

The Otford Society

www.otford.info/otfordsociety

Spring 2014 Newsletter

Otford Society Spring Meeting - Thursday 24th April
AGM & presentation by John Walker of Civic Voice & KFAS

Full details on page 4!

A Final Comment from the Chair

I shall be introducing our new Secretary at the AGM. Mr Keith Gofton joined us in January and is a man of considerable experience. Now retired, he was Head of Estates for London's South Bank University. Keith attended the January meeting of the Kent Federation of Amenity Societies, reported back to the Committee, and in doing so secured our speaker for this year's AGM. Keith has plenty of enthusiasm and enjoys being involved in local issues. We wish him all the best in the months ahead.



As residents of Otford, it falls to all of us to give some thought to the environment we live in. All communities are organic and ever-changing, but we must try to ensure that the values we share are recognised by new arrivals, so that the quality of village life is sustained. We can take nothing for granted.

The Otford Society keeps a watchful eye on the village environment and, over the years, has made some significant contributions from which we all benefit. We are one of the largest amenity societies in the country and, apart from dealing with local matters, we keep up with wider national issues through our affiliation with Civic Voice and the Campaign to Protect Rural England.

We now need a new Chairperson. I said last year that I would end my tenure at this year's AGM. I'm still hopeful that someone will come forward to take on this fascinating rôle. I have greatly enjoyed the last seven years as Chairman, which seem to have passed very quickly.

I offer the Society every good wish for the future, and the new Chairperson "Happy Charing" - to coin a phrase!

A. V. Wiltshire
Chairman

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About Us

The Otford Society is an amenities charity specialising in preserving the rural character of Otford by monitoring planning and development activities, and improving the quality of Otford village life by providing funding to improve village amenities.

We are currently looking for projects to fund which will meet the above goals. To submit an idea, please email otfordsociety@otford.net

We are now on Twitter!



Follow us @OtfordSociety

A History of Otford Pond



Otford Pond, in the centre of our village, has been and is very dear to all residents over many generations, and now we continue to protect it from destruction, by damage from extremely large lorries, attempts to realign roads, or drivers who approach it too fast and think their vehicles are aquatic!

We must, I think, go back firstly to geology and geography. The Pond lies on Coombe Rock, a deposit of chalky sludge dating from the last Ice Age which was washed down from the chalk North Downs on to the top of the underlying Gault clay. The junction of the chalk and Gault forms the spring line, where the water draining down through the chalk encounters the impervious Gault clay and forms springs, resulting in streams which join to form rivers, in our case the Darent.

Our Pond is situated where two ancient trackways meet: the ancient North Downs Way running West/East along the Downs from Salisbury Plain to Folkestone, and the Greenway, a North/South track from Dartford and the River Thames, through Otford (today's Park Lane - the path that runs from Shoreham past the Forge restaurant) to Sevenoaks, the Greensand Ridge and the then forested Weald of Kent. We know that Otford, as it eventually became known, has been inhabited since before 1750 BC, and has been a significant settlement since the Roman period. So it makes the mind wander to think that the Pond, which might well have had pre-Christian religious significance, became a place for people to meet and collect water. Animals were probably watered there on their way to Sevenoaks Market and, later on, steam traction engines refilled their tanks there. The Otford and District Historical Society's archives have a postcard depicting a notice at the Pond prohibiting this activity. The Pond was also the source of fresh water for many villagers until the provision of a mains water supply. The Pond is fed by a stream that begins in the grounds of Friars Pool (the white weather-boarded house in Station Road), and which today flows through a system of pipes and conduits; part of this (beneath the gardens of Colets Orchard) is of Tudor brick construction, while other parts are of centuries-old stone. Its flow is controlled by the owners of Friars Pool. Today the outlet on the western side of the Pond flows underground, down the High Street to join the Mill Stream. Up to the 1800s it ran as an open ditch from Park Lane past the Forge and the Horns public house. This ditch remained open until 1909, when it was conduited following outbreaks of influenza, scarlet fever and measles at the village school in 1908, and a severe outbreak of diphtheria. The village school logbook records that the school was closed from 14th November 1908 until March 1909.



It is said that three-quarters of the village ponds in England were formed in Anglo-Saxon times. Again I like to think that the many visitors to The Archbishop's Manor or Palace here in Otford from 821 to 1600 refreshed their horses at the Pond before entering the grounds. In May 1520, King Henry VIII with his retinue of 4,000, and Catherine of Aragon with her retinue of 1,000, stayed here overnight on their way to the great Anglo-French celebration known as The Field of the Cloth of Gold in Northern France. Where they all slept is difficult to imagine. The Pond has been used by countless people and livestock before and since.

We can find no definite record of our Pond until 1769, when a small-scale map by Andrews, Dury and Herbert appears to indicate its presence. It is also shown on the first edition Ordnance Survey map of 1801, having been plotted by government surveyors in December 1798. One-inch to the mile scale Ordnance Survey maps were commissioned following the Napoleonic Wars, Kent being the first published.

The large-scale Tithe Map of 1844 records the Pond separately, and states that ownership was in the hands of William Tong of Colets Well (the rebuilt Tudor mansion overlooking the Pond).

The Local Government Act of 1894, a sequel to that of 1888, establishing county councils, provided for the election of urban and rural district councils and parish councils. The latter took over all secular business previously dealt with by the vestries, which in future concerned themselves only with church matters. The first Otford Parish Council was formed on 17th December 1894. It was also at about this time that the Parish Council became owners of the Village Green and Palace Approach. In 1910 a Mrs Maclean, the then owner of Colets Well, insisted that the Pond and its banks were a part of her property. She had already erected a low iron post-and-rail fence around its perimeter. In 1926, the throwing of rubbish into the Pond prompted her to erect monstrously high iron railings that stayed in place until 1950. The Otford Preservation Society (formed in 1948, and effectively the predecessor of the Otford Society) sought permission from the then owner, Mr A.H. Campbell, an enthusiastic member of the Society, to tidy the Pond. In 1950 this Society, together with volunteers, set about a grand tidy-up, and removed the railings to enhance the centre of the village prior to the celebration of the Festival of Britain in 1951. It was around this time that the original two willow trees were planted.



Mr Campbell was also responsible for the Pond becoming village property in 1951, entering into an agreement with the Parish Council for a 21 year lease to the village with a peppercorn rent of one shilling (5p) per year.

Records of Parish Council meetings show that it was not until 1964 that ownership of the Pond and its banks passed to the Parish Council, Mr Campbell exchanging it for permission to build a sewer from the new Colets Orchard across the Green. Since then, the Pond has been maintained, and the ducks fed and cared for, by the Parish Council. For numerous years Mr S McWilliams, affectionately known as 'Mr Mac', who together with his wife owned the Willow Tea Rooms, was our resident Pond Warden. After his death in 2002, Mr Brian Thomas took over the responsibility.



In 1974, Kent County Council proposed to fill in and concrete over the Pond, and so make it into a proper roundabout. The village was outraged and, as a part of the objection, the Parish Council applied to English Heritage to 'list' it. This was formalised in 1975 and the Pond is 'listed' as 'a water containment area' and thus given protection for the future.

On 29th December 1976, Philip Gunderson, son of Jean and Ken Gunderson (the OS President), spent a year recording the life of the Pond. His notes are very interesting and are forming the basis of a more detailed publication by the Historical Society.

By 1997, the Parish Council were aware that the Pond needed major maintenance work and asked English Heritage for help, who replied that they could not provide any financial assistance. Several meetings and much correspondence took place with Sevenoaks District Council (SDC) officers. For many years this continued, alongside discussions with consultants regarding the willow trees, construction/remedial work on the walls, meetings with experts about re-puddling the base of the Pond, and enquiries to contractors for cost estimates. It was imperative that the best solutions were adopted for the project. Finally everything came together in 2002 and work started. The ducks were removed and enjoyed a holiday elsewhere; the water was lowered. Large fish were taken to other lakes and ponds by the Environment Agency, and volunteers under the guidance of Mr Thomas and Mr N Catt removed at least nine dustbins full of small fish and gave them new homes. The Pond was then drained and the silt removed to an area in the Woodland Cemetery, where it was spread out and metal-detected, as rumour had it that watches and rings (in the course of romantic tiffs!), etc., had been thrown into the Pond. No luck - only a few pennies and a lot of broken bottles. Other finds: old ginger beer bottles, beer glasses, little pottery ink bottles, bits of broken plates and cups, an old boot, and bits of cars. These have been on display in the Heritage Centre and are now stored in the archive. Work was halted by SDC for some time but eventually, after more meetings, it resumed, and restoration was completed in 2007.



The cost was over £10,000, with funds raised entirely within the Parish (including a sizeable donation from the Otford Society). Barbara Darby, our video expert, recorded the project and has produced DVDs which are available for purchase. A dedication was conducted by our vicar, Rev. Richard Worssam, on a lovely sunny day. This was followed by a Parish Picnic on the village Green. During the following year, islands were constructed and native plants introduced to provide shade and nesting sites, and the water was restocked with fish and ducks. Traditionally we have had Muscovy Ducks, but Moorhens are also often to be seen. We regularly have families of Mallards as visitors who stay to rear their young, and occasionally even swans have appeared. Herons are sometimes seen perching on the roof of the Duckhouse, hoping to catch a fish or two. This prestigious dwelling was originally designed and installed by David Prestage.

We have now officially become the most attractive roundabout in England according to a specialist calendar for 2014, which has a picture on the front as well as for the month of June. As such, our Pond's fame has rightly spread throughout the UK to bring pleasure to all - not just Otford's residents and our numerous visitors.

Long may it continue!

Elizabeth J. Ward, with photos 1,2,3,5,6,8 courtesy of Ed Thompson, photos 4,7 courtesy of the Otford & District Historical Society, and photo 9 courtesy of Phil Clucas.

Otford Society AGM & Spring Meeting

The Otford Society's AGM will take place on Thursday 24th April at 8:00pm in the Otford Village Memorial Hall.

As well as AGM activities, this Spring meeting will include a presentation by John Walker, Deputy Chairman of Civic Voice and Chairman of The Kent Federation of Amenity Societies, of which the Otford Society is a member. John will give a talk on the history and work of these groups, and explain their new initiative which involves producing a manifesto to take to this year's party conferences, with the aim of influencing the policies of the next government. With new homes needed in the next 35 years for an estimated increase in UK population of 50% (25 million people), there will be ever-growing pressure to expand and develop villages like Otford. If Civic Voice, with the support of affiliated organisations like the Otford Society and its members, is successful in helping to shape future national policies, then we might all be saved the need to fight unpopular developments and controversial planning decisions.

All are welcome to attend the Spring meeting, but only members of the Society can vote in the AGM (although you can join on the night).

Keith Gofton

Otford Village Fête

Monday 26th May, 12noon - 5pm

As the world remembers the start of the Great War and the tragic loss of so many lives, the fête committee has chosen “100 Years in Otford” as its theme for this year’s event. Our winning logo, by Ben Brown of St. Michael’s Prep School, was selected from many excellent entries to our design competition, which was open to all children attending Otford schools and clubs. Well done, Ben, and thanks to everyone who took part.

Once again we are delighted that Elands Veterinary Clinic has agreed to run the very popular Dog Show. This event attracts a tremendous amount of interest from dog owners, and each category is always over-subscribed, so please ensure that you register by 12noon to avoid disappointment.

The committee is hard at work finding exciting new attractions for visitors, and of course ensuring that popular attractions such as the mega-slide, road train, and Punch & Judy remain firmly on the programme. We have live music throughout the day, with drinks supplied by local pub The Crown, a BBQ from Otford Scouts, plus tea and cakes available inside the Memorial Hall from the Otford Brownies.

The fête is a great day out for all Otford residents, as well as a way to raise money for its various associations and clubs. We desperately need volunteers to give a few hours on the day of the fête, so if you can offer any help then please email patty.chatterjee@virgin.net

For more information about the day, the planned attractions, and a programme of events please check out the website at www.otford.info/villagefete

Patty Chatterjee, Chair of the Otford Village Fête Committee

Great War Centenary Commemoration

This year’s centenary of the outbreak of the Great War is a moment in time when we can reflect on a national tragedy - the loss of almost an entire generation, in a war not of our making. A war that even a hundred years later casts a dark shadow on the memories of tens of thousands, of dear ones lost, most of them only on the threshold of their lives.

Andrew Roberts has written, “*When we come to remember its outbreak... we should try to recall what it must have been like to stop at the very edge of the precipice of history, taken a look over it, and then, carefully and deliberately, taken that fatal step forward.*”

“**OTFORD REMEMBERED 1901-1914: The calm before the storm**” forms part of the village commemorations and gives a glimpse of what life may have been like in the rapidly-changing years from the death of the old Queen to the outbreak of a savage conflict whose ferocity could not have been imagined in that balmy summer of 1914. The people portrayed in this dramatic presentation are real, as are the events. Only the conversations are imaginary, designed to paint a picture of the early years of the 20th Century before war shattered the lives of so many and altered the course of history. The production honours the memory of our forebears who steadfastly steered us through horrendous times.

This will be a community production involving the Otford Players, the Otford Society, and the Community Singers. It will be part of Otford’s Great War Centenary Commemorations along with the theme of the village fête and an exhibition at the Heritage Centre.

The production will take place in the (old) Methodist Church (High Street) on Friday 9th and Saturday 10th May, as well as Friday 16th and Saturday 17th May. Tickets will be on sale at the Parish Office and in the Library from the beginning of April, at a probable cost of £5 each. Watch local press or the Parish Newsletter for further announcements. Seats may be limited, so book early.

Ken Gunderson

A Haul of Halls

For a village of its size, Otford offers a surprising range of clubs and events. Many take place in one of the four halls which we are lucky enough to have. This series of articles features some of the regular hall users.

This issue: Otford Short Mat Bowls Club

Short Mat Bowls is a scaled-down version of outdoor bowls. Although played to modified rules, the object remains the same – to get the woods as near the jack as possible. The game is played on mats measuring forty-five feet long by six feet wide with a felt-like surface and, to make it more difficult, a wooden 12 inch block is placed halfway down the mat, which the players have to avoid when sending down their woods.

The first meeting of the Otford Short Mat Bowls Club was in June 1985 and we have been serving the local community, of all ages, for nearly thirty years. At that time, there were thirty-three members present and a mat was loaned to the Club. Various fund-raising events were subsequently held, and the first mat was soon purchased for £400. A second mat was later bought using an eighteen month loan from the manufacturers, repayable at £25 per month, with a grant from the Sevenoaks Sports Council.

Since those days the Club has come a long way, with the purchase of an additional mat - making three in all, which is the maximum that the village hall can hold (and even these have been replaced over the years). While in 1986 we had fifty paid-up members, over the years membership has reduced to the present number of twenty-six.

The Club has a team that plays in the West Kent League, against Clubs as far afield as Cowden and Joydens Wood.

We have been very fortunate in receiving a grant from Sport England for the purchase of an electric mat-rolling machine. Mats in the past have always had to be hand-rolled and, with the advent of this machine, the wear and tear on members has been greatly reduced!

Our session times are Thursday and Sunday afternoons at 1:45pm and Friday evenings at 6:45pm. If anyone is interested in becoming a member and would like to find out more, then please contact the Chairman on (01959) 524183.

It is a requirement that flat-soled bowls shoes (not trainers) must be worn to protect the mats, although initially two pairs of socks would suffice and the first three sessions are free.

Doug Dickerson

Calling all golfers!

The Otford Society is forming a Golf Group to play regularly (at least once a month) starting at Darenth Valley Golf Club.

The format will be that members who wish to play 18 holes, and those choosing to play just the front 9, tee off during BST between 3:30 and 4pm, with people who only want to play the back 9 joining the group between 6 and 6:30pm. Hopefully this will mean that Society members who work still get the chance to take part. Once the group games are under way, members can discuss any other ideas, and what they would like to do in the winter.

Interested? Then email secretary@otfordsociety.org.uk

Keith Gofton

Twinning

The Otford-Neufchâtel-Hardelot Twinning Association has a busy programme of forthcoming events:

- Monday 28th April from 7:45pm: social at The Woodman Pub.
- Saturday 3rd May: trip to Hever Castle with our “Twins”, then tea and cake in Otford afterwards.
- Monday 26th May from midday: stall at the Otford Village Fête.
- 6th-8th June: car-sharing weekend, including a coach tour of World War One battle sites with our “Twins” on the Saturday.
- Saturday 19th July: coach trip to Hardelot – this is primarily for school children, who will travel free, but adults will also be welcome at a cost of only £30 for a lovely day out at the seaside.
- Saturday 2nd August: hopefully a trip to see “Les Miserables” in Montreuil, an old walled town near Hardelot.
- Saturday 6th September: 10km run in Hardelot (children: 1 or 2 km).
- 13th-14th September: our “Twins” will be spending the weekend with us here in Kent. Would you like to offer hospitality?
- Plus opportunities to brush up your French with French lessons!

2014 membership fees for the Twinning Association are now due, at just £5 per adult or £10 for a family.

You can find out more information on our website at www.otford.info/twinning or on the French equivalent at www.john-jumelage.com.

Alternatively, contact Jane Lawrey on (01959) 522360 or via the Parish Council Office.

We shall look forward to seeing you - and please send us any suggestions or requests for future activities that you would enjoy.

Jane Lawrey

St. George's Day Lunch

For those who would like to join fellow Society members in celebrating England's Patron Saint and the birthday of our world-famous Bard, William Shakespeare, glasses will be raised in their honour at a celebratory lunch to be held at The Woodman public house on Wednesday 23rd April from midday.

Lunch will start promptly at 12:30pm with a menu of:

- Roast Beef of old England with Yorkshire Pudding

or (with advance notice)

- Homemade Seafood Pie

or (with advance notice)

- Vegetarian Roast

All served with fresh vegetables.

Followed by a choice of:

- Bramley Apple Pie
- Ice Cream Sundae
- Fruit Salad

plus tea or coffee.

The event will include:

- A welcome from the Chairman, Mr Tony Wiltshire.
- A reading by Mrs Marion Wills.
- Thoughts on the day by Mr Ken Gunderson, President of the Otford Society.
- A toast to England & St. George.

This year's price is £16 per person, including a gratuity. Numbers are limited to forty places, so book early to avoid disappointment.

To book, please call Jean Gunderson on (01959) 522709.

*A.V. Wiltshire
Ken Gunderson*

Hospices of Hope Events

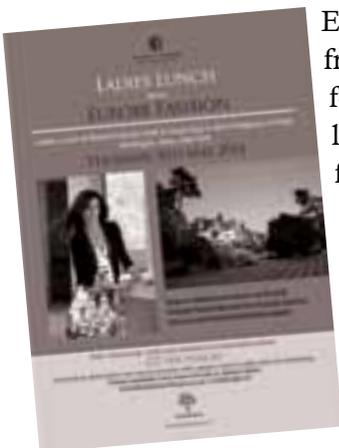


hospicesofhope

• Ladies Lunch with Eurobe Fashion

Thursday 8th May 2014 at 12noon

Rowhill Grange Hotel & Spa, Wilmington, Kent



Eurobe has given its customers fantastic fashion from Europe's leading companies at amazing prices for more than 30 years. Come and enjoy a delicious luncheon at Rowhill Grange Hotel, followed by a fashion show by Eurobe to see their latest labels.

£27 per person to include a drink on arrival, two course lunch with a glass of wine, coffee & mints.

Find out more at www.hospicesofhope.co.uk/ladies-lunch-with-eurobe-fashion or, to book, contact Anna Perolls via anna@hospicesofhope.co.uk or (01959) 525110

• Manhattan Magic Jazz Night

Friday 9th May 2014 at 7:30pm

The Grey Lady, The Pantiles, Tunbridge Wells

An evening of jazz and cabaret from the Great American Song Book, featuring the very talented New York singer Lesley Alexander with the Robert Reid Trio.

£28 per person to include a two-course supper.

Find out more at www.hospicesofhope.co.uk/manhattan-magic or, to book, contact Anna Perolls via anna@hospicesofhope.co.uk or (01959) 525110.



• Otford Quiz Night

Friday 11th July 2014 at 7pm

£12 per person to include a light supper, hosted at our Otford Tea Rooms.

To book, contact Carole Ford via carole@hospicesofhope.co.uk or 525110.

Dates for your Diary

Sunday 20th April

Easter Sunday

Wednesday 23rd April

St. George's Day

Thursday 24th April

Otford Society AGM & Spring Meeting

Monday 5th May

Bank Holiday

Monday 26th May

Otford Village Fête

Saturday 21st June

St Bartholomew's Church Fair

Saturday 19th July

Otford Society Garden Party

To list events in the next newsletter, email newsletter@otfordsociety.org.uk

Membership Report

As a Society, we need 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.

The total paid-up membership for 2013 was 1,061, which represents a drop of over fifty compared with the previous year. Therefore, we all need to try to recruit new members. Please remember to encourage your neighbours to join the Society - especially new residents moving into the area. Also, if you are aware of any issues which have caused members to leave then do let us know (in confidence) so that we can address them.

As ever, my thanks go to our Liaison Officers, who deliver your newsletters and collect the membership subscriptions. Please help them as much as possible by getting your subscriptions to them if they call when you are out. If they leave a message for you to send your subscription, then please take heed and do not disregard their request.

Also, the Society is in need of volunteers to help with deliveries, etc. If you feel able to offer your services, please give me call on (01959) 522491.

Vincent Tilley

The Committee

President:	Ken Gunderson
Chairman:	Tony Wiltshire
Treasurer:	Derek Buck
Secretary:	Keith Gofton
Membership Secretary:	Vincent Tilley
Minutes Secretary:	Ted Scott
Newsletter Editor:	Phil Chapman
Newsletter Distribution:	Elisabeth Lindsay

Also: **Andrea Kelly**
Dennis Glasspool
Jeff Lee
Penelope Winter

Treasurer's Report

Once again our position at the close of Financial Year (ending 31st December 2013) has strengthened, despite an expenditure of £1,750 on the Village Gateways. **Total assets at Year End 2013: £24,285.**

Membership subscriptions declined slightly, despite the hard work of our Liaison Officers, but the shortfall was more than made up by an excellent result from the Garden Party, and other activities. **Surplus on activities for 2013: £346**

Major factors influencing our Year End position:

Receipts	
Subscriptions and Donations received	£2,205
Gift Aid reclaimed	£228
Profit on Fête	£172
Leaflets	£160
Profit on Garden Party	£501
Interest received	£340
Loss on St. George's Day Lunch	-£33

Payments & Donations Made	
Newsletters	£688
Donations made	£242
Donation towards Village Gateways	£1,750
Insurance	£264
Subscriptions to Civic Organisations	£114
Other costs	£193

Outlook for 2014

We have committed an expenditure of £3,000 towards the installation of a Vehicle Activated Sign (VAS) to be sited on Shoreham Road, as well as a contribution of £250 towards the village's new defibrillators. Consequently I am forecasting a loss in the region of £1,000 for the Financial Year ending 31st December 2014.

Derek Buck

Annual Subscriptions	
Adult (Couple)	£5
Adult (Single)	£4
Retired Couple	£3
Retired Single	£2

<p>The Otford Society</p> <p>www.otford.info/otfordsociety otfordsociety@otford.net</p> <p><i>Registered with the Civic Trust</i></p> <p><i>Affiliated to the Campaign to Protect Rural England</i></p> <p><i>Registered charity 272974</i></p> <p>Next Newsletter: Summer 2014</p>
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