

## Transcript from *The West Essex Gazette*

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Saturday, January 24<sup>th</sup> 1925

### Death of Lopping Champion

With the death of Mr Thomas Willingale, which took place on Weds morning at Baldwyns Hill, Loughton, a link with the struggle for Epping Forest has been broken. It was Willingale, with his father and brother, who struck the first blow by asserting their right to lop wood in the forest as their forefathers had done from time immemorial. He was made a martyr so far as being haled before the Justices and convicted of stealing wood and his case lasted on and off for several years. The Commons Preservation Society took up the fight for him and in 1871 a suit was commenced against the Lords of the Manor for the restoration of the Forest lands that they had enclosed as their own private property. "This tremendous legal battle" to quote from the authority of Mr. Edward North Buxton, "in which 18 barristers were engaged, lasted 3 years and the final hearing for 17 days. At length on Nov. Sir George Jessel, delivered judgment – 24<sup>th</sup> 1874, the then Master of the Rolls, forever overthrowing enclosures, the illegality of which was left beyond dispute. Loughton especially had reason to be grateful to Willingale, for by his action the rights of Loughton loppers were maintained, and when the Forest was taken over by the City of London Corporation, not only was a sum of £3 given to each Loughton Freeman, but the balance of £7,000 was handed over in trust out of which the Lopping Hall was built and is being maintained.

Willingale, who was 81 years of age, and stood over 6ft 2ins in height, fell on bad times during his last few years, and although he was helped by a few public spirited residents who sent him small sums of money, practically died in poverty.

*[There is an error in the original in that two lines appear transposed; this text is repeated verbatim from the original. Also the quote marks are not closed in the original.]*

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Saturday, January 31<sup>st</sup> 1925

### Funeral of Thomas Willingale

Very simply all that was mortal of Thomas Willingale was laid to rest in the churchyard of St John's, the Parish Church of Loughton on Saturday. The service was conducted by the Rector, Rev. P. N. Maitland, curiously enough a son of the Lord of the Manor, with whom in his lifetime deceased had waged his warfare. There were a few members of his family present, and in addition Mrs. Wauchope, and Mr J. Tuck, J.P. of Waltham Abbey. He was buried in the same grave that contained the ashes of his father, mother, and brother, the latter with deceased and his father being sentenced by the Epping Justices to two months imprisonment for lopping wood in the early sixties.

The present generation have forgotten, if they ever knew, the debt they owed to the Willingales for their stubborn defence of their lopping rights in the Forest. It should not be forgotten that it was they who struck the first blow in the long fight that made that beautiful

open space free for the people for ever. Many tempting offers were made to Willingale, the father, for him to relinquish his claim, and on as good authority as Lord Eversley, one was for £500, but sturdy yeoman as he was, he refused them all and remained steadfast to his principles. May the earth lie lightly on the Willingales, father and sons.

*[Typo in original should be Lord Eversley.]*

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**Saturday February 7<sup>th</sup> 1925**

**Better Late Than  
Never Memorial to the Willingales**

At their meeting on Monday the Lopping Hall Trustees decided to perpetuate the memories of Thomas Willingale and his two sons, but the form of the memorial will take is left for the annual meeting to decide. The matter was mentioned by Mr Duncan Davey, the Chairman, who said they all knew Thomas Willingale, who had just died, and some of them remembered his father. He quite agreed that had it not been for him and his two sons there would have been no Epping Forest as it is now, and certainly no Lopping Hall, and they would not have been sitting where they were. There should be some memorial and he suggested a marble or brass tablet in the hall of the building. He thought there should have been something done for Tom Willingale in his lifetime, but until after his death he had no idea he had so little to live upon. He (the speaker) had been a lopper; and he went to the last lopping in Loughton, and there was a great set-out that night. There were thousands of people who visited the Forest who would be pleased, he was sure, to subscribe small amounts for a memorial to the men who had saved the Forest for them. He spoke of the Forest land that was enclosed in his younger days and said he remembered the bus loads of navvies who came from London and pulled down the fence opposite the French's place at Buckhurst Hill, and he remembered corn growing on other land near the Robin Hood. That the only Lopping Hall in the world, and he was sure if it were made public that it was intended to erect some memorial to the men who had saved Loughton's lopping rights there would be no lack of subscribers.

On the proposal of Mr Lebbon it was then decided to put the matter on the agenda for the annual meeting which will be held in early April.

[...]

[new section, i.e. not continued from above]

Mr. Norman Henderson, hon sec of the Loughton I.L.P., writes suggesting some form of appreciation to Thomas Willingale and his sons. As the Trustees have "fathered" some such scheme, we have no doubt that Mr Henderson's suggestion will be carried out.

*Transcript made from original held at the British Library Newspaper Archive, Colindale,  
by Steven Willingale 3rd Feb 2010*