

Ongar Millennium History Society Newsletter

May 2016

Welcome to the May newsletter. This newsletter is your chance to make a contribution. We actively encourage members to follow up their own interests and write up their own articles which can be on any relevant topics. Please submit any ideas to the editor.

Our Marion Slade Lecture took a different form this year as it was a tasting evening of local beers from Moreton Brewery. We were introduced to the history of a number of ales and stouts, whilst audience participation was actively encouraged. We enjoyed the samples which were well received by the audience. Luckily the buffet was on hand to keep everyone upright!

We have noted in the Essex Record Office Newsletter an article that may be of interest. If you are interested in undertaking your own oral history project, Essex Record Office can offer training to make sure you end up with tip-top recordings. Contact Essex Record Office on ero.enquiry@essex.gov.uk The Society already has a substantial recordings archive, but this may be useful for future recordings or people doing their own research.

Jenny Main

Up and Coming Events

25th May 10.30 am visit to Harlow Museum – Meet at museum car park, entrance free but donation recommended, followed by Gibberd Garden in the afternoon entrance £4.00, both have cafes and the museum has a garden; car sharing suggested. Let us know if you have a spare seat or need a seat email: info@omhs.org.uk

6th July – Blackmore, St Laurence Church, Blackmore Antiques Centre and Tea Rooms. Further details to be announced.

9th/10th July - History Exhibition at the United Reformed Church

For those interested, the Marconi Exhibition at the Science and Technology Centre, Hall Street, Chelmsford every Sat & Sun 11.00am - 3.00pm free entry, ends on 29th May

Committee members

Chair	Vacancy	Vice Chair + Newsletter	Jenny Main
Treasurer	Kathleen Jenkins	Venues Sec.	Wendy Thomas
Secretary	Sandra Dear	Membership+Speaker Sec.	Lorna Vaux
Archive	Ron Huish		

Plague in Ongar in 1574?

On 28 July 1574, "Thomas, a Strang^r, Surgeõ of Londo" was buried in Chipping Ongar churchyard. Over the next few months (and beginning within three weeks of Thomas's death) another nine parishioners were buried, an unusually high number compared with previous and subsequent years. All these deaths are bracketed together in the parish register with the note "Died of the Plague".

These entries suggest that Thomas's arrival in the town started a fatal epidemic. Perhaps he was trying to escape plague in London and had brought the contagion with him. However, 1574 is not recognized as one of London plague years, and the city did not experience any significant peaks in mortality between the major epidemics of 1563 and 1593. So did Thomas bring plague or some other disease to Ongar, and was he responsible for the subsequent significant peak in the town's deaths?

Of the nine Ongar residents who died after Thomas's burial, three bore the same surname (Adams) so presumably they were either related or from the same household. This is certainly suggestive of epidemic disease.

It is quite possible that the Ongar deaths were caused by plague, as the contagion often rumbled on at a low level between major outbreaks in London. Ongar residents may have missed an earlier outbreak, resulting in a low level of natural immunity in the town's population, therefore leaving them vulnerable to infection. However, this seems unlikely as there must have been a significant amount of trade and travel between the two communities.

If not plague, then what could have Thomas brought with him? Another strong possibility is typhus which was often (in later periods) called jail fever. This was spread readily by the human louse in crowded situations where hygiene was poor. Symptoms of typhus were surprisingly similar to plague, in particular the generalized haemorrhagic rash and the enlarged lymph glands (or 'buboes') and mortality rates were high. It may be significant that Thomas was described as a "stranger", suggesting that he did not have any local relatives. If so, he may have been taken ill while in transit through the town, and may have put up at a busy (and none too clean!) Ongar inn where he would have had ample opportunity to infect others. We shall never know, but must remain thankful that this is no longer a hazard of staying the modern equivalent.

Michael Leach

Source: Cummins, N et al., 2016 *Living standards & plague in London*, online library vol. 69 no. 1

A murder and an abandoned baby

Though usually providing only the bare details, the Chipping Ongar parish register occasionally reveals more. An entry for 9 April 1609 records the burial of Henry, son of Thomas Prentise, adding the startling information that he was "murthered". No further details were added and searches at Essex Record Office have not revealed anything more about this incident. There are a few contemporaries with the surname Prentice/Prentis/Prentice in the parish register but Henry was not baptized in Ongar, so possibly his father Thomas had moved to the town from elsewhere. He may have been the Thomas Prentise "an ancient inhabitant" who was buried on 3 December 1634.

On 26 September 1630 there is a more explicit entry under baptisms: "Matthew, an infant left in ye shambles on Ongar faire day, at night." The outlook for an abandoned baby would not have been good and it is not surprising to find that the same Matthew was buried less than three weeks later on 10 October. The Ongar fair was not the weekly market but the annual hiring fair for farm workers. This would have brought in large numbers of people from anywhere in the surrounding countryside, making the mother of that child difficult or impossible to trace. Had she been local, she would almost certainly have been identified and held to account by the parish officers onto whom the cost of

looking after the baby would have fallen. In spite of the unwanted cost, baptism of an abandoned baby would have been seen as an important parish responsibility, as those dying unbaptised were thought to be destined for limbo.

The reference to "ye shambles" is interesting and is, as far as I know, the only reference to one in the town. The modern meaning is misleading; in the C17 it was the notoriously unsavory part of the market dedicated to the butchery trade, certainly not a healthy spot in which to abandon a baby.

Even under ideal circumstances when a wet nurse could be found, the lot of an abandoned or orphaned baby was not good. On 11 July 1639 Frances Peacock, "a nurse child", was buried. No age is recorded but the description indicates that she was being breast fed. Her baptism is not to be found in the parish register so she may have been brought in from elsewhere. Certainly by the C18 London parishes were sending orphaned babies out to the country to be wet nursed. Early in the following year "a nurslinge" was buried at Ongar, so wet nursing may have been a minor local industry.

Michael Leach

Stories in Brass



*'here lyeth the body of Thomas Grevile son of
Gyles Grevile of London merchant borne
In the conte of Gloc Gentilman whiche
Thoms decessed in his tendyr age the viii
Day of marche the yere of our lord God
1492 on whose soule lord have mercy'*

Thomas's Tale

Beneath the altar table in St. Margaret's church, Stanford Rivers, attached to a slab is a brass to Thomas Greville who died in 1492. Thomas had died young and was buried in the church. It seems likely that he was a 'chrysom child', a baby who died within a month of his christening day. Even if this was not the case he was still young enough to be wrapped in swaddling bands as shown on the portrait on his brass when his life came to its close.

His memorial is a reminder of how vulnerable babies were then and how even if they came from an important family, as Thomas's brass complete with a coat of arms indicates that he did, they were not guaranteed a safe journey through childhood.

We do not know his mother's name but his father Gyles was from Gloucestershire and his family is mentioned in The Visitations of Gloucester. At the time of his little son's death he was a merchant in London.

It is likely that he and his wife had come to live in the countryside to bring up their family away from the noise, dirt and disease of the city but death of course is everywhere.

There is no record of the family living in Stanford Rivers after 1492. They may have returned to London or to another part of Essex or even back to Gloucestershire. Wherever they went they would have taken their sadness with them but the future may have held happiness too. This is something the brass cannot tell us.



Pray for the soules of Robert borrow and his wyf whiche Robert decessed the vii day of August the yer of our lord Mcccc and iii on whose soulys lord have mercy. Amen

A Knight's Adventures

In the same church, close to Thomas's memorial and partly hidden by the altar table is a brass commemorating the lives of Robert Borrowe and his wife Alys. Close in death to Thomas but possibly close in life too as both families would have worshipped at St Margaret's.

The Borrowes were also parents but the brasses of their children are lost. Just two indentations under the parents brass, one for their daughters and one for their sons, show where they would have been displayed. Parish registers only started in about 1538 so we have no details of their family.

Little is known about Robert but judging by the date of the brass and the arms depicted on it he was probably Robert Burgh either the brother or son of Thomas the first Lord de Burgh, a member of the king's household. Thomas de Burgh built Gainsborough old Hall in Lincolnshire which is one of England's best preserved medieval manors. The brass does not tell us where Robert lived in Stanford Rivers and why he and Alys came to live there but it may have been to be close to London while enjoying country life.

Alys, wears a Tudor pedimental headdress and a long gown and a warm cloak.

Robert is shown wearing armour characteristic of a knight of the Yorkist period which with its large metal plates and elbow protectors would have been very heavy and uncomfortable to wear. He is not wearing a helmet which is quite usual for this period. We can see that he had long hair.

At Robert's feet, looking up at him, is a dog with a bushy tail. He probably asked that his favourite hound be shown on the brass. Perhaps he was a good hunting dog and a faithful friend to his master.

Robert's armour and the sword and dagger he carries indicate he may have fought for Edward IV or Richard III and by the time of his death he would have seen many changes including a new dynasty, the Tudors, linked to the Yorks by the first Tudor King Henry's marriage to Elizabeth of York. Robert died in 1503 the same year as Henry.

So two people who lived very different lives are among those who are commemorated in St. Margaret's church. Stanford Rivers is close to Ongar and I would recommend a visit to see all the brasses there.

Gemma O'Donnell

A glimpse of Chipping Ongar trades between 1600 and 1660

Though usually silent on the matter, the Chipping Ongar parish registers occasionally reveal the occupations of the fathers of those baptized, or those who were buried, perhaps to differentiate them from other parishioners with the same name. Not all of the rectors recorded occupations, so this source is unlikely to give a reliable picture of Ongar's trades. The list can be supplemented by occupations extracted from the wills of 22 local residents, though this is a biased sample because the poorer section of the community would have been much less likely to leave wills. A third source of occupations is found in the Quarter Session records, a somewhat different cross section of the community; it is the only place, for example, where the occupation "labourer" is found (accounting for seven individuals). Combining all three sources with their differing biases may provide a roughly representative picture of the occupations of Ongar's population during this period, though doubtless some groups remain under or over-represented. The data also throws up some interesting questions.

It is surprising that, in such a small parish (about 480 acres), farming dominates the list of occupations, with the names of 14 yeomen (who would have owned their own land) and 18 husbandmen (who would have held their land by copyhold from the lord of the manor) over this 60 year period. Farmers are probably more likely than other occupations to be retrieved from the records as they would have been concerned with inheritance of their lands, and therefore more inclined to leave wills. Even if their tenures were quite short, the large number of farmers indicates that their individual acreages must have been quite small, though their landholdings could have spread into adjoining parishes. Judging from later estate maps, piecemeal ownership of scattered fields would not have been unusual at this time.

The trades found are largely the ones that you would expect, topped by ten glovers and eight shoemakers. The former underlines the social importance of wearing gloves. Three linen drapers, two mercers, a hatter and five tailors provided the other necessary apparel. Apart from the four butchers and one baker, food suppliers are absent though it is possible that one shopkeeper and one chandler may have met this need. This paucity may be due to the random way in which occupations were recorded, but it is also likely that food was bought directly from the supplier, or through the weekly market. We are now so familiar with the food supermarket that it is difficult to conceive any other way of shopping, but here we may have a dim glimpse into a very different world. The popularity of wine grew rapidly in the early decades of the seventeenth century and this is reflected by three wine merchants who served the town. The three coopers may have supplied a wider market as well as the local alehouses which would have required casks brewing their own beer. Curiously only one inn holder is recorded – this must be an under-representation in a market town. Inns at that time provided the place for all kinds of commercial, legal and judicial business to be transacted, as well as supplying meals, accommodation and horses for travellers. An example is the parochial inquisition of 1650 – the Crown in Chipping Ongar was one of the six centres in Essex chosen as the venue for this enquiry.

As one might expect, artisans essential for the community are represented – three blacksmiths, a whitetayer (or lead worker), two wheelwrights, two carpenters, three joiners and a locksmith.. Then there are some more unexpected trades – a scrivener, whose writing skills would have been needed by a partly illiterate population), a whale bone body maker (providing corsets for the well-off), and a falconer. The last was almost certainly a visitor as his surname does not appear elsewhere in the parish records. The entry described him as "lying and dying at Thomas Champnis house". Champnis, who can be identified as a husbandman, was most unlikely to have been the employer of a falconer. There is a little evidence of local industry, with a cutler, a currier (or leatherworker) and a tanner. The last was a very insalubrious industry, involving the prolonged soaking of animal hides in unpleasant mixtures of urine and animal dung – hopefully well to the downwind side of the town! There is a hint of cloth making – an enormously important industry in other areas of Essex – with

one weaver and a wool comber – and also one cutler which shows that this trade (which thrived in Thaxted) was also carried on in the town. It is surprising to find a musician, though he was doubtless an instrumentalist rather than a composer. Two apothecaries and three barber surgeons would have provided for the town's health care.

The building trades appear to be absent but, as all but the wealthiest Essex houses at this period were timber framed, the joiner would have been responsible for construction and repairs. The named bricklayer would have put up chimney stacks, paved floors and built dwarf walls for supporting the main timber framework, lined wells and possibly tiled roofs.

Of particular interest is the burial in 1639 of two children (one stillborn) of Thomas Footman who is described in the register as a pedlar. His surname occurs nowhere else in the parish records, so we must assume that he was passing through with his wife and his pack of merchandise when she went into labour with twins. It was not unusual for wives to accompany their itinerant husbands, probably assisting them with the selling of cheap cloth, trinkets and haberdashery items. Pedlars were welcomed by country housewives, as they were a source of news and gossip, as well as providing the opportunity to trinkets, fashion items and broadsheets. However, they were regarded with deep suspicion by the authorities, as they were free to move round the countryside without a fixed abode. Not only were they liable to be arrested and punished as homeless vagrants, but local traders resented the competition and saw their livelihoods being undercut. Various attempts by Parliament to regulate and license pedlars had had little effect.

There was also a 'petty chapman' (a term usually meaning a pedlar), identified as Thomas Gunn of Chipping Ongar who, in 1638, entered recognisances to appear as a witness at the Quarter Sessions in the trial of Mary Young of Stebbing. She was accused of stealing some 'bone lace', a standard item of pedlar's stock and it seems likely that Gunn himself had been the victim of this theft while trading in Stebbing. No record of the outcome of this case has survived, and no members of the Gunn family appear in the Ongar parish records, so his connection with the town must have been transient. This was typical of the life of the poorer sort of itinerant pedlar, though a few did succeed in acquiring relative wealth and a permanent home.

This provides a brief, and probably incomplete, glimpse of a way of life, very different from our own. Anyone interested will find a list of trades and occupations on the OMHS website under projects, Occupation 1600 1660.

Michael Leach

Do you have something to say?
See your name in print!

We are always looking for articles for
the newsletter.

Submit an article to our newsletter.
Email your contribution to:
Jenny.main@ntlworld.com

The Old Rectory, Shelley

The Old Rectory at Shelley, once situated a short distance from St. Peter's Church, no longer exists as it was destroyed by a fire on Thursday 1st September 1932. The house had been unoccupied for three to four years following the death of the rector, Reverend William Philp; his successor residing in Fyfield. Traces of intruders were found in the house and it is thought that they may have accidentally caused the fire which the Epping Brigade fought until late in the evening. The rectory was a timber-framed building dating from the 16th century, if not earlier, where Thomas Newton, subsequently Bishop of Bristol, 1761-82, wrote his "Dissertations on the prophecies".

Below is a photograph of the Old Rectory taken between 1905 and 1910 together with another taken after the fire of 1932.



Acknowledgement: We wish to thank David Taylor for providing us with the photographs.

Keith Snow, Kathy Wenborne and Stan Ball

Dates for your diary

25th May 10.30 am visit to Harlow Museum and Gibberd Garden

We will meet at the museum car park at 10.30am. Entrance to the museum is free, but a donation is recommended. In the afternoon we will go to the Gibberd Garden where the entrance fee is £4.00. Both the museum and Gibberd Garden have cafes and a picnic could be taken in the museum grounds. Car sharing suggested, let us know if you have a spare seat or need a seat email: info@omhs.org.uk or contact a member of the committee.

6th July

A visit to Blackmore, St Laurence Church and the Blackmore Antiques Centre and Tea Rooms. Arrangement are still being made and further details to be announced.

9th/10th July

History Exhibition at the United Reformed Church, the arrangements are still in progress and further details will be announced nearer the time.

For those interested:

The Marconi Exhibition is running at the Science and Technology Centre, Hall Street, Chelmsford every Sat & Sun 11.00am - 3.00pm. The exhibition runs until 29th May and entrance is free.

Further events will be announced in future newsletters and on the website. Have you looked at our website? The site is regularly updated with future events so this is where you will hear the news first. The address is <http://www.omhs.org.uk/> or just type OMHS into a search engine.

Newsletter Contributions

We always welcome articles for the newsletter. If you have anything that you would like to contribute, please submit to the editor or through the website before the end of July 2016 to be in time for included in the next edition of the newsletter