



## Yorkshire & North East Branch Newsletter No 17 - April 2020

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### BRANCH CHAIRMAN'S MESSAGE

**F**ellow Elgarians who have chanced upon their first sighting this year of the spring flower *anemone nemorosa* will, as Elgar did, see this as a sign of hope. In present circumstances our hope is that the coronavirus will pass – as it surely will – and that life will eventually resume with some semblance of normality. Here at the Yorkshire & North East Branch we are doing all we can to ensure a degree of activity: plans are afoot to bring you, where feasible, scheduled talks though a 'virtual platform' which will, I promise, be user-friendly, and about which more details soon; and, of course, you now have our latest Newsletter.

After several years of distinguished editorship of this publication, Tony Pook has retired from the position (but pleasingly he remains a committee member of our Branch), and so we would like to thank our Treasurer, Paul Kampen, for kindly agreeing to take over the editorship, and for writing an article for his first edition. We are also grateful to long-serving committee member Philip Scowcroft, who will be well known to many readers from his earlier articles, for his essays within these pages.

Readers will be glad to know that Tony remains in good spirits despite his recent bout of illness; he has asked me to pass on his best wishes.

We look forward to greeting our members and friends again 'in the flesh', as soon as this becomes possible, and by 'virtual' means perhaps as early as May of this year.

David Young

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### ELGAR AND THE TITANIC

**T**he Titanic sank, with the loss of over 1500 lives, in April 1912. The tragedy was marked by several events of a musical character, including the funeral in Colne (Lancashire) of the liner's Bandmaster, Wallace Hartley\*. The most notable of events was a Titanic Band Memorial Concert at the Royal Albert Hall on the afternoon of Friday 24 May 1912, less than six weeks after the disaster.

The concert was on a huge scale, with seven orchestras taking part: the Philharmonic Orchestra, the Queen's Hall Orchestra, the London Symphony Orchestra, the New Symphony Orchestra, the Beecham Symphony Orchestra and the orchestras of the Royal Opera House and London Opera House. The conductors included Sir Henry Wood; Thomas Beecham; Percy Pitt; and last, but to us not least, Sir Edward Elgar, who in 1912 of course directed the LSO. It was the year in which he composed *The Music Makers* and the year before the première of the symphonic study *Falstaff*.

I do not know the concert's full programme. However, Percy Pitt did conduct Sir Arthur Sullivan's rousing, indeed moving, overture *In Memoriam* and we may be reasonably

sure that some Elgar was present in the programme, not least in the LSO's contribution. Altogether 129 violins took part, 20 trumpets and half a dozen harps, with other instruments in proportion. At the time, the musicians were described as 'the greatest professional orchestra ever assembled'.

**Philip L Scowcroft**  
**December 2018, revised March 2020**

\*The Titanic's band, comprising eight string players, performed on the deck of the doomed liner until the waters engulfed them.



*This, sadly indistinct, photograph shows 16 of the 24 horns at that concert. The section included A.E. Brain, Aubrey Brain and Alfred Brain: respectively grandfather, father and uncle of the great Dennis Brain. Alfred Brain later emigrated to the USA and is a leading horn player on the soundtracks of Hollywood films from the 30s and 40s. He retired to become a chicken farmer.*

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## ELGAR AND ANIMALS

**W**e cannot be in any doubt that our premier composer was an animal lover. The celebrated Ken Russell film showed a representation of Elgar riding a horse – with what factual basis I am not entirely sure, though it reminds us of his later comment "Oh, My Horses!" when noting the perceived suffering of horses during the Great War. In 1908 the Elgars acquired a rabbit as a pet for Carice, called Pietro d'Alba or Peter Rabbit - after Beatrix Potter, of course - to which with typical Elgar whimsicality he ascribed the (self-written) lyrics of some of the songs he set to music around that period.\* Some Elgar movements are named after wilder beasts – 'Wild Bears' and 'The Tame Bear' from *Wand of Youth* Suite no 2 and, at first sight, *The Song of the Bull* for male voice chorus which he penned in 1924 for the Cambridge May Week.\*\*



### ***Carice Elgar and Pietro d'Alba***

But Elgar loved dogs above all. Dogs have several times figured in music by others; for example there is a barking dog briefly featured in Vivaldi's concerto 'Spring' (from *The Four Seasons*). Adaptations for TV or film of *The Hound of the Baskervilles* have had dedicated music composed for them. By extension hunting figures in Berlioz's opera *The Trojans*, Johann Strauss's galop *Auf der jagd* and Haydn's Symphony No 73 ('La Chasse'). Elgar made his own contributions to the corpus of dog music, unsurprisingly – he kept dogs before and after his marriage, though not during it as Alice did not care for dogs: so Elgar's dog music comes from different parts of his life. *Mina*, named after his Cairn terrier, was his last completed work (1933). But long before that the 'G.R.S.' variation of the *Enigma* arose out of an escapade of Sinclair's bulldog Dan and it was not an isolated instance as Elgar inscribed musical fragments in Sinclair's

visitors' book between 1897 and 1903, when Dan died. These 'Moods of Dan', or some of them, later figured in *Gerontius*, *In the South*, *The Spirit of England* and *The Crown of India*. As is – or was – the case with so many composers, Elgar was an inveterate recycler.

**Philip L Scowcroft**  
**April 2018, revised March 2020**

\*E.g. 'The Torch' and 'The River'.

\*\*I have not heard this, though I would dearly love to. The 'Bull', however, does not refer to a real animal but to a pub in Cambridge!



**Left: The cover of The Elgar Society Journal, Vol 18 No 2 showing Elgar's beloved dogs.**

**Right: Branch Chairman Professor David Young, Speaker Secretary Caroline Gilderdale and Branch Secretary Paul Grafton with our branch banner at Harrogate Royal Hall before a performance of *The Spirit of England* and *The Music Makers*.**

**Please see our branch webpage at:**

**<https://elgarsociety.org/branches/yorkshire-north-east/>**

**for up-to-date information as to when our branch activities can resume.**

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## **AS OTHERS PLAY HIM ELGAR FROM ABROAD**

**A** couple of years ago, letter writers to a certain tabloid newspaper were outraged that a 'German orchestra and conductor' had played Elgar's *Pomp and Circumstance March No 1* at the Proms - thus showing clear BBC bias. Ignoring the fact that the conductor was Daniel Barenboim – actually Argentinian and he was for many years resident in Britain – it did make one ask 'Is Elgar "ours" or "everybody's"?' We know that Elgar's greatness was recognised very early in Germany and of course it was a German conductor – Hans Richter – who presided over many Elgar premieres in England. We also know that the Elgars were frequent visitors to Germany and were great lovers of German culture. As for the Berliner Staatskapelle and Daniel Barenboim, I heard that performance

and they showed just what a fine piece of music P&C No 1 is – not just a tub-thumping party piece to be whacked out thoughtlessly.

Evidence for Elgar's internationalism is very easy to find through the medium of YouTube. And it's not recent either: have a look at this from 1934, the year of Elgar's death:  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YAKN4t7AuNU>

To be honest, the conductor - Georg Schneevoight (1872 – 1947) – presides over a performance of the *Cockaigne* Overture with the Finnish National Orchestra that is a bit of a mad scramble rather than the portrait of Hustle and Bustle of Edwardian London which Elgar wrote but, then, was that prescience?

Non-British conductors have certainly championed Elgar's music for many years:- Mahler conducted the 'Enigma' *Variations* and *Sea Pictures* (apart from 'The Swimmer') in New York; Toscanini conducted and recorded the 'Enigma' *Variations* and Pierre Monteux made a fine recording of 'Enigma'. Solti, Barenboim and, most recently, Petrenko junior, have made fine Elgar recordings. There was one notable recording where Leonard Bernstein butchered 'Enigma' leading to a rebellion from the BBC Symphony Orchestra – this can be heard on YouTube for anybody with the stomach for it.

So, what is out there now? Have a look at this:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vLNLvcBmoqo>

Is there a more passionate performance of 'Nimrod' than this one? Look how the Principal viola is revelling in the music and how there is total commitment from all of her colleagues on stage. The conductor, Jacek Kaspszyk, was at that time the Warsaw Philharmonic Orchestra's Musical Director; I myself played for him several times as he was a guest conductor at Opera North in the 90s - once taking us through Mahler 5 with just two hours of rehearsal as the booked conductor went ill on the day of the concert – Kaspszyk was almost literally taken off an aeroplane by his agent at Manchester Airport from where he was about to leave to go home from guest conducting the Hallé.

Then look at this: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=faAacaaA-kl>

This is 'A Far Cry' - an American 'All-star' string group playing the *Introduction and Allegro for Strings*. Apparently they all take turns to lead and play 'down the line' and, to be honest, at least one player seems to be trying to lead from the back which would be very much frowned upon in a symphony orchestra. But again, what commitment and what a big 'Elgarian' sound from what is actually a much smaller group than one would expect for this music.

Now for now something which, either because of the recording quality or because of the orchestra's individual characteristics, perhaps does not present such an 'Elgarian' sound: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=z5z1WSyZEGE>

But let your ears adjust to it. The Spanish Radio and Television Orchestra with the Russian Vasily Petrenko (currently Principal Conductor of the Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra) give a remarkably supple performance of the Second Symphony. I am told by a colleague who has a contact in the orchestra that they knew no Elgar until they did both the symphonies which they absolutely loved. This reminds us of the enigmatic quote in Spanish which Elgar used to head the score of his Violin Concerto: "AQUI ESTA EL ALMA DE.....".

And in the current emergency and also from Spain:

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8FSyeyXpV\\_Q&feature=youtu.be&fbclid=IwAR3BXKkfOB5hKIV0LqABh3lhEnCNg6FuEeVE9Xxcny5hHT\\_ZwMQMTr\\_MPC8](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8FSyeyXpV_Q&feature=youtu.be&fbclid=IwAR3BXKkfOB5hKIV0LqABh3lhEnCNg6FuEeVE9Xxcny5hHT_ZwMQMTr_MPC8)

This is members of the wonderful Orquesta Sinfónica de Galicia (based in A Corruña) playing in their own homes – possibly to a 'click track' - and they chose Elgar to send a worldwide message.

There is much more out there. Perhaps we can revisit this topic in another newsletter?

**Paul A. Kampen**