



The Otford Society Newsletter

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of Amenity Societies

APRIL 2007

NOTICE OF THE ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING OF THE OTFORD SOCIETY Thursday 19th April 2007 – 8.00pm – in the Memorial Hall

All residents are invited to attend the Annual General Meeting, but members only have voting rights. This is your opportunity to voice your opinion on local matters and to influence the policies of your village Society.

The present Executive Committee is:

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| Tony Wiltshire | Chairman |
| Secretary | Carol Griffiths |
| Alf Cook | Treasurer and Vice Chairman |
| Vincent Tilley | Membership Secretary |
| Andrew Barber | Walks Leaflets & NEWSLETTER distribution |
| Jeff Lee | Highways |
| Derek Buck | Website |
| Ken Gunderson | NEWSLETTER Editor |
| Richard McDowall | RADIO representative |
| Carol Griffiths also represents the Society as RADIO Liaison | |

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

The Annual Report of the Society is contained in this edition of the Newsletter. To keep business down to a minimum it is not intended to be read out again at the meeting; please bring it with you if you wish. The detailed financial accounts will be available and distributed at the meeting.

After the formal proceedings there will be an Open Forum on traffic problems in the village.

THE ANNUAL REPORT OF THE OTFORD SOCIETY 2006-7

Minutes of the AGM 2005-6 held at 8pm on 6th April 2006 in the Otford Village Memorial Hall

1. The Chairman (Ken Gunderson) welcomed all members present to the 32nd Annual General Meeting, founded in 1973 as a successor to the old Village Preservation Society, and was pleased to see such a large number of members present (approx. 65)
There were eight apologies for absence: Pauline Alderton, Brenda Aryanpur, Doug Cracknell, Ruth Fleming, Jeff Lee, Sue Istead, Betty Kent and Dorothy Palmer.
Representatives from RADIO were welcomed to the meeting.

2. Minutes of the last Annual General Meeting, held on 21st April 2005 in the Otford Memorial Hall, as printed in the Newsletter of April 2006. There were two spelling corrections – David Sealy and Gwyneth Miller.

Proposed: Eve Wiltshire

Seconded: David Sealy

3. **Matters Arising**

A letter was sent to the 'Chronicle' after the public meeting with SDC but was not published. It was included in the Otford Society Newsletter. It was noted that since the meeting, the members of SDC Planning Committee have changed.

4. **Chairman's Report**

For 16 of the last 33 years I have been your Chairman. You will forgive me if I take a backward glance for a moment. I was persuaded to take over as Chairman as no one else came forward, by Bill Buckland, committee member – friends may remember his warm and gentle personality.

I succeeded Frances Furlong, who had served a short term after Bill Fleming, that stalwart of the Society and planning matters and long-time Treasurer.

Our present Vice Chairman, Alf Cook, has served on the Committee almost as long as myself and has been Vice Chairman since 1992. I thank him, not only for his professional and efficient service to the Society, but for his objectivity and friendly support over many years. He has also been Treasurer for many years.

In fact, although you might think good people are hard to find to serve on the Committee – it would be hard to find a better group than those serving our Society. I commend to you our Membership Secretary, Vincent Tilley, and our Newsletter Distributor and Leaflets Representative, Andrew Barber. The other members of the Committee all play their part when called upon. Looking back, there have been many supportive Committee members who have guided me and I would like to thank them all.

Has anything been achieved over the last 16 years? Are we just an irritation to planners in the current set-up? Why does it seem that the grand strategic strategies set out by Planning Authorities are just mere words to be interpreted at *their* discretion? One of the original purposes of the Village Preservation Society was to 'make Otford more beautiful'. Add to that a role which I think is important, which is to encourage local identity and awareness, and I believe we have had some success. The Otford Millennium Mosaic was organised and successfully completed – largely due to the work of Brian and Doreen Wright. The PCC kindly allowed us to place it on the wall of the Parish Church Hall (it is moveable, by the way) but I believe that perhaps one day we should give it to the Parochial Church Council. Our St George's Day/Shakespeare's birthday celebration has become a traditional event which I hope will continue. Our Newsletter stands as a platform for free comment on any issue.

Achievements in the Planning area are more difficult to assess and perhaps we have not done as well as we could have. Success here is dependent on other factors, particularly the support of other groups and bodies.

5. **Treasurer's Report – Alf Cook**

The accounts were printed in the Newsletter and are in a very healthy state. These were adopted.

Proposed: John Bolton

Seconded: Gwyneth Miller

6. **Membership Secretary's Report**

The membership has risen slightly this year. Thanks to all the Liaison Officers who do such sterling work. Three have resigned this year but have been replaced by three more volunteers. The report was adopted.

Proposed: Barbara Darby

Seconded: Tony Wiltshire

7. **Walks Leaflet and Newsletter – Andrew Barber**

Sales were very good – all going well.

8. **Newsletter – Chairman**

The next Newsletter will be early summer.

9. **Activities**

Trafalgar Bi-Centenary Celebration was very successful. Video available. Two Trafalgar Oaks were planted on the recreation ground.

23rd April – St George's Day/Shakespeare's Birthday – English Tea in Church Hall at 4pm. Talk on David Garrick.

Garden Party 2007 – date and venue to be announced.

10. **Election of Chairman and Officers**

Chairman: Tony Wiltshire

Proposed: Marian Wills

Seconded: Geoffrey Levien

Vice Chair & Treasurer: Alf Cook

Proposed: Eve Wiltshire

Seconded: Cliff Ward

Secretary: Carol Griffiths

Proposed: John Bolton

Seconded: Brian Symons

Committee Members: Andrew Barber
Derek Buck, Jeff Lee, Richard McDowall,
Vincent Tilley, Ken Gunderson.

Proposed: Chris Masson

Seconded: Barbara Collins

11. **Open Forum**

Query about the path across The Green when building starts at St Bartholomew's Church. Memorial is to be boarded up to protect it.

Appeal for funds for the Play area – there has been a good response so far. Otford Society is to give a substantial donation. Joyce Shaw was concerned about the cost of £70,000. Elizabeth Ward said the Parish Council had taken advice about the Risk Assessment.

Sue Stephenson was doing a sponsored walk round the Recreation Ground to raise money for the Play Area Appeal.

David Sealy reminded the meeting that next year was the 300th Anniversary of the Act of Union with Scotland – 1707 – Scottish Parliament was abolished.

Elizabeth Ward spoke about the competition 'The Best of the Best' – The village had been entered and judging would take place on 18th April.

Interval for Tea

There was a presentation by Louise Shrubsole from Sevenoaks Rural Energy Focus on Energy Saving Measures and grants available.

THE CHAIRMAN'S REPORT FOR THE YEAR 2006-2007

This has been an active and positive year for the Society. Reflecting on this year's events I would like to take this opportunity to thank all those who help to make our annual events so pleasant, in particular all those ladies who provide cakes, sandwiches, scones and other tasty morsels.

Last year our St George's Day celebration, which was on a Sunday, was held in the Church Hall and was well attended. Jim Leicester, our Dr Johnson expert, spoke of the actor David Garrick who was a friend and pupil of Johnson. Ray Russell of the Sevenoaks Shakespeare Society gave an interesting talk on phrases from Shakespeare which we still use in everyday speech, probably unaware of their origin. He gave his usual rousing rendition of the famous speech from Henry V, and Marian Wills rounded off the occasion with a reading of some English poetry.

At the Village Fete a few committee members spent the afternoon under a small gazebo advertising the Society and at the same time receiving donations for the Play Areas Appeal. Quite a few people showed interest in the Society. Unfortunately it was a windy day, and at one point we nearly lost our gazebo. It is good that after a period of anxiety a new Fete committee has been formed, ensuring that the 2007 Fete will now go ahead. I'm sure all who can will support this community event.

Richard and Christine McDowall offered their garden for our Summer Garden Party. This gave us all a chance to see for ourselves exactly what kind of impact Wimpey's proposed development would have on this part of Well Road. Richard had put together some super-imposed photographs which clearly showed how the

development would look if permission were given. Our MP, Michael Fallon, was able to have a close look for himself. Additional excitement was provided, thanks to Richard. He allowed us to watch his TV. It was, in fact, the World Cup match between Germany and England – but no happy ending. It was the game that saw England exit the series.

In contrast to the Well Road saga, the gradual appearance of the new Frog Farm farmhouse has had a pleasing reception. Visually it is a great improvement on its 1908 predecessor.

Remembrance Day in November saw the Society lay its annual wreath. There was a good gathering of people around the war memorial, and despite it being a cold morning the sun was shining through. A greater effort must be made this year to make sure the traffic is stopped at 10.50am, and that it does not move on until the trumpet has played its last note. This is a matter for all those involved with this important occasion to co-ordinate the smooth running of that last fifteen minutes of the service.

In recent weeks our attention has focussed on the possible closure of the railway crossing Footpath SR 49. Of the many letters sent to the Rights of Way Office at the Environment Inspectorate, very few support the closure. The proposal first came up in 2004, and the Society has a large dossier from that year. It is now clear that closure and diversion of the Footpath would not affect the train hooters, which would still continue.

From trains to roads. The problem of speeding in and around Otford has become

an issue once more. Jeff Lee will be dealing with this matter in a separate article. We must support all positive suggestions to combat this problem. Linked to this is the problem of HGVs passing through the village sometimes at unacceptable speeds.

Our Secretary, Carol Griffiths, was pleased with the response to the questionnaire on a change to the Society's logo. 95% returned the form and 90% were in favour of a re-designed logo. A decision will be made soon.

The Committee has decided that a receipt will be given in future when members pay their subscription fee. This has not yet been fully resolved, but is being looked into.

I have been attending meetings, along with a dozen or so similarly interested people, held to discuss the production of a Village

Design Statement (VDS). Rod Shelton (01959 523371) is the Chairman. All villages have been asked to produce a VDS which will be a document for the planning authorities to take into consideration when making decisions. It will take more than a year to prepare. If you are interested in knowing more, Rod will be holding an open workshop day. Everyone is welcome, so watch for the date. If you have issues you feel strongly about, Rod will be only too pleased to hear from you.

Otford is a busy and alive village. Visitors enjoy coming here for walks, sport, the pubs, and just to browse. The Otford Society has a key role to play in retaining the ambience. If you have a neighbour who is not yet a member, encourage them to join us. Our strength is in our membership.

A.V. Wiltshire, Chairman

TREASURER'S REPORT

The Accounts for the year ended 31st December 2006 show a small surplus of £98.13. During the year the Society collected, from the residents of Otford, £8,908.50 towards the cost of the Children's Play Area. The Society donated an additional £1,000 towards this Appeal.

Renovation work was carried out on the Pond, and the sum of £5,553.54, which the Society had held for six years, was paid to the Parish Council.

The total Accumulated Funds of the Society now stand at £13,473.26.

Copies of the Annual Accounts of the Society will be available at the Annual General Meeting.

A.J.A. Cook, Hon. Treasurer

WALKS LEAFLETS

Andrew Barber reports sales holding up. The Society is indebted to Doreen and Brian Wright for the best-selling leaflet which brings in a steady income.

MEMBERSHIP SECRETARY'S REPORT – 2006-2007

Once again we had a small increase in the Society's membership during 2006 bringing the total paid up members to 1,159. The number for the previous year was 1,124. There are now members present in 671 of the dwellings in the village, which is approximately half the total number of residences. It is a great achievement for a village amenity society to have such a high level of membership, especially in this day and age of so many conflicting interests.

For this I thank you, our members, for your support, but especially the Liaison Officers, who deliver your Newsletters and collect the membership subscriptions. The Treasurer received all these subscriptions well before the end of the last financial year.

Please try and remember to encourage your neighbours to join the Society, especially new residents moving into the area. It is important to maintain the high level of support we have in the village to add weight to any arguments we wish to put to local authorities on developments affecting our amenities or environment. This is particularly important at this time, with the development pressures from the government on the South East. As you well know there are a number of contentious issues at the current time and we need the weight of the membership behind the Society in influencing these proposals.

We are, once again, short of Liaison Officers and I would ask for volunteers to help with Warham Road and The Green, both quite small rounds for distribution. There are only three Newsletters to deliver per year, plus collection of the members' subscriptions. I look forward to hearing from anyone who can help.

Vincent Tilley, Membership Secretary
Tel: 01959 522491

Dates for your Diary

The new Methodist Hall is nearing completion, and it is expected that bookings can be taken after Easter. Please ring Margaret Nickson (522499) for further information. A celebration fortnight is planned from Saturday 9th June with an open invitation to anyone who lives in the district to attend any or all of the events. Saturday 16th June will be an Open Day, and the hall will be open each weekday for coffee.

Ring Derek Baxter (523687) for details.

ALLOTMENTS ASSOCIATION

14th July, Open Day.

GARDENERS' SOCIETY

31st March, Spring Show, 2.15pm, Village Hall.

30th June, Rose & Summer Show, 2.15pm, Village Hall.

Tuesday evening meetings, 8pm, Village Hall on 3rd April, 1st May, 5th June.

Secretary: Janet Finney (523670)

VILLAGE FETE

28th May (Late Spring Bank Holiday)

The theme is 'Water' (although a dry day is hoped for. [Ed]) Ring Tracey Rowe (07876 197077) or Jacky Cottrell (525870) for details.

OTFORD MATTERS

PLANNING. The Well Road development application Public Inquiry was held at the SDC offices on the 5th and 6th March. Tony Wiltshire spoke for the Society, and RADIO representatives Keith Stockman and Richard McDowall also fought Otford's corner. The matter now hangs in the balance, and it is to be hoped that if judgement goes against the application (again) the case will be finally closed.

Looming on the horizon is the Inquiry into the proposed closure/diversion of Footpath 49 (the Rail Crossing). Letters opposing closure have flooded in to the Rights of Way office of the Planning Inspectorate. Mrs Liddle introduced a note of humour in her letter in regard to the allegation 'that there have been misses that have shaken drivers'. She wrote, 'It is possible, I suppose, that in giving the driver my customary wave of thanks – with an additional blown kiss at Christmas – I may have unwittingly unnerved him ... ' She also mentions the little known fact – 'that the Jack Russell which committed suicide years ago was named Emma.'

Darker clouds gather on the horizon with what seems to be nothing short of two new towns on Otford's doorstep, which could only make the traffic situation much worse. The Rye Lane proposals for 500+ dwellings at the Dunton Green Cold Storage depot, and the huge development suggested on the Fort Halstead site.

Meanwhile, Rod Shelton has made remarkably rapid progress leading the Village Design Statement study group, and has produced a discussion document covering all the aspects debated so far. Protection of village identity and defence from increase in traffic volumes and speeds are high on the agenda.

K.L.G.

Jeff Lee wants

A CAMPAIGN FOR ROAD SAFETY IN OTFORD

In November my partner received multiple injuries while walking the 15 yards home from next door. She was struck by a car travelling well above the 30mph limit. Her injuries required and still require extensive treatment. Our lives were suddenly taken over by worry, distress and medical problems. Friends and neighbours have been wonderfully supportive, and doctors and nurses at four different

hospitals did their work. After all, accidents will happen.

But they shouldn't. After the accident, as we walked or drove around the village we looked at things differently and feeling, as we do, fortunate to live in Otford, we would really like to make it a safer place. Various authorities are responsible for highways, but can be slow to

act. Can we, as residents, think about the way we use the roads and also work to get safety improved?

Most people use roads sensibly, but we are aware of two other accidents close to our address since 2003. We do live on a main trunk road, narrow, unlit with no footway, but clearly signed '30mph' and 'No Footway'. Around the village we looked at bends and junctions, sightlines, the differences between side and main roads, and what the police call 'driver and traffic behaviour'. Pedestrians and cyclists began to look very vulnerable. A wide berth is essential, but not always easy to give. From the footway, buses, vans and lorries seem bigger, faster and more threatening, their wing mirrors often a danger to walkers. Motor-cyclists commonly seem to use the A225 as a test track. Some residents never leave home except on motorised wheels, and children stay locked within home territory. 'Their choice,' one might say, but how can we reclaim our village?

If you keep rigorously within the speed limit, as we did, this causes irritation, and following vehicles will drive close behind, even with headlights flashing. Most of us have experienced this unpleasant and threatening behaviour. However, driving within the limit means there is time to see who or what is ahead, and to react accordingly in any conditions. Through traffic may see Otford's

narrow roads as a nuisance to be negotiated as quickly as possible, but equally residents may be rushing to work or to appointments, or on the school run.

At various times in the past there have been debates on how to improve the traffic situation, and proposals have been made about lighting, 20mph High Street limit, M26 access, new developments hazards, and so on. We do need to get some form of speed control at key points. Seal and Brasted have it on the A25, why not on our own A225? Road-pricing could bring yet more traffic.

The Otford Society, working with RADIO, and with support from organisations such as Living Streets, will be trying to get help and action from Councils and Highway Agencies to improve things and ensure road problems are not just seen as matters of congestion.

Meanwhile we can all try to make the best and safest use of the roads as they are at present. In particular, if all residents agree at the least to stay within the 30mph limit whatever others do, this will force other drivers to do the same. The results could be dramatic.

Finally, most accidents happen within a mile or so of home – victims will live nearby. Don't be one yourself, your fellow villagers would prefer it that way.

OTFORD SOCIETY LOGO QUESTIONNAIRE

Of the 98% of the questionnaires that were returned, 90% wanted a change of logo. 55% suggested a view of the village, and the remaining 45% thought that a montage of various aspects of Otford would be best.

A local artist will provide some illustrations, and the Committee will then decide on the next steps.

Carol Griffiths

Next Otford Society Newsletter - May-June

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