

A TRUE STORY WITH A MORAL.

On the 10th of April this year I officiated at a funeral at Deal Cemetery of a person for whom no relatives could be found. He had been an acquaintance of mine for quite a while although I knew very little about him. He had lived in a rather dilapidated old caravan on various sites around the area and would occasionally call on me for a chat, a cup of coffee and cheese sandwiches. He never told me anything about himself except his name, Michael Walton, and that he was once burnt out of his house and suffered serious skin burns. For this reason he kept out of the strong sunlight and grew his hair long.

Michael had died while in his caravan at Martin Mill and the police contacted me after finding my name and address in his caravan. I administered at his funeral arranged by the local council. It was not as sad an occasion as one would have suspected. Council run funerals are seldom attended by anyone other than the undertakers and myself but people from the caravan park who had got to know and befriend him had had a whip round for flowers, and attended the open air service followed by a small reception back on site afterwards. No one had any more information about Michael and we were satisfied we had done our best for what had been a very pleasant, if some what eccentric man.

I feel that many of the local people in Great Mongeham knew him, at least by sight, as he walked to and from Deal. He also often caught the local bus to Canterbury where he had friends in the Gulbenkin theatre. He had confided in me that he was a composer and musician, also a talented tap dancer.

Well, time went on until I received a phone call from Southampton. It was Michael's sister, the council had given her my name (with my permission) and she wondered what I could tell her about him. I had a very informing and interesting, if not a little sad, conversation with her. Michael had often told me that he had things that he wanted to tell me about himself, but said that they were too horrible to share, so he never did, and I never pushed him as I could tell it pained him to talk about it. He had been a nuclear scientist working for the American government at the time of the cold war, he was working on nuclear defence systems and saw things that happened during testing of these devices that horrified and greatly upset him and so he got out of it as soon as he could. Coming back to live in Southampton, these things played on his mind, so he moved to East Africa and took up a position in Nairobi as a teacher, teaching Nuclear physics. This was at the time of the troubles with the Mau-Mau and one night he found his landlady's body mutilated on his front lawn. So again he came home to try and find a bit of normality and comfort. He resettled for a time again in the Southampton area but his house burnt down with him in it. That was the last anyone of his family knew of him as he just took off and disappeared.

The rest of the story I learnt from him in dribs and drabs as we used to munch our way through the cheese sandwiches. In the Deal area he met up with the late Rev Eric Smith, who set him up with his old caravan and sent him off to Iona where he could find solace. Michael remained there for some time eventually returning to our area. Sometimes you think some people are strange, but when you get to know a little about them you find the reason why. I am so pleased that I met and befriended Michael as did several other people in the village. The moral is that you should never judge a person on their appearance or as an old one says never judge a book by its cover - wait until you read it. (PH)

DATES FOR YOUR DIARY

Carols

Round the tree on the village green on Friday 20th December at 6.30pm

Great Mongeham Society

Thursday the 16th January, 7.30, a Victorian evening

Drop In Market

5th December 10-11 am.

Great Mongeham Horticultural Society

Christmas Party on December 4th. Next meeting then February 5th 2014.

Saint Martin's WI

December 12th - Christmas party in the hall 7.30pm with a Bring and Share buffet.

Next meeting January 9th.

Bingo

Thursdays 19th December, 23rd January and 27th February 2014 – all 7.15 for 7.30 pm start.

Mongeham Singers

Abbeyfields on 4th December at 6.30. Next meeting in February 2014.

St. Martin's Handbell Ringers

Wednesday December 11th at 7.15pm. St. Martin's Carol Service on Sunday 15th

December and after the Carols round the Tree on the green on December 20th.

CLUB, SOCIETY AND VILLAGE REPORTS

GREAT MONGEHAM SOCIETY

Last Thursday's meeting was the AGM of the Great Mongeham Society. The committee of this year was re-elected for the coming year with the exception of Sajjad Afzal-Woodward who wished to step down as secretary. His place was taken by Moyra Carey. The chairman reported on another successful year with well attended meetings and popular excursions. The president outlined the programme for 2014, and this seems to at least equal, if not better, the one for this year. The treasurer reported an increase in expenditure this year, but not enough to warrant an increase in membership subscriptions. David Bradley then gave a fascinating insight into the business of growing apples. His talk covered the history of apple growing, world production, the biology of the tree from seed to fruit and running an orchard farm. As has become the custom at AGMs the meeting concluded with wine and cheese. The next meeting is on Thursday the 16th January, 7.30, a Victorian evening (JR)

SAINT MARTIN'S WI

Welcome, Josie Louise of Dairy Mews as an honorary member of Saint Martins W.I. She joins Mum Emma, Grandmother Wendy, Great grandmother Edna and Aunt Sandra. At the November meeting every one set to with paint and brushes to prepare the salt dough items, previously made, that will decorate the Christmas tree for the Trinity church display on November 30th and December 1st. December 5th will be the group carol concert at St Saviour Church Walmer at 2pm. December 12th will be the Christmas party in the hall 7.30pm with a Bring and Share buffet. January 9th meeting in the hall 7.30pm All are welcome for a 7.30 pm start The programme is not know yet but good speakers and displays are always on the list . For more details 01304- 373604 or 01304-365687 (PS-B)