

# THE OTFORD VILLAGE VOICE

NEWSLETTER OF THE OTFORD SOCIETY



*"A Happy Christmas" from Santa and all his elf-helpers...!*

## THE 2023 ROUND-UP FROM THE OTFORD SOCIETY

### THE SOCIETY GEARS UP FOR 2024

What a lot the Society has achieved over this year and already we are preparing for all the events planned for 2024. Our objective, as everyone knows, is to bring our community together through local events and projects. Well, this, to the best of our ability, is what we have done so far this year and here are some of our ideas for next.

It is perhaps very easy to concentrate on aiming all we do only at the traditional family audience, but our members include everyone in our community. We really do our best to consider how we can help the older residents as well as the young. We also must not forget in our enthusiasm that there are many in

Otford who may not share the same advantages as others. They must have the chance to enjoy our events too just like everyone else. So, all I can say is that our committee do try and have everyone in mind.

I mean just look at what we achieved last year:



In the spring we ran a noisy and funny Race Night, followed by the Players Hall being taken over by our Antiques Road Show. (A waste? Not for all the prize winners and the person who brought in a £10 picture which was valued at £200!) Then it was Easter and Otford's children were searching high and low for their odd-looking Easter creatures hidden in trees, drainpipes and shopfronts. The successful Fete meant its fund was able to donate a new defibrillator to the Memorial Hall and there were lessons on its use throughout the day. And who didn't come to the BBQ on the Green, then? We believe there were over a thousand people on the Green that day. The delicious Garden Party held in the beautiful grounds of Troutbeck made it a Summer to remember. And now we have just completed the amazing Otford Christmas Fayre. You can read some of the compliments we received later on here. The Grotto was a sensation this year and some parents were genuinely weeping with joy. A great success and all down to our marvellous committee and the many volunteers who gave up their time so generously to help.

I think we seem to be doing it right. So, a very big thank you to our committee members, to you for coming and to all those smashing volunteers who support us. Roll on 2024!

*Rod Shelton,  
Chairman Otford Society*

## THE GREAT LIFT

I'm told by our suppliers it is over 20ft tall. The Otford Society like to donate the Christmas tree to the village each year but this one was going to be a bruiser. Five strong men couldn't carry it, so we had to trolley it into position. So many ropes tugging, shoulders pushing and arms shoving and still we

couldn't raise it up! Over and over again we tried. It was agreed more were needed and by 2 o'clock a combined and refreshed team just – and I mean just, got it into the right position. Plop! And it was in, but we still had to wedge and secure its base supports before arranging the 1000 fairy lights to gird its branches. (Thanks to Trevor of Bubblestone Farmhouse for the electricity) "When shall we put up the Christmas tree, kids?" takes on a whole new meaning after raising that one. Do be sure you see it for yourself this year. Trafalgar Square had better look out.

## LIGHTING UP TIME

And, of course, it rained – as it always does when it's time for us to put up the Otford High Street lights. Your stalwart team soldiered on through and, as you will have seen by now, we lit-up Otford once again this year. Another big thank you to those who helped. Doesn't it look pretty? We had to purchase another 50 bulbs to replace all those that had got water-logged through the year. Better that, though, than re-hanging them all again. Even a simple display like ours took many hours of work last year to hang all the wire support structures, drill our way into shop windows and then re-wire again from the inside. Changing a bulb is very much easier. So have a lovely Christmas and enjoy your shopping locally.







## SPREADING THE WARMTH

We again hope be coordinating our Spreading the Warmth campaign this year. With the generous support of our churches and café's there is no reason why anyone should be cold, alone at home in Otford. But getting out of an empty house is the main aim. What we all want is a hot cup of tea, a biscuit and some good company. Those are the important ingredients. We'll do our best to keep the venues supplied with the biscuits, tea and coffees but it is up to all the wonderful teams in the churches and cafes that share with their visitors that make the real difference. If you feel you'd like to help them by joining in one of these local 'keep warm' events in your near-by church hall or café, please come a join in. You'll be more than welcome. It will be your presence joining in a chat that can make all the difference.

## A YOUTH INITIATIVE

We are always looking for ways that we might help make life a little better for everyone in the community. Who needs help as much as anyone are our many teenage residents – all poised at that awkward stage between youthfulness and adulthood. So, we are in discussions with the teams at SDC about ways in which we might be able to provide some direct guidance on a village scale; offering the opportunity to do local work-experience, to provide advice on the opportunities for choosing a career that would best suit your abilities, helping with preparing a CV or taking their first job interview. We have a lot of skills on which we can draw in the Otford Society, and we would like to explore how we can be of practical help at this difficult age. We'd welcome your thoughts on this.

## SPRING HAS SPRUNG

Flowers everywhere and we thought it would be a good time to open our gardens to be part of a Spring Safari next year. Maybe six or seven special gardens that would like to join in could open up to the public, serve a cup of tea, perhaps run a raffle. The important part is that it gives a marvellous opportunity for everyone to walk your way around some lovely gardens all over our village, meet new friends and exchange ideas. The children will be well catered for. It can make for a really enjoyable family safari adventure. If you'd like to take part, contact [rod@otfordsociety.org.uk](mailto:rod@otfordsociety.org.uk)

## THE HERITAGE ORCHARD

A small group of heritage apple trees were planted some years ago on Palace Field by members of the Otford Society. Apart from one loss, the others have all matured and regularly provide a rich crop of apples each year. Where are they? At the top of Palace Field between the footpath and the Sevenoaks Road. We would now like to support the Palace Trust by enlarging it



to be a 'proper orchard of trees'. Apples, pears, plums, quince, gauges and damsons with old-fashioned names like 'Burre Hardy', 'Warwickshire Drooper' and 'Merryweather' will join those already planted. Among them are 'Otford' and the wonderfully named 'Weasel Snout'...! Our local expert assures us that all will grow to be great croppers. So, come the summer and autumn, carry your basket when you go shopping and you may get more than you bargained for. We hope the Heritage Orchard will be a bountiful addition to Otford.

## VICTORIA REGINA

On 1st June, get the family up to Otford Station. That's the day that it's proposed that Queen Victoria, Prince Albert and all their entourage will alight at Otford! It's true. It is planned to be part of The Darent Valley Community Rail Partnership commemoration of the joining of Otford and Maidstone by the steam railway in 1874. When we have confirmation, we plan to stage a Victorian Party to welcome her Majesty's arrival. Make sure you are part of it and bring the camera! Keep a lookout on our website.



*Just some of the 150 egg-animals that were 'released into the wild' for the Otford EGGxtravaganza trail!*



## EGGSTRA SPECIAL EASTER

All the hidden egg-animals and suspended bunnies have by now become an annual Otford event. Up and down the High Street and across to OneStop and the Parade of shops on Sevenoaks Road, we can guarantee your little ones will again be searching out their Easter prey, next year. All thanks for the inventiveness of Phil Clucas for his annual Eggstravaganza – and his ghastly puns!

## A FRENCH AFFAIR

The Village Fete next year will be a French affair with a strong Gallic feel. With our paired village links with Neufchâtel-Hardelot, we hope our French friends will be over here too selling the produce of the region. And there will be the chance to win a trip over there too. The well- established dog show will again pull in dog-lovers from across the district while more traditional entertainment like the wheel of fortune and coconut shy will ensure armfuls of winnings on the day. It has certainly become a big affair these days, but it is still

essentially a local one and the WI, Churches and Allotment Society will all be much in evidence, rest assured. A French affair full of bonhomie.

## SANTA'S EXHAUSTED

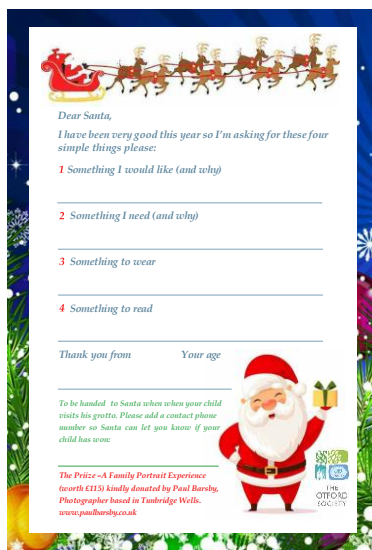
The children's Christmas Grotto this year was such a success that we can report that well over 250 children came to talk with Santa and tell him their wishes. You only had to see their grinning faces when they came out holding their present and chocolates so tight, to know they had had a special time. In truth, it was the parents whose faces told the full story of it. Some were even a bit tearful. It could not have happened though without all the preparation and hard work of our lead, Claire, her personal Father Christmas, and her gang of mischievous little elves. Thanks too to designer Natasha, David and their team who put in hours of work dressing a deserted, empty tower into such a place of magic. Together they turned a visit to Santa into a memory for a lifetime. Thank you too, to Jasmin and the staff of OneStop who kindly donated all the chocolate gifts. We all helped make it a Happy Christmas – particularly to all the children from the Demelza Trust whose grins could not have been wider.

## DON'T TAKE OUR WORD FOR IT

Here are some of the comments that parents wrote to us after visiting

Santa's Grotto:

- "I just want to say thank you for an absolutely stunning and amazing Father Christmas visit today."
- "You reduced us to tears with how special it was. We all felt the magic of Christmas that we haven't felt since we were children."
- "Such a wonderful set up. Huge thanks to all involved."
- "Took 4 granddaughters today and it



*Children who visited Santa in his amazing Tudor 'Winter Palace' were invited to write to him letting him know the present(s) they would like him to deliver on Christmas Eve.*



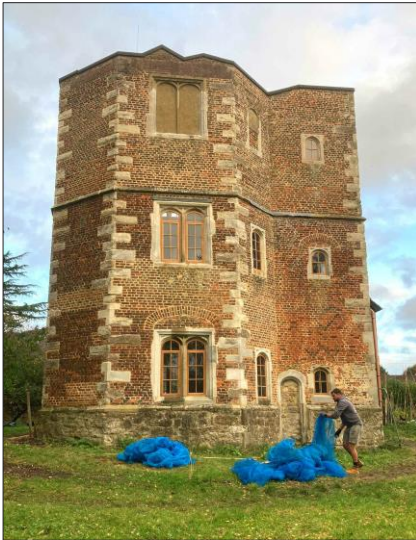
was magical – Every detail so perfectly done. Thank you!"

- "Magical! Well done to the Christmas Elves for putting together such a wonderful grotto for FC and children!"
- "We visited today and our little boy loved it! Thank you to all involved."
- "It was EXCELLENT! Thank you."
- "A huge well done to all who were involved in this. It was truly stunning and my 5 year old was in absolute awe. Thank you."

## NO WAY! TOO MUCH!

If you are not yet a member of the Otford Society, then you certainly should be. At £7.50 a year or £5 if you pay by standing order, you are not only investing in your community, you are getting a really inexpensive deal. Almost every time we hold an event you will find you are offered preferential rates and special offers. And for what? A year's membership for the price of a piece of cake and a cup of tea. So don't say, 'No way! Too much!' It's a steal and, more importantly, you will be helping someone else in Otford to have a better day. After all that's what we are here for. Go to our website today and apply.

[otfordsociety.org.uk](http://otfordsociety.org.uk)



*The scaffolding and netting are down... windows put in place... and for the first time in four-and-a-half-centuries (since the reign of Queen Elizabeth I), Otford's Tudor Palace Tower is weather-proof. Congratulations to the Archbishop's Palace trust!*