

WINEFRED

May 2nd 1994 was publication day for the latest Praxis reissue of a Baring-Gould title. This time it is "Winefred", which was first published in 1900, and which is set in Seaton. On 11th May 1994, Seaton was the venue for an evening meeting "in celebration" of this reissue, arranged jointly by Devon Libraries and the Axe Valley Heritage Association. The speaker was Norman Barns, Warden of the Seaton Landslip Conservation Area. Mr. Barns knows everything about the great Landslip - "convulsion" as it was termed at the time - which took place in 1839, with another severe slippage in 1840, and gave a most compelling talk, with slides. He pointed out the minor geological error which Baring-Gould makes in the novel, and made educated guesses as to precisely which cottage he was basing that of Job Rattenbury on.

The land along this South-East Devon coast is still sliding into the sea, and is still a place of great romance. The local people have an abiding interest in the events of 1839 and 40, and a love for the natural wilderness which it has now become. In Victorian times, Seaton was of very great renown, with large numbers of trippers coming to see for themselves the alteration to the coastline which was taking place almost before their eyes.

In "Winefred", the characters conduct their lives on the edge of these cliffs, where the river Axe empties into the sea. A ferryman across the Axe is the villain of the tale, who meets a terrible Nemesis when the "convulsion" takes place.

Rebecca Smith of Praxis took copies of the book to sell, and David Shacklock took a collection of early editions of many Baring-Gould titles. All in all, it was a successful way of raising Baring-Gould's profile in that area of Devon. The local bookshop is selling "Winefred" in substantial numbers, as well as a lovely book about the Landslip as it is now, with its great wealth of unspoilt flora and fauna. It was also drawn to our attention that there is a new book just out about John Rattenbury, who was the real-life smuggler whom Baring-Gould took as the prototype for Jack, the hero of "Winefred".

Clearly, there is considerable enthusiasm for Baring-Gould and his involvement in local history, geology and archaeology in Seaton and its surrounding neighbourhood.

Copies of "Winefred" are available now from Praxis Books, "Sheridan", Broomers Hill Lane, Pulborough, West Sussex, RH20 2D U Price 16 50 + 75p postage. Paperback. A limited edition of 500 copies

Becky Smith