

# Ongar Millennium History Society Newsletter

## May 2017

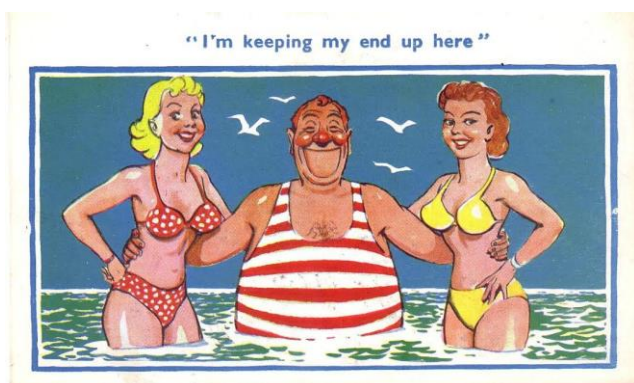
Welcome to the May edition of the OMHS Newsletter. We have published the Newsletter quarterly for many years now and copies are available on our website that date back to November 2007. We have covered many aspects of Ongar and its history thanks to those who have contributed articles.

Have you ever considered submitting an article for the newsletter? We welcome any submissions and articles could be on many areas such as your own, or someone else's family history, local buildings and architecture, characters from the past, organisational history etc. So why not give it a try and send us a submission, no matter how long or short all submissions will be very welcome.

### Upcoming Events

We have been in discussion with Epping and Ongar Railway regarding holding an exhibition at Ongar Station. The exhibition will be on 24th June, and themed "Ongar in Victorian times" and will be held at the Epping & Ongar Railway Station at Ongar. Entry to the exhibition will be free during station open hours so do come along and have a look for yourself.

We also have a talk on Saucy Seaside Postcards that will be given by Martyn Lockwood at Zinc on 16<sup>th</sup> June. The talk starts at 8.00pm and tickets are free to members and £6 non-member



**Jenny Main, Editor**

### Committee members

Chair	Vacancy	Vice Chair + Newsletter	Jenny Main
Treasurer	Kathleen Jenkins	Venues Sec.	Tonia Hart
Secretary	Sandra Dear	Membership+Speaker Sec.	Lorna Vaux
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		Committee Member	Felicite Barnes

## **Frederic Miller Noble**

It is well known that the architect of the south aisle extension of St. Martin's Church was Clapton Crabb Rolfe and that it was completed in November 1884. However Frederic Miller Noble, the building contractor, is overlooked.

Frederic Noble was born in 1863. His parents were Frederic and Harriet who lived in Chipping Ongar High Street. He became a master builder who later in life formed a partnership with Frederick Taylor. In the 1863 edition of White's Directory of Essex he is listed as living in Ongar High Street and his occupation is given as plumber, builder, proprietor of the gas works (closed in 1934) and brickmaker (the brickworks that he owned were in Greensted Road on the site currently occupied by Jewson's, close to a road aptly named Kilnfield).

On 13<sup>th</sup> May 1893 he married Emily Blanche Childs at St. Martin's Church, when he was 30 and Emily was 26. Emily was born in 1867, also in Chipping Ongar.

Later, in 1896, he opened a second brick works in Hallsford, Ongar. Following his death on 19th December 1944 at the Manor House, Chipping Ongar, the brickworks were sold to the engineering company, W. & C. French. The brickfields were again sold in 1966 to Leca who specialised in **Lightweight Expanded Clay Aggregate**, used to make lightweight concrete products. The brickworks finally closed in 1996.

His long association with St. Martin's Church is commemorated by a lectern. The inscription at its base reads: "This lectern is dedicated to the memory of Frederic Miller Noble OB.\* 1944 and Emily Blanche Noble. OB.\* 1952 R.I.P." [\*Abbreviation of obiit, Latin he/ she died.] Frederic had a long association with St. Martin's Church and served on the Vestry (the church committee) as both a member and chairman. He was also a churchwarden and a member of the Burial Board.

When Frederic and Emily's son, Henry Austin, was killed in the First World War, they wanted a lasting memorial, so in 1919 they commissioned a stained glass window in his memory in the south aisle.

## **Keith Snow & Stan Ball**

### **Community care in the seventeenth century**

Amongst the Essex Quarter Session records for July 1664 is a more than usually explicit entry. I have modernized the spelling:

"Whereas Sir John Barrington, Baronet, and James Altham, Knight of the Bath, at Hatfield Broad Oak, directed their warrant on 23 April to the constables of Hatfield to carry Edward Galley and his wife therefrom to Chipping Ongar there to be provided for, whereas the warrant was delivered by John Nash, one of the constables, together with Galley and his wife and child, to William Tabor of Chipping Ongar, victualler, one of the overseers of the poor of Chipping Ongar, nevertheless Tabor,



on the same day, publicly and contemptuously said to Nash 'You may take your warrant and wipe your breech with it.'

Confessed; fined 20 shillings and discharged."

From this we can conclude that Edward Galley, his wife and child were identified as paupers (or likely to become so) and therefore at risk of becoming an unwelcome charge on the poor rates of Hatfield Broad Oak. An order had been obtained from the magistrates directing the constables to return the Galleys to their 'parish of settlement' (in this case Chipping Ongar), the parish which was expected to care of them. It probably proved to be an inconvenient and expensive business for the unfortunate constable (parishes were often tardy or reluctant to pay the expenses) and he may have arrived in Ongar in a foul mood with his reluctant passengers who would have been equally discontent to have their plans thwarted. They had probably been trying to obtain employment or support elsewhere.

William Tabor, the Chipping Ongar overseer of the poor, was probably also reluctant to receive the family whom he would regard as a financial burden to his own parish. Individuals often tried to evade the post of overseer, as they were inevitably in conflict with parishioners who were anxious to spend as little as possible on the indigent poor, and the paupers themselves who were often in desperate need. Then, as now, he may have taken a dim view of paupers, blaming them for their own unhappy predicament. Tabor's occupation indicated that he was running an alehouse that supplied food, and the confrontation may have been further aggravated by generous measures of his own liquid refreshment. Seventeenth century invective was usually very colourful and his choice of words – by the standards of the age - could be regarded as quite restrained. However he unwisely chose to abuse a document issued by his social superiors, namely two gentlemen magistrates, and this would have considerably deepened the offence and resulted in a very substantial fine.

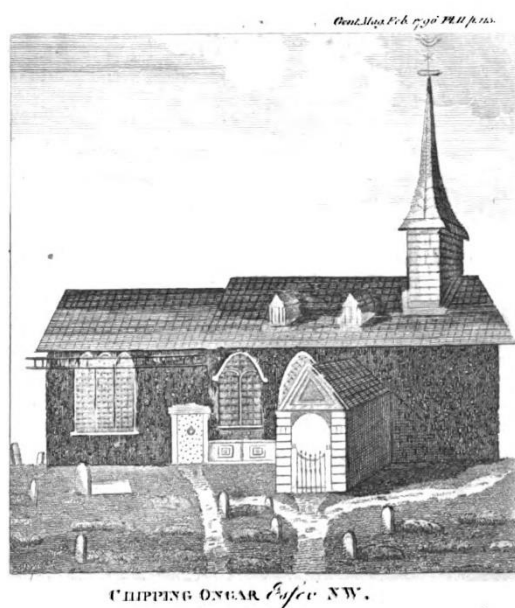
Unfortunately nothing is known about the Galley family. This surname does not appear in the parish registers, though of course it is possible that the child was born during the Interregnum when the registers were not kept. But the fact that there is no burial record for any of them in the years after 1664 suggests that they may have made a later, and more successful, escape from the town.

## Michael Leach

### The "Ins and Outs" of St. Martin's Church

Today the entrances to St. Martin's Church are to the west and south, but this has not always been the case. Here we tell the story of how and why this came about. We begin with an engraving which appeared in *The Gentleman's Magazine*, February 1796.

This shows that at the end of the eighteenth century the church had two doors in the north wall, the one on the right in the engraving with a porch has the appearance of the main entrance. The smaller door may well have been a priest's door permitting ease of access to the chancel when the congregation was assembled. Neither of these entrances exists today.



In the past there have been many attempts to increase the seating capacity in St. Martin's Church as it became insufficient for the growing population of the

town. Pews were first installed in 1749 but those seen currently in the nave date from 1860. The gallery erected in the mid-eighteenth century is evidence of the need to expand and the dormer windows above the gallery provided additional light. In 1877 more seating was provided in the gallery after the organ was moved to the north side of the chancel.

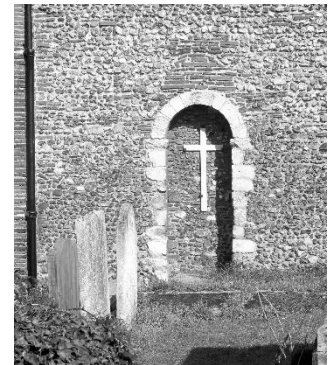
In May 1814 the parish vestry (now called the [parochial church council](#)), which had been considering plans to provide additional seating, decided that the north door should be closed, pews placed across the entrance and a new west door opened. The position of the blocked north door can still be seen from the outside of the church and from the inside by the recess together with the nearby stoop or holy water font once used to make a blessing on entering the church.



On his appointment as Rector in 1878, Rev. James Tanner soon realised that many who would like to attend his church were not able to do so. The population of the town had increased by 50% between 1801 and 1881 and there were simply not enough seats. St. James' Church in nearby Marden Ash was completed in 1882 and there was added competition from the nearby Congregational Chapel (United Reformed Church), extended in 1865, and St. Helen's Catholic Church, built in 1869. These factors stimulated the parishioners to raise funds to build the new south aisle at St. Martin's to provide additional seating for 60-80 people. The extension to the church, which was completed in November 1884, entailed the removal of the south wall of the nave and its replacement by an arcade of four arches and the building of the south aisle. At the same time the vestry was built and a porch constructed for the west door.

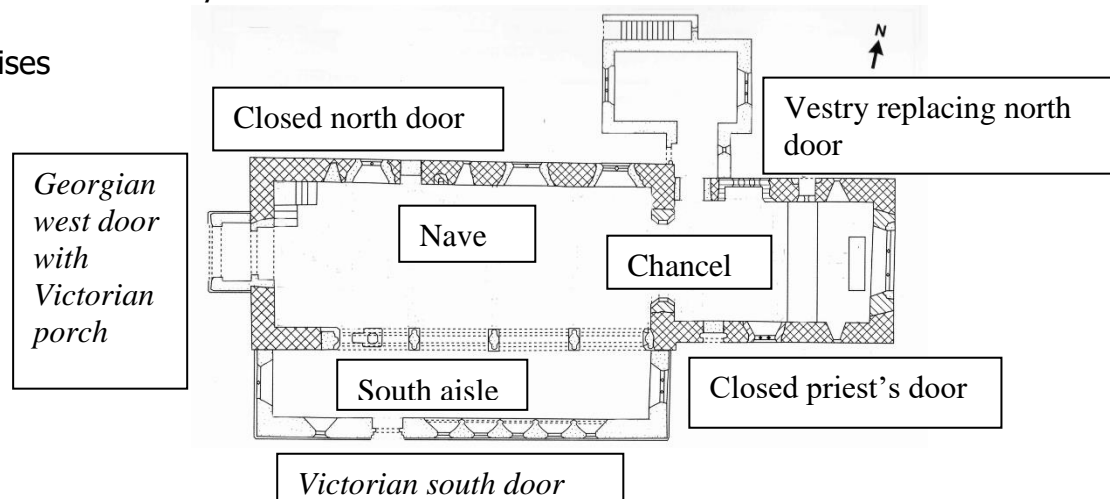
Evidence of the presence of an original south door appears in letters from the Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings opposing the alteration. They stated that the original south wall of the church contained two 'ancient' windows and a Norman doorway. However, despite these objections the church was extended.

In the chancel on the south side there is evidence of yet another door which is assumed to be a second priest's door. From inside the church the outline of the blocked door is apparent from cracks in the render. It can be seen more clearly on the outside of the church where the brick infill bears a large cross and shows the remains of one of the original door hinges.



So the need to enlarge the church in the past has led to the entrances that we see today. Quite why the priest's door in the south wall was blocked is not clear, but it would appear that the additional door in the north wall of the chancel was removed when the vestry was built.

The plan opposite summarises the changes. The current entrances are shown in italics.



## **A Question of Attribution**

The cover illustration of *Aspects of the History of Ongar* reproduced a painting of the junction of Ongar High Street and Church Lane done in 1913 by Annie Laurie Gilbert [*sic*\*] Gilbert (1851-1943), an elder sister of my grandfather and an amateur artist of considerable ability. The painting belongs to Clare Wilson, a great-great-granddaughter of Isaac Taylor of Stanford Rivers and granddaughter of Geoffrey Remington Wilson (1874-1943), for many years in general practice in Ongar.

Last year, I inherited a cache of papers and other family memorabilia that were once in the possession of the eccentric Enid Mercur (née Bell) (1898-1977), the younger daughter of Annie Gilbert's younger sister Madeline. (I suspect that Enid inherited them from her highly respectable unmarried elder sister, Frances (1894-1964), who in turn inherited them from her mother, who died in 1946.) Enid kept them for some years in a barn, whence they passed to Ken Denton when he bought the property shortly before Enid died. When Ken was preparing to downsize and move to Wales, he wondered what to do with this hoard and, finding some Taylor items among the papers (especially a copy of Henry Taylor's pedigree), contacted OMHS and through OMHS got in touch with me and very generously offered to give me the whole collection (except the pedigree, which went to Ongar) for the cost of the postage.

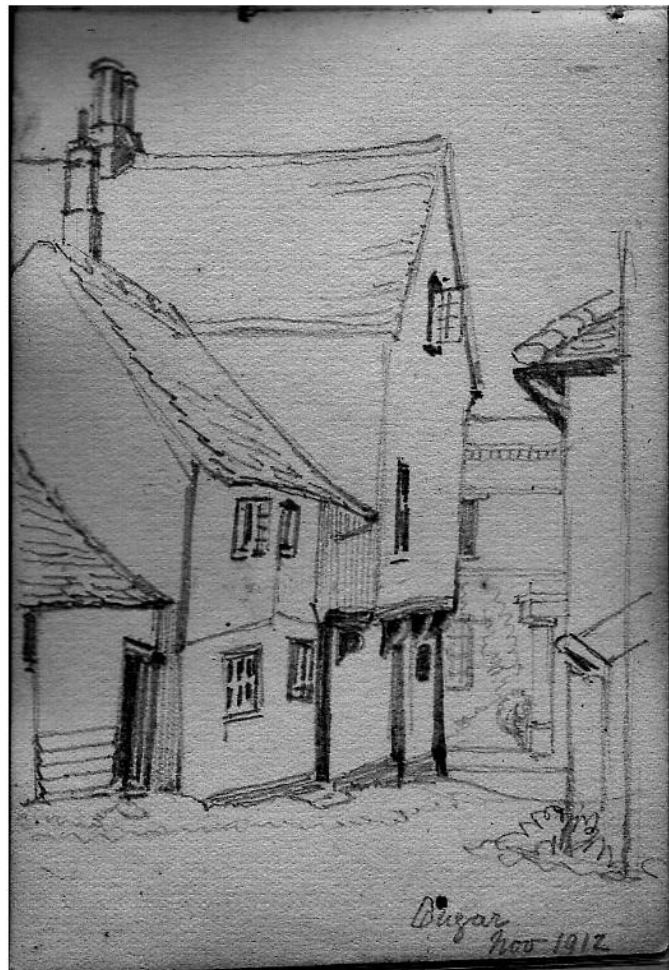
There has been a lot to go through - much of it very interesting, if chiefly about the Bells and the Gees (Annie's & Madeline's mother's family) - and until very recently, I hadn't done much more than glance at the numerous water colours and sketchbooks (all alas bearing witness to the time spent in that barn) and had assumed that they were all the work of Annie Gilbert. Then, in February, I had an exchange of e-mails with Sam Wilson, the half-brother of Clare, in the course of which he mentioned that the Journals of Theodora Wilson (1867-1966), daughter of Thomas Wilson (Sam's and Clare's great-grandfather) by his first wife, had been published by the Harpenden Local History Society (HLHS). My ordering this and mentioning my connection with Sir Henry Gilbert (1817-1901), the co-founder of the nearby Rothamsted Agricultural Research Station - he was an elder brother of my great-grandfather Isaac Charles Gilbert - elicited an e-mail from Gavin and Rosemary Ross of the HLHS seeking information about Sir Henry's family background. This and a separate e-mail from Roger Plumb of Rothamsted, who is organizing an exhibition to mark the bicentenary of Henry Gilbert's birth, led me to look out long neglected material I have about Sir Henry and, since Theodora mentions Annie Gilbert's visiting Harpenden and even a painting by her, to look more carefully at the water colours and sketchbooks for possible pictures of Harpenden and Rothamsted.

Very few of the separate larger water-colours bear any annotation to indicate their subjects, but the sketchbooks are another matter. The first of these I looked at bears on the fly-leaf the signature not of Annie, but of Madeline Gilbert and the date October 30th 1872 (when Madeline would have been not yet ten). The early pages contain distinctly amateur pencil drawings such as a child might do, but then comes quite an skilful water-colour dated August 16th 1876 and not many pages later a series of extraordinarily accomplished and detailed pencil sketches, almost all dated and many giving the name of the place illustrated, culminating in one of a small farmhouse annotated "Harpenden Jan 9 / 88" and another of Rothamsted dated Jan 10 /88. (The places illustrated are from all over England.) This naturally prompted the question: was everything in the sketchbook the work of Madeline or did Annie take it over from her and make at least the fine pencil sketches?

What has all this to do with Ongar? Towards the end of one of the other sketchbooks is a pencil sketch, annotated "Ongar Nov 1912", that is clearly a preliminary study for the painting that Clare Wilson possesses. Does this suggest that, despite that signature of Madeline's, these were almost all Annie's sketchbooks? Or could it even be that they are all Madeline's and that Clare's picture has been misattributed to Annie?

I know of no other evidence that Madeline was a talented artist. What's more, in two of the sketchbooks, there are drawings and water-colours dating from the 1910s and 1920s of places from all over England and even some on the Continent, which might seem more consistent with what would have been feasible for the unmarried Annie than for the wife of a busy schoolmaster, as Madeline was. On the other hand, it is perhaps slightly more likely that her mother's work than her aunt's would have come down to Enid.

However, it is the handwriting that is the clincher. In the Album of Annie and Madeline's grandmother, Ann Gilbert (née Taylor), published in facsimile as *Ann Taylor Gilbert's Album* in 1978, there are several signatures of Annie Gilbert, the characteristic capital 'A's and 'L's in which match those in some unsigned notes found in the Denton hoard, which in turn seem to match the handwriting in the annotations to the pencil drawings, including that on the Ongar sketch. So Annie Gilbert was almost certainly the artist after all.



### **Robin Gilbert**

\* The duplicated "Gilbert" appears on her birth certificate and in many other documents, formal and informal, and her signatures sometimes include all four names. She was named Annie Laurie after an old friend of her grandmother's, but why she was given Gilbert as a forename remains a mystery.

### **A military arsenal in Chipping Ongar**

It is difficult to imagine Ongar as a military town, but the parish registers give occasional glimpses of soldiers quartered here, the former drill hall near the church was built for the local volunteers, World War I saw much activity in and around the town (including the digging of slit trenches on the castle mound) and World War II added a mortar spigot ambush point on Cooper's Hill. However the following report from the *Ipswich Journal* of 22 December 1810 is somewhat surprising.

"A temporary depot of arms and ammunition was some time ago formed at Chipping Ongar. They are now removed to the general ordnance depot of this town, and must have been of considerable quantity, as a number of artillery wagons were employed for several days in their conveyance."  
Where was all this military hardware stored in Ongar?

### **Local doctor attacked**

The *Morning Chronicle* of 10 March 1819 carried the following report:

"Essex Assizes: Charles Britten alias Burton was indicted for assaulting John Potter on the King's highway, on 9th May last, in the Parish of Fyfield, putting him in fear and taking from his person a £5 Romford Bank-note, a check (sic) upon the same bank for £20, and two £1 Bank of England notes.

"It appeared in evidence that the prosecutor (i.e. Mr Potter) was a surgeon residing at Chipping Ongar. In the evening of 9th May last he had occasion to go on his professional duty to Fyfield and about 9 o'clock, it then being light, he saw two men before him and, as he approached them on horseback, he heard one say "now for it." He slackened the pace of his horse, when the prisoner came up and seized his reins, and desired the prosecutor to stop. The other man drew out a horse-pistol and presented it at the prosecutor's head, "give us your money or I'll shoot you". The prosecutor dismounted, and the prisoners lifted his pockets of the property in question, while the other man kept his gun alternately at his head and breast. The prosecutor swore most positively to the prisoner's identity.

"The Learned Judge Bailey summed up the case, but the Jury found the prisoner Not Guilty, assigning for reason that the prosecutor, after the lapse of five months, might be mistaken in the person of the prisoner."

Several interesting points emerge from this report. Stealing such a large sum of money would have attracted the death sentence at that time, and the jury – perhaps reluctant to convict – decided that Potter's identification could not be trusted after a gap of many months, even though the evidence showed that it was still light on the May evening when the attack occurred, and there was nothing to suggest that the men were wearing masks. Did Potter's assailants have prior knowledge of the substantial sum of money that he was carrying, or was the attack purely opportunist? And why was he carrying the modern equivalent of several thousand pounds when going out to do a home visit to a patient?

## **Michael Leach**

### **Publications at the Library**

Members are now able to access two publications supplied from the British Association of Local History. These are "Local History News" and "The Local Historian" and are available to look through in the local history section at Ongar Library. Ongar Library opening times are Tuesday and Wednesday 9.00am to 6.00pm, Friday and Saturday 9.00am to 5.00pm. The library is closed on Mondays and Thursdays.

### **Arboretum Visit**

Members and guests visited the National Arboretum on 17<sup>th</sup> May. It was a very interesting visit and well worth the fairly lengthy journey. There are an astonishing number of memorials on the site which is ever growing as new ones are added. The displays are well organised and very thought provoking.

Unfortunately, despite the preceding day being one of the hottest at that point in the year the actual day was very wet with it raining most of the day. Many of us took advantage of the shelter offered by the road train that toured much of the site and provided running commentary on route regarding the various monuments

## **Jenny Main**

## **Dates for the diary**

### **June - Martyn Lockwood Talk**

Saucy Seaside Postcards

- 16th June at 8.00pm, Martyn Lockwood, saucy seaside post cards. At Zinc, tickets free to members and £6 non-members

### **June - Exhibition at Ongar Station**

- 24th June, OMHS exhibition "Ongar in Victorian times" at Epping & Ongar Railway, free entry to exhibition during station open hours

### **20<sup>th</sup> September – AGM and Talk**

## **Future Events**

Further events will be announced in future newsletters and on the website as they arise. 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 need your help with 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 2017 to be in time for included in the next edition of the newsletter