

A HISTORY OF THE BEST KEPT VILLAGE COMPETITION IN OXFORDSHIRE

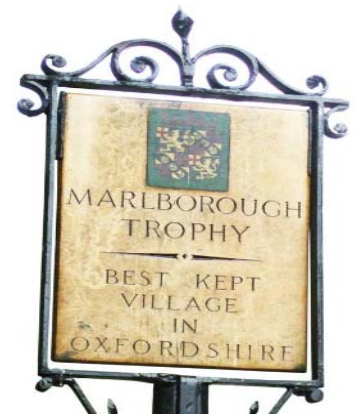
OXFORDSHIRE RURAL COMMUNITY COUNCIL



Supporting
Communities in
Rural Oxfordshire

Published in 2010 by Oxfordshire Rural Community Council.
Material from this publication may be reproduced, provided no profit is made
and the publisher is acknowledged.

For a large print version, please contact ORCC by email:
orcc@oxonrcc.org.uk or phone on 01865 883488



Contents

Patron's Letter	4
Background	5
The Start of the First Competition	6
Ethos and Purpose of the Competition	10
Reflections of the Times	12
Organisational Details	13
Special Sections	16
Judging	17
Judges	19
Trophies	20
Funding and Sponsorship	21
ORCC Management of Competition	22
Winners	24
A Review and the End of an era	26
A Triumph for ORCC's BKV Competition	28
Building on the BKV's achievements	30



A Message from the Competition's Patron



Blenheim Palace.

The “Best Kept Village Scheme” was very admirably based on encouragement of community responsibility: on an effort that was almost totally voluntary in both administration and delivery, although significant expert help must also be acknowledged. The scheme encompassed a broad vision, encouraging community care over a wide spectrum of village life, from war memorials to school playgrounds. It was flexible and sensitive, adjusting to and reflecting village needs and conditions changing over time. Notably it absorbed changes over those fifty years in the concept of village size and reflected too the impact on villages of the surge of house building in the late 1960s. It had a “pathfinder” role, stimulating local awareness of the need for care of the environment previously scarcely touched on that level.

My hope and optimism is that the organisations that are identified as now succeeding the scheme will provide an effective continuation of the original work, an even more pressing need in the face of the vulnerability of our environment in today's world.

Marlborough



Background

The Oxfordshire Rural Community Council (ORCC) was established in 1920 (the first RCC in England and Wales) in response to poor conditions, low expectations and lack of social capital and entrepreneurship in Oxfordshire's villages. The ORCC's approach to tackling these problems was based from the start on what is now known as community empowerment and on self-help. The organisation aimed to develop the skills of local people to work together to identify ways of improving community life and to better organise themselves in order to establish and sustain new activities and facilities.

The ORCC was called a "Council", as it was based on the concept of drawing together a range of organisations with a shared interest in rural community development to work together to improve rural residents' quality of life. Partnership working is not a recent invention.

As well as working with groups in villages, the ORCC campaigned at county level to achieve improvements in service provision to rural communities. It also itself pioneered the provision of new services, such as a travelling library service, to demonstrate their value to other appropriate agencies with the intention of persuading them eventually to take over responsibility for them on a permanent basis.

Up to the outbreak of the Second World War, with Mrs Claire Kreyer as Secretary, the ORCC's work fell broadly into five different areas: social and recreational, health, education, young people and rural industries. Following the War the organisation's capacity was strengthened by receipt of Central Government funding and it was able to start employing development staff to expand and take its work forward. In the 1950s the ORCC's attention, with Leslie Wood as Secretary from 1957, turned to the impact on rural life of people with an urban background who were moving into the villages in increasing numbers.

It is in this historical context that the introduction of the Best Kept Village Competition in 1957 is set.



The Start and the First Competition

On 11 January 1956 the ORCC called a conference for interested organisations to discuss the desirability of holding a Competition in Oxfordshire for the Best Kept Village. This was attended by representatives of the British Legion, Oxfordshire Association of Parish Councils, CPRE, Oxfordshire Federation of Women's Institutes, Oxfordshire County Council and *The Oxford Times*.

Information about competitions in other counties, notably Gloucestershire, was available and after "considerable discussion" the meeting decided that an Oxfordshire competition was "desirable". It was agreed that the first one should be held in the following year, 1957. The likely expense was judged to be £60 per year but from where this would come was not identified.

The scope of the competition was established as follows:

- A "Village" would be defined by having a Parish Council or Parish Meeting
- Villages would be judged in two classes depending on whether their population was up to or over 700
- Judging would take place in June or July and would be based on the Gloucestershire points system suitably amended

At the next meeting in April, chaired by Mr John Cripps on behalf of ORCC and attended by the same organisations with the addition of the Girl Guides, the interest in the Competition of the Duke of Marlborough was reported. The Duke "thought it would be possible to allocate one day's takings (at Blenheim) to build up a prize fund". The ORCC had sent the Duke a photo of the Nottinghamshire trophy given by the Duke of Portland (which cost £49) "to find out if it was the sort of thing he would allow his name to be associated with".

The meeting agreed to offer a trophy for each of the two Competition categories and that winners would have a plaque or certificate as a permanent record, once they had handed on the trophy to next year's winner (which could not be them again beyond a 2-year limit). Entry to the Competition would be free.



The meeting also agreed the following Competition details:

- Entries to be in by 31 October (soon after amended to 31 January, as it was felt that villages would not wish to commit themselves to entering any earlier)
- Judges to visit entrants as soon as possible after that and then again in June

Two rounds of judging: preliminary by area in June and final “after elimination” by an outside judge in July.

A representative of the Duke of Marlborough attended the next meeting of “the Committee” in July, which gave attention to the design of the trophies. This would be based on the Nottinghamshire design with the inclusion of the Duke of Marlborough’s crest if possible. The name would be the Marlborough Trophy.

Judging details were determined including a decision that no allocation of marks should be made known to competitors.

It was agreed that entrants would be told that “Credit will be given for special efforts on the overcoming of special difficulties”. This is indicative of the ethos of the Competition (and of ORCC’s work generally), which was to stimulate and reward community initiative and effort, not to celebrate inherent characteristics such as beautiful architecture or surroundings.

In November the Best Kept Village Competition Committee (BKVCC) heard that the day’s takings at Blenheim on 22 August was £185.71s.0d, for which the Duke was thanked in a formal letter.

Further progress was made with the production of the trophies. The wrought iron supports and frames would be made by Mr W.S. Print of Langford for £15.12s.6d. Mr R.H. Fyson of Kencot would make the wooden panels for approximately £30. The making of the Marlborough coat of arms would be sub-contracted to be painted on a separate piece of material to be let into the wooden panels. “On the question of heraldry, the Duke of Marlborough



has indicated that he was content that the arms and ducal coronet should be used without supporters”.

The permanent plaques would have a different design and be metal shields. The design would be the responsibility of Mr Brown, the ORCC’s Rural Industries Organiser.

“A letter from the Duke of Marlborough had been received suggesting that villages should be asked to pay an entry fee for the Competition. It was decided that, as the conditions of the Competition had already been sent out, no alteration should be made this year but to consider the Duke’s letter again for the Competition in 1957/8”.

In February 1957 another look at the judging arrangements was felt in order and this would be done in the light of practice in Gloucestershire and Berkshire. It was felt advisable to have the final judging done by people from outside the county. It was agreed that judges could receive travelling and out of pocket expenses (in May the rate was fixed of 3d a mile).

In May it was agreed that the two winning villages would make their own dates for the installation of the trophies before the end of July. The BKVC Committee would deliver the trophies to the sites and help the villages with the arrangements for erecting them.

The Duke of Marlborough would be invited to present the trophies and the plaques would be presented at the ORCC AGM.

In July the Committee heard that “Mrs D. Green, after accepting the Committee’s invitation to act as judge in the preliminary round, had expressed her personal views in a letter to *The Oxford Times*. This had been considered inappropriate by the Committee and the Secretary had been asked to write to Mrs. Green explaining the Committee’s views. As a result, Mrs. Green had withdrawn.” Unfortunately there is no record of what were those inappropriate personal views.



It was agreed that the judges' comments on each of the entrants would be incorporated in a general report on the Competition. The winners of each class would be announced in *The Oxford Times* in July, together with a general report. Each village would be sent a copy of its individual report and a list in order of percentages of the other villages in its group "without the names of the judges". Everyone would also get the general report embodying the judges' general comments and observations.

The winning villages would be asked to arrange their own trophy presentation ceremonies.

In conclusion "the Secretary was instructed to ask the Press to stress that the Competition would be held again next year".

The Committee then met in October 1957 when it was reported that "the Marlborough Trophies had been presented by the Duke of Marlborough, accompanied by the Duchess, at two very pleasant ceremonies on Sunday 29 September in Dorchester-on-Thames and Rotherfield Greys".

It was decided that, as the annual expenditure seemed to be £30 to £40 and as the cash balance was at present £47, it would be possible to carry out the 1958 Competition without further appeal for funds.

The Oxford Times was thanked for generous support for the 1957 Competition and for agreeing to continue to support the Competition and give publicity to it.



Ethos and Purpose of the Competition

It is worth quoting from an *Oxford Times* article about the 1958 Competition and the General Report to show what the organisers saw as the key issues and principles involved at the outset of the Competition:

Musing on why 10 villages from the first 1957 Competition did not enter again it was reported that this was either because the last competition “had not overcome village apathy nor aroused sufficient local support” to give confidence to join in again or because “some of those who were near the bottom of the (1957) list ... were apparently discouraged.” “It is hoped that they will realise that the contest exists to help the weak villages by giving people an incentive to serve them well”. “There is no doubt that when a group of people take the opportunity offered by this competition to mobilise their neighbours and arouse public opinion on behalf of their villages, then it becomes constructive and rewarding”.

“The ORCC is sure that this Competition is one of the ways to help people who live in villages to look at them with new eyes and to join together to preserve them as living and cared-for communities.”

It was pleasing to note that the purpose of introducing the Competition was already beginning to be fulfilled, as the standard of entries was thought to have improved since last year.

In the early days litter (particularly) and disfiguring advertisements were a persistent problem, although in 1958 it was noted that at least there were fewer rusty bicycles and tin baths half-submerged in village ponds. However, by 1964 judges were reporting that in most villages the amount of litter was less. Scandalously in 1990 ORCC was asked by local press to comment on an allegation that the Competition was detrimental to conservation because it encouraged villages to be “too tidy”. The allegation was refuted.



In 1963 the ORCC letter inviting entries stressed that the natural beauty of a village is not considered in judging: an essential principle from the start of the Competition, which focussed on community effort, whatever their village looked like. In the following year this was stressed again in the General Report: judges were sure they could tell whether a village was making a corporate effort or not and “so the claim would seem to be substantiated that this Competition gives people of good-will in the villages the chance of coming together to do something for their own community, whereas by himself and without such aid, many a person would hesitate to be the first to take a lead”.

In 1964 it was noted that the condition of churchyards had greatly improved since the introduction of the special section – the Competition was working as intended.

In 1968 there was special praise for the gardens around the new houses and in the new housing estates. It was felt to be very encouraging to see that “among the very first thing that new residents undertake is the getting into order of their gardens”.

In 1974 the General Report reflects: “It was obvious that in many instances there had been communal effort to maintain and improve the appearance of the village. Those who remember the state of many villages before the Competition was instituted agree it has had a marked effect up their appearance.”

In 1983 the ORCC was proud to be one of about 20 organisations in the country given a Queen Mother’s Birthday Award by Keep Britain Tidy Group in recognition of the achievements of the BKVC since it was started in 1956. The letter from KBTG praised “the high level of participation in the field of environmental improvement and litter abatement”. There was an award received on behalf of ORCC by the Chairman, Mrs. Margaret Campbell, from the Secretary of State for the Environment, Rt. Hon. Patrick Jenkin, MP at a ceremony in the Guildhall, London in June.



Reflections of the Times

First in 1958 and also in subsequent years certain village features were regularly singled out as lacking attention and care. These included:

- Allotments – in early days often unused
- Village halls and their surrounds - generally very much neglected and rarely made a feature of the village
- War memorials
- Verges.

The BKVC Committee did more than note these deficiencies, taking active steps to draw them to the attention of organisations who might be in a position to promote remedial action.

The concerns about untended allotments were drawn to attention of parish councils and the Association of Parish Councils. In 1965 four “bad churchyards” were reported to the Archdeacon for the Oxford Diocese.

In 1974 “the somewhat unexciting nature of some school playgrounds was discussed.” The Committee agreed to inform the Local Education Authority that playgrounds were marked by BKV judges for imaginative layout, freedom from litter etc. but that the BKVC Committee would like to suggest that steps be taken to beautify the more austere playgrounds and to make them more interesting to the children. In the same year, as there were still concerns about the state of village hall surrounds, the issue was put on the agenda for the next ORCC conference for village hall committees.

In 1975 “Council estates and areas of new housing were often singled out for their tidiness and attractive gardens. Sometimes though the compact old centre received more care than its peripheral estates and it has been suggested that some of these centres might become conservation areas. Sometimes judges were able to praise the way new buildings blended with the older part of a village. (How happy it would be, were this universal)”. This reflects the changing nature of the village built environment in this period.



Organisational Details

The annual organisation of the Competition from 1958 right up until the Competition's last year generally followed the pattern set in the first year:

- A closing date for entries sometime before Easter
- No entry fee or from 1976 a token fee (initially £1 and thereafter rising gradually to reach £20)
- Two rounds of judging during the May/June/July period
- A means of dealing with villages who were repeated winners in consecutive years: initially a ban on entry again after a defined run of wins and from 1961 a special Winners Class
- An individual judges' report for each village and a General Report recording details of the Competition as a whole.

The division of villages into classes for judging by population size (originally either up to 700 or over 700) also continued, although changes were needed in response to developments within the county, especially the growth of a number of settlements over the years.

In 1969 the village size categories were reviewed in the light of population increases and the fact that Kidlington (then with a population of 10,000), Old Marston and Littlemore, all very large villages, stood out from other villages over 700 population. ORCC noted that the population of the six rural districts had increased by 18,140 between 1964 and 1967.

New categories were agreed as follows:

- Population of under 700
- Population of 700 – 1499
- Population of 1500 and over
- Winners

In 1974 a 3500 population limit was introduced into the third class for practical reasons (presumably judging capacity) but, initially as a concession, villages with a population of over 3500 who had entered the Competition at some time in the past were still allowed to enter.



The limit was reviewed in the following year. “It was represented that the RCC was equally available for work in the market towns and the successor parishes in the county but that the larger villages and one-time small towns did not fit into the pattern of the village competition.” The BKVC Committee agreed to see if there was another organisation who could more appropriately take these on. They also agreed to write to villages and towns over 3000 to get their views and “the officers were asked to be particularly diplomatic in their approach to the former boroughs and urban districts”.

We do not know what, if any, views were received but the idea of a separate competition for very large settlements was never achieved. In the meantime a population limit of up to 3000 was set; a limit which subsequently rose to reach 5000 at the end of the Competition in order to comply with a Calor Gas’ requirement that limits mirrored those adopted for the national Village of the Year Competition.

The BKVC Committee felt that the classes would have to be reviewed again but the inscriber of the Marlborough Trophies pointed out that any changes of category resulted in a need to change the details on the trophies. So it was agreed to leave any change until the current trophies were fully inscribed. The practical implications of category changes prevailed and the four classes continued to the end of the Competition.

The idea of providing entrants with a BKVC poster to be designed for display in the villages was first considered in 1966. In 1970 a poster design competition was organised among the county’s secondary schools in 2 classes - under 14s and over 14s. The winning design – of a girl holding a poster saying “Best Kept Village Competition” with the letters falling off into a wastepaper basket – was printed by Holywell Press and distributed to all villages in the Competition. There is no record of a schools competition being repeated but the provision of a poster for entrants to display as a means of informing residents and encouraging them to participate remained a feature of the Competition.

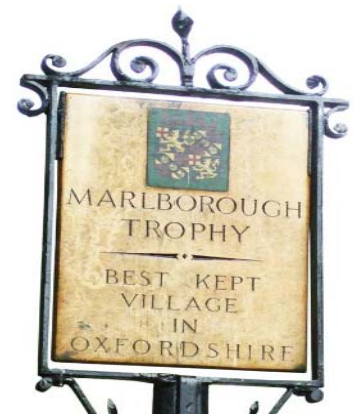


1963 saw the introduction of the idea of providing judges with a sketch map of each village showing location of features to be judged. Initially entrants were asked to provide ORCC with details of the features and the ORCC office then provided a sketch map to judges. From 1975, it was the responsibility of entrants to provide the maps.

In April 1974 local government reorganisation incorporated a new area (formerly North Berkshire) into the county and the BKVC Committee formally agreed that this would be included in the Competition.

Up to 1974 the Competition results had been communicated first to *The Oxford Times* so that they could publish them in advance of other newspapers. In that year Radio Oxford had taken exception to this arrangement and it was conceded that the policy also meant that papers who published on Thursday could not include coverage for a whole week.

The Oxford Times representative on the BKVC Committee said that *The Oxford Times* would be happy to continue financial support of the Competition without being given especially favourable treatment for the publication of results. It was therefore agreed that results should be published to the media on Wednesday with an embargo until Thursday.



Special Sections

War memorials

In 1961 the British Legion's Best Kept War Memorial Competition was brought into the BKVC. This covered free-standing memorials, plaques and memorial gardens that were publicly-owned and publicly accessible. The Legion provided judges: initially for both rounds of the competition but subsequently only for the final round after the BKVC judges had covered memorials in the initial round. It was agreed that all memorials present in villages entering the BKVC would be judged. Villages not entering BKVC could also opt to enter the British Legion competition on its own.

Churchyards

In 1964, following discussions with the Venerable Archdeacon of Oxford, a special competition for churchyards was introduced into the BKVC: initially only for Church of England churchyards. The Diocese agreed to provide an award, to carry out the final judging and to make the presentation to the winner. In 1966 the churchyard section was extended to cover churchyards of any denomination but not local authority burial grounds. In 1973 after discussion with a representative of the Berkshire, Buckinghamshire and Oxfordshire Naturalists Trust it was agreed to allow parts of churchyards to be declared as conservation areas and not judged for tidiness. However, in those days the value of wildlife conservation measures did not seem to be so widely appreciated, as initially no parish took this up this offer. In 1975 the concept of a special competition for churchyards was discontinued due to the general overall high standard of care.

CPRE Nature Conservation Awards

In 1998 the Council for the Protection of Rural England provided awards to villages who showed a particular concern for wildlife conservation. Villages entered for this award by completing a separate form and were judged by experts from CPRE.



Judging

In 1958 marking was organised as follows:

General condition of village – 30 points

Condition of (a) Village Hall surround (b) Churchyard (c) Burial ground and cemeteries (d) Village Green (e) Playing Field – 50 points (10 per sub-division)

Attractiveness of (a) flower and vegetable gardens (b) allotments – 20 points (10 per sub-division)

A percentage mark was to be calculated for any village not possessing every feature.

The distinction between a General Condition section and sections focussing on particular features continued until 1969, although the balance of marks between sections was adjusted from time to time during that period. More points were attached to the General Condition section “so that judges could have more freedom to respond to their instinctive thoughts about this”. The marks for this section were also meant to reflect judges’ perception of the amount of work that had apparently been done in preparing the village for the competition.

Gradually more of the features covered by special sections were included under the General Condition section until they were all included in 1969.

In 1963 the first judges briefing meeting before the start of the judging period was agreed; thereafter being a regular feature of the BKVC annual organisational programme. The briefing proved to be an enjoyable social occasion as well as a business meeting, despite some differences of opinion from among the strongly committed judges. It was an effective means of introducing a new judge to the art and the science of the BKVC.

Judges were generally recruited by word of mouth by ORCC staff, by the Hon. Organiser or by other judges. A new judge was paired with an experienced practitioner in their first year.



In 1977 amendments were made to the marking arrangements in order to achieve a greater degree of standardisation. The maximum mark for General Condition was reduced to 25 and a simple marking scheme covering all the different features was adopted.

1992 saw the first Judges' Party at Holton Village Hall. Before that between 1986 and 1989 a reception for judges was provided at one of their outlets by the Competition sponsors, Halls Oxford and West Brewery.

From the start of the Competition ORCC recognised the essential contribution of the volunteer judges by offering to reimburse them for travel expenses at an agreed rate which was reviewed annually. In 1978 the withdrawal of judges expenses in an attempt to keep down the cost of the Competition led to a reduction in the number of judges coming forward and the practice of offering expenses payments was re-instated. The experience of the Hon. Organiser in the later years of the Competition was that expenses were not often claimed.

Throughout the Competition the understanding was always that judging would be conducted in a way that ensured that judges kept themselves anonymous and unidentified during their visits to villages. In 1963, after some correspondence with Yarnton, the BKVC Committee reminded judges that it was inadvisable to talk to village people while judging; they should certainly not be shown round the village and they should not ask the opinions of village people.

Entering villages wanted full feedback on how they had performed and there were occasional challenges to the judges' remarks. In such cases the Hon. Organiser stepped in to arbitrate and to smooth ruffled feathers. Judges were given clear guidelines on how to provide effective reports on the villages they had assessed and only on rare occasions did the Honorable Organiser feel it necessary to apply some careful editing to the text.



Judges

ORCC is indebted to all the volunteer judges who have helped us to make the BKVC possible over the years. It is impossible to include a comprehensive list of all who served between 1957 and 2006 but perhaps we should highlight some of those who have given us their time and sound judgement for a period of 5 years or more:

Miss E F Aldworth	Mr C J Doel	Dr A M McDonald
Mr and Mrs J W H Allen	Mr and Mrs Elliot	Mrs Maturin
Miss Allison	Mrs P Evans	Dr M G McCrum
Mr and Mrs D G Ansell	Mr and Mrs R J Evans	Canon and
Mrs M F Back	Rev and Mrs M T Farthing	Mrs R E Meredith
Miss M M Baker	Mrs M Figgis	Mr D Montgomery
Mr and Mrs R C M Barnes	Miss A D Fisher	Mr and Mrs E G Murphy
Mrs Bendixson	Mrs I P Foster	Mrs J E Petchey
Mr and Mrs W E Betts	Brigadier Goadby	Dr D Portman
Mr A T Bradburn	Mrs Gordon	Prof. and Mrs C Ruiz
Mr and Mrs R A Brown	Mrs D Gray	Mrs S Russell
Lady Bullock	Mr R D D Green	Mr and Mrs W Sawyer
Mr and Mrs K G Burton	Mr and Mrs Hamilton	Miss E M Scott
Mr R F Burton	Miss Hanson	Mr and Mrs P Shatford
Mrs Margaret Campbell	Mrs I Hardie	Mrs B M Shirley-Smith
Lady Camoys	Mrs J Hardwicke	Miss G Silver
Mrs P Canning	Lady Hayter	Mr and Mrs R G Simons
Mr Cazes	Mrs K Hewitt	Mr S Smith
Mrs G Chapman	Mr P Hilton	Mrs H Street
Mrs P Clarke	Mrs R E Hitchcock	Mrs J Thomson
Mrs Coker	Mr and Mrs J M C Holden	Mrs K L Thorlby
Mr and Mrs P Comely	Mrs J Hone	Mrs J E Turner
Mr and Mrs G H C Cooper	Mr G H Hudson	Mr and Mrs D A Tyler
Lady Ann Cripps	Mrs M G Jacobi	Miss D P Walman
Mrs A J Cullen	Miss D M King	Mr and Mrs Webb
Mr and Mrs Daish	Mr and Mrs D Lees	Mrs J White
Mrs I de Mussenden	Mr and Mrs P Lund	Mrs B Wigley
Morgan	Mr and Mrs J Macdonald	Mrs W Wigley
Mrs M Dick		Mrs C L Willett



Trophies

The trophies awarded over the years continued to include the Marlborough Trophies for the winners in each of the size categories, with an oak shield or plaque for them to keep after the trophy had been moved on. The Marlborough Trophy was a wooden panel in a frame mounted on an oak post, which was then presented and installed in a prominent position in the winning village at a ceremony arranged by the village. The trophy was kept for a year until a new winner was selected. The shields were presented at the ORCC AGM.

A British Legion trophy (a metal plaque) was presented to the winner of the War Memorial competition after their Remembrance Day ceremony. A metal plaque was also provided by the Oxford Diocese for the winner of the Best Kept Churchyard competition. In 1968 Lady Camoys offered to provide a cash prize to go to the best kept village hall surround, in view of the continuing concern about the general poor quality of this feature.

In 1986 a new trophy, the Moffat Shield, provided by Mr. Robin Moffat for the winner of the Winners' Class.

From 1957 to 1962 the Marlborough Trophy presentation ceremonies were attended by the Duke of Marlborough but after that he did not feel able to be involved and the presentation duties were spread around different prominent county figures invited by ORCC. From around 2000 the responsibility for selecting and inviting their celebratory was given to the winning village.



Funding and Sponsorship

ORCC has been supported throughout the Competition by the generosity of a variety of donors and sponsors, without whom it would have been impossible to continue.

In 1958 a joint appeal was made to the Duke of Marlborough for a donation of one day's Blenheim takings for BKVC and ORCC. The Duke agreed on basis of contributing to ORCC "general funds". However, he issued a "warning that he hoped that the Competition would be self-supporting in future". A sum of £196-17s-0d was received, some of which was used to finance the 1959 Competition. The Duke's wish was unfortunately not achieved and, despite having issued his warning, in 1965 he opened his private gardens at Blenheim on 25 July to raise funds for the Competition and £176 was received. This helpful offer was repeated in 1969 producing £78. The Duke continued his support "in kind" from 1984 when he arranged for his Estate Office to maintain the Marlborough Trophies and transport them between winning villages each year free of charge; welcome assistance which continued to the end of the Competition.

The Oxford Times was also a regular supporter through annual donations from 1960 to 1977. From 1963 efforts were made to invite donations from a variety of statutory, voluntary and private organisations and also individuals. Competition entrants were also encouraged to donate. In 1978 it was agreed to consider the idea of seeking sponsorship.

In 1982 the Competition was first sponsored by Halls Oxford and West Brewery Company, who remained as sponsors until 1995. In 1984 and 1985 Touchwood Sports provided cash prizes for the winner and runner-up of a special class for Best Kept Recreation Ground. 1996 saw the entry on the sponsorship scene of Calor Gas, who remained the sole supporter until the end of the Competition. In 2001 the Lord Lieutenant, Hugo Brunner, provided £500 as the Elizabeth Brunner Award, in memory of his mother, who was awarded the OBE in recognition of her long-standing work for the Tidy Britain Campaign. The award went to the best new entry each year until and including 2005.



ORCC Management of Competition

The Competition was managed by a special BKV Committee from 1956. The Committee consisted of members from the organisations represented at the founding conference with subsequent addition of: Girl Guides, Horticultural Adviser of OEFC, Oxfordshire Housing Association, members of ORCC Executive Committee, representatives of some RDCs (those responding to a general invitation), representative of primary and secondary schools, British Council, Oxfordshire Association of Local Councils.

It was chaired by:

John Cripps (1956-1962)

Clare Kreyer, former ORCC Secretary, (1962-1970)

Gladys Chapman (1970-1979).

In 1973 Mr D G Ansell, new part-time ORCC Field Officer, was made responsible for the Competition and organised it through to 1975, when a new ORCC Countryside Officer, Mr John Hardwicke, was appointed.

In 1976 ORCC adopted a new Constitution in 1976, which made new arrangements for the appointment of a BKVC Committee by the Executive Committee to work within a budget determined by the Finance Committee.

In 1979 the ORCC Executive Committee decided to administer the BKVC itself in 1980 rather than to appoint a sub-committee for this purpose. The Competition was run by the ORCC Admin Assistant until 1985 when a series of volunteer Hon. Organisers were recruited. These were:

- Geoffrey Hitchcock (1985-1988)
- Jim Pyke (1988-1991)
- Barbara Bunyan (1991-1995)
- Peter Lund (1995-2006).



In 2001 Peter Lund reported to the ORCC Executive Committee that Calor Gas, sponsors of the BKVC, had teamed up with the *Daily Telegraph* in 1997 to run a national Village of the Year Competition with an emphasis on the social aspects of village life. Each county was invited to enter one village in the Competition, selected through a county Competition. Calor had indicated that they wished counties to re-organise their BKVC in order to become VOY Competitions. Up to now ORCC had not made any decision to re-organise but had been selecting the one Oxfordshire village to be entered by staff discussion and/or by inviting brief written expressions of interest. Peter Lund felt that BKVC judges would not necessarily want to move to a VOYC and suggested that the VOYC should continue to be run separately alongside the BKVC as a “paper exercise”.

Prompted by pressure from Calor Gas to achieve a greater number of entries to VOYC in 2005 the Executive Committee agreed to promote the VOYC as their main competition, with the BKVC run as a section within the VOYC. One of the ORCC Community Development Workers, Aimée Evans was asked to help Peter Lund to manage this.



Winners

Whilst every parish which has ever entered the Competition should receive commendation for their wish to encourage residents to work together to improve the upkeep and appearance of their physical environment, it is not possible here to include a cumulative list of all entrants over 50 years.

What we can do is to celebrate those parishes which have emerged as winners over the years: either as winners of one of the population size classes, or of the winners' class or of one of the special sections for churchyards and for war memorials. These are as follows, in descending order according to total number of wins (given in brackets):

Main competition

Adderbury (10)
Kencot (10)
Bloxham (8)
East Hendred (8)
Goring (7)
Rotherfield Greys (7)
Souldern (7)
Horspath (6)
Steventon (6)
Duns Tew (5)
Shipton-under-Wychwood (5)
Shenington with Alkerton (5)
Warborough (5)
Wootton (Woodstock) (5)
Cuxham with Easington (4)
East Hagbourne (4)
Hornton (4)
Kingham (4)
Combe (3)
Filkins and Broughton Poggs (3)
Chalgrove (3)
Dorchester (3)
Harwell (3)
Hook Norton (3)

Two wins each:

Appleton with Eaton
Blewbury
Brize Norton
Burford
Charlbury
Checkendon
Cropredy
Deddington
Milton-under-Wychwood
Mollington
Rotherfield Peppard
Rousham
Shrivenham
Stanford in the Vale
Stanton Harcourt
Steeple Aston
Stratton Audley

One win each:

Alvescot
Ardington and Lockinge
Aston, Cote, Shifford &
Chimney
Bladon
Cassington
Chadlington
Churchill and Sarsden
Clanfield
Drayton (Abingdon)
Freeland
Glympton
Great Milton
Hailey
Kennington
Kidlington
Leafield
Longcot
Ramsden
Salford
Sibford Gower
Watlington



War memorial

Chalgrove (12)
Brize Norton (9)
Woodstock (9)
Drayton St Leonard (8)
Benson (6)
Cassington (4)
Kennington (4)
Watlington (4)
Wootton (Woodstock) (3)
Steventon (2)

One win each:

Ardington and Lockinge
Ashbury
Aston
Bladon
Burford
Carterton
Clanfield
Combe
Didcot
Freeland
Harwell
Islip
Kencot
Launton
Ramsden
Rotherfield Greys
Shillingford

Shiplake
Shipton-under-Wychwood
Sutton Courtenay
Swyncombe
Upper Heyford
Warborough and
Shillingford
Witney
Wolvercote
Woodcote

Churchyard (1964-74)

Cuxham (7)
Rotherfield Greys (5)
Shiplake (2)
One win each:
Begbroke
Chesterton
Cuddesdon
Forest Hill
Hornton
Kencot
Mixbury
South Stoke

Village Hall Exterior (1969-86)

Sibford Gower (6)
Ardington (3)
One win each:
Brightwell cum Sotwell
Crowmarsh
Duns Tew
East Hendred
Fifield
Rotherfield Greys
Salford
Stanton St John
Wytham

Best New Entry (2001-05)

Crawley
Longcot
Milcombe
Sydenham
Tackley



A Review and the End of an Era

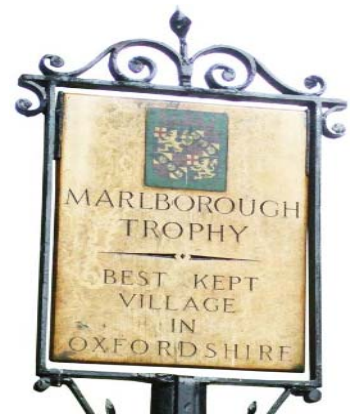
In 2007 Calor Gas informed ORCC that they wished their sponsorship money to be used for a Villages of the Year Competition and not for a BKV Competition. This announcement compounded an existing problem faced by ORCC in that the Competition “cost centre” in the accounts was projecting a deficit of nearly £6,000 for 2007/08.

Experience was also showing that the number of villages wishing to enter BKV each year was on the decline. 93 villages entered in 1991 and numbers had been decreasing since then to reach 36 in 2006.

ORCC was also aware that times were also changing in terms of village populations and the village way of life. Whereas in the past the BKV trophy presentation ceremonies were significant events in a village’s annual social calendar, with plenty of local dignitaries and a substantial section of the residents present followed by a generous tea in the village hall, by 2006 in some of the winning villages it was clear that, although the trophies were much appreciated, the presentation ceremonials were not seen as having the same level of priority.

In 2006 ORCC was encouraged by Calor, and by its commitment to promoting active, caring and inclusive rural communities, to put more staff effort into and more emphasis on the Calor Villages of the Year Competition. ORCC decided to organise and badge the BKVC as part of the CVOYC Environment section and not as a separate competition. The CVOYC’s Environment section naturally covered all the elements of BKV in terms of demonstrating community care and action in the form of litter blitzes, wildlife conservation areas, care and concern for the whole village environment including special features such as war memorials.

All these factors suggested the need for a review of the future of BKV and a letter was written to the volunteer BKV judges by Peter Lund, Honorary BKV Organiser, to get views on possible ways forward.



The options available were as follows:

- Carry on with BKV in its present form, so long as the identified cost centre deficit could be eliminated. This would involve:
 - Successful attraction of additional funding; and/or
 - Replacement of ORCC staff time input with additional volunteer time dedicated to carrying out tasks such as mailings and the compilation and presentation of the General Competition Report and other Competition documentation
- Invite another organisation to take over the running of the Competition as happened in some other counties
- Wind up BKV as a separate Competition and use the Calor Villages of the Year Competition as a means of recognizing community effort towards care of the environment

A majority of the judges responded with reluctant but realistic support for winding up the BKV. There was a sense that a number of them felt that the need for change had been coming for some time. Generally it was recognized that the BKVC had achieved what it set out to do – to engender and embed in village communities a greater sense of care and appreciation of their physical features and natural environment. A decision to phase it out should be seen as a tribute to the significant changes it has brought not as any admission of defeat.

Other organisations, such as CPRE, OFWI, OALC, were invited to consider taking over the BKVC in place of ORCC but none felt in a position to commit scarce resources to this.

The British Legion were invited to continue to organise a BK War Memorial Competition themselves on the understanding that there would no longer be a preliminary vetting process of entries by ORCC through the first round of a BKVC.



A Triumph for ORCC's BKV Competition

News Release—March 2007

'The Oxfordshire Rural Community Council (ORCC) is celebrating 50+ years of its well-known Best Kept Village Competition by recognizing the significant changes that the BKVC has achieved over the years. From evidence all around rural Oxfordshire ORCC and its valiant team of volunteer BKVC judges are aware that there is generally now firmly embedded in village communities a greater sense of care and appreciation of their physical and natural environment.

When ORCC established the Competition in 1956 it did so in order to encourage people to take action to improve the external appearance and upkeep of their village including the community buildings and other physical and natural features. Clearly the lack of upkeep was seen to be a problem which demanded local DIY effort and ORCC decided an element of competitiveness between villages would provide an incentive for action.

Now after 50 years, circumstances and expectations have moved on. Standards generally are higher and fewer villages each year are feeling the need to focus on the "best keptness" of their surroundings by entering BKVC. After consultation with their Hon. Organiser, Peter Lund MBE, and the BKV judges, ORCC will therefore no longer be organizing an annual Best Kept Village Competition.

All the key elements of the BKVC's focus on a cared-for and well-tended village environment are already part of the newer Calor Oxfordshire Villages of the Year Competition (COVYC). The COVYC now offers an annual opportunity to encourage and highlight a wider range of community-based action in our villages, including environmental action. The 2007 COVYC has just been launched. In 2006 Oxfordshire was top of the national league for the number of villages entering the Villages of the Year Competition and the ORCC's approach to running it is commended to other by Calor, the national sponsors.



“When BKV started, parishes needed prompting to promote tidiness. Now that is not the case. BKV has served its purpose in leading to Villages of the Year”, experienced BKV judges have told ORCC, “We suggest that it is time to put BKV into well-earned retirement.”

“ORCC is extremely grateful to all the volunteers and sponsors who have supported the organisation of BKV to and through its Golden Jubilee in 2006. Calor Gas and the Duke of Marlborough have been especially generous as sponsors”, says Linda Watson, ORCC Chief Executive. “Congratulations are due to our Honourable BKV Organiser, Peter Lund, for his recent award of an MBE for services to the Oxfordshire community and to the BKVC in particular. We are delighted that Peter’s involvement with us will continue as a Patron and Honourable Adviser to the COVYC.”

Some comments from our BKV judges:

“I really enjoyed being a judge and appreciated Peter Lund’s hard work.”

“We have always enjoyed being part of a very worthwhile Competition.”

“When we started some 20 years ago as BKV judges, the emphasis of the Competition was on housekeeping, both parish and private, e.g. cleaning up litter, clean verges and tidy gardens. In its way the Competition has been very successful. Most villages are now spick and span. As judges we are grateful that we have been allowed to participate in its success. It has certainly broadened our appreciation of our county.”

“We have no doubt that BKVC has made an important contribution by encouraging villages to look around critically and take action where needed.”



Building on the BKV's achievements

In its 90th year of existence, 2010, the ORCC fully endorses the Duke of Marlborough's thoughts at the end of his Patron's message. We remain committed to continuing to support the efforts of rural communities around the county to conserve and improve their local natural and physical environment. This vibrant area of voluntary effort has now a new dimension undreamed of when the BKVC was started: initiatives to address and reduce the threats posed by current levels of natural resource consumption and climate change.

The Oxfordshire Villages of the Year Competition has provided a means of highlighting and celebrating achievement and good practice across a range of areas of community activity including care for the environment. The 2009 Competition winner, Goring-on-Thames, went on to win the South East Regional Award and an Award in the Environmental category of Calor's National Village of the Year Competition. The community was commended in particular for its enterprising £15 million hydro-electric project to harness power from the 5 million tonnes of water that pass over Goring Weir every day. The project involves installing 3 large (3.5 km wide) 'Archimedes Spirals' in the river which is calculated to generate enough electricity every day for 20% of Goring's households. This is considered to be the most technologically advanced scheme run by community volunteers in the River Thames.

The ORCC has also now obtained funding from the County Council for a short-term project with the Oxfordshire-based organisation, 'ClimateXchange', to help and encourage residents in rural communities to meet the challenges of global warming, by supporting and encouraging local initiatives to promote more sustainable behaviour.

As another means of promoting and supporting biodiversity and renewable energy projects the ORCC is working with a small group of interested individuals to establish a new grant-seeking and grant-making Trust to take over from the Trust for Oxfordshire's Environment, which, due to funding changes, will be winding up its activities in 2010.

About ORCC



Oxfordshire Rural Community Council works to enable rural communities across Oxfordshire to be more socially, economically and environmentally sustainable. Equality of opportunity is central to all our activities. ORCC is an independent charity founded in 1920.

We can...

- ◆ Provide you with free advice on a wide range of rural issues.
- ◆ Keep you informed on the problems facing rural communities.
- ◆ Send you details of ORCC events and a copy of our news and information sheets.

ORCC Website

www.oxonrcc.org.uk

Find out who we are and what we do by visiting our website for news and events, publications, funding information and links to other useful organisations. If you would like to support the work of ORCC, you can join our membership scheme.

ORCC

Registered office:

**Jericho Farm, Worton,
Witney, Oxon
OX29 4SZ**

Tel: 01865 883488

Fax: 01993 883191

Email: orcc@oxonrcc.org.uk



ORCC is a company limited by guarantee (no 2461552) and a charity (no. 900560)