

Ongar Millennium History Society Newsletter



May 2012

We have a busy period coming up in the next few weeks due to our involvement with the Ongar Diamond Jubilee event next month at Love Lane (see call for help below!). Prior to that we are joining forces with Ongar URC for their Open Church and Gift Day on 19/20th May. We will have some displays on show as our contribution to the event.



Unfortunately we have lost two committee members recently: Elisabeth Barrett who is moving down to Wiltshire very soon, and Keith Snow, who has stepped down from the committee due to work load and other commitments. However we are delighted that he is continuing with the memorial inscriptions project. Thank you to both for their valuable input over their time on the committee.

Jenny Main, Editor

 **Ongar's Diamond Jubilee Event** 
Help needed – 4th June
Setting up, running the stall
Children's activities
Ongar's Houses and Blue Plaques
A rota will be in operation throughout the day
Please let John (362461) or Wendy (363655) know
if you can help us for an hour or two.

Committee Members 2011-2012

Chairman: Felicitie Barnes
Vice Chair/Newsletter: Jenny Main
Treasurer: John Winslow
Speaker Sec.: Lorna Vaux
Bookings Sec Wendy Thomas
Minute Sec: Gemma O'Donnell
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NB Committee phone numbers can be found on the membership cards

Projects update

1) Blue Plaques

From the cry for help on the front page, you will be aware that we are going to put up a display of our Blue Plaque properties now that we have a number of them: Budworh Hall, the grammar school (Central House), Jane Taylor's house in Castle Street (of "Twinkle, twinkle" fame), Great Stony, Ongar and more recently at Ongar Station commemorating Father Byles. Hopefully, this will be followed shortly by a further plaque on the Presbytery.

John Winslow

2) Archive

We are continuing to build up our archive of materials which we have been given by members and non-members alike. They are currently stored upstairs at the URC. Please contact John Winslow if you have anything to add to our archive. Thanks.

John Winslow

3) Website

Up to date currently, but the wrong date is given for James Bettley's talk at St Martin's church. It is on Friday 5th October at 7.30pm, not 12th October.

Jenny Main

4) Memorial inscriptions

Keith and David have been working on the inscriptions inside the United Reformed Church, together with the gravestones at the front of the church. They have begun working on the memorials inside St Helen's church. Can anyone help with the name in the large circular window where the surname seems to be "Jumm", but is difficult to be sure due to the script?

Keith Snow

5) House History

Recently, after an interesting and informative discussion with Michael Leach which was very well received by group members, we agreed to some slight amendments to our House History project.

We have decided to add further details of houses already investigated, such as what the buildings were used for and who the inhabitants were. We will also extend the study to include more properties in Ongar and Shelley starting with the Railway cottages in Basons Way. We are all feeling very enthusiastic about this new direction that the project is taking.

Gemma O'Donnell

Ongar United Reformed Church and OMHS

present

Open Church and Gift Day

Sat 19th May 10-5pm

Sun 20th May 12-5pm

OMHS will have some display materials at this event

Light refreshments available

Well done, John

The task has taken about fourteen months, but now John Root is just finishing his weekly photographic record of the building of the new medical centre in Fyfield Road.

It all started when OMHS was granted permission to remove all the internal plaques in the Ongar War Memorial Hospital which covered several years of equipment donated with voluntary funding from several sources. It continued from the demolition of the derelict building, to the first hole in the ground, step by step construction of the new building and will close when the centre is opened, expected in May 2012.

The Primary Care Trust will use a montage of his pictures in their relevant publicity. The work has been financed by OMHS and a full record of his work will be lodged with us in due course. All members will then be able to refresh their memories of the original hospital and subsequent building site in the not too distant future.

Onwards and upwards

John's new overlapping task is making a similar record of the McCarthy & Stone site in the High Street.

John Winslow

Marion Slade Lecture 2012

The Buxtons – an old Essex family by Georgina Green

High Ongar Village Hall was again the venue for this year's Marion Slade Lecture. Our speaker on the Buxton family was Georgina Green, who spoke without notes and amazed us with her wealth of knowledge of the Buxtons of Leytonstone. Unfortunately her talk did not reach as far as the Buxtons of Ongar, but she was able to refer to them from time to time.

It was a complicated topic to follow due to the custom of family names, particularly the names Thomas Fowell Buxton and Edward Fowell Buxton, appearing in most generations, being passed down to the first born child. Luckily Georgina had a number of family trees to help us follow the main characters of the family.

There were links to some well known historical figures including Elizabeth Fry, plus Thomas Fowell Buxton was made a Baronet for his services to the abolition of slavery, having worked with William Wilberforce, who handed over the slavery issue to him. Thomas was also concerned about his workforce and they were all taught to read and write.

After questions from the floor, Georgina was thanked for her interesting and detailed talk, the social part of the evening began with a wine and cheese buffet.

Jenny Main

CORRECTION

Please note that the date of the Joint meeting with the Friends of St Martin's and St Peter's in October is wrong on both the OMHS membership card and OMHS website.

The correct date is Friday 5th October, NOT 12th October, when James Bettley will talk about "The Interesting Story of the South Aisle in St Martin's Church", starting at 7.30pm.

Emmeline Pankhurst at St. Martin's Church, Chipping Ongar

While we were recording the memorials in St. Martin's church on behalf of the Ongar Millennium History Society, we were made aware of the elegant oak choir stalls, one of which is inscribed "E.P.1931". This represents the initials of Emmeline Pankhurst, the famous leader of the suffragette movement and the year in which the choir stalls were donated to St. Martin's. It begged the question – what connection did Mrs Pankhurst have with St. Martin's Church, Ongar?

Emmeline Goulden was born in Moss Side, Manchester on 15 July 1858, the daughter of the owner of a cotton printing company, Robert Goulden and his wife, Sophia, neé Crane. However she claimed to have been born on 14 July – Bastille Day. It is possible that she chose this day for her birthday, as it marked the start of the French Revolution, with its link to equality. Emmeline grew up in a family that was socially and politically active. Her father campaigned against slavery and her mother was an ardent feminist, taking Emmeline to women's suffrage meetings.

At the age of 21, Emmeline met Dr Richard Pankhurst, a Manchester-based lawyer who was 24 years her elder. Richard Pankhurst was born in Stoke-on-Trent in 1834, attended London University, and was called to the Bar in 1867. He became involved in a variety of radical causes and was a supporter of women's suffrage. Richard and Emmeline [married at Eccles Parish Church](#) – St Luke's in Weaste - on 18 December 1879. Richard died in 1898, leaving a young widow.

"Mrs Pankhurst" was one of the most influential women in British social politics. In 1903 she formed the Women's Social and Political Union (WSPU) with her daughters Christabel and Sylvia. Members of the Union supported women's suffrage – the right to vote, and were known as "suffragettes". They adopted the motto: *Deeds not words*. In 1928 her aim was achieved when the Representation of the People (Equal Franchise) Act became law, granting women equal voting rights with men.

Emmeline Pankhurst died on Thursday 14 June 1928 at the age of 69 and was interred in [Brompton Cemetery](#) in London. Shortly after the funeral, one of Emmeline Pankhurst's associates from her Women's Social and Political Union days, Katherine (Kitty) Marshall, together with Rosamund Massy and Lady Rhondda, set up a Memorial Fund and began raising funds to erect a headstone for her grave, to purchase a 1927 portrait of Emmeline by Georgina Brackenbury for presentation to the National Portrait Gallery and to erect a statue in her memory. It was the presence of Kitty Marshall on the fund raising committee that provided the link with Ongar. At some time Kitty and her husband Alfred lived in Ongar and Emmeline often stayed with them. It cannot be confirmed, but it is not unreasonable to assume, that Emmeline occasionally attended services at St. Martin's.

The statue of Mrs Pankhurst was unveiled on 6th March 1930, two years after her death, in [Victoria Tower Gardens](#), adjacent to the House of Commons. Past suffragettes and many national dignitaries gathered as former Prime Minister [Stanley Baldwin](#) presented the memorial to the public.

The Pankhurst memorial fund was clearly successful as there was just over £200 remaining and with it Kitty Marshall, inspired by the ones she had admired in Liverpool Cathedral,

arranged for choir stalls to be installed in St. Martin's Church in Ongar. They were designed by Francis Richards and constructed by Mr. A. Robinson of 4 Bennett's Yard, Marsham Street, Westminster.

So we can fairly claim that the St. Martin's choir stalls give Ongar a special and valuable link with one of the most influential events in British constitutional history.

Keith Snow & David Thompson



The oak chancel choir stalls (left) and a close-up of the inscription showing Emmeline's initials and the date they were donated to the Church.



The statue of Mrs Pankhurst in Victoria Tower Gardens (left) and the portrait of Emmeline Pankhurst by Georgina Brackenbury presented to the National Portrait Gallery (right)

Editor's apologies - Due to lack of space, the David Livingstone article has been held over to the next newsletter. There is so much information it would be a shame not to do it justice.

OMHS Oral History Group

Would you be interested in an afternoon meeting from time to time to reminisce about your memories of Ongar, your childhood and school days?

We would be happy to set up a meeting for this to take place if there is enough interest.

Please contact John Winslow if you like the idea.

Mary Steward Gilbert - a sad skeleton emerges from the cupboard

The mortal remains of Mary Steward Gilbert¹ lie beneath a vast slab in the Ongar General Cemetery. When she died on 20 March 1925, a few months short of her ninetieth birthday, she had been living in Marden Ash, at the house now and in earlier centuries called Dyers, for nearly 45 years. She was the widow of the portrait painter and Deacon and benefactor of the Congregational Church in Ongar (as it then was), Josiah Gilbert (1814-1892)², who is remembered with a plaque on the Livingstone Cottages, acquired by the Church's Trustees thanks largely to a legacy from him.

Mary Gilbert was well remembered by the late Marie Korf, organist of the United Reformed Church for an astonishing 79 years, as a formidable lady despite her diminutive stature, "grey-haired and slung-shouldered", but kind-hearted too; for instance, when Marie did well at school, Mrs Gilbert presented her with a silver thimble, which remained a treasured possession for the rest of Marie's long life. It was Mary Gilbert who caused Marie to be widely known as a child, and for some years thereafter, not by her baptismal names of Nellie or Marie, but as Gretchen. The story goes that Marie's mother was pushing her out one day in her pram when they met Mary Gilbert, who stopped and enquired the child's name. When Mrs Korf replied "Nellie" - which had originally been preferred to Marie - Mary Gilbert retorted that that was no name for a child of German origin, who should be taught to be proud of her German roots. Such was her influence that Nellie became Gretchen from then on! And, as shown above, Mary Gilbert continued to show an interest in the child's progress as she grew up. Marie Korf also told me that Mary Gilbert's coachman, a Mr Smith, was always known to locals as Gilbert Smith.

Mary was born in Manchester on 25 August 1835, the only daughter of the Congregational Minister, the Revd George Steward (1803-1866) and his wife Mary. It seems highly probable that she first met Josiah through her mother, who had moved to Shelley soon after she was widowed and was received into the Ongar congregation on 31 December 1869 on the recommendation of the Revd K.J. Robjohns, her late husband's successor as

¹ Although Steward was her maiden name rather than a baptismal one, the inscription on the stone includes it, and there is evidence in the census return for 1871, which seems to read "Mary S. Angas", that she used it as a middle name for most of her married life. It does not appear, however, on the certificate of either of her marriages.

² Josiah Gilbert was a grandson of the Revd Isaac Taylor and spent most of his childhood from the age of five living with his grandparents in Ongar, for reasons that remain unclear. According to family notes based on information from his niece, Annie Laurie Gilbert [*sic*] Gilbert, he attended a private school in Ongar, conceivably that in the High Street run at the time of the 1841 and 1851 censuses by Richard Stokes (1788-1875).

Minister of the West Clayton Street Chapel in Newcastle-upon-Tyne³. However, just as Josiah was a widower when he and Mary married in Hastings on 9 August 1880⁴ (his first wife Susan having died in 1871), this was not Mary's first marriage either. On 18 May 1859, she had married William Henry Angas, a son of the wealthy and powerful former shipping magnate and banker, entrepreneur, co-founding-father of South Australia and militant Baptist, George Fife Angas (1789-1879)⁵. William Angas died, of Bright's Disease leading to a "cerebral effusion", on 29 July 1879 at the Manse, Tenby, the informant being the Revd John Lewis, a Congregational Minister.

Until very recently, this was virtually all that was known about the twenty-year marriage of William and Mary Angas, the exceptions being that they were not together on the census days of either 1861 or 1871: in 1861, Mary was staying with her brother, George Steward, in Edinburgh, while William was a visitor in the household in Stoke Damerel, Devon, of a 60-year-old Royal Navy paymaster's widow named E.A.Martin; in 1871, there is no trace of William, but Mary was staying in a hydropathic establishment in Matlock, Derbyshire.

A few weeks before Christmas last year, Steve Painter, a distant cousin of mine in Australia⁶, was contacted by another Australian, Kingsley Ireland, who said he had information about the Angases. Steve put Kingsley in touch with me, and I thus learned the explanation for the elusiveness of information about William Henry Angas. In June 1860, a mere thirteen months after the marriage, Mary petitioned for divorce, citing repeated acts of sodomy by her husband, apparently with minors, between July 1859 and January 1860, both on their voyage out to Australia and after arrival in Adelaide. It is not entirely clear what the outcome was, but it seems probable that the petition was unsuccessful and not at all unlikely that this was partly because it was in those days very hard for a wife to prevail at law over her husband, so soon after the Divorce Act of 1857 and while prejudice in favour of husbands remained very strong, and partly because George Fife Angas's wealth and influence was brought to bear. Indeed, I should not be at all surprised if the old horror had been aware of his son's proclivities all along and had encouraged the marriage in the hope of effecting a "cure", but with no regard at all for the interests of the unsuspecting bride. In any case, the circumstantial evidence suggests that William and Mary lived apart for the remaining nineteen years of his life; there is apparently a record of his being in Australia at some point during this time.

Whether Josiah was aware of this scandal, we shall never know, but his second marriage, though again childless, seems to have been as happy as the first, and one has to hope that her second marriage and her new home in Marden Ash enabled Mary to put behind her the hurt and humiliation of the previous twenty years.

Robin Taylor Gilbert

³ Minute books of the Ongar Congregational Church and census returns for Shelley.

⁴ According to Marie Korf, the honeymoon was taken in the Holy Land.

⁵ See further *ODNB*. George Fife Angas was an able and energetic man, but, by all accounts, a pretty unpleasant one too, a bigoted, self-righteous and domineering bully. For instance, he disinherited one of his sons, the talented artist, George French Angas, for marrying a Catholic and he was responsible for a newspaper article accusing the (subsequently beatified) Mother MacKillop and the Sisters of St Joseph of being "thieves, blasphemers, prostitutes & murderesses", for which he never apologized despite its being declared a criminal libel.

⁶ He has a splendid website dedicated to the Taylors of Ongar - <http://freepages.genealogy.rootsweb.ancestry.com/~taylorsofongar/>

Consultation on Ongar's Conservation Area

OMHS were asked to put their views into a very last minute survey on our conservation area. Luckily Michael Leach willing to put forward our ideas on behalf of OMHS

- a) Conservation Area should be extended to include the Old Rectory, as this is an important entry point visually at the northern entrance to the historic town.
- b) buildings at risk identified were 123 High Street, not important in its own right, but very much so from the visual appearance of that part of the High Street and the desperately poor standard of work on the Market House which will leave it vulnerable to future decay from the wrong use of materials (cement mortar and softwood moulding at the bottom of the jetty)
- c) very poor condition of cobbled road surfaces and pavement (and the botched contractors' patches); same applies to street furniture and badly placed signage.
- d) buildings suggested for statutory listing were 1,3 and 5 Castle Street, early C20 in the Arts and Crafts style and largely in original condition
- e) other matters not directly covered by the questionnaire but relevant to the Conservation Area were: the need to plant trees between the police station and Budworth Hall as the existing (particularly the beech) are in poor shape, and it is important to ensure replacement trees for the future in this visually important site; the new access road to the Kings Head development will need to be landscaped when complete (though this may already be part of the planning consent); some thought needs to be given to the safety of pedestrians in Basons Lane when the Kings Head development is complete - at present it is not safe for cars and pedestrians to mix in the lower part of the lane, particularly as most walkers think it is a pedestrian only route; path from 90 High Street through to Livingstone Close etc is in poor condition, looks scruffy and neglected.

Michael Leach

Dates for your diary

Sat 19/Sun 20 May

Open Church and Gift Day

at Ongar United Reformed Church
Sat 10-5pm, Sun 12-5pm

Mon 4th June

Ongar's Jubilee event

Love Lane – Noon till 8pm
OMHS running children's activities and small exhibition .
Please come and see us and help for half an hour
if you can!

**Wed 19th Sept
7.45 for 8pm**

OMHS AGM + talk and short film on Father Byles
Ongar Library

Contributions for next newsletter please!

The next newsletter will be produced in August 2012, so any articles to Jenny please by 29th July. Thank you!