

Sabine Baring-Gould Appreciation Society

Newsletter 1991-92

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SBGAS Newsletter, No 7.

The Pursuit of Clues (Editorial)

A series of articles in one of the Sunday supplements reveals the eager search for Blackmore's Doone Valley and Buchan's Thirty-nine Steps; an earlier piece on the 'literary landscape' made compelling reading in the attempt to sort out Arthur Ransome's Cumbrian hills and lakes. It is clear from booksellers' request lists that a much collected group of SBG's writings is his location novels, such as Mehalah, Red Spider, Bladys of the Stewponey and several others, including the two mentioned in the previous editorial.

However, our man provides a whole range of other 'clues' waiting to be followed up. Some have already been mentioned in past newsletters. Developments are usually slow to mature, and the investigator has to exercise patience. The matter of letters is often tantalising - collections are rumoured but then seem to fade into oblivion. At the moment of writing your editor is waiting to be introduced to a third party who claims to have 'bundles' of BG papers!

Our newest member has been doing some archaeological research, and in due course will share his findings with the Society. In his own detective work SBG seemed less interested in arriving at definitive truth than in enjoying the romance of the features and people encountered in the process. As a pioneer in opening up the secrets of Dartmoor his conclusions have often been disputed both by contemporaries and successors. Yet his work is still acclaimed and valued. As one consequence of this the Society has been honoured by the request of the Devonshire Association to provide a speaker for their annual meeting next May.

Meanwhile, although one or two members report nearly complete collections of SBG's writings, most of us find many titles hard to track down, and the prices demanded for some items beyond our means.

We are most grateful to our President for producing the family crest - see the back cover - which we hope to use as a logo for publicity and correspondence. Many thanks also to the other contributors to this issue.

David Shacklock

The Fabulous Pair

Irene Widdicombe

It feels very strange to be so much older than any of you and to be, I suppose, one of the very few left alive who knew that fabulous pair -Sabine and Grace.

They could not have been more different, a most unlikely match, yet I think it was really one of the most wonderful marriages in history.

I could never describe them to you adequately, to make you see them as I do so clearly in my mind, nor to record to you their unique voices.

How I wish tapes and videos had been known in those days so that you could hear Sabine's bell- like singing voice as we heard it in church on Sundays. His speaking voice was sort of vibrant, some quality I have never heard in any other. He didn't speak much - one felt his mind was always working, but when he did speak it was in quick jerky sentences, always interesting, funny, and he loved to tease.

But Grace! Hers was the most beautiful speaking voice I have ever heard - like velvet, mellow I think describes it, in fact I think mellow is the word that best describes her. What a hard life she must have had transported from a simple background to being the Squire's lady in a large house and I believe that when she first came to Lew she was exposed to some hostility from the snobbish gentry in the countryside around. Then fourteen children to cope with, and the house in such bad repair that I believe there were workmen in doing one thing and another through all her life. And an eccentric husband - such devotion between them, but he could not have been all that easy to live with, and certainly, was not much practical help. She had plenty of excuse to make her a bit crotchety at times, yet in all those years I knew her, and I saw a great deal of her, I never saw her flustered or out of temper, she was always the same - warm, interesting and gently humorous - I just loved them both and was proud of being related to them.

Lew was such a different place from what it is today ... bristling with life. Lew House always full of activity, and Ardoch at the top of the hill where my grandmother lived, filled all through the summer months. I spent every summer there all through my childhood and Lew was my heaven. When I felt a sore throat coming, I would pray that it would turn into a really bad 'flu, so that the doctor would say, "better send her down to her grandmother in Devon".

The whole atmosphere was so different in those days ... when one looks back it all seems ridiculously snobbish ... such a strict dividing line between the big houses and the cottages. For instance, when any of the women or girls met any ladies from the big houses they bobbed a little curtsy. It was just the way things were and it was all taken for granted. I suppose there was a dignity about it and there was a great deal of love and caring behind it.

Granny and Aunt Grace were always so concerned when anyone was ill or in trouble and did what they could to help. Of course, there was no transport in the village except for the Lew

House and Ardoch carriages and horses, so if anyone had to go to hospital, one or other of them harnessed up and took them and were at the ready to bring them home.

Uncle Sabine was always so aware of his flock, and his daily airing every morning when he set off after breakfast in the dog-cart, was the time for him to call on anyone he wanted to speak to, or to enquire after anyone sick. I always remember one day I met a woman whose husband I knew was ill, so I enquired after him ... "Oh, me dear," she said, "Squire, he put us in a proper tizzy s'mornin, he come in and walked right upstairs and into the bedroom before us was properly vitty". That was typical of him, a sudden impulse passing the house, he remembered one of his own was ill - of course he must pop in to see how things were. It would not occur to him that it might be inconvenient.

On these early morning trips if he had no-one special to see, he would pop into Ardoch and find us still at breakfast. There was a lovely relationship between him and Granny - his stepmother, but only a few years older than himself. He loved to tease her and she enjoyed his fun. He would say something outrageous to shock her, and she would reply 'hocus pocus, naughty boy.'

One wonderful day he suddenly appeared and found us breakfasting ... "Morning Granny - Joan's here in her motorcar - going to Dartmoor - want to take Irene". Was I thrilled - I had never been in a car before so it was just as if a child of today was offered a trip to the moon. Permission was given and soon we were off. Uncle Sabine beside the chauffeur and I sitting beside Joan on the edge of my seat, very shy but nearly bursting with the thrill of it. Everyone in the house came to see us off and as we drove towards Dartmoor, people stared at us in wonder, seeing this fabulous horseless carriage speeding along.

When I look back on it all, I wonder if I really did live it, or was it just a book I have read?

SBG's Articles In 'Good Words'

In addition to the SBG book titles that were published by Isbister & Co. ('A Study of St. Paul' 1897; 'Perpetua' - originally serialised in 12 parts in *The Sunday Magazine* 1897; and 'In a Quiet Village', 1900), at least 4 articles are to be found in *Good Words* in the 1890s, under the editorship of the Very Revd. Donald Macleod, 'one of Her Majesty's Chaplains'.

The 1895 volume contains 'Death on the Stage', a 3½ page unillustrated piece recounting the occasions in the previous 200 years when actors had actually expired on stage, or collapsed and died shortly afterwards. Several instances occurred in conjunction with appropriate - usually Shakespearian - death dialogue. Some near fatal accidents are recorded also in suitably entertaining style.

The contribution to the 1896 volume is entitled 'An Old Maid's Letters'. A dozen letters, mostly written in the year 1809 by one Jane Davies to SBG's great uncle Edward Sabine (later KCB and President of the Royal Society), and presented here with interwoven commentary, cover 13½ pages in 3 parts and include 5 photographs (including two of Edward and one of his father, the first Governor of Gibraltar). There are fascinating references not only to the retreat from Corunna and the ill-fated Walcheren expedition, but also to the postal services of the times, and the inscribing of envelope covers by noblemen or MPs as a 'frank' or freepost. A modern sounding note is struck by the comment that "tea is not always to be had upon the road, or if procurable is not often good", and SBG's own observation upon youth: "Young men nowadays have hardly this habit of being gracious to and maintaining lasting association with old ladies; perhaps this is why so few of them have that courtesy of manner and kindly deference towards their elders that marked those of the old school, to which their grandfathers belonged". Arcane medical customs and the administration of the bolus, drenches, castor oil, leeches and Gregory's powder are graphically described.

The 1897 material is rather more antiquarian. 'On Sideboards' is a 3½ page article illustrated by Arthur Twidle documenting the style and usage of the display table or court cupboard from Roman to Stuart times and its 'ancestry' in the common kitchen dresser. 'The Early Christian House at Rome' is described in detail over 7½ pages in two parts, and is illustrated by the previous artist together with 'M. Baring-Gould' (SBG's second daughter Margaret, later Mrs. 'Daisy' Rowe). Sabine himself conducted parties round this house at the time of the excavations in 1889/90, when the graffiti of a previous era of visitors was revealed.

Further Published Material Mentioning SBG

(See Newsletter No. 2, p.2 and No. 3, p.2)

Michael Pollard - DISCOVERING ENGLISH FOLKSONG - Shire/Discovering series no. 270 - 1982 paperback - references on 9 pages.

J.S.P. Agg Large - AND FOR OUR NEXT HYMN - 5 page chapter in typed booklet.

Arthur Mee - DEVON - H&S 1949 - one page (for Lewtrenchard) under the heading "His Long Day Done".

Christina Hole - HAUNTED ENGLAND (originally published Nov. 1940) - new edition Fitzhouse 1990 - 4 pages on Madame Gould; two passing references and three bibliographical to SBG.

Revd. A. Tindal Hart - THE COUNTRY PRIEST IN ENGLISH HISTORY - Phoenix 1959 - one long and a later short paragraph, plus three passing references; SBG described as "the black squire".

Brian Chugg - VICTORIAN & EDWARDIAN DEVON from old photographs - Batsford 1975, paperback 1979 - one photograph.

John Betjeman & A.L. Rowse - VICTORIAN & EDWARDIAN CORNWALL from old photographs - Batsford 1974, 3rd impression 1977 paperback - one mention and one photograph.

Hilary Wreford, Rosemary Clinch, Michael Williams - SECRET WESTCOUNTRY - Bossiney Books 1986 paperback - three pages, two photographs of Lew and 2 passing mentions.

W.G. Hollins & Claude Berry - DEVON & CORNWALL in pictures - Odhams - a few lines.

V. Day Sharman - FOLK TALES OF DEVON - Nelson 1952 - acknowledgment of Devon Characters & Strange Events in two chapters.

E.W. Martin - DARTMOOR - Hale/Regional series 1958 - 4 pages, 4 other references, and two items in bibliography. Christopher Trent - DEVON & CORNWALL - Foulis/Motoring on Regional Byways 1969 - two sentences on Lew House & SBG. B. Anthony Bax - THE ENGLISH PARSONAGE - John Murray 1964 - 4 references and two titles in bibliography.

F.H. Starkey - DARTMOOR THEN & NOW - Wheaton 1986 paperback - dedicated to memory of 4 'Dartmoor Greats' including SBG, who is mentioned and quoted on pages 8-11, from three titles including his item Amongst The Western Song-Men in The English Illustrated Magazine for March 1892. This is the author's 5th title on Dartmoor; his second, EXPLORING DARTMOOR AGAIN, under the Penwell imprint 1981, reprinted 1983 & 1986 (paperback) quotes SBG on the back cover. ("Dartmoor is ... to me - a passion") and mentions him once in the text. It features 21 'explorations' of the moor, and contains some evocative sketches by Sheila Perigal. Harry Starkey's third book, DARTMOOR CROSSES & SOME ANCIENT TRACKS, Wheaton paperback 1983 (revised edition 1989) makes two references to SBG's Book of Dartmoor.

William Addison - ESSEX HEYDAY - two pages on SBG & Mehalah.

The Hurst Johnian Obituary - The Rev. Sabine Baring-Gould

As the Rev. Sabine Baring-Gould was at Hurst as a Master from 1855 to 1864, his departure took place two years after I was born; I cannot therefore speak at first hand, and, as sixty years have gone without this attempt at a record, there do not remain many, if any, men who can.

I only met him once, and that was in 1894, when he came to preach. The occasion was the Dedication of the first instalment of the panelling in Chapel, and his sermon was characteristic. I took him to look at the fresco he painted on the wall of the Second Master's bedroom, in the Shield. He covered his eyes, and shrank away from it, murmuring "Crude, crude!" Which in sooth it is. He said that day that his period at Hurst had been of inestimable value as an introduction to life.

Was there ever such versatility! He was painter, antiquary, musician, squarson, theologian, novelist, etc. original, unconventional. He was attracted to Hurst by the originality of our design, and the unconventionality of our very being. Hurst in 1860 stood alone in England. We had been seven years in our buildings. We had 250 boys (no Head Master's house) and our fees were £23, or £20 per annum. Here was something new and strong, and hopeful for a man with vision, and with religion.

In the only notice I read of him when he died the writer pointed out that he had been right in the Oxford Movement for sixty years, and passed unrecognised, as far as Canonries and the like go. But the world knows his hymns and many of his sermons. I once heard an O.J. at the Hurst Dinner, record that Baring-Gould (known as "Snout") on one occasion gave him thirty-six (sic) cuts, and then washed his hands and sat down and wrote "Onward Christian Soldiers." I remember he was pleased when we sang "Hail the Sign" in Chapel 1894. He wrote music and words of "Now the day is over"; he wrote the words of "Thro' the night of doubt." But these things are national.

Every Hurst man ought to know his reproduction of Bishop Wilberforce's sermon (B.G. *The Sunday Round*, Vol ii.No.xxx) an All Saints Eve. He describes the procession moving from the Armoury, round the Cloisters to the old Crypt Chapel, by little, each with a place and a task. They disappear down the steps at the foot of the Hall stairs into a dark belt (the Shadow of Death), then through the door into the blaze of light before the altar, then of course in the Crypt.

He was naturally a pillar of the *Johnian*. "Hurst Echoes" reprinted a poem, "Easter Eve," which it is good to read at the end of Good Friday. He helped with the Play. In the 1860 Macbeth the witches cauldron for which he was providing thunder and lightning, upset and revealed him to a wondering audience with his trousers incinerated. He made and painted (well heraldically) the coat of arms of the Prince of Wales which for many years appeared in the proscenium. The Play used to be invariably on November 9th (birthday of King Edward VII.), and the coat was "England, over all Saxony." Baring-Gould designed the cover of the *Johnian*. "S.B.G." is at the base of S.Jerome's statue. He designed the bookshelves and cases with their wrought iron, originally red and gold, in the Boys' Library. He painted the window jambs with scenes from the Canterbury Tales and the Faery Queen, and probably did work for the Fellows' Library. There is a *Johnian* description of

his filling up the interval at a School Concert with a representation of a dwarf lady of inconceivable hideousness, who sang an original song of his.

In 1860 he was one of the "Hurst Rifle Volunteers," who used to drill at the New Inn. Tales have always lingered of his rambles with boys, oblivious of bounds, "chivy," call overs, telling them unending tales of the subjects he knew. He took weird holidays, and brought home a pony from Iceland which lived for years in the North Field. He once asked the famous Jim Pierce to go with him. Something happened to Jim at Hurst, but he was so near going that he became a recognised authority (in the Bill Adams School) on such subjects as Silver Fox, and Aurora Borealis.

He lived in the Shield rooms opposite to Rev. John Gorham. They mutually plagued each other. One put the huge Ammonite in the Fellows' Library into the other's bed. The response to this was the secretion of various cuckoo clocks in the room opposite, which heralded spring unintermittently through the night hours.

Sunday 26th May 1991

The Gathering at Lew Trenchard was an exciting and successful event for all who came. It seemed that the youngest to the oldest was making this a great family event. So many had not met before and others had not seen each other for a long time.

Altogether there were 119 of us including the family, support groups of locals, the P.C.C., and members of the Sabine Baring-Gould Appreciation Society, and 98 for the church service.

There was not one Baring-Gould present although over 66 of us could claim to have descended from that name. There were over 20 from Arthur Baring-Gould's side of the family, headed by Irene Widdicombe who, at well over 90, is as mentally sprightly as ever. Bless her for coming.

With the amazing generosity of everyone, donations from the beginning of the year of £1,420, the church collection of £129 and the picnic £550 have all contributed to one great onslaught against the death-watch beetle. More has to be collected of course to complete the job, but the screen is safe for some time having been very well repaired. The Parish Church Council do thank you all for your enormous support.

The whole event was a huge success with one tiny flaw - the video which I hoped would record the day and all the people who came, was absolutely useless, an amateurish flop. But we may be able to collect some videos from members of the family who were recording the event so, hopefully, we can share the day with those in Canada, USA and Africa.

None of us will forget the fun that we all had. The wonderful sunshine, the folk singing by John Hobbs, the first strawberries of the season with clotted cream, and the trip around the house. A day to remember.

By the way, on 26th May 1872 Sabine came into the estate, his father Edward died on that day 119 years ago and there were 119 souls supporting this gathering!!! A strange

coincidence of numbers, one for the numerologists! Perhaps it was a planned event and not a coincidence!

John Reboul has put together a book with all the portraits in Lew House, orders can be taken for copies. Has anyone any photographs of the gathering that he would be prepared to share with everyone?

Image Briggs

SBGAS Newsletter, No 8.

The Thriller Writer (Editorial)

While awaiting an interview recently, your editor was thumbing through a coffee table book on 'Literary England'. The brief paragraph on Lew Trenchard and SBG included a reference to the 'thriller' *In the Roar of the Sea*, originally published as a 'three-decker' 100 years ago. It is a surprising epithet to apply to a Victorian novel, but one which may be justified by the book's popularity; by the end of the year of publication it had run to its fourth edition. It is still a sought-after title today (see p.14).

The most acclaimed of his novels, *Mehalah*, now boasts an unusual revival as you will see from the article on Jonathon Gash. The author of the Lovejoy series regards *Mehalah* itself as not worth reading, but has given the heroine an extension of life. Using his pseudonym Jonathon Grant and under the Century imprint, he has produced a romantic tearjerker with the title *The Shores of Sealandings*. Meanwhile, the original can be taken to have sufficient recommendation (pace Mr. Gash) by John Fowles' introduction to the Chatto edition of 1969, to be found also in the Boydell Press paperback issue of 1983.

We are most grateful to the *Essex Countryside Magazine* for permission to reproduce both that article and Ian Yearsley's Ten Years on the Mud. We also acknowledge the similar kindness of Martin Graebe and the Wren Trust with regard to the centre pages - a copy of their programme entitled, Songs of the West, performed shortly before the launch of the Society in 1989. The Trust is putting on the programme again at the end of March this year at Killerton, near Exeter, the National Trust property whose library holds BaringGould's books (referred to by the code letter 'K' in the bibliography contained in the first three issues of the Newsletter). The Wren Trust would be glad to receive applications for tickets for this event from any SBGAS member.

We also hear of a Surrey author seeking publication of a book entitled Sabine Baring-Gould and Grace, the Mill Girl from Poppleton. We hope to have fuller information about this and reviews of the other books mentioned in this editorial for the next issue.

David Shacklock

Lovejoy Author Turns To Past

"Meg Davis-Berry meets the Essex author who created one of television's favourite characters and has now written the story of a woman for all men."

Jonathon Gash, author of the Lovejoy novels is a surprise - as much to himself as anyone else. He admits to total astonishment at his success and even to what his characters get up to.

His readers would be amazed to find that Jonathon is really John Grant - no pirate treading a fine line on the edges of the law and the world of antiques, but a highly respected doctor and senior microbiologist in London.

He lives quietly at West Bergholt, near Colchester, with his wife, a budgie and a study full of books which almost constitutes a library. Three daughters - two married to actors - shatter the peace when they came home with a variety of small grandchildren.

The Grants moved to West Bergholt more than 20 years ago, when, as a specialist in tropical medicine he returned from overseas appointments in Hong Kong and the Middle East.

Writing started in 1975 "as a game" and, fifteen years on, Lovejoy has become an international success with 14 books and an omnibus edition in print, a new book and television series on the stocks and strong rumours of a film to come.

But writing remains a game and doctoring still comes first. John Grant runs four clinics in London each week while Jonathon Gash comes home to his make-believe world of good humoured trickery, double dealing and occasional clear-cut crime.

But recently John Grant has surprised himself again. He found that his first attempt to write a Lovejoy story featuring a doctor as a central character had turned into something quite different.

The result is his first historical novel, full of the atmosphere of the isolated Essex coast of almost two centuries ago.

The Shores of Sealandings is the story of a mysterious and beautiful young girl rescued from the sea by a fishing lugger from the village of Sealandings. The villagers take the girl in and from then on her strong but benign character influences them all - especially the men.

The girl is Mehala and Jonathon Grant openly acknowledges his debt to the Reverend Sabine Baring-Gould who wrote Mehalah, his own gothic novel of a young east coast girl, during the ten years he spent in Essex in the late 19th century.

Jonathon Grant takes over where Baring-Gould left off, with Mehala drowning, but there the resemblance between the two characters - and the two books - ends.

It's a shame, but Baring-Gould's book is virtually unreadable now", Grant admits.

His own new novel, which is the first part of a trilogy, is most certainly readable, including elements of a Lovejoy-style scam, plenty of historical detail, the atmosphere of East Anglia and a good helping of romance.

But it is the story of the village doctor, totally atone in his fight against disease in general and diphtheria in particular, which is the centre point of the book.

"I felt for him every inch of the way," Grant said, giving his character a life of his own. "I have been there and felt everything he felt - a feeling of being so alone and so helpless."

But why has it taken 15 years for a doctor to write about doctoring and why did he choose antiques as his original subject matter.

"Writing is a game. It's easy to kill off the woman at the end of chapter nine. Doctoring singularly isn't.

"I chose antiques because I used to work in Petticoat Lane every morning to help pay my way through medical school."

He worked from 3am to ten each morning as a runner helping to set up the stalls for the day. That is where he found his pen name of Gash, the street name for rubbish.

He has been an avid collector ever since and his love of the history that each object holds can clearly be seen in *Sealandings*. Today his knowledge of the world of antiques is aided by the dealers around him in North Essex and Suffolk. They are only too eager to help when they realise who the quiet gentleman asking the awkward questions is!

John Grant is obviously a good listener. He has learnt so much of East Anglian customs and Essex history by talking to the older people in West Bergholt and neighbouring villages.

He admits to having fallen in love with this part of the country which has been the background to all his books so far, although his own background was very different.

He was born in a Bolton back street in the 1930s and remembers running to the top of the street to see which mill chimney was smoking that morning to tell his father where he might get work.

School, and the nuns who taught him there were two worlds and almost two languages - one of the streets and one for school - led him to training for the priesthood in a seminary where even football games had to be played in Latin on certain days.

"We had E-days when we spoke English and L-days for Latin. Even if you won the match, but shouted out in the wrong language, you lost."

He decided on medicine rather than religion and ended up as a tropical disease specialist after National Service.

But Grant has never turned his back on his Lancashire roots and has a hefty file of epic poems that he has written in his childhood dialect. They remain unpublished.

"Mainly because my mother and I are the only two people left who understand them," he laughed.

It's possible that a historical novel set in the same period as *Sealandings*, but based in Lancashire, could be the next from the pen of Jonathon Grant. But he is no wiser than we are about that.

"I find I've been looking at maps of my home town from the 1820s and the street pattern hadn't changed at all when I was a boy. Of course, it's totally different now.

"It could be that there's a book brewing."

Writing is still very much a relaxation rather than a task. Unusually for a successful author, he has refused to take a contract with a publisher for a guaranteed sum of money a year for whatever he writes.

He prefers to write without that pressure and he is always surprised at what emerges when his pen hits blank paper. He still writes in longhand and carries out revision in different coloured inks before the book ever reaches manuscript stage.

"It looks like a map of the underground by the time I've finished with it. But I hate wrongness. I have to get things right." He certainly has got things right with both Lovejoy and Mehala, who could become his female counterpart.

The Shores of Sealandings is published by Collins in hardback at £13.99. A sequel, Storms at Sealandings, is due out next year. A new Lovejoy novel, The Lies of Fair Ladies, is scheduled for January to tie in with a new television series.

Ten Years on the Mud

"Ian Yearsley follows in the footsteps of a clergyman novelist and one of his young heroines."

'We begin life as believers, and end it as sceptics. We begin with trustfulness, and go on through every stage of delusion into absolute mistrust. As children, we look up to everyone; as old men we look down on all.'

Thus wrote Sabine Baring-Gould, one-time rector of East Mersea, in his 1888 novel Richard Cable.

A prolific writer, Baring-Gould is best remembered now for his hymn 'Onward Christian Soldiers', but his 'Ten Years On The Mud' - as he referred to his time at East Mersea from 1871- 1881 - saw him produce a number of classic literary works which have still not yet been given the full recognition they deserve. Incisive observations such as the one quoted above characterised his works and sermons.

His 1880 novel, Mehalah, provides one of the most graphic descriptions of the North Essex coastal region ever to have been recorded: 'In summer, the thrift mantles the marshes with shot satin, passing through all gradations of tint from maiden's blush to lily white. Thereafter a purple glow steals over the waste, as the sea lavender bursts into flower, and simultaneously every creek and pool is royally fringed with sea aster. A little later the glasswort, that shot up green and transparent as emerald glass in the early Spring, turns to every tinge of carmine.'

The characters, too, are so alive that one can almost envisage the true life personalities on whom they were so accurately based. Mehalah herself was a young girl on the island; her suitor, Elijah Rebow, was the local bully; and her fiance's mother was a houseboat dweller

who, just as the novel records, was indeed involved in an incident when a pail of water was thrown over a latecomer to her vessel.

Baring-Gould seems to have a particular animosity towards women, judging by some of his acidic comments about the fairer sex: 'As long as the world lasts, women must sting, and men must weep; and the sooner it's over, the sooner to sleep.'

This is strange, as he was apparently happily married for almost 50 years!

In addition to its characters, Mehalah also provides the 20th century reader with a romantic picture of the days of smuggling, when every inn had a false cellar and coloured lights at night were an almost obligatory sight.

A classic portrayal of both Essex and 19th century life the novel was described at the time by Swinburne as being as good as Wuthering Heights. Fortunately for us, the area which Baring-Gould knew, and in which his characters spent their fascinating lives, has so far successfully evaded the destruction which the 20th century has wrought on other parts of Essex.

The Ray, where Mehalah lived, is now National Trust property as the Strood over which she went looking for employment at the nearby Peldon Rose Inn, is now a metalled road, but still subject to flooding.

The rickety structure of Virley church, in which she was married, has now all but crumbled away, but the atmosphere and the memories are still there.

Apart from Mehalah, Baring-Gould also wrote the hymn 'Now The Day Is Over' while he lived at East Mersea, a hymn written, it is said, to be chimed on the bells of the church of St Edmund King and Martyr at East Mersea, where Baring-Gould was rector.

It was here also that he compiled what he considered to be his best work - the 17-volume *The Lives Of The Saints* written between 1872 and 1879.

In all, Baring-Gould produced over 150 widely different works, ranging from novels and hymns to horror stories, religious doctrines and collections of folk songs and sayings. He lived to the ripe old age of 89, dying weeks short of his 90th birthday in 1924.

Today Mehalah, *Richard Cable* and most of his other novels are out of print and must be rooted out in secondhand book shops or borrowed specially from the British Library. They are well worth the effort as it cannot be much longer before the talents of Sabine Baring-Gould are finally recognised after going unnoticed for so long.

He worked hard to raise a family of 14 children while pursuing his other interests and it would be wonderful now for all his efforts to be finally recognised.

As he wrote himself: 'Success is the sanction of conduct, however tortuous.'

SBGAS Newsletter, No 9.

The Letter Writer (Editorial)

In this issue we publish some of the correspondence between SBG and Gladys Dawe, the organist at Lew Trenchard during the last years of his life. They cover quite a range of subjects and moods - from the enthusiasm for continental travel even in his late seventies, to matters of business in London, through the keen interest in musical technicalities, to the close pastoral relationship with his parishioners, and then the almost pathetic musings and self doubts of a lonely old man. Of particular interest are the comments which reveal the motivation for his book writing.

Although we know that many of his letters have not survived, there are undoubtedly a large number which have, and the Editor would be most grateful to receive photocopies so that other episodes or subjects can be presented in future issues.

The article entitled, 'A Marriage of Opposites' unfortunately contains some errors of fact, but seemed of sufficient entertainment value to include. Its source has not been noted, so that it is not now possible to make proper acknowledgment. However, we are delighted to welcome the contribution of our member Raymond Scott, concerning the novel Cheap Jack Zita.

Pursuing the theme of this editorial a stage further, may I encourage members to write letters themselves for the Newsletter - they can be addressed 'to the Editor' or to the membership at large.

By this means people can express thoughts, ask questions, raise issues, and present facts, when a full-scale article about the matter might not be appropriate.

While on holiday recently I was reading *A Book of Dartmoor* (in its paperback version issued by Wildwood House in 1982) and I can thoroughly recommend it as informative light reading. At the same time my wife and then my daughter read and fully enjoyed *The Shores of Sealandings* (reviewed in this issue). We all three have quite different tastes in reading, and rarely even open the same books as each other! Incidentally, my daughter two years ago finished her studies in the History of Art with the Courtauld Institute at Somerset House, which was also the location of King's College School when attended by SBG for two years from the age of ten.

David Shacklock

Whom Did SBG Visit at the Centre of the World and When?

Raymond J. Scott

"What was the world coming to? The world - the centre of it - The Isle of Ely?"

The above is the opening paragraph of SBG's novel *Cheap Jack Zita*, a classic portrayal of 19th century farming life in the Black Fens. The novel's opening scene is in the front of the magnificent west porch of Ely Cathedral and within twenty yards of the Bishop's Palace. SBG describes the City of Ely as "the metropolis of the Fens" and goes on to say "There is not in all England - there is hardly in the world - any tract of country more depressing to the spirits, more void of loveliness, than the Cambridgeshire Fens as they are."

As one comes to expect from SBG there is no shortage of detailed local knowledge and flavour. The novel is one in which fact and fiction are expertly woven together to produce a thrilling story.

With the sudden death of her widowed father, a cheap jack trader selling from the back of his horse-drawn van, Zita is left alone to make her own way in this sometimes hostile environment. Vivid descriptions are given of the continuous battle against the elements even to exist, let alone profit, the digging of turf for fuel, the draining of the fens by windmills, claying or marling of the soil, with the freezing of dykes and rivers the subsequent expertise of the fen-man skater, the wide dependency of laudanum due to the ague - a form of malaria. People born and bred in these fens are proud to be called "Fen Tigers."

Several causes combined to produce discontent in the fens. Those who lived by fishing and fowling were angry because the improved drainage had destroyed their sporting grounds. The labourers were discontented because of low wages and the high prices. All these elements of dissatisfaction which combined at the period of this novel and the high price of wheat produced the explosion which resulted in the Ely and Littleport Riots of 1816 expertly woven into this story. The trial of the rioters came and judgment of death passed on thirty-four men, but only five were executed. Nine were transported for life and the rest served prison sentences.

The whole novel of both interest - particularly to me as a fen-man born and bred - and intrigue evolves around the village of Prickwillow, a tiny hamlet three miles east of Ely. The fens stretch around it like a sea, and in its great fertile fields are found celery, potatoes, sugar-beet and cereals. It is claimed that St. Peter's Church, Prickwillow is the only church in England erected on piles.

Cheap Jack Zita was first published in 1893 in three volumes and unfortunately, as yet, I do not own a first edition. What I do have is what is termed as a 'new edition' published in 1894, and a fourth edition published in 1896. The 1896 edition was the first SBG book I ever owned and at some stage of this book's life it had belonged to Claude D. Kingdon who was for 35 years, the vicar of Prickwillow. Written in the same hand on the inside cover were the words, "This novel was written in my study at Prickwillow."

I would be very interested if this were true and if so, where did SBG stay, and with whom? The book has been illustrated on the blank pages by numerous photographs of Prickwillow

and farming views, also one of the church choir. They combine to give a vivid pictorial insight into this particular part of the world during very hard times.

I sincerely hope that my notes have been of interest and maybe someone will come up with the answer to my original question - Whom did SBG visit at the centre of the world, and when?

SBG References In Print

(See Newsletters No.2,p.2; 3,p.2; 7,p.7,10)

Darrell Bates - THE COMPANION GUIDE TO DEVON & CORNWALL - Collins 1976. p.121 mentions SBG's discovery of 'Widcombe Fair'; p.139 contains 9½ lines on Lew Trenchard and SBG. John L. Blair - A GUIDE TO DEVON & CORNWALL - Chambers 1963 (rev.ed.). Paragraph on Lew Trenchard mentions SBG and recommends A Book of Devon (p.35); A Book of Cornwall and In the Roar of the Sea also recommended (p.99).

Judy Chard - Devon - Cadogan/County Companions 1984. p.68 contains half a page on Lew Trenchard and SBG.

Val Doone - WE SEE DEVON - Harrap 1950. SBG 'wrote what is still the best of books about Dartmoor' (p.52), and one of his stories is quoted.

Simon Goodenough - THE COUNTRY PARSON - David & Charles (thanks to Elizabeth Goldsworthy for pointing this one out). Denys Kay-Robinson - DEVON & CORNWALL - Bartholomew 1977. Includes two relevant pages, referring to SBG as 'a lesser Lord Elgin' and showing a black and white photograph of Lew Church interior.

Paul Minet - LATE BOOKING (his autobiography) - mentions SBG on p.52 and 55.

Murray's HANDBOOK FOR TRAVELLER'S IN DEVON contains one paragraph on Lew Trenchard (p.75) and refers to the Goulds as 'an ancient race'.

J.H.B. Peel - A PORTRAIT OF EXMOOR - Hale 1970. Mentions Bampton as SBG's favourite day out by horse (p.79); quotes his list of extinct gentry - written in 1890 (p.83); quotes an extract from Songs of the West (p.105); quotes SBG on the use of church bells to signal the sighting of a fox (p.140), and in support of hunting parsons - and Jack Russell in particular (p.186), and in praise of 'domestics', along with his lament over changes in the social order (p.201f).

Kathleen Parbury- WOMEN OF GRACE - Oriel Press 1984. References on p.22f,30,36,38f,41f,45,48,51,61,72 and 197 (bibliography): Lives of the Saints (new ed. 1897 & 1898)

Penguin Guide - DEVON - 1939; rev.ed.1947: p.111 contains 3 sentences on Lew Trenchard & SBG.

Walter Walsh - THE SECRET HISTORY OF THE OXFORD MOVEMENTSwan, Sonnenschein & Co 1899 (pop-ed.). p.44 refers to The Golden Gate (1870) and the use of Holy Water in pt.III p.128 (1875 ed).

Ward Lock - DARTMOOR. SBG mentioned under Bridestow (p.89); Bogs and Morasses (p.27); and A Literary Note (p.38): 'of the Moor by birth, residence and ancestry, and held

a fourfold primacy as its historian, archaeologist, poet and novelist'; the references in Urith to Lydford

Castle, Tavy Cleave, Tavistock and Peter Tavy are pointed out (p.40f); in Margery of Quether to Brent Tor; in Eve to Morrell Rocks; in Dartmoor Idylls to Whitchurch Down, Tavy Cleave and the Dewerstone; and in Kitty Alone to Dartmeet.

Michael Williams-HAWKER'S MORWENSTOW-BossineyBooks 1988. References on two pages.

Correspondence with Gladys Dawe

1. Hotel Henri IV, Pau, Basses Pyrenees, France; 21 Dec 1913 Dear Gladys,

I think I must send you a word to tell you that at the English Church here we had this evening Burnett, for the Canticles. I preached. I find that in the parish churches, it is very different from the Cathedrals. These latter are like old fossils. I went in the afternoon today to St. Martin's parish church and it was another thing altogether to the three cathedrals we have been at. For the psalms and Magnificat, the people sang one verse in plainsong, 1 st tune 1 st ending, 5th tune, and Peregrine tune, and the Magnificat to the Royal tune, and the choir and organ in the West gallery the 2nd, 4th, 6th etc. verses and any fauxbourdon and the effect was superb. I am going to try and get a set of fauxbourdons here, if I can. We have had superb weather and the distant view of the Pyrenees wrapped in snow is surpassingly beautiful. Remember me to your father and mother.

Yours truly

S. Baring-Gould

P.S. I enclose a photo of the English chapel here.

2. 4 Jan 1914 Dear Gladys,

Will you most kindly for me copy out our four original fauxbourdons for Magnificat and Nunc Dimittis - not the last Mr. Whitmell made for 1 do not care for it; and put them in the enclosed envelope and send it off by post to the organist of St. Martin's Church at Pau. He has promised to send me some of those used there if I will send him our few fauxbourdons, which will be a good exchange. Mr. Gatrill and I cross over tomorrow, and I shall post them on Sunday.

I am very well and hope to be home during the week, but have to be two or three days in town to see my publisher and other business.

Mr. Gatrill has been unwell and this has necessitated my coming home earlier than I anticipated, as I could not let him travel alone. He came to look after me, but as it happens I have had to look after him.

I remain, Yours truly

S. Baring-Gould

3. Lew Trenchard, N. Devon; 17 Jan. 1919 My dear Gladys,

I have not been able to get over to see you and your dear husband and children for a long time. Do not think that you are out of my thoughts and my heart; but I am not able to get about as formerly. For one thing I am confined to my room during the wet weather. I shall shortly be in my 86th year, and am not able to go round the parish as I should wish. I do not know that my life is worth much, but I generally get laid up with bronchitis for several months in the winter, and am obliged to keep much indoors to avoid a recurrence of this my trouble.

But do not think that I forget you and yours. No! not for a day. When I am gone - when it pleases God to call me, I trust that some of you - my very, very dear people will continue in the love of God and loyalty to his Church, which have been the two things I have ever tried to teach you. So do not think it is neglect on my part, only the infirmity of age.

I remain, Yours truly
S Baring-Gould

4. Lew Trenchard, N. Devon; 17 Jan. 1920 My dear Gladys,

I ought to have written to you before to thank you for your sweet letter. I cannot express to you how much such a kind letter comforts me.

I feel, as I am now on the verge of Eternity so humbled and ashamed at the little I have done for God, that my heart aches and I feel crushed with shame, thinking how little I have done.

My dear child, when I came into this ministry everything - farms, cottages, Lew House - were in rack and ruin, and the property was so burdened with annuities, that I had to write night and day to make money to put things to rights. And in my care for the welfare of the people I could do little for their souls. And now, in my old age, tottering on the edge of the grave, I feel how little I have done, and I feel so humbled, yet when I get from you and others so kind a letter, it cheers me up, and I hope that when I stand before the throne of God, your dear vision* may prevail and He will receive me into his everlasting kingdom.

You have ever been most precious to me.

**vision seems the most likely; the word could be 'views' or 'wishes'. The ending of the letter has not been copied.*

These are transcripts of photocopies kindly made available by a member, Wesley Colwill; No. 3 is reproduced on p.9; some words in No. 1 especially are difficult to decipher. Fauxbourdon is a system of alternative harmonisation, originating on the Continent. A pencilled note adds: "Gladys Dawe played the organ at Lew Trenchard for 20 years. Her father was schoolmaster at Cross Road School, Lewdown for 33 years."