

# The Otford Society NewsLetter

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[www.otford.info/otfordsociety](http://www.otford.info/otfordsociety)

SEPTEMBER 2010

## AUTUMN MEETING

on

Thursday, October 21st 2010

at

Otford Village Memorial Hall at 8.00pm

Speaker - Richard Worssam

Vicar and Village



## A VERY SPECIAL EARLY AUTUMN

It is early September and today is a lovely sunny morning, with blue skies and only a light breeze. As I look through my diary I notice that autumn officially begins with the autumnal equinox on 23 September. There is a gradual change in the air. This morning there was a heavy dew and the grass glistened brightly in the sunlight. Looking down the garden, I am reminded of the line from 'Linden Lea' – 'the apple tree do lean down low'. How quickly we seem to move from one season to the next.

A few weeks ago, on 3 July we had our annual garden party in the grounds of Broughton Manor. It was a beautiful evening and there were over 130 people enjoying a relaxing and happy couple of hours – a record attendance. It was particularly pleasing to see younger Society members with their children enjoying watching the ducks and walking around the lake. Many thanks again to Dennis and Carole Brown for allowing us to use their beautiful garden and making us feel so welcome. Also many thanks to the Otford Society Committee and their wives and partners for all their help in many different ways.

It was only two weeks later that a large gathering was back at Broughton Manor when the Otford Historical Society celebrated its 60<sup>th</sup> Anniversary. This was another well planned event which we all enjoyed. Thanks to Cliff Ward and his team who made the evening so pleasurable.

This year – at this particular time, we are remembering one of the most significant events in our Nation's history. For people of a certain age group the memories will be both vivid and emotional. The late summer of 1940 saw a small group of men and women take on a powerful, hostile force and expel them from our skies.

Many articles, books, memoirs and films have been written and produced about these extraordinary few weeks. Two images remain fixed in our minds – The **Spitfire** and the **Young Men of the RAF** – in their flying jackets. Closely following these two images we have the ever

present picture of **Winston Churchill** and his commanding and emotionally stirring speeches. I continually question myself – ‘how could such a small force, from such a small country, overcome such overwhelming odds?’

We in Otford live under the very skies that witnessed ‘The Battle of Britain’. Down the road we have Chartwell and our doorstep is Biggin-on-the-Bump with its beautiful memorial chapel, guarded by a Spitfire and a Hurricane.

On 18 September, a crowded village hall enjoyed ‘1940 Remembered’ which recalled the events of the late summer of 1940 through the lives of ordinary people. We must thank Ken Gunderson, our president, who wrote and directed this presentation. This is indeed a very special autumn and for me it is extra special, because I was born on 4 September 1939. Between now and Christmas, Otford is busy with boot fairs, flower shows and craft sales; later on we have the Christmas bazaars. Seventy years ago some of these local events would be taking place in much the same way.

Thanks to ‘The Few’ we are still able to lead our own valued way of life.

A.V.Wiltshire  
Chairman

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### Thank you - Barbara

It was with complete surprise and some sense of dismay that I heard of the approaching retirement of our Parish Clerk, Barbara Darby. She will retire at the end of the year. We shall be losing a valued member of the parish council team and a significant voice in our community. Barbara has shown, on so many occasions, an in-depth knowledge on a great variety of local issues.

In recent years I have come to a fresh understanding of the diamond quality of Barbara’s written appraisals when dealing with planning applications or appeal responses. At the monthly Parish Council meetings she can always be relied upon to have the relevant information to hand when responding to questions. Quiet by nature, Barbara gets on with her job without fuss. She is always polite and helpful when people ‘pop in’ to ask for some information, even in the middle of a busy morning.

We all wish Barbara and Ron a very happy and peaceful retirement together. More time for Barbara to spend in the garden and with her animals. Now it’s her turn to ‘pop in’ and ask the new Parish Clerk some tricky questions!

All the best for the future – and THANK YOU.

A.V. Wiltshire  
Chairman

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### Christmas Cards

Last year, for the first time, we offered Christmas Cards for sale. The cards, with views of Otford in the snow, proved very popular and we thought that we would repeat the exercise this year.

The cards will be available in the ‘Mad Hatters Emporium’ in the High Street, opposite the pond, at the beginning of November.

Please contact Carol Griffiths 01959 523140 for any further information.

## GARDEN PARTY

Our Garden Party, held at Broughton Manor on July 3 this year was a great success. There were 140 - 150 people enjoying a glass of wine, conversation with friends and new members the glorious sunshine and the beautiful surroundings. This included children who fed the ducks and walked around the lake with their parents.

Many thanks to Carole & Dennis Brown for their warm welcome and allowing us to use their lovely garden again.



Carol & Dennis Brown talking to members



Sir Michael and Lady Bett

When everyone had gone home and the committee were clearing up - we found that a three legged stool/seat had been left behind. Is anyone missing a stool ?

It has a green, round seat with the word 'Trio' on it (presumably the maker's name) and has a carrying handle.

Please contact Carol Griffiths 01959 523140 to arrange collection.



Our Chairman Tony Wiltshire & his wife Eve



Dennis & Carol Brown with the Chairman and the Secretary - not forgetting Buster the dog !



Mr & Mrs Tony Woodrow Clark

# BATTLE OF BRITAIN 70th ANNIVERSARY

As Otford was 'in the firing line' in 1940, it seemed only right that we should commemorate the Anniversary of the Battle of Britain. The community event, '1940 Remembered', was performed on 18 September, to a large appreciative audience in the village hall. Many people talked about their memories of that time.



The Spitfire

As some of our older residents will remember, Otford had many air raids and both Leonard Avenue (in 1940) and Tudor Drive (in 1944) suffered direct hits. Many people talked about their memories of that time. So here are some pictures of the village in 1940 and some of the events that people remember.



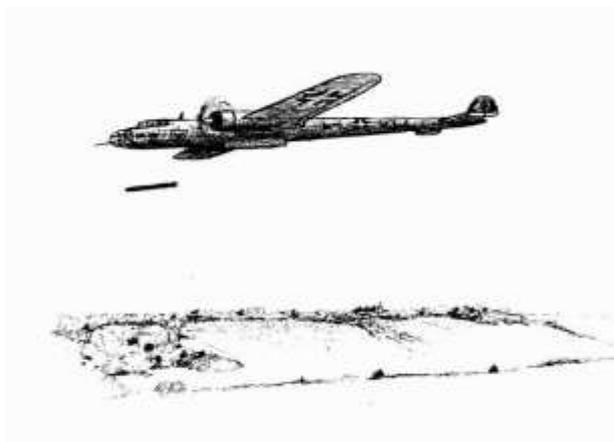
Leonard Avenue in the late 1930's

'I remember finding shrapnel and picking it up and taking it home. Sometimes it was still quite hot and it was always very jagged and you had to be careful it didn't cut your hands'



The ARP post in the old village hall surrounded by sandbags (1940)

'We watched the dog-fights going on, high in the sky above us. It all looked very exciting - but we later realised that young men from both sides were being killed and then it didn't seem so exciting after all.'



Drawing of the Dornier bomber - the plane that dropped the bomb on Leonard Avenue

Drawing by Ted Prangnell. Ted lived in Kemsing during the war and saw the plane drop the bomb. It disappeared from sight towards Otford and then he saw a plume of smoke and debris in the air over Otford. He cycled along Pilgrims Was to Otford and found it had hit the houses in Leonard Avenue



138 German planes flying over Sevenoaks (1940)



Ambulance ladies enjoying a break (1940)

'Many people forget about that the Hurricane pilots worked just as hard as the Spitfire pilots and lost just as many planes and men'.



The Hurricane

Photographs by kind permission of Ed Thompson, David Prestage and the Otford & District Historical Society

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## ANOTHER COMMEMORATIVE OCCASION How '1940 Remembered' was put together

Towards the end of last year, I felt that we in Otford should pay tribute to those who defied Nazi tyranny and military might, to see us through those dark and desperate days of 1940 – 'Our Finest Hour'. It all began with research in the Library, with our Librarian Angela helpful and efficient as always. The first book I ordered, chosen just by its title, 'The Miracle of Dunkirk', proved to be written from a religious point of view by a Christian Minister. He took the view that the deliverance of the British army from the beaches of Dunkirk was somehow guided by a Divine hand. The book was compelling, factual, but graced by wonderful descriptive prose. It made me aware that all events in history can be interpreted in many different ways. Even if we ourselves are present, we can only see from one angle – we have no general oversight – that assessment comes much later.

70 years on I think that we can assume the millions of words that have been written about 1940 give us an almost complete picture from which we can draw the truth.

Amongst the many gripping accounts I read – 'Spitfire Summer' by Malcolm Brown and 'Bob Doe – Fighter Pilot' remain in the memory. They are vivid personal accounts. Bob Doe, son of a Tunbridge Wells gardener, left school at 14, rose from office boy to Wing commander. His story is one of perseverance typical of the men and women who played their part in guiding us through the dark days of war. (His cousin, Bob Doe, is known in Otford as gardening and nature expert and writer).

A draft script was completed just before Easter, (there would be many amendments and alterations to come) and two essential ingredients had then to be finalised – the slides that would provide the pictures, and the music relevant to 1940. Fortunately our experts who had served us so well before, David Prestage and our Chair and music man Tony Wiltshire were there to support the project, which would eventually mean long hours of preparation.

A recording for voices and sounds had to be made, the work done by local expert Lawrence Smith. Music rehearsals started around March, a choir of ladies – as no men came forward. A cast was almost completed, not without difficulties, and ad hoc rehearsals held, all to be drawn together on the night of the performance. If you were in the audience you will have your own



The choir ladies with - Tony Wiltshire



The finale - 'We'll meet again'

opinion as to whether or not it worked. All I can say is that the 1940 'experience' was emotional for me. It was an attempt to pay tribute to the courage and endurance of the people of that time whose fortitude won the day. I felt so proud of them; I hope the feeling of pride extended to the audience. From the warmth of the applause, I suspect that for many, it did.

I thank all those who came to celebrate an event which, although it will live for ever on the pages of British history, will never again be celebrated in quite the same way.

Ken Gunderson

## Alf Cook - Treasurer Otford Society

When the Cook family moved from Bromley to Otford in 1977, it was a good moment for our community, for Alf Cook brought with him ability and expertise, as well as the willingness to give time in the service of his newly adopted village. Alf and Vera have now decided, for family reasons, to move to Cornwall. It is our loss.

Alf's origins are in South West London, where he grew up and went to school. He married Vera, romantically on Valentine's Day 1953. Like many of his age-group his school days and early career were interrupted by evacuation and 'call-up'. Having been a member of the Boy's Brigade and the A.T.C. (Air Training Corps) he served in the RAF from 1943 to 1947. He returned to an accountancy firm, based on the River Thames, where he rose to become a Partner. Retiring from there he took up work with companies managing the fitting out of ships laying underwater cables around Britain and New Zealand.



Alf is now a Freeman of the Waterman's Company and Freeman of the City of London. This entitles him to drive a flock of sheep over London Bridge anytime the urge becomes irresistible.

It seems hard to believe that he has been Treasurer of the Otford Society for about a quarter of a century, and Chairman of the Bromley branch of the Parkinson's Society for over 30 years. Vera was the Secretary of the branch, which raised hundreds of thousands of pounds for medical research.

Alf was renowned on the Society's committee for his careful handling of finances – our money could not have been in safer hands. Family nearby, as well as affection for ships and the sea, will have been a factor in the decision to settle in the historic port of Falmouth. Everyone who knows Alf and Vera will wish them well. We picture them sitting enjoying the changing patterns of the sea, seeing the boats and ships slipping in and out of Falmouth, enjoying the grandeur of the vast Cornish skies and nature's showpiece – sunset across the ocean. They may even think of Otford at these times. If they do, they can be sure that they will be remembered here with affection.

Ken Gunderson

## Farewell to Otford

We have, because of personal reasons, sadly and reluctantly, decided to move to Cornwall. Alf has been Hon. Treasurer of the Otford Society for nearly 25 years. It has been a very big and difficult decision to make. Although compared to many, we are 'newcomers', having lived in Otford for just 33 years. We have loved every minute of it and there are certainly going to be many tears when the time comes to leave, but we have our memories of happy times and the centre of the village with its duck pond will be a permanent fixture in our visual memories. We have of course, like others, fought to keep them from spoiling Otford too much. Luckily, Otford has many people who care and who want to maintain it as a village and keep its village atmosphere. We hope to keep in contact with our Otford friends and therefore keep up-to-date with events.

Thank you Otford, for 33 very happy years – we shall miss you.

Vera and Alf Cook

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### Dates for your Diary

8th October	'War of the Roses' a talk by author Alison Weir St Bartholomew's Church at 8pm
20th October	Otford Historical Society - 'Within Living Memory' a talk by Phil Clucas & Ed Thompson
21st October	Otford Society Autumn Meeting - Otford Village Hall at 8pm
31st October	Puppets And Parables - Family Café Otford Methodist Hall at 5pm
14th November	Remembrance Sunday
17th November	Otford Historical Society - 'The Battle of Britain' A talk by John Ray
20th November	Christmas Market St Bartholomew's Church Centre 10am - 12noon
12th December	Choir Carol Concert - St Bartholomew's Church at 7.30pm

## Living Heritage - a new Autumn Series of Talks

Following on from last year's Autumn Series of talks, entitled 'Living Heritage' there will be four talks on The Medieval Era.

These are on Tuesday evenings at 8pm at the Church Centre.

28 September	The Pilgrims' Way and Pilgrimage
5 October	Oxford's Archbishop's Palace and Church-State Power games
12 October	Medieval Stained Glass
19 October	The spirituality of Julian of Norwich



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## A Banner for the Oxford Society

We have a new Banner ! At the Oxford Fete this year, our Oxford Society sign was blown this way and that in the wind and by the end of the Fete it looked very much the worse for wear ! Therefore the committee decided to obtain a new banner. So with the help of Barbara Derby and her artistic skills, Phil Clucas and Ron Dullage, we now have a brand new banner !

We hope it will be on show at our next meeting on October 21st.

Carol Griffiths



## Subscription Rates

Adult (Single)	£4	Senior Citizen (Single)	£2
Adult (Couple)	£5	Senior Citizen (Couple)	£3

*Next Oxford Society Newsletter – March 2011*  
*Chairman:* Tony Wiltshire 524887, 111 Evelyn Road, TN14 5PU  
*Newsletter Editor:* Carol Griffiths 523140, 11 The Old Walk  
*Newsletter Distribution:* Andrew Barber 523550  
*Membership Secretary:* Vincent Tilley 522491  
*Web:* [www.otford.info/otfordsociety](http://www.otford.info/otfordsociety)     *E-mail:* [otfordsociety@otford.net](mailto:otfordsociety@otford.net)