

ONGAR COMMUNITY TREE STRATEGY

Epping Forest District Council

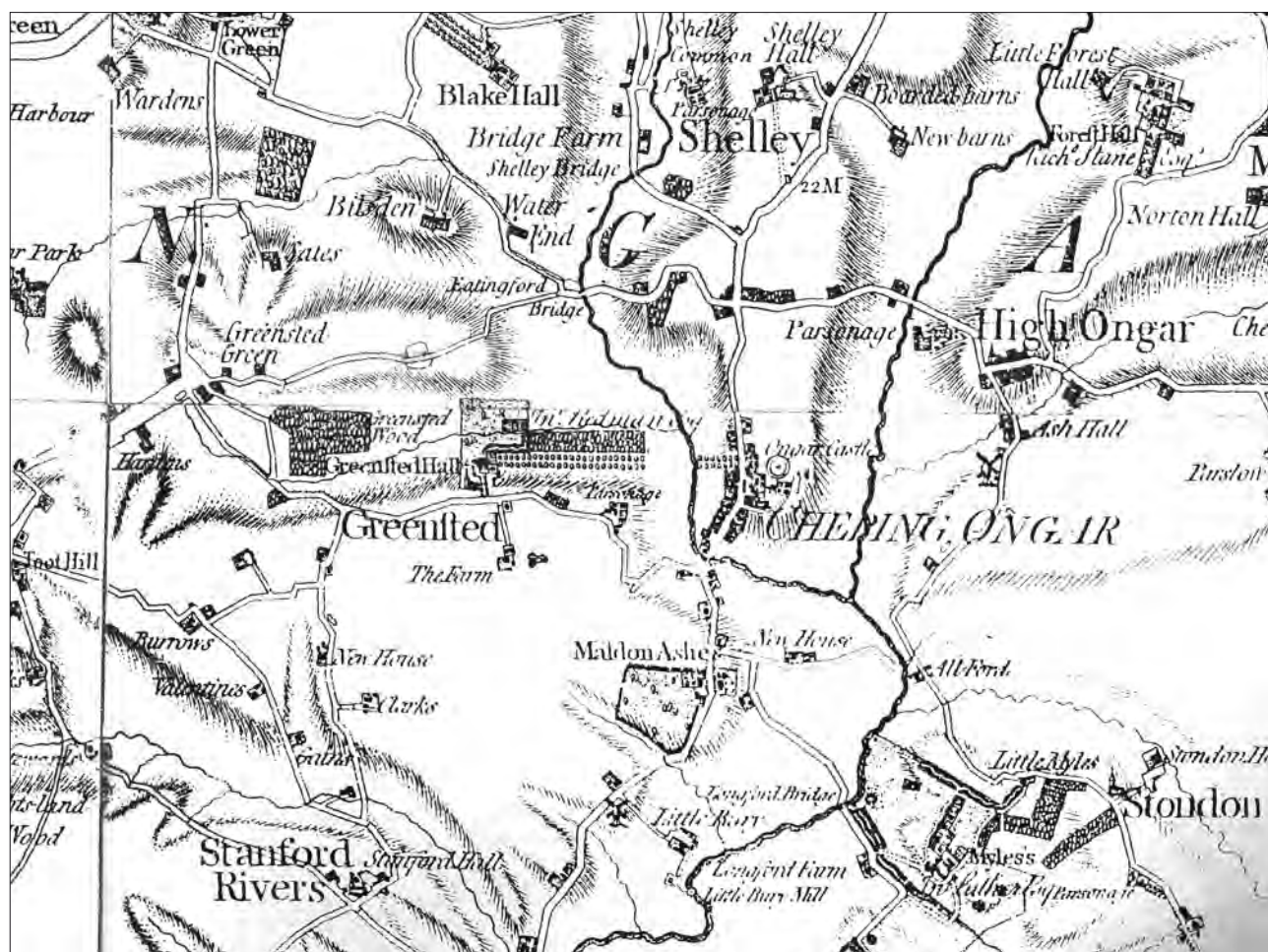
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ONGAR COMMUNITY TREE STRATEGY

An assessment of the trees, hedgerows and woods of the parish in their historic, physical, social and cultural context, with guidelines for their future management.

Prepared by Epping Forest District Council, with Ongar Town Council, Ongar Millennium History Society, and Ongar Wildlife Society.



Dedication

This community tree strategy for Ongar is dedicated to those local people who gave up their time to produce this document. Particular acknowledgement is due to the late Paul Moxey, whose understanding of the relationship between landscape history and human activity underpins this important document.

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Foreword



By Pauline Buchanan-Black, Director, The Tree Council

In the first decade of the 21st Century our awareness has increased of the contribution made by trees to our health and well being, as well as appreciation of their role to help define character of the landscape. In ancient countryside, such as Ongar, the pattern of trees, woodland and hedgerows is particularly important, and of course the veteran trees should be regarded as Green Monuments in their own right.

At the same time, however, our awareness of threats to the treescape, both of town and country has increased, whether from changed patterns of living, the threat of massive new developments, or of unprecedented climate change. In these changing circumstances I believe it is vital for the future of our communities that we find new ways to protect trees and to encourage new and appropriate tree planting. For that, the involvement and active engagement of the community will be vital.

In that context this initiative is both timely and inspiring. The work done to produce it has been a true partnership, with dedicated involvement of many individuals from the local community, with community organisations and the Town and District Councils in support. It might, and I believe it should, serve as a model for other communities across Britain.

On behalf of the Tree Council I am pleased to endorse this Community Tree Strategy for Ongar.

Pauline Buchanan Black



Introduction

This is the fourth of the proposed district-wide series of Community Tree Strategies. It has been developed by Epping Forest District Council with active cooperation and support of the Ongar Town Council, local community organisations and local residents. It is intended that the information and guidance that it contains will promote the protection and active conservation of trees and hedgerows and encourage public participation in projects to enhance the local environment and so influence long term change for the better.

The scope of the project is to:

- 1) Assess the current treescape of the parish of Ongar
- 2) View the landscape in its physical, historic, social and cultural context
- 3) Provide guidance for all concerned on the conservation, management and enhancement for the future.



Key Aim and Actions

The key aim of the Ongar Tree Strategy is to conserve and protect the landscape of the area by encouraging and supporting local projects that enhance its quality and increase its accessibility for the community. This will be achieved by:

1) ensuring that significant trees are not unnecessarily or unjustifiably lost particularly as a result of the planning and development processes.

6) protecting and encouraging careful management of the parish's most important trees by identifying and recording them, through co-operation with their owners, and by legal means and planning powers when necessary.

2) increasing the coverage of hedgerows within the countryside, by avoiding further losses except where necessary and justified, and supporting the planting of new hedgerows.

7) ensuring that tree owners are aware of the importance of trees, and that sources of advice are available, locally and from the District Council.

3) encouraging the planting of trees, particularly larger growing trees in suitable locations.



8) encouraging the conservation of traditional elements of the countryside, and taking advantage of opportunities for enhancement.

4) locating and recording all the important ancient hedgerows within the parish and encouraging their management and protection.

9) continuing to use a variety of means to promote the importance of trees as part of the landscape of the parish, and the life of the community.

5) working with woodland owners and statutory bodies to record and manage woods, conserve their key features, increase their value for wildlife and, when appropriate, increase public access.



Character Appraisal

Location

The town of Ongar lies 11 miles (17.6km) from Chelmsford, 5 miles (8km) from Epping and 7 miles (11km) from Brentwood.

In 1966, Shelley, Chipping Ongar and Greensted together with Marden Ash, were amalgamated to form Ongar Parish (now Town) Council. This covers an area of 2,229 acres (902 hectares), with the greater proportion still in agricultural use.

Size of Parish	Hectares	Acres
Chipping Ongar	183	452
Greensted	275	680
Marden Ash	198	489
Shelley	246	608
Total	902	2229

According to the Tree Council woodlands cover 10% of the whole of the British Isles, but the amount of woodland varies from place to place. In Ongar, woodlands cover less than 6% of the total area, whilst agricultural land covers just under 90%.

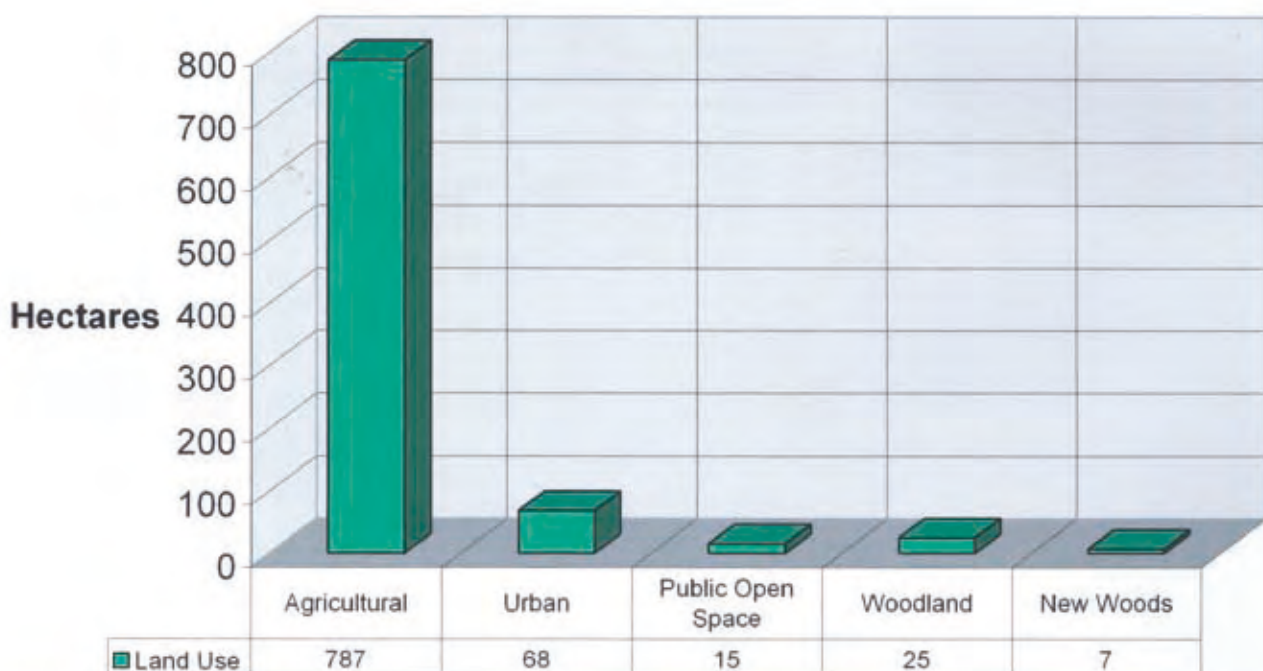


However local residents are fortunate that the open agricultural land surrounding Ongar can be accessed by a network of well maintained public footpaths.

The highest point of the area is about 200 ft (60 metres) above sea level. The land is relatively flat, but with several streams cut into it. The Cripsey Brook flows through the area to the confluence with the River Roding at the eastern edge of the parish.

The population of the Ongar area in the 2001 census was 6060, but has risen since then with the occupation of several new housing developments.

Current Land Use



Geology and Early Landscape History

Geological Foundation

Ongar lies on the boundary of two geological areas. It is within both the London Basin and on the southern edge of the East Anglian plateau - a slightly raised swathe of glacial Boulder Clay stretching from mid Essex into Suffolk and Norfolk.

The Cripsey Brook and its tributary streams flow into the River Roding, forming part of the network of rivers that feed into the Thames to drain the London Clay, Claygate and Bagshot Beds which fill the London Basin. This basin is the great hidden downfold in the chalk which dips between the Chiltern Hills and the North Downs.

In the local area, the higher ground is covered with boulder clay and areas of gravel that were left behind by melting ice sheets at the close of the last Ice Age, c.10,000 years ago. These include the remains of a substantial glacial lake at Shelley, in which a mammoth tusk was found during the construction of a reservoir in 1983.

These glacial deposits originally covered the whole district. They stretch northwards into Suffolk and Norfolk as the East Anglian Plateau. Locally, they have been cut through by the River Roding and its tributaries to expose the underlying London Clay and, in the west of the parish, a small area of the Claygate Beds, which lies above the London Clay.

The result is a gently undulating landscape, with the higher ground capped by glacial clays and gravel patches, but dissected by a network of streams to expose the underlying London Clay along the flanks of their valleys. Along the Roding and parts of the other streams there are deposits of alluvium.

Scattered throughout the area there are occasional 'sarsens', naturally cemented blocks of sandstone, thought to have come from a rock formation which previously extended over much of southern England but which has been lost through erosion. Individual stones were sometimes used to mark old trackways and were often incorporated into the foundations of

churches and other buildings. A few examples occur in the Ongar area.



Mammoth Tusk found at Shelley, 1983

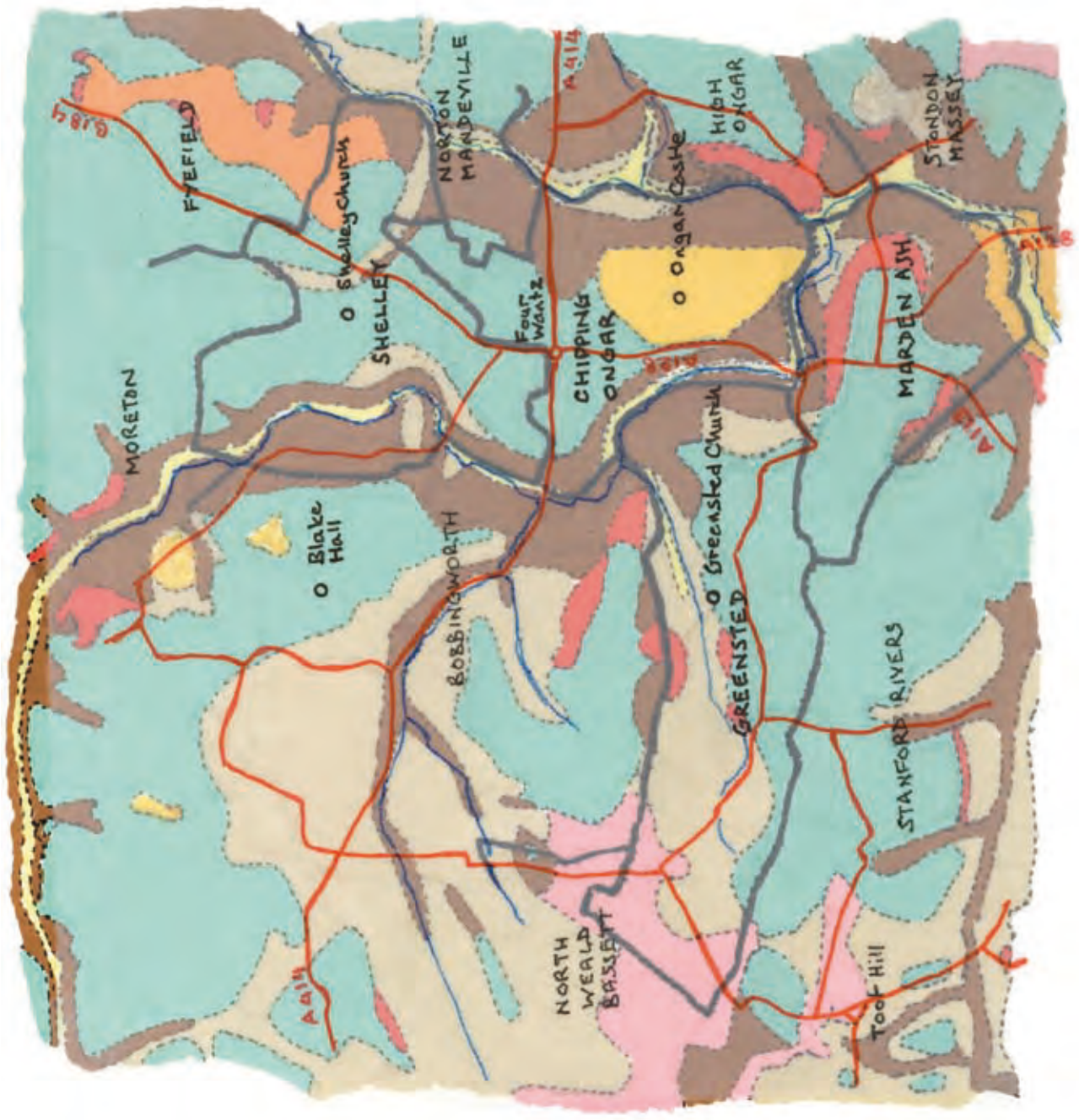
The significance of the underlying geology lies in its influence on the history of the landscape, and the way in which the different character of the various rocks is reflected in the types of tree and other plants that grow on them. Ash, dogwood and clematis, all of which grow in the local hedges, prefer lime-rich conditions and are more frequent on the boulder clay, whereas willows and poplars occur more in the valley bottoms. Of course it is possible to successfully grow trees in places where they would not be found naturally and there are some local examples of trees that 'do not fit' because they reflect a past landowner's whim. However, in general, the geology helps to explain the distribution of the local trees.



SURFACE GEOLOGY OF THE ONGAR AREA

LEGEND

-  Alluvium
-  River Terraces
-  Glacial Lake Deposits
-  Head Gravel
-  Boulder Clay
-  Kesgrave Sands and Gravels
-  Older Head
-  Claygate Beds
-  London Clay
-  Parish boundaries
-  one kilometre



Drawn by Paul Moxey

A Developing Landscape

The origins of today's landscape lie in the developing woodland that colonised the area at the end of the Ice Age and gradually changed as different tree species became established in response to the changing climate. At the same time, early inhabitants began both to modify and remove woodland to meet the needs of the growing population.

Buried pollen deposits from the Lea Valley and Epping Forest provide a clue as to what was happening locally. At first only a tundra type of vegetation, similar to northern Canada or Scandinavia today, was able to survive, but as average temperatures gradually rose, birch, aspen and willow colonised. These were followed by pine and hazel, then alder, oak, small-leaved lime and elm. Other trees - holly, ash, beech and hornbeam – followed and by c.4000 BC the landscape was largely covered by mixed deciduous woodland made up of species familiar to us today. Then as now, the type of woodland varied according to local influences such as geology and drainage. Alder and willow featured strongly in the river valleys, with oak and other species on the higher ground. Small-leaved lime appears to have been abundant in what is now the northern part of Epping Forest and is thought to have extended north and east into much of modern Essex.

This early woodland is sometimes called 'wildwood', implying that it was untouched by human activity. This is not strictly true. The early stages of woodland development coincided with the Mesolithic period, c.8000 BC, when nomadic 'hunter-gatherers' were coppicing and removing trees to create grazing areas. Their numbers would have been small, but their flint tools have been found scattered throughout the area, including a hand axe from Chipping Ongar. There were settlements in the river valleys, and evidence of a seasonal Mesolithic encampment has been found in Epping Forest. Grazing herds of wild cattle and deer would also have given a more open aspect to some areas, and may even have been semi-herded by the Mesolithic people. In fact, it seems that the local woodlands were being modified and used even as they developed.



Traditional method of woodland management

Woodland clearance increased dramatically with the introduction of settled agriculture in the Neolithic period c.4000 BC, and continued into the following Bronze and Iron Ages; it has been estimated that by 500 BC 50% of the original woodland cover had been removed.

To the west and south of the local area, Iron Age hillforts at Ambresbury Banks, Loughton Camp and beside the River Roding at Uphall Camp are witness to an increasingly large, organised and sophisticated society, living in small towns, minting its own coinage, and exporting grain to Rome. The larger woodlands on the poor soils of the Epping Forest ridge, however, remained intact; records indicate that small-leaved lime remained dominant here until the Anglo-Saxon period, before declining dramatically and being replaced by beech and hornbeam. Elsewhere, the spread of settlement and the growing demand for agriculture led to further woodland clearance along the river valleys and lower slopes.



Ongar Woodland History

Roman and Anglo-Saxon Woodland

In 43AD, England was incorporated into the Roman Empire. This brought the establishment of a strong administration, supported by an effective standing army, centred on the new settlement of Londinium, and the construction of a network of good roads - one of which ran close to the Ongar area at Bobbingworth. Romano-British farms were usually located on existing Iron Age sites but the more prosperous became villas as more woodland was cleared, and the general pattern of the landscape continued to be a patchwork of fields and woods. There is evidence of Roman occupation in Chipping Ongar itself. A villa, fishpond, and possibly a water mill were located at Greensted. The Romans coppiced woodland on a systematic basis and introduced sweet chestnut and walnut, but their detailed impact in Ongar is unknown.

The Roman occupation ended with the withdrawal of the legions in 410AD, but it is seldom possible to draw clear lines in history. The administration and economy were struggling before 410AD, and there were valiant attempts to maintain standards afterwards. What is clear is that there was a gradual, but widespread, breakdown of civil order, leading to a significant decline in population and agriculture, with an expansion of secondary woodland into previously farmed areas.

Description of a Layered Hedge

Hedges require management on a regular basis. In Essex, hedges were traditionally cut down to ground level or coppiced and allowed to regrow.

A layered hedge, as shown below, retains its usefulness as a stock-proof barrier and wildlife habitat, but to maintain a hedge like this requires time and considerable skill.

Between the end of the Roman period and the emergence of the Anglo-Saxon state around 900AD the country, and the local area, were subject to a succession of invasions, colonisations and wars, which resulted in further declines in population and continued encroachment of secondary woodland into farm land. Only towards the end of this period was there a gradual and accelerating recovery of population and prosperity, with, by the 9th Century, a significant revival of agriculture and woodland clearance. Movement of Anglo-Saxon settlers along the Thames, Lea and Roding made a major impact on south west Essex. It is possible that that the controlled pollarding and grazing (later enshrined as commoners' rights) within the larger woodlands of Epping Forest originated at this time. This was, essentially, the origin of the landscape described in the Domesday Survey of 1086.



Layered Hedge



Domesday Woodland Survey

King William I commissioned the Domesday survey of England in 1086. The survey sought to record the assets of the realm, and to determine the changes over the two decades of William's rule. Woodland, the source of timber for tools and building, is prominent in the survey, but the area of woodland within a manor or parish is difficult to determine.

The Domesday survey was completed in two volumes, each covering a region of England. In the larger of those regions, woodland is generally assessed in terms of length and breadth expressed in leagues and furlongs, but this will be of limited accuracy.

In Essex, Norfolk and Suffolk, a region covered by the Little Domesday volume, the survey is more detailed. Here the area of woodland is usually expressed in terms of the number of pigs that could be supported by a wood through the consumption of beech mast and acorns. Again it must be expected that translating such a measurement to an acreage will be uncertain. However, Chipping Ongar, Greensted and Shelley possessed woods (as did three quarters of Essex parishes).



Acorns

Domesday Survey

Around Christmas 1085, William I made plans to survey all England. His purpose was to document the ownership of manorial holdings, and to determine the changes in their value during the period of his reign. The survey was aided by the existing Anglo-Saxon administrative structure and, remarkably, the survey was probably completed within a year. Entries for East Anglia are fortunately detailed. The survey is an outstanding achievement in census recording, hugely important for our understanding of medieval England.



Timber framed building: Blake Hall Barn



The Royal Forest of Essex

Following Norman traditions, William I introduced Forest Laws. These laws were devised to protect deer and wild boar (collectively termed venison), and permit royal hunting. Not only was the hunting of deer by the populace prohibited, but crops could not be fenced by their owners in order to control the venison. The laws applied only to certain areas of England, but these areas were extensive, eventually amounting to more than one fifth of the area of the country, spread between about 70 Forests. The term Royal Forest does not imply trees directly but does determine the legal boundary of the region.

The Forest of Essex was one of the largest in England, and its officials were based in three centres: Chipping Ongar, Waltham and Colchester.

Although direct evidence is lacking, the county of Essex became a Royal Forest around c.1100. Since deer were protected, so was their cover, and woodland management was restricted. The Royal Forest offered the opportunity for the king to hunt deer, generate revenue from fines, and stay at hunting palaces and lodges in relative security.

A Chief Justice of the Forests administered all Royal Forests, and a Warden was placed in charge of each. Foresters protected the deer and verderers were appointed to maintain the vert, the woodland. Woodward managed the timber resources within the Forest and regarders were assigned to check encroachments of the Forest boundary.

Deer parks were constructed for raising and managing deer. Recorded evidence of 160 medieval parks in Essex has been discovered.



Ongar Great Park

Ongar Great Park was the first recorded English deer park, a "deer-haye", being mentioned in an Anglo-Saxon will dated 1045. This is the only pre-Conquest reference to such a park confirming the existence of deer management. The park lies to the east of Greensted Green. It is notable because of its size, possibly between five and six miles in circumference, and its considerable initial expense. A deer park would have been surrounded by a high bank and pale. Although most of the bank has been ploughed, remnants of it can be seen separating Ongar Park Wood from High Wood, near to Colliers Hatch.



Medieval Timber Management

Medieval construction in Essex required timber. A farmhouse might require 350 trees in its construction and a barn perhaps 500 trees. Timber, especially oak, was a valuable resource, and required careful management in order to provide a 'crop' suitable for anticipated needs at maturity.

Timber poles of various sizes were used for binding hoops for barrels, hop poles, fencing and cart wheels, as well as being used in charcoal production. Two methods were employed for producing these poles. In pollarding, shoots are regularly cut from a tree at head height, above the reach of browsing deer. These poles would be cut to produce the diameter required for their eventual use. The alternative is coppicing, cutting the tree at ground level, and allowing new shoots to grow. However these shoots are vulnerable to deer, who have to be excluded for several years from coppiced areas by bank and fencing. Other woodland management techniques can be seen, sometimes hybrid techniques both involving coppicing and pollarding.



Church Timber

Church of St Andrew's; Greensted

St Andrew's Church is said to be the oldest wooden church in Europe, as well as being the church where the body of King Edmund of East Anglia, renowned Saint and Martyr, is said to have rested in 1013, before he was buried at Bury St Edmunds.

The church has a unique structure, formed from split oak logs. Recent dating by dendrochronology has indicated a building dating from c.1063. The church was extensively restored in 1848 when a brick plinth was added to support the logs.



St Andrew's Church in Greensted



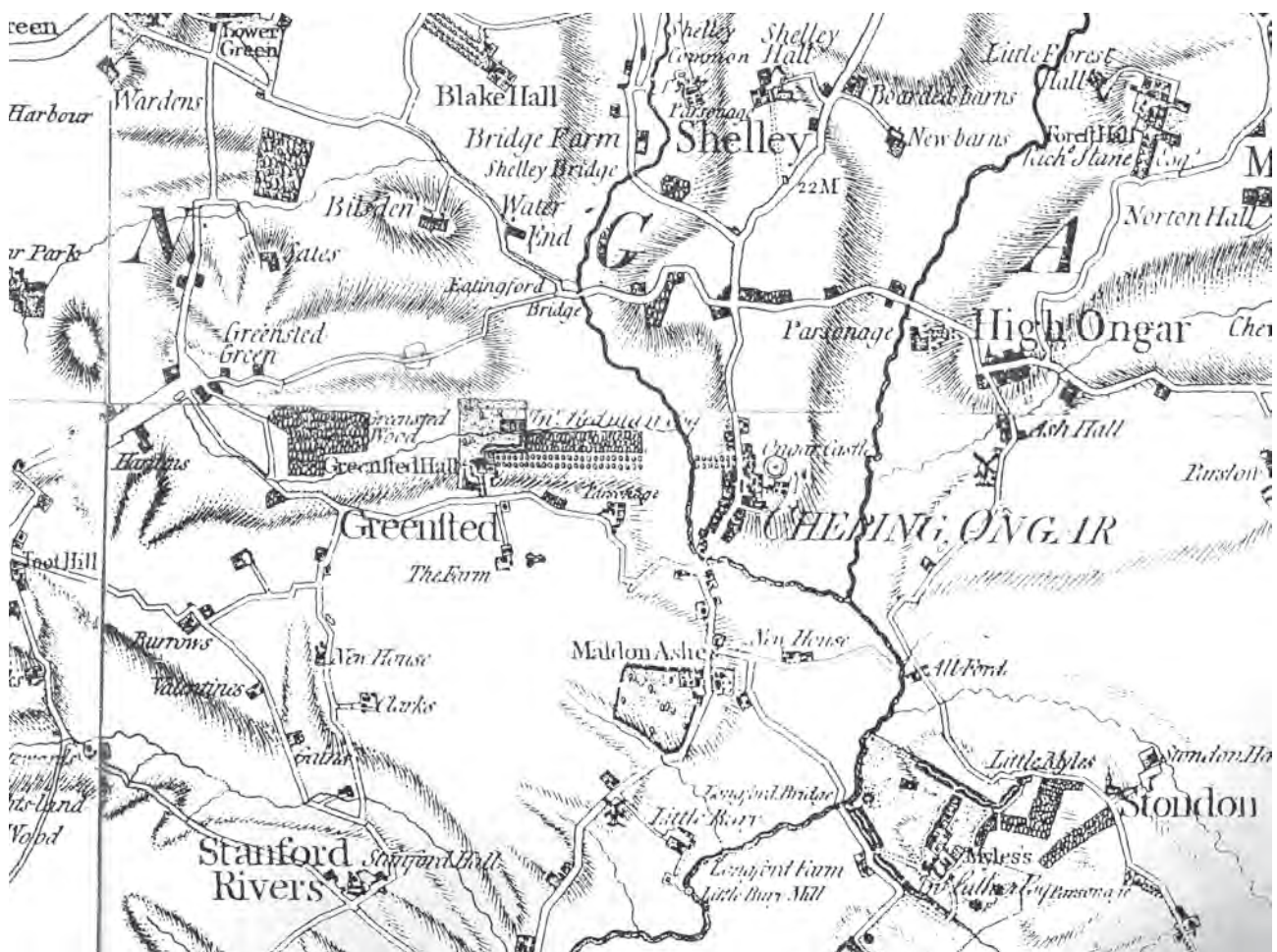
Historical Maps of Ongar

Chapman and André 1777

John Chapman and Peter André surveyed the county of Essex between 1772 and 1774. Published in 1777, at a scale of two inches to one mile, 24 sheets were intended to provide a detailed and accurate map for professional and business use. The map shows 10,000 place-names. It is the first map to incorporate minor roads, bridges, milestones and turnpike gates. Nearly every building is shown, except those in streets. Parks, woods and heaths are also shown. Topography is indicated but its representation is comparatively crude.

The publication of the first large scale Essex map provides useful reference for comparison with the landscape and topography of today.

Ongar Wood appears to extend from the Greensted stream, the boundary here with Bobbingworth, to the avenue. Greensted Wood takes a similar form to that of today. Other areas of substantial woodland are shown on the map around Chipping Ongar. The avenue leading from Banson's Lane to Greensted Hall is clearly shown with a gap at the Cripsey Brook.



A section from the Chapman and André 1777

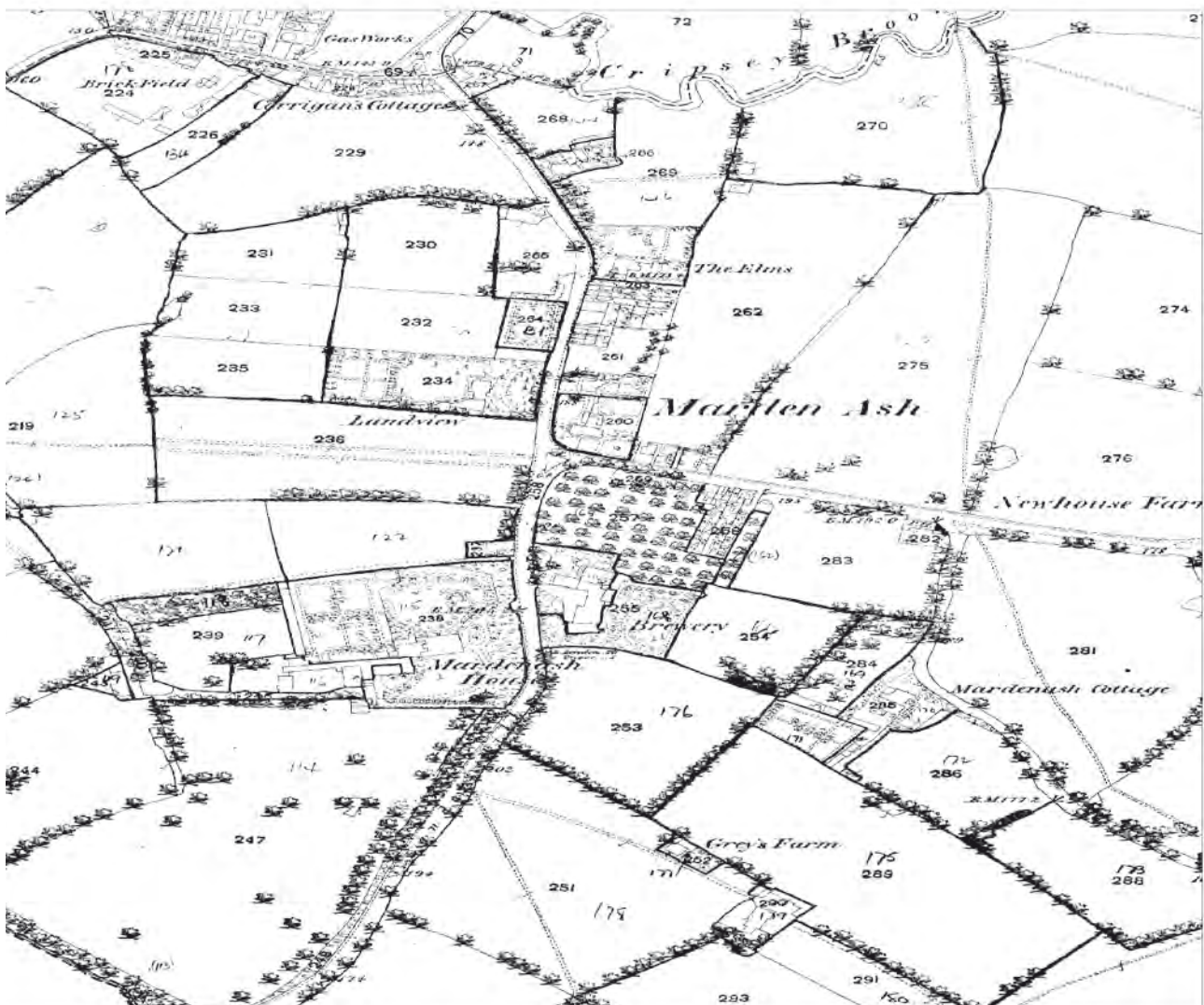


19th Century Maps

The Church of England, faced with a threat to its established status, agreed to the passing of the Tithe Commutation Act of 1836 that required tithes to be replaced by a rent charge based on the price of grain. The Act required an accurate survey to be carried out at parish or township level to assess field acreages and their values. Tithe apportionments were made in 11,395 districts for which maps were drawn up. Although the maps provide details of field names, ownership and tenancy. The maps are inconsistent in scale; they show woodland clearly, often named and giving the acreage. Tithe award maps for Chipping Ongar, Greensted and Shelley are held at the Essex Record Office.

The first military maps of Great Britain date from the Stuart rebellion in the mid-18th Century, but a Board of Ordnance was founded in June 1791, prompted by the threat of Napoleonic invasion. Maps of Kent and Essex were published in 1801 and 1805 respectively, the maps being known as the first of the "Old Series". The survey was carried out at the scale of one inch to the mile. By 1820 coverage of the whole of Southern England had been completed. The Ordnance Survey became a separate organization in 1841.

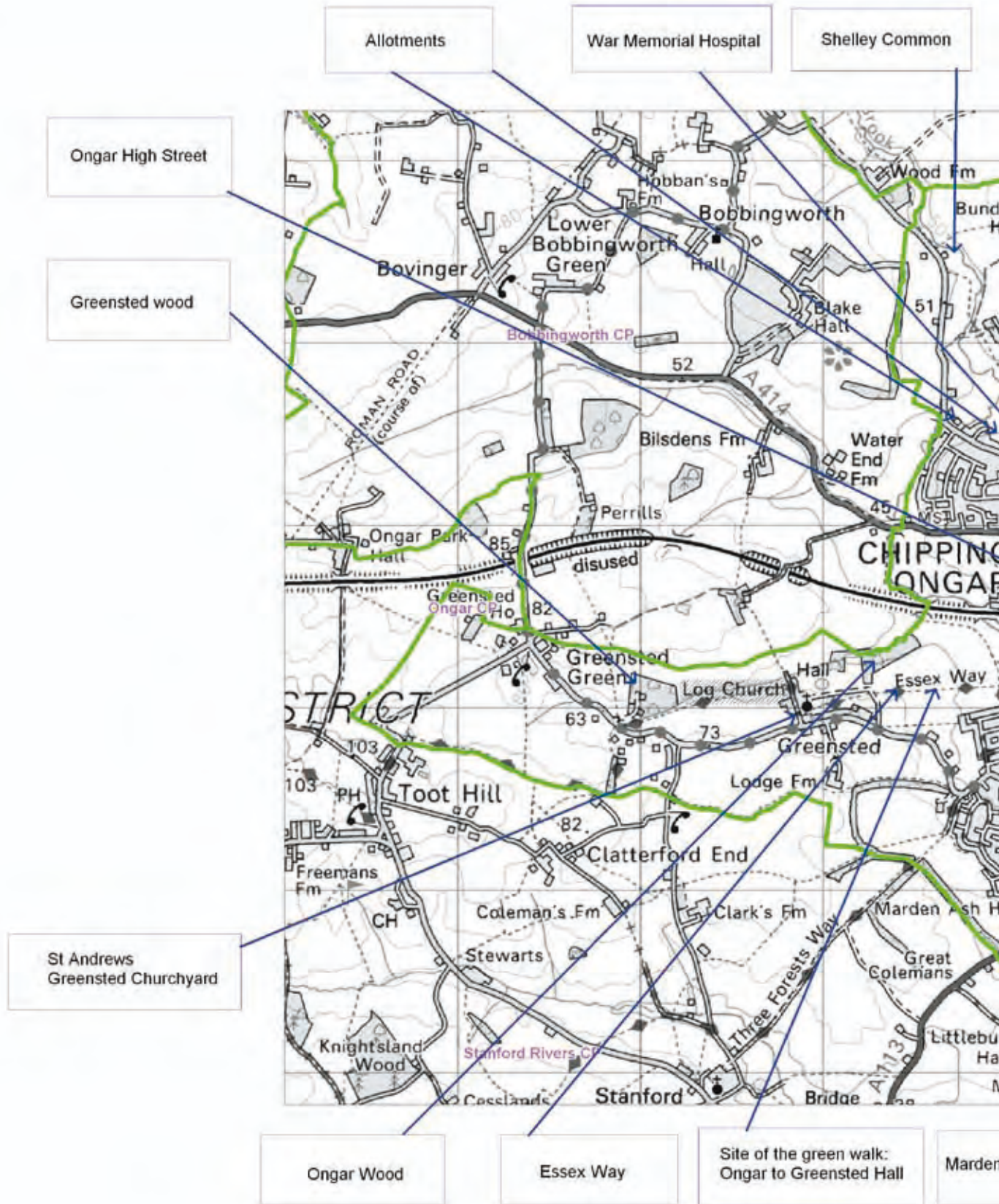
By the 1880s maps at scales of 6ins and 25ins to the mile were available for most of the United Kingdom. The maps, known as the New Series, are an invaluable source for local historians. They are accurate to the extent that individual trees are identified.



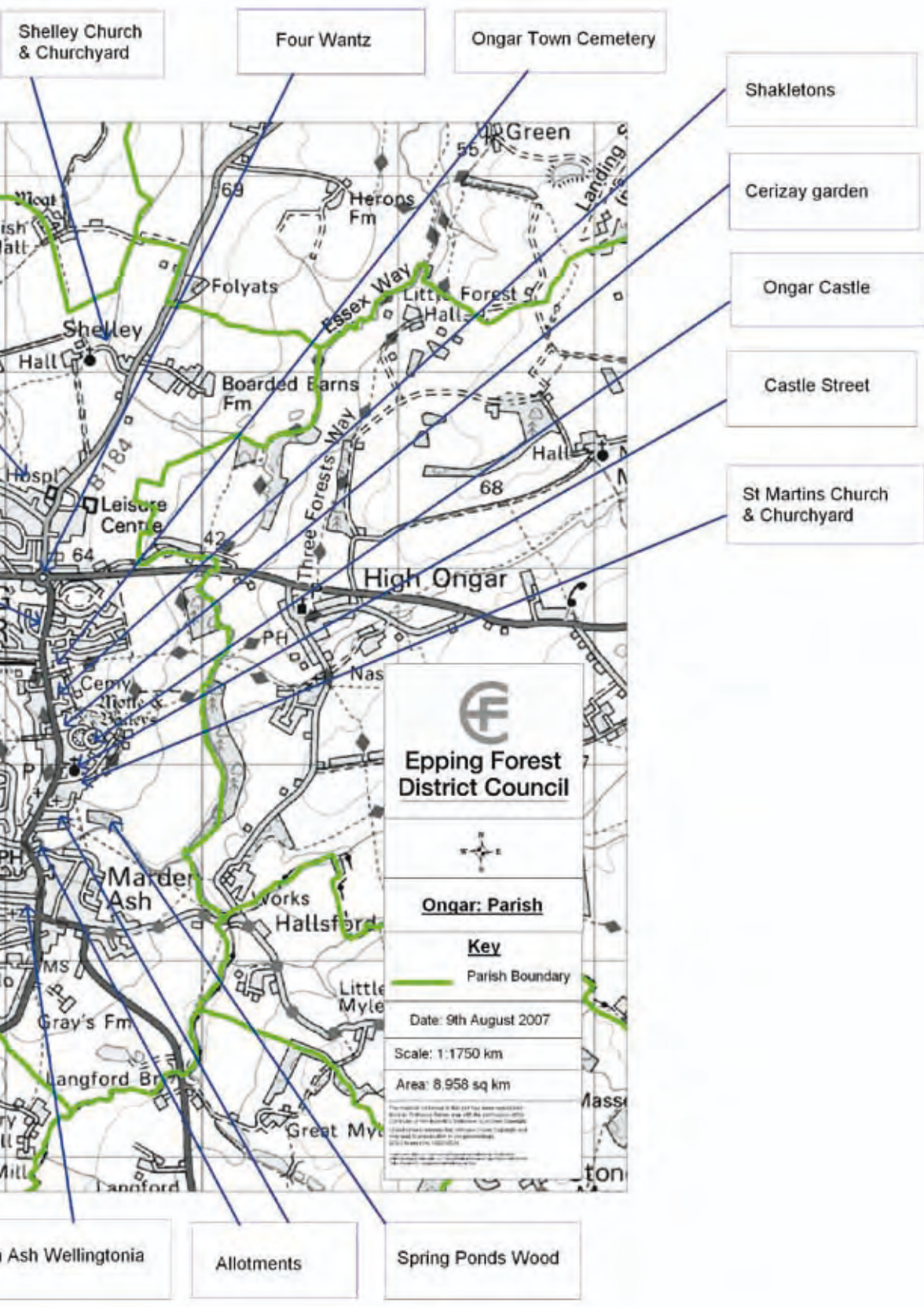
Ordnance Survey Map C1873



21st Century Map



of Ongar



The Present Day Landscape

The Urban Landscape

Ongar in the 21st Century presents a rich mixture of ancient and modern. The town grew quickly in the 1960s but retained its central, historic conservation area. It is still surrounded with essentially rural farmland. Thus residents and visitors alike enjoy a variable landscape containing not only a wide variety of native broadleaved trees but also introduced, rather more exotic, species in its public places, private estates and gardens.

Chipping Ongar, Marden Ash, Greensted and Shelley contain many fine trees, some native but others introduced from abroad. Numbered amongst these are the horse chestnut trees such as those near Shakletons in the High Street, at Marden Ash House and at the end of the entrance drive to Shelley Hall. There is a majestic beech in St Martin's churchyard and a large copper beech in the Cerizay Garden, part of the Pleasance Garden. Scattered throughout the town are sycamores, lopped limes, yews and the occasional oak. A small group of elms survive next to the War Memorial Hospital.

Ongar is twinned with Cerizay in France, a region noted for its fruit orchards. In recognition of this association, cherry trees gifted by the people of Cerizay, along with a walnut tree, were planted in the Pleasance Garden by the Twinning Association. Other fine examples of walnut trees can be seen beside the Telephone Exchange, outside the Police Station, to the rear of the current post office and in the front garden of 109 Queensway, Shelley.

Other plantings include a row of London plane beside the High Road opposite the Police Station and rowans in Castle Street and at the junction of the Fyfield Road with the Morton Road. Some young holm oaks provide a screen to the car park by Smith's Brasserie.

In the past couple of years several young trees have been planted round the Ongar Leisure

Centre and on the Four Wantz Development. These include mountain ash and various species of maple.

Due to the relatively recent urbanisation of substantial areas of Ongar- less than half a century – the stock of mature street trees is rather limited. However some good examples of amenity tree planting can be seen in streets in Shelley, Chipping Ongar, Marden Ash and Greensted. Within these streets can be found limes, birches, rowans, acers, ginkgos and flowering cherries.

Domestic gardens and hedgerows also provide opportunities for increasing the local tree stock particularly with the less well used varieties of English native broadleaved trees, for example, hazel, hawthorn, birch, rowan and wild cherry. In an area like Ongar it is easy to assume that wildlife will flourish. However, nearly 90% of the land area is agricultural and therefore probably turned over to single crops that have limited wildlife value. Domestic gardens on the other hand give almost unlimited scope to provide a variety of differing habitats, encouraging and supporting a wide range of birds and animals, many of which, like the hedgehog, are becoming endangered species.

Scattered throughout the area are large gardens which contain some very fine non native trees; there is a majestic cedar in a garden off the High Street which can be seen from Castle Street. Other species include laburnum, weeping willow, magnolia, ginkgo, Norway spruce and the occasional eucalyptus.



High street Ongar, set within the historic conservation area



Giant redwoods, also known as Wellingtonia, can be seen in the town cemetery and others dominate the skyline in Marden Ash.

The churchyards of St Andrew's Greensted, St Martin's, Chipping Ongar, and St Peter's, Shelley all contain fine examples of limes, yews and horse chestnuts.

Woodlands

A surviving remnant of Ongar Wood forms a narrow strip along the stream which marks the northern boundary between the parish of Greensted and Bobbingworth. Greensted Wood is mainly coppiced hornbeam.

Woodland replanting



Lying to the south of the residential area of Ongar is Spring Ponds Wood, a deciduous woodland covering 2.5 acres (1 ha) that includes a pond and a number of wet flushes, that trickle into the Cripsey Brook. The brook flows along the southern boundary and is a valuable adjunct to the woodland.

The woodland itself consists of mature hawthorn coppice with oak and sycamore standards. Other species present include field maple and ash, with an understorey of elder. Minimal clearance work has taken place in the past but there has been no management activity on the site since 2003. Prior to this a small area on the northern boundary of the site was clear felled which involved the removal of several over

mature poplars. The area was then replanted with native broadleaf species of oak, ash and willow.

Orchards

Small orchards have been recorded in Ongar since the 17th Century. Today, there are surviving orchards close to Marden Ash House and to the west of Bundish Hall. Several of the neglected plots adjacent to west of the High Street, in the Back Lands, have remnants of orchard trees including some large coppiced hazel bushes, apples and plums as well as walnuts.

Many private gardens have apple, pear or cherry trees within them providing fruit in season, but also an abundant supply of nectar for insects in the spring.

Allotments

There are four small allotment sites in Ongar. Two are administered by the Town Council and two are privately owned. Although a number of plots at each location are vacant and overgrown others are well tended and productive. The removal of the vineyard from the Castle Street allotments could provide an opportunity to consider the potential for developing this site as a community orchard or woodland area. These green spaces provide important wild life corridors and potential for future tree planting.



Shelley Allotment



The Farmed Landscape

Today, most of the surrounding countryside consists of large farms. Many of the hedgerows were removed in the final decades of the 20th Century as dairying gave way to arable farming with the need for larger fields. Happily, a good number of hedgerow oaks and ashes survive. Some of these have been lopped or pollarded for poles in the past and are several centuries old. Willows are a feature of the banks of the River Roding, Cripsey Brook and Greensted Brook.

To the east of the town lies perhaps the most readily accessible area of farmland, due to its closeness to the town centre, recreation ground and the well used network of footpaths. It is proof of the old adage that 'trees tend to be allowed to flourish where it is difficult to grow anything else'. The steeply sloping ground to the east of the River Roding in High Ongar is heavily wooded, The much wider and more gently sloping ground between the western bank of the River Roding and the actual town of Ongar is devoted almost entirely to arable farming, with just a few isolated trees and hedgerows remaining as production methods

become increasingly mechanised.

Generally the surviving hedges contain a limited mixture of species, such as oak, ash, elm, hawthorn, blackthorn, hazel, spindle and field maple. One 400m hedge in Greensted contains an amazing 23 species. Other species recorded in hedges include crab apple, willow, wild plum, horse chestnut, poplar, lime, wild cherry, hornbeam, yew, holly and Scots pine. Many surviving hedges have some very scrubby elm infected by Dutch Elm Disease, but a few mature elms, as yet untouched by this fungus, are found in Greensted. Wild service has also been recorded in a couple of hedges around Drapers Corner, and is recorded as a field name on the local tithe map of 1840.

Often the line of a former hedge can be traced as the mature oaks have survived, but sometimes it is only a single field maple or ash which survives along the edge of ditch.

In several locations, new hedgerow plantings have taken place in the past few years filling in gaps in field boundaries, or creating new boundary hedges.



New hedge planting looking towards Onslow Gardens, Mayflower Way



Green Belt

During the 20th Century there was a significant increase in the urban footprint of the area as houses were built on farmland. The site of a former Council Depot and secondary school have recently been redeveloped for housing. The current housing stock is 2560 units, a massive rise from the start of the 20th Century.

The land surrounding Ongar is Metropolitan Green Belt. This was introduced to stop the unregulated sprawl of development into open countryside evident in the 1930s. But it does

not mean a complete stop to development. Exceptional, or very special circumstances have to be shown for large developments to be built in the Green Belt – a recent nearby example is the building of new homes on school playing fields associated with the rebuilding of the secondary school in Epping.

92% of those responding to the Ongar Town survey, said NO to the question about expansion of development into the Green Belt. This gives an indication of the strength of local feeling about the importance of the Green Belt surrounding the urban area.



Development on the edge of Green Belt

Trees and Planning

There are a number of Tree Preservation Orders (TPO) in the area. More recent ones have been made to protect garden trees in advance of development.

Epping Forest District Council has a strong policy on protected trees which ensures that important trees are not lost or damaged as a result of development. The retention of

mature trees and the planting of young ones within new developments are encouraged. The local plan contains the council's policies to guide its consideration for the management of protected trees, but the area contains many trees which are not protected in this way. The next important protection is that the value of trees is appreciated by the community at large.



School Grounds

The grounds of both Chipping Ongar and Shelley Primary Schools have been planted with young trees. There is scope for further projects here, both in the care of existing trees and additional planting.

Ancient Trees

The Ancient Tree Forum believes there are thousands of ancient trees scattered across the countryside yet to be 'discovered'. Part of the ongoing work of the Ongar Tree Strategy will be to identify and record any such trees in Ongar so that they can join the 6,000 ancient trees already recorded in the tree register of the British Isles. So what are we looking for?

Ancient trees (sometimes referred to as veterans), are very old. Depending on species this normally means at least 250 years. Generally speaking they will be standing alone in the open as opposed to being found in dense woodland, and will likely show evidence of having been pollarded at some time during their life.



Veteran Oak in Ongar

Their girth is likely to exceed 3m and, according to species, will probably be hollow due to the decay of the inner hardwood. This does

not, however, mean they are dead. Far from it – they are very much alive and providing an invaluable habitat for wildlife as well as complementing the landscape and providing a fascinating historic link with our past. Some experts say that Britain is home to 80% of the ancient trees left in north – western Europe, in which case we have a special responsibility to look after them. But we can only do that if we know how many there are and where they are located. EFDC Countrycare (in a joint initiative with the Woodland Trust, the Ancient Tree Forum and supported by the Heritage Lottery Fund, the Esme Fairbairn Foundation, English Heritage, the Environment Agency and the Forestry Commission) is beginning to create a complete photographic database of ancient trees so that they can be protected for future generations. As they are found local trees will be recorded.



Oak Tree – High Ongar Road

Landmark Trees

During 1998 a parish wide audit of landmark trees – trees that are special to the community for aesthetic, cultural, social or historical reasons – was carried out and local opinion was sought. The resulting list was published in "Aspects of the History of Ongar" by the Ongar Millennium History Society.

Ten years on most of the trees are flourishing. As stated in the above publication "the list is not final. Hopefully it will never be. It should form the basis of an ongoing audit into the next millennium".



What's in a Name?

Quite a lot when it comes to place names associated with trees. We are all familiar with the naming patterns of some modern housing estates where the use of tree names for streets tries to invoke the 'rural idyll', or with pubs where the reference to trees and woodlands suggests 'olde worlde' charm and traditional 'fayre'. At a somewhat deeper academic level place names associated with trees can provide a wealth of information for the treescape historian, being usually derived from one of the four old languages, Celtic, Norse, Anglo Saxon, or Norman French.

Somewhere between the commonplace and the academic lies the world of folklore and it is here perhaps that we get the best 'feel' for the relationship between trees and humans.

A mixture of fact and fiction, myth and magic. Take the wild service tree (*Sorbus torminalis*) or, as it is more commonly known, the chequers tree due to its bark pattern resembling the squares on a chequers board.



Wild Service (Chequer Tree)

Was the Budworth field near Greensted Church called Checker Mead (allowing for the variation in spelling) because of the presence of wild service or chequer trees in the nearby hedgerow or simply because of the square shape of the field? We may never know.

What is known is that a few examples of chequer trees can still be found in the hedgerow alongside Greensted Road making it an important location for the treescape historian. Due to the fact that chequer trees propagate and colonise by suckering, their presence at a

particular location can be an important indicator of ancient woodland or hedgerow, i.e. woodland or hedgerow that has remained undisturbed for at least 400 years.

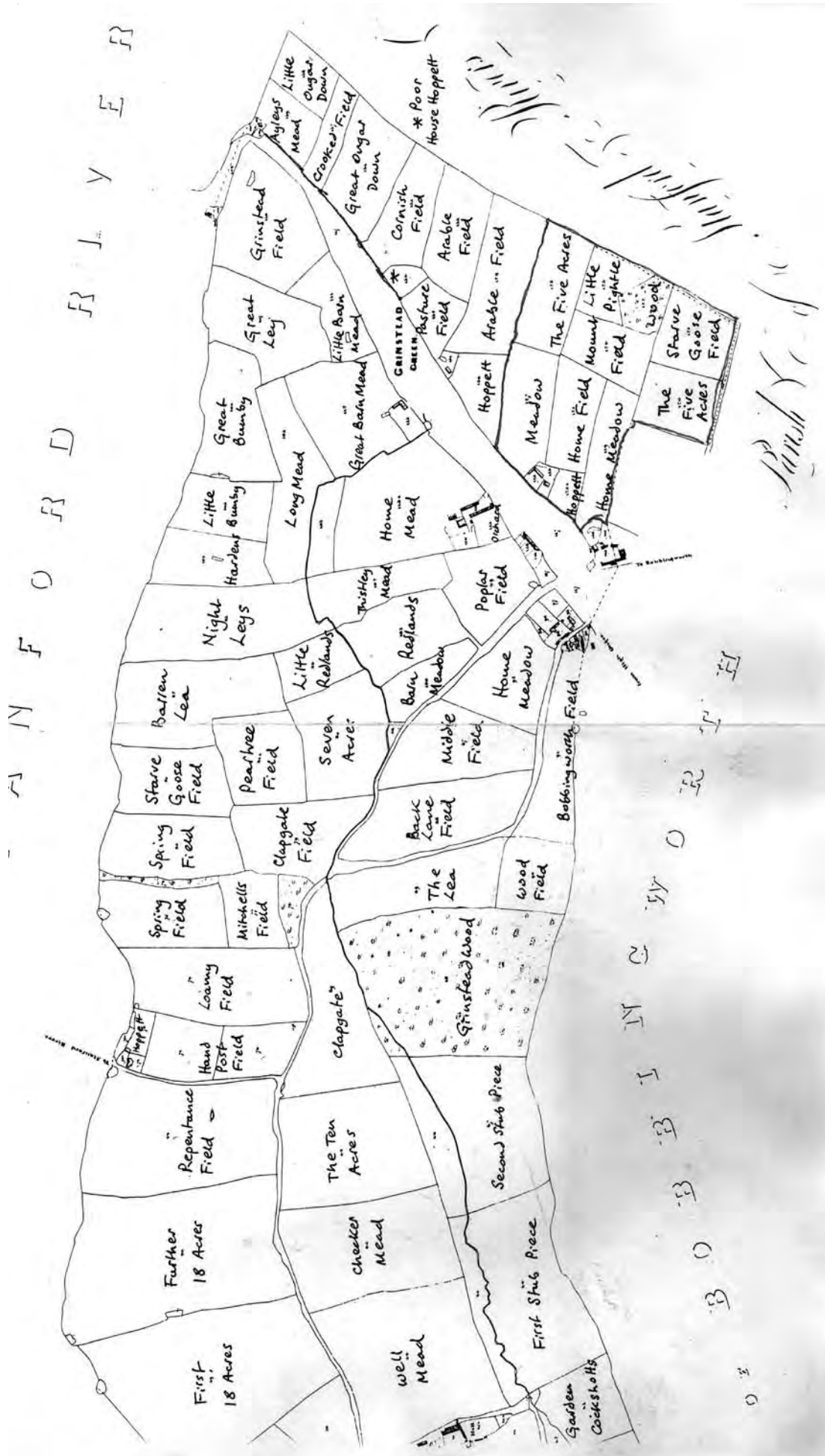
The chequer tree, as well as having chequer patterned bark, bears edible fruits rich in vitamin C, which suggests that, they were a Neolithic staple gaining enough popularity for houses, farms and pubs to be named after them' (Flora Britannica. Richard Mabey). It has also been suggested that 'links may lie in the alcoholic drink made from chequer berries and that the fruit and tree derived their local name from being served in the chequer inns' (Flora Britannica. Patrick Roper). This would of course tie up with the fact that in Roman times a chequer board was the sign for a tavern. So, what's in a name? Quite a lot it would seem from the frequency of pubs and field names associated with the chequer tree.



The Chequers local pub sign



Names of some of the fields around Greensted



Ongar Tithe Map 1841
Reproduced by courtesy of the Essex Record Office

Excitement and Concern at Ongar Bridge

Late in 2006 a large willow on the banks of the Crispey Brook near Ongar Bridge split. The event was met with a mixture of excitement and concern. Excitement that always accompanies a spectacular and somewhat rarely seen natural event was coupled with concern over the potential loss of a landmark tree.

Willows are not noted for their longevity - they eventually tend to split or crack. They not only provide sites for birds and insects to make their habitat, but also provide habitats for other root plants and even other trees.

Twigs and branches from the tree can be carried along by the Crispey Brook and eventually the River Roding, until they settle on a suitable mudbank where they can root and start the cycle all over again.



Winter 2006



Summer 2007

A reminder every time you cross over Ongar Bridge; even in decline the willow is still participating in the natural cycle of life.



50 Favourite Trees

A number of trees were nominated for inclusion in the list for Epping Forest district's fifty favourite trees. In the event, the copper beech in the Pleasance Garden and the horse chestnut to the rear of the castle mound were chosen. Both trees were nominated by the Ongar Millennium History Society.

Photographs of these, and all the favourite trees of the District can be found at www.favouritetrees.org together with the reasons for their importance.



Species (below)	Horse Chestnut - <i>Aesculus hippocastanum</i>
Form	Pollard
Girth	4.14m
Height	20m plus
Age	100 - 150 years
Context	Field
Remarks	This tree stands beside the public footpath to the rear of The Pleasance car park, near the Scout Hut.

Species (above)	Copper Beech - <i>Fagus sylvatica 'Purpurea'</i>
Form	Maiden
Girth	3.8m
Height	20m plus
Age	150 - 200 years
Context	Park
Remarks	This tree stands in grounds of The Pleasance garden and car park between Ongar Castle and Ongar Library on the High Street.



Local Climate

The evidence of early settlement in Ongar along the water courses suggests that these areas were sheltered from the prevailing winds and ideal places to live.

The nearest weather station where records are maintained is in Epping. These records span the last 28 years and the mean annual temperature for Epping since 1979 is 10.3° C. The average annual rainfall for this period is 675mm. Ongar lies 8km to the east of Epping, and the annual rainfall is slightly less than that recorded for Epping.

Sudden thundery showers in high summer can result in significant amounts of rain and this can give rise to localized flooding. The flooding maps produced by the Environment Agency for the main river valleys, the Cripsey Brook and the River Roding show which areas are liable to flood. Much of the river catchment is agricultural and the fields soak up some of the heavy rainfall, but with more hard surfaces within the urban areas, runoff occurs rapidly during downpours and this can lead to surface flooding in streets. Shallow rooted species such as birch, beech, hornbeam, and pine will be particularly affected by drier summers and all will be damaged by prolonged flooding



River Roding in Flood



Looking to the future...

“The Love of woods seems to be a passion implanted in our nature.”

Addison, Spectator, 31 May 1712

As has been shown in this report the landscape we see today and its tree cover has been shaped by geology and the activities of our ancestors'. The geology of our region has resulted in well-drained, fertile soils in which a variety of trees are able to flourish. In the past the extensive use of wood and timber has been essential to all aspects of our ancestors existence. Timber has supplied durable, flexible materials for building farm sheds and barns, the roofs of cathedrals, and ships for both trade and warfare; wood has allowed us to construct tools and patterned, decorative furniture and to carve works of art; domestic heating and iron smelting have been fuelled by charcoal; and leather is softened by tannin from the bark of oak trees. The demand established an economic value for timber.

Maps and early documents confirm that Ongar inherits the important history of a wooded landscape. Today this landscape remains, preserved in both urban and rural Ongar. In the surrounding area historic woodland is prominent and there is hardly a horizon that is not crested with trees. The Three Forests Way, which joins the forests of Epping, Hainault and Hatfield, passes through Ongar. Trees and hedges continue to provide habitats for numerous insect and bird species and, when they are joined, 'green corridors' encourage the movement of wildlife. Sensitive management can establish the setting for woodland flora and protect these vital 'breathing spaces'.

As the demand for timber declined during the 20th Century, the pressure on trees for urban expansion, road building and airport development has increased. Furthermore, as we enter the 21st Century, the implications of climate change will seriously confront our

accustomed way of life, and the management of trees will form a key element in our action to counter some of the consequences. The maintenance of an environment that supports a green landscape is crucial in the face of these challenges.

Locally, the pressures on trees and woodland are expected to be intense. The historic relationship between people and trees, which for thousands of years has been an economic one, has now become one of survival. Conserving our tree landscape is essential to ensure that Ongar continues as a green and pleasant place in which to live. The Ongar Tree Strategy has been presented in response to this. This strategy will result in an action plan, with the plan addressing all elements of the strategy. The plan will include not just a consideration of those trees in public spaces but also those in gardens and allotments, and the wider landscape. A key goal of the plan will be to involve the whole community in observing, recording and nurturing trees and hedges within Ongar. This strategy report should be seen as a wake-up call to preserve not only the present tree stock, but perhaps more importantly, ensure that by community action in our own homes and gardens we leave a healthy, tree-filled legacy for future generations. The eventual success of the project will be clearly evident and will have reflected the commitment, enthusiasm and pride of all members of the community.



Glossary

Ancient hedgerow

Ancient hedgerows tend to be those which support the greatest diversity of plants and animals. They may be defined as those which were in existence before the Enclosure Acts, passed mainly between 1720 and 1840 in Britain and from the mid seventeenth century in Ireland. In the 1970s a Dr Max Hooper and others were working on dating methods for hedgerows. At the time, people believed the diversity of a hedge was determined by soils, climate or management. Hooper's work involved the counting of species within 227 hedges whose age varied from 75 to 1100 years. The age of the hedge was known from written records. What he discovered was an unexpected degree of correlation between species and age. The number of species counted in a standardized way, is approximately equal to the age of the hedge in centuries. This rule of thumb became known as Hooper's Rule. To make it work, you simply count the number of species of trees and shrubs in several 30 yard sections along the hedge. Take an average of these samples to give the age.

Ancient tree

A tree that has survived to be in its final phase of life. For a willow or birch this would be 100 years, but for most native trees it would be at least 250 years. Ancient trees are of particular importance culturally and for their wildlife value. For an oak in Ongar the bole will generally be 4.5m in girth (at 1.5m).

Ancient woodland

Land in Britain that has been continuously covered by trees since at least 1600.

Bagshot Beds

Pale yellow to orange brown fine-grained sand, at some locations capped with gravel.

Biodiversity

Biological diversity, or "biodiversity" is the variety of life that is all around us and all over

the world. It encompasses all living things from microscopic organisms to the largest trees.

Chequer Tree (or Wild Service Tree)

A native tree where the name is derived from shapes on the bark or berries used to make a drink called chequers.

Claygate Beds

Ageological deposit of sandy clays with patches of stiff brown clay and fine-grained sand.

Commoners' Rights

Examples include the free right to (a) graze animals on common land, (b) cut wood to repair dwellings or for fuel.

Coppice

A sustainable system of woodland management involving repeated cutting back to a stump at ground level, usually every 7-25 years.

Deer park

Usually a medieval banked structure of oval shape for the containment and management of deer. About 160 deer parks were recorded in Essex.

Dendrochronology

A technique for dating timber using the pattern in the sequence of annual growth rings. A full sequence may give both planting date (from centre) to felling date (outside).

Die back

The natural process whereby trees shed their upper limbs from the tip backwards when those limbs die.

Domesday Survey

The survey of England in 1086 assessing the landholding and wealth of the manorial estates. This records the changes during the reign of William I.



Forest Laws

Laws framed by William I and subsequent monarchs, with the intention of protecting venison (deer and wild boar) over certain areas in England.

Landmark tree

A tree determined to be 'special' for a variety of possible reasons – aesthetic, cultural, social, or historical.

London Clay

A stiff and sometimes silty blue-grey clay with sandy seams; weathers to a brownish colour near the surface.

Maiden Tree

A tree that has not been modified by cutting. Unless it has been damaged by wind etc., it has its original crown.

Pollard

The practice of cutting a tree's branches back to the main stem generally at a height of 2-3m and allowing new ones to sprout.

Primary woodland

Woodland formed from fragments of prehistoric forest and managed without ever having been cleared.

Royal Forest

Areas of England under the authority of the Forest Laws; the county of Essex was a Royal Forest in 1100.

Secondary woodland

Woodland formed on land since 1600, which had previously been used for agriculture or a non woodland use. It may be a product of natural succession or of planting on formerly unwooded land.

Significant tree

A notable tree that is worthy of being recorded because of its age, its 'landmark' quality, its ecological value, its local importance or its particular species.

Timber

Large tree trunks suitable for sawing into planks.

Tree Preservation Order (TPO)

Order made by the local planning authority under the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 for the protection of trees.

Understorey

The smaller trees and bushes that form a lower level of cover beneath the tallest trees in woodland.

Underwood

The produce of pollarding or coppicing, the wood mainly used for fuel.

Veteran tree

An alternative name for Ancient Trees which is now generally preferred. Differs in including trees that are prematurely aged, and trees in the late part of the mature phase. For a veteran oak the bole will be 3m in girth (at 1.5m).

Wildwood

Woodland re-established over much of Britain following the last Ice Age around 10,000BC.



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