

Opinions vary about the quality of Martin Tupper's writings. Suffice it to say he was only pipped at the post from being Poet Laureate - in good Queen Victoria's reign. This appraisal by Guildford Museum Curator Matthew Alexander provides food for thought:

THE SILENT POOL

In the middle of the last century there lived in Albury a writer named Martin Tupper. For a time his Proverbial Philosophy was the most widely read poetry in the English language. This volume of pious platitudes about life and love, appealed to many in the opening years of Queen Victoria's reign. Tupper himself had an unshakeable belief in his own brilliance and looked upon the savagery of his critics with puzzled incomprehension rather than resentment. However, the reading public gradually lost interest in Tupper and he was eventually forgotten. Forgotten, that is, except in Surrey, where his name will be remembered as the author of *Stephan Langton, a Romance of the Silent Pool*, which he wrote in 1858 to add a new interest in Albury....

The story relates how bad King John, while out hunting near Shere, came across Emma the woodcutter's daughter bathing naked in the Silent Pool. He attempts to have his will of the girl, who prefers to drown rather than submit to his evil advances. The King rides off disappointed, and Emma's brother is also drowned trying to rescue her. The incident comes to the attention of Stephan Langton, born at Friday Street and now a priest with a good reason to detest King John. Before entering the priesthood, Stephan had been in love with a girl who had been kidnapped by the King; she had died of burns sustained in a fire when Stephan had rescued her from the wicked courtiers at Tangle Manor. The public outcry following the tragic drownings enables Langton to begin an undercover campaign against King John. He eventually becomes Archbishop of Canterbury and is able to lead the barons in a united front against the King which leads to the signing of Magna Carta at Run-



nymede. It turns out, however, that Stephan's former love had not really died of her burns but had lived to become an abbess at St. Catherine's near Guildford. Marriage is now, of course, impossible, but when he dies Stephan Langton leaves instructions for his body to be buried alongside hers at St. Martha's.

Their stone coffin-lids may be seen there to this day.

A rattling good yarn, and one in which Tupper was able to indulge his fierce hatred of Catholicism as much as his love for the locality. (Although when he maintains that Stephan Langton was a Protes-

tant forerunner of Martin Luther, one realises just how blinkered his vision was.) Why then should an historical novel, no better and no worse than hundreds of others like it, make such an impact? Simply because Tupper claimed that, far from being a work of fiction, every word of it was true....'or like the truth'. 'It may be depended on for archaeological accuracy in every detail'