



# Holst Birthplace Trust Newsletter



## Members' Music Day

The weather outside was evoked by Neil Williams' own piano composition *Raindrops*, one of the pieces he played to open this year's Members' Concert. Those who braved the weather, though, were rewarded by a varied concert which ranged from sitar music to jazz improvisation by way of a Haydn String Quartet and solos for each of flute, piano and soprano.

As with the two previous Friends' Music Days, however, the major items were choral. This year Elgar's *Six Songs from the Bavarian Highlands* were sung by a choir which came together in the afternoon to rehearse at a Choral Workshop ably led by local choirmaster John Wright.

This wide variety of music perfectly reflected Holst's attitude to amateur music making which he saw as a worthwhile social activity, to be enjoyed and at the same time to be taken seriously. It was indeed a very sociable and enjoyable day which was rounded off by audience and performers alike joining in *I Vow to Thee My Country*, set to Holst's own Jupiter theme.

Many thanks to Carol Sadie and Sue Adlard of the Membership Committee for organising the event and special thanks, also, to all those who took part.

Pam Savell

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## Chairman's Note

2010 is proving to be an extremely eventful year in which we celebrate 35 years since the opening of the Museum and 10 years as an independent trust following the threatened closure in 1999.

It was particularly appropriate, therefore, that David Addison should have been a recent and very welcome visitor to the Museum. David was Director of Cheltenham Museums Service in the mid 1970s and responsible for setting up the Museum in 1975. He lives outside the county now but has retained his interest and enthusiasm for the Holst and we are delighted to acknowledge our debt to him.

Moving on to 2000 and to the establishment of an independent Trust, I was reminded recently that the first two volunteers, on the morning of Tuesday 4<sup>th</sup> April, were Keith James and the late, much-respected, Philip Adlard. Joanna Archibald (now Bellis), our first curator, arrived and took up her appointment two weeks later.

Ten years on, Chris Fletcher leads the very small group of original volunteers, but a number of others have moved on to other interests or to enjoy a more leisurely pace of life. Our thanks and appreciation go to Ann Hookey, Joan Collins, Wendy Cederholm, Kathleen Northage, Sylvia Strange and Jill Julier - although I spied Jill wrestling with some very tenacious ivy in the front garden, so she is not entirely lost to us!

We are delighted that Kate Bennett, Rose Goodman, Sarah Gregory and Amy Rideout have joined our volunteer team; and we're always keen to encourage more to join us. We need 20 people each week to welcome visitors and man the desk, with additional areas such as education, children's activities and guided tours to interest candidates.

This 'special year' has got off to a great start - there is much more to come.

Marjorie Imlah

## Gustav and Isobel

According to the standard accounts<sup>1</sup> of Gustav Holst's early life, he first met his future wife, Isobel Harrison, in 1897 when she joined the Hammersmith Socialist Choir. However an article in the *Journal of the William Morris Society*<sup>2</sup>, recently discovered in the archives of the Museum, shows that the couple would have become acquainted nearly a year earlier.

Born in 1876, Isobel was the only daughter of Ralph and Jessie Harrison. Ralph had been born in France, and the list of his occupations in successive censuses suggests that he was always willing to try a new trade, but less ready to persist in any. In 1881, for example, he was a clerk in the music trade; ten years later he was an estate agent, and later still he became a builder. He had died before Gustav and Isobel's marriage, which took place at Fulham Registry Office on 22 June 1901, and by that time the Harrison family had dispersed. Isobel was living in a flat in Fulham, and according to her marriage certificate had no "rank or profession".

Gustav and Isobel evidently shared an enthusiasm for William Morris's brand of idealistic socialism, for both were active members of the Hammersmith Socialist Society. Isobel had probably been introduced to it by her elder brother, Harry. She was elected as a member in April 1896 and only a week later was also elected to one of the committees of the society. She attended most of the society's business meetings from May to December 1896<sup>3</sup>, taking the chair on one occasion in October. Holst may have joined the society as early as 1895. Like Isobel, he was present at a number of the business meetings, and he took the chair at a meeting in November 1896. Thus the couple had ample opportunity to become acquainted well before Holst was appointed

conductor of the Hammersmith Socialist Choir. Since Isobel was one of his earliest recruits, it is pleasing to speculate that by then she may have found the conductor at least as strong an inducement as her desire to sing.

The choir itself, while it may have been reinvigorated by Holst, was not a new enterprise. The Hammersmith Socialist Society had had a choir since at least 1891, when it was conducted by May Morris; music in the socialist movement was seen not merely as entertainment, but as a means of expressing and cementing comradeship<sup>4</sup>. Records exist of the choir performing at socialist gatherings throughout the 1890s; thus Holst's participation continued an established tradition and allowed him to contribute to the socialist cause in the way for which he was best suited.

Whether the choir remained active after the 1890s is not clear, but neither Gustav nor Isobel appear to have taken part in any political activities after their marriage. However the ideals of William Morris never seem to have lost their attraction for Gustav at least, and his involvement with Conrad Noel and the Thaxted festivals from 1913 to 1925 gave him an opportunity once again to express this sympathy in his art.

Chris Fletcher

<sup>1</sup>All such accounts are derived from Imogen Holst: *Gustav Holst, A Biography*, OUP 1988.

<sup>2</sup>Andrew Heywood: *Gustav Holst, William Morris and the Socialist Movement*, in *The Journal of the William Morris Society*, Vol. XI, No. 4, Spring 1996.

<sup>3</sup>William Morris died in October 1896 and the Hammersmith Socialist Society seems to have folded as a formal organisation soon afterwards.

<sup>4</sup>Andrew Heywood, op. cit.

## Gustav Holst Way

It was decided at the volunteers' briefing in February that we would set up a working party to progress and, hopefully, complete the route and associated guide booklets for the Gustav Holst Way middle distance footpath. We got an extra boost from the *Ramblings* radio programme (see Newsletter 27) which was broadcast on Radio 4 in February.

Two meetings of the working party have now been held, and we are focussing on getting out and walking the route. We hope that by the end of July the exact route and a first draft of a written guide will have been completed. Further meetings will be needed to progress matters such as

funding, publicity, route signage, etc. We will give a progress report to the Trustees at their September meeting.

There will be further Newsletter updates, and we also plan to hold an evening event towards the end of the year, or early in 2011, to inform everyone of progress.

Finally a volunteers' walk will be held on part of the route some time in the summer.

Happy rambling!

Roger Graham.

## Events

Members will receive with this Newsletter a new Programme of Events to cover the second half of the year. There will be a lot to enjoy in the coming months, with events taking place not only in the Museum but also in a variety of different venues in the town. Do take time to read the Programme carefully so as not to miss all that is on offer.

We are very grateful to Cheltenham College for providing the beautiful Chapel as venue for the Concert by the **Oriel Singers** on **Saturday June 12<sup>th</sup>**. This will be a very good opportunity to hear the Choir in this most beautiful setting with its wonderful acoustics.

Please make a note of the date of the **Holst Birthplace Trust AGM** on **Monday June 28<sup>th</sup>** in St Matthew's Church. Everyone is warmly invited to the meeting, which will be followed by a talk to be given by Dr Steven Blake.

September will be an especially busy month with the opening of the **Theodor von Holst Exhibition** on **September 3<sup>rd</sup>**. There is no doubt that this is a major undertaking for our Curator and a most prestigious event for the Museum.

Another important highlight in the year will be the **Holst Birthday Concert** on **September 25<sup>th</sup>** when we will be delighted to welcome Dame Felicity Lott back to Cheltenham to perform in support of the Museum in All Saints Church, which holds such a special association with the Holst family.

We do hope that Members will support these events as we continue to celebrate this 35<sup>th</sup> anniversary year of the Museum, and also encourage their friends to come along and find out more about the work of the Trust.

Liz Auster

## Celebrating 35 Years of the Museum

In 1974 an exhibition to commemorate Holst's centenary was mounted at Cheltenham Art Gallery & Museum. This was due to the combined efforts of Imogen Holst, David Addison, Director of the newly established Cheltenham Art Gallery and Museum Service, and John Wood, Divisional Librarian of Cheltenham Library. Both the Art Gallery & Museum and the Library held Holst material, much of which had been donated by Imogen Holst in the 1950s and late 1960s.

The exhibition was themed around Holst's early days in Cheltenham - with items relating to his von Holst forbears - and his teaching, notably at St Paul's Girls' School. Items which are now very familiar to those who know the Museum were displayed publicly for the very first time: his great-uncle Theodor von Holst's joint portrait of his brother, Gustavus (Holst's grandfather and namesake) and himself; and of course Holst's piano. Imogen Holst writes in the centenary catalogue, 'My mother and I gave the piano to Cheltenham twenty years after his death, when she moved into a smaller cottage...'. Imogen also writes about the possibility of a 'Holst room' at the Art Gallery & Museum: 'To my great joy, Mr. Addison tells me that there is now a possibility of the Holst room becoming a reality in the not too distant future.'

The reality in fact was a range of Holst rooms, a year later, in October 1975, when a Museum devoted to the composer was opened in the very house in which he was born. Again David Addison

and Imogen Holst were very much involved in this project. By sheer coincidence the owners of 4 Clarence Road, Mr. and Mrs. Garlick, were looking to move, and were willing to sell it to the Council, with the view that it would become a Museum.

To mark the 35<sup>th</sup> anniversary the Museum will be displaying material relating to its establishment. Items include the original poster and booklets for the centenary, and Imogen Holst's many letters and scribbled notes - as well as her original draft for the much-loved, *Scrapbook for the Holst Birthplace Museum*. The Museum will also be holding a free admission evening on Friday 14 May from 6-8pm, as part of the Europe-wide *Museums at Night* initiative. Volunteer guides will be on hand throughout the evening, and Sara Salvidge, the Museum's Education and Events Assistant, will be donning her Julia Giles costume, and relating what life would have been like for the Holst family maid.

Looking through the centenary catalogue it is clear then as it is today, how rich the Museum collection is. It is these tangible objects - the letters in Holst's own hand, the paintings, the scores, the piano - that continue to delight and enthuse visitors. However, what also enchants those who enter the Museum is the unique atmosphere created by the period settings, something which we owe to the original staff: David Addison, Mary Greensted and Faye Little.

Laura Kinnear

## Benefactors Benefit the Trust

The Benefactors' Scheme was introduced in February 2009 to enable those who feel that they would like to contribute more to support the work of the Trust in the running of the Museum to pay a higher annual, or life, subscription. Their support is highly valued. We would however like to encourage more Members to consider becoming Benefactors.

As well as helping the work of the Trust, and in addition to standard Members' benefits, Benefactors also receive exclusive invitations to certain events or occasional priority booking. For example, one of the forthcoming events to be held solely for Benefactors will be a Champagne Preview of the Theodor von Holst Exhibition at the

Museum, provisionally on Thursday 2<sup>nd</sup> September. Invitations will be posted to Benefactors nearer to the time. Benefactors may also bring guests into the Museum for free on a one-for-one basis.

If you would like to become a Benefactor of the Holst Birthplace Trust, please contact the Membership Secretary (see below). The Annual Rates are £60 (single) and £100 (joint) and the Life Rates are £1000 (single) and £1500 (joint).

Pam Savell

## Become a Member

**If you are not already a member of the Trust, please do consider joining.** Not only would you have the satisfaction of giving financial and general support to the Museum, but you would also enjoy many other benefits. The new Museum leaflet contains a membership application form.

Annual Membership rates are:

Single £15, Joint £20, Family £25, Corporate £50, Benefactor £60, Joint Benefactor £100, Corporate Benefactor £300.

For further details, please contact the Membership Secretary, Catriona Smith:

tel.: 01242 578172

email: [holstmembers@randc.me.uk](mailto:holstmembers@randc.me.uk)

**We would be grateful if Members would keep Catriona informed of their email addresses. This will help her to ensure that you continue to receive emails concerning Holst events, particularly if notice is short.**

If you would like to become a Volunteer at the Museum, and thus a Volunteer Member, please contact the Curator, Laura Kinnear, at the Museum (see below for contact details).

Devotees of *Savitri*, Holst's chamber opera based on a Hindu story, might like to note that there will be a semi-staged performance in Dorchester Abbey on Sunday 30<sup>th</sup> May, as part of this year's English Music Festival. It will share the programme with Delius' *Hassan*.

Neil Williams will be giving a talk before the concert, entitled *Holst & Dharma*.

Holst features elsewhere on the Festival programme as well. On Saturday 29<sup>th</sup> May, the choral programme includes *The Coming of Christ*, as well as *I Love my Love*; and on Monday 31<sup>st</sup> May, the afternoon concert includes the first Suite for Military Band.

See [www.englishmusicfestival.org.uk](http://www.englishmusicfestival.org.uk) for concert details and booking.

## Rosamund Strode

Many readers will probably have heard of the recent death of Rosamund Strode at the age of 82. Rosamund was an assistant to both Britten and Imogen Holst for many years, and a good friend to the Museum.

Colin Matthews has written a full obituary, which can be found on the Britten-Pears website ([www.brittenpears.org](http://www.brittenpears.org)).



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## Chichester CD

The concert given by the Royal Marines Band and the Cathedral Choir in Chichester last September (see Newsletter 26) was recorded, and has now been issued on CD. The CD is now available in the Museum shop at £7.00 (plus £1.50 P&P if you are unable to call in personally).