



Holst Birthplace Trust Newsletter



From the new Chairman

Marjorie Imlah retired as a Trustee at the Annual General Meeting in June, having completed the maximum number of consecutive years that, under our Articles of Association, any Trustee can serve. A consequence of this is that she has also retired as Chairman of the Trustees, and I have been asked to succeed her in that capacity. To do so is a real privilege, and I know that it will be a challenge for me to maintain her high standards of stewardship and the flow of initiatives that she fostered during the time she was in the Chair.

As Marjorie said on many occasions, the Museum thrives on the dedication and enthusiasm of its Volunteers and other Members and, especially in respect of these qualities, she led by example. She also ensured that your Trustees have, between them, a wide range of skills and experience relevant to our purpose. Such talents were very apparent in two other Trustees who also retired at the AGM and to whom Marjorie paid fitting tributes. Keith James contributed hugely to the public face of the Museum in two vital ways. The first was to seize every opportunity to talk enthusiastically about the Museum around the community and to welcome and inform all visitors to the Museum. The second was to monitor the physical state of the building and its facilities and to advise the Trustees about any remedial or improving measures needed. Brian Carvell filled the important role of Honorary Secretary of the Trust as well as being the Chairman of the Friends. In the latter role he ensured a smooth transition into the new, fully integrated membership structure.

We all owe each of these individuals a cornucopia of thanks and I am pleased that they have all made clear that they will be staying involved in different ways. I am especially delighted that Marjorie was able to preside over the 35th anniversary dinner (see article on page 4), and that she has accepted the invitation from the Trustees to be a Vice-President in recognition of all she has done. Moreover I am sure that the best way to demonstrate our appreciation of what Marjorie, Keith and Brian contributed is to build upon the standards and targets they set and to deliver as many as possible of the initiatives launched in their time. Your ongoing trustees, including now Rob Wilson and Pam Savell, will be working closely with our Curator, Laura, to do just this.

It has been apparent for some time that we must grow our income to keep the Museum in good condition and to build up our Holst archive. Attracting more visitors and recruiting new Members will help a great deal, so increasing national awareness of the special nature of our Museum is paramount. There are a number of ways we can do this and, over the coming editions of this Newsletter, we shall explain and explore many of these in turn. Indeed we start right now with Laura's article in this issue about the coming Theodor von Holst exhibition. This is an event for which we expect wide publicity and many first-time visitors to the Museum. Our Curator has worked extremely hard to ensure that this exhibition is of high quality both in its content and in the manner of its display. Some parts of the Museum will look very different during the three months from early September so, however familiar it is to Members, this is an opportunity to see it in a new light and to introduce others to the treasure that is at 4, Clarence Road, Cheltenham.

Graham Lockwood

Issue 29

August 2010

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Holst and Robert Bridges

The HBM Scrap-book is a fascinating assembly of photographs, and on the 1926 page you can see one (86) of Holst pictured in earnest conversation with Robert Bridges, OM, the Poet Laureate, outside the latter's home at Boar's Hill, Oxford. I recently had cause to write to Mrs Shirley Corke, author of an excellent survey of the first 100 years of the Leith Hill Musical Festivals, and was delighted to discover that her grandfathers were Lord Farrer (whose second wife founded the festivals along with Vaughan Williams and his sister)... and Robert Bridges! She is herself a fine poet, having clearly inherited Robert's genes.

Holst's interest in Bridges' poetry began early, with solo songs from around 1898 (*Awake, my heart; Autumn Song; My Joy* – this last dedicated to Holst's stepmother), a part-song ca 1901 (*Thou didst delight mine eyes*) and another solo song from 1903 (*I will not let thee go*). Bridges's name next crops up, not in connection with Holst's music, but in an Eothen School magazine, where we read that one of the poet's eight plays, *Achilles in Scyros*, was staged at the school on 3 and 4 April 1918 by Forms IV and V. In a contemporary photograph of the production there is the unmistakable form of a press-ganged Second Former, Imogen Holst! In 1925-6 her father turned his attention to the poetry again, this time producing the important and innovative *Seven Part-songs*. Peggy Joseph told me of the day, 2 July 1927, when she was one of the party of musicians from St Paul's Girls' School including her aunt Jane (amanuensis of *Neptune*, then on the staff) whom Holst took to Oxford to perform all seven songs to the poet himself. Bridges afterwards admitted that he found the style 'modern' and perplexing, but 'liked it at a second hearing and came in the end to full pleasure'. On 27 July 1929 Holst's diary records that they were again at Boar's Hill 'singing to Bridges'.

In 1927 two anthems to Bridges texts followed, both with organ and optional bells accompaniment: *Man born to toil* and *Eternal Father, who didst all create*. The first of these ends with a hymn, *Gird on thy sword*, to a tune known separately as Chilswell, after Bridges's home. The next year he set *Christ hath a garden*, with words adapted by Bridges from Isaac Watts. In 1930 Holst was working on his important setting of words from Bridges's *Ode to Music*, requested by Herbert Sumsion for the Three Choirs Festival scheduled for Gloucester the next year, when news came of the poet's death. The coincidence could hardly have been more poignant as he found himself setting to music the words 'Rejoice, ye dead, where'er your spirits dwell, /

Rejoice that yet on earth your fame is bright', and he added the fitting dedication 'In Homage, Robert Bridges'.

There are three letters from the poet to Holst among the two volumes of letters published in the USA in 1984: two dated 26 May and 9 June [1925] relate to *Sing me the men* (the words were by Digby Mackworth Dolben, a relative of Bridges who drowned at 19 in 1867); and another of 4 July [1927] mentions the *Seven Part-songs*. Mrs Corke possesses a letter from Holst which she has kindly given me permission to quote here for the first time:

32 Gunterstone Road, Barons Court, W.14 / Dec 4 [1923]

Dear Dr Bridges

Mr Walter Gandy, a composition pupil of mine at my working man's College in Waterloo Rd has set your beautiful translation of the 'Veni Creator' from the Yattendon book. It is a really good musical setting and we hope to sing it at our next concert if it can be published in time. I believe he has your permission to use your poem but the publisher insists on a letter from you to prevent any misunderstanding. I regret to trouble you but am obliged to have to ask you if you would be so kind as to give the required permission in writing.

Yrs Sincerely / Gustav Holst

P.S. Gandy has used the old Mechlin tune in his setting which is modelled on Byrd's Compline hymn.

The opening of this motet, which fully merits Holst's opinion of it, is quoted in my book *Holst Among Friends* at page 96. Mrs Corke's daughter Emma hopes to arrange a performance at the City church of St Stephen, Walbrook.

Alan Gibbs

Distributors wanted

We distribute Museum publicity material around Cheltenham and surrounding areas and need people to cover **Hester's Way** and **Whaddon** in Cheltenham, and also **Painswick**. If you, or someone else you know, would have the time to help, please contact Catriona Smith:

tel: 01242 578172

email: holstmembers@randc.me.uk

A very special Exhibition

Theodor von Holst: His Art and the Pre-Raphaelites

This September the Holst Birthplace Museum will present an exhibition devoted to the work of the English Romantic painter, and great-uncle of Gustav, Theodor von Holst (1810-1844). Many of you will be aware of the two paintings, *Bertalda Frightened by Apparitions*, and *Self-Portrait with Brother, Gustavus*, which hang in the Museum's Regency Room. *Bertalda* is in the 'Gothic' style: erotic and lugubrious, typical of Holst's work in the 1830s. This painting was exhibited as part of Tate Britain's show, *Gothic Nightmares* in 2004, enabling the artist to step out of the shadows cast by over 150 years of neglect. However Holst was not only a Gothic painter; he also created work which can be described as anticipating the Pre-Raphaelites. Towards the end of his short life (he died of liver failure at only 34), his paintings feature beautiful and mysterious women, for example *The Bride*, 1842, namely Ginevra, Shelley's unfortunate victim of an arranged medieval marriage. Her long dark hair contrasts with the burnished gold background and is clearly a precursor to the later 'stunners' of Rossetti, Theodor's greatest admirer. The exhibition will explore the link between Holst and the Pre-Raphaelite movement through over fifty artworks: paintings, drawings and printed books. As well as work by Theodor, the exhibition will also include work by Rossetti and by Fuseli, Theodor's tutor at the Royal Academy Schools.

The exhibition is a collaboration between the Museum and Max Browne, the foremost scholar on Theodor. The project has been in development for eighteen months, in which time loans both from private and public collections have been secured, and an illustrated catalogue has been researched and written. The catalogue, with a foreword by the well known art critic Brian Sewell, will be available from 3rd September. A private view for Members will be held between 7pm and 9pm on Thursday 2nd September, which is the bicentenary of Theodor's birth. However, for those wishing to avoid the crowded rooms and to look at the exhibits in more favourable circumstances, later or repeated visits are advisable.

Theodor von Holst: His Art and the Pre-Raphaelites is the first major show in the Holst Birthplace Museum's history – extremely fitting in our 35th anniversary year. The exhibition will run from **3rd September** until **11th December 2010**.

Alongside the exhibition there will be several associated events:-

3rd September: A lunchtime lecture about Theodor by Martin Myrone, Curator of 18th and 19th Century Art at Tate Britain;

10th September: An Evening of 19th Century Piano Music (to include works by both Theodor's father, Matthias, and his brother, Gustavus von Holst);

19th November: An Evening of Poetry and Prose, with links to the exhibition.

For further details of these events please contact the Museum.

In addition, thanks to the Ernest Cook Trust, the Museum will be welcoming secondary schools to the exhibition. The Trust has funded an education programme for pupils aged 11+, which includes an education pack and group tours.

Laura Kinnear

Stewards needed

For the duration of the Theodor von Holst exhibition, a Room Steward will be required to be present in the Regency Room / Victorian Bedroom at **all times when the Museum is open**.

No experience is necessary, and all offers will be most gratefully welcomed. A chair is provided!

There is a rota posted in the staff room at the Museum, divided into 1½ hour slots. Two (or more) people can be on at time if they prefer, or share a slot, or stewards can sign up for double slots (3 hrs). (Please include a phone number when adding your name to the rota).

PLEASE SPREAD THE WORD AND USE ALL YOUR POWERS OF PERSUASION:

14 weeks, 5 days a week, 4 per day adds up to a **lot** of stewards.

Remember:

- You could meet a lot of interesting visitors
- Free coffee, tea and biscuits
- Great opportunity to become familiar with the exhibition

If you have any questions, please contact Jenny Jones:

tel: 01242 525889

email: kenherontatchley@hotmail.com

Events

We are moving unbelievably into the last quarter of the year, and I would urge Members to look out their Events Programme in order to be reminded of the many events on offer in the next months.

September will be a very busy month indeed, with not only the opening of the Theodor von Holst exhibition and its associated events (see article on p3), but also the Holst Birthday Concert on September 25th when we are delighted to be welcoming Dame Felicity Lott in our Anniversary Year to perform in All Saints' Church. Please note that there is another special occasion to look forward to on Sunday November 7th, when the Flowers Band will perform a programme of English Brass Band music in an afternoon concert in the Pittville Pump Room.

Tickets for all the September dates are now available from the Museum. Do join us for the events this Autumn, and bring your friends too!

Liz Auster

Join the Trust

If you are not already a subscribing 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 Museum leaflet contains an 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

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).



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Anniversary dinner

As our past Chairman reported in May, this year of 2010 marks the 35th anniversary of the opening of the Birthplace Museum by the Borough Council in 1975, much encouraged at that time by Imogen Holst. This year also marks the tenth anniversary of the Birthplace Trust taking over the responsibility of managing the Museum from the Council. Celebrations are taking various forms throughout this year, and none was grander than the special dinner held on an appropriately sunny Sunday evening on May 23rd at the Hotel on the Park.

Trustees and Benefactors were joined by invited guests, many of whom have played an important part in the evolving story of the Museum, starting with the pioneering work of David Addison, Director of the Borough's Museum Service in 1974, and including those who fought hard to ensure that the Museum was able to continue independently after 2000.

Marjorie Imlah presided over the splendid occasion made possible by the generosity of the Hotel's Managing Director, Benjamin Bowen. She extended a warm welcome to the gathering, including in particular our President Martyn Brabbins and our very supportive Patron, Patricia Routledge. It was a memorable evening for the gathering of more than forty hosts and guests.

Graham Lockwood

Holst & Henry Wood

In 1896 Henry Wood conducted a run of performances of Stanford's opera *Shamus O'Brien* in London. In his autobiography he recalled: "I had a splendid orchestra ... my first trombonist was none other than young Gustav Holst - later to be the gifted composer of the *Planets*. I thought how delicate he looked; he was certainly not physically fitted to play a trombone. In the fourth week of the run of the opera he looked so ill that I told him to go to Margate for a week's rest. So long as he promised to spend the week in complete idleness I would pay his deputy and all expenses. I saw him off on the Sunday morning and had the satisfaction of finding him looking much better on his return. He played to the end of the run."

(The idea of Holst spending an entire week in 'complete idleness' sounds quite unlikely, but perhaps it gave him time to think about his own compositions - in that year he completed a *Fantasia Stücke*, op. 2, for oboe & strings, and a *Quintet*, op. 3, for piano & wind instruments).

Michael Short