

Ongar Millennium History Society Newsletter

November 2008

I can't believe that we are talking about the Christmas social already – but we are, so I hope you will be able to join us in the King's Trust Centre next month. Before that though, we have Remembrance Day this month and OMHS is making its own tribute in this issue to two Ongar men who died for their country in conflicts overseas. In addition, we have placed poppy crosses on all the graves of servicemen that we have discovered in Ongar Cemetery during our transcription project.

Sadly OMHS has lost two great friends this month, Margaret Abbess and Paul Flack, both very talented artists in completely different ways, but who have both helped OMHS with our projects. They will both be greatly missed.

Jenny Main, Editor



Come and join us at the OMHS
Christmas Social 

Wednesday 3rd December 2008
at 8pm
Kings Trust Centre, High St,
Ongar

Refreshments Raffle

Members only please!

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

OMHS 2008 AGM Chair's Report

Since the last AGM the OMHS has had another extremely successful and interesting year. The committee has as usual worked very hard to ensure that you, as members, have been able to participate in many varied activities through the programme and the ongoing projects. Thank you so much for your support. Any organisation is only as good as its members and OMHS IS GOOD !

We have had a year of consolidation but also expansion, and as John will tell you in the Treasurer's report, our membership has increased. The year definitely started on a high with the production and sale of the DVD of old Ongar. We do owe such a debt of gratitude to David Welford and to Edwyn Gilmour for all their hard work with that project, and again as John will report, the sales were very good. Not many are left now. The press did us proud, as did the local Ongar shops, particularly Senners with their continuous promotional loop showing highlights of the DVD .

Another project which came to fruition was the altar kneelers for St Martin's Church depicting the history of Ongar. These were dedicated in May. This project had been ongoing for 2 years. A leaflet was produced and is available in the church explaining their historical context. We were also proud to be able to give support to Peter Evans, better known as Snowy, when he published 'The History of Ongar Research Station', an interesting and informative local read.

The recording of the inscriptions on the stones in the cemetery has taken on a new lease of life and we hope that all the ground work will be finished by the end of the year. Thanks are due to the new band of helpers led by Bob MacDonald, who joined the existing, rather jaded group who had been working on and off in the cemetery for several years. Talking of Bob I must mention his involvement with the EFDC and their initiative to find the 50 Favourite Trees in the district. Bob and Barbara submitted trees on our behalf and two in the centre of Ongar were chosen. The Ongar Community Tree Strategy was a direct result from that, as was our delight in hosting Jon Stokes from the Tree Council with his talk on 'The Importance of Trees in Our Historical Landscape' at our annual Marion Slade Lecture.

We have had talks from Ann Brooks on Aspects of Greensted, and Trevor Roberts from Copped Hall, as well as an invitation from Rotary to listen to a speaker on the history of London Transport. Our visits this year have been to the William Morris Museum in Walthamstow, A Whitehall Walking Tour, and to Crossing Temple Barns

OMHS was given the opportunity by Waltham Abbey District Museum to use the cabinet and to mount historical displays in Ongar library for 6 months starting in March. Jenny Main has done a fantastic job and the exhibitions have created a great deal of interest. The topics covered have been varied,

and the present exhibition is about the development of Ongar. If you haven't already looked at this please do so this evening, and also make sure you see the splendid coins and artefacts in the display cabinet, put on by Frank Knight.

One other highlight of the year was the get together we put on for the past members of the Ongar Wheelers and Shelley Speedway. It was a fascinating afternoon listening to the reminiscences of these older Ongar folk and looking at their photographs and mementos. Interest had been shown in a family history course for members and a low key session took place in the computer room at Theatre Resource with members helping each other. This was so successful that another one is to be organised.

I must put on record our thanks to the committee of the Joseph King Trust for allowing us to use the Kings Trust Centre during the year. It is central in the town and accessible. We used it for the making of the church kneelers, for the Wheelers 'get together' and for our enjoyable annual Xmas Social. We have put a proposal to the Kings Trust that we would very much like to establish a museum in these premises, but although they are happy in principle, there are many considerations that have to be taken into account, such as other users, insurance, and their long term plans etc. Other spaces which could possibly be used for a museum are the new council offices, or alternatively there are rumours that one of the chapels on the cemetery site could be used for a museum. We feel we have plenty of interest to show to visitors to the town as well as locals, but as yet we haven't been able to do anything practical about it

We have again put together a varied programme for next year. We like to look outside Ongar for some of our activities and visits. Often a talk can be followed up by a visit later in the year. So in November we have a talk on Essex Mills and a visit to a mill will follow in the spring. Wendy Hibbitt is our guest speaker for the Marion Slade lecture and she will tell us about life in Hylands House in Chelmsford, again with a follow up visit. We have been very fortunate to get Jim Boutwood as a speaker from SPAB (Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings) and he is coming in February. He will be able to tell us about the work SPAB has done locally as well as nationally. One highlight next year is a guided historical tour of Ongar High Street led by Michael in May. It is a must for anyone who has not had that privilege before.

I have outlined in this report all of our activities during the last 12 months and I think you will all agree that you get value for money. Our subscriptions are used for the day to day running of the society. We like to be able to use the money for the hire of rooms for the speakers and for the Xmas social. However we realise that we will have to raise the subscription at the next AGM. To give us flexibility in the meantime we may have to charge all members a small fee to come to any meetings. Admittedly raffles do help with expenses and we are grateful to all those who participate.

At the beginning of this report I mentioned all the hard work done by the members of the committee. I am very thankful to say that they are all happy to stand again. That must mean that we are a congenial bunch. However we have said that it would be good to have some new blood and fresh ideas. If there are any among you who would consider joining our committee, that would make us very happy. We would also welcome new ideas to start another project. So many of you have skills and interests that we could use. If we manage to find premises for a museum, we will definitely need an archivist or two! How about someone to help us fill in grant applications? At our committee meetings John is always outnumbered and I am sure he would welcome some male company. But strangely enough he is always able to handle us women. Thank you to the library staff and thank you for your time and patience.

Felicite Barnes, Chair OMHS

Margaret Abbess

We were very sorry to hear that OMHS member Margaret Abbess passed away peacefully on 25th October. She was a very talented lady and helped OMHS in many ways not least for her fabulous artwork and designs for the St Martin's Kneeler Project. Her advice was frequently sought in the stitching and making up stages of the project

Hopefully the kneelers will act as a lasting memory to her.

Monumental inscription project for Remembrance Day

As it is Remembrance Day this month and the OMHS project is now moving steadily toward the completion of the transcribing and verification stages, members will, I know, be interested and, yes moved, to hear of two more 'stories behind the inscriptions'. One concerns a young seaman **Sidney MADLE** who lived in Castle Street and the other a First World War pilot **George William COOPER**.

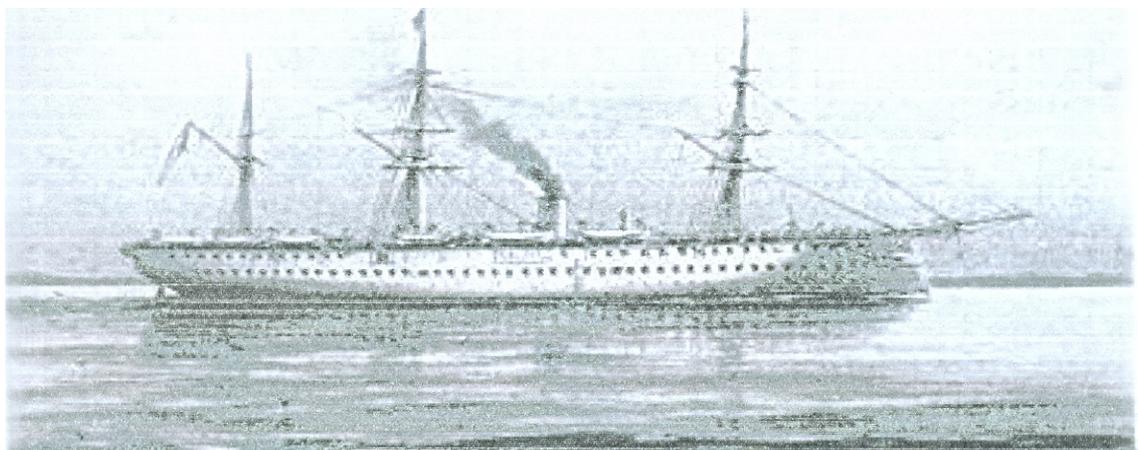
Sidney MADLE

Monumental Inscription: Cross on a triple plinth inscribed 'Sacred to the memory of Sidney Madle. Seaman of HMS Crocodile who was drowned off Cape St Vincent. March 28 1878. Aged 21 years. Deeply lamented by his shipmates by whom this token of respect was erected'

HMS Crocodile was a Royal Navy troopship commissioned for the Indian Government and launched from Wigrams of Blackwall Yard, Wapping in 1867. She weighed over 4000 tonnes with a single steam driven screw and three rigged fore sail masts. She was operated by the Royal Navy to transport troops and their families from Portsmouth to Bombay. This was at a time in our history when Queen Victoria had just been proclaimed Empress of India (1876) and the administration of the sub-continent was passing from the East India Company to a more direct and firm control by the British Government in London, control that had to be held in place by a considerable

military presence. Hence the need for troopships like HMS Crocodile which could transport 1,200 troops and their families to India in just about 70 days via the newly opened Suez Canal (1869). Sidney Madle who had been born in Chipping Ongar in 1856 was just 21 when, as the official records at the National Archive at Kew simply state 'Seaman Madle drowned at sea'. The official location was stated to be 'off Cape St Vincent' (S. W. Portugal). No official explanation of the circumstances of his death exists as far as is known but what I feel can be justifiably assumed is that young seaman Sidney Madle was held in high esteem by his fellow shipmates who took the time and trouble and not inconsiderable expense to erect a monument to his memory in Ongar Town Cemetery. However Sidney's unexplained and untimely death at sea proved to be just part of a deeper family tragedy for the Madles. His mother Susan had died just seven years earlier in 1871, followed a year later by his father, a local tailor in Castle Street, in 1872. At the age of 15, young Sidney was an errand boy in Ongar with no parents and two brothers and a younger sister, Sarah Jane. The Royal Navy might have seemed a very attractive option to a young country boy in late Victorian England. Further research in Ongar Cemetery eventually uncovered the Madle family grave where along with the dedications to Edward Madle and his wife, Susan, was one final entry *Also Sarah Jane daughter of the above who died December 9th 1878 aged 19 years*. This would have been just ten months after the death by drowning at sea of her brother.

Census returns and her death certificate establish that Sarah was living with her elder brother George, also a tailor like his father, at 50, Paradise Street, Battersea at the time of her death. The cause of death was given as pneumonia. A sad, tragic Victorian 'story behind the monumental inscription' for the Madle family of Ongar.



HMS Crocodile

George William COOPER

Monumental inscription (part): 'and also our dear son 2nd Lt. George William Cooper. RAF. killed whilst raiding Cattaro Submarine Base, Albania. 30th August 1918. Aged 18 years'.

Following enquiries to the Dept of Research & Information Services at the Royal Air Force Museum, Hendon, the following information has been obtained. 2Lt George William Cooper was serving with 226 Squadron at the time of his demise and was killed along with his observer Cpl William Alfred Easman when their aircraft, a De Havilland DH9 D2794, failed to return from an attack on Cattaro (Albania). The aircraft took off from Pizzone airfield, Taranto (Southern Italy) at 0530 and was not seen again. It certainly comes as a poignant reminder that young men caught up in the First World War not only lost their lives in the terrible trench warfare of the Western Front but also in the skies above the Adriatic. Whilst we are all too aware of the horrors associated with place names like The Somme, Passchendaele and Ypres we may not be so familiar with places like the Straits of Otranto between Southern Italy and Albania where some of the most fierce fighting of the war took place between aircraft, ships and submarines. The De Havilland DH 9, like all other aircraft taking part in the offensive against the Turkish allies of Germany would have been shipped through the Mediterranean in crates and re-assembled at the allies' main base at Taranto from where young men like George William Cooper, already trained as pilots at the young age of 18 in the fledgling RAF would be expected to undertake a hazardous round trip of over 300 miles across open sea to attack submarine bases and military installations on the Albanian coast. The official RAF report, dated 2nd September 1918, states that George William Cooper and his observer Cpl Easman died 'when their machine which had been shattered by bombs (half burnt) crashed'. Apart from the inscription on the family grave in Ongar Cemetery 2Lt Cooper is also commemorated on the Commonwealth War Graves Commission's Doiran Memorial in Greece. His official place of burial is recorded as The Military Cemetery, Erkvic, Dalmatia.

Both **Sidney MADLE** and **George William COOPER** lost their lives a long way away from their place of birth in Ongar yet both 'stories behind the inscriptions' serve to remind us that local social and family history is not only inextricably linked to major world wide events but also provides a unique, personal insight into them and as such should not be lost.

Bob MacDonald

NB After consultation and in agreement with Derek Berwin. Hon. District Organiser for The Royal British Legion. High Ongar Branch, **poppy crosses have been placed on a number of graves in Ongar Cemetery** that the OMHS Monumental Inscriptions Project team recorded as either the final resting place of a particular member of the armed services or bore a commemorative inscription. The crosses have been placed by members of the project team on behalf of OHMS ready for the national period of remembrance. When the project is completed later this year a list of all such

graves and inscriptions will be provided for the local British Legion as part of the of the ongoing commitment of OMHS to research and record Ongar's local social history.

Who do you think you are? Part two

Following the success of our last Family History Workshop we are planning to hold another self-help session at Great Stony on Friday 16th January 2009, 10-1
If you are interested, please contact Jenny on 01277 362684 - places may be limited!

Baby savaged by pig

"Inquest at Chipping Ongar, Essex, on Anne Reynolds, aged about 18 months, who being left alone in a bed in a cottage. A pig came into the room, got upon the bed and pulled h child out of the same and bit pars of its fingers off and otherwise wounded it in the face to such a shocking manner that it languished till next day and died."

Ipswich Journal, December 2nd 1775

(Taken from "Essex Family Historian" March 2008)

Oldest timber framed home in Britain

"Built without planning permission and still here 1,000 years on. Fyfield Hall near Chipping Ongar is the oldest timber framed home in Britain. It features a timber post carbon dated to between 880AD and 985 AD, a century before the Domesday Book. It was owned by the 3rd Lord Scrope at the time of the Battle of Agincourt, although he was executed at the orders of King Henry V and his headless body lies in a nearby churchyard."

(Taken from "Essex Family Historian" March 2008)

Ed's note: Thanks to **Martyn Lockwood** for the above two snippets!

Brains of Ongar 2008

Congratulations are due to the OMHS team who struck gold this year by snatching the top prize in this very closely fought contest of nine teams. It has been nine long years since we last had our name engraved on the BOO shield. The event on 25th October was organised by last year's winner, the Ongar Library Book Talk Group. The shield is on permanent display in Ongar Library.

Under the rules, we have to give half of the net proceeds of about £220 to charity. We nominated the Alzheimer's Society.

John Winslow

**Paul Flack, sculptor and stonecutter
1961-2008**

Once the OMHS had decided to go ahead with the Ongar Millennium Walk in the late nineties, we needed all the help we could get. We were recommended to Paul who advised us, guided us, pushed us and pointed us in all the right directions.

He obtained the stones, arranged for them to be tested for "slippability" and finally cut them to to the sponsors own designs. In short, without his involvement the project may probably never have progressed at all.

Paul had an international reputation, and his garden and workshop were a joy to behold with numerous carvings of sun dials, heavenly bodies and countless figures and plaques many of which were destined for overseas. It was always a joy to visit, not least for a slice of his mum's delicious fruit cake!

During November 2000 he gave a talk to OMHS members on "My work and local history" but so wide were his interests I remember the evening ending with a number of slides on the issues facing the oppressed people of Peru! He has passed away quite suddenly at the early age of 47. He had so much more to give.

OMHS at Chipping Ongar Primary School

Jenny Main and Keith Snow visited Year 4 pupils at COPS recently at the invitation of their teacher, Mrs Briggs, to talk about some of Ongar's history as part of their local history studies. The children were very enthusiastic and had lots of questions - most of which we were able to answer! It was also great to see our school resource packs being used in the classroom!

Jenny Main

Dates for your diary

**Wed. 3rd December
8pm**

**OMHS Christmas Social
King's Trust Centre, Ongar**

**Friday 16th January
10-1**

**Family History Workshop
Great Stony Computer Room
A self-help session to find your ancestors**

**Thurs. 5th February
8pm**

**Talk by James Boutwood
From SPAB (Society for the Protection of
Ancient Buildings)**

Contributions for next newsletter please!

**The next newsletter will be produced in February 2009, so any
articles to Jenny please by 25th January. Thank you!**