



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 2007

**JEFF LEE continues the campaign for safer roads
and safer driving.
He urges all residents to abide by the speed limits.**

TRAFFIC AND ROAD SAFETY IN THE VILLAGE: AN UPDATE

In the last Newsletter, I wrote an article about roads and traffic and how dangerous the village can be. Very sadly, on 21 April, another accident happened, this time tragically fatal, and involving a gentleman who had lived in the village for many years. Our heartfelt sympathy goes out to his widow and family.

Ironically, just a couple of days earlier, at the Otford Society Annual General Meeting, traffic safety was the theme discussed in the Open Forum. The meeting was very well attended, and I was invited to put forward some thoughts to an audience which I must thank for its attentiveness and active participation. There was general agreement that the situation with traffic in the village needs urgent attention and action. We acknowledge how much time and effort the Parish Council has put into trying to improve things over a long time, but it seems that shifting responsibility from Sevenoaks District Council to Kent Highways has not so far made it easier to change things for the better.

However, there was a great deal of support, and some practical ideas, for improving things. A number of members agreed to meet to look at possible ways forward – both short-term and long-term – and that meeting took place on 22 May. A long list of ideas was generated and the group is now looking at them to see which should have priority. There is much support for a village publicity campaign which will ask all residents to take special care when driving through the village and – in particular – to keep within the 30 limit at all times. Let's face it, if we all drive at 30 or below, it makes it very hard for other traffic to go faster. Never mind if other drivers think it's too slow: IT ISN'T. And the two serious accidents in the village in November and April are the proof. And would you believe it? As I write, the traffic bollards and signs on the small refuge between the Woodman and the pond stand (or rather lie) twisted and shattered. It makes you think what the word 'refuge' really means: anyone standing on it at the time would have wished they were in the pond instead.

So please spread the word among members and non-members alike. There will probably be a number of things which we would like to see happening: making residents and others aware of the traffic risks, possibly through posters or stickers or press articles; surveying traffic use of roads and parking areas; possibly bringing in devices such as ‘Speedwatch’ or vehicle activated cameras which tell drivers if their speed is excessive; maybe looking again at a 20 limit in the High Street; and working towards changes to the village environment by installing ‘gateways’ marking the entrance points to the village on the main roads, as other villages have. And parking needs urgent attention too.

The Society doesn’t have the power or the authority – or the money – to do all these things, but we can do some, as individuals and as members. And we can support and encourage the Parish Council to do others. We’re very fortunate that Rod Shelton and the Village Design Statement committee are taking this issue very seriously and are keen to bring about change quickly. But, as a Society, we all need to show that we think it matters, and we need to start setting examples.

Jeff Lee
May 2007

IN MEMORIAM

BRIAN WRIGHT (1934-2007)

Brian Wright died in April after a long illness. He was a quiet and unassuming man, much liked and respected, who worked for the community in many ways. A brilliant sportsman in his younger days, he excelled at cricket and rugby. The playing of ‘Swing Low Sweet Chariot’ at his memorial service in the Parish Church hauntingly reminded us of his love of the game of rugby. His service to the Otford Society will long be remembered, not only for his beautifully illustrated Walk Leaflets, but for his leadership of the ‘Parish Map’ project, which eventually became the Millennium Mosaic. The Mosaic, now with pride of place in the High Street, serves as a permanent reminder of the life of Brian Wright to all who pass by.

K.L.G.

SYDNEY M. SHAW (1921-2007)

The whole village was stunned by the death of Syd Shaw, killed instantly on the Sevenoaks Road on his way home from a W.I. sale in the Village Hall. He was travelling on his mobile scooter. Syd moved to Otford when he married Joyce some 30 years ago, and immediately became involved in the community. He played at the table-tennis and bowls clubs, took an allotment, and joined in entertainments staged by the W.I. and ‘The Good Companions’. Living for some years next to the Village Hall, he often acted as voluntary key-keeper, and he and Joyce were usually to be seen at the weekly fund-raising coffee mornings. He was a regular attender at many Otford organisations, and could always be seen with the Royal British Legion at the annual Remembrance service with his array of medals. A kind and courteous man, his passing caused great grief throughout the village.

K.L.G.

OTFORD MATTERS

There is a lull on the planning front, with the Public Inquiry yet again dismissing Wimpey's appeal for the Well Road development. However, a further offensive from the builders is possible, so we will continue to keep a careful watch, and our powder dry, with the help of RADIO who have been very active on this front.

The long saga of the application to divert Footpath 49 across the Station forecourt and close the railway crossing has ended with the abandonment of the Public Inquiry. The Society campaigned against the proposals from the outset, several years ago now. Our last letter to the Rights of Way Office said that the new suggested route increased hazards for walkers to such a degree that to hold a Public Inquiry on the matter was a waste of public money and resources. The Planning Inspectorate agreed, helped to its decision by the great weight of public opinion.

The VDS, helmed by Rod Shelton, moves nearer to a successful conclusion. A workshop was held on 28th April, when many photographs were taken by residents, and by the time you read this an Open Day and a community meeting will have been held. The Society has given £100 towards costs.

The Annual Fete – theme 'Water' – turned out to be a very British happening, the events going ahead when many others had been cancelled, despite heavy rain which put the Recreation Ground out of use for vehicles!

This annual occasion was nearly lost to the village until a new committee came to the rescue. The new team, under the Chairmanship of Mrs Patti Chatterjee, deserves to be congratulated on their great effort to keep a traditional community event going.

The new Methodist hall came into use on Easter Sunday while still awaiting some finishing touches. It is now complete, and as well as providing the Methodists with modern premises, it makes a welcome addition to village meeting facilities. From a visual point of view the building merges well with the Library in its prominent position in the High Street Conservation Area. Bookings Secretary: Mrs Margaret Nickson. Tel: 522499.

K.L.G.

Dates for your Diary

Otford Society

June 23rd Summer Garden Party, 62a Well Road, 6pm-8pm. Tickets £5.
Secretary: Carol Griffiths 523140

October 16th Autumn meeting, Memorial Hall, 8pm.

Otford Players

June 22nd AGM, The Hope Room, OVMH. 8pm.
The Players desperately need new and younger members if the tradition of amateur dramatics is to be kept alive in Otford. Anyone who wishes to support this in any capacity is invited to attend. Secretary: Sue Simpson 522786.

Methodist Church

June 11th-15th 10am-12 noon }
June 18th-22nd 7.30pm-9.30pm } New Methodist halls open for viewing. Coffee served.

A NOTE FROM THE CHAIRMAN

The AGM in April was well attended. Extra chairs were needed, and by 8pm the Hope Room was packed. Many people came to hear Jeff Lee speak on the traffic issue. He gave us a well-researched talk with much food for thought. Quite a few people spoke and raised some interesting points. Within three days of the meeting we were to hear of the tragic death of our dear friend Syd Shaw, who was killed attempting to cross a busy road. Syd's death has given an additional impetus to the efforts we are making with the traffic problems around Otford. Jeff has already brought together a small team of helpers; we thank them for giving their time, and look forward to hearing from them in due course.

We anticipate the Village Fete, and our own members' Garden Party. The past year has been a good one for the Society; much has been achieved. Until the next issue – happy times in the garden, enjoy the sunshine, and be glad to live in such a lovely place, 'Otford, a village in Kent – with a pond'.

Yours sincerely
A.V. Wiltshire
Chairman

Editor's Note

The Chairman has not mentioned that at the AGM the former Chair, Ken Gunderson, was honoured by the Society by being elected President. He wishes to thank the Society for this, which he regards as the culmination of many years of happy association and friendships.

The Otford Society has made considerable financial contributions to the village in the past two or three years. These include £500 for exhibition display boards for the village hall, over £5,000 given from our Pond Fund towards the cost of major pond repairs, £8,500 collected for the refurbishment of the Play Area after the appeal launched by the Society on behalf of the village, £100 to the VDS project.

Liaison Officers Shortage

We have a problem of a shortage of Liaison Officers.

Currently we have no help for:

The Butts, Part of Greenhill Road, Pilgrim's Way West, Warham Road & the Upper High Street and The Green.

At the moment committee members are trying to cope with this situation so are there any volunteers who could help us?

It is not a very onerous task as 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

Next Otford Society Newsletter – September

Chairman: Tony Wiltshire 524887, 111 Evelyn Road, TN14 5PU
Newsletter Editor: Ken Gunderson 522709, 37 Knighton Road, TN14 5LD
Newsletter Distribution: Andrew Barber 523550
Membership Secretary: Vincent Tilley 522491

Printed by British Heritage Print, Otford