

Ongar Millennium History Society Newsletter

February 2009

Well what an eventful winter we have had. I hope you managed to get around through snow and flood. We are sorry that we had to cancel one of our meetings, but the forces were against us. We will be re-arranging the SPAB talk and slotting in another meeting sometime soon too.

I cannot believe that we are approaching our 2009 Marion Slade lecture already. It doesn't seem five minutes since the last one, but I'm sure it will be an entertaining and interesting evening. And of course there will be our famous cheese and wine spread too. I hope you are all going to be getting your tickets soon!

Jenny Main, Editor

THE MARION SLADE LECTURE 2009

*Below Stairs at Hylands House
~ A Talk by Wendy Hibbitt*

at Great Stony, High Street, Ongar
Friday 27th March 2009, 7.45 for 8pm

Cheese & Wine

Raffle

Tickets £6.00

John 362461/Barbara 363722

Apologies to members and guests for the cancellation of the talk about the Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings scheduled for Thursday 5th February 2009. Unfortunately the weather and illness conspired against us. We will be arranging another event for members soon, and hope to hear the talk by James Boutwood at a later date.

Committee Members 2008-2009

Chairman: Felicitie Barnes

Treasurer: John Winslow

Minute Sec: Elisabeth Barrett

Website+: Keith Snow

Vice Chair: Jenny Main

Secretary: Barbara MacDonald

Bookings Sec: Wendy Thomas

House Histories

We are always looking for a new approach and new emphasis to record the history of Ongar. Our aim as you know is to promote and foster an active interest in local history. A few members have already approached us to say they would be interested in looking at the history of some of the notable houses in Ongar. This can be widened out to include Shelley, Greensted and Marden Ash, as well as Chipping Ongar.

In the 1950s the WEA did a project on some of the houses along the High Street, which can be seen at the Essex Record Office, and it would be good to do something similar. If you live in an interesting house, or you know someone who does, it could be the start of a new project. We need enthusiastic helpers who would wish to look at the history of their own house or of another building in the town. We are willing to coordinate this and to arrange some meetings where we can get to know what has already been done, and what we can aim for.

There are several old, large and imposing buildings in Ongar High Street in which we should all have a vested interest, including the Budworth Hall, Essex House, and Central House, if we, as a society, are serious about retaining Ongar's heritage. Situated between these are residences, pubs and shops with a wealth of history which also need investigating.

Wherever you live, if you have anything to share or you would like to get involved **please contact our committee members, Barbara MacDonald on 363722 or John Winslow on 362461**
Felicite Barnes

Just part of the service

A Danish lady living in Yorkshire contacted Ongar Library in January seeking information about a fellow countryman called Eskild Terkelsen. The caller was referred to OMHS. Following a recent death in Denmark, the family there were looking through the personal papers of the deceased and found a death certificate issued in the registration district of Ongar in 1935 for Mr Terkelsen and which had led to the enquiry to us. Apparently he had lived in Ongar but was a ladies tailor and costumier with his own business in Winchmore Hill, North London. We were being asked if we could help to find other information. We were told he was born in 1876 and had probably lived in Chelmsford at one time. The caller from Yorkshire had never even heard of Ongar before this!

A quick look in the Chelmsford telephone directory proved to be very fruitful. Not only was there someone with the same surname listed, but a brief call found that he proved to be the great grandson of the late Ongar resident and was able to fill in more details of their family history. He was very pleased to know that another relative was on the family trail. It seems they didn't know of the existence or whereabouts of each other. The original caller was informed of the progress made by us and was extremely delighted. They have been put in touch with each other. We wish them well in their endeavours.

John Winslow

History on our doorstep

The year 1900 was an important year for the Hackney Board of Guardians. They had just agreed the purchase of land in Ongar on which to build homes for the hundreds of destitute children which came within their responsibility. To mark this purchase a plinth was built on the south eastern edge of their land.

All was well until the guardians were informed of the intention to extend the railway line from Ongar along the northern edge of what is now Mayflower Way. Concern was expressed at the guardians' next meeting of the danger of having a railway line along the edge of their land.

So it was decided to erect a two strands strong barbed wire fence starting from the plinth on the eastern corner. Like most brick built posts they became what we now would call 'Mile Stones' which would have etched on them distances from neighbouring towns and cities.

Some 40 years later our country was threatened with being invaded by the Germans. So serious was this threat that the first contingent of Americans arrived to help. However, the Government of that day issued instructions that all road signs and town signs were to be taken down and obliterated. Thus, the Board of Guardians of what was now the Hackney Children's Homes had to find a way to hide the directions and information on their sign posts. This they did by chiselling out the now illegal information.

The lower part of the forbidden sign post can still be seen as one walks along the eastern side of the Ongar road. The chisel marks above the lower three brick blocks is true historical evidence of those turbulent times. "Horror upon horror" the spot is now shared with a speed camera, but this little bit of history remains for us to muse over.

Ron Bames...who can remember the 40s....

Stop Press

We have been offered an opportunity to look around David Livingstone's room in the cottages at the United Reformed Church. This has come about as the cottage is currently empty between lets.

Sandra Dear has kindly offered to be there on **Wed 25th February 2009 to let us in. We can accommodate two groups of up to 10 people at **10am and 10.30am**. The church will be open, and there are some personal effects and memorabilia to be seen in the vestry .Also coffee will be available!**

If you would like to come please contact Jenny on 01277 362684 asap. I will compile a list and it will be on a first come first served basis. Thank you.

We also hope to have a joint history event with URC later this year.

Ware cheap imitations!

In 1913, Henry Taylor, family historian and a grandson of the Revd Isaac Taylor, sent his sister Euphemia to Ongar on a mission. He had apparently some reason to believe that the road in which stood the house that his grandfather bought in 1822 (now No 10, Castle Street) was then called **Win Lane**. In March 1913, Euphemia reported back: "When last in Ongar I tried to trace the Win Lane name. But no one could recall the name. The road is one leading as you remember past Grandfather's last house & on & round by "White House" to Castle House" (memo transcribed by Henry Taylor now in the Suffolk Record Office HD588/6/38). So the matter stood – not proven – when I was writing the chapter for *Aspects of the History of Ongar* entitled "The Taylors of Ongar and their houses there". Henry Taylor being usually a reliable witness, I decided to accept the name, but to include a footnote acknowledging the doubt.

In January 2003, I received a phone-call from the Castle Bookshop in Colchester: would I be interested in buying a vellum-bound volume containing, in manuscript, *A Sketch of The History of the Church meeting in Chipping Ongar, Essex From A.D. 1662 to A.D. 1825* and the Church Minutes 1811-1828 and 1829-1866? Not surprisingly, the sum asked was high, but there is a parable about the Pearl of Great Price and, as a great-great-great-grandson of the Revd Isaac Taylor, I did not hesitate for very long.

Among other gems, my purchase has solved the mystery of Win Lane. The earlier entries in the book are in the hand of the Revd Isaac Taylor himself and at one point he writes "1822 May 17. I removed to a house I purchased in the **Ware Lane** which being close to the Town will I hope give me more intercourse with the people than (owing to my frequent illnesses) I have had for several years". Looking back at a photocopy of Henry Taylor's transcription referred to above, I now see what I failed to take account of before: in one of several annotations in the margins, Henry Taylor has written against the paragraph in question: "In 1822, Revd I. Taylor purchased house in Win Lane, Ongar" and (in larger writing, probably written earlier): "Wire? Lane Ongar or Weir or Win Lane" (the underlined words subsequently crossed out). It seems that he had difficulty in making out the handwriting in his source, but eventually convinced himself that the correct reading was "Win Lane". I don't think that the source can have been the vellum-bound volume itself, since the name there is clearly "Ware Lane" and Henry Taylor was, in any case, very familiar with his grandfather's hand, but it may well be that he had access to a transcription by someone else of the same passage.

The transcription of the contents of the vellum-bound volume is a long-term task vying with many others (including the transcription of the surviving diaries of Susan Gilbert, first wife of Josiah Gilbert of Marden Ash), but, when it is complete, the volume will probably go to the Essex Record Office, together with a copy of the transcription.

Robin Taylor Gilbert

Trees – a part of our history

What are Ancient, Veteran, Notable and other trees of special interest? A good question. When Aspects of the History of Ongar was published in 1999, already a decade ago now, one chapter was devoted to Landmark trees, a term then used to describe and record local trees that were considered special for a variety of reasons - aesthetic, cultural, social or historic. At that time the only other term in common usage to describe trees other than by species was the classification ancient or though even that term was very often interchanged with the classification veteran. Since then and very much part of the trend to try and acknowledge the diverse values of trees the number of classifications has grown; to a point now where the need to clarify the sometimes overlapping classifications has arrived.

The Woodland Trust, The Ancient Tree Forum and other tree organisations have now come up with an agreed set of classifications which are not only useful for the purpose of recording but should also prove useful and interesting to local historians, least not for the fact that they encourage the view that trees should be seen as much a part of the local historic landscape as man made elements. A local building of note may well be 500 years old but so also may be a tree or trees in its grounds.

The Terms:

ANCIENT

An ancient tree is one that has passed beyond maturity and is old, or aged, in comparison with other trees of the same species. The measurement of the girth and height, although not an exact science, are amongst the best indicators of age. For example an ancient oak, allowing for the influence of soil, altitude, climate and growing conditions, will almost certainly have a girth of 10 metres and beyond and be shorter of stature than lesser oaks due to crown retrenchment, or as it is more commonly known 'growing downwards'. A term I rather like because it reminds us that because a tree is starting to shed its upper limbs and becoming hollow inside it doesn't mean it is dead or dying. There is a well known saying about oaks that suggests 'An oak tree grows for 300 years. Rests for 300 years and. Spends the next 300 years gracefully declining'. It is during this 'declining period' that the tree offers some of the rarest and most valuable habitat for a wide variety of wildlife and yet it is during this period that it can be at its most vulnerable to removal for a whole variety of reasons - disease, danger, development etc. It is interesting to note that the decaying inner hardwood of many trees provides one of the most important habitats for wildlife in Europe with the British Isles having more ancient trees than the rest of Europe put together.

VETERAN

The term veteran and ancient have been used interchangeably for many years but at the present time a clear distinction is starting to emerge. It is true to say that all ancient trees will be veterans. But the reverse is not necessarily true. In fact some veteran trees can be quite young. The key word is 'survivor'. A veteran tree is a survivor that has developed some of the features found on an ancient tree, not necessarily as a consequence of time, but of its position, life or environment. A veteran may be a young tree with a relatively small girth in contrast to an ancient tree, but bearing some of the 'scars' of age. The oak tree in the centre of the Pleasance Car Park is clearly a

veteran as are the remaining oaks that can be viewed from Basons Lane and feature on the cover of the Ongar Community Tree Strategy.

CHAMPION

These trees speak for themselves. They are the tallest of their kind or have the largest girth of their kind either in comparison with all other trees in the UK or within a given region. Whilst the Tree Register of the British Isles holds all of the details of the largest of each species there may well still be undiscovered contenders in the countryside.

HERITAGE

A heritage tree is one that has contributed to or is connected to our history and culture. It is a definition that closely mirrors landmark and could equally be applied to all of the landmark trees included in the Aspects of the History of Ongar. The term can also include trees that have rare or great botanical interest and can thus include non native specimens and groups of trees that create particular designs such as avenues, groves, orchards etc.

NOTABLE

Notable trees are usually magnificent, well loved, mature examples which stand out in their local environment very often because they are by and large bigger than other tree around them. They are often taller than ancient trees and may be fatter than many veterans without having any of the veteran 'features'. Certainly Ongar has many notable trees (landmark trees) such as the Wellingtonias in Coopers and the Cedar of Lebanon near Castle Street.

So what's in a name? Firstly as we have seen it focuses attention on the minutiae, one may say, personality of the tree, over and above simply identifying by species. Secondly it helps to place trees in their historical context and when used in conjunction with older maps helps to interpret change over time. But thirdly, and perhaps in this day and age most importantly, detailed classification and recording of trees will add great weight to the argument in favour of retaining green belt land over development. It will, in my opinion, be insufficient in the coming decades to simply argue from the emotive, broad brush 'the countryside is nice and shouldn't be touched' approach. Greater, well researched and documented detail of specific trees and the wildlife habitats they support will in turn provide greater clout to the argument, particularly when presented, for example, alongside the Ongar Community Tree Strategy and the formula known as CA VAT (Capital Asset Value for Amenity Trees) which enables local authorities to calculate the approximate value of trees based on the size of the trunk, height, condition and the number of people the tree serves. In essence it's a means of recognising a tree's worth as an amenity asset. We should be particularly proud in Ongar for it was Chris Neilan, EFDC Landscape and Tree Officer, who devised and tested the scheme which is now being taken up by many local authorities faced as they are and we are with threats to development into our precious green belt and associated treescape.

So as local historians and people who no doubt enjoy walking around Ongar with your eyes open please let me know (363722) if you 'discover' any unusual or special trees that might fall into one or more of the categories outlined. A number of local Tree Wardens are available to check them out and who knows they may well end up on the EFDC Veteran and Notable tree

records and website which is currently standing at just over 1500 trees - one of the highest number based on actual land area in the country.

Bob MacDonald, Ongar Tree Warden

NB I am indebted to the Woodland Trust, Ancient Tree Forum and EFDC Countrycare for much of the detail included in this article.

The Borough



The land in the foreground with its abandoned hay cart has a rather forlorn appearance and indeed to this day the area has not been put to any significant use.

The above description was penned in about 1987 when the book (Ongar in old picture cards) from which the above photograph is taken, was first published. The photograph by Fred Spalding would appear to have been taken during the early years of the 20th century judging by its reference to the Matthew and Baker coachworks and mention of the three arches of the medieval bridge. During the last hundred years The Borough has been the site of a gas works, a bus company, a part of the proposed western by-pass and in latter years a lorry park come car park. On the 24th March 2009 this site will be entering yet another phase of its chequered history when the District Council terminates its lease. So what is it to be for the next hundred years, a continuation of the 'rather forlorn appearance' or a development that makes 'significant use' of this strategic site at the southern entrance to the town. It is understood that the lease of the site will be offered to the Town Council very much along the lines that the leases for the adjacent Ongar Nature Reserve have been agreed. If this is the case then the Town Council has promised to consult widely with the people of Ongar. The Ongar Millennium History Society exists not only to record and preserve the past but also to influence the present and therefore the future of Ongar. As such members will hopefully take this unique opportunity to make their views known; for as we should all know, perhaps better than most, that unless we learn the lessons of history we are likely to go on making the same mistakes.

Bob MacDonald.

Dates for your diary

**Wed 25th February
10am / 10.30am**

**Visit to David Livingstone's cottage
and United Reformed Church
Names to Jenny 362684 asap
Limited spaces available.**

**Friday 27th March
7.45 for 8pm**

**2009 Marion Slade Lecture
"Below stairs at Hylands House"
A talk by Wendy Hibbit
At Great Stony**

**Sat 18th April
10am-3pm**

**Stand at Rotary Fair
at Budworth Hall
Helpers required to run our stand
on a rota basis.
Names to Jenny please 362684**

Also dates still to be confirmed for:

- **Visit to an Essex mill**
- **High Street history walk in Ongar**
- **Visit to Hylands House**
- **Visit to Essex Police Museum**

**Contributions for next newsletter please!
The next newsletter will be produced in May 2009, so any
articles to Jenny by 18th April please.
Thank you!**