



FOREWORD

The Foreword to the book has been written by Dr John West who was senior lecturer in History at Shenstone College, Worcestershire, an Inspector of schools and author of *Village Records* (Phillimore 3rd Edition 1979), *Town Records*, and his latest book is *Captain of the Lyme* (2001) ISBN 0907-683-79-7.

LIGHTWOOD AND LOCALITY

Mischa, hero of Martinu's opera *Julietta*, rediscovers his lost town only to find that the inhabitants have lost their memories and are aware only of the present. In a commuter-driven society, this is happening to all of us and to our home-towns. The current impulse towards family history, which overcrowds the libraries' search rooms every day in an endless pursuit of our own greater-and-greater-grandparents, is quite natural insurance against lack of memory. History teachers must feel grateful for such an active lifeline. Unfortunately, this is also a somewhat self-centred preoccupation, which threatens to obscure an older generation's view of 'local history' as re-creation of the life of a place and its community, rather than that of the individual ancestors of a single family.

It is, therefore, heartening to know that Local History Heritage Groups, like Shooters Hills' and Lightwood's, are alive and well, aiming to 'investigate and record by various means the character of the locality'. When Gillian Swift speaks of Shooters Hills' 'farmland [which] can be seen like a patchwork quilt' and takes the evidence of a five hundred year hedgerow, we see the real meaning of local history. This spreads out from a Roman coin hoard to the enclosure, to the turnpike road, to its toll-house, to 1920s shopping and 1944 US Lease-Lend.

'Finding the character of the locality' was the aim which inspired Gill to enthuse an active group of researchers (and husband Anthony). Together they have listened to a multitude of archivists, archaeologists, museum curators, senior citizens and a host of curious school children. They have married artefacts and photographs with ancient documents and folk memory and, of course, with family history. All this evidence has been skillfully woven into the fabric of a well produced, beautifully illustrated book. Originally conceived as merely 'A Walk around Lightwood', this has become a veritable pilgrimage into the past.

I am proud to have been invited to contribute this brief foreword to an excellent book. Incredibly, it is now forty-seven years since the Primary School Student Miss Hudson (we were very formal then!) and I both attended Shenstone Training Collage in Worcester, Gill to study and I to teach History. Shenstone was a progressive College under an inspired Principal, Huberta Philips. We believed in Education, of children and adults, as a process of discovery and experience. This belief initiated well integrated teaching projects, field study courses and – very innovative – combined subject courses of Environmental Studies. For both Gill and her tutors, Shenstone was a long-lasting, lifetime experience which 'Lightwood and Locality' sums up very well. Thank you Miss Hudson.

Dr John West 2003