

FLORA THOMPSON REPORT

COMMEMORATING FLORA'S LIFE 70 YEARS AFTER HER DEATH

The 'Evening at Lark Rise' special evening event on June 28 last, the main focus of the Old Gaol's Commemoration of Flora Thompson's life 70 years after her death, was very well attended by over thirty five visitors (plus invited guests), who thoroughly enjoyed both the current standing commemorative exhibition (on until July 5) and the 'Evening at Lark Rise' special event, itself.



The main thrust of the actual Flora Thompson commemorative exhibition in the Old Gaol exercise yard, held from June 23 to July 5, is to showcase items and memorabilia, including some rare and scarcely seen items, some over 100 years old, and others, although completely complementary to the Flora Thompson story and her life and works, rarely see the light of day. Others, particularly the commemorative china and metal items of the early and mid eighties, although produced in fairly large numbers, are also largely unknown to the general public, even to many Flora aficionados themselves.

TO PICK OUT SOME OF THE MORE UNUSUAL ITEMS:

The Catholic Fireside Magazine – a bound copy of twelve editions of this periodical each containing work by Flora Thompson, dated July to September 1925.

A feature about Flora Thompson ('poetess' [sic]) in the Daily

Mirror dated 3 March 1921.

A selection from a collection of over 50 theatre programmes from theatres in all parts of the country, from Buckingham to London, Nottingham to Southampton, and all parts between.

A rare copy of 'Fifty-One Poems' by Mary Webb (the author of 'Precious Bane'), signed and inscribed to Winifred Thompson (Flora's daughter), by the illustrator (and well known wood cut engraver of the time), Joan Hassall.

An original (and rare) Countess china egg cup, matching the Royal Doulton china set in the main Old Gaol collection as seen on-screen on the dining table of the 'Timmins' family in the BBC1 television series.

Many original letters from Flora and Winifred to fans and correspondents – all typed on the actual 1910 typewriter in the Flora Thompson room in the Old Gaol.

Edwin Timms letters from the Western Front to his mother, couched in the jingoistic, patriotic language of the period (the Zeitgeist), together with letters from his Commanding Officer and his comrades on his death in action in April 1916.

A series of four 'Lark Rise to Candleford' sequel/'tribute' stories, based on the imagined, continuing romance between Dorcas Lane and Sir Timothy Midwinter, written by Sherry Ledenbach between 2010 and 2013 (see below), comprising:

'Dorcas and Timothy – A Lark Rise to Candleford Tale', a sequel to the BBC TV 'Lark Rise to Candleford' series, 2010

'A Midwinter's Tale', a sequel to the BBC TV 'Lark Rise to Candleford' series, 2011

'My Young Man – A Dorcas and Timothy Christmas', a sequel to the BBC TV 'Lark Rise to Candleford' series, 2012

'A Midwinter's War', 'Dorcas and Timothy – A Lark Rise to Candleford Tale' a sequel to the BBC TV 'Lark Rise to Candleford' series, 2013

A complete, original set of DVDs, by the 'post production'

company, Molinare, of the first ‘Lark Rise to Candleford’ television film series, dated 2008 (see below).

The Dorcas Lane and Sir Timothy Midwinter stories of Shelley Ledenbach

Sherry Ledenbach is an American author and Flora Thompson aficionado, who attended the first couple of ‘Lark Rise Picnics’ at Stowe School (held on the steps of the ‘South Portico’) in June 2011.

Subsequent to this, she wrote a series of ‘tribute’ follow-up stories to the BBC1’s ‘Lark Rise to Candleford’ television series, in the form of four, competently written, ‘imagined sequels’ (‘The Dorcas and Timothy Midwinter’ series), through the years from the end of the fourth (fictional) television series (*few of us who saw it can forget that final scene in the very last episode when Dorcas Lane, dressed in her iconic and familiar mauve silk brocade dress, walked away from the camera, into the shadows, and was gone! – we have that actual dress worn by Julia Sawalha (as Dorcas Lane) in that scene, in our museum collection, together with a host of other properties and memorabilia kindly donated to the museum by the then producer, Annie Tricklebank*), up to and including the ravages of the First World War, through the eyes of its two central protagonists, Dorcas Lane and Timothy Midwinter, and its impact on, and the relationships between, the people and places so familiar to us from Flora Thompson’s own, earlier narrative.

But Sherry Ledenbach was determined that, for her, that was NOT the end of the story, and resolved to carry on, in print, the iconic relationship (inevitably doomed in the BBC’s ‘Lark Rise to Candleford’ series) between Sir Timothy Midwinter, the Lord of the Manor, and the Postmistress, Dorcas Lane and, at the same time, in so doing, introduces us to a whole host of interesting and iconic new characters.

The first BBC1 TV ‘Lark Rise to Candleford’ series ‘post production’ set of disks produced by the ‘Molinare Company’, dated 2008

A ‘Molinare’ post-production test ‘pressing’ by The Molinare, TV and

film facilities ‘village’ (shown below) is, typically, one of the final stages before a product (a television drama series, for example) is released for transmission, or a DVD of such a television or film production is commercially released for sale to the general public.

Molinare is a Film and Broadcast Post Production Facility in the heart of Soho, London, one of many such companies, but is one of the most respected names in the industry with nearly 40 years of experience. They provide state of the art Digital Intermediate, Visual Effects, Sound, Restoration, Library & Data Management Services, International Servicing and Post Production Project Management.

In television, the phases of post-production (i.e. after filming) include: editing, video editing, sound editing, animation and visual effects insertions, viewing and the start of the airing process (advertising and promoting it to the general public ‘on the air’). Normally post-production executes and oversees this preparation until the final product is completely ready.

This full set of the very hard to find pre-transmission test disks was produced for BBC One TV’s first production of ‘Lark Rise to Candleford’ in 2008.

‘Flora’s Fare’

To further add to the ‘spirit of the age’, Jean and her team designed the refreshments to mimic, as far as possible, and allowing for modern tastes, the sorts of food and drink (refreshments) that would, or could, have been available, and common to the urban countryside of the late Victorian era in question. (see page 10)

Talks and Country Matters

After a welcome and introduction from Hélène Hill, and a brief synopsis of Flora’s life and works by Tony Webster, both reading excerpts from the book, Hélène introduced Martin Greenwood, from Fringford, who gave us an update on the forthcoming Shelswell History Festival (also covered in the last newsletter), briefly also touching on the new Fringford Village Trail. Hélène then described her personal passion for bee keeping (apiculture) and lace making, illustrating both with extracts from the books, especially the

character Queenie’s predilection for the old English country practice of ‘Tanging the Bees’, that involved running round after a likely swarm of bees, banging on a tin lid with a spoon to encourage them to land in HER garden, the custom and lore being that if they did land there, all the honey they produced then belonged to her.



What on Earth are they all looking at?

Sales Pitch

As part of the preparations for the evening, we have reproduced a range of prints from original watercolours of two scenes, one of the iconic and familiar Valerie Petts image of ‘Flora Thompson’s Cottage’, and the other (a new image), of the painting by Heather Beaumont of ‘The Old Post Office and Forge’ at Fringford. Both are available in a number of framed and unframed (laminated) sizes, including as postcards and note cards. Call in and have a look at the display in the museum bookshop.

