

# Ongar Millennium History Society Newsletter

## November 2015

Hello and welcome to the November Newsletter. This quarter we cover a look back at our activities over the past year, a family history of the Webster/Gates/Glasscock Grave, Lost Diaries - a unique and fascinating insight into earlier – and very different times, and our review of the Tea at the Ongar Ritz.

A quick reminder that if you haven't already, it's time to renew your membership. It's disappointing that renewals have fallen off somewhat this year which is something we would like to address. The viability of the Society is driven by having a wide and diverse membership, which provides different ideas and prospective membership fees provide vital funding. The membership numbers are an essential criteria when applying for grants and external funding. Since its inception the society has done much good work to document the history of Ongar and bring it to the local and wider community, so we need your help to ensure that we are able to continue this very worthwhile cause.

As a member you receive this quarterly newsletter keeping you up to date with the work of the society. The newsletter is also available from the website 3 months in arrears. All of our newsletters since November 2007 are available on the website and form an invaluable reference source for anyone interested in the history of Ongar. There is also much more on the website about past projects, photos, maps and publications etc.

As many of you will know the Society provides regular talks, events and visits to places of interest. Our initial programme is detailed below and there will be more to come as the year progresses. I would encourage you to make full use of your membership and come along and enjoy the various activities that we run.

Don't forget that the Society has many artefacts from Ongar's history and who knows one day we might even get this into a local Ongar Museum.

Finally we have decided to make a change in the way we deliver the Christmas social this year. The format has remained unchanged for a number of years, so by way of a change the intention is to have a shared lunch. The idea being everyone brings their lunch and something to share. As part of the occasion there will also be an opportunity to view the archive of local artefacts that we have collected over the years.

**Jenny Main**

### **Autumn / Spring Outings and Walks**

- 17th November Talk about the Unknown Soldier at Zinc 8.00pm
- 8th December Members Only. Shared Lunch at the United Reformed Church
- 16th February Family History a short talk by local residents, details TBA
- 18th March Marion Slade Lecture History of Brewing 7.45 for 8.00 Budworth Hall

## **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 report for OMHS 15<sup>th</sup> September 2015**

As chair of the Ongar Millennium History Society I would like to give you a report on our programme and activities since the last AGM. Also to thank all the committee for their help and support during the year. We have had some new committee members and they have brought fresh thinking and ideas which have been welcomed.

We started our programme for the last year at the AGM when Jill Hope entertained us with her stories of Baugh's Chemist, with a talk 'Keep on taking the tablets' which she illustrated with many artefacts. To continue this theme we have used photos of these syringes and pill makers to make an exhibition in the 'windows' at the Health Centre.

In November Michael Leach gave us a fascinating insight into the life of local artist George Rose using his diaries written in World War One.

In December we held our annual Xmas party in the Ongar Town Council Offices. There was lots of food, and conviviality, but where were you the members? Disappointingly there was definitely a shortage of people.

In February we had an excellent illustrated talk by Andrew Smith from the High Country History Society who talked to us on 'Colchester Revealed'. He came at short notice because Frank Knights our local metal detector historian was indisposed. We hope Frank will talk this next year and update us on 'Finding History'

The Marion Slade lecture in the Budworth Hall in March was as usual a big hit. Maria Medlycott from ECC talked on the 'Medieval Essex Town of Chipping Ongar.'

In April we were privileged to listen to Keith Snow on his well-researched topic of 'Charles Darwin and the survival of the fittest. A Victorian Legend'.

In 2015 the Magna Carta and its 800<sup>th</sup> Anniversary was a cause for celebration. Six of the Knights from Essex were signatories at the signing of the Magna Carta. One of these Geoffrey de Manville, lived at Pleshey. So that is why we decided on a visit to Pleshey Castle. It is not usually open to the public but a group of us visited in June. We had the privilege of the company of Quentin Buller who shared with us many interesting facts about the history of the castle.

Another visit was to Chelmsford Museum in July. Nick Wickenden the Museums Manager gave us an overview of the archaeology of the Chelmsford area, and then we spent an hour or so touring the galleries. After a cup of tea and cakes. Again we were able to revisit Pleshey Castle through the museum's exhibition.

This year we have been privileged to be given a grant by Ongar Town Council for help with storage and display in our archive cupboards and we thank them for it. We are still hoping to make these resources more accessible to the general public. A lot of work has been done by committee

members Lorna Vaux and Ron Huish in cataloguing these resources, and there is a book list that has been created. We have an agreement with the United Reformed Church for access at appropriate times to these archives, and we invite any of you who are interested, to sign up for a visit.

We are extremely fortunate in Ongar to have such a lot of history in our town, particularly St Martin's Church. This year there has been two publications outlining aspects of its history, which OMHS has been able to help finance. Daniel Secker, wrote a pamphlet for the Essex Society for Archaeology and History, entitled 'St Martin, Chipping Ongar, the Romanesque church'. This was partly funded by a legacy from Ann Roberts' estate.

As you will know Ongar News has a section where clubs and societies can submit a column. The committee has decided that it would be an appropriate use of the column to write up the history of other clubs and how and why they were formed. Many people in Ongar were not here when this happened. To date we have outlined the history of the Twinning Association and the Angling Club. Perhaps you, our members, can help us with this and write up the history of other local organisations and clubs, that you have been or are involved with and which we can use in our column.

Our website is still going strong and we still get requests from all around the world for information about relatives or places in the Ongar area. We try to answer them, and often refer them to Kathy Wenborne, who likes a challenge.

We were sorry this year to hear of the deaths of Mrs Margaret Buxton of Castle House, who was our patron, and of Wally Barnard, a dear gentle/man, who were both keen supporters of OMHS.

The BOO (Brains of Ongar) Quiz was started by OMHS at the Millennium, and was run each year by us. It was decided last year however that the challenge shield had run out of named spaces, and that it would be an appropriate time to pass the running of this over to someone else, hopefully the Town Council. So last year was the final challenge for local organisations to have their name on the trophy. And the winners were Ongar Millennium History Society.

Our programme for next year has been finalised, but not in time to have the membership cards printed. Meetings and outings will be passed on to you through the newsletter, website and through Emails. Please support the talks and the visits out. And also let us know of anything you would like to do, and we hope for input from you as to the future of the Ongar Millennium History Society.

**Felicite Barnes**

### **Webster/Gates/Glasscock Grave**

There is a headstone in Greensted's churchyard commemorating a large family – Webster, Gates, Glasscock; they all are named. Time has unsteadied it and the growth of a large holly tree has thrust it to lean at an angle. Still, relatives come to that peaceful churchyard to visit it, but who are the eight people that sleep in the shade of the holly tree's branches?

James Webster, the first name on the headstone, was born in Harwich in about 1807, the son of another James, and his wife Rachel (born Rachel Severin Munt). James senior came originally from Norfolk, and at the time of his marriage to Rachel in 1804, was a confectioner in the parish of Bloomsbury in London. Rachel's father was Captain Nicholas Munt, who had been water bailiff for Ipswich. The Munt family is quite interesting, but would be too much of a digression to mention here – however, Rachel's middle name was the maiden name of her maternal grandmother, Elizabeth Severin (1717-1800). Severin is a Huguenot surname, so Elizabeth may have been related to the refugees who established a French church at Thorpe-le-Soken, near Harwich.

James Webster senior relocated on his marriage, and by the time of his second child's birth in about 1810, the family had moved to Writtle, where he worked as a baker. At this time, it was common for bakers to be involved in brewing and innkeeping – his son, Francis, was licensee of the Fox & Goose.

James Webster junior married Mary Ann Gates at a church in Spitalfields in 1831, although her family lived in High Ongar at the time. Her father, Francis Gates (another name on the Greensted headstone) was a baker-cum-taverner too, at the Baker's Arms on King's Street, so it's probably no surprise the couple met – so often in those days, relationship networks intertwined families with local commerce. Quite why they married in Spitalfields is a mystery – they may have used a "suitcase address" to enable them to marry outside of their own parishes, and it may even indicate parental objection to their marriage. Mary Ann was the eldest of twelve children – she was born in 1808, and she was twenty two years old when her youngest sibling was born.

By the time of the 1841 census, James Webster junior and his wife Mary Ann were living in High Ongar, James working as a baker. They had four children under the age of ten (another had died in infancy the year before), and a journeyman baker was living with them, as well as two servants. The servants may not necessarily have been domestic servants as we might think of them – they may have been James' bakery employees.

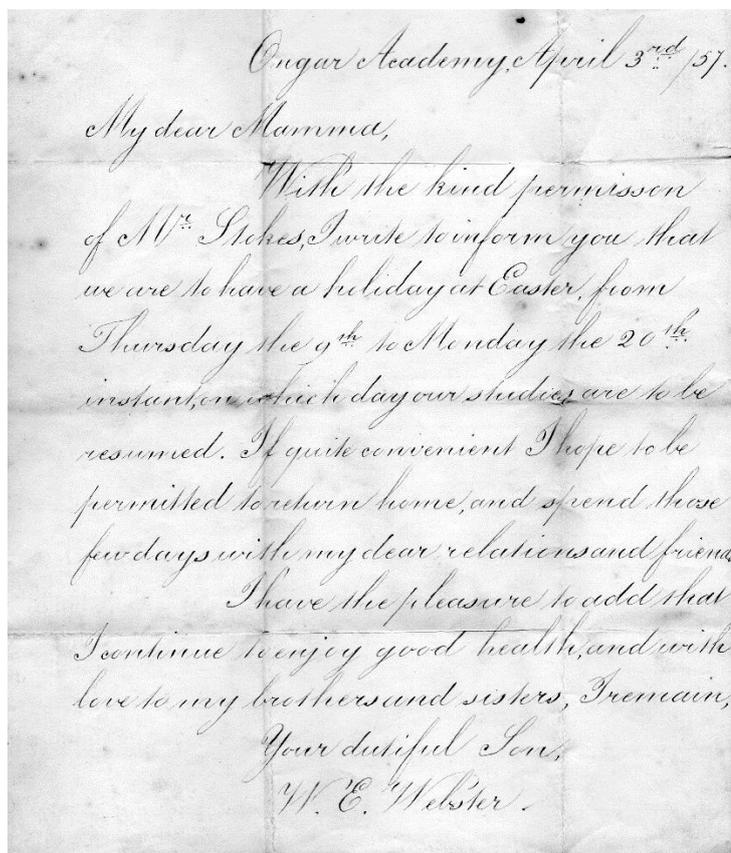
But ten years later, on the 1851 census, we can see that the family have upped sticks and moved to Chipping Ongar High Street, where James Webster junior was working as a merchant. Joyce Clement, one of the Websters' descendants, believed this to be the large white building which is now a solicitor's.



Newspaper articles seem to indicate that although the family lived on the High Street, James had a farm at Greensted. An agriculture article from the Hertford Mercury & Reformer, 25<sup>th</sup> June 1853, talks about a reaping machine invented by Isaac Frost and manufactured in Sheffield, which James Webster, a merchant of Ongar, had bought to use "on his farm at Greenstead, Essex, the next coming harvest." It was reported in several newspapers, including one in Somerset, which suggests that James was quite an innovator. Other newspaper articles show that he was on the Board of Guardians of the Ongar Union, so he was involved with the running of the workhouse. We might think of James, then, as a man who wasn't idle – he pressed for improvements in farming, while being involved in the running of his local community.

Sadly, James was only able to use his reaping machine for one harvest – he died in December 1854 and was buried in Greensted. A note in the burial register says that he was of Chipping Ongar, "having a farm at Greensted". His death notice in The Bury & Norwich Post described him as a corn merchant of Chipping Ongar, and another in the Essex Standard said that his death came "after only a few days' illness." He was 47, and left a wife and six children.

Mary Ann, his widow, did not remarry, and outlived James by thirty years. She seems to have been an indomitable woman, who carried on with her husband's farm, presumably with the help of her children. By 1857, the Websters were no longer living on Ongar High Street. A fascinating and rare survival is a letter from her second youngest child, Walter (1844-1914), from Stokes' Ongar Academy, addressed to his mother at Greensted Lodge. In copperplate hand, Walter formally wrote to his mother about the forthcoming Easter holiday – it was perhaps a writing exercise.



Ongar Academy, April 3<sup>rd</sup> 1857.  
My dear Mamma,  
With the kind permission  
of M<sup>r</sup> Stokes, I write to inform you that  
we are to have a holiday at Easter, from  
Thursday the 9<sup>th</sup> to Monday the 20<sup>th</sup>  
instant, on which day our studies are to be  
resumed. It quite convenient I hope to be  
permitted to return home, and spend those  
few days with my dear relations and friends.  
I have the pleasure to add that  
I continue to enjoy good health, and with  
love to my brothers and sisters, I remain,  
Your dutiful Son,  
W. E. Webster.



W. Webster  
Greensted Lodge  
Essex

Letter and envelope written by Walter Webster

Mary Ann's parents died around the same time as she lost her husband – her father, Francis Gates, in November 1854 and Susannah, her mother, in March 1855. A death notice in the Chelmsford Chronicle said that Francis was "universally respected" and had died "after many years' illness borne with patience & resignation." They were both interred at Greensted with their son-in-law.

On the 1861 census, Mary Ann is the head of the Webster household in Greensted, a farmer of 105 acres, employing six men and one boy. The 1863 trade directory says that she was the farmer at "The Lodge", which is presumably Lodge Farm. In W. R. Powell's "A History of the County of Essex" (1956), it is described as being towards the south of the parish, "a timber-framed house of mid- or late-17th-century date." Mary Ann's letter-writing son, Walter, now 17, lived at home in 1861, and his occupation – "farmer's son" – indicates that he had a role to play in running the Webster's business. His older brother James, 23, also lived on the farm, working as a miller. Richard Buttle Webster, the youngest of the Webster clan, was 14 at the time of the census. He lived in Chipping Ongar, apprentice to Joseph Hubbing, a grocer on the High Street. Poor Richard died only four years later – he was buried with his father and grandparents in Greensted.

By 1871, Mary Ann had moved back to Chipping Ongar High Street. Her surviving children had all married and moved away by this point, so Mary Ann lived with her eleven year old granddaughter, Emily Webster. Emily is a bit of a mystery – she was born in London but who her parents are, I

don't know. Mary Ann and Emily were still living together in 1881, when Mary Ann is described as being of "independent means" – when she died 1885, she left over £1,000, which was a lot of money then, about £70,000. She was taken to the churchyard in Greensted, too, and laid to rest with her family.

But how do the Glasscocks tie in with the Gates and Webster families? Rachel Mary Ann Severen Webster, whose appellation is an object lesson in naming conventions (she appears to have been named after her mother and grandmother, and therefore her great-great-grandmother as well!), married Thomas Glasscock in 1852. They had ten children in quick succession – amongst them, twins in 1853, and a son called Frederick in 1854 – Frederick died soon after his birth and you can see his name on the Greensted headstone. In 1861, her husband was a corn merchant, living on Chipping Ongar High Street, but presumably business faltered (her brother William Hucks Webster, who seems to have taken over his father's corn merchant business after 1854, went bankrupt in 1857) and by 1871, they had moved to Mile End in East London. Thomas worked as a bus driver, which must have been an arduous job, controlling a cumbersome horse-drawn passenger-vehicle through busy city streets – a far cry from being a market town corn merchant. By the time of the 1881 census, Rachel was a widow, living in Bow; like her mother, she did not remarry. Another of her sons, James Webster Glasscock (named, as you can tell, after his maternal grandfather), died in 1888 and was buried with the family in Greensted. By 1891, Rachel was in Wanstead, living on her own means – presumably on the inheritance from her late mother.

When Rachel died in 1898, she was the last member of the family to be buried in Greensted's churchyard. They had come from different backgrounds – from mariners and religious refugees in north-east Essex, to bakers, innkeepers, merchants and farmers in the south-west. History changed and shaped their lives, but today, they rest peacefully in the lee of an ancient church, under the spreading branches of a holly tree.

## **Helen Barrell.**

[www.essexandsuffolksurnames.co.uk](http://www.essexandsuffolksurnames.co.uk)

## **A lost diary**

Diaries give a unique and fascinating insight into earlier – and very different – times, but few survive from the seventeenth century. Diaries kept by women are even rarer and I have always been tantalised by the thought that the one kept by Elizabeth Walker of Fyfield (who died in 1690) might one day be found. We know that she kept a detailed diary because, after her death, Dr Anthony Walker, her husband and rector of Fyfield, published *The Holy Life of Mrs Elizabeth Walker* to extol her virtues. Included in the book are some short extracts from her diary, as well as his own recollections of her spiritual attributes, and the worthy and charitable works that she had performed. Much was expected of a rector's wife in that period, as the following extract (in Dr Walker's vivid seventeenth century voice) demonstrates:

"About three or four years since, there came to the door, begging, a forlorn creature, a girl of about thirteen years old, in such a loathsome pickle as may stain my ink to write, and turn the stomachs of the nice to read it; almost eaten up with scabs and vermin, with scarce rags to cover her, and as ignorant of God and Christ as if she had been born in Lapland or Japan. When she (i.e. Mrs Walker) had asked her many questions, both of her miserable condition and religion (of the latter of which she knew not one syllable, except her Christian name was Mary, her surname was Bun), the case seemed so desperate it almost posed and put her pity to a plunge, what to do to rescue her from the very brink and precipice of temporal and eternal ruin. But while the girl was eating what she sent her warm, being well-nigh starved, she considered what might be done. She feared, if she dismissed her so, her ruin was next to inevitable. And not to prevent that to her power, she judged

inconsistent with the love of God dwelling in her heart. She then resolved, not on the shortest, but the safest course. She ordered clean straw to be laid in an outhouse, where she lodged and fed her, until she procured a charitable neighbour to strip her, cut off her hair and wash her, for it was not possible to cleanse her otherwise. She also provided her old clothes to keep her sweet and warm. Then she used means to cure her itch. And when some months had perfectly recruited her, and made her like another creature, she clothed her new, took her into the house, taught her the catechism, to read, and to do somewhat in the family which might fit her for service, and prevailed with a rich farmer, who had married one of our maids, to take her apprentice, promising to clothe her well."

We can see that, quite apart from her physical condition, there was deep concern about her spiritual state, and her lack of religious knowledge. Mrs Walker, as was usual for a clergyman's wife, was versed in medical remedies, and saw it as her duty to provide her services for nothing to those who could not pay. And, having accepted that her responsibility to God was to rescue the unfortunate girl from her immediate crisis, she ensured also that her future was taken care of.

Mrs Walker's diary would have contained much religious introspection, typical of the strong protestant ethos of the times, but there would have been other insights into a vanished way of life. It is not known if Dr Walker himself kept a diary, though it is certainly possible that he did, as protestants were encouraged to do so as part of the necessary spiritual examination of their lives. Elsewhere in the book he recalled being attacked by footpads near Ongar, and robbed of his pocket watch. However divine intervention ensured that one of the villains, perhaps stirred by an uneasy conscience, returned to his unconscious body and wrapped him in a cloak to protect him from the rain. If both diaries were ever found, independently reflecting on the same life experiences, that would be a rare treasure indeed!

## **Michael Leach**

### **Afternoon Tea at the Ongar Ritz**

Taking Tea at the Ongar Ritz is proving to be very popular. We were celebrating our Queen as the longest reigning monarch in British history. Several members and guests recalled their own royal experiences or "close encounters".

Our own Society had on display its correspondence with Buckingham Palace when we modernised the Budworth Hall clock explaining that it was in celebration of Her Majesty's Golden Jubilee and how we had followed precedent when the clock was originally installed to celebrate Queen Victoria's Golden Jubilee.

Following the interval of tea and cakes in the Ritz tradition, we saw an excellent video of "A Year in the Life of The Queen" which covered many behind the scenes glimpses of the Diamond Jubilee and London Olympics. Even James Bond dropped in!

## **John Winslow**

## Upcoming Events

- **17th November** Talk by Martyn Lockwood about the Unknown Soldier. The talk will be held at Zinc 8.00pm. Entry free to members.
- **8th December** Members Only. A new format this year for our Christmas event as we will be holding a shared lunch at the United Reform Church. There will also be an opportunity to view our archive material on the day.
- **16th February** Family History - a short talk by local residents. We will be announcing details once the arrangements are finalised.
- **18th March** Marion Slade Lecture History of Brewing 7.45 for 8.00 Budworth Hall. The talk will be given by Andy Skene from Moreton Brewery. Entrance by ticket.
- Further events will be announced in future newsletters and on the web site. 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.

## Happy Christmas

The committee would also like to take this opportunity to wish you all a very happy Christmas and New Year.

### 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 web site by January 2016 to be in time for included in the February edition of the newsletter