



1894-1950

## Moeran in Eynsford

**I lost faith in myself round 1926 and composed nothing for several years. I even nearly became a garage proprietor in partnership with Cockerill the ex-air ace...I had an awfully lazy period in Eynsford. If you knock off for a long time, it is frightfully hard to get going.**

Letter to Peers Coetmore, 1948(?)

The village of Eynsford lies to the south east of London, just outside the M25 orbital motorway, in the county of Kent. No longer, perhaps, the sleepy idyll it might once have been, with a fair amount of traffic passing through its main road, the setting is peaceful enough, managing to be engagingly rural without frightening off the affluent commuters able to afford the relatively high house prices there. It is a village that has seen a fair amount of history, and there is a brief if mildly interesting visit to be paid to the ruins of its small castle.



Eynsford lies to the south east of London

One thing the local historians don't mention too often is a notorious set of residents who lived there between 1925 and 1928. It was during these years that Jack Moeran, [Peter Warlock](#) and Warlock's manservant, Hal Collins, took up residence in a small house in the centre of the village, next door to a chapel, a few yards across the road from the pub. To say that these three lived eccentrically would be an understatement.

Little has thus far been written about this time - the lack of musical output puts it somewhat outside Self's remit (though do

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The Five Bells pub

see the page on '[Maltworms](#)'), and Lionel Hill's book begins almost twenty years later. So I am glad to report that, from a pamphlet written by Gwen McIntyre of the Farningham and Eynsford Local History Society a few pieces of the Moeran jigsaw may be reassembled.

McIntyre's primary interest is in Warlock, but she had unique access to long local memories as well as musical history books with which to write her text, and there is plenty there too for the Moeran detective.

In addition to Moeran, Warlock and Collins (a Maori also known as Te Akua, of whom it is said that he "consumed vast amount of stout and would sometimes perform Maori war dances with terrifying



In the garden of the Five Bells

realism") there was a fourth member of the household, Warlock's girlfriend, Barbara Peache. With frequent visitors filling up the small house, it was not unusual for Warlock and Peache to share their bed with a third girl. That this gossip should have escaped the cottage is perhaps an indication of the scandal brought on the village by the household. Other shocks for the locals included public nudity - Warlock riding his motorcycle around the village naked, a visitor collecting fish and chips in the buff, and a strange young man playing the piano with no clothes on. It seems even when clothed, Warlock and Peache always walked around barefoot indoors, which in itself was enough to cause shocked comment.

Their capacity for drink was legendary - "they would full up big urns at the Five Bells and take them back...the kitchen [was]

swimming in beer." At the time Moeran had a "big Renault car", which they often took (if not riding a penny farthing bicycle) to The Peacock, a pub in a neighbouring village. "Once Jack Moeran came home alone and drove his car through a hawthorn hedge and damaged his face."



Moeran

From a friend, Jack Lindsay, comes this evidence: "We drank up all the beer and hurried across to the Five Bells where we sat at the back on the garden seats by the rickety table, with the leaves of the trees brushing the sweat from our brows...then we carried a beer-supply home in a large earthenware jug."

McIntyre relates: "Once a party of them left the Five Bells and went towards Shoreham in Moeran's car. They ended up in a ditch but without much damage to the car or themselves, fortunately.

"...they were very generous to the clientele of the Five Bells and popular with them. During a convivial session, they were joined by a little old man who had made his way to Eynsford from Dartford where he was living in the workhouse attached to Dartford Hospital. Subsequently they had him to stay in the cottage for a week or two and his little figure, which they wrapped in a blanket, was part of the party crossing the road to the pub. They also put him in Jack Moeran's car, wrapped in his blanket, and took him on jaunts round the countryside - no doubt to other pubs." The other main form of transport appears to have been a wheelbarrow, used to carry Warlock home from the station (where the local station master had instructions to haul him out of the train...), and to transport assorted guests and interlopers to and from the Five Bells and various local parties.

Geoffrey Self mentions the household's habit of singing uproarious sea shanties on Sunday mornings to try and drown out the church services next door, for which they received the God-fearing villagers' prayers. They also managed to outrage the Sunday School superintendent once, when Warlock walked over from the Five Bells to talk to some children standing by the church railings, saying to them "I'll be your Jesus." But there must have been a kind of resigned tolerance too, as Warlock played for the children in the church's schoolroom, a musical performance "somewhat marred by his pulling faces as he played...one girl was so taken with the giggles she had to rush from the room." The local children nick-named him "Gentleman Jesus".



Warlock

But in all of this, while Moeran developed a complexion which earned him the affectionate moniker "Raspberry" or "Old Raspberry" and did very little work, Warlock was productive,





though  
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The cottage in Eynsford

depression, as Moeran later recalled: "When the black mood passed he would write a song a day for a week, fumbling about with chords and whistling...All his work was done in this way - quickly, at the piano and often in an atmosphere that was far from quiet."

There were many regular visitors to the house - assorted artists and musicians, including John Goss, Cecil Gray, Bernard van Dieren, Lord Berners, Hubert Foss and Constant Lambert - plus Moeran's 'girlfriend' of the time, Nina Hamnett. "She tells of the large, important lunch that was cooked on Sunday with everyone in the house helping. Some serious beer-drinking was done in the garden of the pub opposite while the food cooked...[Warlock] loved to have large bonfires [which used to] smoulder and smoke at night."

During this time Moeran's previously prolific output petered out, and all we have is a handful of songs and short piano pieces. The time probably also sowed the seeds of his alcohol problems. And yet, coming out of the other side of this manic 'time out' Moeran was to reappraise his work and develop his technique into the mature style which was to prove so fruitful in the 1930's and 1940's.

