



## Friends' Music Day, 21<sup>st</sup> March

Gustav Holst was noted among composers of his time for his enthusiasm for working with amateur musicians. He was able to communicate his deep love of music to people of many backgrounds, abilities and ages. Holst spent some happy years at Pate's Grammar School in Cheltenham, so this provides an ideal venue to repeat last year's inaugural workshop and concert, which were received with such enthusiasm.

John Wright will run the afternoon choral workshop for about 40 singers, rehearsing works by Holst, Elgar, Parry, Stanford and Farmer, and performing them as part of the evening concert. John is a central figure on the Cheltenham music scene, and is currently organist at St. Peter's, Leckhampton and conductor of the Charlton Kings Choral Society. There may still be a few vacancies for contralto, tenor and bass voices - please contact Sue Adlard on Cheltenham 579334.

Carol Sadie, our Secretary, is organising the evening concert, which is expected to include movements from Holst's *Wind Quintet*, the Mendelssohn *Octet*, and choral contributions from the afternoon workshop. In view of

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## February 2009

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## Chairman's Note

Despite the chill of a bleak economy and a bitter winter, I believe we have many reasons to be both positive and optimistic at the start of 2009.

We ended last year on a high with 64 visitors attending our very successful Victorian Christmas activities on 13<sup>th</sup> December - the Museum was alive with the buzz of children's chatter, music, laughter and colour.

We took the opportunity of a three week winter closure to replace our outdated and ineffective storage heaters with safer and more efficient models. The loos have also been redecorated. A small working party helped Laura blitz both the volunteers' kitchen and her office - and lost count of the bags and boxes that went to be recycled.

We have also won a £5,000 grant from the Borough Council Community Pride scheme, which will be matched, thanks to contributions from the Friends and our reserves. This will enable us to organise some urgent repointing to the brick and stone work at the rear of the building and then to

have both front and back elevations repainted.

That deals with our bricks and mortar - what about people and events in the coming year? Laura, to be known from henceforth as our Curator, is now working a four day week and will have more time to deal with the many enquiries and initiatives that arise from an increasing interest in Holst and the Museum.

Our volunteers continue to be valued as an essential element of our growing success. I apologise for not welcoming Pat Davis when she joined us in the autumn and am pleased to confirm that Eileen Ferguson and John Wilman are also part of the 'team'.

You will read elsewhere in this Newsletter about the exciting events, exhibitions and projects planned for the coming year - another reason for my optimistic belief that this is going to be a good one.

Marjorie Imlah

## The Norman Oliver-Frisch Donation

It was a cherished wish of the late Norman Oliver-Frisch to present to the Holst Birthplace Museum his collection of photographs of his aunt Vally Lasker and other relatives. Happily, this has now taken the form of a donation in his name by his son Philip Oliver. Vally was born in Berlin in 1885, one of four sisters, one of whom, Alice, was her twin. Another sister, Hedwig, married botanist Dr. Felix Frisch; Philip is their grandson.

At Morley College concerts from about 1916 you could have heard Hedwig and Alice singing in the choir and Felix leading the second violins. But Vally was Gustav's special friend and colleague there and at St Paul's Girls' School, where they first met. She was a piano pupil of Adine O'Neill and became a full member of the school staff in 1907, the year in which Holst added Morley College to his responsibilities. He appreciated her assistance at both institutions and invited her to give his own daughter piano lessons: Imogen recalled that she soon 'belonged as if she were part of the family'.

But Vally's versatile talents were by no means restricted to the piano. In due course we find her name as Orchestral Secretary, violist and accompanist, choral soprano, organiser, organist, arranger, composer, choir and orchestra trainer and conductor. Along with Nora Day, Jane Joseph and Helen Bidder she was one of a team of amanuenses who helped Holst cope with his neuritis, creating readable full scores from the composer's sketches under his direction, and

arranging them for piano solo, piano duet, two pianos or even organ, to serve for try-outs, lectures, and sometimes publication. She was included in the dedications of four of his works.

Philip's wife Annie has, with his assistance, written a fascinating account of Vally's life from the family's point of view, a copy of which is also being given to the Museum.

In the exhibition of new acquisitions to be held later this year, you will find photographs of the four sisters, as well as of other family members. There is also a previously unknown one of the very first Whitsun Festival involving Holst at Thaxted in 1916, in which identifications have so far been made of Holst, Vally, Jane Joseph, Conrad Noel's daughter Barbara, and her husband Jack Putterill. (The Festival photograph in *Holst Among Friends* is now thought to be from 1917 or 1918.) There is also a particularly amusing programme for a 'spoo' home pantomime which Felix and Vally devised for the family at New Year, 1914.

Seventeen of the arrangements of music by Holst and Vaughan Williams in which Vally was involved were published, and Philip has generously said that he would like to donate any outstanding royalties there may be to the Museum; the situation regarding these is at present obscure, but is being investigated.

Alan Gibbs

## A Holst Family History

From the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century until he died, Henry Ambrose Lediard (1847-1932) researched and wrote his family history. He employed professional researchers to uncover the secrets of his link to the colourful Irish politician Lord John de Blaquiere and his liaison with an actress, Caroline Ambrose, but the majority of his history was derived from his own memories of his immediate family members. One of these was his sister, Clara Lediard, who became Clara von Holst when she married her music teacher, Adolphus von Holst in 1871.

The professionally typed and bound volumes, letters and photographs written and collected by Henry were donated to Cheltenham Art Gallery & Museums in the 1970s via Imogen Holst. These form the basis for the forthcoming exhibition (21<sup>st</sup> February to 16<sup>th</sup> May) and accompanying publication *The Lediards and Whatleys of Gloucestershire: A Holst Family History*. New research has also

been undertaken: documents at Gloucestershire Archives have confirmed that the Lediard and Whatley families were intertwined even before Gustav Holst's grandparents, Mary Croft Whatley (1806-1895) and Samuel Lediard (1804-1852) married in Cirencester in 1826. Census material has also helped to establish the movements of the individual Lediards and Whatleys at specific periods in their lives.

The idea of holding an exhibition about the Lediards and Whatleys was first suggested by Susanne Fletcher, a volunteer at the Holst Birthplace Museum who sadly died last year. Susanne did much work in interpreting the material and highlighting how important it was in understanding the background of Gustav Holst. Therefore the forthcoming exhibition and publication are dedicated to her memory.

Laura Kinnear

## Events for 2009

The new events calendar accompanies this copy of your newsletter and it gives you an overall picture of the many events planned for the year. We should, however, like to highlight a few events that are to take place in the immediate future and to provide some details.

On Saturday the 7<sup>th</sup> of March, the wonderfully hospitable Nina, Princess Odescalchi, has again invited us to her beautiful house for a concert and dinner. Raymond Burley and Gilbert Rowland will provide a concert of guitar and harpsichord music, preceded by a champagne reception and followed by dinner with wine. Raymond is one of Britain's most experienced classical guitarists; he has performed solo concerts, concertos, in film scores, and on radio and television. Gilbert Rowland is recognised as one of Britain's leading harpsichordists, and has given recitals at the Purcell Room, at major festivals in Britain and abroad, and has broadcast for BBC Radio 3. The evening promises to be most enjoyable from both a musical and culinary viewpoint. Tickets (£35) are available from the Museum.

During the Museum's closed period, Chris Fletcher and Laura Kinnear have been working hard on a new exhibition, dedicated to Sue Fletcher. Laura writes about it on the opposite page.

We are delighted to be able to report that the internationally renowned pianist, William Howard, will come to the Museum on Sunday, the 19<sup>th</sup> of April, to play Holst's piano. Tickets for this event are limited by the size of the Museum, so early booking (tickets are £15, £12 for Friends) at the

Museum is recommended.

May 24<sup>th</sup> marks the 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the death of Gustav Holst, and we are working on an appropriate way in which to honour the occasion. Imperial Gardens will be the setting and more information will be forthcoming in your next newsletter and will be heralded on our website.

June will be a busy month for the Museum, starting with a morning concert as the guests of Paul and Ana Gifford-Nash at their magnificent cruciform barn in Siddington. We are delighted to be able to announce that David Powell, sub-principal cellist with the CBSO, and Katherine Thomas, principal harp with the Welsh National Opera, collectively known as *51 Strings*, will perform on Sunday the 14<sup>th</sup> at 11.30, followed by lunch with wine, all for the very reasonable price of £25 (tickets from the Museum as above).

The Trust AGM comes soon thereafter, on Monday the 22<sup>nd</sup>, in the Cheltenham Art Gallery & Museum. Following the business part of the meeting, we will be treated to a talk by Dr Warwick Cole, a familiar figure in the musical world of Cheltenham. The afternoon is free of charge and all are welcome.

Future newsletters will provide more details about events in the second half of the year. Please do attend as many events as you can. They are not only rewarding in themselves, but they are very helpful to the Museum.

Gina Wilson

## Victorian Christmas Activity Day

It turned out to be a busy day for the volunteers on duty for the Victorian Christmas Event on December 13<sup>th</sup>. Although the morning started quietly, by lunchtime the Museum was filling up and the festive fun had begun. The files show that a record 64 visitors came through the door to enjoy the activities on offer.

In the kitchen, in the warmth of the heated range, where a Christmas pudding was waiting to be stirred, children made Christmas lanterns out of empty glass jars; each one individual and special to its maker. In the Music Room Christmas cards and Christmas tree decorations were carefully created from cardboard, coloured paper and of course generous amounts of glue and glitter. In the Regency Room, in the afternoon, a musical interlude was provided by Dinesh and friends, performing a lovely medley of Christmas music on

a unique but most effective combination of musical instruments: sitar, violin and mandolin – Gustav Holst would most surely have approved!

Younger children enjoyed a 'robin hunt' around the Museum and every child, on leaving the Museum, took with them a gift from the 'lucky dip' as well as a chocolate from the giant stocking hanging from the mantelpiece.

The success of the event was certainly the result of the excellent publicity work from Laura and Dinesh and the good preparation by all the volunteers involved. It was an exhausting but happy day enjoyed by all ages, visitors and volunteers alike – the perfect way to start the Festive Season!

Liz Auster

## Holst's Piano

David Owen Norris, who gave us a wonderful concert last year on Holst's piano, has just recorded all of Mendelssohn's *Songs without words* on the Collard & Collard piano that Holst loved and that contributes so much to the atmosphere of the Museum's music room. David is planning to accompany the recording with a scholarly booklet about the music. When the recording is ready, David has graciously agreed to return to Cheltenham for the launch. Watch the website for further information.

Gina Wilson

## Holst in the USA(1)

Supporters of the Holst Birthplace Museum may be interested to know that the Houston Symphony Orchestra in Texas has approached the Museum for help in finding information about Holst and *The Planets Suite*. Later in the year, the orchestra is to develop a project around *The Planets* using photos from NASA and material from other sources. This follows on from last year's project which the Chicago Symphony Orchestra organised and which I believe was very successful. *The Planets* continues to be Holst's most successful work and the most popular British work throughout the musical world.

It is good to know that, while the Museum is increasingly successful locally, its resources are used by prestigious institutions in the US and elsewhere.

Raymond Head

## Holst in the USA(2)

The more alert among those readers who watched the Presidential Inauguration on 20<sup>th</sup> January will have noticed that the US Marine Band played Holst's *First Wind Band Suite* about half an hour or so before President Obama took his oath. It was performed as delegates were arriving to take their seats and could clearly be heard on CNN news. Holst's Suite, written in 1909, is the most popular piece in the wind band repertoire in the USA.



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## The Friends' Column

(*Friends' Music Day* — continued from front page)

Holst's interest in Indian music, she is particularly pleased to feature a trio consisting of sitar, mandolin and violin.

Do come along with your family and friends and support this enjoyable music day at Pate's on the 21<sup>st</sup> March. The workshop will run from 2-5 pm, and the concert from 7-9 pm. There will be drinks in the concert interval. Entry will be free; proceeds from a collection will go to the Museum.

### Benefactors' Scheme

The Friends are launching an enhanced membership scheme, to be known as Benefactors (existing Friends should receive an invitation letter with this Newsletter). This scheme will give our supporters the opportunity to be more closely associated with the Museum and its work, while at the same time allowing us to increase our funding.

Benefactors of the Museum, in return for paying an increased level of subscription, will enjoy all the benefits that Friends currently receive, plus the right to bring guests into the Museum; acknowledgement by name in the Museum; and invitations to attend a small programme of events held exclusively for Benefactors.

The main benefit, however, will be the knowledge that you are contributing more substantially towards the running of the Museum, and the preservation and enhancement of its collections.

### 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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