

How An Interest In Topography Of The Fens Led To Sabine Baring-Gould

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It was whilst dining with friends one evening during the Autumn of 1985 that I discovered Sabine Baring-Gould. Mine host, being aware of my book collection of the fens, mentioned that he had a book which he felt sure I would be interested to see. As the port was being passed he produced an 1896 edition of Cheap Jack Zlta, in which old photographs of the fenland village of Prickwillow had been glued to some of the blank spaces. Inside the cover is written 'Rev. Claude D. Kingdon, 35 years Vicar of Prickwillow'. It goes on in the same hand, 'This novel was written in my study at Prickwillow'.

My host had become the owner of this book via a recent legacy of a house and its contents. The only knowledge he had of the book was that the deceased had been given it by the widow after attending a friend's funeral somewhere in Cornwall. He declared that he had not read the book and was not likely to, but I was very welcome to borrow the book to read. As it was of great local interest I could not put the book down once I had started to read it. Having read the book I could not settle until I had purchased it, which I subsequently did.

I always claim that it was probably the most expensive book I have ever bought, due to the fact that since that first SBG purchase my collection has now grown to 40 books.

Although my mind was now focused on the works of Sabine Baring-Gould I could not totally forget the Rev. Claude Drewitt Kingdon (1859-1949). Knowledge I gained locally told me that he left Prickwillow in 1917, was Curate in charge at St. Teath, Cornwall 1917-1923, was also Rural Dean of Statton, Cornwall and retired 1946. He died on 12th May 1949 and was buried in Whitstone churchyard with other members of his family, the majority of whom were also clergymen.

One very interesting point is that his paternal grandmother was Jane Hawker, sister of Rev. Robert Stephen Hawker, Vicar of Morwenstow.

Before my story ends I must also add that a further bequest from the same estate as my friend's legacy came, left instruction for two cottages to be sold and the proceeds given to Morwenstow Church.

Subsequently, whilst visiting SBG country, I have made extra effort and also visited both Whitstone and Morwenstow churches.

My friend has since moved into a new house which he has called 'Morwenstow Cottage'.

As you can see, there is a certain amount of Cornish mist and mystery that abounds in this part of the Isle of Ely.

I have spent many pleasurable hours searching for, and acquiring, my collection and I look forward to continuing my search and at the same time enjoying those already in my possession.