

Ongar Millennium History Society Newsletter

November 2010

It has been a busy year! I cannot believe it is almost the festive season again ..and with the threat of snow in November! We have been working hard on our projects throughout the year- the cemetery project continues at St Peter's Church, Shelley; the war memories booklet is close to publication; and the High Street history project is getting under way after some preparatory events and exhibitions.

We are always pleased to have input from our members and Ongar residents. This worked really well with the Memory Wall exhibition in Ongar library earlier this month where we had lots of comments and information contributed by visitors to the exhibition. We hope to have similar exhibitions on the top and bottom ends of the town in the near future to gather further memories and information.

With best wishes for the season,

Jenny Main, Editor

Come and join us at the OMHS

Christmas Social



Wednesday 8th December 2010

at 8pm

Banson's, Ongar Town Council,

Banson's Way, Ongar

Refreshments

Raffle

Members only please!

Sorry - very limited car parking.

Committee Members 2010-2011

Chairman: Felicitie Barnes

Treasurer: John Winslow

Minute Sec: Elisabeth Barrett

Website+: Keith Snow

Vice Chair: Jenny Main

Speaker Sec.: Carol Barber

Bookings Sec: Wendy Thomas

Cttee member: Olive Glassington

OMHS AGM 2010 – Chair's report

Welcome to you all. Thank you for coming to this Annual General Meeting. It is my privilege as chair to outline to you how the committee have managed the Ongar Millennium History Society for your benefit since last September. We hope you have found the year stimulating and enjoyable.

As usual our programme has taken the form of talks and socialising in the winter months, and visits out in the summer months. There was a talk by John Whaler about Winston Churchill and Chartwell followed up by a visit. Jenny Butler from the Essex Record Office talked to us about how to research house history and then did a workshop at the Record Office with original documents. Jim Boutwood gave the Marion Slade Lecture on the origins and work of the Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings. We went to the National Record Office at Kew, and Michael took a party around historical Ongar.

It is not always easy in Ongar to find suitable venues for our meetings and so we were very pleased to use the Ongar Town Council Offices for our Christmas get together. High Ongar Village Hall was a very suitable venue for the Marion Slade Lecture, and we do appreciate the use of the library for tonight. Thank you very much to the library staff.

The website, with Web Master Russell Ball, has been spreading the OMHS news around. We would welcome any contributions from you, our members. The website has a voracious appetite. Keith Snow is going to give you an update a bit later.

This year we have had a few problems with finding a home for the OMHS archives, housed in 2 cupboards and a filing cabinet, but they have now been settled nicely in an upstairs room at the United Reformed Church.

Some of our time during this last year has been taken up with putting the finishing touches to the Cemetery Project. This was started in 2004 and we believe we must have recorded information about some 1000 graves in the cemetery. It is part of a national project. Eventually we will have a copy of the recordings, in our archives, as will Ongar Town Council.

Another project which is very close to completion is the publishing of the war time memories of twelve of our members. We have a mock up of how the finished article will look and we just need to make the final adjustments to its presentation. We have been privileged to be able to obtain from the Imperial War Museum some of the wartime drawings of the late Margaret Abbess, which we have incorporated into the text. This will be the first in a series of books we hope to publish, and will be a limited edition.

The committee trusts that we have represented you adequately at town functions, such as the Annual Town Council Meeting and to have had an input into the life of the town through the Ongar News. We are encouraging more collaboration with Epping Forest District Museum, through the website and through the use of the display cabinet and exhibitions in the library.

Although we have been consolidating many of our projects we still have much to look forward to. We are well on the way to putting up our fourth blue plaque. This one will be on the old Great Stony building, and we will have an unveiling sometime in early spring.

Then, of course, we have the anticipation of being part of the Museum Project, hopefully to be housed in the old Cemetery Chapels. This means working with Ongar Town Council and other organisations, like the Railway Preservation Society and the British Legion. We will be hearing all that exciting stuff from Judith later on.

Please get involved with any activities on offer next year. We have started recording inscriptions on the gravestones at Shelley Church, and St Martins Church is still to do. The Memory Wall in the Library will tie in very nicely with our High Street Project.

Since the last AGM we have been very fortunate in persuading 2 of our members, Carol Barber and Olive Glassington to join us on the committee. We felt the need for fresh ideas to keep us moving forward. My personal thanks to the committee. It is a pleasure to work with you all.

Felicite Barnes

Committee decision on visitor charges

At the AGM there was discussion on the price we should charge visitors to attend our meetings. Suggestions were made from the floor, ranging from £2.00 to £4.00. The committee settled on £3.00 for attendance at standard meetings. The charge for the annual Marion Slade lecture will be the same ticket price for members and non-members alike, whilst the Christmas Social is free, but strictly for members only.

Jenny Main

St James' Church Autumn Eayre

The Autumn Fayre was held on 17th October to help raise £2,000 for a new aluminium cross for the steeple. We had a stall displaying numerous photographs and artefacts that drew much interest and had some of our goodies on sale. We were able to make a donation of £29.50 which helped beat the required sum by £7.00!

John Winslow

**Old Ongar Postcard Packs
still available at £2.00 each.
Ideal stocking filler!**

Contact Jenny 01277 362684

Brains of Ongar 2010

In conjunction with last year's winner, the Ongar Labour Party, we sponsored the 13th annual Brains of Ongar (BOO) competition on 23rd October but sometimes we had to pinch ourselves to realise where we were as the Church Rooms seemed to be full of HOGS and OWLS.

There were about 80 people in 10 teams competing for the much sought after BOO Shield and a cash prize. It was a most entertaining high-tech computerised quiz and became hotly fought over. The winner never emerged until the last question in the last round. The winner for the first time in BOO history was Ongar Wildlife Society (OWLS) with the runner-up High Ongar Geriatric Society (HOGS) by just one point. The latter are the new kids on the block and look set to go far if they can keep up this pace.

Apart from winning the shield, OWLS shared equally their prize money of £144 with their chosen charity the Essex Wildlife Trust. Our thanks to Jenny who spent many, many hours putting together the hi-tech stuff, and to John and Jan Turnbull for being the Question Master and Scorer.

Oh Yes! Our own team's inconspicuous effort brought us home in 5th place.

John Winslow

Railway Banks Floral Association at Ongar?

There is a well-known photograph of Ongar station and its goods yard taken on 9 May 1911 from high up on the signal post to the west of the bridge over the Cripsey Brook. The embankments are tidy and free of scrub, though there are some saplings in the foreground – probably ash, as they are not yet in leaf. Of more interest is a neat area just west of the bridge which is contained by a trimmed hedge with a display of flowers. I have seen other photographs of this spot showing activity more like allotment gardening, but in this particular photograph the cultivated area looks decorative rather than for food production.

From about 1875 the Great Eastern Railway awarded prizes to station masters for plants and shrubs on platforms, and it was also their practice to allow small areas adjacent to the tracks to be used as allotments by railway employees. However in about 1900 the Railway Banks Floral Association was formed and its aim was to sow and plant railway banks and cuttings to make them more attractive. Ellen Willmott of Warley Place acted as both treasurer and secretary in the early days, and was active in planting the sides of the cuttings at Brentwood railway station. She was even provided by the GER with a free pass to use when travelling on the Association's business. Apart from improving the appearance, the Association had an altruistic motive in providing colourful planting for the enjoyment of travellers who had no garden of their own.

Was the Ongar embankment garden a part of this scheme, or merely an allotment cultivated by an enthusiastic flower grower?

Michael Leach

Turn Back Time - History of the High Street

OMHS is hoping to research the history of the houses in the High Street during 2011. To this end we have been doing some initial fact finding and taken part in a number of events linked to the topic.

Exhibition in the library

Ongar library was the venue for an interesting exhibition showing changes in our own High Street over the years. It was put together as part of the BBC's Turn Back Time campaign. Did you watch the BBC programmes on Tuesday nights about the shops and shopkeepers from the Victorian era up to the rationing of the Second World War?

The exhibition was put together from photographs we have amassed over time, many originally from Gerry Reeves' postcard collection, plus the spreadsheet put together by Elisabeth Barrett showing the main High Street properties and which shop or business occupied it. It is amazing to see how many different trades existed in Ongar, and how many duplicated each other!

The exhibition invited people to add comments to the display to increase our knowledge and, in some places, correct it! We had a large number of comments added over the two weeks of the exhibition and OMHS are very grateful for the enthusiasm and interest shown. One family phoned the library from Staffordshire having heard that their family's ancestors featured in the exhibition. It was the picture of the Devonish family outside the Two Brewers pub after the First World War. The men had to continue wearing their uniforms as they had no other clothes to wear. They had a fish shop next to the Brewers and a fruit and veg shop on the other side of the road.

The main controversy of the exhibition was about the gas works! Various options were put forward. We erroneously put the gas holder on the lorry park and were put right very quickly. However we were told by some people that there were gas works on the lorry park but the gas holder and showroom were on the Longfields side of the road, by the allotments. We would be grateful for any input from our members to confirm or deny the reality of the situation. Thank you! (Contact Jenny on 01277 362684)

Historic Houses in Ongar High Street. A talk by Ann Padfield

Ann Padfield came to Great Stony on 3rd November and gave us an illustrated talk on the houses on the High Street. She is extremely knowledgeable on many of the houses, particularly the timber-framed buildings, but there are still many more she would love to investigate.

Ann started by talking about **Castle House** which was built in the 16th century by William Morice to provide living accommodation on the castle site, next to the moat, and the **White House** also from the 16th century, although Ann thinks there may be an earlier Elizabethan chimney which might be older than the surrounding timber frame house.

The next building is the old house on the corner of St Martin's Mews, dated 1642 on the building itself. Still known as **March's** by locals, this building shows a good example of a jetty building from the 17th century, with an older 16th century building to the rear. Next door, **Wren House** may well be 16th century or earlier, but had a new front built in the 18th century.

The **Manor House**, sitting back from the High Street behind Manor Square, is not actually a manor house. However it is probably a medieval building and may well be the oldest domestic building in Ongar.

The **Market House** (until recently the Kismet restaurant) dates from the 17th century. It sits forward of the other buildings on that side of the road, so to have its rightful place in the market area. The building was open at street level and had lots of outbuildings to the rear. Upstairs was where the administration of the market took place and traders paid their tolls. The Court of Pie Powder also held sessions here to decide on market disputes.

This wide section of the High Street allowed space for the market stalls and accommodated the **Town Hall** building erected in 1786. The building only survived for just over 100 years before being demolished in 1896. By this time its role had been taken over by **Essex House** on the corner of Castle Street.

Ann has done a detailed study of the three-gabled timber-framed building, still known as **Baugh's**. It is a building of two and a half storeys with a large assembly room on the first floor. The house has been dated c.17th/18th centuries due to the split buttressing in the roof timbers. At one time it had a false parapet in front of the gables, but still has an eight-flued chimney stack!

The **Joseph King cottages** next to the Budworth Hall also date from the 17th century, and a charitable educational trust still benefits from the properties which already existed prior to the start of the trust in 1769. The Joseph King shop (now Balloonatics) is an example of a front-facing cross-wing property.

The **King's Head** (or Inn), currently being brought back to life, is a fine example of a brick-fronted building with tuck-pointing built in 1697. There are some puzzling initials on a plaque on the front of the building. At the rear there are stairs and a gallery access to the accommodation, all individually named Crown, Cross Keys and King's Head.

Greylands has a central location in the High Street and was built in 1845 following a classical style adopted by the early Victorians.

In Castle Street is **Mayfield**, the house lived in by the Taylors. It was built in 1809 by builder T. Williams (who also built Holmlea round the corner on the High Street).

Returning to the lower High Street, Jessamine House and Cottage probably date from the 18th century, with Gothic revival windows plus some false windows too. But why do they sit so far back from the road?

Opposite there are a number of large houses. **Holmlea** looks Georgian but is a remodel of an earlier 17th century house. It has an Adam style porch which dates from the 19th century. The central first floor window is boarded rather than painted glass, and in fact there is a room partition behind it. Next door is a grey brick and slate regency house making a statement of being different!

The **Livingstone Cottages** date from the 18th century, while the **pargetted house** on the corner of Stanley Place dates from the 17th century and is an example of a lobby entrance house, with the chimney stack facing the front door thus creating a lobby. It also has a concertina stack where the flues are all pushed together.

Without moving from our chairs, Ann took us on a tour of many of the buildings we walk past everyday without giving them a second glance. Perhaps we should take time to appreciate them in future.

History of the High Street. A talk by Eric Probert at Ongar library

Ongar Library welcomed Eric Probert on 18th November to talk about how to research history of the High Street as part of the BBC's Turn Back Time campaign.

He took us through the many types of document that we can access to help in our research, through visiting the Essex Record Office (ERO) in Chelmsford, the National Archives in Kew, local libraries and, of course, using the Internet, now home to a plethora of resources, some which have to be paid for while others are free.

ERO can provide the major resources: census, trade directories, electoral registers, parish magazines, local history publications, maps, photos, books, pamphlets and magazines. They also have indexed collections of sale catalogues for properties, photographs and postcards.

<http://www.essex.gov.uk/Libraries-Archives/Record-Office/Pages/Record-Office.aspx>

The Census is accessible via Ancestry in all Essex Libraries and the ERO have it too. The ERO's online catalogue, SEAX, indexes wills and diaries and other personal papers. <http://seax.essexcc.gov.uk/Default.asp> Electoral registers are organised A to Z by name in early editions and then by address later on. They give details of the occupiers and owners of property over a certain rental value.

Business records can be a valuable resource. Using the National Register of Archives, part of the National Archives website, allows you to search by name, place and trade. Account books can be invaluable sources for trade

information such as customers, sales, who is buying what etc. Ongar Friendly Society records give names and occupations of members and payments made.

The Essex Society for Family History website gives a list of history societies; Familia is a web-based list of genealogy resources; local directories are available online; and local newspapers are available at larger local libraries and ERO. Telephone books (1880-1994) are now available and searchable on Ancestry.

Museum websites can be useful, as can mailing lists and message boards online via Rootsweb. History House Essex <http://www.historyhouse.co.uk/> is also a website full of information and links to the history of Essex.

Eric Probert gave us lots of ideas on how to move our high street research forward, so now we just need to get on and do it!

<http://www.ericdprobert.pwp.blueyonder.co.uk/>

Jenny Main

Dates for your diary

**Wed Dec 8th
8pm**

Christmas Social
Ongar Town Council Offices
Banson's Way, Ongar.
NB Limited parking

**Wed Jan 19th
8pm**

**The railway at Ongar since 1865
-a talk by Edwyn Gilmour**
at Church Rooms , Castle Street

**Thurs Feb 10th
8pm**

Historic Finds in the Ongar Hundred
- a talk by Frank Knights & Brian Coles
at Great Stony, Rm 1
NOTE change of date from membership card

**Fri March 25th
7.45 for 8pm**

**2011 Marion Slade Lecture
Who actually saved Epping Forest in
the 19th century**
by Richard Morris, Epping Forest Verderer
Cheese and wine to follow
at High Ongar Village Hall

Contributions for next newsletter please!

The next newsletter will be produced in February 2011, so any articles to Jenny please by 31st January. Thank you!