



## Annual General Meeting, 26 May 2022

### Chairman's Address

You can't do everything on your own. Human nature has taught us that approaching tasks as a group is more effective and often will bring about unexpected benefits. That really has been the story of the re-constituted Otford Society. When I volunteered to take over chairmanship of the Society in 2020, I sought to build a team who could work well and constructively as a group. Today we have a management team of nine and I cannot recommend a more dedicated group of people.

There is our Acting Treasurer **Simon Featherstone**, with whom I had formed the Otford Road Friends a year previously. Simon is well-known to many through management of the Otford Village Hub on Facebook as well as being an active vice chairman of the Parish Council.

My Vice Chairman **Jeff Lee**, who many of you know for his exhaustive safer roads campaigning and his work with me on preparing our Parish Plan, is a hugely experienced organiser and legislator. He provides us with much technical knowledge and behind-the-scenes advice on a wide range of projects.

**Carol Bent**, though chair of planning in the village, still finds time to act as Secretary for the Society. Her extensive contacts and enthusiasm for community events has ensured she is a major contributor to the running of the Society.

**Marianne Bradnock** has led the re-creation of our Otford Society website and does a phenomenal job filling it with up-to-the-minute news and events as well as liaising with all the village clubs. Her broad communication skills cover a wide range of media and we are lucky to call her our associate.

**Phil Clucas**, whose skills in graphic design have brought benefits to so many clubs and events throughout the village, has become something of a legend. His creative, visual work can be found everywhere from Heritage Boards to posters. He is a key contributor to fresh ideas and new projects.

**Jenny Kelly**, another parish Councillor and mother of three, is also a craft designer. Her skills and project ideas, particularly for the younger ones, have been crowned success after success in Otford Society projects throughout the year.

**Patty Chatterjee** – where would Otford be without Patty's exhaustive energy in leading the annual village fete? As a key member of our management team, Patty's experience, contacts and off-the-cuff ideas have proved invaluable to the success of the Society's year.

Recent arrival, **Chris Sutton**, amongst other things, is a keen railway enthusiast and the Society has joined with him to help promote the Darent Valley Community Rail Partnership. This particularly involves revamping and caring for our village station. Chris's wide experience in management and promotion is already bringing us benefits to the planning of this year's Jubilee BBQ on June 2nd. It's a good team. No, it's better than that. It's a really good team! - and if you feel you might have a role to play with us, just let me know.

We took on the role to resurrect the Otford Society two years ago. We all know what a difficult period this has been but I still think we achieved a great deal, despite the difficulties. During the first months of the pandemic Road Friends had done much to help bring our community together and the continuation of the many WhatsApp Road Friend groups is still proof of that success. In 2020, the

Oxford Society set about enlarging into a wider arena. We wanted everyone to be a member of the Oxford Society and to benefit from the communication we could offer. That was one of the reasons for setting up the Ot. Soc. umbrella which is open to every village society, encouraging them to use our website to communicate with a broader range of members. Meanwhile, what have we achieved 'on the ground' since we took on the role?

Gifting Christmas trees to every shop brought a lot of smiles to both residents and our visitors. It was amusing to watch the shops vie for the 'best decorated tree' award but it made another thing clear to everyone: our Oxford Society was back.

Come spring, miniature chicks were hidden in shop windows and around the village. Young contestants made lists of the numbers found to gain their prizes from smiling shopkeepers.

A rather special evening Garden Party was held in the grounds of Colet's Well in September; our thanks to Lady and Sir Michael Bett for all their generous support. What with its raffle, the event helped re-balance the Society funds.

2021 saw the launch of the first of the summer's Oxford Adventures with the publication of a wonderful map encouraging families to explore the natural beauty of our village through local trails, events and challenges. In Oxenhill Shaw & Meadow they could discover a host of surprises: a wooden drum set, a treasure chest, a bug hotel. Two story walks followed the adventures of the *The Little Rabbit Who Was Afraid of Everything*. Activities for the youngest children were laid on at the Oxford Allotments Open Morning. So we thank all those local artists and businesses who contributed to the success of our Oxford Adventures, as well as the inspiration and hard work of lead organisers Caitriona Dickinson, Janet Davies and Jenny Kelly.

At the Oxford Village Fete we had a big presence which included a section on discovering archaeological Oxford as well as supporting the Wheel of Fortune run by the 40's Society. Again, this was another fundraiser which helped keep our books balanced for the year's events.

There was a 'Picnic at the Palace' where families enjoyed an afternoon picnic behind the Palace and walking the newly-cut labyrinth there, designed by Phil Clucas, as well as eating too much ice cream. Our funding balance was usefully used, when we joined funds with the Parish Council, to erect strings of Christmas lights along the High Street and Parade. Yvonne's was also specially lit up for the occasion. Our team did hard work hanging the strings and we hope they will be put to use again this Christmas. (A special thanks to Peter Bradnock who volunteered manfully through the rainstorms!)

Now on to this year and, as you know, we are currently preparing for the Great Oxford Jubilee Barbecue on the Green. A freshly roasted hog on a spit, sausage baps or fresh hamburgers will all be on offer, so be sure to get your ticket early to ensure you get your food. The Rising Sun will be running a beer tent, while cold drinks, cakes and children's games will be on offer throughout the afternoon. Meanwhile 'Move Over Dali' will be putting a tap in your step and 'Miss Vintage' will be taking us through the hits of the period. It should be a memorable afternoon for everyone.

And of course, we'll be there at the Fete, spinning the Wheel of Fortune again and with Race Night and several other fresh events and projects scheduled for later in the year. Not least amongst these will be our annual Garden Party. Rest assured the Oxford Society will keep the year filled with community events right through until Christmas.

This is called a 'Chairman's Address'. It is a requirement of the Annual General Meeting. I hope you haven't found it too formal. When we took over the management of the Oxford Society, our objective was to bring our village community together. I hope you agree we have also done something else – we have put a smile on everyone's face as well. Here's to the next twelve months.

Rod Shelton  
May 2022