly increased from last year. The Liaison Officers Meeting had been well attended. There was a need for more Liaison Officers due to retirement and Mr Tilley appealed for help. The retiring officers, Cynthia Tuite of The Butts and Joan Sweet of Willow Park, would be missed and Mr Tilley thanked them for their support over many years.

## **Walks Leaflets – Andrew Barber**

Andrew Barber commented that the leaflets continued to sell but not to the level of previous years and considered this due to 'saturation'. The last 'Ten Circular Walks from Otford' continued to be the best seller.

## **Otford Society Web Site**

Derek Buck, as the Committee member responsible for web activities, commented that the site was difficult to use being through rather arduous redirection from the Chronicle's 'Beehive' site. He felt that the Society's needs were ably catered for on the two Otford sites – the Otford.org and Otford.net. And it was agreed that the Society site should be allowed to close. John Hubbard said he would be pleased to receive any items of information from residents to put on the web.

## **Planning**

This hadn't been a very active year. Traffic calming had been the main problem and the Highways Dept. High Street proposals had been rejected in an OPC poll. Comment was made about the proliferation of signs around the village centre, causing confusion. The Parish Council representatives promised that this would be looked into. The Village Design Group had now been formed and this was something on which they should be able to advise. This was an independent group of residents who should have the ability to exert influence.

Two proposals would be put forward within the next year in the conservation area. One was the extension to St Bartholomew's to enable the church to have improved facilities. This would be constructed in a style to be sympathetic with the architecture of the church and it was unlikely the Society would have any objection. The other was still in the early stages of formation at the Methodist Church for a new hall. This would be welcomed, as the old hall needed replacement.

The Chairman mentioned a new proposal for a change in the licensing laws, which would affect events held in the Village Hall, involving permission for alcohol moving from local to central authorities.

## **Election of Officers**

Chairman – Proposed by Alf Cook, seconded by Pat Smith

Treasurer – Proposed by Gwynneth Miller, seconded by Vincent Tilley.

Membership – Proposed by Fay Plant, seconded by Betty Medhurst.

All other members of the Committee proposed en bloc: Andrew Barber, Tony Wiltshire and Derek Buck. Proposed by Chris Bourne and seconded by Brian Brauns and all agreed.

## **Newsletter**

The Chairman asked for items of interest and even controversy. Printing continued to be a problem but Brian Brauns volunteered help. The Meeting expressed thanks to Mr Brauns for his help. Betty Jenkins, who had been a lively and frequent contributor to the Newsletter, had recently died and the Chairman expressed the regrets of the Society and members.

## **Other Activities**

The Shakespeare Birthday and St Georges Day Luncheon had been attended to full capacity and thoroughly enjoyed. The event was limited to 50 participants but the Chairman put forward the suggestion that in two years time, when the event will be held on a Saturday, the timing be moved to the evening. This would enable celebrations on a grander scale.

The Garden Party had been held at Broughton Manor and been well attended and enjoyed. Problems continued with finding suitable gardens for this event. The owners of Broughton Manor were not against this being considered as an annual event.

A video on 'Our Living Heritage', to give a visual history of all the listed buildings in Otford, was suggested by the Chairman. Film maker Barbara Darby had expressed willingness to make the video.

## **Open Forum**

Ray Gulliver commented on the changes to bus services to provide transport during the closure of the High Street. Also noted was the fact that the slightest infringement in parking within the lined spaces in the Station Car Park could result in a £50 fine. Questions were raised regarding the cutting back of trees close to the railway track and the meeting was advised that the railway authorities did this as a measure to avoid leaves on the track. The Chairman suggested that if the members objected they should write to the Minister of the Environment.

Pat Smith asked that the offer of Broughton Manor as a permanent venue for the Garden Party be given serious consideration.

A suggestion was put forward that the entry roads to the village have the speed restrictions painted on them and all agreed this.

Roger Fogden asked that the Village Map provided by the Otford Society be renovated. The Chairman responded that although provided by the Otford Society this was now the property of the Parish Council and therefore their responsibility.

The Chairman thanked the members for attending and providing a vigorous and entertaining meeting. The meeting closed at 10.15pm.

## **CHAIRMAN'S REPORT FOR 2003-2004**

The past year has been a quiet one in terms of the Society's activities. The Autumn meeting in October was a well-attended evening of good discussion, as reported in the last Newsletter. Unfortunately the Garden Party was cancelled due to difficulties arising from the closure of the High Street.

In all honesty I must report that it is difficult to conduct the business of the Society without a Secretary, and although I am in regular touch with members of the Executive Committee, we have held no formally minuted meetings. This is not a state of affairs that should continue as it is contrary to our Constitution, and should be corrected as soon as possible by the appointment of a new Chair, and a Secretary. I hope that we will be able to determine the future running of the Society at this Annual General Meeting.

The Society's aim to protect our village against unwanted and unsuitable development, to support enhancement and foster community spirit receives general support and goodwill from residents – witness our continued high membership levels. Much of this is due to the work of the Liaison Officers. It was a pleasure to see so many of them, including new faces, at their March meeting. We should be

grateful to the officers of our Society who serve us so well. Our healthy finances are ably watched over and controlled by Alf Cook, himself a busy man working for other causes. It would be hard to find a more efficient Membership Secretary than Vincent Tilley, and Andrew Barber has done wonders to boost income from the sales of the Walks Leaflets.

The Society does its best to bring pressure on the planning authority, but sometimes the system does not allow for as much democratic discussion as we would like. There is also a good deal of public apathy towards local government, unless one is personally affected.

*Ken Gunderson*

### **TREASURER'S REPORT**

The Accounts for the year ended 31st December 2003 show a surplus of £902.74. This is less compared with 2002. Income for the year was down mainly due to fewer fund-raising activities – i.e., no Garden Party and an information table in place of a sales table at the Village Fete.

With the exception of the cost of printing the Otford Society's Newsletter, expenditure remained about the same.

The total Accumulated Funds of the Otford Society now stand at £16,076.82 of which £5,553.54 is held on behalf of the Pond Appeal. The latter is still awaiting a decision from the Parish Council regarding the work to be carried out on the Pond.

*A.J.A. Cook, Hon Treasurer*

### **MEMBERSHIP SECRETARY'S REPORT – 2003-2004**

Unfortunately, due to late collection by a few Liaison Officers, a number of membership subscriptions for 2003 were not received until early this year. They have all now been passed to the Treasurer.

We have also had resignations from some of our longstanding Liaison Officers, most of whom we have fortunately been able to replace. However, there are still a couple of gaps to be filled, so 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.

According to the records, the membership for 2003 stands at 1,093, which is fairly close to the figure of 1,102 for the previous year. The records also show that there are members present in 649 dwellings, slightly less than the 658 in 2002. Our membership has maintained these sort of levels for the past few years.

I believe that we should aim to maintain or increase this membership level 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.

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

*Vincent Tilley, Membership Secretary*

### **PLANNING**

#### **Orange mobile phone 'tree-mast' and ground level equipment compound, Park Farm**

The Society joined with residents and the Parish Council to object to this plan, and permission was refused by the SDC. A petition organised by the Society contained 115 signatures.

#### **Police house (Kent House), The Green**

Permission has been granted for extensions to this 1950s building. The Listed Wall at the front is not affected. The Society took a sympathetic view on the wish to improve interior living standards, but felt that if alterations were to be permitted, improvements to the front of the rather dreary functional building should be made. It stands facing the Pond in a prime position in the Conservation Area.

### **The Old Vicarage, Shoreham Road**

The application to demolish the house and erect 16 apartments was turned down. The Society's objection was on the grounds of the proposed large building being out of character with neighbouring properties, and the potential generation of traffic near a busy junction and corner was an unacceptable hazard.

### **Coal yard, Station Approach**

Laing Homes have acquired the land, formerly the depot of coal merchants Draper and Bambrook, and propose to demolish the five existing bungalows and build houses on the 1½ acres (approx.) site. (Laing's measurement)

The Company has been in discussion with the Society, the Parish Council and the District Council. The need for some sort of sheltered accommodation and 'affordable homes' for young couples has often been expressed at village meetings. Unfortunately, this was not an option for Laing's, who are in the business of developing 'Brownfield' sites. Nor was low density-low cost; they maintained that central government directives demanded intensive use of available land. This did not prevent them from submitting a plan for seven large 4/5 bedrooomed detached houses. No price mentioned, but obviously very expensive.

Our reaction was that although the low number was acceptable on that site at the approach to the main village street, houses of that style and cost might be difficult to sell, even in today's climate, being so close to the busy and noisy train station.

The alternative second application from Laing's is for 16 houses – a mix of small 2/3 bedrooomed terrace and semi-detached, which they felt reflected the mood of the local discussions.

The Society pressed for a low density scheme on the grounds of traffic problems in Station Road and on towards the Russell House School and adjacent to Otford Station approach.

Laing's have consulted the Highways Dept. on what would be acceptable at this junction, so it seems likely that the SDC would find 16 units acceptable.

The discussions still continue. At the time of writing, nothing has been decided.

### **Proposed closure of Footpath 49 rail foot crossing (by Network Rail)**

DEFRA replied to our letter to the Secretary of State that any objections would be taken into account. The question of train hooter noise, a cause of concern to many residents, is awaiting the recommendations of an EU committee.

*K.L.G.*

## ***Dates for your Diary***

### **Otford Celebration Service, 9th May, 9.30am, St Bartholomew's Parish Church.**

Everyone is invited.

### **Otford Society Garden Party, 19th June, 6pm, Colets Well, The Green.**

By kind permission of Sir Michael and Lady Bett. All members and their friends invited.

Tickets: Ring 522709. If wet in village hall.

### **Autumn meeting, 7th October, 8pm, Memorial Hall.**

Speaker t.b.a.

(We regret that the Garden Party date clashes with the Parish Church Fete. We have been unable to avoid this because of village hall bookings congestion. We hope this will not affect attendance at either event!)

# LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

## MOBILE MAST

To the Editor

By an overwhelming majority Sevenoaks Development Control Committee refused to grant the applicant, Orange, planning permission to erect a mobile phone mast at Park Farm, Otford, very close to houses in Shoreham Road.

A large number of us (mainly residents of Shoreham Road) have waged a strong campaign over the last few months against the mast application – there were over 50 individual letters to Sevenoaks District Council. As an important part of the campaign, the Petition organised by the Otford Society and signed, I believe, by an amazing total of some 115 residents, was a tremendous encouragement to us and well noted by the Development Control Committee members.

On behalf of all who have been directly involved in this campaign, I would like to express most grateful thanks to all who signed the Petition.

*Robert Perkins, Shoreham Road*

## SNOWY WINTERS

To the Editor

Reading the December edition of the Newsletter brought me great pleasure, in particular the article by Fay Plant entitled 'Snowy Winters', recounting the Winter of 1947 in Otford. I was not born until eight years later but much of what Fay describes was familiar to me in the 1960s, when snowfalls were still considerable.

Living in Tudor Crescent, both the chalk pit and The Mount were obvious places to take sledges for that thrilling downhill run. The chalk pit offered only a few gentle slopes except for the big one which overlooked the Scout Hut. As part of a dare I did once go down this very steep, but short, run on my new Tri-ang toboggan made of blue tubular steel with wooden slats on top. The lads who dared me were known as 'The Kemsing Kids' and offered to 'wipe the blood off my toboggan' if I came to grief! Lying on my tummy with my heart in my mouth I sped down and across the public footpath and into the Scout Hut entrance unscathed!

The Mount was just as Fay described, the long gradual slope and the steeper one straight down the Mount. Certainly, it was possible to reach the Pilgrims Way, although there were some large steps halfway down the narrow footpath and members of the public to avoid! Indeed I do have a copy of some 8mm film of me descending this slope at the point where the two humps or bumps occurred.

My first sledge was made out of wood with no metal runners so we had to take a candle with us to grease the underside of the wood. It was heavy to pull up the slopes too. The new lightweight model slid much better, although the runners did begin to rust when the paint scraped off. Once my sister, Dorothy, rode this craft from low on the slope and crashed into a tree, which bent the speed machine. A trip to Waites Garage resulted in a free repair!

Trudging home, with friends, aches and pains and snow in our boots there was a real sense of fulfilment from a simple, cheap, natural pleasure. It provided good exercise as well, much better than sitting in front of a computer today. I agree with Fay that The Mount is much less attractive today, with a sense of being closed in. The magnificent view of our lovely village is hardly possible now!

*Ed Thompson, Sevenoaks*

## IN MEMORIAM

**LES SIMMS**, aged 92, died in January. An Isle of Wight man who served in the army throughout the war, he had lived in Otford since 1959. He and his wife Joyce, who died two years ago, were wonderful gardeners with a natural talent for growing things. They were stalwarts of the Horticultural Society, and winners of many awards.

**DAVID GILBERT** died suddenly in February at the age of 57, to the dismay of his many friends. His Cornish voice resounded at many activities in Otford. In the 25 years or so that he lived here, his whole-hearted contributions to the community were considerable, and will be especially remembered at the Cricket Club, the Fete Committee and the Parish Church.

**KATH SWAN** was 82 when she died in January. A quiet and reserved person, she served on the committees of the Horticultural Society and the Gardeners Society for many years, becoming President in later life. She was much loved and respected by all who knew her.

**MARY WINTERBURN**, whose kind, smiling personality will be long remembered by her friends, died at the age of 82 in February. During the war years she had worked at Bletchley Park. She was an enthusiastic WI member, and became President of the Afternoon WI in 1987. The floats for the annual village Fete, which she helped to organise, were always spectacular, and she last appeared on one as recently as 1997 at Professor Higgins from 'My Fair Lady'.

# Vincent Tilley's

## BOYHOOD MEMORIES OF OTFORD, 1940 TO 1956

From when I was born in Pembury Hospital, until I left home to join the Navy at 16, my home was at 60 Tudor Drive.

My earliest memories are of the wheat field opposite my home and the Land Army girls' huts at the bottom of the road. The field is now the site of Tudor Crescent and the huts have been replaced by flats/maisonettes. What a great time we had playing and hiding in the wheat until the huge combine harvester came to gobble it up in the autumn. We would then follow, as it went round and round the field slowly reducing the patch in the centre, until it had all been gathered in. Each year the straw bales it produced were built into a new haystack to join the others, which lined the side of a short spur off Tudor Drive, called the Haystack Road. This later became the entrance to the upper end of Tudor Crescent. The other stacks were all in various stages of decay, from last year's to the earliest, which was just a patch of loose straw. They would have been positioned from approximately where 1 Tudor Crescent is now to the bungalow called Flettons. It was great fun to climb on these stacks and build dens from the bales or jump from the top onto the loose straw below. In the war the field was the site of a barrage balloon, which may have saved my life, as it caught the wing of a descending 'Doodlebug' and turned it towards the top of Tudor Drive where it caused some considerable damage!

At four I started school in a house in The Chase, just beyond Park Hill Road on the way to Kemsing. This later became Russell House School and moved to its present premises near the station. However, before then I have moved on to Sevenoaks County Primary at Cobden Road, now the site of Age Concern. One winter I remember walking to school in the snow, as there were no trains or buses running. I also attended the Methodist Church Sunday School.

As I grew older, from the age of about five, I ventured, with others, further afield to the Chalk Pit, which was then unlevelled and a great place to play all sorts of games. I particularly liked climbing the pine trees to a considerable height where I could espy all the comings and goings at Otford Station and along 'The Cut' from Tudor Drive to Station Road. We also had much fun sliding down the slippery chalky clay slopes, much to our mothers' disgust at the state of our trousers! Another exciting event was to look over the fence at the bottom of our garden to see the steam-hauled 'Golden Arrow' roaring past on its way to the coast, when it had been diverted from its normal route via Dunton Green.

Later still we made our way to The Mount, which presented a far larger playground. There we would light campfires and roast large mushrooms on two sticks laid across the fire or bury potatoes in the ashes to be roasted. In the autumn we would shelter from the gales and rain in dens we made underneath the beech trees in the woods and where our fires would burn even brighter fanned by the strong winds. I still think of November as the season of horizontal rain!

In the wintertime, just exactly as Fay Plant described in her article, we delighted in sledging down the hill in the winter snow, which back then seemed to last for several days or weeks every year. The snow caused much trouble for the few car owners in Tudor Drive, which at this time was unadopted. They often could not climb the hill and would be locked in until volunteers spread ashes on the hill or put on salt and brushed it clear. When I was small my

Dad used to put me on the sledge and pull it through the snow, via the Cut, to get coal from Bambrook's coal yard at the station, because the coal lorry could not venture down the hill. Tudor Drive was also a great hill to ride down on our Soap Box carts equipped with old pram or pushchair wheels. The equivalent of the skateboards of today and just as lethal for the pedestrians!

In those days the footpath from railway crossing to the village went straight from the top corner of the field by the crossing to the bottom corner by the watercress beds and thence through the churchyard to the pond. Horses, which were mostly friendly, invariably occupied this field but occasionally one had to make a run for the stile! The watercress beds were later converted to ponds for the Trout Farm. As a young lad, returning through the churchyard on dark evenings in the winter didn't seem to bother me.

As soon as I was old enough I took on the paper round for Tudor Drive, cycling down to Leeds the paper shop (now One Stop) early in the morning to collect the papers and delivering them before leaving for school. This round doubled in size in the 1950s, when Tudor Crescent was built on the field opposite and I had to split the papers into two lots to be able to carry them. Cycling was our main mode of transport and with my mates I covered many miles around Otford and the surrounding villages such as trips to the fords across the Darent at Shoreham and Eynsford. The River was another adventure playground where we swam in the stretch in the meadows opposite the Sevenoaks Road and on another occasion built a raft with oil drums to ride downstream on.

At about the age of eleven or twelve I joined the weekly Old Time Dance Club, run by Mrs Phillips and her son from Sevenoaks, in the village hall. There were a number of children, from my age up to teenagers, plus a strong contingent of their mums and other ladies, accompanied by a few husbands. As children we had a really enjoyable time and even danced some of the formation dances at the Summer Fete.

I became a member of the Methodist Youth Club, where I first met my wife Heather who lived in Shoreham. At Christmas on our Carol singing round we would visit Broughton Manor where we were invited in to sing in the Minstrel's Gallery. I also joined the Otford Scouts.

The village was then, as now, an extremely sociable community for all ages with many activities for people of all interests to take part in.

After my final years at Maidstone Technical School I left home and took up an apprenticeship with the Royal Navy where I served for 10 years. However, later in life (1982) I moved back to the village where I spent such a memorable and happy 'Just William' type childhood.

*Vincent Tilley*

### **Otford Society**

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