



New Acquisitions

Perhaps it is a coincidence, but in my first few months of being Manager some rather spectacular items entered the Museum. Therefore, when I was deciding what exhibition should replace *A Holst Miscellany*, the answer seemed obvious: an exhibition devoted to items acquired during 2007/8. Exhibitions showcasing recent material are important for museums; they reinforce the importance of collecting and demonstrate what an important resource the institution is.

Visitors to *New Acquisitions* will have the opportunity to view some unique items, for example the set design sketch for Holst's ballet *The Perfect Fool*. Art Deco in style, with its stark, angular design, the piece was created by the noted designer Oliver P. Bernard. Bernard's work featured in the 2003 Art Deco exhibition at the V&A, and the Holst Birthplace Museum was very fortunate to obtain funding from the MLA/V&A Purchase Grant Fund to secure this important item.

Another star item is the carte de visite of a young Gustav Holst from the 1870s. It is possible that this is the earliest image in existence of Holst. It is on permanent loan from Neil Arthur Williams, who has also given the Museum a carte de visite of Holst's brother Emil; a photograph of (*continued on p2*)

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Chairman's Note

The last four months have coincided with Laura's early days with us - and have proved most successful for a number of reasons. We have welcomed some distinguished visitors, some of whose signatures grace our visitors' book, such as Tim Piggott-Smith and Peter Maxwell Davies; and some, such as Judith Ratcliffe and Neil Williams, bearing gifts. Judith, who is archivist at the Britten-Pears Foundation at Aldeburgh, used the occasion of our AGM to give us a fascinating insight into Gustav's and Imogen's lives and correspondence; Neil used the same occasion to present the Museum with some of the material in his amazing personal collection. This, together with our recently acquired set design for Holst's *The Perfect Fool*, forms part of the current in-house exhibition of new acquisitions (see Laura's article above).

Visitor numbers, particularly for June and, hopefully, July, should reflect our higher profile arising from the statue in Imperial Gardens; the Holst Banner at the Town Hall during the Music Festival; and even the tasteful new t-shirts with

the Holst logo worn by one or two brave souls - and available for purchase at a most modest fee! Another innovation is Laura's programme of Summer Activities, enthusiastically supported by volunteers and chosen to persuade families to visit the Museum.

There have been some very successful events during the last few weeks which are reported elsewhere and we have much to look forward to in the late summer and autumn.

I started this piece on a very hopeful note but end on a sad one. The death of Sue Fletcher has robbed us of one of the Museum's most loyal and committed volunteers, supporters and friends. She will be remembered for her uncomplaining courage and fortitude in poor health and the scholarship reflected in her contributions to these newsletters. We will pay proper tribute to Sue later in the year.

Marjorie Imlah

New Acquisitions (*continued*)

Gustav Holst in the 1930s; and a large photograph of Emil, then known as Ernest Cossart, in a Broadway production of *A Midsummer's Night's Dream*.

Other fascinating additions to the collection include an autographed 1st Edition of the *Music of Gustav Holst* by his daughter Imogen, complete with photographs of her pasted onto the front end paper; an autographed press photograph of Gustav Holst from the 1930s; and a 1933 school photograph of St Paul's Girls' School, London where Holst taught, with Holst pictured in the centre. Among the most poignant items on display is a set of correspondence between Holst and Mary Wyatt, a probable pupil of Holst's. The letter from Mary and the postcard from Holst were exchanged weeks before Holst died. The handwritten words speak of illness, music, regret and tentatively of the future – that never was.

The Composer as Arranger

Two aspects of Holst's work are now generally overlooked: his arrangements of music by Purcell, produced between 1922 and 1928 for the orchestras of St Paul's Girls' School and Morley College, and the incidental music which he composed for special occasions throughout his career.

An enterprising new CD, now on sale in the Museum shop, aims to remedy this neglect. The greater part of the disc consists of four orchestral suites edited from Purcell's incidental music for *The Gordian Knot Untied*, *The Virtuous Wife* and *The Married Beau*. While the arrangements and performance style would not satisfy the present-day purist, even for such ephemera Purcell could not help writing fine music, and Holst's sensitive orchestration was a considerable advance on the contemporary Novello editions for strings and piano. The disc also contains incidental music which Holst wrote or arranged for the *Pageant of St Martin-in-the-Fields* in 1921, and his folk song arrangements for *Pan's Anniversary*, a masque by Ben Jonson revived for the 1905 Stratford Shakespeare Festival, in which Holst collaborated with his friend Vaughan Williams. There is a bonus track of an early salon piece called *Greeting*, Holst's first published orchestral work. The performance of this and the rest of the music by the Philharmonia Bulgarica conducted by Jon Ceander Mitchell is utterly beguiling, and the CD is highly recommended.

Christopher Fletcher

These are just some of the items featured in *New Acquisitions*. All of the items on display help to fill in the gaps of Holst's life, his story. The items further enhance the importance of the Holst Birthplace Museum collection, highlighting it as a vital resource, preserving and making accessible Holst material for a public audience. Indeed the exhibition will be the first time that these items have been on public display.

The Holst Birthplace Museum acknowledges the support and generosity of many organizations and individuals who have made the recent acquisitions possible. These include the MLA/V&A Purchase Grant Fund, the Trafford Memorial Fund, the Friends of the Museum, Neil Arthur Williams, Jenny Ogle, Dr Peter Lewis, Rachel Breeze and the Friends of the National Libraries.

Laura Kinnear

Holst's Piano

On 5 June a capacity audience were captivated by David Owen Norris's delightful performance of three books of Mendelssohn's *Songs Without Words*, followed by a selection of Grieg's *Lyrical Pieces*. These were performed on the piano that Holst bought for £12; as the instrument needs gentle treatment, Holst's music couldn't be played (apart from *Jupiter* as an encore), but this was no disappointment as the chosen pieces very much suited the piano and the Museum's front parlour. Mr Norris added to the evening's enjoyment by explaining more about the pieces, for example how the first book of the Mendelssohn songs all link together in key and melody. During the Lyrical Pieces he explained the meaning of one of the titles – Album-Leaf – which derives from the tradition of a lady in town buying a "leaf", bringing it home at the end of the season, and adding it to her album. Apparently even Jane Austen participated in this activity, and her album included a song by Holst's grandfather.

If many of the Grieg pieces were not familiar to the audience, the better known *March of the Trolls* was probably more recognisable.

The evening passed quickly with a mixture of short, but interesting and delightful pieces, interspersed with witty and entertaining introductions from Mr Norris. We look forward to the results of Mr Norris's plans to record all of the Mendelssohn *Songs Without Words* on the piano on successive Sundays in January.

Carol Sadie

Coming Events

Our autumn season promises to provide a rich, full calendar of events, beginning with the Heritage Open Days on the 14th & 15th of September, which this year will include musical interludes. Admission is free and all are welcome.

Later in September, on the 20th, we will hold our annual Birthday Concert, this year featuring the wonderful St Cecilia Singers, performing a programme dedicated to Ralph Vaughan Williams on the 50th anniversary of his death. Tickets are available from the Museum or on the door and are £15 (£12 for Friends of HBM).

Please note a **change of venue** for Iain Cooper's talk on *Finzi and the Concerto* on the 16th of October. Rendcomb College has offered to host the lecture, which should bring us a wider audience. Tickets are £8 (£5 for Friends) and are available from the Museum or on the door.

Plans for the *Homage to Holst* concert on the 2nd November in the Town Hall are progressing very well. In a re-creation of the concert given by the people of Cheltenham for Holst in 1927, Martyn Brabbins will conduct the Salomon Orchestra and Julian Lloyd Webber will perform. Martyn has not yet finalised the programme, but it will loosely follow the programme of 1927 and will include *The Planets* and music by Cecil Coles. Tickets from the Town Hall box office are £20, £15 and £12. There are also a number of 'super seats' available at £50, which include an invitation to a reception with the artists after the concert.

Finally, Raymond Head and his wife Anthea, an astrologer, are organising a day entitled *Holst, Astrology & the Planets Suite* on Sunday, 7 September from 2.30-5.00pm. Meet at the Holst statue in Imperial Gardens and repair to 2 Wolseley Terrace for an illustrated talk and music.

Work Experience

In June the Museum was fortunate to have two work experience students, Louise Thomas and Janice Lau, from Pate's Grammar School and Dean Close respectively.

They spent their first morning looking round the house and learning how the volunteers set the Museum up for the day. Louise, who is studying art at A-level, particularly liked looking at the beautiful paintings in the rooms of the house, and Janice, who is interested in architecture, said she felt lucky to have a chance to look at a typical small Regency period house.

Louise and Janice spent the bulk of their time helping to devise the *Summer Specials* children's activities that are being held at the Museum this summer. Since they are both artistic, this was perfect for them. So, for example, they made some thaumatropes, an old Victorian toy, and drew out some different designs for them which were in keeping with the Museum; also designs for masks, silhouettes, etc. They also helped with getting in the necessary materials, and with producing flyers and posters to advertise the programme.

Both found their week interesting and felt that they had learnt a lot about working in this kind of environment; and that the experience would be helpful to them in choosing a career path in the future, which is perhaps the most important reason for taking part in the programme.

Laura Kinnear

Matinée Musicale

It is difficult to imagine a more enjoyable way to spend a Sunday afternoon in early summer than at the 'Matinée Musicale' on 18th May, hosted at her Music Barn on Cleeve Hill by Elisabeth Waterhouse, together with her hugely talented family and a group of their friends. The afternoon, in support of the Museum was dedicated to the memory of Elisabeth's husband, William, who sadly died in November last year, and was a fitting tribute to a man who was both a wonderful musician and an enthusiastic collector of instruments.

Elisabeth's son, Graham, opened the concert with his own *Pastorale* for Organ and later he entertained us all greatly with his *Theme, Variations and Finale on a theme by Pachelbel* played on a rare pedal piano. Another memorable item was the Scherzo from Schubert's wonderful Octet, which made excellent use of the musical forces assembled for the afternoon.

The 'Surprise Item' charmed all those present; Elisabeth's grandchildren, aged 4 and 6, played suitably sized violins to their Grandmother's piano accompaniment.

Our grateful thanks go to all those who gave the audience such pleasure with their virtuosity, and to those volunteers and Friends of the Museum who provided the plentiful sandwiches, cakes and scones, but especially to Elisabeth for making us so welcome at her home.

Pam Savell

Friends' AGM

The Friends of the Holst Birthplace Museum will hold their Annual General Meeting on 27th September at 2.30 in St. Andrews Church Hall, Montpellier. After the usual business of the AGM those attending will have the pleasure of listening to Holst expert and former Museum trustee Raymond Head give an illustrated talk entitled *Gustav Holst Today*. Please let Sue Adlard know if you intend to come (see below for contact details). There are vacancies for Committee members and for a Vice-Chair; please send nominations to Brian Carvell, care of the Museum.

Gustav Holst Way

Some progress has been made on the creation of a *Gustav Holst Way* across the Cotswolds. We have contacted the relevant departments and proposed a route which is now being checked for us by the wardens of the Cotswolds AONB. At the invitation of Judith Ratcliffe, Brian has planned a visit to the Britten-Pears Library to look through Holst's diaries in order to see whether there may have been some particular paths that he wrote about. More on this in the next Newsletter.

Not a Friend yet?....

If you are not already a Friend please do consider joining. Not only would you have the satisfaction of giving financial and general support to the Museum but also would enjoy many other benefits, including free admission to the Museum, price reductions at Events run by both the Trust and the Friends, discounts at 3 local restaurants and 'two for one' admission rates at both the Elgar Birthplace and Handel House Museums.

Membership rates are:

Single £15, Joint £20, Family £25, Corporate £50,
Single Life £250, Joint Life £350.

For further details and application forms, contact the Membership Secretary, Sue Adlard
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When Holst was a student he was told that with a name like Gustavus Von Holst he would go far in the world of music, but during the First World War he found it was something of a liability. He was always fond of walking in the English countryside, an activity which provided fresh air, exercise, relief from the stress of teaching, and an opportunity to think about his current compositional work as he walked along. But this harmless pursuit nearly landed him in serious trouble.

At the start of the war anti-German feeling was running high, and people were only too willing to denounce their neighbours to the authorities. As Holst explored the area around his country home near Thaxted, the Essex police began to receive reports of this foreign-sounding "Von Holst" who walked around carrying detailed maps of the area and asking questions of the countryfolk.

The police carried out an investigation, and their report described Holst as a "German hymn-writer" who had moved to the country "for the benefit of his failing health". The report stated that Holst was "Headmaster at Morley's College, Kennington" and "Music Master at St Paul's Schools, Kensington", the inaccuracies of these details indicating that perhaps their investigation was not quite as thorough as it might have been. The police concluded that as Holst and his father were both born in this country he could be regarded as English in spite of his name, and as Archdeacon Gardiner of Birmingham appears to have provided a reference, no further action was taken. The report concluded that "many rumours are current about this man but nothing can be traced against him".

Ironically, after Holst finally got rid of the "Von" part of his name, he discovered that his family (of Swedish, not German origin) had never had any right to it in the first place!

Michael Short.

Volunteers Wanted

The volunteers who staff the Museum are its lifeblood. We could not function without them, and we are always wanting more people to help share the duties.

So, if you like music or history, and might have a few hours to spare each month, we would be very grateful if you would consider becoming a volunteer. For an informal chat and an application form, please contact the Museum Manager Laura Kinnear at the Museum.