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THE FOUNDATION & EARLY DAYS  
of the  
OTTER VALLEY ASSOCIATION

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The Otter Valley Association came into being as the result of a conversation between Dr Anita Jennings and Charles Snow, following a meeting held in the home of Col. Oswald. This was a protest meeting against the proposed demolition of the Church Institute close to the Green in Budleigh Salterton.

These persons thought it would be an asset "if Budleigh Salterton and District had a Preservation or Civic Society" to care for its environment. The public notice of their views was reported in the "Otterton Notes" (Exmouth Journal) on 10th March 1979 which said

Otterton Notes

"The possible formation of an Otter Vale Society, to act as a watchdog for the amenities of the lower reaches of the River Otter and its associated villages and Budleigh Salterton and to stimulate interest in all the facets of the area, was brought to the attention of the Council by Mr. G.J. Stagg."

Meanwhile, Dr. Anita Jennings and Charles Snow contacted Mr. Pat Tunmer who had served as past Chairman of the Sid Vale Association and together they hired the Methodist Church Hall in Budleigh Salterton for a public meeting which was held on March 21st 1979. This was reported in the Express & Echo on the 23rd March 1979 under the title

Civic Society Plan

"At an exploratory meeting attended by 72 people at the Methodist Church Hall, Budleigh Salterton it was agreed to lay the foundation for a civic society.

Chairing the meeting was Mr. Pat Tunmer, retired Bank Manager.....

Actively engaged in the formation of the Budleigh Salterton society have been Dr. Anita Jennings, 21 Northview Road and Mr. Charles Snow of 2 Warren Drive, Budleigh Salterton.....

A steering committee has been set up. An inaugural public meeting will be held at the Budleigh Salterton public hall on Monday, April 9 '79."

On the 24th March 1979, The Exmouth Journal reported widely on the inaugural meeting under the heading (and I quote briefly)

#### Civic Watchdog for the Otter Valley?

"The formation of a civic society to cover the Otter Valley from Budleigh Salterton upstream to Newton Poppleford and spreading to the boundaries of the Exmouth Society and the Sid Vale Association was discussed at an informal meeting at the Methodist Church Hall, Budleigh Salterton on Tuesday.

There was an attendance of 72 and 15 apologies were announced.

Mr. Tunmer, a resident of Salterton for five years and an East Devonian for more than twenty years..... was asked by Dr. Anita Jennings and Mr. Charles Snow, who between them had done the spade work since Christmas to get a civic society formed, to take the Chair. .... Mr. Pat Tunmer explained the aims of the civic societies."

#### The Area & Aims

The new society would cover the town of Budleigh Salterton and the parishes of East Budleigh and Bicton, Otterton, Colaton Raleigh and Newton Poppleford.

Major aims of societies were to stimulate interest in the area and to promote high standards of development.

The society's work would be in co-operation with local Councils but remain independent.

It was not a pressure group out to make only destructive criticisms. It would make constructive suggestions, undertake certain jobs or voice objections to developments or demolitions which it considers undesirable and seek to preserve the countryside.

Meetings and lectures would be arranged in the winter and rambles organised in finer weather.

#### Steering Committee

The following persons drawn from the area agreed to serve on a Steering Committee: Messrs Attwood, Compton, Drake, Snow, Sowman and Tunmer.

Dr. Anita Jennings, Mrs. Helen Gavin and Col. E. Potts also served on this committee.



Mrs. Priscilla Hull kindly offered help with the use of the Fairlynch archives and its Linhay for committee meetings.

#### Open Meeting

This was advertized for 9th April 1979 to take place in the Budleigh Salterton Public Hall. The meeting duly took place and two days later the Express & Echo reported that the Society had been founded. Shortly afterwards, under a banner headline, the Journal reported

#### "Otter Valley Guard Group is formed"

Its report was summarized in its leading paragraph -

"The Otter Valley now has a society of amenity conscious residents which was launched at a public meeting at the Budleigh Salterton Public Hall on Monday. About 125 people attended the inauguration of the Otter Valley Association, formed after a number of exploratory meetings by a steering committee."

The Journal reported that the first Chairman was Mr. Charles Snow and Col. Edward Potts was appointed Vice Chairman. Representatives of the Parishes of East Budleigh, Colaton Raleigh and Budleigh Salterton were appointed to the Executive Committee.

Mrs. Kip Mason became the Associations first Secretary and was to hold this important post for 5 years. Another important appointment was that of Mrs. Margaret Staveley, the Membership Secretary. By December of 1979 she had enrolled some 300 members. Membership fee was fixed at fl a year.

In reply to a question from Mr. Ron Cox of Budleigh Salterton, the Chairman said that he would not go over the heads of the Parish Council in planning matters and deal only with the District Council. His weight "would be given to the Parish Council."

#### First Executive Committee Meeting & Constitution

The first Executive Committee meeting was held in the Methodist Church Hall of Budleigh Salterton on 24 April 1979. A model constitution supplied by the Civic Trust was adopted and it was agreed that some six sub-committees should be formed:

- Planning
- Architecture & Archeology
- Footpaths
- Publicity, Programming & Editorial
- Nature Study
- Pollution

Information Sheet No. 1 was published six months later, the Association's first newsletter, and this revealed that four sub-committees had been set up. The Chairman of the Planning sub-committee was Mr. Staveley and this sub-committee was subsequently renamed the Built Environment Committee to avoid any confusion with the Town Council's Planning Committee. The first Chairman of the Footpaths sub-committee was Mr. Tunmer who was to become subsequently the Association's first President.

Mrs. Hull became the first Chairwomen of the Local History & Archeology sub-committee and Dr. A. Jennings was the founder Secretary of the Programme & Publicity sub-committee. She worked with immense vigour organizing a programme of speakers and vital publicity for the new Association. Indeed, through her work the pattern of the O.V.A. was quickly established and this has been followed basically to the present time. *Mr John Parmee was elected Treasurer soon getting the Association's finances on a*

*sound footing.*  
The Executive Committee felt that the Association should not rush into byelaws, or rules, too soon. It was decided to see what snags were encountered first and then draw up the necessary regulations. (The Association Rules were not completed until 1982.)

#### Early Progress

The Exmouth Journal August 25, 1979 carried the headline

"Now 200 in Go-ahead Otter Valley Watchdog Group" and reported

"In the short period since its formation, more than 200 people have become members of the Otter Valley Association ..... The Association's application to the Charity Commissioners has been granted. Its registration with the Civic Trust is awaited." The report continued "It is intended to walk all the footpaths in the Association's area ..... and keep a record of any findings and observations" .....

The report further stated that the Devon County Council had invited the Association to participate in a survey of the coastal area to a depth of three miles from Budleigh Salterton to the Dorset Coast. The association accepted the invitation to participate up to the boundary with the Sid Vale Association.

Under the headline "The Infant Grows Up" the Sidmouth Herald January 19, 1980 reported

"The Otter Valley Association, the Sid Vale Association's "infant sister" only nine months old, has reached a membership of 300 ..... A social evening in December was well supported despite atrocious weather."



On the 1st April 1980, the Express & Echo under the headline "Rubbish on River Bank", reported a clean-up operation by 28 members of the Otter Valley Association, working in staggered periods over seven hours to clean up the pebble bank and saltings of the River Otter.

The rubbish occupied 120 cu ft and was taken away by a Council lorry.

Under the headline "The Otter Valley Association is a Lusty Infant", the Exmouth Journal, May 24, 1980 reported the Association's first Annual General Meeting at which it was reported membership was now 332 and the Association was 13 months old. Reports were presented by Footpaths sub-committee and Planning sub-committee.

Mr. Snow, Chairman, believed a mood of helpful co-operation with officers of the East Devon District Council had been established. This had led to the Association being provided with a complete schedule of "Buildings of Historic and Architectural Interest" in the area.

The first Otter Valley Association lecture, arranged by Dr. A. Jennings was presented by the well known artist Alan Cotton entitled "Artist in Landscape" on 13th September 1979 and the first guided walk by Mrs. Stammers of Colaton Raleigh, when 35 people and 3 dogs took part.

An early speaker was Trevor Bartlett who spoke on "Badgers & Other Mammals of East Devon".

The writer is indebted to Dr. Anita Jennings to have allowed him to peruse and extract from her numerous records of the early days of the Otter Valley Association.

Charles Snow

~~April~~ 1996

July



Harry Lane map, 1933