

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.