

# Ongar Millennium History Society Newsletter

**August 2011**

This is the newsletter that always saddens me, as it means summer passing and the nights are beginning to draw in. However we hope the OMHS events this autumn will keep you interested and entertained.

We have made good progress on the memorial inscriptions project and you will hear more about this fascinating task at our AGM (see below)

We have lost, and will be losing, committee members over recent months, so if you would like to join us on the committee please contact one of us listed below.

Thank you.

**Jenny Main**

## **ONGAR MILLENNIUM HISTORY SOCIETY**

**Annual General Meeting – Wednesday 28th September 2011,**  
**7.45 for 8 pm at Ongar Library, High St., Ongar**

### **Agenda**

1. Welcome
2. Apologies for absence
3. Minutes of AGM 2010
4. Chairman's Annual Report
5. Receipt & consideration for approval, the accounts for the financial year ending 31<sup>st</sup> July 2011
6. Election of committee and officers of the Society
7. Appointment of auditors

### **Interval**

for refreshments

(Next year's subscription is payable during the interval.)

Followed by a short talk by **Yvonne Tunstill of the Essex Society for Family History** on the Memorial Inscriptions Project which OMHS has contributed by recording the inscriptions in Ongar Cemetery and Shelley churchyard. Work is still ongoing in St Martin's churchyard.

### **Committee Members 2010-2011**

Chairman: Felicitie Barnes  
Treasurer: John Winslow  
Minute Sec: Elisabeth Barrett  
Website+: Keith Snow

Vice Chair: Jenny Main  
Speaker Sec.: Vacancy  
Bookings Sec: Wendy Thomas  
Cttee member: Olive Glassington

## **Was it really ten years ago.....?**

Was it really ten years ago that the OMHS was trying to think of a way to celebrate the Golden Jubilee of Queen Elizabeth II in Ongar, before finally deciding to modernize the Budworth Hall clock.

It had been erected in 1888 to celebrate the Golden Jubilee of Queen Victoria. It was originally lit by gaslight and a brave soul had to climb a ladder into the tower fortnightly and get access to a large key to wind the mechanism 26 times. It was important to keep an accurate mental note of the number of times the key had been turned, because if a 27<sup>th</sup> turn was reached, oh dear, trouble was in store. And we must not forget the bi-annual hourly change.

Over the years the condition of Ongar's most conspicuous landmark deteriorated and had got to the stage when it frequently stopped, was running slow or fast and simply just showed the wrong time. It seemed to chime when it felt like it! All of which was most unsatisfactory as thousands of people passed along the High Street every day.

Once the project was discussed and agreed by all concerned, it really **was** ten years ago that such a huge effort by our Society, the Community Association and local residents was made to give the clock a 21<sup>st</sup> century make-over. It was really a very happy surprise to learn that the original installers, Messrs Gillett & Johnson were still in business after 115 years and having got in touch with them, they were on hand to advise and install. The plan was to establish an atomic controlled time and chime "magic box" with signals coming from Rugby in Warwickshire. The cost would be around £14,000 ex VAT.

Following the 1888 precedent subscriptions were invited from local residents and businesses, and although quite successful there was a huge shortfall. Numerous events were held around the area to raise funds. We applied for, and following much frantic form filling, were lucky enough to obtain grants from the Essex Heritage Trust, The Essex Environment Trust and WREN (Waste Recycling & Environment) which all together allowed the work to go ahead.

When completed a letter explaining the precedent of her great, great grandmother and the Ongar Clock was sent to Her Majesty, with an accompanying photograph of Budworth Hall. A most cordial acknowledgement was received in return.

The result of all our efforts is the clock as we see it every day, always showing the correct time and chiming on the dot! The spring and autumn time change is taken care of automatically. Nowadays those passing by take it all so much for granted.

AND NOW.....Next year the nation will be celebrating the Diamond Jubilee. We can't modernize the clock again. Any ideas?

**John Winslow**

## **Successful summer walks – 1. A walk in Epping Forest**

On Sunday 22 May Tricia Moxey led a walk in Epping Forest for OMHS members. We met at the car park opposite the Queen Elizabeth Hunting Lodge and were shown the ancient trees and learned of their history. Many were mere saplings in the Royal Forest of Tudor times.

Forests are characterised by trees and Epping Forest has a great variety, the most common being hornbeam, beech, oak and birch, and Tricia introduced us to these. She said that in the past, mature trees were used for building and the smaller branches for fencing and firewood so, to make the timber easier to cut, trees were pollarded or coppiced. This meant that the trunks were cut either about eight feet from the ground (pollarding) or at ground level (coppicing) and allowed to grow again. This produced new branches which could be easily harvested, and in the case of pollards were out of the reach of feeding deer and cattle. We saw many coppiced and pollarded trees.

Epping Forest is reputed to be where Queen Boadicea made her last stand against the Roman army and is the remnant of the Royal Forest of Waltham which at one time covered most of southern Essex from London to Great Dunmow. It is now a narrow stretch of land, only 2½ miles wide, extending from Forest Gate in the south to just beyond Epping in the north, a distance of about twelve miles. Today it comprises around 6,000 acres whereas in the middle of the seventeenth century it was ten times this size.

In Tudor and Stuart times the Forest was a favourite resort of royalty for hunting and entertainment. The Queen Elizabeth Hunting Lodge was actually built for Elizabeth's father, Henry VIII in 1543 as a site to view the hunting of deer and, perhaps, wild boar, although it is doubtful that he actually used it. In 1589 Queen Elizabeth had the building modified and is said to have used it as a gallery from which to shoot deer with a bow and arrow. The Queen is believed to have hunted on horseback, enjoying the thrill of the chase. After Elizabeth's death, James I continued to hunt in the Forest and introduced a dark strain of fallow deer from the Continent, which interbred with the native deer, and their descendants can be seen to the present day.

In the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries the splendour of the forest was lost with deer killed for sale on the London meat markets, trees felled for timber and large areas fenced off for private use. Fortunately the Corporation of London intervened in the 1870s and much of the enclosed land was returned to the Forest, some being purchased and some being reclaimed. This culminated in the passing by Parliament of the Epping Forest Act of 1878 by which the Forest was handed to the people. A ceremony on 6 May 1882 commemorated the event when Queen Victoria returned Epping Forest to her subjects for their "use and enjoyment ... for all time".

Nowadays Epping Forest is a popular recreation area as well as being a nationally and internationally important conservation area, with much of it designated as a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) and a European Special Area of Conservation. We were told of the role of the City of London in managing the forest and shown

examples of conservation in action to allow ancient oak trees to flourish. The walk ended at the Hunting Lodge where we visited the exhibition of Tudor food and cooking with tables laid for a royal feast.

**Keith Snow**

### **Successful summer walks – 2. An evening stroll**

Led by our guide Tricia Moxey, a group of members met at the Epping Forest Centre at High Beech for a summer evening stroll on 15th June.

We ambled for about 90 comfortable minutes along paths that took us through areas of beech and silver birch trees, etc, a lake, and controlled undergrowth encouraged to protect the roots of some of the oldest trees. Some of the grand old oak trees are several centuries old and still going strong. Those that we saw were so full of character they seemed to have their own personalities and could certainly tell a story. The forest managers are trying to care for about 60,000 oaks. (Just imagine that!).

The 1987 hurricane felled many trees which have been left in situ and some are now beginning to grow again from their fallen position. Some of the silver birches are showing the effects of air pollution with their trunks turning a shade of pink.

The trees were at their summer best, traffic noise was almost non-existent and the air was clean and fresh. In all, it was a truly delightful evening.

There is much work to be done in conservation throughout the forest area and OMHS gave a donation to the Conservation Volunteers. Should anyone be interested in lending a hand in this interesting and worthwhile work, Tricia can be contacted on 01277 364522.

**John Winslow**

### **Successful summer walks – 3. An evening walk to Greensted**

There was a good turnout for this evening walk led by Anne Brooks. We walked up through the fields to Greensted, looking back to Ongar which looks very different from this view. Unfortunately when we got to the church it was locked and we could not look inside, but Anne took us round the outside and showed us all of the relevant historic details.

The evening finished on a highpoint as OMHS member Gill Adams had invited us all into her beautiful barn conversion and garden next to the church where we had drinks. We would all like to thank her for her amazing hospitality and for Anne's very interesting walk.

**Lorna Vaux**

#### **Still to come....**

**Michael Leach is going to conduct a walk around the Shelley area for OMHS members on Tuesday 13<sup>th</sup> September at 6pm. Meet at Shelley Church. Members only please. Names to Jenny asap please.**

## **Finding out about listed buildings**

As part of the House History project, which a small group of members are working on, we have found two websites which contain information about listed buildings:

<http://www.english-heritage.org.uk/professional/protection/process/national-heritage-list-for-england/> - this list gives more information than the second site below and makes the identification of individual properties easier

<http://www.britishlistedbuildings.co.uk/> - searchable by country, county and locality. Only lists first 100 entries initially

These sites can be searched to bring up listings for local areas, although you may get more than you bargained for! By typing in Ongar, I retrieved between 100 to 220 records, many for Ongar, but also those in Ongar Road, Pilgrim's Hatch, for example.

However it makes fascinating reading and you can spend hours browsing!

**Jenny Main**

## **Cemetery recording**

Our members have spent many, many months in all types of weather carefully transcribing the monumental inscriptions in Ongar's cemeteries. The cemetery in Love Lane and the churchyard at St Peter's in Shelley have been completed and St Martin's is well underway. We are taking part in a national project controlled locally by the Essex Society for Family History who are issuing full details area by area on CDs. Many are already on sale. The recordings can also be found on the Find My Past website, although a charge is made for this service. Comprehensive information and details can be found on [www.esfh.org.uk](http://www.esfh.org.uk) or by calling the Society Chairman John Young on 01279 416204.

The inscriptions have to be recorded exactly as shown and the type of gravestone indicated from a large variety of designs e.g. plain, scroll, angels, military, open book etc. The aim is to help family historians, present and future, trace their heritage and roots.

The Essex Co-ordinator, Yvonne Tunstill, will be giving a short talk on this work after our AGM being held on Wednesday 28th September from 8.00pm in Ongar Library.

**John Winslow**

## **Wanted!**

Have you any photos of old Ongar that we could copy to add to our OMHS archive and/or website?

Also any maps, plans, artefacts that you no longer require?

If so please contact Jenny on 01277 362684

## **St. Martin's Graveyard Survey**

A few weeks ago a retired couple visited St Martin's church to see if they could discover any family graves in the churchyard. They had done some research and knew that many of their ancestors came from Ongar so it seemed likely that some of them would have been buried there too. Unfortunately we had little information available for them at the time but we hope in the near future to rectify the situation for a group of us are the grave hunters of St. Martin's and it's our mission to decipher the tombstones in the church and its grounds.

What a gloomy activity you might think but we don't find it so. Yes it is poignant to discover a child's grave or one where the deceased died in sad circumstances but all the inscriptions serve to keep alive the memories of the past and provide us with an understanding of how communities, not just in Ongar but across the country, developed from the time of the first interments to the present. In fact we have found the experience of working on the survey to be positively uplifting!

The history of Christian burial is fascinating. From late Saxon times onwards the rich and important members of the congregation were buried inside the church usually in graves dug only a foot deep. Each one was covered with floor tiles and often an inscribed tablet was placed on top. It is not considered disrespectful to walk on these. One of the reasons for these floor burials was the belief that the souls of the dead would be humbled by being stood on and they would attain a speedier entry to heaven. By the 15<sup>th</sup> c when family pews became popular, people would stipulate in their will that they wished to be buried next to the spot where they had worshipped. Churches began to fill up with tombs and plaques to the wealthy. Perhaps their surviving relatives would then remember to pray for them, thus finding a fast track to Paradise!

The poor had a far simpler interment as they were usually placed in communal graves outside the building with no marker apart from one large cross to show that the churchyard was a grave site. In the late 17<sup>th</sup> c individual graves with tombstones for all classes started to appear in church grounds. The earliest one we have discovered so far in our survey is dated 1709.

The south side of a church was considered to be the most desirable place for graves and you can see that the ground is higher in this part of St Martin's churchyard due to all the bodies underneath it! To the north of the church a part of the site was often reserved for the bodies of unbaptised babies, suicides and criminals. Possibly these unfortunates were buried in unmarked graves (no doubt causing further distress and sorrow to their families) as the inscriptions we've found on tombstones in the north of our churchyard appear to refer only to respectable citizens.

This burial custom seems very harsh and was probably thought by the church to be a deterrent to those tempted to lead a criminal or impious life. Parents took it very seriously as babies were baptised as soon after birth as possible, usually the next day. Only the father and godparents would attend as it was not considered

appropriate for the mother to go to a service until she had been 'churched' a ceremony which took place some days later.

From about 1538 all the births, marriages and deaths in each parish had to be recorded weekly by the curate and witnessed by a church warden. Many of these Parish Registers can be read online today and are a valuable tool for historians and those researching their family tree. We all hope that when the survey is completed it will also be of use and interest to people. We aim to have a record of each inscription with its location marked on a plan of the church and graveyard so that visitors to the church, including perhaps the couple mentioned earlier who first came to St Martin's a while ago, will find the evidence they are looking for.

**Gemma O'Donnell**

### **Ideas please!**

When OMHS was formed, at the turn of the millennium, the decision was made that the society would not be just for members to sit and be talked to, but to encourage active participation with research into topics that were of interest to our members. Our programme would therefore be 3 pronged – input from speakers, visits out, and individual and group research. We are fortunate to have a fund that is able to finance the latter. The projects that we have sponsored have included the DVD, several publications, resources for schools, the High Street Essay, blue plaques, and the refurbishment of the Budworth Hall clock. At present we are still involved with recording grave and monumental inscriptions at St Martin's, looking at historical buildings in the High Street, and unveiling the latest blue plaque at Great Stony. Can you, our members, now come up with other ideas?

We need input from you, as to topics, and projects that you are interested in and that we can sponsor. Something that you have been thinking of and asking why haven't they done that?

The committee has been pushing for a museum in Ongar, but is that a feasible idea? We do need somewhere to put our resources.

We have in the past recorded many peoples' reminiscences. Perhaps someone would like to record some of the railway enthusiasts and past employees. Please come to the AGM and bring your ideas and then we can have an informal discussion as to what our aims should be in the future.

**Felicite Barnes**

**It's your OMHS!!  
What do you want to do, see,  
research, visit, or hear about?  
Please let any committee member know  
of any ideas!**

## **BBC sends SOS to OMHS**

BBC Essex contacted OMHS during July seeking information regarding the blue plaque we installed in Castle Street commemorating Jane Taylor. It was needed for a car rally/treasure hunt they were organising, being held the following weekend. Those taking part were being asked to obtain some detail to add to their scores. Among other things the BBC needed to know how far off the ground it was and wanted to contact the owner in case of concern at the number of drivers stopping outside the house. We pointed out that the plaque was fixed to a side wall of the property and as there is a high wall along the road boundary, no-one inside the house would be aware of motorists pausing briefly outside.

That was the last we heard and we are unaware of the outcome of this competition and would ask our members to contact us if they are able to complete the story.

**John Winslow**

## **Dates for your diary**

**Tuesday 13<sup>th</sup> Sept 6pm**     **A walk around Shelley with Michael Leach**  
Meet at Shelley Church at 6pm.  
Booking essential. Members only. Limited places.  
Please contact Jenny (01277 362684) to book your place.

**Wed 28<sup>th</sup> Sept 7.45 for 8pm**     **OMHS AGM**  
at Ongar Library, High St, Chipping Ongar  
Followed by a short talk on the Memorial Inscriptions Project by **Yvonne Tunstill** from the Essex Society for Family History.  
Come along and find out what some of our members have been doing with brushes and cardboard tubes over the last 7 years!

**Wed 9<sup>th</sup> November 8pm**     **A talk on Stanford Rivers**  
by Robert Brooks  
in Church Rooms, Castle St, Ongar

**Wed 7<sup>th</sup> Dec 8pm**     **Christmas Social** (for OMHS members only)  
at the Town Council Offices

### **Contributions for next newsletter please!**

**The next newsletter will be produced in November 2011, so any articles to Jenny please by 22<sup>nd</sup> October. Thank you!**