



# THE VILLAGE VOICE

THE NEWSLETTER OF ONSLOW VILLAGE RESIDENTS ASSOCIATION – ISSUE TWENTY SIX NOVEMBER 2011

## ONSLOW VILLAGE'S HIDDEN HISTORY

### Part Two of The Story of the Village Farm and Farmhouse

by Angela Joule

*When Onslow Village Ltd was formed in the 1920s Jonathan Readings's grandfather Jack Box and grandmother Florence were able to rent No 1, the old part of the farmhouse, which had been newly divided, whilst his Great Uncle Charles and his wife bought No 2. Jonathan, who is still a resident of Onslow Village, has been kind enough to contribute the following recollections of his time as a child spent living in the farmhouse.*

Jonathan's grandfather died in 1953 from wounds received in the First World War. His grandmother was rather overwhelmed by the size of the farmhouse so his parents Dennis and Audrey Readings moved with him and his sister Jane from No 5 Hedgeway to live with her, an arrangement that lasted nearly 20 years. Charles and Jean Box lived next door at No 2, with a live-in maid.

His early memories as a young boy in the 1950s of Wilderness Farmhouse was that it was a magical place in which to live. It was close to Guildford but also felt like the countryside because he had a proper farm right next door with the strong smell of cow dung from the cow sheds that were literally outside the back door, and very many interesting farm buildings to explore and play in – Health and Safety would have a field day if it were today!

pigsties and assorted outbuildings. But pride of place in Wilderness Farm was taken by the Tudor Tithe Barn which stood in those days at the end of what is now the pedestrian walkway leading from the shops to Onslow Infant School. This barn was massively built with a large cellar, huge doors on each side to take the hay wagons and a heavily fenced off area at the north end which was used to keep the Wilderness Farm bull in when he wasn't grazing in his own field currently occupied by Onslow Infant School. He was a massive animal so was given a wide berth.

One regular event was known as Ratting Day when the farmer and Geoffrey's father would bring their dogs to the barn. All the exits from underneath the barn would be blocked up except for one and the dogs were sent in. The subsequent stream of large rats was then dealt with by various sizes of people from adults to children. Jonathan never caught one as they were too quick for him! This was a common problem of a farm next to a house with so much food, and materials to make nests.

When Jonathan's Great Uncle Charles died in about 1962, his Great Auntie Jean, living next door in No 2 retired the live-in maid, and invited her cousin Molly to live with her. They continued to live there for several years before selling their part of the farmhouse to a local estate agent and moving into separate bungalows in Powell Close. The estate agent then sold off part of the garden for the development of

the sitting room of No 1 in 1991, they discovered a dinner invitation for the White Hart Hotel in Guildford dated Tuesday 23rd March 1847 which would suggest the Regency grate was installed earlier in the 1840s.

In subsequent refurbishments a further brick arched fireplace in the principal bedroom was found. Among the debris within were the remnants of a small Victorian grate and an envelope dated April 10 1920 addressed to J H Canna Esq. Evidence was found of a variety of other artefacts shedding light on the way the house has been used over the preceding centuries. These included a Georgian range behind which was found an earlier inglenook fireplace with hanging bars for pots and kettles, and a bread oven. When the recent restoration work was done in the inglenook, a time capsule was placed in the bread oven. Off the kitchen area in the hallway is small room which had been a buttery/dairy.

One other discovery was the apparent evidence of an external staircase on the original external wall to No 1, prior to the barn addition, which became No 2, suggesting that the occupants went to their bedrooms above, via the open air! No 1 also has a cellar which has alcoves in the walls which might have been to store flagons of beer or wine. The floor of the cellar sloped to the centre presumably to aid drainage of hanging meat and was vented by two openings at ground level.

The farm was still functioning as such during the Second World War and continued until the early 1960s when it was no longer being farmed and much of the farm had been sold off to build more houses. However, by 1963 Wilderness Farm was no longer operational. The land where the outbuildings stood was developed by Onslow Village Ltd to build Wilderness Court flats. Later the duck pond was drained and the surrounding field was disposed of, with Windsor Close, Powell Close and Onslow Infant School being built in the late 1960s.

Onslow Village Ltd retained a large barn to the west of the farmhouse as a store and workshop for the maintenance of the rented houses of Onslow Village. When Onslow Village Ltd was wound up in 1984 this barn was sold off to the Curtain Raisers Dramatic Society as a prop store and for set building and remains so to the present day.

Jonathan recalls that in the winter, the farmhouse was always cold with the exception of the kitchen, as the coke stove was permanently running there, and the sitting room had a small Edwardian fireplace. His parents always knew that a big Tudor fireplace was behind it but were reluctant to remove the very efficient cast-iron fireplace so never did see the magnificent inglenook behind. As there was no heating upstairs whatsoever and the winters were bitterly cold, in the mornings his family were greeted by ice on the inside of the bedroom windows.

The main feature of the garden in those days was the gigantic cedar tree which some people will remember. The tree was reputed to be at least 400 years old, and had been measured with a circumference at the tree base of nearly 25 feet. The main trunk of the tree had divided about 12 feet from the ground into two main boughs, both of which grew almost vertically. The bough nearest to the house had grown to a dangerous level in the late '40s and was cut off about 25 feet from the ground. Jonathan spent many a happy afternoon sitting on top of this tree stump, undoubtedly giving his parents near heart failure.

One of Jonathan's best friends in those days was Geoffrey the farmhand's son who lived in a cottage approximately where the Wilderness Court garages are now. The farm in the '50s was a mixed arable and dairy farm with about a hundred head of cattle that grazed on the land where the Surrey Business Park is today. The cows would be herded across the A3 to the milking shed which was just outside the back door of No 1. Geoffrey's father was in charge of milking the large herd of Friesian cows and he frequently allowed Geoffrey and Jonathan to herd all the cows from Wilderness Farm back across the A3 to the grazing fields on the other side. The two boys were about six or seven when they were allowed to do this and the A3 then was a three-lane bypass not dual carriageway and traffic was pretty minimal. Nevertheless they would take it in turns to step out into the road and stop the traffic. It never occurred to Jonathan as being brave, stupid or dangerous. The ignorance of youth!

The buildings that the Curtain Raisers now use had been the stables where the Onslow Village milkman Mr Napper kept a large carthorse called Bessie, along with a donkey as company and a milk float. Jonathan's special treat at weekends and during the school holidays was to help Mr Napper with the delivery round.

Bessie knew the round blindfold, which was quite useful as she wore blinkers to stop her being frightened by any loud vehicles that might come past. Mr Napper would pull up at each house and while he and Jonathan delivered the milk, Bessie would move to the next house if it was close by, all ready for the next order.

The farm consisted of a series of buildings built around the farmyard and included the dairy, milking parlour, several

The Tudor Tithe Barn was sold in about 1960 to an American who had it dismantled and shipped out to the United States. Jonathan doesn't know where it went, but was very sad to see it go. In 1961 the farm was pulled down and Wilderness Court flats were built on part of the site and for Jonathan the magic of living next to a farm disappeared. The Readings family moved out of the farmhouse in 1971.

To bring the story up to date, the western wing (now No 2) is constructed of medieval timbers thought to have been salvaged from an earlier barn and brought to the site from elsewhere, with rooms added later on the north side. This barn added a hallway, a kitchen (now a sitting room) and two other rooms, now a kitchen and dining room. The current owners of No 2 were told when they purchased the house in 1978 that one of the features in the house was a large wig cupboard in the main bedroom. There is currently a large inglenook fireplace in the sitting room, formerly a kitchen, and had contained a bread oven which served the whole house as well as a beehive fireplace to the hall. This design of a small conical shape is more usually found in Sussex houses of the period.

What is unusual in houses of this period is the ceiling heights. The owners were visited some years ago by Jean Burrows of Grayshott whose great great grandfather, David Daniel Page had been the farm bailiff in the 1850s and had lived with his wife Sophia in the farmhouse between 1854 and 1856. Outside, what had been a low barn has been converted to the present garage.

When the current owners of No 1 bought the farmhouse in 1991 they found that sadly many of the original features had been lost during 1970s and '80s. However, in opening up the original inglenook fireplace in

there is still a Mr Napper resident in Onslow Village and he is the great nephew of the Mr Napper who worked on the farm.

I was prompted to compile this story by the thought of how fortunate we are in Onslow Village to have such a significant piece of architectural history in our midst. The building has played its part in the life of many generations over the centuries by successfully changing and adapting.

In its time, as today in contemporary homes, when needs must, additions and alterations were made to accommodate the needs of its occupants.

The current owners of the houses said that living there has been a voyage of discovery and they have enjoyed updating them with sympathetic restoration.

*My thanks to Helen Chapman Davies for her kind permission in allowing me to use information from her book "Guildford's Hidden History" and to Jonathan Readings for his reminiscences. In compiling this article every effort has been made to check the accuracy of information. However, as parts of the research are based on people's recollections, this may not always be historically accurate. No part of the article may be reproduced in any form without prior permission from the author.*



*The farmhouse as drawn by Mary Butts in 1992 for a survey conducted by the Domestic Buildings Research Group (Surrey). Reproduced by kind permission of the DBRG.*

# COMMUNITY NOTICE BOARD

If you would like to tell Onslow Village residents about your group's forthcoming events, or issues that might interest them, please email [mdk-ovra@ntlworld.com](mailto:mdk-ovra@ntlworld.com) or ring 07720 945430.

**Next copy date:** 11th January for publication end January/early February.

## RECYCLING NEWS

**Hard-pressed families are wasting as much as £50 every month by throwing out food that can still be eaten.**

Research shows that the equivalent of one in every five shopping bags of food ends up in the bin for no good reason and that means people in the UK spend £12 billion a year throwing away perfectly good food. In Surrey alone it costs the county council £7.6 million annually to dispose of food waste.

Vegetables, salad, fruit and drink are some of Britain's most wasted foods with 83,000 tonnes of bananas alone needlessly binned each year.

These startling figures are being used as part of the Love Food Surrey campaign, which aims to persuade people to shop smarter and waste less.

Lynne Hack, Surrey County Council's Cabinet Member for Environment, said: "I'm sure families would jump at the chance to have an extra £50 in their pockets during these difficult economic times. By making a few simple changes to you can save money and also benefit the environment.

"Through our Love Food Surrey campaign we'll be helping people waste less food by giving them recipe ideas for leftovers, showing them how they can shop smarter and helping people find out how they can store food for longer."

Reducing the amount of food people throw in the bin is also good for the environment. It's estimated that if the UK stopped wasting food altogether, the impact on carbon dioxide emissions would be the same as taking a quarter of all cars off the road.

### Top tips to cut down on food waste:

- Make a list and stick to it – don't be tempted by offers you won't eat
- If use by dates are approaching or you've cooked too much, put the food in the freezer to eat later
- Use a mug to measure rice – one adult portion is a quarter of a mug



## WALKING FOR HEALTH

We are a friendly group of people who meet every Wednesday at the Park Barn Centre and walk for about an hour. We meet at approx 10.15 in the coffee shop in the centre, for the start at 10.30. We walk at a pace that enables us to: a) get our pulses up which is good for our circulation, but still enables us to carry on a conversation; b) keep fit; and c) get to know our fellow walkers. Not to mention the fresh air! It is free to join the group and everyone is welcome.

For more information contact Richard Jefferies on 01483 534706 or just turn up; we are always pleased to see a new face!

## CURTAIN RAISERS

This year's offering from Curtain Raisers is certainly not to be missed! *Red Riding Hood* is the story of Red Riding Hood's granddaughter and her mission to deal with the Big Bad Wolf once and for all! Full of jokes, singing, dancing and plot twists, this show will delight young and old (and everyone in between!).

The show is running in Onslow Village Hall on Friday 20th & Saturday 21st January.

For evening performances, the doors open at 7pm with curtain up at 7:30pm.

The Saturday afternoon matinee opens at 2pm with curtain up at 2:30pm.

Tickets are £8 per person (Child matinee tickets are £6).

So come along and join in the fun!

## GEDFAS

Guildford Evening of Decorative Fine Arts Society (GEDFAS) has started its new season



## DATES FOR YOUR DIARY: Tuesday Talks and the Annual Party



At the time of writing, the beech trees and hedges round the village are looking particularly lovely in all their autumnal glory, but all too soon winter will be upon us again.

To add a bit of festive cheer to a dark, chill evening, mulled wine and mince pies will be on

offer at the final **Tuesday Talk** of the year on 8th November. The subject is *Christmas Traditions* and Sheila Davidson returns with more fascinating stories of how some of our favourite traditions came about, including pantomimes, apple-wassailing, greetings cards and Father Christmas himself.

We then take a break until 10th January when Matt Cusack from the National Trust will give a talk about the *History and Management of Hindhead Commons and the Devil's Punch Bowl*.



On 11th February, we have our **Annual Party** with a buffet, and music from *Sammy Rat* and *The Resonators*: look out for more information on the flyers we'll be sending out in the next month or two.

## WE'RE BACK ON THE WEB!

We are very pleased to report that OVRA once again has a website. It contains all sorts of useful information about OVRA, the village and Guildford in general, with space for other groups to add their details as well, so please visit and let us know what you think:

[www.surreycommunity.info/ovra/](http://www.surreycommunity.info/ovra/)

## Changes at the Hall

This is a message from Mick Gall regarding his Chairmanship of the Village Hall Committee.

"At the recent AGM, I informed all who attended that after five years as Chairman and two years as Vice-Chairman, I would not be standing for re-election.

you can still cut food past the best before date, but not past the *use by* date

- Encourage children to eat by using a cookie cutter to make shapes out of sandwiches, pancakes and pizzas.

For more information contact Lesley on 01483 533762.

## THROUGH TIME with DAVID ROSE

The St Catherine's Village website is aimed at everyone who lives or works in the area or is connected in some way. The latter may include people who used to live there or have relatives there. It also offers information aimed at those who simply wish to know more about the place.

The website's publisher and St Catherine's Village resident, Martin Giles, along with local historian and writer David Rose (ex-Surrey Advertiser) are now looking to expand its coverage into other parts of Guildford, including the Onslow area. This will include news items, dates of events and other community activities, with links to local groups, societies, businesses and so on. If you have not seen the website, go to [st-caths-web.co.uk](http://st-caths-web.co.uk)

A meeting is being planned with members of Onslow Village Residents' Association and any others who may be interested in contributing ideas for stories, features, pictures and relevant information. The success of the venture will depend on a good level of contributions from local residents.

In the meantime, please watch for news of further developments on the St Catherine's website and if you are interested in contributing articles or photographs etc please email Martin Giles at [mgdragon@gmail.com](mailto:mgdragon@gmail.com) or David Rose at [drosedragon@gmail.com](mailto:drosedragon@gmail.com)

September 2011 – June 2012, and also celebrates its 30th year at Onslow Village Hall. The Society presents illustrated talks by expert speakers on various arts subjects every 2nd Wednesday of the month. Social events and visits to historical venues are organised too. The Society always welcomes new members and visitors to come and enjoy these talks and visits.

The programme for the next three months is as follows:

November 9th 2011 – "The Sundial" – Objects of art, craft and science by lecturer and author, Kevin Karney MA JP.

December 14th 2011 – "The Christmas Story" – as told through the paintings in the National Gallery by Caroline MacDonald-Haig, journalist, author, Blue Badge guide.

January 11th 2012 – "Windsor Castle" – Fire, Restoration and the Queen's Jubilee by Oliver Everett, former Librarian of the Royal Library at Windsor Castle.

Venue: Onslow Village Hall, The Square, Wilderness Road GU2 7QR

Membership fee: £40 for single and £70 for two

Visitors: £10 per lecture

For enquiries about membership please contact:  
Lyn Blatchford tel: 07817 135189  
or email: [info@nadfasguildford.org.uk](mailto:info@nadfasguildford.org.uk)

## Wanted

Local guitar tutor for complete beginner.  
Please contact Ellie on 833026 if interested.



The past five years have seen many changes to both halls and I am very pleased to have been instrumental in ensuring that the works were carried out satisfactorily.

The main changes were a total refurbishment of the kitchen and all of the toilet areas; the provision of an electrically powered hatch between the kitchen and main hall; a new notice board and the replacement of all the existing furniture with new. Also installation of a new PA system, sanding of the floors, provision of security fencing and gates, and improvements to the gardens at the front. All of these works were carried out without any Council grants and the hire fees have remained the same for the last four years.

The number of regular hirers has doubled and on many occasions we have had up to 1,000 people using the Hall in one week, thus providing nearly treble the income of five years ago.

The smooth running of the Hall would not have been easy to implement if I had not had the valued help of some key people ie Michael Williams, Steve Mills (Treasurer) and Emily Baxendine.

I am now pleased to confirm that Tony Bundy has taken on the role of Chairman/Hall Manager. Tony has recently retired and will be able to spend the time needed to ensure the Hall continues to provide the necessary services.

I am now joining the Surrey Community Action Group as a volunteer, inspecting village halls throughout Surrey in order to implement a new 'Hallmark Quality Scheme'.

I wish Tony well and thank all of the people who have hired the Hall over the years."

## Success at last!

As you may know, the footpath which runs from the turning circle at the end of High View Road to Farnham Road is not a right of way and OVRA has been trying to get Surrey County Council to rectify this since 2009. To do this we had first to persuade the Council to issue a "Map Modification Order", and in this we have at last been successful.

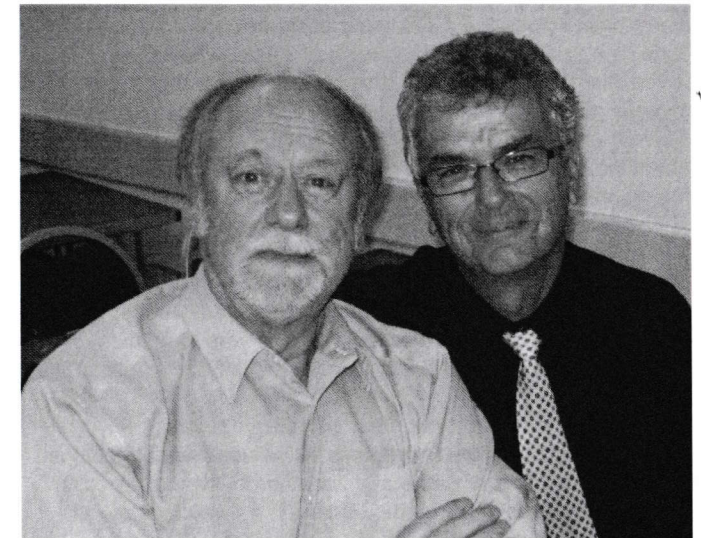
Several Committee members were involved. At first we got nowhere because the council required us to find the owner of the land over which the footpath runs. Despite some misleading information from both Guildford Borough Council and SCC we finally established that the land in question has no legal owner! We also had to prove that the footpath had been in continuous use, and many local residents then helped us to establish that the path had indeed been in continuous since at least 1956 until the present day.

Bernard Parke was especially helpful as he remembered that while a Councillor he had arranged for the steps and handrail to be installed, but unfortunately GBC had no record of this.

Eventually we sent 42 forms to SCC and OVRA would like to thank all those residents in the Village who completed application forms and offered their memories of the use of this path.

The map modification order was finally made on 7th September 2011 and assuming no objections were received, the order took effect after 1st November. This will not mean that the Council will take responsibility for clearing foliage etc; it will be treated like any other footpath where it is the responsibility of residents living next to it to ensure their hedges do not impede foot traffic, but SCC can be contacted if there is a problem and will ensure that the route is kept clear.

For more information go to our website:  
[www.surreycommunity.info/ovra/news#footpath](http://www.surreycommunity.info/ovra/news#footpath)



Mick Gall, the outgoing Chairman of the Village Hall Management Committee and the new incumbent, Tony Bundy.