



Mary Webb was born Gladys Mary Meredith on March 25th 1881 at Leighton Lodge, Leighton, a village south of Shrewsbury. Her father, George Edward Meredith

was a teacher and became a great influence in her life. She shared his love of literature and of the countryside.

The young Mary loved to explore the local countryside and was fascinated by the wonders of the natural world. She developed an extraordinary perception for minute detail in nature and this is reflected in the richness of her poetry and prose. Although her literary output was comparatively small, she leaves a rich legacy of intense creativity and natural mysticism.

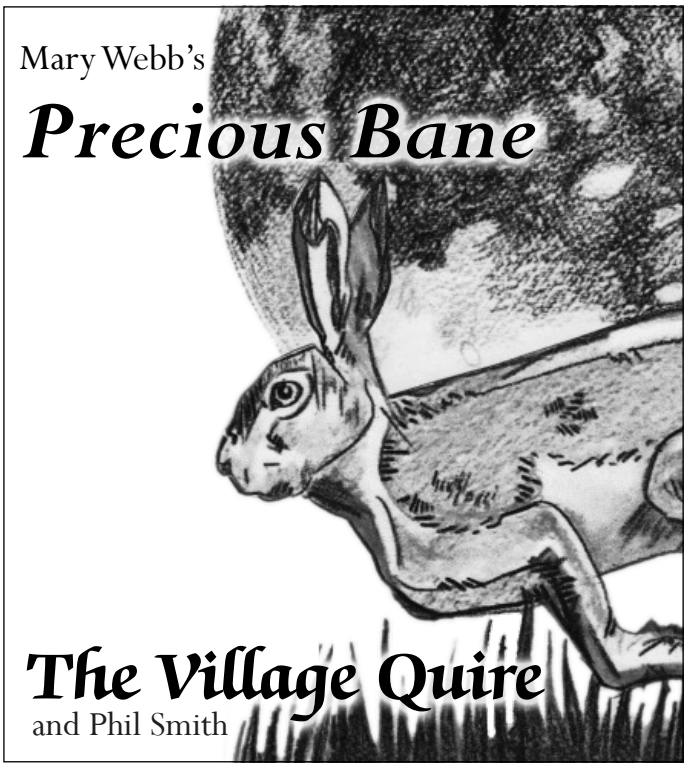
For more information visit **The Mary Webb Society** (www.marywebbsociety.co.uk)

About The Music

In style, the new songs written for *Precious Bane* by Dave Newell are inspired by folk-harmony singing, west gallery music, shape note music and early polyphony, plus a smattering of more 'scrunchy' harmonies where the occasion seems to demand it.

A Note on West Gallery Music

West Gallery Music is energetic, often joyful, no-nonsense stuff that is great fun to sing. This is what you would have heard in rural parish churches in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. 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. The music sung in these west galleries was very often composed by semi-professional musicians who supplemented their incomes from other occupations by their musical activities. *Egypt* and the *Shropshire Funeral Hymn* are both examples of west gallery music.



Prue Sarn is blessed: kind and gentle, loving and giving, bright and brave and strong, witty and sensitive and with a figure like an apple-blossom fairy to boot. But she is also cursed; cursed with a hare lip. Would that her mother, being with child, had not chosen that hour to walk in the woods, but the hare did cross her path and the hare is the familiar of witches and the child was marked for life.

Precious Bane is Mary Webb's story of love and ambition, set in Shropshire's 'lakelands' at a time just after the Napoleonic wars. It is a story of faith and folklore, of pantheism and personal advancement. But above all it is a love story: the love of Prue Sarn for Kester Woodseaves.

Through song and the spoken word, the Village Quire's *Precious Bane* is a fresh telling of that story.

Sarn - A Paradise Lost

There's a discouragement about the place. It may be the water lapping, year in and year out, the great stretch of grey water, gleaming and wincing in the sun – everywhere you look and listen, water; or the big trees waiting and considering on your right hand and on your left – the thick, blotting woods of Sarn,

the young leaves being so brown that there was always a breath of October in our May; or the unbreathing quiet of the place, as if it was created but an hour gone, and not created for us. It was true what folks said of Sarn, that there was summat to be felt there.

Reading 1

The Game of Conquer

Quire sing

Green Gravel

Reading 2

Lightning in the Blood

Quire sing

Timothy Sarn

Reading 3

A Hare-shotten Lip

Quire sing

Lief Would I Wed

Reading 4

Torches and Rosemary

Quire sing

Egypt
(James Leach)

Reading 5

The Wizard of Plash

Quire sing

Preached-against Man

Reading 6

The Precious Bane

Quire sing

Ploughing the Farm
(Trad. Arr. Dave Newell)

Reading 7

The Love Spinning

Quire sing

The Maister be Come

Reading 8

Beguily Raises Venus

Quire sing

Venus Arising

Reading 9

None Shall Touch You Now

Quire sing

The Baiting

INTERVAL

Quire sing

The Best Tall Script

Reading 10

The Love Carriage

Quire sing

The Master's Health
(Trad)

Reading 11

The Lord Gavest ...

Quire sing

Burning and Fuel of Fire

Reading 12

Foxglove Tea

Quire sing

A Bitter Brew

Reading 13

A bed of Lily Leaves

Quire sing

Green Gravel

Reading 14

The Last Game of Conquer

Quire sing

Shropshire Funeral Hymn
(John Symons)

Reading 15

A Crop of Thistles

Quire sing

Suffer Not a Witch

Reading 16

A Woman Whiter Than Lily

Quire sing

Hares on the Mountain
(Trad/ Chris Wood. Arr. Dave Newell)

Precious Bane

Original artwork by Erick Gaume for The Village Quire

The Village Quire is fast gaining a reputation for spine-tingling harmony singing with all the emotional clout, subtlety of expression and love of life that you get when voices are raised together in song.

Phil Smith trained as an actor at *E15*, only retiring to live in Wales after a long and successful career in the profession, where he decided to take up acting as a hobby!

All music written and arranged for this performance by David Newell, unless otherwise stated.

See www.villagequire.org.uk for more details

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