



The Otford Village Society

Working for you to make our village even better

What does the Otford Village Society do?

The Otford Village Society was founded in 1973, and is a Registered Charity with over 1,000 local members. It was originally formed to represent village interests during the planning and construction of the M26, and was successful in ensuring that this motorway crosses below Otford Road rather than sailing over it as originally planned.

Since its creation, the Society has undertaken many projects with the aim of improving the quality of village life. Amongst the more memorable examples, the Society has provided or helped to fund:

- Renovation of the village pond.
- Restoration of St Bartholomew's church tower.
- Equipment for Hale Lane Youth Centre & playground.
- Refurbishment of the Recreation Ground's play area.
- Contributions to the Memorial Hall Refurbishment Project.
- Vehicle Activated Signs to reinforce speed limits, and other traffic calming measures.
- Donations to local charities such as Kent Air Ambulance.
- First Aid defibrillators, located at three key locations in the village.
- The "Welcome to Otford" gateway signs on each of the main roads into our village.
- The Village Mosaic, designed to commemorate the Millennium.
- Apple trees on Palace Field.
- New interpretation panels about Otford Palace on Palace Field.



Photo courtesy Ed Thompson



Less tangibly, but just as importantly, the Society's committee:

- Monitors local planning issues and responds when appropriate.
- Seeks the views of members on major issues likely to affect Otford.
- Strives for a safer community, particularly with regard to traffic.
- Works to protect features and buildings of historical interest.
- Liaises with national bodies like Civic Voice which pursue similar aims.
- Represents members in dealings with Otford, Sevenoaks, and Kent Councils.

The Society also organises social events - future ones are listed on page 8.

The Society is run entirely by volunteers and, while the existing committee and helpers do great work, having even a few more people actively participating would allow much more to be done. We are therefore always looking for members with the time or skills to help with the Society's work. If you might be able to contribute, please contact chairman@otfordsociety.org.uk



The Otford Village Society

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Summer 2015 Newsletter

Summer Garden Party - Saturday 18th July

Join us for our annual social in the grounds of Russell House School!

Full details on page 8.

Chairman's Message

Welcome to our special Recruitment Newsletter which is being distributed to every home in our fabulous village of Otford.

Over the last year, the Society has seen an almost complete change in the management committee, as long-serving members took well-earned retirement after much good work. As its first task, the new committee set itself the goal of recruiting as many new members as possible, not only to perpetuate the Society but also to give it more authority when representing the village.

This is therefore a newsletter of two halves: the outer pages tell prospective members (and remind existing members!) what the Society does and what you can expect to get from joining, while the inner pages offer all the usual newsletter content which we hope will engage existing members as much as ever, and give potential members the flavour of what they've been missing.

To those of you yet to join, I hope this newsletter convinces you to do so. If you're already a member, then please support our activities and encourage your neighbours to sign up! I look forward to meeting you at coming events.

Keith Gofton

Village Fête Results

This year's Spring Bank Holiday was rather overcast, but luckily the rain stayed away for the duration of the Otford Village Fête, and it proved to be extremely well attended with around 8,000 visitors.

This year's Otford Village Society stall heralded a change in format from previous years, as the Wheel of Fortune - which had done sterling service for many fêtes - was finally retired. In its place came family-friendly *Splat the Rat* and *Chuck a Duck* games, which looked easy but turned out to be deceptively tricky - at least for the adults, who were put to shame by the kids who did brilliantly well and soon led to us being "sold out" of the toys available as prizes.

Our final takings generated a profit of just under £100; we had of course hoped to raise more money, but a location with less footfall than previous years, combined with lower prices for playing the new games, conspired against us somewhat. We will attempt to address these points in time for next year's event. In the meantime, our profit has been forwarded to the fête committee, and early indications are that the event as a whole may have raised as much as £12,500 - a new record, and a figure which should guarantee a very healthy contribution to the restoration fund for the Memorial Hall.

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About Us

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

We are always looking for projects to fund which will benefit the whole community. Please email ideas to otfordsociety@otford.net

Otford in Kent - a History

My father always enjoyed browsing the shelves of second-hand bookshops, and a few years ago he found a book with the above title written by Dennis Clarke and Anthony Stoyel, and published in 1975. No doubt some long-term residents of the village will be familiar with the work, or even own a copy, but what was unusual was the inclusion of a newspaper article about the launch of the book. Under the heading *'Authors leave no stone unturned in village book'*, it included a photo of them being presented with leather-bound copies by the Chairman of the Otford Historical Society - to which they were also elected honorary life members. The book was priced at a *'very reasonable £5 nett'*!



The book gives a comprehensive account of Otford's rich history, and combines factual evidence going back to the prehistoric era with many interesting anecdotes. There is chapter on the Tudor era with the construction of the Palace, including a conjectural reconstruction of how it appeared at the time. Of course, the Heritage Centre now contains a scale replica of how the Palace may have looked; the Centre's displays of the time will surely have been used while researching this fascinating tome.

In the chapter on the twentieth century, the book mentions the background to the formation of our own Otford Village Society. Little has changed in the intervening forty years, as the authors cite the major problem facing the village to be the *"increasing menace of motor traffic, with its uproar, pollution, vibration and danger to life and property"*. The vivid description goes on: *"by the early 1970s juggernaut lorries were justly incurring universal odium, and motorists often scorned the 30mph speed limit and regarded pedestrians (and livestock) on roads as trespassers... it is no longer practicable to loiter on road or pavement"*. As a result of traffic and other threats to the tranquillity of village life, the Otford Village Society was formed in the Summer of 1973. The stated objective was *"to promote the general interests of the residents of the Parish and maintain the character and attractive features of the village"*. Within six months of its foundation, the Society's membership had reached 700 (about 300 households).

The early Otford Village Society was especially concerned with the possibility of industrial as well as commercial development in the Parish, and planning issues are still something in which the Society takes a proactive and serious interest. However, the Society really made its mark by successfully lobbying for the M26 to be built under Sevenoaks Road, contrary to the original proposal that it should be above. In subsequent years the Society has worked to serve the interests of local residents, and the recent installation of a Vehicle Activated Sign on Shoreham Road is another example of its continuing efforts to improve the quality of life in the village.

There will no doubt be many more interesting chapters in Otford's history to come and, just as the newspaper article mentions the *"recent excavations"* that contributed to the author's work, perhaps our membership secretary, Gary Bennett, will unearth a few more secrets through his metal detecting about our rich and diverse past...

Ted Scott

Buried Treasure

Hot on the tail of mediæval and iron-age finds near the Pilgrims Way, our membership Secretary Gary Bennett has recently uncovered a small group of third century Roman radiate coins in the grounds of St Michael's School.

Gary, who lives on Pilgrims Way not far from the Progress Roman villa, took up the hobby in early 2014 after his wife jokingly bought him a detector to see what lay beneath their back garden. The garden finds, which included a King John silver hammered coin from around 1205, an Iron Age Terret ring and mediæval pilgrim badges, spurred him on to seek permission to detect on nearby land. This led to the discoveries including two gold rings dating from the Georgian period, a Roman Seal box and numerous ancient coins, tokens and other artefacts, which have been logged with the Portable Antiquities Scheme of the British Museum.

Having neglected the school while exploring his other permissions, Gary recently returned to find areas to detect for a hunt with the school's Junior Journalist group, which wanted to write about his activities for a school publication. It was this search, prior to meeting the junior journalists, that led to the first Roman coin. Another search several weeks later led to the other three. The three bronze and one silver radiate coins all date to a two decade period 260-280AD when Britain was ruled by the Romano-Gallic Empire.

“It is interesting that these coins all date to such a narrow period of the Roman Empire” says Bennett. “It gives us clues about activity around the site occupied by the school, about which little is known prior to the construction of the Beechy Lees Hunting Lodge (*now the main Prep School building*) in the Victorian period”. Gary hopes to return very shortly to try and establish a firmer pattern to the distribution of finds. He is due to give an assembly at the school about this and other discoveries.

Gary is looking to expand his detecting permissions and would love to hear from any landowners or farmers in Otford who are interested in having the history of their land detected and recorded. His contact details can be found on page 6.



Gary Bennett

Planning Update

Fort Halstead

Since last issue, all of the concerns that we raised about the likely effect of the Fort Halstead development on Otford have been confirmed by others. Our Parish Council responded to the invitation of the planning authorities by pointing out that the assessment of road usage (Travel Assessment) appeared woefully inadequate, as it described the likely use of routes through Otford as “*insignificant*” - quietly ignoring the probable use of our station by Fort Halstead commuters and the popularity of Sainsbury’s, use of which will of course bring extra traffic through our village. You may have read in the Chronicle that other nearby villages share similar concerns and have raised similar objections.

The development of the extensive area at the top of Polhill could be of tremendous benefit to the whole region, and provide a great opportunity for first-time house buyers. We just need to ensure that enough forethought is given to the impact on Otford, so that it doesn’t clog our roads or trigger over-development of our village.

Rye Meadow Estate

You may have seen this attractive development from Rye Lane. It stands at the Dunton Green end of road, on what was once the West Kent Cold Store site - which in turn was built over the old Dunton Green brick fields. The master plan is to build 500 homes on this site; the work is split into five phases and predicted to be complete in 2018. There will be no new shops, but space has been allowed for a health centre. So far, 150 homes are complete, but in July a new tranche of 64 apartments will become available as social housing, marketed by Orbit.

This development brings a new, stable, mixed residence community to Dunton Green Parish, and makes good use of the brown field site. Here in Otford, we had feared that narrow Rye Lane would become over-used as a result of extra residents, but this does not seem to be the case so far - we continue to keep our fingers crossed.

Paramount Theme Park

‘All the glamour of Hollywood with the best of British culture!’

That’s how this project is promoted – and it could be built just 18 miles from here, near Bluewater at Swanscombe. Who would have thought we might get a Disneyland on our doorstep? This truly enormous development has now completed its third public consultation and is expected to submit outline plans to the Government later this summer.

As a multi-million pound investment, the “London Paramount Entertainment Resort” hopes to create 27,000 jobs for the area and predicts 40,000 visitors daily. The associated travel plans indicate that most of the road traffic will arrive via the busy A2, but drivers who try to avoid the M25 may come north on the A225 instead, through Otford and the other Darent Valley villages. It goes without saying that we need to pay close attention to this potential development and do what we can to minimise any impact on our village. Find out more at www.londonparamount.info

Rod Shelton

Do you have any questions about local planning issues? If so, contact us via otfordsociety@otford.net and we will find out answers from our advisors and council contacts for inclusion in a future issue.

The Committee & Volunteers

Chairman:	Keith Gofton chairman@otfordsociety.org.uk
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Planning Advisor	Rod Shelton
Walks Leaflets Distribution	Sheila Bonnet
Walks Leaflets Coordinator	Carol Griffiths
Marketing & Publicity Officer	VACANCY
Civic Voice Columnist	VACANCY

Trees Update

The appeal in our last newsletter for suggestions of locations where new trees could be planted generated a record response. We are very grateful to everyone who took the time and trouble to get in touch.

Of course, most of the proposed locations are owned by either Otford Parish Council or Sevenoaks District Council, so there are formalities to address before we can actually purchase and plant new saplings on their land.

Nevertheless, we remain committed to this project, with Ted Scott managing the Society's efforts and continuing to liaise with all stakeholders in order to make our village even greener.

Annual Subscription

£5 per household

We are now collecting members' email addresses, so we can send information about forthcoming events and keep you informed about issues that affect the village.

To join our mailing list, please send your name, email address and street address to membership@otfordsociety.org.uk Your personal information will never be given or sold to third parties.

Articles Wanted!

We are always looking for interesting and original articles to publish in this newsletter. This is your Society, and we want to represent you. Please send your ideas to newsletter@otfordsociety.org.uk

The Otford Village Society

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Registered with the Civic Trust

Affiliated to the Campaign to Protect Rural England

Registered charity 272974

Next Newsletter: Autumn 2015

Hello from Gary

I'm the Society's new membership secretary. I'm 46 years old and moved to Pilgrims Way East, Otford in 2004 with my wife Keeley and three children aged 15, 9 and 4. All of my children are current or former pupils of St Michael's Prep School.

I run a marketing research and statistical consultancy business, which I founded when I moved to Otford. I've worked in the British Market Research industry for around 25 years, including as an Associate Director at Ipsos-MORI, and prior to that managing multi-million pound research contracts at TfL on the London bus and light rail networks.

In my spare time, I enjoy metal detecting, playing pool and snooker with my children - and I've recently started walking the footpaths around Otford. I'm interested in the history and heritage of the area and am determined to become more involved in village life as my children get older.

Hello from James

I moved from London to Otford with my partner less than a year ago. I still work in the city so commute daily.

I recently decided to join the Otford Village Society as I wanted to become more involved in the community and also because I wanted to use my travel time constructively. I now manage the Society's social media accounts, and so hopefully help to raise awareness of the work it does.

Why should I join the Otford Village Society?

The Society's stated aims are:

- To make the village of Otford even more attractive, enjoyable and distinctive.
- To promote civic pride by organising and funding a variety of events and projects that appeal to as many residents as possible.
- To raise money to improve and maintain the amenities of the village, and to support local good causes.
- To preserve the rural nature of Otford, and to work to protect buildings, and other local features, of historical interest.

We hope that all residents will agree that these are worthwhile goals, and will feel able to support them by paying a small annual subscription fee of £5 per household. Members not only receive three newsletters per year, but are also entitled to free entry into the Society's regular meetings.

As well as these direct benefits, members get the chance to influence the direction of the Society and the projects which it prioritises. Increasing the number of members also strengthens the voice which the Society has regarding local issues, and ensures that this voice is representative of residents of every age, location and circumstance.

I/we wish to become members of The Otford Village Society and enclose the sum of £5 as my/our annual membership payment. *(Please make cheques payable to The Otford Society.)*

	<i>Title</i>	<i>First name</i>	<i>Last name</i>
Paying member's details			
Joint member's details			
House name/number			
Address line 1			
Postcode			
Email address			

Gift Aid Declaration

Are you a UK tax payer? If so, every £1 you give could be worth £1.25 to the Otford Village Society, thereby helping to fund even more of our charitable aims in the village of Otford.



I wish The Otford Village Society to further benefit from Gift Aid legislation. I confirm I am a UK tax-payer and have paid or will pay an amount of income tax and/or capital gains tax that is at least equal to the amount reclaimed on ALL my Gift Aid donations (not just The Otford Village Society) for each tax year. I understand that other taxes such as VAT and Council Tax do not qualify. This declaration applies to all eligible membership subscriptions/donations I have made during the last 4 year period and until further notice. I will advise The Otford Village Society if I wish to cancel this declaration, change my home address, or no longer pay sufficient tax on my income and/or capital gains.

Please tick the box above, then date and sign below to confirm your Gift Aid Declaration:

<i>Date</i>	<i>Paying Member's Signature</i>

Please cut out and complete this form (or a copy) and return it to:

Gary Bennett, Membership Secretary, 36 Pilgrims Way East, Otford, Sevenoaks, Kent. TN14 5QW

Email: membership@otfordsociety.org.uk

Forthcoming Events

The Society's ever-popular Summer Garden Party will this year take place on Saturday 18th July between 6pm and 8pm.

Once again we will be enjoying the kind hospitality of Russell House School (opposite Otford Station), which not only offers a peaceful setting in which members can socialise, but also an extensive play area where members' children can have fun.

Tickets are on sale now at the Otford Parish Council office, Yvonne's Newsagent in Telston Lane, and the Otford Emporium by the duck pond, costing £6 per adult or £3 per child (6 to 16) with infants free. The price includes one free glass of wine or soft drink, and complimentary canapés.



There will be a raffle with all proceeds donated to Kent Air Ambulance. In recognition of the Society's on-going support, Kent Air Ambulance has donated a number of raffle prizes, as well as the opportunity for a group of six lucky people to visit its base of operations, which will be auctioned.

Finally, for those who missed our new games at the fête, there'll be another chance to play *Splat the Rat* and *Chuck a Duck*!

If anyone is willing and able to help with catering for the event, please contact elisabeth@otfordsociety.org.uk

Race Night

The Society's first ever Race Night will be held on the evening of Saturday 10th October in the village's Memorial Hall.

Organised in conjunction with Enterama, who have run these events professionally and successfully for many groups in the area, and who have worked at our Hall before, this promises to be an evening full of fun and excitement for all ages.

There will be at least six races in which to participate - all displayed on a large projection screen so that no-one misses any of the action - and the evening will be family-friendly so that everyone can take part.

Ticket numbers will be strictly limited, so watch out for further information posted on village notice boards, Facebook and Twitter in September.

Autumn Meeting

Our regular Autumn Meeting is scheduled for the evening of Thursday 15th October in the Memorial Hall.

This year we are delighted to welcome representatives of Kent Air Ambulance, who will give a talk about the invaluable work that they perform when medical emergencies arise in our county.

Entry to this meeting is free to all Society members.

Full details will appear in the next newsletter.



Magic Show



Another first for the Society, we are organising a family-friendly Magic Show for the early evening of Saturday 28th November.

This spellbinding event will showcase the amazing talents of Robert Pound, an Associate of the Inner Magic Circle, who has wowed audiences around the country, including celebrities such as Sir Paul McCartney and Chris Tarrant.

Tickets will go on sale in the Autumn and are expected to sell out faster than you can say "Abracadabra"!