

Times Past

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Storrington & District Museum

Preserving Yesterday for Tomorrow

Tudor May Revels

John Wharmby enjoys a day spent with Queen Elizabeth I (and Philip Beaumont tells the history of May Day)

During Tudor times, 1485–1603, Storrington was a small hamlet by today's standards, but was significant enough to have a relatively large church, other church buildings, a market and a few dwelling houses like those in West Street and Little Boltons in Church Street, which was new at the beginning of the Tudor period and, like most houses, continued to be developed over the centuries.

Life in those days was concentrated on the church, and so it was only right that the Museum's Tudor May revels started with Family Communion, 'Tudor Style', at 10 a.m.. The first hymn, 'All people that on earth do dwell', originated in 1560 using music written nine years earlier. After the blessing the last Tudor monarch, Queen Elizabeth I, presented herself, followed by the final hymn 'God is love, his the care', with the melody 'Personent Hodie', written in 1582 in the middle of her reign.

After the service the royal party processed into the school rooms across the carriageway to inspect the Weald & Downland Clothing Project, the Tudor weaponry displayed by



Above: Queen Elizabeth I (a.k.a. Meg Everitt) entertains two young citizens.

'Timespan', the Tudor food and herbs on show and to be entertained by the Partridge Pluckers' music and dance. The general public soon began to collect in the hall to participate in the entertainment, spend their pennies on the various stalls, and satisfy the inner man with lunches served in the refectory.

Her majesty gave a few audiences to members of the Society, but the peasantry needed little persuasion to join in the May Revels, and a good time was had by all.



Left: Tudor Family Communion at Storrington Parish Church.



Right: presentation of Tudor weaponry by 'Timespan'.

Right and below:
dance and music
with the Partridge
Pluckers.



May Day dates back in many countries to revels that were important at the time and now survive in form only, for example, well-dressing. Young and newly wed couples asked for the blessing of an early child by rolling down a ploughed field then walking in bare feet over the crop at midsummer. Saint Walpurgis, sister of Saint Wilibald, first Bishop of Eichstatt, became abbess of Heidenheim, and died about 780. One of her festal days was May 1 and popular belief was that she was a witch and May Day is called Walpurgis Night when witches get out their broomsticks and billygoats and make for the nearest orgy where their master, the Devil, waits to greet them.

May 1 came at a time of great importance in the rural calendar; shoots begin to appear in the fields and on the trees, such as hawthorn and may blossom, and the belief that it is unlucky to take them indoors still persists.

In more enlightened times many of the May-associated superstitions have been lost or adapted but many of us, as a sort of insurance, still go through the motions of belief; some of us still cross ourselves, will not walk under a ladder or fail to throw salt over a shoulder; and how many women dislike a left-handed hairdresser in the belief that to be so is 'sinister'?

But May Day has survived all its critics, and it is perhaps a little reassuring to know that in fairly recent times May Day produced some amusing sport for young apprentices and the like - a football match with no rules and a three-mile-long pitch, kick-boxing (in clogs) and many forms of chase and catch in which the lasses are usually caught!

Philip Beaumont



Museums at Night

Mark Slawinski of Culture 24 visits the Museum on May 15

Residents of Storrington and surrounding villages showed great spirit as they braved a grey and rainy Friday evening to attend this quirky, intimate and locally themed Museums at Night event. Housed in the old village school, this compact but comprehensive local museum displayed such treasures of interest as writer and one-time Storrington resident Cicely Mary Barker's 'Flower Fairy' literature and her charming, ethereal artwork.

Also featured was an ancient and rickety harmonium, a retrospective of Drama Society photographs and a beautifully time-weathered bridal gown from the thirties chaperoned by its original owner in a period shot.

The visitors, who enjoyed a glass of wine or two as they swapped reminiscences of times past, were greeted by an intriguingly chilling tale of village paranormal activity, centred upon the account of local lad Bernie Crabbe's haunting during one of Storrington's theatrical productions.

An apparition named 'Phoebe' appeared several times in a particularly frenetic period of activity for the village drama group, and Bernie became the focus of this voice from the past. Spooky stuff indeed.

Elsewhere the wealth of items of local interest gave the single exhibition room a disarming and varied charm, and as night fell we were able to further explore arcane farming equipment and horse ware, crisp leather ice-skating boots from yesteryear and a host of wartime ephemera with poignant village links.

The atmosphere throughout was warm and friendly, and the show was bolstered by a hugely knowledgeable crew of volunteer helpers on hand to pepper the evening with facts, tales and a pearl of wisdom or two.

With a strong network of local links and dedicated staff, the night was argument indeed for further time to be invested in discovering this hidden gem.

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Famous Residents no. 8

David Bussey on the composer Arnold Bax and his final years in Storrington

Visitors to Storrington's White Horse public house in the nineteen forties and early fifties might have found the composer Sir Arnold Bax in the billiards room working at a desk installed for him by the landlord, Hugh Fitch. Bax had escaped to Sussex from his rooms in Swiss Cottage at the beginning of the Second World War. He stayed at a number of addresses, including the Roundabout Hotel in West Chilmington and the Railway Hotel in Pulborough, before discovering the White Horse, where he was based until his death in 1953 at the age of 69. In 1942, the year he became Master of the King's Musick, *Picture Post* published a photographic feature depicting him as 'a square-cut, tweedy figure...taking a pint of beer with the local inhabitants...Once a month he attends the Chanctonbury Music Society's concerts in a Sussex country house. His more frequent recreations are billiards, crossword puzzles, village cricket, and a drink and a gossip with the locals in the bar.'

Bax was unimpressed by attempts of 'the penny rags' to present him as some kind of country squire. He claimed to detest beer, and was too bohemian to belong to the county set. His temperament was passionate and romantic. As a young adult he was fascinated by the poet W. B. Yeats and the world of Irish mythology. On marrying in 1911 he took a house in Dublin but deserted his wife and family in 1918. When he settled in Sussex he had two mistresses, the pianist Harriet Cohen, to whom he dedicated several compositions, and Mary Gleaves, who was unmusical but the woman in his life who best suited his character - he once called her his 'wild young naiad'.

It is generally agreed that Arnold Bax's best work came well before his Storrington days. His most famous piece, the tone poem *Tintagel*, was written in 1917 and celebrated his burgeoning passion for Harriet Cohen. There followed a remarkable series of fiery compositions in the 1920s, but appreciation of these had to wait until his centenary in 1983.

The desk at the White Horse served in the war years for the writing of Bax's autobiography,



Farewell, My Youth, covering his first thirty years and an enormous success when published in 1943. Musical compositions were to be quite sparse during his retirement in Sussex, and he tended to recycle early work when he did write, for example in the film score of *Oliver Twist* (1948).

His obituarist in *The Times* attacked Bax for lacking the discipline to bring his luxuriant imagination under control. A reason for this may be his large private means. His family had an interest in the patent for the manufacture of mackintosh raincoats and also owned a substantial plot of land in Oxford Street approximately where Selfridges stands today. His father qualified as a barrister but never bothered to practise.

Arnold Bax had friends to visit in West Sussex. The composer John Ireland was living at Rock Windmill. One afternoon Bax and Mary Gleaves arrived early for tea with Jomo Kenyatta in Heath Common: Kenyatta surprised them by jumping out of the bushes wearing a bright yellow jersey. *Picture Post* was quite right about his interest in village cricket. His passion for this sport dated back to childhood, and he became President of Storrington Cricket Club. According to a correspondent writing to *The Times* after his death, 'He once took seven wickets for 10 runs in a village match [probably in Norfolk] with his left-handed slows and I believe that this feat gave him as much pleasure as the lovely rendering of one of his symphonies by Sir John Barbirolli and the Hallé Orchestra in the Albert Hall.'

Above: the White Horse, Storrington, Arnold Bax's home from 1941-53.

Below: commemorative plaque to the right of the main door.



George Tyrrell

In Storrington churchyard, enclosed by low hedges, lies the grave of a Roman Catholic priest and modernist religious writer, Father Tyrrell. Why is he buried among Protestants? What is the story?

Issue 7 of Times Past described Tyrrell's life, but to mark the centenary of his death Joan Ham writes on the final years in Storrington.

(Photograph of Tyrrell's funeral procession in Storrington.)

George Tyrrell was born in Dublin and brought up in a staunchly Protestant family but in his teenage years moved steadily closer to Catholicism. In 1879 he was accepted into the Roman Catholic Church. He became a Jesuit novice and studied at Stonyhurst.

By 1904, Tyrrell found that his attitude towards the Jesuits and their General was incompatible and they were 'leagued with those who are doing everything to make Faith impossible'. Things went from bad to worse, and two years later he was dismissed from the Society of Jesus, with the understanding that he could be readmitted if he submitted to their conditions. George Tyrrell went to join the Abbé Bremond in France, deprived of his priestly rights, the mass and the sacraments. He came to Storrington and boarded at the monastery, where the Prior applied unsuccessfully to Rome for a *celebret* (literally 'let him celebrate'), permitting him to say mass.

Meanwhile, Miss Maud Petre had taken Mulberry House in the Square as a place of rest for persons who were sick or overworked, and it was here that George Tyrrell was given two rooms in a cottage in the garden, where he could work and receive visits from his friends. He was excommunicated in the following year, and the Canons Regular, who had previously been friendly, now cut him dead. He was in the advanced stages of Bright's disease, and although the Prior gave him extreme unction on July 12 1909, he could not hear his confession or give him the sacrament, or permit his burial in the Catholic burial ground with a Roman Catholic funeral mass. He died on July 15 1909 and by the kindness of the Rev. George Faithfull, Rector of Storrington, was buried in the churchyard, with his friends, the Abbé Bremond, Maud Petre and others, attending and giving readings.

From the Chair

Summer Events

The Museum had a presence at Storrington's Village Day when 56 people entered the competition set by our Curator. The winner, the only one with fully correct answers, received a copy of one of the paintings in the Museum.

Monday, 29 June dawned fine and warm as we boarded coach for the Museum outing to the Mary Rose and Portsmouth Dockyard. With individual tickets giving free entry to all the attractions, everyone headed off in different directions to find what interested them most. A thoroughly enjoyable day altogether.

The stewards' lunch, once again held at Pauline Archibald's lovely home, was also blessed with beautiful weather. Pauline is a most generous hostess and with members of the Committee plus extra helpers, all of whom had worked extremely hard to provide lots of delicious food, lunch was served to sixty people - well done everybody.

On Sunday, 4 October the Museum will hold its annual Family History Day with a help desk for research queries and problems. We are also holding an interactive session for former pupils of the Old School, Storrington, who are asked to bring along their memories and memorabilia to add to our collection of Storrington's heritage. The Museum will display photographs and other material.



The 'Coronel' horizontal 1/4 plate enlarger, on show in the exhibition 'Frozen in Time', which features photographic equipment from the pre-digital age. It runs until 27 September, 2009.

EDITORIAL TEAM

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