



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

JUNE 2005

SUMMER GARDEN PARTY *18th June*

The members' Annual Garden Party will be held in the grounds of Broughton Manor, one of Otford's most notable Listed houses, by kind permission of Mr and Mrs Dennis Brown. The Society thanks our hosts who have once again opened their garden to our village society.

The event will take place on 18th June, 6pm to 8pm.

All members and friends are welcome, and we look forward to a good attendance.

Fr Richard Harvey has given permission for parking in the grounds of the Catholic Church, which is almost opposite Broughton Manor in the High Street.

We hope for pleasant summer weather, meeting fellow members and guests, but, if it should turn wet, we meet in the Memorial Hall.

Tickets are £3, available from Jean Gunderson (522709) in advance, or on the gate.
Proceeds are donated to the Otford Benevolent Society.

Other Dates for your Diary

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| June 25th | Gardeners' Society Rose & Summer Show, Memorial Hall, 2.15-4.15pm |
| July 2nd | St Bartholomew's Fair, Castle Farm |
| October 6th | Otford Society Autumn meeting, 8pm, Memorial Hall. Details to be announced. |
| October 22nd | Trafalgar commemorative presentation. Evening, Memorial Hall. Details to be announced.
Keep an eye open for signals. |

PLANNING MATTERS

64-66 Well Road. Laing's application for 9 houses refused. No further developments at time of going to press.
Apology: Mr Eric Fordham of 64 Well Road has asked the NEWSLETTER to correct the impression given in the April edition that only Number 64 was involved in the proposed development. Mr Fordham says that he and his wife only acceded to selling land under pressure and on consideration of what alternatives might take place, particularly in relation to Numbers 66 and 68.

Walks Leaflets. Sevenoaks Tourist Information Centre has restored the Society's '10 Walks Around Otford' to its shelves after Andrew Barber reported problems with this in our Annual Report, which was spotted by Sevenoaks Town Council's Town Clerk.

OTFORD MATTERS

PUBLIC MEETING WITH THE SDC PLANNING DEPARTMENT MEMBERS, 20th April

The 'Sevenoaks Chronicle' gave this meeting front page treatment, but failed to convey the mood of dissatisfaction amongst the audience. The only statement from the SDC was from their public relations officer, which indicated that the Planning Authority had been carrying out correct procedures. Thus we went full circle in a futile attempt to find out why majority public opinion is ignored, and public consultation minimal.

The following letter was written to the 'Sevenoaks Chronicle' by the Otford Society Chair, which the paper did not print. Here it is for the benefit of members.

Dear Editor,

Officials of the SDC Planning Department, together with District Councillor Mrs J. Davison, visited Otford on the 20th April and spoke to a large audience crowded into the Primary School Hall.

The meeting was informative in the sense that the SDC gave a presentation of how planning devolves from the national to the local level, and different speakers explained the complexities of the problems.

However, for Otford residents no explanations were forthcoming about recent cases where decisions were made which clearly appeared to diverge from the agreed Local Plan. In most cases objections from respected bodies such as the Parish Council, the Otford Society, the Otford & District Historical Society and the CPRE were over-ridden.

I have always assumed it is the statutory duty of Local Authority to abide by the Local Plan, which took four years of consultation to compile. Residents of this area should be able to rely on administrators to keep to the rules, and it is small wonder that there is public concern when the ultimate decision makers – the SDC – fail to do this.

The Planning Officer, in referring to objections to applications said '500 objections could carry no more weight than one'. Maybe so, but 1,100 (the membership of the Otford Society) objections based on considered arguments citing the agreed clauses of the Local Plan, should not be dismissed out of hand. The attitude of the planning officials seemed to be 'we are the professionals, we know best'. They seem to think objectors are just a vocal minority resisting change. Mrs Davison, who holds the Planning and Transport portfolio in the District Council, at least tried to answer a question, and made a statement explaining why she had decided in favour of the controversial Coombe Road development.

At the Otford Society AGM on the following evening members expressed dismay at a meeting which had achieved very little. A unanimous resolution of no-confidence in Mrs Davison was passed, and Otford's District Councillors were asked to take this into account when voting takes place to elect SDC committees.

A disappointing comment was reported to have been made by Ms Morgan, Strategic Services Director, in responding to a member of the audience after the meeting when she said 'anyway, Otford is not an historic village'.

The 'Sevenoaks Chronicle' in recent months has carried many letters critical of SDC planners. The Authority remains silent. One hopes they are ready for Community Involvement which the proposed new laws require. Are they capable of changing old habits?

*Yours sincerely
K.L. Gunderson*

ST GEORGE'S DAY / SHAKESPEARE'S BIRTHDAY, 23rd April

This year we commemorated the occasion with a dinner in the Memorial Hall for 50 people. The Chairman opened the proceedings by commenting on the commitment to voluntary work in the community by many of the people present. To him, this represented a characteristic of those who live in England, and Otford has reason to be grateful to them.

After the toast to St George, spoken by Mr Jim Leicester of the Royal Society of St George, the company was served with a first class meal, which included roast beef of Old England and Yorkshire pudding prepared under the supervision of Mrs Maureen Bolton. Mr Leicester, who is also a member of the Johnson Society and past President of the Boswell Society, gave a short talk on the 250th anniversary of Dr Samuel Johnson's English Dictionary. A tribute to Shakespeare was given by Mr Ray Russell of the Sevenoaks Shakespeare Society, and his stirring renditions were warmly welcomed. Mrs Marian Wills spoke the words of 'The Soldier' by the First World War poet Rupert Brooke, who died on St George's Day 1915, and a memorable evening ended with everyone joining in singing 'Rose of England'. No one minded that the words and music had been written by a Welshman.

ST GEORGE'S DAY 2006

This falls on a Sunday, and it was suggested to the Parish Church that it would be a good opportunity for a village occasion if the Civic Service were held on that date, to be followed by a community lunch in the Church hall. The Otford Society would have been happy to sponsor this event.

Regrettably, we are informed by St Bartholomew's that this will not be possible, as it is deemed inappropriate to move the date of the Civic Service, for various reasons.

The Chairman writes: 'I am very disappointed at this decision; it will be some years before St George's Day again falls on a Sunday. The Vicar tells me that the Civic Service is designed simply to be a celebration of village life, and that Remembrance Sunday is the day when the village comes together in national celebrations. Remembrance Sunday, of course, has little to do with St George's Day. Our own commemoration is intended to be a community occasion, and to foster local pride and identity as much as a reminder of our English heritage.'

'WE WILL FOLLOW UNITED'

Tom Browning recalls what it was like supporting the village team 40 odd years ago.

The Library Room*, with its floor well spiked by cricketers' boots, was where, at half-time, in Otford United's home matches, Bill Hope provided the hottest cups of tea I have ever drunk.

I was 8-10 years old at the time (1958-60) and remembered that Mum had told me that Bill had been a Chindhit** in the war, and I imagined that this was where he had picked up his tea making skills.

Myself, Tony Laundon and Barry Gatley would wait by the away goal hoping for play to start so that we could nab the practise ball for a kick-about. A reporter from the 'Sevenoaks Chronicle' would turn up, complete with a large press camera, and we would be asked by the visiting goalkeeper 'Which one is Don Marchant?'. He would soon find out, as Don was a very quick centre forward. Apart from Don, the best players I remember were Charlie Atkins and Gordon Kilby, and two brothers who worked for W.P. Banks, Builders of Dunton Green, and whose names I can't recall.

The standard of play was quite high at this time, probably owing to the benefits of National Service and the stiffest opposition in the Tonbridge League was always provided by Ramblers.

We kids approached the heading of a wet leather ball as very much a last resort. The premature death of Jeff Astle, a famous England forward, was blamed partly on the effects of regularly heading such a ball. When Astle retired from the game he set up an office maintenance business under the slogan 'Cleans up every corner'. The practise ball that we had waited to use was much heavier than normal, owing to the waterproof covering applied to it. To keep goal, in our kick-about, was extremely hazardous, and might well have endangered our adult life! Our goal was Percy Grove's slaughter house, and accidentally-on-purpose we would sky the ball onto the roof, bringing down tiles. To this day you can see the patching on the roof. While we were playing we would sometimes hear Percy at his work inside.

I often wonder what players on today's Recreation Ground with its modern facilities would make of those past times. Then, at the end of the games, players had the luxury of two buckets placed outside the hall entrance to remove the worst of the mud!

* Now the 'Hope Room'

** Jungle fighter in Burma 1942-45

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