

GATHERINGS - SUMMER 1993

Rozel Lawlor

There were two occasions this summer where there were gatherings of the Baring-Gould family and members of the Sabine Baring-Gould Appreciation Society.

The first was on 25th June at St. Paul de Leon Church, Staverton, on the River Dart. Staverton staged a flower festival to raise funds for the restoration of their magnificent mediaeval wooden screen which is plagued by the inevitable beetle. This beautiful church in its valley setting was the Gould family's parish church when they lived at Pridhamsleigh and Sabine cherished this link. Surely the screen here must have inspired Sabine to restore the screen at St. Peter, Lew Trenchard. In fact, Mrs. Gould made a gift of money towards this project - the only contribution made by an 'outsider', all other funds needed being raised spontaneously by Sabine's parishioners.

The Festival organisers were kind enough to invite us to their celebration, despite the fact that Sabine in his time had caused the incumbent and parish much distress by removing the Gould family gravestones when renovations threatened their displacement. Despite this deed, the organisers treated us family members and members of the Society with great warmth. It was a perfect summer's day and the church was full of exquisite flower displays, their heady perfume, and indeed, life.

The second occasion was the combined Annual General Meeting of the Society and get-together of the members of the family in the presence of Merriol Almond, chairman of the Society and head of the family. She was staying at Lew Trenchard with Christopher and Betsy, her son and daughter. This was a pleasantly informal gathering, giving us all a chance to examine those books of Sabine which had been collected for sale, including some recently published in paperback.

For me, there was something very special in hearing from Flora Brown how Leila her grandmother (and Sabine's half-sister) had loved the company of my beloved, gentle, grandmother Barbara.

We all walked up the valley of the West Dart to Wistman's Wood, with its sculptural granite, moss-covered boulders and stunted oaks festooned with lichen and ferns.

On the opposite side of the valley runs the Devonport Leat, which was cut at the end of the 18th century to supply Devonport and its growing dockyard.

We returned to eat our picnic lunches together on the banks of the river - sadly, I had to leave the party which was to progress to Lew Trenchard and cream teas in the Dower House.

This was another memorable day, organised by Image Briggs, Sabine's redoubtable granddaughter and family historian.