



# The Otford Society

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## Spring 2015 Newsletter

### Spring Meeting & AGM - Thursday 26th March

*featuring presentations about the past and future of Otford Palace*

Full details on page 3.

## Chairman's Message

I have to start with the sad news that the Society lost a good friend and supporter, when Keith Lindsay passed away on 2nd February. We are grateful for all of Keith's help, and remember him as a warm, friendly and generous person - a lovely man with a good sense of humour who will be sadly missed. Our thoughts are with his wife Elisabeth and her family.

Our last public event, the Autumn Meeting, was a great success thanks to the willing participation of everyone who attended, which was rewarding for the committee after all their effort in planning and organising the event. Some of the strongest outcomes are detailed on page 4, but we would like to reassure members that we will keep all of their suggestions in mind.

One particularly good result for the Society was that we received four offers of help from members. We are now copying committee meeting minutes and other papers to volunteers so that they are the first to know about new plans and opportunities, and can get involved if they see something that appeals.

At the January committee meeting, building on the intelligence gathered at the Autumn Meeting, it was decided that we need to focus on recruitment this year. We have started work on a strategy to expand both the Society's appeal and the ways in which we reach out to current non-members.

One aspect we are addressing is the way the committee operates. Although we have doubled the frequency of meetings to monthly, the matters we need to address are too many for each agenda. As a consequence, each committee member has taken on a number of roles (*see page 8*) and will act as the lead/coordinator for related activities. In this way, we will have a 'focal point' who can form a sub-group of willing members to address a matter and report back to the committee. If you see something that appeals and want to get involved, then please do contact me at [chairman@otfordsociety.org.uk](mailto:chairman@otfordsociety.org.uk)

Other issues being considered include changing the name of the Society to better describe it, undertaking a review of its purpose, identifying key targets for the recruitment campaign, deciding what events we should be organising, and how we can better contact potential members.

We will be able to report further progress at the AGM on 26th March – we look forward to seeing you again then.

*Keith Gofton, 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](mailto:otfordsociety@otford.net)

# Palace Tower

Last issue, Carol Griffiths reported on a project that was under way with the Otford Society's funding, to install two new 'interpretation panels' on Palace Field that would tell visitors a little about the history of Otford Palace.

As members may have noticed, these information boards were installed on 10th December, and we were delighted to secure the services of noted historical author Alison Weir, who was visiting Otford to give a lecture at St Bart's Church, for an official unveiling of the panels on the afternoon of Saturday 13th December.



Please do take the time to read one of the panels when you're next passing, and remind yourself of some of the history of our lovely village. The committee's thanks are extended to Carol, Phil Clucas, designer Mark Peters and fabricators/installers Arc Creative Design for all of their hard work in creating such a high quality product.

## Trees

In December 2011, following the dissolution of R.A.D.I.O. (Residents Against Development In Otford), the Otford Society received a generous donation of £2,471 which represented the residue of funds held by the organisation. The donation was made on the understanding that it would be used to plant and maintain apple trees on Palace Field.

In 2012, Carol Griffiths managed the resulting project to plant heritage varieties of apple tree, and six specimens were successfully planted. It had been the intention to plant many more, but our plans were thwarted by English Heritage, who imposed a limit of six.

After planting and maintaining the trees, £1,990 remains and the committee believes that future maintenance should be funded from the Society's general expenses. This means that the remaining money can be used to purchase and plant other new trees in the village, which will help to make up for some of the recent losses caused by storms, decay and disease, as well as removals required by insurance companies or prompted by claim scaremongering. Our target is to make Otford more attractive to residents and visitors alike.

Of course, before it is possible to proceed, locations where trees could be, and are allowed to be, planted must be identified. Secondly, species must be selected. Ted Scott is liaising with Otford Parish Council and Kent County Council (KCC), and it is likely that the available funds will allow between two and four new trees to be planted, depending on the species.

The choice of tree species will depend upon what best suits the growing environment in Otford, and the impact and effect that residents wish to see. Therefore, readers are invited to suggest to the committee what trees they would prefer and any locations which might be suitable; these suggestions will be taken into account when making a final decision.

The most common types of tree for planting in towns and villages are blossom trees, Autumn leaf colour trees, or bark feature trees. In recent years, examples of species that KCC has planted include Hornbeam, Field Maple, Mountain Ash and Cherry (*see left*) - but other suggestions are welcome.



*Cherry*



*Hornbeam*



*Field Maple*



*Mountain Ash*

# Spring Meeting Preview

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The Otford Society's Spring Meeting will take place on Thursday 26th March between 8pm and 10pm in the Otford Village Memorial Hall.

As well as the formal business of our AGM and more news about plans for the Society's evolution, the meeting will include a presentation by Elizabeth and Cliff Ward about the history of Otford Palace, and an update from Rod Shelton about the work that is under way behind the scaffolding around Palace Tower, and what the future is likely to hold for this precious building.

Please join us to hear these talks and to help guide the future of the Society.



## Otford Village Memorial Hall: Refurbishment Project Appeal

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The land on which the Otford Village Memorial Hall stands was gifted to the Village on 18th October 1920 by Lt. Colonel Frances Bingham Mildmay, 1st Baron Mildmay of Flete, to be used to build a Village Hall as a permanent Memorial to those who died in the Great War of 1914 -1918. The current Hall was built in 1954 with the assistance of donations and grants, and replaced a YMCA hut which had been built in 1915.

In 1963, management of the Land and the Buildings upon it was transferred to a Charitable Trust, and its ownership was vested with the Charities Commission. Since then, a group of Trustees - appointed as representative of Local Societies and Clubs - has managed and developed the Hall, which has become a focal point for village activities and culture. In 1985, following a public appeal, the Club Room was added, while other fund-raising efforts have enabled improvements such as double glazing and new chairs. Still, the only regular source of income for the Hall remains the fees charged for lettings.

Now, the ravages of time mean that a major refurbishment is required to bring the facilities up to modern standards. To this end, in 2014 (and fittingly on the 100th anniversary of the start of the Great War that the Hall commemorates), the Trustees agreed to embark upon an extensive refurbishment plan that aims to:

- Upgrade all toilet facilities using energy- and water-efficient sanitaryware and hand dryers.
- Rebuild the disabled toilet to make it more private.
- Replace the shower room fittings using energy- and water-efficient devices.
- Replace the Main Hall's boiler with two energy-efficient boilers working in tandem (so that if one fails the other can continue to provide a reasonable temperature).
- Upgrade the Club Room's kitchen.
- Replace the Hope Room's ceiling and lighting with an insulated ceiling incorporating energy-efficient lighting.
- Upgrade the Hearing Loop in the Main Hall and install a Hearing Loop in the Club Room.

Fund-raising for this major project is now underway, and a massive £72,000 is required to complete all of the work. The Trustees, through prudent management, have built up a fund of £25,000, and the Village Fête Committee has kindly agreed to donate the entire proceeds of the 2015 village fête to the fund. The Parish Council, Evening W.I. and the Otford Society have also pledged a total of £1,550. Grant applications to KCC and SDC have been made and could provide another £27,500 - but these applications may yet be rejected or reduced. Consequently even the current best-case scenario leaves a shortfall of around £14,000, which would mean that the project could commence but only in a prioritised phased approach until funds are exhausted.

Over the years, the Memorial Hall has become central to village life and is now our de facto community centre. If you are able to help bring the Hall into the 21st Century, please send your donations by cheque payable to "OVMH" to:

Derek Buck, Honorary Treasurer (OVMH), 69 Knighton Road, Otford, TN14 5LE

or by BACS bank transfer to: OVMH, Sort Code 72-06-00, Account Number 38481170  
(in this case, please mail [ovmh.treasurer@otford.net](mailto:ovmh.treasurer@otford.net) with your name and amount donated).

# Autumn Meeting Review

At the Autumn Meeting, we engaged in a brain-storming workshop with members, to garner their views on what they thought the Otford Society's activities and priorities should be. Attendees were encouraged to write their ideas on sticky notes and post them under various headings. After studying these submissions, we concluded that:

- Village history - particularly that of Otford Palace - was a popular subject in many categories. As a result we have arranged talks on the Palace's past and future for the AGM.
- Socially, there were requests for a more family-appealing approach, that we broaden the Garden Party in content and attendees, and that we start a 'socialising group' - all of which we will explore. We are also working on plans to make the Society's stall at the village fête more family-friendly.
- Suggestions for fund-raising included a raffle, boot fair and quiz night, as well as an increase in subscription rates.
- There were a number of requests for the Society to support the village at Christmas, and so a contribution of £400 was made in December towards the new lights arranged by the local shops.
- As always, there was a lot of focus on ideas intended to promote traffic calming and ease parking issues, and it is a pleasure to report that the committee now has a Traffic Officer who will be able to research what developments are practical and coordinate the efforts of volunteers in improving these situations.

Keith Gofton

## Treasurer's Report

2014 was a busy year for the Otford Society, as we contributed £6,623 to Village improvements; of this, £4,952 came from our reserves and £1,671 from 2014's healthy operating surplus (ie. income less expenditure).

Membership subscriptions were maintained at 2013 levels and other income was again generally on a par with 2013. Exceptions were: Interest Received (which fell due to a lower interest rate on our new Fixed Rate Account) and Walks Leaflets (which shows a loss of £158 due to revision and reprint costs of £360 that were written off in the year). Sales of the leaflets raised £202.

Expenses increased this year as, despite low inflation, the costs of Insurance, Hall Hire, and Printing & Postage are continuing to increase noticeably; obviously this leaves less capital available to spend on projects.

### Outlook

2015 is likely to be a challenging year, as our investment income will fall due to a lower capital base and possibly even lower interest rates. In terms of expenditure, we have made a commitment to donate £500 to the Village Hall Refurbishment Fund, and expect to spend this year the £1,990 originally received from R.A.D.I.O. for tree planting (see page 2). To fund other projects currently under consideration, it is likely that, after keeping our subscription rates at the same modest level for the past six years, an increase will prove necessary; this will be discussed at the AGM.

Balance Sheet	2014	2013
<b>Net Worth Represented By:</b>	<b>£19,333.69</b>	<b>£24,285.60</b>
Cash	311.58	315.38
1 Year Fixed Rate Account	10,180.00	10,180.00
Current Account	1,794.25	2,844.85
Investment Account	7,022.86	10,945.37
Stock	25.00	0.00
<b>Profit &amp; Loss Account Represented By:</b>		
<b>Total Income</b>	<b>£3,188.41</b>	<b>£3,599.22</b>
Subscriptions/Donations/Gift Aid	2,534.42	2,458.29
Interest Received	209.83	340.02
Garden Party/Fête/St. George's Day	602.16	640.71
Walks Leaflets	-158.00	160.20
<b>Total Expenses</b>	<b>£1,517.32</b>	<b>£1,260.79</b>
Administration/IT/Meetings/Insurance	793.24	572.79
Newsletters	724.08	688.00
<b>Total Donations</b>	<b>£6,623.00</b>	<b>£1,992.00</b>
Donation to Christmas Lights	400.00	0.00
Donation to Defibrillators	250.00	0.00
Donation to Palace Field Information Boards	2,873.00	0.00
Donation to SID in Shoreham Road	3,000.00	0.00
Other Donations	100.00	242.00
Donation to Village Gateways	0.00	1,750.00

# Survey Results

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Last issue's village survey drew a useful response, although not as high a level of participation as had been hoped. Nonetheless, there was some valuable feedback, and a general indication that members are content with the decisions being taken and events being organised by the committee, which is, of course, heartening.

The initial demographic questions appeared to prove the Otford stereotype, with all respondents falling into the "50 years or older" and "lived in the village for more than 10 years" categories. Although it could be argued that retired members are more likely to have time to complete the survey, it is probably true that these answers reflect the typical Society membership, which is why one of the committee's initiatives is a membership drive amongst younger families.

With regard to Society events, the majority of respondents had attended five or more events during the last three years, and declared meetings about local history to be the most popular, followed by meetings about the natural environment and the Summer Garden Party, then meetings about planning issues and socials with music or dance. This feedback is helpful, although clearly the Society's activities should not overlap too much with those of the Otford & District Historical Society, and it must be remembered that social gatherings tend to be the best fund-raisers. Everyone was happy with the number of events being organised, and their durations.

Comments regarding the newsletter were very positive, with everyone reading at least half of the content, and half of respondents reading everything. A few people felt that some articles duplicated those found elsewhere, such as in the Parish Newsletter, and this will be borne in mind; suggestions for new articles to include in this newsletter are always welcome! Again local history made for the most popular feature, along with local people, while listings of forthcoming events came next, with details of village clubs and planning issues narrowly taking last place. Everyone agreed that the newsletter's length and frequency was appropriate, and that it should remain in a paper format.

The final ranking of priorities for the Society's activities was:

1. Improving the environment by planting trees, maintaining footpaths & green spaces
2. Improving road safety and traffic management
3. Supporting endangered services like village toilets & transport for older residents
4. Improving outdoor facilities like play areas & sports equipment
5. Preserving/restoring local monuments like the Palace Tower
6. Improving local information/signage

On this basis, the current Trees initiative (*see page 2*) and recent traffic calming measures in Shoreham Road should be welcomed. Comments included an opinion that "*people/lifestyle are more important than monuments*", and concerns over parking and the number of traffic signs in the village, culminating in a statement that neatly sums up the Society: "*Let's keep [Otford] semi-rural in feel, not continued urbanisation*".

On the ever-provocative subject of planning, there was agreement across the board that the Society should keep a weather eye on all kinds of development being proposed in the area. What lacked consensus, though, was how to determine whether support or objection should be lodged. Given that the newsletter schedule is not compatible with announcing plans and collecting opinions, the committee hopes to build an email distribution list that will allow faster communication with, and consultation of, members - see page 8 for details. Until this is ready, the committee will continue to use its judgement while paying close attention to its remit to "*preserve the rural character of Otford*".

*Phil Chapman*

## Traffic Calming

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As well as the Palace Field signs discussed on page 2, another project which has come to fruition since the last newsletter, thanks to Jeff Lee, is the installation of a Speed Indicator Device (SID) in Shoreham Road, to remind traffic heading south into the village of the 30mph speed limit.

This device was later joined by "dragon's teeth" road markings where the 30mph area starts. Initial feedback reaching the committee has been very positive, with many people reporting how motorists are applying their brakes when the SID illuminates.

Of course, the battle against traffic - whether the speed of vehicles, the number, or the size - is on-going. The committee recognises that these issues are amongst the top concerns for residents, and investigating further ways to reduce the problem remains a priority.

# Fort Halstead

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In October 2014, Armstrong (Kent) LLP held a public consultation at Fort Halstead regarding the developments proposed for this 500 acre site at the top of Polhill.

Let's look at some background. Fort Halstead was so named in 1882 when it was first conceived as one of a series of defensive forts surrounding London. The site has continued under the ownership of the Ministry of Defence (MoD) throughout the 20th Century. It has performed many roles - most connected with explosives. (Both The Butts and The Charne, by the way, were built pre-war to house the families of the Fort's employees.) Now the MoD's Defence Science & Technology Laboratory (DSTL) has finally announced it will vacate the site by 2018. Armstrong (Kent) are the official developers of the site and are coordinating with Sevenoaks District Council (SDC) to ensure that the design of future development will not adversely affect local communities. So what are they proposing?

Their stated objective is: *'to create a mixed-use development which includes employment space at least sufficient to replace the jobs lost, community facilities and infrastructure to support sustainable development of the site'*. The proposal includes potential development of up to 450 homes. In principle, it should have no impact on the openness of the Green Belt, as the height of buildings will be restricted to minimise any effect upon the surrounding views and countryside, and the development will be mostly concealed behind trees. So far, so good.

SDC has required *'the inclusion of appropriate community facilities and infrastructure to support the sustainable development of the site'*. SDC also require that Armstrong conduct a Transport Assessment, to assure that their development would not have an unacceptable adverse impact on the local and strategic road networks. On these points, we in Otford should be concerned: unaccountably, our village has slipped outside the net of this transport assessment, which would have highlighted the first potential local problem.

450 new families on Polhill will certainly include some who wish to drive through our narrow High Street to reach Sainsbury's (which, in mileage terms, is as close for them as Tesco). Also it is unlikely to take long before the restricted parking at Knockholt and Dunton Green railway stations pushes many of the new commuters to drive through Otford and use our station for greater convenience. Of course, where they choose to park will have yet another effect on our community. Armstrong suggest that they may drive into Orpington or Sevenoaks in rush hour. I hope they are not holding their breath: Otford is a far more convenient choice. The need for a more thorough traffic assessment is clear.

The proposed residential buildings will be designed as a village within the site, and include features like a village hall, local shop and 'Village Green', not to mention a hotel. No reference is made however, to any doctor's practice, primary school, Post Office or library, which are surely part of a typical community's infrastructure. Some more cohesive social planning seems to be needed by Armstrong before their plans make sense for so isolated a community.

There's another problem for Otford: Kent County Council (KCC) estimates that 450 families will include at least 95 young children requiring education. The local schools at Halstead, Riverhead and Dunton Green are, we are told, to be used by this new influx of children - yet these schools are already close to capacity, and by 2018 the situation is very likely to have worsened. Otford Primary will inevitably be selected by many Fort Halstead parents as their next, or indeed, first choice, which could result in pressure for our own school to expand again. More discussion of this crucial issue is surely required between the developers, SDC, and KCC's education department.

The 'employment space' will offer a range of offices and research businesses, as well as a new base for QuinetiQ who currently operate from the site. Sounds good, but read it again. It is only **space** at present - just thin air and sites on which others might build. As yet, there appear to be no concrete proposals for building or allocating sites for specific companies - other, that is, than a proposal to site a new crematorium on the site. Is there still too much blue-sky thinking prevailing? Filling these sites with *'potential employment for 1,500'* will take some doing.

Armstrong have just three years to put these important parts of their jigsaw in place. We wish them well - as much for our sake as theirs - and will watch for the next round of plans with interest.

*Rod Shelton*

*Armstrong Kent's 'draft indicative master plan' is reproduced on the facing page, with their kind permission. More information about the proposal, including a larger version of the drawing, can be found at the website [www.forthalstead.com](http://www.forthalstead.com)*

*Members should be aware that Otford Parish Council's chairman, John Edwards-Winser, participates in the working group for all affected parishes, and is providing a voice for our concerns. Your feedback and comments on this planned development can be routed to John via the Parish Council office.*

# Village Fête Preview - Monday 25th May

The annual village fête will be held, as usual, on Bank Holiday Monday from midday, and plans are already underway to ensure that this year's event will be better than ever.



One of last year's winners: Daisy

We are delighted that Elands Veterinary Clinic has agreed to host the Dog Show again. This is always very popular, so please make sure that you arrive early if you want to book into one of the classes. Remember, it's not only the most handsome dog or pretty bitch that wins - Elands also includes classes for the best rescue dog and the one that the judge would most like to take home!

There will be live music throughout the day, so if you're a fan of Elvis or Frank then we have something for you. Or perhaps you would prefer to listen to Sally play some of the best songs from musicals? We do try to cater for all tastes!

With a new mega-slide, bouncy castles, roundabouts and a land train, there will be lots to occupy the young ones throughout the day.

Naturally there will be plenty of retail therapy available, with a great range of stalls selling locally-made products, as well as activities organised by some of the Otford Associations: don't miss the coconut shy run by the Otford Cricket Club or the amazing range of plants grown by the Otford Gardeners, and don't forget to stop for a pint or a Pimms at the refreshment tent organised by The Crown, whilst enjoying a burger cooked on the BBQ by the Scouts.

The full programme of events will be available at our website [www.otford.info/villagefete](http://www.otford.info/villagefete) from early May.

*Patty Chatterjee, Chair of the Otford Village Fête Committee*

## Hospices of Hope Events

**Ladies' Lunch with Celebrity Chef Rosemary Shrager:** Thursday 11th June from midday, in the Clockhouse Suite at Rowhill Grange Hotel. £27 per person including an arrival drink, two course luncheon with wine, and coffee.

**Hawl's Well That Ends in Murder - A Murder Mystery Evening:** Saturday 13th June from 7pm, in Christ Church Crabb Hall, High Street, Tunbridge Wells. Teams of 4-8 recommended; tickets £12 per person including a light supper.

**'Strictly Come Dancing'-themed Ladies' Lunch** with a performance by professional dancers Michael Hemera & Lauren McFarlane: Monday 15th June from midday, at the Alexander House Hotel, East Grinstead. £29 per person.

For tickets, please email [amy@hospicesofhope.co.uk](mailto:amy@hospicesofhope.co.uk) or call (01959) 525110.



# The Committee & Volunteers

<b>President:</b>	<b>Ken Gunderson</b>
<b>Chairman:</b>	<b>Keith Gofton</b> <a href="mailto:chairman@otfordsociety.org.uk">chairman@otfordsociety.org.uk</a>
<b>Treasurer:</b> + Constitution Lead + Garden Party Coordinator	<b>Derek Buck</b> <a href="mailto:treasurer@otfordsociety.org.uk">treasurer@otfordsociety.org.uk</a>
<b>Secretary:</b> + Traffic Officer + Village Tree Coordinator	<b>Ted Scott</b> <a href="mailto:secretary@otfordsociety.org.uk">secretary@otfordsociety.org.uk</a>
<b>Membership Secretary:</b> + Projects Officer	<b>Gary Bennett</b> <a href="mailto:membership@otfordsociety.org.uk">membership@otfordsociety.org.uk</a>
<b>Newsletter Editor:</b> + Documentation Officer	<b>Phil Chapman</b> <a href="mailto:newsletter@otfordsociety.org.uk">newsletter@otfordsociety.org.uk</a>
<b>Newsletter Distribution Officer:</b>	<b>Elisabeth Lindsay</b> <a href="mailto:distribution@otfordsociety.org.uk">distribution@otfordsociety.org.uk</a>
<b>Fête Coordinator</b>	<b>Andrea Kelly</b>
<b>December Event Coordinator</b>	<b>Diana Adams</b>
Planning Advisor	Rod Shelton
Walks Leaflets Distribution	Sheila Bonnet
Marketing & Publicity Officer	VACANCY
Walks Leaflets Coordinator	VACANCY
Civic Voice Columnist	VACANCY
Social Media Coordinator	VACANCY

## Dates for your Diary

<b>Thursday 26th March</b>	<b>Oxford Society Annual General Meeting</b>
Sunday 29th March	British Summer Time begins
Sunday 5th April	Easter Sunday
Thursday 23rd April	St. George's Day
Monday 4th May	Bank Holiday
Monday 25th May	Oxford Village Fête
Saturday 13th June	St Bartholomew's Church Fair
<b>Saturday 18th July</b>	<b>Oxford Society Summer Garden Party</b>

To list events in the next newsletter, email [newsletter@otfordsociety.org.uk](mailto:newsletter@otfordsociety.org.uk)

## Please help us!

The last couple of years have brought major changes for the Society, with almost all of the committee positions being handed over to new members, as long-standing volunteers have retired - leaving big shoes to fill!

The opportunity is now being taken to re-evaluate the Society's role and priorities, and to ensure that its activities are representative and inclusive of all village residents.

To do this, the committee is keen to encourage the participation of as many people as possible in the Society's activities. If you can spare some time to help, whether just an hour a year at the village fête or as a full-time committee member, then please contact the Chairman.

At present, there is a particular need for people who are able and willing to take on the four roles shown to the left as a VACANCY.

Meanwhile, as the Society's new Membership Secretary, Gary Bennett, settles into the role, a review of membership systems is under way. This will result in changes to how subscriptions are managed, and how contact is maintained with members.

We would particularly like to start collecting the email addresses of members, so that it is possible to send timely information about issues that affect the village and forthcoming events. To join our mailing list, please send your name, email address and postal address to [membership@otfordsociety.org.uk](mailto:membership@otfordsociety.org.uk) Needless to say, your personal information will never be given or sold to third parties.

### Annual Subscriptions

Adult (Couple) . . . . .	£5
Adult (Single) . . . . .	£4
Retired Couple . . . . .	£3
Retired Single . . . . .	£2

### The Oxford Society

[www.oxford.info/oxfordsociety](http://www.oxford.info/oxfordsociety) [oxfordsociety@oxford.net](mailto:oxfordsociety@oxford.net)

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**Next Newsletter: Summer 2015**