

PROGRAMME

Quire: *I Like to Rise When the Sun She Rises* (Folk / Trad)

Reading from: 'People of the Black Mountains'
by Raymond Williams

Quire: *Lark* (West Gallery)

Reading from: 'Rape of the Fair Country'
by Alexander Cordell

Quire: *Far Heaven* (Shape Note inspired)

Reading from: 'The Brecon & Merthyr Silurian'
January 1841

Quire: *The Sheep Stealer* (Folk / Trad)

Reading from: 'The Brecon & Merthyr Silurian'
January 1838 - 'Caution to Constables!'

Quire: *Adieu Adieu* (Folk / Trad)

Reading from: 'A Story'
by Dylan Thomas

Quire: *Bring Us a Barrel* (Folk)

Reading from: 'Precious Bane'
by Mary Webb

Quire: *Winterbourne Tune* (West Gallery)

Reading from: 'Precious Bane'
by Mary Webb

Quire: *Walk this World with Music* (Folk)

INTERVAL

Quire: *Morning* (Shape Note)

Reading from: 'Rebecca's Daughters'
by Dylan Thomas

Quire: *Llangadog* (West Gallery)

Reading from: 'And They Blessed Rebecca - An account of
the Welsh Toll-gate Riots 1839 - 1844' by Pat Molloy

Quire: *Waterseid Tune* (West Gallery)

Reading from: 'Rape of the Fair Country'
by Alexander Cordell

Quire: *Wrestling Jacob* (Shape Note)

Reading from: 'Annals of the Harford Family of Bosbury'
from Herefordshire Archives & Records Office

Quire: *Pisga* (West Gallery)

Reading from: 'The Brecon & Merthyr Silurian'
May 1838 - 'Abergavenny - Duelling Extraordinary'

Quire: *Owen Sound* (Shape Note inspired)

Reading from: 'Rape of the Fair Country'
by Alexander Cordell

Quire: *I Gave Her Cakes* (Catch)

Reading from: 'People of the Black Mountains'
by Raymond Williams

Quire: *Lark* - reprise (West Gallery)
The Farmer's Toast (Folk / Trad)

HIGH DAYS AND HOLIDAYS



ALONG THE WELSH BORDER MARCHES

With actor Phil Smith
and

The Village Quire

About the Show

The inspiration for **High Days and Holidays** came from the wealth of fascinating documents of 18th and 19th century life held in the local archives of Llandrindod Wells and Hereford and in Brecon Library. One need only blow the dust from a few old volumes to meet face-to-face with the garrulous parish clerk, the inebriated 'specials', the duelling young bucks and some larger than life characters from 'above stairs'. These were hard times but there was fun to be had if you knew where to find it ... and these coves knew! Most of the 'action' takes place just inside Wales in the areas around Abergavenny and Brecon but with occasional forays across the border into Herefordshire and Shropshire. How, then, could we avoid one or two additional flourishes from the pens of Mary Webb, Raymond Williams and Alexander Cordell – authors whose work, which although fiction, is rooted in this soil?

If, from its title, you perhaps entertain misgivings that our show may be a little too remorseless in its jollity, then fear not! The 18th and 19th century mind found its pleasures in some surprising places. Ella Mary Leather records that: 'all the poor in a country parish ... would flock to a funeral as a spectacle,' and, 'there was always as much cake and cider, even at poor folk's funerals, as anybody had a mind to take'. Don't be surprised, then, if The Grim Reaper pops up at some point in the proceedings! Likewise with crime, Parson James Woodforde had a real *high day* on March 6th 1761: '... I jumped from two men's shoulders and leaped upon the heads of several men and then scrambled ... immediately under the Prisoner's [Place] ... where I sat and heard three or four tryalls, and likewise condemnation passed on Dumas, alias Darking, alias Hamilton, alias Harris.' Crime was a real crowd-pleaser. A visit to a good trial was a proper *high day* ... unless you happened to be the one in the dock when you might find yourself going off on a long and unwanted *holiday* to Botany Bay – one way ticket!

And we simply could not leave the Rebecca Riots out. The mysterious Rebecca – a man dressed in women’s clothes – led a popular uprising to remove the toll gates from the new ‘turnpike’ roads. These gates were hated and regarded as a deeply unjust form of taxation, the old green lanes having been closed, deliberately, to force travellers onto the turnpikes. The Rebecca Riots hold a very special place in the history of dissent within these shores, for the rioters were triumphant. It must have been a very high day indeed when on Christmas night of 1843, fifty revellers shouting, “Becca for ever!”, sawed up one of the last gates and then threw the pieces into the River Wye at Glasbury – not a mile from the home of the Village Quire!

About the Readings

Brecon and Merthyr Silurian – was a forerunner of the *Brecon and Radnor Express*. It was published as a weekly paper between 1838 and 1853.

Mary Webb – was born in Shropshire. She lived most of her life there and set all of her novels in her home county. Her knowledge of Shropshire folklore, customs and superstitions finds a prominent position in the plots of her novels.

Dylan Thomas – wrote exclusively in English but the Welsh accent is very clear in his writing. He is probably best known for: *‘Under Milk Wood’*, which he described as a ‘play for voices’. According to J. Maclaren Ross, who worked with the poet on film scripts in the early 1940s, Dylan Thomas wanted to write a complete film scenario, ‘ready for shooting, which would give the ordinary reader an absolute visual impression of the film in words and could be published as a new form of literature’. *‘Rebecca’s Daughters’* is regarded as being the nearest that he came to realising this goal.

Pat Molloy – left school at fourteen to work on the railway, subsequently becoming a police officer. He took up writing as a hobby, winning the Queens Police Gold Medal Essay Competition. His book *‘And They Blessed Rebecca’*, is a policeman’s-eye view of the evidence surrounding the Rebecca Riots of 1839 – 1844.

Alexander Cordell – began his working life as a professional soldier. Following demobilisation in 1950 he moved to Wales. He seems to have had a remarkably sharp ear for the idiomatic use of language that he found in his new home and which gives his storytelling in, *‘Rape of the Fair Country’*, much of its vigour.

Annals of the Harford Family – the annals of this ancient family from Bosbury, Herefordshire; held in the local archives of the Herefordshire Records Office.

Raymond Williams – was born in Pandy on the edge of the Black Mountains. All his novels were set in the Welsh Border Marches. Along with beautiful descriptions of place it is his grasp of the broad sweep of history that takes the reader’s attention.

About the Music

The Village Quire

West Gallery Music – is energetic, joyful, no-nonsense stuff that is great fun to sing. This is what you would have heard in



rural parish churches in the 18th and early 19th centuries. West Gallery music was associated with the singing schools that sprang up all over the land at this time. Church authorities had become dissatisfied with the way in which the psalms were sung by congregations. These singing schools were intended to set matters to rights in this respect. Why is it called ‘West Gallery’ music? Well, at this point in history much of the floor space of the typical parish church was either rented out or owned by more or less wealthy parishioners. Where, then, to house the choir? The answer was to build a gallery at the tower or west end of the church, hence: ‘west’ gallery.

Shape-Note – the same conditions that gave rise to West Gallery music in the British Isles were also to be found in America in the first half of the 18th century. American singing schools gave rise to a genre of harmony singing known as ‘shape-note’ music. American singing school teachers developed a system for writing music. They came up with a so called ‘solmisation’ system, a little like the famous one we all know from *The Sound of Music*: ‘Do: a deer; a female deer ...’ Their system used only four syllables: *fa, sol, la* and *me*. Thus, the major scale would be: *fa, sol, la, fa, sol, la, me, fa*. Now we get to the ‘shape’ bit! Each of these syllables was represented by a note head of a different shape. *Fa* is shown with a triangular note head. *Sol* note heads are circular. *La* notes have square heads. *Me* notes are distinguished by their diamond shaped heads. And there you have it, ladies and gentlemen: shape notes! Inevitably, with migration across the pond, some West Gallery tunes became translated into Shape Note music and vice versa.

Folk Song – the oral tradition is very difficult to pin down, tunes being learnt by ear and passed on from one singer to the next. The tunes in our programme have been arranged for choirs to sing by modern arrangers writing in a style unlike that of West Gallery music.

Catches – a catch is a type of round. They were popular in glee clubs where catch singing was: ‘...unthinkable without a supply of liquor to hand.’ Catches were sometimes rather rude!

Please check our website for events, concerts & workshops, or ring 01497 847676

www.villagequire.org.uk