



# Holst Birthplace Trust Newsletter



## Chairman's Message

The Annual General Meeting of the Trust took place in late June, and the Trustees are grateful for the good attendance of Members. I circulated a full report for the year to 31<sup>st</sup> March 2011, a year in which we achieved some welcome publicity for the Museum, and also notable progress in the implementation of our enhanced Education programme described in detail by Sara Salvidge in the previous Newsletter. There was a significant reduction in the revenue deficit for the year but much still remains to be done to eliminate this. The Meeting also brought some changes in the membership of the Trustees. Andrew Ellis retired as a Trustee and Honorary Treasurer after several years of assiduous attention to the detail and integrity of our financial transactions. He leaves with our gratitude. Keith Woodman is now Honorary Treasurer and he and Warwick Cole were elected as new Trustees. Alison Hall nobly responded to our appeal for a new Honorary Secretary. All bring to the Trust relevant skills from their professional careers.

Also, as this edition goes to press, our Curator Laura Kinnear has begun her year of maternity leave with every good wish from everyone associated with the Museum. During her absence, we are grateful to Sara Salvidge who has agreed to be Acting Curator and will extend her working hours in the Museum to fulfil this role.

The current year brings an important new initiative for which Laura has done much vital groundwork. Readers of recent editions of this Newsletter will have spotted a number of references to the transfer to our Museum of a large archive of Holst material from Cheltenham Art Gallery & Museum. This was part of the generous donation by Gustav's daughter Imogen some years after the death of her father. Some of the memorabilia, notably the piano, and part of the archive were transferred to the Birthplace Museum when it opened in 1975, and now the rest has followed on loan. This provides a wonderful opportunity to open up access to a comprehensive source of information about the Holst family and Gustav's music. However a major consequence is the need to find space for storage and provide much easier access.

The Trustees have identified a solution which is likely to be approved by the relevant planning authority, and we plan to feature a more detailed description of this proposed *Holst Discovery Space* in the next Newsletter. The extent to which the full vision can be delivered will depend on the amount of funding that becomes available, as it is a paramount requirement of the Trustees that the project must be financed with new money and without recourse to our key reserves. Hence implementation of the full scheme will depend upon a successful grant application to the Heritage Lottery Fund and matching funding from other sources, including our Members. There is already a sufficient level of individual and trust support to enable the first stage to be completed this coming winter. This step alone will provide a valuable area for archive storage, but with limited access. Thereafter there will be considerable scope for developing an exciting space in which visitors of all ages, as well as serious researchers, will be able to explore much of the extensive archive that is now in the Museum.

Finally, I would like to thank all those who sponsored our team for the Cheltenham Circular Challenge on 19<sup>th</sup> June. We raised a total of £1109.40, plus a further £258.85 in Gift Aid – a splendid effort.

Graham Lockwood

**Issue 33**

**August 2011**

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# The Membership Committee

The 'Friends of the Holst Birthplace Museum' were founded in 2004 with the objective of promoting wide interest in the Museum as well as raising funds to support its work. The Membership Committee was formed from the Friends' Committee in September 2009 when existing Friends became Members of the Holst Birthplace Trust under the revised articles of the Trust.

We are grateful to Sue Adlard, who had such a pivotal role in the formation of the Friends, for remaining on the Committee until January this year to ensure a smooth transition.

Catriona Smith, as our wonderfully efficient Membership Secretary, performs the vital role of sending letters of welcome to new Members, ensuring that we all have current Membership cards and sending subscription renewal letters where appropriate. I know that Catriona's life is made easier by Members who pay their subscription by Standing Order and I would like to thank all those who do.

Richard Smith keeps all Members up to date by editing this very informative Newsletter which Members receive quarterly. Richard also takes the minutes at our meetings and is so efficient that we often have them on our computers the same day!

Volunteers at the Museum are, of course, Volunteer Members. Jenny Jones has been an excellent Volunteer Coordinator. She now wishes to step down, however, and we would love to hear from anyone who would like to take over this important role which Jenny leaves in very good order. Jenny is willing to be on hand to guide her replacement.

It is important that various committees of the Trust work closely together. John Wilman sits on both the Membership and the Events Committees to liaise between them and so keeps us up to date with future events which will be of interest to Members.

The Treasurer of the Trust also sits on the Membership Committee. Until June of this year, Andrew Ellis held this position and we would like to offer him our thanks for his long service, firstly on the Friends and, more recently, on the Membership Committee. We were delighted to welcome Keith Woodman as the new Treasurer in July.

The Chairman of the Trust and the Curator of the Museum are also invited to Committee meetings.

One of the main functions of the Membership Committee is, naturally, to find ways to increase income for the Trust through Membership. To this end the Benefactor scheme was introduced. Benefactors pay a higher subscription and, as well as receiving extra benefits (for example they can bring guests to the Museum for free on a one-for-one basis), they have the satisfaction of knowing that they are further supporting the work of the Trust and helping to secure the future of the Museum. I would like to urge as many Members as possible to consider becoming Benefactors. The annual rates are £60 (single) and £100 (joint). This equates to just £5 and £8.33 a month respectively. With Membership renewals due in October, now is the ideal time to upgrade. Contact details for Catriona can be found at the end of this newsletter. Please also help by encouraging as many of your friends as possible to visit the Museum, support our events, and maybe become Members themselves.

Pam Savell (Chair of Membership Committee)

## Holst at the EMF

Em Marshall, the inspiring founder Director of the English Music Festival, now in its fourth year, continues with her advocacy of the works of Holst amongst many other British composers of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. An early work of Holst's, *The Four Part-Songs*, date from the mid-1890s and is an example of a work that rarely finds its place in the concert repertoire (although it has been recorded) which is a shame because they are well worth singing. I did not hear this work but assume that the Syred Consort under Ben Palmer gave suitably well characterised performances. The concert which I did hear (May 29<sup>th</sup>) included three of the *Seven Part-Songs for female voices and strings*, the *Brook Green Suite*, the *Nunc Dimittis* and the *Two Psalms* of 1912. Of these the powerful *Nunc Dimittis* (1915) created a strong impression because it was very well performed by the City of London Choir under Hilary Davan Wetton as were the *Two Psalms*. Their power came across very strongly and showed us that Holst was writing important and impressive works well before *The Planets*. On Monday 30<sup>th</sup> the Bournemouth Symphony Orchestra under their conductor David Hill gave what was by all accounts (for I did not hear it) a very fine performance of *Egdon Heath*. Em must be congratulated on her espousal of the works of Holst and many other lesser known, but important British composers. May it long continue!

Raymond Head

## Gustav Holst: Out of the Shadows

As a recent volunteer to the Holst Museum whose knowledge of Gustav Holst and his music is slight, I was looking forward to the screening of Tony Palmer's film *Holst: In the Bleak Midwinter* at the Bacon Theatre on 20<sup>th</sup> May. Holst has languished in the shadow of his contemporaries for too long and this film, lasting over two hours, had time to explore his life and music in detail. And what a tour de force it was!

The uninformed might perceive Holst as a cool, dry man — a bleak midwinter sort of man — but Tony Palmer's opening shot of heat-saturated desert signalled that the unassuming, respectable appearance of Holst in his photographs is not the whole story. Enduring poor health perhaps contributed to Holst's frequently anxious expression but, whatever his physical trials, this film revealed that he was richly compensated, not only through his extraordinary musical talent but also through a powerful imagination. One could speculate about this modest man that the sensual romantic side of his character, although masked and diluted for the context of his daily life, found an exuberant release through his music.

Tony Palmer suggests that the key to unlocking this creative wealth was the gift from Vaughan Williams, a life-long friend, of £50 for Holst to take a holiday. I'm not sure what took Gustav as a young man wandering towards North Africa or how he came to stay on the Street of the Dancing Girls in Algiers but his travels appeared to greatly influence his musical composition and developed the range and intensity of his work. Of course I am simplifying. Like many others, I had only been aware of the marvellous suite *The Planets* and one or two other pieces, but this film showed the wide range of his compositions; music for Brass Band, music inspired by other cultures, and, in common with his peers, a rediscovering of the English folk music tradition.

Tony Palmer was the right director to interpret Holst's complex personality and wove sound and image together in at times thrilling or startling juxtaposition. I certainly see Holst in a new and brighter light now and will continue to add to my knowledge of this private man.

Heather Mansell-Jones

## Friendships Kept in Constant Repair

Hugh Cobbe, President of the Vaughan Williams Charitable Trust, gave a presentation at our AGM entitled 'Friendships Kept In Constant Repair'. His theme was the friendships of Ralph Vaughan Williams, and Hugh concentrated on those with Ralph Wedgwood and with Gustav Holst.

Ralph Wedgwood was VW's cousin, and was up at Trinity College, Cambridge at the same time as VW. A deep friendship developed between the two, and VW asked Ralph to be best man at his wedding. Afterwards, Wedgwood went to work in railways, and VW to Berlin for a honeymoon and composition lessons from Max Bruch. He wrote to Ralph regular accounts of life there.

Later, the two men saw less of each other, but there was as yet no reduction in intimacy, and VW's *Sea Symphony* is dedicated to Wedgwood. In 1944 Leith Hill Place, where VW grew up, was left to VW, who offered it to the National Trust; the Trust installed Ralph Wedgwood and his wife as the first tenants. Wedgwood died in 1954.

The friendship between Wedgwood and VW lay outside the musical world, and was based on a shared family background. On the other hand, VW's friendship with Gustav Holst was right inside their music. The two men met at the RCM, and the encounter was to have a great effect on

Holst's life and work, and also the development of English music. They criticised each other's compositions, which both found enormously valuable.

In 1905 Holst became Musical Director of St Paul's Girls' School. He developed his fascination with eastern philosophy and later astrology. It is not clear how far VW entered into this, but Holst's musical activities in Thaxted did mean much to him, and VW's *Mass in G minor* was dedicated to Gustav Holst and his Whitsuntide Singers. In 1923, VW, as Director of the Bach Choir, was able to give the first performance of Holst's *Ode to Death* — 'The performance was so full of you' wrote Holst. During Holst's visit to the United States in 1932, VW greatly missed having him to hand, and wrote to him to say so.

After his American visit, Holst was never in good health. One of VW's last services to Holst was to nurse his *Choral Symphony* through rehearsals for the broadcast, and Holst's to VW was to advise on the *4<sup>th</sup> Symphony*. Holst died on 25<sup>th</sup> May 1934, and for the rest of his life VW remained devoted to the memory of his friend, promoting his music at every opportunity, and, on the establishment of the RVW Trust, included instructions for a memorial concert for Holst.

Alison Hall

## Events

There are several important dates to put in the diary this Autumn. The Museum will be again taking part in the **Heritage Open Days** on 10<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> September. We would be grateful for any donations of good quality music books and CDs for the **Music Sale** to take place over these two days. Entrance to the Museum is free so do please encourage friends and family to 'drop in.' In addition the new exhibition, 'School Days' will be on display

The **Talk by Raymond Head** on 16<sup>th</sup> September, entitled *Some Little known Music of Holst*, will certainly be very popular. Tickets for this talk in the Museum must be purchased in advance as there is a strict limit on numbers to 26 places.

The **Holst Birthday Concert** on 24<sup>th</sup> September is always a highlight in our Autumn programme. This year the Glevum Consort will perform a selection of Baroque music which will be well suited to the special acoustics of All Saints Church. Members can enjoy a privileged ticket concession so please do come and support this anniversary evening and bring friends with you.

Thinking ahead to November we look forward to a **Sunday afternoon Concert** in the Pump Room on 6<sup>th</sup> November and a delightful selection of music performed by Carol Allen and Alan McLean, to include Holst's Lyric Movement arranged by Imogen Holst for viola and piano.

To conclude the year on a note of festive cheer, we invite all Members and their friends to a social evening: **Art, canapés and Bubbles** on 18<sup>th</sup> November, kindly hosted by Jenny and Douglas Ogle with an opportunity to enjoy their very unusual private art collection at 1 Wellington Square. Numbers for this occasion will be limited so please do book your tickets in good time!

Details of all these events are included in the Events Programme, and tickets for the September events will be available from the Museum from the start of August.

Liz Auster

## Songs of the West

On 27<sup>th</sup> June on Radio 3 we heard this folk song compilation of Holst's, recorded the previous day at Plymouth Pavilions by the BBC Concert Orchestra under Gavin Sutherland. One of a pair of works conceived in 1906-7, the other being *A Somerset Rhapsody*, it was subjected to some ruthless pruning, here 14 tunes being reduced to 7. Martin Graebe gives a good account of the work and the songs used, in an article in a recent issue of the *Folk Music Journal* (Vol 10, No 1, 2011). After its first public performance, in Delhi on 8<sup>th</sup> October 1909, it is known to have been played three times in England: in Bethnal Green on 11<sup>th</sup> December 1909, in Bath on 17<sup>th</sup> November 1910, and in Hampstead Garden Suburb on 8<sup>th</sup> March 1913, but not since. Of late, it has been known only in a wind band arrangement by J Curnow (1986), so the broadcast of the original was long overdue. With its sparkling orchestration and witty combination of themes, it is a strong candidate for prompt publication and recording.

Alan Gibbs

## Join the Trust

**If you are not already a subscribing Member of the Trust, please do consider joining and also tell your friends.** 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, which can also be downloaded from the Museum website.

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, on 01242 578172; or email [holstmembers@randc.me.uk](mailto:holstmembers@randc.me.uk).

If you would like to become a **Volunteer** at the Museum, and thus a Volunteer Member, please contact the Acting Curator, Sara Salvidge, at the Museum (see below left for contact details).



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Registered Charity No. 1078599

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