

# Sabine Baring-Gould Appreciation Society

## Newsletter 1994-95

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## SBGAS Newsletter, No 16.

### **Celebrations & Contributions (Editorial)**

The Society enters its sixth year on a high note, with more members than ever before taking an active part in a wide range of activities. The Centenary of the founding of the Dartmoor Exploration Committee by Robert 'Burnard' and SBG has been duly and appropriately celebrated, with Jane Marchand, who is employed by the Park authorities as a field archaeologist, at the centre of these events.

More items of correspondence are coming to light, and we are grateful to Cedric Baring-Gould for the interesting sequence 'Letters to Susan'. Our former Hon. Sec. Patrick Hutton came upon a cache of over 30 boxes of SBG papers at Killerton House; our President has arranged for their safe keeping in a more accessible place, and for authorised research into their contents. We will keep you informed about this exciting discovery.

Our own major event of the year - the Horbury Meet - has been 'written up for us by Image Briggs and Harold Kirk-Smith. The latter is working on the possibility of publishing something on SBG's literary endeavours, as is our Horbury host Keith Lister on the Yorkshire background in particular. Our new Hon. Treasurer has kindly supplied items from recent copies of the Okehampton Times (with permission), and the long interview from the Western Morning News of over 70 years ago.

The Newsletter covers have been updated internally. Externally, the front cover comes from a copy of Church Bells - many thanks to Jim Sunnucks for supplying this rather striking and unusual depiction; the back cover has been taken from a colour photograph of SBG's dogcart which is being lovingly restored by Mr. Tankard of Yelverton, who turned up at Patrick Hutton's shop. I hope we may be able to see the item 'for real' one day at a future gathering.

We are sad to record the deaths of two of our members. Lt. Col. Warwick Calmady-Hamlyn, son of SBG's daughter Grace, died early in the year. It was through him that the Society had the family's approval for its launch, and he made a generous financial 'starter'. Frank Sweeting, of Bramley, was a book collector of renown, whose library included a nearly complete collection of SBG's works. He died in July.

David Shacklock

## Letters To Susan, 1914-16

Written by Sabine to Grace's sister from Lew Trenchard.

(1) 23 Dec. 1914

My Dear Susan,

Grace has asked me to write. She is so crippled with rheumatism that she can not use her hands, and can hardly take a step unassisted. I have to have a trained nurse always with her, and have had since last Easter. No medicine or doctor [??] seems to do her any good. She sends her warm best wishes to all; & kindly sends postal order to each of those below to am.' of 15/- each. You retain [?] 15/-, John, Polly, Milly, Annie & Emma.

I remain wishing you a happy Christmas

(2) 13 Jan. 1915

Grace has asked me to write for her and express to you her as well as my sympathy in the loss you have entertained. She is so completely crippled in her hands that she can not write. Her knees & ankles also are swollen and inflamed so that she can not take a step without help. I greatly fear that she has become a cripple from rheumatism for the rest of her life.

I remain yours truly

(3) 21 Dec. 1915

I enclose Grace's Xmas presents 15/- each to you, John, Polly, Annie, Milly & 10/- to Emma Oakland. I am sorry to say Grace is perfectly helpless. She can not use her hands & has to be fed like a baby, & lies night & day on her back & can not move. Her sight & hearing are also failing her somewhat. Happily she has got a good nurse.

Wishing you all the best things (?) for Xmas & New Year, I remain yours truly

(4) Ap1.19, 1916

I could not get your addresses from dear Grace and it was not till after her death that any were obtainable. She had given the key of her desk to her daughter in law & asked her to destroy her letters, & this dr. in law had gone for three weeks to town. But the end came much more rapidly than we expected, indeed I had thought she might be many more months with us, but heart failure & bronchitis came on. She had a peaceful end at the last and died as I, with a broken voice was reciting over her the comminiatory [?] prayer. She was looking forward to making her Easter communion, but it was not to be. After 48 years of travelling together in life's journey in great union of heart & soul, I feel utterly as if I had no more to care for in this world.

I remain yours truly, S. Baring-Gould

## Onward Eager Buyers

The author of one of the world's best-known hymns, Onward Christian Soldiers, designed and built his own rectory in 1906 at Lewtrenchard.

The Grade 2 listed property, The Old Rectory, is now being offered for sale at £315,000 by the Tavistock office of Millerson.

Designed in what is known as the Arts and Crafts style, the house which is set in about two acres, offers a main hall with feature fireplace, two reception rooms, a superbly appointed kitchen with large breakfast area, a conservatory, cloakroom and utility room. There are eight bedrooms, including a master suite and a guest suite.

The house is centrally heated and has been fully re-wired. Close to the main house is the coach-house, formerly the stables, which is now used for workshops and garaging.

Gardens encircle the property. There are formal lawned areas with landscaped terracing, informal areas and an orchard. There are about 100 mature trees in the grounds.

**Historical note:** Sabine Baring-Gould was the "Squarson" (Squire and Parson) of Lewtrenchard, to the west of Dartmoor, from the age of 47 until his death 43 years later. Previously, in Yorkshire, he had married Grace Taylor, a simple mill girl who was considered to be the inspiration for George Bernard Shaw's Eliza Doolittle. She bore Baring-Gould fifteen children of whom fourteen survived.

Unable to provide for his large family on his rector's stipend and income from the estate, he turned his hand to writing copiously.

He was a good writer who could turn his hand to fiction, travel works, sermons, religious tract and, of course, hymn writing.

As his finances improved he became interested in architecture and designed The Old Rectory as well as building barns on the estate in a grand style.

For further information please contact Martin Gibbs on 0822-617243.

With acknowledgment to the Okehampton Times dated 18th August 1994 for the above article.

## **Two Accounts of the Horbury Weekend, 18-19th June, 1994**

Sentimental journeys are often disappointing. Things are never what once they were, or what one imagines them to be. The first visit of the SBGAS to Horbury Bridge was an exception. The scene is vastly changed, of course, from what it was during Sabine's ministry, but many of the old landmarks he mentions in his Early Reminiscences are still there. It needs little imagination to go back in time to visualize the village as once it was.

Horbury Bridge was the scene of one of Sabine's greatest pastoral achievements. He found it a tough, lawless, hard-drinking, gambling parish, but the Yorkshire colliers, bargees and workers in the woollen mills were soon attracted by the force of his personality and his obvious concern for their welfare. He helped to bridge the gulf between the unchurched masses and institutional religion.

On the Saturday morning we spent an enjoyable time visiting the Horbury Street Fayre and admiring the various stalls and sideshows. We were then invited to the house of Keith and Sylvia Lister for a delightful lunch.

The weekend proper began with a business meeting in Horbury Bridge parish hall under the presidency of Dr. Merriol Almond, the great grand-daughter of Sabine Baring-Gould, who had come over from America for the occasion. This was the hall which Sabine had built in 1865, in which to hold his services and meetings, when the original cottage was no longer adequate for his growing congregation. The election of officers proceeded apace, and the meeting expressed its debt to Mr. Patrick Hutton who had been the Society's secretary since its inception.

Mr. Keith Lister then spoke about the Taylor family and their descendants, many of whom were present, who had provided Sabine with his bride.

We were then conducted round St. John's church, which was built largely as a result of Sabine's successful ministry in the parish. Here we saw the rood screen, erected in memory of his services to Horbury Brig, and the processional cross carried in front of the school children as they marched up Quarry Hill, singing for the first time Sabine's most famous hymn, "Onward Christian Soldiers".

On returning to the parish hall, we were shown a video recording taken three years previously, of the school children re-enacting the original procession at Quarry Hill. The commentator was the well-known Christian personality, Roy Castle.

In the afternoon, the more energetic members of the party followed the mile-long procession route to the parish church of Horbury, the scene of John Sharp's distinguished ministry. En route they saw the quarry from which the stone was cut to build the parish hall, and Poppleton's mill, where both Grace and her father worked.

On arriving at St. Peter's beautiful and spacious church, it gave us both joy and sadness to stand on the very spot where Sabine and Grace had pledged their troth to each other, on 28th May, 1868 - joy because theirs was one of the great love-stories of their age, sadness because Grace died at the early age of 66, after suffering for many years with rheumatoid arthritis.

On Sunday morning, 19th June, we attended a sung Eucharist at St. John's church, where we sang "Onward Christian Soldiers". The preacher was the Rev. Osmond Aisbitt, the vicar of the parish church.

There followed a walking tour of Horbury Bridge to see the cottage, now the local post office, where Sabine held his first meetings, the River Calder and the Calder Navigation Canal, and the house once occupied by Richard Poppleton, the owner of Poppleton's Mill. After lunch at one of the local inns, we went our separate ways.

This annual gathering gave us the opportunity of meeting together, making new friends and greeting old ones, united in our attempt to preserve the memory of one of the greatest churchmen of his day, and perhaps the most versatile and voluminous writer of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. We were especially delighted to meet the charming Mrs. Image Briggs, Sabine's grand-daughter and the Rev. David Shacklock, the founder of the SBGAS and Editor of the Newsletter. We all owed a great debt of gratitude to Mr. Keith Lister for his superb arrangements for the weekend.

Harold Kirk-Smith

This year we had a most interesting trip to Horbury, Yorkshire. Patrick Hutton very kindly drove Merriol Almond and myself up for the weekend - for us it was a most relaxed journey - a long drag for Patrick over motorways with much traffic. Merriol and I were very kindly given accommodation and welcomed with great warmth by Keith and Sylvia Lister. We met their daughter Janine who very expertly taxied us around our extensive and varied programme of events.

Keith Lister is a retired policeman with a keen interest in the history of the area which included the romantic story of Grace Taylor and the man she chose to marry, the local preacher/minister of Horbury Bridge (the parish of St. John), the then thirty year old Sabine, with his good looks and his dynamic preaching. All of this interesting history inspired Keith to become a very active member of the SBGAS and offer his services to lay on the trip. He co-opted his wife, Sylvia, and she nobly played a valuable part in looking after our wellbeing and otherwise supporting Keith in this great consuming interest of his since his retirement.

He organised an interesting tour laid on with great flair for detail, giving us the most minute details of the area, including the factory life, and Poppletons, the factory where Grace was working at the time. He even collected together a number of the Taylor branch of the family and members of Poppletons to meet us as the contingent from down West - he is in the process of writing a book on the life of Grace at Horbury and Horbury Bridge.

Merriol and I felt that this introduction to the members of the Taylor family and for us to "feel" the area where she had been born, meant a very great deal to both of us. This was the whole crux of the weekend, to meet Grace's family line. We both felt that now we could claim to be part-Yorkshire in our heritage! We had been accepted with great warmth and kindness as it all became very alive to us when we met in the old school. We listened to Keith's clear and lucid descriptions of the life at Horbury at that time. We were then shown the film of the hymn, "Onward Christian Soldiers". It was tremendous to see the very streets

which we had by then begun to recognise, with the children all suitably dressed up in the clothes of the period marching up the hill from St. John's church to St. Peter's at the top of the hill in the town of Horbury.

Later on that day Keith marched us up the hill to have tea at St. Peter's church. We were given the stops that the children were given where they used to have lemonade or something similar to keep their spirits from flagging; a long steady climb for those with short legs, although they were marching to that rousing hymn so well-known to all of us. The headmasters present and past were there also to greet us.

Alice Valentine Hinchliffe (nee Taylor) who was brought up by Grace's sister Emma, brought a beautiful book of old photos. It was fascinating to be able to see the faces of Grace's father and her sisters and brothers, and some of her step-family: (Her mother died when she was young and her father married again). We met some of this second family ... it was thrilling to be so welcomed. We also met some of the family linked into the history of Poppletons - the factory where she worked.

Merriol and I feel that it is time the story of Grace is told in all the majesty of the remembering of the saga of her life. Like so many Victorian ladies of her period she had always played the supporting role to her brilliant husband. We have to remember the incredible support and loyalty she gave to this very difficult man, a veritable "will-o'-the-wisp", never there at times of very real domestic crises, who made huge demands upon her, particularly when it is remembered that the forms of life he expected of her were all roles she had had to learn, even to the extent of having to give up her lovely Yorkshire dialect.

He greatly appreciated her, but I wonder if he really thought of the loneliness and the huge trials of the many pregnancies she had often to endure without his support.

She was a very great lady; hers was a tremendous role as great as his had been. She represented the amazing strength and tenacious ability to persevere when life became incredibly tough in those hardened Victorian days ... 15 pregnancies with so much pain and so much heartache ... and never the opportunity to nurse any of her babies herself, or to really get to know any of them. The decree of the time for the lady of the manor was to hand her babies over to nursemaids to bring up. She told my mother that she wished she had had the chance that her daughters had of nursing their own children ... to be allowed to hold them and love them.

My heart ached for that tiny little soul who was torn away from her beloved Yorkshire; she was often homesick for the Yorkshire moors (according to my mother Cicely who looked after her at the end of her life in Devon). I am sure she longed to hear the beautiful lilt of the Yorkshire dialect of her home town. This dialect she was forced to change into the social form needed for that time - the pure snobbishness of it!

She was a very great lady. As a representative of over 150 of her descendants, we remember you with warmth and love and gratitude for your great Yorkshire strength and warmth of your personality.

Neither Merriol nor I will every forget that momentous experience, to have been able to pay our tribute to Grace and her home town, and to meet to many kindly Yorkshire people. Finally, we stood at the altar rails of St. Peter's church at Horbury, the spot where they were married.

Image Briggs

## **Literary Veteran**

### **Rev. S. Baring-Gould at Four Score & Ten `Western Morning News' Interview**

Fifty years ago an Essex rector, then approaching his 40th year, inherited, on the death of his father, the family estate of Lew Trenchard, Devon. With a ready pen, and great industry in the collection of facts, he had published books on history, folk-lore and mythology. Succeeding to an encumbered estate, and determined to restore its economic stability, he began to write in earnest. To-day the Rev. S. Baring-Gould sits in his splendid library, amongst the works of his study and the creations of his genius, long recognized as one of England's most informative writers, author of some of our most arresting romances of rural life, and an authority unquestioned on things that matter in the natural history of social England. With the beginning of the New Year he will be in his 90th year of age. He is rector of his parish, patriarch of his household, and, apologizing for a little deafness, engages the welcome guest with fine old-world courtesy in one of the romantic homes of older England, where men may dream and fear not the waking.

#### The Ghost of Lew Trenchard

Oak-carved, wainscoted, secret-chambered, and with ancestral pictures round the walls, Lew Trenchard turns the imagination to the tales of `merrie England'. Everything about it tells of the days when laws and customs, learning and culture, radiated from our old nobility. It has its history, its legends and its ghost.

The white lady is indeed a well-authenticated feature of Lew Trenchard. In life she was a noble lady, Mr. Baring-Gould's great-great-grandmother, who lived her little life unnoticed and undisturbed. It is not known why she haunts the scene of her domestic peace, but she has been seen, described and identified. She has, in her time, frightened not a few people, and today there are not many who will wander through the avenue of oaks where she is said to take the bracing and enchanted air.

"I have heard many tales of her," said Mr. Baring-Gould, in conducting a representative of "The Western Morning News and Mercury" over the scene. "I have collected them and included them in my reminiscences. But I do not believe in ghosts myself. I generally find when they come to be examined that there is a weak spot in the story. Still, there it is and there are people living to-day who, without knowing anything about her, have described her and her old friend the rector, Parson Ellacombe, too, as they have been sitting in the drawing-room."

#### Religious History of England

All of which our representative was told in the teeth of a bitter north-easterly wind, and as, along with his host, he had been bareheaded and without a coat during the greater part of

an hour's tour of the grounds, he was not sorry to return to the dining-room and the blazing fire of wood. The talk turned pleasantly to literature.

"These are my works," said the veteran, turning to an ample bookshelf. "Some of them I am pleased with, and the others are very poor. I wrote my last ten years ago, and I am now past story writing. But I am still engaged on a history of English religion since the Reformation. It will never be published - it is altogether too big a work. But it will be presented, typed, to the Cathedral Library of Exeter."

### The Lives of the Saints

Of course, I have published books of historical import. I think my 'Lives of the Saints' was a useful book in giving a healthy impression of many characters of legend and superstition. It took me eight years to write and I got very little out of it, but I think it was worth my while. The books are on the 'index' of the Roman Catholic Church, as you might well expect, but I think that was a considerable compliment to my researches. I do not think the saints are any the worse for my little estimates of their lives. I have shown them as human entities and not as cooked up for edification.

### Songs of the West

"But I think I have done my best work through my collection of Devon and Cornwall folk songs, especially the melodies. I spent 15 years in the task, and I have travelled all over the county to get the words and music correct. Some of the songs are very beautiful and they are all deeply interesting. I have gone many miles to listen to the old men who knew the old songs. It was by a lucky accident that I heard of an aged man who knew the 'Oxen ploughing' and I took it from him. The May song I gathered at Padstow, and the Furry song at Helston. I was only just in time.

"These songs are never sung now. They are all gone and I do not believe anybody could find them. They are of immense importance. They are our link with remote days, when songs were the only means of impressing the mind, and when history and tradition were all related in ballads. But I hold that the melodies are superior to the words, which latter have often been corrupted.

### The Author's Workshop

And now come to my workshop. Into the bulging library Mr. Baring-Gould took our representative, with the pride of the artificer who knows that his work will bear examination. He pointed to a plain

standing desk. "That is where I have done all my work. I have always written standing, because I prefer it, and it is easier for me to consult my authorities. I am afraid I can not do it now."

"About your stories?" asked our representative.

"I wrote my stories because I felt it was necessary for me to earn the money. Yes, I have written many stories. The last was ten years ago, and was the result of a visit to Wales. It is called 'In Dewisland', and I thought it very poor."

## How Stories Grow

"Cornwall is very proud of 'The Roar of the Sea'?"

"I believe that was a good story, and had some foundation. I do not know whether I did more or less than justice to cruel Coppinger, but I did my best for him. A better story, I think, is 'Mehalah', which is a tale of the Essex marshes. But personally I like 'The Gaverocks.' It has been very often attacked, but I think it is one of my best. My object was to draw three types of women. I took the highest possible type, the frivolous and as we say, the ordinary woman; and I took the self-sacrificing woman who gives herself for others."

"Do you find your characters, or do you create them?"

"They create themselves. I start with a general plan, and write on, and as I write I find the characters forming. Many times I have found myself floored, and have given up to task for the day, but I just sit in the armchair and the ideas come. It is really as if the figures in the story took possession of one. Yes, I have tried to embody some folk traditions in my stories, and they have seemed to live again in my imagination."

## Life and Morality

Asked as to his work in the parish Mr. Baring-Gould said, "I have tried to do my duty as a clergyman. I have always tried to be fair. From the first on coming here I made it my business to be as much a minister to the Nonconformist as to the Churchman, and I think I have been of service to them all. I still conduct services and preach every Sunday. And I make it my business to be of help wherever there is suffering or trouble.

"I take as broad-minded a view as I can of life and of my fellow men. I am not a prohibitionist in any capacity. You can not teach men self-respect by force. But every day shows that we are learning the meaning and the beauty of the honest, sober, and moral life."

Our representative followed his host through a tour of the church and a ramble over the beautiful grounds, and last, a rummage among the bookshelves. He shared his host's tobacco and borrowed his books. And returning behind an old-fashioned cob, through the autumn glowing lanes to the station, took train for Plymouth, grateful for a day spent in the wonderland of a great man's recollections.

With acknowledgment to *The Western Morning News and Mercury* dated 25th November 1922, for the above article.

## Further References to SBG in Print

Arthur C. Salmon - The Heart of the West - Robert Scott n.d. - SBG's versifying (p.186); In the Roar of the Sea: 'a fresh & bracing romance' (p.221); records of the saints (p.204).

A.H. Fox Strangeways - Cecil Sharp - OUP 1933 - letter of 1904 (p.49); collaboration on Songs of the West and English Folk Song for Schools; life at Lew (p.53-55).

Rob Talbot & Robin Whiteman - The West Country - W&N Country series 28 1993 - refs. p.138 + bibl.p.158.

Sir Herbert Russell - The Delectable West part I: Devon - Bell 1934 (reissue) (first pub.1932) - surf dogs (p.39); buildings (p.133).

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Note on copy of GERMANY found bound in with AUSTRIAHUNGARY by David Kay - SLM n.d. - main title (title page): Other Peoples; (cover & spine) Peoples Abroad SBG described on title page as author of Maholat (!)

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William Addison - Essex Worthies - Phillimore 1973 - para. p.13.

## Review

Mehala Lady of Sealandings - 'the final part of the Sealandings trilogy' - published by Collins Century 1993 and by Arrow in paperback 1994 (501 pp at £5.99).

Jonathan Grant has kept up the standard of the first two Mehalah follow-ups (dropping the final 'h') in a social drama of love and dedication versus intrigue and prejudice, and business versus justice. The whole is packaged once again with some vivid descriptions, eg. of a hanging, a workhouse scene, several belt-splitting meals, and a crude eye operation. The plot develops unconventionally, and yet unlike many modern novels, the ending is definite, but not quite in the 'happy ever after' category. The reader is then left to rework the topographical clues at the third attempt. I offer the equation Sealandings = Dunwich.

(See previous Newsletters 8 pp.2-4; 9 p.6; 11 p.7,15; 12 p.15; 15 p.16). DPRS

## There's No Song Like An Old Song

Folk songs heard by Victorian hymn-writer Sabine Baring-Gould during a visit to South Zeal 100 years ago will be performed in the village again this weekend.

The songs were recently rediscovered at Killerton House library among the papers of the Rev. Baring-Gould, famous for having written 'Onward Christian Soldiers.'

Martin Graebe, a former Okehampton resident now living in Gloucestershire, has researched the songs and put together a programme to be performed at South Zeal Victory Hall by the Okehampton-based Wren Trust this Saturday, August 6th, at 6 pm.

This is how Martin paints the scene almost 100 years ago to the day. 'On the evening of August 9, 1894, the village of South Zeal would have seemed deserted until you came to the Oxenham Arms, the old greystone inn standing at the centre of the village.

'Here the people were gathered in a noisy mass inside and outside, having come to see an unusual entertainment.

'Outside were the boys, clambering over each other to press their noses against the window. If you had pushed your way inside, you would have found the women and girls lining the corridors and, in the bar, the men of the village.

'The centre of attention was five old men who had come to sing the songs that they had learned when they were young.

'Sitting in front of them, and the cause of the commotion, were two gentlemen of the Church. The elder was the Rev. Sabine Baring-Gould of Lewtrenchard and his friend was Dr. Frederick Bussell, a musician from Oxford.

'Baring-Gould, with Bussell's assistance, had recently published "Songs of the West", the first collection of folk songs made in Devon and Cornwall.

'His visit to South Zeal was to meet with the old men - Charles Arscott, "Lucky" Fewins, James Radmore, Samuel Westaway - and to take down their songs for future publication.'

Though he wrote about the visit, Baring-Gould never actually published the songs. Tickets at £2 are available from Dartmoor Folk Festival outlets and on the door.

With acknowledgment to the *Okehampton Times* dated 4th August 1994 for the above article.

## SBGAS Newsletter, No 17.

### The Year of '95.

We are most indebted to Cedric Baring-Gould for providing the main item in this newsletter by Irene Widdicombe under the title 'Uncle Sabine', complementing the pieces she wrote which appeared in nos.6 & 7 before she died. This really settles the question of the third volume of Sabine's Reminiscences - although the term 'suppressed' still leaves open the possibility of discovery!

For the moment however we are entering the realm of these centenary reviews where there is no formal autobiographical material to draw upon.

It was an active and varied year in the literary field. There was one novel: Noemi, a Story of Rock-dwellers, illustrated by R. Caton Woodville, who made his name as a war artist in the Illustrated London News. It is a story of the rivalries between the English and French factions, and between the peasants and the 'Free Companies', in the Dordogne area at the end of the Hundred Years' War. It is quite a racy read, of derring-do by the eponymous heroine, and vivid descriptions of burning out rock castle (ch.X), an execution (ch.XI), and an oubliette (ch.XVI). Here is another gift for television along the lines of the recent 'Robin Hood'.

The year also saw the publication of four 'collections': Old English Fairy Tales, A Book of Nursery Songs & Rhymes, A Garland of Country Song, and English Minstrelsie -published by T.C.& E.C. Jack in eight volumes, concluding in 1897. This work was subtitled 'A National Monument of English Song', "collated and edited, with notes and historical introductions" by SBG with "the airs, in both notations, arranged by H. Fleetwood Sheppard, F.W. Bussell & W.H.Hopkinson" and "dedicated by gracious permission to Her Majesty the Queen". Odd numbered volumes have SBG's essays, with numerous illustrations including some of his own sketches, while each volume has between 6 and 17 pages of notes on the songs, and from 112 to 128 pages of music; each volume has two sepia portraits of contemporary singers, and volume 1 has a striking portrait of SBG as a frontispiece. The final volume has a chronology of the airs as well as a general index of the songs and illustrations. Altogether a fine piece of work. In addition he managed to find the time to produce one pamphlet, one report, and ten articles on cultural, architectural, literary, archaeological and ecclesiastical matters!

David Shacklock

## **Cicely Francis (Image) Briggs**

Family, friends and neighbours gathered on Tuesday, 20<sup>th</sup> December - eight days after her tragic death - for a threefold celebration of Image's life, the whole event presided over and woven together by the Rector of Lewtrenchard, Geoffrey Ball.

First there was the Memorial Service in the morning at Lewtrenchard Church. We sang her Grandfather's hymn 'Now the Day is Over' and gave thanks for Image's caring and committed personality, and her gift of healing developed in later life. We were also remembering her dearly loved cousin Edward (Teddy) Baring-Gould who had died two weeks before her, and doing so in company, time-wise, with their relatives in the USA.

In the early afternoon the Committal took place at Efford Crematorium in Plymouth. The simple ceremony was enhanced by further readings and a message of hope, interspersed with powerful baritone solos by John Hobbs. The opening and closing moments were graced by appropriate renderings on the descant recorder.

Finally there was a 'Reception' at Grimstone Manor, Horrabridge. Guests, unshod, were ushered into a simple room and seated concentrically round a large green candle which was duly lit at 4.00 p.m. After a time of silence there followed an hour of contributions from about ten individuals, offering personal reflections on Image's 'many-faceted' life, in song, reading, history, testimony and prayer.

In reporting an event which was a little strange to this observer, I would not want to say more by way of description than to use the word 'esoteric' (repeated by one contributor), but to underline the affirmation, made by another concerning the theme of light, that Jesus Christ is the Light of the World. At the end of the day we all knew more about her; it would be good to think that we also know more about Him!

As a footnote it must be added that Image was an enthusiastic encourager and consistent contributor to the activities of the Society.

David Shacklock

## **Archive `Nest' Launched At Wren**

Devon's leading Folk Arts project is joining with a leading westcountry folklore archivist to launch a local initiative with national significance.

Okehampton based Wren Trust are engaging the services of an experienced folklore librarian to organise, promote and make accessible their `nest' of reference material. This will involve indexing thousands upon thousands of song titles held in books and manuscripts and cataloguing hundreds of hours of tape recordings of local traditional singers.

Wren are fortunate to engage Jacqueline Patten, an archivist, local historian and performer currently engaged in ground breaking research on the manuscripts of Cecil Sharp and Baring Gould.

From their base in Morchard Bishop, Jacqueline and husband Bob have established an enviable reputation as the Westcountry's leading folk collectors. They are also recognised for their exceptional abilities as documentors, responding to countless requests for research material each year and publishing such milestones as A Somerset Scrapbook with its own sound cassette.

If this scheme goes well, there are plans to link the Patten archive more closely with Wren and to act as a reference point for other collections throughout the south west.

"We see the resulting archive as a living thing", said Jacqueline, "useful to musicians, singers, community projects, local historians, schools, students, theatre companies and the media."

"We are happy to engage Jacqueline, since an archive is more useful the more knowledgeable, approachable and energetic the archivist" said Marilyn Tucker, Wren Projects Co-ordinator, "we see this as a resource with not only regional, but national and international potential."

Launch date has now been set for Tuesday November 29, when the process of building a well-ordered nest will begin.

Jacqueline may be contacted direct, and other times a message can be left at Wren Trust Office.

*Above article dated 24th November 1994 - source not named - supplied by our President.*

## More Published References

An unlikely one to start with! John Osborne's autobiography (1929-1956) *A Better Class of Person* (Faber 1981) - p.84f SBG mentioned as hero to 'Hugh', one of Osborne's teenage friends, an ardent Christian Socialist, later lecturer in politics at Keele. (Can anyone identify 'Hugh' - don't say Gaitskell please!)

*Curiosities of Devon* - Michael Williams - Bossiney Books 1983 (pbk) - quotes Devon Characters on the Misses Durnford (p.9,12) and on an odd will (p.93)

*Dartmoor Seasons* - Devon Books 1987 - quotes *A Book of Devon* (p.50) and SBG on Houndtor (p.105).

*England 1870-1914* - Sir Robert Ensor - OUP 1990 (1st Feb.1936) - 3 sentences on folk songs (p.544).

*The Anglican Parochial Clergy* - Michael Hinton - SCM 1994 - many interesting refs. throughout.

*Dartmoor Reflections* - David Mudd - Bossiney Books 1993- 'an insatiable thirst for anything novel or off-beat' (p. 1 1-13); on Widecombe Fair (p.50); and full page photo.

*Famous Hymns & their Authors* - F.A. Jones - H&S 1903 (2nd) - p.144-148; p.287-9.

*Hymns & Hymn Makers* - A.& C.Black/Guild Lib. 1898 - esp. on 'tunes. p. 150f.

*Gothic Devon* - Belinda Whitworth - Shire 1993 - refs. p.27f, 34f, 48, 55.

*The History of Wicken* - M.Knowles - Elliot Stock 1902 - paras on Cheap Jack Zita and Prickwillow (thanks to Raymond Scott for this item).

*The Homeland of English Authors* - Ernest H. Rann - Methuen 1927 - re. Vicar of Morwenstow (p.137f, 140)

*Mysteries* - Colin Wilson -H&S 1978 - re. divining and dowsing from *Curious Myths* (p.447.) *Lydford Lilies* - Martyn Bateman - on folk songs (p.30); on condition of Lydford Church (p.35.)

*Nathaniel Woodard* - Sir John Otter - BH 1925 - 2 paras. on SBG at Hurstpierpoint (p.103f).

*The Quiver* 1901 - 'A Peep into the Future': feature article on SBG's forthcoming *Nebo the Nailer*, with line drawing of Lew House & photo of SBG (p.1227f).

*Islands of Essex* - Ian Yearsley - Ian Henry Publ. 1994 - 5 refs. including "autobiographical work *Ten Years on the Mud*" - can anyone give further information on this?

*The Romance of the Men of Devon* - Francis Gribble -Mills & Boon 1912 - SBG on Bampfyde Moore Carew p.153f, 156; on Tavistock p.164, 7f.

*Smuggling in East Anglia 1700-1840* - Stan Jarvis - Countryside Books 1987 (rpt 1992) - p.62f: 3 paras, 2 quoting SBG (source not identified)

## ***Novels And Novel Writers by Joseph Hocking***

Author of "The Story of Andrew Fairfax", "Ishmael Pengelly, an Outcast", "The Monk of Mar Saba", etc.

### IV.- S. BARING GOULD

Some two years ago a review appeared in one of our leading daily papers on a historical work by the Rev. S. Baring Gould, in which it was stated that the author in question had produced something like seventy works, and that not one of them was without the stamp of genius. This was surely high praise, and while many will doubtless say that it was rather too strongly worded, none, I think, can deny that the century has produced but few more versatile, more prolific, and more fascinating writers than the squire vicar of Devonshire. In almost every department of literature his name has appeared, and never without success. We see him as a writer of Church history and as a fairy storyteller, as a hymn writer and as a romancer, as an antiquarian and as a writer of songs, as one who vividly describes unfrequented parts of the earth and as one who inspires our imagination and causes our pulses to beat faster as we read the weird pages of *Mehalah*. Everywhere he goes to conquer. That his work is unequal all will admit, but no one will deny that his is the hand of a master.

Of Mr. Baring Gould as a man, however, I know but little. It has never been my fortune to meet him. This has been my loss, for those who are acquainted with him speak of him as a delightful companion, and as uniformly kind and courteous. Besides, to talk to such a man must be an education, for, being many-sided in his tastes and sympathies, he possesses a personality which is unique. It would be easy to write of Mr. Baring Gould as a hymn writer, for what modern hymn is more popular, more inspiring, than "Onward Christian Soldiers"? or what children's hymn is more delightful than "Now the day is over"? If he had given nothing else to the world he would have left a legacy which must keep his name fragrant through future generations.

But it is my work to write of Mr. Baring-Gould as Novelist, for after all it is by his novels that he is best known to the world. I have not a list of his works of fiction before me, but I think he must have issued about a dozen, most of which I have had the pleasure of reading. These works are very unequal in merit, one or two being works of genius, several very clever, while three or four are only moderate. His strength as a writer of fiction, as far as I am a judge, lies in his power to conceive strange, unconventional characters, and to surround these characters by fitting scenes and circumstances. Moreover, although his characters are strange, he makes his readers feel their reality. As an example of this, take one of the most curious stories ever written, which, while by no means one of his greatest efforts, will live in my memory, I think, as long as I live. I refer to *Margery of Quether*.

Now, an ordinary writer with this material to work upon, would have produced a story that the world would have laughed at, if they had taken the trouble to read it at all. But Mr. Baring Gould takes us back to a far-off time, and to a far-off place, in spite of constant reference to modern names and customs, and he impresses the reader with the reality of all he writes. When he writes of ordinary characters and ordinary circumstances, his work lacks interest. He has not the power of Bret Harte, who portrays the commonest and poorest

types of character, and shows how they possess elements of strength and beauty, until you love them. But, to atone for this, he has the power of discovering the strange, the uncanny, the wonderful, in life, and describing it with a great vividness. Hence, if you wish to see Mr. Baring Gould at his best, you must get those works in which his characters are altogether unlike the common run of people. These he always treats with great realism, making them remain as distinct personalities in the minds of his readers. Moreover, his genius is revealed in this: he never strains after effect; you never feel that he is labouring to produce a strange work. Rather, all he does is the natural outcome of a grim and weird imagination, which cannot help fastening upon that which is eerie, or, as the Cornish folks would say, "wisht."

The two novels by which Mr. Baring Gould will be known in the next century, and those by which I think he would like to be known, are *Mehalah* and *John Herring*. Both of these are so widely read, that it would be waste of time for me to subject either to anything like a detailed study. *Mehalah* is an Essex story, and is probably among the finest things of the kind ever written.

His other great book is *John Herring*. It is a story of Devonshire and the north of Cornwall. Here, as far as scenery and local colouring are concerned, the author is more at home than in Essex. One feels that he loves Dartmoor and its surroundings; that the customs, the dialect, and the people are dear to him. The book should, I think, have been called *Joyce*, for *Joyce* is the name of the heroine, and is certainly the most fascinating, the greatest, and the most pathetic character in the book. She is a wild, savage moorland lass. Reared among the caves and rocks of Dartmoor, without education, without children to play with, without companionship save that of a mad, savage old man, she immediately fires the imagination of the reader, and at the same time forms a fine central character, around which the author groups his minor characters and his incidents. Her devotion to *John Herring* is beautiful in the extreme, and, while the author never causes the tear to start to the eye, her figure is always pathetic.

In these two works Mr. Baring Gould has sounded his highest note. Near to them comes *Richard Cable*, and perhaps *The Red Spider*; but these are not works of genius. *Eve* is also a fine story, full of that kind of power for which its author is remarkable; but it falls short of the two which I regard as his greatest works. *Court Royal* is interesting, but the people lack the breath of life; indeed, many of them are more or less paper.

If I may so put it, one of the great things lacking in Mr. Baring Gould's work is what I call, for want of a better word, tenderness. I have never felt that he is truly fond of his characters. Wilkie Collins used to say that he cried because of the sorrows, and laughed because of the joys of those about whom he wrote. You can never fancy the author of *Mehalah* doing this. Indeed, you can fancy him taking a kind of artistic pleasure in the almost tragic ending of his greatest book. In a word, one does not feel that he loves the children of his fancy. He admires them, it may be, and takes a great deal of interest in their doings, but I cannot fancy him becoming distressed for them. Then again he is at times cynical. Take this saying for example, which, I think, appears in *John Herring*: "People say marriages are made in heaven. It is false. They are made in paradise - a fool's paradise." And this spirit is often traceable in his works, keeping them, I think, from rising to the heights to which they would otherwise have risen. Moreover, one has a feeling that he does not truly love his craft. Novel writing with him is a diversion, and he does not think, so he told me, that novels are destined to have any marked effect on the life of the nation. As far as I can judge, he has no feeling that

he has a "call from God," to write novels as much as he has to preach or teach in Lew Trenchard church. This fact, in my judgment, keeps him from being one of our greatest novelists. Another fact may be worth mentioning: he never reads novels. He has no patience to follow the thoughts of his brother writers. Surely this is a serious matter. Our greatest novelists are, as far as I know, readers of the best work of their fellow craftsmen. Just as a preacher is interested in the best books bearing on his work; as a doctor is careful to obtain the medical journals, or as a lawyer reads his Blackstone, so a novelist should be anxious to learn what his brother writers have to say. And it is just this lack of sympathy with his craft which keeps Mr. Baring Gould, especially in his later books, from giving the best he is able to give.

In spite of all this, however, no one can deny his power, and the great wonder is, that, engaged as he is in so many and such various pursuits, he is able to produce each year a novel of such excellence. For although such books as *Cheap Jack Zita* are not worthy to be placed by the side of *Mehalah*, they are still miles ahead of the thousand and one three-deckers with which Mudie's and Smith's shelves are cumbered. Moreover the criticisms I have dared to make, in writing about such a man, are written with hesitation and a feeling almost amounting to pain; for I shall never forget the debt of gratitude I owe him, nor the genuine pleasure I have realised when I have read some of his books, which are in my thinking, unequalled by the works, except a very few, of our contemporary writers.

## **Uncle Sabine & Aunt Grace**

by the late Irene Widdicombe

As we grow older, events and people in our memories of earlier years seem to take on a lustre which is missing in our present close-up view. Maybe the fact that life today is too hurried to allow of people growing to their full capabilities and developing along their own true lines. It seems as one looks back to the turn of the century that there were many more unharrassed characters, even what might be called eccentrics. Delightful people who added a great richness to life. Such a person was my uncle, Sabine Baring-Gould.

It was said of this antiquarian, archaeologist and hymnologist and the last of the Devonshire `Squarsons', that he had a `magpie mind', perpetually searching for and picking up jewels of information and knowledge.

There was something Celtic and even elfish about him, and he had an ever-ready wit. My memory of him sees him perpetually darting ahead in urgency, his keen intelligence and understanding working all the time very impatient of hindrances, collecting and sorting and assessing in his mind all that came within his grasp. This impatience made him trust too much to a rather faulty memory, and even his documentary writings on early church history and the Lives of the Saints are well interlaced with fiction culled from his agile imagination.

Sabine was a prolific writer. His religious themes as well as his entry into Holy Orders, were sparked off by his involvement with the Oxford Movement, while he was at Cambridge. The fact that he reached Cambridge, when one considers the present day qualifications necessary for entry, seems quite a miracle, for up to that time this most unusual lad had received very little organised education.

Sabine's irascible father, and my grandfather, having been invalided out of a cavalry regiment, following an accident to his foot, found the life of a country squire and the company of the bucolic gentry very far from his taste. So, following the fashion of those days, he frequently forced his family into becoming what were known as the "gentile gipsies". Lumbering all over Europe in clumsy carriages, families would spend months complete with coachman, footman, nannies and governesses to take care of the children - if there happened to be a baby in the party it was strapped to the roof of the carriage in its cot. On these frequent sorties young Sabine had an attendant tutor, whenever one could be found to endure the hardships of such a nomadic life.

It was a very hard life and Sabine's mother, who was Edward's first wife, hated it. She was constantly ill and it does not require much imagination to picture the misery of being jolted along rough roads in a probably ill-sprung carriage, when one is feeling sick and exhausted, with nothing to hope for at the end of the day than the problematic comfort of a wayside inn. On the very last of these terrible journeys taken by the family they were accompanied by a friend called Mrs. Snow of Exeter, with her daughter, Lavinia. This Lavinia, later, after the death of the first Mrs. Edward, became his second wife. She was my grandmother, and from her I have heard such descriptions of the rigours of that pilgrimage that I am in no doubt that it would be very difficult in these days for a man to find so docile a wife as the first Mrs. Edward.

It was during one of these last journeys that the tutor decamped. Sabine, a handsome and very wide-awake lad of 15 now left to his own devices, was scratching up the earth in a field near Pau where they were then staying, when he found he had come upon a beautiful Roman mosaic floor. From this incident sprang his lifelong interest in archaeology.

Sabine's first curacy was in the West Riding of Yorkshire. There he saw and fell in love with a beautiful mill girl. It seemed hard to believe when one knew her later as the gracious lady of the manor, with her quiet dignity and pawky humour, or listened to her well modulated, mellow voice, that when Sabine first saw her, a girl of sixteen, she was clattering along to work at the mill, early one morning, clogs, an apron over cotton frock and a shawl about her shoulders. He, fourteen years her senior, sent her to a parson's family for a couple of years where she received some education and was initiated into the ways of sophisticated and polite living. They were subsequently married and started upon a truly happy union.

Very aptly named Grace, she was at ease in any background. I have seen her happily sitting by a cottage fireside chatting with the family, toasting her toes on the fender and a small child upon her knee - equally happy and exactly right, I have seen her entertaining at a large dinner party, sitting with friends in her drawing-room, being entertained in the country houses around; and managing her brood of nine daughters and five sons. A large rollicking family. Above all, Grace was a perfect foil for her unique husband.

In spite of the house full of children and later swarms of visiting grandchildren, Sabine managed to live the life of a near hermit. Standing long hours at his desk he wrote page after page in his neat handwriting. Oddly enough, it his hymns which brought him fame. His novels were merely money-spinners, and having no particular style, they did not live. One feels that if he had taken them more seriously he might have been more successful with them as one comes across brilliant passages, colourful drama and plenty of humour.

My Uncle's daily routine followed a similar pattern during his long life as 'squarson' of Lew Trenchard. After breakfast, faithful Charley Davey, son of the travelling coachman of his

youth, would come to the door with the dog-cart, "the carriage be ready, zurr", he would announce, and he was never kept waiting, his master was eager to be off, never a moment to be wasted in useless dallying. So they set off on the daily airing, always with some object in view. Often there would be some invalid in the village to be enquired after. Later in the day one might overhear some remark such as - "Old Squire, 'e put us in a proper tizzy 'smornin, 'e come up along afore us was vitty". This would refer to his refusal to wait for an answer to his rat-tat on the door; one of his own was sick or in trouble, there was no time to wait upon ceremony - he would push open the door, climb up the stairs, often ladder-like stairs which, as he grew older, he had to take on all fours, and into the patient's bedroom. A few quick words of enquiry, down on his knees for a prayer, then a little joke to provide healing laughter, and before anyone could catch their breath, he was gone.

When there was no such visit to be paid, he loved to call on his step-mother and my grandfather, at Ardoch, on top of the hill above Lew Trenchard. She, so little older than her stepson, had become his very great friend. When staying with her, I have so often been at breakfast when we have heard a quick footstep in the hall and in he would dart, greet her and any of the visitors around the table, usually say something quite fantastic to shock her, and dart off again chuckling at her, "Hocus-pocus, Sabine, you naughty boy!"

Once his duty airing was accomplished he settled down for the rest of the day in his study from where it was difficult to dislodge him even for meals.

All during my childhood I was at many meals in this delightful old Manor house - rather a doubtful joy sometimes as my sister and I were fair game for the teasings of our rather terrifying and boisterous older cousins. "Uncle Arthur's brats" was their name for us. However, I would not have missed the memory of those meals and the cousins were a challenge to try to live up to. In the low-ceilinged dining-room a place was always laid halfway down the side of the refectory table for Sabine and Grace to sit side by side. At tea-time Sabine's place remained empty until all the family were settled; then his swift shuffling footsteps were to be heard, and he would make his appearance, head thrust forward, hands behind his back. After a pat on Grace's shoulder, or a quick kiss on the top of her head, he would sit and eat with great rapidity, sometimes in complete silence as though unaware of all the talk and laughter going on around him. His mind probably left behind in the study. As soon as he had finished eating, he was up. Perhaps he would say a few words, sometimes take a piercing look at each one sitting round the table, then shuffle off, often with shoulders shaking, as though he found his family excruciatingly funny.

This routine was interrupted only when he felt a sudden urge to go off onto the moors or further afield on archaeological pursuits, or when, with his friend, Rev. Fleetwood Shepherd, he went around visiting the villages and hamlets in search of the old folk songs of the countryside. On these jaunts they persuaded the old gaffers to sing the songs they had sung as boys and while Sabine jotted down the words, Mr. Shepherd took the tunes. In this way they rescued "Widdicombe Fair" and other treasures from the past.

The Sunday services were quite special. While following the usual Church of England pattern there were several unique differences. The one which pleased us children was the shortness of the sermons. Uncle Sabine made one point and one point only and it was difficult to forget that point. To add to this commendable virtue there was always the excitement of not knowing quite what turn things might take. My Uncle was very emotional and could easily be carried away by his own pathos or his humour. It was quite a usual

occurrence for him to have to make a speedy descent from the pulpit when a sad illustration he was giving to emphasise his point would send the tears coursing down his cheeks, or on the other hand an amusing picture he might conjure up, set his shoulders heaving in his characteristic way. Gilbert Arundel, his faithful curate was always quick to save the situation, by breaking into the psalms, giving his beloved Rector time to recover his decorum.

Another interesting feature of the services was the usual singing of the psalms. I suppose it was a quirk of his irrepressible humour which made Sabine decree that he should sing the verses turn and turn about with the choir. The contrast between his rich baritone and the coarse Devonshire voices singing in strong dialect was remarkable, in fact the effect on visitors to the church who were not prepared for it, was quite startling. Alas that it all happened before the times of easy recordings, so that the unrepeatable sound only remains in the memories of the diminishing number of people who heard it!

As a final memory, it must be recorded that Sabine's wit could be cruel, but only, I think, when confronted by hypocrisy or any sort of bunkum. Thus the last book he wrote of his memoirs, largely concerned with people he had known and which, he said, was not to be published until ten years after his death, was thought to be too offensive to relatives of the victims of his satire. It was therefore doomed to definite and final suppression.

Sabine lived his ninety years from 1834 to 1924 to the full, yet except for a few of us who knew him so well, all he is remembered by is the hymn, "Onward Christian Soldiers", composed in haste to meet some sudden need.

## SBGAS Newsletter, No 18.

### Editorial

Following the discovery of the 'Killerton cache' a year ago one of our members, Harold Kirk-Smith, has come across an unpublished memoir by SBG's half-brother Arthur, which we are delighted to reproduce in part in this issue. Also in this number we feature "Onward Christian Soldiers" and the hymn manuscripts; a charming reminiscence by a Plymouth man published by the Western Morning News on 7th August 1934; and some extracts from the Hurst Johnian of June 1894 - as well as the usual notes.

Our 7th year cover has another medallion portrait, this one photographic, which originally accompanied an article in the Yorkshire Weekly Post of 11th September 1911. The back cover portrays a pile of SBG paperbacks (referred to in the editorial of No. 18) expertly photographed by Mr. Pat Smith, who has kindly taken on the cover production.

Thanks are also due to members Raymond Scott, for spotting the recent letter in the Daily Telegraph; and Peter Blau, for the item from a dealer's catalogue included in the article 'Onwards and Upwards'. Peter has also sent a computer printout of the SBG titles held at the US Library of Congress, and members are welcome to ask for a copy.

David Shacklock

### Works on the Folk Songs

Letter from Martin Graebe

Dear Dr. Almond,

When last I wrote to you I promised to let you know the outcome of my work on the manuscripts of folk songs collected by your Great Grandfather, kept in the library at Killerton House. It's taken me longer than expected but I now believe I understand the manuscripts, their context and their importance.

As we said in our show (of which you have heard the recording) most of the experts on folk music believe that the manuscript copy and the rough working notes, which Sabine Baring-Gould gave to Plymouth Library, is the full written record of his folk song collecting. In fact, the Killerton Manuscript turns out to contain significantly more material than the manuscript in Plymouth - something like 650 songs and their variants (compared with 203 in the Plymouth MS).

In a magazine interview from 1898, SBG describes four handwritten volumes full of songs and then, in a letter to the song collector Cecil Sharp in 1904, he refers to his 'Vellum covered book' as his source of reference. There are four vellum covered books in the Library at Killerton, three of which contain folk songs and which are, I believe, the fair copy that SBG wrote up for his own use as a reference. It is clear that this is the document from which the Plymouth MS was copied as it explains some of the errors in that manuscript. As

I said above, however, the Killerton books contain a lot more material and it appears that he was working on them until at least 1916.

For those who are interested in English folk song this is a very important discovery, not only because of the new material but also because I believe that it gives us a better picture of what SBG was willing to accept as 'Folk Song' in the years after he published the two major collections 'Songs of the West' and 'A Garland of Country Song'. Certainly they show that, while he was constrained by his calling and by the taste of the times in what he could publish, he was much more broad-minded than these two publications suggest. That fits much better with the picture of the man and his zest for life that I had envisioned from his other writing.

The number of people who will find these manuscripts as exciting as I do is probably small and yet it is vital that the manuscripts are preserved because they are such an important record of folk culture in the South West of England. I know from talking with Denise Melhuish that you fully understand this and that you have taken a strong personal interest in the collection. Likewise, the National Trust have been very responsible in the way they have protected the manuscripts and the safeguards on access that have been put in place.

To date what I have done is to work my way through the three volumes of songs indexing them and recording the singers from whom they were collected. I have also transcribed some of the most interesting of the songs from the later volumes. It seems appropriate to check with you at this stage that you are happy for me to continue working with the manuscripts. The further work that I would like to do is as follows:

- I intend to give a copy of the index of songs that I have prepared to the National Trust at Killerton for the benefit of other researchers. Should there be any wider interest I would make additional copies available.
- I would like to write a paper for the Folk Music Journal describing and manuscripts and my findings about them for the benefit of other researchers in the field.
- I would very much like to start singing some of the songs and to encourage other people to do so. There are some wonderful songs in the manuscripts that I have not seen elsewhere as well as some new versions of songs that are known from other sources. It would be great to bring them back to life.
- I would like, in the medium term, to publish a selection of songs from the manuscripts from the later years of SBG's collecting, possibly associated with a new recording.

I would also like to make another suggestion that I know will be challenging (in recessionary times) but which I believe would be very worthwhile. I would like, with your permission (and also that of the National Trust), to try to get funding within the UK to copy the manuscripts so that they can be more readily available for study. This would relieve the problems of the National Trust not having proper facilities for research at Killerton. There are two appropriate places where a copy of the manuscripts could be housed and be available for study. The first is with the Devon County Library Service who already hold the Manuscript given to them by SBG. The second place would be the Vaughan-Williams Library in London which is where the original manuscripts of the major collectors of English Folk Song are housed I know that both of these libraries would welcome a copy of these manuscripts. The actual process of photographing the documents would have to be carried out with great

care to protect the originals but I know it has been successfully done in other cases. This idea does depend on my finding a source of funds, either from one of the arts support agencies in the UK or from business sponsorship. I do believe, however, that the right place for the originals is with the rest of the library of folk song material. Many of the other books housed at Killerton are annotated in various ways that link with the manuscripts or have pages of notes related to their preparation bound into them. Many of the books on song by other authors and the collections of old ballads were references for SBG when he was writing 'Songs of the West' and 'Garland of Country Song' and I believe that the library as a whole is important for the light it throws on his way of working.

One thing that I should draw to your attention is the fourth vellum covered volume, similar in appearance to the three volumes of folk song, but which contains a mass of detail on the history and lineage of the Baring-Gould family. It may well be that this is all recorded elsewhere (I know Mrs. Briggs wrote up your family history in detail, for example) but of all the items in the library I believe this is a book that would be of inestimable value to any of your family who are researching family history.

I'd like to close by thanking you again for the opportunity to work with the manuscripts so far. I hope you will feel that it is appropriate that I should continue along the lines that I have outlined above.

Yours sincerely, Martin Graebe

## **Germ Hunting in Mehalaland**

By F. Carruthers Gould

There are some works of fiction so strong in what we call "local colour" that they throw back on to the nature which forms the background of the pictures a reflected light, more intense even than the original.

They are like concentrated essences, the distilled scent more potent than the perfume of the flowers themselves.

Of such fictions there are many examples. In Thomas Hardy's Woodlanders we can smell the bark and the resinous fragrance of freshly-cut timber; Blackmore's Lorna Doone is even a stronger example of my meaning. It is Exmoor itself, more Exmoor even than the moor where the scene of the story is laid.

And so that country has come to be known as the Lorna Doone country; the coach that runs from Minehead to Lynton is the Lorna Doone coach, and if you converse with a native, the chances are many that he will ask: "Hav'ee read Larna Doone beuk?"

But when the literary germ hunter finds his way to the Doone Valley, he feels aggrieved and disappointed.

The waterslide is insignificant, and the hills on either side of the stream, instead of being precipitous walls, slope gently up.

But so powerful is the fascination of fiction, that the visitor, instead of blaming the author for exaggeration, feels inclined to find fault with the reality around him.

Now, if Lorna Doone be the fiction prose-poem of Devon and Somerset, we may claim that Baring-Gould's Mehalah stands in the same relation to Essex.

But there is this difference, that the Essex germ hunter will feel no sense of disproportion between romance and reality. Every touch is true to the nature, the spirit of which breathes through every page of the grim, powerful story of Elijah Rebow and Mehalah Sharland. Literary germ hunting is a fascinating pursuit, and profitable to the mind, if it be done in the right way. Many years ago a certain Herr Von Joel catered for the amusement of cockneys in some public pleasure gardens in London, by imitating the song of the nightingale, and Punch had a caricature of one of these cockneys in a country garden, listening to the song of Philomel, to which his host has drawn his attention, and the visitor remarks, with evident delight, that "It's exactly like Herr Von Joel!"

So, having this reductio ad absurdum as a beacon to warn me off the mud, when I sailed down the Blackwater river with a goodly company of merry Maldon and cheerful Chelmsford men, I cast behind me, as if it were a tempter, the idea of making Facts fit too closely into Fiction.

I knew that there would be saltings and marshes and oozy mud banks, veined with shining arteries of creeks and channels and fleets. Am I knew that I should see men rowing in punts, and that the men would bear the names of Musset, De Witt, and Pettican, and that somewhere and somehow I should hear of a real Mehalah.

But what I wanted was to catch the strains of the music, the motif that plaintive ever-recurring theme, in a minor key, of the persistent wailing pipe of the redshanks, the children of the marshlands, the weird whistling of the curlew, the querulous cries of the gulls, and the harsh "crank" of the heron. And we have not to listen long before our ears are attuned to the melody.

Our boat lies at anchor in Mersea quarters, the channel to the west of the island, with the long lonely stretch of the Middle Island on one side, and on the other, across an intervening mudbank, are a few lights twinkling on Mersea Hard.

And when we stand on the deck under the starlit sky, and listen to the wild mournful plaints of the restless feathered folk echoing across the great waste of marshes and saltings, the only sounds, besides the soft lapping of the tide, that break the stillness of the night, we feel that the soul of a soulful man who lives here amidst these solitudes must, like an Aeolian harp, throb to the pulsing of the very air.

This is how Baring-Gould paints the background against which the two central figures in his tragedy, Mehalah and Elijah Rebow, stand out with such fierce intensity:

*A more desolate region can scarce be conceived, and yet it is not without beauty.*

*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 glass-wort, that shot up green and transparent as emerald glass in the early spring, turns to every tinge of carmine.*

*When all vegetation ceases to live, and goes to sleep, the marshes are alive and wakeful with countless wild fowl. At all times they are haunted with sea-mews and royston crows, in winter they teem with wild duck and grey geese.*

*The stately heron loves to wade in the pools, occasionally the whooper swan sounds his loud trumpet, and flashes a white reflection in the still blue waters of the fleets. The plaintive pipe of the curlew is familiar to those who frequent the marshes, and the barking of the brent geese as they return from their Northern breeding places is heard in November.*

No-one who knows and loves these great wide marshlands can fail to detect and to appreciate the wonderful harmony that exists between the voices and the haunts of birds.

There is harmony in the nightingale's song as it trills out from the shadows of the woodland sleeping in the moonlight, and there is the like harmony in the peevish, puling cry of the peewit, and the mournful notes of the redshank or the curlew, as they flit over the great solitudes.

And so in Mehalah it is the voices of the whimbrel that sound the weird chorus of coming tragedy. Mehalah was with her lover, George De Witt.

*The wind had risen, and was wailing over the marshes, sighing among the harsh herbage, the sea lavender, sovereign wood, and wild asparagus. Not a cloud was visible. The sky was absolutely unblurred and thick bespirt with stars. Jupiter burned in the south, and cast a streak of silver over the ebbing waters.*

*Hark!*

*Out of the clear heaven was heard plaintive whistles, loud, high up, inexpressibly weird and sad. "Ewe! Ewe! Ewe!" They burst shrilly on the ears, then became fainter, then burst forth again, then faded away. It was as though spirits were passing in the heavens, wailing about a brother sprite that had flickered into nothingness.*

*"The curlew are in flight. What is the matter, Mehalah?" The girl was shivering. "Are you cold?"*

*"George, those are the Seven Whistlers. They are the long-beaked curlew going south."*

*"They are the Seven Whistlers, and they mean death or death-like woe."*

Again, towards the end of the story, how beautifully the girl's craving for escape from Elijah's thralldom is symbolised by the pitiful struggles of the sea-gull, whose wing the tyrant had wantonly maimed as he had broken Mehalah's heart in striving to break her will, as the wounded bird flapped and edged its painful way to the salt sea.

*In that great light went out also, on the same cold, dark water, the dying bird, that now stirred not a wing.*

The opening scene of Mehalah is laid on the Ray, a raised beach of gravel lying on the middle island, and standing out above the level of the highest tides. It is crowned with thorn-trees, and gorse bushes are scattered about, and it was here that the heroine lived with her mother in "a small farmhouse built of tarred wreckage timber, and roofed with red pan-tiles."

There is no vestige of a dwelling-place here now - but that matters little to a germ-hunter; for did not Elijah Rebow burn it to the ground? For, said he:

*"The Ray is mine; I have bought it with my own money - eight hundred pounds. I could stubb up the trees if I would; I could cart muck into the well and choke it if I would; I could pull down the stables and break them up for firewood if I chose. All here is mine - the Ray, the marshes and the saltings, the creeks, the fleets, the farm."*

The central plot of Mehalah is one that the author has always found attractive: the struggle between two strong wills - one strong for good, the other for evil - warring against each other for the mastery. And it is this grim duel between Mehalah Sharland and Elijah Rebow that is the main thread of the story. For the girl herself we need not search for any germ.

The name Mehalah is not uncommon in the district, and there is one who, so her father says, is really the original of the character. But, so far from being drowned tragically, this Mehalah married a marine, and still lives. So we will take it that the heroine is a creation of fiction, but embodying the pure, healthy independence of her mode of life and her surroundings, and the individuality which solitude will produce in strong natures.

A brown, lithe, handsome girl, with gipsy blood in her veins; graceful, but strong as a sailor lad. She wears the scarlet woven cap of the sailor and the blue knitted guernsey and fisherman's boots, and she rows her punt and shoots wildfowl; but for all that she is never unwomanly. She is as pure and strong as the salt air of her native marshland, and she

stands out against the blackness of the tragedy like a white-breasted sea-gull against the dark background of a mud-bank.

And if Mehalah be the wing-broken sea-gull, Elijah Rebow is the cormorant of the story - swarthy, strong and grasping.

Watch a cormorant! You will never see him "fooling round," wasting time in graceful curves and undulations of flight.

Swiftly and straight he flies from point to point, turning neither to right nor left, as if fiercely intent on doing what he wills, regardless of everything around him.

And there was no "fooling round" in Elijah's way of dealing with the girl whom he loved with a passion as fierce as hate itself.

*"You don't belong to me!" jeered Elijah. Then slapping the arm of the widow's chair, and pointing over his shoulder at Mehalah, he said scornfully: "She says she does not belong to me, as though she believed it. But she does, and you do, and so does that chair, and the log that smoulders on the hearth, and the very hearth itself, with its heat, the hungry everdevouring belly of the house. I've bought the Ray and all that is on it for eight hundred pounds. I saw it on the paper, it stands in writing and may not be broke through. Lawyers'*

*scripture binds and looses as Bible scripture. I will stick to my rights, to every thread and breath of them. She is mine."*

That is Elijah's way of wooing.

On the oak lintel over the fire place in Red Hall is a deeply cut inscription -

*"When I hold, I hold fast."*

This is his gospel.

He and she are both strong, George De Witt to whom she has given her heart is weak, and so he has no scruples in forcing himself between them and striving by theft and treachery, and even by attempted murder, to grasp her to himself.

*"You have a strong spirit; so have I. I like to hear you speak thus. For long you have let me see that you have hated me; you have fought me hard, but you shall love me yet. We must fight, Glory; it is our destiny. We were made for one another, to love and fight, and fight and love, till one has conquered or killed the other."*

But rough and brutal villain as Elijah was, one cannot well help feeling a little thread of pity and sympathy for this strong man whose fierce heart is tortured with love for Glory - Glory "with her great heart, her stubborn will, her strong soul" - and who knows that her lover has no single quality worthy of her.

Did the author find the germ of this powerfully drawn character on Mersea or in Mehalahland? Not an individual one, perhaps, but beyond doubt he found the germs in the human material around him.

I have referred to the influence of the isolation and solitude of the marshlands on individuality of character, and in the case of a man with strength of will and intensity of character this individuality would become overmastering. On these low level lands almost

inaccessible at times, cut off from the outer world, and intersected with a maze of winding creeks, where only a scanty living can be gleaned, the fierce, unscrupulous man who owns farm and marshes and saltings and creeks and fleets, is magnified by his isolation into a sort of tyrant king.

An old boatman who ferries between Mersea and the mainland told me one day, in a philosophic mood, that "man rules the world, and the `Davil' rules the elements."

And so Elijah ruled his little marsh world with a rod of iron, and no one dared stand against his will.

In the old smuggling days the whole of this district was notorious for the trade in contraband; those who knew the guts and channels, and the intricate tracery of the tidal creeks, could run their goods into the heart of the marshlands, almost under the noses of the Revenue men, and all the farmhouses were storehouses for smuggled goods. Smuggling begets the spirit of lawlessness, and even today, although men no longer find it worth their while to risk life and liberty in defrauding the Revenue, the old fierce blood of the smuggler still runs in the veins of many of the natives. They hold to what they get, or to what they consider they have a right to hold, with fierce and grim determination, and the man who interferes with them is hated with an intensity worthy of the old times. A

handsome, stalwart race of vikings with tribal feelings and local prejudices strongly developed.

"Well," you may hear a native say, "I 'lows I ain't got nothing to say against Abraham, but how about his grandfather, where was he born? He wasn't a Mersea man."

If a man has set his heart upon a duck gun, and another buys it over his head at a bigger price, the intending purchaser thinks he has been robbed, the other man has taken the bread out of his mouth; he himself had the greater right; he has been defrauded. And so he swears a feud, which must be handed down from father to son, and woe to the son who does not take up the quarrel and carry it on. In this spirit, widely spread rather than individualised, we may find the germ of Elijah Rebow.

From the *Essex Review*, July 1894

## **Was Baring-Gould's Story of Body-Snatching Bilston Based?**

Sabine Baring-Gould (1834-1924) was a prolific writer on Folklore, Myth and Legend. Cambridge educated, he was ordained in 1864 and held several clerical appointments but never allowed his duties as a clergyman to stem his literary flow.

Around the turn of the century he spent many vacations at Kinver, being on very friendly terms with the vicar of this old Staffordshire parish. During such stays his pen was never idle and he wrote romanticised versions of old folklore tales. One of these, entitled *Bladys of Stewponey* (concerning the adventures of a local highwayman) was made into a silent 'movie' during the 1920's which was actually 'shot' in and around Kinver using actual locations from Baring-Gould's book and enlisting villagers as film extras.

Another, from the same period of his writing career dealt with an old body-snatching legend. For the gist of this we are indebted to Cannock reader, Mr. J. Cook, who tells us that it stems from a handwritten manuscript which has been handed down through his family and is inscribed ... 'copied from the writing of the Rev. S. Baring-Gould...'

Mr. Cook also informs us that his maternal grandfather (who he believes copied the Baring-Gould extract), was born in Ettingshall and this leads Wm to wonder if the 'locale' of Baring-Gould's bodysnatching episode was Bilston, pointing out that the town possesses a place called Mount Pleasant with the local Church and burial-grounds close by. Why, else (he wonders) would his grandfather (who was a collier) have taken the trouble to copy out, by hand, Baring-Gould's story - which reads as follows ...

A strong suspicion was entertained that the graves there had been rifled, and were so continually, and it was proposed to the parish authorities to have lamps and organize a night watch. But the officials shrank from the expense, and some people reasoned that it was as well to allow the resurrectionists to get bodies from graves, as bodies the surgeons must have, rather than run the risk of inducing these scoundrels to imitate the proceedings of Burke by killing individuals for the purpose. Within a stone's throw of the church was a commodious residence called Mount Pleasant. A man, apparently well to do, a Mr. Gosling, took this house, and brought in a somewhat mixed party of men and women. Neighbours thought the family peculiar, but as he was a pleasant-spoken man and the ladies of the party were affable and sympathetic, and as he paid his way more than

content. The females of the Gosling household attended every funeral, and expressed their tenderest feelings of regard and pity for the mourners, asked all particulars about the deceased, his or her age, and what malady had hurried the lamented one to his grave, as also occasionally whether the deceased had good teeth. At night, immediately after every funeral, the men of the party stole forth, furnished with crowbar and spades, and equipped with a sack or two, and made their way into the graveyard, where they worked by the light of a dark lantern. The sexton had been squared, and he had not made the grave very deep, nor had he heaped the earth thickly over it.

But the gang did not confine operations to the last interment. They opened other graves, and if the corpses were too much decomposed to be of any commercial value they contented themselves with drawing all their teeth.

Neighbours now began to notice that lights were burning in Mount Pleasant at all times of the night. It was also remarked that the grave mounds bore a suspicious look of having been tampered with - not those recently made only, but others more ancient.

In the nearest house was a shrewd, observant servant-girl, and the lights, the way they moved about at night in the rooms of the villa - not in the bedrooms, but down-stairs, at times when every one else was asleep - aroused her suspicions. Her bedroom window commanded the villa of Gosling and Co., and wake at what time she might or however early in the morning before daybreak, there the lights were. She resolved on keeping watch; and she stationed herself where, unseen, she could observe proceedings. Towards midnight she saw dark figures emerge from Mount Pleasant and make their way to the Church. Follow she did not. Her courage was not equal to that; but she waited and watched till the figures stole back, and on this occasion she distinctly saw sacks being carried on the backs of two of the men. In the morning the girl told her master what she had seen, and he at once apprised the police.

These latter now placed themselves behind the wall at night to watch what would happen; they were rewarded one night after there had been a couple of funerals in the churchyard. The constables saw the men dig and shovel for about ten minutes; heard them strike a coffin-lid, and proceed to force it up. Then by the faint light they saw them remove a corpse and put it into a sack. Thereupon one of the men came out of the yard as a scout to see that the coast was clear. After that they hoisted the body over the church-yard wall and made towards Mount Pleasant. As the constables on this occasion were but two they collected a sufficient force of watchmen and special constables, and surrounded the building, where the resurrectionists were enjoying a refreshing sleep after their labours. Scaling the wall by means of a ladder and advancing in their stocking-soles, they entered the various bedrooms, and secured four men and two women, pinioned and gagged them. They were taken completely by surprise.

In the kitchen were found two sacks. In one was the body of a girl of eighteen, in the other that of an elderly man. The cupboards and drawers were stocked with extracted teeth and implements of dentistry for drawing them.

When on the following morning it was noised about that a confederacy of body-snatchers had been captured the greatest excitement prevailed.

Gosling and his confederates were duly brought to trial, confessed their guilt, and were transported ...

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## Edward Baring-Gould

Edward Darragh (Teddy) Baring-Gould, grandson of The Reverend Sabine Baring-Gould, died at his home in Santa Barbara, California, on November 28, 1994.

Teddy was born in Wimbledon on June 13, 1906 and grew up at Lew Trenchard with his brother Sabine and his sister Adele. Teddy was educated at Rugby School and Trinity College, Cambridge where he was a member of the Cambridge University Air Squadron.

In 1927 he was sent out to the colonies to fend for himself; he worked for several years for the Anglo-American Pulp and Paper Mills, doing accounting and auditing. In 1932 he moved to California where he managed his distant cousin Alex Baring's ranch in Santa Barbara. During World War II Teddy organized the British War Relief Society in Southern California with the help of his first wife, Shena (née Collins). In 1943 Teddy joined the RAF and flew supply planes across the Atlantic from Brazil until 1945.

Always an adventurer at heart, Teddy made several trips down the little explored Barranca de Cobre in Mexico and drove the length of Baja California in his jeep before the days of roads there. He worked at his home in Santa Barbara as an investment consultant and director of E.W. Axe & Company and tended the ranch he loved, growing avocados and limes. He remained physically and mentally active until the last week of his life. He was a wonderful correspondent, keeping in close touch with his far flung family, members of the Baring-Gould diaspora. Teddy was predeceased by his daughter Marian and his son Michael. He is survived by his second wife, Barbara, his daughter Sarah Louise (Lally), ten grandchildren and four great grandchildren; also several nieces and nephews who also loved him and eagerly awaited his letters.

Lally Baring-Gould, Merriol Almond