

PROGRAMME

Quire: *John Ball (Folk / Trad)*

Reading: 'At Carrants View' from *Poacher's Pie*
by Fred Archer

Quire: *Cabin Hill (Shape Note)*

Reading: from *The Diary of Parson James Woodforde*
1759 – 1802

Quire: *The Prodigal Son (West Gallery)*

Reading: 'The Dissenters of Ayshon and Beckford'
from *Hawthorn Hedge Country* by Fred Archer

Quire: *Birmingham (West Gallery)*

Reading: 'From Winchester to Burghclere'
from *Rural Rides* by William Cobbett

Quire: *Jacob's Well (West Gallery)*

Reading: 'The Valley of the Avon'
from *Rural Rides* by William Cobbett

Quire: *Desertion (Shape Note / West Gallery)*

Reading: 'From Kensington, across Surrey, and along that
County, from *Rural Rides* by William Cobbett

Quire: *When This Old Hat Was New (Folk / Trad)*

Reading: Extracts from the *Elsworth & Knapwell Chronicle*
(Cambridgeshire)

Quire: *New Poole (West Gallery)*

INTERVAL

Reading: from *Gone to Earth*, by Mary Webb

Quire: *As Pants the Heart (West Gallery)*

Reading: 'An Incident', from *Far from the Madding Crowd*
by Thomas Hardy

Quire: *The Harvest (West Gallery)*

Reading: 'The Valentine', from *Far from the Madding
Crowd* by Thomas Hardy

Quire: *False Bride (Folk / Trad)*

Reading: 'Selections April & May 1663'
from *The Diary of Samuel Pepys*

Quire: *Ye Cats that at Midnight (Catch)*

Reading: 'Village Methodists', from *Blue Ribbon Days*
by Thomas Edward Lewis of Clungunford

Quire: *With Harp and Hymns (West Gallery)*

Reading: 'Funerals & Frights, from *Blue Ribbon Days*
by Thomas Edward Lewis of Clungunford

Quire: *Rwssia (Shape Note / West Gallery)*

Reading: from 'Precious Bane', by Mary Webb

Quire: *The Master's Health (Folk / Trad)*
John Ball (reprise)

When Adam Delved...



When Adam delved and Eve span
Who was then the gentleman

An evening of music and words with *The Village Quire* and actor Phil Smith

About the Show

Tonight's programme, '*When Adam Delved ...*' had its origins in a song by Sydney Carter about John Ball. Ball was a Lollard priest who played an important role in the peasant's revolt of 1381. He preached that, in the beginning, God created all men as equals; that hierarchies of wealth and power were made by man and not by God; that such hierarchies should therefore be swept away. Ball expressed these ideas with beautiful economy in the lines: 'When Adam delved and Eve span, who was then the gentleman?' As you can imagine, Ball's ideas were extremely popular with some and a little less so with others. So when the rich and powerful caught him ... well, let's just say that he came to a very sticky end!

What we are left with is a rich pottage of ideas which seemed to us to fall into three broad groups. Firstly we identified a theme of **contentment** – a state in which all are equals, men and women living together a simple life of harmonious industry. Opposed to this we have the theme of **dissatisfaction** – the 'have-nots' want what the 'haves' have got, and the 'haves' just want more. It was ever thus, I hear you sigh. Finally there is **love** – our proto-lovers, Adam and Eve begin, of course, in perfect harmony until, in, on its belly, creeps Sin. Love begins in contentment but sometimes partakes of dissatisfaction, too. '*When Adam Delved ...*', takes a closer look at these three interrelated themes.

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 sprung 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 of 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 not 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!

About the Readings

Our readings come from the pens of a rather diverse group of authors. **Fred Archer** was described as ‘The plain man’s historian of village life’. The local history of the Vale of Evesham was Archer’s area of research. This he presented in novels written in warm, humorous prose. Vivid characters act out their roles in a setting which, whilst undeniably nostalgic is never cloyingly so. **Parson James Woodforde** held the living of Weston Longeville in Norfolk from 1774 until his death in 1803. He was a disarmingly unselfconscious diarist, presenting the minutiae of his thoughts, feelings and actions without varnish or ‘spin’. We get to see Woodforde, ‘warts and all’, and we cannot help but like the man. **William Cobbett** was a radical journalist of the early years of the nineteenth century. He took his ‘Rural Rides’ in the 1820s to see for himself the condition of the rural economy. Often outraged by what he saw of the lot of the farm-workers whom he met, Cobbett spoke his mind in a forthright and courageous way which was often not without a dash of winning humour. The extracts from the **Elsworth and Knapwell Chronicle** are genuine archive material from the chronicles of those parishes. **Mary Webb** was born in Shropshire. She lived most of her life there and set her novels in her home county. Her knowledge of Shropshire folklore, customs and superstitions finds a prominent position in Mary Webb’s plots. **Thomas Hardy** wrote about rural parish life in the early years of the nineteenth century – years just before the novelist’s birth. Hardy is a particularly apt addition to our list as his Father, Uncle and Grandfather were all members of the Stinsford Parish Quire. West Gallery music was in his blood! **Samuel Pepys** rose from obscurity to a position of considerable influence and wealth on the strength of his capacity for careful, accurate accounting. Mastery of detail was his forte. It may be this – what seems to have been a compulsion for him – which makes him such a gripping diarist. As with Woodforde, we get ‘warts and all’. Unlike Woodforde, Pepys does not always come up smelling of roses. **Thomas Edward Lewis** was born in Clungunford. His reminiscences tell of life in a Shropshire village in the nineteenth century. Lewis’ tone is quiet and utterly genuine with gentle wit to be found on every page.

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

www.villagequire.org.uk