

Ongar Millennium History Society Newsletter

May 2008

Well we have had a busy few months as a society; lots of things have been going on: the Marion Slade Lecture by Jon Stokes, a visit to the William Morris Museum in Walthamstow, a talk about Copped Hall, the completion and dedication of the kneelers in St Martin's church, a display at the Annual Town Meeting, displays in the library and a Whitehall Walk in London (which will have happened by the time you read this) – and all since February!

OMHS member 'Snowy' Evans has been very busy producing "A History of Ongar Research Station in the 20th Century" about the May and Baker/Rhone-Poulenc/Aventis research site on the Fyfield Road. 'Snowy' has written about his project for this newsletter and an order form is enclosed here for those of you who would like another slice of Ongar's history to add to your collection.

Amazingly, we are now up to 89 members in OMHS, so this seems a good opportunity to welcome all our new members. I hope you enjoy this issue of the newsletter and your editor is always pleased to receive contributions for future issues. See you again in August!

Jenny Main, Editor

OMHS outing to

Cressing Temple Barns

Sunday 29th June 2008

Meet there ready for 11am

We will have a guided tour around the barns.

Bring a picnic, or refreshments available.

£3.50pp (£2.50 conc.)

Names to Barbara 01277 363722

Committee Members

Chairman: Felicitie Barnes
Treasurer: John Winslow
Minute Sec: Elisabeth Barrett

Vice Chair: Jenny Main
Secretary: Barbara MacDonald
Bookings Sec: Wendy Thomas

St Martin's Church Kneelers

The kneelers are finally in place in St Martin's Church and they look wonderful. A large number of OMHS members and many of the 'stitchers' joined the congregation at St Martin's for a service of dedication on 6th April. We produced a leaflet which was given out on the day to explain the motifs and the reasons for their inclusion. We have also left some laminated versions in the church for visitors to consult as they look around the church.

Unfortunately, Margaret Abbess was not well enough to be with us and see her artistic creation come to fruition, but we took some photographs for her to see. Margaret has since written to us:

"Thank you so much for the Official Photograph – and so quickly! I did appreciate it. I was so sorry not to have come to the ceremony, but it really was impossible. I do hope to call into the church to see the kneelers in position as soon as I can.... Would you please thank the "sewers" for the beautiful flower arrangement and card? It was such a wonderful gesture, especially as I had felt rather guilty at not being around so much during the last few months when I should have been making a special effort. However, from the feedback I've heard, they are much admired and great credit to the "sewers" who did all those long hard hours of tedious stitchery....Many, many thanks....Margaret"

I am sure all members would like to take this opportunity to thank Margaret for all her hard work on the kneeler project and to send her our very best wishes.

Jenny Main

The Marion Slade Lecture 2008

"I could have listened all night." "A thoroughly enjoyable evening." "Very informative. I will certainly look at our trees with new eyes." These are just a few of the many favourable comments made following Jon Stokes's talk on 'Our Heritage of Trees'. Certainly from the OMHS perspective the subject matter, choice of speaker and change of venue provided one of the most successful Marion Slade Lectures to date. Over seventy members and guests attended.

Jon's well-illustrated talk took us, in the space of one very short hour, back over thousands of years of landscape history illustrating how trees had played, and still play, a key role in that development. He also reminded us of man's role in that story and the fact that our once symbiotic relationship with trees and the timber they provided has all but ceased as we enter the 21st century.

Although tackling big themes and some very profound and, yes, disturbing issues, Jon never lost sight of individual examples, some local to Ongar. A timely reminder that we can all play our part in combating climate change and global warming right here in our own backyard. I am sure no one present will forget Jon's brilliant example of how the coppicing cycle - or rather the disruption of the coppicing cycle - had such a devastating effect on woodland butterflies – I will remember it as Jon's fritillary two step! I will also remember his passion and total commitment to preserving our historic Green Monuments. Timely and inspirational.

Bob MacDonald

Scientific Secrets of Ongar Revealed

A piece of the recent history of Ongar has been made available with the publication of a booklet by member Peter 'Snowy' Evans giving an account of Ongar Research Station during the 20th Century.

Having contributed to 'The Aspects of the History of Ongar' in 2000, 'Snowy' felt reference to an interesting piece of recent Ongar industrial history was omitted, that of the Ongar Research Station. For 27 years 'Snowy' was employed by the group of companies that had developed the site and, knowing that it was being sold, started gathering memories and archive before it was lost, but with no idea on how to share the story.

Initially he prepared an illustrated talk for us in February 2004 to which so many ex-colleagues came that the room at Great Stony was bursting. Encouraged by this interest he continued writing until the story was told. Finally having persuaded Merial, the animal health company, who in the UK are based in Harlow, to make a generous donation, publication has been made possible and 500 copies produced.

The account seeks to record the industrial, social and agricultural contribution by the Ongar site and the achievements of global significance, particularly in increased food production. He also acknowledges the contribution made to the Ongar community by the staff employed at the research station.

He has written essentially for the non-scientific reader and future historians, hoping to express the story in language that enables all to appreciate the scope of the work undertaken.

As he was diagnosed with MS in 1992 copies are being provided in return of a minimum donation of £10, which can be Gift Aided, to the East Herts and West Essex Branch of The MS Society of which he is Vice Chairman.

Leaflets for those wanting to order copies are being sent with this newsletter. His database of ex-employees and others interested already numbers over 130. Application forms can also be requested by emailing him at snowyevans@aol.com using the subject heading 'ORS form' or by writing to: ORS form, c/o Whitegates, Chelmsford Road, Ongar Essex CM5 9LX.

Snowy Evans

Ed's note: A great deal of research and hard work has gone into this project. I have seen an proof copy and it will be an important addition to the record of Ongar's history. Please use the enclosed form to place your orders with Snowy.

"The Trees That Made Britain"

The new BBC series featuring Tony Kirkham and Jon Hammerstein from Kew Gardens is due to be screened in May. One of the episodes will hopefully contain footage of the selection process for the EFDC 50 Favourite Trees in which the two OMHS nominations were discussed. One to watch out for!

History of Copped Hall

Members were given an interesting overview of the history of Copped Hall by Trevor Roberts of the Copped Hall Trust at our February meeting.

The name comes from the word 'copt' meaning 'high' as the hall is built on the highest point in the area, over 350 feet above sea level. There have been four mansions on the site, the first built c.1250, a Tudor hall in 1560, the Georgian mansion in 1775 and the current building under restoration today. Henry VIII took over the medieval hall, in theory in return for saving Waltham Abbey from dissolution, but the king destroyed it anyway. Under Mary Tudor the hall became a centre of Catholicism, while in the reign of Queen Elizabeth I the story goes that the first performance of Shakespeare's "A Midsummer Night's Dream" took place in the Long Gallery of the Tudor house as a wedding present for the owner, Thomas Hennige. The Georgian mansion was built after the house had been acquired by the Conyers family, who were London lawyers.

The Wise family took over the house in the 19th century after making their money in railway construction. The family were based in Berkeley Square so had money to spare. They created the Italian garden and conservatory, and at one time the house was considered as a possible addition to the Royal estate. Ernest Wise was also responsible for adding a new wing on to the side of the house as servants' quarters.

In 1917 Copped Hall was destroyed by fire. It began in the south west corner of the house, but spread rapidly and took three days for the fire to be extinguished. The house was a ruin and left to the elements and vandals for many years.

In 1993 there was a threat to the site from a lavish plan for a luxury hotel and golf course. However in 1995 the Copped Hall Trust was formed and they bought the house and site, and this was the beginning of a change in fortune for the mansion. Restoration work is being carried out on the mansion by the Trust and a dedicated team of volunteers and certain parts of the house are now protected from the elements.

Outbuildings have been sold off on 999 year leases and the four-acre walled garden is being brought back into cultivation, and the produce is sold to visitors. Copped Hall has been used for a number of films and TV programmes including Simon Schama, Randall and Hopkirk Deceased, and a film entitled "Flanders" where a week's filming turned into one and a half minutes on the screen.

Access to Copped Hall is via the Upshire Road entrance. It is a public footpath, so it is possible to walk up to the house, while on Open Days and Sunday mornings the lodge gates are manned to allow cars through. Do go along for a visit if you haven't been before, or haven't been for a long while – you will be inspired...and there are lovely homemade cakes too!

Jenny Main

Family History Computer Workshop 18th July 10-1

We have booked the computer room at Great Stony for a 3 hour session for any OMHS members interested in doing their family history by computer. There will not be a tutor present, but we will be able to share our knowledge with each other and try things out. There will be information provided on useful websites used by members. Places will be limited so if you would like to come along please contact Jenny on 01277 362684

OMHS exhibits in Ongar Library

OMHS have taken control of the display cabinet in Ongar Library for the next six months, so we will have chance to display some of our artefacts that we have collected over the last 10 years.

Currently the display reflects the completion of the kneeler project with some of the original art work by Margaret Abbess being on view. Also there is an exhibition on Ongar Grammar School, now Central House, and some artefacts donated by descendants of some of the boys, including a boy's boater hat and copies of the school magazine.

Over the coming months we hope to change the displays and include information on Ongar Wheelers and Shelley Speedway, Ongar Comprehensive School and some of the coins collected locally by Frank Knight.

Jenny Main

Ongar Cemetery Memorial Inscriptions

For those of you new to OMHS you may not be aware that four years ago we started to record the inscriptions found on the gravestones in Ongar cemetery. Many of them are old and are starting to deteriorate due to the ravages of time and weather, so we are anxious to record as much information as we can. A small number of members have been carrying out the recording following strict national guidelines, so not to damage the stones any further in the process. Due to various factors, including your editor's lack of time to allocate the stones left to be done, the last year has seen the project slow down considerably.

The value of these memorial inscriptions is considerable to local and family historians in particular. So much information can be found on some of the stones about the person concerned and their relatives. The records we produce will be submitted to the national project, so that a national database can be built up. Yes, there are people all over the country recording these valuable records before they disappear.

Below is an article which previously appeared in our newsletter in May 2005, but it gives an indication on how much the memorial inscriptions can inspire and inform us about our ancestors.

Bob MacDonald has offered to take over the coordination role to kick-start the process again and is happy to run an induction session, or refresher for those who did some before. (See details following the article below.) It is a fascinating project so why not get involved?

Jenny Main

The Story Beyond the Inscription (Reprinted from May 2005)

Kerbstone with corners. Cross on triple plinth.

Top plinth west facing: In loving memory/of

Middle plinth west facing: HARRY CECIL MATTHEWS. RAF/ Killed Nov 12th 1918/ Aged 18 years.

Bottom plinth west facing: Thine eyes shall see the King in his beauty / Isaiah Chap 33. Verse 17.

Top plinth south facing: Also ALICE / Wife of

Middle plinth south facing: WILLIAM MATTHEWS/Died Nov 28th 1942/ Aged 83 years.

Kerbstone facing west: Also of WILLIAM MATTHEWS. Father of the above, died Feb 16th 1925. Aged 62 years.

(Monumental Inscription. Grave No 479/489 Ongar Cemetery)

Harry Cecil Matthews was born in Ongar in 1900. The first year of the 20thC and the year in which Orville and Wilbur Wright began experimenting with glider flight in America. Harry Cecil was the second son of William and Alice Matthews who lived in High Street, Ongar. William Matthews was a blacksmith with premises in the High Street and a partner in the coach building firm of Matthews and Barker located at Ongar Bridge.

At the time of the 1901 census Harry Cecil had one brother, Herbert (8), and three sisters Amy (11), Ethel (7) and Lilian (5). Photograph No.39. in "Ongar in Old Picture Postcards" by Robert. A. Wingham, taken in 1912 by F .J. Mott shows the 1st June Church Parade passing the Bell Inn. Close inspection of the extreme left edge of this photograph reveals a cropped sign with the letters HEWS showing. The last part of the name Matthews? Further evidence of the location of William Matthews premises can be found in photograph No.28 which shows the archway entrance to the former Crown Hotel. It has always been believed by older Ongarians that the blacksmiths' premises was under the arch where the betting shop and hairdressers are now situated. As the photographs' supporting text tells us 'The Crown does not survive today and the archway pictured has since been blocked in'. I would also suggest that further evidence of the location is the angled doorway adjacent to the arch (now Artful Angel).

Photograph No.10. in the same publication shows 'Ongars first aeroplane visitor' dated 6th September 1912 when one Lt Spencer Grey 'dropped in one of Mr Pratt's fields went up again over two or three fields and dropped again by the Red Cow' Could one of the eager youngsters photographed peering at this early flying machine be Harry Cecil ? He would have been 12 years of age in 1912, the same year in which the Central Flying School at Upavon in Wiltshire was opened to cater for the training requirements of the Royal Naval Air Service and the Royal Flying Corps. Upavon, a little known village to the north of Salisbury Plain, described at the time in *The Aeroplane* 'located on the top of a mountain where it is open to every wind that blows' was to have a dramatic and tragic impact on the Matthews family. On the night of the 4th August 1914 the Imperial German Army attacked France and Belgium. The next four years were to unleash horrors of warfare unparalleled in human history and give birth to advances in military technology undreamt of but a few years earlier.

By the 1st April 1918 when the RNAS and RFC merged to form the Royal Air Force, the Sopwith Camel - its name derived from the hump between the

guns - had become one of the major turning points for the British in the air war. 'Its performance and handling in no way resembled its plodding and unpleasant animal namesake. With a top speed of 118mph, and a climb rate of 10,000 feet in 10 minutes and an astonishing right turn, it proved to be one of the most deadly fighter aircraft of its time. The right turn was due to the colossal torque of its 130hp Clerget rotary engine, which enabled the Camel to carry out a 270 degree turn faster than any other aircraft could do a 90 degree turn. It took a very experienced pilot to carry out this manoeuvre with safety'(1).

It is not known exactly when Harry Cecil Matthews became Flight Cadet No. TR10/90398 Matthews of the Training Reserve of the newly formed Royal Air Force, but it must have been some time after 1 April 1918. What is known is that a matter of months after joining Harry Cecil Matthews was killed. On the 12th November 1918, according to the Casualty Card (2) prepared at the time, F/Cdt Harry Cecil Matthews whilst flying Sopwith Camel No.1416 lost speed when turning into land at Upavon and spun into the ground

The Essex Chronicle, 25 November 1918 reports (3),

“The funeral of the late Sec. Lt. Cecil. H. Matthews [sic], who was killed in an aeroplane accident took place on Sunday afternoon. The first part of the service was held in the Parish Church and was conducted by the Rev. E.E. Barber. On leaving the church the cortege was headed by a firing party of the 2nd Essex Volunteers under Sec.Lt. F. H. Smith: then followed the clergy and choir. Behind the coffin, which was borne on a bier covered with the Union Jack the chief mourners were: Mr and Mrs W Matthews, father and mother; the Misses Amy, Ethel, Lilian and Rose Matthews, sisters; Miss Austin the deceased's fiancée and her father and mother. Then followed the Ongar detachment of the 2nd Essex Volunteers under Sergt Foster and the Church Lads' Brigade and a strong detachment of the Ongar, Shelley and High Ongar Special Constables under Insp Hammond. There were fully 500 present at the Cemetery. The floral tributes included one from the deceased's commanding and brother officers of the RAF School Upavon and another from the town and tradesmen of Ongar. Three volleys were fired over the grave and the "last Post" was sounded by Sergt Miles from the guard at the German prisoners' camp.”

Research into the short life of Harry Cecil Matthews was undertaken following the recording of the inscription as part of the Ongar Millennium History Society's monumental inscription project and the realisation that he had died the day after the First World War ended.

Bob MacDonald

- (1) The First Air War. A Pictorial History 1914 -1919. Terry C Treadwell & Alan C Wood.
- (2) RAF Museum. Hendon. Dept of Research and Information Services (DORIS)
- (3) Newspaper Archive. Central Library. Chelmsford

Why not get involved?

In order to try and complete the Memorial Inscriptions project during the coming summer months, Bob MacDonald has offered to arrange a short induction/refresher session on site at Ongar Cemetery for anyone interested and able to offer just a few hours recording each week. Please contact Bob on 01277 363722 and if there is sufficient interest a suitable date can be arranged.

The Boodle Tomb

Further to the piece in the last newsletter, The Rev'd Susan Cooper writes:

We have read the last plaque on the tomb - the east end, which is broken but we managed to find all the pieces and put them together.

In memory of
MRS SARAH
BOODLE, Late
Wife of MR BOODLE
SNR. of this Town
who Departed
this Life April
the 1, 1789
Aged 77

Together with the Town Council we are looking at having the tomb renovated and are currently waiting for quotes for the work. We will keep you informed.

And thank you again for your help in recording this significant memorial.

Regards

Susan Cooper

Rector, Chipping Ongar St Martin's with Shelley St Peter's

Dates for your diary

- May 21st 2-4pm Ongar Wheelers/Shelley Speedway meeting**
at King's Trust Centre, High Street, Ongar
We are hoping anyone with any information about these groups will come along to share memories.
- May tba Ongar Cemetery induction/refreshers session**
at Ongar Cemetery. If interested please contact Bob MacDonald on 01277 363722.
- May 26th 10-4 OMHS history display at St Martin's Flower Festival**
in the Church Rooms, Castle Street. (Monday only)
The Flower Festival is on Sat/Sun/Monday in the Church - take a chance to look at our kneelers!
- June 29th 11am Visit to Crossing Temple Barns**
Names to Barbara please 01277 363722
- July 18th 10-1 Family History Computer Workshop at Great Stony**
Come and share both your knowledge and problems doing your family history. We have booked the computer room so there are limited places. Names to Jenny please 01277 362684.
- Sept 24th 8pm OMHS AGM at Ongar Library.** Advance notice!

Contributions for next newsletter please!

The next newsletter will be produced in August 2008, so any articles to Jenny by 25th July please. Thank you!