



The Otford Society Newsletter

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OCTOBER 2007

2007 – AN HISTORIC AUTUMN FOR OTFORD

On September 9th a farewell service and reception was held for the retiring Reverend Pat Hopkins, Vicar of Otford for the past 11 years. St Bart's was bathed in the warm sunshine of late summer as a large congregation shared Pat's thoughts on retirement and her move to Norfolk.

At the reception following the service, we were reminded that Pat was Otford's first lady vicar, and that it was under her guidance that the Church Centre was conceived and built. This is the first addition to the Parish Church since the time of Henry VIII. Quite a thought! For those who have not visited the new extension, do try to view it. I was struck by how carefully the *new* had been blended with the *old*. The excellent use of wood in so much of the work is exquisite, and the passage from the church into the extension can only be described as perfect.

Only a few weeks before, we attended the opening ceremony of the new Methodist Church Hall, a delightful building and built with the greatest care and skill. Every aspect – floors, doors, windows, walls and the various fittings are superb. A key feature is the number of available meeting rooms under its roof, and the main auditorium has an excellent acoustic.

We must thank all the people in both churches, who have helped in so many ways over many years, to bring these two lovely buildings to the village.

Reflections

The Summer garden party on June 23rd was a great success, despite a difficult day with the weather. We were fortunate to have two or three hours of sunshine! Our thanks to Richard and Christine McDowall for the use of their lovely garden.

On September 15th in the village hall we had a most enjoyable "harvest home" evening, reminding us of the Otford of 100 years ago. We must thank our President, Ken Gunderson, who conceived this presentation and produced a superb script. Barbara Darby's video is outstanding, and is available to purchase from her. The ladies who prepared the food did a splendid job, and we all had a real feast with the taste of home cooking.

As we approach winter and the evenings draw in, our thoughts turn to Christmas when we will look forward with hope to a new year, and look back on one that, for Otford, has been of historic significance.

My wish for everyone in our village is for peace and happiness.

Tony Wiltshire, Chairman

MEMBERSHIP

The membership is fairly stable with some new members being recruited by the Liaison Officers as residents leave the area. Not all Officers have got their 2007 subscriptions to me yet and I would urge them to do so before the year draws to a close. The Treasurer needs to have the subscriptions before November to be able to prepare the accounts for auditing.

It is important for all of us to encourage neighbours to join the Society, especially new residents moving into the area. This is necessary 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.

As we have not raised our subscriptions since 2002, with costs increasing, the committee have decided to raise subscriptions from January 2008.

The new rates are to be:	Working Couple	£5	Working Single	£4
	Retired Couple	£3	Retired Single	£2
	Postal Couple	£6	Postal Single	£4

Also, we are ceasing to offer Life Membership from 2008, although we will honour those existing life members' arrangements. Life Membership has become increasingly uneconomical for the society and we feel that it is unfair that the other members have to carry the cost difference.

We are still short of one Liaison Officer and I would ask for a volunteer to help with the Upper High Street & The Green, quite a small area for distribution. There are only 3 Newsletter editions 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

OTFORD PLAYERS

The Players are finding it difficult to carry on without a stronger nucleus of production support – across and back stage helpers.

They are currently planning a production of “My Friend Miss Flint”, a comedy, and urgently need a leading man. There must be somebody out there willing and able to play the part of a writer/TV presenter in the 25-45 age range.

They would like to recruit actors of all ages, male and female.

Amateur dramatics has a long tradition of successful productions in our village, and helps to create community activity and strengthen local identity. Anyone interested in supporting Otford Players, please ring Marian Wills (Chairman) 01959 522856.

“OTFORD REMEMBERED

1907 – The Harvest”

An evening celebrating old time harvest home was held in the Memorial Hall on 15th September. Barbara Darby had created a video film, using some of the historical records at the Heritage Centre. By permission of the Head Teacher, the script was able to use the words of Mr Hoff, headmaster of the village school 1878-1919 from his writings in the school log. The evening was supported by folk singers with traditional country and harvest songs, and culminated in a supper prepared by Marian Wills, Eve Wiltshire, and other volunteer helpers.

The video (28 mins) is available from Barbara Darby (01959 522709), cost £7, and would make a delightful Christmas present for any former Otfordonian who has now moved away.

Kent “Gardening for Wildlife” held its 2007 Celebration at the Sevenoaks Community Centre on 27th September. Over 200 people attended and saw Otford receive awards, two going to Barry Davies and the Allotments Association, and another to Cllr. Rod Shelton for his work.

OTFORD MATTERS

Well Road

Yet another application from Wimpey, for a concentration of houses in what has been called “the green heart of Otford”. This time they are asking for 21 dwellings, 40% of which would be “affordable homes”.

Under the present rules developers can make any number of applications – and can usually afford to do so – while objectors have only one shot. Two Inquiries have already turned down building on this site, which developers regard as “brownfield” and ripe for their purpose.

Last date for objections is 11th October.

What’s happened to our VDS? *Rod Shelton, leader of the team, reports*

“A Village Design Statement will usually take a year to two years to complete.” This was the “official” advice we received when we started preparation on the Otford VDS in February. Here we are at the start of October and we have reached the point where the written copy – the meat of your VDS – is ready for submission to the authorities to get their reactions and recommendations. Now begins the business of planning the final design of the document and the sourcing of the many photos and illustrations which will support it.

The statement, with all its many recommendations, is a vision for Otford’s future. It has to tread a difficult path between what is permissible under present development guidelines and what the residents of Otford have indicated they want to happen. The dedicated team of 12 Otford volunteers has worked hard, meeting every fortnight, to ensure that that vision will remain at the heart of your VDS.

Dunton Green Cold Store Site

The meeting of the S.D.C. Development Control Committee on 20th September was well reported in the Sevenoaks Chronicle. I attended on behalf of the Society as we have some concern as to the effect the proposed 480 new houses will have on the use of Rye Lane as access to Otford and its rail link to London.

There were many objections from Dunton Green representatives and residents. These were countered by Cllr. Ann Dawson in her many risings in support of the application for permission by Berkeley Homes Ltd. Rye Lane was mentioned only once and then only as a dangerous road, the inference being that it would not be much used.

There was some confusion when the Chairman called for a vote during the proceedings and announced the motion lost. It was pointed out that there had been no proposal and seconding: the meeting continued. The statement in the Chronicle that permission was refused is not correct and the decision was to hold another meeting in October after councillors had investigated the traffic problems, the number of houses and the design of those adjacent to the railway line which had no opening windows on that elevation.

Andrew Barber

Roads and Traffic – Where Next?

A committed group of members continues to work on behalf of the village to try to make it a safer place for all residents. There has been a meeting of the Parish Council Highways Committee, attended by the Society's traffic group. The issues raised were proposals for tackling the parking situation in the village and the need to make roads and footpaths safer. I can't report that any specific action was agreed at that meeting, but it was an opportunity for us to express our concerns forcefully and at the same time offer support to the Parish Council on your behalf. We have some valuable allies there.

So where next? The Otford Society has agreed to do the following:

- survey residents' views on road safety through a questionnaire (please respond to it and ask others to do the same);
- work for lower traffic speeds through a campaign of car stickers and posters advising "30 in Otford – think it – do it!";
- contribute to funding for a "gateway" or a speed control programme such as speedwatch;
- press for traffic signs to be cleaned and visible and footways and pavements clear of overhang etc.

We will consult road safety professions and organisations, linking that with pressure for improvements in the way the fabric and heritage of the village are enhanced and protected, working alongside colleagues in RADIO and the Historical Society and other groups. The nearly complete Village Design Statement and the excellent ideas from English Heritage and Kent Downs AONB Unit are examples. Think what it would be like to be able to walk safely up to the edge of the pond, or walk down the High Street knowing that any traffic is having to tip-toe its way along, giving precedence to pedestrians all the time... How nice it would be to get our village back!

Jeff Lee

The NEWSLETTER has received a letter from Mrs Joyce Shaw, whose husband was tragically killed crossing the Sevenoaks Road in his mobility scooter.

She mentions the problems mobility scooters have in Otford with such things as kissing-gates and lack of dropped kerbs– problems which can also apply to parents with push chairs. She believes there should be a dropped kerb at The Parade, as well as a pedestrian crossing.

Dates for your Diary

21st October – Otford Society Autumn meeting, 8pm, Memorial Hall (Club Room)

Jeff Lee will speak on the progress of the Society's campaign for road safety in the village.

Cllr. Elizabeth Ward will talk on Keeping Otford Green.

2nd December – Otford Retailers Group Open Sunday

Local shops struggle to compete with superstores and large shopping malls, so take this opportunity to support local traders. Now is the time to buy your Christmas gifts. Street entertainers will add to the fun and atmosphere of the occasion.

Next Otford Society Newsletter – Spring 2008

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

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