

# Ongar Millennium History Society Newsletter

## November 2014

Well, Christmas is around the corner. Where did this year go?

We have had a busy year again with exhibitions, outings and meetings throughout the year. Thank you to all of you who support our events, whether they are talks, walks, meetings and the social activities too.

We must acknowledge publicly the enormous amount that John Winslow contributed to OMHS over 17 years. He has left a big hole to be filled, but we are very pleased to welcome Kathleen Jenkins who has taken over the role of treasurer, and we welcome an influx of new committee members who have put themselves forward to help us keep OMHS alive and kicking

**Jenny Main**

### **Christmas is coming!**

**We would like to invite all OMHS  
members to our Christmas Social  
at Ongar Town Council Offices  
on Wednesday 3<sup>rd</sup> December 2014  
at 8.00pm**

**Raffle  
Refreshments available**

#### **Committee members**

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

## Chair Annual Report 2014

Good evening. It's good to see you all here.....

As chair of the OMHS for the past year I would like to give a report on our programme and activities since the last AGM. Also to thank all those who are on the committee for their help during the past year.

The aims of the OMHS as you will know, are to promote an interest in local history and so we were able to use this theme at the last AGM with an historical film of Greensted Church. In November the, then, General Manager of the Epping Ongar Railway, Simon Hanney, talked to us about EOR and its history as well as its future in the town. In February, there was an excellent talk by Martin Shaw on The History of Poultons and in March, the annual Marion Slade lecture was given by local historian Ann Padfield on her New Research on Ongar High Street. As 2014 is the 100<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the start of World War 1 we have tried to recognise this in our 2014 programme. 'Tea at the Ritz' was an excellent afternoon where we shared First World War memories from our families, as well as the history of the Royal British Legion.

Our activities have included 2 walks in London, a guided tour of St Martin's Church, a walk around the back streets of Ongar, planting poppy seeds in commemoration of the start of World War 1, and helping with the Society of Family History meeting in the library. We have run 2 exhibitions, one in conjunction with the EFDC Museum in the Budworth Hall with an emphasis on World War 1, and one in OTC covering our own research in Ongar High Street. We held a Xmas party, and I think you will all agree it was good to have the opportunity to talk and socialise. We put in a team in the BOO Quiz where we did well but didn't win!

The standing of OMHS has been recognised by an invitation to establish an exhibition as part of the decor of the newly opened Health Centre, and to discussions with the new owner of the recently refurbished Kings Head as to how to incorporate the history of Ongar into the décor there. On another occasion we were included in discussions and invited to submit ideas about the future of Ongar Castle. We hope you enjoyed the calendar for 2014, and we do thank our members who let us use images of the town from their postcard collections.

We are still using all means possible to keep the momentum going about a museum/archive in the town. We were fortunate to have been given another cupboard, to add to the other two, which we are filling with documents and photographs but of course these are hidden away and not on display to the general public. We need some museum space.

One of our public images comes from our website, and we were fortunate enough this year to have been given a grant from the Town Council towards the cost of updating it. Through the website we often receive requests for help with family history or the history of Ongar, which we do our best to help with. We feel that we have been able to help to promote the public face of Ongar, by incorporating our millennium walk in the very visual new maps in the town. The plan and map of the castle in the Pleasance Car Park was refurbished by Epping Forest District Council after we complained that the existing one was dirty and torn it did no credit to the town with all the visitors from the railway.

We were sad to hear of the death of Rayner Harries, a keen supporter, with his wife Anne of OMHS, and we were shocked at the sudden death of David Thompson, a dear friend and supporter. David had contributed so much to the OMHS, particularly with his work on 40 Facts with Keith Snow, and the recording of monuments in the churchyards, cemetery and St Martin's and St Peter's Churches.

OMHS has existed since the millennium. We were known as the Ongar Millennium History Project until then. Several of our committee have been in place for all those years. We now feel we are getting tired and stale and need some different ideas and initiatives. I have decided this is the last year I will put myself forward for the committee. And as you will have already heard John

Winslow, our treasurer has resigned. John has not only been treasurer but the backbone of the society. We will all miss his local knowledge and sense of humour so much. We are now hoping for help from you all. A programme has been put in place for the coming year, starting with a talk on November 10<sup>th</sup> by our president, Michael Leach on George Rose – a distinguished artist born and brought up in Ongar, who kept a diary from 1900 to his death in 1956. Frank Knights, another of our members will show us some of his artefacts and coins in a presentation entitled "Finding History" on February 9th.

The Marion Slade Lecture will be given on March 20th by Maria Medlycott, an architectural historian from Essex County Council, on 'Ongar as a medieval town'. The Xmas party at Ongar Town Council Offices is on December 3<sup>rd</sup>. The summer programme of outings and walks has still to be confirmed. I hope to see you on these dates, and also hope for input from you as to the future of the Ongar Millennium History Society.

Thank you.

**Felicite Barnes, Chair OMHS**

### **Josiah Gilbert. Who he?**

On the walls of the Livingstone Cottages at the lower end of the High Street in Ongar, there are two plaques. One is in honour of David Livingstone himself. The other reads:

THESE COTTAGES ARE VESTED IN  
TRUSTEES FOR THE BENEFIT OF  
ONGAR CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH  
PURSUANT TO THE WISHES OF  
THE LATE JOSIAH GILBERT  
IN MEMORIAM AUGUST 15TH 1892.

Who was Josiah Gilbert? And what else had he to do with Ongar?<sup>1</sup>

Josiah Gilbert was born on 7 October 1814 at Masborough, near Rotherham, the eldest child of the Revd Joseph Gilbert (1779-1852), an Independent Minister, and his wife Ann (née Taylor) (1782-1866), children's writer and literary critic, the eldest child of the Revd Isaac Taylor (1759-1829) of Ongar and his wife Ann (née Martin) (1757-1830). At that time, Joseph Gilbert was Tutor in Classics and Mathematics at the Rotherham Independent College and Pastor of the Nether Chapel in Sheffield; in 1817, he moved to Hull as Pastor of the Fish Street Chapel there and in 1823 to Nottingham, where he remained for the rest of his life, from 1828 as Pastor of the Friar Lane Congregation.

In 1819, Ann Gilbert's parents paid a visit to their daughter in Hull, at a time at which Mrs Gilbert was far from well. When they returned to Ongar, they took with them their eldest grandchild Josiah, then not quite five years old. (*The Autobiography of Mrs Gilbert (formerly Ann Taylor) (AOMMG)*, Vol 2, pp.17-18.) He was to make his home with them for the rest of his grandfather's life. The reason for this apparently drastic step is hard to fathom. It certainly does not betoken any lack of affection between parents and child, nor did it lead to any such lack in later life. Josiah grew up to be a loving and loyal son, whose editing and completion of his mother's biography shows his pride in, and affection for, both his parents wherever one looks, while the evidence in Ann's letters of her devotion, and her husband Joseph's, to their children, and particularly to Josiah, is too overwhelming to be gainsaid (see, eg, *AOMMG*, Vol 2, pp. 19-21). Initially at least, the move was presumably intended, at a time of sickness, to reduce the pressure on a busy Minister's wife and mother of, by now, four children. However, this would not explain why Josiah did not return once Ann was recovered. At Ongar, no doubt with the encouragement of his grandfather, who was an eminent engraver, Josiah first developed an aptitude for art, originally with the emphasis on sculpture. A

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<sup>1</sup> Some of this information has already been recorded in *Aspects of the History of Ongar*, Chapter 8, especially pp.52-53 and 91-93.

rough sketch by Isaac Taylor of Josiah with one of his early sculptures survives in the Nottingham Castle Museum.

On the death of his grandfather in December 1829, Josiah returned to his parents' home in Nottingham. Within a few years, however, he moved to London to undergo formal training as an artist. He was first a pupil at Sass's Academy (letter of Joseph Gilbert, 27 February 1832, Nottinghamshire Archives (M 22880/60)), which cost his father the substantial sum of £40 a year (letter of Joseph Gilbert, 21 July 1832, Nottinghamshire Archives (M 22880/65)), moving to the Royal Academy in 1833, where he was one of the prize students of his year (letter of Ann Gilbert, 20 November 1833, Nottinghamshire Archives (M 22880/74)). He exhibited his portraits, most of which were crayon drawings, regularly at the Royal Academy between 1847 and 1865 (*The Royal Academy Exhibitors* pp.236-237, cf, Suffolk Record Office HD 588/11/5) and his wife Susan's diaries record the names of many of his sitters, ranging from relatives to the Marquess of Devonshire. (That this could be a lucrative business is shown by the fact that Josiah earned £60 in less than a fortnight painting the Marquess of Downshire and Lady Harriet Clive (entry in diary of Thomas Green, Josiah's brother-in-law, for 19 April 1846 - Frome Museum). That is probably about £6,000 in today's money!) A brief account of Josiah Gilbert's career as a painter is given by Heather Williams in *The Lives and Works of Nottingham Artists 1750-1914* (1981), an unpublished doctoral thesis, a copy of which is held by the Nottingham Castle Museum. Unfortunately, the present whereabouts of only a small proportion of his many portraits are now known. There are a few in the Nottingham Public Library, the Nottingham Castle Museum and the Bromley House Library in Nottingham, at least one in the Taylor Room in the Guildhall in Lavenham, one or two in the National Portrait Gallery collection, two in the Laing Gallery in Newcastle, one in the Colchester Museum Resource Centre and a few in private hands (including four owned by the present writer). (See further *OMHS Newsletter* for August 2012.)

Josiah Gilbert married Susanna Green (1809-1871), usually known as Susan, at Chorlton, near Manchester, on 17 January 1839. (Entries in Susan's diaries suggest that their relationship had first blossomed at Thrumpton near Nottingham on 1 November 1834.) Susan's father was the Nottingham hosier John Green, a friend of the Gilbert family, who died in 1832, aged 80; in an entry in Ann Gilbert's Album (p.309) commemorating the wedding, he is described as "the late John Green Esq of Castlegate, Nottingham". Susan's mother Susannah (née Hine) had died in 1811 soon after Susan was born. The address of both bride and groom is given on the certificate as 3 Richmond Terrace, Stretford, the home of Susan's sister and brother-in-law, Anna & John Latham (see, eg, Ann Gilbert's Album p.309 & numerous entries in Susan Gilbert's diaries). Between 1841 and 1866, Susan Gilbert kept diaries, most of which have survived and are preserved in the Essex County Record Office at Chelmsford (D/DU 1545/1-18).

By 1841, Josiah and Susan were living in Berners Street in London, but, in 1843, Josiah accepted an invitation from his uncle, Isaac Taylor of Stanford Rivers, to collaborate with him in the development of a mechanical engraving device (*AOMMG*, Vol 2, pp209ff) and, in September of that year (see also Susan Gilbert's diary for 1843), Josiah and Susan moved to a house at Marden Ash on the southern outskirts of Chipping Ongar, which Josiah initially rented, but later bought. The original house dates from 1556. A facade was added in the mid-18th century and the building extended at the back at various times. (*Survey of Architecture in Ongar* produced by the Workers' Educational Association in the 1950s (Essex Record Office T/P 96).) The name "Dyers" appears in early deeds going back to the sixteenth century, and this is how the house is now known. However, Josiah Gilbert's writing-paper was headed simply "Marden Ash", and, as far as the present writer is aware, there is no reference to a house name in Taylor or Gilbert sources, extensive though those are. An obituary letter in *The British Weekly* of 25 August 1892 by "Claudius Clear" refers to "his beautiful home of many years - Marden Ash, Ongar". When the contents of the house were dispersed after the death of his second wife Mary Gilbert in 1925, a chair was bought by the Padfield family and taken to New House Farm, where Josiah Gilbert had lived with his grandparents as a small boy, and remained there until the house was sold in 1996.

Despite his involvement in the development of the engraving machine, Josiah Gilbert continued actively to pursue his career as a portrait painter, which was fortunate, since the unexpected death of the project's principal backer, Dr Traill, in 1847 - a victim of fever during the Irish potato famine - almost brought it to the point of financial disaster (*AOMMG*, Vol 2, 219ff).

Josiah Gilbert was a loyal member of the Congregational Chapel at Ongar, where his grandfather had been Pastor, and he was for thirty-six years one of its Deacons. A legacy from him enabled the Congregation to repurchase the Livingstone Cottages adjacent to the Chapel, which remain to this day an important source of income for what is now the United Reformed Church.

For several years in the early 1860s, Josiah and Susan Gilbert made extended visits to the Dolomite Mountains in the company of George Cheetham Churchill and his wife Anna Maitland (née Laurie), the daughter of one of Ann Gilbert's oldest friends and sister of Eliza, the first wife of Josiah's younger brother Henry (the co-founder of the Rothamsted Agricultural Research Station). A collection of water colours painted by Josiah during these and subsequent trips to the area was bequeathed to the Nottingham Castle Museum by Josiah's second wife in 1925. Josiah Gilbert and George Churchill were largely responsible for bringing the Dolomites to the attention of the British public.

Susan Gilbert died on 30 March 1871 in Nottingham and is buried in the General Cemetery there. Josiah subsequently married again on 9 August 1880, his second wife being a widow, Mary Angas (née Steward) (1835-1925), the daughter of the Revd George Steward, a Congregational Minister. George Steward's widow Mary had moved to Ongar in 1869, and it is likely that Mary Angas and Josiah met through her mother. Mary's first husband was William Henry Angas (1833-1879), a son of George Fife Angas (1789-1879), whom the *ODNB* notices as having been born in Newcastle and being a fervent Baptist, the founder of the National & Provincial Bank and one of the founders of South Australia. Mary's first marriage was an unhappy one from the outset, her husband quickly proving to be an active homosexual, if not a paedophile. She sued for divorce in 1860, just over a year after the marriage, though apparently unsuccessfully, and the couple lived apart for the rest of William Angas's life. (See further *OMHS Newsletter* of May 2012.)

Josiah was one of the original trustees of the Budworth Hall and was almost certainly responsible for the engagement as its architect of Fothergill Watson of Nottingham, a former pupil and colleague of Josiah's brother Charles, who was himself responsible for the design both (with Watson) of the chapels in the Ongar General Cemetery and of the schoolroom formerly attached to the Congregational (now URC) Chapel in Ongar, which was destroyed by fire in 1919. (See further: *Aspects of the History of Ongar*, Chapter 24, by Michael Leach; the article in the *Ongar Millennium History Project Newsletter*, 7th Issue, of September 1998; and the note in the *OMHS Newsletter* of May 2011.)

Josiah Gilbert died at Marden Ash on 15 August 1892, but is buried in the Nottingham General Cemetery near his first wife Susan, his grave being marked by an elaborate monument, which contrasts with the simpler, yet rather unusual, stone over Susan's grave. Mary Gilbert, who died on 20 March 1925, is buried in the Ongar General Cemetery. In her widowhood, though small in stature, she was a formidable presence well remembered by at least one inhabitant of Ongar who survived into the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the remarkable Marie Korf (1903-2003). A tablet in memory of Josiah and of his first wife Susan is to be seen on an internal wall of the URC chapel in Ongar.

Josiah Gilbert's publications, besides *AOMMG* and his contribution to *A Biographical Sketch of the Rev. Joseph Gilbert* (1853), were: (with G.C.Churchill) *The Dolomite Mountains. Excursions through Tyrol, Carinthia, Carniola, & Friuli in 1861, 1862, & 1863* (1864); *Cadore or Titian's Country* (1869); *Landscape in Art before Claude & Salvator* (1885); *Nature, the Supernatural and the Religion of Israel* (1893). The obituary cited above speculates that he was also the author of one of Murray's early guides to Switzerland, a thesis strongly supported by several entries in Susan's diaries to his

working on "his Guide" and one to his paying a visit to Murray in London. He contributed articles on theological topics to *The Congregationalist* and to *The Expositor*.

Known portraits of Josiah Gilbert are: the sketch by his grandfather referred to above; a study by the Nottingham artist Sylvanus Redgate, also in the Nottingham Castle Museum collection; a photograph owned by the United Reformed Church in Ongar; and what is probably to be identified as a self-portrait, signed and dated 1870, in the possession of the author of this article.

## Robin Gilbert

### Glastonbury Chairs

Many churches have wooden chairs with legs crossed at the sides, sloping backs, curved armrests and Latin inscriptions in Gothic script on the outer and inner arms and back. They also have a motif in the middle of the backrest. These are known as Glastonbury chairs and there are two in St. Martin's Church, Ongar with the following inscriptions:

*Da p-cem Domine; D-ne exaudi oration; A-ra clamor noster; Ad te perueniat; Sit laus deo.*

Following careful study of the inscriptions we concluded that the hyphens indicated missing letters and further scrutiny revealed the full words. The Gothic wood-carved letters were often difficult to decipher but finally we arrived at the following:

*Da p-cem Domine* = *Da pacem Domine* = Give peace O Lord

*D-ne exaudi oratione* = *Domine exaudi oratione* = Lord, hear my prayer

*A-ra clamor noster* = *Audira clamor nostra* = Hear our cry

*Ad te perueniat* = To You we come

*Sit laus deo* = Praise be to God

An example of one of the inscriptions is shown on the right and illustrates the difficulty of interpretation.

The first word begins in *D* and ends in *ne* and is an abbreviated form (hence the hyphen) of *Domine*. The second word is *exaudi* although we were hard pressed to interpret the second letter as *x*. The final word is easier to read and is *oratione*. Hence *Lord, hear my prayer*.



The chairs are made from solid oak, one of the most durable woods used in the Middle Ages. They are constructed without the use of nails, screws or glue. When assembled, they do not fold down, although it is frequently assumed that they do. However the construction allows them to be flattened, when the two poles are withdrawn, for ease of transport. The seats are associated with dignitaries such as bishops and judges travelling for their duties. "Glastonbury chair" is a 19<sup>th</sup> century name.

The original Glastonbury chair was made for John Thorne, a monk and the last treasurer of Glastonbury Abbey, between 1503 and 1539 for Richard Whiting (Whyting, Whityng), the last Abbot of Glastonbury. The former's original name was John Thorne but after becoming a monk dropped his surname and adopted a second Christian name as was the custom in Glastonbury. From then henceforth he was known as John Arthur (Iohanes Arthurus).

Thorne had the chairs made from a description brought back from Rome in 1504 by Abbot Richard Bere (Beere), an emissary of Henry VIII, and they were probably the first chairs to be used in the Glastonbury Abbey, as stools and benches were the normal furniture. The Latin inscriptions on the original chair read: *Johanes Arthurus* (John Arthur), *Monachus Glastonie* (Monk of Glastonbury), *Saluet eu Deus* (May God save him), *Da pacem Domine* (Give him peace O Lord), *Sit Laus Deo* (Praise be to God).

The square on the centre back of the centre panel was a symbol of the Earth (the four corners of the Earth before it was established that it was round). The triple triangle represents the trinity, the circle is the symbol of unity (without end) and the leaf motif on the back of the top rail is a symbol of life. The dimensions of the chair are: height: 35 inches; width: 28¼ inches, depth: 21½ inches; weight 56 lb. [The motifs on the chairs in St. Martin's also depict a square, circle and leaves].

John Arthur perished on Glastonbury Tor in 1539, hung, drawn and quartered alongside Abbot Richard Whiting during the dissolution of the monasteries. The Abbot sat on a Glastonbury chair during his trial at Bishop's Palace, Wells, where one of the two surviving original examples can still be seen.



One of the two identical Glastonbury chairs in St. Martin's Church

**Keith Snow and Stan Ball**

Thank you to all contributors this quarter's newsletter. I have an overflow of articles which I will hold back for the next issue, but please keep writing. It is your newsletter!

Email to: [jenny.main@ntlworld.com](mailto:jenny.main@ntlworld.com)

## Dates for your diary

Monday 10<sup>th</sup> November  
7.45pm for 8pm

“George Rose – local WW1 artist”  
A talk by Michael Leach  
Zinc Arts Centre

Wednesday 3<sup>rd</sup> December  
8.00pm

Christmas Social. Free to members  
Ongar Town Council Offices

Monday 9<sup>th</sup> February  
7.45pm for 8pm

“Finding history”  
A talk by Frank Knights  
Zinc Arts Centre

### **Advance notice:**

Friday 20<sup>th</sup> March  
7.45pm for 8pm

The 2015 Marion Slade Lecture  
“The Medieval Town of Chipping Ongar”  
A talk by Maria Medlycott  
At Budworth Hall, Ongar  
Admission by ticket includes cheese and wine

### **Date for submissions for next newsletter**

15<sup>th</sup> January 2015 to Jenny Main. [jenny.main@ntlworld.com](mailto:jenny.main@ntlworld.com)