

## Travel Guide Editor & Conservationist

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In September while on holiday in Devon, using the ancient 'town' of Lydford as a base, I travelled into Essex/Devon country to Lew Trenchard, the family seat of the Baring-Gould family. The Revd. Sabine Baring-Gould, (1836-1924), may be known to you as the composer of several hymns including 'Onward Christian Soldiers' and 'Now the Day is Over' both of which were composed for children's use; or perhaps you will remember him as the author of Mehalah - a tale of the Essex Marshes, once described as being 'as good as Wuthering Heights', and which he wrote when he was rector of East Mersea, 1871-1881.

His magnum opus was his Book of Dartmoor, first published by Methuen in 1900 and in the preface he writes - "I have wandered over Europe, have rambled to Iceland, climbed the Alps, been for some years lodged among the marshes of Essex - yet nothing that I have seen has quenched in me the longing after the fresh air and the love of the wild scenery of Dartmoor".

Sabine Baring-Gould returned to Lew Trenchard in 1881 as both squire and rector, the 'squarson', and because the parish was a constant drain on his meagre resources depended even more on his writing. His first novel was entitled Through Flood and Flame published in 1868, a semi-fictional account of his romance with Grace Taylor, a fifteen year old mill girl in his parish in Horbury, Yorkshire, whom he married on 15th May, 1868, against the family's wishes, and who bore him 15 children. She died in 1915 and Sabine's physical and mental energy declined from then on. In 70 years his total published output was 130 volumes, including Devonshire and Strange Events, Cornish Characters, Yorkshire Oddities, the pirates of Lundy Island, the Princetown Massacre, Bideford Witches and even candlesnuffers. He reckoned that his collection of West Country folk songs was the most important achievement of his life.

Sabine was recorded as a member of our Society in the lists published for 1873, 4 and 5 (EAST vol.v.pt.iv Old Series and vol.i.pts. i and ii New Series).

'Baring-Gould, Rev. S., M.A., East Mersea Rectory, Colchester.'

This novelist, travel guide editor, church historian, hymn writer and conservationist, being also an amateur archaeologist and prehistorian was among the first to recognise and then publish his account of Dartmoor's antiquities which he declared were the remains of the Bronze Age people of Dartmoor and which he was determined should be protected along with the landscape. He went to great lengths to preserve the relics of Devon's past.

The parish church of St. Peter at Lew Trenchard speaks of Sabine's love and care, although a well-known writer in a recent publication uses the words - "woodwork over-restored".

I noted that the Triptych by a 15th century Flemish artist was presented to the church in 1881 by an un-named Colchester lady. Who was this donor? Was it an Essex Gould or Sperling?

Sabine was in advance of his time and was really the fore-runner in the teaching of The Christian Stewardship of Money; his parishioners raised the whole amount needed to erect a new rood screen between 1835 and 1915 except for one gift from a Miss Helen Gould. No bazaars were ever held, no begging letters were ever sent out. Unhappily, today there is an appeal being made for donations to the Rood Screen Restoration and Preservation Fund and this is brought to your notice. I can give you more details if you are interested.

The pulpit, like the rood screen, was the work of the Misses Pinwell and the gift of Mr. H.M. Sperling whom the locals remember as 'The Maister'.

So as the year draws towards its close I look back over 1990 and all that has been accomplished with the concerted efforts of Council, Officers and Members and remember the words chosen by Sabine Baring-Gould to be carved on his tombstone -

Paravi lucernam Christo Meo - I have prepared a lantern for my Christ.