



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 2006

LOOKING FORWARD **A message from the new Chairman**

The two Committee meetings held since I took on the role of Chairman have been lively and interesting with wide ranging discussion on a variety of issues. It has been good to have Ken with us on both occasions. His in-depth knowledge on local matters, together with his perspicacity, make an important impact on our discussions.

We have welcomed Richard McDowall into our midst as the Otford Society forges new links with R.A.D.I.O. This new group has been very quick to make an impression in our community. R.A.D.I.O.'s help in monitoring proposed building in our village is of the utmost importance. The expansion of the Conservation Area in the heart of the village to help deter unwanted development is also something we both support.

Unacceptable development is a national problem, particularly here in the South East. England and its countryside is characterised by its villages, and tourists from all over the world enjoy visiting places like Otford. It takes very little to change the intrinsic character of villages like ours. We must support R.A.D.I.O. who, like ourselves, are working to preserve the ambience which makes Otford a place we love.

The Otford Society seeks sensitive and sensible planning and ways to enhance life in Otford. We would like to expand our membership, and new members are always welcome – especially newcomers to the village. If you know someone who needs encouragement to join, please have a word with them. Our next meeting will be the Autumn meeting in early October.

This seems to me to be a time to strengthen the Society. Combined with R.A.D.I.O. we can stage a strong presence should the need arise.

Take care; enjoy the Summer!

Yours sincerely,
Tony Wiltshire, Chairman.

THE ANNUAL REPORT OF 2006 AGM A new Chairman is elected

The Society's Annual General Meeting on 6th April was well attended, and brought about a change in leadership.

Tony Wiltshire agreed to accept the Chairmanship, a decision unanimously welcomed. He succeeds Ken Gunderson, Chair for the past 16 years. Tony and his wife, Eve, are well known and active participants in village life. Tony is a long-serving member of the Executive Committee, and Eve a capable organiser of events and fund-raiser with the W.I.

Ken Gunderson writes: The Society needs fresh impetus and the Committee new blood, and it is with absolute confidence that I hand over the reins to my good friend Tony. I have had a long and enjoyable innings, and move on not before time. I am grateful to the Otford Society for giving me the opportunity to become acquainted with so many good people who go about the community doing valuable work, often unsung and unacknowledged. I shall continue to edit the NEWSLETTER until another Editor comes along. I thank you all for your friendship and civility.

Carol Griffiths, Secretary, reports: The Executive Committee was re-elected, with the addition of Richard McDowall of the R.A.D.I.O. group who will co-ordinate opinions and action on planning issues.

The Committee is as follows:

| | |
|-------------------|---|
| Tony Wiltshire: | Chairman |
| Alf Cook: | Treasurer and Vice-Chairman |
| Vincent Tilley: | Membership Secretary |
| Andrew Barber: | Walk Leaflets & Newsletter distribution |
| Ken Gunderson: | NEWSLETTER Editor |
| Richard McDowall: | R.A.D.I.O. representative |
| Derek Buck | |
| Jeff Lee | |
| Carol Griffiths: | Secretary |



SAINSBURY'S ROUNDABOUT

My campaign to have direction arrows painted on the carriageways at the roundabout may, after two years, come to an indecisive conclusion.

I met an officer from the Highways Department of the KCC on Monday 8th May. We stood in the rain from eight to nine o'clock and apart from two minor incidents the traffic behaved perfectly. Again, from five to six o'clock, when Tony Wiltshire joined us, the traffic did nothing to uphold our request.

The officer said he had seen nothing but normal working at a roundabout and his parting remark that if the Department, after careful consideration, made any changes to a junction and there was an accident where there had not been a serious problem previously, they could be held responsible. Although he has not yet sent me his final decision, I think this says it all!

Andrew Barber

OTFORD MATTERS

The Annual Parish Meeting was held on 22nd May, and those present heard of the varied work of the Parish Council over the past 12 months. Budget figures have risen enormously in recent years and their management makes life busier for our over-worked Parish Clerk and her Assistant.

The biggest project has been the building of the Sports Pavilion on the Recreation Ground, designed by Cllr Eric Dilley and named after him.

The Community Support Officer, David Birchall, presented a long report, and the good news seems to be that he has considerably improved the police presence in the village. He expressed some concern at evidence of drinking around the new Pavilion and the Chalk Pit area.

Cllr Elizabeth Ward said the Pond may be re-puddled this summer, possibly with community help.

Planning issues, as always, aroused considerable interest, and Cllr Dilley mentioned the Coombe Road saga where to everyone's relief the application permitted by our Sevenoaks Planning Authority was abandoned. Is it all quiet on the Well Road front, or perhaps just a phoney war? Laing's may be re-organising their reserves, but have made no move since withdrawing their application for 23 houses.

Concern was expressed at the impact on Otford if the 500 houses proposed by Berkeley Homes are built in Rye Lane, Dunton Green. Included in the proposals are two ponds – thus going one better than Otford.

Late news: Laing's have submitted an application for 21 houses at Well Road.



OTFORD PLAY AND RECREATIONAL AREAS PROJECT APPEAL

The Parish Council approached the Otford Society to ask if it would lead an appeal to raise £14,000 (approx.) to upgrade the children's play areas at the Recreation Ground and at Hale Lane. This would enable the Council to apply to central government for grants available to meet the whole costs, the grants being conditional on a proportion of the money coming from the community and not from public funds.

The Committee felt that this was a community project in which we should be involved, and a letter was delivered to every household. The response was overwhelmingly generous. Money came in from individual residents and organisations – small gifts and large donations. The result is that within a few short weeks we have very nearly achieved our goal!

I thank everybody who has given. May our children appreciate the play and exercise opportunities for many years to come – provided for them by the generosity of village people.

Thank you.

Ken Gunderson

DUNTON GREEN BUILDING PROPOSALS

The application to build 500 houses plus offices at the Dunton Green end of Rye Lane causes concern because of its impact on the local infrastructure. DAVID HAYES, Secretary of the Mid Dunton Green Residents' Association, outlines the proposals and the reaction from his members. Otford Society members will make up their own minds on how this large development on our doorstep will affect the whole neighbourhood. Unfortunately objections should have been delivered to the SDC Planning Department by 5th June – after the date of this NEWSLETTER. However, there may be other opportunities to have your say.

The West Kent Cold Store

This cold store has existed for many years. It is located in Dunton Green and vehicle access to and from the site is only possible via Station Road, Dunton Green or Rye Lane, Otford – both are unclassified resident roads. The site comprises refrigerators and deepfreezes for the storage and distribution of food, and hundreds of heavy goods vehicles including artics visit the site every day. At its worst, a couple of years ago, there was an average of 700 lorry movements every 24 hours along Station Road. Local residents have been fighting for some 20 years to get the number of lorries reduced.

Berkeley Homes now own this cold store and have submitted a planning application to redevelop the site. They propose to build approximately 500 dwellings and 5,000 sq.m. of office accommodation. If their application is granted, Dunton Green will see the end of virtually all the lorries.

Dunton Green now has something approaching 1,000 dwellings. This figure has increased in very recent years because it has been targeted for new houses. Berkeley's proposal will create a 57% increase in dwellings and a population increase of about 1,000 people and therefore another 1,000 cars are likely. Unlike the lorries, these cars will be able to make use of Rye Lane, to Otford, as well as Station Road. It is estimated that these additional cars will increase total vehicle movements by 66%, and double existing movements during the morning and evening peaks. Even Berkeley estimate that the current average of 634 lorries movements will be replaced by 2,012 car/van movements.

Dunton Green simply doesn't have the infrastructure to support a development of this size. But

it is not just Dunton Green that will suffer. The influx of such a large number of new people and cars will change the character of the area. Why is such a large development needed when Sevenoaks District Council has already reached, or indeed exceeded, its housing target? In what way will Dunton Green, and the area immediately around it, benefit from a development of this size?

Yet another aspect of great concern is the level of 'affordable housing' proposed. The District Council's adopted Local Plan only demands that 20% of this development be 'affordable housing' yet they have put pressure on Berkeley to accept a figure of 35%. This higher figure has not been endorsed as policy by either District Council or Central Government yet a few individual Sevenoaks District Council officers are pursuing it. Berkeley's has responded by proposing 30%. This translates to about 70 rented dwellings and a further 70 shared ownership dwellings, available for local residents. However, both Berkeley and Sevenoaks District Council define 'local' as anybody in the Sevenoaks District.

This proposed development is certainly a step in the right direction, when compared with the existing use of the site, however many (and possibly most) Dunton Green residents believe this scheme is far too big. The size of the Cold Store site might support 500 dwellings but the existing infrastructure in Dunton Green simply cannot. A development of 200 to 250 dwellings would be more appropriate.

Dave Hayes
Secretary –

Mid Dunton Green Residents' Association

THE OTFORD SOLAR SYSTEM MODEL

A LANDMARK EVENT

David Thomas, master-mind of the unique scale model of the solar system, writes on the latest addition 11,789 miles away in New Zealand.

The Otford Solar System model shows the planets in their relative positions at a given point in time, namely the first moment of the millennium, whereas as far as we know the 10 or so other models of the solar system scattered about the Earth only show the distances and sizes. Our model is a reflection of the Solar System as a whole. Sir Patrick Moore described it as 'deadly accurate' after a visit, and a leading astronomical authority has praised it as being the 'most informative and impressive of all such models'. Our model is also unique in that it shows not only the planets but some related stars to give a sense of the immense distances involved. The latest model of a star, the unromantically named ROSS 154 has now been placed in Christchurch Museum, New Zealand. About 2½" in size, it is on the same scale as the Otford planets. Correctly it should be about 700 miles further on which would have taken it into the Pacific Ocean, so it was more practical to put it in the nearest city, Christchurch!

There are now four models of the nearest stars to our Sun, which holds the central spot on the Recreation Ground. The nearest, PROXIMA CENTAURI, 1½" across, is 5,000 miles away in the Griffith Observatory, Los Angeles. Its true distance is 4.2 light years, which is the distance light can travel in just over four years. (In space light travels at about 200,000 miles a second, which means that light can travel around the Earth in about the time it takes for a camera shutter to open and close whilst taking a photo!)

7,5000 miles away in the Stanley Museum, Falkland Islands, is the 2" model of BARNARD'S STAR, which in reality is six light years away.

SIRIUS, the brightest star in our Northern sky, twice the size of the Sun, is represented by a 24" model in the Sydney Observatory, Australia, 11,000 miles distant. SIRIUS is nearly nine light years away from Earth. Now we have ROSS 154.

We now not only have the largest accurate astronomical scale model possible to construct, but four related models of some of the nearest stars. If one made our Solar System model any smaller, the engraving of Pluto at Sepham Farm would not be visible to the naked eye. If it were made even just three inches bigger, not only would it spread over much of our local countryside, but we could not place any scale stars at their correct distances because planet Earth would be too small. One can have confidence that the model realistically reflects that part of the universe close to us.

You can see illuminated models of the four stars and the Sun in the Heritage Centre.



Some thoughts on wider issues

I estimate that about two to three thousand people a year visit the model, mainly in family groups. It would not be difficult to attract far greater numbers with more extensive publicity. More visitors might be good for trade but could make the difficult parking situation in Otford even worse. Where on earth could we find extra parking areas or even spaces for coaches? More visitors may arrive anyway as Otford has become more widely known since being named Village of the Year.

When conditions are right I look at the skies through binoculars or telescope. Almost always the sky clouds with trails, which is not only disappointing, but a worrying sign of the amount of fossil fuel that is being burnt in the atmosphere.

At the local UA3 geological group we have discussed the melting of the world's major glaciers and climate change. The seriousness of the situation was brought home to us when we were told that decisions are now being made about which areas of Kent will be defended and which will be abandoned to rising waters in the next century. We have learned of the close relationship in rising global temperatures and the use of fossil fuels.

It is interesting that a regular contact with the model makes one more aware of global and wider issues.

PAST TIMES IN OTFORD

Our village was once blessed with many shops. SHIRLEY STRUTT, who lived in Otford until 1974, records her memories of some of them.

The first POST OFFICE I can remember was in the High Street on the right hand part of what is now Nicola's (then two shops). It was run by two ladies and was known as 'Top Warrens' – 'Bottom Warrens' being the shop further down the street. When they left Mrs Rainsford took over but soon moved across the road to what became the 'right hand' Lowrie's store. This was the first pharmacy, run by her husband, which had a corner containing a few toiletries, pottery etc. and was advertised in the Church News as 'The Elfin's Cave'. They then moved to the shop which is still the Pharmacy. After the war the new Postmistress came to this shop, I think to be shown the ropes, and then went to the Parade premises which had never before been occupied.

Of the BUTCHERS in Otford, Groves was housed where Stan the barber now is before moving to the more impressive building next door (now a dwelling). 'Grandpa' Groves ran the shop and Percy came for orders on his bike. He and his two sisters lived above the shop, and when he married he moved to Station Road. Beadels (now Copus) was managed by Mr Beadel and his wife. They had three daughters who lived in Otford until recently.

After the Post Office moved it became a WOOL SHOP run by Mrs and Miss (Peggy) Broadbank, who lived in Greenhill Road. They stocked wool, cottons, buttons, etc., as well as ladies' stockings and underwear. The shop later became 'The Baby Lamb', run by Mr Williams.

There were a number of GROCERS in the village. 'Bottom Warrens' – later the 'Village Stores' – sold petrol and almost anything else, and the son delivered newspapers. During the shop's last years it was run by two men and became known as the 'open all hours' store, goods available when all other places were closed. KNIGHTS BROS, now the Willow Tea Rooms, was run by three brothers. Two were bachelors and lived at the shop; Cuthbert, the married one, lived in Pickmoss Lane. LOWRIE's on the corner of Park Lane was a major grocery. 'Old' Mr Lowrie was a craftsman and responsible for a lot of work in the Church. His workshop was behind the shop, which was run by Mrs Lowrie, a very upright lady. When son Lionel came home from World War II, he and his wife Rose ran the shop. They took over the shop next door as a hardware store with Bill Hope in charge. Their son David, who now owns the properties, which have in turn been gunsmiths and off-licences, now runs them as antique dealers.

MERCHANTS, next to THE BULL garden (now another antique shop), was opened in the late 30s by Mr Marchant, who had been manager at Lowrie's Stores, which caused some ill-feeling at the time. After his early death, his wife carried on the business with her three sons, popular figures in the village, John, Donald and Robert.

After the war a lot of cottages between Lowrie's and The Crown were turned into shops. There was a tea room and baker's, Mr Boakes had his shoe repair business, later Young's shoe shop, and an electrical shop turned into a delicatessen before inevitably changing into an antiques shop.

At the Parade on the Sevenoaks Road, built just before the war, only three of the premises were occupied before hostilities ended. There was the Newsagent (Leeds) and Mrs Foote's tea room and homeopathic shop, now One Stop... There was also Miss Waites, hairdresser. She was the sister of Peter and Cyril (garage owners) and married the barber in the High Street, Mr Prior.

Dates for your Diary

1st July Garden Party for members and friends.
62a Well Road, 6pm-8pm
By kind invitation of Mr & Mrs R. McDowall
Tickets £4 from the Secretary, Carol Griffiths 523140. Proceeds to local charity.

Autumn meeting is planned for early October.

IN MEMORIAM

We are sad to hear that **Geoffrey Levien** has died. He was in his eighties, and his tall figure was to be seen until quite recently at village occasions. A member of the Luncheon Club and the Over 60s, he enjoyed the Players' productions and was a regular attender at Otford Society meetings.

He was always thought of as one of 'the old school' in the best possible way. A kind man of good manners and courtesy to all.

Roy Alexander, who died earlier this year was a leading member of the Otford Society in its early days. His energy and vitality helped set the Society on its course, and he compiled the first photographic record of every building in the Conservation Area, a record which is now housed in the Heritage Centre.

He moved to Ramsbury some 20 years ago and again became heavily involved in the community, joining the Parish Council and heading various projects almost up to the time he died at 90 years of age. His friends in Otford will long remember him.

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