Nailer's Cottage, Ashcroft Museum, Bromsgrove

Newsletter 76 October 2014
The Aims of the Sabine Baring-Gould Appreciation Society

The aims of the Society are to enable those interested in the man and his work to share their enthusiasm and spread the interest among others. These aims are to be achieved by means of Newsletters, a membership list, website, Annual Gathering at venues with some association with Sabine Baring-Gould, and publication of the Transactions.

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SABINE BARING-GOULD was born on 28th January 1834 in Exeter and died on 2nd January 1924 at Lewtrenchard

• Hugely influential collector of folksongs at a time when such songs were being rapidly forgotten.
• Prolific novelist. Among the ten best of his time?
• Folklorist. Magpie collector of anecdotes, practices, beliefs.
• Archaeologist. Pioneer of over 60 excavations on Dartmoor.
• Loved and respected pastor to a widespread Devonshire community
• Reconstructor of buildings - he made enormous changes to both house and church at Lewtrenchard.
• Wrote or translated well known hymns and carols.

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Deadline for Newsletter 77: 15 Feb. 2015

My apologies for the very late issue of Newsletter 76. Unfortunately, I was not able to complete it, get it printed and posted between the end of our Annual Meeting and going off to Malaysia on Nov. 1st.
SBGAS Annual Gathering, Bromsgrove
3-5 October 2014

Some 20 members and guests assembled on Friday 3 October at the congenial Queens Head Inn at Bromsgrove for a feast preliminary to the intellectual feast on the physical setting and theme of SB-G's 1901 novel _Nebo the Nailer_. Set in the Black Country, it gave SB-G ample scope for a complex tale of social concern. The setting for our weekend's lectures, however, was in the considerably more salubrious upper room of Bromsgrove's remarkable open-air Avoncroft Museum, of which more presently.

The first talk on the Saturday morning by Roger Bristow was characteristically well-researched, and based on the area's geology. He proved conclusively that the novel was set not near Bromsgrove, but in the South Staffordshire coalfield where both coal and iron were available together with the necessary fire clay, and where the unusual name of Nebo is concentrated. Curiously, as we later discovered, the surname Homer, also in the novel, occurs in the same area. SB-G had clearly researched the background of his story. We were therefore (cheerfully) in the wrong place, and should have been some 15 km north, a little south of Dudley.

Becky Smith, herself a novelist, and our own in-house publisher, next talked about the novel itself; first serialised in _The Quiver 1901-2_, a periodical primarily directed towards a female readership, and replete with wonderfully sentimental photogravure illustrations. A 6/- hardback soon appeared, to be followed by a more successful 6d. paperback.

Here, SB-G turned from his usual historical settings to contemporary problems in common with three other novels written about this time. Predictably, his chronology is confused; but no matter, he weaves a tale around the flagrant injustices of the appalling conditions in the Black Country's nailing industry, with the usual villains made believable by character-shading, with a crucial main plot and at least five sub-plots — an absorbing tale, with graphic descriptions of the sweated labour of cottage-style nailmaking. As is only right, all ends happily except for Nebo himself.

Pat Tansell, local librarian and volunteer at the museum, next gave a fascinating and well-informed account on the nailers' trade in the Black Country. Bromsgrove (not quite within the notional shifting borders of the Black Country) made smaller nails; elsewhere in the Black Country the sweated industry made large nails, chains, buttons, and associated items. As a cottage industry, it was based in tiny family units with an approximately 12' x 9' forge attached. There, children aged 5-6 worked the bellows, and men and women, husbands and wives and daughters worked side by side. The conditions were appalling, and increasingly poorly paid with the introduction of large-scale manufacturing from the 1830s, and with competition from colonies to which exports had previously been made.

The speaker referred to two powerful women campaigning from the 1890s on behalf of these _White Slaves of England_ as referred to by John C Cobden in his accusatory book of 1853; and she showed many graphic images of single and semi-detached nailers' cottages, their forges, and production in action. She was able to pinpoint the surname Homer to the identical area referred to earlier by Roger Bristow lying further north of Bromsgrove.

The afternoon guided tour through the open air Avoncroft Museum site took us not only to transplanted nailers' cottages and their nailshops, but to a long 14-forged chainmakers' shop, and among much else, a mid-15-century merchant's house, a 1950s pre-fab, and a still used Anglican 1890s tin tabernacle, once a mission church. Not only was the whole site well worth the visit, but we gleaned much information as to the awfulness of the nail trade and its conditions and discovered in detail the reduced and still reducing wages paid in the 1880s for this essentially piece-work activity, such as 14/- per week for a male nailer, 7/- for a male apprentice, 4/- for a female worker, and less for a daughter: not living wages, since materials had also to be bought from this pittance.

Our Chairman Martin Graebe followed with an equally revealing exposé of how he became 'obsessed' by SB-G from an early age. Knowledge of the great SB-G hymns, family visits to Princetown and Dartmoor, Ivybridge and Buckfastleigh, were all inspirational. It was therefore natural to opt for a job in Devon for 20 years; visits to Lewtrenchard House followed, as also the folksongs transcribed by SB-G. The Okehampton Summer Festival of 1989 seems to have been a final turning-point. An intimate and working relationship with the SB-G
Whatever its historical value, Rosedene is a family home with all its memories and momentoes. The plot holders had made a bold step to a new life—but it was a hard grinding life they had chosen. To support a family on the tiny plot took long days of toil and restless worried nights.

Pamela Bristow

We must all be truly grateful to Martin Graebe and Roger Bristow for so quickly and efficiently drawing together a meeting at unavoidably short notice. The meeting was memorable and deeply interesting. We were glad to be there, even if (as it turned out) Bromsgrove was not exactly the Right Place.

We are also grateful to the Avoncroft Museum staff for so well accommodating us, and for the museum’s excellent catering facilities. It was all very well run, enjoyable and instructive, for which many thanks to all concerned.

Robin Price

Nebo, mortally wounded is supported by Fred Folly. His stepfather, Adonijah, lies dead on the ground. Clentham Hall is in the background.
A VISIT TO PAU

In June (2014), I went on a road trip with my brother and my dog to Pau in Aquitaine, Southern France, to see if I could find any trace of Sabine who had spent so much time holidaying there at different stages of his life.

Armed with my nice old edition of his 'A Book of the Pyrenees', first published in 1907, we wandered round the town trying to work out its appeal. "With the exception of the castle, there is nothing of architectural interest in Pau," Sabine writes.*True. But the castle is very beautiful indeed, dating from the mid-fourteenth century. Henri IV of France was born there in December 1553. We were taken on a guided tour and saw the very bed he was born in, as well as a replica of the inverted turtle shell which was used as a cradle for the baby.

Sabine again: "But the great glory of Pau is the view of the chain of the Pyrenees from the terrace and the park."* This we were lucky enough to see on the evening we arrived; by the following morning the view had disappeared off into the clouds after a dramatic thunderstorm during the night. Sabine also mentions the amount of rain that is brought up and discharged over Pau, coming from the Atlantic.

Next up was a visit to the Tourist Office where a bored-looking assistant suggested I went to the Archives Department which is housed in the Tramway Factory. Sabine mentions the trams too: "New Pau has spread and is spreading to north and east so that its extremities have to be reached by electric trams."* I found a helpful archivist. Nothing about Baring Gould came up on the computer, so after much filling-out of forms and acquiring my special card so I could be trusted with the documents for a brief period of time, we tried the 'Roman Villa at Jurançon' and found two little books about it in their collection, one dated 1856, the other 1858. And Sabine’s name was mentioned in each one, just once, and in a very dismissive fashion. In 1856 Charles-Clément Le Cœur wrote that in 1807 two fragments of a mosaic floor were discovered in a field near Pont d'Oly outside Pau and placed in the lobby of the 'prefecture'.

In 1858, the author of 'Mosaïque du Pont d'Oly' disputes the contention that the mosaic was discovered for the first time in 1850 by a "M[onsieur] Beringoold" and in the next paragraph refers to the 1850 discovery as the "second" one. Later on (roughly translated) he states: "The field on which this building sits belongs to M[onsieur] Mourot...the town of Pau leased it to him and in principle left the care of it to a road mender, then sublet the whole lot to a peasant who, in order to keep up with his rent, cultivated as much as possible of the land and thus with each passing day caused all trace of the mapped-out discoveries to disappear under the soil. The buildings designed to protect the Roman remains being incomplete, the vagaries of the weather each year are causing the mosaics to deteriorate further, to the point where soon there will remain only the memory of them and the original site."

It is interesting to view all this against Sabine’s retrospective account of what happened:

"In 1847, when I was a boy, I heard peasants romance about a 'Palais des Fées [Fairies' Palace],' that lay underground in a field by the Lyss, in the commune of Jurançon. I visited the spot and found numerous cubes of mosaic of diverse colours in a ditch. I then saw the peasant proprietor [Monsieur Mourot] and asked him whether he had discovered anything when ploughing. 'Mais oui!' he said, 'five years ago I uncovered a picture that represented men sitting about a table drinking and playing cards.' I knew how to make allowance for a Gascon's imagination, so I bargained with the man to allow me to institute a search. We cut a trench parallel to the stream and crossed walls and mosaic pavements through a length of 150 feet. I then came to terms with the owner of the field. He was to allow me to dig, and he was to charge two sous at the gate for admission.

In a fortnight we had cleared out several rooms, and then, as my pocket-money was exhausted, the English of Pau raised a subscription to pay for the prosecution of the work. In the end we uncovered eleven chambers with well-preserved mosaic floors, and two more of which the floors had broken in upon the heating apparatus underneath, but which had been very richly patterned. The villa consisted of a suite of winter rooms and another for summer residence. In the former all the floors and walls were warmed by a hypocaust. The villa was, moreover, well furnished with baths....

......The most remarkable of the representations on the floors was in the hall next the entrance porch; it showed a cross in mosaic, with a monstrous bust of Neptune at the intersection of the arms, surrounded by fish and lobsters.
When the villa was almost wholly excavated, the municipality of Pau purchased the field, and built a shed over the foundations, but penny wise and pound foolish, neglected to cut a drain around the remains. The consequence was that each room became full of water in the winter, and, frost ensuing, split up the mosaics. When I revisited Pau two years later most of the pavements were ruined. Now, shed and every trace of the villa are gone; the whole is ploughed over, and the only token that there was anything of interest in the field is a notice-board set up to forbid trespassers invading it. On the farther side of the stream is another villa, which I began to dig out, but found the pavements nearer the surface and not so well preserved. Moreover, the proprietor got it into his head that I had discovered and appropriated a pot of gold coins, and he peremptorily forbade further research."

Pesky Englishman! But I know whose side I'd have been on, and feel sad that there is nothing left in Pau to warrant an SBGAS Gathering at any time in the future, not even any apparent record left of where the Baring-Goulds stayed during their many visits there in both the 19th and the 20th centuries. To me, the town seemed rather sad, with an air of neglect about it.

Helen English

*Quoted from Ch. VI, PAU, in A Book of the Pyrenees.

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A BIT MORE ON THE HOLY GRAIL

In Newsletter 67 of October 2011, I endeavoured to expose and clarify Sabine's letter of 1916, a copy of which had come my way, in which he had replied to an enquirer on this topic – one which still seems to fascinate people a hundred years later. I just want to tidy up some loose ends left by that piece.

First I should have said that his letter is more or less a resume of his essay in Curious Myths of the Middle Ages, the last but one of the second series which was originally published in 1868 (first series 1866), entitled The Sangreal.

Secondly I had forgotten then that at the time I was already in possession of a reprint of that essay (entitled The Holy Grail) from Gothic Images of Glastonbury; en route to the Bromsgrove weekend in Ross-on-Wye, I found a nearly identical reprint from Unicorn Books (1976). Neither booklet acknowledged the original publication (just the author), but both had illustrations of an ornate chalice on the cover and inside; they appear to be the same object, viewed from slightly different angles. It would be interesting to know the source of these objects – they do not appear in any of the editions of Curious Myths that I have seen. Both booklets have the same text, despite the difference in pagination; the Gothic Images production is better quality (acknowledging the printer) and is very slightly larger in format; its price at the time of issue was 45p (I have to confess I paid £6.50 for my Unicorn Books copy, albeit nearly 40 years on).

The most startling statement by the author comes in the final paragraph in which he asserts "this old druidic religion" which he has been describing "has emerged under the guise of Methodism/Wesleyanism". Unsurprisingly, some furor must have arisen following the 1868 edition, since SB-G adds an "author's note" to the effect that "exception has been taken to this remark"!
Some modern reprints of Curious Myths have severely abridged the original, so that for instance the Edward Hardy editions published by Jupiter and New Orchard have reduced Sabine’s 23 pages to a mere three, and the notes are omitted. Well worth obtaining, even if your interest in the esoteric is limited, is Batsford’s 1996 Myths of the Middle Ages. Beautifully produced, with Peter Komarnyckij’s striking illustrations, it contains Cyril Tawney’s generous Foreword as well as John Matthews’ general Introduction and a short essay before each chapter. Although only half of Sabine’s essays are selected, ‘The Sangreal’ is reproduced in full. Matthews’ summary of the whole subject is worth quoting: The origins of these mysterious stories have been the subject of literally hundreds of books and studies, as well as of countless poems, plays and novels (and, more recently, films), each with its own interpretation, its own thesis and, depending on its author, its own belief system. The Grail has been described as a cup, a dish, a stone, a floating altar, a bloodline and an idea. It has been sought after, discovered, lost again, recovered again, but has refused to be codified or placed within a framework which could successfully contain it.

David Shacklock

A Titanic tale

Colin White reports that the busiest clergyman [on the maiden voyage of the Titanic] was the Reverend Ernest Carter. After supper on Sunday 15th April 1912, he held a hymn service for some hundred passengers in the second class dining room. The final hymn was Now the Day is Over.


There is, of course, an enduring legend that the band played on as the ship sank, from 12.15am, a few hours later, but I had not heard of the musical event.

Lewtrenchard update

Another year has flown by. The church has seen weddings, funeral christenings and the harvest home. One of the biggest achievements has been Mary Rolfe and the Lewdown past history group, who organised ‘A look back on WW1’ at the Victory Hall. Artist Adrienne Havells designed a commemorative banner which allowed people to attach their own personal notes on individual poppies. The central piece of the design was grey and white, and was hand painted. The picture showed a mounted officer with soldiers to the fore. It was a magnificent piece to see and has travelled around the county. The local community supplied relevant artifacts and it made an extremely informative exhibition. Items included a photo of the Home Guard outside Lew House and a Sabine Baring-Gould tribute from the Western Morning News dated 25 May 1920. It referred to a service held when the war memorial was erected at Lewdown. The service included hymns written by Baring-Gould, who was present. He was in his 86th year, and was assisted by an ebony walking stick and dressed in his robes. Also present were the Brentor band, forty ex-service men, school children and villagers. Sabine was quoted as saying "We are met together today with hearts full of tears, but with hope and joy mixed with our sorrow".

We have said a sad goodbye to Mr Albert Spry in August. He was a walking historian, who brought local history to life with his wonderful knowledge and kind ways. He will be sadly missed.

On a personal note, I have been travelling back in time with the tenants here at East Raddon Farm, which is part of the Lewtrenchard estate. So far, I have got back to the birth of Richard Mason in 1814 here on the farm, but I am yet to discover the date his parents, John and Thomasin, came to live here.

Sylvia Crocker (Lewtrenchard Representative)
Rude about the Rood!

David Shacklock

One item from a recent book clearance of a house less than 200 yards from where I live was *English Church Screens* by the exotically named Aymer Vallance, published by Batsford in 1936. The subtitle, *Being Great Roods Screenwork & Rood-Lofts of Parish Churches in England & Wales*, would not normally earn it a place on my 'must read' shelf, but it has an SB-G reference, so it joins the latest little list of 'SB-G refs'. However this fairly lively put down of Sabine and his views on the subject seemed to require a ‘piece’ in its own right.

Church screens, when they are not the subject of Protestant/Catholic controversy, belong to the more rarefied elements of architecture. It might therefore be helpful to define the terminology briefly. Screens are wooden partitions, often elaborately carved, dividing the chancel (or choir space) from the nave (or congregational space). This was primarily a matter of marking the division of responsibility for upkeep; not until the 17th century was the designation 'screen' used, and the unbiblical concept of the holier area settled in some churches. The rood is the Cross, often the chief image in a church and thus frequently placed near the screen, and so further identifying it as the rood-screen. The rood-loft, where there is such a gallery for singers placed centrally, also takes its name from its proximity to the Cross, but is not part of the structure or purpose of the screen.

So now to Vallance’s rant (p. 32f). A well-known writer, the late Rev. Sabine Baring-Gould, has unfortunately circulated a misleading fiction concerning rood-screens. It appears that once, when he was visiting an old church, which retained its ancient chancel-screen, some witless dotard of a bucolic sextoness told him – and he ill-advisedly adopted the fable, and published it for true – that no rood-screen doors close, and that designedly so, in order to teach that the way from earth (represented by the nave) to heaven (represented by the chancel) remains always open to the faithful believer! Any such symbolic meaning theory is but a fatuous delusion. If it were not (since it is only fair and logical to attach significance equally in the one as in the opposite case), what grim and sinister portent is conveyed by every rood-screen whose doors do happen to close! For that rood-screen doors never shut nor fasten, and that they were not intended to do so, is simply not the fact. It is contradicted both by documentary evidence and by the actual condition of screens themselves. Vallance then quotes thirteen examples to make his point, which, he says should suffice to refute Mr Baring-Gould’s contention as unwarrantable.

So what was SB-G’s contention? I tracked it down to the rather unlikely pages of *An Old English Home*, which contains a 53-page chapter entitled ‘The Parish Church’, including the pertinent section on pp. 129-139.

First he asserts the symbolic use of the screen as depicting the way through to heaven via the Cross, as glimpsed from earth. Then he records a visit to Combe Martin church where he was accosted by the elderly parish clerk (male) who propounded his theory of the unshuttable/unlockable screen doors, which despite SB-G’s doubts the old man insisted upon. Sabine certainly does not express agreement with this theory! Instead he elaborates on the development and use of the singing gallery – his main purpose in opening the subject - and the positioning of church organs. From *Early Reminiscences* it is evident that he admired screens for their beauty, deplored his grandfather’s actions in removing the screen and other woodwork at Lew Trenchard, and went to considerable effort to replace the loss. The symbolism was probably a secondary issue.

\[ .......and a few other references in print \]


John van der Kiste – Dartmoor from Old Photographs – Amberley pbk – p. 8 in list of writers inspired by Dartmoor


Sunday School Praise NSSU 1958 – p. 419 Onward Christian Soldiers 4vs (St Gertrude); p. 504 Through the Night of Doubt & Sorrow 6vs (Marching); p. 529 Now The Day is over 8vs (Eudoxia)

The Hymn Book of the King’s School Canterbury – coll. & Ed. FJ Shirley – OUP 1961 – p. 367 Onward Christian Soldiers 5vs; p. 503 Through the Night of Doubt & Sorrow 8vs


The Werewolf Delusion – Ian Woodward – Paddington 1979 – p. 22 definition; p. 31 John Sterys in Curious Myths; pp. 55-7 Queen of Paris/ The Book of Werewolves; p. 76 cp Hindu folklore; p. 81f re Perigord & Normandy; p. 132 qu. re werewolf wounds; p. 135 pic. from The Book of the West.


Daily Express Community Song Book – under Editor’s Note acknowledgment of songs taken from English Folksongs for Schools, Songs of the West & A Garland of Country Songs; others, e.g. Widdicombe Fair, designated ‘Somerset Song’ in the index & not acknowledged; thus an unsatisfactory source for the researcher

The Cornish Smuggling Industry – Paul White – Tor Mark Press pbk 1997 – p. 23f SB-G on a smuggling baronet


BARING-GOULD TITLES CURRENTLY AVAILABLE

This list is constantly expanding, and older titles are gradually being left out, to save space. Almost certainly there are omissions. Bossiney Books and Llanerch are regularly producing books by or including SB-G. By far one of the biggest publishers of SB-G material is Kessinger Publishing (www.kessingerpub.com) - over 62 titles are currently available, although some of the ‘titles’ are in fact chapters from some of SB-G’s books. If anyone knows of additional titles, please let the Editor know.


“A Book of Folklore” Paperback. Praxis Books 1993. £5.00


“Red Spider” Paperback. Praxis Books 1993 £5.00


“Court Royal” Paperback. Praxis Books. April 2005. £10.00


“Queen of Love” Gloucester: Nonsuch Publishing. £6.


“‘Half My Life’ The Story of Sabine Baring-Gould and Grace” by Keith Lister. Charnwood Publications, 2002. £12..95 (£2.00 P&P) Available from the author at 13 Grove Road, Horbury, Wakefield, West Yorkshire, WF4 6AG


An 80-page Bibliography is available from the Hon. Editor.